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REVISITING THE ARAB STREET RESEARCH FROM WITHIN

**Center for Strategic Studies
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Amman - Jordan**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	P
LIST OF FIGURES	2
LIST OF TABLES	4
INTRODUCTION	5
SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES	6
PARAMETERS	7
METHODOLOGY	7
OUTLINE OF REPORT	9
OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS	
SECTION 1. WHERE ARABS STAND	
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WEST	13
ASSESSING ARAB-WEST BILATERAL RELATIONS	25
SECTION 2. 'US' AND THE 'OTHER'	
PERCEPTIONS OF 'THE WEST' AND 'THE ARAB WORLD'	38
ISLAM IN THE ARAB WORLD	51
SECTION 3. ENGAGING THE WEST : PERCEPTIONS OF WESTERN FOREIGN POLICIES	
WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY	58
CRITICAL CONFLICTS	67
RETHINKING TERRORISM	72
SECTION 4. CONCLUSIONS	82

LIST OF FIGURES		P
I.1	General Attitudes toward Western Countries, National Samples	14
I.2	Percentage Preferring to Undertake Activity in Each Western Country, National Samples	16
I.3	Percentage Preferring to Purchase Goods Produced in Each Western Country, National Samples	17
I.4	Percentage Preferring to Undertake Each Activity in Western Country, National Samples	18
I.5	Favorable Attitudes toward Country by Age, National Samples	20
I.6	Percentage of Respondents Expressing Positive Attitudes toward Country by Education, National Samples	22
I.7	Percentage of Respondents Expressing Positive Attitudes toward Country, by Sample	23
II.1	Percentage Who View Political Relations between Their Government and Western Nations as Good, National Samples	26
II.2	Attitudes toward Changing Bilateral Political Relations, National Samples	27
II.3	Percentage Who View Bilateral Economic Relations as Good, National Samples	28
II.4	Attitudes Regarding Who Benefits More from Economic Relations, National Samples	29
II.5	Attitudes toward Changing Bilateral Economic Relations, National Samples	30
II.6	Percentage Who View Bilateral Cultural Relations as Good, National Samples	31
II.7	Percentage Who Prefer Strengthening Bilateral Cultural Relations, National Samples	32
II.8	Percentage Who View Bilateral Political Relations as Good, by Sample	33
II.9	Attitudes toward Improving Bilateral Political Relations, by Sample	34
II.10	Percentage of Respondents Supporting Closer Bilateral Political Ties, National Samples	35
III.1	Percentage of National Sample Unable to Name One Non-Political Personality in the Western Country, National Samples	39
III.2	. Percentage of Respondents Unable to Name a Single Cultural Personality, by Age, National Samples	40
III.3	Respondents' Estimates of the Prevalence of Individual Values, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data	42
III.4	Respondents' Estimates of the Prevalence of Societal Values, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data	43
III.5	. Percentage of Respondents Who Completely Disagree that Muslims Enjoy Equal Rights in Western Countries, National Samples	44
III.6	Respondents' Estimates of the Prevalence of Social Ills, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data	44
III.7	Percentage of Respondents Reporting Religion and Family are Important (Very Important and Rather Important Combined.), World Values Survey and European Values Survey, Fourth Wave Data, 2001	45
III.8	Perceptions of American Religiosity, BBC poll	46
III.9	Percentage Who Agree that Muslims in the Western Countries Enjoy the Same Rights as Other Citizens, By Age	47
III.10	Perceived Prevalence of Societal Values in Jordanian Society, by Sample	48
III.11	Perceived Prevalence of Individual Values in Jordanian Society, by Sample	49
IV.1	Muslim Respondents' Views on Ijtihad, National Samples	52
IV.2	Muslim Respondents' Views on the Role of the Shari'a in their Country's	52

	Legislation, National Samples	
IV.3	Percentage of Respondents Believing that Shari'a should be the sole source of legislation, by Samples	53
IV.4	Percentage of National Sample having Favorable Attitudes toward Country by Beliefs on the Role of the Shari'a in National Legislation, National Samples	54
V.1	Percentage Agree that "America is a Force for Good in the World", BBC Poll	60
V.2	. Percentage of Respondents Agreeing with Statements about US Foreign Policy, by Sample	61
V.3	Percentage for Whom Television is the Most Important Source of Political News, by Sample	65
VI.1	Respondents' Beliefs over Whether Force was Justified in Iraq, National Samples	69
VI.2	Percentage who Believe the Use of Force in Iraq was Not Justified at All, by Sample	69
VII.1	Percentage of Respondents Disapproving the Killing Civilians of a State that has Occupied Muslim Lands, by Sample	73
VII.2	. Percentage of Respondents Viewing Group as Terrorist by Education, Pooled Data	76
VII.3	Percentage of Respondents Viewing Event as a Terrorist Attack, by Sample	76

LIST OF TABLES

III.1	Percentage of National Respondents Claiming Knowledge of Western Countries, National Samples	39
III.2	Actual and Reported Knowledge of Western Cultures, by Sample	41
III.3	Percentage of respondents in national samples able to name cultural figures	41
V.1	Attitudes toward the Western Foreign Policies, National Samples	59
V.2	Percentage Citing Actor as Most Influential Foreign Policy Maker, National Samples	62
V.3	Percentage Citing Actor as Most Influential Foreign Policymaker in University Samples	63
V.4	Percentage Citing Actor as Most Influential Foreign Policymaker in Business Samples	64
V.5	Percentage Citing Actor as Most Influential Foreign Policymaker in Media Samples	64
VI.1	Percentage Expressing Attitude toward US Foreign Policy, National Samples	67
VI.2	Pooled data: Attitudes toward Outcomes of US-led Operations in Iraq	70
VII.1	Percentage of National Sample Labeling Event as “Terrorist,” National Sample	72
VII.2	Percentage Indicating Group is a “Legitimate Resistance Organization,” National Samples	74
VII.3	Percentage Labeling Events as Terrorist Attacks by Age, Pooled Data	75
VII.4	Percentage of Respondents Viewing Al-Qa’eda as a Terrorist Organization, by Sample	77
VII.5	Percentage of Christians and Muslims Defining Organization as “Legitimate Resistance,” Lebanese National Sample	78

INTRODUCTION

The heightened sense of conflict and mistrust commonly referred to as the "post 9/11 climate," necessitates the investigation and analysis of the current relationship between the West and the Arab world. Analysts and scholars in both the Western and Arab worlds are actively engaged in the examination of this changing and complex relationship. "Revisiting the Arab Street: Research from Within" -- undertaken by the Center for Strategic Studies of the University of Jordan -- hopes to add to this body of inquiry by providing an up-to-date analysis of the beliefs and perceptions prevalent with the Arab public. Using public opinion surveys conducted in five Arab countries, the study presents a picture of the attitudes found on the Arab Street.

The study confirms that many Arabs perceive important differences between the cultures and societies of the Arab world and the West. It shows, also, that Arabs across the region hold more complex and nuanced views than may have been expected. Most significantly, the study identifies Arab reaction to Western, and most specifically US, foreign policy in the region as being the single most important factor influencing Arab opinions about the West.

Respondents in the study were asked to express their opinions on a variety of issues, and to specifically address their feelings with regard to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. Participants in the countries studied -- Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine -- were found not to perceive "the West" as a unified whole. Rather, they differentiate between countries, particularly with regard to politics. For example, the Arab public views France much more positively than it does either the United States or the United Kingdom, primarily because there is a more positive perception about French foreign policy in the Middle East.

Contrary to what some observers, particularly in the US, have suggested, Arabs do not uniformly see "the West" in entirely negative terms. Indeed, they have a high value for many of the attributes Western countries and societies. Arab public opinion does not view the tension between the Arab world and the West in either cultural or religious terms. Despite views frequently promulgated both inside and outside the region, Arabs do not see that there is an ongoing struggle between "Crusaders and Muslims" nor do they support the notion of a "Clash of Civilizations." Rather, they differentiate significantly between states, particularly with regard to politics.

This study finds that Arabs do not "hate" the US and UK for "who they are" or for the cultural values they hold. Negative sentiments are being fueled, rather, by "what they do" -- that is, for specific policies and the impact these policies have on the Arab world. Neither a cultural nor a religious gap is found to be the fundamental reason for tensions between the Arab world and the West. Rather, this study finds that the Arab public disagrees profoundly with the foreign policies of the US (and the UK when they are in agreement) and that this disagreement is at the root of anti-American, and, by extension, anti-Western, sentiments which permeate the region.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The *Center for Strategic Studies (CSS)* - University of Jordan conducted an empirical survey of Arab public perceptions toward the West.

The specific objectives of the study are:

To profile Arab public perceptions of, and attitudes toward, the politics and societies of the West;

To examine Arab perceptions of the culture and political attributes of their own societies;

To present a substantive picture of Arab public opinion concerning Western foreign policy and to measure perceptions about bilateral relations with the West;

To provide a concrete understanding of the wide gulf between Western and Arab definitions and perceptions of controversial issues such as terrorism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Iraq war;

To explore the extent to which cultural differences and Western foreign policies are causing growing Arab hostility toward the West in general, and the USA in particular;

To identify means of promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between Arab and Western societies.

This study also contributes to enriching the survey-based research on Arab-West relations by:

Incorporating a wide-range of issues relevant to Arab-West relations within a single study;

Providing a measurement of the Arab public's perceived and actual knowledge of the West;

Evaluating Arab relations with the West in subjective and objective terms;

Using multi-stage, stratified data from five Arab countries on the basis of four samples each;

Including a comprehensive range of macro- to micro-level measurements;

Contributing to the advancement of sophisticated data collection and analysis in the Arab world.

Specifically, this study aims to demystify the motives and rationales for the state of East-West

relations, while providing a baseline for further work.

Ultimately, the *Center for Strategic Studies* hopes to contribute to the development of a balanced, rational, and less impetuous analysis of relations between the Arab world and the West.

PARAMETERS

1) The Mashreq

CSS collaborated with other research centers to conduct this survey in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Palestinian Territories (known collectively as “the Mashreq”). These countries were chosen because the Arab-Israeli conflict has a direct impact upon them and, thus, their political orientation, especially in relationship to the West, is profoundly shaped by that conflict. All nations studied share a colonial history with France and Britain, and all are heavily affected by US policies in the region. Finally, they provide a sufficiently broad sample from which to draw conclusions.

2) Western Societies

The survey targeted attitudes regarding the US, the UK, and France for the purposes of assessing Arab perceptions of Western societies. The UK and France were colonial powers in the region, and the US has been the major force in the region since the end of World War II, most significantly with relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf War, and the current occupation of Iraq. France, the US, and the UK also have taken a variety of foreign policy approaches toward the region. This approach will thus allow for examination of how cultural and political factors, particularly in the key area of foreign policy, affect Arab attitudes toward the West.

METHODOLOGY

1) Samples

The surveys were conducted between March and June 2004 on four samples in each of the five Mashreq countries:

1. A representative *national* sample of 1200 respondents
2. A *university students* sample of 500 respondents
3. A *business* sample of 120 respondents
4. A *media* sample of 120 respondents

National samples in all of these countries were drawn using a multi-stage, self-weighted design representing all social strata, regions, rural and urban areas, gender, age, occupational and educational distribution in their respective societies.¹

¹ The national sample for Jordan included citizens of Palestinian origin as well as refugees. Refugee camps were not included in Syrian and Lebanese samples. In regard to religion, only Lebanon does not have an

2) Questionnaire

The research questionnaire included 150 questions, covering a wide range of issues from individual and social values to opinions about Western foreign policy. Specific items measured Arab knowledge, perceptions and attitudes toward Western societies, in parallel with their perceptions of their own societies. This juxtaposition allows us to draw out perceived points of similarities and differences between the two cultures. A second section of the questionnaire addressed the issues of the definition of terrorism, the influence of Arab satellite media, the role of *Shari'a* in legislation, the levels of openness toward interpretation of religion and reactions to Western foreign policy in the region. Respondents were also asked to evaluate the status of bilateral relations between their countries and the three Western countries -culturally, politically and economically. Finally, demographic variables provide grounds for cross-sectional analysis.

overwhelming Muslim majority (approximately 50% of Lebanese are Christian). Consequently, we present survey data specifying Muslim and Christian respondents only for the case of Lebanon.

OUTLINE OF REPORT

SECTION 1. WHERE ARABS STAND explores Arab opinions toward the West.

I. "ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WEST" examines Arab attitudes toward France, the US, and the UK generally and, more particularly, as destinations for work, study, medical care, or tourism. Age, education and exposure to the West are analyzed as determining factors in the formation of public attitudes.

II. "ASSESSING ARAB-WEST BILATERAL RELATIONS" CONSIDERS PERCEPTIONS REGARDING bilateral cultural, economic and political relations with three Western countries -- the US, the UK, and France.

SECTION 2: 'US' AND THE 'OTHER' analyzes Arab perceptions of the West as juxtaposed to attitudes about their own culture.

III. "PERCEPTIONS OF 'THE WEST' AND 'THE ARAB WORLD'" explores Arab knowledge of the West and attitudes about societal and individual values deemed as characteristic of the West and the Arab World.

IV. "ISLAM IN THE ARAB WORLD" examines the perceived role for *Shari'a* in legislation. It also considers the degree to which Arab societies are "open" or "closed" to new interpretation of religion and sheds light on the importance that attitudes toward the role of *Shari'a* in legislation have in the formation of opinions about the West.

SECTION 3: ENGAGING THE WEST - PERCEPTIONS OF WESTERN FOREIGN POLICIES

V. "WESTERN FOREIGN POLICY" discusses Arab reactions to and perceptions about Western (and particularly US) foreign policy in the Middle East.

VI. "CRITICAL CONFLICTS" details how Arabs perceive US foreign policies, especially with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the war in Iraq.

VII. "RETHINKING TERRORISM" examines how the Arab definition of terrorism diverges from the standard concept of terrorism in the West.

SECTION 4: Conclusion

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The study draws seven main conclusions:

- 1) ***Arabs hold coherent notions of what constitutes the values of Western and Arab societies.*** They associate the West with values of individual liberty and accumulation of wealth, while they view their own societal values as placing emphasis upon religion and family.
- 2) ***Arab perceptions of Western values do not determine their attitudes toward Western foreign policies.*** They hold negative attitudes toward foreign policies of the US and Britain and positive attitudes toward those of France, but these attitudes are not related to any significant differences in the perceived societal values of the three countries.
- 3) ***Religion is not the basis of tensions between Arabs and the West.*** Contrary to widespread media representations, most Arabs do not view the West or the US, in particular, as following a policy driven by religious forces. The notion of a “Crusader War” is largely dismissed. At the same time, Arab attitudes toward a role for Shari’a in legislation and support for or against openness in *Ijtihad*, are not the driving force behind the formulation of their attitudes toward the West. In short, there is little empirical evidence for the portrayal of Arab-Western hostilities as a religious conflict.
- 4) ***The Arab world does not reject the professed goals of the West’s foreign policies toward the Arab World.*** Indeed, there is great support for liberal democratic principles expressed by Western leaders. However, Arabs object to Western actions because the ‘situation on the ground’ is in contrast to the professed principles.
- 5) ***Arabs disagree fundamentally with US positions on issues such as the definition of terrorism, policies toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Iraqi war.*** They have little confidence in US-led efforts to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and they largely see the US-led war in Iraq as unjustified. In addition, many fundamentally disagree with the US definition of terrorism, often viewing the actions of groups the US identifies as “terrorist” to be legitimate responses to aggression or occupation.
- 6) ***Despite these disagreements and disillusionments, particularly with regard to the US, many Arabs desire stronger relations between their countries and the West.*** This is particularly true of cultural and economic relations, which are viewed as less potentially problematic than political relations. The study also finds that business and media elites are most likely to seek stronger bilateral ties between their countries and the West, even though they are most likely to openly express disagreement with US policies.
- 7) ***Arab dissatisfaction with US policies is unlikely to diminish in the absence of significant foreign policy changes.*** Foreign policy, as exemplified most significantly by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iraq War, is at the basis of fundamental tensions with the West and with the US in particular. This finding is consistent across all countries studied and in all demographic groups. Negative sentiments are particularly strong among youth and non-elites, who disapprove of US policies, are skeptical of American intentions in the region,

and are most likely to reject strengthened bilateral ties. Given the demographic trends in the region, whereby 50% of the population is less than 25 years of age, there is little reason to believe that these attitudes will dissipate without changes in US foreign policy.

SECTION 1

WHERE ARABS STAND

I. ATTITUDES TOWARD THE WEST

Arabs hold more nuanced attitudes toward the West than is often supposed. They differentiate between Western countries, and have a tendency to view France more positively than they view the US and the UK. Arabs also distinguish between attitudes held toward Western countries overall, and their value in specific areas. For instance, many Arabs prefer the US as a destination for undertaking various activities, even though they hold very negative feelings toward the country over all. Viewing the Arab world as uniformly hostile toward the West, locked into an inevitable culture clash, will lead policymakers to miss important opportunities for improving East-West relations. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem.

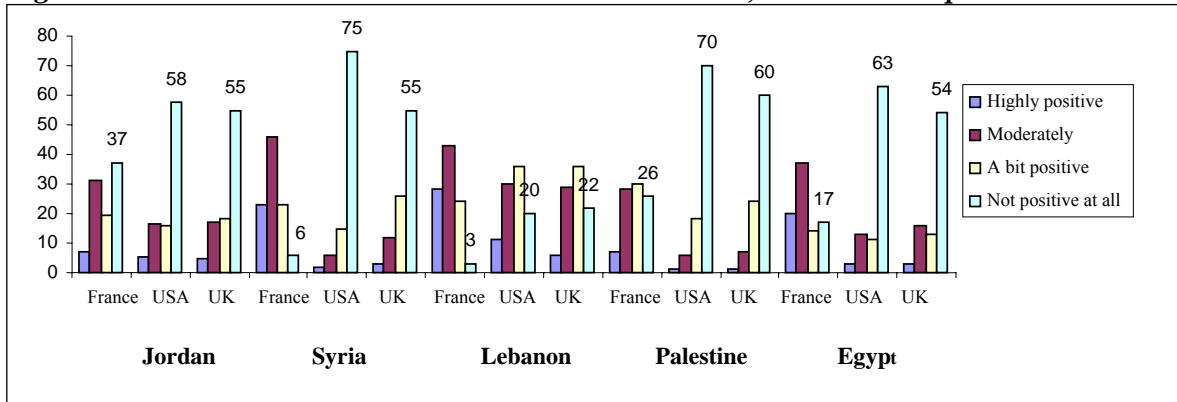
There are critical distinctions within Arab public perceptions of the West, based largely on status, age, and education. Business and media elites consistently hold more positive attitudes toward Western culture and society than do average citizens. In contrast, younger respondents and those with less education are more likely to judge the West harshly. In a region with a large and growing youthful population², underdeveloped educational facilities, and poor prospects for social mobility, anti-Westernism is unlikely to wither away.

Arabs hold negative attitudes toward the West as a whole, but they are nevertheless much more positive toward France than they are toward the United States or the United Kingdom. For example, only 25% of national sample respondents in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt³ report feeling either “highly positive” or “moderately positive” toward the US and the UK as opposed to 57% who felt positively toward France. As shown in Figure I.1, the US fared the worst in the opinion of Arab world, with as many as 75% of Syrians perceiving the US as “not at all positive”. An important exception emerges in Lebanon, where only 20% view the US negatively.

² Youth make up the majority of the populations, with 50% of the population below the age of 23 in Egypt, 22 in Lebanon, 27 in Jordan, 21 in Syria and 17 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Population growth rates in 2000 stood at 2.0% in Egypt, 3.1% in Jordan, 1.4% in Lebanon, and 2.6% in Syria. United Nations Population Fund, <http://www.unfpa.org/profile/compare.cfm>.

³ We were unable to obtain raw data for Syrian respondents. Thus, we used aggregate data for the Syrian samples. This meant, however, that we could not include Syria in analyses of pooled data.

Figure I.1. General Attitudes toward Western Countries, National Samples



Similar results are revealed when respondents summarize their views on each of the three Western countries in a one-sentence statement. Respondents most frequently used positive statements when describing France. This was true of respondents in all five countries and four samples. In contrast, respondents more frequently described the US and the UK with negative statements, including such concepts as “racist”, “aggressive”, “undemocratic”, “morally decadent”, and “helps our enemy”.

The survey population perceives the US most negatively. For example, 46% of the Jordanian national sample associated France with positive concepts such as “democracy,” “tolerance,” “moderation” and “the rule of law”. In stark contrast, only 28% of this sample offered positive statements in conjunction with the US. Only Lebanon yielded a departure from this trend, with positive and negative views of the US almost evenly split. Moreover, the nature of criticism varies. Arabs most frequently described France as being “racist” or “religiously fanatic”⁴ while they described US policies as being “imperialistic”, “repressive”, and “colonial”.

Arabs also characterize the United Kingdom in negative terms. For example, 42% of the Jordanian national sample provided negative feedback about the UK, compared to 27% responding with positive impressions. The UK, like the US, is frequently cited as “repressive”, “colonial”, and “aggressive”. In addition, another 12% of the Jordanians surveyed criticized the British for following policies which were simply an extension of the US agenda. Positive statements regarding the UK tended to praise such attributes as civilization, civility and material progress.

⁴ It is significant to mention that the *hijab* (veil) issue was under vigorous debate at the time our surveys were conducted (between March and June 2004). Demonstrations took place in Amman and letters of objection were written and sent to the French embassy, while the extensive media coverage took a distinctly anti-French tone. Over the same period, France’s position on the 2003 invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq was also a paramount topic of commentary and debate.

DESTINATION: THE WEST?

Despite their relatively negative assessments of these countries, Arabs view France, the UK and the US as desirable places to carry out certain personal and professional activities. To gauge the appeal of the West and then investigate discrepancies between this appeal and reported attitudes, respondents were asked to select *which, if any*, of the three Western countries they would prefer for each of the following activities:

- 1 University education (for respondent or member of family)
- 2 Immigration
- 3 Medical treatment
- 4 Work-related training
- 5 Work abroad
- 6 Purchase of imported goods
- 7 Tourism
- 8 Enjoyment of the arts

Their responses demonstrated that Arab attitudes toward the West - and particularly the US - as a place to do business are quite different than their general feelings toward these countries.

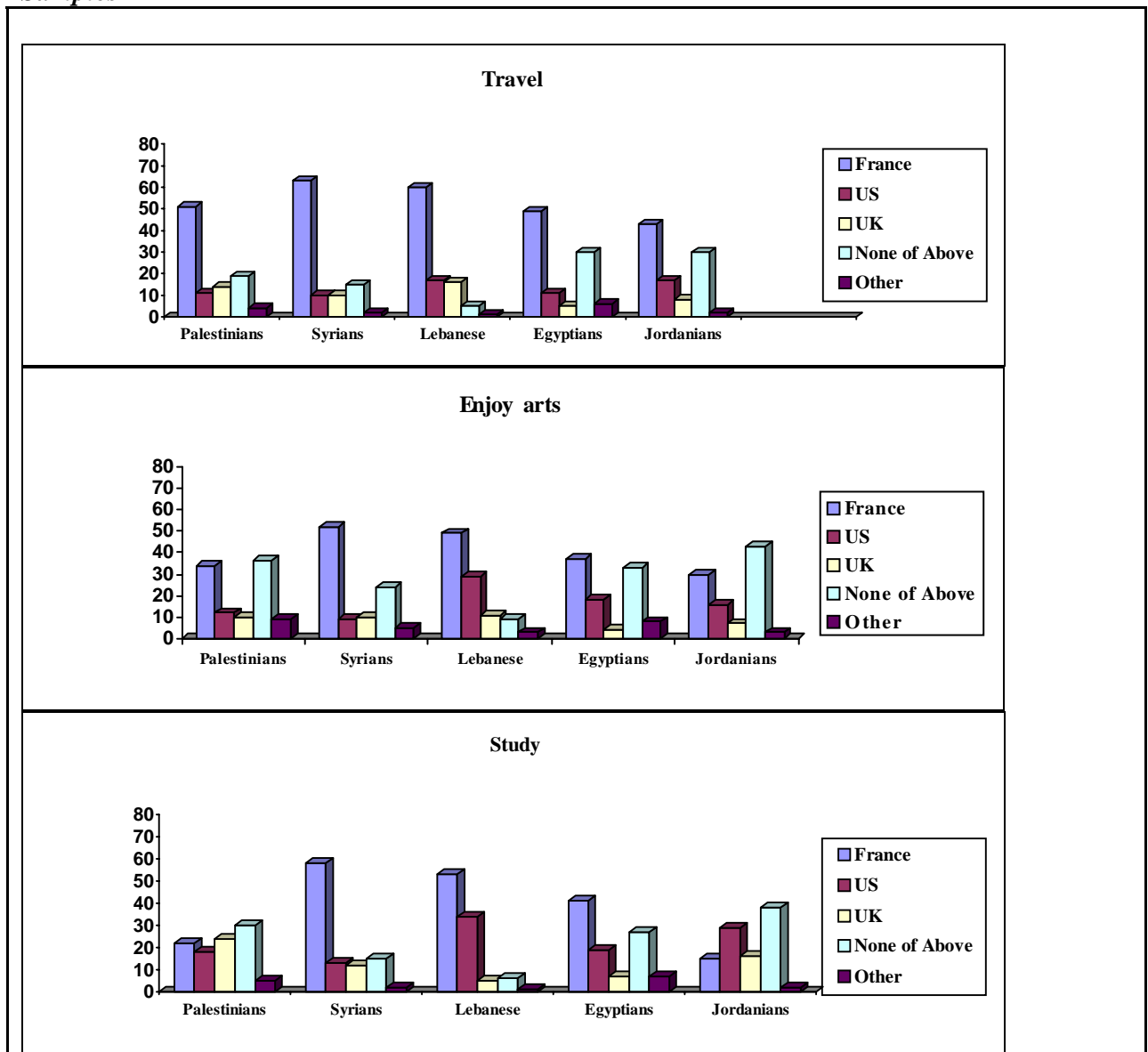
1) France Preferred: Tourism, the Arts, Education and Foreign Products

In many cases, Arab preferences for the West as a destination are consistent with their attitudes toward the West more generally:

Tourism and the Arts. France is the most popular destination for both tourism and enjoyment of the arts. Pooled data indicate that 54% of respondents chose France for tourism, compared to 14% choosing the US, 12% choosing the UK, and 17% indicating none of the three. Similarly, 41% of respondents preferred France as a place to enjoy the arts, compared to 18% choosing the US, 10% choosing the UK, and 26% choosing none of these states. In both cases, these preferences are consistent across the Mashreq, as shown in Figure I.2.

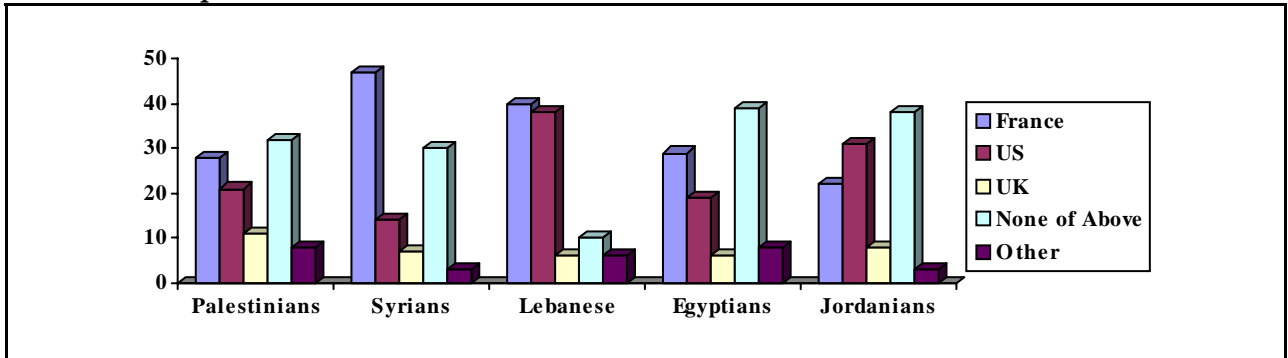
Education. As seen in figure I.2, Arabs also tend to find French education attractive. Lebanese, Egyptians and Syrians are all most likely to prefer pursuing education in France. Jordanians showed a preference for study in the US, while Palestinians choose to study in Great Britain. Importantly, however, 30% of Palestinians, 27% of Jordanians, and 38% of Egyptians stated that they would not choose to study in any of the countries in question.

Figure I.2. Percentage Preferring to Undertake Activity in Each Western Country, National Samples



Purchasing Foreign Goods. Over one quarter of respondents also prefer not to purchase goods produced in Britain, France or the US. Of those who do prefer to purchase these goods, Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, and Egyptians tended to prefer goods produced in France. Only Jordanians chose goods produced in the US. (See Figure I.3.)

Figure I.3. Percentage Preferring to Purchase Goods Produced in Each Western Country, National Samples

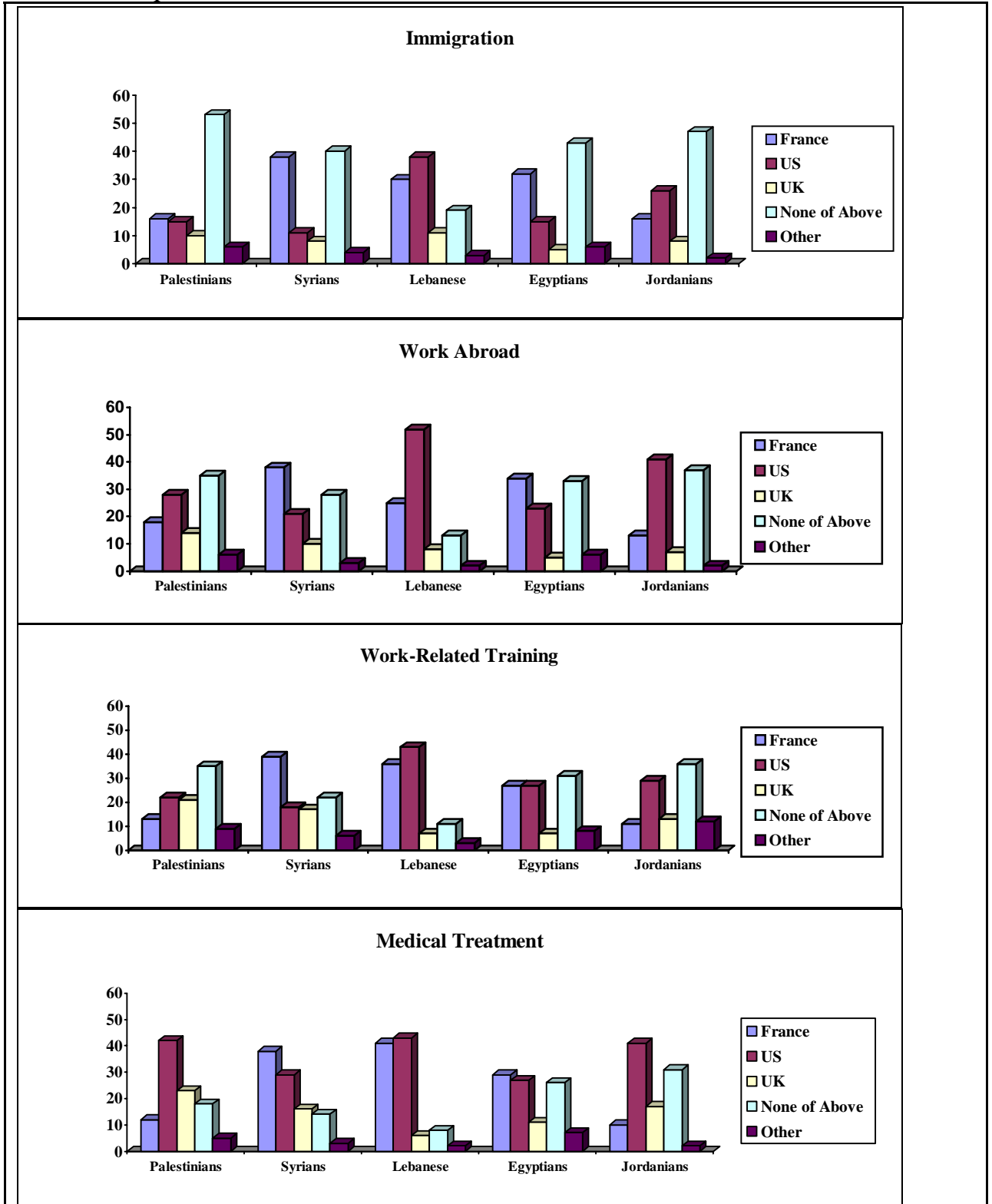


2) Reconsidering the US: Medical Treatment, Work Related Training, Immigration and Working Abroad

Generally negative attitudes expressed by those surveyed do not coincide with their preference toward the US, the UK and France as chosen destinations for specific purposes. Despite their high levels of dissatisfaction, Arabs recognize specific advantages to engagement with the West.

Work and Immigration. Many Arabs would prefer not to work in, or immigrate to, the West. Of those who did, Syrians and Egyptians tended to prefer France; Jordanians and Lebanese were more likely to choose the US. Palestinians, in contrast, tended to choose to immigrate to France but to work or receive work-related training in the US. Britain was not the most frequently chosen destination for immigration in any of the Mashreq countries. (See Figure I.4)

Figure I.4 Percentage Preferring to Undertake Each Activity in Western Country, National Samples



Medical Treatment. Both France and the US were also popular destinations for medical treatment. As seen in Figure I.4, Jordanians, Lebanese and Palestinians chose the US, while the Syrians and Egyptians prefer France.

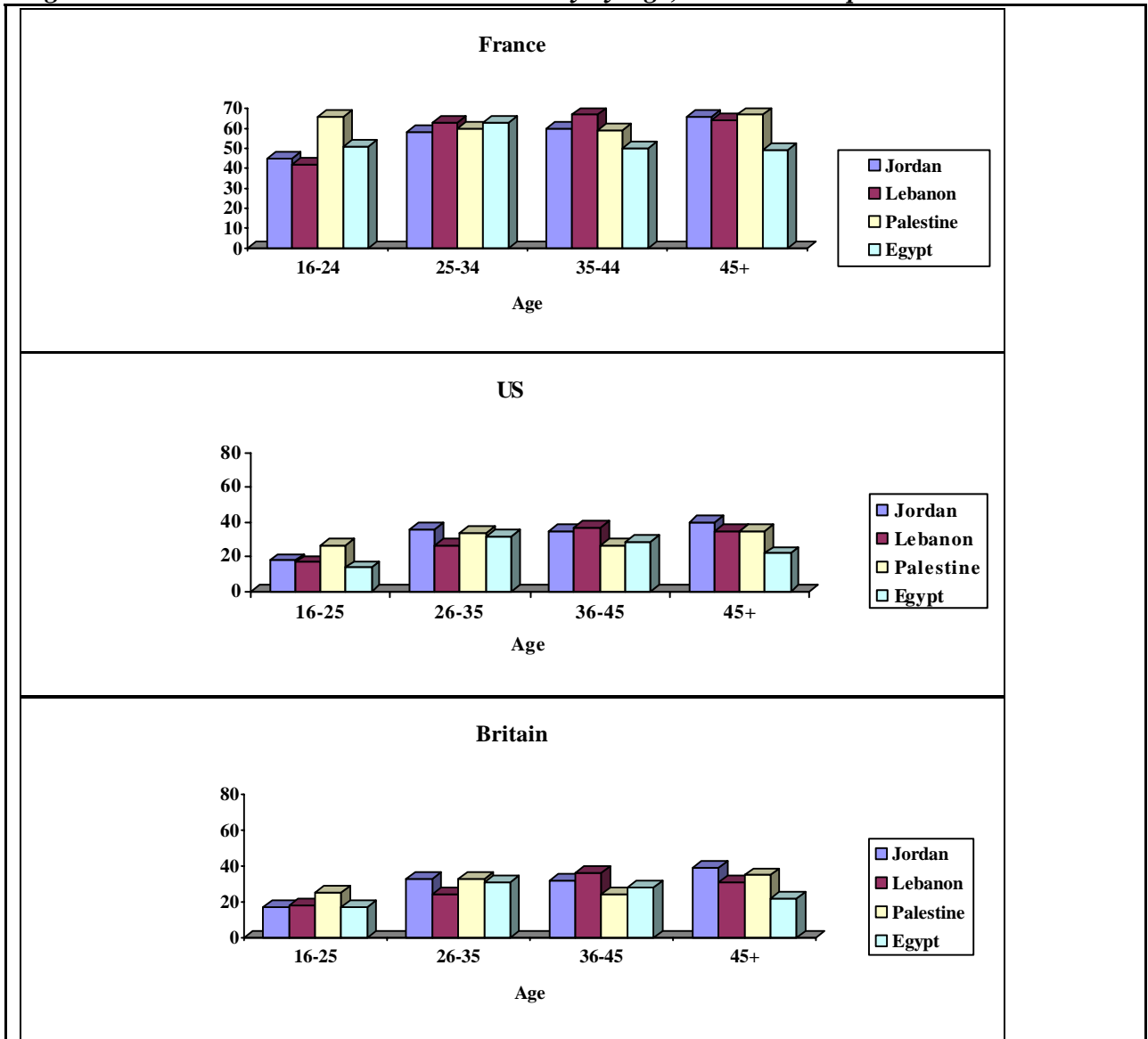
In short, Arabs hold complex attitudes toward the West. They distinguish between France, the US, and the UK -- holding more positive assessments of France than either the UK or the US. Their views on each country also vary, depending on the specific question at hand. For instance, while the vast majority holds negative feelings toward the US, many nevertheless are willing to engage with the US for work, study, and medical care. Thus, while the survey reflected the growing tensions between the Arab world and the West, it does not support the caricature of an Arab public that fully and uniformly rejects the West.

SEEDS OF GROWING ANTI-WESTERNISM: AGE, EDUCATION, AND EXPOSURE

The large, and growing, youth population, the less educated, and those outside of elite circles hold the most hostile feelings toward the West. Thus, we can extrapolate a critical finding: absent major policy changes, the increasingly tense Arab-West relations are unlikely to improve. Given current demographic realities throughout the region, these populations - accompanied by their pent-up anger - show no likelihood of diminishing or withering away.

Age. Youth (ages 16-24) exhibit lower levels of positive attitudes toward the US, Britain and France than all other age groups. Youths are nearly split in their perceptions of France, but older generations diverge, with majorities declaring more positive attitudes toward the French. Lebanon is particularly interesting: Lebanese youth are least likely to feel positively toward France, but their older counterparts are among the most likely to view France favorably. Age appears even more related to attitudes toward the US and the UK. Regarding both countries, and across countries, younger respondents are about half as likely to view these countries positively. (See Figure I.5.)

Figure I.5. Favorable Attitudes toward Country by Age, National Samples



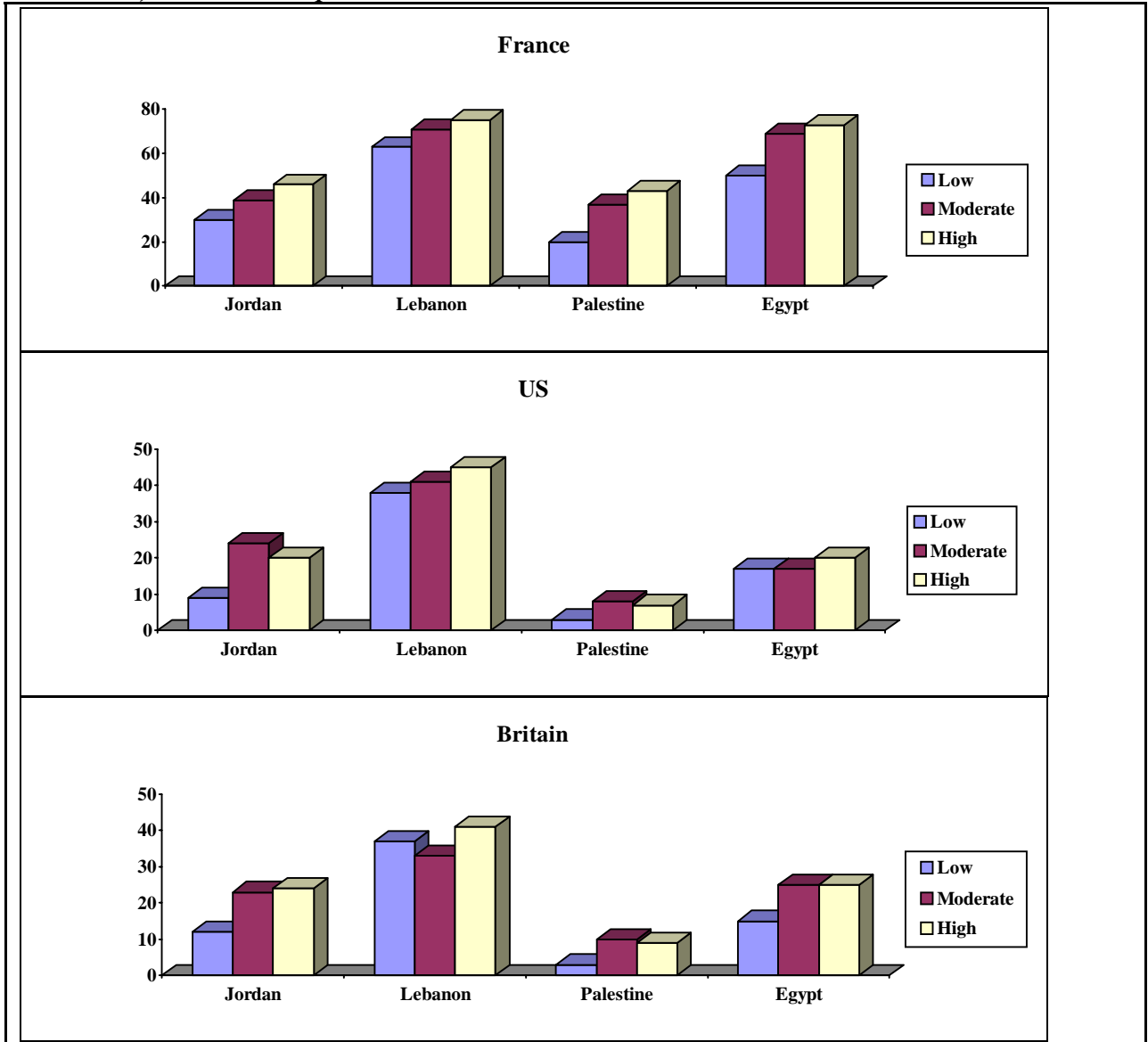
The relationship between age and attitude toward the West as a destination is more complex. Older respondents are more likely than youth to choose “none of the above” when asked in which country they would prefer to undertake specific tasks. For instance, only 18% of respondents aged 16-24 years preferred not studying in any of the three countries, compared to 28% of respondents more than 45 years old. Respondents expressing interest in studying in the US and Britain also declined in relation to age, dropping from 40% and 12%, respectively, of youth 16-24 years old down to 34% and 8%, respectively, of adults over 45 years old. At the same time, the percentage of respondents preferring not to work abroad in any of the three countries rose from 24% of the youngest age group to 35% of the older adults.

Education. The level of education respondents have achieved also affects Arab attitudes toward the West, although it is important to note that all educational levels had high degrees of negative

attitudes. Nonetheless, more highly educated respondents are more positive when asked to give general evaluations of Western countries. In the pooled data, positive evaluations toward France increased from 47% among low-educated respondents to 65% among the highly educated. The same pattern applies to both the US and Britain. Of respondents with low education, 83% reported negative attitudes toward the US and 84% held negative attitudes toward Britain. Of those with high levels of education, 75% and 73% held negative attitudes toward the US and Britain, respectively.

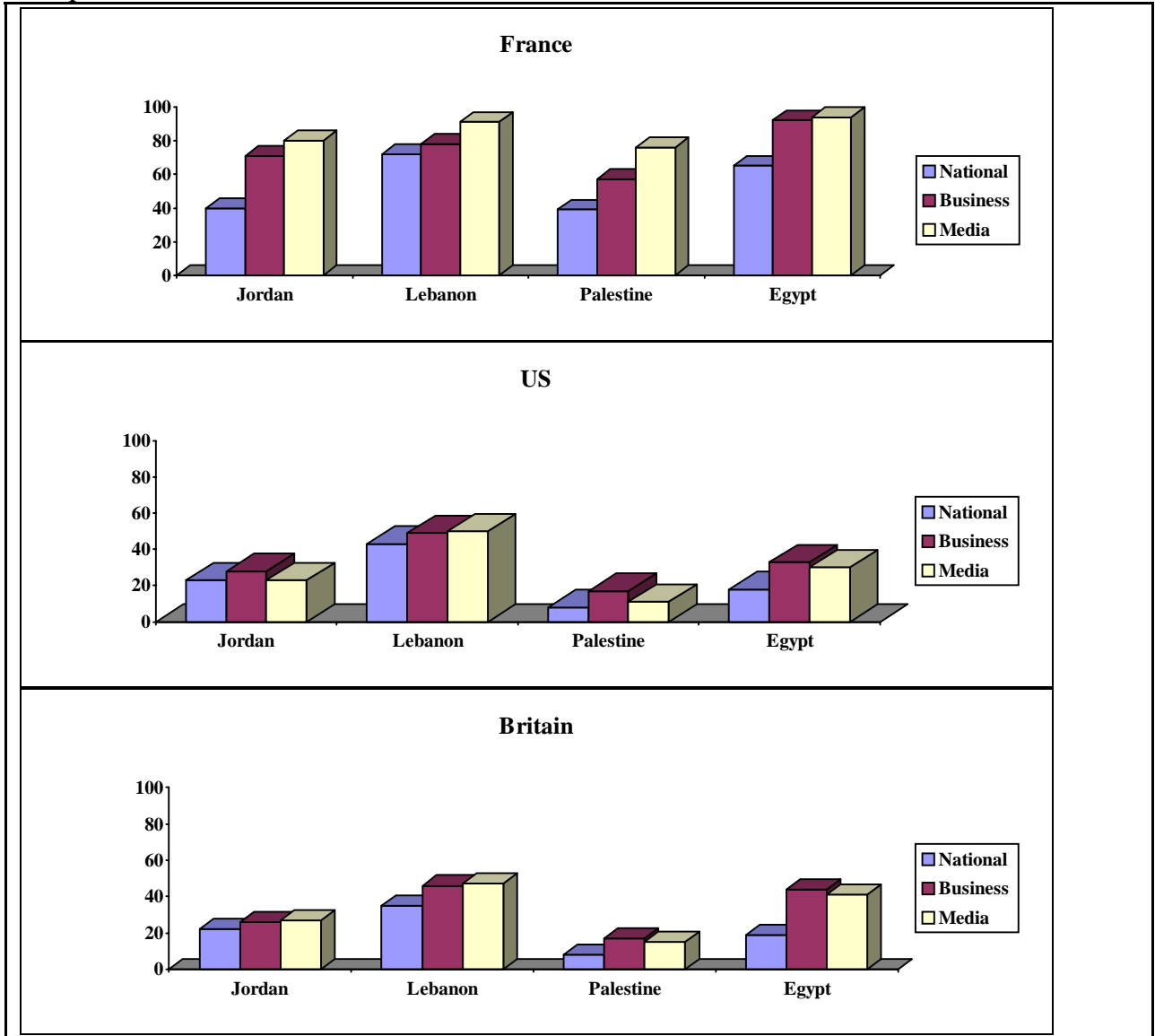
There are some interesting differences in the relationship between levels of education and attitudes toward the West across the Mashreq, as evident in Figure I.6. Most notably, Palestinian attitudes toward the US remained very low even among those with higher levels of education. Education also appears to have little effect on the attitudes about the US of Egyptian respondents. In contrast, education did have a significant impact on Jordanian attitudes toward the US: the higher the education, the more positive the attitudes held toward the US.

Figure I.6. Percentage of Respondents Expressing Positive Attitudes toward Country by Education, National Samples



Business and Media Communities: Members of the business and media community also hold more positive attitudes toward the West than the respondents in the national sample. This was clearly evident in their one-sentence summaries of each Western country. As shown in Figure I.7, this relationship exists across the Mashreq and is consistent regarding all three Western countries. This partially corroborates earlier findings that education affects attitudes, as members in these communities are typically better educated than national samples. It also suggests that direct exposure to the West, through travel abroad, personal contact, access to Western media or use of the Internet, helps to mitigate negative attitudes.

Figure I.7. Percentage of Respondents Expressing Positive Attitudes toward Country, by Sample



CONCLUSION

The survey confirms that Arabs are largely disenchanted with the West, but it also suggests a number of important refinements to conventional wisdom:

Arabs do not feel equally negatively toward all Western countries. Less than 50% of national samples expressed positive attitudes toward all of three countries. France consistently fared better than the US and the UK. As we shall see further, it is not simply “the West” that Arabs dislike.

Arab attitudes toward the West do not determine whether or not they choose France, the US,

or Britain as a place to pursue personal business, get medical care, educate themselves or their children, shop, or vacation. Arabs recognize particular strengths of individual Western countries, and they are willing to engage with them to benefit from their strengths, even if their general attitudes toward the country are negative. This is particularly notable with regard to the US, which respondents view as being equally as desirable as France for medical treatment, work-related training, immigration, and work.

The US and Britain have reason to acknowledge and be concerned about the ever-growing negativity felt toward them in the Middle East. Younger generations and those outside of elite business and media circles demonstrate greater and growing disgruntlement with these Western powers. Within this context, positive attitudes toward the US and the UK can be expected to continue to plummet unless major policy changes are implemented.

II. ASSESSING ARAB-WEST BILATERAL RELATIONS

Arabs hold more complex attitudes toward their respective countries' bilateral relations with France, the US, and the UK than is often supposed. Perceptions of existing relations vary significantly across states. Respondents in the five Mashreq countries viewed relations with France as good and most wanted to see these relations strengthened. In contrast, when asked to describe the state of the bilateral relations in question, Jordanians, Egyptians and Lebanese perceived their countries as having good relations with the US and the UK, but, notably, the majority does not want to see these relations strengthened. Palestinians and Syrians felt their countries already had poor relations with the US and Britain but, at the same time, expressed scarce interest in strengthening those bilateral relations.

Indeed, the study finds strong evidence that individual attitudes toward France, the US, and the UK influence the desire to strengthen bilateral relations with these states. Those surveyed sought stronger ties with the French, whom they generally view positively, even though the current bilateral relations with France are already perceived as strong. In contrast, they are less likely to seek stronger ties with the US, particularly political ties, regardless of whether or not current relations are deemed to already be close. Arabs in the Mashreq do not seek equally strong relations with the West, but rather prefer strong relations with those nations which are already viewed positively, which, in our survey, is France.

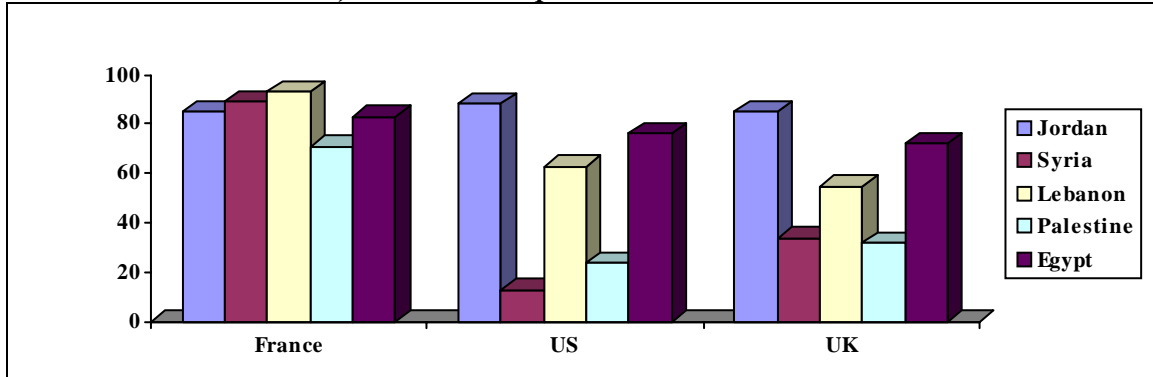
As we shall see later in this report, Arabs are particularly concerned about American intentions in the region, and this concern makes them leery of seeking stronger political relations with the US.

POLITICAL RELATIONS

Existing Relations. Arabs appear to have a clear understanding of existing bilateral relations. Most respondents in all five countries viewed relations with France as good, although as shown in *Figure II.1*, positive perceptions of bilateral relations with France were generally less prevalent among Palestinians and most widespread in Egypt. In contrast, while Jordanians, Egyptians, and the Lebanese described their countries' political relations with the US in positive terms, Syrians and Palestinians see them quite differently. Prevalence of this assessment plummeted from 87% of Jordanians viewing positive bilateral relations with the US to only 27% of Syrians.

Arabs view bilateral political relations with the United Kingdom very similarly to those with the US. Among the national samples, 84% of Jordanians, 70% of Egyptians, 56% of Lebanese, 42% of Syrians and 40% of Palestinians described their bilateral relations with the UK as somewhat good or very good. (See *Figure II.1*).

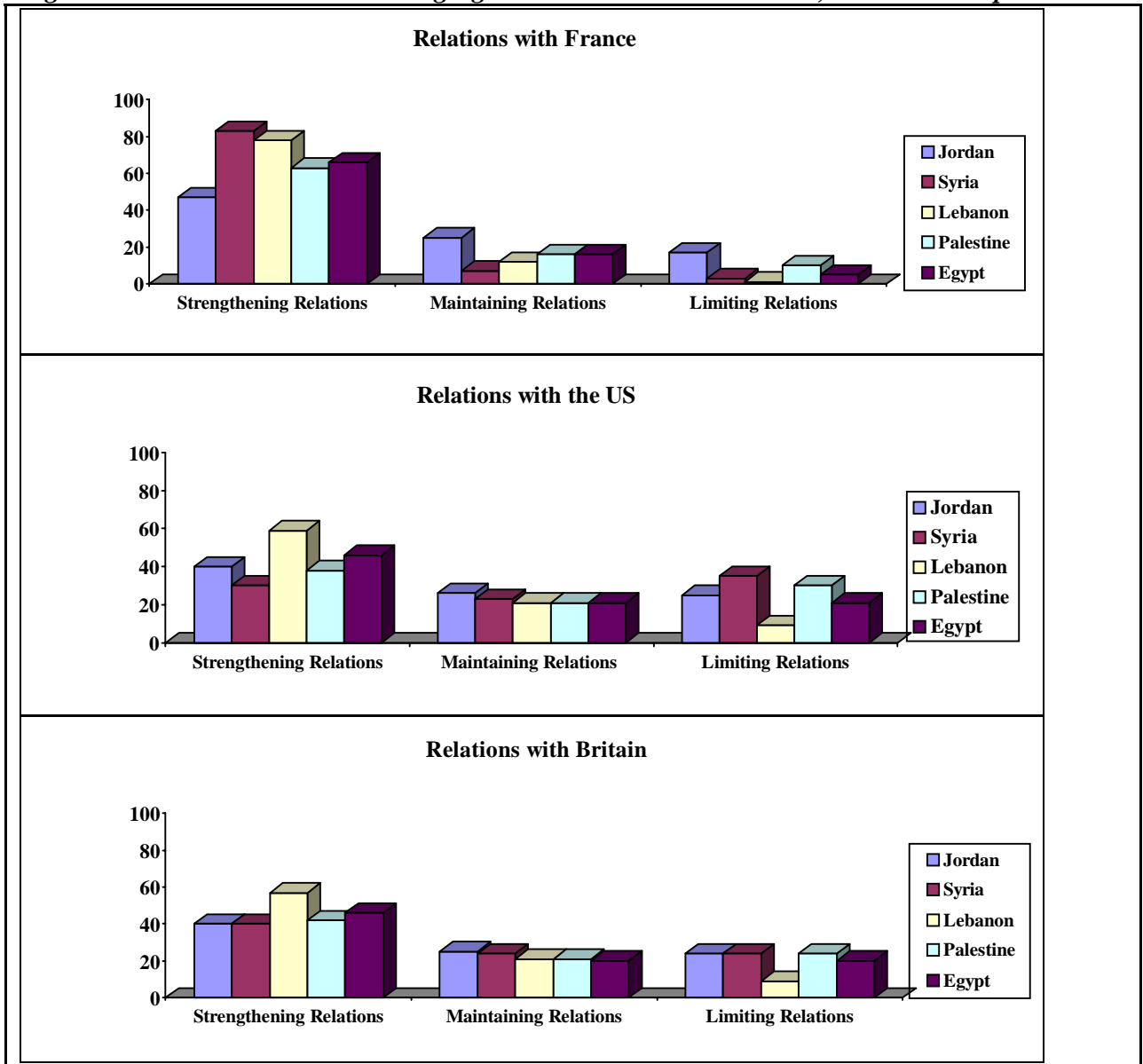
Figure II.1. Percentage Who View Political Relations between Their Governments and Western Nations as Good, National Samples



Strengthening Tie: The public's general attitudes toward each country conditions attitudes toward changing and deepening bilateral political relations. Thus, as shown in Figure II.1, the majority of respondents supported further strengthening ties with the French, even though they already viewed these relations as positive. In contrast, more than 50% of Syrians preferred either maintaining or further limiting relations with the US, even though almost 75% viewed Syrian-US relations as poor. It is not a perceived *need* for improved relations, but rather a general attitude toward these countries under consideration, that most influences enthusiasm for closer ties.

That it is attitudes toward each Western state, rather than the strength of current bilateral relations, which affects enthusiasm for further strengthening bilateral relations, is demonstrated by comparing attitudes toward France, the US, and the UK. Most respondents prefer to strengthen bilateral ties with the French, even though they generally describe these ties as currently strong. In contrast, many are more reluctant to strengthen ties with the US and the UK even when they do not see the current bilateral relations with these states as strong. Indeed, Lebanon is the only country in which a majority of the population favors stronger bilateral, political relations with the US. There, 59% of respondents favored increased political ties, as compared to 40% in Jordan, 30% in Syria, 38% in Palestine and 46% in Egypt. Britain fares somewhat better: Of national samples, 40% in Jordan, 39% in Syria, 57% in Lebanon, 42% in Palestine, and 46% in Egypt sought closer political ties. (See Figure II.2)

Figure II.2. Attitudes toward Changing Bilateral Political Relations, National Samples

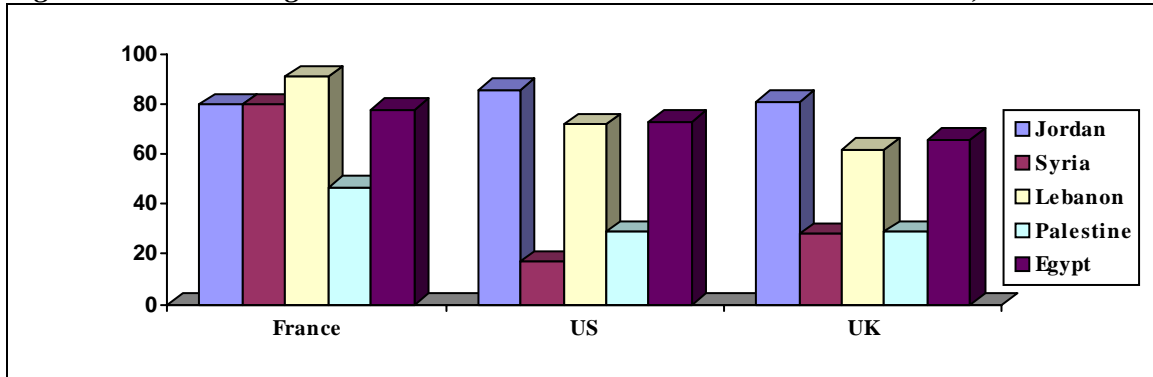


ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Existing Relations. Arab perceptions of economic relations mirror their attitudes about political ties. Most Arabs describe existing bilateral economic relations with France as good or very good: more than three-quarters of Jordanians, Lebanese, Syrians, and Egyptians viewed economic ties with France as positive, although only 53% of Palestinians held this view. Arabs are divided in their perceptions of bilateral economic ties between their own countries and the US. The majority of Egyptians, Jordanians, and Lebanese see these relations as somewhat or very good, while most Palestinians and Syrians see them as poor. Similarly, Egyptians, Jordanians, and Lebanese are likely to see economic ties with Britain as positive, in contrast to Syrians and

Palestinians. (See Figure II.3.)

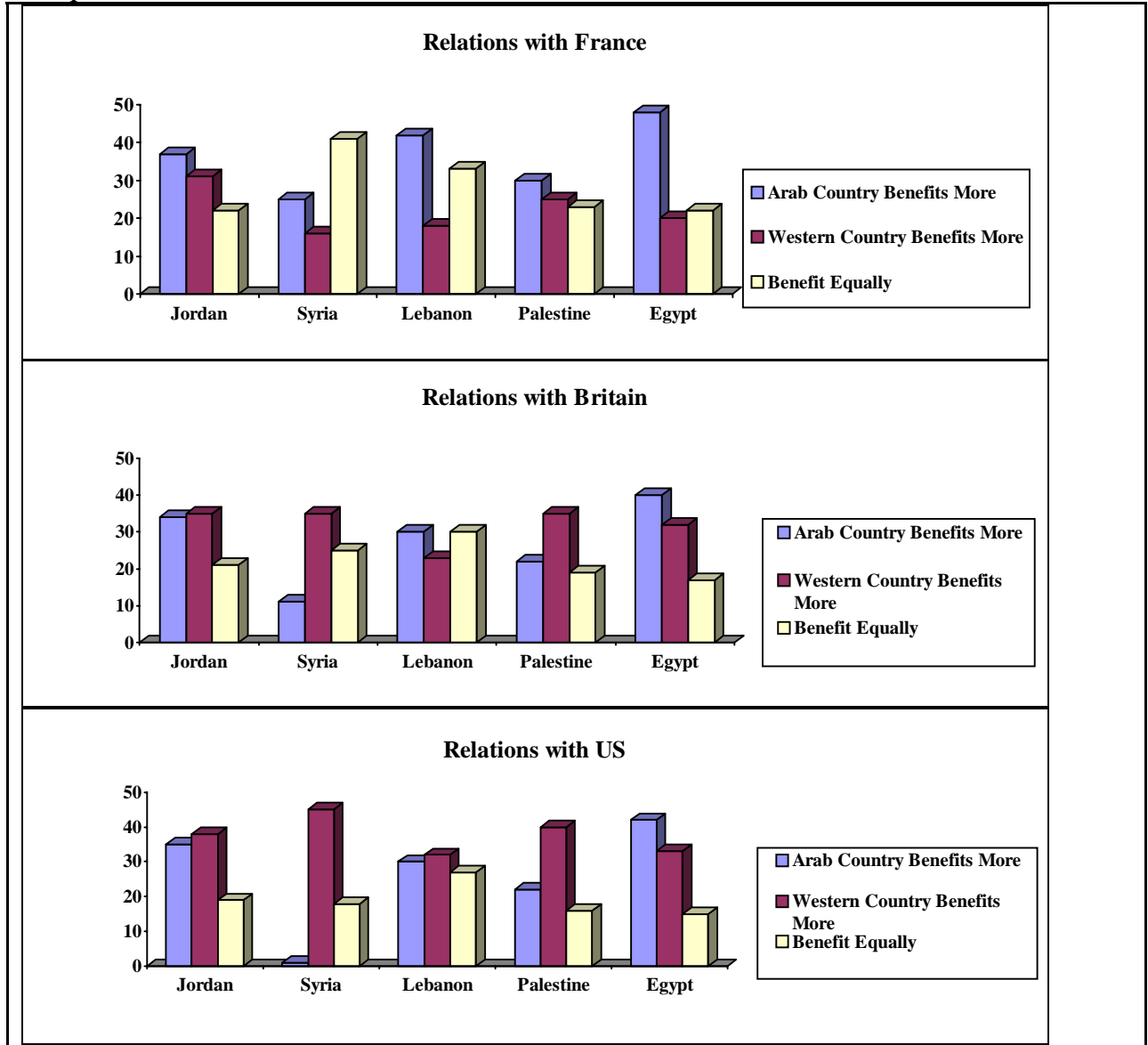
Figure II.3. Percentage Who View Bilateral Economic Relations as Good, National Samples



A similar pattern appears when respondents are asked to assess who benefits more from the economic relations. Majorities of national samples in the five countries believe that their own country is benefiting more than France from bilateral economic relations.⁵ In contrast, Jordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians believe that the US derives more benefit from economic relations, with only Egyptians believing that Egypt benefits the most. Similarly, the majority of respondents in the national samples in Jordan, Syria, and Palestine believe that the UK gains most from their bilateral economic relations, while Lebanese and Egyptian national samples indicated the contrary.

⁵ These perceptions may not equate with the actual economic reality. A study of real, versus perceived, economic benefit coming to the nations surveyed from France (research outside the scope of this study) may not necessarily match the more positive perceptions the public holds about the value of their economic relationship with France.

Figure II.4. Attitudes Regarding Who Benefits More from Economic Relations, National Samples



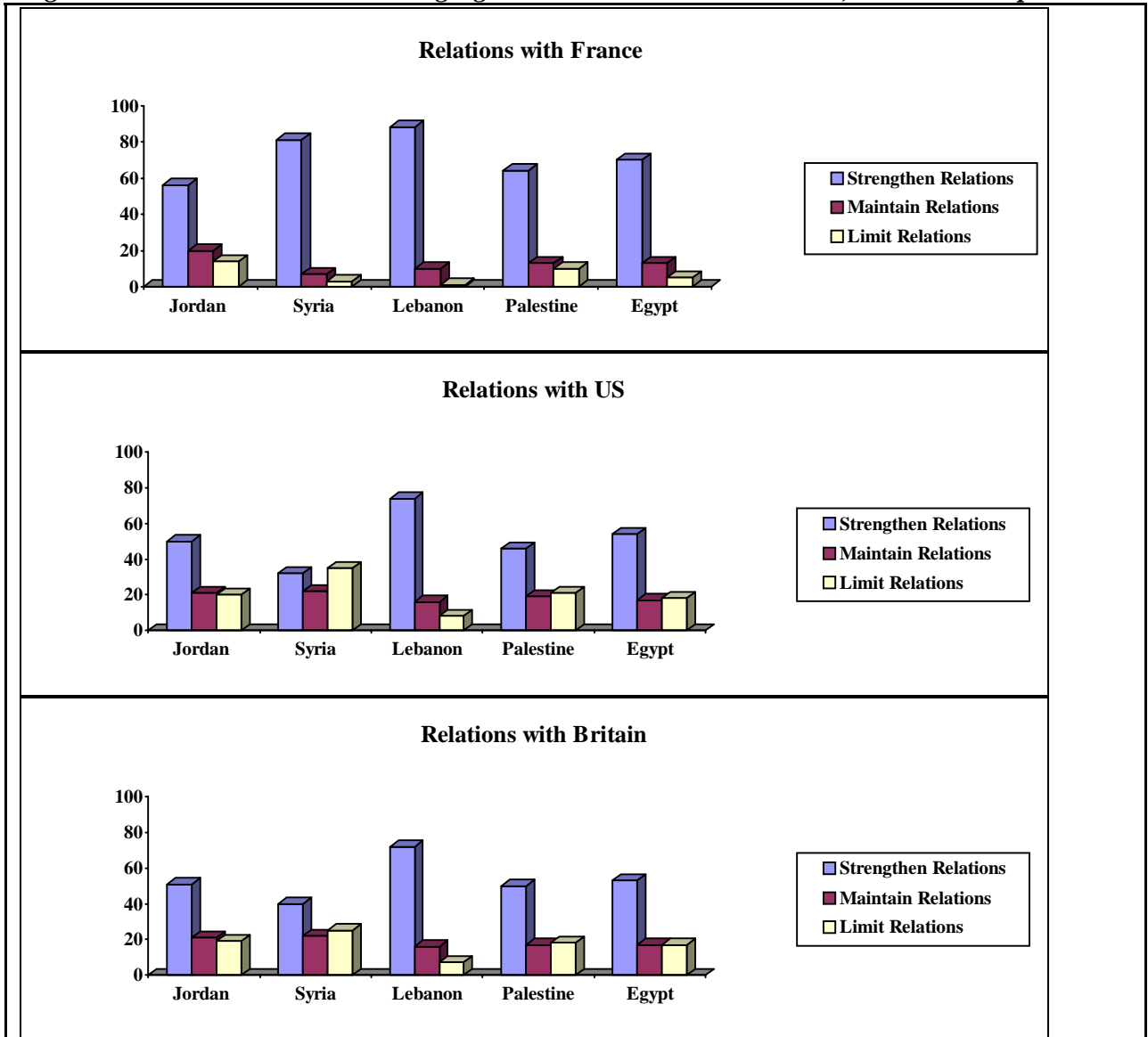
Strengthening Economic Relations. Attitudes toward changing economic relations with the West are largely consistent with assessments of who benefits in the relationships. France is seen as acting more equitably in bilateral ties, thus there is more support for strengthening relations. As shown in Figure II.5, in national samples, 56% of Jordanians, 81% of Syrians, 88% of Lebanese, 64% of Palestinians, and 70% of Egyptians want stronger economic relations with France.

On the contrary, many Arabs see the US as the “big winner” in economic relations, thus they show little enthusiasm for seeing ties strengthened. Syrian respondents are most disinterested, with only 32% of the national sample favoring closer ties. In Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt, only

about half of respondents in the national sample seek improved economic ties. It is notable that this lack of enthusiasm for strengthening of ties also shows up in statistics from Egypt, despite the fact that Egyptians expressed the belief Egypt was benefiting positively from its economic relations with the US. Only in Lebanon do a clear majority want stronger economic relations with the US, with two-thirds to three-quarters of respondents in all samples seeking increased ties.

A pattern similar as that for the US holds for the UK.

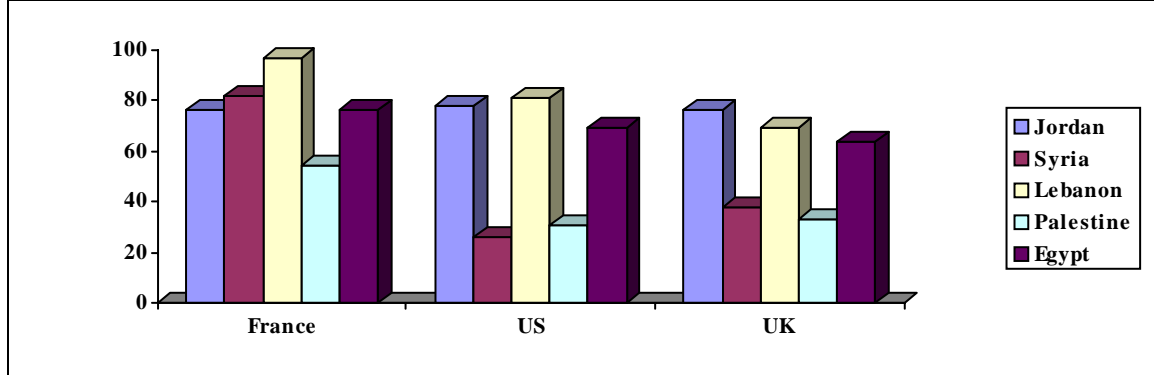
Figure II.5. Attitudes toward Changing Bilateral Economic Relations, National Samples



CULTURAL RELATIONS

Existing Cultural Relations Arab views toward the health of bilateral cultural relations mirror attitudes toward political or economic relations. As seen in Figure II.6, France is perceived most positively, with majorities in all five countries describing cultural relations as very or somewhat good. The Egyptians, Jordanians, and Lebanese also see themselves as having strong cultural ties with the US and the UK, while only a minority of Syrians and Palestinians perceived positive cultural relations with the US.

Figure II.6. Percentage Who View Bilateral Cultural Relations as Good, National Samples

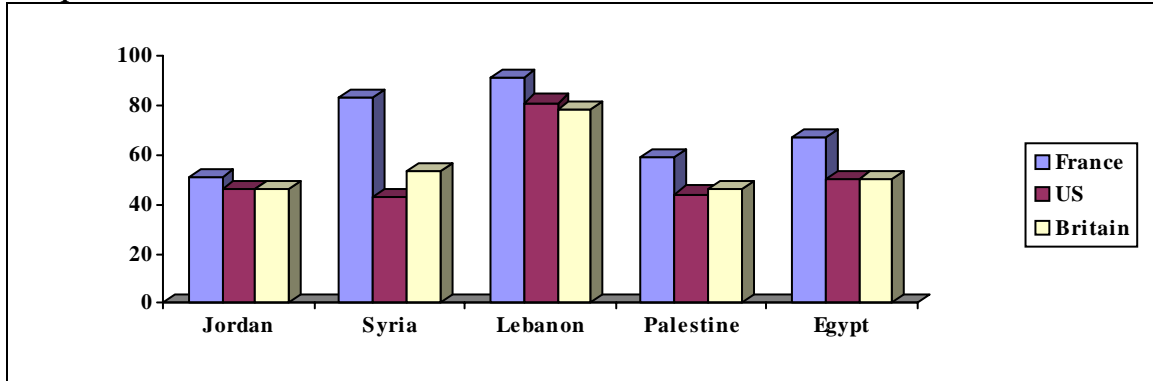


Strengthening Cultural Ties. Similarly, more Arabs prefer to see strengthened cultural relations with the French than with the Americans or the British. (See Figure IBID. below.) Majorities in all countries, and across samples, favored stronger bilateral ties with France. Jordanians and Palestinians were the least enthusiastic in this regard, but even there, 51% and 59%, respectively, sought closer relations. Again, as with economic relations, it appears that the more positive sentiments toward France stemming from political factors also influence attitudes toward cultural relations.

Attitudes toward stronger relations with the US are quite different. Only in Lebanon did a majority of national sample respondents favor closer cultural ties. Eighty-one percent of the Lebanese national sample stood in favor, compared to 46% in Jordan, 43% in Syria, 44% in Palestine and 50% in Egypt.

These attitudes are similar to those towards Britain, where 78% of Lebanese favored closer relations, compared to 46% in Jordan, 53% in Syria, 46% in Palestine and 50% in Egypt.

Figure II.7. Percentage That Prefer Strengthening Bilateral Cultural Relations, National Samples



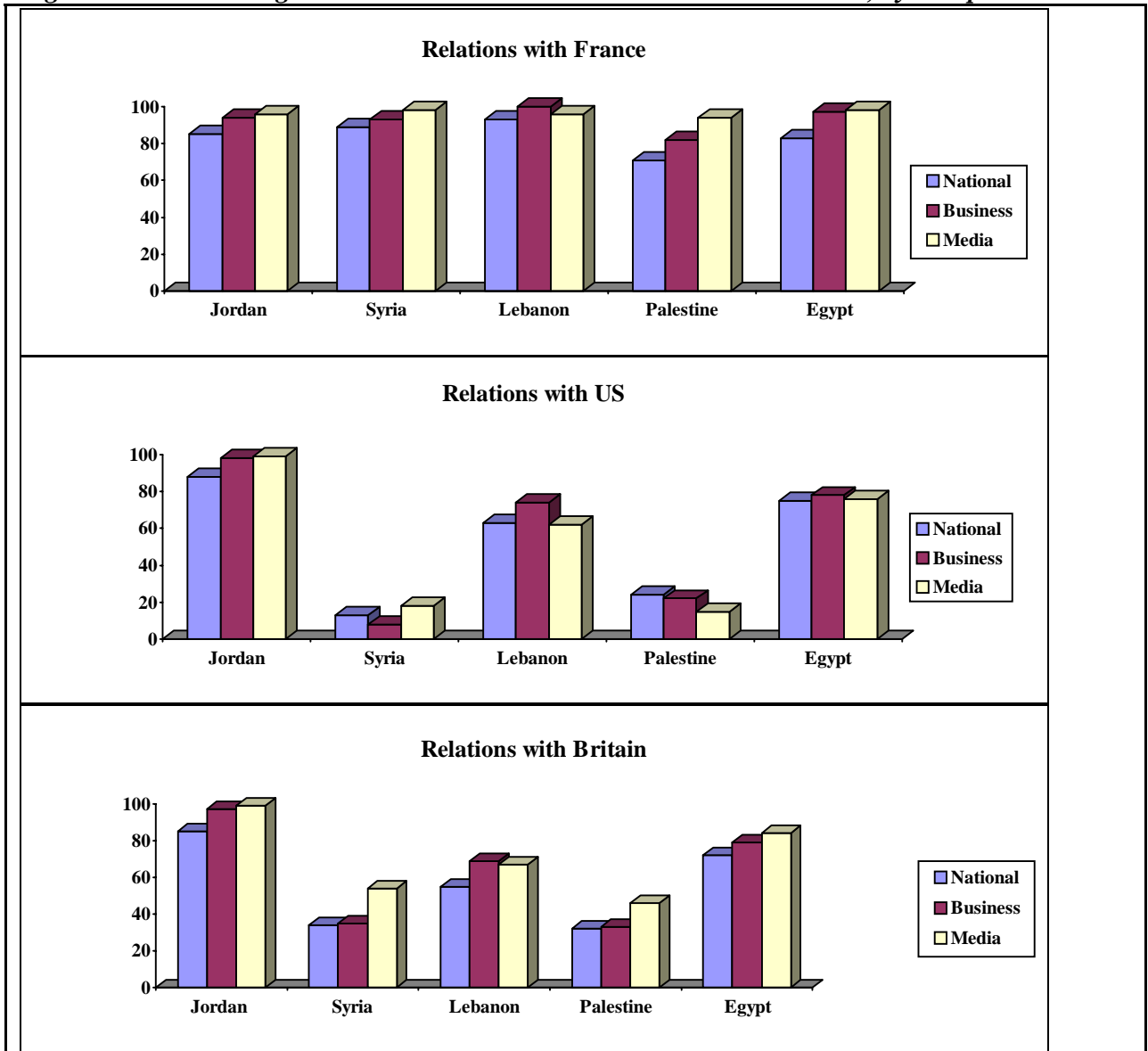
A GAP IN PERCEPTIONS: ELITE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD BILATERAL RELATIONS

There is an increasing gap between the attitudes of educated youth and the members of business and media communities concerning bilateral relations with the West. Business and media communities tend to perceive relations with the West as positive, advocating closer bilateral ties, whereas university students take quite an opposite view. They show greater distrust of the American and British intentions and do not seek stronger bilateral relations with these states.

Business and the Media: Does Exposure Breed Enthusiasm? Business and media elites often assess current relations as better than the national community does. In addition, they are even more likely to show stronger support for improved bilateral relations. This is particularly interesting since, as we shall see in Part III, these elites generally do not feel positively about US foreign policies. They are highly likely to criticize US foreign policies toward Iraq and Israel, and they are more frequently skeptical of US policy intentions. Nevertheless, it appears that greater contact with the West, which is most common among these groups, fosters greater support for closer ties, regardless of negative views concerning US and British policies.

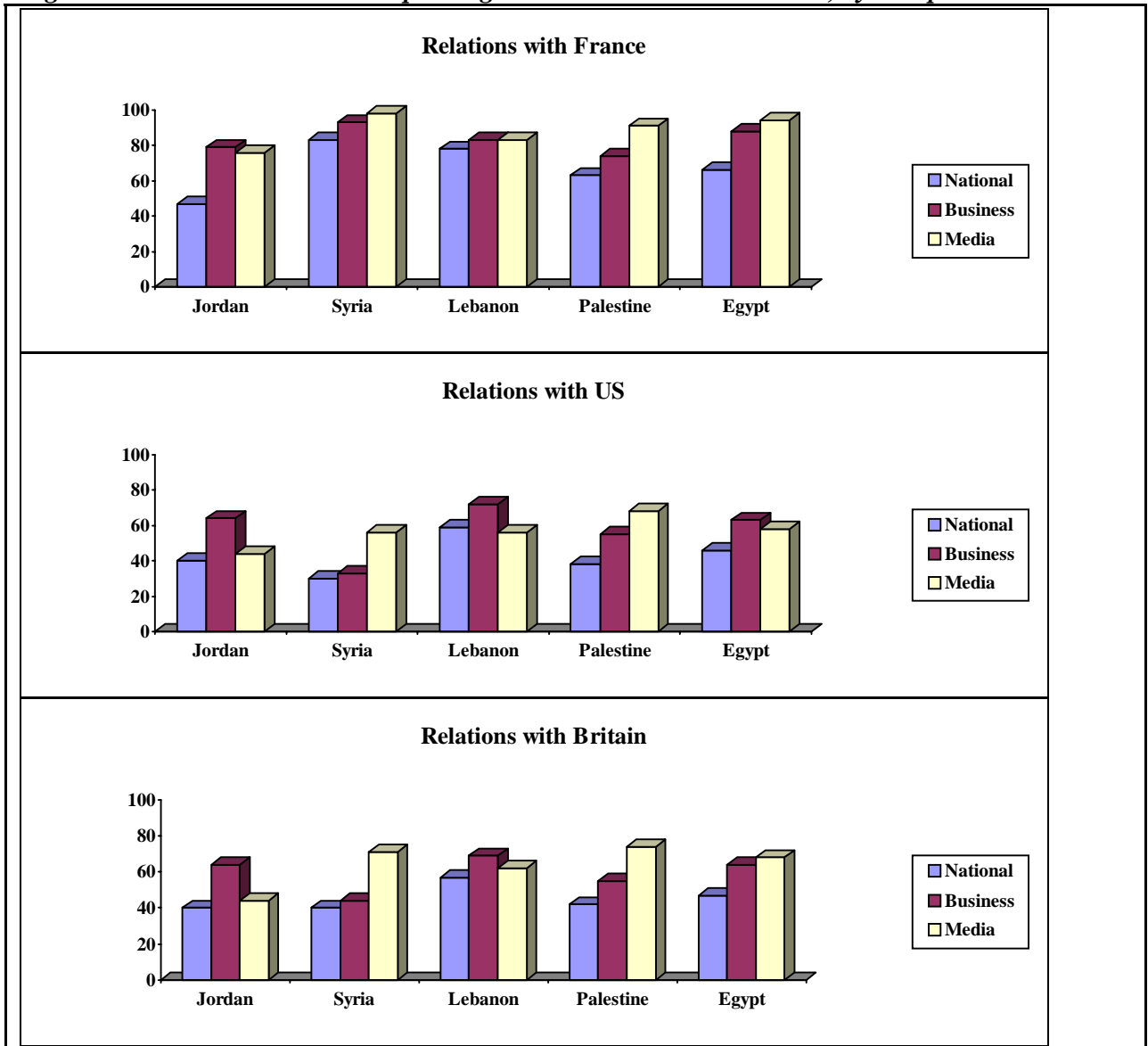
We explore this phenomenon here by focusing on political relations, but similar patterns are found in relationship to cultural and economic relations as well. As shown in Figure II.8, media and business elites are more likely than their national counterparts to see increased ties as beneficial. This is consistently the case with regard to France and Britain, but not with the US.

Figure II.8. Percentage Who View Bilateral Political Relations as Good, by Sample



Respondents in business and media samples were more likely to seek improved political ties than are those in the national samples. We see this in Figure II.9 below. Even in Syria, where enthusiasm for stronger political ties is overall extremely low, members of the business and media communities are more likely to seek stronger relations than their compatriots.

Figure II.9. Attitudes toward Improving Bilateral Political Relations, by Sample



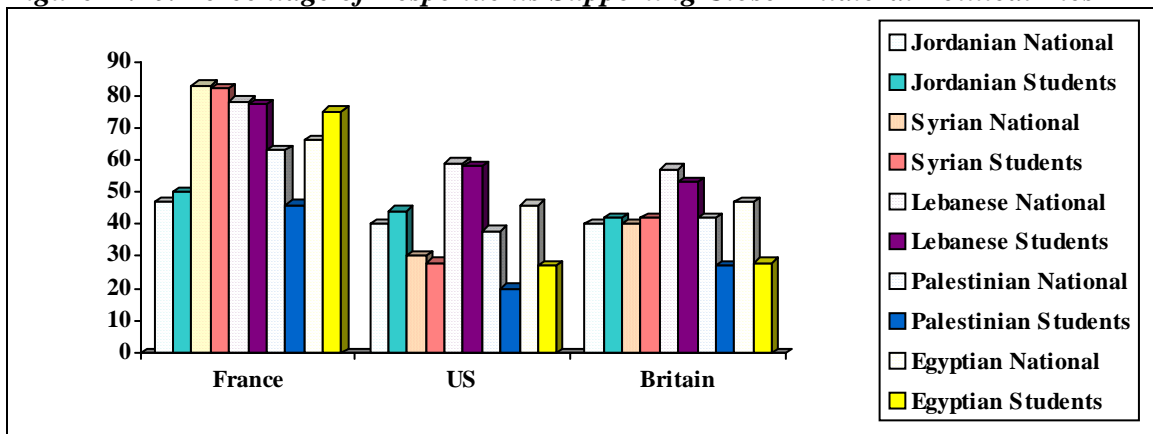
The data thus suggest that greater exposure to -- and frequently stronger personal ties with -- the West acts as a catalyst for desiring stronger political and economic relations.⁶ This is particularly interesting because those in elite circles -- and specifically the media -- are among the most boisterous critics of US foreign policies. Yet, they differ significantly from the average citizen in how they believe Arab states should engage with the US. In this, there is a significant divergence between the views and attitudes of elite communities and those of the general populace.

⁶ Although this study does not explore the relationship explicitly, we assume that elites in business and media communities have often studied in the West, tend to travel there more frequently, have greater access to and interaction with Westerners, and are exposed to more Western media than non-elites.

Disenchanted Youth. Young people -- and particularly university students -- are much less enthusiastic toward the prospects of improving relations with the West. As shown in Figure II.10 below, their support for improved relations with the US and Britain often falls below even those of the national population. This is particularly true for Egyptian and Palestinian students. For example, only 20% of Palestinian university students seek stronger political ties with the US, as compared to 38% of the national respondents. Similarly, only 27% of Egyptian students want to see closer US-Egyptian relations, compared to 46% of the national sample.

This same pattern holds with regard to enhancing ties with Britain: 27% of Palestinian students seek closer Palestinian-British relations, compared to 42% of their national counterparts. In Egypt, 29% of students surveyed sought closer ties with the UK, as opposed to 46% of the national sample.

Figure II.10. Percentage of Respondents Supporting Closer Bilateral Political Ties



The data suggest that student reluctance to seek closer relations with the US and Britain stems from the prevalent belief that these countries are behaving in a negative manner toward the Arab world. When asked, for example, whether the US deals with other countries in the world with respect and dignity, 63% of Palestinian students and 74% of Egyptian students disagreed completely, in comparison with 53% and 59% of the national samples, respectively.

Students are also more likely to believe that the US exploits their country economically. For instance, when asked whether their country or the Western partner benefits more from economic ties, Palestinian and Egyptian students were much more likely than the national respondents to perceive the West as doing better. Specifically, 56% of Palestinian students and 53% of Egyptian students believed the US gained more from bilateral economic relations. This compared to 40% of Palestinians and 33% of Egyptians, generally.

Similarly, 50% of Palestinian students and 38% of Egyptian students believe Britain gains more, as opposed to only 35% of Palestinians and 32% of Egyptians in the national samples.

CONCLUSION

Arabs differentiate quite strongly between the status of current relationships and the desirability of forging stronger economic, cultural, and political relationships with France, the UK, and the US:

Arabs see France as a good partner almost without exception, while they do not see the US and Britain as such. This is particularly the case in Syria and Palestine.

Many Arabs desire stronger relations with the West on all three levels - political, economic, and cultural - despite their political frustration. This often exists even where the general perception is that the West derives a greater benefit from the relationship with the Mashreq countries than do these countries themselves.

Business and media elites view relations with the West somewhat more positively than the average citizen. They are more likely to perceive current relations as good, and they are almost always more likely to desire stronger relations.

University students generally feel less favorably than average citizens about strengthening bilateral relations. Palestinian and Egyptian university students displayed the most negative attitudes with regards to strengthening political, economic, and cultural relations between the US and the UK and their respective countries.

SECTION 2

'US' AND THE 'OTHER'

PERCEPTIONS OF “THE WEST” AND “THE ARAB WORLD”

Many analysts discuss deteriorating Arab-West relations in terms of “the West” vs. “the Arab World”, referring to distinct spheres of civilization, culture, religion, political ideology, and state systems. Yet, what does “the West” mean to Arabs at a conceptual level? Similarly, can we speak of the Arab world as one distinct cultural entity? Most importantly, to what extent is a cultural gap between “the West” and “the Arab World” linked to the increasingly negative attitudes that Arabs have about the West?

This study finds that Arabs do see a significant gap between Western and Arab societies. They characterize the West and the Arab world in concrete and consistent terms, although their depictions of Western culture often differ from the ways in which Western citizens portray their own cultures.

Yet, cultural disparities between the West and the Arab world are not at the core of the current tensions. Arabs believe that Western societies hold many positive values. However, they often feel that Western policies do not reflect the values they profess. It is this inconsistency, rather than the values themselves, that is met with Arab disapproval. There is little evidence that Arabs perceive the West as a Crusader force, intent on destroying the Islamic world in a battle over religious beliefs. Indeed, people in the Arab world see the vast majority of Westerners and those in the US in particular, as not being strongly influenced by religious motives.

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: PERCEIVED VS. ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE WEST

Arabs base their assessments of the West on a fairly thin knowledge of its cultures and societies. Indeed, less than half of respondents believe that they have a good understanding of culture and society in France, the US, and the UK. This figure is still much greater than the percentage of respondents who can actually demonstrate accurate knowledge. Younger respondents and those who are members of the business and media communities know more about Western societies, but educational level is not consistently and significantly related to cultural understanding.

Actual demonstrated knowledge was less than expressed in individual self-assessments. When respondents are asked to describe their knowledge of each Western society on a four-point scale, one-third and two-thirds of national samples reported “very good” or “considerable” knowledge of the US, Britain and France. (See Table III.1.)

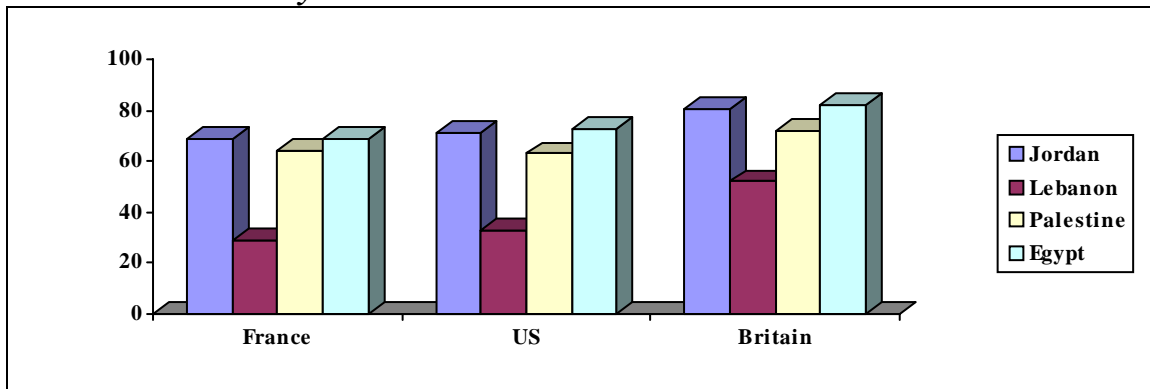
Table III.1. Percentage of National Respondents Claiming Knowledge of Western Countries, National Samples

	Jordan		Syria		Lebanon		Palestine		Egypt	
	<i>Much</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Much</i>	<i>None</i>
France	30	27	41	21	59	8	27	26	35	30
US	43	22	42	22	54	9	35	20	44	25
UK	33	26	33	27	36	21	27	25	32	33

NOTE: “Much” refers to those who claim “considerable” or “very good” knowledge, and “None” refers to those claiming “Hardly any” knowledge or stating “Don’t Know”. Remaining respondents, not listed in the table above, assessed themselves as having “A Little Knowledge”.

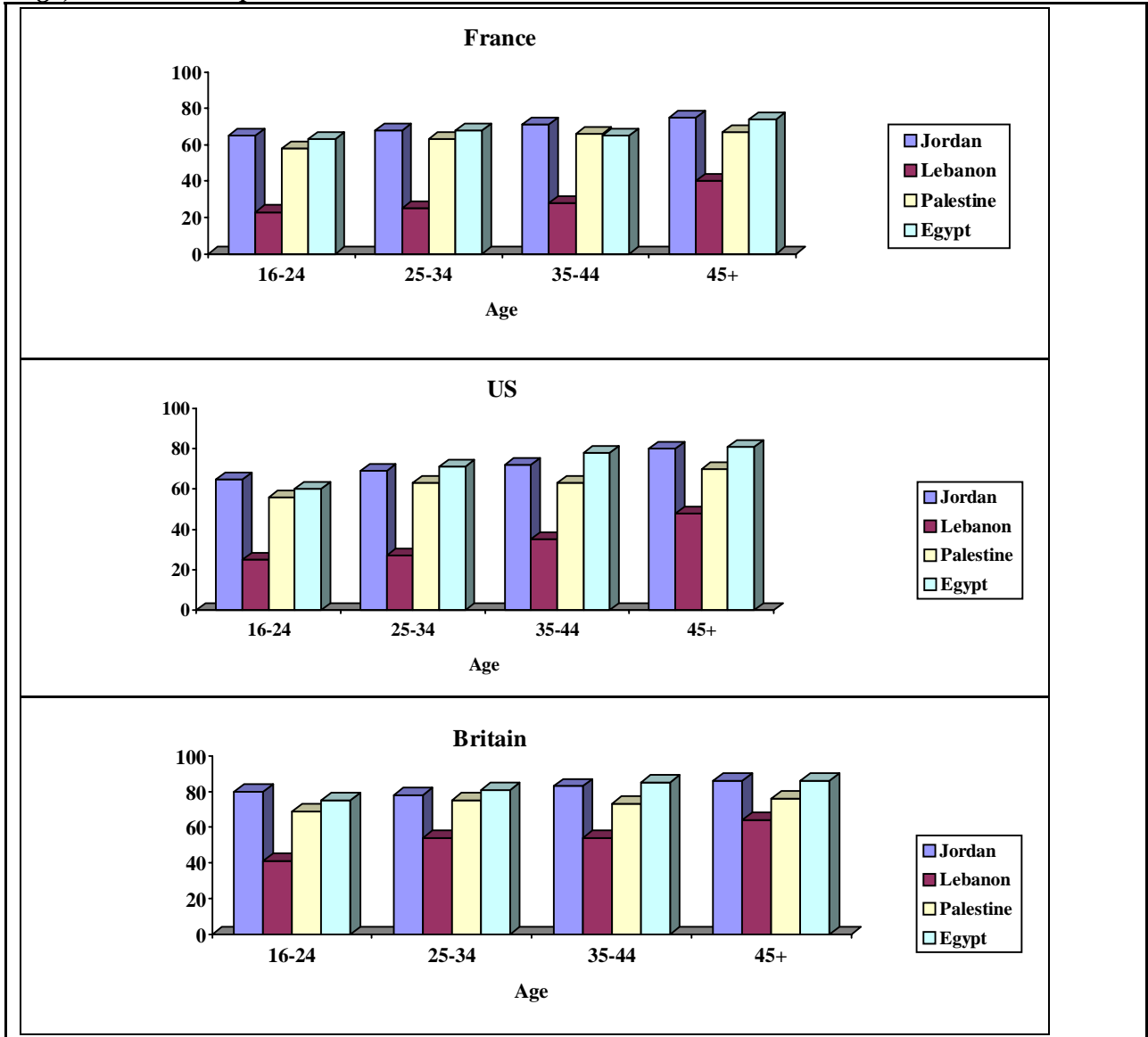
However, when asked to name a single non-political figure from each state, less than one-third of most national samples could do so. Indeed, as Figure III.1 shows, the number of respondents who could not name even one non-political figure exceeded 60% in most cases. Table III.3 illustrates percentages in national samples able to name one, two, three, or no non-political figures.

Figure III.1. Percentage of National Sample Unable to Name One Non-Political Personality in the Western Country.



There are some important exceptions to the knowledge gap. Lebanese generally perceive themselves as having much greater knowledge about the West - and particularly of France and the US - than their neighbors, and, in fact, they are able to demonstrate more actual knowledge. Young people are also more likely to know Western cultural figures. As shown in Figure III.2, the percentage of respondents unable to name prominent personalities drops significantly among younger populations. This is particularly true regarding knowledge of France and the US.

Figure III.2. Percentage of Respondents Unable to Name a Single Cultural Personality by Age, National Samples



Members of the business and media communities, and to lesser extent university students, also demonstrate relatively greater knowledge of Western countries. This is clearly shown in Table III.2 below. Respondents in these samples report a greater understanding of the West, and they are also able to exhibit this knowledge. Media respondents consistently were more able to provide information on Western cultural figures.

Table III.2. Reported Knowledge of Western Cultures, by Sample

<i>Knowledge of</i>	<i>Sample</i>	Jordan <i>Reported</i>	Lebanon <i>Reported</i>	Palestine <i>Reported</i>	Egypt <i>Reported</i>
France	National	30	59	27	35
	University	41	67	40	51
	Business	69	71	44	84
	Media	83	94	66	92
US	National	43	54	35	44
	University	43	54	35	44
	Business	86	62	55	84
	Media	91	80	77	94
Britain	National	33	36	27	32
	University	49	42	40	47
	Business	80	45	43	82
	Media	83	63	68	93

NOTE: “Reported Knowledge” is the percentage of the sample claiming “Very good” or “considerable” knowledge of the country.

This suggests that, for the most part, impressions shape Arab attitudes toward the West at the cultural level more than detailed knowledge of Western societies. Given the tense political situation in the region for more than 50 years, with political news dominating front pages of newspapers and television screens, it is not surprising that space available for issues other than politics has been relatively limited. The data reflect this.

Table III.3 The percentage of respondents in national samples able to name cultural figures

National samples: able to name French cultural figures				
Country	None	One	Two figures	Three figures
Jordan	70	30	16	8
Egypt	69	31	19	10
Lebanon	29	71	25	36
Palestine	64	36	23	12
National samples: able to name American cultural figures				
Country	None	One	Two figures	Three figures
Jordan	71	29	19	11
Egypt	74	26	20	14
Lebanon	30	70	51	35
Palestine	63	38	27	15
National samples: able to name British cultural figures				
Country	None	One	Two figures	Three figures
Jordan	81	19	9	4
Egypt	82	18	11	5
Lebanon	52	48	27	15
Palestine	74	26	15	9

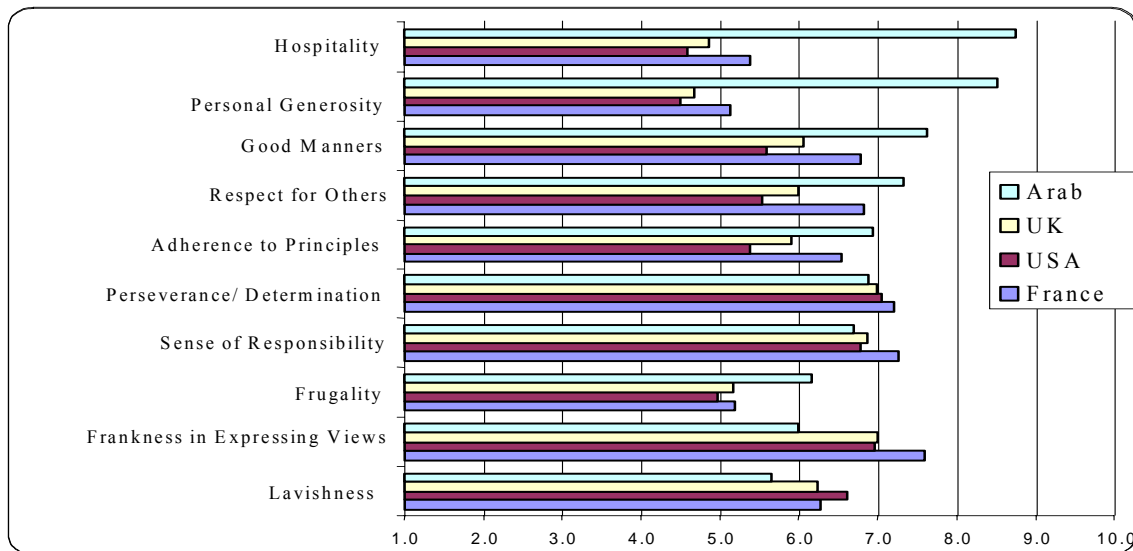
NOTE: Respondents were requested to name cultural figures. A small percentage named “cultural” figures who would more precisely be deemed political figures.

IMAGINING THE WEST

Regardless of the extent of knowledge about Western societies, citizens of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt maintain a fairly unified impression of both Western and Arab cultures. That is, when asked to evaluate the prevalence of *societal* and *individual* values in their own society and in all three of the Western societies, respondents present a consistent picture of their own cultures vis-à-vis a Western ‘other.’ As we will demonstrate later, these shared cultural perceptions stand in contrast to some important differences in views of the West at the political level in different Arab societies. Arabs perceive a cultural gap, but it is not this gap, real or perceived, that they feel underlies the current tensions.

Individual Values. Arabs perceive the individual values held in their societies to be strikingly different from those held in Western societies. These differences are clearly evident in Figure III.3, which summarizes how prevalent Arabs believe each value to be in their own and Western societies. Generally, Arabs see themselves as having good manners and as being more respectful of others than the French, the Americans, and the British. They see Westerners as generally more perseverant and determined, more responsible, and more frank in expressing their views, but as less generous, hospitable, and frugal than Arabs. Once again, they differentiate across Western societies to some extent, seeing the French as holding values more closely related to those of Arab societies.

Figure III.3. Respondents’ Estimates of the Prevalence of Individual Values, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data

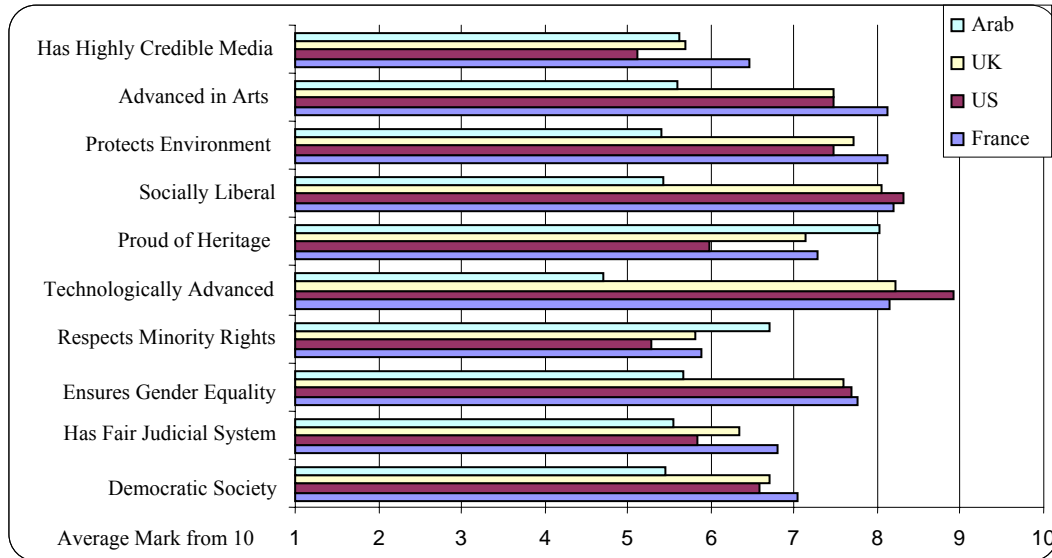


Societal Values. Arabs believe that their societal values stand in sharp contrast to those of the West. They generally associate Western societies with liberalism, individual liberty, democracy, and technological progress, but also with a higher proportion of social problems. In contrast, they see their societies as maintaining stronger values of tradition and family and as being less fraught with social problems.

When asked to assess the prevalence of a set of societal factors, respondents consistently

perceived Western societies as placing a high value on social liberty, gender equality, the environment, and the arts, while they see their own societies as having much greater pride in heritage than Western societies. There is also consensus that Western societies are highly technologically advanced, while less than 50% of respondents believe that Arab societies are technologically advanced. (See *Figure III.4* below.)

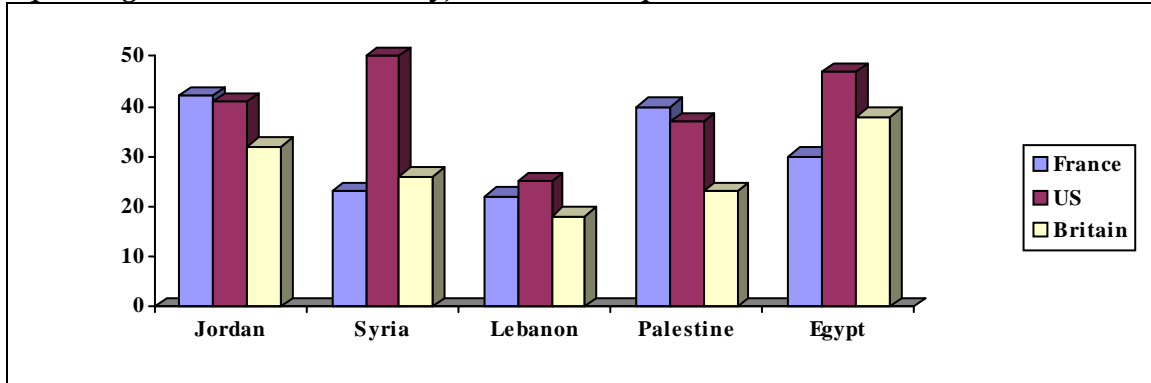
Figure III.4. Respondents' Estimates of the Prevalence of Societal Values, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data



Arabs also believe that Western societies fail to respect minority rights. This perception is linked to a perception that the French, the Americans, and the British discriminate against Muslims. When asked whether or not Muslims enjoy the same rights as others in each country, the vast majority of respondents were skeptical. As shown in *Figure III.5*, 25-50% of respondents in most cases *completely disagree* that Muslims have the same rights in the West as their fellow citizens. In contrast, less than 18% across all national samples agreed that France treated Muslim citizens equally; less than 13% across national samples viewed Britain as providing equal treatment; and less than 12% across national samples largely agreed that the US treated Muslims and non-Muslims equally.

In respect to this specific question, France was viewed almost as critically as the US and the UK.

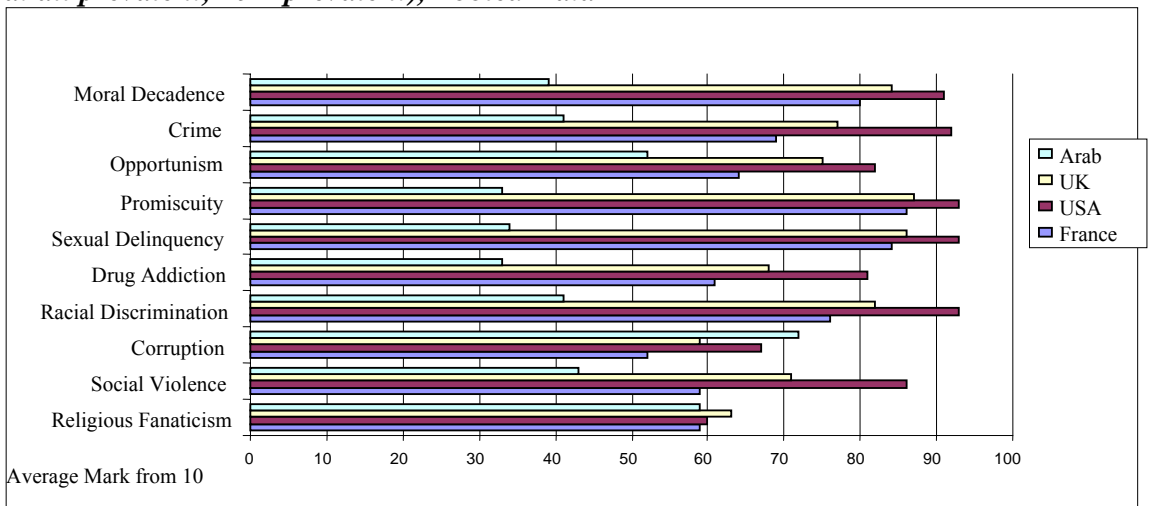
Figure III.5. Percentage of Respondents Who Completely Disagree that Muslims Enjoy Equal Rights in Western Country, National Samples



Finally, Arabs perceive Western society as more heavily plagued by social problems. This is evident in Figure III.6 below, which demonstrates the perceived prevalence of each social problem in Western and Arab societies. The major exception is administrative and financial corruption, which the respondents perceive as more prevalent in Arab societies than Western societies.

Arabs see religious fanaticism as a problem in their societies. Additionally noteworthy, nearly two-thirds of respondents across samples and countries believed religious fanaticism is a problem in both Western and Arab societies.

Figure III.6. Respondents' Estimates of the Prevalence of Social Ills, on a 1-10 scale (1=not at all prevalent, 10 = prevalent), Pooled Data



BACK TO THE CRUSADES?

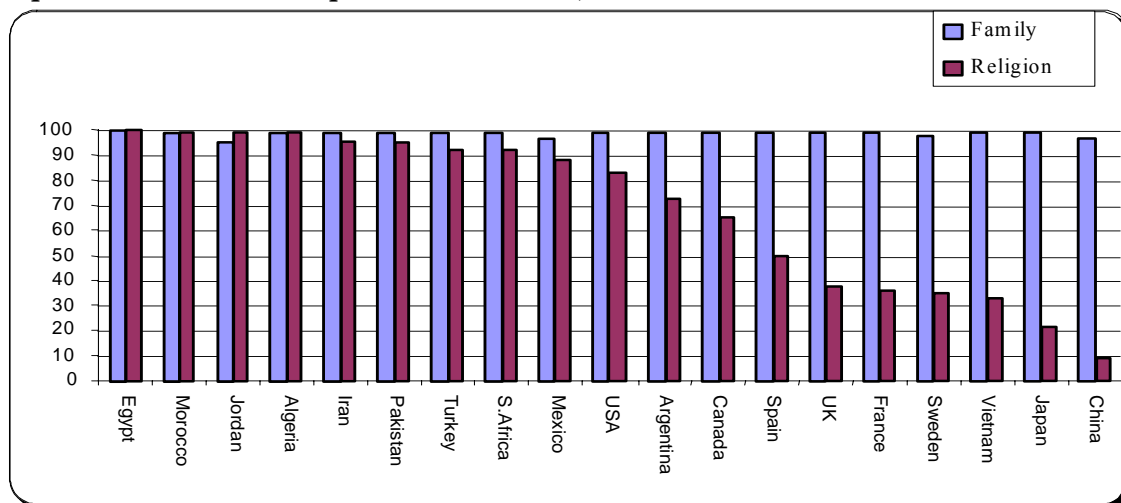
Disentangling the perceptions of “the West” and the “Arab World” allows us to examine the extent to which Arab-West tensions should be characterized as a showdown between Islam and Christianity. The short answer is “no”. The vast majority of Arabs does not see Westerners as

fundamentally motivated by Christianity, and indeed, do not see Westerners as particularly religiously motivated. At the same time, as we shall see in the next section, although there is significant support for a strong role for *Shari'a* in legislation in the Arab World, this is not the basis of hostility toward the West. However, there is considerable concern in the Mashreq that religious fanaticism is gaining strength in both the Arab world and the West. This perceived fanaticism, combined with the widespread discontent toward Western policies, should be a basis of concern.

Most Arabs do not consider religion to be among the most important values held in the three Western countries. Only 4.5% of respondents in the five Arab countries mentioned religion as the most important value to the British. This figure drops to 2.9% for the French and 1.8% for the US.

Importantly, Westerners perceive of themselves very differently than the Arabs do. According to the 2001 *World Values Survey*, 40% of respondents in France and Britain consider religion "very" or "rather" important to them, a figure which is significantly higher than the percentage of Arabs who hold this view about these countries. Moreover, 82% of American respondents in the same survey placed a very high value on religion. (See Figure III.7 below.) As the figure shows, there is also a significant difference in Arab perceptions of family values in the West and Westerners' perceptions of themselves.

Figure III.7. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Religion and Family are Important (Very Important and Rather Important Combined.)

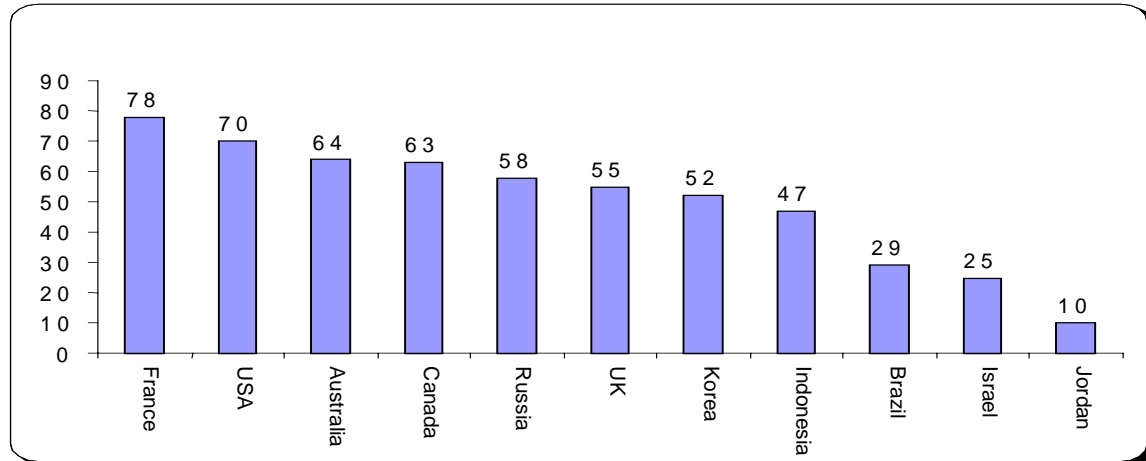


Source: World Values Survey and European Values Survey, Fourth Wave Data, 2001.

Arabs are not the only ones to hold low perceptions of American religiosity, but the gap between Arab perceptions of Americans and American perceptions of themselves is markedly greater. A recent BBC survey found that although the French tend to perceive Americans as religious, all other nationalities viewed Americans as less religious than Americans view themselves. In some cases, the differences are relatively minor: 70% of Americans view themselves as religious, while two-thirds of Australians and Canadians described Americans this way. However, this figure drops to 10% of Jordanians who see Americans as valuing religion. (See *Figure III.8*

below.) When it comes to the importance of religion, there is an enormous gap between Arab perceptions of Americans and the way in which Americans view themselves. This offers credence to the finding that most Arabs do not perceive the majority of Westerners as motivated by desire to undertake a religious crusade.

Figure III.8. Perceptions of American Religiosity



Source: BBC poll (conducted by ICM June 2003).

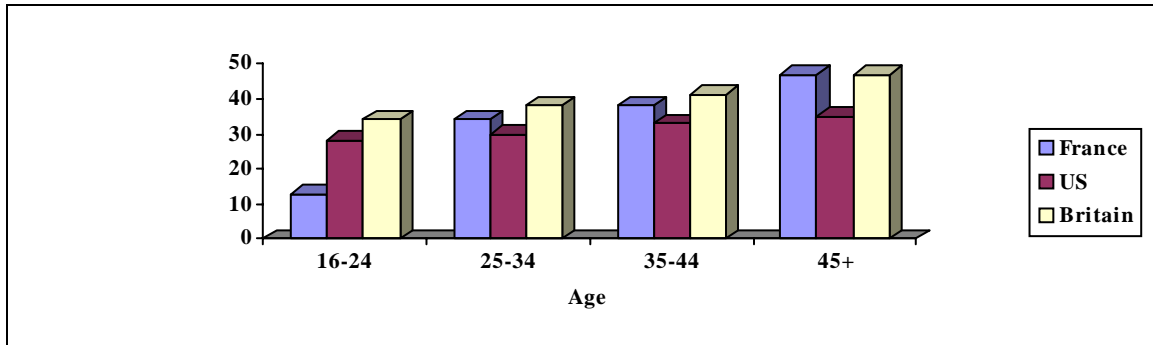
However, Arabs do fear religious fanaticism. Indeed, they fear it both in their own societies and in the West. Pooled results from national surveys find that nearly 60% of respondents see religious fanaticism as a problem in Western societies as well as in their own. It is one of the few social ills that they see consistently pervasive in both cultures. Arabs express the fear that those on the religious fringes might fuel an even more serious Arab-West conflict.

AGE, HIGHER EDUCATION AND EXPOSURE REVISITED

There are important differences in the attitudes of Arabs regarding religion, based on age, education and the exposure gained by business and media communities. Generally, we find continued evidence that young people are more critical of Western societies than the rest of the national population. Business and media elites, and to a lesser extent university students, display more tempered views of both Western and Arab cultures. They are also more likely to be self-critical of flaws they perceive in Arab culture, and a bit less critical of Western cultures than the average respondent. Consequently, elites perceive a narrower gap between Western and Arab cultures than do their national counterparts.

Age. Age appears particularly salient when Arabs assess treatment of Muslim citizens within the Western world. Pooled data show that the percentage of respondents believing that Muslims are treated unfairly in these countries is highest in regards to the UK and lowest in regard to France. Age appears to have a significant effect on the perceptions of such treatment, particularly with relation to France. Only 13% of respondents aged 16-24 years believed that Muslims are treated unfairly in France, compared with almost half of respondents over 45 years old. (See Figure III.9.)

Figure III.9. Percentage Who Agree that Muslims in the Western Country Enjoy the Same Rights as Other Citizens by Age, Pooled Data



Higher Education and Exposure. Higher education and exposure moderates attitudes toward both Western and Arab societies. We saw previously that university students and elites in business and media communities demonstrated a greater knowledge of Western cultures. In addition, we find that these communities are also simultaneously more critical of certain aspects of Arab society and more forgiving toward the West.

These relationships are demonstrated in the Jordanian data. As shown in Figure III.10 below, respondents in the university, media and business samples thought positive social values to be less prevalent than their national counterparts. As shown in Figure III.11, they also thought that positive individual values were less widespread. At the same time, they view Western society to be less fraught with social problems than did respondents in the national sample, and they also see Jordanian society as suffering more from similar social problems. In short, they see less difference between societies of the West and the Arab world.

Figure III.10. Perceived Prevalence of Societal Values in Jordanian Society, by Sample

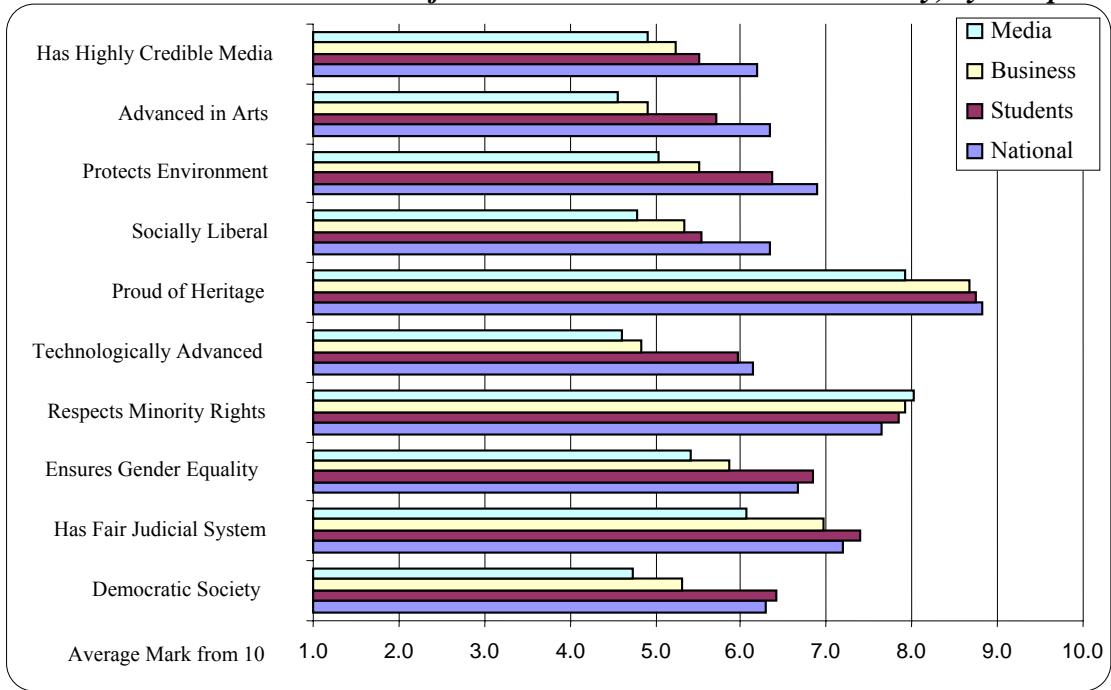
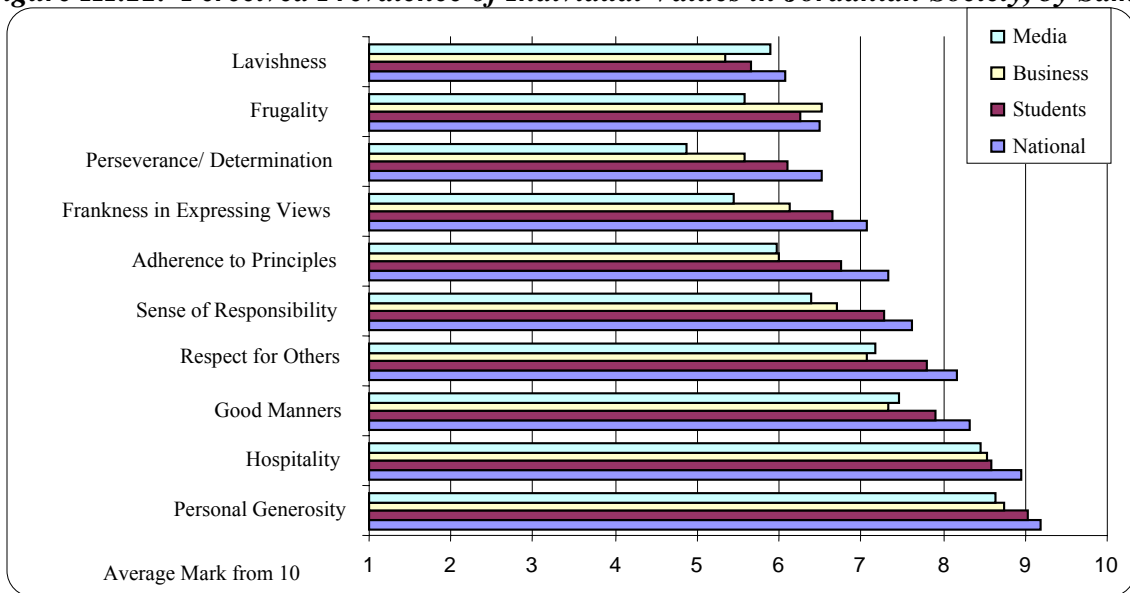


Figure III.11. Perceived Prevalence of Individual Values in Jordanian Society, by Sample



CONCLUSIONS

Arabs draw sharp distinctions between Western and Arab cultures. They have a well defined notion of Arab and Western cultures, defined by similarly perceived sets of societal and individual values. Yet, these perceptions do not explain the fundamental reasons for the escalating Arab-West conflict.

In sum:

Arab understanding of Western values, while consistent, is often not based on detailed knowledge. In most cases, more than half of national sample respondents claimed little or no knowledge of the West, and even fewer were able to demonstrate specific factual knowledge.

Arabs perceive Western social values as distinct from their own, but judge them neither wholly good nor entirely bad. For instance, Arabs almost universally perceive the West as placing little importance upon values of religion, family, and heritage, while Arabs see adherence to these values as more widely practiced in their own societies. At the same time, Arabs perceive the West as being more disposed to democratic values, individual liberty, aesthetic appreciation, and technological advancement.

Arabs see Western societies as lacking in individual values and plagued by social problems, but not driven by religious fervor. Arab perceptions of these individual values yield three important lessons:

- Arabs see administrative and financial corruption as more prevalent in Arab than Western societies. This stands in contrast to the general Arab perception which sees their own societies as more rooted in individual moral values than Western societies. It also suggests the large extent to which Arabs respect Western democratic governance and is probably also a reflection of dissatisfaction with levels of corruption in their own countries.
- Arabs believe that both Arab and Western societies face problems of religious fanaticism. They express concerns that a religiously-oriented conflict could emerge from the actions of fringe elements on both sides.
- At the same time, the Arab public sees the Westerners as caring little about religion, thus suggesting that there is little fear among Arabs that the majority of Westerners are intent on undertaking an anti-Muslim Crusade against them.

Based on this data, it is suggested that the culture gap between the West and the Arab world is not the fundamental cause of Arab-West tensions. Arabs perceive French, American, and British societal values similarly, even though they hold different attitudes toward France than they do toward the US and the UK. Evidence does not support the view that because Arabs appreciate French values, but dislike those of the British and the Americans, they hold different opinions about these countries. Rather, negative attitudes toward the US and Britain are more closely tied to the disapproval of the foreign policies of these nations, particularly

when the reality of their professed policies is at odds with the reality as experienced on the ground.