

Arab Opinion Towards US Policy in the First Year of the Trump Era 2017

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, and its Washington Branch in particular, has an enduring interest in exploring Arab public opinion trends regarding US policies in the Arab region, given the leading role that the United States plays in the Middle East region. This interest grew following the 2016 election of Donald Trump as a new president – one who had advocated contentious policies towards the region and Islam during his electoral campaign and after his accession to power – and who took up the presidency following the US occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent internationalization of Arab regional crises such as seen in Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. To give Arab citizens an opportunity to express their views of those policies the Arab Center conducted a public opinion survey of the Arab region towards US policies towards the end of the first year of Trump’s presidency. Between 14 September and 13 October 2017 a sample of 3,198 male and female respondents was surveyed, averaging 400 respondents per country in the eight Arab societies of Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia.

Survey sampling followed a randomized, stratified, multi-stage, self-weighted clustered approach to ensure an equal likelihood of representation of each member of the society in the sample, as well as of geographical areas, weighted relative to population, of each of the eight countries surveyed. Opinion sampling of citizens (aged 18 years and over) of diverse gender and educational attainment thus provided representative samples of the societies of those countries. The confidence rate in the polling of each community was 95% with a margin of error of $\pm 5\%$.

Arab Public Opinion Trends Towards the United States

In order to consider the views of citizens in the Arab region regarding the United States, the survey posed a set of questions aimed at identifying Arab opinions towards the United States and towards the American people in general, in isolation from US foreign policy in the region – before asking questions seeking their evaluation of US foreign policy.

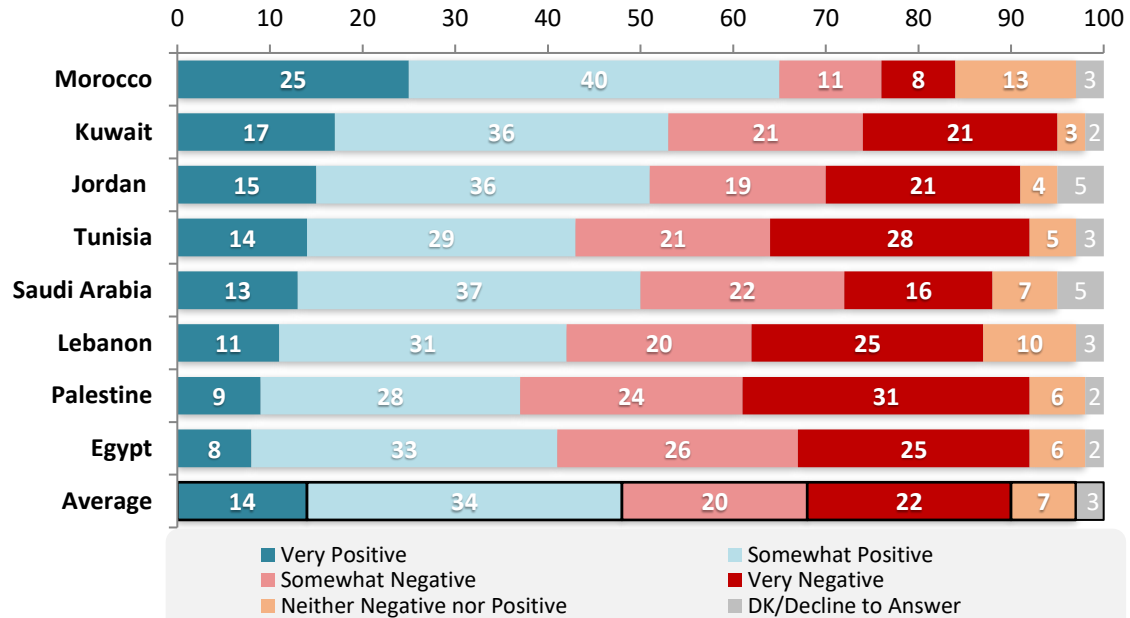
This method of questioning thus allowed for distinguishing respondents' stances towards the United States in general, towards the American people, and towards US foreign policy. Results of the Arab Opinion Index survey for the year 2014 clearly had revealed fundamental differences in public opinion trends regarding United States *as a country, society and culture* on the one hand and opinion and towards US *policies* in the world and in the Arab region. There was thus a clear need to include survey questions soliciting opinion regarding these broader issues; limiting survey questions to trends of public opinion towards foreign policies could lead to generalization suggesting that they represented opinion towards the United States itself and the American people, rather than specifically towards foreign policy or policies.

The survey's findings indicate that public opinion in the Arab region tends to be positive in its view of the United States; when asked about their opinions towards the United States in general, 48% of the respondents stated their view was "very positive" or "somewhat positive," compared to 42% who said their view was "negative" or "somewhat negative". Similarly, to deepen the understanding of the Arab citizenry's point of view with respect to the United States, respondents were asked about their opinion of the American people *in isolation from US foreign policies*. Survey findings revealed that 65% of Arab public opinion reported positive views of American people, American policies notwithstanding – as against 25% who expressed a negative view of the American people. Clearly, when Arab public opinion expresses a view of the United States, it may incorporate opinions

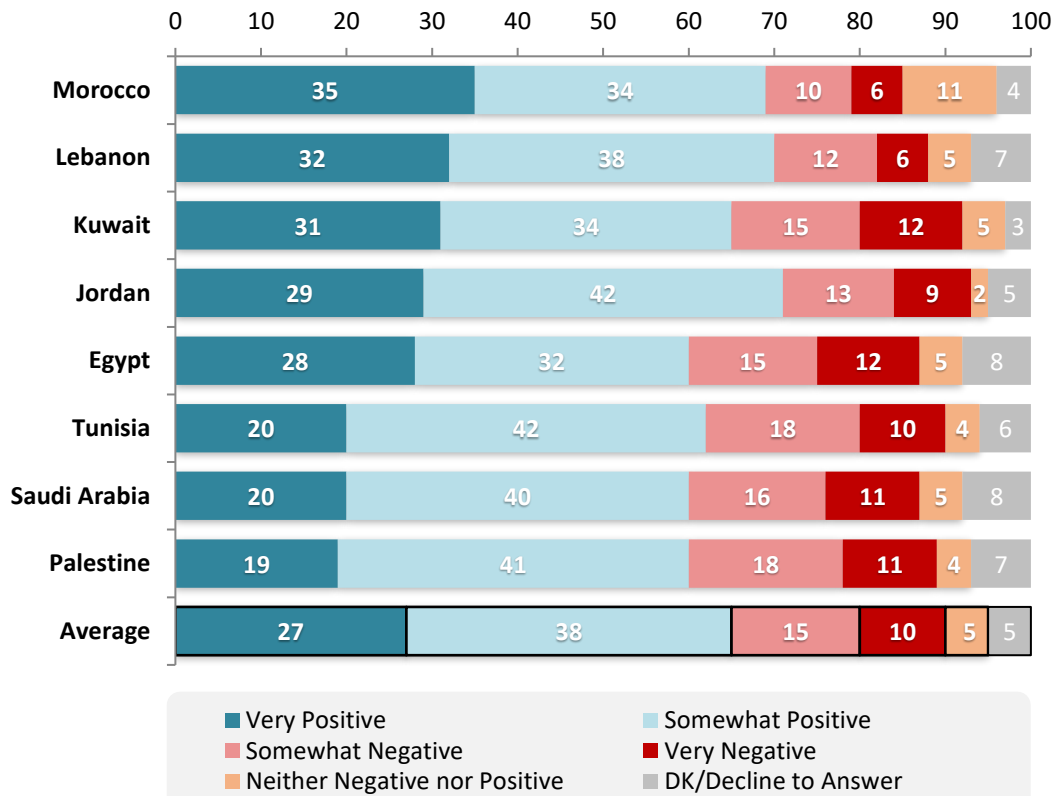
evaluating US foreign policies, and other opinions evaluating the United States in isolation from those policies. It is worth noting that the attitude towards the American people changed somewhat in 2017, compared to the findings of the survey conducted the previous year: in the October 2016 survey results, 73% of respondents reported that their view of the American people was positive, as compared to 65% in this year's survey (October 2017). Thus, over the course of one year Arab public opinion's attitudes towards the American people became less positive, and even if the change is not substantial, it likely reflects a change in mood following Trump's election, given his policies during the first year of his administration.

In the evaluation of US foreign policies, 61% of respondents stated a negative view of US policy in the Arab world, results consistent with Arab Opinion Index surveys conducted over the past three years, findings of which revealed the Arab public's negative perceptions of US Arab region policies. When reviewing public opinion trends by country surveyed, the most negative evaluations of US foreign policies were in each of Palestine, Lebanon, and Tunisia, with only 5% of respondents in those countries rating US policies "very positively". In contrast, the *least negative* of overall negative assessments were concentrated in Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Most respondents in each of the countries surveyed expressed a positive outlook *towards the American people as distinct from US foreign policy*, with the highest levels of this positive view recorded in each of Morocco and Lebanon.

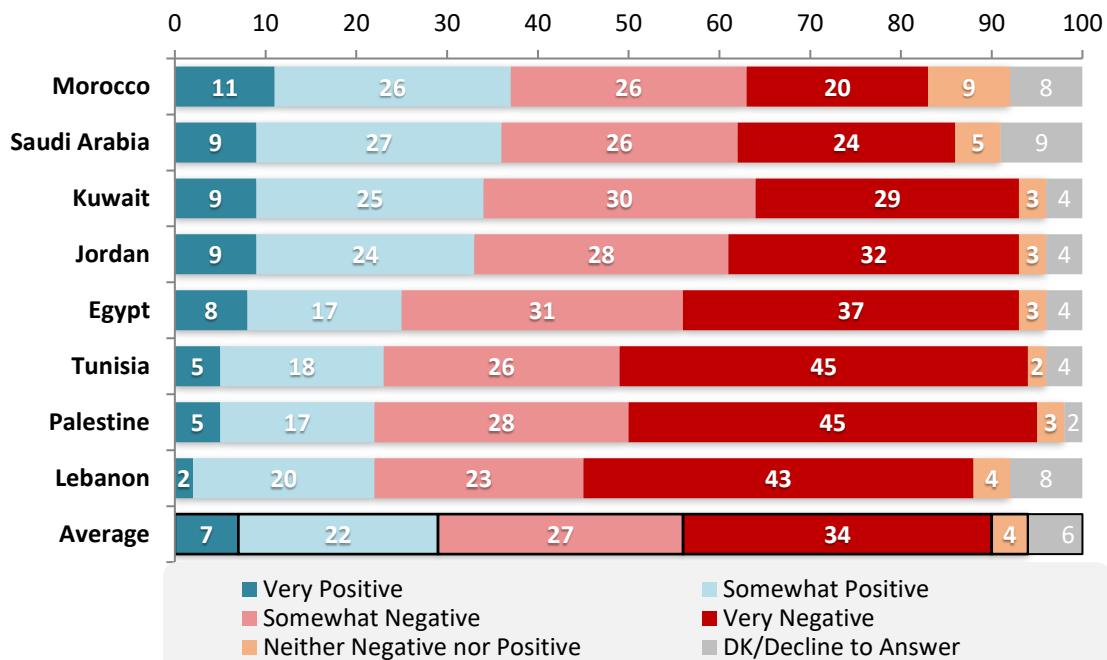
In general, what is your view of the United States?



Regardless of US Foreign Policy, My Opinion / View of the American People is ...



In General, How Do You Evaluate US Foreign Policy towards the Arab World?



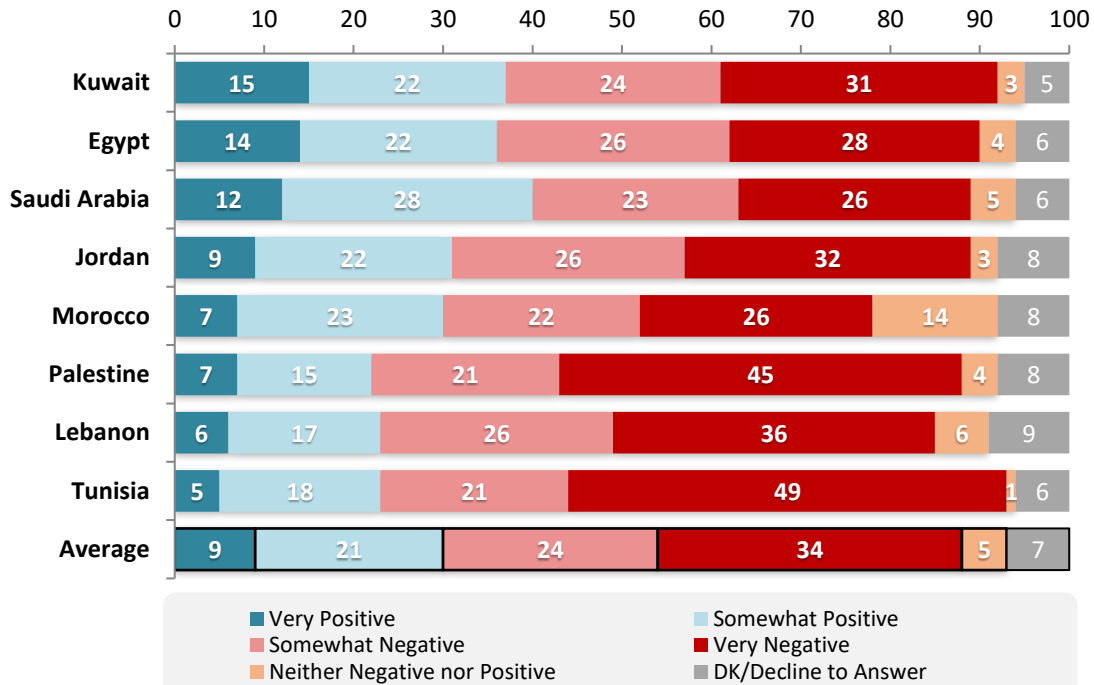
Evaluation of US President Donald Trump's Policies

As mentioned above, this survey aimed to identify public opinion trends towards the US President through several criteria. Respondents were asked about their opinion of Donald Trump generally and their views of his policies towards the Arab world as a whole, in addition to a set of questions reflecting public opinion trends towards Trump and United States' *policy issues* in the Arab region. These pertained to promotion of democracy in the Arab world; dealing with terrorism in the region; maintaining good relations with US allies in the Arab countries; and evaluating the performance of the US President's policies towards regions experiencing crises and conflicts – such as Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, and Palestine.

In terms of how citizens in the Arab region generally view Trump, the results showed that about 30% of public opinion hold a positive view, compared to 58% with a negative view of him; thus the Arab public's assessment of the US President was similar to its evaluation of US policy. Public opinion in both Saudi Arabia and

Egypt offered the *most positive* evaluation of the US President, although the majority view in both was still on balance negative, compared to the findings of negative views garnered from other countries, with the *most negative* views found in Tunisia and Lebanon.

In General, what is Your View of US President Donald Trump?

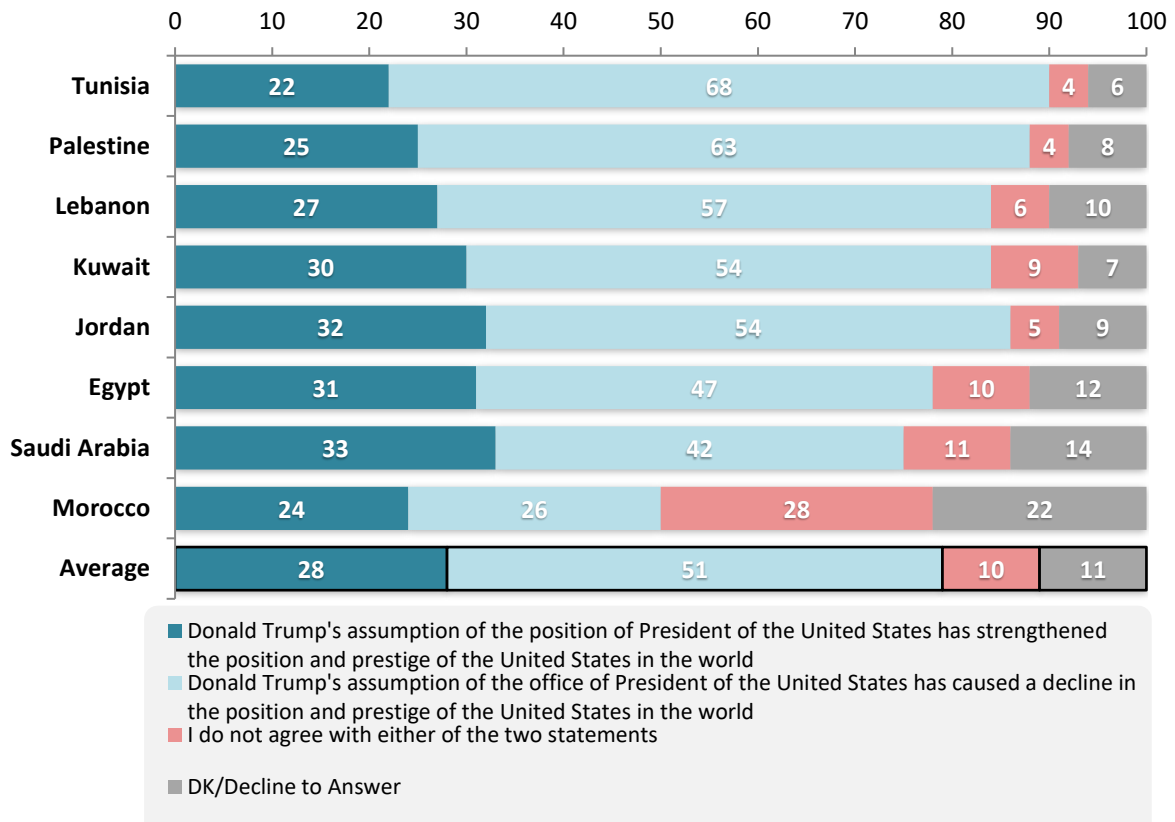


In keeping with the above, two statements were presented to respondents, the first stating: “Trump's assumption of the office of the President of the United States has strengthened the position and prestige of the United States in the world,” and the second that “Trump's assumption of the office of President of the United States has caused a decline in the position and prestige of the United States in the world”. Respondents were asked to choose the phrase best matching their viewpoint. The results indicate that the bulk of public opinion in the region according to 51% of respondents stated that Trump's assumption of the presidency caused a decline in the United States' standing and prestige in the world, compared to the 28% who said it had strengthened the status and prestige of the United States. While majority public opinion in each of the countries surveyed reported a decline United States' status and prestige of the with the arrival of Trump to the presidency, less

than 50% of respondents in Saudi Arabia (42%) and Egypt (47%) reported this. Indeed, the percentage of those who chose the second phrase was the highest in Saudi Arabia, at 33%.

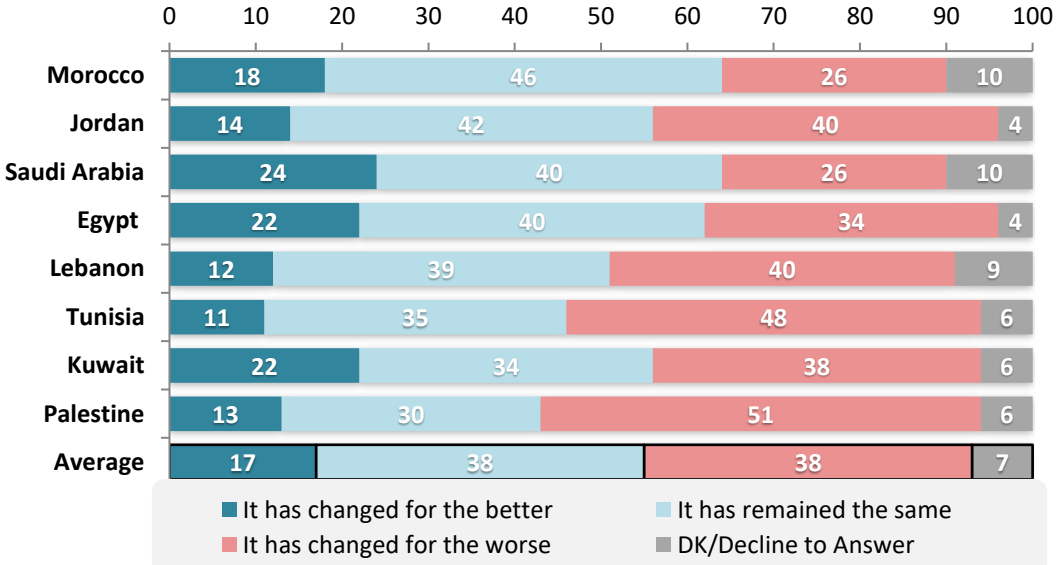
As for the evaluation of President Trump's policies towards the Arab world, the survey results indicated that 61% of the respondents felt these policies to be negative, compared to 29% who stated them to be positive, with the majority of respondents in each country stating that Trump's policies towards the Arab region were negative. Respondents from Tunisia, Palestine, Lebanon and Kuwait rated them more negatively than those from other societies. An exception was found in Saudi public opinion, where the percentage of those who evaluated Trump's policies negatively was 47%, compared to 38% who rated them positively – the highest percentage positive rating recorded amongst countries surveyed. Note that the evaluation of Trump's policies towards the Arab region was consistent with the evaluation of United States policies.

Which of the following statements is closer to your point of view?

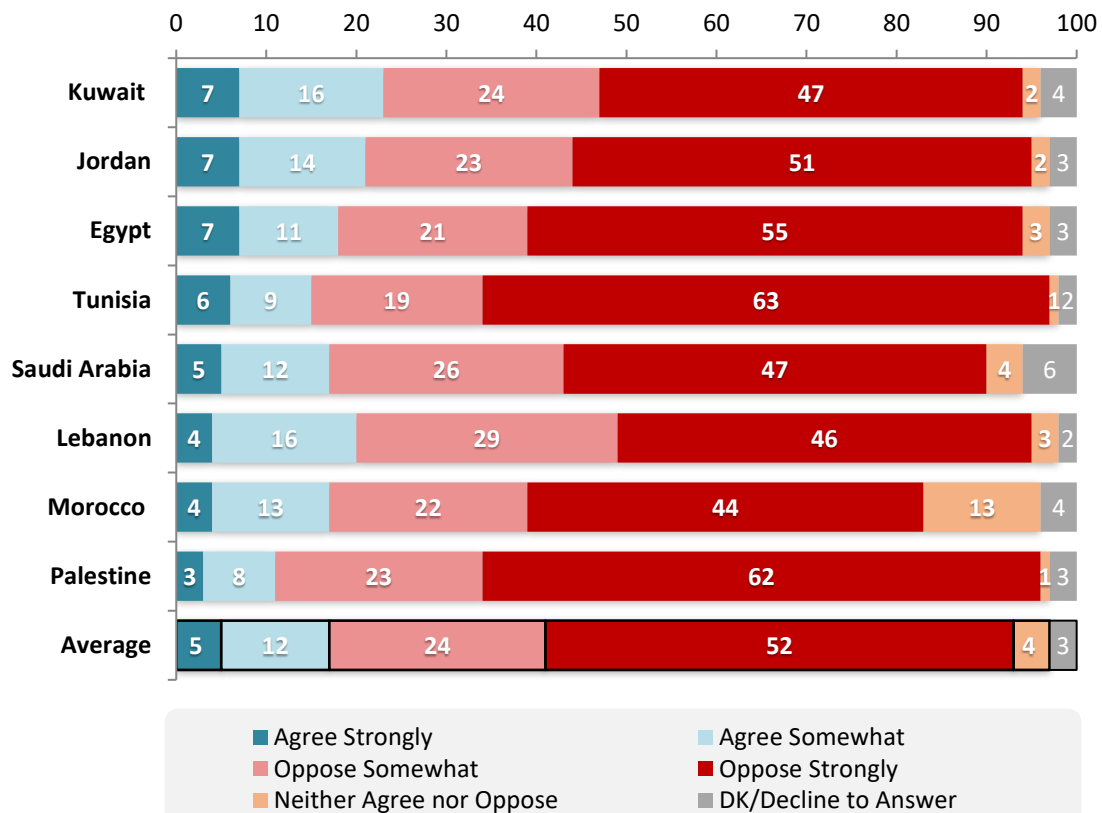


In addition to respondents' evaluations of Trump's policies towards the Arab world, and seeking more precise knowledge of the impact of Trump's arrival to the US presidency, respondents were questioned on the impact on US policies towards the Arab world of Trump having become president. The results showed that respondents were divided equally between two blocs, the first representing 38% of the respondents, who stated that US policies towards the Arab region had changed for the worse shortly after Trump's accession to the presidency, while respondents in the second bloc – also 38% – opined that US policy remained unchanged. In contrast, 17% of respondents expressed a different view, that US policies have changed for the better after Trump became President of the United States. The Palestinians were those respondents who felt most that the policies of the United States had changed for the worse after Trump's accession to the presidency, while the Saudis (24%) and Egyptians (22%) were most expressive of the view that these policies had changed for the better. In any case, the responses garnered suggest that Arab public opinion, as reflected by the respondents surveyed, considers the impact of Trump's accession to the presidency on US policies towards the Arab region to have remained negative and that while evaluating US policies negatively overall, remained divided between two blocs, one considering that after Trump's accession to the presidency these policies changed for the worse, the second that they remained the same.

In general, what is your assessment of President Trump's policy towards the Arab world?



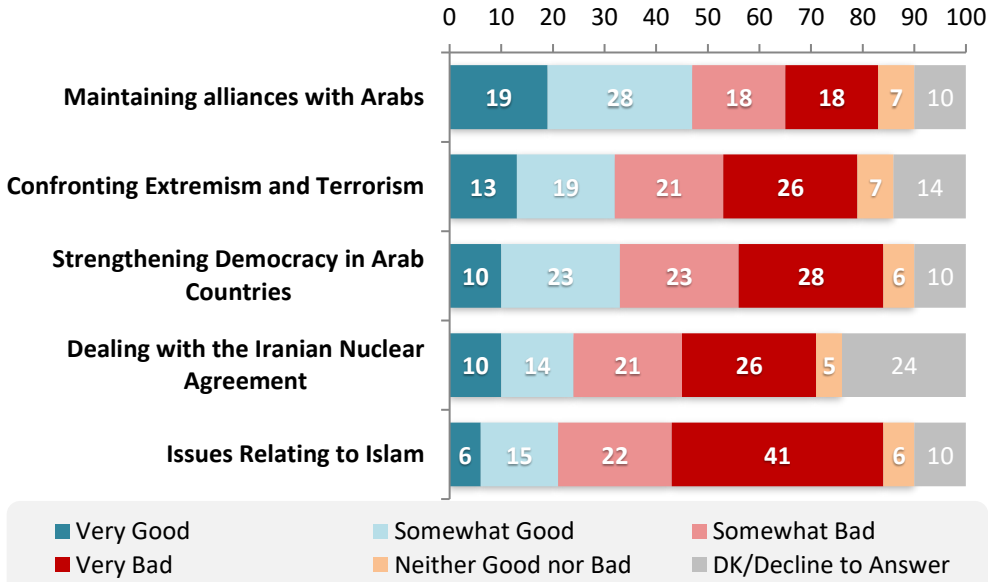
Do you agree with President Trump's policy of preventing people from certain Muslim countries from entering the United States?



In terms of evaluating Trump's policies towards particular issues, respondents were asked about issues related to US policies in the Middle East region, some of which were raised during the election campaign, or were included in his statements and positions immediately upon exercising the powers of his office: confronting extremism, issues related to Islam, stances towards the nuclear deal with Iran, dealings with Arab countries considered to be allies of Iran, and promoting democracy in Arab countries. 63% of respondents rated Trump's performance on issues related to Islam as "poor". Similarly, 51% of the respondents rated Trump's performance in democracy promotion in Arab countries as poor. On the whole, the largest bloc of respondents rated Trump's performance on these issues as poor, with the exception of his performance on preserving US relations with her Arab allies, where 47% of respondents expressed the view that his performance in this regard was good, as compared with 38% who said it was negative. In terms of identifying trends in Saudi public opinion, 56% of Saudi respondents considered that Trump's performance with US allies among Arab countries was good, as also

the case with Jordanian respondents (56%) as well as Kuwaiti (51%). Identifying public opinion trends among the respondents in each of the countries surveyed suggests that the evaluation of Trump's performance in this regard may have been influenced by the Riyadh Arab-Islamic-American summit, or as a result of Trump's stands towards Iran or his expression on several occasions of positive views towards some of his Arab state allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. In any case, public opinion trends on this issue, as voiced by the respondents, do not appear to be value judgments as much as assessments of the reality of the matter. It may be useful to note that those who rated Trump's performance in dealing with the Iranian nuclear deal as “good” were concentrated in Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. These are the same countries in which, in greater proportions than others, his performance in countering extremism was rated good.

How would you rate President Trump's performance on these issues?



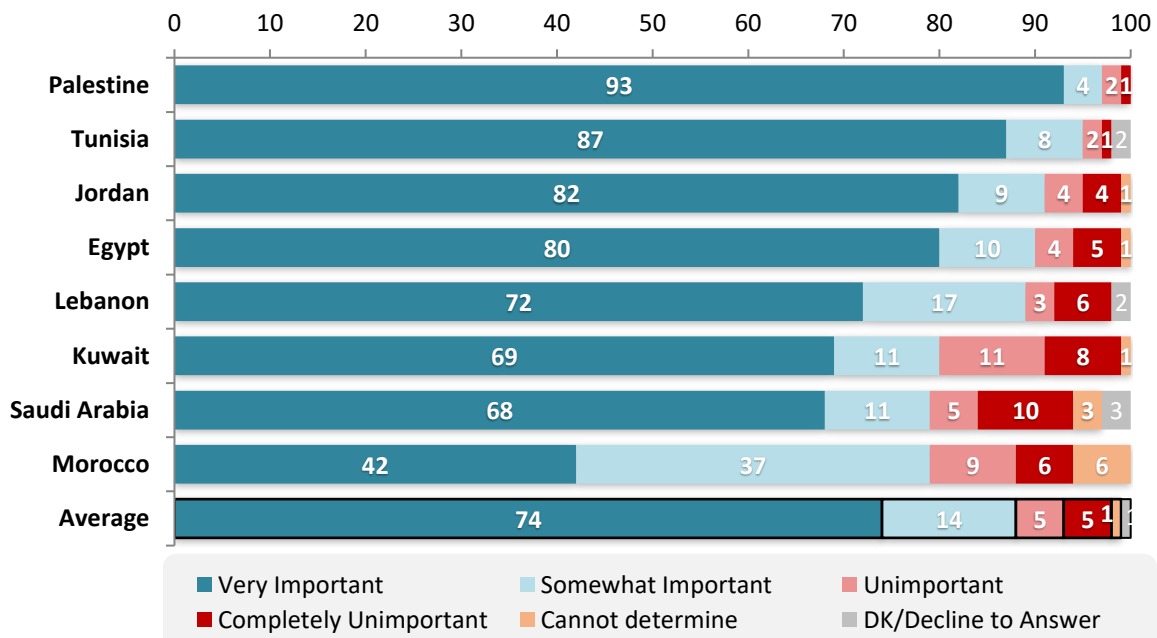
If the answers on the previous topics reflect the trends of Arab public opinion towards developments concerning particular issues in the Arab countries or elsewhere in the Middle East, then public opinion trends towards the performance of the US President concerning “hot spots” in the Arab region may shed more light towards evaluating his performance during the first year of his presidency. The results clearly show consensus among respondents in negatively evaluating the Trump administration's performance in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, and Palestine, with some two-thirds respondents agreeing on its poor rating. Clearly Trump's

performance in US policy towards Palestine is ranked the most negative, followed by his performance in Iraq and Syria. A quarter of the respondents indicated inadequate knowledge to assess Trump's performance regarding Libya, and a further fifth of the respondents expressed their lack of knowledge about his performance in relation to Yemen.

How do you evaluate the administration of President Trump in its policy and performance regarding...?

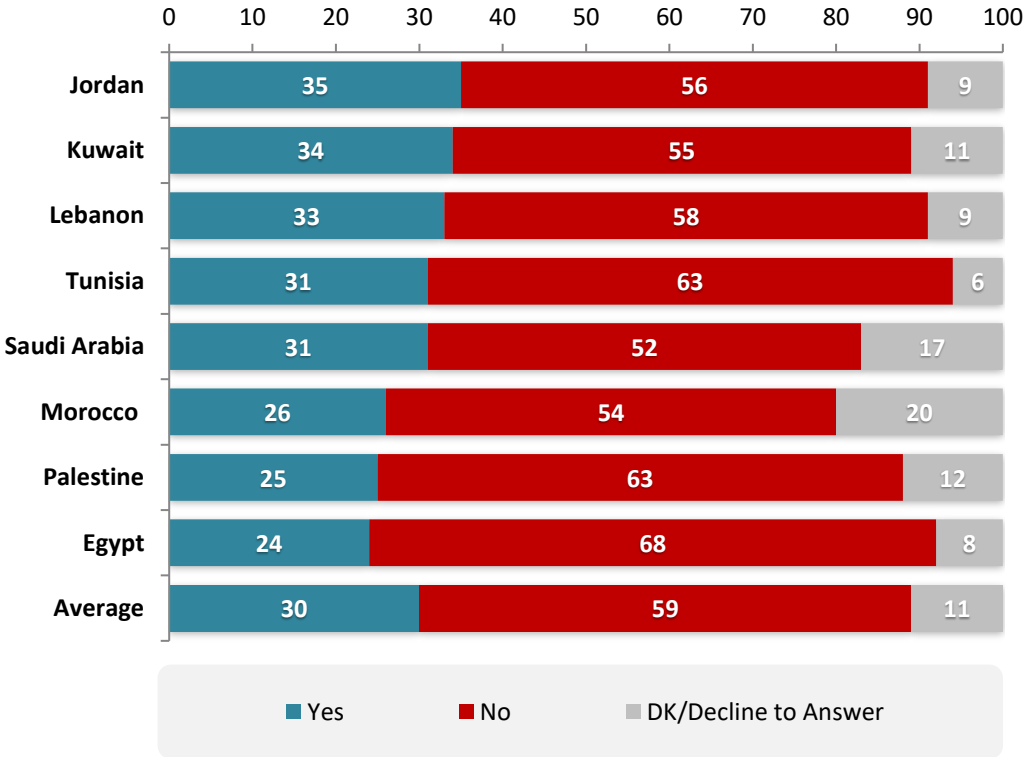
	Very Good	Somewhat Good	Somewhat Bad	Very Bad	Neither Good nor Bad	I don't know/Decline to Answer	Total
Syria	6	15	22	41	5	12	100
Yemen	5	11	20	39	6	19	100
Iraq	4	12	21	45	5	5	100
Libya	4	10	19	37	7	23	100
Palestine	4	8	15	56	7	10	100

How important is the Palestinian Cause to You?



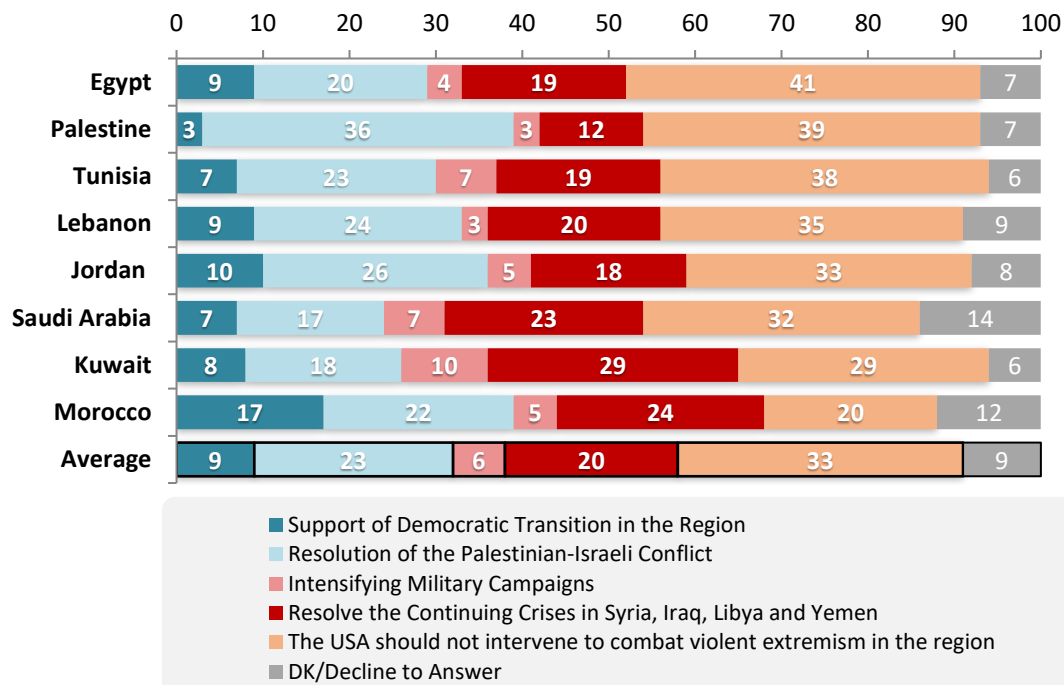
The above data suggests that citizens in the Arab region gave an overall negative evaluation of the policies of the United States of America towards the hot issues in the region under the Trump administration, with Trump's own performance in these areas assessed as poor. Similarly, respondents were asked about the extent to which Trump's policy contributed to fulfilling his promise to fight and eliminate ISIS. The results suggest that the majority of public opinion (59%) believes that Trump's policies did not contribute to achieving this goal, promised upon assuming the presidency, contrasted with 30% who reported that his policies had achieved it. It is striking that the bulk of public opinion in each of the surveyed societies agreed that this goal was not achieved, rising to 68% in Egypt and 63% in both Palestine and Tunisia. It is significant here that the bulk of public opinion did not consider Trump's policies to have led to the elimination of ISIS, despite the fact that the survey was carried out at a time when Mosul and most of the Iraqi national territory had been liberated from ISIS control, and so also with regard to most of the areas that were under its control in Syria.

Trump had promised to fight and eliminate ISIS. In your opinion, did his policies contribute to achieving this goal?



In the terms of Arab citizens' opinions on what US policy should focus on to combat extremism in the Middle East region, the largest bloc of respondents, at 33%, holds the view that the best strategy to combat this extremism is for the United States not to intervene in the region. A second priority focus, for 23% of respondents, is seen to be resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, followed in third place, with 20% of respondents prioritizing resolving the crises in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya. A further 9% of respondents emphasized supporting democratic transformation as the best strategy. The percentage of those voicing support for intensified military campaigns was 6%. Thus, non-intervention of the United States in the region won the approval of a third of respondents as the best strategy to eliminate terrorism and extremism.

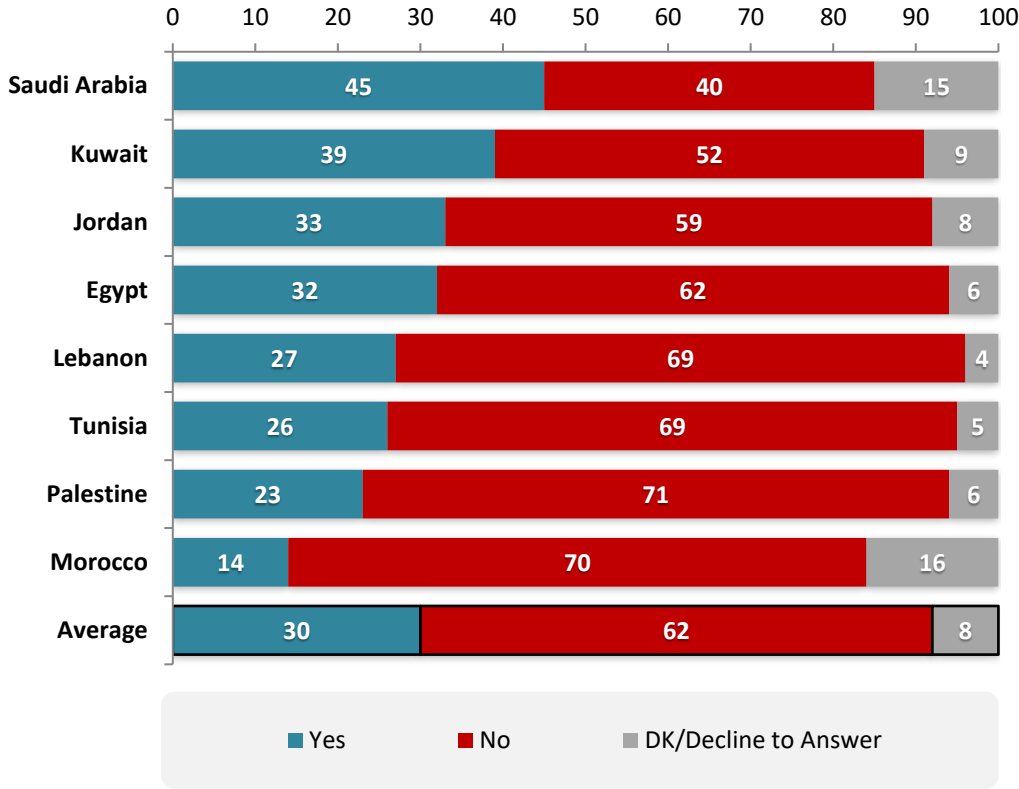
What do you think the focus of US strategy should be to combat and eliminate terrorism and extremism in the Middle East?



With regard to US policies towards Arab countries, especially in light of the huge arms deals that the Trump administration concluded during his visit to Saudi Arabia shortly after assuming his presidential duties, respondents were asked if they considered that arms sales to Arab countries contributed to the security and stability of the region. 30% of respondents expressed their view that selling US arms

contributes to the security and stability of the region, as against 62% who voiced the opposite opinion. Indeed, the bulk of respondents in each of the countries surveyed considered that US weapons sales do not contribute to the region's security and stability. The only exception to this was in Saudi public opinion, which was divided into two blocs; the first, with 45% of respondents, said that selling arms to Arab countries contributes to the security and stability of the region, and the second, with 40%, said the opposite.

Do you think that US arms sales to Arab countries contributes to enhancing the region's security and stability?



Summary/Conclusion

Public opinion in the Arab region continues to oppose US foreign policy, negatively evaluating this policy in the region. This negative assessment of US policies in the region does not broaden into a stand against the United States or its people. On the contrary, the Arab view of the people of the United States in isolation from its foreign policies is positive. The opinion of Arab citizens towards Trump is overall

negative, considering that his presidency of the United States has contributed to a decline in the United States' standing and prestige in the world. Moreover, his presidency either negatively affected US policies in the Arab region or maintained them as they were.

The bulk of the citizenry in the Arab region considered the Trump administration's performance regarding Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq and Palestine to be negative or bad. There is near concurrence on a negative assessment of the Trump administration's stance towards Palestine. The assessment of its stance towards Palestine takes on importance in view of survey's finding that 88% of respondents see the Palestinian issue to be important to them, compared with 10% who consider it unimportant. Consequently, there is nothing that can appease the citizens' negative views of US policies in the Arab region without a fundamental change in these policies, and especially in policies regarding the Palestinian issue. This negative evaluation of US policy is an explanatory factor for mainstream Arab public opinion rejecting US immersion in the affairs of the Arab region.