



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Social Capital in the Middle East and North Africa

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## Executive Summary

Levels of social capital, which is often operationalized by measures of trust, have changed significantly in the Middle East and North Africa over the past 15 years. The 2011 uprisings marked a critical juncture for atrophying, status-quo state-society relations: citizens questioned the nature of governance while governments grappled with reinvigorated demands of citizenship. These demands were not fully met, however, and peaceful transitions towards democracy did not ensue. Instead, many countries experienced significant conflict, including proxy-wars resulting from interests of regional powers and sectarian differences. As of 2019, Tunisia remained as the only country that is on a democratic but fragile path toward a democratic consolidation.

In this context and over a 13 year period (2006-2019), the Arab Barometer can present an overarching picture of how political and interpersonal trust in the Middle East have changed in the years surrounding the 2011 Arab uprisings. With few exceptions, political and interpersonal trust in the Middle East has been decreasing, demonstrating the extent of anti-establishment feelings nurtured in societies. However, trust in legal systems has not decreased as much as trust in political institutions such as government and parliament. These findings suggest that despite widespread lack of confidence in governments and parliaments, ordinary citizens have not entirely given up on existing systems of governance.

These patterns are clearly evident in Tunisia, the only country generally considered to have fully undertaken a democratic transition after the Arab uprisings. All measures of trust show a similar declining trend for political and interpersonal trust in Tunisia since 2011. As of 2018, only 20 percent of Tunisians trust the government, compared with 14 percent who trust parliament, and only 8 percent who have high levels of interpersonal trust. However, trust in the legal system (48 percent) is virtually unchanged between 2011 and 2018, suggesting that Tunisians might still be still committed to the system brought about by the Arab Spring.

Notably, political and interpersonal trust in Egypt have made significant improvements since the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi in 2013. However, trust in the army has decreased to a significant extent: while 95 percent of Egyptians trusted the army in 2013, the proportion fell to 84 percent in 2018, suggesting that seizing power had some cost to the Egyptian military.

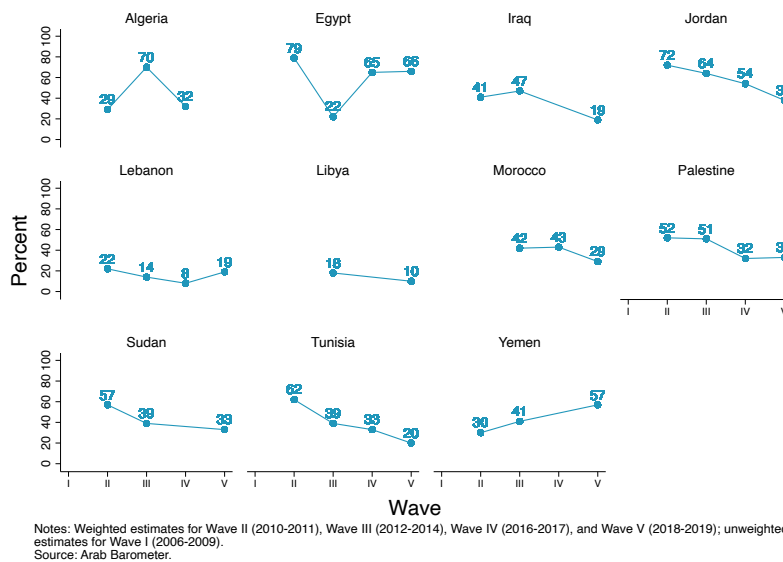
Jordan is another country that suffers from low interpersonal and political trust. Levels of trust before the Arab Spring were relatively high and have since declined considerably. Notably, lower political and interpersonal trust in Jordan is concentrated on regions, such as Aqaba and Tafilah where Transjordanians-

a key element of the historic coalition supporting the state- are concentrated. These results suggest an estrangement between Transjordanians and the government.

## Trust in Governments

With few exceptions, every country in the Middle East has experienced a consistent decrease in the extent of trust in government since the Arab Spring. In the most recent wave of the Arab Barometer, trust in government can be found as high as 66 percent in Egypt and as low as 19 percent in Lebanon and Iraq.

### Trust in Government

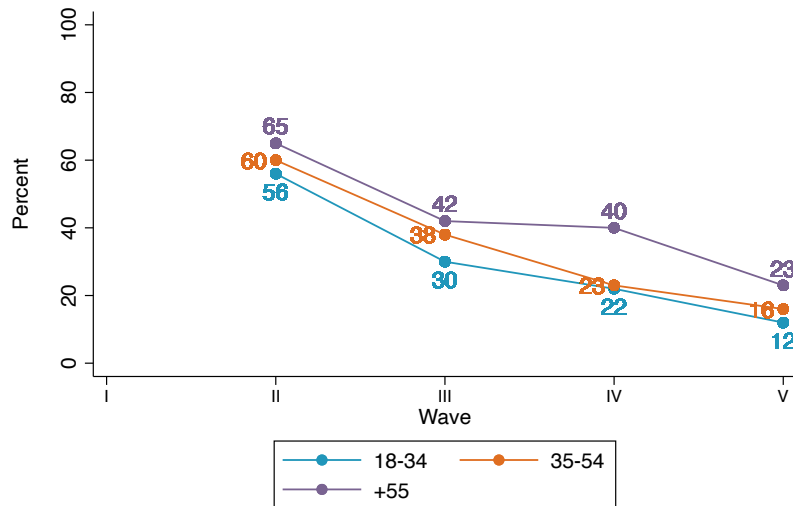


Jordan experienced a significant drop in the level of trust in the government from 66 percent in 2006 to 38 percent in 2018, indicative of the failure of the reforms promised by the government of Jordan after the Arab Spring. Also, this drop may be related to widespread social discontent against IMF-backed tax reforms that were reversed after the protests resulting in the fall of Hani al-Mulki government in 2018.

Notably, the biggest drop in the trust in government occurred in Tunisia, the only country still on the path toward democratization following the Arab uprisings. Trust in the government of Tunisia has dropped to 20 percent in 2018 from 62 percent in 2011, amounting to a 42-point decrease. A closer examination to the trust in government of Tunisia reveals that trust is linked with age: 12 percent of those ages 18-34 say that they have trust in government, compared with 16 percent of those ages 35-54 and 23 percent of those who are

fifty-five or older. Overall, older Tunisians are more likely to trust the government.

### Trust in Government in Tunisia by Age Categories

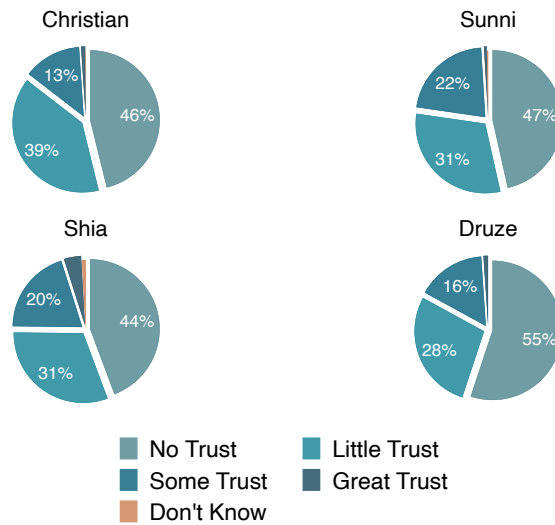


Notes: Weighted estimates for Wave II (2010-2011), Wave III (2012-2014), Wave IV (2016-2017), and Wave V (2018-2019); unweighted estimates for Wave I (2006-2009).  
Source: Arab Barometer.

Lebanon has one of the lowest levels of trust in government. The fragile sectarian balance in country and the vulnerability of the political system to this balance make these levels particularly concerning. When the Arab Barometer Wave II (2010) was fielded, Lebanon had the lowest level of trust in government. This level declined until Wave IV (2016), but by Wave V (2018) the level of trust in government had improved significantly (+11 points).

Levels of trust in government are low across sects in Lebanon, though there is some notable variation. The share saying they have great or some trust in government is lowest among Christians (14 percent) and highest among Shias (24 percent). The difference between Shias and other sects may be related to the 2018 elections, in which Hezbollah has significantly increased its power in the parliament.

## Trust in Government in Lebanon by Sectarian Groups



Notes: Weighted estimates  
 Source: Arab Barometer.

The level of trust in government among Egyptians in 2010 reflects dissatisfaction with Morsi’s government that was democratically elected after the fall of Mubarak. Though trust in government was 79 percent in the months after the Egyptian Revolution, it dropped to 22 percent in 2013 when controversial policies were put in place by the Morsi government. Notably, after Sisi came to power in 2013, Egyptians’ trust in government improved significantly: it increased to 65 percent in 2016 and remained at the similar levels in 2018.

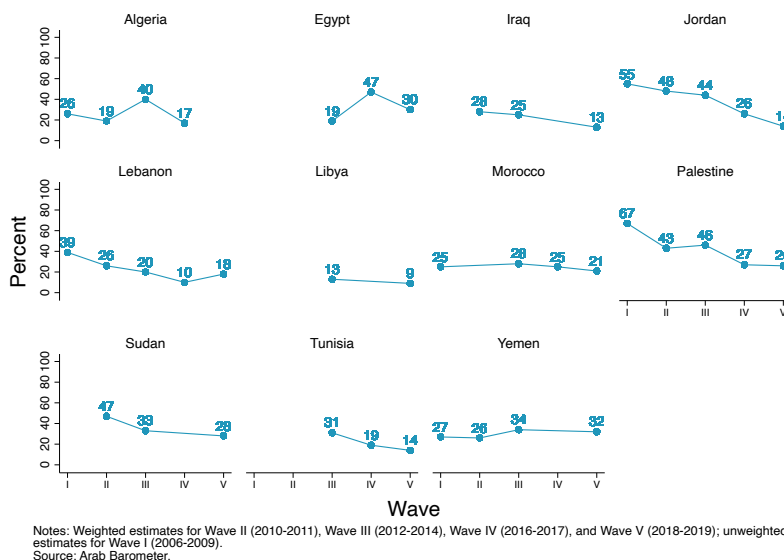
## Trust in Parliaments

Despite most countries in the region having elected parliaments, in most cases they have relatively little political power. Elections are often not free and fair, thereby yielding unrepresentative institutions. Being another key institution of governing system overall, trust in parliaments is highly correlated with that in governments.

With the exception of Yemen and Egypt, all countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer experienced significant drops in the trust in parliament since 2006. The most dramatic decreases have occurred in Jordan and Palestine, which have seen 41-point decreases in trust. Notably, in Morocco and Yemen, there has been no significant change over time. By comparison, Egyptians’ trust in parliament fluctuated. But in 2019, trust in parliament is 11 points higher than what it was in 2013 in the last month of Morsi’s government.

Mirroring the decrease in trust in government, Jordan experienced a significant and consistent decrease in trust in parliament. While more than half of Jordanians (55 percent) said that they have either a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the parliament in 2006, this proportion fell to 14 percent in 2018.

### Trust in Parliament



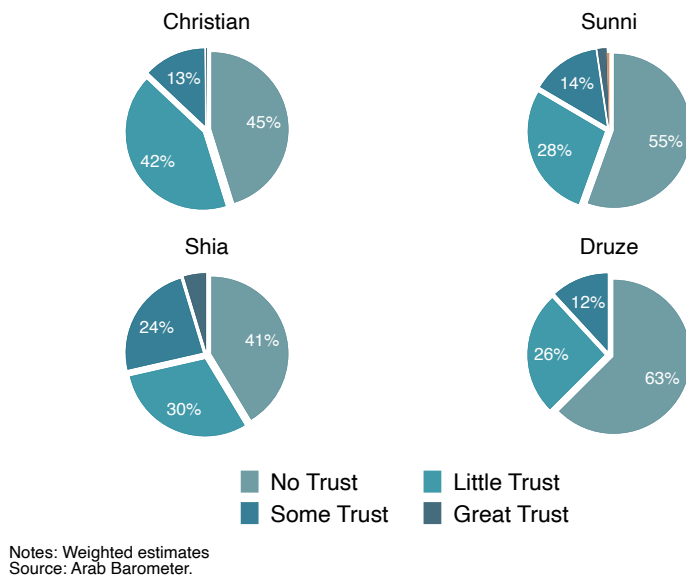
Even though Tunisia’s parliament can be considered as the most representative parliament in the region, only 14 percent of Tunisians say that they have trust in the parliament. This share has declined from 31 percent in 2013, which likely is due to infighting between parties and the inability to improve economic conditions that have resulted in a deep seeded frustration among the Tunisian public.

As of 2018, trust in parliament is highest in Yemen, though only one third (32 percent) of Yemenis have confidence in the institution. The last elections were in 2003, and the parliament only met briefly in sessions since 2015 when it was dissolved and reconstituted by Houthi rebels. Yemenis’ low levels of trust in their parliament has been consistent throughout this time period.

In contrast, trust in parliament in Lebanon steadily decreased between 2006 and 2016, dropping 29 points in this decade. But Wave V of the Arab Barometer registered an uptick in confidence in the institution: though still a minority, the share reporting they trust parliament increases to 18 percent in 2018 up from 10 percent in 2016. General elections in Lebanon were held on May 6, 2018, just four months before the Arab Barometer fielded its survey. These elections were originally scheduled in 2013 but postponed several times due to gridlock in the Lebanese political system.

Hezbollah and its allies made significant gains in parliamentary seats in the 2018 elections. In part a reflection of the group's success, Shias have become the most likely group to trust parliament: 29 percent of Shias cite either great or some trust in parliament, compared with 16 percent of Sunnis, 14 percent of Christians, and 12 percent of Druze.

### Trust in Parliament in Lebanon by Sectarian Groups



### Trust in Legal Systems

Trust in governments and parliaments may not fully indicate the extent of citizens' dissatisfaction with the political system because government officials and parliamentarians can be replaced. Instead, trust in legal system, a more stable institution, may be a better indicator for citizens' disconnect with the system overall.

Indeed, the Arab Barometer reveals that trust in legal systems and courts has not declined as sharply as that in governments and parliaments. For instance, the declines in Jordanians' trust in government and parliament between 2006 and 2018 are 28 and 41 points respectively, but the drop in the trust in the legal system for the same time period is only 11 points.

Furthermore, in some cases, while trust in governments and parliaments has decreased, the trust in legal system has considerably increased. This finding suggests that despite the widespread lack of confidence in government and parliament throughout the region, ordinary citizens may still be willing to find

solutions within the existing institutional boundaries.

The highest level of trust in the existing legal system is in Egypt, where 79 percent of citizens have either a great deal or quite a lot trust in the legal system, followed by 65 percent in Jordan, 62 percent in Yemen, and 60 percent in Morocco. By comparison, the lowest level of trust is found in Lebanon with 25 percent. It is important to note that trust in the legal systems is higher in all countries than that for governments and parliaments, suggesting greater trust in institutions that are charged with providing law and order.

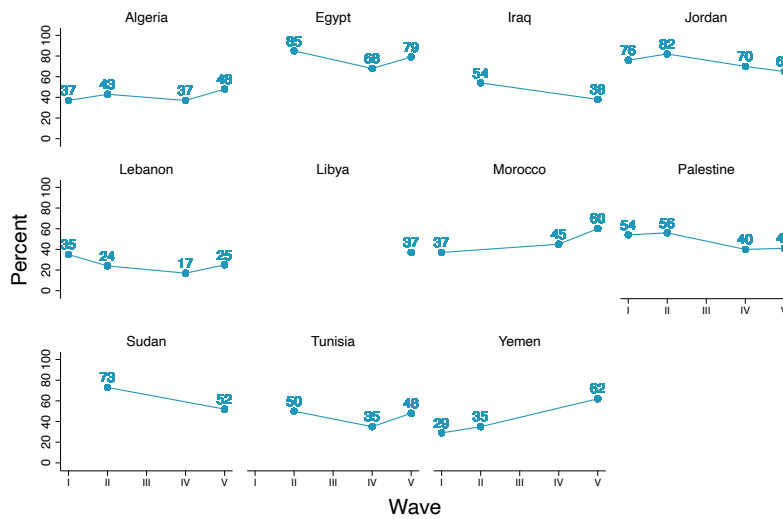
Tunisians' trust in the existing legal system has virtually unchanged between 2011 and 2018 (only a 2 point decline in trust in the legal system), which suggests that Tunisian concerns about government and parliament are not likely to be related to the existing legal system but based on some other factors such as the deterioration of economy since the revolution.

Notably, even though levels of trust of Moroccans have decreased toward the government and the parliament, trust in legal system has considerably increased to 60 percent in 2018, up from 37 percent in 2006. This result indicates that the structural reforms introduced in the wake of fears about the spread of the Arab uprisings may have been viewed positively by Moroccan citizens.

Consistent with the increase in Yemeni trust in government and parliament, trust in legal system of Yemen has significantly increased from 29 percent in 2006 to 62 percent in 2018. However, this result may be biased considering that during the time of war people are less likely to state contradictory opinions due to the fear of appearing disloyal to the cause.



## Trust in Legal System



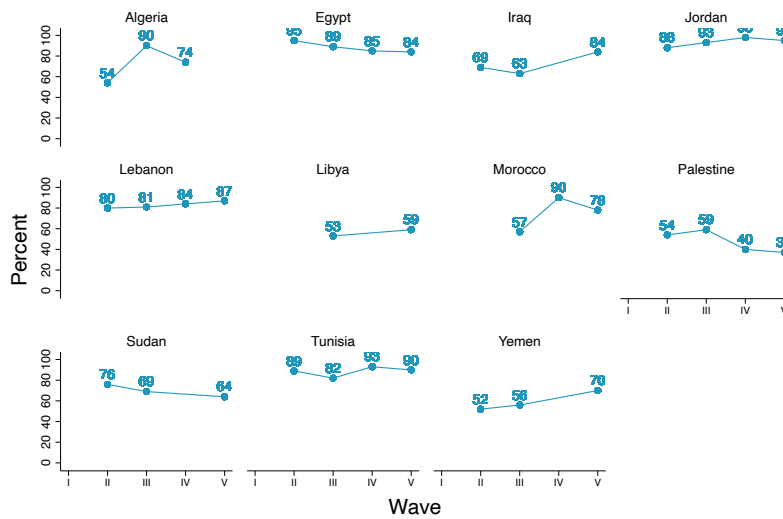
Notes: Weighted estimates for Wave II (2010-2011), Wave III (2012-2014), Wave IV (2016-2017), and Wave V (2018-2019); unweighted estimates for Wave I (2006-2009).  
 Source: Arab Barometer.

## Trust in the Armed Forces

Having been the most-trusted institutions in the region, armies have had significant power in determining the trajectories of the protests during the Arab Spring. While armies in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Sudan helped remove long-standing presidents in the face of massive protests, the Syrian army was actively involved in oppressing the protests.

Indeed, Arab Barometer has found strong trust in armies across time. Even though Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia have experienced strong decreases in trust in government and parliament, trust in armies stands as firm with 84 percent, 95 percent, and 90 percent, respectively. Also, Lebanese trust in army was 84 percent in Wave V, one of the highest levels in the region. Notably, the lowest level of trust in the army is in Palestine with only 37 percent of Palestinians having trust in the army.

## Trust in the Army



Notes: Weighted estimates for Wave II (2010-2011), Wave III (2012-2014), Wave IV (2016-2017), and Wave V (2018-2019); unweighted estimates for Wave I (2006-2009).  
 Source: Arab Barometer.

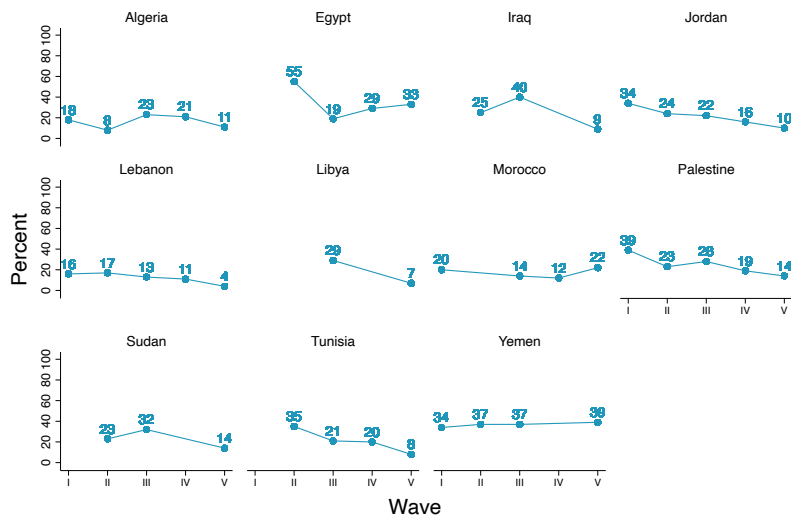
Arab Barometer Wave V was completed fieldwork in Sudan ten days before the Sudanese protests erupted on 18 December 2018. Nevertheless, the trend for Sudan has been a long-term decline in trust in the army: while 76 percent trusted the army in Wave II, this proportion decreased by 12 points to 64 percent in December 2018.

## Interpersonal Trust

Low political trust may set the stage for future protests in the region. In that context, whether protests remain peaceful may be contingent upon the extent of interpersonal trust in society. The Arab Barometer reveals that interpersonal trust is quite low across the region and has been decreasing since the Arab Spring. For instance, only 8 percent of Tunisians exhibit interpersonal trust in 2018, which makes the prospect of democratic consolidation more challenging in the country.

Across the region, minorities in each surveyed country report trusting others. Interpersonal trust is highest in Yemen (39 percent), followed by Egypt (33 percent), Morocco (22 percent), and Sudan and Palestine (14 percent in each). Libya, another country to have suffered from the prolonged civil war, has one of the lowest levels of interpersonal trust in the region with only 7 percent of Libyans stating they have trust in others in the most recent wave of the Arab Barometer.

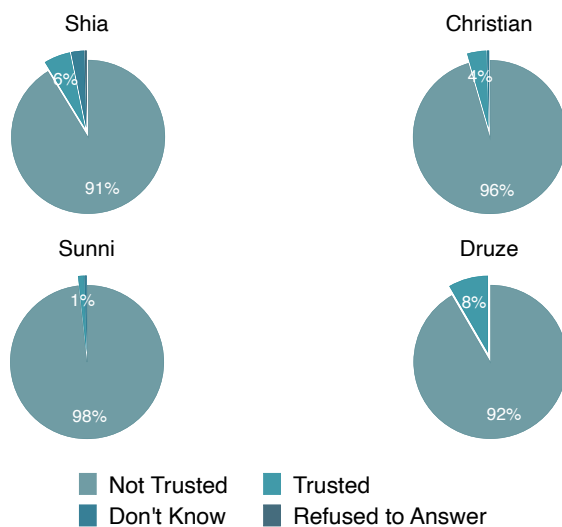
## Interpersonal Trust



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 Source: Arab Barometer.

Additionally, levels of interpersonal trust in Lebanon are extremely low: only 4 percent exhibited interpersonal trust in 2018 compared with 16 percent in 2006. Considering the history and the sectarian balance of Lebanon, this deterioration of interpersonal trust raises concerns about the stability of the country. Notably, Sunnis are least likely to have interpersonal trust at only 1 percent, followed by Christians (4 percent), Shias (6 percent) and Druze (8 percent).

## Interpersonal Trust in Lebanon by Sectarian Groups



Notes: Weighted estimates  
Source: Arab Barometer.

## Conclusion

The Arab uprisings represented a significant challenge to long-standing authoritarian regimes across the region. Sometimes assumed to not be a critical actor in political outcomes, ordinary citizens took to the streets and made their voices heard. Given the changes that took place across the region since, it is important to look at the extent of political and interpersonal trust in the region and how it has changed in the years surrounding these events. Covering a time period between 2006 and 2019, the Arab Barometer presents a detailed picture and vividly indicates different dimensions of interpersonal and political trust that had not been revealed in the past.

To name a few, the Arab Barometer reveals that Tunisians have become more alienated from their government, parliament and army but not from the legal system per se, which can be attributed to the new political culture that has not taken roots in Tunisia's politics. Also, the level of interpersonal trust (8 percent as of 2018) hints at challenges for Tunisia's political transition.

Interestingly, political and interpersonal trust among Egyptians have increased after the military takeover in 2013, indicating the dissatisfaction of Egyptians with Morsi's government and how the government under military tutelage is perceived as providing better governance. Possibly as a result of that, trust in military is virtually unchanged during that time.

Notably, the Arab Barometer reveals that the support of Transjordanians for the political institutions of Jordan has significantly decreased despite Jordan's political system designed to favor the regions where Transjordanians are majority.



## 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 face-to-face public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006. The margin of error is  $\pm 3$  percent.

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



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