new approaches. Unfortunately, while this may pay electoral dividends domestically, it does not address the basic causes of instability in the Middle East. European leaders find themselves in a bind: either support long-term solutions which will stabilise the region and risk domestic unpopularity, or score easier political points at home while leaving an already unstable Middle East to fester.

Stability, security and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region can be achieved by supporting both an economic growth which guarantees the equitable inclusion of all citizens, and a political process which actually represents citizens and their interests. There is a potentially strong demand across the Arab world for such an equitable and inclusive economic and political order. The opportunity to harness such a demand is one which political leaderships on both sides of the Mediterranean urge at their peril.

Introduction

EU policy towards its Southern Neighbourhood aims to ensure the security of Member States and is underpinned by an assumption of a shared interest in democracy, security, and prosperity through economic liberalisation. It sees the main way of achieving these aims as promoting Western-style liberal democracy as a political system capable of providing peace and stability. Evidence from public opinion survey research shows this ambition is supported by citizens of Arab countries, where public opinion polls for over a decade report strong support for democracy. However, these citizens do not share the EU’s procedural conception of democracy, a conception in which civil and political rights are decoupled from – and prioritised over – social and economic rights. The Arab Transformations survey carried out in 2014 in six Arab states (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq) suggests few people demanded this brand of democracy. Furthermore, most people thought the EU has not done a good job of supporting transitions to democracy, nor did they have much appetite for EU involvement in the domestic politics of their countries.

The EU soon portrayed the 2010-2011 Arab Uprisings as a popular demand for liberal democracy. However, while the Uprisings were indeed intensely political, clearly demanding a change of regime (nizām), they were not demands for a liberal and free-market version of democracy. Protesters were more concerned about social justice, economic inclusion, and fighting corruption, and relatively less concerned with those civil and political rights which regional regimes had for decades told people they already had, covering autocracy with a thin veil of ‘façade democracy’.

The EU revised its policies in response to the Uprisings. Unfortunately, while this may pay electoral dividends domestically, it does not address the basic causes of instability in the Middle East. European leaders find themselves in a bind: either support long-term solutions which will stabilise the region and risk domestic unpopularity, or score easier political points at home while leaving an already unstable Middle East to fester.

What do ‘the People’ Want? The Demand for Democracy in Six Middle Eastern States

SUMMARY
• EU policy towards the Southern Neighbourhood aims to achieve security through development and democracy.
• However, it assumes shared understandings of democracy, security and prosperity, and Western-style market democracy as the main way of achieving these aims.
• Data from public opinion survey research shows this ambition is supported by citizens of Arab countries, where public opinion polls for over a decade report strong support for democracy.
• Data from Arab citizens strongly suggest for supporting transitions to democracy, but they reject EU involvement.

KEYWORDS
Democracy, European Neighbourhood Policy, Arab Uprisings, Political Rights, Economic and Social Rights, Security

1 Policy Brief prepared by Andrea Tall and Pamela Abbott

2 ArabTransforms 1

What do ‘the People’ Want? The Demand for Democracy in Six Middle Eastern States

Policy Brief 1

The Arab Transformations

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nations, claiming it recognised the error of previ-
ous support for autocratic regimes, and recog-
nised at least nominally the importance of demo-
sic growth and encouraging a ‘deep demo-
cracy’. However, closer analysis shows that the
eU model of democracy was substantially under-
estimated, and that it did not respond to popular
 demands for social justice and economic rights.
The model of democracy is one that the new
European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) fo-
cuses on formal aspects of democracy, com-
bined with economic liberalization, with later re-
formers shifting away from this model. The con-
temporary conceptions of security and stability of
which it had supposedly recognised the fail-
ures.

Democracy without inclusive economic
growth will not more power conflict in the re-
igion in the future if it did in the past, nor is coop-
eration with autocracies on democracy and human
rights any more likely to support democratisation
than it did in the run-up to the Arab Uprisings.

What the People Want

The Arab Transformations public opinion sur-
voy was carried out in six MENA countries (Egypt,
Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia) in 2014.
It shows MENA citizens are deeply un-
happy with the performance of their govern-
ments and lack trust in them. However, respondents
in one of the two is even lower, varying from a
quarter in Iraq, Libya and Tunisia, to just six per
cent in Egypt. The proportion of those choosing
security as a major barrier to democratisation
is higher, ranging from a high of a quarter in Iraq,
Libya and Tunisia, to around a fifth in Jordan.

The Demand for Democracy

As in previous research, most citizens agreed
that democracy was important to them. However,
fewer, ranging from a low of 30 per cent in Jor-
ad to a low of 19 per cent in Tunisia and Moroc-
ono. This suggests that there may be only qualified
support for democracy. As a result, the demand for
democracy is better than other systems of govern-
ment.

However, they do not necessarily want the
type of liberal democracy promoted by the EU.
In general, the demand for more economic and
social equality is much broader than the one
reason to vote for the ‘Arab Spring’ parties.

What Kind of Democracy do Peo-
ple Want?

What do citizens in the six countries surveyed
think when they say that democracy is the best
system despite its faults? Asked to nomi-
ate the two most important characteristics of
democracy, it is clear that civil and political
rights are not as universally seen as the most
important in the same way as EU policy or indeed
current scholarly consensuses do. Although the most
frequently mentioned is the right to strike, the
vote for human rights and gender equality in
as the ‘best system despite its faults’. Indeed, in
three countries more respondents nominated at
least one welfare variable as being more impor-
tant than the two most important characteristics
of democracy than just focusing on political rights.

Even among those who do prioritise political
rights, there is a much broader understanding of
democracy than just focusing on political rights.
For them, social justice and economic issues
are of equal importance. Some also want democracy
through inclusive development, basic services, and
understanding of democracy. Here, support varies:
51 per cent in Morocco and Iraq to 59 per cent in
Egypt. This suggests that democracy is incom-
patible with Islam, in the way in which they are generally understood in

West of Liberal democracy.

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Figure 2: Democracy is the Best System Despite Its
Faults (%)

Egypt Iraq Jordan Libya Morocco Tunisia
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Figure 3: Democracy is Incompatible with Islam (%)

Egypt Iraq Jordan Libya Morocco Tunisia
Source: Arab Transformations Survey 2014

Conclusions and Recommenda-
tions

Survey data show that while the Arab Upris-
ings may not have been motivated by a pursuit of
liberal democracy, there is certainly wide-
spread support for democracy and a strong
demand for social justice and economic indu-
sion as part of democracy.

The EU rightly rose to the challenge of the
Arab Uprisings Neighbourhood Policy, and in the
early aftermath of the Uprisings it be-
gan to move towards re-assessing both the goals
and the instruments of its policy. How-
ever, partly due to conflict in Iraq and Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis, which has led to the
European public opinion by the problem of ‘Islamist’ ter-
rorism – the EU has backtracked from these