About Georgetown University in Qatar

Established in 1789, Georgetown University is one of the world’s leading academic and research institutions, offering a unique educational experience that prepares the next generation of global citizens to lead and make a difference in the world. Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), founded in 2005, empowers students and shapes the human capacity that the MENA region needs for the 21st century, providing a holistic educational experience built upon the highest academic standards. GU-Q’s Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service (BSFS) stresses multidisciplinary studies in a global context. It is the same globally respected program and curriculum offered at the Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Washington D.C. The BSFS degree is offered in one of four majors: International Economics, International Politics, Culture and Politics, and International History. Students can also pursue a certificate in one of three concentrations: Arab and Regional Studies, American Studies, or Media and Politics. To learn more about GU-Q’s exciting events and programs, or to benefit from its wide array of research, please visit qatar.sfs.georgetown.edu

About the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS)

Established in 2005, the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar is a premier research institute devoted to the academic study of regional and international issues through dialogue and exchange of ideas, research and scholarship, and engagement with national and international scholars, opinion-makers, practitioners, and activists.

Guided by the principles of academic excellence, forward vision, and community engagement, the CIRS mission revolves around five principal goals:

• To provide a forum for scholarship and research on international and regional affairs
• To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas
• To foster thoughtful dialogue among students, scholars, and practitioners of international affairs
• To facilitate the free flow of ideas and knowledge through publishing the products of its research, sponsoring conferences and seminars, and holding workshops designed to explore the complexities of the twenty-first century
• To engage in outreach activities with a wide range of local, regional, and international partners.

About Silatech

Silatech is a regional social organization that works to enable jobs and expand economic opportunities for young Arabs. The organization promotes large-scale job creation, entrepreneurship, access to capital and markets, and the participation and engagement of young people in economic and social development. In order to reach the largest number of Arab youth, Silatech encourages financial institutions to lend youth to start their businesses through combining technical support and various types of innovative financing instruments. Silatech also helps financial institutions design loan products, markets their products and services, provides credit officers with focused training programs, and implements best practices to benefit both youth and the institutions. This is expected to result in the creation of thousands of jobs, enriching the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Arab societies, and reducing the youth unemployment rate in the Arab world.

About the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that supports Qatar on its journey from a carbon economy to a knowledge economy. It does this by unlocking human potential for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by HH the Father Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. QF carries out its mission via three strategic pillars: education, science and research, and community development. For more information, visit www.qf.org.qa.

This publication is made possible by the generous support of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development.
During the second half of the twentieth century, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was hit by a demographic wave that saw its youth population grow at an unprecedented rate. This youth bulge spurred national and international debate regarding the challenges and opportunities that the youth cohort brings to the region. The potential that young people have—either as agents of positive change or instability—was illustrated during the Arab uprisings. In the wake of the unrest, there is a need to expand our collective understanding of the lives of young people in the MENA region, and to examine factors that affect their normative transitions to adulthood. The narrative around Middle Eastern youth often centers on their social, political, and economic exclusion and marginalization. Living through decades of authoritarian rule and political instability, youth in the Middle East have struggled to fulfill their aspirations related to citizenship, livelihood, and social and political participation. Given the continued jobs crisis in the Middle East, where youth generally experience high rates of unemployment and where labor market activity, particularly among young women, remains strikingly low, understanding the economic exclusion of youth and the various means by which to redress it remain significant.

Whether one focuses on transitioning countries or countries that largely weathered the Arab uprisings without significant political upheaval, there has been little progress in implementing needed reforms or significant policy changes. Governments in more stable countries have taken steps to reinforce aspects of the traditional social contract (increasing public sector wages, subsidies, etc.) as a means of easing social unrest, while governments in transitioning countries, faced with immediate needs to ensure legitimacy, have reinforced past approaches rather than forging forward with innovative reforms. In the meantime, economies across the region have been impacted by growing inflation, an erosion of foreign exchange reserves, and worsening security situations. In this context, the region’s youth find themselves locked in a contradiction: while the Arab uprisings gave voice to the frustrations inherent in such exclusion, they continue to struggle to secure social and economic inclusion in their communities.

While some of MENA’s recent macro-economic and political developments have created further obstacles for the region’s youth, young peoples’ responses to these constraints have differed remarkably. As such, the process by which we expand our understanding of young people should be informed by a wider perspective: the aspirations of youth and their senses of identity as well as the economic and political contexts that confront them. How individuals manage the challenges they face, and how youth mobilize collectively to deal with those overarching constraints faced in the region, are likely influenced by diverse factors related to their gendered, national, urban, tribal, cultural, and religious differences.

To explore the underlying causes and consequences of these complexities, CIRS launched a multi-disciplinary research initiative in collaboration with Silatech, a Doha-based and youth-oriented social initiative organization. As many of the region’s youth are contending with the effects of social and economic exclusion, this research explores the ways in which youth manage and respond to various socioeconomic and political constraints across the region, as well as the potentials of policy to support various aspects of youth’s lives. Additionally, this research initiative examines the ways in which Middle Eastern youth collectively regenerate a new consciousness and forge novel methods of mobilization. The original research papers produced as part of this initiative will be published as a special issue of *The Muslim World* in 2017.
Youth in the Middle East
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Introduction
Islam Hassan and Paul Dyer

It has been nearly six years since the eruption of street protests in Tunisia and Egypt that rapidly brought down the regimes in those countries, and inspired similar political demonstrations across the Middle East. The world watched these events unfold, gripped by the narrative of a young generation peacefully rising up against oppressive authoritarianism to secure a more democratic political system and a brighter economic future. Early hopes that these popular movements would end corruption, increase political participation, and bring about greater economic equity, quickly collapsed in the wake of the counter-revolutionary moves of the deep state in Egypt, the regional and international interventions in Bahrain and Yemen, and destructive civil wars in Syria and Libya.

In this context, efforts by the region’s youth to forge a more positive future for themselves and coming generations has been subsumed by these events, and efforts to forge constructive solutions to the long-standing economic challenges facing the region’s youth have largely been sidelined by more immediate concerns related to security and political stability. Still, youth across the region continue to struggle with the more personal fight to build an economic future as they enter adulthood. For many young people, this struggle has only become more acute in the difficult macroeconomic environment faced by many of the countries in the region. Finding real solutions to the economic constraints that shape the transition to adulthood in the Middle East remains as vital today as before the Arab Spring, when youth brought their economic frustrations to streets and squares around the region. Indeed, finding such solutions is perhaps the lynchpin for bringing stability back to the Middle East and building a more prosperous economic future for all of the people of the region.

In the wake of these developments, there is a need to go beyond examining the role of Middle Eastern youth in the post-2011 Middle East and to explore the diverse social, economic, and political contexts in which young Middle Easterners find themselves. This research initiative studies the state of Middle Eastern youth, focusing on the ways in which their experiences continue to shape their worldviews and their priorities. The contribution of this special issue to the burgeoning literature on Middle Eastern youth enhances our understanding of the lives of the young in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and examines Middle Eastern youth’s novel methods of mobilization and its regeneration of a new consciousness.

Across the Middle East, countries have experienced a pronounced increase in the size of their youth populations over recent decades, both in total numbers and as a percentage of the total population. Today, the nearly 111 million individuals aged 15 to 29 living across the region make up nearly 27 percent of the region’s population. This youth cohort is the product of an historical demographic transition, one marked by early high rates of fertility and population growth during the 1970s and 1980s, followed with a rapid decline in fertility seen across the region during the mid-1990s. As fertility rates declined, dependent child populations began to decline, reducing overall population growth rates but ensuring that the generation born during the 1970s and 1980s became an increasing share of the population.
Importantly, while the rise of the youth bulge is often viewed in the context of the challenges that it imposes on the existing political and social order, it can—and should—be viewed as an economic opportunity for the region as a whole. While the growth of the youth population imposes supply pressures on education systems and labor markets, it also means that a growing share of the overall population is made up of those considered to be of working age and thus not dependent on the economic activity of others. In turn, this declining dependency ratio can have a positive impact on overall economic growth, creating a demographic dividend. The ability of a particular economy to harness this dividend, however, is dependent on its ability to ensure the deployment of this growing working-age population towards productive economic activity and to create the jobs necessary for a growing labor force.

For the economies of the Middle East, seizing the opportunity offered by the potential demographic gift has proven a challenge. The initial youth bulge hit the region at the same time as global oil prices collapsed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, driving oil-producing countries in the region to slash prices and those dependent on strategic rents and workers’ remittances from oil-producing countries to implement drastic public sector reform programs and reductions in subsidies. These changes battered countries where a growing number of youth were graduating from school and entering the workforce. Moreover, these youth were transitioning from school to work with expectations built upon an implicit, long-established social contract wherein the population had come to depend on government subsidies and, importantly, the provision of public sector jobs (along with relatively high wages and non-wage benefits enjoyed by workers in that sector). Having invested in education preparing them for government jobs, a growing number of the region’s youth found themselves adrift as they left school, unable to find employment, and, in turn, unable to make other steps in their transition to independent adulthood, including marriage, housing, and starting their own families.

Collectively, the contributions to this study highlight the diversity of social, economic, and political constraints faced by youth across the region and beyond. They also reflect on how these constraints and challenges along with experiences influence Middle Eastern youth’s aspirations and behavior; political and economic views; and identity and social cohesion. Six years after the Arab uprisings, the region is still amidst critical transfigurations shaking the foundations of its states on various levels. The repercussions of the 2011 uprisings have influenced Middle Eastern youth’s experiences providing impetus for questioning perennial sacred beliefs and positions, and forging ahead avant-garde views and responses to the constraints they face.

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Islam Hassan is Research Analyst at the Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University in Qatar. Previously, he served with Qatar University College of Arts and Science, and the Gulf Studies Research Center. His current research interests include state-society relations in the Gulf.
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**Paul Dyer** is a Knowledge Program Manager at Silatech. His research focuses on demographics, labor markets, and public service provision in the Middle East and North Africa. He has a particular interest in impact evaluation and its use in building evidence in support of effective program development for youth. Prior to joining Silatech, Dyer was a fellow at the Dubai School of Government and worked with the World Bank as a consultant in the Office of the Chief Economist for the MENA region. He earned his MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University as the Sheikh Sultan bin Mohamed Al Qassemi Scholar.
1. **Dimensions of Youth Exclusion in the Middle East**

   Hilary Silver

Youth exclusion is a general problem in much of the world, from Europe and the United States to the Middle East and North Africa. Unemployment rates of young people, especially those no longer in school or training, far exceed those of the middle aged. Without a daily life structured by education or work, and without a clear legitimate path into adulthood, jobless youth also lack full political rights, propelling them towards protest or extremism. Facing categorical exclusion from adult roles, they may turn to sometimes counter-cultural tastes and rebellious, risky practices. Thus, in the multiple dimensions that comprise a full dignified, and meaningful life, young people confront obstacles to full participation and belonging in society. In turn, youth exclusion threatens societal cohesion and has numerous economic and political costs.

This paper reviews the three dominant approaches to studying youth—economic, life course, and youth studies—to help us understand and combat youth exclusion in a range of dimensions. It draws largely on theories and evidence about youth exclusion and social inclusion policies in Europe, but draws out implications for promoting the full social inclusion of young people in the Middle East. It identifies trajectories of social inclusion into economic, social, cultural, and political realms of life, taking into account the broader regional and institutional context.

Economists emphasize skill mismatches in the labor market for youth and education, apprenticeship, training, and entrepreneurship programs to address unemployment, but labor market integration is only one aspect of social inclusion. This becomes clear from the life course perspective of sociologists. Exclusion for adults typically means losing status, but young people begin life as “outsiders” unable to participate as full members of society. Every society constructs the category of “youth” in its own way, assigns appropriate ages to social roles, and has institutional and normative rules for the definition of and transition to adulthood. However, in much of the world, the boundary between youth and adulthood is blurring as dependence on adults lengthens to as late as 30 or 35 years of age. Postponement of adopting major adult roles gives rise to a phase of “emergent adulthood” in both European and MENA countries. It is a stage of experimentation and creativity, especially in cultural pursuits from which adults are themselves excluded.

While recognizing regionally specific cultural practices and institutions that distinguish young people in the MENA countries from those in the West, the paper identifies some commonalities between youth in the Middle East and in Europe, most saliently, the secular trend towards persistently high youth unemployment rates. Yet young people face exclusion along multiple interrelated dimensions, preventing them from participating fully in many spheres of adult life. This may lead to migration or a search for alternative beliefs where they can shine.

To be sure, one should not exaggerate the homogeneity of young people. The dualism contrasting youth versus adulthood conceals the temporal erosion of a normative or lockstep sequence of transitions. The extent of exclusion varies by age, education, parentage, gender, racial, ethnic, sectarian, caste, and other distinctions. Categorical exclusions may also vary according to the dimension or sphere of social
life in question. The age at which one is eligible for military service, for instance, may not coincide with that for alcohol consumption, marriage, or a driver’s license.

Youth inclusion policies currently focus mainly on economic concerns—youth guarantees, apprenticeships, lower minimum wages, more relevant education, and so on. Nonetheless, the political, social and cultural aspirations of young people should not be underestimated. Economic exclusion, unemployment and poverty are poor predictors of political extremism, even if young people figured centrally in the Arab Spring protests. Economic exclusion can be a result of social exclusion, as well as the reverse. *Wasta* or social connections and living in a central neighborhood are important for securing employment information. Successful youth employment initiatives in Sweden, Belgium, and Germany supplement training with personal support, individual counseling and supervision of unemployed young people, creating contacts for those at high risk. Indeed, minority groups and women suffer economic, political, and social discrimination, shutting them out of many institutions. In the MENA countries, greater openness and trust of youth, safeguarding equal treatment, and the provision of opportunities for leadership experiences in political parties, volunteering in social welfare services, or travel for sports, nature, and other recreation seem to build confidence and optimism. Positive outlets for youthful energy deter more destructive pursuits. Activities and places where youth can actively and meaningfully contribute to society provide an essential springboard into adulthood and full social inclusion.

**Hilary Silver** is a Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies and Professor of Public Policy at Brown University, and currently Visiting Senior Fellow at the Ash Center of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She served for six years as editor of *City & Community*, a journal of the American Sociological Association Section on Community and Urban Sociology, from whom she received the 2016 Lynd Award for Lifetime/Career Achievement. Silver has also consulted for a wide range of international organizations, most recently, the World Bank and the United Nations. Her research interests include comparative inequality, social exclusion and poverty, urban sociology, and policies to promote social inclusion. In the run-up to the Sustainable Development Goals, Silver published *The Contexts of Social Inclusion* (2015) for the UN DESA. Her documentary films, *Southside: The Fall and Rise of an Inner-City Neighborhood* (2009) and *Direction Home* (2015), have aired on RI PBS. Her forthcoming book, *Social Exclusion* will be published by Polity Press, and her edited volume, *Comparing Cities*, by Routledge. Among other recent publications, Silver’s article “Divided Cities of the Middle East” can be found in *City & Community* (2010).
2. **High Aspirations and Limited Opportunities: A Comparison of Education Quality in the MENA Region and its Implications for Youth**

   Samar Farah

While education is the cornerstone of every society, this statement takes on a particular significance in the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where over half of its population of 385 million are below the age of 24. Historically, education has served a variety of purposes. In the MENA region, it began in the form of religious instruction taking place in Quranic schools. Under colonial rule, modern educational institutions were established, but access for native students was limited to only a few students to maintain control over the populations. After the fall of colonialism and in the context of modernization, Arab governments created national education systems, which helped to promote national identity and social cohesion. They also aimed to produce employees with the skills to work in state-owned enterprises and to develop the growth of national industries and services. Since then, education has come to serve a broader economic purpose of developing citizens that contribute human capital to the development of their respective nations.

Over the past decades, access to education has grown significantly. Countries in the MENA region have focused their investments on building schools and post-secondary institutions to accommodate the growing population of children and youth. However, although a higher percentage of children, and in particular girls, are now enrolling in and completing their schooling, the quality of education remains low. Many children continue to drop out of school and in most countries few men go on to complete their higher education.

The transition to work has also become more difficult primarily as a result of the large youth population. Although employment rates have gone up over the past decade, the economies in the region have not been able to absorb the growing population of youth. The MENA region currently boasts the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. Approximately 54 percent of them are either unemployed or inactive, with women being particularly affected. To date, Gaza has the highest unemployment rates in the world, where 60 percent of its youth are out of work. In Libya, between 2011 and 2014 this rate increased from around 43 percent to 49 percent. Even in the oil-rich states of the Gulf more than 35 percent of 16-25 year old nationals, especially university graduates, are not employed.

These trends are further compounded by the political conflicts in the region, where approximately 87 percent of children in the region live in conflict zones. In countries such as Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Iraq the basic needs of the populations are not being met. In the case of Syria, over 6.6 million people have been internally displaced and there has been an exodus of over 4.7 million to surrounding countries, most notably Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, while almost 1 million have applied for asylum in Europe. This rapid influx of large numbers of refugees has placed a serious burden on the host countries. While there is insufficient data to estimate the total number of youth affected, around 750,000 Syrian children are out of school in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. As these countries are prioritizing the provision of primary education to refugee children, it is estimated that 42 percent of five to seventeen-year-olds are out of school while 83 percent of youth (aged 18-24) remain out of school. This situation is placing pressure on youth to engage in informal work to support their families or is exposing them to other potentially harmful influences and activities, such as abuse, marginalization, violence, and extremism.
In light of this complex and volatile regional climate and the growing vulnerability of youth, this study uses national data from international assessments to provide a comparative assessment of how the countries across the MENA region fare with regards to access, equity, and quality across three levels—schools, teachers, and students. The article then discusses how education policy level challenges such as access, teacher quality, curriculum, and assessment are inhibiting the quality of education systems in the region. Finally, the paper concludes with a review of the consequences of low education quality on the employment prospects of youth.

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The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) suffers from the highest level of youth unemployment in the world. This scarcity of jobs for Middle East youth has three proximate causes: the youth bulge in MENA, which has put unprecedented strains on regional labor markets; an educational system that does not develop the skills that meet the needs of private sector employers; and a legal environment that has shackled the private sector in these economies—a private sector that would have the potential of absorbing new labor market entrants within a more business-friendly regulatory context. These regional institutions—the legal environment, the educational system, and the structure of the government sector—developed at a time when the goal of the educational system was to produce credentials for workers going into government jobs. However, with the collapse in oil prices and the subsequent impact on MENA economies and government budgets in the 1980s, these public sector jobs have not been produced at the same rate as the number of young people completing school.

Presently, the MENA region is in the middle of a demographic transition, moving from high fertility rates to low fertility rates. Subsequently, from Morocco to Iran, MENA is experiencing a “youth bulge” by which those aged between 15 and 29 years old comprise the largest cohort of the population. In many countries of the region, the share of the youth population is near or over 30 percent of the total population (compared to near 20 percent in most Western countries). This unprecedented rise means that both educational systems and labor markets are under intense pressure to accommodate these new entrants. In the Palestinian case, in particular, the youth bulge in the West Bank reached a peak in the period between 2005 and 2010 (at 30 percent of the population), but, in the Gaza Strip, it is not predicted to peak until the period between 2025 and 2030.

The 2011 uprisings and eventual overthrow of the leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya demonstrate the threat of failing to meet the needs of the burgeoning youth population. Thus, the significance of Middle East youth unemployment derives not only from the impact on young people, but also on its broader impact on society. The uprisings of 2011 began as largely youth-led protests but eventually became revolts supported by all age groups. While the original grievances voiced by protesters primarily concerned political conditions, some of these political issues were also economic concerns. As such, although the main theme of discontent was over authoritarian policies, these policies also impinged on political, social, and economic freedoms. Furthermore, as Campante and Chor claim, it was the relatively low opportunity costs of engaging in the protests (due to high youth unemployment) that made the uprisings burst forth when they did. Because continued unemployment delays a whole series of activities that are along the normal pathway to adulthood, including marriage and independent family formation, a lack of jobs has serious societal consequences. Continued failure to address the issue of youth exclusion in the region will lead to more frustration and increased political challenges. Furthermore, the stalled transition to adulthood of Middle East youth will not be solved by the new regimes without dramatic reforms.

In order to better understand the issue of youth unemployment in the Middle East, this article takes a single case study from the Arab world, that of the Palestinian youth. While the case of Palestine
may seem peculiar given the unique political environment of the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the same economic and political institutions that have led to stagnation and high rates of youth unemployment throughout the region are also found in Palestine. Furthermore, there are many commonalities between Palestinian governmental institutions and those found throughout the region that have ultimately led to the same institutional failures. Notably, many of the same labor and business regulations found in the Levant and North Africa are found in Palestine. It is notable that since October 2015, Palestine has seen a new spike in attacks against Israelis, which some have considered to be the “Third Intifada.” This Third Intifada is seen as the natural consequence of the same lack of job growth, absence of political freedoms, and failure to deliver on political promises that was witnessed in other Arab countries. However, in the case of Palestine, the anger is directed towards the Israeli state, instead of at domestic leaders. While protests by youth throughout the region led to either overthrow or a domestic policy response to placate the demands of youth, the lens of the occupation distorts the mechanisms for change. The response by Israeli policymakers to anger arising in Palestinian youth has the complicating factors of needing to respond to Israeli constituencies (settlers, defense industry, etc.) that will lead to a change in the potential cost-benefit calculation for both Israeli responses and the initial attempt at a protest. For example, one response to Palestinian protests and violence is for Israel to close access to the Israeli labor market for Palestinian workers. As such, a direct consequence of political action in the Palestinian context is to exacerbate the poor macroeconomic conditions and to diminish the ability of the government to effectively bring about macroeconomic growth.

The article discusses the basic labor market conditions for Palestinian youth, including labor force participation and unemployment rates, and examines educational outcomes and the role that family background plays in determining school completion. We then conduct a statistical analysis to show the determinants of successful transitions from schooling to work, and conclude with policy implications of the findings.

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4. *Aspirations, Poverty, and Behavior Among Youth in the Middle East: Some Theoretical Considerations*

Manata Hashemi

Many regional observers have characterized socioeconomically disadvantaged young men and women in urban areas of Middle Eastern nations as inhabiting a “space of dissidence.” It is argued that the threat of disaffected youth who have no opportunities to engage in productive employment will lead to extremism. The general consensus in these types of accounts is that depressed economic conditions—as a result of high levels of unemployment and low levels of marketable skills—leave socially and economically marginalized youth (15–29 years) in Middle Eastern societies more disposed to frustration, fatalism, and feelings of powerlessness. These feelings, in turn, are argued to lead some youth to engage in deviant practices to seek the power and dignity that they feel is lacking in their daily lives. These deviant practices are often linked to participation in radical movements—defined as insurgency and political militancy—thereby causing further regional violence and instability. Irrationality—defined as extremism in decision-making and social conduct—thus becomes the signifying characteristic of the young and disadvantaged in the Middle East.

In response to this imputed irrationality, scholars, in the language of rational choice theory, have alternatively argued that the poor in the Middle East engage in a deliberate calculation of means and ends in order to attain the power and wealth necessary for upward mobility. Paying particular attention to the negotiating and bargaining that occurs among family members, these accounts subscribe to the cooperative conflict model of the household. Individual family members act to maximize socioeconomic advantage while simultaneously solidifying their membership in households. Thus, to rescue poor, Middle Eastern youth from the image of passive subjects, these scholars posit them—and others within the household unit—as rational, autonomous agents whose goals are defined by individual interests and preferences.

This article is a reaction to both of these homogenizing representations of one of the most populous and significant generations of our time. Heterogeneities that exist among socioeconomically disadvantaged youth in Middle Eastern societies—in particular, heterogeneities in life circumstances, age, gender, sociopolitical contexts, motivations, and beliefs—lead to differences in the ways that these youth cope with unemployment and feelings of powerlessness. These youth can neither be categorized as inhabiting a space of radical dissidence, nor do they always engage in everyday struggles to pursue economic goals that are in line with their individual preferences. Indeed, as Bayat argues, the latter perspective overlooks a holistic understanding of the motives involved in these efforts, where morality is mixed with cost–benefit calculations. That is, while actions are structurally determined to the extent that these young people continuously look for the most efficient way of navigating their circumstances, notions of what constitutes maximum efficiency are themselves based on cultural norms.

I argue that socioeconomically disadvantaged youth—that is, those who suffer from conditions of social and economic hardship relative to their peers; those who live below the national poverty lines in their countries; and those who come from working class families who struggle to make ends meet—make rational choices and engage in rational acts but within certain cultural bounds. In relying on the language of bounded rationality, I argue that social conduct among these youth is rational in the sense that they do not act in accordance to extreme emotional states. Youth do act, however, in accordance with cultural values. Attitudes,
beliefs, norms, and practices that comprise a young person’s cultural world can cause seemingly irrational acts—such as engaging in fraudulent schemes, preferring unstable work in the informal economy to stable formal sector jobs, or dealing illicit goods on the black market—to seem reasonable.

After critically examining the two dominant analytic approaches used to describe behaviors among marginalized youth, namely affective and rational driven action, I argue that these young people’s “orientations to the future”—their aspirations—that are embodied in their particular beliefs, motivations, and norms create coping strategies that are overlooked by current theoretical perspectives. I build on the work of aspiration-based theorists of individual behavior, namely Arjun Appadurai and Debraj Ray, to argue that these youth do not act to maximize economic security per se, but to pursue their aspirations, which comprise an important aspect of culture. This does not mean that poor youth do not bring strategy and calculation into their practices. Rather, I argue that their wants, preferences, and desires are derived from larger cultural valuations and group interactions. In such a way, this article lays the conceptual groundwork for a theory of behavior that synthesizes rationality with cultural action.

In arguing for aspirations-bounded rationality, I do not suggest that this interpretation is correct in the sense that it exactly captures the motives of all poor youth in the Middle East. Indeed, the argument largely remains a theoretical possibility, grounded in previous literature and my own observations of poor youth in Iran. The utility of the present approach lies in its enhanced explanation of enduring patterns of behaviors among some youth in the Middle East.

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5. Youth, Religion, and Democracy after the Arab Uprisings: Evidence from the Arab Barometer

Michael Robbins

The Arab uprisings of 2011 left an indelible mark on the region. As long-standing presidents fell in four countries, many wondered if a wave of democratization might be sweeping the region. This early optimism soon faded as protests were violently suppressed in Bahrain and as Libya, Syria, and Yemen fell into civil war. This narrative of the failure of the uprisings to yield substantial political reform overlooks an important period of political openness that was found in Tunisia and Egypt, the two countries where the protest movement began. From 2011 to 2013, both countries witnessed unprecedented periods of political freedom. For the first time, citizens in both countries experienced free and open elections, enjoyed a greater ability to speak freely, and watched as long-standing Islamist opposition groups formally entered the political sphere.

Evidence from around the world shows that ordinary citizens are likely to respond to the changes in their political environment through a process of political learning. Thus, a critical question, particularly in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia is: to what extent, if any, did the political changes as a result of the Arab uprisings change attitudes toward democracy and political Islam in the initial years after the uprisings? Has there been a shift in attitudes with citizens becoming more likely to support democracy or wanting a different role for religion in politics in response to these events? And, to what degree, if any, have changes in attitudes varied by country context? Although a watershed event of this nature may affect citizens of all ages, the focus of this research is on citizens aged between 18 and 29 years old as existing evidence suggests that youths are most likely to engage in political learning since they are less likely than older generations to have fixed political ideas.

This article compares the changes over time in attitudes of youth in Egypt and Tunisia, two countries that experienced dramatic political changes in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. The primary comparison is the change in attitudes over time within each country; views of youths just after the respective revolutions are compared with views of a similar cohort two years after these events to determine how the Arab uprisings affected views toward democracy and political Islam in the two aforementioned countries. The second comparison is how the shifts in attitudes during this period differed between youths in the two countries. This comparison provides insight into how responses to the events of the Arab uprisings varied by country context.

The basis for this examination is public opinion data from the Arab Barometer, a project that conducts face-to-face nationally representative surveys of men and women aged 18 and older across the Middle East and North Africa. The article begins with an overview of the respective political and religious histories of both Egypt and Tunisia. It then examines popular support among youth for both democracy and political Islam at the time of the revolution, including relevant socio-demographic differences within each country. The paper analyzes changes in youth attitudes in each country as a result of the events that followed the revolution, including a comparison of these changes between countries to understand how different social and political contexts may account for the differences in the nature of change between the two countries. To further understand the reasons for these changes, the paper compares and contrasts these experiences and highlights the contributions of this research to the broader literature on political transitions and support for democracy.
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For half a century, according to Oxford University’s Migration Observatory, opinion polls in Britain have consistently shown that the public favors a reduction in immigration. Successive opinion data have pointed out the extent to which British public opinion is preoccupied with the subject, with results showing that asylum and immigration were the third most cited priorities. Germane to the immigration discussion, the voice of older generations of migrants in the United Kingdom, especially the Arab predominantly Muslim diaspora, is missing. Immigrants are only cast in stereotypical roles as either victims fleeing oppression or as economic and social burdens on the British community. They are often approached as a single unit of analysis although reality is more nuanced, and there is a generational dimension that is worthy of examination. This paper argues that a long-term approach to migration requires a twofold analysis: active contribution of all existing immigrants in the UK, including “foreign citizens,” to the immigration debate; and a deeper understanding of linkages between diaspora communities in the UK and source countries of their parents which are often also perceived as their other “home.”

At the same time as the British public discourse is becoming increasingly phobic of the Arab and Muslim “other,” British-Libyan youth remain actively engaged with both the Arab world and the UK more than their parents. This engagement poses interesting questions to the literature on collective identities. Collective identities, moderated by collective maltreatment, can be a key determinant of political participation in the host country or country of residence. In the case of British Libyans, collective identity was fragmented, both within and away from Libya because of the political oppression back home, and that has created a curious case in which belonging to the host community as well as to an in-group (diaspora and immigrant community) was thwarted. Identification was thus mostly within the family.

By examining the accounts of fifteen British Libyan youth, this article examines the mechanics of those negotiations and their policy implications. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with British Libyans in the UK of both genders between 21 and 30 years of age. The interviewees had all been to Libya in the period between 2011 and 2014, and some were combatants in the Libyan civil war. Their ancestry belongs to different regions in Libya, and their experiences diverge and converge in various ways but provide important insights in their connection to the homeland, currently in conflict, and their sense of belonging to the new “home,” the UK. With a small sample of respondents, the article does not generalize its argument on the collective identities of the entirety of the British-Libyan community in the UK but, instead, it highlights the need to engage this community in policymaking and explores short and long-term considerations on immigration policies in the UK in the next decade.

Children of naturalized immigrants are trodden at the crossroads between belonging and not-belonging to both their current and other homes. There is an extensive body of analysis on Muslims in the UK, and a number of reports on better integration strategies and challenges as related to criminal and terrorism studies. This demographic group, however, seems to have been left out of academic work as well as from current debates on the refugee crisis in Europe and the unrest in North Africa and the Middle East. By
examining the accounts of British-Libyan youth, this article addresses this caveat. It examines the different ways through which they negotiate their hyphenated identities as well as presence in the UK at a particularly critical moment in the history of the Arab region.

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