

PERCEPTIONS ON DEMOCRACY AND ISLAMISM: HYPOTHESES AND SECOND-GUESSED PREDICTIONS

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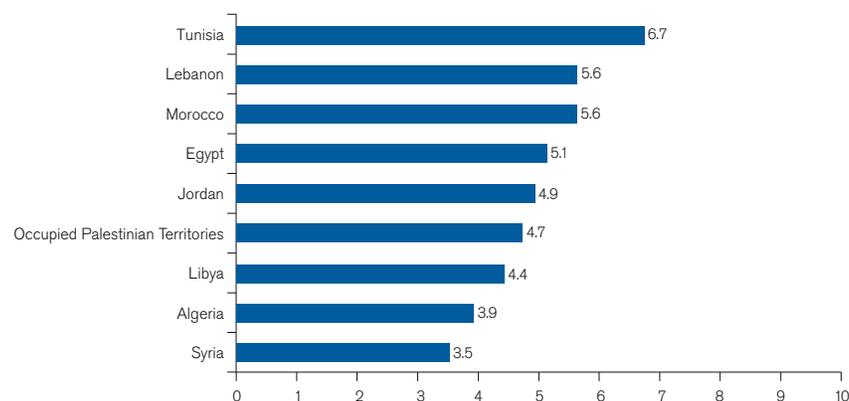
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Assessing the perspectives for sustainable democracy in several Arab Mediterranean countries as well as the potential role of political Islam in the region were two of the questions put to the nearly 700 respondents from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean who participated in the 3rd Euromed Survey.

In both cases, the responses are based on individual perceptions drawing on the knowledge of respondents about the countries' realities and on their own experience as citizens. This makes it difficult to properly evaluate the replies, as we do not know the personal profile of the respondents, which could explain to a great extent why they answer in one way or another. In any case, the overall "winners" in terms of democratic expectations are Tunisia – which leads the ranking with an average 6.7 out of 10 –, followed by Lebanon and Morocco (both occupying a second position with a 5.6, respectively). A second group of countries comprises Egypt (5.1), Jordan (4.9) and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (4.7). Finally, the group of democratic laggards is made up of Libya (4.4), Algeria (3.9) and Syria (3.5).

Graph 1: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in the following countries

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

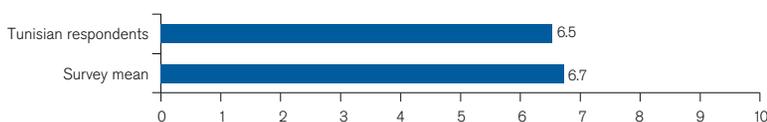
First-glance conclusions: all the "revolutionary" countries which succeeded in toppling their dictators head each of the aforementioned groups. Amongst them, Tunisia emerges clearly as the country with the highest democratic expectations within the Arab World, while the outlook for Egypt raises more doubts and a lot of uncertainty in the case of Libya. A further (though possibly misleading) remark which can be made in light of these results: monarchies are not doing *that* badly, even if Jordan lags behind Morocco and Egypt. The most striking results re-

late to Lebanon – which ties with Morocco – and to the Occupied Palestinian Territories which, in spite of the stalemate of the negotiation process and their situation of vulnerable instability, almost “pass” with a 4.7. In turn, the Algerian failure – a dire 3.9 only beaten by Syria, which comes in last position due to the direction taken by the Syrian revolution, where repression is bringing the country closer to a civil war – is hardly surprising. One last remark: the overall mean of the 9 countries only fails by a small margin: 4.9. Could this figure be somehow related to the 7.3 (out of 10) attributed by respondents to the role that political Islam could play in the Mediterranean in the coming years? Whether there is a positive or negative correlation between the two is difficult to tell based on the available data, but this article will try to speculate on a number of hypotheses.

In order to provide more accurate explanations – albeit always tentative –, one needs to analyse each of the countries in more detail. At the forefront of democracy, Tunisia is well-perceived both externally and domestically, its citizens being optimistic with regard to the country’s democratic perspectives. 46% of Tunisian respondents assess with an 8 or a 9 their country’s democratic outlook, while an equal percentage of the total respondents give it a grade between 7 and 8. The countries most confident about Tunisia’s democratic prospects are its neighbours from the Maghreb, the Mediterranean European countries and Israel. There seems to be a consensus on Tunisia. Neither Ennahda’s victory in the October 2011 elections or its lack of political experience or later social unrest had managed, at the beginning of 2012, to dispel optimism about the Tunisian transition. Perhaps Ennahda’s alliance with the other two winning parties, namely Ettakatol and CPR in order to establish the so-called Tunisian “troika”, has been perceived as a step forward towards the long-awaited democracy. Or maybe the very manifestation of democracy implied in the Islamist victory has helped to convey this vision. The extent to which political Islam is seen as a factor supporting democratization is difficult to tell. Nonetheless, based on the responses to the second question it could be argued so, as 69% of Tunisians expect Islamism to play an important role in the region. When looking specifically at the distribution of responses, two separate “peaks” come to the fore: 24% of Tunisians attribute an 8 to this role, while 21% give it a 5, a result that could be interpreted as a reluctance to acknowledge such a role.

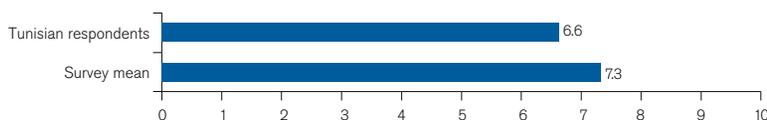
Graph 2: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in TUNISIA

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)



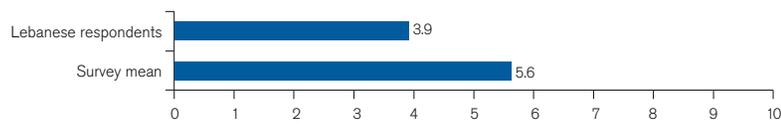
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

The external perception is a key factor in order to account for the results in Lebanon. National respondents themselves are the ones assessing their country’s democratic perspectives with the worst grades. Their opinions fall mainly in the range between 4 and 5 (59%) and between 1 and 2 (30%) – possibly reflecting the Lebanese awareness of the shortcomings of their own political system and the high degree of national and regional instability they are subject to. Such a negative assessment stands in sharp contrast with the overall external perception,

which places the country’s democratic perspectives mainly in the range between 5, 6 and 7 – Turkish respondents being the most optimistic ones, followed by their neighbours from the Mashreq. It is indeed surprising that in contrast with the Lebanese sense of pessimism, its neighbours have faith in its potential for democracy, with the exception of Israel, which interestingly enough is more in line with the Lebanese attitude, assessing its neighbour’s democratic prospects with a 4.3. As for the role of political Islam in the region, the answer in the case of Lebanese respondents does not raise the slightest doubt: 27% think it will be an 8 and a non-negligible 14% attribute it a categorical 10. Therefore, Lebanese respondents are well aware that political Islam will be a key actor in the region and seem sceptical with regard to its potential for democratization. In the light of these remarks, let everyone draw their own conclusions on whether there is a correlation or not between these two elements.

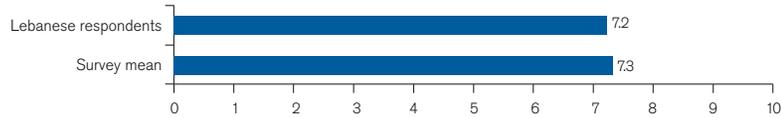
Graph 3: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in LEBANON

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



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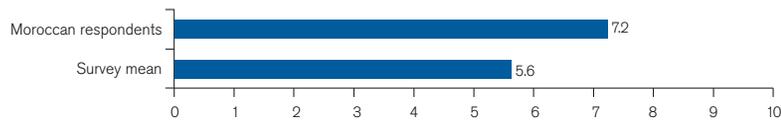


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

The case of Morocco is interesting because the Moroccans themselves are the ones catapulting the final grade by giving their country a 7.2 in the question on democratic prospects, although the rest of respondents from other countries also give a pass grade to Morocco and to its “top-down” process of reform. All in all, the results show that either there is little dissidence in Morocco or it is poorly-represented in the sample. As to the role of Islamism, even if elections had been held and the victory of the PJD was already known by the time the Survey was conducted, responses are fairly homogeneously distributed (although most of them are found between 5 and 8), almost minimizing the *faits accomplis*. These results give grounds to suspect possibly biased responses.

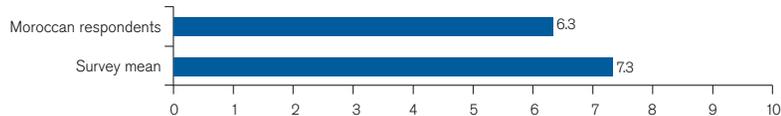
Graph 4: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in MOROCCO

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape

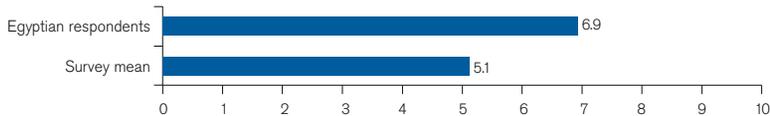
(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)



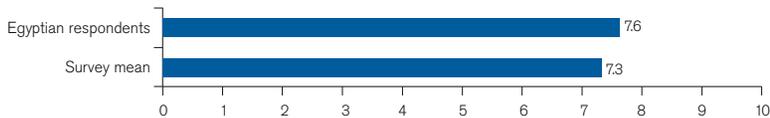
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Egypt is another example of a country whose citizens overestimate their country’s potential (6.9) compared to the external perception (5.1), and this despite the fact that when they answered this Survey they were in the midst of parliamentary elections, and that there had been new clashes between the military and the revolutionaries which pointed to the difficult course the Egyptian process was taking. On the role of Islamism, Egyptians were clearly well-aware of what was coming up: 29% gave it a 7 and another 29% gave a 9 to its future role in the region. Could it be on this basis that Israel only gave Egypt a 4.1 as a “democratic” grade?

Graph 5: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in EGYPT
 (average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



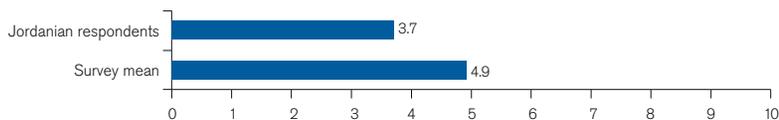
Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape
 (average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)



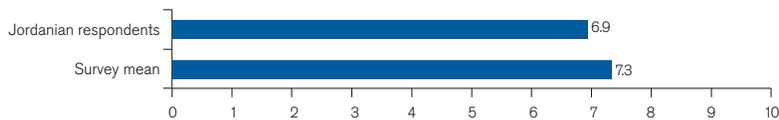
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Jordanian respondents are on average pessimistic about their country’s democratic outlook (3.7), though their replies show a strong polarisation of opinions (11% assess it with a 1, while 16% assess it with an 8). This can mean that some of them are very satisfied about the response provided to the uprising by the regime, while others are deeply disappointed about the outcome of the reform process. In turn, on the role of political Islam, notwithstanding some divergences, a remarkable 33% consider that it will play a prominent role and the majority of the responses tend to reflect the same view.

Graph 6: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in JORDAN
 (average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape
 (average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)

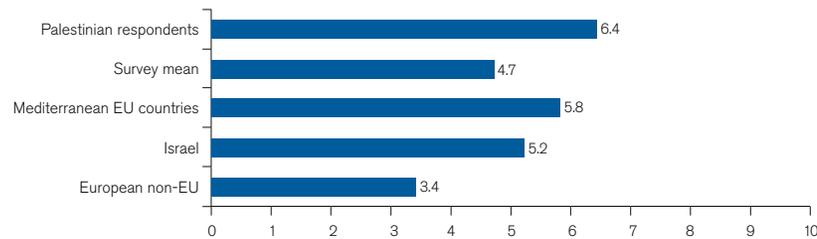


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

One of the most outstanding cases is that of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Palestinians are well-aware that Islamism is a key actor (since the first Islamist democratic victory came with Hamas in 2006) and they give their country an optimistic 6.4 in terms of democratic potential. And so do the European Mediterranean countries (5.8) and even Israel, which gives them a surprisingly hopeful 5.2. It is peculiar to see that the immediate neighbourhood still harbours hopes about the potential for democracy in Palestine in spite of the current situation, while the Balkan countries give it a gloomy 3.4. Could this be seen as an internal reading of the Palestinian conflict by the Balkan respondents?

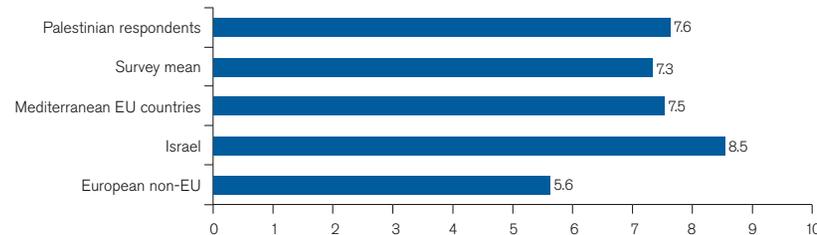
Graph 7: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)



Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)

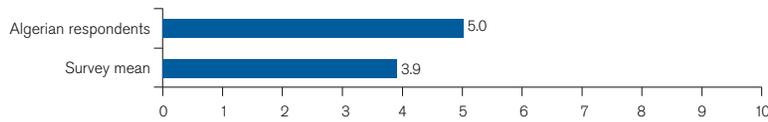


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

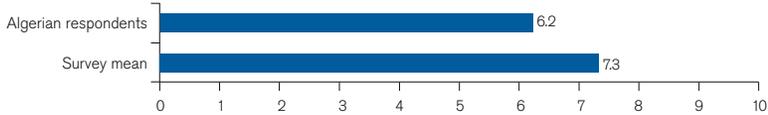
Leaving aside the Libyan responses due to the low representativeness of the sample, the article will now focus on the two “pending” countries: Algeria and Syria. Responses relating to Algeria, maybe due to the long-awaited change that never happens, reflect a very pessimistic view about the country’s future, notwithstanding the fact that Algerians improve the result by shifting the mean to the right (see graph below). The responses from Algerians show a certain polarization of opinions and a social dissent regarding their democratic path, coupled with a more moderate assessment of the role that political Islam will play in the region (6.2). This can certainly be seen as a reflection of Algerians’ own past traumas, of a regional interpretation of the question through a national lens and of a wish of not having their past experiences repeated. And yet in the case of Algeria, the elections held after the Survey show, indeed, that neither is the country experiencing a clear process of change, nor is political Islam a relevant actor in the country, in spite of the high expectations raised by the media prior to the elections.

Graph 8: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in ALGERIA

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)

**Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape**

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)

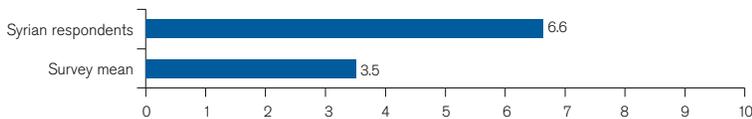


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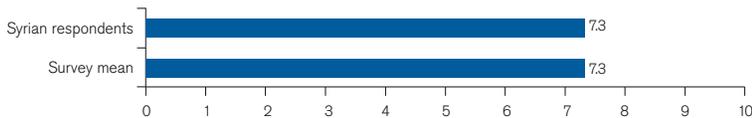
Syria is an extreme example of a fragmented and confronted society: 13% assess the potential for democracy with a 1, whereas 38% attribute it a 9 and 26% a 4-5. The first impression in light of these results is that many of the Syrian respondents are loyal to Bashar al-Assad's regime, while a minority of them are radical opponents and a non-negligible group in-between does not dare to take sides, lest it would have a negative impact on their status. However, these results could be interpreted the other way around, namely that most respondents come from the opposition and predict a close end to the current regime and a real potential to establish true democracy in the country. Whether such a view is linked or not to the remarkable role that Syrians attribute to political Islam in the region is more difficult to tell.

Graph 9: Assessing the prospects of sustainable democracy in SYRIA

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for very improbable and 10 for very probable)

**Role of political Islam in the future Mediterranean landscape**

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for negligible role and 10 for key role)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 3rd Euromed Survey

Last but not least, it should be noted that even though Islamism plays a fundamental role in democratic Turkey, the future of regional Islamism is toned down by Turkish respondents – light years away from the emphatic 38% of Israeli respondents predicting a highly probable role of political Islam in the region. Against the backdrop of the unfolding events and the rise of Islamism in all electoral processes, there are reasons to believe that Israelis have a sound knowledge of the political trends in the region. Whether they are satisfied with them is something we can imagine, but we cannot judge based on the data provided by this Survey.