



الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer V

Yemen Country Report



2019

Executive Summary

Protests broke out in Yemen in 2011 eventually leading the fall of long-standing President Ali Abdullah Saleh. In the years that followed, Yemen descended into civil conflict after advances by Iranian-supported Houthi rebels captured much of the country. Ongoing intervention by a Saudi- and Emirati-led coalition halted the Houthi advance, but led to a protracted conflict that continued at the time of the survey. This conflict has resulted in one of the world's most dire humanitarian situations of the 21st century with widespread hunger and disease affecting a massive number of citizens.

Within this environment, Yemenis are divided about the biggest problem facing their country, with foreign interference, the ongoing war, and the collapse of the economy being the primary issues. However, although foreign influence is a principal concern, more than half of Yemenis want stronger relations with Qatar and Turkey although less than half say the same about Saudi Arabia. In all three cases, those living in government-controlled areas are more likely to favor stronger ties. Meanwhile, few say they want stronger relations with Iran, although those in Houthi-controlled areas are far more likely to do so.

Despite the dire conditions facing the country, Yemenis remain surprisingly optimistic about their country's future. Many, particularly those in government-controlled areas say that the country is heading in the right direction and hopeful that the economy will improve. In part, this optimism may be due to a sense that the Houthi advance has been halted combined with a belief that the situation could not become any worse than it already is.

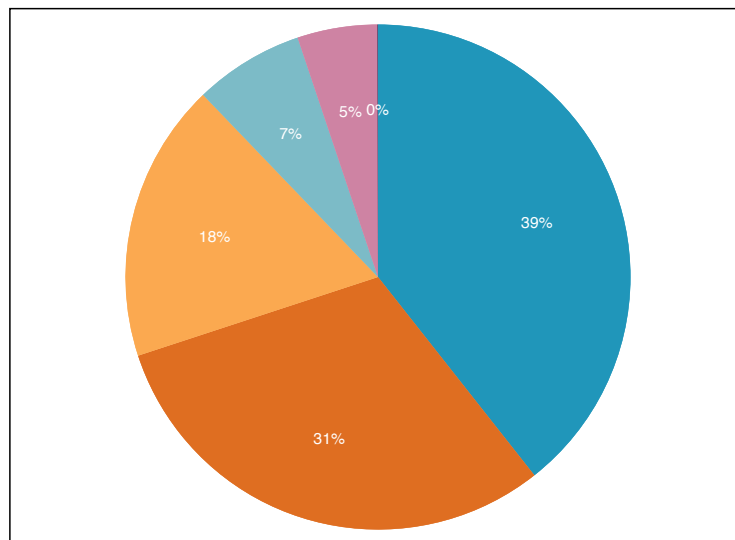
Unsurprisingly, views of the government remain very poor, especially in Houthi-controlled areas. By comparison, the internationally-backed government is more widely supported by Yemenis. In part, the relatively favorable views of government may be related to a so-called "rally-around-the-flag" phenomenon, whereby in times of crisis like the ongoing conflict, respondents are reluctant to be critical of the government so as not to appear disloyal to the broader cause.

These are among the key findings from a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Jordan by the Arab Barometer in December 2018. The survey conducted 2,400 face-to-face interviews in the respondents place of residence has a margin of error of ± 2 percent and had a cooperation rate of 73 percent.

Foreign Relations and Foreign Aid

A plurality of citizens says the economy is the most important challenge facing Yemen today (39 percent), followed by foreign interference (31 percent). Given that nearly a third of Yemenis cite foreign interference as a challenge and over half say that the main motivation for Western countries giving Yemen aid is to gain influence over the country (51 percent), it is unsurprising that only a third of Yemenis say it would be better for Yemen to increase its openness to the outside world (35 percent).

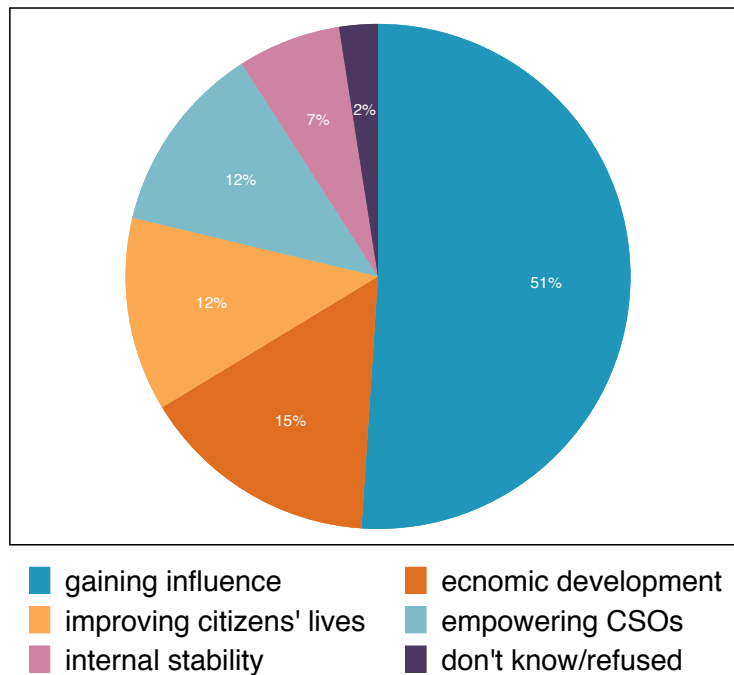
What is the most important challenge facing your country today? *% saying this is the most important challenge.*



- economy
- foreign interference
- other
- corruption
- security
- don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

What is the main motivation for foreign aid? *% saying this is the main motivation.*

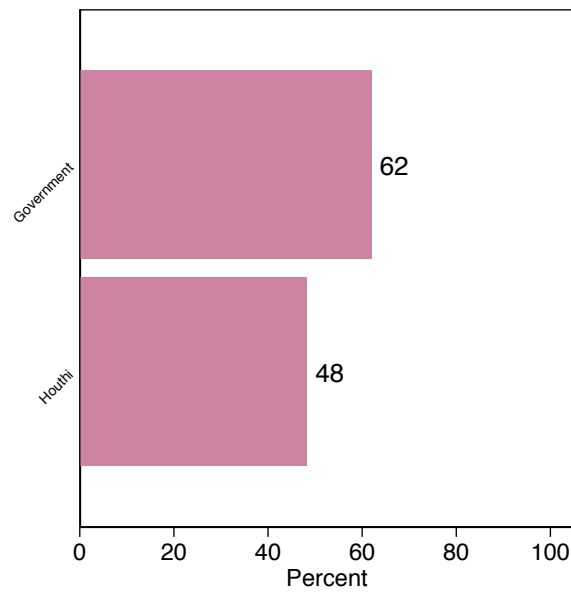


Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

With the exception of Iran, Yemenis are generally supportive of stronger relations with regional powers. Over half of respondents favor stronger ties with Qatar (53 percent), though those in Houthi-controlled regions are less likely to do so than those in government-controlled regions (48 percent versus 62 percent). Similar trends are apparent with support for stronger relations with Turkey. Again, over half of respondents overall would like to strengthen ties with Turkey (59 percent), with those in Houthi-controlled areas less interested than those in government-controlled areas (53 percent versus 69 percent). Meanwhile, fewer than half of respondents support stronger ties with Saudi Arabia (44 percent), though more than half of those in government-controlled regions do so (58 percent). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the role of Saudi Arabia in coalition strikes on Houthi areas, fewer than four-in-ten respondents in Houthi-controlled regions are interested in stronger ties with Saudi Arabia (36 percent). A similar discrepancy between the preferences of those in Houthi-controlled areas and government-controlled areas is evident when asked about strengthening relations with Iran. Overall, fewer than two-in-ten Yemenis favor stronger ties with Iran (18 percent), which is a sizable decrease from 27 percent in 2013. Among those in Houthi-controlled regions 27 percent of respondents support stronger ties with Iran, while only four percent of those in government-controlled areas say the same.

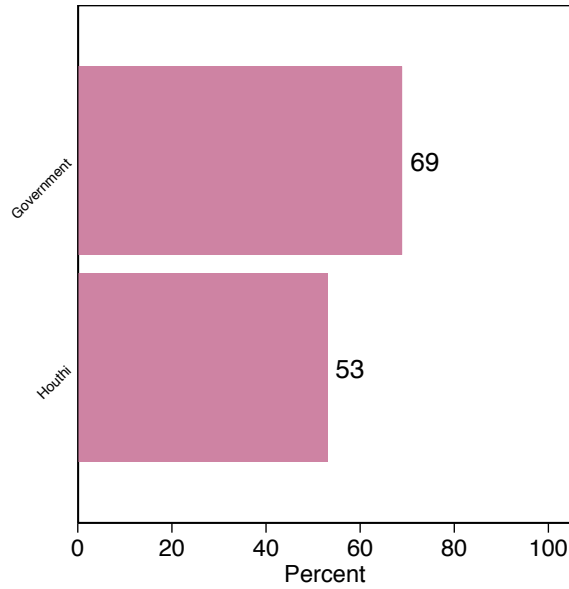
With the exception of China, Yemenis show limited interest in strengthening ties with global powers. Rates of support for stronger relations with the United States are nearly half what they were in 2013 (20 percent versus 45 percent), and are low across all demographic categories. By comparison, a quarter of Yemenis support stronger ties with Russia while three-in-ten say the same about stronger ties with the United Kingdom (32 percent).

Should economic relations with Qatar become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



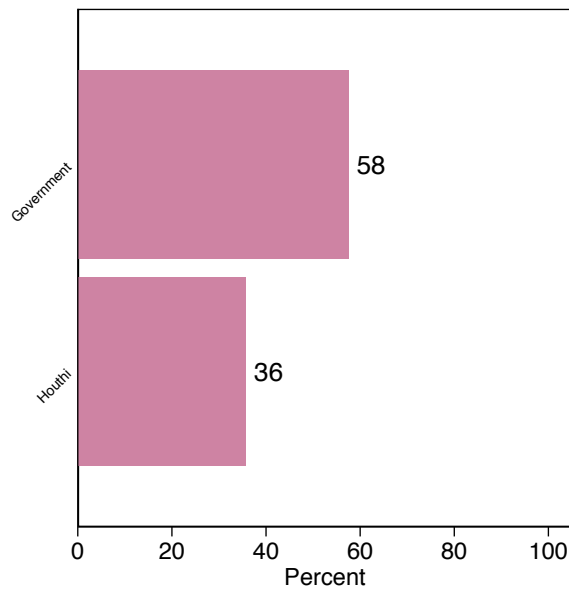
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with Turkey become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



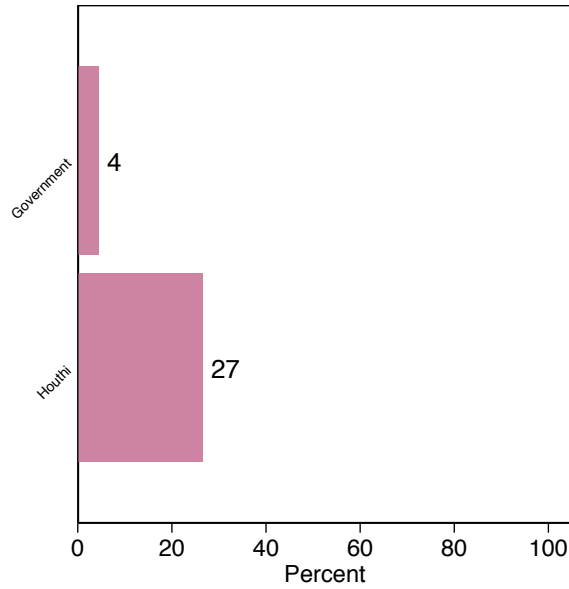
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with Saudi Arabia become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



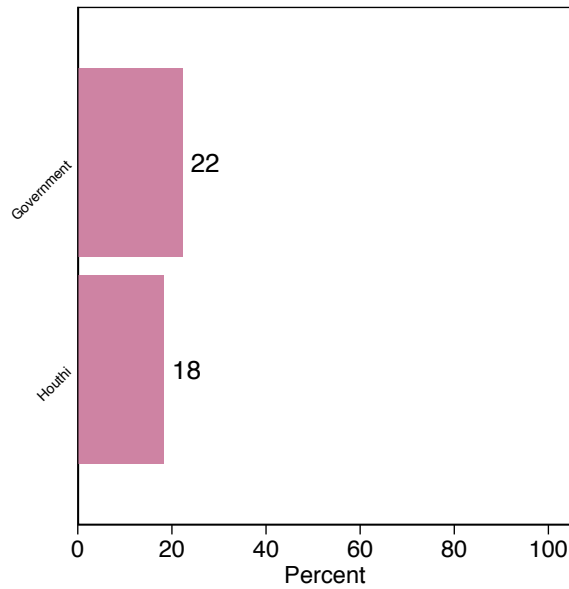
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with Iran become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



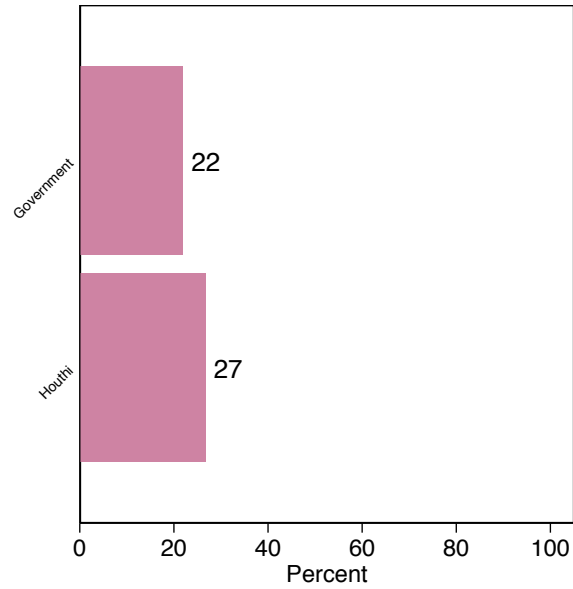
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with the United States become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



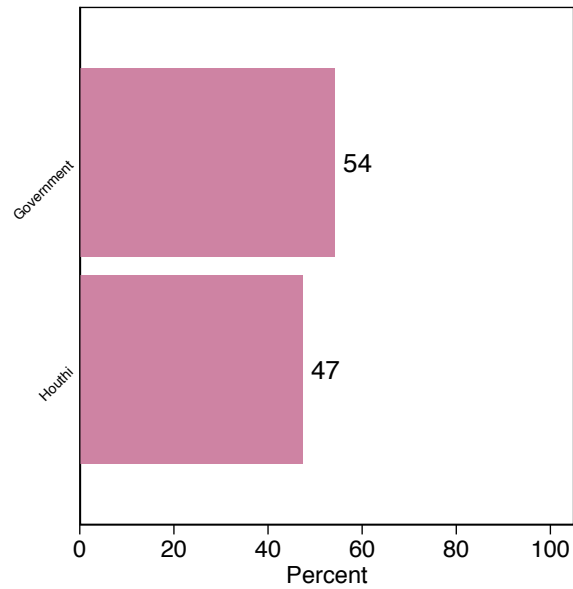
Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with Russia become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.



Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should economic relations with China become stronger?
% saying relations should become stronger.

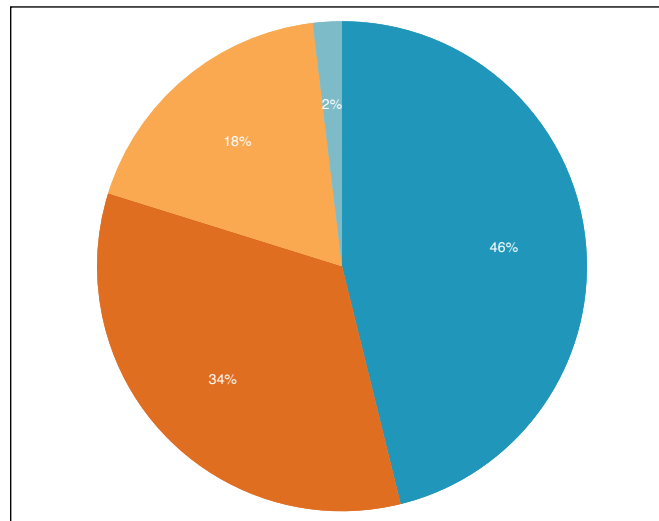


Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

The Economy

In the midst of a civil war and beset by humanitarian crises, Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab World, suffers from high unemployment and a collapsing economy. Nevertheless, its citizens are for cautiously optimistic about the general direction of their country and economy. Roughly half think Yemen is headed in the right direction (46 percent) and nearly three-quarters think Yemens economic situation will be better or even much better in the next few years (71 percent). In part, this optimism may reflect how poor conditions have become in Yemen in effect, there is little possibility that the situation could become substantially worse than it is today.

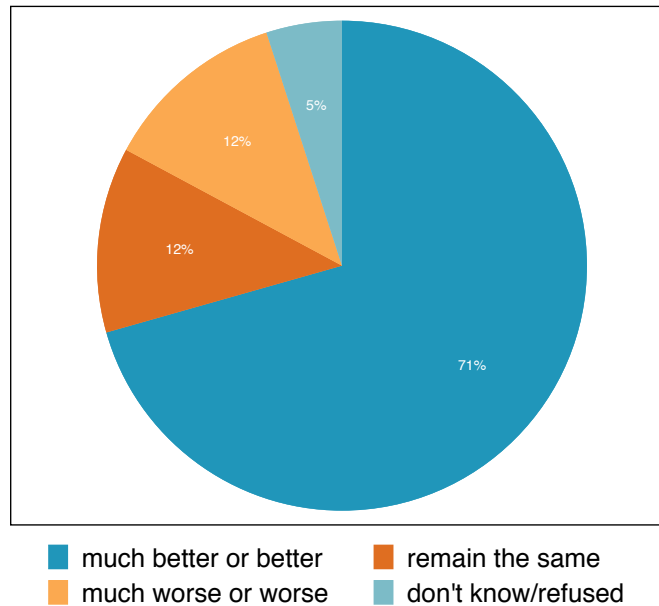
Is the country headed in the right direction?



■ right direction ■ between right and wrong
■ wrong direction ■ don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

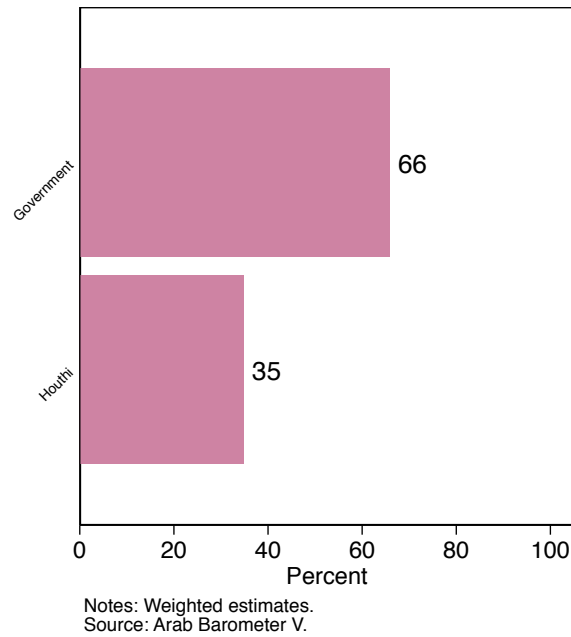
Is the future economic situation better or worse?



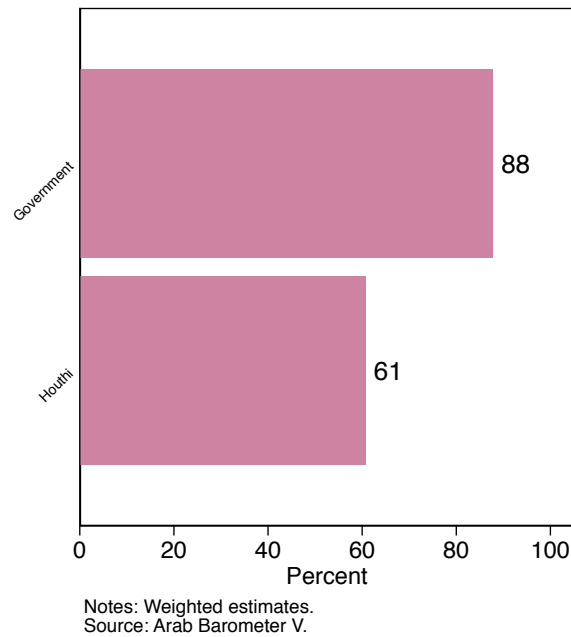
Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Additionally, an analysis of patterns within the country suggests that perhaps what accounts for this overall optimism about the future is the disparate impact of the crisis on government-controlled areas versus Houthi-controlled areas. Though the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is widespread and not limited to Houthi-controlled areas, the Saudi-led coalition's economic blockade targeting the Houthis has dramatically affected the plight of Yemenis living in these regions. Indeed, the outlook in Houthi-controlled areas is much less optimistic than it is elsewhere. Only a third of respondents in Houthi-controlled areas say Yemen is headed in the right direction (35 percent), as compared to two-thirds (66 percent) of those in government-controlled areas. This discrepancy is also discernible in terms of expectations for the future. While nearly nine-in-ten respondents in government-controlled areas think the economic situation will be better or much better in two to three years (88 percent), far fewer say the same in Houthi-controlled areas (61 percent).

Is the country headed in the right direction?
% saying its in the right direction.



Is the future economic situation better or worse?
% saying its much better or better.



Though generally optimistic about the countrys future, there is significant concern about the current state of the economy. A plurality of Yemenis cite the

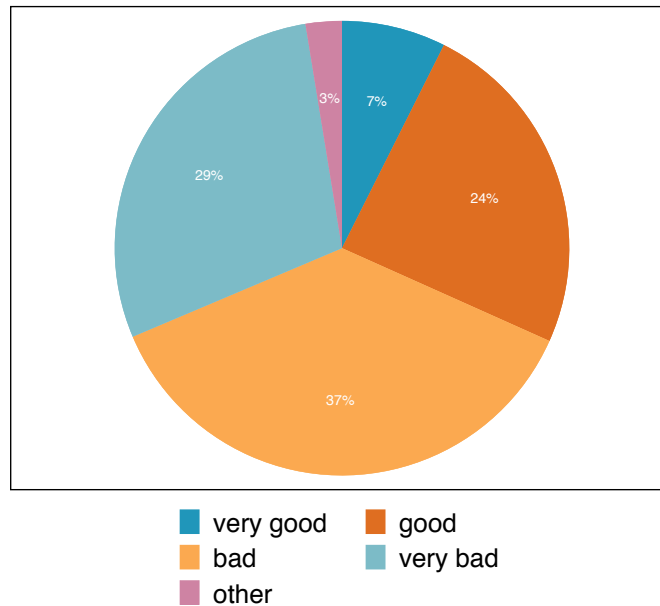
economy as the biggest challenge facing Yemen today (39 percent) while only a third of respondents say the current economic situation is good or very good. Nevertheless, most Yemenis believe the economic situation has deteriorated in recent year, with more than half rating the economic situation as being better a few years ago (54 percent) while roughly a quarter say it is unchanged (23 percent). Again, regional differences are pronounced. Those in government-controlled areas are nearly twice as likely as those in Houthi-controlled areas to evaluate the current economic situation as good or very good (48 percent versus 24 percent). Conversely, those in Houthi-controlled areas are significantly more likely than those in government-controlled areas to say the economic situation two to three years ago was better than it is now (63 percent vs. 40 percent). Such sentiments perhaps reflect the changing dynamic of the civil war in Yemen and the worsening humanitarian crisis particularly in Houthi areas.

Government Performance

Despite more than half of Yemenis, both overall and when disaggregated by region, voicing expectations that the economy will improve in coming years, a majority of citizens do not think the government is doing much at present to improve various dimensions of the economy. Fewer than a third evaluate the governments performance on creating employment opportunities as good or very good (31 percent). Those in government-controlled regions are roughly twice as likely to evaluate the governments performance in this regard as good or very good (47 percent versus 23 percent).

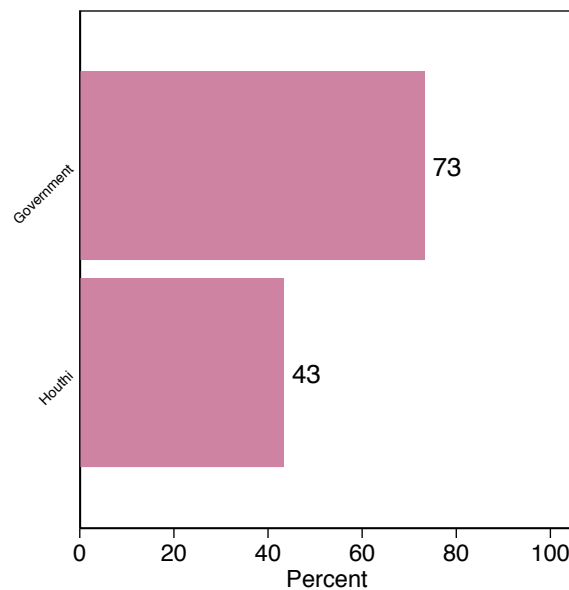
Respondents are similarly critical of government performance on narrowing the gap between rich and poor, with only a third evaluating it as very good or good (34 percent). Again, those in government-controlled areas are more likely than those in Houthi areas to evaluate the governments performance positively in this regard (43 percent versus 29 percent). Frustration is also high with government efforts to keep prices down, as fewer than four-in-ten respondents approve of the governments efforts (37 percent). Citizens living in government-controlled regions are more than twice as likely as those in Houthi areas to evaluate the governments performance in this regard positively (57 percent versus 26 percent).

How is government performance on creating job opportunities?



Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

How is government performance on keeping security and order? *% saying its very good or good.*



Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Yemeni citizens evaluate government performance in domains other than the economy more positively. Again the distinction between the beliefs of those

in Houthi-controlled versus government-controlled areas is prominent. Satisfaction with the governments performance in maintaining security and order is quite low with fewer than one-in-five Yemenis saying the government does a very good job and fewer than two-in-five saying it does a good job. Fewer than half of those in Houthi areas say the government is doing a good or very good job (43 percent), as compared to nearly a quarter of those in government-controlled areas (73 percent). Again, Houthi areas face a more precarious security situation, and given active bombing and military campaigns by both government and government-affiliated forces against Houthi areas, so it is unsurprising that respondents in these regions do not see the government as a source bolstering security and order.

Overall, these findings may appear surprising initially. The economic situation in Yemen now is arguably worse than it was during these previous waves yet citizens remain somewhat optimistic about the future and a sizable minority rates government performance positively. In addition to regional disparities stemming from the economic blockade, there are perhaps two additional elements at play explaining this unexpected optimism and satisfaction with the government apparent among Yemenis. First, a heightened sense of satisfaction in government performance, particularly in government-controlled areas, may be a product of the so-called rally round the flag effect. This well-documented phenomenon posits that during times of crisis people tend to support their preferred faction to a greater extent. Yemenis might be more inclined to positively evaluate the government positively during this time of crisis in the name of unity despite the myriad problems facing the country. Second, though the economic blockade has had a disparate effect on Houthi and government-controlled areas, the situation across Yemen is nonetheless quite bleak. After years of a deteriorating situation Yemenis may perceive an inflection point where economic and life outcomes have reached their nadir, lending towards a general optimism that the situation will improve because it seemingly cannot get any worse.

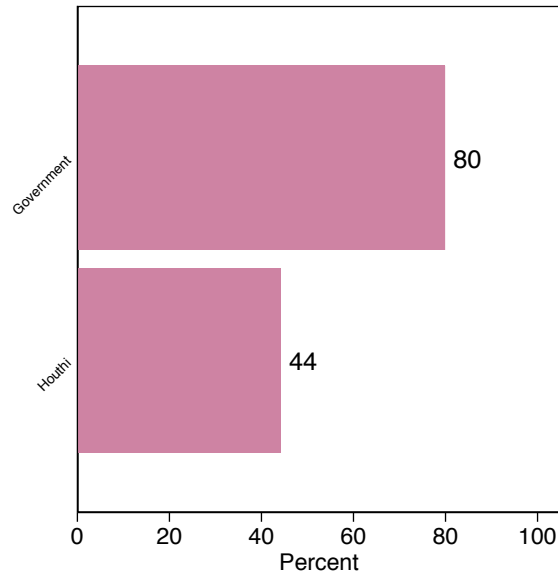
Institutional Trust and Corruption

Yemenis have low levels of trust in government agencies and related institutions. For all institutions, the gap between the views of those in Houthi-controlled areas versus government-controlled areas is sizable with the former exhibiting much lower levels of trust in all of the countrys institutions. Individuals in government-controlled areas are significantly more likely to have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the government (80 percent versus 44 percent), local government (81 percent versus 47 percent), the army (90 percent versus 58 percent) and the police (82 percent versus 57 percent). This regional gap is less pronounced for trust in political parties (37 percent versus 27 percent), and in fact the opposite trend is apparent for trust in parliament with those in Houthi

areas slightly more likely to trust political parties than those in government-controlled areas (34 percent versus 28 percent).

How much trust do you have in government?

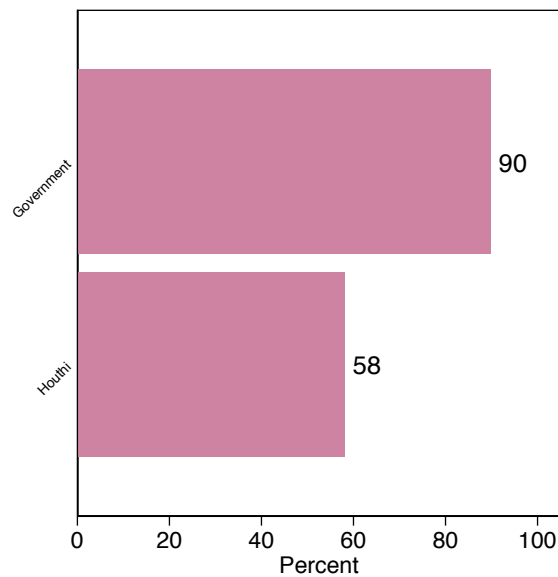
% saying great trust or some trust.



Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

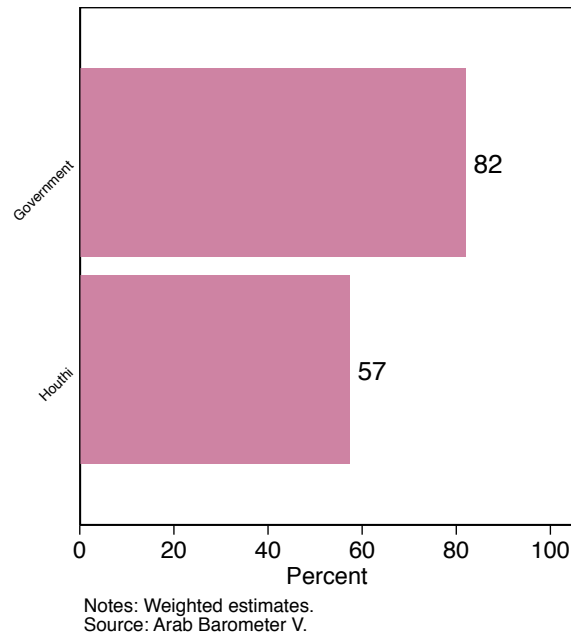
How much trust do you have in the army?

% saying great trust or some trust.

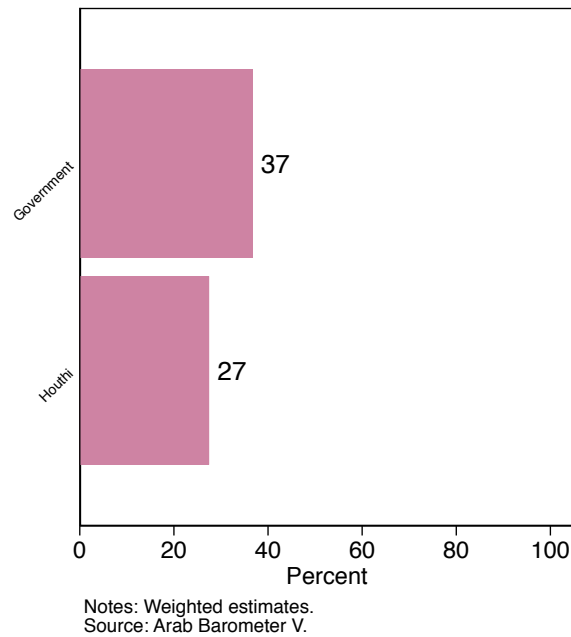


Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

How much trust do you have in the police? *% saying great trust or some trust.*



How much trust do you have in political parties? *% saying great trust or some trust.*

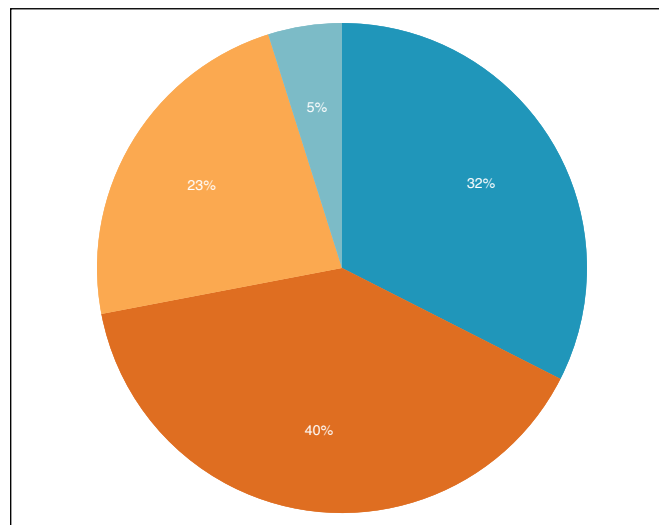


Though fewer than one-in-ten Yemenis cite corruption as the biggest challenge facing the country (7 percent), the vast majority think corruption exists to a

large or medium extent within state agencies and institutions (72 percent). Attitudes on the prevalence of corruption at the national level show little regional variation and in fact little variation across demographic differences as well, suggesting there is recognition of this problem throughout the country and across groups. In contrast, views on the extent of corruption at the municipal level diverge regionally. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of Yemenis living in government controlled areas think that hardly any, or very few, officials are corrupt at the local or municipal level. Less than half of those in Houthi areas say the same (49 percent).

Over half of Yemenis think that the national government is working to crack down on corruption to a large or medium extent (59 percent). While this represents a nearly two-fold increase from 2013 (31 percent), citizens in Houthi-controlled regions are nonetheless far less likely than those in government-controlled areas to believe the government is tackling pervasive corruption (46 percent versus 81 percent).

What is the extent of corruption at the national level?



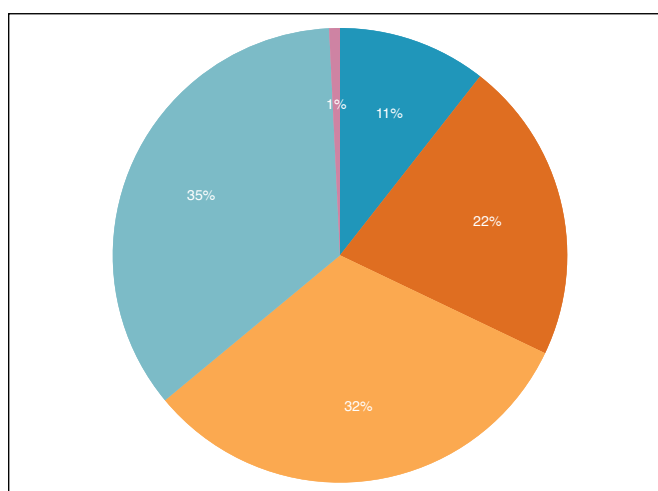
■ large extent ■ medium extent
■ small extent ■ no extent/don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Politics and Democracy

Only a third of Yemenis are interested in politics (33 percent), representing a slight decrease from previous years (37 percent in 2013). The gender gap here is notable with men being nearly twice as likely as women to say they are interested in politics (42 percent versus 22 percent). These low levels of interest might result from a prevailing attitude among Yemeni respondents that politics is often too complicated to follow (81 percent). This belief is shared by respondents in both government and Houthi-controlled areas (86 percent versus 78 percent).

How interested are you in politics?

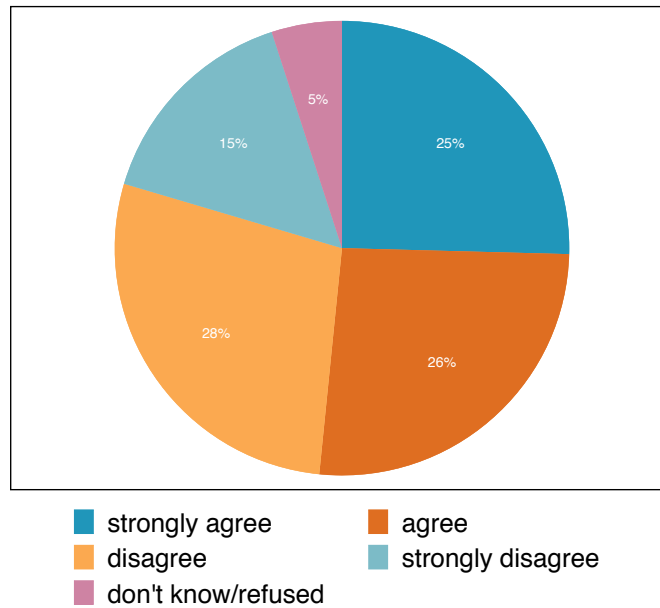


■ very interested ■ interested
■ uninterested ■ very uninterested
■ don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

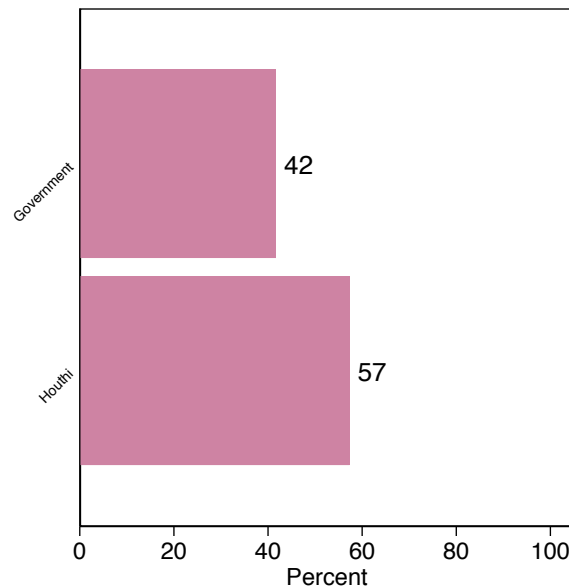
Despite stating limited interest in politics, Yemeni citizens have clear preferences for a democratic system. Though fewer than three-in-ten say it does not matter what kind of government Yemen has (28 percent), over half say that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government (52 percent). Those in government-controlled areas are more likely to prefer democracy than are those in Houthi areas (61 percent versus 46 percent). Not only do those in government-controlled regions prefer democratic governance at a higher rate than do those in Houthi areas, they are also nearly twice as likely to characterize the current governance as being closer to a democracy than a dictatorship (67 percent versus 35 percent).

Is democracy better than other systems?



Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Is democracy better than other systems? *% saying strongly agree or agree.*

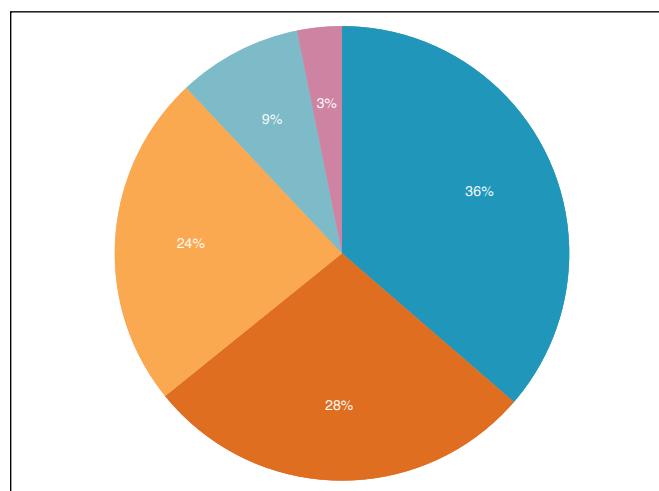


Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Given this general inclination for democracy, how do Yemeni respondents characterize or define democracy? A plurality say the most essential characteristic of

a democracy is that the government ensures law and order (36 percent), which is likely a function of the continued conflict facing the country. Meanwhile, nearly three-in-ten say democracy is a system with multiple parties competing fairly in elections (28 percent) and roughly a quarter say the most essential characteristic of a democracy is that the government ensures job opportunities for all (24 percent). Interestingly, fewer than one-in-ten say a media free to criticize the government is the most essential characteristic of a democracy (9 percent).

What is the most essential characteristic of a democracy?

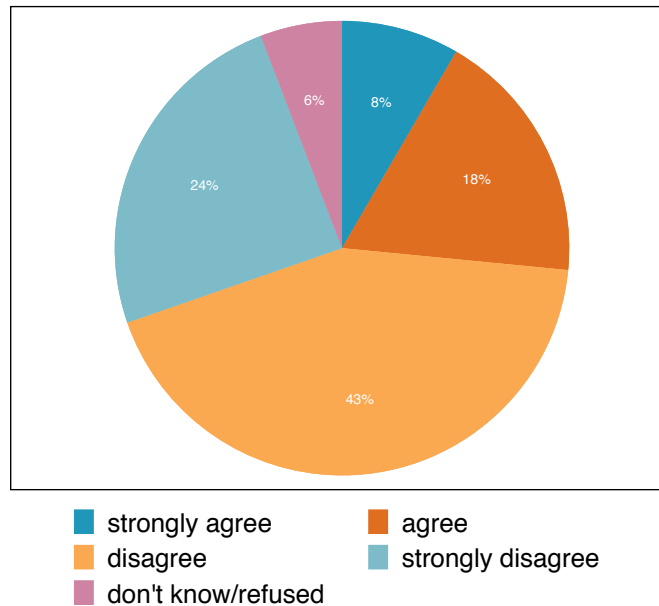


- law and order
- fair elections
- create jobs
- free media
- don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

At the same time, few Yemenis believe that democracies have inherent political and economic problems. For example, only about a quarter say that economic performance is weak in democratic systems (25 percent), that democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability (26 percent), and that democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems (27 percent). Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that Yemenis are quite open to a democracy. However, their definition of democratic governance seems to center on order, multi-party elections, and economic opportunities, as opposed to civil liberties like a free media.

Are democracies ineffective at maintaining security and order?



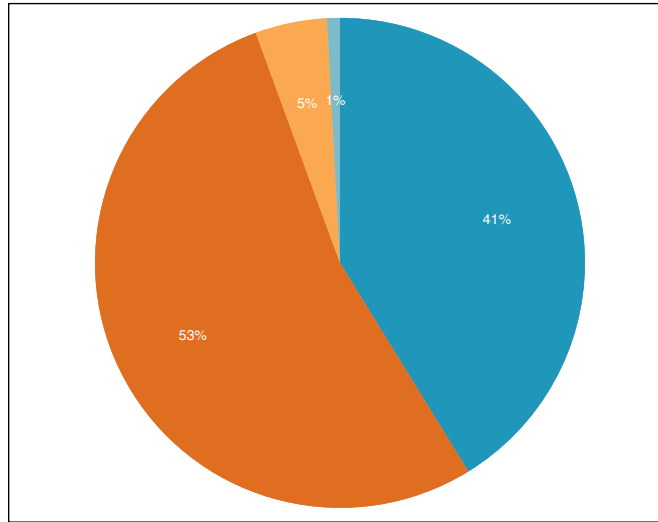
Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Identity and Religious Practice

Yemeni society remains deeply religious with most citizens identifying as either religious or somewhat religious (41 percent and 53 percent, respectively). As in many countries, youth (ages 18-29) are less likely to consider themselves religious (33 percent). However, across all other age cohorts rates of religiosity are roughly comparable, with about half of those aged 30 to 39 (48 percent), 40 to 49 (45 percent), and 50 and older (48 percent) saying they are religious. Though personal definitions of religiosity may vary both person-to-person and temporally, the vast majority of Yemenis report that they are quite observant in practice as well. Almost half say they pray five times a day (45 percent) while a further four-in-ten say they do so at least once a day (41 percent).

Despite self-identifying as religious, Yemenis are less trusting of religious leaders now compared to five years ago (61 percent in 2013 versus 46 percent in 2018). Overall, roughly two-in-ten say they have great trust in religious leaders (18 percent), and while about three-in-ten say some trust (28 percent).

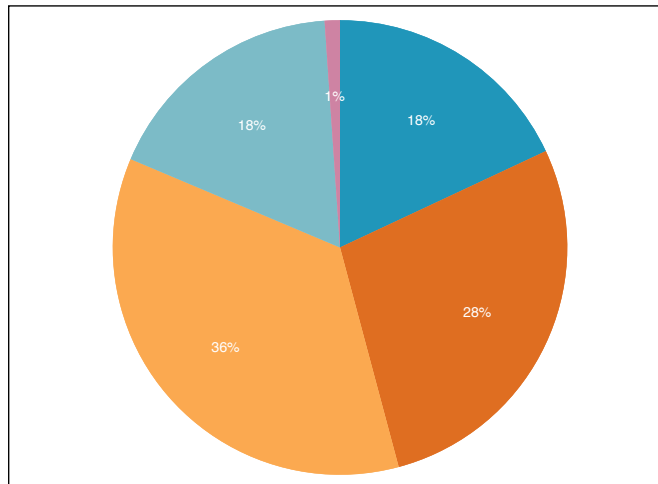
How religious are you?



■ religious ■ somewhat religious
■ not religious ■ don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

How much do you trust religious leaders?



■ great trust ■ some trust
■ little trust ■ no trust
■ don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

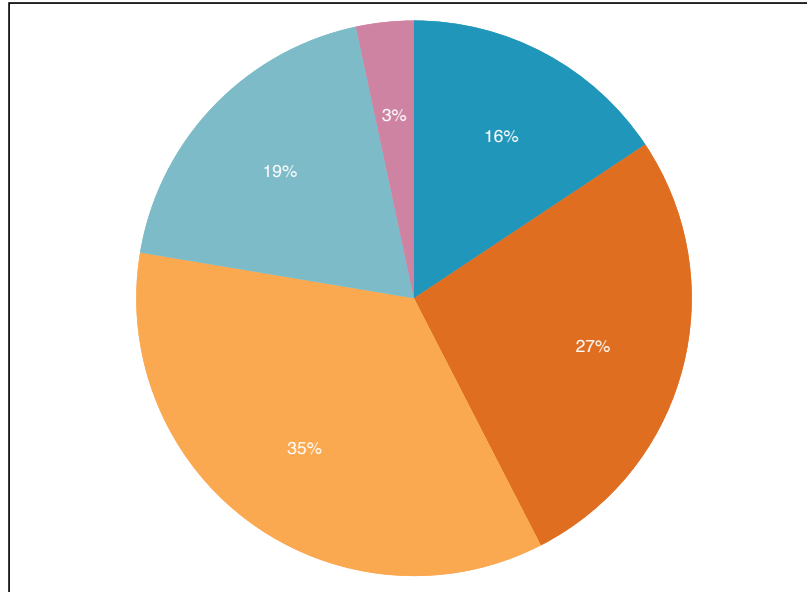
Political Islam

Despite general tolerance of, or perhaps even support for, democratic governance, Yemenis are generally split in their views on the place of religion in politics and governance, both overall and when disaggregated by demographic differences. Fewer than half of Yemenis think that religious clerics should have influence over government decisions (43 percent) this level lower than all previous Arab Barometer surveys in the country. Those in Houthi regions (47 percent) are more likely to believe clerics should have such influence than those in government-controlled regions (34 percent). Along the same lines, fewer than four-in-ten respondents think Yemen is better off if religious people are in positions of power (38 percent). However, those in government-controlled regions are less likely to think this than are their counterparts living in Houthi regions (33 percent versus 40 percent). A majority of Yemeni citizens also view religious leaders as just as likely to be corrupt as non-religious leaders (60 percent). This belief is more pronounced in government-controlled regions (72 percent), as compared to Houthi regions (53 percent).

At the same time, fewer than half of respondents say that religious practice is a private matter separated from socio-economic life (42 percent). Those in government-controlled areas are more likely than those in Houthi areas to believe religious practice is a private matter (58 percent versus 36 percent).

Yemenis overwhelmingly support the implementation of the sharia, with over seven-in-ten saying that the laws of their country should be based either entirely or mostly on the sharia. Four-in-ten say they should be based entirely on Sharia, and over three-in-ten say they should be based mostly on Sharia (31 percent). This view is more widely held in Houthi-controlled regions (74 percent) as compared to government-controlled regions (65 percent).

Should clerics influence decisions?

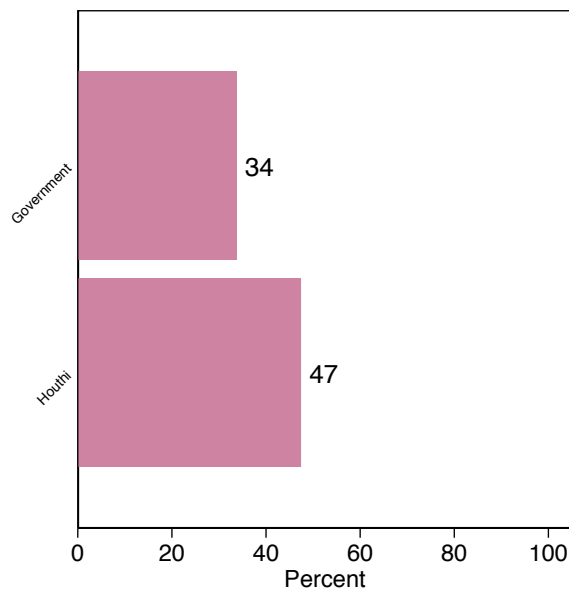


- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

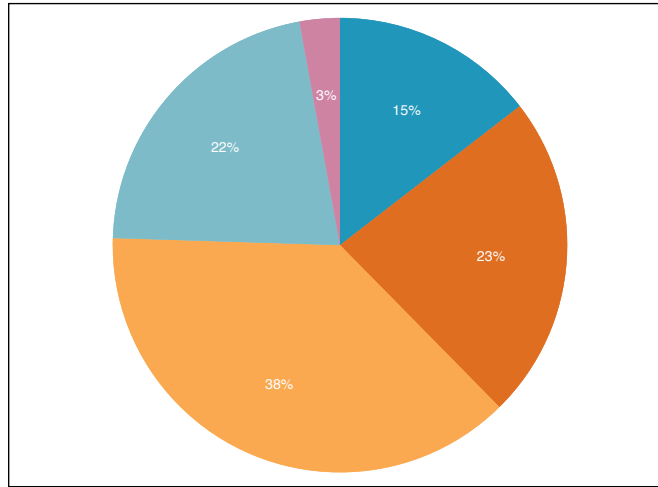
Should clerics influence decisions?

% saying strongly agree or agree.



Notes: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

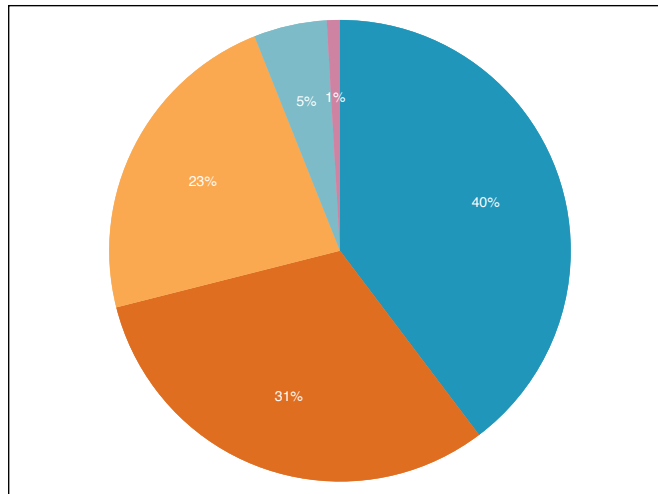
Is the country better off with religious leaders in power?



- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
- strongly disagree
- don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

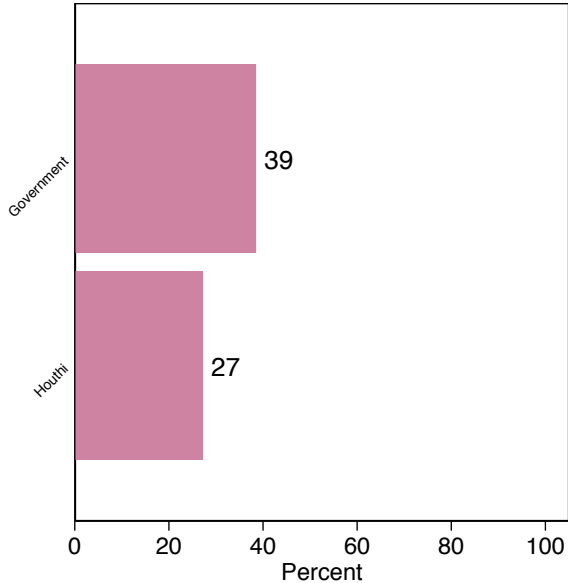
Should laws be based on sharia or the will of the people?



- Entirely the sharia
- Mostly the sharia
- Equally sharia and will
- Mostly or entirely will
- Don't know/refused

Note: Weighted estimates.
Source: Arab Barometer V.

Should laws be based on sharia or the will of the people?
% saying mostly on sharia.



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 ± 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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