

TAKING THE PULSE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE EURO- MEDITERRANEAN REGION

The first block of the Euromed Survey aimed to define the concept, role, mission, means and focus of civil society according to the respondents' opinion. It also looked at specific civil society actors and social movements that have recently had a significant political impact on both shores of the Mediterranean.

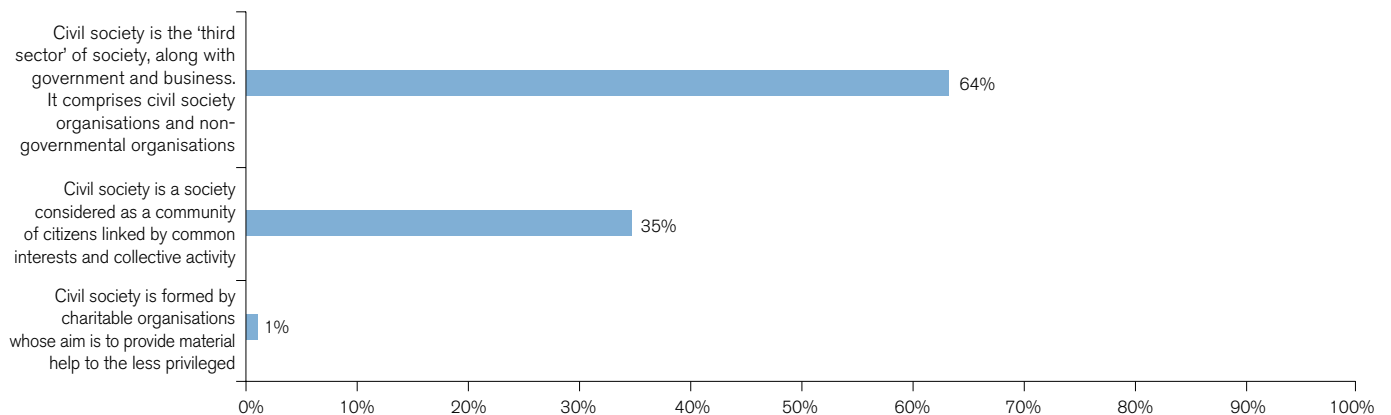
Main findings:

- There is a strong consensus among respondents to the Survey that civil society is an important component of democracy.
- Respondents also agree, albeit less strongly and unanimously, with the assertion that civil society is playing an important role in their respective countries. Among all respondents, Tunisians strongly agree in the biggest proportions with the assertion that civil society is playing an important role in their country. Turks and Egyptians strongly agree with this assertion to a lesser extent.
- Civil society's main mission should be monitoring policies and watchdogging citizens' rights rather than substituting the government and offering services not provided adequately otherwise.
- Public mobilisations are seen as the main efficient means for civil society to achieve its objectives. Only a minority of respondents are of the opinion that reaching out to international audiences is efficient.
- Civil society in European countries should concentrate primarily on climate change. The second main focus should be on "human rights, democracy and rule of law". In Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries, "human rights, democracy and rule of law" should be the main focus of civil society. The second main focus should be corruption.
- Of all categories of civil society actors, trade unions and human rights organisations are those most frequently identified as the most influential. European Union (EU) respondents identify environmental organisations as influential in their respective countries to a larger extent than SEM respondents. In turn, SEM respondents consider in bigger proportions than their European counterparts that women's rights or youth organisations are influential in their respective countries.
- When it comes to the impact of specific social movements in EU countries, the most frequent answer from EU respondents is movements related to climate change, while SEM respondents are more prone to consider that the Gilets Jaunes have had the greatest impact in the EU.
- Asked about recent social movements with greatest political impact in SEM countries, respondents mentioned most frequently the recent Hirak movement in Algeria and more generally the 2011 Arab Spring.

DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY AND ITS ROLE

The **first question** of the Euromed Survey was designed to determine how experts, activists and policy-makers understood the concept of civil society. Most respondents (64%) favoured the UN definition: “Civil society is the ‘third sector’ of society, along with government and business. It comprises civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations.” The second preferred definition (35%) is the one that gives more weight to the concepts of “common interests” and “collective activity”, while only 1% of respondents chose to relate the concept of civil society only with “charitable organisations”.

Graph 1: From the following descriptions of civil society that come from authoritative sources, which one do you consider is the most appropriate?



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Below there is a selection of some of the open comments formulated by some respondents in relation to this question:

Il est impératif de mettre en exergue la dimension ACTEUR en articulation avec l'État et le secteur privé. Sa fonction ne peut être limitée aux actions caritatives, remplissant le vide laissé par l'État ou corrigeant les méfaits du secteur privé.

Moroccan respondent

Civil society provides the opportunity to rebalance the current narrative of representation, and providing a voice at a time when populism is proving divisive.

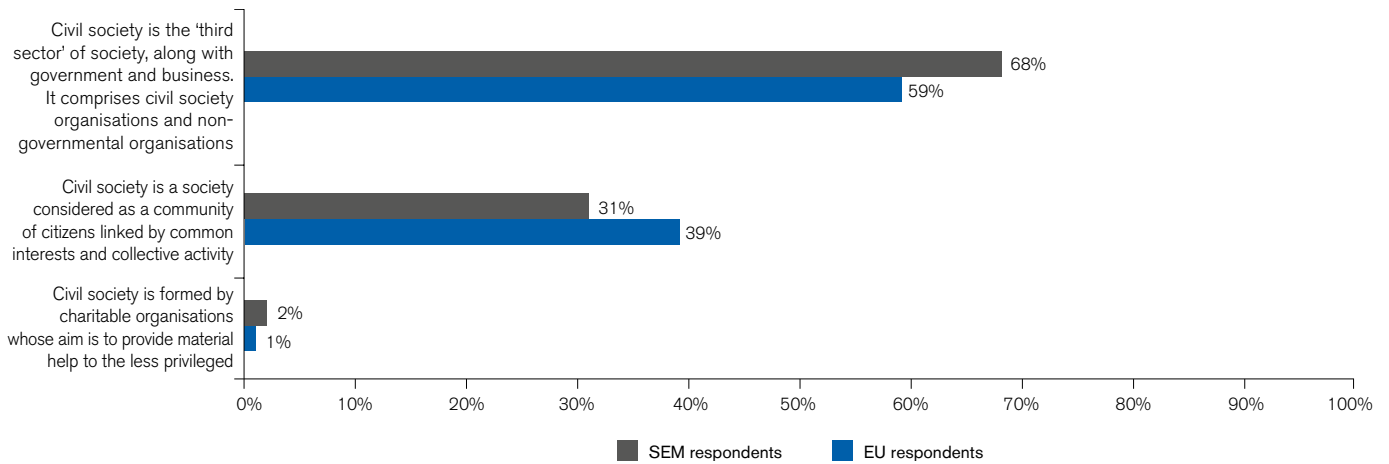
British respondent

Civil society is dynamic, vibrant and influential. Definition and roles of civil society are changing. The main question that arises is what might the contextual environment for civil society look like in 2030? Therefore, how might models of engagement for civil society develop?

Tunisian respondent

There are no significant differences between southern and northern participants in this regard, although respondents from SEM countries seem to more consistently support the aforementioned UN definition.

Graph 2: From the following descriptions of civil society that come from authoritative sources, which one do you consider is the most appropriate?

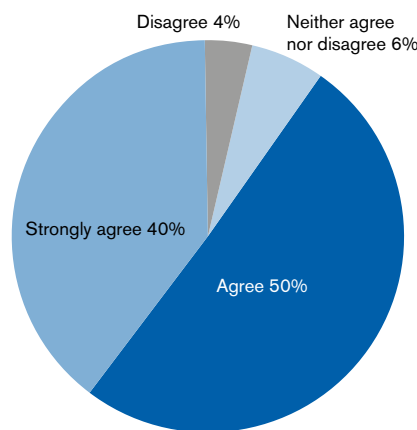


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Questions 2 and 3 set out to determine how respondents perceived the importance of civil society's role in their respective countries and how much civil society matters for democracy. Although there was almost unanimity around the assertion that "civil society is a defining pillar of democracy" (95% agree or strongly agree), the percentage of participants believing that it actually plays a significant role in their own societies is slightly lower (91%). The patterns of answers to both questions were quite similar in EU and SEM countries.

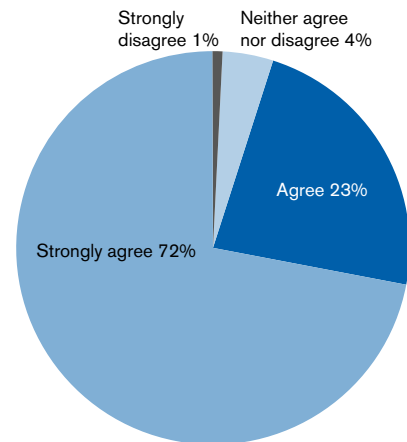
Graph 3a: Do you agree that civil society is playing an important role in your society?

All respondents



Graph 3b: Do you agree that civil society is a defining pillar of democracy?

All respondents

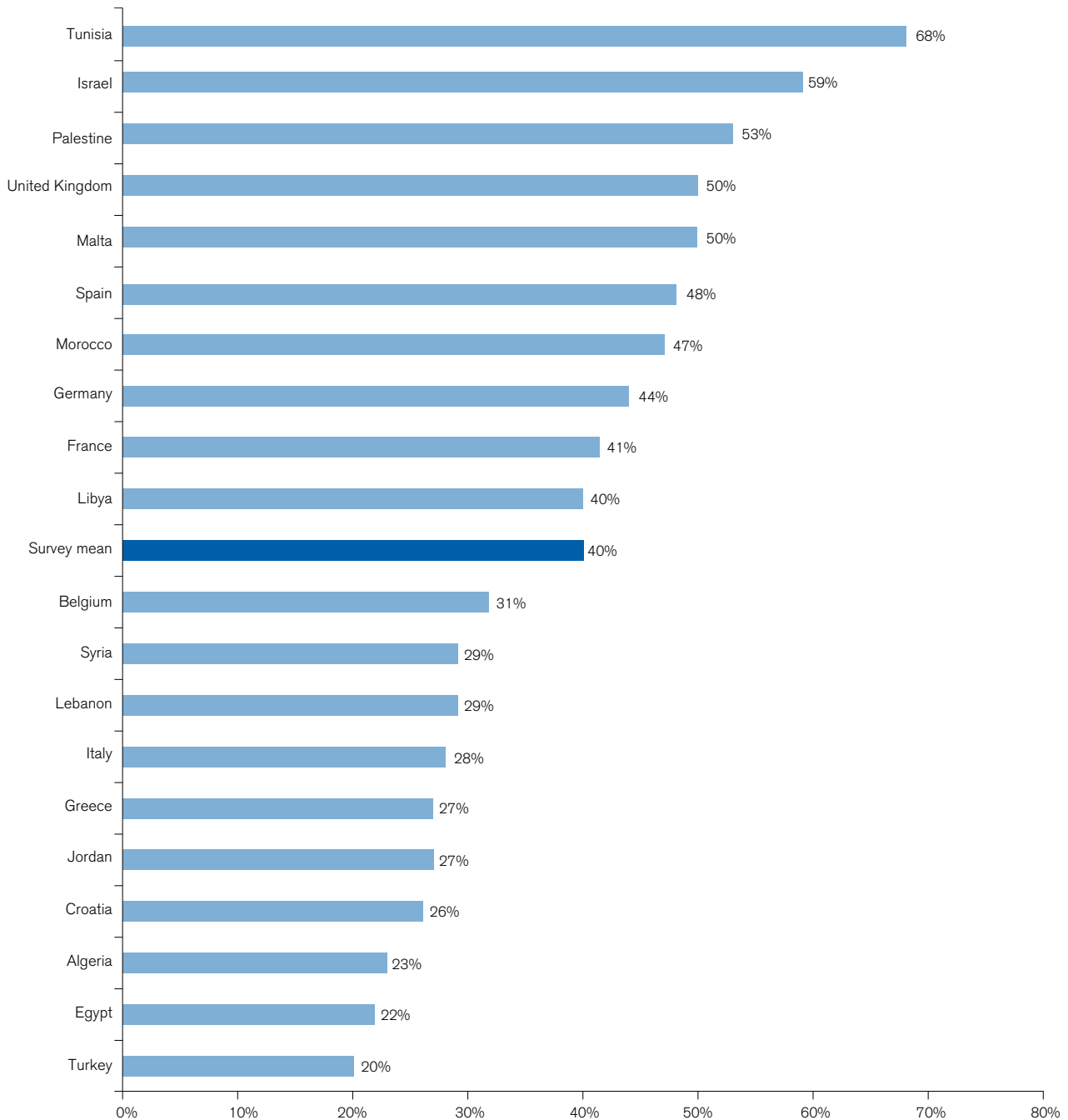


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

A breakdown of answers per country shows an acute perception of the importance of civil society by Tunisian respondents (68% of Tunisian respondents strongly agreed that Tunisian civil society is playing an important role in society). In turn, percentages are significantly below the mean for respondents from countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Algeria.

Graph 4: Do you agree that civil society is playing an important role in your society?

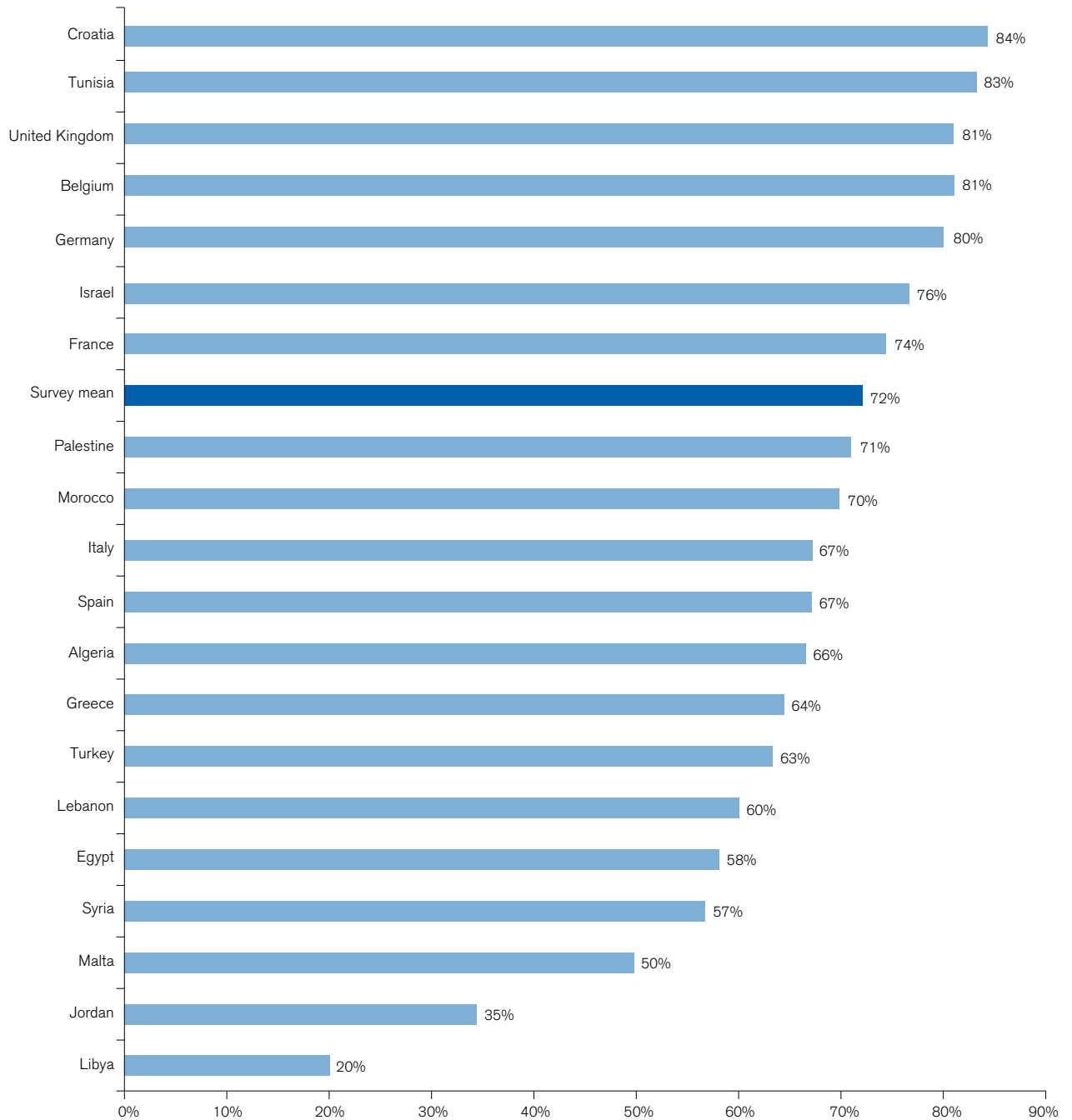
(% of strongly agree answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

In general, respondents were more prone to strongly agree that civil society is an important component of democracy than to consider it has an important role in their respective countries. However, here again respondents from Tunisia did so in bigger proportions than other countries from the region.

Graph 5: Do you agree that civil society is a defining pillar of democracy?
(% of strongly agree answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

In their comments, some participants elaborated on the role and importance of civil society actors:

Dans notre pays, la société civile ne joue pas son vrai rôle, c'est-à-dire être le lien entre les autorités et le citoyen. Elle est en quelque sorte marginalisée.

Algerian respondent

The answer to this question mostly depends on how civil society is actually defined. For instance, they are less important or influential than social or classical media, but can make more of a difference in a specific area of activity.

Austrian respondent

Le développement de la société civile est l'instrument le plus adéquat pour sortir de la profonde crise de la démocratie politique et sociale qui alimente les groupes fondamentaux, xénophobes, racistes et violents.

Algerian respondent

Civil society represents a fundamental part of the democratic system for its ability to express controversial views; represent those without a voice; mobilise citizens into movements; promote transparency and responsibility in the political system.

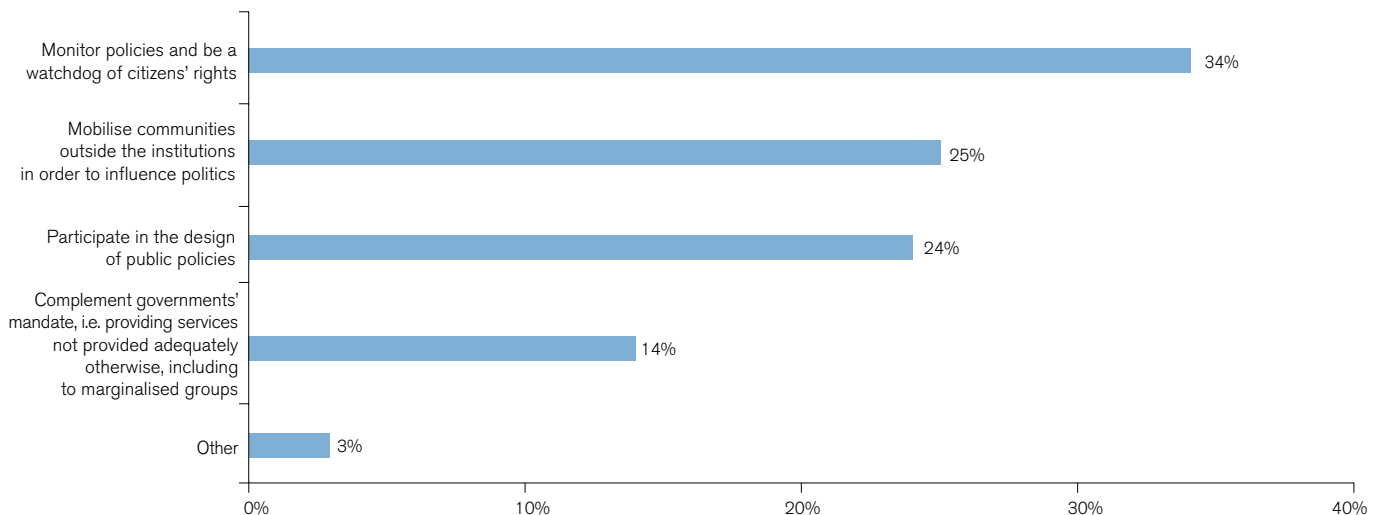
Italian respondent

IDENTIFYING CIVIL SOCIETY'S MISSION, MEANS AND FOCUS

The **fourth question** invited participants to identify the two most important missions of civil society from four different options. More than a third of respondents (34%) chose monitoring and watchdogging citizens' rights as one of their two preferred options. Respondents were less inclined to consider that civil society's main mission is to complement or substitute governments' role.

Graph 6: What should be the most important mission of civil society?

(respondents were asked to choose 2 options out of 4)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

In respondents' comments, some elaborated on their answer, while others formulated alternative ideas.

Provide a sounding board and expression of ideas, which challenge and support all levels of government to make more informed decisions about public policy.

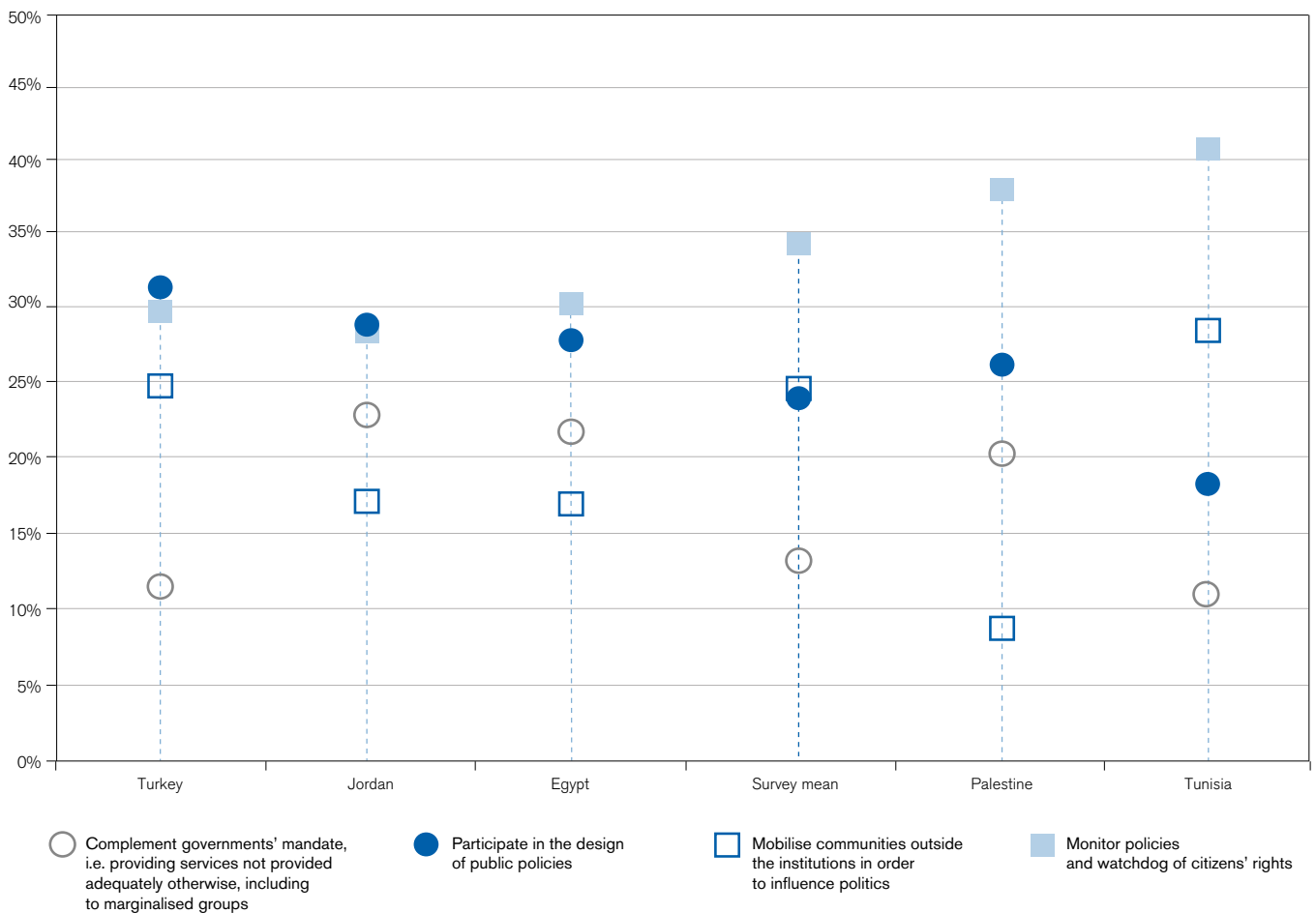
British respondent

To be independent is itself a mission and to avoid adapting to foreign donor's official or unofficial policies in order to implement a real representation of the people or communities concerned.

Palestinian respondent

The ranking of civil society's most important missions was quite similar on both shores of the Mediterranean. One of the findings that derives from the analysis of per country results is that Turkish respondents are the only ones to consider that civil society's main mission is to participate in the design of public policies.

Graph 7: What should be the most important mission of civil society?
(respondents were asked to choose 2 options out of 4) respondents from:



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Question 5 turned to the means civil society has at its disposal in order to achieve its objectives. More precisely, it invited respondents to assess which of those means were most relevant and efficient. Respondents were able to choose two out of five options. Organising public mobilisations was identified as the most efficient means and reaching out to an international audience the least efficient one. Answers showed a very tight margin between the four most preferred options: public mobilisations (25%), cooperation with central authorities

(21.8%), engagement with subnational entities (21.6%) and social media campaigns (19.6%). Only 9.8% of respondents chose international outreach as the most useful means for civil society to achieve its goals.

Construction de plateformes communes de plaidoyer auprès du gouvernement entre OSC travaillant pour la même cause : justice, égalité genre, équité sociale et économique, handicap...

Moroccan respondent

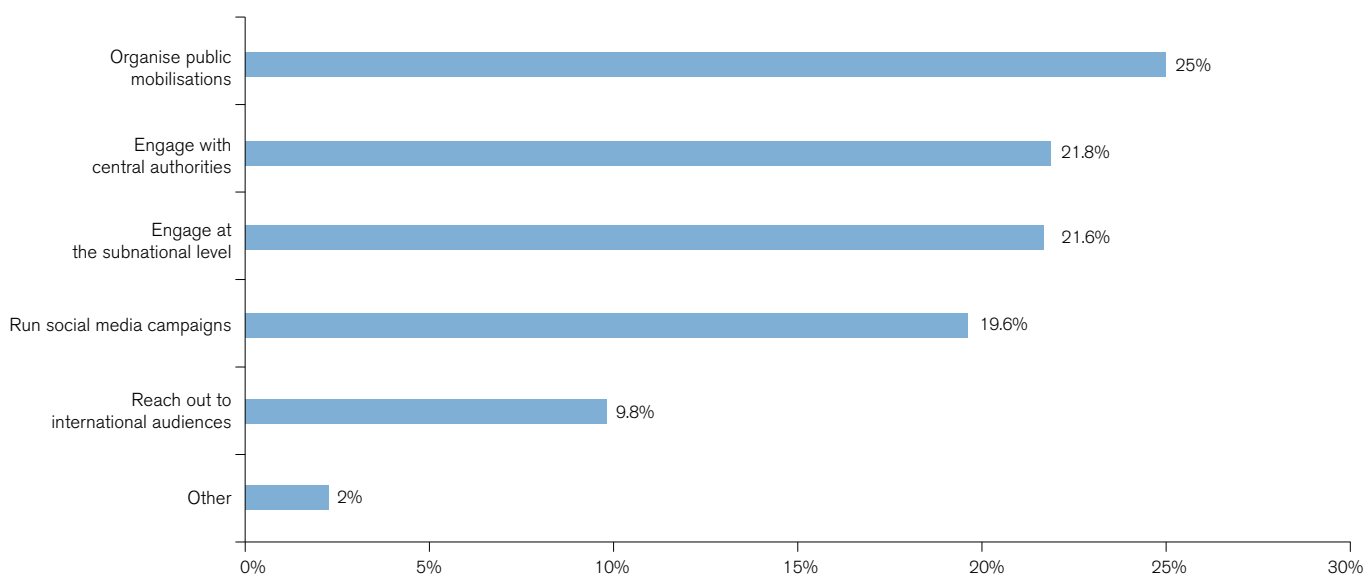
Building transnational/cross-regional networks with similar organisations/movements to increase its impact and outreach.

Polish respondent

Interestingly enough, offline activities seem to be perceived as more effective than online ones, particularly in the Mashreq, where only 16.3% of respondents chose social media campaigns as one of their two preferred options. A percentage that stands in contrast with the 23.2% in the Maghreb, where social media ranked as the second most relevant means, after public mobilisations.

Graph 8: Through which means is civil society in your country more likely to achieve the objectives it pursues?

(respondents were asked to choose 2 options out of 5)



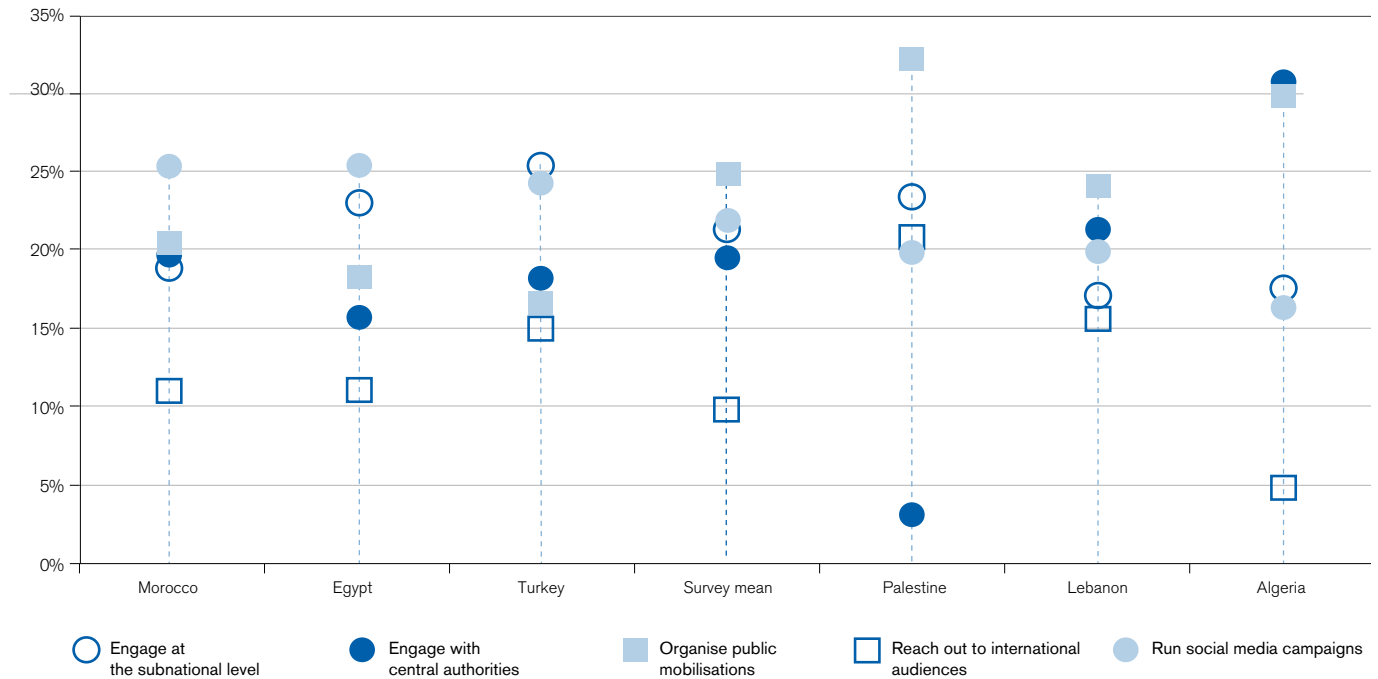
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Again, there were no significant differences in patterns between answers from SEM and EU countries, although the former seem to be a bit more prone to “reaching out to international audiences”.

Some notable cases are Morocco and Egypt, where respondents considered “engage with central authorities” as the first option. Algerian respondents chose “run social media campaigns”, while Turkish and Italian respondents put “engage at the subnational level” in first place.

Graph 9: Through which means is civil society in your country more likely to achieve the objectives it pursues?

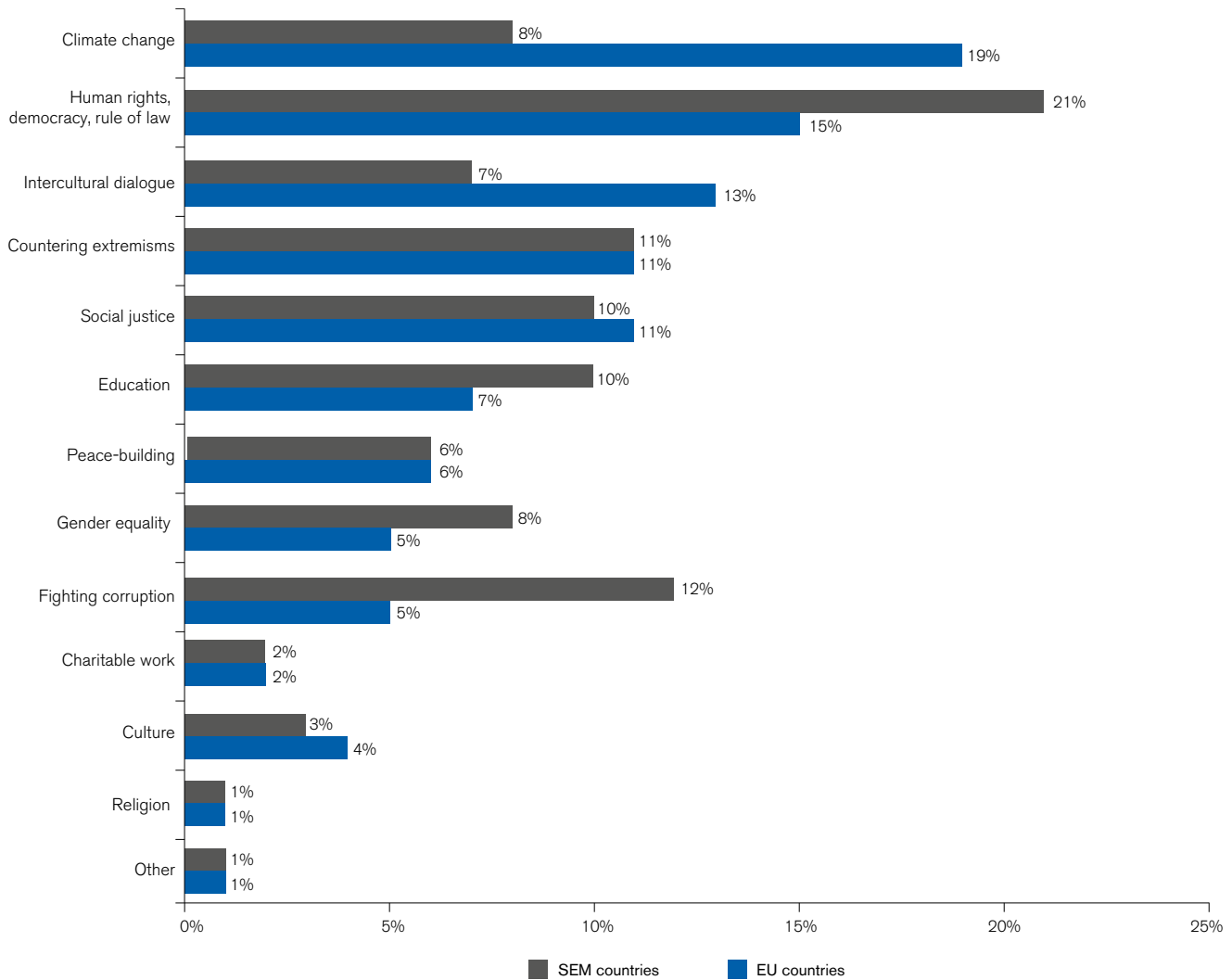
(respondents were asked to choose 2 options out of 5) respondents from:



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

The **sixth question** aimed to assess which topics should be the focus of attention for civil society in the EU, SEM and respondents' home countries. Respondents considered that climate change; human rights, democracy and rule of law; and intercultural dialogue (in this order) should be the main areas of focus for civil society in the EU. In turn, they considered that human rights, democracy and rule of law; fighting corruption; and counter-extremism efforts should drive the agenda of civil society in SEM countries.

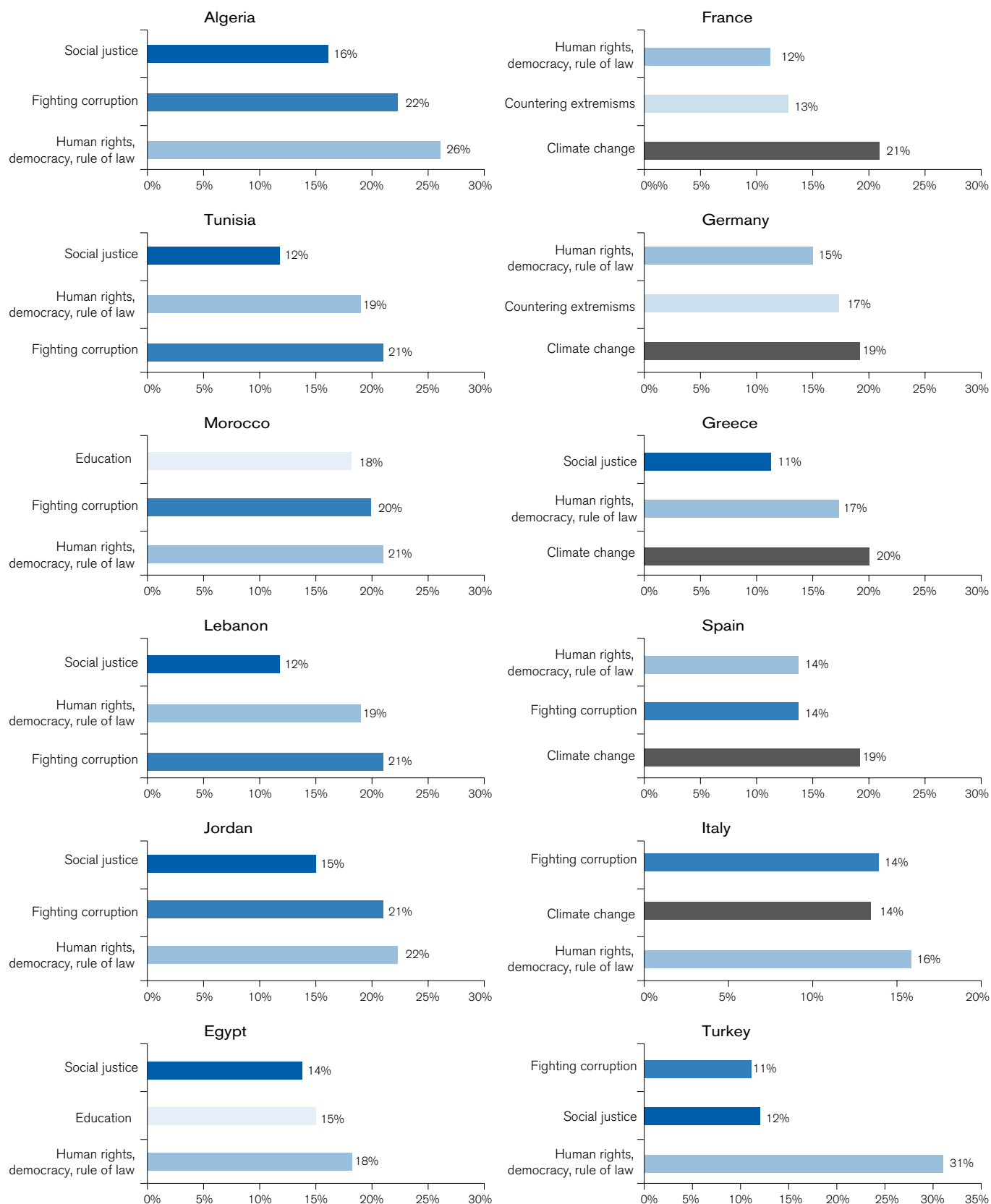
Graph 10: What should be the main focus of civil society in:
(respondents were asked to choose 3 options out of 12)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Respondents were also asked to identify what the focus of civil society in their own countries should be. Among other interesting findings, it is worth mentioning that Italian respondents stand together with their southern and eastern counterparts and consider that the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law should be the top priority for civil society working in their respective countries. Human rights, democracy and rule of law is also mentioned in the top three of other European countries, including Germany, France, Greece and Spain. Results also that show human rights, democracy and rule of law comes first for Egyptians, Jordanians, Algerians, Moroccans and Turks, while fighting corruption comes first for Lebanese and Tunisians.

Graph 11: What should be the main focus of civil society in:



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

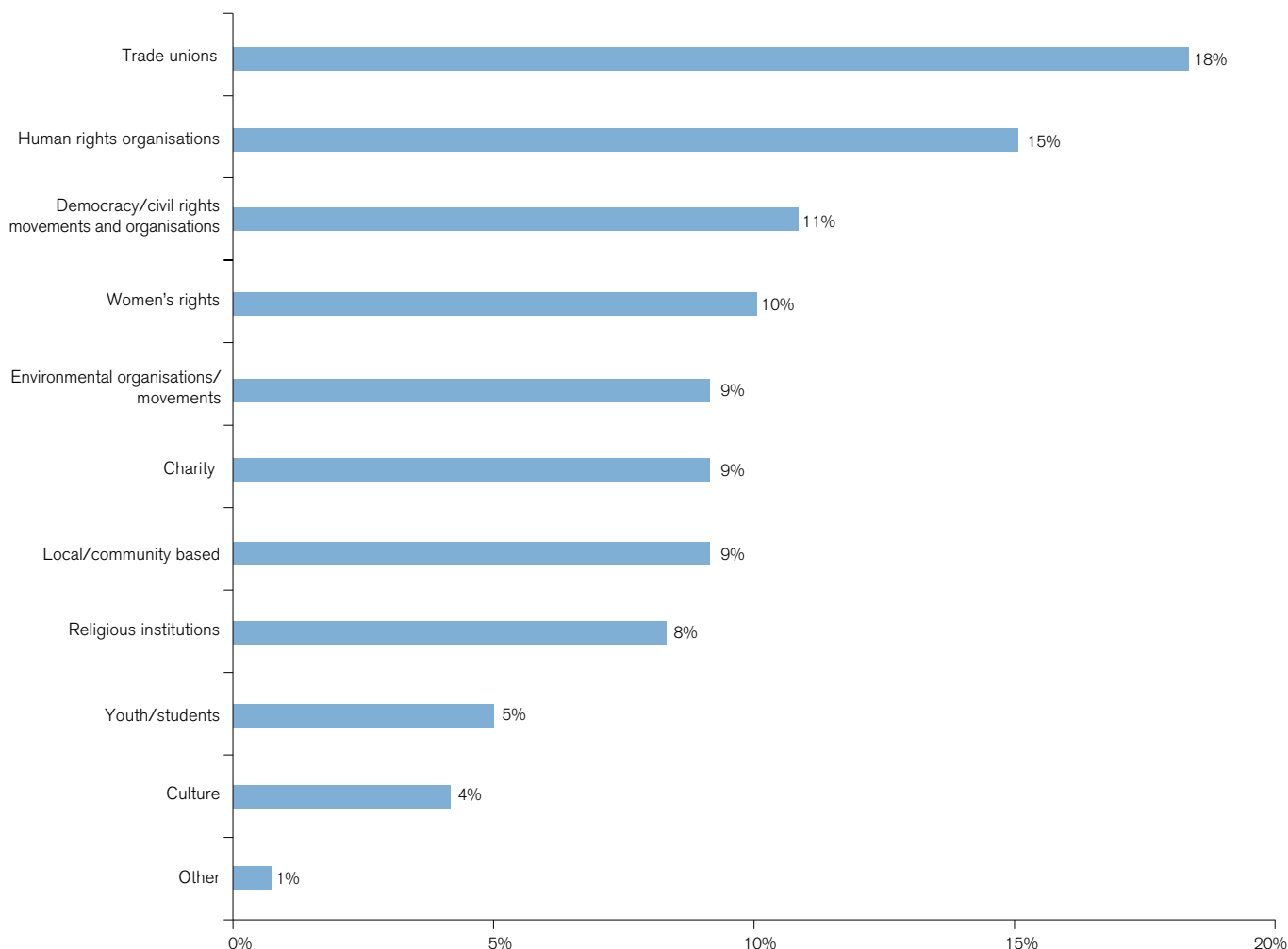
CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Questions 7 and 8 turned to the impact of specific civil society actors and social movements. Answers to question 7 provide useful insights into which civil society actors are seen as the most influential in respondents’ countries of origin. Answers to question 8 provide a picture of how the impact of social movements is assessed in EU and SEM countries. Both questions gave respondents the opportunity to name three specific actors or movements of their choice without any filter. The author of this report has been clustering those responses into general categories *a posteriori*.

Among the most influential civil society actors, the most frequently mentioned categories are trade unions and human rights organisations.

Graph 12: In my country, the most influential civil society actors are?

(all respondents) (categories developed from the open-ended answers)



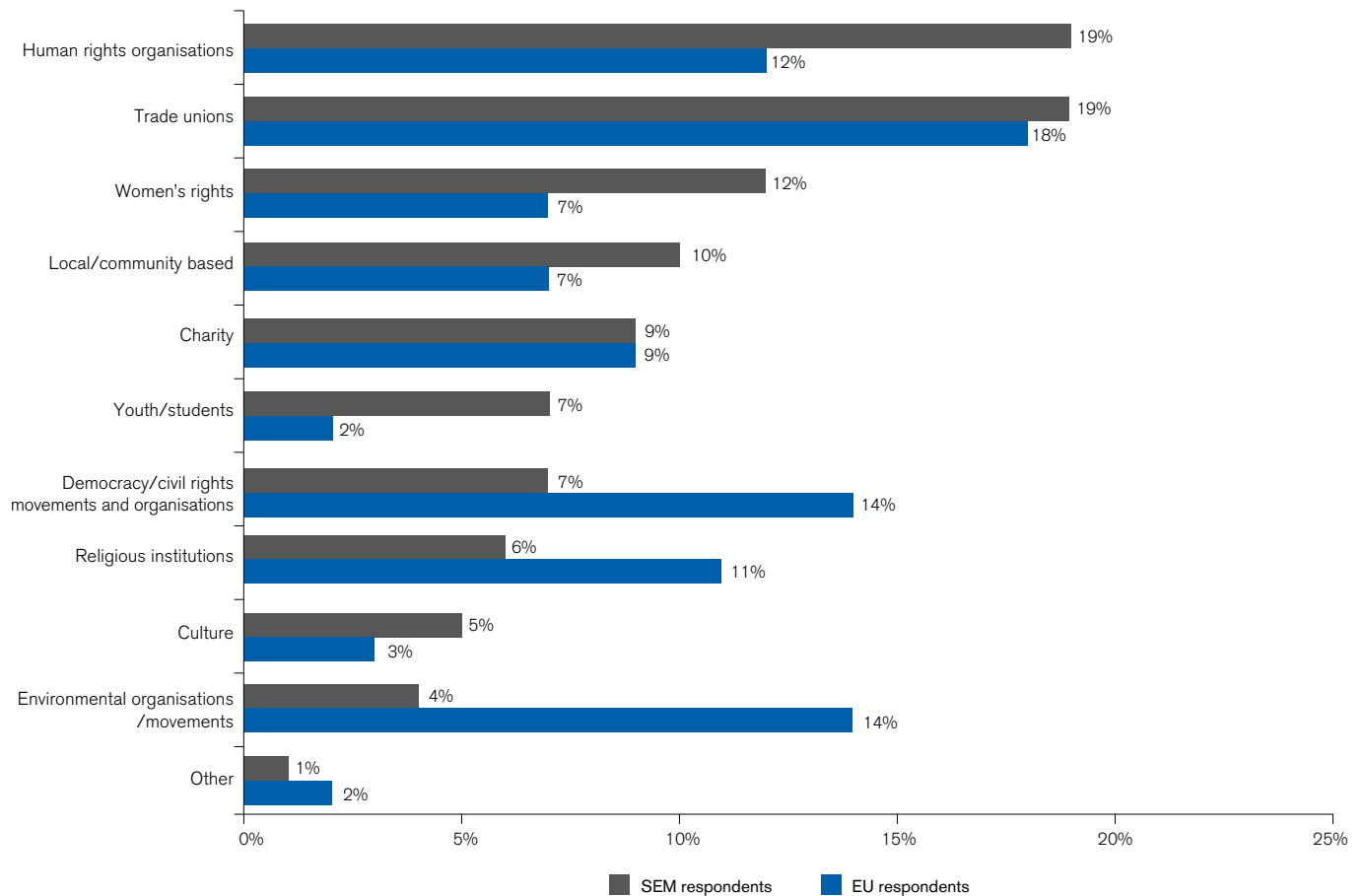
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

EU respondents identified environmental organisations as the second most influential actor in their respective home countries (14.5%), just after trade unions (17.8%) and followed very closely by pro-democracy and civil rights movements (14.2%). In contrast, SEM respondents gave more prominence to human rights organisations (19.4%), followed by trade unions (18.8%) and pro-women's rights organisations (12.5%).

It is worth observing that respondents from SEM countries are more likely to consider that women's rights organisations are more influential than their European counterparts.

In general, there seems to be a greater dispersion among EU respondents' answers, while SEM participants gave more homogenous responses.

Graphs 13: In my country, the most influential civil society actors are?
(categories developed from the open-ended answers)

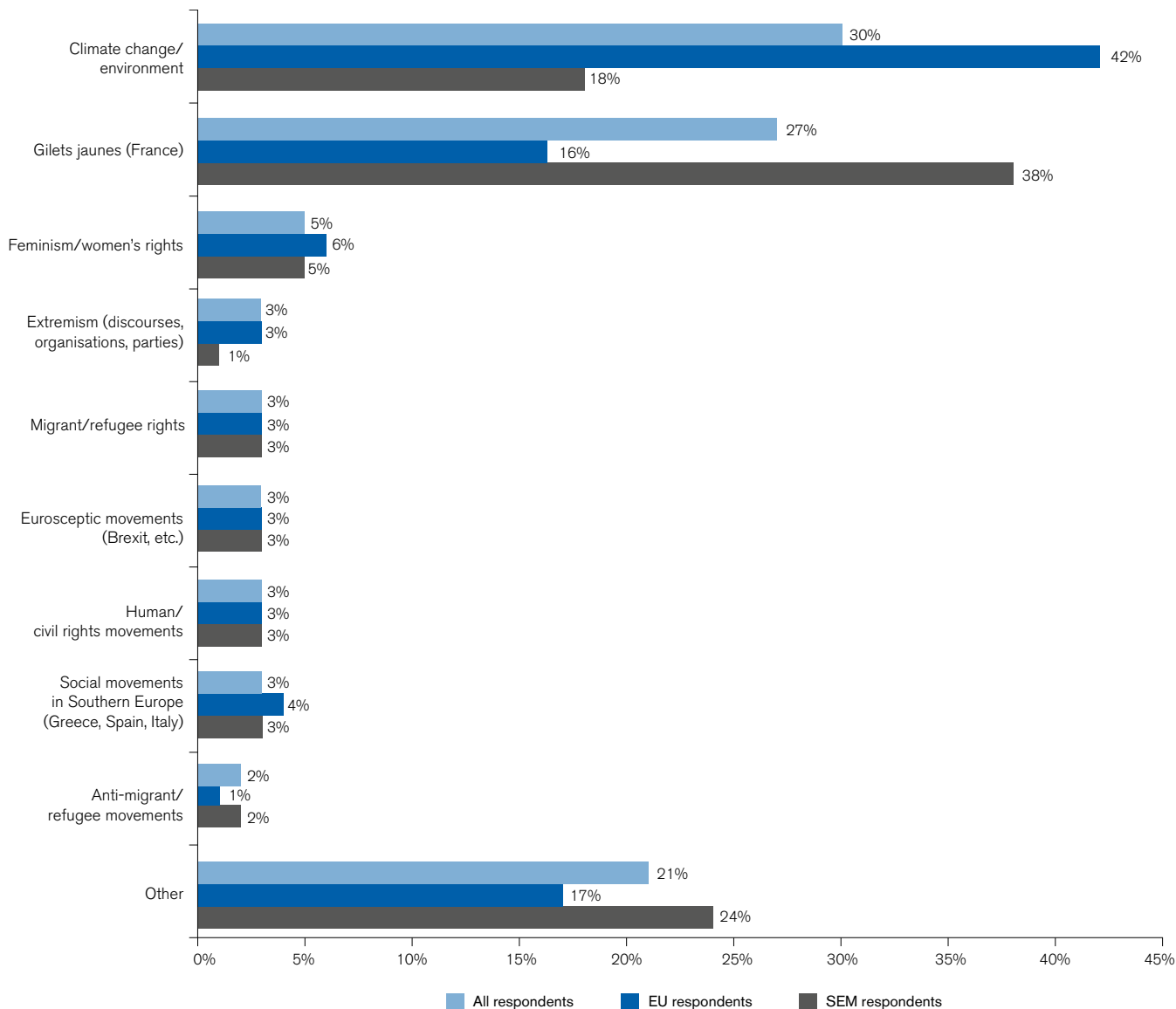


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

When it comes to recent social movements, Euromed Survey participants considered that the ones with the greatest political impact in EU countries are climate change-related mobilisations (29.6%), such as the Fridays for Future, and the Gilets Jaunes movement in France (27.4%). In fact, SEM respondents cited this movement twice as often as environmental organisations, just the opposite of their northern counterparts.

Graph 14: Among recent social movements, which ones do you consider had the greatest political impact?

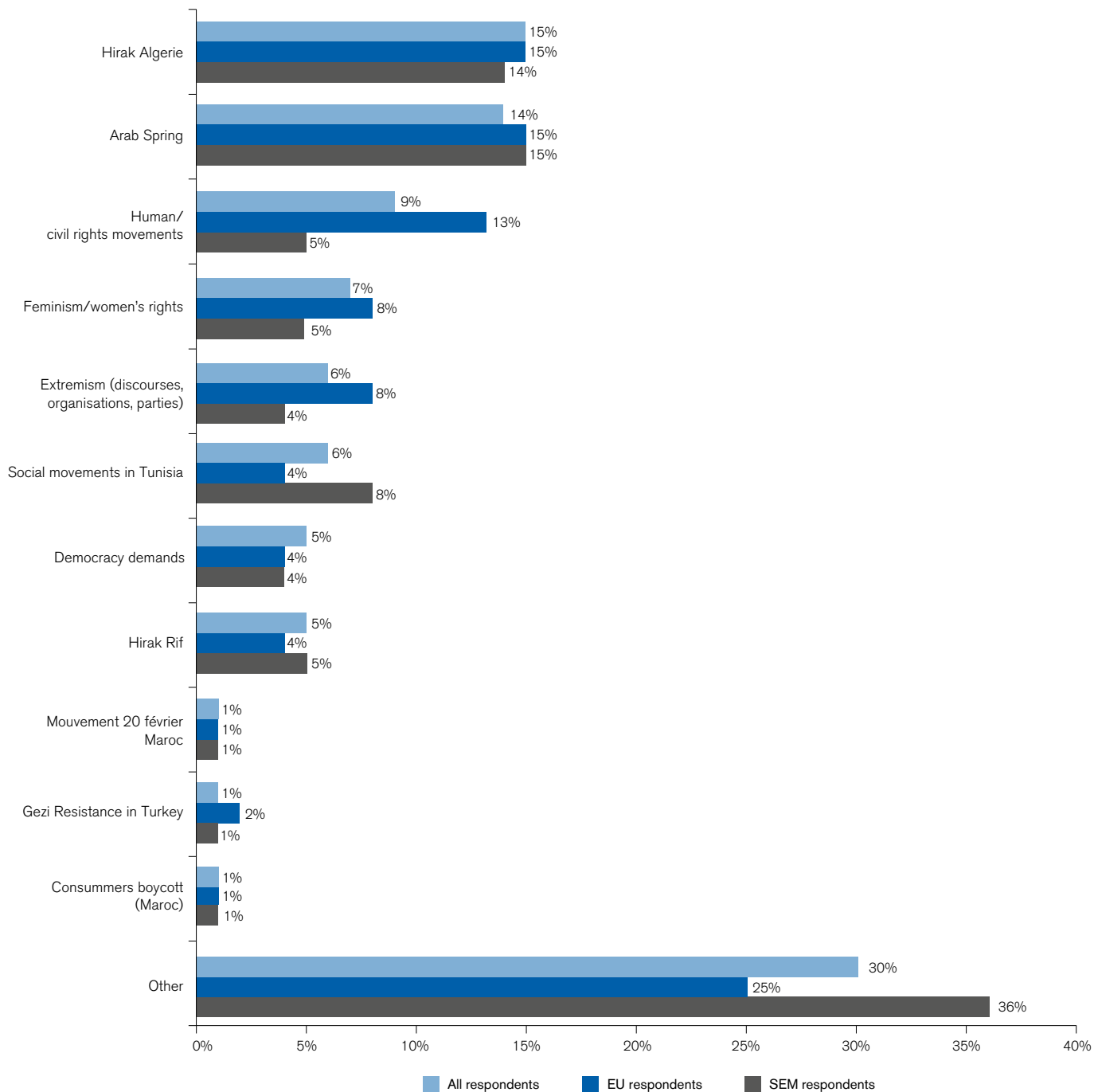
In EU countries (categories developed from the open-ended answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey

Respondents cited a considerably greater number of specific social movements when talking about SEM countries. Thus, grouping them under different general categories was harder than in the case of EU countries. However, they agreed that the two most influential single movements in SEM countries are the Arab Spring and the Hirak in Algeria, both mentioned with a very similar frequency (around 15%) by respondents from both shores of the Mediterranean. SEM respondents cited social movements in Tunisia twice as often as EU respondents.

Graph 15: Among recent social movements, which ones do you consider had the greatest political impact? In SEM countries (categories developed from the open-ended answers)



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 10th Euromed Survey