

Andrea Teti, Gennaro Gervasio, & Pamela Abbott (2021) Perceptions of the EU: Activists and Public Opinion in the Middle East in *Routledge Handbook in EU-Middle East Relations* Edited By [Dimitris Bouris](#), [Daniela Huber](#), [Michelle Pace](#)

Introduction

The EU suffers from a poor reputation amongst populations and activists across its so-called ‘Southern Neighbourhood’. This reputation is due, among other things, to a mismatch between how the EU perceives itself and how people and activists perceive its actions and their consequences. While the EU believes its policies are rooted in and promote stability, security, and democracy, its actions are often perceived to have the opposite effect. To show how and why this is so, this chapter builds on existing analyses of the EU’s self-conception by ‘triangulating’ it both with evidence from interviews with activists and with public opinion polls.

This triangulation reveals the perception mismatch between EU and MENA populations and activists. In particular, the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has at its heart a procedural and formal understanding of democracy focusing on a narrow subset of civil-political rights, and assuming – despite decades-long failures – that ‘market liberalisation’ will produce both democratization and social justice (Teti, 2012b, 2015). Activists and populations, however, have more holistic and substantive conceptions of democracy, in which civil-political and socio-economic rights are inextricable. While the EU equates democracy with *liberal* democracy, regional populations see democracy in terms much closer to *social* democracy and, ironically, to the so-called ‘European Social Model’. This mismatch also helps explain why the EU is perceived not as a values-driven ‘normative power’, but as a cynically self-interested (Cebeci, 2019; Huber et al., 2018).

This chapter uses interviews with activists and survey data to return a picture of the way the EU is perceived. Qualitative sources like interviews and participant observations in Egypt – which in this respect is representative of broader regional dynamics and of the countries surveyed – are crucial to understand how activists and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) work, while survey data gauge public opinion overall. For this chapter, we use survey data for Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco from the Arab Barometer III (2013), the Arab Transformations (2014) and Arab Barometer IV (ABIV) (2016) surveys (for more information on the data sets and method see, Abbott et al., 2017).

The View from the EU

The EU sees itself as a ‘normative power’ (Manners, 2002) promoting democracy and human rights, and claims its policies take into account what people in its Southern Neighbourhood want (Pace, 2007, 2011; Pace and Seeberg, 2010; Teti, 2015; Teti et al., 2020). Indeed, support for democracy was the EU’s flagship theme in the post-Uprisings revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011, and still an important aspect after its security-centric 2015 revision (on the broader changes of EU foreign policy, see Schumacher and Bouris, 2017). For example, the Council called for “effective promotion of good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights” as these are “important for long-term stability” (Council of the European Union, 2015). Indeed, after the Uprisings the EU believed – as it had proclaimed ever since the 1991 Luxembourg Council and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership – that “the EU is seen as a model and an inspiration for people in the neighbourhood when it comes to the values that are the basis for the ENP — human rights, democracy, fundamental freedoms and prosperity and solidarity” (European Commission, 2013: 21). Prominent Commissioners publicly and repeatedly claimed as much. Enlargement and ENP Commissioner, Štefan Füle, declared: “The

peoples of this region have taken a courageous stand to defend their rights and to introduce democracy and social reforms. The EU must rise to the challenge” although “it has often focused too much on stability” despite the fact that “there can be no real stability without real democracy” (Füle, 2011: 1, SPEECH/11/436). External Action Service head Catherine Ashton stated equally clearly that “We want to be Tunisia’s strongest ally in their move towards democracy” (2011b) and, in Cairo, that “The EU stands ready to accompany the peaceful and orderly transition to a civilian and democratic government and to support Egyptian efforts to improve their economic situation and increase social cohesion” (2011a).

Despite the rhetorical centrality of democracy and of the ‘European Social Model’, close analyses of the corpus of EU strategy statements and policy documents betray remarkable continuity with the pre-2011 era, stretching back at least to the Barcelona Process (Teti et al., 2020). As before the Uprisings, the EU defined democracy in procedural terms prioritising civil-political rights directly connected with ‘free and fair elections’ over and above both other categories of civil-political rights – e.g. freedom of association and protest – and social, economic and cultural rights (Teti et al., 2020). Conversely, socio-economic rights are absent from EU narratives: socio-economic *issues* such as ‘inclusive growth’ are certainly present, and the EU recognises these are related to ‘societal resilience’, but these are presented as *issues*, not *rights*. While democracy is nearly always mentioned in conjunction with civil-political rights, socio-economic questions are nearly never presented as a matter of rights, but as outcomes of economic policy, and these texts *never* link socio-economic *rights* to democracy (Teti, 2015; Teti et al., 2020).

Finally, ‘conditionality’ is the instrument through which the EU supposedly writes its leverage into its formal agreements with Southern Neighbourhood countries, e.g. Association Agreements (e.g. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011). After the Uprisings, the EU said ‘negative conditionality’ – sanctions for not fulfilling human rights and democracy clauses in intergovernmental agreements – would be complemented by the ‘more-for-more’ principle, i.e. that countries meeting agreed expectations would be rewarded. Here, too, an analysis of pre-Uprisings policies shows that the EU already incorporated both elements in its policy repertoire despite never actually implementing them (Pace, 2007, 2014; Pace and Cavatorta, 2012; Teti, 2015; Teti et al., 2020).

Activists and Social Movements

Well before the Uprisings, activists from Egyptian and other Mediterranean Arab CSOs were critical of the EU’s conceptions of democracy vis-à-vis the MENA (e.g. Pace, 2010; Pace and Seeberg, 2010).¹ Not only did the EU’s relations with most authoritarian regimes in the Arab World oscillate between ‘very friendly’ to ‘strong support’, but to CSO activists there was a clear mismatch between EU pro-democracy policies and actual effect: regardless of rhetoric or intentions, the Union’s ‘democracy assistance’ *de facto* undermined it.

The promotion of private sector investment, for example, comes with attempts to dismantle welfare policies and undermine unionisation – e.g. importing agricultural labour, shift differentiation in factories, counter-unionisation legislation.² For activists, if EU policies are

¹ This section relies on semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation gathered between January 2009 and January 2016. Interviewees were selected as representative leaders and active members of some of Egypt’s principal CSOs which were pro-democracy, independent of the regime, and actively engaged in organisation and protest. Interviews were conducted and analysed by Gervasio in Arabic. Given the wealth of data, only representative quotes are reproduced here. Interviewees are anonymised for their security.

² Labour activist 1, Cairo, 12/01/2009.

counterproductive to democratization, this is because Western governments have other aims. The EU, in particular, is perceived as pursuing interests that “are primarily economic and commercial, so much so that a report of the Commission on Egypt, which was highly critical, was withdrawn as a consequence of the Egyptian government’s pressure.”³ Just how intensely the incompatibility between privatization and democratization is felt is evident from the words of a labour leader who claimed that by pressing for privatisations “the US and the EU create the very conditions which we have to fight against.”⁴

What emerges from interviews before and after the Arab Uprisings is a vision of the socio-economic and political conditions for democracy as inextricable. Orthodox scholarly and policy literature on democratization does not recognise this connection – even explicitly argues against (see Teti, 2012a). In addition, Western media, scholarship, and policy debates often presented protesters’ economic demands as separate – and often higher – priorities than political demands. However, from speaking to activists both before and after Egypt’s ‘January Revolution’ and from documents produced by groups across the left-liberal political spectrum, it is clear that these two dimensions are viewed as inseparable.

For instance, one of activists’ central concerns has always been poverty, and social justice generally. For most activists interviewed, socio-economic issues, however, are not simply questions of poverty or aid, they are inevitably political. They believe that without minimum socio-economic standards being achieved for all, political rights remain truncated both in principle and in the practical possibility of exercising them. Moreover, these socio-economic demands go to the heart of the economic system which the regime – under Mubarak first, and al-Sisi later –, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the EU support.⁵ Framing socio-economic issues as matters of *rights* beyond economic strategy effectively (*re*)*politicises* them. Activists employ language which reclaims those rights, thus pushing both regional governments and the EU to recognise their *obligation* to respect those rights, and placing a moral and political cost on violating them. By contrast, the EU’s discursive construction makes socio-economic outcomes matters of trade and aid, not rights, thereby withdrawing the moral and political leverage which comes with the EU having to respect those rights (Teti, 2015).

CSO leaders agreed in diagnosing a convergence of economic interests between these three actors – the Army, the Brotherhood, and the EU. One, for example, argued that in Egypt there had been extensive attempts by the private sector to dismantle the country’s meagre welfare net and undermine unionisation.⁶ Labour market ‘liberalisation’ continues to be demanded by structural adjustment programmes pushed by IFIs and by the EU with rationales closely connecting international trade and ‘inclusive’ economic growth. According to a labour leader “the US is mostly interested in the creation of free trade areas, bilateral trade agreements etc. which favour Egyptian businessmen” while “the EU is most interested in the Association Agreement [which] is inspired by pure market and commercial rationales, that is to say

³ Feminist activist 1, Cairo, 14/01/2009.

⁴ Labour activist 2, Cairo, 13/01/2009. Similar sentiments were expressed by labour activist 1 and Labour activist 3, amongst others.

⁵ The Brotherhood’s inclusion in this list was stressed by most activists, who argued that its economic programme is neo-liberal, and that workers know this well, because the ‘pious bourgeoisie’ – which owns many private enterprises and votes for the Brotherhood – does not support strikes and does not favour change (*taghyir*) in work protection.

⁶ Labour activist 1, Cairo, 12/01/2009.

[rationales] of exploitation.”⁷ This in turn, translated into political pressure, both on/in Egypt, and internationally.

Most importantly, CSO leaders argued that the connection between the economic and the political – and between civil-political and socio-economic rights – is inextricable, not least in relation to democratization:

“When US pressure for democratisation eased, neither the EU nor its Member States maintained it, on the contrary, embassies put very strong pressure on the government, even more than the US, to carry out privatisations. But *while [the privatisation of] gas, water, electricity, etc. are considered ‘services’ in the West, they are human rights here.*”⁸

It is not infrequent to see arguments that the Uprisings were driven by economic demands and that these were more important to protesters than democracy (Hanieh, 2013; Joya, 2011; Pace and Cavatorta, 2012; Sika, 2012; Springborg, 2011). These interpretations assume it is possible to separate the economic from the political and contradict activists’ own accounts of their political programme and conception of democracy. In this respect, it is important to emphasise that, as several activists stated, the call for social justice does not entail placing socio-economic rights and conditions *above* civil-political ones, but that these are reciprocally necessary and inextricable both in principle and in practice for democracy to be possible. Indeed, activists stated explicitly that civil-political rights were crucial for democracy, reprimanding both the Egyptian regime and the EU for being ready to support “easy” rights such as the right to vote, but reluctant to seriously support what they called the “difficult rights” – freedom of association, of protest, etc.

The dramatic trajectory of Egypt’s ‘January Revolution’ itself demonstrates that activists’ conception was more in line with the wider people’s demands than with the EU’s conception of democracy and transitions towards it.⁹ This conception – and the political programme it implied – was equally clearly at odds with the ‘road to democracy’ chosen by post-Uprising regimes and *de facto* supported by the EU, namely, first, the alliance between the Military and the Muslim Brotherhood, which lasted until July 2013, and the Military-driven government since then. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the first government which emerged after the July 3rd, 2013 coup included Kamal Abu Eita, a well-known labour leader who headed one of the two independent trade union organisations formally established – though in practice already operating since the late 2000s – after the 2011 Uprising. However, rather than acknowledging the importance of activists’ perception of democracy and the degree to which their demands reflected the wider population’s, this appointment successfully co-opted a powerful alternative vision of democracy and an emerging political actor, neutralising both.¹⁰

After the coup, the EU accepted the new regime’s neutralisation of the political and economic agenda which people demanded, and which labour activists represented. This is certainly a missed opportunity to rein in the combination of socio-economic polarisation and political repression – the hallmark of the Mubarak regime which had driven people to revolt.

⁷ Interview with Labour activist 5, Helwan, 15/01/2009.

⁸ Interview with Labour activist 2, Cairo, 13/01/2009; emphasis added.

⁹ Interviews with Human Rights Activist, Cairo, 01/08/2012; Feminist Activist 2, Cairo, 16/06/2012. See also Gervasio and Teti (2014).

¹⁰ Labour activist 6, Cairo, 18/01/2014; Labour Activist 2, Cairo, 06/02/2014. See also Alexander and Bassiouni (2014).

Perceptions of The Uprisings, Democracy and the EU

Public opinion data on people's conception of democracy shows respondents value civil-political rights and the procedural aspects of democracy, but also social justice and socio-economic rights (Teti et al., 2019, 2020). As noted above, despite its rhetoric of a 'European Social Model', itself very close to preferences displayed by public opinion in MENA states included here, the EU actually frames its policies in terms of a procedural and market-driven conception of democracy leaving little space for social justice. This section uses survey data to outline first, what priorities people have in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, and secondly, how the EU is perceived. Contrasting these perceptions with activists' narratives identifies areas where activists reflect public sentiment and those where they would find their positions unsupported, as well as areas in which the EU is failing to meet people's and activists' expectations in each of the region's countries considered here.

2 *What do 'The People' Want? Drivers of the Arab Uprisings*

During the Uprisings, the EU admitted it had failed to understand and respond to people's aspirations, and claimed it would support them thenceforth. But what the EU believed people wanted was *liberal* democracy – what it called 'deep democracy': civil and political rights, 'clean government', free and fair elections – and while recognising people were concerned about social injustice, it remained wedded to the idea that 'inclusive growth' could be delivered by neoliberal growth policies which had previously failed – blaming that failure on poor governance, lack of democracy, or poor implementation.

People in the 'Southern Neighbourhood', however, have a different understanding of the Uprisings' causes and of what should change in their countries. Along with economic problems, corruption is nearly uniformly perceived as the most significant blight: people indicate corruption as the most important priority for their country, as prime driver of the Uprisings, as a key characteristic of democracy, they perceive it to be nearly ubiquitous, and say their governments have done little to tackle it since the Uprisings (Sapsford et al., 2019). For example, asked to nominate the two main challenges facing their countries in 2011, when the Uprisings were in full flow, the economic situation was by far most frequently nominated (over 80% in Egypt and Jordan, over 70% in Tunisia). In Tunisia, 22% nominated democratisation, but this is still less than a third of those nominating the economy. Both internal security (nominated by 49% in Egypt, 20% in Jordan, 30% in Tunisia) and corruption (Egypt: 23%, Jordan: 27%; Tunisia: 33%) were more frequently nominated than advancing democracy.

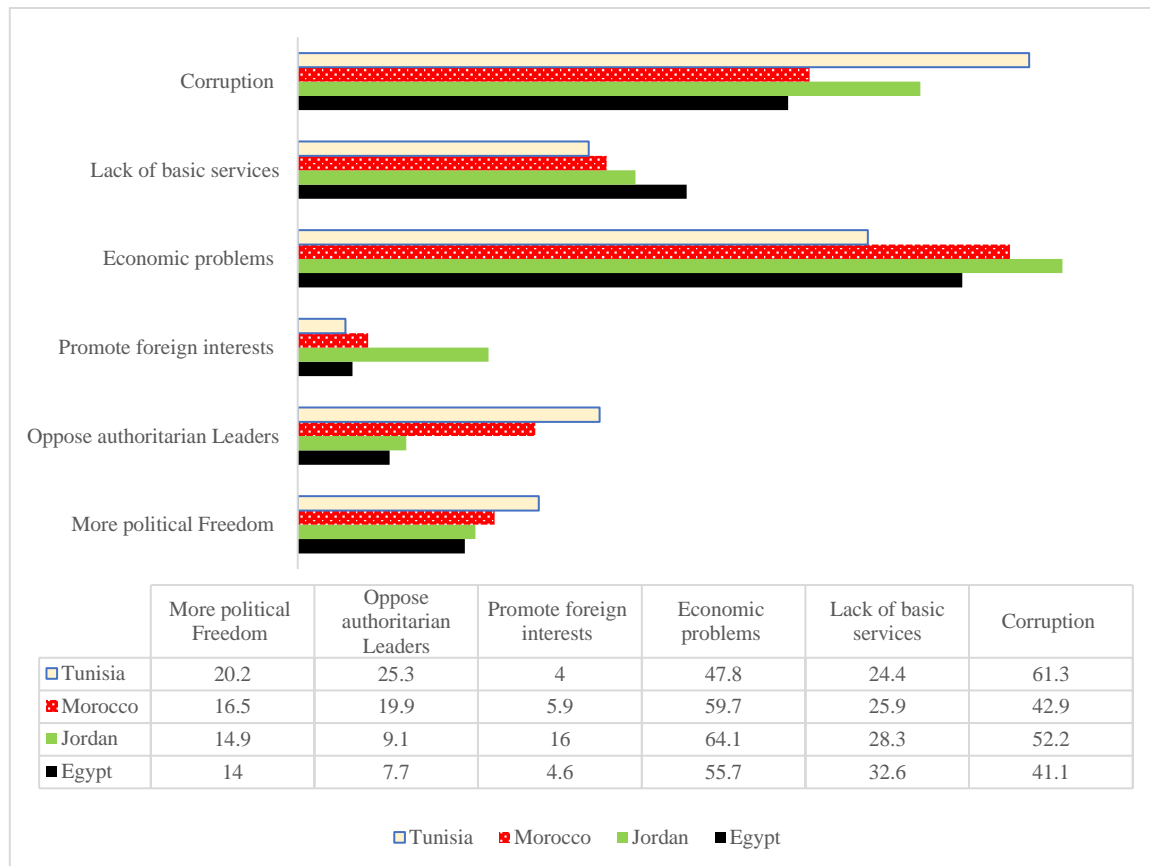
These results give rise to two common misconceptions: first, that they suggest that the general public in Arab countries cares less about democracy than they do about jobs and welfare; second, that corruption is a merely technical problem. While respondents do prioritise social justice over civil-political aspects of democracy – a significantly smaller proportion nominate either political freedoms or opposing authoritarianism¹¹ as key aspects of democracy or national priorities (Figure 1) – one cannot conclude that this reflects a disregard for democracy itself, as opposed to, for example, a distrust of political elites who for decades have covered authoritarianism with a fig leaf of holding regular elections.

Secondly, it is crucial to consider the full import of corruption as a national priority, as a driver of the Uprisings, and as one of the key characteristics of democracy. Corruption by its nature is both political and economic, and endemic corruption by definition is inextricable from the

¹¹ Asked a comparable question in 2011, when the Uprisings were ongoing, the responses were much the same (see Teti et al., 2018)

social, economic and political systems people revolted against. In this sense, the ‘regime’ referred to in the chant *ash-sha ‘b yureed isqaat an-nizaam* (the people demand the downfall of the regime) is also a ‘system’ of hierarchies and exclusions embodied by corruption. To call for an end to corruption is to call for the end of the system as a whole, not merely technical judicial-policing reform.

Fig. 1: Main drivers of the uprisings (“the two most important reasons”), %

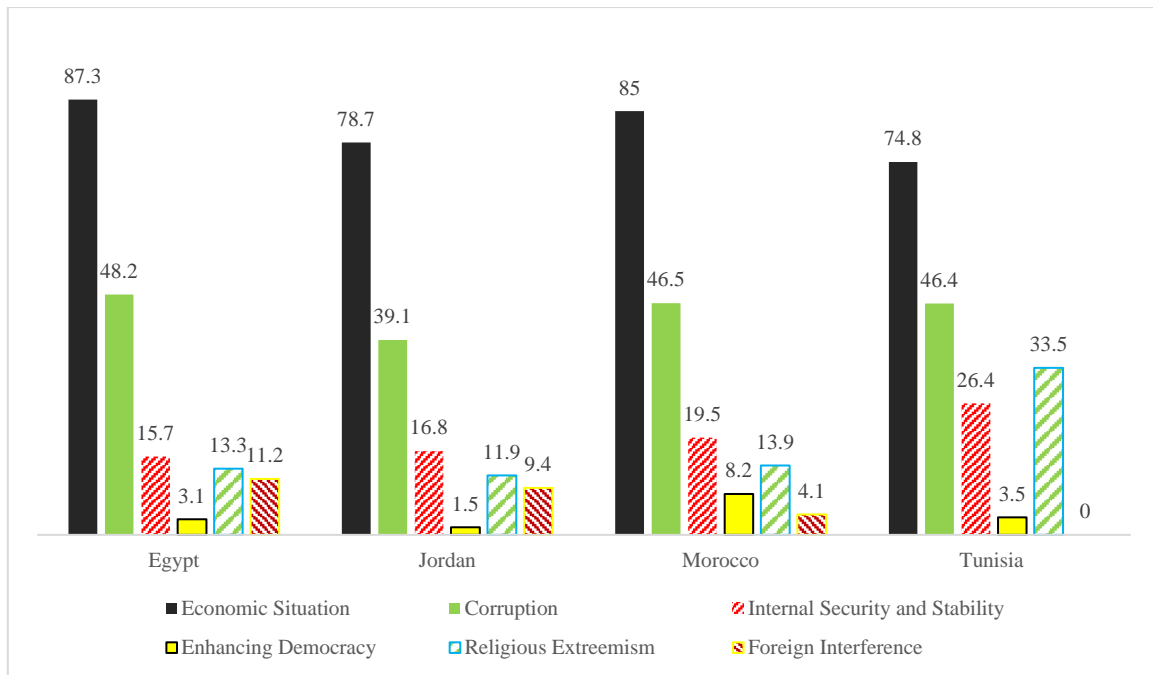


Source: AT2014

Note: Egypt is the only country which has substantial numbers recorded as ‘other’ or ‘DK’: ‘other’ – Egypt 11%, Jordan 0, Morocco 2%, Tunisia 0.2%; ‘DK’ - ‘other’ – Egypt 16%, Jordan 3%, Morocco 7%, Tunisia 0.5%;

By 2016, the situation remained unchanged: economic issues were the most frequently nominated challenge across all four countries, with corruption a clear second, and enhancing democracy nominated by less than 5% (Figure 2). This is consistent with the possibility that respondents are not necessarily inimical to the civil-political aspects of democracy, but that the socio-economic aspects are more pressing, particularly in the face of a political elite which frequently promised and failed to deliver both civil-political and socio-economic dimensions of democracy.

Fig. 2: Main challenges facing their country in 2016 (“the two most important challenges”), %



Source: ABIV

3 Support for Democracy

The fact that respondents do not reject democracy is evident in a series of relevant questions in several different surveys and at different times, including the ArabBarometer (III, IV) and Arab Transformations surveys.

Indeed, there *is* strong support for democracy. Asked if despite its faults democracy is the best system of government, a clear majority agreed it was (61% in Egypt,¹² 78% in Tunisia, 80% in Morocco, to 90% in Jordan; AT2014). Support for democracy was also strong when respondents are given a description of democracy: 65% of Jordanians, 76% of Egyptians, 77% of Moroccans, and 78% of Tunisians approve of democracy, whereas they do not approve of authoritarian government (ABIII 2013). These results show respondents approve of democracy, and that they have a shared understanding of the civil and political characteristics involved – those which the EU refers to as ‘deep democracy’.

Survey data suggests there is a complex relationship between people’s perceptions of the relationship between democracy and economic performance (Teti et al., 2020) (Figure 6.3). For example, in Tunisia – the one post-Uprisings government that began transformation towards democracy – over 40% of respondents agree that in general democracies’ economic performance was weak, and over two-thirds that democracies are not effective at maintaining order and stability. Tunisians strongly support democracy in principle, so this is likely due to Tunisian governments’ poor performance on employment creation, inclusive development and security since 2011 (Teti et al., 2018).

¹² A third of respondents said they did not know. Given the survey was carried out less than a year after a democratically elected government was overthrown in a military coup that had some public support, it is possible that some people were hesitant about democracy. Certainly, in earlier rounds of the AB and WVS Egyptians’ support for democracy had been as high as or even higher than the support in the other countries. The question was not asked in Egypt in ABIV.

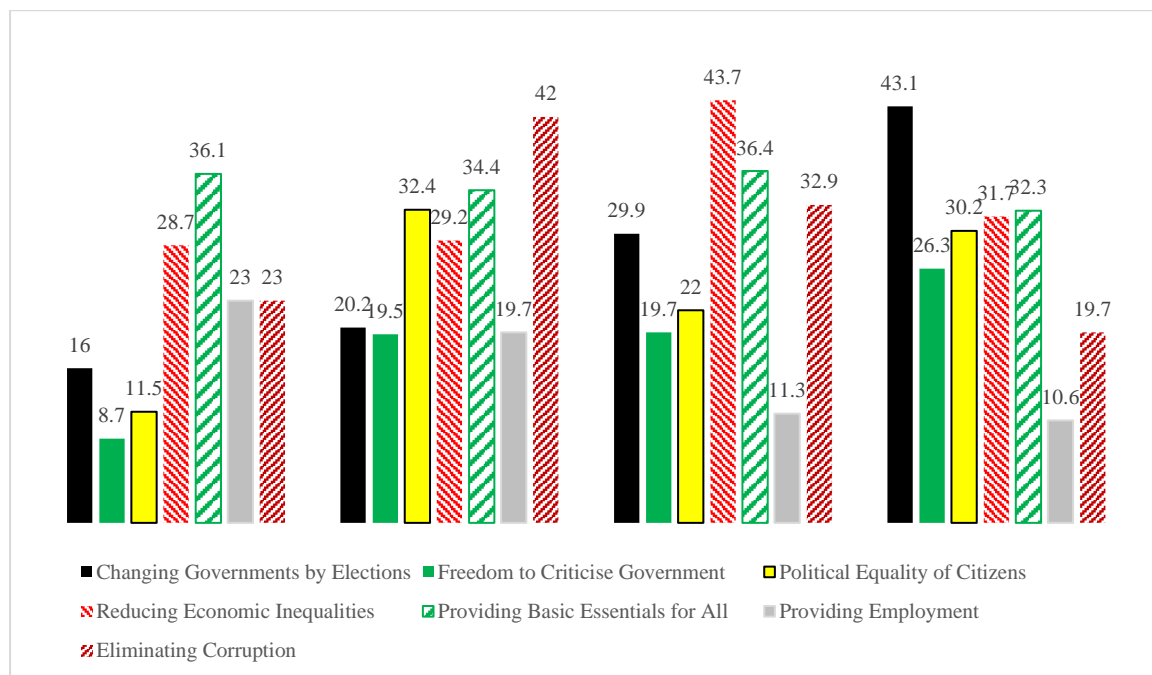
That said, on balance, respondents are more likely to see it as appropriate, and more likely that citizens are more ready than not for democracy: 75% in Morocco, 69% in Jordan, 67% in Egypt, and 56% in Tunisia.

4 What Type of Democracy Do 'The People' Want?

In brief, people do not share the EU's assumption that the Uprisings were motivated by a desire for *liberal* democracy, or that 'market democratisation' produces inclusive economic growth.

Answers to a question in the AT survey asking people to nominate democracy's two most important characteristics show respondents placed more emphasis on democracy being distributionally fair (tackling corruption and economic security) and less emphasis on formal political aspects like elections – again, perhaps unsurprising given many authoritarian regimes' rhetorical equation of 'democracy' with elections, which certainly are not free. This prioritisation is evident from other data: taking elections and freedom to criticise government as indicators of liberal democracy, only in Tunisia did a majority of citizens (60%) nominate one or both as one of the two essential characteristics of democracy in 2014; less than half did so in Egypt (21%), Morocco (43%), and Jordan (37%). Moreover, of those who nominated two main characteristics, only 3.9% of Egyptians, 2.4% of Jordanians, 5.2% of Moroccans and 5.5% of Tunisians named *both* changing governments through elections *and* freedom to criticise government, meaning that the vast majority of citizens mentioned at least one characteristic of democracy focused on social or economic factors and rights.

Figure 3: Two most important characteristics of democracy



Source: AT2014

Similarly, people prioritise social justice and the reduction of inequalities: a relatively large majority prioritised 'narrowing the gap between rich and poor' or 'government not wasting public money' over 'choosing government leaders in free and fair elections' and 'express[ing] political views openly': 67% in Egypt, 85% in Jordan, 64% in Morocco, 63% in Tunisia. Moreover, most people prioritised 'basic necessities provided for all' and 'government providing quality public services' over 'legislature having oversight over the government' and

‘people being free to organise into political parties’: 86% in Egypt, 74% in Jordan, 76% in Morocco, 83% in Tunisia (ABIV 2016).

This shows citizens’ deep concern for social justice. But it would be wrong to conclude citizens do not value civil-political rights. The vast majority of citizens in each country in 2013 supported freedom of the press, of expression, and of association being guaranteed in the Constitution (Egypt 88.8%, Jordan 86.5%, Morocco 86.3%, Tunisia 85.1%).

The EU is not wrong that people want democracy and have a shared understanding that it requires civil-political rights. The difference lies with what *else* democracy should guarantee. What the EU sees people as wanting – and the conception of democracy framing its foreign policy – fails to capture what the region’s people associate democracy with. The results above, replicated in all major surveys, indicate citizens have a more holistic understanding of democracy, which also includes socio-economic rights, and governments which are corruption-free, obey the rule of the law, and respond to citizens’ priorities. However, over two decades of market-oriented reforms favoured by Western power and IFIs, dressed in the garments of electoral democracy, have failed to facilitate this kind of democracy.

5 *The EU’s Regional Reputation*

Since the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, the EU has aimed to create a group of friendly countries on its Southern boundary shaped in the EU’s own self-image: peaceful coexistence and economic integration built on market liberalisation and, in due course, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance (Cebeci and Schumacher, 2017; Teti et al., 2020; Zielonka, 2013). In the post-Uprisings ENP, ‘deep democracy’ represented a programme of reforms which would not only further a set of ‘fundamental values’ – democracy, human rights – but that would also achieve geoeconomic and geopolitical objectives, which the EU admitted had been pursued in counterproductive ways before 2011 (e.g. Füle, 2011b).

The 2014 AT survey includes questions on people’s perceptions of that international environment which the EU wished to mould in its own self-image. Responses suggest people see it as unstable and insecure, and that the domestic environment was also felt to be insecure. People perceive foreign governments as causes of this instability (Teti et al., 2020). Asked to say which states contributed to regional (in)stability in 2014, albeit often ranking below the USA, Iran, Turkey, Israel or Russia, over a third of Egyptians and nearly half of Jordanians saw the EU as a *destabilising* force, and somewhat fewer – nearly 1 in 10 – in Morocco and Tunisia, despite the high levels of investment and aid the EU channels there. However, when asked in 2016 which country from nine options among the region’s and the world’s international actors posed the greatest threat to the stability of respondents’ countries specifically, the EU was mentioned by fewer than 1% of respondents in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco, and only 3% in Tunisia (AB IV). This suggests the EU is perceived as a negative force, but not a primary threat.

6 *Attitudes to Democracy Promotion*

The EU promotes democratisation in four ways: *dialogues with governments* (since 2011, these involve CSO representatives by consulting them before meeting governments); *socialisation* through person-to-person encounters (students and business people); *funding* CSOs working on democratisation, good governance, rule of law, or human rights; and *political conditionality*, intended to incentivise reform: more money, mobility, and market access reward increased progress, while reductions are the sanction for not doing so – at least, were the Union willing to pursue these.

Regardless of its intentions, survey questions on the promotion of democracy suggest the EU has little credibility as a normative power (Figure 4). Only a minority of citizens think the EU has had a positive impact on the promotion or facilitation of democratic transitions: 17% in Egypt, 23% in Jordan, 38% in Morocco, and 43% in Tunisia. Furthermore, in Egypt and Jordan more citizens thought the negative impact of the EU outweighed positive aspects (31% in Egypt, 27% in Jordan).

Figure 4: Attitudes to Economic Relations with the EU, USA, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey



Source ABIV

EU (and US) democracy promotion activities are not seen positively, and neither is seen as significantly better than the other. This is consistent with the fact that the policies these actors promote are at odds with citizens' conceptions of democracy, although it is possible that these answers are given as proxies for a general opinion of these actors interfering in internal affairs.

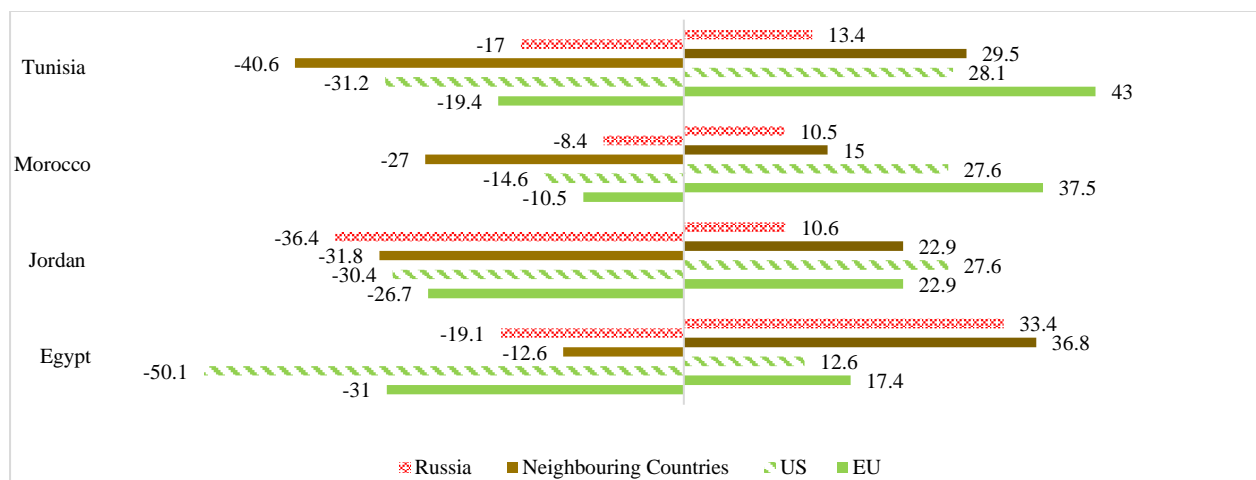
7 Attitudes to Conditionality and Foreign Influence

Respondents, with the partial exception of Morocco, think foreign interference in their countries' internal affairs is a barrier to domestic reform. Citizens are also far from convinced that external demands for reform are acceptable. This suggests doubts concerning the extent to which people might find political conditionality acceptable, in line with their rejection of Western powers interfering in their countries' internal affairs.

However, two results contradict this expectation. First, ABI III data shows only in Tunisia a majority (56%) think foreign demands for reform are always unacceptable whether in principle or because they harm national interests. In Morocco, a majority (54%) think that external demands for reform are acceptable or acceptable with conditions. In Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia a noticeable minority agree that foreign demands for reform can be acceptable – including those with conditions – ranging from just over a third in Egypt and Tunisia to 43% in Jordan (ABIII).

Secondly, these figures suggest that citizens might support external demands for reform if conditionality or external interference were compatible with people's priorities – e.g. supporting social justice by reducing inequality, increasing employment and job quality, etc. In addition, while foreign governments are perceived by and large to contribute to regional instability, it is domestic governments which people perceive as responsible for the inequalities, corruption and repression which so concern them: external pressure directed at improving social inequalities might find an audience.

Figure 5: Influence of External Actors on the Development of Democracy, %Positive and %Negative



Source: AB IV 2016

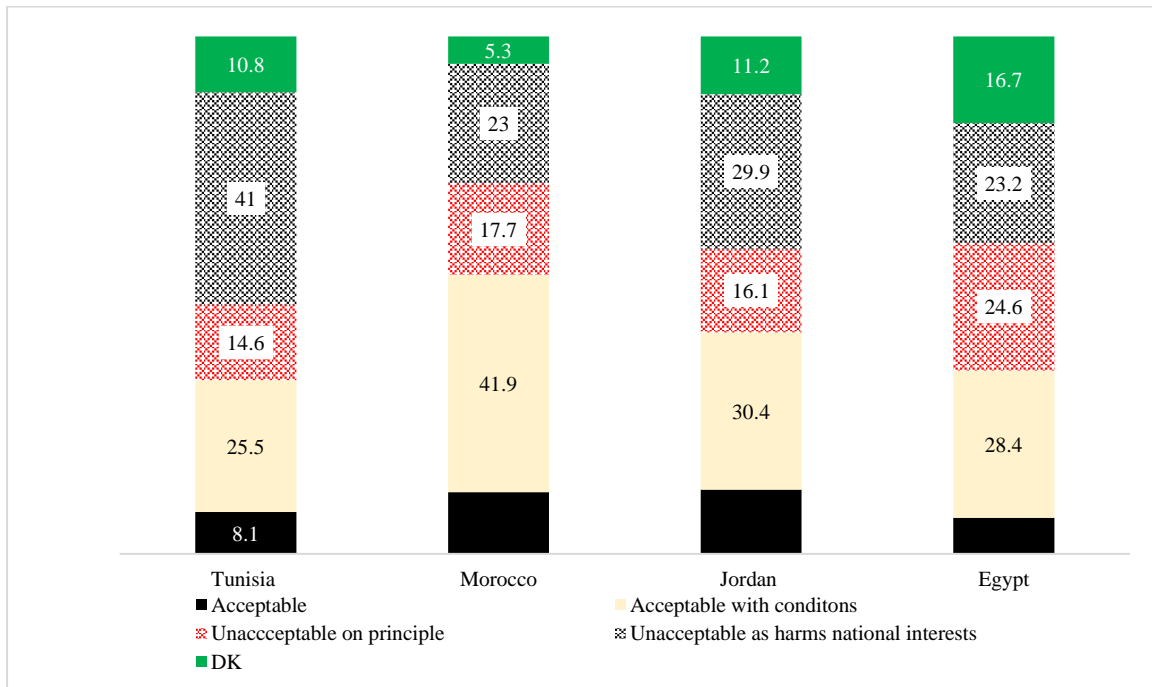
Notes:

1. % neutral. **Egypt:** EU 22.8%, US 14.2%, neighbouring countries 27.5%, Russia 20.4%. **Jordan:** EU 40.6%, US 34.1%, neighbouring countries 39.1%, Russia 42.5%. **Morocco:** EU 31.3, US 30.3, neighbouring countries 39.7%, Russia 45%. **Tunisia:** EU 24.1%, US 26.2%, neighbouring countries 22.9%, Russia 40.6%.
2. % missing values. **Egypt:** EU 28.7%, US 23.2%, neighbouring countries 23.1%, Russia 27.1%. **Jordan:** EU 9.0%, US 8.0%, neighbouring countries 6.3%, Russia 10%. **Morocco:** EU 20.7, US 27.8%, neighbouring countries 18.4%, Russia 36.2%. **Tunisia:** EU 13.6%, US 14.6, neighbouring countries 7.0%, Russia 29%.

It is noticeable that Tunisia – the one country that began a tentative transformation towards democracy – is more negative about foreign demands for reform than the other three and, with Egypt, the country that thought interference from Western countries was an obstacle to domestic reform. Of our four countries, Tunisia is the one that *has* been particularly concerned about foreign demands for neoliberal economic reforms since 2011 – reforms which resulted in *more* unemployment rather than creating the jobs Tunisians want. We can only speculate which policies and interference citizens have in mind when answering, but it seems reasonable

to assume that they are likely to be influenced by their country’s experiences of external demands for reform.

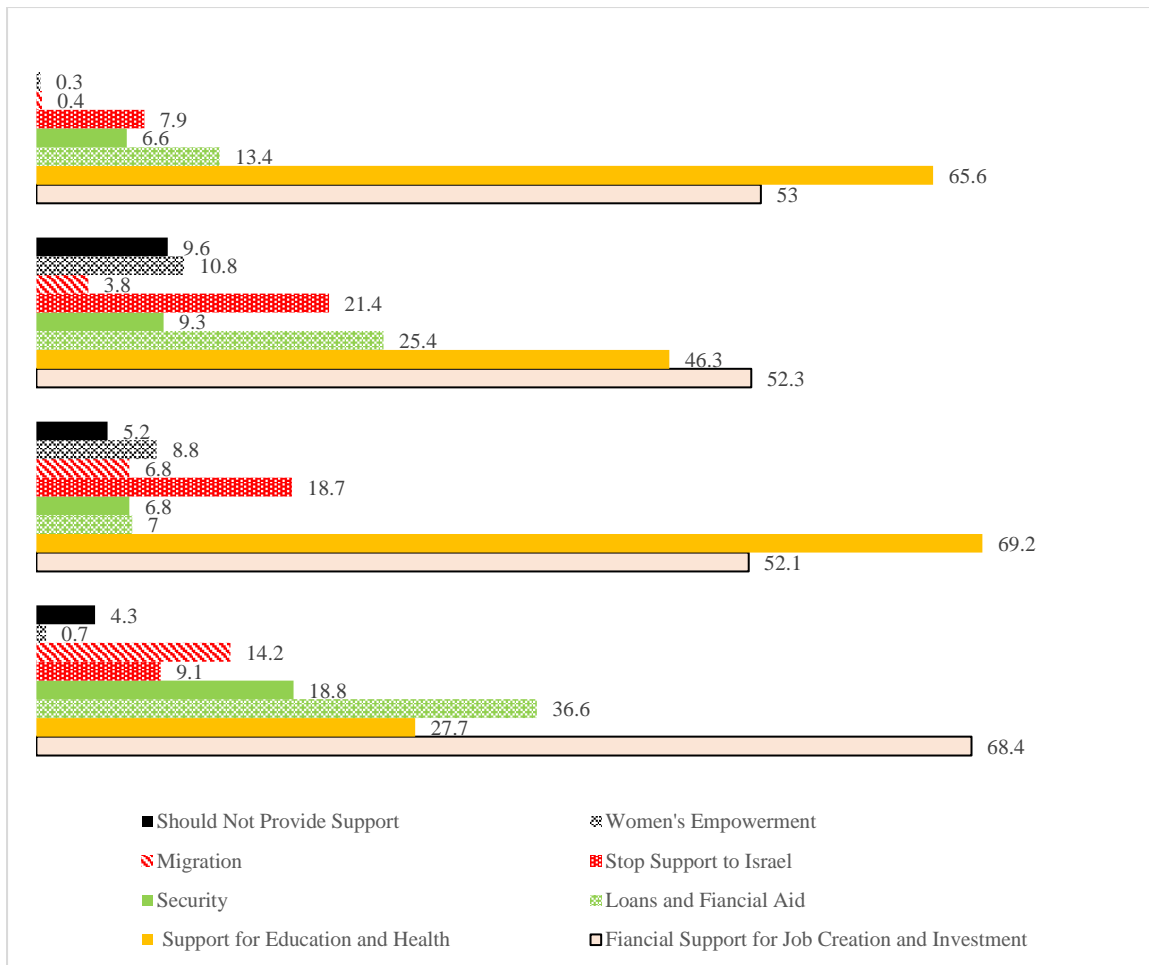
Figure 6: Acceptability of External Demands for Reform



Source: ABIII 2013

Moreover, few citizens think foreign interference is one of the two *most serious* challenges facing their country, varying from a ‘high’ of 11% in Egypt to a low of 4% in Morocco: while respondents have a negative perception of the EU’s influence, they do not accept that ‘foreign fingers’ pose a challenge to the survival of their respective countries.

Figure 7: Kind of Support EU Should (Respondents Nominated Up to Two Ways), %



Source: AT 2014.

Note: missing values Egypt 17.8; Jordan 2.2; Morocco 5.5; Tunisia 2.4

Conclusions

What emerges from a comparison of the EU's self-narrative, activist narratives, and public opinion data is a mismatch between the kind of democracy the EU wishes to promote and what kind of democracy people and activists want. Neither people nor activists want the EU's brand of procedural democracy if it comes *without* social justice: democracy must, in their view, deliver both civil-political *and* socio-economic rights. This mismatch is at the heart of the EU's inability to be perceived as a 'normative power' and its poor reputation in the region. This mismatch also suggests an important source of 'blowback': the EU's foreign policy, while aiming to achieve security, stability, prosperity and democracy, actually undermines them.

That said, survey data suggests that there exists a possibility for EU action to be simultaneously self-interested, 'normative', *and* facilitate democratic transition and regional stabilisation: People are positive about economic relations with the EU, and since citizens who are more positive about economic relations are also more positive about the EU's role in democracy promotion, they may be willing to accept external influence *if* it reflects what they perceive as national priorities, namely reducing socio-economic inequalities and tackling corruption. Designing its 'external action' to truly respond to populations' priorities may pave the way for the making and implementation of EU normative power. However, until it does so, it cannot be surprising that the EU is seen as complicit in creating the very conditions against which protesters revolted in 2011.

References

Data Sets

(AB III) Arab Barometer III. Available at: <http://www.arabbarometer.org/waves/arab-barometer-wave-iii/>

(AB IV) Arab Barometer IV. Available at: <http://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/>

(AT) Arab Transformations. Available at: <https://abdn.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/arab-transformations-survey-data>

Other:

Abbott P, Sapsford R, Dièz-Nicloás J, et al. (2017) *The Methods Handbook for the Political and Social Transformations in the Arab World Project*. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.

Alexander A and Mostafa B (2014) *Bread, Freedom, Social Justice: Workers and the Egyptian Revolution*. London: Zed Books.

Ashton C (2011a) Remarks by HR/VP Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit to Egypt, SPEECH/11/117. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_11_117 (accessed 17 January 2020).

Ashton C (2011b) Remarks by the High Representative/ Vice President Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit to Tunisia, 14 February 2011, SPEECH/11/101. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_11_101.

Cebeci M (2019) *Problematizing Effectiveness and Potential of EU Policies in the Mediterranean*. Rome: MEDRESET.

Cebeci M and Schumacher T (2017) *The EU's Constructions of the Mediterranean (2003-2017)*. MEDRESET Working Paper No 3. Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali.

Council of the European Union (2015) Council Conclusions on the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015 - 2019. 10897/15. Brussels: Council of the European Union.

European Commission (2013) *European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a Stronger Partnership JOIN(2013)4*. Brussels: EC/HCEU.

Füle Š (2011a) *Revolutionising the European Neighbourhood Policy in Response to the Mediterranean Revolutions*. In: *Round table discussion organised by Members of the European Parliament*, Brussels, 2011. European Union.

Füle Š (2011b) *Speech on the recent events in North Africa*, SPEECH/11/130. Brussels: European Commission.

Gervasio G and Teti A (2014) *Civic Activism and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution*. In: Gervasio G, Anceschi L, and Teti A (eds) *Informal Geographies of Power in the Middle East*. London: Routledge, pp. 55–70.

Hanieh A (2013) *Linages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Huber D, Nouria A and Paciello MC (2018) *The Mediterranean: A Space of Division, Disparity and Separation*. MEDRESET Policy Paper 3.

- Joya A (2011) The Egyptian revolution: crisis of neoliberalism and the potential for democratic politics. *Review of African Political Economy* 38(129): 367–386.
- Lavenex S and Schimmelfennig F (2011) EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance? *Democratization*. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13510347.2011.584730> (accessed 12 June 2015).
- Manners I (2002) Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(2): 235–58.
- Pace M (2007) Norm Shifting from EMP to ENP: The EU as a Norm Entrepreneur in the South? *Cambridge review of international affairs*.
- Pace M (2010) Interrogating the European Union’s Democracy Promotion Agenda: Discursive Configurations of ‘Democracy’ from the Middle East. *European Foreign Affairs Review* 15(5): 611–628.
- Pace M (2011) Liberal or Social Democracy?: Aspect Dawning in the EU’s Democracy Promotion Agenda in the Middle East. *International Journal of Human Rights* 15(6): 801–812.
- Pace M (2014) The EU’s Interpretation of the ‘Arab Uprisings’: Understanding the Different Visions about Democratic Change in EU-MENA Relations. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52(5): 969–984.
- Pace M and Cavatorta F (2012) The Arab Uprisings in Theoretical Perspective – An Introduction. *Mediterranean Politics* 17(2): 125–138.
- Pace M and Seeberg P (2010) *The European Union’s Democratization Agenda in the Meditterrean*. London: Routledge.
- Sapsford R, Tsourapas G, Abbott P, et al. (2019) Corruption, Trust, Inclusion and Cohesion in North Africa and the Middle East. *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 14(1). Applied Research in Quality of Life: 1–21.
- Schumacher T and Bouris D (2017) The 2011 Revised European Neighbourhood Policy: Continuity and Change in EU Foreign Policy. In: *The Revised European Neighbourhood Policy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 1–33.
- Sika N (2012) *The Political Economy of Arab Uprisings*. Barcelona.
- Springborg R (2011) The precarious economics of Arab springs. *Survival* 53(6). Routledge: 85–104.
- Teti A (2012a) Beyond Lies the Wub : The Challenges of Post-democratization. *Middle East Critique* 21(1): 5–24.
- Teti A (2012b) The EU’s First Response to the ‘Arab Spring’: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity. *Mediterranean Politics* 17(3): 266–284.
- Teti A (2015) Democracy Without Social Justice: Marginalization of Social and Economic Rights in EU Democracy Assistance Policy after the Arab Uprisings. *Middle East Critique* 24(1). Routledge: 9–25.
- Teti A, Abbott P and Cavatorta F (2018) *The Arab Uprisings in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia: Social, Political and Economic Transformations*. London: Palgrave.
- Teti A, Abbott P and Cavatorta F (2019) Beyond elections: perceptions of democracy in four

Arab countries. *Democratization* 26(4): 645–665.

Teti A, Abbott P, Talbot V, et al. (2020) *Democratisation against Democracy: How EU Foreign Policy Fails the Middle East*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zielonka J (2013) Europe's New Civilizing Missions: the EU's Normative Power Discourse. *Journal of Political Ideologies* 18(1): 35–55.