

Nuances and Differences in the Meaning of Democracy and Citizenship

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While democracy is principally associated with tolerance and respect for diversity, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is not perceived as a strong driver towards these values, in particular due to its institutional nature. Larbi Sadiki explores the differences in the understanding of democracy by citizens from the diverse areas of the Mediterranean. In this context, the author highlights positive trends in the position of women as actors of social change, and the acceptance of attitudes integral to citizenship learning.

Proposing an analysis of the quantification and measurement of issues concerning the appeal and perception of democracy and citizenship, equally elastic concepts that defy fixity of meaning and interpretation, is a challenging endeavour in the context spawned by the 'Arab Spring' which offers an arch of possibilities and attendant stirrings and openings (Sadiki, 2014). This is the tenor of this article, which is guided by a minimalist analytical agenda: assessing the reception and perception of democracy and citizenship in 'Arab Spring' states, with special reference to Southern Mediterranean states, very often lumped under the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) rubric.

Whilst aware of definitions of democracy that hesitate to pin it down to universally applicable norms and institutions or an idealistic template, the understanding of democracy here is simplified to stress the provenance of authority (who), the procedural mechanisms of forming government (how), and the norms and values to be pursued by a democratic government (why) (Huntington, 1991). Similarly, citizenship is defined here as the quality of belonging within an 'imagined' political community and the status of equality supposed to accrue from such membership and refer to political, civil and social aspects as in T. H. Marshall's holistic interpretation (Marshall, 1950).

The attitude of tolerance

Contextualisation is vital for the sake of a credible exercise that unlocks 'readings' – which do not write off 'mis-readings' at a time of fluidity. It is therefore the binary quality in the figures at hand, in relation to the question of democracy and citizenship, which impresses most. The open-ended nature of the historical moment, the brevity of the time span along with the twists in the very élan, universally termed as the 'Arab Spring', now nearly three years in gestation, dictate against over-confidence in taking too much stock of the set of the Surveys conducted for the 2013 Anna Lindh Foundation Report, namely, in relation to democracy and citizenship.

Concomitantly, the figures enlighten and obfuscate, reveal and hide, and clarify and confuse. Indeed, a great deal has changed; and yet more needs to be transformed so that democracy and citizenship land on *terra firma*, especially in countries of the Southern rim of the Mediterranean where the Arab Spring's uprisings 'exploded', unravelling hunger for 'freedom' (*hurriyyah*) and 'dignity' (*karamah*). The two notions were, across a vast geography stretching from Tunisia, the Arab Spring's birthplace, to Syria, still mired in unabatedly tragic blood-letting over contested imaginaries of democracy and citizenship, reflective of wide-based idealisation of norms that can readily be associated with democracy and citizenship.

However, will these countries withstand the test of time and space when the next set of surveys is recorded in 2015? Or have they been tattered by the reverses of the Arab Spring itself? What shape is going to take the democratisation process in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia? What will be the impact of the Arab Spring on Euro-Arab relations? The Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll registers similar perceptions among most of Europeans and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries (SEM) interviewees with an average of 40% believing it will have a positive impact, with a pick of optimism among Danes with 70.5% and 30% assessing it will have influence negatively future relations, with Belgians and Turkish among the most sceptical (39%), (Chart 6.1).

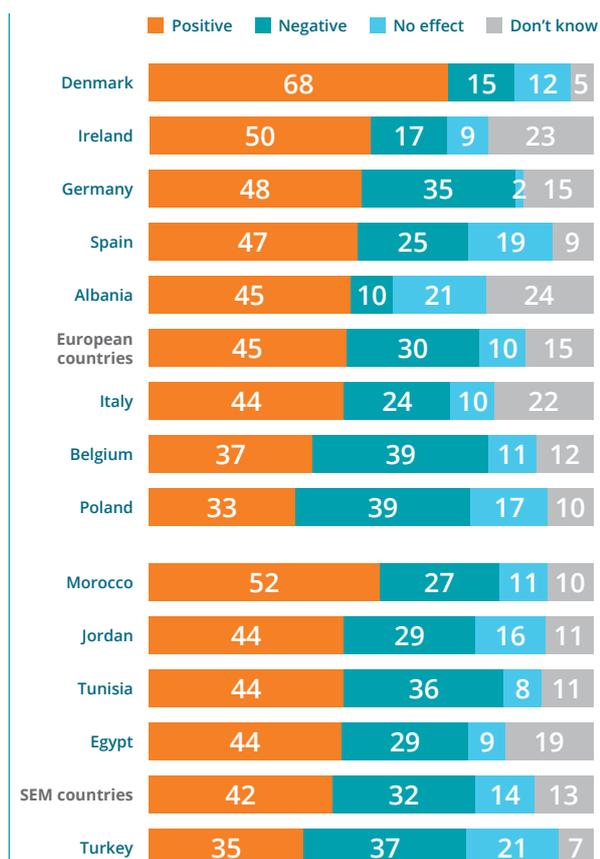
The Survey confirms one thing: the presence of various publics whose predilections for democracy and citizenship suggest nuance. The figures do not indicate solid majorities for any of the values measured. Indeed, there are majorities but by no means can they be taken as firmly behind anything in particular – with qualified exceptions as shall be pointed out below. The results are fraught with ambiguity and even weighed down by tensions in a fashion that point to extremely hesitant publics, torn between ascriptive attachments and cosmopolitan aspirations.

In this vein, what is one to read from respondents who highly value freedom and freedom of speech, given 48.5% and 36.6% in SEM countries, as readily available associations made with democracy (pertaining to what might be termed a cosmopolitan ethos that refuses determinacy as the basis for politics) yet at the same time believe in the existence of absolute guidelines with scores as high as 79.6% in Morocco, a country with extensive European links, and 50% in Turkey, with territory in Europe? The perception of 'good' and 'bad' seems to be still underpinned by ascriptive moorings. In this regard, the contrast between the number of Europeans believing in the existence of absolute moral guidelines (25.5% for 2012) and SEM countries (52.5% for the same year) is put into sharp focus and it is significant the difference of six percentage points between the highest scoring European country Poland (38.3%) and Egypt (44.4%) with the lowest average among SEM. The opinion poll results in Egypt show a substantial shift with regard to this value, with a drop of 27 points since 2009 that it is worth flagging up especially in an area where change is often progressive and spans a long period of time.

Whilst on the score of the associations made with democracy, freedom and freedom of speech feature high in the responses by SEM countries' respondents, other constitutive democratic traits do seem to be as impactful yet. Free elections, an important democratic institution, scores a mere 15.3%, the rule of law 8.8%, participation in political decisions 3.3% (incidentally the latter two are almost identical to European responses), recognition of diversity 6.5%, rule of the majority 2.5%, having a parliament where people are represented 0.7%, political accountability and separation of powers, equally integral to democratic institution-building, feature equally low in the respondents' democratic priorities, close to 0%!

One dissonance with the above comes to the fore in respect to the strong agreement across both rims of the Mediterranean on cultural and religious diversity. This to an extent serves as a corrective to the aforementioned scores on values associated with democracy. Both European and SEM participants strongly agree on the need to ensure equal rights and opportunity within society to people from different cultural, political or religious backgrounds – respectively 59% and 48%. Similarly, they valorise cultural and religious diversity as conduits of prosperity – with the Poll registering strong agreement among 50% in SEM countries and 47% for their northern Mediterranean neighbours. There is however, hesitation as to whether cultural and religious diversity constitutes a threat to social stability. Taking into consideration the above mentioned variables, the data register a positive understanding of democracy – even if that is reduced to two predominant features: freedom and freedom of speech.

Chart 6.1
Ultimate effects of the Arab Spring on Euro-Arab relations by country



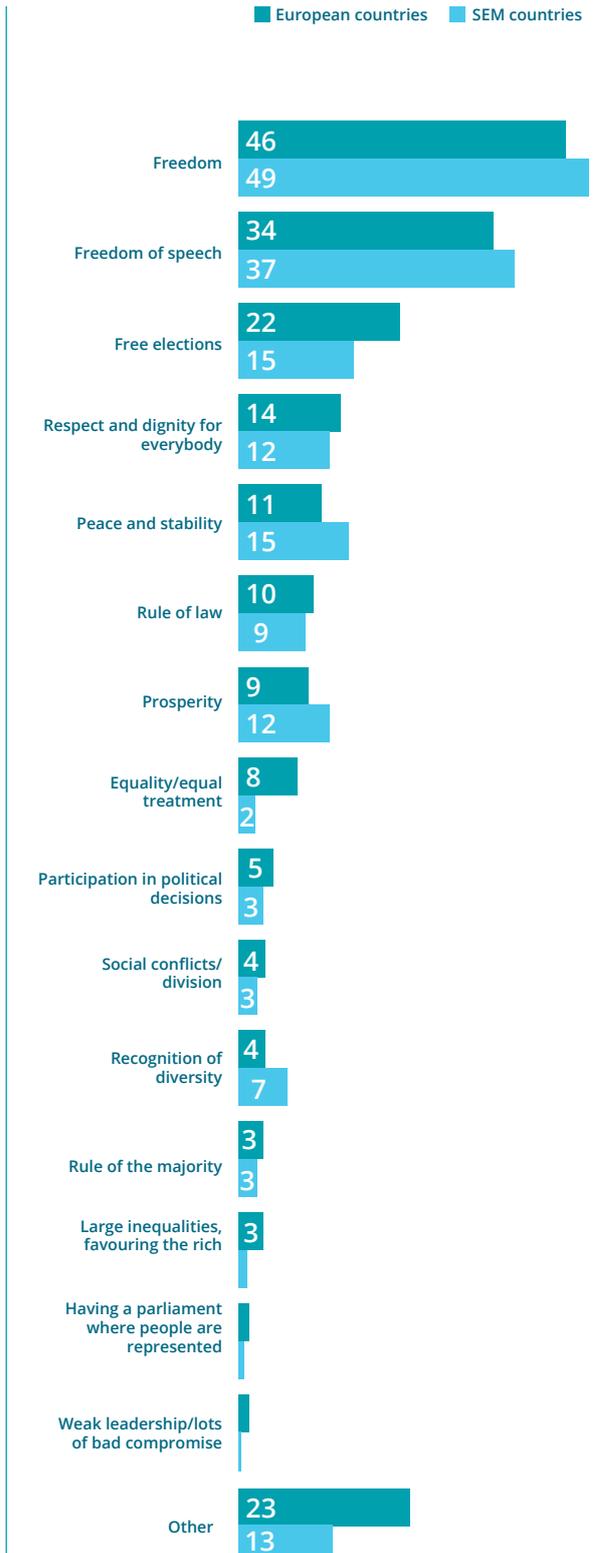
Survey Question: Most of the Arab countries are experiencing significant changes started with social movements which have been called an 'Arab Spring'. What do you think, will be the ultimate effects of these changes on the relations between Europe and the Arab countries? **Base:** % of all respondents, by country, where 'Positive' effect: sum of 'Very positive' and 'Positive' answers, 'Negative' effect: sum of 'Very negative' and 'Negative' answers (© Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2012).

Women's role as an indicator of democracy

Gender equality as an important norm instrumental to engendering equal citizenship and democratic identities gives additional clues as to the standing of democracy in the minds of European and SEM participants. Generally, the benefit of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in relation to gender equality for both sets of respondents seems to be more positive than negative; the lowest scores recorded in Poland 22% and Turkey 12.7%. An interpretation of Turkish results could be found in the uneven political process underpinning Turkish membership in the UfM.

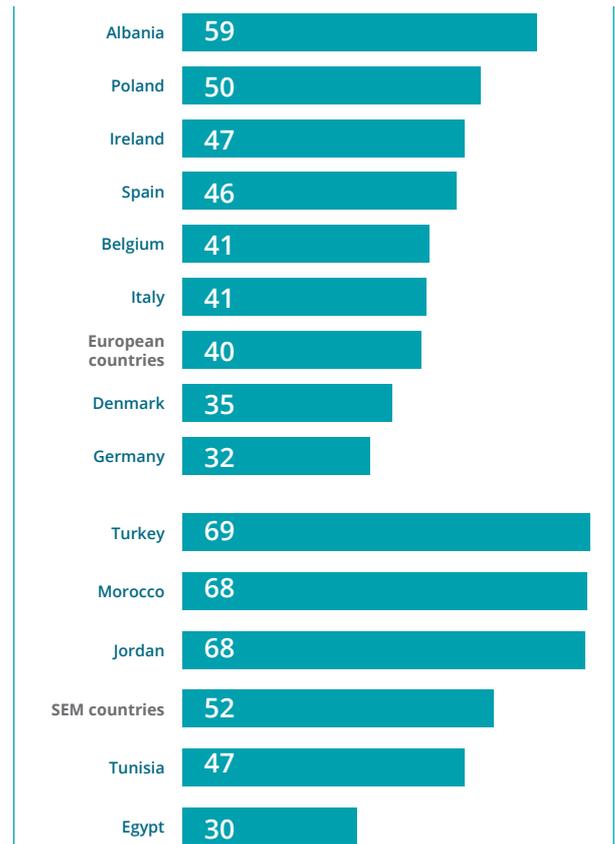
The scores in Albania (55%) and Morocco (53%) are close. So are those scored by the Irish participants (48%) and their SEM counterparts in Egypt (46%). Furthermore, considerations around the position of women in society constitute an important indicator on the pace of democracy within any given context

Chart 6.2
Words that come to mind when thinking about democracy



Survey Question: When someone is referring using the word DEMOCRACY, what are the words that come to your mind (what do you think they are referring to)? **Base:** % of all respondents, % of mentions by regions (© Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2012).

Chart 6.3
Women's role in society and expectations for the future



Survey Question: Do you think that women in your society today play a greater role, the same, or lesser role than they did 5 years ago? And what role do you think they will be playing in 5 years from now? **Base:** % of all respondents, % by country (© Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2012).

and the Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll shows a positive trend in the perception of both Europeans and SEM who record a better role for women today compared to five years before (60%). Scores recording future expectations concerning women's role in five years from the 2012 survey project an outcome of solid majorities, with 73% of Albanians, 89% of Moroccans, 75% of Turks, 63% of Tunisians and 48% of Egyptians affirmatively behind stronger role for women. These trends are in line with trends identified in Northern Mediterranean countries.

The scores on gender, across the board, drop when the data concerning the present and future situation of women in society are merged to obtain a result as close as possible to the foreseeable reality: a noticeable decrease in the exceptions on women's role in society is found in the two leading Arab Spring countries, registering 30% in Egypt and 47% in Tunisia and a similar trend can be traced in Denmark scoring 35% and Germany with 32%. Expectations from the Union for the Mediterranean.

On the whole, respondents from SEM countries moderately rate the benefits which will be definitely bought about by the UfM: this is the case when considering the potential benefits with regards to the increase in the respect for cultural diversity (Egypt: 60.6%; Jordan: 60%; Morocco: 57%; Tunisia: 48%), the improvements for the environment (49%), the increased possibilities for young people (44%), the increase of individual freedom and the rule of law (39%). Still, it must be noted that the latter value is higher than in 2009 when an average of 37% was recorded and that the rule of law did not appear as a priority association to people's mind when asked about the meaning of democracy but when coupled with freedom, a highly valued associate of democracy, the ratings went up. The highest benefit that SEM see in the UfM is in relation with innovation and entrepreneurship, ranging between 63% in Egypt, the highest percentage amongst SEM countries, and 19% in Turkey where in 2009 45% of respondents considered this a potential benefit. This might be self-explanatory since Turkey has already passed, with flying colours the learning curve of close association with the EU, and Turkish respondents indicate that their country is now quite capable of self-regeneration without heavy reliance on the Europeans.

Finally, when looking at the association that respondents in SEM countries make between the Mediterranean region and civic participation in democratic transition we realise that this is a reality only for 34% of SEM male and 29.1% of SEM female respondents, in line with Europeans' responses. The figures are impressive for what they say and they do not say. In Egypt and Tunisia, the two countries that up to 2012 when the survey was conducted, changed the face of the Arab region through their revolutions and were poised to join the ranks of fledgling democracies, only 40% of Egyptians and 25% of Tunisians associated the Mediterranean region with civic participation in the democratisation process. Even more worrying could be the percentages of people who said that this association was 'somewhat' possible with respectively 29% and 56%. These results might be read as a questioning to the UfM leadership in the field of democratic transition. Whether this reflects the not too distant past when the EU might have been blamed, rightly or wrongly, for supporting authoritarian regimes or inertia as the US seemed to be taking the lead in democracy promotion is a moot point.

Conclusion

The scores discussed above depict a synoptic picture of a region still coming to grips not only with the Arab Spring – thought of fairly highly as a progenitor of positive change – but also, and more importantly, with the representations and values of democracy mainly associated to gender roles, equality of rights and opportunity, and freedom. What can be gleaned very generally from the above is that democracy in the minds of participants is not interpreted through institutional features (e.g. parliaments, rule of law, separation of power, etc.). Rather, it is expressed in attitudinal norms of tolerance, namely towards de-gendered societies and citizenship and toleration of diversity, culturally, religiously and politically. On this score alone, despite noted ascriptive attachments, SEM participants seem to be marching, slowly but surely, towards acceptance of attitudes integral to learning democracy and citizenship.

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