



Findings from the 2017-2018 Arab Opinion Index Announced

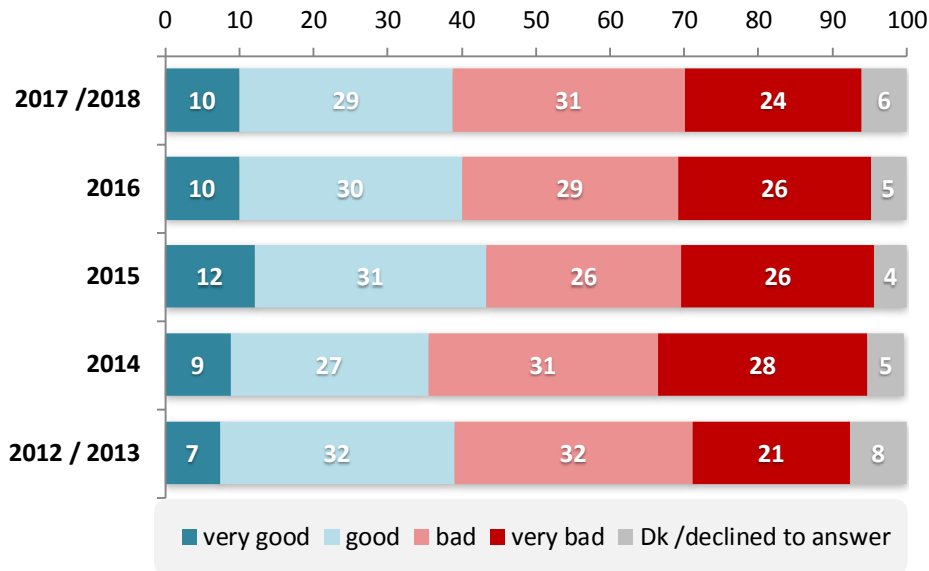
Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Introduction

The 2017-2018 Arab Opinion Index is the sixth in a series of yearly public opinion surveys across the Arab world. The first survey was conducted in 2011, with following surveys in 2012/2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016. The Arab Opinion Index is the largest public opinion survey covering the Middle East and North Africa. The 2017-2018 Arab Opinion Index is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with 18,830 individual respondents in 11 separate Arab countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Morocco and Mauritania. Sampling followed a randomized, stratified, multi-stage, self-weighted clustered approach, giving an overall margin of error between +/- 2 % and 3% for the individual country samples. The overall samples guarantee probability-proportional-to-size (PPS), ensuring fairness in the representation of various population segments. Our sample was balanced on gender as well. The fieldwork was carried out by an overall team of 840 individuals (half of whom were women), who conducted 45,000 hours of face-to-face interviews, covering a total of 760,000 kilometers across the population clusters sampled.

Views of Democracy and Political Conditions

Figure 1: Respondents' evaluations of the general political circumstances in their home countries.



In the face of generally negative evaluations of the political orders of their home countries, a large majority of Arabs (74%) expressed views supportive of democracy, compared to 17% who could be said to oppose democracy. Similarly, 76% agreed that a multi-party democracy was a good form of government for their home countries. In contrast, majorities varying in size from 61% to 75% expressed their opposition to a set of other forms of government, including one restricted to Islamic Sharia, free of elections and of political parties; an electoral system where competition was restricted to Islamists; or an electoral system where competition was restricted to secular parties.

Figure 2: Agreement/disagreement with the statement that democracy remains better than other forms of government, despite its shortcomings?

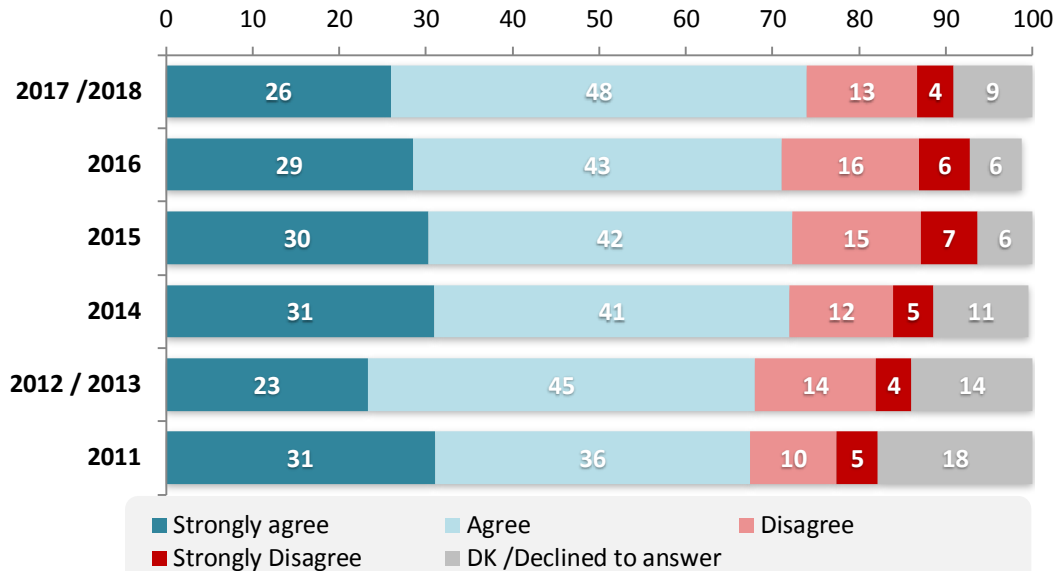
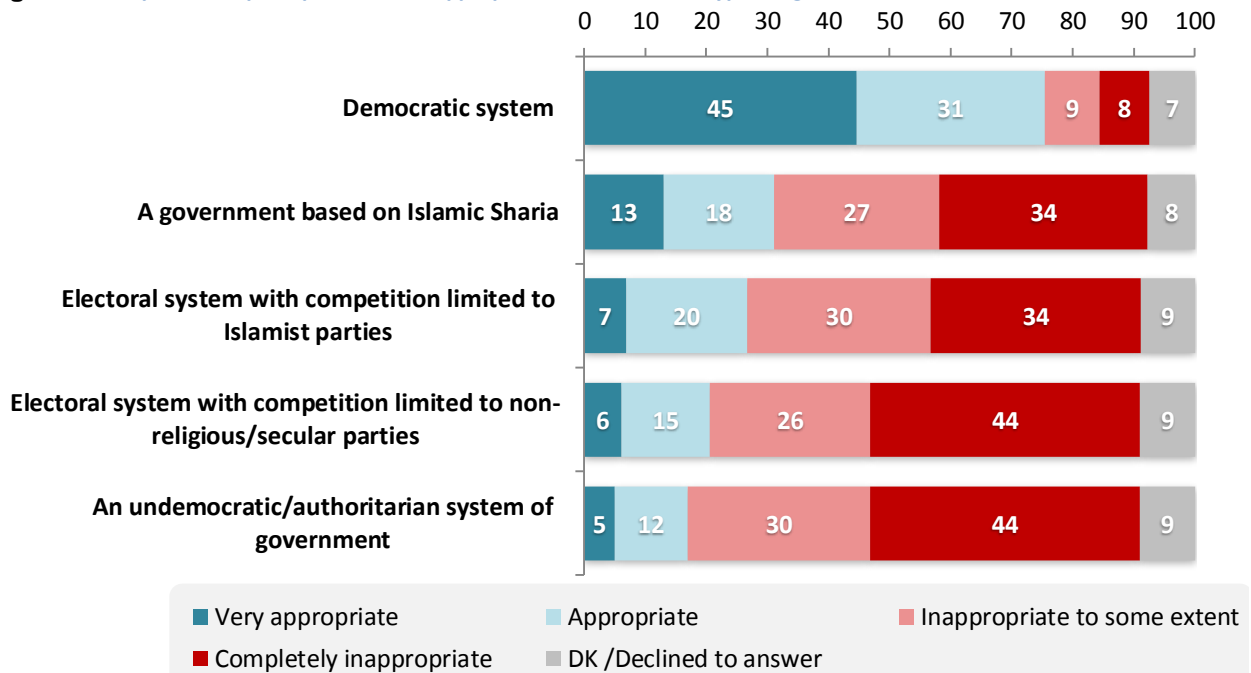
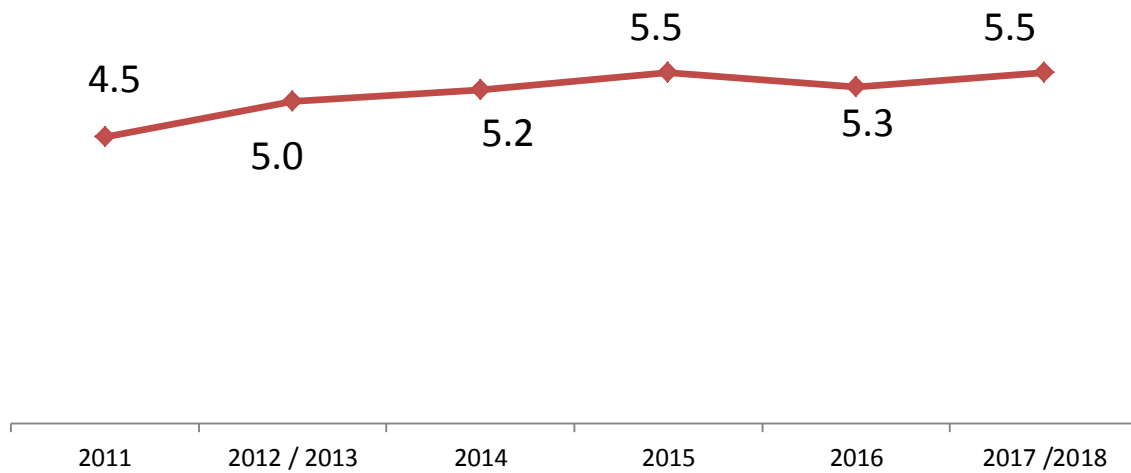


Figure 3: Respondents' perceptions of the appropriateness of various types of government for their home countries.



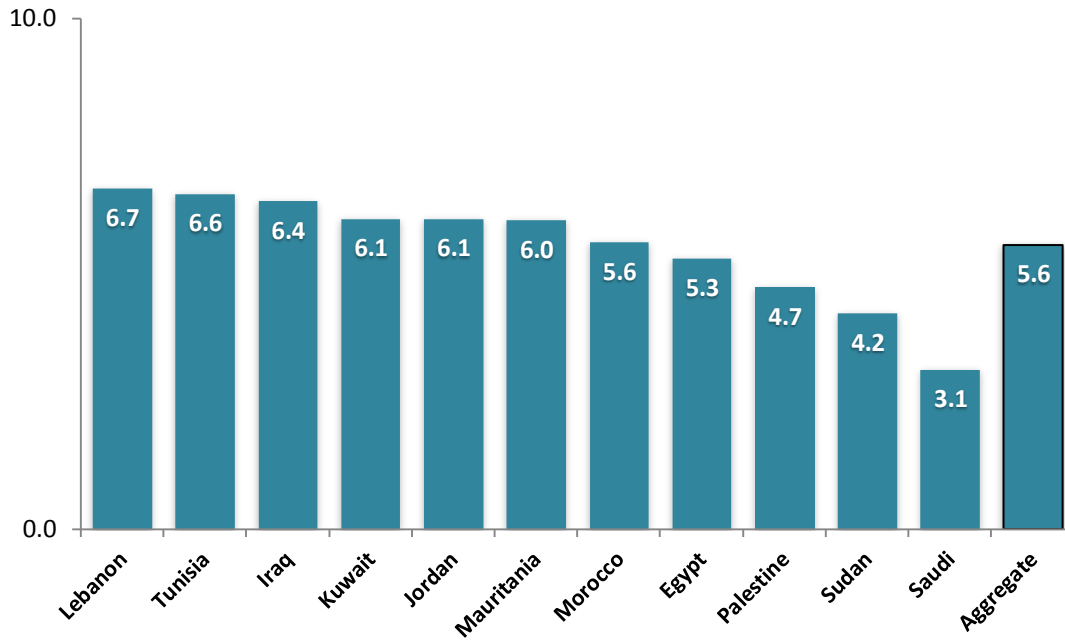
- When asked to rate the level of democracy in their home countries on a numeric scale from 1 to 10--with 1 being “completely undemocratic” and 10 being “democratic to the greatest extent possible”--respondent evaluations averaged to 5.5. Across individual countries, there was wide variation, from 7.5 to 3.7.

Figure 4: Democracy Scale Average by Year



- We also asked the question of how much they are able to criticize the government using a sliding scale, with 1 being the least ability and 10 being the most ability. The average number was 5.6 regionally, with respondents in Saudi Arabia being predictably the least able to criticize the government, and respondents in Lebanon and Tunisia being the most.

Figure 5: Criticism of the Government Scale by Country



Views of the Arab Spring

In 2017-2018, close to a majority of Arabs (49%) regard the peaceful protests which formed the Arab Spring of 2011 positively. There is a consensus among respondents which believes that the original uprisings were directed against dictatorial regimes, as popular movements aimed at supporting the transition to democracy and in protest at financial and administrative corruption.

The Arab public is neatly divided, too, over the present state of the Arab Spring and its future outcomes: fully 45% agreed with the statement that the Arab Spring “will achieve its aims,” despite acknowledging present setbacks. This is compared to 34% who agreed with the opposing statement that “the Arab Spring has come to an end,” and that the old regimes have returned to power.

Figure 6: A narrow majority continues to have positive views of the original peaceful, popular uprisings of 2011 which gave rise to the Arab Spring.

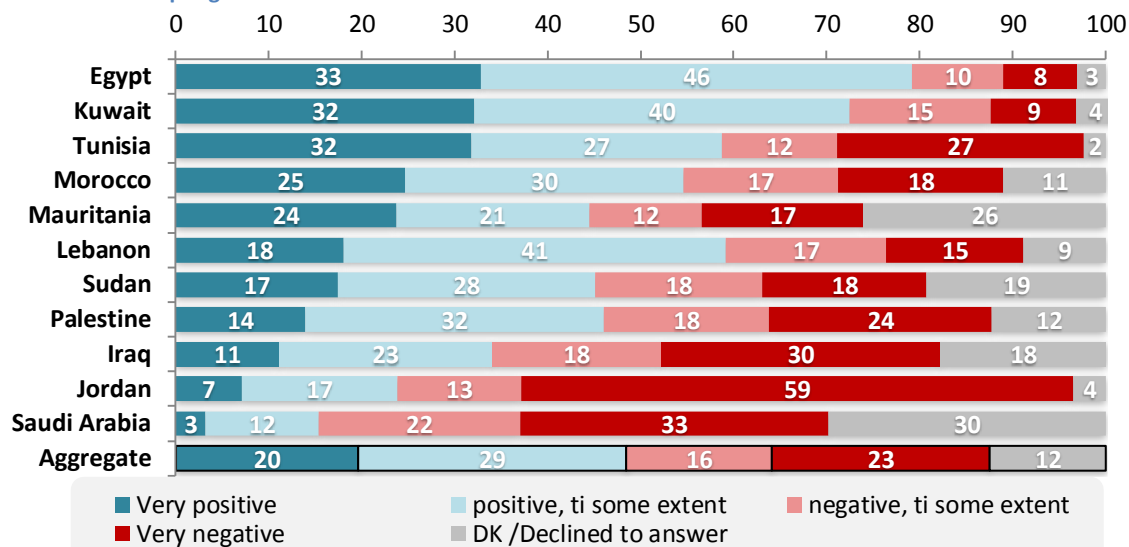
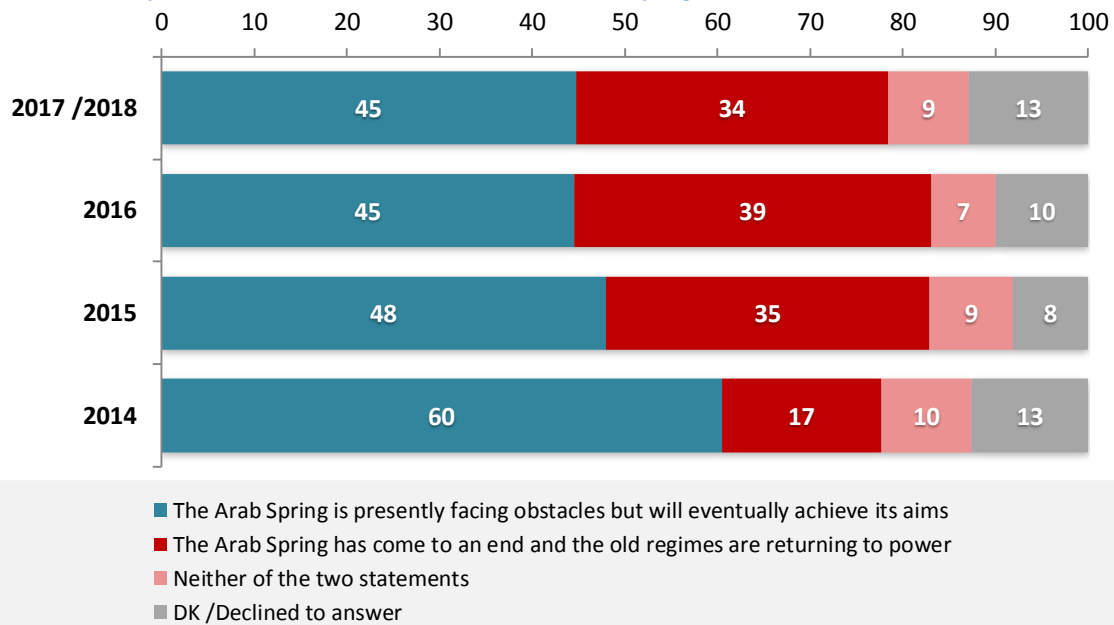


Table 1: Explanations given for the outbreak of the uprisings of the Arab Spring

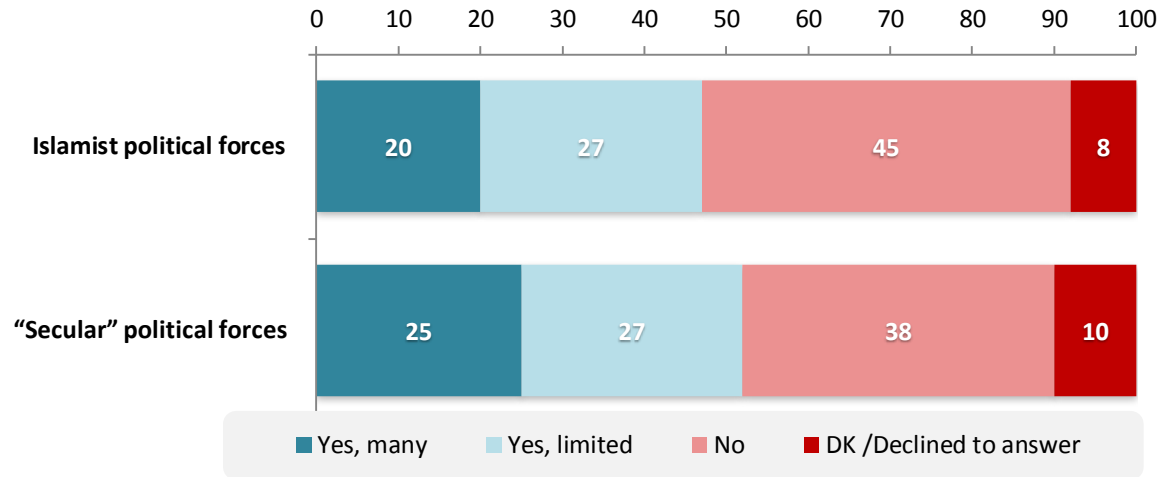
	Most important	Second-most important	Averaged
Against corruption	21	11	16
Opposition to dictatorship	14	9	11
Response to economic circumstances	20	17	19
For the sake of political freedoms	8	8	8
To end injustice	8	14	10
To demand dignity	4	9	6
To demand democracy	4	8	6
To achieve equality and justice	5	12	8
Other reasons	3	1	1
Don't know/declined to answer	13	0	7
No second choice provided	0	13	7
Total	100	100	100

Figure 7: The Arab public remains divided over the fate of the Arab Spring.



Looking specifically at the ascendancy of Islamist political movements which may arise from the Arab Spring, 47% of respondents stated that they were worried, to varying extents, about the rise to power of such groups, compared to 45% who stated that they were not worried about Islamists coming to power. By comparison, 52% of respondents expressed their concerns/worries of the rise to power of non-religious/secular groups, while 38% stated they had no concerns with secularists coming to power. These two large blocs understate the sharp sense of disarray in Arab public opinion, with political groups on both sides of a polarized divide eliciting the anxieties of Arab citizens in roughly equal measure. The public worries which surround the rise to power of such groups could be a potential obstacle to a wider democratic transition in the Arab region, paving the way for authoritarian institutions to exploit public fears and regain power.

Figure 8: The political ascendancy of both secular and Islamist political groups gave rise to worries among the Arab public.



Internet Usage

Internet penetration has increased markedly over the years of the Arab Opinion Index, with 63% of respondents to the 2016 survey being regular internet users, compared to 37% who do not use the internet. Amongst internet users, 82% have accounts on Facebook and a separate 26% have accounts on Twitter while another 39% of Arab internet users have accounts on Instagram. Meanwhile, 72% of social media users reported using their social media accounts to obtain political news and information.

Figure 9: Frequency of internet use: internet penetration has increased considerably during the life of the Arab Opinion Index.

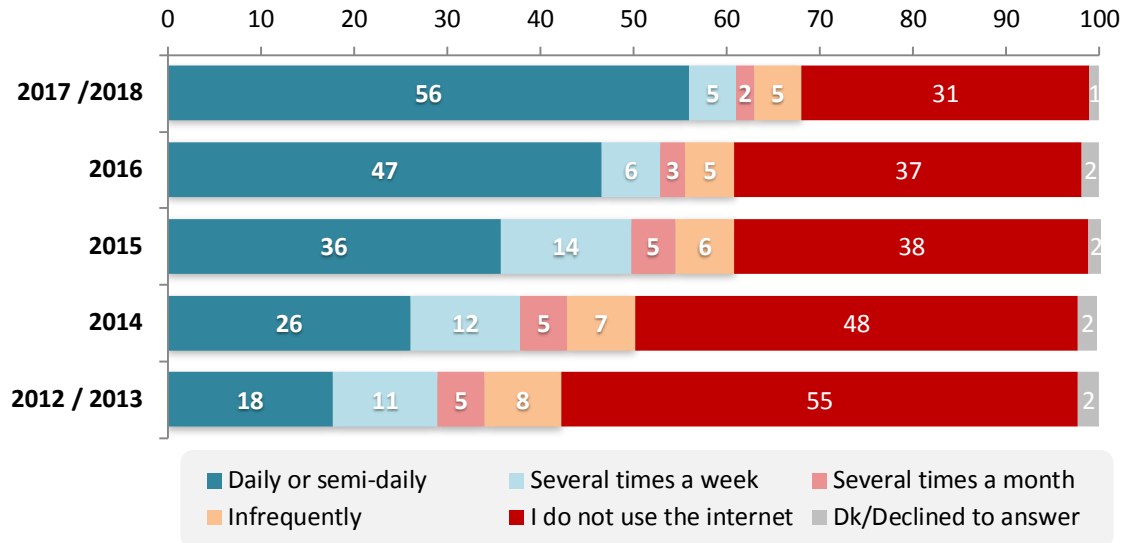
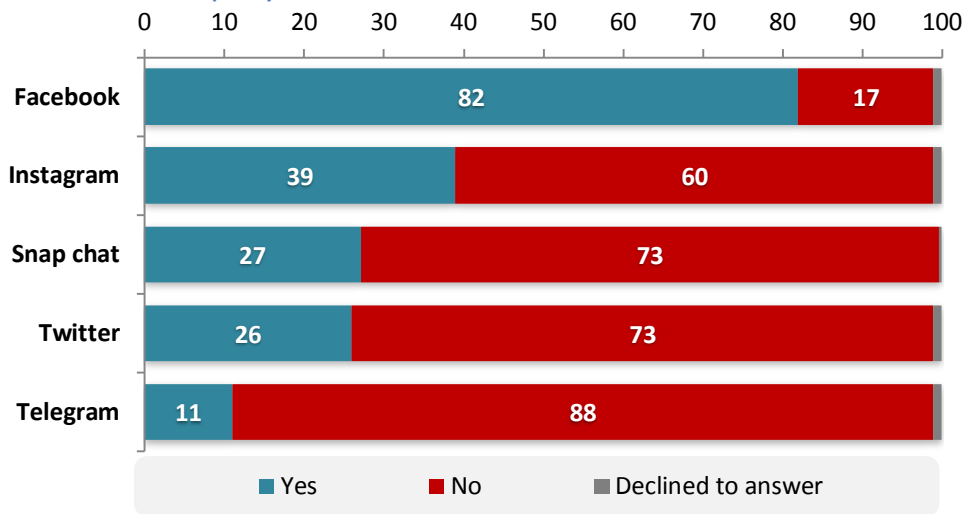


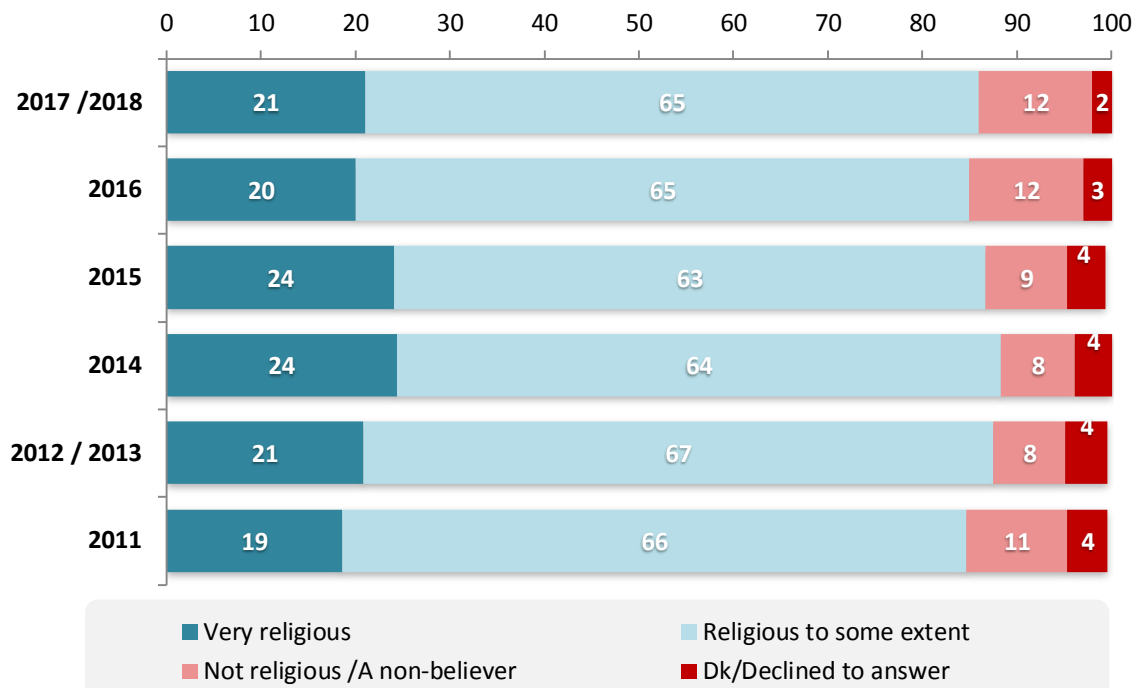
Figure 10: Social media users: frequency of various social media channels.



The Role of Religion

Most Arabs define their own religiosity in one of three ways: “Religious to some extent” (65%) or “Very religious” (21%), and only 11% of Arabs defined themselves as “Not religious”.

Figure 11: Self-identified religiosity.



While a majority of Arabs are religious, to varying extents, this does not preclude widespread religious tolerance: vast majorities of respondents believe that no religious authorities have the right to denounce followers of variant interpretations of their own religion, or to declare followers of other religions to be apostates. Additionally, a majority of Arabs show no real preferences for other religious individuals in their personal, day-to-day dealings, nor do they believe that irreligious people are generally worse individuals than they are. Majorities of respondents believe that clerics should influence neither government decisions nor voting behavior at the elections.

Figure 12: "No religious authority is entitled to declare followers of other religions to be infidels."

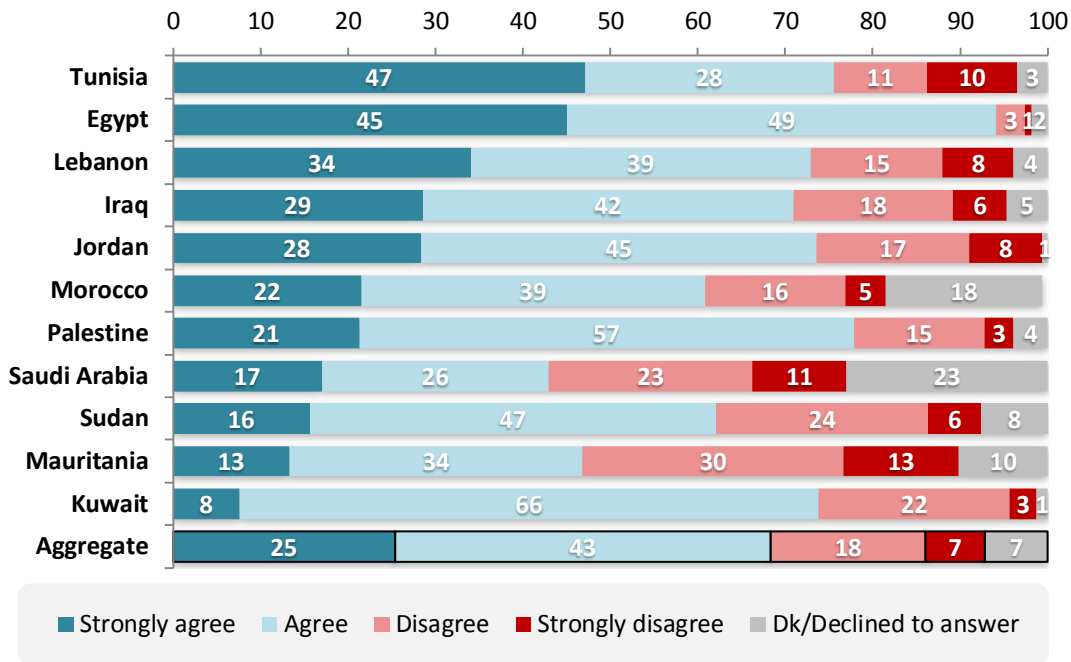


Figure 13: "In your day-to-day life, do you prefer to deal with religious individuals?"

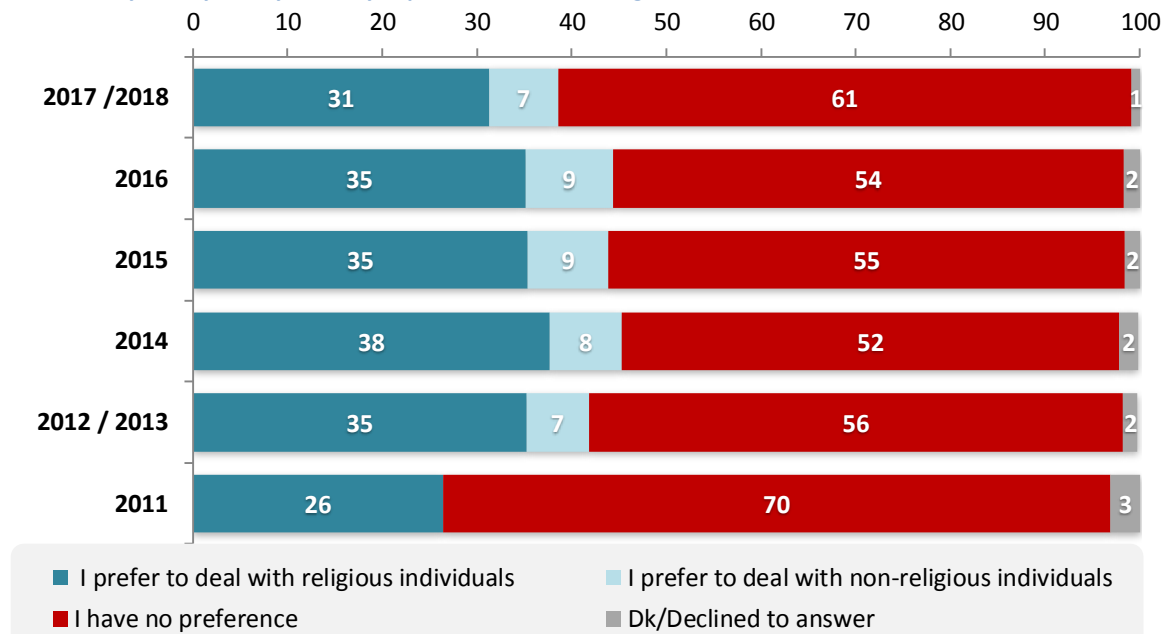


Figure 14: "The government has no right to use religion to win support for its policies."

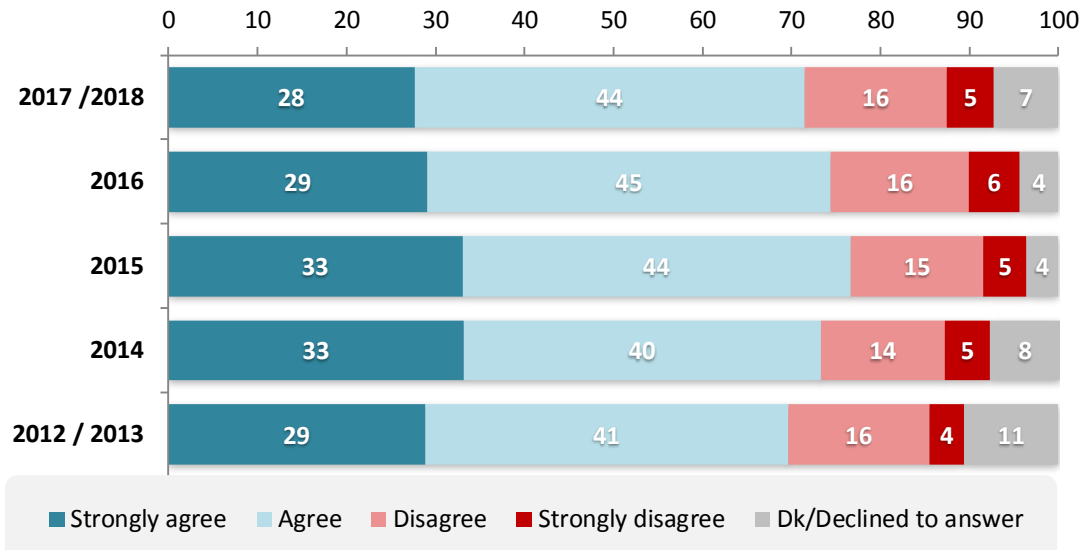
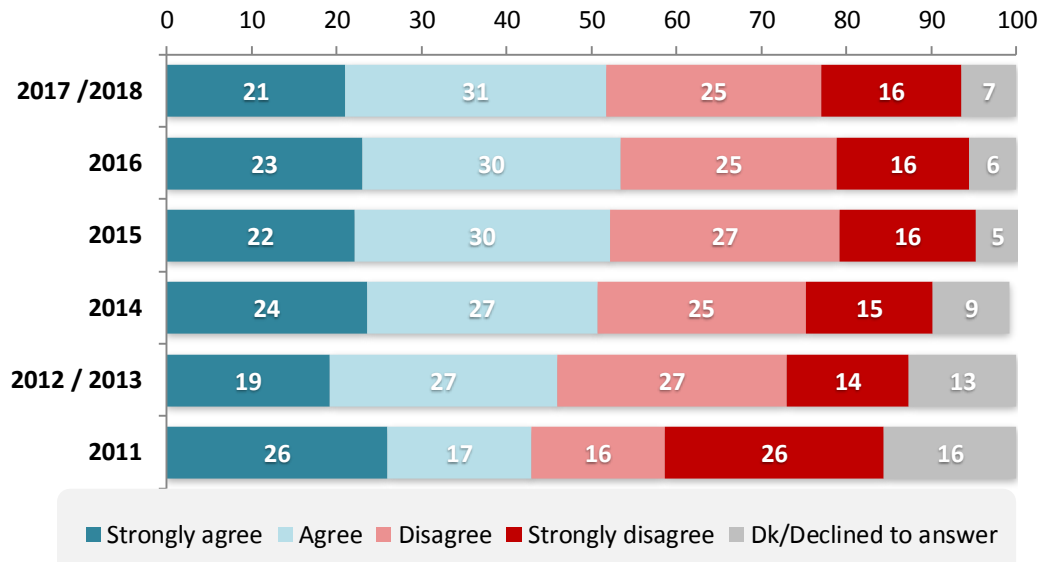


Figure 15: "It would be better for my home country if religion was separated from politics."

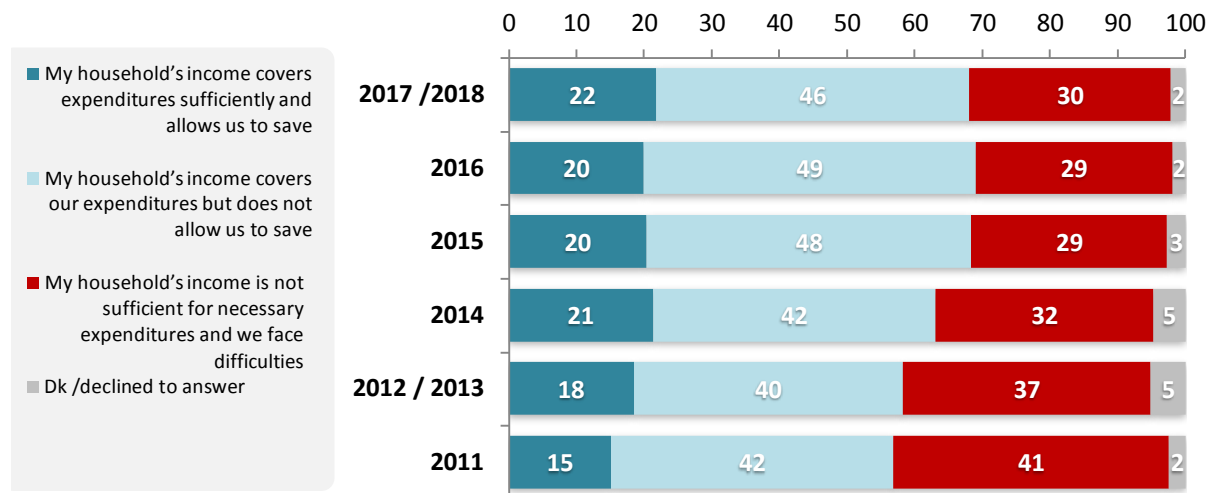


Economic Conditions

Respondents offered a variety of answers when asked to define the single most pressing problem facing their country. The largest group, 47% of respondents, provided answers which focused on economic issues: unemployment, poverty, and price inflation. A further 18% offered answers which centered on safety, security and stability while 20% gave answers which concerned political issues, such as governance, democratic transition, the insufficiency of public services, and financial and administrative corruption.

The results of the 2017-2018 Arab Opinion reveal a widespread, and total, lack of satisfaction with their own financial circumstances. A full 46% of respondents reported that while their household incomes were sufficient to cover necessary expenditures, they could not make any savings (these families are designated as those living “in hardship”). Another 30% of citizens in the Arab region live “in need,” in that their household incomes do not cover their necessary expenditures.

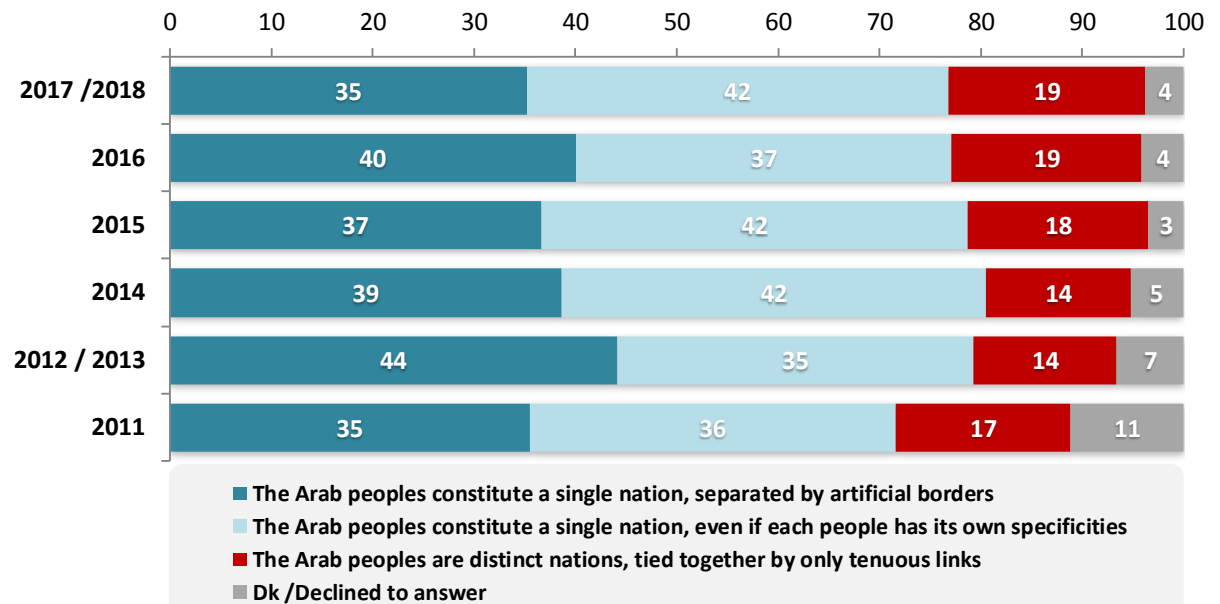
Figure 16: Self-reported Household Income Level



Regional and International Politics

Overall, a strong majority (77%) of Arabs believe that the various peoples of the Arab region constitute a “single nation”, even if some respondents qualify this belief. Only 19% maintain that the different Arab peoples are distinct nations tied by only tenuous bonds.

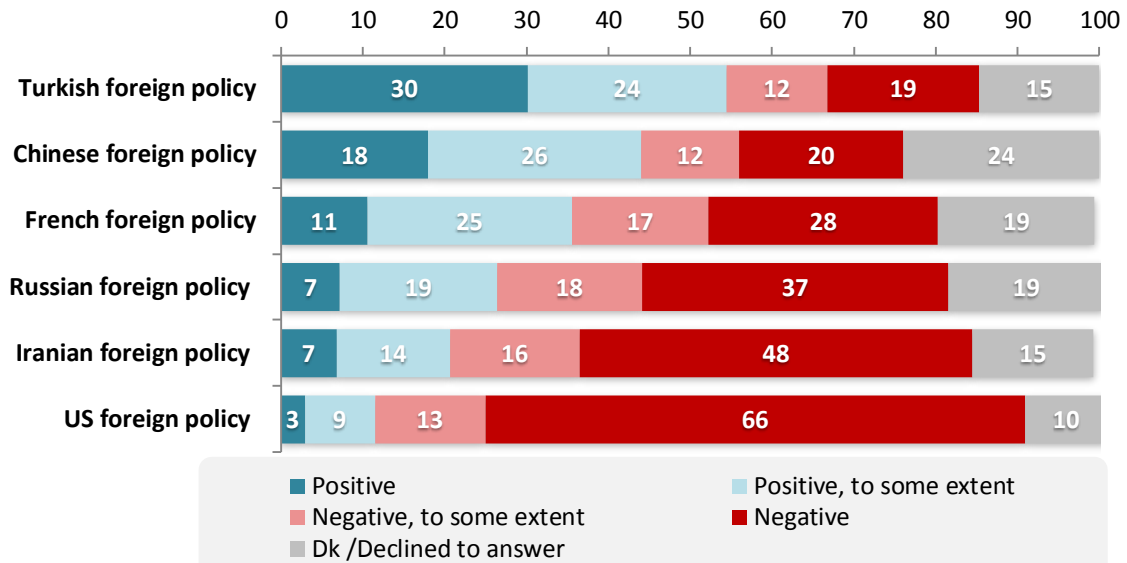
Figure 17: Respondents generally agree that the various Arab peoples constitute a single nation.



Results from the 2017-2018 poll show increasing public disenchantment with the policies of a number of foreign countries, both regional and global powers, in comparison with previous years. The Arab public generally has a negative view of the Arab regional policies of a number of international powers: strong majorities have negative views of the foreign policies of Russia, Iran, and the United States towards the Arab states.

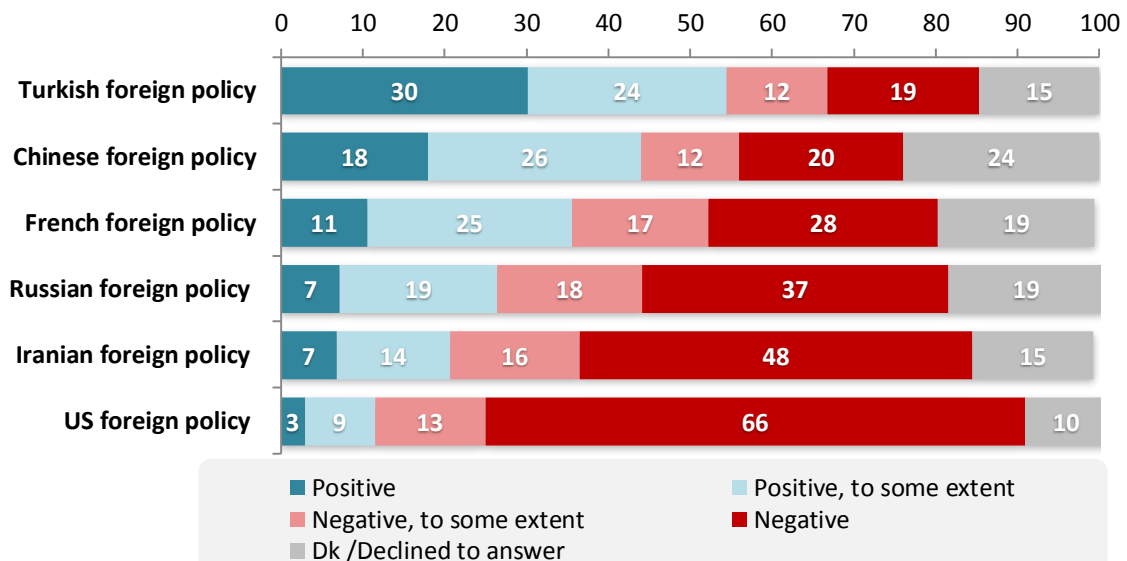
In specific terms, 79% of the Arab public has negative views of the foreign policy of the United States towards Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. Similarly, around 64% and 55% of Arabs view negatively the policies of Iran and Russia, respectively.

Figure 18: Changes in public perceptions of the Arab regional policies of a number of foreign powers.



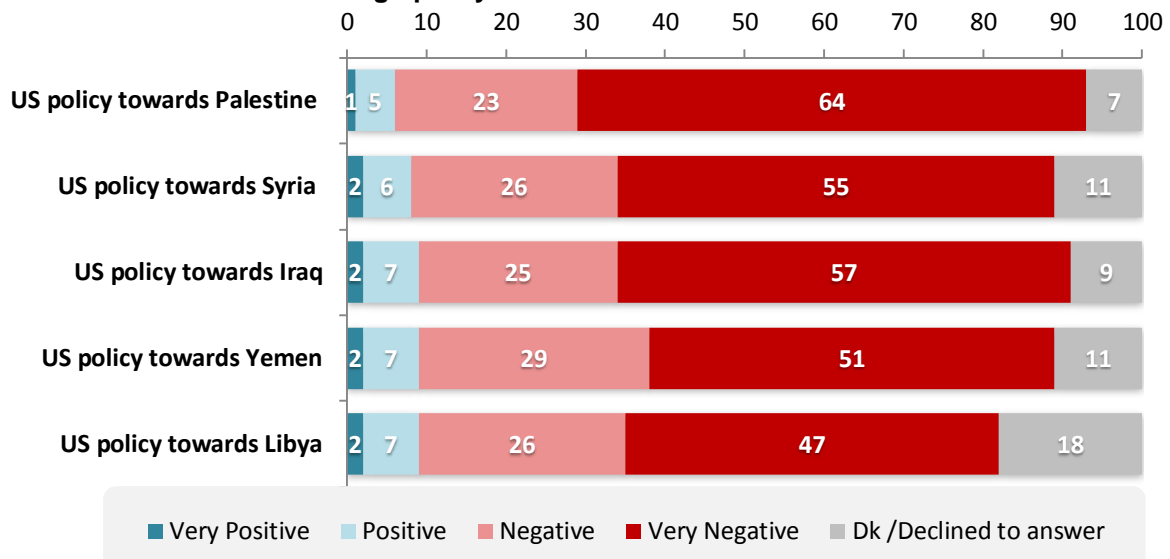
Israel and the United States in particular were also identified as the greatest threats to collective Arab security: 90% of Arabs named Israel as the country which posed the greatest threat to collective Arab security, and 84% of respondents designated the US in this way. In a similar question, 66% of Arabs agreed that Iran is a threat to the stability of the Arab region. In sum, there is a firmly entrenched public view which regards Israeli policies and US policies as destabilizing to the region.

Figure 19: Foreign policy assessments.



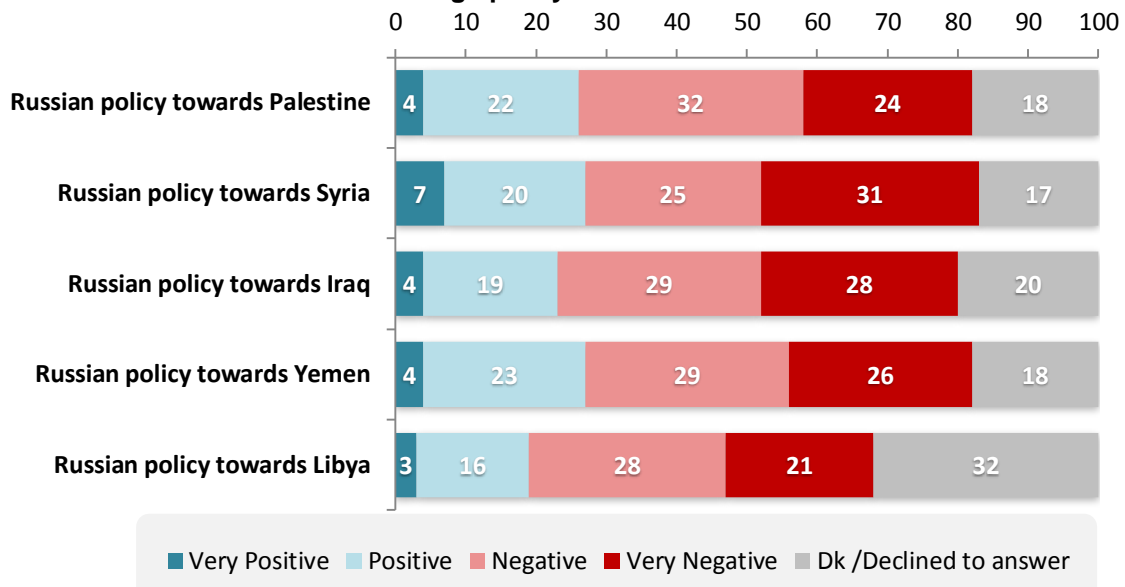
- When asked to look at specific US foreign policy areas, vast majorities of Arabs had negative views of US policy towards Palestine (87%, up from 79% last year); Syria (81%) and Iraq (82%).

Figure 20: Assessment of US foreign policy.



- When asked to look at specific Russian foreign policy areas, approximately half of Arab respondents have negative views of Russian policy towards Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

Figure 21: Assessment of Russian foreign policy.



- When asked to look at specific Iranian foreign policy areas, over half of Arabs have negative views of Iranian policy towards Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

Figure 22: Assessment of Iranian foreign policy.

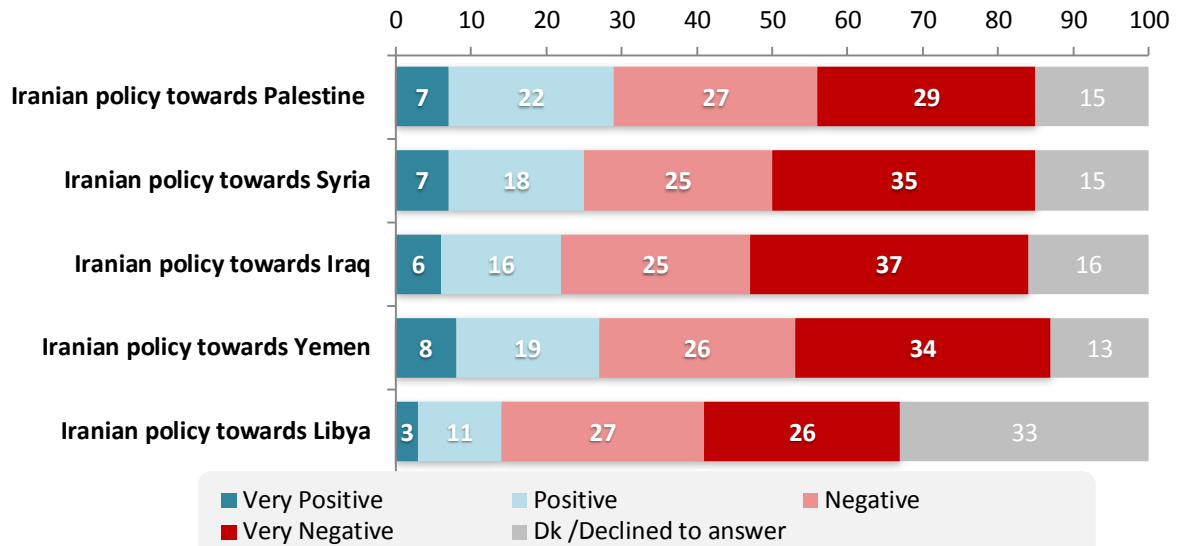
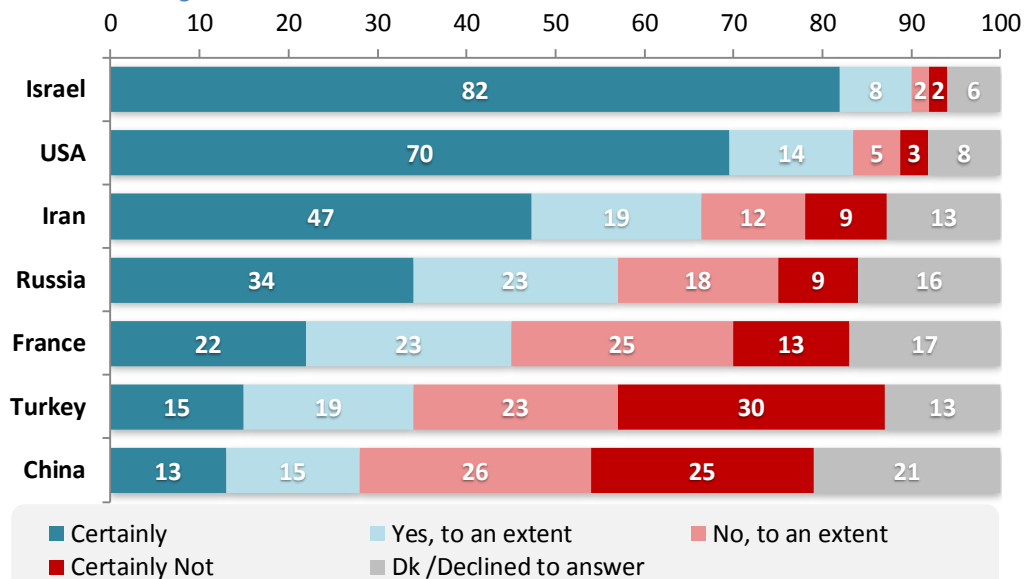


Figure 23: Assessment of foreign threats.



This was in line with a widespread negative view of Israel. An overwhelming majority (87%) of Arabs would disapprove of recognition of Israel by their home countries, with only 8% accepting formal diplomatic recognition. In fact, one half of those who accepted recognition of Israel by their governments made such recognition conditional on the formation of an independent Palestinian state. When asked to elaborate on the reasons for their positions, respondents who were opposed to diplomatic ties between their countries and Israel focused on a number of factors, such as Israeli racism towards the Palestinians and its colonialist, expansionist policies.

Figure 24: The Arab public has consistently opposed recognition of Israel by their governments.

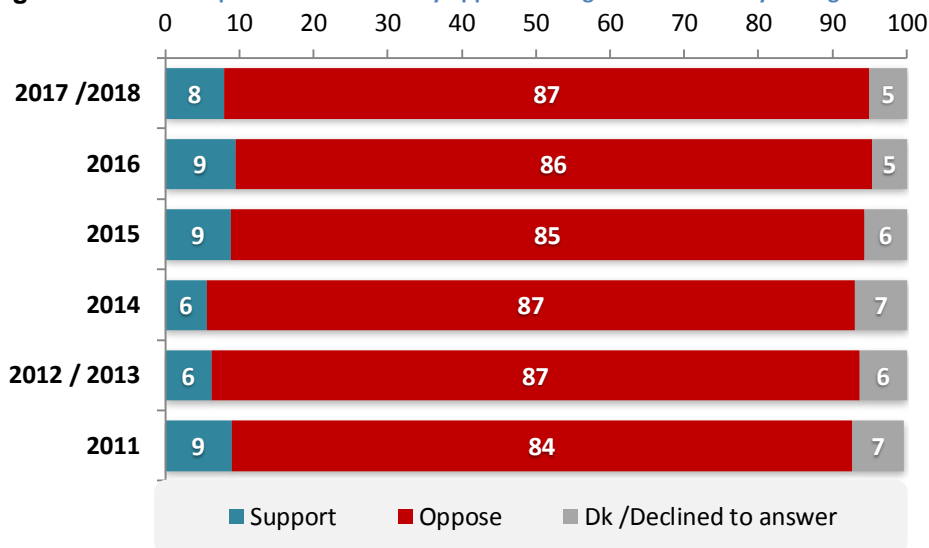


Table 2: Reasons cited to oppose diplomatic recognition of Israel/year of survey

Reasons cited to oppose diplomatic recognition of Israel/year of survey	2017 /2018	2016	2015	2014
Colonialist occupying power in Palestine	31.7	27.0	24.5	23.4
Expansionist state set on controlling more Arab territory	10.1	13.0	13.0	2.4
A terrorist state/supports terrorism	7.4	7.6	10.4	1.2
(Israel) is racist towards Arabs	6.3	8.2	10.3	12.2
Israeli dispossession of the Palestinians; continued oppression of the Palestinians	8.3	8.1	6.9	5.5
Recognizing Israel negates the Palestinian people	5.3	5.8	5.6	7.5
Israel is an enemy of my people/the Arabs in general	3.4	3.3	4.7	11.5
Israel threatens regional security	3.4	3.2	3.4	2.5
Religious reasons to oppose Israel	6.6	5.2	3.3	4.9
Israel violates agreements and treaties	1.6	2.1	2.4	2.3
Israel does not exist	1.1	0.4	0.3	--
Other reasons	0	0.2	0.0	3.4
Do not know/declined to answer	6.8	6.4	6.4	18.4
Approve of the recognition of Israel	7.9	9.5	8.9	6.0
Total	100	100	100	100

Results on ISIL or Islamic State

Results from the 2017-2018 survey show an overwhelming majority (92%) of the Arab public does has a negative view of ISIL, with only 2% expressing a “positive” view, and 3% “positive to some extent”. Crucially, favorable views of ISIL were not correlated with religion: respondents who identified themselves as “Not religious” were just as likely to have favorable views of ISIL as those who identified as “Very religious”. Similarly, no relationship could be shown between respondents’ opinions of ISIL and their views on the role of religion in the public sphere. In other words, public attitudes towards ISIL are defined by present-day political considerations and not motivated by religion.

Figure 25: General view of ISIL

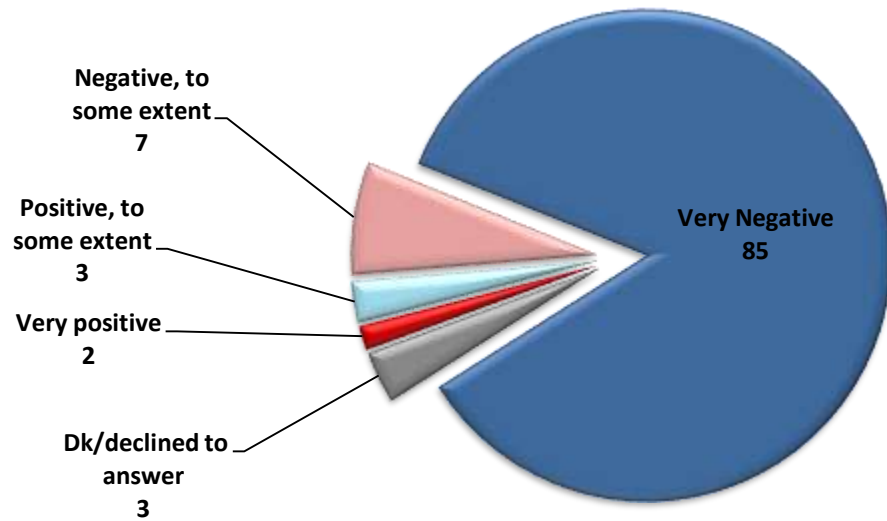


Table 3: Views of ISIL in combination with religiosity.

Attitudes towards ISIL	Would be better for my home country if religion was separated from politics	
	Agree	Disagree
Positive/varying extents	5	4
Negative/varying extents	95	96
Total	100	100

The Arab public offers a diverse set of remedies when asked to suggest the best means by which to combat ISIL, when given the chance to define their first and second preferences for the means to tackle ISIL in particular, and also terrorist groups more broadly: direct military action was the most widely selected first choice, with 18% of respondents; ending foreign intervention in Arab countries was selected as the first choice by 17% of respondents; and 13% proposed resolving the Palestinian cause.

Table 4: Proposed remedies to ISIL/terrorism more broadly, first choice made by respondents.

Remedies offered to defeat ISIL	First most significant	Second most significant	Averaged score
Intensify military efforts	18	12	15
End foreign intervention	17	18	17
Resolve the Palestinian Cause	13	7	10
Support the Arab democratic transition	12	6	9
Resolving economic questions: unemployment, poverty and price inflation	9	15	12
Resolve the Syrian conflict in a manner which responds to the aspirations of the Syrian people	7	7	7
Purging extremist interpretations of Islam	7	11	9
Ending the sectarian policies of some Arab states	4	6	5
Spreading a culture of religious tolerance	3	7	5
Ending the Libyan crisis in a manner which meets the aspirations of the Libyan people	1	2	1
Other reasons	1	0	1
Do not know/declined to answer	8	--	4
No second answer given	--	8	4
Total	100	100	100