In the decade before the Arab Uprisings, people became increasingly disaffected with corrupt regimes which maintained power by rewarding a political and economic elite while excluding increasing swathes of the population from economic gains and political voice. As structural reforms failed to ‘trickle down’ and only increased crony elites’ strength, the middle classes joined working classes in becoming disaffected and politically mobilised. Survey data shows that with the unprecedented wave of protests across the MENA region in 2010-11 came a renewed optimism that post-2011 regimes are addressing their concerns and delivering a way of life people have reason to value. The analysis is illustrated by looking at three cases that epitomise relatively stable post-Uprisings countries: Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt.

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.

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In the decade before the Arab Uprisings, people became increasingly disaffected with corrupt regimes which maintained power by rewarding a political and economic elite while excluding increasing swathes of the population from economic gains and political voice. As structural reforms failed to 'trickle down' and only increased crony elites' strength, the middle classes joined working classes in becoming disaffected and politically mobilised. Survey data shows that with the unprecedented wave of protests across the MENA region in 2010-11 came a renewed optimism that post-Uprisings governments would bring desired change, but also awareness that socio-economic problems remained as acute as political ones, if not more so. Survey data also suggests that what drove protesters was a demand for both social and economic rights (e.g. decent jobs, social protection, universal education and health services) as well as political change. Protesters displayed this sense of betrayal in the slogans they used, such as the immensely popular 'Bread, Freedom, Social Justice' ('Aysh! Horreyat! 'Adala al-igtima'eyya!). Since then, people’s expectations have gone largely unattended on a range of issues from social security to jobs, trust in governments has dropped drastically, the economy remains the single largest challenge (and cause of migration), corruption remains pervasive, unemployment endemic, political reforms have been either cosmetic or reversed or in Tunisia's case remain shaky, and people have little faith that things will change. This potentially toxic mix of factors has not been addressed either by regional governments or their international counterparts. Indeed, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and Western governments quickly recast the Uprisings as a struggle merely for formal democracy and the overthrow of autocracy. This made it possible to stress the need for an orderly transition to democracy while continuing the very economic policies ordinary citizens blamed for the increasingly precarious lives they were leading.
The Situation in 2011: Challenges and Hopes for the Future

People in Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan identified a range of issues which drove them to protest, and in 2011 they identified a number of challenges they saw their country as facing, but they were also reasonably trusting that governments would deal with them and optimistic for the future.

Asked to identify the two main challenges facing their country, people focused on the economy: 81% of Egyptian respondents to the 2011 Arab Barometer survey nominated the economic situation, closely followed by 80% of Jordanians and 70% of Tunisians. Other significant challenges, albeit noticeably less important, included: internal security – mentioned by half of Egyptians, nearly a third of Tunisians, but only 10% of Jordanians – and corruption, mentioned by between a quarter and a third of respondents. In Jordan, Palestine was also seen as an issue by a significant minority. Corruption was not always named as one of the two major challenges, but it was seen as pervasive in state institutions: around 80% of Egyptians and Tunisians and 74% of Jordanians agreed it was a problem. In fact, the vast majority of respondents thought it difficult to get employment without connections (wasta) and nearly two-thirds in Jordan and Tunisia and nearly half in Egypt thought it difficult to get a job at all without connections. However, in 2011, three-quarters of Egyptians, two-thirds of Tunisians and just over half of Jordanians did think that the government was making reasonable efforts at cutting down on corruption.

Democracy was noticeably low among challenges identified in Egypt and Jordan, although a fifth mentioned it in Tunisia. At the time, both Egypt and Tunisia were in turmoil, with concerns about whether the upcoming elections for the Tunisian Constituent Assembly would be fair and free, while in Egypt there was no timeline to elections at all, so respondents may have underestimated how easy it would be to obtain democracy after their Revolutions. It is also possible that these results reflect a certain amount of ‘democracy fatigue’ in Arab MENA countries resulting from local regimes’ strategy of heavily relying on ‘democracy’ as a rhetorical banner to legitimize their regimes but delivering none of the social justice of political voice citizens wanted, while Western governments cooperated with those regimes claiming this would facilitate democratization.

1 In the 2014 ArabTrans survey, respondents were asked to reflect on 2011: 69.2% of Egyptians, 76.9% of Jordanians and 62.8% of Tunisians said economic factors were one of the two main drivers of the Uprisings, and 41.1% of Egyptians, 47.8% of Jordanians and 61.3% of Tunisians mentioned corruption compared with 21.4% of Egyptians, 23.4% of Jordanians and 42.8% of Tunisians indicated political rights were one of the two main demands of demonstrators.

2 The data for 2011 is based on analysis of Arab Barometer II data. The surveys were carried out in June/July 2011 in Egypt, December 2010 in Jordan, and September/October 2011 in Tunisia.
As Fig. 3 shows, people, while relatively hopeful generally, were much less certain that governments in 2011 were actually delivering on the specifics what they saw as their countries’ challenges. In fact, governments were thought to be performing badly in two of the areas that were seen as major drivers of the Uprisings: job creation and inclusive development (i.e. all social groups benefiting from economic growth).

Despite such considerable challenges and poor current performance by governments, most people were optimistic that things were going to get better and that by 2016 governments would address the main challenges facing the countries. This optimism peaked in Egypt (81%) and in Tunisia (74%) whereas Jordanians were less certain, with not much more than half being reasonably optimistic. Many also expressed trust in government (77% in Egypt, 72% in Jordan, and 62% in Tunisia) and a feeling that governments were undertaking far-reaching reforms (76% in Egypt, 69% in Jordan, 66% in Tunisia). Again, Egyptians and Tunisians were particularly optimistic about prospects for post-revolutionary change: just over 90% of Egyptians and around 85% of Tunisians thought that in coming years they would have better economic opportunities and greater social justice. This optimism was likely due to the fact that, at least in Egypt and Tunisia, people felt that the economy, despite being identified as the major challenge, would improve considerably. In Jordan, however, the number of people who expected the situation to be better by 2014-16 dropped over 10%.
Did the Uprisings Bring Change? Assessing Material Developments from 2011 to 2014

As with any post-revolutionary period, temporary turbulence in economic as well as political life is to be expected: the key question is whether the socio-economic and political causes of the Uprisings are being addressed in a manner which satisfies the expectations of a majority of the population. To what extent was people’s optimism rewarded? Did things change for the better by 2014? How do people see the future? People were no happier in 2014 than they had been in 2010. According to the Gallup World Poll life satisfaction in the three countries is low.

It should be emphasised that survey data suggests no single pattern captures post-Uprisings developments: Jordan, Tunisia, and Egypt epitomise these differences. These countries’ political trajectory differed markedly. Tunisia undertook a shaky path towards greater formal democracy and human rights. It is seen as the only MENA country on this transition path, although many question both the ‘depth’ of political changes and whether both secular and Islamist post-revolutionary governments have addressed issues of social justice. In Jordan, the monarchy assuaged discontent by changing governments and making some concessions, achieving a semblance of equilibrium, if perhaps temporary and precarious. In Egypt, the ‘January Revolution’ was met with successive counter-revolutionary efforts: first a military government (2011-2012) then an Islamist-majority parliament and Presidency (albeit freely and fairly elected), and finally the second Army-dominated government after the 2013 coup removing the elected President and dissolved parliament. With the partial and qualified exception of Tunisia, post-Uprisings governments across the region have not responded proactively to citizens’ demands, but rather combined security crackdowns with making the minimal concessions necessary to stave off mass mobilisation.

Secondly, unemployment, one of the key drivers of the Uprisings, has remained high. Particularly youth unemployment has increased in Egypt and has remained unchanged in Jordan and Tunisia. Unemployment continues to affect educated young people and especially young women disproportionately. Furthermore, the overall rate conceals the number of people, including the young, who have withdrawn from the labour market altogether or have become demoralised and are no longer actively looking for work. In addition, there are the underemployed, those in poor-quality, poorly remunerated jobs in the informal sector, and those working as unpaid family workers. Precarious employment of this kind inflates the apparent rate of employment, masking the difficulty of bringing about inclusive development.

Given that resources on which these countries must build their development have not increased, other indicators of macroeconomic health provide cause for concern. Economic growth slowed compared to pre-Uprisings levels, which were already sluggish relative to these countries’ ‘youth bulges’. The Egyptian economy depends on income sources like tourism and the Suez Canal which are vulnerable to political instability, and on hydrocarbons the price of which has dropped to historic lows. The portion of GDP made up of natural resource rents and tourism receipts declined from 11.7% of GDP in 2010 to 5.4% in 2014 (having already fallen from 19.6% in 2008). Consequently, GDP per capita growth declined from 5.1% in 2010 to 1.8% in 2011 before recovering slightly to 2.2% in 2014. Jordan, where the economy was already in recession in 2010 due to the impact of the 2007-08 global crisis, saw GDP per capita contract by 3.4% in 2010, and by 3.5% in 2011, before showing some recovery by growing 1.3% in 2014. Tunisia saw negative growth...
in 2011 (-3.5%) before recovery to in 2013 (+2.75%) and in 2014 (+1.3%). However, in real terms GDP stagnated because of high inflation: between 2010 and 2014 the Consumer Price Index increased by 42% in Egypt, 17% in Jordan, and 27% in Tunisia. The extent to which poverty and inequality patterns changed is not yet evident in detail. However, overall, in Egypt poverty increased by 1% to 26.3% in 2012/13 compared to 2010/11, continuing a trend in increasing poverty that started in 1999/2000. There is no recent poverty data for Jordan, but the influx of Syrian refugees has certainly had a negative impact on the country’s social and educational services. As with Jordan there is no recent data on poverty incidence for Tunisia but loss of tourism revenues, decline in mining activities and low agricultural productivity is almost certainly having a negative impact on incomes, particularly in rural areas.

Other economic data is not more encouraging. The external debt stock of the three countries has increased: in Egypt it nearly doubled from US$14.1 billion to US$24.3 billion, in Jordan it went from US$36.54 billion to US$39.6 billion, while in Tunisia it went from US$22.5 billion to US$26.4 billion. Foreign direct investment (FDI) in Egypt nearly halved from 3% to 1.6% of GDP; in Jordan FDI declined from 6% of GDP to 5%; in Tunisia FDI remained virtually unchanged at about 1% of GDP. Net official development assistance (ODA) in Egypt increased from 0.3% of GNI to 2%; in Jordan it increased from 2.6% to 4.9% of GNI; and in Tunisian ODA increased from 5.3% of GNI in 2010 to 9.2% in 2014. In real terms (constant 2013 prices) ODA receipts increased by 56% in Egypt, 73% in Jordan and 97% in Tunisia. In Egypt the relative importance of donors changed from Western ones to the Arab Gulf states with the Arab donors contributing 75.5% of ODA between 2011-14 compared with 11.9% between 2007-10. Although EU Institutions’ ODA nearly doubled and that of the EU countries remained much the same, the share of their contribution declined from 32.7% overall for the period 2007-10 to 23% for the period 2011-14. In Jordan, by contrast, the combined contribution to ODA of the EU member states and EU Institutions increased from 27% to 36% while that of the Arab donors increased from 12% to 20%. In Tunisia the combined contribution of EU member countries remained the same, at 65%, while Arab donors’ share declined from 12% to 8%. In Egypt nearly a third of ODA was made up of concessional loans, and half in Tunisia, but only 16% in Jordan. Remittances in Egypt increased from 4.8% of GDP to 6.5%, recovering to the pre-2008 Economic Crisis level, in Jordan they declined from 13% of GDP to 10%, and in Tunisia they remained virtually unchanged at just over 2% of GDP. The number of Egyptian migrant workers declined between 2010 and 2013 while those from Jordan increased by 6.5% and those from Tunisia increased by 4.5%. Furthermore, little progress has been made in reforming the economy: in all three countries, the public sector remains comparatively large with little being done to liberalise the private sector; crony capitalism remains untouched, with the government favouring an insider economic elite in return for continuing support, and ‘liberalising’ economic reforms which serve the interest of precisely those client elites. With such a track record, it is little wonder that the IMF itself recently recognised ‘trickle down’ economics has not worked.

Evidence of the existence and negative impact that corruption had on economic growth and development more generally is coming to light. In Egypt, for example, politically connected firms have been shown to have virtually cornered the market in loans but employ less workers and are less profitable than comparable non-politically connected ones. Levels of perceived corruption by expert informants remain high although it has decreased since the 2010-2011 Uprisings in Egypt (from 3.1 in 2010 to 3.8 in 2015, i.e. a 7% absolute decrease), and in Jordan (from 4.7 in 2010 to 5.3 out of 10 in 2015, a 6% absolute decrease). However, in Tunisia there was an increase by 2015 (from 4.3 to 3.8 out of 10, i.e. an absolute increase of 5%).

**Figure 7: Source: Transparency International.**

Raw economic data does not capture the full picture of socio-economic life, and it has long been recognised that measures of happiness and wellbeing are needed to provide a more rounded picture. However, on this count also, Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt have a worrying track record. With respect to wellbeing, there is little evidence of
any improvement, with virtually no progress on the Human Development Index and the subjective satisfaction measured by the Gallup World Poll moving up only marginally between 2010 and 2014 (from 4.7 to 4.9, on a scale from 0 to 10) in Egypt, remaining unchanged at 5.1 in Tunisia, and declining in Jordan from 5.6 to 5.3. For countries experiencing such profound turmoil as Tunisia and Egypt, this in itself could be considered a positive result, although it does suggest that underlying causes of dissatisfaction remain.

Did the Uprisings Meet Expectations? How People Perceive Changes after the Uprisings

This lack of progress in improvements in material conditions was evident in the responses ordinary people gave to the 2014 ArabTrans public opinion survey. Despite their optimism about the future in 2011 (see Fig. 4 above), only 12% of Egyptians thought the Arab Spring had been positive for their country by 2014, and although the proportion was higher in Tunisia it was still only 31%. Jordanians had been less confident about the future even initially, but even here progress had been less than anticipated, with only 25% thinking that the Arab Uprisings had brought about positive change for their country.

Furthermore, respondents saw the same challenges in 2014 as the ones they identified in 2011, with the economic situation nominated by a far higher proportion of respondents than other challenges in both years. Concern about corruption, nominated as the second highest challenge in both years, had increased by over 2.5% to 71% in Jordan and concern about internal security increased marginally in Tunisia. However, as in 2011, few thought that the nature of the political regime was one of the two main challenges facing the country. Concern centred on the economy and to a lesser extent security and corruption. As in 2011, the overwhelming majority of respondents thought that corruption was pervasive in state agencies and institutions: 77% in Egypt – even though it is not specifically nominated as one of the two major challenges – 88% in Jordan and 85% in Tunisia. Getting a job without waste continued to be seen as difficult, with the proportion that saw it as virtually impossible increasing from about half to three-quarters in Egypt, increasing from about to-thirds to about three-quarters in Jordan and remaining at about two-thirds in Tunisia. People had clearly become disillusioned with government’s efforts to crack down on corruption in Tunisia and Egypt: confidence that the government was making at least a reasonable effort to tackle corruption had declined from two-thirds to one-third in Tunisia and from three-quarters to just over half in Egypt. Trust in government plummeted most noticeably in Tunisia, where it fell from 62% in 2011 to 16% in 2014, and in Jordan, where it fell from 72% to 29%. Although less drastic, there was also a significant decline in Egypt, from 77% to 56%. The latter difference is most likely due to the political polarisation which took place between the election of President Morsi (who received 51.49% of the vote in 2012) and the 2013 coup removing him which set Islamists against those supporting Egypt’s second post-revolutionary military government. No such polarisation took place in Jordan, while splits between Islamists and secularists in Tunisia have ultimately been recomposed in national unity governments.

![Figure 9. Source: Authors’ own calculations from ArabTrans data.](image)

The main concerns of ordinary people in 2014, then, continued to be the economic situation as it had been in the aftermath of the revolution (see figure 2 above) but with heightened concerns about security. Furthermore, the optimism that people had expressed in the aftermath of the Uprisings that the economic situation would improve had not been met. Asked to compare the economic situation in 2014 with 2009 people felt that their own and the country’s economic situation had deteriorated, more so in Jordan and Tunisia than Egypt but to some extent in all three countries. Specific economic concerns included just over 50% of both Egyptians and Tunisians and 28% of Jordanians being worried about a loss of their or their spouse’s job. Around 40% of respondents in all three countries were worried that they would not be able to ensure that their children received a good education.
Although not highly nominated as one of the two main challenges facing the country compared with how respondents remembered the situation in 2009, respondents perceive the overall security situation as having deteriorated alarmingly by 2014. This was the case for both perceptions of security of the country and for the security situation of respondents’ own families, although less so in Jordan than in Egypt and Tunisia. Ordinary people were concerned both about the threat of a war involving their country and about internal strife and terrorism. Three quarters of Egyptians and well over three quarters of Tunisians (84%) were concerned about the threat of civil unrest/terrorism, as were 46% of Jordanians. Concern about their country being involved in a war was lower but still high, with 59% of Egyptians, 66% of Tunisians and 40% of Jordanians being worried about the possibility. It should be noted that while Egypt and Tunisia have experienced some spectacular terrorist incidents – including aimed at tourists, with consequent impact on the economy – neither of these countries was ever at serious risk of nationwide insurgency, civil war, or war with neighbours. The perception of insecurity of this kind is more likely to be a measure of the effectiveness of regime propaganda, particularly in Egypt where the government has emphasised the theme of external and internal threats to security. In Jordan there has been less internal instability, but the threat of instability spilling over from Iraq or Syria has been much more realistic.

Figure 11. Source: authors own analysis of ArabTrans data

Governments were generally seen as performing badly especially in implementing economic policy and generally to be performing less well than in 2011 when performance had not been rated that highly (see Figure 3 above). The decline in the rating of government performance as at least good in terms of managing the economy was noticeable higher in Tunisia (from 56.5% to 8.5%) and Jordan (from 66.3% to 29.2%) than in Egypt (52.4% to 38.5%) but still a significant and large decline in all three. There was also little confidence in governments’ performance in employment creation, controlling inflation or creating a more inclusive society. By contrast Jordanians and Egyptians thought their respective governments were doing a reasonable job in providing security, unlike Tunisia, where only a fifth thought the government was doing a good job.
Levels of satisfaction with government performance in 2014 varied across the three countries but none scored highly. This contrasts sharply with the optimism of 2011, especially among Egyptians and Tunisians. In Egypt, while a relatively high proportion of citizens rate their government’s overall performance highly (59%) noticeably less than 50% of people are satisfied with the way education, healthcare, social security and democracy are developing, with just over 50% being satisfied with the economy. This suggests that despite comparatively higher levels of overall satisfaction with government, structural problems in Egypt remain unaddressed. Indeed, people’s expectations have gone frustrated: across all three countries, levels of satisfaction with how things are developing in 2014 are much lower compared to the over 90% who thought things would improve in 2011. Jordan scores noticeably better on the way education, healthcare, social security and democracy are developing, but less than 40% are happy with the economy, and only 50% are happy with the government’s performance of its duties. Tunisia scores particularly low on all counts. Of particular note are very low levels of satisfaction with government performance (19.6%) with developments in the economy (10.8%) and in social services (25.7%). And while 40% of Tunisians judge government performance in providing basic utilities as being at least good, they are also profoundly disillusioned with their governments’ efforts at creating a more inclusive society (3.7% judge it to be at least good), at controlling inflation (3.7%), and at creating employment (8.5%). These results suggest how limited post-Uprisings improvements are perceived as being, despite Tunisia’s better track record compared to other countries that experienced uprisings. Furthermore, levels of satisfaction with how democracy is developing – a proxy for how responsive governments are seen to be in addressing the concerns of their citizens – is fairly low, varying from a high of just over half in Jordan to less than a quarter in Tunisia.
Conclusions

Populations in Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan were driven by both political and socio-economic marginalisation to protest in what became the 2010-11 Arab Uprisings. The success of those protests endowed post-revolutionary governments with considerable trust from their population, but that trust was predicated on expectations of delivering reform on both underlying social and economic issues as well as political reform. Economic data suggests no significant change since 2011, and political analysis suggests leaderships are at best sluggish in carrying out reforms. ArabTrans survey results in 2014 show that trust in political leaderships has fallen, as have expectations of future improvements, while in populations’ perceptions underlying socio-economic tensions remain largely unimproved. This suggests not only that pre-Uprisings economic policies contributed to socio-economic dislocation leading to the Uprisings, but that post-Uprisings policies have failed to deliver promised inclusive growth, leaving countries vulnerable to political instability.

Furthermore, the economic and political influence of Gulf monarchies increased in all three countries, including through the provision of development assistance and foreign direct investment. This is especially the case for Egypt which is also dependent on Gulf States providing employment opportunities for migrant workers, a dependency made worse by the unemployment crisis. The EU continues its policy of promoting liberal democracy and tying political rights to trade while ignoring popular demands for economic and social rights, economic security and decent public services. In practice, it also continues to support authoritarian rulers, seen as essential partners in maintaining stability, fighting terrorism, ensuring hydrocarbon supplies, and stemming migration into Europe. This stance has lost the EU any moral authority it had in the region. IFIs, along with the US and the EU, have failed to learn lessons in economic policies, blaming crony capitalism and authoritarian rulers for the financial bankruptcy of regimes and for their failure to deliver inclusive social development rather than recognising the contribution to this result of economic orthodoxy.

A major lesson learnt by citizens across the region is that street protest is an indispensable complement and corrective to the ballot box when governing elites do not deliver on their commitments. Authoritarian rulers may have regained the upper hand, but the Uprisings suggest that this ‘stability’ is precarious and that lasting solutions require fundamental political and economic reforms delivering social justice.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy interventions must include a clear understanding of what people want, including the existence of strong support for a development state. Data suggests a fundamental mismatch between the EU’s liberal conception of democracy and people’s view that social justice and economic rights are integral to democracy. The EU should replace its emphasis on procedural democracy with a broader approach, including modernising the public sector and good governance, alongside the promotion of human rights (civil, political, economic, and social). Policy should aim to eliminate elite capture, promote effective government (policy formulation and service delivery), and tackle corruption. Development assistance should be directed towards investment in infrastructure, supporting programmes creating social development and decent employment opportunities for young people. The EU should continue to support measures to prevent illicit financial flows and business paying corporation and other taxes in countries where profits were earned.

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 macro and survey data, policy analysis, and historiography.
## Project Identity

### Project name
Political and Social Transformations in the Arab World (ARABTRANS)

### Coordinator
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### 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
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### Further reading