Corruption in MENA Countries

Corruption is seen as rife in Middle East and North African (MENA) countries and as a central cause of volatility, discontent and instability, migration, terrorism and underdeveloped economies. In a public opinion survey carried out by the Arab Transformations Consortium in 2014 in six MENA countries, corruption was frequently mentioned by survey respondents as a major reason for the 2010-11 Arab Uprisings (aka ‘Arab Spring’). Corruption was nominated by between 41 and 64 per cent of respondents across the countries as one of the main drivers of the 2011 Uprisings. It is by far the single most frequent reason in four of six countries, and comes second after ‘economic problems’ in Egypt and Jordan (Figure 1).

Around 60 per cent in every country thought that there was a great deal of corruption in their country, with very few saying there was no corruption in government (Figure 2).

A crack-down on corruption is one thing that rulers mostly promised at the time of the Arab Uprisings – it is an easy rhetorical gesture – so we might ask whether respondents felt such a crack-down had taken place, three years after the Uprisings. The simple answer is that they did not: over half of the respondents thought that little or nothing was being done (Figure 3). Even in Egypt, the country most impressed with government’s efforts, more than a third thought little or nothing was being done.

SUMMARY

Corruption is the antithesis of the Rule of Law and erodes the discourse of fairness and mutual consideration which is necessary for peace, prosperity and political development. It increases the risk of state capture and resistance to change by the political elite. It results in poor public management and resource allocation and inequitable distribution of resources. It has consequences for individual countries but also for harmonious diplomatic and economic relations. The European Union’s Neighbourhood Policy is intended to help its near neighbours develop into a sustainable economic, social and political stability. At the same time the EU deploys normative leadership to promote a social and political security based on a respect for human rights, a dependence on the Rule of Law and a style of governance which can listen to its people and can face replacement, if need be, without the need for armed confrontation. For this, the extent of corruption in MENA is a serious problem.

KEYWORDS

Corruption, Middle East, Arab Spring
MENA citizens are clearly aware of the extent of corruption in their countries and of the negative impact it has on their daily lives. Anti-corruption measures appear to be widely supported, with 86% of respondents saying they would be willing to support an anti-corruption campaign if it provided a clear indication of what the campaign would achieve. The same percentage said they would be willing to sign a statement against corruption.

Corruption and the rule of Law

Corruption is considered a serious problem in MENA countries, with 69% of the population believing that corruption is a major problem in their country. The survey found that levels of corruption are highest in the Middle East, with 79% of respondents in the Middle East saying that corruption is a major problem, compared to 68% in North Africa.

The survey also found that the public is skeptical of government actions to combat corruption. Only 28% of respondents said they had faith in the government to address corruption, while 72% said they did not believe government efforts would be effective.

There is a clear demand for action against corruption. The survey found that 85% of respondents said they would be willing to pay more in taxes if the money would be used to fight corruption.

The survey also found that more than half of respondents said they would be willing to engage in direct action against corruption, such as protesting or boycotting businesses.

Conclusion

The survey highlights the deep-seated public concern about corruption in MENA countries and the strong demand for action against it. The EU and its member states, as well as the United Nations, have an important role to play in supporting anti-corruption efforts. This includes providing financial and technical support, and building capacity within MENA countries. It is also important to support civil society organizations and the media in their efforts to expose corruption and promote transparency.