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BY RAMZY BAROUD

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Gaza Matters, and Democracy is Functional: On the Latest Democracy Perception Index



Image by CHUTTERSNAAP.

The Democracy Perception Index (DPI) issued its 2024 report on May 8, revealing important and interesting shifts in global perceptions about democracy, geopolitics and international relations.

The conclusions in the report were based on the views of over 62 thousand respondents from 53 countries – roughly representing 75 percent of the world's total population.

The survey was conducted between February 20th and April 15th, 2024, when the world was largely consumed by the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip.

It is important to note that the Index, though informative, is itself conceived in a biased context as it is the product of a global survey conducted by western-based companies and organizations.

In fact, the results of DPI were published ahead of a scheduled 2024 Copenhagen Democracy Summit, whose speakers will include Hillary Clinton, US Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell and President of the European Council, Charles Michel.

The first speaker listed on the conference website is Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the Founder and Chairman of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation – which commissioned the Index.

All of this is reflected in the kind of questions which are being asked in the survey, placing greater emphasis on whether, for example, ties should be cut with Russia over Ukraine, and China over a war that is yet to take place in Taiwan.

These major shortcomings notwithstanding, the outcome of the research remains interesting and worthy of reflection.

Below are some major takeaways from the Index:

One, there is growing dissatisfaction with the state of democracy, and such discontent is not limited to peoples living in countries perceived as non-democratic but include peoples in the US and Europe, as well.

Two, democracy, in the collective awareness of ordinary people, is not a political term – often infused as part of official propaganda. When seen from the viewpoint of people, it is a practical notion, whose absence leads to dire implications. For example, 68% of people worldwide believe that economic inequality at home is the greatest threat to democracy.

Three, also on the topic of ‘threat to democracy’, growing mistrust of Global Corporations (60%), Big Tech (49%) and their resulting Economic Inequality (68%) and Corruption (67%) lead to the unmistakable conclusion that western globalization has failed to create the proper environment for social equality, empower civil society or build democratic institutions. The opposite, based on people’s own perception, seems to be true.

Four, global priorities, as seen by many nations around the world, remain committed to ending wars, poverty, hunger, combating climate change, etc. However, this year’s top priority among European countries, 44%, is also centered on reducing immigration, a significant number compared to the 24% who prioritize fighting climate change.

Five, the world is divided between cutting ties with Russia and China, although again, the selection of the question reeks with bias. Those in western countries, who are subjected to relentless media propaganda, prefer cutting ties, while most people in the rest of the world prefer keeping ties. Consequently, due to China’s positive perception in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, the Index gave Beijing a “net positive”. Russia, on the other hand, is on the “path of image rehabilitation in most countries surveyed with the exception of Europe”, Politico reported.

Six, the greatest decline was suffered by the United States largely due to Washington's support of Israel in its ongoing war on the Gaza Strip. "Over the past four years .. perceptions of the US's global influence became more positive – peaking in 2022 or 2023 – and then declined sharply in 2024," the report concluded.

The large drop took place in the Muslim countries that were surveyed: Indonesia, Malaysia, Türkiye, Morocco, Egypt and Algeria. Some western European countries are also becoming more critical of the US, including Switzerland, Ireland and Germany.

Seven, most people (55% compared to 29%) believe that social media has a positive effect on democracy. Despite growing social media censorship, many in the Global South still find margins in these platforms which allows them to escape official or corporate media censorship. Growing criticism of social media companies, however, is taking place in western countries, according to the survey.

Eight, despite official propaganda emanating from many governments, especially in the west, regarding the greatest threats to world peace, the majority of people want their governments to focus on poverty reduction, fighting corruption, promoting economic growth, improving health care and education, while working to reduce income inequality. "Investing in security and defense" came seventh on the list.

Nine, people in countries which have an overall negative perception of the United States include some of the most influential global and regional powers – China, Russia, Indonesia, Austria, Türkiye, Australia and Belgium, among others.

Despite massive media propaganda, censorship and fear-mongering, peoples around the world remain clear on their collective priorities, expectations and aspirations: real democracy, social equality and justice.

If these collective yearnings continue to be denigrated and ignored, we should expect more social upheaval, if not outright insurrections and military coups in coming years.

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the Editor of The Palestine Chronicle. He is the author of five books. His latest is "These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons" (Clarity Press, Atlanta). Dr. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul Zaim University (IZU). His website is www.ramzybaroud.net

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