

Unhappy Development: Determinants of Social Wellbeing in Arab Countries

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Paper Abstract: Despite economic and social development progress in the 2000s, there has been an increasing dissatisfaction with life among the population of many developing Arab countries which at the end of the decade ranked amongst the least happy economies in the world. This situation fits the so-called 'unhappy development' paradox, defined as declining levels of happiness at a time of moderate to rapid economic development. This paper empirically tests the strength of association of a range of objective factors and subjective domain satisfactions with life evaluation in developing MENA in the years immediately preceding the Arab Spring uprisings (2009-2010). The findings suggest a significant, negative association between life satisfaction levels in the region during this period and each of the main perceived reasons for the 2011 uprisings-dissatisfaction with the standards of living, poor labor market conditions, and 'wasta'.