

Why Middle East publics have mixed views on climate change

Author:

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DUBAI: A majority of people in 28 countries believe that climate change will result in serious global economic damage, rising sea levels endangered cities, mass displacement of people and even wars, a YouGov poll has found.

But the survey of 30,000 people has revealed noticeable differences in attitudes between East and West.

People in Eastern and Middle Eastern countries are much more likely than those in the West to believe that climate change will have a serious impact, according to the poll.

In the Middle East, the survey polled public opinion in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.

"Climate change may never before have been as firmly fixed in the public consciousness as it is today," said the YouGov report.

"That climate change is happening and that humanity is at least partly responsible is a view held by a majority across the world."

Yet only 47 percent of respondents in the UAE and 39 percent in Saudi Arabia believe that they or their country could take more action on climate change.

"The area of concern that stands out for the Middle East in general is the proportion of respondents in the region who believe either they or their country could be doing more to combat climate change," Scott Booth, head of data products and services at YouGov MENA, told Arab News.

"Less than half of respondents in the region thought they or their country could be doing more," he said. "In all cases, a lower proportion thought they themselves could be doing more to tackle climate change."

"Unfortunately, this may reflect an attitude in the region that while climate change is a problem, it's not 'our' problem. The likely impact, and thereby the onus for action, has been placed elsewhere."

When asked to describe their views about the global environment, 52 percent of UAE respondents said they believe that the climate is changing and human activity is mainly responsible. Similarly, 42 percent of Egyptians stated the same, followed by 35 percent in Saudi Arabia.

Western countries such as Spain and Italy show a substantially larger proportion (69 percent and 66 percent, respectively) believing that climate

change is due to human activity.

A further 7 percent of Egyptian and Saudi residents said the climate is changing but human activity is not responsible at all, while 6 percent of UAE respondents had the same opinion.

Of the countries included in the poll, these figures are only the same or higher in the US (10 percent), Norway (8 percent) and Sweden (6 percent).

Overwhelmingly respondents in the Middle East said they believe that the climate is changing and that it is mainly or partly due to human activity.

FAST FACTS

- 39% – Saudi respondents who believe they or their country could do more on climate change.
- 35% – Saudi respondents who believe the climate is changing and human activity is mainly responsible.
- 75% – Saudi respondents who believe climate change will affect their lives substantially.

But Booth said that the issue of acknowledgement of climate change as a human problem is more pronounced in the Middle East.

Seven of the 10 countries where respondents were most likely to call climate change a human-caused issue are in South or Southeast Asia, compared with only one in the Middle East.

“Generally, the data would suggest that the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and Saudi Arabia are getting the message that the climate is changing, and they’re beginning to believe this change is largely human-caused,” Booth said.

“One area where respondents in the Kingdom stand out from the rest of the GCC is in perceived impact, with only three-quarters (76 percent) of Saudi respondents saying climate change will affect their life at least a fair amount.”

Muhammad Ishfaq, a senior economic analyst with the Dubai government’s finance department, told Arab News: “It was a general perception, before cities grew and urbanization started, that nature was the main cause of climate change.

“Most Middle Easterners still believe nature is the main cause of climate change, as a big part of Saudi Arabia and the UAE was originally populated by nomadic people who experienced only rural development.”

He added: “Western countries experienced industrialization and urbanization much earlier than the Middle East.”

But Ishfaq said the perception is changing as industrialization and

urbanization in the UAE, a limited agriculture base and low precipitation are accentuating the effects of climate change.

“The frequency and nature of dust storms in the UAE may change the future perception about nature and the causes of climate change as human or natural,” he added.

For the Middle East, described by the World Bank last year as “the most water-scarce in the world,” acknowledging and acting on the implications of climate change may be critical to the region’s future.

When respondents were asked to indicate who they think is responsible for the current situation with climate change, the study showed a general divide between regions.

Asian and Pacific people generally held international bodies accountable, while Middle Eastern respondents saw the governments of wealthy nations as responsible. More respondents in the US and Europe believe that businesses and industry are to blame.

Overall, the finger was pointed primarily at China and the US, with India further away in third place.

Booth said education is the main obstacle to wider acceptance by Middle Eastern populations that they or their country could be doing more on climate change, as is the case when “trying to get people anywhere in the world to consider and address a problem that doesn’t immediately and obviously impact their daily lives.”

But he added that education will have a limited impact so long as the problem appears unlikely to affect people’s lives directly.

“Another solution is to create a financial incentive for behaviors that combat the issue: Excise taxes can punish behaviors that are deemed damaging, while credits promote behaviors that positively affect the issue,” he said.

“For example, we may place an excise tax on gasoline and diesel fuel, while offering a credit for driving an electric vehicle.”

Ishfaq said water and land resources in the Middle East are under stress due to increasing industrialization and tourism.

“Rapid urbanization is becoming a major challenge for more food, larger greenhouse gas emissions, and social and energy security,” he said.

“For instance, with a growing population’s food requirements needing to be met, the UAE experiences overfishing and overgrazing, and waste is reaching (critical) levels.

“Meanwhile, the exploitation of oil and gas generates wealth but destroys environmental habitat.

“It’s essential for decision-makers and local populations to understand the

modality of climatic trends in the Middle East.”

While some findings of the YouGov survey make for gloomy reading, the good news, as the report notes, is that “the public has faith that the worst effects of climate change can still be averted (and) that dramatic action will be needed in order to do so.”



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[Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia fail to reach agreement on Nile dam](#)

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By SAMY MAGDY | AP

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Sat, 2019-10-05 17:48

CAIRO: Irrigation ministers from three key Nile Basin countries wrapped up a two-day meeting Saturday in Sudan's capital without resolving differences over Ethiopia's soon-to-be-finished Blue Nile dam, with Egypt calling for international mediation to help reach a "fair and balanced" agreement. Sudan Irrigation Minister Yasser Abbas told reporters in Khartoum that progress was made but differences on filling the giant reservoir and operating rules of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam remain unsettled. He said Ethiopia proposed a plan to fill the reservoir over four to seven years, without elaborating. He added that the three countries would continue consultations without giving a time frame.

Egypt's Irrigation Ministry, meanwhile, said in a statement after the meeting that talks have stalemated, claiming Ethiopia rejected "all proposals that ... avoid causing substantial damage to Egypt."

"Ethiopia ... offered a new proposal that contradicts previously agreed principles governing the filling and operating process," said Muhammed el-Sebai, spokesman of the ministry.

He said Egypt has called for international mediation "to help reach a fair and balanced agreement that protect the three countries' rights."

Ethiopia did not immediately respond.

Egyptian presidency spokesman Bassam Radi said Egypt was looking forward to an "instrumental role" by the US in the talks. He said because there was no breakthrough in negotiations, there was a need for an "international instrumental role to overcome the current deadlock."

White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said Thursday the US supports Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan's negotiations to reach a sustainable and mutually beneficial agreement.

"All Nile Valley countries have a right to economic development and prosperity," Grisham said. "The administration calls on all sides to put forth good faith efforts to reach an agreement that preserves those rights, while simultaneously respecting each other's Nile water equities."

Egypt fears the dam could reduce its share of the Nile River, which serves as a lifeline for the country's 100 million people. Ethiopia has roughly the same population and says the dam will help its economic development.





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New round of talks on Nile waters starts in Sudan's capital
Egypt lowers fuel prices after protests

[Anguish for jailed UK-Iranian mum at sending daughter to Britain](#)

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Sat, 2019-10-05 13:55

LONDON: The husband of a British-Iranian mother jailed in Tehran since 2016 said on Saturday the couple's decision to send their five-year-old daughter to him in Britain to start school was "bittersweet."

Richard Ratcliffe, whose wife Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe is serving a five-

year term for sedition, told AFP he is looking forward to seeing daughter Gabriella for the first time in more than three years.

But she has been staying with relatives in Iran since her mother's detention and visiting her in jail each week, so he fears the impact of the change. "It will be bittersweet," Ratcliffe said, adding they hoped Gabriella will be back in London by Christmas.

"It will be lovely to have her back... and then also we will be weary of the fallout for Nazanin," Ratcliffe added, noting Gabriella had been "her lifeline and that lifeline will have been taken away."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe, 40, stated in an open letter released earlier this week that Gabriella, who only speaks a few words of English, would return to Britain "in the near future."

"My baby will leave me to go to her father and start school in the UK," she wrote.

"It will be a daunting trip for her traveling, and for me left behind.

"And the authorities who hold me will watch on, unmoved at the injustice of separation," Zaghari-Ratcliffe added, describing being apart from her daughter as the "deepest torture of them all."

Zaghari-Ratcliffe was arrested in April 2016 as she was leaving Iran after taking their then 22-month-old daughter to visit her family.

She was sentenced to five years for allegedly trying to topple the Iranian government.

A project manager with the Thomson Reuters Foundation, the media group's philanthropic arm, she denies all charges.

The case has unfolded amid escalating tensions between Tehran and the West, particularly with the United States and Britain.

Her detention in Iran has included a week-long transfer to a mental health ward of a public hospital earlier this year.

Husband Ratcliffe said they had applied for an exit visa for Gabriella but were unsure how long it would take.

"I would be very surprised if it doesn't happen, but I wouldn't be surprised if it takes a bit of time," he added.

In her open letter, addressed to "the mothers of Iran," Zaghari-Ratcliffe said she had little hope of being released imminently.

"My hope for freedom from my own country died in my heart years back," she stated.

"I have no hope or motivation after my baby goes. There is no measure to my pain."

In response to the letter, rights group Amnesty UK called on Tehran to free the mother.

"It's time for Iran to end this cruel punishment," it said.



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Australian couple return home after 3-month Iran detention
Iranian hackers targeted a US presidential campaign, Microsoft says

[Tunisia presidential runner Saied quits campaigning](#)

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TUNIS: Tunisian presidential candidate Kais Saied announced Saturday that he was quitting campaigning, in order to avoid an unfair advantage over his jailed opponent Nabil Karoui.

"I will not personally campaign on moral grounds, to avoid any doubt over the fairness between the candidates," Saied wrote on his Facebook page.

An independent professor of law, Saied won the first round of voting on

September 15 with a low-budget grassroots campaign conducted largely via Facebook. He remained low-key after the vote, avoiding some television appearances.

His rival, media mogul Karoui, has been under investigation since 2017 for money laundering and tax evasion and was arrested on August 23 – a week before the campaigning started for the first round presidential vote.

With the run-off vote scheduled for October 13, Tunisia's president, the United Nations, international observers and numerous politicians have called for "equal opportunity" between the two candidates.

Interim president Mohamed Ennaceur warned Friday that Karoui's detention was "an abnormal situation that could have serious and dangerous repercussions on the electoral process."

The United Nations called for "peaceful and transparent" elections.

Karoui accuses his political rivals, notably Ennahdha, of politicizing the judicial process.

His supporters have raised the possibility of appealing the outcome if Karoui isn't elected.

Saied nonetheless stressed his "deep conviction that equal opportunities must also include the means available to both candidates," referring to Karoui's media and financial empire mobilized for his campaign.

Karoui has campaigned via Nessma – the leading private television channel that he founded – and through his wife Salwa Smaoui, who has given interviews to local and international media.

The drama of the presidential race has eclipsed Sunday's legislative elections, a key vote for this country that led the Arab Spring, where parliament has a wide prerogative over crucial issues including the economy.



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Tunisia polls not likely to yield a clear winner Tunisia sets presidential election runoff for October 13

Monitor: 9 militants killed in Russia strikes on Idlib

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Sat, 2019-10-05 09:23

BEIRUT: Nine militants were killed Saturday in Russian airstrikes on Syria's war-torn province of Idlib, a monitoring group said.

"Russian strikes this morning targeted the Hurras Al-Deen group and Ansar Al-Tahwid in eastern Idlib... killing nine jihadists," said the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, adding eight others were wounded.

Six of the dead were members of the Al-Qaeda linked Hurras Al-Deen, a group which is also targeted by the US-led coalition.

Moscow is a key ally of Syria's President Bashar Assad in the country's civil war, and despite an Idlib cease-fire deal reached on August 31, the province has continued to be targeted by Russian air attacks.

Russia-backed regime fighters have for weeks been chipping away at the edges of the province bordering Turkey that is the last militant stronghold outside of Assad's control.

Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham – a group led by Syria's former Al-Qaeda affiliate – extended its administrative control over the whole of Idlib in January, but other rebel factions remain present.

In late August, clashes between anti-government fighters and regime forces left more than 50 dead on both sides, when the militia attacked loyalist positions in the south.

Last month, Russia and China vetoed a UN Security Council resolution backed by 12 of the 15 member states that called for a cease-fire in Idlib province.

It was Russia's 13th veto of a UN resolution since the Syrian conflict

erupted in 2011, highlighting the Security Council's impasse over the issue.

The Syrian war has killed more than 370,000 people and displaced millions since it erupted in 2011 with the brutal repression of anti-government protests.



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Erdogan says Turkey plans military operation east of Euphrates in SyriaUS accuses Syria of chemical weapon attack in May in Idlib, sanctions firms aiding Russia