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## Trends and Impacts in Conflict Settings Issue No. 3

Political Polarization or Common Ground?

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)**

**TRENDS AND IMPACTS IN CONFLICT SETTINGS**

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**POLITICAL POLARIZATION OR COMMON GROUND?**

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## Executive summary

Many countries emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings seriously weakened by conflict and political deadlock. Observers have concluded that democratic progress in those countries has largely been hampered by divisive politics and the increasing fragmentation of society. Many argue that the social-political divide is on generational lines and that dissatisfied youth, accounting for around 20 per cent of the region's population, is a driver of that polarization.

The so-called Arab youth bulge (measured as the proportion of people in the 15-24 age cohort compared to total population) is itself a source of debate. While similar demographic bulges have been seen as contributing much to "miracle" growth in East Asia, no such thing has happened in the Arab region. Indeed, although the education level of young men and women has improved greatly across the region in past decades, unemployment has proven a scourge for young Arabs even more so than for youth in other parts of the world. If education raised the expectations of many young people, they have largely been dashed by the realities of a labour market unable to absorb them. Socioeconomic despair has been matched by political exclusion.

Most scholarly study on the youth bulge in Arab countries and the volatility of the region has concentrated on the problem of unemployment and the security implications of the "population bomb". There is little doubt that youth have played a part in the upheavals in the region since 2010. A combination of their latent frustrations and savvy use of new media fuelled many of the mass mobilizations that were a part of the uprisings of the Arab Spring. There is also little doubt that more or less radical Islamist movements have had growing success in rallying young people to their banners. Research has shown that young Arab people are more inclined to follow current affairs than their peers in other parts of the world, indicating a heightened political awareness. Does that make youth in the Arab region a driver for change or, at the very least, a polarizing force in society? Can Arab youth be seen as a cohesive social force that can be mobilized en bloc? Many observers see Arab youth as forming a social underclass that poses a threat to stability and political order.

Few attempts have been made to trace manifestations of polarization in Arab societies empirically. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relevance of long-held assumptions on the political and socioeconomic impact of youth bulges in developing countries and to see whether, or to what extent, youth constitute a driving force for social division in the Arab region.

The study looks at two questions: To what extent is there a sociopolitical divide along generational lines and whether or not the region is witnessing youth-driven polarization. It explores patterns of youth preferences and behaviour in the region based on 2010-2014 World Values Survey (WVS) data from 60 countries, including nine Arab countries in transition (ACTs).

The arguments on youth bulge linking young demographics to violence and instability need to be revisited. Although, according to data, young people are more likely to view the use of force as justifiable to achieve certain ends, they are also more likely to have positive views on democracy. A close look at the degree of divergence in youth preferences reveals that, as far as strategies of mobilization and political orientation go, youth cannot be seen as a cohesive category or collective actor. For that they are too divided among themselves. The degree of their ideological radicalization is comparable to that of older generations. Standard deviation analysis of responses shows that, as a group, young people disagree more strongly among themselves than older generations on issues of ideology, the use of violence for political action, and the role of religious institutions.

The findings also make evident that youth are not necessarily at the forefront of struggles for democratic change and that young people and older generations value civil rights equally. They are also at odds with claims that young people, as an "economic underclass", are more likely to support distribution of income and less likely to be divided on that subject than people in other age groups. Analysis of the survey

responses shows that the issue of gender equality is highly controversial among young people in eight of the nine ACTs surveyed.

These findings are corroborated by our analysis of data obtained through the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2013).

Our study suggests that there is a vital need to rethink core assumptions about youth in the region. The fact that these findings defy prior assumptions about youth in the Arab region highlights the urgent need to develop institutional capacity based on bottom-up participatory mechanisms to engage young people and to invest in rigorous needs assessments before launching youth initiatives. Campaigns promoting civil rights and gender equality need to be aimed specifically at youth and not just the public at large. International, regional and national bodies need to invest more in the gathering of empirical data on Arab youth.

## ملخص تنفيذي

بلدان عديدة خرجت من انتفاضات الربيع العربي وقد أنهكتها الصراعات والأزمات السياسية. ويصطدم التقدم على مسار الديمقراطية في تلك البلدان، حسب المراقبين، بهوة تزداد عمقاً بفعل الاعتبارات السياسية وبشرخ متزايد في المجتمع. وتؤكد آراء كثيرة أن الشرخ الاجتماعي والسياسي يتجلى بين الأجيال، إذ يكون الشباب بالوضع الراهن زهاء 20 في المائة من مجموع سكان المنطقة، وقد حركهم الاستياء من الوضع الراهن وباتوا محركاً لحالة الاستقطاب التي يعيشها المجتمع.

وما يعرف بتضخم أعداد الشباب في المنطقة العربية (أي نسبة الأفراد في الفئة العمرية 15-24 سنة من مجموع السكان) هو نفسه موضع نقاش. فهذا التضخم، الذي كان مصدراً لما عُرف "بمعجزة" النمو في شرق آسيا، لم يحقق نتائج مماثلة في المنطقة العربية. والواقع أن التحسن الكبير في مستويات تعلم الشباب من رجال ونساء في مختلف بلدان المنطقة في العقود الأخيرة، لم يكفِ لاستئصال آفة البطالة، التي تصيب من الشباب العرب عدد أكبر منه في سائر مناطق العالم. وأدى تحسن مستوى التحصيل العلمي بأعداد كبيرة من الشباب إلى الارتقاء في تطلعات وتوقعات، تحطمت على واقع سوق عمل عاجزة عن استيعابهم. وحالة اليأس التي انتابت الشباب من المجتمع والاقتصاد تأججت بفعل الإقصاء السياسي.

وقد ركزت معظم الدراسات العلمية التي تناولت التضخم في أعداد الشباب في البلدان العربية وتقلب الأوضاع في المنطقة على مشكلة البطالة والتداعيات الأمنية "للانفجار السكاني". ولا شك في أن الشباب اضطلعوا بدور فاعل في الانتفاضات التي هزت المنطقة في عام 2010. وكان الإحباط القابع في داخلهم وبراعتهم في استخدام وسائل الإعلام بمثابة رافد للعديد من حركات التعبئة الشعبية التي شكلت جزءاً من انتفاضات الربيع العربي. ومما لا شك فيه أيضاً أن المجموعات الإسلامية المتطرفة نجحت في جذب الشباب إلى صفوفها. وبيّنت الأبحاث أن الشباب في المنطقة العربية هم أكثر اهتماماً بالأوضاع الحالية من أقرانهم في سائر مناطق العالم. وهذا الاهتمام دليل وعي سياسي متوقد. فهل يجعل هذا الوعي من شباب المنطقة محركاً للتغيير، أو قوة قادرة على الاستقطاب في المجتمع؟ هل يشكل الشباب قوة اجتماعية متماسكة يمكن تعبئتها ككتلة واحدة؟ إزاء هذه الأسئلة، يرى العديد من المراقبين، في الشباب في المنطقة طبقة اجتماعية دنيا تهدد من موقعها الاستقرار والنظام السياسي.

قليلة هي الدراسات التجريبية التي تعقبت مظاهر الاستقطاب في المجتمعات العربية. ولذلك تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في صحة الافتراضات السابقة بشأن الأثر السياسي والاجتماعي والاقتصادي لتضخم أعداد الشباب في البلدان النامية وإلى معرفة ما إذا كان الشباب قوة تعزز الانقسامات الاجتماعية في المنطقة العربية، وإذا صح ذلك فلأي مدى؟

وتنطلق الدراسة من سؤالين: إلى أي مدى تعاني هذه البلدان من انقسامات اجتماعية سياسية بين الأجيال وهل تشهد استقطاباً محوره الشباب؟ وتتناول أنماط خيارات الشباب وسلوكياتهم في المنطقة على أساس بيانات من ستين بلداً شملها المسح العالمي للقيم للفترة 2012-2014، ومنها تسعة بلدان شهدت تحولات في المنطقة العربية.

وفي تحليل تضخم أعداد الشباب، لا بد من إعادة النظر في الحجج التي تربط بين تركيبة الشباب السكانية والعنف وعدم الاستقرار. وتشير البيانات إلى أن الشباب يميلون إلى تبرير استخدام القوة لتحقيق غايات محددة، وإلى تأييد المنظور العلماني للديمقراطية. ولدى التمعّن في الفوارق في ميول الشباب يتبين عدم اعتبار الشباب فئة متماسكة أو وحدة جماعية من ناحية استراتيجيات التعبئة والتوجّه السياسي. فهم منقسمون

انقساماً حاداً. ومدى تطرفهم الايديولوجي لا يقل عن تطرف الأجيال الأكبر سناً. ويظهر تحليل الانحراف المعياري في الإجابات أن الشباب كمجموعة يختلفون فيما بينهم أكثر من الأجيال التي تكبرهم سناً في القضايا الايديولوجية، وفي اللجوء إلى العنف في العمل السياسي، وفي دور المؤسسات الدينية.

وتوضح النتائج أيضاً أن الشباب ليسوا بالضرورة في طليعة النضال من أجل التغيير الديمقراطي وأنهم مع الأجيال الأكبر سناً في تقديرهم للحقوق المدنية. وهذه النتائج تناقض المزاعم بأن الشباب "كطبقة اقتصادية دنيا" هم أكثر ميلاً إلى دعم توزيع الدخل وأقل عرضة للانقسام في هذا الموضوع مقارنة بالفئات العمرية الأخرى. ويبين تحليل الردود على المسح أن موضوع المساواة بين الجنسين هو موضوع خلاف حاد بين الشباب في ثمانية من البلدان العربية التي أجري فيها المسح.

وتؤكد هذه النتائج تحليلنا لبيانات مشروع المواقف العالمية لمركز بيو للأبحاث في عام 2013.

وتشير الدراسة إلى أن الحاجة ملحة لإعادة النظر في الافتراضات الرئيسية حول الشباب في المنطقة العربية. وواقع أن النتائج تناقض الافتراضات السابقة تؤكد ضرورة بناء القدرات المؤسسية عبر آليات المشاركة التي تنطلق من القاعدة إلى القيمين على القرار لإشراك الشباب وتقييم احتياجاتهم بدقة بهدف توجيه إطلاق المبادرات. ويُستحسن أن تستهدف الحملات المطالبة بالحقوق المدنية والمساواة بين الجنسين الشباب بشكل خاص بدلاً من أن تتوجه دائماً إلى جميع شرائح المجتمع. وينبغي للهيئات الدولية والإقليمية والوطنية أن تستثمر أكثر في تجميع بيانات من واقع الشباب العرب.

## Introduction

The experiences of other regions demonstrate the positive role youth can play in human development. Some argue that as much as a third of “miracle” growth in East Asia can be attributed to the demographic dividend resulting from a favourable youthful population structure, investment in human capital, and effective economic and social institutions and governance. Active engagement and participation by young people have been associated with greater social capital, tolerance and social cohesion. Moreover, where the energy of young people has been channelled into democratic institutions, responsive governance has taken root. In the prevailing Arab context of political polarization, stalled transitions and the absence of consensus on the need for democratic reform, can youth be a force for stable transition? Can youth in the region be seen as a cohesive collective actor or rather as divided agents?

There is a need to: (i) trace youth preferences and behavioural trends; (ii) identify the gap between those preferences and institutions and current policies; (iii) craft appropriate youth policies and; (iv) develop institutions to address youth issues and forge cohesion amid social transformation, instability and threats of violence. This study looks at two questions: To what extent is there a sociopolitical divide along generational lines and whether or not the region is witnessing youth-driven polarization. It explores patterns of youth preferences and behaviour in the region based on 2010-2014 World Values Survey (WVS) data from nine countries.

The arguments on youth bulge linking young demographics to violence and instability need to be revisited. Although, according to data, young people are more likely to view the use of force as justifiable, they are also more likely to have positive views on democracy. A close look at the degree of divergence in youth preferences reveals that, as far as strategies of mobilization and political orientation go, youth cannot be seen as a cohesive category or collective actor, even if young people share similar patterns of participation.

Chapter I of this study looks at the definition and dynamics of polarization and how the issue is framed in literature on the Arab region. The main issues, framework of analysis and an empirical profile of youth in the region are then presented. The chapter concludes with a discussion of methodology and the study's significance.

Chapter II explores the attitudes and experiences of young people with regard to various avenues of mobilization and political participation, in order to assess the degree to which youth can be seen as a cohesive force. Findings from the WVS contradict some commonly held views on Arab youth, showing for instance that the degree of ideological radicalization of young people and membership in parties were comparable to those of the rest of the population.

Chapter III analyzes participant responses to questions on issues such as the promotion of equality, political accountability, the role of religious institutions in democracies, civil rights and gender equality. Findings show that young people are, by world standards, especially polarized on some of those questions, particularly with regard to the role of religious institutions and issues of inequality. However, the study demonstrates that youth cannot be seen as a uniform driving force behind polarization.

## I. BRINGING YOUTH BACK IN

Many countries emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings weakened. Deadlock, institutional conflict, sectarianism and violence have been identified as root causes for stymied reform or democratic reversals across the region. Observers stress the detrimental effects of polarization, or alignment along multiple lines of potential conflict, whereby citizens are organized around exclusive identities into opposing factions. Democratic progress has been hindered by divisive politics and societies have become more fragmented: Along sectarian lines; secular versus Islamist; and/or regime versus civil society. “Mitigating polarization has become of almost existential import” for promoting political transition and holding Arab societies and polities together, according to Youngs (2014).

Recent scholarship has focused on the impact of polarization, appropriate sequencing of transition steps, the distribution of power within government, or electoral laws that promote pluralism and coalition-building. Discussions of institutional polarization have been disconnected from another important body of literature on youth bulges. With the endorsement of the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) in the mid-1990s, the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and publication of the World Bank’s Development and the Next Generation Report, youth development emerged as a priority area for policymakers worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Arab countries have the youngest population in the world and the long-term welfare of young people has emerged as an important measure of development. A growing number of observers have linked the involvement of young people in the Arab Spring uprisings to exclusionary politics. However, scholarly interest in the political role of youth has not gone beyond understanding their role in “revolutionary moments”.

### A. THEORETICAL CONTEXT: DEBATING POLARIZATION

#### 1. *What is polarization?*

Findings on the causes and consequences of political polarization vary, due largely to the variety—and sometimes ambiguity—of approaches to defining and studying it. Three main dimensions need to be highlighted: (a) polarization of the elite and the masses; (2) polarization of behaviour versus opinion, or attitudes and; (3) polarization as radicalization versus alignment of opinions. Evidence regarding the degree of polarization among the elite and the masses is mixed. Research in the United States of America consistently confirms growing polarization among political elites, in institutions such as Congress and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Researchers, however, are divided as to whether polarization among the elite has been matched in the masses.

Polarization is often used to refer to a radicalization of opinion on specific issues (such as on climate change or abortion in the United States), rather than the coherence of people’s opinions on a range of issues (Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008). It can also refer to the alignment of individuals or groups along multiple lines of potential disagreement on an issue. Typically, they form opposing factions along identity lines rather than becoming radicalized. People aligning along multiple, potentially divisive issues—even if their positions are not extreme—can polarize society. Lindqvist and Östling (2010) observed that polarization is not dependent simply on the degree to which opinions are radicalized but, more importantly, on how they relate to one another.

In this study, “polarization” refers to the absence of consensus on the basic rules of the game. The focus is on attitudes among the masses. The survey questions in the study combined fundamental values/attitudes and a behavioural component captured by recall questions. This builds on the work of

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly resolution 50/81 and World Bank, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Levendusky, 2009; Munzert and Bauer, 2013, citing Zaller, 1992; Baldassarri and Gelman, 2008; Abramowitz and Saunders, 2005. For findings on the United Kingdom, see Adams, Green and Milazzo, 2012.

DiMaggio and others (1996), whose analysis incorporates behavioural indicators based on two measures of political participation—voting and a set of “recall” questions about engagement in political acts.

## 2. *Causes*

There are various theories about the drivers of polarization. Inequality and factors associated with it, such as economic vulnerability and exposure to risk, are seen by some as causes. The institutional architecture of governments has also been identified as a vital factor contributing to, or mitigating, polarization. In that context, debate has focused on electoral systems. Majoritarian systems are considered likely to produce stable governments but tend to be dominated by one or two parties. Moreover, first-past-the-post counting rules under-represent minority votes. Proportional representation with multiple political parties is more inclusive of voter preferences but, as with the majoritarian system, much depends on how districts are drawn and at what level the threshold is set for representation.

Demographics deserve attention. DiMaggio and others (1996) looked at the level of disagreement between subgroups in their study and found little evidence of intergroup polarization. With regard to age, gender, education, region and religious affiliation, the results portray stability or even instances of depolarization. Baldassarri and Bearman (2007) did not see signs of polarization predicated on demographic variables such as age, gender, race, religion and education. However, it is generally agreed that young people tend to be at the vanguard of important social, and sometimes political, shifts in countries that can manifest themselves in inter-group polarization. When looking for polarization trends in public opinion over time, distinctions between birth cohorts and generational change must be taken into account (Bartels, 2013). Evans (2002) notes that “it could be the next generation that is polarizing”. However, DiMaggio and others (1996) found that differences between young people aged 18 to 29 and the rest of the population in the USA were “numerous but inconclusive”: although they noticed increased polarization, or dispersion or variance on certain issues, in that age group, their overall results were not much different from the broader opinion trends (e.g., increased unity of opinion on gender roles, racial integration and crime; polarization on abortion and, to a lesser degree, feelings toward the poor).

The potentially causal relationship between polarization and political and social volatility makes study of the former important. Polarization, especially among the elite, can undermine vital public institutions (such as the legislature, the judicial system or the media). The level of antagonism or degree of polarization in society influences the intensity of conflict. According to Esteban and Ray (1999), conflict reflects “a situation in which, in the absence of a collective decision rule, social groups with opposed interests incur losses in order to increase the likelihood of obtaining their preferred outcomes”. The sum of resources dissipated in the struggle for preferred outcomes, whether through lobbying or violence, denotes the level of conflict in society. The more polarized a society is, the more likely it is to be prone to conflict and instability. Autocratic regimes with polarized polities/societies risk political instability and violence. In the absence of institutions that can moderate disagreement, promote compromise and power-sharing, polarization is linked to the generation of tension and social unrest and the possibility of revolt (Esteban and Ray, 1994).

Scholars such as Hetherington (2008 and 2009), Abramowitz and Saunders (2008), and Levendusky (2010), highlight the beneficial side of polarization. One recent study found that political awareness tended to increase alongside growing polarization of the elite, and political polarization boosted public interest in elections. In their analysis of data from the 2004 US presidential election, Abramowitz and Saunders concluded that voter participation rises as the result of greater perceived differences between candidates and political parties. The extent to which polarization has an adverse impact on the general political landscape or on individual behaviour, according to Lee (2012), is therefore unclear.

### 3. *Polarization in the Arab context*

Few attempts have been made to trace popular manifestations of polarization in the Arab region empirically. This paper seeks to investigate political polarization as a challenge to democratic transitions and shed light on the relevance of long-held assumptions about the political implications of youth bulges in developing countries.

Prior to the uprisings, Arab youth had assumed a central, if complex, position in policy discourses in the region and in international organizations and multilateral institutions focused on sustainable development. That was due largely to the scale of unemployment among them and their growing radicalization and militarization, seen by some as “a tragic lost opportunity to prepare for the future, when the ratios will surely change” (Joseph, 2011). Youth unemployment globally is more than double that of adults. In the Arab world, that ratio quadruples, according to Hoffman and Jamal (2012). Young people are often depicted as the “underclass” of the 21st century due to the scarcity of coveted public sector jobs, the tendency of fresh graduates to remain unemployed or underemployed for long periods, wage stagnation, the growing perception of relative deprivation, and informal employment.

Studies highlight that such economic constraints disrupt socialization processes and are causing “generational scarring” - irreversible consequences for the long-term life chances of the post-1980 age cohort (Chauvel, 2010). Successive food, fuel and fiscal crises, as well as the global economic recession, have made entering the labour force tougher and driven down wages, leading to downward social mobility as the middle class youth population expands. Dubbed the “middle class poor”, swathes of young people neither enjoy the positions held by their parents nor receive similar economic and social compensation for their educational assets (Bayat, 2011). Confronted with mass unemployment, their aspirations far exceed their opportunities and capacity to achieve.

Socioeconomic exclusion has often been associated with top-down youth policies and a persistent lack of access to political power. Joseph (2011) argues that governments in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have increasingly excluded the population, especially youth, from political participation. The region has one of the lowest rates of party membership and electoral participation among young people worldwide. The lack of grass-roots autonomous organization has narrowed the appeal even of civil society.

This state of affairs has rendered youth unable to influence national decision-making, while increasingly subjecting them to systematic forms of social control and/or regime disciplining. Arab youth has progressively become a less critical political constituency to regimes as they have moved away from mobilizing young people in pursuit of industrialization. The decline of Arab nationalism since the 1970s and the adoption of market-led development initiatives have rendered the inclusion of youth in political order a distant promise.

According to Sawaf and Hoballah (2011), sound national policies on youth drafted in recent years in Arab States have been undermined by inadequate funding, lack of political will and insufficient implementation, and by the failure of young people to get involved.

#### B. PUZZLE

This study seeks to assess to what extent one can speak of a growing gap in public opinion and social values between youth and older generations and looks at empirical patterns of youth preferences and behaviour in the region. Using results from the World Values Survey 2010-2014, the following chapters adopt a cross-generational perspective in order to accomplish two analytical tasks. The first is to discern if opinions about various facets of politics and society are products of a particular life stage. The second is to see whether the degree of polarization, or dispersion of opinions and attitudes, can be attributed to age differences and whether youth as a group exhibits a higher degree of (dis)agreement on controversial questions. The nine cases under consideration are Arab countries in transition (ACTs) that underwent

sociopolitical upheaval and reforms in recent years<sup>3</sup> or that moved towards holding regular multi-party elections with varying levels of freedom.<sup>4</sup>

The study looks at conventional assumptions about the political repercussions of youth bulges in developing countries where the authority of the State is contested and its institutions are weak. The dominance of modernization theory narratives regarding Arab youth renders this exercise crucial in order to move beyond the image of them as “a unique group ... trapped in a maze of a supposedly stagnant culture and religion while the rest of the world changes” (Bayat and Herrera, 2010). Until now, the literature has focused on unemployment and security implications of the “population bomb”. Rigorous analysis of youth attitudes is vital, because the region’s stability and democratic potential hinge not just on understanding patterns of entrenched division, but also on identifying collective actors most affected by polarization. The study will examine the preferences of a constituency whose values, behaviour and political choices may well shape the future course of nations.

### C. YOUTH: DISPERSED AGENTS OR COLLECTIVE ACTOR?

Some argue that modernization, socioeconomic pressures and policy-making that excludes young people in the Arab region have produced a new sense of collective consciousness among them. They claim that mass education has shaped youth as a social category. Because education “serves as key factor in producing and prolonging the period of youth, while it cultivates status, expectations, and possibly, critical awareness”, many argue that young people fall in to a unique social condition in which the individual is neither dependent nor totally independent (Bayat and Herrera, 2010). That phenomenon is most marked in urban areas.

Generational research focuses on the effects of larger socioeconomic, political and cultural processes on youth as a force for change. According to this literature, Arab youth belong to the global “e-generation”, for which hopes were raised of the spread of a new world order founded on human rights, gender equality and democracy. Education reform and access to information and communication technologies (ICT) have stimulated civic engagement and political awareness. However, Arab youth represent a distinct sub-set whose self-identification and consciousness have been influenced by the events of 11 September 2001, prolonged geo-political conflicts, neo-imperialist interventions and a “clash of civilizations” discourse, in addition to increased scepticism about multiculturalism in the West.

Bayat and Herrera (2010) point to the crystallization of a distinct consciousness among Arab youth on “issues of social justice accompanied by a profound moral outrage at the violation of fundamental rights”. According to Daniel Brumberg (2013), “the emergence of a new generation of activists who had no patience for the game of protection-racket politics” contributed to mobilizations in the 2010 uprisings. “Their disaffection with autocratic ‘business as usual’, coupled with their disdain for corrupt, cronyism-riddled forms of neo-capitalist development, gave rise to bridge-building efforts between young Islamists and secularists in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen.”

Differentiation across age cohorts can thus be expected in studies exploring self-identification patterns, values and political behaviour. In a recent study of identity construction among citizens from marginalized cultural backgrounds in Jordan, Doughan (2011) found distinct differences across age groups. Whereas younger participants were most concerned about cultural recognition in public discourse, older ones expressed greater interest in building institutions catering to the needs of their ethnic communities.

Attempts to see Arab youth as a collective actor may be overstated. Given ideological and class differences, and ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, it is hard to speak of young people as a cohesive social

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<sup>3</sup> Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen.

<sup>4</sup> Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the State of Palestine.

category. According to Khouri (2011), youth tend to adhere to “different, and at times conflicting, identities in spheres such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, gender and sexuality, family ties, ideology and social norms”. They also adopt social behaviour from the West. Their values and self-definitions constantly evolve in response to local and foreign influences.

Young Arab people face several sources of pressure. Family solidarity profoundly impacts young people’s living standards regardless of their economic background or skills. Prospects for marriage, one of the key markers of adulthood in the Arab region, are linked to the extent of support provided by parents and extended family members among the post-1980 generation. Education and gender affect job opportunities. One study (Assaad, 2014) shows that young people who invest in formal training and academic credentials have the greatest difficulty in accessing labour markets. Female participation rates in the labour force have stagnated overall, but educated women have been particularly hard hit by unemployment.

One could therefore hypothesize that polarization is particularly pronounced among youth. Closer analysis would, however, reveal the influence of prevailing societal cleavages, both vertical and horizontal. A survey in Lebanon (Harb, 2010) revealed strong differences between youth groups in terms of self-identity, cultural orientation and values, depending on where they lived and their sectarian background. Another study (Ibrahim, 2008) noted that the revival of youth activism across the region has been fuelled less by ideological commitments than by practical needs. That is a telling point given the marked inability of youth-led movements to maintain their cohesiveness during the uprisings.

Social mobilization theorists have increasingly incorporated cognitive ideological beliefs into their analysis. Accordingly, recent scholarship tends to highlight the contingent nature of collective mobilization. Viewed through that prism, collective actors tend to be defined by deliberate action by means of organized investment of time and resources.

#### D. PROFILING ARAB YOUTH

The Arab region is experiencing one of the world’s largest youth bulges (measured as the proportion of people in the 15-24 age cohort compared to the total population). The number of young people in the region multiplied 5.32 times between 1950 and 2010 to reach 51 million, or 20 per cent of total population. Its expansion dates to the late 1970s, when the annual growth rate of this segment of the population reached 3.75 per cent (ESCWA, 2011). By 2030, growth is expected to decelerate to 1.41 per cent, but the number of young people will exceed 66.7 million, more than 17.5 per cent of the total population (table 1).

TABLE 1. YOUTH BULGE IN THE ARAB REGION

	Number (in millions)	Percentage of total population	Annual growth rate
1950	9 546	18.75	1.73
1960	11 347	17.31	1.73
1970	16 510	19.14	3.75
1980	22 227	19.13	2.97
1990	30 434	19.42	3.14
2000	40 575	20.32	2.88
2010	50 859	19.66	2.26
2020	57 928	18.16	1.3
2030	66 731	17.65	1.41

Although demographic trends differ significantly across the Arab region, most countries are still in the early stages of demographic transition with youthful populations (table 2).

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION BY AGE GROUP, 2010 ESTIMATE  
(PER 100 TOTAL POPULATION)

Country	0-14	15-24	25-64	65+	Total
Yemen	42.0	23.1	32.2	2.7	100.00
State of Palestine	42.1	21.4	33.7	2.8	100.00
Lebanon	23.7	20.0	47.8	8.5	100.00
Iraq	41.2	19.8	35.6	3.4	100.00
Jordan	35.1	19.8	41.7	3.4	100.00
Morocco	28.1	19.8	47.1	5.0	100.00
Egypt	31.5	19.7	43.3	5.5	100.00
Libya	29.4	19.3	46.7	4.6	100.00
Tunisia	23.5	18.8	50.7	6.9	100.00

Source: Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), 2013.

Considerable progress has been made in education in the Arab region. Most Arab countries have achieved universal or near-universal primary school enrolment since the 1970s. Enrolment in secondary school has risen from just over 20 per cent of children to nearly 70 per cent, an increase from 4 million pupils to almost 30 million. Female education has caught up with male education and in many countries there are more female than male university students, the ratio being as high as 7:3 in some Gulf Cooperation Council countries (ESCWA, 2013).

However, economic and social policy has failed to absorb the growing youth population into the labour market (ESCWA, 2013). The education many graduates receive does not adequately prepare them to compete in the open labour market. Although overall growth in employment between 2001 and 2009 was the highest in the world — between 3 and 3.6 per cent — youth employment actually declined in the same period (ESCWA, 2011). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that youth unemployment in 2013 was 29.1 per cent in the Middle East and 23.7 per cent in North Africa, compared with a global average of 12.6 per cent. Unemployment among young women was higher still – 43.5 per cent in the Middle East and 36.7 per cent in North Africa.

In some countries, economic disruption resulting from unrest and transition exacerbated unemployment. In Egypt, unemployment increased from 8.9 per cent in 2010 to 12 per cent in 2011. In Tunisia, during the same period, it increased from 13 per cent to 17 per cent, mainly because of the repatriation of Tunisians working in Libya. In Yemen, unemployment stood at 45 per cent in 2012 and many people were underemployed or marginally employed. Unemployment continues to be a major concern for 41 per cent of young people in Gulf countries and 46 per cent in other Arab countries (ESCWA, 2013). Around 45 per cent of young people in Arab countries afflicted by poverty or embroiled in conflict face unemployment. The opportunity cost of youth unemployment in the Arab region is reported to be up to US\$50 billion.

TABLE 3. GROWTH IN EMPLOYMENT RATES BY AGE GROUP IN  
ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES (1995-2009)

	Over 15 years	15-24	25 years and higher	Total
1995-2000	3.4	4.06	3.24	10.7
2000-2005	3.05	1.57	3.4	8.02
2005-2009	2.63	1.38	2.89	6.9

Source: ESCWA.

Recent research demonstrates a link between higher education in most Arab countries and increased probability of unemployment or underemployment. Data from 2009 showed that more than 43 per cent of people with tertiary education were unemployed in Saudi Arabia; 24 per cent in the State of Palestine; 22 per cent in Morocco and the United Arab Emirates; 14 per cent in Tunisia; and more than 11 per cent in Algeria

(ESCWA, 2013). Many such young people take on whatever work can be found, including informal, low-level jobs.<sup>5</sup> As a result, many young people in the Arab region find themselves languishing in a protracted period of “waithood”. Young people who are adult in age are not recognized as such because of social markers, such as their inability “to build, buy or rent a house for themselves, support their relatives, get married [and] establish families” (Honwana, 2014).

#### E. SIGNIFICANCE

The degree to which the grievances of young people in the region, particularly joblessness and growing income gaps, and their savvy use of new media, fuelled the Arab Spring uprisings and subsequent cross-class mobilizations remains debatable. The region has, however, without doubt witnessed a new breed of youth politics. Youth have shaped the goals and leadership of relatively autonomous social movements, such as the April 6 movement in Egypt, youth mobilizations in Lebanon calling for Syria’s withdrawal as part of the Cedar Revolution in 2005 and the second Palestinian Intifada of 2000. They have also been the driving force behind Islamist mobilization. The Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and emerging Salafist groups have all succeeded in rallying citizens below the age of 30. Although such success has been attributed to the lure of money and power in some cases, studies of moderate political Islam highlight non-material incentives. Shehata (2011) explicitly links the success of Islamist movements in Egypt prior to the uprising there to grievances among young people. Islamic ideas, according to Hadiz (2014), provide young people with a tool for making “sense of their relative marginality and to forge political responses”. The unexpected electoral successes of Salafist movements in rural Egypt highlighted the central role of ideas in attracting young voters (Bayat and Herrera, 2010).

There is evidence that militant groups mainly recruit young people. Up to 69 per cent of known Islamist extremists have received or were enrolled in higher education degrees, according to studies. Research on two radical Islamist groups in Egypt during the late 1970s showed that the average age of militants was between 22 and 24 (Ibrahim, 1998). Hezbollah fighters are on average estimated to be 22 years of age (Krueger and Malečková, 2003). Sociological studies (Hegghammer, 2006) in Saudi Arabia show that the average age of Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP) militants is 27. Powell and others (2005) dubbed young Muslim men between the ages of 15 and 30, whose shared alienation and marginalization drive them to militancy, “generation jihad”.

As in other regions, youth in Arab countries today constitute the most educated age cohort. Their interest in politics, however, surpasses that of their contemporaries in other regions. The 2014 Arab Youth Survey (Asda’a Burson-Marsteller, 2014) shows that 47 per cent of young Arabs follow current affairs daily, with 59 per cent citing the Internet as their preferred news platform and 39 per cent regarding Facebook and Twitter as their most trusted sources of information. All of this indicates that Arab youth make up a politically conscious group able to mobilize collectively.

#### F. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore: (i) the extent to which the political behaviour of youth in the region is consistent with modernization school assumptions; (ii) whether, and to what extent, patterns of polarization in the region are driven by youth; and (iii) whether youth can be considered a cohesive collective actor. Using the World Values Survey (WVS) 2010-2014, the study situates the region in comparison with other countries and compares the records of nine countries in the Arab region. The WVS includes questions pertinent to these issues and has the virtue of having been conducted recently and in 60 countries, including nine Arab countries in transition.

Samples were drawn from the entire population of persons 18 years and older, with a minimum sample of 1,000. The survey is comprised of different questions, the responses to which generate one of three possible types of data: Answers expressed on an ordinal scale; categorical (non-ordered) variables with

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<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that the informal economy accounts for up to a half of total employment in the Arab region.

only two possible answers; and interval variables coded on a discrete scale (integer values from 1 to 10). Answers coded as “don’t know” and “no answer” were not counted. Data analysis is based on age groups of 18 to 29 years (youth) and 30 years of age and older.

There is debate on capturing the degree of polarization. DiMaggio and others (1996) examine the polarization of distributions as: increases in (a) statistical variance; (b) bimodality (gaps in the distribution of opinions—which measures how opinions cluster into separate agglomerations); (c) constraint (ideological coherence); and (d) consolidation (intergroup differentiation). Epstein and Graham (2007) see manifestations of polarization “as a bimodal distribution of ideologies, rather than as a left-to-right continuum, or as the decline of deliberation between people on opposite sides, which may in part be due to the declining prevalence of centrists who can forge a middle ground between extreme ideological camps”. Iversen and Soskice (2014) measure it as the share of people who place themselves away from the centre on a left-right spectrum. The measure proposed by Esteban and Ray (1994) contains a free parameter, which could affect analysis, and it is created for variables with at least an interval scale, which could create a problem for the first two types of variables from the survey described above.

To overcome these limitations, we applied different measures of polarization for the three types of variables. Direct comparison between variables is thus only feasible when they are of the same type.

- (i) For dichotomous variables, we created a simple, *ad hoc* statistic defined as:

$$1 - |f_A - f_B|$$

where  $f_A$  and  $f_B$  are the relative frequencies of the first and second possible options, respectively. Thus, a value of 0 corresponds to minimum polarization (all agree on the same answer) and 1 corresponds to the maximum (perfect disagreement: a 50 per cent-50 per cent distribution);

- (ii) For ordinal variables, we apply Van der Eijk’s (2001) measure of polarization, which is constructed specifically for ordered rating scales, with a minimum value of 0 (perfect agreement) and a maximum of 1 (maximum polarization), passing through a case of no agreement (at 0.5, where the frequency distribution is equal for each of the possible responses);
- (iii) For interval variables, we make the assumption that they exist on a continuous scale but that they are coded only on a discrete scale (integer values from 1 to 10). We then calculate the standard deviation since, as Lindqvist and Östling (2010) argued, this is highly correlated with the measure of Esteban and Ray and eliminates the need to determine the free parameter.

In order to assess the degree of polarization, we compare data from each Arab country in transition (ACT) in this study to the average for the 60 countries available in the survey (we shall call it the world average), for either age group. This “comparator” allows us to determine to what degree opinions of Arab youth on certain issues differ from those of their peers worldwide.

In an effort to corroborate findings from this study, as described below, data analysis for available ACTs using the 2013 Pew Global Attitudes Project is presented in the annex. Questions in that survey cover many topics in the WVS.

This study is based on analysis of opinions. Some responses obtained, particularly from young people in ACTs, may seem counter-intuitive when compared to trends in behaviour witnessed during the Arab uprisings and the literature reviewed above. It is therefore even more important to compare the responses, or the degree of divergence in opinion on these issues, between youth in ACTs with those of their peers in other countries. This study seeks to understand diversion of opinions between different generations, make an approximation on how to measure polarization, and contribute to the future use and analysis of polarization data in understanding youth preferences and attitudes.

## II. YOUTH AS POLITICAL ACTORS IN POLARIZED CONTEXTS

Scholars on the Arab region have tended to link the grievances of young people to polarization patterns in the economic sphere without giving serious consideration to their role as political actors based on cultural identity or ideology. The overriding premise is that the demographic dividend has failed to materialize because young people continue to face obstacles in their transition to employment and integration into the market. Population transitions resulting in a large working-age population, with proportionally fewer dependent children and retirees, have neither freed up resources for investment nor increased savings, nor are they likely to narrow income-based polarization in the long run.

Dhillon and Yousef (2009) contend that the Middle East is in the grip of three “great games”: (1) Geopolitical competition as States in the region and world powers vie for influence; (2) competition between nations in the region to develop in a global economy; and (3) a “generational game” marked by the struggle of young people to receive an education, find work and form families. The struggle by youth for prosperity and inclusion is, however, considered to have only an *indirect* influence on political transformation.

This section attempts to bridge the gap between two bodies of scholarship. The first is focused on the macro-institutional level and explores the challenge of polarization in cases of democratic transition. The second is the literature on the political implications of youth bulges, heavily influenced by classic modernization school assumptions regarding the effects of demographic transitions on political order, the propensity for violence and mobilization outside established institutions.

### A. VIOLENCE

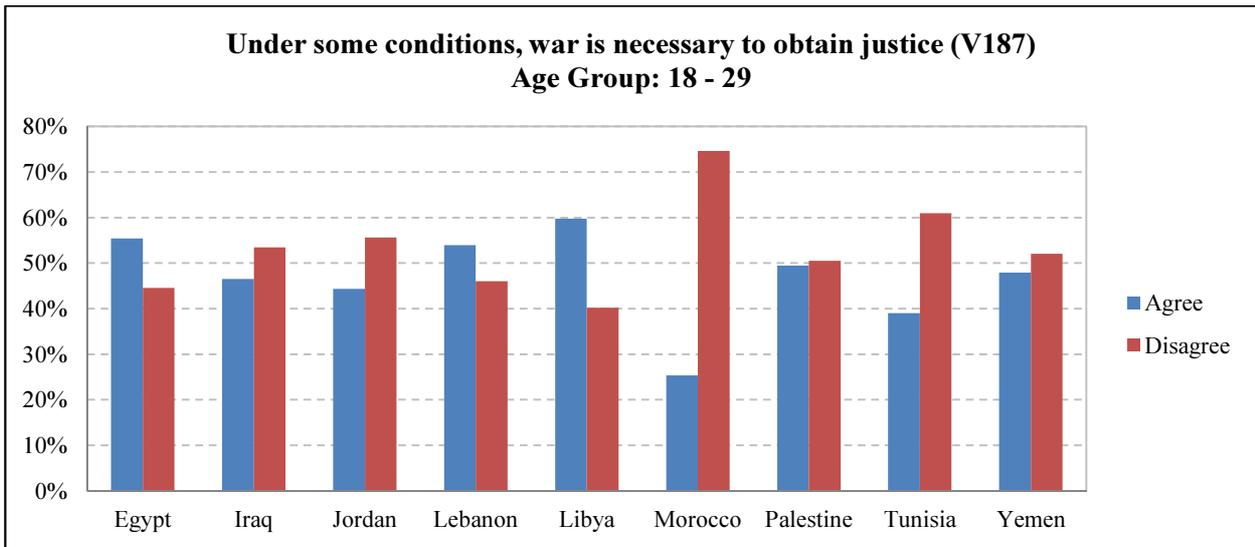
An influential body of literature suggests that the presence of youth as a significant portion of the population automatically poses a threat to stability and political order. Moeller (1968) argued that the age composition must be considered a major coefficient in the incidence of violence. Samuel Huntington (1996) said that growth in the 15 to 24 age cohort across the Muslim world provided not only potential recruits for fundamentalist movements, but also people willing to engage in violent insurgency, wars and global migration: “An excess in young adult male population leads to social unrest, war, and terrorism, as the third and fourth sons that find no prestigious positions in their existing societies rationalize their impetus to compete by religion and political ideology.”

Governance studies have long claimed that youth is a “politically volatile” constituency. Echoing the classical analysis of Durkheim (1873), observers warn that young people, particularly in rapidly urbanizing developing countries, are likely to experience anomie, a condition in which society provides little moral guidance. Anomie among young people has been hypothesized as an underlying dynamic driving social disintegration, open violence and instability. The capacity of young people to mobilize quickly via social networks or formally organized movements, and the proclivity of some for joining non-State armed groups, have long marked them as a significant security risk for ruling elites.

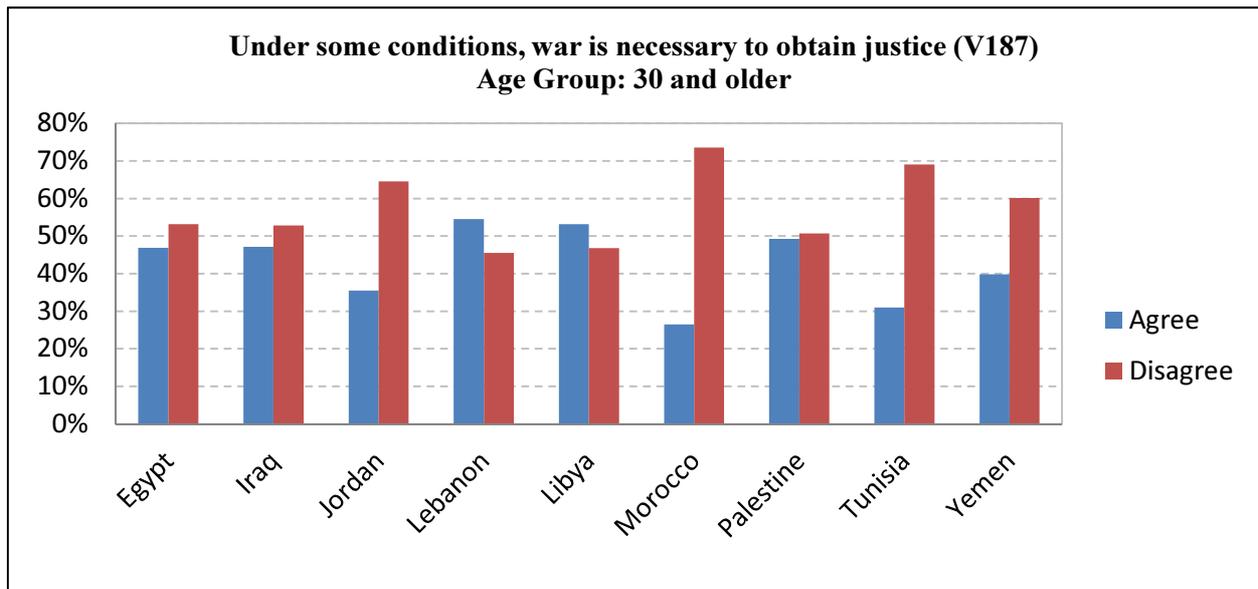
Critics of these assumptions contend that the analysis masks the mediating role of institutions and ideas in motivating people to engage in violence. The mere presence of a sizeable youth population, they say, is not in itself sufficient to explain the resort to open violence. In polarized societies, the absence of inclusive power-sharing arrangements or institutions offering channels for participation render the resort to violence a rational response by excluded constituencies, such as youth. Furthermore, youth bulges are transient and dynamic phenomena that defy attempts to generalize political behaviour.

Survey results are interesting. In response to the statement “Under some conditions, war is necessary to obtain justice”, young people in ACTs tended slightly more than other generations to support the premise. That tendency is consistent with the literature.

**Figure I**

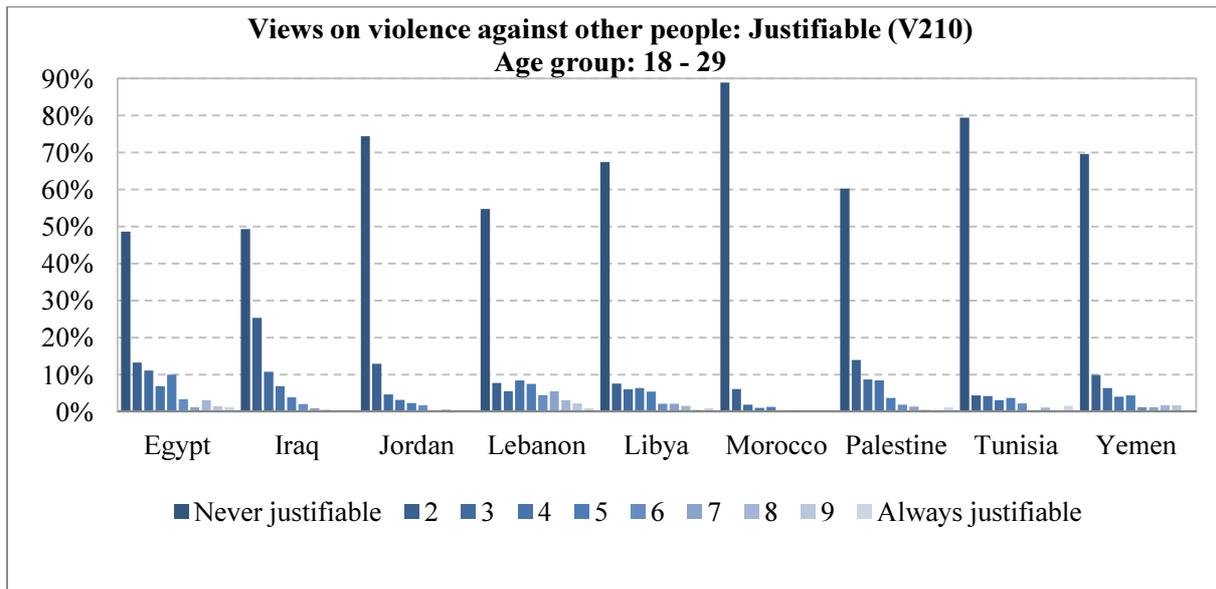


**Figure II**

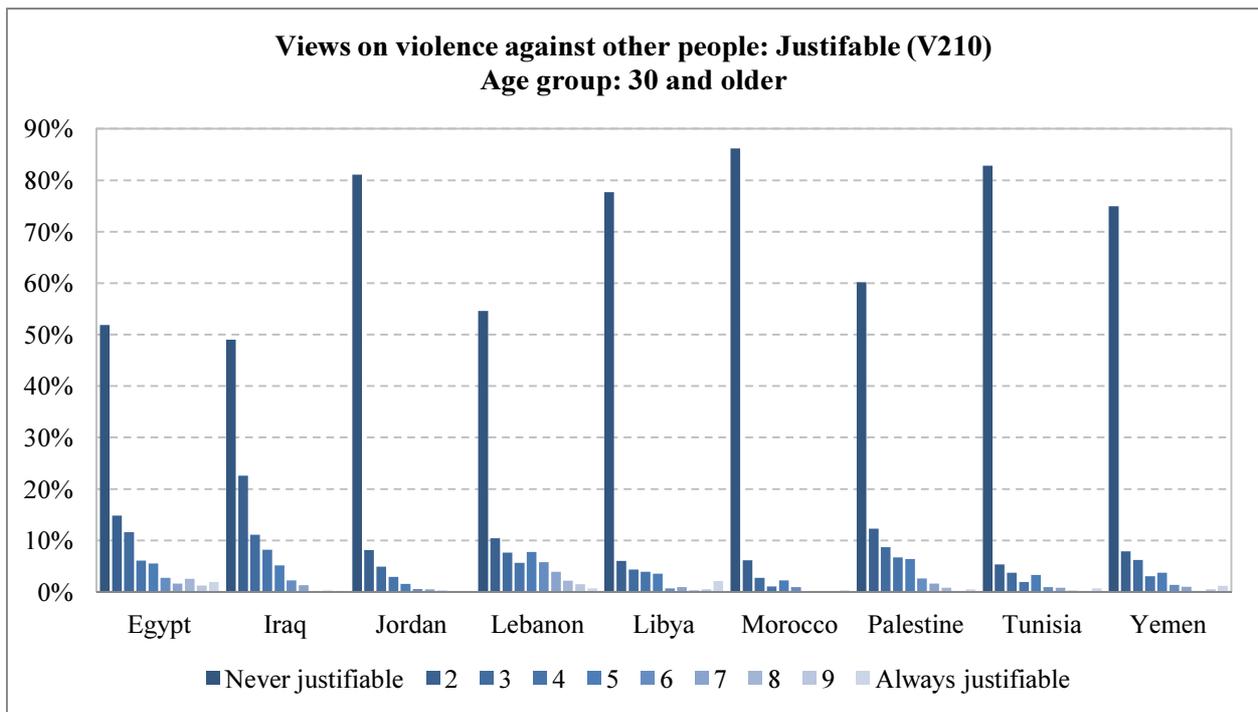


Data analysis for each of the ACTs shows that, while the ratios are small, young people are somewhat more likely to justify the use of violence than those aged 30 and above (figures III and IV).

**Figure III**



**Figure IV**



**B. RADICALIZATION THROUGH POLITICAL PARTIES**

Political parties can be understood as institutions that link State and society, by mediating socioeconomic interests or constructing sociopolitical blocs based on competing interests or ideologies. They constitute “alliances in conflicts over policies and value commitments within the larger body politic” (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Through the “conflict-integration dialectic”, parties express and negotiate differences. As vehicles for mobilization, competition and policy setting, political party systems may channel the radicalization of youth preferences and behaviour in polarized contexts. It is being increasingly suggested that features of party organization and electoral rules may have a significant impact on polarization in society.

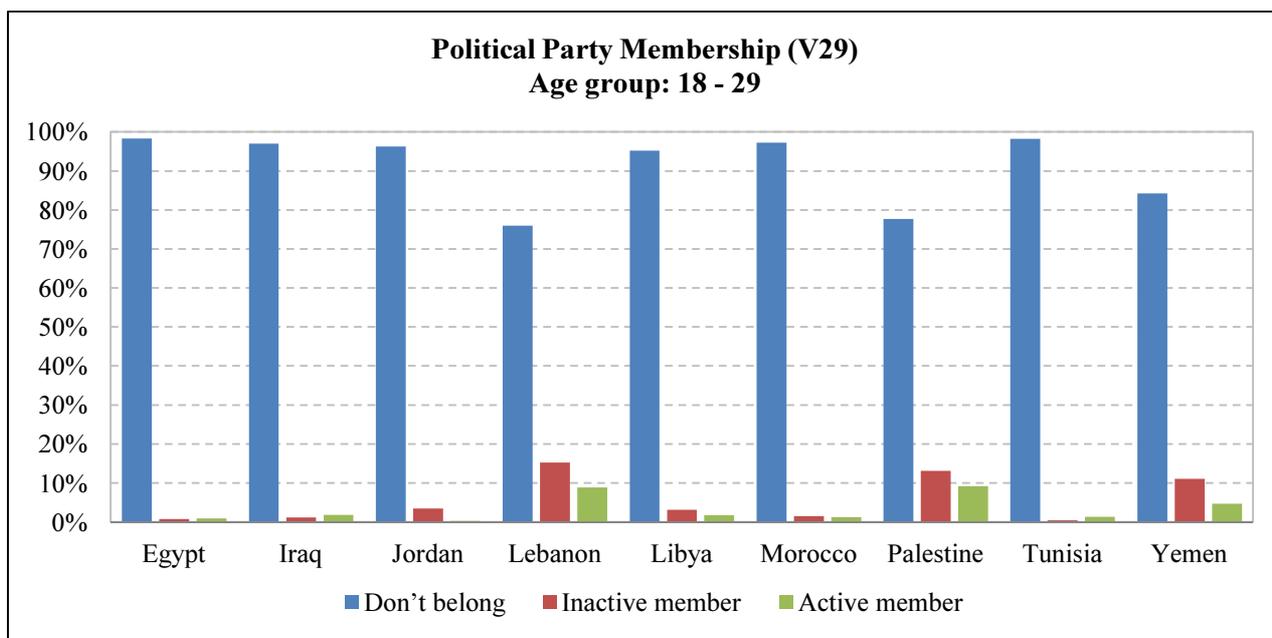
Political parties are commonly classified in three categories (Katz and Williams, 2006). The first group are inflexible and hierarchical parties dominated by the elite, reliant on financing by the rich few or the State, and which stress the importance of ideas. They do not seek to organize people inside the party structure so much as bind them through ideological appeal. Mass-based parties draw their support and resources from large segments of the population. Centralized, bureaucratic and hierarchical, they yield to popular demands and are therefore more ideologically flexible. They tend to bind voters through clientele policy and the integration of people into political processes. Catch-all parties appeal to the median voter, have flexible platforms and rely moderately on popular mobilization. They become dominant by moving to the political centre.

The constellation of political party types carries important implications for the degree of polarization in society. The presence of elite and mass-based parties can increase the risk of polarization, for if the ideological distance between them widens sufficiently, the chances of broad agreement on policy and institutions diminish. Only where mass-based or catch-all parties are deeply rooted in society does the risk of polarization recede. Such parties can move with public opinion or inspire shifts by the masses while keeping the ideological gap between them relatively small.

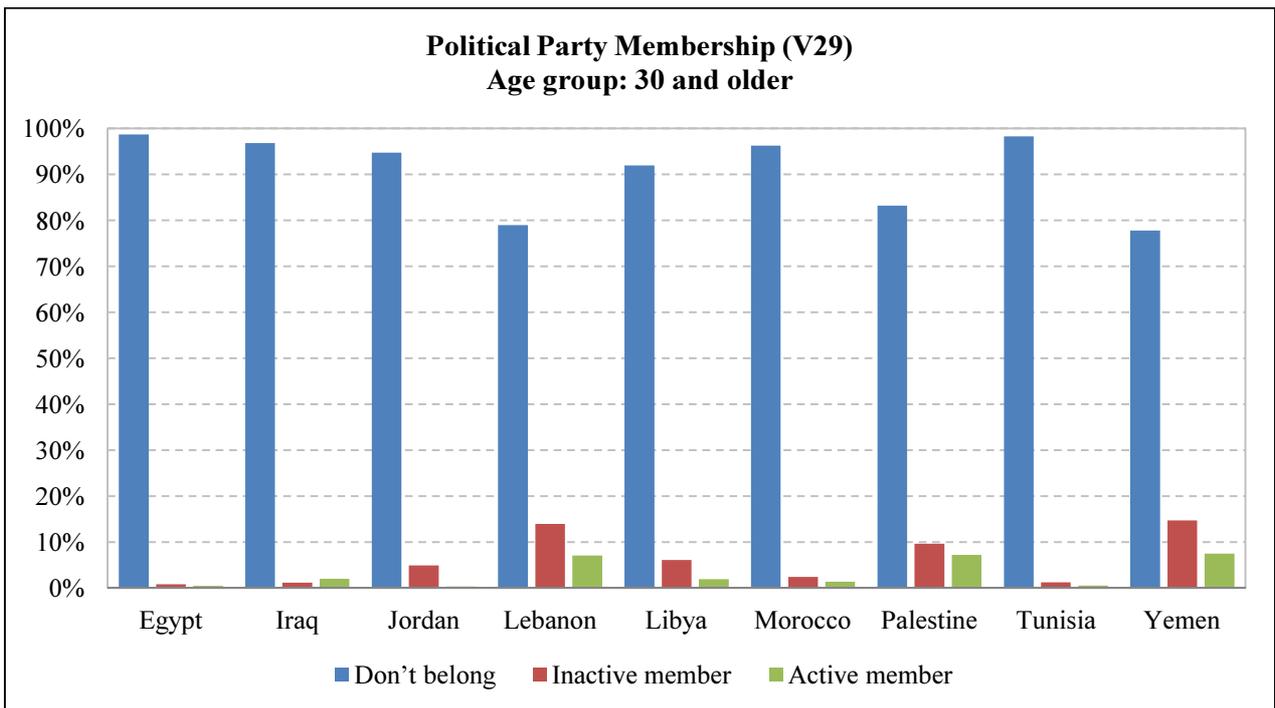
Electoral institutions that structure competition among political forces also influence the degree of voter polarization (Sharabati, 2014). Majoritarian, first-past-the-post counting rules can aggravate polarization by effectively encouraging only the major parties to stand. Proportional representation allows forces aside from the majority party to stand, depending on the threshold of minimum votes for representation, counting rules for remaining votes, and whether a Hare formula (allowing preferential votes within a list) or a closed party list is adopted. Voter demographics and behaviour, how electoral districts are drawn up and the use of electoral quotas to guarantee adequate representation of women, ethnic minorities, organized labour groups, or rural groups can also contribute to or mitigate polarization.

The World Values Survey shows that only 3.2 per cent of youth and 2.8 per cent of people aged 30 and above reported being active members of political parties in the region, which is consistent with the presence of elite, inflexible parties.

**Figure V**

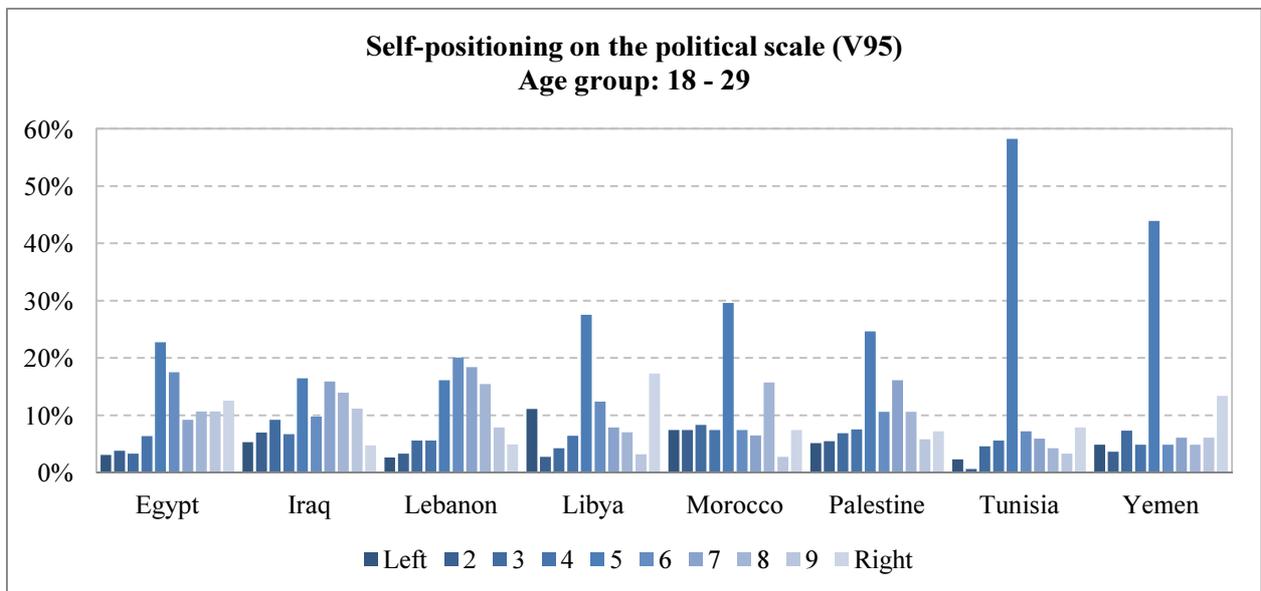


**Figure VI**

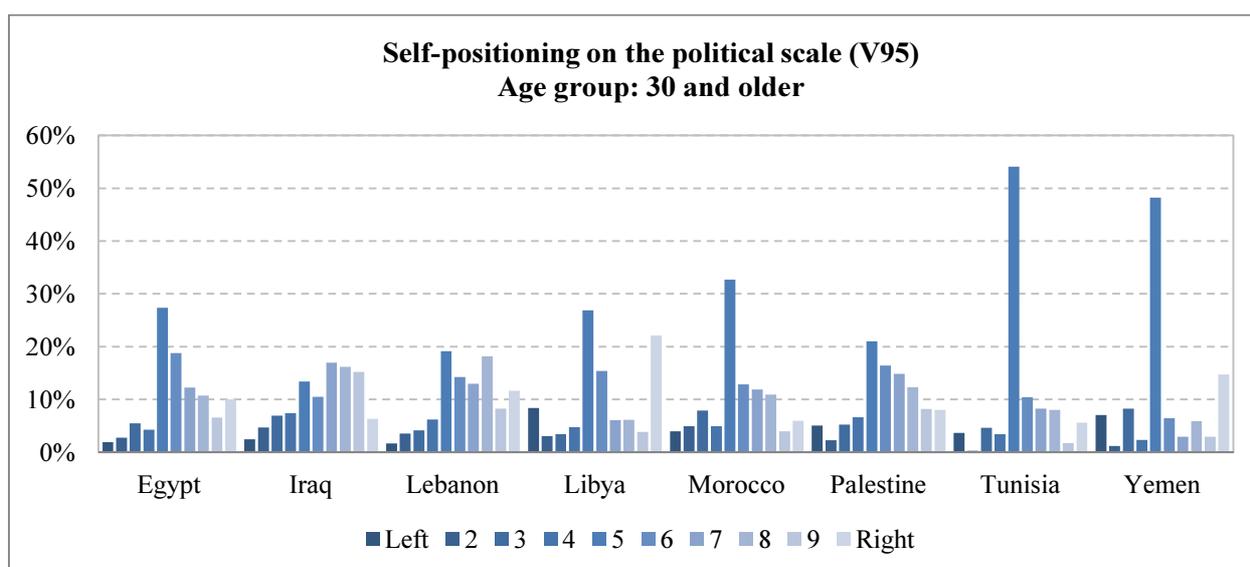


WVS results also indicate that the degree of ideological radicalization among youth is comparable to that of the rest of the population (figures VII and VIII). Indeed, while 15.2 per cent of young people positioned themselves on the extreme left or extreme right of the political scale, the ratio was actually marginally higher for the rest of respondents, at 15.9 per cent.

**Figure VII**



**Figure VIII**



Empirical evidence from the region thus disputes the presumed role of political parties as vehicles for youth radicalization, given that young people are no more likely to be active in political parties or to position themselves on the political extremes than the rest of the population.

### C. STRATEGY AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

The degree to which opinions among young people on political issues and mobilization strategy vary indicates to what extent youth constitute a collective actor. Thus far we have examined the frequency of responses among two age groups. Henceforth we will focus on standard deviation of replies. In table 4, for instance, we see that young people tend to disagree more among themselves than other age groups on whether the use of violence against other people is justifiable.

TABLE 4

Do you think that violence against other people can be justified? (V210)			
Country	Total	18-29	30 +
Egypt	2.18	2.18	2.18
Iraq	1.49	1.48	1.50
Jordan	1.12	1.25	1.06
Lebanon	2.31	2.42	2.24
Libya	1.85	1.93	1.80
Morocco	1.01	0.87	1.10
State of Palestine	1.74	1.72	1.74
Tunisia	1.55	1.75	1.40
Yemen	1.71	1.81	1.65
World Average	1.62	1.75	1.57

In Lebanon, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, the views of young people on the use of violence are more polarized than they are among those aged 30 and above. In Egypt, the divergence of opinion among youth and people aged 30 and above is identical, while in Morocco, and to a lesser degree in Iraq and the State of Palestine, the level of polarization is roughly similar among all age groups.

Given how survey participants positioned themselves on the political scale (table 5), it is hard to see youth as a collective actor. In Egypt, Morocco, Iraq and, to a lesser extent, the State of Palestine and Tunisia there was a greater dispersion of views among young people on where they positioned themselves on the political scale than among the rest of the population. In Lebanon and, to a lesser degree, in Yemen the responses by young people reflected a lower dispersion of views compared with the rest of the population of those countries. In Libya, the degree of dispersion of views was the same in both age groups. The degree of diversity of opinion among youth in most ACTs studied was higher than the global average. Again, this suggests less cohesiveness among youth on this subject in ACTs than portrayed in the literature.

TABLE 5

Self-positioning on the political scale: left or right? (V95)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	2.19	2.35	2.13
Iraq	2.40	2.48	2.33
Jordan	NA	NA	NA
Lebanon	2.18	2.08	2.23
Libya	2.75	2.74	2.74
Morocco	2.34	2.48	2.18
State of Palestine	2.32	2.35	2.28
Tunisia	1.84	1.88	1.82
Yemen	2.45	2.44	2.46
World Average	2.23	2.16	2.24

### III. IDEOLOGICAL CLEAVAGES AND YOUTH PREFERENCES

The more polarized a society is, the more it will be prone to instability and deep contestation that threaten the ability of institutions to mediate political differences. Polarization can block transition to democracy and good governance by eroding the consent of citizens to the prevailing regulations and laws. The following seeks to take stock of polarization patterns on a range of controversial issues across age groups.

#### A. INEQUALITY

Comparative studies show that there is a strong direct co-relationship between Gini coefficients and the degree of political polarization. Income inequality increases political polarization or dispersion of voters' political preferences when it comes to the question of redistribution. According to Meltzer and Richard's model (1981), voters' preferences for redistribution reflect their relative position in the distribution of income. Therefore, the higher pre-tax income inequality, the more dispersed political preferences on redistribution will be.

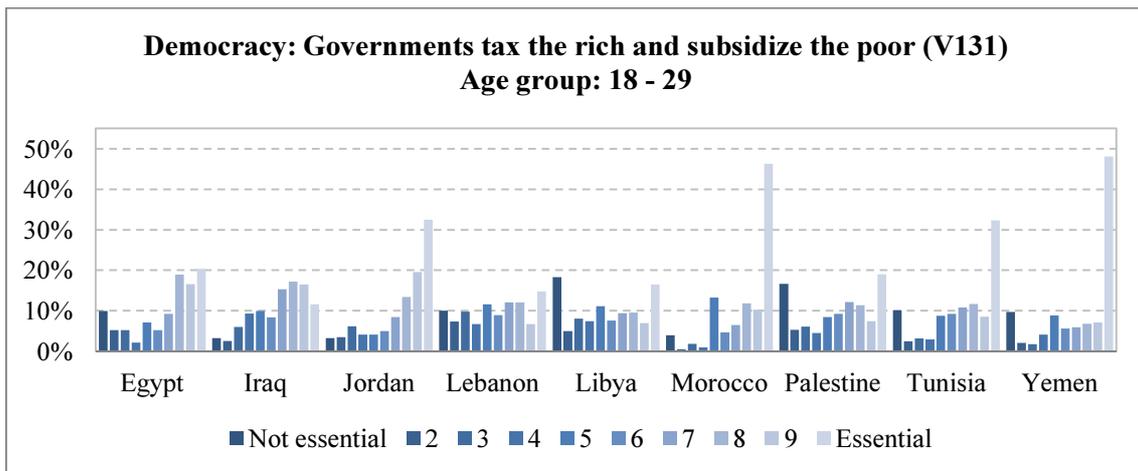
However, a study of 20 advanced democracies in 2014 showed that mass polarization was negatively related to income inequality. Iversen and Soskice (2014) found two clusters of democracies: (1) high inequality-low mass polarization with polarized, right-shifted elites (such as the US and United Kingdom), and (2) low inequality-high mass polarization with left-shifted elites (such as Sweden). This is counter-intuitive, given that standard models would suggest that increased dispersion in income results in a wider dispersion in preferences.

High youth unemployment and lack of access to resources make young people an economic "underclass". Many young people in the region are trapped in low productivity, temporary or other types of work that do not lead to better jobs. Even during periods of economic growth, many perform unpaid work supporting informal family businesses or farms. They are thus denied access to wages comparable to those earned by older segments of the population and social security. We might therefore suppose that they are more likely to support redistribution of income and to have less polarized views when it comes to redistribution preferences.

The survey, however, showed nearly the same preferences among the youth and older generations in all ACTs. Although the region's record on inequality is better than other developing areas, most people surveyed viewed redistributive policies as essential to democracy.

Nonetheless, the degree of support for redistribution of income varied and polarization of preferences was high. Interestingly, the question sparked similar levels of polarization across all 60 countries surveyed. In the ACTs, youth were more polarized in their responses than the rest of the population only in Egypt, Iraq and the State of Palestine. The reverse was true for Libya, Yemen and Tunisia, while polarization in Jordan, Morocco and Lebanon was constant or varied slightly between age groups. These findings are at odds with the hypothesis that youth are more likely to support income redistribution and, overall, to have less polarized views on the matter.

**Figure IX**



Note: For figures IX and X, the wording of the question was: How essential do you think [the following] is as a characteristic of democracy? Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”: Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.

**Figure X**

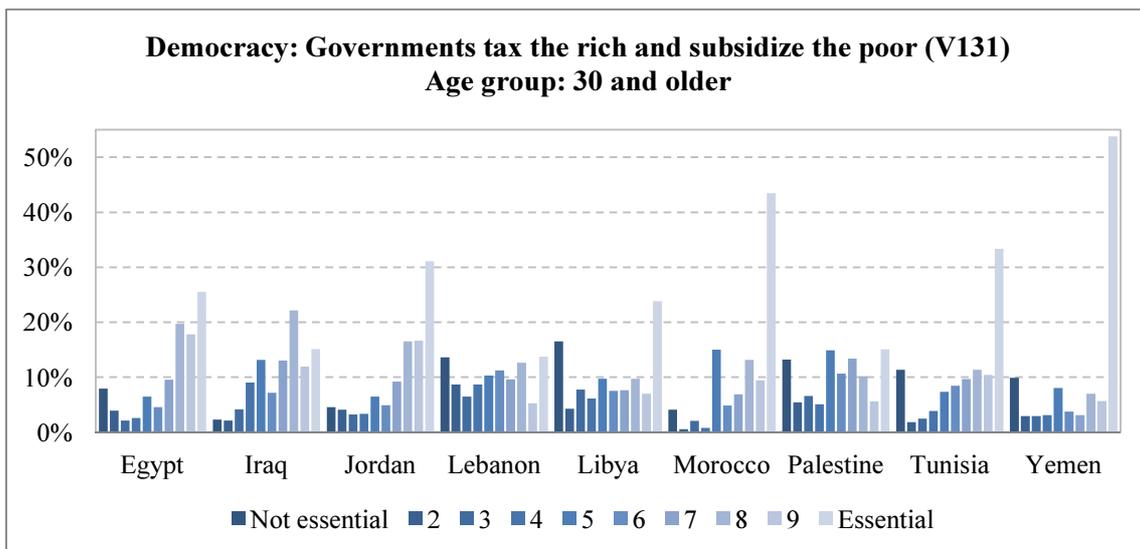
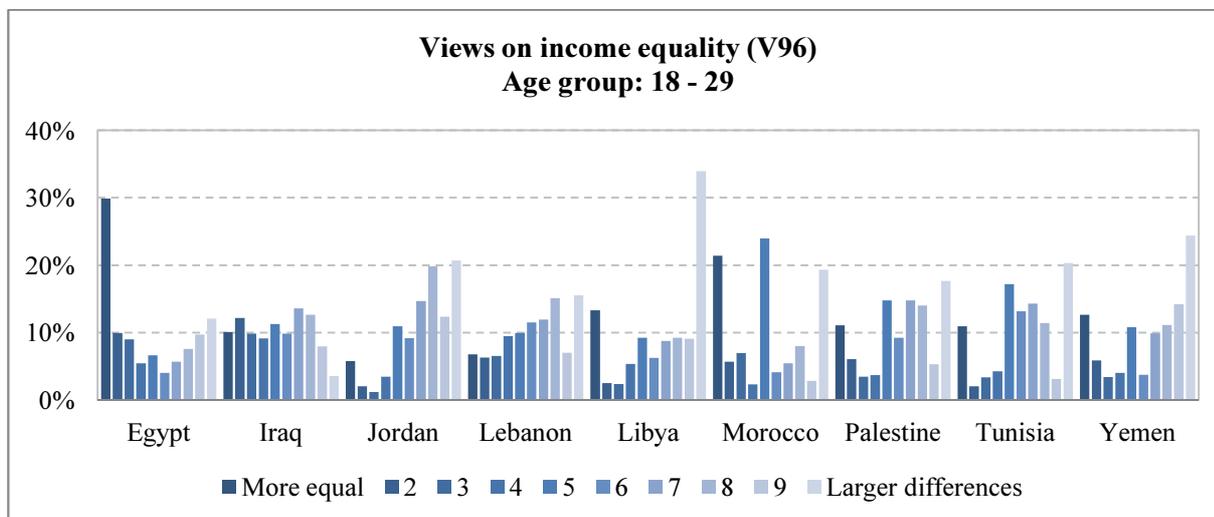


TABLE 6

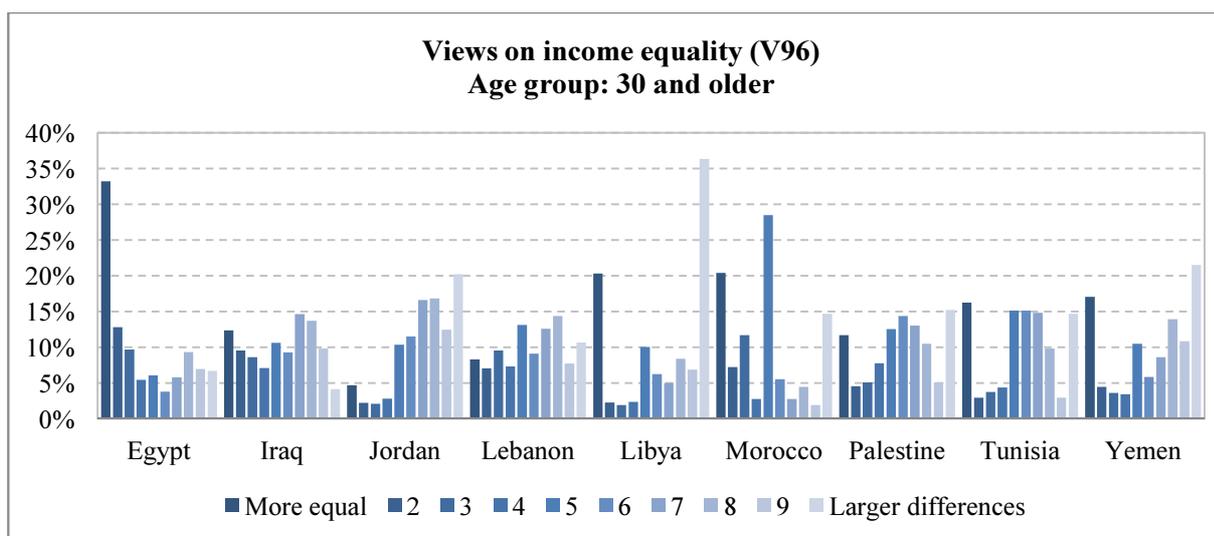
Democracy: Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor (V131)			
Country	Total	18-29	30+
Egypt	2.86	2.98	2.79
Iraq	2.37	2.43	2.34
Jordan	2.66	2.65	2.67
Lebanon	2.96	2.91	2.98
Libya	3.25	3.17	3.28
Morocco	2.49	2.47	2.50
State of Palestine	3.02	3.18	2.92
Tunisia	3.01	2.97	3.03
Yemen	3.14	3.08	3.18
World Average	2.81	2.77	2.81

Responses to survey question No. 96 on views and preferences on income equality<sup>6</sup> suggest that young people are slightly less inclined to support income equality than older generations.

**Figure XI**



**Figure XII**



The question is highly polarizing, with the global average for youth at 2.72. There was an even higher level in Egypt, Morocco, Yemen and Libya, with Egypt having the highest (3.39) among youth of all surveyed countries. The figure for youth in the remaining ACTs surveyed fell close to the world average and differed only slightly from the level of polarization among people aged 30 and above in their respective countries. In Lebanon, for example, the question polarized young people only slightly more than those aged 30 and above. The level of polarization for both age groups is in line with the world average. So, contrary to the hypothesis, polarization of opinions on this matter is not predominantly youth driven. Although young people are at a greater economic disadvantage, the survey results suggest that they are less likely than older generations to support the promotion of greater income equality.

<sup>6</sup> How would you place your views on this scale? 1 = incomes should be made more equal to 10 = we need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort.

TABLE 7

Views on income equality (V96)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	3.24	3.39	3.16
Iraq	2.73	2.66	2.77
Jordan	2.44	2.47	2.42
Lebanon	2.76	2.75	2.75
Libya	3.42	3.19	3.51
Morocco	3.11	3.23	2.98
State of Palestine	2.85	2.89	2.83
Tunisia	2.85	2.78	2.88
Yemen	3.23	3.17	3.25
World Average	2.76	2.72	2.76

## B. DEMOCRACY

Post-uprising transition has triggered debate on institutional choices that define the contours of political power exercised by elected authorities, including mechanisms of political accountability outside the election process, the role of religion, gender equality and civil rights. This section explores the extent to which divisions on such issues are demographically driven.

### 1. Political Accountability

Contrary to popular assumptions since the Arab uprisings, the views of young people in the region on principles of democratic governance do not differ greatly from those held by the rest of the population. Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections was characterized as a very good feature of political systems by 21.49 per cent of young survey participants and 26.62 per cent of those aged 30 and above. Surprisingly, political accountability is among the least polarizing issues raised among different age groups in the ACTs. The degree of divergence among youth on this issue is comparable to that of the older population and in line with the world average.

TABLE 8

Views on political systems: Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections (V127)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	0.14	0.17	0.13
Iraq	0.35	0.32	0.36
Jordan	0.42	0.42	0.42
Lebanon	0.40	0.41	0.40
Libya	0.39	0.35	0.41
Morocco	0.28	0.28	0.28
State of Palestine	0.41	0.42	0.41
Tunisia	0.51	0.52	0.50
Yemen	0.34	0.32	0.35
World Average	0.33	0.33	0.33

In most of the ACTs surveyed, the level of divergence between the different age groups was the same (Jordan and Morocco) or nearly the same (Lebanon, the State of Palestine and Tunisia). Only in Egypt was the divergence among youth noticeably higher than that for the rest of the population, while in Libya and Iraq the opposite was true. Egypt showed the lowest level of polarization over this question among youth in the ACTs and came close to the global minimum (0.16 in Azerbaijan). Youth in Tunisia, however, displayed the highest level of polarization on this issue worldwide. Asked whether people's obedience to their rulers was an essential characteristic of democracy, 38.44 per cent of young people and 34.26 per cent of respondents aged 30 and above did not agree. The issue was moderately polarizing (see table 9).

TABLE 9

Views on democracy: People obey their rulers (V138)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	2.44	2.44	2.43
Iraq	2.50	2.52	2.49
Jordan	2.23	2.34	2.18
Lebanon	2.84	2.93	2.78
Libya	3.31	3.19	3.36
Morocco	2.73	2.78	2.68
State of Palestine	2.70	2.74	2.68
Tunisia	2.67	2.74	2.60
Yemen	2.67	2.62	2.69
World Average	2.69	2.63	2.69

In most ACTs, youth were more polarized than the rest of the population on whether it is a duty to obey the authorities. In Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia, Iraq and Jordan, polarization can be said to be youth-driven. In Egypt, the degree of polarization was the same in the two groups. Youth in Libya and Yemen were less polarized than their elders. Jordanian, Egyptian and Iraqi youth showed lower divergence of opinions than their peers around the world, Yemeni youth were close to the world average, while youth in Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, the State of Palestine and Tunisia all showed greater divergence of opinion than the global average.

Popular opinion on whether the army should take over when Government is incompetent was evenly split. Regardless of age, around half of respondents tended to agree with military intervention in politics when Governments fail to perform. Standard deviation scores of responses reveal that the issue of army intervention in politics is highly polarizing around the world, with a global average of 2.82 for youth and 2.86 for those aged 30 and above.

TABLE 10

Views on democracy: The army takes over when Government is incompetent (V135)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	NA	NA	NA
Iraq	2.64	2.57	2.67
Jordan	2.84	2.84	2.85
Lebanon	2.77	2.68	2.81
Libya	3.30	3.21	3.34
Morocco	3.40	3.45	3.36
State of Palestine	2.76	2.85	2.70
Tunisia	3.44	3.39	3.47
Yemen	3.48	3.44	3.51
World Average	2.86	2.82	2.86

Morocco, Yemen, Tunisia and Libya showed a high level of polarization on this issue and youth in Morocco revealed themselves to be more divided on the issue than in any other of the countries surveyed. However, the divergence in opinions among youth was in most ACTs *less* marked than among people aged 30 and above. Only in Morocco and the State of Palestine were young people more divided than the remainder of the population. Young people in Iraq and Lebanon were less polarized than other age groups in those countries and than their peers around the world.

## 2. Religion and Politics

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, public opinion in the ACTs became increasingly split on the role of religion in political life. Debate centred on the limits of authority to be exercised by directly elected officials, the domain of religious authorities and the role of sharia in the legal system of any given country.

Participants were asked to rank their views on whether interpretation of the law by religious authorities constituted an essential feature of democracy. Results showed public opinion nearly evenly split on the role of religious institutions in public and political life, with youth more secular than other generations. Thus, 52.11 per cent of youth in the ACTs surveyed, as opposed to 47.51 per cent of those aged 30 and above, considered the role of religious authorities in a country's law-making to be nonessential for democracy. The survey data showed that opinion in the region on the role of religious institutions in democracy was deeply divided. Only youth in Iraq were less divided than the world average. Standard deviation scores of responses from Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, the State of Palestine and Yemen were among the highest in the world. Youth in Morocco, the State of Palestine, Iraq, Jordan and, to lesser extent, Lebanon, were more polarized than the rest of the population.

TABLE 11

Views on democracy: Religious authorities ultimately interpret the laws (V132)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	2.96	2.90	2.98
Iraq	2.48	2.50	2.44
Jordan	2.82	2.86	2.80
Lebanon	2.64	2.65	2.64
Libya	3.31	3.29	3.32
Morocco	3.15	3.24	3.07
State of Palestine	2.84	3.03	2.71
Tunisia	3.12	3.00	3.19
Yemen	3.33	3.28	3.35
World Average	2.65	2.62	2.65

## 3. Civil Rights

It is widely believed that civil rights and personal freedoms were one of the main triggers for the mass mobilization of young people during the Arab Spring uprisings. Survey results, however, indicated that youth valued those rights and freedoms no more than other age groups. Across the ACTs surveyed, 76.7 per cent of young people and 77.6 per cent of those aged 30 and above held that civil rights constituted an essential element of democracy.

The question of civil rights is moderately polarizing (table 12). Young people proved to be considerably more divided on the issue than their elders in the State of Palestine and Tunisia, while in Egypt and Jordan the difference was marginal. In Lebanon, Libya and Morocco, young people were less polarized than the remainder of the population. Polarization of views on civil rights in Iraq and Yemen did not vary

across age groups. Egyptian and Iraqi youth revealed themselves to be significantly less divided on the matter than their peers elsewhere in the world. This was also true, to a lesser extent, of Moroccan and Jordanian youth.

TABLE 12

Views on democracy: Civil rights protect people from State oppression (V136)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	1.91	1.94	1.90
Iraq	1.99	1.99	1.99
Jordan	2.34	2.36	2.33
Lebanon	2.71	2.56	2.79
Libya	2.87	2.73	2.94
Morocco	2.27	2.19	2.34
State of Palestine	2.53	2.62	2.47
Tunisia	2.39	2.49	2.30
Yemen	2.51	2.51	2.51
World Average	2.45	2.43	2.45

#### 4. Women's Rights

The drafting of new constitutions following the Arab uprisings and debate on the rights of women to participate in protests, run for public office, or receive equal representation, brought to the fore the key issue of gender equality. Results showed that more than two thirds of respondents saw gender equality as essential to democracy. The ratio, however, varied slightly across age groups, with those in favour of equal rights for women representing 67 per cent of youth and 68.32 per cent of people aged 30 and above. Opinions were highly polarized in the ACTs.

TABLE 13

Views on democracy: Women have the same rights as men (V139)			
Country	Total	18 - 29	30+
Egypt	2.43	2.42	2.43
Iraq	2.59	2.56	2.60
Jordan	2.68	2.78	2.63
Lebanon	2.78	2.78	2.78
Libya	3.27	3.21	3.29
Morocco	2.75	2.76	2.73
State of Palestine	2.96	3.08	2.88
Tunisia	2.95	3.00	2.92
Yemen	3.24	3.30	3.20
World Average	2.44	2.46	2.43

The issue is most divisive in Libya and Yemen. Yemeni youth revealed themselves to be more divided than any of their peers in the 60 countries surveyed. The same could be said for people aged 30 and above in Libya. Responses from the State of Palestine and Tunisia showed high divergence of opinions. Among the ACTs surveyed, the issue was least divisive in Egypt. In Jordan, Morocco, the State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen it could be concluded that polarization on the issue was youth driven. There was less divergence of opinion in Egypt and Iraq, and such divergences were the same across all age groups in Lebanon.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Aside from mapping the ideological sources of political polarization in ACTs, the foregoing analysis of public opinion trends in the nine Arab countries surveyed demonstrates, in spite of the growing mass of literature on the “population bomb” and the politically destabilizing effects of youth bulges, that youth have a mixed record in driving polarization patterns and cannot be understood as a collective actor in a cohesive sense. Several specific points can be made.

Contrary to mainstream assumptions on radical Islam, the outcome of the study suggests that, although young people are more likely to support the use of force, their degree of ideological radicalization is comparable to that of older generations. Overall, young people tend to profess secular attitudes on the role of religious institutions in a democratic context. Standard deviation analysis of responses shows that, as a group, young people disagree more strongly among themselves than older generations on issues of ideology, the use of violence for political action, and the role of religious institutions in a country’s law-making processes.

The findings make evident that youth are not necessarily at the forefront of struggles for democratic change in the Arab region. Political accountability was among the least polarizing questions across age groups and young people and older generations showed that they value civil rights equally. There is little evidence that democratic openness is a divisive issue in the region.

The study shows that the majority of people in the region view income redistribution policies as an essential component of democracy. The degree of support for such redistribution, nonetheless, varies and polarization of preferences is high among the entire population. These findings are at odds with claims that young people, as an “economic underclass”, are more likely to support distribution of income.

Opinions are widely divergent in the region on the question of equal rights for men and women and the study indicates that gender equality is a more controversial issue among young people in eight of the nine ACTs surveyed than among their peers elsewhere in the world.

Our findings are corroborated by analysis of data obtained through the Pew Global Attitudes Project (2013) for selected ACTs.

Unlike much of the literature on the subject of youth in Arab countries in the wake of the uprisings in the region, our study suggests that polarization patterns in the ACTs are not necessarily youth driven and that young people in those countries should not necessarily be seen as a collective actor. There is therefore a need to rethink core assumptions about youth in the region, which have not just informed social science research, but also influenced donor programmes and government policies in recent years.

The analysis presented above provides insight into the attitudes, values and preferences of Arab youth in the wake of the Arab Spring. Future research can build on these findings to identify patterns of continuity and signs of discontinuity. The study should help observers and policymakers to identify issues that trigger generational polarization and tailor initiatives by Governments and other institutions with a stake in long-term human development. International, regional and national bodies need to invest more in the gathering of empirical data on Arab youth.

The study’s macro-level focus on public opinion patterns in the Arab region, and the lack of rigorous data on emerging preference patterns among young people make it unsuitable for developing in-depth national policy recommendations. It does, however, suggest entry points for future debate on youth policy. First, the fact that the findings defy prior assumptions about youth in the Arab region highlights the urgent need to develop institutional capacity based on bottom-up participatory mechanisms to engage young people and to invest in rigorous needs assessments before launching youth initiatives. Secondly, attempts to lay the foundations for democratic governance through public campaigns stressing the values of citizenship and civil

rights are likely to yield better results if designed to cater to young people in particular as well as the public in general. This would cement a link between the keenness of young people for political accountability and the building of democratic institutions. Lastly, the findings of the study suggest that efforts to further women's rights and advance gender equality in the Arab region need to target youth, who are more divided on this issue than other age groups.

Annex

**ANALYSIS OF THE PEW GLOBAL ATTITUDES PROJECT (2013) DATA  
FOR SELECTED ARAB COUNTRIES IN TRANSITION**

The Pew Global Attitudes survey questions touch on many of the topics (such as democracy, the role of religion in politics, women’s rights, justifying violence to defend Islam) covered in the World Value Survey (WVS), although of the Arab countries in transition, only Egypt and Tunisia are included.

Direct comparison of the two surveys is impossible, but one can compare analysis of how polarized different age groups are on a given question. Our purpose is to determine whether the surveys show common trends in behaviour or opinions among young and older people in ACTs and to what degree opinions diverge between these two groups.

Presented below are select Pew Global Attitudes survey questions related to questions in the WVS (V127, V132, V135, and V139).

Variables		Egypt			Tunisia		
		Total	Young 15-29	Rest 30+	Total	Young 15-29	Rest 30+
V34 C (Related to V135. See page 27)	Please tell me what kind of influence the military is having on the way things are going in your country. Is the influence of military very good, somewhat good, somewhat bad or very bad in your country?	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.10	0.11	0.09
V37 (Related to V132. See page 28)	Which of the following three statements comes closer to your view – laws in our country should strictly follow the teachings of the Quran, laws in our country should follow the values and principles of Islam but not strictly follow the teachings of the Quran OR laws in our country should not be influenced by the teachings of the Quran?	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.27	0.25
V57 (Related to V132. See page 28)	In your opinion, how much influence should religious leaders have in political matters? A large influence, some influence, not too much influence or no influence at all?	0.32	0.35	0.30	0.52	0.51	0.50

Variables		Egypt			Tunisia		
		Total	Young 15-29	Rest 30+	Total	Young 15-29	Rest 30+
V88 (Related to V127. See page 25)	Some feel that we should rely on a democratic form of government to solve our country's problems. Others feel that we should rely on a leader with a strong hand to solve our country's problems. Which comes closer to your opinion?	0.75	0.72	0.76	0.87	0.88	0.86
V122 H (Related to V139. See page 27)	Thinking about your country's future, how important is it that women have the same rights as men? Is it very important, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all?	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.25	0.37	0.22
V125 (Related to V127. See page 25)	Which is more important to you - that your country has a democratic government, even if there is some risk of political instability OR that your country has a stable government, even if there is a risk it will not be fully democratic?	0.91	0.89	0.92	0.78	0.79	0.78

Comparing polarization indicators, we see that most of the findings from the Pew survey corroborate our conclusion that youth are not necessarily (more) polarized on many political questions and cannot necessarily be considered to be at the forefront of struggles for democratic change in the region.

In Egypt, in only one question (V57, on the influence of religious leaders in politics) do young people show a (albeit marginally) higher degree of polarization than older generations. The results show that Tunisian youth are a little more polarized than the rest of the population on different political matters, although more so with regard to the question of women's rights and equality (V122H). If we compare the results for Tunisia for this variable with a similar variable in the WVS (V139), we see that the findings of the two surveys are comparable.

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Arab countries have the youngest populations by global standards. Given the region's demographics and record of youth activism during the Arab uprisings, the present study revisits the youth bulge arguments dominating post-Arab uprising literature, which have often linked young demographics to violence and instability. The study explores the extent to which polarization patterns are youth driven and whether young people can be conceptualized as a collective actor.

Employing standard deviation analysis to responses from the most recent wave of the World Values Survey (2010-2014), the study explores empirical patterns of preferences and attitudes among young people in nine Arab countries in transition. Examining the degree of divergence in youth opinions reveals that, as far as political orientation goes, young people cannot be conceptualized as a cohesive category, even if they may show similar participation patterns. Unlike prevailing post-Arab uprising literature on this subject, the study suggests that polarization patterns in Arab countries in transition are not necessarily youth-driven and that young people in these countries should not necessarily be conceptualized as a collective actor.