Authoritarian Regime Resiliency in the Middle East: A Comparative Case Study of Syria and Jordan

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AUTHORITARIAN REGIME RESILIENCY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF SYRIA AND JORDAN

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors in the Major Program in Political Science in the College of Sciences and in the Burnett Honors College at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

Following the onset of the Arab Spring in 2011, the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East were expected to crumble while paving the pathway to democratization. Yet many of these regimes have remarkably survived. Even the regimes that had been toppled following popular protests were displaced by more repressive regimes characterized by the same form of rule as their predecessors. A prominent example of this pattern is Mubarak’s regime that was initially displaced by Morsi’s democratically elected government until it was overthrown by a coup spearheaded by General Sisi and replaced with a military dictatorship that persists today. The number of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East today is no different than it was pre-2011, hence the purpose of this thesis is to explore the factors that contribute to the resiliency of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. This will be achieved by comparing two different variants of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East that have experienced similar outcomes, regime survival. Utilizing primary language sources, this thesis will examine (a) Syria that represents an authoritarian regime characterized by republican rule and (b) Jordan an authoritarian regime characterized by monarchical rule (linchpin monarchy).
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INTRODUCTION

Nearly a decade has passed since the events of the Arab Spring have unfolded in 2011, yet the political landscape of the Middle East remains largely unchanged. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi triggered a revolutionary bandwagon that propelled across the Arab World, mobilizing thousands if not millions against the authoritarian regimes and ruthless dictators of the region. The events of such a phenomenon mirrored that of the 1989 revolutions that toppled the communist regimes of the Soviet satellite states, hence it was expected by scholars and experts that the Arab Spring would finally pave a pathway for democratization of the Middle East. However, what they failed to anticipate was the degree of resiliency concerning authoritarian rule in the region, that allowed the status quo to remain virtually untouched. In fact, the events of the Arab Spring wreaked havoc that further destabilized the region, for instance the popular protests witnessed in Syria and Libya yielded mass-scale violence that rapidly escalated into civil war dragging both countries in turmoil and ultimately rendering them as failed states, that continue to struggle in administering authority over their national territories.

In the events that popular mobilization did indeed successfully topple an authoritarian regime, it was nonetheless replaced by a regime that was perhaps more repressive and authoritarian than its predecessor, as the newly installed regimes failed to implement the reform and changes demanded by the protestors, instead their rule mirrored that of their forerunner. Such was the case with the ‘Egyptian revolution’ that toppled Hosni Mubarak and displaced him with the first ‘democratically elected’ president, Mohammad Morsi. As Morsi’s rule proved to be no different than Mubarak’s as he engaged in similar dictatorial behavior, thus resulting in a
second wave of massive public protests calling for his resignation. This resulted in a military coup that imprisoned and trialed Morsi, while displacing him with general Abdelfattah Sisi, whose regime characterized by a form of military dictatorship displayed a greater degree of repression and brutality than both of his predecessors.

The outcome of the Arab Spring while it may have not led to democratization, seems to capture the true resilient nature of authoritarianism in the Middle East, highlighted by the willingness of the heads of some of these regimes such as Syria to pursue extreme brutalized repressive channels in order to preserve the status quo, while others such as Jordan and Morocco have avoided violence to a certain extent and an existential threat through some reforms to appease dissent. Hence, explaining why the Middle East is perhaps the only region in the world during the contemporary period that has failed to fully embrace a wave of democratization. The Middle East continues to serve as the global beacon for authoritarian rule as it currently houses the largest number of authoritarian regimes in the world, not to mention the fact that it has been resilient to all recorded waves of democratization in history.

The nature of authoritarianism and its resiliency in the Middle East is not simple, rather multilayered and complicated involving a multitude of factors such as type of regime, size and composition of population, foreign support, state capacity among others. Furthermore, the degree of authoritarianism employed within a regime differs across the Middle East, for some regimes maybe highly authoritarian and repressive while others are semi-authoritarian. It must be considered that authoritarian rule in the Middle East is expressed through different forms contingent on regime type, broadly speaking regimes in the Middle East may be categorized as either a republic or monarchy. However, further variations exist within each category that exhibit
a unique form of authoritarian rule accordingly, for instance the Egyptian regime under Mubarak can be categorized as a “military led autocracy” that is defined by Geddes, Frantz, and Wright as a form of “autocratic rule led by a member of the military.”¹ Such a form of rule entails two dimensions “military regime” that involves the domination of the policy making process by a group of military officers, as well as “military strongman style” rule where a dictatorship exists that is controlled by a military officer unrestrained by other elite elements.² The military led autocracy in Egypt can be traced back to 1952 following the coup d’état led by the Free Officers Corp that toppled the puppet monarchy and displaced it with a military dictatorship under Gamal Abdul Nasser, since then the Egyptian military has evolved as a powerful institution with a firm grip over Egyptian politics, economy and society.

Another form of authoritarian rule that categorizes republican regimes in the Middle East is one characterized by a highly personalistic/ sultanistic style of rule, such as that of the Syrian regime under the Assad family and Libya under Gadhafi. Such regimes revolve around the ruler and his highly personalistic style of rule absent of any ideology or commitment to any system of values resulting in the creation of cult of personality, according to Chehabi and Linz “the ruler exercises his power without restraint, at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system.”³ Gadhafi was notorious for juggling around different ideologies at various stages of his reign in order to garner support, for instance

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² Ibid
hosting a conference in Benghazi of nearly all African leaders in celebration of Pan Africanism and calling for African unity while being crowned “King of Kings”. Sultanistic regimes are further characterized by high levels of corruption and patrimonialism as the mechanism of bureaucratic administration is continuously undermined by the ruler’s personal arbitrary decisions, hence positions in the regime are recruited directly by the ruler along patrimonial lines rather than being based on qualifications. This is evident in the Syrian regime under Hafez Al Assad who regularly appointed close family members and friends in senior positions within his regime, for instance he appointed a trusted friend as a commander within the Syrian Air Force despite not being qualified as a pilot.

Middle Eastern monarchies can be divided into two distinct archetypes entailing the dynastic and linchpin monarchies. The former variant is best described by Herb as the domination of the state by the ruling family, this is achieved by the complete monopolization of the governing institutions and bureaucratic affairs of the state by the ruling family. In addition, mechanisms are developed to distribute and redistribute political power among members of the ruling family thus excluding the involvement of external actors such as other elites, this is further fortified by the hereditary mechanism that facilitates the succession of the throne to other members of the dynasty following the death of the monarch. Dynastic monarchies are common among all Gulf monarchies yet it originated in Kuwait in 1938 when Al Sabah the emir dissolved

parliament resulting in the subsequent takeover of his family over key state ministries and posts. The latter form of a Middle Eastern monarchy that is non dynastic based on Herbs classifications is termed as linchpin monar chies. According to Russell Lucas, in this variant of a monarchy, the ruling family does not monopolize all head positions in government yet limits participation to political institutions. The monarch places himself above routine politics and relegates the responsibilities for such affairs to a parliament. He also encourages “social pluralism and mobilize it along vertical lines to participate in the governing of the state, underneath the leadership of the monarchy”.7

Henceforth, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the factors contributing to the resiliency of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. This will be achieved through a comparative examination of two different variants of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East that exhibited regime resiliency. Both, Syria and Jordan have ultimately shared similar outcomes in terms of regime survival specifically in light of the greatest challenge that has faced and even toppled several Arab autocratic regimes in the region, the Arab Spring. This will be further discussed in the research design section below.

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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON AUTHORITARIAN RESILIENCY

The persistent nature of authoritarianism in the Middle East has been the subject of scholarly debate since the late 20th century. The third wave of democratization rose in Southern Europe in the 1970s and Latin America during the 1980s propelling a democratic wave across different parts of the world, including the heart of the communist sphere in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, the Middle East skipped out on the third wave of democratization, as no noticeable regime change let alone a regional shift in the political arena from repressive authoritarianism to democratic liberalization took place. Such global events seem to highlight or at least draw attention to the resilient nature of authoritarianism in the Middle East when it comes to political liberalization and democratization. This has been further evident following the series of Arab uprisings that erupted in late 2010 that would form what is known as the Arab Spring, arguably the first regional wave of democratization through mass popular mobilization against despotic rulers and regimes. Yet these uprisings ultimately resulted in the widening of authoritarian activity in the region through brutally repressive means that wreaked havoc on the Middle East and its fragile state of stability.

The existing literature examines authoritarianism in the Middle East through the consideration of various factors, with different researchers placing an emphasis on a specific factor that is said to serve as the central force driving regime resiliency, ranging from the state coercive apparatus to elite coalitions and claims to legitimacy among other unique factors. In

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most Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, political power is concentrated in a single figure, for instance Egypt under Mubarak and Sisi (while a military oligarchy is arguably present, Sisi remains the figure of supreme authority), Libya under Gadhafi, Tunisia under Bin Ali and virtually all Arab monarchies. The conceptualization of proposed factors relating to authoritarian regimes is contingent upon their attribution broadly to either legitimation, repression, or cooptation.

**Legitimation**

Gerschewski claims that legitimation, repression and co-optation are the key factors of reenforcing stability in autocratic regimes. *Legitimation* is utilized as a means of measuring and assuring “active consent, compliance with the rules, passive obedience, or mere toleration within the population”\(^9\), its primary function is gaining support for the political elite from the masses through the motivation of righteousness. The demand for legitimation within autocratic regimes is derived from the assumption that the persistence of modern autocracies can no longer be solely reliant on a purely repressive style of control, where the ruler asserts unrestrained control over the ruled without the considerations of the ruled. Modern autocrats must structure their rule based on the interdependencies that classify the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, resulting in some form of social contract\(^10\). A social contract in this context refers to a form of a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled whereby passive support for the rulers is provided in exchange for economic or material benefits and stability for the ruled, thus

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\(^10\) ibid., 19.
guaranteeing the political isolation of the public sphere. For instance, this can be observed during the events of the Arab Spring, where political and regime stability in the authoritarian states of Egypt and Tunisia were contingent on such reciprocal relationships between the rulers and the ruled facilitated by a social contract\textsuperscript{11}. Nonetheless, when the structure of the social contract collapsed as a result of the withdrawal of consent by the ruled given a myriad of unaddressed grievances, dissent was catalyzed and ultimately surfaced thus resulting in mass popular mobilization against the rulers.

Furthermore, legitimation is employed by Middle Eastern monarchs to justify their rule through an allusion to religious and/or cultural claims. For instance, the Hashemite dynasty in Jordan seeks to derive its legitimacy from genealogical links and ancestry to Prophet Muhammad.\textsuperscript{12} The royal family bears the title of sharif or noble and claims to be direct descendants of Al-Hasan, the son of Fatimah, daughter of Prophet Muhammad, hence granting themselves a special right to govern under Islamic law and tradition\textsuperscript{13}. As a result, such lineage has endowed special religious titles and duties on the Hashemites such as stewardship of the holy sites in Mecca and Medina since the 10th century, as well as occupying the title of sharif of Mecca up until their defeat by the emerging Saud dynasty in 1924\textsuperscript{14}, not to mention custodial duties for Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem up until present day. Such claims by the

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\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 11.
Hashemites were essential in consolidating their rule and gaining superiority over other tribes in the collective region of the Middle East and North Africa. Such claims have historically and continue to facilitate Hashemite dynastical rule through the employment of religion, that is held as a supreme cultural entity in the Middle East as legitimizing their rule in a manner that is parallel to the ancient divine right in the eyes of the ruled, a majority of whom share the same Islamic identity and hold religion to a high personal value, at least that is how they appear and behave in public. In fact, the Hashemite monarchy continually reminds its population of its special religious titles and genealogical links to the Prophet Muhammad as means of legitimizing their rule in the eyes of a highly conservative and religious society, for instance the employment of expressions and phrases in speeches where King Abdullah II addresses his nation by praying to Prophet Muhammad and referring to him as the “Arab Hashemite Prophet”, a title that has been exclusively utilized by the Hashemites.

Nonetheless, legitimation specifically in the authoritarian framework faces significant challenges concerning its validity and accuracy, for it is difficult to empirically and accurately measure the notion of legitimate rule in autocratic and authoritarian regimes. In Ambiguities of Domination: Politic, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria, Lisa Wedeen explores the gap between the image and overall legitimacy presented by Syrian President Hafiz Al Assad and his actual perception by Syrians including the degree to which Assad’s rule is considered legitimate as painted by his regime. Hafiz Al Assad maintained a cult of personality reinforced by the state propaganda apparatus (state owned media entailing news channels, magazines, and newspapers) that depict Assad as a hyper glorified icon that is omnipresent and omniscient, much like the depictions of Kim Jung Un in North Korea. “In newspaper photographs he appears
as the "father," the "combatant," the "first teacher," the "savior of Lebanon," the "leader forever," or the "gallant knight," a transparent reference to the modern-day Salah alDin. Despite such images and symbolism, Wedeen suggests that the depiction of Assad in Syrian society is merely a façade as no one would actually believe the holiness and omniscience of Assad that highlight his immortality or God-like presence. Rather, Assad’s cult of personality manifests a general atmosphere of skeptical ambivalence that attends the practice of politics in Syria. Spectacles relating to the glorification of Assad and the fortification of his cult of personality are typically organized by agents affiliated with the regime, they additionally devise strategies for enforcing attendance at events celebrating Assad or the regime, for instance members of the Baathist party are known to close down university gates to prevent students from leaving then escort them unto buses that would transport them to celebrations reveling the president.

The cult of personality is additionally fortified by the regime’s instrumentalization of repression, the threat of coercive power by the regime facilitates the function of the cult of personality in terms of sustaining the rule of the regime regardless of whether legitimacy claims are actually believed by the population. For instance, as long as the threat and actual use of force such as detainment, torture, exile or death by the regime against dissidents who dare to openly challenge the legitimacy of the cult of personality exists, then the integrity of the cult of personality at least in the open public sphere is preserved as it is not viable for dissidents to openly challenge the cult of personality given the high risks of repression. However, in the case

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16 Ibid, 2.
17 Ibid, 2-3.
that repressive capacity and use of force by the regime is not sufficient to contain dissidence then it is highly likely that dissidence would erupt, thus exposing the fabricated nature of the cult of personality and its failure as a mechanism of regime resiliency. That is exactly what happened during the 2011 uprising when mass demonstrations overwhelmed the coercive apparatus in many different parts of the country and destroyed the most conspicuous symbols of the cult of personality (i.e., statues of Hafez Assad).

Similarly, the legitimacy of Hashemite rule in Jordan is exaggerated and reinforced by regime elements such as state-owned social media channels that glorify the Hashemite dynasty under the guise of hyper nationalism and patriotism. The so-called patriots that run such channels claim to be independent from the state and regime, yet disseminate elements of propaganda nearly immediately as state owned pages and channels publish theirs in a manner that is suspicious. Hence implying that such ‘independent’ nationalist social media channels are either state owned or their operators are paid and employed by the state to remit propaganda onto a wider audience. Furthermore, the cult of personality present in the Jordanian regime relies on repression as a pillar of support similar to that of Assad’s regime, security forces possess nearly unrestricted power in monitoring and cracking down on all forms of dissent aimed at King Abdullah II and his family. Security forces, most notably the infamous mukhabarat closely monitor and censor all forms of dissent both online and publicly. Multiple reports that detail the detainment, beating and mistrial of individuals voicing their opposition against the regime and
government are common. For instance, several dozens of pro-reform peaceful protestors were
detained and brutally beaten by Gendarme forces for allegedly ‘insulting’ the king in 2012.\textsuperscript{18}

Gerschewski claims that legitimation is measured based on the performance of the regime
economically, socially and maintaining public order.\textsuperscript{19} Hence the higher a regime performs the
greater degree of fulfillment it achieves of the social contract. Yet that is not necessarily the case
as authoritarian regimes typically employ significant degrees of repression in order to maintain
their persistence, thus resulting in the phenomenon known as “preference falsification”\textsuperscript{20}, this
involves a relationship between an individual’s private and public preferences. For instance, an
individual supporting the overthrow of a government may not publicly display his anti-
government sentiments in any form given the fear of being persecuted by the government.
Instead, such an individual may publicly display pro government sentiments by attending
nationalist rallies and sharing pro government propaganda (public preference) despite actually
being anti-government (private preference). Therefore, a sharp disparity exists between the
individuals private and public preferences thus constituting preference falsification. Kuran’s
conceptualization of preference falsification is consistent with Wedeen’s observations
concerning the Assad regime as noted in Ambiguities of Domination: Politic, Rhetoric, and
Symbols in Contemporary Syria from a theoretical perspective. Wedeen mentions a sharp gap


that exists between the symbolism and image maintained and portrayed by the Assad regime entailing his cult of personality, and what Syrians genuinely believe in regards to such imagery and legitimacy claims. This divide is parallel to that between public and private preferences and as well as their relation to preference falsification as discussed by Kuran, the cult of personality of Assad as sustained by his regime through the threat of use of coercive force serves to generate the public preference of Syrians that is said to encompass public support and admiration of Assad. Nevertheless, Weeden suggests that it is impractical to assume that such legitimacy claims are believed by the public thus implying the fabricated nature of Assad’s cult of personality, in fact it is highly likely that most Syrians reject such claims and acknowledge their fabricated nature as any rational human would yet they refrain from publicizing such sentiments in fear of persecution by the regime, thus representing their private preferences.

Consequently, measuring the attitudes of the public within an authoritarian state towards the regime and rulers that govern them as an indicator of legitimacy (e.g., via public opinion surveys), it is highly likely that answers will be extremely biased and skewed in favor of the regime while failing to mirror actual sentiments of the public given fears of government persecution and the mechanics of preference falsification as mentioned earlier. Consequently, the eruption of mass protests, as happened in Syria in 2011, could come as a complete surprise.

Based on the previous theoretical discussion concerning legitimation, it can be anticipated that legitimation serves as an essential pillar of stability in the Jordanian regime that has historically been image conscious. The religious titles and claimed genealogical links to Prophet Muhammad have been continuously instrumentalized by the Hashemites in justifying their right to the throne, and power compared to other Arab tribes in the region. This strategy of
legitimation is specifically relevant and potentially effective in a society that can be classified as highly religious and conservative where such claims allude to shared religious values of the people. On the other hand, in Syria it can be anticipated that legitimation is not as effective or nearly as crucial to the stability of the Syrian regime compared to the Jordanian regime given the brutal history behind Assad’s ascension to power. Not to mention the dynamics of the ethnic/religious identity of the ruling family compared to the majority of the population in Syria, where the Assads identify as Alawis (an ethnic religious minority) and governs over an ethnically and religiously diverse population that is primarily composed of Sunni Arabs.

Repression

Repression is the defining feature of autocracies and central to their survival. Escribà-Folch concluded that “repression does work. In other words, it significantly reduces the likelihood that a dictator will be replaced in a given year”\textsuperscript{21}. Repression can be defined as “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities”\textsuperscript{22}, its main functions is channeling the demands of the regime elite through generating a political culture at both the elite and popular levels based on the threat of the use of force by the state. Repression is an effective mechanism for stability but also highly costly. Thus, repression alone fails to guarantee regime survival on the long run, specifically in times of


economic downturns where the regime fails to afford the material incentives that its repressive apparatus relies on, such as pay for security forces.

Repression can be divided into two subtypes that of high intensity and low intensity based on Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way’s assertions in *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*\(^{23}\), the former subtype involves state coercive activity targeting high profile targets such as oppositional leaders, large groups of people such as demonstrators and dissidents, or even opposition organizations. On the one hand, high intensity repression is measured through the frequency of repression of mass demonstrators, violent operations against organized opposition parties including murder, imprisonment or exile of oppositional leaders. On the other hand, low intensity repression is less visible and subtle compared to high intensity repression. Such repressive activity is said to be measured through the presence of a surveillance system, intimidation and physical harassment tactics, as well as infringement upon civil liberties such as freedom to assembly, not to mention restricting and even denying education or employment opportunities. Data highlighting both low and high intensity repression within countries can be found at the Freedom House, The Cingranelli-Richards Human Rights Dataset, and the Political Terror Scale project\(^ {24}\). Based on most recent data compiled from human rights reports from Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and the US Department of State, Jordan scored a value of 3 on the Political Terror Scale, indicating “extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be


common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.”

Hence, suggesting the presence of moderate levels of repression. Syria scored a value of 5, the highest possible score on the Political Terror Scale indicating “terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.” Thus, these numbers suggest extremely high levels of repression.

Repression has proven to be an instrumental mechanism for reinforcing authoritarian regime rule and thus contributing to the resilience of authoritarianism in the Middle East. The use of repression by the authoritarian states of the Middle East is embodied by the employment of a complex intertwined system of state security, military and intelligence forces all operating under the command of the autocrat in what is termed as the coercive apparatus. Bellin summarizes the extensive literature on the coercive apparatus suggesting that regime survival is contingent upon the state’s capacity in sustaining its monopoly on coercion. She adds that the will of the state in crushing opposition and dissent through its coercive apparatus is equally as significant as possessing the capacity to do so, for the regime may not survive if it lacks one or the other. For instance, to draw upon the conceptual distinction between will and capacity, Bellin presents a case where a regime has the capacity yet not the will such as South Korea under Roh Tae Woo in 1987. Similarly, Egypt under Mubarak possessed the capacity to suppress the 2011

26 Ibid.
protests in the wake of Arab Uprisings, yet the military establishment ultimately decided to
dissociate with the dictator. If the establishment had decided to act otherwise and used extensive
coercion, it would have arguably prevented the demise of Mubarak’s reign. On the other hand, a
regime may possess the will yet lacks the capacity to crush opposition as was the case in Benin
under Kerekou in 1989. It can be argued that Libya under Gaddafi falls under this pattern during
its experience with the Arab Uprisings, Gadhafi notoriously stated his intention in a national
address to hunt down and eliminate every revolutionary that he labeled as traitors in every
neighborhood and corner in Libya. However, his capacity to crush opposition was heavily
hindered given foreign actors supplying and arming opposition militias, not to mention the
NATO coalition bombings that crippled Gaddafi’s forces and ultimately brought about his
gruesome public demise.

Syria presents a unique case study for such a pattern as the Assad regime has explicitly
demonstrated its will to crush all forms of opposition irrespective of the costs incurred both
domestically as well as internationally, the Syrian regime is notorious for maintaining a
formidable repressive apparatus yet its capacity has been hindered and bolstered by a multiplicity
of factors at various stages during the civil war such as the fragmentation of the Syrian Armed
Forces due to mass defections, the rise of ISIS, and foreign intervention (NATO airstrikes, fiscal
and military support to the Assad regime by its allies Iran and Russia, and material support for
various oppositional Sunni militias by foreign actors such as Saudi Arabia and UAE).
Consequently, given the complicated state of conflict in Syria that has been ongoing since 2011,
the Assad regime continues to persist while failing to fully contain and repress opposition, thus
struggling to fully restore regime authority across the country and win the civil war decisively.
Overall, in comparison to the Qaddafi regime, the ability of the Assad regime to obtain support from powerful external states such as Russia and Iran, was central to its ability to stay in power.

The coercive apparatus is dependent on various conditions in order to effectively persist entailing a continuous flow of adequate material funding, webs of international support, and low levels of institutionalization compounded by patrimonialism. Other factors additionally influence the functioning and structure of the coercive apparatus, in “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East Lessons from the Arab Spring” Bellin highlights the importance of the coercive apparatus’s loyalty or defection to the regime, specifically the military as regime survival among those that experienced mass popular mobilizations during the onset of the Arab Uprisings can be boiled down to one question: “would the military defect? Or, more specifically, would the military shoot the protesters or not?”

First, fiscal health is essential to the robustness of the coercive apparatus that requires a constant stream of funds to pay and arm its members. When the regime lacks financial resources, the security forces will no longer be able to pay its recruits thus risking defection and ultimately crumbling the structure of the coercive apparatus from within. Hence, the availability of continuous material incentive to security forces and the military is essential in not only arming them, but also ensuring their willingness to take orders ultimately ensuring regime survival.

Despite the economic turmoil in the region the majority of states, as distinct from many Sub-

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Saharan African regimes, possesses access to a steady revenue through a form of rent income that is sufficient for military/security related spending. In fact, in 2000, 6.7% of the GNP of various Middle Eastern states was spent on defense compared to the global average of 3.8% and 2.2% in NATO countries at the time\(^{30}\), the region is additionally home to the highest spenders on arms globally such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, Iran, Egypt, UAE, Kuwait and Algeria, all of whom accounted for 40% of the global arms sales in the year 2000\(^{31}\). The Middle East & North Africa (5.4%) as a region continue to maintain a military expenditure (% of GDP) that is significantly higher than the world average (2.2%) in 2019, based on most recent data made available from the World Bank\(^{32}\). In addition, as of 2019, five of the top ten countries with the highest military spending’s as part of % of GDP are Arab authoritarian states located in the Middle East such as Oman (8.8%), Saudi Arabia (8.0%), and Jordan (4.7%)\(^{33}\).

As mentioned earlier, such authoritarian states are able to fund their coercive apparatus through access to rentier income, either in the form of hydrocarbon exports (e.g., nearly 30 billion dollars in revenue for the Saudi state), or through foreign aid (e.g., Egypt receives aid from the United States amounting to 2 billion dollars annually). This allows such states to maneuver away from domestic economic turmoil and poor overall fiscal conditions by spending rent income on the state prioritizing defense and security at the expense of education, health,

\(^{30}\) Ibid. p.147.
\(^{31}\) Ibid. p.147
employment and infrastructure. For instance, according to IMF, despite facing an economic crisis that forced the Egyptian regime to reduce the subsidy of basic products, its military and defense expenditure increased significantly 34.

The coercive apparatus is additionally heavily reliant on the existence and preservation of webs of international support with the important exception of Iran that has been subjected to crippling sanctions since the withdrawal of the United States from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action under the Trump administration. The regimes would be unable to sustain their fiscal capacity to maintain such an apparatus in cases of foreign support withdrawal35. Authoritarian regimes that maintain a robust coercive apparatus rely on foreign aid and patronage in order to secure the necessary funds and armaments for their various security forces and military. Given the geopolitical significance of the Middle East, leaders of the various authoritarian states have historically enjoyed copious amounts of aid and patronage from both western and eastern powers during the cold war in exchange for promises on deterring or facilitating communism in the region. Foreign aid continued to pour into the region despite the end of the Cold War, given the Middle East’s geographic positioning (serving as the link of trade between Asia and Europe) and access to natural resources. Hence, western policy makers provide fiscal and military support to various authoritarian regime in order to secure their own interests, including maintaining a constant supply of oil to the global market and for security purposes in terms of containing the rise of Islamist regimes.

34 Ibid., 148.
35 Ibid., 144.
Another variable relating to the robustness of the coercive apparatus is the degree of institutionalization present in the apparatus, this refers to the presence of career advancements and promotions based on performance and skill, signifying that the institutionalized coercive apparatus has a merit-based hierarchy\textsuperscript{36}. However, scholars such as Scharpf and Glaßel disagree with this notion by asserting that the structure of the coercive apparatus specifically the secret police is designed to be dominated by ‘underachievers’\textsuperscript{37}, the tradeoff for the low skill offered by such underachieving recruits is unconditional loyalty for the regime fueled by ambition, as such recruits under the threat of discharge and career pressures are forced to continuously demonstrate their value to their superiors with hopes of surpassing their competitors for higher positions within the hierarchy. Consequently, the regime exploits such ambitions to generate regime loyalty and recruit zealots within their coercive apparatus. Alternatively, a patrimonial driven coercive apparatus is said to be organized based on cronyism, the hierarchy and advancement within such a system is plagued and influenced by nepotism, corruption and politics rather than merit and the rule of law. In addition, the private and public goals are often blurred leading to the abuse of power and wide spread corruption\textsuperscript{38} for the sake of personal gain. A coercive apparatus organized along patrimonial lines and exhibiting low levels of institutionalization is said to be less receptive to political reform and is closely tied to the status quo and identity of the regime in power, thus operating in a manner that ensures regime survival and authoritarian resilience.

\textsuperscript{36} Bellin (2004, 145).
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
This is a consequence of patrimonial organization that can be defined as a system where “the ruler exerts power on the basis of kin ties, patron-client relations, personal allegiances, and combinations thereof, with few formal rules and regulations”\(^{39}\). Such an organization blurs the distinction between the institutional identity of the coercive apparatus and authoritarian regime that it serves. The regime reinforces patrimonialism through mainly patronage and the creation of a loyal base. For instance, the head of an authoritarian regime may select senior positions within his coercive apparatus based on ethnic or sectarian lines. Hafez Assad filled key positions within his coercive apparatus with members of the Alawite group or members of his inner circle\(^{40}\).

Nearly all director positions within the different intelligence agencies relating to the Syrian coercive apparatus have been loyal Alawite supporters of Assad, such as Mohammed Nasif Kheirbek, a member of an Alawite clan closely affiliated with the Assads\(^{41}\).

On the other hand, an institutionalized coercive apparatus could develop an identity and path that is distinct and does not necessarily overlap with that of the regime, hence officers can view themselves as separate from the state. Therefore, an institutionalized coercive apparatus will be more likely to be tolerant and receptive of reforms\(^{42}\), given the risk of jeopardizing the institutional integrity of the system as a result of divisions within the elite generated from an old and stagnant regime. Ironically, it can be argued that an institutionalized coercive apparatus resulted in the demise of Mubarak’s regime given the certain degree of institutionalization.


\(^{41}\) Holliday (2013, 54).

\(^{42}\) Bellin (2004, 145).
maintained in the Egyptian Armed Forces that is a byproduct of Egypt’s historical experiences with state building under Muhammad Ali and Ottoman administration during the 19th century. Consequently, the military evolved as a unique entity and institution whose identity is divorced from that of that of the autocrat such as Mubarak, thus resulting in the failure of the Egyptian armed forces from intervening and suppressing the Egyptian revolution against Mubarak’s regime.

Based on this discussion, it can be anticipated that repression is central to the survival of the Syrian regime. This was evident during the reign of Hafez Al Assad where the Syrian Army and security forces besieged the town of Hama and were deployed to brutally crush a series of uprisings instigated by the Muslim Brotherhood resulting in thousands of civilian casualties in what is known as the Hama Massacre of 1982. In recent times, most notably following the onset of Arab uprisings in 2011 the Syrian regime has demonstrated its unrestricted capacity and will in brutally repressing all forms of opposition including detainments, tortures, murders, indiscriminate shelling of towns and the use of chemical warfare. Contrarily, while the Jordanian regime employs repression as a means of regime stability its scope, capacity, and will is dwarfed by that of the Syrian regime as repression levels displayed by the Jordanian regime are moderate and limited to intimidation tactics, censorship and occasional detainment of political opposition. Hence, it is anticipated that repression although contributing to the resilience of the Jordanian regime, its function in regime stability is not as crucial as it is in the case of Syria.
Cooptation

Johannes Gerschewski defines cooptation “as the capacity to tie strategically-relevant actors (or a group of actors) to the regime elite”\textsuperscript{43}, essentially forging an alliance on the intra-elite level involving elites from various backgrounds such as the industrial or business and military with that of regime/political elites, thus serving the function of maintaining elite cohesion and the regulatory capacity of the political elite. Alternatively, cooptation can be extended to involve the masses thus form a strategic bond between the ruler and the ruled, this can be observed in the Arab oil rentier states as investigated by Beblawi in “The Rentier State in the Arab World” where the state occupies the role of as a provider of private favors through the ruler’s benevolence”\textsuperscript{44}. As a result, the interests of the masses encompassed in the form of no taxation and welfare benefits is enmeshed in the interests and ultimately survival of the regime that serves as the benefactors. Hence, such a bond linking the rulers with the ruled generate a feature of ‘no taxation thus no representation’ as the public is essentially politically kept passive, isolated, and prevented from the process of governance, in exchange for a variety of tangible benefits.

The function of cooptation is instrumental as it serves as a form of balancing mechanism that checks the power of nonpolitical elites, it ensures that the power of non-political elites does not obstruct that of the political elite, and that elites operate specifically concerning the use of their resources in a manner that is in line with that of the political elite. Preventing nonpolitical

\textsuperscript{43} Gerschewski (2013, 22).
elite actors from accumulating too much power that may potentially jeopardize the status quo of the political elite is also essential to authoritarian resiliency. Nonetheless, this threat is not necessarily exclusive to non-political elites as members of the same ruling elite coalition may attempt to expand the limits of their power at the expense of other members, thus resulting in what has been termed as elite factionalism.

Elite factionalism that often threatens the stability of authoritarian regimes has been investigated extensively by Svolik who writes, “the dictator may acquire more power at the expense of the ruling coalition, which may attempt to deter such opportunism by threatening to stage a coup”45. Subsequently, two forms of authoritarian regimes are produced: contested and established dictatorships. The former is a form of regime defined by a “power struggle between the dictator and the ruling coalition and coups occur frequently”46. The latter form is a more stable regime where the authority of the dictator is uncontested by the ruling coalition. In that case, coup attempts will ultimately be futile. An established dictator can only be removed through factors exogenous to the regime, such as popular uprising or foreign intervention.

Cooptation has served as one of the essential mechanisms for the regime survival of the Assad’s in Syria, specifically elite cooptation as examined by Stacher who proposed that “the ruling coalition’s senior elites are the central agents for maintaining a political system”47. During his reign, Hafiz Assad incorporated elements of the elites and state organizations into his regime, rather than isolate them in order to ensure long term stability. Senior officials and members from

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46 Ibid., 478.
various state institutions including the military, security forces and the Ba’athist party for instance were frequently consulted by Assad in policy formulation, thus Assad did not place himself above other elites, instead forming a coalition where they form a pillar of the Assad regime. This mirrors Stacher’s proposition where “elites are structurally positioned near the epicenter of governance”48 given their capacity to preserve or challenge the status quo.

Henceforth Assad has formed an elite coalition that placed various elites near the epicenter of political power in Syria. This system allowed for cementing the identity and interests of the elite into Assad’s regime, thus absorbing them into the status quo and preventing internal sources of opposition that might undermine the structure of authority in the regime and challenge Assad’s power. Consequently, contributing to regime resiliency even after the passing of Hafez Assad, whereby the elite coalition stepped in and orchestrated the succession of his son Bashar Assad49. This further demonstrates that Assad’s regime fits into the established dictator archetype as discussed by Svolik, the inclusion of various elites into Assad’s regime and their placement near the epicenter of governance corelated the stability and longevity of Assad’s regime with that of the elites, as they may experience a loss in power or wealth should the status quo be shifted. The position of elites and their power was interwoven with the Assad regime as they were granted pivotal roles in the coalition that ruled Syria, hence the coalition including the elites and different elements of state institutions organized the succession of Hafiz Assad’s son Bashar Assad into power following his death, as a means of preserving the status quo and the coalitions position as well as power in Syria.

48 Ibid., 79.
Hence, it can be anticipated that cooptation is vital to the propagation of authoritarian rule in both the Syrian and Jordanian regimes, thus contributing to their resiliency to similar extents. In Syria, Hafez Al-Assads cooptation strategies characterized by an ethnic dimension where he placed members of the same ethnic group he affiliates with, the Alawites, in positions near the epicenter of governance minimized internal dissent among elites, thus contributing to his survival and the dynastic succession of his son Bashar following his death. In Jordan, the very foundation of Hashemite rule since its genesis was based on a contract and subsequent alliance between the powerful tribes of then Transjordan and the Hashemites, this alliance was the key to Hashemite dynastic survival in the past decades as it faced a series of existential threats.
As mentioned earlier briefly in the introduction, the research question I aim to explore in my thesis is: “What factors contribute to the resilience of authoritarianism across different types of regimes in the Middle East?” The main focus of this study is to investigate the resiliency of various authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. To accomplish this, I will compare two Middle Eastern regimes characterized by an authoritarian framework, yet differ in type of regime, more specifically, monarchical or republican rule. My first case is the Hashemite regime in Jordan, which represents an authoritarian regime characterized by monarchical rule specifically of the linchpin archetype. My second case is the Assad regime in Syria, representing an authoritarian regime classified by republican rule. Both regimes have survived thus far, hence exhibiting authoritarian resilience.

These regimes are fundamentally different and have faced drastically different outcomes following the Arab Spring; Syria plunged into a full scale total civil war, while Jordan avoided violence through concessions at the behest of the monarchy such as the implementation of a new constitution containing 42 constitutional amendments that in essence would curtail some of the king’s power while promising to expand the public political sphere. Nonetheless, both the Syrian and Jordanian regimes have exhibited authoritarian resilience through the survival of their regimes thus far, hence I am to conceptualize authoritarian resilience and indicate it through

dynastic survival, specifically the perpetuation of the Hashemite rule in Jordan and the Assad rule in Syria.

I aim to identify both similar and different factors that have contributed to the endurance of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan and the Assad regime in Syria over the past several decades using a tripartite conceptual framework of legitimation, cooptation and repression. Methods employed to sustain authoritarian rule that is common to both dynasties include the monopolization over the state’s coercive apparatus entailing intelligence agencies, security forces and the military, the formation of cross-societal alliances that is dominated by the ruling dynasty, and the formation of external alliances with regional and global powers in order to secure resources, specifically finances to overcome periods of economic hardship that run the risk of triggering political turmoil. Moreover, differences across both regimes must be taken into consideration to provide an additional lens into the regional persistence of authoritarianism, such as population size and ethnic-sectarian composition, legitimacy claims and the nature of foreign alliances.

Evidence employed in this thesis will be extracted from a comprehensive literature review consisting of peer reviewed academic journals, books and articles relating to authoritarianism in the Middle East. Various news articles both in English and Arabic from different media outlets local, international and state-owned will be additionally used to supplement the thesis. Furthermore, I aim to extract data first hand from sources such as speeches, publications from state-owned media, social media accounts owned or sponsored by each of the Syrian and Jordanian regimes, as well as opposition pages and accounts in order to measure the degree of legitimation, repression, and cooptation as part of the grander
authoritarian framework present in both the Syrian and Jordanian regime. For instance, I will analyze the contents of speeches and articles published by each regime to derive the image and legitimacy claims presented by the regime itself.

As for repression data will be gathered through reports from various sources including human rights organizations as well as journalistic news reporting from local and international media outlets detailing the detainment, harassment, torture and overall use or threat of use of coercion by the Syrian and Jordanian regimes on their subjects respectively. In Syria, numerous detailed accounts of human rights violations, persecution and repression of Syrians demonstrate the brutal repression of the regime. In Jordan, the regime does not rely on repression to the same extent as the Syrian regime. However, it should be also kept in mind that Syria witnessed mass scale popular protests that called for the end of the regime, Jordan’s experience with the mass uprisings was limited to small-scale anti-government protests that initially called for reform rather than regime change.

For cooptation data will be gathered to investigate the nature of coalitions formed by both the Syrian and Jordanian regimes, their composition and role will be examined in order to conclude whether they contributed to regime resiliency or posed a challenge to the status quo through coup attempts. Cooptation was instrumental in the survival of the Assad regime since its genesis. Hafez Al Assad incorporated a coalition of various elites ranging from state institutions, the military and the Ba’athist party into his regime that encompassed a role of policy formulation and serving as aides to Hafiz Al Assad. This allowed the Assad regime to maintain a robust internal structure that was virtually void of internal opposition emanating from the elite.
Similarly, cooptation is vital to the propagation of Hashemite rule in Jordan, specifically the coalition of East Bankers. The Hashemites have long relied on East Bankers consisting of indigenous tribesmen that predominantly inhabit the southern provinces of Jordan as their main pillar of support for their rule, in exchange the Hashemites would guarantee to protect the interests of the East Bankers in terms of providing employment opportunities within the public sector, and enabling them to dominate senior positions in the government as well as the regime’s coercive apparatus. Consequently, a system built on “wasta” (connections) was born that favored the East Bankers while discriminating against Jordanians of Palestinian origins.

The thesis will utilize data to evaluate the claims set forth by previous scholars concerning the survival of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East within the framework of repression, legitimation and cooptation. However, the thesis aims to additionally explore the role of other potential factors that have not received as much scholarly attention such as population size, ethnic composition, geographic location, external alliances and nature of economies, in contributing or undermining resiliency of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.
EMPIRICAL DISCUSSION

*Legitimation*

Legitimation is employed by the Hashemite regime as a central pillar of stability and mechanism for survival in Jordan. This is mainly derived from ancestry claims set forth by the regime linking the Hashemite ruling dynasty to Prophet Muhammad, hence granting the Hashemites a special right to govern under Islamic law and tradition. Such religious allusions are instrumental in consolidating power in a region like the Middle East that holds tradition and religion as supreme values that guide many aspects of daily life both in the past and present, thus when the Hashemites claim descendancy from the most historically, religiously and culturally significant figure in the Middle East they are afforded a competitive advantage for political power over all other tribes and dynasties that is unparalleled in the region. The Saud dynasty for instance despite its political significance and power in the region fails to replicate the legitimacy claims enjoyed by the Hashemites as they do not possess similar direct genealogical links to the Prophet Muhammad, this has historically fueled the rivalry between the Hashemites and Saudis.

Consequently, legitimation continues to serve as a powerful tool in the survival of the Jordanian regime as the monarch continually reminds his population of the special religious titles and genealogical links of the Hashemites to Prophet Muhammad, specifically given the highly religious and conservative nature of Jordanian society. This is evident in the opening remarks of national speeches addressed by the monarch that entail the traditional prayer to Prophet Muhammad with a Hashemite twist, emphasizing the claimed Hashemite identity of the Prophet. For instance, this reference can be clearly highlighted in the opening of King Abdullah II’s
speech in the opening of the 19th Parliament’s Non-ordinary Session in 2020 “In the name of Allah the merciful, as well as prayers and peace to our Master Muhammad, the Arab Hashemite Prophet”\textsuperscript{51}.

As mentioned earlier the symbolic and assumed custodian roles of the Hashemite Dynasty are essential elements in the legitimation of their rule and regime image in Jordan, the Middle East and the broader Muslim world. The monarch continuously places emphasis on the Hashemite custodianship over Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem domestically and abroad. This is facilitated through speeches addressed by the monarch himself or through the dispersal of propaganda material scattered across the kingdom. For instance, a billboard placed in one of the busiest traffic routes in the capital city Amman that depicts an image of Al-Aqsa Mosque with the caption that reads “Jerusalem is Arabic and its custodianship is Hashemite”. The billboard additionally depicts an image of a heart joined by both the Palestinian and Jordanian flags with a caption that reads “One Heart” symbolizing the unity between the ethnic Palestinian (West Bankers) and ethnic Jordanian (East Bankers) populations of Jordan (See Figure 1). This billboard is an example of a propaganda campaign initiated by the regime to reinforce its legitimacy concerning its role in protecting holy sites in Jerusalem. This role was put in jeopardy during the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in May 2021 that involved explicit attacks and raids on Al Aqsa Mosque by Israeli security forces and settlers. The crisis immediately fueled public out roar in Jordan that included largely unorganized demonstrations and criticism of the regime’s handling of the situation. Protestors were critical of the fact that Jordan only

\textsuperscript{51} خطاب العرش السامي في افتتاح الدورة غير العادية لمجلس الأمة التاسع عشر. The Jordanian Senate. Retrieved from: http://senate.jo/ar/page/node/34565456
extended verbal condemnation of the Israeli government and failed to meet popular demand (given nationwide demonstrations such as those in front of the Israeli embassy calling for the cancellation of the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel known as the Wadi Araba Agreements, as well as revoking the recent gas deal), that at the minimum included the expulsion of the Israeli Ambassador and closure of the Israeli embassy in Amman. Hence, the regime was prompted in dispersing propaganda elements such as the billboard mentioned earlier as a public image repair campaign.

Figure 1: The Al-Aqsa Billboard in Amman
Source: Author’s photo
In addition, references of allusions to the religious and cultural significance of the Hashemite dynasty are embedded deep in national symbols and imagery such as the national anthem that contains the lyrics “O King of the Arabs, you share the goodness of the Prophet, Honor in lineage,”52. this alludes to the claimed descendence of the Hashemites and genealogical links to Prophet Muhammad. Such claims are integral to the Hashemites claim to the throne and legitimacy both domestically and regionally, this is evident in the founding of the modern Jordanian state following the declaration of Transjordan from the British and the crowning of King Abdullah I as its king in 1946, where ancestry claims to Prophet Muhammad were widely accepted by the local tribal population (East Bankers) that received the Hashemites and were perceived as a sufficient reason for the Hashemite ascension to the throne53 despite the fact the Hashemite dynasty was not native to the territories of Jordan rather originating in Hijaz.

Tribal acceptance of Hashemite rule is additionally highlighted in the events following the expulsion of Glubb in 1956 and the subsequent Arabization of the Jordanian Armed Forces that were largely Bedouin and displayed immediate loyalty to King Hussein54.

Nevertheless, as the tribal nature of the Jordanian population began to shift following waves of mass migration of Palestinian refugees into Jordan in the after math of the Arab Israeli Wars in 1948 and 1967, legitimacy claims of the Hashemites began to be challenged specifically by the Jordanian populace that originated from the West Bank. This was evident following the

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52 https://www.jaf.mil.jo/Contents/National_Anthemar.aspx
54 Ibid, p.22
merging of the West Bank and Transjordan under Hashemite authority that was repeatedly challenged by powerful Palestinian forces such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem at the time, Al-Haj Amin Al-Hussayni whose supporters opposed Hashemite authority and accused the monarch of betrayal over ‘his pro-British policy and talks with Tel Aviv’\(^{55}\). In addition, it must be noted that Hashemite authority was further challenged recently by prominent tribal figures in the traditionally loyal tribal base of the Hashemite regime following liberalizing economic policies adopted in the reign of King Abdullah II that resulted in economic grievances among the East Banker population, such sentiments were further catalyzed and emboldened following the events of the Arab Spring. Ahmad Abbadi is a tribal leader, former MP and a prominent anti-monarchist who publicly challenges Hashemite authority and claims that the territories of Jordan rightfully belong to its local tribes based on a British agreement in 1917 that divided the Jordanian territories among local tribes. Abbadi claims that the Hashemites unlawfully confiscated tribal lands through the state that they run and repopulated them with refugees in recent years, while noting that ‘In Jordan the tribes have the legality and power, the others are employees that take their power and legality from the state’\(^{56}\).

The Jordanian regime additionally relies on social media to bolster its image and as a means of legitimizing the regime through the lens of fabricated or at least highly exaggerated popular support and patriotism. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, social media accounts exist in Instagram that are aimed at glorifying the Hashemite dynasty and its rule in Jordan under the guise of hyper nationalism and patriotism. While such accounts maintain no

\(^{55}\) Ibid, p.21
official ties to the regime in the eyes of the public, their activity is suspicious in that it seems to remit regime propaganda synchronously with official state-owned media channels, thus implying that such social media accounts are entirely state-owned or its operators are paid off by the regime. An example of such suspiciously hyper-nationalist social media pages is a public Instagram page titled @1946hkj that is littered with thousands of regime propaganda posts, and has a following of 117,000 individuals. The description of the bio of the page highlights an extreme form of nationalism that places national and regime interests above all, as it states “And in our love for Jordan, we are not neutral, but fanatical to death, and we do not compromise on Jordan, because its interest is above everything.” This page is dedicated to spreading content that promotes loyalty and pride in the Jordanian royal family, military and security forces as their identity is intertwined with the monarch, who according to the operators of the page forms an integral and perhaps the only component of the conception of a nation and national identity.

The exaggeration of the page’s loyalty towards the regime stems not only from its near synchronous publishing of propaganda content as official regime sources, but also from its demonstrated capacity in defending the regime and monarch, specifically in domestically turbulent times such as the attempted coup allegedly spearheaded by the king’s half-brother Hamza in April 2021. Immediately after news of the failed coup broke out, the page titled 1946hkj published a series of posts that depicted their unconditional support for the monarch while calling out those “feeding into the chorus of sedition by lying while being aware of their lies in order to escalate the situation”.

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57 https://www.instagram.com/1946hkj/
58 https://www.instagram.com/p/CNiRDi4hCPk/
an image of King Abdullah II with a hashtag “this nation will stand” and a caption that reads “we are with you our Master/Sir”. Another post depicting an image of the monarch entails a caption that reads “March for we stand with you and behind you, march for the eye of God will protect you, march in the scale of your pride in us, we love you Sir, and took pride in you in front of the world, and showed you off as the rightful King and Leader”59, the exaggerated vocabulary utilized in the vivid descriptions of loyalty in the captions of the posts published by the Instagram page 1946hkj illustrate the artificial nature of the page, thus suggesting that it is either state owned and operated by regime elements or its operators are paid off by the regime to publish regime propaganda. This is further evident given that the nature of comments posted under the posts of @1946 is in unison in that it amplifies the glorification of the regime and the royal family, for there are no comments that exist formulating critical voices calling out the propaganda messages shared by the page or expressing criticism over the monarchy. It is highly likely that such comments would get deleted as a means of censoring critical voices online and dissent. For instance, during the events of the alleged coup attempt against King Abdullah II earlier this year, nearly all posts posted under the page @1946hkj expressing support for the king and calling out those fomenting chaos were disabled. In fact, a greater degree of variety exists in similar posts concerning the regime and monarch under the social media accounts of non-state-owned local media channels such as @royanews, where comments forming critical voices and can be labeled as anti-monarchist can be found under various posts.

Religious and cultural elements are absent in the legitimation of the Syrian regime at least in a scale that mirrors that employed by the Jordanian regime. The Assad regime mainly relies on

59 https://www.instagram.com/p/CNjSsOOhN9C/
a cult of personality to fuel its legitimacy that is facilitated through the dissemination of symbolic and rhetorical elements that ensure the hyper-glorification of Assad, thus fabricating a seemingly omniscient presence of Assad in all aspects of Syrian society. Such elements and exaggerated symbolism are evident in the regime’s Instagram account titled @syrianpresidency⁶⁰ that was launched in 2013 as part of an effort to promote Assads regime and rehabilitate its domestic, regional and global image following the domestic turmoil that quickly evolved into a full-scale civil war in Syria. The account maintains a sizeable following of 166,000 and contains over a thousand posts depicting Bashar Assad and other regime figures such as his wife Asma in imagery comforting wounded soldiers, families and civilians or walking amongst a large crowd of seemingly adoring civilians in rural villages, as depicted by a post that showcases Bashar Al-Assad walking in the midst of crowds of residents while inquiring about the damages to their state of living following forest fires in the villages of “Mashta Al Hilu”⁶¹. One post in particular highlights the exaggerated symbolism employed by the regime for the purposes of legitimation, the post in question depicts an image of Assad’s wife, Asma Al Assad with an excessively long and descriptive caption published on Mother’s Day 2021 that celebrates Syria as a mother⁶². It seems that the symbolism paints Asma Al Assad as ‘the mother’ of Syria expressing her grief over the war and recognition of the efforts and the resilience of the Syrian mothers collective in their bravery, and commitment to raising the future generation of Syria in the harsh conditions of war.

⁶⁰ https://www.instagram.com/syrianpresidency/
⁶¹ https://www.instagram.com/p/CGUa_lMFR0n/
⁶² https://www.instagram.com/p/CMrMzDGIIEx/
The overwhelming majority of online engagement in the posts posted by the page @syrianpresidency glorify Assad and display messages of support from both real and fake accounts. However, comments can be found criticizing Assad and calling out his regime for its brutality in recent decades that have not yet been censored or deleted, for instance one user named @elifhanna commented “How about those mothers who were forced to abandon their homeland because of your husband’s brutality against his own citizens? Life is so unfair and reality is so terrifying”63 under the Mother’s Day post mentioned earlier. Another user @ali_toma98 commented “he slaughtered half his people while displacing the other half, and he disfigured his nation that was God’s paradise on Earth and after all that he’s now talking against terrorism…”64 on a video posted by the page depicting Assad giving out a speech in a mosque discussing religious extremism in the region, and how it was exploited by Western powers to breed regional chaos and instability to suit their agendas.

The Assad regime also boasts the high re-election rate of Bashar Al-Assad who was reelected in June 2021. It instrumentalizes grand re-election oath ceremonies that involve the swearing in of Assad for another term and a national address broadcast nationally and abroad for the purposes of legitimizing Assad’s ‘re-election’ and the continuous propagation of his rule. In the most recent oath ceremony, regime figures and loyalist occupy large halls while chanting and celebrating Assad for his reelection as a sign of popular support. In one instance a man stands up and interrupts the ceremony in order to recite a poem written specifically for Assad, recognizing his bravery and victory in the civil war while calling him ‘our true and only leader, the son of

63 ibid
64 https://www.instagram.com/p/Clio9ROLEDY/
This practice of legitimation mirrors that in actual democracies that operate on popular sovereignty, the difference in the case of Syria is that principle of popular sovereignty is absent in the process of governance, and the regime fabricates as well as manipulates election results while making no attempt in presenting such elections as free and fair. In fact, documentation reveals that regime loyalists have voted more than once, and official regime results illustrate that in some cases the number of votes for Assad exceed the number of residents in areas controlled by the regime. Given widespread fraudulent practices, Assad was reelected with 95% of the vote.

The Assad regime has been documented in pursuing campaigns bolstering Bashar Assad’s image from a religious lens in order to appeal and appease the Sunni religious majority of the Syrian population. For instance, depicting Assad as a pious Muslim that frequently attends prayers at mosques during religious holidays while attending discussions with religious figures broadcasted on national TV that condemn terrorism and religious extremism/sectarianism. Evidence of such activities are littered across the Syrian regime’s Instagram page mentioned earlier @syrianpresidency such as a post depicting Assad performing prayers in the Grand Umayyad Mosque in Damascus celebrating Eid Al Fitr. Another post depicts Assad performing the prayers in the Sa’ad bin Muath mosque in Damascus with a caption reading “President Assad

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65 (July 17th, 2021). “President Bashar Assad Reelection Oath Speech” خطاب القسم.. الرئيس بشار الأسد يحدد توجهات سوريا للسنوات السبع القادمة. RT Arabic.


67 Ibid.

68 https://www.instagram.com/p/COzOsyCFjWN/
participates in the religious celebration of the anniversary of Prophet Muhammad’s birth”\(^69\). Such posts are an effort by the regime to depict Bashar Assad as a ‘good Muslim’ who practices the faith of the Sunni population majority despite belonging to the ethnic-religious minority of the Alawites, this is a strategy adopted by the regime aimed as a means of legitimizing Assad’s regime in Syrian society.

**Repression**

Despite the image the Jordanian regime broadcasts as being a beacon of liberalism and progressive in a hostile region plagued by repressive authoritarian rule, in order to appease its Western benefactors, the Jordanian regime at its core is authoritarian that regularly employs repression as an instrument to preserve the monarchial power. Evidence of the use of repression by the Jordanian regime to quell opposition to maintain dynastic survival of the Hashemites can be traced to the reign of King Hussein Bin Talal in the period following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, King Hussein shifted his policies from concessions to repression of the PLO that at the time posed a direct threat to Hashemite sovereignty and his survival through the Palestinian militia’s establishment of a de facto ‘state within a state’. This ultimately led to a brutal military crackdown by Jordanian armed forces on the PLO presence that entailed shelling of Palestinian refugee camps housing PLO members, expulsion of Palestinian refugees, and campaigns purging the public sector from the PLO and Palestinians all together, resulting in thousands of casualties.

\(^69\) [https://www.instagram.com/p/CG5JrZWFqPc/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CG5JrZWFqPc/)
in a period known as Black September (1970-1971). The Jordanian regime continues to implement repression in recent times under King Abdullah II specifically following the events of the Arab Uprisings in 2011 that posed potential direct threats to his regime survival.

In Jordan, the regime did not face an existential crisis as mass popular and social mobilization failed to materialize at least on a scale mirroring to that of neighboring countries such as Egypt or Syria. Jordan did witness a wave of small anti-government demonstrations during the onset of the Arab uprisings that continued to gain momentum despite concessions from the regime to welcome “democratic reforms” based on protestors demands. Initially the regime utilized coercion to repress demonstrators through its repressive apparatus, however once the street level repressive activity became publicized among international media outlets the image conscious regime, which has a staunchly pro-Western orientation, was forced to improvise its means of quelling dissent with constrained repression. For instance, the regime implemented covert means of repression to cover the tracks of its repressive apparatus such as deploying non uniformed regime agents and sympathizers that “engaged in sabotage, setting fires and attacking people on the streets”. Moreover, the regime resorted to legalistic channels to dilute the nature of its repressive activities against any form of dissent under a vaguely defined provision relating to anti-terrorism, “The anti-terrorism law allows the repression apparatus, composed of the

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country’s intelligence agency and the State Security Court (SSC), to suppress any dissenting voice by means of systematic judicial harassment and torture.”

The utility of repression by the Jordanian regime has evolved and expanded following the events of the Arab Spring that generated immense political, social, and economic turmoil in the Middle East that continues to echo today, thus posing continuous threats to the Jordanian regime that is struggling to cope with an increasingly worsening socio-economic landscape compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is evident in the regime’s handling of the nationwide protests of teachers orchestrated by the Teachers’ Syndicate demanding salary raises, the regime responded by deploying undercover public security forces to peaceful teacher protests to detain protesters, and the police to arrest lawful members of the Teachers’ Syndicate. On July 25th 2020, the Prosecutor General of Amman ordered the arrest of all 13 members of the Teachers Syndicate executive board that resulted in police raids of the syndicate’s headquarters in Amman and closure of all its branches in the kingdom, the order additionally entailed ceasing the operations of the syndicate for 2 years. The following measure was extrajudicial and a breach of Jordanian rule of law as the attorney general does not possess the power to issue the closure as described by Human Rights Watch that labeled the legal grounds for such procedures as ‘dubious’. Authorities were additionally reported to have arrested over 250 individuals from

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the protests by August 2020 and “forced detainees to sign pledges promising to refrain from future demonstrations to secure their release”\textsuperscript{76}. Global reaction to such events was limited to condemnations issued by the UN and human rights organizations such as HRW, western governments that consider Jordan a close ally failed to comment or condemn the authoritarian activities of the government highlighted by the events of the Teachers’ Syndicate protests.

Furthermore, the Jordanian regime has increasingly engaged in campaigns of crackdown on dissent expressed on social media through censorship and arrests. In April of 2020, authorities arrested Roya TV’s General Manager Fares Sayegh and News Director Mohammad Alkhalidi following a news report published by Roya news on its website and social media that displayed a video depicting interviewed locals expressing their resentment and grievances of the economic fallout induced by the government’s harsh lockdown that began in March 2020\textsuperscript{77}. Both Sayegh and Alkhalidi were referred to the military court of national security and charged under the Anti-Terrorism Law. However, they were released on bail 3 days later and prompted the media outlet Roya to issue an apology for publishing sensitive materials that defied government orders concerning the pandemic while renewing "the executive boards trust and faith in the Jordanian state under the leadership of King Abdullah II in preserving national security”\textsuperscript{78}. Another instance of media censorship and persecution of journalists involves the arrest of cartoonist Emad Hajjaj after publishing a political cartoon criticizing the normalization of ties between


Israel and the UAE under Mohammed bin Zayed, and the subsequent Israeli efforts in blocking the UAE’s purchase of F-35 fighter jets from the US (See figure 2). Hajjaj was referred to the State Security Court and was briefly charged with ‘disturbing Jordan’s relations with a foreign state’\textsuperscript{79} under the Anti-Terrorism Law in August 2020, until he was released shortly after his arrest where prosecutors dropped his charges and converted them to defamation under Cybersecurity Law that would be handled by a civilian court\textsuperscript{80}.

![Figure 2: Emad Hajjaj’s cartoon titled “Bin Zayed & Israel”](image)


While the repression exhibited by the Jordanian regime can be classified as low intensity, its capacity has noticeably expanded in recent years hinting at a decrease in tolerance of dissent by the regime. This is evident in increased censorship and monitoring of online activity by


security forces, the frequency at which voices of opposition are either suppressed or prosecuted has increased dramatically over recent years. This form of repressive activity has expanded to all segments of society including elite tribal figures and members of the royal family. In fact, the repressive capacity of the Jordanian regime seems to extend its borders by silencing critics and dissidents based abroad such as Jordanian activist Ahmad El Otoum based in the UAE, that was detained by Emirati authorities in late 2020 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for using social media to criticize the Jordanian government, king and royal family.81

In addition, the Jordanian regime has been reported to utilize its coercive apparatus to crush dissent across all levels of society. This has been especially evident in recent news where the king employed the coercive apparatus to stifle dissent within his own family and the political elite that were once thought to be above the law and untouchable, resulting in the house arrest of the king’s half-brother and former crown prince Hamza bin Hussein, as well as the detention of other senior political figures.82 The ‘Sedition Trial’ highlighted the use of the regime’s vaguely defined anti-terrorism laws used to suppress dissenting voices, Bassem Awdalla a former advisor to King Abdullah II and a low ranking royal family named Sharif Hassan bin Zaid were charged with sedition, inciting opposition to the regime, and engaging in activities jeopardizing national security 83. Both defendants were charged with a sentence of 15 years in prison. The severity of the expanding repressive capacity of the Jordanian regime has been publicly recognized and

criticized by former crown prince Hamza bin Hussein in a video he published under house arrest in the immediate aftermath of the regime’s crackdown on elite dissent, “Even to criticize a small aspect leads to arrests, and abuse by the security services”.

The coercive apparatus is the primary mechanism for repression in Jordan that is directly funded and maintained by foreign aid. The Hashemite regime in Jordan has long been a recipient of foreign aid that it relies on to barely stay afloat economically despite harsh conditions, as well as to fund its coercive apparatus. The Hashemite regime has been receiving crucial foreign aid for decades since the onset of the Cold War, where the United States has granted the regime 1.4 billion USD in the period from 1957-1980. However, it was not until 1994 when Jordan has embraced the full grace and generosity of foreign aid from western powers. Following Jordan’s signing of the peace treaty with Israel, the United States immediately increased economic aid to the monarchy from 50 million USD prior to the peace treaty in 1993 to almost 220 million USD by 1999. The European Union also poured multilateral aid into Jordan in 1995, in the form of approved loans and grants valued up to 550 million euros.

The regime in Jordan is favored by the West for its pro-Western orientation. This is specifically highlighted by the bilateral relation between the United States and Jordan, where Washington quickly realized Jordan’s would be role in facilitating American geopolitical projects within the region, thus offering the monarchical regime generous amounts of aid and

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86 Ibid., 48.
support, whose stability was now viewed as more important than any democratic reforms project. In the face of the perceived risks of the rise of anti-western and anti-Israeli fundamentalists to power through democratic channels, generous amounts of material support in the form of economic assistance and military equipment were employed to fortify a compromised economy and the regime’s security apparatus. The bilateral relationship between Washington and Amman continues to blossom resulting in increased economic, military and humanitarian aid, for instance Jordan is one of the United States’ largest recipients of foreign aid receiving 1.2 billion USD in 2016. The United States is Jordan’s single largest provider of bilateral assistance, providing more than $1.5 billion in 2019, including $1.082 billion appropriated by the U.S. Congress to Jordan through USAID in the 2019 fiscal year budget, and $425 million in Foreign Military Financing.”

The display of repression by the Syrian regime in the past decade is unparalleled to any other authoritarian regime in the region, given the extent pursued by the regime to crush opposition and hold onto the reins of power in the onset of a prolonged and complex civil war. During the onset of the uprisings, the regime immediately resorted to highly repressive channels facilitated by its repressive apparatus to brutally crush peaceful protests, that involved the imprisonment, torture, and murder of thousands of protestors. The expansion of the scale of protests was complimented by an increasingly intense and violent response from the regime, ultimately the Syrian military was involved and consequently fractured into pro government

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forces and those that defected forming the Syrian Rebel forces. As protests continued to amass against Bashar Assad in 2011, the response of the regime’s coercive apparatus was brutally repressive and continued to amplify regardless of costs, this is highlighted by security forces imprisoning, torturing and murdering thousands of protestors, not to mention unleashing the Syrian military against its own people resulting in massacres. Bashar Assad employed all methods regardless of the costs to preserve the status quo and thus ensure regime survival, he even authorized the use of chemical warfare and barrel bombs against his own people in order to crush the insurgency.

The degree of repression employed by the Syrian regime can be empirically measured using its score on the Political Terror Scale that was mentioned earlier, Syria scored a value of 5 indicating extremely high levels of repression. In addition, Syria is currently ranked as the least free nation-state in the world by Freedom House. One of the most infamous displays of repression by the regime that set off the civil, war was the arrest and torture of 15 teenage boys in the southwestern city of Dera’a, that spray-painted “the people demand the fall of the regime” on a school wall in the wake of the Arab Spring. Further evidence of the severity of repression utilized by the Syrian regime is displayed behind the scenes in military detention facilities and prisons littered across the country where severe human rights violations including intense

beatings, torture, and executions on a mass systematic scale were observed, recorded and leaked by military defectors. An example of such entails the ‘Caesar photographs’ that depict the systematic killings and deaths of detainees in regime detention facilities located across Damascus, over 50,000 images were smuggled out of Syria by a defector codenamed ‘Caesar’ between May 2011 and August 2013\(^\text{94}\) revealing horrifying images of piles of dead bodies of detained men, women and children that died under the custody of the Syrian regime.

The causes of death for the detainees ranged from starvation to murder by security officials (gunshot wounds). The majority of the victims photographed were held in 5 different security branches (Branch 215, Branch 227, Mezze Airport Branch 248, Branch 216, and Branch 238)\(^\text{95}\) in Damascus, upon death detainees are transported from the branches to morgues in military hospitals such as 601 Military Hospital. Nonetheless, based on images and the harrowing remarks of ‘Caesar’ the frequency of deaths in the branches far exceeded the capacity of morgues in military hospital, hence bodies were stockpiled in the open-air garages of military hospitals. “We used to use the morgue, but they were bringing way more bodies, so we decided to start using the garage.”-Caesar.\(^\text{96}\) The harrowing scenes depicted in the photographs reveal thousands of bodies with identification numbers mimicking scenes of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, the Syrian regime under Bashar Assad unleashed chemical warfare on its citizens to crush opposition and for intimidation purposes. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapon confirmed 17 instances where chemical weapons were ‘likely or definitely


\(^{95}\) Ibid.

\(^{96}\) Ibid
used (out of 77 allegations of chemical attacks engaged by the Syrian government. One of such instances is the chemical attacks launched on the Ghoutta area of Damascus, on August 21st, 2013 reports and videos began to surface of large numbers of dead animals and people in the opposition-controlled districts of Eastern and Western Ghoutta. “Victims consistently showed symptoms including suffocation; constricted, irregular, and infrequent breathing; involuntary muscle spasms; nausea; frothing at the mouth; fluid coming out of noses and eyes; convulsing; dizziness; blurred vision; and red and irritated eyes, and pin-point pupils. According to an expert review of the available evidence, the symptoms exhibited by the victims are consistent with exposure to a nerve agent such as Sarin.” The use of chemical agents was confirmed by site visits, chemical, medical and environmental samples retrieved by a special UN team sent to investigate the attacks. Regime involvement in the chemical attacks can be traced to a Human Rights Watch investigation, where the report highlights the use of a range of Soviet era and produced surface-to-surface rockets used to deliver chemical agents in the attacks. Given the nature and origins of the artillery used to carry the chemical agents unleashed in the attacks on Ghoutta, it is highly likely that the Syrian regime was the perpetrator.

The Syrian regime’s destructive capacity of repression is further highlighted by its record of indiscriminate artillery shelling and ‘barrel bombs’ targeting densely populated civilian areas

such as schools, medical facilities, mosques and essential facilities (water and electric).

According to a UN human rights inquiry into Syria report, 50% of total documented deaths in 2014 were a consequence of aerial strikes, ground shelling and explosions in general\textsuperscript{100}. In 2015, 27,006 civilian deaths were recorded as a result of mortar, artillery, and rocket attacks\textsuperscript{101}, the main culprit in these casualties are barrel bombs, large containers filled with explosives and in some cases chemical agents (Ghoutta attack in 2013; barrel bombs filled with chlorine agents used by the Syrian regime) are dropped from helicopters or planes on rebel-controlled neighborhoods and other densely populated areas. This is a signature tactic of the Syrian Air force in order to reduce the cost of bombardment while maintaining a destructive scale, that results in mass civilian casualties given the indiscriminate nature of their targeting.

The Syrian coercive apparatus mainly the military is financed and supported by foreign actors such as Russia and Iran, the primary benefactors of the Assad regime. Syria maintains an extensive history of arms deals with Russia, in fact “according to SIPRI estimates, Russia supplied Syria with 72 per cent of its arms imports during 2007–2011”\textsuperscript{102}. Russia continues to supply the Syrian regime with sophisticated weaponry despite the regime lacking the financial resources to afford paying for such equipment. For instance, it was reported that Syria owed 3.6 billion USD to Russia for previous arms deals, yet Russia continued to supply the Syrian regime


with advanced anti-aircraft systems and missiles such as SA-17 and SA-22 (artillery systems)\textsuperscript{103} while maneuvering away from UN embargoes, maintaining that the nature of such arms deals is ‘defensive’ for the sake of Syria. Following the outbreak of Syrian civil war that was encompassed by an increasingly sectarian element, Iran alongside Russia quickly adapted the position of a lifeline for the Syrian regime that was facing an immediate existential threat. Consequently, Iran supplies Assad’s coercive apparatus with arm supplies entailing light arms, advanced strategic weapons, hardware for Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, and an array of ballistic missiles by either flying them into Syria through Iraqi airspace, or utilizing smuggling networks through Turkey and Lebanon facilitated by Iranian airline companies such as Iran Air\textsuperscript{104}. Iranian support and investment into the survival of the Syrian regime thus far has been estimated to be around 15 billion USD annually, not to mention Tehran’s support and dissemination of Shi’a militias such as Lebanon’s Hezbollah that compromise nearly 80% of the Syrian regime’s ground forces\textsuperscript{105}.

\textit{Cooptation}

The Hashemite regime in Jordan has long instrumentalized cooptation in minimizing and deterring the mobilization of various opposition forces. This has been evident in the 1957 military coup attempt and the events known as Black September in 1970, both of which have sought to topple the Hashemite throne. The key to the success of the Jordanian regime’s

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
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cooptation strategies lies in its strategic alliances that tie powerful actors with the regime such as East Bankers and subsequently wealthy Palestinian businessmen with the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies in the beginning of the 21st century under King Abdullah II’s reign.

In order to understand the successes of cooptation strategies and the nature of alliances pursued by the regime to preserve political power, the ethnic composition of Jordan’s population and its history must be discussed. Jordan’s population underwent drastic demographic changes over the past decades, traditionally the population compromised of majority of various Bedouin tribes scattered around southern provinces that were referred to as East Bankers or Transjordanians, given their extensive presence in the region that predated the advent of the Transjordan mandate under the British and its subsequent formation into the nation-state of Jordan. They served as the traditional powerbase of the Hashemite regime beginning with King Abdullah I, the founder of the Emirate of Trans-Jordan. In addition, small populations of Arab Christians exist in the northern/ north western provinces as a result of Christian settlement from other Levantine territories such as Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria in the past. However, following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War an exodus of Palestinians began out of Palestine into neighboring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, given the systematic ethnic-cleansing campaigns orchestrated by the newly established Israeli government in order to shift the ethnic tides of the population in the nascent Israeli state in favor of the Jewish population at the expense of the Palestinians that were massacred and forcibly displaced. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled into Jordan and thus sparking a massive demographic shift in the local population where they subsequently formed 50% of the total Jordanian population at the
time. The demographic shift continued to expand following the advent of the Israeli state and its persecution of Palestinians over the decades resulting in more Palestinians fleeing to Jordan, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War further exacerbated this given Israel’s annexation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that were previously under Jordanian administration. The territorial losses of Jordan and the aftermath of the 1967 war resulted in 355,000 Palestinian refugees heading to Jordan.

The population of Jordan is further compromised of other ethnic groups that exist in minority such as Assyrians, Armenians, Kurds, and Circassians. However, they form a minute proportion of the total population and have no potential or history of significant political (exception of Circassians) nor economic power, thus for the purposes of this discussion regarding cooptation the two main actors that will be discussed extensively are the Palestinians and East Bankers.

The East Bankers have traditionally served as the backbone of the Jordanian regime given their immediate reception of the Hashemites upon their arrival to Trans-Jordan and continued loyalty to the throne, in fact the loyalty of the tribes was essential in aiding the survival of the regime as it faced two major existential threats. On April 13th, 1957 in light of rising radical pan-Arabists that were anti-monarchists, opposition forces in Jordan joined by General Ali-Abu Nowar head of the Jordanian Army at the time and with the influence of external actors (Syria, at the time of the coup it was reported that 3,000 Syrian troops moved towards the Syrian-Jordanian border in support of the coup) orchestrated a coup attempt against

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107 Ibid.
King Hussein\textsuperscript{108}. However, the coup attempt was thwarted given the loyalty of Bedouin units in the army stationed in Zarqa that alerted King Hussein of the plot and immediately mobilized against it, thus ensuring the survival of the Hashemite regime\textsuperscript{109}. The dominance of Bedouins in the Jordanian military is the legacy of Glubb who selectively recruited Bedouins. Another instance highlighting the role of East Bankers in supporting the Hashemite regime as it faced existential crises, is the events of Black September in 1970. As discussed previously in the repression section, the Jordanian Armed Forces that predominantly consist of loyal East Bankers under the leadership of King Hussein led a brutal military crackdown on the guerrilla forces of the PLO, in response to the organization’s attempts to undermine Hashemite sovereignty in Jordan thus leading to thousands of casualties.

In exchange for their loyalty to the throne, the East Bankers are guaranteed a monopoly on political power compared to other demographics in Jordanian society. Hashemite rulers, beginning with King Hussein ensured that loyal tribal elements would dominate senior positions in parliament, the military, and the various branches of the regime’s coercive apparatus. In addition, employment within the public sector is favored towards East Bankers who maintain exclusive access to employment opportunities based on tribal affiliations. This created a system of ‘wasta’ which translates into ‘connection’, this system fueled by tribal politics, affiliations and the primacy of East Bankers infiltrated all aspects of Jordanian society since its conception, influencing matters such as employment, access to contracts, and even legal loopholes such as evading arrests. Not to mention, that it is arguably the primary contributor to the


\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
underdevelopment of institutions and civil society in Jordan, as it serves as a governing mechanism that favors tribal politics over other civil forms. Regardless, the system is the legacy of the powerful alliance and its fruition between the Hashemite rulers and East Bankers who have traditionally and continue to serve as the regime’s backbone, specifically in times of crisis as witnessed in 1957 and 1970.

Evidence of the East Bankers’ loyalty to the Hashemite throne continue to be found in recent times under King Abdullah II’s reign, specifically in times of regional political turmoil that have the potential for spillover effects such as the Arab uprisings where small scale protests and opposition mobilized against the regime, hence prompting loyal tribal elements to immediately rally in support of the regime while renewing their allegiance to the king. An example of such is one of the largest and most powerful tribes in Jordan, ‘Bani Hassan’, that denounced the events of the regional Arab uprising as ‘destabilizing aimed at furthering selfish private interests rather than the public good’ while condemning the tribal elements that mobilized in opposition of the king, claiming that they do not represent Jordan’s tribes that are loyal to the Hashemite rule that is said to be ‘a symbol of Jordanian pride and unity’

Nevertheless, the so-called backbone of the Hashemite regime faced serious blows in recent decades under the tenure of King Abdullah II that implemented neo liberal economic reforms aimed at modernizing the economy, subsequently jeopardizing the economic gains of the East Bankers and ultimately undermining their traditionally dominant position in society. Consequently, grievances fomenting among various tribal sources have resulted in the surfacing

of opposition and dissent against both the government and the king directly, this is evident in the creation of the ‘Hirak Movement’ entailing nearly 40 tribal youth activists groups representing rural communities\textsuperscript{111}, fueled by grievances joined forces with other opposition units (peasantry, Muslim Brotherhood) in protests chanting slogans directly against the monarch demanding serious political reform or threatening similar outcomes to other regimes in neighboring Arab nations\textsuperscript{112}.

The relationship between Jordan’s tribes and the Hashemites shifted drastically following 2011 regional political turmoil, influx of refugees and continuously deteriorating economic situation (soaring poverty and unemployment rates) compounded by a public perception of state mismanagement of funds, as well as high levels of corruption fueled resentment among the bedrock support of the monarchy\textsuperscript{113}, thus spurring prominent tribal figures to organize protests and continuously challenge the regime including its legitimacy. Fares Al-Fayez, one of the most prominent opposition political activists in Jordan and member of Bani Sakhir tribe, publicly called out the king for acting as a ‘demi-god’ while demanding for serious political reform that involved curtailing some of the king’s executive powers, he further added that ‘we will not accept you’ while challenging the legitimacy of Hashemite rule by claiming that ‘the country is ours, the land is ours’ and that the king, his father and great grandfather ‘came to us from Hijaz’


\textsuperscript{112} Al-Shara’an, M. (September 2nd, 2019). “Hirak Movement…Why Changes in Demands?” حراك الأردن... لماذا يتغير سقف الشعارات والمطالب؟. Al Jazeera.

\textsuperscript{113} Ersan, M. (February 13th, 2019). “Jordan’s king facing mounting pressure as tribal support ebbs away”. \textit{Middle East Eye}. Retrieved from: https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/jordans-king-facing-mounting-pressure-tribal-support-ebbs-away
implying that the Hashemite dynasty is foreign in Jordan and its legitimacy is based on a contract between the tribes and the Hashemites, hence Al-Fayez’s remarks ‘You owe us, we don’t owe you’114. Al-Fayez was arrested following his speech, thus sparking outrage among his tribe that threatened to ‘shake the pillars of the Jordanian state’ if he was not released immediately, these sentiments were echoed by Al-Fayez’s son, Mujhem, who threatened that the Bani Sakhir tribe would block main roads between the capital and Madaba, in addition to disrupting flights from Jordan’s main airport if his father was not released115.

The other domain of cooptation utilized by the Jordanian regime entails Jordanians of Palestinian origins that constitute an economic elite, given their dominance in the private sector of the economy. The economic strength of the Palestinians stems from the legacy of the government patronage system installed by the regime that facilitated the primacy of Transjordanians in many domains of Jordanian life while simultaneously discriminated against Palestinians. Moreover, following the events of the 1970 civil war, the regime orchestrated ‘Jordanization’ programs that purged the civil service, political institutions, army, press, and public sector from Palestinians116. Therefore, following their marginalization and status as political minority despite occupying a demographic majority, the Palestinians were forced to dominate the private sector within a generation given that they were better educated and more

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115 Ibid.
professionally skilled than Transjordanians. Not to mention, that Palestinians had access to the labor markets of oil producing gulf states in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{117}

Nonetheless, the economic rise and dominance of the Palestinians did not carry any political significance nor gains over the decades as they remained marginalized from the centers of political power in Jordan up until King Abdullah II’s ascension to the throne. The new king’s implementation of policies aimed at liberalizing the economy and neoliberal cooptation strategies encompassing social entrepreneurs’ networks laid down the framework, whereby certain wealthy Palestinian entrepreneurs were able to begin converting their economic might into political power, as they drew closer to the regime and monarch himself. Entrepreneurs such as Ghassan Nuqul, Maher Kaddoura, and Dina Shoman were placed at the helm of the Jordanian social entrepreneurs network as decision makers, they influenced and supported handpicked social entrepreneurs\textsuperscript{118}. The Jordanian monarch and his loyal business elites carefully monitor and control the development of the SEN to “create a new generation of socio-economic elites, and thus, target the co-optation of hand-picked social entrepreneurs and their alignment to the political and economic agenda.”\textsuperscript{119} This is primarily advanced by local initiatives such as KAAYIA (King Abdullah II Award for Youth Innovation and Development) and awards founded by royal decree such as KAFD (King Abdullah II Fund for Development), these awards place emphasis on the entrepreneur as an individual rather than the enterprise for the purpose of cooptation as a means of forging a new generation of socio-economic elites that are in line both

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
politically and economically with the ruler. Hence, the neoliberal restructuring of Jordan’s economy has enabled the authoritarian renewal of the Jordanian regime through the lens of social entrepreneurship networks and youth empowerment.

Despite the Syrian regime demonstrating both an unrelenting will and unrestricted capacity in repressing all forms of opposition, its survival both historically and thus far cannot be solely attributed to repression. In fact, the Syrian regime is arguably held together by cooptation strategies facilitated through corporatism and neo patrimonial rule maintained by what Kevin Mazur terms as ‘informal networks of linkage’\textsuperscript{120}. Such strategies were adopted by various authoritarian regimes rising to power in the Arab World that aimed at consolidating political power and control over society while developing a weakly industrialized economy, this is evident in Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Algeria that were ruled by socialist regimes that attempted to implement bold modernization programs in the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{121}.

In order to comprehend the cooptation strategies pursued by the Syrian regime, the ethnic composition of the Syrian population and its subsequent division into classes accordingly must be explored. The heterogeneity of the Syrian population emanates from differences along religious and ethnic lines, Syrians can be broadly attributed to one of the three major religious groups in the country either Sunni Muslims, Christians and one of the various variations of the ‘Islamic religions’ (Alawis, Druze, and Isma’ili’s)\textsuperscript{122}. Other religious groups exist such as the Yezidis and Shi’ite Muslims yet their numbers constitute a miniscule portion of the Syrian population. As for ethnic affiliations, Syrians are predominantly Arabs with sizeable portions of

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, p.63
the population being Kurds or non-Arab Christians, such as the Assyrians (whose presence in the region outdates the advent of Islam and the subsequent Arab conquests) and Armenians (who have fled genocide perpetrated by the Ottomans in the early 20th century). Other ethnic groups exist in minority such as Turkomans and Circassians who have been residing in Syria since the days of Ottoman rule.123

Historically prior to the 20th century Sunni Arabs existed as the prime economic and social actors in Syria given their class background as urban merchants, landowners and Muslim scholars, thus dominating political life up until the rise of the Ba’athists.124 However, it must be noted that a majority of the Sunni population did not possess economic nor political power given the diversity in class backgrounds and regional locations, some resided in cities and served as merchants while others existed in more rural regions and served as peasants or simple tribesmen. Christians did occupy certain prominent positions within the realms of governance and commerce, yet they have never possessed any form of executive power. The dominion of Sunni Muslims over political life persisted during the imperial rule of both the Ottomans and the French that delegated special roles for them as local power brokers tasked with maintaining stability.125 Nevertheless, this political system where Sunni Muslims occupied prominent roles within the realm of politics was shattered with the decline of imperial rule in the Middle East and the subsequent rise of Arab nationalism, resulting in the political mobilization of rural areas in Syria under the Communists, Ba’athists, and Arab Socialists.126 This was further compounded by

123 Ibid.
125 Ibid, p.68
126 Ibid, p.68
the formation of the United Arab Republic where Syria merged with Egypt under the rule of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958, the Arab nationalist project of the UAR was short-lived as Nasser’s policies entailing the alienation of Syrian political actors and ambitious nationalization policies resulted in a military coup that paved pathway for the rise of the Ba’athists, in addition to the implementation of a political culture dominated by the Alawi minority in Syria that still persists today under Assads regime.

The primary mechanism driving cooptation in the Syrian regime involves an intertwined relationship between informal networks and the ethnic nature of the regime. While the ethnic component of the Syrian regime maybe contested among scholars, it is undoubtedly true that those surrounding the epicenter of political power in Syria stem from the Alawites minority, to which both Hafez and Bashar Assad belong. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, this is evident in senior positions within the coercive apparatus of the Syrian regime during Hafez Assad’s reign, Hafez exclusively appointed Alawite supporters deemed loyal to fill in director positions within the different intelligence agencies relating to the Syrian coercive apparatus, such as Mohammed Nasif Kheirbek, a member of an Alawite clan closely affiliated with the Assads. Furthermore, public employment is dominated by Alawites that gain exclusive access to personal networks (obtained through connections to an immediate family member such as a cousin or uncle) that facilitate employment opportunities within the public sector, that are at the minimum unavailable to non-Alawites or much more difficult to access. However, it must be additionally considered that elite actors in Syria that are entrenched deep within the regime are

not necessarily limited to Alawites, in fact several Sunnis occupied prominent positions within
the regime such as Mustafa Tlass that served as a former Minister of Defense, Rustum Ghazaleh,
former chief of Political Security, and Ali Mamluk, former head of the Syrian General
Intelligence Directorate ‘mukhabarat’\textsuperscript{129}.

The Syrian regime pursued coalition building with various segments of Syrian society
that expanded beyond the Alawi minority and different elite actors through establishing informal
networks with various local communities, thus contributing to the regime survival over the past
decades by minimizing cross-societal mobilization of opposition. For instance, during the reign
of Hafez Assad the Syrian regime underwent several “modernization projects served as vehicles
for development of clientelistic linkages between the Syrian state and local communities”\textsuperscript{130}. The
establishment of the Peasants’ Union facilitated state regulation into agriculture affairs
specifically grazing lands, through delegating cooperative tribal leaders that served as
intermediaries between the regime and peasants, hence serving as a “a means of handing out
patronage goods”\textsuperscript{131}. Moreover, the regime employed elite clientelism to establish coalitions
with non-political elite actors in Syria, this applies specifically to the local realm of business.
Business clientelism was achieved through regime efforts in establishing links with families or
individuals through informal deals that involved personal relations with businessmen and regime
figures. For instance, the regime would promote opportunities and deals for regime linked
businessmen in exchange for support and a portion of the revenue earned, the regime required
foreign companies operating in Syria to have local partners, these partners are typically regime

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, p.70
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, p.74
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, p.74
linked businessmen who in exchange for such opportunities end up overcharging foreign companies for basic services such as rental of governmental lands then sharing the rent with regime figures or officials. Business clientelism is not limited to Alawite families or individuals, in fact a significant portion of the beneficiaries of this strategy are Sunni Muslims that have backgrounds linked with the regime such as the sons of Mustafa Tlass. In addition, this form of clientelism maintains a regional dimension that further transcends the ethnic nature of the regime, whereby linkages and networks established between the regime and loyal businessmen were more prominent in major cities that maintained high economic and trade activity such as Aleppo and Damascus. This form of coalition cements the interests of nonpolitical elite with that of the political elite, hence acting as a mechanism for preventing and controlling internal elite dissent.

The effectiveness of cooptation strategies pursued by the Syrian regime beginning from the reign of Hafez and persisting into Bashar’s enabled minimization of opposition mobilization in the face of the Arab Uprisings in 2011. This was achieved through networks established between the state and local communities that provided material benefits for individuals and families whether informally or formally linked to the regime, hence incentivizing certain local communities to refrain from mobilizing in support of the opposition in fear of losing access to material benefits that were regularly provided before the uprising, as well as access to the networks that provide a wide variety of privileges. This was further facilitated through intermediaries, that acted as informal regime policing mechanisms that controlled dissent within their own communities given their linkages to the state. Therefore, “populations with greater

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132 Ibid, p.81
state linkage, including non-Sunni local communities, Sunni local communities of tribal background, and those with high levels of government employment, participated at systematically lower rates than other communities in the uprising’s first six months.”¹³³

¹³³ Ibid, p.160
CONCLUSION

The resiliency of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East is rooted in three main pillars of legitimation, repression and cooptation. The empirical discussion confirms some hypotheses on the mechanisms of such pillars while offering new insights that tend to be overlooked. Legitimation has historically been and continues to be a foundation in the Hashemite regime in Jordan given unique ancestral links and genealogical links to the most supreme religious and cultural historical figure in the region, Prophet Muhammad. The Hashemites employed such legitimacy claims as a means of gaining an edge over other tribes and dynasties in the region in an ascent to power, even today the monarch and his regime continue to implement symbols and rhetoric within the public sphere to emphasize the legitimacy of Hashemite rule domestically, regionally, and even internationally as observed by King Abdullah II’s rejection of the Abraham Accords under the Trump administration. Contrarily, despite the Syrian regime attempting to utilize various legitimation tactics such as the regime campaign in painting the image of Bashar as a pious Muslim that regularly attends prayers at the mosque, such tactics were ultimately unsuccessful given the artificial nature of the cult of personality of Assad that is strictly contingent on the state’s coercive capacity.

Repression has proven to occupy a greater role in the resiliency of the monarchical regime in Jordan than initially anticipated, despite its image as a liberal regime and favorite among Western governments. This has been demonstrated in the regime’s expanding repressive capacity in recent years following the events of the Arab Spring and the subsequent regional political turmoil that has left several age-old autocratic regimes deposed, hence the Jordanian
regime under pressure and fears of suffering a similar outcome has increased its crackdown on all forms of dissent emanating from all segments of society aimed against the existing political order under the monarch. This ranges from the silencing of local critics abroad in neighborly authoritarian regimes (Ahmad El Otoum) to the forced closure of the Teachers’ Syndicate in response to organized protests, and the house arrest of the king's half-brother whom allegedly conspired with both local and foreign actors in a coup attempt against the reigning monarch. The analysis additionally reveals that a great degree of the regime’s repressive capacity is directly financed and supported by foreign allies such as the United States, the primary benefactor and donor to Jordan’s coercive apparatus. As expected, repression was instrumental to the survival of the Assad regime in Syria as it faced existential threats, most notably during the onset of the Syrian civil war where the regime immediately unleashed the full destructive scale of its repressive capacity on opposition forces ranging from indiscriminate shelling and dropping of barrel bombs on civilian areas to unleashing chemical agents in local towns and cities, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties. There is no shortage of evidence documenting the role of repression in the survival of the Assad regime in Syria, both in terms of scale and capacity as evident by countless international media coverage, UN commissions, and leaks from regime defectors such as the Caesar photographs. The repressive capacity of the Syrian regime was further fortified by foreign actors such as Russia that provided air power as well as arms, and Iran that smuggled sophisticated weaponry into Syria for the regime’s use in addition to providing ground troops in the form of Iranian-backed militias.

Cooptation served as the primal foundation of the Hashemite regime since its genesis in the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921, more so arguably than legitimation. This is rooted in the
powerful alliance between the Hashemites starting from the Jordanian state’s founder King Abdullah I and the Transjordanian tribes of the south, that recognized the monarchical rule of the Hashemites and pledged allegiance in exchange for benefits and protection of the interests of the tribes. Consequently, the regime under King Hussein engineered and adopted a government patronage system that ensured Transjordanians would dominate the centers of political power (civil service, military, public sector and senior positions in coercive apparatus) despite shifting demographic tides and the subsequent economic rise of the Palestinians, thus ensuring the primacy of Transjordanians in various domains in Jordanian life while politically alienating Palestinians. However, the empirical analysis additionally reveals the increased erosion of cooptation as a strategy for regime survival in Jordan specifically in recent times, given the neoliberal economic restructuring and modernization policies undertaken in the reign of King Abdullah II. Hence, such policies have come at the expense of the economic benefits of Transjordanians while paving the path for the conversion of economic power to political clout of certain Palestinian actors as witnessed in local Social Entrepreneur Networks.

The deteriorating economic condition compounded by a rampant rise of corruption under the reign of King Abdullah II, in addition to his controversial economic policies ebbed away support from the same tribal elements the Hashemite regime has historically relied on to survive in the face of existential threats. Thus, revealing cracks in what has been long referred as the bedrock of the monarchy in Jordan. In recent years opposition challenging the regime and its legitimacy have been increasingly fomenting and erupting among various prominent tribes that were once considered unconditionally loyal to the throne threatening the outbreak of social and political turmoil, such developments shed the light on the effectiveness of cooptation in the
Jordan and questions its utility as it is in the future and the concurrent increase in repression, thus suggesting a shift in the dynamics of authoritarian rule in Jordan where the regime may have to increasingly rely on repression as a primary tool of survival as it faces more serious threats such as the failed coup in 2021.

Similarly, cooptation in Syria has been foundational to the Assad regime dating to Hafez’s reign who carefully selected members of his own ethnic community, Alawites to occupy prominent roles within his regimes, most notable senior positions within the military, security forces and intelligence agencies. The ethnic nature of the Assad regime is no coincidence, rather a strategic cooptation strategy that ensured internal elite dissent against the ruler was minimized. Furthermore, the regime's instrumentalization of business clientelism that ensured the cooptation of non-political elites including non-Alawites such as Sunni businessmen further fortified the cohesion of elites within the regime, this cemented the economic interests of the business elite with the status quo of the regime given exclusive access to deals and trade opportunities. Not to mention, the establishment of informal networks scattered throughout various communities through linking regime elements with intermediaries, that additionally acted as an implicit policing mechanism controlling dissent within their respective communities.

While the thesis primarily examined the mechanics behind authoritarian regime survival in Syria and Jordan, the findings can be expanded to offer an insightful framework into the resiliency of authoritarian rule in some Middle Eastern regimes and its collapse in others, specifically during the events of the Arab Uprisings in 2011 that posed the most significant existential threat to authoritarianism in the Middle East to this day. Legitimation, repression and cooptation are employed by all authoritarian regimes in the region as mechanisms of governance
and instruments of survival in the face of threats. Religious legitimacy has long been instrumentalized by the royal family in Morocco against Islamist threats\(^1\) and to consolidate public support. Similar to the Hashemites in Jordan, the Alawite ruling dynasty in Morocco claim to be descendants of Prophet Muhammad hence granting them special privileges to govern according Islamic tradition. Not only does the monarch claim genealogical links to prophet Muhammad but traces its lineage to the fourth caliph in Islam, Ali bin Abi Talib via the Idrisid dynasty\(^2\). Hence, the regime in Morocco relies on historical-religious claims to justify and propagate its rule.

Repression is the backbone of all authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, its employment has been extensively or at a minimum partially documented from Morocco to Iran. Bellin highlights the instrumentalization of repression to facilitate authoritarianism across various regimes in the Middle East through the presence of a coercive apparatus entailing security forces, intelligence units and the military under the helm of the autocrat. In Saudi Arabia, the regime frequently unleashes its repressive capacity on its Shi’ite minority population concentrated in the eastern region of Qatif, resulting in the militarization of the region through a heavy presence of security forces that closely surveil the region and violently suppresses demonstrations inspired by the Arab Uprisings in 2011\(^3\). This resulted in dozens of civilian

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injuries, deaths and detainments of Shi’ites as political prisoners that are typically charged under terrorism acts or espionage as Iranian agents\textsuperscript{137}, thus resulting in death penalties and consequently executed by the state. Similarly, the regime in Bahrain heavily relied on repression as a means of survival in the face of mass popular uprisings primarily carried out by the nations Shi’ite majority and emboldened by the wave of pro-democracy protests that swept the Arab world in 2011. The regimes response was violent entailing the use of live ammunition on protestors by security forces, detainments and exiles of opposition figures. In addition, the monarchical regime invited foreign troops originating from Saudi Arabia and the UAE to aid its efforts in crushing dissent\textsuperscript{138}. The regime continues to detain, torture, exile and force confessions out of opposition figures as a means of stifling dissent and ensuring regime survival.

As for cooptation, its employment as an instrument of regime survival is evident across some of the Arab Gulf states in response to the growing political threat of the Muslim Brotherhood. In Bahrain, a powerful alliance exists between the Al Khalifa ruling family and the Muslim Brotherhood given the sectarian dimensions of political opposition that emanates from the country’s Shi’ite population. The Muslim Brotherhood’s political extension in Bahrain exists in the form of a bloc known as ‘Al Minbar Islamic Society’ that continually support the monarchy’s positions and policies in parliament\textsuperscript{139}. The party is believed to be supported by the


Bahraini Royal court\textsuperscript{140} and its government support is viewed as an effort by the regime to counter Shi’ite political mobilization. In Qatar, the regime has adopted a form of cooperative cooptation in regards to the Muslim Brotherhood given the regime’s relatively peaceful experience with the Muslim Brotherhood\textsuperscript{141}. This is a byproduct of the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar limiting its activities to social reform such as promoting Islamic education\textsuperscript{142}, rather than attacking the political structure and seeking participation through mobilization. Hence, despite not having an official chapter, the Muslim Brotherhood is allowed by the regime to operate in Qatar given its voluntary self-isolation from the Qatari political realm.

Nevertheless, the three pillars of authoritarian resiliency crumbled in the face of opposition in regimes such as Egypt and Tunisia that underwent regime change, given the ousting of Mubarak and Ben Ali by waves of mass protests that swept both countries and ignited the revolutionary bandwagon of the Arab Spring. In Egypt, the fate of the Mubarak’s brutal dictatorship came down to a major blow dealt to the regime’s coercive apparatus and hence repressive capacity, this blow originated from the Egyptian military defecting from Mubarak’s orders and abstaining from suppressing mass protests. This not only signified a diminishing in the state’s repressive capacity but a failure in cooptation with non-political elite, specifically the military establishment that ultimately decided to abandon Mubarak’s regime and maintain a neutral position that may have appeared to favor the Egyptian protestors, people and overall

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
public sentiment. Similarly, in Tunisia the scope of mass mobilization and public protests that called for the overthrow of the regime exceeded the regime’s repressive capacity, thus leading to the escape and exile of Ben Ali and his family to Saudi Arabia.
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