



**ArabTrans**

## **The Arab Transformations Project: Executive Summary**

The Arab Transformations Project asked a series of questions of around ten thousand citizens across seven MENA countries in order to better understand what people want, four years on from the Arab Uprisings of 2010-2011.

The answers came back as an echo of the popular slogan which launched the so-called 'Arab Spring' in Tunisia: '*Aysh! Horreya! 'Adala al-igtima'eyya!*' meaning 'Bread! Freedom! Social Justice!'. This succinctly mapped out the kind of society protestors wished to see their regimes replaced by: a more inclusive social, economic and political system to replace the oligarchic, authoritarian kleptocracies that had ruled.

The research carried out by the Arab Transformations Project shows that a wish for a stronger economy is the principle objective of citizens across the surveyed region, over and above any particular government reform or model of social justice.

However, freedom from political marginalisation and the ability to participate in economic development are also of fundamental concern, as is the delivery of a fairer society through greater social justice.

The Project identifies that unless these desires and expectations are delivered, the threat encapsulated in a second core slogan of the Uprisings could come to pass: '*ash-sha'b yurid isqaat an-nizaam*' or 'the people demand the downfall of the regime.' The fragility and brittleness of the current regimes across all seven nations surveyed should not be underestimated.

### **Time for change**

In an appeal to policy makers the Arab Transformations Project is calling for changes in EU policies to stabilise the region and reduce the potential for even greater levels of economic migration to Europe.

Specifically the Arab Transformations Project proposes a re-think of the Paris Agenda with greater co-ordination between state and non-state donors through an organised planning process engaging recipient states. In addition the Project recommends a re-think of the free market model of growth which may not be the most appropriate form of stimulation for these economies. Finally the Project is calling for EU policy to provide the means for effective action on corruption, capital flight and taxation.



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### Project Themes

In order to better explain the findings of its research, the Arab Transformation Project has organised its data around a number of themes.

#### EU-MENA Relations:

Through its research, the Arab Transformations Project identifies a disconnect between what the EU may believe it is achieving in the MENA region, and local perceptions of the failure of its influence and impact. The EU aims to attain inclusive growth and shared prosperity, inclusive political systems and democracy as well as greater security and stability. However, the research shows that it has failed to respond to popular demands and has instead produced greater economic polarisation, ongoing political marginalisation and *de facto* support for authoritarian regimes. Through its existing policies, the EU has not addressed the structural causes of insecurity and instability in MENA countries. The effects of these failures have been a deeper undermining of the EU's reputation as well as increasing pressures on migration.

#### Security:

Across all countries surveyed as part of the Arab Transformations Project, there is a general perception that the security situation has significantly deteriorated. This is particularly prevalent in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. This phenomenon is linked to the turmoil of the Uprisings, and in Libya there is specific concern about civil war and terrorism. In Egypt, government-led propaganda has also served to engender a greater national concern around the state of national security.

#### Quality of Life:

Respondents to the Arab Transformation survey were not simply concerned with their economic circumstances but their quality of life more generally. Most respondents felt relatively safe in their immediate neighbourhood and that they had neighbours that they could rely on in time of need. They were concerned about educational and employment opportunities and the quality of public services. Respondents expressed relatively high levels of dissatisfaction with the educational, health and social security systems in their individual countries. Many had an expectation that the EU should provide development assistance for education, social services and job creation.



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### Gender:

The Arab Transformations survey found relatively slight differences between male and female respondents on gender issues. Female respondents were less likely than males to have participated in the Uprisings or to have considered the possibility of migration. Few respondents believed gender equality was a priority, but women and younger people were marginally more likely to support gender equality than men and older respondents. Most people considered education to be equally important for girls as boys and that married women should be able to work outside the home if they wished. However, respondents were less certain that women made as effective political leaders as men and a large majority wanted *Sharia* law to be enforced - a legal system that gives women fewer rights than men.

### Social Media and Youth:

The Arab Transformations Project research has identified that the virtual tool of social organisation - social media - was influential in the Arab Uprisings in helping to make people better informed. It may play a greater role in organising political activity when citizens are already engaged in conflict situations. The research demonstrates an almost ubiquitous interest in politics across the region and identifies a schism between traditional political activities - such as voting and membership of political parties - and activism by age. Older people who are active politically tend to be offline whilst younger people who are politically engaged tend to operate online.

### Corruption:

Roughly sixty per cent of those surveyed as part of the Arab Transformations Project believed state corruption is extremely widespread with the number leaping to ninety per cent when responses from those who believe there is a medium level of corruption within society are added. Very few respondents believed their governments were taking measures to address corruption. Corruption is of course more than simply about money, but includes nepotism, cronyism and clientelism. Across much of the region the phenomenon of '*wasta*' is prevalent. This is a form of social influence enabling one to provide services in the expectation of reciprocation from others. In all countries over eighty per cent of respondents believe *wasta* is always or almost always needed to secure a job. Corruption was given as a major reason for joining or supporting the Arab Uprisings by many respondents.



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### Migration:

Forty per cent of respondents surveyed in the Arab Transformations Project considered living abroad, with a majority considering doing so for a temporary period. This varied by country, with over half Moroccans saying they have considered migration, compared with just over a quarter of Iraqis. Around a fifth of Jordanians and Moroccans have considered permanent migration compared with just six per cent of Egyptians. The key driver for migration is economic, however in Iraq security is the overriding concern, and in Libya both security and education are more important drivers. Political reasons for migration account for only three per cent of responses to the survey, although the economy and security are deeply entwined in political contexts.

### Politics and Religion:

Although religion is clearly important it is not so certain to what extent this translates into the political sphere. The Arab Transformations survey found that with the exception of Jordan, all countries have a majority of people who agree to an extent to a separation between Islam and the government. This is particularly prevalent in Egypt. In all the countries surveyed a large majority of respondents think that at least some laws should be based on - rather than simply applying - religious jurisprudence (Sharia) especially Family Law and Property Law, with Tunisia being a partial exception. Only in Algeria and Jordan did a large majority want the government to implement exclusively Islamic Law.

### Trust:

Trust is the basis of social cohesion. It is what makes it possible for individuals and groups to interact in ways which work to everyone's profit, on balance. The Council of Ministers was trusted by just over half the respondents to the Arab Transformations survey in Egypt and Iraq, but only around a quarter or less in the rest of the countries surveyed. Parliament was trusted by very few; nor were political parties. Local government was trusted by only between twenty and thirty per cent of respondents, except in Iraq where this figure reached nearly sixty per cent. There is a great deal of variation in the extent to which the courts and legal system are trusted. Egypt had the most faith in them at over fifty-eight per cent, whilst Morocco was the lowest with just twenty-eight per cent. The police were trusted by over eighty per cent of Jordanians but Iraqis, at only eleven per cent, barely trusted them at all. Respondents did not have much faith in the media; Iraq was the most trusting but only thirty-five per cent expressed 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of trust in media sources.



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### Drivers of the Uprisings:

Support for the Arab Uprisings, perhaps not surprisingly, varied by country, but overall the tendency is for supporters to be male, relatively young (not elderly) and neither the poorest nor the least well educated in society. The research conducted by the Arab Transformations survey reveals differences between the seven countries surveyed but overall corruption and economic issues were perceived as significantly more important drivers than purely political ones. By 2014 people seem less optimistic about the outcomes of the Arab Uprisings than they did in 2011, and less likely to say that they supported them. The general view is that the economic situation of the countries and individual households has deteriorated, with the exception of Iraq where overall respondents note a small improvement. Egyptians are noticeably more positive about the prospects for economic growth.

For further details, supportive academic papers and other materials please visit the Project website: <http://www.arabtrans.eu/>