



Democracy in the Middle East and North Africa: *Five Years after the Arab Uprisings*

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Key Findings

- Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), eight-in-ten Arabs believe that democracy is the best system of government, even though it may have problems. This perception seems to have increased in most countries from 2013 to 2016.
- There also appears to be consensus regarding the economic performance under democratic government: Less than one third across the region believe that economic performance is weak under democratic governance.
- However, Arab views on the flaws of democracies are mixed: One third believe that democracy is ineffective in maintaining stability; four-in-ten think that democracy is indecisive; almost every other person says that the people of their country are not ready for democracy.
- With the exception of Palestinians and Algerians, Arab publics predominantly evaluate their countries as more democratic in 2016. They seem to be more skeptical regarding the suitability of democracy to their countries in 2016.

Introduction

Uprisings engulfed parts of the Middle East in 2011, starting in Tunisia and then erupting in countries including Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. This ‘Arab Spring’ brought varying levels of change in these countries. For example, Tunisia has witnessed a more inclusive government while Jordan and Morocco have seen constitutional changes. Meanwhile, Algeria has remained relatively stable. What have been the effects of these regional events on popular support for democracy? Did the Arab uprisings represent a sustained demand or a short burst of desire for democracy?

Prior analysis of Arab Barometer results found that the Arab Spring did not significantly shift popular attitudes towards democracy. Rather, demand for democracy was high at the time of the uprisings (Wave II in 2010-2011) and remained high after (Wave III in late 2012 – early 2014). Is this still the case in Arab countries or have the events in the five years following the Arab uprisings diminished the public’s desire for democracy? The results from Wave IV (2016) of the Arab Barometer, the primary focus of this report, shed some light on attitudes towards democracy in the years after the Arab uprisings.

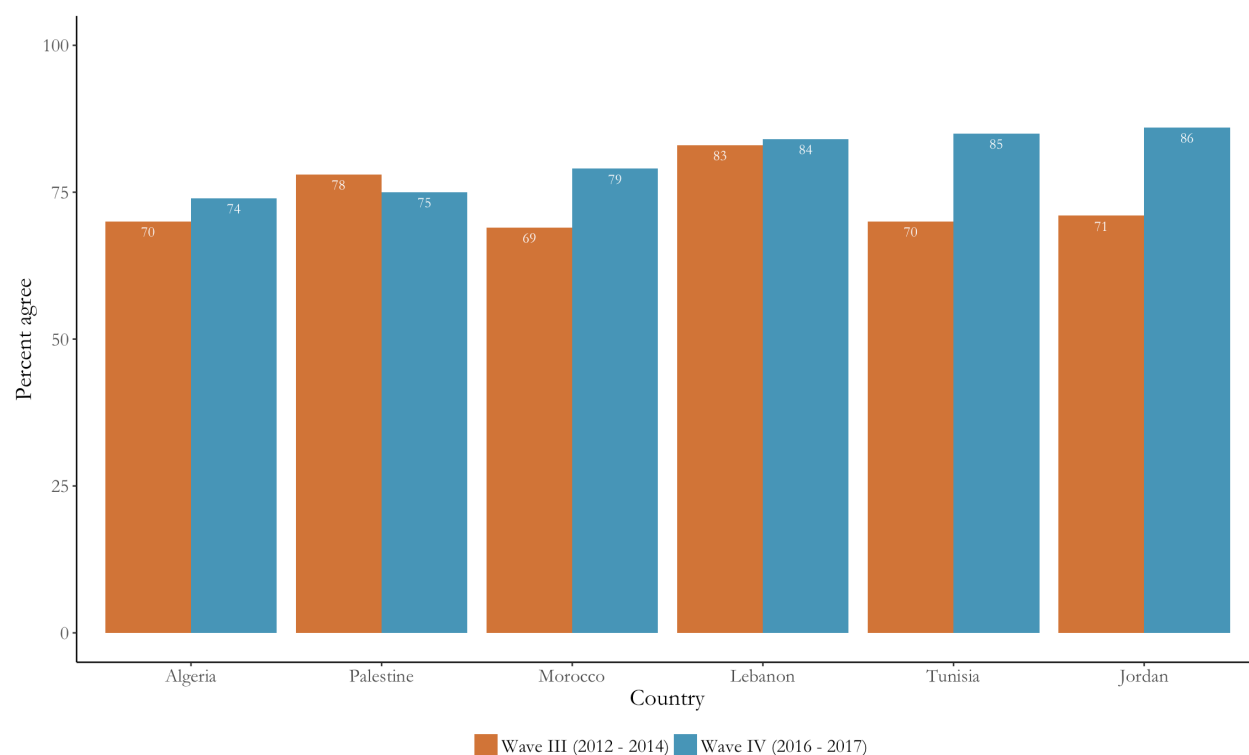


Figure 1: Democracy Better System of Government

Attitudes towards Democracy

It is helpful to think about the regimes of the seven countries discussed below using Freedom House's scores based on political rights and civil liberties. According to scores for 2018, Tunisia is the only country classified as free. In contrast, Tunisia's neighbor, Algeria, remains dominated by the country's military and security forces. Lebanon, Morocco, and Jordan are considered party free and the other countries covered in both waves are rated as not free by Freedom House.

Democracy is the better system of governance

Regardless of regime type or experience with the Arab uprisings, the survey results make clear that Arab citizens still want democracy. Across the region, the vast majority of citizens (ranging from 91 percent to 77 percent) say that democracy is the best system, despite its potential problems. In fact, in most countries surveyed, regardless of regime type, citizens are now more likely to say democracy is the best system compared to 2013.

There has been a 16-percentage-point increase in support for democracy in Morocco and a 10-point increase in Jordan between 2013 and 2016. There are smaller increases in Lebanon (1 point) and Tunisia (6 points). Palestine remains unchanged at 79 percent. In contrast, Algeria has decreased by 6 points, but most citizens (77 percent) still favor democracy.

Many citizens also say that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government. This differs from the prior question about support for democracy because instead of affirming that it is the just the best system citizens are in effect asked if it is the only viable system. In Jordan (68 percent), Lebanon (66 percent), Egypt (54 percent), and Morocco (51 percent), more than half say that democracy is always preferable to other types of governance. In Tunisia, roughly half (49 percent) also support this statement. In contrast, in Palestine (41 percent) and Algeria (37 percent), fewer than half of citizens hold this view. Instead, in both societies, many say that under some circumstances alternative system may be preferable or that the form of the country's government does not matter to people like them.

Commitment to democracy

Although most citizens say democracy is the best system, how strong is this belief? To measure this concept, the Arab Barometer asks people the degree to which democracy is associated with a number of problems that critics often attribute to this type of political system. Specifically, it asks if democracy is indecisive and has too much quibbling. In most countries, fewer than half of citizens associate this problem with democracy, including just 18 percent in Morocco.

Meanwhile, those in Tunisia (73 percent) and Palestine (52 percent) are more likely than citizens elsewhere in the region to harbor this concern.

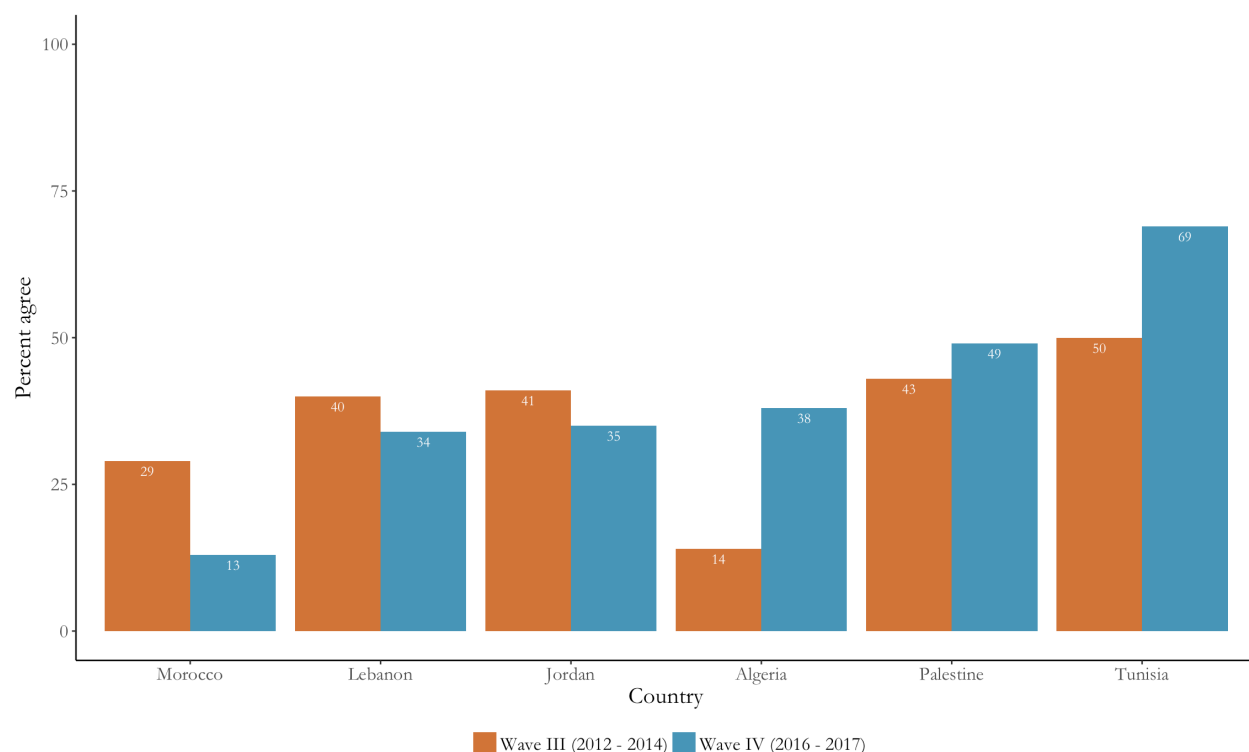


Figure 2: Democracy Indecisive and Full of Problems

There have been divergent trends across the region in concern about the degree to which democracy is indecisive. In three cases, concern about democracy being indecisive has increased since 2013 while the percentage has decreased in three other countries. The most dramatic increase (23 points) is in Algeria where citizens are more than twice as likely to say that democracies are indecisive in 2016 than in 2013. There are smaller increases in Tunisia (14 points) and Palestine (9 points). In contrast, Morocco has shown a 14-point decrease while the percentage has fallen by 9 points in Jordan. This indicates that more people have a favorable view of democracy in these two countries. Such views could be the result of both regimes holding competitive elections in 2016. In Lebanon, there has been a 6-point decrease in citizens that say democracy has problems relative to 2013. This is especially surprising since Lebanon had had no president for two years during the Wave IV survey.

Economic performance under democracy

Another problem sometimes associated with democracy is that it has negative effects on the economy. In fact, this concern is more widespread across the

Middle East and North Africa.

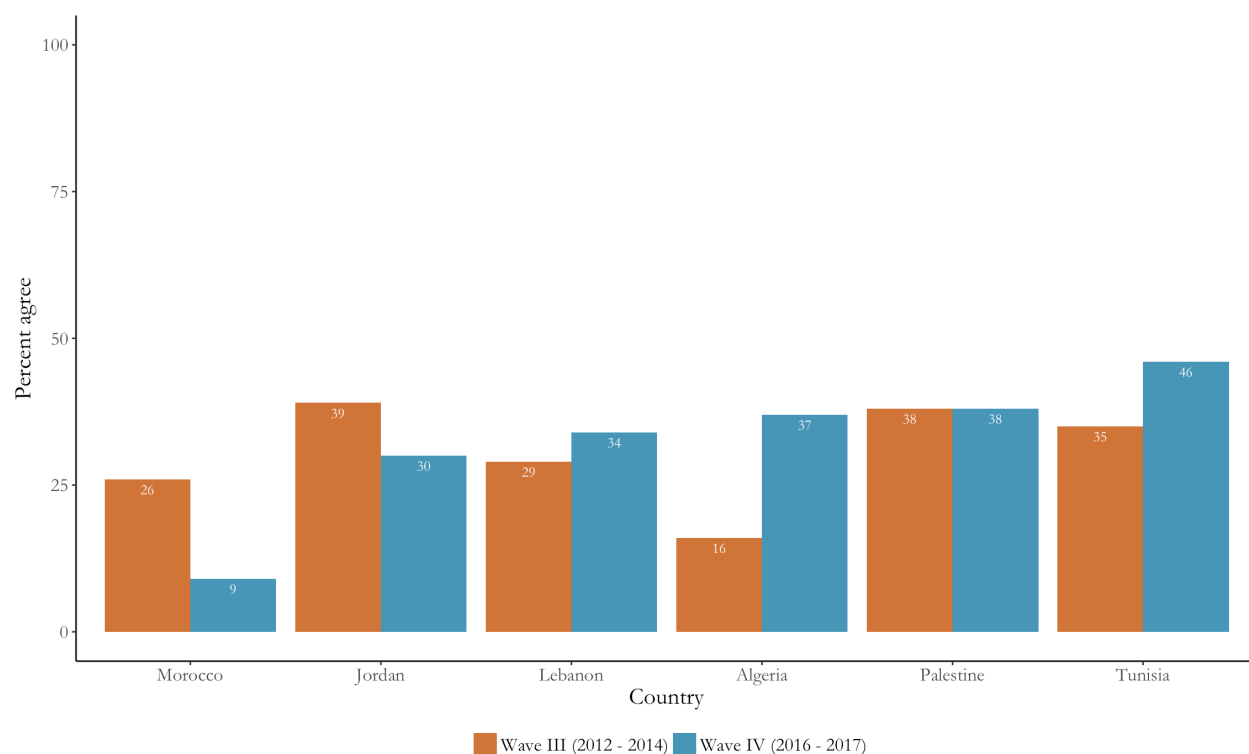


Figure 3: Economy Weak in a Democracy

About half of Tunisians associate democracy with weak economic performance, while this perception is also relatively common in Palestine (41 percent) and Algeria (39 percent). In Jordan (31 percent) and Morocco (12 percent), fewer hold this view and there has been a downward trend over time. Since 2013, the percentage of citizens who say democracy is bad for the economy has fallen by 17 points in Morocco and 11 points in Jordan.

It is important to note that the Jordanian and Moroccan economies were relatively weak during this period, which for Jordan could be attributed to the spillover effects of the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. Since neither country is generally considered to be a full democracy, perhaps citizens are less likely to link economic problems to a democratic system in both cases.

In contrast, the rest of these countries show an increase in those who associate weak economic performance with democracy. There has been a large increase (21 percentage points) in Algerians that believe the country's economic performance is weak under democracy. Part of this is perhaps a demonstration effect from the events in its neighbor Tunisia. There have been increases in Palestine and Lebanon as well. In the relatively more democratic Lebanon, this increase may partly be due to the government's struggle to cope with the effect of the Syrian crisis on economic growth.

Maintaining stability under democratic governance

Another potential shortcoming of democracy is a perceived lack of order and stability. Citizens are more likely to perceive this problem to be an issue in Tunisia (56 percent) and Palestine (47 percent) than elsewhere in the region. In the other countries, fewer than 35 percent believe that lack of security is an issue. For example, in Morocco only 9 percent of citizens harbor this concern.

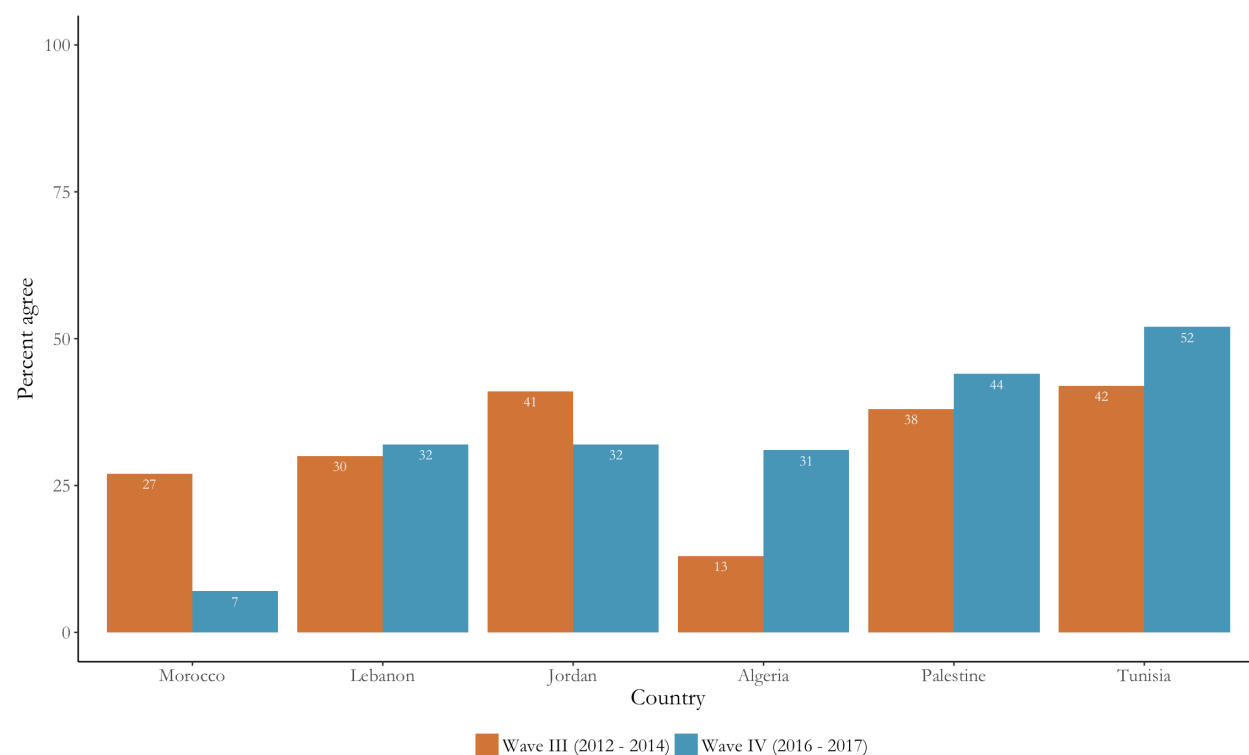


Figure 4: Democracy Ineffective in Maintaining Stability

The biggest increase in negative perception about the effects of democracy is in Algeria, where citizens are 18 points more likely to say that democratic regimes are not effective at maintaining stability. Perhaps this increase reflects the security issues facing Tunisia, a relatively democratic neighboring country compared to Algeria. Meanwhile, there is also a significant increase in Palestine (8 points).

In contrast, large decreases in Morocco (20 points) and Jordan (13 points), indicate that citizens are less likely to associate these problems with democracy in 2016 than in 2013. Again, it is possible that these views are linked with constitutional changes in both countries. Citizens may believe their countries are more democratic, with the Moroccan King Mohammed VI's recent removal of ministers to introduce "accountability" in the government and the Jordanian Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour's (2014 – 2016) measures to combat corruption. These reforms did not lead to instability, so it may be that citizens are more

likely to believe that instability is not a problem that comes with democracy.

Are the people ready for democratic government?

The final question in this battery asks people whether their fellow citizens are prepared for democracy. In Tunisia, three-quarters (76 percent) say that their country's citizens are not prepared for democracy, which likely reflects some of the challenges the country has faced during its democratic experiment following the Jasmine revolution. In Palestine, 57 percent say that citizens are not prepared for democracy. Elsewhere, between 30 percent and 45 percent of citizens hold this view.

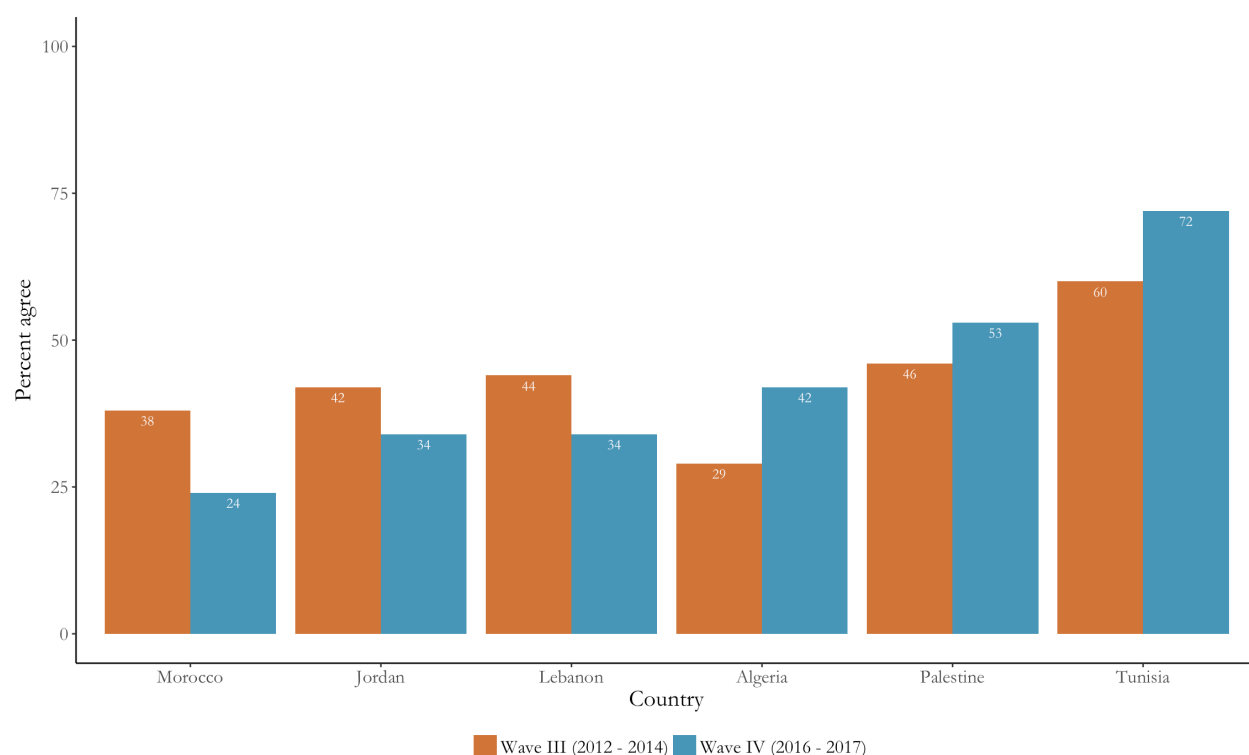


Figure 5: People Not Ready for Democracy

Overall, attitudes on this question follow no regional trend. There has been a decrease in Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco since 2013, indicating that citizens are now less concerned about the their country's residents not being capable of living in a democracy. For Jordan and Morocco, this could link back to the changes in the each country's constitution. In contrast, there have been increases in the percentage of citizens that believe those living in their country are not prepared for democracy in Algeria (12 points), Palestine (10 points) and Tunisia (5 points).

Democracy Ratings

Perceived State of Democracy

In terms of democratic development of the regimes themselves, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 10 the extent to which their country is democratic, with 0 being completely authoritarian and 10 being fully democratic. Jordan has a score of almost 7, meaning they believe their regime is closer to a democracy than an authoritarian system. Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia are closer to the midpoint at 5. Egypt has an average score of 4.7, and Algeria and Palestine are closer to 4.

Overall, there is an increase in the extent to which citizens believe that their country is democratic. Palestine and Algeria remain exceptions here. Despite Algeria's significant decrease, Algeria, Egypt, Palestine and Tunisia have relatively similar ratings. Given that Tunisia is widely considered the most democratic country in the region, it is clear that the political system is still seen as having many shortcomings by its citizens.

| Country | 2013 | 2016 | Δ† |
|-----------|------|------|-------|
| Egypt | 3.1 | 4.7 | +1.6 |
| Morocco | 3.98 | 5.10 | +1.12 |
| Lebanon | 4.16 | 5.11 | +0.95 |
| Jordan | 5.86 | 6.71 | +0.85 |
| Tunisia | 4.32 | 4.97 | +0.65 |
| Palestine | 4.49 | 4.05 | -0.44 |
| Algeria | 6.32 | 4.36 | -1.96 |

Figure 6: State of Democracy

†Δ indicates change from 2013 to 2016.

| Country | 2013 | 2016 | Δ† |
|-----------|------|------|-------|
| Morocco | 5.38 | 7.15 | +1.77 |
| Jordan | 6.05 | 6.52 | +0.47 |
| Egypt | 4.59 | 5.02 | +0.43 |
| Tunisia | 4.85 | 4.78 | -0.07 |
| Palestine | 5.56 | 4.85 | -0.71 |
| Lebanon | 5.42 | 4.57 | -0.85 |
| Algeria | 7.28 | 5.36 | -1.92 |

Figure 7: Suitability of Democracy

†Δ indicates change from 2013 to 2016.

Perception of Suitability of Democracy

On this same scale, citizens were asked how appropriate democracy is for their country. Morocco has the highest score here at 7.2, indicating a stronger belief that democracy is appropriate for the country. This is followed by Jordan's rating of 6.5, while the rest of the countries surveyed are close to the midpoint of 5.

With regard to trends over time, there has been a decrease in Algeria, Palestine, Tunisia, and Lebanon and a marked increase in Morocco (1.8). Egypt and Jordan have experienced smaller increases of less than a half a point on average. It is worth noting that in Egypt, Wave III took place in the last months of Morsi's government and Wave IV was in the context of Sisi's government, under whom citizens say democracy is slightly more appropriate.

Conclusion

Attitudes toward democracy have not changed consistently across the region. The most significant differences are found in Morocco and Jordan, where citizens are now less likely to associate potential problems with democratic government while also exhibiting a greater commitment to this system. This change could be attributed to their respective monarchies holding competitive elections and generally attempting to alter their citizen's perceptions of the regime. Arguably, the reforms did relatively little to open up the system of government despite being promoted as democratic reforms by the regime. As a result, it is possible that citizens in both countries believed that the country was more democratic but also saw that many problems often associated with democracy were not exacerbated by these reforms. In turn, they may have become less concerned about the potential for democracy to be the source of greater challenges. In contrast, Tunisia's government has become more inclusive and the public is witnessing firsthand the challenges of a democratic transition and consolidation. As a result, their survey responses demonstrate that they associate more problems with democracy despite their continued support for this type of governance.

Egyptians on the whole perceive their government to be more democratic and for democracy to be more appropriate for their country, whereas Algerians show the opposite effect in addition to associating more problems with democracy. Despite political turmoil in Lebanon, citizens associate fewer problems with democracy and have increased their support for it. As for Palestine, the public associate more problems with democracy but continue in to support the system.

Overall, these results suggest that domestic politics are driving results in each country as opposed to updating taking place in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. The primary exception may be Algeria, where citizens may be updating their beliefs based on the experience in neighboring Tunisia. However, elsewhere domestic changes are more likely to account for shifts in public opinion. As a result, Tunisia's ongoing struggle to consolidate democracy is likely having minimal effects on views elsewhere in the region, implying that there are few if any lasting effects of the Arab uprisings on attitudes toward democracy. Instead, citizens continue to hope for improved governance and believe that democracy is likely to be the best system to achieve this goal, even if many in continue to harbor some concerns about effects of such governance on their country.



About Arab Barometer

The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insights into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

We have been conducting high quality and reliable public opinion surveys of probability samples representative of citizens aged 18 or above in the Middle East and North Africa since 2006. Each country survey included approximately 1,200 respondents. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's place of residence. The error margin is ± 3 percent.

The Arab Barometer is the largest repository of publicly available data on the views of men and women in the MENA region. Our findings give a voice to the needs and concerns of Arab publics.

Until 2017, the Arab Barometer has conducted 36 national surveys over four waves including more than 45,000 interviews in 14 Arab countries.



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