The Arab Spring uprisings. Photo: Mosa'ab Elshamy (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The Arab Spring Then and Now, through the Prism of Public Opinion

David Pollock

Mass popular discontent inspired the Arab Spring a decade ago, but its violent failures leave a very different legacy today. Surveys show that many Arabs now prioritize stability and economic sustenance over politics, revolution, or even religion. Most accept coexistence with Israel, and even more despise Iran and its sectarian allies, who have turned the Arab Spring into civil wars. Among Arab states, many leaders are highly attuned to public opinion and invest in attaining credible data for use as a tool in policy formulation. In the US, specific episodes show how adequate attention to this factor helped formulate sound Mideast policies, but inadequate attention contributed to tragic failures, even 9/11. With the signing of the Abraham Accords and a new administration in Washington, an understanding of the ranges and nuances of Arab public opinion in different countries can help contribute to informed foreign policy analysis and policy deliberations, both in Israel and the United States.

Keywords: public opinion, Arab world, Arab Spring, Israel, United States

The eruption of the Arab Spring a decade ago caught most of the world—including the Arabs themselves—almost totally by surprise. But once it happened, everyone began to pay new attention to the underlying but long-neglected issue of Arab public opinion—yet once more, as this was not the first time that an eruption on the "Arab street" caught the world off guard.

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The Arab Spring within the Cycle of Activism and Quiescence

The events of the Arab Spring should be viewed as part of a recognizable pattern in the Arab world marked by a groundswell of popular sentiment, recurring at intervals of precisely one decade: after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and his subsequent mass mobilization of the "Arab street" in 1990-91; in the wake of 9/11, and the wave of surprisingly significant Arab (and broader Muslim) popular sympathy for jihadi terrorism, as well as the Palestinian second intifada, in 2001-03; then again when mass uprisings helped force out Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt, Saleh in Yemen, and Qaddafi in Libya (but not Assad in Syria), in 2010-2011; and most recently in 2019-20, as massive new popular protests forced out Bouteflika in Algeria and Bashir in Sudan, and challenged the regimes in Lebanon and Iraq.

What accounts for this three-decades-long, pendulum-like rise and fall of the "Arab street"? Most likely the cycle reflects, at least in part, a natural tendency among many societies to tire of political turmoil after a few years and prefer to concentrate on improving daily civilian life instead, but later, very gradually, to forget how bad the turmoil was, and eventually to erupt again if significant frustrations and resentments return. This may help explain why we now see more mass protests, and some political change, in places like Sudan, Algeria, and Lebanon, rather than in those Arab states that experienced the original Arab Spring most intensely a decade ago.

Empirical survey data from polls in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 commissioned by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and supervised by me—including responses from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan—provide some support for this hypothesis. First, the large majority of poll respondents in a survey from June 2020 say their top priorities are practical personal matters, such as family, income, health, jobs, and education, rather than political or even religious issues. Second, polls from November 2019 and June 2020 suggest the majority (or at least plurality) in many countries polled, even in countries like Egypt where poverty, corruption, and repression are widely perceived as serious problems, agree with the proposition, "When I think about what's going on in places like Syria or Yemen, I feel that our own situation here is actually not so bad." Fewer than half in each country polled think the current protests in Iraq or Lebanon will yield positive change; and at least half in each country say it's a "good thing" that "we are not having such large protest demonstrations here."

These sentiments are largely echoed by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, which also helps account for the startling calm there, even as the peace process has been totally frozen since 2014. (A detailed documentation of this and other key related issues can be found in *A Nation Divided: Palestinian Views on War and Peace with Israel*, of June 2020.) Instead of guessing why no third intifada is underway or on the horizon, I decided to "crowdsource" the answer and pose that question to the Palestinians themselves. In surveys conducted in the West Bank and Gaza in mid-2019 and again in early 2020, the responses were clear. Only a small minority said this was because they still retained some hope of a peaceful, diplomatic

solution to their plight. Rather, most said their quiescence reflects a combination of other, grimmer motives: they generally prioritized their everyday practical needs over politics; they feared chaos, violence, and repression—both by Israel and by the two Palestinian governments—to no likely benefit; and they do not trust their own leaders to manage a confrontation with Israel.

In other words, a decade after the largest Arab uprisings of recent times, many Arabs now prefer stability over disruption. In this sense, the primary legacy of the Arab Spring may not be its apparent or temporary successes in a few places, but its most miserable, enduring failures: in Syria or Yemen or Libya. The "reverse demonstration effect" of those conflicts now counters the earlier demonstration impact that the initial Tunisian uprising had on so many other Arab states during the first wave of the Arab Spring.

And yet the sustained popular uprisings in Sudan and Algeria in the past two years suggest that this sweeping generalization, like most others, also has some exceptions that prove the rule. Did the polls predict that too? Unfortunately, no, because the Algerian and Sudanese governments allowed almost no serious political polling, by either internal or external experts. As I noted in 1993, "Where you can't measure public opinion, it doesn't matter very much—until the revolution!"

After the Arab Spring: How Arab Regimes Deal with Public Opinion

There is a second rough, long-term cyclical pattern to Arab uprisings, categorized by type of regime. In the 1950s and 1960s, a series of hereditary Arab monarchies and theocracies were toppled by violent insurrections: Egypt in 1952, Iraq in 1958, Yemen in 1962, and Libya in 1969 (though the latter was a military coup, not a popular revolution). Since then, however, the monarchies have fared better in this respect than the other types of autocratic Arab regimes, or even the quasi-democratic ones, like Lebanon or post-Saddam Iraq. It is too often overlooked that the Arab Spring, in its different versions over the past decade, touched the six Arab kingdoms of the Gulf, Jordan, and Morocco only very lightly.

Why? At first glance, some say the obvious answer is money; the oil-rich Gulf governments can simply buy off opposition as needed. There is some validity to this observation. In 2011, for example, the Saudi government, concerned about the spreading civil unrest in its neighborhood, abruptly announced a $100 billion gift to its citizens. Included in that package was the government's creation of 60,000 new jobs—every single one of them in the Interior Ministry, charged with surveillance and suppression of dissent.

At a second glance, though, this cannot be the whole story, because the oil-poor kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco have also exhibited a goodly measure of immunity to the mass spread of any "anti-crown" virus. Thus other factors must also play a role, including the King's degree of religious legitimacy; his image of being above the political fray and his appeal for stability; his adeptness at finding scapegoats; his ability to offer promising future prospects by shuffling parties and prime ministers; and his successful appeals to nationalism. Also at work is aid from fellow Arab monarchs abroad, whether financial and/or military, as most vividly displayed by the Saudi intervention to protect the King of Bahrain early in the Arab Spring.

And at third glance, it appears that public opinion plays a significant role here as well. Contrary to common misconception, most contemporary Arab kings do care about what the public thinks and take care to understand and even cater to it, at least to some extent. Put simply, they realize their thrones may be at risk. Thus, the King of Jordan, to cite the most clear-cut case, has long employed a royal pollster (surely an oxymoron historically) to good effect, to design electoral districts, promotional campaigns, and even some policy options.

Moreover, in recent years, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman has assiduously followed this very model of a modern monarch. There exists clear (though little-known) evidence that the Saudi government is increasingly aware of, interested in, and at least to some extent receptive to its own public's views. One sign is the activity of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, a Riyadh-based institute for assessing popular attitudes and promoting intra-Saudi discourse. The institute was founded fifteen years ago, but significantly increased its productivity after MBS was named crown prince in 2016.

A central goal of the Center is to keep a finger on the pulse of public opinion for systematic input on official policies—not just outreach to promote those policies after the fact. This, one of its top managers readily acknowledged in July 2018, is an unfamiliar and challenging concept in Saudi Arabia, but is currently taken quite seriously at the highest levels of government. Around the time of MBS's ascent, the Center established a division dedicated to conducting opinion polls. When I visited the Center in mid-2018, it had already fielded over 100 polls, surveying a total of around 33,000 Saudis. According to experts there, the Center's findings and insights enabled it to provide the government with more than 100 specific policy recommendations over the preceding two years, 65 of which were accepted and implemented. One striking case is popular support for the long-awaited decision in 2018 to allow Saudi women to drive. Other initiatives reflect the gamut of social and economic issues, including the selective but very public crackdown on corruption.

In my polls in Saudi Arabia, Saudis have been willing to voice mixed views even on some especially sensitive issues. For example, asked in late 2017 if Islam "should be interpreted in a more moderate, tolerant, and modern direction," just 30 percent said yes—though that was double the figure from late 2015. But on foreign policy issues, my polls confirm that Saudi official policies are largely in tune with the public. Fear and loathing of Iran and its regional proxies, from the Houthis to Hezbollah, is nearly universal not just among the Saudi elite, but on the Saudi street as well.

Much the same is true, albeit with smaller majorities, for other seemingly provocative moves: the feud with Qatar, the close alliance with the United States, and even the conditional support for a settlement with Israel. In 2018, the Saudi head of the Muslim World League, for example, made the astonishing proposal to march for peace to Jerusalem along with Jewish and Christian clerics. This is possible given tacit support from around two-thirds of the Saudi public, who say that peace with Israel is desirable as long as Palestinian rights are also respected.

On the basis of these polls and discussions inside Saudi Arabia, I was able to publish this prediction in October 2018, just a week after the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi:

> Awful as this episode appears to be, its broader significance is a separate question. And while such incidents understandably damage Saudi Arabia's image among some Western governments, analysts, journalists, and investors, they are of remarkably little interest to most people inside the country. As a result, contrary to conventional wisdom, they do not seriously threaten the kingdom's government—at least not with the specter of mass protest, or of organized dissidence by major segments of the society such as the business, clerical, professional, or military establishments….
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> Altogether, then, the wisdom and ethics of current Saudi policies and practices, ranging from the whereabouts of Jamal Khashoggi to the war in Yemen, from the crackdown on corruption to

> the crackdown on free speech, appear very different inside and outside the kingdom. Some outsiders may well question particular Saudi government choices. They should not, however, confuse their own judgments with dire, unfounded predictions about Saudi instability. Inside the kingdom, issues that loom large abroad are outweighed by the Saudi government's overall attentiveness to the pulse of its people.

Today, two years later, this contrarian prediction stands the test of time—not a very long time, to be sure, but in today's Middle East, perhaps a respectable amount. And if it is indeed respectable, that is because it was based on actual evidence about public opinion.

The Arab Spring's Public Opinion Legacy for Israel

There is an additional, powerful, yet little understood legacy of the Arab Spring, also related to public opinion. To a significant extent, the conviction of Arab nations that Israel poses the most serious threat in the Middle East has changed. Rather, most now recognize the more significant threat that Iran and its proxies or allies represent for the region. And as a result, they are more ready to make peace with Israel. This shift in public opinion is one of the drivers behind recent seemingly surprising departures in government policies and regional dynamics. The occasional poll suggesting that many Arab publics still view Israel as a major threat is misleading. As Professor Michael Robbins, director of the Arab Barometer, explained recently in an October 2020 webinar hosted by Singapore's Middle East Institute: if—but only if—the question of Israel is prompted by the pollster, many respondents agree it remains a threat; otherwise, however, respondents hardly mention Israel spontaneously when asked broadly about threats or challenges to their country or the region. Other polls purporting to show contrary results, such as the Qatari Arab Center's polls, are deeply flawed methodologically and thus biased beyond repair.

Most important, though often misunderstood, is that this is true today not only at the elite governing level, but also at the popular one. Poll after poll proves that at least since 2014, large majorities in many Arab societies strongly disapprove of Tehran's policies and of Khamenei personally; attach very little importance to good relations with Iran; and overwhelmingly dislike Hezbollah, the Assad regime, and the Houthis. This is true even in the Shiite-majority Arab states of Iraq and Bahrain. The striking exception is Lebanon, which is acutely polarized on these issues by sect: the Shiites are still pro-Iran and pro-Hezbollalh, although somewhat less so in the past two years, as Washington Institute polling from November 2019 and November 2020 demonstrate; the Sunnis are almost uniformly opposed to both; and the Christians are caught in the middle, but leaning most recently toward the Sunni pole, according to these same data sets.

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What does all of this have to do with the Arab Spring? Here again, the timing and context lead one to judge that what tipped the scales was the Syrian civil war. Before that, most Arabs were convinced that the main threat to the region was Israel. But now, the region's peoples have woken up to the fact that the Iran-backed Assad regime, whose legitimacy was based partly upon "resisting" Israel, turned its entire military arsenal, with help from Iran and Hezbollah, toward repressing its own citizens.

In the wake of its war with Israel in 2006, Hezbollah's popularity in the region was

indisputable. Its approval ratings in various surveys were tremendously high, and there were demonstrations and public displays of support for Hezbollah on nearly every Arab street. Five years later, Hezbollah became involved in military operations in Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad. On the popular level, Hezbollah revealed its true, sectarian, pro-Iranian face and slaughtered thousands of civilians in Syria, after having once been primarily seen as a party supporting the Palestinians against Israel. All of this coincided with the deployment of other Iranian militias that wreaked havoc in Iraq and Yemen, leading many ordinary Arabs to discover a different "truth" about their real enemies.

Today, the majority of Arab peoples accept in principle the concept of peace with Israel and a two-state solution to resolve the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, most credible polls show that majorities also accept the idea of some Arab governments maintaining different kinds of relations with Israel right now—even without a final agreement on the Palestinian issue. However, according to the results of the Washington Institute's November 2020 poll, the majority of Arab publics are still wary of very cozy personal relations with Israel. This is clearly the case, to take a striking example, with the public in Egypt, which officially has been at peace with Israel for over forty years. Yet anecdotal and media accounts suggest that most Egyptians still dislike Israel, and surveys, including the most recent polling concluded in November 2020, confirm that most do not favor much personal contact with the Jewish state. Nevertheless, poll after poll also confirms that the solid majority of Egyptians continue to support a two-state solution, implying peace with Israel. They also agree, based on November 2018 polling, that "Arab states should offer both the Israelis and the Palestinians incentives to moderate their positions."

Remarkably, there has not been a single large-scale protest demonstration in Arab streets against Israel's recent peace agreements with the UAE and Bahrain. This is completely different from the situation in the region just a few years ago. During the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, or even more recently during the campaigns between Hamas and Israel in Gaza in 2009 and 2014, there were major demonstrations calling for death to Israel. Another such war, or intifada, could conceivably return the region to its old ways.

But the Arab Spring, and particularly its Syrian debacle, has fundamentally changed the calculus of Arab popular threat perceptions. As one Syrian opposition fighter told me in July 2012: "I used to be fanatically anti-Israel, like most of my friends. But we have just learned the hard way that Israel is actually more merciful (*arham*) than my own government." In Sudan, we now witness the remarkable spectacle of an "Arab Spring-like" popular revolution, notwithstanding some deep internal divisions, actually promoting not enmity but rapprochement with Israel—an almost unthinkable prospect for the past several generations.

The US Government and Arab Public Opinion, from Bush I to Biden: Two Success Stories

Given the importance of the nexus between Arab public opinion and the Arab Spring, and how much Arab governments take it into account, one wonders how that connection is understood and acted upon by key outside powers as well. Over the past 30 years, the US government has at times paid very close attention to Arab and broader Muslim world public opinion—but at other times ignored it. What accounts for the dramatic ups and downs of expert or official interest in Arab popular attitudes? That question is easy to answer, in much the same cyclical vein as the earlier question about the Arab Spring itself. Experts and officials, like most people, naturally and usually pay close attention to some critical phenomenon or trend only after, not before, it emerges as a crisis. Then they soon enough forget about it, once the crisis seems to ease.

Some very striking examples of both kinds of response are worth noting. In the former category, when US officials heeded Arab opinion polls, the first and probably most significant episode occurred in advance of the 1991 Gulf War (Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm), after Iraq invaded and occupied Kuwait in August 1990. Millions of Arabs in Amman, Tunis, Casablanca, and elsewhere in the region marched in the streets in support of Saddam Hussein, so in deciding how to react, the George H. W. Bush administration was quite concerned about the potential for political upheaval there.

The result was the launch of the first solid public opinion polls in many Arab countries, at first just tacking on a few political questions to an otherwise innocuous questionnaire for a commercial market research survey about brands of cigarettes, or even shampoo. These surveys revealed that completely contrary to the conventional wisdom at the time, Saddam was hardly a pan-Arab hero. True, he was widely admired in a few Arab societies, like Jordan or Tunisia; but he was widely reviled in others, including—crucially—the Arab Gulf states, Egypt, and Syria; and he was the object of very mixed views in still other Arab states, such as Morocco.

These significant data sets quickly made their way, on a weekly basis starting in September 1990, all the way up to President Bush and his most senior advisors. They helped determine whether and where the US would work to enlist Arab governments' political and military support against Saddam, without undermining their own internal stability. And because of their counterintuitive success in predicting and guiding actual political outcomes, polling became one of the tools privately trusted both by the US and by some Arab governments to gauge the mood, and the policy implications, of the proverbial "Arab street."

Two decades later, after many years of calm before the storm of the Arab Spring, interest in Arab opinion polls dwindled in many quarters. To make matters worse, fewer such polls were available at all, as Arab governments cracked down increasingly on free expression. That indeed helps to explain why the uprisings caught so many off-guard.

Then, when mass protests surged in one Arab country after another in early 2011, interest in surveys picked up. To cite one example: an unpublished Egyptian survey I conducted in early 2011, in the very midst of the January/February 2011 revolution there, showed that most Egyptians did not initially view it in primarily "Islamic" terms. This privately attracted some high-level US government attention, and may have helped tip the balance toward acceptance of Mubarak's overthrow. Shortly afterward, surveys that accurately predicted that two Islamic parties (the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafist al-Nur party) would win a solid majority in the new, post-revolutionary Egyptian parliament may have helped tip the balance toward American acceptance of the accession of the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi as president of Egypt following the very close 2012 election. Given the nature of Egyptian public opinion, the alternative might well have been major instability and/or very violent repression in this key Arab ally of the United States. But just one year later, as evidence mounted that much of the Egyptian public was already fed up with the Morsi regime, Washington again shifted course. Despite some misgivings and verbal regrets, it accepted General Sisi's overthrow of Egypt's elected leader. The US, with a nod to the Egyptian street, even refused to label the event a military coup, speaking instead of a regime change "with popular support."

The larger point, however, is that the initiative in each of these rapid political twists and turns lay with the Egyptian public, not with Washington. This, of course, runs counter to the conspiracy theories that claimed it was the US that either supported the Muslim Brotherhood or opposed it. Surveys measuring Egyptian public opinion played a role, if only a secondary one, in American policy calculations. But more important, American policy played

only a secondary role in all of these dramatic Egyptian developments.

Syria provides another dramatic, early instance of public opinion surveys as a factor—or in this case a missing link—in US policy toward the original Arab Spring. This case is discussed in more detail below, but suffice it to say here that as in the Egyptian case, actual surveys in 2011-2013 showed that the mass uprising against Assad's regime was not primarily an "Islamic" one. This suggested to some that the US had a genuine opportunity to help replace a hostile regime by seriously supporting the relatively moderate Syrian opposition. In the end, the Obama administration decided to pay less heed to the Syrian public, and more to its own concerns about not getting dragged into a civil war, or into a clash with Iran, with which it was secretly negotiating a nuclear deal.

Fast forward to today, and to the transition from the Trump to the Biden administration in Washington. On Arab-Israeli peacemaking policy, some senior Trump officials made practical use of Arab public opinion data in pursuing their sharply revised approach. That shift included a much greater emphasis on economic issues and on other Arabs, rather than on the Palestinians. In that context, these American officials noted that popular attitudes toward Israel had softened in the Arab Gulf states, even as Palestinian attitudes had hardened. They took into account survey findings showing that most Arabs overall, in this case including the Palestinians themselves, were more concerned about economic than about political problems. And they were intrigued by responses to this bellwether question, asked in the Washington Institute surveys over the past several years across six key Arab societies: "Should Arab governments offer incentives, both to Israel and to the Palestinians, in order to encourage them to moderate their positions?" In every Arab country polled in 2017, 2018, and 2019 the solid majority (averaging around two-thirds) of the public consistently answered in the affirmative, with the exception of Lebanon in 2019, where slightly less than half were in favor.

In the end, offering such incentives to Israel was exactly what the UAE and Bahrain did in August-September 2020: they "normalized" diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel, in exchange for its commitment to freeze West Bank annexation. And they knew from public opinion polls, as did the American officials who encouraged them, that this seemingly radical step would largely be accepted by their own populations. While that was certainly not the sole factor in these policy calculations, it was clearly one of the contributing causes for these historic normalization agreements.

How much (or little) attention the Biden team will pay to this new equation is naturally unknowable at this point. Nevertheless, if recent past experience, plus their own previous interest in opinion polls, is any guide, members of the new administration will presumably once again give some consideration to regional popular opinion as they formulate and execute Mideast policies. In the Arab-Israeli arena, the paradox they will confront is this: polls show that both the Palestinian and Israeli publics have soured on the two-state solution, even as other Arab publics have increasingly come around to supporting it. This underlying transformation may well argue against dramatic departures from current policy, despite the typical temptation of each new president to distinguish himself from his predecessor.

The US Government's Take on Regional Public Opinion: Two Tragic Failures

In sharp contrast to these two success stories, however, there have also been several significant episodes when the US government chose to ignore Arab or broader Muslim public opinion polls—at its own peril. The most egregious example, in which I was directly involved, took place in advance of 9/11. A year earlier, while in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research at the State Department, I organized, supervised,

and analyzed a series of surveys, published in unclassified form as a monograph entitled, "The Muslim Majority: New Views from Beyond the Middle East."

The analysis pointed out that in Pakistan, alone among major Muslim countries, a plurality actually favored jihadi terrorism against American civilian targets. Based on that data, plus background knowledge of Pakistan's close ties with the Taliban in Afghanistan and their al-Qaeda protégés, I predicted a clear and present danger of a major terrorist attack in the homeland, and publicly raised that prospect with a senior official in the incoming George W. Bush administration.

When I reentered the Secretary of State's Policy Planning Staff in May 2001, four months before 9/11, I immediately penned a five-page memorandum addressed directly to the Secretary. Its opening sentence, quoted in my unclassified official performance review for that year, was, "The U.S. can no longer live with Taliban support for terrorism." The memorandum went on to prescribe that the US urgently deliver this ultimatum to both Pakistan and the Taliban: hand over bin Laden and his entourage to us within 30 days, or we will go in and get them ourselves. Unfortunately, this advice, based partly on exclusive public opinion data, was ignored. Much later, after the events of 9/11, it was officially recognized as "stunningly prescient" but, of course, that was too late to prevent this terrible tragedy.

A second and more recent case in point, albeit a more ambiguous one, concerns US policy toward the Syrian opposition at the height of the civil war there, in 2012-13. One of the arguments made in Washington against serious support for that opposition was its allegedly predominantly Islamist or even jihadi composition. In fact, however, several credible private surveys of the Syrian opposition at the time, both in exile and inside the country, demonstrated that at that early stage it was still more liberal, secular, and democratic, rather than Islamist or jihadi. Those findings were quickly relayed to relevant US officials, with the gist even published in three major American daily newspapers. Yet this relatively encouraging conclusion was either ignored or overridden at the most senior US government levels.

Why did that happen in this particular instance? To be sure, such public opinion and survey data, even about a key Arab Spring development in progress, is never the only, and rarely the decisive, factor in government policy decisions. There were indeed other claims made to justify US reluctance to become more deeply entangled with the Syrian opposition. Prominent among them were the arguments that this could prove too protracted, demanding, or destabilizing a mission, and more confidentially, that it could jeopardize the concurrent secret US diplomatic outreach to Iran. Nevertheless, given the surprisingly positive survey results noted above, the choice to dismiss them was arguably another significant missed opportunity for a different and possibly more effective US policy.

Conclusion

The preceding "survey of surveys" leads to a few basic conclusions. First, from an intelligence and policy point of view, Arab public opinion is measurable, and it matters. It is certainly not a perfect guide, neither to prediction, nor to policy deliberation. But polls can clearly help clarify the nature of brewing political storms—and, just as important, the areas of likely continued calm, as in the Arab Gulf states. They can help identify both policy opportunities, as in the case of Arab-Israeli normalization, and pitfalls, as in the case of neglecting the tragically high level of popular support for jihadi terrorism in the years just before and just after 9/11.

More specifically, we need to know which Arab governments are paying more attention to their own public's opinion, and which ones are paying less attention to it, perhaps at their own peril. And we need to know how much and what kind of attention other powers, inside and outside the region, are paying to this factor as they formulate and execute their policies.

Such considerations would advance our understanding of where and when the next Arab Spring (or Palestinian intifada) is more or less likely to occur. Equally useful, public opinion polls can aid in deciding how best to try and promote, preempt, or if need be, respond to such developments.

Such considerations would advance our understanding of where and when the next Arab Spring (or Palestinian intifada) is more or less likely to occur. Equally useful, public opinion polls can aid in deciding how best to try and promote, preempt, or if need be, respond to such developments. One practical tip: beware of places where there are no real political polls! Algeria and Sudan right now are among the exceptions, whether cautionary or inspirational, that prove this rule.

Second, looking back at the Arab Spring's first decade, polls show that Arabs themselves have decidedly mixed views. There is surprisingly little explicit introspection about it in the available survey data, which in itself suggests a high degree of uncertainty or ambivalence. But we know that today, about half of most Arab publics polled still express some sympathy for mass popular protests, particularly about corruption. Whether that is a glass half full, or half empty, is yet another judgment call.

The role of public opinion polls over the next decade, then, should be to track where and when the divergence between rulers and ruled is narrowing, and where and when it is widening to the point of possible traumatic injury to both.

My own view, based on responses to related questions, is that the majority of Arabs in most places have moved toward a higher prioritization of personal goals, economic welfare, and social stability—probably in part due to all the travails they have witnessed over the past revolutionary decade. Significantly, even in the one relative democratic success story of the original Arab Spring, Tunisia, the Arab Barometer survey director reports (in the same Singapore seminar cited above) that popular expectations and trust in post-revolutionary processes or institutions have declined dramatically in the last few years.

Third, looking ahead, what do the polls suggest about the coming decade? Despite the disillusionment, there are some grounds for cautious optimism. The trajectory of Arab public opinion is increasingly toward what could reasonably be called moderation: to reject religious extremism, to oppose Iran's hegemonic ambitions and proxies, to accept some kinds of normalization with Israel, and to look for pragmatic steps forward rather than sweeping ideological movements in most areas of public life.

All this is particularly true of the rising younger, under-30 half of the overall Arab adult population. That is naturally where most futurists are focused. But even more significantly, surveys demonstrate that even the older generation, which still controls the discourse and the decision making in many of these countries, is not far behind their children in terms of this attitudinal trend over time.

That is not to affirm unequivocally, however, that reason and moderation will prevail. To be sure, some Arab regimes and elites remain brutally unresponsive to public opinion, and/or hopelessly and violently internally divided. Other repressive Arab regimes are arguably restraining their own militant publics, yet for that very reason are at some risk of major internal upheaval, or even overthrow. Dire economic and demographic projections for the region as a whole, including the formerly oil-rich countries, likewise lead to a certain degree of apprehension about their medium-term futures.

The role of public opinion polls over the next decade, then, should be to track where and when the divergence between rulers and ruled is narrowing, and where and when it is widening to the point of possible traumatic

injury to both. It should also be to locate those concrete issues on which rulers may have more or less margin for maneuver than they (or we) commonly believe, and to use that knowledge to suggest a menu of positive policy adjustments. Armed with this acquired wisdom, one can then factor in public opinion, along with all the other elements at play, into a sensible and constructive assessment of the prospects for the next season of Arab politics.

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