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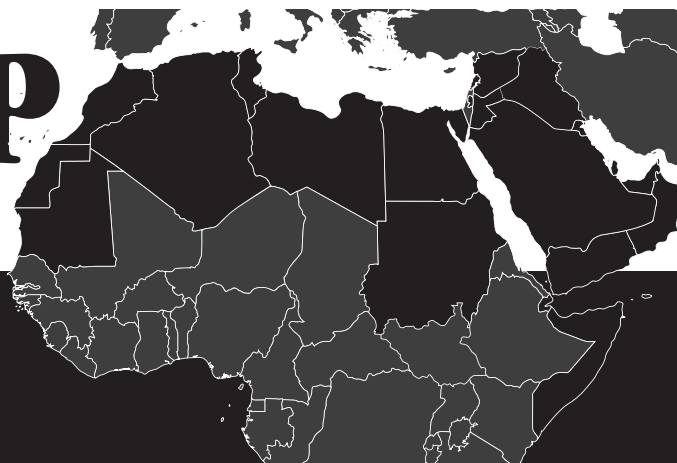
Mohammed Nosseir writes in Opinion

14 & 15 Arab Media Forum

Special coverage

Arab News/YouGov poll: 81% of Americans cannot identify Arab world on map

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP HOW AMERICANS SEE THE ARAB WORLD



65% of Americans say they don't know much about the Arab world

19% can correctly identify the region's geography

51% believe the US media coverage of the area is insufficient

- Half of respondents to exclusive survey say US media underreport the region
- A fifth believe that Agrabah — the fictional city from 'Aladdin' — is part of the Middle East
- Image problem in the West to be discussed at Arab Media Forum panel in Dubai

BEN FLANAGAN
ARAB NEWS STAFF

DUBAI: Most Americans have scant knowledge of the Arab world, with eight in 10 unable to point out the region on a map, a wide-ranging Arab News/YouGov poll has found.

The survey of 2,057 people in the US revealed an alarmingly low level of awareness about the Middle East and North Africa, but also a desire for more

media coverage of the region.

More than a fifth of respondents said Agrabah — the fictional city from "Aladdin" — is a real part of the Arab world. An even higher proportion — 38 percent — would be happy with a US travel ban on citizens of Agrabah should they be proven a threat.

The US public's knowledge gap does, however, extend far beyond Disney fiction.

The "The Arab Image in the US" poll, conducted March 17-21, found that 65 percent of respondents admitted to knowing little about the Arab world, with 30 percent having no interest in understand-

ing the region further.

Over three-quarters of respondents said they would not consider traveling to the Arab world, with 39 percent saying the whole region is too dangerous to visit.

The results of the poll are published today to coincide with the Arab Media Forum (AMF) in Dubai. An Arab News panel discussion on "The Arab Image in the West" will be held today, the second day of the forum, to discuss the media's role in addressing the region's perception problem.

This is significant as a low engagement in news about the Arab world was seen as

one factor behind the vast gap in Americans' knowledge exposed by the Arab News/YouGov poll.

Almost eight in 10 of the respondents said they follow international news, but of those only 24 percent tune into news about the Arab world. But half of the respondents said they think US media do not provide sufficient coverage of the region.

Stephan Shakespeare, the chief executive of polling firm YouGov, said the findings are significant and a cause for concern, especially at a time when President Donald Trump is ramping up the US involvement in the Arab world.

"America appears more isolationist since the advent of President Trump and yet at the same time more willing to intervene fast with military action, defying Russia with a surprise attack in Syria," Shakespeare writes on page 5.

"Whatever one's views of these situations, everyone surely hopes for increased understanding between the peoples of the world."

Shakespeare did, however, point to some "more hopeful" signs from the poll findings.

For example, when it comes to immigration — one of the key talking points in last year's US election — the results

were generally positive.

The survey found that 63 percent of respondents believe Arab immigrants have made efforts to integrate themselves in US and Western societies.

And Shakespeare also pointed to the desire of US citizens to learn more about the Middle East, something on the agenda at this week's Arab Media Forum.

"About a third (of respondents said) they would like to see more media coverage about social, cultural and scientific aspects of the region," Shakespeare wrote. "There appears to be some readiness to consider broader and more positive types of news."

Saudi Ideological War Center launches initiatives to fight terrorism

Project to be supervised by deputy crown prince

ARAB NEWS

RIYADH: The Ideological War Center (IWC), a subsidiary of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Defense, is launching extensive plans to fight extremism and terrorism, the ministry announced on its social media accounts.

In a series of messages released in several languages via social media, the IWC will focus on exposing mistakes, allegations, suspicions and deceptive techniques promoted by extremists and terrorists.

IWC also discussed on its social media accounts the correct Shariah methodology regarding issues of extremism and terrorism. The messages also aim to introduce intellectual initiatives similar to the ones presented by Saudi and non-Saudi agencies as well as intellectual initiatives for



Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition.

In addition, the IWC, plans to raise the level of Islamic awareness in Muslim and non-Muslim countries to garner more support about the real Islam.

Continued on Page 3

Unimpeachable evidence continues to pile up: Analysts tell Arab News HRW: Assad regime used nerve agents in 4 attacks

SIRAJ WAHAB
ARAB NEWS STAFF

JEDDAH: New evidence indicates that the Syrian regime used suspected nerve agents in four chemical weapons attacks since December. This includes the one in an opposition-held town on April 4 that killed nearly 100 people, a human rights group said Monday.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report that these attacks "are part of a broader pattern of Syrian regime forces' use of chemical weapons," which could be categorized as crimes against humanity.

The rights group said the April attack on Khan Sheikhun and the three others using suspected nerve agents all took place in areas where offensives by armed forces fighting the regime threatened military air bases.

It said witnesses had described symptoms consistent with exposure to nerve agents that they and other local residents had experienced after planes attacked northern Hama on March 30 and eastern Hama on Dec. 11-12.



Abdul-Hamid Alyousef holds his twin babies who were killed by a chemical weapons attack in Khan Sheikhun in the northern province of Idlib, Syria, in this April 4 photo. (AP)

In Khan Sheikhun, HRW said 92 people, including 30 children, had been identified by residents and activists as victims of exposure to deadly chemicals. Medical personnel reported that hundreds more were injured, it said.

In at least some attacks, the rights group said, the aim appears

to have been to inflict "severe suffering" on the civilian population.

"The government's recent use of nerve agents is a deadly escalation — and part of a clear pattern," said Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch.

"In the last six months, the government has used warplanes,

helicopters and ground forces to deliver chlorine and sarin in Damascus, Hama, Idlib and Aleppo," he said. "That's widespread and systematic use of chemical weapons."

Oubai Shahbandar, a Syrian-American analyst and fellow at the New America Foundation's International Security Program, said: "Unimpeachable evidence continues to pile up of Bashar Assad's complicity in directing the sarin gas attack against civilians.

"There remains an ongoing disinformation campaign on social media attempting to spread fake news and absolve the regime of this war crime," he told Arab News on Monday.

Shahbandar said the evidence against Assad was overwhelming. "The question is how the international community will prevent him from using his chemical stockpiles yet again," he said.

Hamdan Al-Shehri, a Riyadh-based Saudi political analyst and international relations scholar, said the confirmation from HRW was one more clinching evidence

of Assad's savagery against his people.

"He has no qualms in killing his own people with these weapons of mass destruction," Al-Shehri told Arab News. "Assad wants to remain in power forever. That is his only objective. He doesn't care how many Syrians have to die in order for him to remain in power."

He said the real problem was Russia. "(Russian President Vladimir) Putin needs to accept these findings and stop supporting the Assad regime," he said. "But I am not hopeful that Russia will change. Putin will simply try to cover up Assad's misdeeds."

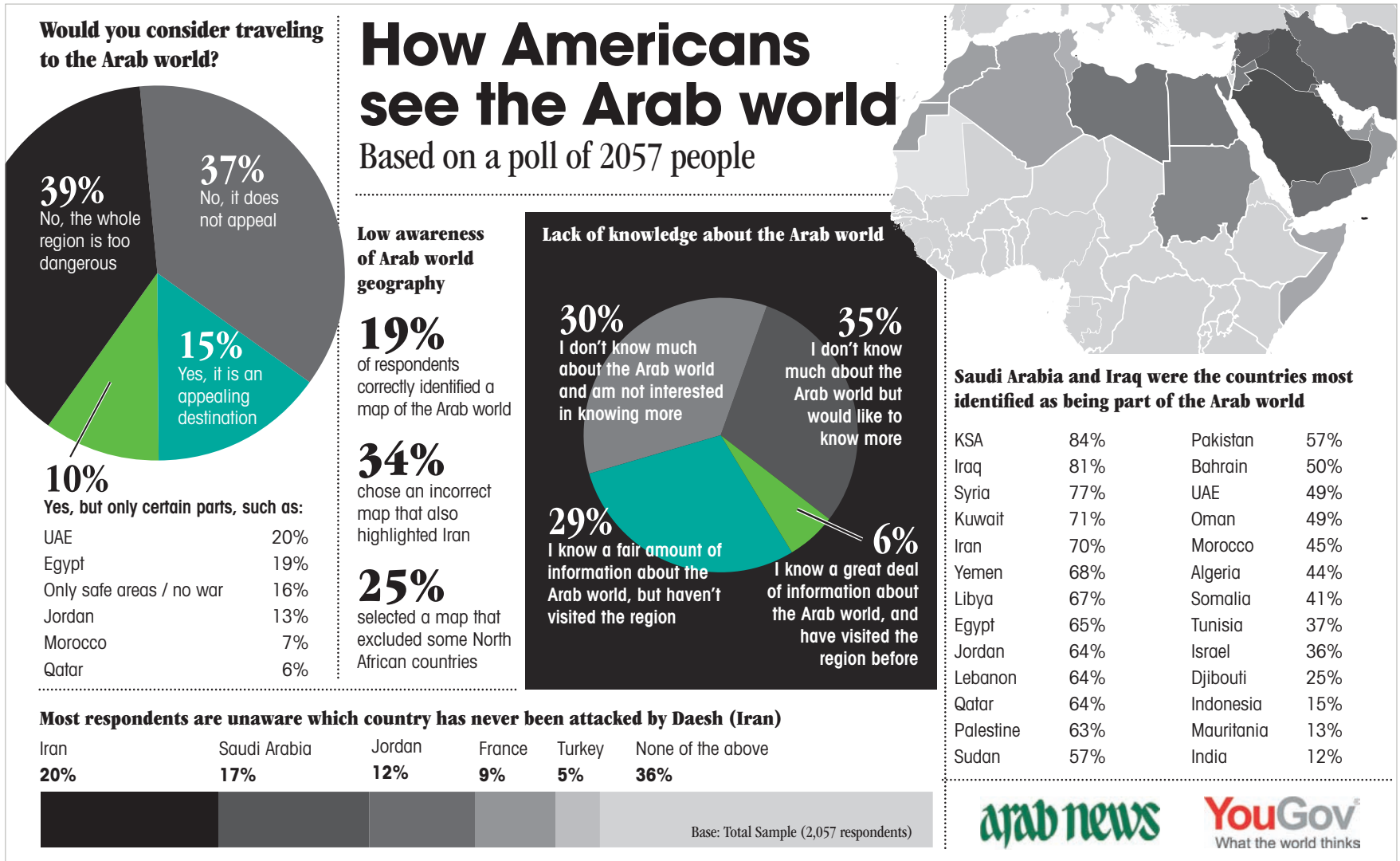
Al-Shehri said this overwhelming evidence will strengthen the resolve of the international community to stop "Assad's crime against humanity."

— With input from AP



Survey exposes American 'apathy' toward Arab world

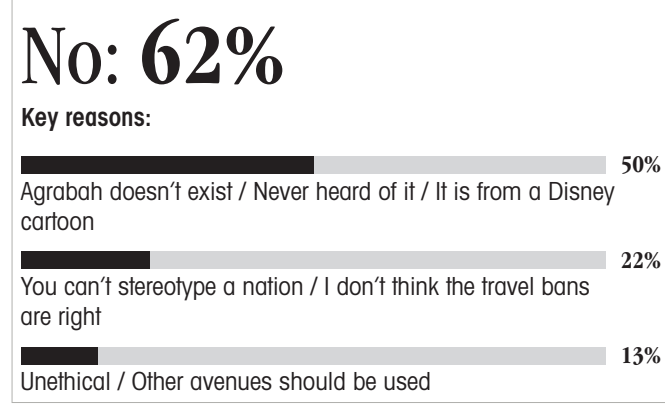
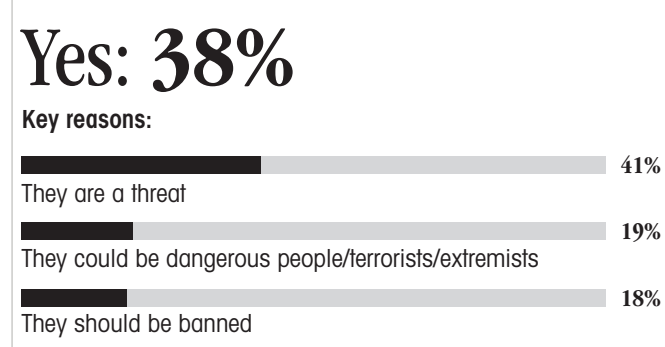
- Arab News/YouGov poll: 65% of US public know little about the Middle East and North Africa
- Half think national media underreport the region and want more news on culture, society
- 76% would not travel to this part of the world



Agrabah: Not so imaginary to some

21% of respondents identified the "Sultanate of Agrabah" as part of the Arab world despite it being a fictional city from Disney's *Aladdin*.

When asked whether a US travel ban should be imposed on the citizens of "Agrabah" if they were proven to be a threat:



BEN FLANAGAN
ARAB NEWS STAFF

DUBAI: Citizens of the US have a widespread "apathy" toward the Arab world, with Americans showing huge gaps in knowledge about the region, an Arab News/YouGov poll shows.

Americans (who consume international news) do not follow the news about the Arab world and 65 percent of Americans do not know much about the Arab world, shows the indifference and apathy toward the region," Nagdev said. This exacerbates the region's poor

news cycle driven by negative stories on war and terrorism," Nagdev said. "The lack of knowledge is also unsettling given the influence and power of the US in the region, with a huge military presence." But despite the "apathy," there were signs that American consumers

among the top news sources, especially for the younger audience with no pre-conceived notions about the Arab world." This is a clear opportunity for the Middle East's media outlets, Nagdev said. "On a positive note, over half of the respondents believe media could play a positive role in better defining the image of the Arab world. This is a

among the top news sources, especially for the younger audience with no pre-conceived notions about the Arab world."

The Arab... what? Despite that, the poll revealed very low awareness levels of the Arab world in a sample of Americans — something that Nagdev linked to the "negative perception" the region has in the West.

Americans' view of Arabs in the US

American citizens surveyed in "The Arab Image in the US" poll gave their opinions on immigration in the US — a major issue during last year's election. A total of 63 percent of the respondents said they believe Arab immigrants have made an effort to integrate themselves in US and Western societies, while 37 percent

think they have failed to do so. But there was a clear political divide over the issue: 83 percent of the respondents who affiliate themselves with the Democratic Party have a positive view about Arab immigrants adapting to life in the West, compared to just 37 percent of the Republican voters. The panel was also asked about attitudes toward Muslims at home. A total of 53 percent said

they are concerned that an increase in Islamophobic statements by politicians, organizations and other individuals would increase the number of hate crimes against Muslims or Arabs in the US — with 32 percent saying they are "very concerned." Democrat voters were found to be significantly more concerned about this than the Republican voters.

image in the West, the research expert added. "The negative perception of the Arab world is largely driven by non-followership of the news regarding the Arab world. The huge knowledge gap is further accentuated by the

wanted more news from the region. Just over half the respondents said the US media do not provide enough coverage of the Arab world and more than a third of the Americans polled said they want more news about Arab society

fantastic opportunity for the local media to expand their presence and influence in the US," he said. "This probably is the best time for the Arab media outlets to increase their presence in the US through social media channels, which rate

The "knowledge gap" varied according to political affiliation: 42 percent of Democrat voters claim they do not know much about the Arab world but are eager to learn more, compared with 26 percent of Republican voters. When shown three different maps, one of which illustrated the Arab World accurately, just 19 percent of respondents correctly identified a map of the Arab world, with 34 percent choosing an incorrect map that also highlighted Iran and 25 percent selecting an incorrect map that excluded some North African countries. More than a fifth of the respondents said Agrabah — the fictional city from "Aladdin" — is a real part of the Arab world. Most respondents to the Arab News/

YouGov poll were unaware that Iran had never been attacked by Daesh — with only 20 percent stating this. But 45 percent of the respondents correctly identified Saudi Arabia as the country that founded the Islamic military alliance to combat Daesh. But over three-quarters of the American respondents would not consider traveling to the Arab world. Of those, 39 percent would not consider it because they believe the whole region is too dangerous, while another 37 percent just do not find it appealing. Again, there was a divide according to political affiliation: Republican voters were most likely to reject the idea of visiting the Arab world due to finding it too dangerous, with 52 percent claiming this, compared to 32 percent of Democrat voters. "It is a shame that 76 percent of Americans would not travel to the region, given the rich historical and cultural significance of the region. Cities such as Dubai have established a strong tourism brand that attracts over 14 million tourists each year," Nagdev said. "However, the recent events have meant a decline in tourism numbers to places such as Egypt and Jordan, which are largely dependent on the tourism industry... Perhaps with Dubai hosting the World Expo in 2020 and Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2022, the next few years will be crucial in redefining the image of the Middle East."

A deep and dangerous knowledge gap

The future of the Middle East is being driven by policies made by the American administration, which itself is driven by the often-incorrect beliefs its 325 million population have about the region.



RAY HANANIA | SPECIAL TO ARAB NEWS

Americans are the most educated people in the world but the least educated about the world. The American education gap widens when it comes to topics of the Middle East, an area they should be better informed about considering that in the past nearly two decades, more Americans were killed or injured there than in any other international region.

A new survey by YouGov in partnership with Arab News, the Middle East's leading English-language newspaper, reports that two countries — Iraq and Saudi Arabia — stand out in Americans' minds as being part of the Arab world. I am sure the reasons are simple: More than 4,500 Americans have died in Iraq since the US first invaded that Arab country in 2003. Oil from the Middle East countries,

mainly Saudi Arabia, fuels the cars Americans need to sustain their lifestyle. Yet in the survey of more than 2,000 Americans by YouGov and Arab News, the gap in American knowledge about the Middle East is staggering. A large segment of those polled, 65 percent, admitted they do not know much about the Arab world. Nothing says that more than the

fact that 21 percent of those surveyed actually identified the "Sultanate of Agrabah" as an Arab country. Apparently, Americans were really moved by the Hollywood lyrics, "Oh, I come from a land, from a faraway place where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face, it's barbaric, but hey, it's home." Agrabah, Arabia is the "City of Mystery" located "this side of the Jordan river" that was home for Aladdin in Disney's 1993 children's animated movie. It does not exist. But 38 percent said that Agrabah should be added to the US travel ban if its "citizens" pose a threat. Why is all this important? Because the future of the Middle East is being driven by the policies made by the American administration, which is driven by the beliefs and stereotypes its 325 million population have

about the Middle East. The polling showed other startling realities of how Americans view the Arab world, such as that only 19 percent of Americans could actually identify the region on a map. The Arab News/YouGov poll shows Americans do want more information about the Arab world, with half of the respondents blaming the US mainstream news media for not providing enough coverage. On the one hand, the survey shows that Americans are ripe for understanding more about the Arab world. That is great for the growing English-language segment of Arab world's news media, like Arab News, which is growing in popularity in the US market. But the survey also points to a fundamental problem that exists. It is not just that the Americans do not know much about the Middle East before they send their sons and daughters to fight in that region. It

shows that the Arab world is not doing its part to inform Americans. Unfortunately, the Arab governments invest little or no money in public relations and communications strategy to promote their events, culture, tourism, and more importantly, issues to the American people. In contrast, Israel, which 36 percent of the respondents to the poll identified as being a part of the "Arab world," spends hundreds of millions of dollars on public relations and communications campaigns, and it pays off big time. The US Congress is planning cutbacks on funding to foreign countries. It provides \$35 billion in foreign aid each year to 135 countries, including \$1.5 billion to Egypt, \$1 billion to Jordan, \$373 million to Iraq, \$210 million to Palestine, \$156 million to Lebanon, \$155 million to Syria, and \$82 million to Yemen. But America gives \$3.1 billion a

year to Israel, which engages in the oppression of Arab citizens and civilians and fuels public antagonism and perceptions against many Arab countries. So there is little wonder that more than 54 percent of Americans sympathize with Israel in the conflict with Palestine, while only 19 percent sympathize with Palestinians, according to a 2016 PEW Research Center study. And a survey last year by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed that only 36 percent of American voters support allowing Syrian refugees to enter the country. American perceptions have a direct impact on the Middle East. The YouGov and Arab News survey helps us understand why that impact has not been positive.

■ Ray Hanania is an award-winning Palestinian American columnist and author. Reach him at rghanania@gmail.com.



Gap in understanding means that fake news thrives



It is time for the Arab world to raise its voice in addressing the severe gap in knowledge in the West — or face the consequences.

FAISAL J. ABBAS | EDITOR IN CHIEF

Is it a surprise that there is a lack of knowledge about the Arab world in the US? Perhaps not, but just how pronounced this awareness gap is — as revealed by a recent Arab News/YouGov poll — does indeed come as a shock.

As our survey showed, eight in 10 Americans cannot identify the Arab world on a map, while a worrying 21 percent believe that Agrabah — an entirely fictional city — is a real part of the Middle East.

"The Arab Image in the US" poll, conducted from March 17-21, found that 65 percent of the respondents admitted to knowing little about the Arab world, with 30 percent having no interest in understanding the region further.

And over three-quarters of the respondents said they would not consider traveling to the Arab world, with 39 percent saying the whole region is too dangerous to visit.

This is all the more shocking, especially as I sit in Dubai writing this, in the plush surrounds of the Madinat Jumeirah hotel complex, where the Arab Media Forum (AMF) is being held. The city is perfect for tourists and wants to attract 20 million of them a year by 2020. It is among the safest cities in the world. And yet, only one in four Americans would consider traveling to the Middle East as a whole, according to our poll.

There is clearly much more at stake here than tourism numbers. Where there is a lack of understanding, misinformation thrives and "fake news" goes unchecked.

But there was a glimmer of hope in the results of the poll of more than 2,000 Americans. It found that 30 percent said they do not know much about the Arab world, but are keen to find out more. And more than half of the poll respondents consider the media to be effective in depicting the true image of the region.

There is clearly an opportunity for the media industry — in both the US and the Middle East — to step up to the challenge. And likewise for the lobbying efforts by the Middle Eastern governments, which have not historically been as strong as they could.

At a time when fake news is thriving, telling and investing in real, credible stories from the region is essential to solving the perception problem and closing the knowledge gap.

Faisal J. Abbas is the editor in chief of Arab News. He can be reached on Twitter @FaisalJAbbas

How the survey was conducted

YOUGOV

How do Americans perceive the Arab world? How much do they know about it? How interested are they in news coming out of the region?

Such questions are gaining more and more attention, especially in light of the changes in the US administration. In this context, Arab News approached YouGov to run an online research study to better understand current US perceptions about the Arab world and examine differences by age groups, gender or political affiliation.

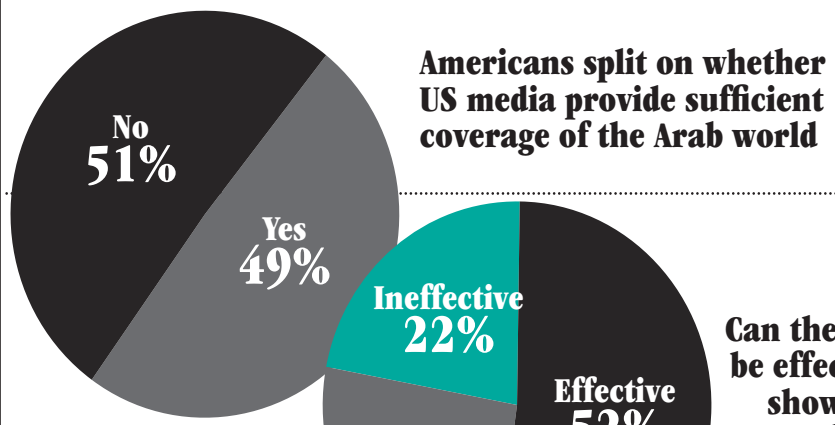
YouGov ran a study on its US proprietary online panel with a sample of American citizens living in the US. The sample was representative in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and education. The overall margin of error is considered low at 2.2 percent, compared to the 3 percent industry average.

The Arab News/YouGov American perception survey ran from March 17 to 21 across all US states. The total sample achieved was

2,057. In addition, the survey captured parameters like party affiliation (Democrat, Republican, independent and others), whether or not they are registered voters and their political viewpoints among other factors.

Overall, respondents answered 24 closed-ended questions around news-related behaviors, trust in different news platforms, interest in news related to the Arab world, their knowledge about the region and interest in visiting this part of the world. In addition, they were asked questions about the rise of Islamophobia, their views on Arabs who have migrated to the US, their knowledge of the alliance against terror and countries that have been the victim of Daesh attacks and the perceived role of media in portraying the real image of the Arab world.

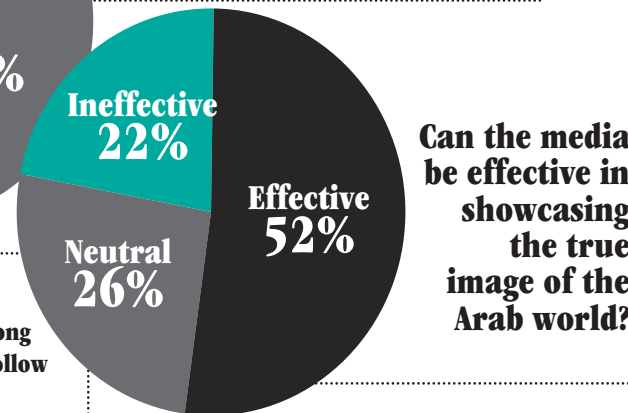
There was a near-even gender split among respondents, with 48 percent male and 52 percent female. The majority, 89 percent, are registered voters, and 61 percent of the sample fell between the ages of 30 and 64.



Americans split on whether US media provide sufficient coverage of the Arab world

Tuned in:
The regions of interest among Americans who said they follow international news

Americas	77%
Europe	56%
Arab world	24%
Asia	12%
Africa	4%



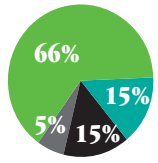
Can the media be effective in showcasing the true image of the Arab world?

Tuned out:

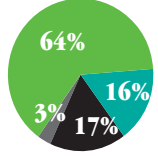
Reasons for not following news about the Arab world

There's a lot of negative news coming out of this region	22%
I don't know much about the region	16%
The region doesn't interest me	15%
It's not the kind of news I am looking for	14%
The region is too complicated	12%
Other	21%

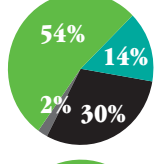
Media channels seen as most accurate



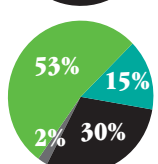
International English-language newspapers/websites (such as the Guardian, Jerusalem Post, Asahi Shimbun)



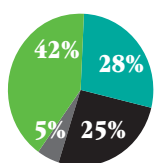
International English-language TV news stations (such as BBC World, Russia Today, France 24)



Mainstream US newspaper/websites (such as USA Today, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal)

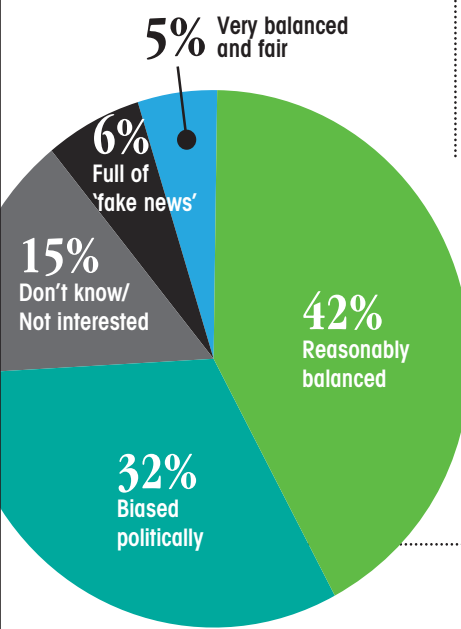


US TV news stations (such as Fox News, CNN, MSNBC)



Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc)

Legend: Accurate (Green), Neutral (Blue), Not accurate (Red), Don't know/Not sure (Grey)



Regional media outlets seen as 'reasonably balanced'

View of American respondents on English-language Arab-owned media outlets

Americans say the US media has a shortfall in coverage about Arab society issues

What areas of coverage respondents want to see more of

Society issues	38%
Arts, science and culture	35%
War and conflict reporting	32%
Business coverage	25%
Sports stories	13%

Most US citizens think media can present true image of Arab world

ARAB NEWS

DUBAI: More than half of the American public believes that the media can be an effective platform to present a true image of the Arab world, an Arab News/YouGov poll has found.

The "The Arab Image in the US" poll of 2,057 people living in the US, carried out from March 17 to 21, found a widespread lack of public knowledge about the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

But 52 percent of the respondents

said that the media could help depict the true image of the Arab world. The poll found that 78 percent of Americans follow international news. But of those, only 24 percent follow news about the Arab world.

Non-followers of news about the

Arab world blame it on the negative context of news. The stated belief that "there is a lot of negative news coming out of this region" was found to be significantly higher among Republican voters compared to Democrat voters, the poll found.

Polarized media a challenge to US perceptions of Arab world

Smaller websites and social media have become important sources of news about the region and these tend to be even more likely to take positions outside the mainstream.



STEPHAN SHAKESPEARE

We are living at a time of rising global tensions, with fears of new wars and even nuclear conflict becoming more real than at any moment since the 1970s. America appears more isolationist since the advent of President Donald Trump and yet

at the same time more willing to intervene fast with military action, defying Russia with a surprise attack in Syria and threatening to confront the unstable North Korea. Whatever one's views of these situations, everyone surely hopes for an increased understanding between the peoples of

the world.

It is in that context that the partnership between YouGov and Arab News has been created: To shed light on what people think within the Arab region and about the region, and why.

With the survey we publish today, we find out more about the

sources of news that create the American view of the Arab world. I believe our survey gives three reasons for concern and one for optimism.

The first cause of concern is the low level of understanding about the Arab world. Only one-quarter of Americans who follow international news claim they follow news about the Arab world, compared to 56 percent for news of Europe.

So it was not surprising that when our poll asked them to identify which of three maps represented the Arab world, only 19 percent chose correctly, which is much less than even a purely random choice would have yielded. Although 45 percent of the respondents identified Saudi Arabia as the leader of the military alliance to combat Daesh, 36 percent

thought it was Iran. The second concern is that people tend to take a negative view of the Arab world. The main reason given by people who do not take an interest in the Arab world is that "there is a lot of negative news coming out of this region." Three-quarters reject the idea of visiting the Middle East.

The third concern is the fracturing and polarization of the American news media, which poses new challenges to creating a better understanding about the Arab world. Not so long ago, most Americans got their news from the big TV networks and from their local newspapers, which tended to express a consensual, somewhat progressive view of the world. Now media is much more fractured and Americans are served by sources that take opposing sides in big political debates. Anyone with an

Internet connection can be a journalist. The upside is a multiplicity of voices being heard and news being spread quickly and widely. But it has also created confusion about the quality and trustworthiness of sources. For supporters of both of the main parties, smaller websites and social media have become almost as important sources of news about the Arab world and these tend to be even more likely to take positions outside the mainstream.

But there are also some more hopeful signs. By almost two-to-one, Americans think that Arabs who have migrated to the US and other Western societies have made an effort to adapt and integrate. Over half are concerned about Islamophobic statements leading to hate crimes. About a third say they would like to see more media

coverage about social, cultural and scientific aspects of the region. There appears to be some readiness to consider broader and more positive types of news.

How to meet the challenge? It is noteworthy that some Arab news sources are gaining traction among the American population and are getting a positive response. And when we asked whether the Arab-owned English-language outlets were balanced or biased, 47 percent said they were "very" or "reasonably" balanced, against 37 percent who thought them to be biased or unreliable. This suggests there is a real opportunity to increase the influence of the Arab voice in America through new media innovations.

Stephan Shakespeare is the CEO and founder of YouGov.