THE MIDDLE EAST
A REGION DIVIDED
THE ARAB YOUTH SURVEY 2017 IS DEDICATED TO
THE ARAB WORLD’S 200 MILLION YOUTH

Special thanks to:
PSB for fieldwork and analysis, Proof for design and production of the White Paper, and our commentators, whose analysis brought rich context and insight to this year’s findings.
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The key theme running through the ninth edition of the annual ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2017 is a sobering one: we live in a region where young people straddle a fault line between hope and despair. A vast, important demographic that is united by religion, language and culture is increasingly separated by access to opportunity. Even today, given the conflicts, security issues and unemployment which sadly mark much of the region, our overall finding looks surprisingly positive: just over half of young Arabs as a whole still believe their nation is on the right track. Looking at the Survey on a region-by-region, or country-by-country level, however, we see a stark divide between youth in the Gulf states, who are brimming with optimism, and those in the Levant and Yemen, who are anxious and disillusioned about the future. It would be easy to dismiss this divide as the result of the widening income gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ – those that have oil, and the prosperity that should come with it and those that don’t. But that’s too simplistic – Iraq and Libya, for example, are oil-rich states, but are among those countries in which youth are most concerned about unemployment, and least confident in their government’s ability to address that issue. The Gulf states, too, have seen oil revenues plunge by half since 2013 – from $735 billion to $365 billion in 2016 – but we have not seen a corresponding drop in optimism in that region. This isn’t a crisis of economics, it’s a crisis of leadership. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our Survey finds that almost all young Arabs believe their governments should do more for them, but it is only in the GCC where they believe their governments are actually doing something about the issues. That suggests Gulf states are getting something right, and it’s not necessarily linked only to wealth.

What’s clear from the findings is, even if many young people do lack confidence in their government’s ability to help them, they’re under no illusion that it is anyone else’s responsibility.

Sunil John

Sunil John is the founder and chief executive of ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller. He has been at the heart of the public relations business in the Middle East for more than two decades. During this time he has shaped ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller into the benchmark public relations consultancy in the Arab world. He also leads the agency’s research arm, PSB Middle East, and its branding and digital marketing subsidiary, Proof ME. Sunil is the first PR professional in the Middle East to receive the Outstanding Individual Achievement SABRE Award in the EMEA region from The Holmes Report.
Young Arabs realise that while their elders played the victim game and sought intervention and protection from foreign allies, that strategy no longer cuts ice. The world is becoming increasingly inward-looking and globalisation is being challenged: Britain is leaving the EU; Trump has pulled out of major global trade deals; a global shift rightwards promises more protectionism and less intervention. The Middle East, for better or worse, is going to have to address its serious shortcomings itself. Young people throughout the Middle East can’t change their neighbours. But can they work with those neighbours to improve their lot?

The answer, I believe, is yes. According to this year’s Survey, young Arabs do not see the US, Russia or other international powers as their biggest allies, but Saudi Arabia and the UAE. And they increasingly see the UAE as a model country – one that they would not only choose to live in over any other, but also want their own countries to emulate.

This suggests a solution: that good governance could be the UAE’s newest export. The soft power of the UAE is one of the Middle East’s greatest assets – and one that doesn’t just enrich the UAE but the whole region, through the promotion of stability and prosperity.

National and international complexities mean that a one-size-fits-all model would be unrealistic. But some aspects of the UAE model are universal: empowering youth, and focusing on enabling positivity, happiness and tolerance – increasingly in short supply across the region – would be a strong start.

The Arab Spring of 2011 is behind us, and last year’s Survey showed us youth were increasingly disillusioned with its legacy. But revolutions can take a long time for their full effects to become apparent. For better and for worse, the region is very different today than it was six years ago. It’s easy to concentrate on the ‘worse’ – the conflicts in Yemen, Syria and Libya, the refugee crisis and continued instability in Iraq, to name just a few. For better, though, we see that nations are waking up to the new reality and finally preparing their economies for the future. In Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar we see younger generations taking more prominent roles in government; in Egypt we are seeing the return of a measure of economic and political stability; in Iraq and Syria we see Daesh in retreat; in North Africa, outside of Libya, we see relative stability; and across the region we see young people increasingly rejecting the message of extremism.

Twelve years ago, long before the Arab Spring provided a wake-up call to autocratic regimes, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, sent a clear message to Arab governments: “You must change, or you will be changed.”

The 22 Arab nations spread across two continents, Asia and Africa, have to pull together in a historic movement to declare a shared manifesto that focuses on a unified destiny. The solution for the region’s problems, as the Arab Youth Survey sees it, must come from within this region, and not from the US, Russia, Europe or even the United Nations.
The 9th Annual ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2017 was conducted by international polling firm PSB Research to explore attitudes among Arab youth in 16 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. PSB conducted 3,500 face-to-face interviews from February 7 to March 7, 2017 with Arab men and women aged 18 to 24. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and English.

The aim of this annual survey is to present evidence-based insights into the attitudes of Arab youth, providing public and private sector organisations with data and analysis to inform decision-making and policy formation.

The survey is the largest of its kind of the region’s largest demographic, and covers the six Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia) the Levant (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestinian Territories) and Yemen. The survey did not include Syria due to the civil unrest in the country.

Participants were interviewed in-depth about subjects ranging from the political to the personal. Topics explored included the concerns and aspirations of Arab youth, their views on the economy and the impact of unemployment on their lives, the election of Donald Trump and its implications for the region, their attitudes towards Arabic language, and their media consumption habits.

Respondents, exclusively nationals of each of the surveyed countries, were selected to provide an accurate reflection of each nation’s geographic and socio-economic make-up. The gender split of the survey is 50:50 male to female. The margin of error of the survey is +/-1.65 per cent.

There were 200 respondents for each country represented in the survey, except for the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt with 300 respondents each, and Iraq with 250 and Palestinian Territories with 150.

The geographic location of respondents was also taken into account by PSB when developing the fieldwork methodology – with, for example, 40 per cent of UAE respondents in Abu Dhabi, 40 per cent in Dubai and 20 per cent in Sharjah.

Saudi respondents were drawn from Riyadh, Jeddah and Dammam; Palestinian Territories’ youth from the West Bank and Gaza; Oman’s youth from Muscat and Batinah; Lebanese youth from Beirut, Saida, and Tripoli; Tunisian youth from Tunis, Sfax and Soussa; Iraqi youth from Baghdad, Irbil and Basrah; Egyptian youth from Cairo, Alexandria and Mansoura, and so on across each country. When analysed, this geographic spread provides a more accurate national picture than findings based solely on the responses of those living in capital cities.

In some of the data in this report, some results may not total 100%. This is because survey participants could select multiple answers.
16 COUNTRIES:

**GCC:** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE

**Levant & Yemen:** Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories and Yemen

**North Africa:** Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia
TOP 10 FINDINGS

WHAT DO 200 MILLION ARAB YOUTH HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THEIR FUTURE?

01
Optimism among young Arabs is waning, with a clear split by geography into ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’

02
Young Arabs want their countries to do more for them and many feel overlooked by policymakers

03
Young Arabs view unemployment and extremism as the biggest problems holding back the Middle East

04
Many young Arabs say their education system falls short of preparing students for jobs of the future

05
Young Arabs say Daesh has become weaker over the past year

06
The UAE sprints ahead of the pack as the country in which most young Arabs would like to live and want their countries to emulate
07

Young Arabs say Donald Trump is anti-Muslim and express concern, anger, and fear about his presidency.

08

Anti-American views are on the rise and now Russia – not the US – is seen as the region’s top international ally.

09

Despite their pride in the Arabic language, most young Arabs say they are using English more in their daily lives.

10

Among young Arabs, Facebook is the number one medium for daily news.
OPTIMISM AMONG YOUNG ARABS IS WANING, WITH A CLEAR SPLIT BY GEOGRAPHY INTO ‘HAVES’ AND ‘HAVE NOTS’
OPTIMISM IS WANING AMONG ARAB YOUTH, WITH YOUNG ARABS IN THE GULF BEING THE ONLY ONES OVERWHELMINGLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE DIRECTION OF THEIR COUNTRIES

Thinking about the last five years, in general, do you think things in your country are going in the right direction or the wrong direction?

All

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Right direction</th>
<th>Wrong direction</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>45%</td>
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Young Arabs are becoming less optimistic about their future, with the findings from 2017 showing a plunge in optimism from previous years, and revealing a stark split between those living in the wealthy GCC states and those living elsewhere – with youth in the Levant and Yemen being the least optimistic about their futures.

Asked whether their country has been heading in the right direction over the past five years, just over half (52 per cent) of those surveyed were still positive about their country’s direction in 2017 – but this represents a decrease from the situation one year ago, when two-thirds (64 per cent) said they thought their country was going in the right direction.

The percentage of respondents who feared their country was headed in the wrong direction increased by 14 points, going from 31 per cent in 2016 to 45 per cent this year.

The findings also reveal a deep regional split with shifts in optimism becoming more pronounced with geographic and socio-economic differences. In the oil-rich GCC member states, an overwhelming majority (85 per cent) of young people are confident that their country has been heading in the right direction over the past five years, while only 13 per cent believe the opposite to be true.

In the Levant (Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Jordan) and Yemen, which face mounting social, political and economic challenges, these figures are reversed: 85 per cent believe their country is headed in the wrong direction, versus only 14 per cent who are optimistic about their country’s overall trajectory. Young Arabs in North Africa hold a middle ground: half of the region’s young people (51 per cent) believe their country is headed in the right direction, while 42 per cent disagree.
LONG-TERM OPTIMISM IS ALSO DOWN FROM A YEAR AGO, WITH 2 IN 3 YOUNG ARABS IN LEVANT AND YEMEN SAYING THEIR BEST DAYS ARE BEHIND THEM

Which of the following do you agree with?

Looking at long-term optimism, the figures reflect a growing pessimism among young Arabs. This year, 58 per cent of young Arabs say that their best days are ahead of them, a 13-point drop from last year. Today, 39 per cent of young people believe their best days are behind them – a 15-point increase from 2016.

Again, youth in the economically developed GCC countries are far more optimistic than the average, with 78 per cent saying their best days are ahead of them, compared to 61 per cent in North Africa and just 32 per cent in the Levant and Yemen. Only a fifth (21 per cent) of young GCC citizens are pessimistic about the future; the proportion rises to a third (33 per cent) in North Africa and two-thirds (66 per cent) in the Levant and Yemen.
WHILE GCC YOUTH SEE A HEALTHY ECONOMIC FUTURE, ONLY 1 IN 5 YOUNG PEOPLE IN LEVANT AND YEMEN THINK THEIR ECONOMY IS GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

In general, do you think the economy in your country is going in the right direction or in the wrong direction?

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<th>Regional split</th>
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<th>North Africa</th>
<th>Levant &amp; Yemen</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>78%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>82%</td>
<td>47%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrong direction</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
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When asked specifically about the economy, just over half (52 per cent) of young Arabs had a positive outlook – down 9 points from 2016’s 61 per cent. Only a third (33 per cent) of those surveyed in 2016 believed their country was headed in the wrong direction economically. This number has risen to 44 per cent in 2017.

Youth in the more economically stable and prosperous nations of the GCC are, again, hugely optimistic on their country’s economic outlook, with 82 per cent believing their country is headed in the right direction economically, and only 15 per cent disagreeing. In contrast, in the Levant and Yemen, more than three quarters (78 per cent) of young Arabs believe their economies are going in the wrong direction, with just one in five (21 per cent) thinking the economy is on the right track. Opinions in North Africa are evenly split, with 47 per cent viewing the economic direction of their country favourably and 45 per cent having a negative opinion.
YOUNG ARABS WANT THEIR COUNTRIES TO DO MORE FOR THEM AND MANY FEEL OVERLOOKED BY POLICYMAKERS
YOUNG ARABS ACROSS THE REGION OVERWHELMINGLY FEEL THEIR GOVERNMENTS SHOULD DO MORE TO ADDRESS THEIR NEEDS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?

My country should better address the needs of the youth.

Across the Arab World, an overwhelming majority (81 per cent) of young Arabs feel that their government should do more to address their problems and issues.

In the GCC, the outlook is significantly more positive. While the vast majority (85 per cent) of the youth in the prosperous Arab Gulf countries believe their governments can do more to address their needs, a similar proportion (86 per cent) believe their governments are putting policies in place that will benefit young people, versus just 12 per cent who disagree.

In North Africa, 85 per cent of young people believe their governments should do more to address youth issues, while a little over half (54 per cent) think their governments are putting the right policies in place, while 39 per cent believe that they are not.

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WHILE GCC YOUTH OVERWHELMINGLY FEEL THEIR GOVERNMENTS ARE PUTTING YOUTH-FOCUSED POLICIES IN PLACE, MOST YOUNG ARABS IN LEVANT AND YEMEN THINK THEY ARE BEING OVERLOOKED

Now thinking specifically about your country’s youth, do you think your government has the right policies to address the issues most important to young people?

More than half [57 per cent] of respondents believe their governments have the right policies in place to address the most important issues facing youth; 40 per cent are not convinced the strategies laid out by their countries’ officials take their best interests into account.

Once again, there are significant differences in opinion across the region. In the Levant and Yemen, three-quarters [74 per cent] of those surveyed believe that their governments have not set adequate policies to address youth issues – three times the number of respondents who have faith in their governments’ youth-related policies (24 per cent).
Another extraordinary year has passed in the Arab world. A year in which, in cities across the region, relationships have developed, businesses have flourished and communities have thrived. That same year, in other cities and towns, tragedy has struck, battles have been fought and communities have been broken.

That two such divergent realities exist in one region is testament to the extraordinary time of upheaval that the Middle East is living through. At such a moment, perhaps it is no surprise to see such different realities reflected in the attitudes of young Arabs.

Asked whether, considering the past five years, things in their countries were generally going in the right or wrong direction, fewer Arabs than last year felt things were going well (52 per cent in 2017 compared to 64 per cent in 2016). In a region where four countries are still at war (Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Libya), the picture was more mixed, with slightly more (51 per cent versus 42 per cent) thinking their countries were moving in the right direction.

In North Africa, where some countries are stabilising (Egypt) alongside those still at war (Libya), the picture was more mixed, with slightly more (51 per cent versus 42 per cent) thinking their countries were moving in the right direction.

What we see therefore is the emergence of two Middle Easts. One where stability and prosperity have birthed a generation who believe even the sky is not the limit, and another where, in a matter of years, communities and cities that have thrived for centuries have broken apart.

This bifurcation of optimism into the haves and the have nots also projects into the future. Asked whether they agreed that “our best days are ahead of us” or “our best days are behind us”, fewer were optimistic overall (58 per cent optimistic versus 71 per cent last year). Split for geography, GCC youth were most optimistic (78 per cent), while youth in the Levant and Yemen were least (32 per cent).

Here again is the tale of two Middle Easts. In one part, optimism and a belief in the future. In another, anxiety and fear. In the Arab world, optimism, satisfaction and even happiness appear to be split by geography. Where you are born determines whether you will reach for the stars.
One might ask why this split even matters. Geography has always determined life chances. Those born in rich, peaceful countries – and even in the rich, peaceful parts of particular countries – always do better than those born in the poorer parts. Applied to the Arab world, one might ask whether these findings merely confirm the same process is happening in this region as happens in many other parts of the world. Surely only those most enamoured with the political union of Arab countries are concerned if some countries are poorer and less optimistic than others?

Look closer however and having two Middle Easts turns out to be a problem as much for the optimistic half as for the rest. The Arab world is almost unique in one respect: across 22 countries, there is the bond of a common language, common culture and a belief in a shared future. That means that, more than in other parts of the world, there is an intense feeling of solidarity across borders and an easy ability to move between countries.

Over the years, that has meant mass movements of people, with some of the best and brightest in the Levant, Yemen and North Africa finding their way to the prospering economies of the Gulf, often spending years and decades building lives and families and businesses. If the split in optimism and life chances continues, this brain drain will only increase, further exacerbating a divide.

Moreover, the instability and wars of the Middle East have not remained in their own countries. The Middle East has borne the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis, with Arab countries and Turkey taking the majority of refugees. But still the crisis has continued, with refugees crossing the Red Sea into East Africa and the Mediterranean into Europe.

A region with two Middle Easts is therefore a profound policy challenge, for leaders in the optimistic half as much as in the rest. A lack of prosperity, stability and optimism in one part will necessarily lead to a mass movement of people. It also provides a breeding ground for nihilistic ideologies that also bleed across borders. The Middle East has proved to devastating effect that a lack of life chances in one area breeds challenges that eventually spill across borders, no matter how high the walls are built.

Such policy must start with the youth, because they are the majority of the population: most Arabs are young. Governments whose policies focus most on enabling young people to have a prosperous future find their youth most optimistic. When you are sure that your family and community will be safe, that your talents will be recognised and that your hard work will be rewarded, you will feel most optimistic.

It is profoundly in the interests of policymakers across the region to ensure that a degree of prosperity reaches all the countries of the Middle East. In such an interconnected region, prosperity everywhere is the best defence against instability anywhere.

If asked whether they believed their governments had the right policies to address the issues most important to youth, the split of the answers by country correlated well with economic prosperity. In GCC countries, huge majorities thought youth challenges were being addressed (93 per cent in the UAE, 92 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 87 per cent in Kuwait). While in countries facing significant economic and policy challenges, the numbers were reversed (83 per cent most likely to say No in Palestinian Territories, 78 per cent in Iraq, 71 per cent in Yemen).

This link between youth-focused policies and optimism should not be a surprise. The entire focus of young people is on the future. Their future. Governments whose policies focus most on enabling young people to have a prosperous future find their youth most optimistic. When you are sure that your family and community will be safe, that your talents will be recognised and that your hard work will be rewarded, you will feel most optimistic.

It is profoundly in the interests of policymakers across the region to ensure that a degree of prosperity reaches all the countries of the Middle East. In such an interconnected region, prosperity everywhere is the best defence against instability anywhere.

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YOUNG ARABS VIEW UNEMPLOYMENT AND EXTREMISM AS THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS HOLDING THE MIDDLE EAST BACK
More than one in three young Arabs (35 per cent) believe that the biggest obstacle to the development of the Middle East is unemployment, compared to 2016, when exactly half the youth population perceived the rise of Daesh as the main obstacle.

This year, the threat posed by Daesh has slipped 15 points to tie with unemployment as the top concern, though the general threat from terror remains a major stumbling block to the region’s progress, with 34 per cent citing it as the biggest obstacle.

Economic and security concerns figure high in this year’s survey; one in four young Arabs (27 per cent) perceive the rising cost of living as the key obstacle, while civil unrest (19 per cent), lack of strong political leadership and lack of democracy – both at 17 per cent each – are also cited.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, lack of Arab unity and slow economic growth – all at 16 per cent – are among other top obstacles noted by Arab youth. Just one in ten Arab youth say loss of traditional values and lack of opportunities for women are challenges to be addressed for the region to progress, while 6 per cent cite anti-Muslim sentiment as the top obstacle.
Concern about unemployment has increased. The number of young Arabs ‘very concerned’ about unemployment has increased by 9 points from 2016 to 51 per cent – meaning one in two young Arabs are unsure of their job prospects.

This goes hand-in-hand with their lack of confidence in their national governments’ ability to deal with unemployment. Compared with 53 per cent who expressed very or somewhat confident levels in their governments to create jobs in 2016, there has been a decline of 2 points to 51 per cent.
Youth in Iraq (69 per cent), Algeria (64 per cent) and Bahrain (60 per cent) are most concerned about unemployment, and youth in Lebanon (24 per cent), Iraq (35 per cent), Tunisia (36 per cent) and Egypt (37 per cent) are least likely to be confident in their government’s ability to address the issue.

The findings support the IMF figures on youth unemployment in the region, showing high rates of joblessness among young Arabs. Libya is the highest, with 49 per cent unemployment among youth, followed by Palestinian Territories (43 per cent), Egypt (42 per cent), Iraq (39 per cent), Saudi Arabia (33.5 per cent), Tunisia (32 per cent), Yemen (30 per cent), Jordan (29 per cent), Lebanon (21 per cent), Morocco (21 per cent), Algeria (20 per cent), Kuwait (19.4 per cent), Oman (18.8 per cent), Bahrain (14 per cent) the UAE (10 per cent) and Qatar (1.5 per cent).
MANY YOUNG ARABS SAY THEIR EDUCATION SYSTEM FALLS SHORT OF PREPARING STUDENTS FOR JOBS OF THE FUTURE
OUTSIDE THE GCC, FEW THINK THEIR EDUCATION SYSTEM PREPARES STUDENTS FOR THE JOBS OF THE FUTURE

Thinking about education in your country, how satisfied are you with the preparation of students for jobs of the future?

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<th>Thinking about education in your country, how satisfied are you with the preparation of students for jobs of the future?</th>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
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<tr>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>49%</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
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Quality of education is a cause of concern for young Arabs, particularly in non-GCC nations. Nearly half the Arab youth said they were not satisfied with the current level of preparation of students for the jobs of the future. Of the 51 per cent who said they were satisfied with the current education system, most are from the GCC nations.

Most young Arab people who expressed their dissatisfaction are from North Africa and Levant & Yemen.

Jobs of the future were identified at the inaugural Global Manufacturing & Industrialisation Summit, held in Abu Dhabi in March 2017, as those that will require significant technology skills, replacing the traditional manufacturing jobs that are increasingly being automated.
QUALITY OF EDUCATION IS A RISING TOP-OF-MIND CONCERN FOR MANY YOUNG ARABS ACROSS THE REGION

How concerned are you about the quality of education in your country? (Showing "Very Concerned")

Concern about the quality of education received has spiked. Compared to 32 per cent in 2016, there is an overall increase by 7 per cent to 39 per cent this year in the number of young people who are ‘very concerned’ about the quality of education in their country.

The sentiment is shared across all 16 countries surveyed, with young people in the Levant and the GCC expressing most concern (41 per cent in each area), followed by youth in North Africa (36 per cent).

The trust of young Arabs in their governments to reform the education sector for preparing the youth for the jobs of the future is low in Levant and North Africa. While one in two young Arabs in North African nations expressed confidence in their governments, in Levant only 34 per cent were upbeat.

Most young people in the GCC nations (83 per cent) say their governments have the drive and resources to promote educational reform that matches the jobs of the future.
The Middle East has changed dramatically since the Arab Spring, six years ago. Long-serving dictators have fallen; a civil war has raged in Syria; Daesh came seemingly from nowhere to unleash new levels of depravity in Iraq and Syria; from Tunis to Cairo to Manama, the old political order has furiously battled new challenges – and deep social media penetration has reflected and refracted this historic moment of transition.

One thing, however, has remained stubbornly constant: unemployment. The Arab world retains the number one ranking in youth unemployment in the world. In fact, the problem has actually deteriorated since the Arab uprisings, ticking upward to 30 per cent today from 27 per cent five years ago, according to the World Bank.

All of this takes place against a backdrop of a rising emerging world, fueled by rapid urbanization, dramatically growing physical and technological connectivity, and growing middle classes. Thus, from Chile to China, Saudi Arabia to South Africa, young people are connecting to the world in ways unimaginable even a decade ago, and finding ways to create and innovate despite the odds. Most importantly, what we are seeing around the emerging world is a revolution of aspiration: simply put, young people expect – and demand – a better life than their parents, and aspire in ways their parents and grandparents hardly could have imagined.

This is no different in the Arab world and that is partly why the youth unemployment problem is so tragic, and has such impact. On the one hand, a rising emerging world coupled with technology has opened new vistas of opportunity, but strained public sectors and weak job growth in the Arab world have failed to leverage what should be an Arab demographic gift of educated, connected, motivated young people, and have instead made it into a demographic burden.

Large-scale youth unemployment and underemployment corrodes societies, fuels unrest, and inhibits the economic growth needed to create the virtuous circles of development that help people achieve fulfilling, meaningful, healthy lives. While there is much talk of unemployment leading to extremism or social ills, the reality is that the majority of people affected do not take up arms in jihad or enter a life of crime; rather, they struggle to eke out a living, seek to take their talents elsewhere, or simply live a quiet, tragic life of squandered potential.

Afshin Molavi
Afshin Molavi is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and co-director of the emerge85 Lab, an initiative that explores the dramatic global transformations emanating from the 85% of the world’s population that lives in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. He is also a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation, where he was co-director of the World Economy Roundtable, an ambitious exercise to re-map the global economy in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. He also writes a regular global affairs column for Newsweek Japan, and frequently contributes to The Washington Post’s Global Opinions section, and other global media.
Every year, when ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller asks young Arabs to list their top concerns, unemployment has always sat at or near the top of the list. Young people have consistently delivered the same message: they want jobs, economic dignity, hope for their future.

This finding is not surprising. If, over the last 20 years, you sat in any coffee shop in north Africa, spent time in any university in the Levant, or probed beyond the headlines of economic modernization in many of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, you would have heard widespread concerns about youth unemployment.

There have been a few exceptions: the UAE and Qatar have done a better job at employing their youth. This is not only a matter of oil or gas wealth or small populations (both help – though they didn’t help Libya much). Instead, a reading of the key competitiveness indexes from the World Bank’s Doing Business Index to the World Economic Forum’s Competitiveness Index to various innovation, investment, and transparency indexes, demonstrate that the GCC states – notably the UAE – are ahead of the rest of the region in creating a regulatory environment of opportunity.

What young people want most in the Arab world and beyond is simply a fair opportunity.

Young people are not looking for wasta (Arabic for ‘connections’) to get ahead, rather they want a wasta-free environment that will reward hard work, innovation, merit and playing by the rules. This might help explain why young people consistently choose the UAE first when asked where they would live if they could live anywhere in the world. They see it as a place of opportunity.

This also helps explain why young North Africans flock to Europe: there are opportunities there, they feel, even in a sluggish Europe. Or why so many young, professional Arabs seek jobs in the GCC states: a job is a job, after all, and many of the world’s leading consulting firms, hotels, banks, universities and industrial players have grown their footprints from Dubai to Doha, Muscat to Manama.

Ironically, the current troubles over unemployment and underemployment in the Arab world owe something to the success of the past six decades in expanding access to education, improving public health, and developing more – albeit still limited – opportunities for women. The massive expansion of university education opportunities has created a new generation of graduates without jobs.

Young Arabs beyond the GCC states also worry that their current education fails to prepare them for jobs of the future.

The GCC youth feel differently, with 80 per cent saying their education system prepares them well, though I do not think they should be so optimistic. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution dramatically transforms the way we will live, produce, consume, and connect, few universities anywhere in the world are adequately preparing young people for jobs of the future – let alone GCC universities.

This leads to a final, perhaps ominous point. The surefire way to create large numbers of jobs has always been industrialisation and manufacturing. East Asia’s tigers rode industrialisation toward job creation and economic development. But rising automation means the next wave of industrialisation comes with fewer manufacturing jobs.

Still, for the foreseeable future, the world will still need industrial products. While building an ammonia plant may not be as exciting as creating a technology company, “old-fashioned” industry will still employ a lot more people, and will be vital to solving this problem.

There is no skills shortage in the Arab world. Young Arabs have plenty of skills, and plenty of drive. There is an opportunity gap, and bridging that gap, above all, must be the driving force for policymakers over the next generation and beyond.
YOUNG ARABS SAY DAESH HAS BECOME WEAKER OVER THE PAST YEAR
Over the past year, do you think Daesh has become significantly stronger, somewhat stronger, somewhat weaker, significantly weaker, or neither stronger nor weaker?

61% said "weaker",
31% said "stronger",
8% opted for "neither stronger nor weaker".

Most likely to say Daesh is getting weaker:
- Iraq 82%
- Lebanon 77%
- Palestinian Territories 71%

Most likely to say Daesh is getting stronger:
- Libya 41%
- Yemen 39%
- Saudi Arabia 37%

Young Arabs feel that Daesh’s threat to the region is receding but as intense efforts to combat the extremist group continue, they say education and providing jobs are as important as military action in defeating terror and extremism.

Asked, "Over the past year, do you think Daesh has become significantly stronger, somewhat stronger, somewhat weaker, significantly weaker, or neither stronger nor weaker?" 61 per cent said "weaker", 31 per cent said "stronger" and 8 per cent opted for "neither stronger nor weaker".

Young Arabs are most likely to say Daesh is getting weaker in Iraq (82 per cent), Lebanon (77 per cent) and Palestinian Territories (71 per cent), while those most likely to say the group is getting stronger are in Libya (41 per cent) Yemen (39 per cent) and Saudi Arabia (37 per cent).
Concern over Daesh has declined from last year, when half of all young Arabs said they were ‘very concerned’ by its rise. In line with the perception that Daesh is getting weaker, this year, only 36 per cent said they were ‘very concerned’ at the terror group’s rise. The finding correlates with youth’s perception of how well they think their governments are addressing the threat from Daesh.

Asked “How confident are you in your government’s ability to deal with the rise of Daesh?”, 58 per cent said they are ‘very or somewhat confident’ – a rise of five points from 2016.
EDUCATION AND JOBS ARE SEEN AS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS MILITARY ACTION IN DEFEATING DAESH AND TERRORISM

Which of the following, if any, do you think should be your government’s top priority in the fight against Daesh and terrorism in general?

- Military action
  - Iraq
  - Oman
  - Libya
  - Qatar
  - Bahrain
  - Palestinian Territories

- Educational reform
  - Morocco
  - Lebanon
  - Yemen

- Well-paying jobs
  - KSA
  - Egypt
  - Tunisia
  - Jordan

- Media campaigns
  - Kuwait
  - UAE
  - Algeria

At the lower end of the scale, ‘Giving people more personal freedoms’ was picked by just 8 per cent, while reforming bureaucracy to fight corruption and weakening cooperation with Western powers were viewed as a top priority in fighting Daesh by just 5 per cent of those polled.
Sixteen years into the war on terror, Al Qaeda presents an ever-greater threat to the world, and especially to the region, in terms of strength, number and relevance. The group has more followers than it did and has ensconced itself in insurgencies across the region. Then there is Daesh, which emerged in the wake of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and evolved into a global organization competing alongside Al Qaeda to wreak havoc in various countries.

Despite spending upwards of two trillion dollars to eradicate Al Qaeda, the world faces a worse problem than it did in 2001. Clearly, something is not working. The findings of this year’s ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey offer a window of what might be missing in the equation ...

the need to go beyond military action in the fight against Daesh and terrorism. Education reform and providing well-paying jobs are seen as just as important as military operations.

Given that Daesh emerged from Iraq, the findings related to this country are particularly telling. The highest number of respondents who said that Daesh weakened over the past year come from Iraq (82 per cent), but Iraqis are also the second-least likely to be confident in their government’s ability to deal with the issue of unemployment, after Lebanese respondents. Concern about unemployment has increased since 2016, with young Iraqis expressing strongest concerns.

There is an obvious divergence between expectation and reality in Iraq, and this should worry any policymaker dealing with the threat of terrorism in the region and beyond. The government in Iraq is facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent history, coupled with economic stagnation and low oil prices. Around three million Iraqis are internally displaced. Of the 11 million in need of humanitarian assistance, only 6.2 million are targeted, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Hassan Hassan
Hassan Hassan is a senior fellow at the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy in Washington DC, and former associate fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House. He focuses on Syria, Iraq and the Gulf States, and studies Islamist, Salafist and jihadist movements in the wider region. He is also a columnist for The National newspaper in Abu Dhabi, and a contributing writer for The Guardian, Foreign Policy, Foreign Affairs, the Financial Times and The New York Times. He is the co-author of the bestselling book ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror.

Despite spending upwards of two trillion dollars to eradicate Al Qaeda, the world faces a worse problem than it did in 2001. Clearly, something is not working. The findings of this year’s ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey offer a window of what might be missing in the equation ...
The respondents in the survey highlighted the steps needed to fight extremism. They saw five top priorities: military action, educational reform, jobs, media campaigns to expose the Daesh ideology as a distortion of Islamic teachings, and reforming religious institutions to fight extremism. Failure to listen to these voices will only perpetuate the problem.
THE UAE SPRINTS AHEAD OF THE PACK AS THE COUNTRY IN WHICH MOST YOUNG ARABS WOULD LIKE TO LIVE AND WANT THEIR COUNTRIES TO EMULATE
ONE IN THREE YOUNG ARABS WOULD LIKE TO LIVE IN THE UAE – A BIG INCREASE FROM 2016 – MAKING THE UAE MORE THAN TWICE AS POPULAR AS THE US

Which country in the world, if any, would you like to live in?
(Showing Top 5)

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Preference for the UAE was so strong this year that it left other nations trailing, with the US a distant second at 15 per cent, Canada and Saudi Arabia at 14 per cent, and Germany behind the Kingdom at 13 per cent.

In the 2017 Survey, the United Arab Emirates cemented its position as the country most young Arabs would like to live in and would most like their own countries to view as a role model.

This year, one in three (35 per cent) young Arabs say they would most like to live in the United Arab Emirates, a significant increase of 13 points from last year when under a quarter (22 per cent) put the UAE in the top spot.
The UAE has also strengthened its position as the model country for other countries to emulate.

Which country in the world, if any, would you most like your country to be like? (Showing Top 5)

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- UAE: 23% in 2016, 36% in 2017 (▲ 13)
- USA: 19% in 2016, 15% in 2017 (▼ 4)
- Canada: 9% in 2016, 14% in 2017 (▲ 5)
- Germany: 12% in 2016, 13% in 2017
- Saudi Arabia: 9% in 2016, 12% in 2017

As asked which country they would like their own country to emulate, the UAE again came on top, with more than a third of young Arabs saying the UAE was their model country, against one in four last year.

The US was in second place, dropping from 19 per cent last year to just 15 per cent this year, and just 1 percentage point ahead of Canada (14 per cent), with Germany in fourth place at 13 per cent and Saudi Arabia behind at 12 per cent – still an increase from 9 per cent last year.
THE UAE IS VIEWED AS SAFE AND SECURE, WITH A GROWING ECONOMY AND A WIDE RANGE OF WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Now thinking specifically about the United Arab Emirates, which of the following phrases, if any, do you associate most with the country?

The UAE scored highly among Arab youth for its safety and security, growing economy, good job opportunities – and good wages – and its high-quality education system, all listed as key associations with the country.

Since the Arab Spring, the Survey has consistently revealed that safety and security are key concerns of Arab youth, along with good job opportunities and economic stability. With all those factors found in abundance in the UAE – and with a familiar language and culture, as well – it’s no surprise that the UAE’s position as a regional success story is viewed so positively by young Arabs.
In the 70s and 80s, many youth growing up in a region facing similar challenges to what we see today – stagnant economies, conflict, unemployment, and a lack of opportunity – thought the solution would be to move West, and especially to the US. The so-called American dream captured the imagination of an entire generation. Today, this destination has been displaced by the United Arab Emirates.

In 2001, when I first started working in the UAE, it was clear that something different was happening. In fact, it was that “something” that drove me to resign from my job in the UK and move to Dubai. There was a contagious sense of positive energy, can-do attitude, and a mesmerising vision for the future. Against the odds, the UAE story was being written.

While Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait heralded regional wars, the Levant countries were stagnant and focusing on security issues, and North Africa was witnessing non-inclusive growth, the UAE was building islands visible from space (Palm Island), a world-leading airline (Emirates), expanding its ports and taking over global trade routes, a media free zone (soon to become home to regional leaders like MBC), and unleashing a property, tourism, and retail boom that quickly transformed the UAE into the region’s undisputed business and trade hub.

In those days, this “UAE rising” story was captured by several researchers and journalists who noted that while the region missed an opportunity during the 1970s oil boom, “the UAE … learned their lessons, and we’re getting it right this time. You never had a champion. Today you have one”1. It is in Jim Krane’s book2 that I was quoted talking about the UAE Dream back in 2005. In my various meetings with Jim, I kept telling him how a whole generation of Arabs would soon stop hoping to emigrate to the US for a better future. “Forget the American Dream, the goal of a generation of young Arabs, today we have the Dubai dream”3.

All this was not simply a product of good fortune or political timing or even natural resources. It was a direct outcome of sound, well-executed, bold economic policy, led by visionary and inspiring champions.

The UAE was simply focusing on the right things, and doing them right. Today, the economy is moving further and further from dependency on oil. The UAE has built vibrant and competitive sectors like logistics, trade, and tourism. The country has produced globally competitive national champions in the global aviation industry, retail, hotels, ports, and is now tackling space. The growth was not only state-driven. The UAE is also home to one of the largest private equity funds in the emerging markets, and now can boast homegrown Middle Eastern ‘unicorns’.

Dr Yasar Jarrar
Dr Yasar Jarrar is a senior strategy advisor working in the Middle East on Public Sector and Social Impact issues, and is the co-founder of the Arabic portal for the Future of Government. He is also chairman of the Open Data Institute, Dubai; Visiting Fellow at the Cranfield School of Management, UK; Senior Fellow at the MasterCard Centre for Inclusive Growth; and a Senior Advisor at the Harvard International Negotiations Program at Harvard University.

The UAE was simply focusing on the right things, and doing them right. Today, the economy is moving further and further from dependency on oil. The UAE has built vibrant and competitive sectors like logistics, trade, and tourism. The UAE is also home to one of the largest private equity funds in the emerging markets, and now can boast homegrown Middle Eastern ‘unicorns’.
The Arab world needs a new development model, and the UAE holds a lot of lessons, experience, and potential to help this transformation. Not every Arab youth can go to live and work in the UAE, but they can (and will) push their governments to adopt a development model that delivers similar results.

The growth was not only state-driven. The UAE is also home to one of the largest private equity funds in the emerging markets and now can boast homegrown Middle Eastern ‘unicorns’ like Souq.com and Careem.

Indeed, after the 2014 oil price decline, the only GCC country that is projected to get back to non-oil GDP growth levels similar to the 2006-2015 period is the UAE. The numbers are also very favourable when it comes to inclusive growth. In 2015 a report on inclusive growth in the Middle East and Africa found that the only country in the region that had a balanced growth picture was, again, the UAE. In fact, it came close to the OECD standards and far ahead of regional standards.

This impressive economic development is one side of the coin of the UAE Dream story. Jobs and economic opportunity have consistently ranked as the number one concern for the region’s youth. The other side of the coin is softer, but equally important. The UAE inspires hope in a better future; something the Arab Youth Survey notes is not lost on the region’s youth.

The 2016 UN Arab Human Development Report called for bringing youth back into the center – politically, economically, and socially – and giving them a real stake in their societies. In that space, the UAE stands out again. The country has placed youth at the centre of development, and went as far as appointing a Minister of State focusing only on youth affairs (she is under 25). In addition to the impact this actually has on national policies and youth inclusion, these signs are visible and amplified by social media across the region. The UAE keeps raising the bar, every day, and offering a new hope.

This is not to say that the UAE does not have its own challenges. The road ahead is long, and, in quoting His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, in the race for excellence, there is no finish line. The UAE has a very ambitious agenda (UAE 2021) that aims to build on its current strengths, and address the gaps in areas such as education and healthcare, and drive further economic diversification.

There are many lessons from the UAE story that can help move the region forward. Naturally, countries are different and not every country can replicate the UAE model, nor should they. However, there are more similarities in the region than differences. The whole region shares five critical issues: a large youthful population, an exponential penetration of information technology and social media, a weak private sector, a bloated and ineffective public sector, and a widening income gap.

The Arab world needs a new development model, and the UAE holds a lot of lessons, experience, and potential to help this transformation. Not every Arab youth can go to live and work in the UAE, but they can (and will) push their governments to adopt a development model that delivers similar results.

1. Nasser Al Saidi, former Chief Economist at Dubai International Financial Center
2. City of Gold: The Story of the World’s Fastest City, 2009, Jim Krane
3. Ibid
4. A critical measure when it comes to the effectiveness and sustainability of economic development and growth
5. Published by MasterCard Centre for Inclusive Growth (USA)
6. UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai
YOUNG ARABS SAY DONALD TRUMP IS ANTI-MUSLIM AND EXPRESS CONCERN, ANGER, AND FEAR ABOUT HIS PRESIDENCY
ARAB YOUTH REGARD DONALD TRUMP’S VICTORY AS MORE CONSEQUENTIAL FOR THE REGION THAN RISING OIL PRICES AND DAESH LOSING TERRITORY

Which of the following developments that took place in 2016 do you think will have the biggest impact on the Arab world over the next five years?

- Donald Trump winning the US presidential election: 25%
- Crude oil prices beginning to increase: 18%
- Daesh losing territorial ground in Iraq and Syria: 15%
- Saudi Arabia ending its diplomatic relations with Iran: 10%
- Military conflict continuing in Yemen: 10%
- Syrian government forces defeating anti-government rebels: 7%
- UN Security Council passing a resolution condemning Israeli settlement construction: 7%
- United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union: 6%

Donald’s Trump’s ability to completely dominate global conversations continues, with a quarter of young Arabs saying the election of the controversial 45th President of the United States will be the development which will have the biggest impact for the Middle East region over the next five years.

Trump’s election eclipsed the recovery in crude oil prices, Daesh’s loss of territory in Iraq and Syria, Saudi Arabia breaking off diplomatic ties with Iran and the ongoing conflict in Yemen as the most important development shaping the future of the Middle East.
NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF ARAB YOUTH VIEW TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY WITH CONCERN, ANGER OR FEAR

Which word, if any, best describes how you feel about Donald Trump’s presidency?

64% 😞
Concerned 29%
Scared 15%
Angry 20%

19% 😊
Excited 4%
Optimistic 7%
Hopeful 8%

14% 😞
Uncertain 14%

Not only is Trump’s election viewed as important, it is also seen as a major cause for concern for most young Arabs, with two thirds of young Arabs either concerned, scared or angry about Trump taking the helm of the world’s most powerful state and largest economy.

In total, 19 per cent said they were excited, optimistic or hopeful about the new president, and 14 per cent said they were uncertain.
FIVE IN SIX YOUNG ARABS VIEW DONALD TRUMP UNFAVOURABLY, MAKING HIM THE LEAST POPULAR US PRESIDENT OF THE 21ST CENTURY

How favourable is your opinion of each of the following individuals? If you do not know enough about a particular individual to offer an opinion, please indicate this.

Despite having only just taken office when the survey was conducted, Trump was already the least popular US president of the 21st century among respondents, with an 83 per cent unfavourable rating among Arab youth, compared with 77 per cent for George W Bush, who oversaw the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and Barack Obama, who was disliked by 52 per cent of young Arabs.

Obama continues to enjoy a 45 per cent favourability rating among young Arabs, compared with Bush at 19 per cent, and an 11 per cent rating for Trump.
AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF YOUNG ARABS THINK TRUMP IS ANTI-MUSLIM

To what extent do you agree or disagree that Donald Trump is anti-Muslim?

The travel ban, introduced while the 2017 Arab Youth Survey was being conducted, effectively banning citizens from seven predominately Muslim countries from entering the US may well have influenced opinion: a majority (70 per cent) of young Arabs surveyed said they believe Trump is anti-Muslim, with this especially strong among youth in key US allies including Qatar (87 per cent) Saudi Arabia (84 per cent) Oman (79 per cent), and Iraq, the UAE and Egypt (all 78 per cent).
HALF OF ARAB YOUTH SAY TRAVEL BAN WOULD MAKE IT EASIER FOR TERROR GROUPS TO RECRUIT YOUNG MUSLIMS

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?

President Trump banning nationals of seven* Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States will make it easier for terrorist groups to radicalize and recruit young Muslims.

Further, almost half (49 per cent) of young Arabs believe the travel ban would make it easier for terrorist groups to radicalise and recruit young Muslims – a view especially strong in the UAE and Egypt, with 68 per cent of young people in both countries agreeing that banning nationals from Muslim-minority countries from entering the US would make it easier for terrorist groups to fill their ranks.
America’s influence in the Middle East is waning, with the US being overtaken by Russia as the region’s top international ally in the opinion of the region’s youth.

Asked “Who is your country’s biggest ally?”, the region’s two largest economies, UAE and Saudi Arabia, take the top spots, with the UAE inching ahead of its neighbour for the first time.

But it is young Arabs’ perceptions of key international allies that are a source for possibly the biggest surprise of this year’s Survey: in 2016, a quarter (25 per cent) of young Arabs viewed the US as their country’s biggest non-Arab ally, with Russia identified as such by just 9 per cent.

This year, the US’s stock has dropped 8 percentage points, to 17 per cent – tying it with Qatar in fourth place – while Russia has surged 12 per cent, placing it as the region’s top non-Arab ally.
ANTI-AMERICAN VIEWS ARE ON THE RISE: IN EIGHT ARAB NATIONS A MAJORITY OF YOUTH NOW CONSIDER THE US THEIR ENEMY, UP FROM FOUR A YEAR AGO

Concerning for American policymakers is the significant shift in those who don’t view the US as an ally at all, but as an enemy. In 2016, two thirds of young Arabs viewed the US as an ally; in 2017, almost half [49 per cent] view the US as an enemy.

In 2016, a majority of Arab youth in just four countries – Iraq, Yemen, Palestinian Territories and Lebanon – viewed the US as an enemy. This year, that list has doubled, with a majority of young Arabs in four more countries – Libya, Algeria, Qatar and Egypt – seeing America as an enemy.

Do you consider the United States a strong ally, somewhat of an ally, somewhat of an enemy, or a strong enemy of your country?

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In 2016, 63% of young Arabs viewed the US as an ally; in 2017, 46% view the US as an ally. This is a 17% decrease.

In 2016, 32% of young Arabs viewed the US as an enemy; in 2017, 49% view the US as an enemy. This is a 17% increase.
DISILLUSIONED WITH US ACTION IN THE REGION, YOUNG ARABS CAST A WARY EYE OVER TRUMP

Kim Ghattas
Kim Ghattas is an international affairs correspondent for the BBC based in Washington D.C. and the author of The Secretary: A Journey with Hillary Clinton from Beirut to the Heart of American Power. She writes a column for Foreign Policy magazine. Previously based in Beirut, she covered the Middle East extensively from 1998 to 2008.

No matter how much President Obama worked to disentangle the US from the Middle East, or led from behind as he tried to encourage the region to chart its own course, the Arab world kept tugging at his sleeve.

His vision, including a nuclear deal with Iran that would ostensibly allow the US to decrease its military footprint, was smart and strategic – but the region wasn’t ready, and the Obama administration’s approach was too academic, divorced from the reality of complex relationships.

American influence is deeply embedded in the Middle East, for good or ill, through historical ties, military alliances and civil society exchanges. US elections are always closely watched in the Arab world, because living on the receiving end of American foreign policy can have life or death consequences. People follow the ups and downs of the campaign, the polls, the debates; the region’s hopes and dreams then fall and rise with the results, and with every action taken by the new president.

When George W. Bush invaded Iraq, and Saddam Hussein’s statue was toppled in Baghdad, some people in Syria told me they hoped this meant statues of their own autocratic leader, Bashar el Assad, would soon be toppled in Damascus. Elsewhere in the region, I witnessed hope about the signal it sent to have the entrenched dictatorship of Saddam come to an end almost overnight. Until, of course, disillusionment and bitterness set in with the post-invasion debacle.

When Barack Obama was elected, he stirred hope in the heart of young Arabs as they watched, starry eyed, his speech in Cairo in 2009. What precisely they were expecting is unclear, intangible, but their hopes derive from a long-held reflex in parts of the Arab world of looking to the US as a savior. And though they were again disappointed, Obama still remains more popular than his successor and predecessor.

Yet young people’s expectations of America are simultaneously tempered by the lucid understanding that American foreign policy is driven by constants of its national security interests: so ahead of American president elections, Arabs will often also say they expect nothing new from the next occupant of the Oval Office.

The election of Donald Trump was different. The level of angst and disbelief generated by his rhetoric during the campaign were palpable every time I traveled to the region and the concerns were soon confirmed by the new administration’s travel ban.

“The impact of being barred from the US will, of course, be felt most by young Arabs deprived of access to the land of opportunities, not their leaders. So it is no surprise that 83 per cent of respondents have an unfavorable view of the man who is not only narrowing their horizons but also cozying up to those same leaders who are failing to provide jobs and opportunities for their young populations.”
Despite the chaos and disruption the ban caused for thousands of Arabs, young and old, not a single Arab government denounced it, nor Arab officials advocated for the thousands caught up in the chaos at airports or refugee camps, or families suddenly separated by the Atlantic.

The disconnect between some Arab leaders and their people – the same one which fueled the uprisings in 2011 – may widen as transactional alliances between the US and Arab countries are bolstered on the basis of security and military cooperation. Though last year’s survey showed that stability had become the number one concern, a stability built on more repression will not be sustainable. With the US seemingly no longer interested in raising the issue of human rights, young Arabs may feel increasingly trapped and frustrated.

If Russia’s standing is rising in people’s eyes, while America’s is slipping, it is likely because of some respondents’ desire for a reliable partner that delivers, the way Russia has done consistently for Syria’s president for example, alongside Iran. Indeed, views of Russia and the US often mirror the Saudi-Iran regional divide. In those countries where Iran has strong proxies, like in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, a majority considers the US an enemy.

Meanwhile, Trump’s military strike against Syria, after the survey, in April 2017 in reaction to the Assad government’s use of chemical weapons, provoked jubilation, not only amongst Syrians opposed to Assad but also Arabs across the region who resented Obama for abandoning Syrians to their fate. Trump’s affectionate nom de guerre on social media is now Abu Ivanka al Amreeki, Father of Ivanka the American.

The region and its youth are an unpredictable, emotive judge of America, opinions fluctuate with changing expectations of what they want the US to deliver. Two years ago, the US was still seen as a top international ally, right after Saudi Arabia and the UAE, now Russia is at the top. With Trump himself proving just as unpredictable and impulsive, people’s views and anxieties about him and America will shift often during his time in office.

The survey shows that 70 per cent of young Arabs view Trump as anti-Muslim, the governments in many Arab countries sought to downplay both the ban and the rhetoric, with a Saudi royal advisor issuing a statement saying Trump was a “true friend of Muslims” and that the travel ban was “a sovereign decision aimed at preventing terrorists from entering the United States of America”.

The impact of being barred from the US will, of course be felt most by young Arabs deprived of access to the land of opportunities, not their leaders. So it is no surprise that 83 per cent of respondents have an unfavorable view of the man who is not only narrowing their horizons but also cozying up to those same leaders who are failing to provide jobs and opportunities for their young populations.
DESPITE THEIR PRIDE IN THE ARABIC LANGUAGE, MOST YOUNG ARABS SAY THEY ARE USING ENGLISH MORE IN THEIR DAILY LIVES
Most young Arabs see Arabic as central to their national identity. While on average 80 per cent of young Arabs agree with the statement “Arabic is central to my national identity”, in the GCC it is 90 per cent, while those who agree with the statement is lowest in the Levant at 70 per cent.

Despite Arab youth perceiving Arabic as part of their identity, the notion that Arabic is losing its value is on the rise.
YOUNG ARABS INCREASINGLY FEEL ARABIC IS LOSING ITS VALUE

Consistently, over the past three years, the number of young Arabs who agree that Arabic is losing its value is increasing. This year, 60 per cent of young Arabs agreed with the statement, an increase of 3 points over 2016.

This was most pronounced in North Africa, where 69 per cent of young people felt Arabic was losing its value followed by youth in the GCC (59 per cent) and the Levant and Yemen (53 per cent).
MOST ARAB YOUTH NOW USE ENGLISH MORE THAN ARABIC IN THEIR DAILY LIVES, ESPECIALLY IN THE GCC

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?

On a daily basis, I use English more than Arabic.
(Showing “Agree”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All</th>
<th>GCC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>68%</td>
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</table>

Over three consecutive years from 2015, Arab youth increasingly use English over Arabic in their daily lives, with the dominance of English particularly prevalent among youth in GCC states.

Across all markets, an average 54 per cent said they use English over Arabic daily – a consistent increase from 2015, and a jump of 8 points over 2016.

In the GCC states, specifically, 68 per cent of Arab youth say they use English more than Arabic, an increase of 6 points compared with 2016.
AMONG YOUNG ARABS, FACEBOOK IS THE NUMBER ONE MEDIUM FOR DAILY NEWS
MORE YOUNG ARABS SAY THEY GET THEIR NEWS DAILY ON FACEBOOK THAN TV NEWS CHANNELS, ONLINE SOURCES, OR PRINT

How often do you _______?
(Showing Daily)

- 35% Get your news on Facebook
- 31% Read the news online
- 30% Watch TV news channels
- 9% Read newspapers

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the statement?

I use Facebook to share interesting news articles I read.
(Showing “Agree”)

- 2015: 41%
- 2016: 52%
- 2017: 64%

Social media plays an ever greater role in the daily lives of young people across the region, with Facebook emerging in 2017 as the number one source for young Arabs looking for their daily news.

In an updated question for 2017, 35 per cent of young people in the Arab world picked Facebook as their main daily news source, against 31 per cent for other online news sources, 30 per cent for TV news channels and just 9 per cent who get their news from newspapers. (Last year’s Survey question on news consumption did not include Facebook as a separate news channel, therefore an accurate year-on-year comparison cannot be made.)

Facebook also registered a significant increase in the number of young Arabs who use the platform to share news stories, with 64 per cent sharing topical stories via Facebook, compared with 52 per cent last year and just 41 per cent in 2015.
In terms of overall popularity, Facebook and WhatsApp are tied as the most popular social media channels, with 68 per cent of young Arabs checking the platforms daily, an increase of 13 points and 6 points respectively from last year. YouTube is viewed daily by half of young Arabs (50 per cent), while Instagram has seen a marked increase in daily use, to 48 per cent from just 28 per cent in 2016. Twitter has also seen a rise, and is viewed daily by 37 per cent of young Arabs, against 28 per cent in 2016. One platform that is new for the Survey in 2017, and so does not have the corresponding data from 2016, is Snapchat, which according to our findings this year is used daily by 42 per cent of young Arabs.
FACEBOOK, WHATSAPP AND THE SMARTPHONE FUEL A MAJOR TRANSFORMATION

Maysam Ali

Maysam Ali is Assistant Director of the Stevens Initiative at the Aspen Institute, an international effort to connect youth in the Middle East and North Africa and the United States through education technology. She was previously Deputy Director of Middle East Programs, leading Partners for a New Beginning (PNB), a program promoting job creation in the Arab world, and launched PNB chapters in Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

“Here are decades where nothing happens,” the Russian revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin once said, “and there are weeks where decades happen.” After decades of stagnation, the Arab world is currently undergoing an era of rapid and profound transformation. As the findings from the 9th annual ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey 2017 reveal, nowhere is this transformation more evident than in the world of media and communications, where three major trends are visible.

The first trend is the transformation of Facebook from a social networking site into a news source. This is a departure from 2009, when the primary source of news for most Arabs was television, followed by online newspapers and radio shows. While young Arabs still watch Al-Jazeera and read Asharq Al-Awsat, they increasingly access these news outlets via Facebook. Thirty-five per cent of those surveyed said they get their news on Facebook, compared to 31 per cent who read news elsewhere online, 30 per cent who watch television, and only 9 per cent who read newspapers.

The second trend is the rapid rise of WhatsApp as the region’s key communications platform. WhatsApp – which was bought by Facebook in 2014 for $19 billion – was initially a means for Arabs to send cheap, instant, secure communications to friends and family, both locally and abroad. In time, however, it has evolved into a platform for video-conferencing, news dissemination, and mass communication.

WhatsApp has become an indelible resource for the millions of Arabs – particularly Syrians – who have become refugees, scattered around the world, due to conflict. WhatsApp has helped to lighten, however little, the overwhelming burden of displaced people through its free international voice and video calls and its ability to send private messages secured through end-to-end encryption.

A little over two decades ago, the news diet of many Arabs was mainly reliant on government-controlled television, radio, and newspaper. By 2009, watching satellite television was by far the most popular activity for young people in the region looking for news. Today Facebook is king. As a Syrian friend in Dubai put it to me: “I go to Facebook to get personal insights, feelings, and opinions.”

A business consultant who spends most of his time in Riyadh and Dubai told me he reads news from at least five new sources daily, all via Facebook. Many users today “follow” their favorite opinion leaders, receiving news from a mix of activists, newspapers, television channels, and analysts.

The second trend is the rapid rise of WhatsApp as the region’s key communications platform. WhatsApp – which was bought by Facebook in 2014 for $19 billion – was initially a means for Arabs to send cheap, instant, secure communications to friends and family, both locally and abroad. In time, however, it has evolved into a platform for video-conferencing, news dissemination, and mass communication.

""
In 2017, 68 per cent of young Arabs said that they visit WhatsApp daily, a rise from 62 per cent the year prior, and today matching Facebook for number of daily visitors, way ahead of other social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter. WhatsApp has become an indelible resource for the millions of Arabs – particularly Syrians – who have become refugees, scattered around the world, due to conflict. WhatsApp has helped to lighten, however little, the overwhelming burden of displaced people through its free international voice and video calls and its ability to send private messages secured through end-to-end encryption.

Syrians abroad have dozens of WhatsApp groups where they exchange the latest information. Breaking news is quickly verified, editorialized, and shared; content that proves to be newsworthy is then posted on public platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and broadcast on mainstream media. The potential for growth is remarkable, particularly considering new features WhatsApp is introducing, including the ability to share content for a 24-hour period, rivaling Snapchat, which is used daily by 42 per cent of young Arabs.

WhatsApp is also growing in the news space. Media organisations have specialised teams that can be contacted through WhatsApp, and prominent journalists in the region curate content for their “subscribers”, who sometimes number in the hundreds. These groups are often local but subscribers can join from around the world. Immigrants who wish to receive news from home can easily do so.

The third trend – which has fueled the first two trends – is the remarkable proliferation of smartphones. What was once a luxury for the well-heeled is increasingly a necessity for everyone. The GSMA, which provides analysis on global mobile operator data, estimates that 65 per cent of people living in the Middle East and North Africa will have a smartphone by 2020 – the fastest adoption rate after sub-Saharan Africa. Smartphones have given virtually all Arab youth a video camera that allows them to instantaneously capture and upload videos on multiple platforms, drawing attention to under-reported stories, including human rights violations and poor provision of services by both the public and private sectors. The smartphone, coupled with social media, is enhancing both transparency and accountability.

As in the West, the Arab world must contend with challenges posed by social media, including the tendency to consume news that reinforces one’s own beliefs and opinions. In a region increasingly divided along ethnic, sectarian, and ideological lines, without proper attention, social media platforms could serve to widen, rather than narrow, these divides.

The changing media and communications environment in the Arab world has rightfully been the cause of great excitement. Social media platforms are providing a generation of Arabs opportunities to connect and share opinions and content in a safe and effective environment. This is helping train a future generation of tech-savvy journalists and content creators. But, as in the West, the Arab world must contend with challenges posed by social media, including the tendency to consume news that reinforces one’s own beliefs and opinions. In a region increasingly divided along ethnic, sectarian, and ideological lines, without proper attention, social media platforms could serve to widen, rather than narrow, these divides.
Established in 2000, ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller is the region’s leading public relations consultancy, with 11 fully-owned offices and six affiliates across the Middle East and North Africa. The agency provides services to governments, multinational businesses and regional corporate clients and institutions, operating five specialist communication practices – Brand Communication, Corporate, Financial, Enterprise & Technology and Public Affairs. A digital, design and marketing subsidiary – Proof ME, and a full-service research insights agency – PSB Research Middle East – complete the offering. ASDA’A Burson-Marsteller is part of the global Burson-Marsteller network and a WPP company.

asdaabm.com

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psbresearch.com

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wpp.com
## SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MEDIA INDICATORS 2017

### Sources:
- Youth unemployment: World Bank, [The Economist](http://econ.st/2aOzE0e), [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps)

### Country Population (million) | GDP PPP (US$ billion – 2017 est.) | Contribution of oil to GDP (%) | Youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment (%) | Internet users (million; 2017 est) | Internet penetration rate (%) | Facebook users (million) | Facebook penetration of population (%) | Total social media penetration (%)
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---

**GCC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>GDP PPP (US$ billion – 2017 est.)</th>
<th>Contribution of oil to GDP (%)</th>
<th>Youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment (%)</th>
<th>Internet users (million; 2017 est)</th>
<th>Internet penetration rate (%)</th>
<th>Facebook users (million)</th>
<th>Facebook penetration of population (%)</th>
<th>Total social media penetration (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
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<td>68.9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>91.5</td>
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<td>18.8</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.44</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>40.81</td>
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**LEVANT & OTHER MIDDLE EAST**

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>GDP PPP (US$ billion – 2017 est.)</th>
<th>Contribution of oil to GDP (%)</th>
<th>Youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment (%)</th>
<th>Internet users (million; 2017 est)</th>
<th>Internet penetration rate (%)</th>
<th>Facebook users (million)</th>
<th>Facebook penetration of population (%)</th>
<th>Total social media penetration (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
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<td>612.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Jordan</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Levant &amp; other ME Total</td>
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**NORTH AFRICA**

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>GDP PPP (US$ billion – 2017 est.)</th>
<th>Contribution of oil to GDP (%)</th>
<th>Youth (15 to 24 years) unemployment (%)</th>
<th>Internet users (million; 2017 est)</th>
<th>Internet penetration rate (%)</th>
<th>Facebook users (million)</th>
<th>Facebook penetration of population (%)</th>
<th>Total social media penetration (%)</th>
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<td>Egypt</td>
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