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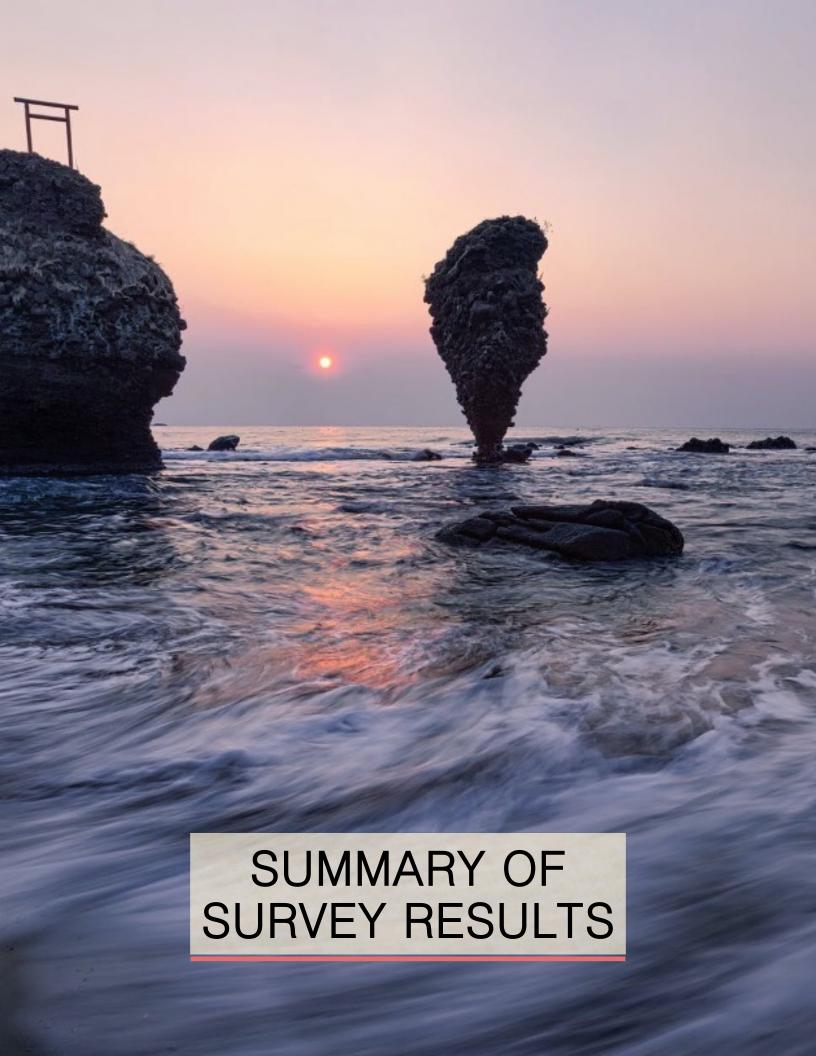
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## What IF Youth Led the MENA Region Youth Perceptions Survey Results

In a region where nearly 30% of its population aged 15–30, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to a bright generation of driven young people who strive to advance and develop their countries. There have been numerous initiatives over the past ten years aimed at enhancing the level of youth inclusion in their countries' decision—making processes. While the current level of such engagement remains low, this report looks to illustrate a clearer picture of the benefits that would result should youth be given their rightful opportunities. More specifically, MENAACTION conducted an online survey featuring 1,324 respondents from 14 countries to explore how the MENA region would look like, politically, economically, and environmentally if youth were its leaders.

#### CHALLENGES FACING YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION

The survey results show that staggering 78.3% of the respondents believe that their countries are headed in the wrong direction. Data from the World Values Survey and the Arab Barometer unveil low levels of public confidence in governments across the region, particularly among youth. This was mirrored in the survey results, as 69.1% of the respondents believe that their countries treat youth very badly or somewhat badly, compared to just 13% who stated that their countries treat them very well or somewhat well.

Much of these perceptions stem from perceptions of government inabilities to create jobs, respond to citizen needs, and address the stagnant corruption that has long engulfed the administrative sector. To that end, the survey results found that 64.6% of the respondents highlighted economic issues as the main challenges facing youth in the MENA region.

This was divided between 44.4% who indicated unemployment, lack of job opportunities of proper and lack support for young entrepreneurs; 10.5% who stated poverty difficulty to make ends meet; and 9.7% who indicated that they fear the unknown future and have been denied from fulfilling their aspirations. Further, 13.5% of the respondents outlined challenges pertaining to the lack of safety and security, prevalence of armed conflicts and sectarianism, and the poor education systems.

Other notable challenges included 14.4% who believe that they are being actively excluded from the political and public life within their countries, as their improve the overall attempts to conditions tend to be faced with rejection, especially since 5.5% of the respondents referred to their countries' misgovernance, administrative financial corruption, and nepotism as the main challenge they face.



#### YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

The respondents ranked a number of different political systems to determine which systems would be most appropriate to govern their countries. The results show that if we were to rank these political systems in terms of respondents' favorability toward them, plural democracy that is inclusive of all would rank highest, followed by the rule of experts, then religious laws, then army rule, and finally authoritarian rule.

Next, the respondents indicated a number of characteristics they believe are tenets of good governance. Further analysts shows that the way youth perceive good governance is somewhat synonymous with advanced liberal democracy.

In fact, liberty ranked first with emphasis on political and social rights as the most important element of good governance; followed by rule of law, with proper separation of powers and checks and balances; then economic benefits by way of ensuring economic equality (social democracy); and finally, participation and competition.

While youth face a number of imminent challenges in the region, the majority of respondents maintained that reform should take intricate rushed reform. precedence to Additionally. of the the maiority respondents also believe that it is unacceptable to use of Wasta (nepotism) to obtain the services they want but may not be entitled to or even to obtain their rightful services.

#### YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS ON ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

The survey also looked to gauge the respondents' perceptions on how they believe their countries' economies should be run. 69.4% indicated that there should be greater incentives for individual effort as opposed to making incomes more equal. This highlights youth's value for individual effort.

On the other hand, 77.3% of the respondents believe that governments should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for, compared to 19.4% who believe that people should take more responsibility to provide for themselves. These two results signify that most youth in the



## What IF Youth Led the MENA Region Youth Perceptions Survey Results

MENA region believe in a certain welfare baseline, whereby everyone is provided for while maintaining proper incentives for individual effort. They do want to see a greater governmental role when it comes to public service provision that can ensure proper welfare. human security. and socioeconomic support while also operating within an economic scheme that promotes individual effort.

Looking at which priorities governments

ought to focus on to improve economic conditions, achieving a high economic growth and maintaining a stable economy featured heavily in the results, followed by a portion of the respondents who wanted to see more input from citizens, and another group emphasized who strengthening countries' defense systems and reforming education the systems. When it comes to public spending, the education system ranked highest with 57.1%, followed by the healthcare system and national security.

#### YOUTH'S PERCEPTIONS ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

In this section, the survey looked to illustrate which countries youth want theirs to have closer political, economic, security, and cultural ties. For political alliances, 15.4% indicated Arab states in general, including the Gulf countries, followed by 15.3% for the United States – as the highest percentage for a single country, 8.8% for Russia and 7.7% for Turkey.

For economic alliances, Arab states in general, including the Gulf states, ranked highest with 27.3% of the respondents, given the financial capacity of these countries. 19.4% of the respondents indicated China, as the highest percentage for a single country, demonstrating its tremendous economic prowess. Turkey and the United States followed with 8.2% and 7.6%, respectively.

As for security alliances, 16.9% and 15.2% of the respondents believe their countries should align with the United States and with Russia, respectively, especially given their strong defense systems and advanced militaries. It is likely that Russia might not have ranked this high had it not been for its invasion of Ukraine, which probably enhanced the respondents' perceptions of its power. In third came Arab states in general, coupled with 6.6% for Egypt and 5.7% for the Gulf states, as Arab militaries have been involved in a many operations and coalitions lately.

For cultural alliances, 37.2% indicated Arab countries in general, which stems from the prevalence of cinematography, music, art, publications, and more importantly, language.



Further, 17.6% indicated Western European countries, including Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, and Finland.

6.9% referred to Turkey, mostly due to its influence on pop culture across the region.

#### The Environment and Climate Action

The last section of the survey focused on youth's perceptions in relation to climate change and climate action. Looking at the extent to which environmental protection should be prioritized against economic growth, the results show that nearly half the respondents believe that should be case, even if it causes slower economic growth and job losses.

This was mirrored by 64.4% of the respondents who indicated that climate change is an issue that is very important to them personally, coupled with 26.5% who stated that it was important, as 31.2% of the respondents indicated that they have taken or regularly take actions out of concern for climate change.

Such figures illustrate a high level of attention to face this global challenge

coupled with a growing interest, as 49.6% of the respondents stated that they are becoming more interested in taking action out of concern for climate change.

Additionally, when the survey examined the respondents attitudes and intentions toward climate action, the results show that youth would consider to alter their daily routines to protect the environment.

This included using greener sources of taking part energy, in support campaigns, recycling waste, buying organic food, and even leaving their jobs if they caused harm to the environment. As such, with the right campaigns and with better investment proper public transportation networks, youth of the MENA region can play a massive role in respond to the imminent threat of climate change.



### **ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

MENAACTION is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, established by youth from the Middle East and North Africa region, designed to advocate for the rights of MENA youth. MENAACTION is for youth by youth, focusing on issues of policy, advocacy, democracy and human rights. MENAACTION believes in the meaningful engagement of youth as stakeholders and active agents for change and development, with proper youth inclusion in political and public life at the top of our mission.

Currently, the level of youth engagement in the decision-making processes across the MENA region is lacking, particularly given the fact that over two-thirds of the populations are under the age of 35. If youth were to be engaged properly, their countries would benefit immensely, least of which is because of their drive and energy. Rather, their inclusion in decision-making would reflect positively due to the fact that youth tend to advocate for issues of concern for the general public, unlike any other social, demographic, or political group. It would also result in increased productivity, an issue that faces most countries in the region.

To that end, MENAACTION conducted a survey between February and April of 2022 to gauge youth's perceptions on a number of political, economic, and environmental aspects to essentially explore how the region would look like, politically, economically, and environmentally if youth were its leaders.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The survey looked to achieve the following objectives:

- Gauging youth's perceptions in terms of a series of political, economic, and environmental governance matters;
- Provide a picture of how the region would look like if youth were to have a wider space to assume their roles as political, economic, and environmental decision makers; and
- Understanding the major issues facing youth in the MENA region and their root causes to essentially provide policy recommendations that can effectively address these challenges.



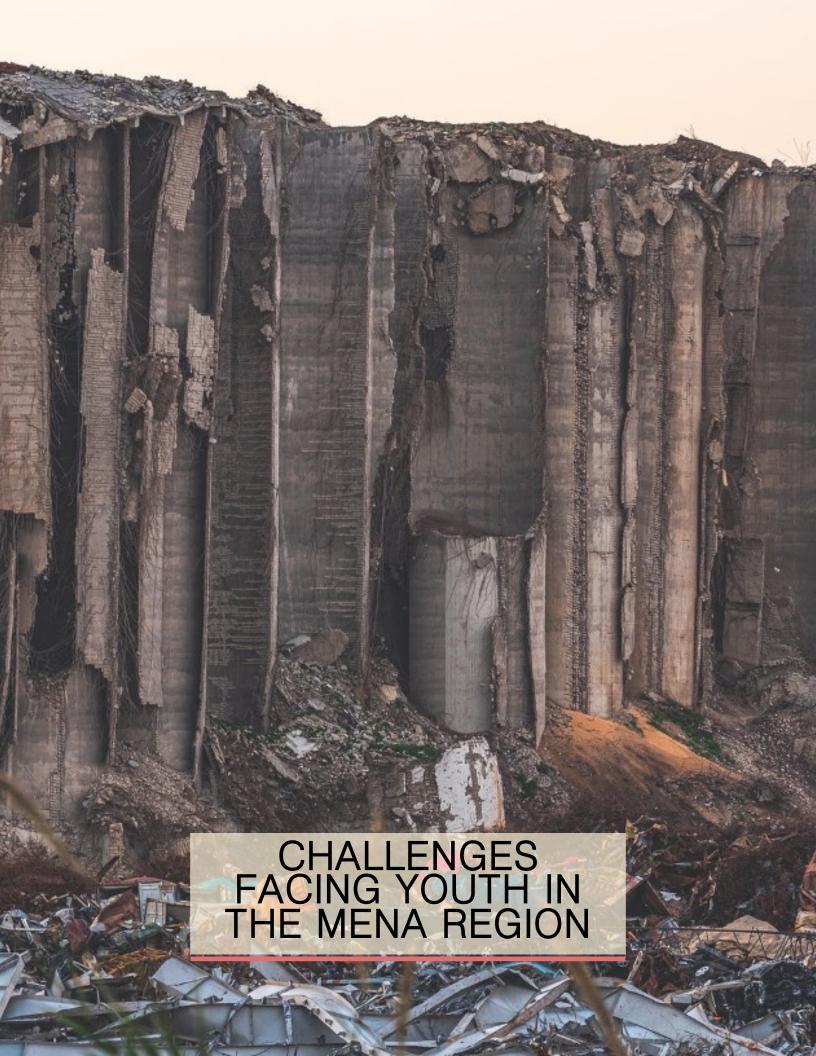
#### SAMPLE

The total achieved sample is 1,324 respondents from 14 countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, and Yemen. Looking at demographic breakdown, the sample featured a 50–50 male to female ratio. The sample also comprised of 75.2% of respondents aged 18–34 and 24.8% of individuals aged 35 and older. Additionally, 43.3% of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree, 18.4% hold a master's degree or higher, 18.7% hold a diploma or completed 2 years of college, 10.9% completed secondary education, 5.4% underwent vocational or technical training, and 3.2% completed basic or elementary education.

## DATA COLLECTION

The survey was conducted online, using KoBo toolbox. MENAACTION ran paid promotions on its Facebook page to acquire respondents. MENAACTION faced a number of challenges during the data collection phase:

- Initially, the survey was advertised in 21 countries across the MENA region; however, 7 countries did not record any responses.
- Secondly, certain countries were recording low participation rates. As such, MENAACTION focused more promotions in these countries along, which resulted positively.
- Finally, female response rate was initially low, causing MENAACTION to run a paid promotion directed only at young women in the region until the sample finally achieved equal representation of males and females.



The first section of the survey explored youth's perceptions in terms of the overall conditions and in relation to the challenges they face within their respective countries. The results show that a combined 17.3% of the respondents believe that their countries are headed in the right direction, compared to a 78.3% who indicated that their countries are headed in the wrong direction, featured a near 60% who believe that things are mostly going in the wrong direction within their countries.

Such figures are alarming, and they are likely induced by the deteriorating economic conditions, especially the high unemployment rates among youth in the MENA region, as governments have been unable to create a sufficient number of jobs to accommodate the unemployed. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has also placed governments and the private sector alike in an unenvious position, with citizens – particularly youth – facing the biggest burden of the economic crises across the area.

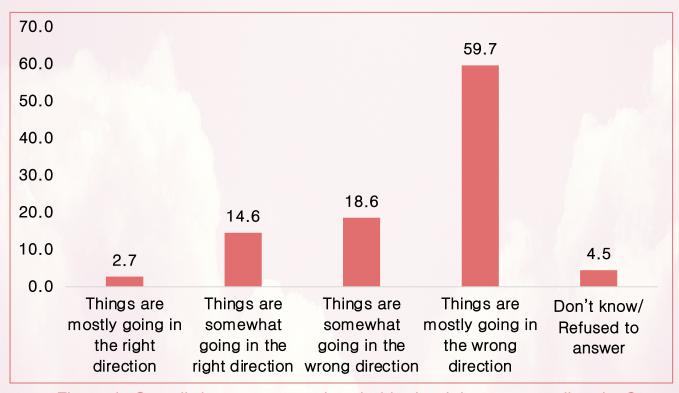


Figure 1: Overall, is your country headed in the right or wrong direction?

A research report by MENAACTION in late 2020 suggests that the average level of confidence among youth in their governments in the MENA region stands at 58.5 percentage points, which translates into "trust to a low extent". This survey results, however, further highlight these low levels of trust. In fact, when asked to assess their countries treatment of youth, only 13% indicated that their countries treat youth very well or somewhat well. On the other hand, 69.1% believe that their countries treat youth badly – divided between 23.6% who stated that they are treated somewhat badly and a 45.5% treated very badly.

Given the fact that over two thirds of the populations across the MENA region are people below the age of 35, who ideally can and should be leading their countries toward better conditions and increased growth, it is important that regional governments address the reasons behind these perceptions to ultimately ensure proper inclusion of young people in public life.



Figure 2: Taking everything in consideration, how would assess your country's treatment of youth?

Looking at the main challenges facing youth in the MENA region, it was not a surprise to find that unemployment, lack of job opportunities, and poor support for young entrepreneurs topped the chart with 44.4% of the respondents. Another 10.5% of the sample took it one step further and illustrated that the biggest challenge they face is the terrible economic conditions – manifested in poverty and difficulty to make ends meet. That was mirrored further by 9.7% of the sample who argued that they fear the unknown future and that they are denied of the ability or opportunity to fulfill their dreams and aspirations, with many respondents indicating "we have become unable to live, and we can only think about the next day and how we are going to eat and provide for ourselves and our families."

The proper inclusion of youth in the decision-making processes would reflect positively on the development, productivity, and overall economic growth within their countries. However, 14.4% believe that they are being actively excluded from the political and public life, thus being unable to contribute to their countries' roadmaps. Such perceptions of marginalization are also coupled with perceptions that they are denied of their basic sociopolitical rights and personal freedoms.

This was supported by another 5.5% of the respondents who carped of their countries' misgovernance, administrative and financial corruption, and nepotism and favoritism. This was especially the case among respondents from Iraq and Yemen who have become disenchanted with political parties' dominance over government decisions, particularly that they favor certain people over others.

Armed and sectarian conflicts have engulfed the region for decades. Nearly 7% of the survey respondents cited the absence of safety and security and the prevalence of wars and sectarian conflicts as the biggest challenge they face, which threats they very existence. A number of respondents added that they are generally head-hunted by armed groups to use them as fuel for their wars. These conditions exert countless negative impacts on young people, one of which is education. About 6.6% of the respondents stated that their countries' educational systems have deteriorated badly over the past few years, thus limiting the level of proper preparation of youth for the labor market, in which jobs are essentially scarce.

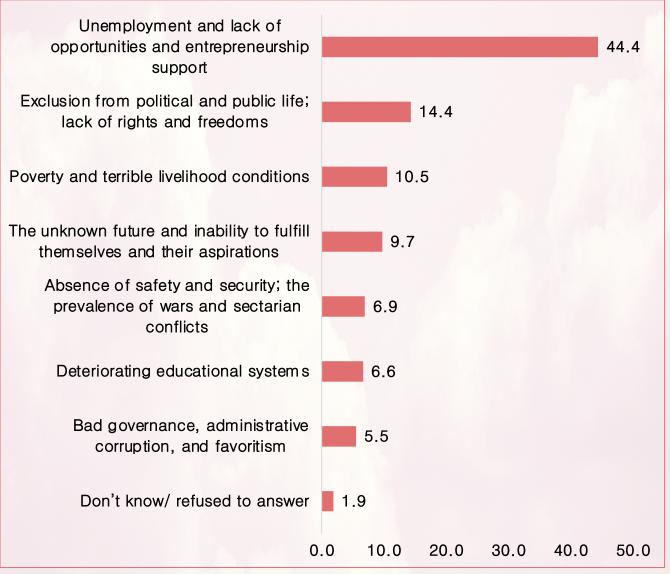


Figure 3: In your opinion, what is the single biggest challenge facing you as a young person today?



#### ASSESSMENT OF POLITICAL SYSTEMS

If youth were to lead the MENA region, what type of political systems would they employ? The survey asked the respondents to assess the compatibility of a number of political systems to govern their countries. These political systems ranged from democratic, to autocratic, to authoritarian, to theocratic, to praetorian.

The results show that a democratic political system ranked highest with a mean score of 2.7 out of 4, translating into the upper ends of "fairly good"; followed by 2.3 for "having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country" and 2.0 points for a pluralistic parliamentary system that is inclusive of nationalists, leftist, right wing, and religious parties who compete in parliamentary elections.

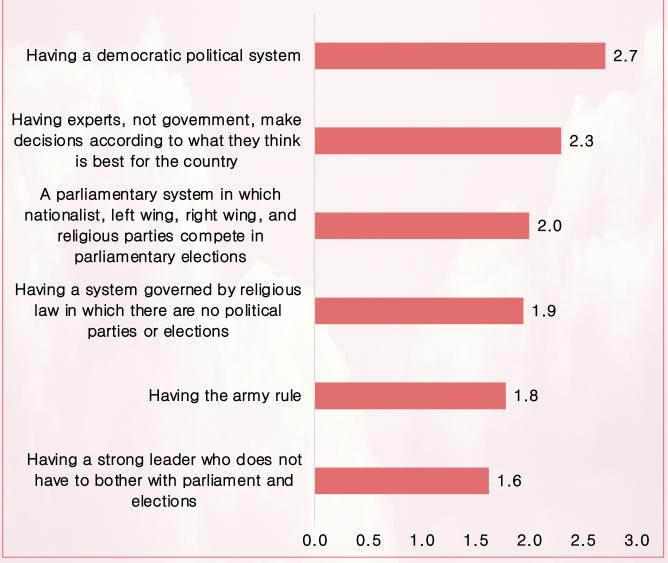


Figure 4: For each one of the following political systems, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing your country?

[Mean scores; 4 = very good; 1 = very bad]

Further, a system governed by religious law without political parties or elections followed with an average score of 1.9 points, which translates into "fairly bad". This was followed by army rule and a unitary strong leader in the absence of parliament and elections, with 1.8 and 1.6 points, respectively.

Ultimately, if we were to rank these political systems in terms of respondents' favorability toward them, plural democracy that is inclusive of all would rank highest, followed by the rule of experts, then religious laws, then army rule, and finally authoritarian rule.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

One of the most common definitions of democracy is a system of governance that promotes "participation, competition, and liberty." Often times, when democracy is discussed within the context of the MENA region, it is generally rendered merely to the exercise of elections.

To that end, the survey looked to assess youth's perceptions in terms of the most important characteristics of good governance, whereby the data was analyzed on a scale of 1-4, in which 4 means very important and 1 means very unimportant.

The results show that civil and political rights were viewed as the most important tenets of good governance, which demonstrates the value youth place on liberty. Free elections was ranked in third as the most important element of good governance, followed by "people receive state aid for unemployment" in fourth; "governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor" in sixth; and "the state makes people's incomes equal" in eighth.

This is consistent with a view held by analysts in the region, arguing that people assess the success of governance through its economic impacts, according to data from the Arab Barometer.

In fifth came total separation of the three branches, emphasizing people's need for proper rule of law and checks and balances, which was assessed between "very important" and "somewhat important". This was the same case for the provision of equal rights for women as for those granted to men and ensuring the same treatment.

When it comes to the army taking over governance (when the government is incompetent); the religious leaders interpreting the law; and people obeying their elected and unelected leaders, they all came at the bottom of the list, ranked between "somewhat unimportant" and "very unimportant".

Ultimately, looking at the survey results, we find that youth in the MENA region believe that the most important elements of good governance are as follows:

- Liberty political and social rights;
- Rule of Law proper separation of powers and checks and balances;
- Economic benefits (Social Democracy) ensuring economic equality and supporting the poor; and
- Participation and competition (Minimalist Democracy) emphasizing free and fair elections

Such traits suggest that youth's definition of good governance is somewhat synonymous with advanced liberal democracy.



Figure 5: Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of good governance. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of good governance. Would you say it is very important, fairly important, somewhat unimportant, or very unimportant? [Mean scores: 4 = very important; 1 = very unimportant.]

### POLITICAL REFORM AND NEPOTISM

Despite the tremendous challenges facing the region's youth, 61.7% of respondents believe that political reform ought to be introduced intricately. Young people do face imminent economic and sociopolitical challenges, yet they do not prefer rushed reforms, as just 33.5% believe that political reform should be introduced all at once. Regional governments should navigate their processes of reforms carefully.

While there is more support for calculated reforms that require longer duration to flourish, the past few years showed that youth across the region have become more impatient with the failed policies. The emphasis, though, ought to be directed toward finding proper mechanisms that serve to enhance productivity, which is a proven and sustainable approach to achieve (rapid) economic growth.

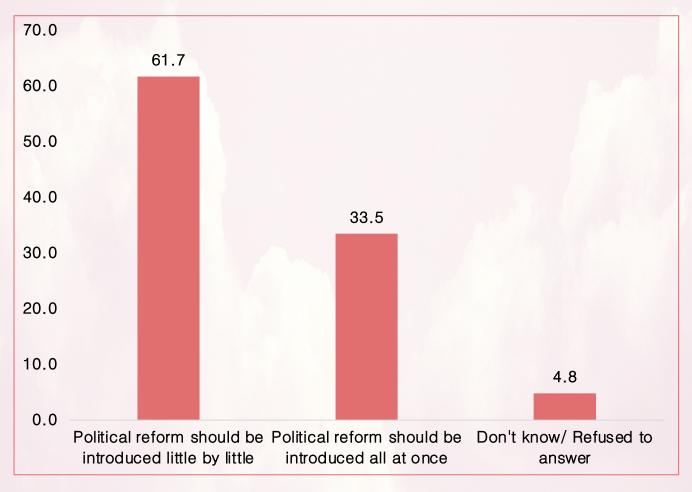


Figure 6: Which one of the following statements is closest to your view?

While there is a high prevalence of Wasta (nepotism) and favoritism across the region, the survey results illustrate that youth do not think that the use of Wasta is acceptable, regardless of the context.

In fact, a total of 87.8% of the respondents believe that the use of Wasta to obtain the services they want but may not be entitled to is unacceptable, compared to 67.2% for obtaining one's rightful service. At the same time, nearly 30% believe that using Wasta is acceptable, to some degree, when it comes to obtaining their rightful service, many of whom attribute that to bad governance, the prevalence of corruption, and administrative laziness within the public sector.

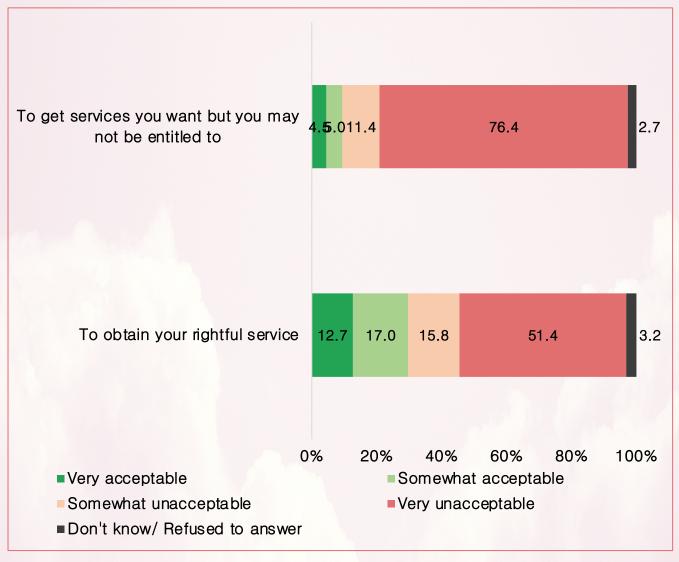


Figure 7: When it comes to Wasta and favoritism, to what extent do you think it is acceptable to use Wasta in the following situations?



It is without a doubt that unemployment is one the most difficult challenges facing youth in the MENA region. Coupled with governments' inabilities to create jobs to withstand the influx of new young labor market entrants, it is likely that this challenge persists unless major critical changes are implemented.

While acting fast is essential, it is also as important to ensure that potential interventions do not turn a blind eye on the challenges of tomorrow, particularly that the MENA region remains unprepared to accommodate employment within a vastly changing job market.

In fact, a report by WeForum indicates that 65% of current elementary school students will be working in jobs that do not exist now and 85 million jobs will be replaced by robotics in the next 5 years. This challenge has been ongoing for 3 decades, yet some universities continue to cancel academic programs that are essential for the job market, and that includes programs in the information technology field.

Ultimately, when it comes to a challenge in which they are major stakeholders, youth's interests, priorities, and needs vis-à-vis their countries' economic governance ought to be taken seriously.

## ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE ECONOMY

The survey, first, asked the respondents to indicate whether they believe there should be greater incentives for individual effort or incomes should be made more equal. The results show that 69.4% of the respondents stated that there should be greater incentives for individual effort, compared to 28.7% who indicated that incomes should be made more equal.

Given the difficult current socioeconomic conditions in the region, which were exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, youth still place more value to individual effort. The results show that youth respond and perform better when given proper incentives, such as benefits, proper work environments, and more prospects for self-fulfillment.

Moreover, such results indicate that more youth are interested in personal growth than the overall wellbeing of society, as they demonstrated a higher value for individual effort as opposed to communal or more inclusive values of equality.

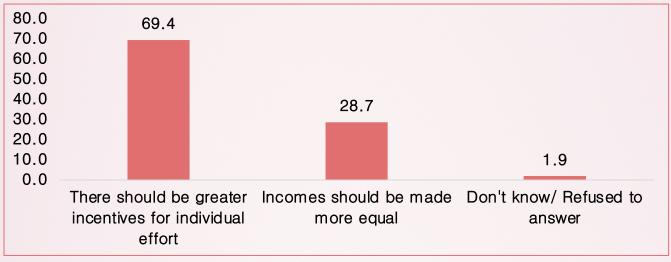


Figure 8: Which of the following two statements is closest to your opinion?

When discussing the role the state should play within the economy, one aspect often raised is the extent to which the state should intervene to ensure the welfare of citizens. To that end, while the majority of the respondents stated that there should be greater incentives for individual effort (as seen in figure 8) – a more capitalist viewpoint, the majority of the respondents indicated that they prefer government intervention, as 77.3% of the respondents indicated that "government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for", compared to 19.4% who stated that "people should take more responsibility to provide for themselves."

Such results are more societal leaning rather than individualistic, unlike what is outlined in the graph above. When examining both cases, it is apparent that the majority of youth in the MENA region believe in a certain welfare baseline, whereby everyone is provided for while maintaining proper incentives for individual effort. Additionally, the results signify that youth want to see a greater governmental role when it comes to public service provision that can ensure proper welfare, human security, and socioeconomic support while operating within an economic scheme that promotes individual effort.

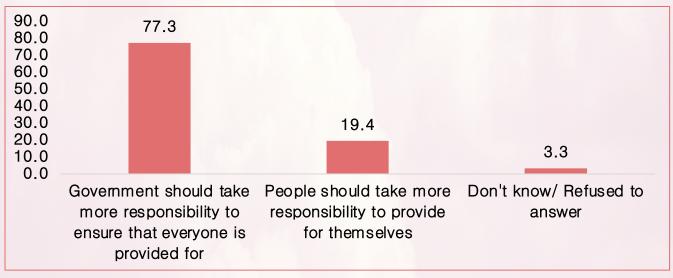


Figure 9: Which of the following two statements is closest to your opinion?

Ultimately, the above mentioned survey results clearly demonstrate the capitalist-socialist discussion at their ideological core. In fact, when asked about whether government ownership of business and industry should be increased or private ownership should be increased, the results were almost identical. As seen in the graph below, 44.3% of the respondents pushed for increased government ownership, while 44.8% pushed for increased private ownership, with half a percentage points difference.

When examining these results, we can see two main groups: a group that believes in more government ownership, who essentially believes in the standards of a socialist economy, with subsidized services a norm and an opposite group can be split into two smaller groups: one that believes in individual growth and another that simply distrusts their governments.

Assuming both groups opted for the option they perceive would benefit their conditions and would improve their countries' economies, the fact that we see such zigzags between capitalist and socialist values demonstrate the complexity of the economic challenges facing the region.

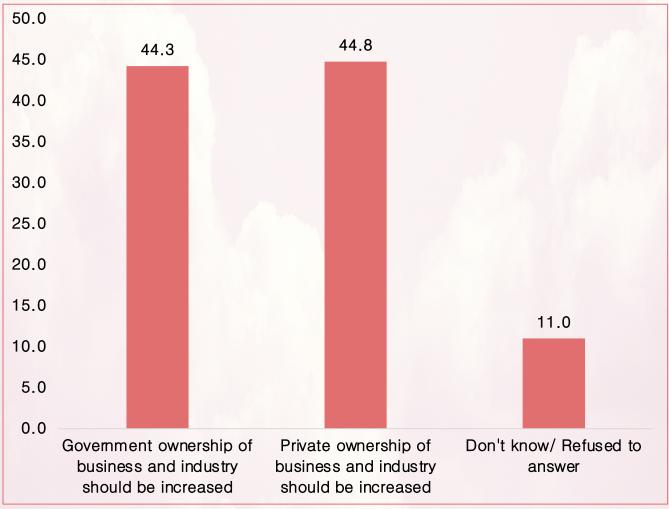


Figure 10: Which of the following two statements is closest to your opinion?

#### PRIORITIES IN PLANNING AND SPENDING

When asked what the government should prioritize, unsurprisingly, 62.6% of the respondents indicated that the government should prioritize a high level of economic growth. This can mostly be attributed to the difficult economic conditions in the region, with high unemployment rates that disproportionally affect youth, which explains such a high percentage of the respondents who believe that achieving economic growth ought to be the priority.

This was followed by 17.5% who indicated that there should be a greater level of participation in decision-making. While ensuring that youth's voices are amplified in policymaking, it is apparent that the respondents placed greater value on ensuring that their countries emerge out of the economic turbulences they are facing. Nevertheless, the remaining 19.8% of the respondents were split between ensuring strong defense systems and ensuring the aesthetics of their cities and communities.

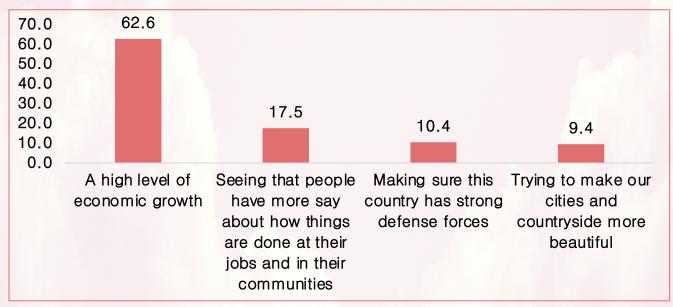


Figure 11: Of the following, what is the most important priority for the government?

When asked about another set of government priorities, 50.5% of the respondents maintained that a stable economy ought to be treated with utmost priority. This signifies the value youth place on the need to improve the economic conditions that threaten their future.

In addition to that, a little over a quarter of the respondents indicated that the priority should be to ensure a society in which ideas count more than money, which is consistent with tenets of equality – seen throughout the survey, especially when coupled with 10% who indicated that the main priority should be to achieve progress towards to a less impersonal and more humane society.

Further – and similar to previous results, 13.4% of the respondents believe that the government's priority should be to fight crime, as they emphasized the importance of security.

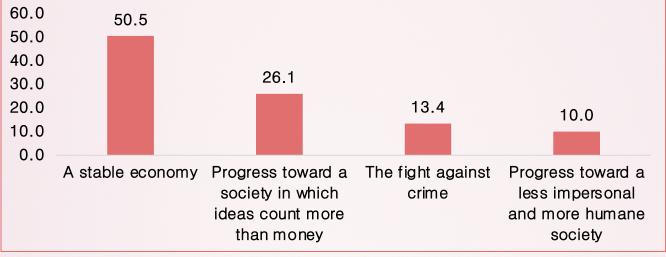


Figure 12: Of the following, what is the most important priority for the government?

Following that, the survey asked the respondents to indicate which issue they believe their governments should focus on to improve the economic conditions. Unsurprisingly, 45.4% indicated that the governments should create more job opportunities, which is consistent with the responses seen before.

25.8% believe that reforming the education system should be the main focus, which can be considered a long-term solution for issues, as it better equips children and youth for better opportunities.

Further, 13.2% believe that the cost of living should be lowered 4.4% believe that the and government should focus on raising existing wages, both of which reflect the same sentiment and highlight the issue that most youth in the region face, as it has become more difficult for youth become independent due to the disparity between wages and cost of living. 11.2% believe that the government promote should foreign investment, which contribute to diversifying the economy. create more jobs, and raise the prevailing wages.

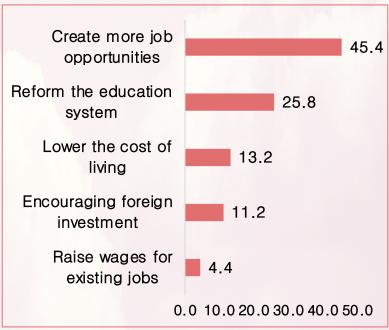


Figure 13: Of the following, what is the important issue for the government to focus on to improve the economic conditions in your country?

To close off this section, the respondents were asked to indicate the most important priority for government spending. The education system ranked highest with 57.1% of the respondents, which demonstrates the level of emphasis youth place on education, as a key to resolve the challenges their countries face. Youth understand that the issues prevalent in the region today are accumulations of previous generations, decades of mismanagement and corruption, that cannot be erased in one swept move, which is why focusing on education can be a good place to start.

This was followed by 17.8% for healthcare as the most important priority for government spending. These results show youth's wish to see improved healthcare services and highlight the prevalent gaps in the sector's infrastructure. In addition to that, 6.8% indicated national security, which is understandable given the number and magnitude of armed conflicts engulfing the region.

In fourth came "subsidies on energy products" with 4.2% – despite the fact that energy costs continue to rise across the region. It was followed by 1.5% for protecting the environment and responding to climate change and another 1.5% for improving roads and transportation, as seen in the graph below.

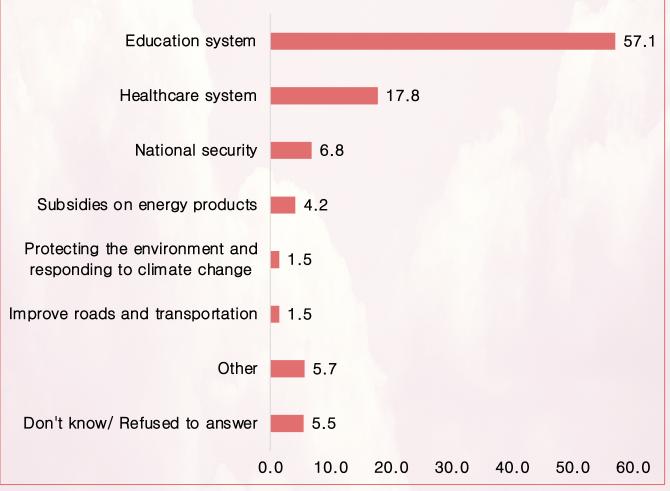


Figure 14: Of the following, what is the most important priority for government spending?

## Support our Work

MENAACTION is a nonprofit organization, EIN 85-3884888 all donations will be used solely for the projects that MENAACTION implements for the development of youth of the MENA region. To learn more about our mission, goals, and work, please visit our website www.menaaction.org

MENAACTION is currently working on two major programs:

#### MENARY Monitor

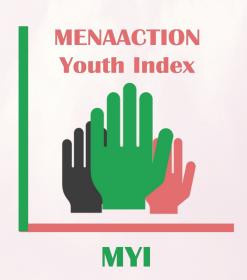
MENARY Monitor is a weekly newsletter, a compilation of English, Arabic, French, Farsi, and Turkish news items from trusted sources, distributed weekly to government institutions and policy makers, international organizations, and researchers.

The main objective is to provide stakeholders with trusted, accurate, and accessible updates on all matters concerning youth in the region, including points of concern requiring action.



#### MENAACTION Youth Index (MYI)

The MENAACTION Youth Index (MYI) seeks to compile all youth-related data into one index. It comprises of sub-indicators, including economic inclusion, educational opportunities, freedoms, equality, political engagement, cultural engagement, health, technology, and environment.



Support our work by visiting: <a href="https://www.menaaction.org/donate">www.menaaction.org/donate</a>





Several political figures, researchers, and activists have emphasized the importance of ensuring proper alignment of a state's foreign policy with the needs of its people. Throughout the MENA region, governments are mostly faced with the challenge of "omni-balancing", which suggests that they ought to address and balance geopolitics, specifically the security dilemma, with domestic security dilemma; the socioeconomic and political challenges they face domestically.

The survey asked the respondents to indicate which countries should be their countries' political, economy, security, and cultural allies. The results as follows.

### POLITICAL ALLIANCES

Looking at political alliances, 15.4% indicated that their countries' closest political allies should be Arab states in general, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which demonstrates Arabs' affinity to one another and the perceived economic benefits that would follow.

This was followed by 15.3% for the United States. While the United States has generally had polarizing perceptions in the region, people still acknowledge its importance as a political ally.

Russia and Turkey came in third and fourth with 8.8% and 7.7%, respectively. This is unsurprising given Turkey's political and economic influence in the region in addition to its popularity as a tourism and investment destination. Having Russia high on the list, however, can be attributed to the current war with Ukraine, as people recognize its growing global power.

Saudi Arabia ranked fifth as the most popular country to align political with, demonstrating Saudi Arabia's growing political influence under Crowne Prince Mohammad bin Salman. Egypt followed with 4% of the respondents, as it has always held a prominent position in the region, regardless turbulences it may have had.

Other countries include Germany, the United Kingdom, China, other European countries such as France, Sweden, Spain (especially among Moroccan respondents), Japan, and South Korea.

It is worth noting that 10% of the respondents believe that their countries need to look internally and disregard any ties with any foreign state. This stems from their belief that their countries always emerge starved, stretched, or simply worse off from any foreign alliances.

Further, they tend to associate foreign alliance making with foreign intervention, with the belief that no country would want to align with theirs unless they want to extract its resources and weaken it.

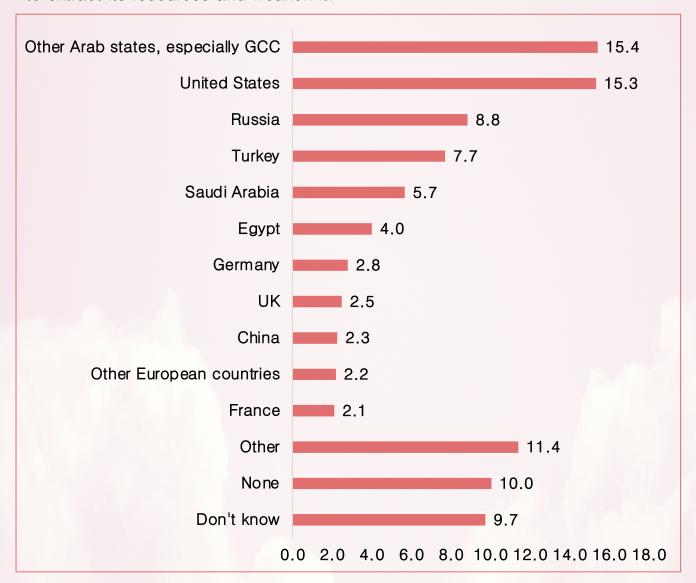


Figure 15: In your view, which country should be the closest political ally of your country?

## **ECONOMIC ALLIANCES**

When it comes to identifying the countries with whom regional states should economically align, Arab states, including the GCC states, ranked high on the list, as 27.3% of the respondents believe their countries should economically align with these states (including 9.9% for Saudi Arabia and the UAE). This is similar to their views on political alliances, and it can be attributed to the economic and financial capacity of the Gulf countries, especially nowadays as they further diversify their economies. It is also worth mentioning that the Gulf states are an attractive destination for young Arabs to move and work there, which can have an impact on their perceptions here.

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China ranked second with 19.4%, which solidifies it as a global economic power and demonstrates its position as an attractive economic partner. Turkey came in third with 8.2% of the respondents, as Turkey remains influential in the region in attracting investment prospects. In fact, many Arab youth view Turkey as a destination for work and even immigration.

The United States ranked lower on this list, with only 7.6% of the respondents viewing it as the most important economic ally. This is despite the fact that the US has numerous free trade agreements with countries in the region, and it remains the world's biggest economy.

European states, including France, Italy, and Spain followed with 4.6% along with 3.6% for Germany. Then, 3.2% indicated Japan and 2.5% referred to Russia, respectively. About 11.3% identified other countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brazil, with 5.4% of the respondents believe their countries should explore the path of self-sufficiency.

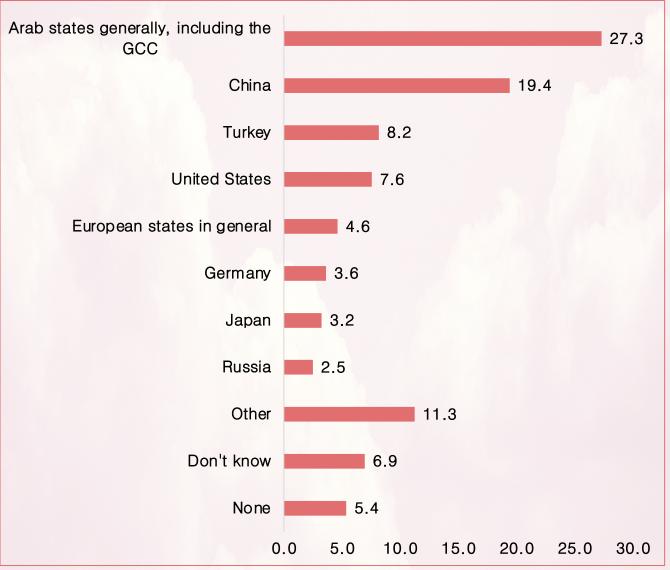


Figure 16: In your view, which country should be the closest economic ally of your country?

### SECURITY ALLIANCES

Looking at security alliances, 16.9% and 15.2% of the respondents believe their countries should align with the United States and with Russia, respectively. As the two states have two of the most powerful militaries in the world, it is not surprising that the respondents want their countries to align with them, especially given the extent of wars and conflicts in the region along with the prevalence of armed groups.

About 11.5% indicated Arab states in general, coupled with 6.6% for Egypt, and 5.7% who referred to the GCC, mainly Saudi Arabia. This is attributed to the fact that Arab militaries have been more involved recently, including playing an important role in the coalition that defeated Daesh in Iraq and Syria last decade. Additionally, many militaries around the region are viewed positively, such as the case with the Egyptian and the Jordanian militaries.

Similar to their political and economic attraction, Turkey ranked highly with 6.5% of the respondents. This figure might have been higher had it not been for Turkey's involvement in Syria, which stretches until today with its presence in many locations across the country.

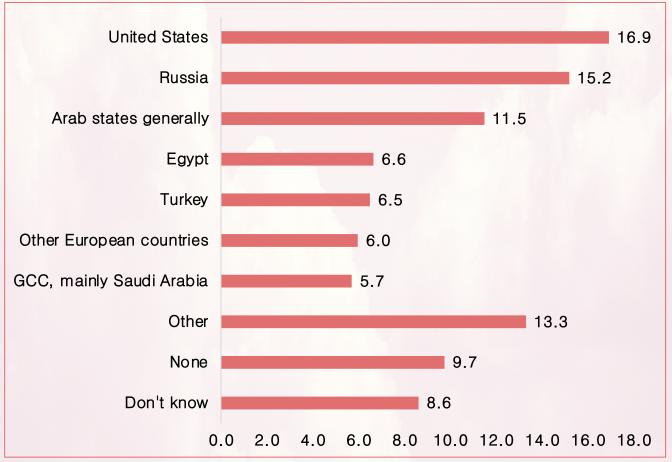


Figure 17: In your view, which country should be the closest security ally of your country?

### **CULTURAL ALLIANCES**

For cultural relations, 37.2% of the respondents highlighted that their countries should culturally align themselves with other Arab countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE – as the most prevalent states. This stems from many factors, including cinematography, music, art, and publications, let alone the importance language plays in this context. Another factor is the importance of religion and religious values.

Western European countries were cited as the second most important cultural allies by 17.6% of the respondents. This included Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Scandinavian countries – mainly Sweden and Finland. Following that, 6.9% identified Turkey as the most important cultural ally, due to Turkey's influence in pop culture across the region, particularly television shows that became widely popular over the past decade. While such shows are not as aired on Arab television channels as they used to be, the cultural influence has become rather institutionalized.

About 4.5% indicated Japan, especially given the increase in popularity of animation shows. On the other hand, only 4% of the respondents indicated the United States and Canada despite the prevalence of American television shows and movies across the region as well as the use of English in daily life. About 16.1% indicated other countries, including New Zealand, India, Iran, and Malaysia.

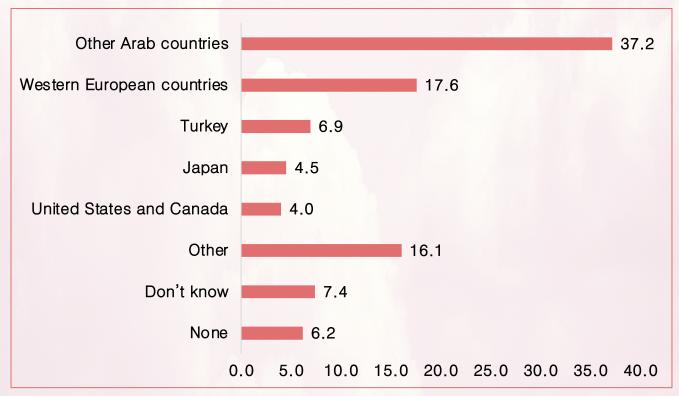


Figure 18: In your view, which country should be the closest cultural ally of your country?



"If there is one cause for events that will profoundly affect all human beings in all parts of the globe in the coming decades, it will be climate change. The consequences of this change will affect each of us, young or old, rich or poor. Maybe not at the same time or with the same intensity, but it will catch up with us all eventually." The words of Dr. Rula Tabbash, Specialist in Theoretical Physics of Elementary Particles, have been resonating in the MENA region recently. With youth increasingly taking part, and more often, leading climate action efforts around the region, the survey looked to gauge their thoughts on a variety of issues concerning the environment, climate change, and climate action.

#### THE ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

When discussing environmental protection policies, one of the main points raised by opponents is the importance to achieve economic growth, regardless of its impact on the environment. In a region where economic challenges have been reiterated as the main area of concern – as seen throughout this report, it was somewhat surprising to see that almost half the participants (49.8%) stated that protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs, while 40.1% stated that economic growth and job creation should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent.

Such figures show that people are aware of climate change and its implications, albeit achieving economic growth shifts the mindset of many. While half of the respondents were confident enough to sacrifice economic growth and employment opportunities, a decent 40.1% were not.

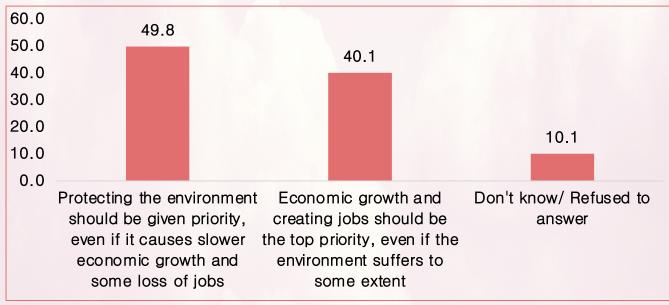


Figure 19: Here are two statements people sometimes make when discussing the environment and economic growth. Which of them comes closer to your own point of view?

#### CLIMATE CHANGE AND CLIMATE ACTION

When asked if the issue of climate change is important to them personally, an overwhelming majority (64.4%) of respondents stated that climate change was very important to them personally, followed by 26.5% who indicated that it was somewhat important. This shows a high level of awareness towards global issues and their impact at both the regional and even national levels.

On the other hand, only 6.8% indicated that climate change was not important to them, divided between 5.1% who stated that it was somewhat unimportant and 1.7% who indicated that it was not important at all. Overall, when calculating the mean score; the extent to which youth believe climate change is an issue of importune to them personally, the data yields a mean score of 3.49 out of 4 (87.25%), which translates between "very important" and "somewhat important".

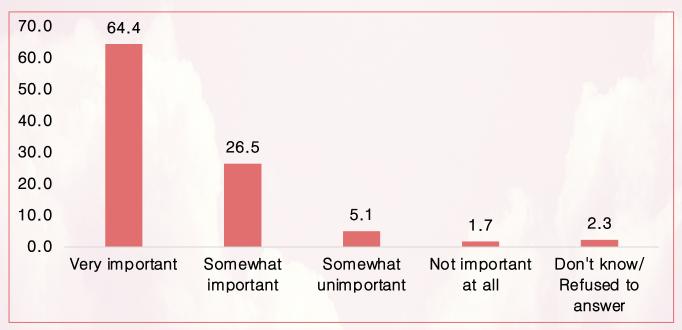


Figure 20: Reports from various organizations indicate that the MENA region is one of the most affected regions in the world by climate change – such as droughts, floods, wildfires, pollution, and food and water security. How important is the issue of climate change to you personally?

Following that, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they have ever taken, or regularly take, any actions out of concern for climate change. About 31.2% stated that they have taken or regularly take actions out of concern for climate change. In comparison to the percentage of those who indicated that climate change was an issue of importance to them personally, this is rather a small percentage than anticipated. At the same time, this could be attributed to a variety of reasons: (a) organized activism levels tend to be low in the region or (b) there might be a lack of opportunities for youth to engage in climate action.

Nevertheless, 49.6% of the respondents stated that they are becoming more interested in taking actions, which shows a tremendous level of civic responsibility, especially when combined with those who stated that they do take regular action. While civic responsibility is not entirely prevalent across the region, when given the chance, youth demonstrated that they are prepared and willing to take action on matters of interest for the general population.

On the other hand, only 12.8% stated that they do not take action out of concern for climate change nor are they interested. Such a low percentage is consistent with the low percentage of those who view climate change as unimportant issue to them personally.

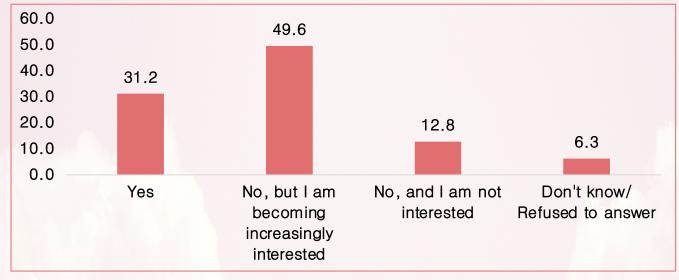


Figure 21: Have you ever taken, or do you regularly take, any action out of concern for climate change?

Following that, the survey asked the respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree with a number of statements concerning human behavior and the environment. First, when asked if having a car is part of having a good lifestyle, 37.8% stated that they strongly agree coupled with 38.7% who somewhat agreed. Due to the relatively subpar transportation systems in the region, a car is not only considered a sign of a decent life, but it also seen as integral to fulfilling life's daily duties. As a result, apart from switching to electric cars or hybrid cars with lower emission rates, youth are left with no other option to get from one place to another in the region. Therefore, collective action is a necessity if we were to counter the inevitability of climate change, and building effective public transpiration networks is one essential step.

When asked whether they would quit their jobs if they caused environmental damage, a combined two-thirds of the respondents agreed, reflecting a high level of awareness and a strong sense of civic responsibility. It would be difficult to place any blame against the 20.1% who somewhat disagreed and the 8.7% who strongly disagreed given the scarcity of job opportunities across the region.

The third and fourth statements focused on the role of human beings within nature, as the third one stated "humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs" and the fourth indicated "nature is strong enough to cope with the impact of modern industrial nations". A relatively high percentage of the respondents agreed – to various degrees, as 51.9% agreed with the third statement and 45.8% agreed with the fourth statement. Such a high level can be attributed to prevalent misconceptions along with low levels of education within this context.

The last statement gauged the respondents' intentions when it comes to making personal sacrifices for the sake of the environment. Only 7.9% stated that they strongly agree and 18.4% stated that they somewhat agree. While 42.6% strongly disagreed and 27.3% somewhat disagreed. This is generally consistent with the percentage of those who indicated that they take regular action out of concern for the environment, and in this context, they can be referred to as the custodians of the environment.

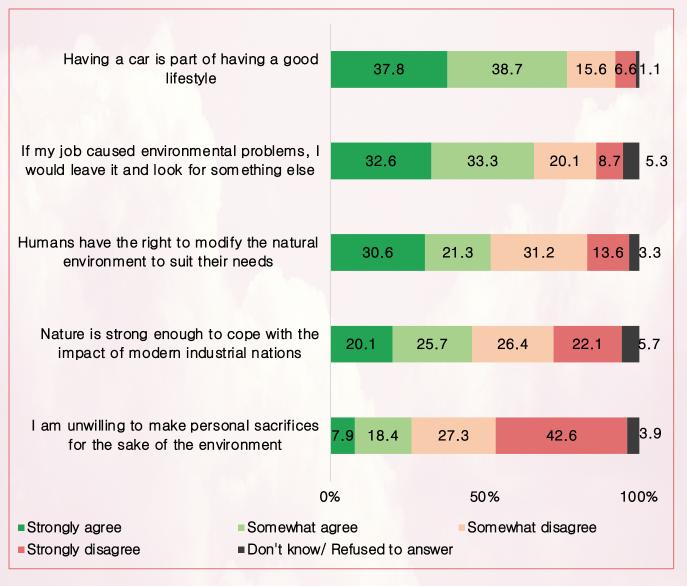


Figure 21: Have you ever taken, or do you regularly take, any action out of concern for climate change?

The final component of this study focused more on intentions within the context of climate action. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they would consider doing a variety of actions to protect the environment. As seen in the graph below, most respondents ranked between "will definitely do" and "might do" with an average score of 3.35 out of 4.

Turning off the lights when not in use ranked highest with an average score of 3.8, followed by 3.7 for buying energy efficient lightbulbs, 3.4 for both taking part in campaigns about environmental issues and recycling plastic, 3.2 for using public transportation, and 3.0 for buying organic food and walking or cycling to work. The significance of these results is that with the right campaigns that focus on these daily behaviors, a large portion of the public would be very willing to oblige.

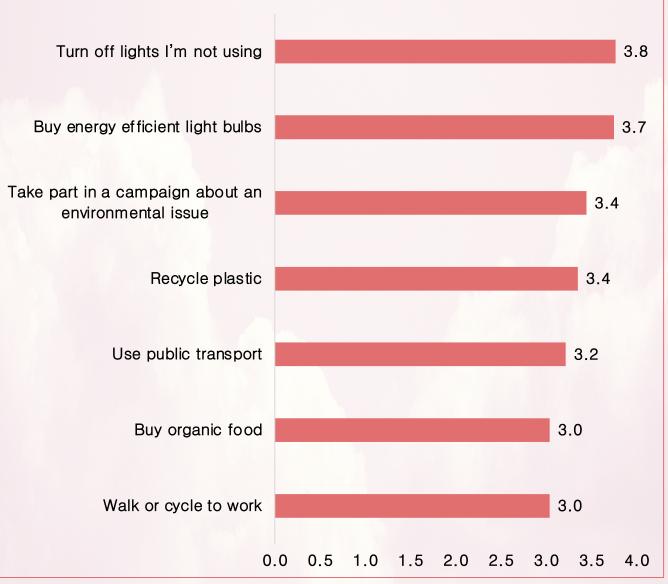


Figure 23: For each of the following, tell me to what extent would you consider doing that to protect the environment? [Mean scores; 4 = will definitely do and 1 = will definitely not do]



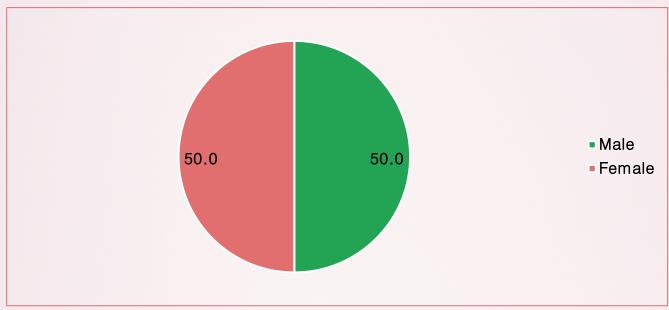


Figure 24: Gender

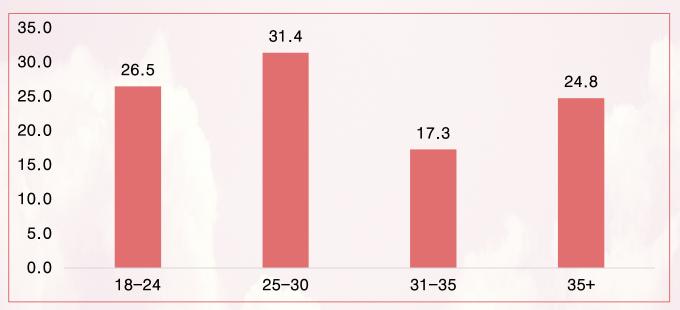


Figure 25: Age

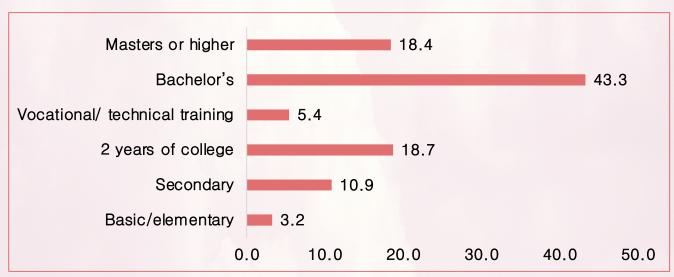


Figure 26: Level of Education

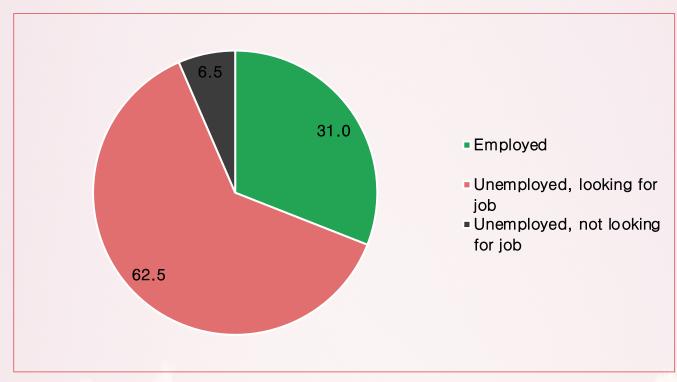


Figure 27: Employment Status



Figure 28: Country

#### **ABOUT MENAACTION**

MENAACTION, established by a group of young professionals from the MENA region, is a nonprofit organization designed to advocate for the rights of MENA youth. MENAACTION is for youth by youth, focusing on issues of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights. MENAACTION looks to build a vast network of young people in the region and MENA youth around the world. Our beneficiaries are primarily MENA relevant youth, policy makers, international organizations, and local civil society organizations. Our team brings a wide range of backgrounds including research, policy, advocacy, and media and journalism, and are fluent in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Amazigh, French, and English.

MENAACTION believes in the meaningful engagement of youth as stakeholders and active agents. As such, we utilize our network of peers around the world as our network of advocates, experts, and activists. They are provided with the space and opportunity to contribute our programs and activities through our online and offline presence. We compile their contributions and utilize them under our programs of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights. Such contributions will also inform our campaigns, and we will ultimately produce white papers and reports to be delivered to the relevant stakeholders, including decision makers.

MENAACTION is rooted in empowering voices in and from the Middle East and North Africa to lead efforts to incorporate youth in the region into policy and decision making. while expanding opportunities for youth involvement across society. Through a focus on youth and a combination of policy, advocacy, democracy, and human rights programs, MENAACTION provides a unique and distinct approach to addressing issues in the region. Our platform empowers not only young experts on the region, but also young experts from the region. Under our focus on policy, advocacy. democracy, and human rights.





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