

ARAB BAROMETER SURVEY PROJECT

ALGERIA REPORT

(1) Views Toward Democracy

Algerians differed greatly in their views of the most basic characteristic of “democracy”. Approximately half of the respondents stated that the most important characteristic was economic in nature. Overall, the plurality (29.8%) of respondents stated that the most important characteristic is a small income gap between rich and poor while 20.9% of respondents said it was the provision of basic necessities including food and shelter for all citizens. The other half of respondents stated that the most important characteristic was political, with 27.6% of respondents stating it is the opportunity to change government through elections and 21.6% of respondents stating it is the ability to criticize the government or the right to free speech. Less than 1% of respondents provided a different answer for the most important characteristic of democracy.

The distribution of responses for the second-most important characteristic was largely similar. Again, the plurality (35.8%) stated that it was a small gap between rich and poor. This was followed by the ability to change the government through elections (22.3%), the ability to criticize the government and freedom of speech (22.2%) and provision of basic necessities (19.0%). These findings are summarized in table 1.

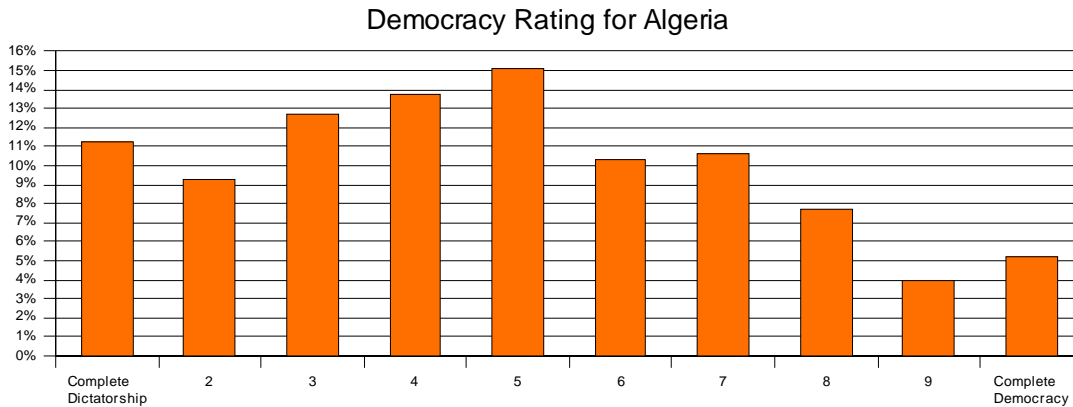
Table 1

Conception of the Most Important Characteristic of a Democracy					
	Ability to Change the Government through Elections	Freedom to Criticize the Government	Smaller Gap Between Rich and Poor	Basic Necessities for Everyone	Other
1st Choice	27.40%	21.43%	29.55%	20.74%	0.88%
2nd Choice	22.32%	22.22%	35.82%	18.97%	0.67%

Despite differences in the conceptions of democracy, overall support of democracy was quite high. 32.5% of respondents agreed strongly with the statement that despite all its problems, democracy is still the best form of government for Algeria. Additionally, 50.6% of respondents agreed with this statement while only 10.8% of respondents disagreed and 6.3% disagreed strongly.

Although support for democracy is high, there is widespread debate over the degree to which Algeria should be considered a democratic country. A majority (62.1%) considered Algeria to be closer to a dictatorship than a democracy. Overall, the mean response was a rating of 4.8 out of 10, with 10 being a complete democracy and 1 being a complete dictatorship. The full distribution of responses can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1



Despite Algeria's recent history of civil conflict, most Algerians do not support the violation of human rights in the name of security as 55.9% of respondents stated that the violation of human rights was not justifiable at all and 19.0% said it was not very justified in the name of security. However, 14.1% of respondents said it was somewhat justified and 11.1% said it was completely justified.

(2) Political Participation and Citizenship

Overall, relative interest in matters of politics is not particularly high in Algeria. The majority of respondents stated that they had little (37.4%) or no interest (30.3%) in politics. Only 7.4% indicated that they were very interested in politics while 25.1% said that they were interested. A likely explanation for this result is the relatively low level of internal efficacy seen among ordinary Algerians. Among respondents, 34.2% stated that they agreed strongly while 45.3% agreed with the statement “sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.” Of the remaining 20.5%, approximately half disagreed and the other half disagreed strongly.

Similarly, levels of participation in the political process were relatively low. Only 45.2% of respondents stated that they had voted in the previous national election. Although nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated that they had never signed a petition or organized with others to draw attention to an issue over the last three years, 11.2% indicated they had done so once and 18.5% said they had done so multiple times. Fewer respondents indicated they had attended a demonstration or a protest during the same period, with 8.7% saying they had done so once and 12.2% said they had done so more than once. Interestingly, the differences in participation by education and employment sector tend to be relatively small. However, as shown in table 2, individuals with higher levels of education are somewhat more likely to have participated in a public demonstration while individuals employed in the public sector were significantly more likely to vote than those in the private sector.

Table 2

		Participation Rate in the Elections	Participation Rate in Public Demonstrations
Education	University or Above	50%	24%
	Less than University	52%	19%
Employment Sector	Public	57%	22%
	Private	46%	22%

Algerians were largely divided on the ease of obtaining basic services from the government. 61.5% stated that it was easy or very easy to obtain an identity document while 27.6% of respondents it was difficult and 10.8% said it was very difficult. However, Algerians' perceptions of the ability to file a complaint when their rights had been violated was significantly lower. Only 18.1% of respondents stated that it was easy or very easy. Conversely, 33.7% said it was difficult and the plurality (48.2%) said it was very difficult.

(3) Religiosity and the Role of Religion in Public Life

Questions regarding the primary identity for ordinary Algerians revealed some contradictory findings. When asked which identity best describes them, the vast majority (70.5%) of respondents said that above all they were Muslim. This was followed by 20.4% who said they were above all Algerian and 5.6% who said above all they were Arab. However, when asked about what social or geographical identity was most important, half of the respondents chose Algeria. This response was followed by their family/tribe (30.5%). Asked in this manner, only 16.1% of respondents chose the Islamic world. The full results can be seen in table 3.

Table 3

Social or Geographical Identity					
Family/Tribe	City/Village	Governate	Algeria	Arab World	Islamic World
22.69	1.69	0.85	36.38	0.77	11.92

Attitudes toward the role of religion and religious leaders in the political process shows important variation. Among respondents, 61.0% stated that men of religion should have an influence on decisions of government. Within this group, nearly a third were strongly supportive of this statement. Conversely, 27.3% of all respondents were unsupportive and 11.6% were strongly unsupportive of this statement.

Despite widespread debate, the majority of ordinary Algerians believe that democracy and Islam are compatible systems. In fact, only 12.2% of respondents agreed strongly with the statement that Islam and democracy were incompatible while 18.5% agreed. The plurality (46.6%) disagreed and 27.2% disagreed strongly. However, the vast majority of Algerians believe that the government should implement only laws of the *shari'a* with 47.0% strongly agreeing and 42.4% agreeing. Only 7.0% disagreed and 3.6% disagreed strongly. Nevertheless, a large majority also agreed that the government should only implement laws that are in accord with the wishes of the people with 29.2% agreeing strongly and 37.3% agreeing. On the other hand, 25.6% disagreed and 7.9% disagreed strongly with this statement. The relatively high support for both items lends further strength to the finding that ordinary Algerians believe that Islam and democracy are compatible. The results are summarized in table 4.

The Relationship between Islam and Democracy			
Response to statement that Islam and Democracy are not Compatible			
Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
12.23%	18.45%	46.60%	22.72%
Response to statement that all laws should be based on <i>shari'a</i>			
Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
47.02%	42.36%	6.99%	3.62%
Response to statement that all laws should be made according to the wishes of the people			
Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
29.20%	37.33%	25.61%	7.87%

Table 4

Interestingly, the perceptions of the compatibility of Islam and democracy do not appear to vary greatly by the preferred political system of ordinary Algerians as shown in figures 2 and 3. These somewhat surprising findings could suggest that views towards the compatibility of Islam and democracy have minimal effect on individual-level support for democracy or authoritarianism.

Figure 2
Distribution of respondents stating that Islam and Democracy are Compatible among those who State that a Parliamentary Democracy is Suitable for Algeria

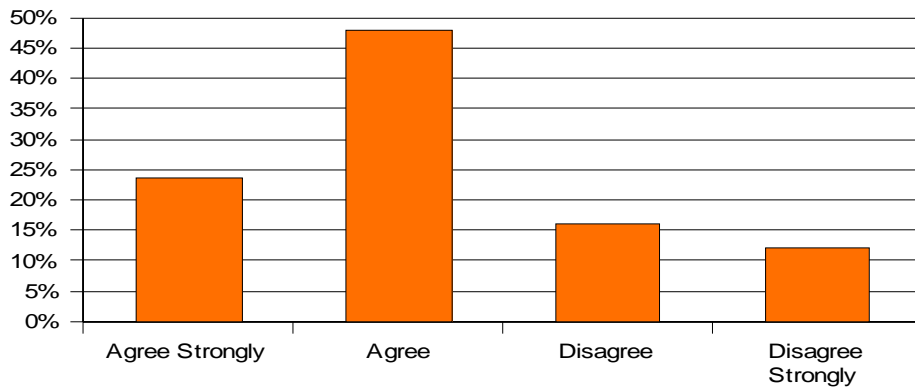
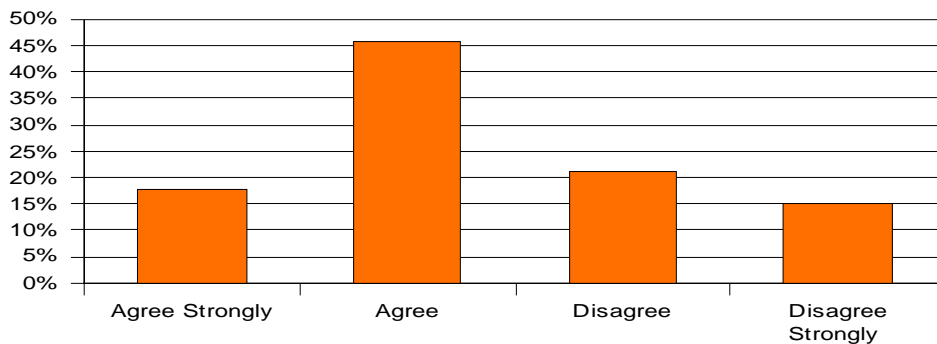


Figure 3

Distribution of respondents stating that Islam and Democracy are Compatible among those who state that a Political System Governed by Sharia without Parties or Elections is Suitable for Algeria



Similarly, most Algerians believe that religion is not a private matter and that it should not be separated from public life. While 35.9% of respondents supported a divide between the two, only 14.8% of all respondents stated that they were strongly supportive of it. Of the nearly two-thirds of respondents who believed that religion and the state should not be separate, approximately half were supportive while the other half was strongly supportive of this lack of separation.

Overall, education had limited explanatory effect on the views of respondents toward whether or not

religion was a private matter. Although illiterate individuals were much less likely to agree with this statement than others, no pattern existed at higher levels of education as seen in figure 4. Surprisingly, there was minimal difference between individuals who stated they were religious and those who stated they were not religious as seen in figure 5. However, there appears to be a strong correlation between individuals who are likely to be more supportive of political Islam and views towards whether or not religion was a private matter. As can be seen in figure 6, individuals who tended to be more supportive of political Islam were less likely to view religion as a private matter.

Figure 4

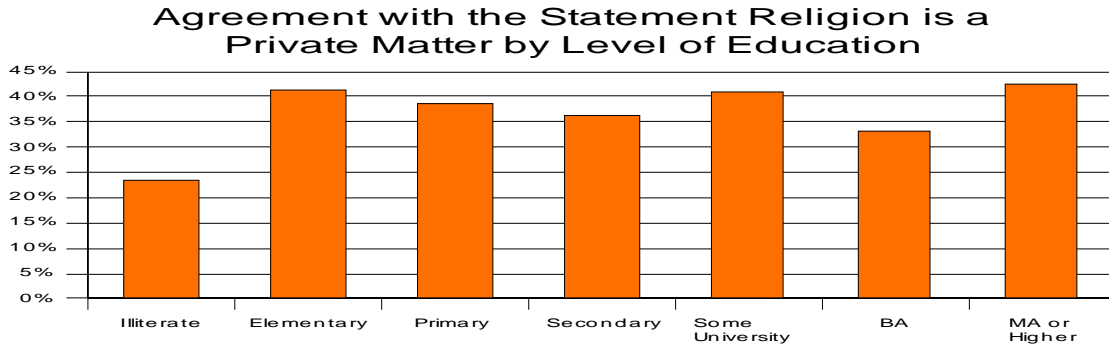


Figure 5

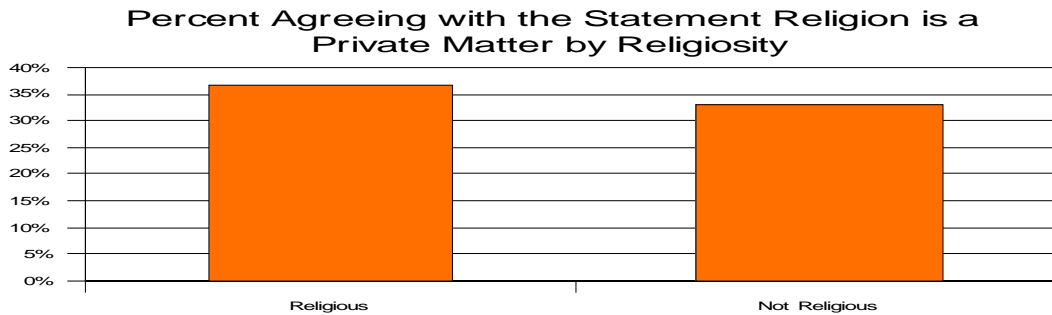
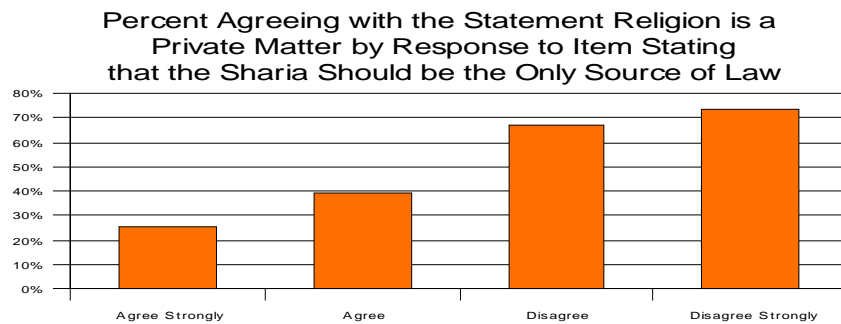


Figure 6



Evidence from the Arab Barometer varies in terms of the level of personal religiosity in Algerian society. When asked if they considered themselves religious, 54.2% of respondents stated yes. While only 12.7% of respondents said they were not religious, almost a third (32.3%) of the sample declined to answer the question. However, while 86.8% of all respondents stated that they prayed and, among the literate population, only 18.1% of respondents said that they read the Quran on a daily basis while 26.2% stated they did so several times a week. The plurality (41.2%) said that they sometimes read the Quran and 14.6% said they did so rarely.

Indirect measures of religiosity suggest that matters of religion are important to the majority of Algerians. For the vast majority of Algerians, religiosity is seen as an important attribute among potential spouses for their children. In fact, nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of respondents stated that it was very important that the potential spouse of their son or daughter prays. An additional 18.1% said it was somewhat important while only 16.3% of respondents said it had little or no importance. This finding was even stronger for an item asking if it was important if the potential spouse fasted for Ramadan. In this case, 83.9% of respondents said it was very important and 8.9% said it was somewhat important. Only 7.2% said it had little or no importance.

On controversial issues within the interpretation of Islam, Algerians are largely divided. A slight majority of Algerians (53.7%) believe that women are required by Islam to wear the *hijab*, with half of these respondents stating that they strongly agree that this is a requirement. Among the 47.3% of respondents who said that it was not a requirement of Islam, just over a third stated that they strongly agreed that it was not a requirement. Additionally, less than half (42.0%) of respondents state that in a Muslim country Islam requires that the rights of non-Muslims to be inferior to those of Muslims. Among all respondents, 17.8% state that they strongly agree with this statement while 24.2% state that they agree. The plurality of respondents (39.2%) disagree while 18.8% disagree strongly.

Interestingly, as shown in figures 7 and 8, perceptions of the requirement in Islam for women to wear the *hijab* do not appear to vary greatly by level of education or by personal religiosity. However, it does vary significantly with the belief that religion is a private matter as seen in figure 9. Respondents who agreed that religion is a private matter were much more likely to state that Islam does not require women to wear the *hijab* whereas those who believed that religion was a public matter were also more likely to believe that Islam requires women to wear the *hijab*. This finding lends some evidence to support the hypothesis that views about the *hijab* are related to views towards the role of religion in public life in Algeria.

Figure 7

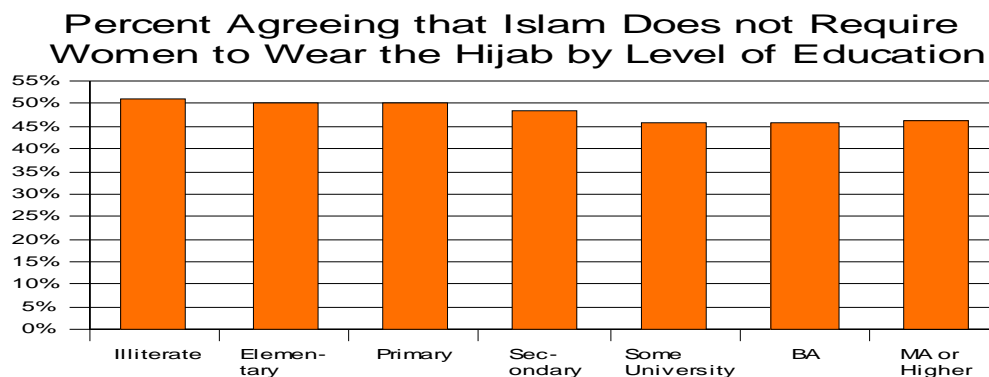


Figure 8

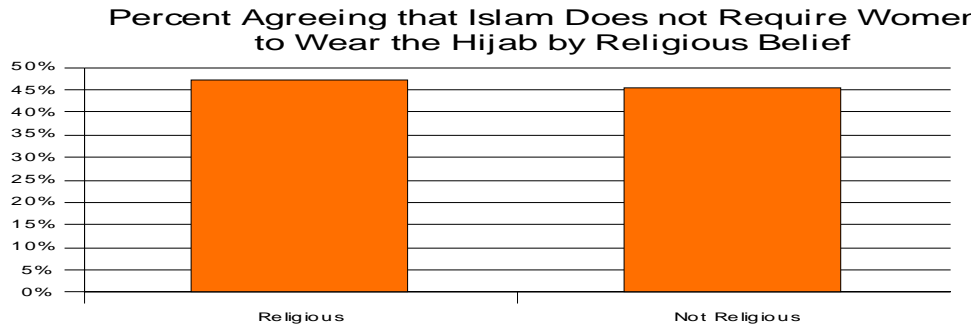
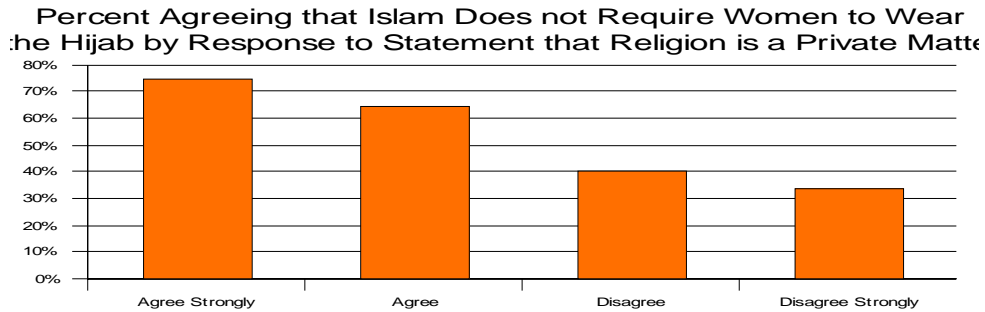


Figure 9



(4) Views towards Public Institutions

Levels of trust in public institutions in Algeria were shown to be relatively low. For example, when asked about their trust towards parliament, only 8.1% of the sample answered that they had a great deal of trust while 20.9% said that had quite a lot of trust. 24.8% of the sample said they did not have very much trust, while nearly half of respondents (46.2%) said they had no trust at all. Trust in the courts was somewhat higher, but was also low overall. Only 13.6% had a great deal of trust, 26.4% had quite a lot of trust, 26.2% had little trust and the plurality (33.8%) had no trust at all.

Algerians were largely divided on the quality of the last presidential election with approximately half the population stating it was relatively free and fair. Overall, 19.1% said that the election was completely free and fair while 30.9% said that it was overall free and fair but with minor problems. A further 17.7% said that although they considered it to be free and fair, there were major problems with the election while the plurality (32.3%) answered that it was not free and fair.

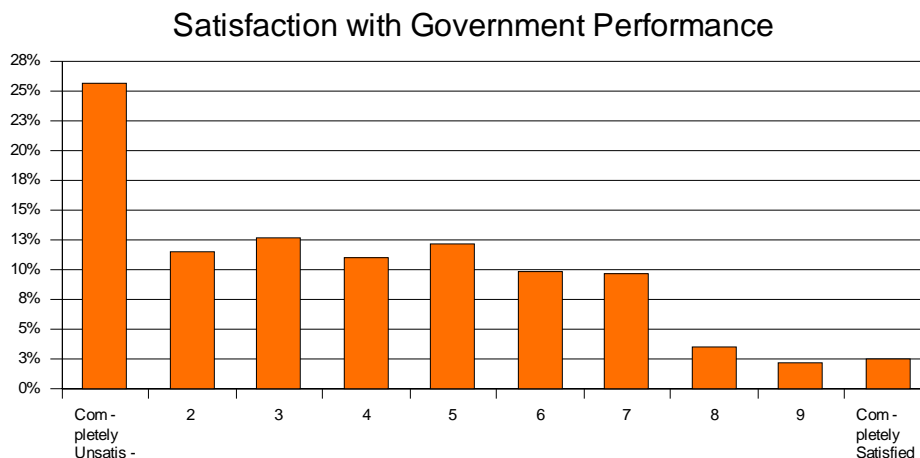
Algerians were largely divided on perceptions of the effects of government policies on their lives. Few individuals believed that policies had a large positive effect (2.7%) or a large negative effect (7.5%). However, only 17.1% of respondents believed that policies had a positive impact compared to 28.3% who believed they had a negative impact. The plurality (44.4%) believed that they did not have either a positive or negative effect on their daily lives. Interestingly, as seen in table 5, it appears that perceptions about the economic well-being of the country had a greater effect on perceptions of the effect of government policies on a respondents' life than perceptions about the economic well-being of a respondent's family.

Table 5

Percent of respondents stating that government policies have a positive impact on their life by ratings of economic conditions in Algeria							
Economic Conditions in Algeria				Economic Conditions for the Family			
Very Good	Good	Bad	Very Bad	Very Good	Good	Bad	Very Bad
52.0%	27.9%	13.2%	9.6%	26.7%	26.3%	16.2%	16.7%

Overall, individuals were relatively unsatisfied with the performance of the government at the time the survey was taken. Only 2.5% were completely satisfied while slightly over one-quarter of respondents were completely unsatisfied. Nearly three-fourths of respondents rated the performance as more negative than positive on a ten-point scale and the mean response was 3.9, with one being completely unsatisfied and 10 being completely satisfied. The full distribution can be seen in figure 10.

Figure 10



Ordinary Algerians are divided on perceptions of government efforts to deal with the problems that affect their daily lives. Approximately half (48.9%) of respondents believe that government officials are knowledgeable about their needs. However, perceptions of the vast majority of citizens was that the government and political leaders do not care about ordinary people. Only 7.4% of individuals strongly agreed with the statement that officials cared about them while 18.2% agreed. On the other hand, 40.8% of respondents disagreed with this statement and 33.7% disagreed strongly. Meanwhile, very few individuals believed that the government took the opinions of ordinary citizens into account when making decisions. In fact, only 9.2% of strongly agreed with this statement with 17.4% agreed. Conversely, 39.8% disagreed and 33.6% disagreed strongly.

Less than half (37.3%) of ordinary Algerians believe that the government has created conditions under which citizens can prosper through their own efforts, with approximately 40% of these individuals strongly agreeing with this statement. Among all respondents, 37.9% disagreed and 24.8% disagreed strongly with this statement.

(5) International Affairs

Respondents were told that some people have claimed that the Arab world lags behind other world regions and were asked what was mainly responsible for this gap. The majority (50.3%) of respondents stated that both international and domestic factors were equally important in explaining this gap. The majority of the others (36.7% of all respondents) stated that internal factors primarily responsible for this gap while only 13.0% stated that external factors were primarily responsible.

Respondents rated the success of the Arab League in promoting Arab unity as poor. The majority (50.9%) answered that the Arab League had not been successful at all while 27.7% said that it had not been very successful. Conversely, 16.5% stated it had been somewhat successful while only 4.9% said it had been very successful.

Attitudes toward U.S. actions in the region were largely negative. Nearly three-quarters of respondents stated that U.S. democracy promotion in the region had been successful. Among all respondents, 40.3% stated that disagreed that U.S. democracy promotion had been successful and 32.6% disagreed strongly. Only 6.4% of individuals agreed strongly with this statement while 20.6% agreed. Opinion was also divided toward a statement asking if respondents agreed or disagreed with the statement that despite negative U.S. foreign policies, ordinary Americans are good people. A slight majority (52.0%) agreed while the remaining 48.0% disagreed.

While the majority (68.6%) of respondents stated that U.S. and Western culture has many positive attributes, a majority (71.0%) also claimed that exposure to the culture of the U.S. and other Western countries has a harmful effect on Algeria. Overall, level of education and personal religiosity have little explanatory power in predicting attitudes toward the perceived effect of Western culture on Algeria (figures 11 and 12). There does appear to be a weak relationship between this item and attitude toward the place of religion in society with those who believed religion was a private matter less likely to believe that Western culture was harmful (figure 13).

Figure 11

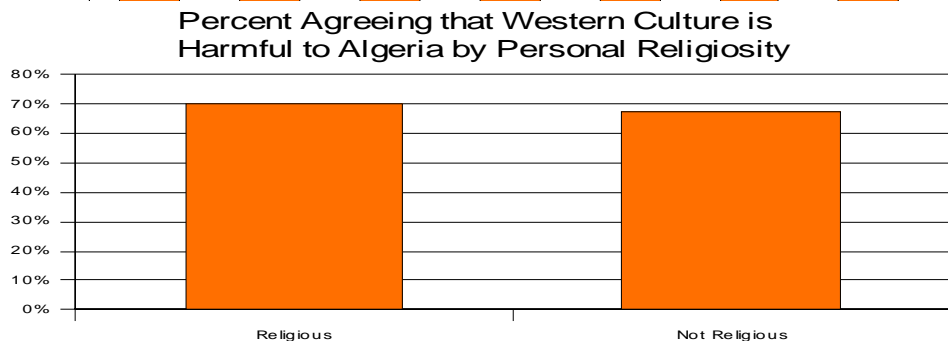
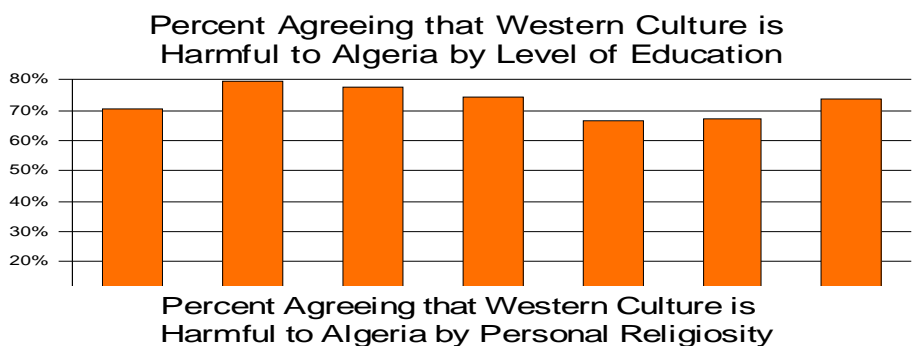
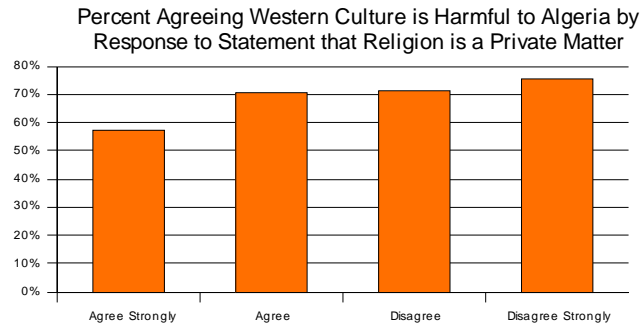


Figure 12

Figure 13



Algerians were very likely to categorize recent attacks and explosions in the Arab world as being terrorist acts. The vast majority (81.1%) stated that the Sharm al-Sheikh and Dahab explosions in Egypt were terrorist acts and 85.6% said the Amman hotel bombings of November 2005 were terrorist acts. Similarly, 82.3% stated that the Casablanca bombings were terrorist acts. A large but somewhat smaller majority characterized explosions in Europe as being terrorist acts with 74.2% of respondents stating that the London bombings and 75.2% stating that the Madrid bombings were terrorist acts. However, as can be seen in figures 15-17, perceptions of the Madrid bombings as terrorist acts did not vary significantly by level of education, personal religiosity, or attitude toward whether religion is a private matter.

Figure 15

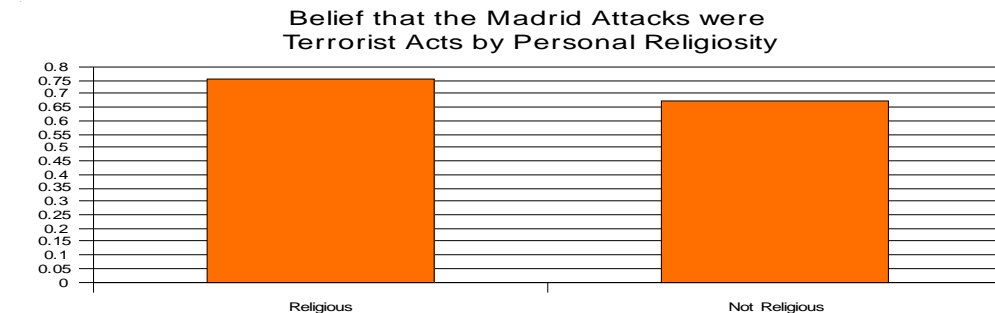
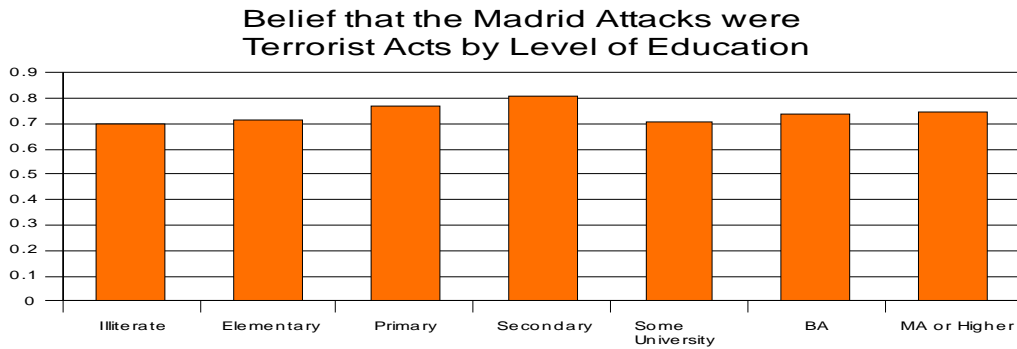
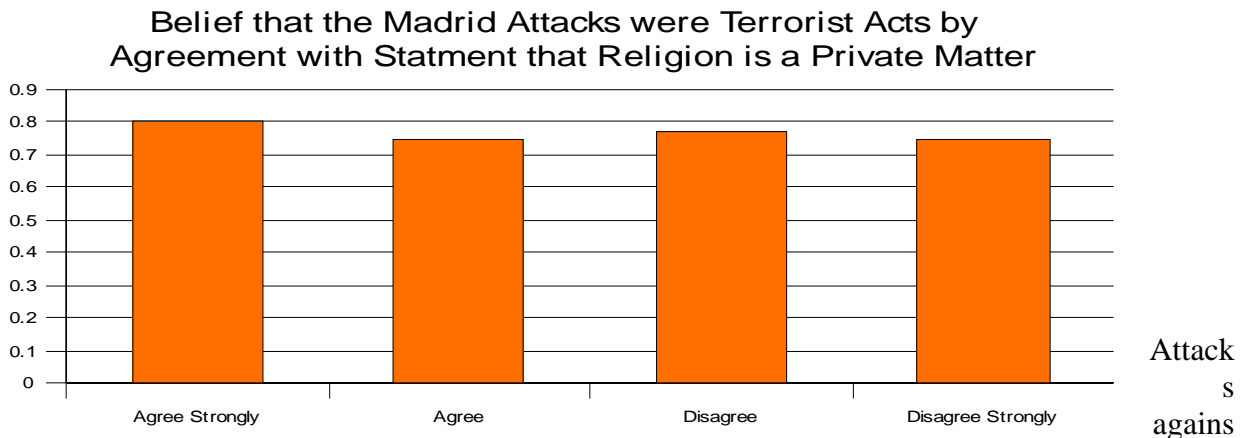


Figure 16

Figure 17



t the U.S. and its interests appear to be more widely tolerated by ordinary Algerians. When asked if U.S. involvement in the region justifies attacks against the U.S. everywhere, two-thirds of respondents agreed with and the plurality (35.4%) agreed strongly. Only 17.2% of respondents disagreed while 15.5% disagreed strongly.

However, ordinary Algerians were strongly opposed to the attacking ordinary civilians in opposition to the U.S. occupation. Only 6.2% of respondents agreed strongly and 8.5% agreed with this statement. Overall, 40.9% disagreed while the plurality (44.4%) disagreed strongly.