



المنتدى الاستراتيجي العربي  
ARAB STRATEGY FORUM

ARAB NEWS

# MOSQUE & STATE

HOW ARABS SEE THE NEXT  
10 YEARS





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# INTRODUCTION

As part of an ongoing collaboration with the Arab Strategy Forum, Arab News has developed a pan-Arab opinion poll to better understand Arabs' current and future concerns, what they believe are top problems for their countries, what is driving conflict in the region, how are women's rights improving, and what is the intersection between religion and politics in their lives.

The chosen research partner for this study is YouGov. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), YouGov has the largest pure research online panel where thousands of residents participate in surveys across 19 countries, offering unparalleled insight across the Arab world.

# METHODOLOGY

The pan-Arab survey was conducted using an online interview administered among members of the YouGov panel of close to 1,010,200 individuals across the MENA region who agreed to take part in surveys. An email was sent to participants selected at random from the panel, inviting them to take part and providing a link to the survey. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov. Fieldwork was undertaken between 23 and 30 October 2019. The total sample size consists of 3,079 Arabic speakers, aged 18 years or above, residing across 18 countries in the Arab world and including both genders.

The Arab world is home to a population of more than 400 million across 22 nations with various cultures and traditions, united by one spoken language. Arabs are a diverse group in terms of religious affiliations and practices. Today, about 93 percent of Arabs are adherents of Islam, and there are sizable Christian minorities. Arab Muslims primarily belong to the Sunni, Shiite, Ibadi, and Alawite denominations. Arab Christians generally follow one of the Eastern Christian Churches, such as the Oriental Orthodox or Eastern Catholic churches. Other smaller minority religions are also followed, such as the Baha'i Faith and Druze. Of those surveyed for our political Islam study, 80 percent of those who responded described their faith as being Sunni Muslim, 3 percent Shiite Muslim, 1 percent Alawite, 3 percent other and 12 percent preferred not to say.



# ANALYSIS

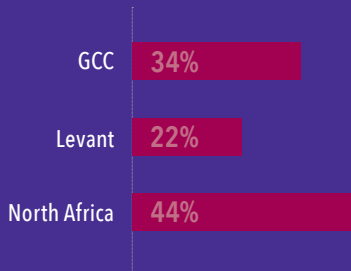
Throughout this report, analysis is based on overall results and where significant, differences by various demographics are highlighted. Given the sensitive nature of the topic at hand and the various events taking place across the Arab world, it was thought important to look at the data from a different angle by grouping certain nationalities based on commonalities in their home countries. For the purpose of analysis, three clusters have been created:

1. Less economically stable countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia)
2. Economically stable countries (GCC)
3. More socially or politically unstable countries, such as those experiencing some sort of conflict (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan, Palestine, Libya, and Yemen)

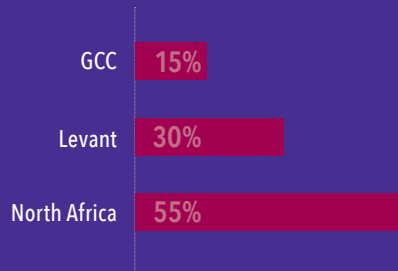
**The following analysis is representative of the Arab online population with an overall margin of error of  $\pm 1.77$  percent. This margin of error naturally increases the more granular we look at the data (for example, females aged 25-35 in Jordan), and thus only sub-samples of at least 50 respondents have been analyzed and reported on.**

# DEMOGRAPHICS

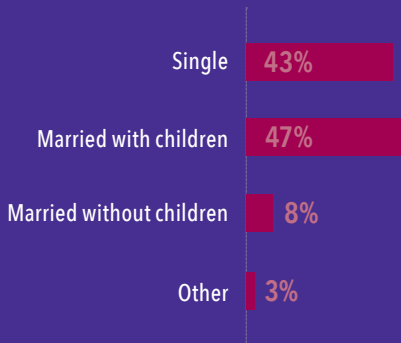
### Residence



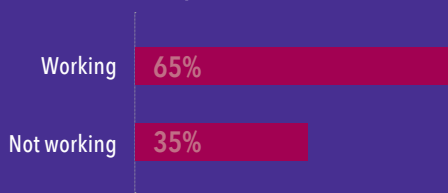
### Nationality



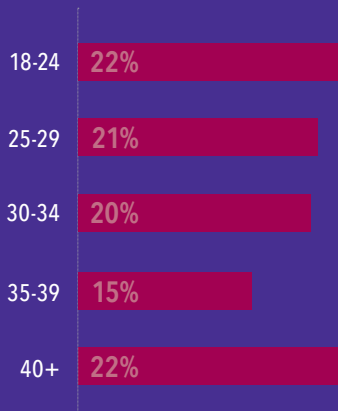
### Marital Status



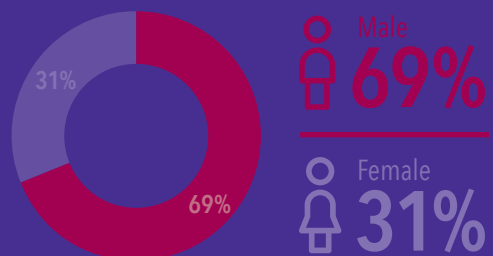
### Employment Status



### Age



### Gender



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The findings shed light on several areas of clear consensus across the Arab world. One of the strongest messages is that the Arab world has had enough of extremism and religious political parties and that they simply want corruption and unemployment to be tackled.

A significant proportion of respondents across the Arab world, 43 percent, strongly disagree with "the use of religion for political gain". Overall, 58 percent of Arabs disagree with the use of religion for political gain. Significantly, the two nationalities that are the most conclusive in thinking that religion is affecting their home countries' political decisions – Iraqis (75 percent) and Lebanese (63 percent).

In Iraq, protests have exposed deep resentment at Iran's influence in the country, with the violent protests, including the firebombing of the Iranian embassy in Najaf in the country, leaving scores dead at the hands of the authorities, culminating in the resignation of the prime minister, Adel Abdul-Mahdi.

Meanwhile in Lebanon, where Iran-backed Hezbollah plays a dominant role in the country's affairs, protests have called out the Shia-backed group amid the wider call for an end to corruption in the nation.

In the poll, respondents in both countries rocked by protest and violent crackdowns stridently believed that there would be 'less wars in the world if religion and politics were separate', with 68 percent in Iraq and 65 percent in Lebanon. That contrasts strongly with the Arab world average which saw just over one-third (36 percent) supporting that statement.

In contrast, in countries in the Arab world where stability reigns, for example in the GCC, there is an ongoing support of religion and its central role in society. Overall, religion plays a key role in guiding the morals of society. The vast majority of Arabs practice their religion and want life to remain in line with Sharia law. Women are empowered and their empowerment is welcomed, at the same time secularization is rejected and the idea of separating mosque and state is rejected by most and heavily questioned by the majority.

Regardless of views of religion, 61 percent of respondents across the Arab world believe the future would be better if economic matters were put above everything else. Some 36 percent believe that fact "strongly". This feeling is most strongly held in countries where the economies have not performed or matters of religion have dominated politics.

For religious political parties that have not addressed the bread-and-butter issues confronting the people of Iraq and Lebanon, the message could not be louder or clearer – the role of the state is to address our needs, religion must not to be used for political gain.



# KEY FINDINGS

## ARAB VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF MOSQUE AND STATE

### RELIGION IS CENTRAL TO ARAB SOCIETY

The Arab world remains religious, with 72 percent saying their country was deeply religious or somewhat religious, while 66 percent class themselves as actively practicing their religion. While 66 percent of Arabs identify with a religion and practice it, 17 percent practice but not regularly, while only 2 percent practice only at major holidays such as Ramadan, and 4 percent stated they belonged to a religion but did not practice.

Regardless of denomination or religious practice, 59 percent of those interviewed in this pan-Arab survey considered the Arab world to be very to somewhat religious. When thinking about their home country, Arabs are more likely to consider their societies to be religious. Almost three quarters (72 percent) of Arabs considered their home country to be very to somewhat religious compared to only 17 percent who believed their home country was not religious to secular. Citizens of Syria (60 percent), Tunisia (55 percent) and Lebanon (51 percent) were the least to consider their countries to be religious. On the contrary, nationals of Sudan (85 percent), Yemen (84 percent), the UAE (83 percent), and Saudi Arabia (77 percent) believed their countries were religious to very religious.

The intersection of mosque and state across the Arab world is seen in its most positive light for providing a moral compass; more than three-fifths of Arabs (62 percent) believed in the need for religious laws to maintain moral standards in societies, with two-fifths (38 percent) strongly agreeing. Support for the statement, “we need religious laws to maintain standards in society” was highest in North Africa (66 percent) and the Levant (59 percent), followed by the GCC (52 percent). There was no significant difference across age and gender.

**72%**

OF ARABS CONSIDERED THEIR HOME COUNTRY TO BE **VERY TO SOMEWHAT RELIGIOUS** COMPARED TO ONLY

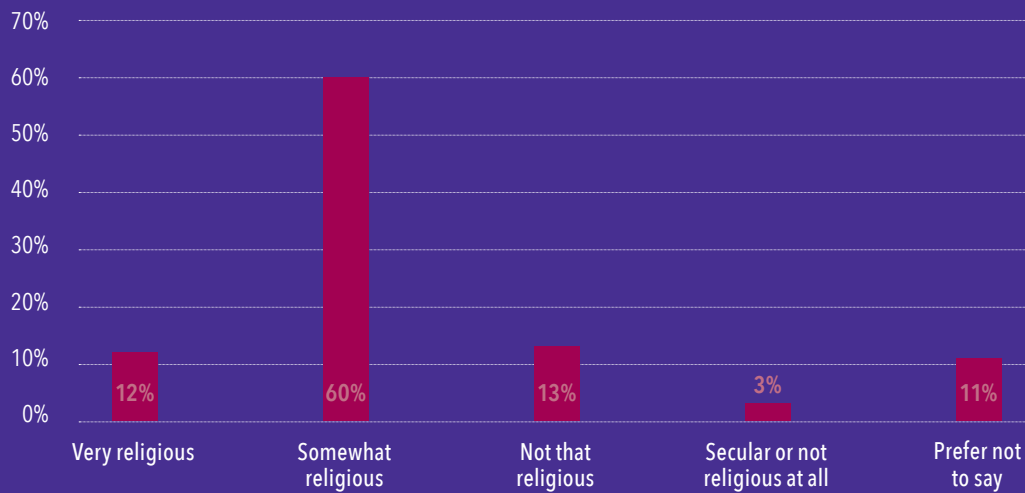
**62%**

BELIEVED IN THE NEED FOR RELIGIOUS LAWS TO **MAINTAIN MORAL STANDARDS** IN SOCIETIES



# THINKING ABOUT YOUR HOME COUNTRY NOW, OVERALL HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE IT?

## Overall responses



## Responses by cluster



Response	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Overall
Very religious	10%	19%	13%	12%
Somewhat religious	63%	56%	56%	60%
Not that religious	14%	10%	15%	13%
Secular or not religious at all	3%	3%	5%	3%
Prefer not to say	11%	11%	12%	11%

**CLUSTER 1** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia

**CLUSTER 2** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

**CLUSTER 3** Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan

# ARABS REJECT THE USE OF RELIGION FOR POLITICAL GAIN

In contrast to the positive role that religion plays in society, a significant proportion of Arabs do not believe that their religion should be a political issue, with the majority (44 percent) opposed to the idea. When protests hit Lebanon, this number rose to 58 percent.

In line with this view, Arabs reject the use of their religion for political gain. Nearly three-fifths of Arabs (58 percent) disagree with the use of religion for political gain, just 15 percent offer some sort of support for the use of religion for political gain. Overall, across the Arab world, discounting for those who prefer not to say, 83 percent of Arabs could not offer any sort of support for the use of religion for political gain.

Nationals of the Levant were most likely to disagree with the use of religion political gain, followed by nationals of North Africa and GCC. When looking across the generations, younger Arabs aged 18 to 24 were more likely to support the use of religion for political gain, however where countries have experienced turmoil, the rejection of religion for political gain rises sharply. Those in Lebanon and Iraq disagree with the use of religion for political gain in the greatest numbers.

**58%**

DISAGREE WITH THE USE OF RELIGION FOR POLITICAL GAIN

**15%**

OFFER SOME SORT OF SUPPORT FOR THE USE OF RELIGION FOR POLITICAL GAIN

When looking across the generations, younger Arabs aged 18 to 24 were more likely to support the use of religion for political gain.



# SECULARIZATION APPEALS TO A MINORITY

Where religion and politics are separate and countries are stable, the benefits that religion brings causes the majority to reject secularization as having a potential negative impact on their society over the next 10 years. It was also clear there is little appetite for more secularization in the Arab world with only 17 percent of respondents believing it could be positive, with the remainder neutral, unsure or unwilling to say.

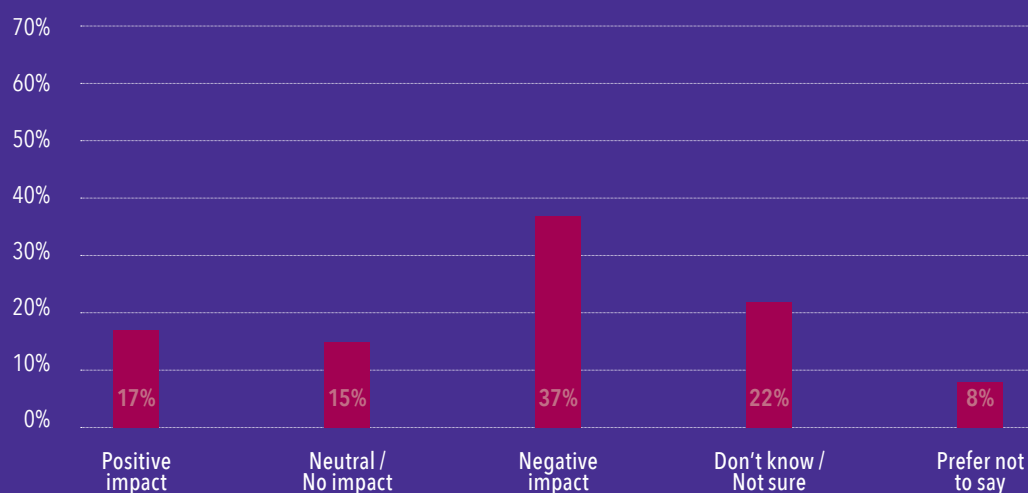
However, parts of the Arab world, who have experienced conflict where religious parties had been involved, support for secularization rises. In Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq where that 17 percent jumped to more than 40 percent, perhaps understandable given the recent turmoil.

When asked if separating mosque and state would cause a decline in religious practice, the majority, 35 percent, disagreed with that view. Indeed, the fear of their country diverting from religion was way down most respondents' list of concerns, with only 15 percent in the Arab world naming it as an issue. There was also no clear majority among respondents when asked if separating mosque and state would cause an identity crisis among Muslims in their country, 31 percent believed it might or would, 31 percent believed it wouldn't or might not, with those neutral or those not willing to answer holding the majority.

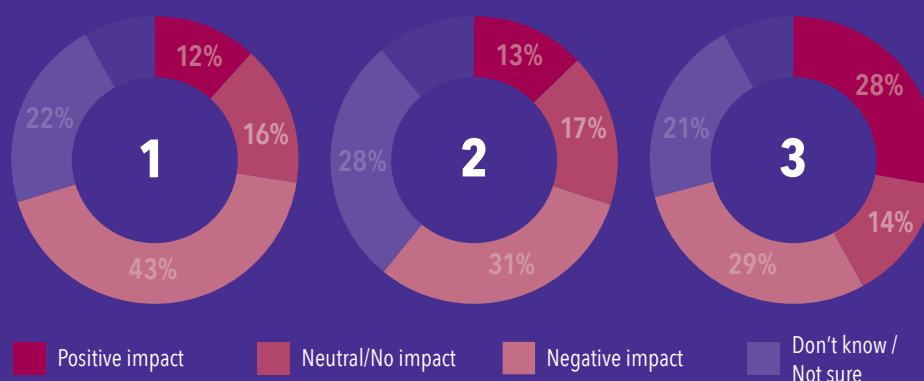
When asked if separating mosque and state would cause a decline in religious practice, 35 percent disagreed with that view.

# WHAT KIND OF IMPACT DO YOU BELIEVE SECULARIZATION WOULD HAVE ON SOCIETY?

## Overall responses



## Responses by cluster



Response	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Overall
Positive impact	12%	13%	28%	17%
Neutral / No impact	16%	17%	14%	15%
Negative impact	43%	31%	29%	37%
Don't know / Not sure	22%	28%	21%	22%
Prefer not to say	8%	11%	8%	8%

**CLUSTER 1** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia

**CLUSTER 2** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

**CLUSTER 3** Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan



# EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

When asked if they felt religion played a part in political decisions, it is perhaps unsurprising that countries in conflict were more likely (52 percent) to feel that religion and politics overlapped and tended to feel the impact of religion on their government's political decisions more than the rest, with Iraqis (74 percent), Lebanese (63 percent), and Yemenis (57 percent) more conclusive in stating that religion was affecting their countries' political decisions. These nations also believed, disproportionately higher than the Arab world, the political decisions in their country would continue to be affected by religion over the next decade.

When examining the relationship between religion and state economic decisions, almost half of GCC nationals (47 percent), believed religion impacted their countries' economic decisions, nationals of "economically challenged" countries thought the opposite – 57 percent stated that government economic decisions were not impacted by religion.

There was much greater consensus about the role of Islam in society, with 60 percent of Arabs feeling that religion impacted their governments' societal decisions. This belief was strongest among nationals of countries in conflict (68 percent) compared to the more stable GCC and economically challenged countries (56 percent). Iraqis were most likely to say that societal decisions were strongly impacted by religion (49 percent).

**47%**

OF GCC RESIDENTS BELIEVED RELIGION **IMPACTED** THEIR COUNTRIES' ECONOMIC DECISIONS

**57%**

OF RESPONDENTS FROM ECONOMICALLY CHALLENGED COUNTRIES STATED THAT GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC DECISIONS WERE **NOT IMPACTED** BY RELIGION

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# EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF SEPARATING MOSQUE AND STATE

Arabs, in general, seemed undecided when it came to the separation of religion and politics and the potential repercussions on their societies, religious practice, and individuals' roles and rights in a changing world – and even its ability to avoid potential wars.

Arabs were polarized over whether separation of religion and politics would result in fewer wars. While 36 percent of Arabs agreed that there would be fewer wars if the world of religion and politics were separate (with 20 percent strongly agreeing with the statement), another 32 percent disagreed with the statement (with 18 percent strongly disagreeing). Nationals of countries in conflict, more than others, tended to agree with such a statement. Almost half (48 percent) saw fewer wars as a result of separation of religion and politics, compared to 33 percent among economically challenged countries and 28 percent among nationals of the GCC (the more economically stable countries).

## 36%

OF ARABS **AGREED** THAT THERE WOULD BE FEWER WARS IF THE WORLD OF RELIGION AND POLITICS WERE SEPARATE

## 32%

**DID NOT BELIEVE** THERE WOULD BE FEWER WARS IF RELIGION AND POLITICS WERE SEPARATE

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# CAUSES FOR CONCERN IN THE ARAB WORLD

## CALLING OUT CORRUPTION

The findings shed light on several areas of clear consensus across the Arab world. One of the strongest messages is that the Arab world has had enough of extremism and religious political parties and that they simply want corruption and unemployment to be tackled. When asked to list the top problem for their countries, respondents from every region of the Arab world overwhelmingly called out corruption, with a combined average of 57 percent.

# 57%

OF ALL RESPONDENTS LISTED  
**CORRUPTION** AS THE TOP PROBLEM  
IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY

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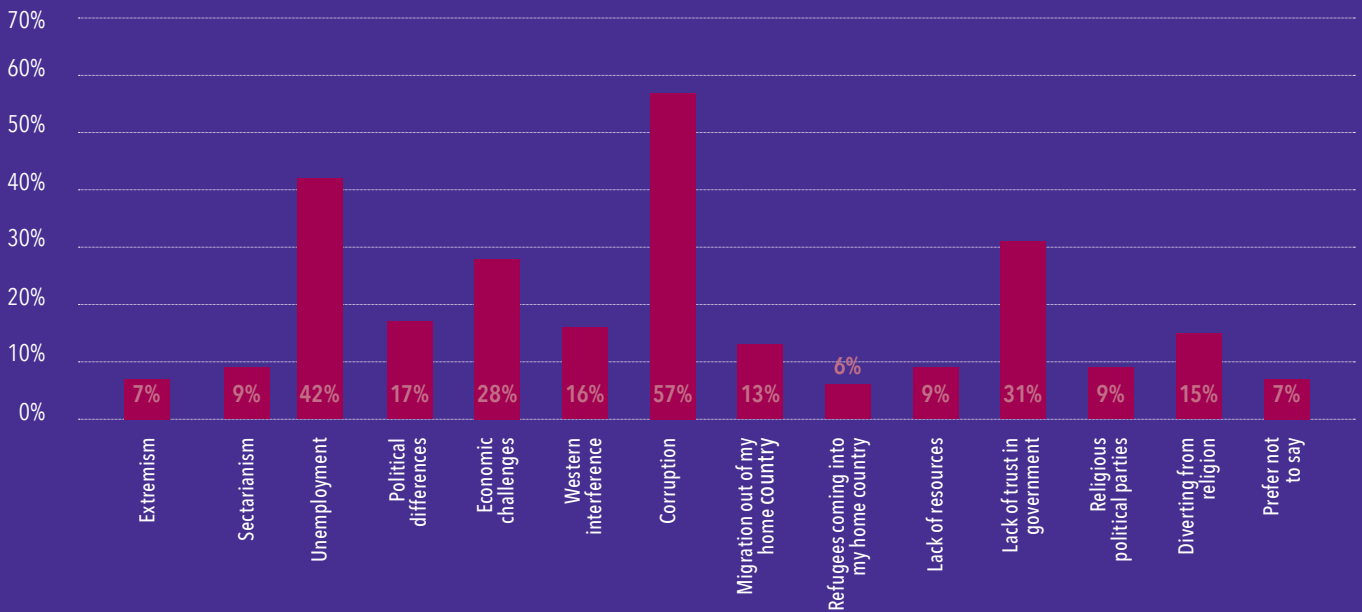
## POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

Countries in conflict were affected by political differences (23 percent), with Libyans in particular the most likely to select it as a top country concern (50 percent). Understandably, sectarianism was an issue more profound in countries in conflict (20 percent compared to 10 percent overall), and specifically among Iraqis (32 percent) and Lebanese (33 percent). Libyans (50 percent) and Yemenis (41 percent) were most likely to be worried about political differences given the respective conflicts each country is going through at the moment, while Iraqis were most worried about religious political parties (53 percent). The latter concern seemed to be much more heightened among nationals of countries in conflict (18 percent compared to 9 percent overall).



# THINKING ABOUT YOUR HOME COUNTRY, WHICH OF THE BELOW DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE TOP PROBLEMS? SELECT UP TO THREE.

## Overall responses



## ECONOMICS AND UNEMPLOYMENT ARE FRONT OF MIND

Unemployment, which ranked second (42 percent) in the list of Arabs' concerns, affected younger people (47 percent) and women (47 percent) more, with a higher percentage picking unemployment as a number one issue. Economic challenges were felt to be a problem for those living in North Africa 27 percent, and 25 percent for Levant). On a country level, Sudanese were most likely to select economic challenges as a top worry for their country (53 percent).

# 42%

OF RESPONDENTS LISTED  
**UNEMPLOYMENT** AS THE TOP  
CONCERN IN THEIR COUNTRY

# ECONOMICS MUST COME FIRST

Arabs are sending a clear message to governments indicating their worries and concerns and listing their priorities. Three-fifths (61 percent) of Arabs agreed with the statement “the future would be better if economic matters were prioritized above everything else” (with 36 percent strongly agreeing). A majority (70 percent) of nationals of countries in conflict agreed to prioritizing economic matters above all. Nationals of Saudi Arabia were most likely to be the outliers, as only 33 percent agreed to prioritizing economy above other matters and 22 percent disagreed. Iraqis (57 percent) and Lebanese (61 percent) were most likely to strongly agree with this statement.

**61%**

OF ARABS BELIEVE THE FUTURE  
WOULD BE BETTER IF ECONOMIC  
MATTERS WERE PRIORITIZED ABOVE  
EVERYTHING ELSE

**70%**

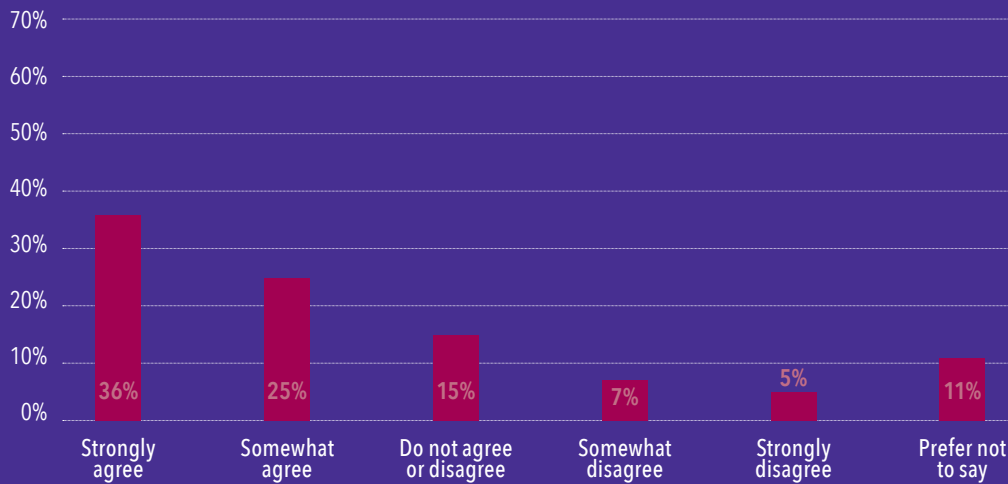
OF NATIONALS FROM COUNTRIES  
IN CONFLICT AGREED TO  
PRIORITIZING ECONOMIC MATTERS  
ABOVE ALL

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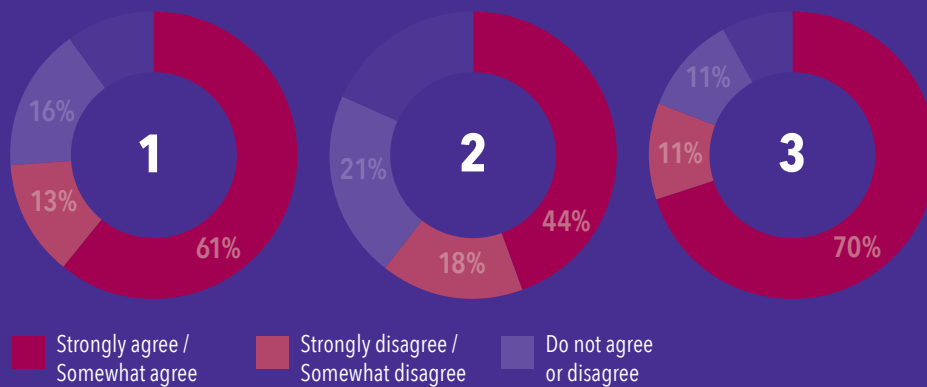
Arabs are sending  
a clear message  
to governments  
indicating their  
worries and  
concerns and listing  
their priorities.

# I BELIEVE THE FUTURE WOULD BE BETTER IF ECONOMIC MATTERS WERE PRIORITIZED ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE.

## Overall responses



## Responses by cluster



Response	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Overall
Strongly agree	36%	23%	45%	36%
Somewhat agree	25%	21%	26%	25%
Do not agree or disagree	16%	21%	11%	15%
Somewhat disagree	8%	8%	5%	7%
Strongly disagree	4%	8%	5%	5%
Prefer not to say	10%	18%	8%	11%

**CLUSTER 1** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia

**CLUSTER 2** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

**CLUSTER 3** Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan

# REJECTING EXTREMISM

Three-fifths (60 percent) of Arabs agreed that “extremist views have no place in Islam”, and of these, 47 percent strongly agreed to the statement, while just 6 percent of Arabs strongly disagreed with the statement and 14 percent of Arabs preferred not to answer. Interestingly, only 7 percent of respondents across the Arab world named extremism as the top problem for their home country, and just 15 percent saw it as the main cause of conflict in the Arab world.

Younger Arabs (18 to 24 years old) were the least likely to agree with “extremist views have no place in Islam.” Just 47 percent agreed with the statement, in contrast to the older age group (35+) which stood at 67 percent in agreement. Data showed that the youngest, although showing least support to the statement, were either hesitant or unsure of their stance toward the relationship between Islam and extremist views, as 20 percent neither agreed nor disagreed and another 20 percent preferred not to answer.

**60%**

OF ARABS AGREED THAT **EXTREMIST VIEWS HAVE NO PLACE IN ISLAM**

**15%**

OF RESPONDENTS SAW EXTREMISM **AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF CONFLICT IN THE ARAB WORLD**

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# THE EVER-DECLINING POPULARITY OF EXTREMIST GROUPS

Over the next decade, respondents across the Arab world believe extremist groups will continue to decline in popularity, with Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS/Daesh, Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and Hezbollah all facing big drops in support.

The removal of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed regime in Sudan attracted strong support, with 38 percent of the Arab world respondents believing this to be a positive development. In Sudan itself that figure soared to 82 percent.

A majority of respondents across the GCC, Levant, and North Africa (37 percent) combined believe that over the next 10 years, fewer political parties would be motivated by extremism. Again, Iraq, where Iran's political influence is pervasive, is the only country where those believing this would rise (37 percent) outweighed those who believed it would fall (35 percent).

In general, older Arab respondents were more likely to expect a decline in extremism than younger people (31 percent of 18 to 24 year olds compared to 44 percent aged 40+). Overall, optimism prevails as over two-fifths (43 percent) of Arabs predicted a fall in terrorism levels in their home countries (17 percent somewhat less, 27 percent much less).

## 43%

OF ARABS PREDICTED A FALL IN **TERRORISM LEVELS** IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY

## 38%

BELIEVED THE REMOVAL OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD-BACKED REGIME IN SUDAN WAS **A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

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# A TOLERANT FUTURE

Moderate Islam is also predicted to rise over the next 10 years across the Arab world by a majority of respondents (47 percent overall – 22 percent much more, 25 percent somewhat more).

Citizens of countries in conflict were the more hopeful of a brighter future that embraced more tolerance (56 percent), compared to 49 percent of all Arabs who expected to see more tolerance in their home country over the next 10 years (23 percent much more, 26 percent somewhat more). 55 percent of UAE nationals expected an increase in tolerance in the UAE in the coming 10 years, while 67 percent of Sudanese expected to see more moderate Islam over the next 10 years.

A significant proportion of Arabs, 46 percent, believe inter-faith cooperation will enjoy growth over the next 10 years. In the survey, a majority of the Arab world (51 percent of respondents) supported having public places of worship for other religions. Nationals of Lebanon (61 percent), Tunisia (61 percent), and Syria (53 percent) were the most hopeful of a future where inter-faith cooperation had more place in their home countries.

**47%**

OF RESPONDENTS SAID **MODERATE ISLAM** WOULD RISE OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS

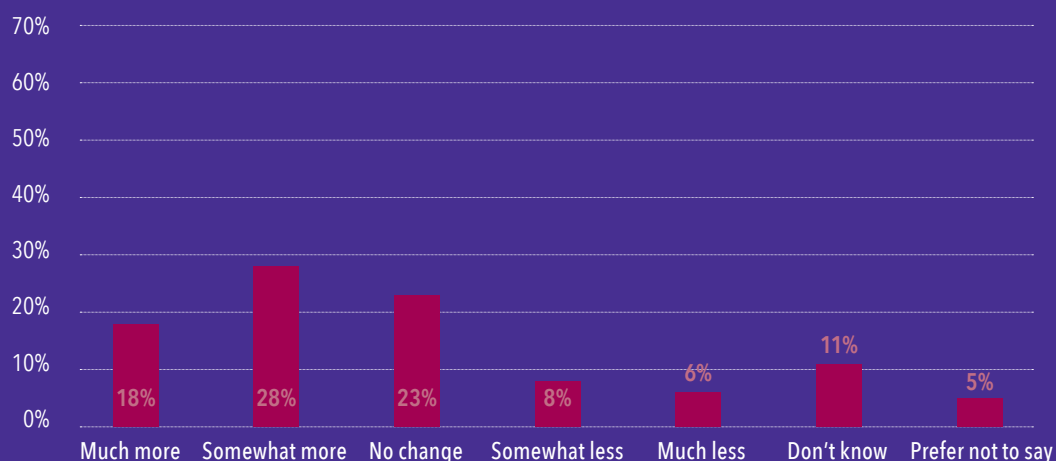
**46%**

OF ARABS BELIEVE **INTER-FAITH COOPERATION** WILL GROW OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS

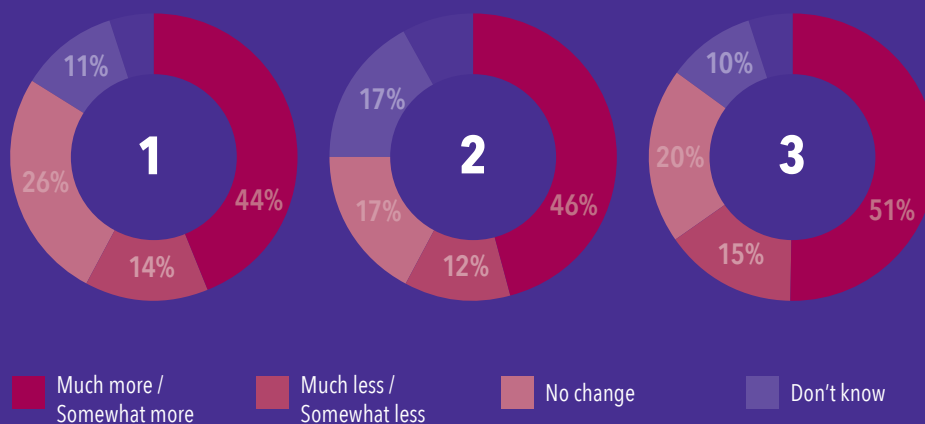
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# WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE, DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE MORE OR LESS INTER-FAITH COOPERATION IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY?

## Overall responses



## Responses by cluster



Response	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Overall
Much more	17%	21%	20%	18%
Somewhat more	28%	25%	30%	28%
No change	26%	17%	20%	23%
Somewhat less	8%	8%	8%	8%
Much less	6%	5%	6%	6%
Don't know	11%	17%	10%	11%
Prefer not to say	5%	8%	5%	5%

**CLUSTER 1** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia

**CLUSTER 2** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

**CLUSTER 3** Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan

# AN IMPROVING PICTURE FOR WOMEN

## SUPPORT FOR FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Almost half (49 percent) of Arabs said that female empowerment would have a positive impact on their home country in the 10 years to come. This was felt strongest in the Levant with 60 percent, followed by the GCC with 48 percent and 44 percent in North Africa.

Females (64 percent) tended to agree the most with such a movement compared to 42 percent agreement among their male counterparts. Youngest Arabs (53 percent among 18 to 24 years of age) felt most positively about female empowerment. In lock step with that, a large majority (61 percent) believe that female empowerment will continue to increase over the next decade.

Women holding ministerial roles in the Arab region gained strong support from respondents, with 59 percent expressing positive sentiment on the matter, as opposed to 14 percent who were negative. Data suggested that countries in conflict (59 percent) were avid supporters of this movement and the hope it might bring to their societies in the years to come. Across the Arab world “women holding ministerial positions in the Arab world” was supported by the large majority (67 percent). 32 percent of Arabs felt

extremely positive about women holding government ministerial roles in the Arab region. Nationals of countries in conflict (64 percent) and GCC (63 percent) tended to expect much more of female empowerment in their countries.

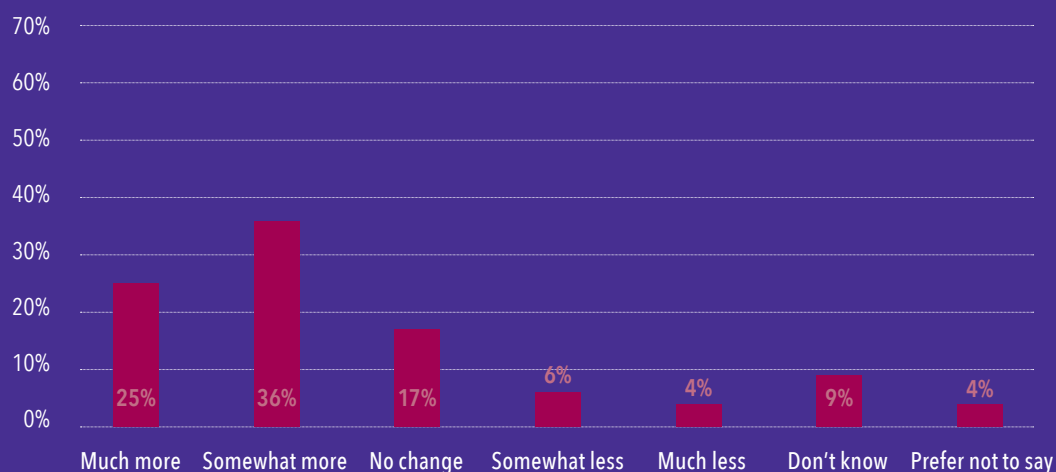
A woman’s right to choose what to wear also attracted majority support, with 52 percent expressing positive sentiment. And 77 percent of the Arab world expressed their disagreement with forced marriage, with 67 percent of respondents strongly opposed.

June 24, 2018, marked a historic date for women in Saudi Arabia as they were allowed to drive, making the Kingdom the last country to ban women from driving. 40 percent of Arabs felt extremely positive about allowing women to drive in Saudi Arabia. On average 66 percent of Arabs agreed with the policy and only 9 percent did not agree.

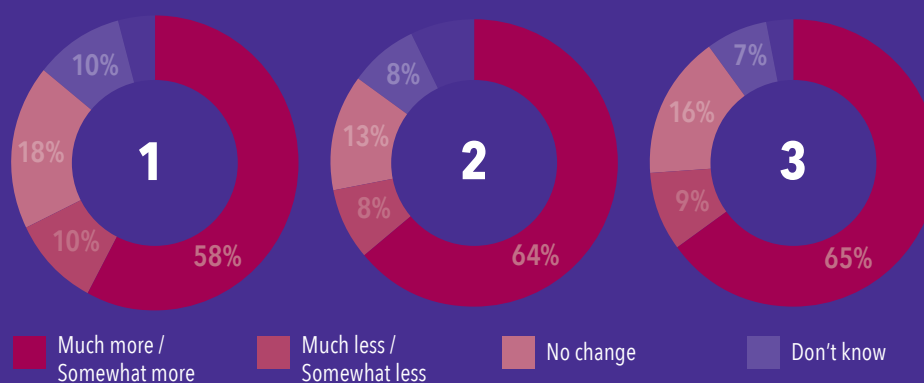


# WHEN THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE, DO YOU EXPECT TO SEE MORE OR LESS FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN YOUR HOME COUNTRY?

## Overall responses



## Responses by cluster



Response	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Overall
Much more	22%	37%	23%	25%
Somewhat more	36%	27%	41%	36%
No change	18%	13%	16%	17%
Somewhat less	6%	5%	6%	6%
Much less	4%	3%	4%	4%
Don't know	10%	8%	7%	9%
Prefer not to say	4%	7%	3%	4%

**CLUSTER 1** Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia

**CLUSTER 2** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates

**CLUSTER 3** Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan

# WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE FUTURE?

The data collected and the results published in this report form a snapshot in time and an opportunity to take the temperature on where we are today. As ever, political, societal, and economic matters are rapidly moving in the Arab world, and thus a new picture could be painted very soon.

To get a window on the future, we must look to the views of young Arabs. By looking at the views of those aged 18 to 24 years old, the need for Arab governments to focus on the economy becomes ever more pressing. Young Arabs are most likely to be affected by unemployment and they are most likely to be uncertain about what a potential separation of mosque and state might look like. Our data indicates that young people are more likely to support the use of religion for political gain. Whilst this remains a minority, the message to governments is loud and clear – economics must be addressed if the harmony between mosque and state is to be maintained.

By examining the views of Lebanese and Iraqis, we gain insight into how political Islam damages the future of both mosque and state. Countries in conflict, such as Iraq and Lebanon, which have suffered from sectarianism and the Interference of religious political parties, don't want religion to interfere with politics anymore. They are most likely to reject the use of religion for political gain, welcome tolerance and interfaith cooperation. They are also more likely to see potential in secularization and feel that the separation of mosque and state would mean fewer wars.

This view is in contrast to countries like the GCC. In the Arab world, where the economy is good and politics are peaceful, religion has a key role to play and there are no calls for change. Arabs regard Islam highly and consider it an impartial element of their lives, a matter that touches upon their personal domain. Where mosque and state are separate but in harmony, there is support for more of the same, a rejection of secularization, no support for political religious groups and positive expectations for a moderate and tolerant future.

Whilst these two sets of countries have had different experiences, underlying both the views of “conflict countries” and “stable countries” is the fundamental rejection of the use of religion for political gain. Through this research, respondents indicated that religion had a strong and stable place in the lives of Arabs. One of the strongest messages is that the Arab world has had enough of extremism and religious political parties and that they simply want corruption and unemployment to be tackled. Governments have a clear role to play in supporting religion and in order to do this, religion must not be used for political gain.



# ABOUT ARAB STRATEGY FORUM

Launched in 2001, the Arab Strategy Forum provides accurate annual forecasts on important events throughout the year. The Forum brings together senior government officials, strategists and academics from the Arab region and the world to capitalize on reliable insights and data and in-depth analysis to facilitate future regional challenges and opportunities.

The Arab Strategy Forum employs new forward-looking mechanisms and authoritative research from regional and international institutions, with the aim of building new generations of supervisors who are able to read the transformations in the region and contribute to the formulation of policies and strategies to meet future challenges.

# ABOUT ARAB NEWS

Arab News is the Middle East's leading English-language daily. This report forms part of the ongoing research and analysis being carried out by Arab News around the world to help readers better understand the changing Arab region and the opportunities that this presents for governments, organizations, and individuals. This study builds on the influential 2016 study into Arab attitudes toward the United States (US) elections and two 2017 Arab News YouGov polls into American and British perceptions of the Arab world.





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