

# Tunisia Five Years after the Revolution

Findings from the Arab Barometer

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## Findings from the Arab Barometer

*“Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” – Winston Churchill*

### Overview

*Five years after the Arab uprisings, Tunisia remains the region’s best – and likely only – hope to complete a transition from authoritarian rule to a more inclusive form of government. However, amidst a myriad of challenges, ranging from weak economic growth and unemployment to terrorist attacks and political fragmentation, many have come to question whether Tunisia will survive or will succumb to a retrenchment of authoritarianism.*

*Transitions from authoritarianism depend on a number of key factors, including public support for democracy. If citizens do not demand political reforms or lose faith in democracy as a system of governance, the likelihood of a successful transition declines. In such cases, political elites interested in their own power are afforded a greater opportunity to hijack the transition process, once again concentrating power in their own hands.*

*Within this context, the results of the fourth wave of the Arab Barometer in Tunisia provide a clear cause for optimism.<sup>1</sup> Citizens have not given up on democracy. In fact, the results show that an even greater number of citizens (86 percent) now say that democracy, despite its problems, remains the best system of governance than did shortly after the revolution (70 percent).*

*Perhaps even more importantly, the survey shows that Tunisians are more supportive of democracy even though they have come to recognize some of its potential limitations. At the time of the revolution, the vast majority of Tunisians had never lived under this type of system, leading many to believe democracy represented a panacea for all of the country’s ills. In 2011,*

	2011	2016	<b>Difference</b>
<b>Indecisive</b>	19	69	<b>+50</b>
<b>Bad for Stability</b>	17	51	<b>+34</b>
<b>Bad for Economy</b>	17	45	<b>+28</b>
<b>Best System</b>	70	86	<b>+16</b>

Arab Barometer q516

<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Arab Barometer, please visit [www.arabbarometer.org](http://www.arabbarometer.org).

*less than 20 percent of citizens said that economic performance was weak in a democracy or linked democracy with political instability or indecisiveness. By contrast, five years after the revolution almost half or more say democracy suffers from each of these problems. In sum, Tunisians have become more supportive of democracy even though they recognize it is a far from perfect political system.*

*Although Tunisians remain supportive of democratic governance five years after the revolution, they do so within a very challenging political environment. Fewer than one-in-five rates the state of the economy as good and nine-in-ten say corruption is rife. Additionally, nearly all Tunisians fear that they cannot provide their child with a good education, that the country will suffer more terrorist attacks, and that someone in their family is likely to face harassment or threats to their personal safety when going about their daily life.*

*Given the lack of progress on ameliorating such issues over the last five years, Tunisians are increasingly losing confidence in public institutions. Roughly a third say they trust the government and the courts, while just one-in-five has confidence in parliament. These levels are significantly lower than in previous Arab Barometer surveys in 2011 and 2013. Meanwhile, about a third or fewer Tunisians rate the government as doing a good job tackling some of the key problems facing the country including managing the economy, creating jobs, or reducing inequality.*

*Political parties, which are an important link between citizens and their government, fare no better. Just 12 percent of Tunisians say that they trust political parties to a great or medium extent. Moreover, about two-thirds say that they do not closely identify with any existing party. The two largest parties, Nidaa Tounes (13 percent) and Ennahda (11 percent), have similar levels of support. Under these circumstances, neither party has a dominant position and will likely need to form a coalition with other parties to ensure political progress, limiting the possibility of a return to one-party rule. However, to build a stable party system, these and other parties must focus on building a broader base of support within society.*

*The problems facing Tunisia are particularly acute for younger Tunisians, who are more likely to be dissatisfied with the political situation. For example, those who are 18-34 are 17 points less likely to trust the government than those who are 35 and older. Younger Tunisians are also less likely to say the government is effectively tackling corruption (-8) and that economic conditions are good (-7 points), while they are more likely to link democratic governance with economic problems (+8). These differences reflect the challenges the younger generation has experienced early in their adult lives, including the far higher rate of youth unemployment in Tunisia. Perhaps as a result, more than half of Tunisians ages 18-24 want to emigrate from their country.*

*A key question is why has support for democracy endured, including among the younger generation, despite the rocky transition? Two explanations seem likely. First, most Tunisians believe that their country is far from being fully democratic. When asked to place the level of democracy in Tunisia on a scale of zero to 10, with zero being a complete autocracy and 10 a complete democracy, the average score was 5.0. This rating represents a marginal increase since 2013 (4.3), but underscores that Tunisians believe that their country has a long way to go to becoming fully democratic.*

*A second factor is likely the regional environment. As difficult as the situation is in Tunisia, events in other countries suggest no better way forward. Libya and Yemen, which experienced regime changes in 2011, have been plagued by civil war. Meanwhile, Egypt's coup in 2013 and subsequent authoritarian retrenchment reveals the great costs of a failed transition process. Thus, despite recognition of the problems associated with democracy, Tunisians appear to recognize that there remains no preferable form of government.*

*Importantly, many Tunisians have not given up hope of a better future. About half expect that economic circumstances will improve in the next 3-5 years. This optimism may be tied, in part, to the growing desire for better economic relations with foreign countries. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of Tunisians want economic relations with the U.S. to become stronger than in past, compared with three-quarters (77 percent) who say the same about the E.U.*

*Along with a desire for stronger economic relations, views of the West have also improved in recent years. In 2016, more than half of Tunisians (54 percent) said the U.S. role in its transition has been positive or neutral, compared with 37 percent in 2013. The E.U.'s role is viewed even more positively, with two-thirds saying it has been positive or neutral in 2016 compared with 41 percent in 2013. These changing views afford the U.S. and E.U. a renewed opportunity to assist the ongoing transition in Tunisia.*

## Background

*In five years since the Tunisian revolution, the country and the region have witnessed significant changes. The transition from strongman rule to a more inclusive form of government has been far from smooth. Weak economic growth and high levels of unemployment continue to plague the country. Economic challenges are particularly acute for youth, with recent estimates showing that one-third of youths in rural areas and one-fifth in urban areas are unemployed.<sup>2</sup>*

*To date, the challenges of political transition have produced weak governments that have been unable to address these pressing challenges. The weak Troika coalition government, led by Ennahda, eventually gave way to a technocratic caretaker government led by Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa. New parliamentary elections in 2014 were won by Nidaa Tounes, a new party formed largely to oppose the religiously-based Ennahda party. Subsequently, Beji Caid Essebsi, the founder of Nidaa Tounes won the presidential election in December 2014, securing Nidaa Tounes as the leading party. However, in less than a year the party splintered over the issue of party leadership, leading to the mass resignation of 32 party members from parliament and making Ennahda the largest party.<sup>3</sup>*

*Terrorist attacks by the Islamic State have also been all too common occurrences in Tunisia. Attacks on the Bardo Museum in March 2015 killed 22 people, most of whom were tourists. A second IS attack in June of the same year at the beach resort of Sousse took the lives of 38 people, again mainly foreigners. A third attack on a bus carrying members of the Presidential Security guard killed 12 Tunisians in November 2015. Soon after the survey was conducted, another attack by IS targeted Ben Gardane, a border town with Libya and resulted in the deaths of nearly 20 Tunisians.*

*Despite these ongoing challenges, Tunisia continues to be considered the last possible hope for a successful transition to democracy among countries that experienced regime changes after the Arab uprisings. Building an inclusive government that can address the myriad of political challenges facing the country is essential to the country's long-term prospects, and the best hope of providing a model for other countries in the region.*

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<sup>2</sup> See World Bank. 2014. Tunisia - Breaking the barriers to youth inclusion. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/11/20419856/tunisia-breaking-barriers-youth-inclusion>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-politics-idUSKCN0SYI8T20151109>

## Current Conditions in Tunisia

Five years after the Revolution, ordinary Tunisians continue to have a gloomy view of economic conditions.

In 2016, just 15 percent rate the country's economy as being good or very good. By comparison, shortly after the uprising, which is generally linked to economic conditions, roughly a quarter (27 percent) said the economy was good or very good. However, since 2013 (12 percent), perceptions of conditions remain largely unchanged.

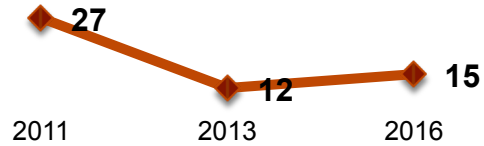
Despite the hardships over the past five years, Tunisians remain relatively optimistic about their future. In 2016, half (49 percent) expect the economy to improve in the next three to five years, which is a slight decline from 2013 (55 percent). The initial wave of optimism from the months after the revolution have clearly passed, however, when fully 78 percent of the Tunisians believed the economy would improve in the coming years.

Economic optimism is not uniform throughout society, however. For example, younger Tunisians, meaning those between the ages of 18 and 34, are 16 points less likely to believe the economic future will improve compared with those who are 35 and older. Similarly, women are more optimistic, on average, than are men by 8 points. Most likely, this is a reflection of current prospects for employment among youth and men. Unemployment and underemployment is significantly higher for Tunisia's youth than the older population and labor force participation rates are higher for men, suggesting that those who face grim job prospects may be most pessimistic about the future. Meanwhile, no significant differences are found among those who are more and less educated or those living in urban or rural areas.

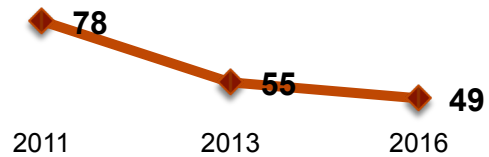
Despite recent terrorist attacks by the Islamic State, most Tunisians (71 percent) feel the security of their family is secured. This level is 19 points higher than in 2013 (52 percent), a relatively similar to the percentage shortly after

### Views of the Economy

% who say the economic situation is good or very good



% who say the economy will improve in 3-5 years



Source: Arab Barometer q101 and q102.

### Economic Optimism in Tunisia

% who say the economy will improve in 3-5 years by...

Age	18-34	35+	Difference
	38	54	-16
Gender	Men	Women	Difference
	45	53	-8
Education	Secondary and above	Less than secondary	Difference
	46	51	-5
Urbanity	Urban	Rural	Difference
	50	48	+2

Arab Barometer q201.

### Increased Sense of Security

% who say their security is ensured or fully ensured



Source: Arab Barometer q105.

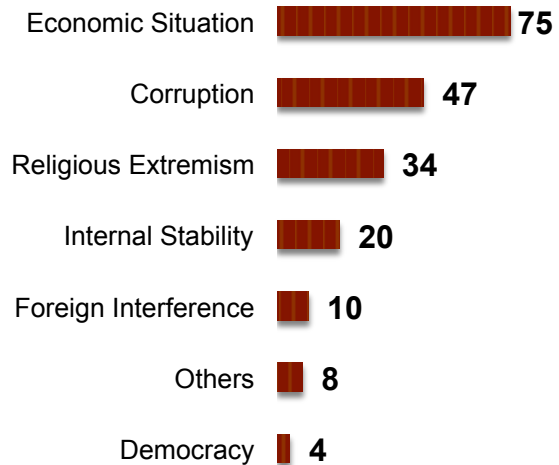
*the revolution (66 percent). Notably, Chokri Belaid, a leading politician, was assassinated in the first days of fieldwork of the 2013 survey, which was one of the first high profile attacks following the revolution. The shock of this event may account for the lesser sense of security. Nevertheless, despite continued attacks, most ordinary Tunisians do not feel that their personal security is directly threatened. Perhaps, this is a product of the fact that many attacks by the Islamic State have targeted tourist facilities frequented by Westerners instead of Tunisian citizens.*

*When asked about the biggest problems facing their country, in 2016 three-quarters of Tunisians list economic issues as one of the two most important. The next most common response is corruption (47 percent), followed by religious extremism (34 percent) and maintaining internal stability and security (20 percent). Less frequent responses were limiting foreign interference (10 percent) and achieving democracy (4 percent), while eight percent identified other concerns.*

*When asked about specific concerns in going about daily life, Tunisians paint a rather bleak picture. For example, nine-in-ten (91 percent) say they are very worried about the ability for children to receive a quality education, 97 percent are very worried about the possibility of a terrorist attack in Tunisia, and 91 percent say they are very fearful that someone in their family will be harassed on the street.*

### Biggest Challenges in Tunisia

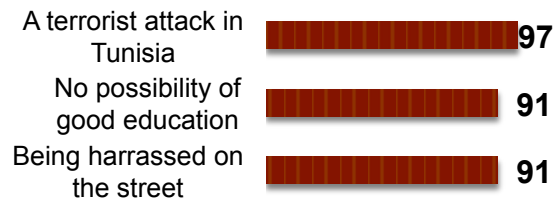
*% who say ... is one of the two biggest problems facing their country*



Source: Arab Barometer q206.

### Concerns in Going about Daily Life

*% who say they are very worried about the possibility of...*

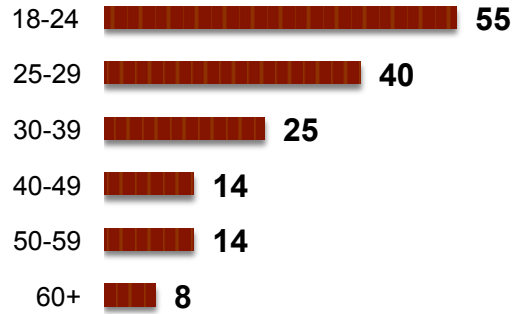


Source: Arab Barometer q107.

*Facing such conditions, about one-in-five Tunisians (22 percent) want to emigrate. However, younger Tunisians are far more likely than older generations to seek to move abroad. More than half of Tunisians aged 18-24 (55 percent) want to emigrate, as do 40 percent of those 25-29. A quarter of those 30-39 look to leave their country while 14 percent or fewer of those 40 and older seek to leave their country.*

### **Desire to Emigrate**

*% who say they are thinking about leaving Tunisia*



Source: Arab Barometer q104.

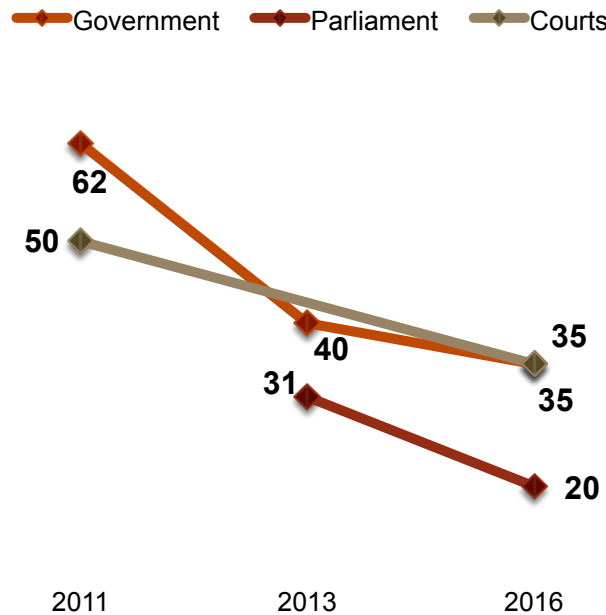


## Ratings of Government

Confidence in government and its institutions is low in Tunisia. In 2016, 35 percent of citizens trust the government to a great or medium extent, compared with 40 percent in 2013 and 62 percent in 2011. Levels of confidence in the courts reveals a similar decline since the revolution, with one third of Tunisians (35 percent) saying they trust this institution to a great or medium extent, compared with half in 2011 (50 percent). Confidence in parliament is even lower, with just one-in-five Tunisians saying they trust parliament in 2016, which is an 11-point decline since 2013. Finally, trust in political parties is the lowest, with only 12 percent of Tunisians saying they trust them to a great or medium extent.

### Low Confidence in Institutions

% who say they have some or a lot of trust in government



Source: Arab Barometer q201.

Note: Tunisia did not have a parliament at the time of the survey in 2011 and the question about trust in the courts was not asked in 2013.

Levels of trust in government vary by a number of demographic factors. In 2016, younger Tunisians (ages 18-34) were 17 points less likely than those who are older to say they trust the government. Similarly, those with at least a secondary degree were also less likely to trust the government by 7 points. Meanwhile, those in urban areas have slightly less trust in the government, while there are no differences in levels between men and women.

### Trust in Government

% who say some or a lot of trust

Age	18-34	35+	Difference
	23	40	-17
Education	Secondary and above	Less than secondary	Difference
	29	36	-7
Urbanity	Urban	Rural	Difference
	33	39	-6
Gender	Men	Women	Difference
	34	36	-2

Arab Barometer q201.

*This decline in trust in government appears related to the perceived failure of the government to address key challenges facing ordinary citizens. About one third of citizens say that the government is doing a good job managing the economy, which is 17 points fewer than in 2011.*

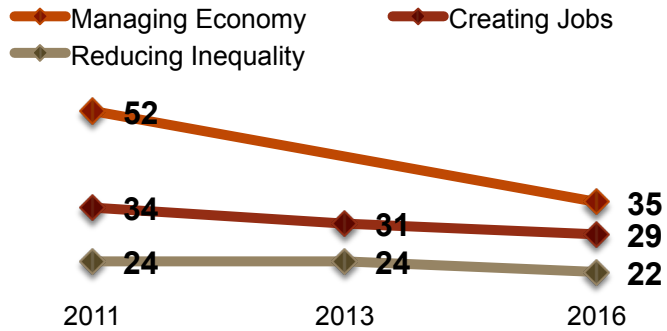
*Additionally, a minority says the government has been effective at creating jobs, with 29 percent holding this view, which is relatively similar to the levels observed in 2013 and 2011.*

*Meanwhile, fewer than a quarter say the government has been effective at reducing levels of inequality, which is also unchanged from previous years.*

*When asked specifically about corruption, Tunisians say it remains a widespread problem in their country. Nine-in-ten say that corruption is present in government institutions to a great or medium extent. Over the same period, the belief that the government is seeking to address this problem has declined precipitously. In 2016, among those who say there is corruption in government, 42 percent say the government is working to root out corruption to a great or medium extent, compared with 54 percent in 2013 and 65 percent in 2011.*

### Ratings of Government Policies

% say government is doing a good or very good job on



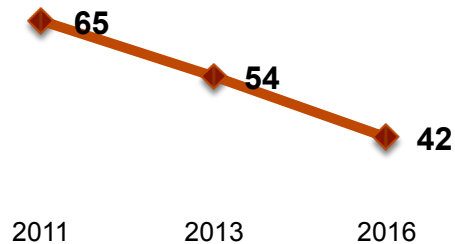
Source: Arab Barometer q204.

### Corruption Continues Unabated

% who say corruption pervades government to a great or medium extent



% who say government is cracking down on corruption to a great or medium extent



Source: Arab Barometer q210 and q211.

Note: The question on the level corruption was changed in the fourth wave, meaning previous waves cannot be directly compared.

*Among those who believe there is corruption in government, not all Tunisians are equally likely to say the government is cracking down on this problem. Notably, those with at least a secondary education are 22 points less likely to say the government is addressing corruption than those with lower levels of education. Similarly, those in urban areas are 7 points less likely to hold this view, as are men (-8) and younger Tunisians (-6).*

### **Tackling Corruption**

*% who say government is cracking down on corruption to a great or medium extent*

<b>Education</b>	<b>Secondary and above</b>	<b>Less than secondary</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	23	45	-22
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	30	38	-8
<b>Urbanity</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	32	39	-7
<b>Age</b>	<b>18-34</b>	<b>35+</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	30	36	-6

Arab Barometer q211.

## Ratings of Democracy

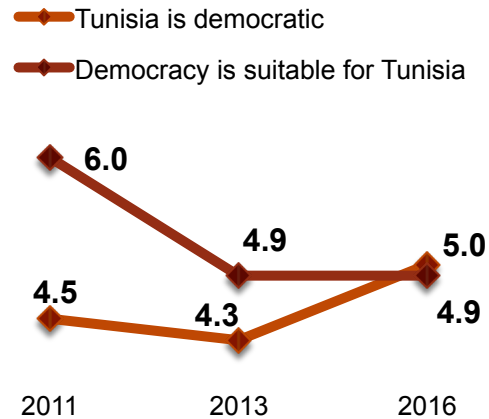
Tunisians say that their country falls at an intermediate level between being fully democratic and fully authoritarian. In 2016, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being a complete autocracy and 10 being a complete democracy, the average response is 5.0. This represents a slight increase from previous years. Shortly after the revolution in 2011, the average was 4.5 while in 2013 it declined slightly to 4.3.

Meanwhile, Tunisians are growing concerned that democracy is appropriate for their country. On a similar scale, with 0 meaning democracy is not suitable and 10 that democracy is completely suitable, the average response is 4.9. This response is significantly lower than in 2011, when the mean response was 6.0.

Part of this decline may be related to a growing concern that their fellow citizens are unprepared for democracy. In 2016, nearly three-quarters (73 percent) agree or worry that others in their country are not ready for this system. In the five years since the revolution, this percentage has steadily increased by 32 points.

### Democracy in Tunisia

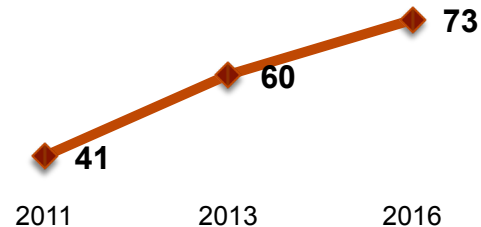
On a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high), mean average % of those who say ...



Source: Arab Barometer q511 and q512.

### Citizens and Democracy

% who say that their fellow citizens are not ready for democracy



Source: Arab Barometer q5165.

## Democracy is the Worst System...

The Arab Barometer includes a number of questions on attitudes toward democracy, including the degree to which citizens favor it and potential problems they associate with it. At the time of the revolution, Tunisians were optimistic about the benefits democracy would bring to their country. Coming out of a long period of strongman rule under President Ben Ali, few believed that a more inclusive system of governance would not yield tangible results. Five years later, however, opinions have changed dramatically.

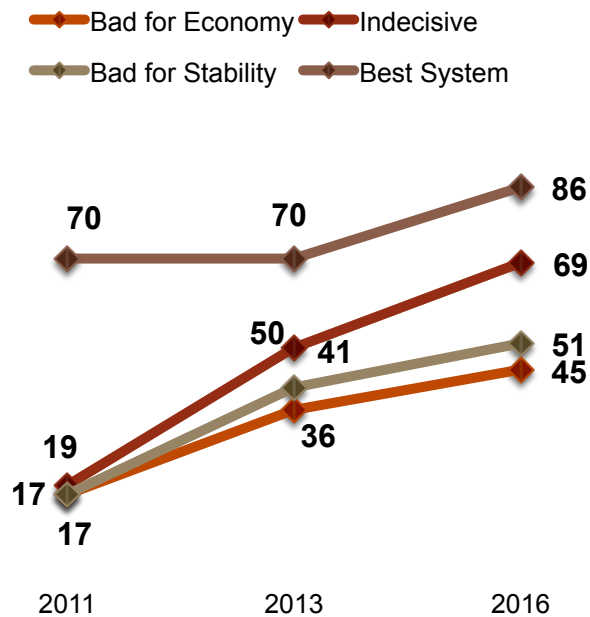
One claim that opponents of democracy often make is that it is not good for the economy. Since 2011, more and more Tunisians have tended to agree. In 2016, nearly half (45 percent) of Tunisians say that economic performance is weak under democratic rule, which is more than two-and-a-half times the percentage who agreed in 2011. This is also a nine-point increase since 2013, when 36 percent agreed democracy leads to poor economic outcomes.

Similarly, concern has grown about the ability of democracies to maintain order. In 2016, half (51 percent) of Tunisians agree that democracies are not effective at ensuring security and stability. Shortly after the revolution, just 17 percent held this view. Since 2013 (41 percent), concern about this problem has increased by 10 points.

Worries about the fact that democracies are indecisive are even higher. In 2016, seven-in-ten Tunisians (69%) agree or strongly agree that this is a weakness of democratic governance. In 2013, only half held this view compared with just 19 percent in the months after the revolution. The failure of political leaders and their parties to make substantial progress on addressing the major challenges facing Tunisia in the wake of the revolution has likely contributed to this changing perspective.

### Views of Democracy

% who say democracy is...



Source: Arab Barometer q516.

*Broadly speaking, there are few differences in attitudes about democracy by demographic group. The one partial exception is that younger Tunisians are somewhat more likely to attribute problems to democratic governance. Those 18-34 are 11 points more likely to say democracy is bad for stability and 8 points more likely to say it is bad for the economy compared with those who are 35 and older. However, youth are about as likely to say that democracy is indecisive and they are not significantly less likely to support democracy than their older counterparts. Likely, these changing views come from the fact that more of their formative years were spent under democracy.*

### **Youth Concerns about Democracy**

*% who say democracy is...*

<b>Age</b>	<b>18-34</b>	<b>35+</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Bad for Stability	59	48	+11
Bad for the Economy	51	43	+8
Indecisive	72	68	+4
Best System	83	87	-4

Arab Barometer q516.

*Yet, despite growing concerns about the problems associated with democracy, Tunisians have not lost confidence in this system overall. Rather, Tunisians are now more likely to agree that, despite its problems, democracy is better than all other political systems. Fully 86 percent agree or strongly agree with this statement, compared with 70 percent in both 2011 and 2013. This increase, combined with the growing concerns over the efficacy of democracy, suggests that Tunisians have come to believe that democracy is a far from perfect system, but that it remains the best option of all the alternatives. In fact, as difficult as the situation in Tunisia is, no preferable model exists for countries that experienced upheavals in 2011. Yemen and Libya remain at civil war while Egypt has returned to its former ways under President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Most likely, despite the hardships, none of these paths look more appealing than a renewed commitment to making democracy work.*

## International Relations

At the time of the revolution, Tunisians were divided on their views toward foreign countries. Five years after the revolution, however, it is clear that citizens desire stronger relations with the West, including the United States.

In 2016, nearly two-thirds of Tunisians (64 percent) say they want economic relations with the United States to become stronger than in previous years, compared with 14 percent who want them to remain unchanged, and 15 percent who want them to be weakened. Overall, Tunisians are becoming more supportive of stronger relations with the US compared with previous years. At the time of the revolution, just under half of citizens said they wanted stronger relations with the US (47 percent) which was largely unchanged in 2013 (51 percent).

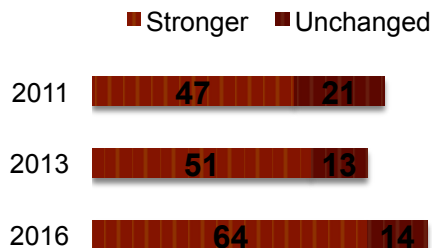
Tunisians are similarly supportive of stronger economic ties with the European Union. Although this question was not included in previous waves, in 2016 three-quarters of citizens favored stronger economic ties with the EU. Meanwhile, 12 percent want ties to remain unchanged and just 6 percent say they should be weakened.

Tunisians also favor stronger economic relations with Saudi Arabia. In 2016, 58 percent held this view, while 19 percent hoped relations would remain as they were and 16 percent wanted them to become weaker. Desire for stronger relations with Saudi Arabia has increased markedly in recent years, with just 39 percent wanting closer relations in 2011 and 44 percent in 2013.

By comparison, few Tunisians want improved economic linkages with Iran. In 2016, one third favored this position, 17 percent wanted relations to remain the same and 37 percent wanted them weakened. The percentage who want stronger relations with Iran has remained more-or-less constant since the revolution, as roughly a third favored stronger relations in both 2011 (35 percent) and 2013 (32 percent).

### Relations with the West

% who want economic relations with the U.S. to be ...



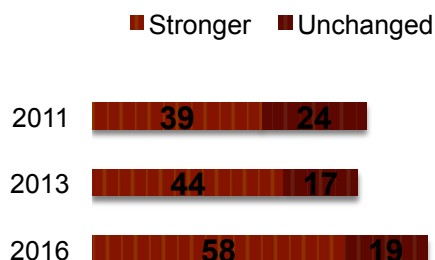
% who want economic relations with the E.U. to be ...



Source: Arab Barometer q700.

### Relations with Regional Powers

% who want economic relations with the Saudi Arabia to be ...



% who want economic relations with Iran to be ...



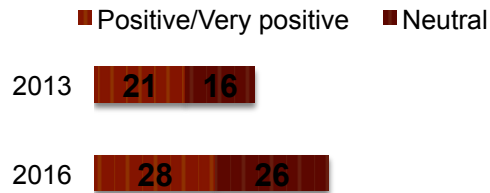
Source: Arab Barometer q701.

Views of the US role in Tunisia's democratic transition are also improving. In 2016, the majority (54 percent) of Tunisians say that the US has played either a positive (28 percent) or neutral (26 percent) role in development of democracy in their country. By comparison, just over a third (37 percent) said the same in 2013 (21 percent positive and 16 percent neutral). In 2016, appraisals of the EU's role in democratization are somewhat higher, with two-thirds of Tunisians saying it has played a positive (43 percent) or neutral (24 percent) role in the country's transition. Perceptions of the positive role the EU has played have increased dramatically since 2013, with Tunisians now 17 points more likely to say its role has been positive.

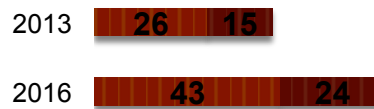
Despite a desire for closer economic relations with the US and a largely positive view of the role it is playing in the country's transition to democracy, Tunisians are divided on what is the most helpful step the US could take for the region as a whole. Overall, 19 percent say resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would be the most useful role for the US, while 19 percent say promoting economic development in Tunisia. Much smaller percentages say promoting democracy in Tunisia (4 percent) or promoting women's rights (3 percent). Half say that the US should not get involved in the region.

### West's Role in Transition

% who say U.S.'s role in promoting democracy has been...



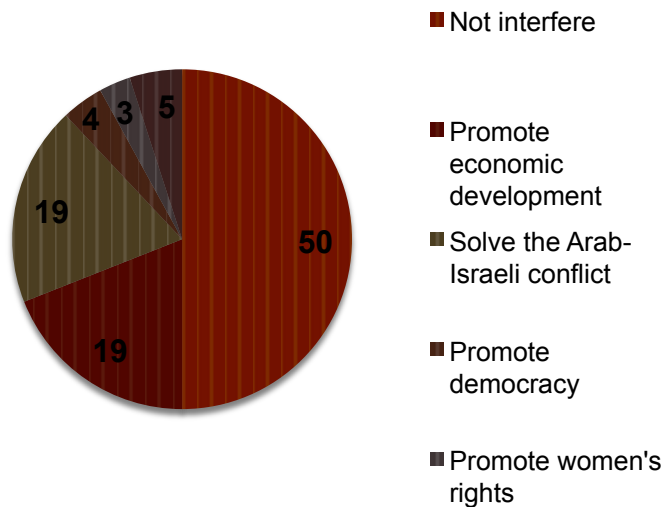
% who say E.U.'s role in promoting democracy has been...



Source: Arab Barometer q701.

### Preferred role for the U.S. in the Region

% who say the U.S. should...



Source: Arab Barometer q713.



## About the Survey

*The Arab Barometer is a public opinion survey conducted in partnership between academics and survey experts in the Arab world, the United States and Europe. The survey in Tunisia, conducted from February 13-March 3, 2016, was led by One to One for Research and Polling. The survey included 1,200 respondents randomly selected from all 24 of Tunisia's governorates. The survey was conducted face-to-face in the respondent's place of residence and has a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent.*

*To date, the Arab Barometer has conducted 29 national surveys over three waves including more than 35,000 interviews in 14 Arab countries. The ongoing fourth wave will include 10 countries, including one not previously surveyed, and more than 11,000 interviews. For more information about the project, please visit [www.arabbarometer.org](http://www.arabbarometer.org).*