Democratic Backsliding and Threats to Democracy
Evidence from Arab Barometer

Amaney Jamal
Princeton University

November 13, 2022
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?
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.
Growing concerns about democracy across MENA...
...but widespread support for democracy

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 & indecision

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

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Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022)
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

Arab Barometer

Democracy & instability

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

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Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022)
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

Arab Barometer
Unchanging Views of Democracy
Democracy is the best system
Democracy is the best system

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

% saying they strongly agree or agree
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Morocco

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

% saying they strongly agree or agree
- Algeria
- Libya
- Palestine
- Sudan
Democracy is the only viable system
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2018-2019</th>
<th>2021-2022</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
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<td>64%</td>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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<td>Algeria</td>
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<td>Yemen</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
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*Arab Barometer Wave V (2018-2019) and Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022)*
Closer relations with China & democracy is indecisive
Closer relations with Russia & democracy is bad for the economy

2018-2019

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

- Stronger relations with Russia
- Weaker relations with Russia

2021-2022

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

- Stronger relations with Russia
- Weaker relations with Russia
Closer relations with Saudi Arabia & democracy is bad for the economy

2018-2019

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

- Stronger relations with Saudi Arabia
- Weaker relations with Saudi Arabia

Iraq: 49/53
Tunisia: 38/43
Algeria: 36/43
Sudan: 33/44
Libya: 35/41
Lebanon: 27/42
Palestine: 32/32
Yemen: 21/31
Jordan: 17/26
Kuwait: 11/30
Egypt: 7/8
Morocco: 8/7

2021-2022

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

- Stronger relations with Saudi Arabia
- Weaker relations with Saudi Arabia

Iraq: 70/80
Tunisia: 63/72
Algeria: 63/72
Palestine: 66/72
Libya: 61/65
Jordan: 53/67
Lebanon: 48/59
Sudan: 66/72
Morocco: 43/43
Mauritania: 39/39

Arab Barometer Wave V (2018-2019)
Arab Barometer Wave VII (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

Iraq: 21%
Lebanon: 14%
Tunisia: 7%

2021-2022

Economic Rating in Autocracies
% saying very good or good

Egypt: 41%
Morocco: 36%
Jordan: 23%
Views of the job creation in ‘democratic’ & authoritarian countries

2018-2019

- Tunisia: 17%
- Iraq: 6%
- Lebanon: 4%

2021-2022

- Egypt: 22%
- Morocco: 20%
- Jordan: 14%
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% saying they strongly agree or agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022)
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

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<th>Country</th>
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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

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A leader who bends the rules
Tunisia: Support for new regime

**Trust in the president**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust Level</th>
<th>% Saying</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quite a lot of trust</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not a lot of trust</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>No trust at all</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don't know/Refuse</td>
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Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021), Tunisia

**Trust in Prime Minister Najla Bouden**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust Level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal of trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>No trust at all</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/Refuse</td>
<td>25</td>
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Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021), Tunisia
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

Arab Barometer, Tunisia
Tunisia: Views of the economy’s effects on the new government

**Trust in the government**

- **% saying**
  - View the economy positively
  - View the economy negatively

- A great deal of trust: 23% positive, 12% negative
- Quite a lot of trust: 34% positive, 27% negative
- Not a lot of trust: 15% positive, 18% negative
- No trust at all: 25% positive, 38% negative
- Don’t know/Refuse: 4% positive, 5% negative

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

- % saying
  - View the economy positively
  - View the economy negatively

- Strongly agree: 29% positive, 26% negative
- Agree: 46% positive, 46% negative
- Disagree: 12% positive, 14% negative
- Strongly disagree: 8% positive, 9% negative
- Don’t know/Refuse: 5% positive, 5% negative

Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021), Tunisia
Making Democracy Work
Definition of democracy

Primary characteristic of democracy
% saying jobs for all

- Tunisia: 55%
- Iraq: 51%
- Jordan: 48%
- Lebanon: 42%
- Libya: 38%
- Palestine: 34%
- Kuwait: 31%
- Morocco: 29%
- Egypt: 26%
- Yemen: 24%
- Algeria: 22%
- Sudan: 17%

Primary characteristic of democracy
% saying government ensures law and order

- Egypt: 40%
- Algeria: 40%
- Morocco: 37%
- Yemen: 36%
- Libya: 34%
- Sudan: 31%
- Kuwait: 31%
- Palestine: 29%
- Jordan: 25%
- Iraq: 23%
- Lebanon: 22%
- Tunisia: 21%
Definition of democracy

**Primary characteristic of democracy**

% saying free and fair multiparty elections

- Yemen: 28
- Sudan: 26
- Palestine: 18
- Lebanon: 14
- Morocco: 12
- Iraq: 11
- Egypt: 11
- Tunisia: 10
- Libya: 10
- Algeria: 9
- Kuwait: 5
- Jordan: 5

**Primary characteristic of democracy**

% saying freedom of the press

- Algeria: 23
- Egypt: 20
- Sudan: 20
- Lebanon: 18
- Jordan: 17
- Palestine: 15
- Morocco: 14
- Kuwait: 14
- Iraq: 12
- Libya: 10
- Yemen: 9
- Tunisia: 8

Arab Barometer Wave V (2018-9)
State of the economy

**Current economic situation in the country**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% saying very good or good</th>
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<td>Lebanon</td>
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*Arab Barometer Wave VII (2021-2022)*

**Current economic situation in the country**

- **Jordan**
- **Lebanon**
- **Morocco**
- **Tunisia**

*Arab Barometer*
Food insecurity

“We worried our food would run out before we got money to buy more”
% saying the statement is often or sometimes true

- Mauritania: 74
- Sudan: 67
- Libya: 67
- Egypt: 67
- Lebanon: 63
- Morocco: 62
- Iraq: 60
- Tunisia: 57
- Jordan: 53
- Algeria: 48
- Palestine: 38
- Kuwait: 15

“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

- Egypt: 68
- Mauritania: 65
- Sudan: 63
- Iraq: 57
- Tunisia: 55
- Libya: 53
- Lebanon: 48
- Jordan: 48
- Morocco: 36
- Palestine: 34
- Algeria: 34
- Kuwait: 5
Conclusions

1. Major changes in concerns about potential problems related to democracy, but clear majority still think it's 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.
Amaney Jamal
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