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The Fragility-Grievances-Conflict Triangle in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Edited by

Timo Kivimaki and Rana Jawad

MDPI

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About the Editors

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Timo Kivimäki is a Professor of International Relations at the University of Bath, UK, and a Senior Non-Resident Fellow of the Sejong Institute (Seoul, Republic of Korea). Professor Kivimäki joined the University of Bath in January 2015. Previously, he held professorships at the University of Helsinki, the University of Lapland, and the University of Copenhagen. Professor Kivimäki has also been the Director of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (Copenhagen) and the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Helsinki. In addition to purely academic work, Professor Kivimäki has been a frequent consultant to the Finnish, Danish, Dutch, Russian, Malaysian, Indonesian, and Swedish governments, as well as to several UN and EU organizations on conflict and terrorism.

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Dr. Rana Jawad is a Senior Lecturer of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath. Her main research interests focus on the social policies and welfare systems of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with particular emphasis on the Arab and Muslim populations there. She is also a leading specialist in the role of religious ideas, actors, and institutions in shaping social welfare action. In 2013, she co-founded and now convenes the MENA Social Policy Network, which is the world's only research and knowledge exchange group of its kind. Since 2021, Dr. Jawad has been leading a UK Global Challenges Research Fund research project on conflict prevention and social policy, (2020–2024). This project funded the production of this book.

Preface to "The Fragility-Grievances-Conflict Triangle in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)"

This book is based on a Special Issue on the same topic, published by Social Sciences journal in 2021-2022. It looks at the conceptual, theoretical and causal/constitutive interaction between state fragility and conflict as well as between state fragility and lack of human development. It focuses on the MENA region, paying particular attention to the role of social policies and the political contexts that underpin them.

The book consists of four sections:

1. Introduction,

2. Section dealing with factionalism and political discontent, consisting of chapters on:

  a. Fragmentation and Grievances as Fuel for Violent Extremism: The Case of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi

  b. Determinants of the Arab Spring Protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya: What Have We Learned?

  c. The (Semi) State's Fragility: Hamas, Clannism, and Legitimacy, and

  d. Political Fragility and the Timing of Conflict Mediation

3. Section on Social Protection, State Fragility and Conflict, consisting of chapters on:

  a. Service Delivery, State Legitimacy and Conflict in Arab Countries: Exploring the Key Linkages Using a Social Policy Perspective

  b. Social Security Enrolment as an Indicator of State Fragility and Legitimacy: A Field Experiment in Maghreb Countries

  c. State Fragility, Social Contracts and the Role of Social Protection: Perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region, and

  d. Subsidy Reform and the Transformation of Social Contracts: The Cases of Egypt, Iran and Morocco, and finally

4. Conclusions.

The book looks at the interaction between different aspects of state fragility and political conflict and developmental grievances. Instead of only looking at formal political and economic institutions, the book also focuses on informal sectors both in politics and the economy.

The introductory article of the book shows that state fragility in the MENA region predicts developmental grievances and violence, as it does in the rest of the world. However, the MENA region is unique, as its problems have become more internationalised and the region is intervened in militarily by outsiders more than other regions. Conflict and developmental grievances in the MENA region are much more related to problems of political legitimacy than in the rest of the world. The impact of economic reliance on commodity and raw material trade is also much more complicated in the MENA region than in the rest of the world. The following chapters complicate this picture further by engaging more sophisticated data and realities that are often left behind by the data. The book consists of articles focused on different aspects of these generic and MENA-specific factors in the fragility–grievance–conflict triangle.

This book aims at sparking a theoretical and empirical debate that focuses on the complex relationship between, on one hand, states' institutional capacity and resources (including the felt social, economic and political injustices and lack of public services in the MENA) and, on the other, grievances and conflict. The aim is to offer analyses that set a foundation to further debate and research that focuses on policies to remedy the social and political problems of the MENA region related to the triangle of fragility, grievance and conflict.

Timo Kivimaki and Rana Jawad
Editors

Article

The Fragility-Grievances-Conflict Triangle in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): An Exploration of the Correlative Associations [†]

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Abstract: The intention of this special issue of *Social Sciences* is to study state fragility and its relationship with conflict and grievances in the post-Cold War Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This article will lay the foundation for such a study by offering a conceptual foundation, data and the identification of the correlative associations that are specific to the MENA region. This article suggests that the relationship between political legitimacy, factionalism of the state, and conflict needs special, MENA-specific emphasis, as this relationship seems more prominently different in the MENA region, compared to the rest of the world. While in the rest of the world, different aspects of state fragility all relate to grievances and conflict dynamics, in the MENA region political factionalism has a disproportionate role in the explanation of conflict grievances and violence. Moreover, the role of oil dependence, and the impact of external intervention requires attention of specialists of the region.

Keywords: state fragility; conflict; MENA; Middle East; failed states; weak states; conflict fatalities; corruption

1. Introduction

Politically induced human suffering in the post-Cold War era has often been described as something grounded in chaos, opportunistic violence and exploitation, mobilised by personal or group interest of identity groups that fragile states cannot control (Duffield 2001; Gilbert 2003; Heupel and Zangl 2010; Kaldor 1999, 2013; Kalyvas 2001; Melander et al. 2009; Mello 2010; Münkler 2002). Barbaric violence "is usually unleashed when overarching political or economic systems are either weakened or collapsed" (Duffield 2001, p. 110). "The new wars arise in the context of the erosion of the autonomy of the state and, in some extreme cases, the disintegration of the state" (Kaldor 1999, p. 5). The description of post-Cold War political human suffering often merges some of the old elements of conflict, development and state-building into a holistic context in which the interaction between previously separately studied elements is in the focus.

The core concept of this article and the special issue is the concept of state fragility, and the focus is on interaction between state fragility and grievances, and fragility and conflict. Laying the foundation to such analysis will be done by clarifying the definitions and conceptual associations between the three clusters of variables. Based on the definitions of the core concepts of state fragility, conflict and grievances, this article will select and adjust data for the analysis of the causal associations between the variables of fragility, conflict and grievance. These data are openly available in the University of Bath Research Data Archive at https://doi.org/10.15125/BATH-00951 (Kivimäki 2021a). Finally, this

article will do exploratory work by investigating bivariate correlations between such indicators of state fragility, conflict and grievances that make sense from the perspective of the conceptual foundation. The intention of such exploration is to flag out the apparent anomalies of MENA, so that it would be possible for the rest of the articles of this special issue to focus on MENA-specific structures and dynamics. This way we can identify how to complement the more global and general theories of state fragility, in order to understand the phenomenon in the MENA region. Instead of attempting to move from correlative associations to explanatory, causal models simply by using the quantitative data and more sophisticated quantitative methods and models, the intention is to flag the regionally specific associations and leave their explanation to more understanding, qualitative analysis. This way, the explanation of causal complexes is approached through the understanding of the region and its conflicts and dynamics of state fragility rather than approaching full explanations from the perspective of numbers. Yet, the statistical exploration of the correlative associations in this article intends to guide qualitative analysis of this special issue and prevent it from overgeneralizing exceptions into rules.

2. Conceptual Relationship between State Fragility, Conflict and Grievances

State fragility is often described as consisting of two elements: lack of efficiency and lack of legitimacy of state institutions (Fukuyama 2011; Lemay-Hébert 2009; Marshall and Cole 2014; Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017). Effectiveness of state institutions is emphasised by scholars who follow Weberian tradition and define fixed criteria for capable, inclusive and democratic state institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Weber 1946). Others, following the Durkheimian tradition, emphasise the legitimacy side by claiming that, since state institutions are supposed to work for the people, a felt ownership of these institutions is more important than the perfect shape and form of the institutions themselves (Durkheim 1957; Lemay-Hébert 2009). For our purposes there is no need to take sides in favour or either two schools, as they both are right in their definition of state fragility. No matter how legitimate institutions are, if they fail to produce welfare or security, they add little to the quality of lives of the citizens. A country with perfect legitimacy but no effectivity is like a car with an accurate steering, but no engine. Effective, but illegitimate institutions, which people work against and fail to consider their own, are also not useful for the citizens: They are like a car with a powerful engine, but no steering wheel. There is a need, both, for legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions to be strong: Without one or the other, states are fragile.

The effectiveness aspects of state fragility are conceptually and empirically linked with conflict and grievances in two ways. On the one hand, inability to deliver (economic, political and security effectiveness) in poor countries implies grievances that make the life of citizens or at least groups of citizens, unbearable. This way, the lack of effectiveness is directly linked with grievances and indirectly with conflict, too, as much of conflict violence is motivated by grievances. This indirect link from state inefficiency to conflict has been emphasised in the conflict literature tradition that focuses on the grievance-related motives of violence (Davies 1962; Gurr 1970; Runciman 1966).

The narrative that links a state's social and economic inefficiency with grievances and conflict is simple. We can assume that people generally want to avoid risky and morally repulsive use of violence. Yet, state fragility or failure and the resulting grievances may make life so unbearable that changing this intolerable situation may be a stronger motive than the willingness to avoid violence. In the literature of grievance-based violence, a state's inability to deliver either creates absolute or relative deprivation. In the former case, a state's inability and the resulting grievances lower the threshold of violence (Burton 1993; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fisher 1990; Hoadley 1981; Mitchell 1990; Rubenstein 1990) and, consequently, cause conflict. In the case of relative deprivation—a situation where there is a gap between the expected and observed receipt of welfare, income, wealth, political power, or something else—a state's reduced capacity to deliver basic needs, motivates violent change (Gurr 1970, 1993; Runciman 1966). The literature on relative deprivation has developed further, distinguishing

between horizontal and vertical inequalities that can create the feeling of discrepancy between expected and observed receipt of welfare. While the original theories of relative deprivation represented the latter version, and managed to get only spurious empirical support (Brush 1996), the theory of horizontal inequalities as causes of conflict have now a much stronger empirical evidence base (Cederman et al. 2011).

On the other hand, state effectiveness is conceptually and empirically associated with opportunistic violence: A state's inability to enforce rules of political and economic competition may lead to the temptation to aim at private or a group's selfish gains by means of violence (Tilly 1978; Duffield 2001; Kaldor 1999; Mello 2010; Münkler 2002). Thus, the linkage between state fragility and conflict can also be related to the opportunities for violence, not just motives.

In a rational theory of warfare, the linkage between state fragility and violence is based on a narrative in which a state's inability to secure individual citizens forces individuals to seek security from their ethnic, religious, regional or other groups. Consequently, in a situation where a state cannot contain violence, groups will see each other as threats, and this threat is seen the more severe, the stronger other groups are. This leads to a security dilemma, in which groups mobilise against each other and this makes intra-state conflicts likely (Fearon 1995; Fearon and Laitin 2004; Poulton and Youssouf 1998).

While violence requires both motives and opportunities, conflict literature often differentiates between opportunity-based (Tilly 1978) and motive/grievance based theories (Gurr 1970). However, in the 1990s, theories emerged with the focus on gainful, rather than grievance-based motives (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Tanter 1998). These theories focused on exploitation, looting and pillaging as motives for conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; De Sousa 2000; Kaldor 1999). Implicitly, the distinction between gainful vs. grievance-based theories was based on judgements on legitimacy of motives. Motives related to mere survival or basic needs were considered as legitimate and they were therefore not questioned: Conflict could only be avoided if all groups had access to basic needs (Burton 1993; Fisher 1990; Hoadley 1981; Mitchell 1990; Rubenstein 1990). In these theories, the root cause of conflict is (often developmental) grievance, which links conflict and grievances empirically. This linkage was strengthened in early peace research by the articulation of the concept of structural violence. Such violence does not have an agent—nobody does direct violence to anybody—yet years of human life are lost due to unfair structures that deny groups of people access to basic needs (Galtung 1969; Galtung and Höivik 1971). This way, the focus on lost years of life makes it possible to measure and compare the effects of structural grievances that Galtung then also calls violence and direct violence that we see in conflicts. State's failure to effectively offer all citizens an equal access to basic needs is then simultaneously state fragility, violence and a grievance.

Dealing with the greed-related conflict motives, states needed to focus on the opportunity side of conflict prevention. While states could not simply control opportunities to violence that emanate from serious grievances, as that itself would constitute support for structural violence, states were expected to control gainful greedy motives of violence.

Finally, state capacity is also related to opportunities to non-violent change. The lack of legitimacy of the state's governance of security, politics, economy and social affairs affects perceptions of alternatives of violent change: if citizens perceive no legitimate means of influence, illegitimate violent means often become more attractive (Lichbach and Gurr 1981). Thus, both legitimacy and effectiveness of the state apparatus are conceptually and empirically linked to grievances and violence.

Putting together greed and grievance-based motives and opportunities to gain with violence and opportunities to gain without violence brings us closer to the economics of conflict economics where some of the likely causes of conflict motives seem hindrances to the opportunities to use violence rationally. Poverty and vertical inequality that may give rise to conflict motives, may also render violence "economically unviable" by creating obstacles for the funding or arming violence (Anderton and Carter 2019, pp. 115–18). Furthermore, within this context of conflict economy, we can interpret the relationship

of democratic political grievances with conflict also as a question of alternative costs and benefits. Non-violent channels of protest may not relate only to reduced motives of conflict; they may also relate to conflict by offering less costly, more economical, alternatives to violence.

3. Measuring State Failure, Conflicts and Developmental Grievances

Before revealing how the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region differs from the rest of the world, there is a need to define the data that such flagging out of differences will be based on. This section will explain the data, assess their validity and reliability and sort out the modifications to existing datasets that have been made for this study to avoid tautological reasoning.

A study that focuses on state fragility will have to operate based on observations of country years, i.e., how state fragility, conflict and human development vary between each country in each year. There are 3960 such observations in our analysis, 432 country years in the MENA area. All countries in the world are included in the analysis from 1995 to 2018, which is the last year with data on state fragility. Countries (often small and those who are not independent) with no data on state fragility are not included even if there were data on the other variables.

There are two main datasets on state fragility: State Fragility Index (SFI) 1995–2018 of the Systemic Peace project (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017) and the Fund for Peace data for 2006–2020 (Fund For Peace 2020). Both are used extensively, and both consist of indicators that consider both legitimacy and effectivity of state institutions. For this study, the former is more useful as it builds more explicitly on the idea of state fragility consisting of problems with effectiveness and legitimacy and because its data reach almost to the beginning of the post-Cold War era, which, in many senses, is a unique era in which the triangle of fragility, conflict and grievances are aligned in a relatively stable way.

The legitimacy and effectiveness of state institutions can vary between different clusters of issue areas where the state operates. One way to take this into account is to distinguish between security, political, economic and social institutions and study the level of effectivity and legitimacy separately between these clusters of state functions. This is the strategy adopted here, even though all these clusters of issue areas are interlinked. It is useful also to study the profile of state fragility and for that we need to analytically separate between fragility of the security, political, economic and social institutions. It is clear that there can be effective but illegitimate states (Saudi Arabia) or legitimate, but ineffective states (India or perhaps Egypt after the democratic election of Morsi), quite as there can be states that manage their economy in a legitimate and effective manner (Singapore) but have a limited political legitimacy. Different profiles of state fragility/strength may have different kinds of problems with the alleviation of popular grievances and controlling violence and conflict.

The measurement of legitimacy and efficiency of security, political, economic and social governance of the state is based on indicators that are explained in detail in Marshall's global report of 2017 (Marshall and Cole 2014; Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017). Security efficiency in this dataset means the ability of the state to guarantee the safety of citizens and institutions crucial to the wellbeing and safety of citizens. Security legitimacy again means the feeling of justification of the agency, referents (what objects and values are being protected) and methods of the security establishment for the production of security in the state. In the State Fragility Index, security efficiency is measured by the outcomes of a state's security measures. This is done by measuring the sum of annual scores for all wars in which the country is directly involved for each continuous period of armed conflict, then taking into account the interim years of "no war" between periods of armed conflict and then still counting years of peace, or no war, since the end of most recent war period (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017, p. 52). Our measurement of political violence is based on the best estimate of the number of deaths relating to combat between warring parties or to violence against civilians (Högbladh 2020, p. 5; Sundberg and Melander 2013).

Our main measurement of the level or intensity of violence in a given state and in a given year is based on the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset (Sundberg and Melander 2013), which gives us the number of fatalities in each country during each year from 1995 to 2018, and the World Bank's World Development Indicators data (World Bank 2020) on population. Instead of simply comparing the number of conflict fatalities in China and San Marino, for example, data created for this paper (Kivimäki 2021a) will look at conflict fatalities per population. This indicator gives a better indication on the reality of conflict intensity in a given country and shows the risk for individual citizens to be killed in violence. This is something that can then be correlated with state fragility indicators in that specific country. Data of population is from World Bank's World Development Indicators https://databank. worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SP.POP.TOTL&country=# (accessed on 22 December 2020). Thus, in order to avoid tautological reasoning, one cannot use this aspect of state fragility in correlative analysis of the associations between state fragility and conflict. Security efficiency is naturally considered in all other calculations, though.

Security legitimacy, again, is measured in the State Fragility Index by using state repression as an indicator (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017, p. 52). Since our definition of political violence/conflict includes one-sided violence against unarmed civilians (Sundberg and Melander 2013), this measure of state fragility can neither be included when investigating the relationship between conflict and state fragility. Thus, I have created an additional State Fragility value: New War State Fragility, that reaches from 0 (no fragility) to 19 (maximum fragility). This value includes all but these two elements of state fragility, and it can then be used for the investigation of the relationship between state fragility and conflict. The full state fragility index with security indicators is used in all other tests of association.

Since MENA is different than the rest of the world in terms of the association between political legitimacy of state institutions and violence, it is useful also to explicate how political legitimacy is measured in this article. Political legitimacy is defined here as popular perception of the inclusion and fairness of the political system. I follow the State Fragility Index and measure political legitimacy as lack of factionalism, lack of political discrimination, lack of political salience of elite ethnicity, lack of polity fragmentation and lack of exclusionary ideology of the ruling elite (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017, p. 53).

Economic efficiency as an element of state strength (lack of fragility) is defined as the ability of the state to generate and allow private sector to generate wealth and economic prosperity (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017, p. 53). In the State Fragility Index, it is measured by an indicator based on per capita GDP values. My measurement of developmental grievances is based on UNDP's Human Development Index on the level of human development: The lower the level of human development is, the greater the objective developmental grievances are. UNDP measures human development by using life expectancy, expected years of schooling, mean years if schooling and GNI per capita (PPP) as elements of the indicator (United Nations Development Report 1995). Thus, the two indicators (economic efficiency and developmental grievances) overlap conceptually and cannot be used to study the empirical interaction between developmental grievances and the economic efficiency aspect of state fragility. The indicator of social effectiveness in the State Fragility Index also derives from some of the same indicators as the Human Development Index that we use for our indicator of grievances and cannot, therefore, be used in the study of the relationship between state fragility and grievances. In order to reconcile this, I have created a fragility index that is a sum of all other efficiency and legitimacy indexes, except for the economic efficiency. This will be used for the analysis of the relationship between developmental grievances and state fragility.

Problems of economic legitimacy could be measured by indicators that measure corruption or the extent to which state institutions are extractive and lack transparency. Another possibility would be to look at how much economic performance adds to the development of the national economy by measuring the dependence of foreign trade on the export of primary commodities. While the former seems to correspond to the

intuitive idea of economic legitimacy, the latter, adopted by the State Fragility Index, is interesting as it describes the quality of economic performance of the state. The economic management system may be effective in the production of wealth, but if this wealth production is too singularly focused on the production and trade of primary commodities, it does not create the forward link to development (Senghaas 1985). Furthermore, such a development strategy also creates dependencies that make the national governance of welfare and wealth production difficult. The use of the SFI indicator for economic legitimacy is especially useful in the MENA context, given that some of the problems of state fragility, developmental grievances and conflict seem to be causally linked to the dependence of the MENA countries and great powers on oil and other energy resources. This is something where the MENA region differs drastically from the rest of the world.

However, since the legitimacy of the official economic governance is intuitively associated with the state's ability to curb corruption, I will also need to consult indicators of corruption and transparency to reveal the relationship of this element of state fragility with violence and grievances. I will use Transparency International's Corruption Index, which is a scale based on a meta-analysis of expert assessments on

> "*bribery, diversion of public funds, prevalence of officials using public office for private gain without facing consequences, ability of governments to contain corruption and enforce effective integrity mechanisms in the public sector, red tape and excessive bureaucratic burden which may increase opportunities for corruption, meritocratic versus nepotistic appointments in the civil service, effective criminal prosecution for corrupt officials, adequate laws on financial disclosure and conflict of interest prevention for public officials, legal protection for whistle blowers, journalists, investigators when they are reporting cases of bribery and corruption, state capture by narrow vested interests, access of civil society to information on public affairs.*" (Transparency International 2019, p. 2)

However, this index has a uniform methodology only from 2012, while corruption was measured slightly differently before that. Thus, it is not possible to compare the transparency score before and after 2012. Since such comparison is vital for this study, I have made certain methodological arrangements.

On the one hand, I have used the Transparency International's Corruption Index and investigated the two periods 2012–2018 and 1995–2011 separately. This makes some sense especially in the MENA region where year 2012 represents the first year after the turbulent year of the Arab Spring. However, given that our data are annual, this makes both periods very short, and this limits the statistical significance of our findings. Consequently, I have used the anti-corruption rank of countries as an indicator of relative measure of corruption. The methodologies before and after the turn from 2011 to 2012 data are different, and thus, developments cannot be followed from 2011 to 2012 in each country. Yet, both methodologies measure corruption. Therefore, following the corruption rank makes more sense than comparing the index that before 2012 ranges between 0 and 10, and after 2011 between 1 and 100. The corruption rank measure cannot capture global developments as it assumed that the absolute level of corruption does not change in the world (which is a simplifying assumption). Since there is variation in the capture of the data over year (in 1995 the number of countries included is just 41), the rank of each country is divided by the number of countries captured by the data each year. This way, the indicator varies between 1 (the most corrupt country) and 1/n (n = number of countries in that year's data) and gives the highest value to the most corrupt country 1/n and the lowest value to the best country of the n countries of that year.

Thus, I will use the Transparency International's measures for the study of corruption as an element of economic illegitimacy, while also using the SFI measure of foreign dependent economic management as an indicator of illegitimacy of state's economic management. The two indicators are rather independent from each other both globally and in the MENA region. There is hardly any correlation between dependence on trade in

primary commodities and corruption, despite the fact that countries with dependency on oil trade could be assumed to be more corrupt in their economic management.

Unilateral international efforts, by great powers such as the US, UK, France and Russia, at dealing with the violent state failure, have often approached the problem of state fragility from a very militaristic standpoint. These efforts have linked fragility with political violence (and punishing the predatory agents of violence), while much less attention has been paid to the grievance side of the triangle. Since one of the obvious intervening variables that could explain the difference of MENA's relationship between state fragility, grievances and conflict compared to the rest of the world, is the greater likelihood of external unilateral intervention, there is a need, also to define how intervention is identified and measured.

In this article, intervention is defined as external military involvement with warfighting, (defined as something that produces battle deaths) as listed by UCDP conflict data (Pettersson et al. 2019), by great powers in originally intra-state conflict or one-sided violence of a fragile state (with New War State Fragility above 6). (For a justification of such choice, see Kivimäki 2019, Chapter 2, and Kivimäki 2021b, Chapter 3). As great powers, we define the five permanent members of the UN of which four—US, UK, France and Russia—have conducted interventions. As a result of this ruling the list of interventions in the world is as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. List of protective interventions.

Main Fragile Country and/or Location of Battle, Years of Intervention	Leading Actor in Humanitarian Intervention	Main Target of Intervention
Serbia/Kosovo, 1999 March–June	United States	Serbian/Yugoslavian government
Sierra Leone, 2000, May–September	United Kingdom	RUF and Sierra Leone soldiers turned rebels
Afghanistan, 2001 October–	United States	Al Qaeda, Taliban
Pakistan, 2004 June–	United States	Taliban and Islamist groups
Iraq, 2003 March–December 2011, Aug 2014–	United States	Al Qaeda, IS and other Islamist groups
CAR, December 2006	France	Union of Democratic Forces for Unity
Somalia, January 2007–	United States	Al-Shabaab (2007: ICU)
Mauritania, July 2010	France	AQIM
Libya 2011 March–October, August 2016–	United States, United Kingdom and France	Government of Libya (2011), IS (2016)
Yemen, December 2009–	United States	AQAP (and, in 2016, the Houthi government)
Mali, January 2013–	France, United States	AQIM
Syria, August 2014– (2017–)	United States	IS (since 2017, also the Syrian government)

4. Fragility and Grievances in the MENA Region

There is an intuitive understanding of the relationship between state fragility and human development. It is difficult to develop state capacity if the level of health, education and economic development is low. Equally clear is that human development will not thrive in countries where the state apparatus is incapable to facilitate such development.

Crude correlative testing supports this assumption.[1] In general, the negative relationship between human development and state fragility is statistically very significant all through the indicators of fragility.[2] Unsurprisingly, it is very strong between human development and the legitimacy of social governance. There is a strong association between human development on the one hand and economic legitimacy problems (reliance on trade in primary goods), political efficiency problems and security legitimacy, and a moderate association between human development and security efficiency, political legitimacy, and economic legitimacy (All this supports the findings by Acemoglu and Robinson 2012, for example).

Time-lagging human development variable and time-lagging fragility variables reveal that the lack of development predicts fragility equally as much as fragility predicts problems with human development. If we measure economic legitimacy problems with the relative corruption index, we can see that corruption, too, is very strongly and statistically very significantly associated with problems of human security. There, too, it is impossible to say which influences the other more. The same is true, both for the period before and after the turn from year 2011 to 2012 if we measure this with the original Transparency International's corruption indicator.

In general, the negative association between human development and state fragility is weaker in the MENA than in the rest of the world. The overall legitimacy-related fragility as well as lack of legitimacy of governance in social and security affairs were strongly negatively associated with the level of human development. In MENA the statistical effect of human development on state fragility is slightly stronger than the effect of fragility on development. What is especially peculiar is that economic legitimacy problems are positively (even if negligibly) associated with human development (Unlike assumed by Senghaas 1985 in his theory of forward and backward economic linkages). If we analyse economic legitimacy by using corruption as an indicator, MENA is relatively similar to the rest of the world. There is a very significant, very strong association between corruption and human development. This association is getting stronger over time and seems much stronger after the Arab Spring.

The main anomaly of the MENA region is related to the issue of dependence on primary production: oil and its international impact. If we look at this association by looking at how human development varies in general between the four levels of dependence on trade in primary products (in the SFI data), we can see that the entire positive association is based on the low level of human security in the second lowest category of dependence. The entire positive correlation is due to the fact that in category 1 (of categories from 0 to 3) there are two outliers, Egypt in 1995–2011 and Syria after 2015, with low human development and political instabilities that reduced dependence on the trade in oil. So, the real general MENA-level anomaly is that there is no negative correlation between dependence and human development, not that there was a strong positive correlation. It may be that the oil economy can be better mobilised for social protection and human development than economy based on the production of other primary products. It may be that the heavy investments required for oil exploration necessitate greater attention to grievances. The fixed nature of the assets in the oil business motivates the investing states to make greater efforts at avoiding political instability that could compromise the investments. This could be the reason why some scholars have found evidence of the effect of oil in increasing the stability of rentier states, whose stability is consolidated by rents and

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[1] Testing the variables that indicate fragility, development, violence and intervention by using Shapiro–Wilk W test reveals that none of our variables are normally distributed. Scatterplots of the relationship between these variables also show that many these relationships are not necessarily linear, and data are not equally distributed about the regression line (homoscedasticity). Thus, when article refers to statistical associations between variables, the reference is to Spearman correlations, rather than Pearson correlations. Spearman correlation does not carry any assumptions about the distribution of the data. Thus, it is the appropriate correlation analysis for this data.

[2] This paper uses the Quinnipiac University (Politics) standard for the interpretation of correlative relations. An association is significant if p-value is below 0.05, and very significant if it is below 0.02. Correlation is negligible if correlation coefficient is [0.1–0.199], weak if coefficient is [0.2–0.299], moderate if it is [0.3–0.399], strong if it is [0.4–0.699] and very strong if it is over 0.7. All calculations are based on the data created for this paper (Kivimäki 2021a).

appeasing social protection from the state's oil income (Basedau and Richter 2014). At the same time, many other factors may intervene in the effect of dependence on oil exports on human development, and there have been theories that have suggested a negative impact of oil dependence on human development (through adverse political effects) (Ross 2001).

In addition to the MENA anomaly, there is the anomaly of Egypt and Syria, who both are low human development countries with relatively low dependence on trade in commodities (Syria only after 4 years of war and Egypt until the Arab Spring). In Syria, conflict-related sanctions must have been large part of the explanation for the reduction of oil sales, and they were associated with declining human development. In Egypt the Arab Spring reduced reliance on trade in primary products, while eventually then leading to increasing human development.

If we try to trace the reason for the lack of the global association between dependence and lack of human development in the MENA region, we can see that the anomaly is mostly constituted by the difference of oil producing states and more diverse economies. I will look at each year since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011 and compare MENA countries with high economic dependence (ecoleg 2 or 3) on trade in primary produce (mainly oil) with countries with low dependence (ecoleg 0 or 1). There, it is possible to see that until Syria's declining oil exports lowered it from the former to the latter group of countries, the average level of human development was almost the same in both groups. At the same time, the higher dependence countries were lifted to a higher human development level once Syria moved from the group to the lower dependence group after sanctions had lowered its economic dependence on the exportation of oil.

Annual variation in the dependence on commodity production within countries also to some extent explains the positive correlation (or absence of correlation if Syria and Egypt are excluded) between the level of dependence and human development in the MENA region. In general, the level of dependence of countries in MENA region varies only a little. There was no variation or no data in six of the MENA countries. Yet, it was the main oil producing countries, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iraq, Bahrain, Oman and Qatar,[3] where stable human development was a condition to stable oil production. There, stable oil production also afforded social protection and human development.[4] Interestingly, Egypt affected the human development comparison between economically dependent and independent countries in the MENA region by contributing to the anomaly of MENA. Yet Egypt, was also one of those countries whose year-to-year comparison weakened this anomaly: Egypt's economy grew more with the diversification of its economy.

Despite the description of the correlative relationships between economic dependence on trade in primary commodities and human development, numbers do not explain why the MENA region is different in this respect. Why does dependence on primary commodities have this differing effect in MENA compared to the rest of the world remains a puzzle that only qualitative investigations and zooming into the relationship in individual countries can answer.

5. State Fragility and Violence: Apparent and Real Anomalies in MENA

In general, our data show that fatalities and civilian fatalities per population are very significantly associated with all state fragility indicators, as many of the scholars of resource mobilisation suggest. (This supports the findings by Commission on State Fragility 2018; Tilly 1978; World Bank 1988). Conflict intensity predicts the weakening of the state, while state fragility predicts, almost exactly as strongly, conflict intensification. In the MENA region, in general, conflict fatalities and civilian fatalities are less strongly associated with state fragility in the MENA region than in the rest of the world (see Table 2 below). However, what has not been revealed in the previous research is that the relationship between general state fragility and violence is not linear. Figures 1 and 2 consisting of a

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[3]   Iran (along with Egypt), however, is the main exception of the MENA exception: There, external factors such as sanctions are likely to define how much human development progressed and especially how much oil is being sold.

[4]   US military intervention does not seem to affect the association between HDI and economic legitimacy.

scatterplot displaying values for variables of New War State Fragility and conflict fatalities per population show the non-linear relationship between fragility and violence in the world (Figure 1) and in MENA region (Figure 2).
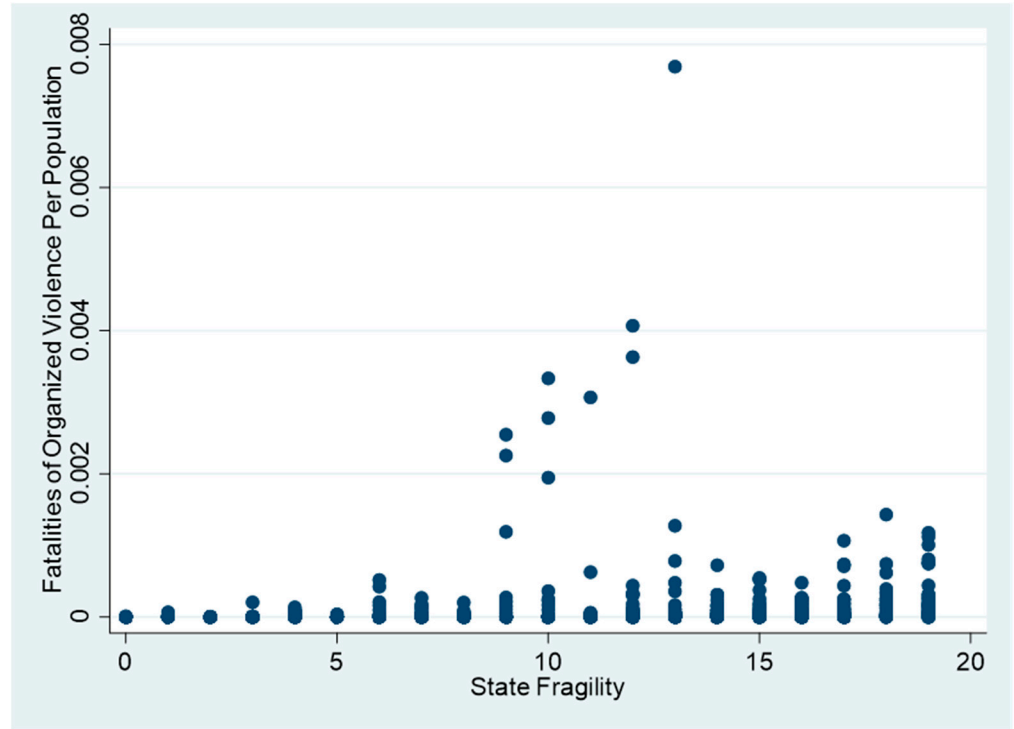

Figure 1. State Fragility and Fatalities of Organized Violence Per Population World Data.
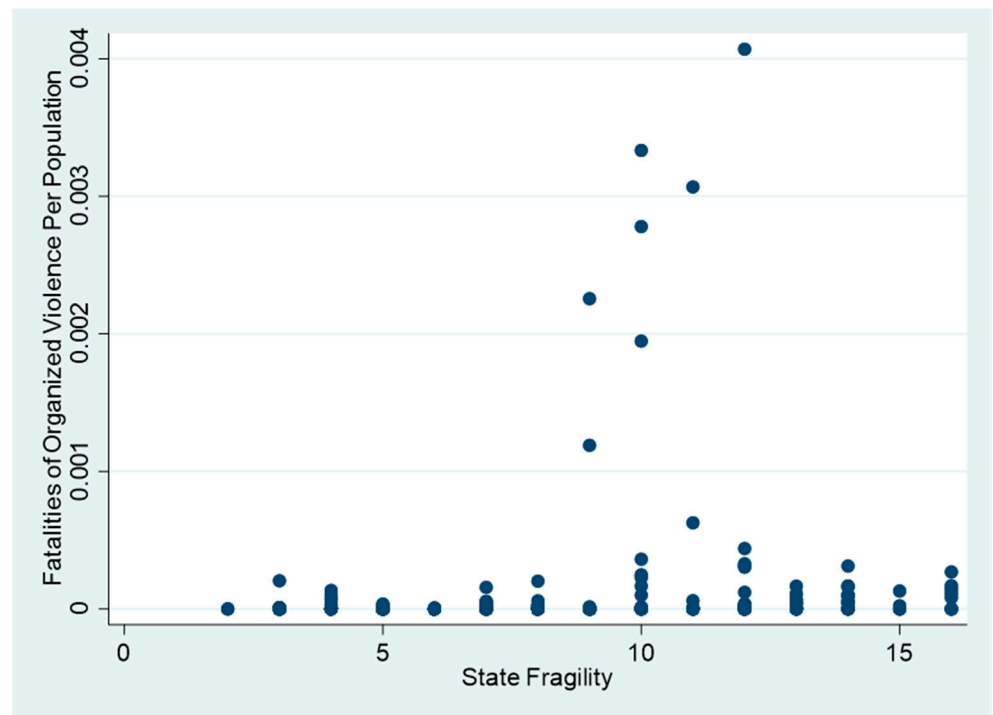

Figure 2. State Fragility and Fatalities of Organized Violence Per Population MENA Data.

Instead of a linear increase of fatalities as state fragility increases, it is possible to see, both in the global and in the MENA data, that while fragility does increase the risk of

conflict, the main conflict risks are in the categories of New War State Fragility between 9 and 12 in the MENA region and between 9 and 13 (including both) in the whole world. The most conflict prone level of state fragility is the one of Algeria since 2002, Egypt 1996–2016 (excluding 2012, when the state was stronger), Iran 2004–2012 (after which it was stronger), Libya after the ousting of Gaddafi, Saudi Arabia until 2001, Syria before 2008 and after 2012 and Tunisia before 2001. This corresponds to the findings on the relationship between democratic political legitimacy by Hegre and others (Hegre et al. 2001). Yet, political legitimacy is not the only factor that creates this inverse U-curve relationship between state fragility and conflict. It seems that the mobilisation of the most intensive violence requires some state strength, while at the same time strong states with legitimacy also manage to regulate competition and disagreements and contain violence. The inverse U-shape could also be related to conflicts through the economic logic that was revealed already in 1955. Economic growth, which is crucial for the alleviation of developmental grievances, requires some economic inequalities and then perhaps also fragmentation in society, while too much inequality hampers growth as it reduces society's ability to avoid growth disrupting conflict (Kuznets 1955).

The global association is strong between fatalities per population and civilian fatalities per population, on the one hand, and new war fragility and general legitimacy fragility, on the other. It is moderate between conflict fatalities, on the one hand, and the general effectivity fragility indicator, political efficiency and legitimacy fragility, economic efficiency fragility, and social efficiency and legitimacy fragility indicators, on the other. Only weak associations can be found between both fatality indicators and economic legitimacy, while civilian fatalities are also weakly associated with political and economic effectivity fragility. Fragility and violence predict each other almost as well, while it seems that state fragility is a better predictor of civilian fatalities than civilian fatalities of fragility.

Corruption is very significantly associated with both conflict fatalities and civilian fatalities of conflict. The association is strong between conflict fatalities and corruption perceptions index after 2011 and moderate before that, while the association between civilian fatalities and corruption is moderate and strengthening through the whole period. This way, our findings support the mainstream findings on the association between corruption and conflict (Rus 2014). There is no systematic direction of the association: Violence predicts corruption just as corruption predicts violence. Violent international punishments of corrupt leaders tend to increase rather than decrease corruption, and thus, less militaristic measures would be more useful in the fight against corruption (Kivimäki 2021b). While in general the association between violence and corruption is similar in MENA, corruption predicts violence more efficiently there than violence predicts corruption. The association is clearest in the main conflict countries: Yemen, Libya and Syria, but also in Algeria, and Iran. In Iraq the data are missing, while in Egypt, Morocco, Kuwait, Lebanon and Turkey the association is negligible.

In the MENA region, the association between fragility and violence is weaker than in the rest of the world except when it comes to political legitimacy problems, i.e., factionalism, political discrimination, political salience of elite ethnicity, fragmentation and exclusionary ideology of the ruling elite. This association has been theorised by thinkers of the so-called subaltern realism, who have emphasised the need for third world states to consolidate their state power before they start developing checks and balances or humanitarian constraints to such power (Ayoob 1991, 1997; Azar and Moon 1988). However, these theories have not discovered how MENA-specific this conflict problem of subnational fragmentation is. This aspect of political governance—state apparatus serving the interests of some groups only—explains 43% of the variation in fatalities of political violence per population in the MENA region (and 16% in the rest of the world), if we assume that the direction is from fragility to conflict rather than the other way around. The overall fragility level is strongly associated with conflict fatalities and moderately with civilian fatalities in the world but only moderately with conflict fatalities and weakly with civilian fatalities in the MENA region. The following table reveals the differences between MENA and the world in detail

by showing the non-parametric correlations between the violence and fragility variables (all correlations are statistically very significant, the number of observations for the world is 3906, for the MENA: 432).

Table 2. Violence (all and civilian battle deathsper population) and State Fragility: Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the World.

Fragility Indicator	MENA		World	
	Battle Deaths	Civilian Deaths	Battle Death	Civilian Deaths
New War State Fragility (excludes security fragility)	0.3468	0.2780	0.4123	0.3821
Efficiency fragility (excl. security)	0.2767	0.2352	0.3672	0.3454
Legitimacy fragility (excl. security	0.3542	0.2741	0.4123	0.3758
Political effic. fragility	0.2385	0.2120	0.3253	0.2992
Political legit. fragility	0.6527	0.5586	0.3981	0.3693
Economic effic. fragility	0.3020	0.2388	0.3223	0.3001
Economic legit. fragility	−0.1327	−0.1140	0.2212	0.1928
Social effic. fragility	0.1618	0.1564	0.3420	0.3323
Social legit. fragility	–	–	0.3286	0.3064

Table 2 reveals two stark differences between the region and the rest of the world. One is the greater association between political legitimacy problems and conflict in the MENA area, and the other is the negative association between economic legitimacy fragility (reliance on the trade in primary commodities) and conflict. It seems that primary production, i.e., oil, makes MENA's conflicts different. Oil economies tend to invest more on stability-enhancing social protection and, thus, avoid conflict better. Yet, the relationship between the two cannot be revealed without a fuller analysis of a number of independent, overlapping, mediating, moderating and proxy variables that interact with the effect of oil dependence on development (Ross 2012).

It would be reasonable to expect that US intervention is an intervening variable that somehow explains the variation in the association between primary production and violence. External intervention in general and US intervention, specifically, is associated with increased number of fatalities of conflict per population. In the MENA region, this is especially true. While in the world, there will be more than five times the number of fatalities if the US intervenes in the conflict than if the conflict is allowed to develop without US intervention. In MENA, US intervened conflicts are more than 10 times more fatal. With one-year time lags in data, we can also see that both in the world and in MENA, US intervention predicts increased fatalities more than increased fatalities predict US intervention.

Analysis of the data suggests that in the world the association between primary production and violence is strong if the US intervenes in violence, whereas it is negligible if there is no US intervention. However, the association is strongly negative in the MENA region if there is a context of US intervention, whereas it is weaker if there is no such context. So, US intervention implies a negative relationship between trade in primary trade and conflict in the MENA region, and the opposite implication in the rest of the word! In other words, reliance of countries on ordinary commodity trade predicts violence, especially if US intervenes, but it predicts lower levels of violence in the MENA, especially if the US is militarily involved in the country during the year. If one adds one-year time lags to the variables on violence or those on state fragility, one can see that dependence on trade in primary products predicts violence in the world slightly more than the other way around if US is involved militarily. In MENA, the impact goes both ways with equal strength independent of US intervention.

An investigation of variation over time within countries (panel data models) does not reveal a clear picture of what contributes to the MENA anomaly. A comparison between countries produces an almost equally confusing picture. However, if one takes out Syria as

an outlier, we can see that the real MENA anomaly is that the region lacks any correlation between conflict and reliance on export of primary products (whereas globally there is a positive correlation). The negative correlation between the two is explained by the developments in and sanctions against Syria.

The profile of the much stronger association between problems of political legitimacy and violence in the Middle East and North Africa than in the rest of the world is interesting. If we look at the distribution of observations in a two-dimensional graph (see Figure 3) and add a Lowess curve to describe the association, we can see that all major events of violence have taken place in countries with major problems of political legitimacy. The Lowess curve is useful especially in non-parametric strategies for fitting a smooth curve to data points. Since none of the variables used in this study are normally distributed, using the Lowess curve for our descriptive statistics is appropriate. The curve shows that almost all serious violence takes place in countries within the highest political legitimacy problem category. Tunisia is the only country with no political legitimacy issues and yet has experience of major violent events, especially in 2015 and 2016 in the MENA region.
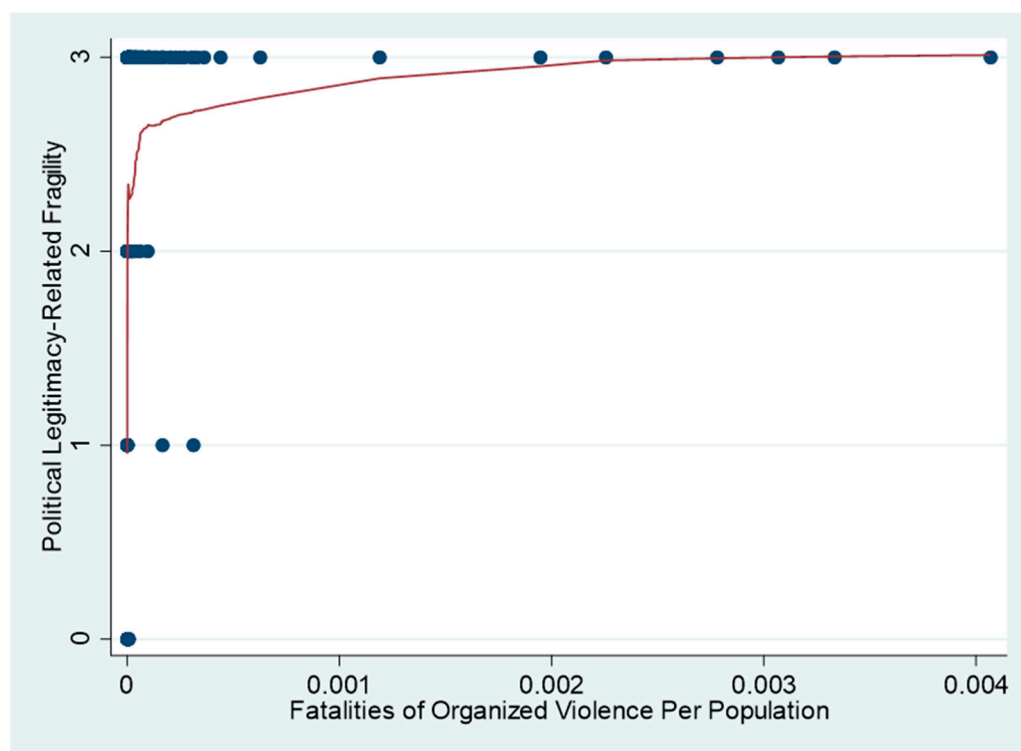
Figure 3. Political Legitimacy Problems and Fatalities of Organized Violence Per Population.

Given the role of Syria in the explanation of the anomaly of the MENA region with regards to the associations between violence and trade dependence, and human development and trade dependence, it would seem natural to test the role of Syria with regards to the MENA anomaly about stronger association between conflict and political legitimacy problems. However, the stronger association between political legitimacy problems and violence is not related to Syria. In fact, without Syria the MENA Region would be even more anomalous in this respect. If we then look at the countries with the highest levels of political legitimacy problems or highest levels of conflict fatalities per population, we can see that no single country dominates in the explanation of the MENA region's stronger association between war and political legitimacy problems. The relationship is also clearly mutual between the two variables; there seems to be a typical mutually constituting and reinforcing relationship between the two. Yet, factionalism, political discrimination, political salience of elite ethnicity, fragmentation and exclusionary ideology of the ruling elite predicts conflict fatalities more than the other way around.

The strong association between political legitimacy problems and violence is not primarily because of changes within countries. Variation in legitimacy does not lead to variation in the number of conflict fatalities per population, except in Libya and Yemen, whereas in six MENA countries, there was no variation in political legitimacy, while in other countries the association between the two variables was weak, negligible or non-existent and in some cases negative (Tunisia, for example). Thus, the reason for the strong association between the two variables was the fact that countries without serious political legitimacy issues did not have serious problems with violence.

Testing the levels of violence between groups of nations in the highest political legitimacy problem category (3 out of categories from 0 to 3) with the rest of countries makes sense, on the one hand, because that divides countries in roughly equal groups, and on the other, because Figure 1 shows that the main problem with violence is with the highest category of political legitimacy problems. By comparing these groups in each year, it is possible to see that the average annual number of conflict fatalities per population was in each year of observation (1995–2018) at least 16 times higher (and often much higher), and on average more than 35 times greater in countries of the highest political legitimacy problem category compared to the rest of MENA countries. Clearly the strong association between the two variables is because of differences between MENA countries rather than between years. Syria, Libya and Iraq with massive political legitimacy problems and extensive political violence compared to Morocco, Kuwait, Tunisia and Oman with political legitimacy and relative peace is what this association is about.

6. Conclusions

To understand state fragility in the Middle East and Northern Africa, we need to understand to what degree MENA region is similar to the rest of the world, to what degree it is different, and to what degree individual countries different from the regional or global patterns. This article has shown that state fragility predicts developmental grievances and violence, while violence and grievances also predict state fragility. The relationship can be causal to both directions or a relationship of mutual constitution in which part of the interaction is not exogenous but partly conceptual and partly related to our knowledge and interpretations on the related elements. The interpretation of the role of sub-state groups, such as religious, ethnic or regional groups within states has a crucial role especially in the explanation of violence in MENA.

In addition to similarities, the MENA region also has its unique problems related to state fragility. The regional economy is very dependent on the production of oil and other energy resources. It seems clear that the relationship between such reliance and conflict as well as such reliance and development is very different in the MENA region than in the rest of the world. Egypt and Syria are the most different from the rest of the world in this respect. To trace the dynamics of this anomaly and the map the causal complex between oil dependence and conflict/grievance will require analysis that is informed by MENA-specific understandings.

Furthermore, the region is different from the rest of the world in the sense that it has been exposed to external intervention more often than the rest of the world. External intervention, especially by the United States, has affected both state fragility and conflict in the region.

Finally, the region has suffered from problems of political legitimacy, especially factionalism in polities. This factionalism and subnational challenges to the state lie much closer to the problem of political violence in the MENA region than similar problems in the rest of the world. It would be possible to claim, on the basis of this paper's exploration, that the relationship between factionalism and conflict is the dominant problems of state fragility in the MENA region.

Numbers can reveal the nature of the difference, as has been demonstrated above, but the understanding of it requires closer qualitative analysis of the different elements, different countries and different historical contexts. This is especially true for the associa-

tions that seem to be mediated through interpretations of realities of subnational groups. If we think of the prominence of problems of political legitimacy in the explanation of MENA conflict, for example, it may be important that we do not interpret the relationship simplistically as purely exogenous. If fragmentation predicts conflict, this knowledge may actually strengthen the real reason for conflict in fragmented MENA societies. Resistance of diversity and forced assimilation, as well as the idea that the state belongs to one group and others should assimilate into it, may very well be what constitutes conflict realities in some MENA societies. This, even if correlative analysis suggests that its proxy—fragmentation and discrimination—is behind violence. Thus, we need explanations deeper from the societal dynamics. This is the task of the other articles of this special issue.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the University of Bath and the project was approved by the university's ethics committee.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data (Kivimäki 2021a) presented in this study are openly available in the University of Bath Research Data Archive, at doi:10.15125/BATH-00951.

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Article

Fragmentation and Grievances as Fuel for Violent Extremism: The Case of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi

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Abstract: Violent extremism naturally benefits from any state of fragmentation. This article focuses on Iraq in a period of a staggering rise in terrorist attacks that started with "operation Iraqi Freedom." The rhetoric of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi is used as a case study. Analyzing his statements between 2003 and 2006 shows his weaponization of the concepts of out-groups and threat; it is shown to have a temporaneous association between the escalating violence and successful mobilization. This highlights the saliency of these concepts, the crucial role of Iraq's Sunni Arabs' grievances, and the resulting societal fragmentations, which all play in Zarqawi's efforts to mobilize his in-group. The use of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory outlines Zarqawi's rhetorical strategies in portraying his enemies, and therefore, exposes the rhetorical justifications behind his violent extremism. Results show, temporally, prominent implementation of out-group/threat in the rhetoric, the different out-groups in question, and the types of threats portrayed. In addition, this article concretely shows the effect of the allied forces/Iraqi government's policies in fortifying Zarqawi's rhetoric by way of adopting hostile and discriminatory measures against Sunni Arabs. This article also shows an undeniable dialectical relationship between societal fragmentation/grievances and violent-extremist rhetoric and returns the question to policy makers.

Keywords: Iraq; Middle East; terrorism; violent extremism; Social Identity; threat; fragmentation; grievances; Shia; Sunni

1. Introduction

This article investigates the possible interrelationship between the rhetoric of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi and the fragmentation-grievances dynamics in post "Operation Iraqi Freedom" times; indeed, analyzing language lies at the heart of this research endeavor. The MENA region is one where grievances and factionalism plays a major role in violent conflicts (Kivimäki 2021); here we use Iraq's case vis a vis its spike in terrorist-related deaths after the 2003 war. We analyze in-period statements of Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi and use two social psychology theories in highlighting how such factionalism and grievances are weaponized for the purpose of inflaming such violence. This way we provide compelling evidence of the importance of factionalism and grievances for terrorist rhetoric, and show, in detail, how that is the case.

In a region infamous for its instability, Iraq has always been one of the most unstable countries, especially since Saddam Hussein took to power in 1979. Since then, the country has suffered consecutive catastrophes: two gulf wars followed by paralyzing United Nations sanctions left it in shatters. Another factor for Iraq's instability lies in the innermost dynamics of Iraqi society. Saddam's regime was one heavily reliant on elite ethnicity: in fact, all of Iraq's rulers since the 1920s were from the Sunni Arab community, itself a minority in the country (Jaboori 2013). Hussein's regime didn't stop at politically marginalizing other factions of Iraqi society, rather, on multiple occasions, it chose to wage war against them. Examples of which are the 1988 offensive against Kurdish forces allied with Iran during the Iran–Iraq War, and the 1990 rebellion by both Kurds in the north and the far outnumbering Shias in the south (Pirnie and O'Connell 2008).

In turn, this morphed into an active marginalization of the Sunni community following the Iraq War in 2003 and the resulting toppling of Hussein's regime and, thereby, his Sunni Arab elite of regime figures. At the time, Sunni Arabs largely boycotted the first elections, which naturally resulted in an overwhelming win for the Shia majority. They, however, did take part in the 2005 election when they managed to achieve evident success in their regions, but they were, ultimately, denied influential positions that were held by Shia and Kurdish members (Jaboori 2013). Such an environment of frustration ignited an insurgency of massive scale; Sunni extremist groups launched bombing attacks against U.S. troops as well as Shia populations (Pirnie and O'Connell 2008). The latter, in turn, made sure to take revenge by terrorizing Sunni civilians and utilizing murder and intimidation in order to force them to leave their homes (Pirnie and O'Connell 2008). The situation concerning Iraqi Sunnis remains concerning, as Renad Mansour (2016) put it, "Iraqi Sunnis are disillusioned by the monopolization of power by a few Shia elite and the impunity of perceived sectarian Shia militias that are part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)."

Following "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in 2003, a fragmented, fragile, and volatile Iraq was left a fertile land for extremists to fester and pursue their agendas. Of these extremists, none was more influential than a Jordanian Al-Qaida member named Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi. He was, perhaps, the key leader of the Arab Sunni insurgency against U.S. forces and the Shia-dominated Iraqi government. Zarqawi's importance in this study stems from the fact that, in a country plagued by all kinds of armed conflicts, Iraq is by far the country with the highest rate of terrorism deaths to conflict deaths in the world. The attached graphs herein show the saliency of terrorist attacks in the context of a civil war, in Figure 1. We chose to highlight the fatalities that took place the years spanning before the start of the War and the year following Zarqawi's death.

Born in 1966 of Jordanian Palestinian parents in the rough town of Az Zarqa, Zarqawi was believed to had been radicalized in prison where he spent time for crimes of drug possession and sexual assault, amongst others (Michael 2007). Later, he traveled to Afghanistan in 1989 where he started his involvement with Islamism. After, he headed back to Jordan and started a jihadist organization and ended up being sentenced to prison for that reason and for possession of illegal weapons (Michael 2007). Zarqawi later moved to Iraq and became a key figure in the Iraq war, even before the war began, for his mere presence was one of the major justifications for the war, as U.S. Secretary Powell clearly stated in his famous U.N. speech in 2003. In fact, Zarqawi was mentioned twenty-one times in just one section of that speech in the attempt to link Saddam's regime with Al-Qaida (Breslow 2016). This, in turn, helped Zarqawi's rise as a public figure (Warrick 2016). The following years witnessed his organization's ascendance to the Iraqi scene, accompanied by sectarian mobilization and brutal tactics that caused him to be perceived as an extremist by no other than Bin Laden (Patterson 2016). Nevertheless, he led Al-Qaida's affiliate in Iraq (AQI), which preferred to focus on the "near enemy" of whom Shia Muslims were paramount; such was aided by reference to the fatwas of the famous medieval scholar Ibn Taymayyah (Celso 2015, p. 24). Following his death, his successors slowly evolved into forming what is now known as ISIS (Warrick 2016). Indeed, Zarqawi may very well be considered the father of ISIS (Patterson 2016).

In this article we analyze how factionalism and grievances lead to conflict by focusing on the very processes that Zarqawi utilized to mobilize his supporters into violence. This way the intention is to move from the correlative relationship between factionalism and organized violence on the one hand, and grievances and violence on the other (Kivimäki 2021), to the analysis of the mechanism in which factionalism and grievances are being translated into organized violence. The impact of external intervention, also specific for the causal complex in MENA according to Kivimäki, is also included in the examination of this article.
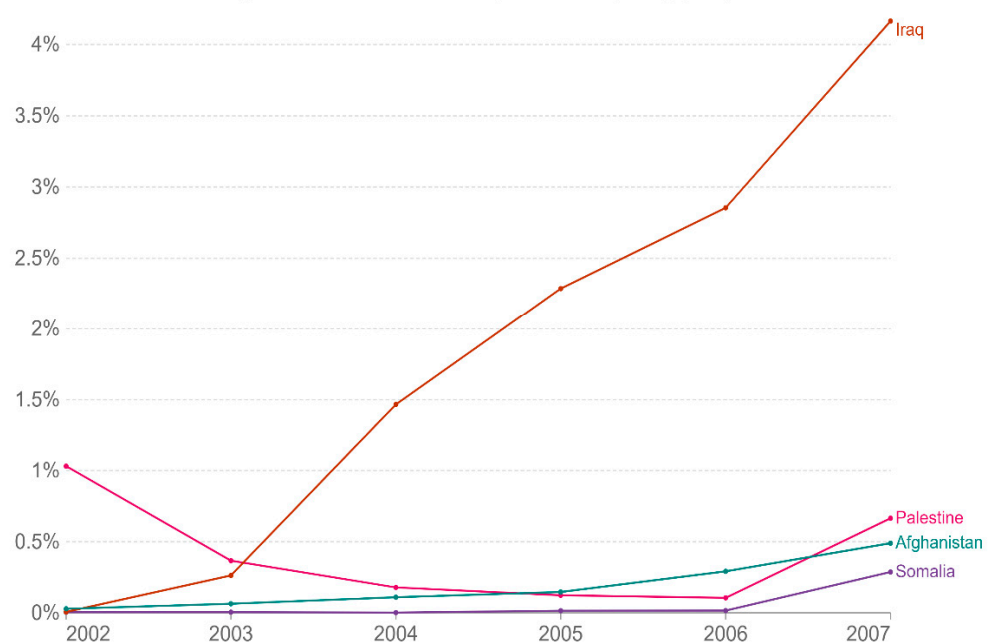
Figure 1. Development of fatalities of terrorism, relative to total deaths in Iraq compared to Palestine, Afghanistan, and Somalia, between 2002 and 2007.

The focus of this article is on one of the most violent countries in the Middle East, Iraq, during the period of 2003 to 2006, when fatalities of organized violence had sharply increased. We will show how Iraq's post-war environment created a perfect storm for Zarqawi to capitalize on existing fractions within the Iraqi society and mobilize Arab Sunnis in the country against American troops as well as their fellow Iraqis. In doing so, we utilize the Integrated Threat and the Social Identify Theories, through which an analysis of Zarqawi statements is presented. This analysis will show the mechanism by which Zarqawi made use of, as well as exacerbated, existing factionalism, and how said factionalism was formulated in Zarqawi's rhetoric. We show, through careful analysis of Zarqawi's statements, a rhetoric empowered by the political chaos left by the U.S. invasion of a country blessed, as well as cursed, by a rich and complex history from which the invading powers were mostly blind.

The first included chart shows a success story, so to speak, of terrorism in a country that, at the time, suffered immense violence and instability. Between the time that the Coalition's forces took over Iraq, and the time Zarqawi died, there was an evident rise of terrorism-related deaths. Not long before the war, deaths by terrorist acts were virtually non-existent. After the war, these deaths spiked to constitute up to 4% of total deaths by 2007. To put this into perspective, the country's conflict deaths in the same time frame ranged, approximately, between 8% and 15%. This far exceeds the world average, and for comparison, the next country on that chart, Palestine, peaked at 1% in 2003 (Figure 1). The second chart is three dimensional with the time dimension, from 2002 to 2007, indicated by the one-directional arrow; it illustrates the changes in terrorism and conflict deaths with time. It shows that while conflict deaths moved back and forth (declining in 2004 and 2007), fatalities of terror increased consistently following the U.S.-led intervention (Figure 2). Both graphs have been created using a portal provided by Our World in Data. Data on conflict deaths are sourced from The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) dataset, while data on terrorist incidents are sourced from the data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) dataset.
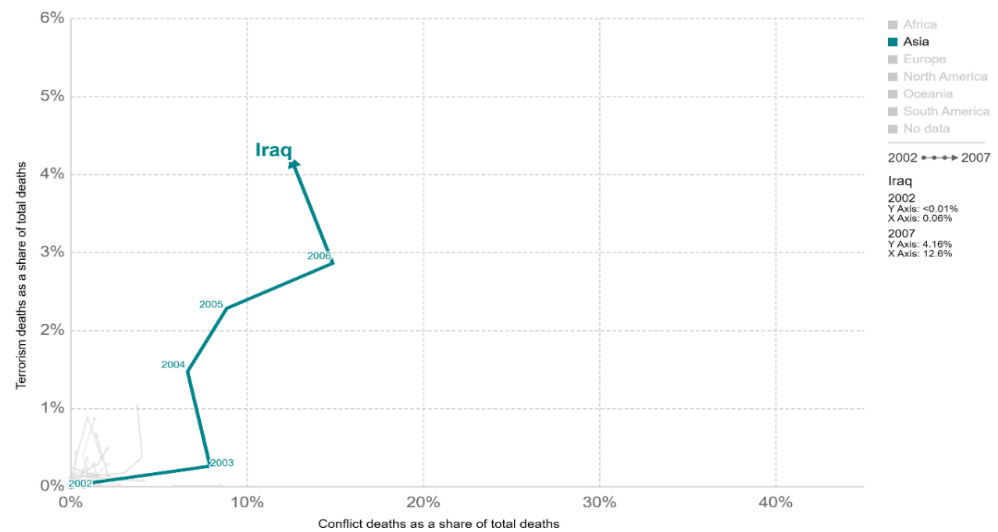
Figure 2. Fatalities of terrorism compared to fatalities of conflict in Iraq between 2002 and 2007.

Here we outline GTD's definition of terrorism as "The threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (2021)). Such a significant proportion of terrorism deaths in Iraq highlight the imperative necessity for studying terrorism in that country; the dialectic between fragmentation and grievances on the one hand and terrorism on the other implores us to investigate that two-way relationship between reality and rhetoric. Inasmuch as terrorist leaders, like Zarqawi, seek to create their preferred reality, they, in turn, take advantage of the existent reality by way of building on, and then manipulating, it. This article seeks to expose that very dialectic, to expose how Zarqawi took advantage of existing fragmentations and grievances in order to plant seeds for more.

2. Theoretical Framework

This article builds on two social psychology theories, Integrated Threat Theory and Social Identity Theory, as a building block in establishing a framework for analyzing discriminatory rhetoric of extremists like Zarqawi. For factionalism to be converted into conflict, one must establish rhetorical links between the two in order to successfully influence the targeted audience of said rhetoric.

Any discussion of the Iraqi civil war, and the accompanying violent-extremism, cannot be adequately understood without minding the Sunni-Shia divide, which is a key element of this research; however, an extensive analysis of this phenomenon goes beyond the scope of this article. In fact, it has been tackled repeatedly before: our research focuses on the dynamics between the allies/Shia-dominated Iraqi government vs. Zarqawi and his organization to which civilians often fall victim; that corroborates Finnbogason et al.'s (2019) claim that "a large degree of the violence across the Shia-Sunni divide is clearly dominated by state-based conflicts. It is driven by centralised actors, primarily states, rebel groups, and militias rather than communities" (p. 47). For more on the Sunni-Shia divide and its role in the region's conflicts see also (Svensson 2007; Cheterian 2021; Ahmed 2012; Abdo 2017; Larsson 2016). Here we add to the existing literature by highlighting how this divide is aggravated by Iraq's post-war policies and measures, as well as capitalized by Zarqawi's rhetoric.

Social Identity Theory explains the ease with which individuals can ascribe themselves to an *in-group* that stands unique from *out-groups*. It is defined as "a social psychological theory of identity formation that privileges the role of large group identities in forming

individuals' concepts of self. It has been used, in particular, to examine the formation and forms of adherence to national and ethnic groups." (Calhoun 2002). It was pioneered by Henry Tajfel in 1970s and 1980s and came as a result of years of academic curiosity regarding how individuals develop their social as well as individual identities, and, therefore, the relationship between that individual and society at large (Baker 2012, p. 130). For Tajfel and Turner (2004), intergroup relations are dominated by bias towards the *in-group*; the mere identification with an *in-group* results in such bias, and, similarly, "the mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the in-group." (Tajfel and Turner 2004, p. 281).

Integrated Threat Theory (ITT) adds to Social Identity Theory (SIT) by outlining the importance that *perceived threats* have over that intergroup dynamic. A belief that one's culture, for example, is under *threat* from another poses a serious impediment in the face of cementing a healthy relationship between these cultures, affecting many aspects of interaction between them, and even encouraging prejudice between members of these different cultures (Stephan et al. 2000, p. 240). The theory has been used in multiple studies, and was updated by Stephan and Renfro to revolve around two key types of threats: *realistic threat* and *symbolic threat* (Stephan et al. 2002). *Realistic threats* are those concerned with the wellbeing of the *in-group* such as political and economic power, while *symbolic threats* are concerned with the *in-groups'* values, beliefs, or worldviews; *realistic threats* are tangible unlike *symbolic* ones, and both, importantly, may only be *perceived* and not necessarily actual (Stephan et al. 2002).

The two theories work together by way of complementation; once group identity is established, and once *out-groups* are identified, then it becomes remaining the connection between these *out-groups* and their perceived *threat* towards the *in-group*. Zarqawi didn't simply identify the groups he identified as enemies, but rather went to great lengths in establishing why and how said groups are dangerous to his constituency. Together, these two theories provide a viable framework for studying the link between societal fragmentation and terrorism. Employing them will highlight the different *out-groups* that pose as a *threat* to Zarqawi's *in-group*, in addition to the types of such *threats*. Said analysis is then further utilized to illustrate the relationship between changes on the ground and changes in the rhetoric.

We sought to operationalize the Social Identity Theory and the Integrated Threat Theory through the breaking down of SIT and ITT into their basic elements. By searching for, and coding such elements, we draw a picture of factionalism in Iraq as reflected and developed by Zarqawi. Once this picture is clearly drawn, a subsequent analysis is provided to shed light on how Zarqawi took advantage of a divided society in order to plant the seeds of violence and instability: this picture will manifest the different *out-groups* (enemies) in the focus of Zarqawi's rhetoric, as well as the different *threats* posed to Zarqawi's de facto *in-group*.

Before we commence, however, it is important to tackle the question of the historical roots of said factionalism. Our analysis of Zarqawi's rhetoric is a window through which we seek to understand the weaponization of existing factionalism in creating a narrative of agency and emergency; Zarqawi sought to speak for his *in-group* and portray the emergency that is the various *threats* he ascribed to the different *out-groups* in the country. Such narrative is, at least partially, yet importantly, ingrained in the collective memory of the peoples who live in the region, as well as in the belief system that the likes of Zarqawi adopt. In the next section, we show the conceptual ground upon which Zarqawi built his rhetoric; first, we outline the historical, as well as the theological, background of said rhetoric, and then we provide evidence of the relation between the historical/theological and the very words Zarqawi used, in our database.

3. Methodology

Our investigation adopts a mixed method research approach. Qualitative Discourse Historical Analysis is used to disclose the main concepts with which *threats* and *out-groups*

are built in Zarqawi's rhetoric. In addition, said approach establishes the consensus that this rhetoric appeals to; this is done by outlining the analogous relationship between this rhetoric and the historical-theological environment in which the former operates. This work comes to complement other textual analysis literature (see Corman and Schiefelbein 2006; Lorenzo-Dus and Macdonald 2018; Macdonald and Lorenzo-Dus 2021), and terrorist identity literature (see Rothenberger and Kotarac 2014; Rothenberger et al. 2018; Talbot 2008).

As stated in our introduction, the analysis of language lies at the core of this article; whether it's *threats* or *out-groups*, inasmuch as the language is consistent in its choice of terminology, the rhetoric associated therewith is comprehensible to the audience. Discourse Historical Analysis recognizes language as a method of social practice; it seeks to "transcend the pure linguistic dimension and to include, more or less systematically, the historical, political, sociological and/or psychological dimension in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion" (Reisigl and Wodak 2005, p. 35). One of the original purposes of DHA, in fact, was to identify discriminatory discourses such as those racist or ethnicist (Reisigl and Wodak 2005, p. 44). We will highlight the historical-theological bases upon which groups or individuals can be outcast in Islam; those lay the building block for Zarqawi's discriminatory rhetoric against other Muslims. We link the linguistic tools to their historiological-theological roots: Zarqawi's rhetoric is to be proven as based on two main pillars; one is focused on the theological justification of demonizing certain Muslims, mainly Shias, building on the concept of the *munafiq* (hypocrite). The other pillar is one that links the aforementioned theological justifications with a historical narrative concerning the *out-groups* under study.

While the qualitative DHA illuminates the internal logic of the rhetoric under study, it is less helpful when it comes to exploring how different themes develop in time, nor does it help with exploring the relevant importance of different *threats* and *out-groups*. It is here where this article seeks the aid of computer-assisted textual analysis.

The computer-assisted textual analysis method utilized NVivo as a tool for providing an analysis of the development of Zarqawi's rhetoric through time; *threats* and *out-groups* are presented in a time scale showing their varied degrees of saliency at different points of time.

Finally, a dialectical analysis focused on the interaction between Zarqawi's discourse, on the one hand, and the non-discursive developments of the intervention, as well as the allied discourse on counterinsurgency, on the other.

Collecting reliable terrorist-related data can, needless to say, be a rather arduous task. Our textual data was taken from the most reliable source we can find where such materials are available: Archive.org. This website is a non-profit organization and is one of the internet's most renowned libraries; it was founded in 1996 by Brewster Kahle and holds twenty petabytes of data which includes web pages, books, audio and video recordings, and software programs, amongst others (InternetArchive.org n.d.). There exists a collection of Zarqawi statements, many of which are transcripts from video or audio statements that are also available on the website, making them easy to verify. In total we had forty-two statements from which we included all statements issued in the studied time period between 2003 and 2006, all except ones of personal or apolitical nature, leaving us with thirty- seven statements.[1] We endeavored to find the best sources for Zarqawi rhetoric, and this material was the most complete and reliable we could find.

Inasmuch as we investigate the role of factionalism in creating violence and volatility in Iraq, we operationalize these theories by breaking them down to their basic elements. These elements are sought and coded in a database constituted of thirty- seven Zarqawi statements issued in a time period starting from the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003 to the time of Zarqawi's death in 2006. In so doing, we distinguish the different *out-groups* who posed threats to Zarqawi's *in-group* (Sunnis in general and Sunni Arabs in particular) as well as the types of *threats* per se. Furthermore, we investigate the development of said concepts through time and in relation to political developments on the ground (see Supplementary Materials).

With the help of NVivo, a computer qualitative data analysis software package, we carefully analyze statements by Zarqawi. Those statements were chosen to reflect Zarqawi's active years in Iraq, therefore neither statements outside that time frame, nor letters of personal nature were included, leaving us with thirty- seven statements. We chose to analyze the documents in their original version, in Arabic, providing a purer engagement with the rhetoric in question; this spares us the unfortunate loss, as well as change, of meaning that results from translating any text. Analyzing the texts in their native Arabic shall provide a unique advantage over other studies that depend on translated texts.

The statements came either as transcripts of video or audio statements, or as written statements in their original form. The total amounted to 407 full-size pages, each of them was read and scanned for the relevant nodes. Each of them was analyzed and coded on NVivo, which left us with a rich database that we're discussing next. The coding process of these documents distinguished six "nodes," four of which were out-groups while the other two were two types of *threat*. These nodes are:

Enemy	Description
Kurds	An out group that is present yet far from salient.
Local Rulers	Here are references to authorities, political leaders, or political regimes.
Rawafid	"Rawafid" mainly means Shia, and it is certainly the case in most of the coded documents; the word meaning "those who refuse. Derogatory term historically applied by the Sunnis to describe the Shiis, who refused to accept the early caliphate of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman as legitimate." (The Oxford Dictionary of Islam 2021).
West/Jews/Christians	The decision to put them together was made based on Zarqawi's wording as was frequently encountered in the text. Together they form the "far enemy" as opposed to local rulers and Shias who constitute a "near enemy."

Out-groups (enemies) are coded if they come in the context of posing *threat*, otherwise they are NOT coded, for example, Zarqawi mentioning an Islamic scholar who replied to the former's statement on the withdrawal of Italian troops. For an *out-group* to be coded as an enemy it must be implicitly or directly accused of posing a *threat*. Furthermore, attributing enmity to one group by way of associating it with another may be counted as two different nodes; an example of that is resembling Shias of Jews in the context of both being a *threat*.

Threats: *realistic threats* can be financial, political, physical, and threats to self-worth. While *symbolic threats* are those of religion and the groups' morals and way of life. Such distinction is both necessary and useful in understanding how different types of *threats* are used. This, for instance, could prove especially important in the context of Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) where perceived *symbolic threats* may be remedied by psychological operations (psyops) or counter-propaganda wars. While perceived *realistic threats* may be remedied by revising military strategies or economic policies.

Looking for *threats* in the text means looking for *threats* that are directed towards the group as a collective, and are necessarily posed by another group. This group must be current and relevant; *threats* mentioned in way of lecturing religious sermons were not coded. If the people mentioned to have been killed are Jihadists, then the *threat* is coded if it's in the context of drawing attention to an existing *threats* or conflict. *Threats* need to be external and posed by an *out-group*; i.e., mentions of *threat* as a result of people not following true Islam are NOT coded. *Threats* coming from god, whether a test or a punishment, are NOT coded.

Furthermore, *threats* must be current. However, *out-groups* in the latter might be coded as enemies if seen to make direct comparison to the current situation, for example, mentions of Shias betraying Islam in the past. Abstract mentions of *threats* in way of

religious preaching are NOT coded. Past *threats* are coded only if they come in the context of the present *threat*, for example, Zarqawi using the past in order to invoke the *threat* Shias pose. On the other hand, *realistic threats* taking place as a result of jihadist operations are NOT coded. For example, Zarqawi talks about Muslims being killed in his operations.

Threats need to be external and posed by an *out-group*; i.e., mentions of *threat* as a result of people not following true Islam are NOT coded: *threats* coming from God, whether a test or a punishment, are NOT coded. *Realistic threats* taking place as a result of jihadist operations are NOT coded, for example, Zarqawi discussing Muslims being killed in his operations. *Symbolic threats* also need to be imposed by an *out-group*. For example, mentions of loss of morals, or a weakening of religious commitment that are happening with the development of time, as a result of globalization, or for any reason that is NOT caused by an *out-group*.

This article approach was to take coding in a parallel sampling process; such process allows for comparing two or more cases either to all other cases or to subgroups of said cases (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2015, p. 243). More specifically, this is a rather common approach called a "pairwise sampling process" where "all the selected cases are treated as a set and their 'voice' is compared to all other cases one at a time in order to understand better the underlying phenomenon and has been most common amongst qualitative sampling designs" (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2015, p. 243). In practice, nodes were not coded more than one time in a single page. Once a certain node was coded, it wasn't coded again regardless of its repeated occurrence in the relevant page. This approach assumes that the presence of a node in a page is sufficient to consider that the node plays a considerable role in the page's rhetoric. However, and most importantly, this approach meant that a percentage of how often a certain node is mentioned (relative to the number of pages) can be easily shown. The coding process itself adopted a rather conservative approach; the coded sentence, word, or phrase, should be directly and unequivocally referable to the nodes they are allocated to.

Furthermore, the context in which a judgment (i.e., the decision to code for a specific node) is only considered within the specific page. For example, when a word such as "enemy" occurs at the start of a page, it is only coded based on what accompanies it in the same page, despite already knowing who that enemy is (based on the previous page/s). This is to make the coding process more transparent, easier for revision and assessment, and replicable. If the word "enemy," for example, was mentioned without a clear evidence (within the page itself) as to who the enemy in question is, the instance wouldn't be coded at all.

4. Discourse Historical Genealogical Investigation of the Concept of Threat in Zarqawi's Islamic Extremism

If our analysis showed a prominence of the concept of *threat* in Zarqawi's rhetoric, we endeavor to outline the discursive-historical roots of such concept as adopted by Zarqawi. The importance of said approach is the evident link between creating agency on the one hand and creating emergency on the other: as Zarqawi attempted to speak on behalf of Sunni Arabs in Iraq and adopted the persona of a devout Muslim, he had to justify killing other Muslims in a manner that is compatible with, as well as convincing for, the targeted audience of Sunni Muslims.

Reisigl and Wodak saw the phenomenon of racism as a social practice and an ideology which is manifested discursively (Reisigl and Wodak 2005). Similarly, the concept of *threat*, and the phenomenon of discrimination associated with it, as used by Zarqawi, is also manifested discursively. And like racism, which must be put within its political, social, and historical contexts (Reisigl and Wodak 2005), *threat* ought to be analyzed discursively.

It is of the essence then, before analyzing the rhetoric of the man in question, that we understand the societal and cultural discourses that led, or at least aided, in adopting this specific rhetoric that we are later to shed light on.

Religion is perceived by billions of people in the world as a source of morality, something that is of intimate relationship with our subject; religion provides believers a frame-

work, so to speak. John Locke, for example, viewed religion as a source of moral law, coming directly from the commandants of God (West 2013, p. 474). The importance of Islam as a religion in this project comes clear as the man under study, and therefore his rhetoric, is fundamentally influenced by Islam; for him Islam is indeed a source of moral law. Furthermore, Islam's influence here extends beyond mere theology; the history of Islam and its politics play a key role in shaping the world in which we live, and which, certainly, shaped the very identity of Zarqawi. The concepts of jihad, people of the book, and very importantly, the Sunni-Shia divide are integral concepts in this project. Of course, we are not the first nor the last to acknowledge the strong sectarian identification of many extremist organizations; the CIA's 2007 National Intelligence Estimate, for instance, asserted that Al-Qaida works to include some Sunni communities in its efforts and from which to seek support (Hoffman 2008, p. 134). Others showed that Lebanon's Hezbollah enjoys large support in the country's Shia community (Norton 2007) as Shias in Lebanon are likely to support Hezbollah, its expansion, and its use of force (Haddad 2006, p. 21).

In their attempt to understand jihadi rhetoric, some seek to find direct links between the use of the Quran and such rhetoric. Donald Holbrook, for instance, draws our attention to the employment, and alteration, of the Quran and the Hadith by jihadis for the purpose of the latter's discourse; Holbrook, very helpfully, outlined how Ayman Al-Zwahiri relies often on verses from the Al-Mā'idah chapter of Quran which declares "O believers, do not hold Jews and Christians as your allies. They are allies of one another; and anyone who makes them his friends is surely one of them" (Holbrook 2010, p. 16). Others complemented this addition to the literature by analyzing the tools which jihadis use in order to manipulate and shape certain religious texts into supporting these jihadis' narratives: Ijtihad, for example, which is a "term in Islamic law that allows for the process of religious decision making by independent interpretations of the Quran and the Shariat" (Venkatraman 2007, p. 236) was shown to have historically been useful in mobilizing Muslims against the Crusaders, something which jihadis later were inspired by, and made use of (Venkatraman 2007, p. 236). Wiktorowicz found that jihadists expanded the concept of the apostates, from those who defect from Islam or reject essential teachings such as prayer, to leaders who refuse to implement Islamic law as jihadis see it; Wiktorowicz correctly forecasted that jihadis' targets will include a wider range of categories, mainly Shias in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and in Iraq due to Zarqawi's influence (Wiktorowicz 2005, p. 94).

It is evident, then, that Islam plays a significant role in the discourse of jihadis worldwide, and that such role has, indeed, drawn attention from scholars who studied it from a wide variety of angles and methodologies. This article, therefore, will provide a fresh and deep analysis of this link between Islam, its history and theology, and jihadist rhetoric; fundamentally speaking, this research will make evident that, when it comes to said rhetoric, much of it comes down to the concept of *threat* and the utilization of that *threat* in that rhetoric. This utilization, in turn, needs the second key concept, which is *out-group*; whether a certain jihadist depends on the Quran, the Hadith, or Ijtihad, there are two essential ingredients: *threat* and *out-group*.

Jihad is considered, for the purposes of this article, Islam's mechanism of collective self-defense and is traditionally seen as a collective duty, something that jihadis, including Bin Laden, sought to elevate to the ranks of individual duties; in fact, Bin Laden insisted that jihad be categorized as one of Islam's five pillars and second to belief (Gerges 2009, p. 3) This defensive and collective nature of jihad, according to the classical interpretation, is bound by strict rules and regulations, something that jihadists advocated to change, inspired by Sayyid Qutb, into an individual and permanent revolution against infidels (Gerges 2009). Jihad, then, is done against the *out-group* as defined by the jihadist implementing it; how *out-groups* are defined and categorized by jihadists, and what the justifications are for waging war against them, lies at the heart of our project's research question.

Out-groups in Islam constitute, naturally, non-Muslims who are perceived in relatively simple terms in Islamic theology. There are the infidels (kuffar) and there are Ahl-Alkitab,

or people of the book, a Quranic term used to refer to Christians and Jews. The Quran was persistent in using the term Ahl-Alkitab to describe followers of the two other Ibrahimic religions, and when it comes to Christianity, it was more interested in showing the misconceptions and errors that Islam maintained Christians have about their own religion (Griffith 2013). Islam's relationship with Jews, on the other hand, was more troublesome; Prophet Muhammad had a series of treaties and wars with the Jews of Arabia. One notable incident was the attack against the Jews of Khaybar, which ended in the latter's defeat and the capture of their leader (Carimokan 2010, p. 401). In any case, the rule towards the people of the book was, generally speaking, that they are to be offered peace and tolerance as long as they pay their special taxes (Jizya) and abide by the few restrictions imposed upon them (Long 2013, p. 283).

To consider Christians and Jews, for the purposes of this study, as *out-groups* is a relatively straight forward logical step. What is more difficult, and perhaps more interesting, is searching for the theological, discursive, and historical building blocks with which extremists like Zarqawi build their narrative for excluding other Muslims, and therefore, portraying them as part of the *out-group* and a source of *threat*. In this context, the concept of the *Munafiq* becomes very useful.

5. Converting the In-Group to the Out-Group: The Concept of the Munafiq

Between fragmentation and grievances exists a dialectic which we endeavor to uncover, the grievances, stimulated by certain policies or developments, are adopted, moulded, and reshaped by terrorists seeking further fragmentation. Such fragmentation, when intended to target a specific group, largely depends on the establishment of said group as an enemy (*out-group*) that, in turn, benefits from the portrayal of that group as a source of *threat*.

Drawing the lines of fragmentation, in the case of Zarqawi, required the exclusion of groups from the existing *in-group*; Shias and Kurds were a prime example. Here we explore a rather important concept: the term *Munafiq* lays the ground for such fragmentation by way of categorizing people accused of it as a source of *threat* (therefore belonging to the *out-group*) to Islam and Muslims. It is crucial, at this stage, to maintain that this concept is directly linked to that of "takfir;" the latter is the ultimate goal of the use of "*munafiq*." Takfir is "labeling other Muslims as kafir (non-believer) and infidels, and legitimizing violation against them" (Kadivar 2020, p. 3). The term "*munafiq*" is a theological-discursive tool for the purpose of takfir, as we shall see next. For more on "takfiri" ideology and its use in Islamic extremism see also (Hartmann 2017; Rajan 2015).

Munafiq (Plural Munafiqoon or Munafiqeen) is an Arabic word for "hypocrite," a word that carries a rather heavy weight in Islamic theology. It is a "polemical term applied to Muslims who possess weak faith or who profess Islam while secretly working against it . . . the Quran equates hypocrisy with unbelief (kufr) and condemns hypocrites to hellfire for their failure to fully support the Muslim cause financially, bodily, and morally." (Esposito 2003). The evident importance of this term does not come as a surprise when we remember that the Quran has an entire chapter titled "al-Munāfiqūn" or "The Hypocrites": The conceptual origin lies clear as the Quran defines hypocrites as those who "آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا فَطُبِعَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ" "Believed then blasphemed thus their hearts are sealed and they cannot understand" (Surah Al-Munafiqun n.d.). The concept of the Munafiq, then, leaves the door wide open for any who wish to demonize a certain group for one reason or another; it is an effectivediscursive tool which justifies a narrative of discrimination for individuals who are happy to employ such concepts for the purposes of solidifying their rhetoric, whether justifiably of not. Those portrayed as Munafiqs are beyond redemption and can never acquire God's forgiveness: It is "سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَسْتَغْفَرْتَ لَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تَسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ لَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللّه لَهُمْ إِنَ اللّه لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ" all the same for them whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for

them; never will Allah forgive them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people." (Surah Al-Munafiqun n.d.).

This term acts as a conceptual framework for a discriminatory rhetoric weaponized against certain individuals or groups of people. Scholars have noted the significance of this term and its uses in different contexts and by different characters: Achmad Ubaedillah outlined how Abdullah Bin Abd Al-Razzaq, the Grand Shaykh of Khalawatiyah Samman in Maros, Indonesia, used the word Munafiq to describe those who denounce him, his followers, and his order; the word served as a double-edged weapon both to boost his religious authority, and to undermine his opponents (Ubaedillah 2014). A well-known Chechen Mujahid against the Russian state, Dokka Umarov, also used the word Munafiq to describe his enemies, the word also was applied to those who doubted his ambitions of establishing an Islamic Commonwealth within the Russian Federation (Knysh 2012, p. 316). In fact, Umarov categorized people into four distinct groups: Mujahideen, Kuffar (Infidels), Murtads (Apostates), and Munafiqs; Knysh noted the saliency of the word and how it was used to describe even observant Muslims, as long as they criticized Umarov or refused to join his fighters (Knysh 2012, p. 323).

Zarqawi himself often utilized this word in his rhetoric, and for the same purposes: in a letter criticizing the Iraqi government and resembling it to that of Afghanistan's Karazi's, he combined *realistic threat* and the term *Munafiq* in accusing the Shia-dominated government of treason, stating that "History and contemporary experience prove that indirect colonization is the most potent weapon against this nation. Instead of the foreign infidel enslaving this nation and pillaging its resources, that, instead, will be done by *Munafiqs* who belong to this nation in colour and tongue."[2] The use of *Munafiq* as a tool to demonize other Muslims is operated in parallel with associating them with the more traditional enemy (Christians or the West) and manifests itself in another example: Zarqawi urged his Mujahideen in another statement maintaining that

فبِقتالكم حاملي لواء الصليب ومن سار تحت هذا اللواء من المنافقين والمرتدين من أبناء جلدتنا فإنكم لاتذودون عن حمى الرافدين فحسب؛ ولكنكم تدافعون عن الأمة بأسرها .

"In your fight against carriers of the Cross flag, and those who marched under this flag of munafiqeen and apostates of our countrymen, you're not just defending Mesopotamia alone, but you're defending the entire nation."[3]

The concept of the *Munafiq*, then, opens the door to a flexible definition of the enemy and provides the framework for categorizing other Muslims as sources of *threat*. The *Munafiq* pretends to be a Muslim, works with the enemies of Islam, and seeks to destroy the creed of Islam and those who follow it. Fundamentally, the *Munafiq* is part of the *out-group* and therefore can be accused of being a source of *threat*. Every *in-group* requires an *out-group*, and if one is to portray certain groups as the enemy it is imperative that these groups are portrayed as *out-groups* first, before outlining their supposed *threat*. To accuse a specific group of hypocrisy may not, in itself, be a sufficient factor in the effort of creating an enemy of that group. This is accompanied and fortified by a *threat*-focused argumentation as we shall see in this article.

As an addition, and not substitution, historical contexts are integrated here as supporting evidence that shed light on the historical developments that shaped the rhetoric of the man under study; any rhetoric cannot be born in isolation of the times in which it was born. In fact, using non-discursive rhetoric is especially useful here, as it helps us better understand rhetoric when it is studied in multiple and layered texts such as the data we employ in this project. In essence, this is what Foucault would call the pre-discursive level of reality: "A discourse is defined in terms of statements (énoncés) of 'things said. Statements are events of certain kinds once tied to a historical context and capable of repetition; the position in discourse is defined as a consequence of their functional use" (Olssen 2014, p. 28).

In the next section we show the empirical application for the concepts discussed above, which are, later, linked to the real-world events. The relevance of these concepts is shown over a considerable amount of data, as well as the dialectical relationship therebetween those events and the rhetoric itself.

6. The Big Picture: The Totality of Zarqawi's Discourse on Out-Groups and Their Threat

6.1. Out-Groups

Our analysis of the different *out-groups* manifested in Zarqawi's rhetoric showed a clear categorization of four different groups of enemies portrayed: Shias (or Rawafid according to Zarqawi), the West with which Christians and Jews are merged, local ruling regimes, and Kurds. Figure 3 shows the occurrence rate of each node through time and in each individual statement, while Figure 4 shows these rates relative to the average percentage of yearly occurrences. The charts resulting from our analysis paint an interesting picture of Zarqawi's priorities when it comes to whom he identified as enemies. In said picture, two categories of enemies appear as most salient: the West-Christians/Jews and the Shias. What is especially noticeable is the evolution of the Shia node through the coding process. Shias appear to evermore gain a greater role as Zarqawi's enemies through time. Starting from 2005 they begin gaining prominence, with the W-C-J category leading the charts, before becoming the unquestionable centre of focus in 2006.

Overall, the analysis shows a prominent role of *out-groups* in the formation of Zarqawi's discriminatory rhetoric; they were featured in every statement, and in a few they took a substantial share of these statements. An example of which is a document titled "الحق بالقافلة" or "join the caravan," in which W-C-J nodes were present in 9 out of 11 pages, and local regimes were mentioned in 6 pages. Our charts demonstrate the relevance of *out-groups* in our database; while the W-C-J category is ever prominent, we find a clear sharp rise in the prominence of the Rawafid (Shias) category.
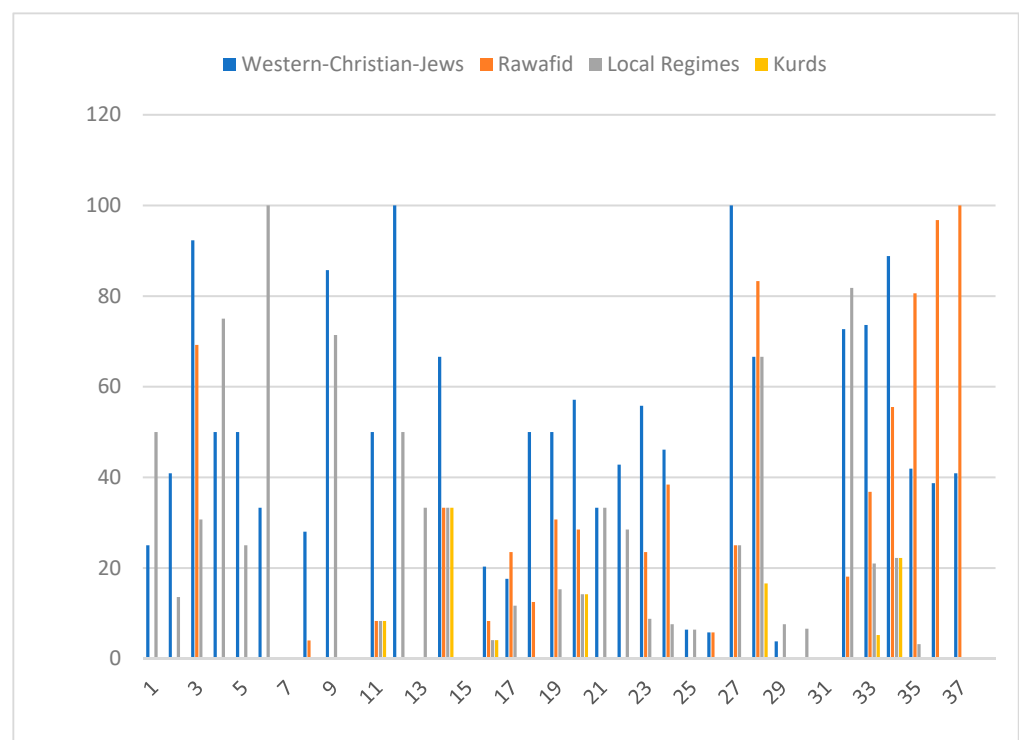
Figure 3. Out-groups in Zarqawi's statements in percentage points (relative to number of pages by title).
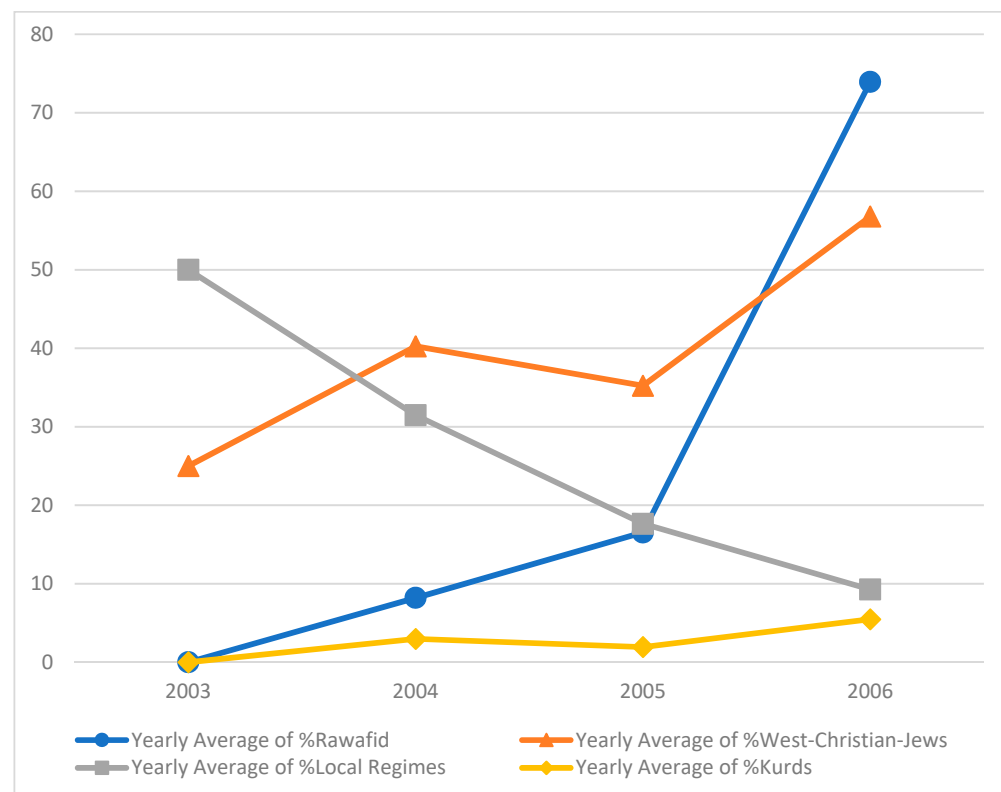
Figure 4. Development of out-groups in Zarqawi's statements in yearly average percentage of occurrences.

6.2. Threats

In June 2006, a report produced at the Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point Academy highlighted an analysis in which Zarqawi's then newly released statement was the focus. The author stipulated that "Although attacks continued as Zarqawi lowered his profile, his reduced media presence left them disassociated from a larger strategic purpose. This statement is intended to rectify that situation by clearly explaining the 'apostasy' and danger posed by the Shi'a." (Fishman 2006, p. 1). This report referred to one of the statements under study in this project and reflected a parallel with our research goals. Indeed, linking *out-groups* to *threats* was a strategic decision made by Zarqawi, a strategy that we, here, uncover.

For example, a 2004 statement titled "رسالة الى الأمة" or "letter to the nation", was constituted in 13 pages, 12 of which mentioned *realistic threats,* and 8 mentioned *symbolic threats*. A 2005 statement titled "أينقص الدين وأنا حي" or "would the religion be harmed while I'm alive" was spread over 34 pages, 24 mentioned *realistic threats* and 13 mentioned *symbolic threats*. Figures 5 and 6 show the saliency of *realistic* and *symbolic threats*: in both we encounter the importance of *threat* as a building stone upon which Zarqawi's rhetoric was established.

Both *realistic* and *symbolic threats* were consistently present throughout the data, although *realistic threats* seem to be slightly more dominant. This, interestingly, shows the limitations of dependence on discourse per se: The religious order upon which Zarqawi built his legitimacy was of evident value in these texts. However, the reliance on *symbolic threats* was clearly far from sufficient for Zarqawi; *realistic threats* were shown to be more salient in the vast majority of statements analyzed. This highlights the direct relationship between developments in the political sphere and the rhetoric of a terrorist leader willing to use these developments by way of lyrical weaponization.
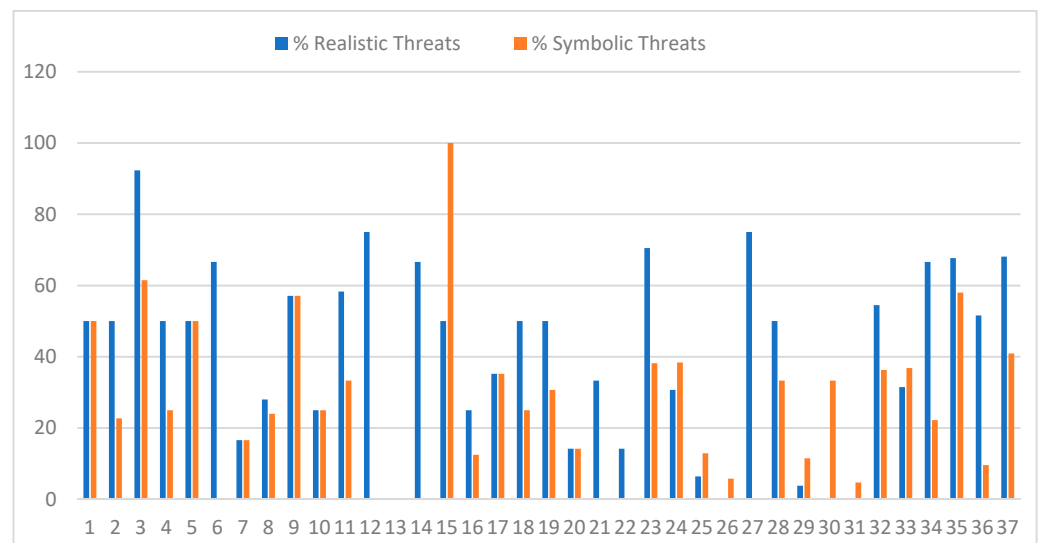
Figure 5. Realistic vs. Symbolic Threats in Zarqawi's statements in percentage points (relative to number of pages).
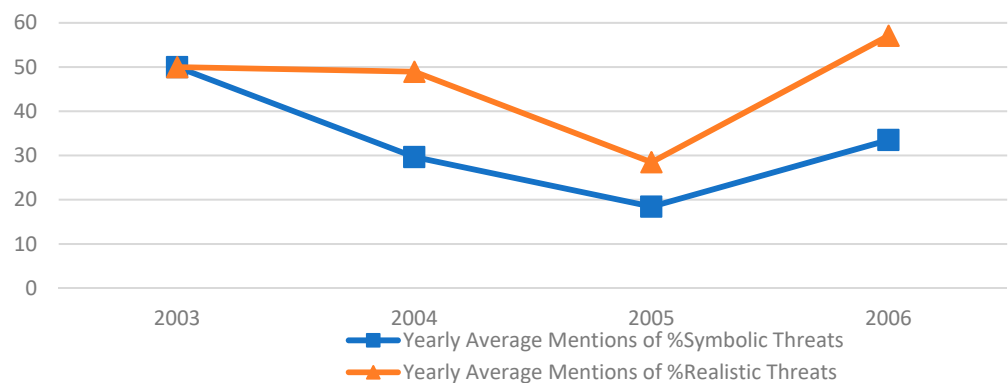
Figure 6. Development of threats in Zarqawi's statements in yearly average percentage of occurrences.

Now that we have established the various ways Zarqawi's rhetoric was engaged with, as well as affected by, historical developments in post-war Iraq, we discuss next the particularities of this dialectic in a time-specific manner. Linking our findings to these developments shall shed light on the mechanisms by which said developments fortify, if perhaps inadvertently, terrorist rhetoric and, therefore, fuel violent conflict through further inflammation of grievances and fragmentation.

7. Discussion: The Vicious Circle: How Allies' Policies Emboldened Sectarian Violence

As mentioned in the introduction, post-war Iraq witnessed a staggering rise of terrorist attacks, particularly in the years prior to the death of Zarqawi. Our investigation so far has shown the mechanism by which Zarqawi incorporated various *out-groups* in his rhetoric. Next, we outline the dynamics in which Zarqawi's rhetoric reflected, as well as benefited from, the developments, resulting in a pronounced interrelationship between developments on the ground (i.e., factionalism and Sunni grievances), Zarqawi's rhetoric, and terrorist related deaths. Our research shows a clear correlation between the developments on the Iraqi land and Zarqawi's formatting of the *out-group* (enemy). At the early stages of the occupation the rhetoric was evidently keen on defining the far enemy (W-C-J). That, however, began to change by the year 2005; such change can be better understood by linking the historical events on the ground with the rhetoric as analyzed. Such linkage may

also demonstrate how hasty policy making can deliver monumental damage to the fabric of society and, therefore, open the door for terrorists such as Zarqawi to capitalize on the societal void and the chaos resulting thereof.

In May 2003, the U.S. government appointed Paul Bremer, which effectively made him the ruler of Iraq, in his capacity as head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, who, in turn, appointed 25 Iraqis as members of the Iraqi Governing Council (Katzman 2009). The CPA's carried a process of "de-Baathification" of the country and rejected the return of armed forces members to service; such measures were taken to assure Shias and Kurds of the democratic process (Katzman 2009). At such an early stage, as we see, sectarian and ethnic considerations were given absolute priority for a country trying to recover from war and chaos; the roots of societal divisions in Iraq were re-planted and replenished.

Zarqawi's statements often kept with the political developments on the ground and provided commentary on them; they constitute a rather useful tool for tracking how these developments influenced, as well as were used by his rhetoric. For 2003 we only have one statement which, naturally, focused on the external *threat* posed by the far enemy. In fact, we see in our analysis that Zarqawi focused on the W-C-J and the local regime (the Jordanian King), which worked with the allies.

By the year 2004, the Shia-dominated Iraqi government had started to fight the insurgency together with the allied forces. Zarqawi was already making himself infamous as Iraq's most wanted man. Newsweek magazine described him as "The World's Most Dangerous Terrorist" after U.S. officials accused him of personally beheading Nicholas Berg, an American hostage (Michael and Hosenball 2007). Zarqawi indeed issued a statement following the murder of Berg in which, our analysis shows, he blamed the W-C-J, citing, amongst others, the torture stories leaked from Abu Ghraib prison: "As for you, mothers and wives of American soldiers . . . we tell you that the honour of Muslims in Abu Ghraib prison is defended with blood and souls" a clear reference to a *symbolic threat*.[4]

Indeed, the years following the Iraq War witnessed an evident dominance of Shias over the Iraqi government, its army, and its security forces. Case in point was that of Interior Minister Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi: a former high-ranking commander of the Shia Badr Organization who was accused by Sunni Arab notables of turning a blind eye to the torture, kidnapping, and murder of Sunnis in the country, all crimes committed by the Iraqi Security Forces, which were dominated by Shia militias (Beehner 2006). Such Shia militias were fighting the Sunni-led insurgency alongside the U.S. forces, despite the former's role in the worsening sectarian tensions. These militias were officially banned, but the U.S. Defense Department continued to encourage them and were seen as an Iraqi problem rather than an American one (Beehner 2006). Zarqawi, consequently, made sure to tackle the topic of the Badr Organization's activities: "Everybody knows the truth about the demonic alliance . . . First, Americans, the carriers of the crucifix banner, Second, Kurds in the form of Peshmerga forces . . . Third, Rawafid, the enemies of the Sunni people represented by the Badr Brigade."[5] By that time, our analysis shows, Shias had started to be ever more mentioned in Zarqawi's rhetoric.

Sunni Arabs were left in a hostile environment in which even the government is an oppressor. Such developments left Zarqawi great opportunities on which he could capitalize. By 2005, Shias, as our chart shows, became a constant target in the man's rhetoric; this correlated with a major transition of power from the allies to Shias by way of elections in which Shias won the vast majority while Sunnis boycotted; the latter were not helped by Zarqawi's threats against the democratic process and those who took part in it (Gonzales et al. 2007). In fact, Zarqawi had started demonising Shias in 2004, if on fewer instances: in a statement in October 2004, he commented on the battle of Fallujah "It's you I address, my nation, as your sons' blood is spilled in Iraq all over, and in Fallujah especially, after the worshippers of the crucifix and those with them of our skin, who . . . betrayed God and his Prophet, such as the Peshmerga, and Rawafid."[6] Here he clearly chose to refer to *realistic threat*.

Zarqawi, then, was able to frame a narrative of *realistic* and *symbolic threats*, to which he linked the various factions of Iraqi society that he wanted demonized and outcasted, further adding fuel to the fire of the civil war and reverse engineering the allies' and Iraqi government's narratives of fighting extremism. Legitimate existing grievances were aligned with a discriminatory rhetoric, giving the former a weight of legitimacy and authority. This pattern became far more prominent by the year 2005. For example, in the first statement of that year, Zarqawi addressed the then on-going Fallujah battle, portraying an infidel army seeking the harm of Muslims. He stated that "The battle uncovered the ugly face of Rawafid . . . they had a large role in the enactment of killing, robbery, vandalism, and the murder of unarmed children, women, and elderly . . . and for the record, 90% of the profane army is from Rawafid and 10% are of Kurdish Peshmerga."[7] The employment of *realistic threat* here relied on a straight-forward accusation: Shias and Kurds are murdering our innocent civilians.

A Shia-dominated government, and the associated Sunni complaints thereabout, constituted rhetorical fuel for Zarqawi, which nurtured the latter's discourse against Shias and Kurds. The end of 2005 witnessed parliamentary elections that resulted in an overwhelming win for the Shia-led United Iraqi Alliance, followed by the Sunni Arab Iraqi Accord Front, which won 58% and 18.6% of the votes, respectively (BBC 2005). These elections, this time, enjoyed a large Sunni Arab presence but suffered a crisis of its own; the Iraqi Front Accord rejected the results and complained the elections had been rigged; the secretary general of the Iraqi Islamic Party was quoted as warning the electoral commission "not to play with fire" (BBC 2005). That again, reflects the relevance of these developments in shaping and helping Zarqawi's rhetoric. In a statement issued a few months later, he reminded his audience that "the follower of the political map of Iraq knows that the majority of parliamentary seats are occupied by Shias, and Kurdish and Sunni secularists . . . and this tells us that parliaments will always be ruled by tyrants."[8] In contrast to the last quote above where *realistic threat* was mentioned, it is employed in a less direct way, and comes with a warning against democracy: the *out-groups* are denying us political power through democracy.

In fact, Zarqawi's focus on the Shia had only intensified by 2006, during which the very last three statements featured in our analysis were solely addressed to the portrayed danger of Shias. These documents were in three parts and titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid." Quantitatively, our analysis shows this focus as paramount, with the first document mentioning Shias as an enemy in around 80% of all pages, the second document 96%, and the third statement at 100%. This later emphasis on Shias as a predominant enemy is well demonstrated in Figure 4.

The justification, which comes at the end of the third part linked by a long historical lesson on Shias' past infractions against Islam (*symbolic threat*) and Sunnis (*realistic threat*), is eventually associated with claimed breaches of the Iraqi government and its associated organizations. Zarqawi maintained that "if we consider . . . the reality of Shias in Iraq today, we find that the Badr Brigade and the Mahdi Army . . . raid Sunnis' homes with the pretense of looking for jihadists . . . they kill the men, imprison women and harass them . . . these tragedies are committed by Shia militias alone, or with the help of occupying American forces"[9] and follows by calling Sunnis to arms "Sunni people wake up and rise, and be prepared to get rid of Shia snakes' poison."[10]

Having established Shias' *realistic threat*, Zarqawi complements his arguments by establishing *symbolic threat*. At this stage, there exists a remark that supports our quantitative findings highlighting the prominence of Shias as the main enemy: Zarqawi maintained that "They committed a hideous act . . . by committing blasphemous deeds *which exceeded those of the deeds of this religion's original enemies,* as they tore Qurans apart as well as dozens of important mosques until they proved that they are, indeed, God's enemies."[11] Here Zarqawi clearly distinguishes Shias from the far enemy (*W-C-J*) and puts them in the position of Sunnis' largest enemy before all others. Their *threat* is *symbolic*, yet grievous, clearly by their indication as Islam's biggest enemy. Zarqawi concluded this last statement,

issued a few months before his death, calling Shias, namely one spiritual leader of theirs, Muqtada al-Sadr, to war: "Based on what has been said so far, we have accepted to join the battle against you and your flock of sheep."[12]

8. Conclusions

Iraq, following the invasion of 2003, plunged into a vicious circle of sectarian violence, the aftermath of which is still felt to this day. Within those years the first three were of particular importance as they set the tone for the country's political environment. An overarching sectarian war took hold; one of its key players was Abu Musa'ab Al-Zarqawi.

In this article we sought to shed light on the dialectical relationship between reality and rhetoric, that is to say, on the effects of grievances and fragmentation in aiding terrorist rhetoric. We showed how Zarqawi took advantage of an existing fragmented environment, which was charged with sectarianism and racism, in order to fortify a rhetoric of exclusion and violence. We also showed how the Sunni Arab community's grievances constituted fuel, for Zarqawi, for the purposes of cementing said fragmentation.

With the help of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, we analyzed thirty-seven statements by Zarqawi that permeated his active insurgency in Iraq between 2003 and 2006. In this analysis, we demonstrated the relevance of these two theories in studying the rhetoric of violent extremism: the value of the concept of the *out-group* was evident in the form of taking advantage of existing fragmentations to create a narrative of "us vs. them," while the concept of *threat* was weaponized in the context of existing grievances.

Furthermore, in Zarqawi's process of creating agency and emergency, we found that the occupation forces and its allied Shia-dominated government committed mistakes, as well as transgressions, against Arab Sunni communities, which were quickly and concretely taken advantage of by Zarqawi. Through careful analysis of Zarqawi's statements, we tracked the development of his narrative through time and linked the fulcrum of his rhetoric, wholly as well as within individual statements, to developments which happened on the ground.

A sectarian-based political system only aggravated the existing fragmentations in an already unstable country, while an increasingly Shia-dominated political regime aggravated grievances within the Sunni Arab community. As Shia domination over the political scene, as well as over the security forces, became obvious, Shias gradually became Zarqawi's main target as his rhetoric portrayed them as the most salient of dangers. All this indeed, correlated with one of the country's bloodiest years, and which at the same time, saw the world's highest number of terrorism-related deaths.

This article outlined the fact that terrorism doesn't take place in isolation of its environment; government actions and policies were proven to provide a fertile ground in which terrorism prospers and upon which terrorist rhetoric can be built. The allies' transgressions in Abu Ghraib prison and the Iraqi government's tolerance, if not adoption, of Shia militias such as the Badr Brigade, we proved, were invaluable rhetorical capital for Zarqawi to launch his attacks on the status quo and to call for the murder of Westerners and Iraqis alike. Counterterrorism efforts, subsequently, ought to consider the internal policies and living environments under which communities under threat of radicalization live.

It ought to be clear, by now, the critical importance of paying attention to societal fragmentation and grievances, especially in unstable regions. Zarqawi's case represents a valuable case study of the detrimental consequences of these factors on the security and stability of society. We have seen how historical grievances can pose as open wounds ready for malicious actors to infect and develop into horrific existential threats. This case study is a lesson for policy makers in the crucial significance of carefully studying the history of the communities that they aim to govern and lead; it is a reminder that the present never lives in isolation, that the past matters, and that ignoring the latter may mean that someone else can open the forgotten pages of history and edit them for his own malicious purposes, as Zarqawi did.

The aftermath of Zarqawi's death, leading to the meteoric rise, as well as fall, of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, is a clear indication that Zarqawi's case example is one which is always prone to be reproducible, unless the underlying grievances are tackled and treated, probably by way of true democratic institutions and rule of law. Iraq's example shows how ignoring painful history may very well lead to its recurrence.

Notes

[1]   Access at https://archive.org/details/Abo_mosaab_alzarqawi, accessed on 21 September 2019.

[2]   Data base document titled "The Islamic ruling on the government of Iraq's Karzai".

[3]   Data base document titled "People of Islam seek strength".

[4]   Document tilted "a short word on the video tape of butchering Nicholas Berg" dated 11 May 2004.

[5]   Document tilted "Where are the people of courage?" dated 11 September 2004.

[6]   Document tilted "Letter to the nation and Mujahideen inside Fallujah" dated 12 November 2004.

[7]   Document titled "Thus are messengers tested then the reward is theirs" dated 21 Janaury 2005.

[8]   Document titled "This is a message for people" dated 24 April 2006.

[9]   Document titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid part 3", dated 1 June 2006.

[10] Document titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid part 3", dated 1 June 2006.

[11] Document titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid part 3", dated 1 June 2006.

[12] Document titled "Have you received the talk of Rawafid part 3", dated 1 June 2006.

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Article

Determinants of the Arab Spring Protests in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya: What Have We Learned?

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Abstract: This paper provides empirical evidence on the determinants of protest participation in Arab Spring countries that witnessed major uprisings and in which social unrest was most pronounced. Namely, this paper investigates the latter in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya using a micro-level data survey, the Arab Transformation Survey (2015). The findings of our probit regression analysis reveal that gender, trust in government, corruption concern, and social media usage have influenced the individual's perception of protest activism. We find evidence that the role of economic factors was inconsistent, whereas political grievances were more clearly related to the motive to participate in the uprisings. We then control for country-specific effects whereby results show that citizens in each country showed different characteristics of participation. The findings of this research would set the ground for governments to better assess the health of their societies and be a model of governance in the Middle East.

Keywords: Arab Spring; participation; protesting; probit model

1. Introduction

The political landscape of the Arab states has been significantly shaped by the events of the so-called "Arab Spring". After decades of authoritarianism along with political and civil repression, a sentiment of discontent and disappointment developed throughout the years among Arab residents. The movements began in Tunisia when mass and vicious demonstrations took place against the long dictatorial standards of the tyrant rulers. This inspired other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to undergo similar movements, adopting this activism and making it a powerful tool that matured later in the form local uprisings. Consequently, these riots have reshaped the political in the region (McKay 2011).

Social mobilization is regarded as "conflictual", mainly due to its forms. The protest has been identified as the main foundation of social movements rising the threat of civil wars or conflicts (Porta 2008). The causes of these conflicts are viewed as double-edged. On the one hand, the authorities' inability to meet the continuous demands of citizens has contributed to their grievances (Gurr 1970; Hoadley 1981; Fisher 1990; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). On the other hand, it stems from the state's inability to curb uprisings in a peaceful approach. This results in the state responding with violence, which further entices conflict (Tilly 1978; Mello 2010). Most of the protests in the MENA region were oppressed by brutal measures taken by the state as in Libya and Egypt, while in other cases, appeasement and nonviolent measures were taken, such as in Tunisia.

This paper aims at providing empirical understanding of the determinants contributing to "Arab Spring" uprisings. The paper focuses particularly on the North African countries of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia where revolutions were more prevalent and the timing of such rebellions were almost simultaneous suggesting that these nations share common features in respect to their long-standing leaders, corrupt government and their educated citizen mainly youth who suffered from unemployment (Anderson 2011, p. 3).

Revolutions taken place in Tunisia and Egypt were special in respect to their ability to exploit their leaders, while the case of Libya witnessed much more violence adopted by the government to crackdown on protesters.

The findings of this research would set the ground for governments to better assess the health of their societies and set a model of governance in the Middle East. We use a unique dataset extracted from The Arab Transformation Project, which was carried out in 2015. The study employs participation in any "Arab Spring" protests as the dependent variable. The explanatory variables are classified into eight different sets, and empirical analysis is carried out using a probit regression model, which investigates the determinants of taking part in "Arab Spring" protests.

The remainder of this paper is as follows. Section 2 introduces a summary of related literature in the Arab World. Section 3 defines the data and variables included in our model. Section 4 introduces the empirical model and the methodology used. Section 5 elaborates on our findings. Section 6 provides a summary for our research along with recommendations for further studies, and Section 7 provides policy implications according to our findings.

2. Literature Review

Examining the literature on democratization and political movements provides a basic guide for understanding the reasons behind the power of the street. Various studies highlight the role of socioeconomic and ideological factors in shaping individuals' beliefs and social and political opinions. Moreover, gender is a vital determinant of political participation as previous research has shown that gender is a determining factor in political pariticpation, perception and engagement (Inglehart et al. 2003; Atkeson 2003; Andersen and Jennings 2010). The Arab Spring participants and particularly youth strongly demanded reforms with respect to economic, educational, and employment reforms and faced with little or no response from their respective governments.

The literature also confirms that unemployment is a determining factor in driving individuals to protest, as a natural outcome of economic frustration over dire economic needs and underutilized potential of human capital (Ottaway and Hamzawy 2011, pp. 4–6; Sadiki 2000). Campante and Chor (2012) indicate that citizens in countries that exhibit high levels of unemployment and rapid educational development show higher tendencies to witness protest movements, including the Arab Spring. Such an approach has been confirmed by Paasonen (2020) who explored the role of unemployment in the "Arab Spring" uprisings. His empirical results show that unemployed individuals are more likely to take part in "Arab Spring" uprisings compared to those who are employed. Likewise, Al-Shammari and Willoughby (2019) suggest that unemployment among youth and regime durability are solid indicators of predicting any revolt or uprising that could result in regime change. In contrast, other arguments refute the hypothesis that illustrates a relationship between unemployment and political participation. For instance, Byun and Hollander (2015) show no evidence for the role of unemployment on the level of demonstrations taking place in "Arab Spring" countries. When studying the case of Tunisia, Doherty and Schraeder (2015) find no employment difference in terms of contributing to protests before the downfall of Ben Ali. Similarly, using the principal wave of the "Arab Barometer" survey, unemployment did not explain the participation in "Arab Spring" in either Tunisia or Egypt (Beissinger et al. 2012).

Several studies cite age and education as key drivers of being engaged in demonstrations. For instance, Paasonen (2020) shows that unsurprisingly being younger and more educated increases the probability of taking part in protest movements. History also shows that youth-rich nations are not afraid of revolting, as they have underutilized potential and growing frustration over the status quo. Nations with younger populations experienced three times more civil conflicts than other countries that had an older population in the 1990s (Terrill 2011). Demographically, the MENA region has a population of about 30% between 15 and 29 years, which is relatively high and could be one of the factors that the

region has experienced high levels of violence and conflicts (BBC Trust 2012). Nevertheless, many recent studies confirmed the effect of higher education on political engagement (Henderson and Chatfield 2011; Solis 2013). According to Glaeser et al. (2007), when the economy is struggling to provide the basic opportunities for its youth, the opportunity cost of political commitment tends to be lower including the educated labor, driving all youth have a higher tendency in joining political activism.

Moreover, Aissa (2012) presumes that the expansion in schooling gives rise to a democratic movement. Based on the World Value Survey, Campante and Chor (2014) claim that individuals who obtain a salary with a deficit in their education and biographical attributes reveal more inclination to participate in protests, predicting that educated people who express little trust in their institutions increase the likelihood of their participation in political activities. In other words, when expectations and improvement in education are not met, political violence is more likely to occur (Noland and Pack 2007).

Explanations of the government trust approach are worth noting. Many studies found a link between distrust and protest participation (Jackson 1973; Sears and McConahay 1973; Abravanel and Busch 1975; Citrin 1977) giving insights that protest occurs when people lack trust in their institutions (Muller and Jukam 1977; Muller et al. 1982; Pierce and Converse 1989). Likewise, a low level of trust sets the phase for a violent political protest which can be widely spread to show political instability (Parsons 1963; Coleman 1963, 1970).

Many articles have looked at the role of social media as a catalyst to accelerating social change. Literature on social media draws attention to its vital role in recruiting individuals and mobilizing them through the efficient online coordination of political movements beyond state control (Hussain and Howard 2012; Juris 2012; Diani 2000). Social media is often regarded as a modern resource that enhances communication channels among citizens to call for political demands and express grievances (Pérez 2013), thus resulting in a sense of empowerment, especially to those who are marginalized, to disrupt the monopoly of the authoritarian setting (Radsch and Khamis 2013). It was found that 93 million tweets made by Egyptian women focused on complaints about their states and contributed to the rebellion against the oppression of Mubarak's regime (Ali and Macharia 2013). In this sense, social media became their safe place to discuss their beliefs and speak publicly in times where their culture limited their political engagement (Cattle 2015). Another euphoric aspect of social media is being a useful instrument to spread knowledge, transparency, and raise awareness (Tatarchevskiy 2011; Müller and Hübner 2014), thus facilitating the flow of messages abruptly and impulsively to reach global exposure and support (Alqudsi-Ghabra 2012). Accordingly, the role of social media in politics was viewed as a threat to governments (Lynch 2011). Focusing on specific social media platforms, Lotan et al. (2011) shed light on the role of Facebook and Twitter in the Egyptian context to connect individuals with local and external communities. Interactive practices have been widely linked to the success of the Arab spring revolution, which was also labeled the "Facebook movement" (Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Lim 2012; Juris 2012). Müller and Hübner (2014) confirmed the latter in the Tunisian context.

However, most social scientists were circumspect if not disruptive. Comunello and Anzera (2012) criticize the Internet's role in the democratization process, arguing that individuals cannot solely depend on the Internet without prior knowledge of international relations theory. Other studies concluded that technology was not the reason behind protesting, but rather how technology was present in distinctive circumstances (Anderson 2011; Samin 2012). Byun and Hollander (2015) conducted an experimental design showing no correlation between a high level of internet connectivity and the level of unrest. Hussain and Howard (2012) focused on the Gulf countries; his results confirmed that increased frequency of social media coverage tended to be associated with a low level of protests. Along similar lines, findings of quantitative models lack the presence of a relationship between frequent use of social media and successful revolutions, concluding that social media is not an adequate instrument for protests. (Dewey et al. 2012). Burris (2011) shed light on the "trap" of the liberation technology paradigm through neo-orientalist tendencies

in the context of the Arab Spring uprisings. On another note, The Twitter devolution was claimed by Lynch (2013b) to be harmful to the political landscape in Arab countries.

Additionally, the lack of equality, continuous poverty, and deprivation due to the government's denial led to the eruption of mass protests throughout the Arab world. The relative deprivation theory (Gurr 1970) argues that when individuals feel that their rights are left unrecognized, they may deviate towards social activism to have change. The literature on relative deprivation covered vertical inequalities, however, efforts were made to integrate horizontal inequalities, which bring stronger empirical evidence of validity behind conflicts (Cederman et al. 2011).

This deprivation hypothesis is viably clarified by Tunisian residents when the feeling of disparity and denial drove them to demand a democratic system (Kerson 2011). Basic rights such as freedom of speech, political freedom, and the right to vote have been restricted in Tunisia and other countries, motivating citizens to revolt against the political establishment (Müller and Hübner 2014). Thus, inspired by the nearby demonstrations, Libyan citizens refused to settle down and chose to defend their human rights, especially freedom. Such argument was emphasized by an empirical approach to this issue; results show that inequality is an important factor behind an individual's willingness to protest (Parent and Zouache 2017).

Along with lack of prospects, anger over widespread corruption in the MENA government were driving factors for people to take part in the Arab Spring. Research on firm performance in the MENA region has demonstrated a negative relationship between firms engaging in informal activities and firm performance (Abdo Ahmad and Fakih 2021), which in turn translates into lower unemployment rates, triggering protests (Fakih et al. 2020) and leading to a highly frustrated population. Frustration dominated people when they observed the luxurious lifestyle of the elites while most of the population had to grapple with basic necessities (Salamey 2015). For instance, the elites in Arab countries were spending a fortune of money to indulge in their lavish activities rather than helping their economy from drowning (Ogbonnaya 2013). In the case of Egypt, according to ABC News, President Mubarak and his family were charged with a high, unjustified wealth estimated at USD 70 billion (Kim 2011).

There were many calls for controlling the widespread corruption in the MENA region. Many surveys confirmed the urge for the need to root out corruption in Arab countries. For instance, according to a survey done by YouGovCambridge31 in almost eighteen Arab countries, 260,000 respondents mentioned that the major problem in their country is corruption. The "Arab Spring" was believed to be a natural outcome to people's suffering from poverty and unemployment. However, studies showed that the real reason behind these revolutions was the country being ruled by corrupt and unjust dictators. The intensity of the injustice was unbearable to people which led them to riot into the streets and protest against their suffering (Byun and Hollander 2015).

3. Data and Variables

We use a micro-level dataset extracted from the Arab Transformation Project, which is coordinated by the University of Aberdeen (UK) in collaboration with other partners (Abbott and Teti 2015). It was conducted by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Program. The latter covers six countries in the MENA region and consists of 12,145 Arab citizens. It establishes surveys that analyze the individual's perception about politics, education, social life, economic state, and governance. However, our study is restricted to Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, where we examine the factors that influence the individual's decision to protest.

Our dependent variable is participation in "Arab Spring protests", which is a binary variable that equals one if the respondent participates in any Arab Spring protests and zero otherwise. The explanatory variables are divided into different sets. Basic socioeconomic factors, also known as control factors, are included in the first set. It covers gender, a dummy that equals one if the candidate is male and zero otherwise. It also covers age,

which is defined in years. Additionally, this set covers education, which is captured through two binary variables: (i) No Education, which behaves as a reference variable in our study, and it is equal to one if an individual has an elementary education or below and zero otherwise; (ii) higher education, which equals one if the respondent has a secondary degree and above and zero otherwise. The Employment Status of the respondent also represents another binary variable where being employed takes the value of one, zero otherwise. Finally, the Health Status of the respondents equals one if a respondent claims good health and zero otherwise.

The second set holds Arab Spring factors ranging from Corruption, Authoritarianism, External Interference, Political Freedom, and Economic Problems. The Arab Transformation Survey (2015) asked respondents to identify the most important challenge facing their country and their perception about the reason behind citizens' participation. The set treats these factors as binary, which equals one if the respondent mentioned the above challenges.

The third set contains the Personal Beliefs factors of respondents. It includes the binary variable Social Security which equals one if the respondent feels satisfied with the system of social security and zero otherwise. Similarly, we measure satisfaction with the progress of the economy using a binary variable named Economic Satisfaction. The variable Equality Proponent reflects the tendency to place equality among all by the government, taking a value of one when the respondent believes that their current political system is practicing equality and zero otherwise.

The fourth set takes into account the Confidence in Institutions factors which consider binary variables of Corruption Concern, a variable asking candidates about their opinion of the government's effort in cracking down on corruption. Furthermore, a good extent in rooting out corruption is represented by the value of one, and zero otherwise. Similarly, for the Job Creation variable that equals one if the respondent believes that the government is doing well in creating job opportunities. Finally, the Trust in Government indicator equals one if individual shows trust for the government and zero otherwise.

The fifth set incorporates Poverty measures by comparing a household's income and expenses. The variable is equal to one if individuals' income was not sufficient to cover their expenses and zero otherwise.

The economic factor is covered in the sixth set where respondents evaluate the status of the economy at the current time. The National Economy variable, if equals to one, indicates good evaluation for the national economy and zero otherwise.

The seventh set employs Internet usage as a proxy variable for all forms of social media taking the value of one of the corresponding respondents uses the internet frequently, and zero otherwise.

The last set adds Country Dummies to control for the variation in countries applying Tunisia as a reference country in the empirical regression.

4. Methodology

Given the binary nature of the dependent variable, either the logit or probit method can be utilized. Although they differ in the distribution function, both methods produce similar results. After checking for robustness, the probit model was chosen in this paper using the Arab Transformation (2015) data to investigate the determinants of individual's participation in "Arab Spring" protests.

The explanatory variables mentioned above are expected to exhibit correlation and therefore Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) are used to detect multicollinearity. Given that the average score is below 10 and VIFs show a value less than 5, we conclude that our model shows no problematic correlation between the explanatory variables as can be shown in Table 1. To this end, the model is said to be reliable.

Table 1. Collinearity diagnostics among the explanatory variables.

Variable	VIF	SQRT VIF	Tolerance	R-Squared
Male	1.34	1.16	0.7452	0.2548
Age	1.50	1.23	0.6649	0.3351
Employed	1.34	1.16	0.7488	0.2512
Higher education	1.49	1.22	0.6711	0.3289
Health	3.82	1.95	0.2617	0.7383
Against corruption	1.20	1.10	0.8336	0.1664
External interference	1.03	1.01	0.9731	0.0269
Economic problems	1.40	1.18	0.7134	0.2866
Authoritarian leaders	1.29	1.13	0.7771	0.2229
Political freedom	1.27	1.13	0.7878	0.2122
Equality	4.00	2.00	0.2498	0.7502
Economic satisfaction	1.66	1.29	0.6027	0.3973
Social security	1.33	1.15	0.7538	0.2462
Trust government	1.57	1.25	0.6385	0.3615
Job creation	1.38	1.17	0.7252	0.2748
Corruption concern	1.26	1.12	0.7938	0.2062
Poverty	1.20	1.09	0.8360	0.1640
National economy	1.04	1.02	0.9603	0.0397
Social media	1.41	1.19	0.7069	0.2931

The probit equation is estimated as follows:

$$PART_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 SE_i + \alpha_2 AS_i + \alpha_3 PB_i + \alpha_4 CI_i + \alpha_5 POV + \alpha_6 EC_i + \alpha_7 SM_i + \alpha_8 C_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where $PART_i$ is a binary variable that equals one if the respondent (i) participates in any Arab Spring protests. The other variables (explanatory) represent individuals' characteristics present in the survey's dataset. *SE*, *AS*, *PB*, *CI*, *POV*, *EC*, *SM*, and *C*, stand for Socioeconomic, Arab Spring, Personal Beliefs, Confidence in institution, Poverty, Economic, and Social Media factors, respectively, in addition to the country dummies. The error term which follows a normal distribution is represented by ε_i.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the variables of interest representing some of the characteristics of the respondents. It is shown that 34% of respondents participated in some sort of protests within the Arab Revolutions, 32% of respondents are Egyptian, 39% are Libyan, and 29% are Tunisian. We find that 50% of the candidates are males; the average age of those who were engaged in revolts is 39 years old. We also observe that 37% are employed, 76% obtained higher education, and 41% are highly active on social media platforms. The Arab Transformation Survey (2015) asked respondents to identify the challenges and reasons that they believed citizens participated in their societies, 57% claimed that corruption was the reason, only 6% identified external interference as a cause for protesting, 41% contributed demonstration for economic grievances, 23% believed that people were joining protests to oppose authoritarian leaders, and 22% mentioned that citizens were brought to streets to demand political freedom. When asking respondents about their current political system, 72% stated that there is a good extent in spreading equality, 32% were satisfied with the economic development, and 35% were satisfied with the social security system. Moreover, opinions at the institutional level show that only 30% trust their government, 26% believe that the government is showing a good effort in creating job opportunities, and 44% admit that the government is working on cracking down on corruption. At a personal belief level, 45% mentioned that they are poor since their income level is not enough in covering their expenses. Surprisingly, only 4% believed that the national economy obtains a good status.

Table 2. Summary statistics of variables.

	Mean	**Standard Deviation**
Dependent variable		
Participation	0.34	0.47
Independent variables		
Male	0.50	0.50
Age	39.35	14.20
Employed	0.37	0.48
Higher education	0.76	0.43
Health	0.60	0.49
Against corruption	0.57	0.50
External interference	0.06	0.23
Economic problems	0.41	0.49
Authoritarian leaders	0.23	0.42
Political freedom	0.22	0.41
Equality	0.72	0.45
Economic satisfaction	0.32	0.46
Social security	0.35	0.48
Trust government	0.30	0.46
Job creation	0.26	0.44
Corruption concern	0.44	0.50
Poverty	0.45	0.50
National economy	0.04	0.20
Social media	0.41	0.49
Egypt	0.32	0.47
Libya	0.39	0.49
Tunisia	0.30	0.46
N	3994	

5. Empirical Results

5.1. Main Results

Table 3 interprets the marginal effects resulted from the probit model of the determinants of the protest participation in the Arab Spring. Each column represents one of the specifications described earlier in the data and variables section.

Table 3. Determinants of the decision to participate in Arab spring protests (probit model, marginal effects).

	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**	**(7)**	**(8)**
Socio-economic factors								
Male	0.471 ***	0.468 ***	0.462 ***	0.503 ***	0.528 ***	0.540 ***	0.585 ***	0.706 ***
	(0.064)	(0.065)	(0.084)	(0.090)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.094)	(0.101)
Age	−0.014 ***	−0.014 ***	−0.013 ***	−0.014 ***	−0.014 ***	−0.016 ***	−0.008 **	−0.006 *
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Employed	0.116 *	0.111 *	0.146 *	0.186 **	0.160 *	0.164 *	0.121	0.013
	(0.065)	(0.066)	(0.085)	(0.090)	(0.091)	(0.092)	(0.094)	(0.099)
Higher education	0.518 ***	0.439 ***	0.523 ***	0.484 ***	0.428 ***	0.405 ***	0.225 *	0.044
	(0.074)	(0.076)	(0.103)	(0.112)	(0.117)	(0.118)	(0.124)	(0.132)
Health	−0.120 **	−0.119 **	0.102	0.059	0.170	0.194	0.150	0.301
	(0.056)	(0.058)	(0.171)	(0.175)	(0.179)	(0.182)	(0.186)	(0.198)
Arab Spring factors								
Against corruption		0.342 ***	0.284 **	0.218 **	0.214 **	0.229 **	0.175 *	0.179 *
		(0.064)	(0.084)	(0.090)	(0.092)	(0.093)	(0.096)	(0.100)
External interference		0.153	−0.005	−0.003	0.027	−0.054	−0.046	−0.149
		(0.124)	(0.166)	(0.174)	(0.176)	(0.183)	(0.186)	(0.206)
Economic problems		−0.069	−0.137	−0.148	−0.137	−0.137	−0.113	0.164
		(0.068)	(0.090)	(0.096)	(0.098)	(0.099)	(0.102)	(0.111)
Authoritarian leaders		0.393 ***	0.243 **	0.192 *	0.152	0.171	0.195 *	0.100
		(0.074)	(0.098)	(0.103)	(0.106)	(0.107)	(0.110)	(0.115)
Political freedom		0.432 ***	0.339 ***	0.295 ***	0.277 ***	0.268 **	0.269 **	0.177
		(0.073)	(0.094)	(0.101)	(0.103)	(0.105)	(0.109)	(0.116)
Personal Beliefs factors								

Table 3. *Cont.*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Equality			−0.059	0.089	−0.026	−0.052	0.031	−0.032
			(0.159)	(0.163)	(0.167)	(0.170)	(0.175)	(0.186)
Economic satisfaction			−0.377 ***	−0.111	−0.085	−0.069	−0.043	0.124
			(0.093)	(0.110)	(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.116)	(0.128)
Social security			0.185 **	0.207 ***	0.156	0.145	0.173 *	0.188 *
			(0.085)	(0.093)	(0.095)	(0.097)	(0.099)	(0.105)
Confidence in institutions factors								
Trust government				−0.726 ***	−0.691 ***	−0.690 ***	−0.707 ***	−0.505 ***
				(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.115)	(0.118)	(0.128)
Job creation				0.245 **	0.221 **	0.239 **	0.212 *	0.143
				(0.108)	(0.110)	(0.111)	(0.114)	(0.123)
Corruption concern				−0.284 ***	−0.269 ***	−0.265 ***	−0.208 **	−0.272 ***
				(0.086)	(0.088)	(0.089)	(0.091)	(0.097)
Poverty factors								
Poverty					−0.263 ***	−0.288 ***	−0.151	0.030
					(0.087)	(0.089)	(0.093)	(0.099)
Economic factors								
National economy						0.570 *	0.620 *	0.334
						(0.328)	(0.334)	(0.363)
Social media factors								
Social media							0.763 ***	0.662 ***
							(0.096)	(0.103)
Country Dummy								
Egypt								−0.301 **
								(0.141)
Libya								1.043
								**(0.111)
Constant	−0.555 **	−0.872 ***	−0.910 ***	−0.731 ***	−0.574 **	−0.519 **	−1.112 ***	−1.577 ***
	(0.125)	(0.147)	(0.209)	(0.226)	(0.241)	(0.244)	(0.265)	(0.288)
N	2439	2439	1426	1299	1268	1246	1240	1240

Note: No education category is the reference group for higher education variable. Statistical significance: * 10%, ** 5%, *** 1%; Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

Column 1 presents the Socioeconomic variables, which behave as a control group to our study. Results indicate that gender, age, educational attainments, and health status are related to protest involvement, while employment does not matter. This result seems to be surprising taking into consideration earlier research that acknowledged the role of unemployment behind the so-called "Arab Spring" protest, except in light of the findings of Paasonen, 2020, who addressed the gaps of previous studies mainly in raising the problem of measuring unemployment. In her paper, unemployment was not regarded as a major force instigating individuals towards rebellion. Whilst various sources of conflict exist simultaneously, there is no denying that the dominant source of political problems in the MENA region stems from factionalism in politics. Such subnational challenges to the state have inevitably caused a growing doubt around the state's political legitimacy and could perhaps be the determining factor behind state fragility in the MENA region (Kivimäki 2021).

The findings indicate that males are engaged in demonstration 16% more than females. In addition, age and health status are negatively correlated to protesting, implying that political uprisings are associated with a higher likelihood of protest participation among youth and those who have poor health. Result for education, however, contributed with a higher propensity of protest participation among educated people. These findings are consistent with (Paasonen 2020; Noland and Pack 2007).

Column 2 incorporates Arab Spring factors. Corruption, authoritarianism, and political freedom show statistical evidence in support of the reason behind protest participation. These findings coincide with the narrative that protestors have been triggered by democratic and anticorruption reform ((Müller and Hübner 2014; Byun and Hollander 2015; Aissa 2012).

Column 3 adds personal beliefs variables. Health did not seem to impact an individual's participation anymore. We find significant evidence that individuals who are dissatisfied with the economic development show a greater tendency to engage in protest activism. The continuous poor efforts by the government to boost the economy push individuals to express discontent (Arampatzi et al. 2018). Surprisingly, our finding reveals that people who feel satisfied with the social security system are more likely to participate in protests compared to those who are dissatisfied. This unfamiliar result is consistent with other studies that speak for higher levels of participation among individuals who benefit from social welfare (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Klandermans 1997; Theiss and Kurowska 2019). Ideally, receiving satisfying social welfare empowers them to take part in political activities in the form of political transition; on the contrary, dissatisfied people are helpless in bringing about political change.

Column 4 presents Confidence in Institution factors. Authoritarianism and Satisfaction with the economic development lost their significance behind prioritizing protests whereas employment status showed positive and significant results implying that employed are more likely to have been engaged in rebellions. This suggests that the unemployed might have less interest in politics, which decreases the likelihood of revolt (Paasonen 2020).

We also find that individuals who show no trust in the government are more likely to participate, as concluded by Campante and Chor (2014). Additionally, there is evidence that cracking down on corruption by the government decreases the likelihood to bring people into the streets. This compulsion may be a reasonable result of massive calls to offset the level of corruption. Curiously, respondents who believe that the government is doing good efforts in creating jobs are 8.5% more likely to be involved in protests than those who gave bad evaluations for job opportunities. There is a gap in providing any empirical evidence to approve the link between job creation and increased stability. Developing a typical comprehension of the stability term enables more understanding of the linkage between job creation and stability (Bergh and Zanker 2013).

Column 5, which incorporates poverty measures, shows that 8.7% of those whose income does not cover their expenses are less likely to be inclined in protest than those whose income is sufficient for their needs. We would have expected the relationship to be positive instead of negative, as proved by other studies according to the deprivation theory (Kerson 2011; Parent and Zouache 2017). Our results imply that the political conditions of the MENA region explain the desire to rebel rather than economic distresses. This in turn distinguishes MENA countries from the rest of the world, especially South Asia. Moreover, Social Security and the employment variable became statistically insignificant.

Column 6 introduces the Economic factor: National Economy. We found no statistical relationship between national economy status and protesting. Unlike other studies which claim that the economy is declining due high level of inflation, individuals show more propensity towards protesting (Byun and Hollander 2015).

Column 7 accounts for adding the Social Media factor, obviously some variables such as higher education, corruption, job creation, and poverty flipped their significance. However, we obtain significant results indicating that frequency in using social media increases the probability of joining protests. This emphasizes the role of social media in antigovernment movements (McKay 2011; Chokoshvili 2011).

Lastly, column 8 introduces Country dummies. The results show that gender, trust in government, corruption concern, and social media usage influence protesting decisions for revolts, while other factors display no significance. Results are consistent with the other studies (Andersen and Jennings 2010; Muller et al. 1982; Chokoshvili 2011; McKay 2011).

Compared to Tunisia, Egyptian citizens are 9.4% less likely to participate in protests, whereas Libyan residents are 36% more likely to be engaged in revolutions. A likely explanation for dispersion in participation rate can be due to differences in population size, cultural and societal factors. Of note, our explanatory power increased when moving from column 1 to column 8 as the pseudo R2 increased from 8% to around 30% when proceeding with the model, indicating that our model is an excellent fit when adding all variables.

5.2. Heterogeneous Effects across Countries

Table 4 reports the marginal effects from the probit model of determinants of protest participation across the studied countries. Each column corresponds to specifications discussed earlier across each country separately.

Table 4. Determinants of the decision to participate in Arab Spring by country (marginal effects).

	Egypt	Libya	Tunisia
Socio-economic factors			
Male	0.406 *	0.587 ***	0.917 ***
	(0.239)	(0.176)	(0.165)
Age	0.005	0.002	−0.021 ***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Employed	0.146	0.175	−0.146
	(0.233)	(0.182)	(0.160)
Higher education	0.063	0.098	−0.173
	(0.230)	(0.344)	(0.208)
Health	0.817 **	0.467	−0.456
	(0.395)	(0.367)	(0.348)
Arab Spring factors			
Against corruption	0.453 **	0.401 **	−0.285
	(0.207)	(0.175)	(0.182)
External interference	−0.474	0.216	−0.840
	(0.448)	(0.308)	(0.648)
Economic problems	0.344	0.381	−0.174
	(0.248)	(0.216)	(0.180)
Authoritarian leaders	0.574	0.075	0.015
	(0.328)	(0.184)	(0.189)
Political freedom	0.440	0.414 **	−0.266
	(0.269)	(0.189)	(0.212)
Personal-Belief factors			
Equality	−0.999 ***	0.097	0.595 *
	(0.365)	(0.354)	(0.330)
Economic Satisfaction	0.595 **	−0.198	0.191
	(0.261)	(0.228)	(0.236)
Social security	0.038	0.514 ***	0.033
	(0.219)	(0.191)	(0.187)
Confidence in institution factors			
Trust government	−0.359	−0.814 ***	−0.153
	(0.244)	(0.225)	(0.244)
Job creation	0.096	0.203	0.093
	(0.205)	(0.213)	(0.283)
Corruption concern	−0.329	−0.166	−0.226
	(0.234)	(0.155)	(0.171)
Poverty factors			
Poverty	−0.223	0.010	0.285 *
	(0.206)	(0.184)	(0.168)
Economic factors			
National economy	0.541(0.565)	−0.165(0.511)	
Social media factors			
Social media	0.475 *	0.573 ***	0.954 ***
	(0.261)	(0.156)	(0.192)
Constant	−2.407 ***	−1.341 **	−0.483
	(0.620)	(0.564)	(0.478)
N	422	382	435

Note: No education category is the reference group for higher education variable. Statistical significance: * 10% ** 5% *** 1%; Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

The unconditional marginal effects in Egypt show that those who claim good health are 6.4% more likely to participate in protests than those with poor health. Corruption was shown to be a significant reason for bringing people to the streets. The result is in line with a recent study arguing that corruption brought a wave of dissatisfaction among Egyptians, leading them to protest (Saidin 2018).

Egyptians who mentioned that their current political system is much better at providing equality among individuals are 18.8% less likely to be engaged in protests. Such a conclusion was argued by Acemoglu et al. (2005) through the social equality approach. Thus, suggesting that Egyptians who support and call for the principle of equality tend to fear less political engagement compared to those that are less adherent to this principle (Fakih and Ghazalian 2019). Still, those who are satisfied with how the economy is developing are 6.3% more probable to demonstrate. Though improved economic conditions would lower unemployment, it is more likely to cause a higher degree of insurgencies (Berman et al. 2011).

Hence, the results give us an insight that those who are satisfied with the economic condition would be engaged in revolutions due to their belief that they are the advocates for the country, not the oppressive leaders.

Similar to Egypt, corruption also tends to matter for Libyan protestors in addition to the urge for political freedom; yet Libya shows a gender gap where male shows more tendency towards protesting. In February 2011, protestors raised their call for democratic changes, the rejection of corruption, and against the violation of human rights (Lynch 2013a). The lack of trust in government accounts for higher engagement in protests. It is worth mentioning that those who are better off in social security are more likely to join revolts than those who are dissatisfied. Those who are better off are more likely to protest, not necessarily those who are poor and helpless (Klandermans 2011). Notably, social media had a significant impact on Libyan people towards democracy as 21% of those who use social media show a higher likelihood to protest. Though the Libyan governments tried to limit internet access, which seemed to be a threat to the authoritarian regimes, protestors used Twitter to post and share information (Gire 2017).

For one thing, none of the reasons behind the protest were significant for Tunisia. In addition, revolutionary participants in other countries showed no significant difference in age except in Tunisia, which shows a negative and significant relationship between age and participation, but the magnitude remains very low (0.5%). Being a male and an active user on social media increases the likelihood of participation in demonstrations. Social media was an effective tool impacting the path of Arab spring in Tunisia, which displayed a peak after the self-immolating incident of "Mohammad Bouazizi" whose act had considerable impacts on the Arab world (Hussain and Howard 2012).

6. Conclusions

This paper examines the factors behind participation in the Arab Spring demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Findings for all three countries reveal that set of socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors have established a motivation behind an individual's decision to protest. The willingness to participate in uprisings was shown to be driven by political grievances rather than economic factors. The intention of such a result may reinforce the main determinant for conflict in weak MENA communities, suggesting that aspects of state fragility in MENA seem to be different than other societies in the world (Kivimäki 2021).

We find that the gender gap is significant in the examined sample, lack of trust in government showed to be a significant trigger towards protesting, social media played an essential role in influencing people to take part in protests, and governments' attempts to combat corruption tend to decrease the probability of bringing people into streets. Indeed, each country had its roots for the uprisings; hence, our results show a substantial difference among the studied countries in citizens' pattern toward rebellion. For instance, corruption and inequality seemed to increase the likelihood of protest participation in Egypt. We also find evidence that Egyptians with good health and who are satisfied with the economic development in their countries were engaged in political activism more often than those who are dissatisfied. As for Libyan citizens, males were more probable to join revolts. It was found that corruption, political freedom, lack of trust in government, and social media usage are the main drivers to prompt the protesting mechanism in Libya; however,

satisfaction with the social security played a positive role in influencing people to join revolts. Lastly, Tunisia showed a gender gap difference in protest involvement. Regardless of the low magnitude, youth engagements tend to be significant, and usage of social media was correlated with a higher likelihood for political participation.

To further validate our findings, we can include other countries, increasing our sample size to helps us draw more accurate generalizations. Adding more economic indicators that were unfeasible to us and essential in having a better understanding whether participants were motivated by political change or economic grievances.

To reach a more diversified understanding of the "Arab Spring" and its broader implications requires looking at their margins; hence, the narration of the "Arab Spring" employing a more in-depth approach. Although revolts used the same slogans calling for freedom and the fall of the "regime", considering them as a single revolution indicates a misguided viewpoint given the differences between distinct Arab countries (Ventura 2016, p. 285). Many groups anticipated their movements such as the "Arab Spring" for recognition purposes. On the other hand, terms such as Arab awakening is linked to a "Neo-Orientalist" world-view calling for people's awareness in the Arab world about the West's approach to portraying them as oppressed, under-civilized, and lacking agency, to the idea of "Arab despotism" and the belief that Western philosophical theology is the only path towards modernity, or the "Islamist Winter", which was employed to swing the focus of the social movement to political and security threats (Huber and Kamel 2015, p. 129; Al-Kassimi 2021). In this context, the representation of the events taking place in MENA seems to be generalized and associated with the myth of "Oriental despotism" (Ventura 2016, p. 286). The neo-orientalist approach can be recognized based on how rebellions were gendered by considering how Arab women were seen as victims of oppression and required saving (Al-Kassimi 2021). For instance, Western media deployed a gendered issue out of the uprisings and the continuous calls for women's rights confirm their "Orientalism" (Mahmood 2006; Abu-Lughod 2013; Abbas 2014; Ventura 2016, p. 291). Moreover, to state that all Arab are Muslims represents a neo-Orientalist myth (Mahmood 2006; Abu-Lughod 2013; Abbas 2014). The participation of women in the protest challenges the neo-orientalist approach whereby a broad range of females were involved in the protests. Whether on the ground or their heavily online presence on social media platforms, such as Leila-Zahra, Esraa Abdel-Fattah, and Lina Ben Mhenne, they played a major role as activists in women empowerment agenda. Such a deterministic frame necessitates a deeper recognition and deconstruction (Khalid 2015, p. 163). Of note, Western modernity has refuted the ideology of Arab women as being rational and competent authors of their political lives by limiting the intricacy of Arab cultural heterogeneity across the Mashreq and Maghreb (Al-Kassimi 2021, p. 26).

7. Policy Implications

Understanding the factors that gave rise to the uprising helps to better assess the health of our society and to provide guidance for strategies ensuring political stability. Governments shall rely on two main pillars to build citizenship and minimize the risk of political instability. The first pillar is forming an anticorruption ecosystem by taking solid and firm actions to fight the existing corruption. Some measures include restructuring the judicial system to avoid bribes and irregular payments, investigating and penalizing those involved in corrupt acts within the public administration, and seizing assets where wealth cannot be explained, subject to judicial oversight (Morgan 1998). The second pillar is building transparency and trust between citizens and the government. Though efforts to earn public trust are limited, transparency is assumed to be crucial (Kettl 2017). A vital prerequisite for that is creating portals where government spending is published regularly allowing citizens to track all the ongoing projects and initiatives. It is worth noting that governments can adopt social media to provide complementary information broadcasting, communication, and participation channels whereby citizens can access government services and also government officials be able to make more informed decisions. Countries

can also put citizens at the heart of policy making by offering them the opportunity to shape legislation in areas that they care most about by voting on policy proposals. Transparent, unbiased, and inclusive policy making helps in improving democratic performance (Shah 2007).

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Article

The (Semi) State's Fragility: Hamas, Clannism, and Legitimacy

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Abstract: This article shall ask how Hamas, as a non-state actor, negotiated legitimacy with the clans in a fragmented and factionalized tribal society in the Gaza Strip from 2007–2011. An important factor that shapes the extent of power of rebels and non-state actors in limited statehood areas (LSA) pertains to the negotiation of power these rebels develop with clans in certain areas or times. Rebel governance is a complex and multidimensional concept shaped by the pre-existing particularity of the rebel, its identity, level of factionalism, the former structure of administration, and the extant political institutions. This paper will discuss Hamas as a contemporary case of rebel governance in war and post-war times, which has resulted in a special case of fragile governance. Based on ethnographic research on Hamas and insights from political theories of identity and governance, this paper suggest that tribal factionalism led to violence and played a major role in shaping the governance structure and mechanisms through political affiliation, informal judicial mechanisms, and as a part of the social network which resists government authority. This paper shall propose that Hamas used two paths of negotiations with clans: a coercive power (violent), and by mobilizing individuals of these clans and families as part of the informal judicial system (*U'rf*). This research aims to contribute to the understanding of rebel governance in general, and Hamas in particular, showing how struggle over legitimacy is shaped and negotiated, and why Hamas could be considered a special case in the study of rebel governance.

Keywords: factionalism; rebel governance; Hamas; Gaza; Palestine; informal institutions

1. Introduction

We did not expect that. Public administration of the Gaza Strip is extremely difficult. We are walking on the edge of a knife. We are a resistance movement but also a government. We were caught from the beginning between the fire of clans, and the siege of Ramallah and the occupation.[1]

This article analyzes the negotiation process of power and legitimacy between Hamas and clans within the Palestinian community in Gaza in a time of fragility and uncertainty. Understanding this complex and dynamic relationship between clans and rebels, specifically in the case of Gaza, is vital to understand how and what brings order in society under the rebels' rule. It is similarly important as the internal dynamics further affect the external strategies when dealing with rebels and the communities under their control.

In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the overlapping loyalties, factionalism, and the former authorities' reliance on informal institutions (managed by the clans), have created an invisible sense of competition between tribes and a governing structure which is fragile. This not to say that there is a strong competition in the form of a prolonged and continuous fight, but rather a silent struggle which provides tribesmen with privileges and resources, determining who legitimizes whom. Therefore, tribes were, and are still, competitors to Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip, particularly within the judicial system and in their capacity to influence Hamas members from powerful tribes and the wider society.

While there are many who have examined rebel governance and how rebels and non-state actors interact with local communities, their research has primarily focused on

the ways in which states and international organizations negotiate power and authority with the rebels so as to ensure order (Hurd 2008; Clark 2008; Arjona et al. 2015; Arjona 2014). Contrary to the academic orthodoxies that associate rebels with warlordism in general, as well as with non-state actors in the MENA, rebels often rely upon local legitimacy within their societies; in fact, authors of many studies have shown that Hamas has established a professional and well-institutionalized security force (Brenner 2016; Sayigh 2011).

This paper shall provide empirical and theoretical findings on rebel governance and non-state actors' governance, contributing to the emerging field of study on rebel governance in general and the Middle East in particular. The driving question is how Hamas negotiated legitimacy in fragile semi-statehood/limited statehood area with clans in the Gaza Strip. The words clans and tribes will be used interchangeably; however, clans here refer to extended families carrying the same name, while tribes can be a coalition of clans based on blood, or intermarriage or historical ties. As this Special Issue focuses on state fragility, conflict and grievances, this article examines how one main pillar that led to state fragility concerns Hamas as a rebel group: a lack of having legitimacy (Kivimäki 2021). This paper shall draw upon the political sociology theory of identity, primary sources data from the author's extensive observations, and ethnographic research on Hamas and its administration in the Gaza Strip, as well as more than two dozen interviews from the Gaza Strip, among them with Hamas's activists, members of the Qassam, academics, Hamas police officers, civil society organizations, professionals, and clan leaders. I suggest that the relationship between Hamas clans is not based on social services provision alone, as many have suggested, but more importantly on a lengthy negotiation process using coercive and non-coercive strategies. I will also suggest that the factionalism and fragility of formal institutions has led to violence whenever rebels or non-state actors assume power. In other words, the legitimacy of Hamas and its government comes from diverse sources that range from service provision, Islamic identity, coercion, reform, anti-corruption, and struggle against the occupation.

To present these findings, in this article I will first explain clannism in Palestine, and the clans in the political life from the first Intifada and the establishment of the PA, until Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007; serving to illustrate clannism and how it has been used as a tool to create loyalists and manipulate society, thus maintaining order. Next, I shall explore the relevant literature on rebel governance, order, and legitimacy. In the latter sections, I focus on how Hamas used coercive power and an informal judicial system (*Lijan Islah*) to gain legitimacy within the clans. The two main cases I have studied are those of the Helles clan from Shejaia and the Dougmoush clan from Sabra area, both selected as they represented the most powerful families in the Gaza Strip with political affiliation to Fatah.

Clans are a crucial element of Palestinian society, where they are considered essential for social cohesion and solidarity, as well as a seat of power with which political parties seek to engage. In the Gaza Strip, clans form a network of power, particularly in the absence of formal institutions, and a fragile political system. When the Palestinian Authority was established by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat formed a separate department, the Clans Affairs Commission, affiliated with his office, to keep clans' loyalty. Arafat, the chairman of the PLO, rewarded many tribal leaders with various positions while dividing other clans to keep them under his control (Alijla 2013).

> According to Mustafa Ibrahim, a Palestinian journalist and human rights activist, "The Palestinian Authority strengthened the role of the clans and their authority. It provided them with the legitimacy and a capacity to meet, organize, and even interfere in policy-making, which should only go through constitutional legal authorities such as the parliament". (Mustafa 2019)

In that sense, the fragmentation and fractionalization of the clans led on the long run to the fragility of the whole semi-statehood of the PA.

Although clans had stronger power and authority before 2000, they had more during the second Intifada because of the loss of wages for thousands of Palestinian workers in

Israel along with the Israeli strategy concerning the weakening of formal institutions of the Palestinian Authority, and the fragmentation of the Palestinian political system. This caused people to turn away from the police in order to seek conflict resolution from clans (Sayigh 2011, pp. 75–83), who further provided a social welfare network for laborers who lost their jobs. As the formal institutions and security apparatuses weakened, many clans overlapped with criminal groups. In Shejaia, a member of a famous clan killed a member of a smaller clan in front of the police station. The police could not act, and the judicial system could not find a witness, as hundreds feared for their lives if they provided testimony[2].

Clannism and its manifestations continued as a competitor to the Palestinian Authority and its security forces, with many Palestinian security leaders employing bodyguards from strong clans, providing these families with weapons and (il)legal protection. After Hamas assumed power, the clans continued to present a challenge, echoing Fatah's inability to confront and extinguish clan violence, and that this "was not an option for Hamas at all".[3] In contrast to Fatah, Hamas was more successful in dealing with clans, ending their abilities to lawlessly use violence in the society. In special operations, Izzedin Al Qassam brigades continued to provide support to Hamas's security forces when needed, particularly against clans in Shejaia, Sabra, and Khan Younes. Indeed, one of the major successes of Hamas security forces and its governance structure since 2007 has been its strategy of response to clans and extended clan structures in Gaza (Sayigh 2011, pp. 62–67). However, that resulted in there being no single authority in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, leaving it with weakened legitimacy and a fragile capacity to create order.

This article contributes to the literature on factionalism and its problems for governance, especially in the cases of limited statehood areas or rebel governance. As far as the author is aware, there have not been such studies focusing on factionalism within the rebel governance literature. Besides that, this research provides empirical evidence that many existing political science studies (such as on the conflict in intrastate theory) can be applied to the cases of rebel governance or limited statehood areas.

This research uses the process-tracing method and historical narrative. It is the best method to capture the historical narrative in a very complex area and within the context of rebel governance and legitimacy theories. The aim is to capture a causal mechanism and explain the decision process within the negotiation process within the problem of legitimacy (Falleti 2006). The research used a snowball mechanism with interviewees, meaning they introduced the author to others within their network, confirming the historical narrative of the same story from several sources and from the news outlets, archives, and personal observations of the author during that time in the Gaza Strip.

This paper starts by examining the concepts of rebel governance, order, and legitimacy in the case of Hamas. The next section discusses the case of security chaos and clannism in Gaza society before 2007. The third section provides insight on the use of violence against clans and how Hamas tried to acquire legitimacy using coercive power, while the last section examines how Hamas used informal institutions in a fragile and fragmented society to acquire legitimacy.

2. Rebel Governance, Order, and Legitimacy

Rebel governance as a field of study has recently emerged with a focus on non-state actors in civil war and limited statehood areas. Many of these studies focus on the issues related to the violence of non-state actors, such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hamas in Gaza, and Hizballah in Lebanon, while ignoring an important aspect of the life of these groups or externally identified rebels, particularly their acquisition of legitimacy and how they negotiate this with their surrounding environment. However, there are other studies that focus on legitimacy, but in general with no focus on the Middle East (Heydemann 2018; Al-Jabassini 2019; Florea 2020; Gilbert 2020; Furlan 2020).

Rebel governance can be defined as the mechanism by which order is created in an identified geographical area, under the control of a specific rebel group (or a number of

rebel groups), enabling it to govern and meet its own goals, practice its authority, and create a form of order with direct or indirect negotiable legitimacy (Worrall 2017, p. 711).

The above definition has two important factors: the creation of order and meeting goals. Examining the order and goals of Hamas as a rebel group after 2007 will show how its rule depends upon order. The challenge for Hamas was to create order amid factionalized and fragmented parts of the society. Therefore, the creation and negotiation of this order, through both formal/informal mechanisms and violent/non-violent tools, will revolve around Hamas's acquired legitimacy. Legitimacy, in this case, is "the generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman 1995).

Rebels are part of the process of order, but they are not alone, as there is the society, norms, values, and beliefs. Therefore rebels (Hamas too) are not in complete control of order; there is a need for them to be in contact, negotiation, and interaction with many ordering forces. As part of the ordering process (imposing order) in Gaza, Hamas has been forced to interact with a range of forces at all levels. Locally it must deal with clans, political parties, extremist groups, armed militias, civil society organizations, and youth initiatives, and on a national level, with Fatah, the Palestinian Authority, and its different sets of departments and ministries, while regionally and internationally, it is faced with Israel, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey, the UN, and other international organizations.

Since 2011, there have been three waves of protests erupt in the Gaza Strip. These protests were led by youths who were not satisfied by the status quo of political division, and the worsening living conditions in the Gaza Strip, particularly the lack of access to electricity, water, and employment. These protests were named "*Bidna Na'eesh*", which means "we want to live", and "*Bikaffi*" which means "enough is enough" (Manasra 2019; Yaghi 2019; Al-Ain 2019). The waves of protests were a manifestation of Hamas's failure as a rebel group to meet the needs of youth who constituted more than 40% of the whole population. Hamas's de facto police have used extensive force and violence against youths and participants in these protests.

These protests, and Hamas's subsequent reaction, raised questions about the legitimacy of Hamas as a rebel group and its governance structure. The well-known writer Majed Kayali argued, "It seems that Hamas has exploited the democratic elections to assume power; meaning, democracy for one time, one vote" (Kayali 2019). In this article, I argue that Hamas as a rebel group has negotiated legitimacy and order in society in a dynamic way, shifting and evolving through time and circumstances. I also argue that fragmentation and factionalization/politicization of the clans in Palestine could lead to more violence.

When Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, its legitimacy was questioned both locally and internationally. In the eyes of its members, sympathizers, and even legal experts, Hamas's government was the legitimate ruler. Hamas's presence and ending of the security chaos was wanted and welcomed. The questioning of legitimacy is explained by two factors. First, the way in which Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, where a paramilitia, rather than a formal part of the Palestinian Authority, took power and ousted the Palestinian Authority forces, and second, whether the legitimacy of Hamas's government was considered legal under basic Palestinian law.

As Hamas won the elections and Ismael Haniya was the prime minister, his dismissal by Abbas in June 2007 should have afforded him the opportunity to lead a caretaker government until a new government could be formed and a confidence vote in the PLC ensued. However, Abbas announced a state of emergency, dismissed Haniya's government and appointed Salam Fayyad as the new prime minister. The Arab and international community recognized Fayyad's government as the legitimate one, while internally, Hamas's government and its legitimacy was disputed among all ranks of society. Based on the above argument, Hamas did not declare itself as a rebel group but as legitimate, dubbing itself "the resistance government".

A determinant that supports the argument of Hamas as a rebel group in the Gaza Strip is the absence of accountability mechanisms. There is a complete absence of institutions that can hold Hamas and its individuals accountable for the use of violence, extrajudicial executions, torture, financial assets, the budget, tax, and elections, among many other institutional state functions.

Hamas has inherited a structure of governance that is deeply penetrated by the informal institutions of cultural and societal norms; in many cases, such as the judicial system (*Muslaha*), these informal institutions have surpassed the more formal fragile establishments. In such cases, the capabilities of Hamas's governance to order and reorder is limited and coercive, shaped and affected by the extant factors and forces. Therefore, Hamas has been successfully negotiating its legitimacy and authority over the Gaza Strip, both regionally and internationally, securing itself as the de facto ruler; thus, succeeding in structuring order in society according to its vision and objectives. As the article reveals later, the fractionalization of the society and fragmentation of the judicial and security system leads to political violence.

One of the main challenges of Hamas after 2007 was to restore order. Indeed, as one of its senior leaders argued:

> When we took over the Gaza Strip, social order was our main target. We wanted to do that job. We have been advocating for that in elections, mosques, streets, and *Diwans*, and we wanted to deliver social order and end *Al-Falatan Al-Alamni*.[4]

Order is not just a political tool through which a rebel state may exercise its coercion or authority; it can further impact economic relations (Migdal 1988), shared norms (Worrall 2017), or even the institutions of any given society. In this paper, I see order as a set of overlapping economic, societal, and shared norms which form the structure of the whole society. In Gaza, the clans have their own moral code which influences the wider structure of order in the society, affecting economic relations, social life, and political order.

In the wake of the 2007 takeover, Hamas used excessive violence against two main components of the structure, namely the previous Fatah-dominated institutions and the familial/tribal structure of clans, to deconstruct their authority. Although violence is an exceptional tool, it can also be an integral part of the process of establishing cultural order (Worrall 2017). Hamas used indiscriminate violence at the beginning of its de facto rule, but after restructuring, developing a set of rules, and ensuring a higher level of professionalism (including the separation of the *Izzedin Al Qassam* from the civil police), it started to use discriminative and calculated violence, predominantly against clans and Islamist extremists (Sayigh 2011).

By violence, I mean the authoritarian practices of illegal and arbitrary imprisonment and torture, rather extreme violence that results in severe causalities and causes fractures within the social fabric. In this sense, the violence used by Hamas was targeting individuals and groups of individuals (clans, for instance) in order to shape their behavior in submitting to Hamas as the singular ruler, or to take control of a particular area (Kalyvas 2006) and thus eliminate no-go zones for the Hamas police (Sayigh 2011). However, the dilemma that many would argue faced Hamas would be that such violence has to be undertaken in accordance with the local practices in order to be effective.

Hamas has worked in two different ways to make the use of violence practicable; the first is avoiding using military officers and fighters to act in their own living areas, avoiding tribal clashes and future revenge (to maintain social order as far as possible); and the second is mobilizing members of large *Hamula*/clans to become members of Hamas and act as mediators between their clan and the de facto government. In Shejaia, Hamas brought Jabalia's police and Izzedin Al Qassam fighters of Northern Gaza to act against the Helles clan. Concurrently, they mobilized members of the Helles tribe to negotiate the surrender of their clan and end the conflict. This was partially successful but did not stop Hamas from using extreme violence, killing more than a dozen members of the clan (AbedRabo 2008).

According to a Hamas police officer who worked in Gaza in 2008, with the minister Saed Siyam,

> We had to act; we were forced to use violence and restore order. But I can tell you that we were afraid of the social response. So we decided to bring police and Qassam from the north to avoid future killings and revenge in the same neighborhood, especially in Shejaia. At the same time, we asked Hamas members from the same clan to act, convince their clan to surrender and hand over the wanted individuals. At the end, we were forced to also attack and kill, as they [the Helles clan] were targeting us too. We had no choice but to use calculated violence.[5]

Order in Gaza under Hamas simultaneously developed in two ways. The first was the lack of mass protesting against Hamas's de facto rule, interpreted as the recognition of it (Hamas) as the legitimate ruler, thus exchanging civilian freedom and rights for the provision of security and services. In such a way, Hamas was able to use coercive power. The second was using mosques, meaning the internalization of norms and values which produce order. In the second mechanism, Hamas operates in Gaza through its members who are locals and have been connecting, mobilizing, and building social networks through mosques and social welfare organizations. Post-2007, it had an inbuilt socialization mechanism which allowed it (Hamas) to use coercive power to bring order and ensure legitimacy when needed.

When Hamas exercised its power, it recognized legitimacy as a crucial element to bring order. To gain legitimacy, Hamas linked local ordering (imposing order by Hamas through understanding the local fabric of the society) practices and the newly built structure of governance to ensure that it derived strength from these practices (such as the *Lijan Islah* of clans), and further challenged opponents who used these processes to undermine Hamas's legitimacy. Indeed, Hamas built its legitimacy in different forms and across different intervals (times) based on the circumstances—the provision of services, the struggle against the occupation (Zionist enemy in their terms), and its willingness to share power with Fatah—as well as moral legitimacy, such as the use of "goodness", anti-corruption, a reform agenda, and Islam as an identity. As a senior Hamas leader argued:

> Our legitimacy is derived from the people themselves. From mosques, from families, from people who we serve in our schools and clinics. We have given a lot and we proved that we are not corrupt like Fatah. But the main legitimacy comes from our sacrifices and resistance against the enemy [Israel].[6]

After 2007, Hamas worked hard to maintain its legitimacy using a combination of these strategies, aware that any diminishing of its legitimacy would affect the ability to govern properly. After 2014, Hamas's legitimacy started to be questioned following severe corruption within its ranks and the diminishing capacity to provide services and secure order as clans clashed and unrest started to increase. Hamas subsequently imposed high taxes which led to an increase in basic goods prices, causing people to challenge its capacity to maintain order. Therefore, many youth-led groups took to the street protesting Hamas's inability to administer properly, calling for reconciliation with Fatah and using cries such as "*Biddna Ine'sh*", which means "we want to live". This was met with an iron fist and the arrest and torture of hundreds of youths (DW 2019; BBC 2019).

3. *Al-Falatan Al Amni* and the Troubling Clannism

Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) election in January 2006. Hamas's manifesto in the election campaign was "Change and Reform", which used the widespread corruption and the damaged reputation of the Palestinian Authority led by Fatah as a strategy to gain traction among the Palestinians (Milton-Edwards 2007). Hamas's success in the elections paved the way for it to assume power for the first time. Ismael Haniya, Hamas's then leader, was nominated to form the government and in his first media statement, he asserted that his government would work with no delay to end "*Al-Falatan Al*

Amni", meaning the security chaos which Gaza had suffered for many years (Aljazeera 2007).

Hamas's government had not only an internal challenge but also enormous international and regional obstacles ahead. The economic and political sanctions imposed upon Hamas resulted in fractionalization within both Palestinian political institutions and society. The challenges were not only political but also financial, as public sector employees did not receive salaries due to the siege. Hamas was unable to secure enough budget funds to cover operational and bureaucratic expenses as well as the salaries of the employees who were mostly affiliated with Fatah. According to a senior Hamas activist,

> We had many challenges, inside Gaza and outside. We felt everyone was trying to stop us from doing anything. We decided to work simultaneously on both sides [internal and external] with very limited resources and trying to make the government work.[7]

However, Hamas was mostly focusing on the internal issues because it was suspicious of Fatah's next move. As soon as Hamas won the elections, Fatah leaders warned Fatah-affiliated government employees against cooperating with Hamas (Watan 2016). These obstructive efforts, along with the denunciation of the electoral defeat, manifested in Fatah-affiliate rejection of following the instructions of Hamas ministers, particularly within the security apparatus, presenting Hamas with the urgent challenge of security chaos. Since the start of the second Intifada, many of Fatah's leaders, such as the head of the Military Police apparatus, had adopted a policy of mobilizing individual members of big clans as mechanisms of protection and influence. Fatah's provision of power, weapons, and societal connections to members of big clans constituted an overlap between clans, criminal groups, and the security apparatus. As a result, two parallel fragile institutions were created; one loyal to Hamas and another to Fatah, which eventually led to violence.

According to a Hamas security officer,

> Before Hamas won the elections and formed the government, we knew that Fatah had its security apparatus of criminals and criminal networks from big families. Many of Fatah's leaders used them as a tool to act against their rivals in Fatah and Hamas too. For example, S. B. was a member of the Death Unit of the Preventive Security, which killed many Hamas members but also insulted the chief commander of the police.[8]

In 2004, the Death Unit established by one of Fatah's leaders, Mohamed Dahlan, stormed the headquarter of the Palestinian Police in West Gaza, attacking and insulting (by putting his head in the toilet) the chief commander of the Police, Gazi Al Jabali, as a response to his efforts to end the security chaos. Many have called the act a competition between security lords (heads of security) to prove who held power. Indeed, Al Jabali had no kind of clan protection as he was one of the Palestinian leaders who returned with Yasser Arafat in 1993, named by many Palestinians as "Al'Aedeen" (Osama 2004). This kind of behavior was widespread among the Palestinian leadership.

Hamas did appreciate the value of members of powerful families, particularly those with criminal records and who were willing to repent. These individuals were targeted by the "Da'wa" branch of Hamas, which invited them to "return to God" and work with them as an Islamic movement for redemption. The use of Islam and Islamic teaching was not an arbitrary move to mobilize former criminals, rather a well-calculated step to strengthen Hamas's military and violent actions against its rival Fatah when needed. The authority of extended families was so powerful that it affected the decision-making of the judicial system as well as the security apparatus. In many cases, the *Diwan* of a clan could hold more power than the headquarters of the police or a security agency. According to a senior Hamas activist,

> The idea that we needed clan support began in early 2004. It was the beginning of us having strength and being able to breathe after a decade of oppression. So, there was an indirect decision to recruit and mobilize members from powerful

families, who also have active and senior members within the PA and its security apparatus.[9]

4. The Iron Fist: Hamas's Coercive Power

The creation of order is a complex process that interconnects and varies depending upon the situation, actors, and the different authorities that exist in society. When a rebel group tries to create order in society after taking over a territory, it finds other competitors. Those competitors leave the comfort zone of not being in power in a fragmented society and start to compete with others such as rebels and already existing political and socioeconomic structures, as well as the norms and traditions of society. In cases where tribalism and clans exist, the authority and legitimacy of Hamas was questioned by these actors, as many of them were affiliated with other political groups; thus, it was necessary for Hamas to use coercive power and authority to impose its sociopolitical order in the early days. The tribal factionalism created a competitor to the formal and fragile political system, which was unable to control it violently. However, the semi-state or quasi-state security apparatus of Hamas was new on the scene and wanted to prove itself. Although Hamas had built a network with clans, it was able, and indeed forced, to use its violent capacities in many areas across the Gaza Strip. In the early days of Hamas in power, it faced groups such as gangs and previous disreputable members of Fatah security with links to drugs and torture. Hamas's Izzedin Al Qassam used its extensive and extreme violence against clans. According to a senior Hamas security officer,

> When we took over the Gaza Strip, we knew that there would be resistance from local groups, political parties, and most importantly from clans in areas such as Shejaia, which is famous for strong and extended families with powerful authority and weapons.[10]

To achieve their goals, rebels need to engage with the civilian population to exercise their control and gain legitimacy, as they will not be imposing their authority in a vacuum. We understand Hamas as a rebel/non-state actor in a broader spectrum along with other actors in society, particularly clans. In other words, the moves and actions of other groups provided constraints and opportunities for Hamas to react and interact to achieve its goals and exercise its coercive power. After June 2007, Hamas took no actions but rather waited in what Richards called a state of "no peace–no war", where no dichotomous conflict or peace exists (Richards 2004).

The use of violence was flexible and in a continuous process of negotiation with the different societal actors; therefore, there was a need to maintain the idea of using the violence against clans as a tool to meet the threats that endangered the order Hamas was trying to impose. As Hamas moved forward and started to be a service provider, the idea of negotiation and using both coercive power and soft tools was increasing (Heger and Jung 2017). However, as the governance of Hamas was not clear and not stable, these negotiations were also not stable. As traditional authorities who own the ethical codes in Gazan society, clans needed to negotiate and engage with Hamas as a rebel group and the governing body in the Gaza Strip, which had newly acquired the authority of violence. As one *Mukhtar* and clan leader told me,

> When Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, we were in the *Diwan*, and all were talking about it. There was a feeling that they wanted to take our weapons and revenge on our sons who worked in the security and were part of Fatah. However, some of us took the initiative and invited one Hamas leader to the *Diwan* and told them that we would try to keep the order and continue to work on *Islah* [reconciliation]. We did not want any confrontation with them as we knew they were waiting on any mistake to crush us.[11]

Crushing traditional internally embedded norms and informal institutions such as the clan was an option, especially after Hamas was able to take over the territory and begin to establish its form of order. The use of violence was not the only tool on Hamas's table;

clans were still the linchpin that holds the network of informal institutions in place. The emergence of clans goes back to the traditional culture in Palestine, during the British mandate and later the Israeli settler colonialism, while in the second Intifada and the aftermath of weakened formal institutions, and during the political fragmentation, the role of clans took on a greater importance than before. As in most Arabic countries and communities, regimes and authoritarianism build on vertical chains of kinship ties, consciously exploited by the rulers (Sharabi 1988); Hamas, as with its rival Fatah, is no exception. It needed clans and needed to gain the clans' legitimacy, not least to avoid breaking the rules of the transitional norms with a violent confrontation from the start.

A senior Hamas and community leader confirmed that, arguing,

> Hamas knows that clans are important in the society. They are part of the social fabric, and without them, the society will break down. But at the same time, we needed to limit their power and authority and put an end to the powerful families, and their weapons, who used violence against smaller families. At the same time we needed to be legitimate in their eyes.[12]

In an interview, Khalil Abu Shamala, director of the Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights in Gaza, stated, "any takeover or molding of this [tribal] system will most certainly affect the core of social relations in Gaza, especially when we take into consideration Hamas's increasing Islamization of the law" (Cunningham 2010). This was confirmed by a Fatah leader in Gaza who agreed that Hamas sought to negotiate power and legitimacy from the first day of taking over the Gaza Strip.

> We received the deputy head of the Al Qassam at our house. He met with a Fatah leader and the elders. As both the biggest clan in the area and considered one of the most affiliated with Fatah, they asked the most senior Fatah leader to take the lead and participate in [power sharing]. He refused the offer, but a Hamas military leader asked if the clan could take a side and not make troubles in the coming months, and they will be imposing new order.[13]

Clearly, Hamas knew that violence had limits in a factionalized and fragmented society, so it needed to use other means, and to immediately begin renegotiating its power and legitimacy with the clans rather than wait until the formation of the new order. Initially, Hamas used violence to contain and control its rivals (Fatah), and then a critical issue emerged in the negotiation of power within Hamas as an authority: there was an internal discussion on whether to strip powerful families of their weapons or adopt the strategy of wait and see. Many hardliners, such as Mamhoud Al-Zahar, were in favor of the strategy of "*Kasr Anf*", meaning to "break their nose" as a metaphor to make clans surrender and break their pride as powerful families. Other senior leaders, particularly from the Izzedin Al Qassam, were against this strategy in the first days. They feared that many members of the military wing would not be happy with this strategy, and Hamas would lose more than it gained.

The use of violence and coercion is high in such a case and lasts as long as the coercion is effectively applied, but seeking sustainable legitimacy is more appealing than the use of violence. This was evident when the Hamas police and its Executive Force, established to be under the full control of Hamas's Minister of the Interior during the first government, avoided extensive clashes with the Al-Masri clan in Beit Hanoun, Northern Gaza, after the death of one of its members who worked at the Palestinian Intelligence Agency. The Al-Masri clan, known to be affiliated with Fatah, killed a member of the Al-Kafarna clan who worked for the Executive Force of Hamas (Addustor 2007). Similarly, when Hamas tried to disarm and seize governmental cars owned by some families in Shejaia, Northern Gaza, Khan Younes, and Rafah, military clashes erupted, forcing Hamas to pull back and not confront clans at that stage (Alittihad 2007).

Interestingly, the process and negotiations were different in the Sabra area when the Dougmoush clan turned to global Jihadism. Many members of this clan are also part of *Jaish Al-Islam* (Army of Islam) and previously collaborated with Hamas in military operations

against Israelis, including the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. In August 2006, *Jaish Al-Islam* kidnapped two Fox News journalists, Steve Centanni and Olaf Wiig, holding them in the Dougmoush clan area (ABC 2006). Embarrassingly for the Hamas government, the PA paid money for *Jaish Al-Islam* to release the two journalists after they (symbolically) converted to Islam. In December 2006, two members of the Dougmoush clan were shot dead by Hamas's affiliate clan, the Al-Deiry. In response, the Dougmoush clan killed three members of the Al-Deiry clan who were senior militants of Gaza and close to Hamas hardliner Mahmoud Al Zahar (PalInfo 2007). These clashes and criminal acts deepened the fragmentation among clans in Palestinian society and strengthened the attachment of tribes to political parties, leading to a higher level of factionalism.

On 12 March 2007, *Jaish Al-Islam* kidnapped the British journalist Alan Johnson. Although they demanded the release of international terrorists, their real demands were millions of US dollars and the release of ten members of the Dougmoush clan. This was a challenge to Hamas, Hamas's unity government, and the PA. In previous cases, Fatah and the PA paid the ransom, but this time, they warned Hamas to face this challenge alone (Lafi 2007; Al-akhbar 2007).

When Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in June, *Jaish Al-Islam* and the Dougmoush clan started to open channels for negotiations. Alan Johnson's release would be an event that could provide international legitimacy for Hamas as a governing body, which could, in turn, provide security. As a result, it formed a committee of religious scholars to rule and issue a joint Fatwa to end the conflict and release Johnson. According to a journalist who followed the issue closely,

> Hamas wanted international legitimacy and at the same time wanted to non-violently neutralize the Dougmoush clan and *Jaish Al-Islam*. The only solution was to use Islamic Sharia as a means to achieve that. Mumtaz Dougmoush [Leader of *Jaish Al-Islam*] was more into solving it peacefully as he knew that no one would support him if Hamas decided to eliminate him.[14]

This account was confirmed by a senior Hamas leader,

> There was one option: negotiations. First to avoid clashes with *Jaish Al-Islam*, as then we would be faced by a wave of criticism from our own members, questioning how we could kill an Islamic group member. Second, because we [Hamas] wanted to gain legitimacy internationally and prove that we are able to handle such cases that previous security [Fatah] was not able to solve. And third, that there was no room for clashes with a clan like Dougmoush. We were just taking over the Gaza Strip and we were building our offices and security. It would not help.[15]

However, that was not the case with all families. Depending on the circumstances and sequences of events, Hamas was able to neutralize some families who were actively acting against Hamas in June 2007, amid the military clashes between Hamas militants and the PA security forces. On 12 June, Hamas surrounded the Bakers clan neighborhood, asking all men to gather in the mosque, subsequently arresting dozens and assassinating six (Miftah 2007). According to one member of the Bakers clan,

> They attacked us from all sides and asked all men to leave and be inside the mosque. They searched our houses. We were 300 in the mosque, all men. Later they killed six men and one woman.[16]

Clearly, there was reasoning behind the decision to engage with the Bakers, and when a Hamas militant was asked about the clan, he stressed that,

> The clan was part of the security [group] of the Fatah militia that killed many Hamas activists. They had attacked the [nearby] house and office of Hamas's leader, Ismael Haniya. They were clearly part of the fight, and we had the chance to act at that moment.[17]

These four different cases show that Gaza clans were trying to send a message to Hamas that, to govern Gaza, clans had to have an influence and clans are as important as other parts in the governing and ruling process. However, Hamas could not use violence in all these instances as it may have harmed its local and traditional legitimacy, as well as attracting disapproval from its own members. The opportunity to negotiate power, use violence, and neutralize was a carefully calculated strategy by Hamas leaders to avoid loss.

In the last week of July, events took a new direction when Hamas accused Fatah activists of detonating a bomb, killing several of its top military leaders from the Shejaia area, namely Hassan AlHelou, Ammar Musabeh, Iyad AL Hayya, Osamal Alhelou, and Nidal Almubayed (KUNA 2008). On 2 August, Hamas accused Fatah activist and military leader Zaki AlSakani of plotting the killings of the Hamas leaders before escaping to the Helles clan's area in Shejaia (Maan 2016). This incident was the perfect opportunity for Hamas to use violence against clans in the Shejaia area, since families who were affiliated with Fatah created a no-go zone in the eastern part of Gaza, undermining Hamas's legitimacy to some extent. According to a senior Hamas leader,

> As of April 2008, we felt that there were some no-go zones for us under tribal and clan names. Shejaia, a tribal society, closed narrow streets, held meetings, and organized events under clan titles and we could not intervene as it was under the clan name. There were some warnings for us, and it undermined our legitimacy. It had become normal that someone would tell us [Hamas leaders], *"Tshataro A'ala Al Shejaia"* [be courageous enough to take Shejaia clans down and make them surrender].[18]

The Helles clan is numbered in thousands of men, well-trained in using both light and heavy weaponry. Living in the eastern part of Gaza, they have always been affiliated with Fatah, with hundreds of members working in the PA police and security apparatus. What is more, the Fatah leader in Gaza was from the same clan. As one of its leaders said,

> We are a clan who live on the eastern borders of Gaza near the occupation. We are a big clan, and we need to protect ourselves from Israeli incursions. We have weapons and they are used only against the occupation. Israel has killed dozens from our clan since 2002 and we are part of the wider resistance of the Palestinians.[19]

During ethnographic research and observations, Hamas leaders, along with academics and other civil organizations, disagreed with the narrative of the clan leader. They argued that militarization and factionalization within clans was normal in Shejaia families since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. They stocked weapons, had conflicts, and many of their members committed crimes. As one researcher argued,

> 'Clans have weapons and they used them as a show of power and competition as to who is stronger. It was a norm so that they acquired more positions in the PA in a clientelist way.[20]

Clearly, clans were not just a part of traditional structure, but also of the political parties and their militarized branches, which led to the fractionalization and fragmentation of the clans and within the clan themselves. On 2 August 2008, Hamas decided to take a step forward and use violence. It surrounded the area of East Shejaia for three continuous days of military clashes, resulting in the deaths of eight of the Helles clan and three Hamas police officers, while more than 130 were injured (Rabbo 2008; Alquds 2008). The brutal and extremely violent eradication of the most powerful clan in eastern Gaza opened the door for Hamas to ask clans to surrender and hand over their weapons.

In the second week of September 2008, three of the Dougmoush clan killed police personnel while a patrol car was passing through their neighborhood, subsequently fleeing to their security quarter in the Sabra district. As a result, Hamas's forces encircled and besieged the district, checking IDs and names of people who entered and exited the area. The Dougmoush clan anticipated a similar conclusion to that of the Helles clan, and Hamas

intensified its forces around the area. The Dougmoush proposed to hand over three members to Hamas's security forces, but Hamas's de facto Minister of the Interior rejected the offer, refusing to negotiate with the clan. On 16 September, Hamas's security forces, along with its military wing, attacked using rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, and snipers, killing ten members of the clan, one child, and a police officer, and leaving 40 wounded (AlRiyad 2007). The clan was accused of being affiliated with Fatah, while many were also members of *Jaish Al-Islam* (Addustor 2008).

In a statement, Hamas's security forces said,

> The [Hamas] police will not consider anyone to be above the law, [regardless of] clans, political affiliation, or social status. (Safadi 2008)

This statement and campaign against one of the most powerful families in east Gaza, coming less than a month after the first campaign against the Helles clan, was a clear message ending the negotiation with clans. It was understood that coercion would be used to impose the rule of law and end clannism in the region.

According to a senior Hamas leader,

> The campaign on Dougmoush clan assured us that it was the time to take the power of the clans down and ensure they were not endangering our order any-more. When we ended the Dougmoush security quarter and the security chaos, we gained legitimacy of the people, and by that, the way was [open] ahead of us to act against clans in a violent way.[21]

After Hamas took control over the Gaza Strip, one of the most important factors in the negotiation process between the clans of Gaza was the anticipation of violence. In the first few months, Hamas avoided clashes with big, powerful clans affiliated with Fatah. From 14 June 2007 until September 2007, Hamas imposed the main element of social order—ending security chaos, "*Al Falatan Alamni*"—which provided it with partial legitimacy from the public. After Hamas built its security apparatus, opportunism as a strategy to neutralize clans was a rising possibility. Yet it waited for the clans to initiate the violence or break the new rules of the game. Coercive power was primarily used to end the domination and authority of the clans, and then further used to seek legitimacy as the ruler of the Gaza Strip in their eyes, particularly after the legal processes of arrests and trials that many clan members now faced. The end of clan militarism and factionalism provided such a sense of power that many other clans reached out to clan members within Hamas to secure visits to security and police headquarters or even liaise with them in social affairs. As one Hamas police officer argued,

> After September 2008, we had many clan heads [*Mukhtars*] visit, to coordinate and collaborate with Islah committees and the police.[22]

5. The Carrot and the Stick: Parallel Institutions

Scholars who have studied rebels stress that they need to have a governance arrangement that maintains a reciprocal relationship between them and the local communities (Mampilly 2012). Hamas has had very sensitive relations with the powerful and most influential clans and, although it has benefited from these clans (particularly the medium-sized) to win the elections, considered them a threat to its de facto formal institutions and legitimacy.

As Weber noted, "social order by virtue of sacredness is the oldest . . . universal type of legitimacy" (Weber 1968), and there was a need for those clans living under the control of Hamas to obey it based on traditional sanctity. That is why Hamas later adopted, notably after the assassination of its Interior Minister, a new strategy of gaining legitimacy through providing services, creating new structures to include clans, and efforts to divide and conquer powerful families affiliated with Fatah and the previous authorities.

In 1987, the Palestinian leadership called upon the local population in the Gaza Strip and West Bank to boycott the local court and Israeli administration. In the midst of the first

Intifada, Palestinians refrained from complying with the Israeli military courts, instead resorting to other methods of conflict resolution, such as traditional mediation (Terris and Inoue-Terris 2002). Customary laws flourished during the first Intifada even though young political leaders tried to undermine their authority. These political leaders had more loyalty to their political affiliation than to tribal politics, unhappy with clan chiefs accused of corruption (Terris and Inoue-Terris 2002). Hamas was also dissatisfied with the degree of control that clan heads had, particularly when these clan leaders did not behave and judge according to Sharia law (Zilberman 1996). The prevalence of customary laws within informal institutions stood as a barrier to Hamas increasing its political and judicial influence. For Hamas, clans were more fragmenting than a uniting factor in the society, while for Fatah, clans were seen as an unaccepted alternative to the revolution or the liberation movements that could be exploited by the occupation.

Clans in Palestine undermine the democratic governance and the rule of law but also work as problem-solvers, customarily disputing resolutions as well as imposing informal forms of social order. Because accusations of corruption frequently tarnished the formal courts under the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (1994–2007), the *Mukhtars* (clan chiefs) became one of the only functioning judiciaries in Gaza during the "*AlFalatan Al Amni.*" When Hamas took power, it tried to undermine the power of clans, gaining more legitimacy from the public and affiliated clans as the only authority in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas's Ministry of the Interior established a "Clans and Public Relations" department responsible for coordinating and collaborating with clans and providing official certificates to new *Mukhtars*. The start of the new policy was to create a parallel set of institutions to those that had existed before, appointing new *Mukhtars* from small families and providing them with stamps to issue formal certificates. In later stages, new *Mukhtars* from powerful and big clans were appointed besides the already active ones, but these posts were given to younger members, those affiliated with Hamas, or Islamists to compete with the other old Mukhtars. The strategy was to divide and conquer big clans, and in 2009 alone, Hamas replaced more than 630 *Mukhtars* and appointed more than 70 new (Sayigh 2011). According to a Hamas senior police officer,

> We knew that getting complete legitimacy from the previous political regime and its affiliated clans will be difficult. Therefore, we moved to create our own legitimacy by appointing new *Mukhtars*, in most families including the most powerful families which were affiliated with the PA previously.[23]

Hamas increased the numbers of affiliated *Lijan Islah* (reconciliation committees). During the time of the PA, there were not more than a dozen *Lijan Islah,* supervised by the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs, along with the Ministry of the Interior. Although Hamas rejected customary law and informal conflict resolution during the first Intifada and the Fatah-led PA, it came to accept the practice of *Lijan Islah* in a strategy to gain legitimacy of the clans. In 2008, Hamas's de facto government established the General Administration for Tribal Affairs and Social Reconciliation, appointing Abu Nasser Al-Kujuk (Hamas affiliated) as the head of the newly established department (Brenner 2016). The customary tribal law (*U'rf*) is the main pillar of the clans' conflict resolution strategy, which was rejected by Hamas because it does not follow Sharia and Islam. The *U'rf* is also a principle of informal institution that keeps social cohesion and solidarity within the community on the basis of integrity and the honor of the clan. As a clan leader argued,

> The *U'rf* is based on the principle that few elders and wise men have the authority and mandate over the whole clan.[24]

When Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, as a strategy to gain legitimacy within clans and families and to avoid increasing pressure on the formal judicial system, it accepted the *U'rf*, but within its own framework. A new legal and Islamic framework (booklet) was prepared by a leading Hamas Islamic scholar, Marwan Abu Ras, with all leading members of these committees being Hamas clerics or members of Hamas. Hamas's *Lijan*

Islah were also competitors and parallel institutes to those formed and active under the PA's commission of Tribal Affairs. As the head of PA's *Lijan Islah* affirmed,

> The *Lijan Islah* of Hamas were part of a strategy to create parallel institutes to the existing PA. They started with the formal institutes, such as ministries and police, and now they want to legitimize themselves through the clans and the *U'rf*.[25]

By the end of 2014, there were more than fifty committees (*Lijan Islah*) and more than 600 certified mediators who were members thereof (Balousheh 2014). The members had to be approved by the head of Hamas's Ministry of the Interior, who is a member of Hamas and senior cleric within its Da'wa committee. However, Hamas police, as the formal authority and the one that can execute imprisonments and fines, worked closely with the *Lijan Islah* of Hamas, ignoring the *Lijan Islah* affiliated with the PA. This created a rift in the society when it came to conflict resolution. While clans could choose between the two different *Lijan Islah* based on their political affiliations, the more complex the case, the more people would lean toward engaging Hamas's *Lijan Islah* as they had the power to coordinate with the police as a formal institution[26].

As pragmatic as it could be, Hamas's seeking of legitimacy and preservation of social order through clans remains an important means for its rule in the Gaza Strip. It was crucial for both Hamas and the clans to share power within limited and clear borders. Though Hamas was aware that factional loyalty is important to its members, it discovered that a clan's identity could help in securing partial legitimacy and maintaining social order with minimum resources. In this manner of negotiation, and without having to confront clan leaders affiliated with Fatah and the PA, Hamas provided clans with their power but under the parameters of its supervision, authority, and framework. Newly appointed clan *Mukhtars*, mediators, and members of *Lijan Islah* were mostly affiliated with Hamas, and respectful of members of society in general, which helped Hamas to avoid public confrontation or criticism. Factionalism of clans led to violence in Palestinian society, and Hamas tried by two strategies to maneuver and maintain informal control, by neutralizing clans, but also trying to unify them through formal mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

This paper examines how tribal fractionalization leads to violence in fragile and limited statehood areas. The findings support the introduction of this Special Issue, and that the level of fragmentation and factionalism could predict the development of violence (Kivimäki 2021). It argues that sub-national factionalism, exemplified by tribalism, interacts with conflict between political parties, leading to higher probabilities of violence. It contributes to the emerging scholarship on rebel governance and non-state actors in fragile and limited statehood areas.

When Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it provided an opportunity for Hamas, as the Palestinian Authority miscalculated its capacities to govern the Gaza Strip after Israel pulled its troops from the center of the territory (keeping them on the borders). This paper provides new empirical evidence to support Fearon and Laitin's theory of intra-war (Fearon 2011). When the PA could not provide protection to small families and individuals (as well as financial support amid a heightened level of unemployment), Hamas and clans provided a safety net for them. Later, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, clans became a new threat to Hamas.

Hamas serves as a contemporary case for rebel governance with an undoubted capacity to continue its power in a very tribal society where the authority of the state is often challenged by factionalized clans and political parties. It is, therefore, important to examine the complex negotiations of power and legitimacy between the different actors that provide Hamas as a rebel group with the broader and ordered space to govern the Gaza Strip. To achieve long-lasting order, legitimacy, and exercise of power as a rebel group, and with limited resources but with a degree of stable internal relations, the order that Hamas has tried to impose is dynamic and multi-layered, particularly with the clans. This study is important in helping to understand the dynamics of legitimacy in rebel-controlled areas,

especially in the Middle East, where the clan is an entrenched part of society. In line with Kalyvas' argument, the case of Hamas shows that rebels are embedded within the daily life and practices of society through clans, extended families, and mosques, which generates a strong network that supports and serves the legitimacy of Hamas (Kalyvas 2006).

The article argues that there has been an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of power between Hamas and various actors in the community. However, with the clan, there was a rollercoaster of a negotiation process that started peacefully, then became violent, and latterly renegotiated its legitimacy with the clans using their de facto authority and informal judicial system (*Lijan Islah*). Mobilizing the informal institutions of *Lijan Islah* is a depiction of a fragile state in a limited statehood area. The informal institutions are usually used when the formal institutions are weak or cannot do their job effectively.

Hamas's style of governance reveals that it was driven towards creating a new bureaucratic machine similar to that which had previously existed under the Palestinian Authority and parallel to the ones managed by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. Hamas created a meaningless structure of a state in the image of a sovereign "state", built around its ability to provide security using harsh measures and its capacity to create and expand upon its network of informal institutions as tools with which to impose its measure within and around clans. In the aftermath of June 2007, the transition regime kept the same pattern of control and negotiation with the public by building a framework that reflected Islamism, sacrifices, reform, security, and unity. Through this framework, Hamas worked consistently to create legitimacy among the local institutions, either those previously existing (pre-2007) or the new ones created to strengthen its capacity and provide an image of legitimacy among the society of Gaza. For Hamas, the critical factor has been to prevent political challenges to its de facto rule while at the same time maintaining social cohesion and legitimacy.

Hamas used two strategies to negotiate and manage fragmentation of the clans over public orders designed to establish its legitimacy: the first was using coercion, and the second was using the informal institutions of the tribal judicial system, although Hamas did not use coercion directly after it took over the Gaza Strip, rather waiting for the clans to make the first move. This finding is in line with Barakat and Fakih's findings in this volume that political stability needs a strong judicial system and anti-corruption mechanisms, which in our case led to more fragmentation in Palestinian society (Barakat and Ali 2021).

The two cases of clans and how Hamas acted towards them suggests that Hamas was able to acquire social legitimacy through clan members, *Mukhtars*, and attempts to change the structure of the informal judicial system by creating a parallel one, thus diminishing the role of the PA-affiliated system, while pushing towards fostering its own informal judicial system that was partially formalized and supervised by the MoI. As two different judicial systems competed and tried to enforce their norms amid weak formal and strong judicial systems, the society became prone to more violence as Hamas tried to use coercion, and clans tried to enforce their own norms.

Clearly, Hamas's strategy to legitimize itself in a fragmented and fragile society relied upon bringing together the mosque, security apparatus, reconciliation committees (*Lijan Islah*), local Hamas activists, and emirs of the neighborhoods. This reflects a deep understanding of the society and the importance of using coercive functions and the social control of securitization. The article argues that this benefited Hamas in gaining legitimacy through a complex set of passive and active negotiation and renegotiation processes, particularly when used at the right time.

Informed Consent Statement: All subjects involved in this research provided consent to participate without revealing their identity.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   Interview with senior Hamas leader A, Gaza January 2020.
2   Interview with clan's leader in Gaza, March 2020.
3   Interview with Hamas security officer A, March 2020.
4   Interview with senior Hamas leader B, East Gaza, February 2020.
5   Interview with Hamas Police Officer B, January 2020.
6   Interview with Senior Hamas leader A, Gaza, January 2020.
7   Interview with Hamas activist, Gaza, March 2020.
8   Interview with Hamas Police officer B, January 2020.
9   Interview with senior Hamas Activist, February 2020.
10   Interview with Hamas Police officer C, Gaza, February 2020.
11   Interview with Clan's leader, Khan Younes, March 2020.
12   Interview with senior community leader/Member of Hamas, Jabaliya, February 2020.
13   Interview with Fatah leader, Gaza March 2020.
14   Interview with a Journalist, Gaza March 2020.
15   Interview with senior Hamas leader B, Gaza, February 2020.
16   Interview with member of Baker's clan, March 2020.
17   Interview with member of Baker's clan, March 2020.
18   Interview with senior Hamas leader C, Gaza, March 2020.
19   Interview with Fatah leader, Gaza March 2020.
20   Interview with researcher, North Gaza, February 2020.
21   Interview with senior Hamas leader D, Shejaia, March 2020.
22   Interview with Hamas Security officer A, Gaza March 2020.
23   Interview with Hamas Police officer B, Gaza, January 2020.
24   Interview with clan leader, Gaza March 2020.
25   Interview with head of PA Lijan Islah Committee, March 2020.
26   There has been intense debate between 2008 and 2010 about the Lijan Islah, which the researcher followed closely. Note: All names have been removed for safety reasons upon the interviewees' requests.

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Article
Political Fragility and the Timing of Conflict Mediation

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Abstract: In recent years, much of the public discourse regarding conflict in the Middle East has pondered the possibility of military intervention, but far less attention has been paid to the optimal mechanisms for conflict mediation. There remains considerable confusion in the study of conflict resolution about how to locate the right time, or 'ripe moment' for this type of third-party involvement. This is a crucial area of policy relevant research. When attempting to model ripeness, most of the literature has relied on expected utility models of decision-making and found that crucial but nebulous factors that are important in the MENA region, such as conflicting parties' psychology, religious and political beliefs, as well as grievances compounded over time, cannot easily be incorporated into the framework. This paper offers a plausibility probe to highlight the potential of an augmented approach. Using Poliheuristic (PH) Theory that reflects the non-compensatory nature of political risk, it creates a litmus test for third-party mediation based not on what conflicting parties aim to achieve, but what outcomes and processes they must avoid. The result is a relatively simple identification of 'bad' timing, as well as theory-informed mechanisms designed to help practitioners generate better conditions for mediation. This probe contributes to our understanding of the relationship between political fragility and conflict in the MENA region by indicating how political fragility might be conceptualized as a process that can be mapped and perhaps interrupted.

Keywords: conflict; mediation; PH theory; Israel; Palestine; ripeness

1. Introduction

Kivimäki notes how "(s)tate fragility is often described as consisting of two elements: lack of efficiency and lack of legitimacy of state institutions" (Kivimäki 2021, p. 2). As this special issue explores the relationship between fragility, conflict and grievances in the MENA region, this article focuses on the component of political fragility (Kivimäki 2021). It does this by drawing on Poliheuristic (PH) Theory to outline political fragility procedurally, as a process evident in how elites who represent conflicting parties make decisions about conflict. Rather than identifying a particular party's fragility, the approach in this paper provides a system for condensing and thereby simplifying our understanding of the interaction between societal grievances, political fragility and conflict. This permits parsimony on one hand, while facilitating the integration of existing insights, such as identified problems with legitimacy (Alijla 2021; Loewe and Zintl 2021), factionalism and oil-dependence (Kivimäki 2021), into a single, ordered framework. This article does not identify any new indicators of fragility, but instead helps researchers to rank known indicators and make that ranking relevant for practitioners.

This article's use of the Poliheuristic approach is intended to translate the mutually constituting relationship between grievances, fragility and conflict into the specific actions of elite decision-makers who represent conflicting parties. The geo-strategic importance of MENA actors, the level of global disruption expected to result from their conflicts and the position of the 'Orient' in western imaginations have all contributed to a disproportionate level of international pressure placed on conflicting parties in the post-Cold War Middle East and North Africa. Through the lens of PH Theory, this paper presents an inherent dichotomy associated with that pressure: Although it seems reasonable to call on the

relevant leaders to seek mediation and resolution, the way political fragility functions automatically precludes much genuine peace-making behaviour. For example, the PH approach asserts that outside observers should expect intransigence among leaders who face societal grievance complications that are pertinent to the region. This inflexibility should not automatically be dismissed as personal or moral failure.

This paper presents a plausibility probe case study of PH Theory's usefulness in mapping how political fragility functions and argues that this approach provides insights which should be useful to practitioners who must work on conflict mediation in real time. The structure of this paper is as follows. In Section 1, a literature review identifies existing approaches to the study of optimal mediation conditions and explains why an explicitly bounded rationality model of decision-making is needed. Section 2 then covers the PH approach in more detail. Section 3 clarifies the methodology, and Section 4 provides the case study.

2. Literature Review

Bercovitch defines mediation inclusively as "a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own efforts, where the disputing parties or their representatives seek the assistance, or accept an offer of help, from an individual, group, state, or organization to change, affect, or influence their perceptions or behavior, without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of the law" (Bercovitch 1992, p. 7). Most conflict resolution literature has relied on expected utility theories of decision-making to structure investigations about the best timing for outside actors to push for mediated peace talks (Duursma 2014). The search for optimal conditions is analogous to the search for ripe timing, sometimes referred to as ripeness (Zartman and Berman 1982; Zartman 1985; Pruitt and Olczak 1995; Pruitt 2005). The idea of ripeness refers to the conceptualization of necessary but not sufficient conditions for the initiation of negotiations, including quantifiable criteria and psychological complications. These make up the two main components of ripeness: (1) the mutually hurting stalemate (MHS), which is likely to be marked by the presence of a recent or impending catastrophe, and (2) the perception among conflicting parties themselves that there is a way out (WO) (Zartman 2000, 2008).

Within this literature, conflicting parties are assumed to form their preferences by weighing the anticipated costs of continued fighting against the likely benefits. The aim is to find the sweet spot "when the parties find the costs of continued confrontation too high and the prospects of an agreement enticing" (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002, p. 116). However, as a set of guiding assumptions for conflict resolution scholarship, expected utility includes two components that constrain theory development in this area.

First, expected utility conceptualizes the decision-maker as conducting a holistic, exhaustive search for options (MacDonald 2003; Allison 1971). Therefore, the model itself provides little guidance for researchers about whether a particular dimension of conflicting parties' interests is likely to be more or most important. This means that researchers must inductively select their dependent variables. The resulting tests tend to indicate that one or more variables is not definitively causal in generating an MHS or WO. For example, the number of casualties is a reasonable variable to investigate, but Greig and Regan (2008) find no link between high numbers of deaths and leaders' willingness to engage in talks. Alternatively, studies do identify a relationship between costs and readiness to enter negotiations, but only by defining the variance in 'costs' very broadly (Beardsley 2010; Maundi et al. 2006). Although rigorously determined, such findings struggle to advance the agenda.

Second, the model conceptualizes preferences as purposeful action that seeks utility maximization (MacDonald 2003). This means that, while scholars recognize the real-world importance of more complex factors in parties' willingness to enter peace talks, the underlying model struggles to provide a systematic way to incorporate them into theory development.

Scholars, for example, widely accept that leaders' individual perceptions of a WO are crucial antecedents to mediation (Bargal and Sivan 2004; Pruitt and Olczak 1995; Saunders 1999; Greig and Regan 2008; Zartman 2008; Maundi et al. 2006; Duursma 2014). The parties themselves must perceive the possibility of a solution; they must share the desire to find an agreement and judge that the prospective deal is beneficial to their interests (Haass 1990, pp. 27–28). Bercovitch and Kadayifci note how parties' motivation, willingness and optimism are key to good timing (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002). Likewise, Beardsley and Lo assert that "(t)he process of 'getting to yes' is inherently a process of getting the sides to recognize that concessions are needed to resolve the conflict" (Beardsley and Lo 2014, p. 364). This has also been referred to as readiness (Schiff 2017).

However, it is difficult to notice the presence of WO perceptions among conflicting parties when, in practice, their preferences are inconsistent—or their behaviour is inconsistent with their stated preferences—and so they do not appear to be engaging purely in maximizing reasoning. Humans act, for example, in many ways that unnecessarily escalate a conflict, such as refusing to withdraw despite imminent defeat, or rationalizing exponential costs through ideological belief (Zartman 2003; Dowty 2006). Leaders' interests may also be selfish and context-dependent, such as the need for recognition or stalling (Maundi et al. 2006; Beardsley 2011). These needs may also be fueled by feelings of distrust or reflect risk aversion behaviours (Kelman 2005; Ben-Artzi et al. 2015).

Scholars have generally addressed these add-on complications by highlighting one or more intervening variables at a time. For example, leaders' expectations of utility may be affected by the constraints of global power relationships, such as alliances during the Cold War, or tense regional relationships (Bercovitch and Kadayifci 2002). Leaders' perceptions of a WO may also be complicated by commitment problems resulting from whether the respective parties are defenders or challengers (Beardsley and Lo 2014). They may be struggling with governmental legitimacy (Druckman and Green 1995) or exhibit greater or lesser readiness for talks according to their pre-existing preferences as doves or hawks (Pruitt 2005). This creates an analytical problem, as integrating each new insight into models of ripeness appears to be conceptually unmanageable (Bercovitch and Houston 2000).

Taken together, these two components of expected utility particularly frustrate investigations into the role of public opinion in creating and noticing perceptions of a WO. Some crucial insights exist. Public pressure, for example, may "decrease the costs of non-agreement and can potentially create a situation in which successful bargaining is impossible" (Chiozza and Goemans 2004; Goemans 2000; in Beardsley 2011, p. 403). It is also possible that combatants may desire third party mediation to direct blame for unpalatable concessions towards an outside party (Beardsley 2010). While it is accepted that public opinion must be crucial (Stover 2002; Hermann 2004; Desivilya 2004; Deutsch et al. 2006), the questions of when, how and how much elude the model. This is precisely because expected utility provides little guidance on the importance of one dimension over another and is focused on examining consistent, preference-seeking behaviours at the expense of seemingly inconsistent, risk-avoidance behaviours.

It is the contention of this paper that, although it is not feasible for theoretical assumptions to meet all the expectations of reality, the integration of a PH perspective provides a significant but simple insight that furthers the model by highlighting which of these seemingly additional variables are the most important empirically and so procedurally. This should also allow the analyst to pinpoint when and why the crucial psychological condition, the perception of a WO, is not present, and so when pushing for mediation could be harmful.

3. Why PH Theory?

This article offers Poliheuristic Theory as a necessary mechanism for advancing the study of timing in conflict mediation by integrating a procedural awareness of political fragility. Kivimäki (2021) notes how the interaction between a state's inefficiency, societal grievances and conflict can be portrayed relatively simply, as violence becomes the only

mechanism available for addressing an intolerable situation, or it serves as an opportunistic tool (Alkhayer 2021). However, this causal pathway becomes much harder to describe linearly if the analysis occurs after conflict is already ongoing and there is (A) a feedback loop that is further complicated by collective trauma and historical narratives and (B) conflict resolution demands that elite decision-makers proceed with negotiations despite the expectation of backlash from among their own supporters. This problem of long-term, continuously reinterpreted conflict is particularly pertinent to the MENA context. Within these real-world dynamics, political fragility must be something that functions rather than labels.

PH Theory was developed to act as a conceptual bridge between parsimony and accuracy in analytical models of decision-making (Mintz 1993, 2004, 2005; Mintz and Geva 1997; DeRouen 2002a; Lui 2002; Christensen and Redd 2004; DeRouen and Sprecher 2004; James and Zhang 2005; Kinne 2005; Brulé 2008; Keller and Yang 2008, 2009; Oppermann 2014). Instead of conceptualizing people as only goal-oriented maximizers, PH theory builds on cognitive approaches that "feature mental shortcuts and other processes indicative of the mind's inability to carry out the complicated calculus of the rational model" (Mintz and DeRouen 2010, p. 8; Mintz and Geva 1997). There is a balance to be struck between descriptive accuracy and the appeal and utility of conflict resolution models, between "parsimony in theory building and the complexity in human action" (Zartman 2000, p. 237). This is the line along which PH Theory aims to walk, through the use of a two-stage model.

The decision-making process for Stage One is conceptualized according to principles of behavioural science established since the development of Prospect Theory and the 'Cybernetic perspective' (McDermott 2001, 2004; Simon 1959, 1985; Steinbruner 2002). Stage One is governed by five key characteristics: decision-making is non-holistic, dimension-based, satisficing, order-sensitive, and non-compensatory (Mintz and Geva 1997). This means that politicians consider only a truncated range of options, which are clustered into organizing themes. They eliminate options according to their basic requirements rather than actively searching for an optimal alternative; their preferences are affected by the order in which they receive information, and they have some basic requirements that cannot be compensated for. These characteristics are not separable components of Stage One—they amalgamate to justify an analytical focus on first assessing the decision-maker's political dimension, before assessing their preferences across any other dimension.

In terms of its contribution to understandings of ripeness, the most important characteristic of Stage One in PH Theory is the recognition that decision-making is non-holistic, leading to its character of being non-compensatory (Mintz and Geva 1997). PH Theory assumes that the decision-maker "adopts heuristic decision rules that do not require detailed and complicated comparisons of relevant alternatives, and adopts or rejects undesirable alternatives on the basis of one or a few criteria" (Mintz and Geva 1997, p. 85). Rather than maximizing by evaluating every option equally, decision-makers only evaluate options long enough (and in enough detail) to find an option that satisfies their basic core needs.

Assuming that political actors operate under self-interested motivations, politicians see gains and losses first in terms of political currency and only then in the context of policy success or failure (DeRouen 2002a). In the PH approach, therefore, loss-aversion overrules all other considerations, and so decision-making is driven by the desire to avoid political failure rather than to achieve success (Anderson 1983). Consequently, "a low score in the political dimension cannot be compensated for by a high score in some other dimensions" (Mintz and Geva 1997, p. 84). For example, if a leader perceives that there is an intolerable danger to their political survival from simply entering mediation, then neither incentives in the form of promised economic aid, nor threats of actions such as sanctions, would be likely to encourage more flexibility (Astorino-Courtois and Trusty 2002; DeRouen 2002b).

Therefore, in Stage One of PH Theory, it is assumed that politicians abandon all options that pose too great a threat to their political survival (Mintz and Geva 1997). The types of risk that leaders consider in this stage include a "(. . .) significant drop in public support for a policy; (. . .) prospects of an electoral defeat; (. . .) potential collapse of the coalition

government or regime; (. . .) threat to political power, dignity, honor, or legitimacy of a leader" or problems such as demonstrations and riots (Mintz 2004, p. 9).

After too-risky options have been eliminated, decision-makers can then be assumed to engage in a traditional cost-benefit analysis based on expected utility in Stage Two; this allows the selection of a final choice (Mintz and Geva 1997). Importantly, a PH perspective allows the analyst to anticipate that certain options will not be viable after Stage One, even if those discarded alternatives were objectively the most sensible (Beckerman 2020).

This type of reasoning has been hinted at within conflict resolution scholarship, but existing work has struggled to condense these disparate elements into a parsimonious framework. When attempting to reduce a large set to a more manageable subset, Maoz et al. (2007) noted that the analyst could begin by eliminating unfavorable options rather than simply selecting favorable alternatives. Scholars already recognize that this exclusion strategy might generate a different range of remaining alternatives than the expected utility assumption's inclusion strategy (Yaniv et al. 2002; Maoz et al. 2007). The importance of non-compensatory variables is also implicit in the notion of "peace spoilers", which highlight the role of constituency preferences in blocking peace processes (Newman and Richmond 2006). Nevertheless, systematic inclusion of these insights remains elusive.

In contrast, PH Theory indicates that, according to the non-compensatory loss-aversion principle, the political dimension always encompasses the primary (if not total) motivation for decision-makers. Thus, it should be reasonable to always begin the ripeness puzzle by locating these non-compensatory variables—these political survival pressure points—just as one would begin a jigsaw by locating the corner pieces. The resulting model is deceptively simple. Instead of asking what leaders want to achieve through conflict, mediation and resolution processes, analysts would ask, as a first priority, what conflicting parties need to avoid. This realization provides a crucial mechanism for theory development because it gives researchers a systematic way to combine insights on otherwise disparate problems, such as legitimacy and factionalism, by first assessing how they affect the leader's political risk calculation.

As the rest of the proverbial conflict resolution puzzle remains somewhat mysterious, PH Theory mostly seems to provide a way to determine (from the most important, i.e., non-compensatory indicators) whether a conflict is definitely not ripe. This means that it provides a procedural description of political fragility that inherently indicates the practical importance of understanding that fragility.

4. Methodology

This paper now draws on the congruence method to offer an illustrative plausibility probe (George and Bennett 2005; Eckstein 1975). This qualitative approach is appropriate here because the real-world phenomenon of conflict ripeness is difficult to separate from its context (Yin 2008). Specifically, the congruence method offers a way for single cases to assist with theory development by investigating a specific theory's usefulness for understanding a particular case (George and Bennett 2005). This differs from process tracing in that it is not necessary to trace a casual pathway directly from independent to dependent variable. As such, the congruence method offers only tentative findings.

To assist in theory development, this article combines congruence with a plausibility probe. This type of case study is a preliminary investigation of "relatively untested theories and hypotheses to determine whether more intensive and laborious testing is warranted" (George and Bennett 2005, p. 212). This is an inductive exercise that is only appropriate when the theory is novel, or being applied in a new way, and previous research indicates its necessity (George and Bennett 2005). Rather than testing theory, the aim is to probe its usefulness to determine whether it is worth refining enough for more rigorous testing (Fenno 1973; Fiorina 1977; Lebow 1981; Evans et al. 1993; Vertzberger 1998).

Poliheuristic Theory has already been subject to case-based testing as a model for decision-making (see, for example, Astorino-Courtois and Trusty 2002; Kinne 2005; Ye 2007; Tal-Shir and Mintz 2018). As such, the case presented here is less concerned with the

validity of PH theory as a whole, but instead focuses on asking whether the Poliheuristic framework provides useful insights for understanding and mediating conflict. Poliheuristic Theory is an established approach in the fields of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Relations (Redd et al. 2010; Mintz and Chatagnier 2020), and so this article probes whether the PH approach contributes anything new or different to established, expected utility-derived advice specifically for conflict mediation in the MENA region.

Single plausibility probe cases must be selected according to the dependent variable, requiring a relevant example of attempted conflict mediation. Due to the nature of the probe, it is also necessary to select an example in which the conditions are likely to re-occur and for which research exists that offers practical advice. American involvement in the Israel-Palestine conflict is an appropriate focus, as one of the longest running diplomatic interventions in the Middle East that also remains unresolved. The most contemporary, formal bilateral talks in this category took place under the Kerry Initiative, 2013–2014. These talks were also reflective of established diplomatic practices, and the nine-month negotiation took place under relatively unremarkable political conditions. Importantly, it is widely acknowledged that the Kerry Initiative took place when conflict conditions were not ripe (Schiff 2018). Therefore, if the PH approach was going to be a useful analytical framework in practice, it would have to demonstrate this unripeness according to the information available to mediators in real time.

Therefore, the following plausibility probe presents a mapping of the political dimension for conflicting parties that would have been apparent to American state department officials during the 2013 talks between Israel and Palestine. The most important element that distinguishes Poliheuristic Theory as a framework from expected utility is its emphasis on the assessment of non-compensatory political variables—whether there is 'too much' risk to the decision-maker's political survival. Rather than incorporating political survival into the standard rationality framework as an add-on factor, the behavioural science that underpins Poliheuristic Theory demands that these political survival variables always be assessed first (in Stage One). As noted above, decision-makers will automatically discard 'too risky' options, possibly leaving only a truncated range of sub-optimal alternatives to choose between (in Stage Two).

In accordance with the theoretical propositions discussed above, this probe asks whether, according to information available to decision-makers in real time, the importance Poliheuristic Theory places on non-compensatory political variables generates insights that diverge from existing scholarly and practitioner recommendations on mediation.

5. Case Study: The Kerry Initiative

5.1. Overview

The Kerry Initiative in 2013 attempted to rescue the failed peace negotiations that took place during President Barack Obama's first term in office. Obama professed a commitment to Middle East peace and a belief that Israeli and Palestinian leaders could come together "in a rational way" to agree a two-state solution (Schiff 2018, p. 11). During Obama's second term in office, the White House announced that Secretary of State John Kerry would undertake an ambitious plan to resume negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders beginning in July 2013. This would be shepherded by Martin Indyk, former Ambassador to Israel and Secretary of State for Near East Affairs. The aim was to reach a final agreement within nine months, by 29 April of the following year.

5.2. A PH Approach

To map PH Theory's non-compensatory loss-aversion principle and determine whether this provides a description of how political fragility functions in conflict mediation, this probe asks four related questions: (A) Would a PH assessment of the relevant political dimensions have indicated any red flags before talks commenced? (B) Did the breakdown of talks in 2013 reflect or defy Poliheuristic reasoning? (C) Does this analysis produce any new insights?

(A)

It appears that before the Kerry Initiative began, both Israeli and Palestinian political dimensions presented a number of risks to the relative decision makers' political survival. The Israeli political dimension during Kerry's initiative was dominated by three potential risks: coalition politics, perceived security threats and the need to maintain American support. These high-pressure points, as well as their potential to remove genuine peace-seeking options from the leadership's choice set, would have been evident to Kerry's staff.

First, the need to keep coalitions together acted as a constraint on Israeli decision-making. George Mitchell had struggled with Israeli domestic politics between 2009 and 2012 partly because the coalition government under Netanyahu was a constant distraction (Mitchell and Sachar 2017). The 2009 elections in Israel had left the centrist–liberal Kadima party (led by Tzipi Livni) with the most Knesset seats, but Netanyahu (as head of Likud) seemed more likely to achieve a coalition and was asked to form the government.

Notwithstanding a dramatic formation and dissolution of a unity government with Kadima in 2012, Netanyahu's coalition between 2009 and 2013 was comprised predominantly of right-wing parties: Likud, Yisrael Beintenu, Shas and Jewish Home, all with subtly different antipathies towards the peace process derived from varying preferences for security, nationalist and religious concerns. These nuanced but hardened differences made it very difficult for the Israeli government coalition to agree outwardly and amongst themselves. Indeed, three former Likud leaders had found it necessary to leave the party to make progress with the Palestinians in previous years (Danin 2013).

However, an Israeli General Election in January 2013 lost the Likud–Beitenu block a quarter of its seats, forcing it to seek a more diverse coalition (Reed 2013). The new 2013 Israeli coalition still included Likud and Yisrael Beitenu as a joint grouping, but also the new parties Yesh Atid and Hatnua. Led by a celebrity journalist, Yair Lapid, the centrist Yesh Atid party was in favour of peace through a two-state solution. Led by Tzipi Livni (after her ousting as head of Kadima in 2012), the liberal Hatnua party focused its platform on achieving a final settlement with the Palestinians. Livni joined Netanyahu's coalition in return for a position as Justice Minister, giving her the peace process portfolio. This may certainly have seemed like an opportunity for more effective mediation, especially considering public opinion polls at the time.

In December 2012, 62% of Israeli voters reportedly supported a two-state solution, with the same proportion even among right-wing voters and even when questioned about a divided Jerusalem (Tzvia Weiniger 2012). Similarly, 69% of Israelis polled in 2013 voiced their support for the Arab Peace Initiative (Eldar 2013). Israeli public support for peace talks in the proceeding years had also been reassuringly high. In theory, as noted by Sasley (2013), this general goodwill should have provided some protection from peace spoilers.

Second, Israeli political life has long been saturated with securitized discourses built upon a combination of traumas that persist despite the country's economic and military success (Siniver 2012). This means that, as new regional threats unfold or escalate, public and governmental tolerance for risk tends to decrease. The expected benefits of peace processes have frequently become overshadowed by the known costs of attacks that occurred in recent memory, such as abductions, rocket fire and suicide bombings. This was pertinent during the Kerry Initiative because Netanyahu's government had failed to deter rocket fire from Gaza as recently as November 2012. The Israeli Operation Pillar of Defense was intended to prevent rockets that threatened Israel for a distance of 40 km, but ended with a ceasefire, despite militants having escalated to firing rockets with a range of 80 km (Abu Amer 2013a). It was widely acknowledged that the cease-fire would not hold.

Seemingly existential risks, such as the fear that Iran or its allies in Syria might use weapons of mass destruction against Israel, have also made it difficult to discuss relinquishing control to Palestinian security forces in strategically sensitive areas such as the Jordan Valley. Concerns persist that an independent Palestine in the West Bank might ultimately adopt militancy or Iranian proxy support. In January 2013, Netanyahu drew public attention to these broader security concerns, moving one of five Iron Dome defence

batteries north in case of a chemical weapons attack from across the border with Syria (Reed 2013). Israel also launched strikes against targets in Syria in May 2013 and February 2014 while the Kerry Initiative was ongoing.

Third, Israel has often found itself isolated and relying on material support and diplomatic cover offered by the United States. It was widely reported during Obama's tenure, however, that Netanyahu had alienated the US president and was undermining that historic relationship. Although the likelihood of severed relations was never high, the possibility that everyday antagonisms could lessen influence and create rifts over time was raised consistently to oppose Netanyahu's behaviour (The Times 2012).

This concern might have been amplified by Obama's nomination of Chuck Hagel for Secretary of Defence in January 2013, a slightly controversial selection given Hagel's history of criticism towards Israeli lobbying (McGreal 2013). Obama visited Israel in March 2013 to reaffirm American commitments to Israeli security against Iranian nuclear development and Syrian chemical weapons (and finalized a $10 billion arms deal with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE the following month). Nevertheless, the US president's subsequent floundering over his 'red line' in Syria must have undermined those earlier reassurances (Sanger and Rudoren 2013).

Likewise, the relevant Palestinian political dimension during this period was also dominated by three potential risks to the leader or regime's survival: Mahmoud Abbas's rivalry with Mohammad Dahlan, the power struggle with Hamas, and the need to maintain a broad base of international goodwill and aid. Again, these potential 'spoilers' were evident in public discourse and diplomacy at the time.

First, Abbas has long maintained his position as Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and key member of the Fatah party through elite consensus and tacit public acquiescence rather than through an applicable electoral mandate. By 2013, his main rival within Palestinian politics had emerged as the former head of the Palestinian Preventive Security Service (PSS) in Gaza, Mohammad Dahlan (Jaraba and Shitrit 2014).

After Hamas overran Gaza in 2007, Dahlan moved to the West Bank and became influential within Fatah and the security services. He was able to place close contacts in key positions and use foreign financial connections to maintain those alliances (Jaraba and Shitrit 2014). He exhibited skillful political manoeuvres and was able to bring adversaries, such as Tawfiq al-Tirawi, into his confidence through a shared conflict with other figures, such as Jibril Rajoub (Jaraba and Shitrit 2014). Together with supporters from across the West Bank, Gaza and multiple refugee camps, Dahlan accused Abbas and the PNA of weakness and mismanagement. The Fatah Central Committee expelled him from the organization in 2011 and attempted, unsuccessfully, to quash his remaining base of support.

Having to suppress such internal dissent to avoid provoking Israel has damaged Abbas's popular appeal, and the resumption of talks in 2013 was unpopular among his base in Fatah and the PLO. Many Palestinians feared that Israel would extend talks indefinitely to confuse, frustrate and marginalize the Palestinian cause. This was based on a relatively recent trauma. The Bush-era Roadmap had unreasonably championed an unachievable level of Israeli security as the precondition for Palestinian statehood, and former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had agreed numerous concessions in his final days in office without the ability to follow through (Abrams 2013). To plunge further political capital into Kerry's 2013 efforts, the Palestinian delegation required quick results (Danin 2013). This urgency amid the challenge from Dahlan provided the internal context for Abbas's demands.

Second, the period before and during the Kerry Initiative witnessed new developments in rivalry between the PNA and Hamas. Israel's Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012 had eliminated the Hamas military commander, Ahmed al-Jabari, and threatened the ruinous prospect of an Israeli ground invasion (Abu Amer 2013a). This coincided with a contraction of Hamas's engagement with formal political processes.

Since its election in 2006, Hamas had represented the continuation of armed resistance against Israel, appealing to Palestinian youth as "the natural heir of Fatah's original project"

(Abu Amer 2013b). The group also derived legitimacy from a careful use of popular religious rhetoric, as well as its internationally funded social programmes providing medical care, childcare and Islamic education as well as field hospitals and funerals during the direct confrontations with Israel (Abu Amer 2013b). This freedom fighter image has frequently been used to criticize the PNA as collaborators while celebrating Palestinian unity in principle.

However, years functioning as a government in Gaza also left Hamas open to criticism over dissatisfaction with specific MPs and ministers, as well as internal disagreements between then Chairman of the Hamas Political Bureau, Khaled Meshaal, and other prominent figures in the movement such as Moussa Abu Marzouk, Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud al-Zahar (Abu Amer 2013b, 2013c). To avoid exposing these divisions, the group ultimately declined to participate in local elections. Instead, Hamas favoured the outsider, opposition narrative that originally defined its raison-d'être.

During this time, both Israeli and Palestinian Authority security services feared that Hamas would orchestrate 'quick win' operations, such as abductions (after a successful exchange of multiple Hamas prisoners for the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit) and further armed activities, particularly in the West Bank. Hamas even called for a third Intifada in September 2013. Such popular but disruptive activities represented a constant threat to Abbas's credibility in early 2013, both internally and externally in terms of his ability to deliver peace after an agreement.

Third, the PLO chairman was also facing broader diplomatic considerations. Foreign aid, which somewhat protected the PNA against collapse, depended on successful conflict management within PNA administered areas as well as engagement with mediated peace processes. PNA funding and diplomatic support from the Gulf had severely declined since the rise of Hamas, leaving Abbas in a somewhat precarious financial situation between American and European diplomatic preferences on the one hand and Palestinian calls for justice and resistance on the other. Seeking goodwill from further afield, Abbas met with numerous foreign leaders during this period, including Iranian President Ahmadinejad in February 2013, Chinese officials in May 2013 and Jacob Zuma while in South Africa the following year (BBC News 2013).

These factors summarize the pressing aspects of political dimensions for both Israeli and Palestinian decision-makers in 2013–2014. For practitioners seeking to apply a Poliheuristic framework in real time, this initial task of the mapping of the political dimension and its potential danger zones should be relatively straightforward. The following section attempts to understand how these pressure points might have been operationalized during the case at hand.

(B)

According to PH reasoning, and depending on each decision-maker's sensitivity to risk, these fraught political dimensions could have severely limited the available options in Stage One before a cost-benefit analysis between the remaining options could be performed in Stage Two. As this paper is concerned with conflicting parties' ability to initiate genuine talks, this section is focused on the first stage only—it asks whether risks were non-compensatory rather than whether the behaviour was ultimately optimal. In 2013, both sets of decision-makers had to choose between making concessions and not making concessions on a small number of core issues: preconditions, borders with land swaps, the right of return, security in the Jordan valley, and the status of Jerusalem. If concessions had been offered, then the exact nature of subsequent choices would have become delicate. However, both sides reneged on the preconditions and showed little willingness to offer concessions in other areas.

5.3. Preconditions

The failure to engage fully with the preconditions suggests that risk to political survival was too great. However, this generates a somewhat tautological argument. If both sets of

leadership, represented by Prime Minister Netanyahu and PLO Chairman Abbas, intended to maintain their political positions as a first priority (but not necessarily as the only goal), and the option to offer concessions was seemingly removed from the choice set without a holistic search or utility-maximising perspective, then the PH approach represents a workable model in this case. To avoid the tautology, this analysis would need to be achievable pre-emptively or in real time. The following attempts to chart how and when options may have been removed from the choice set. In practice, both sides seemed to face a great deal of pressure to engage in peace talks in which they could genuinely negotiate very little.

First, could both sides have simply refused to engage with the Kerry Initiative? Although debatable, it is important to recognize that the Obama-era United States still occupied a great deal of financial, military and normative power in the international community, meaning American wishes were not easy to dismiss.

In addition, Israeli and Palestinian interactions often operated within a zero-sum mindset. If one side refused to cooperate, that decision would have gifted the other with the moral high ground and a diplomatic victory. Therefore, refusing any participation at all was almost certainly non-compensatory for both parties. There were also political incentives to be part of the process. Peace talks promised Mahmoud Abbas more American attention, understanding and possibly aid, and Netanyahu's second-largest coalition partner (Yesh Atid) needed some involvement in peace talks to build a platform for future electoral success. Both sides had to take part, and there were benefits associated with simply appearing to be willing.

However, with regard to the preconditions, the Israeli Prime Minister faced far less political risk than his Palestinian counterpart. Abbas needed Israel to produce some tangible result early to justify his team's involvement in a process that was already perceived to have dismissed and marginalized Palestinian needs. This translated into American pressure for Netanyahu to approve the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners in four batches. All were convicted of killing Israelis and had been held since before the Oslo Accords. Discharging these men would have seemed like an Israeli sacrifice, but the same prisoners were supposed to be freed in 1999 as part of the Sharm El Sheikh memorandum. They had remained imprisoned ostensibly due to fears of violence associated with the Second Intifada. Therefore, there was a clear precedent for Israel that prisoner releases might be reversed on security grounds with near impunity.

In return for prisoner releases, Netanyahu's government required Palestinian leaders to halt any attempts at unilateral recognition via international institutions, particularly in approaching the International Criminal Court (ICC) to accuse Israel of war crimes. However, such unilateral action was not genuinely dangerous to Israeli governmental integrity. Israel could have easily absorbed the reputational costs of losing this diplomatic battle; its politicians have a long history of denying external authorities the right to comment on military methods and have often blamed anti-Semitism for sparking international criticism. Therefore, whereas a successful completion of the preconditions was absolutely vital for Abbas (in the sense that quick results were almost certainly non-compensatory), Netanyahu risked almost nothing by entering talks in principle. This imbalance of non-compensatory risks was voiced before the Kerry Initiative was announced.

However, fulfilling the preconditions in practice carried far more risk for Netanyahu than agreeing to them in theory. Although the Israeli government formed in 2013 included Yesh Atid and Hatnua rather than a coalition of purely right-wing parties, the most problematic veto player remained Avigdor Lieberman as head of Yisrael Beitenu.

The Israeli Prime Minister did not have a direct rival from within his own party. Netanyahu accepted the principle of a negotiated two-state solution in 2009, defended his mandate to pursue this outcome, and cautioned his colleagues against permitting the creation of a binational state that would erode Jewish self-determination (Sasley 2013). Indeed, following Kerry's announcement of resumed talks, Netanyahu framed the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as a way to meet Israel's broader security needs (Sasley 2013).

However, maintaining cooperation from Yisrael Beitenu was more uncertain. A settlement resident himself, Lieberman reacted to Kerry's initiative by refusing to allow an agreement based on the 1967 borders, or any settlement freeze, and denying that Mahmoud Abbas represented the wishes of any Palestinian communities (Sasley 2013). Even the US State Department was unsure of how to handle this combination of contradictory Israeli governmental views. Former US Ambassador to Israel, Martin Indyk, had been rather scathing on this topic before negotiations commenced. "There's been no government in Israel," he told *Politico* in March 2013, "so there's been no time to prepare that. If they were going to do that, the president should have gone nine months from now—not now" (Gerstein 2013).

By November 2013, the importance of Yisrael Beintenu and of security discourses became apparent. Netanyahu adopted Lieberman's stance on the 1967 borders, suggesting (with no expectation of agreement) that the unilaterally constructed separation wall would provide a new boundary. Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon (who had recently been elected to head the Likud central committee) was publicly promoting Lieberman's preferred annexation strategy, that "Palestinians living in the West Bank . . . be offered Israeli citizenship or residency or be made the responsibility of Jordan" (Booth and Eglash 2013). This general stance also drew support from right-wing nationalist opposition figures such as Naftali Bennet. Between them, they heavily promoted the idea that Palestinian leaders should recognize Israel specifically as a Jewish nation state as another precondition for continued talks (Lieberman 2014).

Likud ministers continued to agitate for annexation, particularly of the Jordan Valley, throughout December 2013. They remained in the minority within the Knesset (left-wing parties offered to join the coalition if peace talks caused its dissolution), but losing the support of Yisrael-Beitenu would have seriously eroded Netanyahu's ability to keep forming governments. It is reasonable to assume that his desire to resolve the Palestine issue was secondary to his desire to ensure political survival.[1] To maintain this relationship with the vocal minority, nearly 2000 new settler homes were approved in January 2014. Netanyahu and Bennett also showed solidarity the following month by storming out of a moderately critical speech made by the European President, calling it lies (Black 2014).

Against this contentious backdrop, fulfilling the agreed concessions became predictably contentious. Israel released 26 prisoners in August 2013, another batch at the end of October and the third tranche at the end of December. As these prisoners were convicted for murdering Israelis, their release prompted a series of backlashes in the press related to justice for the victims' families and the prospect that they may reoffend.

The Palestinian delegation withdrew from talks in November 2013, citing Israeli intransigence and further Israeli settlement building. Abbas also declared that he could not recognize Israel as a Jewish state because that would put non-Jewish citizens at risk of exile and deportation (Knell 2014). Yasser Arafat had recognized the state of Israel already in 1988 and 1993. By the end of December, chief negotiator Saeb Erekat declared that the talks were a failure, that Palestine should continue to seek recognition unilaterally, and that there could be no extension of the deadline. The PLO chairman and Palestinian negotiating team were precluded from continuing by the lack of quick results.

Indeed, Abbas faced a great deal of criticism for his accommodating patience. In what was presumably an attempt to appear reasonable to international audiences, Abbas commented while travelling in South Africa that he supported boycotts of settlements but not of Israel more broadly (Goldman 2013). This led to him being labelled a traitor. Commenting from Israeli prison, the widely popular figure Marwan Barghouti stated, "Any Palestinian official who lacks a democratic mandate and any real public support who today explicitly speaks against boycotting Israel only shows how aloof he is from his own people's aspirations for freedom, justice and equality, and how oblivious he is to our struggle for our inalienable rights" (Sherwood 2013). Samia Botmeh, a lecturer at Birzeit University in the West Bank, added that "Palestinians are angry and feel let down by Abbas's comments" (Sherwood 2013).

A sense that Dahlan was poised to take power intensified the risk associated with this waning public confidence in Abbas. When Dahlan reportedly met with Field Marshal el-Sisi in early 2014, Abbas struck out against his main rival by withholding the security service salaries of Dahlan supporters in Gaza. It is likely that the Egyptian meeting felt particularly undermining since Dahlan and Sisi had a long-standing working relationship from their days collaborating across the Gaza–Egypt border. An unnamed official told *Al Monitor* that, "All of that has pushed Abbas to curtail Dahlan's influence in Gaza. Sisi is finding his way to Egypt's presidency, and the PA fears that (Sisi) will be able to attract Saudi Arabia and the UAE to his side and then (pressure) Abbas (to act) in Dahlan's favor" (Abu Amer 2014). Far-reaching political interests were clearly at stake.

The snubbed employees responded by organizing a sit-in and accusing Fatah's leadership of marginalizing Palestinians in Gaza. This prompted other prominent Fatah leaders, such as Muhammad al-Madani and Zakaria al-Agha, to denounce the action in principle or deny that it was punitive (Abu Amer 2014). Rather than on Abbas directly, the controversy was blamed on Abbas-loyalist Nabil Shaath, who had also received death threats from Dahlan supporters in the past (Abu Amer 2014). Nevertheless, Abbas himself gave a speech in March 2014 and used a large proportion of this time to criticize Dahlan.

Netanyahu then refused to release the last batch of prisoners, asking for an extension to the deadline to justify their release. In retaliation, Abbas signed 15 conventions on human and social rights. In further retaliation, Israel demolished several EU-funded structures and approved another 708 settler homes in Gilo.

The problem for Abbas remained the need to have something to show for Palestinian involvement. He visited the White House in March 2014 but clearly could not commit to the Kerry plan. The PLO Chairman's domestic situation meant there was no way that the options to recognize Israel as a specifically Jewish state and to abandon the right of return were within his choice set (The Times of Israel 2014). Abbas did, however, apparently list three conditions for resuming talks after the deadline: borders to be dealt with in the first three months of talks, a total construction freeze in settlements, and the release (without deportation) of the final prisoners. Again, it is evident that quick results were paramount. As Shapland and Mekelberg note, "bad experiences with interim, partial, temporary or (solely) 'economic' solutions have caused the Palestinians to reject any further such arrangements, only a comprehensive settlement is now possible" (Shapland and Mekelberg 2018, p. 11).

Realistically, as the good faith preconditions were constantly violated and Palestinian internal politics intensified in criticism, the option to continue with Kerry's Initiative must have represented non-compensatory political risk for Abbas. He could not continue without the fulfilment of Israel's preconditions, but Netanyahu struggled to provide those preconditions while hoping to remain relevant to Israel's nationalist right.

5.4. Remaining Core Issues

In addition, even if talks had continued, each core issue would have presented similar political hazards. On borders and land swaps, there were longstanding American and PLO expectations that the 1967 borders would form the basis for negotiations, with wriggle room on discussing densely settled areas. There was some mention within Israeli circles about reprising the Sharon Plan, in which parts of the so-called Arab Triangle in the north of Israel would be transferred to a Palestinian state. This, however, was not agreed by the United States and did not fit prior, hard-won arrangements endorsed by the PLO (Winer 2014).

Security in the Jordan Valley also remained problematic. The Hamas takeover of Gaza in 2007 set a worrying precedent for both Israel and Jordan as militancy in the West Bank would be harder to contain. However, the Israeli insistence (and Jordanian preference) for maintaining a military presence in the Jordan Valley has always represented a violation of expected Palestinian sovereignty (Berman 2013). In July 2013, Abbas announced that there could not be a single Israeli in Palestine and clarified by October that this meant the exclusion of all Israeli troops.

To address the right of return, Abbas reportedly mentioned in passing that this may have to be waived to ensure a settlement. The possibility of a small number of token returns plus compensation had been part of previous discussions with Israeli Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert. However, abandoning the 'right' was wildly unpopular among young Palestinians and so a practical compromise largely depended on the belief that Israel would volunteer appropriate levels of compensation. The 2013–2014 discussions never progressed to this stage.

As possibly the most sensitive aspect of Israeli–Palestinian relations, Jerusalem was not addressed in initial bilateral meetings. Abbas and King Abdullah of Jordan signed a pact in March 2013 to protect the holy city of Jerusalem, signaling that the Palestinian negotiators would not be railroaded on this issue. Regardless, unlike Bill Clinton's complicated layered approach to the holy sites that was proffered, albeit unsuccessfully, at Camp David in 2000, Kerry's Initiative never advanced far enough to tackle the Jerusalem problem in any depth. Netanyahu announced in October 2013 that there could be no right of return and no divided Jerusalem.

It seems apparent, therefore, that the parties found themselves in an impossibly limited position at every juncture. Abbas could not engage fully without a tangible result, and Netanyahu could not produce a tangible result and expect to keep his position. It does not appear as though there was much scope for a rational cost–benefit analysis in Stage Two because no alternatives were left in the choice set after Stage One. Procedurally, this provides more insight into how political fragility functions, maintaining unripeness, despite external pressures for mediation.

(C)

Descriptively, this analysis would seem familiar to conflict analysts and specialists in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, it adds an important procedural component to the search for optimal mediation conditions and activities designed to 'ripen' otherwise unripe conflicts. The insight of a PH approach is the apparent necessity to prioritize the political dimension rather than operate primarily in terms of utility maximizing 'sticks' and 'carrots' and treating political risk as just one complication among many. This subtly changes the advice offered by prominent scholars and practitioners in this area.

Richard Haass, the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, has noted the absence of ripeness in Israel–Palestine, and that "it's not right for any number of reasons" (CFR Events 2015). When pressed to explore what those reasons are, however, American former diplomats often mention the constraints of domestic politics as one of many factors (CFR Events 2015).

William Quandt, a former member of the Carter Administration actively involved in the Camp David Accords, provides seven key ingredients for American success in mediating the Israel–Palestine conflict (Quandt 2005, pp. 426–20). However, there is no sequence specified for his list of insights. Likewise, Kurtzer et al. (2013) offer 11 items that they deem crucially important for any future American mediation efforts in Israel–Palestine. The authors stress that their list of policy suggestions is indicative rather than exhaustive, but it is pertinent to note that the list is numbered without being ranked. No element of the peace process is able to be promoted as more or most important.

In addition, while there is a clear consensus that conflicting parties' political survival is crucial to diagnosing or encouraging the best timing for mediation, this recognition does not translate into a clearly articulated priority. Dennis Ross, for example, after serving as President Bill Clinton's Middle East Envoy, recognizes how political environments placed enormous pressure on both Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak at Camp David in 2000.

Ross coherently describes the highly constraining political environments faced by both parties: Unelected leaders lack legitimacy, "(s)o they are easily put on the defensive and fear being accused of conceding principles or perceived rights. Their sense of vulnerability makes them risk-averse (. . .)" (Ross 2004, p. 762). He notes how even democratically elected leaders "(. . .) preside in a highly competitive political environment,

with governments that are always based on coalitions of different parties", again making them risk-averse (Ross 2004, p. 762). However, Ross's policy advice does not centre on ameliorating this vulnerability that is felt on all sides.

Unfortunately, risk-aversion is often treated as a moral failing of one or more of the parties involved. They are called upon to show courage or make 'tough decisions' as though no constraint is insurmountable if the leader possesses a strong enough resolve (Wright 1997; Tait 2014; The Daily Mail 2016). Ross, for example, explains the outcome of Camp David talks in 2000 in relation to the leaders' egos. Ross asks, "Was timing the issue or was Arafat incapable of transforming himself from a revolutionary into a statesman? I came to believe the latter (. . .)" (Ross 2004, p. 761). This is despite Ross's recognition that the rise of Hezbollah "raised the costs, in his (Arafat's) eyes, of making fundamental concessions" (Ross 2004, p. 761).

Martin Indyk has expressed similar frustrations with both parties regarding the overbearing nature of their political circumstances. Indyk has complained about a lack of urgency between negotiators and that "(i)t is easier for the Palestinians to sign conventions and appeal to international bodies in their supposed pursuit of 'justice'" and "easier for Israeli politicians to avoid tension in the governing coalition and for the Israeli people to maintain the current comfortable status quo" (Wilner 2014). The result is that they never feel the need to "make the gut-wrenching compromises necessary to achieve peace" (Wilner 2014).

Therefore, a Poliheuristic approach to ripeness endows some elements of existing advice on American mediation in the Israel–Palestine conflict with new relative importance that might have been useful in 2013. This perspective prioritizes key recommendations from existing advice and, in so doing, downplays the assignment of blame. Thus, there is the potential for a new model of ripeness to emerge.

In the first and most important (non-compensatory) stage, analysts and mediators hoping to understand or develop the MHS and WO must map conflicting parties' political dimensions by assessing the type and nature of risks to their political survival. This means that the mediator's priority is to ameliorate those risks, and all other recommendations for initiating or achieving successful mediation become subsidiary.

With regard to the Kerry Initiative, an awareness that quick results were a non-compensatory requirement for the Palestinians would have prompted American mediators to secure the prisoner releases and settlement freeze before all other considerations. If this was not possible, despite the diversified Israeli government formed in January 2013, then it would have been clear that fulfilling concessions was a non-compensatory task for the Israeli Prime Minister and signaled that negotiations were stillborn.

This may have prompted the Obama Administration to reprioritize their efforts in the short term. Instead of pushing for immediate talks, the White House could have heeded Indyk's warning and worked to ripen the conflict instead. This may have been pursued by helping to secure Abbas's political position through material and ideational aid while working to cement Netanyahu's relationship with Israel's centrist and liberal parties and easing the everyday indignities and violations that ordinary Palestinians endure under occupation.[2]

6. Conclusions

This paper has offered a plausibility probe that presents supplementary insights to existing work on conflict ripeness. By outlining the modelling problem created by a reliance on expected utility as an underlying framework for conceptualizing decision-making, the introduction of PH Theory offers a potentially useful alternative.

PH Theory would demand that mediation analysis and recommendations must reflect the non-compensatory loss-aversion principle. Through this prism, perceived risk to conflicting parties' political survival must be considered in the first instance when assessing the presence or absence of ripeness, and then perceived risk must be ameliorated as a first step towards developing ripeness—all other efforts seemingly risk futility. This case study

provides a note for prospective mediators on the crucial significance of appreciating conflicting parties' non-compensatory needs. It is a reminder that the appropriate conditions or timing for good faith mediation are not likely to be the result of bold leaders making the oft-demanded hard choices unless those non-compensatory needs are ameliorated first. This reinforces an understanding among diplomats that domestic political concerns not only matter, but also matter the most.

Procedurally, therefore, political fragility might be summed up as a process of multiple, severe and proliferating risks to leaders' political survival that removes key options from the choice set. This is a pathway rather than an outcome. These non-compensatory risks narrow the options that leaders are able to consider, sometimes excluding what would otherwise seem to be optimal courses of action. In this sense, political fragility might be mapped and anticipated in response to unfolding events. This probe, therefore, contributes to our understanding of the relationship between political fragility and conflict in the MENA region by indicating how fragility may be functioning in real time and so how it might be addressed in future.

Notes

[1] Although Tzipi Livni and Yair Lapid threatened to leave the government if peace talks fell apart, Netanyahu seems to have interpreted this correctly as an empty threat. The government did not dissolve until Netanyahu dismissed Livni as Justice Minister in December 2014, prompting the Yesh Atid MKs to resign at the same time.

[2] The ethical considerations for these actions are beyond the scope of this paper, but they are relevant to raise as available options tailored to the desired outcome of a formal peace agreement. This is also the approach recommended atheoretically by former US State Department official Elliot Abrams (2013).

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Article

Service Delivery, State Legitimacy and Conflict in Arab Countries: Exploring the Key Linkages Using a Social Policy Perspective

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Abstract: This paper addresses the question of how service delivery (SD) affects state legitimacy (SL) and conflict (C) in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, drawing particularly on frameworks that move beyond a state-centric approach. Focusing on the majority-Arab countries of MENA, the paper aims to: (1) offer a preliminary explanation of the distinctiveness of this region in light of some of the main findings of the introductory paper by the lead guest editor Timo Kivimäki and (2) explore the potential of a social policy perspective in explaining the relationship between SD, SL and C. This is achieved by combining research insights acquired through extensive qualitative social policy research in the MENA region with a re-reading of the existing literature on SD, SL and C. To support a comprehensive re-examination of the issues at hand, the paper also draws on the 5th Wave of the Arab Barometer micro-level survey (ABS) on Arab citizen perceptions of socio-economic conditions in their countries and macro-level social welfare expenditure data from the World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI). By bringing insights from the social policy literature on the MENA region into conversation with broader research on the relationship between SD, SL and C, we identify several distinctive features of service delivery in the MENA context and examine their implications for state legitimacy and conflict.

Keywords: service delivery; state legitimacy; conflict; social policy; Middle East and North Africa; social protection; social expenditure

1. Introduction

Research on state legitimacy and conflict has become increasingly focused on the role of service delivery. At the same time, global and national peace-building strategies have paid growing attention to the importance of service delivery as a key "arena of conflict" (Baird 2010; World Bank 2018, p. 25). Policy experts and academic observers now recognise the intrinsic connection between a lack of access to social protection services and societal grievances that may undermine state legitimacy or even contribute to violent conflict. This is exemplified in countries experiencing conflict such as Syria, Yemen, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Colombia (Baird 2010; World Bank 2018). Although recent literature has shown that the relationship between service delivery and armed conflict is non-linear (Mcloughlin 2015), there is convincing evidence that service delivery does shape state legitimacy and authority because of the key role that citizen perceptions of fairness, accountability and rule of law in services such as education, health, sanitation and even jobs can play in political stability (Brinkerhoff et al. 2012; Stel and Ndayiragije 2014). As such, service delivery is considered a marker of "risk" (World Bank 2018, p. 25) to conflict because it reflects a wider process of political inclusion and wealth redistribution in society.

Kivimaki's (2021) starting point in the introductory article to the Special Issue is that the relationship between political legitimacy, grievances and armed conflict seems

different in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region compared with other world regions.[1] He hypothesises that this link is different in the MENA region due to a range of factors including: (1) the region's dependence on oil, (2) the relative importance of external intervention in the region, (3) the disproportionate role of "political factionalism" in the explanation of conflict grievance and violence in the MENA region[2] and (4) the link between the fragility of human development and conflict is weaker in MENA than in other regions. Our paper engages with these issues by exploring the underlying social and political mechanisms in MENA that may explain these links. In so doing, we first contextualise State Legitimacy (SL), Service Delivery (SD) and Conflict (C) in a discussion of MENA states; and second we then bring to bear data on the social policy context of these states to better situate the role of public services and service delivery. This allows for a deeper level discussion of the connections between state legitimacy, public services and conflict. This paper brings together insights from the social policy literature to present a re-reading of existing debates around the relationship between service delivery, state legitimacy and conflict. The purpose of the paper is to reexamine the state of knowledge in a new light in order to identify pertinent lines of enquiry for the study of C, SD and SL in MENA.

Service delivery is understood in this paper as a concept at the heart of social policy and reflects the wider political organisation of a society in terms of how citizens access key services and participation in decision-making. Effective service delivery has historically been viewed as an important tool for building citizen trust in government and in turn enhancing state legitimacy (Brinkerhoff et al. 2012; Van de Walle and Scott 2011). Although the idea of a "virtuous circle"—where improvements to service delivery can build state legitimacy—has underpinned state-building policy, this approach has been widely criticised in the more recent literature, as we discuss below (Mcloughlin 2018). Social policy is defined broadly to encompass a system of public service delivery that includes social insurance, social safety nets, health, housing and education services, and a political settlement reflecting the social rights of citizens and residents. Related to social policy is the more recent concept of social protection. As defined by Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004, p. 10), *"social protection describes all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised groups".* Together, global, national and local providers of social services form the social policy landscape of a country.

The paper is based on countries in the Arab sub-region primarily because the research conducted focuses on Arab countries affected by conflict. These countries share similar social and political challenges such as informality, low social protection coverage and government budget deficits. Quantitative data is drawn mainly from the Arab Barometer[3] Survey (ABS) data for the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. The ABS data allows us to explore broad patterns of micro-level social grievances in relation to state functions. These have been identified by other key scholars as necessary to provide deeper understanding of conflict (Cammett and Salti 2018).

The paper brings together three novel perspectives in order to examine the linkages between SL, SD and conflict in MENA: first, it adds new empirical insights from the Arab countries where the study of service delivery in relation to state legitimacy research is narrowly dominated by two models of welfare based on the role of Islamic movements and the Rentier state; second it brings to bear a social policy perspective whose core focus is, after all, the equitable provision of social and public services, although empirically this has historically focused on high-income Western countries (Barrientos 2013); third, it critically reviews the literature on service delivery, state legitimacy and conflict in relation to the Arab region, which has received little academic attention so far. In so doing, the paper's point of departure is a growing body of multi-disciplinary literature on state legitimacy, which argues that the analysis of state legitimacy, service delivery and conflict should start

with discussion about the nature of the state in the local context and an analysis of local normative perceptions (Mcloughlin 2015; Stel and Ndayiragije 2014). As noted earlier, we emphasise the importance of looking beyond the state by considering non-state providers of service-delivery as well as community and international level actors. Our analysis incorporates micro-level Arab Barometer survey data as well as insights from fieldwork conducted with social policy makers and service-users in a range of Arab countries (funded by various grants including the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the Carnegie Corporation of New York) in order to highlight Arab citizen perceptions of state services and legitimacy. This approach supports more critical schools of thought in the literature that seek to re-frame the study of the state in low- and middle-income countries (Pitcher et al. 2009; Nay 2013).

Two key arguments are made, one empirical, relating to the distinctiveness of the MENA region, and the second more conceptual in relation to the study of the relationship between service delivery, state legitimacy and conflict. First, we argue that sub-national forms of identity (such as religion, tribe or sect) are especially important drivers of service delivery in MENA countries, a feature that helps to explain why the connection between poor service delivery and state legitimacy or conflict is weaker in the region. Second, we argue that the social and political analysis of service delivery is required to better understand these relationships, hence the usefulness of a social policy perspective which highlights that the form of political participation is an important determinant of the link between service delivery and conflict, and that service delivery may need to support the expansion of social welfare if it is to be effective. A related point is the finding reported in this paper that Arab citizens attribute greater importance to the state of the economy and access to jobs than they do to the delivery of public services. We conclude, therefore, that to better understand state legitimacy and service delivery in MENA, further research on how different forms of political participation address social rights and equality is needed.

It is worth noting here what the analytical benefits of a social policy perspective in the study of state legitimacy are: (i) the social policy lens draws attention to the issues of membership, allocation and entitlement (Jawad et al. 2019), which reveal how citizens are socially and politically organised in a society and how they access key services and social benefits. This helps to reinforce the notion of the political embeddedness of service delivery and, therefore, how social ties can be formed or broken, leading to the possible risk of conflict; (ii) the social policy lens de-emphasises the value of service delivery as purely a political tool for state legitimacy in favour of emphasising its welfare function and contribution to social cohesion and wealth redistribution—these being important constituents of peace-building processes (Midgley and Piachaud 2013). This raises the issue of considering how service delivery actually contributes to social welfare, rather than just enhancing trust in the state or political leaders. This links to a wider issue pointed out by Sedgwick (2019) about legitimacy being deserved or not; (iii) in social policy, service delivery is a relatively newer function of the modern nation state, which is especially characteristic of the European welfare states after the Second World War. Social rights are the rights related to services and social benefits. They do not automatically flow from the political right to vote so political participation in elections is not enough to understand how state legitimacy may be enhanced. Arab states, similar to other developing countries, are grappling with a range of structural pressures, from low political participation and low trust in government for all citizens to ensuring law and order over their territory to providing accessible health and education services to their populations.

The paper is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. For the qualitative data, we draw on document analysis of social protection expenditures and first-hand interviews with policy makers and non-governmental organisations and policy labs funded by various UK and international research projects (including ESRC and the Carnegie Corporation of New York) to understand the normative underpinnings of social policy in the Arab countries. This data is not presented here, as the purpose of this paper is to reexamine the state of knowledge in a new light in order to begin to identify pertinent lines of

enquiry for the study of C, SD and SL in MENA. The quantitative data covers state social welfare spending on health and education that is based on World Bank World Development Indicators (WDI) data, with the larger proportion of data discussed in the paper drawn from the ABS. The latter provides opinion data of Arab citizens about a range of political and social issues in their countries. ABS data cover issues of trust in political leaders as well as concerns about the key challenges facing Arab populations. It is a face-to-face, high-quality survey, offering a unique opportunity for the comparison of public opinion in the Arab region. Given the absence of recent census data in many Arab countries, the sampling frame for this survey is constructed using maps paired with the latest population estimates from the statistics authorities in the respective country covering all citizens ages 18 and above. We use the most recent available dataset: wave five conducted in 2018–2019, covering 12 countries, namely Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen[4]. The number of respondents was around 2400 respondents in most countries, as illustrated in Table A1 in the Appendix A. Before moving further, a brief note is necessary to explain our use of the key concepts that guide our analysis (the concept of service delivery has already been defined above):

(1) State Legitimacy comprises two forms of legitimacy: one normative and one explanatory or empirical (Sedgwick 2019). The normative understanding asks what forms government should take and, drawing on Western political philosophy, concludes that democratic forms of government are the gold standard of state legitimacy. On the other hand, the explanatory understanding emphasises *"what forms of government are obeyed in practice"*, and therefore focuses on the perceptions of citizens and key stakeholders. This links to Max Weber's (Weber 1978, p. 213) original concept of "the belief in legitimacy" (Legitimitätsglaube) (cited in Sedgwick 2019). A significant body of literature has emerged in support of this view and this paper follows this school of thought in highlighting micro-level data on citizen perceptions of Arab state legitimacy as well as disaggregated or more contextual understandings of the state in MENA. To this end, Schwarz (2008, p. 600) has noted that *"focusing on a functional understanding of statehood allows to highlight where Arab states are strong (security function and in times of oil booms, welfare function) and where they are weak (representation function, and in times of fiscal crisis, welfare function)"*.

(2) Conflict, according to Kivimaki's (2021) paper, is measured in relation to the number of fatalities that stem from organized violence, based on Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) measures. According to the UCDP, organized violence covers state-based conflict (the use of armed force where one of the parties is the state or government), non-state conflict (armed force between two organised groups which are not the state), and "one-sided" violence (where the state uses force against civilians). Whilst acknowledging that conflict can be understood more broadly as a situation where structural, direct or cultural violence are manifest (Galtung 1969), our discussion of conflict will focus on situations where there is organized violence present. Since our study is based primarily on qualitative data, we will not limit our analysis to those situations where 25 battle deaths or fatalities are recorded in a given year, as per UCDP definitions.[5]

The paper is organised as follows: the next section examines the current state of literature on service delivery and state legitimacy; Section 3 sets out the main characteristics of the Arab state and identifies the gaps in the theoretical literature. To set the scene for the social policy analysis, it reviews data on key government health and education spending and examines the overarching socio-economic trends across conflict- and non-conflict-affected Arab countries. Section 4 moves on to the micro-level setting by presenting the ABS data and the results of the statistical analysis on citizen perceptions of their political leaders and socio-economic challenges in their countries. This provides scope to understand the demand side of social services. Section 5 engages more deeply with the social policy perspective by offering two institutional models of service delivery in Arab countries based on qualitative research. These are denoted as a state-based distributive model and a non-state (mainly religious) model. Section 6 synthesises the paper's findings to offer explanations of the relationship between SL, SD and C in MENA as well as highlighting

new lines of enquiry that emerge from the data analysed. The paper then concludes by reflecting on the main hypotheses set out by Kivimaki (2021) for this Special Issue.

2. The Relationship between Service Delivery, State Legitimacy and Conflict

Before moving to an analysis of the MENA region, this section takes stock of recent theoretical and conceptual literature on the relationship between service delivery, state legitimacy and conflict. It concludes by highlighting some implications of this recent literature for our understanding of the MENA region.

2.1. Service Delivery, State Legitimacy and Conflict

There is a long-held assumption in the state-building literature that improving service delivery leads in a straightforward way to improvements in state legitimacy (a "virtuous circle"), but several recent studies have found that this relationship is non-linear. Mcloughlin (2015, p. 341) argues that the relationship between state legitimacy and service delivery is "conditioned by expectations of what the state should provide, subjective assessments of impartiality and distributive justice, the relational aspects of provision, how easy it is to attribute (credit or blame) performance to the state, and the characteristics of the service".

The case of Sri Lanka (for example in Mcloughlin (2018) shows that where there is a lack of trust in the state's motivations, service provision can promote feelings of unfairness, and actually erode state legitimacy with certain groups, when it is perceived to have been distributed unevenly. This finding has been reflected in the flagship World Bank's (2018) Pathways for Peace report, which stresses that the uneven delivery of services can undermine state legitimacy, especially when it feeds into pre-existing narratives or the experience of exclusion. It is often the perception of whether services are delivered fairly that is more important than the reality. A long-running research study into service delivery and state legitimacy based on research in DRC, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Uganda (the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium) generated four key findings (McCullough et al. 2020). First, state legitimacy is co-constructed, not transactional. In other words, legitimacy is not simply a reflection of people's experience of the state but rather based on a complex interaction between people's beliefs about how the state acts and their experience of it.

Second, the study finds that "services become salient in the construction of legitimacy if they (re)produce contested distribution arrangements" (McCullough et al. 2020, p. iv). The project found some instances where state legitimacy was boosted by improvements in service delivery and found that these instances occurred when services were "connected to meta-narratives that delegitimise an authority" such as narratives about "disputed distribution arrangements, particularly between elite groups and excluded groups" (McCullough et al. 2020, p. iv). The third finding was that basic services do not necessarily "break or make the state" but that they may provide "teachable moments" (McCullough et al. 2020, p. v). Services can help contribute to a gradual process of shifting people's expectations of the state—either by improving it or by reinforcing a wider delegitimising narrative. Whether these narratives connect will depend a lot on the person's group identity and other factors.

The fourth finding was that the state "may not need to legitimate its power to all citizens in order to maintain its power" (McCullough et al. 2020, p. v). States will often shift between strategies of control and legitimation over time. In contexts where the state's approach to certain groups is repressive, "increased investment in basic services in areas where these groups are the majority is unlikely to have an impact on perceptions of state legitimacy" (McCullough et al. 2020). According to the Democracy Index, the MENA region has the highest level of repressive governance in the world, so this finding seems particularly relevant and is worthy of further exploration.

Most existing literature on state legitimacy has failed to account for subnational variation or how and why state legitimacy is generated and maintained for different groups or regions. As Gunasekera et al. (2019) show in their study of Sri Lankan state legitimacy, legitimacy is rooted in narratives that vary sharply across groups and regions. Specific

services are connected to different ideologies and narratives, and different groups are interpolated with these in different ways. Furthermore, the state itself does not manifest itself in a uniform way to all groups and is more complex and elusive than is normally depicted in the existing literature on state legitimacy. In Fragile-conflict-affected countries (FCC), the state's authority and legitimacy is typically patchy and contested amongst a range of state and non-state institutions. This contestation is particularly acute in borderland or frontier regions (Plonski and Walton 2018). As Cheng et al. (2018) have argued, "[i]n such contexts, stability may be dependent less on how well formal government institutions perform and more on the "bargaining equilibrium" that emerges between elites to ensure that they cooperate and engage with each other rather than attempt to pursue their interests through the use of violence".

To understand the connection between conflict and state legitimacy, therefore, it is important to (1) disaggregate the state and to examine the role of both state and non-state actors, (2) to look beyond the state level and try to understand sub-national variation and how narratives about the state and services are different across groups (e.g., for some, agriculture is the key factor, and the state's image and legitimacy is rooted in its support for this sector. This is particularly important in consociational systems (such as in Lebanon) or countries where political order depends on patronage-based legitimacy (Mourad and Piron 2016). Looking beyond the level of the state also implies (3) paying more attention to regional and international actors. These themes will be developed further below.

2.2. The Political Marketplace

Some more recent work has sought to reconceptualise legitimacy and authority in "fragile and conflict-affected countries" (FCC). Moving away from a western state-building approach, which is based on normative Weberian ideas of what a legitimate state looks like[6], recent international relations and political science literature have sought to develop a more nuanced and varied depiction of what local legitimacy looks like.[7] De Waal's "political marketplace" framework (De Waal 2009, 2018) is critical of Weberian approaches to understanding state legitimacy, which assume a relatively straightforward connection between state capacity, legitimacy and peace. The political marketplace framework highlights four key factors, which De Waal and others have argued are particularly salient both in Africa and in the "Greater Middle East" region: (1) politics is regulated less by formal and institutional rules and more by interpersonal relationships and financial transactions to buy loyalty of key elites, (2) political finance is derived mostly from externally derived rents rather than domestic sources, (3) control over the means of violence is distributed among elites rather than concentrated in the hands of a single ruler, (4) the terms of the political marketplace are regionally and internationally integrated. By highlighting the extent to which international actors are heavily implicated in the political marketplaces, the political marketplace framework (and other political economy frameworks such as North et al.'s 2009 "Limited Access Order" approach or Khan's 2010 notion of "political settlements", which it builds on) highlights that while western states may be rhetorically committed to promoting liberal states and liberal peace in the MENA region, in reality their policies are more designed to maintain the established order (see, for example, Turner (2015) on the Occupied Palestinian Territories). One criticism of the early political marketplace literature is that it underplays the role of identity (see Tschunkert and Ginty 2020). More recent work by Kaldor and Waal 2020) has sought to address this gap. Hadaya (2020), for example, explores how existing sectarian cleavages in Syria were instrumentalised by the Assad regime and contributed to the descent into entrenched armed conflict.

This brief review of existing literature generates two key insights for our questions about fragility, grievances and conflict in the MENA region and why the link between state legitimacy and conflict seems weaker in the MENA region than elsewhere. First, the general literature on state legitimacy and service delivery shows that the link between the two is non-linear, and to understand the connections, we need to adopt a locally-rooted approach which is alert to the ideologies and narratives that frame service provision in

any given context (including the analysis of sub-national variation). Second, existing approaches have tended to neglect the way in which states in sub-Saharan Africa and the Greater Middle East are often structured not according to liberal norms (as assumed by western donors) but rather according to the rules of the political marketplace. De Waal's political marketplace framework highlights factors that support directly Kivimaki's general findings about the importance of political factionalism (high levels of competition between elites, often structured along ethnic or sectarian lines, which are monetised and central to the maintenance of political order), the importance of oil revenues (and other external rents) and the importance of external intervention (or high levels of external penetration) for explaining the MENA region's exceptionalism.

3. Understanding the Arab State

This section contextualizes service delivery and legitimacy through a discussion of the key characteristics of Arab states and brings to bear descriptive data that explains the social policy background of the issues discussed in this paper. Schwarz (2008) explains that in the Middle East, generally, state formation was, as in other colonised regions of the world, driven by international geo-politics and the interests of Western powers. First, it is important to recognise the diversity of state structures in Arab countries which vary from the consociational democracy of Lebanon to the one-state rule of Syria and Egypt to the monarchies of the Arab Gulf, Jordan and Morocco. However, it also fair to argue that oil rents (and later political rents) made possible the development of a centralised state apparatus which, today, remains more of a "façade of statehood" that is dominated by military, tribal, sectarian or patronage-based affiliations.

Hinnebusch and Gani (2019) explain that the Middle East (of which Arab states form the largest country grouping) is the only world region where traditional monarchic rule is still evident even where countries regard themselves as republics. The dominant political model across the region is neo-patrimonialism, which is a *"a hybrid that combines practices from the region's pre-modern state-building inheritance with bureaucratic structures partly imported from the West . . . .the neo-patrimonial state is usually considered "weak" in the sense of the ability to implement policies . . . . and especially foster economic development, but, at the same time, it is quite robust in its combination of different kinds (personal and bureaucratic) of authority"* (Hinnebusch and Gani 2019, p. 4).

In his seminal work Beblawi (1990) noted that it was the combination of colonial rule and the fixing of an economic value to oil which helped to form more stable Arab states in the post-war era. The population groups seeking rule for themselves under the colonial powers took on the functions and role of the modern nation-states without fully resolving disputes over national territory or identity. Hence, the Arab nation-states that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s were primarily focused on law and order and maintaining security with minimal financial and administrative state capacity. It was later in the 20th century that the idea of a social contract and an obligation to provide public services emerged.

According to Springborg (2020), the limited access order framework (first developed by North et al. 2009) explains the dominance of clientelism in the MENA region as the model by which rulers control society and provide services. This occurs in both the mainstream public space and in the non-state sector where religious, especially Islamic political movements and other kinship-based entities, substitute state presence. Limited access to resources goes hand in hand with a lack of "political entrepreneurship" in MENA (Springborg 2020, p. 66). In connection with this, institutions of the "deep state" are key to understanding how MENA bureaucracies and official state institutions operate (Springborg 2020, p. 69). Originating in Turkey, the deep state concept (*derin devlet*) (Springborg 2020, p. 68) refers to a *"network of individuals in different branches of government with links to retired generals and organized crime, that existed without the knowledge of high-ranking military officers and politicians"*.

Focusing on the influence of oil on state formation in the region, Schwarz (2008) has argued that the existence of a Rentier state serves as a strong impediment to democratic

rule and helps to conserve socio-political norms in Arab societies and polities, such as the patrimonial nature of social interactions and primordial loyalties based on allocation patterns. The presence of an allocation state, not based on extraction contracts, thus explains why the process of state formation in the Middle East has not followed a path of economic development, sustained reform and democratization.

Schlumberger (2010) pulls together some of these strands by arguing that there are several factors which have helped non-democratic Arab regimes "maintain power since the 1970s: (1) religion; (2) tradition; (3) ideology; and (4) the provision of welfare benefits to their populations". He argues that in many MENA states, the importance of religion in underpinning power is low or in decline and suggests that traditional and material forms of legitimacy remain more important. Emphasising the production base of a nation-state, Delacroix (1980) argues that the capitalist world economy is diverse and certain modes of production do not foster the development of class identity, and as such states emerging under these conditions are influenced by political drivers other than class. This is the case of Asian, African and Arab countries.

Using the example of African state scholarship, Pitcher et al. (2009) argue that analysis of state legitimacy has been too narrowly focused on formal bureaucratic structures and small territorial spaces. This theoretical orientation is influenced by political bias in the mainstream literature against personalized relations in the public realm and a focus on explaining why liberal democracies have not taken root outside of Europe. In the authors' words, *"rather than questioning the supposed exclusion or neutralization of personal ties in rational legal bureaucracies, these analysts have seen such relationships as either impossible to institutionalize or as "polluting" the public sector"* (Pitcher et al. 2009, p. 138). To this end, the authors argue that there is a misinterpretation of Weber's work whereby the rational-legal model of authority is considered the gold standard, leading to a neglect of Weber's original argument that patrimonial linkages are a natural form of reciprocity in all societies and support valid state formation. Patrimonialism is a "voluntary form of compliance of subjects" (Pitcher et al. 2009, p. 138), and to a certain extent we find evidence of this through qualitative research in the Arab countries (as discussed in this paper). Bellin (2012) specifically identifies patrimonial influence in the MENA countries' military bodies. She argues that in the Middle East, extensive access to rent and international support, coupled with the patrimonial political structures of Arab countries, has fostered a capacity for repressive politics.

Hinnebusch (2020) has further expounded the importance of the local populace in state formation through the categorisation of MENA countries as *authoritarian-populist*. Using the example of Syria to illustrate the complex interaction between state legitimacy and a social contract based on populism, the author shows how that the Ba'th regime's political roots and support base was in the Syrian villages that it had managed to incorporate through land reform and party organization. Hafiz al-Asad wooed peasant producers with subsidized inputs and good state prices for crops which were later undone by the neo-liberal reforms of his son and successor Bashar al-Asad's in the 2000s. Combined with the impact of a harsh drought, these reforms led to the rise of the Islamic rebellion and the Syrian civil war. Hinnebusch (2020) argues that flour and bread subsidies have remained a symbol of the populist social contract in Syria and were maintained even at the height of the conflict both by the Bath'ist state and its Islamic opponents who had emerged from the disgruntled villages of Eastern Syria. Sobhy's (2021) analysis of education and the social contract in Egypt argues that the protection dimension (relating to security, rule of law and protecting territorial integrity) is more important at underpinning state legitimacy than provision (delivering services) or participation (doing this in an inclusive and democratic way), a finding that could reasonably be extrapolated across the region based on our analysis of the ABS survey data below. She argues that before the uprisings, Arab regimes sought to compensate for a decline in provision by improving participation. However, she argues that any approach at boosting state legitimacy and the social contract should not neglect the protection dimension as well.[8]

A key argument proposed in the social contract literature is that boosting service provision may not be enough to reverse declines in state legitimacy in the region—protection and participation are also important (Loewe et al. 2020). These arguments lend important credence to the social policy perspective incorporated in this paper, and this issue is explored further in the next sections of the paper. From here, it is possible to draw linkages with Sedgwick (2019, p. 99), who notes that from an explanatory perspective of legitimacy, the Arab state may have a claim to legitimacy, but whether this is "deserved" is another matter. Perceived legitimacy is central to explaining both authoritarian resilience and state collapse and recent history, especially following the Arab uprisings of 2011, which show that state collapse seems to be the only viable alternative to authoritarianism in Arab countries. Sedgwick (2019) distinguishes between authoritarian politics, where the terms of reference for analysis are general structures such as "regime" or "state," in contrast to democratic politics, where a more dynamic distinction is made between *"government or leadership on the one hand and state institutions on the other hand, and between both of these and the political system or constitution"* (Sedgwick 2019). In this view, democratic politics is legitimate whereas authoritarian politics is not. The degree of legitimacy different institutions enjoy may vary, whilst in an authoritarian system, and leadership may change even if the authoritarian system persists. According to this approach, Sedgwick (2019) notes that the key form of legitimacy that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states demonstrate is output legitimacy as reflected in the broad range of social and welfare services they provide to their populations. In another categorisation by Schwarz (2008), GCC states also figure prominently as providers of welfare, hence we see that there is recognition of the role of welfare services in contributing to state legitimacy in the Arab countries, albeit with limited theoretical development and comparison to other non-Arab countries.

To further this argument, it is worth considering the patterns of social expenditure in Arab countries. These form the first step in integrating a social policy analysis and providing a contextual policy background for service delivery in this paper. Here we provide a descriptive overview in order to begin to identify more important lines of enquiry in relation to conflict and state legitimacy. First, it is noted that the already significant levels of poverty in the Arab countries have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as can be seen in the graph below.

As shown in the Figure 1 below, the poverty headcount is significantly higher in crisis-affected Arabic countries such as Yemen, Syria, Sudan and Iraq. While poverty rates are likely to increase in almost all Arab countries because of the pandemic[9], the magnitude of this increase is likely to be higher in conflict-affected countries. Indeed, between 2019 and 2021, the poverty headcount ratio increased by around 1 percentage point in countries such as Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Sudan. Indeed, conflict has had a negative impact on social institutions and infrastructures, which explains the high poverty in the affected countries (Abu-Ismail 2020). The expectation, therefore, would be that state legitimacy would fall in these circumstances thereby drawing attention to the role of social services such as health and education in supporting peace. We take a cursory look here at government spending in the Arab region.

How does this snapshot of poverty reflect against the general trends in social spending in the Arab countries? It is well known that Arab countries have spent more on the military than on social welfare such as health and education (El-Ghonemy 1990). Figures 2 and 3 below show health and education expenditure spending data that is drawn from the World Bank WDI survey. As can be seen, most fragile and conflict-affected countries spend less than the MENA average health expenditures.[10] Lebanon has the highest share of current health expenditures in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (8.4%), while Djibouti has the lowest share of health expenditures in GDP (2.3%). The level of health expenditures are low overall in MENA countries[11] (5.8%) compared to the world average (9.89%) and other regions such as North America (16.42%), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (12.46%), Europe (10.14%) and East Asia and the Pacific (6.67%), as the share of GDP.[12] In sub-Saharan Africa, the share of current health expenditure in GDP was

slightly lower, at 5.09% in 2018. Furthermore, Figure 2 does not show a clear difference in health expenditures between conflict- and non-conflict-affected countries.
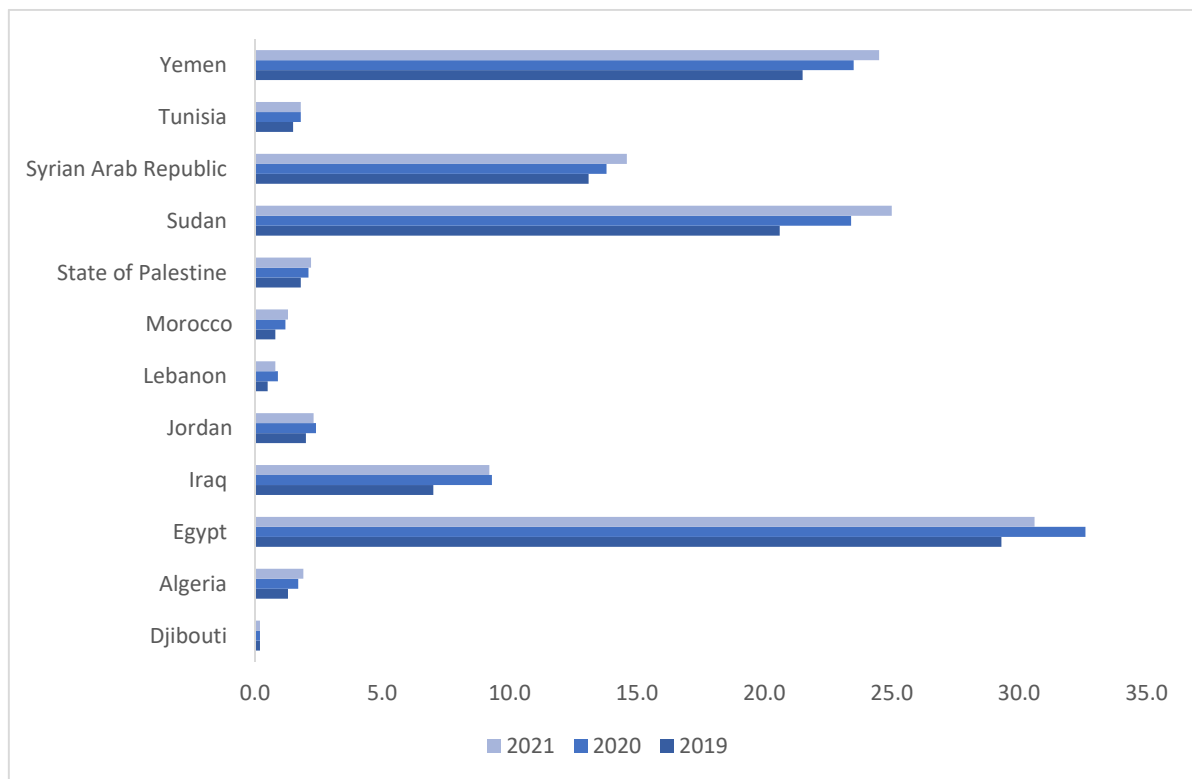
Figure 1. Headcount poverty ratios (%) using national poverty lines. Source: (UN-ESCWA 2020). Note: The results are the output of the projected scenario; for more details about the results of other scenarios, please see UN-ESCWA (2020).
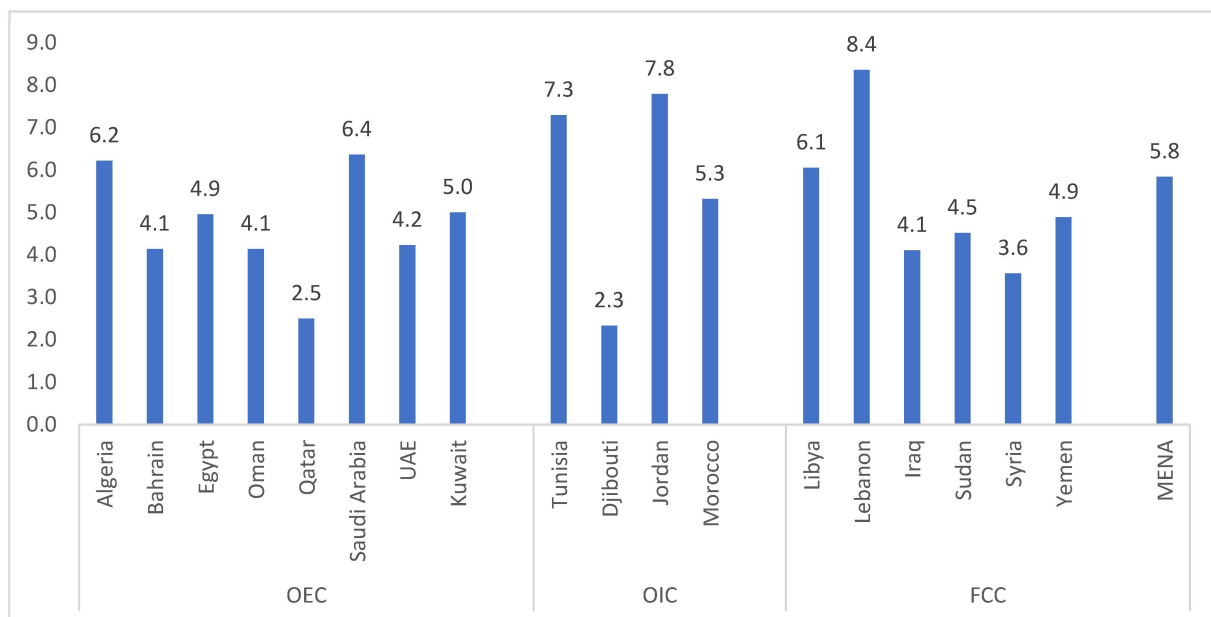
Figure 2. Current health expenditure in 2018 (% of GDP). Source: World Development Indicators. Available online: https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/ (accessed on 15 July 2021). Note: FCC: Fragile Crisis affected Countries, OEC: Oil Exporting Countries, and OIC: Oil Importing Countries.
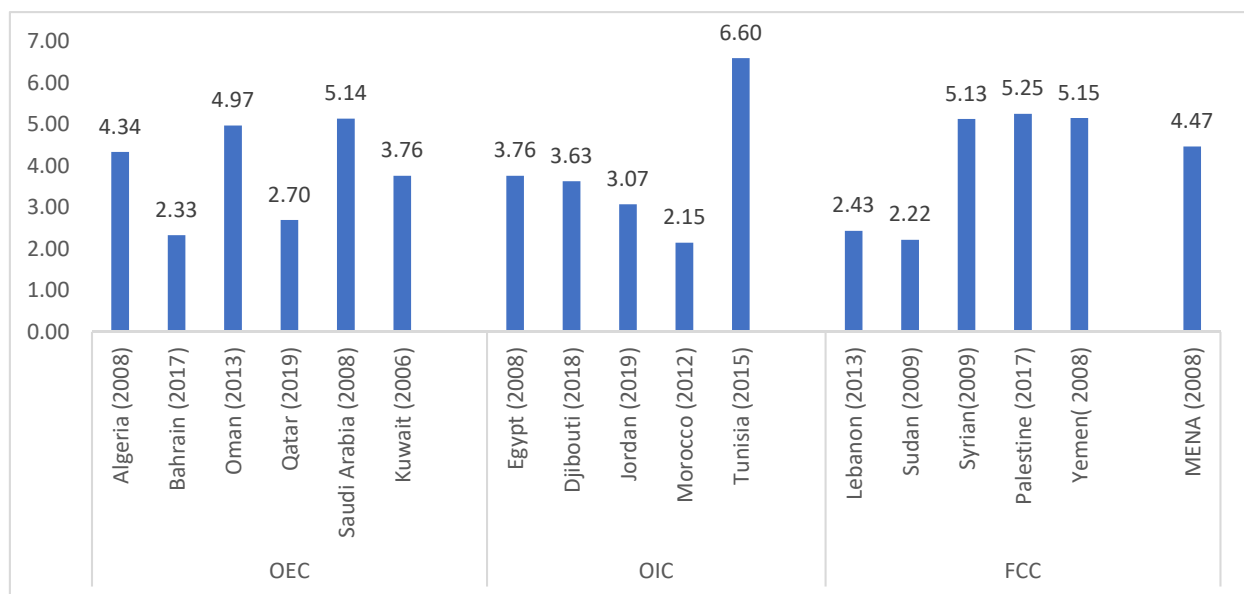
Figure 3. Government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP). Source: World Development Indicators. Available online: https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/ (accessed on 15 July 2021). Note: FCC: Fragile Crisis affected Countries, OEC: Oil Exporting Countries, and OIC: Oil Importing Countries.

There are similar findings for education expenditure, as seen in the Figure 3 below. As shown, the highest expenditures on education were made in Tunisia (6.6% in 2015) and the lowest in Sudan (2.22% in 2009). However, low values could also reflect that the private sector and/or households have a large share in total funding for education, which is the case of the GCC. To compare with other world regions, the average government expenditure on education in the MENA region is 4.47% of GDP, which is close to the world average (4.5%), but lower than in OECD countries (5.01% in 2017)[13], and slightly higher than East Asia & Pacific (4.15% in 2017) and sub-Saharan Africa (4.3% in 2018) [14].

Education and Health expenditures are generally low in both conflict and non-conflict countries in the Arab region, compared to other world regions. Hence, it is not possible to confirm the relationship of health and education expenditures on conflict by relying on social services spending alone, although this matter is worth exploring in further depth. Low social expenditures could be viewed as a lack of access to social services for the poor population.[15] However, policies should be evaluated by their outcome rather than the amount allocated; also, attention should be paid to the demand for social services from the poor rather than only focusing on the supply (Morrisson 2002). To complement this macro-level perspective, the paper now turns to the key results from an analysis of ABS data of citizen perceptions regarding the socioeconomic situation in their respective countries and the level of trust in their governments and political leaders. Barometer survey data have been used in the analysis of conflict and state legitimacy issues and, given the lack of data availability, they serve as suitable proxy indicators for state legitimacy. One limitation of these indicators is that they are derived from cross-sectional data and only provide a snapshot of public opinion and therefore are not able to capture changes in peoples' views or priorities over time, which may be important for developing a more nuanced understanding of how SD, SL and conflict are related.

4. Citizen Perceptions of State Institutions and Political Leaders in Arab Countries

The ABS asks respondents about the important challenges facing their countries and the results, reported below, show that three stand out: the economic situation, corruption and public services are among the most important challenges facing the countries, as illustrated in Figure 4. A noteworthy finding is that international interference appears to be less important than domestic issues.
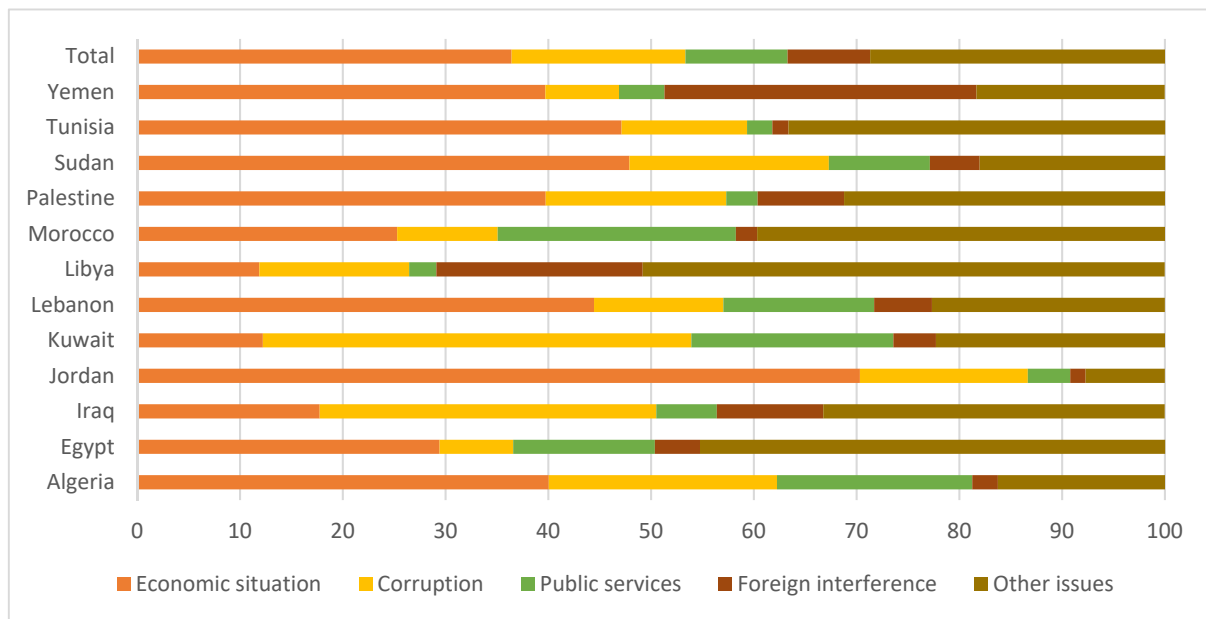
Figure 4. Most important challenges in Arab countries. Source: Arab Barometer Survey Fifth wave (2018–2019). Available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/ (accessed on 15 July 2021).

Figure 4 shows that the most important issue facing Arab citizens is the economic situation (poverty, unemployment and inflation). This result is valid for almost all the countries except Kuwait and Iraq, where 41% and 32% of respondents reported that the most important challenge facing their countries is corruption. In Libya, the most important challenge would be foreign interference, according to 20% of respondents. Furthermore, financial and administrative corruption is also a concern for Arab citizens; 16.91% of all respondents in Arab countries report that it is the most important challenge. The cross-country comparison shows that in almost all countries, this challenge comes in the second position. For instance, in Algeria and Tunisia, 22.21% and 12.21% of respondents, respectively, report that corruption is the most important challenge facing the country. As will be discussed later in this paper, the higher importance attributed by Arab citizens to these matters in comparison to the delivery of services is an important marker of the relationship between SL, SD and C in MENA and deserves further research.

Poor public services, such as health and education, is identified as another important challenge in many countries. Nearly 10% of total respondents report that public services are the most important challenge in Arab countries; the cross-country comparison shows that 23% of Moroccans report that public services are the most important challenge. These compare with 19% in Algeria and Kuwait and around 14% in Egypt and Lebanon. This finding raises important new questions about the relative importance of services for the risk of conflict in Arab countries. It would be worth mentioning that the above analysis looks at relative rather than absolute concerns; indeed, the question asks respondent to pick 1 among 10 alternatives of answers[16], which may have affected responses and makes it unclear how the conflict is related to social services and the economic situation. To address this issue, the following paragraphs will analyse questions asking about opinions on health and education separately. The ABS also asks respondents about their trust in government, parliament, political parties and religious leaders. The level of trust in these entities is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 5 shows that the populations of the Arab countries are more likely to trust religious leaders and less likely to trust government and political parties. Indeed, the level of trust in government is low; an average of 21% of respondents declare trusting their government, which can be interpreted as state illegitimacy. The lowest trust in government has been observed in Libya (8.41%), Iraq (12.23%) and Jordan (12,75%), while the highest

values of state legitimacy have been observed for Egypt (36.38%), Yemen (32.54%) and Kuwait (32.31%). Furthermore, on average, only 34,58% of respondents have reported that they trust parliament. The highest levels of trust are observed in Egypt (72%) and the lowest in Libya (10.15%). In addition, Arab populations do not seem to trust political parties, with only 15% expressing trust. The highest value is observed in Yemen (30.17%) and the lowest value is observed in Libya (4.42%). Finally, 40% of Arab populations population report they trust religious leaders, which is higher than the share of the population trusting the government. This result is valid for all countries. In Egypt more than half (53%) of the population report they trust religious leaders, but this percentage is lowest in Libya, at 18.11%. This data confirms existing knowledge in the literature.
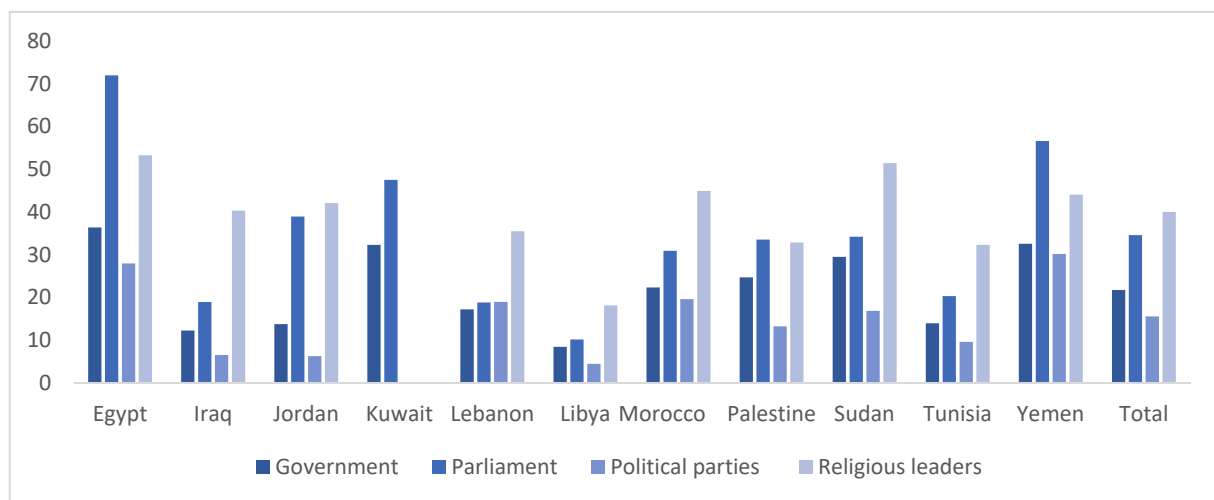
Figure 5. Percentage of people trusting government, parliament, political parties and religious leaders.Source: Arab Barometer Survey Fifth wave (2018–2019). Available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/ (accessed on 15 July 2021).

In terms of satisfaction with health and education systems[17] in their countries, the results are shown below:

Health and education are two key aspects of the social policy system. The ABS data is limited in its coverage of services; hence, we use these two policy areas as the closest indicators to social policy expectations among citizens. Figure 6 shows that the percentages of people satisfied with health and education systems in Arab countries are 38.74% and 42.51%, respectively. This low satisfaction level may reflect the low quality of health and education services, which might not be in line with the population's needs and expectations. The data shows that the highest level of satisfaction with health system is observed in Jordan, where more than 63% of the population report that they are satisfied, while the lowest level of satisfaction is observed in Libya, where only 18% of respondent declare they are satisfied. With regard to education, Palestine has the highest level of population satisfaction (65.9%), while the lowest level of satisfaction is observed in Iraq (26.65%). Indeed, conflict in Iraq and Libya has devastated many health and education infrastructures, which has made the quality and access to those services very low /restricted. Again, these data need further exploration; for example, Palestine is one of the countries most affected by conflict in the Arab countries, and yet it has a relatively high level of citizen satisfaction with the education system.
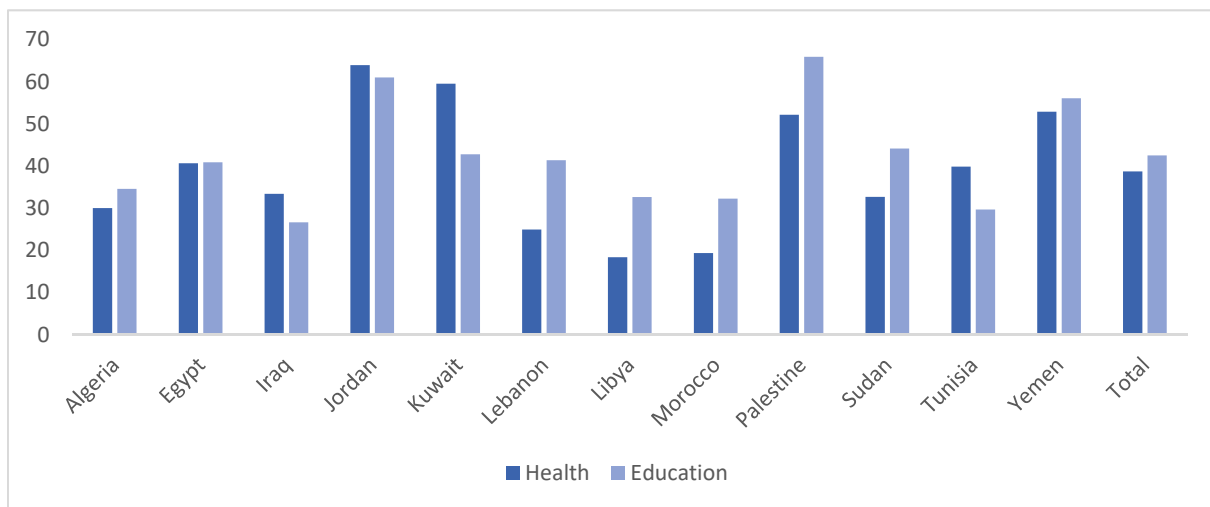
Figure 6. Percentage of people satisfied with health and education systems. Source: Arab Barometer Survey Fifth wave (2018–2019). Available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/ (accessed on 15 July 2021).

The ABS asks for opinions about a range of other policy areas that are relevant for a social policy perspective. These questions relate to government efficiency in many areas such as creating employment, providing security, reducing inequalities and controlling inflation. The results of these questions are summarized in Figure 7.
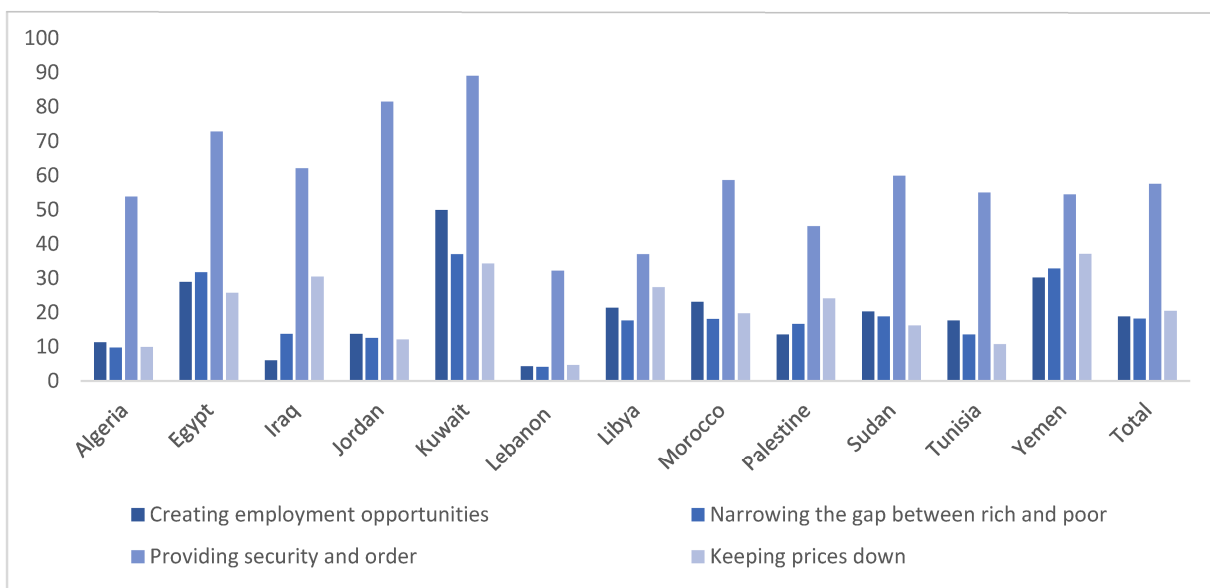
Figure 7. Percentage of people reporting that the government efficiency is good by area. Source: Arab Barometer Survey Fifth wave (2018–2019). Available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/ (accessed on 15 July 2021).

Figure 7 shows that in all countries, the local population is more likely to report that government efficiency is good in providing security and order (57.55%). The lowest levels of satisfaction are in relation to employment and gaps between rich and poor. This is noteworthy, as these are critical areas of study in social policy although it is not possible to see a clear trend in the graph. Only 18.79% of Arab populations report that government efficiency is good at creating employment. This percentage is 18.18% in relation to narrowing gaps between rich and poor and 20.24% in relation to keeping prices down. The cross-country comparison shows that Kuwait is doing best according to their

citizens except in keeping prices down. On the other hand, Lebanese citizens express the lowest satisfaction in all four areas.

These regional findings are supported by case study literature on Lebanon. A study on municipal service delivery by Mourad and Piron (2016), for example, argues that Lebanese citizens have very low expectations of the state, and that central and local government "do not derive 'performance-based' legitimacy from delivering services for all, and provide few opportunities for 'process-based' legitimacy, such as through participation mechanisms". They do point out, however, that civil society protests in 2015–6 regarding waste disposal started to challenge state performance on specific service delivery issues, highlighting that the dynamics of the social contract are liable to shift over time.

Tschunkert and Ginty (2020), in another study of state legitimacy in Lebanon, argue that most people are fairly ambivalent about the state, and that *wasta* (a system of family connections and networks that shapes the distribution of resources) is more important for most people. Tschunkert and Ginty's (2020) account of legitimacy in Lebanon highlights a profound lack of trust in government—the state is hollow, or a husk—and legitimacy is often invested in other institutions such as *wasta* or organisations such as Hezbollah, which sit largely outside of the state structures. Lebanon is also a society highly penetrated by international actors who shape the political marketplace profoundly.

The low quality or lack of access to social services may lead Arab populations to riot or enter into conflict with the state (Kivimaki 2021; Merouani et al. 2021), although the general robustness of this relationship is questioned in the wider literature, as has been convincingly argued by Mcloughlin (2015). The ABS also provide data on participation in formal and informal political activities during the last three years (2015–2018/2019). The results are illustrated in the following figure.

As seen in Figure 8 below, formal political participation (voting in election) is on average higher than informal political participation (protest, political meeting petition, and the use of force for political causes). However, informal political participation is still relatively high in Arab countries compared to other regions[18], and it is even higher than formal political participation in some countries, such as Algeria. In Yemen the participation rate in protest (39.51%) is nearly equal to participation in voting (41.1%). Furthermore, participation in protest is higher in conflict-affected countries such as Yemen (39.51%), Sudan (28.56%) and Palestine (28.17%) compared to other countries. There are also relatively high levels of participation in protests in Morocco (28.13%), which is similar to the rate observed in conflict-affected countries. How political participation translates into access to services requires further investigation that can help better explain the linkages between SD, SL and C.

Figure 8. Percentage of people having participated in politics during 2015-2018/2019. Source: Arab Barometer Survey Fifth wave (2018–2019). Available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/ (accessed on 15 July 2021).
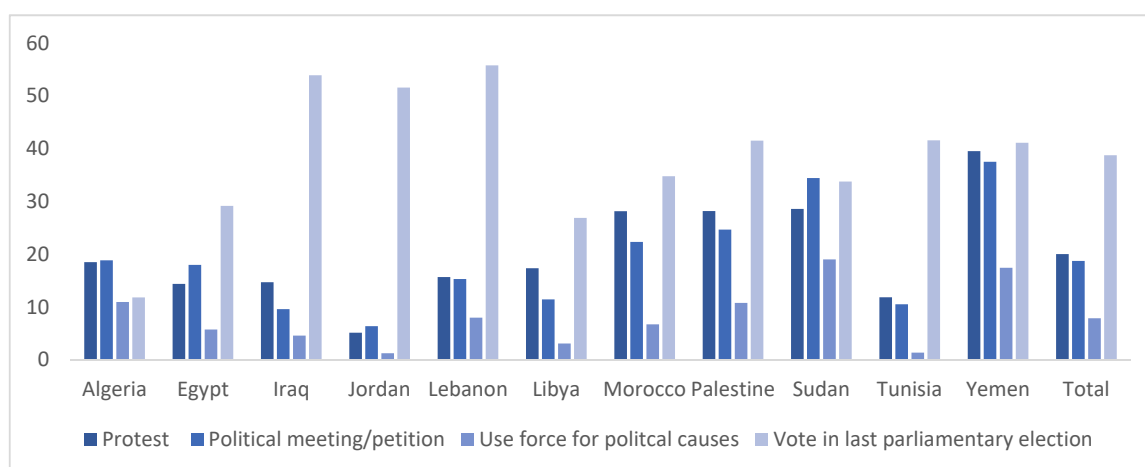
Cammett and Salti (2018) also discuss micro-level data based on opinion surveys to highlight how social groups in Arab societies experienced social grievances differently and how this impacted on their participation in the Arab uprisings of 2011. In line with other observers, the authors argue that rather than social grievances being of a homogenous nature across the Arab world, and hence population mobilization on the basis of similar frustrations (such as lack of jobs), the logic of diffusion provides a better explanation for why citizens were led to the street. There are macro-level concerns that commonly affect all Arab countries, such as government failure to provide key services and job opportunities, especially since the late 1970s, and the rampant corruption and clientelism which was especially felt among the Arab middle classes. Such perspectives highlight the need for further qualitative research to understand the underlying mechanisms of conflict.

Diwan (2013) notes that the "middle class" was a key constituent of the Arab Spring uprisings and in fact the main counterpart protagonist to the youth population who are also considered leading mobilisers of the Arab Spring. According to Diwan (2013), the secular Arab middle classes had been historically co-opted into the "political settlements" since the 1950s because Arab rulers saw interest in keeping them on side. The middle classes either had posts in government or were allowed to form political oppositions, in both cases adding legitimacy to the authoritarian regimes that emerged in MENA post-independence. Again, further research is needed to explore the direct relationship among these factors.

To summarise, this quantitative overview offers only a preliminary picture of the situation and raises further questions. It has shown that levels of expenditure on key public services are generally lower than other world regions and that levels of satisfaction with public services are low, both in MENA countries affected by conflict and those that are not. What is also evident is that MENA populations are especially dissatisfied with their government's performance in addressing unemployment and inequalities between rich and poor. These are issues of relevance to social policy and may act as compounding factors of conflict when they interact with identity-based drivers (Stewart 2008). Overall, the data appear to echo findings from case studies on countries such as Lebanon that poor standards of public service are to some extent expected by the population who generally have low levels of trust in government. The flipside of these low expectations of government is the wide array of public authority that exists in the MENA region, and in particular the high degree of trust in religious leaders. Finally, this quantitative analysis highlights the varied forms of political participation that exist in the MENA region, demonstrating that the importance of formal political participation (voting) is less than in other world regions. One important implication here is whether further research should explore forms of political participation that directly connect with service delivery, such as alternative forms of inclusion and decision-making that citizens are affiliated to MENA. The next two sections develop this argument further.

5. Explaining the Main Mechanisms of Service Delivery in Arab States

This section takes a deeper look at the social and political processes which underpin service delivery in the Arab countries by incorporating insights from qualitative research based on fieldwork in Arab countries exploring state and citizen perceptions and experiences of social welfare and social policy, providing necessary institutional analyses of the issues at hand (see Jawad 2009; and Jawad et al. 2019). We identify two dominant models of service delivery which shape social and political identities profoundly in the Arab countries, thereby taking the discussion of legitimacy, service delivery and conflict outside of the state. The two models help to explain the perceptions of Arab citizens in relation to the importance of service delivery and low expectations of the state. As such, this section enhances the ABS data discussion already provided and supports the re-examination of the literature based on a social policy perspective. For example, citizens may be less concerned about state service delivery because they are already receiving services through sub-national providers such as religious or patronage networks. This

section therefore provides an explanation for the non-linear relationship between service delivery and state legitimacy.

First is a distributive model of state welfare characterising not only the *Rentier states* of the Gulf but also the patrimonial systems of leadership followed by most Arab countries and, second, a model based on the influential role of non-state approaches of religious groups is highlighted. Within these two models, there are two rationales deployed by political leaders for delivering services to citizens: the distributive model is based on the rationale of reducing "dissent" and the risk of protest as seen in the 2011 Arab uprisings. The non-state approach is based on a communal identity akin to the notion of a "right" as seen in the discourses of brotherhood and community among religious organisations (Jawad 2009; AlJabiri and Jawad 2019). This takes on populist notions of appealing to the downtrodden populations neglected by the state.

Although political actors providing services in Arab countries use welfare strategically to leverage political gain, they also call upon historical social bonds in the form of religion, tribal, ethnic or sectarian identities. As such, the arguments about repression and lack of legitimacy are accurate only insofar as they exclude segments of the Arab populations that do not have this sense of "patrimonial compliance" (Pitcher et al. 2009). There is therefore, a complex array of social relations and norms that produce the required political stability and social cohesion to keep these systems in place. The ABS data presented in the paper also confirms the important role of religion in MENA more generally.

5.1. The Distributive Model and the Logic of Dissent

Alshalfan (2013) analyses the effectiveness of the distributive state model based on the case of Kuwait, which is generally regarded in the literature as the model example of an Arab Gulf state using oil revenues to provide generous social welfare benefits to its population. As noted elsewhere in the literature, distributive states contrast with the Western model of welfare states in the way they finance welfare services, this being based on rent revenue rather than the extraction of surplus revenue through taxation. Hence, bureaucracies do not develop in such states to become accountable in the delivery of essential public service (Alshalfan 2013). Rather, they serve the state's primary role as the employer and purveyor of welfare benefits. This type of state subsidises a range of goods and services and also provides essential services such as education, employment and free housing. The adverse effect of this is that states dependent on this mode of finance, such as the Arab Gulf states, are vulnerable to oil revenues and in recent years, they have grown concerned by the welfare dependency of their populations. The distributive welfare approach also means that governments brush over the inequalities within their local populations. For example, merchant families remain the most affluent members of Kuwaiti and other Arab Gulf populations (Alshalfan 2013).

It has been widely argued that Rentier states tend to be weak states because a high dependence on oil revenue hinders the development of accountability mechanisms between state and society that would otherwise develop through a taxation system and corresponding need for democratic representation (Schwarz 2008). On the other hand, these states use social welfare benefits to gain societal acquiescence. Mazaheri (2017) provides an interesting analysis of the Muslim Shi'a population uprisings in the oil-fertile Eastern province of Saudi Arabia to show how marginalised populations in oil-rich economies use rioting and "dissent" (Mazaheri 2017) to access better services such as water and sanitation. Th Arab Spring events also set in motion similar responses by Arab governments who used handouts, cash assistance or increased public sector pay to abate social dissent.

Beyond the Arab Gulf states, analysts also agree that the detrimental effect of oil on the political development of Arab states is felt across the Arab world. This is because oil-rich Gulf states use oil revenues to fund development assistance and aid to lower income Arab countries such as Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan. In turn, non-oil Arab countries have a long history of relying on migrant workers and foreign remittances from their oil-rich neighbours. This feeds into a "rentier mentality" (Beblawi 1990), which is described as a

break in the intrinsic link between work and reward. Beblawi (1990) argues that *Rentier ethics* are in juxtaposition with the ethics of production, and Arab societies have come to expect wealth and resources to be circulated though other mechanisms, such as clientelism and favouritism, due to the loss of the link with economic production.

5.2. Non-State Actors and the Logic of "Right"

The second model covers the role of religious actors in the provision of services, specifically Islamic political movements and welfare organisations. Since most people in the MENA region work in the informal sector (68.6%) and most of this group rely on non-state service provision, this appears to be an important theme in the MENA literature. A literature review by Ismail (2018), for example, found that local service delivery in Egypt was being undermined by a crackdown on religious organisations and civil society groups. Some studies examine how non-state armed groups such as Hezbollah or various groups in Syria have used the delivery of basic services as a means of bolstering their standing with local communities.[19] An interesting feature of the region, is that many important non-state political movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood or Hezbollah, have a regional or transborder dimension (Schlumberger 2010).

Two notable cases in the literature are Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, who have acquired formal political status in their respective polities (Heger and Jung 2017; Jawad 2009). There are various strands of literature in relation to service provision by religious organisations. Heger and Jung (2017) note that service provision in conflict zones can take a variety of forms: to provide welfare, food, medical services, education, and/or religious services. Qualitative research has shown that social welfare is an important element of the political and social identity of these religious organisations (Jawad 2009; Jawad et al. 2019; Jawad and Eseed 2021) in that they not only provide the local infrastructure of education, health and sanitation services but also help to consolidate community support for the religious movement or organisation that is providing these services and effectively representing the interests of the community in the national polity. In the case of Hezbollah, welfare services are separated between the support given to military personnel and those offered to the wider community as part of a network of charities. The Emdad committee is one such example of a charitable organisation politically affiliated to and staffed by Hezbollah but serving communities in need mainly in the southern suburb of Beirut and in the South of Lebanon, where the majority of the Shi'a population of Lebanon resides (Jawad 2009).

Hamas' service provision role is also quite well-developed and, similar to Hezbollah's, took root before the organisation formally launched itself as a political organisation. For example, the grassroots involvement in elections in universities, workplaces and trade unions was often one way in which Hamas developed a support based in the local population. Hamas took on the social welfare role previously covered by the Muslim brotherhood, sometimes also operating out of unofficial community centres that are used both to distribute goods and services but also as party headquarters (Heger and Jung 2017).

According to Heger and Jung (2017), the earlier literature on rebel organisations in conflict zones argued that such groups provided social welfare services when state institutions were absent or insufficient. This in turn helped rebel groups gain power and legitimacy among the populations they supported. More recent work has examined in more depth how the social services provided by religious organisations link with their political activity and claims to power. For example, one set of studies link service provision to particular forms of violence such as suicide bombing, attacks on civilians and lethal attacks (Heger and Jung 2017, p. 1207). Key conclusions that emerge from this literature are that (1) service-providing groups tend to have a larger support base since service provision facilitates recruitment and the legitimacy of the rebel group, especially where the state is perceived as weak or corrupt; (2) involvement in service provision also means that an organisation has a complex structure distinguishing between a range of functions and therefore may have a greater capacity to negotiate in peace deals as well as a greater

aptitude to fight; (3) such groups are more likely to be involved in more severe forms of violence and high risk tactics such as suicide attacks or violence against civilians (Heger and Jung 2017, p. 1207).

6. New Lines of Enquiry about MENA Emerging from the Arab Context

This section synthesises the discussion so far by making linkages with the existing literature and proposing possible new lines of enquiry that deserve further research. First, a brief review of the data presented in this paper is worth noting. Service delivery is a key focus of this Special Issue, and it is also a core topic in the social policy literature. Hence this paper has engaged with a social policy perspective by conducting a preliminary review of data on social expenditure and considering levels of citizen satisfaction in relation to social policy areas such as the gap between rich and poor, access to jobs and services, and satisfaction with health and education. Conceptually, the point of departure both in this paper and the Special Issue is that SD and SL are not directly correlated, a relationship which is even more problematic in the MENA region. However, the ABS data also show populations are most concerned about economic and social issues in their countries. The paper has therefore brought to bear qualitative data that proposes two dominant forms of service delivery: one state and one non-state. Both rely on types of political affiliation that are not based on citizen rights but rather on ascribed identity, such as religion or patronage.

An interesting indicator to highlight is the gap between rich and poor, as shown in Figure 7. Satisfaction with this policy area is higher in countries where there are more large social assistance systems, such as Egypt and Kuwait. This raises the question of whether there might be further investigation needed of the social and political context of service delivery processes to better understand the linkages between SD, SL and C. Since concern with jobs and the economic situation are also of key concern, as highlighted earlier, these data may imply that Arab citizens connect their welfare with economic considerations more than with state interventions to improve their lives through services. As such, service delivery may have relatively little impact on state legitimacy in MENA countries, especially when current literature such as on Lebanon (cited above) refers to low expectations of government. The data presented already show that Arab populations are politically active in the formal and informal spheres, but what we know less about is the extent to which this form of political participation has any influence on services such as through citizen voice in local government. As pointed out by Pitcher et al. (2009), we also propose here that deeper qualitative investigation is required to understand whether political forms of participation which enhance social rights and equality may play a role in strengthening state legitimacy and service delivery in MENA. These would need to also account for religious non-state actors who pose a political challenge for the state in many MENA countries, especially where these groups have mobilised against the state and provided services.

Service delivery focuses on the performative functions of the state. Hence, the findings of this paper support a growing body of literature that emphasises the social and political processes underpinning how services are delivered and citizen perceptions of their fairness rather than whether they are simply present or absent (Stel and Ndayiragije 2014).

The social policy perspective applied in this paper to further examine the relationship between SL, SD and C in MENA thus leads to the following key conclusion: it is important to further research Arab citizen perceptions of the role of the state and the extent to which state delivery is considered a fundamental part of this. This is because the ABS data discussed here suggests that finding jobs is a more important concern for Arab citizens at a time when many already take part in formal elections, such as by voting. The qualitative data regarding the two types of models of service delivery in MENA also provides some background context to the social and political processes that are in operation in Arab countries. Where the state provides services as part of clientelist structures, citizen distrust in the state may be muted. Where non-state and especially religious actors provide services, citizens benefiting may already have low expectations of the state or may already be in conflict with state agencies due to having alternative political/religious affiliations. These

issues deserve further investigation. In this respect, we acknowledge the inherent limitation in the ABS data, which is that it is not possible to make a direct association between the trends identified in this paper with actual citizen perceptions of state legitimacy in MENA. Further analysis and qualitative research would be required. The paper has, however, made the worthwhile contribution of identifying the key trends that are essential for more rigorous study of SL, SD and C in MENA.

The above argument supports existing research on social contracts in MENA countries that are characterised by an "autocratic bargain"—basic services in exchange for "limited political and civil liberties" (Jawad 2020), with benefits mainly flowing to the urban middle classes, especially those working in the formal sector. These issues are compounded by the high level of dependence on oil revenues, which has led to jobless growth in some states. The private sector plays an important role in health and education provision, and, as such, the connection between state legitimacy and service delivery is already weak. To this end, Loewe et al. (2020) view the Arab uprisings in 2010–2011 as "an expression of discontent with a situation in which governments provided neither political participation nor social benefits, like employment". Loewe et al. (2020) suggest that improved service provision could be one way to rebuild social contracts in the region, but little detail is provided on this point. They argue that the current challenges facing MENA states are multifaceted, and that MENA states often fail in all three core state functions (protection, participation and provision). This implies that improving provision alone may not be enough, a view that is confirmed in this paper as well by the wider literature on service delivery, state legitimacy and conflict viewed above.

One final issue is how the COVID-19 pandemic is magnifying social inequality and forcing drastic reconfiguration of state social spending across the world, including in MENA. A forthcoming UN-ESCWA report (UN-ESCWA 2021) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that social protection systems in the Arab region have not been resilient to crisis. This is especially the case for education, health care and water and sanitation systems. COVID-19 has amplified fragilities and inequalities across digital, gender, social and educational lines, especially in regions already affected by conflict. In conflict-affected countries (e.g., Palestine and Syria), COVID-19 responses were led by expanding or building on existing humanitarian relief programmes and platforms rather than on social protection systems, as in other countries. For example, Iraq introduced an Emergency Grant for unemployed people, Palestine added thousands of families to the "National Cash Transfer Programme" and in Syria, unemployed, daily and seasonal workers, self-employed, older persons and persons with disability were allowed to register online for COVID-19 cash support, food and health baskets. According to Daw (2021), conflict-affected countries such as Yemen, Syria and Libya have very low vaccination coverage of their populations since the war effort inevitably disrupts resource flows, adequate function of health services and access to key services such as water and sanitation.

In sum, two key arguments emerge based on the data discussed here: (1) non-state forms of identity (such as religion, tribalism and clientelism) are especially important drivers of service delivery in MENA countries, a feature that helps to explain why the relationship between SD, SL and conflict may be weaker in this region and (2) further analysis of the political and social processes by which citizens form political allegiances and access services is required. This is how a social policy analysis can complement existing research on SD, SL and C. Hence, the paper proposes that it is not just any form of political participation that matters, but one which can expand social welfare among Arab citizens. A key challenge remains, however, in that Arab citizens appear to value access to jobs more than access to services. This raises the issue of whether service delivery is the main determinant of state legitimacy in the first place.

7. Conclusions

Recent findings from the literature on state legitimacy and conflict have found that the link between SL, SD and conflict is non-linear, and that liberal frameworks focused

on formal politics are of limited use to understand state legitimacy in MENA. Research on the political marketplace has emphasised the importance of external revenues as well as regional and international interventions in explaining the relationship between SL and conflict, factors that are particularly salient in the MENA context.

In view of the above, the aim of this paper was to re-examine the main literatures and trends in service delivery, expenditure and citizen perceptions in order to understand the MENA context and identify relevant lines of enquiry in relation to the relationship between SL, SD and C. The paper focused on the Arab sub-region and has undertaken two inter-related tasks: (1) it has offered a preliminary explanation of the distinctiveness of the MENA region in light of some of the main findings of the introductory paper by Kivimaki (2021) and (2) it explored the potential of a social policy perspective in explaining the relationship between SD, SL and C.

A broad review of the quantitative data shows that MENA populations are generally unsatisfied with government services and many governments in the region appear to be more effective in delivering security than services. The data also raise questions about the relative importance of social welfare services such as education and health, for although the ABS opinion survey identifies public services as one of the major challenges faced by Arab publics, the brief review of trends of social expenditures across conflict and non-conflict settings in MENA does not show a clear pattern of linkages with conflict. We have also highlighted how informal political participation (through protests) is relatively high in the MENA region compared to other world regions, and what is increasingly clear is that it seems to co-exist with the authoritarian and patrimonial systems that are dominant in the Arab countries.

We see from the ABS data that some countries affected by conflict such as Yemen, Sudan, Libya and Iraq do not consider poor service delivery as a main challenge, whilst others such as Kuwait, Algeria and Egypt (which are not experiencing major armed conflict) see it as a major problem. Hence, there does not seem to be a direct effect of social services delivery on conflict. This matter deserves further research. The explanation could be that, for countries badly affected by conflict, concerns about services are not high on their agenda; concern is focused on more immediate issues such as the economic situation and the urgent need for jobs. For now, in order to further investigate how SD, SL, C are related to each other in the MENA context, the paper has presented two main models of service delivery based on extensive qualitative research: the distributive model and the non-state (mainly religious) model. The latter is an exceptionally prominent aspect of service delivery in the MENA region, and the former is part of a wider social contract in many Arab countries that is characterised by an "autocratic bargain"—governments rely on external rents which allow them to engage in distributional policies (e.g., fuel subsidies and employment schemes) that domestic revenues would not permit and then use them to entrench neo-patrimonial networks. Oil is the main source of income, but regimes in the region have also drawn on other forms of international funds. Some of the vulnerabilities of these arrangements were exposed during the Arab Spring.

Overall, the discussion presented in this paper has highlighted a number of key features that make the MENA region distinct: (1) traditional forms of rule and clientelism based on ascribed identity; (2) religious forms of authority remain especially important and (3) low levels of trust in political leadership with greater concern for jobs than services. Although these issues need to be investigated further with qualitative research and deeper quantitative analysis, the evidence so far points to the weak link between the provision of services and conflict in MENA compared to other regions, as shown by Kivimaki's (2021) introductory paper. Further research is needed to examine how the social policy context of MENA shapes issues of trust and state perceptions. This is in line with the more critical research approaches adopted by scholars such as in the Sub-Saharan African context, who argue for the contextual analysis of state authority (Pitcher et al. 2009).

Social policy, by virtue of its broad incorporation of state and non-state social welfare action, along with its emphasis on equity of access, allows such an analysis to take place.

This may help to identify new forms of political participation around ideas of human dignity and equality that can strengthen state legitimacy. These issues are ever more pertinent following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created further challenges for service provision, poverty and state legitimacy in Arab countries.

Appendix A

Table A1. Number of respondents to the ABS by country.

Countries	Algeria	Egypt	Iraq	Jordan	Kuwait	Lebanon	Libya	Morocco	Palestine	Sudan	Tunisia	Yemen	Total
Sample Size	2332	2400	2461	2400	1374	2400	1962	2400	2493	1758	2400	2400	26,780

Notes

[1] Kivimaki distinguishes between the legitimacy associated with various state functions relating to security, political, economic and social institutions. He also distinguishes between the legitimacy and efficacy of these different dimensions.

[2] In Prof Timo Kivimäki's introductory paper to this special issue (Kivimaki 2021, p. 11), "political factionalism" is defined as "factionalism, political discrimination, political salience of elite ethnicity, fragmentation and exclusionary ideology of the ruling elite".

[3] For a good discussion about the utility of public opinion surveys, please see the ORCD report. The reliability of ABS itself is well demonstrated on the website and also supported by previous literature using this dataset. Available online: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/public-opinion-surveys-as-input-to-administrative-reform_5kml611pccxq-en;jsessionid=5FGJIjtSjkgB7RMzoXP865PB.ip-10-240-5-5 (accessed on 7 November 2021).

[4] For more details about the Arab Barometers survey, available online: https://www.arabbarometer.org/ (accessed on 7 November 2021).

[5] UCDP definitions can be found here: https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/#tocjump_04524342825375349_33 (accessed on 7 November 2021).

[6] Donors have also moved away from this more normative, technical approach to state building and in recent years shown a greater interest in understanding the politics that underpins stability and political order. See for example Cheng et al. (2018).

[7] Other examples of this argument and approach include Clements (2008); and Kelsall (2008).

[8] We found some discussion of this point in relation to Lebanon. Mourad and Piron (2016) cite the World Values survey 2010–2014: "citizens [in Lebanon] gave priority in part to economic growth and in part to defense and citizen engagement", which they argue was in contrast "with wider findings across MENA, which found people placed a high value on education and health along with employment, with growth the most common top priority".

[9] UNESCWA has highlighted some of the limitations in their methodology estimating poverty. The methodology has lead to some overestimations of the poverty headcount. The case of Egypt was mentioned as one example showing the weakness of the methodology (see (UN-ESCWA 2020) for more details).

[10] We have used the share health expenditure in GDP from WDI. The World Bank defines the variable as the "Level of current health expenditure expressed as a percentage of GDP. Estimates of current health expenditures include healthcare goods and services consumed during each year. This indicator does not include capital health expenditures such as buildings, machinery, IT and stocks of vaccines for emergency or outbreaks.

[11] Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, West Bank and Gaza, Yemen.

[12] (Balkhi et al. 2020). Available Online: https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpubh.2020.624962.DOI=10.3389/fpubh.2020.624962ISSN=2296--2565 (accessed on 7 November 2021).

13   https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=OE (accessed on 7 November 2021).

14   Ibid.

15   According to Morrisson (2002), the poor are the most likely to need universal access to social services.

16   What is the most important challenge facing your country today? 1. Economic situation [INTERVIEWER: IF ASKED, POVERTY, UNEMPLOYMENT, INFLATION] 2. Financial and administrative corruption 3. Democracy and representation/governance 4. Internal stability and security 5. Foreign interference 6. Religious extremism 7. Fighting terrorism 8. Public services [INTERVIEWER: IF ASKED, HEALTH, EDUCATION, ETC.] 9. Security 10. Political/party issues 11. Others, specify. 12.DK.

17   The questions were worded as follows: How satisfied are you with the educational system in our country? and How satisfied are you with the the healthcare system in our country? 1. Completely satisfied 2. Satisfied 3. Dissatisfied 4. Completely dissatisfied 98. Don't know [INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ] 99. Refused to answer [INTERVIEWER: DO NOT READ]. Figure 6 presents the share of respondents who picked the two first alternatives.

18   For instance, the 7th wave of the World Value Survey (WVS 2017–2021) shows that the percentage of people having already attended lawful/peaceful demonstrations is estimated around: 15% in Latin America, 8% in South Asia, 9% in East Asia and 14% in Sub-Saharan Africa. (for more details on WVS please see: https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp, accessed on 7 November 2021).

19   See for example Weigand (2009) and the extensive bibliography there.

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Article

Social Security Enrollment as an Indicator of State Fragility and Legitimacy: A Field Experiment in Maghreb Countries

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Abstract: State legitimacy and effectiveness can be observed in the state's approach to delivering welfare to citizens, thus mitigating social grievances and avoiding conflicts. Social security systems in the Maghreb countries are relatively similar in their architecture and aim to provide social insurance to all the workers in the labor market. However, they suffer from the same main problem: a low rate of enrollment of workers. Many workers (employees and self-employed) work informally without any social security coverage. The issue of whether informal jobs are chosen voluntarily by workers or as a strategy of last resort is controversial. Many authors recognize that the informal sector is heterogeneous and assume that it is made up of (1) workers who voluntarily choose it, and (2) others who are pushed into it because of entry barriers to the formal sector. The former assumption tells us much about state legitimacy/attractiveness, and the latter is used to inform state effectiveness in delivering welfare. Using the Sahwa survey and discrete choice models, this article confirms the heterogeneity of the informal labor market in three Maghreb countries: Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Furthermore, this article highlights the profiles of workers who voluntarily choose informality, an aspect that is missing from previous studies. Finally, this article proposes policy recommendations in order to extend social security to informal workers and to include them in the formal labor market.

Keywords: informal employment; social security; state effectiveness; Maghreb countries; individual preferences; discrete choice model

1. Introduction

In his seminal contribution to understanding the mechanisms of employment informality in developing countries, Maloney (2004) highlights the cost of social protection for impoverished workers. Given the low quality of services in many developing countries, mandatory contributions can be disadvantageous.

Alternative explanations include that given by Lopez (1970), who postulates that individuals will choose an informal job if they do not have access to a formal one, and that of Fields (1990), who shows that informal employment can be chosen for its easy access and flexibility of work. Günther and Launov (2012) show that the informal labor market is partly composed of workers who find the informality attractive and others that use it as a last-resort opportunity. Shehu and Nilsson (2014) highlight the socio-demographic determinants of informality, showing the impact of certain variables on the probability of being enrolled in social security systems.

In line with ILO (2003), this article defines informal employment as employment that is not enrolled with social security. We tackle the issue of low social security enrollment in three Arab countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), and try, for the first time in the studied countries, to link it to issues of state fragility/strength and grievance. Indeed, state fragility/strength is defined as the state's ability to offer effective and legitimate governance in the social, economic, political, and security realm (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017).

Hence, the inability of the state to deliver effective social protection to workers could make its fragility debatable.

This article will show that some categories of workers are excluded from social security, while others choose voluntary informality and prefer not to be enrolled in social security. This article considers the ratio of informal workers to total workers as an indicator of the lack of legitimacy of governance of social protection (and thus one element of state fragility). On the other hand, exclusion from social security is viewed as an indicator of a lack of efficiency of social governance (and thus an indicator of state fragility). In both cases, the non-enrollment in social security/informality brings social risks and therefore potential grievances. Hence, this problem of social security of workers and the social protection coverage of populations in general would have a conflicting effect. To suit the purpose of this paper, we propose a slightly modified definition of conflict[1] and consider conflict as a contested incompatibility that concerns politics (or political and economic competition), and results in some intentional harm that conflicting parties use against each other. Indeed, according to Gurr (1970), one of the causes of conflict is "relative deprivation", such as not having access to the welfare state advantages (health, education, and social security coverage), which sometimes results in motives to rebel and initiate conflict. Hence, this article relates to the entire triangle of "state fragility–grievance–conflict" for this Special Issue.

The methodology is based on an estimation of discrete choice models used to study the determinants of informality. We rely on an original survey (Sahwa), which provides a unique opportunity for cross-country comparative analysis. The dataset covers 10,000 young people (15–29 years old) in five Arabic countries. It measures variables in the labor market, which are demographics, values, confidence in government, and institutions and the importance of religion.

Our main focus is on the reasons for not participating in social security schemes. Some respondents declare that they choose to work informally to avoid income reductions, or because they are simply not interested in social security coverage. Other workers declare that they are excluded from social insurance because their employers do not want to declare them to social security; in some cases, the employers themselves are not insured.

The likelihood of choosing informality varies according to socio-demographic characteristics and other behavioral variables, such as confidence in the government and job satisfaction.

Our findings clearly show that job satisfaction would have a negative effect on the workers' willingness to choose informality. Furthermore, we show that income has a negative effect on the probability of choosing informality for the second and third quartiles of workers. However, this effect is positive for the last quartile. Informality is also more likely to be chosen in the agricultural sector. Though education may have a negative effect on informality, it has a positive effect on the probability of choosing it. The probability of choosing informality is greater for risk-averse and individualistic workers. Finally, the cross-country comparison shows that informality is more likely to be chosen in Morocco and Tunisia.

The empirical verification of the aforementioned postulate allows policymakers to assist the excluded workers and encourage free riders who choose informality to participate in social insurance schemes.

Extending social security could be made using a Beveridgian strategy[2] and assistance programs for people who are excluded, particularly women, poorly educated people, temporary salaried workers, family workers, low-income workers, and single people, as revealed in our empirical results. However, the governments of the investigated countries should also provide some incentives to increase the willingness of free riders to participate in the social insurance scheme. These incentives may target male, highly educated, and self-employed workers and employers, and workers with a high income (fourth quartile).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes social security systems in the three countries studied; Section 3 reviews the theoretical and empirical studies

that deal with informality; Section 4 provides a description of the data and the econometric approach; Section 5 presents the empirical results; Section 6 presents the conclusions.

2. Social Security Systems in the Maghreb Countries

Social security systems across the Maghreb countries are quite similar. They are straightforward and are provided by only one basic public pillar. The systems are corporatist and contributive. In every country, there is a set of insurance funds that cover workers against different categories of social risks. We will expand upon this in detail in the following section.

2.1. Algeria

The Algerian social security system is made up of five insurance funds that offer coverage against all social risks (sickness, maternity, accident and injury at work, death, disability, unemployment[3], and retirement). The first found is the "Caisse Nationale des Assurances Sociales des Travailleurs Salariés" (CNAS). This fund covers employees against sickness, maternity leave, accidents at work, and invalidity. The rate of contribution to this fund is 34% of one's monthly wage (9% supported by the employee, and the rest by the employer). A total of 18.75% of this sum is paid to the pension fund "Caisse Nationale des Retraites" (CNR). It administers pensions of salaried workers of the public and private sectors. It offers a pension with a maximum replacement rate of 80% of the mean of the five best wages of one's active life (reference wage). On the other hand, the self-employed and employers have to buy insurance from the "La Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale des Non-Salariés" (CASNOS). This fund covers those insured against the same risks as does the CNAS, with the exception of maternity leave and accidents at work. CASNOS also administers a pension scheme for non-salaried workers. The contribution rate to CASNOS is 15% of the annual income of the self-employed. However, there is a possibility for workers to pay a fixed amount of DZD 32,400 per year if annual revenue is not declared by the self-employed. The replacement rate provided by CASNOS is the same (80%) as the CNR replacement rate. However, the retirement age is 65 years old (60 for women) for the self-employed, as opposed to 60 years (55 years for women) for employees. The last two insurance funds are the " Caisse Nationale des Conges Payés et du Chomage-Intempéries des Secteurs du Batiment, des Travaux Publics et de l'Hydraulique" (CACOBATH) and "Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Chômage" (CNAC). These funds cover, respectively, leave caused by bad weather in the construction sector and the unemployment risks of employees with permanent contracts (Merouani et al. 2014; Merouani 2014).

2.2. Morocco

The social security system in Morocco provides coverage against all social risks. It comprises the "Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale" (CNSS), "L'Agence Nationale d'Assurance Maladie" (ANAM), and "La Caisse Nationale des Organismes de Prévoyance Sociale" (CNOPS). These last three funds cover salaried workers of the public and private sectors against all social risks (sickness, maternity leave, work injury and accidents at work, invalidity, and death). The contribution rate to social security in Morocco is 28.40% of the wage (21.47% paid by the employer). A total of 11.89% of this contribution is used to finance pensions that are administered by the "Caisse Marocaine des Retraites" (CMR). The maximum replacement rate of the pension system in Morocco can reach 100% for employees of the public sector, and 70% for the employees of the private sector. The latter group can also subscribe to a supplementary pension scheme that is administered by the "Caisse Interprofessionnelle Marocaine de Retraite" (Dupuis et al. 2011). Furthermore, the government established a law in 2010 (law no. 03–07) entitling the self-employed to the social security system. However, this law is not yet applied, which means that the self-employed can only be insured through voluntary insurance in the market. This voluntary insurance charges the insured person 12.89% and 4.52% for pension and health insurance, respectively.

2.3. Tunisia

The Tunisian social security system is made up of two main schemes: the schemes for salaried workers and the schemes for non-salaried workers. The first one is administered by the "Caisse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale". This fund provides insurance against invalidity, death, and unemployment, and also provides pensions and family allowance. Health insurance for employees is administered by the "Caisse Nationale d'Assurance Maladie" (CNAM). This fund provides coverage against sickness, maternity leave, and work injury and accidents at work. The total contribution rate[4] is between 26.15% and 29.75% (the employer's share is between 16.97% and 20.57%). A total of 12.5% of the contribution goes to retirement insurance. The maximum replacement rate for pensions is 90% and 80% for the employees of the public and private sectors, respectively. The legal age of retirement is 60; however, due to pre-retirement possibilities, the average age of retirement is 58 (Ben Othman and Marouani 2016). Furthermore, there is a pension fund for public sector workers called the "Caisse Nationale de Retraite et de Prévoyance Sociale" (CNRPS). This fund administers pensions and death insurance for public sector workers.

The Tunisian social security system also includes the self-employed scheme; it is administered by the same fund as that for employees. Enrollment in CNSS and CNAM is mandatory for the self-employed. However, the insurance against accidents at work and work injury is voluntary. The contribution for self-employed workers is about 14.71% of the declared income. The pension replacement rate varies from 30% of the average income of the 10 first years of their active life to 80% if the workers have contributed for 35 years.

In order to extend coverage, Tunisia improved its social security system in 2002 by creating a special scheme for low-income workers and a special scheme for artists and intellectuals (Ben Braham and Marouani 2016).

3. Literature Review on Informal Employment

A general observation in developing countries is the coexistence of a small formal and a large informal labor market. The first segment is usually well organized and is covered by social security systems. However, the second segment (the informal labor market) is not covered by social security (Assaad 2014) The theoretical background of informal employment has been assessed by four main schools of economic thought. Firstly, the dualist school sees the informal sector as covering marginal activities that provide income to the poorest population. This school considers informal workers to be excluded from the modern economy (Hart 1973; ILO 1972). Secondly, the structuralist school claims that the informal market is made up of subordinate microenterprises and workers that reduce the input and labor cost of larger enterprises. This school considers that informality is driven by the willingness of firms (capitalists) to reduce labor costs and evade taxes (Castells and Portes 1989). Thirdly, the legalist school sees informality as microentrepreneurs that choose to work informally to avoid costs, as well as to avoid the time and effort associated with formal registration (De Soto 1989). Lastly, the voluntarist school has the same view as the legalist school but does not blame the cumbersome nature of the registration process (Chen 2012). While each school considers informal employment and its causes in different ways, the recent literature argues that those theories are complementary (Huang et al. 2020) and need to be combined in order to better understand informality (Chen 2012). This article argues that the informal labor market is heterogeneous and is explained by many factors. Each theory mentioned above could be suitable to a particular category of informal workers, according to their profile.

Following the above theories, the empirical literature has investigated whether informal employment is chosen voluntarily or whether people are pushed into it because of the barriers that prevent them from accessing formal jobs (Günther and Launov 2012). The majority of researchers argue that the informal labor market is composed of individuals who choose informality and others who do not. Lopez (1970) argues that individuals may choose informal employment if they find barriers that prevent them from accessing a formal one. For instance, Perry et al. (2007) found that there are two lenses through which

one can view informality: exclusion and exit. Under the first lens, informal workers are viewed as being excluded from state benefits or from the circuit of the modern economy. Under the second lens, informal workers may be viewed as individuals/households who have conducted their own cost-benefit analysis of the formality and decide their optimal level of engagement with governmental institutions. High informality would be the result of a low level of engagement. The authors argue that the two lenses are complementary. Lastly, the authors highlight that the exclusionary mechanisms may be more important in some countries and exit mechanisms may be more important in others. The last point will be tackled in this article by comparing the cases of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia.

In a study on the Indian labor market, Duggal (2006) stipulates that the unemployed apply a strategy of "let's start with something"; in this sense, they choose any kind of job (including an informal job without social security coverage). Falco (2013) shows that the unemployed must often choose between formal employment with difficult access and informal jobs with easy access. Renana (1998) shows that in India, social security is not a priority for workers. A popular expression used by female workers goes: "Let us earn enough income and we can take care of all our other needs". These women prefer economic security (income) rather than social security. This preference may be due to behavioral factors such as myopia and uncertainty surrounding social risks and the offer of benefits. Other researchers have analyzed job satisfaction in the formal and informal sectors; Razafindrakoto et al. (2012) explored the Vietnamese workplace. They show that 39% of informal workers are satisfied with their job; 50% declare that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; and less than 10% declare that they are not satisfied. These results show the heterogeneity of labor markets and the need for further research to identify who is truly satisfied with an informal job, as we will show in the present article. Fields (1975, 1990) led a study on informal workers in Malaysia and Costa Rica. He shows that informal workers are satisfied with their job, and they do not want to look for formal employment. According to Fields, people choose informal employment for many reasons, such as ease of access, and also because informal employment does not require a high level of education or a high cash flow. This sort of flexibility leaves time for workers to look for another, better job (Fields 1990). De Soto (1989) argues that choosing informality is a rational behavior adopted by the self-employed to escape the bureaucratic burdens and costs of formality. Others consider informality to be a result of a strategy of multinational firms that tend to employ local workers without social security coverage in order to minimize their costs of labor (Moser 1978; Portes et al. 1989).

Banerjee (1983) shows that 41% of informal workers in India are looking for a new job; Banerjee has interpreted this result as evidence of labor market segmentation, which was attributed, in part, to imperfect information. A similar result was found by Rhee (1986) in South Korea. By applying an econometric model to seven Latin American countries, Auerbach et al. (2007) show that low social security coverage is the result of the workers' unwillingness to participate in this system.

Some studies on the mobility of workers in labor markets show that workers may move from formal to informal jobs; Bellache (2010) shows through a survey in the region of Bejaia (Algeria) that a high proportion (42%) of informal workers have left a formal job. Maloney (2004) shows that among formal workers who move to the informal sector in Mexico, two-thirds move voluntarily, looking for more independence or higher incomes. He assumes that informal employment may be chosen by individuals for the desirable non-wage features; those individuals maximize their utility rather than their income. Mazumdar (1981) and Balan et al. (1975) led a study in Malaysia and Mexico, respectively; they both show that workers leave formal jobs to occupy informal ones. The authors argue that informal jobs offer more flexible hours of work and sometimes a higher income than formal employment.

A more recent study in the MENA region (in Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Jordan) shows heterogeneity among the behaviors of workers in the labor market (Gatti et al. 2014). The authors investigated whether or not the workers are seeking a new job. The findings

show that while informal workers are more likely to be willing to change their jobs, less than half of them want to change or are looking for other jobs: 45% of the informal workers in Lebanon (36.9% in Egypt and 34.4% in Syria) are looking for a new job, which confirms behavioral heterogeneity between workers with regards to informality. Furthermore, Gatti et al. (2014) framed this heterogeneity as a difference between informal self-employed workers and informal employee workers; they claim that self-employed people may voluntarily choose informality.

Focusing on the informality of enterprises, De Mel et al. (2013) have been looking for potential incentives that push informal enterprises in Sri Lanka to register. They found that neither information nor reimbursement of the registration fees increased the registration rate. Only cash transfers for enterprises have been found to incentivize enterprises to register; the higher the amount of cash, the higher the likelihood of registration.

In light of this literature, we argue that there are two main concepts with regard to the origin of informal employment: the first one notes that informal employment is chosen voluntarily, and the second one perceives informal employment as an activity of subsistence and a strategy of last resort. We believe that the two views can be simultaneously true. The following section is concerned with the identification of the individual characteristics of those who chose informality. We will also reveal the characteristics of workers who are pushed involuntarily into informal employment. To do so, we rely on the Sahwa dataset.

4. Data and Econometric Approach

4.1. Data

This article uses the Sahwa dataset, which is created from a representative survey covering 10,000 households in five Arabic countries: Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia. The sample was chosen using stratified sampling. Conducted in 2016, this survey focuses on youth empowerment and analyzes the situation of one young person (15–29 years old) from each household. This adds up to 2000 young people per country, and 10,000 young respondents in the total sample. In the present article, we focus only on active young workers in the three Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), reducing our sample to 1525. We are focusing on the issue of enrolment in social security. We adopted the ILO definition of informality, that informal employment is employment not covered by the social security system.

To clean our dataset, we removed some incoherent results. We deleted those who are self-employed and who declare that they are not insured because their employers do not want to declare them. Despite this reduction in subjects, the size of the sample allowed for econometric modeling.

4.2. Econometric Approach

In order to uncover the factors causing workers to choose informality, we estimated a weighted logit model for the entire sample, including the three countries mentioned[5]. We used weighting to obtain a representative result for all the population. Weighting is used in surveys to show how many people out of the total population are represented by the surveyed person. This variable (weight) is larger than one for under-represented groups, and smaller than one for over-represented groups[6].

As mentioned, we utilized a logit[7] model, which allowed us to estimate the impact of socio-demographic variables on the likelihood of choosing informality.

$$CH_i = \beta + aSD_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

The dependent variable of choosing informality was measured using the following question: "Why are you not affiliated to the social security system?" The choices were:

My employer does not want to declare me;

My employer is not insured;

I am not interested in social security;

To avoid a decrease in my salary/earnings.

We grouped the first two answers in the category of "excluded" and the last two categories[8] in the group of "chosen informality". SD_i is a vector of socio-demographic variables. Hence, a collinearity problem can arise in the model. We resolve this problem in this article by measuring the variation inflation factor (VIF). This factor measures the inflation of the coefficients of the model induced by the correlation between the independent variables. Collinearity occurs when the VIF is greater than 10 (Mansfield and Helms 1981).

Finally, in order to obtain more precise results, we measured interaction effects in the logit model. Interaction effects measure the effect of two independent variables simultaneously on the probability of choosing informality. This calculation can be formalized with the following equation:

$$y = a + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_1 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Analyzing the interaction effect consists of the interpretation of β_3, which measures the impact of X_2 on y controlling for X_1. For example, if y is the variable that measures the probability of acquiring a disease, X_2 is a dummy variable of "smoking", which takes the value 1 if the individual smokes. X_1 is the gender variable. In the model below, β_3 would measure the impact of smoking on the likelihood of women becoming sick.

5. The Empirical Results

5.1. Who Are the Free Riders? Disruptive Statistics

As is well known from employment surveys in the studied societies, the Sahwa survey confirms the low rate of participation in the social security system. Among 1525 workers in the three countries, only 485 (31%) participate. Low participation is observed in the three countries; the participation rate in social security (formality) is about 41% in Algeria, 21% in Morocco, and 30% in Tunisia. These proportions constitute the formal employment of the labor market. According to Günther and Launov (2012), income provided for the respective employments (formal and informal) can be a determinant of individual choices. We present the logarithm for the distribution of income for formal and informal employment in the following figure (Figure 1):
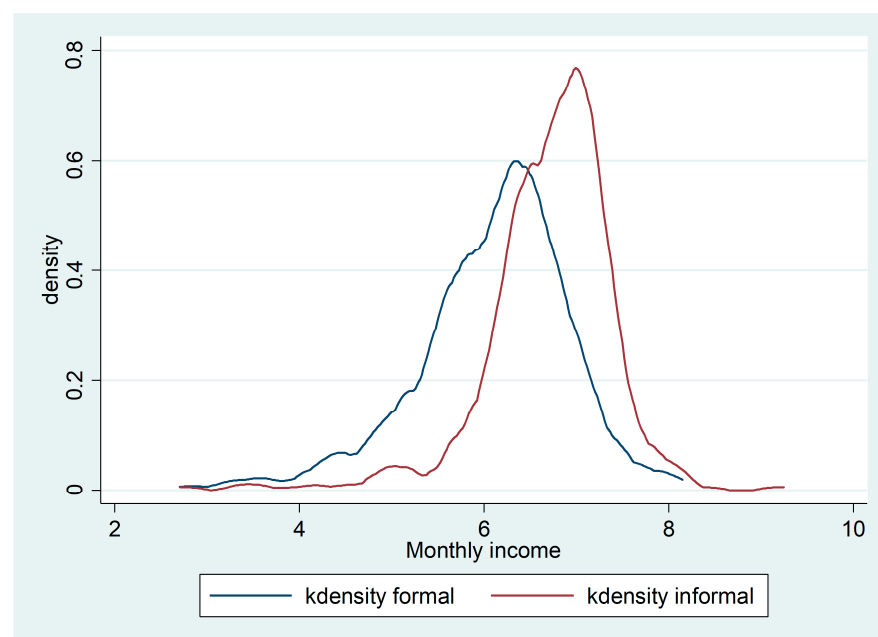
Figure 1. Densities of monthly log income for the three countries. Source: Sahwa dataset using Stata.

The figure above shows that formal and informal incomes overlap for the three countries, and it also demonstrates that not all informal workers earn less than formal workers. This result seems valid[9] for all countries when studied separately (see Figure A1 in Appendix A). Our finding is in line with that of Günther and Launov (2012), from their study in which the authors plot the wages of formal and informal workers in the Ivory Coast.

The reasons for not being insured are summarized in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons for not being insured (%). Source: Sahwa dataset using Stata.

	Algeria	**Morocco**	**Tunisia**	**Total**
Employer refuses to insure me	11.46	13.28	11.14	11.97
I am not interested	35.29	59.6	41.23	45.66
Reduction in my salary/earnings	9.29	16.95	15.88	14.19
Employer is not insured	23.22	9.6	13.09	15.06
Other (specify)	20.74	0.56	18.66	13.13
Total	100	100	100	100

The table above shows that a large percentage of the respondents (46%) are not interested in social security. A total of 14% of workers are not enrolled in order to avoid reductions in their earning; 12% and 15% of the workers declare that their employer is not insured or does not want to insure them. These workers are thus excluded from the social security system.

In order to simplify the interpretation of our results, we grouped the four categories into two larger categories, distinguishing between workers who choose[10] informality and those who are excluded[11] from the social security system. The result shows that 69% of the workers would choose informality. The rest of the workers (31%) would be excluded. The proportion of workers that choose informality varies across countries: it amounts to 56% in Algeria, 77% in Morocco, and 70% in Tunisia.

The summary statistics of the survey show that informality is a choice made by workers in both rural and urban areas. More specifically, 70% and 67% of the workers in the rural and urban areas, respectively, may choose informality. The highly educated seem to be more likely to choose informality; 73% of people with secondary and higher education qualifications report that they are not interested in social security or they want to avoid a decrease in income, and hence they may choose informality. This number is about 66% for those with a low and medium level of education. This result may be due to the fact that highly educated people are more likely to understand social security rules and ultimately understand that enrolment in the system is not necessarily beneficial. Indeed, the contribution rate is still high (35% in Algeria for instance), but the benefits that enrolled people can obtain from the system are low (Merouani et al. 2016a). Marital status analysis shows that 75% of married workers prefer informality, while 68% of singles choose informality[12]. Given that self-employed workers do not depend on an employer to enroll in social security, those who are not enrolled in the system have indeed chosen informality.

With regard to confidence in their government, we found that 67% of the people who choose informality report that they are not confident in the government, which means that confidence in the government might be a significant determinant of choosing informality so as to avoid the public social security system. This article also analyzes the correlation between the variable of choosing informality and the job satisfaction variable; the results show that 62% of workers who choose informality report that they are satisfied with their job and 38% are not satisfied[13]. Hence, one might think that workers could prefer an informal job for the satisfaction that this job provides. We are also attentive in our study to household composition and its potential impact on the likelihood of choosing informality: we observe that 67% of respondents who live with their parents, and 75% of respondents who do not live with their parents, choose informality. The findings also show that when parents are not insured, children are more likely to choose informality: 72% of children with

uninsured parents choose informality, while 65% of workers whose parents are insured choose informality.

With regard to correlations between the choice of informality and religious factors, we explore the question of the importance of religion in the place of work[14] and the importance of religion in trade and financial transactions[15]. We found that workers who report that they are more preoccupied with religious matters are less likely to choose informality (67%). On the other hand, 75% of workers who are not preoccupied with religion choose informality. The same correlation has been found for the importance of religion in trade and financial transactions. These results suggest that there is a potential negative effect of religion on the probability of choosing informality.

The survey provides data on the number of workers looking for a new job, and it reveals that 76% of workers who choose informality are not looking for a new job. We also study the relationship between risk aversion[16] and their informality preference. This relationship shows that risk-takers are more likely to choose informality than risk-averse workers. We tested a second behavioral variable, which is altruism[17]. It is worth mentioning that this later variable measures respondents' self-perception of their altruism, which is not the best method to measure this behavior. Indeed, other experimental measures, such as the dictator game (Murphy et al. 2011), ultimatum game, and public good game (Faillo et al. 2013), could be used. The descriptive statistics show that this variable does not seem to affect the preference for formality or informality. The proportion of altruistic people who choose informality is practically equal to the proportion of individualistic workers who choose informality.

We display more details and descriptive statistics in Appendix A.

5.2. Econometric Results

The summary statistics displayed above reveal general trends and the correlation between socio-demographics and informality preference, and do not allow emphasis on the significant determinants of choosing informality. In order to obtain more precise results about the causality, we ran a weighted logit regression. As mentioned below in Section 3, firstly, this model was expected to reveal the impact of the different socio-demographic variables on the probability of being insured. Then, we ran a second model to show the determinant of informality preference. The results of the two models are presented in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2. Weighted logit model. Dependent variables: (1) affiliation to social security and (2) choosing informality. Definition/description of the independent variables can be found in Appendix A. Source: Sahwa dataset using Stata.

VARIABLES	(1) Odds Ratio Affiliation to Social Security	(2) Odds Ratio Choosing Informality
Urban	1.142	0.77
	(0.188)	(0.156)
More than secondary education	2.091 ***	1.802 ***
	(0.324)	(0.38)
Single	0.411 ***	0.887
	(0.105)	(0.335)
2. Permanent employee	6.404 ***	0.306 ***
	(1.268)	(0.12)
3. Non-permanent employee	0.879	0.372 ***
	(0.165)	(0.121)
4. Contributing family help	0.467 **	
	(0.176)	

Table 2. *Cont.*

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	**Odds Ratio Affiliation to Social Security**	**Odds Ratio Choosing Informality**
2. Neither confident nor not confident	0.915	0.877
	(0.188)	(0.256)
3. Confident in government	0.988	0.866
	(0.177)	(0.22)
2. Satisfied	0.700 *	0.755
	(0.13)	(0.251)
3. Dissatisfied	0.512 ***	0.507 *
	(0.121)	(0.186)
4. Very dissatisfied	0.249 ***	0.421 **
	(0.0833)	(0.162)
Living with parent	2.014 ***	0.76
	(0.449)	(0.211)
Parent insured	2.552 ***	0.781
	(0.43)	(0.157)
Female	1.094	1.028
	(0.192)	(0.255)
Religion at work ((Ref Very important)		
2. Important	0.791	0.9
	(0.176)	(0.245)
3. Neither important nor unimportant	0.725	1.303
	(0.207)	(0.493)
4. Unimportant	0.735	1.328
	(0.268)	(0.622)
5. Not important at all	0.689	1.953
	(0.286)	(1.029)
Religion in commercial transactions (Ref Very important)		
2. Important	1.103	1.131
	(0.251)	(0.306)
3. Neither important nor unimportant	0.634	1.418
	(0.191	(0.516
4. Unimportant	1.276	1.403
	(0.409)	(0.659)
5. Not important at all	1.148	0.79
	(0.477)	(0.367)
Not looking for a new job	1.733 ***	1.513 *
	(0.303)	(0.322)
Risk-seeking (Ref: Risk 1)		
2. Risk2	1.415	0.811
	(0.366)	(0.26)
3. Risk3	1.504	0.69
	(0.402	(0.219)
4. Risk4	1.451	0.908
	(0.413)	(0.329)
5. Risk5	2.196 ***	0.378 ***
	(0.599)	(0.13)
6. Risk6: high risk aversion	2.167 ***	0.75
	(0.556)	(0.294)
Altruistic 1 (Ref: altruistic1)		
2. Altruism2	0.819	1.252
	(0.177	(0.351)
3. Altruism3	0.846	0.948
	(0.186)	(0.275)
4. Altruism4	0.668	1.677
	(0.185)	(0.617)

Table 2. *Cont.*

VARIABLES	(1) Odds Ratio Affiliation to Social Security	(2) Odds Ratio Choosing Informality
5. Altruism5	0.608	0.763
	(0.246)	(0.349)
6. Altruism6 (individualistic)	0.819	0.250 *
	(0.427)	(0.211)
Constant	0.0720 ***	4.258 *
	(0.0363)	(3.322)
Observations	1387	583

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Model 1: The second column of the table below displays the odds ratio of the logit model that explains the determinant of informality (not being insured by social security). It appears that this stratum does not have a significant effect on informality in the studied societies. However, our study confirms previous research (Bellache 2010; Sebastian and Weinschelbaum 2012; Merouani et al. 2016a) showing that education has a negative impact on informality. The analysis of marital status shows that single workers are less likely to be affiliated with social security; this may be because they do not have to care for family members or because the family insurance replaces the social security system for this category of workers. The logit model also displays the effect of employment status on the probability of being insured. It shows that permanent employees are more likely to be affiliated with social security than employers and the self-employed. The latter are risk-seeking and free-riders (Falco 2013); they tend to avoid formal institutions; hence, they avoid social insurance funds. Finally, family-contribution workers[18] are less likely to be affiliated with the social security system, compared with employers and self-employed workers. This may be due to the low level of qualifications of this category of workers, and the lack of flexibility of social security systems that do not enable family workers to be entitled to social security. The results about confidence in the government do not have any significant effect on the likelihood of informality. Job satisfaction tends to be a significant determinant of informality. People who are satisfied with their job are prepared to stay, even if the job is informal. The result of the logit model shows that people who are not satisfied are less likely to be affiliated with social security. Furthermore, the household composition has a significant effect on the probability of participation in the social security system; the model shows that people who live with their parents are more likely to be enrolled. This is because the enrollment of the workers aims to cover the other members of the household. The results show also that the probability of being insured is higher for those who have insured parents. Surprisingly, gender has no effect on the probability of being insured; previous studies in Algeria have shown that females are less likely to be insured (Merouani et al. 2016a; Bellache 2010). As mentioned previously, the Sahwa dataset offers an opportunity to test the effect of some behavioral variables on social security entitlement. We tested, in particular, the effect of religion, risk aversion, and altruism on the probability of being insured. Religion does not seem to have a significant effect. However, risk aversion has a positive effect on the probability of being insured. More risk-averse people are more likely to be insured by social security. These results are in line with Merouani et al. (2016a). Altruism has no significant effect on the probability of being insured. Finally, we tested the reliability of this model (Appendix A: Table A10) and confirmed its good predictive ability (79% of the values were correctly predicted).

Model 2: The second model in the third column of the table above (Table 2) regresses the same variables as the first model with regard to the probability of choosing informality. The results show that the stratum does not affect significantly the probability of choosing informality. The relationship between education and the probability of choosing informality is positive. Among informal workers, the more educated are more likely to avoid the social

security system. As mentioned in the previous section, this result may be due to the fact that less educated people are more supportive of government institutions and are therefore less rebellious with regard to social security. On the other hand, highly educated people better understand the inefficiencies of the social security system, which encourages them to avoid it. Marital status does not seem to have a significant effect on the willingness to choose informality. Another explanation of these results may be the fact that more educated people would have other savings and investments to draw on. The analysis of the job status shows that self-employed workers and employers are more likely to choose informality compared to employees (permanent and non-permanent contracts). Surprisingly, the model shows that confidence in government does not have a significant effect on the probability of choosing informality. As mentioned in the first model, job satisfaction may be one of the significant determinants of choosing informality. The second model shows that those most satisfied with their job are more likely to choose informality. This informal job may provide greater satisfaction than the satisfaction provided by social security in a formal job. We also tested the inverse relationship (effect of social security on job satisfaction, Table A9 in Appendix A); but the results were not very conclusive. We found that insured people are more likely to be satisfied with their job. We also found that people who choose informality are more likely to be satisfied with their job compared to those who do not choose informality. Otherwise, living with parents or having insured parents does not have an effect on the likelihood of choosing informality. The effect of gender and religion on the probability of choosing informality is not significant. Furthermore, using this model, we have taken note of responses to the question of seeking another job. Results show that people who choose informality are not looking for a new job, implying that they are satisfied with their job. Otherwise, risk aversion is perceived as a significant determinant of pension-saving (Bommier and Grand 2014) and social security participation (Merouani et al. 2016b); that is, we are aware of the effect of risk aversion on the probability of choosing informality in this study. Our findings are in line with previous studies, which show that the most risk-averse individuals are less likely to choose informality. Other categories of risk aversion show insignificant results. The second behavioral variable is altruism; this variable plays an important role in social dilemmas (Murphy et al. 2011; Alger and Cox 2013; Tirole 2017). This article shows that individualistic people are more likely to choose informality. This may suggest that workers do not want to participate in a system based on solidarity, where the young pay pensions for the elderly, and healthy people pay for sick people. We believe that the effect of this behavioral variable on the probability of choosing informality area value adds to the literature. Finally, the prediction ability of this model was tested (Appendix A: Table A11); 65% of the values were correctly predicted.

In order to avoid collinearity, especially between income and education, we ran another model that reveals the effect of income, sector of activity, and age on informality. This model also allows us to know in which country informality is most preferred. The results are presented in the following table (Table 3).

The table shows that income has a positive effect on the likelihood of enrollment in social security. This result is in line with the literature (Bellache 2010; Merouani et al. 2016a). Furthermore, other studies argue that the income from informal employment is lower than the income from formal employment (Shehu and Nilsson 2014). However, the effect of income on the probability of choosing informality is negative for the first three quintiles of income, and it is positive for the highest category of income. Workers in this last category are more likely to choose informality. The sector of activity analysis shows that workers in manufacturing are more likely to be enrolled in social security; the second-best-covered sector is trade and services, and the third, the building sector. The agricultural sector is the least covered by social security in the studied society. This result is in line with the data from the household employment survey. These surveys show that the coverage rate in the agriculture sector is very low (see ONS for Algeria, HCP for Morocco, and INS for Tunisia). In terms of preference for informality, the model in the last column of the table shows that workers in the construction/building sector are less likely to choose informality. This confirms Portes et al.'s

(1989) hypothesis, where they argue that firms do not declare their employees in order to maximize their profits. Otherwise, age has a positive effect on the probability of being insured, which is in line with Shehu and Nilsson (2014) and Merouani et al. (2016a). However, age does not seem to affect the preference for informality.

Table 3. Logit models. Dependent variables: enrollment in social security and choosing informality. Source: Sahwa dataset using Stata.

	(1)	(2)
VARIABLES	**Enrollment in Social Security Odds Ratio**	**Choosing Informality Odds Ratio**
2. Pincome2	1.760 **	0.672 *
	(0.432)	(0.149)
3. Pincome3	4.139 ***	0.574 **
	(0.979	(0.135
4. Pincome4	8.086 ***	1.740 *
	(1.916)	(0.536)
2. Manufacturing	6.843 ***	0.809
	(2.628)	(0.271)
3. Building	1.358	0.513 **
	(0.549)	(0.142)
4. Trade and services	3.823 ***	1.283
	(1.269)	(0.295)
Age	1.173 ***	1.018
	(0.0283)	(0.0235)
4. Morocco	0.288 ***	2.932 ***
	(0.0662)	(0.7)
5. Tunisia	0.931	2.059 ***
	(0.164)	(0.433)
Constant	0.00120 ***	1
	(0.00092)	(0.57)
Observations	1305	760

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

This article reflects the context of a cross-country comparative study. The results show that the probability of being insured is higher in Algeria compared with Tunisia and Morocco. This may be due to the high share of the agriculture sector in Morocco, which is characterized by low social security coverage. Furthermore, in Tunisia, the probability of choosing informality is twice as high as the probability of choosing informality in Algeria. Indeed, the population in Tunisia might be frustrated with the traditional Tunisian political parties and their failure to resolve the problems of unemployment, poverty, and the low standard of living. This frustration led to the events of the Arab Spring, reflecting the low confidence of the population in government and institutions.

Finally, to test the robustness of our model, we ensured that the collinearity problem did not occur in our models. As mentioned in the second section, collinearity occurs when the independent variables are correlated. In the following table (Table 4), we display variation inflation factors (VIFs) to show that the collinearity problem does not exist in our models. The VIFs are all below 10.

In order to obtain more detailed results, we tested for interaction effects in this article. As mentioned in Section 3, interaction effect analysis allows us to measure the impact of two variables simultaneously on the dependent variables, which are being an informal worker and the probability of choosing informality. In our study, we estimated the interactions between gender and education, income, employment status, country, and income quartile. These pairs have been chosen to test some of the findings in the literature. Kaliciak et al. (2019) found that highly educated females save more in voluntary pension accounts than lower-educated females in the USA; likewise, females with a high income save more than females with a low income in the USA. Females who were formerly married or

in a relationship save less in voluntary pension accounts than other female (single/widows) in Italy. Other studies have investigated interactions between a set of socio-demographic variables and have found heterogeneous results (Adhikari and O'Leary 2013). In addition to these usual interactions, our study displays interactions between countries and gender.

Table 4. Collinearity diagnostic. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Variable	VIF	Squared VIF	Tolerance	R-Squared
Urban	1.15	1.07	0.8712	0.1288
Education	1.15	1.07	0.8668	0.1332
Marital status	1.38	1.17	0.7267	0.2733
Job situation	1.08	1.04	0.9252	0.0748
Confidence in government	1.01	1.01	0.9869	0.0131
Job satisfaction	1.3	1.14	0.7707	0.2293
Living with parents	1.4	1.18	0.7136	0.2864
Parents insured	1.15	1.07	0.8678	0.1322
Gender	1.07	1.04	0.9309	0.0691
Religion	1.17	1.08	0.852	0.148
Searching for a job	1.27	1.13	0.7894	0.2106
Risk aversion	1.15	1.07	0.8677	0.1323
Altruism	1.15	1.07	0.8712	0.1288
Mean VIF	1.19			
Model 3 and 4				
Variable	VIF	Squared VIF	Tolerance	R-Squared
Pct	1.22	1.1	0.8194	0.1806
Sect	1.03	1.01	0.9714	0.0286
Age	1.07	1.04	0.9307	0.0693
Country	1.15	1.07	0.8713	0.1287
Mean VIF	1.12			

The results of interaction effects are presented in Table A8 of Appendix A. They confirm the positive impact of education on the probability of being insured and the probability of choosing informality, but there is no gender difference highlighted by the model; interaction between education and gender does not give a significant result.

Even if it was not significant in the previous models, marital status analysis shows that single workers are less likely to be insured than married workers; however, the interaction of marital status with gender does not show a significant difference/effect. The impact of the job situation on the dependent variables, shown in the previous models, is confirmed in this model, but its interaction with the gender variable does not show a significant effect, which means that there is no difference between men and women given their job situation. The cross-country analysis again shows that workers in Tunisia are more likely to be enrolled in social security compared to Algerian workers. However, the interaction effect shows that, compared to Algerian male workers (reference variable), Moroccan and Tunisian females are less likely to be enrolled in social security. The findings do not show a significant effect of this interaction on the likelihood of choosing informality. Furthermore, the interaction between countries and sectors of activity shows that, compared to the agriculture sector in Algeria, the services sector in Morocco, and the building and services sectors in Tunisia report a lower probability of enrollment. However, the interaction between employment status and gender does not show a significant effect on the likelihood of choosing informality. Finally, the interaction between quartiles of income and gender shows that, compared to males in the first quartile of income, females in the fourth quartile of income are more likely to choose informality.

6. Conclusions

In this article, we have explored original survey data and used empirical methods to reveal the profile of workers who are excluded from the formal sector, and those who voluntarily choose informality in the studied countries. We believe that the results will enable us to formulate policy recommendations that will enhance the extension of social security to all workers in the studied countries.

We have demonstrated that more educated workers are more likely to be insured, but among informal workers, the more educated are more likely to choose informality. The social security system and insurance companies must provide strong incentives to this category of workers (Thaler 2016) because they are in a position to make a responsible choice. Insurance contracts must be fair enough to attract highly educated workers. We have also shown that self-employed workers are more likely to choose informality, due to the distortion of the insurance system provided for self-employed people in these countries. The self-employed schemes need to develop their insurance contracts and offer the same benefits to the self-employed as to employees. Currently, the self-employed are excluded from some benefits such as support for accidents at work and maternity leave. Allowing access to these benefits will increase the participation of the self-employed in the social security system. Some authors (Renana 1998) have recommended improving social security coverage through market and insurance companies. These companies would be more likely to offer a contract suitable to the income and needs of self-employed workers. The results show that workers may prefer informal employment because it offers higher job satisfaction than formal employment. Risk aversion seems to be a significant determinant of social security participation; hence, social security systems may offer a high quality of protection in order to attract more adherents. The results of studies on altruism show that individualistic workers are more likely to choose informality. This category of workers (individualistic people) may prefer to save funds in their individual accounts rather than saving in a pay-as-you-go system that is based on solidarity.

Our next general conclusion states that certain categories of workers are excluded from the formal labor market, and that they need special assistance through the Beveridgian component of the social protection system. According to the result of our models, these categories are contributing family workers, non-permanent employees, women, single people, poorly educated workers, workers with a low income, and workers in the building sector.

Moving now onto more specific findings, according to the results of the interaction effect, Moroccan workers, particularly women with high incomes, are more likely to choose informality; therefore, they may be targeted with specific incentives to participate in the formal sector. This can be carried out through the existing systems of social security or through a market that offers more suitable insurance contracts to wealthy female workers. Women in Morocco and Tunisia are less likely to be covered by social security than in Algeria, which may push policymakers to think about implementing particular measures in order to provide coverage for these categories of workers. The results also show that, compared to the Algerian system, the Moroccan and Tunisian systems are less likely to cover workers in the building trade and services sectors. There is an opportunity here for these countries to focus on those sectors.

Finally, we should note that this area of study is in need of further research. We have focused here only on three Maghreb countries, while the approach can be extended to two more Arabic countries (Egypt and Lebanon) for which data are available. Additionally, we can include some macroeconomic predictors such as GDP per capita in each country to explain the informality. Thus far, the study was an attempt to attribute the low social security coverage to low state effectiveness and legitimacy, but we aim to develop the analysis further regarding the relationship between informality, social security coverage, and the social realm of state governance and how it manages to offer protection from social grievances. While there is agreement on the conceptual and empirical relationship between state fragility, grievance, and conflict (Kivimäki 2021), this article should be followed up by a study empirically explaining those relationships in the Maghreb and Arab countries. It

should show how social protection coverage could be explained by state legitimacy and effectiveness, and its potential to attract more workers. Understanding the aforementioned relationships has tremendous significance for the future shape of social security systems and the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG 8) in the workplace.

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Appendix A. Summary Statistics

Table A1. Affiliation to social security and the reasons for not being insured. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security				Choose informality			
No	1039	68.13	68.13	No	280	31.11	31.11
Yes	486	31.87	100	Yes	620	68.89	100
Total	1525	100		Total	900	100	
Affiliation to social security.dz				Choose informality.dz			
No	326	58.74	58.74	Non	112	43.75	43.75
Yes	229	41.26	100	Oui	144	56.25	100
Total	555	100		Total	256	100	
Affiliation to social security.ma				Choose informality.ma			
No	354	78.15	78.15	Non	81	23.01	23.01
Yes	99	21.85	100	Oui	271	76.99	100
Total	453	100		Total	352	100	
Affiliation to social security.tn				Choose informality.tn			
No	359	69.44	69.44	Non	87	29.79	29.79
Yes	158	30.56	100	Oui	205	70.21	100
Total	517	100		Total	292	100	

Table A2. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured according to marital status. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security				Choose informality			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Married	112	80	192	Married	26	74	100
Single	911	401	1312	Single	252	532	784
Total	1023	481	1504	Total	278	606	884
Affiliation to social security.dz				Choose informality.dz			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Married	25	26	51	Married	5	14	19
Single	299	203	502	Single	106	129	235
Total	324	229	553	Total	111	143	254

Table A2. *Cont.*

Affiliation to social security.ma				Choose informality.ma			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Married	57	22	79	Married	15	41	56
Single	285	72	357	Single	65	219	284
Total	342	94	436	Total	80	260	340
Affiliation to social security.tn				Choose informality.tn			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Married	30	32	62	Married	6	19	25
Single	327	126	453	Single	81	184	265
Total	357	158	515	Total	87	203	290

Table A3. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured according to level of education. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security				Choose informality			
	Yes	No	Total		Yes	No	Total
Medium education level and lower	611	157	768	Medium education level and lower	183	359	542
More than a medium education level	428	329	757	More than a medium education level	97	261	358
Total	1039	486	1525	Total	280	620	900
Affiliation to social security.dz				Choose informality.dz			
	Yes	No	Total		Yes	No	Total
Medium education level and lower	208	75	283	Medium education level and lower	82	84	166
More than a medium education level	118	154	272	More than a medium education level	30	60	90
Total	326	229	555	Total	112	144	256
Affiliation to social security.ma				Choose informality.ma			
	Yes	No	Total		Yes	No	Total
Medium education level and lower	222	41	263	Medium education level and lower	46	176	222
More than a medium education level	132	58	190	More than a medium education level	35	95	130
Total	354	99	453	Total	81	271	352
Affiliation to social security.tn				Choose informality.tn			
	Yes	No	Total		Yes	No	Total
Medium education level and lower	181	41	222	Medium education level and lower	55	99	154
More than a medium education level	178	117	295	More than a medium education level	32	106	138
Total	359	158	517	Total	87	205	292

Table A4. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured, according to confidence in government. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security				Choose informality			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Not confident in government	678	291	969	Not confident in government	181	415	596
Neither confident nor not confident	152	86	238	Neither confident nor not confident	40	87	127
Confident	209	109	318	Confident	59	118	177
Total	1039	486	1525	Total	280	620	900
Affiliation to social security.dz				Choose informality.dz			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Not confident in government	182	126	308	Not confident in government	59	86	145
Neither confident nor not confident	47	35	82	Neither confident nor not confident	17	16	33
Confident	97	68	165	Confident	36	42	78
Total	326	229	555	Total	112	144	256
Affiliation to social security.ma				Choose informality.ma			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Not confident in government	222	64	286	Not confident in government	55	166	221
Neither confident nor not confident	60	16	76	Neither confident nor not confident	15	44	59
Confident	72	19	91	Confident	11	61	72
Total	354	99	453	Total	81	271	352

Table A4. *Cont.*

Affiliation to social security.tn	No	Yes	Total	Choose informality.tn	No	Yes	Total
Not confident in government	274	101	375	Not confident in government	67	163	230
Neither confident nor not confident	45	35	80	Neither confident nor not confident	8	27	35
Confident	40	22	62	Confident	12	15	27
Total	359	158	517	Total	87	205	292

Table A5. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured according to the sector of activity. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security	Non	Yes	Total	Choose informality	Non	Yes	Total
Agriculture	174	26	200	Agriculture	50	106	156
Industry	98	94	192	Industry	32	54	86
Building	154	31	185	Building	63	70	133
Services	613	335	948	Services	135	390	525
Total	1039	486	1525	Total	280	620	900
Affiliation to social security.dz	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**	**Choose informality.dz**	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**
Agriculture	58	6	64	Agriculture	28	22	50
Industry	27	23	50	Industry	9	16	25
Building	66	19	85	Building	36	23	59
Services	175	181	356	Services	39	83	122
Total	326	229	555	Total	112	144	256
Affiliation to social security.ma	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**	**Choose informality.ma**	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**
Agriculture	62	12	74	Agriculture	10	52	62
Industry	21	14	35	Industry	5	16	21
Building	24	2	26	Building	8	16	24
Services	247	71	318	Services	58	187	245
Total	354	99	453	Total	81	271	352
Affiliation to social security.tn	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**	**Choose informality.tn**	**Non**	**Yes**	**Total**
Agriculture	54	8	62	Agriculture	12	32	44
Industry	50	57	107	Industry	18	22	40
Building	64	10	74	Building	19	31	50
Services	191	83	274	Services	38	120	158
Total	359	158	517	Total	87	205	292

Table A6. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured among new job seekers. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security	No	Yes	Total	Choose informality	No	Yes	Total
Yes (searching for job)	477	129	606	Yes (searching for job)	161	237	398
No	562	357	919	No	119	383	502
Total	1039	486	1525	Total	280	620	900
Affiliation to social security.dz	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**	**Choose informality.dz**	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**
Yes (search for job)	198	60	258	Yes (search for job)	82	76	158
No	128	169	297	No	30	68	98
Total	326	229	555	Total	112	144	256
Affiliation to social security.ma	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**	**Choose informality.ma**	**No**	**Yes**	**Total**
Yes (searching for job)	92	24	116	Yes (searching for job)	26	65	91
No	262	75	337	No	55	206	261
Total	354	99	453	Total	81	271	352

Table A6. *Cont.*

Affiliation to social security.tn				Choose informality.tn			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Yes (searching for job)	187	45	232	Yes (searching for job)	53	96	149
No	172	113	285	No	34	109	143
Total	359	158	517	Total	87	205	292

Table A7. Affiliation to social security and the reason for not being insured according to job satisfaction. Source: Sahwa dataset.

Affiliation to social security				Choose informality			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Very satisfied	166	161	327	Very satisfied	24	128	152
Satisfied	413	232	645	Satisfied	104	259	363
Dissatisfied	272	66	338	Dissatisfied	83	142	225
Very dissatisfied	188	27	215	Very dissatisfied	69	91	160
Total	1039	486	1525	Total	280	620	900
Affiliation to social security.dz				Choose informality.dz			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Very satisfied	38	75	113	Very satisfied	6	27	33
Satisfied	106	113	219	Satisfied	32	49	81
Dissatisfied	128	34	162	Dissatisfied	51	47	98
Very dissatisfied	54	7	61	Very dissatisfied	23	21	44
Total	326	229	555	Total	112	144	256
Affiliation to social security.ma				Choose informality.ma			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Very satisfied	59	36	95	Very satisfied	5	54	59
Satisfied	189	53	242	Satisfied	48	140	188
Dissatisfied	74	5	79	Dissatisfied	17	57	74
Very dissatisfied	32	5	37	Very dissatisfied	11	20	31
Total	354	99	453	Total	81	271	352
Affiliation to social security.tn				Choose informality.tn			
	No	Yes	Total		No	Yes	Total
Very satisfied	69	50	119	Very satisfied	13	47	60
Satisfied	118	66	184	Satisfied	24	70	94
Dissatisfied	70	27	97	Dissatisfied	15	38	53
Very dissatisfied	102	15	117	Very dissatisfied	35	50	85
Total	359	158	517	Total	87	205	292

Table A8. Logit model with interaction effects. Dependent variables: being insured (second column) and choosing informality (third column). Source: Sahwa dataset.

	(1)	(3)
VARIABLES	**Odds Ratio**	**Odds Ratio**
2. Female	2.301	0.0650 **
	(1.719)	(0.0778)
1. More than medium education level	2.116 ***	1.628 *
	(0.427)	(0.409)
2. Female #1. More than medium education level	1.434	1.476
	(0.599)	(0.799)
1. Single	0.302 ***	0.598
	(0.116)	(0.296)
1. Single #2. Female	2.052	2.204
	(1.471)	(1.969)
2. Permanent employees	8.641 ***	0.324 **
	(2.371)	(0.145)
3. Non(permanent employees	0.805	0.328 ***
	(0.22)	(0.119)

Table A8. *Cont.*

VARIABLES	(1) Odds Ratio	(3) Odds Ratio
4. Family workers	0.360 *	1
	(0.215)	0
2. Permanent employees #2. Female	0.687	0.913
	(0.419)	(0.85)
3. Non (permanent) employees #2. Female	1.54	1.738
	(0.866)	(1.34)
4. Family workers #2. Female	2.063	1
	(1.907)	0
1. Living with parents	1.716	0.762
	(0.629)	(0.276)
2. Female #1. Living with parents	0.497	0.922
	(0.339)	(0.657)
4. Morocco	3.867	3.716 *
	(3.561)	(2.57)
5.Tunisia	7.628 ***	1.955
	(5.352)	(1.264)
4. Morocco #2. Female	0.229 **	2.418
	(0.156)	(2.231)
5. Tunisia #2. Female	0.461 *	1.906
	(0.206)	(1.739)
2. Industry	3.783 **	1.55
	(2.17)	(1.128)
3. Building	4.409 ***	0.69
	(2.358)	(0.409)
4. Services	6.977 ***	1.813
	(3.308)	(1.017)
4. Morocco #2. Industry	0.127	2.88
	(0.167)	(4.182)
4. Morocco #3. Building	0.138	1.179
	(0.217)	(1.2)
4. Morocco #4. Services	0.0631 ***	0.48
	(0.0574)	(0.37)
5. Tunisia #2. Industry	0.472	0.612
	(0.394)	(0.559)
5. Tunisia #3. Building	0.0986 ***	1.372
	(0.0832)	(1.095)
5. Tunisia #4. Services	0.0894 ***	0.895
	(0.0677)	(0.654)
2. Second quartile of income	2.131 *	0.519**
	(0.836)	(0.154)
3. Third quartile of income	5.435 ***	0.427***
	(1.918)	(0.135)
4. Fourth quartile of income	10.66 ***	0.583
	(3.809)	(0.242)
2. Second quartile of income #2.Female	1.114	1.921
	(0.616)	(1.057)
3. Third quartile of income #2.Female	0.914	3.665
	(0.557)	(4.182)
4. Fourth quartile of income #2. Female	0.585	16.26 **
	(0.357)	(21.6)
Constant	0.0185 ***	4.618 **
	(0.0124)	(3.355)
Observations	1202	509

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table A9. Ordered logit model; the dependent variable is job satisfaction. Ordered form very satisfied to not at all satisfied. Source: Sahwa survey and Stata software.

VARIABLES	(Odds Ratio) Job Satisfaction	(Odds Ratio2) Job Satisfaction
Affiliation to social security	0.543 ***	
	(0.0708)	
Looking for a new job	0.180 ***	0.171 ***
	(0.0235)	(0.0291)
Urban	0.723 ***	0.649 ***
	(0.0841)	(0.0955)
Female	1.084	0.91
	(0.142)	(0.167)
2. Permanent employees	1.327 *	1.241
	(0.22)	(0.321)
3. Non(permanent employees	2.133 ***	1.851 ***
	(0.308)	(0.35)
4. Family workers	1.916 **	1.789 *
	(0.536)	(0.588)
Single	1.493 **	1.877 ***
	(0.257)	(0.443)
1. More than medium education level	0.883	0.97
	(0.101)	(0.144)
2.Risk 2	1.008	1.194
	(0.187)	(0.275)
3. Risk 3	1.189	1.266
	(0.213)	(0.297)
4. Risk 4	1.361	1.305
	(0.282)	(0.332)
5. Risk 5	0.913	0.67
	(0.179)	(0.198)
6. Risk 6	1.012	0.855
	(0.223)	(0.278)
2. Altruism 2	0.984	0.717
	(0.145)	(0.146)
3. Altruism 3	1.076	0.898
	(0.173)	(0.2)
4. Altruism 4	1.286	1.138
	(0.271)	(0.309)
5. Altruism 5	0.855	1.198
	(0.234)	(0.474)
6. Altruism 6	0.673	0.579
	(0.322)	(0.426)
7. Altruism 719	0.506 ***	
	(0.131)	
Choose informality		0.684 **
		(0.117)
Constant cut 1	0.0214 ***	0.0126 ***
	(0.00815)	(0.00638)
Constant cut 2	0.237 ***	0.127 ***
	(0.0854)	(0.0601)
Constant cut 3	1.128	0.602
	(0.396)	(0.272)
Observations	1388	798

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

**Table A10.** Test of reliability of the logit model in Table 2 (dependent variable: informal employment).

Classified + if Predicted Pr(D)	≥0.5	
True D defined as aff ! = 0		
Sensitivity	Pr(+D)	57.84%
Specificity	Pr(−~D)	90.07%
Positive predictive value	Pr(D+)	75.00%
Negative predictive value	Pr(~D−)	80.57%
False + rate for true ~D	Pr(+~D)	9.93%
False − rate for true D	Pr(−D)	42.16%
False + rate for classified +	Pr(~D+)	25.00%
False − rate for classified −	Pr(D−)	19.43%
Correctly classified		79.11%

Table A11. Test of reliability of the logit model in Table 2 (dependent variable: choosing informality).

True D Defined as Choice ! = 0		
Sensitivity	Pr(+D)	75.68%
Specificity	Pr(−~D)	50.39%
Positive predictive value	Pr(D+)	66.40%
Negative predictive value	Pr(~D−)	61.54%
False + rate for true ~D	Pr(+~D)	49.61%
False − rate for true D	Pr(−D)	24.32%
False + rate for classified +	Pr(~D+)	33.60%
False − rate for classified −	Pr(D−)	38.46%
Correctly classified		64.67%

Table A12. Variables description.

Variables of the Models	Definition/Description
Urban	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent lives in urban area
	More than secondary education
	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent has more than secondary education
	Single
Employment Status	Employment status variables have 4 alternatives: 1—self-employed reference variable in the models, 2—permanent employee, 3—non-permanent employee, 4—contributing family help
Confidence in government	Confidence in government is an ordinal variable presented as a Likert scale; 0 means no confidence at all in government and 10 means absolute confidence in it. This variable has been re-codified into 3 categories (1—not confident, 2—neither confident nor not confident, 3—confident)
Job satisfaction	Job satisfaction variable is an ordinal variable classifying respondents from 1 (those who are very satisfied with their job) to 5 (very dissatisfied)
Living with parents	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent reports that he/she lives with parents
Parents insured	Dummy variable equal to 1 if parents of respondents are insured by social security
Female	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent is a female
Importance of religion at work	Religious variable is an ordinal variable presented as a Likert scale, ranging from 1 if the respondent declares that religion is very important to 5 if religions is not important at all
Importance of religion in commercial transaction	Religious variable is an ordinal variable presented a Likert scale, ranging from 1 if the respondent declares that religion is very important to 5 if religions is not important at all
Not looking for a new job	Dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent is not looking for a new job
Risk aversion	Risk aversion variable is an ordinal variable classifying individuals in the Likert scale, ranging from 1 (risk-tolerant) to 6 (risk-averse)
Altruism	Altruism variable is an ordinal variable classifying respondents from 1 (most altruistic) to 6 (most individualistic)
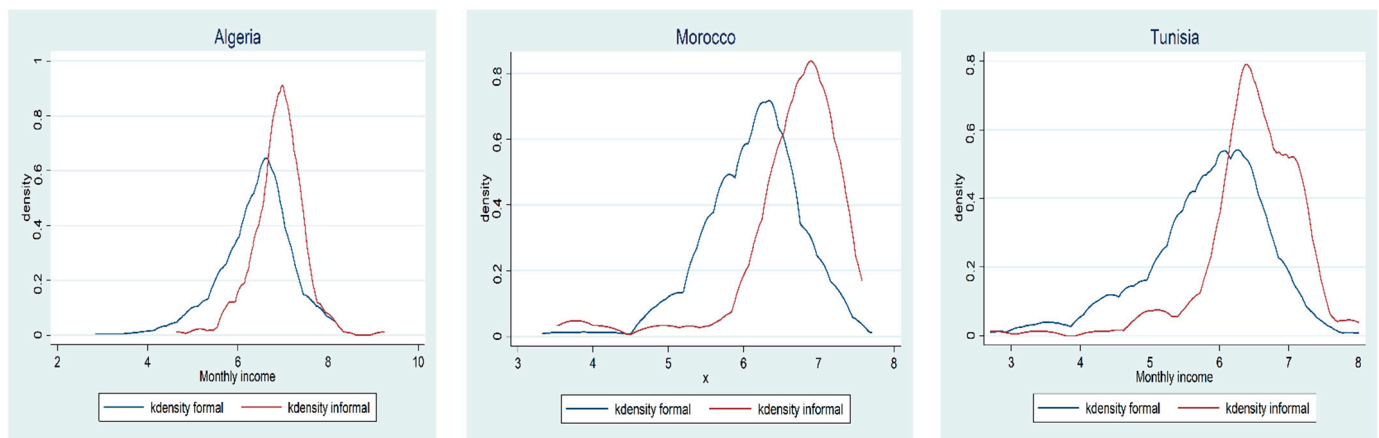
Figure A1. Densities of monthly log income. Source: Sahwa dataset using Stata.

Notes

1   The standard definition of conflict is "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory, where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year." (Högbladh 2020)

2   For more details about Beveridgian social welfare, see Merouani et al. (2014) and Whiteside (2014).

3   Only employees with a permanent contract are eligible for unemployment insurance.

4   Contribution rate is variable according to the probability of having an accident at work and work injury.

5   The sample of workers by country is low, analyzing each country separately is less likely to provide consistent results.

6   For more details about the method of weighting, see Solon et al. (2015).

7   For more details on the logit model, see Merouani et al. (2016a).

8   One may think that the category of workers who want to avoid a reduction in their income do not choose informality but are concerned that they would be unable to provide for their families or maintain a lifestyle if they pay social security contributions. This is not valid in the case of our sample because these workers have a higher average monthly income (USD701) compared to those in the category who report that their employers refuse to insure them (USD451), and those who report that their employer is not insured (USD477). The highest average income was observed among those who declare they are not interested in social security (USD954).

9   Given the low sample size of workers by country, one should be cautious in interpreting these figures.

10   Workers who declare that they are not insured because they are not interested or to avoid a reduction in their income.

11   Workers who declare that the employers do not want to declare them or that they themselves are not enrolled in social security.

12   The number of divorced and widowed respondents is very small in the sample.

13   For more details about the cross-tabulation of job satisfaction and informality, see Table A3 in Appendix A.

14   To what extent is religion important in your place of work?

15   To what extent is religion important in your commercial and financial transactions?

16   Having adventures and taking risks is important to this person; living an exciting life. The answers are ranked from 1 "This greatly resembles me" to 6 "Does not resemble me at all".

17   It is important to this person to take care of the people around them. The answers are ranked from 1 "This greatly resembles me" to 6 "Does not resemble me at all".

18   Workers who hold a "self-employment" job in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household, who cannot be regarded as partners, because their degree of commitment to the operation of the establishment, in terms of working time or other factors to be determined by national circumstances, are not at a level comparable to that of the head of the establishment (ILO 2003).

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Article

State Fragility, Social Contracts and the Role of Social Protection: Perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

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Abstract: Social contracts and state fragility represent two sides of one coin. The former concept highlights that governments need to deliver three "Ps"—*protection*, *provision*, and political *participation*—to be acceptable for societies, whereas the latter argues that states can fail due to lack of *authority* (inhibiting protection), *capacity* (inhibiting provision), or *legitimacy*. Defunct social contracts often lead to popular unrest. Using empirical evidence from the Middle East and North Africa, we demonstrate how different notions of state fragility lead to different kinds of grievances and how they can be remedied by measures of social protection. Social protection is always a key element of government *provision* and hence a cornerstone of all social contracts. It can most easily counteract grievances that were triggered by decreasing *provision* (e.g., after subsidy reforms in Iran and Morocco) but also partially substitute for deficient protection (e.g., by the Palestinian National Authority, in pre-2011 Yemen) or *participation* (information campaign accompanying Moroccan subsidy cut; participatory set-ups for cash-for-work programmes in Jordan). It can even help maintain a minimum of state–society relations in states defunct in all three Ps (e.g., Yemen). Hence, social protection can be a powerful instrument to reduce state fragility and mend social contracts. Yet, to be effective, it needs to address grievances in an inclusive, rule-based, and non-discriminatory way. In addition, to gain legitimacy, governments should assume responsibility over social protection instead of outsourcing it to foreign donors.

Keywords: state fragility; social contract; social protection; Middle East and North Africa; state–society relations; protection; provision; participation; government legitimacy

1. Introduction

Throughout history, states and their governments could only emerge (and endure) with at least some consent by society. All governments depend on a minimum degree of legitimacy and, in turn, state legitimacy depends on the existence—and fulfilment—of a social contract on rights and obligations of the state and societal groups towards each other. More concretely, social contracts say that society should recognise a government as legitimate if it satisfies the expectations of citizens in terms of delivering *protection* (individual and collective security) and *provision* (of economic and social services) and granting some *participation* (in political decision-making).

Social protection is typically a key element of social contracts. Rich members of societies wish to have a state that protects their wealth against robbery by the poor—and by strangers—whereas the poor accept such a state only under the condition that the rich pay for it and for its delivery on the *protection* of citizens and, in addition, share a bit of their income with the poor through social protection schemes. Every now and again, state and society reconsider and, if necessary, renegotiate the deal—and if no agreement is reached, that is, if grievances continue, societal groups start to push, by force, for a new social contract, and conflict arises.

Our article has two aims: First, to explain the link between social contracts and different conditions of state fragility and to propose the concept of the social contract as a further way to systemise the "fragility–grievances–conflict triangle in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)" and beyond, as discussed in the *Social Sciences* special issue of this title that our article forms part of, and second, to discuss, using empirical evidence from the MENA region, how different notions of state fragility lead to different kinds of grievances and how these can—more or less easily—be remedied by measures of social protection.

Methodologically, we based our analysis on a systematic review of publicly available literature on social contracts and social protection in MENA[1] countries, which we have been following and reviewing for the last 25 years. From among all the MENA countries, we selected the most telling country cases in regard to (i) their governments' ability or failure to deliver the three Ps—*protection*, *provision*, and political *participation* (see also diagram 1 further below)—and (ii) their efforts to reform social protection in different ways. Specifically, we provide evidence from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen and triangulate them with the results of research on some fragile sub-Saharan African countries (Chad, DR Congo, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda).

We proceed as follows: Section 2 presents a non-normative concept of social contracts and links it with the most up-to-date conceptualisations of state fragility, while paying attention to possible triggers of popular grievances. Section 3 elaborates on the development of social contracts in MENA countries since World War II and the respective role of social protection. Section 4 provides examples from outside and inside MENA where social protection has helped (or not) to address signs of state fragility and cures for the most essential deficits in social contracts with regards to *protection*, *provision*, and *participation*. Section 5 concludes the article.

2. Linking Social Contracts, Different Conditions of State Fragility, and Popular Grievances

At a glance, the relationship between social contracts and state fragility might seem self-explanatory: States with a well-functioning social contract are less fragile. Yet, what counts as a well-functioning social contract? That is, what are the criteria to assess whether a social contract contributes to the stability of a state or, on the contrary, makes it more fragile? In this section, we dissect different elements of social contracts (Loewe et al. 2021) and state fragility (Grävingholt et al. 2015) and relate them to each other. By doing so, we also point to different categories of popular grievances.
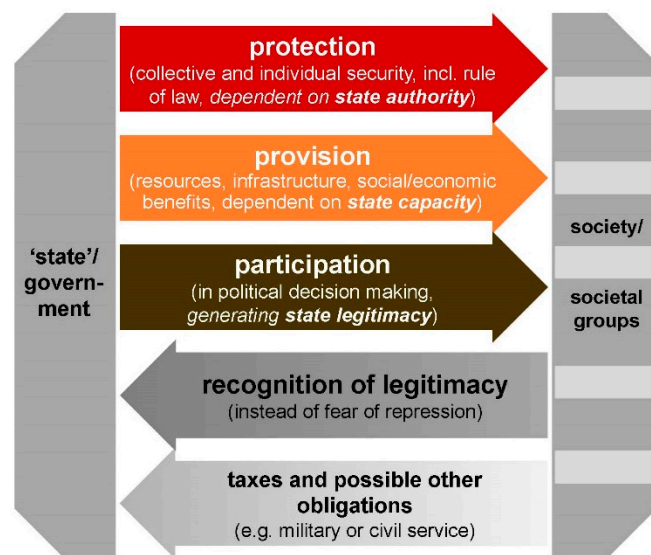
The term "social contract" has a long history of thought and, across different traditions, usually carries a positive connotation. In Europe, liberal state philosophers Hugo Grotius (1625), Thomas Hobbes [1651] 1985), John Locke [1689] 2003), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) used it to contrast a state-controlled setting that includes property rights, some degree of security, and possibly distributive justice with the "natural state of anarchy". In this way, the existence of a social contract is something positive in itself. The social contract is, however, not a purely European idea. In the MENA region, contractarian thought goes back to the Qur'ān itself, which establishes a contract (*ᶜaqd*) between God and the believers who submit to the former, thereby defining rights and duties for the *muslimīn* and their leader, the *imām*. These duties explicitly include the responsibility of the wealthy to care about the poor.[2] Similarly, 15th-century thinker Ibn Khaldun proposed a reciprocal concept of communal solidarity between individuals, the so-called *ᶜasabīyya*, which falls under the patronage of a *šarīᶜa*-abiding ruler (Krieg 2017).

Only more recently, a debate[3] has evolved differentiating "good" and "bad" social contracts, implying that not the mere existence—which may be better than anarchy but can be taken for granted today by the large majority of countries—but the specific design of a social contract needs to be taken into account. The crucial point is the question of whether there are objective criteria allowing the judgment of when a social contract is good (or at least better than others). If the answer is yes, it is possible to make proclamations on which

reforms are due to "improve" social contracts, as some authors do. Quite often, however, such proclamations have been in line with a quite liberal agenda of Western democracy, human rights, and free market economy (e.g., Devarajan and Mottaghi 2015; Larbi 2016; Razzaz 2013; Shafik 2021; World Bank 2004).

Social contracts can be conceptualised in a purely analytical way as "*the entirety of explicit or implicit agreements between all relevant societal groups and the sovereign (i.e., the government or any other actor in power), defining their rights and obligations towards each other*" (Loewe et al. 2021). The possible obligations of the government can be categorised by three Ps (Figure 1). As will be illustrated below, the state is supposed to deliver three Ps corresponding to the three core functions of a state as conceptualised by comparative politics literature: *authority*, *capacity*, and *legitimacy* (Grävingholt et al. 2015):

- *Protection*, including collective security against external threats and individual security against possible damage caused by criminal or politically motivated attacks;
- *Provision* of social and economic services such as access to land ware and other resources, infrastructure education, health, social protection, a good business climate, government procurement, and others; and
- *Participation*, that is, granting citizens a voice in political decision-making at different levels.

Figure 1. Deliverables in a social contract. Source: Loewe et al. (2019). Available online: https://www.die-gdi.de/briefing-paper/article/the-social-contract-an-analytical-tool-for-countries-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-mena-and-beyond/ (accessed on 11 November 2021).

In exchange, citizens are expected to

- *accept* the ruling authority of the government; and
- *pay taxes* or fulfil any other obligations (e.g., military service) in accordance with their ability to do so.

These deliverables vary substantially across countries (e.g., OECD—Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2009) subject to an iterative process where society has expectations of the state and the government makes an offer of what it is willing (and able) to give. Whether society accepts the offer depends on the readiness and ability of citizens to claim for anything better. The shape of social contracts depends thus on the relative strength of society and the government. To a certain degree, governments can also defend their rule and insist on their preferred social contract by the use of repression. Yet, in the long run, they hardly ever succeed without at least some legitimacy emanating from a social contract.

The fact that societal preferences (i.e., values, norms, or expectations) play such an important role explains why assessing the quality of social contracts by objective criteria is hardly feasible. Outsiders typically have only limited knowledge on these preferences because they may be quite different from those of people elsewhere. The Universal Human Rights Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda certainly establish some generally accepted criteria, yet people in different countries would certainly disagree on how to prioritise the numerous, sometimes conflicting goals mentioned in the agendas.

Therefore, we suggest assessing social contracts only by a system-immanent logic: their functionality. Their key purpose is to improve the predictability of outcomes in iterated state–society interactions and, hence, to relieve the contracting parties of renegotiating their mutual obligations time after time. From this point of view, social contracts are good if they are sustainable, i.e., if their conditions are acceptable to all contracting parties over a longer period (Muggah et al. 2012). As long as governments provide all three Ps mentioned above, society is likely to fulfil its deliverables, too, and social contracts are likely to be stable. This does not mean that they do not change at all. Quite the contrary: They often evolve quite considerably but smoothly with the effect that it is sometimes difficult to say whether a social contract has changed substantially or been replaced by a new one. In particular, the third P—*participation*—guarantees that the contracting parties renegotiate the social contract regularly and adapt it unanimously.

Hence, only the contracting parties themselves can say whether their social contract is good. The flaw of such an approach is that we realise that a social contract is dysfunctional only when people revolt against it.

This is where the concept of state fragility comes in. If a government fails to deliver one or more of the three Ps sufficiently, that deficiency likely sparks popular grievances and political instability known as state fragility (Grävingholt et al. 2015; Kivimäki 2021).[4] State fragility looks rather different depending on which deliverable is missing:

- Some governments fail in the delivery of *protection* (most often with respect to the individual security of citizens) because of a *lack of authority* (examples include El Salvador and Sri Lanka but no MENA countries);
- Some governments fail in the delivery of *provision* (e.g., infrastructure, laws to safeguard fair competition on markets or social protection) because of a *lack of capacity* (examples include Zambia and Burkina Faso but no MENA countries);
- Some governments fail in the delivery of *participation* (which holds for China but also for most MENA countries, such as Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia); and
- Some governments fail in the delivery of *all three Ps.* They lack authority, capacity, and legitimacy (examples in MENA are Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen). As a result, the countries suffer from frequent armed conflicts or even civil wars.

In all four cases, the populace's grievances can be considerable. Yet, the first three categories of states still have social contracts, even though they may be truncated and hence unstable—and become ever more unstable with any cutbacks in the remaining two Ps. Countries in the fourth category, failing in all three deliverables, do not have a nationwide social contract any more but at utmost fragmented, sometimes competing, local social contracts, maintained by their former government or other actors such as we currently see in Syria, Yemen, and Libya (Muggah et al. 2012).

All forms of state fragility can give rise to serious popular grievances. If we take a closer look at how grievances arise and to what degree they affect people, we find that some are more profound and urgent than others. Maslow's by now famous pyramid chart presents such a hierarchy of needs. Only if individuals' most basic physiological needs (food, water, warmth, rest) and safety needs are satisfied will they be motivated to seek fulfilment of their higher-order psychological and self-fulfilment needs (Maslow 1943). Since 1990, the UNDP's Human Development Index, measuring and comparing gross national income per capita, educational attainment, and life expectancy between all countries, has provided a standardised measure of the degree to which these basic needs or developmental grievances are being met (Kivimäki 2021).

From this angle, deficiencies in social contracts pertaining to one of the first two Ps, *protection* or *provision*, may be more urgent and more likely lead to protests—whereas citizens can grudgingly put up with a lack of *participation*, at least for some time, they cannot survive without basic nutrition, hygiene, and shelter. Thus, governments failing in the delivery of *protection* or *provision* may find themselves at risk of major popular unrest and actual breakdown sooner than governments not granting *participation*, whose chronic lack of legitimacy destabilises them in the long run.

In any case, social contracts differ, of course, not only in their *substance* but also in their *scope* (the contracting sides and their respective spatial range of rule or influence) and *temporal dimension* (beginning, duration, and end) (Loewe et al. 2021).

As regards the scope, it is important to consider that neither government nor society are homogeneous actors. First, both the government and society can be internally quite divided in terms of interest.[5] Second, the government is not necessarily the executive of a nation state. Instead, it can be any body enjoying executive force in a territory, even one with shifting boundaries. This includes supra-national powers such as the European Union just as much as transnational powers (e.g., the so-called Islamic State that controlled large parts of Iraq and Syria for several years, see Revkin and Ahram (2020)) and sub-national units of power (such as the organised confessional communities (*ṭawā'if*) in Lebanon, Kurdish minorities in Iraq and Syria, and tribal actors, for instance in Yemen) (see Ayoob 1995). All of these can establish their own, sometimes overlapping[6] social contracts. Such competition over social contracts can, in turn, influence citizens' priorities so that *participation* gains relative importance vis-à-vis the other 2 Ps.

Finally, in their temporal dimension, social contracts differ with regards to the *when* and *how long*: How long are they respected and when do contracting parties demand renegotiation or decide to cancel a social contract in hope of striking a better deal?

3. The Erosion of the Provisionist Social Contracts in the MENA Region after 1985

When MENA countries achieved full independence after World War II, they established strikingly similar "populist-authoritarian social contracts" (Hinnebusch 2020). Almost all had powerful states with much *authority* to deliver *protection*, in terms of both individual and collective security. In addition, the republics started delivering *provision*, the second P, quite extensively in order to implement their ideologically motivated plans of transforming societies but also to legitimise their rule. At the same time, they were not (yet) ready to allow for the third P, meaningful political *participation*. The region's monarchies followed this strategy somewhat later even though they never had a plan to transform societies. They were even less ready to allow for political *participation* but still felt the need to legitimise their rule at least in material terms, i.e., extended *provision*—in particular because their citizens started to compare the performance of governments such as those of the Syrian republic and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan or the Algerian republic and the Moroccan monarchy (Loewe et al. 2021). As a consequence, authoritarianism has long been much more persistent and wide-spread in MENA than in any other world region (with the possible exception of Central Asia), whereas spending on social protection and other elements of *provision* have always been at least on average levels (Loewe 2010b).

Improvements in social protection for all groups of society were at the core of governments' efforts to expand their delivery on *provision*. During the 1950s and 1960s, MENA governments established energy and food subsidies, social housing schemes, and free public health care systems in order to reduce the costs of essential commodities for people with low income as well as others. They established social assistance programmes to support households with particularly low incomes, especially if they had no male members of working age. Somewhat later, MENA governments also extended the coverage of public social insurance schemes—most often inherited from former colonial powers—to additional groups of the population in order to prevent them from falling into poverty because of illness, work-disability, old age, unemployment, or the death of the main breadwinner in the family. They created thousands of jobs in the public sector to help people with low-

and middle-income backgrounds climb up the societal ladder (and to co-opt them). Finally, they redistributed land and property owned by large landlords to landless workers and nationalised companies, in particular in finance and heavy industry, in order to transform societies towards better social justice (Loewe and Jawad 2018).

State *capacity* to deliver such *provision* was based on the fact that all MENA countries benefitted, until the mid-1980s, from substantial external rent income. Some countries had sources of direct rent income (e.g., from natural resources like oil, gas, gold or phosphate, remittances, and other sources such as the Suez Canal rents in the case of Egypt), whereas others befitted more indirectly (from politically motivated budget transfers by the Gulf countries or as a consequence of Cold War alliances). During the 1990s, at the latest, this very capacity started to weaken, however, because all external incomes declined, most significantly because of a drop in oil price and the end of the bipolar world order. In addition, governments distributed their *provision* over an ever-growing population, reducing the per-capita benefit bit by bit (Hinnebusch 2020).

All MENA governments therefore decided at some point in time to reduce *provision* and focus it more on strategically important societal groups: the economic and political elite and the politically active urban middle classes. Concretely, they saved in their spending on social assistance, public health and education programmes, and large-scale provision of public-sector jobs. Energy subsidies, social insurance, and small enterprise promotion programmes—which all benefit the urban middle class substantially more than the poor—were also expanded (Loewe and Jawad 2018).

One could say that governments altered the stipulations of the social contracts, thereby discriminating between the terms for more and less powerful groups. They intensified their care for societal groups such as entrepreneurs, the intelligentsia, and organised, formally employed workers—groups who fully enjoy all three options of Hirschman's exit/voice/loyalty schema (Hirschman 1970). Meanwhile, they saved on their spending on societal groups who largely lack both "voice" and "exit" because of a lack of resources and organisational capacities.

We argue that the uprisings dubbed the "Arab Spring," which rocked most MENA countries from 2010 onwards—first Tunisia; then Egypt; then Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen; and some years later Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Sudan—should be interpreted as a grievance about their deficient or "unsocial" social contracts (El-Haddad 2020). Protesters pointed to the fact that governments continued to deny citizens any tangible *participation*, the third P, while cutting down on the delivery and fairness of *provision*, the second P.

It is difficult to say which grievances pushed Arab people onto the streets in protest. Some authors see material factors—inappropriateness of *provision*—as the main reason (e.g., Devarajan and Mottaghi 2015; Luciani 2016; Winckler 2013), whereas others emphasise the lack of political *participation* (e.g., Kivimäki 2021; Barakat and Fakih 2021; Moghadam 2013; Saidin 2018). Most likely, it was a combination of factors—those who went to the streets criticised governments' delivery of *participation* and *provision* as well as the way how state representatives treated citizens without respect or dignity. In Egypt, they all shouted for "Bread! Freedom! Social justice!" yet different groups of protesters (young liberal intelligentsia, Muslim Brothers, trade unions, etc.) likely each focussed on a different claim.

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, and in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we do know that the citizens of Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia today have a clear preference for *provision*. In a representative survey conducted on behalf of the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE), more than 1000 nationals in each country were asked to select the two most important duties of the state from a list of six options, where two options represented each of the three Ps.[7] A total of 89% selected at least one that represented *provision* (93% of Tunisians, 86% of Lebanese nationals, 85% of Egyptians), whereas just 54% selected one that represented *protection* (63% of Egyptians, 52% of Tunisians, 49% of Lebanese nationals) and as little as 19% opted for an aspect of

participation (28% of Lebanese nationals, 14% of Tunisians, 13% of Egyptians) (Loewe and Albrecht 2021).

However, where a trans- or subnational group questions the *scope* and general characteristics of a social contract, *participation* gains relative importance. Such is the case if radical and violent extremists mobilise their followers (e.g., Alkhayer 2021).

Although after the uprisings, the social contracts of MENA countries developed in quite different directions, it is fair to say that none of them are fully stable, that is, sufficiently address both the government's and society's demands for a long-term new social contract:

- Tunisia, commonly regarded as the only successful case of the Arab uprisings, has continued to strengthen the third P, *participation*—at least until summer 2021—yet reforms in terms of reprioritising the delivery of *provision* have stagnated so far (El-Haddad 2020; Mahmoud and Súilleabháin 2020). Economic difficulties have marred political achievements to a great degree (Chomiak 2021; Gallien and Werenfels 2019), thus leading to renewed protests.

- Jordan, Morocco, Iran, and the Gulf monarchies seem to be trying to preserve as much as possible of their old social contracts (Kinninmont 2017; Nazer 2005; Luciani 2017; Thompson 2018; Vidican Auktor and Loewe 2021). However, it is not yet clear whether "old" means the original populist–patrimonial social contracts of the 1950s–1970s, the dismantled unsocial social contracts of the 2000s, or a mix of both, such as in Jordan's "tribal-state compact" (Yom 2020). In any case, *protection* ranges high on the agenda of these countries, whereas meaningful *participation* plays no role at all. The question is thus mainly what kind of *provision* the state is going to deliver in the future and to whom.

- Egypt has moved towards a *protectionist* contract where *provision* plays almost as little a role for government legitimisation as *participation* (Rutherford 2018). President Sisi portrays himself as the saviour of the country and the only alternative to the instability and chaos that countries such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen are witnessing and any other relevant political force, mainly the Muslim Brothers, would bring to Egypt as well. In this dictum, the delivery of *protection* is enough for a government to legitimise itself with the effect that the well-being of low-income households in Egypt continues to deteriorate (Ibrahim 2020; Sobhy 2021).

- Syria, Yemen, and Libya have descended into civil wars. Their governments have lost control over large parts of the territory with the effect that there is no nation-wide social contract and large parts of the population are not enjoying any of the three Ps anymore. In addition, the relations between the different (regional, religious, ethnic, socioeconomic) parts of society—which are the very important horizontal elements of any social contract—have been poisoned by mistrust and need to be restored in order to rebuild a new social contract (Furness and Trautner 2020). Thus, a new government needs to arbitrate in a fair manner between the former conflicting parties to promote its legitimacy. Social reconstruction will be more important than reconstruction of destroyed physical infrastructure (World Bank 2020).

These developments show that most MENA governments face a dilemma: They are not ready to grant more *participation* but are also unable to return to former *provision* levels. The grievances of citizens are thus growing, and the unsatisfactory management of the COVID-19-pandemic—both in terms of *provision* (health care and poorly targeted social assistance) and *participation* (citizen information and consultation) (Abouzzohour 2021; Krafft et al. 2021; Younis et al. 2021)—tends to exacerbate the trend. Widespread dissent from the existing social contracts may lead to increasing numbers of people choosing the "exit" option (Hirschman 1970) and trying to "enter" another social contract by migrating to Europe. In the long term, however, many more might choose the "voice" option again—this time, however, perhaps less peacefully than in 2011. Additional MENA countries might then implode and millions more would flee from their home countries.

All actors—governments, citizens, and the outside world—therefore have an interest in the reinforcement of the social contracts in the MENA region. To pre-empt revolt and brain drain, governments must take a first step here, and—given the fact that the existing autocratic leaders will not be willing to allow much *participation*—they should at least target measures that improve the well-being and security of citizens (*provision* and *protection*).

Better social protection is an ideal instrument in this regard, as it is an effective kit to improve the relations between state and society. Of course, lack of *participation* is by far the main flaw of MENA social contracts, but better *provision* could still act as a remedy because MENA citizens may now see their basic needs as endangered, too. In particular, the growing relative deprivation of citizens in MENA countries—defined as "a situation where there is a gap between the expected and observed receipt of welfare, income, wealth, political power, or something else" (Kivimäki 2021)—requires a stronger focus on social protection.

4. Social Protection as a Cornerstone in Social Contracts

Social protection may look like one out of many items of *provision* in social contracts today. This impression is due to the fact that modern states provide a large array of services to citizens: infrastructure, enterprise development, market information, public education and training, health services, labour-market policies, and many more. Most of these services, however, fulfil citizens' higher-order and not their most basic physiological needs at the base of Maslow's pyramid. Thus, the most fundamental government service has always been social protection, which is the "entirety of policies and programmes that protect people against poverty and risks to their livelihoods and well-being" (Loewe and Schüring 2021). Social protection thus includes measures that (i) protect people with low income against the most serious manifestations of poverty, (ii) prevent people from significant declines in well-being caused by risks, (iii) promote people with low incomes to escape from poverty, or (iv) transform societies towards better social equality, inclusion, social mobility, and sustainable livelihoods (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Guhan 1994; Loewe and Schüring 2021).

The oldest and most rudimentary social contracts may not have been acceptable to low-income parts of the population if they had not provided for social protection: some redistribution of harvests, some poverty relief, some sharing of public goods, some mutual support in case of adverse events such as work-disability or death of the main breadwinner of a family. For more affluent households, of course, *protection* has always been more important: security from external threats (attacks from outside), internal threats (theft and violence), and political/ legal threats (disappropriation of the rich by the government, the judiciary, or armed gangs) (Harari 2011).

Effective social protection is thus a powerful instrument for strengthening the acceptability of existing as well as for rebuilding new social contracts. Of course, it can be particularly helpful for the repair of social contracts that suffer from poor state performance in the domain of *provision*. Yet, social protection can also support social contracts suffering from deficits in terms of *protection* or *participation*—where it helps to fulfil citizens' higher-order needs—or all three Ps, as Figure 2 illustrates and will be explained next.

4.1. States Failing on the Delivery of Provision

At first glance, it appears trivial to state that social protection can contribute effectively to the repair of social contracts suffering from weak government performance in *provision*. Social protection is at the core of *provision*, addressing citizens' most basic needs, and that is the reason why we can expect any increase in social protection spending to make citizens more satisfied with the social contract that exists in their country and more willing to accept the rule of their respective government. Several empirical studies have, in fact, found evidence of a negative correlation between social protection spending and grievances of citizens (Burgoon 2006; Ogharanduku 2017; Raavad 2013; Taydas and Peksen 2012; Valli et al. 2019). Conditional cash transfer schemes can even contribute significantly to the trust

of households in political leaders, as Evans et al. (2019) showed for Tanzania. This can be due to three effects: first, citizens' appreciation of government commitment to social welfare; and second, a reduction in poverty and inequality; and third, social protection spending that can foster growth and thereby reduce the opportunity costs of being part of an armed group (Babajanian 2012; Burchi et al. 2020; Koehler 2021; Mallet and Slater 2013; Reeg 2017; van Ginneken 2005).
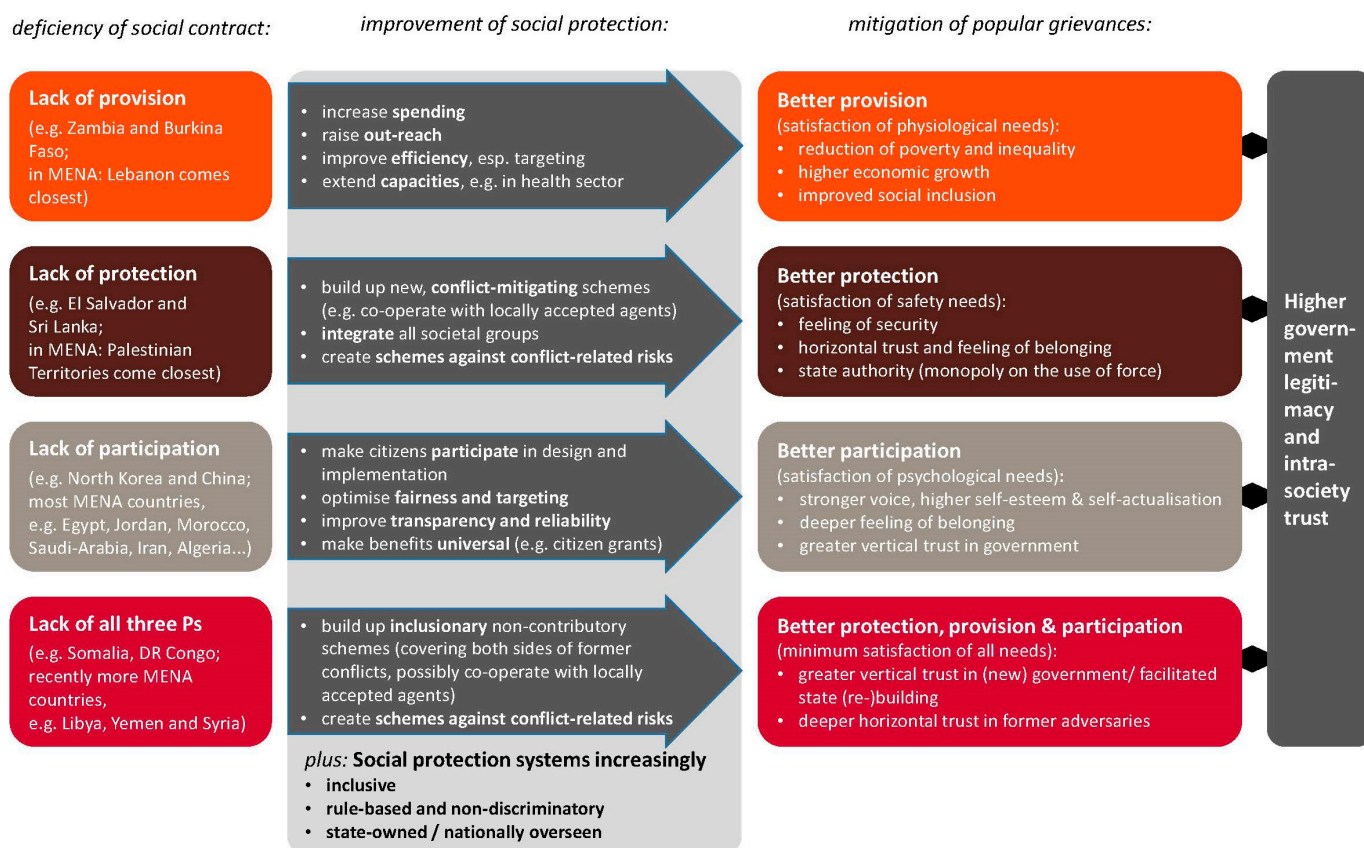
Figure 2. Social protection as a remedy of popular grievances within deficient social contracts. Source: authors.

Likewise, social protection has the potential to strengthen the trust between individual citizens, either within the same societal groups or from different ones. Therefore, it can solidify the horizontal intra-societal dimension of social contracts. Several studies have confirmed this assumption, showing that social insurance and assistance schemes can contribute to horizontal trust (Adato 2000; Pavanello et al. 2016) and that social protection schemes have a positive impact on the willingness of people to co-operate with others (Attanasio et al. 2009, 2015; FAO 2014).

However, these positive effects should not be taken for granted, as they are conditional on proper programme design and implementation. In particular, lack of fairness or transparency in benefit targeting can create feelings of resentment, enfold negative effects on both state–society and intra-societal trust, or even spark social conflict (Brigg 2008; Molyneux et al. 2016). Especially problematic are social protection programmes that differentiate substantially between different groups of society. For instance, social insurance programmes in many MENA countries distinguish by groups of employees, and often the benefits for high-income groups are more generous than those for the poor. Tunisia has 13 different social health insurance schemes, thereby mirroring and intensifying the existing stratification of society (Loewe 2019). Lastly, social protection benefits need to effectively address the needs of beneficiaries and be acceptable in socio-cultural terms (Mallet and Slater 2013). Several empirical studies confirm that if social protection programmes are not designed in an inclusive and needs-oriented way, they cannot effectively counteract societal

grievances but can even have negative—or at least mixed—effects on societal perceptions of government (Adato 2000; Adato and Roopnaraine 2004; Aytaç 2014; Browne 2013; Bruhn 1996; Carpenter et al. 2012; Guo 2009; Idris 2016).

In addition, social protection programmes can only contribute to government legitimacy if they have been set up by the state (Gehrke and Hartwig 2018; Zepeda and Alarcón 2010). Many cash-for-work programmes in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and Iraq, in contrast, are not only fully funded but also initiated and designed by foreign donor agencies and hence foster appreciation for those agencies rather than national governments (Bastagli and Samuels forthcoming; Loewe et al. 2020; Zintl and Loewe forthcoming). Likewise, social protection programmes can also undermine the reputation and legitimacy of the government if they are organised by non-state actors—especially if those actors are competing or even opposing the ruling government. The Muslim Brothers in Egypt, for example, ran quite effective health, social aid, and education programmes during the 1990s and 2000s, which probably contributed to the popularity of the Muslim Brothers just as much as their religious teaching and preaching (Batley and Mcloughlin 2010; El-Hedeny 2021).

There are manifold examples of poor implementation and targeting in the MENA region, which help explain why many social policies of governments do not sufficiently achieve positive effects on social contracts. MENA countries spend much more on social protection, health, and education than countries in other world regions, with the exception of Central Asia and the Caucasus (and, of course, OECD countries), so hardly any of them are an example for the category of states failing mainly in terms of *provision*—these are more likely to be found in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Liberia, Angola, Kenya) and South Asia (e.g., Pakistan, Nepal). It is rather the inefficiency and ill-targeting of many programmes to above-average income earners that provide ample evidence of why costly *provision* has not led to meaningful legitimacy.

- *Commodity subsidies* on energy, food, and water account for a high share of social policy spending in most MENA countries even though they primarily help the rich and not the poor. Many low-income earners cannot afford to purchase large amounts of subsidised commodities, even at the reduced prices (Loewe 2019). They own no cars or central heating (and hence do not buy petrol or heating oil), live in smaller homes than the rich, and have no swimming pools and often no showers (and hence consume less electricity and water). In 2010, MENA countries spent on average 6% of their gross domestic product (GDP) on subsidies, but the effects on poverty and inequality rates were negligible.[8] Since then, most MENA countries have reduced subsidies but still spend substantial sums on them (Vidican Auktor and Loewe 2021).

- *Direct social assistance schemes* suffer from substantial administration costs—accounting for up to 86% of their total budgets (Loewe 2010a)—and from targeting errors as well. Hardly any of those programmes reach out to more than a third of the households belonging to the poorest income quintile of the population, whereas a majority of the beneficiaries (58% in Jordan, 60% in Egypt, 68% in Iraq) are not effectively poor. Therefore, these programmes reduce national poverty head-count rates by just 4% on average and the GINI coefficient by a mere one percentage point (Silva et al. 2012).

- *Health costs and benefits* are also unequally distributed across income groups. Most MENA governments allocate substantial shares of GDP on health (3% on average) but private households still pay large sums out of pocket—in 2017, on average 34% of all national health care costs.[9] Low-income people thus often have difficulties accessing adequate health care.[10] Differences in health care utilisation and achievement become obvious when comparing figures for citizens belonging to the lowest and the highest wealth quintile—for instance, under-5 mortality in Egypt (42 versus 19%), babies born in a health care facility in Sudan (9 versus 71%), 2-year-old children vaccinated against measles in Iraq (58 versus 88%), or professional medical attention to children under 5 with acute respiratory infections in Sudan (27 versus 63%) (Loewe forthcoming).

Shortcomings in social protection often correlate with generally poor government delivery of *provision*. Where state *capacity* cannot guarantee basic public infrastructure and

services, economic crises deepen, popular grievances are on the rise, and more people rely on social protection. For instance, Lebanese authorities proved unable to provide sufficient energy, road infrastructure, and functioning water and sewage systems (Garrote Sanchez 2018), which was exacerbated by an acute banking and currency crisis and the Beirut harbour blasts in 2020; poverty levels in Lebanon are now rising.

As a result, the citizens of most MENA countries are dissatisfied with the current performance of their governments in terms of *provision*, the second P of social contracts—even though most MENA governments are still investing substantially in health, education, and social protection policies and perform much worse in respect to the third P, political *participation*. In a recent survey, large shares of interviewees said that they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the public health system in their country (27% in Egypt, 61% in Lebanon, and 69% in Tunisia), the education system (36%, 39%, and 73%), the public social protection system (23%, 59%, and 68%), and the government's performance in fighting poverty and inequality (35%, 83%, and 85%) (Loewe and Albrecht 2021).[11]

Divergent experiences with subsidy reforms in Iran and Morocco in recent years demonstrate possibly sensitive points when renegotiating service provision within social contracts. Iran's subsidy reforms show how MENA governments could improve their performance in terms of provision, even though these positive effects did not endure for long. When the Iranian government decided to reduce energy subsidy spending in 2010, it realised that it lacked the microdata needed to compensate low- and medium-income earners with targeted social assistance. Instead, it introduced payments to *all* Iranians, marketing this step as an expression of citizens' rights rather than government paternalism (Vidican Auktor and Loewe 2021). Of course, the stabilisation of the political order may in fact have been the main motive for the reforms. Unfortunately, there are no data on people's satisfaction with the new scheme, but figures suggest that it did indeed reduce poverty and inequality. The share of households living below the international poverty line of USD 4 in PPP went down from 23% in 2009 to 11% in 2013 (Salehi-Isfahani et al. 2015), and food consumption increased by 8% per year despite significant food price increases (IMF 2014). However, by 2020, large parts of these positive effects were rendered ineffective by inflation. Some observers hypothesised that the inflationary pressures have been caused by the generous cash transfer scheme itself, but more likely the main reason was renewed international sanctions leading to a steep depreciation of the Iranian currency (Mostafavi-Dehzooei et al. 2020).

Morocco provides an example for subsidy reforms with mixed effects, showing the government's will to cushion negative effects onto citizens who were dissatisfied with the reforms. Morocco decided in 2012 to reduce most subsidies until 2021 and to compensate low-income households by extending the outreach of two social policy schemes: *Tayssir* ("facilitation"), a targeted direct cash transfer programme, raised the number of its beneficiaries from 1 to 7% of the population between 2009 and 2014, and RAMED, the *Régime d'Assistance Médicale pour les Économiquement Démunis*, raised the overall coverage of social protection against health risks from 23% of the total population in 2012 to 63% in 2018 (MMoH 2018). It offers free membership in Morocco's social health insurance scheme to households below the national poverty line and at generously subsidised contribution rates to households with an income only little above the poverty line (Machado et al. 2018). Nevertheless, however good the intentions of the Moroccan government may have been, the satisfaction of citizens with the health care system decreased during the reforms. In the 2006 Arab Barometer survey, 64% of Moroccan respondents found government efforts to improve basic health care services bad or very bad, but the share of people who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied was even higher (80%) in the poll round of 2018 (Arab Barometer 2021). This finding alleges that Moroccans consider that the opening of a health system for large additional population groups does not automatically improve health care *provision*. Without the allocation of additional funds to the health system to raise the quantity and quality of its services, not even the newly covered population groups benefit substantially from extended access to health care *provision*.

Yemen provides perhaps the most telling example within the MENA region for government failure in *provision*. Since its reunification in 1990, the country has been suffering continuously from competing claims on government authority (independence movements in the former South; Houthis in the far North; tribes cooperating with Islamist factions). When public protests in 2011 in the capital Sanaa called for more effective measures against corruption, poverty, and inequality, the police tried first to clamp down on them. Due to international pressure, president Ali Abdallah Saleh stepped down and the transitional government of national unity under former vice-president Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi organised a national dialogue on conflict settlement and state reform. Yemen enjoyed a moment of relatively high *participation* even though the transitional government was not elected and the dialogue was not sufficiently connected to the local level. However, the attempt to negotiate a new social contract failed, and this was due to unequal *provision*. The old political elite misused state structures and government programmes for the delivery of *provision* mainly to their own clientele rather than the entire population. Social protection programmes focussed thus on specific regions and socio-economic groups. As a result, opposition parties withdrew one after the other from the national dialogue process. The country descended quickly into a civil war that has lasted until today, pushing Yemen to the last ranks globally in terms of human development and state fragility (McCandless forthcoming).

4.2. States Failing on the Delivery of Protection

Social protection can also help to stabilise or even repair social contracts that suffer mainly from the government's capacity to deliver *protection*. At first glance, this may be surprising: Why should social protection, which is first and foremost an element of *provision*, also cure deficits in *protection* and help meet citizens' security needs?

A first answer is that the three Ps are to some degree—depending on the country—imperfect substitutes. Governments that suffer from low legitimacy because of failure in the delivery of *protection* or *participation* can still improve their reputation somewhat by expanding their delivery on *provision*. Admittedly, they may have to do twice as much as governments performing at least moderately with regards to all three Ps.

Second, social *protection*, as the term itself says, also has an important protection function. It can be crucial for the individual security of people who, for lack of any income source over a long period of time, risk starvation. Other typical instruments of *provision*, such as health services or access to improved water, have a similar *protection* function. This second function is sometimes overlooked as other social protection instruments cover shocks such as unemployment or work-disability, which are less likely to threaten life as such.

Third, the need for social protection is much higher where governments fail in delivering sufficient *protection*. Here, people are much more likely than in other countries to be killed or injured, lose their possessions (house, savings, machinery, cattle, etc.), get dispelled, or lose their income source. Social protection includes measures to prevent such events or help people mitigate or at least cope with the shocks. Distinctive social protection instruments can economically support surviving family members; provide medical treatment to the injured; compensate families who lost their homes, savings, machinery, or cattle; and provide new jobs and income to those who lost their income source (Cherrier 2021). Therefore, social protection can break a vicious circle that exists between vulnerability to threats and different forms of poverty (Ovadiya et al. 2015). In other words, effective social protection systems render communities more resilient against external shocks and disasters, which are less likely to precipitate a crisis (Levine and Sharp 2015).

At the same time, public social protection programmes can restore the acceptability of the government in power, improve people's trust in it, strengthen their feeling of belonging, and thereby contribute to the rebuilding of the social contract between the government and the citizens (De Regt et al. 2013). Nobody relies on or believes in a state that fails to deliver at least on the *protection* of citizens. Citizens ask themselves why they should accept such a state, let alone defend a government that is apparently unable to safeguard even the

sheer existence of people. If, however, the same government starts efforts to provide social protection against at least some of the effects of life-cycle, economic, political, or societal risks, citizens may acknowledge the goodwill of the government and appreciate that it is still better to have at least some form of government. Some may even stop opposing the government and perhaps support it, understanding that it could deliver services much better if it were better supported by society.

Unfortunately, there is hardly any empirical evidence on the effects of social protection in countries suffering mainly from limited delivery of *protection* by the state—other than the fact that in such low-protection contexts the delivery of *provision* is limited as well. Ovadiya et al. (2015) found that low-authority countries most often (i) have social transfers rather than contributory forms of social protection, (ii) suffer from low coverage/high leakage in their social protection schemes, and (iii) struggle with inefficient social protection scheme administration.

Empirical evidence on the issue is particularly rare in the MENA region—which is the reason why we first present some findings from sub-Saharan Africa:

- The results of a DIE research project conducted in 2015–2016 on cash transfer schemes in five fragile countries (Sierra Leone, Chad, DR Congo, Uganda, and Somalia) confirm that lack of state authority constitutes a challenge for the construction of efficient social protection schemes just as much as lack of state capacity. In Uganda, outbreaks of violence repeatedly challenged the operations of the cash transfer scheme under research, and in Chad, the state had to make additional efforts to safeguard security during the pay-out of benefits (Strupat et al. 2018). In Somalia, cash transfer projects co-operated therefore with local leaders and *hawala* agents (European Commission 2019).

- At the same time, the project found that social protection schemes have some, if limited, potential to strengthen state authority and thereby contribute to the delivery of *protection*. In Chad in particular, cash transfers have helped to reduce tensions between different societal groups and thereby have strengthened vertical trust in the government (ibid.).

- The government of Mali concentrated its efforts on building up a national cash transfer scheme in the southern part of the country, where it enjoyed higher authority. International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) therefore decided to set up local cash transfer schemes in the norther pat of the country. Over time, they adjusted the benefits and targeting criteria to those applied by the government in the South, resulting in the emergence of an effectively uniform, nation-wide programme (European Commission 2019).

None of the MENA countries are a prime example of the category of states that fail mainly in terms of *protection*. Several MENA states are affected by armed opposition or even civil war. The governments of Syria, Yemen, and Libya in particular are questioned in terms of their authority and cannot provide full *protection* to their citizens, but they fail with regard to the other two Ps as well. They thus belong to the fourth category of failed states discussed further below. Only the governments of Iraq, the Palestinian Territories, and Yemen before 2011 have perhaps less authority than capacity and fail therefore in terms of *protection* more than the governments of other MENA countries.

The Palestinian Territories are a particularly interesting case in this regard, as its government, the *Palestinian National Authority* (PNA), falls short in terms of authority mainly because of its lack of sovereignty and dependence on Israeli control. Large parts of its budget are financed by donor aid (30%), lending (7%), and the transfer of import duties that Israel collects on behalf of the PA. (More than 80% of Palestinian exports are to Israel and almost all the rest passes through Israel.) This triple dependency causes regular severe liquidity problems for the PNA, which has not yet been able to deliver considerably on *provision*: Recently, it spent about 16% of GDP on public employment, 5% on education, 5% on the public health system, 3% on public pensions, 2% on energy subsidies, and 1% on a large array of direct social transfer programmes (World Bank 2016). One of the latter, the West Bank and Gaza Cash Transfer Programme, has been built up only recently

and is perhaps one of the most efficient ones of its kind in the MENA region, as it uses a sophisticated management information system (Ovadiya et al. 2015). It reaches out to more than half of the bottom income quintile of the population (14% of the entire population) and has reduced absolute poverty incidence by about 17 percentage points and income inequality as measured by the GINI coefficient by almost 8 percentage points, which is all far above regional averages (Silva et al. 2012). So far, the PNA has resisted all the numerous claims voiced by the international donor community to reduce social protection spending in order to consolidate its budget. The PNA is well aware that its acceptance by citizens depends highly on the delivery of *provision* in a context where its delivery on *protection* (economic, human, and collective security) is imperfect.

Another telling case is Yemen before 2011, where the government was also failing predominantly in the delivery of *participation* but also in terms of *protection*. It had lost *authority* in large parts of the country: The South and the far North were under the control of secessionist armies, and other regions were threatened by Islamist gangs and commercial kidnappers. However, the government used polarising identity politics and the *provision* of social protection to regain legitimacy from larger parts of the population. It increased energy and food subsidy spending to more than 15% of GDP for some years—which is, to our knowledge, more than any other country has ever spent on it. In addition, Yemen's government paid 1.3% for public health, 0.5% for public pensions, and at least 0.4% for direct social transfers (including, among others, school meals, social aid, and public works programmes) (Loewe 2019). In the end, social protection was the last channel for the government to demonstrate to Yemenis in some regions that it was still in place.

4.3. States Failing on the Delivery of Participation

Failure on the delivery of *participation* is, in a way, the standard category of MENA states. Almost all MENA countries fall chronically short in terms of *participation*. Even the populist–authoritarian social contracts of the 1950s and 1960s in almost all MENA countries were good for the poor in economic but not in political terms. Admittedly, social protection cannot—and from a liberal Western normative angle, should not—fully cure the deficit. Yet, generous social protection benefits can create material conditions that make citizens reluctant to rebel against the state.

Political *participation* is good for citizens for two reasons: First, it is a good in itself, as humans hold psychological desires for belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation (Maslow 1943). Second, it makes sure that policies are shaped according to the interest of citizens. The second reason, however, becomes less important if the government serves at least the social and economic interests of large parts of the population even without their political *participation*. The main challenge for autocratic governments relying on material legitimisation is thus to identify the level of benefits that they have to give to each group of the population to sufficiently satisfy its needs and thus make a rebellion against the government risky due to the fact that all population groups have something to lose if the rebellion fails. Therefore, the government assures that most citizens still prefer to tolerate the rule of the government even without political participation (loyalty) rather than to migrate (exit) or rebel (voice).

Pay raises in the public sector and the sudden emergence of new, respective extensions of existing social transfer schemes the 2010–2011 uprisings in many Arab countries can be seen as a good testimony that *provision* partially substitutes *participation* in the legitimation of governments. Egypt, for example, slightly increased its spending on health care and unemployment benefits, raised the share of subsidies in the 2011–2012 budget by almost 25% and salaries in the public sector by 15%, and extended unlimited-term working contracts to 450,000 workers who had been working for the state so far on the basis of temporary contracts. Jordan created 21,000 new public-sector jobs, almost a third of them in the police apparatus; raised minimum and public-sector wages, unemployment benefits, and maternity pay; increased spending on social assistance and food and energy subsidies; and extended social insurance to parts of the informal sector. Morocco increased food

subsidies by almost 90%, as well as minimum wage, public-sector salaries, and pensions; furthermore, it created thousands of public-sector positions. Iraq promised to provide each household with 1000 KWh electricity for free monthly. Oman, in addition to creating 50,000 new public sector jobs, increased housing and student allowances, food and energy subsidies, minimum wage, unemployment benefits, and pension payments, and decreased pension contribution rates (ESCWA 2017). Two thirds of Arab countries reduced the price of food and energy, and almost all of them provided higher salaries, half of them new jobs in the public sector (Matzke 2012). Many of the increases were reverted later (after 2015) or were eaten up by inflation when governments thought that the acute threat of further grievances had declined (ESCWA 2017).

MENA governments are conscious that substantial reductions in social protection spending endangers their legitimacy. When a larger number of them started to cut down on energy (and some also food) subsidies, they used different strategies to prevent grievances.

- The government of Iran continued to rely on *provision* but with a more egalitarian touch (see above).
- Morocco embarked a bit on *participation*. Reinvesting only parts of what it saved with subsidy reform to extend social health insurance coverage and social assistance spending, the government made huge efforts to (i) explain via extensive awareness campaigns why subsidy reform was inevitable, (ii) discuss with a large range of national NGOs how the reform could be shaped to harm the different groups of Moroccan society as little as possible, and (iii) inform the entire publication as early as possible of the results of the consultation process and the steps to be done over the years to come. However, these new ways of *participation* were not extended to other policy fields. In this and other instances, the main risk to real reform is that *participatory* opportunities concern only firmly circumscribed, often purely technical fields, or that sophisticated plans elaborated by commissions simply disappear into drawers (e.g., Zintl 2013, p. 202).
- Finally, Egypt has been relying more and more on the delivery of *protection* as the last and only remaining source of government legitimacy. The government cut down heavily on subsidy spending but used just a bit of what it saved for the extension of direct social transfer spending. It tightened repression much more and has been propagating the argument of being the only government able to effectively defend the individual and collective security of citizens. As warning examples, it points to Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq, where governments lost their authority to armed opposition or rebel groups and no longer were able to provide full *protection* to the population (Vidican Auktor and Loewe 2021).

These examples show that MENA states, chronically short in granting *participation*, have found ways to make up for *provision* cuts without stepping up *participation* in a meaningful way—with the exception of Tunisia, who by and large managed to safeguard their authoritarian core. Interestingly, the process that has taken place in Egypt under the rule of President Al-Sisi has not just led to the substitution of large parts of *provision* by increased emphasis on *protection*. In addition, even the little bit of *participation* that existed in Egypt prior to 2011 has disappeared in the meantime. The history of government initiatives to reform social health insurance in Egypt provides convincing evidence for this trend. Before 2011, the government of Egypt had made several attempts in the field but failed each time because opponents were able to organise resistance against the reform with the support of NGOs, the media, and trade unions. The government did not succeed in persuading buoyant urban middle classes of the necessity of reform, effectively repressing the opposition, or offering adequate compensation to the losers of the reform. This shows that there was still some element of *participation* in Egypt's social contract under President Mubarak, which has widely vanished under President Al-Sisi, who finally pushed through the social health insurance reform by ignoring all voices arguing against it and again pointing to the fact that his government is the only guarantor of protection for Egyptians (Loewe and Westemeier 2018).

In extremely un-participatory social contracts, sector governance may provide an opportunity to still strengthen state–society interaction or even trust. In this sense, social protection programmes can also make a very relevant contribution to social contracts with a weak element of *participation* if the programmes have a participatory element themselves, such as involving potential beneficiaries in the design and implementation. Some donor-funded cash-for-work programmes in Jordan, for example, based their activities on intensive, systematic local consultation processes meant to achieve a broad-based consensus on the public goods to be produced by the activities (a park, a road, a community centre, a safer way to school, etc.) (for further details, see Loewe et al. 2020). Governments implementing social protection measures benefit from higher legitimacy and stability if they use more participatory setups.

4.4. States Failing on the Delivery of All Three Ps

The delivery of social protection is definitely most crucial but also the most difficult for governments failing in terms of all three Ps. Their countries typically have no nationwide social contract anymore because large parts of the population do not recognise its legitimacy any longer. A new social contract, fulfilling citizens' needs at least to a minimum, must therefore be built if long-term stability and security is meant to be achieved. The alternative is perpetual civil war.

Rebuilding social contracts in such contexts is an extremely challenging task because the government is short on authority, capacity, and legitimacy. Still, some governments of war-affected countries have managed to set up at least small social protection schemes and thereby lay the nucleus of a new social contract. For instance, Sierra Leone and Nepal invested in social protection after the end of the civil wars in 2002 and 2006, respectively. Nepal drastically extended the outreach of its social protection programmes (social aid, school feeding, and cash-for-work) and spending on these programmes from 0.5 to 2.5% of GDP by 2012 (Ovadiya et al. 2015). Sierra Leone's cash-for-work programme provided a perspective for former militia fighters and was successful due to low administrative costs and the intense co-operation between the central government and local actors in designing and running the programme (Reeg 2017). Similarly, social cash assistance and a food voucher programme set up in 2011 and 2013, respectively, in the DR Congo's conflict-affected eastern part of the country were successful due to local village chiefs' support as well as high flexibility in the processing of benefit payments (Strupat et al. 2018).

Although social protection programmes can be run by quite different actors and achieve positive effects on human development, their possible positive effects on rebuilding social contracts and political stability depend on the government assuming responsibility for them. For instance, the above-mentioned cash-for-work programmes in Jordan (Loewe et al. 2020) and in DR Congo (Strupat et al. 2018) have had hardly any positive effect on state–society relations, as funding came from foreign donors and henceforth had no major impact on reinforcing the legitimacy of the central government. The government of Somalia, in contrast, apparently understood this lesson. Departing from a UN-run unconditional cash and voucher transfer scheme that had been installed after a terrible famine in 2010–2012, in 2016, Somalia's new federal government developed a national development plan with the construction of a national social protection system at its core (unconditional cash assistance, cash for work, and free basic health services) (EU 2017).

All efforts to form a new social contract will fail unless most citizens understand that a new social contract is better for them than their current situation of anarchy. Often, the problem is that citizens across the former state territory are likely to realise the necessity of a new social contract at different points in time and with different willingness to compromise on actors and contents of such a new deal. Thus, a fragmentation of the territory with competing miniature social contracts is rather likely. A case in point is Syria, where different actors—al-Asad, the Kurdish-dominated Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), the Turkish-dominated Syrian Interim Government in Northern Syria, and the Syrian Salvation Government led by former al-Qaeda affiliate Hayat Tahrir al-Sham

(HTS) in the North-West region of Idlib—all seek to reaffirm their authority, capacity, and legitimacy vis-à-vis their competitors.

Since 2011, the Syrian al-Asad regime has not only been withdrawing state *protection* of large parts of the population but also targeting and exposing them to armed conflict. It quelled the initially peaceful protests by brute force—*participation* had never been high on al-Asad's and his predecessors' agenda—and applied a shoot-to-kill policy even at funeral marches. In later stages of the civil war, it targeted insurgent neighbourhoods by shelling, barrel bombs, and—as was later confirmed by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)—chemical weapons. Furthermore, al-Asad stopped the *provision* of basic public services and actively destroyed large parts of public infrastructure. In late 2018, about 40% of schools and a quarter of public hospitals were destroyed, whereas another quarter of hospitals were severely damaged and thus operable only in a limited way (UN-ESCWA and University of St. Andrews 2020). About half of the population has been either internally displaced or taken refuge abroad, and over 90% of the population lives in poverty and depend on humanitarian assistance. Although al-Asad declared to have won the conflict, his inability to *provide* for even the most basic needs of Syrian citizens—in summer 2020, inflation and a growing budget deficit forced it to reduce food subsidies—further undermines its legitimacy. Syria's per capita budget spending has plummeted to USD 227 and thus 70% below the level of 2010, though only half as many citizens live in its territory (Christou and Shaar 2020).

The government of Yemen, in contrast, did all it could to save at least parts of its social protection system, even during times of very intense fighting, in order to uphold its claims, underline its feeling of responsibility, and preserve its popularity in large parts of the country.[12] Most of the pre-war social protection system collapsed after 2015, but the Social Fund for Development (SFD) continued to operate. With funding from external donors, it provided financial support to some 300,000 people in 2017, mainly through cash-for-work projects. The SFD was not drawn into the conflict between the government and rebel armies because it is backed by the government but co-operates firmly in the design and implementation of all its activities with the local communities, who have a better understanding of the concrete needs in place (European Commission 2019).

5. Conclusions

The fragility–grievances–conflict triangle continues to threaten the stability of several MENA states. MENA citizens feel their grievances are not sufficiently addressed by governments in power. Unfulfilled demands for better *protection* and *provision* and for political *participation* fuel discontent and conflict. As we have shown, the very nature of these grievances points to three distinct weaknesses of social contracts, which are closely intertwined with particular shapes of state fragility.

We have provided theoretical arguments and some empirical evidence showing that social protection can be a powerful instrument to reduce state fragility and build or repair social contracts, which can be good for all involved parties: A focus on social protection benefits the well-being of citizens and contributes to a more active and inclusive way to run government affairs, and governments need to change only how they rule, but not the fact that they retain their power. A more responsive social contract promotes the stability and security of the affected countries themselves and of other countries in the same region or elsewhere.

Yet, the exact policy measures need to be calibrated with regard to the exact nature of the state fragility and the state deliverables missing from the social contract in question. Where social contracts suffer mainly in terms of *protection*, social protection programmes should, first of all, cover risks emanating from external or internal threats to security (e.g., terrorism, natural disasters, environmental degradation, policy failure, robbery). Where social contracts suffer mainly in terms of *provision*, social protection programmes should be extended in terms of scope and scale and their effectiveness, efficiency, fairness, and distributional effects should be improved. Where social contracts suffer mainly in

terms of *participation*, social protection programmes should predominantly help citizens to participate in political decision-making processes and become more participatory themselves in their design, implementation, and administration. The most challenging setting is, of course, where social contracts fail in terms of all three Ps: *protection*, *provision*, and *participation*. Here, the government lacks the necessary *authority*, *capacity*, and *legitimacy* to set up new social protection programmes, which can potentially be at the beginning of new social contracts. However, donors can help to bridge the gap in terms of *capacity*, whereas increased co-operation with local actors can help to bridge the gap in terms of *authority* and even contribute to the reconciliation between former adversaries in fighting.

As illustrated by the empirical evidence discussed, some general rules apply for all scenarios in order to maximise the positive effects of social protection programmes on social contracts. (i) Governments do not need to run all social protection programmes themselves, but must assume overall responsibility so that the overall social protection system covers all parts of the population against their most salient risks and against poverty. (ii) All programmes should be as universal as possible, i.e., provide benefits to people because they are citizens, i.e., contracting parties, rather than out of a patrimonial feeling. (iii) If, however, benefits have to be targeted to specific sub-groups of the population, the benefits should still be based on transparent, individual rights rather than by arbitrariness or allegiance. (iv) The benefits should be fully reliable and predictable in advance in order to maximise beneficiaries' feeling of security. (v) The governance of the social protection programmes themselves should be transparent, rule-based, and as participatory as possible. (vi) The different programmes in one country should be well co-ordinated and harmonised in order to ease the exchange of data, avoid duplication in efforts and gaps in coverage, and produce synergies and coherence (Loewe and Schüring 2021).

MENA social contracts remain loopholed, predominantly by lack of *participation*. MENA leaders are not inclined to concede more *participation*, but through social protection—especially if delivered through more participatory schemes—they could reduce citizens' grievances and thus state fragility. If MENA autocrats prove willing to negotiate social contracts in regard to fairer and more inclusive social protection schemes (something that is rather costly to them), they could renew trust, legitimacy, and, ultimately, their rule (something that should be very dear to them). To do so, they would have to earmark public expenditure for better social protection. Redirecting expenditure is difficult because of high public debts and the need to cut back on entrenched clientelist prerogatives (i.e., the need to re-negotiate cronies' selective *participation*). Yet, in light of the instable social contracts and unpredictable fragility–grievances–conflict dynamics, this is still likely to be a good investment.

Notes

[1]   We use the term "Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region" in accordance with the widely-used definition by the World Bank, covering Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Occupied Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, as well as—though rather implicitly—West Sahara. Some organisations would also include Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan, and/or Turkey.

[2]   Islamic governments are accountable for the provision of social aid to those in need, including non-Muslims. Social justice (ᶜadāla iğtimāᶜiyya) is a central goal of Islamic policy. This does not mean the complete leveling of income and wealth differences (equity of outcome), nor pure equity of opportunity. Islamic governments provide for social protection among others by imposing zakāt (a levy mainly on wealth) or through the awqāf (voluntary religious endowments). For these and other Islamic instruments of social protection, see Jawad and Eseed (2021); Loewe (2010a, pp. 68, 82); Tajmazinani and Mazinani (2021, pp. 28–31).

[3]   e.g., for the MENA region, Heydemann (2007); Kinninmont (2017); UNDP—United Nations Development Programme and AFESD—Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (2002); Yousef (2004).

[4]   Grävingholt et al. (Grävingholt et al. 2015, p. 1284) defined state fragility also as "fragile statehood", as it "is not so much the fragility of the state as such in a legal or even ontological sense as it is the state's [lacking] ability to fulfil its basic functions."

[5]   Egypt, for example, long had different power poles inside the government: the army, the president, the minister of finance, and the minister of labour. Likewise, society can be quite divided into social classes, ethnic groups, tribes and clans, religious communities, tribal groups, and other interest groups.

[6]   For instance, for some years several social contracts have existed in different parts of Syria (Furness and Trautner 2020).

[7]   "Guarantee safety of citizens" and "defend country against neighbouring countries" represented protection; "provide education, health and sanitation to all" and "create employment opportunities" represented provision; and "enable citizens to participate in political decisions" and "allow citizens to elect the government" represented participation.

[8]   Food subsidies in Egypt, for example, reduced income poverty rates by just a third in 2009, whereas energy subsidies reduced income poverty rates by less than a fifth in 2004, even though both programmes together consumed 8% of GDP at that time (Silva et al. 2012).

[9]   In 2017, private household contributions to total national health care spending amounted to 72% in Sudan, 58% in Iraq, 56% in Egypt, 54% in Morocco, and about 30% in Jordan, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Algeria (Loewe forthcoming).

[10]   For example, 46 and 45% of the women interviewed in Jordan (2018) and Egypt (2008), respectively, declared that they had difficulties financing urgently needed health care. The shares were even higher in the bottom wealth quintile (64% and 70%, respectively) (cited in Loewe forthcoming).

[11]   A comparatively low share of Egyptian respondents admitted to being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the al-Sisi government's 3P delivery. We assume that this is partly due to a bias introduced by respondents' mistrust and fear of government repression and does not mirror the de facto quality of government services. At the same time, Egyptians seem to be less critical and more loyal to the government in general even if they have no trust in it—something that Loewe and Albrecht (2021) call a "rallying behind the flag"-effect.

[12]   According to Arab Arab Barometer (2021) data, the share of Yemenites with great or medium trust in the government (cabinet) increased from 41% (2013) to 57% (2019).

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Article

Subsidy Reform and the Transformation of Social Contracts: The Cases of Egypt, Iran and Morocco

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Abstract: After independence, subsidies have been a cornerstone of the social contracts in the Middle East and North Africa. Governments spent heavily to reduce poverty and strengthen their legitimacy. Yet, subsidies became financially unsustainable and donors pressed for reforms. This article assesses reform processes in Morocco, Egypt and Iran between 2010 and 2017, thus before sanctions against Iran were further tightened and before the COVID-19 pandemic. We show that even though the three countries had similar approaches to subsidisation, they have used distinct strategies to reduce subsidies and minimise social unrest—with the effect that their respective social contracts developed differently. Morocco tried to preserve its social contract as much as possible; it removed most subsidies, explained the need for reform, engaged in societal dialogue and implemented some compensatory measures, preserving most of its prevailing social contract. Egypt, in contrast, dismantled subsidy schemes more radically, without systematic information and consultation campaigns and offered limited compensation. By using repression and a narrative of collective security, the government transformed the social contract from a *provision* to a *protection* pact. Iran replaced subsidies with a more cost-efficient and egalitarian quasi-universal cash transfer scheme, paving the way to a more inclusive social contract. We conclude that the approach that governments used to reform subsidies transformed social contracts in fundamentally different ways and we hypothesize on the degree of intentionality of these differences.

Keywords: subsidy reform; social contract; government legitimacy; Middle East and North Africa (MENA); Morocco; Egypt; Iran; protection; provision; political participation

1. Introduction

For decades, countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been spending almost 7% of gross domestic product (GDP) on direct and indirect social transfers (IMF 2013, p. 50)[1]. Yet, the effects on poverty and inequality have been dissatisfying[2] especially because most of the spending was in the form of subsidies (6% of GDP on average) rather than direct social transfers (only 0.7% of GDP on average). Subsidies reduce the prices of core commodities such as energy, food, water or public transportation. Direct transfers, in contrast, are paid to households in the form of, for example, social assistance. This pattern is not limited to the resource-rich MENA countries with large rents from the export of fossil fuels (for example, Iran or the Gulf states), but prevails equally in MENA countries where such rents are much smaller (for instance, Egypt) or even non-existent (such as Morocco and Tunisia).[3]

Subsidies used to be a core element of the populist-authoritarian social contracts that almost all MENA countries developed after independence (Loewe et al. 2021; Hinnebusch 2020). Social contracts are agreements between societal groups and their sovereign on rights and obligations toward each other. Typically, they stipulate the government to maintain *protection* (security of citizens), *provision* (social and economic services), political *participation*, or a combination of these, in exchange for citizens accepting the rule of the

government. The early, post-independence social contracts of MENA countries were meant to provide for autonomy from Europe, socio-economic transformation and nation-building but also stability of an authoritarian government. Food and energy subsidies were the main elements of these social contracts (Loewe et al. 2021). They lowered the cost of living of low-income households and thereby reduced poverty and inequality. Subsidies also supported local firms in their competition on world markets by providing cheap energy and primary products (Rougier 2016). In both cases, subsidy spending helped governments defend the legitimacy of their rule in the absence of meaningful political *participation*.

Over time, however, subsidies have become a heavy burden for all MENA governments because their rent income has decreased while the number of inhabitants in their countries has continued to rise. In addition, it became evident that subsidies benefit the rich rather than the poor, and incentivise users to consume more food and energy—with negative effects on health, the environment, and employment. International finance institutions (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) therefore started to push early on for subsidy reform, especially in the poorer countries of the region. These efforts were met with resistance because reductions in subsidy spending not only affect low-income households but also middle-class consumers, micro and small businesses, and in some countries also larger companies in energy-intensive sectors. National rulers were therefore concerned that subsidy reform would delegitimise them, provoke revolt, and ultimately undermine their social contract with citizens. Only fairly recently, and under severe fiscal pressure, several MENA governments have engaged in extensive subsidy-reducing reforms. However, since the reform strategies differed, it is likely that social contracts were changed in different ways—depending, for example, on the inclusiveness of reform implementation. While the role, size, and (socio-economic and environmental) impact of subsidy reform have been widely discussed in the literature, a systematic assessment of the various different reform strategies and their different impacts on the prevailing social contract is missing.

In this article, we explore the dynamics of subsidy reforms conducted between 2010 and 2017 in three MENA countries: Morocco, Egypt and Iran. We show that the social contracts of these countries, which were quite similar before, have developed in different directions as a result of variations in subsidy reforms. We focus primarily on the pre-2017 period since reforms were initiated during that time frame. Although we reflect on policy implications during the post-2017 period, reform outcomes remain volatile due to changes in US politics towards the Middle East and the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. All three governments substantially reduced their subsidy spending, but they used different strategies in their efforts to reduce the likelihood of major social unrest (namely, unrest that could threaten their rule). Opposition to reform was present in all three countries, but governments aimed to contain it through different measures. While it is not surprising that social contracts change as a result of such policy interventions, we show that the specific strategies used to reform subsidies can be decisive for the direction in which social contracts develop.

We explore two questions: First, what have the governments of Morocco, Egypt and Iran done to make reforms pass with as little social unrest as possible? Second, what do their respective strategies mean for the transformation of social contracts? Our assessment draws on academic literature, data from policy reports, published statistics, mass media articles, available online, from national and international sources reporting on subsidy reform interventions, and interviews conducted with experts that have observed national-level developments during the respective years of reform.

The comparison of Morocco, Egypt and Iran shows that five strategic options—or combinations of those—can help governments overcome possible challenges to subsidy reform: creating awareness and acceptance of the need for reform; initiating a national dialogue on implementation alternatives; setting up mechanisms to compensate potential losers; proving the credibility of governments in their ability to bring reforms to an end;

and repressing opposition to reforms, with the risk that it can entirely undermine the social contract.

The three cases show different emphases on these five elements by each focusing differently on one of the three types of government deliverables: *protection*, *provision* and *participation*. The government of Iran focused on *provision*, which had always been at the core of social contracts of MENA countries. It compensated households with a quasi-universal direct cash transfer scheme, broadening the social basis of the country's social contract (at least for a couple of years). The government of Egypt, however, shifted its focus more towards *protection* as the main source of its legitimacy in Egypt's new social contract. It replaced subsidies by far less generous conditional cash transfer programmes, used repression, and legitimised its policy by calling for compliance for the sake of security and national stability. Morocco emphasised *participation* without sacrificing too much of the delivery of *provision* in order to preserve (at least) the fundaments of the country's old social contract. Its government established a new conditional cash transfer scheme. Relative to the other two cases, more emphasis was, however, put on raising awareness of the necessity and acceptance of reform, thus strengthening public information, an important element of *participation* (Loewe et al. 2021).

This article proceeds as follows: Section 2 presents the definition and framework of analysis of social contracts. Section 3 summarises the literature on subsidies, their strengths and weaknesses, challenges with reform and ways to manage them. Section 4 examines the reform strategies in the three MENA countries. Section 5 concludes by providing implications for the emerging social contracts.

2. Social Contracts

For our research purposes, we define a social contract as the 'entirety of explicit or implicit agreements between all relevant societal groups and the sovereign (i.e., the government or any other actor in power) defining their rights and obligations towards each other' (Loewe et al. 2021, p. 3). Social contracts add to the legitimacy of governments and allow them to stay in power without excessive use of repression. Thereby, they create dynamic equilibria in state-society relations and make politics more predictable (McCandless et al. 2018).

All countries with effective governments have social contracts but these differ substantially in the rights and obligations that they ascribe to the government and the various societal groups. The government has to deliver one or more of the following three "Ps" (see Figure 1):
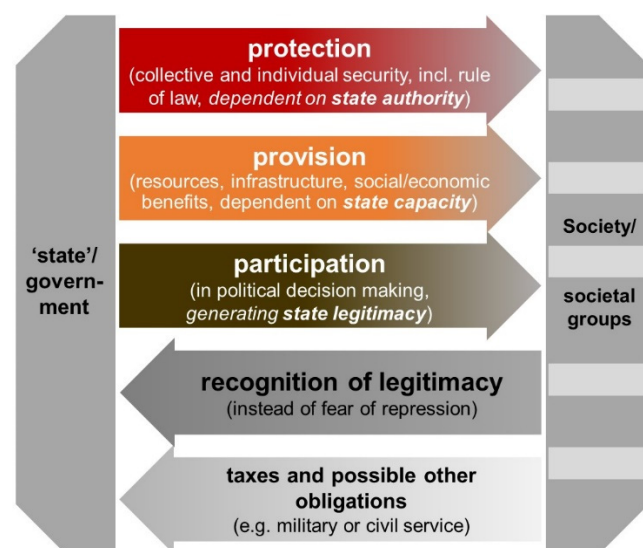

Figure 1. Deliverables in a social contract. Source: (Loewe et al. 2019).

- *Protection* (which includes collective security against external threats, individual security against physical threats such as criminal acts, as well as legal security such as the enforcement of human and civil rights);
- *Provision* of basic services such as access to resources, infrastructure, social services (for example, health and education), social protection and economic opportunities;
- *Participation* of society in political decision-making processes at different levels.

This creates an incentive for social groups to recognise the incumbent government as legitimate, to pay taxes or other obligations, not just out of fear of oppression. Failing to provide any or several of these deliverables leads to societal discontent and political instability known as "state fragility" (Grävingholt et al. 2015, p. 1282).

However, social contracts are all but static. While their main function is to render the relationship between state and society more predictable, they are renegotiated again and again in more formal and more informal processes. The result of these renegotiations can be that social contracts remain more or less as they are, are adapted, or are replaced by new ones. Of course, the result always depends on the relative negotiation power of the various contracting powers (McCandless et al. 2018).

After independence, almost all MENA countries had quite similar populist-authoritarian social contracts (Hinnebusch 2020). Above all, the republics in the region—but successively also the monarchies—legitimised the rule of authoritarian government on the basis of *provision* and *protection*. In particular, they provided social benefits for large parts of the population (energy and food subsidies, free health care and education, social housing, jobs in the public sector, public procurement) in order to compensate citizens for their lack of political *participation*.

To a large extent, these benefits were financed by rent income from abroad (from hydrocarbon exports, other natural resources, politically motivated transfers from abroad, remittances and other sources such as the Suez Canal rents in the case of Egypt). As a result, when external rent incomes declined while the population in MENA countries continued to grow, MENA governments faced budgetary problems. As a result, more or less all of them started to cut down the *provisions* stipulated by the existing social contracts, namely social benefits for the poor, while transfer programmes (such as energy subsidies) that benefitted more powerful societal groups such as the rich and the urban middle classes were kept in place.

The uprisings—which rocked most of the MENA countries from 2010 onwards—can therefore be seen as a protest against the erosion of the previous social contracts: falling social benefits and higher taxes along with continued low political *participation*. After the uprisings, however, the social contracts of MENA countries evolved in different directions. The rest of this article is meant to illustrate how these differences result from governments' choice of reform strategies with respect to key policy fields such as social policies/subsidy reforms.

It should be stressed, however, that the article looks mainly at the period until 2017. As a result, it does not consider the second subsidy reform in Iran (2018) and its effect, which unfolded only in the subsequent years. Furthermore, even more important, we do not look at the effects of the COVID-19, which has brought about additional challenges to the MENA countries (just like for the whole world) and which also has brought about further changes in the social contracts in the region.

3. Rationale, Effects and Challenges to Subsidy Reform

Governments have different options to overcome the challenges associated with subsidy reform, which, we argue, distinctly affect the existing social contracts. Before we reflect on this issue, we would like to briefly review the literature on why subsidies are widely used and what economic and social effects they trigger.

3.1. Goals of Subsidies and Distortionary Effects on the Economy

Subsidy estimates vary widely depending on the choice of benchmarks, measurement assumptions, and scope. A subsidy is any intervention lowering the actual selling price of a product. This can be an explicit transfer to the producer or seller, a tax reduction at any stage in the value chain or the sale of a product owned by the government (e.g., oil or gas) below world market price. The latter case would not even show up in the government budget because it causes only opportunity costs (foregone revenues).

Governments have diverse motives for the provision of subsidies (Rougier 2016; Victor 2009), such as to (i) improve households' access to basic commodities, (ii) lower the cost of living and thereby reduce poverty and income inequality, (iii) enable local industries to compete on world markets (e.g., through access to subsidised energy), (iv) create rents for cronies owning industries that are particularly energy-intensive (e.g., steel), or (v) buy legitimacy (e.g., social benefits in exchange for low political *participation*).

However, subsidies also tend to have unintended negative side effects on the economy. They constitute a significant burden on state budgets (Verme and Araar 2017; Sdralevich et al. 2014), making it difficult to fund other social programmes or productive investments. However, their effects on poverty and inequality are normally much more limited than those of direct cash and in-kind transfers (INS et al. 2013; Verme and Araar 2017), due to the fact that subsidies tend to benefit mostly middle- and higher-income groups rather than the poor (Coady et al. 2010). Furthermore, many subsidy schemes suffer from leakages and losses in the apparatus, i.e., shortcomings in transfer efficiency (Blomquist 2006). Finally, many subsidy regimes constitute adverse incentives for consumption, production, and investment, by encouraging, for instance, investments in energy-intensive modes of production rather than in energy efficiency and renewable energy or in labour (IMF 2013, p. 16).

3.2. Challenges to Reform and How to Address Them

Acknowledging the manifold negative effects of subsidies on the economy and society raises the question of why governments—particularly in the MENA region—have continued paying them for decades. The literature argues that removal is an extremely challenging task from a political economy perspective for three main reasons.

First, the existence of subsidy regimes creates lock-in for governments, which have built up these schemes not only to support vulnerable households or firms but also to buy legitimacy. The removal of subsidies can therefore be a risk for social and political stability and for regime survival (Inchauste and Victor 2017).

Second, many countries lack the administrative capacity needed to set up compensation mechanisms for the losers of reform. Very few low- and middle-income countries have social transfer schemes with efficient targeting mechanisms (Inchauste and Victor 2017), one of the reasons why subsidy schemes have been so popular in MENA countries in the past.

Third, many citizens are not even aware of the various problems associated with subsidies. As a result, they are often against reform, even if it harms them only marginally (IMF 2013, p. 23).

Reform would require policymakers to overcome these challenges. Drawing on existing literature, we argue, that the following elements contribute to addressing the challenges of subsidy reform. Each of them addresses one or more of these three challenges.

Information: Information is at utmost a precondition for real political *participation* but it can make citizens feel that they *participate* at least in their government's reasoning about existing problems and possible ways to solve them. The government can run public information campaigns in the media to *create awareness and acceptance of the need for reform* by: (i) sensitising the population to problems associated with subsidies; (ii) explaining that in the long-run reform is better for all societal groups; and (iii) informing at an early stage about the rationale, goals, design, and possible effects of the implementation strategy, to make subsidy reform acceptable to all relevant segments of the state and the society

(Worley et al. 2018). Information campaigns were key for containing opposition against subsidy reforms in Tunisia, Ghana, Niger, Uganda, Ukraine and the Philippines (Alleyne and Hussain 2013; Clements et al. 2013; Sdralevich et al. 2014).

Dialogue: Dialogue is a strategy of enabling citizens to *participate* in political decisions at least in informal ways. The government can initiate a 'social dialogue between and among different interest groups' (Karshenas et al. 2014, p. 726) (i) on the weaknesses of the existing subsidy schemes; (ii) on possible ways to reconcile the interests of the various social groups and identify an acceptable compromise; and (iii) on different options of reform implementation (in terms of speed, sequencing and other questions) (IISD 2013). Stakeholder dialogue was an important factor of success for energy subsidy reforms in Kenya, Namibia and Niger while lack of it was the main reason for widespread protests against energy reforms in Indonesia, Sudan and Yemen (Alleyne and Hussain 2013; Clements et al. 2013; Sdralevich et al. 2014).

Compensation: Compensation is a strategy that allows governments to not reduce *provision* but rather replace one form of *provision* with another form. The government can set up compensatory mechanisms to mitigate at least part of the losses that some social groups may suffer from subsidy cuts (IISD 2013). These mechanisms can, for example, be in the form of targeted or universal direct cash transfer programmes, extension of public health or education services, or increase in the minimum or average wage levels, each having advantages and disadvantages. At best, the compensation measures are set up even before the government starts reducing subsidies (Sdralevich et al. 2014). Compensation measures secured the political feasibility of subsidy cuts in Armenia and Indonesia (where both countries built up new targeted cash transfer schemes), Niger (where the government established a lump sum subsidy for the transportation sector), Yemen, Mozambique and Nigeria (where the government raised the budget of cash-for-work programmes), Mauritania (where the government transformed temporary safety nets into targeted social transfer programmes) and Sudan (where the government increased public sector wages) (Alleyne and Hussain 2013; Clements et al. 2013; Sdralevich et al. 2014).

Government commitment: Government commitment can be seen as a strategy of 're-pression light'; it is meant to tell citizens clearly that the government will not *participate* citizens in decision-making. It will not negotiate, and protests and uprisings will not make a change. Governments can use various measures to strengthen their own credibility of being willing and able to implement reforms. Commitment becomes obvious if willingness to implement reforms comes with risks for regime survival, for example, if the government proceeds with reform despite country-wide protests or if it promises subsidy reforms to foreign donors or if it connects its own destiny with the reform. Government commitment was essential in the Dominican Republic and in Ghana (Inchauste and Victor 2017).

Repression: Governments can, of course, also repress opposition to reform overtly through verbal expressions, legal restrictions or police/military action. In many cases, the threat of force suffices to hold back reform opponents (Moerenhout 2018). This strategy tends to further reduce opportunities for political *participation*. Therefore, it can be detrimental for the existence of a social contract as such and hence turn out to be unsustainable for the regime itself. All too often, regimes resort to repression without need, while underinvesting in strategies that might build public support for reforms.

As we will see in the next sections, how these strategies are used and emphasised to manage the reform process affect the social contract of a country in different ways.

4. Subsidy Reform in Morocco, Egypt and Iran

After several attempts to reduce subsidies in the 1970s, since the mid-2020s, policy-makers in the MENA countries have been discussing more intensively the need to reform subsidy schemes, mainly due to growing budgetary problems but also pressure exerted by foreign donors to rationalise spending.

After 2010, several countries—especially Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates—took major steps towards reforming subsidies. The vulnerable political

landscape after the Arab Spring uprisings and the fact that these reforms are still ongoing, lead us to explore some of these cases in more detail. We focus here on Morocco, Egypt, and Iran, because these three countries followed quite different reform pathways (which are likely to result in different manifestations of new social contracts). The three countries have also been able to promote reforms fairly quickly without provoking larger-scale protests against the reforms.

Even if reforms started at different points in time, the political and economic framework conditions of reform were similar, a reason why we can still compare and contrast their strategies and outcomes. Our lines of inquiry are therefore orientated on two questions: First, what have the governments of Morocco, Egypt and Iran done to make reforms pass with little social unrest? Furthermore, second, what do their respective strategies mean for the transformation of social contracts?

4.1. Morocco

Energy prices have always been higher in Morocco than in other MENA countries. Nevertheless, its fuel subsidy budget increased tenfold during the 2000s. As Morocco imported 90–95% of its energy resources in the past, subsidies have continued to put pressure on the government's budget. In 2012, Morocco's subsidy bill peaked at 6.6% of GDP, higher than its spending on investment or its combined spending on education and health (Verme et al. 2014).

Therefore, in 2012, the Moroccan government began a systematic process of reforming subsidies, the goal being to dismantle the subsidy regime fully by 2017 (Verme et al. 2014). By 2021, all subsidies had been removed except those on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG, typically butane gas used for cooking and heating), flour, sugar and water, which are primarily consumed by low-income groups.

In 2013, a new pricing system was put in place for gasoline, diesel, and fuel oil, allowing local prices to rise with price changes on world markets (Verme and Araar 2017). As a result, gasoline prices increased by 20%, diesel by 14% and fuel oil by 27% (Sdralevich et al. 2014, p. 45). By 2015, subsidies for these products were removed entirely (see Table 1). Electricity prices were also increased by 3 to 5% except for those consuming less than 100 kW per month (Merrill et al. 2015). This decision reduced subsidies by almost 2% of GDP and lowered the fiscal deficit to 6% of GDP (from 7.3% in 2012) (Merrill et al. 2015). By 2019, the share of subsidies in GDP had dropped to 1.6% (IMF 2019) and the government of Morocco continued—even during the COVID-19 pandemic—to bring this figure further down (Maroc Diplomatique 2020).

The increase in prices was, however, not followed by major opposition from consumer groups. The fact that world energy and food prices were comparatively low during the reform phase was beneficial in reducing the impact on consumers. More importantly, price increases were introduced only gradually following an extensive communication strategy and stakeholder dialogue (see below). Moreover, to minimise the impact on vulnerable groups, the reform left out prices for LPG consumed mostly by (poor) households and by the agriculture sector (a strategic source of income and employment for Morocco), and for sugar and flour (Royaume du Maroc 2014).

As such, while Morocco remains among the countries with the lowest LPG prices worldwide, the government was successful in achieving acceptance for reform, protecting the poor, avoiding social backlash, and buying itself time to identify optimal compensation mechanisms. Estimates show that if LPG prices increase by 30%, poverty rates are likely to increase by 9% (Verme and El-Massnaoui 2015) and the impact on small industrial producers and farmers is also likely to be significant. Further, reform was implemented at a time when Morocco also invested heavily in renewable energy as a way to reduce its dependence on imported fossil fuels and its vulnerability to changes in world energy prices. Expanding the use of energy efficiency instruments (a key component of Morocco's new energy strategy) also contributed to reducing energy consumption and the financial burden on consumers.

Table 1. The reform of energy subsidies in Morocco.

| | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
	Price Increase	Partial Indexation	Complete Indexation	Complete Indexation
Government spending on energy subsidies as a percentage of GDP	6.5	4.6	3.5	1.4
Gasoline	+2 DH/L	Subsidy fixed at 0.8 DH/L	Subsidy eliminated	Subsidy eliminated
Diesel	+1 DH/L	Subsidy fixed at 2.6 DH/L	Partial indexation	
Fuel oil (N2)	+988 DH/L	Subsidy fixed at 930 DH/L	Subsidy eliminated	
Fuel oil for electricity generation			Subsidy eliminated + compensation directly to utility company	

Source: Adapted from MMoEF (2016, p. 8).

Aside from the gradual implementation of reform and the systematic alignment with other reforms in the energy sector, the following aspects may also have contributed to the population's acceptance of higher prices: extensive information; dialogue with selected representatives of society; compensation for those affected by higher prices; and government commitment. Repression played a limited role in Morocco. The government of Morocco has thus tried not to reduce the delivery of *provision* and *participation*. It replaced one form of *provision* with another and provided for a minimum level of informal political *participation* of citizens through information and dialogue.

4.1.1. Information

In addition, Morocco implemented a comprehensive and well-orchestrated communication strategy (El-Katiri and Fattouh 2017) channelled through public TV and radio discussions, newspaper articles targeted to different audiences including educated youth, advertisements, and debates. This campaign explained the scale and distribution of subsidies[4], the economic reasons for reform, the different reform steps and ways to shelter the poor from negative effects, and the multiple benefits that could be captured as a result (El-Katiri and Fattouh 2017). In addition, the government promised the population that they would increase energy prices only gradually and continue the subsidisation of LPG, sugar, and flour, which is particularly important for the poor. Efforts to engage in dialogue and to provide information contributed not only to improving awareness, but also to building support for reform.

4.1.2. Dialogue

To avoid political backlash, the government also engaged in dialogue with representatives of important social groups (Verme and Araar 2017). In 2012, it established three commissions (including government, trade unions, and civil society representatives) to assess options for reforms, their possible macroeconomic effects, and how to mitigate negative effects (Verme and El-Massnaoui 2015). The leadership of the Justice and Development Party (PJD), which currently commands the executive branch of the government, and the popularity of prime minister Benkirane of the same party have been critical for keeping reform going, making it acceptable for many citizens and ensuring that no additional political opposition gained momentum (Merrill et al. 2015). The PJD also played a role in appeasing stakeholders such as trade unions, which protested against reforms several times.

4.1.3. Compensation

Before the reforms, the budget of Morocco's direct cash transfer schemes had been smaller than the MENA average and reached just 15% of the households in the poorest quintile of the population (Silva et al. 2013). For this reason, the government developed specific measures to compensate professional categories most significantly hit by subsidy reforms, such as passenger/merchandise transporters and the industrial sector (Verme and El-Massnaoui 2015).

In addition, two existing nationwide social protection programmes were expanded. *Tayssir* (Arabic for "facilitation") provides cash transfers to poor families (identified by geographical and categorical targeting) with children between ages 6 and 15 on the condition that they attend school on at least 80% of school days. The programme is active in rural areas with poverty head-count rates above 30% and school absenteeism above 5%. The programme extended its outreach from 80,000 families in 2009 to 466,000 families in 2014 (Nazih 2018).

The other programme is the Regime d'Assistance Médicale pour les Économiquement Démunis (RAMED—Medical Assistance Scheme for the Economically Deprived, Rabat)—a social health insurance programme granting free medical treatment to its members. Membership is free for households below the national poverty line and highly subsidised for households barely above it (who pay about 12 EUR per person and year but not more than 60 EUR per family). The number of members increased from 5.1 million individuals in mid-2013 to 11.46 million in 2017 (Machado et al. 2018). As a result, the overall coverage of social health insurance (including also the programme for formal sector employees, which had already existed in 2012) increased from 23% of the population (2012) to 63% (2018) (MMoH 2018).

However, both programmes face severe difficulties in targeting and budgeting. They fail to disburse transfers on time, to cover at least a large majority of households below the poverty line and to exclude at least households with very high income from benefits. In addition, the supply of health services falls short of keeping up with demand for them, which has risen sharply as a result of millions of people being covered by RAMED with the right to free access to health services. Patients complain about very long waiting times, the absence of doctors, bad hygiene, unrespectful treatment by health personnel and the lack of even the most basic equipment and medication (Verme and El-Massnaoui 2015; Nazih 2018).

To address these issues, the government is working on a unified National Population Registry (Maroc Diplomatique 2020). Further, the debate on whether to use universal or targeted cash transfers to compensate the poor is still ongoing. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, households working in the informal sector and workers with a social security number who lost their jobs, or who work less than before, received compensation. This new circumstance created momentum for improving the social targeting system, with the adoption of Law 72.18 in June 2020 approving a new mechanism, the Unified Social Register, aimed at identifying households wishing to benefit from social support programmes. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether the targeting problems will be solved and thus if acceptance of the reform will persist in the medium-term.

4.1.4. Government Commitment

While it is difficult to distinguish to what extent government commitment (as defined earlier) played a role in the Moroccan case, several factors may have been important in increasing the government's credibility in implementing reforms, such as extensive information campaigns that contributed to transparency in implementation, and wider reforms in the energy sector to improve energy security.

4.1.5. Repression

In Morocco, protests against subsidy reform have been dispersed and did not escalate for several years, a reason why repression was only moderate between 2012 and 2017. This

context facilitated the government's focus on solutions associated with the subsidy reform rather than on using heavy-hand repression to de-escalate social tensions. While uprisings have increased since 2017—especially in the northern part of Morocco—they were not triggered by subsidy reforms. Instead, other concerns, such as unemployment, health services, civil rights, treatment by the authorities, political participation, education and corruption, featured more prominently among protest movements. These recent uprisings were however met with increased repression, raising questions about the government's ability to protect "the rights and dignity of its citizens" (Chahir 2021).

4.2. Egypt

Few other MENA countries have spent so much on food and energy subsidies as Egypt (26% of total government spending, 8.7% of GDP in the fiscal year 2012/2013 according to Sdralevich et al. (2014), and even more than 35% of the government's spending or 12.5% of GDP according to Griffin et al. (2016). Given that, in 2014, the government budget deficit peaked at 13.7% and total public debt surpassed 100% of GDP, decision-makers acknowledged that subsidy cuts could not be further avoided. This decision was reinforced by evidence that the poorest 40% of the population benefitted least from subsidies (only 43% of the food subsidies, 3% of gasoline subsidies, 7% of natural gas subsidies) (Abdalla and Al-Shawarby 2017).

Attempts to reform subsidies were made, however, even earlier than 2014. First steps were taken under President Mubarak who in 2008 increased the price of diesel by 25%, and in 2010 the price of sugar by 200% and that of edible oil by 120%. Further reforms were implemented after the uprisings in 2011 by the Muslim Brotherhood government of President Mursi and even more so after the army coup in July 2013 brought President Al-Sisi to power. As a result, the price of electricity for households rose by 16% while gasoline prices rose by 112% (Sdralevich et al. 2014).

However, the most substantial reforms were started after the presidential elections in 2014. By that time, the government had already eliminated large parts of the opposition and reinforced repression. Step by step, the government reduced all energy subsidies. As a result, by 2017 the price of petrol had gone up by 387% relative to its 2010 level, and the price of LPG (mainly used by low-income households for cooking) rose by 650% (see Table 2). Total government spending on energy subsidies decreased between 2013 and 2016 from USD 269 to USD 96 per capita in constant 2019 prices (IEA 2020).

While end-consumer prices are still below international levels, the price increase strongly affected large parts of the Egyptian population, in particular because the government also had to float the Egyptian pound (EGP) and introduce a value-added tax. All three measures were taken in order to fulfil the requirements for getting a USD 12 billion loan in 2016 from the IMF plus the same amount from bilateral donors. After 2016, government spending on energy subsidies increased again to USD158 per capita in 2019 (IEA 2020).

These reforms had painful effects not only on the poor but also on the middle-class. Yet, they did not provoke major social unrest. Exceptions were smaller local protests that ended when the government promised to take back part of the reform (Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017). This acquiescence can be explained by three factors: fear of renewed political turmoil and instability; strong state-led repression and threatening of opposition movement; and strong government commitment to implement reform whatever it takes. Public information and awareness campaigns were also used, at least at the beginning, but in a less consistent manner than in Morocco and without any substantial societal dialogue. Specifically, although initially in 2014 the Egyptian government engaged in communication campaigns to explain the rationale for reform, its interest in integrating societal actors in the reform process faded later on. Furthermore, information on the next reform steps was often unsystematic, incomprehensive and sometimes even misleading (see below). Moreover, the compensation schemes were limited in scope and scale and therefore unable to absorb much of the negative effects of subsidy reforms. We can thus say that the government of Egypt reduced the delivery of both, *provision* and *participation*.

Table 2. The reform of subsidies in Egypt 2010–2017.

	2010	2012	2013	2014	2016	2017	*Change 2010–2017 (%)*	*2017 (Percentage of International Benchmark Price)*
Average consumer prices (2010 = 100)	100	118	129	142	178	220	*120*	*100*
Government spending on energy subsidies per inhabitant in constant 2019 prices	208	270	269	213	96	224	*107*	*n/a*
Government spending on energy subsidies as a percentage of GDP	6.9	7.0	7.1	6.3	3.3	9.1	*132*	*n/a*
Consumer electricity (kWh)								
(1–50 kWh)	5	5	5	7.5	11	13	*160*	*7*
(51–200 kWh)	11	11	12	14.5	19	22	*100*	*13*
(201–350 kWh)	16	16	19	30	42	55	*244*	*31*
(351–650 kWh)	24	24	29	40	55	75	*213*	*43*
(651–1000 kWh)	39	39	53	71	95	125	*221*	*71*
(beyond 1000 kWh)	48	48	67	84	95	125	*160*	*71*
Gasoline 80' (1 litre)	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.6	2.4	3.7	*306*	*41*
Gasoline 92' (1 litre)	1.8	1.9	1.9	2.6	3.5	5	*186*	*25*
Gasoline 95' (1 litre)	1.8	5.9	5.9	6.3	6.3	6.6	*277*	*. . .*
Diesel (1 litre)	0.8	1.1	1.1	1.8	2.4	3.7	*387*	*27*
Natural gas (1 litre)	0	0.4	0.4	1.1	1.6	2	*1900*	*. . .*
LPG (for cooking) (12.5 kg)	0	4	8	8	15	30	*29,900*	*. . .*
Baladi bread (1 loaf)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	*0*	*14*
Subsidised cooking oil (1 kg)	3	3	3	7.35	10	12	*300*	*91*
Subsidised sugar (1 kg)	1.25	1.25	1.25	4.5	7	8	*540*	*100*

Note: In 2016, the Egyptian Pound was devalued to half of its former price, also reducing the effects of the subsidy reform. Sources: Ecker et al. (2014); Farouk (2017); IEA (2020); James (2015); Ketchley and El-Rayyes (2017); Adel and Amina (2017); Sdralevich et al. (2014); time series at http://en.thefuelprice.com/Feg (accessed on 1 March 2021) and http://www.thecropsite.com (accessed on 1 March 2021); own calculations.

4.2.1. Information

The government informed the population regularly, especially early on, using various media channels on the reasons, goals and next steps of the subsidy reform (Ketchley and El-Rayyes 2017). Yet, information often came at short notice, was at times incomplete or contradictory, and sometimes the government even did the opposite of what it had previously stated it would do. For example, in 2013, it announced cuts on energy but not on food subsidies (El-Katiri and Fattouh 2017). Food subsidies were, in fact, not reduced in 2014, but a limit was set on the number of subsidised food items that households could buy at reduced prices.[5] However, starting just two years later, subsidies on food other than bread were gradually reduced, and a substantial number of households lost the right to buy subsidised food (Abdalla and Al-Shawarby 2017; Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017). For a while, bread continued to be exempted from both the rationing and the price increases, but then the government also limited the purchase of subsidised bread to five loaves per person and day (James 2015, p. 10; Ketchley and El-Rayyes 2017). Likewise, the government initially promised to exempt LPG from subsidy cuts because many low-income households use it for cooking, but in 2014 the price of LPG also went up by 87% (Moerenhout 2018).

4.2.2. Dialogue

The decision to eliminate all energy and almost all food subsidies within just five years was taken unanimously by President Al-Sisi who has gained almost absolute authority in Egyptian politics. The only tangible opposition movement, the Muslim Brotherhood,

was brutally repressed and other political groups (liberals, socialists, democrats) were largely discouraged from organising public demonstrations. The small opposition parties in parliament stayed silent on the issue (Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017). Open debate only took place within the army itself. The army leadership was in favour of subsidy reforms while some segments were against them, mainly because a number of army-owned enterprises used to benefit considerably from the old subsidy system (James 2015, p. 5). However, the army leadership held the sway and no public consultation with society representatives took place. Interestingly, this strategy contrasts not only with the strategy of the Moroccan government but also with the strategy that earlier governments of Egypt had used. In the late Mubarak years, the government opted for communication and negotiation to promote a social insurance reform that ultimately failed (Loewe and Westemeier 2018).

4.2.3. Compensation

In the beginning, the government promised to set aside 15% of the savings from reform for "social investments" such as cash transfer programmes, targeted food subsidies, free health insurance for the poor, and other social protection programmes to compensate the poor (James 2015, p. 17).

Until the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, however, little happened in that regard. The government's spending on social transfers did not increase by much, food subsidies were cut rather than extended, and the free health insurance for the poor will not be implemented in all governorates until the year 2032 (Loewe and Westemeier 2018). At the beginning of the reforms, the government extended food subsidies to 20 more items in order to compensate the poor for energy subsidy cuts (Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017); however, starting in 2016, it gradually reduced almost all food subsidies except for bread. Some authors also argue that the increase of public sector wages in 2014 was meant as compensation for subsidy cuts but benefitted only the middle-class (El-Cassabgui 2017).

The only immediate measure taken to compensate households for the reduction of subsidies was the establishment of two cash transfer schemes in 2015 with World Bank financial support: *Karāma* (Arabic for "dignity") provides proxy means-tested cash transfers of 350 EGP per person per month to elderly and severely handicapped people, and *takāful* (Arabic for "mutual support") grants proxy means-tested transfers of 325 EGP per family per month (plus 60–140 EGP for every child up to three) to poor families on the condition that children go to school regularly. The programmes are meant to replace some of the existing social assistance and social pension schemes, which suffer from significant deficits in terms of coverage, efficiency and effectiveness (Loewe 2014).

However, the new schemes do not perform significantly better. In early 2020, they covered about 2.5 million households or 10% of the population (Egypt Today Staff 2020). Yet, this number corresponds to just a third of the number of people living below the national Egyptian poverty line, and in 2018, only 45% of beneficiaries were from the poorest income quintile (17% were even from the richest income quintile) (Breisinger et al. 2018). The old transfer schemes had covered 4% of the population and, at most, 20% of the poor (Loewe 2010). Moreover, the transfers provided by the *karāma* system are equivalent to about 73% of the current national poverty line, while those provided by the *takāful* system correspond to just 25%. This is just slightly higher than transfers provided by the old cash transfer schemes (20% of the national poverty line for one programme, 10% for another; see (CAPMAS 2018)). As a result, the new schemes increased the consumption of beneficiaries by only 8.4% and lifted only 11% of them out of poverty (Breisinger et al. 2018). Lastly, the budget for these new schemes is just about USD 1.4 billion per year or 0.5% of GDP (UNICEF 2019), while the government saved several percentage points of GDP by reducing subsidies.

4.2.4. Government Commitment

The government repeatedly insisted that it did not want to alter any element of the subsidy reform even under pressure from protests. In other words, people would have to

accept the reforms or challenge the Sisi government as such. Thus, the government-linked the reforms to its own destiny in order to strengthen its own credibility (Moerenhout 2018).

Even if the economic situation in the country was much better than many Egyptians perceived it to be, the Sisi regime was able to paint it in a dark light. Thereby, Sisi was able to portray himself not only as the saviour of the country, but also as a guarantor of stability. The president often highlighted that his policies were essential for the stability of Egypt and that Egyptians knew well what instability meant: they only had to look at the destiny of Syria, Yemen or Libya (El-Katiri and Fattouh 2017). Furthermore, he warned that reforms were inseparable from his own rule. Finally, he could point to international organisations not only supporting his subsidy reforms but also making further support dependent upon them (Adly 2020). As a result, most Egyptians accepted the Sisi regime and its political stand as a price for stability.

4.2.5. Repression

Of course, large parts of the population were still not in favour of reforms because they had benefitted markedly from subsidies. However, violent state repression discouraged opposition (Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017). In addition, the whole country found itself in an atmosphere of nationalism and glorification of political leadership.

The hopes of large parts of the population were on restoring stability and growth (El-Katiri and Fattouh 2017) and the political leadership capitalised on this atmosphere. When local protests broke out on 6–7 March 2017, they were not brutally suppressed; instead, the security police distributed bread and the government urged everyone to consider the country's delicate situation and be ready for shared sacrifice (Ketchley and El-Rayyes 2017).

The apparent generosity was counterbalanced by threats of repression and low tolerance to criticism targeted towards the government. Specifically, the president, assured the population that, if need be, the army could "deploy all personnel across the entirety of Egypt in just six hours" (Sakr 2016). As a result, planned protests often do not even materialise because of fears of police aggression. More than 2000 Egyptians were detained after the crackdown on protests on 20 September 2019 alone. Observers believe that these protests had mainly been provoked by subsidy cuts and commodity price hikes, which was all the more credible against the background that the government afterwards considered reinstating subsidies for rice and pasta for almost 2 million Egyptians. Furthermore, individuals claiming that President Al-Sisi should step down were jailed and a journalist was detained just because of publishing an animation related to the revolution in 2011, resulting in prisons being currently overcrowded (Ioanes 2019).

The use of repression and threat has thus been successful for the regime so far. In the long term, however, it may turn out to be a challenge for citizens' trust in the government and, hence, for the existence of a social contract in Egypt as such: the mistrust can unload in yet another revolution and a civil war or the transformation of the country into a totalitarian dictatorship.

4.3. Iran

Iran, a major exporter of fossil fuels, had one of the largest subsidy programmes worldwide. By early 2010, the value of subsidies equalled 20–25% of GDP (Mostafavi-Dehzooei et al. 2020). Most subsidies in Iran relate to the sale of government-controlled energy and food products below world market prices. They are thus foregone revenues rather than real expenditures (Harris 2017). Even if Iran's government budget deficit never exceeded 2% of GDP, increasing budgetary pressures due to economic sanctions and decreasing revenues from oil exports contributed to the government's decision to engage in subsidy reform (Salehi-Isfahani 2017).

The reform, focused especially on energy products and bread, started in 2010 and continued at a gradual pace in 2012 and 2014, just a few years before the reforms in Morocco and Egypt. The government decided to increase fuel and natural gas prices to at least 90% and 75% of export-parity prices, respectively, and power tariffs to full cost-recovery levels

(Kojima 2016). As a result, the price of gasoline rose by 400% and diesel by 900%. Bread prices doubled (Salehi-Isfahani et al. 2015).

Due to external shocks (that is, intensifying sanctions, sharp depreciation, and high inflation) economic downturn followed and the early benefits from reform were eroded after only a few years. Already in 2012, the reform was halted due to criticism in the parliament.

A second phase of price increases started in 2014 (see Table 3), decreasing fuel subsidy spending from 10.5% in the fiscal year 2012/2013 to about 4% of GDP in the fiscal year 2015/2016 (IMF 2015). Energy subsidies decreased from USD 1384 per capita (in constant 2019 prices) in 2012 to USD 453 in 2016 (IEA 2020). In 2016, subsidies for gasoline had been fully eliminated, while subsidies for diesel still existed. Later, however, energy subsidies increased to previous levels (USD 1039 per capita in 2019, as per IEA (2020)) so that energy prices are again well below world-market levels. This is mainly due to international sanctions that accelerated local inflation and currency devaluation, which reduced the real value of nominal energy prices fixed by the Iranian government.

Table 3. The reform of energy subsidies in Iran.

	December 2010		April 2014	
	RIs/Unit	**USD/Unit**	**RIs/Unit**	**USD/Unit**
Regular gasoline within quota [a] (litre)	4000	0.4	7000	0.3
Regular gasoline outside quota (litre)	7000	0.7	10,000	0.4
Super gasoline within quota [a] (litre)	5000	0.5	8000	0.3
Super gasoline outside quota (litre)	8000	0.8	11,000	0.4
Diesel within quota (litre)	1500	0.1	2500	0.1
Diesel outside quota (litre)	3500	0.3	5000	0.2
Residential kerosene (litre)	1000	0.1	1500	0.1
Residential furnace oil (litre)	2000	0.2	2500	0.1
Residential LPG sold in 11-kg or smaller cylinders (kg)	1000	0.1	2100	0.1
Residential LPG sold in larger cylinders [b] (kg)	5000	0.5	6500	0.3
Natural gas for electricity generation [c] (mcf)	22,653	2.2	22,653	0.9

Notes: Between 2013 and 2018, the Iranian rial (IR) depreciated to a quarter of its former value with the effect that most of the subsidy reform was nullified. [a] The quota for private car owners is 60 L per month. In February 2015, the quota for inter-city taxis was decreased from 900 to 750 L per month, and for taxis capable of running on both gasoline and natural gas from 600 to 500 L. The quotas for city taxis are 500 L for gasoline-only and 300 L for bifuel. [b] The price of LPG sold in larger cylinders was raised to RIs 6000/kg in July 2013. [c] The price of natural gas for the power sector has remained at RIs 800/cubic metre. Source: Kojima (2016, p. 67).

The first reform phases were met with only limited opposition. Two factors played a larger role in this outcome: comprehensive information of citizens on the rationale and goals of reforms; and clear compensation process to shift subsidies to direct cash transfers as part of the goal to make government spending more efficient and more egalitarian, compensating both poor households as well as the middle-class. The government has thus tried not to reduce political *participation* while extending the benefits of *provision* to larger parts of the population.

Since 2018, however, unmet social and economic expectations have led to larger protests. Unrest peaked in November 2019, when the government announced that the price of gasoline would increase once more, by 50%, in response to budgetary pressures created by renewed international sanctions. It soon became obvious, however, that the real source of the social unrest was not the subsidy reform—not least because energy subsidies had started to increase again in real terms after 2016. Instead, the protests were due to

more general socio-economic and political concerns among Iranians, triggered by renewed international sanctions and Iran's costly military intervention in Syria.

4.3.1. Information and Dialogue

The early acceptance of price increases by the Iranian population was partly due to an effective information strategy that contributed to trust-building. Authorities engaged in a months-long public dialogue to explain the rationale for reform and describe how reform was to be implemented. The fact that the rich benefitted most from energy subsidies was the central message in the "massive government advertising campaign" (Salehi-Isfahani et al. 2015, p. 5). Once reform was announced, the size of the compensation and the way in which it was to be channelled was explained in detail.

4.3.2. Compensation

The government specified that 50% of the savings from subsidy reform were meant to finance a new scheme paying out direct cash transfers to low- and middle-income households. In total, 30% were promised to enterprises that were particularly hard hit by the subsidy cuts. The remaining 20% were meant to reduce the budget deficit (IMF 2014). However, the government realised that it was challenging to identify low- and middle-income households properly. In addition, 30% of all households did not fulfil the formal requirements of transfer receipt (present birth certificate, have a bank account, and so on). Therefore, the government decided to turn instead to a quasi-universal cash transfer scheme, for which 97% of the population registered by 2014 (Kojima 2016). Even though it was not the initial intention of the government to set up a quasi-citizen grant to replace energy subsidies, it soon understood its benefits and promoted the new cash transfer scheme as a superior instrument to include the entire population, thereby improving social cohesion.

Soon after the announcement of subsidy reform in 2010, the president also stated that 445,000 Iranian rials per person (USD 40 in 2011, but USD 90 in purchasing power parities (PPPs)) would be deposited per month in the existing or newly created bank accounts of all registered individuals even before the reform started, but that this amount could be withdrawn only after prices had been raised. For a family of four, this was about 28% of the median per capita expenditures and greater than the monthly expenditures of 2.8 million Iranians (Salehi-Isfahani et al. 2015). The amount was immediately available on the day of the subsidy reform so that households did not face a gap between the reduction of subsidies and the payment of compensations. Thereby, the government built trust in its intention to protect those negatively affected and avoided potential social protests against the reform (Kojima 2016). This effort paid off, as individuals did not rush to withdraw the funds on the day prices were increased. Per capita income growth was clearly pro-poor for a number of years, a reason why reforms were very popular among large parts of the population (Mostafavi-Dehzooei et al. 2020). Even the IMF applauded it for being able to win support not only from the poor but also the more sceptical middle class (Harris 2017).

The transfers were also effective in reducing poverty and inequality. Despite the sanctions that were levied on Iran and their negative effects on economic growth and inflation, Iran's national poverty line head-count rate went down from 14% in 2009 to 8% in 2013 (respectively from 23% to 11% by the international USD 4 in PPP poverty line) (Salehi-Isfahani et al. 2015). Meanwhile, food consumption increased by 8% per year despite significant food price increases (IMF 2014).

After 2013, however, the positive effects of the subsidy reforms on poverty rates were reduced by inflation (Enami et al. 2016). The real value of the cash transfers decreased by two-thirds by 2020 (Mostafavi-Dehzooei et al. 2020). Although often linked to the cash transfers themselves, the inflationary pressures have been shown to be mostly related to the renewed international sanctions that provoked a steep depreciation of the Iranian currency. The same pressures, however, also reduced the value of nominal energy prices again, with the effect that in 2019 Iran was back close to where it had started with social transfer reforms in 2010. After another sharp increase in energy prices, social unrest erupted once more in

November 2019, which made the government establish a second cash transfer scheme, this time targeting only the lower 70% of the population and being less than proportional to family size (Mostafavi-Dehzooei et al. 2020).

4.3.3. Government Commitment

When first announcing the reform, president Ahmadinejad named the process "the most sweeping economic 'surgery' in Iran's modern history" (Guillaume et al. 2011, p. 3). The IMF (2014, p. 4) has also qualified it as "the most courageous move to reform subsidies in an energy exporting country". While the other factors discussed above (communication and compensation) contributed to improving credibility to implement reforms, it remains difficult to assess to what extent government commitment (as defined earlier) played a role.

4.3.4. Repression

The initial lack of revolt against reforms cannot only be explained by the compensation strategy; rather, it was also due to the use of repression and control. During the first phase of the reform, 800 checkpoints and sites were secured. Gas filling stations, shopping malls, and the entire Tehran bazaar were guarded by security forces and riot police. The government also threatened transportation workers with fines and union membership withdrawal if they took to the streets while the media was ordered to not criticise the programme. At the end of 2019, national protests (triggered by increases in gasoline prices) were brutally repressed. (Kojima 2016).

5. Conclusions on the Transformation of Social Contracts

Our three case studies show that in spite of the common challenges posed by subsidies we can observe considerable differences in how policymakers engaged with the problem of reform (see Table 4). These differences impacted social contracts in quite different ways.

The government of *Morocco* prioritised policies to avoid major social unrest. On the one hand, it established some new elements of rudimentary *participation* (namely public dialogue between state and society) in order to ensure peaceful acceptance of higher prices. The government explained why reform was essential for long-term development and started a discourse with key stakeholders. On the other hand, it continued to deliver on *provision*, though in a different form than before. It implemented reforms gradually, left some subsidies in place for products that were most crucial for the poor and established some new social programmes to compensate losers of reform with limited income. Even though these programmes were rather small in scope and scale, the reform strategy has created hope that a new social contract that is more egalitarian, more efficient, and perhaps *more participatory* than the old one, could emerge.

Egypt implemented more drastic reforms. Its subsidy scheme had been more generous than the Moroccan one but its reform was also implemented in a more radical and *less participatory* way. The government relied heavily on repression and instilled the fear of instability. Compensation remained small. This means that Egypt's government under President Al-Sisi does not build any longer on the *provision* of social benefits as a means to buy legitimacy. Instead, it mainly offers the promise to provide for security and stability in exchange for (once again) citizens' acceptance of its authoritarian political order. These reform choices led to a new social contract, which is even less egalitarian than the old one but more repressive and, hence, probably also less sustainable. As Rutherford (2018) argues, Egypt's state-society relations have transformed from a *provision pact* to a *protection pact*. We will see in the future how sustainable this kind of strategy can really be.

Iran's strategy for reform was again different. The government embarked on ambitious subsidy reforms but invested most of what it saved from reform into a quasi-universal direct cash transfer scheme, which was much more efficient and egalitarian than subsidies, at least for a couple of years. Although implemented in a top-down manner with elements of repression, reform was extensively communicated and the implementation process

carefully designed. Thereby, the government preserved its strong commitment for *provision* and, hence, for the core of the country's old social contract.

Table 4. Comparison of the three country cases.

	Morocco	Egypt	Iran
Situation before subsidy reforms started			
Dependency on energy imports	Imports 90–95% of energy needs	Has become net energy importer	Major exporter of fossil-fuels
Costs of subsidies	About 7% of GDP in 2012	About 14% of GDP in 2012	About 13% of GDP in 2010
Government budget deficit	Peaking to more than 7% of GDP	Peaking to 14% of GDP	Always less than 2% of GDP
Scope of subsidy reforms			
Energy subsidies	All kind of energy subsidies except for LPG	All kind of energy subsidies, but the effect was halved by the devaluation of the Egyptian pound in 2016	Most kinds of energy subsidies, but the effects were to a great amount nullified by two currency devaluations, in 2013 and 2018
Food subsidies	All subsidies except for flour and sugar	Threshold for total amount of food subsidies received	Not yet
Measures taken to prevent resistance			
Policy dialogue	Considerable public debate	No public debate at all	No larger public debate
Information	Extensive information provided to the population	Limited and even inconsistent information	Extensive information provided to the population
Compensation	Means-tested social transfers for low-income households (but limited in scope and scale and hence not very effective in protecting the poor)	Means-tested social transfers for low-income households (but very limited in scope and scale and hence almost ineffective in protecting the poor)	Very generous unconditional quasi universal cash transfers (benefitting more than 95% of all households)
Self-commitment of the government	Clear signal given by government that there was no alternative to subsidy reform	Clear signal given by government that it would implement reforms against all possible opposition	Clear signal given by government that it would implement the reforms for the better of the country
Repression	Hardly any intimidation related to reform	Intimidation of possible protesters	Limited intimidation
Effects of reform			
Transformation of the social contract	Attempt to retain as much as possible from the existing "social contract" while still making it more affordable	Replaced "provision contract" by "protection contract"	Made social contract more inclusive

Source: Authors.

An end to the reforms has not yet been reached in any of the three countries. Thus, it remains to be seen whether reform can be sustained in the near future and whether the population will continue to accept the reforms and the changes that they have brought to the social contracts. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional pressure on government budgets, due to the urgent need to spend on health, social protection, and economic support. In addition, the renewal and intensification of international sanctions on Iran have triggered a new wave of inflation that has undermined the progress achieved and is heavily threatening the sustainability of the expensive, new quasi-universal cash transfer scheme. What is certain is that if the subsidy reforms are not sufficiently integrated with the countries' long-term development strategies—that is, if jobs, economic opportunities, and social assistance fail to materialise—their sustainability will remain fragile.

These cases, and others in the literature, suggest that while governments choose different strategies for reform depending on domestic framework conditions and resources, three elements remain essential for minimising negative effects on households and the economy: (i) dialogue with society on the design of reforms; (ii) information of citizens on the rationale and goals of reforms; and (iii) generous and carefully designed compensation schemes for the social groups affected most negatively by reforms.

Proof of the government's commitment to reforms (for trust-building) and the use of repression also result in preventing major revolts against reforms in the short run. Yet, it remains to be seen how sustainable the effects of these two elements can be in the long run, especially if emphasis is placed on repression.

Ultimately, subsidy reforms present a unique opportunity to establish more functional social protection systems. The choice of compensation programmes is decisive for the way in which reforms alter the existing social contract. Many governments opt for targeted transfers because they believe they cannot afford to pay benefits to others than the poor. Furthermore, in many countries, targeted transfers are also generally welcomed by large parts of the population. The appreciation is, however, conditional on the transparency, fairness and effectiveness of the targeting criteria and process. In reality, targeting the poor is quite difficult in low- and middle-income countries because of limited statistical data and, hence, it is either very expensive, defective or both. In addition, there is a large potential that households are favoured or disfavoured on political grounds or personal connections (Harris 2017). Finally, targeted transfer schemes are often designed, implemented and administered in a manner that beneficiaries perceive as paternalistic, benevolent and condescending. As a result, existing targeted transfer systems are rarely very popular.

The main alternative is to provide flat transfers to all households, as Iran did. Of course, such universal transfers are not cheap because they are also channelled to rich households. However, with targeting costs and possibilities of manipulation and corruption close to zero, universal transfers are more reliable, more effective in terms of poverty reduction (because they have hardly any error of exclusion) and in terms of social inclusion and cohesion (Hertog 2017). Moreover, universal transfers compensate all parts of society (not only the poor) for losses caused by cuts in subsidy spending, which can be crucial for the well-being of the middle-class and for the political backing of reforms.

Of course, it is important to adequately determine the level of universal transfers. Iran, for example, set a very high level at the beginning with the effect that the bulk of savings by cutting subsidies was soon eliminated. Today, due to high inflation rates, the real level of transfers has fallen considerably. It is possible, however, to find a compromise: If, for example, 10% of the direct and indirect benefits of subsidies have been flowing to the poorest 40% of the population, the government could set the level of universal lump-sum transfers such that all transfers cost a quarter of what subsidies used to cost. In this case, the net benefit/loss of the poorest 40% would be zero on average, and only the three richest income quintiles would incur net losses. Alternatively, the government could spend on universal direct transfers even half of what it used to spend on subsidies. In this case, the poorest households would even gain from the reform, the poorer parts of the middle-class would gain as much as they lose, and only the richest 40% of the population

would suffer a net loss. Further, half of the spending on subsidies could be used for other social programmes or for infrastructure.

The most important argument for universal transfers is, however, that their rationale is an entirely different one than that of targeted transfers. Targeted transfers tend to be seen as an expression of paternalism and charity, both by policymakers and recipients. Universal transfers, in contrast, are not granted on the basis of need but of citizenship. They are perceived as an expression of a social contract that gives equal rights to all citizens. Universal transfers therefore strengthen the trust of citizens, the reliability and legitimacy of the government and the link between citizens and the government.

Ultimately, this means that Morocco and Egypt could also make their social contracts more inclusive if they set up universal cash transfer schemes or at least more generous targeted cash transfer schemes. A more generous social policy (though still more efficient than the subsidy scheme) could thus be a way to make the social contract more acceptable for the majority of citizens and hence more sustainable. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic challenges the sustainability of subsidy reforms as the negative social and economic effects to become more visible. Therefore, it remains to be seen how robust the new social contracts will be in the face of a looming economic crisis. In this context, we would expect that the delivery of governments on *provision* and *participation* will be all the more important.

Notes

[1] MENA countries spent even more than 9% of GDP on food and energy subsidies between 2009 and 2013 (Sdralevich et al. 2014).

[2] Food subsidies in Egypt, for example, reduced income poverty rates by just a third in 2009, while energy subsidies reduced income poverty rates by less than a fifth in 2004, even though both programmes together consumed 8% of GDP at that time (Silva et al. 2013). Direct social transfer programmes, in contrast, reduced income poverty rates by little more than 3% and the Gini coefficient by less than 1% but they also accounted for much less than 1% of GDP. Egypt is by far the best-performer in that regard: Yemen's energy subsidies, for example, reduced income poverty rates by just 5% in 2009 even though they consumed almost 14% of GDP (Silva et al. 2013). In Tunisia, subsidies reduced poverty rates by 3.6% and the Gini index by 1.1% (INS et al. 2013).

[3] The average spending of oil-exporting MENA countries on gasoline and diesel pre-tax subsidies fluctuated between 3% and 5% of GDP between 2009 and 2013, while the average spending of oil-importing MENA countries on gasoline and diesel pre-tax subsidies fluctuated just slightly lower between 2% and 4.5% of GDP (Sdralevich et al. 2014). The spending of oil-exporting countries on food subsidies ranged from 0.1% of GDP in the United Arab Emirates to 2% of GDP in Algeria and about 3.5% of GDP in Iraq, while the respective share was equally dispersed in the oil-importing countries (0.2% of GDP in Lebanon but 2.5% of GDP in Egypt) (Sdralevich et al. 2014).

[4] The Moroccan government conducted a survey in 2010 finding that more than 70% of the population were unaware of the existence of fossil-fuel subsidies (Chen et al. 2014). For instance, most buyers of 12 kilogramme cooking LPG bottles were unaware that the real market price was over 100 Moroccan dirhams instead of the standard retail price of 40 Moroccan dirhams (Chen et al. 2014).

[5] The government issued smart cards for all eligible citizens allowing the purchase of subsidised goods with a value of up to 15 EGP per person per month (Abdellatif and Fakhry 2017; James 2015).

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Editorial

The Fragility–Grievances–Conflict Triangle in the MENA Region: Conclusions of the Special Issue

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Several problems related to violence, grievances and states' lack of legitimacy and capacity to manage economic, social and political issues are clustered together as a lump of misery in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA). These problems and many more have been revealed in a Special Issue of *Social Sciences* on "The Fragility–Grievances–Conflict Triangle" in the MENA region (Kivimäki and Jawad 2021).

The introductory article of the Special Issue reveals that almost all incidents of organised violence take place in fragile states with problems of legitimacy and efficiency in management, and almost all fragile states have a greater risk of violence. In particular, corruption and the use of the state for the benefit of group interest (fractionalisation of states) predict organised violence by states and non-state actors in the MENA region (Kivimäki 2021). State fragility has also made mediation of conflict more difficult as it has increased risks for conflicting parties and delayed the emergence of a ripe moment for the mediation of conflicts: even though conflicting parties feel the hurt of conflict and would like to end it, political fragmentation makes mediation and conflict resolution risky for some of the parties in conflict. This reduces the likelihood of ending the conflict (Beckerman 2022).

International humanitarian interventions have not addressed these problems, but rather, they have escalated violence and have thereby contributed to state fragility and developmental grievances. While these interventions may have punished some of the criminals and terrorists committing atrocities in the Middle East, they have also deepened divides between ethnic and religious groups. Talip Alkhayer reveals in this Special Issue how terrorist orators have managed to utilise international military interference into nations' or religious groups' domestic affairs to demonise other religious groups and create a feeling of panic and threat (Alkhayer 2021). All this has further expanded the lump of misery in the MENA region.

While the relationship between developmental grievances and violence could not be revealed clearly in the statistics of conflict and development, more detailed studies have revealed the complex relationship between such grievances and social protection on the one hand and organised violence and state fragility on the other. Rana Jawad's, Oliver Walton's and Walid Merouani's article explains the question of how service delivery affects state legitimacy and conflict in the MENA region by using the 5th Wave of the Arab Barometer, a micro-level survey on Arab citizens' perceptions of socio-economic conditions in their countries, and macro-level social welfare expenditure data from the World Bank World Development Indicators. It turns out that the link between service delivery, state legitimacy, and conflict is non-linear and that liberal frameworks focusing on formal politics are of limited use to understand state legitimacy in MENA. The focus on politics and the economy in the study of the triangle of legitimacy, service delivery, and conflict needs to include the perspective of informal economy (informal sector) and politics (protests). External revenues, as well as regional and international interventions, are crucial in explaining the relationship between service delivery and conflict. MENA populations are generally unsatisfied with government services, but this does not seem to predict conflict in the

region. Many governments in the region appear to be more effective in delivering security than services (Jawad et al. 2021).

The Special Issue penetrates deeper into the group and individual levels, as well as informal and formal sectors of economic relations. In their article on Magreb countries Walid Merouani, Claire El Moudden and Nacer Eddine Hammouda reveal the differences between states' approaches to delivering welfare to citizens and thus to mitigating social grievances and avoiding conflicts. However, a special challenge faced by all these states is the large proportion of workers in the informal sector outside the official social protection network. It is often assumed that voluntary opting out of the formal labour market demonstrates problems with state legitimacy as people choose to work outside it, while at the same time, involuntary drifting into the informal sector may indicate inefficiency in the state's social protection management. Yet, as the study by Merouani and others reveals, the individual motives for staying in the informal sector are numerous, and neat and parsimonious classifications of motives may be simplistic (Merouani et al. 2021).

From the informal economic sector, the Special Issue moves on to the informal political sector. By using a micro-level data survey on the determinants of protest participation in Arab Spring countries, Zahraa Barakat and Ali Fakih show in their article that gender, trust in government, concern with corruption and social media usage have influenced the individual perception of protest activism. Echoing the findings of the introductory article, the authors found micro-level confirmation of the fact, especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, that the effect on protests of economic factors was inconsistent, whereas political grievances were more clearly associated with the motive to participate in the uprisings (Barakat and Fakih 2021).

However, economic and social issues are important for the prevention of structural violence in MENA and for the overall popular satisfaction and the relationship between people and the state. Marcus Loewe and Tina Zintl reveal in their article how social protection plays an important role in the consolidation of legitimacy in states. The social contract between citizens and the state is based on tax contributions and popular obedience to public order on the part of the citizens, while, as a quid pro quo to this, states offer protection and provision to the citizens and allow popular participation. When citizens or the state fail to keep to their end of the contract, states become fragile, ineffective and illegitimate. While democratic participation is rare in the MENA region, Lebanon can be seen as the main case of a state's failure to provide social protection. The lack of social protection predicts state fragility and conflict despite the fact that this happens through a complex process involving state legitimacy and changing popular understandings of the social contract (Loewe and Zintl 2021). Georgeta Vidican Auktor and Loewe, further show how different approaches can be used to move from provision based on subsidies to securitizing protection (Egypt), new ways of provision (Iran) and participation (Morocco) and how these strategies fare in terms of sustaining or reforming the social contract and maintaining social peace (Vidican Auktor and Loewe 2022).

The lack of both protection and provision is also a problem in the semi-state of Palestine, and the problems of state fragility and political fragmentation haunt not just states but also state-like entities similar to Palestine. Abdalhadi Alijla reveals this in his article. State fragility can thus also exist as a problem where an internationally recognised state does not exist (Alijla 2021).

All in all, the Special Issue offers a much-needed overview and several explanations on the otherwise confusing triangular problems of state fragility, grievance and conflict, focusing on one of the conflict hotspots in the world. The MENA region provides an especially revealing case for the study of how different problems of governance interact. In many other regions where state fragility is a serious problem, economic problems are more severe and dominant, such that the interaction between state fragility, developmental grievances and conflict cannot be identified as well as it can in the relatively more affluent MENA region. While one of the three interrelated problem areas is dominant in some regions, in the MENA region, each side of the triangle is strongly linked to the other sides,

and thus some of the interaction that may be difficult to identify globally may in fact be revealed in this region.

The Special Issue also demonstrated that many "regularities" related to the interaction between conflict, state fragility and developmental grievances are very much region-specific, in some cases time-specific, country-specific, and even sub-country-region-specific. To understand how different aspects of state fragility interact with conflict and development in a specific region, we need to understand both the generic features of such interaction as well as the spatiotemporal context of such triangular interrelationships.

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