

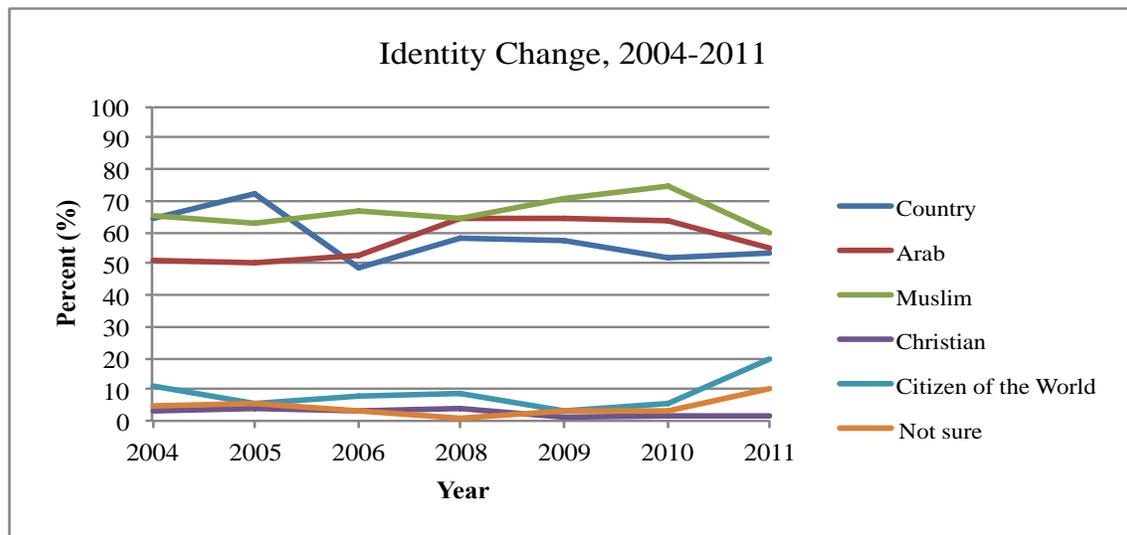
The Arab Uprisings and the Rise of Cosmopolitan Identity

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A Discussion Paper

As sectarian conflict and civil wars have attracted global attention since the beginning of the Arab uprisings in 2010, there has been another aspect that has been all but ignored in the discourse: a significant rise in the number of people—though still a minority-- who asserted cosmopolitan identity (“citizen of the world”) as their top identity choice in the first two years of the Arab uprisings. An analysis of this increase and of its possible causes sheds light on the fluid sense of identity in Arab and Muslim countries, and on the discourse on sectarianism and pluralism.

FIRST AND SECOND IDENTITY CHOICES COMBINED



BASED ON POLLS IN EGYPT, KSA, MOROCCO, JORDAN, LEBANON, AND UAE

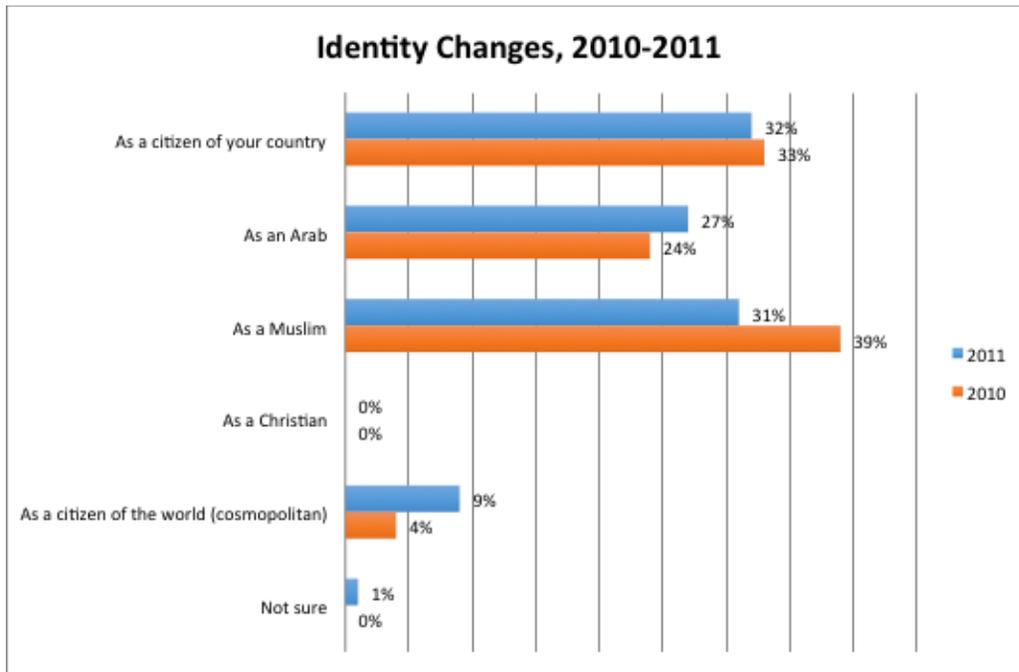
We argue that this increase in cosmopolitan identity is partly a product of the increased global sympathy for Arabs during and after the uprisings that began in 2010, and of increased Arab awareness of this sympathy. The rise in solidarity from citizens of other countries made the “citizen of the world” identity more appealing.

Identity is always a function of relations with others, and many people have multiple identities at once: Sunni or Shia, Jordanian or Egyptian, Arab or Kurd, Muslim or Christian, citizen of the world and member of a tribe. The central question is about prioritizing: under what circumstances does one identity rise above the others?

In previous work, Telhami posited identity selection as a function of a dynamic relationship between two rules on opposite ends of the spectrum: On the one hand, certain aspects of identity are devalued when they do not deliver on core aspirations as one jumps on the bandwagon of that aspect of identity that seems most promising. On the other end, people rally behind that aspect of the self that is most under assault. In other words, people are what they have to defend. In the years following the September 11th attacks, for example, a pervasive sense among Arabs and Muslims that the wars waged by the US in the name of

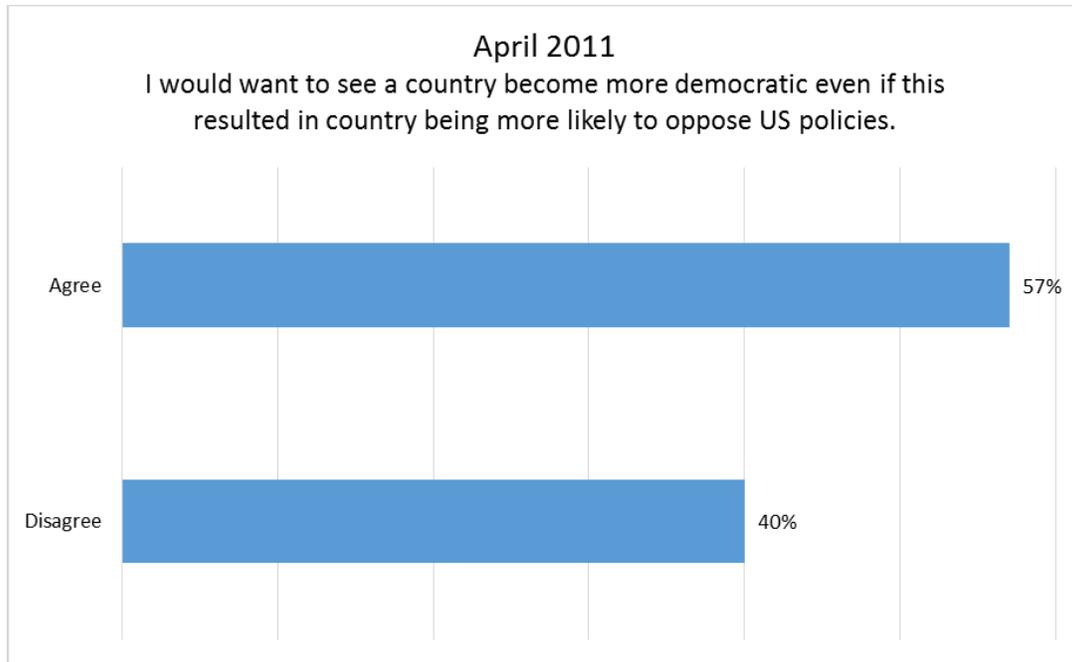
fighting terrorism were intended to weaken Islam and Muslims, inclined Arabs and Muslims to rally around their Muslim identity.

However, as the US moved to pull its forces out of Iraq, and as the Arab uprisings shifted focus from the American-led war on terrorism, there was also a drop in identification as Muslim in the first two years of the Arab uprisings.



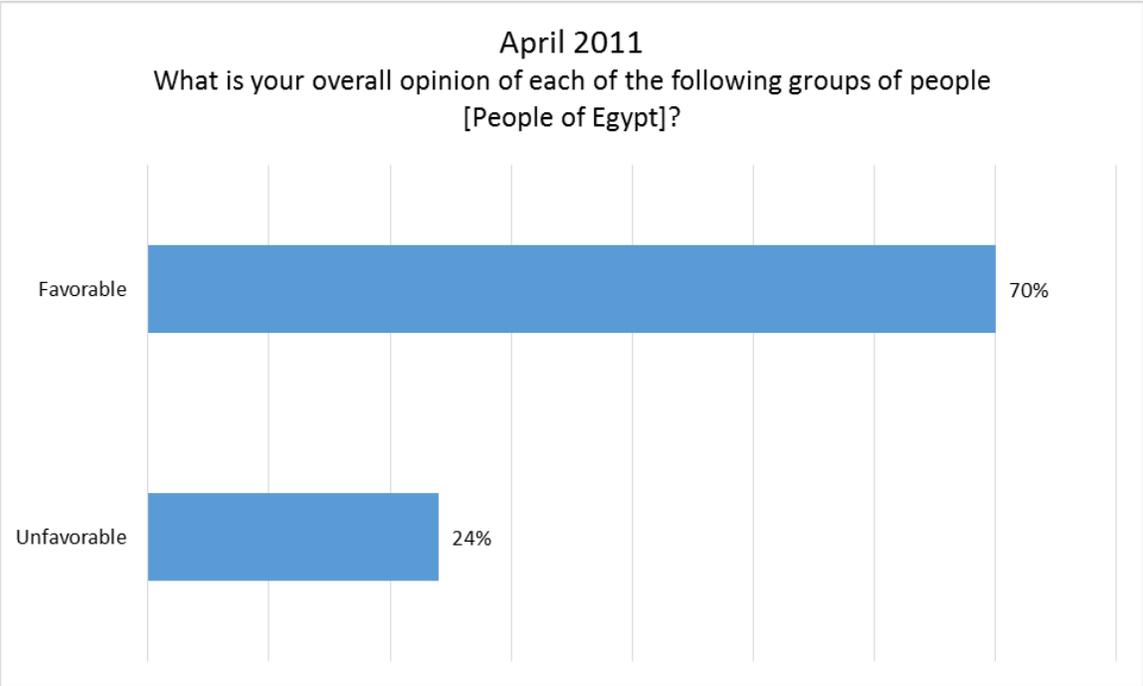
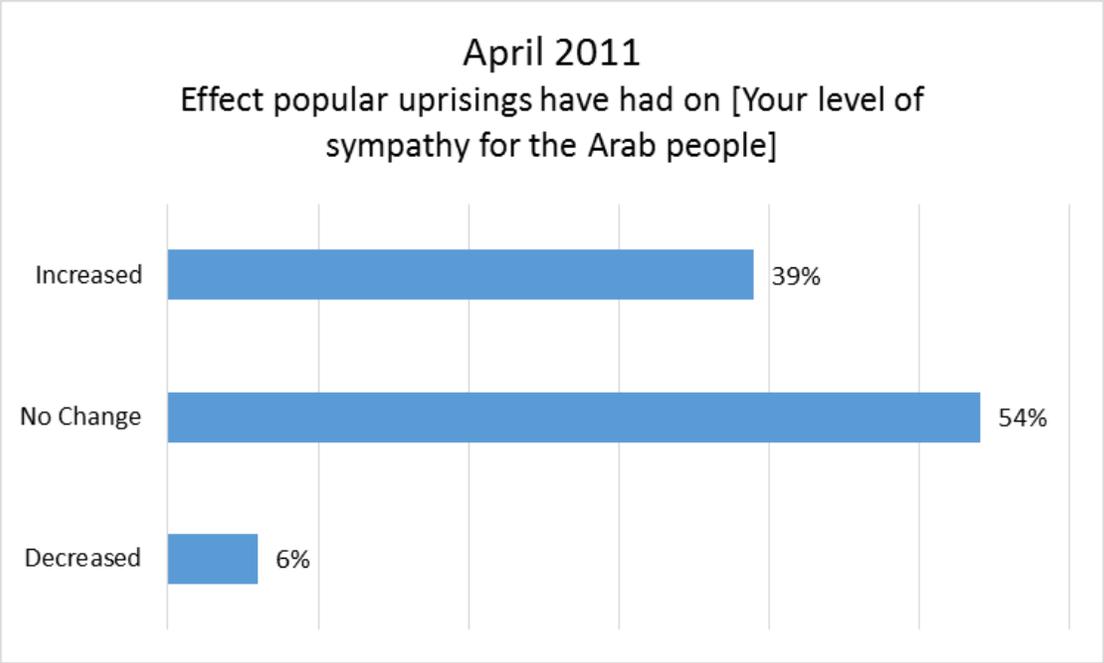
In the same spirit, the embrace of the international community of early Arab aspirations that was exhibited in the first two years of the Arab uprisings resulted in an increase in the number of people who viewed themselves as citizens of the world even above their own faith or nationality.

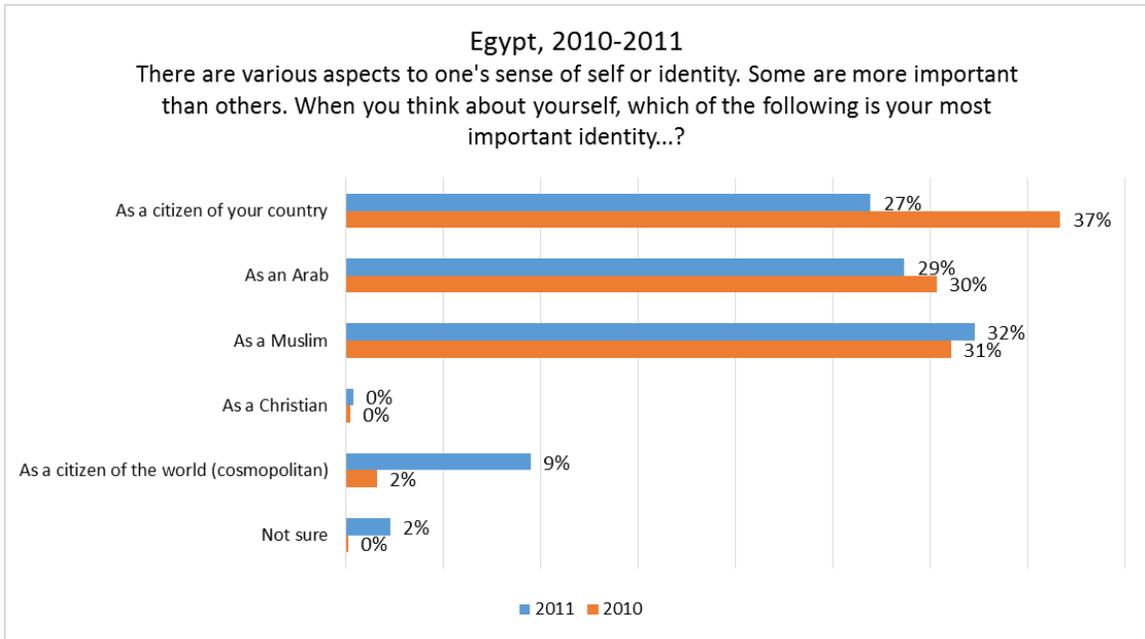
In Telhami's April and August 2011 polls of American public opinion, Americans expressed a fairly positive view of the uprisings, with more people saying they were "about people seeking freedom and democracy" than "about Islamist groups seeking political power" while a plurality said it was about both. Even more surprisingly, 57% of Americans also indicated that they would want to see countries become more democratic even if it resulted in opposition to US policies, showing a strong level of sympathy for democracy that outweighs their own national interests.



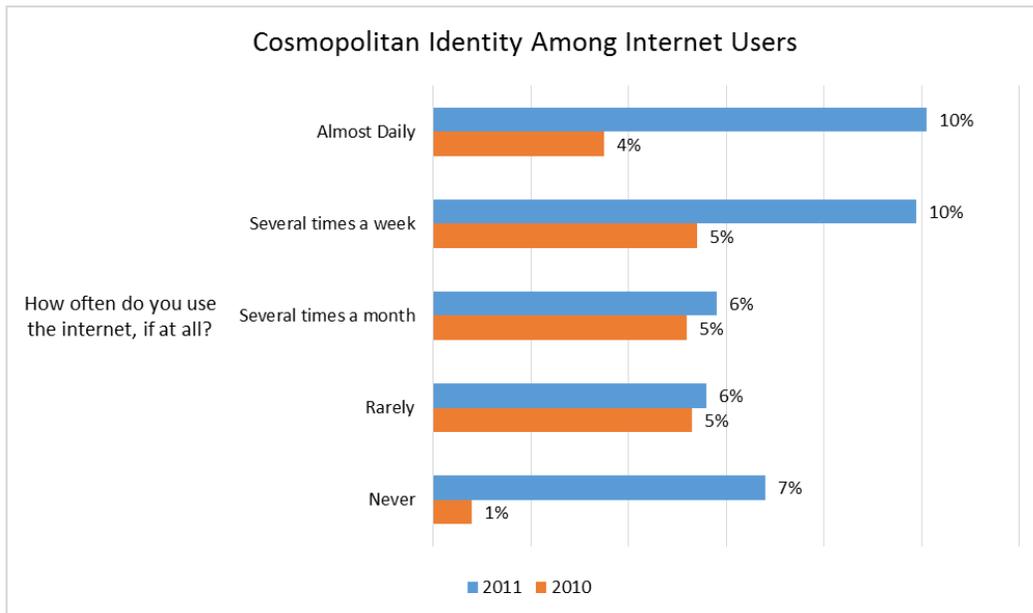
The global support for Arabs during the uprisings was perhaps most clearly demonstrated through Twitter and the increase in social media use to spread information and support for Arabs. While social media allowed Arabs to witness global support for their efforts, it played a more important role in helping Arabs communicate information about the events taking place in their countries – during the week before Mubarak’s resignation, tweets about Egypt grew from 2,300 tweets a day to 230,000 a day. International news sources used tweets to spread information to the region while also facilitating ideas about liberty and revolution.

In addition to displays of support through social media, polls show that American public sympathy for Arabs increased in the year following the start of the uprisings, with 39% saying that their sympathy for the Arab people had increased. In particular, Americans in 2011 were very sympathetic toward Egyptians, with 70% expressing an overall favorable opinion of the Egyptian people in April 2011 – comparable to American public attitudes toward the Israeli people. Cosmopolitan identities in Egypt also grew during this time, with the annual Arab Public Opinion Poll showing in October 2011 that almost 10% of Egyptians viewed themselves primarily as citizens of the world – a significant increase from the 2% of citizens who identified as such in the 2010 iteration of the poll.

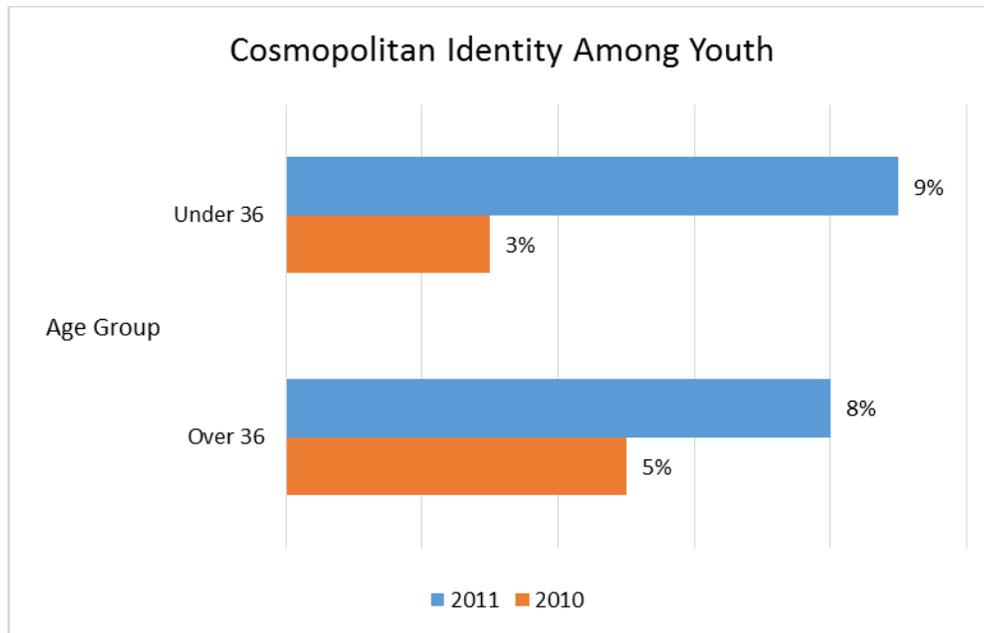




If an outpouring of global sympathy were indeed driving an increase in cosmopolitanism, we would expect to see an increase in this identity among people who are most in touch with the global community – in particular, those who most frequently use the Internet. Indeed, among those in the six countries studied who use the Internet “almost daily” or “several times a week”, cosmopolitan identification increased by six and five percentage points, respectively, between 2010 and 2011.

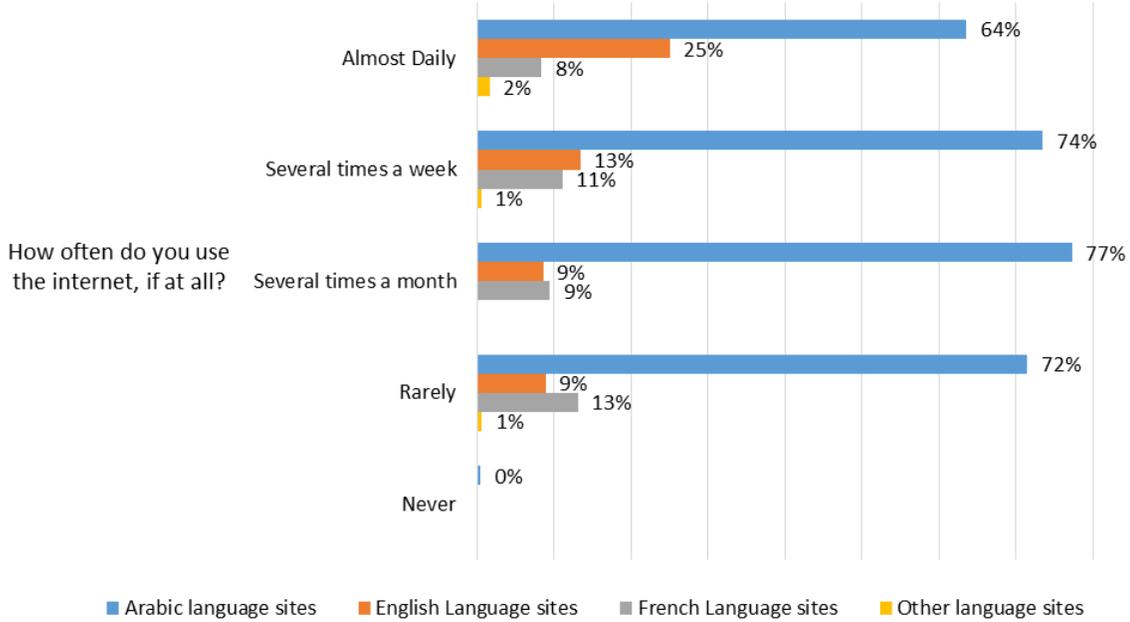


Cosmopolitan identification also increased among young Arabs. This is perhaps due to the surge in Internet use among this age group between 2010 and 2011. Among Arabs under 36 years of age, the percentage of those who used the Internet almost daily increased from 16% in 2010 to 50% in 2011. This sharp rise in Internet use increased this age group's access to the global community and their sympathies for Arabs' democratic cause. As evidence of this increased access to global sympathies, from 2010 to 2011 the percentage of young Arabs who identified as citizens of the world grew three-fold, from 3% to 9%. Cosmopolitanism also increased among the older population, but by a lesser degree (from 5% to 8%), perhaps because their Internet use did not increase as significantly as the younger population.



Furthering the relationship between Internet use and access to the global community, Arabs who used the Internet more frequently also visited a more diverse collection of foreign language websites. While all groups of Internet users most frequently visited Arabic language websites, those who use the Internet almost daily or several times a week were also more likely to visit English and French language websites than people who used the internet less frequently. This implies that people who use the Internet more frequently are exposed to a wider array of information, and are also more likely to be familiar with the global perceptions of the Arab Uprisings. As a result of this awareness of global sympathies, those who visited websites in languages other than Arabic were more likely to identify as cosmopolitan. While some of this correlation may be due to endogeneity – those who identify as citizens of the world are more likely in general to visit foreign language websites – the dramatic increase in cosmopolitanism among people who visited non-Arabic language sites from 2010 to 2011 implies that this could be a result of the increased access to global perspectives and not purely a result of preexisting beliefs.

Foreign Language Website Visits



Cosmopolitan Identity Among Foreign Language Website Visitors

