**Doha 06/10/2020**

**ACRPS announces the results of the Arab Opinion Index**

The ACRPS is proud to announce the publication of the 2019-2020 Arab Opinion Index. The AOI is a yearly public opinion survey conducted by the ACRPS across a range of Arab countries. This year’s AOI is based on the findings of face-to-face interviews conducted between November 2019 and September 2020 with 28,000 individual respondents in 13 Arab countries (Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Algeria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar) with a margin of error of +/- 2-3%. It is the fruit of some 69,578 hours of work by more than 900 researchers in areas requiring 820,000km of travel, making it the largest public opinion survey in the Arab World in terms of sample size, the number of countries covered, the number of variables tested, and the volume of data collected. It supplies data used by many academic institutions and academics in their own work. The findings are presented by country and as pan-Arab averages. Countries are divided into different regional categories:

* **Arab Maghreb:** Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia.
* **Nile Valley:** Egypt, Sudan.
* **Arab Mashreq:** Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq.
* **Gulf:** Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar.

The AOI is a yearly public opinion survey conducted by the ACRPS across a range of Arab countries. It provides important data about trends in Arab public opinion on a range of economic, social and political issues of direct relevance to Arab citizens, including democracy, citizenship, equality, and civil and political participation. It presents citizens’ evaluations of their own circumstances, general conditions in their home countries, state institutions and their confidence therein. It also looks at their attitudes towards Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the regional policy of international and regional powers (such as USA, France, Germany, Russia, China, and Turkey).

## **Views on Democracy**

The results show that there is near unanimous support for democracy, with 76% of respondents indicating their support for a democratic system and only 17% opposed.

Figure 1: Agreement/disagreement with the statement that democracy remains better than other forms of government, despite its shortcomings (results from previous years)

Figure 2: Agreement/disagreement with the statement that democracy remains better than other forms of government, despite its shortcomings (by region)

74% of respondents stated that a pluralist democratic system would be appropriate to their countries, while 57-72% agreed that undemocratic systems – governments based on Sharia without elections, army or military rule, authoritarian or limited democracies – would be inappropriate. Comparison with previous years’ results shows that general approval for democracy is still stable and indeed rising.

Figure 3: Respondents' perceptions of the appropriateness of various types of government for their home countries.

This consensus on support for democracy is accompanied by a negative evaluation of existing democracy in the Arab World. Respondents placed the level of democracy in the region at 5.8/10 – that is, democracy remains, as far as they are concerned, only halfway there.

Citizens’ assessment of the level of democracy as measured by their ability to criticise their governments (between 1 and 10) shows that this ability is limited: 6.0/10. Tunisia, Sudan and Mauritania received the highest evaluations, while Saudi Arabia (3.9) and Palestine (4.6) received the lowest.

Figure 4: Democracy Scale Average by Year

Figure 5: Criticism of the Government Scale by Country

Figure 6: Democracy scale versus ability to criticise the government by region

## **State institutions and government performance**

The results show that citizens’ confidence in state institutions is variable. While confidence in military and security institutions is high, confidence in judicial, executive and legislative institutions is weaker, with parliaments enjoying the least confidence of all the institutions. Public opinion is split on the performance of parliaments’ oversight of government or representation of society. Approximately half of respondents believe that parliaments are carrying out their functions in this regard, while the other half do not. These rates are higher in Tunisia and Kuwait, and respondents in the Mashreq disagreed particularly strongly that parliaments were successfully overseeing government performance. The results also show that assessment of government performance in foreign, economic and public and service policy is quite mixed: between 43% and 50% (depending on country) assess it positively, similar to results in previous years.

There is also near consensus on the fact that financial and administrative corruption are widespread in Arab countries: 91% believe that it is present, to varying degrees. Data from previous years show that citizens’ assessments on this point have not changed much. Respondents from the Mashreq were the most likely to say there is corruption, while those in the Gulf were most likely to say that there was no corruption. There is a widespread belief that corruption is similarly common in both the public and private sectors, with slightly more people reporting that it is present in the public sector. 43% of respondents believe that politicians are the group most involved in financial and administrative corruption, with 23% identifying senior economists and 16% senior state employees.

32% of respondents stated that their home countries apply the law equitably to all citizens, while 46% said that they apply the law while giving some groups favorable treatment and 20% that they do not apply the law equally whatsoever. The opinion that countries apply the law inequitably was most common among respondents from the Mashreq.

Figure 7: Citizens’ trust in major state institutions (aggregate of all countries)

**Figure 8: Respondents ’evaluation of the performance of their representative legislative councils in their duty to monitor governments according to Arab world regions**

Figure 9: Extent of financial and administrative corruption in respondents’ countries over time

Figure 10: Extent of financial and administrative corruption in respondents’ countries (by region)

Figure 11: Extent of financial and administrative corruption in the public and private sectors

Figure 12: Groups contributing most to contribution

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Most contributing | 2nd most contributing  | Average  |
| Politicians  | 43 | 15 | 29 |
| Senior Economists | 23 | 25 | 24 |
| Senior State Employees | 16 | 30 | 23 |
| Municipality heads, mayors | 4 | 10 | 7 |
| Junior employees | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| Media and Press figures | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Others  | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| I don’t know/won’t reply | 4 | -- | 2 |
| No other choice | -- | 8 | 4 |
| Total  | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Figure 13: Equitable application of the law over time

Figure 14: Equitable application of the law (by region)

## **The Arab Spring**

Since 2011, the majority of respondents have looked positively at the Arab Spring, with 58% stating that the revolutions and protests of that year were positive (very or somewhat positive) and only 28% negative (very or somewhat negative). The highest level of support was in Egypt, where 82% of respondents stated that the Arab Spring had been positive; 57% of Jordanians deemed it negative. 22% of Saudis described it as negative, with a large rate of nonresponse: 44% refused to answer. Respondents held that the revolutions and popular protests were a response to corruption, poor economic conditions and authoritarian regimes and an attempt to bring about a transition to democracy.

The results show that popular opinion is confused about the present state and future of revolutions. 48% of respondents stated that that the Arab Spring is facing obstacles but will ultimately achieve its goals and 30% that it is over and that the old regimes have returned to power.

The majority of Arab citizens support the protests which have emerged recently in countries such as Sudan and Algeria. Majorities in Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan all expressed support for popular protests in their own countries: 85% of Sudanese respondents, 82% of Iraqis, 71% of Algerians and 67% of Lebanese. The reported rates of participation in protests ranged between 15% in Iraq and 37% in Sudan.

**Figure 15: Support for the 2011 protests and revolutions over time**

**Figure 16: Support for the 2011 protests and revolutions by region**

**Figure 17: Most important most reasons for the outbreak of the Arab Spring**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The reasons** | **important most reasons** |
|
| Against corruption | **31** |
| Due to poor economic conditions | **16** |
| Against dictatorship | **16** |
| For political freedoms | **6** |
| To end oppression  | **6** |
| For justice and equality | **4** |
| For democracy  | **3** |
| For dignity  | **4** |
| Other  | **1** |
| don’t know, decline to respond | **13** |
| No other choice | **0** |
| Total  | **100** |

**Figure 18: Support and opposition for protests in Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan**

**Figure 19: Assessment of the fate of the Arab Spring (choice of two statements) over time**

**Figure 19: Assessment of the fate of the Arab Spring (choice of two statements) by region**

**Figure 20: Participation in protests in Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq**

## **The role of religion**

Most Arabs define their own religiosity in one of three ways: “Religious to some extent” (63%) or “Very religious” (23%), and only 12% of Arabs defined themselves as “Not religious”.

**Figure 21: Self-identified religiosity over time**

**Figure 22: Self-identified religiosity by region**

While a majority of Arabs are religious, to varying extents, this does not preclude widespread religious tolerance: 65% of respondents believe that no religious authorities have the right to denounce followers of variant interpretations of their own religion, or to declare followers of other religions to be apostates. Additionally, 61% of Arabs show no real preferences for other religious individuals in their personal, day-to-day dealings, nor do they believe that irreligious people are generally worse individuals than they are. 71% of respondents believe that the state or electoral candidates should not use religion to win support or votes.

AOI data shows that public opinion in the Arab region is divided on the separation of religion and politics, with the majority favoring this separation. It is worth noting that the number of respondents supporting separation has been gradually increasing since 2011, with the highest level of support (more than 80%) in Lebanon and Iraq and the lowest in Saudi Arabia and Algeria (60%).

**Figure 23: Support for the statement "No religious authority is entitled to declare followers of other religions to be infidels"**

**Figure 24: Support for the statement "No religious authority is entitled to declare followers of other religions to be infidels" by region**

**Figure 25: Responses to the question "In your day-to-day life, do you prefer to deal with religious individuals?" over time**

**Figure 26: Responses to the question "In your day-to-day life, do you prefer to deal with religious individuals?" by region**

**Figure 27: Support for the statement "The government has no right to use religion to win support for its policies."**

**Figure 28: Support for the statement "The government has no right to use religion to win support for its policies” by region**

**Figure 29: Support for the statement "It would be better for my home country if religion was separated from politics" over time**

**Figure 30: Support for the statement "It would be better for my home country if religion was separated from politics" by region**

## **Economic and political conditions**

44% of citizens characterized the political conditions in their country as generally good (very good or good), while 50% characterized them as bad (very bad or bad).

**Figure 31: Respondents’ assessment of political conditions in their country over time**

**Figure 32: Respondents’ assessment of political conditions in their country by region**

The results also show that citizens’ economic conditions are very unsatisfactory. 45% say that their family’s income covers basic needs but that they are unable to save (i.e. in hardship), while 28% say that they face difficulties making ends meet (i.e. in need). Excluding Gulf respondents, the majority of citizens in Arab countries are either in hardship or in need.

**Figure 33: Self-reported household income level by region**

80% of respondents believe that the inhabitants of the Arab World constitute a single nation even if individual Arab peoples are differentiated from one another. Only 16% state that they constitute more than one nation.

**Figure 34: Assessments of Arab national unity over time**

**Figure 35: Assessments of Arab national unity by region**

## **Regional and international politics**

Respondents’ assessments of some foreign powers’ policies showed a level of mistrust: the majority perceive US, Russian, and Iranian policy in the region negatively, more negatively in fact than in previous surveys. The view of US policy saw further decline this year, perhaps reflecting respondent assessment of/reaction to the Trump administration.

**Figure 36: Public perception of various foreign powers’ Arab policy**

Almost three quarters of respondents characterized US policy on Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen as bad. Three fifths characterized Iranian and Russian policy with regard to the same countries as negative as well.

**Figure 37: Assessment of US foreign policy**

**Figure 38: Assessment of Russian foreign policy**

**Figure 39: Assessment of Iranian foreign policy**

Israel and the United States in particular were also identified as the greatest threats to collective Arab security: 90% of Arabs named Israel as the country which posed the greatest threat to collective Arab security, and 82% of respondents said that the US threatened collective Arab security. In a similar question, 68% of Arabs agreed that Iran is a threat to the stability of the Arab region, and 65% pointed to France. In sum, there is a firmly entrenched public view which regards Israeli policy as the greatest threat to the region’s security and stability.

**Figure 40: Assessment of foreign threats over time**

With respect to the Palestine question – and of particular relevance given recent developments and claims that Arabs are becoming less concerned with Palestine – the results show clearly that Arab societies continue to see Palestine as an issue of relevance to all Arabs and not just to Palestinians. 88% of citizens refuse to recognize Israel, citing a range of factors: particularly that the state of Israel is colonialist, racist or expansionist. It is clear that these positions are not rooted in cultural or religious positions. The majority of Sudanese and Saudi citizens reject recognition of Israel, in spite of a high rate of nonresponse in the Saudi context given current conditions of repression.

**Figure 41: Support for governments recognizing Israel over time**

**Figure 42: Support for governments recognizing Israel by region**

**Figure 43: Reasons given for opposing diplomatic recognition of Israel since 2014 (as a percentage of respondents)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reasons cited to oppose diplomatic recognition of Israel/year of survey** | **2019 /2020** | **2017 /2018** | **2016** | **2015** | **2014** |
| Colonialist occupying power in Palestine | 33.7 | 31.7 | 27.0 | 24.5 | 23.4 |
| Expansionist state set on controlling more Arab territory | 9.4 | 10.1 | 13.0 | 13.0 | 2.4 |
| A terrorist state/supports terrorism | 7.6 | 7.4 | 7.6 | 10.4 | 1.2 |
| Israeli dispossession of the Palestinians; continued oppression of the Palestinians | 6.8 | 8.3 | 8.1 | 6.9 | 5.5 |
| Religious reasons to oppose Israel | 6.7 | 6.6 | 5.2 | 3.3 | 4.9 |
| (Israel) is racist towards Arabs | 5.9 | 6.3 | 8.2 | 10.3 | 12.2 |
| Recognizing Israel negates the Palestinian people | 4.8 | 5.3 | 5.8 | 5.6 | 7.5 |
| Israel is an enemy of my people/the Arabs in general | 4.1 | 3.4 | 3.3 | 4.7 | 11.5 |
| Israel threatens regional security | 3.6 | 3.4 | 3.2 | 3.4 | 2.5 |
| Israel violates agreements and treaties | 1.6 | 1.6 | 2.1 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| Israel does not exist | 2.3 | 1.1 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 3.4 |
| No reasons given | 1.9 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 0.6 | 10.2 |
| Total of those opposed to recognizing Israel | **88.2** | **86.8** | **85.9** | **85.4** | **87.0** |
| Approve of the recognition of Israel | **6.2** | **7.9** | **9.5** | **8.9** | **6.0** |
| Do not know/declined to answer (as a percentage of respondents) | **5.6** | **5** | **5** | **6** | **7** |
| Total | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

**Figure 44: Reasons given for opposing diplomatic recognition of Israel by region**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Mashreq** | **Maghreb** | **Gulf** | **Nile Valley** | **Average** |
| Colonialist occupying power in Palestine | 43.4 | 36.1 | 26.0 | 21.0 | 33.7 |
| Expansionist state set on controlling more Arab territory | 10.4 | 9.4 | 8.0 | 9.5 | 9.4 |
| A terrorist state/supports terrorism | 9.6 | 4.3 | 6.5 | 11.5 | 7.6 |
| Israeli dispossession of the Palestinians; continued oppression of the Palestinians | 5.1 | 8.4 | 6.5 | 7.4 | 6.8 |
| Religious reasons to oppose Israel | 3.6 | 10.5 | 6.0 | 6.3 | 6.7 |
| (Israel) is racist towards Arabs | 5.7 | 5.7 | 6.3 | 6.0 | 5.9 |
| Recognizing Israel negates the Palestinian people | 3.7 | 5.8 | 4.5 | 5.8 | 4.8 |
| Israel is an enemy of my people/the Arabs in general | 4.1 | 3.6 | 3.4 | 6.2 | 4.1 |
| Israel threatens regional security | 3.5 | 3.4 | 2.9 | 4.9 | 3.6 |
| Israel violates agreements and treaties | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.3 | 2.6 | 1.6 |
| Israel does not exist | 1.1 | 1.4 | 6.4 | 0.1 | 2.3 |
| No reasons given | 0.7 | 3.1 | 2.7 | 0.8 | 1.9 |
| Total of those opposed to recognizing Israel | **92.1** | **93.2** | **80.4** | **82.3** | **88.2** |
| Approve of the recognition of Israel | **6.1** | **2.6** | **6.3** | **13.2** | **6.2** |
| Do not know/declined to answer (as a percentage of respondents) | **1.8** | **4.1** | **13.4** | **4.7** | **5.6** |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

## **Social media**

Internet usage is on the increase, with only 27% of respondents stating that they do not use the internet as opposed to 72% who say that they do. 86% of internet users report having a Facebook account, 39% a Twitter account and 53% an Instagram account. 72% of social media users say that they use it to get political news and information, 57% to express their opinions on political events, and 53% to engage with political issues. Respondents from Saudi Arabia and Jordan were the least likely to use social media for political purposes. 86% of internet users report that they use Arabic to surf the web, while the most used second language was English (28%).

**Figure 45: Frequency of internet use**

**Figure 46: Respondents who report using the internet or not using the internet by region**

**Figure 47: Respondents who report having a social media account, by website**

**Figure 48: Respondents who state that they have a social media account by region**

**Figure 49: Frequency of internet use to engage with political issues**

**Figure 50: Frequency of internet use to engage with political issues by region**

**Figure 51: First and second languages used while surfing the internet**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|   | **Most common language** | **Second most common language** |
| Arabic | 87 | 7 |
| French | 7 | 13 |
| English | 4 | 30 |
| Kurdish | 1 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 1 |
| Refused to answer | 1 | -- |
| No second language | -- | 49 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

## **Results on ISIL or Islamic State**

Results from the 2019-2020 survey show an overwhelming majority (92%) of the Arab public does has a negative view of ISIL, with only 2% expressing a “positive” view, and 3% “positive to some extent”. Positive views of ISIL do not correlate with agreement with their ideology or way of life: those who support the separation of religion and state are just as likely to have a positive view of ISIL as those who do not. Rather, these views are rooted in a political attitude linked to political conditions in the region.

**Figure 52: General view of ISIL**

## **Fighting terror in the region**

The Arab public offers a diverse set of remedies when asked to suggest the best means by which to combat ISIL. When given the chance to define their first and second preferences on how to tackle ISIL in particular, and terrorist groups more broadly, 17% favored resolving the Palestinian issue; 15% foreign intervention; 13% direct military action; 12% supporting democracy; 11% solving economic problems; 7% purifying Islam of extreme positions; and 5% resolving the Syrian crisis and addressing the aspirations of the Syrian people.

**Figure 53: Proposed remedies to ISIL/terrorism more broadly, first choice made by respondents**