

Given the security situation in 2014 it is not surprising that citizens in Libya and Iraq were more likely to suggest security support. It is interesting to note that few people chose the option of ceasing to support Israel, given that nearly three quarters thought Israel had a destabilising effect on the region. This is probably indicative of the priority citizens give to improving their economic situation. It may also be because citizens have given up on the EU and the West more generally actually taking any effective measures to resolve the Palestinian question.

## The Mismatch between EU Policy and what Citizens Want

The 2014 ArabTrans survey shows that citizens in all six countries have a low opinion of the EU's claims that it is a normative actor, that it facilitates democratisation and development, or even that it is a force for stability in their region. The Union's specific response to the Arab Uprisings is not judged positively and there is at least implicit hostility to the EU's self-proclaimed role as a normative actor. There seems to be a considerable disjuncture between the avowed intentions behind EU policy and what people in the region see as their priorities. This disconnect is likely to be at the root of the poor reputation the EU enjoys amongst regional respondents. The problem lies partly in the goals and instruments of the EU's policies themselves. However, it is important to note that the fact that respondents have a generally poor opinion of the EU's democracy promotion efforts and that democracy ranks very low among areas on which respondents would like to see the EU focus are not results of a culturally determined or religiously mandated aversion to democracy per se. Rather, they seem to be related to a mismatch between the conception of democracy in EU documents and the conception of it which the survey data suggest is held by MENA public opinion, as well as a mismatch with respondents' socio-political priorities generally. While the EU focuses on formal institutions and processes, for MENA citizens the substantive aspects of democracy – inclusion, social justice, etc. – are at least as important and cannot be separated from procedural considerations, particularly when the region's 'hybrid regimes' have been putting a democratic façade on autocracy for several decades.

## Policy Recommendations

While survey data are never unambiguous, they do suggest certain patterns.

► **A Not-So-Normative Actor:** The EU's claim to normative leadership is not convincing: neither the EU nor its Member States are perceived as a force supporting transitions towards democracy, nor towards inclusive development, nor even as a force for stability in the region.

► **It's Not (Just) About Image:** It is a mistake to infer that the EU is simply not doing enough to publicise its positive role. Survey data show that 1) MENA citizens wish to see greater social and economic inclusion as well as favouring democracy; 2) worsening economic inequality and corruption drove the Uprisings; but that 3) post-Uprisings expectations remain frustrated and people believe the EU and their governments are doing little to promote economic or political inclusion. This suggests respondents are reacting to an objective situation, and that as such the EU – as well as MENA governments – need to question whether their policy instruments are effective enough, and indeed whether their priorities sufficiently respond to those of MENA citizens.

► **Corruption:** One concern shared unambiguously across the vast majority of all MENA respondents was with corruption. Citizens of all countries wish to see an end to corruption, or at least serious and visible government efforts trying to end it.

► **Differentiation:** The six countries surveyed are not uniform in what they value and in their priorities. Policy will obviously need to be tailored to the needs and views of the receiving country (in the light, probably, of the history of their relations with the donor country or countries).

► **Democracy:** Most non-rentier states in the Middle East have for decades dressed up autocracy with a democratic façade, which has undermined the reputation of democracy itself and of those promoting it. Elections which at best served to settle internal regime competition but offered citizens no real alternatives, civil and political rights which exist on paper only to be swept aside in fact, and increasing social and economic polarisation have made a mockery of the notion that any sort of transition towards inclusive democracy might be

taking place. Unfortunately, European acquiescence to autocratic regimes at a political level and support for 'neoliberal' policies which have produced greater hardship and a growth in crony capitalism have done nothing to establish clear daylight between MENA autocracies and European democracies.

► That being said, survey data show support among respondents for greater social justice and economic inclusion, as well as political voice: there is an unambiguous demand for change from citizens throughout the Middle East. The EU should not abandon attempts to bring about positive change and should use its influence to continue to promote democratisation and respect for human rights as values that underpin political stability. It should, however, rethink what those goals entail – particularly a more inclusive and socially just form of democracy – and the tools it has thus far given itself to pursue those goals.

# ArabTrans

Policy Brief prepared by Andrea Teti and Pamela Abbott



# The Arab Transformations

## Policy Brief 2

### *Perceptions of the EU: Public Opinion in Six Arab States*

## Introduction

The EU views itself as a normative actor and stresses the importance of working in partnership with its Southern Neighbourhood in reaching its intertwined goals of security, stability, inclusive development and shared prosperity, and of strengthening democratisation, human rights and the rule of law across the Mediterranean. The Arab Transformations Project public opinion survey carried out in 2014 in six countries – Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia – sheds some light on this on how citizens viewed the EU and its involvement with their own countries, as well as the extent to which they thought EU policies addressed their concerns.

The EU recognised at the time of the Arab Uprisings that its policies had failed the people of the region and concluded that it needed to strengthen its focus on promoting deep and sustainable democracy and inclusive economic development. However, it did not rethink the goals and instruments of its policies to address popular demands for social justice and economic rights. Rather, it continued to promote a narrow procedural form of democracy, supported authoritarian rulers, and pursued economic policies that have proved to worsen economic inequality. This inability to address the structural causes of economic and political polarisation poses a serious risk to the

## SUMMARY

- Data from Arab Transformations surveys in six MENA countries shed light on what citizens think of the EU and whether its policies address their concerns.
- Survey data show citizens are less concerned with formal aspects of democracy and more with corruption, the rule of law, and social justice.
- Citizens across the region are also concerned about the effect of current development policies.
- The EU is not seen as a factor for stability, and few see it as promoting democracy.
- When asked what policies the EU should prioritise, their emphasis is on economic support and development.

## KEYWORDS

European Union, Arab Spring, Democratization, Human Rights, European Neighborhood Policy, Public Opinion, Social Justice, Economic Rights.

Union's long-term goals in the region and is reflected in the poor reputation of the EU which public opinion data reveal. This data suggests the Union's image in the region is rather that of a cause of instability and an ineffective promoter of both democracy and inclusive development.



The findings from the Arab Transformations Public Opinion Survey show citizens are more concerned about economic security and their governments fighting corruption than about procedural democracy and political rights. Our findings suggest that what citizens want is social justice, economic rights and the eradication of corruption, rather than strictly, explicitly or exclusively Western-style (neo)liberal democracy.

## Perceptions of the EU's Role in Stabilising the Region

When respondents were asked whether they perceived various international actors as forces for stability or instability, the EU is perceived more favourably than other global powers. However, even so, its role in the region is not seen very favourably. Thirty-one per cent of respon-

dents saw the EU as a force for instability in the region and 41 per cent as a force for stability. By contrast, the USA was seen as a greater destabilising influence (52% of respondents), with only a third seeing it as a force for stability. Of the six countries surveyed, Egypt had the most negative attitudes to the EU, with only 15 per cent seeing it as a force for stability, while 54 per cent of Moroccans saw it as a stabilising force. Only the Arab League was rated as a greater force for stability than the EU overall, and even then by only a small margin (44%). Russia (32%) and China (25%) were seen as threats to stability by a smaller proportion of respondents than the EU, with the notable exception of Jordan, where 56 per cent of respondents saw Russia as a threat. However, these two powers were also less likely to be seen as a force for stability (Russia 26%, China 31%).

Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia	Total 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 59.3%	No country nominated 53.5%
Russia 16.9%	UK 17%	Germany 14.5%	UK 15.3%	Germany 30.4%	Germany 22.8%	Germany 13.4%
Germany 11.5%	Germany 13%	UK 12.1%	Italy 9.4%	Spain 8.5%	Italy 10.0%	UK 11.3%
Italy 2.4%	Sweden 9.5%	Italy 2.1%	Germany 5.6%	UK 7.0%	Switzerland 5.0%	Italy 6.2%
UK 2.4%	Italy 7.5%	Switzerland 2.1%	Switzerland 2.1%	Sweden 4.4%	Spain 1.6%	Russia 4.1%
Turkey 1.9%	Russia 6.7%	Spain 1.0%	Spain 2.0%	Italy 4.3%	Belgium 0.5%	Spain 2.9%
Sweden 0.9%	Netherlands 5.1%	Sweden 0.7%	Netherlands 0.6%	Russia 3.3%	Sweden 0.3%	Sweden 2.2%
Greece 0.7%	Switzerland 4.0	Norway 0.3%	Sweden 0.4%	Switzerland 3.0%	Austria 0.2%	Switzerland 2.1%
Spain 0.5%	Denmark 1.6%	Netherlands 0.3%	Greece 0.4%	Netherlands 1.3%	Netherlands 0.2	Netherlands 1.1%
Belgium 0.2%	Spain 1.6%	Denmark 0.3%	Bulgaria 0.4%	Norway 1.1%	UK 0.2%	Belgium 0.7%

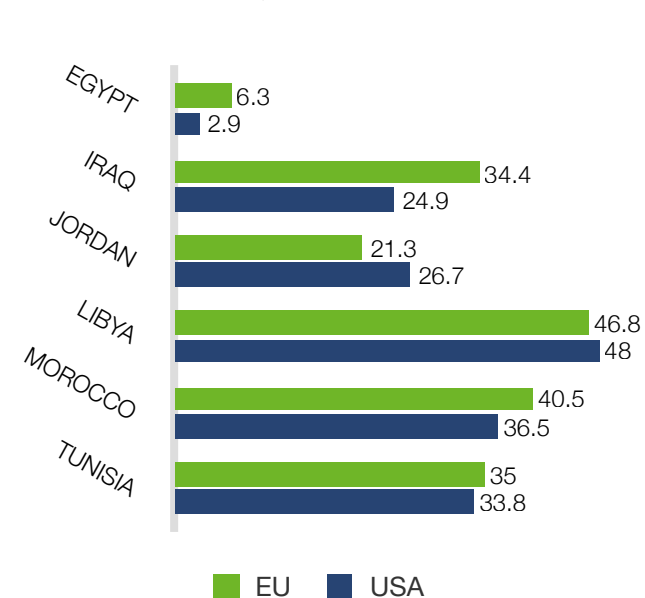
Notes: white squares denote non-EU countries; 12.7% of respondents nominated no country, Egypt 11.8%, Iraq 4%, Jordan 15.5%, Libya 19.2%, Morocco 2.6%

When respondents were asked with which country their own country should form closer relations, EU countries were not frequently nominated. In response to an open question, respondents nominated a total of 58 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 mentioned by less than one per cent of respondents. When asked specifically with which European state they would like their country to have closer relations, 53 did not name any and only 39 per cent named an EU Member State. In total, 16 Member States were nominated, with only Germany (13.4%) and the UK (11.3%) reaching double digits. Regardless of the intentions or merits of EU policies, the majority of respondents seem to have little appetite for closer relations with either the EU as a whole or its component parts.

## Perceptions of the EU's Role in Promoting Democracy and Development

Furthermore, the EU is not seen as having had a very positive influence on the development of democracy. It does vary by country, ranging from 47 per cent in Libya to just six per cent in Egypt. The US is viewed in much the same light, suggesting that lack of support for Western powers being involved in democracy promotion is not specific to the EU. This suggests considerable disillusion with the EU as a normative actor supporting democracy.

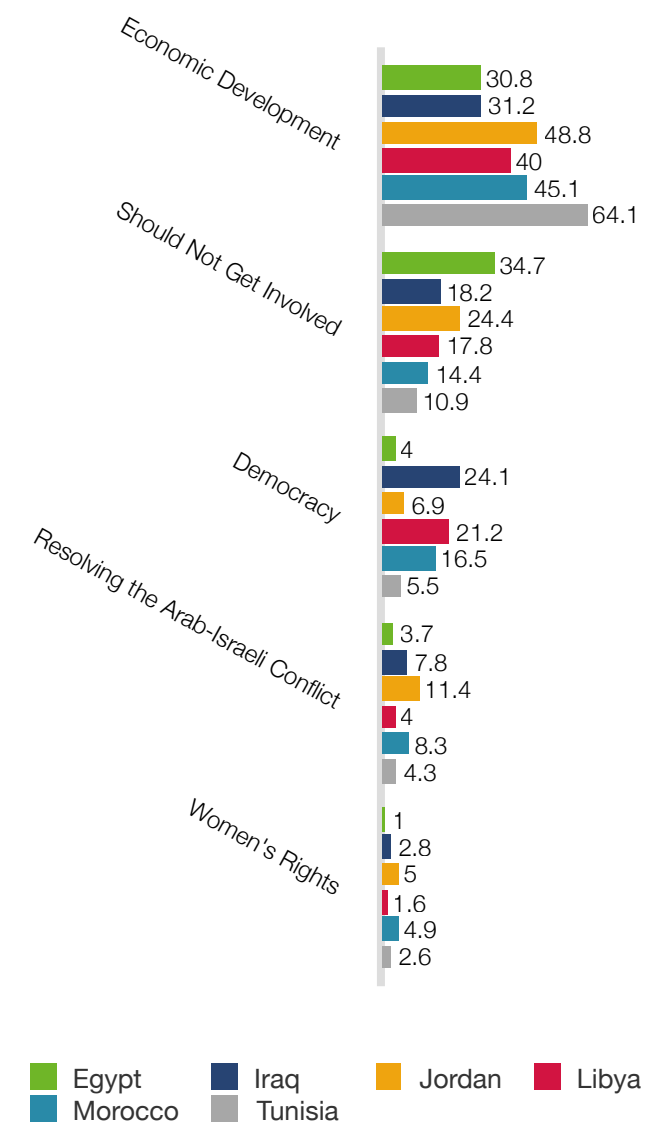
FIGURE 1: EU AND US POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON DEVELOPMENT OF DEMOCRACY, %



Respondents were also asked about their perception of the EU's impact in specific policy areas, particularly democracy and development. Overall, one in three thought the EU should not get involved or did not know in what policy it should be involved. Moreover, although most respondents in all countries supported some form of democracy, only 13 per cent said that the most positive thing the EU could do would be to support democratisation (with some variation by country, ranging from four per cent in Egypt to a quarter in Iraq).

On the other hand, support for economic development ranged from 31 per cent in Egypt and Iraq to 64 per cent in Tunisia, and promoting economic development was the most frequently nominated response in all countries.

FIGURE 2: POLICY THE EU SHOULD PRIORITISE IN SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT, %

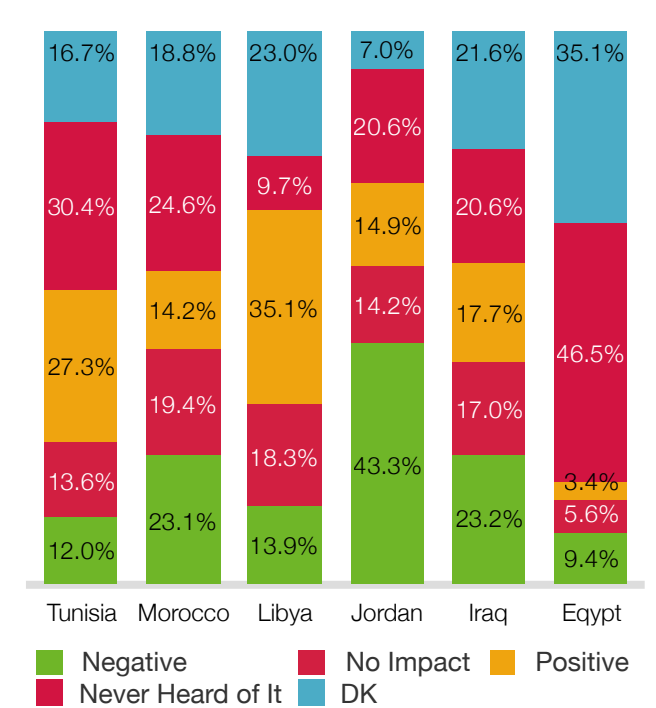


Note: 25.8% of respondents in Egypt, 16% in Iraq, 3.6% in Jordan 15.5% in Libya, 10.9% in Morocco and 12.6% in Tunisia said they did not know.

## Perceptions of Development Assistance

Less than a third of respondents said they had heard about EU development assistance to their country in general, varying from 56 per cent in Libya to a mere nine per cent in Egypt. Of those who had heard of it, a majority held positive opinions about it, varying from 92 per cent in Iraq to 57 per cent in Egypt. Nearly twice as many people (63%) said they had heard about EU programmes responding to the Arab Uprisings, but only 24 per cent evaluated the impact of these programmes positively and exactly the same proportion overall thought they had a negative impact. Libyan respondents were the most positive by a considerable margin, at 35 per cent, and the Egyptians were the least positive (only 3.4%).

FIGURE 3: ASSESSMENT OF THE EU PROGRAMME IN RESPONSE TO THE ARAB UPRISINGS, %

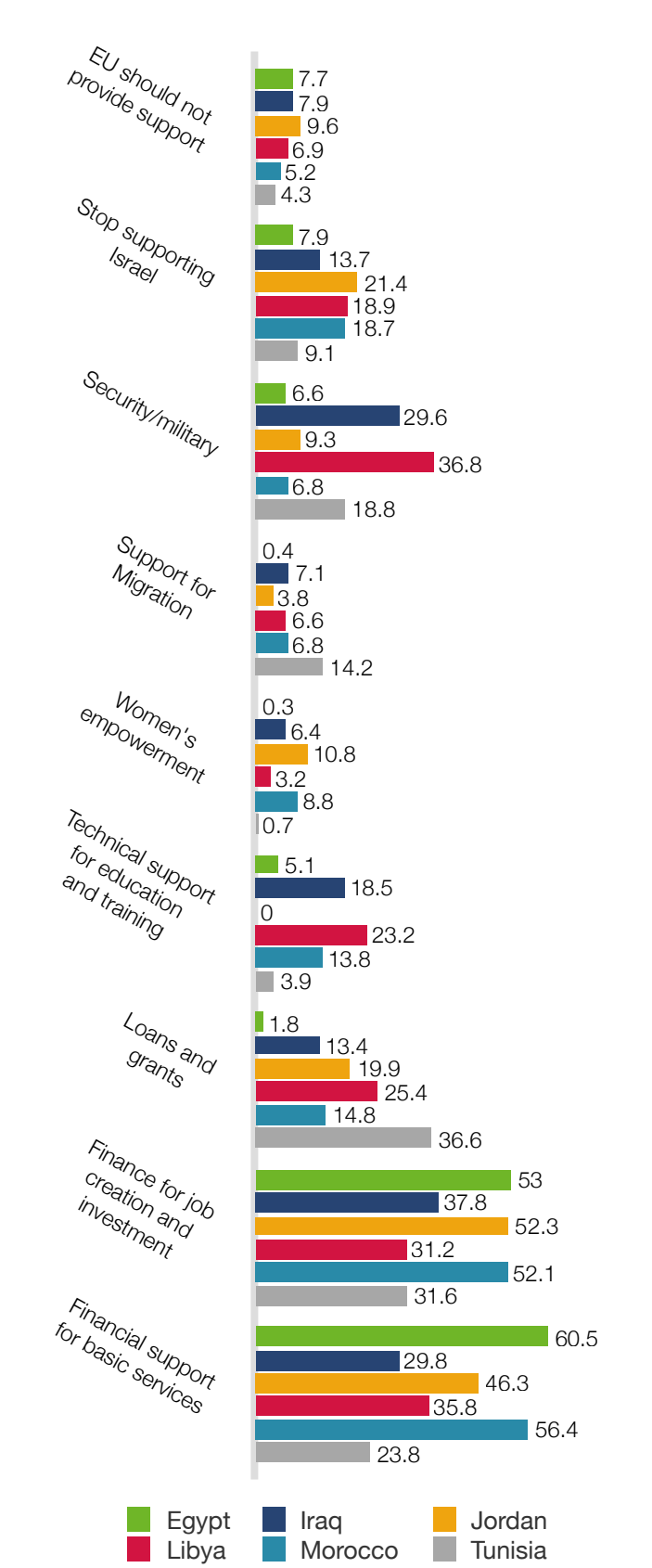


## What Support Citizens Want from the EU

When asked to name the two most important things the EU could offer to support their country, over 80 per cent gave at least one example. Various kinds of financial support were most frequently mentioned (Figure 4), with 56 per cent of respondents naming support for at least one of basic services, jobs, investment, and/or loans and grants. There was noticeable variation by country: 76 per cent mentioned fi-

ancial support in Egypt, compared to 49 per cent in Libya.

FIGURE 4: NOMINATED AS ONE OF TWO TOP PRIORITIES FOR EU SUPPORT, %



Note: 17.8% in Egypt, 14.9% in Iraq, 2.2% in Jordan, 11.2% in Libya, 5.9% in Morocco and 2.4% in Tunisia said they did not know.