

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title and subtitle.

Optimism During Uncertain Times

A Report on Jordanian Youth

FES MENA Youth Study: Country Analysis Jordan

NADINE KREITMEYR

February 2018

- The Jordanian society is a very youthful society, approximately 70 per cent are below the age of 30 of which 20 per cent are between 15 and 24 years old. However, the youth unemployment rate amongst the latter alone is at 33,4 per cent (2015). Amongst youth with a high educational level this rate is even higher. This has strong implications for their current and future prospects with regard to their economic, social, and political situation and perspectives.
- The Arab Spring has underlined that economic, social, and political issues complement each other and have resulted in particular amongst youth in a feeling of uncertainty. Contrary to other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Jordan only faced limited protests. This prompts questions about how Jordanian youth evaluate the political, economic, and social situation in Jordan as well as their personal situation.
- All in all, Jordanian youth appear rather optimistic in terms of the (future) overall situation in Jordan, in their family and in their personal life.



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Characteristics of the Survey Sample	3
3. Society & Identity	3
4. Socio-Economic Situation	5
5. Politics & Society	9
6. Conclusion	11
References	13

1. Introduction

Youth is a topic that has been largely neglected in studies on politics, economy, and society in Jordan. As a consequence, not much is known about Jordanian youth. This is surprising, given that similar to most other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Jordan has a very youthful society. This report aims to fill this gap. It presents the findings of a survey conducted from May to July 2016 with 1,000 Jordanian youth aged from 18 to 30, as well as selective follow-up qualitative interviews with youth from the survey sample in December 2016 and January 2017. It is part of a survey carried out by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in eight MENA countries.¹

The analysis suggests that, overall, Jordanian youth are rather optimistic about their future in terms of the social, economic, and political situations. This report covers four main issues. The first section provides an overview of the characteristics of Jordanian youth. The following section focuses on questions of society and identity. The last two sections focus on the socio-economic situation of youth and their civic and political engagement.

2. Characteristics of the Survey Sample

The sample selection of Jordanian youth followed a quota based on age, gender, and region. Accordingly, 36 per cent of the youth belong to the age group 18 to 20, 35 per cent to the group 21 to 25, and 29 per cent to the group 26 to 30. The gender quota ensured that male and female respondents are equally included (50/50). Moreover, youth from all of the twelve regions in Jordan are represented in the sample. This ensures that the different perspectives and lives of Jordanian youth are covered.

This being said, the Jordanian youth included in this study represent a wide spectrum beyond the three indicators mentioned above, in particular in terms of their milieu of residence, educational background, and marital status.² With regard to the milieu of residence, the majority of surveyed youth are either residents of large cities (37 per

cent) or of medium-sized cities (33 per cent). In addition, youth from small cities (14 per cent), rural centres, villages, and refugee camps (16 per cent combined) were also included. The analysis of the educational background of respondents indicates that, although youth have low, medium, and high educational levels, most of them have a medium level (63 per cent; secondary or intermediate school). Only one in four has achieved a high degree (i. e. baccalaureate/A-levels/tawjihi or higher). These results need to be evaluated in relation to the age of Jordanian youth – i. e. the fact that many of them have not yet completed their education. One-third of the youth are currently students – 29 per cent of them at schools and 64 per cent at universities – who will receive their degrees in the near future. To ignore this fact would give a misleading picture of the educational background of Jordanian youth. In fact, in a regional comparison, the university attendance rate of Jordanian students is amongst the highest. With regard to their marital status, 68 per cent of young people included in this survey are still single. This is particularly the case among men (78 per cent) and youth with a medium educational level (75 per cent). Young women (35 per cent) and youth with a low (43 per cent) or high (35 per cent) educational level are more often married. Thus, the findings show that Jordanian youth cannot easily be regarded as a homogeneous group simply on their age – social, economic, and political dimensions have to be taken into consideration when talking about youth as a social group.

3. Society & Identity

Jordanian youth are strongly attached to their families and religion, both of which play a major role in their lives; however, leisure activities, friendships, as well as feelings of security or fear are also important.

The family constitutes the most important institution and group for Jordanian youth concerning nearly all aspects of life: 92 per cent of respondents believe that one needs a family in order to live a happy life. The family provides a feeling of stability that neither the partner nor friends – and even less the economic or political situation – can provide. For example, while 84 per cent consider their relations with the family to be (rather) stable, only 68 per cent make the same statements about their relationship with their partner. The trust in one's friends was reported as (rather) stable by 62 per cent of the respond-

1. This survey was part of a regional study covering eight countries in the MENA region. The regional results are published in English as: *Coping with Uncertainty: Youth in the Middle East and North Africa* (London: Saqi Books, 2018). The complete regional and country-specific data is available at: <http://www.fes.de/lnk/youth-study>.

2. The sample only includes Jordanians who consider themselves youth and explicitly excludes self-identified adults.

ents. Related to that, youth also turn to the family first in case of money problems (79 per cent), sickness (85 per cent), personal problems (68 per cent), etc. Friends and the partner follow at a significant distance; depending on the issue, 13 to 37 per cent of respondents contact them. Likewise, 70 per cent would raise their kids either exactly like their parents did or about the same – only 30 per cent would do so (very) differently.³

The majority of respondents (70 per cent) live in the same household with their parents. Amongst single youth, this figure is 95 per cent; amongst married youth, 9 per cent either live with their parents in the same household, or have their own household but in the same house as their parents. Interestingly, while it does not seem to play a role in this context whether youth dispose over their own budget or not, youth with a low educational level less frequently live with their own parents in the same household or in the same house (54 and 3 per cent respectively).

These findings on the important role of the family in the life of Jordanian youth are not surprising given that family relations in the MENA region are generally rather close. This being said, these findings also give some indication of the relationship between the younger and the older generations. Studies on youth – in the MENA region as in other world regions – implicitly or explicitly assume that generational conflicts exist and intensify with the scarcity of opportunities youth face compared to the older generation.⁴ The findings of this survey do not confirm this assumption with regard to family relations as has been demonstrated above. Indeed, when explicitly asked about relations between the generations within the family unit, 73 per cent of respondents state that they are harmonious.⁵

Relations between women and men within the family are also reported to be harmonious (84 per cent).⁶ This holds true especially among youth with a high educational level (87 per cent) and in big cities (85 per cent).

3. Note also that 88 per cent say one needs children to live a happy life; only 8 per cent say a happy life is possible without children.

4. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*. New York: UNDP, 2016.

5. At the neighbourhood level this rate drops to 50 per cent and on the country level to 46 per cent. This tendency manifests across all the categories.

6. Similar to the relationship between the generations, this rate drops at the neighbourhood and at the country level (58 and 53 per cent respectively).

However, slightly fewer women describe the relationship as harmonious (82 per cent). The father is predominantly the head of household (62 per cent) and the manager of everyday household affairs (59 per cent) and not the mother (only in 6 and 10 per cent of cases respectively).⁷ Moreover, 69 per cent think it has become more difficult to find a partner (highest score together with Tunisia): while men state that women are too demanding and want higher financial security, women say that men are increasingly poor/cannot take care of a family and that moral standards are decaying.⁸

The survey results show that, in addition to family, religion plays a very important role in the life of Jordanian youth; 98 per cent of the respondents are Muslims and 2 per cent Christians. In fact, independent of the gender, educational level, marital status, budget, and milieu of residence, Jordanian youth have become more religious compared to five years ago, according to their own perception.⁹ As is the case with the feeling of stability that the family provides, 83 per cent of Jordanian youth state that their personal faith in religion is a (rather) stable field of personal life. In this respect, Jordan is not exceptional in the region. The tendency towards more religiosity and the importance of religion in the personal life of youth is a regional phenomenon.

Related to that, the analysis of the survey results highlights that more than half of respondents display signs of their religious orientation. The headscarf (32 per cent) and the prayer bump (17 per cent) are the most common ones. Men (66 per cent as opposed to only 20 per cent of women), youth with a low educational level (49 per cent), singles (48 per cent), and residents of small cities (50 per cent) more often do not display any signs of religious orientation. For 71 per cent of youth, *halal* products – especially food and cosmetics – are very important. Moreover, while 79 per cent of surveyed youth are convinced that religion is a private matter and nobody should interfere, 66 per cent think Islam should play a larger role in daily life.

Taken together, Jordanian youth, on average opt for more visibility, interference, and a larger role of religion in

7. In 13 to 16 per cent of the cases, the head of the household and the manager of the everyday household affairs is the husband/wife or the respondent himself/herself, especially among married youth.

8. UNDP, Chapter 4 (see note 4).

9. On a scale from 1 = »not religious« to 10 = »very religious«, religiosity currently reaches an average of 6.9 compared to 6.3 five years ago.

daily life. In addition, the traditional or tribal value of paying attention to codes of honour and shame is one of the most important aspects Jordanian youth refer to in the context of attitudes, behaviour, and life achievements.¹⁰

Youth identity and values are not only shaped by their families, religion, and traditional or tribal values, Jordanian youth also share the interests of youth around the world and engage in leisure activities, such as watching television (79 per cent), and surfing the Internet (52 per cent), listening to music (34 per cent), followed by visiting neighbours/relatives (31 per cent), and doing something with the family (26 per cent).¹¹ Contrasting to these rather conventional and customary activities that do not challenge family values, other activities – such as going to the cinema, dancing/parties, sitting in coffee shops, or joining youth clubs – are much less prevalent (below 10 per cent). Similar dynamics can be observed in the region as a whole. While engaging in the latter kind of leisure activities also depends on their availability and whether youth have the financial means to finance their leisure activities, it is noteworthy that differences also exist between women and men. In most cases, they practice activities with varying frequencies. This is also the case with regard to sharing interests with youth around the world; whereas men share an interest in football (44 per cent), women favour fashion (46 per cent).

The focus on the family and individual activities further manifests in the group or clique attachment and participation. On average, 64 per cent of Jordanian youth in the survey are part of a fixed group of friends who frequently meet. Youth with a low educational level (52 per cent), women (58 per cent as opposed to 69 per cent of men), married individuals (52 per cent), and youth who live in small cities (53 per cent) are to a lower degree part of a clique. Although half of the respondents are very satisfied with their clique and slightly more than one-third are satisfied, in general, Jordanian youth prioritise a good job (46 per cent) and a good marriage (31 per cent) over good friends (4 per cent) when it comes to their personal future. This wish, similar to other statements the interviewees made, contradicts the claimed overall satisfaction with the socio-economic situation of youth and their family.

10. The same level of importance is given to respecting law and order (8.6); engaging in politics, however, receives the least importance (4.6).

11. These activities also indicate that the youth overwhelmingly belong to the lower middle class (70 per cent according to self-assessment).

In addition to feelings of stability in their personal lives, which have already been discussed – such as family relations, religion, or trust in friends – youth also experience fear and anxiety. Before discussing this, however, it is important to emphasise that Jordanian youth display the highest overall feeling of security – including, inter alia, school/job, family, economic situation, political transformations, and future developments – amongst the youth included in this study. On a scale from 1 = »not at all secure« to 10 = »totally secure«, Jordanian youth rate 7.5; Bahrain (7.0), Morocco and Egypt (both 6.8) follow. Syrian refugees and Yemeni youth feel least secure (4.5 and 5.0 respectively). Jordanian youth are rather optimistic with regard to their own future and personal life (77 per cent) as well as the future of society (83 per cent). They, and Moroccan youth (76 per cent and 84 per cent respectively), are among the most optimistic youth among the youth in the MENA region. The main anxieties with regard to the future are becoming poor (41 per cent) and becoming seriously sick (36 per cent), followed by not being as successful as one wished (32 per cent) as well as increasing insecurity and losing one's job (each 28 per cent). It is noteworthy that Jordanian men are slightly more anxious about the future than Jordanian women. Altogether, the level of anxiety is below the regional averages and Jordan is one of the countries in the region with the fewest anxieties amongst the youth. In terms of the importance of changes during the last five years, Jordanian youth report that changes within the family (70 per cent), social instability (65 per cent), food shortages (63 per cent), growing violence (58 per cent), and job losses (55 per cent) are the most important that have occurred. These high rates can partially be explained by the fact that Jordan is an immigration state, which has hosted several waves of refugees in the past two decades – mainly Iraqis and Syrians – in addition to the Palestinian refugees who have lived in Jordan for much longer. In particular, the high influx of Syrian refugees and the ongoing conflict in Syria in the recent past have nurtured the fears of Jordanian youth, as well as their feelings of stability and change.

4. Socio-Economic Situation

In general, respondents from all of the different backgrounds attest an improvement in the economic situation since 2010. The overall economic situation of their family is considered very or rather good by 79 per cent of Jordanian youth compared to 74 per cent in 2010.

The evaluation of their personal economic situation confirms this optimism and resembles the assessment of the overall economic situation; 71 per cent describe their situation as rather/very good.¹² Moreover, more than 50 per cent of them attest the stability of the economic situation. Thus, their optimism does not seem to be a snapshot in time. In order to shed light on this optimism, this section focuses on social class, employment, and questions of emigration.

According to their self-assessment, 70 per cent of respondents see their families as lower middle class and 19 per cent as wealthy or upper middle class (see Figure 1 below); 50 per cent consider themselves to be part of the working class.

A closer look at the Jordanian lower middle class reveals a more nuanced picture. At least three segments can be differentiated, of which one can be considered part of the upper middle class. This becomes particularly evident when looking at various indicators of class position. Several indicators help to assess class position – including the educational and employment background of the parent generation, living situation, expenditures, shopping patterns, and leisure activities.¹³

With regard to the first two indicators, 40 per cent of respondents report that their fathers have a high educational level, 19 per cent medium, and 30 per cent low. The main occupation of their fathers is either state employee (26 per cent), self-employed without higher education (12 per cent), retired (20 per cent), or self-employed in the service sector (10 per cent). They receive a stable income, which amounts on average to 532 euro per month. By contrast, only 20 per cent of respondents state that their mothers have a high educational level, 36 per cent medium, and 26 per cent low. The majority of mothers do not have a stable income: 87 per cent of them work without income or are jobless, 5 per cent are state employees, and 3 per cent are retired. On average, the income of mothers who have a job amounts to 449 euro per month. Moreover, whereas 62 per cent of men with a paid job do not receive sickness payments, the rate among women is 83 per cent.

The living situation, expenditures, and shopping patterns also indicate that the social class of Jordanian youth is more complex and nuanced than often assumed. Characteristics of both the lower middle class and upper middle class can be jointly observed. In terms of housing, 41 per cent of youth live in single houses and 49 per cent in apartments. In rural areas, single houses dominate (64 per cent). In 66 per cent of cases, the family is the owner of the residence, and 85 per cent of respondents have a

12. The most visible exception is youth with a low education level who assess their family's overall economic situation as well as their personal economic situation less positively.

13. The leisure activities have been discussed in the previous section.

Figure 1: Class Assessment (values in percentages)

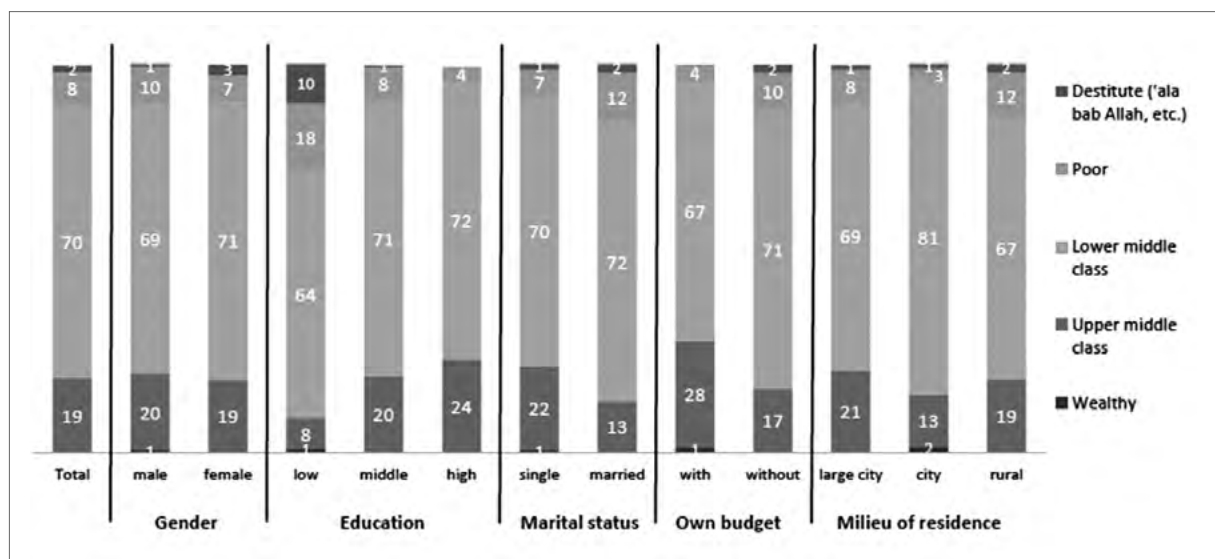


Table 1: Monthly Expenditures
(values in percentages; multiple answers possible)

Food (oil, sugar, etc.)	69
Wheat and bread	54
Clothes	45
Water and electricity	36
Mobile phone	26
Internet	21
Cigarettes	19
Housing rent	18
Studies	16
Local snacks	14
Gas bottles (cooking)	13
Going out with friends	9
Transport/ travelling	8
Paying debts/ instalments	8
McDonald's, Pizza Hut, KFC	8
Medication, drugs	5
Cosmetics	5
Insurance	3
Music	2
Video and online games	2
Other	2

room for themselves; this rate is lower among respondents with a low educational level (72 per cent). Jordanian youth are above the regional average in terms of the housing situation. With regard to expenditures, the major items they spend money on are food (69 per cent, including cooking oil, sugar, etc.), wheat/bread (54 per cent), clothes (45 per cent), and water/electricity (36 per cent). However, compared to these expenditures, which are more prevalent amongst the lower middle class, the expenditures for lifestyle activities and products that are characteristic for the upper middle class and the wealthy – such as mobile phones, the Internet, going out with friends, fast food, or cosmetics – are much lower. Thus, while the housing situation indicates that respondents are well off, a closer look at the expenditures suggests the opposite.

The shopping patterns give similarly mixed results that reveal patterns, particularly amongst the lower middle class: using predominantly bakeries (62 per cent), grocers (59 per cent), supermarkets (43 per cent), butchers (42 per cent), or weekly markets (33 per cent), and only rarely malls (29 per cent). In conclusion, respondents assess their own class position lower than the consideration of the various indicators suggests. However, it has been shown that there is variation across different indicators of class. Depending on which indicators are used to assess the class position and socio-economic well-being, the findings may change.

The financial situation of youth further underlines these findings. Three-quarters of respondents have no money at their disposal, and the main reasons are that they are either students (44 per cent) or not working (50 per cent). Amongst those who have access to money, most receive pocket money from their parents (58 per cent), earn money from their own work (37 per cent), or receive a scholarship (5 per cent). In more than 50 per cent of cases, the financial support takes place on an irregular basis.¹⁴ That also explains why few young Jordanians have their own bank account (18 per cent). Only those who have their own budget and have a high educational level typically have a bank account (38 per cent and 36 per cent respectively) and/or credit card (30 per cent and 28 per cent respectively). Similarly, 85 per cent of respondents do not have savings, but of those who have their own budget 42 per cent save money. Security/in case of need is the main reason for saving money (51 per cent), followed by dowry (15 per cent). Although the majority of respondents do not save money, they also do not have debts (79 per cent). The highest rates of debts are amongst men (26 per cent), youth with low educational levels (34 per cent), and married youth (40 per cent). The amount of debt ranges from medium, which is between one and six monthly budgets (46 per cent) to high, which is more than six monthly budgets (39 per cent).

Before discussing the employment situation, which includes questions of job security and satisfaction, it is important to underline that of those 25 per cent of respondents who have access to money, with only 37 per cent is it due to their own work. Amongst women, the rate is the lowest with only 15 per cent compared to

14. The youth who support their families primarily do so on an irregular basis (15 per cent), only 9 per cent on a regular basis.

Table 2: Reasons for Choosing the Job, answer »true« (values in percentages)

	Total	Gender		Education			Marital Status		Budget		Milieu of Residence		
		male	female	low	middle	high	single	married	with	without	large city	city	rural
I had no other option	56	58	46	60	61	46	58	51	42	65	55	50	62
It is the only work I know how to do	30	30	29	39	27	30	26	37	26	32	28	28	42
It is a secure job	61	59	68	52	57	70	59	64	66	57	58	64	75
It is a business that belongs to my family	26	28	16	26	29	20	29	19	30	22	25	25	24
My boss is from the same area	24	26	18	24	26	21	27	19	26	23	22	28	34
It's nicely paid	35	37	31	28	35	40	38	28	46	29	35	40	37
It's work that is socially well accepted	60	60	60	46	58	68	62	55	68	54	59	52	67
I can engage with friends and colleagues	53	53	54	42	52	60	58	43	61	49	54	43	58
I can learn a lot	52	51	54	50	47	59	54	46	62	45	50	53	58
I have the option to upgrade my position	48	47	56	48	42	58	51	44	60	41	48	52	54

men with 56 per cent. Thus, the number of respondents who work is very low.¹⁵

Most respondents are state employees (30 per cent), followed by employees with insurance and workers without insurance but continuous employment (both 16 per cent); in addition, 10 per cent work in a family business, are self-employed, or work as day labourers. Differences between the genders, educational level, and milieu of residence are pronounced. With regard to the reasons for choosing a job, respondents with jobs list job security (61 per cent) and the social acceptance of the job (60 per cent) as the most important (see Table 3 below). The lack of other options is also a common reason for choosing a job (56 per cent). Furthermore, the work environment matters – that is, colleagues/friends (53 per cent), learning possibilities (52 per cent), and the option to upgrade one's position (48 per cent).

15. This corresponds to the challenges of youth unemployment and the labour market transition. The unemployment rate among the 15 to 24 years old alone was already 33.4 per cent in 2015. See: Ralitza Dimova, Sara Elder, and Karim Stephan, (2016). *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in the Middle East and North Africa*. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 44, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2016; Valentina Baruccci, Nader Mryaan, *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Jordan*. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 14, Geneva: International Labour Office, 2014; Ryan Brown, Louay Constant, Peter Glick, Audra Grant, *Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2014.

The satisfaction with the work is rather high; only 22 per cent of respondents state that they are not at all or only a little satisfied with their work. In contrast, 45 per cent are satisfied a lot with their work, especially women (62 per cent). When asked about the criteria for a satisfying employment situation in general (including those who currently do not work), the answers given by all respondents are not so different from the reasons for choosing a job given by those who currently work: 57 per cent name job security as a very important criterion followed by a high income (56 per cent), the option to upgrade one's position (53 per cent), as well as having the feeling of achieving something (52 per cent). Moreover, 70 per cent of respondents are rather or totally confident that it will be possible to realise their job wishes. This being said, 49 per cent are (consistently) not using their full potential with regard to their performance level (work, studies, daily affairs) and only 25 per cent feel that they have a good work-life balance. As a consequence, there seems to be a clash between job wishes and performance.

As discussed above, fears, the change of the current situation, refugees, and emigration concern Jordanian youth. Nearly 33 per cent of respondents have witnessed violence and 11 per cent have experienced psychologi-

cal violence – especially youth with a low educational level and rural residents. Amongst respondents, 9 per cent consider themselves refugees, but 90 per cent have never lived outside of their country; of those who did, 30 per cent lived in the Gulf and 60 per cent in other Arab countries.¹⁶ Similarly, only 12 per cent state that one of their family members emigrated, either to North America (37 per cent), the Gulf (34 per cent), or Europe (19 per cent). Thus, Jordanian youth have limited experience with emigration and display mixed feelings about the issue. While some youth are fascinated by the idea of emigration (20 per cent) or emphasise the financial benefits of having a family member abroad (33 per cent), 27 per cent consider emigration to be a loss in their personal life or have been negatively influenced by the experience of an emigrated family member (18 per cent).¹⁷ Approximately 55 per cent of respondents with a family member who has emigrated state that emigration is of no importance to them, and 56 per cent of all respondents assert that they are definitely not going to emigrate. Among those who play with the idea of emigrating, the preferred destinations within Europe would be the United Kingdom (36 per cent), Germany, and France (both 32 per cent). Related to that, the readiness among all respondents to leave their family in order to obtain a good professional qualification, to accept work in a rural region in their own country, in an Arab country, or in Europe in order to change their current situation is between 36 and 49 per cent. Thus, approximately half of respondents do not appear to be very flexible in terms of emigration, whereas the other half does. Hence, initiatives aiming to facilitate the transition of youth from education to employment and the creation of employment opportunities need to consider this emigration inflexibility.

5. Politics & Society

Following the discussion about socio-economic issues, this section focuses on the political dimension, which includes civic and political engagement as well as political views. The Arab Spring has demonstrated that new

16. Although this information was not provided explicitly, these results indicate that refugee youth have lived in Jordan for a long time or are born there and are not recent refugees.

17. These statements cannot be generalised, because only youth who have an emigrant in the family and who consider this to be important answered this question – that is, not more than 50 people.

communication technologies play an important role for youth and their mobilisation. Therefore, this section begins with an overview of communication.

Jordanian youth began to explore the modern communication technologies intensively around 2009. Although they were not among the early users of mobiles or smartphones (2009 on average) and the Internet (2011) compared to the other countries in this study, these are now widespread modes of communication in Jordan: 92 per cent of Jordanian youth use the Internet (only 78 per cent of youth with a low educational level use the Internet), and 98 per cent of them use their phones to do so. However, only a few actually have a contract (6 per cent), the majority uses prepaid plans; most contracts exist in rural areas (16 per cent). Rural youth also exhibit the highest rate of Internet use at home (97 per cent; this is the second highest among the countries under study). Other common places where youth use the Internet is anywhere they have access (40 per cent) or at the workplace (35 per cent). Internet cafés, shops, cafés, and restaurants are only used by about 20 per cent, and universities by 12 per cent of Internet users.

WhatsApp (91 per cent) and Facebook (89 per cent) are the dominant social networks amongst Jordanian youth. They primarily use these networks for leisure purposes – for example, to keep in touch with friends (65 per cent), to organise meetings with friends (43 per cent), to share music/videos/photos (42 per cent), and for job-hunting purposes (35 per cent). Discussions and mobilisation for politics rate very low (16 to 17 per cent), for religious affairs they are slightly higher (18 to 25 per cent).

These tendencies are consistent with the attitudes, values, and interests of youth discussed so far. As shown in the following, Jordanian youth do not use other channels for political discussions and mobilisations either; most of them simply have limited or no interest in civic or political engagement. Nevertheless, 51 per cent think that the political situation is (rather) stable.

The civic engagement of Jordanian youth is limited to a few areas of interest, none of them overly political or controversial. The main areas youth frequently support are the interests of the young people (14 per cent), helping the poor/vulnerable (12 per cent), improving the community life in their area of residence (12 per cent), a better/cleaner environment (11 per cent), and improving



Table 3: Reasons for No Civic Engagement, answer »strongly agree« (values in percentages)

	Total	Gender		Education			Milieu of Residence		
		male	female	low	middle	high	large city	city	rural
There are no or only very few initiatives in my area	45	45	45	34	45	53	43	48	59
They are not professionally managed	37	39	34	34	35	43	36	33	44
It remains unclear where the money goes	37	41	31	29	37	40	37	30	41
It's only for the benefit of a few	35	37	33	27	34	40	35	33	38
Only strong men have a say	37	38	37	31	36	43	36	46	35
Volunteer work never pays off	28	30	25	32	28	25	26	34	31
The government is not supporting it	35	39	31	29	37	34	35	42	31
There is no income from that	35	39	31	37	35	35	34	37	42
There are no prospects in it	34	37	31	33	34	33	32	40	38
My family does not want me to do so	29	26	32	33	28	28	28	32	31
I am already struggling to make ends meet	45	50	39	39	42	54	46	40	43

the situation of disabled people (11 per cent). The survey results show that young men are somewhat more engaged than young women; the same holds true for youth with a high educational level as well as singles.

Similar to the limited level of civic engagement and the absence of controversial political issues on the agenda of Jordanian youth, the institutions and places of engagement are also few in number and hardly affiliated to a political group. Most youth participate in a group at school or university (15 per cent) or in a youth organisation (9 per cent). Only 6 per cent support social goals as members of a religious institution. So, if Jordanian youth do not show significant levels of civic engagement, what are the reasons for this? Respondents report a combination of personal and structural reasons for non-engagement: 45 per cent state that they are themselves already struggling to make ends meet; the same proportion have the feeling that none or few initiatives exist in their neighbourhood. In terms of structural reasons, others argue that social projects are not professionally managed (37 per cent), it remains unclear where the money goes (37 per cent), and only strong men have a say (37 per cent).

With regard to political engagement, 87 per cent of respondents state that they have little or no interest in politics. Youth with a high educational level and residents of small cities are slightly more interested in poli-

tics, they express a (high) interest in politics (17 and 20 per cent respectively). Accordingly, 92 per cent of respondents do not actively inform themselves about politics.¹⁸ The Internet (67 per cent) and TV (62 per cent) are the main sources of information. Only 16 per cent of respondents who inform themselves about politics use face-to-face conversations to do so. Amongst respondents, political actions considered/used are participating in elections and boycotting certain goods – both 6 to 16 per cent, so also rather low. Other political actions – such as participating in demonstrations/strikes or joining a political party (0 to 3 per cent) – are hardly considered or done. This has also become apparent in the small scale of protests in the context of the Arab Spring.¹⁹ In fact, respondents predominately term the events that have been taking place since late 2010/2011 »Arab Spring« (19 per cent), »foreign intervention« (20 per cent), and »anarchy/chaos« (14 per cent); they hardly describe these events as revolutions (8 per cent). Respondents are convinced that the events were started by youth but then hijacked by others (54 per cent), in particular by external/international actors such as the United States (41 to 47 per cent). Moreover, youth

18. This is the highest rate amongst the countries under study. The average rate of not actively informing oneself about politics is at 82 per cent.

19. See S. Tobin, Jordan's Arab Spring: The Middle Class and Anti-Revolution, in *Middle East Policy* 19, no. 1 (2012): 96 f; S. Yom, Jordan and Morocco: The Palace Gambit, in *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 2 (2017): 132 f.

hold these events responsible for widespread violence (53 per cent). Thus, for the majority of Jordanian youth, the Arab Spring has more negative than positive connotations.

Given the small scale of political action and protests in Jordan, what are the preferred political systems among Jordanian youth? The survey results suggest that three different systems appeal to youth. The most popular political system sees a strong man who governs the country at the centre (32 per cent). In particular, men, youth with a high educational level, married youth, and residents of small cities favour this system. The second preferred system is a combined democratic and Islamic system (22 per cent), and the third is a democratic system (21 per cent). The latter system is particularly favoured by rural youth. However, it does not become clear how youth define the current political system and whether it corresponds with their preferences. In view of the trust Jordanian youth put in state institutions and the role of the state in daily life they envision, we can conclude that they do not give much thought to these questions. In general, trust in institutions is (rather) high (see Table 4 below).


The family (42 per cent), parties (40 per cent), the parliament (37 per cent), and the education system (36 per cent) as well as the tribes (35 per cent) are considered trustworthy. By contrast, religious organisations (29 per cent) and neighbourhood associations (28 per cent), the police (22 per cent) and the government (16 per cent) are trusted less. With regard to the role of the state in everyday life, respondents are content with the role it plays (34 per cent) or wish for a larger role (63 per cent). Especially rural youth would like the state to play a larger role. Nearly half of all the respondents want the state to have a larger role in the area of surveillance, followed – with a noteworthy distance – by social security (28 per cent). This statement corresponds with the fears and anxieties of respondents.

6. Conclusion

This report has shed light on a plethora of social, economic, and political issues that shape the lives and perspectives of Jordanian youth. It has become clear that, overall, respondents are optimistic about their future

Table 4: Trust in Institutions (values in percentages)

	Total	Gender		Education			Milieu of Residence		
		male	female	low	middle	high	large city	city	rural
Educational System	36	35	37	31	37	36	37	34	32
Media	33	32	35	29	35	31	34	30	35
Family	42	40	45	36	43	44	41	46	43
Government	16	18	14	15	16	16	16	20	11
Parliament	37	37	38	17	43	34	39	36	25
Military	31	30	31	23	32	32	34	27	21
Police	22	21	23	16	21	26	22	21	24
Religious organisations	29	27	32	16	31	31	32	28	21
Tribe	35	37	34	22	35	42	35	41	29
Human rights NGOs	29	27	30	25	29	30	28	29	35
Neighbourhood associations	28	28	29	13	31	29	28	33	16
Parties	40	39	40	27	41	42	39	44	36
Trade unions	29	29	29	26	28	35	30	33	20
Legal system and courts	35	32	39	19	35	44	36	36	34
United Nations	10	9	11	8	11	8	10	15	8



with regard to the social, economic, and political situations. In light of the political instability and the socio-economic situation in Jordan, this is surprising.

Nonetheless, Jordanian youth are also plagued by fears. They are particularly afraid of impoverishment and security issues; the Arab Spring and its consequences across the MENA region play a large role in nurturing their fears.

Jordanian youth have very limited interest in politics and political action, and related to that do not inform themselves about political issues. Participating in elections is the closest many young people get to politics. However, besides their families and religion, state institutions – especially the government and the military – are considered trustworthy institutions.

The family and religion are of key importance to Jordanian youth. The majority of respondents still live with their families and consult them in all important matters of their lives. The family stands above all other aspects in life. Religion is the only other institution that provides a strong feeling of stability; in fact, a tendency towards more religiosity can be observed.



References

- Barucci, Valentina / Mryaan, Nader** (2014): *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in Jordan*. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 14, Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Brown, Ryan / Constant, Louay / Glick, Peter / Grant, Audra** (2014): *Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
- Dimova, Ralitzka / Elder, Sara / Stephan, Karim** (2016): *Labour Market Transitions of Young Women and Men in the Middle East and North Africa*. Work4Youth Publication Series No. 44, Geneva: International Labour Office.
- Gertel, Jörg / Hexel, Ralf** (2018): *Coping With Uncertainty*. Youth in the Middle East and North Africa, London: Saqi Books.
- Tobin, S.** (2012): Jordan's Arab Spring: The Middle Class and Anti-Revolution. *Middle East Policy* 19 (1), 96–109.
- UNDP** (2016): *Arab Human Development Report: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality*. New York: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- Yom, S.** (2017): Jordan and Morocco: The Palace Gambit. *Journal of Democracy* 28 (2), 132–146.



About the author

Nadine Kreitmeyr is an Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Social Sciences at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. She holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the interplay of authoritarianism and neo-liberalism in the Middle East and North Africa from a comparative politics perspective with a focus on Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan.

Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Dep. for Middle East and North Africa
Hiroshimastr. 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Responsible:
Dr Ralf Hexel, Head, Middle East and North Africa

Phone: +49-30-269-35-7420 | Fax: +49-30-269-35-9233
<http://www.fes.de/nahost>

Orders/Contact:
info.nahost@fes.de

Commercial use of all media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung or of the organization for which the author works.

This publication is printed on paper from sustainable forestry.



ISBN
978-3-96250-073-3