

Arab Barometer VI

Libya Country Report



2021

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic could not have hit Libya at a more difficult time. Civil war was still raging and left the country divided, weakened its economic situation, and demolished its fragile emergency preparedness capabilities. Although Libyans are highly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in their country, at times they considered other security-related issues to be more pressing than the pandemic itself during 2020. Yet, the pandemic brought with it a set of challenges that further weakened the Libyan state and worsened the living conditions of its citizens. Fortunately, with the rollout of various COVID-19 vaccines in 2021, Libyans have expressed their willingness to receive these vaccines.

The newly formed Government of National Unity (GNU) quickly seized the moment by importing and administering vaccines. Lack of infrastructure might have hindered the vaccination efforts, however, especially in rural and remote areas. In return, Libyans acknowledge the government's efforts and express optimism regarding its mandate. At the same time, they recognize the obstacles facing the government, including the weak social services, the troubled economy, and the prevalence of corruption within state agencies. Libyans clearly support democracy, though their view and understanding of a democratic system does not necessarily reflect a belief in liberal democracy. However, they do support a stronger female presence in politics and in the workforce. In fact, the barriers of women's employment in Libya seem to be more related to structural shortcomings than to culture.

Libyans are wary of overt foreign interference in their country and they show little favor toward countries that have intervened in their country directly. While the internal polarization is reflected in the varying attitudes towards regional powers, there is greater agreement regarding views of global powers. China enjoys favorable views across all regions in Libya. The United States, however, witnessed a shift from negative to positive views in Libya between October 2020 and March 2021. Another matter that Libyans undoubtedly agree on is their opposition to any normalization of relations between Arab states and Israel.

These are among the main findings of three nationally representative telephone surveys conducted in Libya during the course of 2020-1. The sample was drawn through random digit dialing (RDD). Between July 2020 and March 2021, we interviewed 2,730 Libyan citizens to track changes in their evaluations

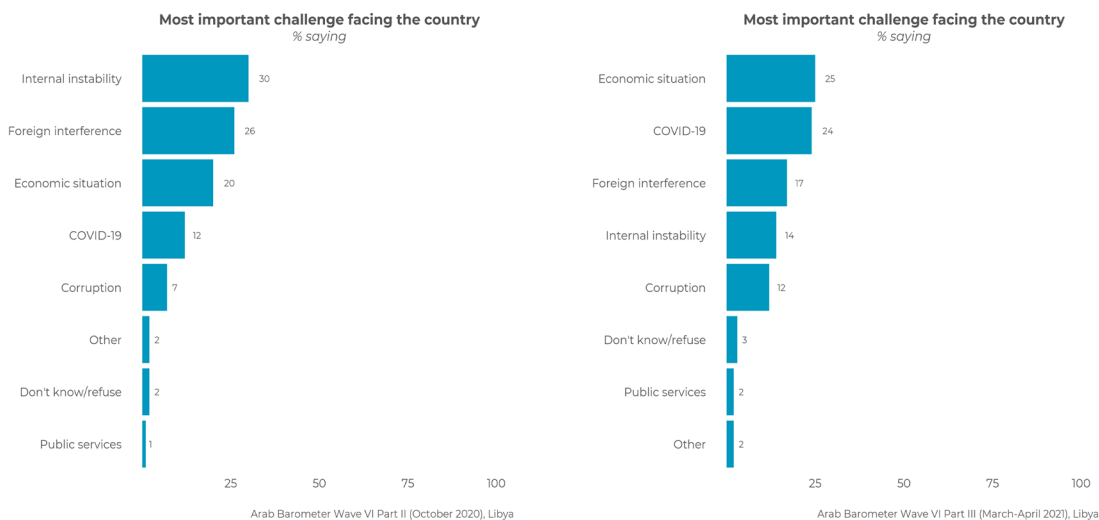
of their conditions over time during the pandemic. The margin of error of these reported results is ± 3 percentage points. The surveys are part of Arab Barometer's sixth wave which was carried out in seven MENA countries. Arab Barometer's sixth wave is the only publicly available survey that captures the changing sentiments of citizens across MENA during the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information about the surveys can be found in the links below:

About AB6

How we did this.

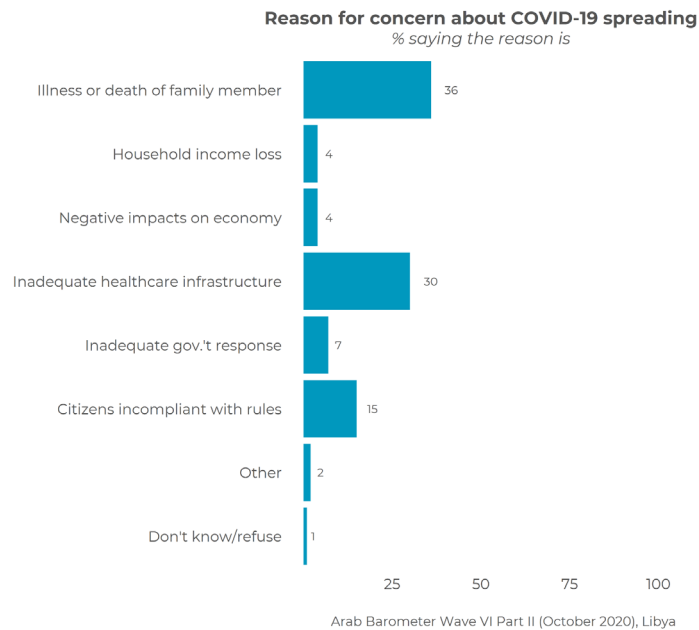
COVID-19, related challenges, and vaccine hesitancy

While most countries were focusing all their resources on the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, Libya was facing another challenge that significantly threatened the livelihood of its people: the civil war. It was, therefore, unsurprising, that in October 2020, internal instability and foreign interference were seen as the two most important challenges facing the country (30 percent and 26 percent, respectively) followed by the economic situation (20 percent), while only 12 percent named COVID-19. However, by March-April 2021, perceptions about the greatest challenges reversed as peace agreements largely held and direct confrontations had stopped for a few months, as a result of the August 2020 ceasefire. Instead, Libyans shifted their attention and concern towards more routine issues relating to daily life. Concern over the economic situation and COVID-19 rose to 25 percent and 24 percent, respectively. At the same time, lack of internal stability and foreign interference declined to 14 percent and 17 percent, respectively. Corruption remained fifth on the list of greatest challenges for Libyans, rising from seven percent in October 2020 to 12 percent in spring 2021.

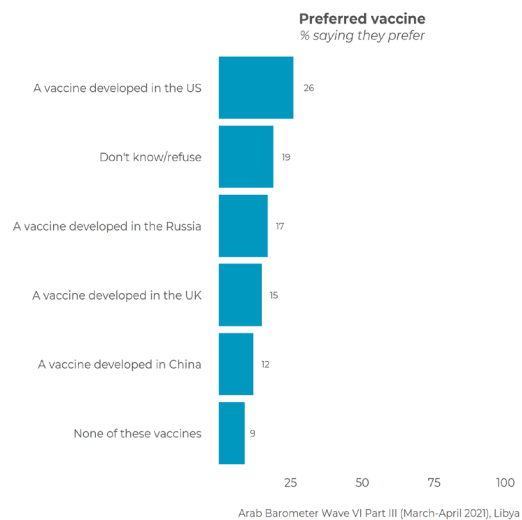


Despite the slight shifts in attitudes regarding the biggest challenge facing the country, concern over the spread of COVID-19 in the next six months did not change significantly. Three-quarters of Libyans (75 percent) said they were very concerned or somewhat concerned about the spread of the virus between August and September of 2020. Seven months later, levels of concern remained high with 72 percent of Libyans saying the same between March and April of 2021. Thus, COVID-19 being a more important challenge could be the result of the ceasefire that pushed instability aside, rather than the result of COVID-19 being more concerning.

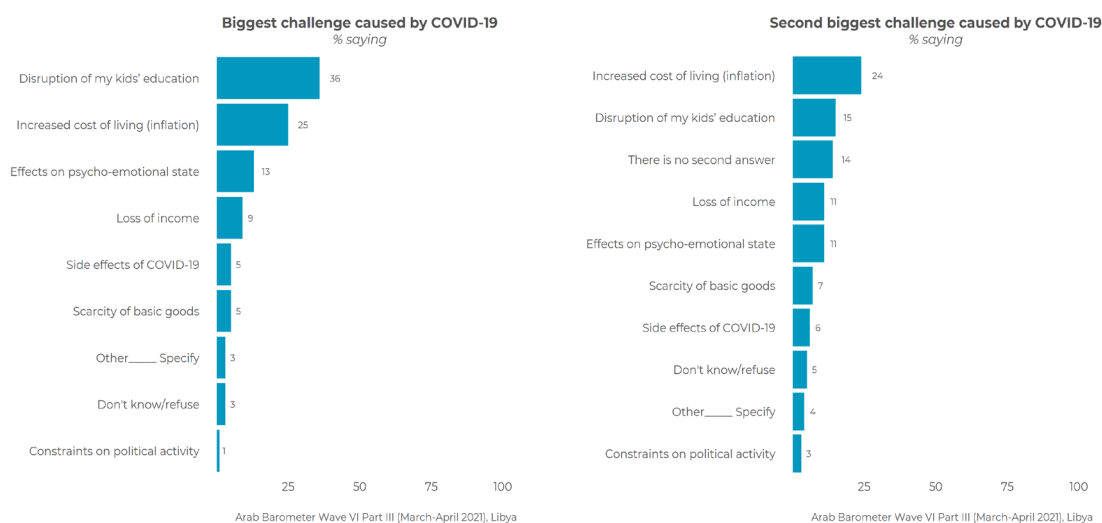
Among those who expressed concern, more than a third cited the illness or death of a family member as their reason for concern in 2020 (35 percent between August and September; 36 percent in October). A smaller percentage cited the same reason between March and April 2021 (21 percent). Another prevalent item for concern among Libyans was the inadequate healthcare infrastructure in the country, with three-in-ten referring to it as their reason for concern in October 2020. As time went by, people’s compliance with the social distancing rules diminished, resulting in frustration among fellow citizens, with as high as 29 percent of Libyans citing others’ noncompliance as their reason for concern between March and April 2021. On the other hand, a sizable portion of those who are unconcerned about the spread of COVID-19 says that the threat of the virus is exaggerated (31 percent between March and April 2021 compared with a third in October 2020).



Libya has one of the lowest vaccine hesitancy rates in the region among countries surveyed. A clear majority of Libyans (70 percent) say they are very or somewhat likely to get the vaccine if it is made available to them. Libyans prefer US-made vaccines (26 percent) over vaccines made in other countries like Russia (17 percent), the UK (15 percent), and China (12 percent). Notably, around the time of the survey, only Sputnik (Russian) and AstraZeneca (British) vaccines were widely available for the public.



Most Libyans were lucky enough not to experience significant interruptions in their employment status due to COVID-19. Only two percent reported a permanent job loss, while fewer than a third of Libyans (29 percent) cited temporary job interruption, a tenth said they had to work from home, and 59 percent experienced no impact on employment at all. Nonetheless, the pandemic had brought on some major challenges for Libyan families. As the country lacked a resilient, up-to-date infrastructure, most institutions were forced to shut down in the first phases of the pandemic. School closures led to the disruption of kids' education, as most schools lacked the resources to switch to online learning. More than half of Libyans say that this disruption is one of the two biggest challenges they faced because of COVID-19 (51 percent). Nearly half of Libyans point to inflation as the other biggest challenge (49 percent).

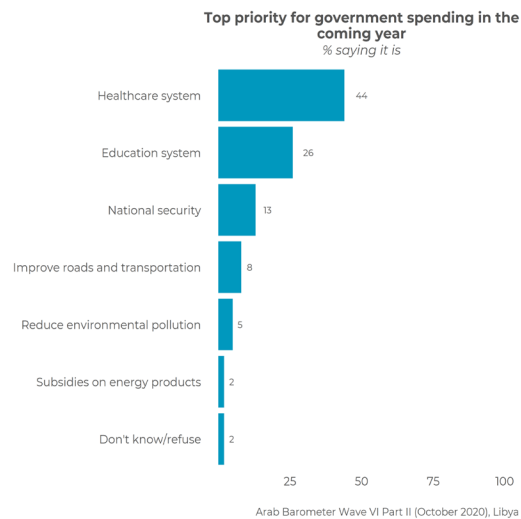
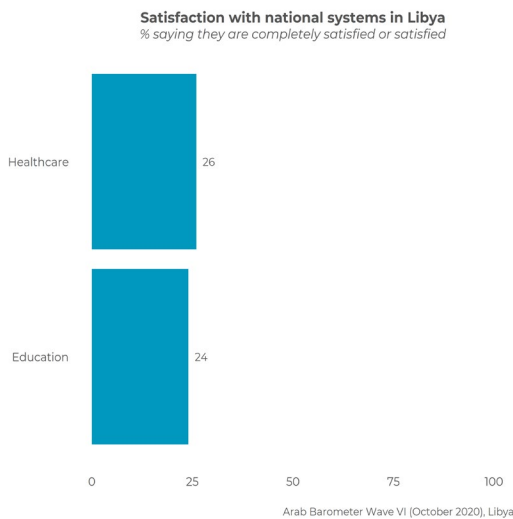


Evaluation of Public Services

The conflict has further damaged most public services in the country, especially the healthcare and education systems. The concern over the spread of COVID19 in Libya is, in part, the result of a wide perception that the healthcare system is incapable of dealing with the pandemic. Only 26 percent of Libyans expressed satisfaction when asked about the healthcare system in October 2020. The percentage remained effectively unchanged, increasing by only two points to 28 percent between March and April 2021. With the current health challenges, it is no surprise that 44 percent choose the healthcare

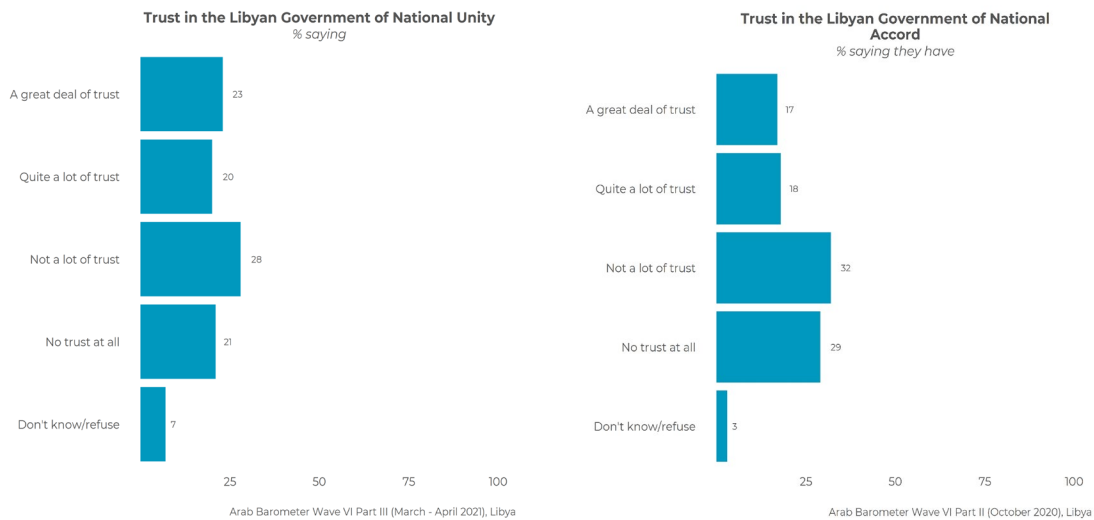
system as their preferred top priority for government spending in the upcoming year.

The education system fared even more poorly in the eyes of citizens. In October 2020, only 24 percent said they are completely satisfied or satisfied with the education system; and 26 percent chose it as top priority for government spending in the upcoming years. As schools reopen their doors for students, more people are expressing their satisfaction with the education system between March and April 2021 (34 percent). This rise may also be attributed to the general sense of optimism and hopefulness regarding the government at the beginning of 2021.

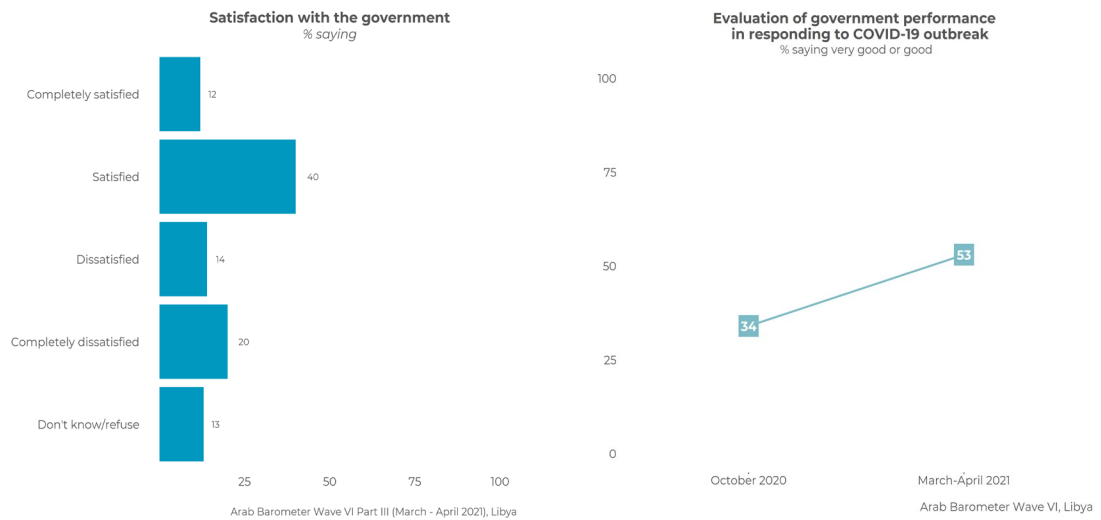


Government trust and performance

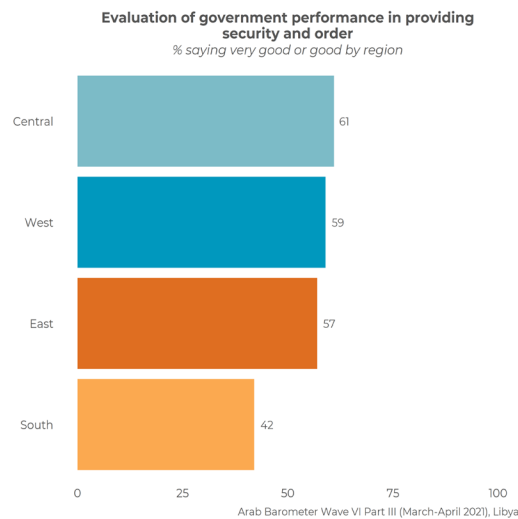
In February 2021, the UN-facilitated national dialogue process ended with the formation of a new, unified executive authority termed the Government of National Unity (GNU). The formation of the GNU followed years of division in state institutions that weakened the government, causing it to lose the trust of most Libyans. The GNU fared better than its predecessor, the Government of National Accord (GNA), with 44 percent for GNU compared to 35 percent for GNA. In October, the House of Representatives scored similarly to the GNA (35 percent).



In terms of performance, Libyans seem to be willing to give the GNU a chance. A few weeks after its formation, more than half say they are completely satisfied or satisfied with the GNU performance (53 percent), which may be more based on hope than on the GNU’s actions to date. The survey results suggest that two main fields have contributed significantly to this level of satisfaction with the government. The first is the response to COVID-19. The GNU Prime Minister emphasized repeatedly that combating COVID-19 was one of his government’s priorities. The government received and began administering vaccines around the period the survey was fielded. Although the GNU had been recently formed at the time of the survey, Libyans rate its performance in responding to the pandemic more highly (53 percent) than that of the GNA (34 percent).

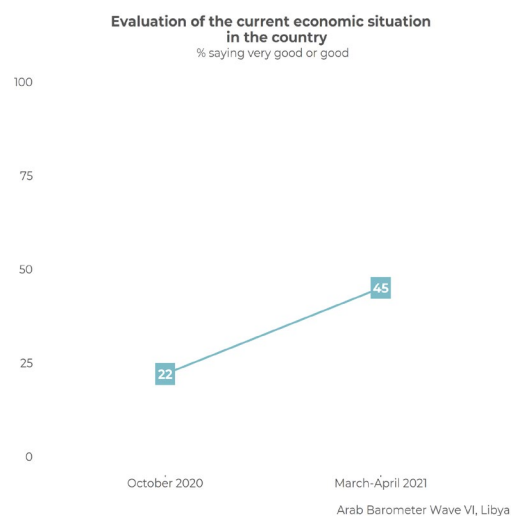
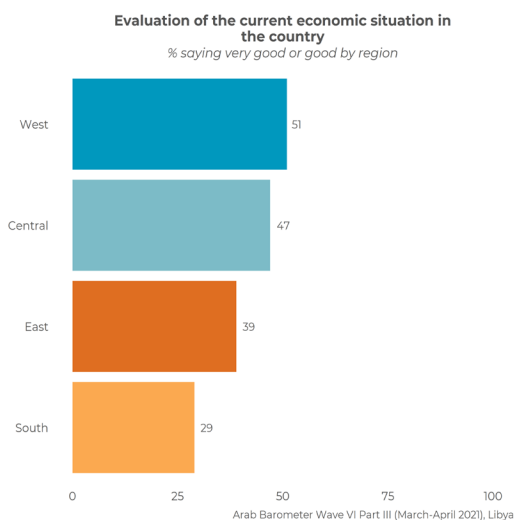


The other field contributing to the positive evaluation of the GNU performance is security. Libyans appear to associate the current state of calmness and relative stability with the work of the government itself. The majority say that the GNU performance in providing security and order is very good or good (58 percent). This evaluation, however, differs across regions. While 61 percent in the central region say the performance is very good or good, only 42 percent in the south say the same. Additionally, Libyans are more satisfied with the GNU performance in keeping prices down (36 percent) than with the GNA performance (20 percent).



Economy

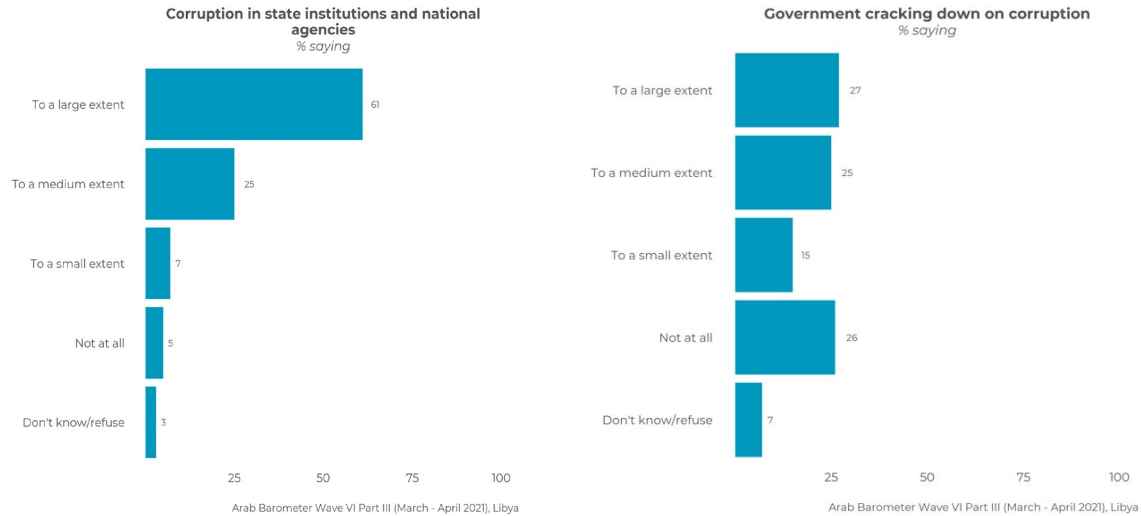
The Libyan economy has suffered the consequences of conflict and instability which led to the shutdown of oil production, the main source of income for the state. It is, thus, no surprise that fewer than a quarter of Libyans said the economic situation is very good or good in October 2020 (22 percent). The halting of hostilities and new political agreement earlier this year has resulted in a steady oil production and a stable currency exchange rate, which translated immediately to improvements to the overall economy. In spring of 2021, nearly half (45 percent) of Libyans said the economic situation was very good or good. However, this evaluation, too, varies between regions. While more than half in the West say the situation is very good or good (51 percent), only 29 percent evaluate the situation as such in the south, along with 39 percent in the East and 47 percent in the central region. Notably, Libyans still express optimism in their prediction of the economic situation in the upcoming years. In spring 2021, the majority said that the situation will be much better or somewhat better in the next 2 – 3 years (78 percent). Critically, those living in the different regions are about equally optimistic about Libya's economic future.



Corruption

Similar to many countries in the region, Libya has a deep-rooted problem with corruption. The overwhelming majority of Libyans say that corruption is prevalent to a large or medium extent in state institutions and national

agencies (86 percent in March and April 2021). Over half of the population, however, believes the GNU is working to combat corruption.

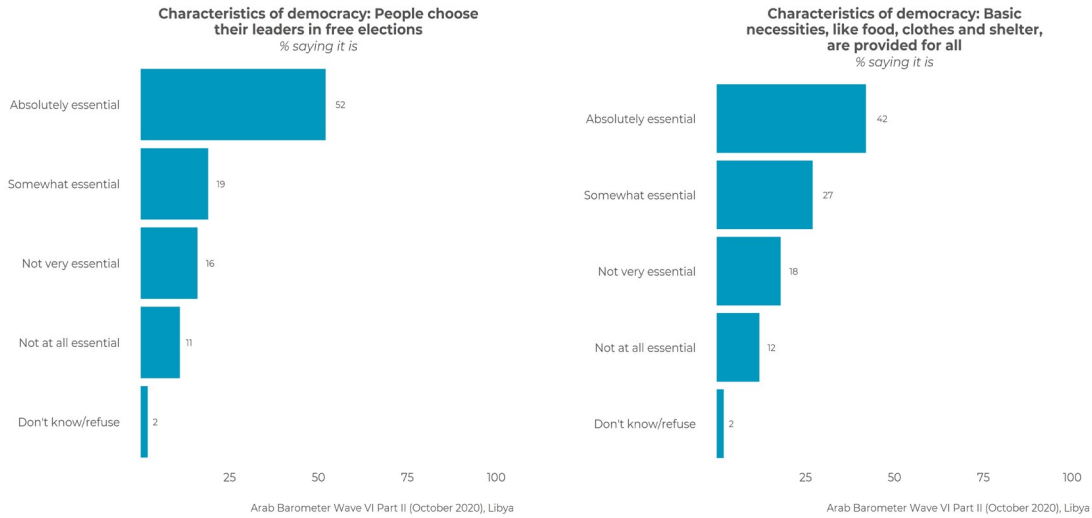


Views on democracy

Ten years after the uprising that toppled the Gaddafi regime, Libyans continue to strongly support democracy. There is widespread agreement among Libyans that free elections, equal rights, and provision of basic services are important characteristics of any democratic system. The last general elections held in Libya took place in June 2014 for the House of Representatives. As the country fell into civil war shortly after that election, Libyans were not given a chance to vote again at the national level. Earlier this year, the National Dialogue Forum reached an agreement to host general elections in December 2021. While disagreements regarding procedural matters arose, the public's desire to see elections held in the country remains unchallenged. The majority of Libyans say that free elections are an absolutely or somewhat essential part of democracy (71 percent).

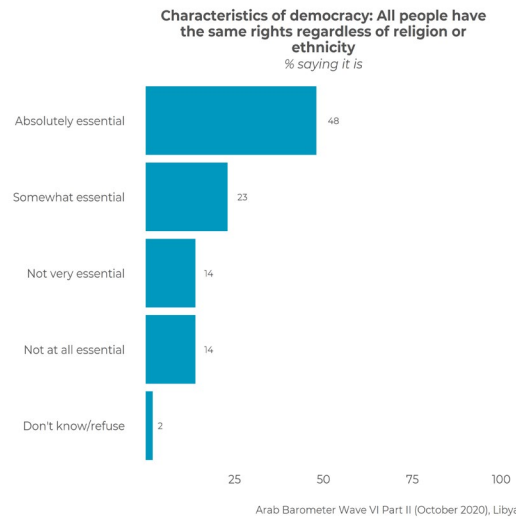
While Libya is almost homogenous religiously, with at least 95 percent of the population being Sunni Muslims, the country is home to multiple ethnic groups. There is a strong belief that democracy should be inclusive of all these groups, with more than seven-in-ten Libyans saying it is absolutely or somewhat essential that under a democratic government all people have the

same rights regardless of religion or ethnicity. Meanwhile, a strong but somewhat lower percentage (68 percent) say that the provision of basic necessities for all is absolutely or somewhat essential part of democracy.



Arab Barometer Wave VI Part II (October 2020), Libya

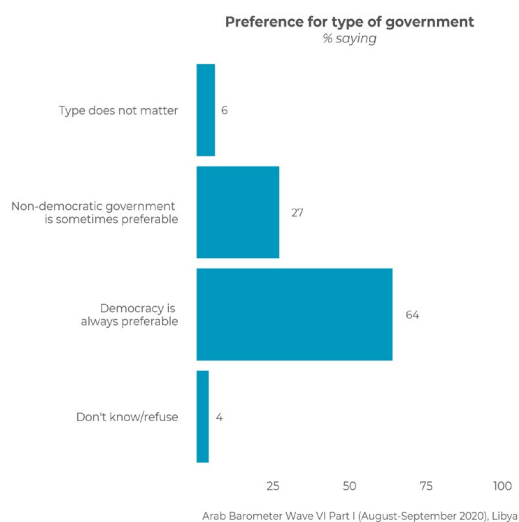
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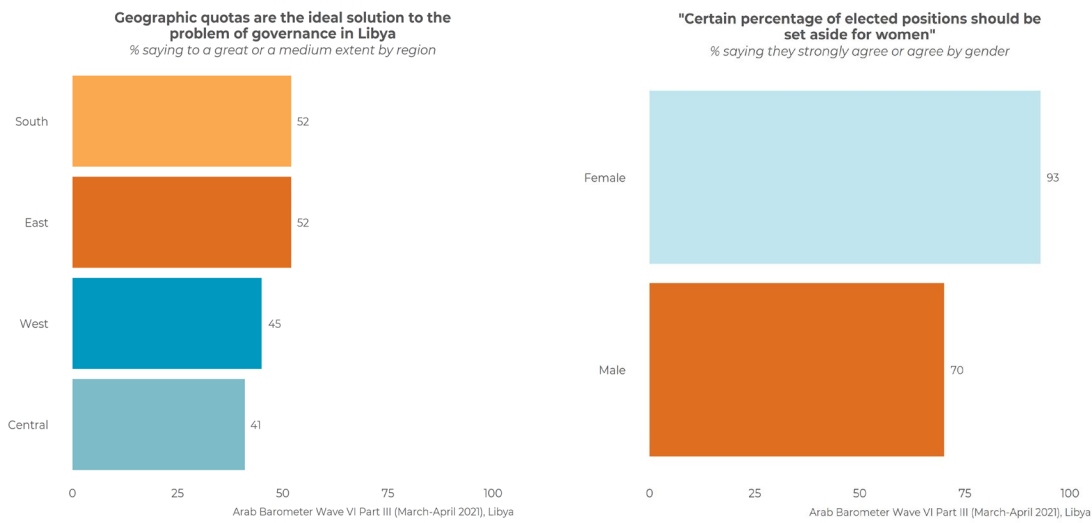
Arab Barometer Wave VI Part II (October 2020), Libya

Nearly two thirds (64 percent) say that a democratic government is always preferable. While around a quarter (27 percent) say that a non-democratic one might be preferable under certain circumstances. Although democracy is preferred, the ongoing crisis has possibly pushed more Libyans to prioritize efficiency and stability over democracy, at least in the short term. Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the population say that whether a government is democratic or not does not matter as long as it can provide

order and stability in the country. Roughly the same percentage say that Libya needs a leader who can bend the rules if necessary to get things done. That, however, does not necessarily mean that people are looking for a populist leader. Only half of Libyans (49 percent) say it is very or somewhat important to have a popular leader who appeals to the people, regardless of qualifications. Although Libyans are eager for democracy, their definition of the system might not match that of a liberal democracy.



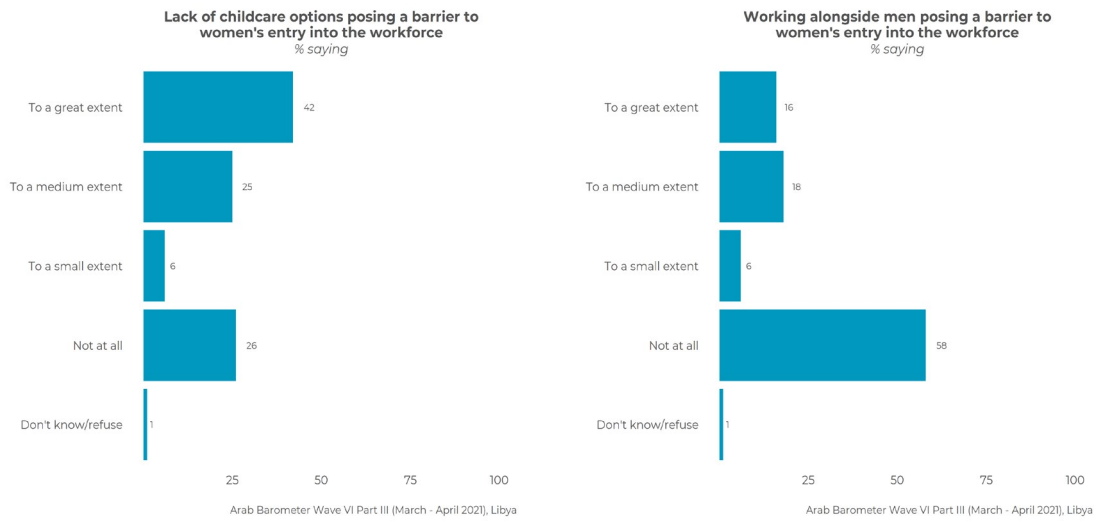
One governance question that has been present in the Libyan political discourse since 2011 concerns the implementation of quotas, including gender and geographic quotas. The majority of Libyans believe that a gender quota should be implemented to allow for more women to hold elected positions (82 percent). Women, unsurprisingly however, are more supportive of a gender quota than men (93 percent for women versus 70 percent for men). Geographic quotas are often proposed as a solution to issues of marginalization and centralization. They are, however, significantly less popular than gender quotas. Not quite half say that a geographic quota would be an ideal solution to the governance problem in Libya (47 percent). More than four-in-ten Libyans say that geographic quotas should not be implemented (43 percent). People in the eastern and southern regions of the country are somewhat more likely to support geographical quotas than their counterparts in the central and western regions.



Gender

Women continue to face barriers to their participation in various aspects of public life in Libya, including in politics and in the labor force. Between August and September 2020, more than six-in-ten Libyans say they strongly agree or agree with the idea that a man is better at political leadership than a woman (61 percent). Despite that, three quarters say that a woman can become president or prime minister in a Muslim-majority country. At home, almost half of the population say that taking care of children is a woman’s primary responsibility (51 percent) and that a man should have the final say in all family-related decisions (46 percent) in the spring of 2021.

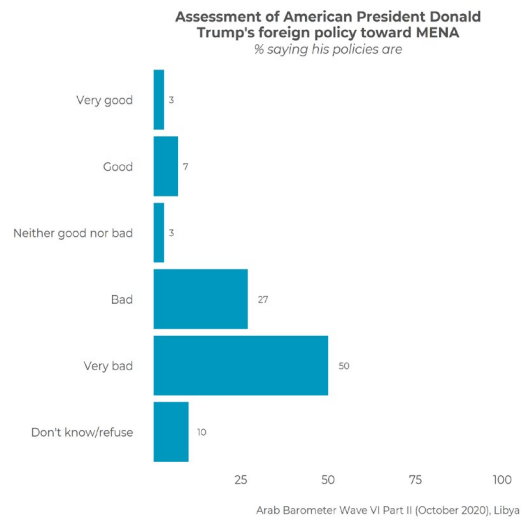
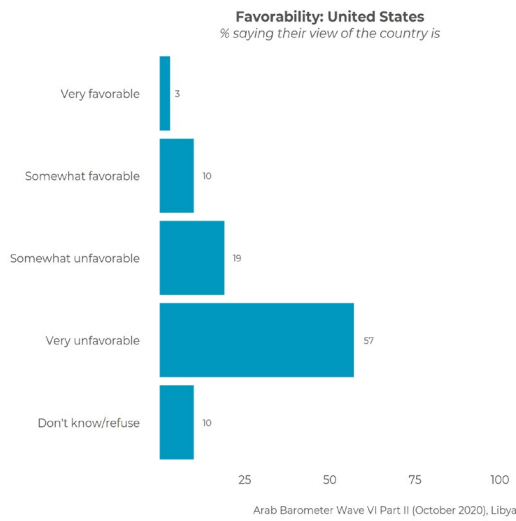
In the labor market, the barriers to women’s employment appear to be more structural than cultural in nature. Nearly two thirds of Libyans say that low wages (68 percent), lack of childcare facilities (67 percent), and lack of means of transportation (63 percent) pose a significant barrier to women’s entry into the workforce. Cultural barriers, such as working alongside men or men being given priority in the job market, are seen as smaller barriers to entry.



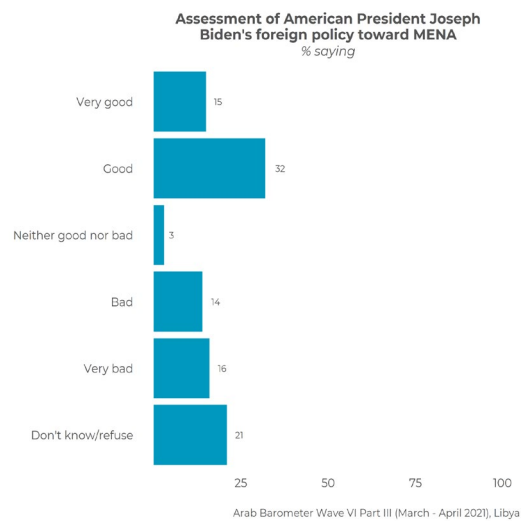
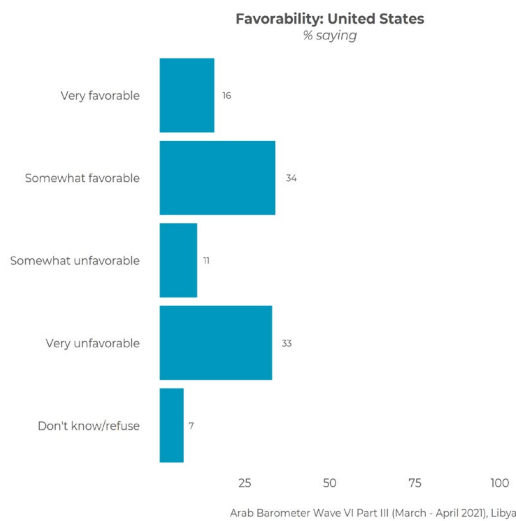
International Relations

The past 12 months witnessed a significant change in attitudes towards global and regional powers in the country, especially toward the United States. In October 2020, only 14 percent of Libyans said they have a favorable view of the U.S. Just one-in-ten Libyans rated the policies of former president Donald Trump as very good or good while more than three-quarters said that the former President’s policies were very bad or bad. President Trump’s unpopularity in Libya should not be a surprise, given his rhetoric against Muslims, and more importantly, his travel ban which targeted Libya among other Muslim-majority countries. In addition, Libyans were largely unconvinced that the U.S. foreign aid is helping their country. Nearly half said that the aid is neither strengthening civil society nor advancing women’s rights (46 percent). Notably, Libyans prefer foreign aid to focus on building infrastructure and improving the educational system in the country.

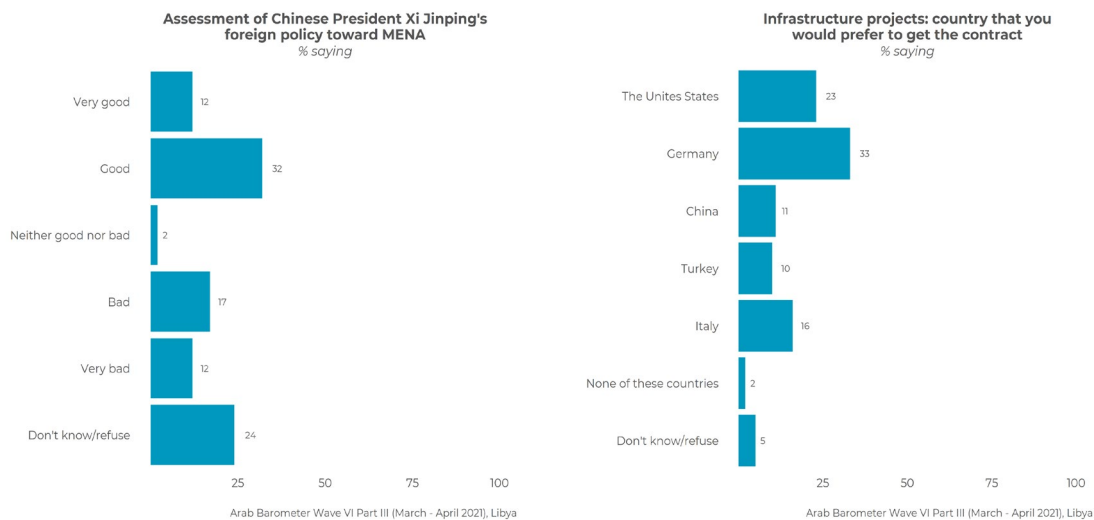
Arab Barometer – Wave VI
Country Report - Libya



The recent change in the White House, following the 2020 elections, brought some positive changes in attitudes towards the U.S. among the population in Libya. Two months after President Biden assumed office, half of Libyans said they have a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of the U.S. Nearly half as well said President Biden's foreign policies were very good or good (47 percent). Six-in-ten said they expect a great or medium change in U.S. foreign policy under Biden from that under Trump.

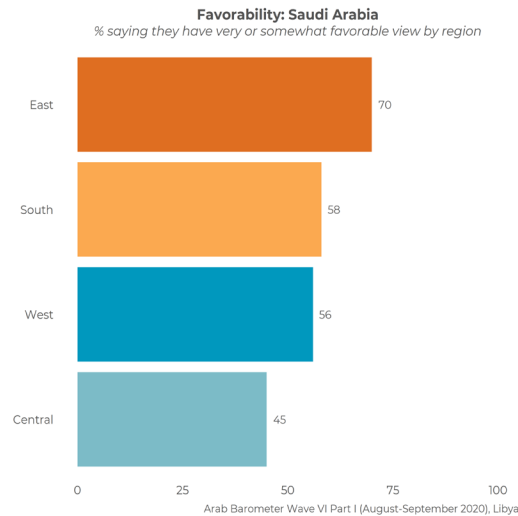


The other global superpower, China, is viewed more favorably in Libya. Around 60 percent of Libyans say they have a favorable view of China. Fewer than half, however, say that President Xi’s policies are very good or good (44 percent). The difference could be attributed to President Xi’s less prominent presence as the face of China’s foreign policy in the region, and in Libya in particular. Nearly a quarter of Libyans say they do not know Xi’s policies or refuse to answer the question (24 percent). Despite the high level of favorability China is getting in Libya, Chinese companies are not as popular as their Western counterparts. Only 11 percent of Libyans say they want Chinese firms to work on infrastructure projects in Libya, compared to 33 percent and 23 percent for German and American companies, respectively.

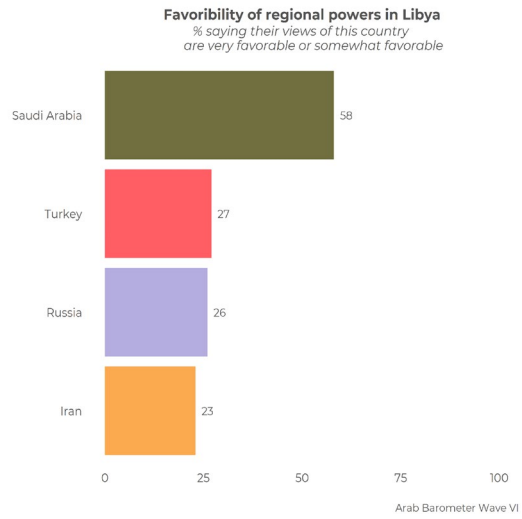


Unlike global powers, no regional power seems to enjoy widespread popularity among Libyans except for Saudi Arabia. A large portion of Libyans say they have a very favorable or somewhat favorable view of Saudi Arabia (58 percent). The policies of the Kingdom’s Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, are seen as very good or good by 45 percent of the population. Interestingly, the Kingdom enjoys significantly more support in eastern Libya (70 percent) than it does in central Libya (45 percent). One possible explanation is the impact of Madkhali Salafists who exercise noticeable control over religious institutes and security services as part of their alliance with the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), the de facto ruler of the eastern region. That is in addition to the Kingdom’s perceived support for the LAAF. Saudi Arabia’s main regional rival, Iran, is not as popular, however. Fewer than a quarter say they have a

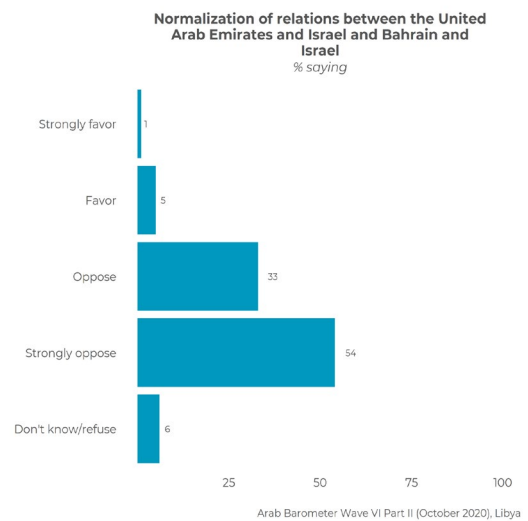
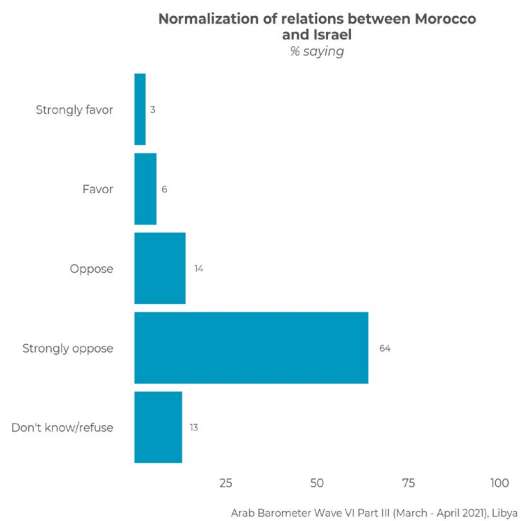
favorable view of the Islamic Republic (23 percent) and even less percentage say the policies of its Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, are very good or good (19 percent).



Several foreign actors have been heavily meddling in Libya over the course of the last decade. The foreign interference intensified during the April 2019 attack on Tripoli by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, supported by Russia, against the Government of National Accord, supported by Turkey. This direct interference has damaged the popularity of the two countries in various parts of Libya. While 27 percent express favorable views of Turkey, a slightly smaller percentage (26 percent) say they have very or somewhat favorable views of Russia. Only two-in-ten Libyans say the policies of Russian president, Vladimir Putin, are very good or good. Though slightly more popular, Erdogan enjoys the approval of less than a quarter of the population (23 percent). Unsurprisingly, Turkey is two times more favored in the central and western regions - where most supporters of the GNA reside - than it is in the eastern region - where the LAAF is headquartered. Russia is least favorable in the central region.



As for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Libyans are overwhelmingly opposed to any normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel. In October 2020, almost nine-in-ten Libyans said they strongly oppose or oppose the Abraham Accords. Only one percent said they strongly favor the accords. Although slightly fewer Libyans opposed the normalization between Morocco and Israel, the vast majority said in spring 2021 they strongly oppose or oppose the agreement between the two countries (78 percent). About one-in-ten (9 percent) said they strongly favor or favor it.





ABOUT ARAB BAROMETER

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

We have been conducting rigorous, and nationally representative public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006 across 15 countries.

We are the longest-standing and 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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