



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Arab Barometer V

## Kuwait Country Report



2019

## Executive summary

A constitutional emirate with an elected, 50-seat National Assembly, Kuwait's political system is considered to be more open compared with neighboring Gulf states. The country has an active Constitutional Court that has the power to review the constitutionality of parliamentary laws, bylaws, and royal decrees. Kuwait was not completely untouched by the Arab Spring, though the protests in 2011-2012 that brought hundreds to the streets did not call for the "overthrow of the regime" so much as the protection of democracy from corruption, electoral changes, and court rulings that threatened it.

One year out from the next parliamentary elections slated for 2020, similar discontents that brought people to the streets in 2011 pervade beliefs and attitudes among Kuwaiti citizens in 2019. The plurality (42 percent) say that administrative and financial corruption within state institutions is the most pressing problem facing their country, while only about half (48 percent) believe the government is taking steps to tackle this problem, a significant decrease since 2014 (-29 points).

Kuwaitis are less likely to trust the government (47 percent) and parliament (32 percent) compared with other national institutions like the police (78 percent) and the judiciary (85 percent). As with the belief that the government is fighting corruption, trust in the government and parliament has decreased significantly since 2014, falling by 37 and 35 points, respectively. Older Kuwaitis are more likely to trust the government and parliament than their younger counterparts.

Notably, political discontent in Kuwait appears unrelated to economic prosperity, as it remains the richest country per capita among Gulf states. Relative to citizens of other Arab countries, a vast majority of Kuwaitis rate the economy as good (77 percent), though the share significantly decreased since 2014 (-18 points). Correspondingly, only 8 percent of Kuwaitis have considered emigrating, which is the lowest level among the countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer.

While the majority (60 percent) of Kuwaiti citizens favor strengthening economic ties with Saudi Arabia, only three-in-10 prefer stronger economic relations with the U.S, a long-time strategic ally. This share is even lower than that of support for Qatar (48 percent) and Turkey (39 percent), the competitors of Saudi Arabia.

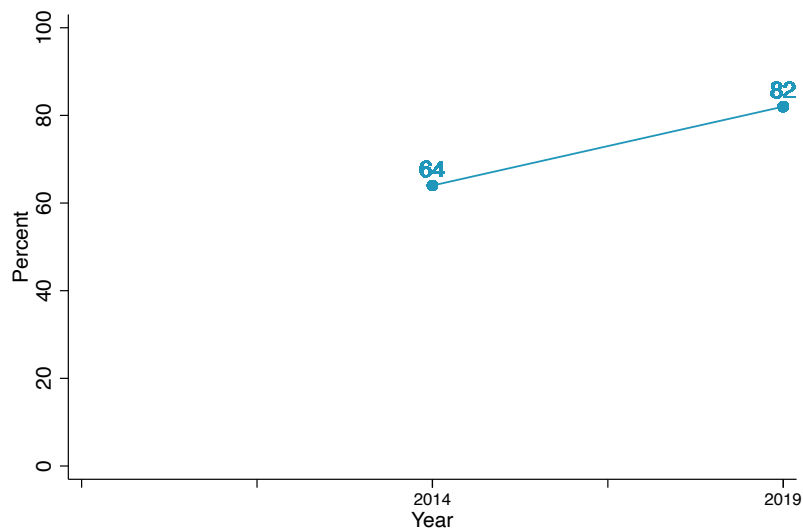
These are among the key findings from a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Kuwait by the Arab Barometer from 22 April to 11 June 2019. The survey conducted 1,374 face-to-face interviews in the respondent's place of residence. It has a margin of error of  $\pm 3$  percent and a cooperation rate of 41 percent.

## Corruption

Corruption within state institutions remains an important concern for Kuwaitis. The vast majority (82 percent) think that there is corruption within state agencies and institutions in Kuwait to a large or medium extent, which is a dramatic increase from 2014 (+18 points).

### To what extent do you think that there is corruption within the national state agencies and institutions in Kuwait?

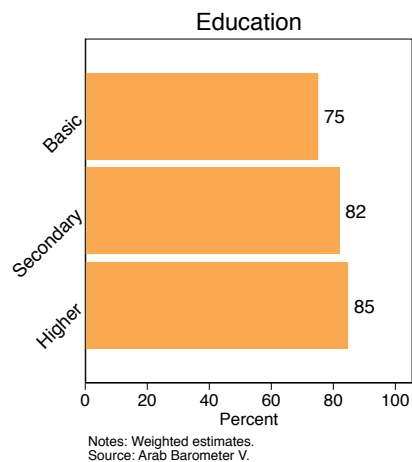
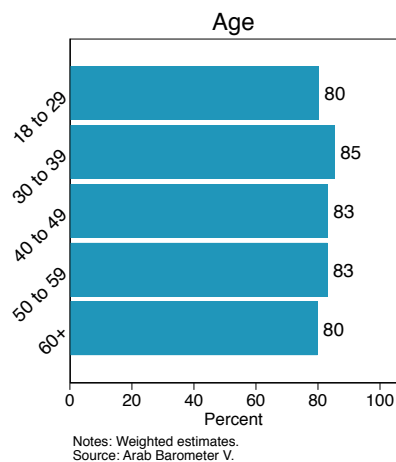
*% saying to a large or medium extent.*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer.

Kuwaiti perception of corruption is weakly related to age and education levels. Eight-in-ten of those older than 60 say that there is corruption within national state agencies and institutions in Kuwait, compared with 86 percent of those ages 30 to 39, and 84 percent of those ages 40 to 59. By comparison, a vast majority (84 percent) of those with university degree believe that there is corruption within state institutions. Meanwhile, those with a basic level of education are least likely to say there is corruption (75 percent).

**To what extent do you think that there is corruption within the national state agencies and institutions in Kuwait?**  
*% saying to a large or medium extent.*

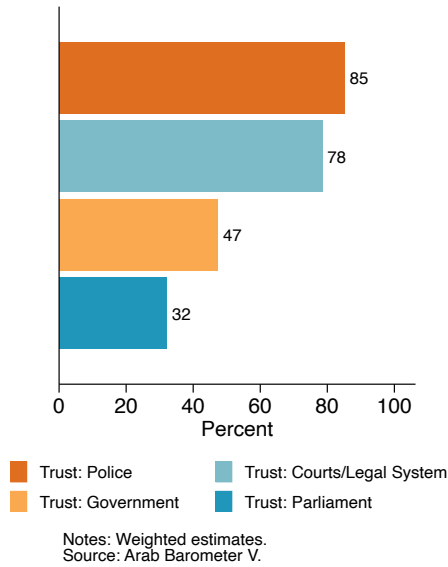


Though perception of corruption is widespread among Kuwaitis, roughly half (46 percent) of those who think that corruption within state institutions exists to a large or medium extent say that the national government is working to crack-down on corruption to a significant degree, a 29-point decrease since 2014. Yet corruption does not appear to be related to government services. Only small shares believe that it is necessary to pay a bribe to a civil servant in Kuwait to receive better education (13 percent) or health care services (11 percent), and 92 percent affirm that they would consider these types of actions-making a side payment to speed up a government service-a form of corruption.

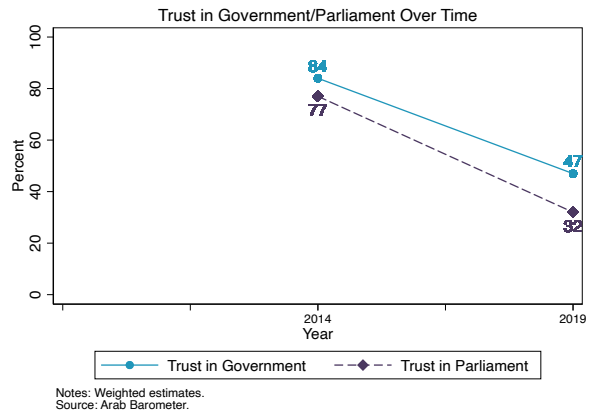
## Political Institutions

Jibing with concerns about corruption, Kuwaitis have limited trust in state institutions. Roughly half trust in the government to a great or some extent, and 32 percent say the same about parliament. Trust in each of these institutions, however, has decreased significantly since 2014, when significant majorities trusted government (84 percent) and parliament (77 percent). Notably, an overwhelming majority trusts the police- the most trusted among all institutions- followed by 78 percent who trust the courts and legal system.

**How much trust do you have in...?**  
% saying a great deal or quite a lot  
of trust

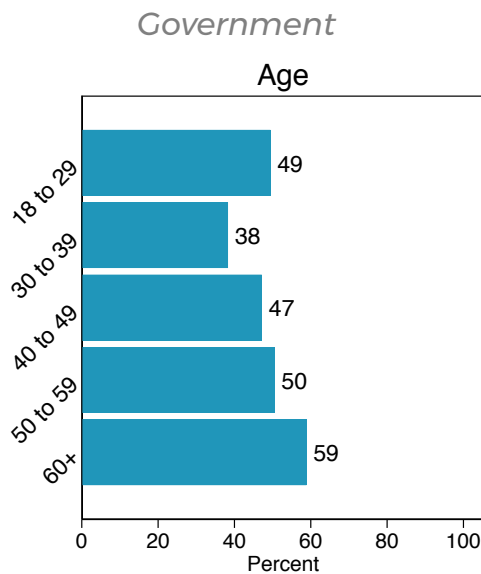


**Trust in Government and Parliament**  
% saying a great deal or quite a lot  
of trust

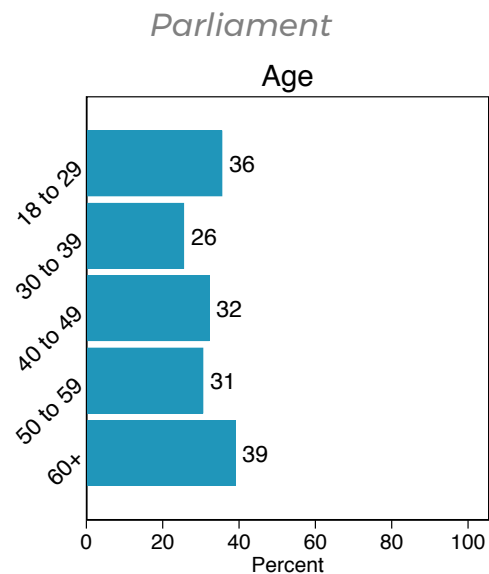


Trust in each government and parliament vary significantly by age. One cohort in particular stands out: 30 to 39-year-olds, who would have been between 22 and 31 years old during the 2011-2012 protests, are markedly different than those older and younger than them. Only 38 percent of those ages 30-39 trust government, and only 24 percent of this age group trusts parliament. In comparison, roughly half or more of those ages 18-29, 40-49, 50-59, and those over 60 trust government, and 31 percent or more of each of these three cohorts trusts parliament.

### Trust by Age % saying a great deal or quite a lot of trust in:



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.



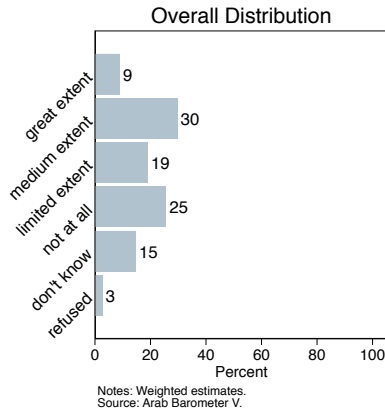
Notes: Weighted estimates.  
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## Political Preferences

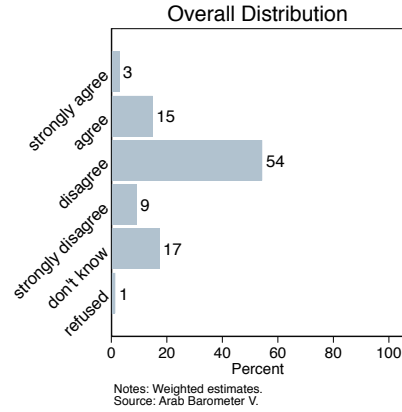
Despite pervasive complaints of corruption and distrust in political institutions, Kuwaitis favor a democratic system to other types of governance. More than half (62 percent) affirm that even though democracy may have problems, it is still better than other political systems. Relatively small minorities attribute poor governance and economic performance outcomes to the democratic system. Roughly three-in-ten (27 percent) believe that democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems. Similarly, only 18 percent believe that democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability, and only 18 percent believe that under a democratic system, the country's economic performance is weak.

### Beliefs about Democracy

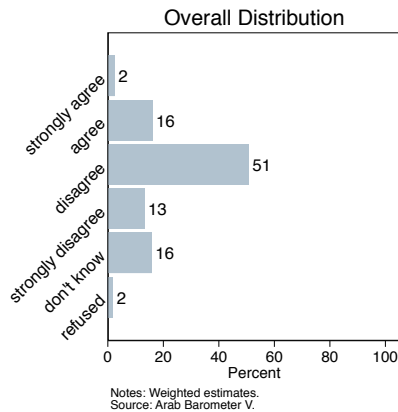
*"Democratic systems may have their problems, yet they are better than other systems."*



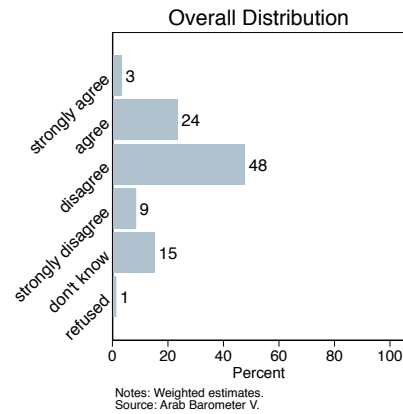
*"In democratic systems, the economic performance is weak."*



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

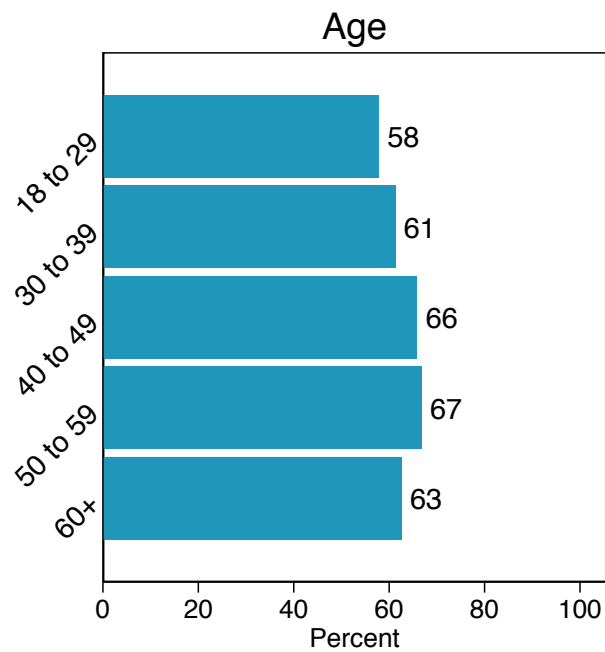


*"Democratic regimes are indecisive."*



Though support for democracy is widespread in Kuwait, views again differ by age. Roughly two thirds of each of the three older cohorts (68 percent of those 40-49, 68 percent of those 50-59, and 63 percent of those over 60) believe that democracy is better than other governance systems. These cohorts in particular would have lived through the parliamentary and electoral instability in the 1990s.

**"Despite its problems, democracy is better than other systems."**  
*% saying they strongly agree or agree*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.

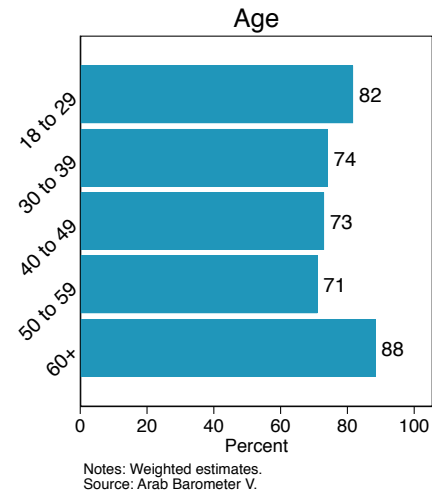
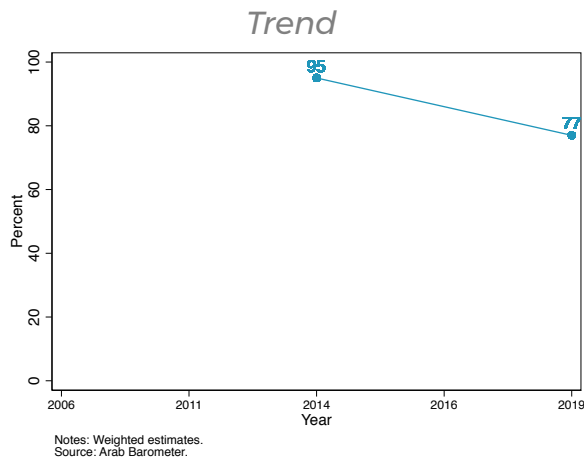
## Economic Situation

Political discontent notwithstanding, Kuwaitis' evaluation of their economy is mostly positive, albeit less so than it was five years ago. About three-quarters (77 percent) evaluate the national economy of Kuwait as good or very good, which is higher than in other countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer. However, the evaluation of the national economy has decreased by 22 points since 2014. Six-in-ten (61 percent) say the economic situation in Kuwait was much or somewhat better 2-3 years ago than it is today.

The youngest (18 to 29) and oldest (60+) age groups are more likely to evaluate economic conditions as good or very good, while the sentiments of those between the ages of 30 and 59 are slightly cooler .



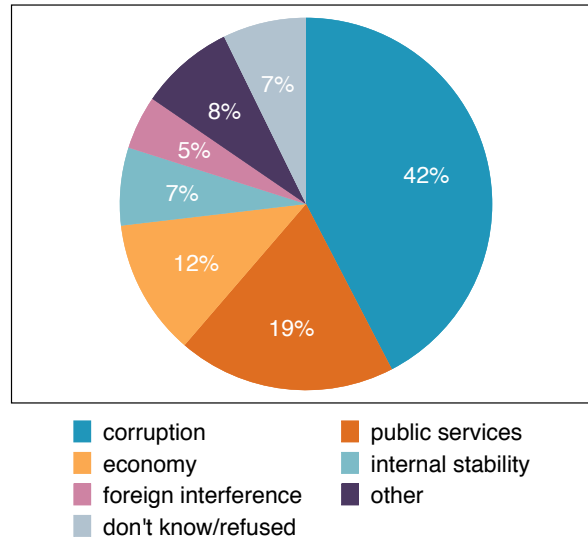
## How would you evaluate the current economic situation in Kuwait? *% saying very good or good*



The extent to which Kuwaitis attribute the state of the national economy to the government, however, is questionable. Ratings of the economic aspects of government performance have declined since 2014. Roughly half (51 percent) of Kuwaitis say the government is doing a good job creating employment opportunities, down from 64 percent in 2014 (-13 points) and 39 percent say the government is doing a good job limiting inflation, down from 63 percent (-24 points).

Still, only a small minority of Kuwaitis (12 percent) say the economy is the greatest challenge facing their country, setting Kuwait apart from most other countries surveyed by the Arab Barometer. Instead, when asked about the greatest challenge facing their country, the most commonly cited problem is corruption (42 percent), followed by public services (19 percent).

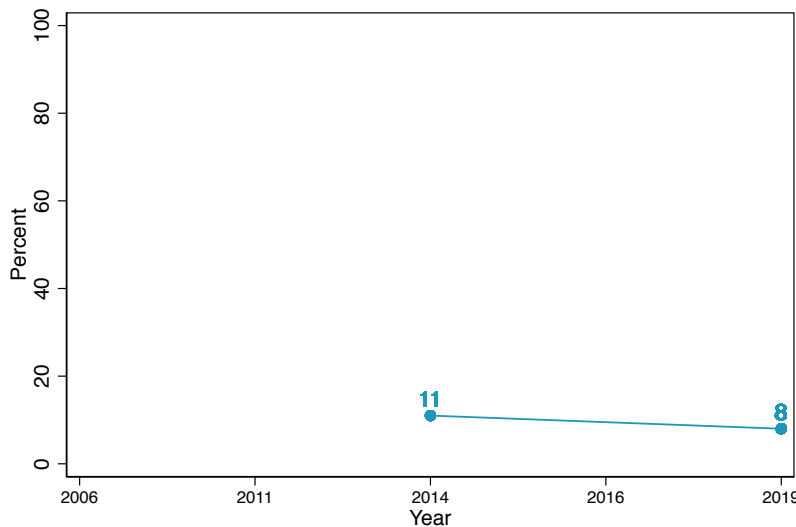
### What is the most important challenge facing Kuwait today?



Note: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Given that economic motivations often underpin the desire to migrate, it is unsurprising that few Kuwaitis have considered moving abroad (8 percent), which is effectively unchanged from the 11 percent who said the same in 2014. Desire to emigrate among Kuwaitis is strongly linked with age and education levels. Among those who want to migrate, 27 percent list corruption as their main reason for migration, followed by educational opportunities (20 percent), economic reasons (12 percent) and political reasons (12 percent).

### Have you ever thought about emigrating from Kuwait? *% who say yes.*

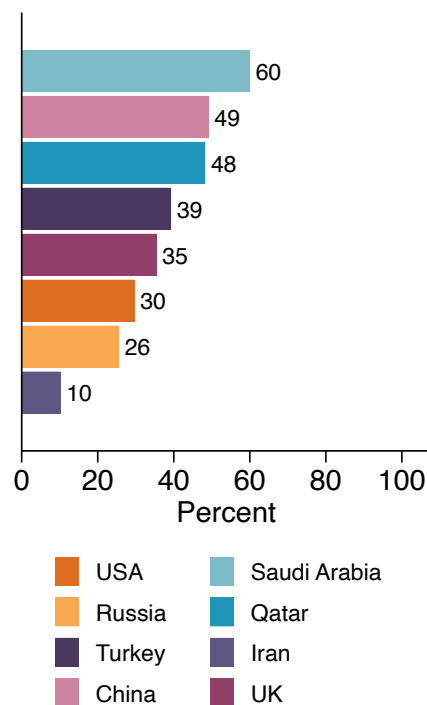


Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer.

## International Relations

The desire to open up to the outside world has cooled in Kuwait since 2014, when 47 percent wanted to open up to a greater extent. In 2019, the share drops to 36 percent. Accordingly, Kuwaitis appear to preference developing regional ties more than international ones, with 60 percent wanting to strengthen ties with Saudi Arabia. Lower shares desire stronger economic relations with Qatar (48 percent) and Turkey (39 percent), which are regional rivals to Saudi Arabia. In contrast, only about a third want stronger ties with each the US (30 percent) and the UK (35 percent), while roughly half (49 percent) want stronger relations with China. Regionally, Iran is an exception, as only 10 percent want to see stronger ties with it, and 42 percent name it as the country that poses the greatest threat to stability in Kuwait.

**International Relations**  
*% who want stronger economic relations with...*



Notes: Weighted estimates.  
Source: Arab Barometer V.



## 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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