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LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Beyond
the Arab Spring:

Will economic and security challenges

further test Tunisia's democracy?

by Rorisang Lekalake

Introduction

In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa, where many countries experienced political liberalization during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Bratton, 1997), the authoritarian regimes of North Africa were largely able to resist popular demands for transformation by introducing limited, top-down reforms. In Tunisia, there were some improvements to political freedoms after Zine El Abidine Ben Ali took office in 1988 and was elected as president the following year in the country's first election since 1972 (Abushouk, 2016). This brief period of loosened restrictions was followed, however, by decades of authoritarian repression: "Even in a region that was notorious for its leaders' disdain for honest government and civil liberties, Tunisia [under Ben Ali] long stood out for the thoroughness of its system of control and repression" (Freedom House, 2012, p. 4).

Optimism about the prospects for democratization in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region emerged in 2011 in response to a series of mass anti-government protests known as the Arab Spring. The events led to the overthrow of four authoritarian regimes in rapid succession that year, including Ben Ali's, but it was soon evident that most regimes would ultimately prove resistant to these demands for reform (Freedom House, 2012). The protest movements have resulted in divergent outcomes, from a full democratic transition in Tunisia to ongoing civil conflicts in Libya and Syria.

Although widely considered to be the only unqualified success story of these uprisings, Tunisia's progress has been accompanied by periods of severe political upheaval and insecurity. In recent years, the country has experienced a number of high-profile attacks on security forces and civilians and has become a leading source of recruits to extremist organisations such as the Islamic State (IS) (Soufan Group, 2015; Dodwell, Milton, & Rassler, 2016). Growing numbers of ex-combatants from foreign conflicts return to an absence of a government program for their de-radicalization and reintegration into Tunisian society (Gall, 2017). The current security context has sparked fears of damage to the country's prospects for further democratization.

This paper examines Afrobarometer public opinion data to assess the extent to which citizens have embraced political changes since 2011. Do Tunisians perceive an improvement to the country and the North Africa region since the events of the Arab Spring? Are they supportive of democracy and the way it is being implemented? What role do they think religion should play in the country's democracy? Do they believe that the government should prioritize further democratization over national security concerns?

Results show that Tunisians are divided: Only a slight majority say the Arab Spring has had a positive impact on the country. This ambivalence may be explained by dissatisfaction with progress in some policy areas, including corruption and socioeconomic and security outcomes. Public demand for democracy and satisfaction with its implementation have increased. However, there is evidence that the country's security context could threaten gains toward consolidating citizen support for democracy.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2017. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples. (See Appendix Table A.1 for a list of surveyed countries and fieldwork dates.)

The Afrobarometer team in Tunisia, led by One to One for Research and Polling, interviewed 1,200 adult Tunisians in April/May 2015. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. One previous survey was conducted in Tunisia in 2013.

Views on democracy | Tunisia | 2015   AFROBAROMETER

66% Prefer democracy

68% Reject one-party rule

79% Reject presidential dictatorship

57% Reject military rule

77% Reject religious rule

33% Demand democracy

Key findings

- A slim majority (52%) of Tunisians say the Arab Spring has had a positive impact on their country – the most favourable assessment in the North Africa region. Strong majorities of citizens perceive progress on key aspects of democracy during this period, while two-thirds see an increase in the government's respect for human rights. Fewer see improvement in the preservation of law and order (47%) and in reducing corruption (25%), regional inequality (15%), and income inequality (6%).

- Although fewer citizens than in 2013 say they prefer democracy over any other system, the proportion who both prefer democracy and reject one-party rule, military rule, and presidential dictatorship (i.e. who "demand" democracy) increased from 27% to 33%. Urban residents, men, and citizens with higher levels of education and material security are more likely to demand democracy.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of Tunisians would disapprove of a political system governed by Islamic law without elections or political parties – by far the highest level of rejection among countries surveyed in North Africa. Rejection levels are higher among urban residents and younger citizens and increase with levels of education and material security – the same pattern as for citizen demand for democracy.

- The proportion of citizens who say that Tunisia is "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems" increased from 27% in 2013 to 38% in 2015. The proportion who are satisfied with the implementation of democracy in the country increased even more sharply (by 20 percentage points). However, young people, women, citizens with less than post-secondary education, and those living with higher levels of material deprivation are more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy.

- Despite rising popular demand for democracy, a slight majority (53%) of Tunisians say the government should prioritize security and the fight against terrorism, even if it means undermining democracy and human rights. This view is more common among rural and older residents, women, and citizens with no formal education.
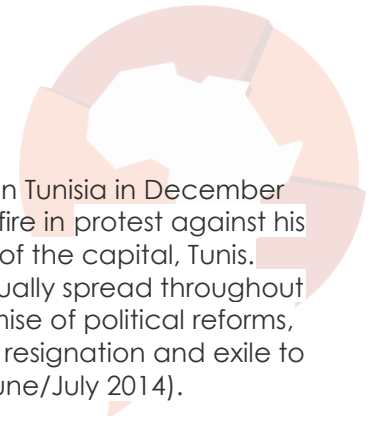
Tunisia and the Arab Spring

The events that would come to be known as the Arab Spring began in Tunisia in December 2010 when a young street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in protest against his treatment by local authorities in Sizi Bouzid, a city 270km to the south of the capital, Tunis. Local demonstrations against Ben Ali's autocratic government eventually spread throughout the country. Despite the use of brutal security measures and the promise of political reforms, Ben Ali's two-decade-long tenure ended on 14 January 2011 with his resignation and exile to Saudi Arabia (see EUSpring, 2014 for a timeline of these events until June/July 2014).

The success of Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution" inspired similar movements elsewhere in the MENA region, toppling long-established authoritarian regimes in Egypt (February 2011), Libya (October 2011), and Yemen (November 2011). In the North Africa region, Morocco and Algeria succeeded in avoiding significant unrest by introducing symbolic reforms (Gartenstein-Ross, Barr, Willcoxon, & Basuni, 2015). Furthermore, while Sudan has experienced periodic protests against government austerity measures since they were introduced following South Sudan's secession in 2011, President Omar al-Bashir's regime has withstood this unrest (Dahir, 2016).

Following Ben Ali's ousting, Tunisia held national elections in October 2011 to form a Constituent Assembly responsible for drafting a new constitution, which was passed on 26 January 2014 and establishes a range of political rights and civil liberties. National elections in late 2014 were declared free and fair by international and local observers (National Democratic Institute, 2015). In recognition of this progress, Tunisia in 2015 became the first MENA country in four decades to be categorized as "free" based on Freedom House's ratings of political rights and civil liberties. Currently, all other North African countries are classified as either "partly free" (Morocco) or "not free" (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Sudan) (Freedom House, 2017).

Tunisia is exceptional not only because it is the only country that successfully transitioned to democracy as a result of the Arab Spring protests, but also because this transition occurred against a backdrop of global declines in political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House, 2017). Diamond (2015) consequently cites Tunisia among the principal cases on which democracy promoters should focus their efforts in order to consolidate these gains and support the country's nascent democracy.

## Perceived impact of the Arab Spring

As Diamond says, "The 'Arab Spring' has imploded in almost every country that it touched save Tunisia, leaving in most cases even more repressive states or, as in the case of Libya, hardly a state at all" (2015, pp. 151-152). Reflecting this limited success, only about one-third (32%) of citizens in the five North African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2015 say the Arab Spring uprisings had a "somewhat positive" or "very positive" effect on the region.[1] This perception is highest in Sudan (39%) and lowest in Algeria (27%) (Figure 1).

In contrast, about half of all respondents in Tunisia (52%) and Egypt (48%) – the two countries that experienced the most significant political change during the period – say the Arab Spring has had a positive effect on their own countries. This view is significantly less common in Morocco (36%), Sudan (25%), and Algeria (18%).

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[1] Afrobarometer does not currently conduct surveys in Libya.

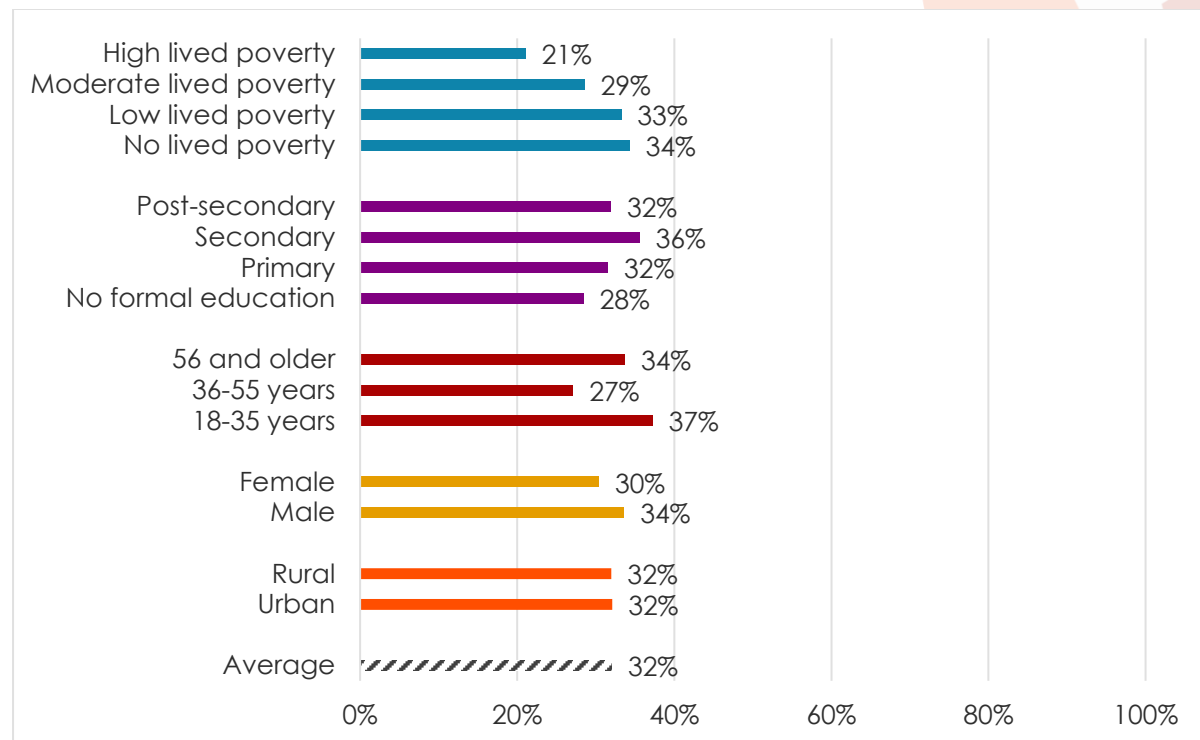**Figure 1: Positive impact of the Arab Spring** | 5 North African countries | 2015
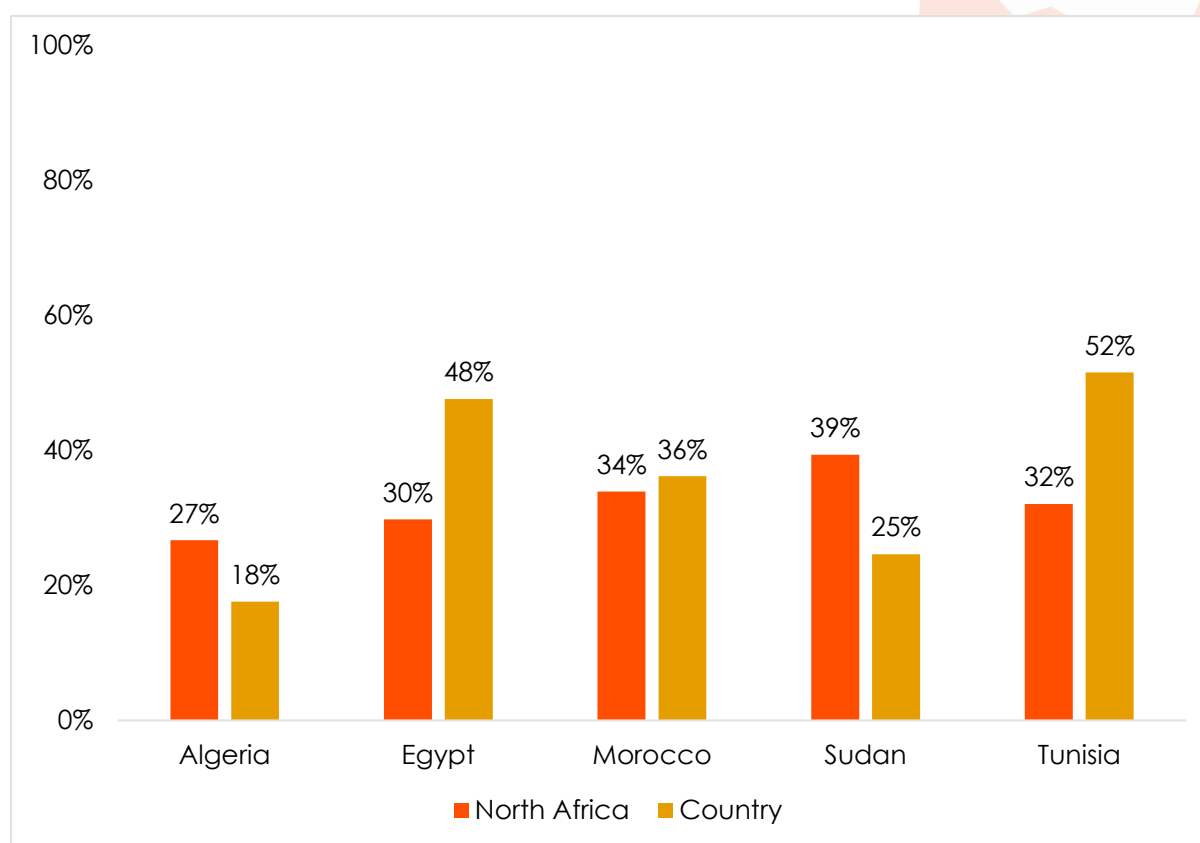
Respondents were asked: *During 2011, several Arab countries in North Africa witnessed a wave of popular protests demanding democracy and improvements in human rights, popularly known as the "Arab Spring." Do you think the Arab Spring has had a positive impact, a negative impact, or no impact on: The North African region? [Your country]?*
(% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

In Tunisia, the belief that the Arab Spring has had a positive impact on the North African region as a whole is slightly higher among men than women (34% vs. 30%) and increases with higher levels of socioeconomic security as measured by Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) (Figure 2).[2] Citizens who frequently lack access to basic goods and services ("high lived poverty") are significantly less likely to say the Arab Spring has had a positive impact on the region than those living under conditions with no or low levels of material deprivation (21% vs. 34%, on average).

As shown above, significantly more Tunisians reported a positive impact on their own country than on the region (by 20 percentage points). Citizens with higher levels of material security and those with formal education are more likely to perceive a positive impact on Tunisia (Figure 3).
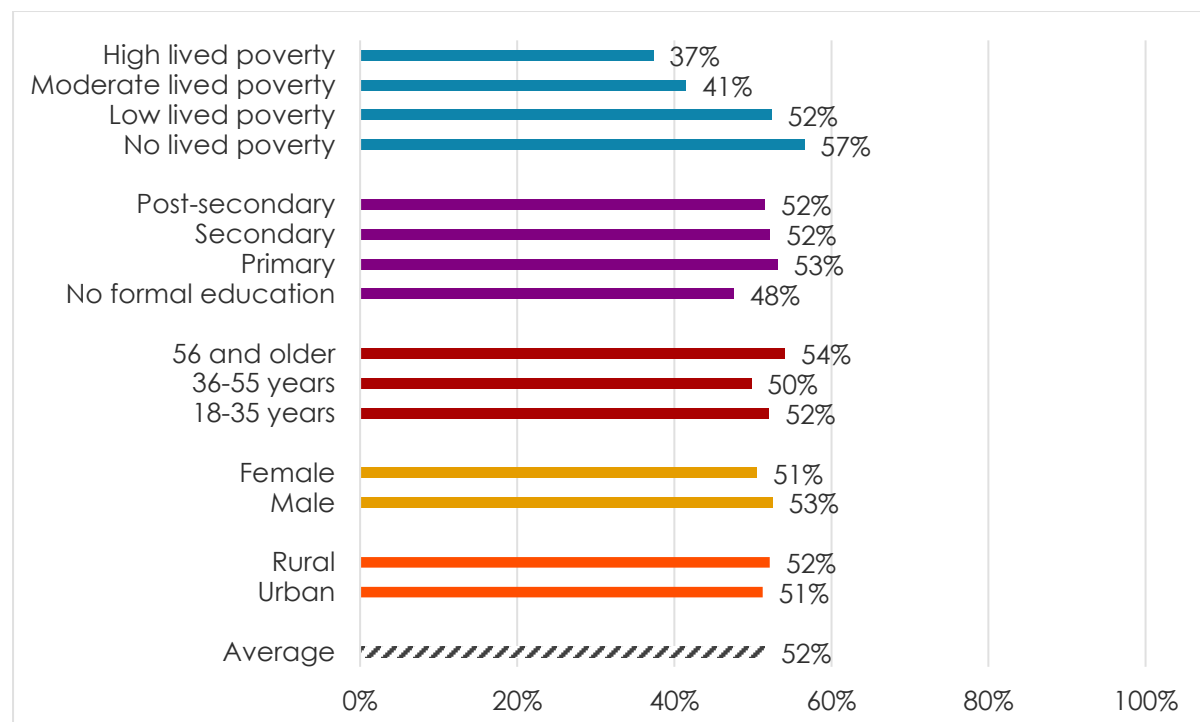
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[2] The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking them how often they or their family members went without enough food, enough clean water, medicines or medical treatment, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income during the previous year. "No lived poverty" refers to full access to all five basic necessities, while "high lived poverty" refers to regular shortages of these goods and services. (For more information on the LPI, see Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29, available at www.afrobarometer.org.)

Figure 2: Arab Spring's positive impact on the region | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | Tunisia | 2015

Category	Value
High lived poverty	21%
Moderate lived poverty	29%
Low lived poverty	33%
No lived poverty	34%
Post-secondary	32%
Secondary	36%
Primary	32%
No formal education	28%
56 and older	34%
36-55 years	27%
18-35 years	37%
Female	30%
Male	34%
Rural	32%
Urban	32%
Average	32%

Respondents were asked: *Do you think the Arab Spring has had a positive impact, a negative impact, or no impact on the North African region? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")*

Figure 3: Arab Spring's positive impact on the country | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | Tunisia | 2015

| Category	Value
High lived poverty	37%
Moderate lived poverty	41%
Low lived poverty	52%
No lived poverty	57%
Post-secondary	52%
Secondary	52%
Primary	53%
No formal education	48%
56 and older	54%
36-55 years	50%
18-35 years	52%
Female	51%
Male	53%
Rural	52%
Urban	51%
Average	52%

Respondents were asked: *Do you think the Arab Spring has had a positive impact, a negative impact, or no impact on Tunisia? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")*

Perceived changes on selected indicators

Survey respondents were also asked whether they perceive any change since the Arab Spring on nine specific political and economic indicators. Large majorities of Tunisians report improvements on three key aspects of democracy: freedom of speech (which 94% of respondents say has increased "somewhat" or "a lot"), political competition (89%), and the public's right to choose political leaders (also 89%). Furthermore, two-thirds (66%) of citizens say the Tunisian government's respect for human rights has increased "somewhat" or "a lot" during the same period, while a slight majority (52%) report an improvement in respect for the national government (Figure 4). However, fewer than half of respondents (47%) see improvements in the preservation of law, order, and stability, and even lower proportions of citizens say the same about corruption levels (25%) and about regional inequality (15%) and income inequality (6%).

Previous Afrobarometer findings indicate that economic issues and security are major concerns for Tunisians. Unemployment is the most frequently cited problem (by 57% of respondents) facing the country, followed by crime and security (43%) and management of the economy (41%) (Bentley, Olapade, Wambua, & Charron, 2015). Given these priorities, the perceived lack of improvement on rule of law, corruption, and inequality may help explain why a large proportion (45%) of survey respondents say that the Arab Spring has had a "very negative" or "somewhat negative" impact on Tunisia. In July 2016, the country's then-prime minister, Habib Essid, lost a parliamentary vote of confidence due to his disappointing record on security and economic concerns (Al Jazeera, 2016).

Figure 4: Improvements since the Arab Spring | Tunisia | 2015
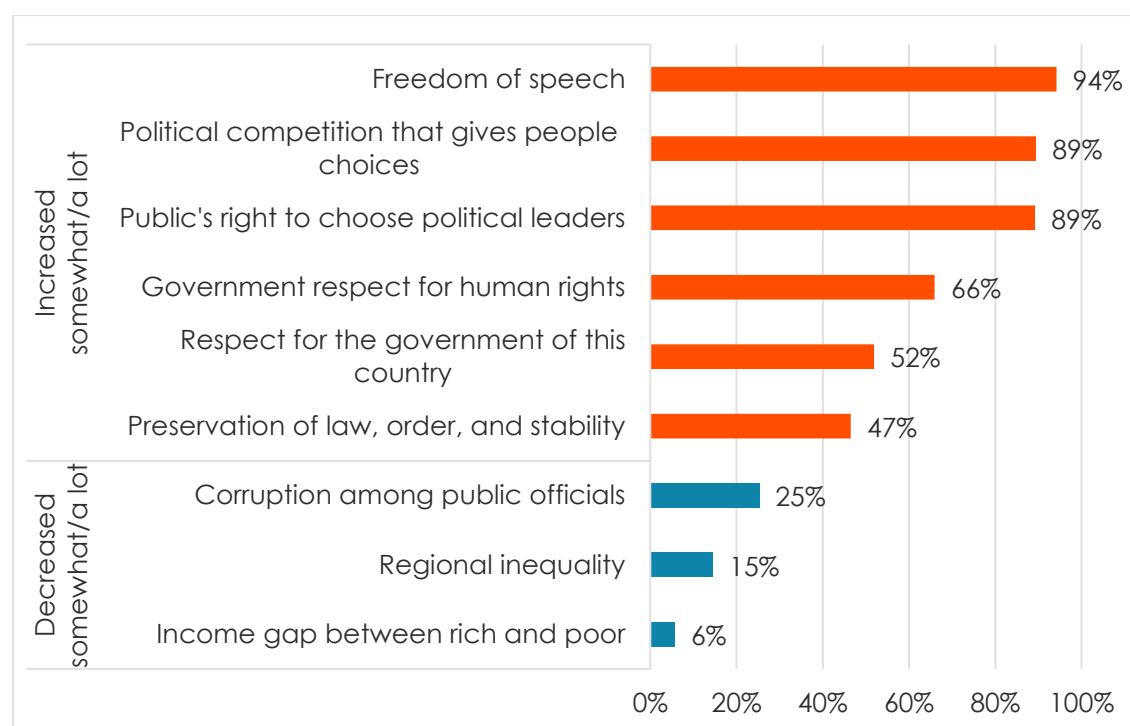
Respondents were asked: *Comparing the situation in your country today to how things were four years ago before the Arab Spring, do you think the following things have increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

Public support for democracy

The Arab Spring protests were largely bottom-up movements that encompassed a wide variety of demands but generally centered on demands for expanded political freedoms and better governance and accountability. Protesters used social-media platforms to share

information and reveal government abuses (Abushouk, 2016), which expanded their reach beyond national borders. Previous Afrobarometer analysis shows that citizens in the North Africa region have the highest average levels of digital media consumption on the continent: Four in 10 (40%) get news from the Internet at least "a few times a week," while 36% say the same for social media – almost double the averages across 36 surveyed countries of 22% and 21%, respectively (Nkomo & Wafula, 2016).

Citizen commitment to democracy

Since 1999, Afrobarometer has gauged citizens' commitment to democracy in Africa via the concept of "demand for democracy," which is measured as the proportion of respondents who both agree that "democracy is preferable to any other form of government" and disapprove of three authoritarian alternatives to democracy (one-party rule, military rule, and presidential dictatorship). The most recent results indicate that while Africans are generally supportive of democracy, there was a slight overall decline in democratic demand levels across the 34 countries surveyed in both 2011/2013 and 2014/2015 (Mattes & Bratton, 2016). Furthermore, there were significant setbacks in a number of countries, including in promising democracies such as Ghana and South Africa.

In Tunisia, the proportion of citizens who say that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government" decreased somewhat between 2013 (71%) and 2015 (66%), while rejection of one-party rule increased significantly (from 57% to 68%) and disapproval of both military and one-man rule were stable (Figure 5). The proportion of Tunisians who demand democracy (i.e. who prefer democracy and reject non-democratic alternatives) has increased modestly, from 27% in 2013 to 33% in 2015.

Figure 5: Key public attitudes toward democracy | Tunisia | 2013-2015
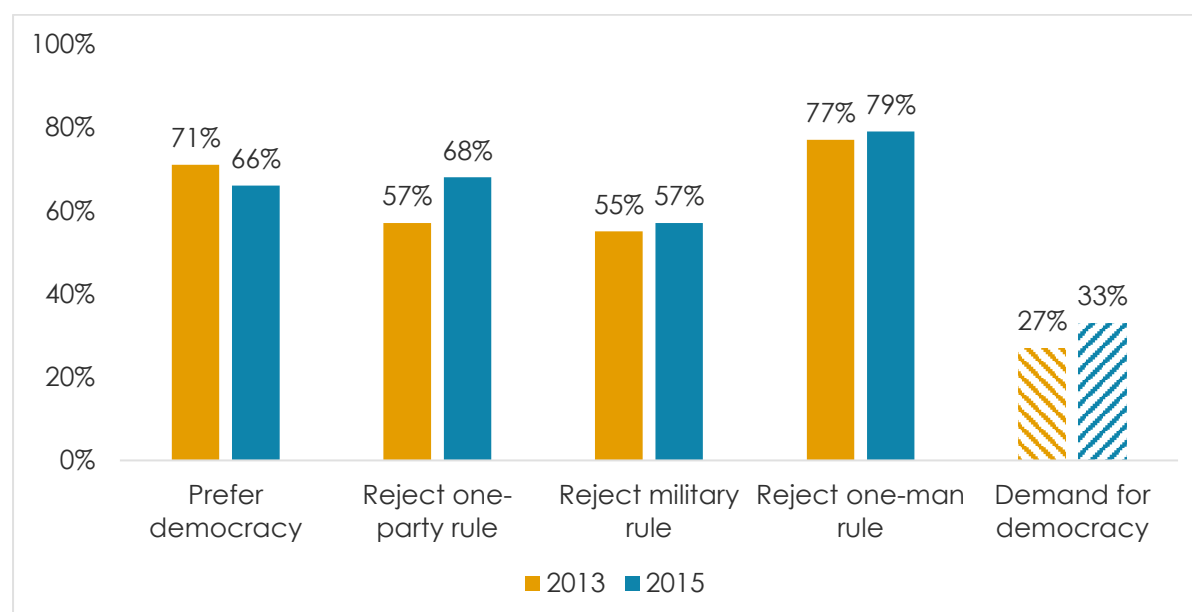
Respondents were asked:

1. Which of these three statements is closest to your opinion? (% who say democracy is preferable)
   Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
   Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
   Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
2. There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)
   A. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
   B. The army comes in to govern the country.
   C. Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so the president can decide everything.
Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives

North Africans tend to hold significantly lower levels of these pro-democracy attitudes than citizens in other African regions (see Appendix Table A.2 for North African frequencies). Furthermore, public disapproval of military rule is lower than disapproval of one-party and one-man rule within the region, including in Tunisia. And Tunisians are less likely to demand democracy than Moroccans, despite Tunisia's status as North Africa's only "free" country.

Public preference for democracy in Tunisia is higher among citizens older than 35 years and increases with educational attainment and levels of material security (Figure 6).

In contrast to equal levels of stated support for democracy, urban residents are more likely than rural respondents to be committed democrats holding all four pro-democratic attitudes (37% vs. 23%). In addition, men are more likely to demand democracy than women (40% vs. 25%), and demand levels increase with education and material security (Figure 7). These differences mirror the patterns in demand levels by these demographic indicators across the 36 countries surveyed in 2014/2015 (see Mattes & Bratton, 2016).

Figure 6: Preference for democracy | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | Tunisia | 2015
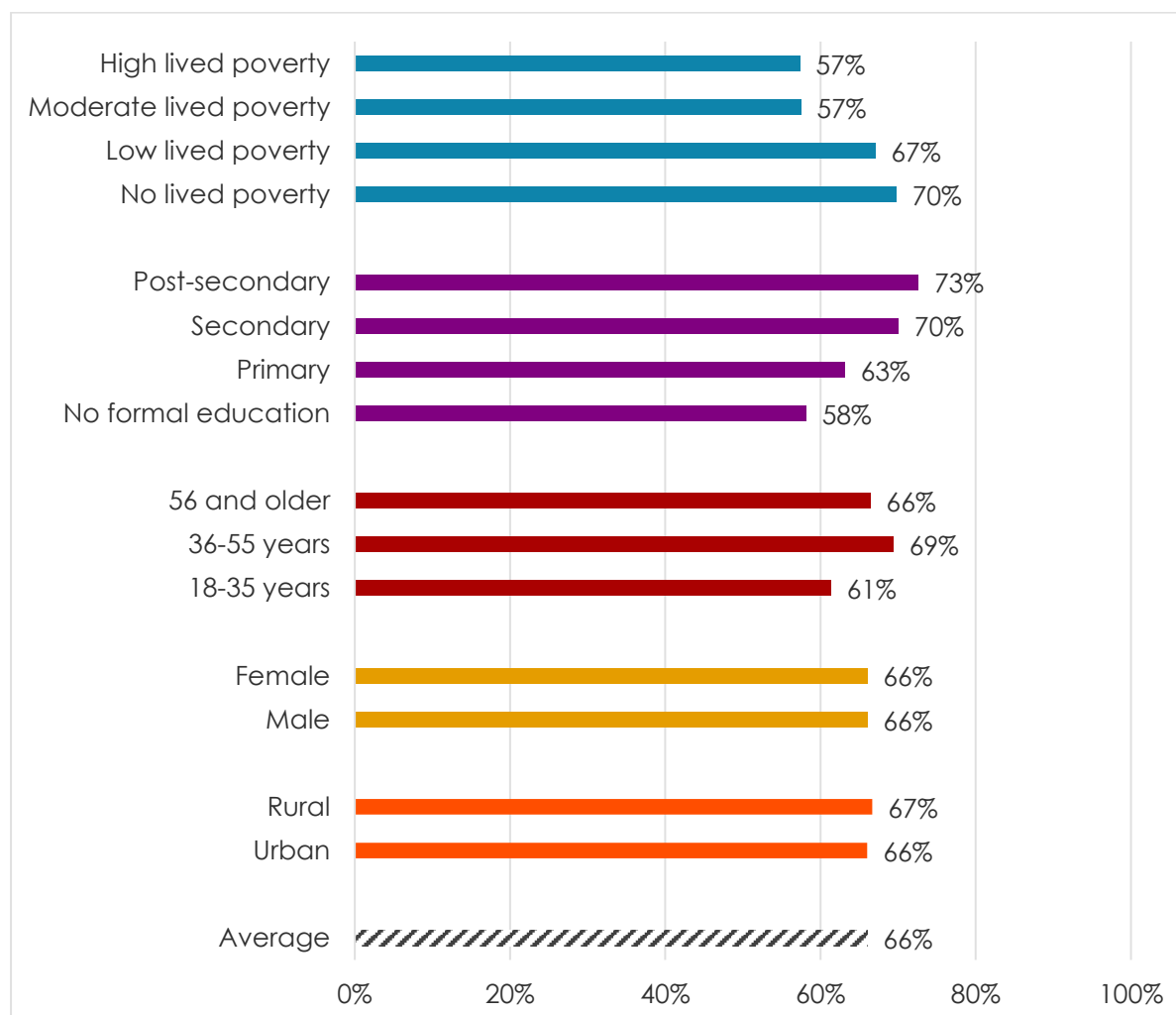
Respondents were asked: *Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?*
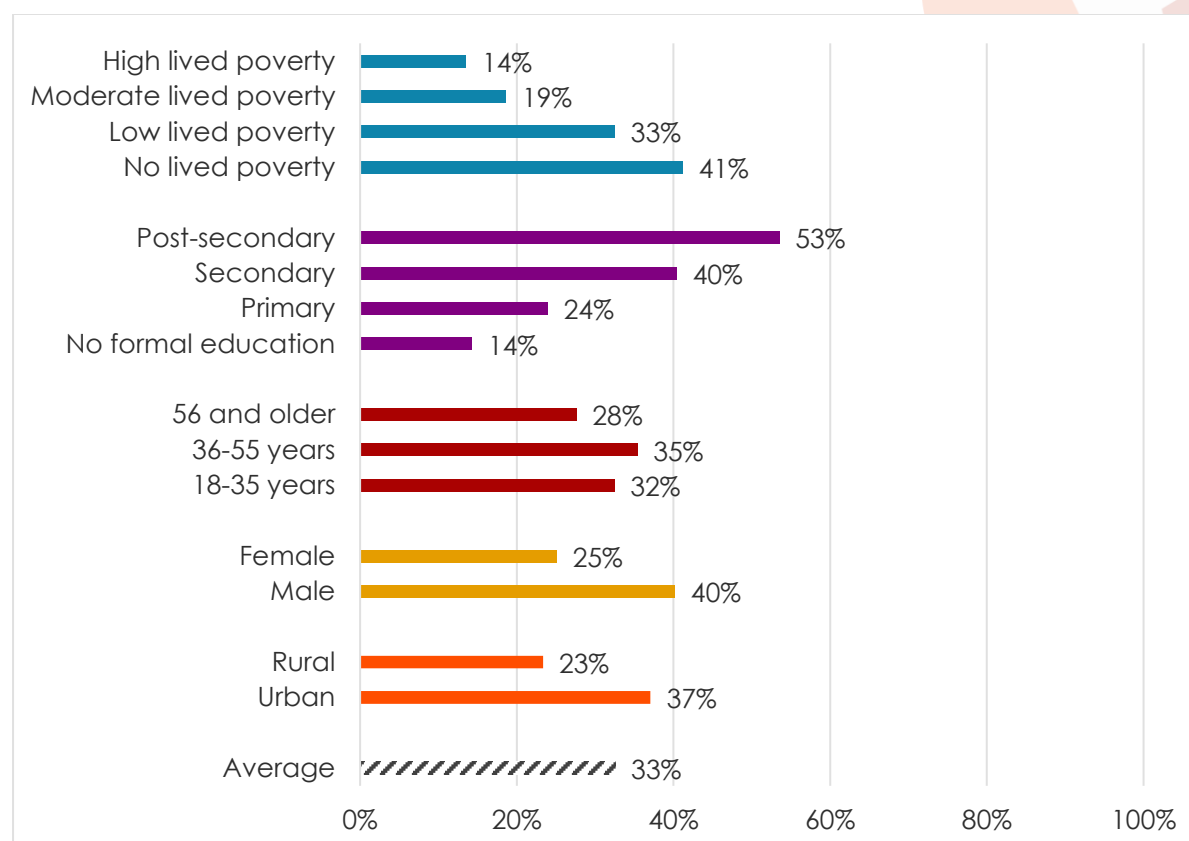   *Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.*
    Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
    Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
(% who say democracy is preferable)

Figure 7: Demand for democracy in Tunisia | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | 2015

(% who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives)

While calls for greater individual rights and freedoms were prominent among the various demands made during the Arab Spring, Robbins (2015) cites survey evidence of unchanged citizen support for democracy in nine MENA countries to argue that the uprisings were "less a cry for democracy than a demand for better governance and improved economic performance" (p. 81). In both the 2010/2011 and 2012/2014 waves of the Arab Barometer survey, about 70% of respondents in Tunisia agreed that "despite its problems, democracy remains the best system" (Robbins, 2015, figure on p. 82).[3]

While Afrobarometer also shows majority stated preference for democracy in Tunisia, the results indicate relatively low levels of demand for democracy in the country – particularly among key demographic groups, including women. In line with Tunisia's gender gap on this measure, previous Afrobarometer studies have shown that women's engagement in civic and political affairs lags behind those of their male counterparts in the North Africa region – even among the youth (Wambua, 2017; Lekalake & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). These findings indicate a need for further civic education specifically targeting Tunisian women in order to increase their demand for democracy and levels of political activism.

These efforts may be hampered, however, by general disapproval of women's empowerment: The 2011/2013 Afrobarometer survey found that support for women's equality is lower and reported rates of gender-based discrimination are higher in North Africa than in other African regions (Chingwete, Richmond, & Alpin, 2014).

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[3] These results are not directly comparable to findings from Afrobarometer because of difference in question framing and wording (see Figure 5).

Religion and democracy in Tunisia

Despite the Arab Spring's limited success, Stepan and Linz (2013) argue that its events make an important contribution to the study of democratization because of the uniquely central role that religious forces played in these movements. Countering Huntington's (1993) contention that many religions, including Islam, are incompatible with liberalism and democracy, Stepan and Linz posit that religion and democracy can flourish simultaneously in countries that have adequate institutional differentiation between the two: "[where] religious authorities do not control democratic officials who are acting constitutionally, while democratic officials do not control religion so long as religious actors respect other citizens' rights" (p. 17).

Tunisia's 2014 constitution enshrines this differentiation between civil and religious authority. It establishes a "civil state" and guarantees a wide range of individual rights and freedoms, including the right to "freedom of conscience and belief," which goes well beyond the norm in most Arab countries by giving individuals the right to both choose and change their religious affiliation (Netterstrøm, 2015). Abandonment of Islam ("apostasy") is restricted in 70% of MENA states, including Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan (Theodorou, 2016). Netterstrøm (2015) argues that the role of the Tunisian Islamist party Ennahda in drafting and passing the 2014 constitution is "remarkable," given that many of its features go against key aspects of Islamist ideology and that Ennahda held the largest share of seats in the Constituent Assembly.[4]

Afrobarometer survey results indicate strong support for the separation of civil and religious authority in Tunisia, as enshrined in the 2014 constitution. Seven in 10 citizens (71%) say that religious leaders "should not interfere in voters' decisions in elections," which is well above levels in the rest of the region (Table 1). Furthermore, only minorities agree that democracy contradicts the teachings of Islam (18%), that Tunisia would be better off if religious people held public positions (22%), and that non-Muslims should enjoy less political freedom in Muslim-majority countries (23%).

Table 1: Public attitudes toward religion in politics | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Sudan	Tunisia	Average
Democracy is a system that contradicts the teachings of Islam.	23%	11%	9%	20%	18%	16%
In a Muslim country, non-Muslims should enjoy less political rights than Muslims.	29%	17%	11%	27%	23%	21%
Religious leaders like imams, preachers, and priests should not interfere in voters' decisions in elections.	28%	48%	44%	56%	71%	49%
Our country is better off if religious people hold public positions in the state.	32%	16%	31%	52%	22%	31%

Respondents were asked: *The opinion of Islamic jurists and religious scholars differs with regard to their interpretation of certain issues in Islam. I want to ask to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")*

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[4] Netterstrøm (2015) defines Islamism as "the idea that Islam is not just a religion, but also a political ideology. It is the belief that all aspects of society can and should be organized according to the fundamental texts of Islam" (p. 111).

In addition to the alternatives to democracy cited in the previous section, Afrobarometer asks citizens of North African countries whether they would approve or disapprove of a system governed by Islamic law without any elections or political parties. More than three-quarters (77%) of Tunisians say they would "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of such a system, which is substantially higher than the levels recorded in 2013 (60%). Rejection of this political alternative is also considerably higher in Tunisia than in the other four North African countries surveyed, which range from 31% in Sudan to 46% in Egypt and Morocco (Table 2). This provides further evidence of public preference for democratic governance in Tunisia.

Table 2: Attitudes toward governance under Islamic law without elections or political parties | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Sudan	Tunisia	Average
Disapprove/Strongly disapprove	41%	46%	46%	31%	77%	48%
Neither approve nor disapprove	27%	24%	21%	13%	4%	18%
Approve/Strongly approve	23%	15%	28%	52%	17%	27%
Don't know	9%	16%	4%	5%	2%	7%

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? A system governed by Islamic law without elections or political parties.*

In Tunisia, disapproval of governance under Islamic law without elections or political parties is slightly higher among urban residents and citizens aged 55 years or younger. Moreover, it increases with educational attainment and material security (Figure 8). This pattern supports the findings on preference and demand for democracy shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 8: Rejection of governance under Islamic law | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | Tunisia | 2015

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? A system governed by Islamic law without elections or political parties. (% "strongly disapprove" or "disapprove")*

Stepan and Linz (2013) credit the success of Tunisia's democratization to the unique relationship between Islamist and secularist forces in the country, which began building mutual trust and collaborating in opposition to Ben Ali's regime several years before the events of the Arab Spring. Furthermore, although Ennahda won the largest share of votes (37%) in the 2011 elections, it had to form a coalition government with two secularist parties and did not have the required two-thirds majority to pass a new constitution without the support of these secularist movements. The party's leadership ultimately chose to change its ideology to improve its appeal among centrist voters: "Contrary to the founders' intent, it is not religion but politics that determines the party's public stances. Indeed, political calculation not only trumps religious doctrine, but determines the very interpretation of religion itself" (Netterstrøm, 2015, p. 121).

A secularist party, Nidaa Tounes, won a plurality of seats in the October 2014 parliamentary elections (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017) and formed a coalition government with Ennahda and other parties. Given this political context of collaboration between Islamist and secularist parties and strong public support for a separation of civil and religious matters, it appears that religious forces are unlikely to impede further democratization in Tunisia in the short term.

Citizen evaluations of Tunisia's democracy

Tunisia's remarkable progress toward institutionalizing democratic values, structures, and processes appears to be reflected in public opinion, as in the perceived improvements since the Arab Spring in freedom of speech, political competition, the public's right to choose their leaders, and the government's respect for human rights (see Figure 4 above). Although Tunisia experienced greater success than any other affected country, its transitionary period was marked by significant challenges, including inter-party tensions in the Constituent Assembly and the assassination of two politicians in 2013 (Bouazza & Schemm, 2013).

Do citizens see Tunisia as a democracy? Are they satisfied with the way democracy works in their country?

In 2013, Tunisians on average gave their democracy a significantly higher rating (4.6 on a 10-point scale) than in either 2003 (2.1) or generally under former President Ben Ali's rule in 1987-2011 (1.9) (Figure 9). These results clearly indicate that citizens recognize that Tunisia was not a democracy prior to 2011, made substantial progress after 2011, and still has some way to go before becoming a full democracy. Furthermore, a majority of citizens (61%) at the time wanted Tunisia to be completely democratic in the future.

Figure 9: Average ratings of past, present, future democracy | Tunisia | 2013
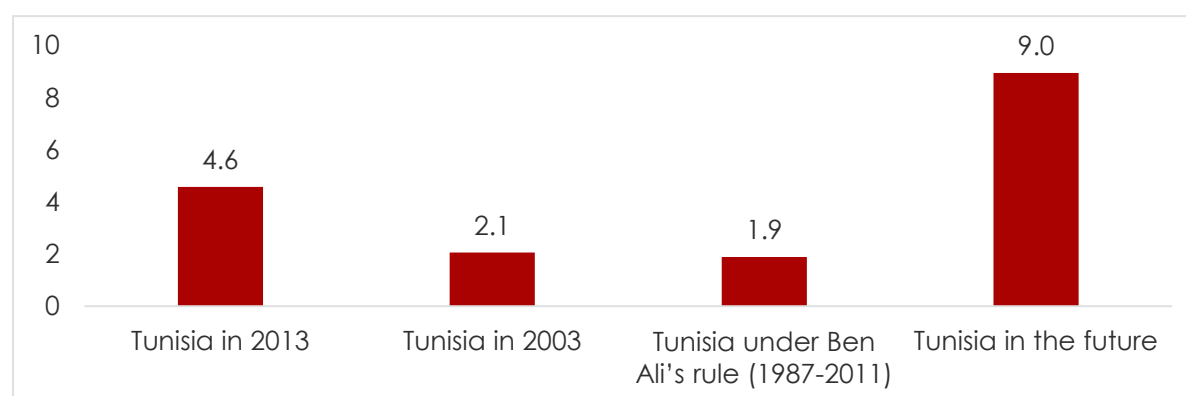
Respondents were asked: *On a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means completely undemocratic and 10 means completely democratic, where would you place each of the following, or haven't you heard enough to say: Tunisia today? Tunisia 10 years ago, in 2003? Tunisia under Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's rule? And on the same scale, where would you want Tunisia to be in the future?*
**Note:** *Figure shows the mean score of responses on a scale from 0 (no democracy) to 10 (full democracy).*

In Afrobarometer's 2015 survey, four in 10 respondents (38%) say that Tunisia is "a full democracy" or a democracy with only "minor problems," and 58% are either "fairly" or "very" satisfied with the way democracy is working. Both measures have improved significantly (by 11 and 18 percentage points, respectively) since 2013 (Figure 10).

Although Tunisia is the only country in the region currently considered to be "free" by Freedom House, its citizens are less likely to say the country is "a full democracy" or one with only "minor problems" than their counterparts in Algeria (43%) and Egypt (42%). Furthermore, although Tunisians are significantly more satisfied with their democracy than the regional average (58% vs. 48%), citizens in Egypt are almost as likely to express satisfaction (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | Tunisia | 2013-2015
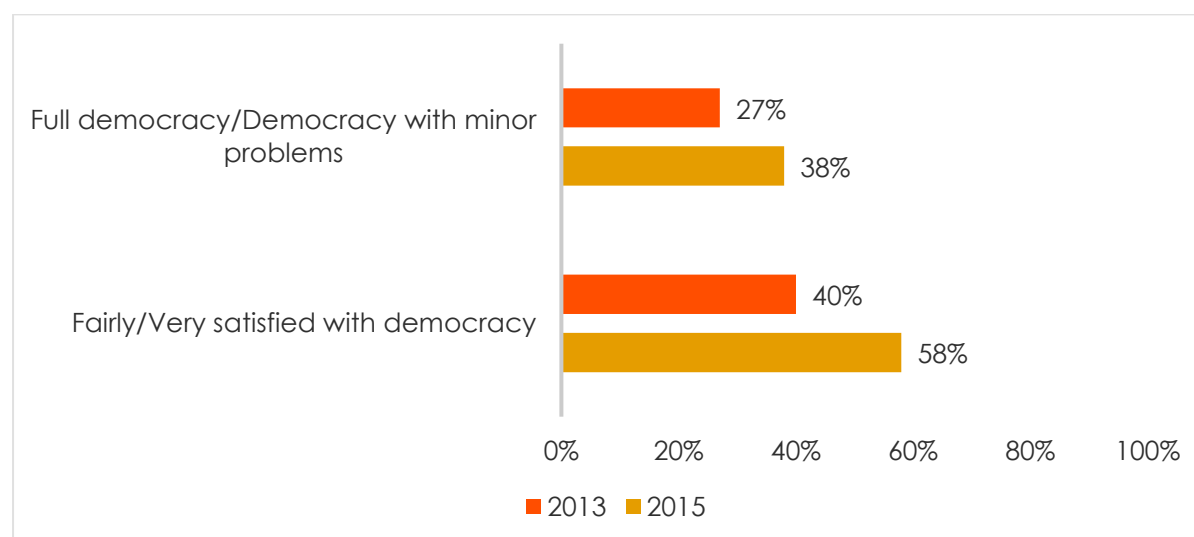
Respondents were asked:
- *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Tunisia today?*
- *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Tunisia?*

Figure 11: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | 5 North African countries | 2015
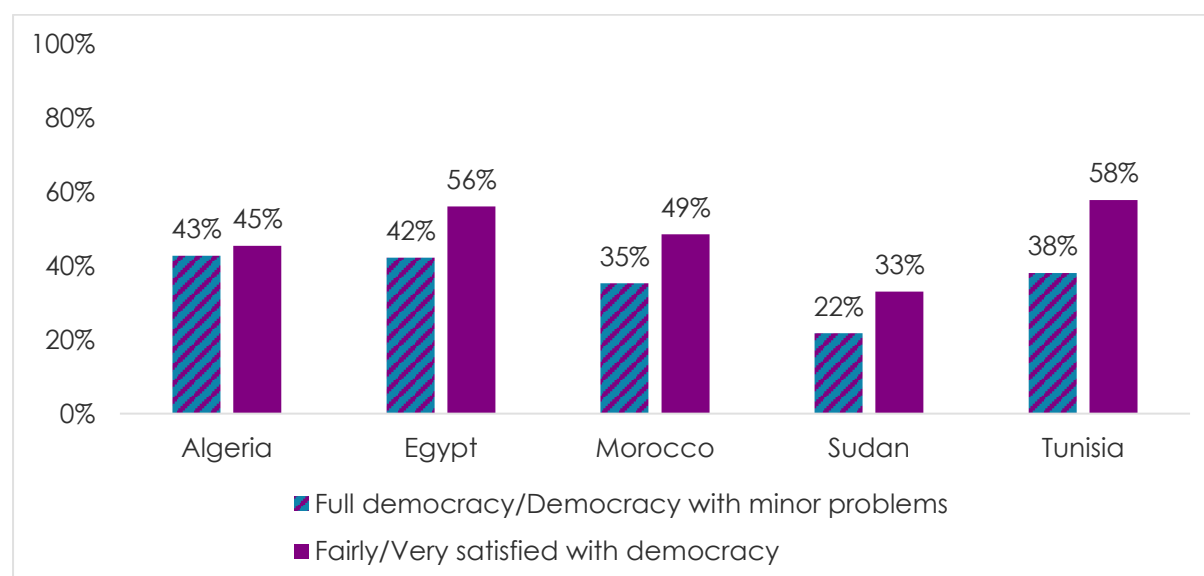
Respondents were asked:
- *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Tunisia today?*
- *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Tunisia?*

Young Tunisians (aged 18-35) are less likely to perceive the country as a full democracy or one with minor flaws than their older counterparts (34% vs. 40%) (Figure 12).

Tunisian youth are also slightly less satisfied with the way democracy is currently implemented in the country (54% vs. 60%), as are women and those with less than post-secondary education (Figure 13). Analysis by lived poverty shows that citizen dissatisfaction increases with higher poverty levels, which could be a reflection of public concern about the country's economic performance.

While improvements in Tunisians' demand for and assessments of democracy are promising, they also indicate that the government is not yet meeting its citizens' expectations. This is not uncommon across 36 surveyed countries (Mattes & Bratton, 2016), suggesting that citizens are likely to pressure their governments for further democratic reforms. However, considering that only one-third of Tunisians are committed democrats (i.e. prefer democracy *and* reject three non-democratic alternatives), ongoing challenges to national security may become a threat to consolidating democracy.

Figure 12: Extent of democracy in Tunisia | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | 2015

High lived poverty	32%
Moderate lived poverty	38%
Low lived poverty	36%
No lived poverty	41%
Post-secondary	39%
Secondary	33%
Primary	37%
No formal education	45%
56 and older	40%
36-55 years	40%
18-35 years	34%
Female	38%
Male	38%
Rural	39%
Urban	37%
Average	38%
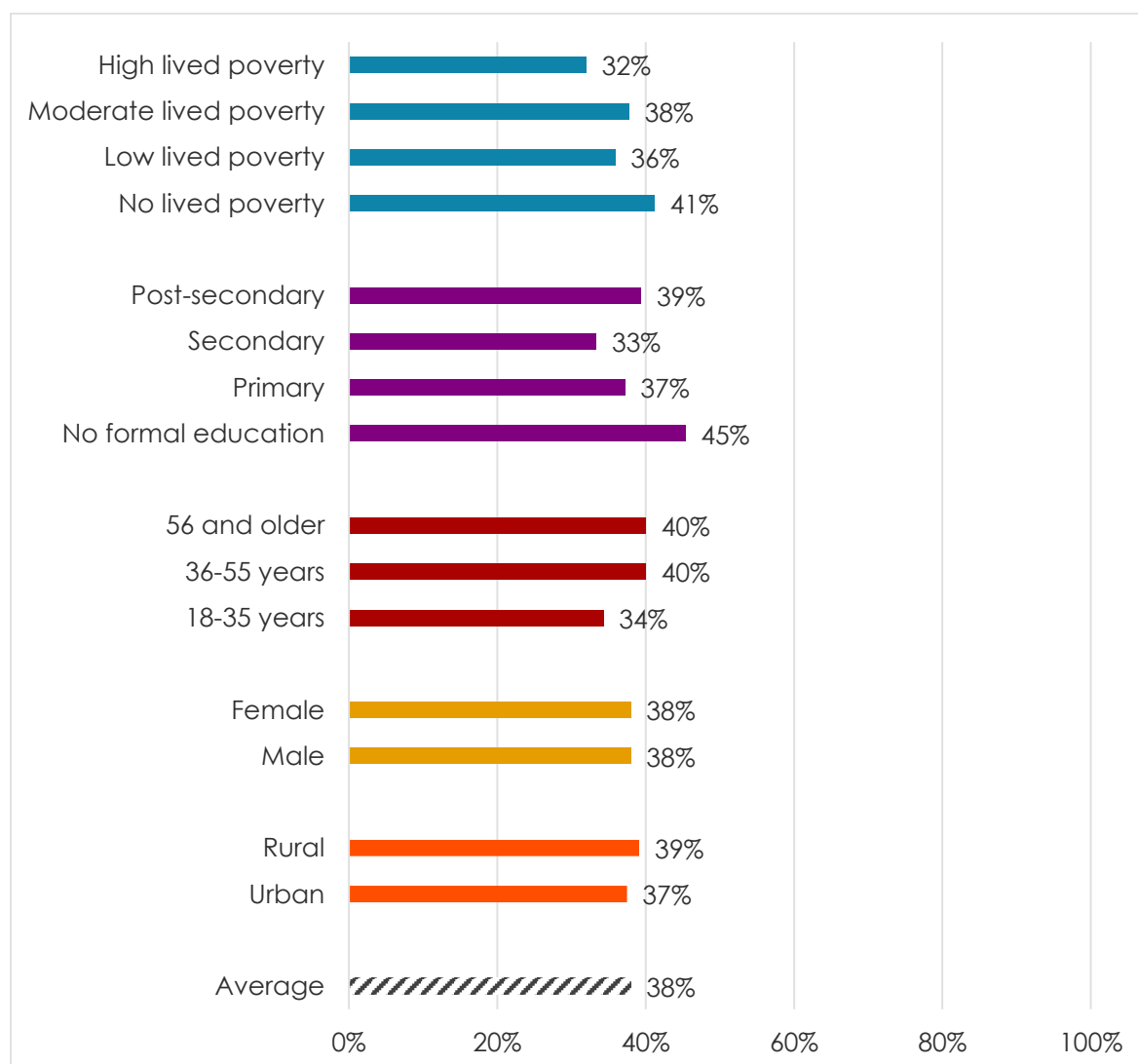
(% who consider Tunisia "a full democracy" or "a democracy, but with minor problems")

Figure 13: Satisfaction with democracy in Tunisia | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | 2015

High lived poverty	43%
Moderate lived poverty	51%
Low lived poverty	55%
No lived poverty	66%
Post-secondary	65%
Secondary	53%
Primary	56%
No formal education	59%
56 and older	61%
36-55 years	59%
18-35 years	54%
Female	56%
Male	60%
Rural	59%
Urban	57%
Average	58%
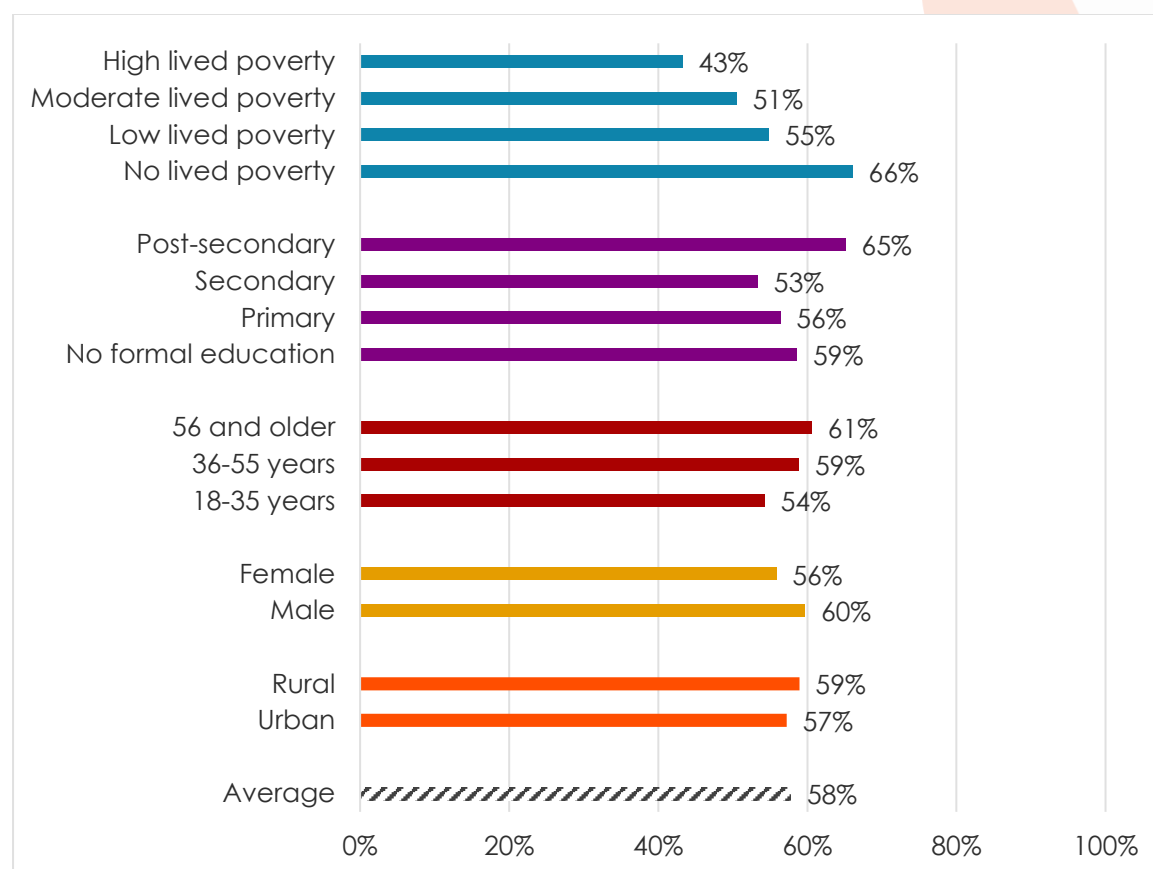
(% who say they are "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with the way democracy works in Tunisia)

Security and democratization

This paper has shown that relatively few North African citizens say the Arab Spring protests have had a positive impact on the region. While the uprisings in Tunisia led to a full democratic transition and an unprecedented expansion of citizens' rights and freedoms, they had limited success elsewhere in the region. The overthrow of Libya's longtime leader, Moammar Gadhafi, has had a particularly destabilizing effect on the region as the resulting political vacuum contributed to the growth of violent extremist activity throughout North Africa and beyond (Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2015).

In 2015, Tunisia experienced its highest number of terrorism-related deaths since 2000 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016). Extremist groups carried out three major attacks on civilian and military targets: the Bardo National Museum attack in March (in which 22 were killed), an attack on a hotel in the resort town of Sousse in June (38 fatalities), and the bombing of a bus transporting presidential guards in Tunis in November (12 fatalities) (Al Jazeera, 2015). In August 2015, the legislature introduced an anti-terrorism bill, which has faced significant criticism from human-rights activists due to the expanded powers given to the security sector (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Amnesty International (2017) presents evidence that the state of emergency first declared in response to the 2015 attacks has led to major human-rights violations.[5]

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[5] The state of emergency, extended multiple times since 2015, was expected to be in force until at least May 2017 at the time of publication (News24, 2017).

In addition to restrictions on individuals' rights and freedoms, there is a risk that further insecurity in Tunisia may lead to wavering public support for democracy in favour of even more security measures. Evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean shows that citizen fears about violent extremism have an inverse relationship with pro-democratic attitudes and political tolerance (Merolla, Montalvo, & Zeichmaster, 2012).

Citizen priorities: Security vs. democracy

Previous Afrobarometer analysis shows that security-related issues rank higher among citizens' priorities in North African countries than on average across 36 countries surveyed in 2014/2015, which appears to be a result of the growing threat of violent extremism in the region (Bentley, Lekalake, & Buchanan-Clarke, 2016). Moreover, Tunisians are more likely than citizens in other North African countries to prioritize security concerns, to say that armed extremist groups such as the Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL) and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) are active in the country, and to believe that they pose a threat to national security.

Interestingly, public concern about security issues is higher in Tunisia than in Sudan and Egypt even though the number and severity of extremist attacks in 2015 were far lower (see Appendix Table A.3). Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork in Tunisia took place in April/May 2015, shortly after the Bardo National Museum attack and during the new state of emergency (see Appendix Table A.1 for fieldwork dates in the other featured countries). This context is likely to have had a significant effect on public opinion at the time and may explain this heightened concern with security.

Tunisians were asked to choose whether their government should prioritize security and counter-extremist efforts over strengthening democracy and human rights. Despite majority support for democracy in general, more than half (53%) of survey respondents say the government should "prioritize ensuring security and fighting terrorism, even if it undermines democracy and human rights," while 44% say it should focus on "strengthening democracy and protecting human rights, even if this undermines security and the fight against terrorism" (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Government prioritization: security vs. democracy and human rights
| Tunisia | 2015
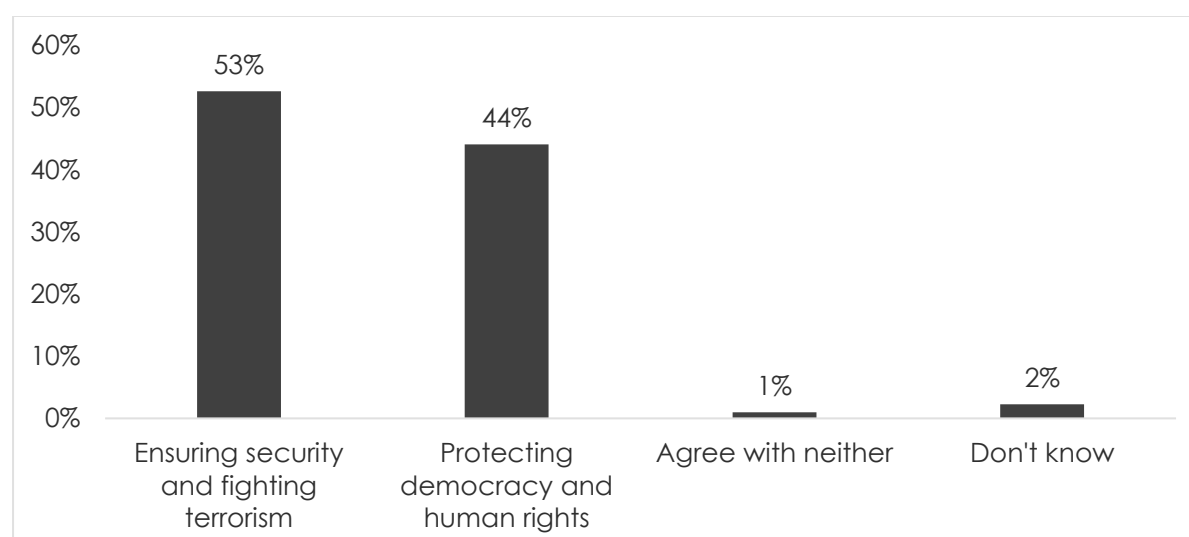
Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
   Statement 1: Government should prioritize ensuring security and fighting terrorism, even if it undermines democracy and human rights.
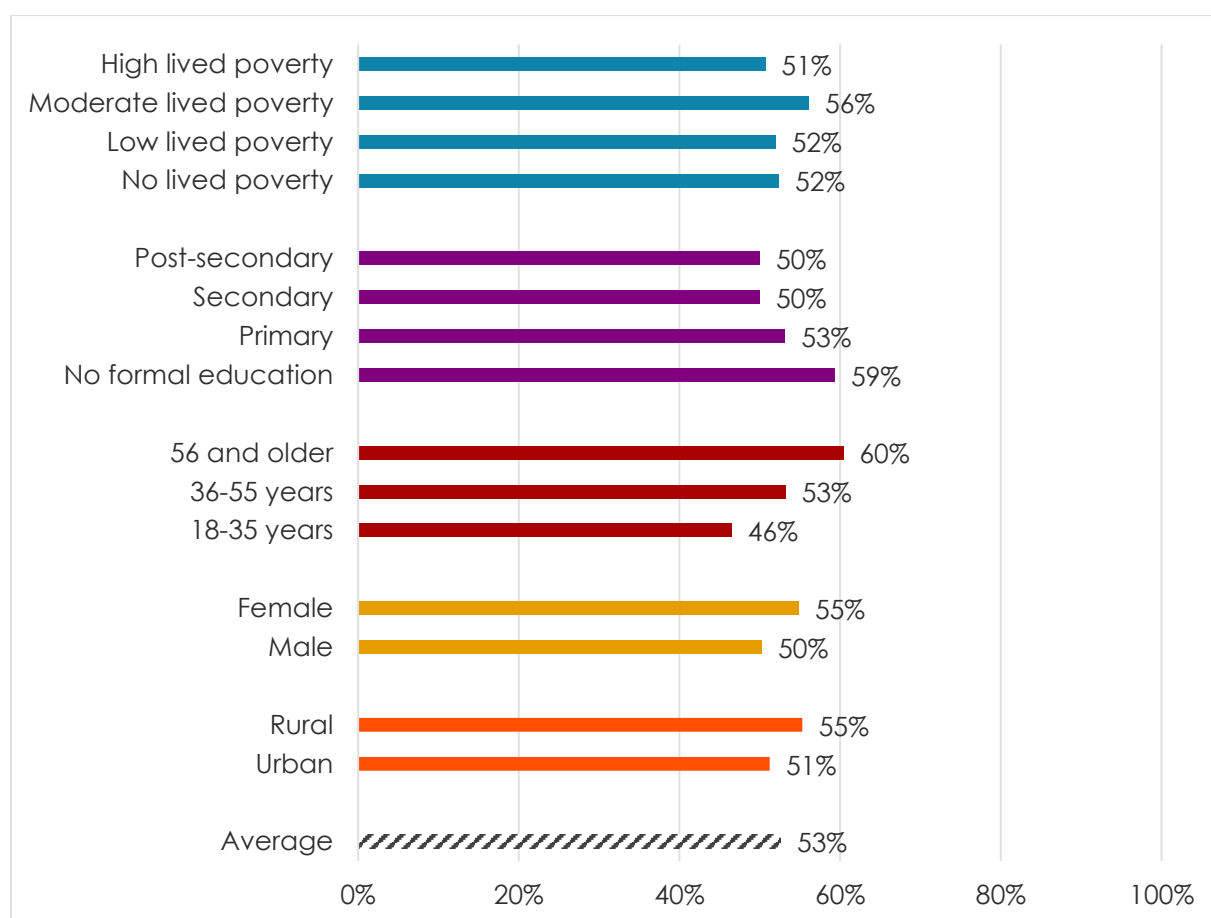   *Statement 2: Government should prioritize strengthening democracy and protecting human rights, even if this undermines security and the fight against terrorism.*

In the other four North African countries, citizens were asked how governments should balance anti-terrorism efforts vs. suspected terrorists' human rights. As in Tunisia, public opinion is divided: On average, 47% of respondents say their government "should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection to terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights," while 43% say the government should "never violate individuals' human rights," even in the fight against extremist violence (see Appendix Table A.4 for frequencies by country).

In Tunisia, rural residents, women, older respondents, and citizens with no formal education are more likely to prioritize security concerns over strengthening democracy and human rights (Figure 15), suggesting that these groups feel particularly vulnerable to security threats.

Even if the timing of the survey fieldwork may have affected Tunisians' perceptions of extremist violence and, by extension, citizens' prioritization of security concerns over the protection of democratic and human rights, violent extremism has continued to pose a significant threat to political stability in Tunisia. Moreover, jihadist propaganda in the country aims to destabilize the government by calling attention to persistent poverty and inequality (Gall, 2017). These were key rallying cries of the Tunisian uprisings and are seen by the public as a leading cause of recruitment into jihadist movements (Bentley, Lekalake, & Buchanan-Clarke, 2016). This suggests that failing to address both insecurity and long-standing economic problems may lead to citizen support for further security measures and an eventual erosion of citizen support for democracy.

Figure 15: Prioritization of security over strengthening democracy | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and location | Tunisia | 2015

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" that the government should prioritize ensuring security and fighting terrorism, even if it undermines democracy and human rights)
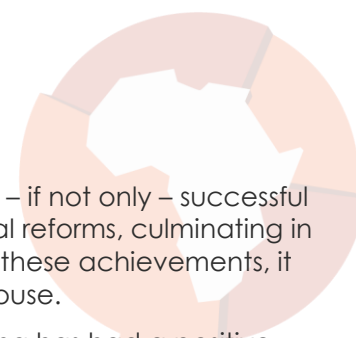
Conclusion

After sparking the Arab Spring, Tunisia is widely recognized as its most – if not only – successful case. Since 2011, the country has introduced a wide range of political reforms, culminating in a new constitution and parliamentary elections in 2014. As a result of these achievements, it is currently the only North African country rated "free" by Freedom House.

Despite this success, only a slim majority of Tunisians say the Arab Spring has had a positive effect on the country, and even fewer say the same for the region at large. This may reflect continued dissatisfaction with progress in certain policy areas, especially efforts to reduce corruption and economic inequality.

Democracy appears to be gaining traction: Tunisians increasingly see the country as democratic, express satisfaction with the way democracy is working, and demand democracy. Urban residents, younger citizens, and those with higher levels of education and material security are most likely to hold pro-democratic views. While these results are promising, they suggest that further progress is possible by increasing support for democracy among women and citizens living under poor material conditions – a common pattern for citizen commitment to democracy in Africa.

Findings on citizen prioritization of security measures show cause for concern, however, as a slight majority of Tunisians would prefer that the government prioritize national security over further democratization and the protection of human rights. This is particularly troubling given that enhanced security measures since 2015 have already led to allegations of significant abuses by state security forces.

As insecurity caused by violent extremism threatens progress made to date and many of the socioeconomic conditions that precipitated the 2010/2011 protests continue to persist, it is imperative that Tunisia's democratic government work to protect its most vulnerable citizens and to meet Tunisians' economic as well as political aspirations.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Algeria	May-June 2015	2013
Benin	May-June 2014	2005, 2008, 2011
Botswana	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Burkina Faso	April-May 2015	2008, 2012
Burundi	September-October 2014	2012
Cameroon	January-February 2015	2013
Cape Verde	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011
Côte d'Ivoire	August-September 2014	2013
Egypt	June-July 2015	2013
Gabon	September 2015	N/A
Ghana	May-June 2014	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Guinea	March-April 2015	2013
Kenya	November-December 2014	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011
Lesotho	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Liberia	May 2015	2008, 2012
Madagascar	December 2014-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mali	December 2014	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Mauritius	June-July 2014	2012
Morocco	November 2015	2013
Mozambique	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
Niger	March-April 2015	2013
Nigeria	December 2014-January 2015	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013
São Tomé and Príncipe	July-August 2015	N/A
Senegal	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Sierra Leone	May-June 2015	2012
South Africa	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Sudan	June 2015	2013
Swaziland	April 2015	2013

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Tanzania	August-November 2014	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Togo	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

Table A.2: Key public attitudes toward democracy | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Prefer democracy	Reject one-party rule	Reject military rule	Reject one-man rule	Demand for democracy
Morocco	64%	80%	77%	77%	47%
Tunisia	66%	68%	57%	79%	33%
Algeria	46%	64%	54%	57%	21%
Sudan	44%	69%	46%	60%	17%
Egypt	53%	60%	33%	49%	13%
North Africa	55%	68%	53%	64%	26%
36-country average	67%	78%	73%	78%	43%

Respondents were asked:
1. Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
*   Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.*
*   Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.*
*   Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.*
(% who say democracy is preferable)
2. There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?
*   A.   Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.*
*   B.   The army comes in to govern the country.*
*   C.   Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything.*
(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)
Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives

Table A.3: Citizen threat assessment and terrorism data | 5 North African countries | 2015

	Citizen perception of ISIL/AQIM activity (% "somewhat" or "very active")	Citizen perception of ISIL/AQIM threat (% "somewhat or "a lot")	Number of terror attacks (2015) (GTD)*	Number of fatalities due to terror attacks (2015) (GTD)*	GTI score (2015)**	Global ranking (2015)
Tunisia	64%	77%	17	103	4.963	35
Egypt	53%	51%	346	790	7.328	9
Algeria	37%	39%	16	21	4.282	42
Morocco	18%	32%	1	0	0.892	95
Sudan	25%	24%	159	210	6.600	18

Respondents were asked:
1. *How active do you think each of the following Islamic movements are in [your country]: The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, known as ISIL? Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, known as AQIM?*
2. *In your opinion, to what extent do ISIL or AQIM pose a threat to [your country's] security?*
Note: Table is adapted from Bentley, Lekalake, & Buchanan-Clarke (2016) to provide updated Global Terrorism Database (GTD) data (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, START 2016) and Global Terrorism Index scores (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016).
* GTD data include all successful and unsuccessful terror attacks, not only those attributed to ISIL or AQIM.
** GTI scores are based on the number of terrorism-related incidents, fatalities, and injuries and a measure of property damage from terrorist incidents. Higher numbers correspond to a greater impact.

Table A.4: Government prioritization: peace and security vs. human rights | Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Sudan | 2015

	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Sudan	Average
Ensure security	34%	59%	55%	41%	47%
Respect human rights	51%	31%	34%	55%	43%
Agree with neither	7%	2%	4%	1%	4%
Don't know	8%	8%	7%	3%	7%

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
- *Statement 1: Government should be free to deal with persons suspected of connection with terrorism in any way necessary to ensure peace and security, even if it means violating their rights.*
- *Statement 2: Government should never violate individuals' human rights, even when it comes to ensuring peace and security for the country*

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