



الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer VII

Tunisia Report



2022

Executive summary

Tunisia was the country that sparked the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and that many analysts held out as the region's best hope for a political transition to democracy. Yet, after a decade of weak governments and poor economic performance that did not address the concerns of citizens that precipitated the Jasmine Revolution, Tunisians became increasingly frustrated with conditions in the country. Without clear solutions or a hope for improvements, the country's path was becoming increasingly untenable.

Against this background, the Arab Barometer survey of Tunisia makes clear that many citizens welcomed the events of July 25, 2021, including the suspension of parliament. It appears Tunisians viewed these actions as attempting to break the political deadlock more than a political coup. The fact that their president was taking charge and promising solutions to the political deadlock appears very attractive to most citizens. As a result, Saied is the most popular national actor in the country save for the armed forces, which appears linked with his actions on July 25. The survey finds that the suspension of parliament and stripping member of parliament of their immunity were supported by the vast majority of citizens at the time of the survey.

These political changes also appear to have led to a dramatic shift in the overall attitudes of citizens. For example, a decade-long decline in attitudes about economic prospects sharply reversed, with the majority of Tunisians now believing that the economy will improve in the near future. A majority also now say the government is working to tackle corruption for the first time since 2013, which also signals a renewed hope for the future.

Tunisians are also increasingly satisfied with the government, including six-in-ten who rate the its overall performance positively. However, the situation is not all positive. On specific measures, such as the quality of health care, education, or other basic services, ratings of government performance are far lower. Nevertheless, there has been a major increase on some key subjective measures, such as how the government is doing on addressing the wealth gap between rich and poor. As with the economy, many trends on how the government is performing have recently reversed their decade-long decline.

Most of these changes appear linked with popular views of President Saied. The level of trust in government has doubled since 2018 even though trust in parliament has fallen during this period. By contrast, more than four-in-five Tunisians say they have confidence in the President while more than half trust Prime Minister Najla Bouden, who had recently been appointed by the President at the time of the survey. At the same time, there is extremely low support for other major political actors, including one-in-ten or fewer who say they have

confidence in former Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi or Ennahda. Meanwhile, a minority of citizens say they have confidence in religious leaders or civil society organizations, suggesting there are few alternative sources of legitimacy to the president at this time. In fact, among other major political actors, only the armed forces enjoy high levels of trust than the President.

Despite a growing optimism about the future, major challenges remain in the present. Economic conditions and corruption remain the top concerns for citizens. Only 14 percent rate the economy as being good while a majority of citizens say they have recently worried their food would run out before they have the money to afford more. There is also a near universal perception that corruption exists within government institutions. Moreover, a greater percentage of Tunisians are thinking about emigrating than in any previous Arab Barometer survey. Thus, despite renewed hope about the future, the survey makes clear the challenges of everyday life in Tunisia.

Notwithstanding the challenges over the last decade, Tunisians remain committed to democracy as the best form of governance. Nearly three-quarters affirm that democracy is the best system while nearly two-thirds say it is the only viable system of governance. However, Tunisians are also clear on the limitations of this political system, with two-thirds majorities agreeing that under democracy economic performance is weak and that democracy is indecisive and full of problems.

Although supportive of democracy, the survey results make clear that most Tunisians are demanding significant changes to the system. A majority say that the existing political system needs major change or should be replaced entirely while eight-in-ten say the country needs a strong ruler who can get things done even if it requires bending the rules. Given the frustrations of the last decade, it appears many Tunisians are willing to support President Saïed's efforts to enact dramatic change, even if it requires him to pursue legally questionable methods to do so.

Tunisians are far less likely to perceive COVID as the country's primary challenge relative to the economy and corruption. Still, despite the rates of COVID being relatively low at the time of the survey, half of citizens remain worried about the spread of the virus in the coming six months. Among those who say they are not concerned about its spread, the vast majority cite the fact that there is a vaccine as the basis for no longer fearing the virus's spread.

As in other countries around the world, there is some evidence to suggest that the experience of lockdowns and other related challenges may have had an effect on view of gender roles in the country. Tunisians have long agreed that women should enjoy equal rights to men, but have been less convinced women should play equal roles to men in public or private spheres. However, after many

years without significant changes on the views of the roles for women, there has been a major shift since 2018. The perception that men are better at political leadership has declined by 16 points while the perception that men should have the final say in household decisions has declined by 11 points over the last three years, meaning for the first time in an Arab Barometer survey a minority of Tunisians hold both of these views.

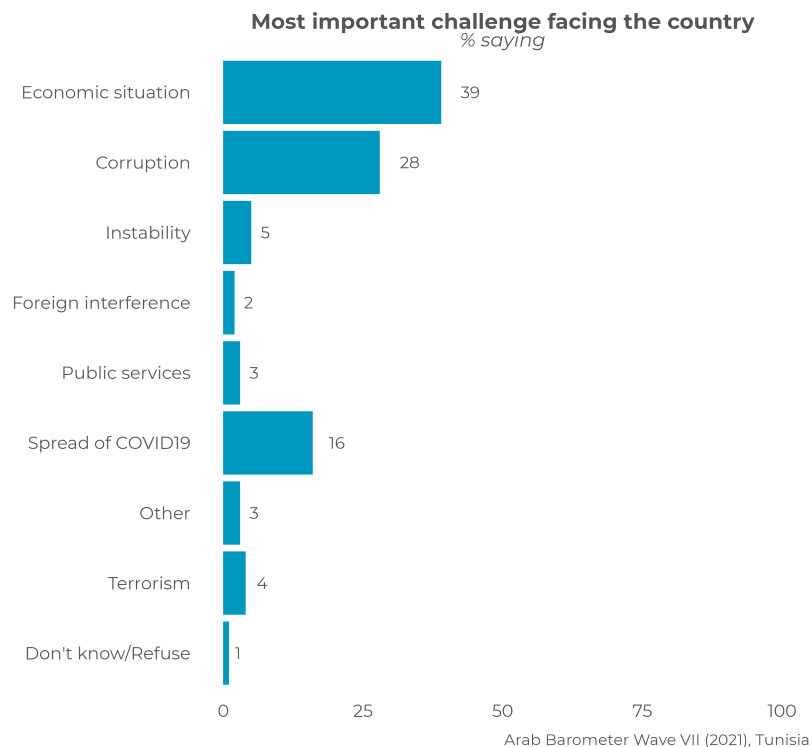
Turning to international relations, among global powers, Tunisians look most favorably upon China, followed by Russia and the U.S. Within the region, about half view France, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia favorably, while views of the U.K. are somewhat lower. However, Tunisians are relatively open to the outside world, particularly in increasing economic relations. Majorities say they want closer economic ties with China, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia, for example.

These are among the main findings of a nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted in Tunisia. The survey included 2,400 randomly selected citizens from across all governorates of Tunisia and was fielded from October 1 - November 20, 2021 using a multistage clustered sample. The margin of error for the reported results is ± 2 percentage points. The surveys are part of Arab Barometer's seventh wave which is the the largest publicly available survey that captures the sentiments of citizens across MENA following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information about the surveys can be found at www.arabbarometer.org.

COVID

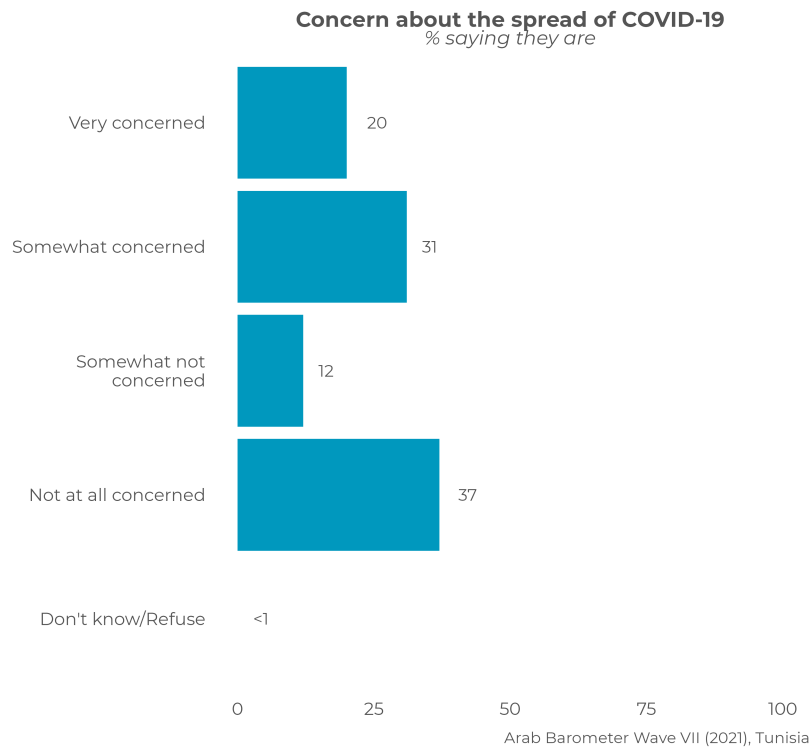
Like many countries around the world, COVID has deeply affected Tunisia. Tunisia suffered a massive wave in summer 2021 brought about by the Delta variant, although rates had fallen dramatically by the time the survey was fielded in October 2021. During the period of fieldwork, official estimates show that rates were lower than at any time since October 2020, which was the start of the first wave that affected the country.

Against this background, the survey results make clear that COVID was far from the top concern of Tunisians. Only 16 percent say that this is the most important challenge facing their country, compared with 39 percent who say the economic situation and 28 percent who say corruption. These findings track closely with the results from Arab Barometer's sixth wave, which demonstrated that levels of concern about COVID increased and decreased in parallel with the overall rates of infection for the country. This survey, occurring between the waves of infection brought about by the delta variant and the subsequent omicron variant, follows this trend.



Still, concern about COVID was not negligible. Half (51 percent) of Tunisians said they remained somewhat (31 percent) or very concerned (20 percent) about

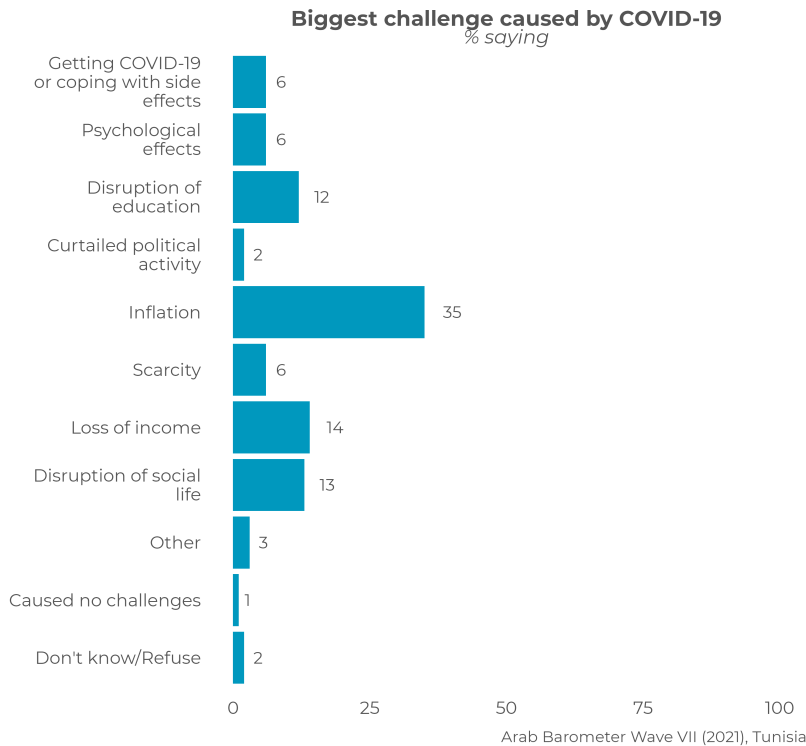
the spread of the virus. Among this group, the primary concern was having a family member fall ill or die rather than the effects on the country's economy or the household's finances. However, many Tunisians (37 percent) say they are not at all concerned about the future spread of the virus. Among this group, the predominant reason for the lack of concern is the fact that a vaccine against the virus exists.



It appears that the relatively-high vaccination rate in Tunisia has significantly alleviated concerns. More than two-thirds (69 percent) say they have been vaccinated, including three-quarters (75 percent) of those who are thirty and older. However, just over half of those ages 18-29 say they have been vaccinated. Vaccination rates are also higher among those who are better educated, with three-quarters (76 percent) of those with a university degree having been jabbed compared with two-thirds (66 percent) of those with only a secondary degree or less.

Among those who have not been vaccinated, six-in-ten say they are either very likely (36 percent) or somewhat likely (24 percent) to get vaccinated. Among these citizens, nearly half (44 percent) do not have a preference among vaccines while 27 percent prefer the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine with five percent or

less favoring any other type of vaccine. Among those who don't intend to get vaccinated, 36 percent say that it is up to God to decide what happens while three-in-ten say that they do not believe the vaccine to be effective. Notably, among those who are unlikely to be vaccinated, the concern about the vaccine being ineffective is the primary reason given by those who have a college education or above (53 percent).



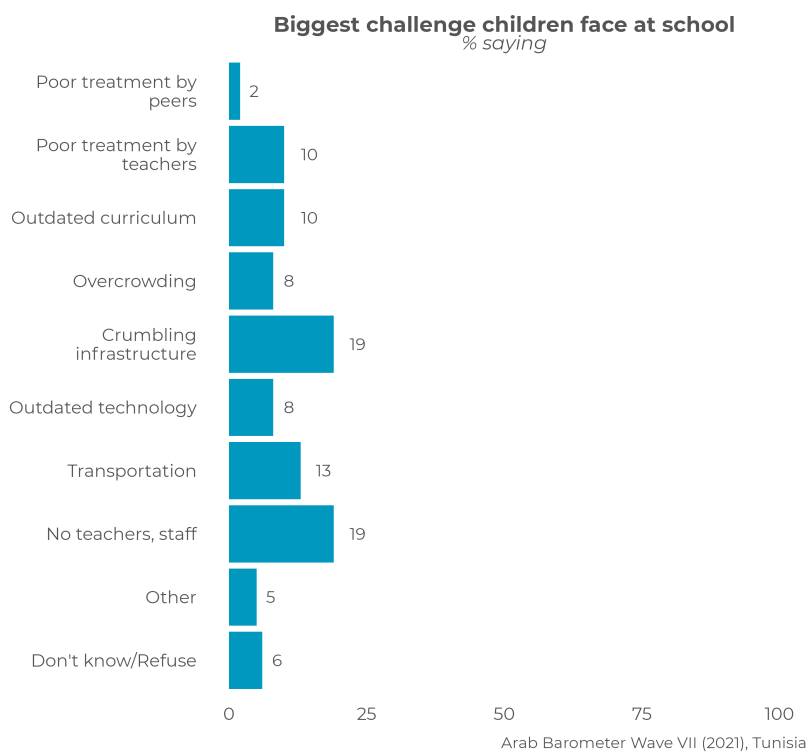
As in countries around the world, the pandemic has caused major challenges in Tunisia. When asked about the major challenge caused by the pandemic, the plurality (35 percent) say an increased cost of living. Meanwhile, roughly equal percentages say a loss of income (14 percent), disruption of social life (13 percent), and disruption to children's education (12 percent). Only 13 percent of citizens say they have received relief aid during the pandemic, with nearly all of those who have getting monetary assistance. Among those who have received assistance, two-thirds say it came from the national government while virtually none report receiving assistance from an international or local NGO.

Despite these challenges and the limited number who have received assistance, the majority rate the government's performance on responding to COVID positively (62 percent). This is especially true for those who are 30 years or older (67

percent) compared with those who are ages 18-29 (38 percent). Yet, the crisis has also laid bare significant challenges in the healthcare system as it attempts to cope with the challenges from the pandemic. Tunisians' biggest concerns relate to an insufficient number of hospitals (38 percent) and a scarcity of medical supplies (32 percent), likely a reflection of the shortages experienced during the major wave of infections from the delta variant in the first half of 2021. Notably, Tunisians were far less likely to say that the high cost of care (14 percent) or a lack of trained medical professionals (9 percent) was the primary weakness of the country's healthcare system.

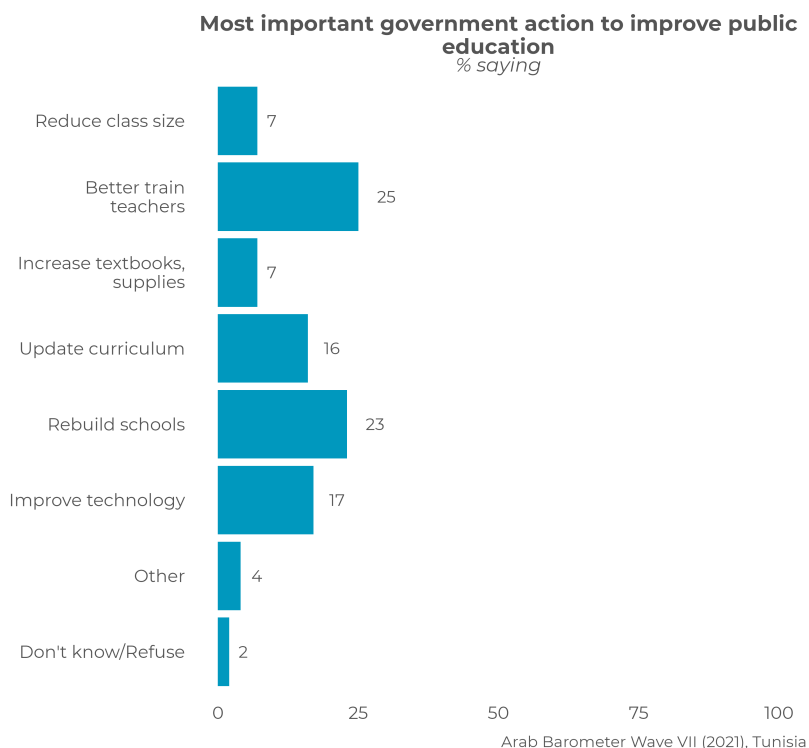
Education

The educational system in Tunisia has faced many challenges, particularly dealing with the effects of COVID-19 since 2020.



When asked about the greatest problem in the school system, Tunisians are divided. Roughly one-in-five say crumbling infrastructure or a lack of qualified

teachers (19 percent, respectively). Meanwhile, 13 percent point to transportation-related challenges and one-in-ten say poor treatment of students or an outdated curriculum and eight percent say overcrowding or poor technological resources.

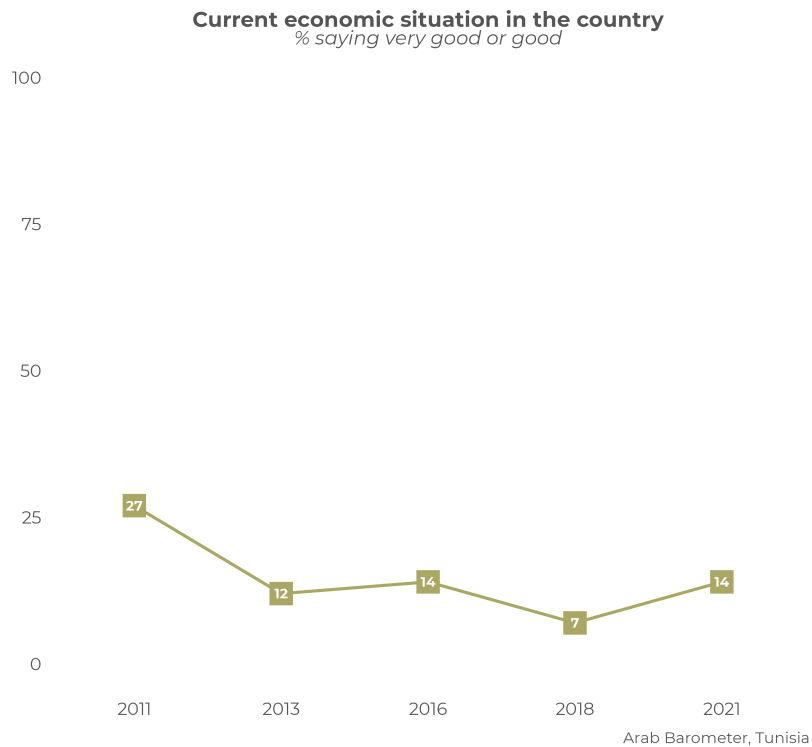


When asked about the most important step the government could take to improve the nation's schools, responses were somewhat similar. A quarter believe the most important step is to better train teachers, 23 percent say repairing schools, 17 percent want greater use of technology in the classroom, and 16 percent say updating the curriculum. Notably, youth ages 18-29 are 10-points more likely than those 30 and older to say the key action should be updating the curriculum but eight points less likely to say better training of teachers. In sum, there are a range of issues that citizens believe are limiting the quality of schools making it even more challenging to target reforms in a single area.

Economy

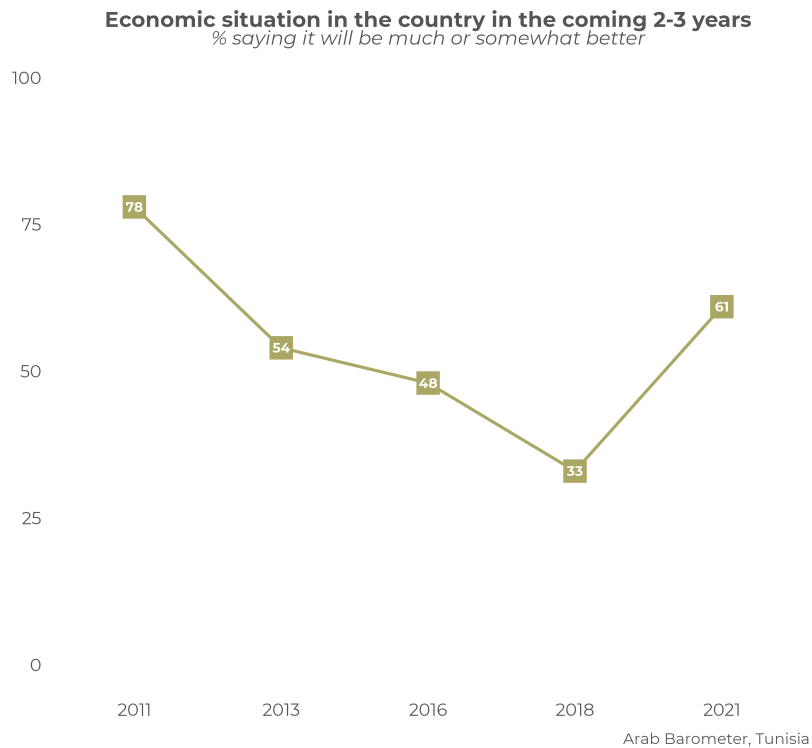
Ratings of the economic situation remain very poor in Tunisia with just 14 percent saying the economy is good or very good. Nevertheless, despite the effects

of COVID, this rate is up from 2018 when just seven percent said the same. Notably, more than half (54 percent) of Tunisians say the economy is doing very badly, reflecting the continuing economic collapse in the country where income per capita is now about a quarter lower than at the time of the 2011 revolution.¹

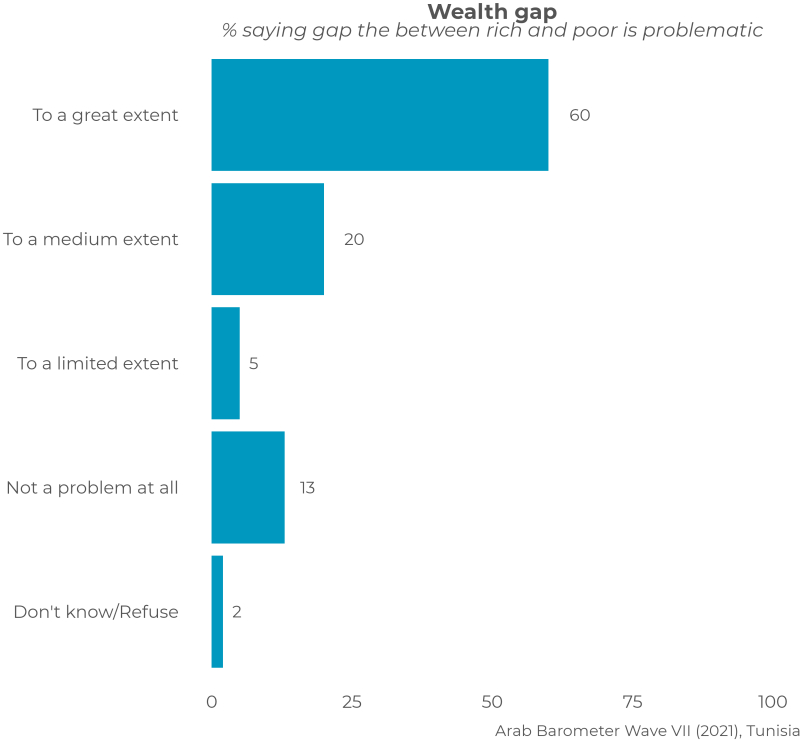


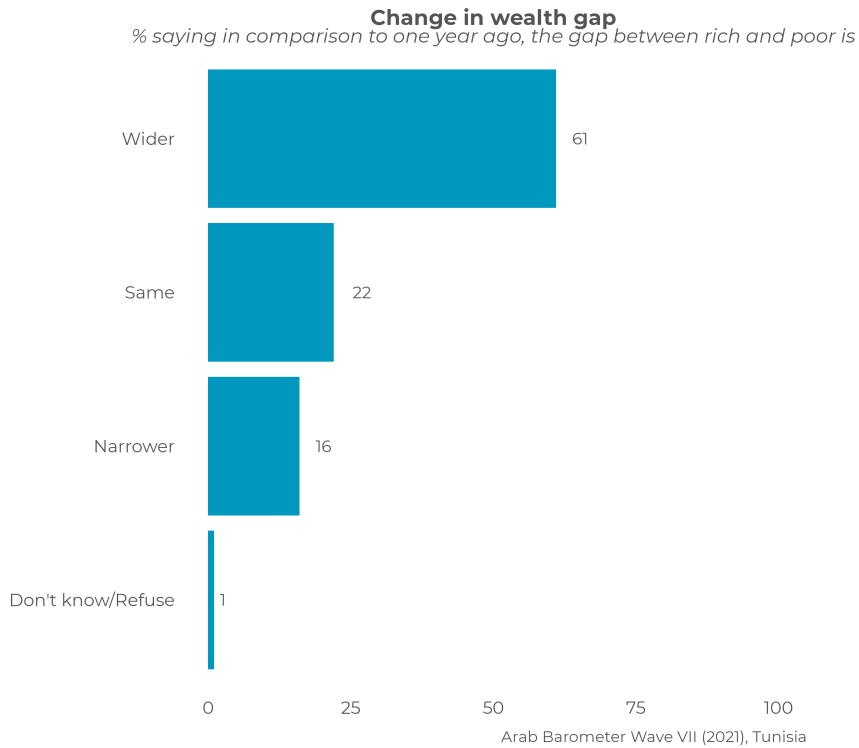
Yet, Tunisians are relatively optimistic about their country's economic future. A clear majority (61 percent) expect the economic situation to improve in the coming 2-3 years. This percentage is nearly double the percentage in 2018 (33 percent) and reverses a long-standing decline in economic optimism. In fact, this is the highest level of optimism seen in Arab Barometer surveys since 2011 just a few months after the Tunisian revolution. Youth are somewhat less likely to hold this view, with those ages 18-29 being 16-points less likely to say the economy will be much better in the near future compared with those 30 and older.

¹Jamal, Amaney & Michael Robbins. Why Democracy Stalled in the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2022.

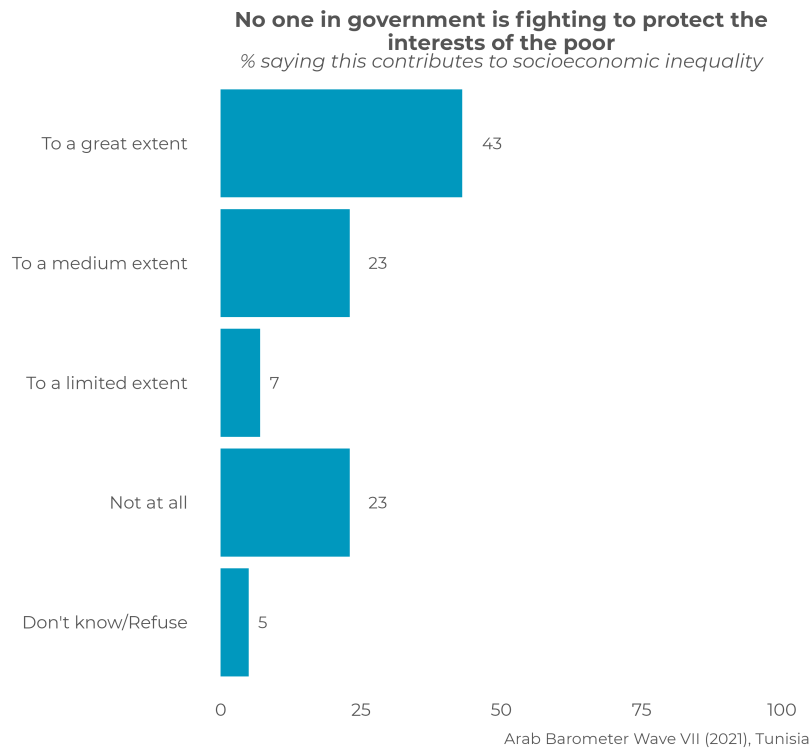


One of the ongoing challenges facing Tunisia is socio-economic inequality. The vast majority of Tunisians (80 percent) say that this is a problem to a great (60 percent) or medium (20 percent) extent. Unsurprisingly, those who are unable to afford their basic needs are more likely to rate this problem as to a great extent than those who are able to do (+11 points). Moreover, there is a clear perception that this gap is growing, with 61 percent of Tunisians saying it has increased in the past year, compared with 22 percent who perceive no change and 16 percent who say it has narrowed.

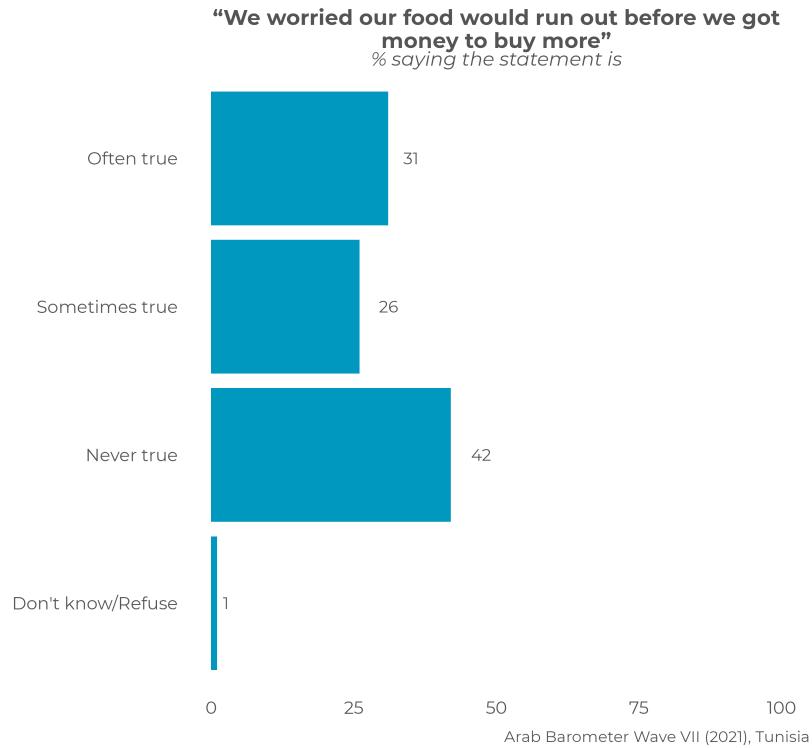




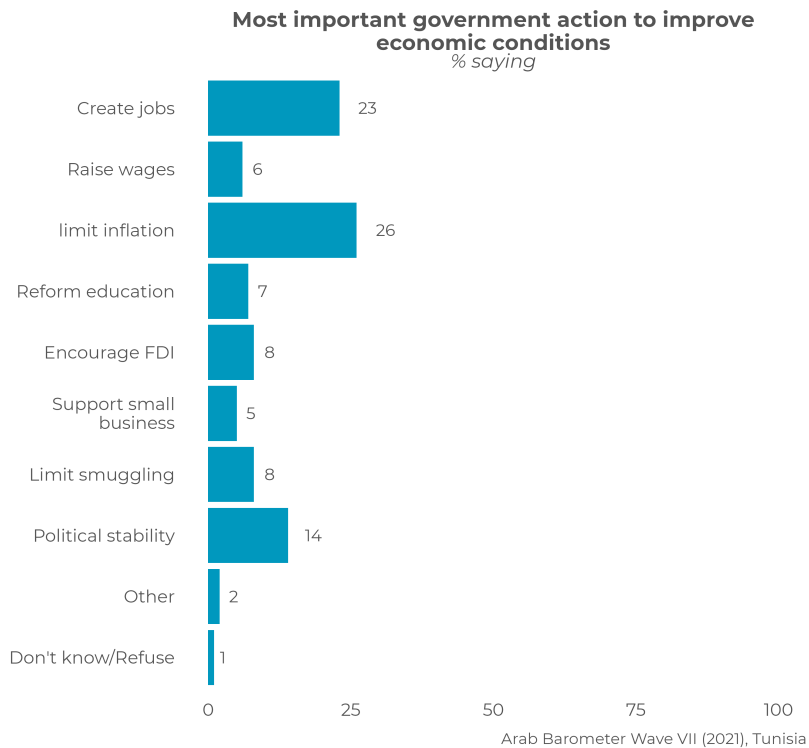
When asked about the key source of socio-economic inequality, a majority (61 percent) say that it is due to the fact that some people work harder than others. By comparison, 55 percent attribute the gap to the fact that some people are born into wealthier families. However, 65 percent of citizens say that it is due to the fact that the government is not fighting to protect the interests of the poor, including 43 percent who say that this factor contributes to a great extent. In other words, Tunisians are somewhat more likely to blame a failure of government policy over individual effort or structural factors in explaining the problem of inequality.



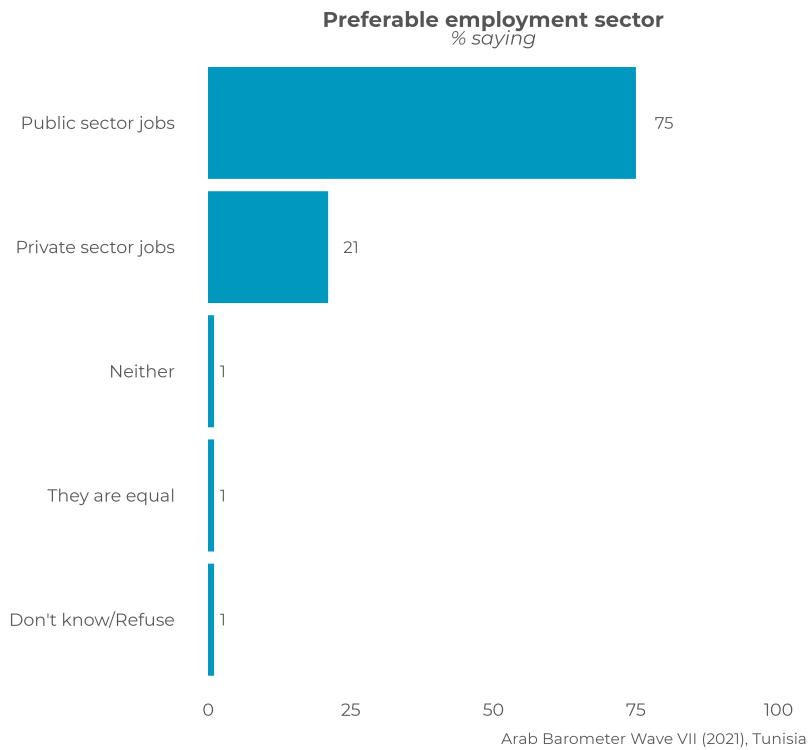
The perception of increasing levels of inequality may be due, at least in part, to the struggles of many citizens to afford basic necessities. Fully 57 percent of citizens say that it is often (31 percent) or sometimes (26 percent) true that they have worried their supply of food would run out before they were able to afford more, with a similar proportion (55 percent) saying this outcome had in fact happened to them. These results demonstrate the major challenges being faced by more than half of the country's population who are struggling to afford basic necessities.



When asked about what the government should do to improve economic conditions, the most common responses are to lower the cost of living (26 percent) or to create more job opportunities (23 percent) followed by increasing political stability (14 percent). Notably, youth ages 18-29 are 10-points more likely to want the government to focus on creating jobs compared with those 30 and older, which is presumably related to the extremely high rate of youth unemployment in Tunisia.

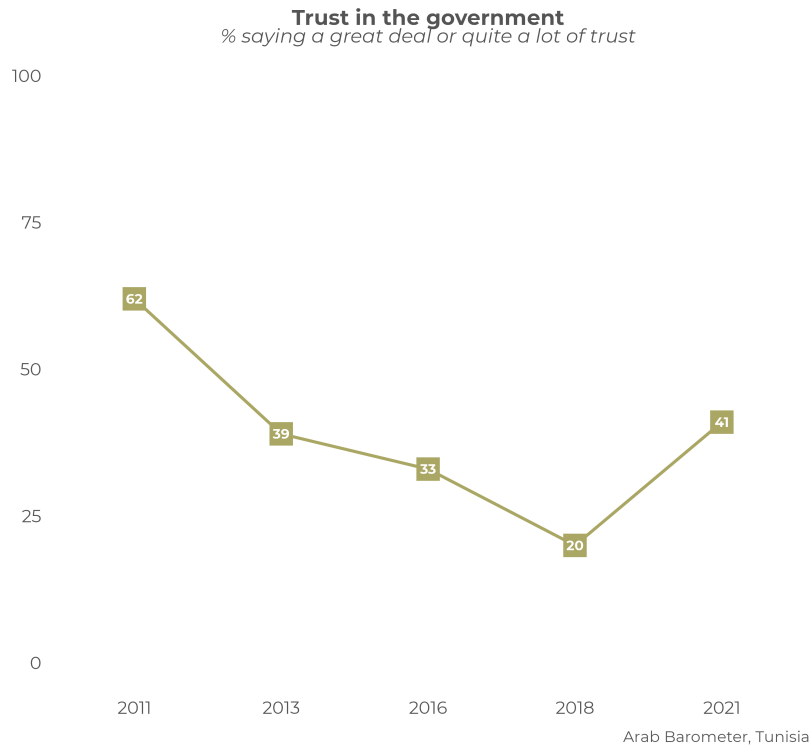


The survey results also make clear that most Tunisians hope for employment in the public sector, which is seen as preferable to the private sector. Overall, 73 percent of Tunisians say that it is harder to get a job in the public sector than the private sector. Tunisians are also more likely to say that public sector jobs pay better than private ones (53 percent vs. 42 percent) while the overwhelming majority (71 percent) believes that public sector jobs offer greater job security. Unsurprisingly, three-quarters view public sector jobs as being the preferable job to have, which suggests that Tunisians are likely hoping for the government to increase the number in the public sector to a greater degree than they want it to promote investment in the private sector.

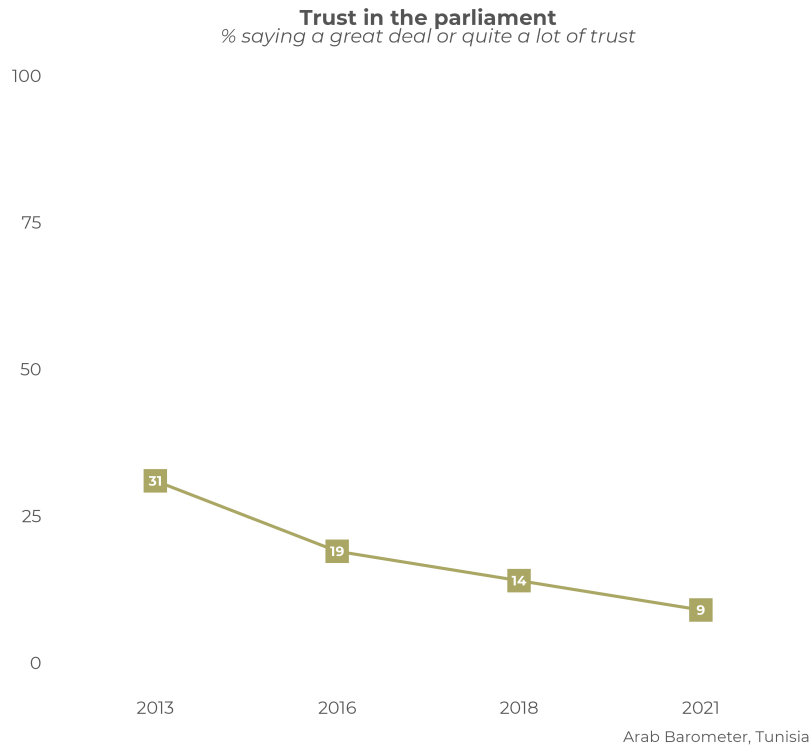


Trust in Political Actors

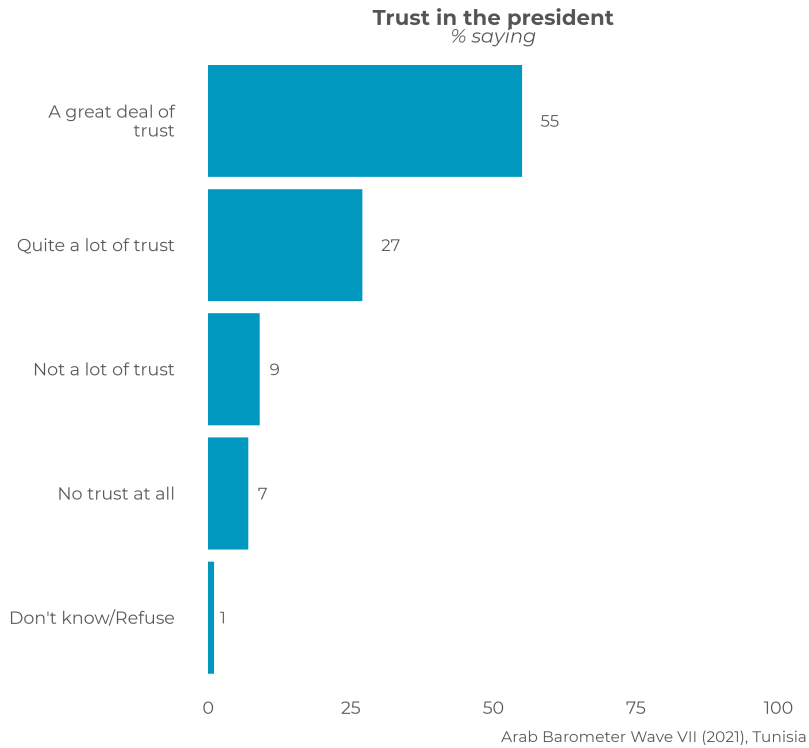
The 2021 Arab Barometer survey in Tunisia marks a stark reversal in trends on trust in government. Since the Jasmine Revolution, levels of trust in government had fallen dramatically, dropping from 62 percent in 2011 to just 20 percent in 2018. However, this trend exhibited a dramatic reversal in 2021, rising to 41 percent who are confident in the government. Notably, as for most other measures of trust in political actors, youth ages 18-29 are 15 points less trusting of the government than those who are 30 and older. However, there are not substantial other demographic differences in levels of trust in government by gender, level of education, or income.



There is virtually no trust in parliament in Tunisia, with just nine percent saying they trust it to a great or medium extent compared with 81 percent who say they have no trust at all in this institution. Although levels of trust in parliament have never been high, there has been a long-standing decline in perception of this institution, with trust falling continually since 2013 when it was at 31 percent. Notably, the percentage who say they have no trust at all has increased by 16-points since 2018, signaling the overall frustration with this key institution of democratic governance.

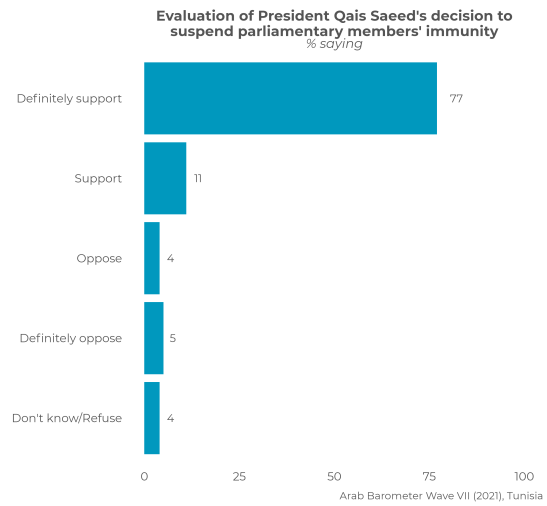
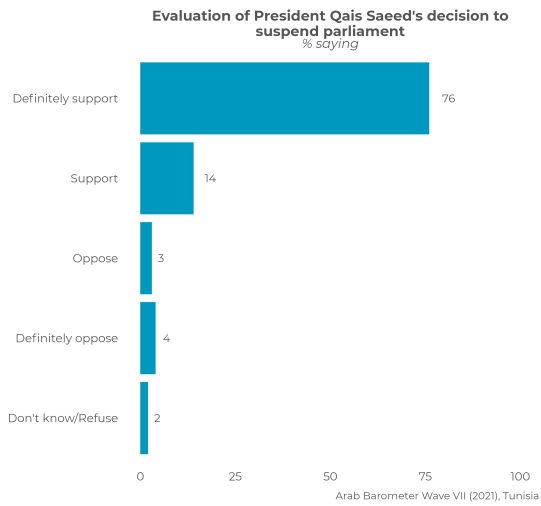


In contrast to parliament, an overwhelming majority of Tunisians (83 percent) say they trust President Saied, including more than half (55 percent) who say they have a great deal of trust in the president. However, youth ages 18-29 are somewhat less trusting, with only 45 percent saying they trust the president to a great extent compared with 59 percent of those who are 30 years and older. The level of trust is also lower among those with at least a college degree (46 percent) compared with those who have a secondary degree or less (58 percent). However, these results make clear that the vast majority of Tunisians have confidence in their president and that he is by far the most favored elected official in the country.

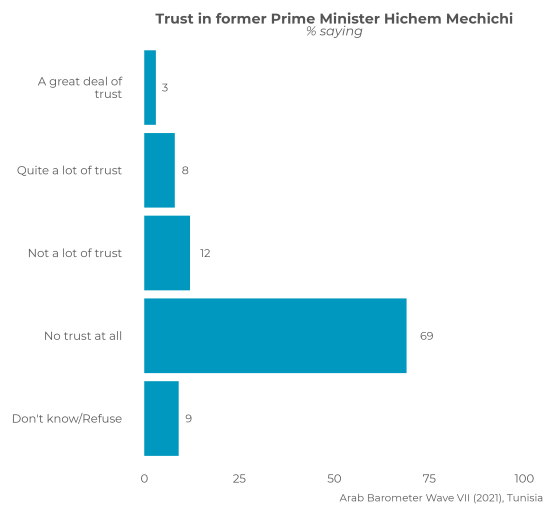
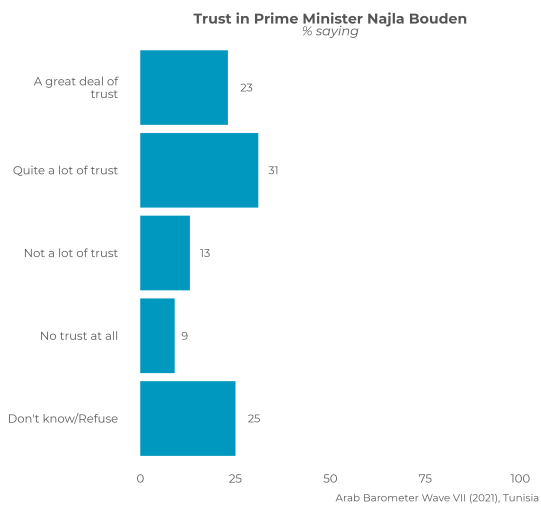


Confidence in the president appears to be due, in large part, to the actions taken by Saied on July 25, 2021. Public distrust of parliament made President Saied’s decision to suspend this institution extremely popular, with 76 percent of Tunisians saying they strongly support this action with a further 14 percent saying they somewhat support it. Only seven percent oppose or strongly oppose this move. Similarly, the decision to strip members of parliament of their immunity from prosecution was equally popular, with 77 percent strongly supporting this action, 11 percent somewhat supporting it, and only nine percent opposing it. The events of July 25 may have been a constitutional coup, but these actions were strongly backed by the public at large.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Tunisia Report

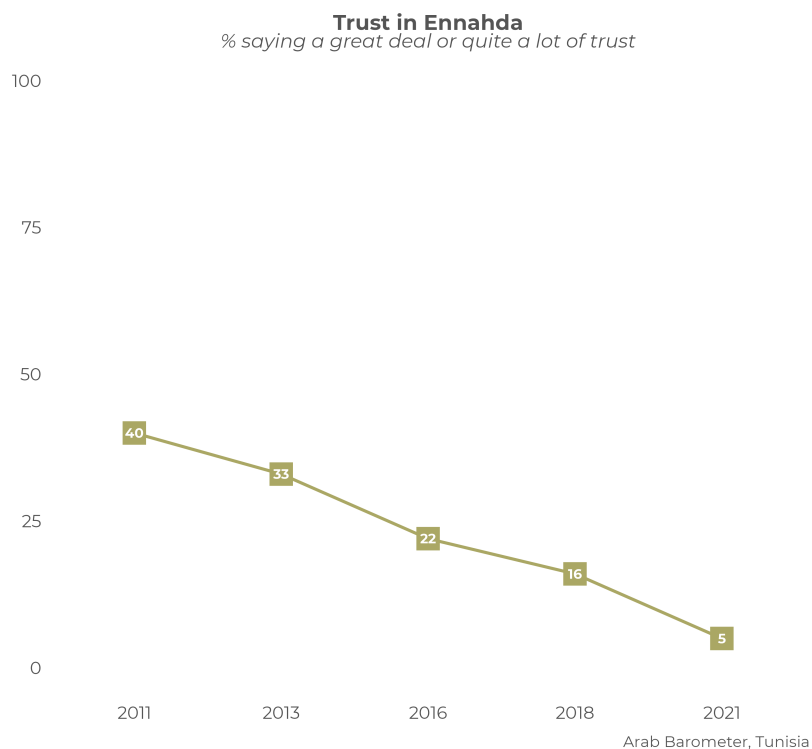


Additional evidence suggests that confidence in President Saied is related to him personally rather than those who are affiliated with him. Shortly before the beginning of the survey, President Saied appointed Tunisia's first female Prime Minister, Najla Bouden, who had previously served as the Minister of Education. Trust in her is far lower than in President Saied, with only 54 percent saying they trust her to a great (23 percent) or medium (31 percent) extent. However, as PM Bouden becomes more known, it is possible that this level will change, as a quarter of Tunisians don't know enough to offer an opinion about her.



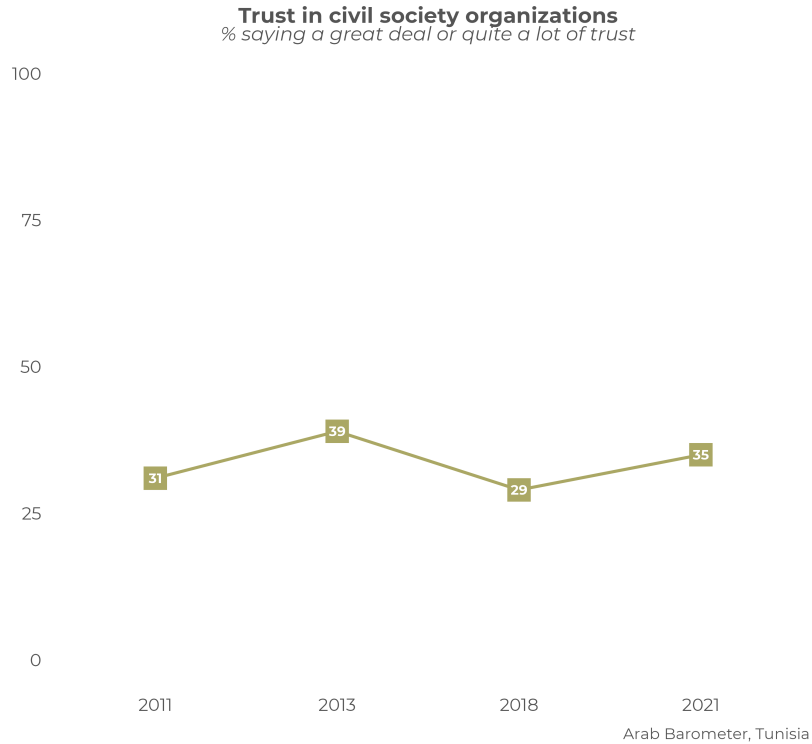
The survey does confirm the unpopularity of the alternative political actors to President Saied. When asked about trust in former PM Hichem Mechichi, who was deposed on July 25, 2021, only 11 percent express confidence in him. By comparison, 69 percent say they have no trust in former PM Mechichi at all.

Trust in Ennahda has dropped to only five percent with the overwhelming majority of Tunisians (89 percent) saying they have no trust at all in this party. In 2011, soon after the Jasmine Revolution, fully four-in-ten Tunisians had trust in Ennahda, but this level has fallen each wave of Arab Barometer, including to 16 percent in 2018. It appears that the strong association between Ennahda and the paralysis in the country's parliament, among other factors such as party infighting, have served to significantly discredit this movement over the past decade. However, given the low confidence in parliament, Ennahda, and other key political actors such as former PM Mechichi, there are few if any credible existing political alternatives to President Saied in the eyes of ordinary Tunisians.

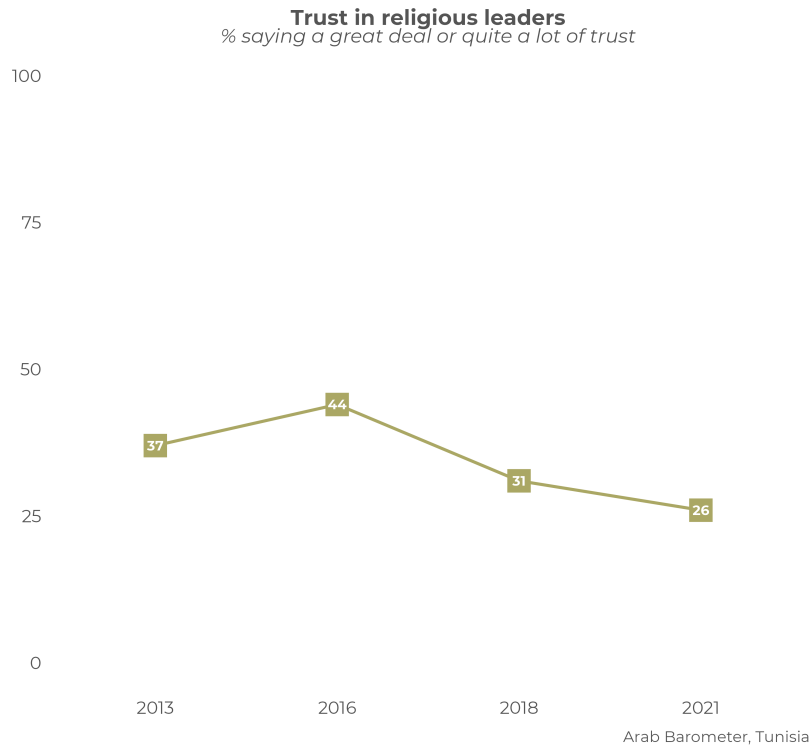


Civil society is also not widely trusted by Tunisians. Just 35 percent have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in civil society organizations, which is similar to levels seen over the past decade in Tunisia. Despite the efforts of many of these

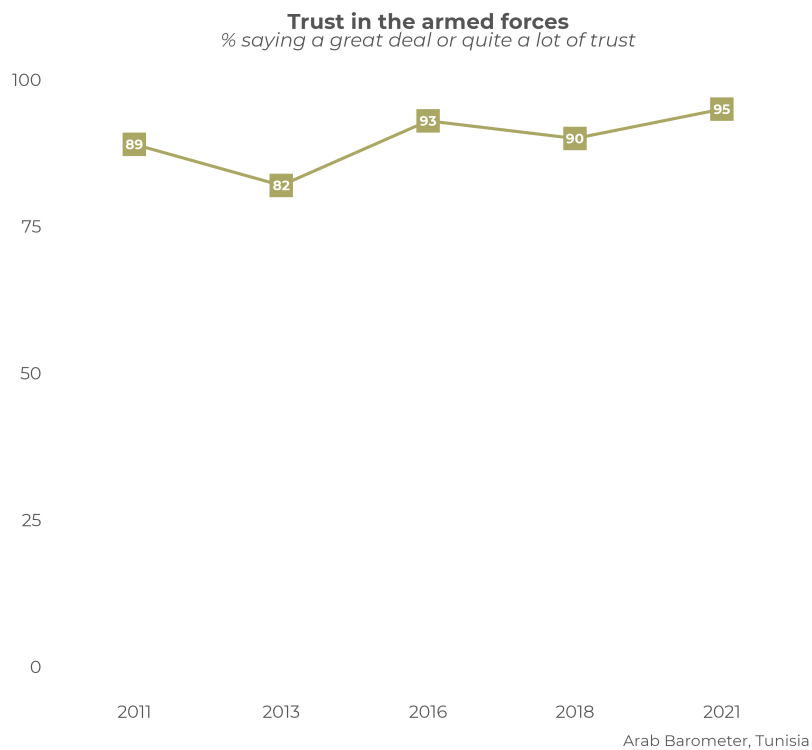
groups to deepen Tunisia’s democracy or promote human rights, Tunisians appear to remain relatively wary of these groups and their influence on society.



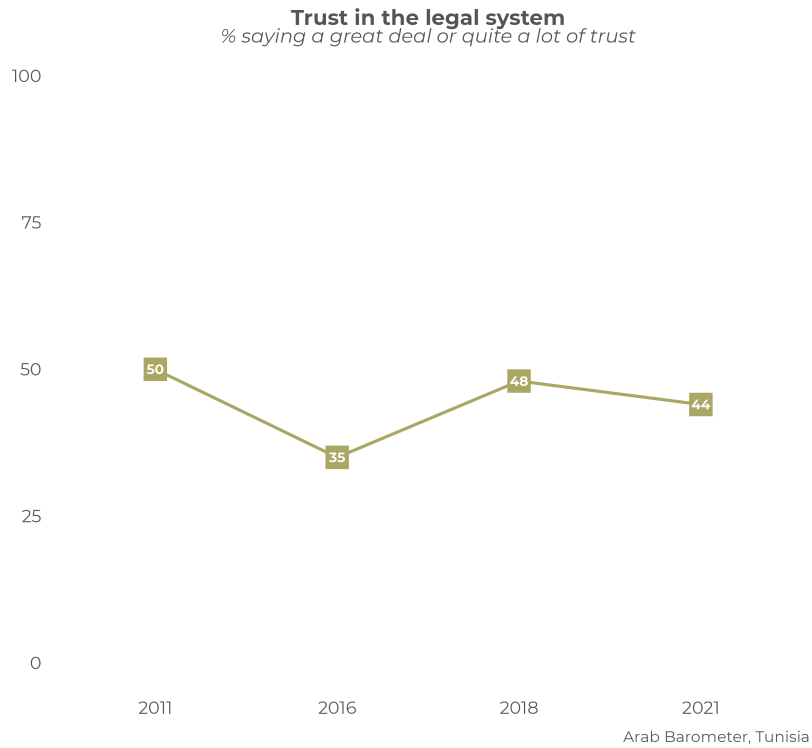
Levels of trust in religious leaders is even lower at 26 percent. This level represents a substantial decline since 2016 when 44 percent of Tunisians expressed confidence in religious leaders and a moderate decline since 2018 when 31 percent held this view.



The armed forces, which has historically been apolitical but helped enforce President Saïed’s orders to close parliament on July 25, is the only major government institution with high levels of trust. Fully 95 percent say they trust the armed forces, including 78 percent who do so to a great extent. This level is somewhat higher than most of the surveys conducted by Arab Barometer over the last decade, but in all years since 2011, at least 82 percent have expressed confidence in the military, making it the most trusted institution in the country over the last decade.

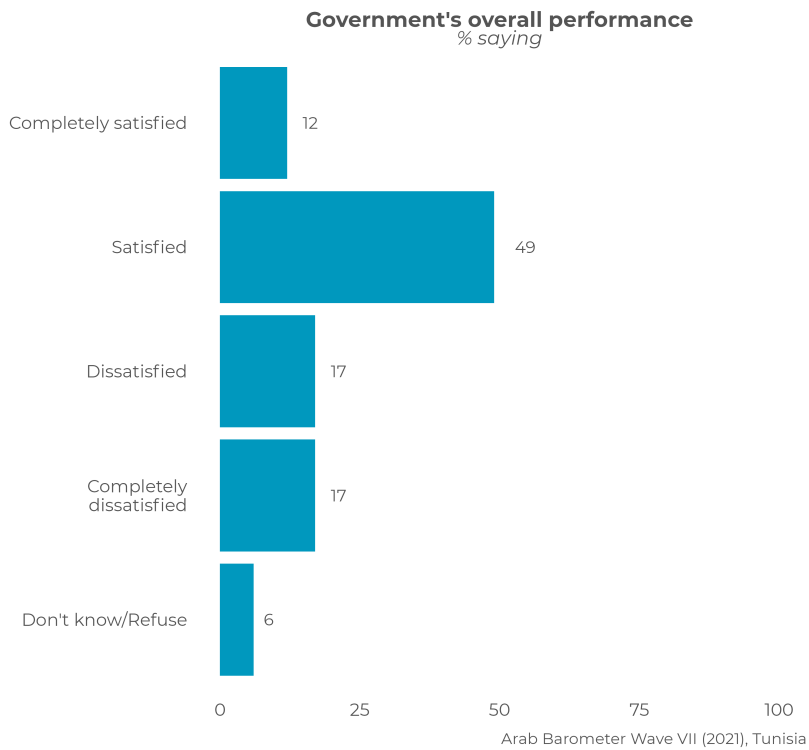


Trust in the judiciary remains moderate. Nearly half – 44 percent – say they trust the legal system to a great or medium extent, which is down slightly (-4 points) since 2018.



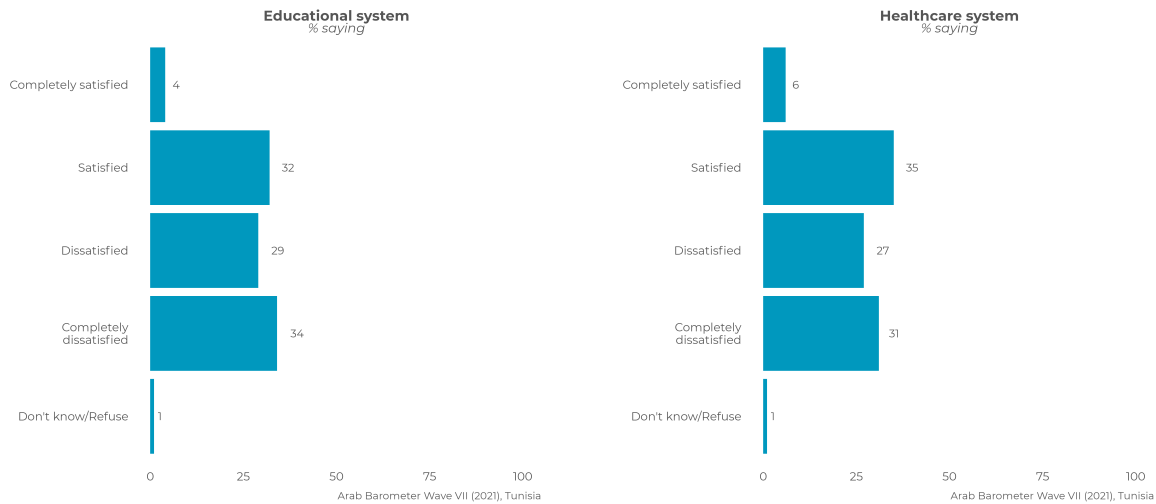
Government Performance

Views of the government's performance are positive overall, with 61 percent saying they are satisfied (49 percent) or completely satisfied (12 percent). However, those who are younger are less likely to be satisfied. Only 54 percent of those ages 18-29 are satisfied compared with 63 percent of those who are 30 and older. By comparison in 2018 only 19 percent of citizens were more satisfied than dissatisfied with government performance. Like other indicators, this increase appears to be due to a more positive view of the government overall following the events of July 25, 2021.



By a number of other specific measures, views of government performance are significantly lower. Just 36 percent say they are satisfied with the educational system, although this varies widely by level of education. Among those with a college degree or more, only 22 percent are satisfied with the educational system compared with 39 percent of those who have a secondary degree or less. Perhaps surprisingly given the challenges posed by COVID for schools, perceptions of the educational system are in fact slightly better than they were in 2018 when only 29 percent had a positive view.

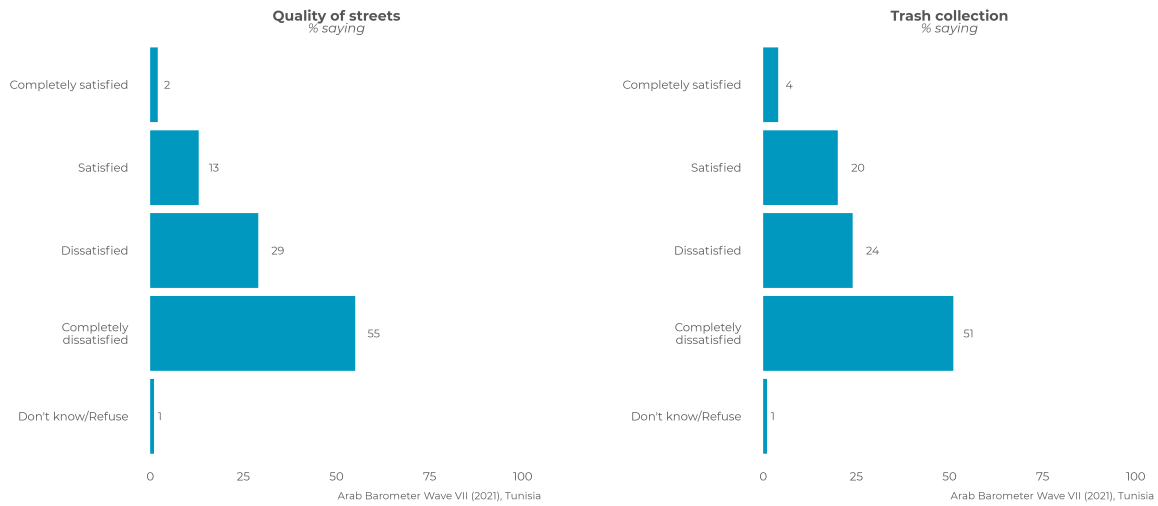
Arab Barometer – Wave VII Tunisia Report



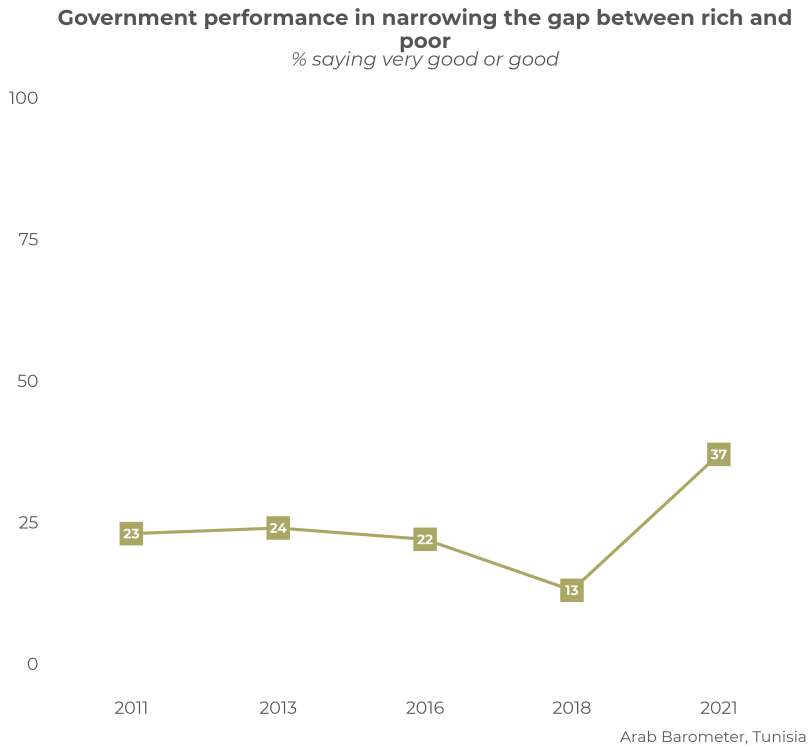
Meanwhile, 41 percent say they are satisfied with the healthcare system, which is effectively unchanged since 2018 or 2016 when it was 39 percent in both years. Despite the challenges of COVID, it appears Tunisians have not changed their views of the healthcare system. However, like in rating the educational system, those with a college degree or above are more critical, with just 27 percent having a positive view compared with 45 percent of those with a secondary degree or less. This difference could be a result of relative expectations, with educational elites holding both systems to a higher standard.

Although ratings of healthcare and education are moderate, satisfactions with infrastructure and basic government services are far lower. Just 15 percent say they are satisfied with the quality of the country's streets and roads, compared with 55 percent who say they are completely dissatisfied. The results are also very low for the quality of trash collection, with just 24 percent being satisfied or completely satisfied compared with half (51 percent) who are completely dissatisfied.

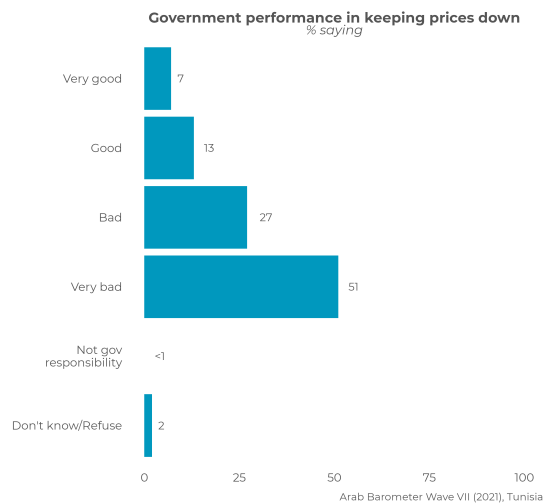
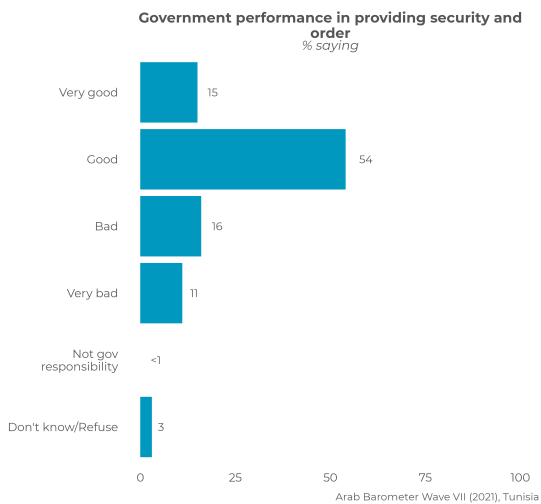
Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Tunisia Report



Ratings of government performance on other critical issues are also relatively low. When asked to rate the job the government is doing in reducing inequality, a minority of citizens (37 percent) say the government is doing a good or very good job. However, this level is far greater than in 2018, when just 13 percent held this view. In fact, this rating is far above any previous Arab Barometer survey in Tunisia where at most a quarter rated the government’s performance on reducing inequality positively. Given the deep concern about this issue in Tunisia, it appears many citizens hope that the new government will be able to address this problem.

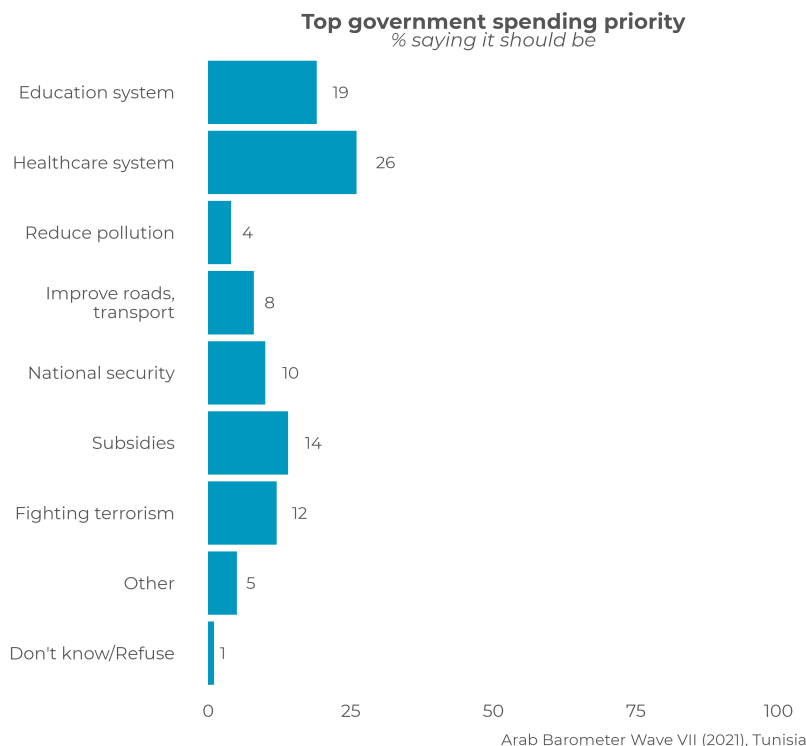


Citizens have a significantly higher rating of the degree to which the government is providing security and order. Seven-in-ten (69 percent) rate the government’s performance as good or very good, which is 14 points higher than in 2018.



Only one-in-five Tunisians say that the government is doing a good or very good job keeping prices down, while half say the government is doing very badly on this measure. Although low, this level is 10 points higher than it was in 2018 and similar to the level in 2016 (21 percent).

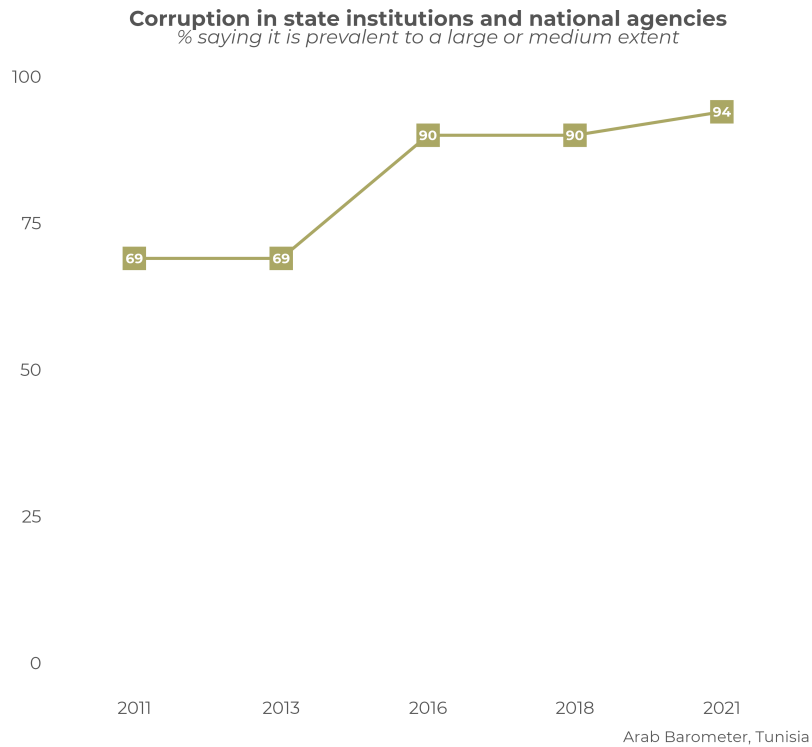
In terms of the top spending priorities for the government, Tunisians most prefer investment in the healthcare system (26 percent) and the education system (19 percent), followed by increasing subsidies (14 percent), fighting terrorism (12 percent) and a focus on national security (10 percent). Despite their poor ratings of government performance on maintaining roads and concern about the environment, just eight percent favor focusing on investing in roads and transportation while four percent want the government to address environmental pollution.



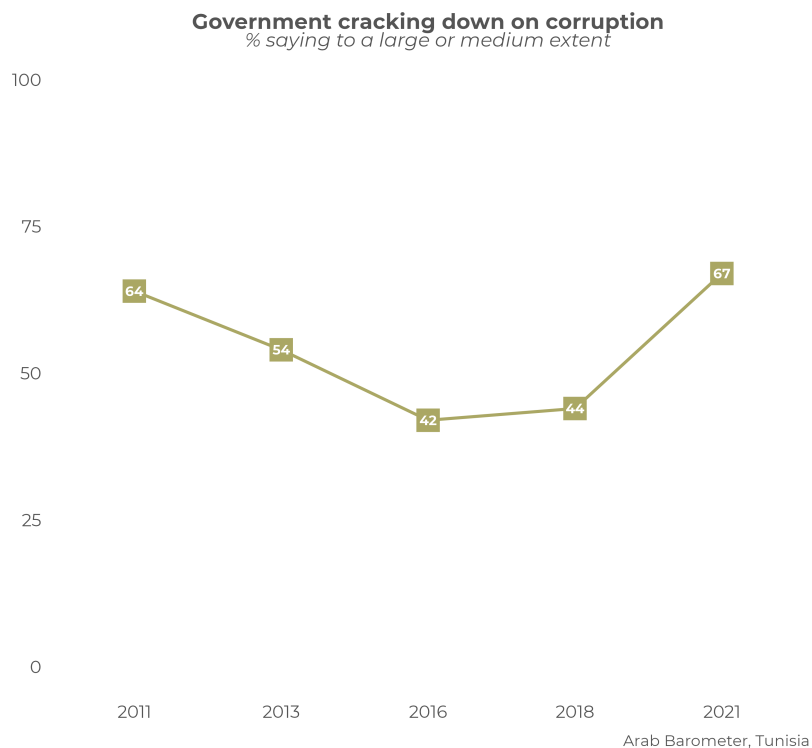
Corruption

Tunisians remain deeply concerned about the level of corruption they perceive in state institutions. Nearly all citizens (94 percent) say that corruption is preva-

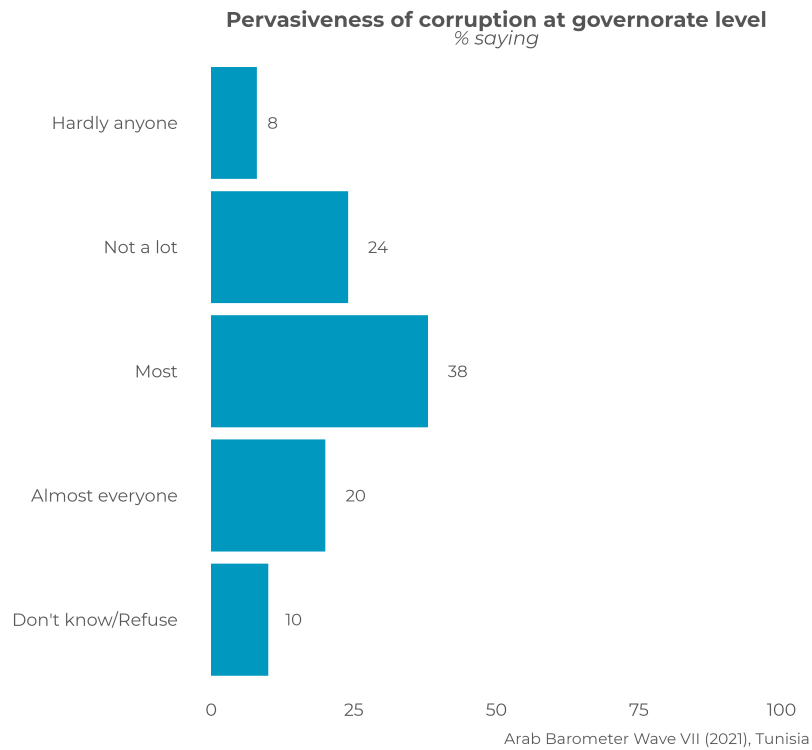
lent to a large or medium extent in the national government, which is the highest level exhibited at any point over the past decade.



However, Tunisians are now more likely to say that the government is working to crack down on corruption than in recent years. Fully two-thirds say that the government is doing so to a large (36 percent) or medium (31 percent) extent. This level is similar to the percentage in 2011 shortly after the Jasmine Revolution, but significantly higher than at any time survey since 2013 where fewer than half of citizens held this view. However, youth are somewhat less likely to say that the government is working to crack down on corruption, with only 22 percent of those ages 18-29 saying the government is doing so to a large extent compared with 42 percent of those 30 and older. Additionally, those who have at least a college degree are less likely say the government is cracking down to a large extent by 11 points compared to those with a secondary education or less.

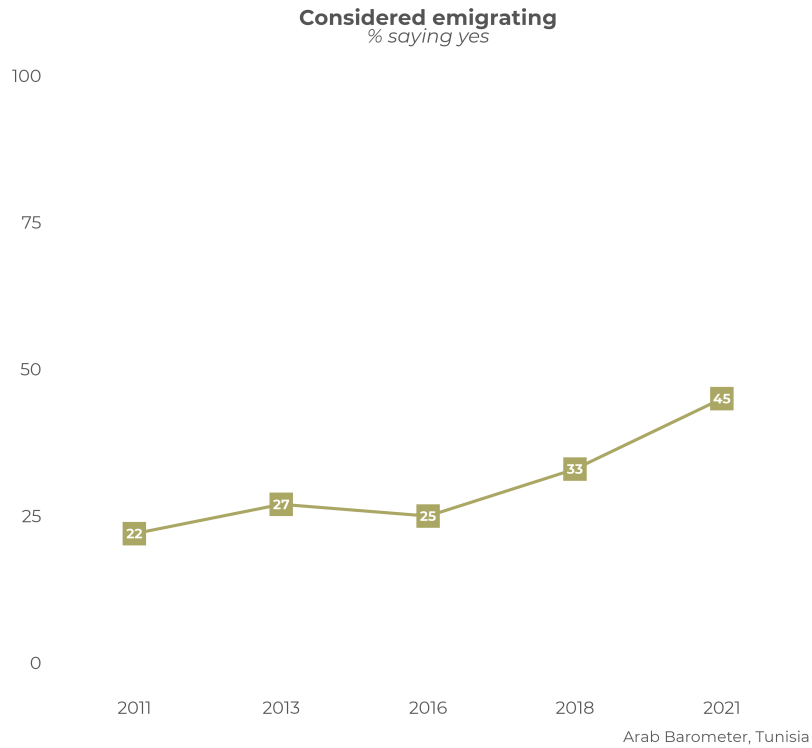


Concern about corruption at the regional level is lower, but still a majority (58 percent) of Tunisians say that almost all or most governorate-level officials are corrupt.

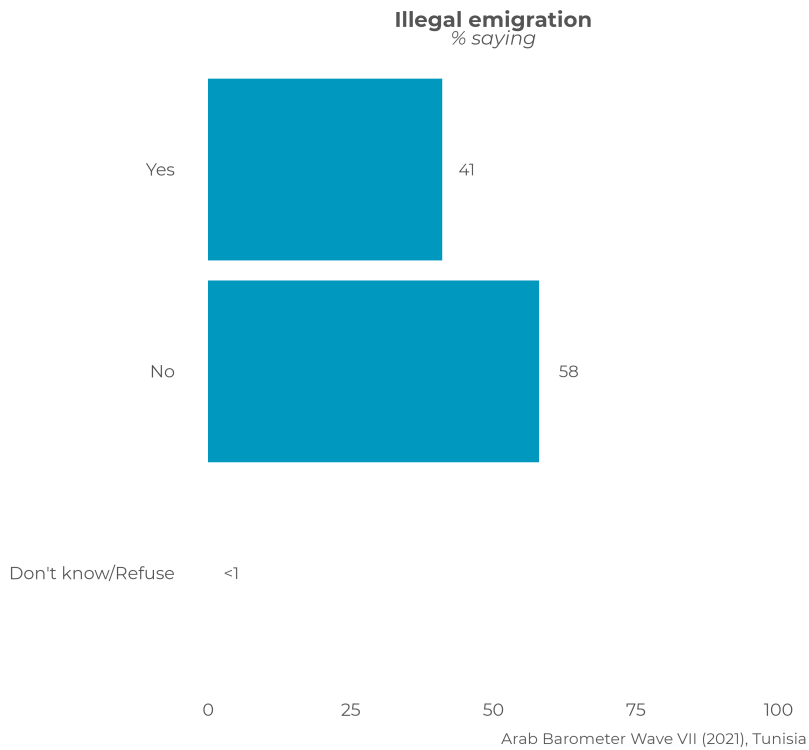


Migration

Given the magnitude of the problems facing Tunisia, it is perhaps unsurprising that nearly half (45 percent) of Tunisians seek to leave their homeland. This level is double the rate in 2011 (22 percent) and 12 points higher than in 2018 (33 percent). As has been found in previous years, youth ages 18-29 are especially likely to want to move abroad, with 65 percent having considered leaving Tunisia. Men (52 percent) and those who have a university degree or more (56 percent) are also more likely to want to leave their homeland. The fact that the country's youth and better educated are more likely to want to leave poses a significant risk of brain drain for the country.

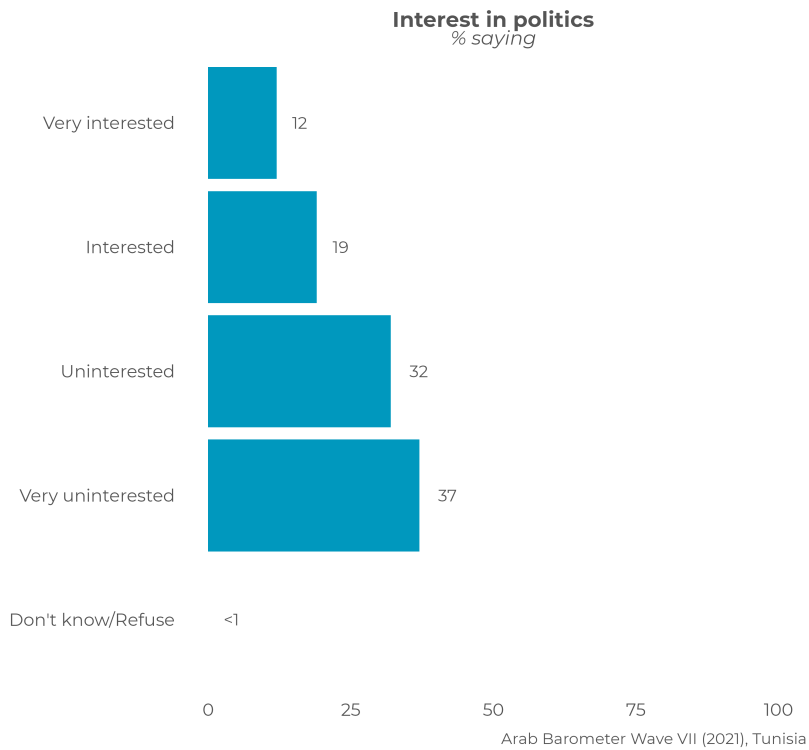


Among potential migrants, many are willing to leave Tunisia even if they lack the necessary papers to do so. Among this group, 41 percent say they are willing to do so. Among potential migrants, men are substantially more likely to do so than women (53 percent vs. 26 percent) while those who have a secondary degree or less are substantially more likely to consider doing so than those who have a university degree or above (47 percent vs. 25 percent). Overall, the percentage of potential migrants who would consider leaving without the necessary papers is unchanged since 2018.

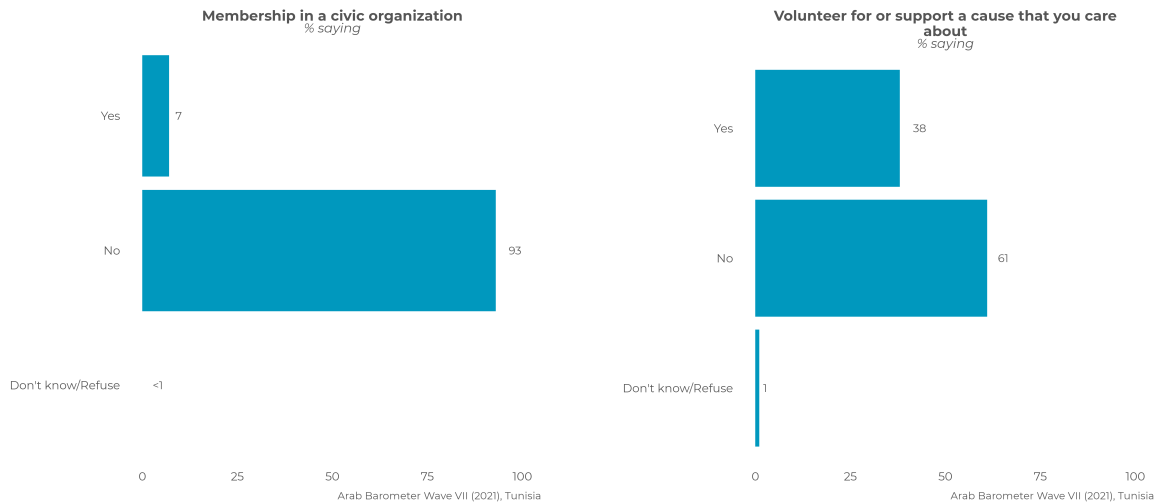


Political Engagement

Interest in politics remains relatively low. Just 12 percent of Tunisians say they are very interested while a further 19 percent say they are interested. However, the plurality (37 percent) say they are very uninterested in politics. Youth are especially disengaged. Only 20 percent of youth ages 18-29 say they are interested or very interested compared with 35 percent of those 30 years of age and older. Despite the relatively low levels of engagement, the percentage of those who say they are interested is actually higher than in 2018 when just a quarter (24 percent) said the same.



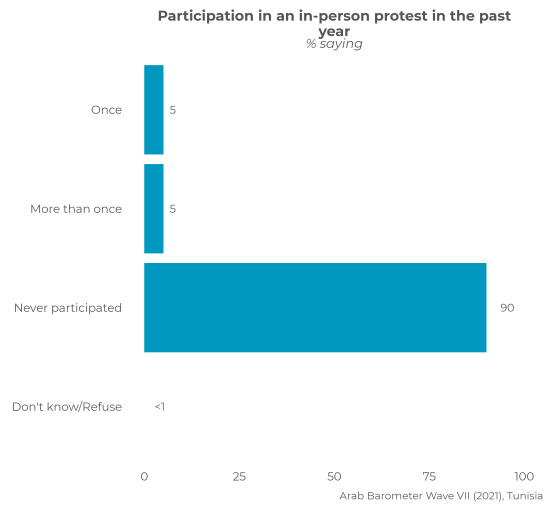
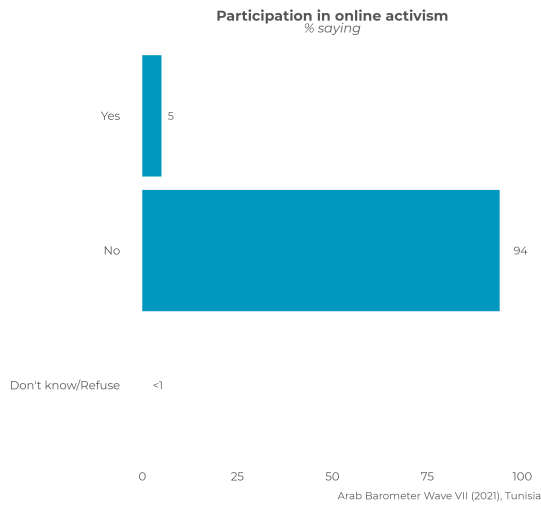
Membership in civic organizations is very low, with just seven percent of citizens. However, youth involvement is significantly higher in this regard. Among those ages 18-29, 14 percent say they are a member of an organization compared with just four percent of those ages 30 and above. Although youth engagement is still low, it appears that the democratic opening – the period during which this group reached adulthood – corresponded with a somewhat greater engagement in civic organizations.



Although formal membership in organizations is relatively low, a much greater percentage of Tunisians say they have volunteered for a cause. Nearly four-in-ten (38 percent) say they have given of their time to help a cause they care about. Although there are no differences by age, those who have at least a college education are more likely to volunteer than those who have a secondary degree or less (47 percent vs. 36 percent). Meanwhile, six-in-ten Tunisians say they have donated to a charity or to support a cause, suggesting greater engagement in this form.

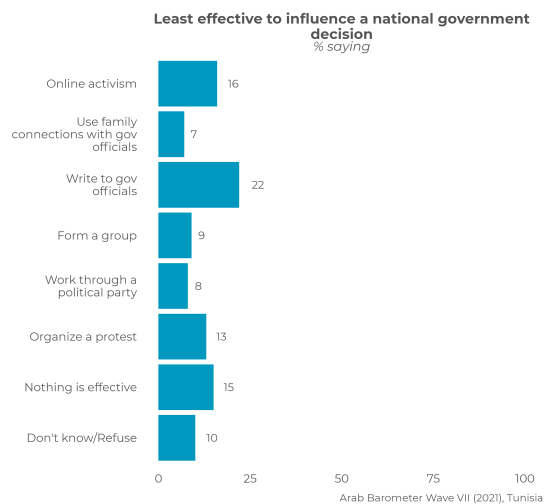
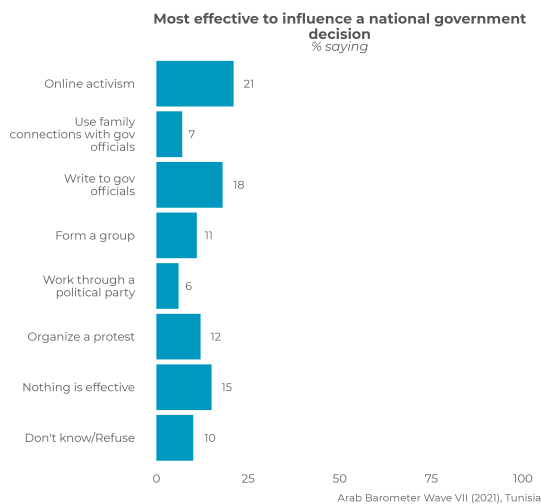
Online activism has increased in recent years, but very few Tunisians say they have shared in, participated in, or attended an online activity whose aim was to solve a problem. Only five percent say they have done so. Unsurprisingly, youth ages 18-29 are somewhat more likely to have done so than those who are 30 and older (8 percent vs. 4 percent) while those who have a college degree are seven points more likely to have done so than those with a secondary degree or less.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Tunisia Report



Meanwhile, only one-in-ten Tunisians have participated in an in-person demonstration or protest in the past year. COVID-related restrictions or fears of gathering in groups given potential health risks likely contributes to this relatively low percentage.

Despite a decade living under a democratic system, there remains no consensus in Tunisia about the most effective way to influence a government decision. One-in-five (21 percent) say it is online activism while 18 percent say it is writing to a government official, 12 percent say it is organizing a demonstration, 11 percent forming an interest group, seven percent working through family connections, and only six percent working through a political party. Meanwhile, 15 percent say that there is simply no effective way to influence government.



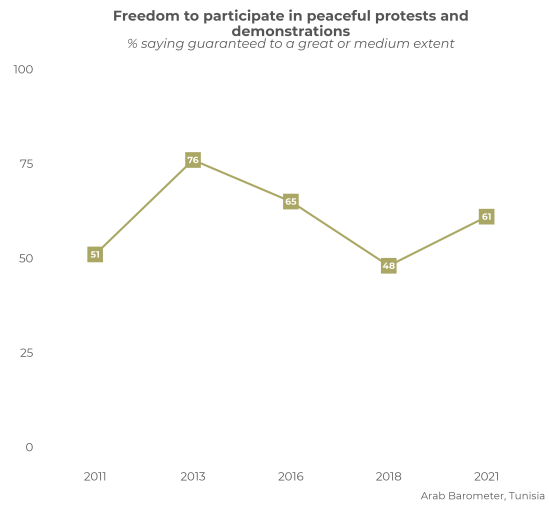
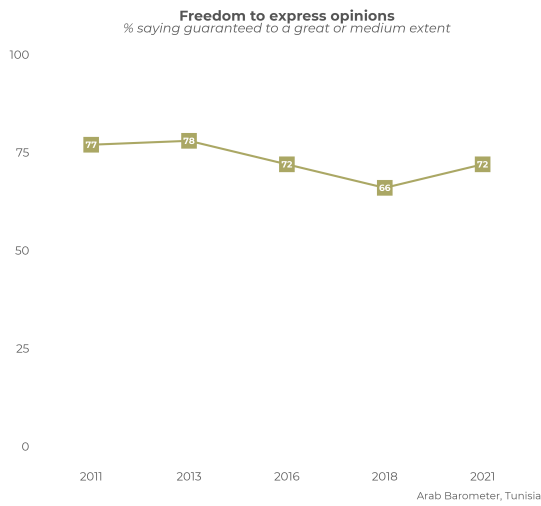
At the same time, when asked about the least effective way to influence a government decision, there are striking parallels. Overall, 22 percent say that the least effective way to influence government is writing to a government official, followed by 16 percent who say online activism, 13 percent who say organizing a demonstration, nine percent who say forming an interest group, eight percent who say working through a political party and seven percent who say focusing on family connections.

These results suggest that Tunisia's democratic experiment never made clear to citizens how they could feel engaged in the political process. The diversity of responses to the most and least effective ways to influence the government and the overlap implies that citizens lacked a degree of clarity about the most effective ways to engage with their officials. The fact that very few consider contacting their officials or a political party as the most effective approach combined with the fact that many say this is actually the least effective approach helps explain a significant disconnect between Tunisians and their government over the past decade.

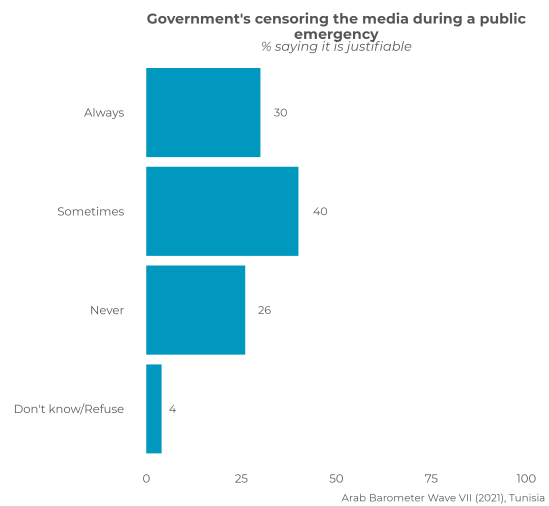
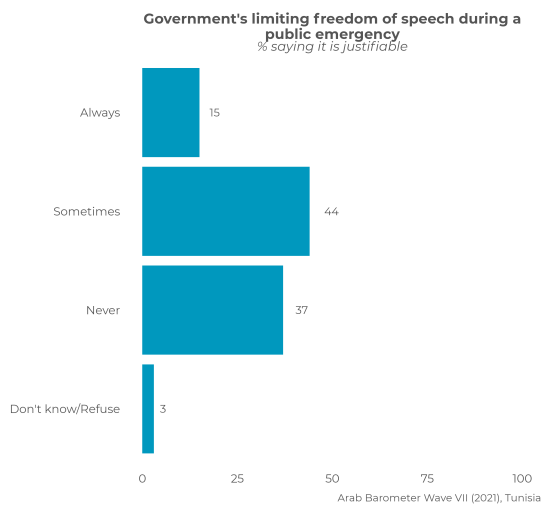
Civil Rights

Despite the restrictions on civil liberties put in place by President Saied on July 26, 2021, ordinary Tunisians do not perceive significant losses in their basic rights. A clear majority of Tunisians (72 percent) say that freedom of speech is guaranteed to a great or medium extent, which is a slight increase (5 points) since 2018. Somewhat fewer say they enjoy the guaranteed right to participate in peaceful demonstrations, with 61 percent holding this view, although this level represents a dramatic increase since 2018 (13 points). Those with a university degree or above are significantly more likely to say this right is guaranteed compared with those who have a secondary degree or less (17 points). Two-thirds (67 percent) also affirm that freedom of the press is guaranteed to a great or medium extent, with those with a university degree or above being 11 points more likely to hold this view than those with a lower level of education. Similar percentages also say that freedom of religion is guaranteed, with 68 percent affirming it is guaranteed to a great or medium extent.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII Tunisia Report

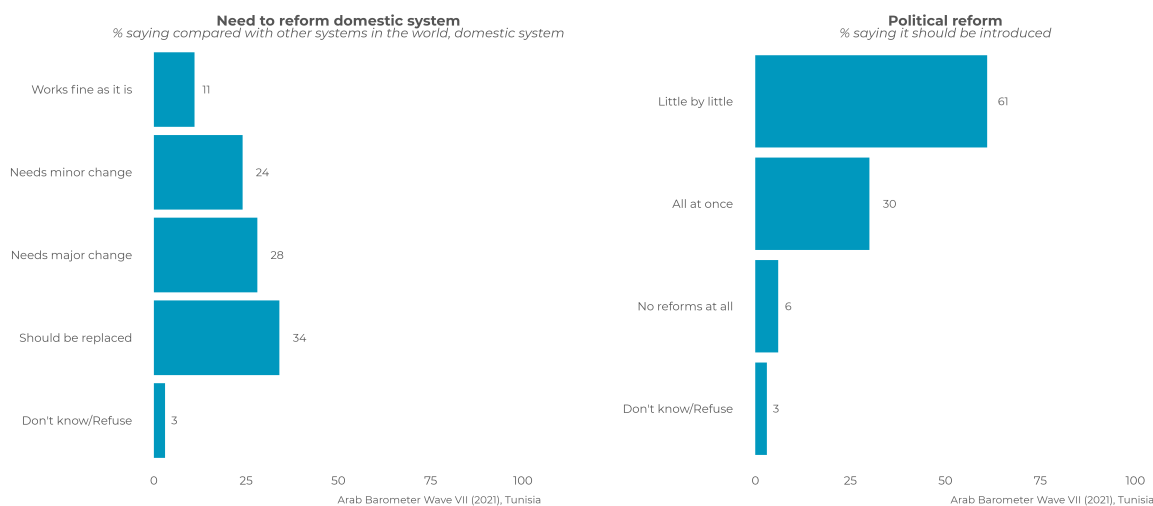


While a majority of Tunisians believe their rights are guaranteed, fewer believe that it is always justifiable for the government to limit these liberties in a time of public emergency. Only 15 percent believe it is always justifiable for the government to limit freedom of speech in response to an emergency, while 44 percent say it is sometimes justifiable and 37 percent say it is never justifiable. However, there is greater tolerance for allowing the government to censor the media during a crisis, with 30 percent saying it is always justifiable, 40 percent sometimes justifiable, and only a quarter (26 percent) saying it is never justifiable.



Democracy

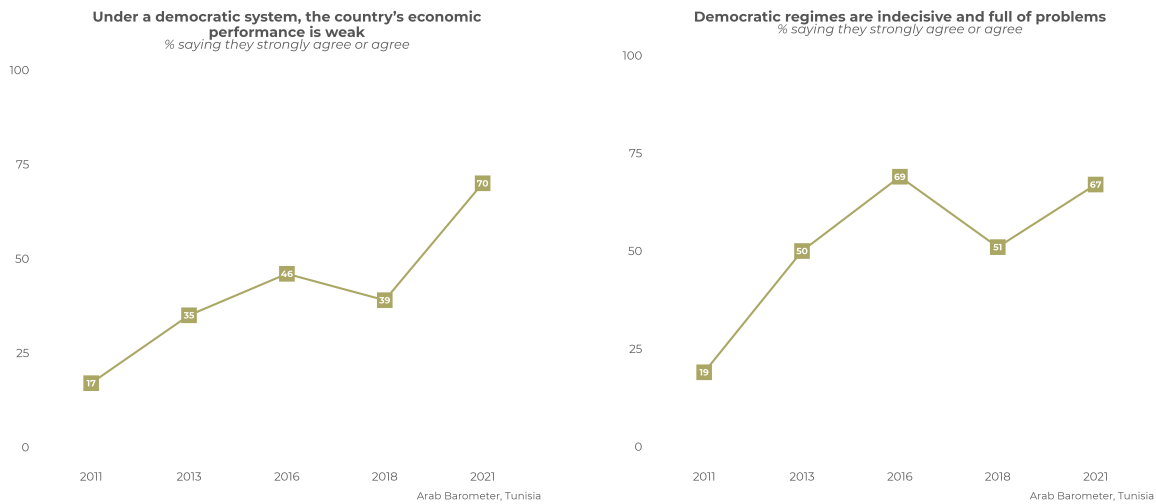
Tunisians are deeply frustrated with the political system that has governed Tunisia over the past decade. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Tunisians are vocal in calling for significant changes. When asked about the degree of reform to the domestic system that is needed compared with other systems around the world, the plurality (34 percent) says that the entire system should be replaced followed by 28 percent who said major reforms are necessary. Meanwhile, only a quarter (24 percent) say the system only requires minor change with 11 percent saying the system is working fine as it is. Youth ages 18-29 are especially in favor of replacing the entire system, with 41 percent holding this view compared with 31 percent of those who are 30 and older.



Although Tunisians are frustrated with their system, they largely remain reluctant about dramatic changes to the political system. A majority (61 percent) say that political reform should be introduced gradually, although nearly a third (30 percent) say it should be introduced all at once. Perhaps unsurprisingly, youth ages 18-29 are more likely to favor dramatic reforms, with 36 percent being in favor compared with 29 percent of those who are thirty or older.

Tunisians are also keenly aware of potential limitations of democracy. Fully seven-in-ten agree or strongly agree that under a democratic system economic performance is weak, likely reflecting on the declining economic conditions in the country over the last decade. Notably, this level represents a dramatic increase in concern about the economic performance under a democratic system compared with 2018, when only 39 percent held this view (+31 points) and is 43-points higher than in 2011 shortly after the Jasmine Revolution. Concern about

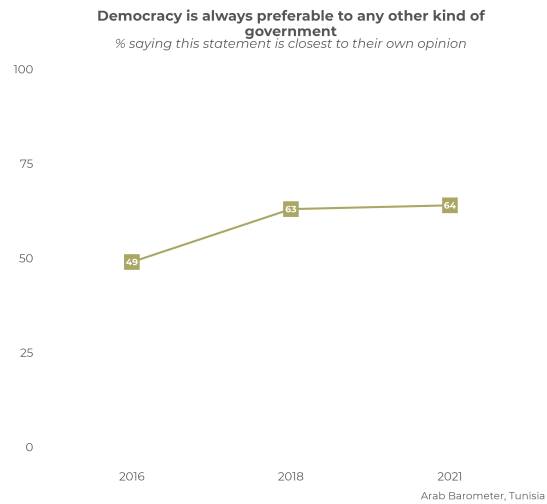
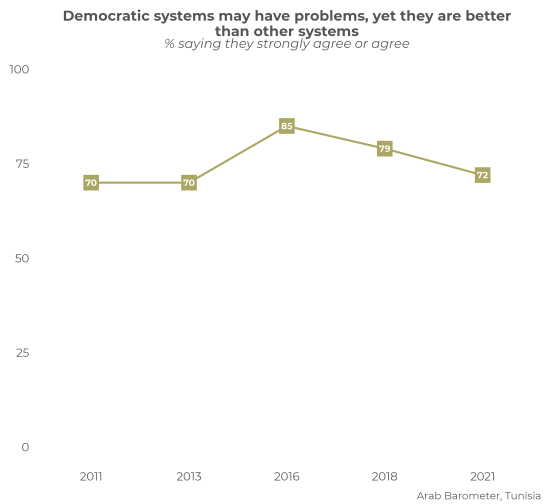
this potential drawback of democracy is widespread among key demographic groups, although youth ages 18-29 are slightly more likely to hold this view than those who are thirty and above (+6 points).



Results are similar for other potential problems sometimes associated with democracy. Two-thirds agree that democracy is indecisive and full of problems, which represents a 16-point increase since 2018. Meanwhile, 66 percent say that democracies are not effective at maintaining order and stability, which is a 24-point increase since 2018 and 39 points higher than in 2011. In short, the challenges faced by Tunisia since the revolution, and particularly those of the last few years, appear to have made many question the degree to which democracy is likely to solve many of the key challenges faced by Tunisia.

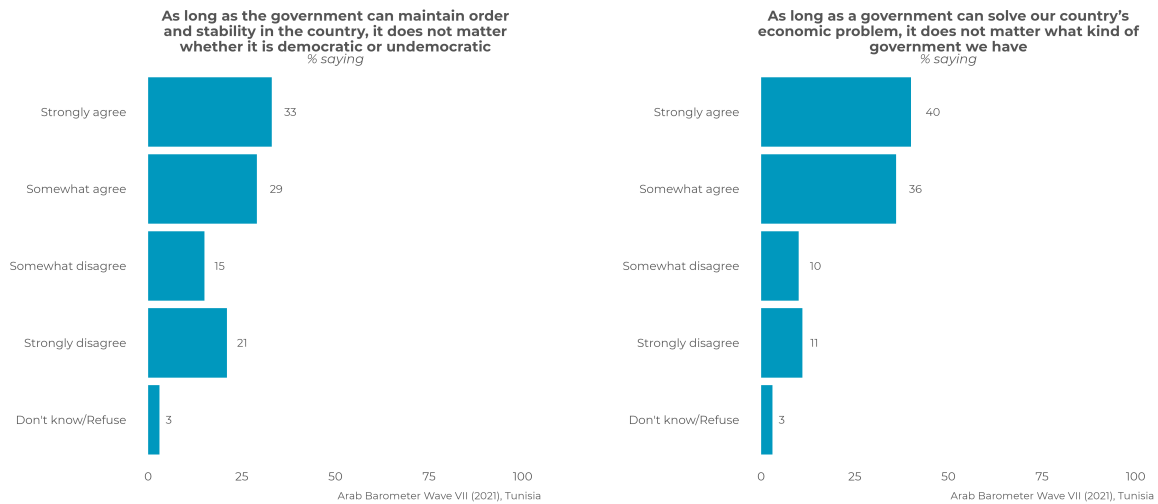
Yet, despite these reservations about the ability of democracy to solve their issues, Tunisians have not given up on democracy. Fully 72 percent affirm that despite its problems, democracy remains the best system of governance. Although this percentage has fallen by seven points since 2018, the percentage is about the same as 2011 when seven-in-ten held this view. Additionally, Tunisians of all key demographic backgrounds hold this view, meaning that Tunisians have yet to give up on this system of governance.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII Tunisia Report



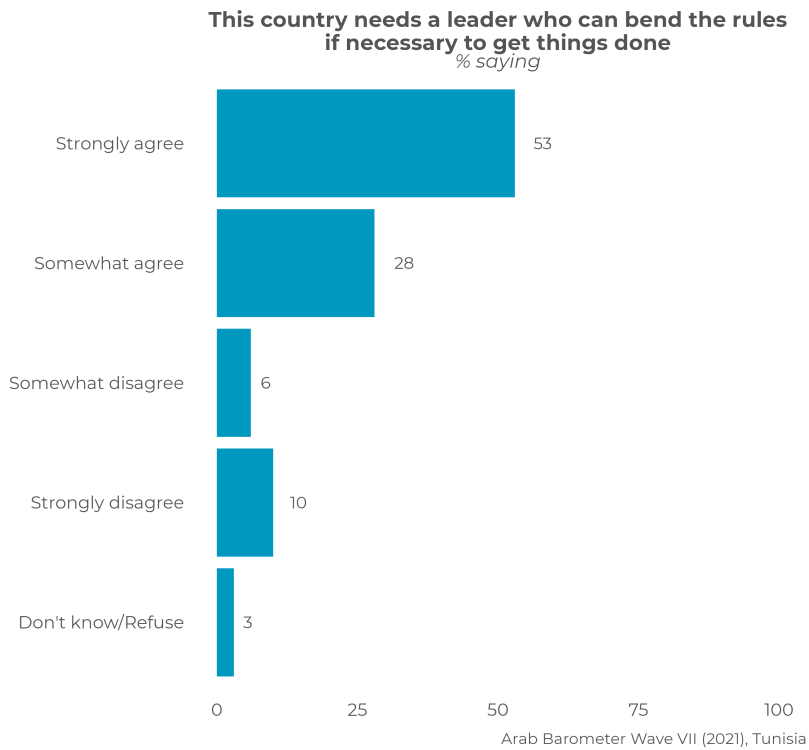
Even by a stronger test of commitment to democracy, a majority of the public continue to favor a democratic system. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Tunisians say that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government. By comparison, just one-in-five say that sometimes a non-democratic government may be preferable while nine percent say the type of government does not matter to them. Notably, there are not meaningful demographic differences on this question, with Tunisians of all backgrounds being about equally likely to say democracy is always preferable.

Nevertheless, despite a clear preference for democracy, Tunisians make clear that they ultimately prioritize results over a specific system of governance. When presented with the statement "as long as the government can solve our country's economic problem, it does not matter what kind of government we have", 77 percent strongly or somewhat agreed. Notably, youth ages 18-29 are substantially less likely to strongly agree with this statement by 18 points compared with those who are older, implying that despite the turmoil of the past decade, youth are somewhat less inclined to cede democratic rule.



Meanwhile, Tunisians are also less willing to turn away from democracy for the sake of stability. Overall, 61 percent say that as long as the government can ensure stability, it does not matter if the country is democratic or not. As with the economy, youth ages 18-29 are substantially less likely to strongly agree with this statement than those who are 30 and older (-16 points).

Ultimately, Tunisians are looking for strong leadership after the relatively weak governments of the past decade. When asked if the country needs a leader who can bend the rules if necessary to get things done, four-in-five (81 percent) strongly or somewhat agree. By this measure, youth are only five points less likely to strongly agree, suggesting that they are primarily looking for a leader who can find solutions to the basic challenges they are facing.

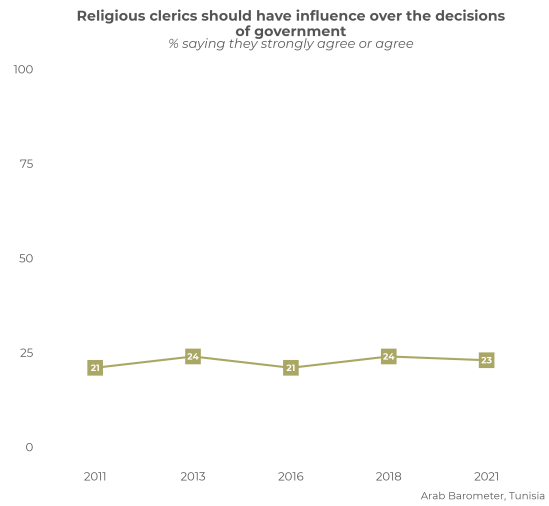
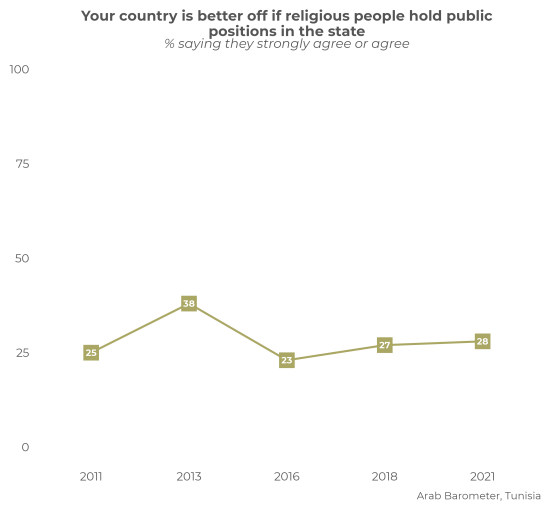


Political Islam

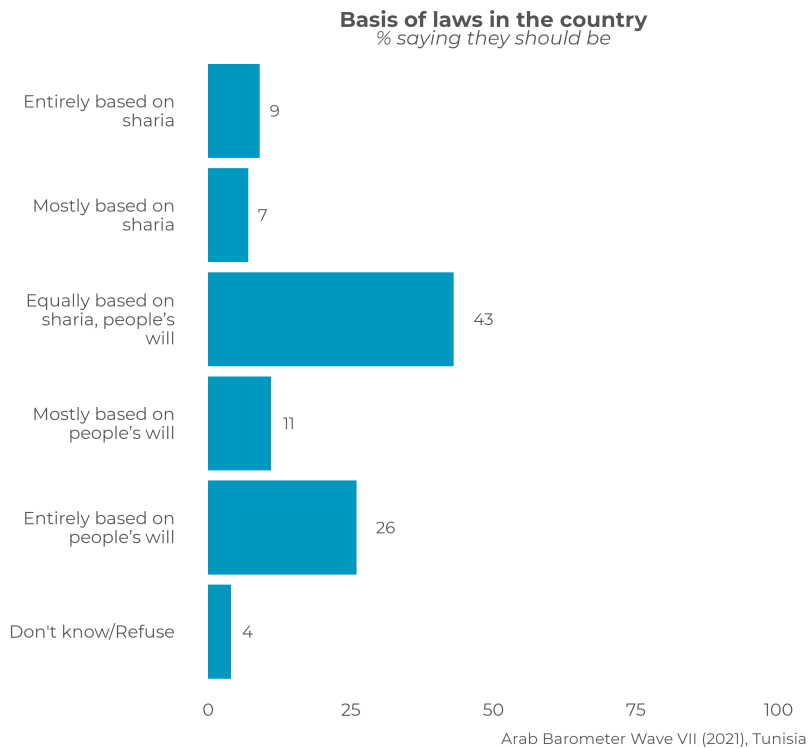
Support for giving religion a role in politics is limited in Tunisia. Just 28 percent believe that their country would be better off if more people who were religious held positions in government, which is effectively unchanged from 2018. Meanwhile, just 23 percent think that religious leaders should have influence over decisions of government, which is also essentially unchanged over the last decade. At the same time, the vast majority of citizens (72 percent) believe that religious practice is a private matter that should be separate from social and public life, which is a five-point increase since 2018.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII

Tunisia Report



Tunisians are also less likely than those in most other countries surveyed to say that the basis for the laws in their country should be the sharia. Only nine percent say the laws should be based entirely on the sharia while seven percent say they should mostly be based on the sharia. The plurality (43 percent) say the laws should be equally based on the sharia and the will of the people, while a nearly equal percentage say they should either be based mostly (11 percent) or entirely (26 percent) on the will of the people.

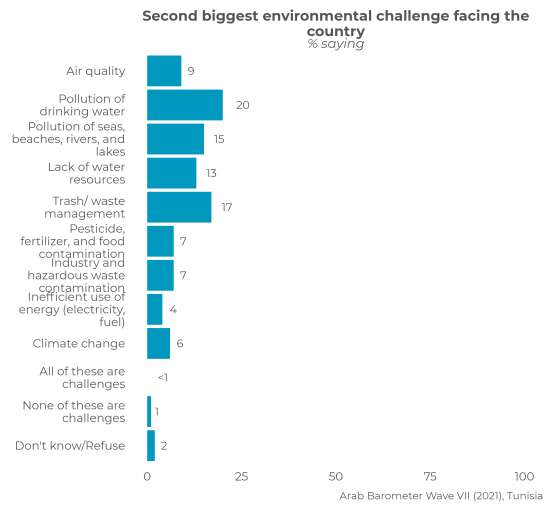
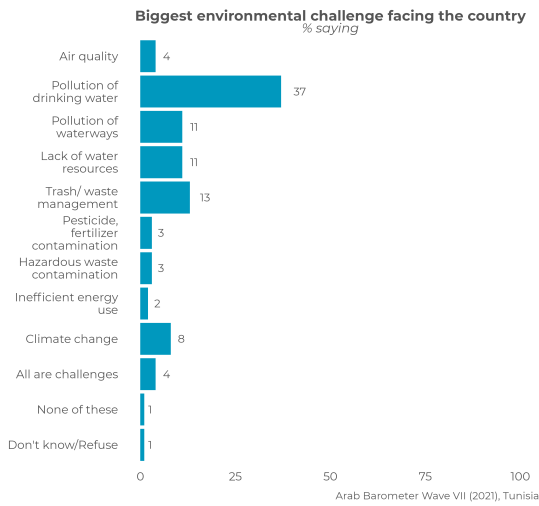


Environment

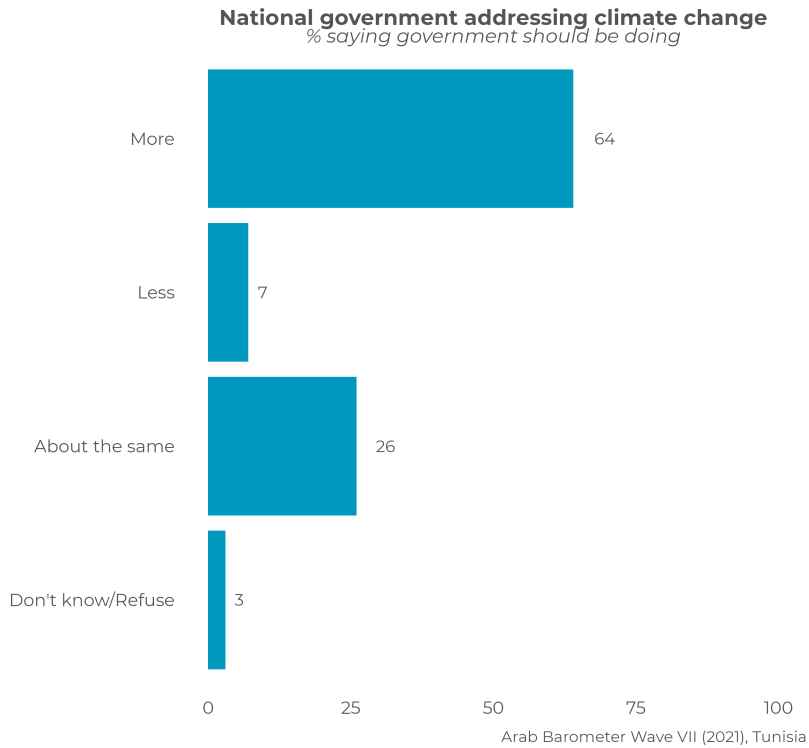
Awareness of climate change and concerns about the local environment have been increasing across North Africa in recent years. When asked about the most pressing environmental issue facing their country, Tunisians are far more worried about local issues than global ones, with a significant focus on water issues (59 percent). By far the top concern of Tunisians is pollution of the drinking water (37 percent). Other issues of concern include waste management (13 percent), followed by lack of water resources and pollution of rivers, lakes, and seas (11 percent, respectively). By comparison, just eight percent say climate change and four percent air quality.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII

Tunisia Report

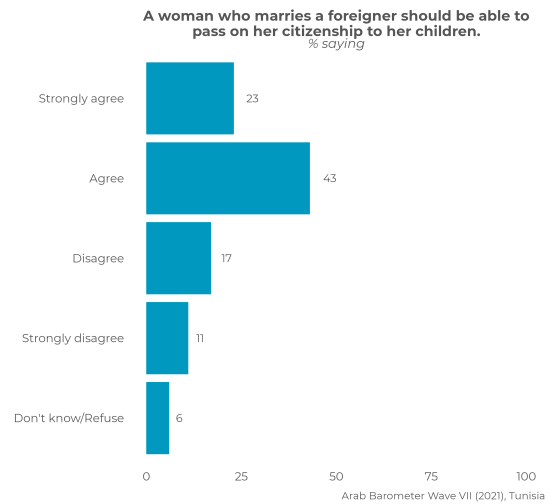
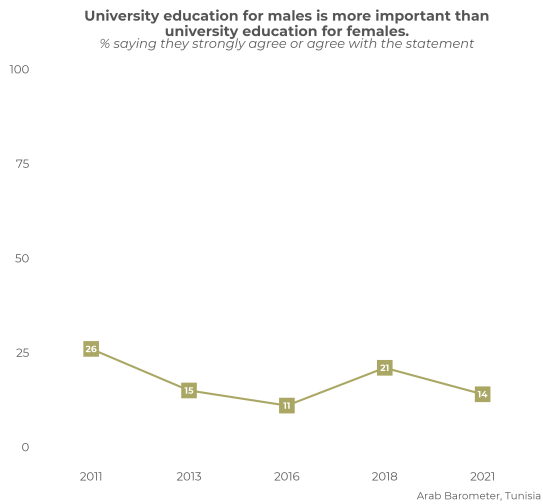


Despite a significant focus on local issues, citizens do want their national government to do more to address climate change. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) want the Tunisian government to do more to address this problem, compared with a quarter (26 percent) who think the government should not change its focus and seven percent who say it should do less. There is not a significant difference by age, with youth and those who are older being about as likely to favor the government doing more to address climate change.



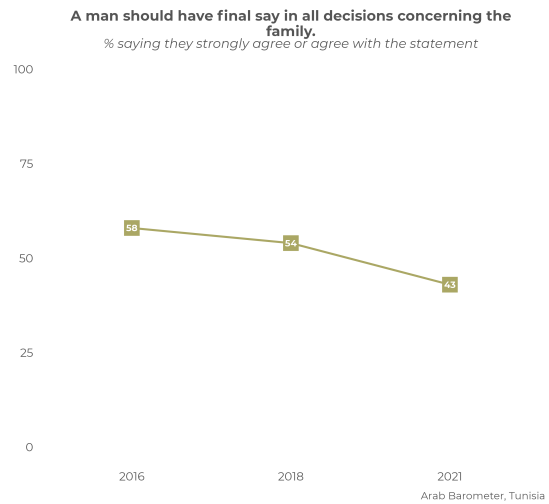
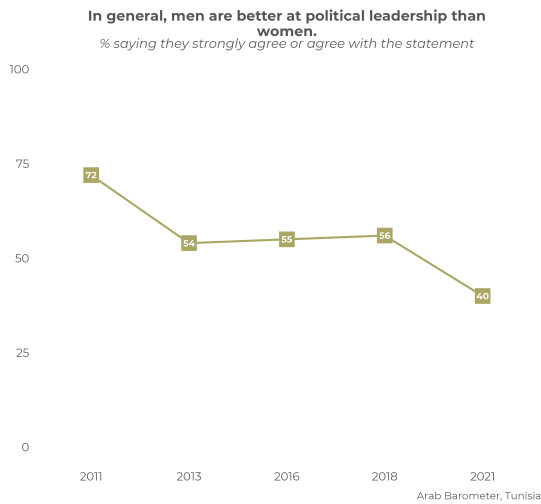
Gender

Tunisians have long agreed that women should have equal rights to those of men, but over the last few years the perception that women should play equal roles to men in both public and private life has increased. Only 14 percent of Tunisians say that a university degree is more important for men than for women, which is seven points less than in 2018.



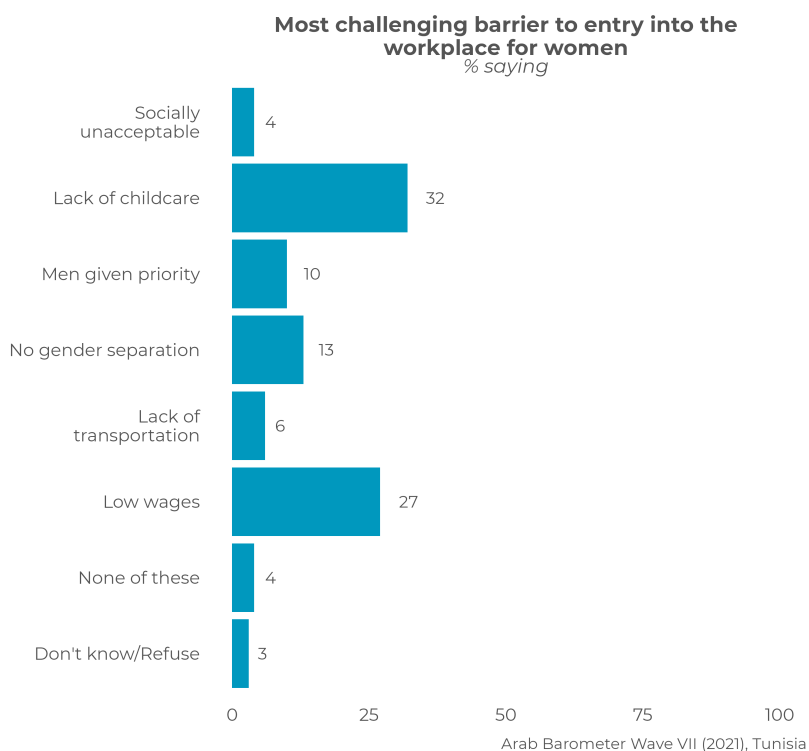
There is also strong agreement that a child’s citizenship should not be tied only to the nationality of his father. Two-thirds (66 percent) of Tunisians say that a woman should be able to pass on her nationality to her children. Women are ten points more likely to hold this view than men while those with a university degree or above are 12 points more likely to agree than those who have a secondary degree or less. However, by this measure too, a clear majority of citizens support equal rights for women.

In terms of roles in the public sphere, when asked if men make better political leaders than women, 40 percent agree or strongly agree. Notably, this represents a 16-point decrease since 2018 and a 32-point decrease since 2011. Unsurprisingly, men are substantially more likely to hold this view compared with women (50 percent vs. 31 percent) while those a secondary education or less are 12 points more likely to agree than those with a university education or above.



In the private sphere, 43 percent of Tunisians say that the man should have the final say in all decisions concerning the family, which is 11 points lower than in 2018. Again, men are substantially more likely to hold this view than women (56 percent vs. 29 percent) while those with a secondary degree or less are far more likely to agree than are those with a university degree or above (47 percent vs. 25 percent).

Women’s labor force participation rates are relatively low across MENA compared with other world regions. Arab Barometer asked a number of questions to assess the challenges women face that are greater than men’s in entering the workforce, including both structural and cultural challenges. When asked about the degree to which transportation represents a barrier to workforce entry, the majority (65 percent) say it is an equal barrier for both men and women. However, nearly a quarter (23 percent) say it is a bigger barrier for women. By comparison, fewer think a lack of skills is a disproportionate barrier for women. The majority (62 percent) say it is an equal barrier for both men and women, while 14 percent say it is a bigger barrier for women and 12 percent that it is a bigger barrier for men.



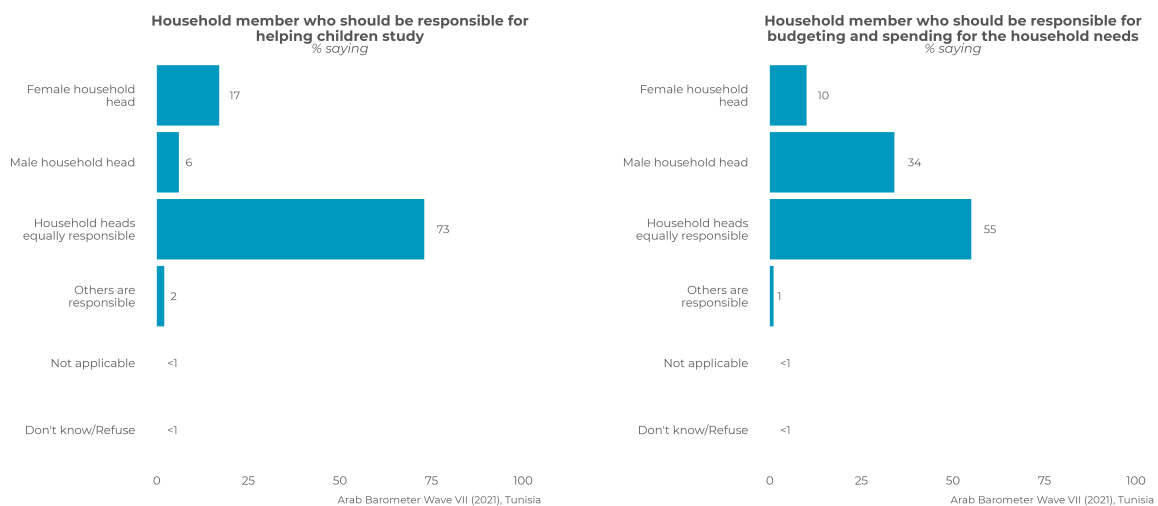
By comparison, relatively few Tunisians believe men and women working alongside one another is a barrier. Six-in-ten (59 percent) say it is not a barrier for either sex, roughly a quarter (27 percent) say it is an equal challenge for men and women while only eight percent say it is a bigger barrier for women.

When asked about the biggest barrier to women's entry into the labor force, the two most commonly cited issues are lack of childcare (32 percent) and low wages (27 percent), followed by a lack of gender-segregation in the workplace (13 percent) and men being given priority for jobs (10 percent). However, women are significantly more likely to blame a lack of child care option compared with men (37 percent vs. 27 percent) as are those who are thirty and older compared with you ages 18-29 (35 percent vs. 24 percent).

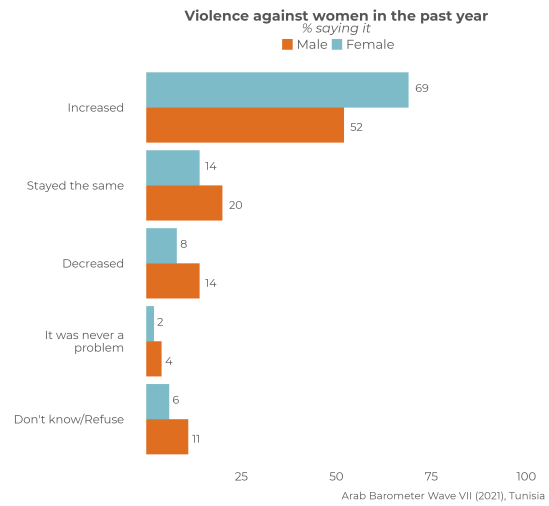
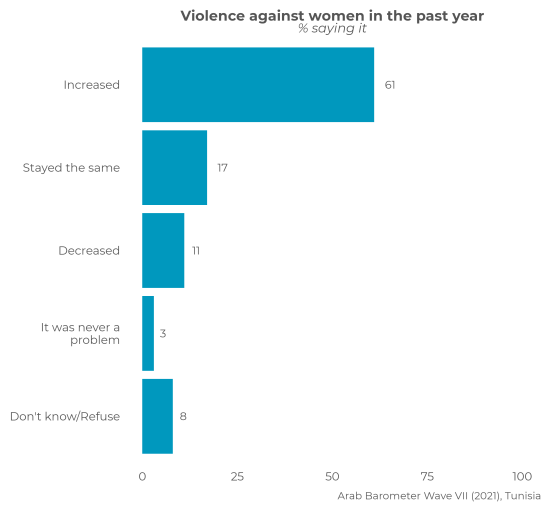
The vast majority of citizens also disagree that men and women should be segregated in the workplace. Only one-in-five (21 percent) believe that men and women should not work in the same space

Within the household, there is a strong perception that men and women should share a number of responsibilities equally. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) say that both mothers and fathers should take equal responsibility for helping

children study, with only 17 percent saying it should be the responsibility of the female head of the household and six percent saying it should be the male head of the household. When asked about who should be responsible for budgeting and spending decisions within the household, a majority (55 percent) said both the male and female head of household should be equally responsible, followed by a third (34 percent) who say the male head of household and one-in-ten who say the female head of household. For helping children study, there are not meaningful differences in views of men and women, however, women are significantly more likely than men to say that household financial decisions should be shared equally between men and women heads of household (61 percent vs. 48 percent).

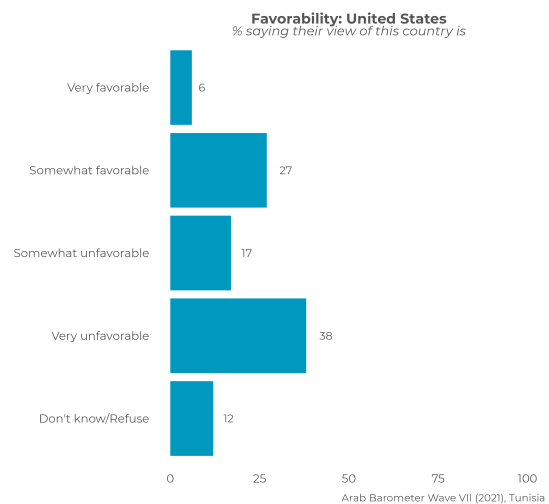
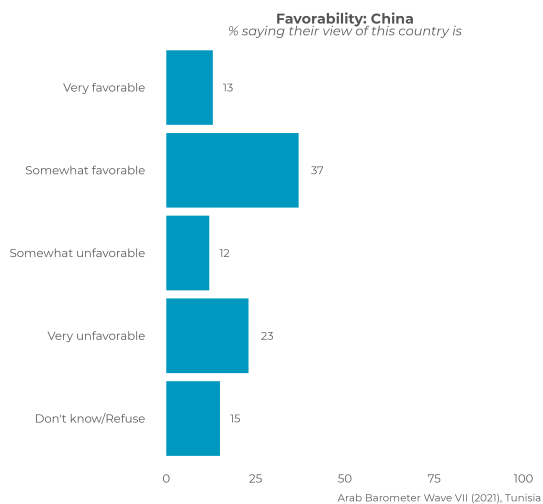


Despite significant gains for women in recent years, there are also some causes for concern based on the survey data. Studies from around the world have suggested that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women has increased. It appears that Tunisia is no exception. When asked if they believed that violence against women had increased in the past year, six-in-ten (61 percent) perceive that it has compared with only 11 percent who say it has decreased and 17 percent who say it is unchanged. Notably, women are 17-points more likely than men to say that violence has increased over the past year.

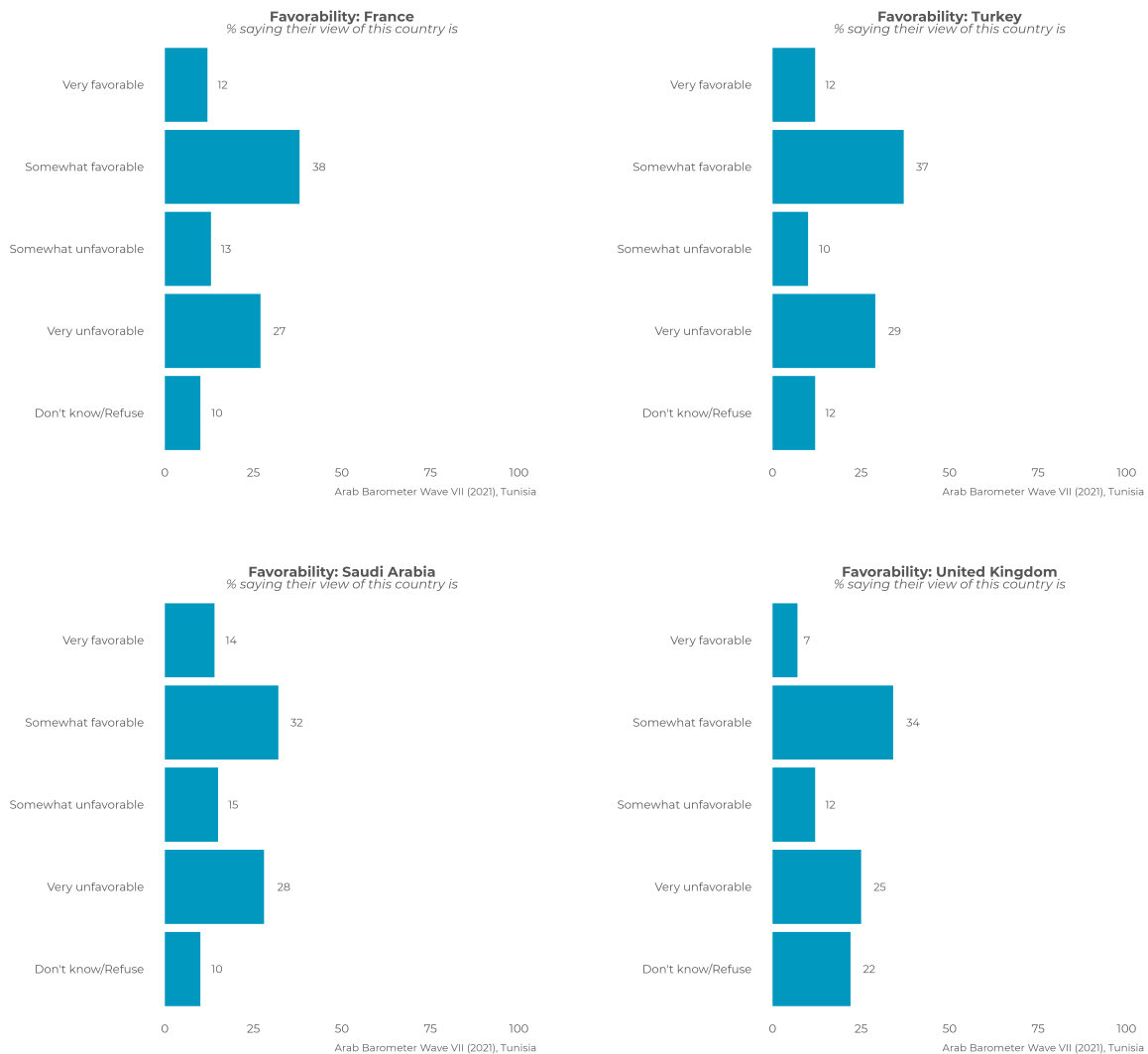


International Relations

Among global powers, China is the most favored country with half saying they view it very or somewhat favorably. By comparison, a third of Tunisians have a positive view of the U.S., with younger Tunisians ages 18-29 being eight points more likely to hold a positive view of the U.S. than those who are older. Meanwhile, Russia is somewhat more popular, with 43 percent holding a positive view

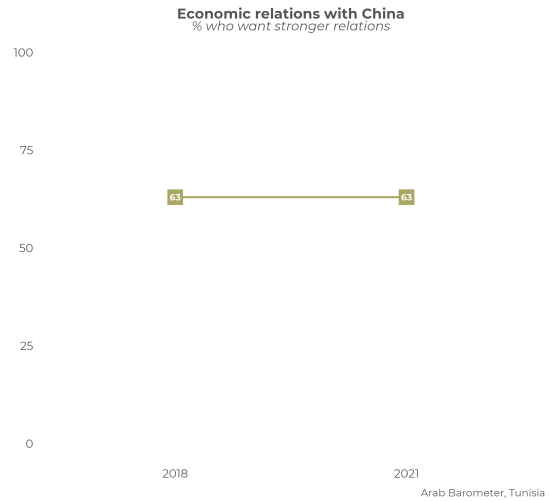
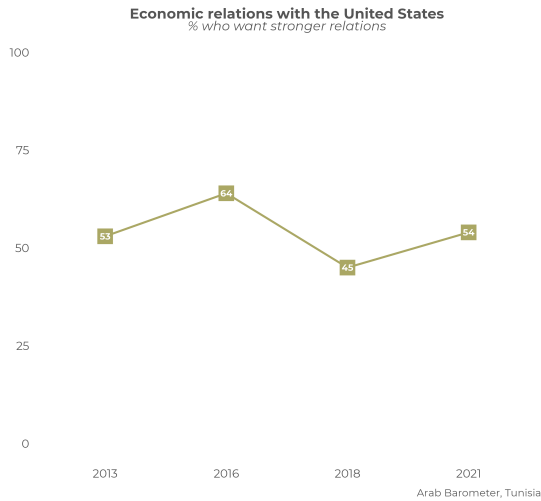


Among regional powers, Tunisians tend to be relatively divided. About half say they have positive views of France (50 percent), Turkey (50 percent), and Saudi Arabia (47 percent). Broadly speaking, there are relatively few demographic differences in views of these countries with the exception of Turkey, as youth ages 18-29 who are 19 points more likely to view Turkey positively than those who are older. Meanwhile, 41 percent have a positive view of the U.K.

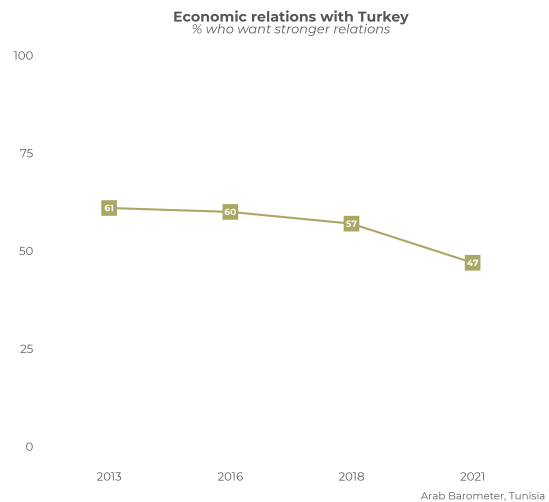
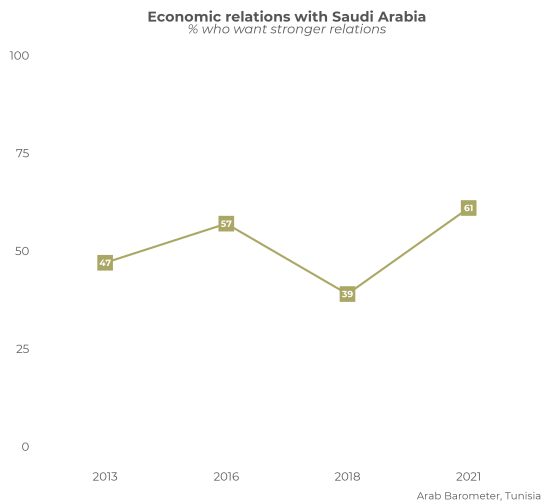


Tunisians are relatively open to strengthening economic relations with foreign countries even if they do not have overly positive views of them. A majority (54 percent) want stronger economic relations with the U.S. compared with only 21 percent who want these ties to become weaker. Overall, a desire for closer economic ties with the U.S. has increased by nine points since 2018. A similar

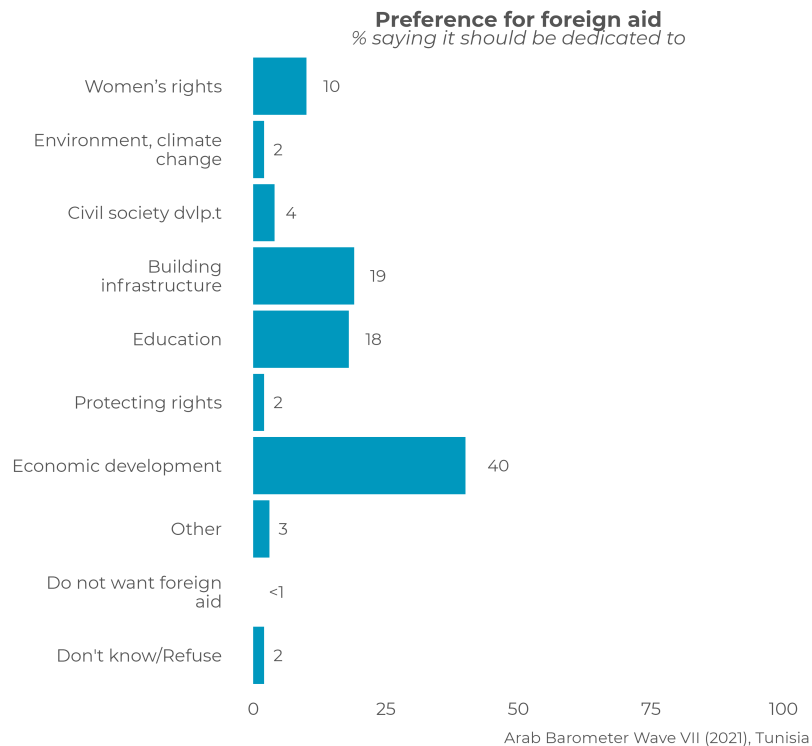
percentage, 52 percent, favor stronger economic relations with Russia, which is effectively unchanged since 2018. However, Tunisians are most likely to want closer economic ties with China (63 percent), although this level is unchanged since 2018.



Among regional powers, a majority want stronger economic relations with Saudi Arabia (61 percent), which is a dramatic increase since 2018 (+22 points). By comparison, only half want closer economic relations with France while 47 percent want closer ties with Turkey, which represents a 10-point decline since 2018.



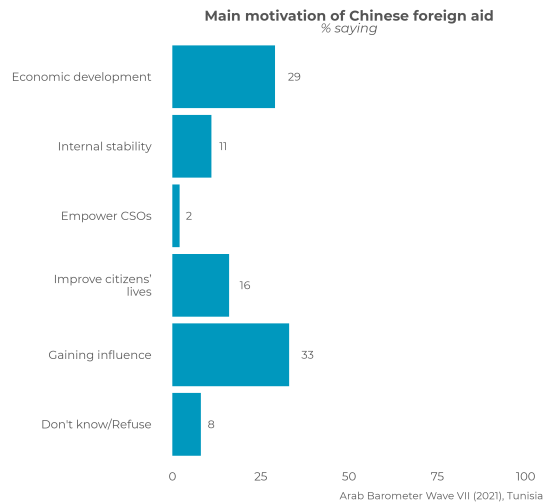
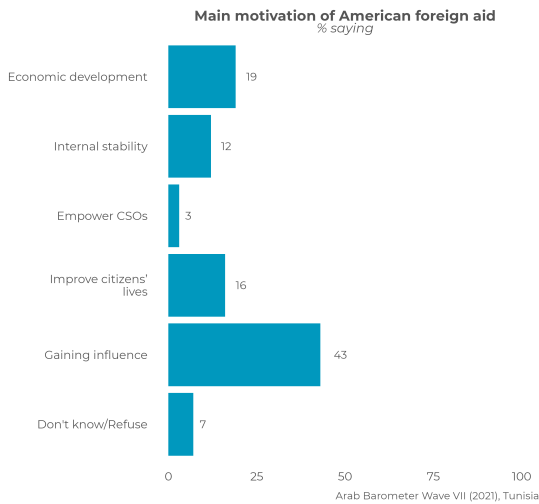
In terms of foreign aid, the vast majority of Tunisians prefer that it be directed toward economic development (40 percent), infrastructure (19 percent), or education (18 percent), which is consistent with the deep economic challenges and concerns about education detailed above. Meanwhile, one-in-ten say foreign aid should focus on women’s rights, while fewer than five percent name other respective areas for assistance.



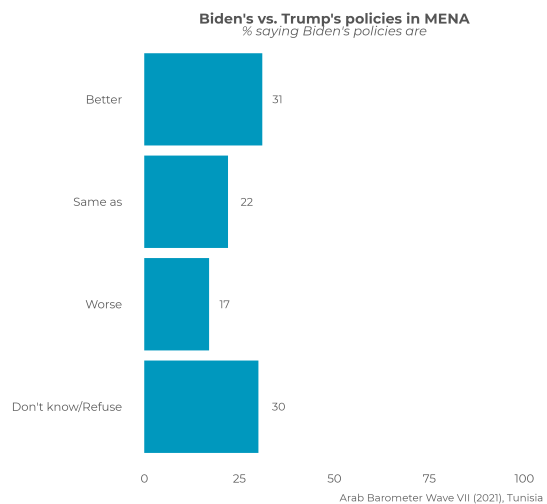
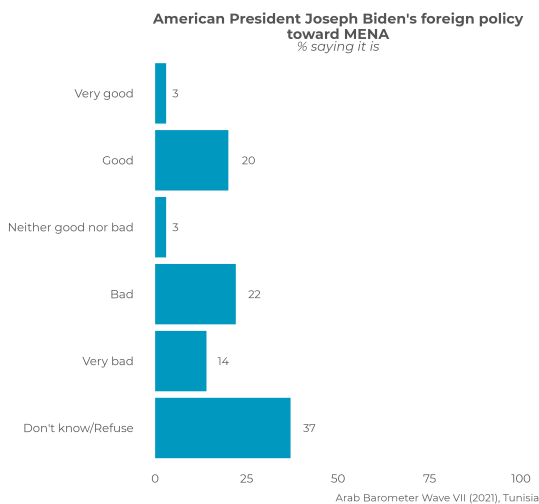
Perceptions of U.S. foreign aid are relatively positive, with 62 percent saying that U.S. assistance strengthens educational initiatives to a great or limited extent. A similar percentage (63 percent) says that U.S. aid advances women’s rights, but fewer (51 percent) say the same about it strengthening civil society. However, when asked about the main motivation for the U.S. giving aid to Tunisia, the most common response is to gain influence over the country (43 percent), compared with just one-in-five (19 percent) who say it is to promote economic development, 16 percent who say it is to help ordinary citizens, and 12 percent who say it is to promote internal stability. By comparison, Tunisians are less likely to say that the primary motivation for Chinese aid to their country is to gain influence (33 percent) while they are more likely to say it is to promote economic development (29 percent).

Arab Barometer – Wave VII

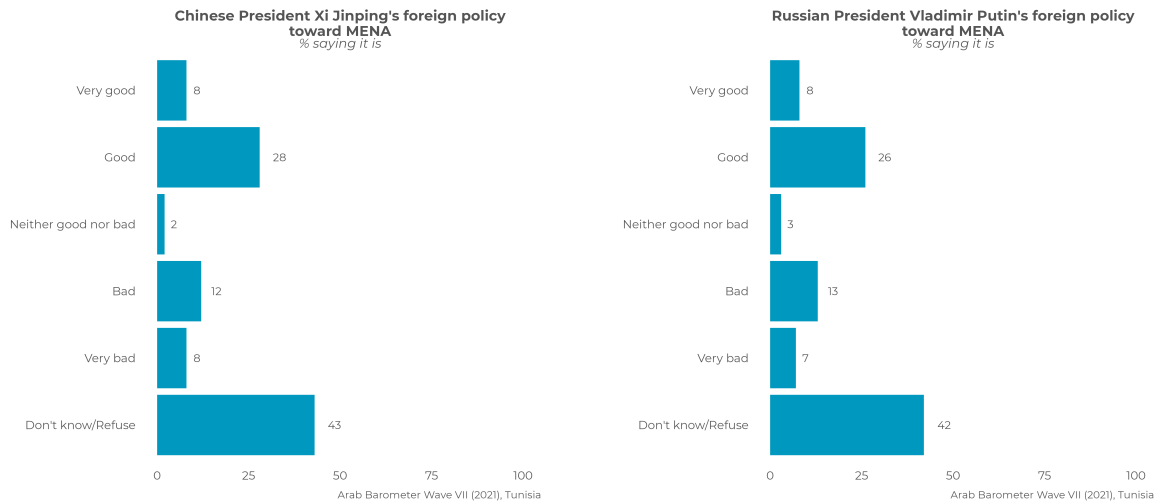
Tunisia Report



Support for the foreign policies of U.S. president Joe Biden is relatively low, with only 23 percent of Tunisians describing them as good or very good. However, many Tunisians (37 percent) say they don't know enough to say, suggesting that this percentage is driven in part by the fact that Biden is still a relatively new leader. Nevertheless, ratings of Biden are still significantly better than they were for former U.S. President Donald Trump, who was rated positively by only 10 percent in Tunisia in 2018. Additionally, when asked directly, three-in-ten (31 percent) Tunisians say Biden has better policies compared with Trump, 22 percent say they are the same, 17 percent say they are worse, and 30 percent say they do not know.

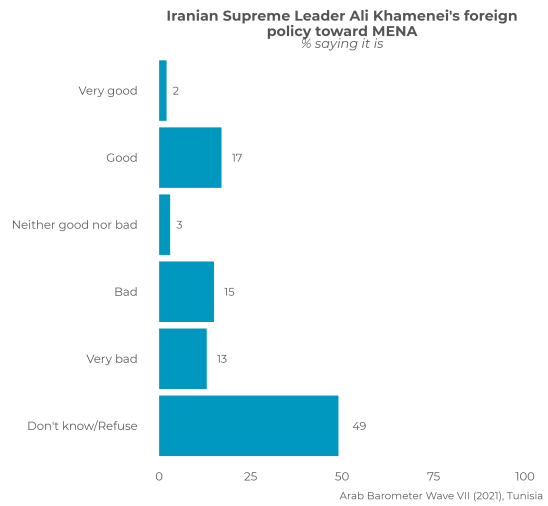
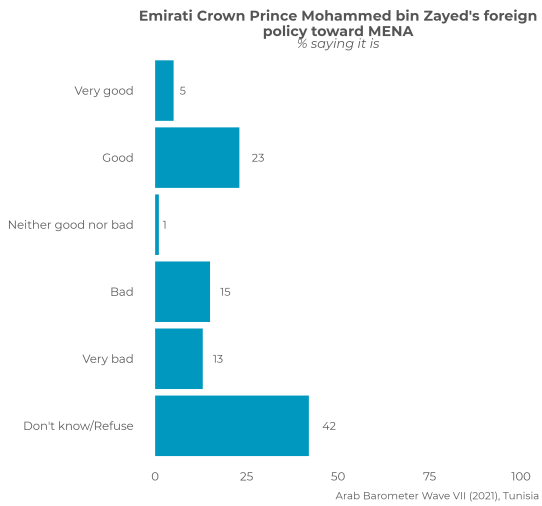
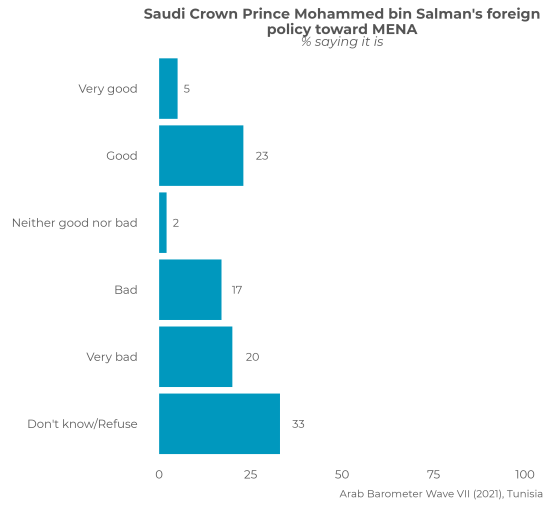
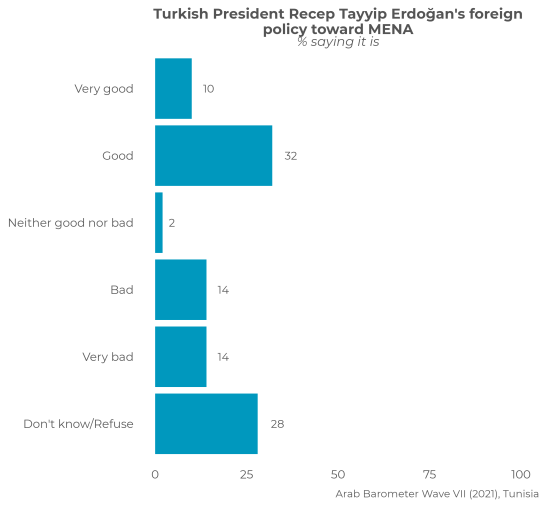


Chinese Premier Xi Jinping’s foreign policies are favored by 35 percent of Tunisians, which is similar to ratings for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s foreign policies (34 percent). For Putin, this rating is effectively unchanged since 2018. Notably, the survey was conducted prior to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, meaning its ratings of his foreign policy may have since changed.



Among regional powers, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s foreign policies are favored by 42 percent of Tunisians, which represents an 11-point decline since 2018. Although lower, ratings are still higher than for other regional leaders, including UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (29 percent), Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (28 percent), and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (20 percent).

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Tunisia Report





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 rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006. The margin of error is ± 2 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.



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