

China ranks high as development model for Tunisia but trails France, U.S. in perceived influence

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 117 | Imen Mezlini

Summary

Tunisians look up to China, the world's largest economy, as a model for the future development of their country but consider it far less influential in Tunisia than France and the United States, according to Afrobarometer survey results.

Public perceptions are divided as to whether China's economic and political influence on Tunisia is positive or negative. As for China's economic development assistance, a plurality (47%) of Tunisians say it helps meet the country's needs, while about half as many (19%) disagree.

Results of the 2015 survey show that China's image in Tunisia is mainly formed by economic factors, such as the low cost and low quality of products.

These findings are relevant as Tunisia confronts serious economic problems and looks for foreign investment to revive the economy.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being released. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

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

Key findings

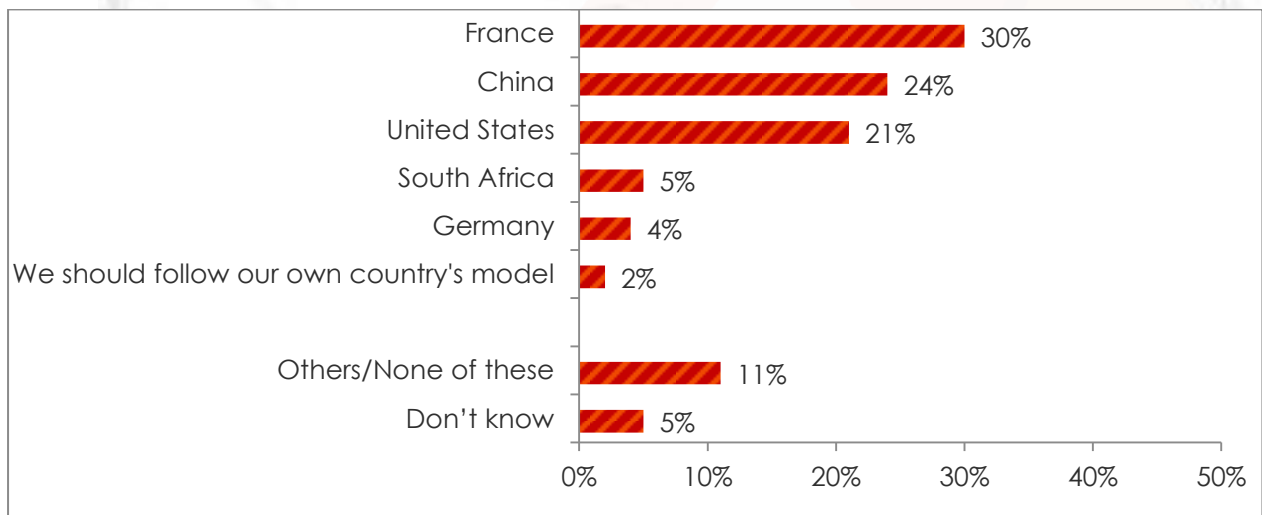
- China ranks as the second-most-popular model, after France, for the future development of Tunisia.
- While China is perceived as one of the best models for their country's development, Tunisian citizens consider China far less influential than France and the United States.
- Half (50%) of Tunisians say that China has "a lot" of influence on their country's economy. Tunisians are about evenly divided as to whether this influence is positive (42%) or negative (39%).
- A plurality (47%) of Tunisians say that China's economic development assistance helps meet their country's needs, while only 19% disagree.

- The main factors that contribute to a good image of China in Tunisia are economic, led by the low cost of Chinese products.
- The quality of Chinese products is the main factor that conveys a bad image of China in Tunisia.

China as development model

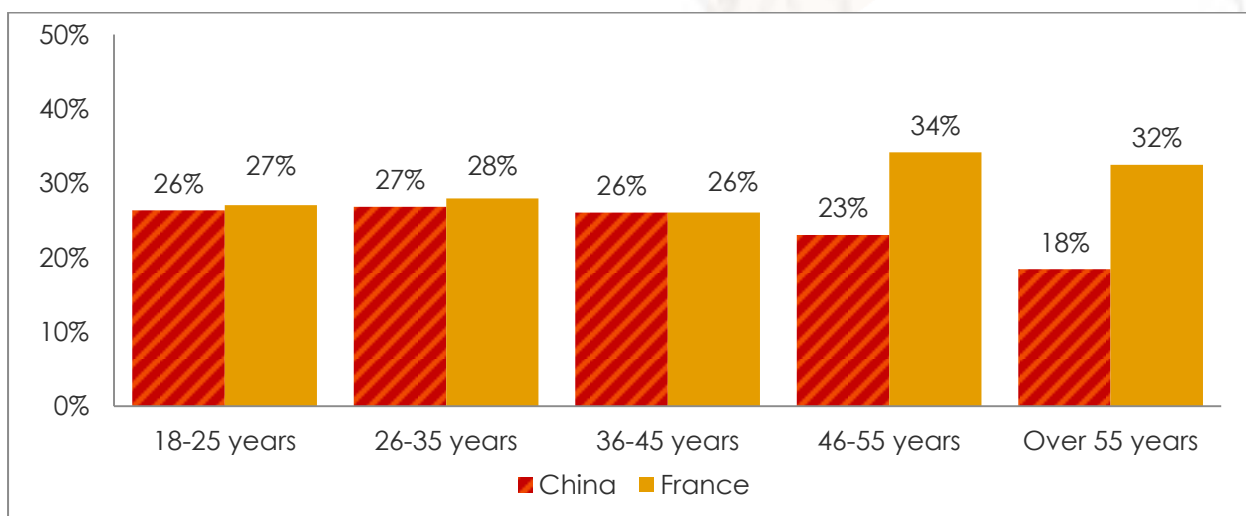
Tunisians are attracted by China's development model: About one-quarter (24%) of them rank China as their top model for the future development of Tunisia. This places China in second place, after France and ahead of the United States (Figure 1). Younger Tunisians are more likely to choose China as a development model than their elders (aged 46 years and over), who prefer France as a model (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Best model for future development | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country?*

Figure 2: Best model for future development | by age | Tunisia | 2015

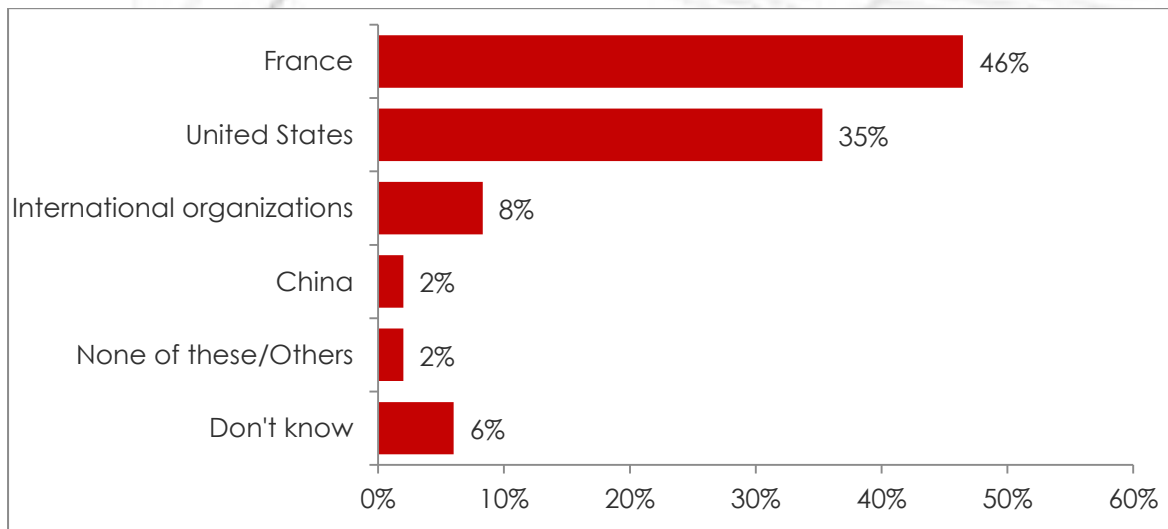


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country?*

China's influence on Tunisia

While China is considered one of the best models for the future development of Tunisia, only 2% of Tunisians perceive China as the most influential foreign entity in Tunisia. France is considered most influential in Tunisia (cited by 46% of respondents), followed by the United States (35%) and "international organizations" (8%) (Figure 3).

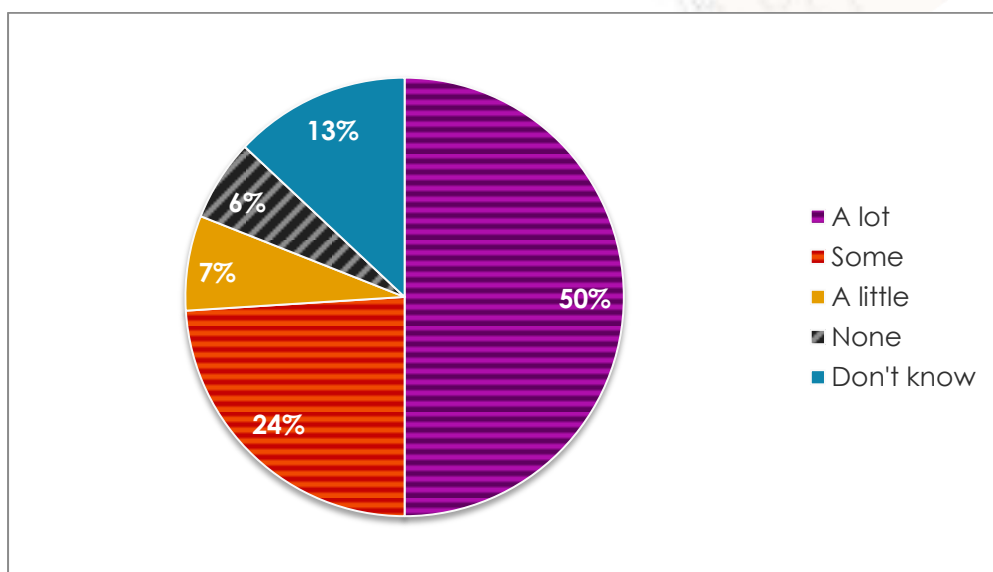
Figure 3: Most influential foreign entity | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following do you think has the most influence on Tunisia?

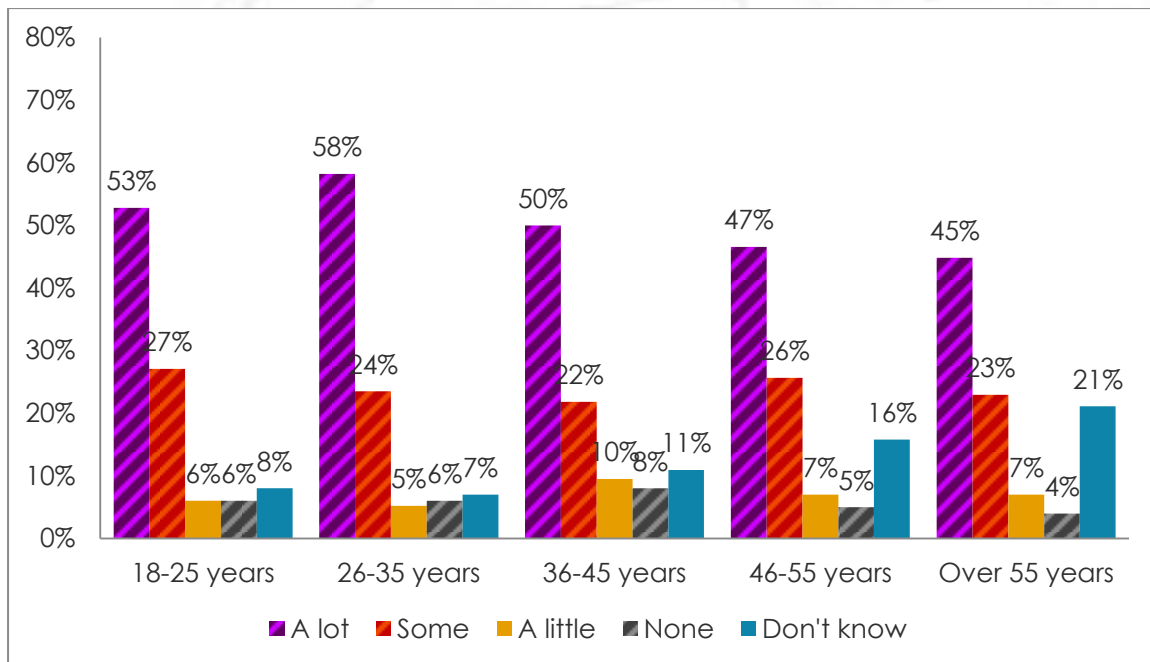
Even so, about three-fourths of Tunisians say that China's economic activities do exert "a lot" (50%) or "some" (24%) influence on Tunisia's economy (Figure 4). This perception is more pronounced among younger citizens: 59% of respondents aged 18-29 years describe China's economic influence as "a lot," compared to less than 50% of those aged 40 and above (Figure 5).

Figure 4: China's influence on Tunisia's economy | 2015



Respondents were asked: How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Tunisia have on our economy?

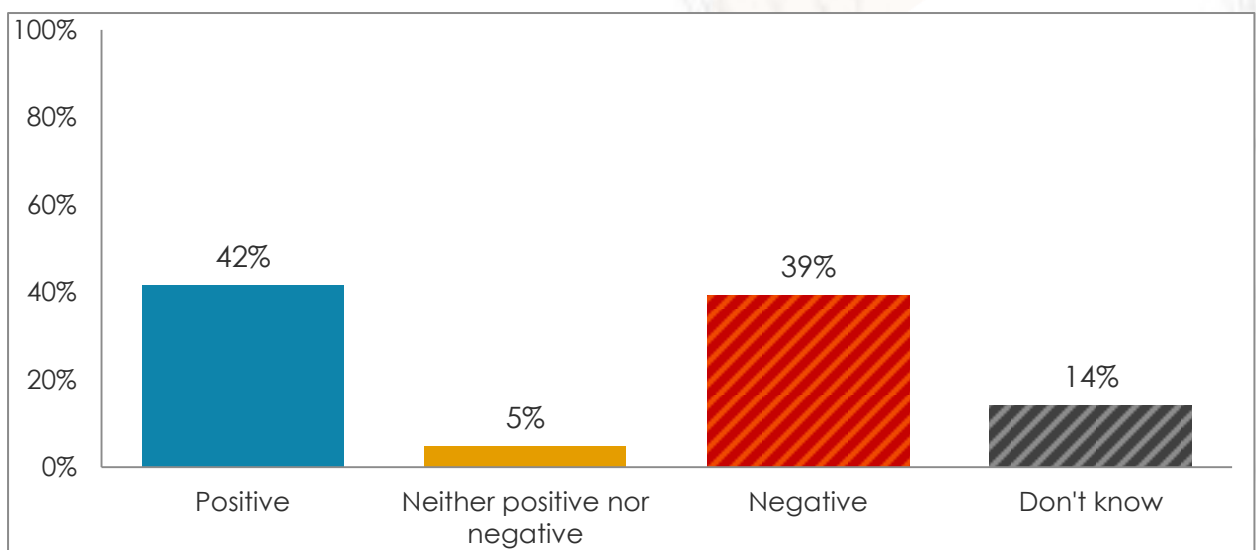
Figure 5: China's influence on the economy | by age | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: How much influence do you think China's economic activities in Tunisia have on our economy?

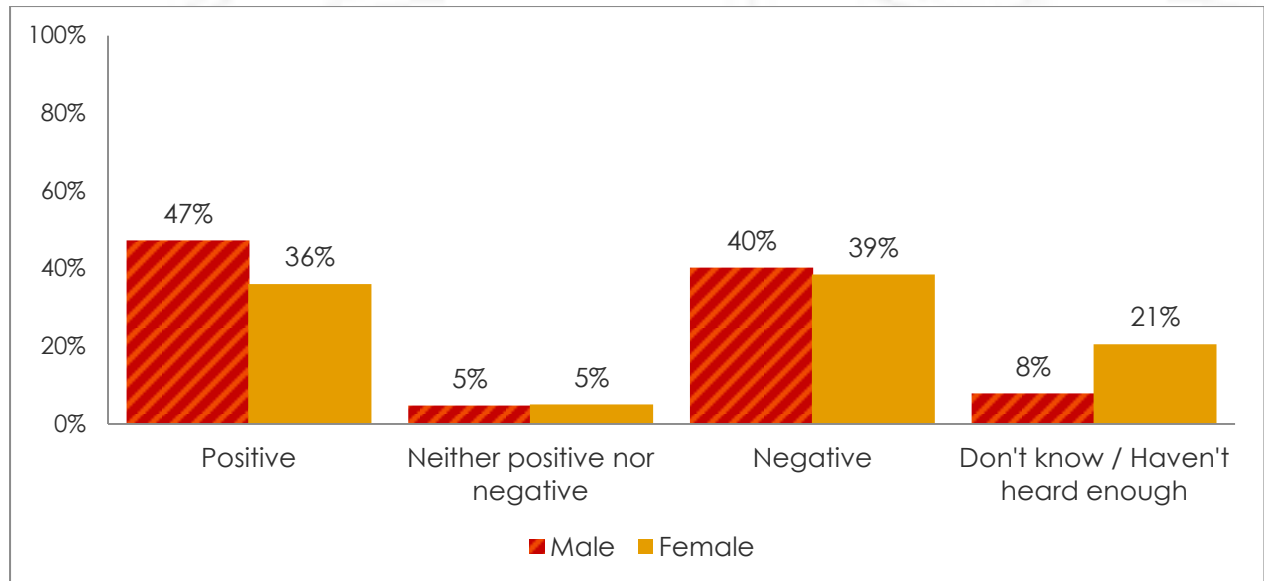
When it comes to the quality of China's economic and political influence, Tunisians are about evenly divided: 42% say China has a "somewhat" or "very" positive influence, while 39% describe China's influence as "somewhat" or "very" negative (Figure 6). Men are more likely than women to see China's influence as positive, 47% vs. 36%, while women are more than twice as likely as men to say they "don't know" (Figure 7). The positive perception is more pronounced among younger citizens, ranging from 47% among 18- to 25-year-olds to 39% among those aged 46 and older (Figure 8).

Figure 6: Perceptions of China's economic and political influence | Tunisia | 2015



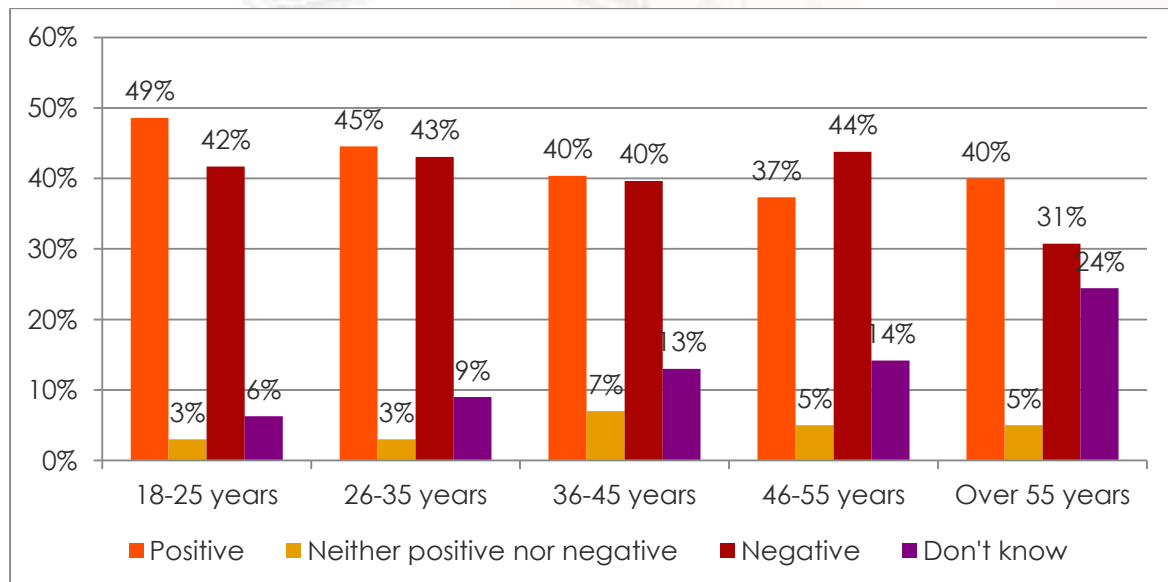
Respondents were asked: In general, do you think that China's economic and political influence on Tunisia is mostly positive, or mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 7: Perceptions of China's economic and political influence | by gender | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In general, do you think that China's economic and political influence on Tunisia is mostly positive, or mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Figure 8: Perceptions of China's economic and political influence | by age | Tunisia | 2015

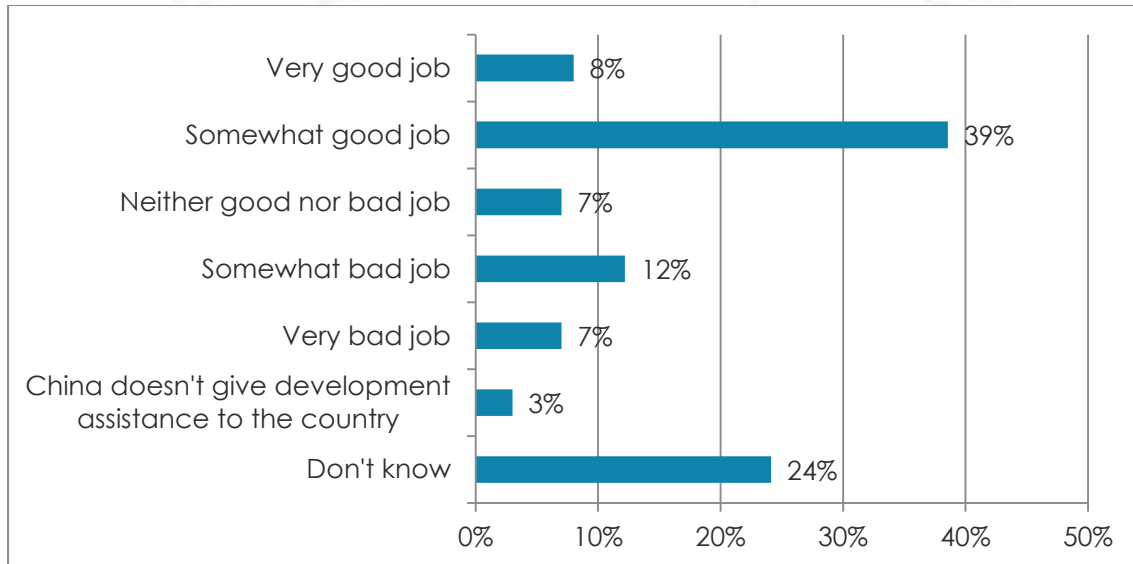


Respondents were asked: *In general, do you think that China's economic and political influence on Tunisia is mostly positive, or mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

China's assistance to Tunisia

When asked how well China's development assistance helps meet Tunisia's needs, Tunisians are far more likely to say it does a "somewhat" or "very" good job (47%) than a "somewhat" or "very" bad job (19%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Does China's development assistance help meet Tunisia's needs? | Tunisia | 2015

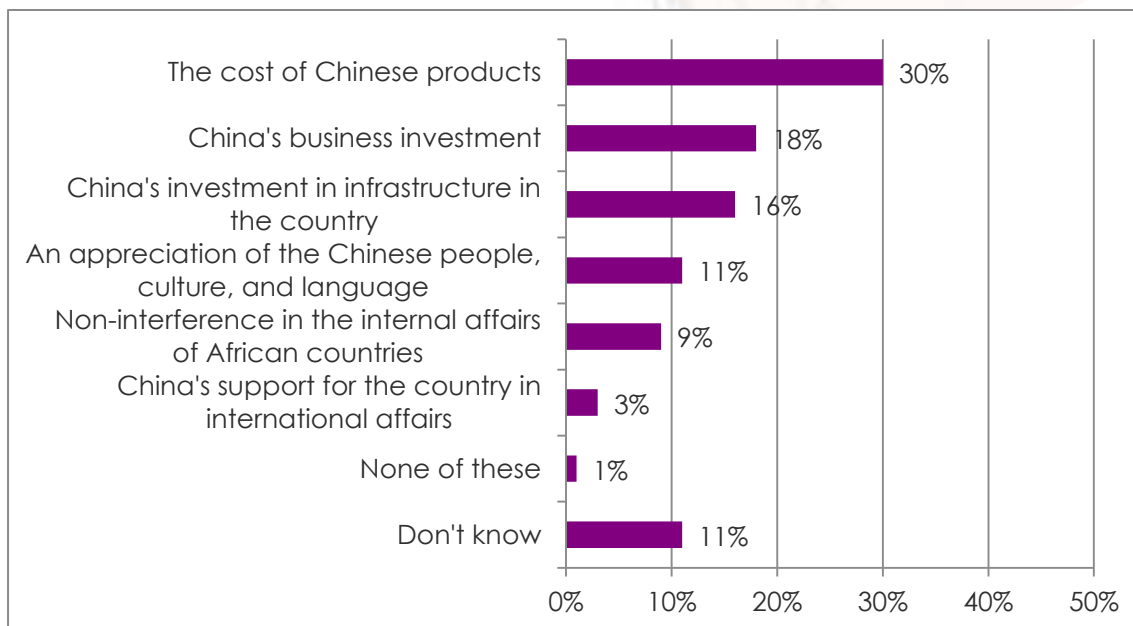


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, does China's economic development assistance to Tunisia do a good job or a bad job of meeting the country's needs?*

China's image in Tunisia

The main factors contributing to a good image of China in Tunisia are economic, led by the low cost of Chinese products (cited by 30% of respondents), China's business investment in the country (18%), and China's investments in Tunisia's infrastructure (16%) (Figure 10). About one in 10 respondents mention an appreciation of Chinese people and culture (11%) and China's non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries (9%).

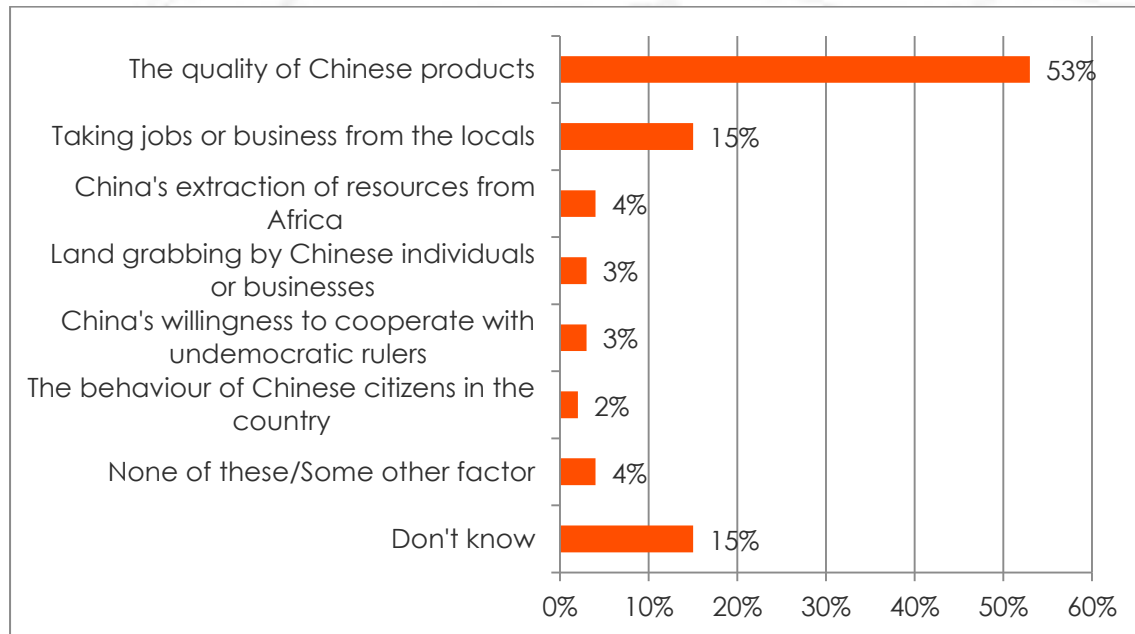
Figure 10: Factors contributing to a good image of China | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following factors contributes most to positive images of China in Tunisia?*

On the other hand, a majority (53%) of Tunisians cite the quality of Chinese products as a factor that shapes China's bad image in Tunisia (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Factors contributing to a bad image of China | Tunisia | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following factors contributes most to negative images of China in Tunisia?

To further explore these data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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