



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Arab Barometer V

## Algeria Country Report



2019

## Executive summary

Beginning in February 2019, many citizens began to take to the streets which ultimately resulted in the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. On the eve of the protests, Algerian citizens were not only deeply frustrated with economic conditions, but with the system as a whole. Perceptions about the state of the economy and optimism about the country's future have plummeted since 2013, yet, fewer than half say that the economy is the country's biggest problem. Instead, a nearly identical percentage say that corruption or the quality of public services are the country's primary challenge.

Algerians have limited faith in their government to perform its duties. Just one-in-ten say the government is doing a good job tackling unemployment, inflation, or reducing inequality. Despite the peace that has followed the civil war of the 1990s, on the eve of the protests only half said the government was doing a good job providing security, suggesting a widespread frustration with the country's rulers. Faced with these broad challenges, nearly a third of Algerians seek to leave their homeland to pursue a better life abroad.

Support for democracy is relatively low in Algeria compared with other countries in MENA. When asked if democracy is always preferable, fewer than half agree with nearly a third saying sometimes a non-democratic government is preferable and one-in-five saying it doesn't matter what kind of government they have. Meanwhile, few Algerians say their country is currently democratic despite the fact that just one-in-ten defines democracy in terms of free and fair multiparty elections.

The Algerian civil war in the 1990s was fought between Islamist forces and their more secular opponents. In the two decades that have followed, this divide remains stark. Roughly equal percentages of Algerians support and oppose a greater role for religion in public life.

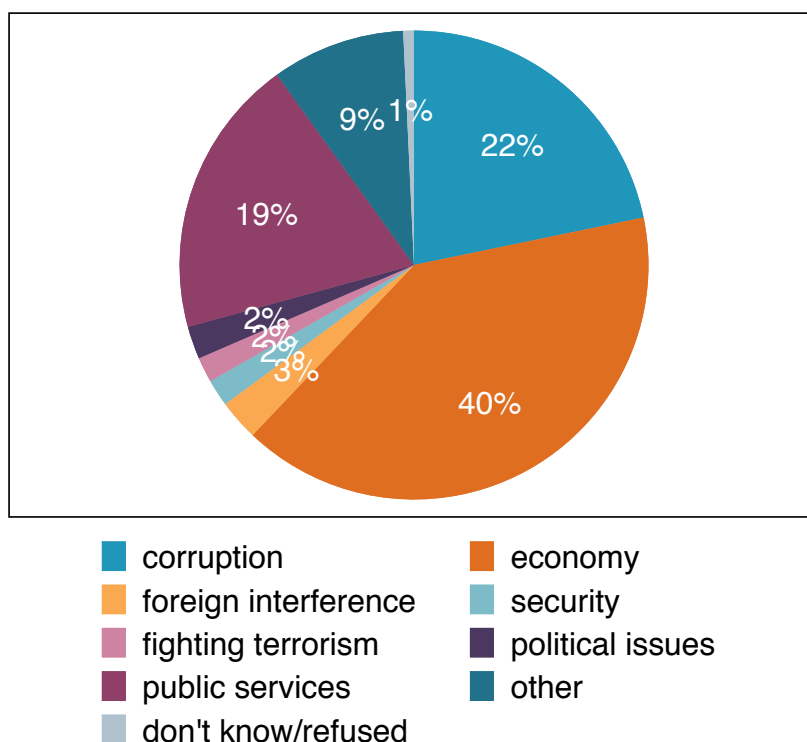
Meanwhile, although Algerians are increasingly likely to say their country should open up to the outside world, relatively few want closer relations with key global or regional powers. Similarly, relatively few want increased aid from the outside world, reflecting a deep suspicion about the motivations for giving aid. In fact, a majority says that the primary reason foreign countries provide aid is to gain influence over Algeria.

These are among the key findings from a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Algeria by the Arab Barometer from 30 January - 18 February 2019. The survey conducted 2,332 face-to-face interviews in the respondent's place of residence has a margin of error of  $\pm 2$  percent and had a cooperation rate of 76.7 percent.

## Economic Conditions

In 2019, Algerians have taken to the streets in mass to protest not only against former President Abdulaziz Bouteflika, but also again against *le pouvoir*, or the ruling system that has governed the country. In fact, the results of the survey suggest that it was not a single factor that has driven discontent in the country, but a collection of grievances. When asked about the most important challenge facing the country, four-in-ten cite economic issues as the most pressing problem. Meanwhile, roughly one-in-five says corruption (22 percent) or public services (19 percent), while others say internal security (5 percent) or other factors.

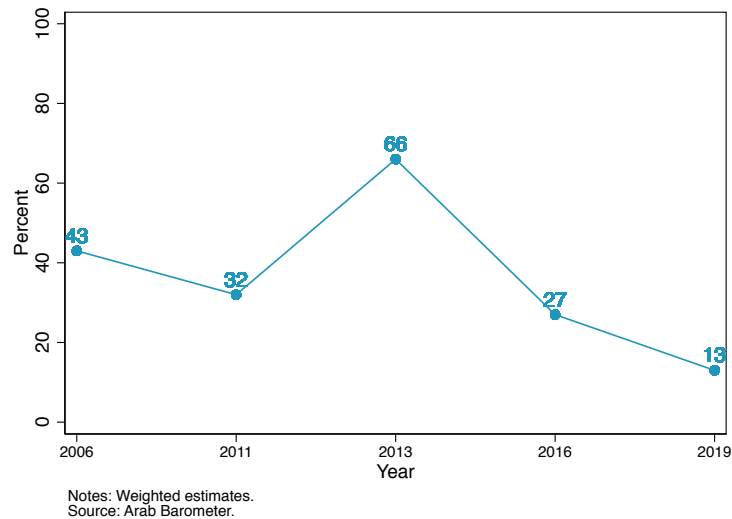
### What is the most important challenge facing your country today? *% saying this is the most important challenge.*



Note: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.

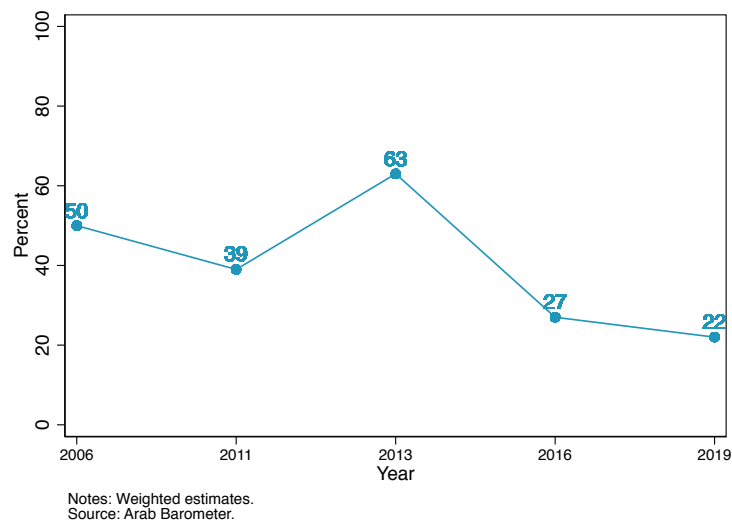
Only 13 percent of Algerians rate the economy as good, which is a dramatic decline since 2013 (-53 points). Following the Arab uprisings, the Algerian government increased subsidies and implemented other economic policies that benefited ordinary citizens thanks to, in part, high oil prices. However, with the collapse in the world price of oil in 2014, Algeria – MENA’s only non-GCC member of OPEC – faced additional economic challenges and declining economic fortunes for the country’s citizens.

**How would you evaluate the current economic situation in your country?**  
*% saying the current economy is very good or good.*



Similarly, economic optimism has declined substantially in recent years, peaking at 63 percent in 2013 but dropping by 41 points to just 22 percent in 2019. Notably, economic optimism is similar among both young and old, male and female, rich and poor, urban and rural, and highly educated and those with lower levels of education. However, there are important geographic differences; a third (34 percent) of those in the central area around the capital Algiers expect the economy to improve, compared to 23 percent of those in the country's northwest and just 13 percent in the country's northeast.

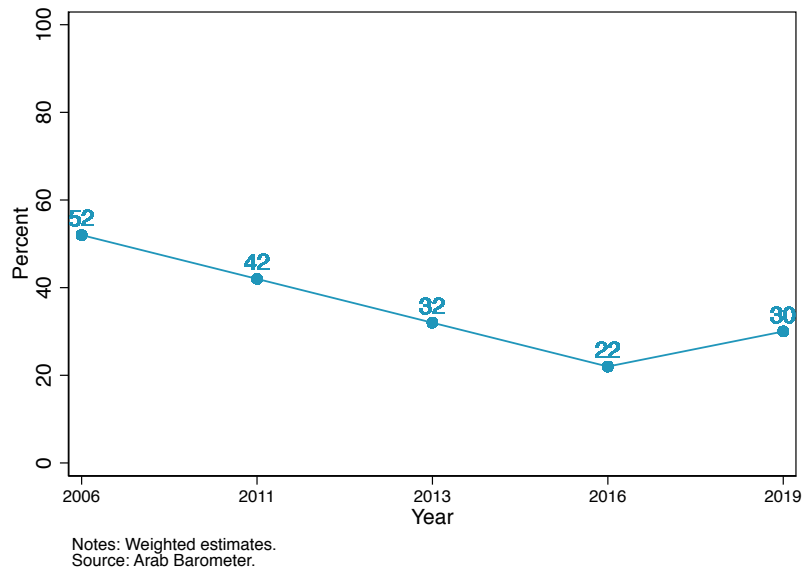
**What do you think the economic situation in your country will be in the next few years (2-3 years) compared to the current situation?**  
*% saying the economy will be much or somewhat better in 2-3 years.*



## Migration

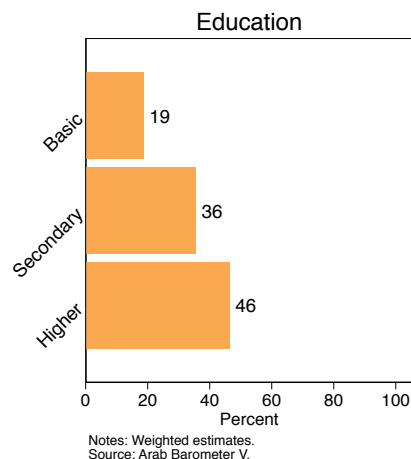
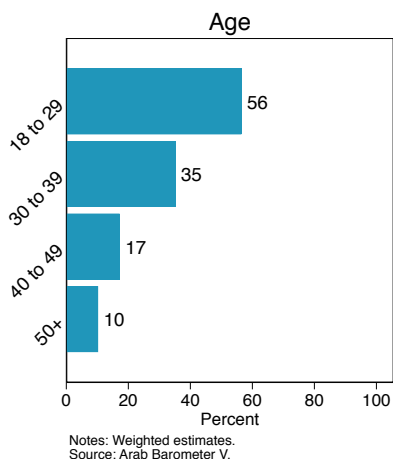
Three-in-ten Algerians have considered to migrating, which is an 8-point increase since 2016. This change reverses a long-standing decline in the percentage that have thought about leaving their homeland from 2006 to 2016, suggesting an important shift in attitudes.

### Have you ever thought about emigrating from your country? *% saying they thought about emigrating.*



Younger Algerians are far more likely to consider emigrating than older generations. Notably, more than half (56 percent) of those ages 18-29 are thinking about leaving compared with 35 percent of those 30-39, 17 percent of those 40-49 and 10 percent of those 50 and older. Algeria also risks losing its best and brightest, with nearly half (46 percent) of those with a university degree considering emigrating compared to just one-in-five (19 percent) with a basic level of education.

## Have you ever thought about emigrating from your country? *% saying they thought about emigrating.*



Men are also far more likely than women to think about emigrating (42 percent vs. 17 percent), while those from urban areas are also more likely to do so (+7 points). Notably, those from the central region around Algiers are about 10-points less likely to consider migrating than those from other parts of the country.

Among potential migrants, the reasons for thinking about leaving the country vary. The most commonly cited factor is economic reasons (38 percent), followed by corruption (22 percent), educational opportunities (16 percent) and family reunion (10 percent).

Potential migrants were asked what destinations they were considering, including if it was more than one. Two-thirds of potential migrants from Algeria are considering going to Europe, while just over a third (36 percent) say North America. Meanwhile, roughly one-in-ten (12 percent) say a GCC country, while 6 percent say a non-GCC country in MENA. Meanwhile, only 42 percent of potential migrants say they would consider migrating illegally.

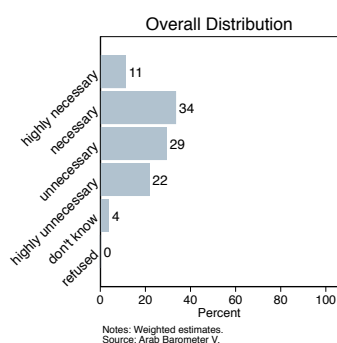
## Corruption

It was not possible to include many questions on corruption in Algeria that have been used in previous waves. However, it was possible to ask about the frequency of paying bribes in some aspects of daily life.

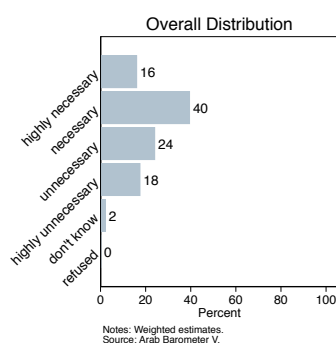
A majority of Algerians (56 percent) say that it is necessary to pay a bribe (*rashwa*) to a civil servant to receive better health care services. Youth ages 18-29 are somewhat more likely to say bribes are necessary than those who are older. Additionally, those in the central coast around the capital Algiers are more likely than those living in other regions to say bribes are required for better access to health care.

**In your opinion, to what extent do you think it is necessary to pay *rashwa* to a civil servant of your country to receive better...?**

Educational services



Health care services

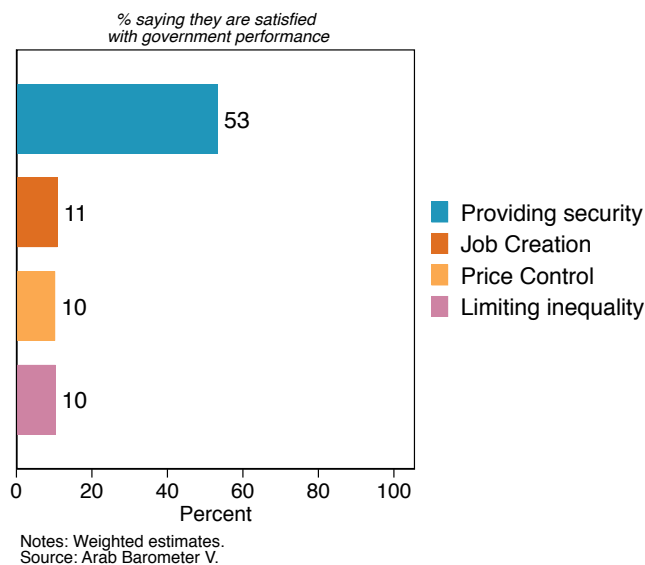


A smaller but sizable percentage (45 percent) also say it is necessary to pay a bribe to receive better educational services. Younger citizens are more likely to say bribes are required in education, with those 18-29 being 15 points more likely to hold this perspective than those 50 and older, while those living in rural areas are 10 points more likely than those in urban areas.

## Government Performance

Algerians rate government performance on the economy as poor. Just one-in-ten say the government is doing a good job creating employment, limiting inflation, or reducing inequality. These low levels represent a significant decline from 2013. Algerians are now 20 points less likely to say the government is doing a good job creating employment and 17 points less likely to say they're reducing inequality than six years ago. Given the low ratings overall, there is little variation by demographic group or region – nearly all Algerians rate the government extremely poorly on this basis.

## How would you evaluate the current governments performance on...? *% saying very good or good.*



Perceptions of government performance on providing security are significantly more positive, however. More than half (53 percent) say the government is doing a good job providing order.<sup>1</sup> However, this level represents a 14-point decline from 2016. Perceptions do vary significantly by region, however. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of those living in the areas around Algiers say the government is doing a good job in this area, compared with 56 percent in the country's northwest and just 38 percent in the northeast.

Views of the quality of essential services are also relatively low. Roughly a third say they are satisfied with the educational system (36 percent) or health care system (31 percent). Notably, the quality of services appears to be higher in the capital area and surrounding regions than in other parts of Algeria, with those living in the central coastal region being more likely to rate both services positively.

## Political Preferences

Support for democracy is mixed in Algeria. When prompted, only roughly four-in-ten (41 percent) agree that democracy is always preferable, which is among the lowest across all countries surveyed. Meanwhile, three-in-ten say that, at times, a non-democratic government is preferable while about a fifth (21 percent) say it doesn't matter what kind of government they have. Support for

<sup>1</sup>The survey was conducted in the weeks before the main protests began in early 2019.

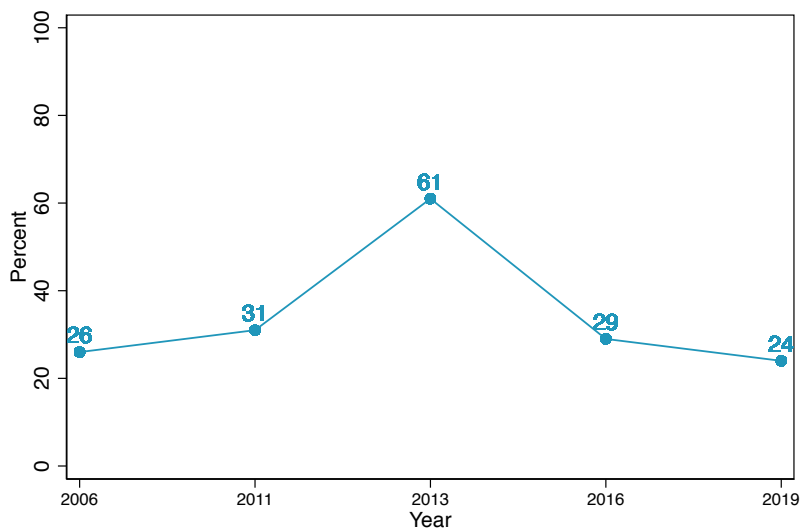


democracy is linked with level of education, with half (51 percent) of those with a university degree always preferring democracy compared with roughly a third (35 percent) of those with a basic level of education.

However, Algerian conceptions of democracy differ from those commonly used in the West. When asked about the most essential characteristic of democracy, four-in-ten say it is a government that ensures law and order, likely a reflection of fears over a return to the period of civil war in the 1990s. Meanwhile, roughly a quarter say that the primary definition of democracy is a media that is free to criticize the government (23 percent) or a government that ensures job opportunities for all (22 percent). Meanwhile, only one-in-ten (9 percent) define it in terms of multiparty elections.

Relatively few believe that their country is democratic, with roughly a quarter (24 percent) saying Algeria is closer to a democracy than a dictatorship. Citizens living in and around Algiers are the most likely to say Algeria is democratic (39 percent), with those in the country's northwest (26 percent) and northeast (13 percent) being significantly less likely to hold this view. Additionally, only 17 percent of youth ages 18-29 say their country is democratic, which is lower than for other age cohorts.

### **Trend in perception of extent of democracy in Algeria** *% placing their country at score 6 or higher.*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer.

Although most Algerians do not believe they live in a democracy, a slight majority think that this political system is more suitable than not for their country, which is a 11-point increase since 2016. Notably, this view is held equally across ages and levels of education in the survey.

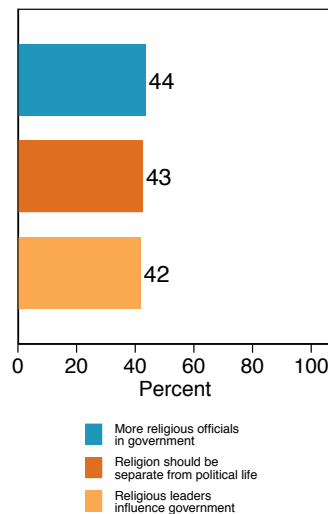
Even though many Algerians think democracy is suitable, a sizable percentage express concerns about this type of system. For example, nearly four-in-ten (38 percent) say the economy performs poorly in a democracy, which is 22-points higher than in 2013. Similarly, 35 percent say that democracies are indecisive while three-in-ten say democracies are ineffective at maintaining order, which are dramatic increases since 2013. Likely, these shifts are the result of Algerians reflecting on the experiences of their neighbor Tunisia where the democratic transition has faced a significant number of challenges since 2011.

## Religion and Politics

The Algeria civil war was fought in the 1990s after the military canceled the second round of the 1990-1 elections. The result was a conflict with more than 100,000 deaths and the defeat of the Islamist insurgency.

Roughly two decades after the end of the conflict, a clear divide remains in Algeria about the role of religion in politics. When asked if the country would be better off if more religious people held public office, 44 percent agree compared with 45 percent who disagree, which is effectively unchanged since 2013.

### Religion in Public Life *% saying they agree*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Similarly, 42 percent believe that religious leaders should have say over decisions of government compared with 48 percent who disagree, which is unchanged since 2016. Meanwhile, when asked if religion should be separate from social

and economic life, 43 percent agree while 51 percent disagree. Thus, by multiple measures, nearly half of Algerians continue to see a role for religion in public life while about the same percentage do not.

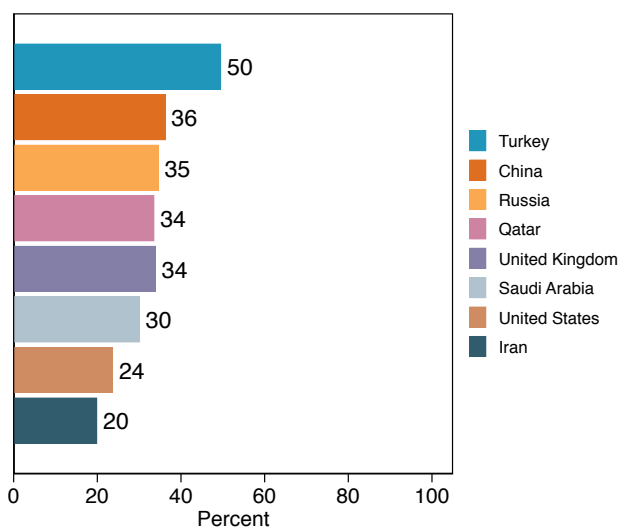
Although there is little difference in attitudes by age, gender, income or urbanity, those who have higher levels of education are less likely favor a role for religion in politics. Meanwhile, those in the country’s northeast are most likely to support religion in politics while those in the northwest are the least likely to do so.

Although Algerians are divided about the role for religion in public life, there is general support for basing the country’s laws on the sharia. Overall, 43 percent say that the country’s laws should be entirely (15 percent) or mostly (28 percent) based on Islamic law. Meanwhile, 39 percent say that they should be based equally on the sharia and the will of the people, while only 14 percent say that they should mostly or entirely be based on the will of the people.

## International Relations

Compared with other countries in MENA, few Algerians want closer economic relations or increased foreign assistance. For example, a quarter (24 percent) want closer relations with the U.S., which is the lowest percentage in MENA. The percentage has steadily declined since 2013, falling by 19-points during this period. Notably, those with higher levels of education and those living outside the Algiers region are far more receptive to stronger relations with the U.S.

**International Relations**  
*% saying they prefer stronger ties*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Support for closer relations with other global powers is only somewhat higher. For example, roughly a third favor closer ties with China (36 percent) or Russia (35 percent).

Among regional powers, only three-in-ten want stronger ties with Saudi Arabia, which is an 18-point drop since 2013. Support for ties with Qatar is slightly higher (34 percent), although Turkey is by far the most supported regional power with half wanting relations to grow closer. Meanwhile, Iran is the least popular with just one-in-five favoring stronger ties.

Meanwhile, support for increased foreign aid is limited. Roughly a quarter (27 percent) want more assistance from the U.S., compared with 32 percent want more aid from Russia and 38 percent from China. A desire for additional aid from regional powers is also limited. Meanwhile, only third (34 percent) want additional aid from Saudi Arabia. In part, this reluctance toward foreign aid is likely the result that more than half (55 percent) say the primary motivation for Western countries providing aid is to gain influence over their country.

Despite a reluctance for stronger economic relations or more outside aid, Algerians are increasingly supportive of opening up to the outside world. Four-in-ten say it is better for their country to open up to a greater extent compared to just 32 percent who said the same in 2013.



## 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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