

## The Downfall of Democracy Standards in the Arab World

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### ABSTRACT

The Arab Index has recently published his annual survey which is aimed at identifying the trends of Arab public opinion towards a range of economic, social and political issues, including public opinion attitudes towards democracy issues, and citizens' assessments of their general situation and the general conditions of their countries. This paper is concerned in examining to which extent do the Arab citizens feel this relationship between corruption and the level of public freedoms? Can it assess the level of democracy or the deterioration of freedoms in their countries? In the process of examining the results of the Arab Index, this paper found that the huge complains of corruption is not accompanied by a parallel complains of the absence of freedoms.

### INTRODUCTION

The authors of the Arab Index tried to show some bright aspects of the Arab societies in terms of improving the position on democracy, institutions, elections, religiosity and other freedoms (Arab Index, 2018). When this paper compared the results of this indicator with the results of Transparency International's Corruption Index and Freedom House's Global Freedom Index, it was found that the situation in the region is still considered dreadful, despite the little progress in citizen attitudes. The Corruption Index shows that the majority of the world has not made progress at all to end corruption, except that some have made slight progress (CPI, 2018). Significantly, the index of freedom is declining, indicating a decline in freedom around the world as a result of the rise of nationalists and populists ideologies in democratic countries, who pose a threat to global democracy. This paper will examine the relationship between corruption and the level of public freedom in the Arab world, and whether this relationship can assess the level of democracy or the deterioration of freedoms in the Middle East

### STATISTICAL ANALYSES

The Arab Index has relied on the prevalence of financial and administrative corruption in the Arab countries as one of the normative indicators that can contribute to the interpretation of the relationship between citizens and the state and in their assessment of the performance in the Arab countries. It can be noticed that there is a parallel increase between high rates of corruption and low freedoms. All Arab countries suffer from corruption; they all score less than 50 points on the corruption index except for the UAE and Qatar; this means that the Arab countries are under high corruption. In addition, the Freedom Index reported that the only country classified as a free country in the Arab world is Tunisia with a total score of 78 out of 100. Only five Arab countries were classified as partly free whereas the rest of the 14 were classified as non-free.

Some analyses for the indicators' results concluded that most countries with low levels of press protection and non-governmental organizations have the highest levels of corruption. Whereas the latter contributes to the restriction of civil society which it's considered a reflection on the level of democracy; this means there is a negative correlation between corruption and

the level of public freedoms. Countries with democratic regimes generally enjoyed relatively good rates on both indicators, far superior to other countries with undemocratic regimes.

The Global Freedom Index is based on two basic criteria: political rights and civil liberties, and a total score of zero to 10 per country. The Arab citizens have evaluated the level of democracy in their countries in the order as follows: Saudi Arabia (7.5), Kuwait (6.9), Jordan (6.2), Mauritania (5.9), Lebanon (5.8), Egypt (5.6) Tunisia (5.2), Morocco (5.1), Iraq (4.9), Palestine (4.7), and Sudan (3.7). The general average was 5.5; this means that the overall assessment of democracy is slightly above average; 55 percent of the respondents found that the freedoms were fully guaranteed or fairly guaranteed in their countries. This is contrary to the results of the Freedom Index, which states that most states are free or incomplete. Therefore, the results indicate that the Arab public's assessment of its freedoms is higher than the evaluation.

While Tunisia was at the top of the Arab countries as a free country with a score of 70, which is 10 times that of Saudi Arabia, the Tunisian assessment of democracy in their country was underestimated by the Saudis, whose country was found to be a non-free state with an estimated democracy of 7.5. This means that access to freedom supports democracy, and the more democratic the system is the more citizens enjoy a sense of criticism that helps them evaluate their reality. On the contrary, the more the citizens are oppressed, the more likely they will accept the corrupt conditions and consider it acceptable.

The Global Freedom Index report showed that the majority of respondents reported that citizens were unable to criticize the government without fear, despite their positive assessment of the level of democracy (Freedom House, 2018). How can freedoms be guaranteed? The report interpreted this result as being a practical issue while the evaluation to guarantee the freedoms is mixed between practical and conception issue. Hence, the Arab citizens do not have the basic conditions in order to be able to assess their situation accurately. This requires the adoption of additional objective means of measurement to assess the compatibility of the citizen's theoretical assessment the real situation and practical reality.

### **CONCLUSION**

It can be concluded that the Arab region understands democracy on a political basis based on guaranteeing political and civil liberties and a system of government that respects pluralism and the transfer of power. The index showed that the Arab citizen complains about the deterioration of the economic situation and that a large segment of the Arab families live in a state of destitution. This has made citizens believe that democracy contributes to the improvement of economic situation and safety. Although these two factors may exist in the most authoritarian regimes such as in China or a poor country such as Costa Rica where is enjoys democracy.

### **References**

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