

Democratic Backsliding and Threats to Democracy

Evidence from Arab Barometer

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Princeton University

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About Arab Barometer

- ▶ Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world
- ▶ Arab Barometer is the longest standing and largest repository of publicly available data on ordinary citizens' views in MENA
- ▶ Arab Barometer's mission:
 1. Track attitudes & behavior
 2. Build institutional capacity
 3. Disseminate knowledge about ordinary citizens living in MENA

About the project

- ▶ More than 125,000 personal interviews to date
- ▶ 87 nationally representative surveys
- ▶ Seven waves across 15 countries providing trend data on how views have changed
 - ▶ Wave 1 (2006-7) in 7 countries
 - ▶ Wave 2 (2010-11) in 10 countries
 - ▶ Wave 3 (2012-14) in 12 countries
 - ▶ Wave 4 (2016-17) in 8 countries
 - ▶ Wave 5 (2018-19) in 13 countries
 - ▶ Wave 6 (2020) in 7 countries
 - ▶ Wave 7 (2021-22) in 12 countries
- ▶ Data are open source & publicly available for analysis at arabbarometer.org

About Wave 7

- ▶ Generous support from NED for surveys & training
- ▶ Nationally representative surveys of approximately 2,400 citizens per country ages 18 and above
- ▶ Conducted in-person (face-to-face) in the respondent's place of residence
- ▶ Complex survey design stratified by governorate & urbanity
- ▶ Fielded from October 2021 to July 2022
- ▶ Response Rates: 17% to 74%
- ▶ Fielded by local partners in each country

The Arab Uprisings of 2011

- ▶ Political openings in:
 1. Tunisia
 2. Egypt
 3. Yemen
 4. Libya
- ▶ Challenges to the state in
 1. Bahrain
 2. Syria

Outcomes

- ▶ Political openings in:
 1. Tunisia: Democratic system until 2021
 2. Egypt: Democratic system until 2013
 3. Yemen: Ongoing civil conflict
 4. Libya: Ongoing civil conflict
- ▶ Challenges to the state in
 1. Bahrain: Short-lived protest
 2. Syria: Ongoing civil conflict

What did protesters want?



What did protesters get?

 UNITED STATES
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In Tunisia, Economic Crisis Threatens Political Progress

Terrorism Halves Tourism, and Jobless Youth are Radicalized, Labor and Islamist Leaders Say

Thursday, November 12, 2015 / by: Fred Streser

PUBLICATION TYPE: Analysis and Commentary

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Corruption Continues to Destabilize Iraq

After the defeat of ISIS, endemic corruption is now the main threat to Iraq's stability, alienating the population from its ruling elite and driving young people into a protest movement that demands radical change.

EXPERT COMMENT 1 OCTOBER 2019 — 2 MINUTE READ

Democracy & MENA

[Our Issues](#)[Perspectives](#)[Policy Recommendations](#)[Explore the Map](#)

PRESS RELEASE March 3, 2021

New Report: The global decline in democracy has accelerated

Freedom in the World 2021 finds that the annual gap between losses and gains widened in 2020, and fewer than a fifth of the world's people now live in fully Free countries.

NEWS

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A RECOMMENDATION THAT REINFORCES
your customer satisfaction scores.

Arabs believe economy is weak under democracy

🕒 6 July

...but widespread support for democracy

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

MONKEY CAGE

Arab citizens know democracy's not perfect. They want it anyway.

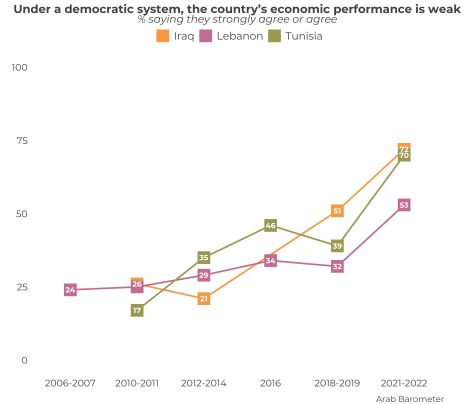
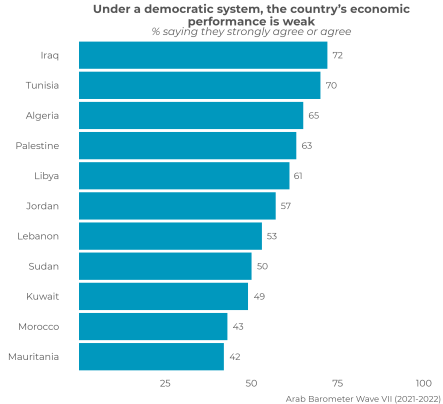
That's what Arab Barometer finds in its latest wave of surveys across 10 countries in the Middle East and North Africa

Key questions on public perceptions of democracy in MENA

1. How do MENA citizens feel about democracy?
2. How have views of democracy changed?
3. What accounts for these changes?
4. What can these changes tell us about democracy in MENA today?
5. What does this mean for the future of democracy in MENA?

Changing Views of Democracy

Democracy & the economy



Democracy & the economy

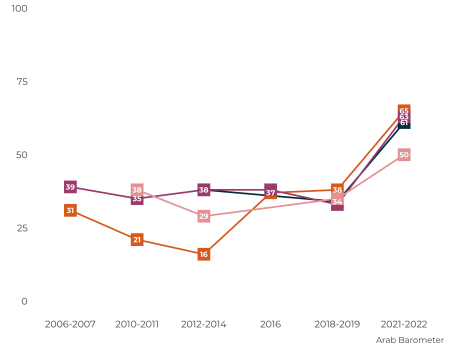
Under a democratic system, the country's economic performance is weak
% saying they strongly agree or agree

Jordan Kuwait Morocco



Under a democratic system, the country's economic performance is weak
% saying they strongly agree or agree

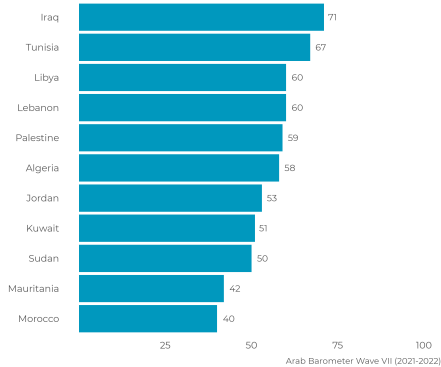
Algeria Libya Palestine Sudan



Democracy & indecision

Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems

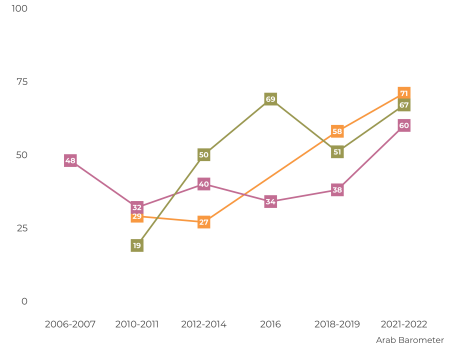
% saying they strongly agree or agree



Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems

% saying they strongly agree or agree

Iraq Lebanon Tunisia



Democracy & the indecision

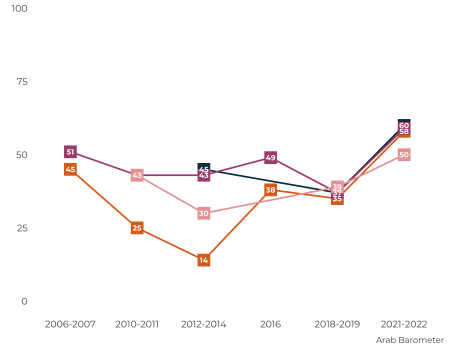
Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems
% saying they strongly agree or agree

Jordan Kuwait Morocco



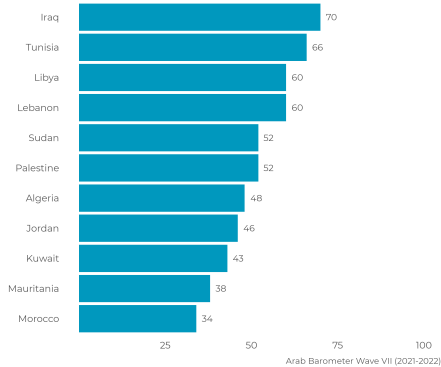
Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems
% saying they strongly agree or agree

Algeria Libya Palestine Sudan

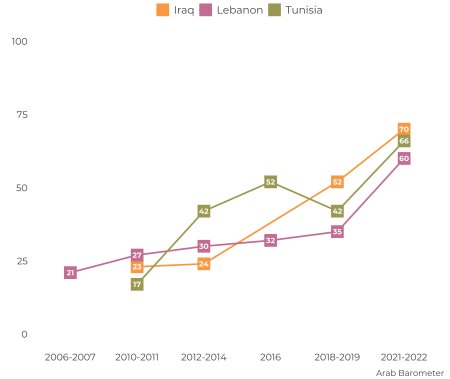


Democracy & instability

Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability
% saying they strongly agree or agree



Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability
% saying they strongly agree or agree

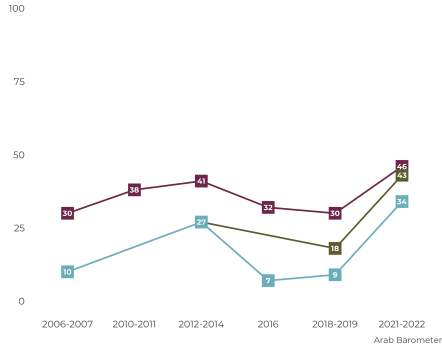


Democracy & the instability

Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability

% saying they strongly agree or agree

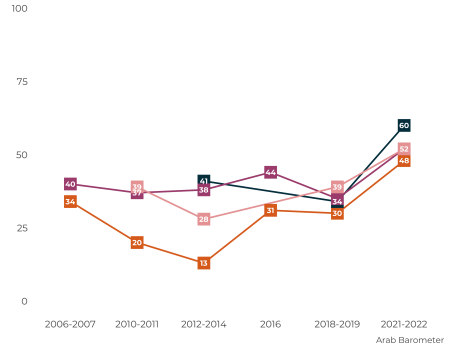
Jordan Kuwait Morocco



Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability

% saying they strongly agree or agree

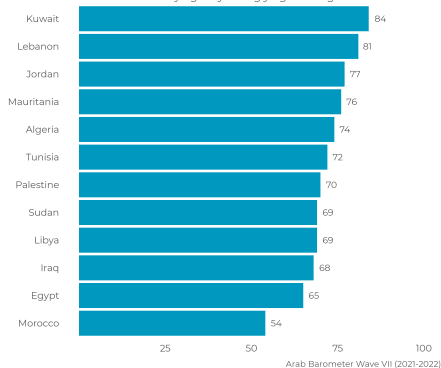
Algeria Libya Palestine Sudan



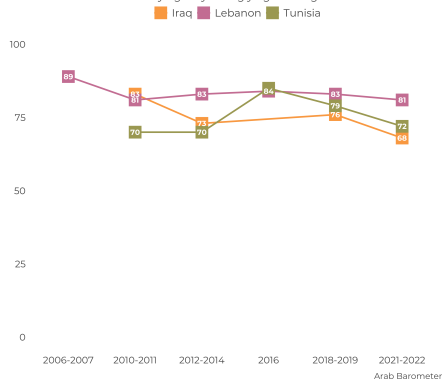
Unchanging Views of Democracy

Democracy is the best system

Democratic systems may have problems, yet they are better than other systems
% saying they strongly agree or agree



Democratic systems may have problems, yet they are better than other system
% saying they strongly agree or agree

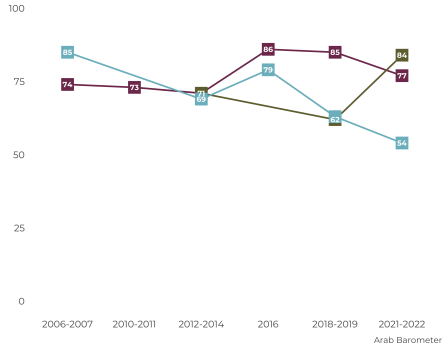


Democracy is the best system

Democratic systems may have problems, yet they are better than other system

% saying they strongly agree or agree

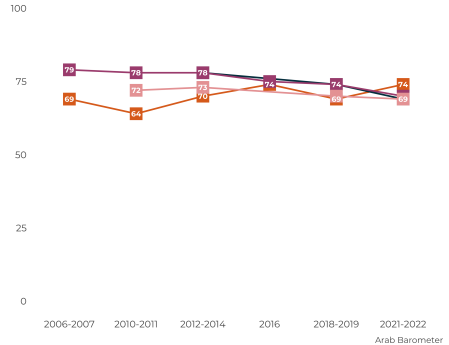
Jordan Kuwait Morocco



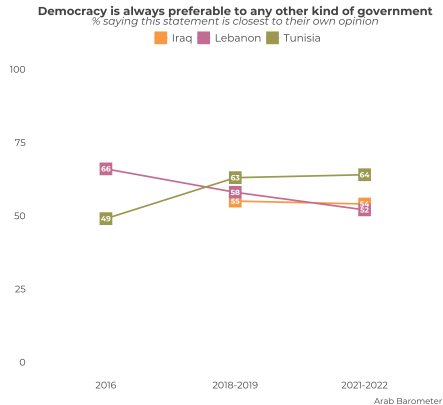
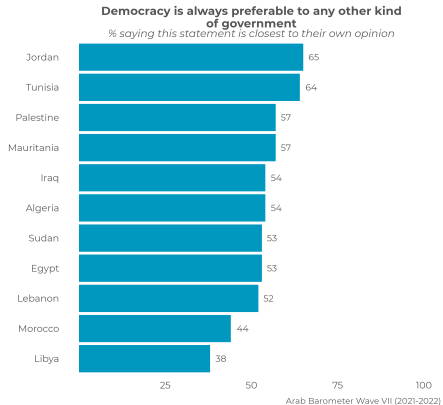
Democratic systems may have problems, yet they are better than other system

% saying they strongly agree or agree

Algeria Libya Palestine Sudan



Democracy is the only viable system

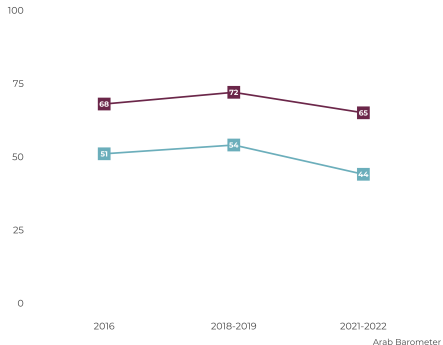


Democracy is the only viable system

Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government

% saying this statement is closest to their own opinion

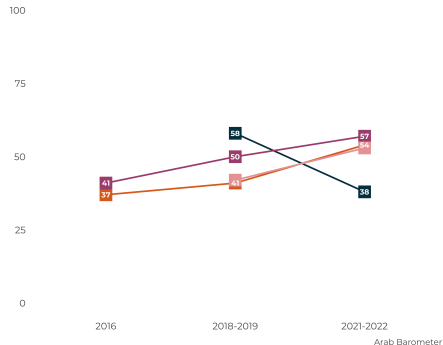
Jordan Morocco



Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government

% saying this statement is closest to their own opinion

Algeria Libya Palestine Sudan



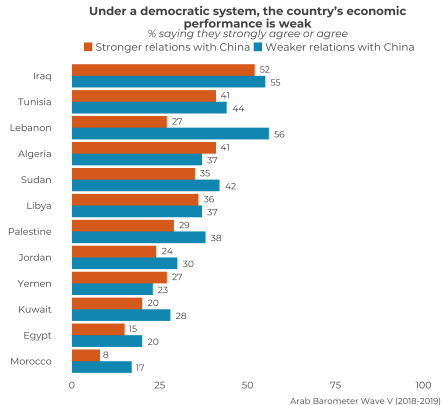
What Accounts for Changing Views?

Core Suppositions

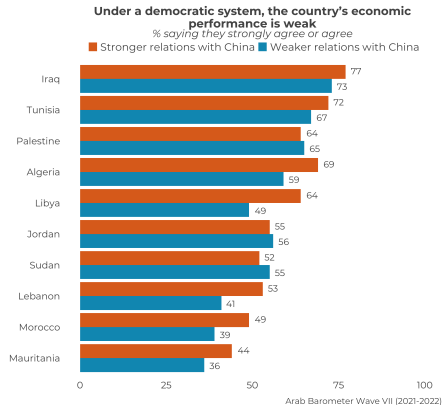
1. Influence from autocracies like China, Russia, & Saudi Arabia
2. Government performance in MENA 'democracies'
3. Global retrenchment of democracy

Closer relations with China & democracy is bad for the economy

2018-2019

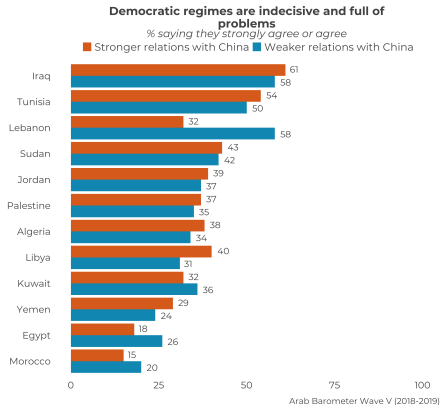


2021-2022

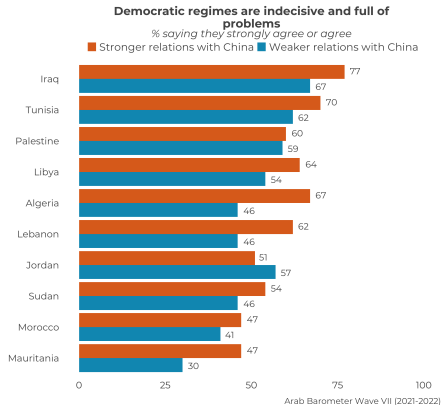


Closer relations with China & democracy is indecisive

2018-2019

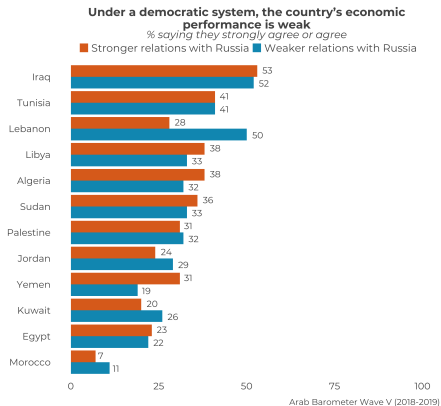


2021-2022

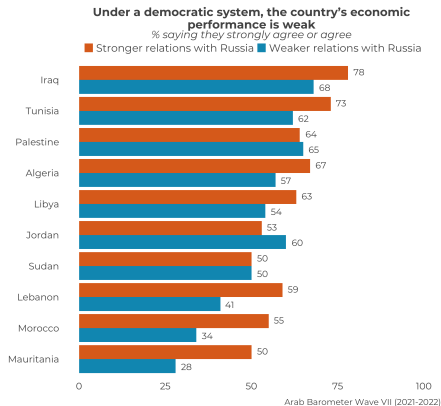


Closer relations with Russia & democracy is bad for the economy

2018-2019

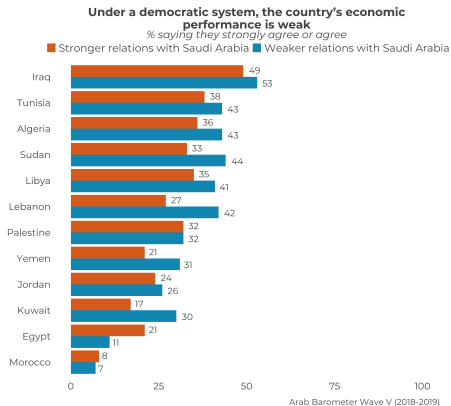


2021-2022

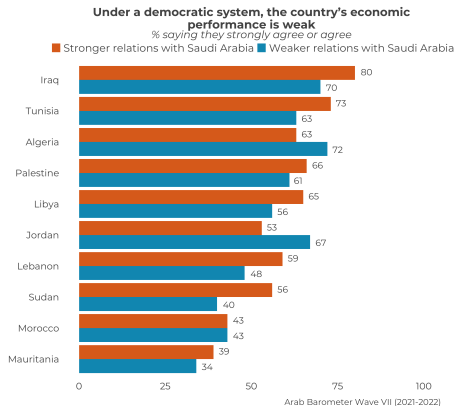


Closer relations with Saudi Arabia & democracy is bad for the economy

2018-2019



2021-2022

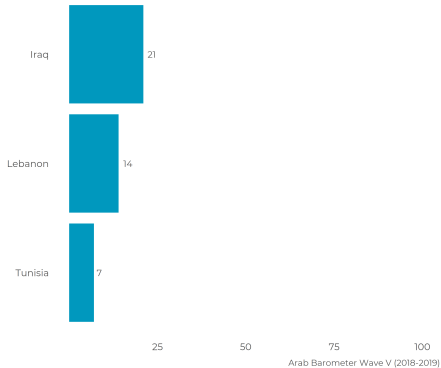


Government Performance in 'Democracies'

Views of the economy in 'democratic' & authoritarian countries

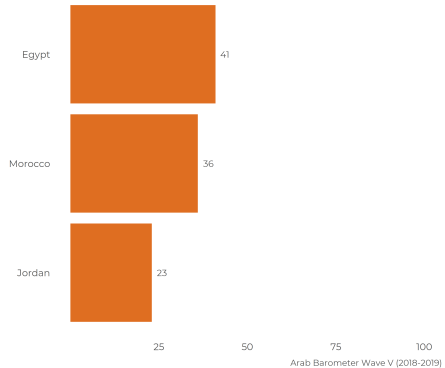
2018-2019

Economic Rating in Democracies
% saying very good or good



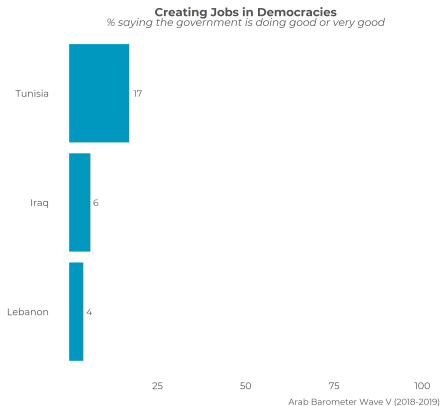
2021-2022

Economic Rating in Autocracies
% saying very good or good

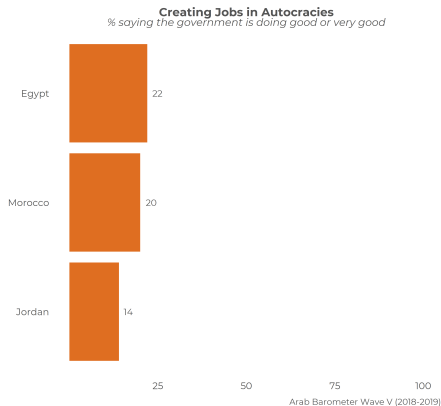


Views of the job creation in 'democratic' & authoritarian countries

2018-2019



2021-2022

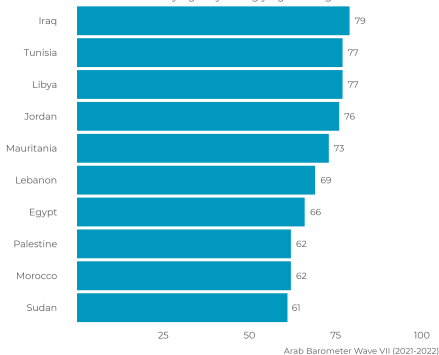


Democracy vs. Effective Government

Solving country's economic issues

As long as a government can solve our country's economic problem, it does not matter what kind of government we have

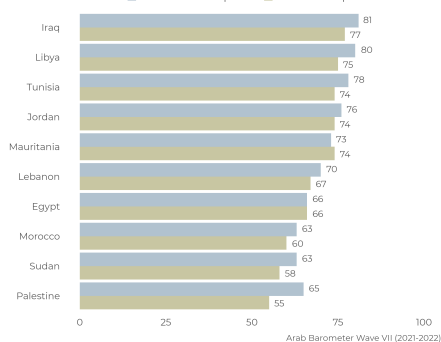
% saying they strongly agree or agree



As long as a government can solve our country's economic problem, it does not matter what kind of government we have

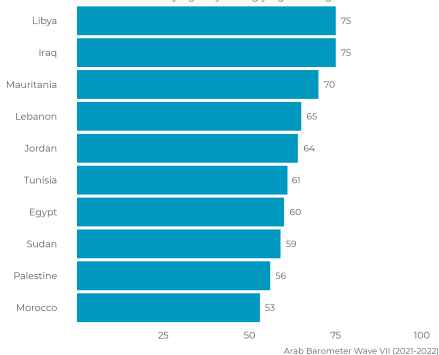
% saying they strongly agree or agree

■ Cannot cover expenses ■ Can cover expenses

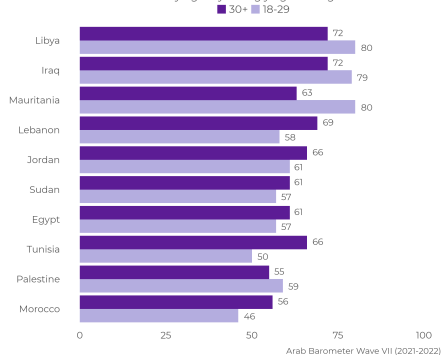


Maintaining stability

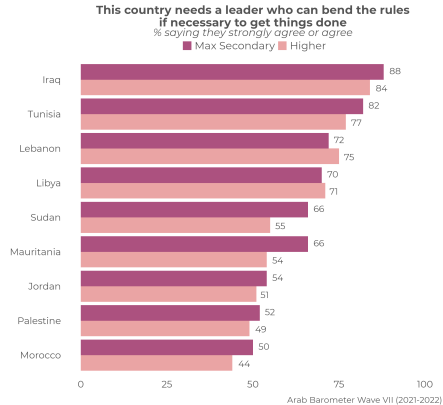
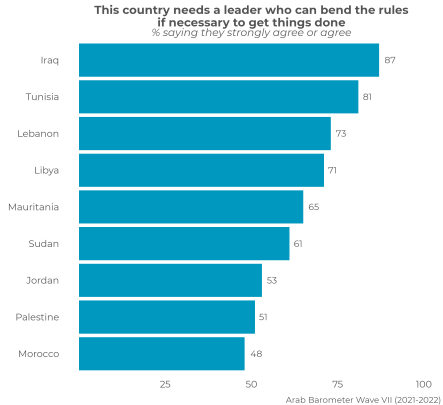
As long as the government can maintain order and stability in the country, it does not matter whether it is democratic or undemocratic
% saying they strongly agree or agree



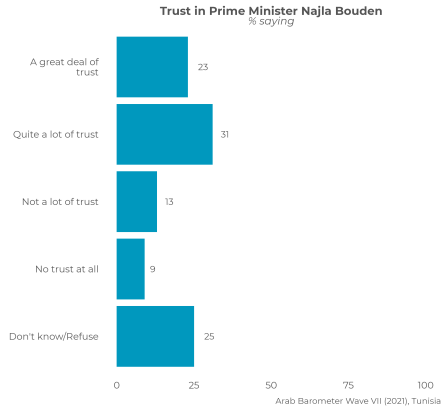
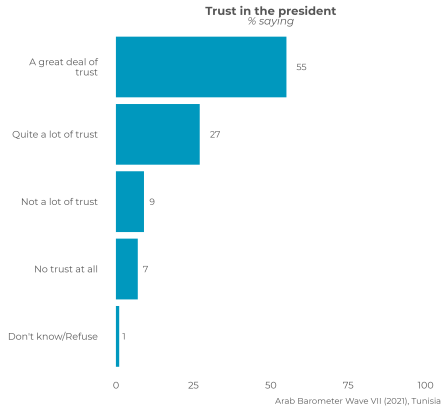
As long as the government can maintain order and stability in the country, it does not matter whether it is democratic or undemocratic
% saying they strongly agree or agree



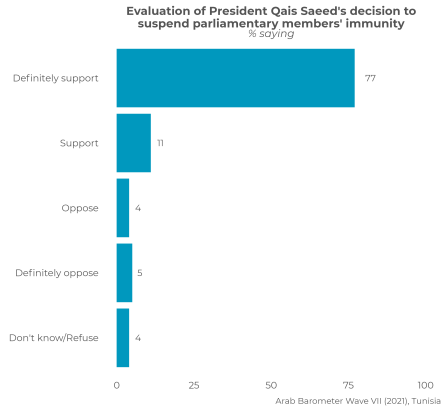
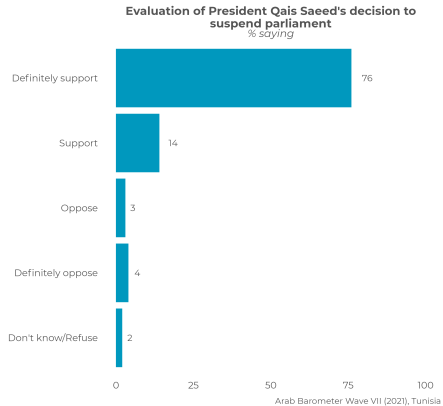
A leader who bends the rules



Tunisia: Support for new regime

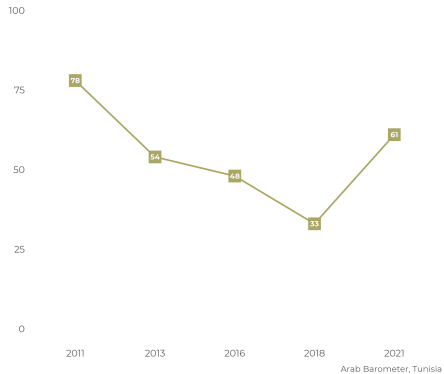


Tunisia: Support for the coup

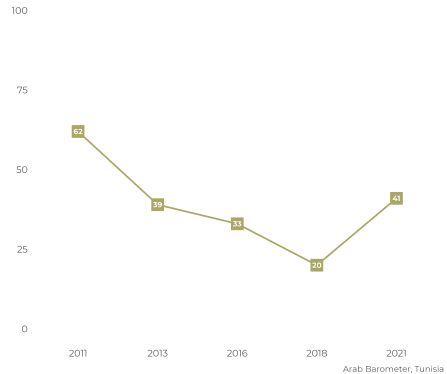


Tunisia: Renewed optimism

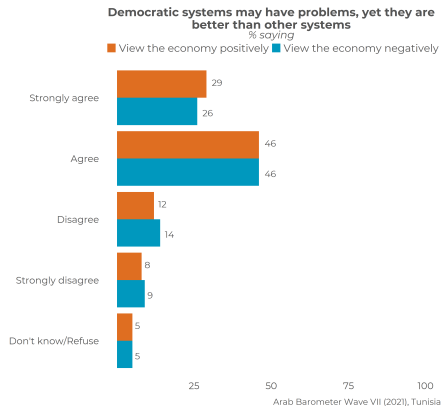
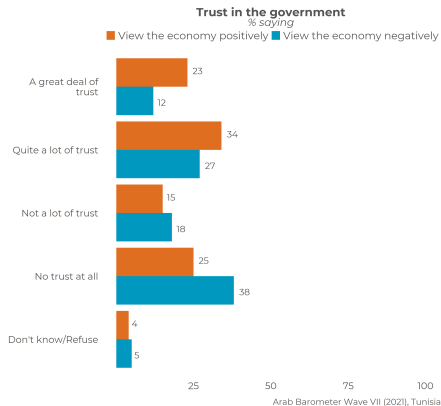
Economic situation in the country in the coming 2-3 years
% saying it will be much or somewhat better



Trust in the government
% saying a great deal or quite a lot of trust

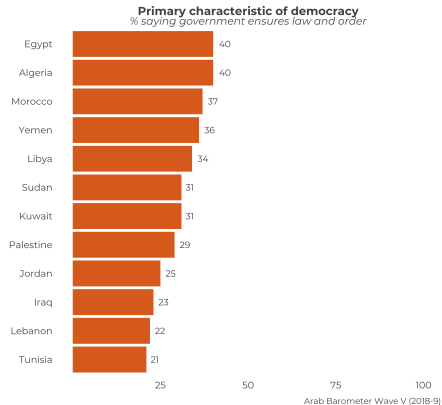
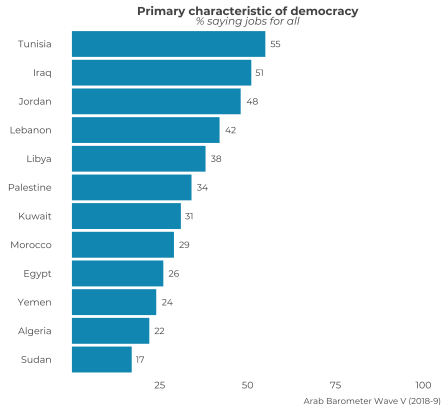


Tunisia: Views of the economy's effects on the new government

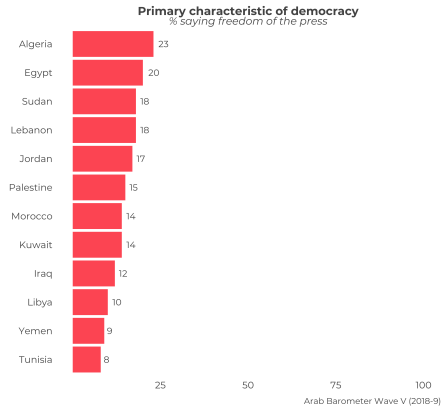
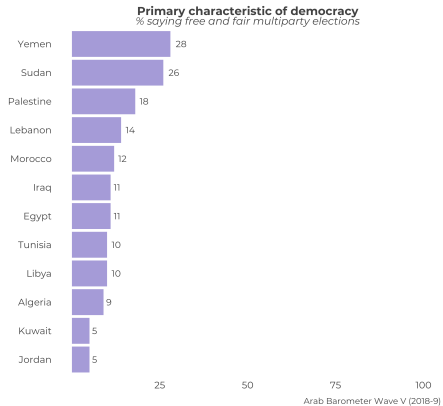


Making Democracy Work

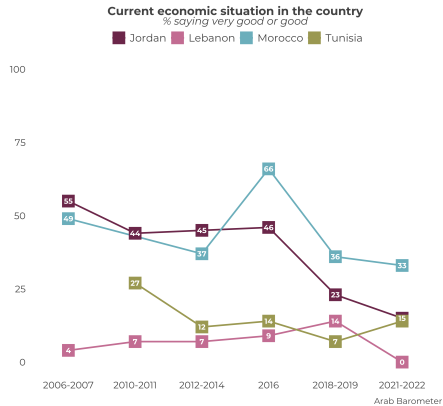
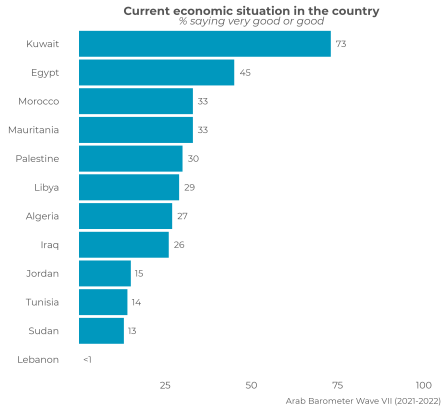
Definition of democracy



Definition of democracy



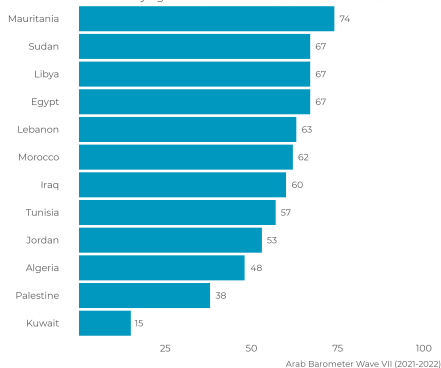
State of the economy



Food insecurity

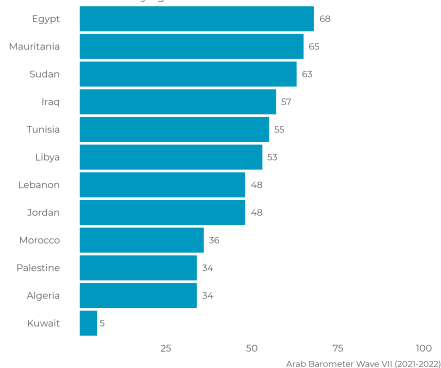
"We worried our food would run out before we got money to buy more"

% saying the statement is often or sometimes true

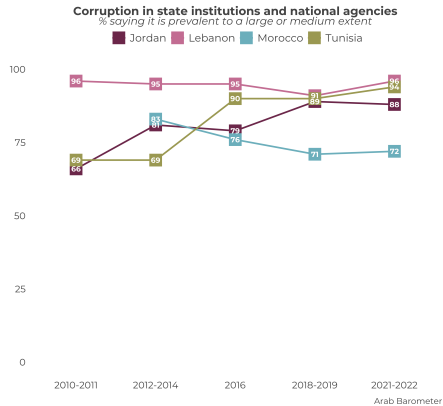
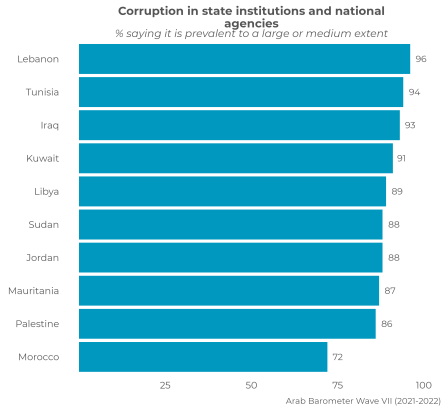


"The food that we bought did not last and we did not have money to get more"

% saying the statement is often or sometimes true



Corruption



Takeaways

Conclusions

1. Major changes in concerns about potential problems related to democracy, but clear majority still think its the best system of governance.
 - ▶ Gradual changes in more 'democratic' countries.
 - ▶ Recent & dramatic changes in less 'democratic' countries.
2. Recent changes likely the result of weakness of democratic experiments in MENA & rise of authoritarian alternative models.
3. Democracy is no longer understood as a panacea.
4. MENA citizens prefer democracy, but primarily want a system that will deliver results.
5. Majority do not understand democracy in procedural terms but rather substantive terms, meaning economic and political outcomes go hand-in-hand.
6. Need for further research on this topic.



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