new approaches. Unfortunately, while this may pay electoral dividends domestically, it does not address the basic causes of instability in the Middle East. European leaders find themselves in a bind: either support long-term solutions which will stabilise the region and risk domestic unpopularity, or score easier political points at home while leaving an already unstable Middle East to fester.

Stability, security and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region can be achieved by supporting both an economic growth which guarantees the equitable inclusion of all citizens, and a political process which actually represents citizens and their interests. There is a potentially strong demand across the Arab world for such an equitable and inclusive economic and political order. The opportunity to harness such a demand is one which political leaderships on both side of the Mediterranean forgo at their peril.
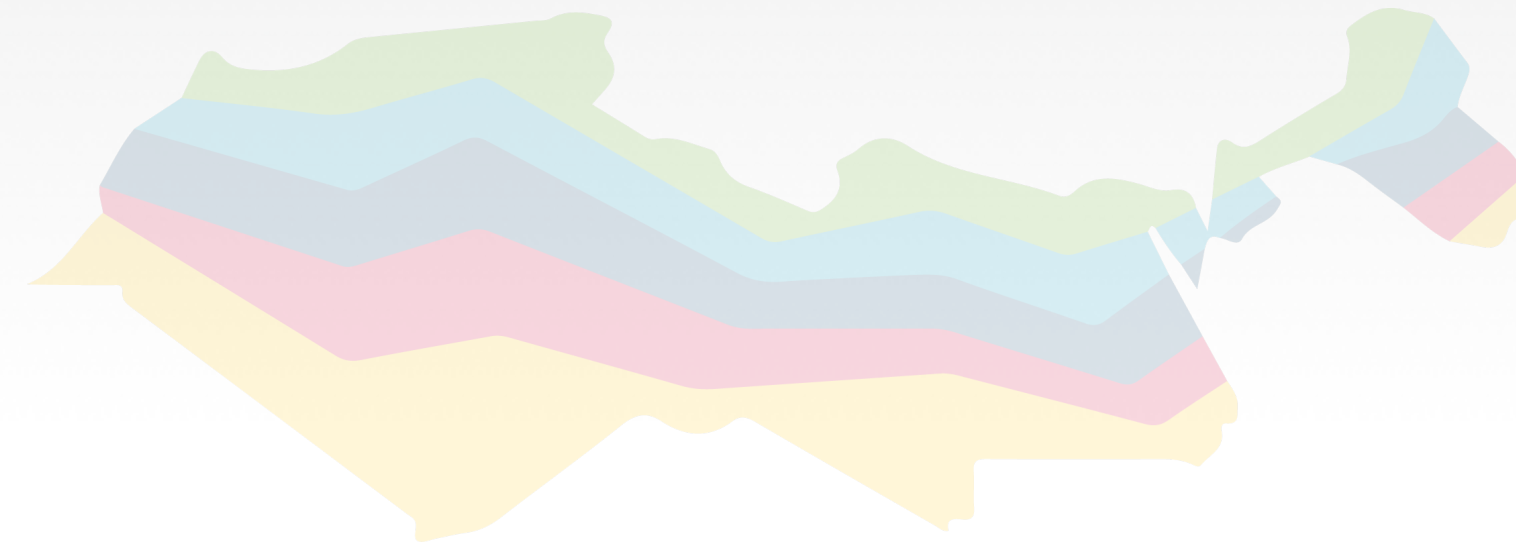
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The Arab Transformations

Policy Brief 1

What do 'the People' Want? The Demand for Democracy in Six Middle Eastern States

Introduction

EU policy towards its Southern Neighbourhood aims to ensure the security of Member States and is underpinned by an assumption of a shared interest in democracy, security, and prosperity through economic liberalisation. It sees the main way of achieving these aims as promoting Western-style liberal democracy as a political system capable of providing peace and stability. Evidence from public opinion survey research shows this ambition is supported by citizens of Arab countries, where public opinion polls for over a decade report strong support for democracy. However, these citizens do not share the EU's procedural conception of democracy, a conception in which civil and political rights are decoupled from – and prioritised over – social and economic rights. The Arab Transformations survey carried out in 2014 in six Arab states (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq) suggests few people demanded this brand of democracy. Furthermore, most people thought the EU has not done a good job of supporting transitions to democracy, nor did they have much appetite for EU involvement in the domestic politics of their countries.

The EU soon portrayed the 2010-2011 Arab Uprisings as a popular demand for liberal democracy. However, while the Uprisings were indeed

SUMMARY
- EU policy towards the Southern Neighbourhood aims to achieve security through development and democracy.
- However, it assumes shared understandings of democracy, security and prosperity, and Western-style market democracy as the main tool to achieve this.
- Data show Arab citizens strongly support for democracy but equally that most reject the EU brand of formal liberal democracy, demanding social and economic rights.
- MENA citizens also do not think the EU has facilitated transitions to democracy, and they reject EU involvement.

KEYWORDS
Democracy, European Neighbourhood Policy, Arab Uprisings, Political Rights, Economic and Social Rights, Security

intensely political, clearly demanding a change of regime (nizaam), they were not demands for a liberal and free-market version of democracy. Protesters were more concerned about social justice, economic inclusion, and fighting corruption, and relatively less concerned with those civil and political rights which regional regimes had for decades told people they already had, covering autocracy with a thin veil of 'façade democracy'. The EU revised its policies in response to the Up-

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SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME

risings, claiming it recognised the error of previous support for autocratic regimes, and recognising at least nominally the importance of 'inclusive growth' and encouraging a 'deep democracy'. However, closer analysis shows that the EU model of democracy remained substantively unchanged, and that it did not respond to popular demands for social justice and economic rights. The model of democracy set out by the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) focuses on formal aspects of democracy combined with economic liberalisation, with later reforms shifting away from even this in favour of conventional conceptions of security and stability of which it had supposedly recognised the failings.

Democracy without inclusive economic growth will no more prevent conflict in the region in the future than it did in the past, nor is cooperation with autocracies on democracy and human rights any more likely to support democratisation than it did in the run-up to the Arab Uprisings.

What the People Want

The Arab Transformations public opinion survey was carried out in six MENA countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) in 2014. It shows MENA citizens are deeply unhappy with the performance of their governments and lack trust in them. However, they do not think that the Arab Uprisings were primarily motivated by a demand for more political rights, nor do they think that lack of political rights are among the two most important challenges facing their countries in 2014. Survey data suggest they are generally more concerned about corruption, social justice and the economic situation.

FIGURE1: TWO MOST IMPORTANT DRIVERS OF THE UPRISINGS (%)
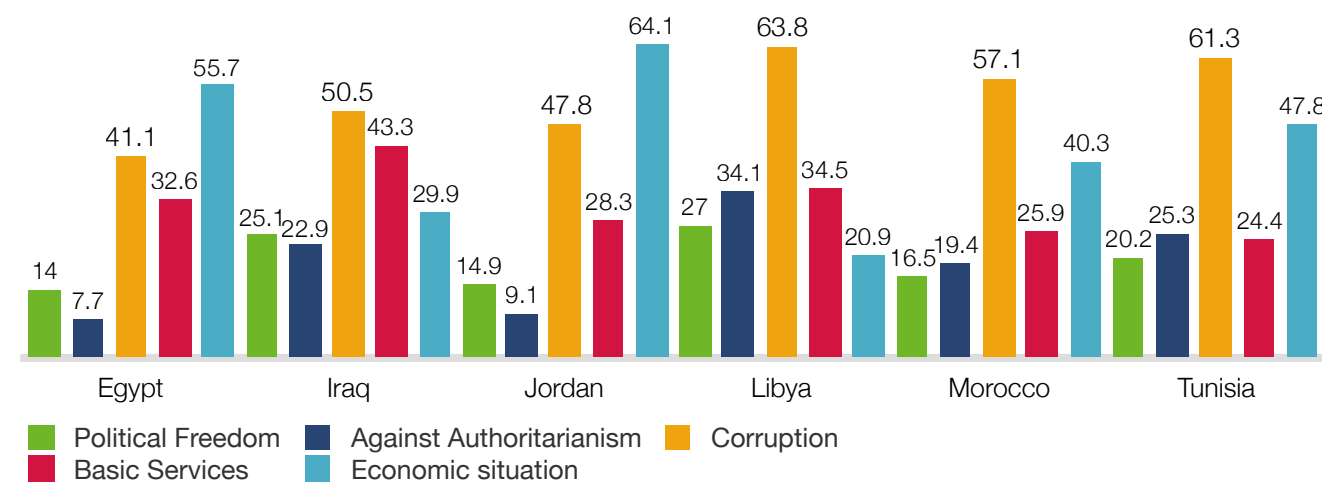
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Only a very small minority of citizens in 2014 thought authoritarianism was one of the two main challenges facing their country. It varied from a low of just two per cent in Egypt and Jordan to 17 per cent in Libya. By contrast, the economic situation was nominated by three quarters of citizens across the six countries surveyed, varying from around 90 per cent in Egypt and Jordan to just over three-quarters in Morocco and Tunisia, a half in Iraq and 28 per cent in Libya. In Iraq and Libya – countries scarred by deep divisions and conflict – there was much concern about security. What is clear is that, whatever their political preferences, citizens reject the democratic façade which 'adaptable autocrats' have sought before and since the Uprisings in which political rights and social justice are merely rhetorical fig-leaves: citizens want both a substantive political inclusion – i.e., government responsive to people's needs, listening to citizens' voices – and a fairer, more stable and more dignified economic outlook. They want responsive governments that they can trust and which prioritise meeting citizens' needs rather than lining their own pockets and abusing the rule of law.

The Demand for Democracy

As in previous research, most citizens agreed that 'democracy as a system may have its problems but is better than other systems'. This ranged from a low of 62 per cent in Egypt to a high of 90 per cent in Jordan. However, the proportion of respondents strongly agreeing is much lower, varying from a high of 39 per cent in Jordan to a low of 18 per cent in Tunisia and Iraq. This suggests that there may be only qualified support for the idea that democracy is better than other systems of government.

FIGURE 2: DEMOCRACY IS THE BEST SYSTEM DESPITE ITS FAULTS, %
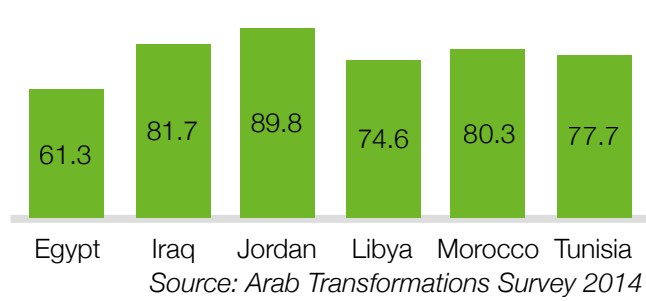
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Nor is there any evidence that Islam is seen as a major barrier to democratisation. A majority agree that democracy is compatible with Islam – or rather disagree that it is incompatible with Islam – ranging from 71 per cent of Moroccans and Iraqis to 59 per cent of Egyptians.

FIGURE 3: DISAGREE THAT DEMOCRACY IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH ISLAM (%)
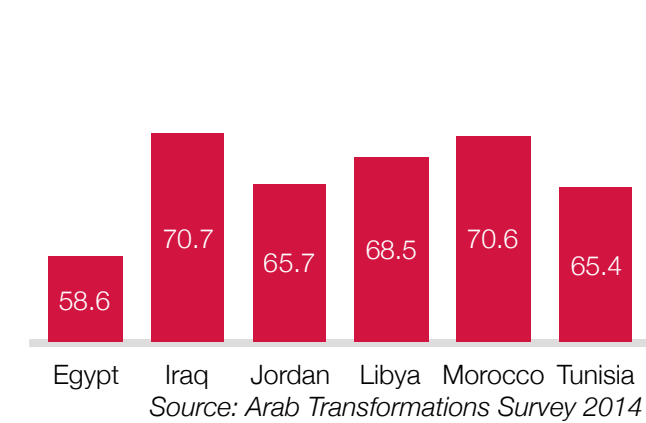
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

However, they do not necessarily want the type of liberal democracy promoted by the EU. Taking the kind of minimalist procedural definition espoused in the EU's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a clear majority of citizens do see open multiparty elections as at least somewhat suitable for their country. However, support falls dramatically when we consider only those who see procedural democracy as the only suitable system – that is, that their countries should become democracies. Here, support varies: 51 per cent in Iraq, around 38 per cent in Egypt and Tunisia, around a quarter in Jordan and Morocco, and 17 per cent in Libya.

Furthermore, while Islam is not seen as a barrier to democracy, there is strong support for religious law (shari'a), with less than 10 per cent wanting no law to be based on shari'a. This raises questions about the extent to which there is support for human rights and gender equality in

the way in which they are generally understood in Western liberal democracy.

What Kind of Democracy do People Want?

What do citizens in the six countries surveyed think about when they say that democracy is the best system despite its faults? Asked to nominate the two most important characteristics of democracy, it is clear that civil and political rights are not seen universally as the most important in the same way as EU policy or indeed current scholarly consensus do. Although the most frequently mentioned is indeed the right to vote, it is only in Iraq and Libya that more than 50 per cent nominate it, and even then it is only just over a half, falling to only around 20 per cent in Egypt and Jordan. Freedom of speech and political equality are much less frequently mentioned. Even fewer are those who nominate two such political characteristics as the most important, varying from a high of a quarter in Iraq, Libya and Tunisia, to just six per cent in Egypt. The proportion of those choosing voting in elections as one of the two is even lower, varying from a quarter in Libya to around a fifth in Iraq and Tunisia, a tenth in Morocco, and around five per cent in Jordan and Egypt. MENA citizens appear unsurprisingly sceptical of voting in the region's 'façade democracies'.

FIGURE 4: POLITICAL RIGHTS AS ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF DEMOCRACY (%)
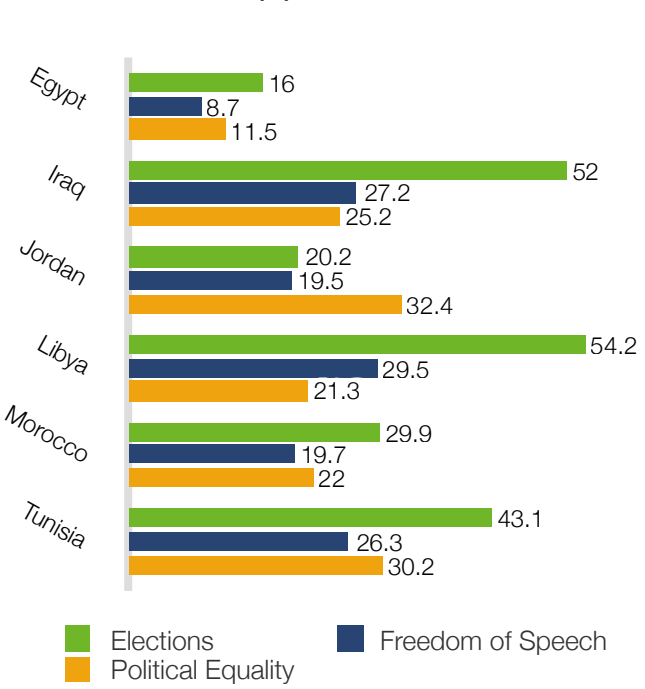
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Even among those who do prioritise political rights, there is a much broader understanding of democracy than just focusing on political rights. For them, social justice and economic inclusion are also crucial: providing for citizens' welfare through inclusive development, basic services, and full employment are all seen as important by most citizens, varying from nearly two-thirds in Morocco to half in Libya. In Iraq and Jordan over 40 per cent of citizens think that a democracy fights corruption, as do a noticeable minority in all other countries.

FIGURE 5: NON-POLITICAL CHARACTERISTICS NOMINATED AS ONE OF TWO MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACY (%)
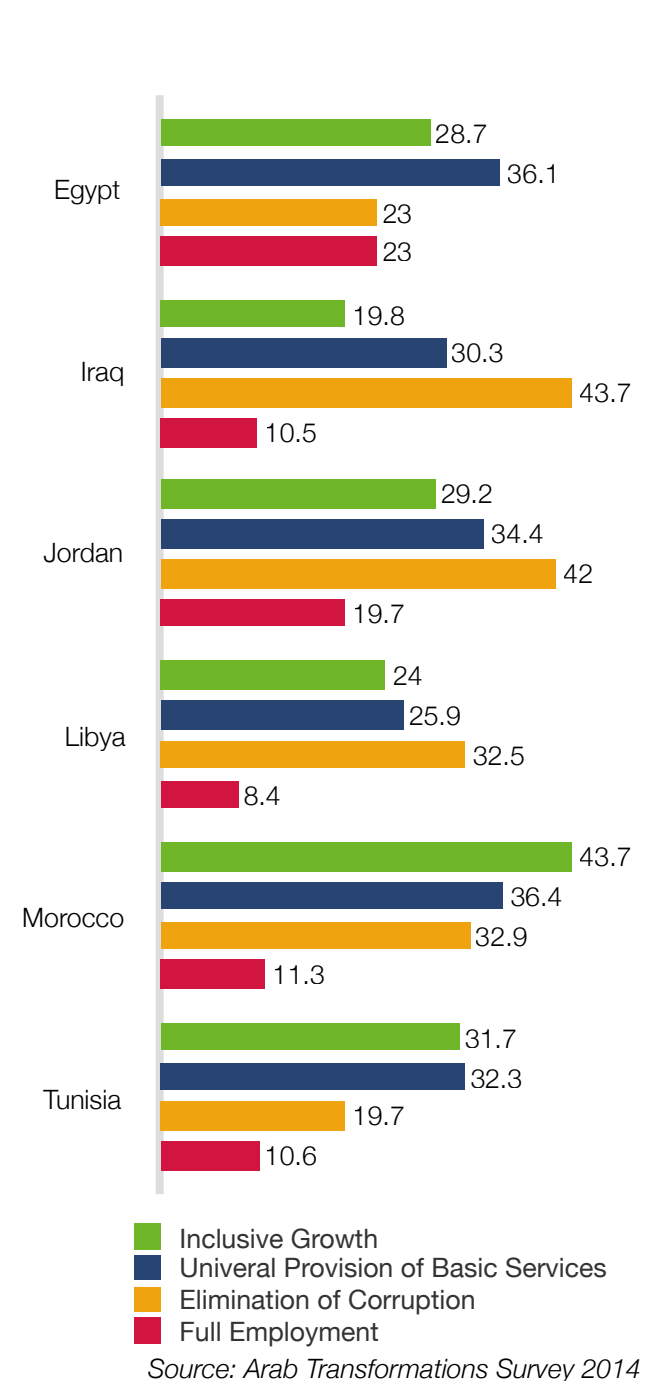
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Indeed, in three countries more respondents nominate at least one welfare variable as being one of the two most important characteristics of democracy than nominate a political variable.

FIGURE 6: POLITICAL AND WELFARE RIGHTS AS ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACY (%)
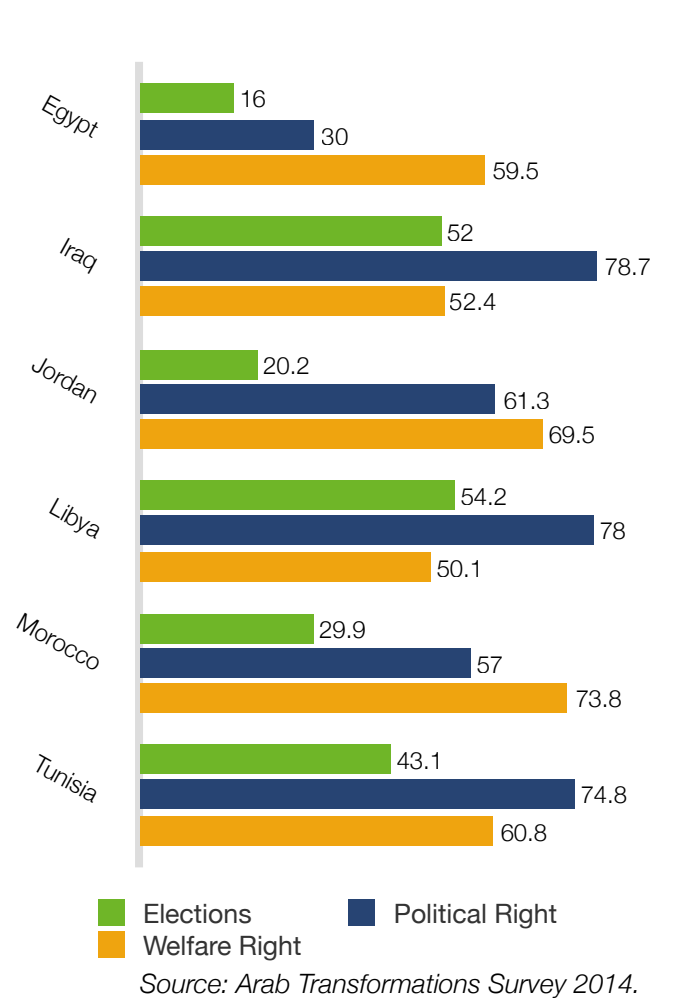
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Survey data show that while the Arab Uprisings may not have been motivated by a pursuit of (liberal) democracy, there is certainly widespread support for democracy and a strong demand for social justice and economic inclusion as part of democracy.

The EU rightly recognised the limits of its pre-Uprisings Neighbourhood Policy, and in the early aftermath of the 2010-2011 Uprisings it began to move towards re-assessing both the goals and the instruments of this policy. However, partly due to conflict in Iraq and Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis – aggravated in European public opinion by the problem of 'Islamist' terrorism – the EU has backtracked from these