

# Shifting Attitudes in the Arab World Toward Israel: The Importance of Public Diplomacy

By Lindsay J. Benstead

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## **Shifting Attitudes in the Arab World toward Israel: The Importance of Public Diplomacy**

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### **Abstract**

To what extent have Arab citizens' attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shifted since 2006? This article assesses national-level public opinion toward diplomatic, security and economic relations with Israel using new Arab Barometer data from 15 Arab countries spanning the decade between 2006 and 2016. Support for recognizing Israel if a two-state solution is reached with the Palestinians declined between 2006 and 2013 in six countries—Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt—but increased in four others—Sudan, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen. Since 2011, support declined in Egypt for maintaining the Egypt-Israel Treaty, though a majority of citizens still support maintaining it, and fewer than half of Palestinians and Jordanians support maintaining their agreements with Israel. For public diplomacy practitioners, the data suggest that long-term, unresolved conflict shapes how citizens see Israel, the U.S. and their governments. Yet evidence of the increasing demand for the U.S. to play a role in peacemaking in some Arab countries in the years preceding the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem—and the significant degree of willingness in some Arab countries to accept Israel if a two-state solution is reached with the Palestinians—should serve as a resource in public diplomacy efforts and strengthen diplomats' resolve to work for a peace agreement.

Authoritarian regimes in North Africa, especially until the Arab Spring, left citizens with limited, if any, power to hold their governments accountable for issues affecting their lives. This was especially true of foreign policy. The executive controls foreign policy in non-democratic regimes and places few constraints for citizens or the other branches of government (Fish, 2006).

Among examples of Arab governments' lack of responsiveness to public opinion on foreign policy issues concern relations with Israel. Egypt and Israel concluded a peace treaty in 1979, through which Egypt agreed to not attack Israel in exchange for the return of the Sinai Peninsula, which Israel captured in the Six-Day War in June 1967. However, Egypt's Peace Treaty was regarded as a "cold peace." President Sadat saw it as being in Egypt's interests to regain the territory it had lost to Israel, but public opinion in Egypt and the Arab region opposed such a move because it believed that the agreement did nothing for the Palestinians, whose right to a state was addressed only tangentially in the agreement. After signing the accord, President Sadat was assassinated by the Egyptian extremist group, Islamic Jihad, and the agreement was repudiated by the Palestinian leadership and the Arab world (Tessler, 2009). Several decades later, after Israel and the Palestinians signed the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, Jordan and Israel also concluded a bilateral agreement. But this agreement is not widely accepted by Jordanians, 55 percent of whom come from the West Bank. Jordan's treaty with Israel is a major source of support for the Islamist opposition party, the Islamic Action Front (IAF).

More significantly than is reflected in the international media, the Arab Spring mobilizations were, at least in part, a response to Arab countries' pro-Western and pro-Israeli policies (Brownlee, Masoud, & Reynolds, 2015), as illustrated by public protest, such as graffiti in post-revolutionary

Tunisia that shows solidarity with the Palestinians (Image 1). While there were many reasons for the Arab Spring—most stemming from concerns about domestic economic problems and corruption—U.S. efforts were not strong or strategic enough to avert anger toward American foreign policies from influencing national protest movements.



Image 1. Graffiti in solidarity with Palestine, central Tunis, 2012. Lindsay Benstead.

The Arab Spring opened new opportunities for North Africans to contest—and to some extent shape—foreign policy. Nowhere is this truer than in Tunisia, which made a transition to an electoral democracy following the ouster of President Ben Ali in 2011.<sup>1</sup> Increased freedom brought new potential for mobilization on foreign policy issues, and demonstrations took place in 2015 in solidarity with Palestinians. Tunisia's first free and fair elections in 2012 awarded a plurality of seats for the formerly banned Islamist party, Ennahda, as well as constitutional changes aimed at supporting Palestine. Tunisia's 2014 Constitution calls on

the state to supply, "...all victims of injustice, wherever they are, defending the peoples' right to determine their destiny, to supporting all just liberation movements, at the forefront of which is the movement for the liberation of Palestine" (Preamble) and is the world's only constitution to mention another country, reflecting more closely Tunisian public opinion, which is strongly pro-Palestinian (*The Tunisians Constitution of 2014*; Petrucci & Fois, 2016).

Until recently, we knew little about Arab citizens' views on foreign policy concerns, including their views on Arab-Israeli relations and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is surprising, given the salience of these issues for Arab citizens and the growing body of survey data from the Arab world (Zaller, 1992; Zaller & Feldman, 1992; Eichenberg, 2016). Yet new, underexploited data are available from the Arab Barometer—the first cross-national survey conducted in the Arab world that asks individuals about their views toward foreign policy (*Arab Barometer*). For the first time, it is possible to compare attitudes across space and time, offering new insights for both scholarly debates as well as public diplomacy practice.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, this article leverages Arab Barometer data from 15 Arab countries spanning a decade (2006 and 2016) to assess how Arab citizens view Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how their attitudes shifted since 2006. Four findings emerge. First, Arab-Israeli peace is far less important than domestic concerns to most Arab citizens, but a non-negligible proportion of Jordanians see Arab-Israeli peace as one of the country's most important concerns. This suggests that the government of Jordan, perhaps more than other Arab countries, should be concerned about the instability that could arise from policies that are not well aligned with public opinion. But many Jordanians are willing to accept Israel if a two-state solution is reached with Israel.

Second, support for recognizing Israel, if a two-state solution is reached with the Palestinians, has increased in some countries between 2006 and 2013 and decreased in others. Declining support for recognizing Israel occurred in Lebanon, Iraq and North Africa (including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt), but increased in Sudan, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen. Although the correspondence is imperfect, declining support for recognizing Israel has occurred in most of the countries that are emerging democracies or which experienced substantial regime change during the Arab Spring.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that democracies allow more open debate around foreign policy issues, and that preference falsification in surveys may decrease as social norms allow for freer expression of views about controversial issues (Kuran).

Third, since 2011, support for maintaining the Egypt-Israel Treaty declined in Egypt, though a majority still support maintaining it. Additionally, fewer than half of Palestinians and Jordanians support preserving the Oslo Accords and the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty, respectively.

Finally, Arab citizens widely see external interference as a problem—and many blame the U.S. and Israel for creating Da'esh. In some countries—especially transitional countries (including Tunisia, Libya and Egypt)—U.S. involvement appears to be least welcomed. In others, many citizens do wish to have U.S. development support. In all countries, listening sessions are needed when formulating development programs, given the variation in the types of priorities that would be welcomed by citizens. Citizens in several countries also increasingly support the U.S. as a partner in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. While these findings may seem contradictory, they highlight the ambivalence that often underlies public opinion about complex political issues. In addition, despite diminishing support for recognizing Israel

in some countries, increasing demand for the U.S. to play a role in peacemaking in Algeria, Tunisia and Jordan (though not in Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon or Palestine) in the years preceding the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem offers opportunities to tie public diplomacy practice to public opinion.

Rather than focusing on direct diplomacy alone, the U.S. and other Western nations should acknowledge Arab citizens' rising frustration toward the failed peace process while leveraging this opportunity to promote peacemaking in the countries where it is most demanded (namely in Palestine and Jordan, where 39 percent and 38 percent, respectively, wanted the U.S. to support peacemaking). Yet evidence of the increasing demand for the U.S. to play a role in peacemaking in some Arab countries in the years preceding the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem—and the significant degree of willingness in some Arab countries to accept Israel if a two-state solution is reached with the Palestinians—should serve as a resource in public diplomacy efforts and strengthen diplomats' resolve to work for a peace agreement.

By showing that Arab citizens' attitudes are responsive to world events and suggesting that democratization is associated with greater expression of Arabs' antipathy for Israel, the results have implications for the literature on public opinion and foreign policy. There was increased demand for a U.S. role in peacemaking in some countries as of 2013. Yet, it is already possible that this window of opportunity is closing since the U.S. moved its embassy to Jerusalem in 2017. Since that time, Palestinians grew less willing to accept the U.S. as a mediator, according to polls in the West Bank and the Gaza strip.<sup>4</sup> As the two-state solution becomes less and less viable, Palestinian and Arab concerns about their political crisis are increasing. This should encourage

U.S. efforts to work to support a peace agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This is particularly true as relations warm between Israel and countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Sudan, Oman and the United Arab Emirates due to shared concerns about Iran and the strengthening of a Sunni Muslim Axis to counter its influence.

This article summarizes the context of Arab public opinion and its implications for public diplomacy. First, it provides an overview of Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian relations since 1948 and discusses the available data from the Arab Barometer collected in 15 countries since 2006. Second, it examines aggregate national-level attitudes toward three subjects: (1) the salience of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a concern to Arab citizens relative to other problems their countries are facing, (2) attitudes about Israeli-Palestinian peace and existing peace treaties with Israel in Egypt and Jordan, and (3) attitudes about Western interference and the U.S. role in the peace process. Finally, the article concludes with implications for how these developments in public opinion inform U.S. and Western countries' public diplomacy strategies by offering opportunities to tie public diplomacy practice to public opinion and leverage this window of opportunity to shape foreign policy and achieve meaningful improvements in human development and the prospects for peace.

## **The Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

Relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians have deteriorated since the first wave of the Arab Barometer was conducted in Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Jordan and Yemen in 2006. The Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were signed in 1993, creating the Palestinian Authority (PA) as the administrative body to represent the Palestinians.

The Accords also called for a gradual withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories (i.e., Gaza and the West Bank), beginning with major Palestinian population centers in the West Bank, referred to as “Area A,”<sup>5</sup> a halt to violence by the Palestinians, and an end to Israeli settlement building. The parties agreed to negotiate a final status agreement by 1999, with the goal of Palestinian statehood and agreement on borders, refugees, security and water, and to end all future claims.

Israel withdrew from the West Bank’s Area A following the Oslo Accords and the Gaza strip in 2005, but Israeli settlement building continued in Area C and East Jerusalem. Increasing Israeli control over the territories and rising violence led to the Second Intifada (Palestinian uprising) in 2000 (Gordon, 2008). Palestinians gradually lost hope that the Oslo framework would produce a two-state solution, and in 2012, Palestinian Authority President Mahmood Abbas pursued an internationalization strategy, achieving non-member observer state status for Palestine in the United Nations (UN).

Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) polls in Palestine since the 1990s illustrate how citizens’ views are shaped by these developments in the conflict over the past three decades (*Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)*). But, while a few studies focus on Arab public opinion toward foreign policy (Tessler & Robbins, 2007; Benstead & Reif, 2017; Warriner & Tessler, 1997; Jamal, Tessler, & Robbins, 2012; Moaddel, Tessler, & Inglehart, 2006; Benstead, 2018a), none systematically examine Arab opinion toward Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>6</sup> This is partly due to the recent development of survey research in the Arab world, which began in the early 1990s with the World Values Survey (WVS)—a cross-national survey that includes the Arab countries but does not ask questions about Israel.

The Arab Barometer was the first survey to measure attitudes about foreign policy issues across the Arab region and now spans 15 countries over a decade (2006-2016).<sup>7</sup> The survey covers a wide range of issues related to Israel. (See Online Appendix 2 for a list of questions on foreign policy and Israel in the Arab Barometer).

### **Arab-Israeli Peace**

The Arab-Israeli conflict has been a feature of other Arab countries' foreign policy landscapes since Israel gained statehood in 1948. Israel's declaration of independence was quickly followed by the first Arab-Israeli war between the Arab League and Israel and included troops from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which sought to destroy the new state. Although the parties signed an Armistice agreement in 1949, establishing the Green Line, Israel remains in a state of war with all of the involved Arab countries, except for Egypt, which signed a treaty with Israel in 1978-1979, and Jordan, which did so in 1994, following the signing of the Oslo Accords with Israel. The Arab League has not recognized Israel, but the 2002 Saudi-led Arab Peace Initiative, which was ratified by the Arab League, promises recognition of Israel by the Arab world if it withdraws to behind the 1949 Armistice line (i.e., the Green Line).<sup>8</sup>

Israel also fought several other wars with its Arab neighbors: the Suez Crisis in 1956 with Egypt, France and Britain, the Six-Day War in 1967 with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and the Yom Kippur/Ramadan War in 1973 with Egypt and Syria. Israel intervened militarily in Lebanon in 1982 to oust the PLO from Lebanese territory and fought with Hizballah in Lebanon in 2006. Since Israel unilaterally pulled out of Gaza in 2007, Israel has intervened militarily in Gaza since 2005 against Hamas, which does not recognize Israel and regularly launches

rockets into southern Israel from the Gaza strip (Beinin & Hajjar).

None of the Arab states recognize Israel apart from Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain (Table 1), but many other Arab countries have official and unofficial diplomatic, security and economic relationships with the Jewish state. In 1951, following the first Arab-Israeli war, the Arab League pronounced a boycott of Israeli products, goods passing through Israeli ports and companies doing business with Israel—prompting Coca-Cola to close franchises in Arab countries (Micheletti, 2003). Algeria and a few other MENA governments still enforce the boycott, although WikiLeaks cables revealed Israeli products enter Algeria through secondary channels, and authorities allow American companies that do business in Israel to operate in Algeria (Benstead & Reif, 2017). Notably, however, there has been increasing unofficial security cooperation between Israel and several Gulf countries in recent years, including Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia, due to common concerns about Iran. This Sunni Muslim Axis includes not only Gulf countries but others such as (North) Sudan.

**Table 1. Countries in the Arab Barometer by region and political regime**

Country	Relations with Israel	Region
<i>Democracy</i>		
Iraq	Does not recognize Israel and has been in a state of war since 1949 Arab-Israeli War. Participated in 1967 Six-Day War and 1973 Yom Kippur War.	Levant

Lebanon	Does not recognize Israel; Participated in 1949 Arab-Israeli War, but not the 1967 Six-Day War or the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel intervened on the side of the Christians in the Lebanese civil war in 1982. Ongoing border clashes and 2006 war with Hizballah in Lebanon, which claims to represent Lebanon's Shi'a and is backed by Iran.	Levant (Borders Israel)
Tunisia	No diplomatic relations, trade relations cut in 2000. Hosted PLO from 1982 to 1993.	North Africa
<b><i>Open Anocracy</i></b>		
Algeria	No diplomatic relations. Staunch anti-Israel policies though informally some lack of application of the Arab League boycott of Israel.	North Africa
Yemen	Does not recognize Israel. Participated in the 1949 Arab-Israeli War.	Gulf
<b><i>Closed Anocracy</i></b>		
Morocco	No diplomatic relations. Staunch anti-Israel policies though informally economic and political ties.	North Africa
Egypt	Peace treaty with Israel since 1978.	North Africa/ Levant (Borders Israel)
Jordan	Diplomatic relations since 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty; strained due to tensions around Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, which Jordan helps to administer.	Levant (Borders Israel)
Sudan (North)	Participated in the 1949 Arab-Israeli War and the 1967 Six-Day War. Israel has not denied a secret relationship with Sudan since 2016.	East Africa

<b><i>Autocracy</i></b>		
Kuwait	Does not recognize Israel or have trade relations; participated in the 1949 Arab-Israeli War, 1967 Six-Day War, and 1973 Yom Kippur War.	Gulf
Oman	Unofficial trade relations since 1994.	Gulf
Syrian Arab Republic	Does not recognize Israel and has been in a state of war since 1949 Arab-Israeli War. Participated in 1967 Six-Day War and 1973 Yom Kippur War. Israel occupied the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967.	Levant (Borders Israel)
Bahrain	Recognized Israel in 2018 due to shared interests countering Iran.	Gulf
United Arab Emirates	Does not recognize Israel and has no economic relations; increased unofficial intelligence cooperation to curb Iran.	Gulf
Qatar	Trade relations since 1996 and subsequent diplomatic relationship.	Gulf
Saudi Arabia	Does not recognize Israel; Led the Arab Peace Initiative proposal to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict endorsed by Arab League in 2002; increased unofficial intelligence cooperation to curb Iran.	Gulf
<b><i>Failed/Occupied/Not Included</i></b>		
State of Palestine	Oslo Accords signed 1993; Continual conflict, particularly since the Second Intifada in 2000	Levant (Borders/ Occupied by Israel)
Libya	No diplomatic relations.	North Africa

Source: Polity IV regime authority score  
<http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>.

Officially, Morocco does not recognize Israel, but has long encouraged Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and does not enforce the Arab League boycott of Israel. Morocco's close ties with Israel are due in part to the relatively large number of Jews in Morocco, some high-ranking Jewish Moroccans in the palace, and the institution of the "Commander of the Faithful" as a protector of the "People of the Book." Morocco uses its support for the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process to argue that Western countries should accept its policy in the Sahara (Abadi). It also strengthened economic ties with Israel in 1994 following the Oslo Accords between the Israelis and Palestinians. Formal efforts to promote bilateral trade were cut in 2000 following the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

Egypt established diplomatic relations with Israel following the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty. While it has never had official diplomatic relations with Israel, Tunisia became the first Arab country to host members of the Israeli leadership. Like Morocco, it cut trade relations with Israel in 2000 due to the outbreak of the Second Intifada. At the same time, it hosted the Palestinian Liberation Organization from 1982-1993, when the Oslo Accords were signed.

Algeria and Libya have taken a more stringent approach. Opposition to Israel on the part of both the Algerian government, as well as its population, has always been strong. This is due to the brutality of Algeria's colonization by France and the revolutionary war. Libya too has not had diplomatic relations with Israel, and Gadhafi was a vocal supporter of the Palestinian cause, but members of the transitional regime have indicated the possibility of future relations with Israel. Sudan participated in the 1949 Arab Israeli War and the 1967 Six-Day War and played host to the Arab League summit in 1967 when the Khartoum Resolution was signed, calling for continued belligerence against Israel referred to colloquially as the "Three No's:" "No peace with Israel, no recognition of

Israel, and no negotiations with Israel.” But in recent years, (North) Sudan’s relations with Israel have warmed and Israeli officials have not denied having a secret relationship with Sudan since 2016.

Among countries in the Arab Gulf, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain established unofficial relations to share intelligence (“Astonishing Move,” 2018), due to their shared interests to counter Iran, while Qatar and Oman have set up economic relations. The Qatar National Olympic Committee and the State of Israel funded the Doha Stadium in Saknin, Israel, demonstrating the shared interests between the two countries. Only Yemen and Kuwait do not recognize Israel or maintain unofficial ties.

Israel’s most complex relationships are with countries with which it shares borders. Jordan has granted citizenship to millions of Palestinians from the West Bank, who now make up 55 percent of Jordan’s population (Ryan, 2011). Jordan’s diplomatic and economic ties and 1994 peace treaty with Israel fuel the opposition. There has also been tension since the Second Intifada over the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, which Jordan has administered since it controlled the West Bank and East Jerusalem between 1949 and 1967.

Although Lebanon does not recognize Israel, the border was calm between the 1949 Arab-Israeli War and armistice and the Israeli intervention in the Lebanese Civil War in 1982. Since that time, there have been ongoing border clashes with Hizballah, including the 2006 war between Israel and Hizballah, which claims to represent Lebanon’s Shi’a and is backed by Iran. Syria and Israel have been in a consistent state of war since the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, 1967 Six-Day War, 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the 1982 Lebanon War and Israel occupies the Golan Heights from Syria. Efforts in the 2000s between Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Israeli

leaders to negotiate a peace deal were short-lived and unsuccessful.

## **Arab Barometer Surveys**

Despite the long history of the conflict, we know little about how citizens feel about their countries' relationships and how the mood of public opinion concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has changed since the Arab Barometer was first conducted in 2006. The Arab Barometer has now been conducted in 15 countries using nationally representative samples of the adult populations.<sup>9</sup> North Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Sudan have been surveyed in at least two of the four waves, while Libya has been surveyed once by the Arab Barometer. In the Levant, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon have each been surveyed at least twice. In the Gulf region, only the United Arab Emirates and Oman have not been included in the Arab Barometer. This region is less well covered, but one survey has been conducted in Kuwait, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, while four have been conducted in Yemen. In addition to Yemen, Jordan, Algeria, Palestine and Lebanon have been included in all four waves of the Arab Barometer, spanning 2006 through 2016. One critical case—Syria—has not been surveyed.

The Arab Barometer thus covers countries with different regime types and foreign policies toward Israel, including all of the countries which have concluded peace treaties with Israel (Table 1). Egypt, Jordan and Bahrain recognize Israel, while others do not. Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia are democracies, while Palestine, Libya and Egypt have had free and fair elections but have slid back into authoritarianism or state collapse (*PolityProject*). Some countries are geographically close to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while others are located farther away (Table 2).

**Table 2. Nationally-representative surveys in North Africa**

	World Values Survey <sup>ii</sup>	Arab Barometer	Afro Barometer <sup>iii</sup>
<b>North Africa</b>			
Morocco/ Western Sahara	2001	2006 (Wave 1)	2013
	2007	2013-2014 (Wave 3)	2016
	2011	2016 (Wave 4)	
Algeria	2002	2006 (Wave 1)	2013
	2013	2011 (Wave 2)	2015
		2013 (Wave 3)	
		2016 (Wave 4)	
Tunisia	2013	2011 (Wave 2)	2013
		2013 (Wave 3)	2015
		2016 (Wave 4)	
Libya	2014	2014 (Wave 3)	2013
Egypt	2001	2011 (Wave 2)	2016
	2008	2013 (Wave 3)	
	2013	2016 (Wave 4)	
Sudan	-	2010-2011 (Wave 2) 2013 (Wave 3)	2013
<b>Levant</b>			
Jordan	2001	2006 (Wave 1)	-
	2007	2010 (Wave 2)	
	2014	2012-2013 (Wave 3)	
		2016 (Wave 4)	

Iraq	2004 2006 2012	2011 (Wave 2) 2013 (Wave 3)	-
Syria	-	-	-
Palestinian Territories	2013	2006 (Wave 1) 2010 (Wave 2) 2012 (Wave 3) 2016 (Wave 4)	-
Lebanon	2013	2007 (Wave 1) 2011 (Wave 2) 2013 (Wave 3) 2016 (Wave 4)	-
<b><i>Gulf</i></b>			
Kuwait	2014	2014 (Wave 3)	-
Qatar	2010	-	-
United Arab Emirates	-	-	-
Bahrain	2014	2009 (Wave 9) <sup>i</sup>	-
Oman	-	-	-
Saudi Arabia	2003	2011 (Wave 2)	-
Yemen	2014	2007 (Wave 1) 2011 (Wave 2) 2013 (Wave 3) 2016 (Wave 4)	-

<sup>i</sup>Small sample of 500 listed in Tessler documentation. <sup>ii</sup>Waves 1-6. <sup>iii</sup>Waves 1-6. See also Online Appendix Table A1.1. The World Values Survey and the Afro Barometer have been conducted in many Arab countries, but these surveys do not ask questions about the Arab world's relationship to Israel.

## **Attitudes toward Arab-Israel Relations and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The cases in the Arab Barometer allow researchers to assess how Arab citizens view Israel and the Peace Process, and how their views have changed since 2006. Has the emergence of democracy in Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia—or the political transitions which failed to produce sustained democracy in Palestine following free elections in 2006 and Libya and Egypt, following their democratic elections in 2012—impacted citizens' views of their governments' foreign policies toward Israel?

### **Pro-Israel Policy and the Arab Spring**

First, how do citizens see the Arab-Israeli conflict in the context of different social, economic and political challenges faced by their nations? According to the Arab Barometer Wave 1 (2006-2008), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other international issues are far less salient to citizens than domestic concerns in all countries, but non-negligible proportions cite the Arab-Israel conflict as the most or second-most important issues, particularly in Jordan. As shown in Table 3, internal issues like the economic situation and corruption were consistently viewed as the most important issue by the majority of the population. Fewer than 10 percent of the population selected ending the Arab-Israeli conflict and the U.S. occupation in Iraq as the most important problem in Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. This issue was most concerning for Jordanians, seven percent of whom say the Arab-Israeli conflict is the most important issue facing their country.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 3. Most important problems facing country**

	<b>North Africa</b>				<b>Levant</b>						<b>Gulf</b>	
	<i>Algeria</i>		<i>Morocco</i>		<i>Jordan</i>		<i>Palestine</i>		<i>Lebanon</i>		<i>Yemen</i>	
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Internal issues</b>												
Economic situation	51%	33%	56%	32%	67%	19%	39%	29%	56%	26%	54%	34%
Corruption	31%	43%	27%	52%	18%	46%	11%	18%	26%	49%	32%	56%
Authoritarianism	8%	13%	4%	7%	2%	8%	1%	2%	10%	11%	2%	4%
Ending security chaos	-	-	-	-	-	-	22%	30%	-	-	-	-
<b>External issues</b>												
Ending US occupation in Iraq	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	8%	27%	21%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Arab-Israeli conflict	2%	3%	2%	4%	7%	17%	-	-	6%	10%	2%	2%
Other	-	-	7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Don't know/refuse	8%	6%	4%	3%	4%	3%	0%	0%	2%	1%	9%	3%

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 1. (Not asked in Wave 2-4)

Question wording: "In your opinion which of the following is the most important problem facing [respondent's country] today? Economic situation (poverty, unemployment, inflation); Corruption; Authoritarianism; Ending the US occupation of Iraq; The Arab-Israeli conflict."

Consistent with media coverage of the uprisings, which focused on domestic issues such as authoritarianism and corruption, few Tunisian and Egyptian citizens believed external issues played a role in causing the Arab Spring (Table 4). In Egypt, one percent of citizens cited Egypt's pro-Western policy as the most important case of the Arab Spring, while one percent of Tunisians cited it as the second most important reason. Almost no Egyptians cited pro-Israeli policy as a factor. Even if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is important to Arab citizens, it is not what they view as among

the most pressing issues generally and in relation to the Arab Spring in particular.

**Table 4. Perceived causes of the Arab Spring**

	<i>Egypt</i>		<i>Tunisia</i>	
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Internal issues</b>				
Economic situation	54%	26%	63%	18%
Civil freedoms	7%	10%	14%	29%
Prevent Gamal Mbarak from taking power	7%	14%	-	-
Corruption	29%	44%	17%	46%
Replacing Mbarak/Ben Ali	10%	3%	4%	5%
Social justice	0%	0%	-	-
Price hikes	0%	0%	-	
<b>External issues</b>				-
Pro-Western policy	1%	0%	0%	1%
Pro-Israel policy	0%	0%	-	-
Don't know/refuse	1%	1%	2%	1%

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2. (Not asked in Wave 1, 3, or 4)

Further, respondents were asked whether the aims of the Arab Spring were realized, and could identify three reasons in any order.<sup>11</sup> 14 percent of Tunisians and Egyptians stated in at least one of their three choices that weakening their country's pro-Western or pro-Israel policy was an objective of the Arab Spring. Of those who mentioned Western interests as a cause of the Arab uprisings, 33 percent believed the

Arab Spring realized the goal, while 62 percent said it had not, and five percent said they did not know. Of those who mentioned their government's pro-Israeli policy, 36 percent believed the Arab Spring realized this goal, while 58 percent said it had not, and seven percent said they did not know.

These survey questions help to establish the importance of the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to citizens. Although an increasing number of respondents are concerned about this issue, they rarely see it as the most important concern facing their country. At the same time, the conflict is salient to Arab citizens who have well-formed views that are likely to shape their countries' foreign policies because mechanisms of sanctioning and selection operate to some degree, even in authoritarian regimes.<sup>12</sup>

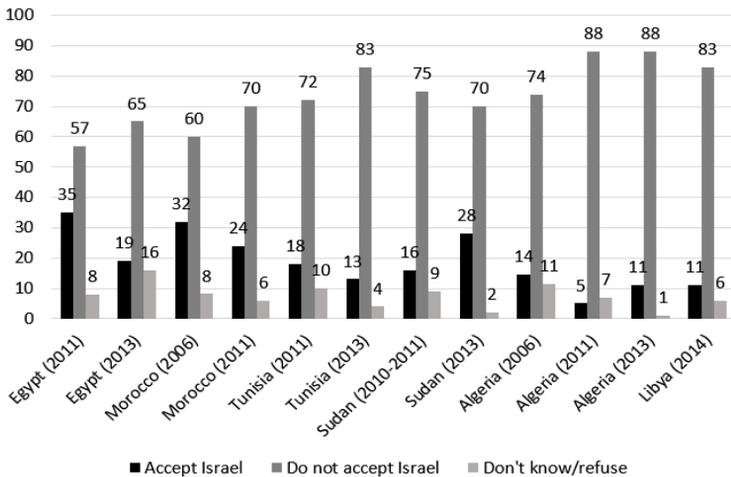
### **Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian Peace**

Second, how do respondents view the prospect of Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian peace, and are they willing to recognize Israel if a Palestinian state is achieved? Citizens vary across countries in terms of their willingness to accept Israel. And, while previous work (Benstead, 2018a) showed that support for Israel declined between 2006 and 2013 in North Africa (including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt) relative to the Levant and the Gulf, this was not the case elsewhere in the Arab world. Willingness to accept Israel stayed relatively the same in Palestine and worsened marginally in Lebanon and Iraq, while the Sudanese were substantially more willing to accept Israel, and Yemenis and Jordanians were marginally more willing than in 2006.

One possible reason for the decline in North Africa is the electoral success of Islamist parties, including the election of the Muslim Brotherhood to the parliament and presidency in Egypt and the Islamist Party of Justice and Development

(PJD) in 2011 elections. But this cannot explain the decline in Algeria, where Islamist parties have done poorly in recent elections. Another possible explanation is the failure of the Oslo Accords, and the eruption of the Second Intifada in 2000. Still, another reason may be the rise of new technologies and the success of social movements calling for actions such as boycotting. A democratic transition may open new avenues for expression of attitudes about foreign policy that are less available in authoritarian countries where citizens may also be more prone to falsify their true preferences in surveys. All of the North African countries (Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt), with the exclusion of Algeria, experienced political transitions after 2011; Lebanon and Iraq also have free and fair elections. In all of these cases, fewer citizens in the past say that they would accept Israel. Whatever the reason, more research should examine this question.

**Figure 1. Attitude about recognizing Israel (North Africa)**



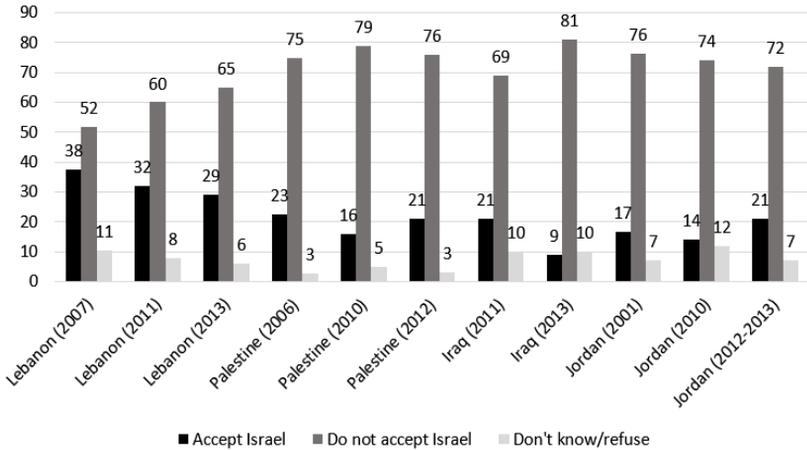
Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 1-3. (Not asked in Wave 4).

Question wording: "Which of the following statements best expresses your opinion about the problem of Israel and Palestine? The Arab world should accept the existence of Israel as a Jewish state in the Middle East only when The Arab world should not accept the existence of Israel as a Jewish state in the Middle East."

Within North Africa, the highest levels of citizens who would accept Israel are in Egypt and Morocco, where 35 percent (2011) and 32 percent (2006), respectively, would accept Israel if a two-state solution is reached (Figure 1). Within North Africa, Algerians hold the least conciliatory views. In 2011, willingness to accept Israel ranged from five percent in Algeria to 35 percent in Egypt. The proportion of citizens who say that the Arab world should accept Israel as a Jewish state when the Palestinians make peace with Israel fell from 35 percent in Egypt in 2011 to 19 percent in 2013. In Morocco, support for recognizing Israel fell from 32 percent in 2006 to 24 percent in 2011. 18 percent of Tunisians favored recognizing Israel in 2011, but two years later, this proportion fell to 13 percent. In Algeria, acceptance ranged from 15 percent in 2006 to five percent in 2011 and 11 percent in 2013. The survey was conducted only once in Libya in 2011, when 11 percent agreed with recognizing Israel.

In the Levant, as shown in Figure 2, support for accepting Israel ranged from nine percent in Iraq in 2013 to 38 percent in Lebanon in 2007. In Jordan, 17 percent would recognize Israel in 2001, and this proportion increased to 21 percent by 2012-2013. In Palestine, 23 percent would accept Israel as of 2006, but this proportion edged down to 21 percent by 2012. In Lebanon, the proportion fell dramatically from 38 percent in 2007 (before the war) to 29 percent by 2013. In Iraq, the proportion fell from 21 to nine percent between 2011 and 2013. These figures show precipitous declines between 2006 and 2013 in support of recognizing Israel if a two-state solution were reached with the Palestinians.

**Figure 2. Attitudes about recognizing Israel (Levant)**

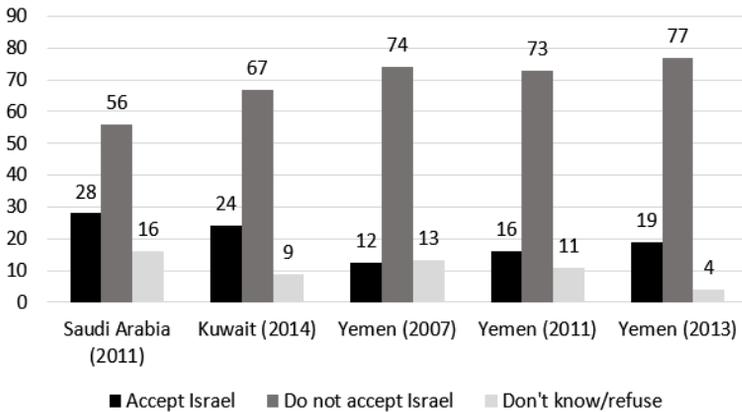


Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 1-3. For the question wording, see Figure 1.

In the Gulf, the highest proportion who would accept Israel is in Saudi Arabia, where 28 percent indicated they would as of 2011. In the Gulf, acceptance of Israel varies from 12 percent in Yemen in 2007 to 28 percent in Saudi Arabia in 2011, and acceptance of Israel increased in Yemen from 12 percent in 2007 to 19 percent in 2013. However, the smaller number of survey waves conducted in the Gulf region compared with the Levant and North Africa makes it more difficult to compare attitudes in the Gulf countries across countries and times. Yemen is the only country where questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been asked in two waves, and several Gulf countries have not been surveyed at all as part of the Arab Barometer, due to authoritarian regimes (that is, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates). Thus, the data show that attitudes toward Israel vary within each sub-region and are not consistently higher or lower in North Africa, the Levant, or the Gulf.

Generally, willingness to accept Israel has declined over time in every country where the survey was conducted at least twice, except for Sudan, Yemen and Jordan, where support for Israel increased between 2006 and 2013.

**Figure 3. Attitudes about recognizing Israel (Gulf)**



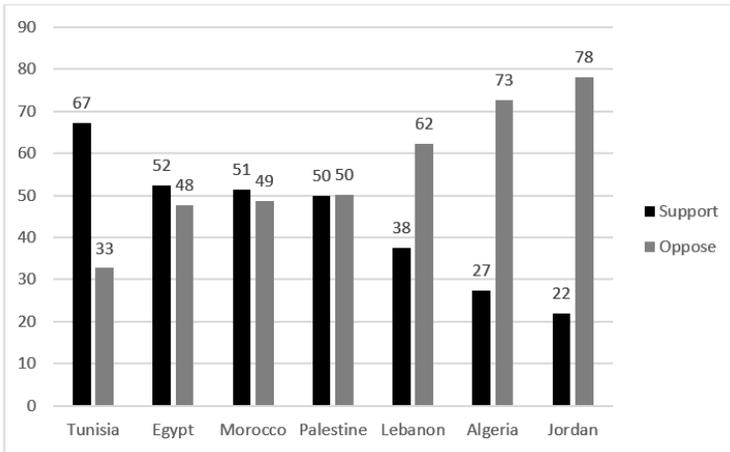
Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 1-3. For the question wording, see Figure 1.

### *Support for a Two-State Solution*

Wave 4, conducted in 2016, asked citizens whether they would support or oppose a two-state solution between the Israelis and the Palestinians. This slight difference in the question wording results in substantially higher support for recognizing Israel alongside a Palestinian state and shows how sensitive public opinion is to adjustments in question wording (Eichenberg, 2016).

As shown in Figure 4, support ranged from 67 percent in Tunisia—a country with consistently more conciliatory views toward Israel in surveys—to 22 percent in Jordan. In 2013, when using the older version of this question, only 13 percent of Tunisians thought that the Arab world should accept Israel if a two-state solution were reached with the Palestinians. But in 2016, 67 percent supported a two-state solution when asked with a slightly different frame. The question of framing is an important one not only to scholars of public opinion, but also to public diplomacy practitioners because it suggests both how difficult it can be to compare results across countries and time if the question wording changes, as well as how reporting on these more favorable results can be a tool to encourage peaceful attitudes toward intransigent conflicts.

**Figure 4. Attitudes about recognizing Israel (2016)**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 4. (Question wording differs in Waves 1-3).

Question wording: Do you support or oppose the solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel known as the two-state solution?

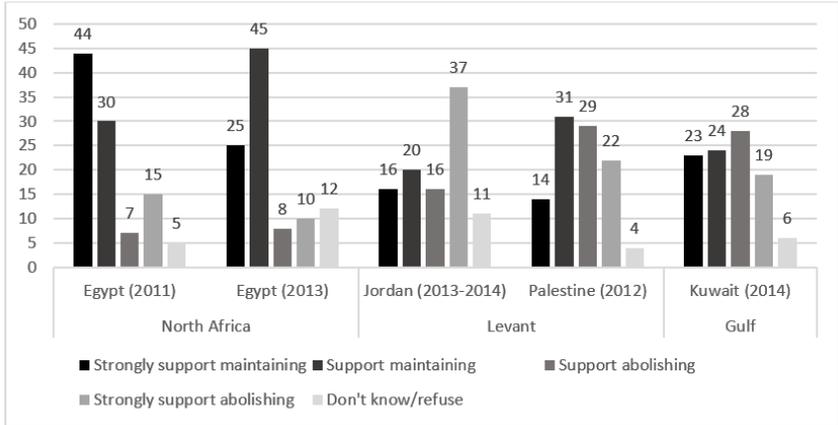
Other findings are notable. As of 2016, Palestinians are split about 50/50 on whether they support a two-state solution, and this is likely both because some reject Israel while others want a binational state or a federation with Jordan. Six years earlier, 71 percent of Palestinians wanted to abandon a two-state solution when given a binational state in the former British mandate of Palestine that would be a home for both Israelis as well as Palestinians as an alternative.<sup>13</sup> Yet, according to a PSR poll conducted in 2016,<sup>14</sup> two-thirds of Palestinians believe that the two-state solution is no longer viable. This illustrates the sensitivity of public opinion in Palestine to the failure of the Peace Process to result in tangible improvements to their lives or independence of a Palestinian state.

Moreover, very few Algerians—27 percent—accept a two-state solution, while only 22 percent of Jordanians do. Jordanians also reject the “Jordan” option (that is, incorporating the West Bank into Jordan), which is reported to be a non-starter for Jordan (Lynch, 2009). Two-thirds of Palestinians also reject a Palestinian-Jordanian confederation, according to a 2018 PSR poll.<sup>15</sup>

### *Arab-Israeli Peace Treaties*

Among those states that have concluded peace treaties with Israel, attitudes vary concerning whether to maintain or abolish the treaties. A majority of Egyptians favor maintaining the 1979 Egypt-Israel treaty (70 percent), but support declined between 2011 and 2013 (Figure 5). In 2011, 44 percent strongly supported maintaining the treaty, 30 percent supported, seven percent did not support, and 15 percent strongly did not support. By 2013, only 25 percent of Egyptians strongly supported maintaining the treaty, while 45 percent supported maintaining it—a slight decline in support.

**Figure 5. Attitudes about existing peace treaties with Israel**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3.

Question wording: All except Kuwait: “Do you: Strongly support maintaining the peace treaty with Israel; Support maintaining the peace treaty with Israel; Support abolishing the peace treaty with Israel; Strongly support abolishing the peace treaty with Israel.” Kuwait: “What’s your position on the peace treaties signed by some Arab countries with Israel? I strongly support maintaining peace treaties with Israel; I support maintaining the peace treaties with Israel; I support abolishing the peace treaties with Israel; I strongly support abolishing the peace treaties with Israel.”

However, compared to the 70 percent support in Egypt for their treaty, only 36 percent of Jordanians support maintaining their peace treaty with Israel; 45 percent of Palestinians support maintaining the Oslo Accord; and 47 percent of Kuwaitis believe that Egypt, Jordan and Palestine should maintain their treaties with Israel.

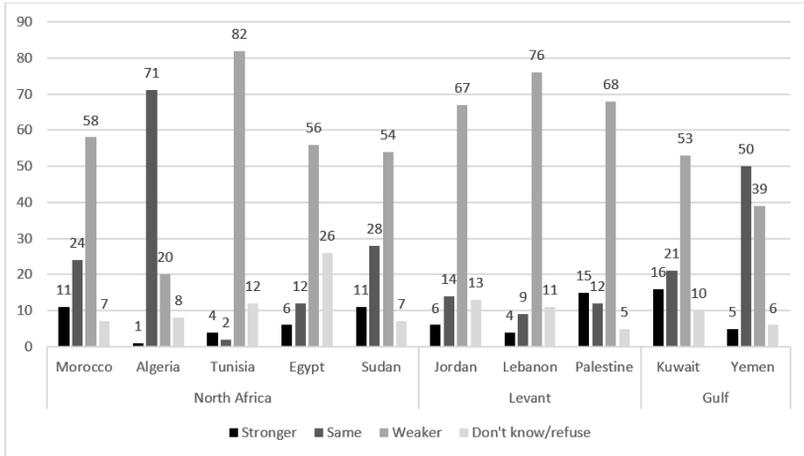
## **Economic and Security Relationships with Israel**

Third, to what extent do citizens believe their country should have an economic and security relationship with Israel? Many citizens disapprove of their country's present relationship with the Jewish state. In Tunisia in 2011, when asked about relations generally with Israel, 78 percent desired weaker relations, while five percent desired for it to remain the same; three percent said it should become stronger and 13 percent did not know. In the later wave, this question was asked in more countries and specified economic versus security cooperation. Generally, North Africans desired weaker ties in those countries (Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt).

When asked about economic relations (Figure 6), 58 percent of Moroccans, 20 percent of Algerians, 82 percent of Tunisians (an increase from 78 in Wave 2, which asked about relations in general), and 56 percent of Egyptians wanted weaker ties with Israel. Only 20 percent of Algerians want weaker ties with Israel, but this may be in great part because those ties are extremely limited, because the Arab boycott of Israel is more strictly implemented in Algeria.

In the Levant, six percent of Jordanians, four percent of Lebanese and 15 percent of Palestinians wanted stronger economic relations with Israel, while 67 percent, 76 percent and 68 percent, respectively, wanted weaker relations. In the Gulf, citizens were more likely to want stronger economic relations with Israel. 16 percent of citizens in Kuwait and five percent in Yemen held this view, while 53 percent and 39 percent, respectively, wanted weaker relations.

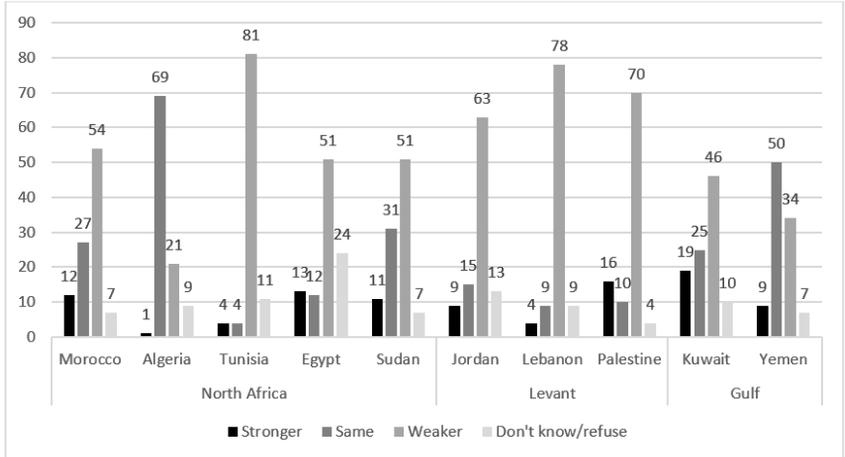
**Figure 6. Attitudes about economic relations with Israel**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3.

Question wording: “Do you prefer that future economic relations between your country and Israel: Become stronger than they were in previous years; Remain the same as they were in previous years; Become weaker than they were in previous years.”

Results for security relations are similar, but citizens were slightly more likely to support security cooperation than economic interaction with Israel (Figure 7). This is different from most other contexts (Libya for instance), where more people desired economic relations with Western countries over security relations (Benstead & Boduszynski, 2015). When asked about economic relations, 54 percent of Moroccans, 21 percent of Algerians, 81 percent of Tunisians, and 51 percent of Egyptians wanted weaker ties with Israel. In the Levant where this was asked, 63 percent of Jordanians, 78 percent of Lebanese, and 70 percent of Palestinians wanted weaker relations. In the Gulf, there was relatively high support for security cooperation with Israel—only 46 percent in Kuwait and 34 percent in Yemen wanted weaker ties with Israel.

**Figure 7. Attitudes about security relations with Israel**

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3.

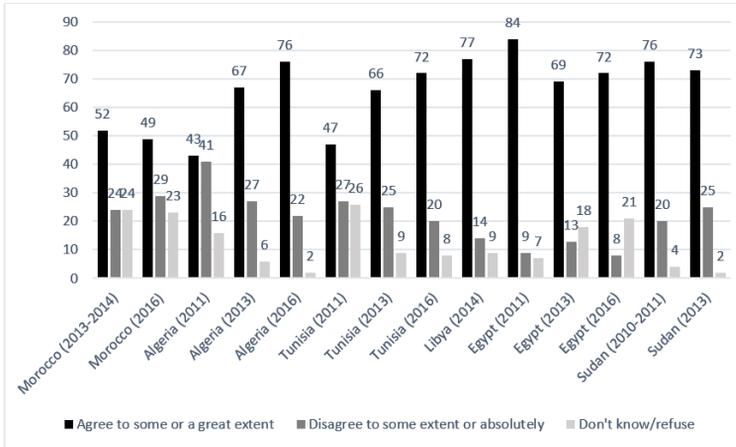
Question wording: "Do you prefer that future security relations between your country and Israel: See Figure 6 for response options."

### **Attitudes toward Western and Israeli Support and Interference**

Finally, how do Arab citizens regard Western influence in the region, especially as it relates to solving the Arab-Israeli conflict? The extent to which citizens see foreign interference as an obstacle to reform in their countries varies across countries and time, with perceptions of foreign interference increasing in Algeria and Tunisia but declining in Egypt and Sudan in ways that should also be explored in the literature (Figure 8). Perceptions of foreign interference increased in Algeria from 43 to 67 percent between 2011 and 2013—a large increase, possibly due to the Arab Spring. Similarly, this perception increased in Tunisia from 47 to 66

percent between 2011 and 2013, yet it declined from 84 to 69 percent in Egypt during those same years.

**Figure 8. Perceived foreign interference in local affairs (North Africa)**

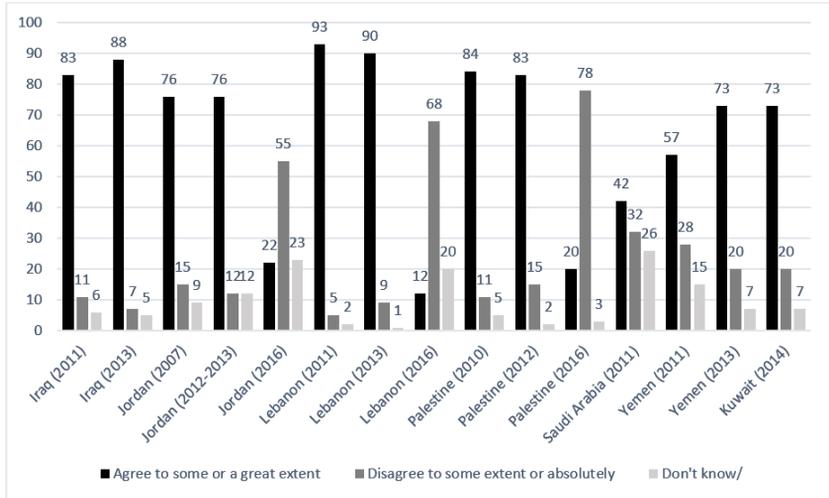


Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2-4. (Not asked in Wave 1 or 4).

Question wording: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Foreign interference is an obstacle to reform in your country. I agree to a great extent; I agree to some extent; I disagree; I absolutely disagree.”

Figure 9 shows attitudes about foreign interference in the Levant and the Gulf, where trends are mixed. For instance, perceived interference increased from 83 to 88 in Iraq and 57 to 73 percent in Yemen between 2011 and 2013. Yet, it remained the same in Jordan (76 percent in 2010 and 2012-2013) and Palestine (84 percent in 2010 and 83 percent in 2012), but it declined from 93 percent to 90 percent in Lebanon between 2011 and 2013.

**Figure 9. Perceived foreign interference in local affairs in the Levant and the Gulf**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2-3. (Not asked in Wave 1 or 4).

Question wording: See Figure 9.

Citizens were also asked which forms of support from the U.S. they welcome, or whether they oppose support, which they see as interference. Support for the U.S. not interfering at all was high: from a low of 26 percent of Moroccans who chose this in 2014 to a high of 79 percent of Algerians who chose this option in 2013 (Table 5-6 and Figure 10). Other countries, in which at least half of respondents chose this option, included Egypt, where 62 percent did so in 2016, and Libya in 2014, where 54 percent chose this option, and Tunisia in 2013, where 54 percent also chose this option. In countries where the question was asked in two waves, the sentiment that the U.S. should not interfere increased in Egypt, Morocco and Palestine—sometimes a sizeable amount.

**Table 5. Desired US assistance (North Africa)**

	Algeria		Egypt		Libya	Morocco		Tunisia	
	2013	2016	2013	2016	2014	2014	2016	2013	2016
Promote democracy	1%	9%	10%	4%	11%	13%	7%	8%	4%
Promote economic development	3%	11%	7%	7%	12%	25%	18%	26%	19%
Contain Iran	1%	-	1%	-	2%	3%	-	0%	-
Solve the Arab-Israeli conflict	7%	23%	15%	15%	11%	20%	27%	7%	19%
Promote women's rights	1%	8%	1%	2%	1%	5%	4%	1%	3%
The U.S. should not interfere	79%	44%	44%	62%	54%	26%	31%	54%	50%
Don't know/refuse	8%	5%	25%	10%	9%	8%	13%	4%	5%

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3-4. (Not asked in Wave 1-2).

Question wording: "What is the most positive policy that the US can follow in our region? Promote democracy; Promote economic development; Contain Iran; Solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict; Promote women's rights; The US shouldn't interfere."

Yet, there was an increase in demand for the U.S. to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in every country in which the question was asked twice, except for Lebanon, where the proportion who believed the most desired intervention by the U.S. would be to solve the conflict fell from 33 percent to 26 percent between 2013 and 2016 (Table 6). In contrast, in Algeria it increased from seven to 23 percent between 2013 and 2016; in Egypt, it remained consistent at 15 percent in 2013 and 2016; in Morocco it increased from 20 to 27 percent between 2014 and 2016; in Tunisia it increased from seven to 19 percent between 2013 and 2016; in Jordan it increased from 25 to 34 between 2013 and 2016; and, in Palestine it increased from 36 to 38 percent between 2014 and 2016. Only in Palestine did more respondents desire the U.S. to not intervene in the conflict than those who supported a U.S. role in peacemaking, while in Morocco and Jordan, nearly as many respondents desired the U.S. to intervene than who did not want interference.

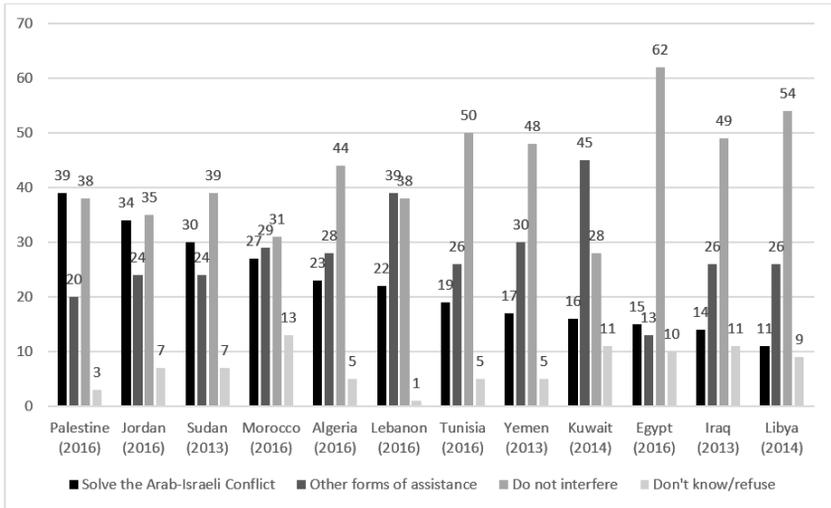
**Table 6. Desired U.S. assistance (Levant and Gulf)**

	Iraq		Jordan		Kuwait	Lebanon		Palestine		Sudan	Yemen
	2013	2013	2016	2014	2013	2016	2014	2016	2013	2013	
Promote democracy	8%	6%	7%	15%	5%	11%	4%	8%	9%	9%	
Promote economic development	9%	13%	15%	16%	5%	27%	11%	9%	10%	13%	
Contain Iran	8%	2%	-	9%	5%	-	2%	-	2%	4%	
Solve the Arab-Israeli conflict	14%	25%	34%	16%	31%	22%	39%	39%	30%	17%	
Promote women's rights	1%	1%	3%	5%	3%	2%	2%	4%	3%	4%	
The US shouldn't interfere	49%	36%	35%	28%	45%	38%	36%	38%	39%	48%	
Don't know/refuse	11%	17%	7%	11%	6%	1%	6%	3%	7%	5%	

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3-4. (Not asked in Wave 1-2). For the question wording, see Table 5.

There is reasonably high demand in the Arab region for the U.S. to support various development objectives. As shown in Figure 10, more than 50 percent of citizens in most countries in the most recent wave (i.e., 61 percent of Lebanese, 61 percent of Kuwaitis, 59 percent of Palestinians, 58 percent of Jordanians, 56 percent of Moroccans, 54 percent of Sudanese, 51 percent of Algerians) wanted the U.S. to support their countries through addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict or another form of support. But in Tunisia, this support was welcomed only by 45 percent of citizens while in Egypt, it was welcomed only by 40 percent of citizens. In Libya, only 37 percent wanted support. This suggests that transitional countries are least eager for foreign interference. Many citizens do wish to have U.S. development support, but listening sessions are needed to better understand the forms of support that are welcomed. And in some types of countries—namely transitional countries—this support may be generally less welcomed.

**Figure 10. Desired U.S. assistance**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 3-4. (Not asked in Wave 1-2). For the question wording, see Table 5.

*Threats to Stability*

Many Arab citizens see Israel as a threat to stability in their country. In Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt and Palestine, Israel was seen as the biggest threat. Moroccans identified "Other" (unspecified) and Tunisia identified "Libya" as the biggest threat to stability in their country (Table 7). The proportion who identified Israel as the biggest threat ranged from five percent in Tunisia to 75 percent in Palestine. Yet, the extent to which citizens see Israel as a threat does not correlate with their distance from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only five percent of Tunisians see Israel as the biggest threat to their country, with 65 choosing Libya instead, a response choice that was unavailable in the other countries. Only 22 percent of Moroccans believed that Israel

was the biggest threat to their country, with more than half (56 percent) selecting the other (unspecified) category. 32 percent of Jordanians and 45 percent of Lebanese saw Israel as the greatest threat, below Syria, which was selected by 21 and 20 percent, respectively. While further from Israel, but consistently with other research on boycotting of U.S. products, forty percent of Algerians see Israel as the biggest threat, while 29 percent saw the U.S. as the biggest threat. 66 percent of Egyptians and 75 percent of Palestinians believed that Israel is the biggest threat.

**Table 7. Threats to stability of one's country (2016)**

	Tunisia	Morocco	Jordan	Lebanon	Algeria	Egypt	Palestine
US	15.8%	8.6%	5.6%	13.0%	28.7%	20.9%	18.6%
Israel	5.0%	21.6%	32.0%	44.7%	40.1%	65.6%	74.6%
Iran	2.4%	8.3%	17.5%	10.7%	5.5%	3.5%	2.2%
Turkey	0.9%	0.1%	-	0.3%	0.4%	3.9%	0.6%
EU	3.3%	0.6%	-	0.4%	9.4%	0.4%	0.4%
KSA	1.1%	0.6%	0.2%	5.6%	4.1%	0.5%	1.2%
Syria	0.9%	3.1%	21.4%	19.7%	2.2%	0.1%	0.9%
Russia	0.7%	0.9%	1.2%	0.7%	0.4%	0.2%	0.8%
Other	5.3%	56.1%	22.1%	4.9%	9.3%	5.1%	0.7%
Libya	64.9%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (Not asked in Wave 2-4).

Question wording: What country poses the greatest threat to stability in your country?

The U.S. was seen by most respondents as deserving the blame for creating Da'esh, but Israel was also considered at fault by many (Table 8). In an open-ended question, Israel was sometimes seen as responsible for creating Da'esh. At least 16 percent (i.e., in Tunisia) in every country thought

Israel was responsible and the proportion reached as high as 37 percent in Morocco, the only country in which this was the most common answer. At least 21 percent (i.e., in Lebanon) thought that the U.S. was responsible, and this was the most common answer in Algeria (38 percent), Jordan (33 percent), Palestine (62 percent), and Tunisia (53 percent). In Lebanon, “Other” was the most common answer, mentioned by 43 percent of respondents. Some respondents also volunteered answers such as social injustice, political exclusion and sectarian differences.

**Table 8. Party responsible for creating Da’esh (2016)**

	Algeria	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestine	Tunisia
US	38.0%	32.9%	20.9%	23.7%	62.0%	53.1%
KSA	5.7%	0.5%	13.1%	2.0%	2.1%	1.3%
Iran	3.9%	18.0%	3.9%	7.7%	2.6%	3.2%
Israel	25.9%	17.7%	17.7%	37.3%	18.6%	16.4%
Al-Qaeda	7.7%	0.4%	-	6.9%	5.1%	1.6%
Other GCC country	1.9%	0.1%	1.0%	2.4%	1.0%	2.4%
Russia	0.8%	0.9%	-	0.3%	0.6%	0.5%
Social injustice	4.5%	-	-	6.0%	3.5%	3.6%
Political exclusion	1.3%	-	-	0.4%	0.5%	1.0%
Sectarian differences	8.8%	1.9%	0.2%	9.9%	2.4%	2.4%
Other	1.4%	27.5%	43.2%	3.5%	1.6%	14.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

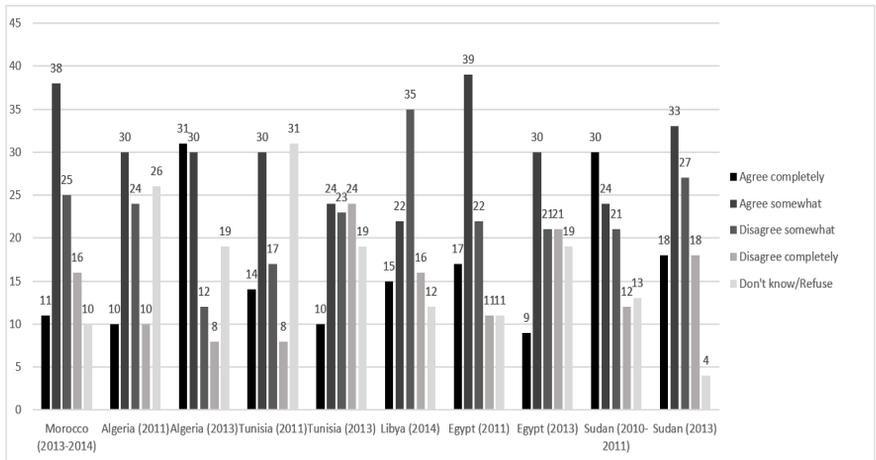
Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 4 (Not asked in Wave 2-4).

Question wording: Who or what do you think is responsible for creating Da’esh? (Open-ended; do not read responses)

### *Operation Against the U.S.*

When it comes to supporting armed operations against the U.S., the proportion of citizens who agree completely or agree somewhat varies across the region and across time (Figure 11). Support for militancy increased from 40 to 61 percent in Algeria between 2011 and 2013, while declining in Tunisia from 44 percent to 34 percent during those same years.

**Figure 11. Support for operations against the U.S. (North Africa)**

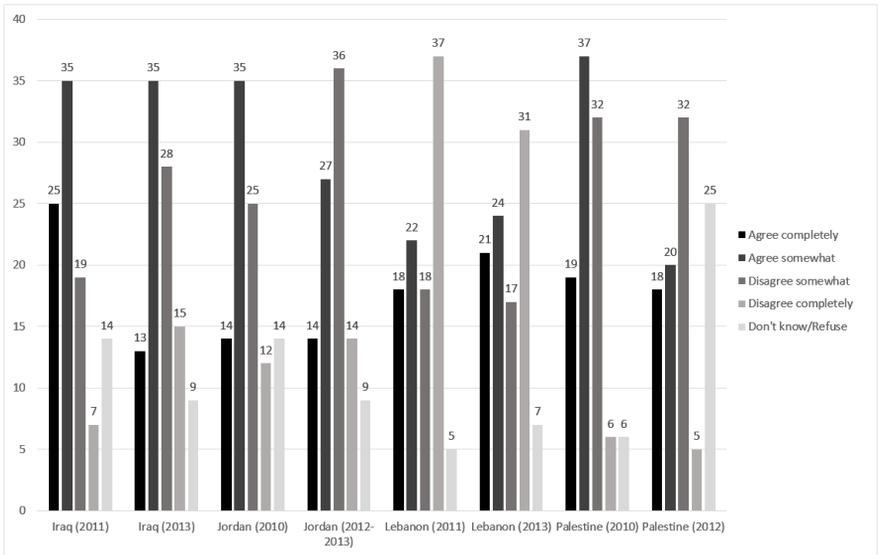


Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2-3. (Not asked in Wave 1 or 4).

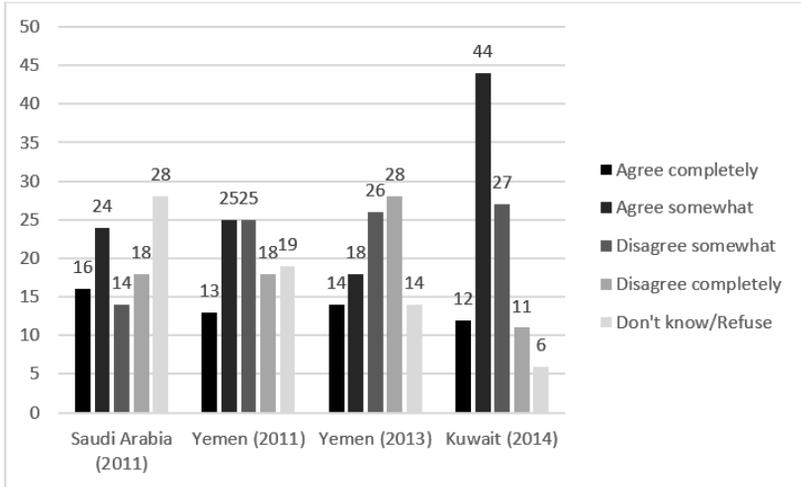
Question wording: "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The United States' interference in the region justifies armed operations against the United States everywhere. I strongly agree; I agree; I disagree; I strongly disagree."

Likewise, in the Levant and Gulf (Figure 12-13), support for armed operations has decreased in some countries but increased in others. The countries with the highest support for armed operations against the U.S. were Algeria (61 percent in 2013), Iraq (60 percent in 2013), and 56 percent in Kuwait (2014), Palestine (2010) and Egypt (2011). Those with the lowest support were Yemen (32 percent in 2013), Tunisia (34 percent in 2013), Libya (37 percent in 2014), Palestine (38 percent in 2012) and Egypt (39 percent in 2013). These trends suggest that anti-Americanism is highly dependent on specific domestic and international developments, and in any case, is highly complex, especially in the Arab world (Lynch, 2007; Benstead & Reif, 2017; Zoubir & Ait-Hamadouche, 2006).

**Figure 12. Support for operations against the U.S. (Levant)**



Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2-3. (Not asked in Wave 1 or 4). For the question wording, see Figure 11.

**Figure 13. Support for operations against the U.S. (Gulf)**

Source: Arab Barometer, Wave 2-3. (Not asked in Wave 1 or 4). For the question wording, see Figure 11.

## Conclusion and Implications

Arab citizens hold diverse views about the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflict and these views have shifted in unexpected ways. Four findings stand out. First, Arab-Israeli peace is far less important than domestic concerns to most Arab citizens, but a non-negligible proportion of Jordanians see the conflict as among the top two most important problems faced by their country. This suggests that the Jordanian government is justified in their concern about the instability that could arise from policies that are not well aligned with public opinion. But it also suggests that Jordanians would welcome efforts to recognize a Palestinian state in the context of a peace agreement. For

U.S. public outreach efforts in the region, it also suggests an opportunity for external actors to listen to Arab citizens about their concerns and to find ways to address them. Jordanians were relatively more welcoming of a U.S. role in peacemaking; 34 percent wanted the U.S. to have a role in this area, while 24 percent wanted other forms of support, and 35 percent did not want the U.S. to interfere.

Second, support for recognizing Israel if a two-state solution is reached with the Palestinians increased in some countries between 2006 and 2013 and decreased in others. Declining support for recognizing Israel occurred in democracies and North African countries—that is, in Lebanon, Iraq and North Africa, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt—but increased in Sudan, Jordan, Palestine and Yemen. This suggests that democracy does not necessarily lead to a willingness to accept a peace treaty. As the Arab world becomes more democratic, citizens may express greater discontent about the situation in Palestine. Greater civil rights may also lessen preference falsification in surveys and lead to higher rates of reporting of disapproval toward Israeli policy (Benstead, 2018b).

Third, since 2011, there is a widespread decline in support for existing agreements with Israel. Support declined in Egypt for maintaining the Egypt-Israel treaty, though a majority still support maintaining it. Fewer than half of Palestinians and Jordanians support maintaining the Oslo Accords and the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty.

Finally, Arab citizens widely see external interference as a problem—and many blame the U.S. and Israel for creating Da'esh. In some types of countries—namely transitional countries (including Tunisia, Libya and Egypt)—U.S. involvement appears to be least welcomed. In other countries, many citizens do wish to have U.S. development

support, but listening sessions are needed, given the variance in the types of development priorities demanded. Yet support for the U.S. to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict increased since 2011 in several countries. While this may seem contradictory, it highlights the inherent ambivalence in public opinion toward complex political issues and the great perceived need to address the failures of the Oslo Accords to lead to Palestinians statehood.

Arab citizens' mixed and generally deteriorating views of their relationship with Israel—coupled with evidence of increased demand for a solution with the assistance of the U.S. in some countries—is striking. But it is not new. The effective end to the Oslo Peace Process and continuation of Israeli settlement building and Palestinians' loss of land has long-led to a confusing period in which a two-state solution appears less and less viable, and yet the status quo is unsustainable. Lynch found in 2009 that Jordanians, “emphasized strongly that the time for listening was coming to an end and that they hoped to see the U.S. begin putting forward proposals. They all said that they did not want another “peace process” which would waste years without tangible change—they want a quick push to peace negotiations with clear, enforceable benchmarks.”

At the same time, an important caveat is a change in public opinion about the role of the U.S. in the peace process after the U.S. moved its embassy to Jerusalem. In 2017, more than 90 percent view the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as a threat to Palestinian interests. A majority does not trust Trump's peace intentions nor those of the U.S.' Arab allies and supports a return to an armed intifada.<sup>16</sup> An overwhelming majority of Palestinians reject an American role in the peace process as of 2018, two years after the last Arab Barometer was conducted.<sup>17</sup> 90 percent of Palestinians view the Trump Administration as biased in favor

of Israel. And despite the ending of U.S. aid to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the PA, 60 percent oppose the resumption of contacts with the administration and a majority expects U.S. efforts to fail in shutting down UNRWA.<sup>18</sup>

Once the fifth wave of the Arab Barometer is implemented, it will be possible to assess how these developments shape Arab views on recognition of Israel. The timing of the survey administration may also straddle key developments and allow for a natural experiment. Yet rising Arab discontent does not mean that peace efforts would be fruitless. Public diplomacy is needed more than ever to understand and acknowledge the extent of Arab opposition to U.S. policies to more urgently seek opportunities to use direct diplomacy to find a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Another caveat is that the question in the Arab Barometer on the U.S. role in peacemaking did not ask about other actors who would likely participate in negotiations, such as other Quartet members (UN, EU, and Russia). More research should examine whether Arab citizens' views of peacemaking depend on which negotiating partners lead the efforts. This is especially important as more recent surveys suggest that Palestinians see the Trump administration as biased and oppose the U.S. moving its embassy to Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

This article extends the literature on public opinion by illustrating the impact of question wording on the conclusions that researchers draw (e.g., in relation to whether to accept Israel) when asking about complex issues. For survey methodologists and comparative politics scholars, changes in question wording are problematic for making comparisons across space and time. Still, we know that many citizens are likely ambivalent and conflicted (Zaller & Feldman, 1992; Zaller, 1992; Eichenberg, 2016) and

this means that the findings are highly sensitive to question wording. This is most concerning when we only have one indicator for a survey topic, such as the desire for the U.S. to be involved in peacemaking. More questions are needed on this point with more actors and a clear, direct way of asking the question that does not give respondents a long list of possible alternative response options may reduce measurement error.

For scholars of Middle East politics as well, evidence for a growing divide in public opinion trends in democratic and authoritarian cases is important. Support for recognizing Israel declined in North Africa—the region affected by the Arab Spring transitions in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt—and in two democracies: Lebanon and Iraq. This may suggest that increasing political mobilization and opportunities for more openly sharing one’s views on foreign policy may lead to more contestation against pro-Israel policies in transitional countries than in more closed political contexts. While this is not entirely surprising, it offers a realistic view of democratization as an unstable and non-linear process that affects not only domestic politics, not also regional and international relations. And it shows that a one-size-fits all approach to the region is misguided without tailored public diplomacy efforts in different countries.

At the same time, the large variation across countries and time invite more detailed studies to better understand why citizens hold the views that they do about outside actors, including Israel and the U.S. Researchers should improve question formats that use long lists of response options such as the one highlighted here, which asks respondents to select from a list of ways that they would like the U.S. to support development. These questions may place a high cognitive burden on the respondent and be susceptible to primacy or recency effects, leading to measurement error. For public

diplomacy practitioners, the rise in demand across both authoritarian as well as democratic countries for the U.S. to try to help resolve the conflict should encourage efforts to do just that, regardless of how recent developments to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem have affected opinion. Additionally, it is necessary to continue to ask these questions over time and to better understand what complex array of considerations and experiences shape views on Israel, peace and other international considerations.

This article also has implications for public diplomacy specialists by illustrating how public opinion research can be used to identify overlapping interests and promoting peace. While the data show relatively low levels of support across the region for a two-state solution, they also highlight the high degree to which many citizens desire a solution to the conflict. And they show that many Arab citizens are willing to accept Israel if a two-state solution is reached. These insights could be useful for public diplomacy specialists seeking to engage in discussions with citizens and leaders about the benefits of pursuing a peace agreement.

If extra-regional contributions to peacebuilding and democratic consolidation are to be meaningful and effective, then the population must be receptive. Public outreach on security, economic and political development policy must be a two-way street of presenting to and hearing from foreign publics. Engagement must be complemented by more than mere acquiescence by the local population, but by an active effort to listen to and offer the forms of assistance and support that are seen as helpful by Arab citizens. The types of support that the population desires must also be taken into account. Educational exchange, trade, and investment are pathways for positive engagement that are widely welcomed by Arab citizens.

When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, these efforts are key. Despite diminishing support for recognizing Israel in some countries, an increasing willingness by others to recognize Israel—and increased demand for a U.S. role in peacemaking in some Arab countries before the U.S. moved its embassy to Jerusalem—should encourage engagement while the window of opportunity is open. Recognition of the extent to which Arab citizens are willing to accept Israel if concessions are made should serve as a resource in public diplomacy efforts and strength diplomats' resolve to work for a settlement.



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## Endnotes

1. Libya too held a free and fair election in 2012, but the security vacuum and resumption of the civil war undermined the government's ability to govern and organize elections. But some leaders since 2011 have stated that Libya could recognize Israel.
2. Public diplomacy is "a country's efforts to create and maintain relationships with publics in other societies to advance policies and actions" (Melissen & Wang, 2019, pp. 1).
3. Algeria did not experience substantial regime change during the Arab Spring, but consistently has some of the least conciliatory views toward Israel due to its colonial occupation by France and revolutionary regime that opposes colonialism in all forms.
4. PSR poll 66, December 7-10, 2017.
5. Area A includes Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jericho and 80 percent of Hebron.
6. One study examines U.S. and European views toward the Arab world and the Arab-Israeli conflict. See (Boer, 1983).
7. Other surveys have been conducted by individual scholars in the intervening years before the World Values Survey was first conducted, but these surveys received limited coverage in the scholarly literature and the data are not, in general, publicly available.
8. The Green Line is not an international border but has become a *de facto* starting point for discussions between Israel and Palestine about the borders of a future Palestine state. Various peace plans have proposed swaps of land by Israel and the Palestinians across the Green Line. Incursions of Israeli settlements, roads, or the border wall beyond the Green Line are also widely regarded as a political loss of land for the Palestinians. The final borders of the Israeli and Palestinian state are subject to negotiation under the terms

of the Oslo Accords, but the failure of the Peace Process to achieve a final status agreement under the Oslo Framework now twenty years on has led to widespread disillusionment with the framework, and for many, with the two-state solution itself. A majority of Palestinians now say that they support a one-state solution, in the form of a bi-national state, while many supporters of Hamas call for the dissolution of Israel and a return to Arab, Muslim control over all of the territory.

9. Detailed information on survey dates, number of respondents, and sampling procedures is available at <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>.
10. Data weighted for all analyses of Waves 2 and 3 of the Arab Barometer.
11. Data not shown in a table.
12. Theorists propose two mechanisms through which public opinion can shape foreign policy. First, through sanctioning, citizens shape foreign policy by threatening to leaders who make policies which citizens oppose. Second, through the selection mechanism, citizens vote for and support politicians and parties that support their views (Tomz, Weeks, & Yarhi-Milo, 2017)
13. PSR poll 37, September 3-October 2, 2010.
14. PSR poll 62, December 8-10, 2016.
15. PSR poll 69, September 5-8, 2018.
16. PSR poll 66, December 7-10, 2017.
17. PSR poll 67, March 14-17, 2018.
18. PSR poll 69, September 5-8, 2018.
19. PSR poll 66, December 7-10, 2017.

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