



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

## Civic Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa

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## Key Findings

- Overall, approximately six-in-ten across the MENA region believe that freedom of expression, freedom of association in parties and organizations as well as the freedom of the press is guaranteed in their countries. However, only every other person thinks they also have a guaranteed right to protest.
- One third of Arabs also believes they have the ability to criticize their government without fear.
- However, turnout is in decline – only every other person reports they have turned out in the last legislative election in their country. Only 15 percent across MENA report they attended a rally in the run-up to the last election.
- Formal non-electoral participation also appears to be at a low point with only one-in-ten stating they have taken part in protest action or attended a meeting and signed a petition at last once during the three years.
- Disenchantment with politics may have a new outlet, however: Approximately four-in-ten Internet users across MENA say they use online channels and social media to obtain information about political events. Two-in-ten Internet users also state that they use the online channels to express their opinions about politics and society.
- While seemingly disillusioned with politics, Arab publics have a heart for those not so well off: Almost 95 percent across the region say they help the poor even if it comes at a cost to themselves.

## Introduction

Seven years have passed since the Arab uprisings, which marked a major push in civic engagement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The Arab Barometer allows tracking various attitudes towards citizens' perceived freedoms, electoral and non-electoral ways to participate in politics and society as well as reports about charity in the surveyed countries. This report provides an inventory of the developments since the Arab spring across these areas providing trends as well as snapshots of the latest survey results in these areas.

The report shows that Arab publics were seemingly disillusioned with the outcomes of the Arab Spring demonstrated by a drop in the region's perception of political freedoms and different kinds of formal participation. However, in a snapshot of the 2016 survey, the Arab Barometer observes that non-formal ways of participation in online forums, such as Facebook or Twitter, remain popular. Finally, the region appears to value charity and its people willing to help those in need even if major costs are involved. However, the Arab Barometer also observes cross-country variations, which require further study in the future.

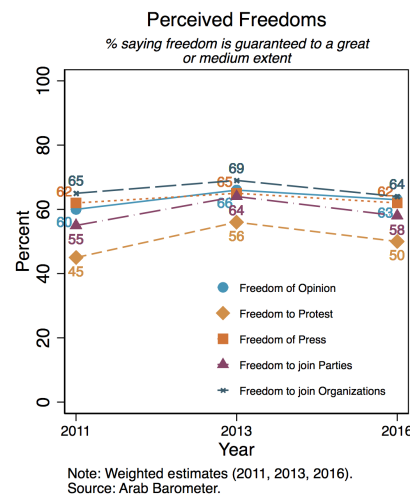


Figure 1: Trends in Perceived Freedoms

## Perceived Freedoms

The Arab people's perception of freedom in their countries seems to be rather stable over the past years. The Arab Barometer has repeatedly asked respondents to evaluate the extent to which freedom of expression; freedom to protest; freedom of the press; freedom to join political parties; and freedom to join other civil organizations is guaranteed in their countries. Figure 1 suggests a slight upward trend in all areas after the Arab uprisings, but the proportion of people perceiving to have these freedoms seems to have dropped since.

Arab Barometer - Wave IV  
Topic Report

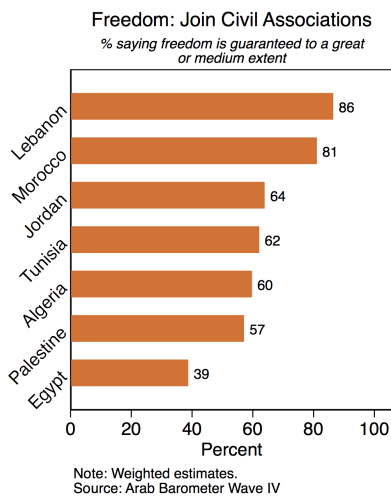
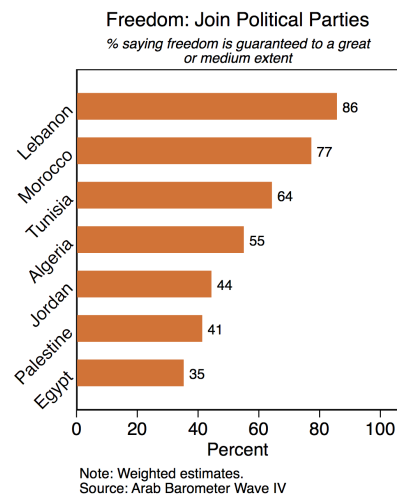
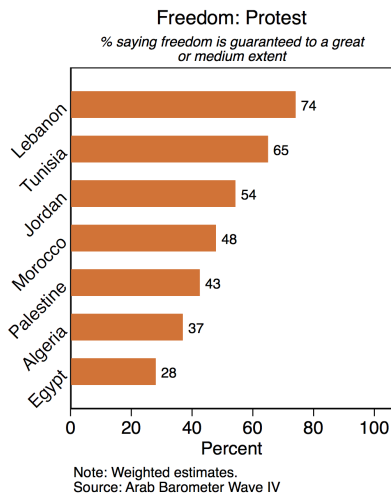
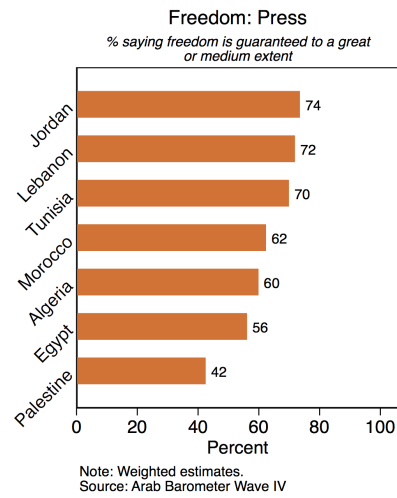
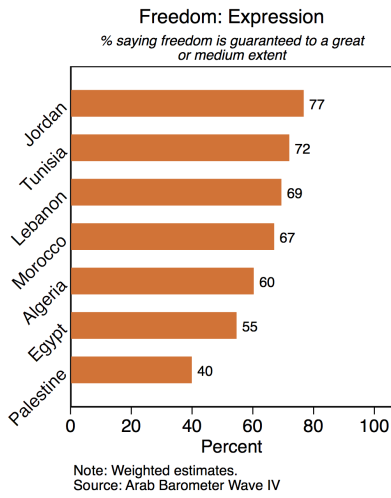


Figure 2: Perceived Freedoms by Country

In 2016, almost two thirds reported that the freedom to express themselves (63 percent), freedom of the press (62 percent), and freedom to join civil organizations (64 percent) are guaranteed to large or medium extent. The proportion of people stating that they are also free to join political parties (58 percent) is a bit lower. Only every other person reported that they are free to join protest action (50 percent) in 2016. There appears to be substantive cross-country variation, however.

The perception that freedom of expression is guaranteed is most prominent in Jordan (77 percent), followed by Tunisia (72 percent), Lebanon (69 percent), and Morocco (67 percent). It is noteworthy that Algeria (60 percent), Egypt (55 percent), and Palestine (40 percent) are the three countries in the proportion of people stating that their freedom of expression is guaranteed is lowest.

A similar picture is painted when looking at the freedom of the press. Once again it is the Jordanians (74 percent), Lebanese (72 percent), and Tunisians (70 percent) reporting that the press are free in their countries. In addition, a majority of people in Morocco (62 percent), Algeria (60 percent) and Egypt (56 percent) think the press are free. Most skeptical are the Palestinians; only 42 percent perceive that the freedom of press is guaranteed to a large or medium extent.

Looking at the freedom to protest, it appears that the Lebanese are the most optimistic that they have this right. Almost three quarters (74 percent) state that this freedom is guaranteed to a large or medium extent. About two thirds of the Tunisians (65 percent) and roughly every other person in Jordan (54 percent) and Morocco (48 percent) view their right to protest as guaranteed to large or medium extent. More skeptical are the Palestinians (43 percent) and Algerians (37 percent). The proportion of people perceiving a guaranteed right to protest is lowest in Egypt. Only 28 percent state that they the freedom to protest is guaranteed to a large or medium extent.

In addition, the majority of people in the Lebanon (86 percent) report that the freedom to join political parties is guaranteed in their country, followed by the Moroccans (77 percent), Tunisians (64 percent), and Algerians (56 percent). However, people believing that the this right is guaranteed in Jordan (44 percent), Palestine (41 percent) and Egypt (36 percent) are in the minority.

A similar observation can be made about the freedom to join other civil associations. Once again, 86 percent of the Lebanese report that they this right is guaranteed in Lebanon, followed by 81 percent of Moroccans. The majority of people in Jordan (64 percent), Tunisia (62 percent), Algeria (60 percent), and Palestine (57 percent) also feel that they have a guaranteed right to join civil associations. Most skeptical are once again the Egyptians. Only four-in-ten believe they have a guaranteed freedom to join associations in their country.

## Ability to Criticize Government

Do the Arab people feel that they have the liberty to criticize their governments in particular? Overall, it seems that roughly two thirds feel that this is case across the years surveyed. Public opinion dropped to 56 percent in 2011, the year of the uprisings, but seem to have recovered since. The Arab Barometer observes little variation across the region.

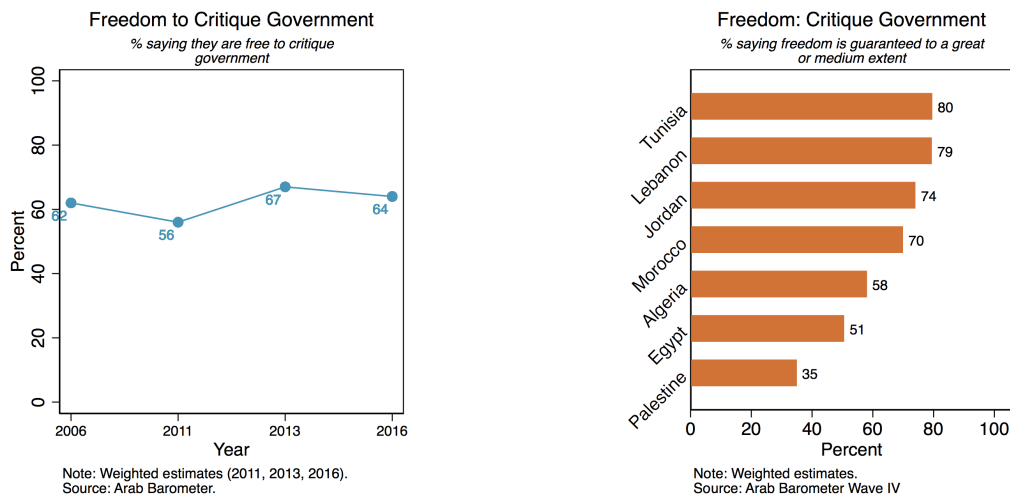


Figure 3: Perceived Ability to Criticize Government

However, it appears that there is a lot of cross-country variation regarding the perceived liberty to critique government. Tunisia stands out as the country with the most positive perceptions: Eight-in-ten respondents report that they are free to criticize the government in 2016, followed by Lebanon (79 percent), Jordan (74 percent), and Morocco (70 percent). Algerians and Egyptians seem to be more skeptical. Only six-in-ten in Algeria and every other person in Egypt report they are free to criticize their governments. By contrast, Palestinians seem to most disillusioned when it comes to the liberty to criticize their government: Only one third state that they perceive to be granted this freedom in 2016.

## Electoral Participation

One direct way of measuring political participation is electoral participation, i.e., voting in formal elections for a representative body. While every other respondent (53 percent) reported to have voted in 2006, the Arab Barometer observes a slight downward trend in 2011 to 48 percent. The Arab uprisings seemed to have a positive impact on electoral participation: It peaked after at 56 percent in 2013 but it fell again since to 48 percent in 2016. However, decline in turnout

can be observed all over the globe and should not be interpreted as a particular trend in the region.

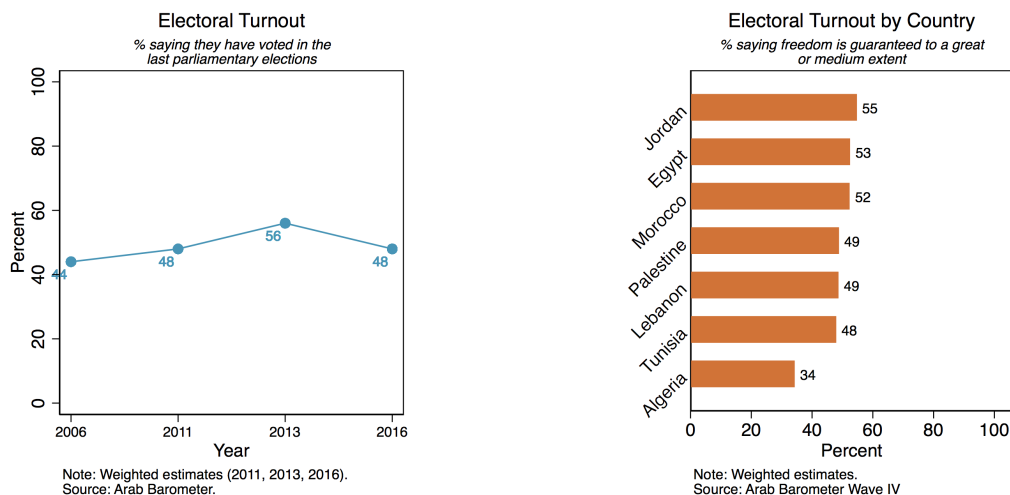


Figure 4: Reported Electoral Turnout

The Arab Barometer also observes very little variable across countries in its latest wave in 2016. Jordan appears to have the highest turnout rate with 55 percent, followed by Egypt (53 percent), and Morocco (52 percent). In Palestine, Lebanon (both 49 percent), and Tunisia (48 percent) turnout has dropped below the 50 percent mark. However, it is Algeria that stands out, with the lowest reported turnout rate. Only one third report that they have voted in last parliamentary election.

## Political Participation Beyond Voting

Even though the people in the MENA region perceive to have the freedom to participate, participation beyond voting seems to be rather low. In 2016, a minority of people across the region report to be a member of political party (4.9 percent). Reported party membership appears to be highest in Palestine and Lebanon with 13 and 12 percent, respectively, reporting they are a member of party. However, party membership falls below 5 percent in Morocco (3 percent), Algeria (2 percent), Tunisia (2 percent), Egypt (1 percent) and Jordan (<1 percent).

Reported membership in civil organization, such as unions, religious organizations, sports and cultural organizations, seems to be a little bit more prominent than membership in political parties. About one-in-ten people (11.2 percent) report to be a member of a formal group. Membership in civil associations is most prominent in Morocco with 22 percent reporting to be part of a formal

groups, followed by Palestine (18 percent) and Lebanon (10 percent). In Algeria (9 percent), Tunisia (8 percent), Egypt and Jordan (each 6 percent) reported membership in civil associations falls below the 10 percent mark. In addition to relatively low reported membership rates, non-electoral participation in other more formal ways appears to be relatively low.

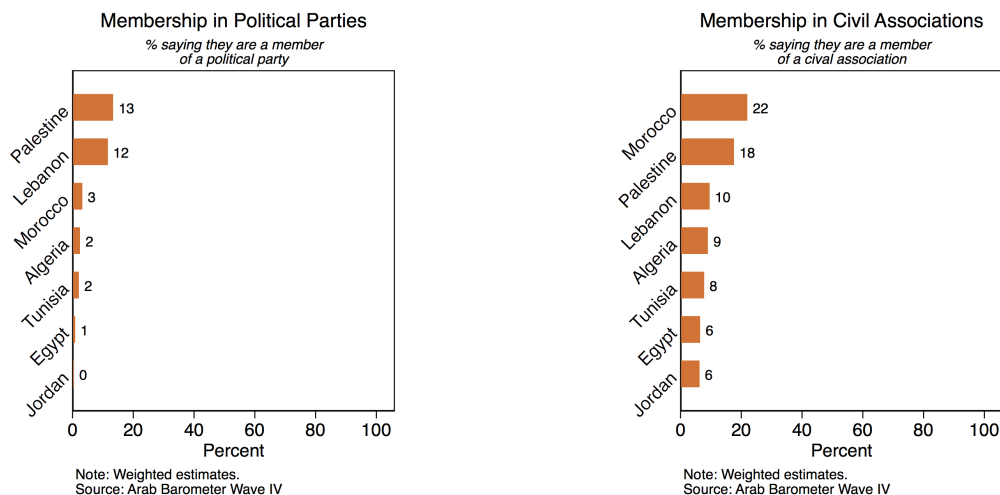


Figure 5: Membership in Formal Groups

The Arab Barometer records a drop in reported participation in rallies since 2006. While one fifth (20 percent) across the region stated they attended a rally in 2006, the number dropped to 17 percent in 2011, briefly recovering after the Arab Spring to 21 percent, but dropping again to only 15 percent in 2016. Participation in petitions seems to be relatively stable ranging from 19 percent in 2006, to 17 percent in 2011, then recovering to 20 percent after the Arab uprisings. However, in 2016, the Arab Barometer observes a drop in reported participation in petitions to only 12 percent suggesting that only one-in-ten across the region has signed petition.

A similar pattern can be observed for protest action: In 2006, 18 percent report to have participated in a protest, march or sit-in. This number drop to 15 percent in 2011, with a slight increase to 19 percent in 2013, but then drops to only 13 percent in 2016.

However, there is substantive cross-country variation in non-electoral, formal participation. Looking at participation in rallies, Jordanians (23 percent) and Palestinians (22 percent) are most eager to attend rallies, followed by the Lebanese (14 percent), Moroccans (13 percent), Algerians (12 percent), and Tunisians (11 percent). The least active participants in rallies are the Egyptians with only 7 percent reporting they attended a rally.

The Palestinians also seem to be most active regarding signing petitions. About one quarter (24 percent) state that they have done this at least once in



the past, followed by 17 percent of the Lebanese and 15 percent of the Moroccans and Algerians, respectively. Compared with only one-in-ten Tunisian (11 percent), 5 percent of Jordanians and 3 percent of Egyptians reporting to have participated by signing a petition in 2016.

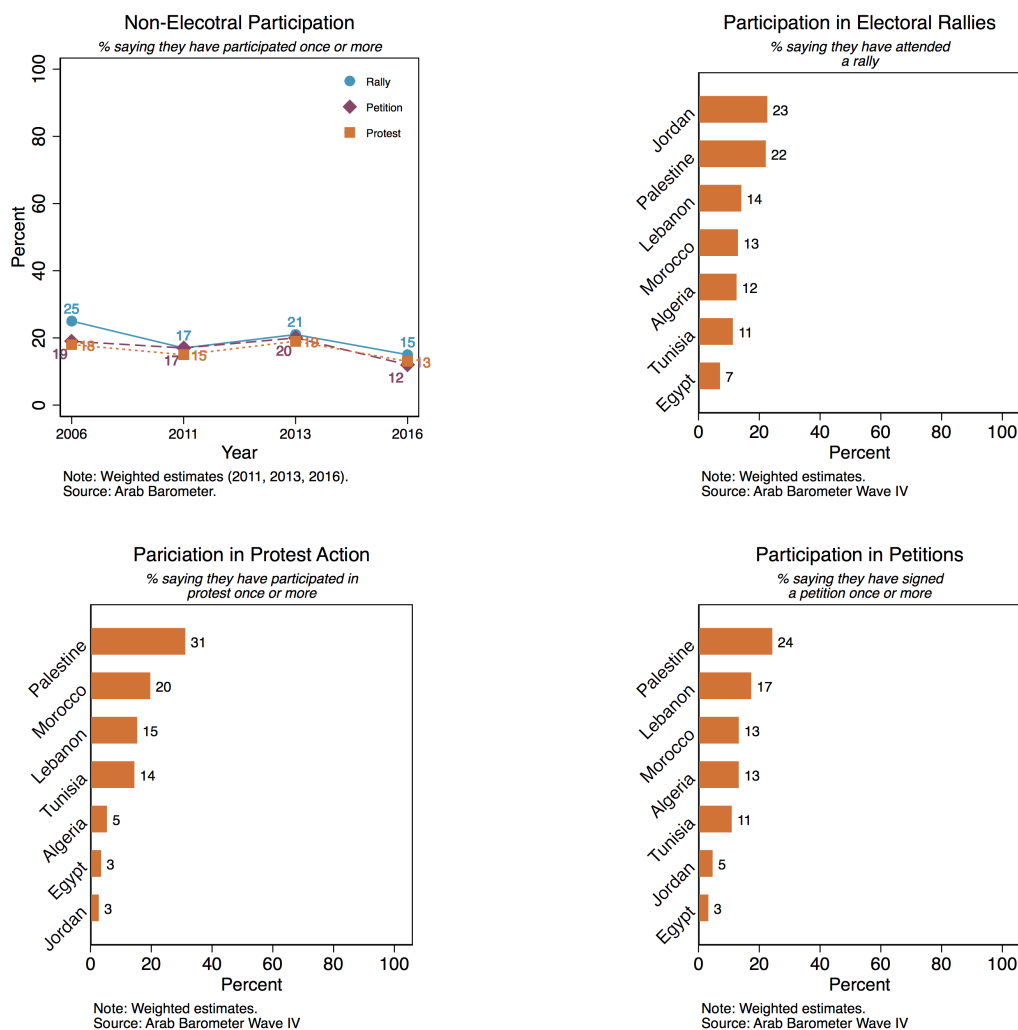


Figure 6: Reported Non-electoral Participation

Looking at protest action, it is once again the Palestinians who stand out to be especially active. Almost one quarter (24 percent) report to have participated in protest action, marches, or sit-ins at least once. This may not be surprising given the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel. In addition, two-in-ten Moroccans (20 percent), 15 percent of Lebanese and 14 percent of Tunisians state that they have participated in protest action at least once, compared with only 5 percent of Algerians and 3 percent of Egyptians and Jordanians, respectively. Seven years after the Arab uprisings, formal non-electoral engagement seems to have reached a low point.

## Online Participation

### Political Information and Opinion Expression

Today, the definition of wider participation also includes online activity. In 2016, approximately six-in-ten people in the MENA region (59 percent) report to use the Internet. Internet usage is highest in Lebanon (81 percent), Palestine (72 percent), Jordan (64 percent), and Algeria (62 percent). Almost every other person in Morocco (49 percent) and Tunisia (48 percent) state that they use the Internet. Usage is lowest in Egypt where only 36 percent indicate they use the Internet at least occasionally.

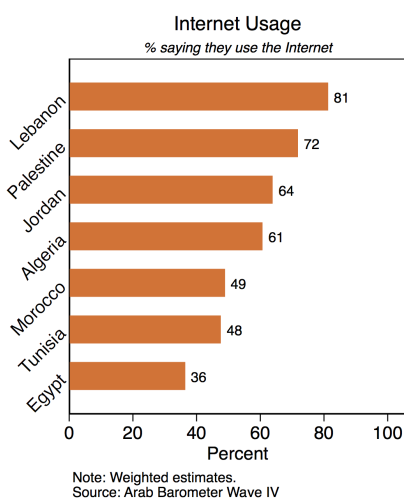
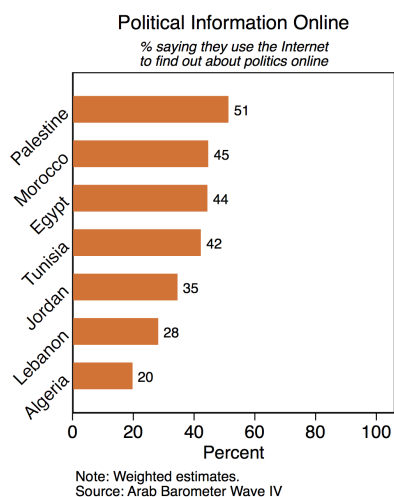


Figure 7: Reported Internet Usage

The Arab Barometer survey also asked whether respondents use the Internet to find out about political activities and also if they express their opinion about politics online. Only those who reported to use the Internet at least occasionally, i.e., less than once a week or more often were asked this question.

Approximately, four-in-ten Internet users (37.0 percent) report that they obtain information about political activities online. There is substantial variation across countries. Palestinians seem to be most active in obtaining information about political events online: Every other respondent in Palestine (51 percent) states that they use this mean to find out about activities followed by the Moroccans (45 percent), Egyptians (44 percent) and Tunisians (42 percent). The Jordanians and Lebanese seem to be less active. Only one third of Jordanians (35 percent) and 28 percent of Lebanese use the Internet to find out about political activities. The least active appear to be Algerians: Only two out ten search for political activities in Algeria online. Of course, we would expect the youth to be more active regarding online activity. The Arab Barometer suggests that indeed almost 80 percent of the 18 to 35 year olds uses the Internet to search

for political activities, compared to 40 percent of people aged 36 and above.

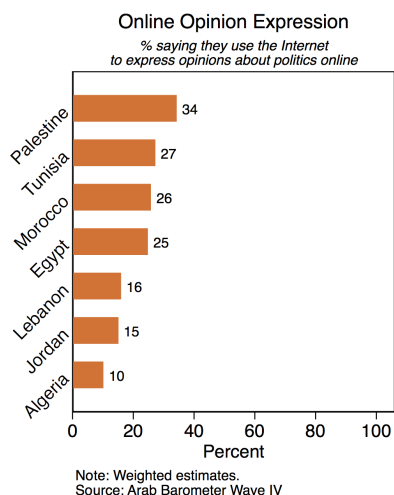


Country	18 - 35	36 +	Δ†
Algeria	15.9	29.7	+13.8
Egypt	41.3	53.1	+11.8
Jordan	30.3	39.7	+9.4
Lebanon	22.5	34.7	+12.2
Morocco	44.7	44.5	-0.2
Palestine	48.2	56.0	+7.8
Tunisia	37.3	51.6	+13.9

†Δ indicates age difference.

Figure 8: Online Participation by Country and Age

Looking at the age differences across countries, it appears that the older age cohort (36+) is more eager to engage politically online. The difference Δ between both age groups in using the Internet to obtain information about political events is smallest in Morocco (Δ = 0.2 percentage points), followed by Palestine (Δ = 7.8 percentage points), and Jordan (Δ = 9.4 percentage points). It is largest in Algeria (Δ = 13.8 percentage points), Lebanon (Δ = 12.2 percentage points), Egypt (Δ = 11.8 percentage points), and Tunisia (Δ = 11.1 percentage points).



Country	18 - 35	36 +	Δ†
Algeria	9.1	12.9	+3.8
Egypt	23.1	29.7	+6.6
Jordan	13.7	16.8	+3.1
Lebanon	13.4	18.9	+5.5
Morocco	25.4	27.0	+1.6
Palestine	29.8	41.0	+11.2
Tunisia	28.6	24.6	-4.0

†Δ indicates age difference.

Figure 9: Online Participation by Country and Age

Perhaps younger Arabs use the Internet for other things than obtaining news on political events. In addition, the empirical definition of the young Arabs, ranging from 18 to 35, is rather wide.

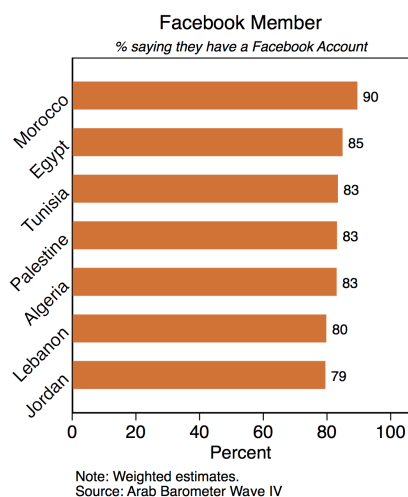
A similar picture is painted looking at expressing political opinions online. Only two-in-ten Internet users (21.4 percent) state that they also their express opinions about politics online. The most eager participants appear to be the Palestinians: More than one third (34 percent) state they use the Internet to voice their opinions about politics, followed by the Tunisians (27 percent), Moroccans (26 percent) and a quarter of Egyptians (25 percent). Less eager are the Lebanese and Jordanians with only 16 and 15 percent, respectively, stating they participate online by expression their opinions about politics. The least active are again the Algerians, only one-in-ten say they express their views on politics online.

Turning to the potential age differences, two-in-ten young Arab Internet user state they express opinions online, compared a quarter aged 36 and above. Looking at the cross-country differences, the patterns (surprisingly) follow a similar direction as for political information online. All countries display a larger proportion of Arabs aged 36 and above reporting that they use the Internet to voice opinions about politics. The exception is Tunisia, in which the reverse and more intuitive pattern can be observed. A larger proportion of young Arabs state that they use the Internet to express political opinions compared to those aged 36 and above. The age gap is largest in Palestine ( $\Delta = 11.2$  percentage points). Smaller age differences can be observed in Egypt ( $\Delta = 6.6$  percentage points), Lebanon ( $\Delta = 5.5$  percentage points), Algeria ( $\Delta = 3.8$  percentage points), Jordan ( $\Delta = 3.1$  percentage points), and Morocco ( $\Delta = 1.6$  percentage points). In Tunisia, the proportion of younger Arabs expressing opinions online exceed that of older Arab ( $\Delta = 4.0$  percentage points).

Once again, the reason for this unexpected pattern may be that younger Arabs use the Internet for different activities than political engagement. Of course, these results might also be biased by different understandings of what expressing opinions about politics means. While some interpret liking political statements as opinion expression, other would consider sharing or commenting on political content as opinion expression. The Arab Barometer data do not allow disentangling these potentially different perceptions of the online information and opinion expression.

## Social Media Usage

In 2016, approximately eight-in-ten Internet users across the MENA region (82.8 percent) reported to have a Facebook account. There is little variation across countries ranging from 90 percent of Moroccan Internet user reporting to have a Facebook account to 79 percent of Jordanians. In all other countries the proportion of Facebook users ranges around 80 percent.

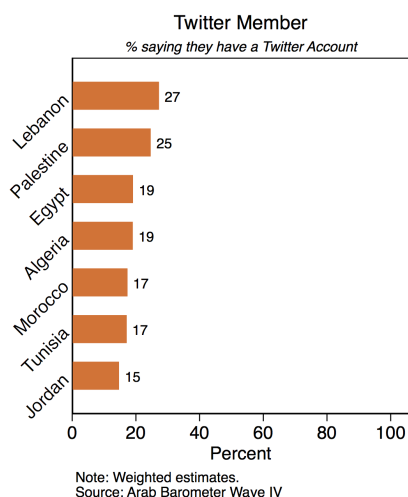


Country	18 - 35	36 +	Δ†
Algeria	89.1	67.1	-22.0
Egypt	86.9	79.1	-7.8
Jordan	83.8	74.2	-9.6
Lebanon	88.3	70.0	-18.3
Morocco	95.1	72.4	-22.7
Palestine	86.3	78.5	-7.8
Tunisia	89.9	70.8	-19.1

†Δ indicates age difference.

Figure 10: Reported Facebook Membership

We observe an age difference, however. While almost 90 percent of the 18 to 35 year olds report to use Facebook, the proportion is smaller for those aged 36 and above with approximately 70.0 percent. The age gap in Facebook usage follows the expected pattern. Younger Arabs seem to be more likely to use Facebook. The age difference is largest in Morocco ( $\Delta = -22.7$  percentage points), Algeria ( $\Delta = -22.0$  percentage points), Tunisia ( $\Delta = -19.1$  percentage points), and Lebanon ( $\Delta = -18.3$  percentage points). It is smallest in Jordan ( $\Delta = -9.6$  percentage points), Egypt and Palestine (each  $\Delta = -7.8$  percentage points).



Country	18 - 35	36 +	Δ
Algeria	24.2	5.6	-18.6
Egypt	20.8	14.0	-6.8
Jordan	16.4	12.7	-3.7
Lebanon	32.3	21.3	-11.0
Morocco	20.0	9.1	-10.9
Palestine	28.8	18.6	-10.2
Tunisia	20.1	11.4	-8.7

†Δ indicates age difference.

Figure 11: Reported Twitter Membership

Two-in-ten Arabs report to have a Twitter account. There is also some variation across countries. The Lebanese display the highest proportion of Twitter

usage with almost 3 out of 10 reporting to have an account, followed by the Palestinians (26 percent), the Egyptians and Algerians (both 19 percent) as well as Moroccans and Tunisians (both 17 percent). Twitter seems to be least popular among Jordanians, only 15 percent report to have a Twitter account.

The Arab Barometer also observes some differences across age. While 23.8 percent of the 18 to 35 year olds report to use Twitter, only 14.9 percent of those aged 36 and above report to have an account. The age difference in Twitter usage is largest in Algeria ( $\Delta = -18.6$  percentage points), Lebanon ( $\Delta = -11.0$  percentage points), Morocco ( $\Delta = -10.9$  percentage points), and Palestine ( $\Delta = -10.2$  percentage points). The smallest gaps across ages can be observed in Tunisia ( $\Delta = -8.7$  percentage points), Egypt ( $\Delta = -6.8$  percentage points) and Jordan ( $\Delta = -3.7$  percentage points). The patterns follow the expected direction, younger Arabs aged 18 to 35 display a higher proportion of Twitter usage compared to those aged 36 and above.

It appears that MENA publics move towards more towards informal – and also more anonymous – ways of participation. Surprisingly though, it seems that those in the older age cohort (36+) are more eager to engage politically, while larger proportions of younger generations have Facebook and Twitter accounts but report to be less politically active.

## Charity

Civic engagement in MENA also involves a large proportion willing to be helping the poor. Almost one third (31.3 percent) report that they are happy to support the poor even if it induces some major costs for themselves. A majority of people (62.2 percent) further state that they are willing to be charitable as long as it only involves small costs for themselves. Only 2.3 percent of Arab publics say they are not willing to help the poor under any circumstances. Even though women are often sought to be more charitable, there appears to be no difference by gender across the region. Similar is true for potential age differences. There is also no variation across the major religions with Muslims and Christians reporting to be equally charitable.

Looking at the variation across the region, it appears that the Palestinians (40 percent), Algerians (38 percent), and Tunisians (37 percent) are most willing to help the poor, even if major costs are involved for themselves. In addition, one third of Jordanians report that they are happy to help those in need, even if it induces major costs for them. About one quarter of the Lebanese (27 percent) and Moroccans (26 percent) say they are willing to help the poor at any cost. In Egypt, only two-in-ten say they would be willing to help, even if it involved major costs for themselves.

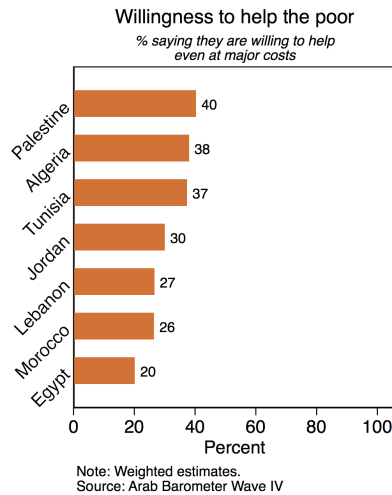


Figure 12: Charity By Country

Of course, these reports may be biased by social desirability pressures. Helping the poor is something that is generally regarded as a good cause and thus prone to over-reporting. In addition, it is also important looking at the motives of being charitable. Across the region, the main motivation of helping the poor appears to be the prospect of receiving rewards from God in the hereafter. Among those who are willing to help for major or small cost, the majority of people (51 percent) report that this is their main motivation to help, followed by sadness to see people suffer (23 percent), enjoying making people happy (15 percent), and wanting to make the community a better place (7 percent).

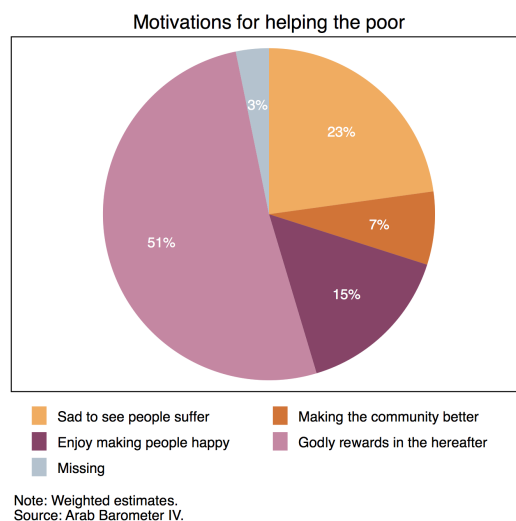


Figure 13: Motivations of Charity

## Conclusion

Seven years after the Arab uprisings, the MENA seems to be hesitant to engage politically. Many of Arab publics are pessimistic when evaluating their perceived rights to take part in politics and society. Turnout is in decline – which admittedly is something that can be observed elsewhere, too – reported membership in formal organizations is low. Similarly, few Arabs appear willing to take part in formal political action beyond voting. The proportion of people stating they have attended a rally, signed a petition, or participated in protest action is rather low. Nevertheless, it seems that the people in the MENA have found (other?) outlets to express concerns about politics and society. Large proportions of younger and older people obtain information about political activities online and report to express their views about politics in online forums. This maybe also be reflected in large percentages of all ages signing up for social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter. One major aspect of civic engagement is the willingness to help people in need. The majority of people in the region reports to be happy to help poorer people, even if it involves costs for themselves. After all, disillusionment with politics does not seem to affect society and the willingness to help out each other across the region.





## 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 high quality and reliable public opinion surveys of probability samples representative of citizens aged 18 or above in the Middle East and North Africa since 2006. Each country survey included approximately 1,200 respondents. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's place of residence. The error margin 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.

Until 2017, the Arab Barometer has conducted 36 national surveys over four waves including more than 45,000 interviews in 14 Arab countries.



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