
*The **Arab Barometer** uses in-depth public opinion surveys to track attitudes in Arab countries with respect to pluralism, freedom, conceptions of governance and democracy, civic and political participation, social and religious values. Survey waves were carried out in 2006-08 and in 2010-11. This third wave, conducted in 2013, puts in perspective deep trends beyond the turbulence of daily events. www.arabbarometer.org and www.arab-reform.net.*

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Skiping the Arab Spring? The Arab Barometer surveys a changing Algeria

Michael Robbins*

On April 17, 2014, Algerians will vote in presidential elections. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the ailing president, is running for a fourth term. While a number of prominent parties are calling for citizens to boycott the election in protest of Bouteflika's candidacy and of biases in the electoral law, the ruling elite seems confident that it has defused popular frustrations and can impose its candidate. Yet the streets of Algerian cities are seething.

As Algerians prepare to go to the polls, a recent analysis of three public opinion surveys conducted as part of the Arab Barometer from 2006 to 2013 reveals that only a minority of citizens have positive evaluations of the government or the state of democracy in their country. Yet, in the years since the beginning of the Arab spring, the overall trend is one of increasing satisfaction with living conditions. For example, in 2013 four times as many Algerians rate the government's performance as good compared with just two years earlier (40% vs. 10%). Similarly, the percentage who says that the state of democracy and human rights is good or very good has risen from just 8 percent in 2011 to nearly a third (32%) in 2013.

Satisfaction with the state of the economy has also increased dramatically during this time period. About twice as many Algerians said the economy is doing well or very well in 2013 (66%) compared with 2011 (32%). This change may be due to the government's dramatic increase in social spending following the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Algerians (77%) state that economic issues remain the biggest challenge facing their country.

Similarly, in 2013, Algerians were more likely than in 2011 to say that their basic rights were guaranteed, including freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom to vote in elections. In 2013, fully three quarters of citizens said each of these liberties was ensured. One major exception to this trend is the freedom to

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demonstrate peacefully, which a minority (42%) said was guaranteed in both 2011 and 2013.

Perhaps reflecting on the recent experiences of Tunisia and Egypt, in 2013, most Algerians (78%) expressed favor for gradual changes to the existing system rather than massive and sudden reform. By comparison, in the months after the Arab Spring, only 54 percent favored reforms being implemented little by little rather than all at once.

Despite the electoral success of Islamist parties in Egypt and Tunisia following the Arab Spring, religious parties in Algeria enjoy little success. On the whole, Algerians no longer support a significant role for religion in politics. Three quarters of those polled agree that men of religion should not affect how people vote in elections and fewer than three in ten say religious leaders should have influence over government decisions.

The surveys also revealed numerous generational differences and a persistent dissatisfaction among youth. Algerians aged 18-34 are less likely than those 35 and older to rate the government's overall performance positively or to be satisfied with its efforts on job creation and they are much less likely than older cohorts to support a political party.

Algerians Say Their Country's Situation Is Improving

Following the events of the Arab Spring, the Algerian regime has undertaken fewer political reforms than many other Arab countries. Nevertheless, by multiple measures, Algerians say that their country's overall situation has improved significantly during this time. Algerians are now more likely than they were at the beginning of the Arab Spring to say that the economic situation is good, their personal security is ensured, and that the state of democracy and human rights is good.

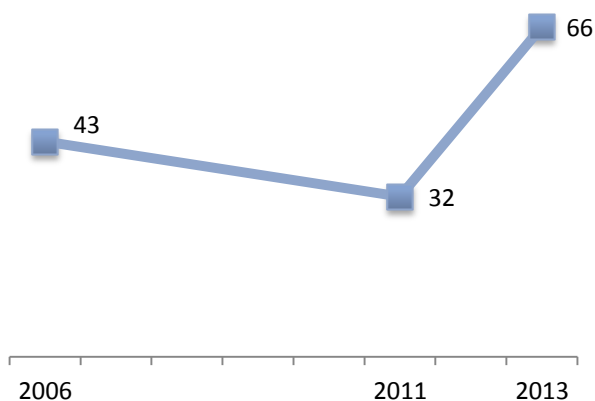
Like many Arab countries, Algeria suffered from high unemployment in the years leading up to the Arab Spring. Perhaps as a byproduct of the effects of the worldwide economic slowdown, the percent of Algerians saying their country's economic situation was good or very good declined from 43% in 2006 to about a third (32%) in 2011. However, following the Arab Spring satisfaction with the economy had risen dramatically. In 2013, nearly two-thirds (66%) of Algerians rated the situation as being good (57%) or very good (9%). Overall, younger (18-34 years old) and older (35+) Algerians were about as likely to hold this view in all three surveys.

This dramatic shift could be the result of a number of factors. A major one is the government's decision, shortly after the onset of the Arab Spring, to dramatically increase social expenditures: public sector salaries were increased by 34%,¹ expenditures on commodity subsidies and social housing were boosted, and lending programs to the youth bolstered. In total, public spending increased by roughly 25%.²

At the same time, in neighboring Tunisia, in the year after the Jasmine Revolution the economy contracted by nearly 2 percent and unemployment rose from 13 in 2010 percent in to 18.3 percent in 2011. Although the Tunisian economy grew by 4 percent in 2012, unemployment fell by less than a point to 17.6 percent. During the same period, Algeria's economy grew at a steady 3 percent per annum and unemployment remained largely unchanged, increasing from 10 percent in 2010 to 11 percent in 2012.³

Rising Economic Satisfaction

% who say the economic situation is good or very good



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¹ Salhi, Hamoud. "Is Algeria Immune from the Arab Spring?" BBC Online, July 27, 2011. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14167481>

² Huber, Daniela, Susi Dennison and James D. Le Sueur. "Algeria Three Years After the Arab Spring." Mediterranean Paper Series, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2014. http://www.iai.it/pdf/mediterraneo/GMF-IAI/Mediterranean-paper_24.pdf

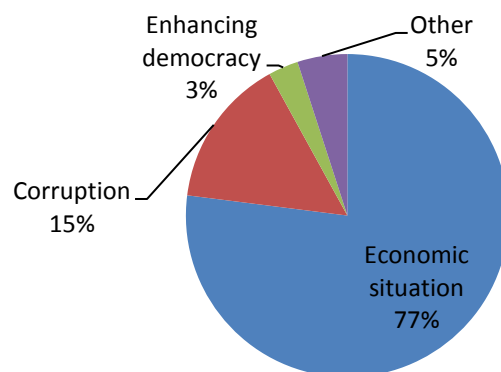
³ World Development Indicators, The World Bank, 2014; ILOSTAT, International Labor Organization, 2014.

Nevertheless, it is clear many Algerians remain concerned about the state of the economy. More than three-quarters list economic issues such as poverty and inflation as the biggest challenge facing the country.

Meanwhile, the second most prominent concern is administrative corruption (15%). By contrast, only 3 percent of citizens say enhancing democracy is the greatest challenge while a small percentage (5%) specify a range of other issues.

Algeria's Most Pressing Challenge

% who say it is ...



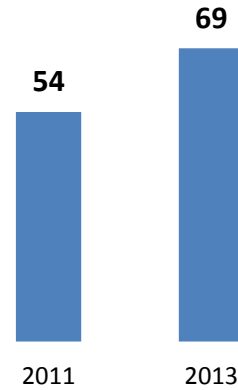
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Algerians are also increasingly likely to say that their personal security is ensured or fully ensured than they were in the months following the Arab Spring. In 2011, just over half (54%) of citizens felt secure. By 2013 nearly seven-in-ten (69%) said the same. In part, this increase coincides with the regime's efforts to crack down on militant groups throughout the country.

Although most Algerians feel secure, only a minority describes the state of democracy and human rights as good or very good in either 2011 or 2013. Instead, in both years the most common view is that the state is neither good nor bad (59% in 2011 and 48% in 2013). Overall, however, the trend indicates that Algerians are becoming more satisfied with the state of democracy and human rights in their country. In 2011, only 8% rated their state as good or very good, compared with nearly a third (32%) in 2013.

Increasing Sense of Personal Security

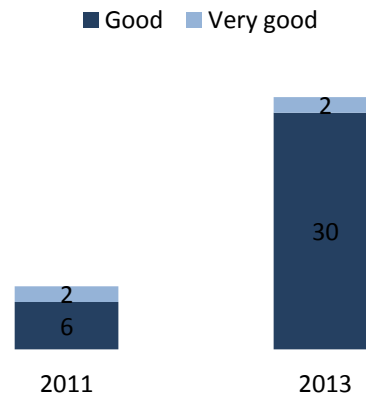
% who say their personal security is ensured or fully ensured



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Democracy and Human Rights

% who say their state in Algeria is ...



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Views of Government Performance

In 2013, fewer than half of Algerians said the government is doing a good job overall or on specific issues such as creating jobs, narrowing income inequality, or managing the democratic transition. However, the Arab Barometer finds that ratings of the government's performance have increased dramatically since the early days of the Arab Spring.

In 2011, satisfaction with the government's performance was extremely low.⁴ Only one-in-ten Algerians said that the government was doing a good or very good job. By 2013, four times as many held this view, an increase of 30 percentage points.

Results are similar on specific issues. In 2011, just 10 percent said the government was doing a good job on decreasing economic inequality, which is roughly the same percentage as in 2006 (14%). By 2013, however, more than one-quarter (27%) held this view. Similarly, ratings of government efforts to create jobs have improved recently. In 2006 and 2011, fewer than two-in-ten Algerians said the government was doing a good job on increasing employment (17% and 15%, respectively). In 2013, nearly one-third (31%) held this view.

Younger Algerians are somewhat less likely to be satisfied with the government's performance than older Algerians. In 2013, those ages 18-34 (33%) were 13 points less likely than those 35 and older (46%) to say the government was doing a good job on the whole. Similarly, younger Algerians (26%) were 10 points less likely than older Algerians (36%) to rate the government's performance on creating jobs as good or very good. However, generational differences were limited to these two issues; younger and older Algerians are about equally likely to say the government is doing a good job narrowing the income gap and managing the democratic transition.

Improving Views of Government

% who say government is doing good or very good job ...

	2011	2013	Difference
Overall	10	40	+30
Narrowing income gap	10	27	+17
Creating jobs	15	31	+16
Managing the democratic transition	-	47	-

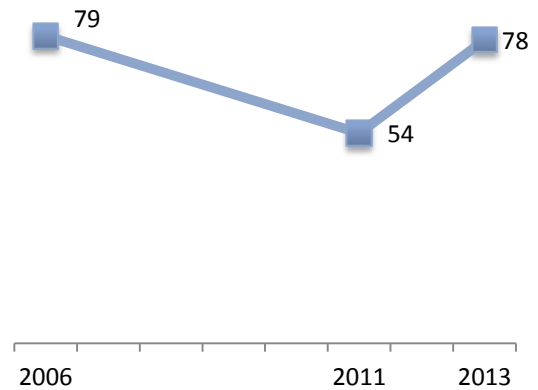
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⁴ This question was not asked in 2006.

Perhaps linked with growing satisfaction with the government, Algerians are now more likely than in the months after the onset of the Arab Spring to say that reforms should be implemented gradually instead of all at once. In 2011, slightly more than half (54%) of Algerians agreed that reforms should be implemented little by little. In 2013, nearly eight-in-ten (78%) held this view, which is nearly identical to the percentage in the 2006 survey (79%). Perhaps reflecting on the outcome of events in Egypt and Tunisia, many Algerians may have tempered their desire for massive changes, instead preferring gradual reforms of the existing system.

Rejection of Radical Reform

% who agree or strongly agree reforms should be implemented gradually rather than all at once



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Rights and Liberties

The percentage of Algerians who believe that they enjoy a number of basic rights has increased dramatically since the Arab Spring. In part, this change may be related to the reforms taken by the Algerian government in response to the events sweeping the region. In 2011, the government lifted the state of emergency that had been in place for nearly two decades. Additionally, the regime adopted new laws governing association, media and political parties which it touted as major steps forward despite claims to the contrary by opposition activists.⁵

In 2011, just over half of Algerians said that the freedom to join a political party and freedom of the press (53%, each) was guaranteed to a medium or great extent. By 2013, more than three-quarters said these rights were ensured (80% and 78%, respectively).

Similarly, most Algerians believe that they enjoy the freedom to vote in elections. Nearly seven-in-ten (69%) said this right was guaranteed in 2011, compared with 89% in 2013 (+20 points). The percentage who says freedom of expression is ensured also increased during this period from 60% to 76% (+16 points).

By contrast, a minority of Algerians says the right to demonstrate peacefully is guaranteed to a medium or great extent. In 2011, about four-in-ten held this view (42%). In 2013, the percentage remained unchanged, perhaps a reflection of the government's ongoing restrictions on freedom of assembly.⁶

Increasing Confidence in Rights Being Guaranteed

% who say freedom ... is guaranteed to a medium or great extent

	2011	2013	Difference
To join a political party	53	80	+27
Of the press	53	78	+25
To vote in elections	69	89	+20
Of expression	60	76	+16
To peacefully demonstrate	42	42	0

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⁵ See Algerian Ministry of Communication, 'Vote on the draft media law', http://www.ministerecommunication.gov.dz/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=662&Itemid=1; "In Algeria, New Media Law Stifles Free Expression." Committee to Protect Journalists, January 25, 2012. <https://www.cpj.org/2012/01/in-algeria-new-media-law-stifles-free-expression.php>

⁶ UN News Centre. "UN Human Rights Chief Calls on Algeria to Review Laws on Civil Society, Freedom of Assembly." September 19, 2012. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=42936&Cr=algeria&Cr1=#.U0MTOa1dVIA>

Party Politics

Very few Algerians are members of a political party. In 2011, only 2% stated they were members while 3% did so in 2013. However, a greater percentage of Algerians now state that they support a political party.

In early 2011, nearly nine-in-ten citizens (87%) said that no party comes closest to representing their political, social and economic aspirations. Among the remainder, the long-dominant National Liberation Front (FLN) had the greatest support (6%). The National Rally for Democracy (RND) and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) received the support of 3 percent and 2 percent of Algerians, respectively. No other party had the support of more than 1 percent of the population.

Most Algerians Do Not Identify with a Party

% who say ... party best represents them

	2011	2013	Difference
No party	87	62	-25
FLN	6	18	+12
RND	3	6	+3
PT	1	4	+3
FNA	<1	2	+2
FFS	1	2	+1
Hamas (MSP)	1	2	+1
Ennahda	<1	1	+1
RCD	2	2	0
Jil Jadid	-	<1	0

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By 2013, Algerians were much more likely to say they favored a political party. Those saying that no party best represented them fell by 25 points to 62 percent. Meanwhile, support for the FLN tripled to nearly two-in-ten Algerians (18%). The RND again represented the second largest segment of Algerians at 6 percent followed by the Workers' Party (PT) at 4 percent. Two percent or fewer Algerians supported all other parties.

In 2013, older Algerians were much more likely than younger Algerians to identify with a political party. Only half of those 35 and older said that no party represented them. By contrast, nearly three-quarters (74%) of citizens ages 18-34 did not favor any party. Older Algerians were also much more likely than the younger generation to support the FLN (26% vs. 9%). Support for all other parties was about equal between the older and younger generation.

Religion and Politics: the ‘post-Islamist era’?

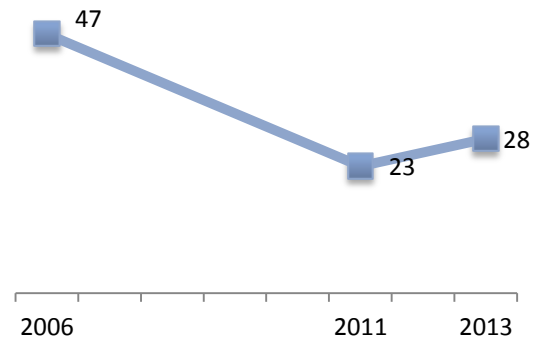
Support for giving religious leaders a role in the political process has declined over the last decade. Although Algerians were divided on the role religion should play in politics in 2006, now only a minority support a substantial role for Islam in politics, a trend that Algerian sociologists describe as the post-Islamist era⁷.

In 2006, nearly half (47%) of Algerians said religious leaders should have influence on decisions of government. By 2011, however, fewer than a quarter (23%) said the same. The percentage remained largely unchanged in 2013 with 28% favoring religious leaders having a role in decisions of government.

Similarly, in 2006 Algerians were divided on whether religious leaders should be able to influence how citizens vote in elections. At the time, slightly more than half (55%) said religious leaders should *not* have this ability. By 2011, more than two-thirds (69%) said religious leaders should *not* affect how people vote in elections while in 2013 more than three-quarters (78%) held this view.

Falling Support for Mixing Religion and Politics

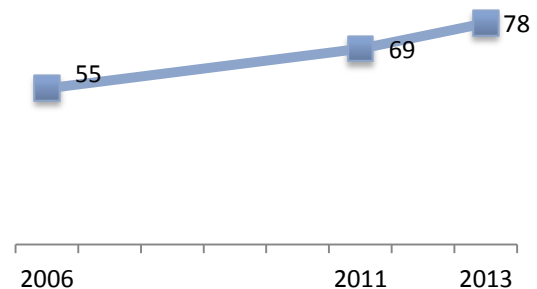
% who agree or strongly agree religious leaders should have input on government decisions



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Most Do Not Want Religious Leaders to Influence Elections

% who agree or strongly agree religious leaders should not influence how people vote



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⁷ This term has been used by Algerian sociologist Nasser Djabi.

About the Surveys

The surveys represent national probability sample designs of adults 18 years and older. They were conducted face-to face in Arabic and covered all regions of the country. The surveys include questions relating to economics, political institutions and attitudes, elections and parliament, the media, democracy, religion culture and international affairs. The third wave survey also includes questions on political developments related to the Arab Spring.

The first wave survey was conducted May 26 – June 18, 2006 and included 1,300 respondents. It was led by Dr. Abdallah Bedaida of the University of Algiers. The sample was stratified by region. Subsequently, area probability sample was used for selection of communes with quotas for age, education and gender.

The second wave was conducted April 15 – May 11, 2011 and included 1,216 respondents. It was led by Dr. Abdenasser al-Jabi of the University of Algiers. Area probability sampling was employed with Algeria's 48 wilayas being combined into larger geographic areas yielding three strata: the north, the highlands and the south. Interviews were distributed across these three strata by probability proportional to size. Primary sampling units (PSUs) were communes. Each commune was designated as either urban or rural depending on the size of the population. Districts with more than 1,100 residents were designated urban while those with fewer were designated rural. Within each district, households were randomly selected in clusters of 10. A total of 877 respondents were interviewed in urban areas and 339 in rural areas.

The third survey was conducted March 13 – April 6, 2013 and included 1,220 respondents. It was also led by Dr. al-Jabi and the same methodology was employed as in the second wave. A total of 810 respondents were interviewed in urban areas and 410 in rural areas.

The full questionnaire for each wave and additional details about the surveys can be found on the Arab Barometer website (www.arabbarometer.org).

The Arab Barometer is a chapter of Global Barometer Surveys. It has its operational base at the Center for Strategic Studies in Jordan (CSS) and involves close collaboration among the Arab Reform Initiative, the University of Michigan, Princeton University, the Palestine Center for policy and Survey Research and national research centers which lead survey teams in target countries. For the third wave, surveys were conducted in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. The third wave is funded by the Afro Barometer, the Canadian International Research and Development Centre (IDRC) and the US Institute of Peace.
