



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Arab Barometer VIII

## Tunisia Report



2024

## Executive summary

Over the past dozen years, Tunisia has experienced dramatic political change. In 2011, the Jasmine Revolution led to the fall of its long-standing leader, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, ushering in a period of political instability. Following the rewriting of the constitution, free and fair elections were held but yielded only weak and largely ineffective governments. Although Tunisians enjoyed far greater political rights, economically the country regressed. A decade after the revolution, GDP per capita had declined significantly. Stories of corruption within government institutions remained common, yielding an increasingly frustrated public. Elections may give voters a say, but the outcomes of the system often appeared no better than in the days of Ben Ali. Citizens demanded radical change and looked for a leader who they believed could deliver actual results.

In the 2019 presidential elections, many Tunisians turned to Kaïs Saïed as a solution. Saïed ran a populist campaign as a political outsider, calling for ending corruption and reforms to the electoral system. In the final round of voting, he captured nearly three-quarters of the vote for an overwhelming victory and strong electoral mandate. In July 2021, Saïed dismissed the prime minister and suspended parliament. Ruling by decree, many members of the judiciary were dismissed and many opposition politicians were arrested.

Despite international criticism of these actions, results from the 2021 Arab Barometer demonstrated that most Tunisians were in favor of his actions.<sup>1</sup> Just three months after the events of July 25, 2021, most Tunisians had confidence in the president, a majority were optimistic about their economic future for the first time in years, and most believed the government was finally tackling the problem of corruption. In short, many Tunisians had hope for their country's future.

In late 2023, Tunisians remained more optimistic than they had been before the election of Saïed, but Arab Barometer's survey suggests that some are starting to lose hope. Promises of economic improvements have not been realized—just one-in-ten rate the economy as good, which is largely unchanged since 2013. Economic optimism has also fallen, dropping by 14 points since 2021. During this period, hunger has also increased dramatically, with two-thirds of Tunisians saying they have gone without food at least once in the previous month. Moreover, the most common perception is that government mismanagement is the source of food insecurity.

Views of most political institutions are relatively weak. Just over a third have confidence in the government while less than a quarter trust parliament. However, trust in President Saïed remains strong, with about three-quarters expressing confidence in their leader. Still, this level is a six point decrease from 2021.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB7-Tunisia-Report-EN.pdf>

Despite high trust in the president, only about half rate the government's performance positively, which is down by eight points since 2021. Satisfaction is greatest in the government's provision of defense and basic infrastructure, but only about a third are satisfied with healthcare or education. Ratings of economic performance are even lower, with fewer than a quarter being satisfied with the government's efforts on narrowing the wealth gap, creating jobs, or addressing inflation.

Corruption remains a major scourge, with more than 90 percent of Tunisians saying it is present in national institutions to a great or medium extent, which is effectively unchanged over the past eight years. However, there now is a far greater belief that the government is now working to tackle this problem than in the recent past. Since 2021, about two-thirds of Tunisians credit to government for addressing this problem compared with a minority of citizens who said the same in 2016 and 2019.

Given the problems facing ordinary Tunisians, it is unsurprising that many seek to leave their homeland. Nearly half say they have considered emigrating, particularly those who are young and are better educated. Among this group who has thought about leaving, not quite half say they have begun to make plans to make this a reality and about four-in-ten say they would consider leaving Tunisia even if they lacked the required documentation to go to another country.

Despite the crackdown on opposition groups, Tunisians do not believe that there has been a meaningful decrease in their political rights. Seven-in-ten say they enjoy the right to freedom of speech, which is greater than the share in 2019. Fewer say that freedom of assembly is guaranteed at 56 percent, which is a slight decrease from 2021 but more than in 2019.

Despite the political changes, Tunisians remain both supportive but cautious about a democracy. Eight-in-ten affirm that despite its problems, democracy is their preferred political system. However, about seven-in-ten perceive democracy to lead to poor economic outcomes, instability, and indecisiveness. In short, it remains an imperfect but desired system.

However, many of the frustrations about democracy but continued support may stem from how Tunisians define democracy. Tunisians are more likely to associate it with the provision of economic necessities, equality under the law, and a lack of corruption than they are to link it with free and fair elections. In fact, Tunisians effectively do not differentiate between democracy and dignity (*karama*), which was a key demand of the protests in 2011 that led to the fall of the Ben Ali regime. Thus, Tunisians are likely to support a system that can deliver such results more so than they are one that simply allows them to choose their leaders in regular election.

In the field of international relations, the views of Tunisians have been deeply affected by the war in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> Prior to October 7, 2023 four-in-ten Tunisians held a favorable view of the U.S. Just three weeks later, only 10 percent supported the U.S. Similar declines are found for U.S. allies, including a drop of 14 points for France and Saudi Arabia, respectively. By contrast, evidence suggests an increase in support for Iran over the same three-week period. By the end of fieldwork, the policies of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamanei were equally popular to those of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and more popular than those of Emirati President Mohammed bin Zayed. Meanwhile, Tunisians do not appear to have substantially changed their views of either China or Russia in the weeks after October 7.

Arab Barometer also included a number of key issues facing domestic politics in Tunisia. In the case of gender, for the most part Tunisians favor women's equality in both domestic and public spheres. The vast majority affirm that women should have the same rights as men and favor quotas for women in the cabinet and parliament. However, despite these attitudes, it is clear women's participation in the labor force still trails that of men. Tunisians see many barriers facing women, including a lack of jobs and a lack of childcare. But, other factors also may play a role, including the fact that most say women face significant levels of harassment in the workplace.

Tunisians also express deep concerns about their natural environment and climate change. The greatest concern is over water resources, but clear majorities are worried about broad impacts from climate change including on their physical and mental health. They express significant concerns about the effect on their daily lives as well. In terms of contributors to climate change, Tunisians are most likely to see business as the problem, including both international and domestic corporations. But, most also say both governments and citizens around the world and in Tunisia also play a role. Perhaps more importantly, Tunisians affirm that businesses, governments, and citizens should all take responsibility for trying to address climate change. And, most Tunisians favor taking clear steps toward improving their environment and tackling climate change, including punishing polluters and phasing out the use of fossil fuels.

These are among the main findings of a nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted in Tunisia. The survey included 2,406 randomly selected citizens from across all governorates of Tunisia and was fielded from September 13 to November 4, 2023 using a multistage clustered sample. The margin of error for the reported results is  $\pm 2$  percentage points. The surveys are part of Arab Barometer's eighth wave which is the the largest publicly available survey that captures the sentiments of citizens across MENA amidst the current crisis

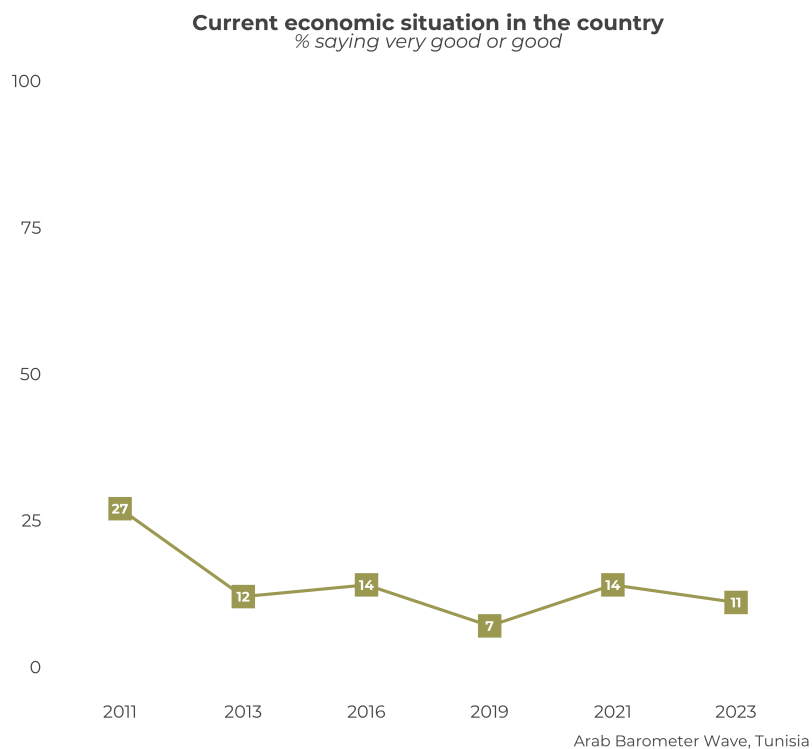
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<sup>2</sup>For additional details, see <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/middle-east/how-israel-hamas-war-gaza-changing-arab-views>

taking place in the Middle East. Additional information about the surveys can be found at [www.arabbarometer.org](http://www.arabbarometer.org).

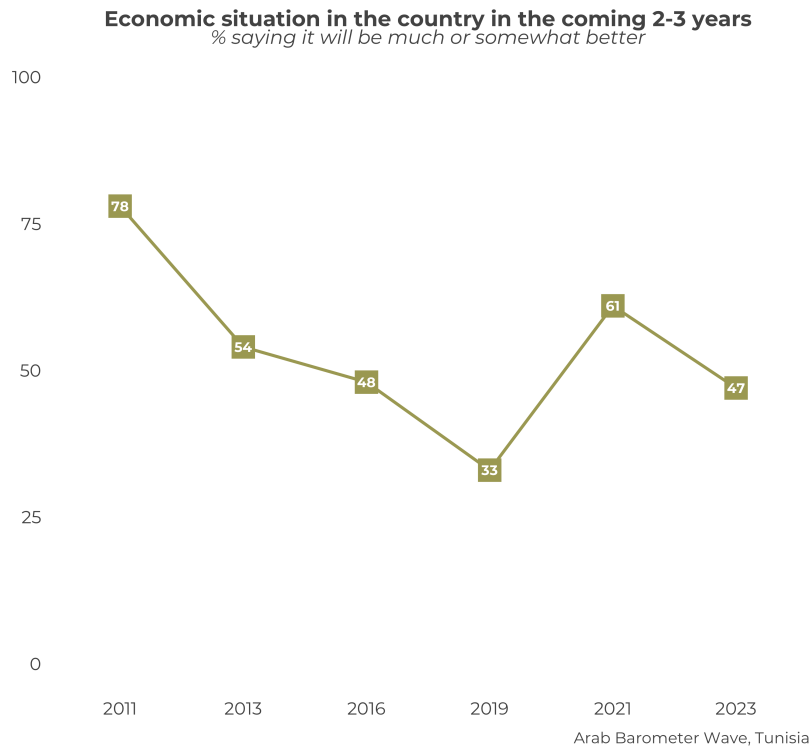
## Economy

The economic situation remains very poor, with about half (49 percent) citing this issue as the country's biggest challenge. By comparison, roughly a quarter (24 percent) say corruption while no other issue garners more than 10 percent. When asked specifically about what represents the biggest economic issue, the most common response is inflation (49 percent), distantly followed by lack of jobs (17 percent), poverty (13 percent), and low wages (11 percent). Ratings of the economic situation are very low in Tunisia with just 11 percent saying the economy is good or very good. This level is barely changed from 2021 when 14 percent said the same. Moreover, the majority of Tunisians (59 percent) say the economy is "very bad" while a further 30 percent say it is "bad".



Economic optimism is somewhat higher, with nearly half (47 percent) saying they expect the economy to improve in the coming few years. However, this

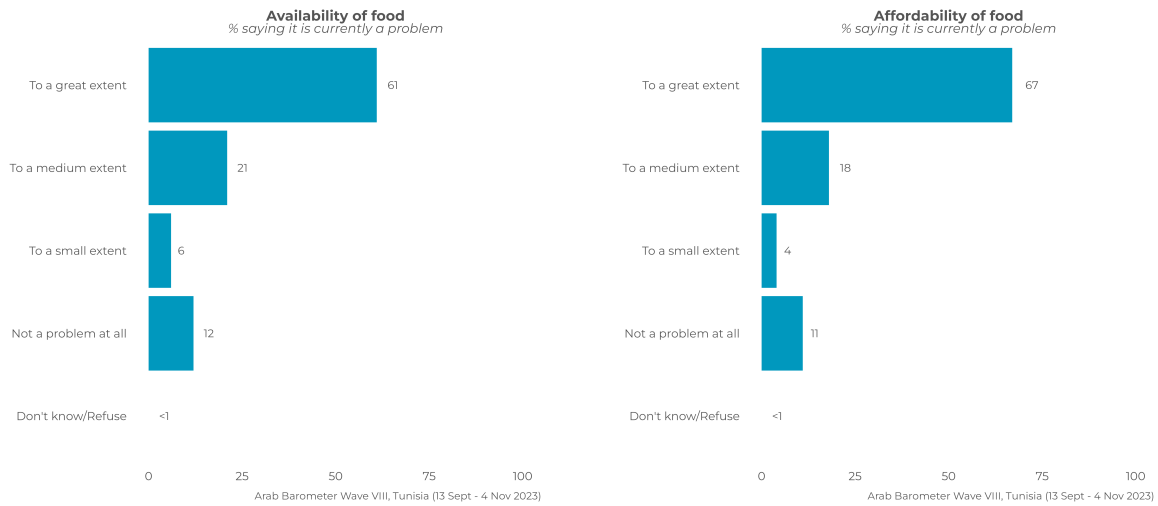
level has fallen by 14 points since 2021. On average, youth ages 18-29 are less optimistic than those who are 30 and older (33 percent vs. 53 percent).



Despite some economic optimism, the depth of the challenges Tunisia is facing is unprecedented in recent times. When asked whether their household had run out of food before they had money to buy more, two-thirds say this was often (32 percent) or sometimes (35 percent) true in the previous 30 day period. This represents a significant increase of 12 points in just the past two years, highlighting the further deterioration in the economic position of ordinary Tunisians.

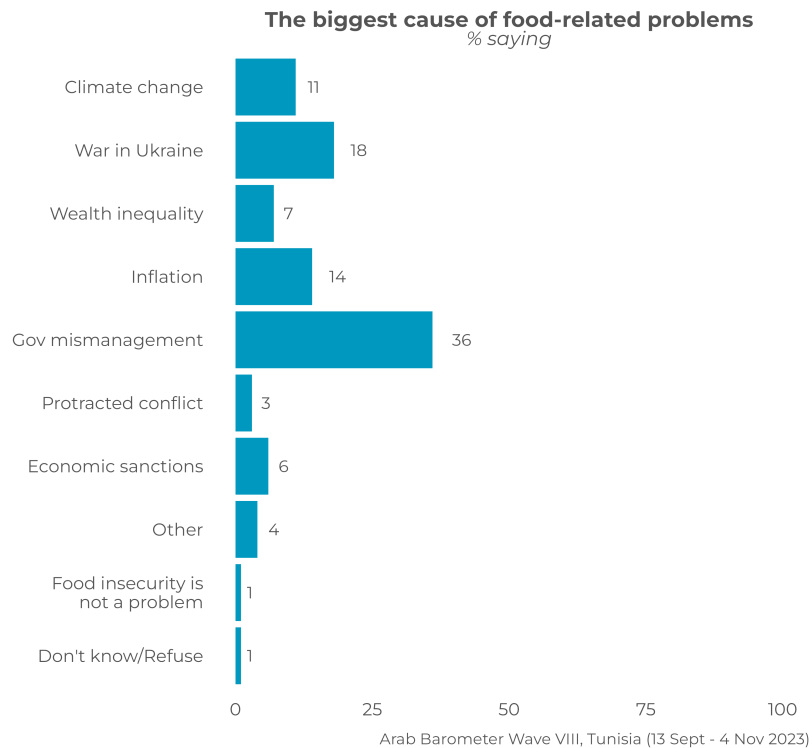
The challenge of food insecurity is two-fold. Eight-in-ten (81 percent) say that the availability of food is a problem to a great or medium extent. Meanwhile, a similar percentage (84 percent) say that even if food is available, its affordability represents a problem to a great or medium extent.

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Food insecurity has become a major issue across MENA.<sup>3</sup> Yet, rather than a global challenge, Tunisians are far more likely to attribute the problem to domestic conditions. The plurality (36 percent) blame government mismanagement for food-related issues while 14 percent cite inflation and seven percent wealth inequality. Global issues do factor into the equation for some Tunisians, with 18 percent saying food-related challenges are primarily due to the war in Ukraine and 11 percent citing climate change.

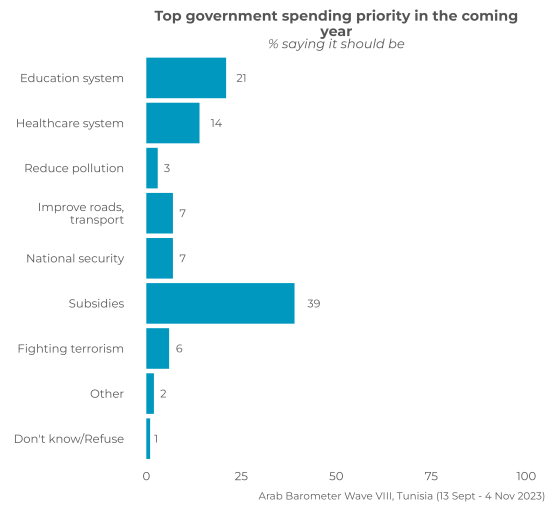
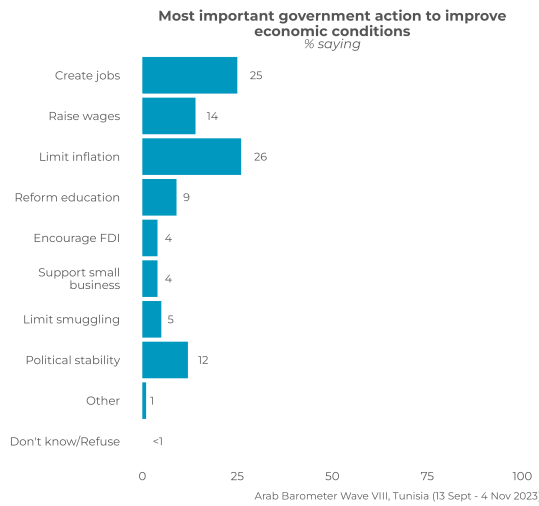
<sup>3</sup>[https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVII\\_Food\\_Insecurity\\_Report-ENG.pdf](https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVII_Food_Insecurity_Report-ENG.pdf)



Resolving Tunisia’s economic challenges will require significant reforms, but ordinary Tunisians are divided on what the government should focus on. The most common response is to limit inflation (26 percent) or to create more jobs (25 percent). Meanwhile, 14 percent want higher wages and 12 percent political stability. No more than one-in-ten say reforming education (9 percent), limiting smuggling (5 percent), encouraging foreign direct investment (4 percent), or supporting small businesses (4 percent).

Tunisians also emphasize that they want government spending to focus on improving the national economy or their household situation. About four-in-ten (39 percent) say that the government should make subsidies the top spending priority, which is a 25 point increase since 2021. The only other areas of spending garnering greater than 10 percent support are education (21 percent) and healthcare (14 percent).



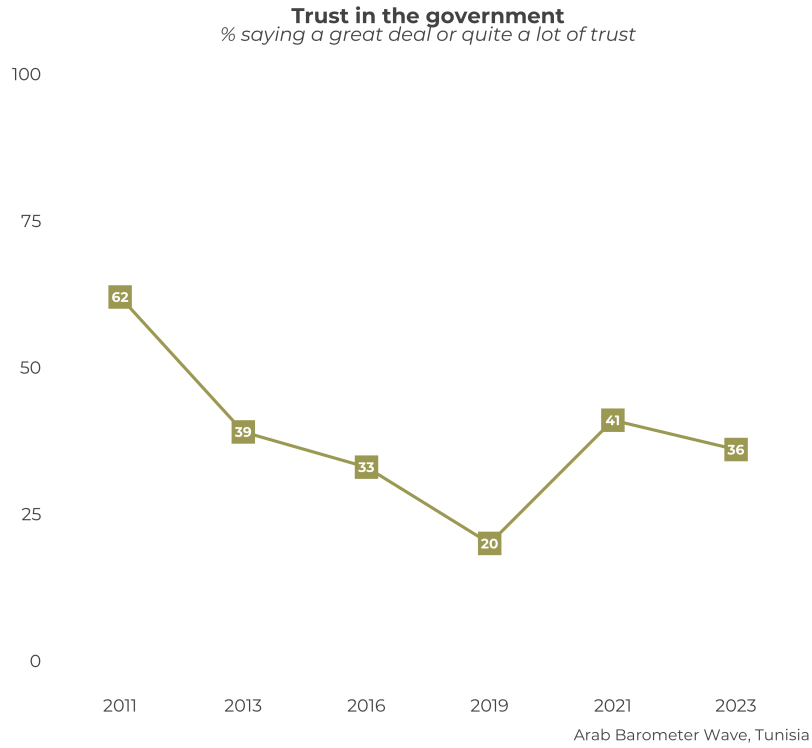


## Trust in Political Actors

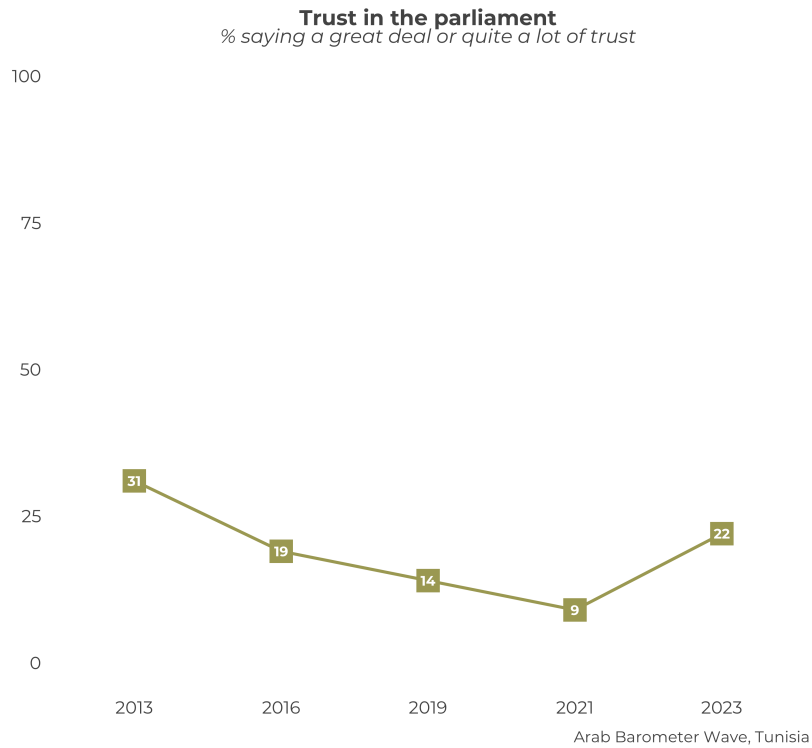
The 2023 Arab Barometer survey was fielded a little more than two years after the events of July 2021 when President Kais Saied issued an emergency declaration that fired the prime minister, suspended parliament, and gave himself all executive power. As our previous reporting has detailed, these steps were broadly popular with ordinary citizens.<sup>4</sup> Today, the president remains deeply popular, although not to the extent as in fall 2021. Moreover, there are signs of decline in confidence in the government more broadly, suggesting a slight reversal of the initial enthusiasm for these actions.

Trust in the government overall remains relatively low. Just over a third (36 percent) express confidence in the government, which is a drop of 5 points since 2021. However, this level is up dramatically from the post-revolution low of 20 percent in 2019. Overall, it has returned to similar levels observed in 2013 and 2016.

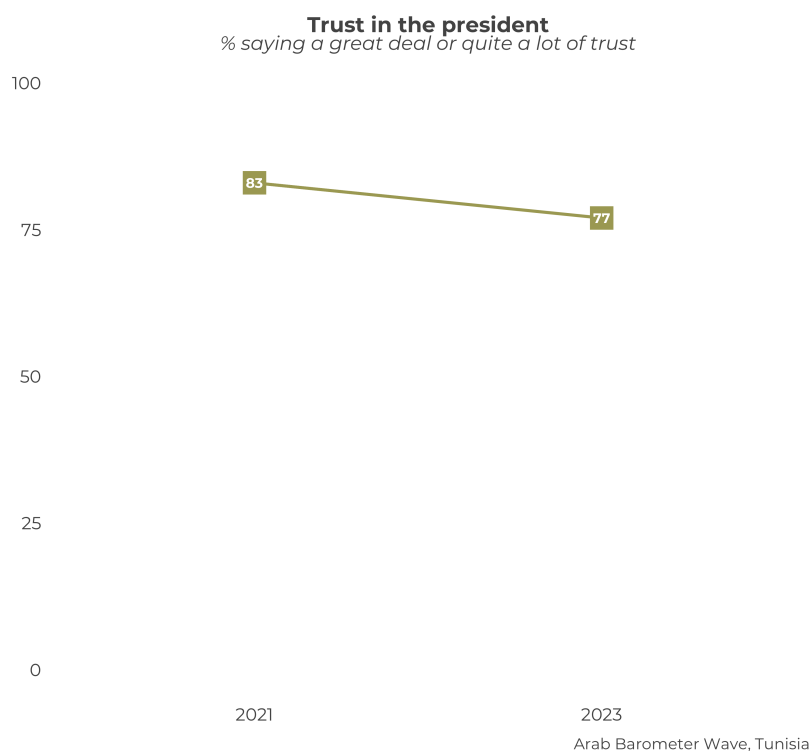
<sup>4</sup><https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/AB7-Tunisia-Report-EN.pdf>



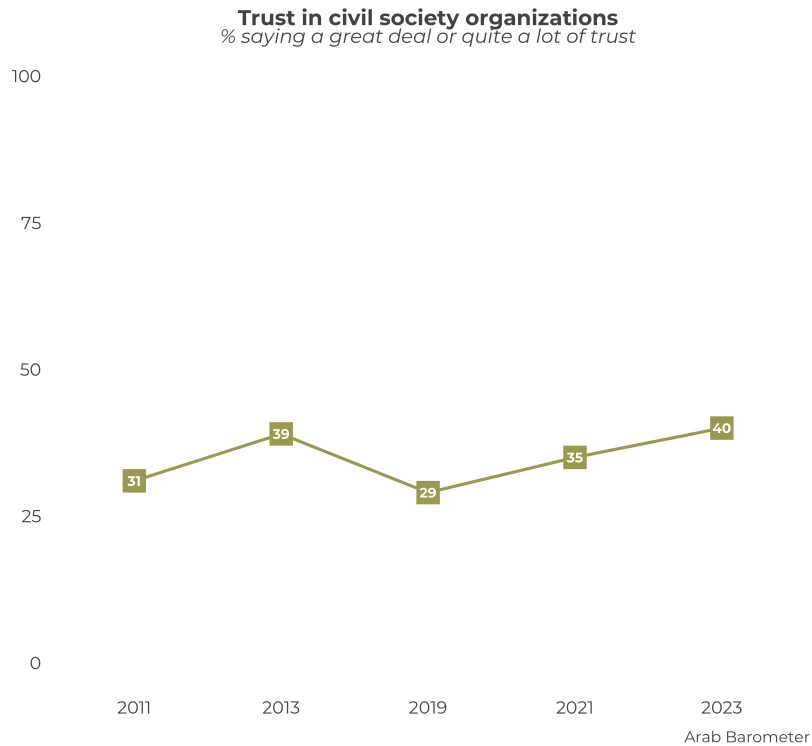
Trust in parliament remains low in Tunisia, but levels have increased following the 2022-2023 parliamentary elections. Confidence in parliament has more than doubled since 2021 rising by 13 points to 22 percent. This level remains below the early days after the revolution and remains similar to the level observed in 2016.



Tunisians have far greater trust in President Saied than they do in the government or parliament. About three-quarters have great (47 percent) or quite a lot (30 percent) of trust in Saied, which is a decline of six points since fall 2021. As in 2021, youth (ages 18-29) are significantly less confident in the president. Those who are younger still overwhelmingly trust the president at 67 percent, but this level is well below the 81 percent found among those ages 30 and above. Additionally, those who have at most a secondary degree are somewhat more likely to have confidence in the president than those with a college degree (79 percent vs. 72 percent).

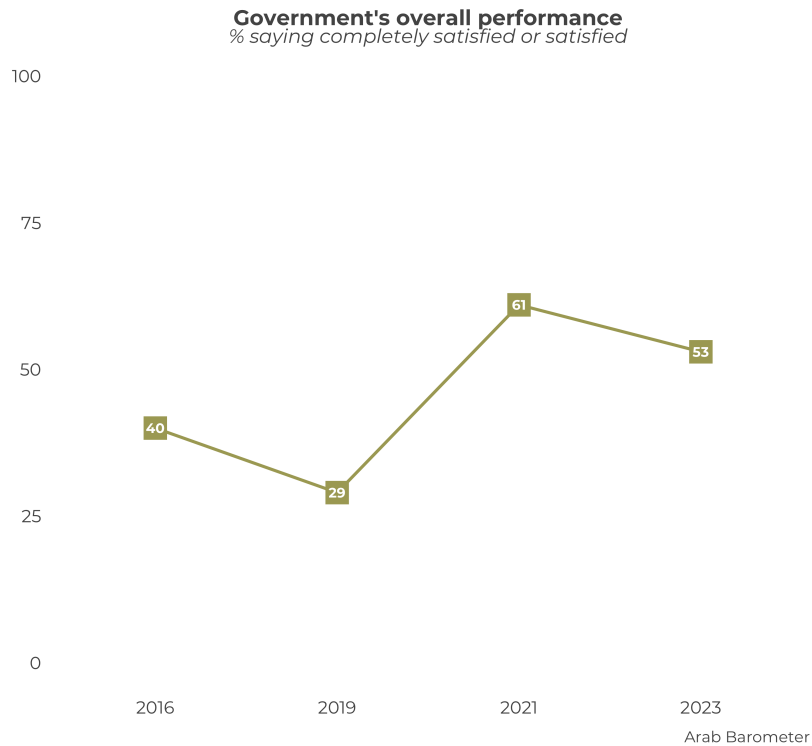


Trust in civil society organizations is not overly high. Four-in-ten Tunisians say they have confidence in these actors. However, this level does represent an increase from 2021 when just 35 percent said the same and up 11 points since 2019. In fact, current levels are as high as ever seen since the Jasmine revolution, effectively tied with the level observed in 2013 (39 percent).

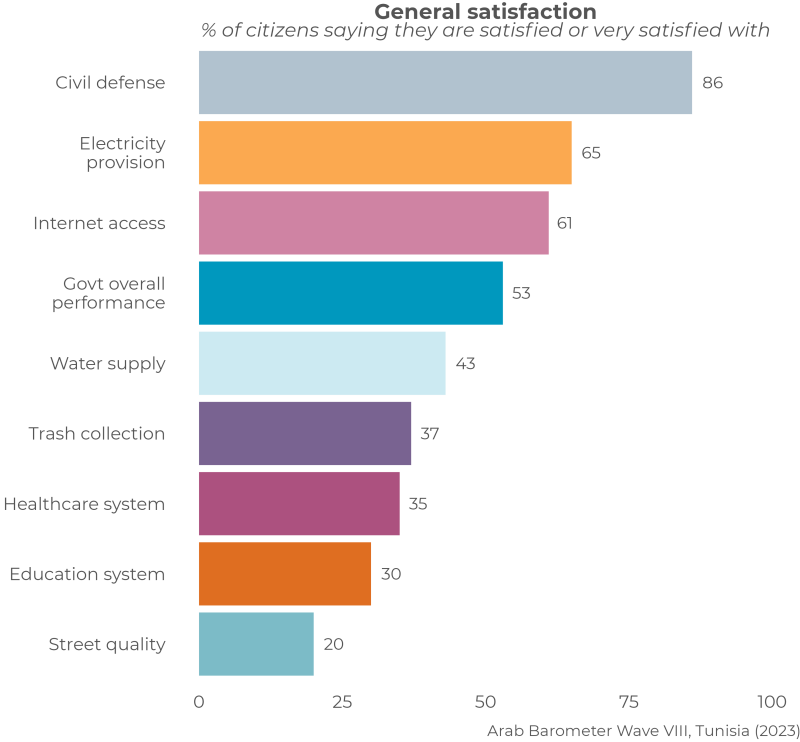


## Government Performance

Ratings of government performance are mixed. In a general sense, about half (53 percent) of Tunisians say they are satisfied or very satisfied with the government's performance overall. To an extent, this rating splits the difference between those who have confidence in the President and those who have confidence in the government overall. But, it is notable that this level of support is relatively high considering economic conditions, particularly with two-thirds of citizens saying they had missed a meal in the previous thirty days. Still, despite this relatively positive rating, this level is eight points lower than in 2021, which is relatively similar to the decline in economic optimism during the same period.

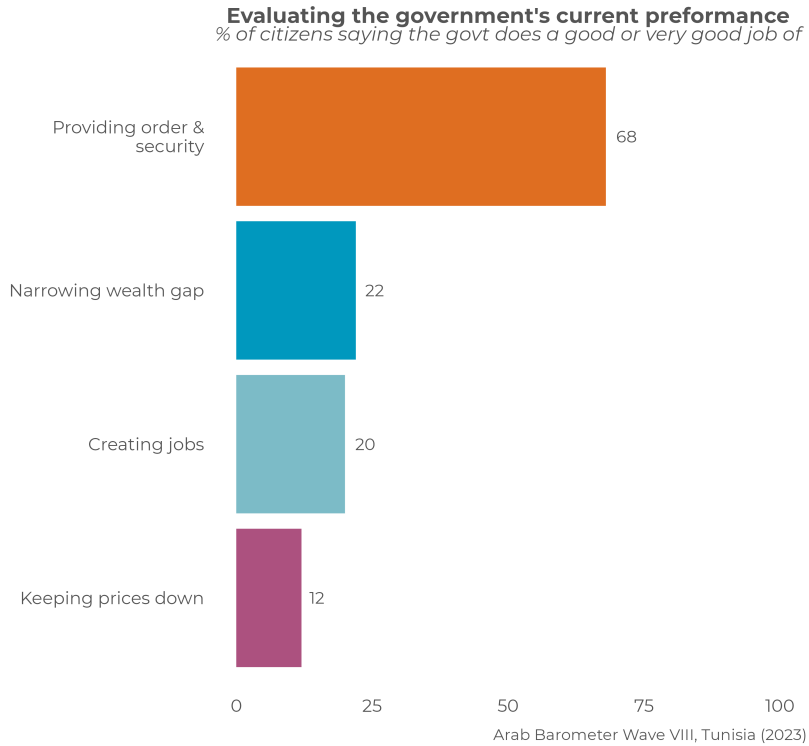


Looking into specific areas of performance, Tunisians are most satisfied with government performance on civil defense (86 percent), followed by electricity provision (65 percent), and internet access (61 percent). However, ratings are far lower on other key areas. Just 43 percent are satisfied with the water supply, 37 percent with trash collection, 35 percent with healthcare, 30 percent with education, and 20 percent with the quality of the country's street and roads.



These results imply that citizens are pleased with the government’s efforts to improve security, particularly after the terrorism issues in the 2010s. Ratings related to many areas of infrastructure provision are also relatively positive. However, Tunisians appear frustrated primarily with service provision. The government would be advised to invest in and work to reform education and health care to better meet the needs of citizens.

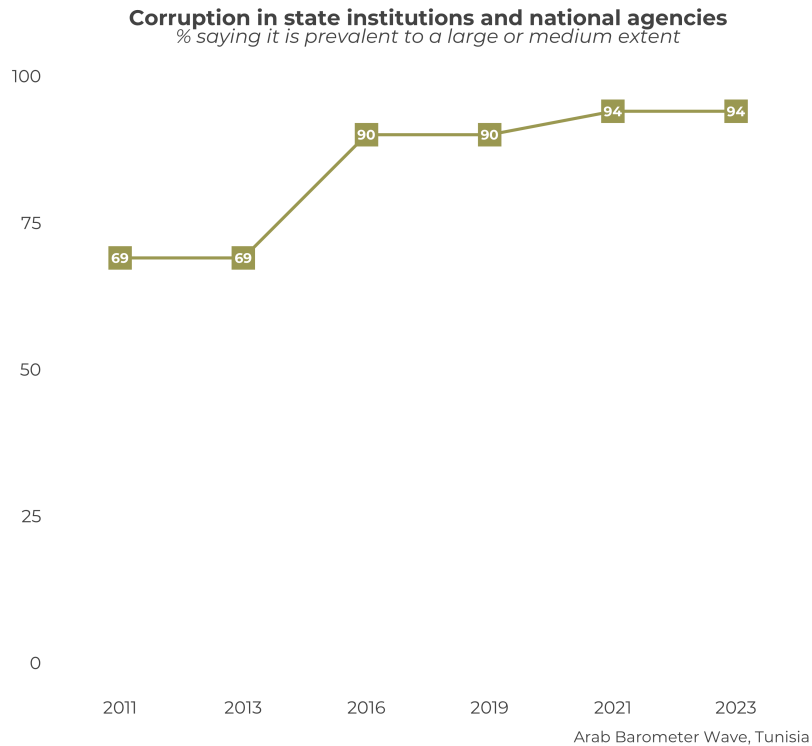
Meanwhile, when specifically asked about how the government is performing, ratings of government efforts to address economic issues are very low. Only 22 percent say the government is doing a good or very good job of limiting inequality. A similar percentage (20 percent) say the government is doing well creating jobs. Ratings of its efforts to limit inflation are even worse, with just 12 percent saying it has done a good job keeping prices down. However, ratings are significantly higher for the government’s efforts to ensure security and order, with about two-thirds say it has done a good or very good job.



## Corruption

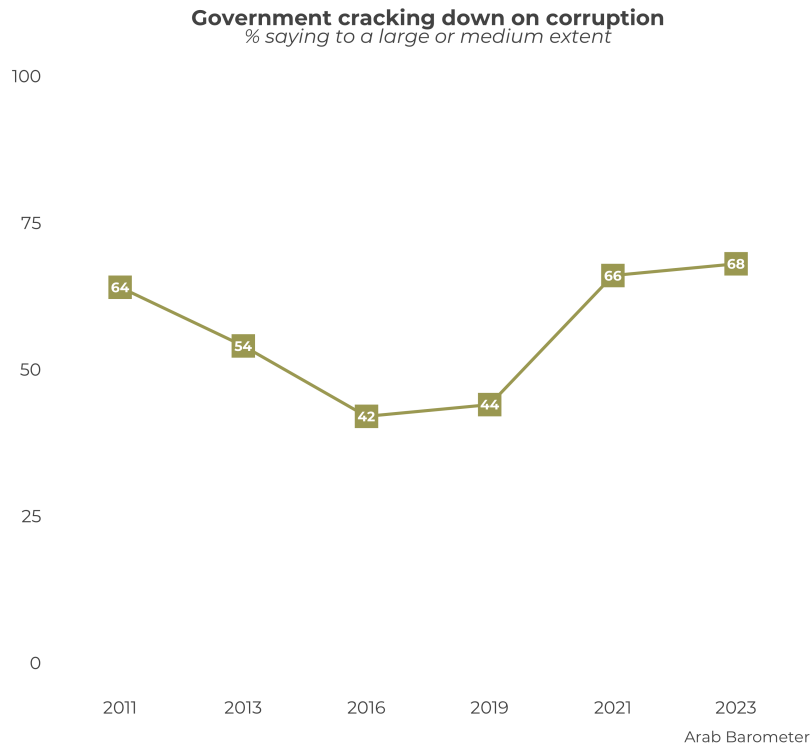
Perceptions of corruption in state institutions remain extremely high. Nearly all citizens (94 percent) say that corruption is prevalent to a large or medium extent in the national government, which is unchanged from 2021 but higher than at any point since the 2011 revolution.



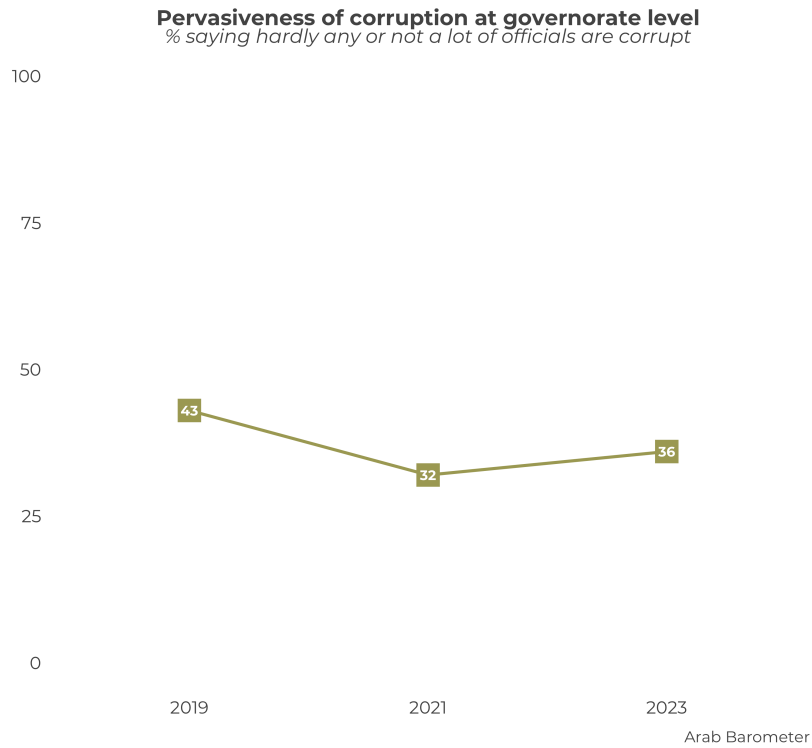


Despite no change in perceptions of corruption, most Tunisians continue to believe that the government is working to tackle this problem. About two-thirds (68 percent) say the government is doing so to a large or medium extent, which is similar to the percentage in 2021 (66 percent). This level is similar to the level seen shortly after the Jasmine Revolution (64 percent) and much greater than in the late 2010s when fewer than half believed the government was taking meaningful steps.

This general increase following the events of July 2021 likely helps to explain the strong support for President Saied; Tunisians appear to believe that even if government efforts have yet to yield clear improvements, they may bear fruit in the future. At the same time, it is unclear how long Tunisians will give the government to succeed in the campaign against corruption. If Tunisians were to feel that progress was no longer meaningful, it could translate into decreasing support for the country's leaders.

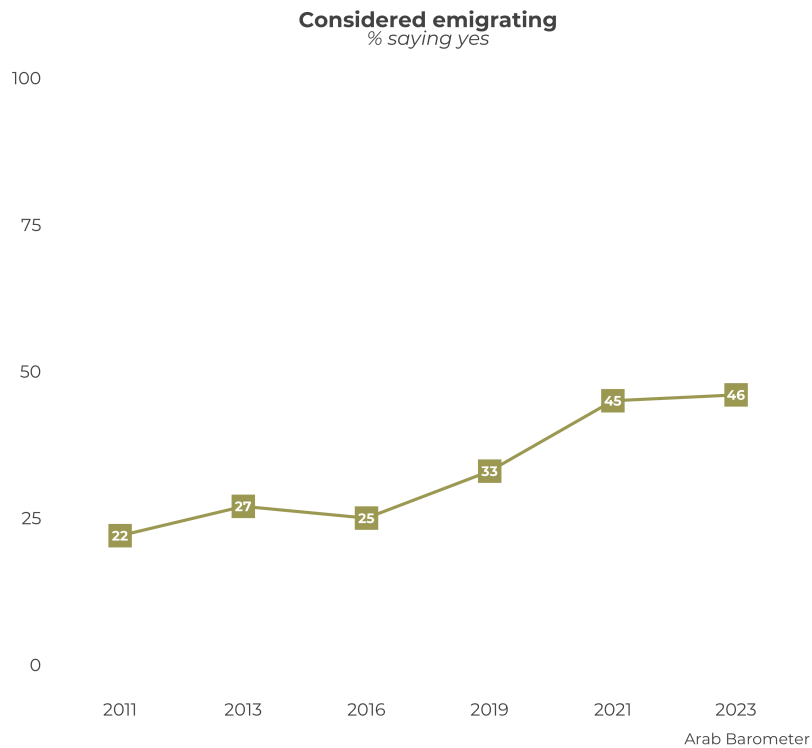


Concern about corruption at the regional level is lower, but still relatively high. When asked about the degree to which officials at the governorate level are corrupt, roughly a third say hardly any or not a lot are corrupt. This level may have increased slightly since 2021 (+4 points), but it is lower than in 2019 when 43 percent held this view.



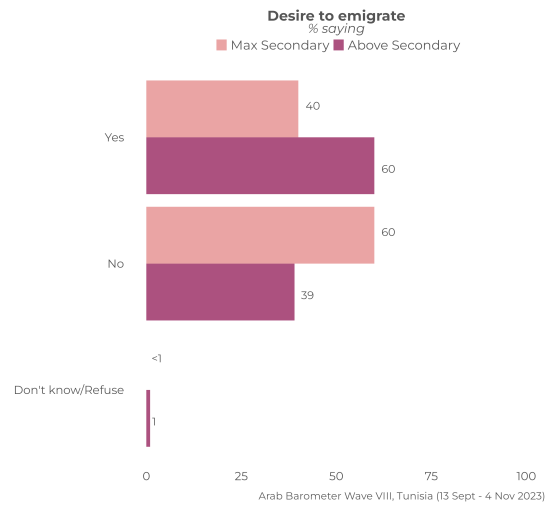
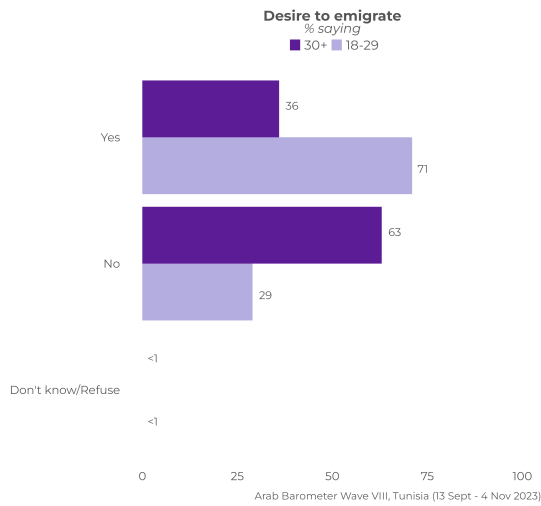
## Migration

Nearly half (46 percent) of Tunisians want to leave their homeland. This level is more than twice the percentage in 2011 (22 percent) and substantially greater than in the late 2010s. However, it is not significantly more than in 2021 when 45 percent were considering emigrating, meaning the long-term increase may have leveled off.

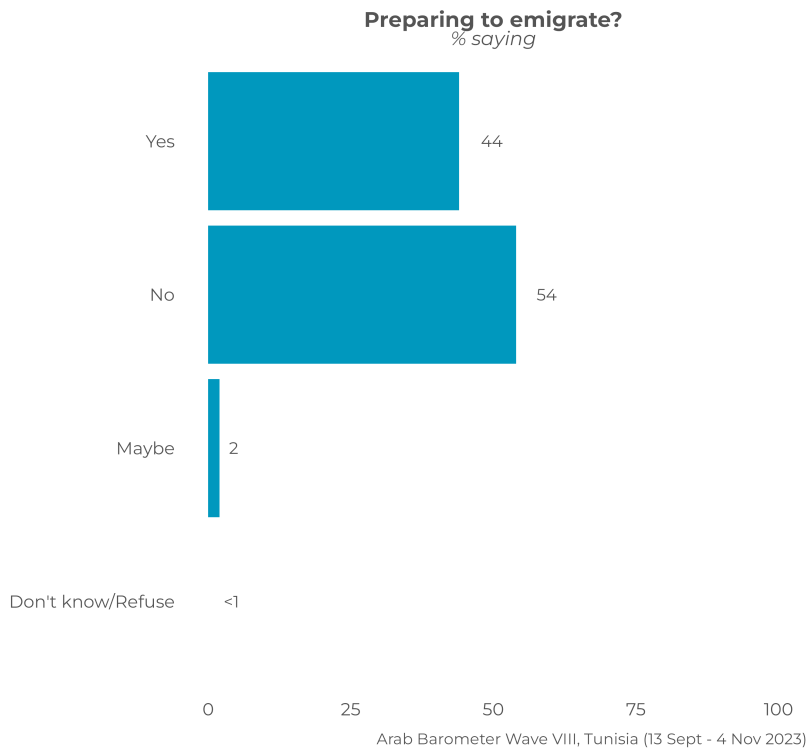


Tunisians who are ages 18-29 are far more likely to want to leave their country than those who are 30 or older. For youth, 71 percent are considering emigrating compared with 36 percent of those who are older. Additionally, those with at least a college degree are far more likely to want to emigrate than those with a high school degree or less (60 percent vs. 40 percent). Notably, however, men (47 percent) and women (45 percent) are about equally likely to be looking to a future abroad. In previous surveys in Tunisia and in most other MENA countries, men were substantially more likely to consider migrating relative to women. However, this gap has closed for Tunisia.

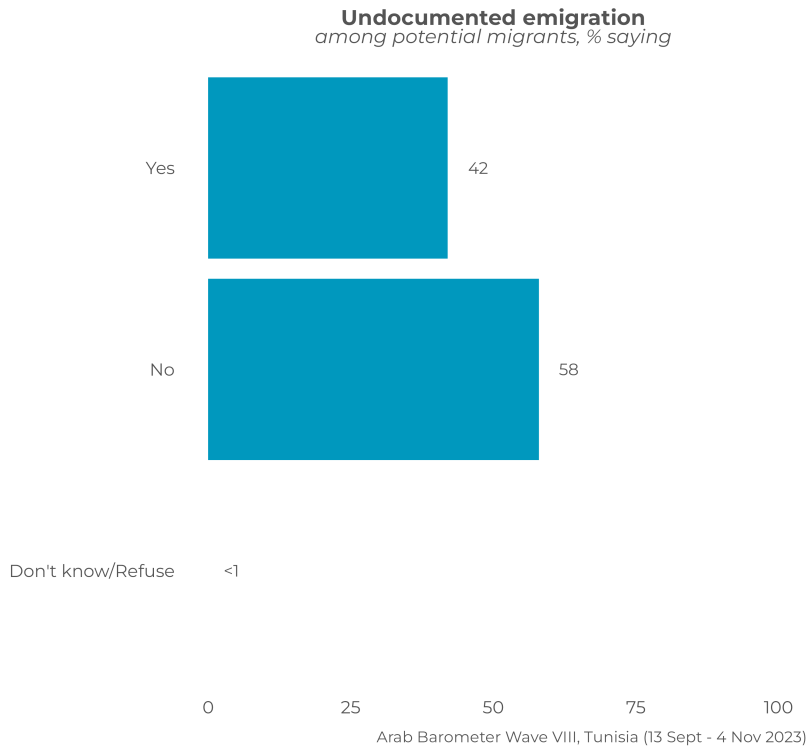
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Considering migration is not the same as taking steps toward making it a reality. Among those who are considering leaving their homeland, 44 percent report having begun preparations to leave. Those who are ages 18-29 are more likely to have taken such steps compared to those who are 30 or older (53 percent vs. 37 percent). Men are also far more likely to have done so compared with women (53 percent vs. 36 percent). However, there is a relatively small gap by level of education with 48 percent of those with a college degree having taken steps toward leaving compared with 42 percent of those with at most a secondary degree.

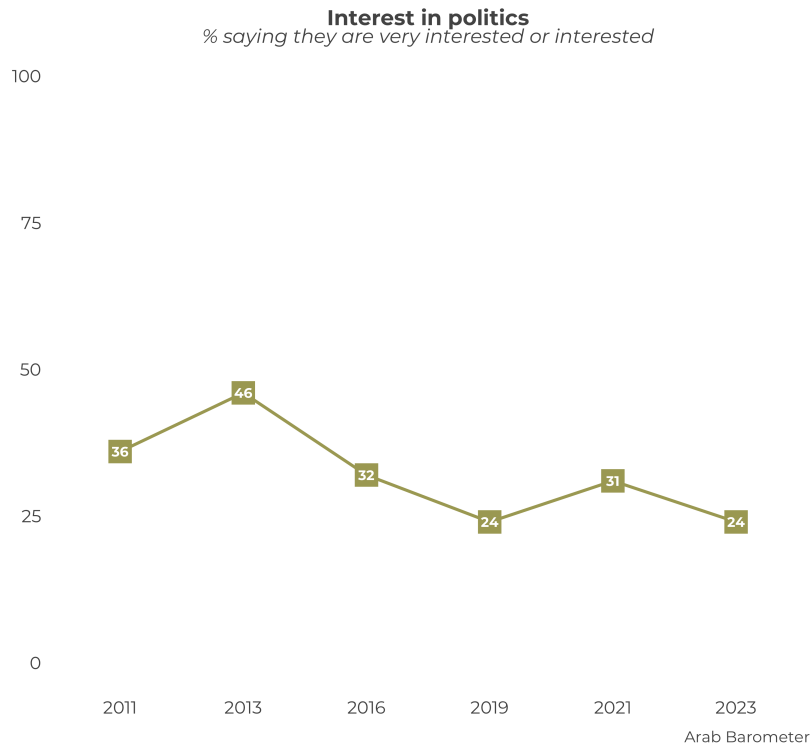


Many potential migrants are willing to leave Tunisia even if they lack the required papers. Among those considering migration, 42 percent say they are willing to do so, which is effectively unchanged since 2021. Among potential migrants, men are substantially more likely consider leaving without papers than women (54 percent vs. 30 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 (51 percent vs. 28 percent). Overall, the percentage of potential migrants who would consider leaving without the necessary papers is unchanged since 2018.



## Political Engagement & Civil Rights

Interest in politics is very low in Tunisia. Only about a quarter (24 percent) say they are interested or very interested in the subject. This level is a 7-point decrease since 2021, which occurred a few months after the dramatic political changes in July of that year. As a result, interest in politics has dropped back to be tied with the lowest point since the revolution in 2019 and far below the level found in 2013 (46 percent).

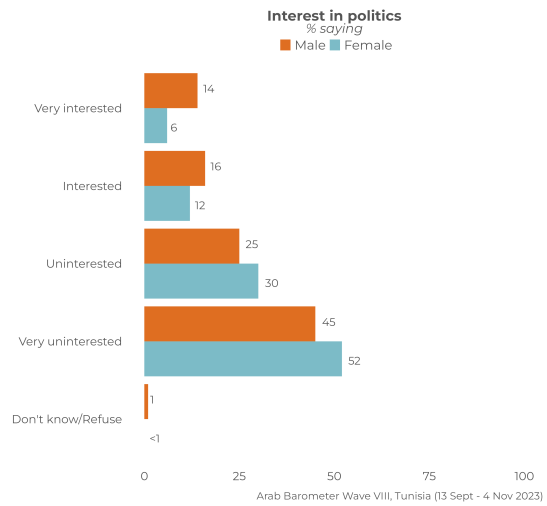
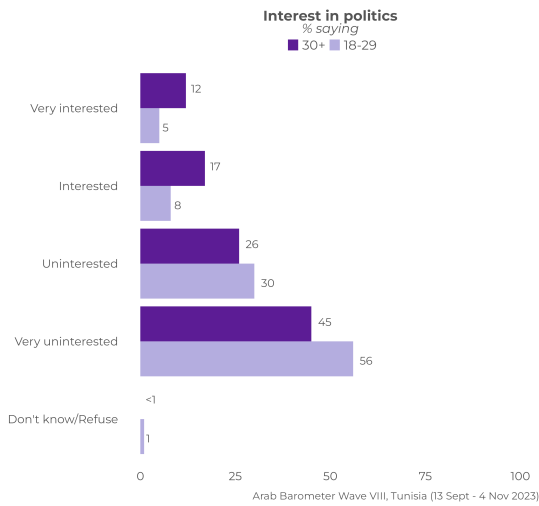


Youth are particularly disengaged from the political process. Only 13 percent of those ages 18-29 say they are interested or very interested compared with 29 percent of those 30 years of age and older. Somewhat surprisingly, interest in politics does not vary with level of education. Those with a college degree and those without are equally likely to have an interest. However, men are substantially more likely than women to express an interest in politics (30 percent vs. 18 percent).

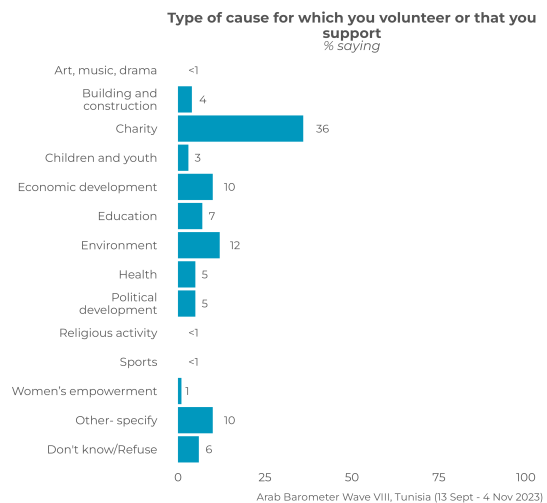
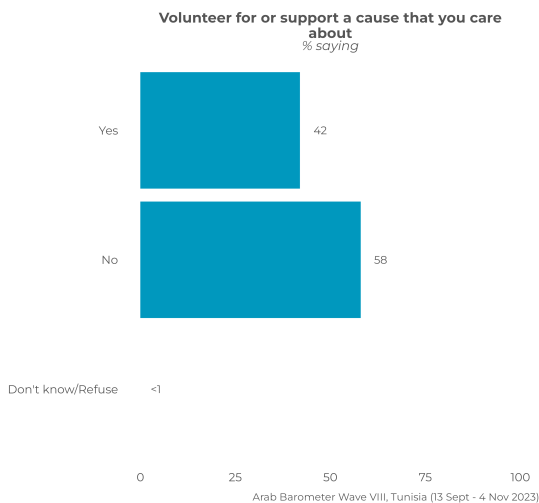


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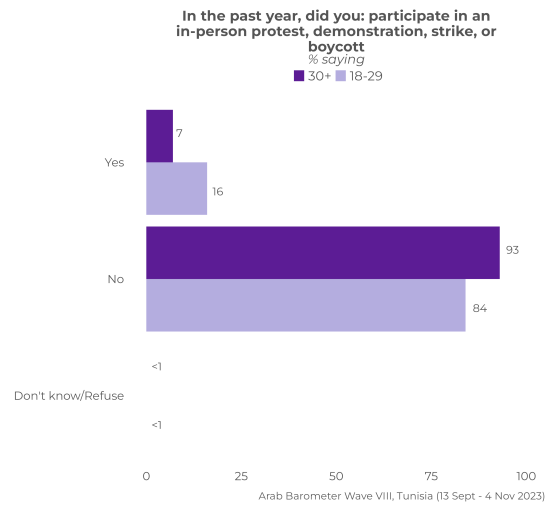
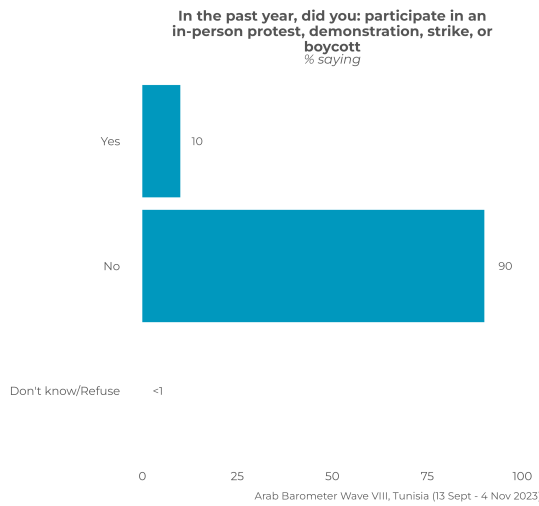


A substantial percentage of Tunisians are engaged in their communities. About four-in-ten (42 percent) volunteer for a cause. Most commonly, this is in support of a charity (36 percent), but at least one-in-ten say it is to improve the environment (12 percent) or for economic development (10 percent).

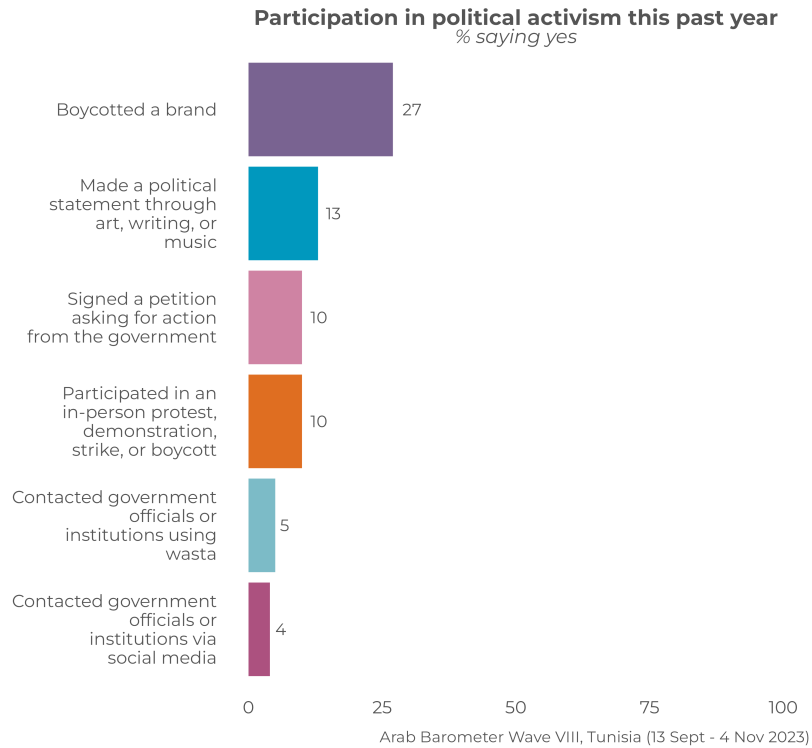


Political engagement can take a number of other forms, including taking to the streets to protest. Although most Tunisians have not done so in the previous year, the percentage is relatively high by global standards. One-in-ten Tunisians say they have demonstrated peacefully in some form over the prior 12 months. This is particularly true for the country's youth, with 16 percent of those ages 18-29 having protested compared with seven percent of those 30 and older.

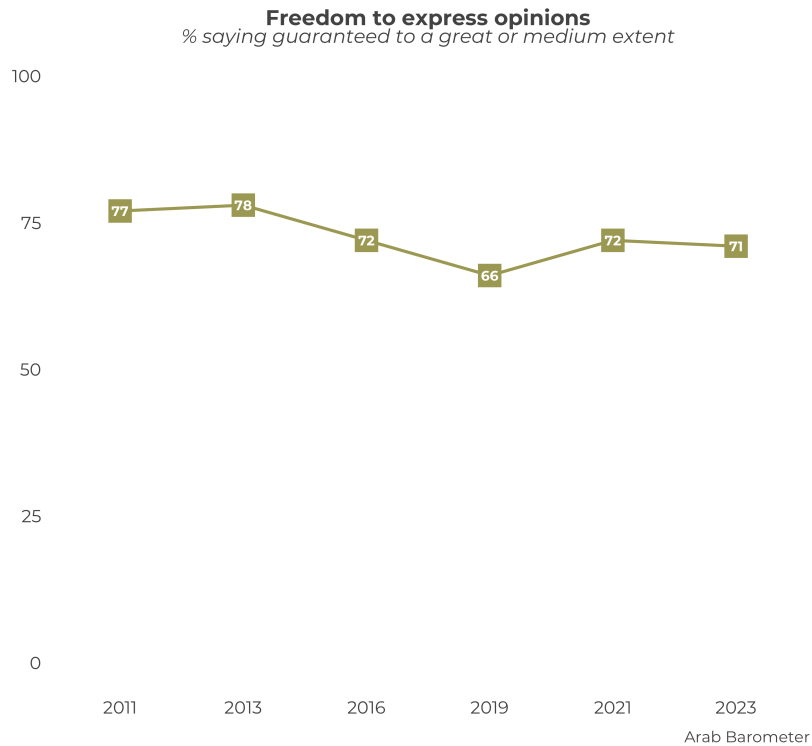
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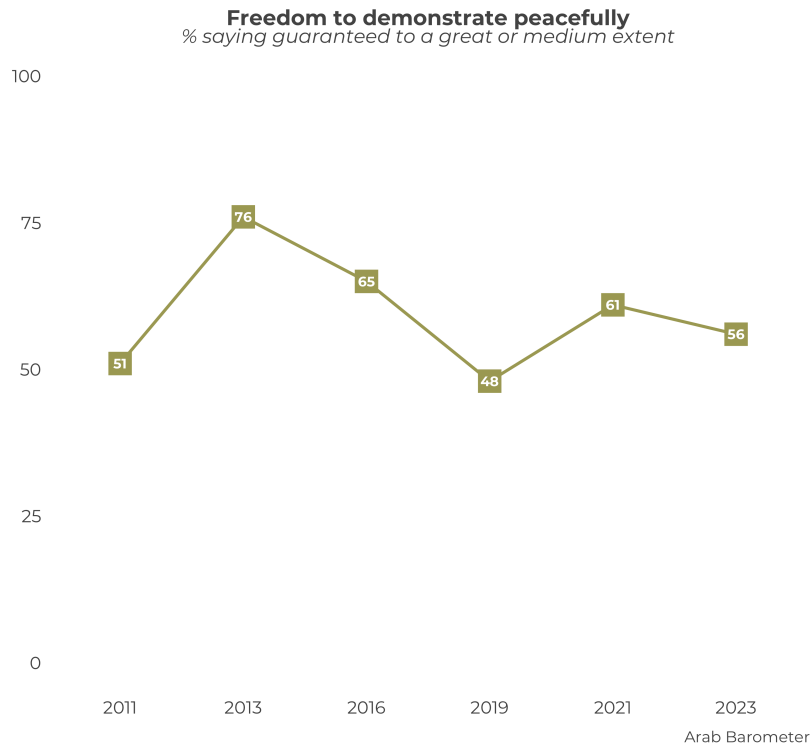
Other forms of engagement are not commonly used by Tunisians. A similar one-in-ten say they signed a petition targeting government officials in the previous year while five percent used *wasta* to contact a government official and four percent contacted government officials using social media. Taking part in boycotts was a significantly more common strategy with 27 percent saying they had done so in the previous 12 months. Meanwhile, 13 percent say they had made a political statement through art, writing or music.



Levels of political engagement depend, in part, on the environment, including the extent to which basic rights are protected. Since the Jasmine Revolution, most Tunisians believe that the right to freedom of speech is guaranteed to a great or medium extent. Although this percentage fell from 78 percent in 2013 to 66 percent in 2019, it has increased slightly and now stands at 71 percent.



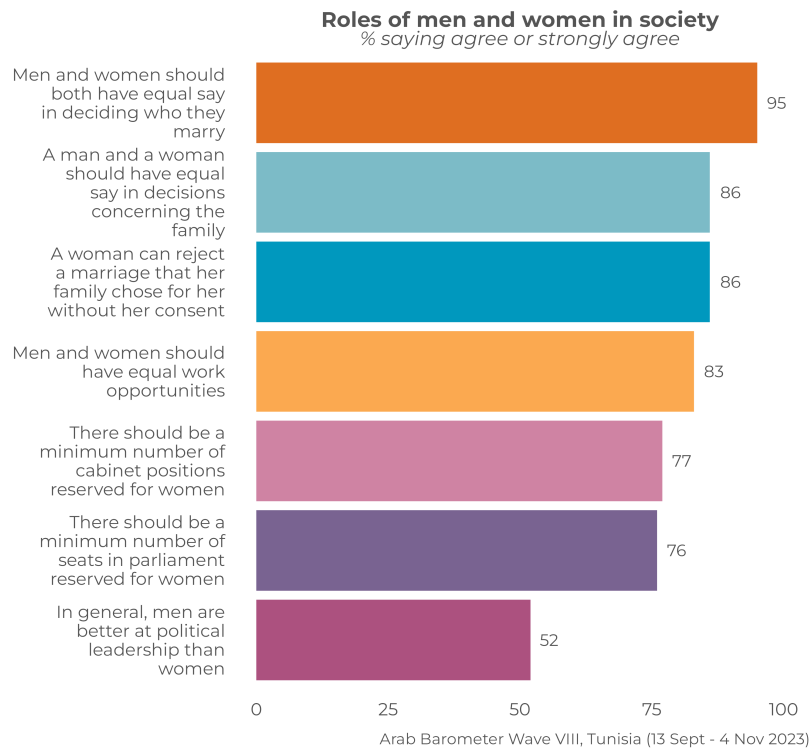
In comparison, perceptions of the freedom to demonstrate peacefully have shifted dramatically since 2011. Despite the major protests of the Jasmine Revolution, only half (51 percent) of Tunisians said they enjoyed the right to demonstrate in 2011. This percentage increased dramatically by 2013 to three-quarters (76 percent), before beginning to fall. By 2019, it had dropped to just 48 percent. However, the percentage increased in 2021 to 61 percent before falling to 56 percent in the 2023 survey. Overall, these results show a clear deterioration in the degree to which this right is guaranteed since the early years after the revolution with Tunisians now far less convinced they have this ability.



## Gender

The vast majority of citizens have remained committed to equality for women. Nearly all (95 percent) of Tunisians affirm that men and women should have equal rights in deciding whom they should marry. Meanwhile, 86 percent believe that men and women should have equal say in decisions concerning the family and that a woman can reject a marriage made without her consent, respectively. Within the political realm, about three-quarters (77 percent) believe that there should be a minimum number of cabinet positions reserved for women while 76 percent say the same about reserving seats in parliament for women.

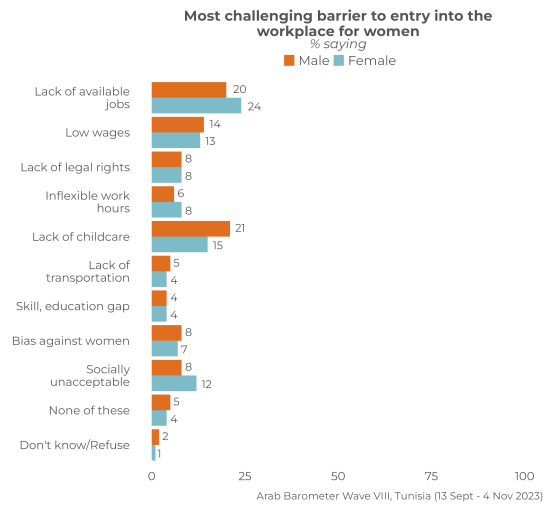
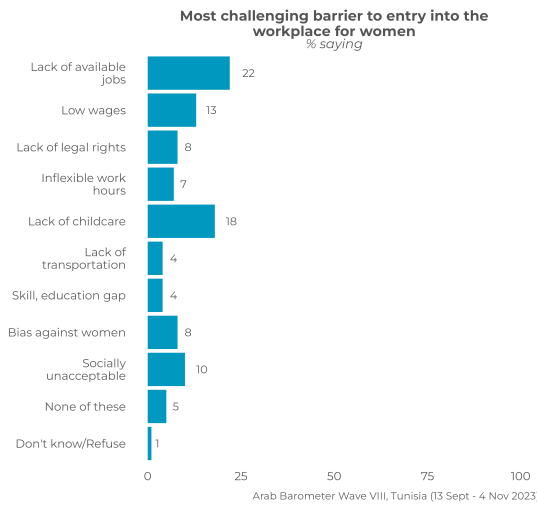
Yet, there remain areas where women are still not viewed as fully equal. Despite the fact that most Tunisians want quotas for women in the cabinet and parliament, about half still say that men are better at political leadership than women (53 percent).



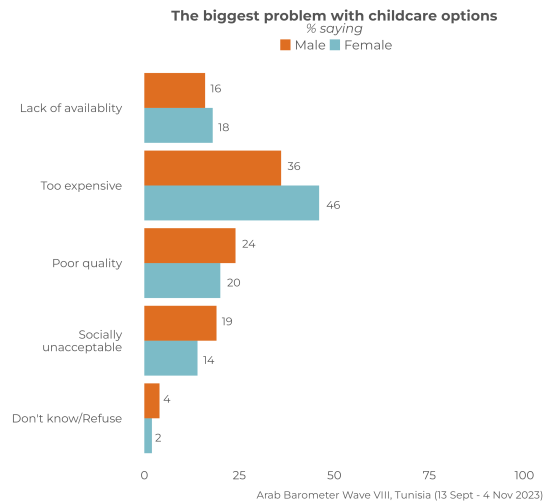
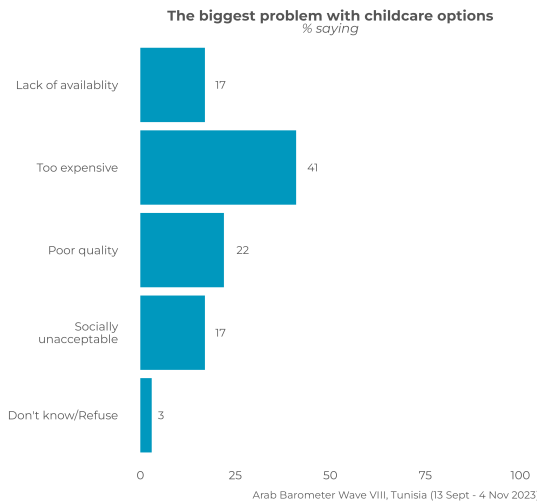
In 2022, only about a quarter of women in Tunisia were active in the labor force,<sup>5</sup> suggesting women face widespread barriers to employment. Responses from Tunisians suggest the challenges to increasing rates of women’s employment are multifaceted. The two most commonly cited are lack of available jobs (22 percent) and lack of child care (18 percent). Additionally, about one-in-ten say low wages (13 percent), social unacceptability (10 percent), and bias against women (eight percent). However, there are differences in opinion by gender, with men being more likely to point to lack of childcare than women, while women are more to cite a lack of available jobs.

<sup>5</sup><https://www.statista.com/statistics/1191562/female-labor-force-participation-rate-in-tunisia/>

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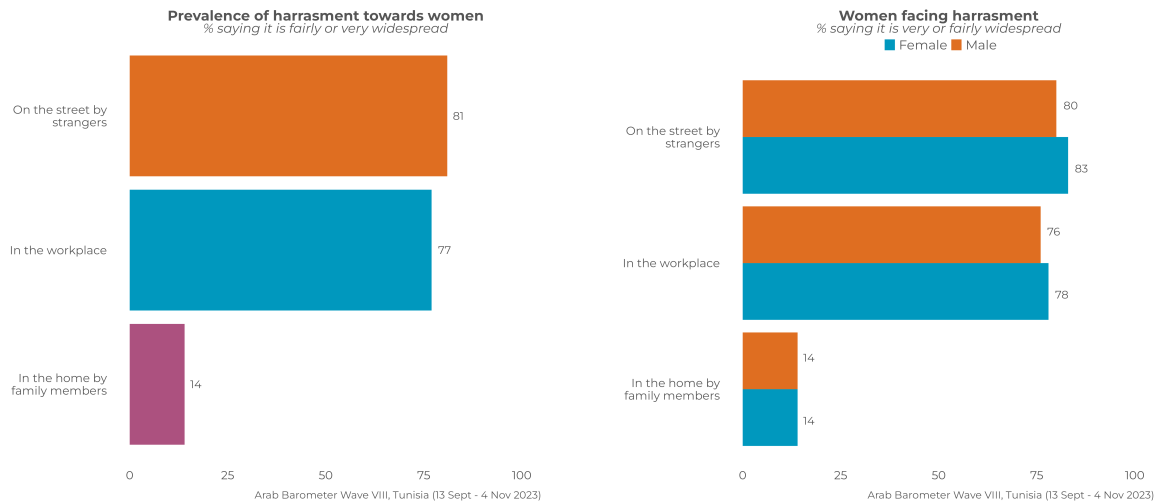


Drilling down on the issue of childcare, Tunisians say the biggest challenge is cost (41 percent), followed by poor quality (22 percent), lack of availability (17 percent), and being socially unacceptable (17 percent). Women are particularly sensitive to the cost of child care relative to men, while men are somewhat more concerned about the quality of childcare and the social acceptability of it. Notably, these - cost, quality, and availability - are all challenges that the government could work to address to increase the possibility to work for all Tunisian parents, but in particular women in the country.



Harassment is another significant problem affecting women in Tunisia. About three-quarters (77 percent) say that harassment of women in the workplace is very or fairly widespread. And, this is not just the perception of Tunisian women—both men and women are equally likely to hold this perception. Tunisians are even more likely to say that women are very or fairly likely to suffer harassment on

the street (81 percent). And again, there are no significant differences between the perceptions of men and women. Finally, there is a general consensus that women do not face harassment in the private sphere within their homes with only 14 percent of Tunisians saying this is a problem.



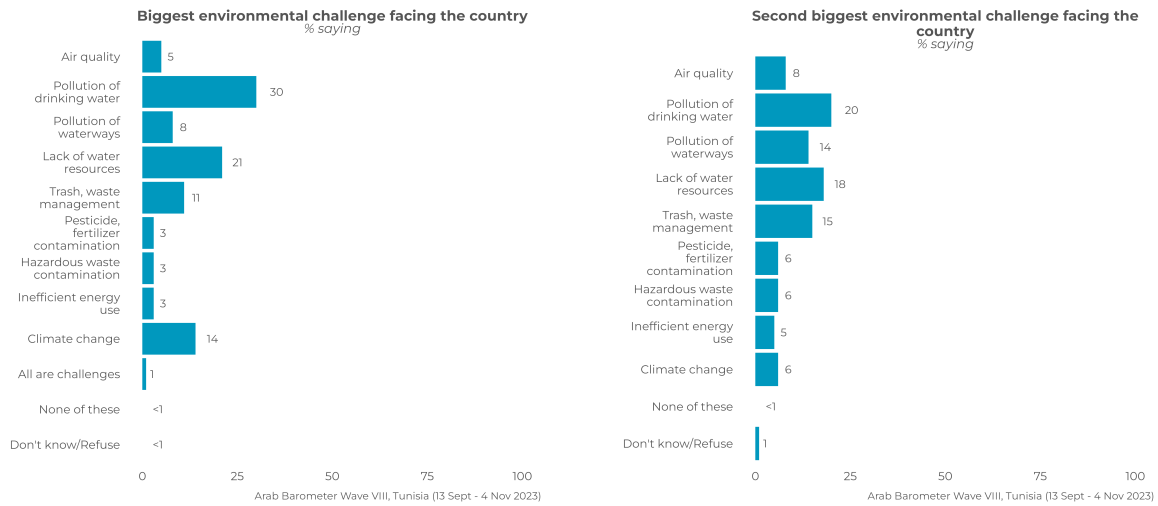
## Environment

Tunisians see water issues as the primary environmental challenge facing their country. About six-in-ten say their biggest environmental concern is pollution of the drinking water (30 percent), lack of water resources (21 percent), or pollution of waterways (eight percent). Beyond water, 14 percent are worried about climate change and 11 percent waste management. Meanwhile, when asked about the second biggest environmental challenge, half also name a water-related issue.

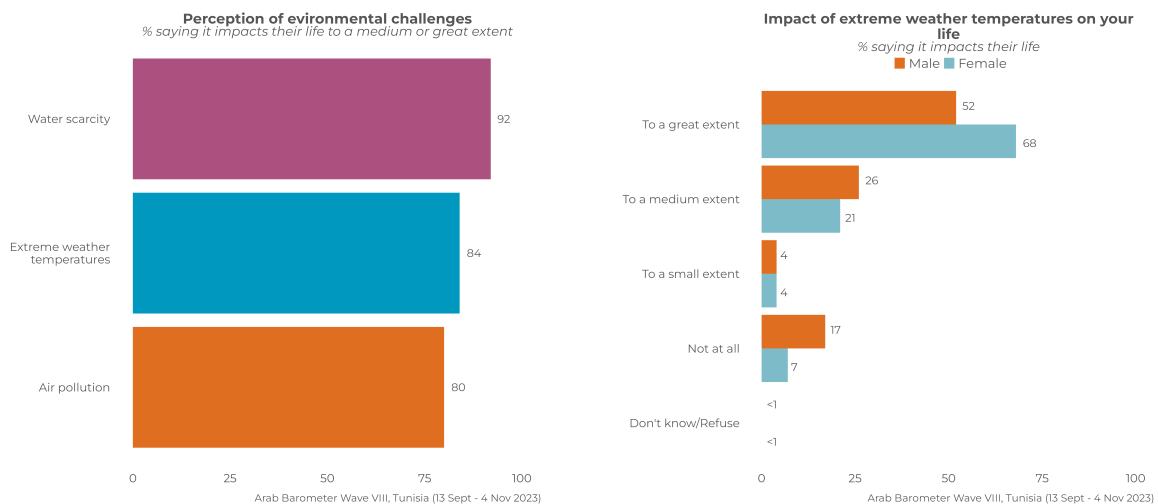


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## Tunisia Report

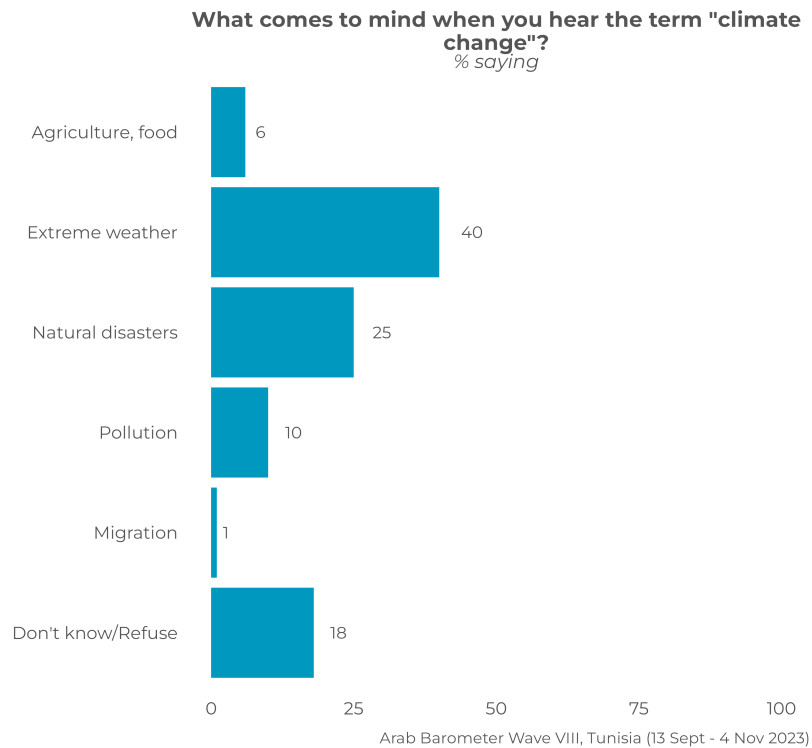


When asked about some of the effects associated with climate change on their daily lives, it is clear that Tunisians are feeling a major impact. Fully 84 percent say their daily life is affected by extreme temperatures. Women are especially likely to say extreme temperatures affects their daily life at 89 percent compared with 79 percent of men. Air pollution is also seen as a major impediment to daily life, with four-in-five Tunisians saying it affects their daily life to a great or medium extent. However, it is clear that water scarcity is seen as the biggest challenge facing Tunisians in their daily lives. Overall, 92 percent say that this issue impacts them daily to a great or medium extent.

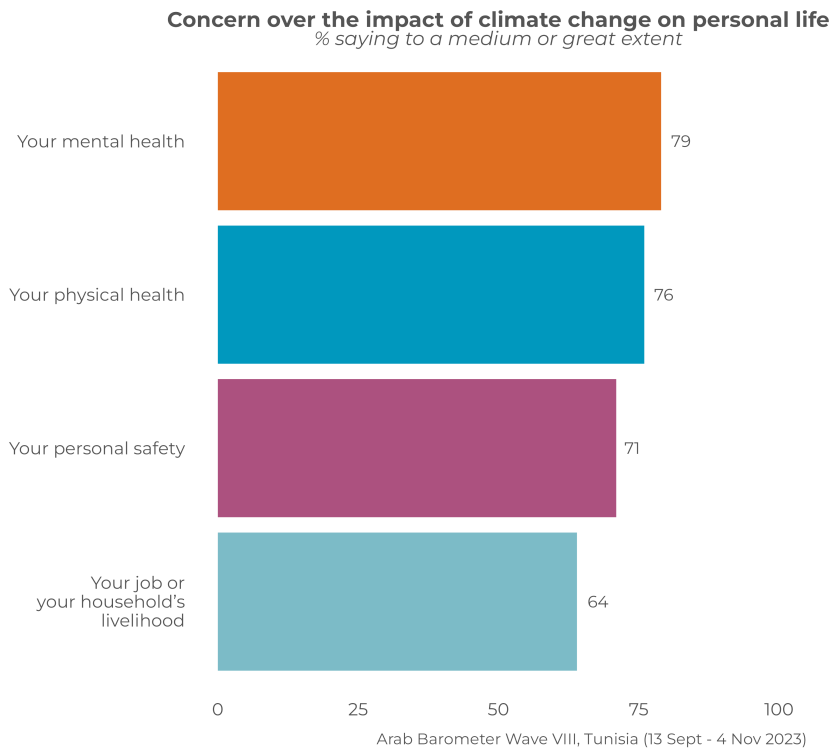


When asked to describe their understanding of the term “climate change” in their own words, the most common association for Tunisians was extreme weather at 40 percent. However, many believed it related to natural disasters (25 percent) or pollution (10 percent), while relatively small percentages said it re-

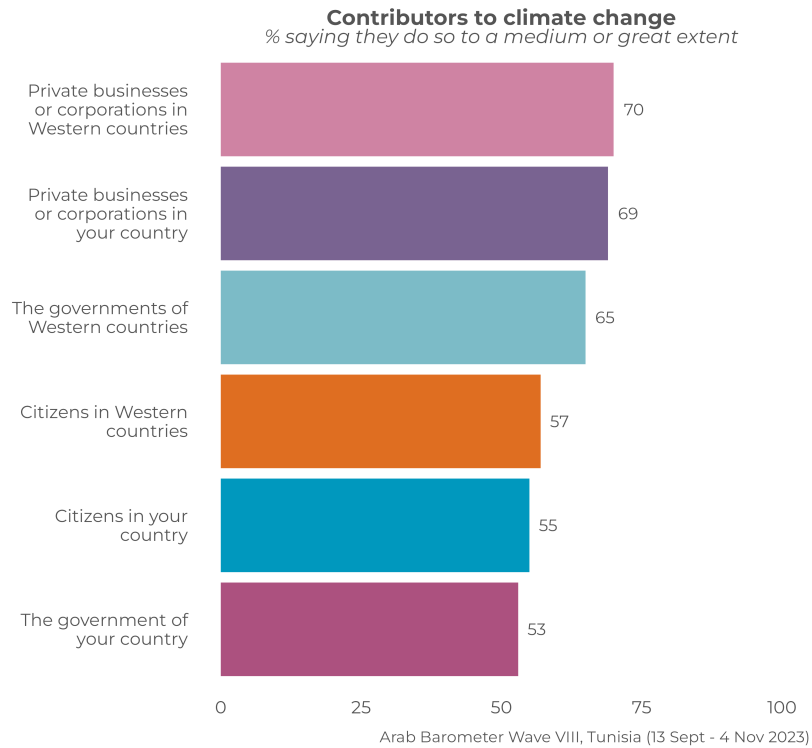
lates to agricultural production (six percent) or migration (one percent). However, nearly one-in-five Tunisians (18 percent) said they didn't know, suggesting there remains a gap in knowledge for many about this critical event that is affecting their lives.



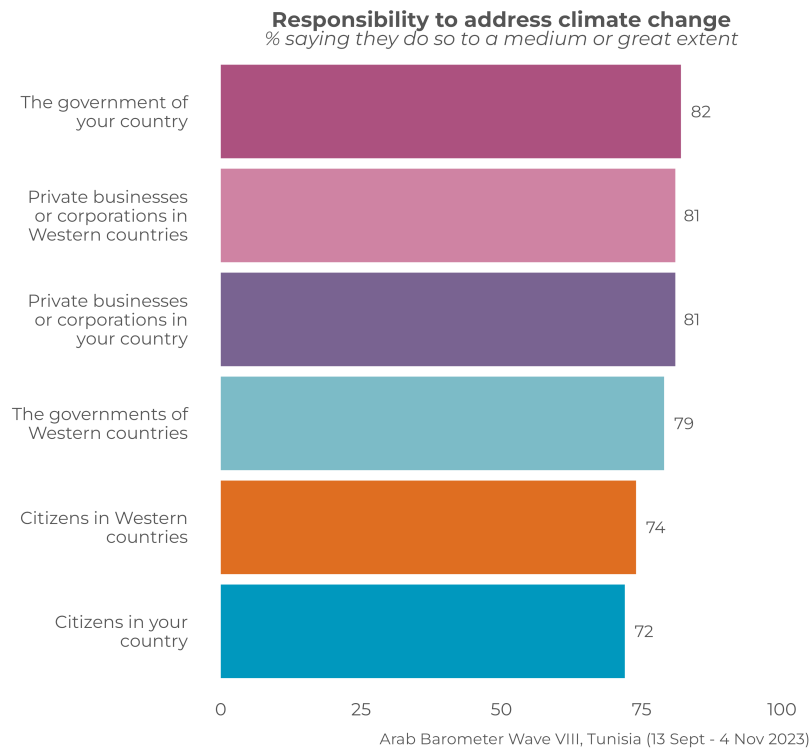
Despite different understandings of climate change, it is clear that Tunisians perceive negative implications for their lives. About four-in-five (79 percent) say they are concerned about the effects of climate change on their mental health to a great or medium extent while roughly three-quarters (76 percent) say the same about their physical health. Most Tunisians are also worried to a great or medium extent about climate change as it affects their personal safety (71 percent) or their household's economic situation (64 percent).



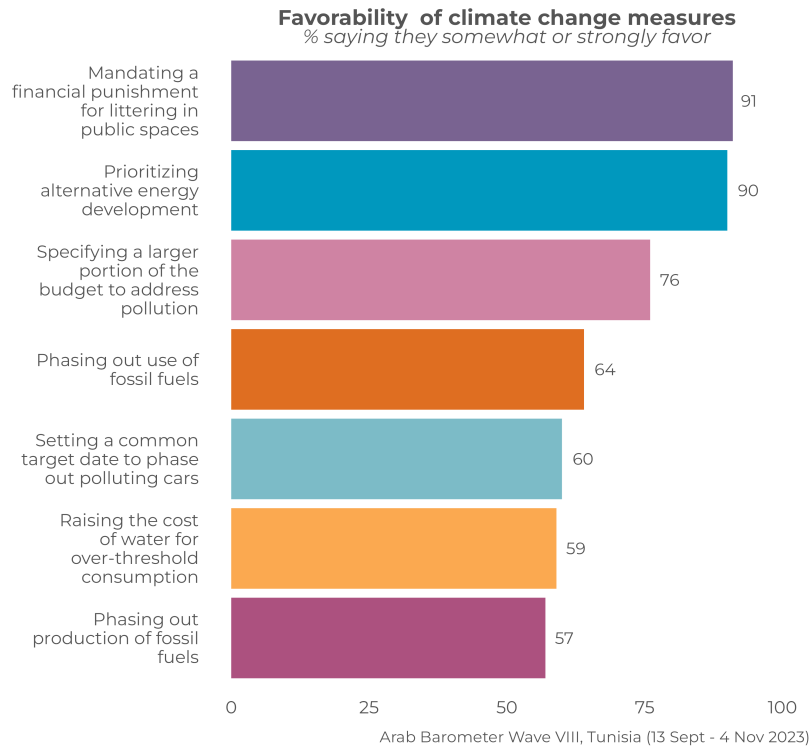
When asked to assess the key contributors to climate change, it is clear that Tunisians associate this problem with the business sector. Seven-in-ten say that private corporation in Western countries contribute to a great or medium extent while a similar percentage (69 percent) say the same about businesses in Tunisia. About two-thirds (65 percent) blame governments in Western countries while slight majorities say that citizens in Western countries (57 percent), Tunisian citizens (55 percent), and the Tunisian government (53 percent) are meaningfully responsible for contributing to the problem of climate change.



When asked about the parties that bear responsibility to address climate change, Tunisians widely believe that all actors have a role to play. Roughly four-in-five say that their government (82 percent), Western businesses (81 percent), Tunisian businesses (81 percent), and governments in Western countries (79 percent) have a great or medium responsibility to address climate change. An overwhelming majority of Tunisians also believe that ordinary citizens, whether in the West (74 percent) or their own country (72 percent) have a responsibility to address this challenge.



Tunisians also favor taking a number of steps to improve the environment or tackle climate change. Nine-in-ten favor mandating fines for littering in public (91 percent) and prioritizing alternative energy development (90 percent). Meanwhile, three-quarters (76 percent) want to allocate more in the national budget to address pollution. Meanwhile, smaller majorities support changes to the use of fossil fuels or water. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) favor phasing out the use of fossil fuels, 60 percent favor setting a date to phase out polluting cars, 59 percent favor raising the cost of water for high volume users, and 57 percent favor phasing out Tunisia's production of fossil fuels. Taken together, it is clear that Tunisians want more serious action by their government to address the problems related to their environment and climate change.



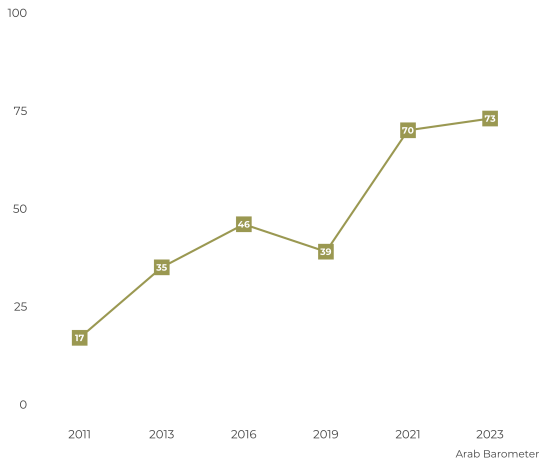
## Democracy

Tunisians are increasingly likely to believe that democracy is a system of governance with clear limitations. When asked if the economy is weak under democracy, 73 percent now agree or strongly agree compared with just 17 percent in 2011. Like in other countries in the region,<sup>6</sup> there has been an especially dramatic rise in this perception in recent years.

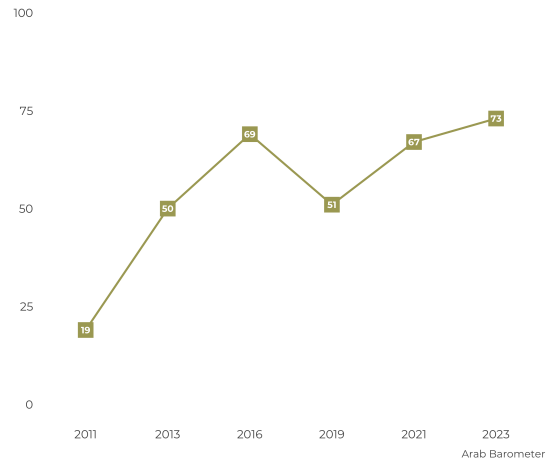
<sup>6</sup>[https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVII\\_Governance\\_Report-EN-1.pdf](https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/ABVII_Governance_Report-EN-1.pdf)

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

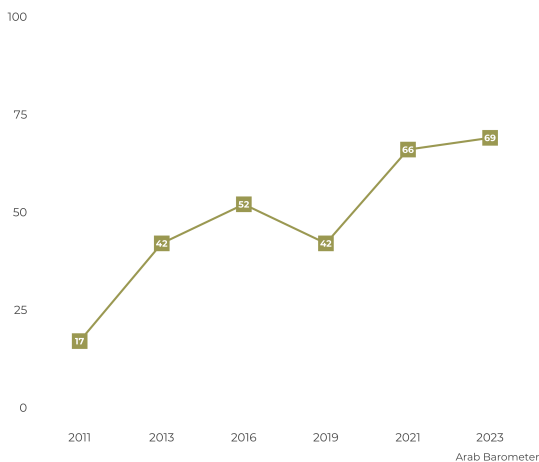


**Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems**  
*% saying they strongly agree or agree*

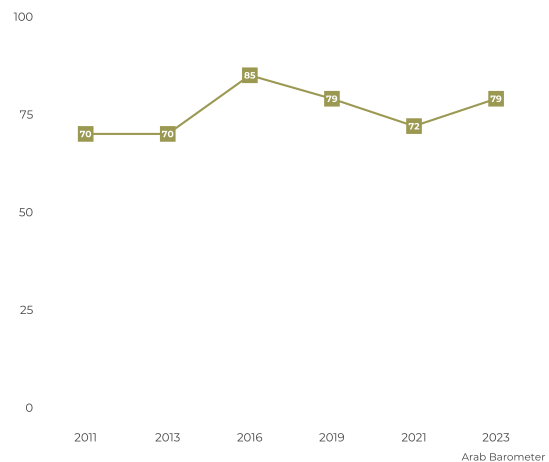


This does not represent the only concern Tunisians have with democracy—a similar 73 percent say democracy is indecisive and full of problems compared with 19 percent in the months after the Jasmine Revolution. The percentage who say that democracy is not effective at maintaining stability and order is similar, rising from 17 percent in 2011 to 69 percent today.

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



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



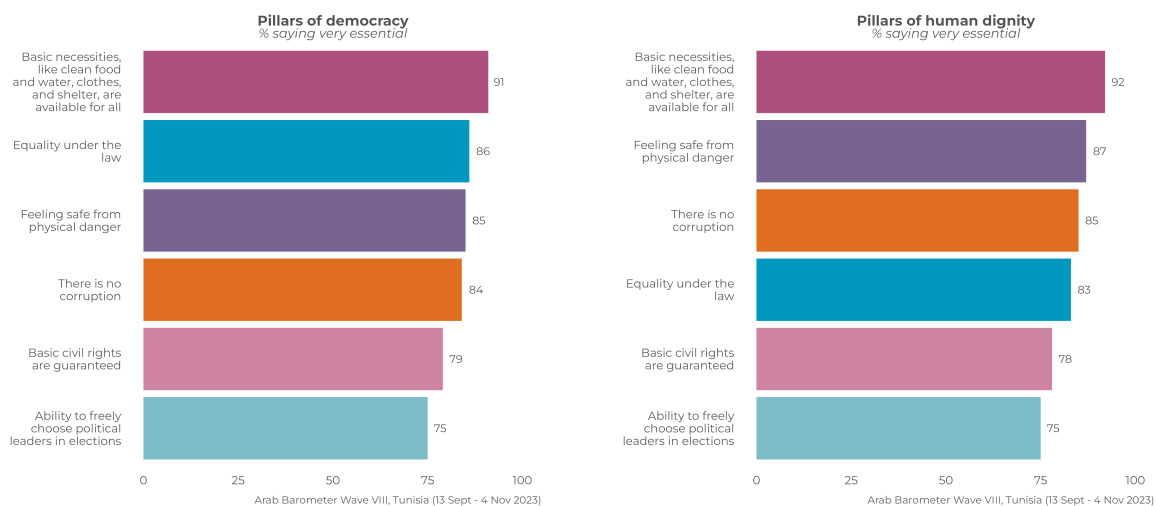
Despite these growing concerns about democracy, Tunisians' support for the system as the best system had not dropped. In fact, this level has increased to 79 percent today from 70 percent in 2011. This apparent contradiction may indicate that Tunisians realize democracy is not perfect, but want it regardless. Or,

it could mean that democracy is supported broadly but not deeply—meaning that Tunisians prefer it, but not particularly strongly.

Given the growing concerns about democracy not just in Tunisia, but also in the broader region observed in Wave VII, Arab Barometer included additional questions to help better understand how those in the region perceive democracy.

First, Arab Barometer sought to better understand how Tunisians defined democracy. The survey results make clear that it is a broader concept than simply elections. In fact, multi-party elections are seen as one of the less essential components of democracy, at least when compared with the provision of basic necessities or protection of human rights. In fact, an experimental design reveals that ultimately, Tunisians effectively understand democracy (*dimuqratiya*) to be equivalent to dignity (*karama*), making it clear that Tunisians expected different elements from democracy than their system delivered following the Jasmine Revolution.

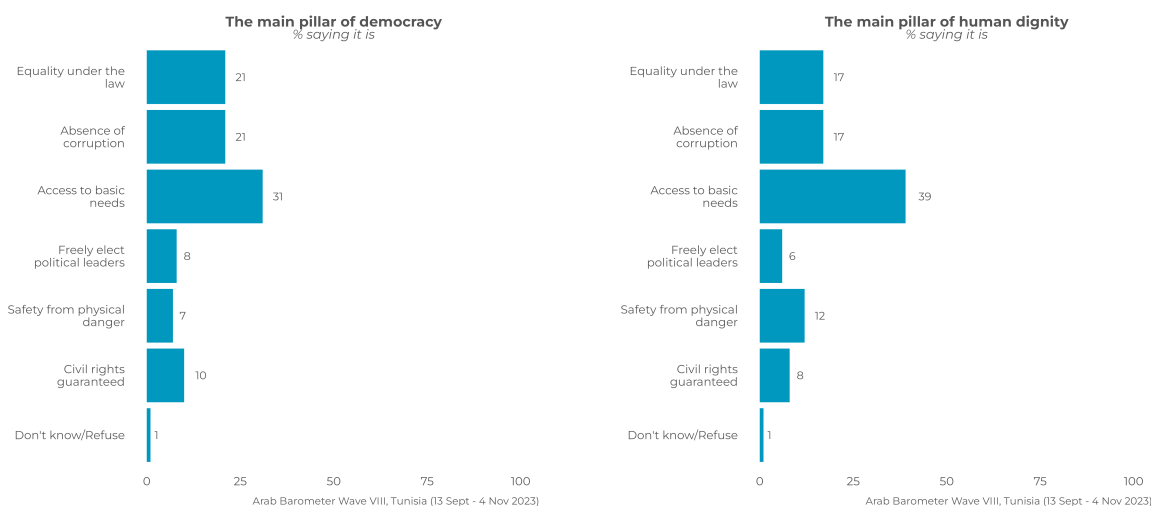
Arab Barometer designed the survey so that half of the respondents received questions about the degree to which certain features are essential to democracy. The other half received the same list of features, but were asked the degree to which they were essential to dignity. The list of items was as follows: 1) basic necessities available for all; 2) feeling safe from physical danger; 3) equality under the law; 4) basic civil rights are guaranteed; 5) no corruption; and 6) the ability to freely choose political leaders in elections.



The comparison of the results is striking. Tunisians are most likely to say that the provision of basic necessities is "very essential" to both democracy and dignity. Meanwhile, the feature that was least likely to be deemed "very essential"



for both was the ability to freely choose leaders in elections. Meanwhile, the other four items were also within three points of each other (and thus within the margin of error) falling between 87 percent and 78 percent as being essential to both dignity and democracy.

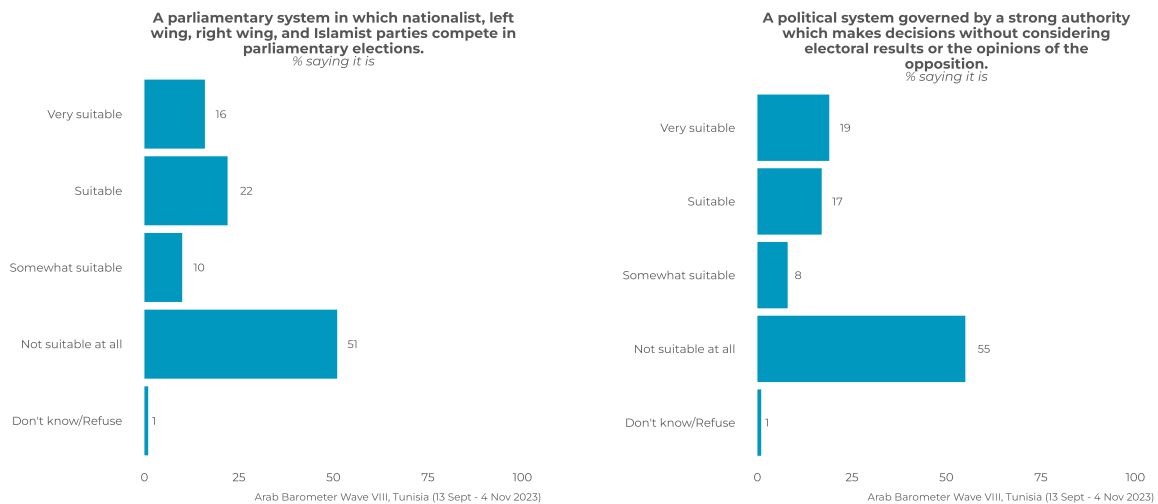


When Tunisians are asked which is the most essential characteristic of democracy or dignity, greater differences emerge. Although the availability of basic necessities for all is seen as the most essential feature for both dignity and for democracy, it is more closely associated with dignity (39 percent vs. 31 percent). However, there remains a strong overlap between other categories. For democracy, 21 percent, respectively, say its most essential characteristic is equality under the law or the absence of corruption. This level is marginally higher than for dignity, where 17 percent say each of these is the most essential feature, respectively. For the remaining three features, at most 12 percent say any of them is the defining aspect of democracy or dignity.

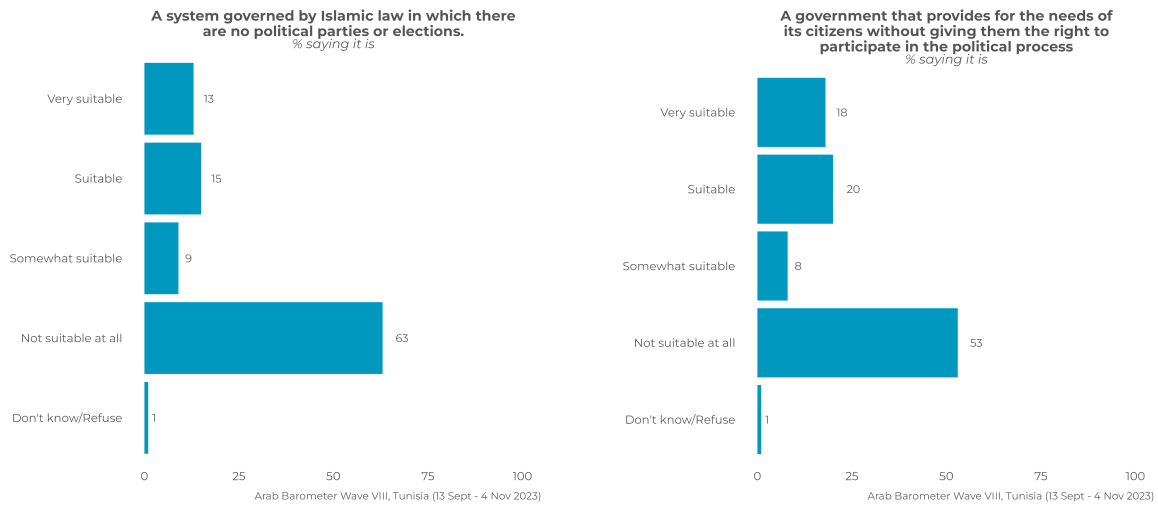
These results make clear that Tunisians are judging ‘democracy’ less by the features of the political system than the outcomes that it delivers. It appears that Tunisians strongly link democracy with dignity, the latter of which was the key demand during the Jasmine Revolution, or as it is also known—the Dignity Revolution. Since that time, Tunisians have been seeking dignity, particularly the ability to be economically secure and have their basic rights protected, but the political changes have often failed to deliver on these hopes.

Given the greater emphasis Tunisians place on what government delivers compared with its structure, it is perhaps less surprising that there is not a general

consensus on how the country should be governed. When asked if a parliamentary system where parties of all ideologies are allowed to contest elections would be suitable for Tunisia, about half (51 percent) say this would not be suitable at all. By comparison, only 16 percent say it would be very suitable and 22 percent suitable as a means to govern the country. Yet, this does not mean that Tunisians favor authoritarianism. When asked about a political system governed by a strong authority, more than half (55 percent) say that it is not suitable at all. However, 19 percent say it is very suitable and 17 percent that it is suitable.



Tunisians are also not supportive of a political system governed by Islamic law (*shari'a*) without elections. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) say that it is not suitable at all compared with 13 percent who say it is very suitable and 15 percent who say it is suitable.

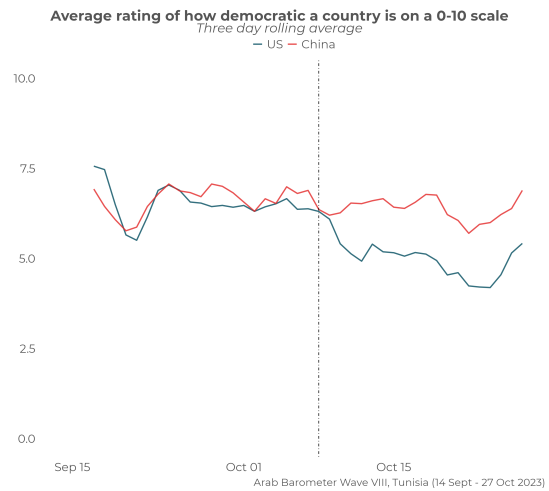
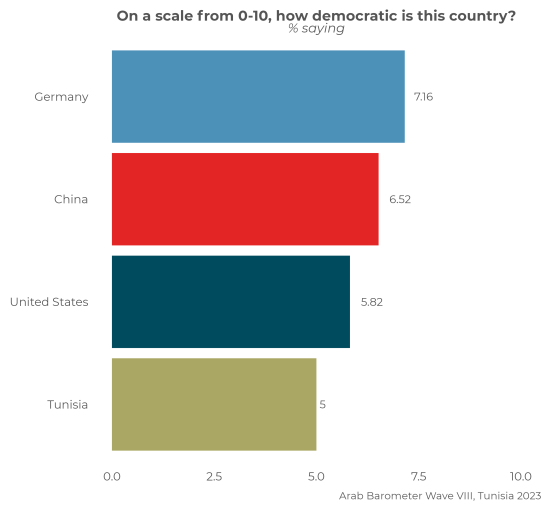


Tunisians are also generally opposed to a system that provides for their basic needs but which denies them voice in the political process. About half (53 percent) say this system would not be suitable at all for their country while 18 percent say it would be very suitable and 20 percent say it would be suitable.

This comparison reveals that at least half of Tunisians reject all four of these means of governing their country. A majority of citizens reject systems that do not provide them say in the political process or systems that would compromise their basic rights. Yet, half also say they do not want a liberal parliamentary system, perhaps due to the fact that this system appears unruly and appeared unable to provide economic solutions in the years after the 2011 revolution. As a result, Tunisians do not appear to share a common vision for their political future.

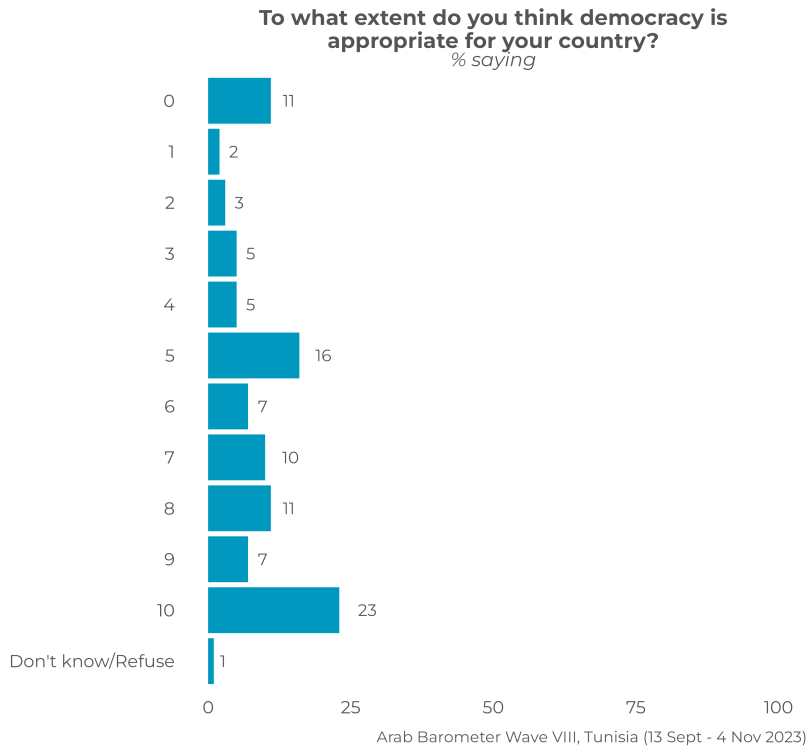
As another means to gain insight into how Tunisians understand democracy, Arab Barometer included questions about the degree to which select countries around the world are democratic. When posed with a 0-10 scale, the mean (average) rating of Germany was the highest of the four at 7.16 out of 10. China was second at 6.52 followed by the United States (5.82) with Tunisia (5.00) ranking the lowest on average. This order reinforces that Tunisians consider Germany, a wealthy country with strong social service provisions and guaranteed political rights as the most democratic. Meanwhile, China is a country that has delivered strong economic growth but in the absence of guaranteed political rights, falls lower.

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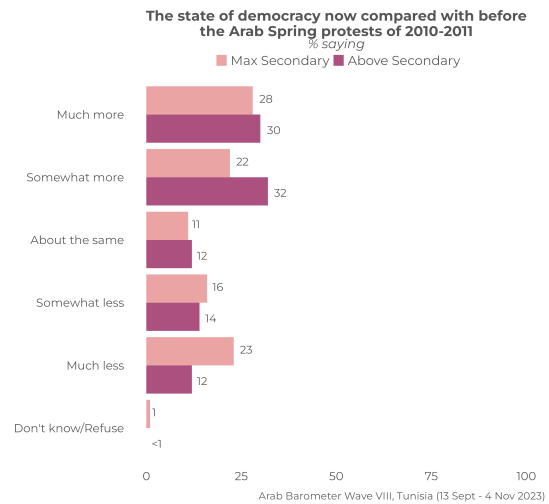
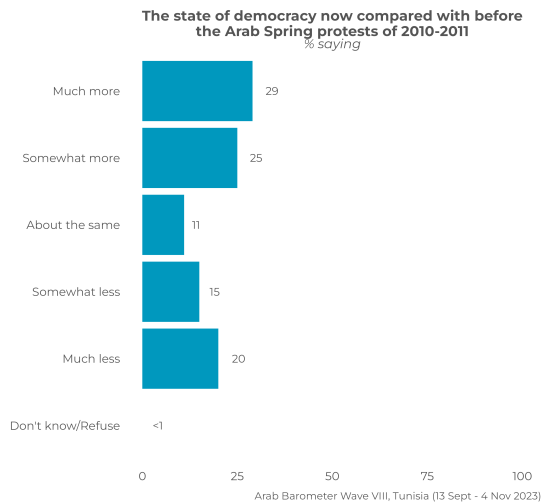


The United States, with weaker social protections than Germany but strong political rights, scores somewhat lower than China. However, some of this effect is likely due to changing perceptions of the U.S. due to the conflict in Gaza. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East, the U.S. was rated effectively the same as China. Finally, Tunisia, a country with weaker economic conditions and social protections and lacking the same degree of political rights as Germany comes in last.

Even though Tunisians believe their country is only partially democratic, they believe that this system of governance is suitable for their country. On a similar 0-10 scale, 58 percent of Tunisians say that democracy is more appropriate for their country than not (rating of 6-10) while a further 16 percent are at the midpoint of 5.



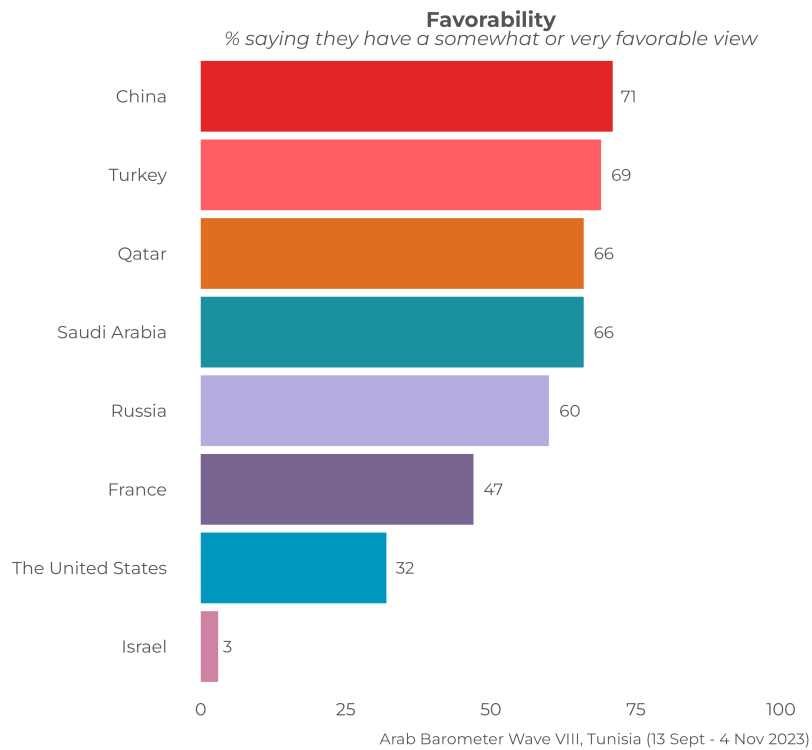
Despite the challenges and setbacks since the 2011 revolution, Tunisians are still somewhat optimistic that their country is more democratic today than it was under the rule of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. A majority (54 percent) say that the country is more democratic in 2023 than it was in prior to the Jasmine Revolution. A further 11 percent say that the level is about the same. Notably, those with a college degree are significantly more likely to say the country has made democratic progress than those with at most a high school degree (62 percent vs. 50 percent).



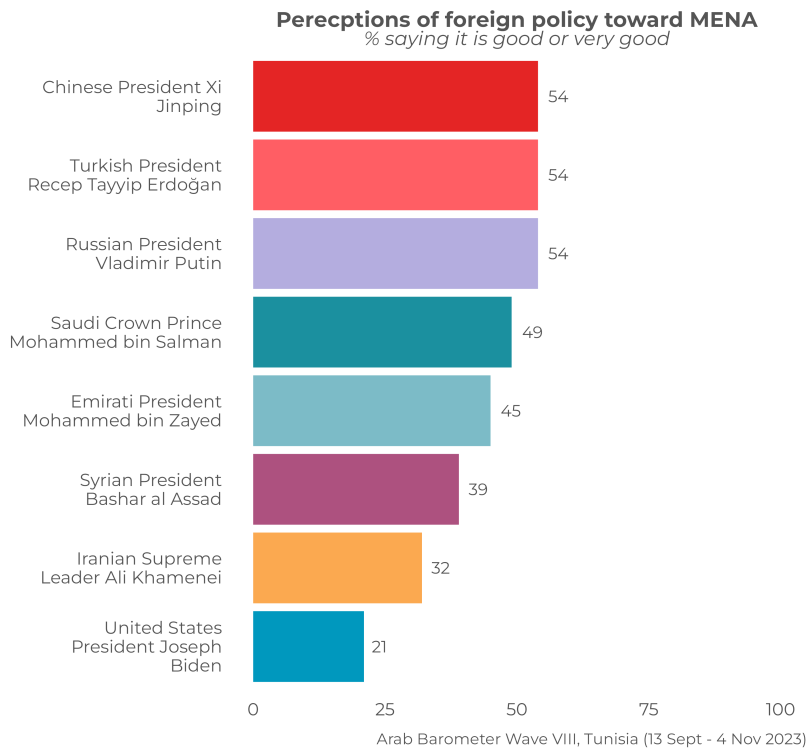
## International Relations

Fieldwork for this survey took place both before and after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks in Israel. About half of the total number of interviews fell before this event and half in the three weeks that followed. Analysis of the data makes clear that the war on Gaza had a dramatic impact on how Tunisians perceived foreign actors, effectively divided between the degree to which countries were viewed as supporting or opposing the Israeli military attacks.

First, without taking into account the changes brought about by October 7, results from the survey make clear there are vast differences in how Tunisians view foreign powers. When asked if they have a positive view of foreign countries, China (71 percent) and Turkey (69 percent) come out on top. They are closely followed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia (66 percent each). Favorability of Russia (60 percent) is a bit lower, while nearly half (47 percent) view France favorably. Lagging behind these countries is the U.S. at 32 percent while only three percent have a positive view of Israel.



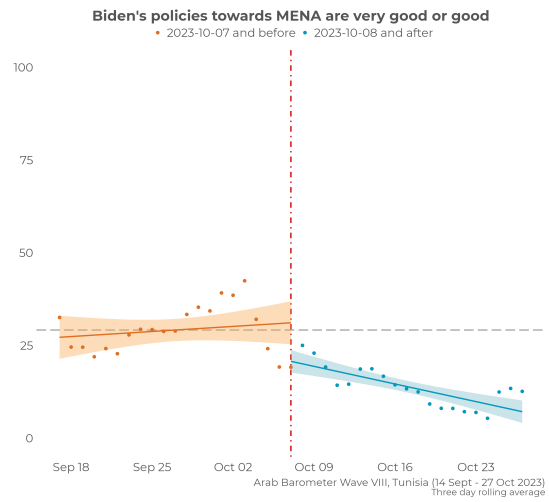
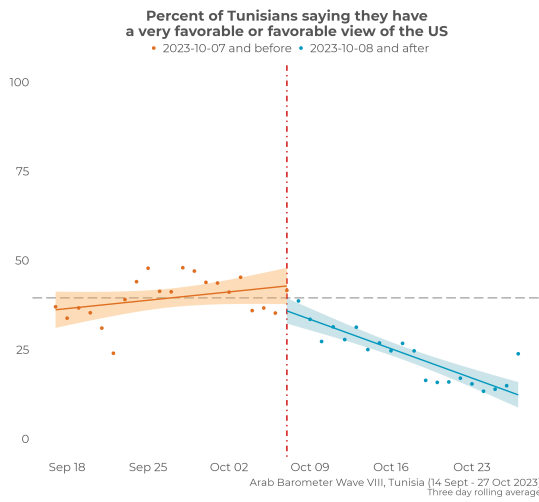
Views of foreign leaders present a relatively similar ordering, although there is not full overlap between leaders and countries included in the questionnaire. Support for the regional policies of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Russian President Vladimir Putin are all tied at 54 percent. About half (49 percent) support the policies of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), followed by 45 percent for Emirati President Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ), 39 percent for Syrian President Bashar Al Assad, 32 percent for Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and 21 percent for U.S. President Joe Biden.



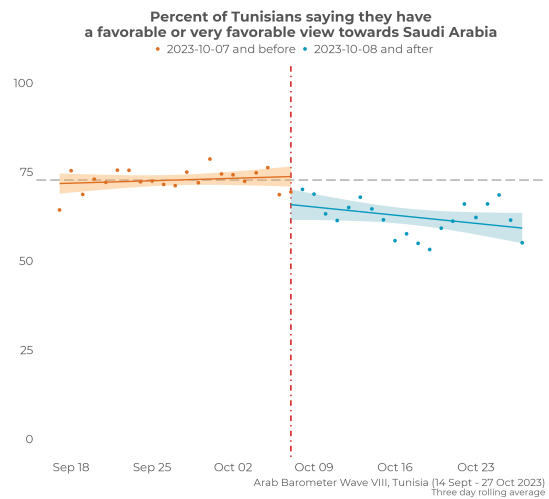
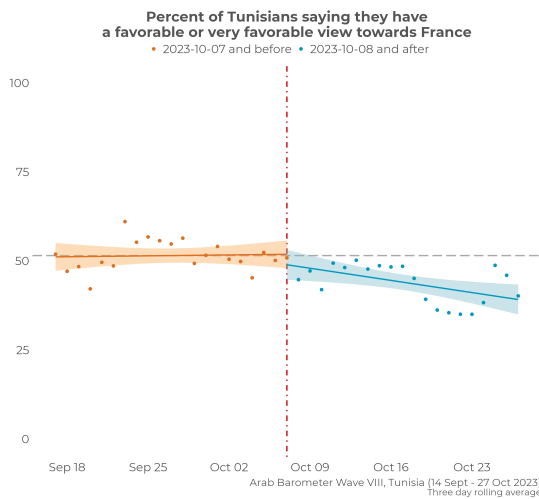
A more nuanced analysis includes the changes that took place as a result of the events in Gaza, which demonstrates how attitudes shifted over the course of fieldwork. The country most affected was the U.S., which demonstrated very strong support for Israel, including its military campaign in Gaza following October 7. Before October 7, on average 40 percent of Tunisians had a favorable view of the U.S. and 29 percent favored Biden’s foreign policies. Plotting a best-fit line to capture the moving trend in the weeks that followed paints a very different picture. Estimates from Arab Barometer demonstrate that on the final day of fieldwork with a sufficient number of interviews for analysis, most likely only 10 percent of Tunisians held a favorable view of the U.S. while just 6 percent help positive views of Biden’s policies.



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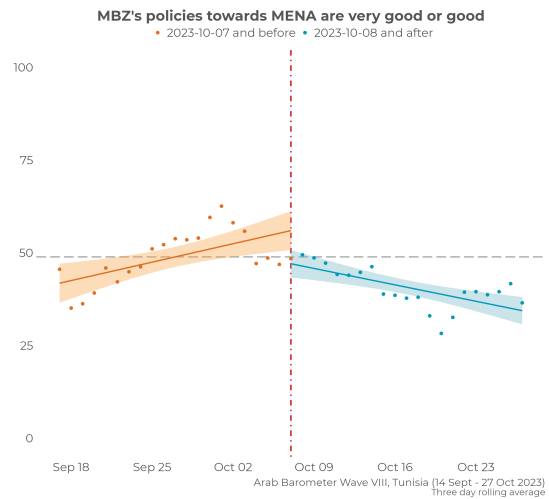
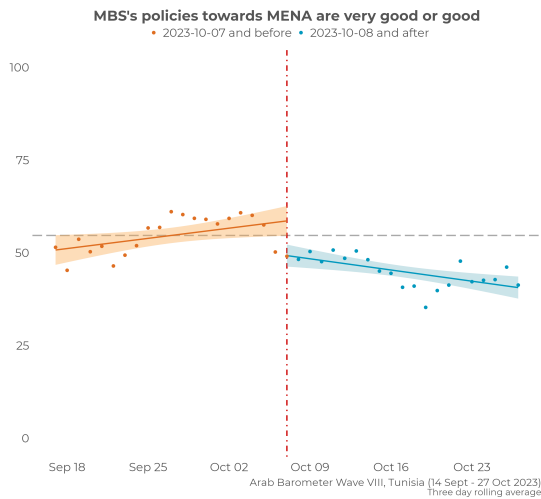


The Tunisian public also shifted against other countries that have shown support for Israel or been connected with them through normalization of relations. In the case of France and Saudi Arabia, support dropped by 14 points during this same period.

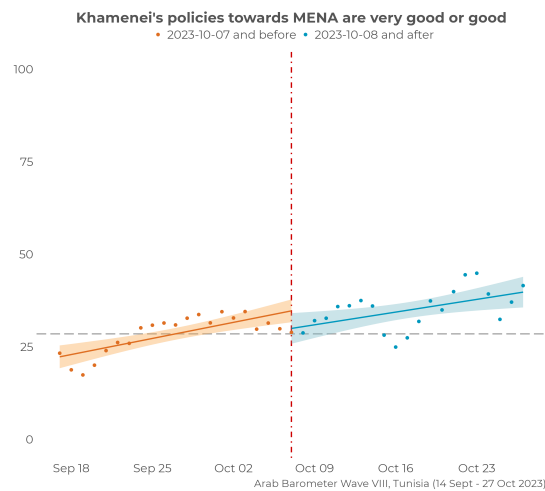


For regional leaders, shifts were fairly dramatic. Prior to October 7, the UAE had normalized relations with Israel while there were reports that Saudi Arabi was close to doing so. At this time, 55 percent of Tunisians favored Mohamed bin Salman’s foreign policies while 49 said the same about Mohammed bin Zayed’s policies. However, three weeks after October 7, these levels had dropped to 40 percent and 33 percent, respectively.

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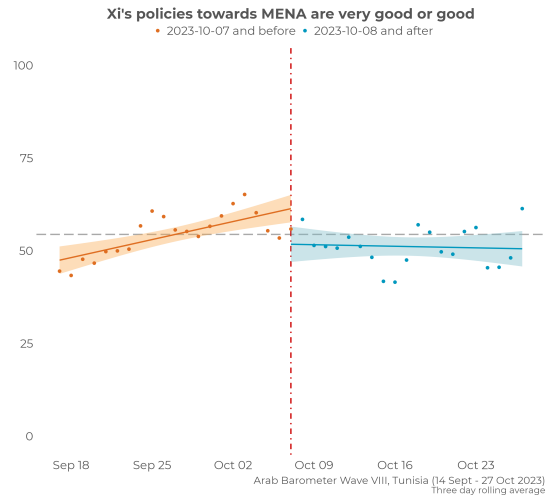
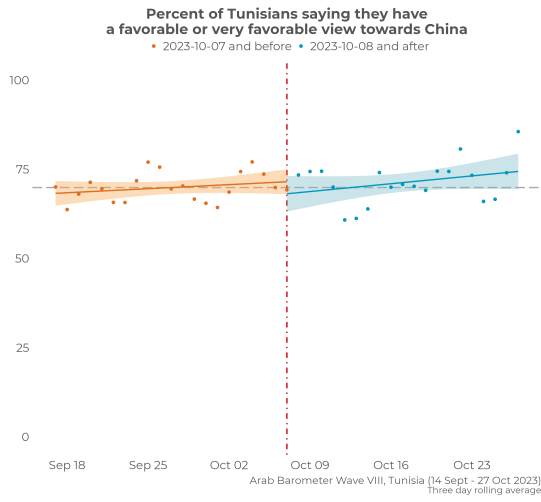


Meanwhile, Iran remained deeply opposed to Israel and condemned its military campaign in Gaza. Prior to October 7, just 29 percent of Tunisians favored Ali Khamenei’s foreign policies while three weeks after the attacks this level had risen to 41 percent. This level was tied with MBS and exceeded that of MBZ, highlighting a dramatic shift in opinions as a result of the war in Gaza.

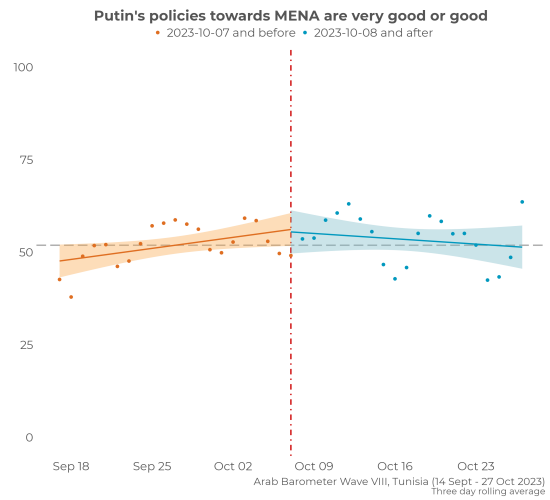
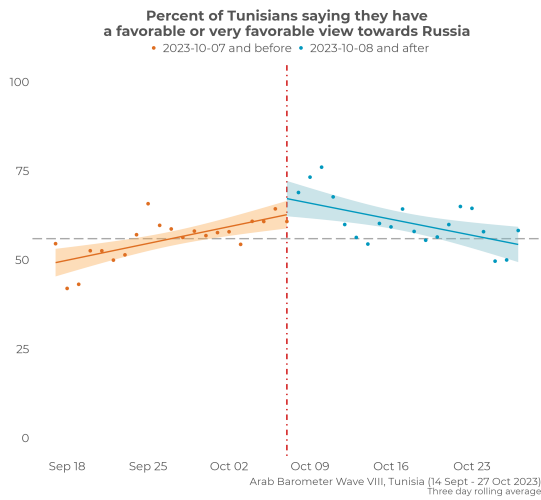


For China, views of the country and Xi changed relatively little before and after October 7. Overall, Chinese image remained strong and may have increased slightly, but not substantially. Meanwhile, views of Xi may have decreased a small amount, but were effectively the same..

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For Russia, the findings are similar. It appears that neither Russia's nor Putin's image changed meaningfully before or after October 7 among ordinary Tunisians.





## About Arab Barometer

Arab Barometer is the leading and most influential research network on public opinion in the Middle East and North Africa. We are nonprofit and nonpartisan, hosted at Princeton University and the University of Michigan.

Founded in 2006, we are the longest-standing research network that conducts rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys in the Arab world. We disseminate the findings through analyses and reports to deepen public conversations and facilitate data-driven solutions to the pressing problems facing ordinary citizens across MENA.

Our public opinion surveys give ordinary citizens a stronger voice, and our analysis, highlighting key demographic differences and changing trends, help comprehend MENA citizens' shifting views, attitudes, and behaviors.



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