**[Changes in Arab public opinion](https://nation.com.pk/19-Feb-2020/changes-in-arab-public-opinion%22%20%5Ct%20%22_new)**

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Across the Middle East and North Africa, 2019 provided an eventful end to a tumultuous decade. There were unsettling developments on multiple fronts, to name just a few, there were: popular uprisings in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq; international intervention in civil conflicts raging in Libya, Yemen, and Syria; dangerously accelerated tensions with Iran; and fading hopes for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the US promises about a great “deal.”

In late 2019, Zogby Research Services (ZRS) once again had the opportunity to poll public opinion across the Middle East and North Africa about many of these issues that are of such critical concern to the region and its peoples. Among the topics covered in our 2019 survey were: the unsettled situation in Iraq; the status of the “Arab Spring” countries – focusing on Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Arab attitudes toward Iran; and how Arabs view the role played by the US and other global powers in their region.

Since we’ve been surveying attitudes on these issues every year since 2011 for the annual Sir Bani Yas Forum held in the UAE, this year’s results enabled us to identify both areas where the public’s views were similar to those of earlier years and areas where there were dramatic changes in opinion. What follows were dramatic changes in opinion.

The most notable development in Iraqi attitudes is the high percentage of Iraqis (almost six in ten) – including a majority of respondents in all sub-groups, Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs, and Kurds – who want their country to be united under a central government and not divided into separate regions. As further evidence of this unity, there is a marked increase in the number of Iraqis from all sub-groups, who are now wary of Iran. In fact, when we asked Iraqis to identify their main concern with Iran, they said it was Iran’s involvement in their country.

Iraqis, however, also told us of their deep dissatisfaction with the direction of the country and their lack of confidence that their lives will improve in the near future. Given these dangerously low levels of satisfaction and confidence, it was not surprising that mass protests erupted in the fall. After the eruption of demonstrations, we surveyed the public’s attitudes toward the protests. Iraqis told us that they supported the demonstrators and that their confidence in their government had been shaken by the violent response to the protests.

The reactions in the so-called “Arab Spring” countries were mixed. During 2019, attitudes in Egypt continued to sour, with Egyptians reporting very low levels of satisfaction with their current situation and little confidence that it will improve in the next five years. When asked to evaluate the role played by various institutions in their country, Egyptians gave low scores across the board. Tunisians, on the other hand, are more positive both with their present situation and are more optimistic in their future, despite recent electoral tumult.

With regard to Syria, there is a growing acceptance in Arab public opinion that the Assad government has survived the civil war. But attitudes are divided as to whether Syria will have peace in the next decade, with respondents in most Arab countries pointing to the prospect of future clashes between the Assad government and the opposition and the potential for conflict between Russia and Iran for influence in Syria.

One of the more intriguing results in our 2019 survey were the changes in Arab views toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Most Arabs still blame the US and Israel for the absence of peace and have little confidence that the conflict can be resolved in the near future. Maybe as a result of this despair, this issue now ranks low as an Arab priority. Also noteworthy is the fact that majorities in most Arab countries now say that normalization with Israel, which they acknowledge is already happening, may be a good thing. This development shouldn’t be overstated, however, since there is still no love for Israel. It appears, from our survey, to be born of frustration, weariness with Palestinians being victims of war, and the possibility that normalization might bring some economic benefits and could give Arabs leverage to press Israel to make concessions to the Palestinians.

We learn from our 2019 ZRS poll that the greatest concern with Iran across the region is with its nuclear program, followed by Iran’s role in the Arab Gulf. Most intriguing, though, is the growing wariness of Lebanese and Iraqis with Iran’s involvement in their countries. It is the top concern of respondents in both Lebanon and Iraq. This is significant since past polling has shown Lebanese and Iraqis viewing Iran more favorably than did Arabs in other countries.

In our 2019 survey we find a continued slide United States’ favorability in the Arab World. With only a few exceptions, in almost every country there is a sharp decline in respondents’ views of US policies toward Syrian, Iraq, Iran, and Muslims. And only Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Jordan now see the US as a being a dependable ally in the next decade. Instead of the US, respondents in a number of Arab countries now look elsewhere, to China, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, or Russia.

As a result of this unsettling world order, we also find that Arabs are turning inward. When we asked Arabs what their foreign policy priorities were for the region, far and away their top choices are investing more of the region’s wealth and expertise in creating a more prosperous and stable Arab World and promoting greater political unity among the Arab states.