



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



ArabTrans

What do 'The People' Want? Citizens' Perceptions of Democracy, Development, and EU-MENA Relations in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, and Morocco in 2014

This document looks at how citizens of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, and Morocco viewed EU-MENA Relations in 2014 when the survey took place and what their attitudes are to the policies pursued by the EU with respect to their countries.

Focusing on North Africa, Jordan, and Iraq, the ARABTRANS project combines a cross-national public opinion survey carried out in 2014 with microdata, indexes, and other survey data to analyse trajectories of political, social and economic transformations before and after the 2010-2011 Arab Uprisings.

May 2016

INTRODUCTION

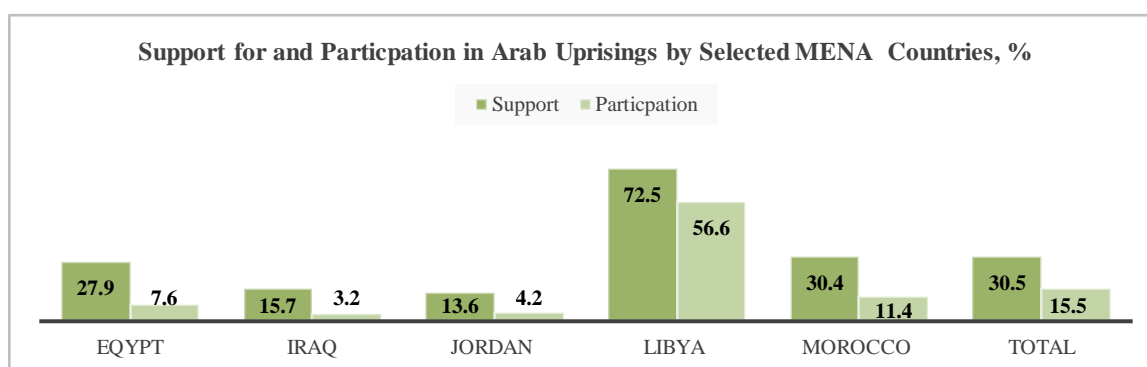
In 2010-11 an unprecedented wave of protests and demands for regime change spread across the MENA region following the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouaziz in Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, on December 17th, 2010. In the wake of this 'Arab Spring,' many called for a 'paradigm shift' in the EU's approach, including the then Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Commissioner, Štefan Füle, who stated: "The peoples of this region have taken a courageous stand to defend their rights and to introduce democracy and social reforms. The EU must rise to the challenge [...] it has often focused too much on stability [...] Now is the time to bring our interests in line with our values. Recent events in the South have proved that there can be no real stability without real democracy" (SPEECH/11/436; p. 1). However, the EU's substantive vision for both development and democratization remained unchanged, paying too little attention to socio-economic rights and inclusive economic development on the one hand and to politically sensitive civil and political rights (e.g. freedom to protest and freedom of association) on the other. This lack of responsiveness transpires from public opinion surveys conducted by the ARABTRANS project in Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, and Morocco in 2014. Specifically, it sheds light on what people's political demands are, what they understand by democracy, what they want governments to deliver, their attitudes to the EU, how they evaluate EU policies and how they think the Union can best support them. This research suggests populations are using 'thicker' conceptions of democracy, including social justice and economic rights as well as civil/political rights. In short, what they want is a 'decent society' in which there is economic security, in which they are recognised as full citizens, in which different groups work together and in which they are empowered to take control over their own lives. Failure to engage with the populations' demand for a better life risks undermining EU credibility as a normative actor and as a stabilising force in the region. By not responding fully to people's hopes the EU risks missing an opportunity to exert a stabilising influence in the region.

The Arab Uprisings and Citizens' Demands: Why People Protested and What Remains a Challenge

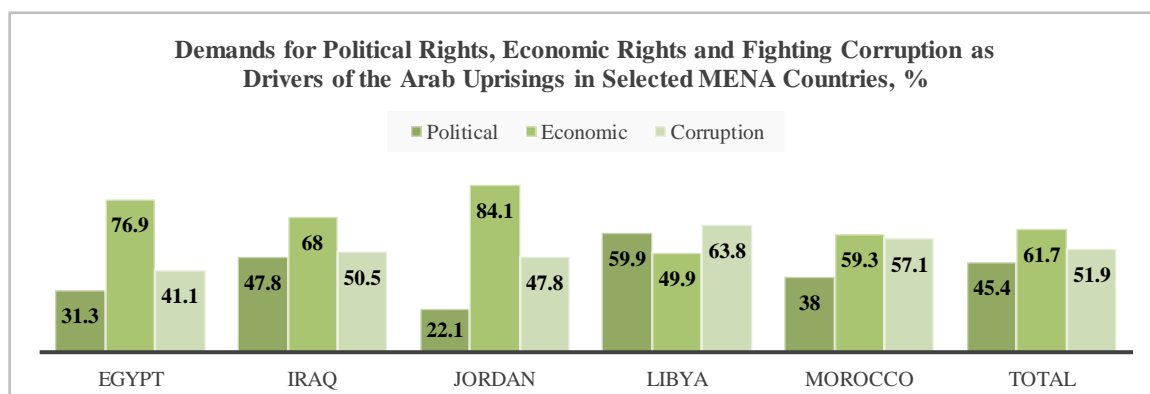
In the media and in scholarly literature, the Arab Uprisings ('Arab Spring') are presented as a spontaneous popular mobilisation of citizens demanding regime change. Frequently, these analyses also explicitly state or implicitly assume that what people were demanding was Western-style democracy, understood as free and fair elections and the rule of law alone. Much of this coverage also suggested that a significant proportion of citizens in the Arab Middle East supported the Uprisings even if they did not participate actively.

The 2014 Arab Transitions survey findings suggest a more complex picture in all these respects.

For a start, across the five countries surveyed, just under a third of respondents said they supported the Uprisings, although this varied from a low of 14% in Jordan to a high of 73% in Libya.

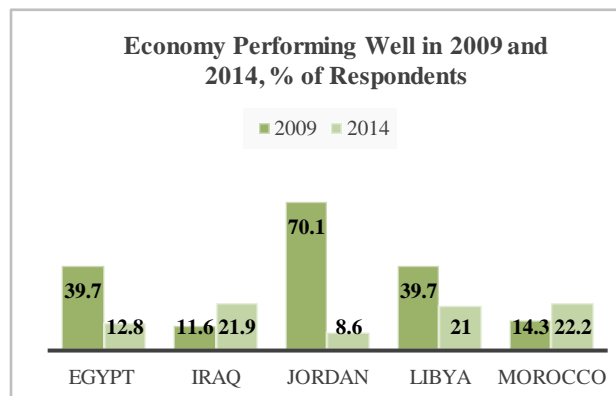
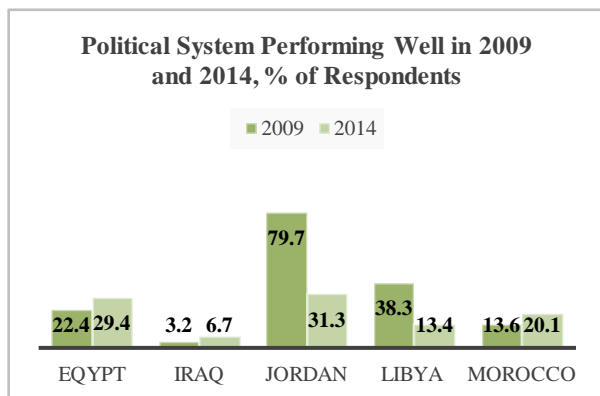


When asked what kinds of issues drove them to protest, people gave answers which can be grouped together based on whether they refer to civil-political rights, socio-economic rights, or corruption. These answers suggest that while civil-political rights are indeed important, socio-economic rights are also vital. Socio-economic rights are ones that people are entitled to under international conventions which all the countries governments have ratified, and which they were supposedly pursuing – not least with EU help. In this 2014 survey, people continued to see the same main challenges as facing their countries, namely those that stemmed from corrupt, self-seeking regimes unwilling or unable to deliver both socio-economic as well as civil-political rights. While there are differences between countries, it is clear that corruption and economic problems are seen as at least as important as the denial of political rights in driving people to protest. Over 60% of people thought that one of the two main factors behind the Uprisings was the demand for economic rights, specifically protest against economic problems and/or demand for better basic services. Fighting corruption was seen as a main factor by 52% of respondents, while less than half of all respondents thought that one of the two main drivers was to demand political rights, i.e. to oppose authoritarian leaders and/or to demand more political freedom.



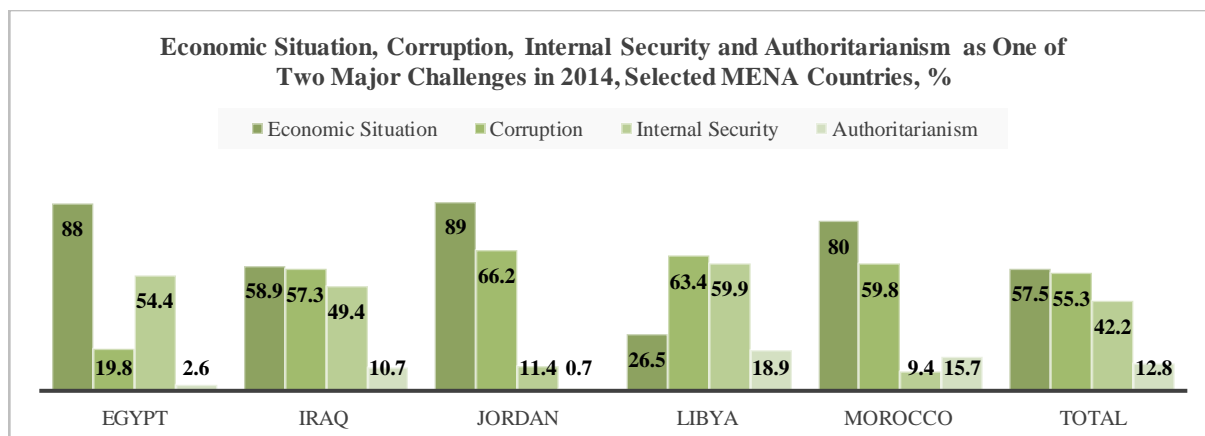
As far as their opinions of the Uprisings three years on are concerned, answers suggest that in respondents' eyes calls for regime change had in the main brought no positive outcomes, and few saw much hope for the future. This is perhaps not surprising, since uprisings by their nature bring a period of instability, including attempts by displaced leaderships to regain power. Nonetheless, both the political system and the national economy were judged to be performing even more poorly than they had been five years previously. Only

19% of respondents thought the political system was performing well in 2014, compared to 32% who said it had been doing well in 2009; 19% thought the economy was doing well in 2014, compared with 29% who thought it had been doing well in 2009. In addition, only a third of respondents thought that the political system or the economy would be performing well in five years' time, suggesting a considerable scepticism about the future. While there are differences between countries – in Morocco and Iraq respondents did actually see marginal improvement – the overall picture is that political and economic systems were perceived to be performing poorly by the populations they ought to be serving.



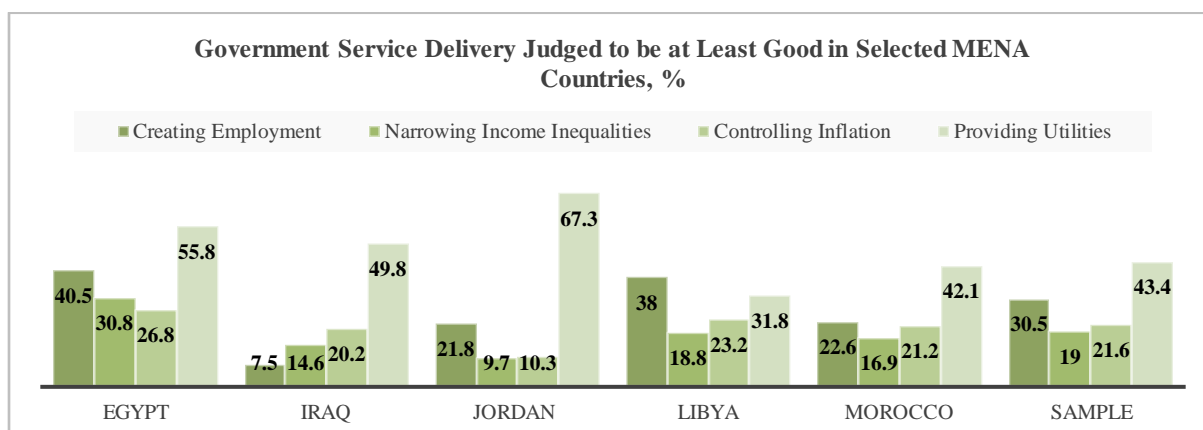
Ongoing Challenges: Corruption, Basic Services, Poverty, and Jobs

The survey also asked what people thought were the two main challenges facing their countries. Here, the economic situation and official corruption stand out, along with internal security. Across all countries, only a small minority see authoritarianism as one of the two main challenges, although the forms of authoritarianism in respondents' countries often involve a deep interconnection between political, economic, and security issues. Although each country displays a different situation, in Egypt, Morocco, and Jordan the economic situation was seen as the greatest challenge, in Iraq economy and security are virtually tied with corruption not far behind, while in Libya corruption and security outstrip both the economy and authoritarianism. The prominence of security in Iraq and Libya is not surprising, and the prominence of economic difficulties and of corruption underlines the continuing importance – and absence – of inclusive and equitable growth across the region.



When asked specifically about corruption, 81% of respondents thought it was a problem in state agencies, seen as self-serving and not responding to the legitimate demands of citizens. This varied from a high of 91% in both Morocco and Iraq to a relative low of 69% in Libya. Interestingly, in Egypt, although corruption was only mentioned as a major challenge by 20% of respondents, 87% nonetheless thought that corruption was a problem in state agencies. On average, only 20% of respondents thought their government was making a concerted effort to crack down on corruption, varying from a relative – but still modest – high of 31% in Egypt to a low of 8% in Iraq.

A similar picture emerges when people were asked about the delivery of services by governments. Here, people remain concerned about the government's record to control inflation, to reduce income inequalities, and to create employment. The provision of basic utilities by government was seen as somewhat better in 2014, although access to basic utilities is a human right and *all* residents, as rights holders, should have access to these, and in most cases MENA governments are still far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals.



A Lack of Trust in Institutions

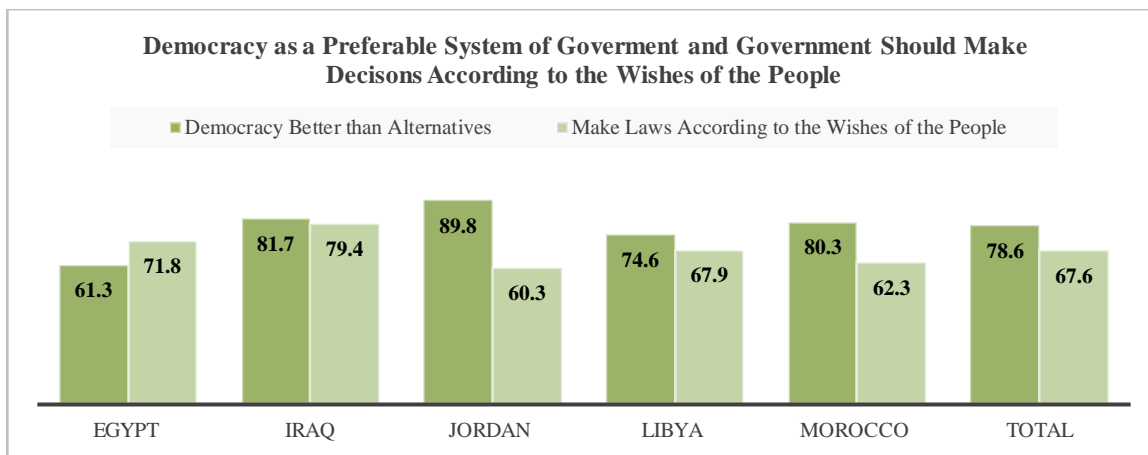
More worryingly, not only was government seen as not delivering what citizens wanted, but there was also a lack of confidence in other institutions – government, political organisations, the forces of law and order, and civil society more generally. In the sample as a whole, only one in twenty people said they trusted parliament, and only one in four trusted the Council of Ministers. Even fewer trusted political parties: just 13 per cent. Confidence varied by country, with as many as 31% of respondents trusting parliament in Libya but only 4% in Iraq, and 55% trusting the Council of Ministers in Egypt compared with just 18% in Iraq. While slightly higher, confidence in the police and the legal system was also low, 46% and 47% respectively overall, meaning that citizens could have no confidence that corrupt politicians and public officials would be held to account. Trust and confidence did vary by country: in Egypt and Jordan, for example, confidence in both the police and the courts was noticeably higher than in other countries, while few Iraqis expressing confidence in either of the two – 2.9% and 4.9% respectively.

In addition, people reported having poor access to impartial political information. They also said that they had little confidence in organisations that generally help to hold governments accountable and providing an independent voice. For example, taking all countries, only 1 respondent in 20 respondents had confidence in the press, 29% in civil society, and 31% in religious leaders. This suggests that none of these institutions were seen as being able to hold government to account, nor were they seen as representing citizens' views. While the levels of confidence varied by country, they were uniformly and worryingly low: the highest level of trust in the media was in Iraq with barely over one third, while a mere 14% trusted the media in Libya, which scored the lowest. The picture was much the same for civil society, with the highest level of confidence being in Egypt at just over a third, and the lowest being 17 per cent, in Iraq. Confidence in religious leaders was only marginally higher at 30 per cent, varying from a high of 51% in Iraq to a low of 19% in Libya.

What kind of Democracy and Political Regime do 'the People Want'?

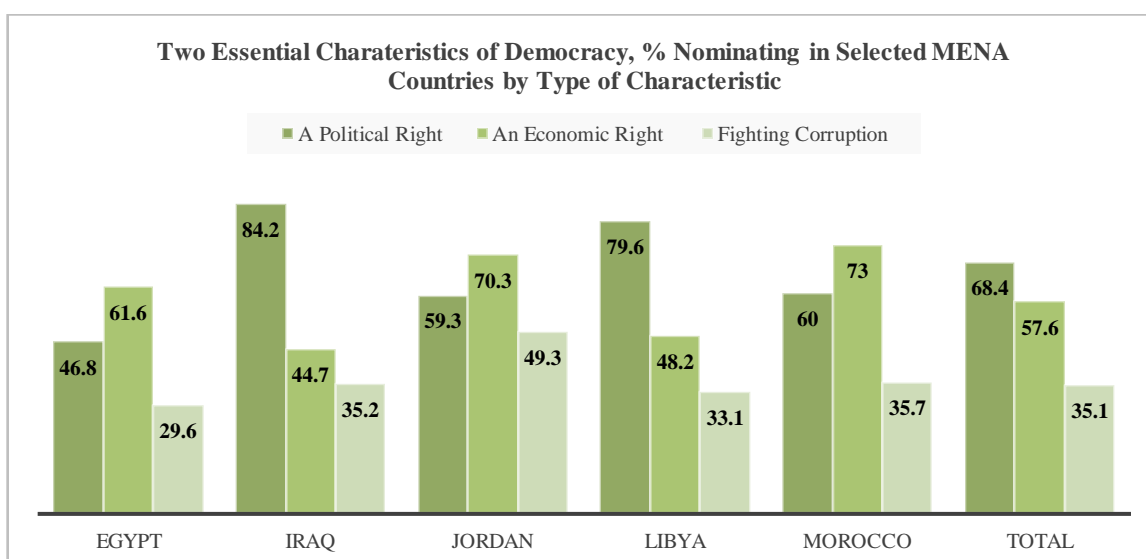
One of the most famous slogans of the Uprisings was *ash-sha'b yurid isqaat an-nizam*: the people want the downfall of the regime. But what did they want it to be replaced by? The Arab Uprisings were often portrayed as calls for removing particular dictators and installing a liberal form of democracy concentrating on aspects of democracy such as elections and political rights. While populations certainly protested against authoritarianism and called for civil and political rights, this is at best a partial vision of what populations called for and protested against in 2010-2011. This difference is crucial, because too often 'Western' governments concentrate nearly exclusively on these aspects. From the 2014 Arab Transitions survey, it is clear that respondents wanted responsive government but not simply the 'thin' form of liberal democracy focusing on the formal characteristics and procedures of democracy.

For example, asked how democracy compares with other systems of government, 79% of respondents agreed that while democracy has its problems, it is better than alternatives, and 68% thought that the government should make laws according to the wishes of the people. Responses varied somewhat by country, with Egyptians being less certain about democracy and Jordanians the most certain. However, Jordanian citizens were also the *least* likely to think government should make laws according to the wishes of the people.



Across all countries, 49% of people thought that parliamentary democracy – a parliamentary system with left wing, right wing, secular, and religious parties all competing – is suitable for their country. However, there was considerable variation across countries, with an overwhelming majority of respondents in Iraq selecting it (80%), but only 26% in Libya.

In addition, the surveys show that people think of democracy not just in its ‘thin’ procedures (e.g. elections) but also in its ‘thick’ or substantive aspects such as socio-economic rights. For example, asked to nominate the two most important characteristics of democracy, the most frequently mentioned was being able to change governments through elections, at 43 per cent; but getting rid of corruption was the second most frequently mentioned at 35%. Combining the items related to civil-political rights (elections, freedom to criticise government, and citizens’ political equality), 68% of respondents mentioned at least one of these, while 58% mentioned an economic right (reducing economic inequalities and/or provision of basic services and/or employment creation). The evenness of the split across civil-political and socio-economic areas is also reflected in the fact that 40% of respondents nominated only political rights, 29% mentioned only economic rights, and 29% mentioned both a civil-political and a socio-economic right. There were noticeable differences by country, with respondents in Iraq and Libya – both conflict-torn countries – being most likely to nominate at least one political right, while those in Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt more likely to mention an economic right. There was sometimes noticeable variation by country – for example, while 59% of respondents in Iraq mentioned changing governments through elections, only 20% of Jordanians mentioned this factor. While a significant minority in all the countries nominate lack of corruption as an essential characteristic of democracy, Jordan had the highest proportion of respondents mentioning corruption, at 49.3 per cent, but only 29.6% of Egyptians mentioned this factor. However, despite these differences, in all countries a noticeable proportion of respondents nominated at least one political right and/or one economic right.



Perceptions of the European Union

The EU is sometimes described as a ‘normative actor’ and certainly sees its fundamental values as central not only to its internal dimension but also to its external relations. However, although it is perceived more favourably than other global powers, respondents did not necessarily see the Union as supporting either democracy or development.

Thirty-one per cent of respondents saw the EU as a force for instability in the region, 41% saw it as a force for stability, and the rest remained neutral. The US was seen as a greater force for instability, by 52% of respondents, with only a third seeing it as a force for stability. Egypt was the most negative about the EU, with only 15% seeing it as a force for stability, while at the other extreme 54% of Moroccans saw the Union as a stabilising force. Only the Arab League was rated as a greater force for stability than the EU – and only then by a small margin, at 44%. Across the surveyed countries, Russia (32%) and China (25%) were seen as a threat to stability by a smaller proportion of respondents compared to the EU, with the noticeable exception of Jordan, where 56% of respondents see Russia as a threat. However, these countries were also less likely to be seen as a force for stability, with Russia at 26% and China at 31 per cent.

Despite their relatively high rating as a force for stability, EU countries were not frequently nominated by respondents as ones with which they would like their own country to have closer relations. In response to an open question, respondents nominated a total of 58 different countries, but only seven per cent of respondents nominated an EU Member State, with the three most frequently mentioned being Germany (2.5%), France (2.3%) and the UK (1.6%). Nine other EU countries were each mentioned by less than 1% of respondents. By a considerable margin, the most frequently nominated country was Saudi Arabia – although even then, the Kingdom was nominated by only 20% of respondents. By contrast, the US was nominated by 6.3% of respondents across all countries, Turkey by 7.7 per cent, Russia by 2.4 per cent, China by 2.6 per cent, and Iran by 1.4 per cent.

In addition, when asked specifically about a European state with which they would like their country to have closer relations with, 53% did not nominate any country, and only 39% nominated an EU Member State. In total, 15 Member States were nominated, with only Germany achieving double digits (13.4%). Only five other Member States received more than one per cent of nominations: the UK (11.3 per cent), Italy (6.2%), Spain (2.9%), Sweden (2.2%), and the Netherlands (1.1%). Non-EU European countries fared little better: the most frequently nominated was Russia at 4.1 per cent.

Regardless of the intentions or merits of EU policies, it appears that the majority of respondents have little appetite for their countries forming closer relationships with either the EU as a whole or its component states.

Top 10 European Country Respondents Think Their Country Should Strengthen Relations with to Improve Current Situation (Open Question), % of Respondents

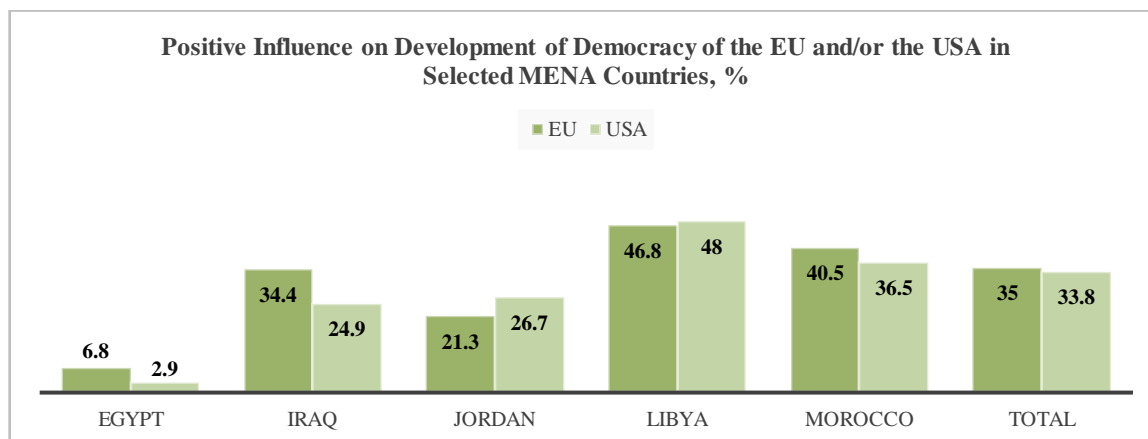
Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Libya	Morocco	Sample
No Country Nominated 62.6%	No Country Nominated 28.9%	No Country Nominated 66.2%	No Country Nominated 62.5%	No Country Nominated 31.3%	No Country Nominated 53.5%
Russia 16.9%	UK 17%	Germany 14.5%	UK 15.3%	Germany 30.4%	Germany 13.4%
Germany 11.5%	Germany 13%	UK 12.1%	Italy 9.4%	Spain 8.5%	UK 11.3%
Italy 2.4%	Sweden 9.5%	Italy 2.1%	Germany 5.6%	UK 7.0%	Italy 6.2%
UK 2.4%	Italy 7.5%	Switzerland 2.1%	Switzerland 2.1%	Sweden 4.4%	Russia 4.1%
Turkey 1.9%	Russia 6.7%	Spain 1.0%	Spain 2.0%	Italy 4.3%	Spain 2.9%
Sweden 0.9%	Netherlands 5.1%	Sweden 0.7%	Netherlands 0.8%	Russia 3.3%	Sweden 2.2%
Greece 0.7%	Switzerland 4%	Norway 0.3%	Sweden 0.4%	Switzerland 3%	Switzerland 2.1%
Spain 0.5%	Denmark 1.6%	Netherlands 0.3%	Greece 0.4%	Netherlands 1.3%	Netherlands 1.1%
Belgium 0.2%	Spain 1.6%	Denmark 0.3%	Bulgaria 0.4%	Norway 1.1%	Belgium 0.7%

Note: white squares denote non-EU countries

The Perception of EU Policies: Democracy, Development, and the Response to the Uprisings

Respondents were also asked about their perception of the EU's impact in specific policy areas, particularly democracy and development.

Overall, only a third of respondents thought the EU has had a positive impact on the development of democracy in their countries; roughly the same response as for the USA. However, there was considerable variation in responses across countries: nearly half of respondents in Libya and 41% in Morocco thought that the EU has had a positive influence, compared with a mere 7% in Egypt.



Indeed, to the extent people agreed that the EU should be involved in their country at all, they thought it should be supporting economic development. Overall, one in five did not think that the EU should have any involvement in policy in their country at all, and only 16% said that the most positive thing the Union could do would be to promote democracy. On the other hand, support for economic development stood at 43 per cent. There was some variation by country, but the pattern was quite clear: promoting economic development was the most frequently nominated response in all countries, albeit by less than half of respondents across the 5 countries.

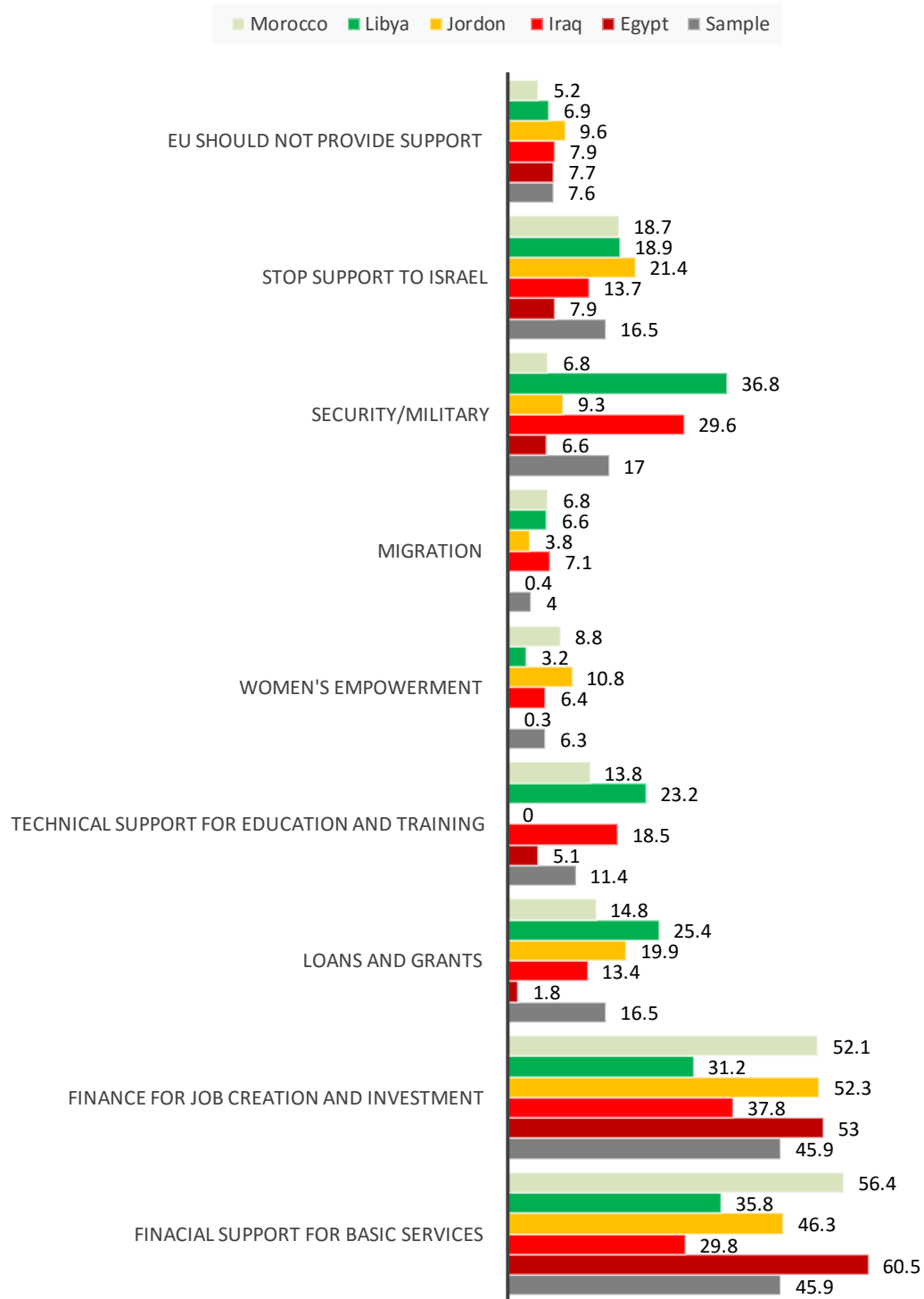
When asked to nominate the two most important things the EU could offer in support of their country, over 90% gave at least one example. Various types of financial support were the most frequently mentioned, with 56% of respondents nominating at least one – e.g. support for basic services, for jobs and investment, and/or loans and grants. There were noticeable variations by country: 76 % of people mentioned financial support in Egypt, compared to 49 % in Libya. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the security situation, respondents in Libya and Iraq were more likely to suggest that the best way the EU could provide support was to their military. It should be interesting to note that while nearly three-quarters of respondents (74.5%) thought that Israel had a destabilising influence in the region – ranging from 89% of respondents in Iraq through 83% in both Jordan and Egypt, 63% in Libya to 59% in Morocco – only 9 % of people actually saw ceasing to support Israel as a way in which the EU could support MENA countries.

One thing to note is that less than a third (30%) of respondents had actually heard about EU development assistance to their country – varying from 56% in Libya to a mere 9% in Egypt – and that of those that have heard of it a majority had positive opinions about it, varying from 92% in Iraq to 57% in Egypt.

Nearly twice as many people said they had heard about EU programmes specifically in response to the Arab Uprisings (63%). However, only 24% evaluated the impact of these programmes positively, and exactly the same proportion saw them as having had a *negative* impact. Libyan respondents were the most positive by a considerable margin, at 35%, and the Egyptians were the least positive, with only 3.4% thinking the programmes had had a positive impact.

In sum, the 2014 ARABTRANS survey seems to show that people in Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq have a low opinion of the EU's claims to be a 'normative actor', to facilitate democratization and development, or even to be a force for stability in their region. People are on average not very familiar with the EU's work in the region, but when they do know about it they appreciate it. However, the Union's specific response to the Arab Uprisings is not judged positively.

How the EU Can Support Selected MENA Countries, % Nominating



Conclusions

The 2014 ARABTRANS survey sheds light on three key areas: what led people to revolt, their political priorities and conception of democracy, and their perception of the EU's regional role.

EU policy towards the MENA region has focused on promoting a 'thin' version of democracy focusing on the one hand on civil and political rights (e.g. free and fair elections), and on the other hand focusing on liberal economic policies aiming to achieve economic inclusion. While securing civil and political rights is very important to people in countries surveyed, survey findings show that citizens are also deeply concerned with securing social and economic rights and with fighting corruption. A majority of respondents want governments that are responsive to the wishes of their citizens, but only slightly more than half think that 'thin', procedural democracy – free and fair elections, civil and political rights *alone* – is a suitable form of government for their country. There are differences among respondents in what they see as the most important characteristics of democracy: 40% prioritised political rights, with the rest evenly divided between those who prioritised both political and economic rights and those prioritising economic rights alone. This balance between socio-economic and political factors was also what people perceived were the causes of the 'Arab Spring' to start with. People see the causes of the Uprisings to be discontent with the economic situation and corruption as much as if not more than wanting Western style democracy or even more political rights and freedom. What people want is governments that are responsive to their demands for a decent life – economic security, decent employment, adequate utilities, and social services including education and health, and an end to a political system rife with corruption and cronyism.

With regard to regional relations, the EU was as frequently seen as a force for instability in the region as a force for stability, nor did respondents did not prioritise EU Member States when choosing countries with which their countries should develop closer relations. Over 90% did think that the EU can provide positive support to their countries, but they prioritise economic support rather than the Union's programmes supporting democracy.

In sum, few respondents wanted the EU to promote its brand of 'thin', procedural democracy in which civil and political rights remained uncoupled from social and economic rights, and it is this balance between issues that drove them to revolt in 2010-11. A majority of respondents, with some variation by country, were not aware of what support the EU is actually providing to their country, and while a majority of those that had heard about EU programmes were positive about development assistance, people were much less positive about programmes the EU implemented specifically in response to the Uprisings.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EU programmes in the Southern Neighbourhood have consistently emphasise civil/political rights and procedural aspects of democracy. While not ignoring the socio-economic dimension, EU programmes have subsumed it under the rubric of development, specifically aiming for market-driven inclusive development through which to stimulate democratization. Such policies are likely to have helped produce precisely the socio-economic dislocation MENA populations protested against in 2010-2011.

The pursuit of current policies has produced considerable popular disenchantment with the EU as a 'normative power'. To regain regional credibility and offer a political vision capable of meeting regional and global challenges, the EU should consider a response that rethinks not just the instruments but also the substantive objectives of its approach to the promotion of democracy, development, and regional stability.

Specifically, the EU could explore alternative types of programmes to fund (e.g. focusing on socio-economic rights as well as challenging civil-political rights such as freedom of association and protest) and to broaden the types of organisations to target. It should look beyond its orthodox approaches to democracy to give greater priority to socio-economic rights integrating it more systematically into the holistic human rights agenda articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The ARABTRANS project's multi-method research deploys an interdisciplinary approach drawing on Political Science, Sociology, Middle East Studies, Development Studies, Public Policy, and Social Psychology. The project looks comparatively at attitudes and behaviours in selected MENA countries in the context of the social, political and economic transformations that have been taking place across the Middle East and North Africa since February 2011. The main methods used are nationwide probability surveys carried out in 2014 in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, and Morocco, secondary analysis of macrodata, discourse analysis, and historiography.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Political and Social Transformations in the Arab World (ARABTRANS)
COORDINATOR	Dr Andrea Teti, School of Social Sciences, University of Aberdeen, UK; a.teti@abdn.ac.uk
CONSORTIUM	Análisis Sociológicos Económicos y Políticos – ASEP – Madrid, Spain Applied Social Science Forum – ASSF – Tunisia Centre de Recherche en Économie Appliquée pour le Développement – CREAD – Spain Centre for Survey Methodology – Conclusia – Chisinau, Moldova Dublin City University – DCU – Dublin, Ireland Egyptian Centre for Public Opinion Research – BASEERA - Cairo, Egypt Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies – IIACSS – Amman, Jordan Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale – ISPI – Milan, Italy MEDA Solutions – MEDAS – Morocco University of Aberdeen – UNIABDN – Aberdeen, UK University of Graz – UNI GRAZ – Graz, Austria University of Jordan – JU – Amman, Jordan
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FOR MORE INFORMATION	Contact: Dr Andrea Teti, School of Social Sciences University of Aberdeen Aberdeen AB24 3FX Scotland, United Kingdom a.teti@abdn.ac.uk
FURTHER READING	Abbott, P., Sapsford, R, and Teti, A. <i>After the Arab Uprisings: Political, Social and Economic Attitudes in the MENA Region in 2014</i> . Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen. Talbot, V., Maggiolini, P. and Teti, A. <i>EU-MENA Relations</i> . Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale. Teti, A., Talbot, V. and Maggiolini, P. <i>The Impact and the Role of the European Union on Political Transitions in the Middle East and North Africa: Democratization and Democracy Assistance Policy</i> . Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen