

Most Arabs reject ISIS, think 'caliphate' will fail, survey finds

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Dubai: A majority of young Arabs regard Islamic State as the "biggest obstacle" facing the Middle East region and believe the terror group will fail to establish a caliphate, a new survey has found.

According to the ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey, an overwhelming majority of Arab teens and young adults now strongly oppose the terror group with nearly 80 per cent ruling out any possibility of supporting the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), even if it were to renounce its brutal tactics.

While three in four Arab youth are concerned about the rise of ISIS, just one in six believes the terror group ultimately will succeed.

Though concern is rising – with 50 per cent of youth citing it as the biggest obstacle in the region, up from 37 per cent last year – tacit support for the group is declining with just 13 per cent agreeing they could see themselves supporting the terror group even if it did not use so much violence, compared with 19 per cent in 2015.

A quarter of young people believe that a lack of jobs and opportunities are the main recruitment drivers for the terror group, although one in four of those surveyed also said they could see no reason why anyone would want to join the terror outfit.

Arab youth cite Saudi Arabia as their biggest ally for the fifth-year running (31 per cent), followed by the UAE (28 per cent) and the US (25 per cent), according to the survey.

However, the survey suggests the views on the US are increasingly polarized. While two-thirds of young Arabs view the country as an ally, one third see the country as an enemy, especially in Iraq (93 per cent), Yemen (82 per cent) and Palestine (81 per cent).

Iran's increasing regional influence is also reflected in the survey, with 13 per cent of young Arabs now viewing the country as their biggest ally – although a small majority of young Arabs (52 per cent) view it as an enemy. "This is an important survey of how Arab youth – the largest and arguably most important demographic in the region – think about the evolving and challenging environment in which they live," said Donald A Baer, Worldwide chairman and CEO, Burson-Marsteller, a public relations firm that has tracked young Arabs' views in annual surveys for the past nine years.

"Today's Arab youth are tomorrow's leaders, business owners, workers and consumers, and the information in this survey helps all of us to reach and understand this group better," he said. Five years after the Arab Spring, most young Arabs today are prioritising stability over democracy. In 2016, just 36 per cent of young Arabs think that the Arab world is better off following the uprisings, down from 72 per cent in 2012 at the height of unrest.

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