

Arab Barometer V

Iraq Country Report

2019

Executive summary

Nearly four years after ISIS began political and territorial usurpation campaigns across Iraq, 2018 opened on the heels of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's announcement of the country's liberation from the group. With Iraqi Special Forces at the helm of these military efforts and increasing stability restored to various areas, Iraqi public opinion has high trust and confidence in the security and enforcement apparatuses to do their jobs and provide services.

This stands in stark contrast to appraisals of political institutions and government performance. Trust in parliament and the judiciary have seen double-digit drops since 2011. Corruption remains high among the challenges Iraqis suggest are facing their country, and one-in-four believe that corruption pervades national state agencies and institutions to a large extent. Evaluations of the economy are not much better: two-in-ten evaluate the economic situation in 2019 as good, down from half in 2013. Only 16 percent of Iraqis indicate they are generally satisfied with the overall government performance.

The May 2018 elections, which registered record low turnout since 2005, and the subsequent months-long struggle to form a government have not helped these perceptions, if not outright contributing to them. In fact, the majority (60 percent) believe that the elections were neither free nor fair.

These negative assessments of political institutions, government performance, and the economy may underpin beliefs that Iraq is experiencing a decline in democracy, with only 23 percent saying that the country is somewhat democratic. Still, the majority (75 percent) believes that democracy, despite its flaws, is better than other forms of government.

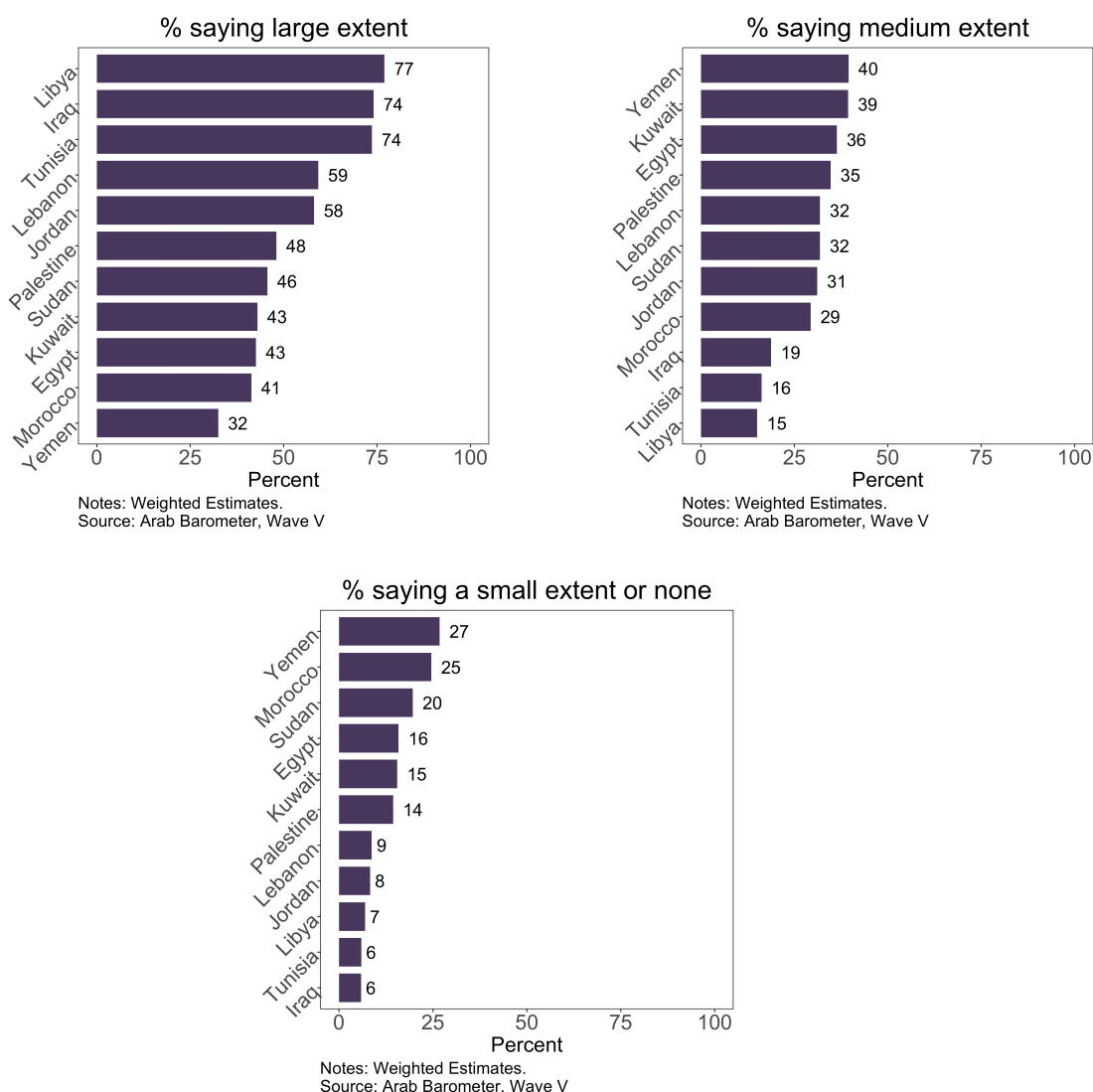
A final noteworthy trend relates to views of the United States. While 63 percent of Iraqis want to open up the country to the rest of the world to a greater extent, the U.S. is not one of the countries with which Iraqis generally want stronger relations. Instead, majorities (or near majorities) want ties with China, Turkey, and Russia. That said, there is significant regional variation in views on policies and relationships with the U.S., with the North and West regions of the country generally being more favorable than Baghdad and the South.

These are among the key findings from a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Iraq by the Arab Barometer from 24 December 2018 to 27 January 2019. The survey conducted 2,461 face-to-face interviews in the respondent's place of residence. It has a margin of error of ± 2 percent and a cooperation rate of 86.7 percent.

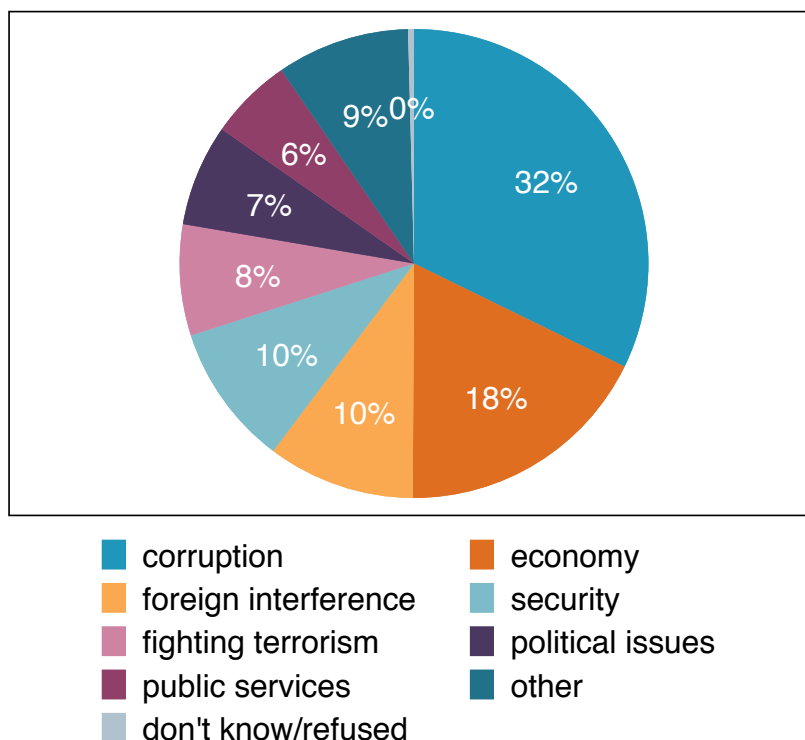
Corruption and Government Performance

In a trend observed since 2011, the perception that corruption pervades the political landscape is widespread in Iraq. While complaints of corruption are high across the Arab world, more Iraqis (74 percent), along with Libyans and Tunisians, than citizens in other Arab countries believe that the extent of corruption is large within national state agencies and institutions. The plurality (32 percent) believe that corruption ranks first among the most important challenges facing the country, making Iraq the only country other than Kuwait surveyed by the Arab Barometer to rank corruption as a bigger problem than the economic situation.

Perceived Extent of National Corruption by Country



What is the most important challenge facing your country today?



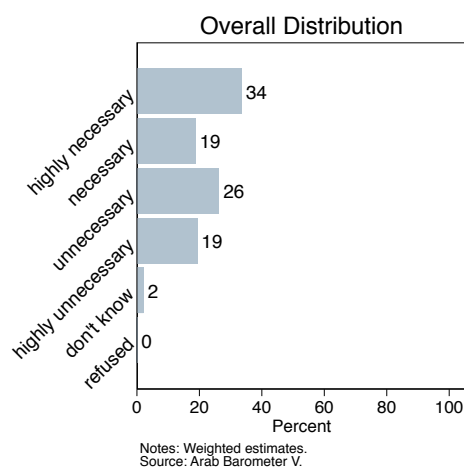
Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Specifically, majorities believe that it is necessary to pay rashwa (a bribe) to access better education (53 percent) and healthcare (56 percent), and 94 percent report that a wasta frequently is used to gain employment.¹ Meanwhile, Only 22 percent think that the government is serious about fighting corruption, a 13-point drop from 2013.

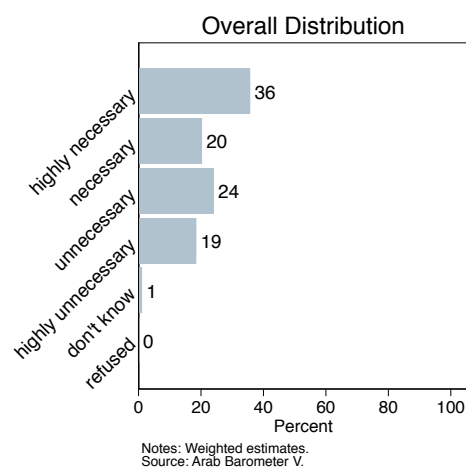
¹ Often translated as a “connection,” wasta implies approaching someone with clout to bypass a formal or established process otherwise used to access a job, service, license, etc. Wasta is frequently understood as a form of nepotism or cronyism.

To what extent do you think it is necessary to pay *rashwa* to a civil servant of your country to receive better:

education services?

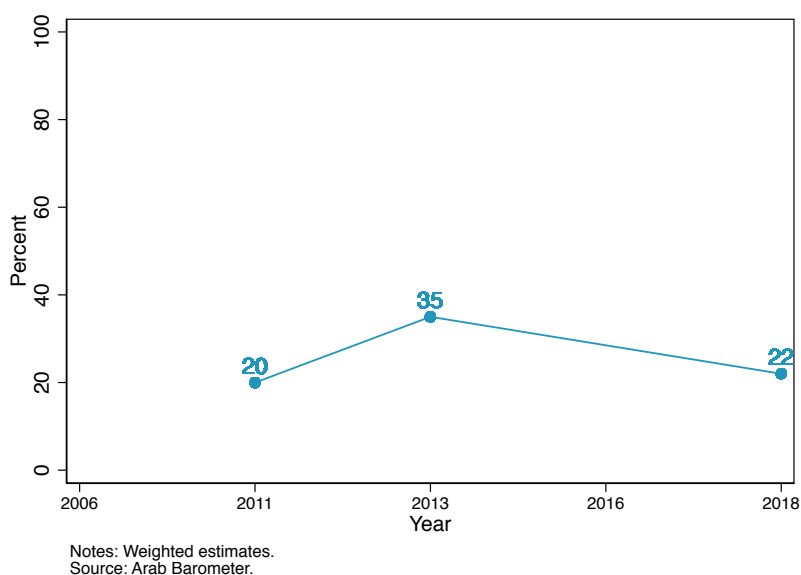


healthcare services?



Trend in perceived extent to which the national government is working to crackdown on corruption

% saying to a large or medium extent

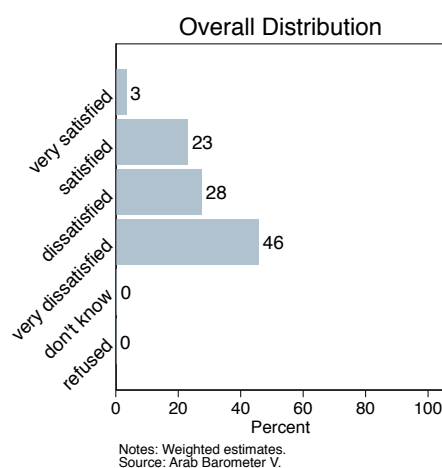


While majorities report both the necessity to use corruption to access government services and jobs, minorities believe that the Iraqi government is doing a good job at providing the same services. Few are satisfied with the education

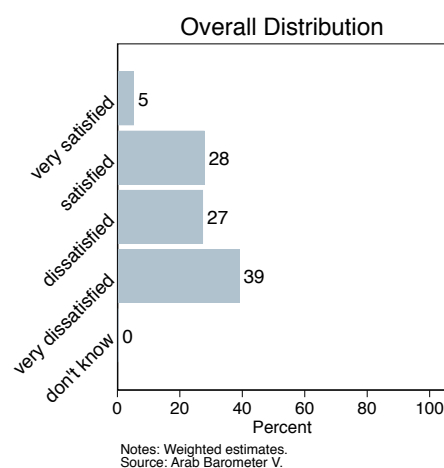
system (26 percent) and health care system (33 percent). The share of Iraqis who believe that the government has done a good job at creating employment opportunities has dropped from 29 percent in 2013 to just 6 percent in 2019 (-23 points). Entrepreneurship appears to be stilted by bureaucratic hurdles. Just two-in-ten say it is easy to register a business, three-in-ten say the same about acquiring building permits.

How satisfied are you with the:

education system?

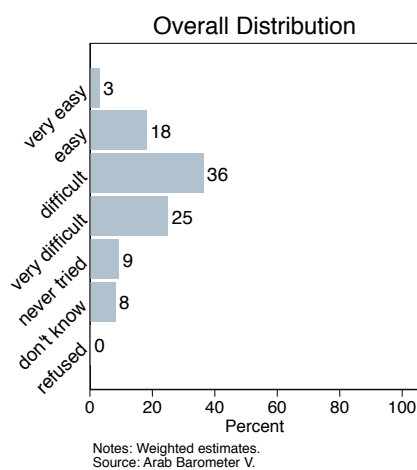


healthcare system?

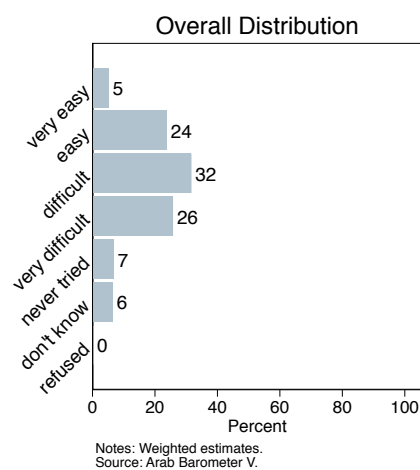


In your experience, how easy is it to:

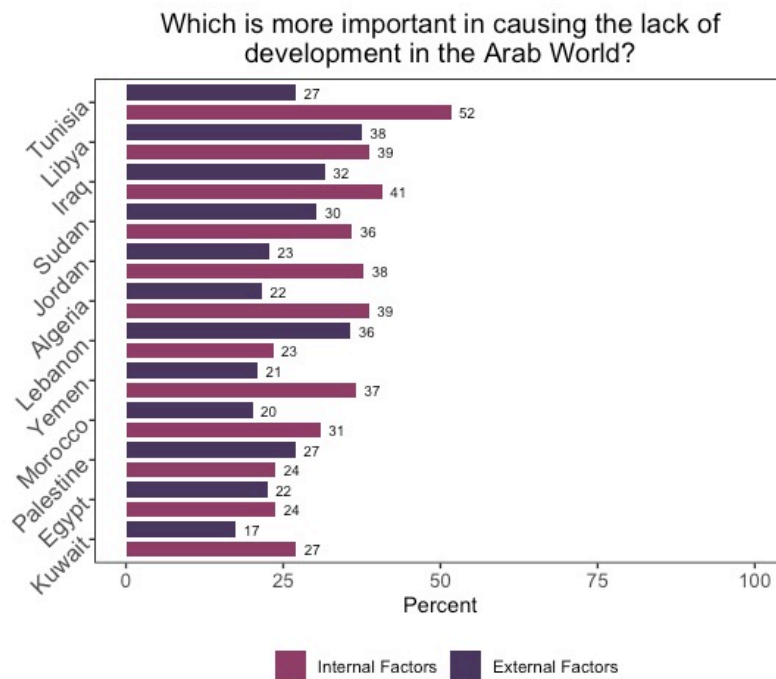
register a business?



get a building permit?



Perceptions of pervasive corruption coupled with stilted service underscore general dissatisfaction with government performance. Only 16 percent of Iraqis indicate they are generally satisfied with the overall government performance, while roughly 30 percent agree that the government does all it can to provide its citizens with necessary services. Among MENA countries, Iraq has the second highest share (41 percent) of citizens saying that internal factors alone are most important in causing the lack of development in the Arab world.



Notes: Weighted Estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 5

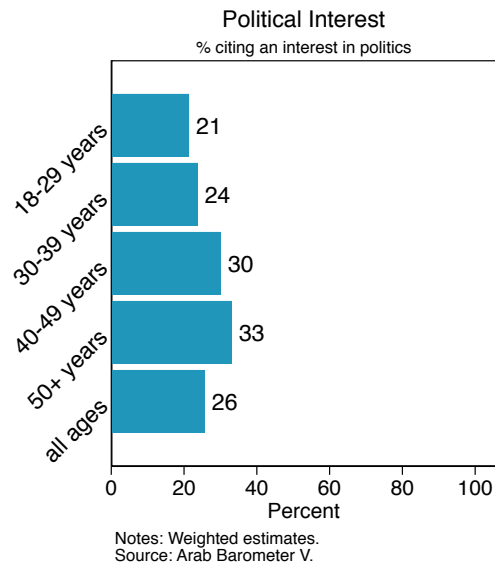
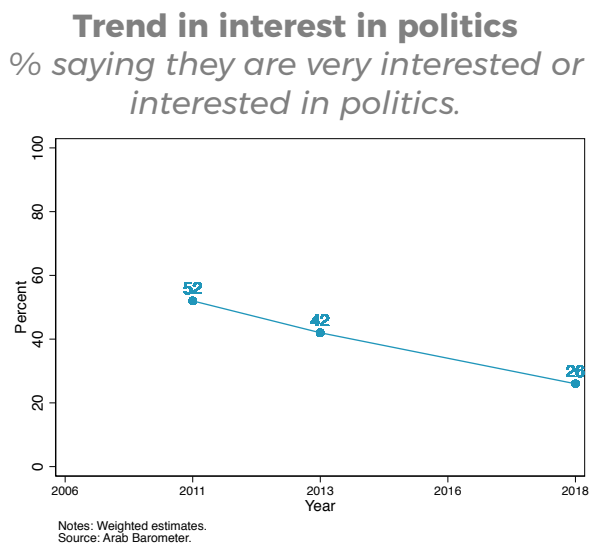
There is at least one area of government performance that garners more satisfaction among Iraqis. 63 percent say the government has done a good job providing security and order. In 2019, the share saying they were able to get help from the police reached 72 percent, a 14 point increase since 2011.

Elections and Institutional Trust

Widespread sentiments of dissatisfaction with government performance bleed into Iraqis' appraisals of and participation in their electoral system. Iraq's May 12, 2018 national elections held throughout the country's 18 governorates witnessed record low turnouts since 2003. Only 44 percent of the eligible voter

population voted for candidates to fill the 329 seats in the Council of Representatives, which constituted a decrease from 62 percent in 2014. With 9 seats reserved for minorities and 25 percent of seats reserved for women, Iraq’s open list proportional representation system offered 23 political coalitions, 45 political parties, and 19 independent candidates—a total of 87 lists with more than 7,000 candidates—from which Iraqi voters could choose.² The 2018 elections also introduced a new biometric voter ID card which required eligible voters to register and receive the card prior to the election.

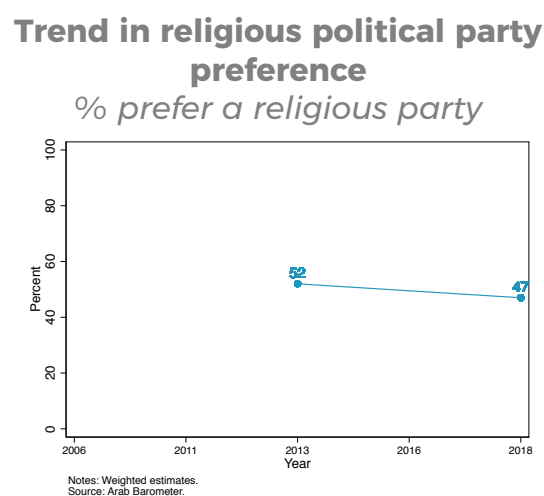
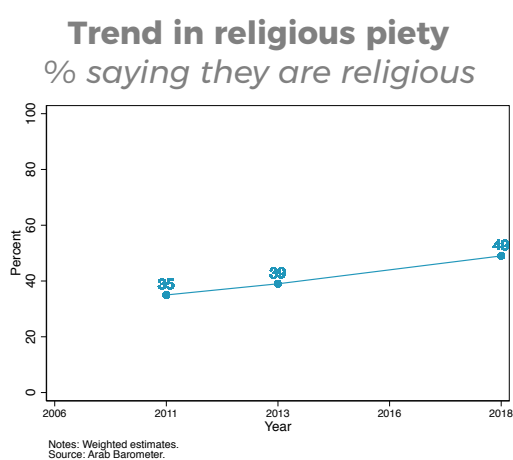
Against this backdrop, most Iraqis (75 percent) report feeling that politics is too complicated to understand, and interest in politics has waned significantly only 26 percent say they are interested in politics, compared with 52 percent in 2011. The decline is particularly pronounced among youth (age 18-29), fewer of whom report voting and taking an interest in the political system.



This cooling of overall feelings towards politics reverberates in a sense of detachment from and skepticism toward various aspects of the electoral system. Low shares report having attended a campaign event (11 percent), and six-in-10 say that the elections were neither free nor fair, with roughly a quarter stating they were major problems.

² International Foundation for Electoral Systems, “Elections in Iraq 2018 Council of Representatives Elections Frequently Asked Questions.” (May 2018)

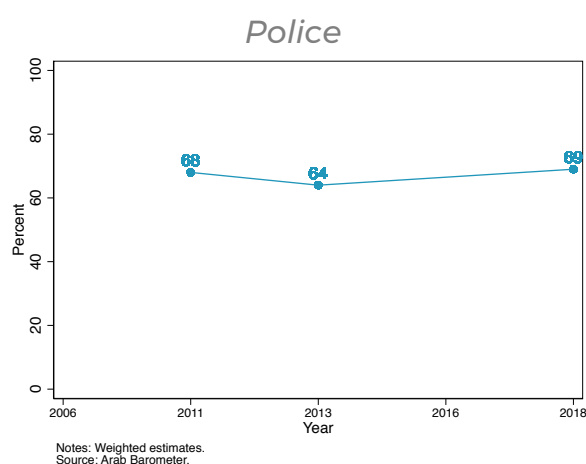
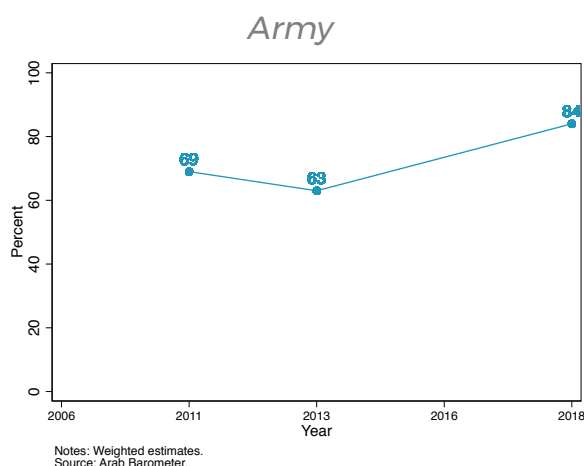
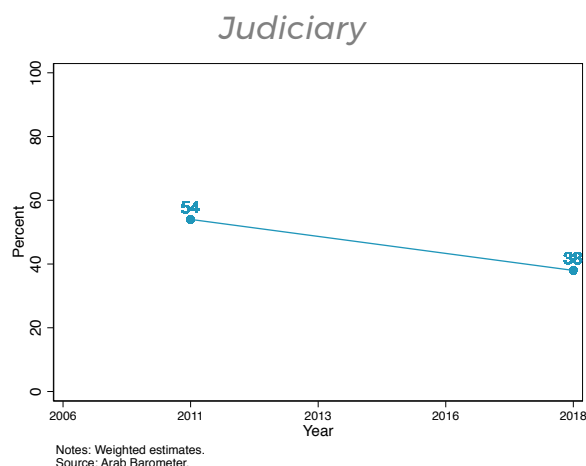
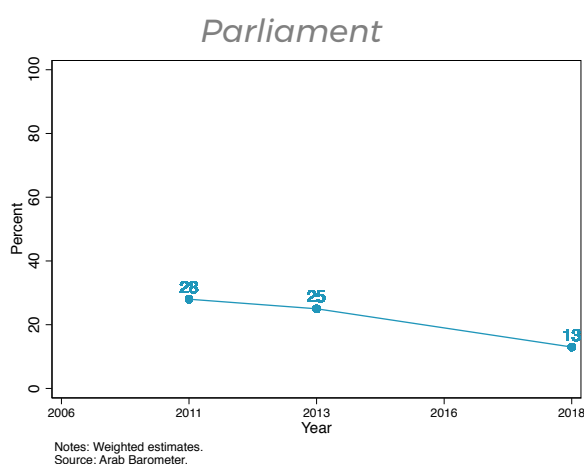
The plurality of Iraqis (48 percent) do not feel close to any political party, and only 6 percent trust political parties. While there has been a 10-point increase in share of Iraqis describing themselves as “religious” between 2013 (39 percent) and 2019 (49 percent), there is a small decrease in the preference for a religious over a non-religious party from 52 percent to 47 percent in the same time period. This mirrors a more marked decline in trust in religious leaders. In 2019, roughly 40 percent trust religious leaders, down from 64 percent in 2013, and seven-in-10 think that religious leaders are as corrupt as non-religious leaders.



Trust in public—and particularly political—institutions also is declining. In 2019 a minority of Iraqis trust the parliament (13 percent) and the judiciary (38 percent), marking a 15- and 16-point drop since 2011. Only one-in-four trust the civil service. In contrast, there is high trust in enforcement institutions 69 percent trust the police and 84 percent trust the army.

Trends in Institutional Trust

% saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in:



Referendum on Democracy

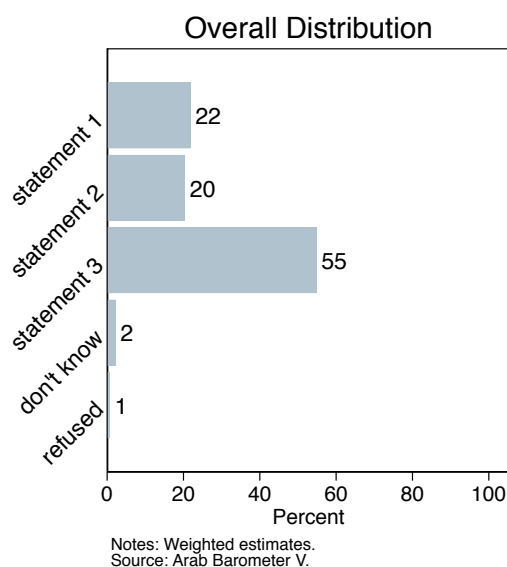
National assessments of perceived corruption and performance coupled with a decrease in voter turnout and in election-related participation appear to be a referendum not only on the government, but also on the political system in the country. Iraqis perceive their country as one experiencing a democratic decline. Citizens who think Iraq is somewhat democratic have never been in the majority, but only 23 percent think so in 2019, compared with 37 percent in 2013.

Which of these statements is closest to your opinion ?

Statement 1 It doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

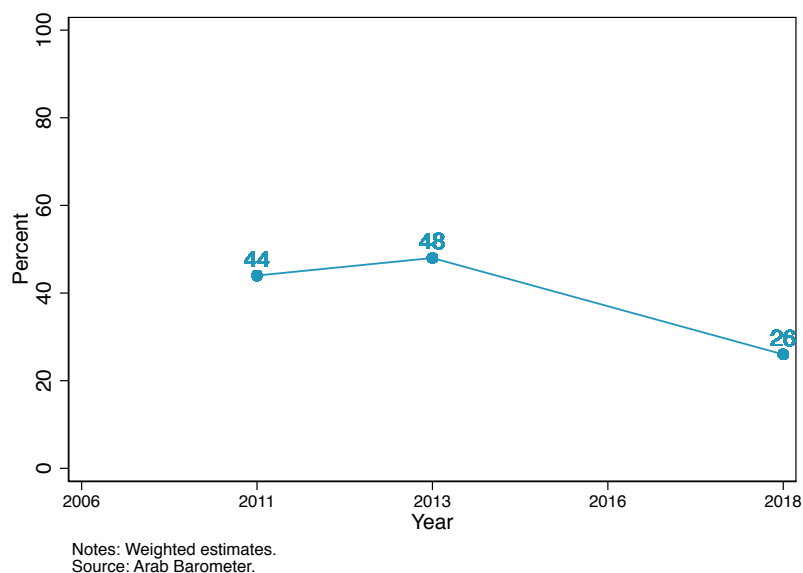
Statement 2 A non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3 Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.



Trend in suitability of democracy

% placing their country at score 6 or higher on a scale of 0 to 10



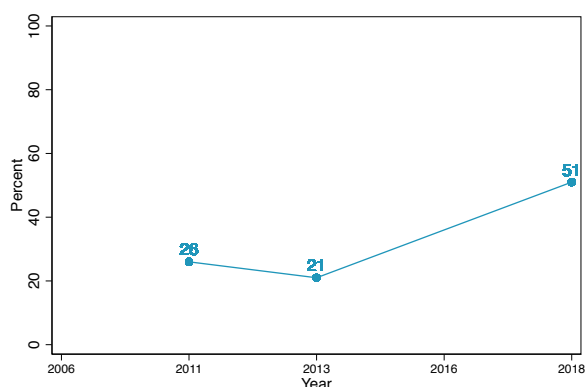
Disillusionment with the political system is not limited to its procedural or institutional elements. Compared to 2013, there is a 28-point or greater increase in

the share who believe that democracy is bad for each economic growth, decisiveness, and order and stability.

Trends in Beliefs about Democracy

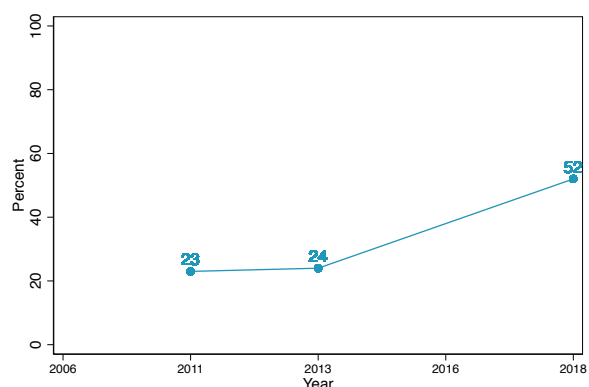
% saying they strongly agree or agree with the following statements:

"In democratic systems, the economic performance is weak."



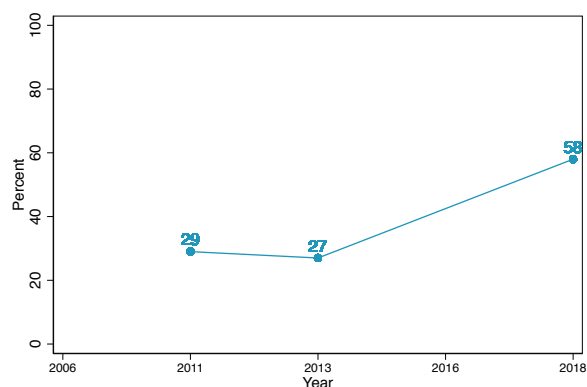
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer.

"Democratic regimes are ineffective in maintaining order and stability."



Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer.

"Democratic regimes are indecisive."



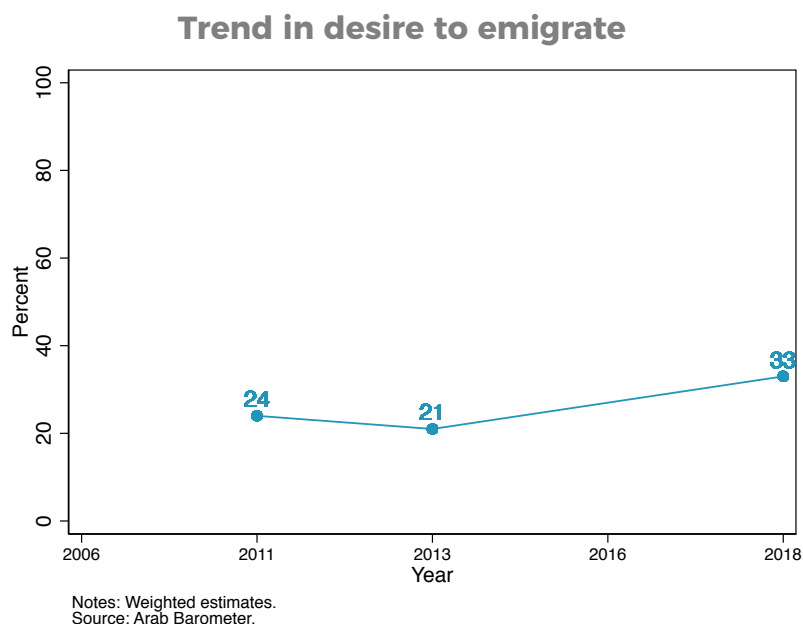
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer.

But this appraisal of democracy as a political system may be linked to Iraqis' appraisal of the government performance. When asked, roughly half of all Iraqis (51 percent) believe that the most essential characteristic of a democracy is to ensure job opportunities. Only 21 percent rate the economic situation in the country as good, compared with 52 percent in 2013. If the economy is the yardstick by which Iraqis are measuring the system, then it is unsurprising that the political system is seen as falling short.

Nevertheless, 55 percent of Iraqis believe that democracy is the preferred form of government for their country, and despite its substantive flaws, 75 percent believe that democracy is better than other political systems. It appears Iraqis like the idea of democracy, but they do not like the specific brand of it that has developed in their country.

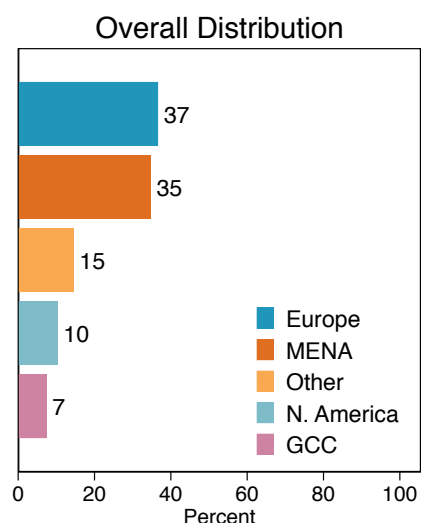
Migration

With faith in their political system decreasing, it is unsurprising to see an increasing percentage wanting to leave the country. Roughly 30 percent have considered emigrating to another country, a 12-point increase since 2013. The desire is particularly high among youth and highly educated individuals.

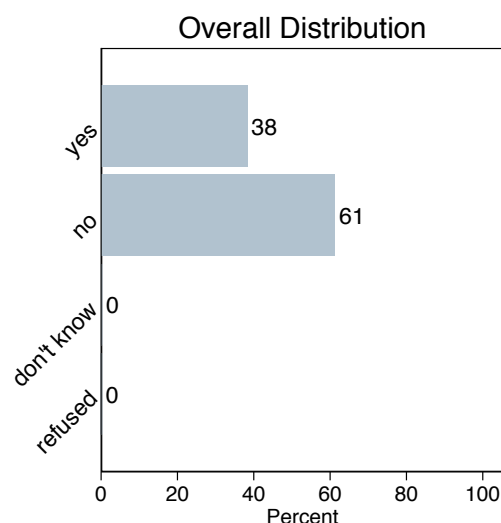


Consistent with evaluations of the economy, the most frequently cited motivations among those who want to leave are the economy (41 percent), security (34 percent), and political issues (19 percent). Of those who would leave, just over one-third indicate they would emigrate to either Europe (37 percent) or non-GCC MENA (35 percent) countries. To get there, 38 percent would consider leaving even if they didn't have the required documentation.

Which region are you thinking of emigrating to?



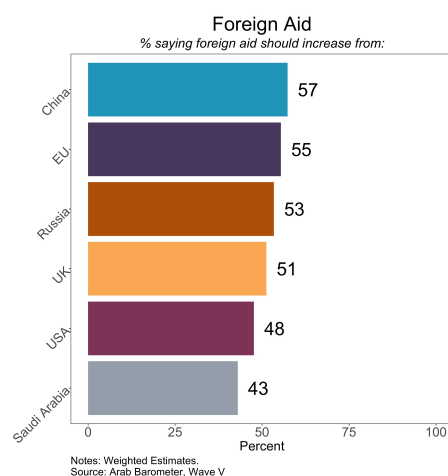
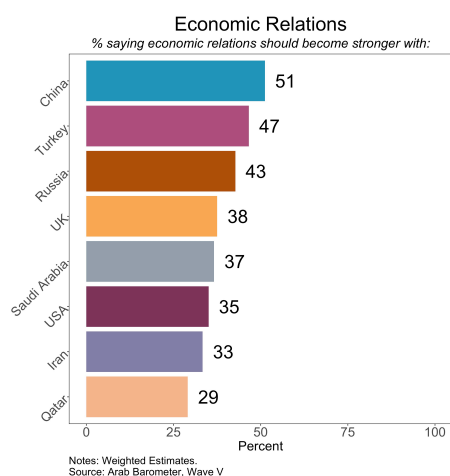
Consider emigration despite lacking required papers?



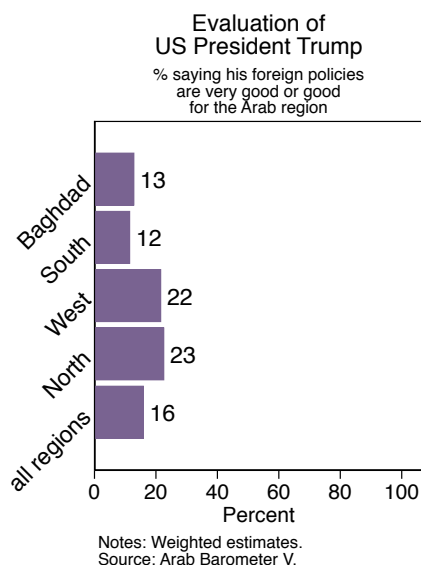
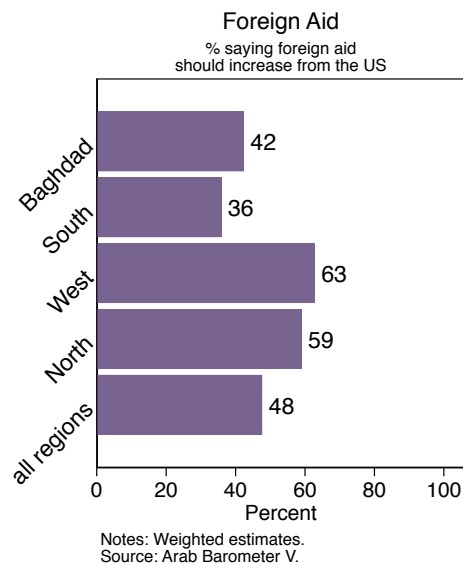
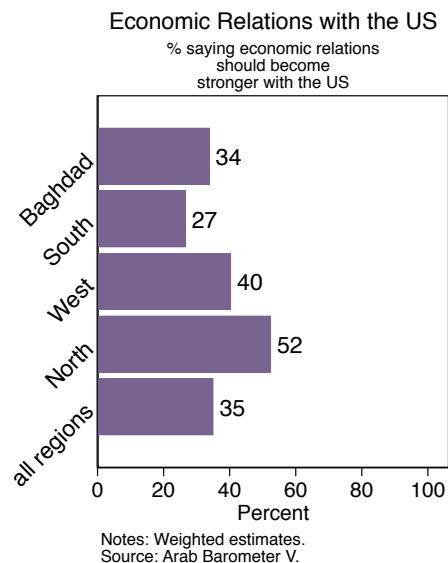
International Relations

Just as the desire to emigrate has increased, so too has a preference to open up to the rest of the world. In 2019, 63 percent of Iraqis express a desire for this option, up from 51 percent in 2011. But Iraqis' preferences for whom they want stronger international relations with have shifted away from the "Western bloc" and more toward the "Eastern" one.

Roughly half prefer that economic relations become stronger with China (51 percent) and Turkey (47 percent), followed by Russia (43 percent). This trend spills into evaluations of foreign policies and preferences for aid. More than twice as many Iraqis believe that Putin's (38 percent) and Erdoğan's (37 percent) foreign policies are better for the region than those of Trump (16 percent). Similarly, majorities prefer greater aid from China (57 percent), the European Union (55 percent), and Russia (53 percent).



Results on attitudes toward the United States appear to reflect general fatigue with nearly 15 years of continued American military presence in the country. But there is significant regional variation. Support for stronger ties with the US holds at 35 percent nationally in both 2011 and 2019. At the regional level, however, the majority (52 percent) of Iraqis in the North report wanting stronger ties with the US, compared to a minority across other regions. This likely reflects support for the latest American intervention in Iraq to fight ISIS, an initiative begun by Obama in 2014. While still minorities, Iraqis in the West (22 percent) and North (23 percent) are almost twice as likely to support Trump's foreign policies as those in Baghdad and the South. Similarly, compared to minority shares in these latter two areas, majorities in the West and North (63 percent and 59 percent, respectively) want increased aid from the US.



Where majorities form at both the national (60 percent) and regional level is in the belief that violence against the United States is a logical consequence of its interference in the region. This belief is particularly pronounced in the South (67 percent). Furthermore, there remains a clear distinction between perceptions of the American government and the American people. Nearly 60 percent of Iraqis—and majorities across regions—affirm that ordinary Americans are good people, irrespective of U.S. foreign policy.



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 ± 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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