

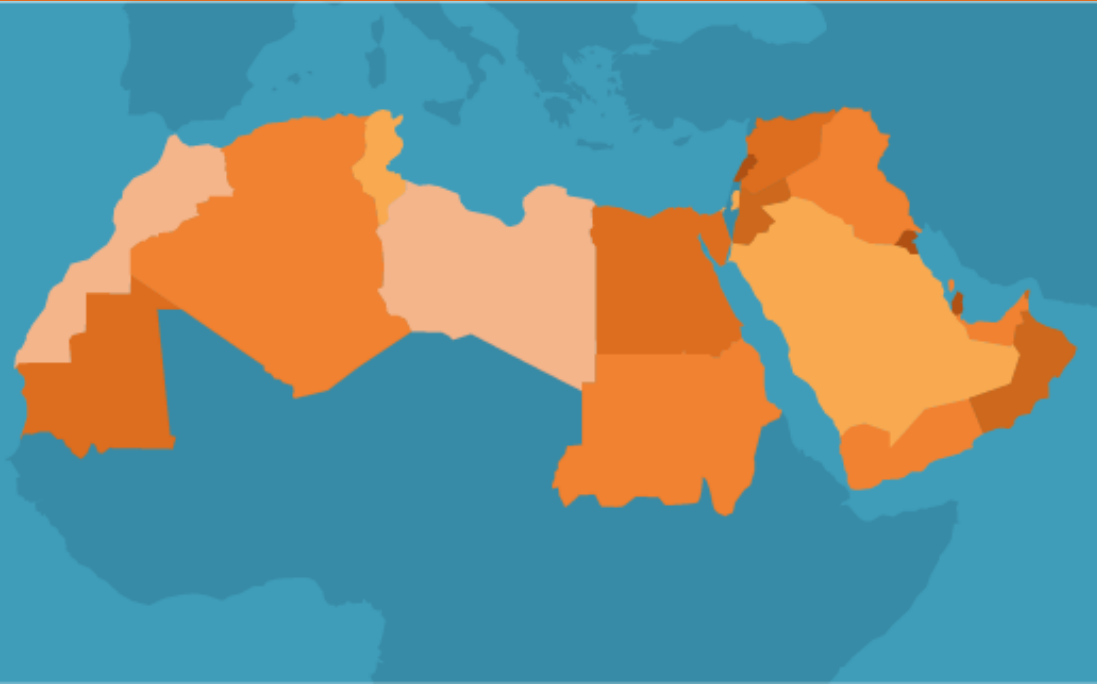
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Turkey in the Middle East:

Findings from the Arab Barometer

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الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER



Turkey in the Middle East: Findings from the Arab Barometer¹

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Overview:

Turkey, as country with a long history in the region and its promotion of "shared brotherhood", has exerted a significant influence on Middle Eastern societies. Even though Turkey followed pro-Israel and anti-Islamist policies in the past, its policies have increasingly become anti-Israel and pro-Islamist with the increasing prominence of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

After the Arab Spring, a period in which many Middle Eastern countries were trying to find their own way of democratic governance – or at least they claimed to do so – Turkey was presented as a role model for the Middle East. The Arab Barometer Wave II (2011) shows that Middle Eastern societies believed that Turkey is a moderately democratic country with the mean value of 6.4 in a 11-point scale, with 10 being a democracy to the greatest extent possible. It is noteworthy, that, for example, the Palestinians give Turkey the same rating as the United States of America (6.7). However, as authoritarian tendencies trumped democratic aspiration, Turkey joined the group of failed democratization attempts. Discussions about how Turkey can be a role model for other countries in the region disappeared.

In the region, Turkey has adopted a pragmatic approach when it comes to international relations: if it has strong economic relations with a country, Turkey is likely to support maintenance of the status quo. One example for such an approach is Libya. However, if there are no strong economic ties, Turkey is likely to support parties embracing the premises of political Islam, which, for example, was the case in Egypt and Tunisia.

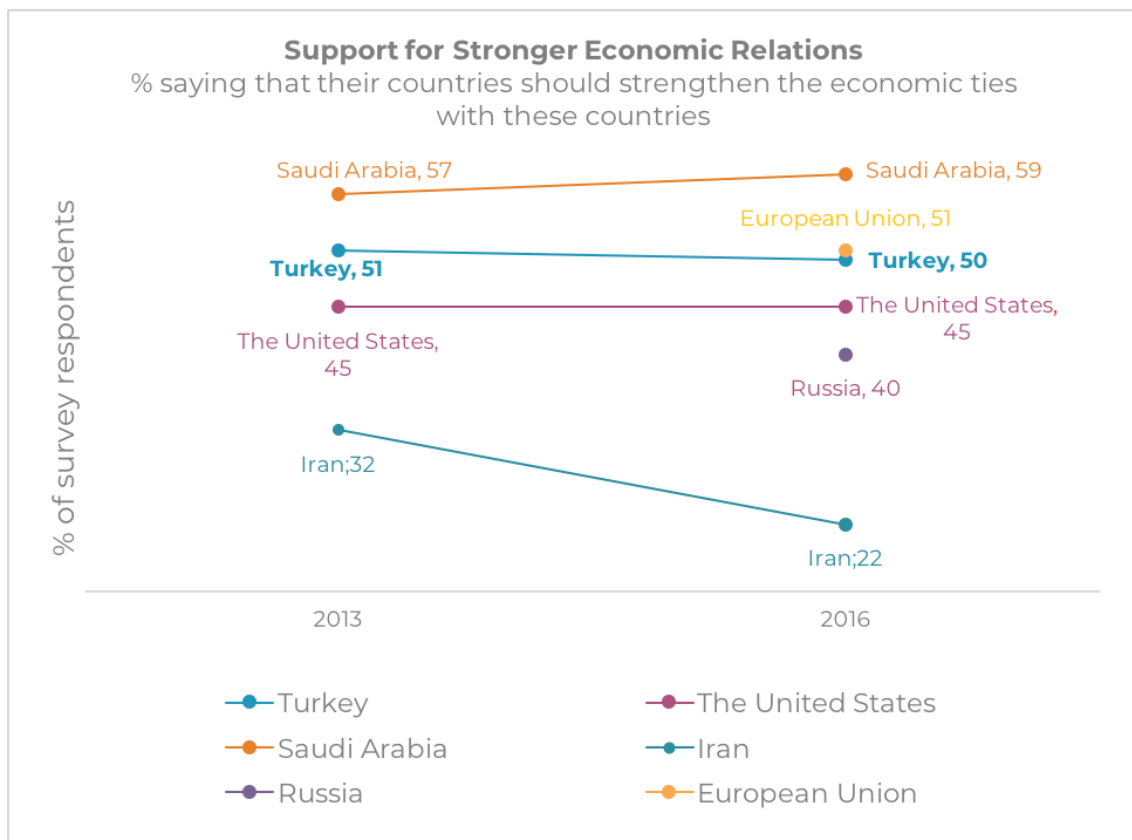
The Arab Barometer reveals that Arab publics are likely to report that their countries should strengthen the economic relations with Turkey (51 percent in 2013 and 50 percent in 2016). However, there are cross-country differences. For instance, in 2016, the support for stronger relations with Turkey is highest 59 percent in Saudi Arabia, but lowest in Egypt (19 percent), which halted its economic relations with Turkey after the coup.

Even though public attitudes towards Turkey tend to be stable over time, decline in support for stronger economic relations with Turkey can be observed: In Egypt, the support for stronger relations with Turkey has decreased

¹The views represented here are the views of the author, not those of the Arab Barometer.

²Emre conducted this work during a fellowship with the Arab Barometer in 2017.

dramatically between 2013 and 2016, from 48 percent to 19 percent. This 29-point decrease is likely to stem from Turkey's close relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. It may also be related to the difficult relations between Turkey and Egypt after the Turkey openly condemned Egypt for jailing former President Mohamed Morsi, the leader of Muslim Brotherhood. Lebanon is another country where public opinion seemed to be affected by Turkey's actions in the region. In 2016, only a quarter of Lebanese thought that Lebanon should improve its future economic relations with Turkey. This represents a decrease of 25 percentage points since 2013. This decrease may be linked to rumors of Turkey intervening in the Syrian civil war and Turkey's Operation "Euphrates Shield" in Syria³ only a week before the Arab Barometer survey was conducted in Lebanon.



Perceptions about Turkish Democracy

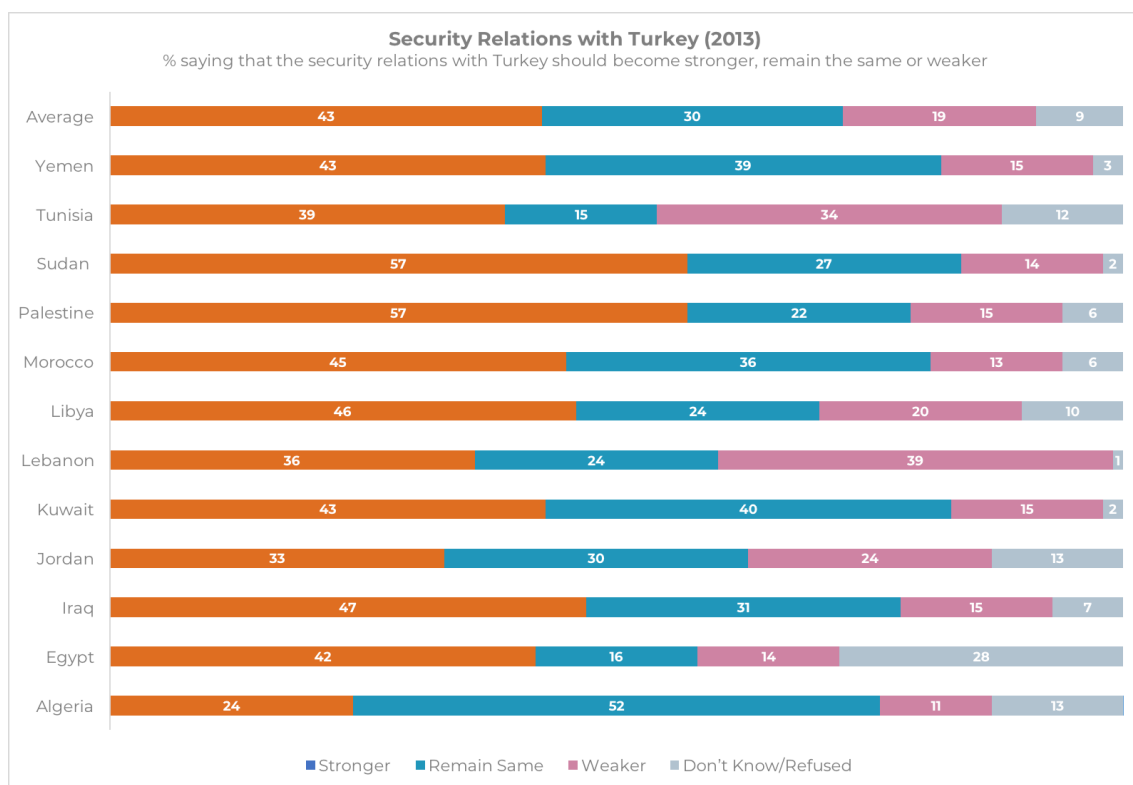
After the Arab Spring, Turkey has been described as a role model for Middle Eastern countries struggling to find their own democratic path. Numerous Western accounts on democratization in Middle Eastern countries upheld

³Operation "Euphrates Shield" was a cross-border operation by the Turkish military and Turkey-aligned Syrian opposition groups in the Syrian Civil War which led to the Turkish occupation of northern Syria.

Turkey’s conservative Islamist party leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan for upholding democratic values. In 2011, the Arab Barometer asked respondents to evaluate to what extent they thought Turkey is democratic, with 0 indicating no democracy whatsoever and 10 democratic to the greatest extent possible. The Arab publics reported that Turkey is on average moderately democratic, with a mean score of 6.4.

To better understand how Arab publics evaluate Turkish democracy, it is important to compare this score with the democracy rating for other countries. On average, Arab publics view their own countries as less democratic than Turkey with a mean score of 4.6. This is noteworthy, as they believe that Turkey is closer to being fully democratic than their own countries. It is also interesting to compare Turkey’s democracy score to that of the United States, which is considered a consolidated democracy.

On the same scale, the US receives a mean value of 7.3. Thus, there is only a 0.9 difference in the average rating when compared to Turkey. In other words, Arab publics believe that Turkey approximates the same level of democracy as found in the United States.



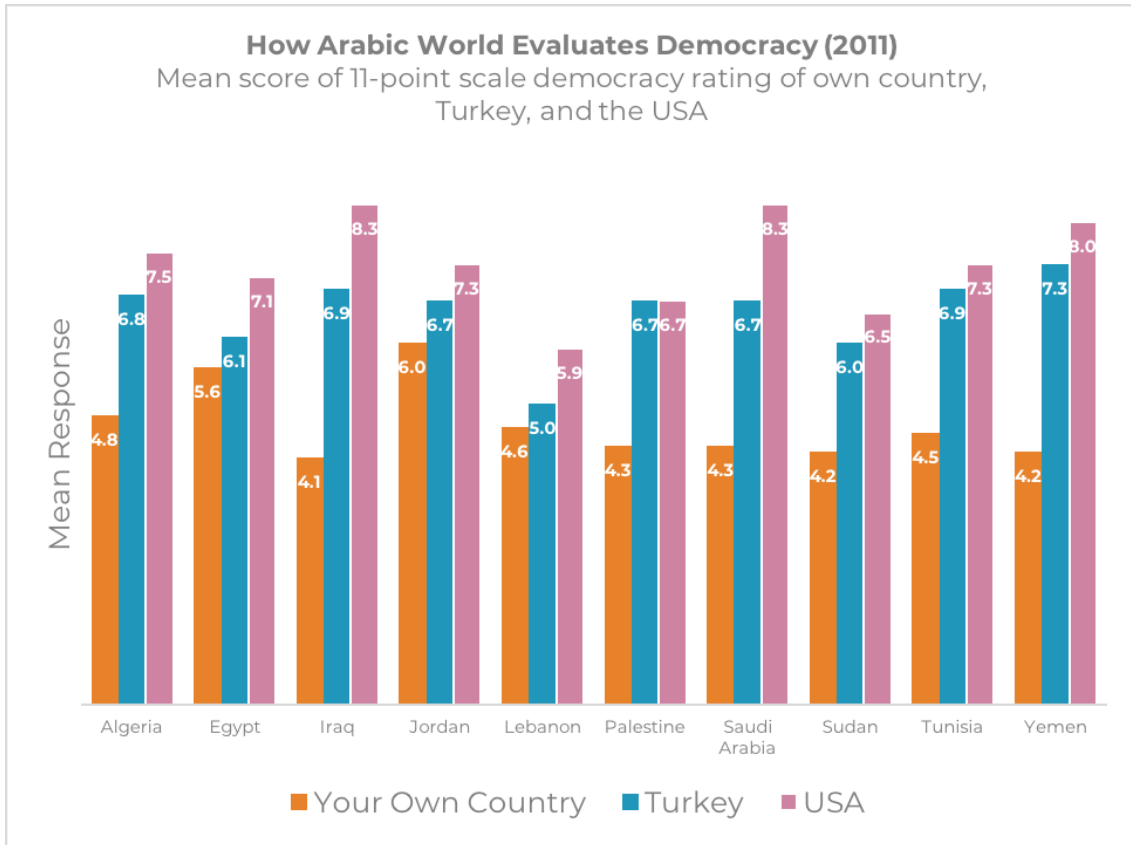
However, there are cross-country differences. While peoples’ perceptions towards the Turkish democracy are lowest in Lebanon (mean score = 5.0), it is highest in Yemen (mean score = 7.3). Palestinians rank Turkey and the United States equally at 6.7.

Attitudes towards Stronger Relations with Turkey

Turkey has sought to establish strong relations with most countries in the Middle East. Even though some consider Turkey's effort to strengthen these relations as a type of neo-imperialism, most citizens in the Middle East have positive attitudes towards Turkey and Turkish people. However, that is not to say that public opinion has always been pro-Turkey. On the contrary, people's perceptions towards Turkey seem to be linked to their local contexts rather than to Turkey's moves and actions in the Middle East. The Arab Barometer asks respondents about their opinions on the direction of future economic relations of their countries with Turkey. It also asks about other influential countries in the region, such as the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. A basic comparison between respondents' attitudes towards future relations with Turkey and these countries can give an insight about how the Arab world perceives Turkey relative to other actors in the region.

In 2013, the Arab Barometer reveals that half of citizens (51 percent) prefer stronger future economic relations between their country and Turkey. Among these four countries, support for stronger relations with Turkey ranks second after Saudi Arabia (57 percent). Support for stronger relations with Turkey is also greater than that for the U.S. (45 percent) and Iran (33 percent). Moreover, few Arab citizens report a preference for weaker relations with Turkey: only 15 percent think that the economic relations with Turkey should become less strong. This is one of the lowest scores when compared to Saudi Arabia (13 percent), the U.S. (23 percent), and Iran (32 percent).

In 2016, at the time when Turkey increased its influence in MENA by openly supporting the Sunni opposition in Syria as well as other Islamists in the region, Arab citizens' support for stronger economic ties with Turkey remained stable: half (50 percent) believed that their country should strengthen the economic relations with Turkey. Only preferences to strengthen ties with Saudi Arabia (59 percent) and the European Union (51 percent) are higher. By contrast, preferences to strengthen ties with the United States (45 percent) and Russia (40 percent) are lower, while support for closer economic relations with Iran have dropped by 10 percentage points to 22 percent. However, a somewhat larger percentage of survey respondents (21 percent) believe that future relations between their countries and Turkey should be weaker in future. This represents a 6 percentage point increase since 2013 and can possibly be interpreted as a result of Turkey's role in promoting political Islam across MENA.



In addition to economic relations, the Arab Barometer also asked about the future directions regarding security relations between the respondents' home countries and Turkey. The graph above displays the percentage of those who report that they prefer the future security relations between their countries and Turkey to become stronger. Four-in-ten indicate that their countries should strengthen security relations with Turkey. This is a considerable difference compared to preferences for stronger economic relations (δ 10 percentage points). This difference may stem from possible reservation of respondents to voice opinions on security-related issues.

The desire for stronger security relations with Turkey is lowest in Algeria (24 percent), and highest in Palestine and Sudan (57 percent, respectively). It is noteworthy, that the plurality of Lebanese prefer security relations between Lebanon and Turkey to become weaker (39 percent).

The Arab countries and perceptions of international relations

Since survey respondents' perceptions towards their countries' relations with Turkey are likely to be affected by the domestic circumstances, the following section investigates the attitudes of individual Arab countries towards Turkey.

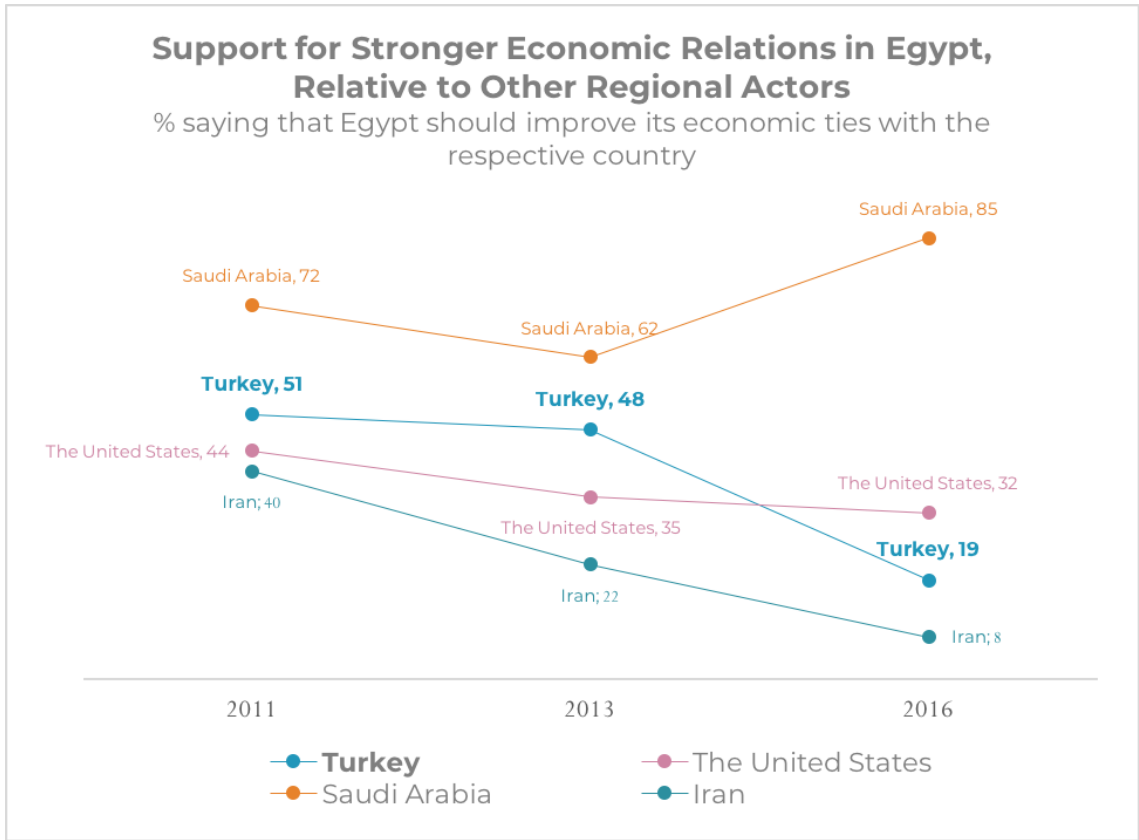
Egypt

Turkey has been engaged in Egyptian politics especially since former President Hosni Mubarak was ousted from the presidency and the Arab uprisings. The Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey supported closer relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. After Mohamed Morsi was elected as the new president in 2012, Recep Tayyip Erdogan was one of the first country leaders to congratulate. This was just after the second wave of the Arab Barometer conducted in Egypt in June and July 2011. However, after Mohamed Morsi and Muslim Brotherhood were ousted and Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power, relations between Egypt and Turkey changed dramatically. For instance, Turkey became home to a number of exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood, while Egypt allegedly considered giving asylum to Fethullah Gulen, the cleric accused by Erdogan of plotting the Turkish coup attempt in July 2016.

The Arab Barometer allows keeping track how these events may have affected Egyptians' attitudes towards the future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey. Although Turkey was favored by the majority of Egyptians over other regional actors prior to the coup in Egypt, this support decreased dramatically by 2016. While the 2011 Arab Barometer reveals that half of the Egyptians (51 percent) believed that the future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey should become stronger than they were in previous years, only 19 percent report a preference for maintaining the status quo, and one-tenth believe that the relations should become weaker.

Despite authoritarian tendencies of Mohamed Morsi and a number of concerns raised about the process of drafting new constitution in 2013, the Egypt-Turkey relationship was stronger when the third wave of the Arab Barometer was fielded. Slightly less than half of Egyptians (48 percent) report that the future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey should become stronger than they were in previous years. Meanwhile, 14 percent want the relations to remain same, and one in ten believes that the relations should become weaker. About one-quarter (26 percent) are uncertain about the future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey, a development that can be attributed to the concerns about Turkey's increasing role in Egyptian politics.

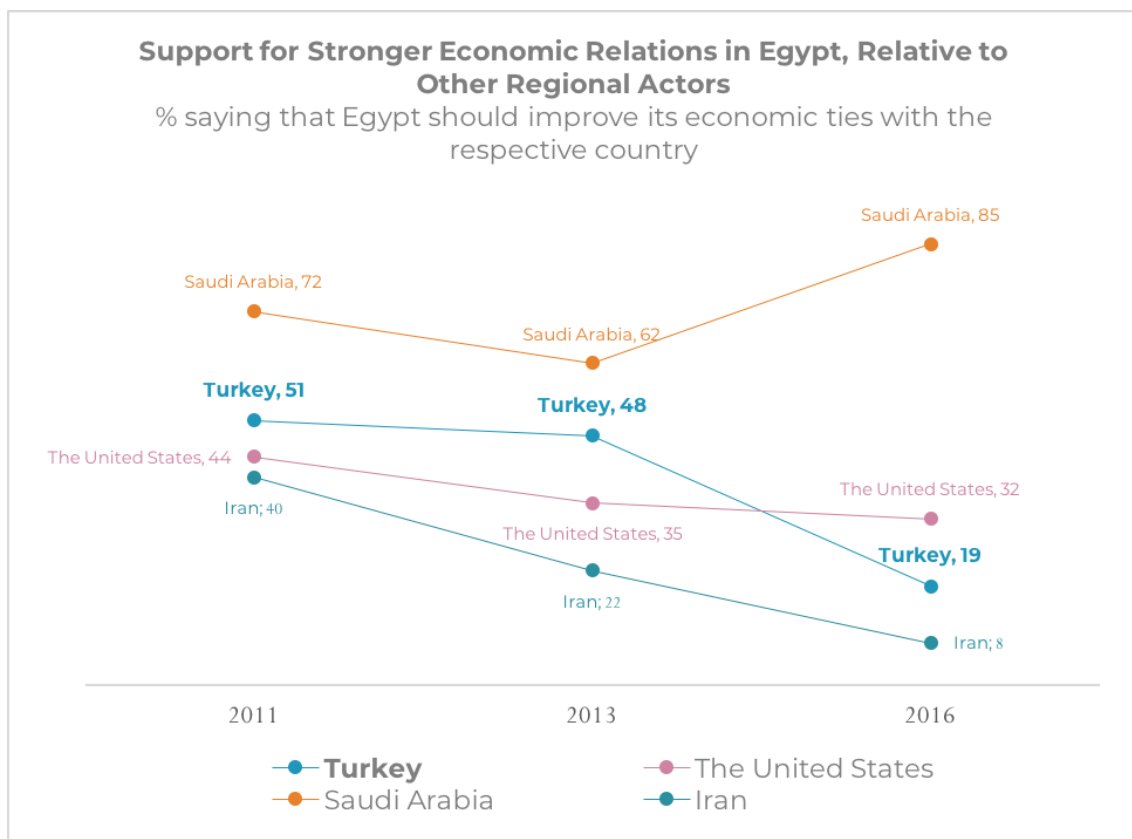
However, when military seized power and Mohamed Morsi ousted in 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood was once again outlawed in Egypt. Under al-Sisi, Egypt harshly criticized all parties affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, including the AKP in Turkey. Thus, the Egyptian-Turkish relations were strongly affected by this development, when the fourth wave of the Arab Barometer was fielded in 2016. Egyptians' views towards the directions of future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey dramatically changed: only 19 percent of Egyptians reported that the relations should become stronger than they were in previous year. This represents a 29-point decrease since 2013. About half of the people (47 percent) think that the relations should become weaker, which represents a 37-point increase since 2013.



There are differences between those who reported some trust in the Muslim Brotherhood and those who do not trust the Muslim Brotherhood. In 2011, among those who state that they trusted the Muslim Brotherhood, more than half of Egyptians (55 percent) believe that Egypt should strive for stronger relations with Turkey, compared to 47 percent of those who reported a preference for stronger ties, but do not trust the Muslim Brotherhood. Similarly, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood are less likely to prefer future economic relations to become weaker (10 percent of supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood compared with 16 percent of opponents this party).

In 2013, the Arab Barometer further revealed that support for stronger relations with Turkey did not substantively change among those who support and those who do not support the Muslim Brotherhood. Among the supporters, a majority (55 percent) say Egypt should improve its economic relations with Turkey, compared with 46 percent of the opponents of the Muslim Brotherhood who think stronger economic ties are better for the country. In addition, the desire to see weaker relations with Turkey has remained constant for Muslim Brotherhood supporters (10 percent), whereas it decreased among Muslim Brotherhood opponents from 16 percent in 2011 to 11 percent in 2013. Similar percentages of both Muslim Brotherhood supporters and opponents reported that they had no opinion about the future direction of economic relations between Egypt and Turkey (supporters: 24 percent in 2013 compared with 17 percent in 2011; opponents: 26 percent in 2013 compared with 11 percent in 2011).

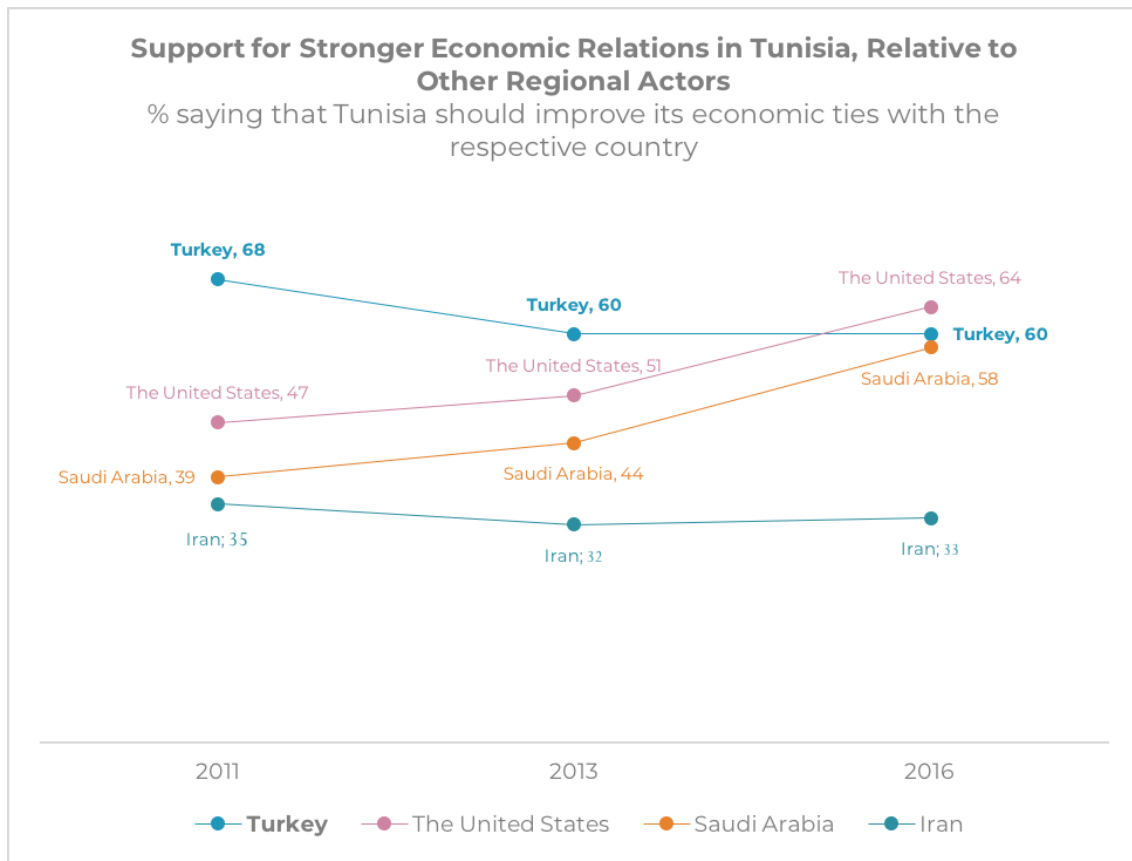
The Arab Barometer did not ask about support for the Muslim Brotherhood as part of its fourth wave in 2016. However, based on the respondent's political attitudes towards religious parties, we can provide some insights. Those who prefer religious parties in the parliament state that the future economic relations between Egypt and Turkey should become stronger: 21 percent of supporters of religious parties in the parliament report a preference for stronger relations between Egypt and Turkey, compared with 17 percent of those who do not support religious parties in the parliament. Similarly, support for religious parties does not show differences in their preference for weaker economic relations between Egypt and Turkey (46 percent of supporters compared to 48 percent of non-supporters). These numbers may suggest that the Egyptians' perceptions of Turkey are driven by views on Egypt's domestic politics.



Tunisia

After Ennahda came to the power in Tunisia, bilateral relations between Tunisia and Turkey improved dramatically. Turkey supported Tunisia politically and economically after the Jasmine Revolution. For instance, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) announced that Turkey provided the largest share of foreign aid to Tunisia with USD45 million in 2015. Turkey was also among the first countries announcing its support for the political

transition in Tunisia. However, this support likely stemmed from the AKP's political ideology than the countries economic ties with Tunisia. Prior to 2011, Turkish investment in Tunisia was minimal. Since this time, however, the Arab Barometer reveals that Tunisians' support for stronger relations with Turkey has remained stable and that Turkey remained among the most favorable regional actors among Tunisians.

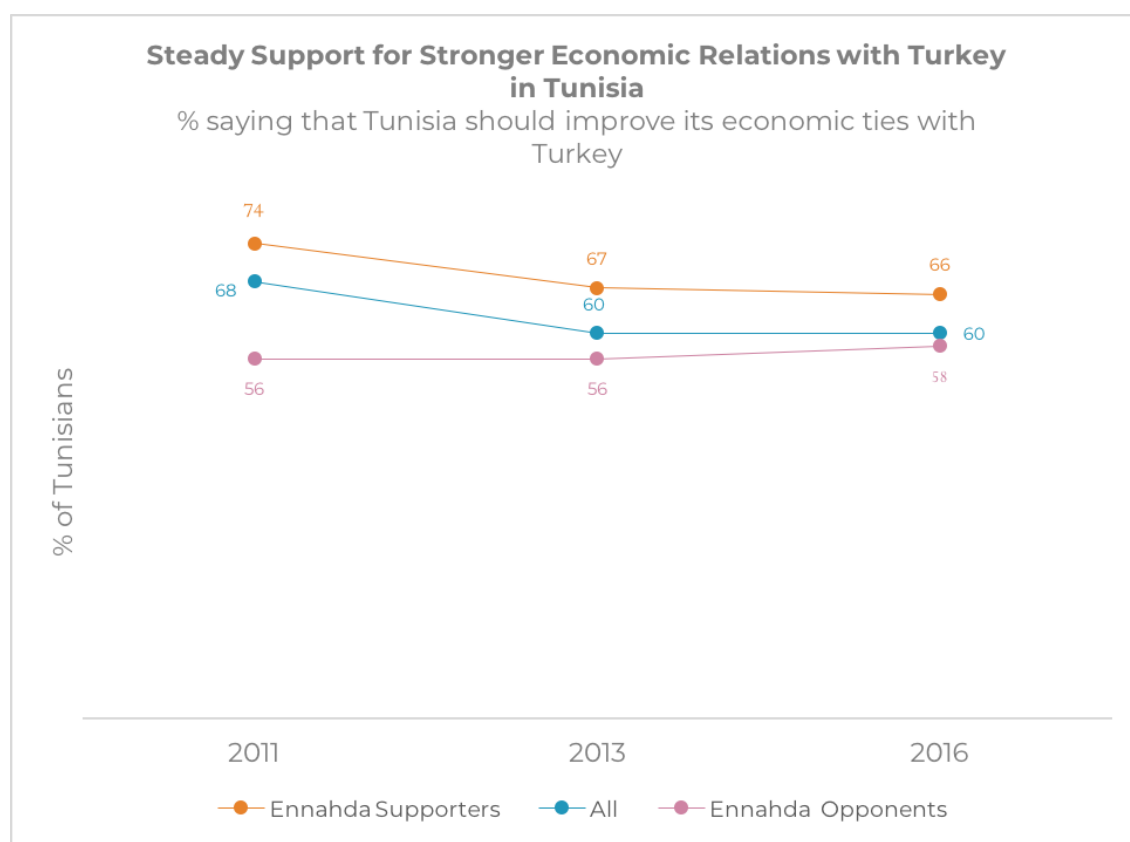


The second wave of the Arab Barometer was conducted a few months after the resignation of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. At the time, the vast majority of Tunisians (68 percent) believed that the future relations between Tunisia and Turkey should become stronger, while 16 percent thought that they should remain the same. Only 2 percent said that the economic relations should become weaker.

In 2013, Tunisians' preferences for stronger economic relations with Turkey decreased, but the majority (60 percent) still thought stronger economic ties are favorable. Only 12 percent were in favor maintaining the status quo, while 16 percent stated a preference for weaker ties. This represents a substantial change compared to 2011.

Despite the fact that Ennahda lost the 2014 elections and the government was led by Nidaa Tounes, a secular party with links to the former regime, Tunisian support for stronger relations with Turkey remains high. In 2016, a majority (60 percent) stated that Tunisia should improve its future economic

relations with Turkey, while 17 percent reported that the relations should remain the same, and 15 percent were in favor of weaker ties. This might be related to the change in party power in Tunisia.



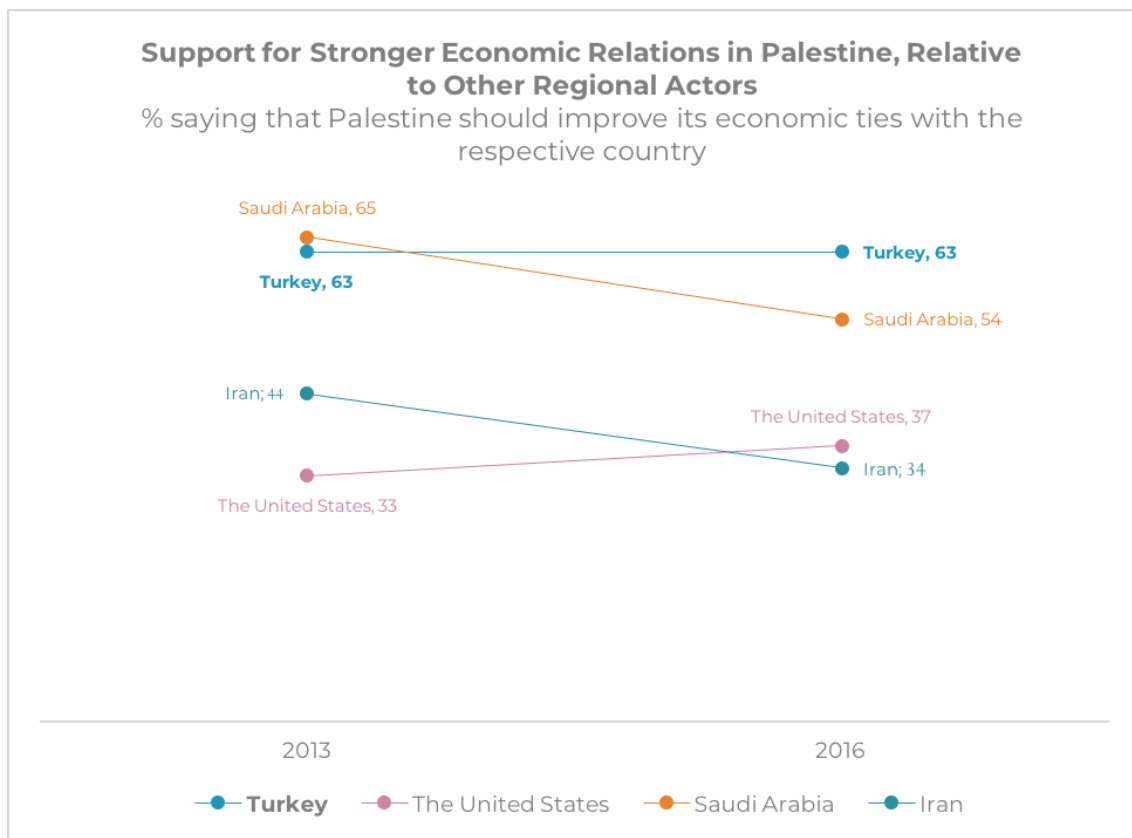
Tunisians’ attitudes towards Turkey differ according to whether or not they support Ennahda. In 2011, among those who support Ennahda, about three quarters (74 percent) report that Tunisia should improve its relations with Turkey, compared with 56 percent of those who do not support Ennahda. This gap closed somewhat by 2013. A majority of 67 percent of Tunisians supporting Ennahda reported stronger future economic relations with Turkey compared to 56 percent of Ennahda opponents. In 2016, these views remained largely stable: while 66 percent of those who reported trust in Ennahda believed that the future economic relations between Tunisia and Turkey should become stronger, 58 percent of the opponents said the same. Between 2011 and 2016, the preference for weaker economic relations with Turkey has substantially increased among Ennahda supporters ranging from 2 percent in 2011 to 12 percent in 2013 and 2016, respectively.

Palestine

Turkey has supported the Palestinians’ desire to self-determination since 1987. It has also been one of the major donors to Palestinian foreign aid. In total, Turkey’s aid increased to 396 million US Dollars between 2005 and 2015, and

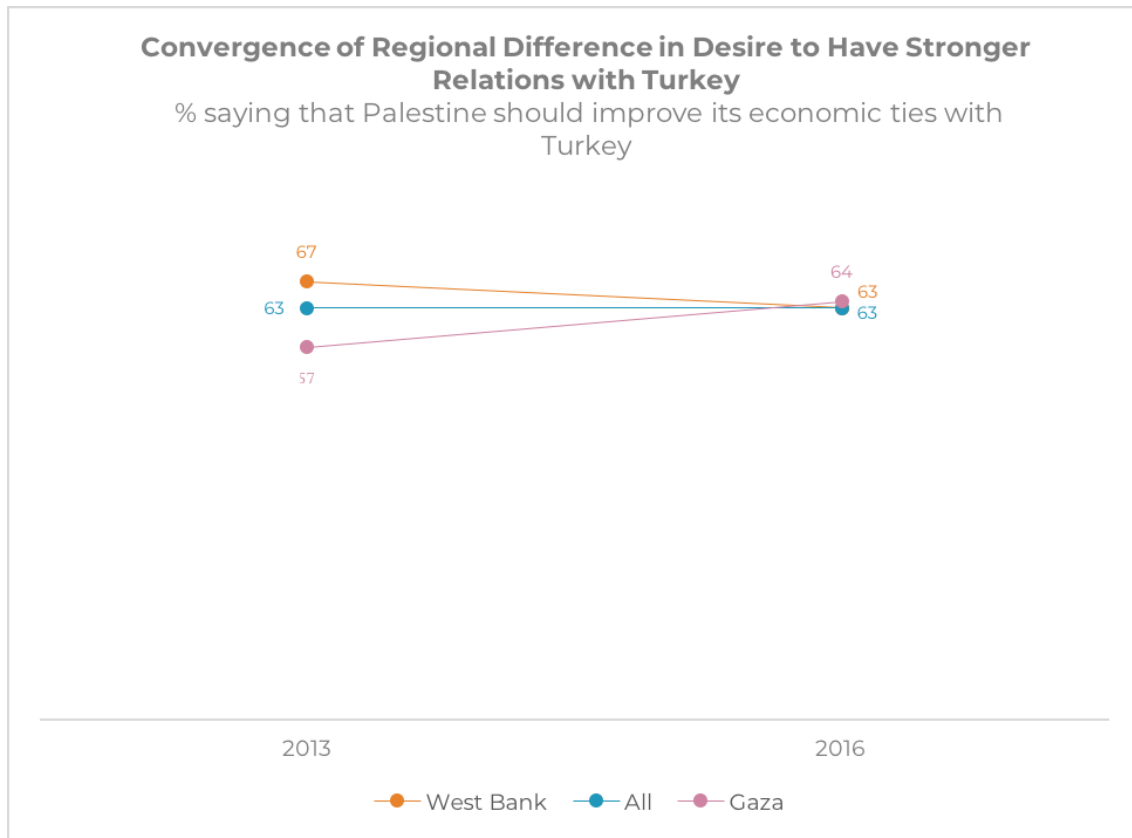
the country promised another 200 million US Dollars in foreign aid for the following two years. Furthermore, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has demonstrated his commitment to Palestine, frequently criticizing Israel for its activities in the country. However, Turkey’s approach to Palestinian-Israeli conflict has been pragmatic: since the AKP established its power, the trade volume and security cooperation between Turkey and Israel have steadily increased. However, Palestinians’ views towards Turkey remain positive. In 2013, the Arab Barometer survey reveals that nearly two-third of Palestinians (63 percent) voice a preference for stronger future economic relations between Palestine and Turkey. Meanwhile, 20 percent state that the relations should remain the same. Only 12 percent report that they would prefer weaker economic ties.

In 2016, Palestinians’ perceptions towards the future economic relations between Palestine and Turkey remained mostly unchanged. About two-thirds of the Palestinians surveyed (63 percent) believe that Palestine should work to improve its future economic relations with Turkey; 17 percent voice a preference for maintaining the status quo; while 15 percent are in favor for weakening ties.



Although average Palestinian support for stronger relations with Turkey remained unchanged between 2013 and 2016, some geographical differences can be observed. While Palestinians in West Bank are more likely to favor of stronger economic relations with Turkey (67 percent in West Bank compared to 57 percent in Gaza in 2013), three years later a larger proportion

of Palestinians in Gaza report that the future economic relations between Palestine and Turkey should become stronger (64 percent in Gaza compared to 63 percent in West Bank). This increase in Gaza may be attributed to the ideological closeness between the Hamas and the Islamist AKP.

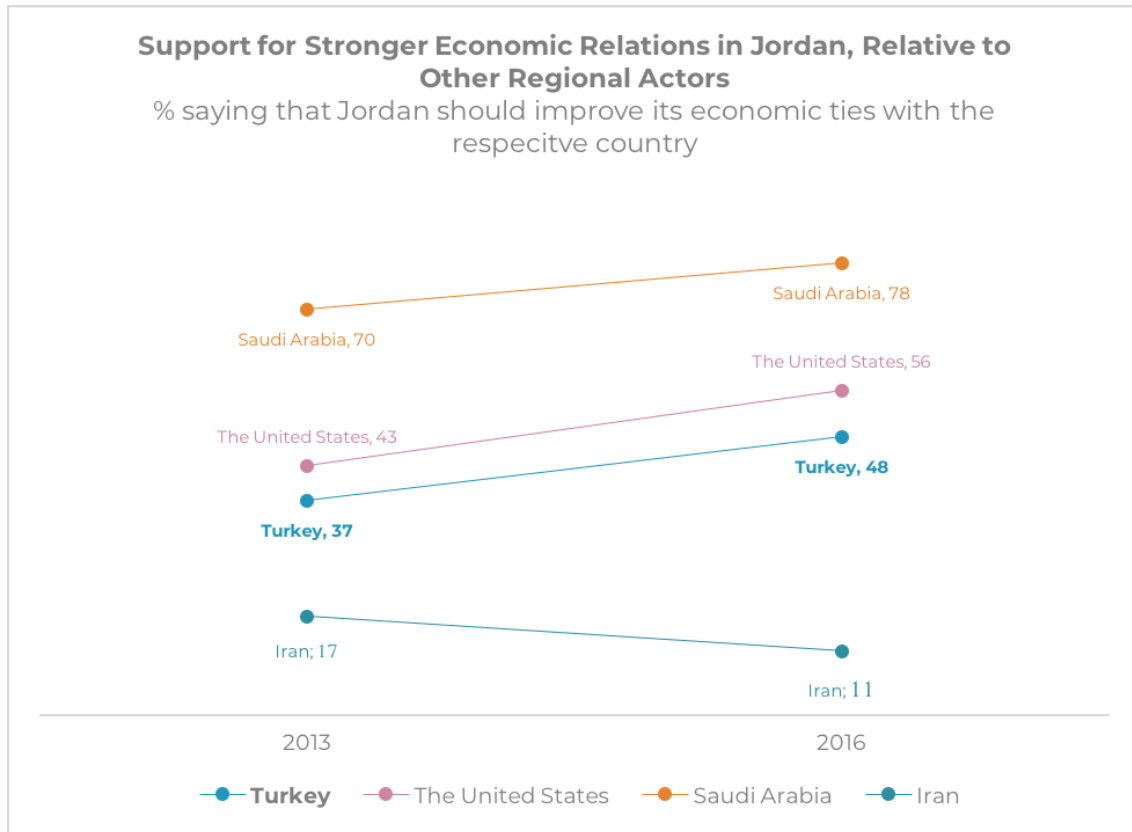


Jordan

The economic relationship between Jordan and Turkey has mostly been shaped around both countries' security concerns. Both countries share the goal of reducing former Soviet influence on the Middle East, which is demonstrated by their joint agreement based on information sharing and collective action. After 2009, when the countries signed free trade deal, the economic relations between the countries became crucial. According to Ministry of Foreign Relations of Turkey, the trade volume between Turkey and Jordan has reached about USD 1 billion. However, with the accusation Turkey may strategically help the Islamic State, Jordanians now appear to be concerned about Turkey's commitment to the stability of the region.

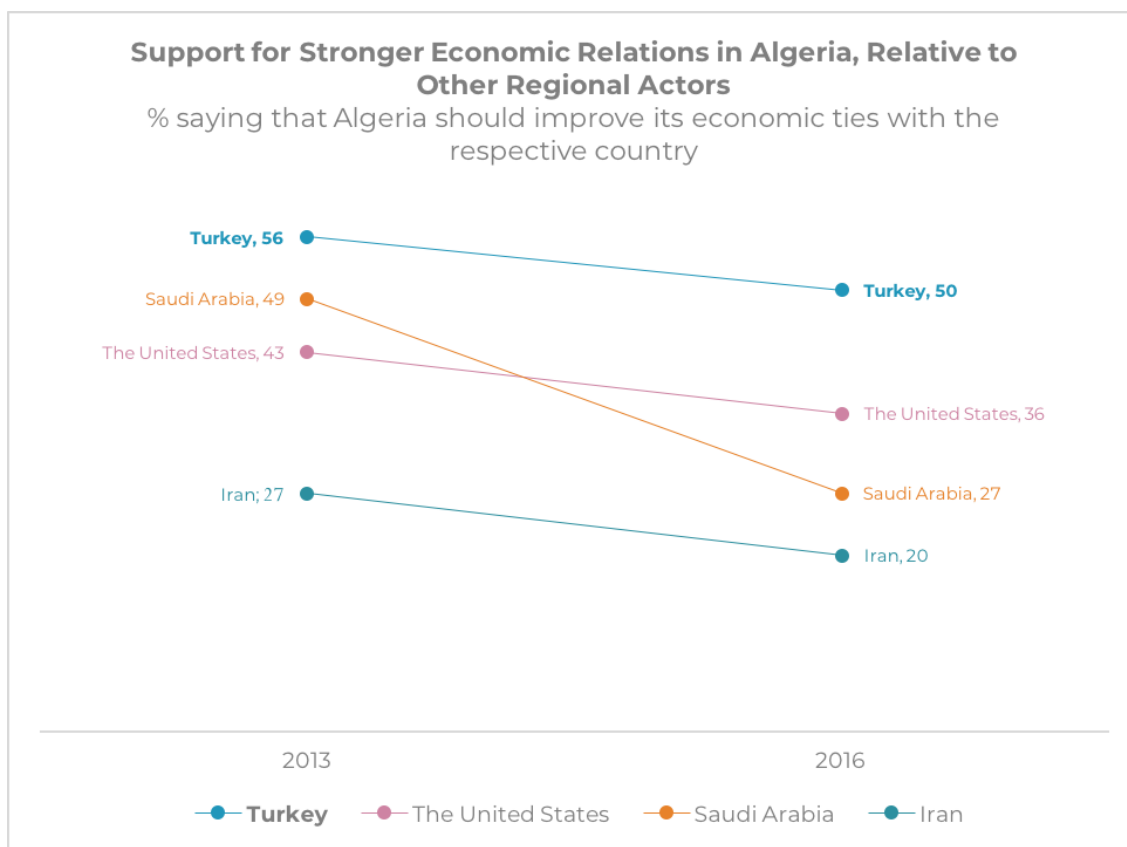
Against this background, Jordanians are the most skeptical about future economic relations with Turkey, although many still hope for better relations. While 37 percent stated that future economic relations between Jordan and Turkey should become stronger in 2013, this percentage increased to 48 percent in 2016. It can also be observed that the proportion of those who

preferring to maintain the status quo remains stable (2013: 28 percent; 2016: 29 percent), while the proportion of people with preferences for weaker ties dropped from 23 percent (2013) to 18 percent (2016). This increase in support for stronger Jordanian-Turkish relations may be linked to growing Turkish influence in the region, embracing the premises of political Islam.



Algeria

Algeria has the largest trade volume with Turkey in the North Africa. It is an important market for Turkish goods has become a key ally for Turkey, especially after the onset of the Libyan civil war. Currently, there are about one thousand Turkish companies operating in Algeria. Turkish television is also widespread in Algeria, which could possibly be linked to positive attitudes towards Turkey. Algerians tend to think that the economic relations between Algeria and Turkey should become stronger, which has remained consistent over time.



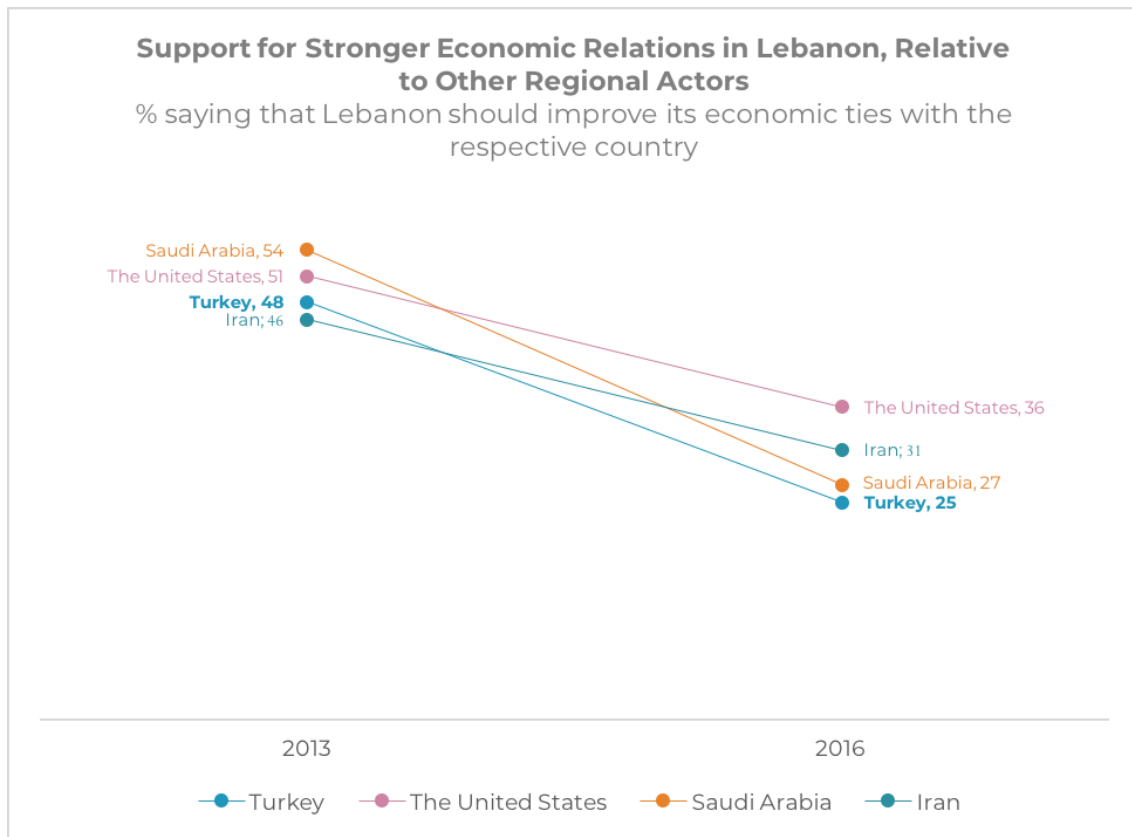
In 2013, a majority of Algerians (55 percent) reported a preference for stronger future economic relations with Turkey while about one third (32 percent) wanted no change. Only 4 percent thought that relations with Turkey should become weaker. In 2016, support for stronger relations with Turkey decreased slightly: half of Algerians state that their country’s economic relations with Turkey should improve. Similar to 2013, 32 percent reported that the economic relations should remain same, but the proportion of those in favor of weaker ties has increased from 4 to 13 percent.

Lebanon

The economic relations between Turkey and Lebanon have been limited, especially since Lebanon acknowledged the Armenian genocide. Yet, the countries maintain ties established in their common history dating back to Ottoman times. With the escalation of the Syrian civil war, concerns about the possible spillover effects among Lebanese citizens increased. As a neighboring country, Lebanon is directly affected by the war and has become an policy arena for struggling regional powers, such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. These events might be some reasons why the public opinion in Lebanon has shifted away from establishing stronger economic ties with Turkey between 2013 and 2016.

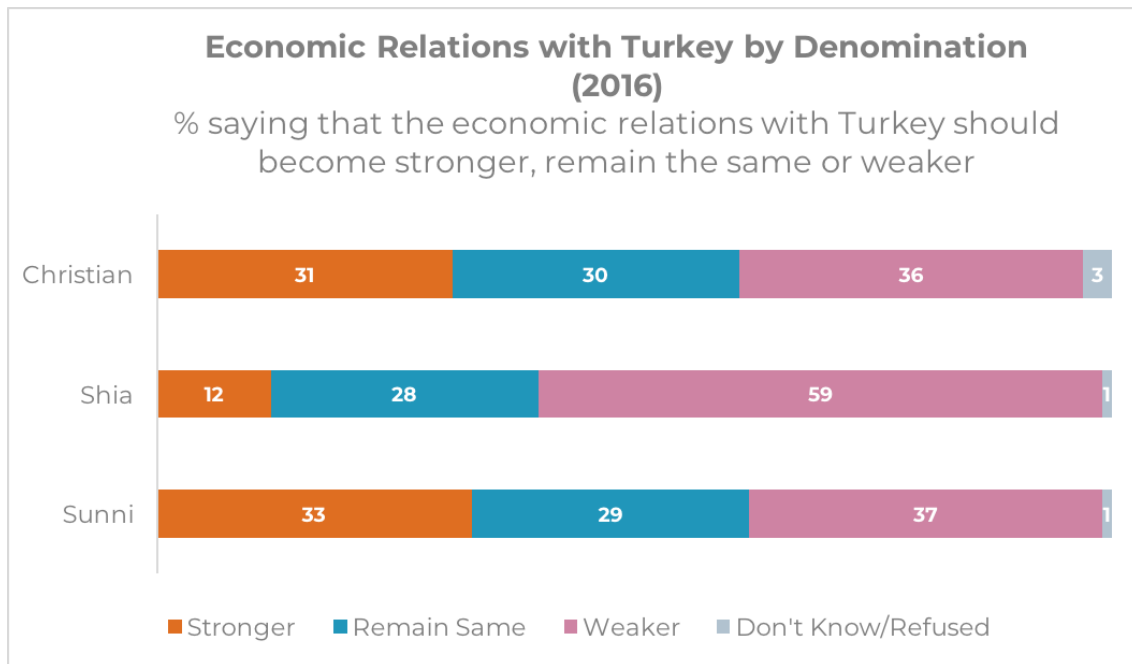
Looking at the Arab Barometer surveys, 48 percent of the Lebanese report a

preference to strengthen the economic relations between with Turkey. About one quarter (26 percent) are in favor of maintaining the status quo; another quarter voices a preference for weaker economic ties with Turkey.



The fourth wave of the Arab Barometer was fielded at a time, when Turkey prepared for cross-border military operations, such as Operation "Euphrates Shield". Lebanese perceptions regarding future relations with Turkey may have been affected by this intervention: only a quarter of the Lebanese (25 percent) were in favor of stronger economic ties with Turkey in 2016, which represented a 26 percentage point decrease since 2013. One third believe that the economic relations with Turkey should remain the same. Meanwhile, four-in-ten state that they are in favor of weakening ties with Turkey – a 25 percentage point increase since 2013.

As Turkey openly supported Sunni opposition groups in Syria, we may expect Sunnis in Lebanon to have stronger preferences to collaborate with Turkey economically. However, the Arab Barometer data show little variation among this group when compared to other religious sects; only 27 percent state that Lebanon should strengthen its economic relations with Turkey, compared with 31 percent of Christians and 12 percent of Shias who hold this view.



Sunnis are more likely to be in favor of the status quo, however. Overall, 45 percent of Sunnis want the economic relations with Turkey to stay the same, compared to 30 percent of Christians, and 28 percent of Shias. They are also the least likely group to report a preference for weaker economic ties; three out of ten (28 percent) voice a preference for weaker economic relations with Turkey, compared with one third of Christians (36 percent) and a majority of 59 percent among Shias.

Other Countries in the Middle East

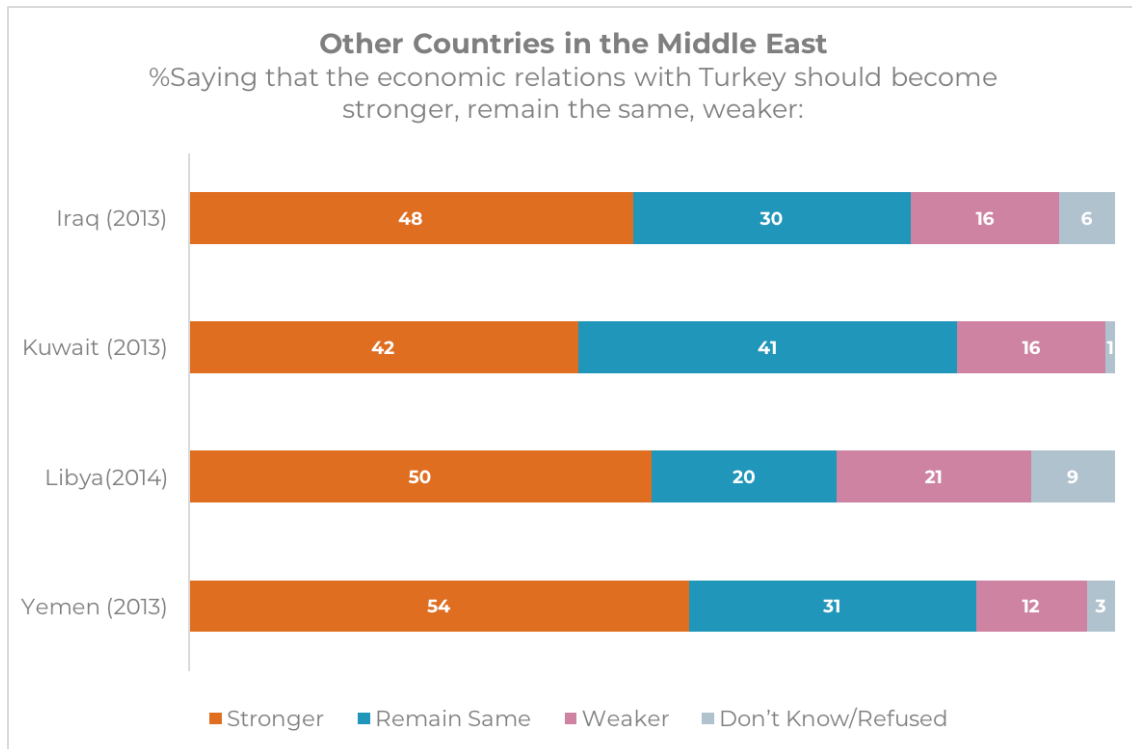
Some countries have not been frequently surveyed by the Arab Barometer, so only snapshots of their preferences of economic relations with Turkey can be provided.

Yemen was surveyed in 2013, before the civil war. A majority of Yemenis (54 percent) think that Yemen should improve its economic relations with Turkey. One third (31 percent) are in favor of the economic ties remaining the same. Only one out of 10 (12 percent) voice preference for weakening economic relations.

In 2014, after international coalition's intervention, half of Libyans interviewed by the Arab Barometer state that they prefer the future economic relations with Turkey to become stronger. A fifth (20 percent) think that the economic ties should remain the same and about the same proportion (21 percent) are in favor of weaker economic relations with Turkey.

Turkey and Kuwait are in closely cooperate economically and have already made plans to relations to improve their economic ties. In 2013, about four-in-ten (42 percent) think that Kuwait should strengthen its economic relations

with Turkey. Another 41 percent report that they would like to maintain the status quo. Only 16 percent are in favor of weaker economic ties with Turkey. Iraq has been a valuable market for Turkish construction firms, especially after American intervention in 2003. Turkey has been a major actor helping to rebuild Iraq. In 2013, 48 percent of Iraqis believed in stronger economic relations with Turkey. Almost one third (30 percent) favored maintaining the status quo while only 15 percent favored maintaining the status quo while only 15 percent believe that Iraq should half weaker economic ties with Turkey.



About

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 high quality and reliable public opinion surveys of probability samples representative of citizens aged 18 or above in the Middle East and North Africa since 2006. Each country survey included at 1,200 respondents. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's place of residence. The error margin 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.

To date, the Arab Barometer has conducted 36 national surveys over four waves including more than 45,000 interviews in 14 Arab countries. For more information about the project, please visit www.arabbarometer.org.

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