From Protest to Rebellion? Institutions and Protest Escalation in Autocracies.

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FROM PROTEST TO REBELLION?
INSTITUTIONS AND PROTEST ESCALATION IN AUTOCRACIES

A dissertation presented
by
Anya Vodopyanov
to
The Department of Government
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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in the subject of
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Harvard University
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FROM PROTEST TO REBELLION?
INSTITUTIONS AND PROTEST ESCALATION IN AUTOCRACIES

ABSTRACT

Major exogenous shocks, which increase the vulnerability of autocratic regimes, present a unique opportunity for citizens to rebel against their hegemons. Yet in practice, we observe significant variation in protest strategies across autocracies: in some, shock-induced demonstrations grow into mass rebellion while in others they remain tame and scattered and quickly fizzle. The goal of this project is to further our understanding of the variation in dynamics of protest escalation and, more generally, of contention under autocracy and conditions for authoritarian survival and change. My dissertation develops a new theoretical framework which bridges psychological, political economy, and historical institutional approaches. My central argument is that the likelihood of protest escalation hinges on a key aspect of autocratic design: the extent to which the autocratic elite institutionalizes opportunities for its popular base – the “minimal winning coalition” necessary for an uprising – to bargain with the state over non-strategic local matters, such as distribution or status positions. All things equal, autocrats who provide no spaces for bargaining are more likely to face protest escalation because top-down rule alienates their mass base by depriving it of voice and incentivizing predatory governance; by the same token, institutionalized bargaining can buy support because it endows the mass constituency with some leverage over state agents and encourages more client-oriented intermediation.
I evaluate these theoretical predictions against detailed qualitative and quantitative evidence from Syria and Jordan, two neighboring Arab states where the regional unrest of 2011 precipitated street protests. Using a natural border experiment, I show how the countries’ dissimilar institutional designs – Syria’s top-down model and Jordan’s bargaining-centric model – nurtured, over time, measurable differences in the mass constituencies’ relationship with the state, which directly affected the nature of protests in 2011. I demonstrate that already before 2011 the Syrian constituency was systematically more disaffected, economically independent, and more united than the Jordanian, and that this created a far more fertile ground for protest escalation in Syria than in Jordan. My research also suggests that government violence against protesters and non-violent tactics such as divide-and-rule are not independent explanations for escalation, but endogenous by-products of countries’ institutional foundations.
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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout this work, I use the most common transliterations of Arabic proper names and places used in English media, to make the text as accessible as possible to the non-Arabic speaker. Thus, the capital of Jordan is spelled as Amman rather than ʿAmmān, the cradle of the Syrian revolution is Daraa rather than Darʿa, and the name of the longest-serving Syrian president is Hafez Assad rather than Hāfīz al-Assad). I exclude most diacritics, but use an apostrophe to indicate the voiced pharyngeal fricative (i.e. the letter ʿayn) and the glottal stop (the letter hamza). Finally, whenever I am aware of the way an individual spells his or her name in English, I employ that spelling.
PART ONE: INTRODUCTION & THEORETICAL DISCUSSION
CHAPTER 1. INSTITUTIONS AND VARIATION IN PROTEST ESCALATION IN AUTOCRACIES AFTER EXOGENOUS SHOCKS

1.1 PUZZLE AND OVERVIEW OF ARGUMENT

Dictators are only as strong as their citizens let them be. Autocrats can hide behind strong security states, cozy international alliances, or clever elite coalitions, but if citizens muster the courage to walk into the streets and denounce their rule en masse, the regime can quickly lose its legitimacy, its elite friends, and its power. For this reason, dictators may not fear specific instances of localized collective action, but they will fear protest escalation\(^1\) - the evolution of small or unpolitical protests into large and politically charged movements (Davenport, 2005; Kuran, 1995). Despite its implications for critical political phenomena like authoritarian maintenance, not to mention the lives of over half of the world’s population living under autocratic regimes today,\(^2\) protest escalation in non-free regimes has attracted surprisingly little attention in the scholarship.\(^3\) In particular, many gaps remain in our understanding of how escalation varies across autocratic states: why protests, once begun, quickly grow into broad regime-threatening movements in some countries but not in others.

In this dissertation I offer a new theory that explains variation in protest escalation in non-democracies, particularly after major triggering events that increase dictators’ vulnerability. To be clear, my goal is not to predict how protest movements are born or how they change (and end) over the long durée but rather to explain why protests, once begun, either rapidly intensify into rebellion or remain limited during their critical initial stages. My central argument is that in a given autocracy – and particularly in resource-poor autocracies that constitute the majority of
non-democratic regimes worldwide – the likelihood of escalation is determined by the nature of the country’s ruling institutions. Institutions shape the paths of escalation because they shape the nature of the relationship between the autocratic regime and the regime’s popular base (RPB) – the group that constitutes the “minimal winning coalition” necessary for an uprising – and, therefore, both the types of grievances that drive RPB members to take to the streets and the effectiveness of autocrats’ tools for dissipating dissent. Given information about institutions, I suggest, it is possible to predict the relative chances of escalation, a priori.

In stressing the role of institutions in deterring popular rebellion, I build on a large and growing literature that has prioritized the institutions through which autocrats deploy their power rather than levels of dictators’ resources and coercive/bureaucratic capacities. My main contribution to this literature is in highlighting a new institutional mechanism that has better explanatory power than some of the factors highlighted by older studies (such as centralization of power), which helped to make sense of variation among historical pre-World War II dictatorships but not the smart “upgraded” regimes that survived into the modern period.

I suggest that while most modern autocrats centralize power and construct broad coalitions, the characteristic on which they vary considerably – and which directly affects the likelihood of protest escalation – has to do with the extent to which they institutionalize mechanisms for their popular base to bargain over non-strategic everyday political and distributive resources of direct import to the latter’s lives. At one end of the spectrum are regimes that do not institutionalize bargaining and seek to rule by decree. These systems, I argue, are most vulnerable to protest escalation because they foster forms of governance that alienate their popular base; the outrage and solidarities that this breeds among the popular base, in turn, raises the chances that this politically pivotal group will mobilize and embrace anti-regime slogans when given the chance.
Autocracies at the other end of the spectrum also centralize power but leave spaces for negotiation with their popular base, even while retaining full control over the rules of negotiation. These systems stand a lower chance of protest escalation because they foster forms of governance that draw the regime’s mass base closer to the regime politically and economically; with a politically-pivotal mass constituency that is both less keen on dramatic political change and more easily appeased with limited concessions, protests in these states both start and remain small and qualitatively non-oppositional.

My theory bridges micro-level psychological approaches with macro-level historical institutionalism, and in doing so extends a range of popular theories of autocratic maintenance and collective action which focus either on the micro or on the macro picture but have a blind spot for the other. Specifically, the theory provides answers to several key puzzles that have bewildered past accounts, such as why politically oppositional “mobilizing frames” resonate with some authoritarian societies more than in others, why the same basket of government concessions can succeed in “buying off” protests in one autocratic regime but fail to do so in another, and why some of the largest protest movements arise in dictatorships with the weakest pre-existing civil societies. By bridging the micro and macro approaches, I am also able to provide an integrated explanation for regimes’ violence against protesters – a phenomenon often invoked as a leading independent cause of protest escalation but itself rarely explicated. I show that the level of violence is endogenous to the country’s ruling institutions because they shape the autocrat’s relationship with his popular base – and that, in essence, a dictator’s choice to “shoot” is nothing more than his desperate attempt to control a situation where his relationship with the mass base is broken and he is unable to calm protests by non-violent means.
1.2 DEFINING PROTEST ESCALATION

Before moving to explanations for variation in protest escalation, it is useful to define what I mean by “protest escalation” in the first place. As already mentioned, what I am interested in here is not the onset of protests – how or why they start – but how the intensity of protests changes during their first weeks. The main temporal sequence of escalation in a given country can be visualized in Figure 1.1: moving from a pre-trigger time $t_{-1}$ when there is no/low collective action, to a point in time $t_0$ when a major exogenous trigger event shakes the country (I will explain shortly the significance of this event), to $t_1$ when protests start, to a point $t_2$ after which the protests begin to change in intensity (escalate or de-escalate) until an undefined point $t_n$ when the collective action ends in some way, for instance in a revolution or in a return to pre-trigger status quo. The “outcome” of interest for this study takes place during a few short periods (lasting several weeks) after escalation begins at $t_2$, which we can arbitrarily denote as the period $t_2$ through $t_4$.

Figure 1.1 Temporal sequence of collective action and escalation
Although the periods between the \( t's \) in the model can vary in length, I assume that the time that elapses between the trigger and start of protest (\( t_0 \) to \( t_1 \)) and between the start of protest and escalation (\( t_1 \) to \( t_2 \)) it is likely to be relatively short; the big unknown is \( t_x \), which can range from days to years and even decades. Since \( t_x \) is unknown (and difficult to predict), I have arbitrarily chosen to limit the timeframe of interest – \( t_2 \) to \( t_4 \) – to several weeks. This period is chosen because it is sufficiently long for protests to take their distinct path but also sufficiently soon after the trigger at \( t_0 \) to allow me to investigate the effect of pre-protest factors on the course of the collective action.

What are the main features of protest escalation? Existing studies do not converge on a single overarching definition, but do hint at two key dimensions. The first is the intensification of protest demands (Pierskalla, 2010; Patel, 2013). There is no standard indicator for this dimension because the meaning of demands is usually context specific: what may count as routine and innocuous in one autocracy may be politically bold and incendiary in another. In general, however, a clear sign of intensification is a qualitative shift in protesters’ demands from modest parochial concerns to major national political issues: for instance, from demands for repairs of local roads to calls for change in the nature and selection of the country’s leadership. The second dimension of protest escalation is the conjoining of small pockets of collective action into a large coordinated movement (Rasler, 1996; L. Anderson, 2011), or what I call movementization. The two main indicators of movementization, as implied by the definition, are growing protest breadth and coordination: the rapid mobilization of a cross-class/cross-regional coalition of supporters, and concerted efforts by this broad activist base to join forces to push towards a common goal. Although the literature does not provide specific thresholds and there may be some gray areas, it is clear that protests would not qualify as movements if they either fail to
mobilize numbers or fail to synchronize, or both. Overall, then, a clear indicator of escalation is when protests have rapidly grown into large coordinated movements and ramped up their collective demands, and of the opposite when slogans remained low-key, participation declined, and activists remained divided.

Finally, what is the significance of major exogenous triggers in my model of protest escalation? Studies of collective action have long recognized the importance of various kinds of precipitating events for triggering mass protests, because they usually increase the vulnerability of governments and provide activists with the political space to march, make claims, and coordinate (Tarrow, 1994; Turner & Killian, 1987; Beissinger, 2007). Triggers can take the form of major occasions (including significant shifts in a country’s economic/security doctrine) or minor “everyday” occurrences (such as an insult by a local government official), and that they can be endogenous (planned by the regime, like a scheduled national election) or exogenous. Why do I focus my analysis specifically on precipitating events that are large and exogenous? For one simple methodological reason. Unlike the onset of protests, protest escalation is very difficult to pull off in strong autocracies due to repression. Large exogenous shocks, which place autocrats in a far more vulnerable position than other types of trigger events and stand the best chance of loosening the autocrat’s repressive grip and breaking protesters’ internalized “barrier of fear,” allow me to control for these well-studied constraints on collective action and to explore a less-studied and more important puzzle with which I began this study: namely why, even under similar constraints and opportunities, protests in some autocracies escalate to regime-threatening levels but remain small and tame in others.
1.3 EXISTING EXPLANATIONS

How have existing studies accounted for divergent paths of protest escalation in autocratic regimes? In contrast to a booming literature on advanced democratic societies, studies on collective action in non-free regimes are much thinner, and questions of protest escalation in particular have been given little systematic attention. If we take all the available literature (on democracies and non-democracies) into consideration, studies fall in one of two camps: one that suggests that protest paths are determined by pre-protest conditions (i.e. at $t_{-1}$), and one that claims that protest escalation is shaped entirely by contingencies and action-reaction dynamics after protests start. Let me briefly discuss the various explanations in each category. As I show below, none are insufficient for answering the question at hand, but provide a useful starting point for building new theory.

1.3.1 Pre-protest conditions as causes of protest escalation

Several major explanations fall in the “pre-protest conditions” category, three of them dedicated to explaining the escalation of demands and three - to the movementization of protests. One theory that connects escalation of demands to pre-existing conditions is the theory of “authoritarian bargains.”\(^\text{12}\) It adapts several strains from an older social movement theory (SMT) literature, related to absolute grievances (Smelser, 1962) and relative deprivation (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970),\(^\text{13}\) to non-democratic settings, and argues that escalation of protest demands is a direct function of the relative attractiveness (volume, quality, accessibility) of autocrats’ pre-protest distributive handouts relative to the alternatives. More generous and otherwise better
distribution dampens escalation because it gives individuals a vested interest in the state, and vice versa. Although the explanation has been heavily critiqued by newer empirical studies on consolidated democracies, it continues to thrive in the literature on authoritarian regimes where dictators’ material handouts are believed to be central to the maintenance of public quiescence (Magaloni, 2006; Blaydes, 2010), and as such, it deserves to be taken seriously. Certainly, the argument has been made compellingly for autocracies at the extreme end of the wealth spectrum, including many resource-rich Arab Gulf states which saw weak collective action even after the very strong exogenous shock of Tunisia’s revolution and regional unrest in early 2011 (Ross, 2011). However, there is also plenty of evidence that raises questions about the explanatory power of the theory, or at least about the conditions under which it does or does not hold — for instance, the powerful popular uprisings in “generous” autocracies like the Shah’s Iran, former Communist dictatorships of Eastern Europe, and oil-rich Bahrain in 2011, and, even more strikingly, the weak collective action after strong triggers in not-so-generous resource-poor states such as Jordan.

A second explanation, which has become prominent in the literature on the 2011 Arab Uprisings, connects escalation of protest demands to autocratic regime type. It argues that monarchies are less likely to see protests escalate into rebellion than military/republican dictatorships because of their superior symbolic legitimacy (Daadaoui, 2013), broader social coalitions, and better access to foreign aid (Yom & Gause III, 2012). A casual glance at Arab protests in early 2011 appears to support the broad correlation suggested by the theory — protest demands escalated (to calls for revolution) in only one out of eight Arab monarchies (Bahrain) but in five out of seven Arab republics; however the explanations are less persuasive. The argument that monarchies had more symbolic capital is questionable, not only because all Arab
autocracies invested in political symbols to boost legitimacy (republican presidents like Gamal Abdel Nasser and Hafez Assad did so at least as much as the monarchs), but also because scholars of monarchical symbolism have maintained that in times of crisis the monarch’s religious titles and symbolism are not what keeps people from revolting (Hammoudi, 1997: 25). The second argument – that monarchs survived due to their broad mass coalitions – also does not sit well with all the evidence from the Arab world, where many monarchies often rested on narrower social bases (Jordan and Bahrain are prominent examples) than republican regimes (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, to name but a few) which were populist states (Waldner, 1999; see Chapter 2 for further discussion). Finally, the correlation between foreign aid and escalation of protest demands appears weak: in the Arab world, monarchies that received generous Western aid (e.g. Jordan) did not see dramatic protest escalation but republics that received the same (e.g. Egypt) did. All in all, if the correlation between regime type and escalation is not spurious and if there really is a specifically “monarchical” advantage, scholars have yet to find it; but as it stands the argument is mostly correlational.

A third body of literature that hints at connections between pre-protest attributes of a society and protest demands is a strand of the social movement theory which focuses on “protest frames” – or lenses through which activist leaders choose to interpret events, identify injustices, attribute blame, and “package” the message of the collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000; Polletta & Ho, 2006). It argues that protest demands can follow different trajectories – towards escalation or the opposite – because their starting messages can differ. This provides a very useful way to think about variation: if protests in different autocracies in fact begin from qualitatively distinct starting goals, it makes sense that their subsequent trajectories may also diverge (in fact, I find this to be the case in my empirical analyses). The main problem with the dominant framing
literature is that it was shaped by the Western democratic experience, and its explanations of the origin of frames – which is key for unpacking the sources of variation in escalation – does not travel well to autocratic systems. For example, one explanation, that the nature of original protest goals depends on the level of the country’s economic development at $t_{-1}$ – that industrializing economies are more likely to see “economic” bread-and-butter demonstrations, while industrialized societies “political post-materialist concerns (Inglehart, 1990; Klandermans, 1986) – would struggle to make sense of variation across modern autocracies, since most are industrializing states. The same goes for arguments that protest claims are shaped by prior traditions of ideological dissent and by “collectively-learned shared understandings concerning what forms of claim-making are possible [and] effective” (Tilly, 1999). In strong autocratic states, activists rarely have significant prior experience (sometimes none) with bold protest frames that challenge the regime, and many also lack “traditions of ideological dissent” to draw on, since dictators are usually effective at wiping out ideological challengers. Finally, some studies have explained frames in terms of pre-existing “socio-historical contexts,” but the proponents of this research direction themselves admit that “the theoretical and empirical literature… on the relations between frames and their political and cultural contexts… remains thin” (Polletta & Ho, 2006; see also Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

Three currents within the social movement theory link the movementization of protests to pre-protest conditions. The first connects the breadth of protest mobilization to the pre-protest strength of formal and informal civic networks. McAdam and McCarthy are some of the many authors who call on the scholarship to pay more attention to “institutionalized relationships” as enablers of mobilization, and even go so far as to suggest that these “mobilizing structures” are an absolute “precondition” for the emergence of social movements (McAdam et al, 1996).
Although the theory was derived from the experience of democratic societies (McAdam, for instance, studied the role of black churches in the U.S. civil rights movement), some scholars have convincingly applied it to several cases of large-scale mobilization in autocracies: for instance Skocpol has famously highlighted the role of the clerical and bazaari networks in mobilizations preceding the 1979 Iranian revolution, and Ekiert and others have documented the role of the Solidarity networks in the 1989 Polish uprising (Ekiert & Kubik, 2001; Goodwin & Skocpol, 2000). Yet Poland and Iran were in many ways exceptional. Most autocratic states lack spaces for strong independent civil societies, and the “mobilizing structures” theory cannot explain how large-scale oppositional movements can take off in these kinds of states, including Tunisia and Syria in 2011 (Chomiak, 2011; Augustus Richard Norton, 2001).

A second explanation suggests that the breadth of mobilization is conditioned by the prior experience and strategic know-how of protest activists (Edwards & McCarthy, 2008). This argument cannot explain rapid movementization in most autocracies, since activists often lack opportunities for organizing and have few “protest repertoires” to draw on.

Third, SMT studies explain coordination among pockets of collective action with reference to the salience of particular pre-existing collective identities. Authors argue that individuals are more likely to join a movement if they perceive that it represents a social group with which they identify in some way (Devos et al, 2002; Gordijn et al, 2006), and if they feel that they can effect change through collective action (Polletta & Ho, 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). This explanation offers a compelling account of how mobilization might occur in authoritarian regimes that lack strong civil societies, because it suggests that identity, instead of concrete networks, can serve as a glue of collective action. The problem with the theory is that it is not framed comparatively: it does not explain under what conditions people come to identify with a
given type of group or cause and to believe that they can (and want) to affect change through collective action with members of that group.

### 1.3.2 Contingencies as causes of protest escalation

A second category of explanations argue that protest escalation cannot be predicted by pre-protest conditions, and is entirely contingent on events and interactions after the start of collective action.

Within this category, two literatures argue that protest demands are constructed iteratively through interactions between the protesters and elements of the state, disagreeing only on the specific mechanisms connecting the interactions and the demands (Staggenborg, 2011; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). One literature proposes that demands are shaped strategically – that they are strategic soundbites that protest leaders use to shape public opinion and to pressure the government (Polletta & Ho, 2006; McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). The second suggests that demands are shaped by emotions, such as anger or contempt towards the government for its various provocations; this theory suggests that claim-making can quickly spiral into very bold calls (such as calls for revolution) not because activists strategically plan it out this way but because their anger and outrage make them less risk averse (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013; Jasper, 2011; Pearlman, 2013; Goodwin & Jasper, 2006). 20 Both the “rational” and “emotional” micro-logics offer compelling insights in their own way, and they certainly can and have been successfully applied to autocratic settings, including the Arab uprisings (Pearlman, 2013). However, both explanations are incomplete. Most importantly, they do not explain under what conditions activists are driven by emotions and when by strategic
consideration – a question that is particularly glaring for cases that began in response to the same trigger and political opportunities (like protests across the Arab region in 2011) but varied considerably in their emotional content from the get-go.

Turning now to movementization, four key streams of literature propose that movements are constructed through contingencies in the process of protesting. One stream emphasizes the mobilizational role of movement entrepreneurs” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Smelser, 1962) – that collective identities are constructed in large part by charismatic, skillful, and strategic protest leaders (Polletta & Ho, 2006; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Smelser, 1962). The argument chimes with the experience of many movements in democracies, but has limited applicability to autocratic protests which often lack clear leadership structures. For example, many of the Arab uprisings in 2011 were leaderless – some even deliberately sought to remain decentralized to avoid infiltration and “decapitation” by the regime (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012; Durac, 2013; Khatib, 2012).

A second and related stream in this literature argues that protests are most likely to mobilize a broad base of supporters if either protest leaders or the activist rank-and-file generate “persuasive” frames – in the moment of protest – that resonate with large numbers of people (Benford & Snow, 2000; Polletta & Ho, 2006). for instance, frames that tap into “strong …emotions” about shared grievances (McAdam, 2004) or frames that “effective[ly] convey… the political impact” of the collective action (Koopmans & Duyvendak, 1995). As discussed earlier, frames offers a compelling framework for understanding demands, but the key question this literature does not address is why different frames stick in the first place. For instance, in the early stages of the Arab uprisings many observers assumed that the virulently oppositional frames used by Tunisian and later Egyptian revolutionaries would resonate and serve as a
“blueprint” for all Arab publics given their shared experience of living under authoritarianism (Lynch, 2012a), and yet this did not turn out to be the case: as I discuss more in subsequent chapters, Tunisia’s and Egypt’s “revolutionary” frames from the beginning struck a powerful and emotional chord with some Arab publics but not with others – and we lack a good explanation for why.

The last two literatures in this category suggest that mobilization and protest solidarities have less to do with the characteristics of the protesters themselves than with the regime’s response to protests. One literature identifies regime violence as a key cause of movementization. It argues that violence forges movements because it generates outrage and brings people together as victims of the state (Staggenborg, 2011; Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001; Nepstad & Smith, 2001), and, conversely, that “when authorities …are sympathetic to movement goals [mobilization is] more difficult …because supporters may feel that there is no need for collective action” (Staggenborg, 2011). In a journalistic sense, the connection between violence and mobilization is compelling: interviews with protesters often reveal that they joined demonstrations because the state had killed one of their close friends or relatives and they felt angry and compelled to seek vengeance. In a deeper social scientific sense, however, the argument is unsatisfying because violence usually does not “just happen” – it may well be an endogenous parameter, and if so there may be a deeper root cause for mobilization that the literature does not address.

The final explanation considers another regime strategy: deliberate efforts to divide the public and prevent movementization through selective cooptation – the classic “divide-and-conquer” approach (Acemoglu et al, 2004). The explanation is intuitively persuasive given the extensive evidence – from places as diverse as China (Perry, 2008; O’Brien, 2008) and Morocco (Cavatorta, 2007; Wegner & Pellicer, 2011) – for the nefarious effects of divide-and-rule on
collective action. But just as with the literature on regime violence, the problem with this explanation is that it does not consider the (possibly endogenous) origins of the divide-and-rule approach: in fact the biggest question it does not answer is why, if divide-and-rule is such an effective tool for countering mass mobilization, we don’t see more dictators using it consistently and successfully as soon as they face popular disturbances.

The existing approaches provide important foundations for building a theory of protest escalation in authoritarian regimes. For instance, to understand escalation of protest demands we can draw insights from “framing” studies, and to understand movementization turn to literatures on collective identities and government strategies for partial intuitions. That being said, as the above discussion makes clear, the theories by themselves are insufficient. Most were inspired by the experience of consolidated Western democracies, where the opportunities and motives for collective action differ from autocracies. Meanwhile, the explanations that can be applied to the authoritarian context leave many questions – partly because they draw on single case studies and do not generate comparative predictions (for a similar critique, see (Polletta & Ho, 2006)), and, relatedly because most do not bridge the macro and micro dynamics of protest and escalation in one integrated story. Many theories (for instance, the theories of regime types, mobilizing structures, authoritarian bargains, including even the literature on relative deprivation) paint the big comparative picture but pay little attention to the micro level; meanwhile literatures on the other extreme (for instance, theories of framing, emotions, collective identities, and solidarities) focus on important individual psychological drivers of demands or mobilization, but are largely silent on the larger root causes or context within which the micro dynamics take place (for a similar critique see Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).
1.4 AN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY OF PROTEST ESCALATION

In this section I outline a new comparative theory of protest escalation in autocracies. My main claims are that the nature of the relationship between the autocratic regime and its popular base before the protests shape the likelihood of protest escalation after a powerful exogenous shock, and that the two dimensions of escalation – intensification of demands and movementization of the collective action – are connected, and tend to move together. Unlike many existing theories, which take either a micro-level or a macro-level approach to the study of collective action, my explanation connects the two levels. It focuses on the subjective perspective of the regime’s popular constituency, the group with a collective “veto power” over mass rebellion, but shows how the individual-level mechanisms are shaped by macro-institutional dynamics, which can be measured and compared and used to predict variation across autocracies.

1.4.1 The actors

Contentious collective action is a complex social phenomenon, but in its simplest form it can be boiled down to an interaction between two sets of actors: the regime leadership, the focus of claims-making, and the regime’s popular base (RPB), the actual or potential claim makers (in later chapters, I will also bring in regime intermediaries, but here for simplicity I will only focus on the two main actors – the citizens and the regime leadership). In autocracies, regime leadership consists of either a president or a king, and a cadre of senior advisers, including selected security officers. The RPB is chosen by the regime and is composed of groups regime leadership believes to be vital for its long-term survival; its specific make-up can vary from
country to country, but in general it tends to incorporate large groups to provide autocrats with a critical mass of supporters – such as the poor, sizable ethnic or geographic groups, or popular professions such as farmers or government bureaucrats (Bueno de Mesquita et al, 2004). My reason for focusing on the RPB rather than the “mass public” in general is that the RPB is vital to the regime’s survival and its behavior in protests therefore holds the “veto power” over whether protests will mobilize a critical mass of supporters and whether their message will seriously threaten the regime. An RPB that readily mobilizes and escalates demands is capable of transforming low-key protests into rebellion, while an apathetic RPB is likely to ensure that the collective action remains low-key.

1.4.2 The argument

I suggest that the likelihood of protest escalation is predicted by a string of inter-related proximate, intermediate, and ultimate causal factors, all of which precede the trigger event and the beginning of collective action.

The proximate factors include three characteristics of the regime’s popular base (RPB) at time \( t_{-1} \), namely: 1) its political approval of the regime, 2) its vested material interest in the regime, and 3) its potential for broad-group solidarities. By political approval I mean the relative portion of the regime’s mass coalition that supports – or, at least, does not strongly oppose – the political hegemony of ruling autocratic system. Reliable popular approval ratings in autocracies are notoriously scarce, because the data is rarely collected and individuals often “falsify” their political preferences to avoid repression (Kuran, 1995; see also Wedeen, 1999), but three complementary indicators may paint a partial picture. One is a qualitative estimate of
the portion of the RPB that attaches prestige to leading regime institutions (such as the ruling hegemonic party, politburo, or court); another is the portion of the RPB that respects or (covertly) supports figures or organization that stand in opposition to the leading regime institutions; and a third is a quantitative estimate of RPB participation rates in national or local elections. The first two measures are straightforward: broader support for regime institutions and weaker support for oppositional entities signal stronger political approval of the state. The last measure is more uncertain but may be useful as a complement to the two qualitative measures. Although a growing literature argues that clientelism rather than politics drive participation in authoritarian elections (Magaloni, 2006), we know that expressive voting and electoral boycotts do take place even in “clientelistic” authoritarian electoral contexts (Blaydes, 2010) suggesting that the participation measure may at least partially capture political approval.

By “vested material interest” in the regime I mean individuals’ subjective perception that they derive more personal material benefits from the perpetuation of the existing ruling system than from its demise. The argument is not new: even though the concept has not been systematically tested, the idea that autocrats minimize the chances of popular rebellion when they give citizens economic buy-in and are vulnerable when they do not lies at the foundation of the theory of authoritarian bargains, and has been proposed by a range of empirical studies on autocratic maintenance. My main contribution lies in proposing an explicitly comparative framework and a new indicator which is closer to how people subjectively assess their economic interests/preferences. My indicator of vested interest is the portion of the RPB that subjectively attaches a higher value/prestige to the regime’s distributive goods, including state jobs and services, than to equivalent goods in the private sector. This “subjective” indicator stands in contrast with traditional “objective” measures such as those used in the literature on authoritarian
bargains, which assume individuals’ vested interest to be a function of the measurable volume and attractiveness of government handouts. For reasons I discuss shortly, the objective and subjective can diverge considerably – and Figure 1.2 illustrates the potential difference by plotting three hypothetical preference curves for an average individual in the RPB, with objective attractiveness of regime goods as the “causal” variable on the X-axis and vested interest in the regime as the outcome on the Y-axis. The prediction of the authoritarian bargains theory is captured by preference curve C: a 45-degree line indicating a one-to-one relationship between the objective attractiveness of regime goods and vested interest. By contrast my theory, which argues that the relationship between objective goods and vested interest is mediated by individuals’ subjective valuation of said goods, suggests that in different autocracies the average RPB member may have different preference curves (A, B, or C, for example) and that the same volume and attractiveness of regime goods – x – can therefore translate into different levels of vested interest depending on the preferences (y^a if on curve A, y^b if on curve B, etc).

Differences in the way the average member of the regime’s popular base values state goods can lead to differences in aggregate levels of usage (higher usage among the RPB that values more), however I suggest that the “valuation” and “usage” indicators are not interchangeable because individuals can use goods without valuing them and value goods without using them (for instance, if they temporarily don’t have access). The first part of the argument is based on the plausible assumption that people can use state goods for opportunistic as well as sincere reasons – and that a society full of opportunists, who use state goods as a temporary stand-in for preferable outside options, will have a much weaker overall material stake in the state than a society with predominantly sincere users, who treasure the same benefits. The second part of the argument is that a usage-based measure does not capture the preferences of people who do not
currently have access to state goods (such as the unemployed). The difference between my argument and the usage argument can be visualized, once again, in Figure 1.2.

**Figure 1.2 Hypothetical preference curves of mass coalition member.**

![Figure 1.2 Hypothetical preference curves of mass coalition member.](image)

Finally, by “potential for broad-group solidarities” at time $t_{-1}$ I mean something very similar to what Bayat terms “passive networks” of “imagined solidarities” among strangers based on their shared experience of an autocratic state (Bayat, 2010), what Arnsperger calls “empathy with…others, irrespective… of who those others are or whether one cares for them personally” (Arnsperger & Varoufakis, 2003), or “latent collective identity” (Mueller, 1994) built on shared values and experiences (Benford & Snow, 2000). The two key features of the concept are that the solidarities extend to large groups – potentially the regime’s entire mass base – which might be juxtaposed with small-group solidarities which bind only limited groups such as families or
parochial communities; and that they lie dormant but can be “activated” by powerful exogenous shocks and in situations of collective action. One good measure of the “potential for broad solidarities” would be the strength of large collective identities (such as class, profession, ideology, social values) relative to the strength of small-group interests (familial, parochial, etc), at time $t_{-1}$. The less the regime’s popular base identifies with small-group interests, the stronger its potential for broad solidarities.

Having defined the proximate causes of escalation, let’s turn to the mechanisms that connect the RPB’s political approval of the regime, vested economic interests, and potential for broad solidarities to the escalation of collective action. Broadly speaking, the causal argument (illustrated schematically in Figure 1.3) is two-fold: the RPB’s political approval and vested interests at $t_{-1}$ affect the propensity for the escalation of demands during $t_2$-$t_4$, while all three proximate causes the propensity for protest movementization at $t_2$-$t_4$ (so the two dimensions of escalation are partly linked).

**Figure 1.3 Proximate causes of protest escalation**

![Exogenous Trigger](image)
The connection between the two causal factors at $t_{-1}$ and the escalation of demands runs through three mechanisms, summarized in Figure 1.4. The first mechanism entails the RPB’s goals at the outset of the collective action at time $t_1$. Building on the insight of the framing literature, which notes that protests can start on the basis of different “frames,” I suggest that a major reason why protest demands follow different trajectories in different autocracies is that they start with different goals. The protest goals of the average RPB member at time $t_1$ affect subsequent escalation for two reasons. First, they determine the threshold of demands. More far-reaching goals mean higher thresholds (potentially even revolution) while more modest goals mean that there are limits to how far the majority of the RPB are willing to change about the status quo; even if both the high-threshold and low-threshold protests start out with similar demands, the former will have more “room” to escalate. Second, the nature of protest motives at $t_1$ can affect the chances of escalation through their emotional content. Once again, the social movement literature provides important, if only partial intuition. Building on studies which suggest that the presence of emotions is likely to lead protesters to adopt more challenging claims against their government, I predict that a regime constituency that is driven to protest by far-reaching goals is more likely to escalate demands than one with more modest goals because it is more likely to be driven by anger and frustration – emotions that sustain escalation. The reason why RPBs in different states can develop dissimilar protest goals in the first place comes down to differences in their pre-protest politics and vested interests, because they shape people’s stake in the system. Political disapproval is more likely to lead to a stronger desire for significant change to the status quo, and weak economic interest in the regime can make individuals less hesitant to jettison the status quo system, and vice versa.
Protesters’ initial goals (at $t_1$) can condition different trajectories of escalation (at $t_2$), independent of other intervening factors, but additional mechanisms - particularly those having to do with the interaction between the regime and RPB protesters after $t_1$ - can reinforce the initial trajectories. In fact, I suggest that the second mechanism through which the RPB’s pre-protest political approval and vested interest affect escalation of demands involves the regime’s response (at time $t_2$) to protesters’ initial protest claims (at $t_1$), particularly the regime’s balance of carrots (economic inducements) and sticks (hard repression) at $t_2$. Building on (Lichbach, 1987), (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001) and others, I suggest that a relatively more violent regime response, especially when a powerful exogenous shock temporarily weakens the regime and weakens citizens’ fear of regime repression, increases the likelihood of escalation: when the autocrat can no longer effectively cow citizens into silence, the violence only serves to stoke anger – an emotion that emboldens demands. The key question that existing studies do not convincingly explain is why regimes choose different levels of violence. I suggest that the regime’s strategy itself is a “best response” to the politics and economic preferences of its
popular base and to their initial protest demands at time $t_1$, for two reasons. First, regime leaders are more likely to feel threatened when their popular base has a history of antagonistic politics, because protesters with such a background are more likely to have ambitious protest demands – and feel like they need to act forcefully to prevent escalation; conversely, when the RPB is more approving regime leaders are less likely to resort to violence because they will feel less cornered and in less need of coercion. The second reason has to do with the RPB’s economic preferences towards state goods. I suggest that when the regime’s popular base attaches little value to the regime’s distributive handouts, the regime has fewer levers to “buy off” RPB protesters with economic concessions; this limits the regime’s options for handling the unrest by non-violent means and may leave a violent response as the only politically palatable option. By mirror logic, when the regime’s base values state goods and feels economically invested, regime leaders have less need for coercion because they will be able to address the protesters’ modest demands with limited distributive concessions.

A third and related channel through which the two pre-protest factors affect protest escalation involves protesters’ response to the government’s use of violence at $t_2$. Once again, building on the existing literature on collective action and emotions, I suggest that the emotions stirred by government provocations among the regime’s popular base will affect the speed, if not the likelihood, of escalation: that, all things equal, a more emotional response will lead protesters to raise their demands more quickly. My major departure from the existing literature is in arguing that the regime’s popular base does not automatically respond emotionally to violence, but that in fact the “emotional content” of the reaction is systematically related to the constituency’s pre-protest relationship with the state. The more the RPB disapproves of the regime politically and economically, the more likely it is to start its protests on an angry and emotional note and to
react emotionally to provocations – and to provoke more regime violence in response, setting off a vicious action-reaction cycle. Conversely, the more invested the RPB in the regime politically and economically, the more likely it is to overlook or negotiate around confrontational, even violent, situations and to prevent the cycle of escalation.

The prediction I made earlier was that the likelihood of protest movementization during the window between $t_2$-$t_4$ is shaped, directly or indirectly, by the RPB’s initial protest demands at $t_1$ (and, ultimately, by pre-protest political approval and vested interests) and potential for broad solidarities at $t_{-1}$. Since this causal story skips a few time periods, let me step back briefly to explain the three main mechanisms (summarized schematically in Figure 1.5) that connect dots.

**Figure 1.5 Causal model for movementization of protests**

![Causal model diagram]

The first mechanism involves the basis of protest organization/mobilization at the outset of the collective action (time $t_1$). The intuition for this mechanism is suggested by studies of social movements which note that the nature of collective solidarities matters for mobilization. Pushing
further on this insight, I suggest that some types of solidarities allow for broader and more
coordinated mobilization than others, and, in particular, that RPB protesters who mobilize on the
basis of non-exclusive identities such as shared values or experiences or membership in very
large groups (for instance, the lower-income class) are significantly more likely to mobilize
broad coordinated movements than protesters who organize on the basis of narrow exclusive
interests, such as a family or parish. The logic behind this proposition is simple: protests
organized on the bases of large and non-exclusive solidarities are less divisive than those that
mobilize along exclusive small-group identities, and they are therefore more likely to resonate
with a much larger pool of people and to ensure protest cohesion. Why do regime constituents in
some regimes organize around broad inclusive collective identities while those in other
autocracies around narrow exclusive ones, at the time of collective action? Existing social
movement literature does not explore this question in a systematic comparative way, especially
in autocracies. My answer is that the two proximate determinants of protesters’ dominant
solidarities at $t_1$ are the potential for broad solidarities at $t_{-1}$ and the nature of protesters’ initial
goals at $t_1$. The first is self-explanatory: a regime constituency is more likely to mobilize on the
basis of broad solidarities if it had strong potential for broad solidarities before protests began.
The second is important for the ability of protest hotspots to congeal into a cohesive movement
because protest goals delimit participants’ incentives to reach out to a broad range of other
people as allies-in-protest. Protesters who take to the street to push for far-reaching political
change are more likely to strive to form a broad alliance so that it can be sufficiently strong to
challenge the powerbrokers, than protesters who are motivated by more limited goals such as
economic spoils.
The second mechanism runs through the nature of the regime’s response (at time $t_2$) to protests. While all autocrats seek to divide protesters to prevent the growth of broad oppositional movements, their strategies can differ: some autocrats strive to divide protesters by means of force, while others deploy economic incentives to “divide and conquer” their challengers. The path that the regime ultimately takes has vital implications for movementization (which I discuss shortly), yet the choice is not systematically studied by existing studies. I suggest that the two approaches – violence and economic divide-and-rule – are in fact substitutes, and shaped by the initial basis of protesters’ organization/solidarities and by their initial demands, at $t_1$. Autocrats are more likely to unleash violence when the collective action their constituency engages in is mobilized around broad inclusive interests and aims for systemic political change – because it is politically threatening to the regime and because its non-economic goals undermine the regime’s ability to “buy off” the protesters with non-violent, material concessions. By contrast, divide-and-conquer is the preferred approach when the regime’s base mobilizes around limited economic goals and small-group solidarities, because when protests take this form the regime does not need to use violence: it can satisfy protesters with minor distributive concessions, and it can further protect itself from the mobilization of a threatening movement by exploiting the protesters’ small-group solidarities to divide them further.

The third channel through which the RPB’s initial protest goals and solidarities can affect movementization relates to the protesters’ response (at $t_3$) to government attempts to divide them. Here the Social Movements Theory literature provides several useful insights. First, as already discussed, we know that broad and swift mobilization is more likely when it is driven by explosive emotions, particularly anger about shared grievances (McAdam, 2004). What kind of government behavior provokes outrage? Violence. As Goodwin and others have shown, state
violence forges collective movements because brings people together through their shared victimhood and rage at the state (Goodwin & Pfaff, 2001). Overall, therefore, the prediction is that a relatively more violent regime strategy increases the likelihood of movementization because it raises negative emotions, while a strategy based on the manipulation of distributive goods à la divide-and-conquer is less likely to lead to broad and coordinated collective action because, even if it causes some resentment among groups who miss out on the distributive spoils, it would not provoke the same level of visceral emotional outrage as outright slaughter.

At the beginning of the section I noted that protest escalation has proximate, intermediate, and ultimate causes. If the proximate causes are the popular constituency’s political approval of the state, its vested interests, and its potential for broad solidarities, the intermediate cause – which shapes the proximate factors – is another quality of the regime’s popular base, which in studies of social psychology and social movement literatures has been called “affect.” Although most research has looked at citizen affect towards governments in advanced democracies (as citizens) or towards economic firms (as consumers), many of the general insights from the literature can be applied to study and make predictions about affect among mass constituencies towards their authoritarian regimes.

In psychological literature, affect is used to denote a long-term positive or negative emotion (like happiness and confidence or, conversely, anger and fear) (J. Lerner & Keltner, 2001) that can be experienced towards people or large impersonal organizations. Affect towards the authoritarian regime, just like affect towards a company or brand, can be thought of as a vector of long-term emotions, where “positive affect” connotes the constituency’s positive long-term emotional predisposition towards the state (including feelings of satisfaction, pride, prestige),
while “negative affect” connotes shades of long-term emotional alienation (including feelings of anger, disgust, outrage). Although in some ways affect sounds like political approval of the regime, it is in fact more diffuse and in some ways more subconscious: while political support or opposition to the regime are deliberate political stances, affect can be felt by individuals without a clear-cut political agenda and connotes merely a general feeling or association with the state.

Research in social psychology shows that an individual’s affect towards another entity is shaped by the extent to which that entity satisfies the individual’s human need to be heard, to be respected, and to have some agency over her life – attributes that are important to people because they are integral to human sense of self-worth (Winick, 1996; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Consistently unpleasant, demeaning experiences such as being ignored or publicly humiliated – or reports of similar disrespectful treatment, from others – channel negative emotions and over time sculpt a negative affective frame, while consistently respectful interactions have the opposite effect. Although these basic needs for being heard and respected are often conflated with individuals’ yearning for political freedoms, I suggest that the two are distinct: the second is about having the right to a free and fair political process as a political agent, while the first is about being acknowledged and treated with dignity as a human being.

Research suggests that individuals can willingly accept a generally unfree (political) process if, within the limits of that system, they feel they have some personal agency, voice and dignity. For instance, studies in legal psychology found that litigants who felt that the tribunal had really listened to them and taken seriously their story felt more satisfied with the court ruling and with the integrity of the court system in general, even when the result was an adverse one (Winick, 1996). Similarly, experiments in behavioral economics show that people have, ceteris paribus, more positive views of political bodies when they are invited to participate in some way in the
decision-making process (Olken, 2010). I suggest that citizens form their affective or reputational “map” of an authoritarian regime on the basis of similar factors: on whether, during their everyday interactions with regime intermediaries, they feel that the system consistently leaves them spaces for voice and agency and minimally respects their human dignity. I also suggest that affect, like reputation, is sticky because people form their views and associations based on accumulated experiences: once they come to perceive their state in a negative light their cynicism and mistrust of the system will take time to change, even when the state makes an effort to atone for past wrongs.

What does affect have to do with protest escalation in authoritarian regimes? Evidence from experimental psychology and behavioral economics – although not specific to the context of mass protests – provides strong intuitions. It suggests that affect should have a negative causal effect on the chances of escalation, because it is positively correlated with what would be the equivalent of support for the state and economic vested interest, and a negative effect on generalized solidarities.

The intuition for a positive causal connection between an individual’s affect and politics towards the state is provided by marketing and legal psychology studies. This literature shows that when people have consistently unpleasant experiences with specific public organizations and feel deprived of voice and control over important decisions affecting their lives, they most likely to take a more oppositional stance towards those institutions - and, conversely, that when people feel heard and able to negotiate situations that matter to them they become more accepting of those organizations and develop stronger political buy-in (Bienen & Gersovitz, 1986; Ronner & Winick, 2000). The implication for the context at hand would be that autocratic regimes that deprive citizens of voice and that generate negative affect are more likely to strong political
disapproval among their constituents. Of course autocrats are not like firms, and the key
difference between marketing situations and an autocratic system is that individuals often cannot
“exit” from an autocracy they dislike (change the political order) the way shoppers can switch to
a new brand of shoes. Arguably, the lack of an exit option in autocracies only amplifies the effect
of affect on political approval: without the “exit” option, individuals who already have negative
affective feelings towards the state are forced to continue living under it and to accumulate the
negative experiences, which can only aggravate their political cynicism.

The intuition for a positive causal link between individuals’ affect and valuation of the
regime’s distributive goods (and, by extension, material vested interest in the state) comes from
new experimental findings in behavioral economics and marketing psychology, which suggest
that cognitive factors play a prime role in consumer choice and brand loyalty, independently of
the objective qualities of the goods in question. These studies highlight three cognitive factors.
One is the manner in which a service is rendered: “the exact same [goods],” notes one study,
“can be desired or avoided, depending on …presentation” (Ariely et al, 2006), and customers
respond most positively to personalization of services and to empathetic and responsive
treatment by sales staff (Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001; Goldsmith, 1999; Shemwell et al, 1998).
Another factor is what might be called participation: experiments find that customers value
services more when they partake in “identifying or building solutions to their own needs”
(Salvador et al, 2009). A final factor is customers’ subjective beliefs about the company’s
reputation: their “feelings [about] the brand” (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998) and about prior
experiences dealing with the company – for instance, “anger or disgust… induced by a prior,
irrelevant situation” (Lerner et al, 2004; Han et al, 2007). I suggest that an analogous
mechanism applies to autocrats who, like firms, seek to “sell” their goods to citizens in order to
give the latter a vested interest in the state’s survival. If we think of the authoritarian state as the firm and of the regime’s popular base as the consumers, the insights here suggest that the exact same bundle of state goods can appear more valuable to citizen-consumers with positive affect towards the regime or the authoritarian “brand,” than to citizens with negative affect. The effect of affect on economic preferences can be visualized in the previously discussed Figure 1.2: controlling for an individual’s socio-economic status, a change in affect from negative to positive can “shift up” an individual’s preference curve from curve “A” to curve “B” (or anywhere in between) and increase the individual’s perceived vested interest in the state (irrespective of the objective volume or quality of state goods that he receives), and vice versa.36

Finally, the insight that affect may shape the potential for broad / generalized solidarities comes from several literatures. One strand of literature suggests a direct link: it argues that shared negative experiences of life under the dictatorship can create either real or potential solidarities among citizens, including the regime’s popular base, long before protests begin. Scholars have shown this dynamic at play with the underground Solidarność movement in Poland which took shape over the course of a decade prior to the famous 1989 protests (Ekiert & Kubik, 2001),37 and in the case of the “alienated constituencies” that later became the main drivers of Iran’s and Egypt’s revolutions (Bayat, 2007; Kurzman, 1996).38 In addition to this direct connection, I suggest that there is also an indirect causal effect through the RPB’s vested material interest in the state (which, as discussed earlier, is also shaped by affect). When regime constituents value state goods, autocrats can exploit this preference to sow divisions among social groups, and especially within its politically-pivotal popular base. The state divides by forcing members of its mass base to compete for the coveted spoils in a zero-sum-style game – the classic divide-and-rule approach.39 Contrary to dominant studies of divide-and-rule under
autocracy, which usually assume that autocrats (given sufficient income) are always able to sow divisions by cleverly manipulating distributive resources, I argue that this is not necessarily the case and that in fact autocrats’ ability to break their constituents’ potential for broad solidarities depends on the nature of constituents’ affect towards the regime and valuation of regime goods.

If the intermediate cause of protest escalation is affect, the **ultimate cause** which shapes differences in affect across autocratic societies is the **nature of institutions** that autocrats nurture since state-building, at a time preceding \( t_{-1} \), which we can call \( t_{-2} \). What do I mean by institutions? There is certainly no shortage of typologies describing modalities of authoritarian rule in comparative politics literature. Regimes have been classified along various spectra - communist versus free-market, decentralized versus centralized, republican versus monarchical, clientelist versus Weberian-bureaucratic, to name but a few. These categories provide helpful starting points for the purposes of this dissertation, but none are ideal. Some typologies are observational rather than analytical-causal: for instance, as discussed earlier, the typology distinguishing between monarchical and republican dictatorships makes an important empirical observation that on the whole modern monarchies appear to be more “immune” to uprisings, but does not make a convincing argument about why this might be the case. Other typologies are not ideal because they focus on features that do not vary significantly across dictatorships. For example, the classifications of modern autocracies by their degree of decentralization, their Weberian-bureaucratic discipline, or their patron-clientelism are not always helpful for capturing meaningful real-world variation because all modern illiberal regimes tend to centralize power, and all breed bureaucratic corruption and clientelism in some form – even hard-core Communist-Leninist regimes that were once thought to be closest to the Weberian ideal. This is not to say
that centralization and clientelism are irrelevant to understanding affect, but as I describe below the relevant distinction may be their form rather than their degree.

A new typology is necessary to understand affect and a regime’s relationship with its constituency, and I suggest that the most appropriate typology captures one dimension in particular: the extent to which a regime institutionalizes citizen bargaining – and therefore agency and voice – into the fabric of its rule. Under this typology, autocracies can fall on a spectrum between two extremes: a Top-Down (TD) model which seeks to give decision-makers maximal autonomy from grassroots input and hence gives citizens no institutionalized mechanisms for bargaining in any sphere of public policy, and the Institutionalized Bargaining (IB) model which conditions various aspects of local governance, especially (but not exclusively) distributive decisions, on a quid-pro-quo with its constituent base.

The Top-Down (TD) model, as the name suggests, is designed to give the state maximal control over all aspects of policy and implementation. Some may succeed in this endeavor while others may fail due to lack of capacity, but the key feature of TD regimes is that they attempt to subordinate society to their directives and to suppress input from the mass public, including the regime’s popular coalition, so as to retain full control. Such institutional designs were adopted by a range of populist, developmentalist, and socialist-leaning autocracies, including – to pick the most vivid examples – pre-2011 Baathist Syria, Baath-era Iraq, 1953-1970s Egypt, Shah’s Iran, Mao’s China, and the former Soviet Union and Communist states of Eastern Europe. Although many of these states coupled their drive towards maximal control with a populist ideology or rhetoric, which conveniently awarded the state the “leading role” in advancing policy in the name of progress and development and progress, ideology was not the “cause” of these
institutions but, as I discuss in Chapter 2, an endogenous feature that originated from the same root as the institutions themselves (more on the roots of institutions, shortly).

The TD type resembles but is distinct from several existing state typologies. For instance, it closely resembles the “autonomous state” described by Przeworski and others, where leaders steer policy from the top and “insulate [themselves] from particularistic individual [and] societal pressures” (Przeworski & Limongi, 1993). Yet for my study, the TD model is more useful for analytical as well as empirical reasons. The concept of “state autonomy,” as defined in the literature, mixes rulers’ desire for autonomy, the independent variable of interest to this study, and strong bureaucratic capacity to actually maintain true autonomy (Amsden, 1990; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993), an analytically distinct quality that I am not exploring here (and keeping constant in my empirical analyses). The TD model, which focuses strictly on rulers’ desire for autonomy, zeroes in on the dimension of interest. Another type of state that may superficially resemble the TD is the authoritarian populist or revolutionary republic (Conniff, 2012; Hudson, 1977) (many studies, for instance those on the Arab world, use the terms “populist” and “revolutionary” interchangeably since in that region most populist regimes came to power by overthrowing monarchies and becoming republics, but the terms need not be interchangeable). While some examples of TD states that I noted earlier – including Baathist Syria and Iraq, Mao’s China, and Communist states of Eastern Europe – suggest that historically many autocracies that sought autonomy were indeed revolutionary republics, I resist the terminology because analytically there is no reason why TD states must be republics. In fact, several examples of modern TD states are monarchies, including Iran under Shah Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979) (Farazmand, 2001).
At the other end of the spectrum are autocracies that fit a model I call Institutionalized-Bargaining (IB). The IB state, like all modern autocracies, is also highly centralized, but does not seek autonomy or to impose policies on its mass constituency from the top down. It is a system where the state retains ultimate control over national strategic decisions and resources but, as the name suggests, where citizens have institutionalized channels for bargaining with the state – to use their own “smarts” to “win” various goods and concessions from the state – particularly in non-strategic matters such as local distributive politics and administration. (As I will discuss later, the fact that IB autocracies permit bargaining is not necessarily a sign of weakness, for they can shape the rules of the quid-pro-quo process and leverage it to obtain desired political behavior from their constituent base). The give-and-take can be formal or informal, but it is institutionalized in the sense that that is intentionally built and manipulated by the regime. Historically, IB design has been widely adopted by post-World War autocracies, including postcolonial Jordan, Morocco, post-1960s Yemen Arab Republic, and Mexico during the late PRI period (1970s-2000).

The IB state resembles but is distinct from several existing typologies. It resembles the Competitive Authoritarian regime type (Levitsky & Way, 2002), where the public has meaningful mechanisms for bargaining with the regime and its intermediaries over limited aspects of local policy and representation through the means of competitive elections. Although many modern IB states are CA because in competitive autocracies the vote gives individuals a meaningful bargaining chip in negotiations with state officials (non-competitive elections do not give voters bargaining power because they are much more controlled by the state and votes are less meaningful), the IB-state category is broader than CA because the bargaining can be over something other than votes, such as participation in oppositional political activity such as
opposition parties or street protests. For example, I show in Chapter 2 that Jordan was an IB state for two decades before it (re)introduced competitive elections in 1989. There are also reasons why I chose “IB” over another popular label in the literature, “clientelist autocracy.” The main reason is that clientelism and corruption is not exclusive to IB (or CA) states: as mentioned earlier, all illiberal regimes have it, including Top-Down systems. The second reason is that by labeling a regime “clientelist” we reduce its governance to a single dimension which does not capture the full spectrum of interaction between the state and the mass base. “Institutionalized Bargaining” is more meaningful because, just like the “Top Down” label, it is not sector-specific and directly speaks to the key aspect of governance that affects the quality of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled.

Top-Down and Institutionalized-Bargaining institutions lead to different levels of affect among the regime’s popular base because they condition dissimilar forms of everyday governance on the ground. Top-Down institutions, even though they permit states to pursue a more programmatic – even developmentalist – approach to policy and (ceteris paribus) to provide better for their citizens materially than IB systems, lead to a predominantly negative affect, for two reasons. First, by seeking to control policy from the top, they set up a very unequal relationship between the rulers and the ruled, depriving the mass public including the RPB of agency and voice – qualities that are integral to human sense of self-worth and central predictors of affect. Second, building on insights by North and Przeworski about the connection between state autonomy and abuse of power (North, 1990; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993), I suggest that TD regimes, by striving to place themselves above public scrutiny, open wide opportunities for predation, including extortion and heavy-handed forms of control that can hurt the lower-income groups and alienate the regime’s mass coalition if it includes those groups. It
is not my intention to argue that the predatory governance practices are intentionally encouraged by the regime leadership; to the contrary, I suggest that many may be endogenous by-products of the incentives embedded within the TD institutional system – and run against the wishes of the top elites who stand to lose from the subsequent political fallout.

Institutionalized-Bargaining systems stand a much better chance of nurturing positive (or at least non-negative) affect among the regime’s constituent base for reasons that mirror the causes of negative affect in TD systems. First, even though IB systems centralize power and set the major political “rules of the game,” their incorporation of rigorous citizen-state bargaining over local matters that directly affect the lives of their constituent base such as low-level distributive decisions, political promotions, and dispensation of local justice, gives the latter a measure of ownership and sense of voice and agency. Given my discussion earlier about the importance of voice and agency to human self-worth, I suggest that the low-key empowerment will boost affect and can, up to a point, even outweigh frustrations with the government including those related to the generosity of economic distribution and limitations on political freedoms. Second, by making the mass constituency’s voice a deciding factor in certain local decision-making processes, IB institutions generate stronger incentives than TD regimes for state agents to court the regime’s mass constituency and to avoid predatory behavior that could unduly antagonize it. For this reason, I suggest that corruption and repression in IB states are less likely to take the same harsh form as in TD autocracies: instead of extortion and heavy-handed coercion, they are more likely to take the shape of cost-free patronage and subtle incentives-based types of control. Of course, the responsiveness and “customer service” aspects of IB systems should not be overstated; the spaces for bargaining can be relatively limited even in consolidated democracies, the model of responsiveness, let alone in centralized autocratic states. My point here, however, is that in
relative terms and in comparison to the TD alternative, IB systems produce more citizen-friendly governance and that this is enough to make a big difference to the RPB’s relationship with the regime.

The foregoing discussion suggests several predictions regarding the effects of institutions on protest escalation. It predicts that autocracies with Top-Down systems should have high potential for protest escalation following large exogenous shocks, because their attempts to exclude citizen voices and their antagonizing forms of governance should generate low affect, low political approval, low vested economic interest (curve “A” on graph in Figure 1.2), and higher likelihood of broad solidarities. The prediction is the opposite for autocracies with Institutionalized-Bargaining rules. These should have a lower potential for protest escalation because their spaces for citizen voice and bargaining and less antagonizing local governance should generate higher affect, higher political approval, higher vested interest (curve “B” in Figure 1.2), and lower likelihood of broad solidarities among the regime’s politically-pivotal mass base. Figure 1.6 presents a visual summary of the predictions - including the sequencing of proximate, intermediate, and ultimate causal factors, and the partial connection between the two dimensions of the dependent variable.
Figure 1.6 Full causal model with proximate, intermediate, and ultimate predictors of protest escalation.
1.4.3 Origins of institutions

The last discussion prompts a logical question: if IB institutions offer autocrats better protection against rebellion from the ranks of their own popular base, why don’t all dictators build them?

How is it that different rulers end up with different institutional models, including TD? Existing literature agrees that institutions are partly shaped by intra-elite relations at the time of state-building, although few studies offer a systematic theory that connects specific elite relations to specific institutional outcomes. Waldner’s path-breaking work on late development suggests a close connection between the intensity of elite conflict and institutions constructed at state-building (Waldner, 1999), although since Waldner only examines cases that in my schema would fit the TD autocratic type (including Syria, which I examine in depth in later chapters), his insights do not speak to the bigger comparative question about the origins of TD and IB institutional models. Other studies note that different postcolonial autocratic regimes appeared to have different policies towards pre-existing domestic elites – sometimes co-opting them, and sometimes destroying them (Weinbaum, 1980; see also Herbst, 2000) – but do not systematically explain why.

Expanding on these insights, I suggest that the best way to think about the origins of TD or IB institutions is as a function of the threats that rulers face from competing political elites at the time of state-building, before they consolidate their monopoly on force and power over society through state-building ($t_{-2}$). If the old elites are wealthy and/or well-armed, they can unseat the fledgling regime in a coup or by stirring a popular revolt. I suggest that state-builders construct different institutions as a “best response” to these twin economic and military threats from old elites. Rulers construct Top-Down institutions when they have a need and an opportunity to
crush pre-existing elites, and they construct Institutionalized-Bargaining institutions when they find it beneficial to coopt their political rivals instead of crushing them. The “crushing” strategy is necessary - and possible - when pre-existing elites are economically powerful but militarily weak: their wealth (and therefore ability to build a militia or broad support to displace the fledgling regime) makes them an existential threat, but their relative military weakness at the time of state-building gives state-builders a temporary opportunity to destroy them preemptively. The choice to crush the old elites, in turn, entails Top-Down institutions for one simple reason: the new regime’s paranoia that, as a result of its violent beginnings, it may face a resurgence of a hostile old-elite class and a revolt by the latter’s former mass supporters. Under these conditions, a top-down approach seems like an attractive option because it frees the regime from having to concede anything to its former competitors, and allows the regime to create a centralized programmatic distributive system capable of serving and wooing a broad mass coalition.47

Under what conditions do state-builders choose to coopt old elites? I suggest that they pursue this strategy either out of necessity, when pre-existing elites are already militarily strong and therefore cannot be crushed, or out of expediency, when their rivals are both militarily and economically weak and when incorporation is both politically non-threatening and less costly than destruction. The strategy of cooptation goes hand in hand with IB institutions for two reasons. First, because the cooptation strategy commits the ruling elites to govern partly through pre-existing structures, it forces the regime to negotiate some governance matters with the old elites and deprives it of the ability to impose policy from the top. Second, the coopting regime has strong incentives to extend bargaining powers not only to intermediary elites, but also to its non-elite popular base, in order to keep the former in check. By endowing the old elites with bargaining powers the regime risks creating rival centers of power that could threaten its own
position, and its best strategy for avoiding this scenario without undermining the bargaining framework is to manipulate the terms of bargaining process in a way that dilutes the intermediaries’ power and simultaneously fortifies the regime. From the autocrat’s perspective, the optimal approach here is to force the coopted elites to compete for their seats at the regime’s bargaining table based on their ability to successfully negotiate the loyalty of a maximally large portion of the regime’s popular base. This challenging task both keeps the elites in check and simultaneously straddles them with responsibility for an outcome that benefits the regime. As a result of these incentives the popular base is given agency, voice, and leverage over the regimes’ intermediary elites – the hallmark of an IB regime that I described earlier.

Over time rulers can slowly reorient their approach (examples of partial transitions from TD to IB systems include Indonesia from mid-1980s to 2000 (Robison, 1988), Egypt from 1970s through 2000s (Moench, 1988), Mexico after the 1930s under the PRI (Hamilton, 1975), and China after Mao). However, in most cases, the initially chosen institutions are “sticky” partly because they are endogenous to the socio-political context that produced them and partly because of the sheer difficulty of the switch. Figure 1.7 visually summarizes the mechanisms that lead state-builders to adopt TD and IB institutions, in the form of a stylized game tree.
Figure 1.7 Origins of Top-Down and Institutionalized Bargaining-based institutions

**Threats and opportunities at State-building**
- Military power of old elites
- Economic power of old elites
  - High
  - Low

**State-builders’ response**
- State-builders’ strategy towards old elites
  - High: COOPT → INSTITUTIONALIZED BARGAINING
  - Low: COOPT → INSTITUTIONALIZED BARGAINING

- High: COOPT → INSTITUTIONALIZED BARGAINING
- High: CRUSH → TOP-DOWN
- Low: COOPT → INSTITUTIONALIZED BARGAINING

At time $t_{-3}$, $t_{-2}$, and $t$.
A detailed controlled comparison of Syria and Jordan presents an excellent medium for illustrating the empirical implications of my theoretical claims about the effects of institutions on protest escalation, for several reasons. First, the two neighboring Arab states are both autocracies (in both the broad and narrow senses of the term), that share a remarkable range of structural characteristics such as income (both were resource-poor middle-income in 2010), location in the same geographic region, and linguistic and cultural affinities with each other and with Tunisia, whose revolution triggered their protests - which permits a controlled comparison. (To control for the countries’ difference in size (on the eve of 2011, Syria’s population was approximately 20 million while Jordan’s 6.1 million), Chapter 6 compares two subnational regions in Syria and Jordan which have identical populations.) Second, the countries differ in their institutional legacies – the independent variable in this study – because at the time of state-building in the early 1960s, Syrian and Jordanian rulers constructed institutions close to the opposite ends of the TD-IB spectrum: Syria - a distinctly Top-Down approach, Jordan - a classic Institutionalized-Bargaining system. Third, both countries saw protests in 2011 in response to a common exogenous shock, Tunisia’s uprising – a fortuitous feature, which makes it possible to hold constant the power and timing of the trigger event. Finally, Syria and Jordan make for an interesting comparison because their protest paths quickly diverged in a way that, at the time, “surprised” many long-time observers (Gelvin, 2012): Syria’s protests escalated within days and weeks into a powerful national opposition movement bent on unseating the ruling regime, while Jordan’s protests remained relatively tame and divided. The trajectories surprised observers partly because Jordan had scored higher on many standard predictors of collective action,
including the objective level of material grievances (see Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion) and strength of pre-existing “mobilizing structures” (see Chapter 4); in addition to everything else, Jordan’s regime had more questionable bases of legitimacy, as a younger and more “artificial” state than Syria, with a less popular leader at the helm on the eve of 2011.55

My controlled empirical comparison of Syria and Jordan in chapters 2 through 5 lends support to the basic theoretical insights presented in this chapter. The comparison focuses on both countries before the 2011 uprisings begin, and concludes with a close look at the early stages of protests from January through April of 2011.56 Using rare micro-data, opinion surveys, and qualitative interviews from both countries, I show that well before 2011 the largest and most politically pivotal Syrian constituencies scored significantly higher than their Jordanian counterparts on the predictors of escalation that I had outlined earlier, suggesting that the countries’ different protest paths were (at least partly) foreseeable before 2011. Syrian constituencies had consistently lower levels of affect towards the state than their Jordanian counterparts, as well as significantly lower levels of political support and material interest, and higher generalized trust and solidarities. I show that these characteristics were not coincidental but systematically shaped by the nature of the countries’ ruling institutions and governance.

1.6 SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

This study is based on a range of original empirical research conducted in Syria and Jordan over the course of two years during 2009-2011, and follow up in 2012-2014. The research draws, above all, on interviews and informal conversations with almost 370 individuals, conducted in
Arabic, in local dialects. The interviewees included a range of national and local figures –
demonstrators, political party and labor activists, bureaucrats, mayors, parliamentarians,
ministers, journalists, academics, small and large entrepreneurs, communal leaders, rural tribe
members, and even members of the security services (mukhabarat). While a sizeable portion of
the interviews were completed in Damascus and Amman, in ministry offices or official
designated institutions, many were conducted in rural districts and villages far from the capitals,
in people’s homes. About a quarter of my interviewees agreed to talk to me on record; others,
especially many of my Syrian interlocutors, asked for complete confidentiality or asked me not
to attribute certain sensitive comments. Although none of the questions I asked would have
incriminated my interlocutors with a serious offense, in Syria the visceral fear of the
authoritarian regime was so high that during 2009-2010 discussion about any aspect of politics –
national or local, good or bad – was sensitive. Jordanian interviewees were less cautious, and the
majority of interviewees who requested anonymity were officials who over the course of the
interview had disclosed compromising information about their corrupt practices and backdoor
dealings with the mukhabarat. During the winter, spring, and summer of 2011 I regularly
observed and participated in the Arab-Spring related protests in Jordan, both inside and outside
the capital. Unfortunately, due to the security risks, I was unable to do the same in Syria and my
evidence on Syria’s demonstrations comes from interviews with participants and close observers,
as well as media and other secondary sources.

To complement the rich original qualitative material, I also rely on numerous quantitative
data. One category of sources I rely on a great deal throughout the dissertation are rare
government data I collected from Jordanian and Syrian ministries of Health, Municipalities,
Finance, Labor, Social Affairs, and Trade, which include health infrastructure and labor
statistics, original municipal budget data, voter statistics, original census data, and household income and expenditure surveys. Another key source is time-series individual-level survey data, collected in Syria and Jordan during 2009-12 by Gallup, and original survey data that I collected in Jordan in early 2011 (I attached questions to a larger existing survey). I also rely extensively on analyses of Arabic-language press and printed government materials, and a variety of historical sources and unique maps of the region from the Ottoman and colonial periods. A systematic compilation of statistics on protest locations, demands, and participant numbers in select parts of Syria and Jordan was collected from a broad scraping of local and regional Arabic-language media reports from the first 4 months of the uprisings.

As many have noted before me (Blaydes, 2010), obtaining data in strong authoritarian regimes such as Syria and Jordan – especially quantitative government statistics – is extremely difficult. My ability to access data owed partly to my fluency in local Arabic dialects, my shameless persistence with repeated visits to ministries, and a fair amount of luck. By the end of my research stays, ministry staff knew me, and at several directorates where I was a particularly frequent visitor I was even given a small desk to leaf through dusty folders and transcribe data tables. I was extremely lucky to have completed all of my quantitative data collection in Syria a month before the uprising began, at which point access became all but impossible for researchers. Since, in addition to access, a key concern with data from authoritarian regimes is its reliability, I devote a section of the Appendix to a discussion of the trustworthiness of the various statistics used throughout the project.
1.7 PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is organized as follows. Chapters 2-5 address the pre-protest period. Chapter 2 focuses on the historical periods $t_{-3}$ and $t_{-2}$. It introduces the two central cases of this study, post-1960s Syria and Jordan, the nature of their popular coalitions, and the design their ruling institutions as intended by their respective state-builders. I argue that while both autocracies centralized power and built their rule on similar rural mass constituencies, they opted for different institutional arrangements: Syria for one that closely resembled the Top-Down “ideal type,” and Jordan for the Institutionalized-Bargaining model – arrangements that both regimes retained through the beginning of popular unrest in early 2011, the endpoint of my empirical analysis. I detail the defining features of each distinct institutional arrangement, and show that they each originated out of the particular combination of threats and opportunities regime leaders faced at the time of state-building.

Chapter 3 uses the cases of Syria and Jordan to illustrate my theoretical insights in Chapter 1 that contrasting institutional designs can condition important differences in governance and, correspondingly, in state-society relations on the ground, long before the experience of protests. I show that Syria’s Top-Down institutions produced more exclusive and antagonizing forms of local governance which depressed mass constituencies’ affect, while Jordan’s Institutionalized-Bargaining system produced more inclusive and kinder governance forms which increased affect and drew the regime’s constituency closer towards the regime.

Chapters 4 and 5 trace the causal effect of pre-protest affect ($t_{-1}$) – and ultimately, of historical institutions – on predictors of protest escalation at $t_{-1}$ in Syria and Jordan. Chapter 4 focuses on the first dimension of protest escalation, namely protest demands. Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, it presents two main results that support the predictions of the
theory laid out in this chapter. First, it shows that already before 2011 Syria and Jordan differed measurably on the two key vectors of escalation of protest demands, mass constituency’s political approval and vested material interest in the regime, and second, it demonstrates that the differences between the two states were strongly related to their mass constituencies’ affect towards the regime and experience of its governance. Chapter 5 shifts focus to the second dimension of protest escalation, the movementization of protests. It too provides preliminary support for my theory, demonstrating that already prior to the 2011 protests the Syrian mass constituency had much higher potential for broad solidarities than the Jordanian, and that the difference was driven by their affective feelings about the state.

Chapter 6 bridges the pre-protest and protest periods. It exploits a natural border experiment to demonstrate with more precision the causal linkages between institutions and predictors of protest that I had demonstrated in chapters 3-5, and traces how the pre-protest predictor variables systematically shaped Syria’s and Jordan’s paths of escalation during the early stage of both countries’ “Arab Spring” demonstrations, in winter-spring of 2011.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the argument and contributions, as well as a brief discussion of future extensions.
PART TWO: INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS OF PROTEST ESCALATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern Syria and Jordan offer a fascinating comparison for studying the social implications of autocratic institutions, because, despite the countries’ cultural and geographic proximity, they were governed since the early 1960s under two very different institutional frameworks. This chapter takes a close look at the modern Syrian and Jordanian autocratic states from the state-builders’ perspective: how they constructed their states, what groups they chose as their popular base, and most importantly the origins and design of their ruling institutions. I argue that while both the Syrian and Jordanian state-builders centralized their rule and staked their power on similar popular alliances, Syrian rulers adopted a form of rule that resembled the Top-Down approach I described in Chapter 1 while Jordan’s leaders went for the opposite extreme, an arrangement that resembled an Institutionalized-Bargaining model – approaches that both regimes retained through the beginning of popular unrest in 2011. I show that the institutional arrangements were distinguished by three main features: the way they envisioned the role of regime intermediaries, the way they approached distributive politics, and the way they sought to exercise control over society. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the origins of Syria’s and Jordan’s distinct institutional arrangements and argue that the respective leader chose them in response to the particular combination of threats and opportunities they faced at the time of state-building.
2.2 SYRIA AND JORDAN BEFORE STATE-BUILDING

As territorial and political entities, modern Syria and modern Jordan (or Transjordan, as it was called until 1948) were born in the early 1920s on neighboring pieces of land carved out of the former Ottoman Empire. Even though the territories fell under the suzerainty of two different colonial powers, which also left each country with a different type of regime at independence in 1946 – Syria as a republican government, Jordan as a monarchy – in practice, between the 1920s and the beginning of state-building in the early 1960s, both territories were governed indirectly and therefore neither the type of colonial power nor formal regime type significantly affected the style of administration on the ground. Both the French in Syria and the British in Jordan chose to ruled indirectly, through pre-existing rural powerbrokers, because they were both unable and unwilling to extend their rule into the peripheral lands; being short on money, they chose to outsource the business of day-to-day governance to prominent local elites (E. Thompson, 2000; Alon, 2007). France’s move in 1920 to depose Syria’s short-lived monarch and turn the country into a republic - and, conversely, Britain’s choice to nurture a constitutional monarchy in Jordan – had little effect on the day-to-day governance in either province during this period, since both territories continued to be ruled by autonomous local notables until well after the colonial powers departed.

2.3 STATE-BUILDERS: SYRIA’S BAATH AND JORDAN’S KING HUSSEIN

The history that is most relevant to this study begins in the early 1960s, the decade during which Syrian and Jordanian rulers broke with the previous tradition of indirect rule and began to
construct powerful centralized autocratic states that persisted until the eve of the 2011 uprisings. While the specific approaches to state-building differed, the goals of Syrian and Jordanian state-builders were the same: to extend the direct physical and political reach of the state, and to help the rulers consolidate their power. Roads, canals, and railway lines were built to more tightly connect hitherto abandoned peripheries to the center; new ministries and agencies were set up to document and shape policies in a wider range of social and economic areas; schools and health clinics began to be constructed in previously underserved towns and villages; municipal and village councils were integrated into a central system of local administration; religious institutions and endowments were brought under central state control; and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) extended the state’s hand into the productive economy (Richards et al, 2013).

Both countries were aided in these efforts by foreign sponsors – the Soviet Union and wealthy Arab Gulf states in the case of Syria, and the United States and the Arab Gulf in the case of Jordan - and by the 1970s-80s, their administrative-repressive apparatuses were of comparable size and weight relative to the population (Richards & Waterbury, 2008).

In Syria, state-building began in 1963 with the rise to power of the Arab Socialist Baath Party (henceforth, Baath Party) through a military coup. The Baath or “Resurrection” Party was formed in 1942 by a group of middle-class Arab nationalists, led by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar. The Party had not always intended to take control over the country in a military coup: it appealed to segments of the peasantry and educated professionals (Batatu, 1999) and won increasing number of seats in the country’s post-independence parliament due to its Arab nationalist and pro-poor welfarist platforms and especially due to its alliance with the charismatic politician Akram Hawrani who had a large following among Syrian peasants. However, over the course of the 1950s, the Baath and other progressive parties stopped seeing
the legislature as a legitimate mechanism for political change as they watched their policies increasingly blocked in parliament by conservative politicians, mostly wealthy landowners and tribal sheikhs empowered by French indirect rule policies (Waldner, 1999). After the failure of the country’s brief union with Egypt during 1958-1961, which was staged to break the paralyzing gridlock in parliament,\(^7\) and relapse of Syrian politics to the previous impasse between progressive and conservatives, the Baath and a coalition of other Arab nationalist parties staged a coup on March 8 1963. Despite their numeric minority in the progressive coalition, the Baathists quickly emerged on top due to their superior representation in the military, and quickly eliminated their former allies to clear the way to uncontested power and consolidation of that power through rapid state-building (ICG, 2004).\(^7\)

In Jordan, state-building was initiated in the late 1950s-early 1960s by King Hussein bin Talal (1952-1999), the grandson of the country’s founding Hashemite king, Abdullah I,\(^7\) as a strategy to maintain power in light of new political threats – namely, to prevent the kinds of strident oppositional movements and attempted coups and assassinations that had nearly cost the young king his power and life during the turbulent 1950s decade. The main threat to the regime was the activity of leftist and nationalist parties, most prominently the Communists and the Nasserites (named after their charismatic leader and president of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser), which had grown in popularity in Jordan and the rest of the region during the 1950s and which openly opposed- and sought to undermine the Hashemites’ conservative monarchical regime (B. S. Anderson, 2005).\(^7\) The nationalist and progressive messages of these parties appealed to urban or newly urbanized Transjordanians and to Jordan’s growing and increasingly politicized population of Palestinian-Jordanians, which was resentful of King Abdullah I’s unilateral annexation of the West Bank following the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 (B. S. Anderson, 2005;
Vatikiotis, 1967). By 1954-5 progressive leftist and nationalist parties were winning seats in parliament and leading large anti-government demonstrations culminating in 1955-7, demanding greater socio-economic justice and more checks on the powers of the King (Vatikiotis, 1967). Narrowly escaping several elite coups and a potential popular uprising, Hussein only regained some measure of control after 1957 when he fired his cabinet, banned all political parties, and imposed martial law (B. S. Anderson, 2005). It was then, after the dramatic events of 1957, that Hussein became convinced of the need to abandon the old system of indirect rule which he had inherited, and to centralize power and build a powerful state, the way other states in the region were doing at the time.

2.4 MASS COALITIONS

In addition to their simultaneous state-building efforts, a second important parallel between the Syrian and Jordanian regimes after the 1950s was their leaders’ choice to entrench their power in an alliance with a rural popular base – an alliance that remained central to both regimes through 2011.

Although Baathist Syria is sometimes portrayed as sectarian, given that after 1970 the president and many elite security officers hailed from the minority Alawi sect (an off-shoot of Shi’a Islam), careful observers have shown that in fact the regime’s popular base (RPB) was based primarily on class (Hinnebusch, 2012). There was no evidence of an obvious sectarian bias in the Baath’s social policies (Sadowski, 1988), as ordinary Alawites remained among the most deprived groups in the country (ICG, 2011; Watfa, 2012) while Sunnis who comprised the
majority of the Syrian peasantry became the Baath’s most important beneficiaries (Batatu, 1999; Hinnebusch, 2012; Waldner, 1999)\textsuperscript{78} - the backbone of its bureaucracy and main target of its welfare policies (Batatu, 1999; Khawaja, 2002).\textsuperscript{79} The rural constituency mattered to the regime because it was large: it constituted 61% of the total population in 1963 and 44% in 2010,\textsuperscript{80} in addition to large numbers of rural migrants,\textsuperscript{81} and the regime continued to invest in this mass coalition through 2011. Indeed, it is important to understand that even though after the mid-1980s president Hafez Assad embarked on careful economic reforms, both he and his son Bashar who succeeded him did so “without abandoning” their original rural base (Pierret & Selvik, 2009; see also Hinnebusch, 2011).\textsuperscript{82} Through the late 2000s, they avoided layoffs from state-owned enterprises; continued most of the old agricultural and food subsidies,\textsuperscript{83} and raised public sector wages throughout the 2000s at rates far surpassing inflation (Kabbani & Habash, 2008).

In Jordan, the regime’s popular base (RPB) after the 1950s also comprised mostly the rural constituency, albeit for different reasons. After Hussein began to expand his state and administrative capacity, rural Transjordanians received a disproportionate share of political privileges and state jobs and services,\textsuperscript{84} and remained at the core of the Hashemites’ mass coalition through 2010 even as their numbers shrunk from 46% of the national population in the early 1960s to less than 20% in 2010.\textsuperscript{85} The alliance between the Hashemite regime and rural Transjordanians was rooted in symbolic and coalitional politics. First, it was a gesture of gratitude from the monarchy for the supposedly\textsuperscript{86} welcoming reception Transjordanians had given Amir Abdullah when he first arrived in the territories in the 1920s and made himself the first Hashemite sovereign. Second and more importantly, the alliance was part of King Hussein’s strategy starting in the early 1960s to protect his rule from the allegedly more politicized urban Palestinian-Jordanian population, which had been more active in the oppositional demonstrations.
and attempted coups and mutinies during the 1950s. By reorienting his mass base solidly towards
the rural Transjordanian population, he gambled that this constituency could be rendered more
loyal and pliable, and could ensure his regime’s survival.87

2.5 SYRIA’S AND JORDAN’S INSTITUTIONAL DESIGNS

Despite their parallel investment in rapid state-building and their similar rural mass coalitions,
the post-1950s Syrian and Jordanian regimes adopted radically different institutional systems to
govern their states.

2.5.1 Top-Down institutional model in Syria

The Syrian regime strove for a model of governance that approximated the Top-Down approach
described in Chapter 1: a system that would make the Baath a “leading party in the state and
society” (Article 8, 1964 Constitution) and give decision-makers full control over society
(George, 2003). Although, as I will show in the next chapter, the regime never achieved full
control and autonomy, its pursuit of the Top-Down approach was clear, and could be seen
particularly in three main spheres: the way the regime envisioned the role of government
intermediaries, the way it approached distributive politics, and the way it sought to exercise
control over society. First, since the Baath sought to maximize autonomy and control, it sought
to build a disciplined implementing/mediating apparatus that could faithfully execute its top-
down orders and remain loyal to anyone but the state. To this end, it chose not to base its
implementing apparatus on the old powerful class of notables that had mediated for the state – indeed, had been the state in most Syrian territories – prior to 1963, seeing the notables as political competitors for the hearts and minds of the public and therefore untrustworthy (Chatty, 2010; Waldner, 1999). Instead, it set about building a new structure of intermediary institutions that was more directly under its control and that had three main features. It was hierarchical and gave more prominence to positions that could most effectively extend regime’s control, such as the Baath Party, corporatist “popular” unions (the most important of these being the Peasant Union), and provincial governors and security services, and less prominence bodies that were closer to the grassroots and more difficult to steer from above, such as “traditional” communal leaders and local councils. It sought to recruit and promote administrators on the basis of merit and loyal execution of top-down directives. And it recruited primarily from the regime’s chosen rural base, seeing the poor and uninfluential communities as more pliable and politically loyal administrators (Hinnebusch, 1984; Waldner, 1999).

The second area where the Baath’s strategy bore the imprint of a Top-Down approach was distributive politics. Upon coming to power, the Baath not only centralized but monopolized the planning and execution of the state’s distributive functions (Heydemann, 1999). In doing so, it hoped to first and foremost remain in full control over the distributional process and thus stamp out rivals centers of (distributive) power, and to more effectively deliver the fruits of economic development to its mass constituency and thus gain popular support. The hierarchical organization of the government’s local executive bodies was designed to achieve the first objective. For instance, in the health sector, local health directorates in the provinces – which had the closest relationship with local communities – were given no power over implementation and were designed to “receive orders from the cent[ral]” Ministry in Damascus and from the
governor’s office, and ultimately from the Baath Party’s central health policy committee (Sen & Faisal, 2012). The central government intervened in micro-level decision-making in the same way in other social sectors like education, and even in private agriculture (most of the country’s agriculture remained privately owned) where the government sought to steer farmers towards particular crops and production targets (Hinnebusch, 1989; Arslanian, 2008; Minot et al, 2010). Topping off the Party’s efforts to project its leading policy role were its Five Year Plans, which remained in use from the 1960s through the 2011 uprisings and which detailed the Baath’s past achievements and future projects for the entire country. The Baath’s aim to establish top-down control over the distributive arena went hand in hand with its secondary goal of weaning away lingering popular support from its old-elite rivals: it sought to use the first to achieve the latter by channeling resources towards maximally efficient, equitable, and inclusive redistributive programs capable of raising living standards of the masses (Hinnebusch, 2009; George, 2003).

For example, in the health sector, the regime used its programmatic approach to ensure that the construction of hospitals and clinics followed a needs-based formula that privileged rural areas and areas with higher population densities (one hospital was to be built for every 40,000-50,000 individuals, and a new center for every 10,000 rural or 20,000 urban dwellers). And in both its 1964 and 1973 Constitutions, the regime guaranteed citizens a range of universal public services, including education (Article 37) and health care (Article 47), free of charge, and “guarantee[d] work for all citizens” as a matter of right (Article 36).

Finally, the top-down approach was engrained in the way Baathist regime sought to control its mass constituents and intermediaries. To control its mass constituency, the regime chose to squeeze pre-existing independent identities and associations, and encourage membership in corporatist state-run organizations to aid indoctrination and policing of dissent. Since it had
inherited a country with prominent sectarian and ethnic cleavages, the Baath worked hard to weaken “traditional” communal solidarities and to ensure that the regime became the primary focus of loyalty. In the 1964 constitution, it declared “regionalism, sectarianism and tribalism [to be a danger to] the livelihood and existence of the people” and actively sidelined tribal, ethnic, or religious leaders by expropriating their wealth and making the Party the country’s dominant economic and political patron (Chatty, 2010). In cities, the Baath squeezed the independent civic associations which had deep roots to society and strong ties to wealthy clerics and bazaari merchant class: after 1963 it incorporated all mosques and religious endowments under the state control, closed many religious charities, and subjected the charities that remained to stifling monitoring by the Ministry of Interior and security services. Although during 2005-8 Bashar Assad briefly opened some breathing space for civic activity to create the impression of liberalizing his regime, the changes were in fact marginal and only left space for the quasi-governmental “modern” associations patronized by the First Lady (Haidar 2010). While seeking to crush “traditional” communal structures, the regime encouraged mass membership in regime-sponsored corporatist organizations, most importantly the Baath and an array of “popular” unions, especially the General Peasants’ Union. By bringing the country’s large and diverse population under these corporatist umbrella structures, the regime sought to facilitate top-down control and monitoring of dissent (Hinnebusch 1984: 121). In 1970 the Party swung “the doors wide open” for its rural popular base (Hinnebusch, 1984; Perthes, 1995; Stacher, 2012), and began to require membership in unions for all Syrians working for the government, all elementary and secondary school students (Ziyadeh, 2011), and all peasants who wanted to receive land (under the land reform laws) and farming subsidies - essentially, the majority of the population. In addition to monitoring its popular
rural constituency, the regime also sought to control its intermediaries which were also of peasant origins. From 1963 through 2011, Baath party cells shadowed every office within the civilian bureaucracy in the form of a giant parallel government, reporting on the work and disciplining bureaucrats (Zisser, 2001). The Baath was empowered to monitor MPs and mayors, and de facto to co-govern with provincial governors. Finally, to ensure that the party itself remained in check, the regime fell back on the intelligence services which had more selective membership, were more easily maneuverable, and were directly controlled by the president (Ajami, 2012; Batatu, 1999).

2.5.2 Institutionalized Bargaining model in Jordan

The Jordanian regime built its power on a very different set of rules – a system that was closer to the Institutionalized-Bargaining model described in Chapter 1. Like the Baath, King Hussein centralized power, resources, and decisions over national strategic decisions, but unlike his neighbor did not seek to impose policies from the top down, and deliberately left decisions over local non-strategic matters – especially local-level distributive decisions – up for negotiation with his intermediaries and mass constituency. The approach, once again, is best exemplified by the way the regime envisioned the role of government intermediaries, approached distributive politics, and sought to exercise control over society.

First and most importantly, Hussein did not sideline pre-existing rural elites like the Baath had done, but coopted them and placed them at the center of his implementing/mediating apparatus. To persuade the notables – most of whom were tribal sheikhs – that regime service was in fact in their interest, Hussein therefore applied a mix of financial, status, and symbolic
incentives, including generous regular stipends (Jureidini & McLaurin, 1984), discretionary powers over the myriad new government jobs and services created in the process of state-building (Ramahi, 2008),\textsuperscript{112} and the creation of a range of state symbols that emphasized the prestige of sheikhly and tribal status and symbolically “tribalized” the society and monarchy itself (Alon, 2007; Oudat, 2005). After 1957 Hussein turned the formerly dormant Royal Court and Royal Tribal Advisory Council into the most prestigious institutions in the country (Mutawi, 1987)\textsuperscript{113} and consciously modeled them on traditional tribal diwans (councils),\textsuperscript{114} and after the mid-1960s began an aggressive cultural “tribalization” campaign that both elevated the sheikhs’ prestige and simultaneously welded them more closely to the monarchy (Fathi, 1994; Oudat, 2005)\textsuperscript{115} through the use of new history textbooks and popular literature (B. S. Anderson, 2005; Shryock, 1997) and a brand of patriotic films and folk songs which deliberately conflated dirah (tribal land) with watan (homeland or nation).\textsuperscript{116} The “coopted” intermediary system was defined by two main features. For one, it was designed to be pluralistic and horizontal rather than hierarchical. Since the regime envisioned its intermediaries as negotiators over resources and local administrative policies rather than as executors of top-down orders, it empowered mediators who were closest to the grassroots communities such as the tribal sheikhs (Oudat, 2005)\textsuperscript{117} and elected officials (before 1990 most mayors\textsuperscript{118} and MPs\textsuperscript{119} were themselves also drawn from sheikhly strata\textsuperscript{120}), rather than those who were centrally appointed such as governors and presidents of corporatist unions. And second, it recruited and promoted not on the basis of merit and faithful and efficient execution of policies, but largely on the basis of the intermediaries’ relationship and skillful bargaining with their own rural Transjordanian constituencies – the very communities who were part of the regime’s constituent base (more on this question below).
The institutionalized bargaining system was also apparent in the area of distribution. Although after the 1950s Hussein, like the Baath, greatly expanded the volume of public employment and services used distributive largesse to buy the support of key constituencies, he did not guarantee universal access to state resources, even for his popular base, but let the process of bargaining with intermediaries drive the day-to-day allocative decisions.\textsuperscript{121} The Constitution dispelled expectations of universal access by suggesting that public services such as health and education would be provided on a partly for-pay basis (Halasa, 2008) and that public sector jobs would be created only “within the limits of its [the government’s] possibilities” (Article 6, 1952 Constitution). Even the regime’s Five Year Plans\textsuperscript{122} (1972-1998) bemoaned that the government “lack[ed] comprehensive systematic plans” and allocated social services at “random” (Jordan National Planning Council 1981: 16, 277). Although the civil service, public sector companies, and military had formal employment procedures, it was clear that the procedures were designed to be sidelined and the jobs to be filled by sheikhs and other intermediaries through lobbying with central ministries and ultimately the Royal Court which controlled the purse strings. For instance, a loophole in Jordan’s labor code legally exempted the vast majority of public sector jobs from official applications, allowing the positions to be allocated on a discretionary basis.\textsuperscript{123} Since promotions within civilian bureaucracy were also discretionary, intermediaries were given the opportunity to advance their clients’ careers by hiring them into “low-skilled” positions – as janitors, drivers, or secretaries – and then transferring them to more “respectable” desk jobs.\textsuperscript{124} Intermediation and bargaining with the regime was also designed to be a sine qua non for hiring in the security sector which employed over half of the working male population in rural districts in the 2000s,\textsuperscript{125} in municipal government which in 2010 employed over 15% of the civilian government workforce (CSS,
and in public sector companies which until the late 1990s included some forty organizations. Finally, by design, access to social services had to be lobbied for. Rural Transjordanians had to find the “best” intermediaries to lobby authorities for “royal favor” (makrumeh malakiyeh) to order the construction of a new public health facility in their town, to allow them admission to one of the exclusive Royal Medical Services hospitals (WHO, 2006a), or to help them defray costs of basic health services since most required co-pays. The same went for other social sectors, including education.

Finally, the IB approach could be seen in the way Hussein chose to control his intermediaries and mass base. Like the Baath, the Hashemite regime had to worry about the risk of disloyalty among intermediaries – in some ways, more so than the Baath since it gave its intermediaries more independence in the form of bargaining power. Unlike the Baath, however, Hussein chose to neutralize the risk not through top-down control but by retaining ultimate control over the rules by which intermediaries were given bargaining power or even a seat at the bargaining table. Despite leaving day-to-day local administrative and distributive decisions to intermediaries, Hussein ensured that he had ultimate control by monopolizing access to resources and prestige (like the Baath) and most importantly by making intermediaries “work” for those desired goods. First, unlike the Baath which preferred to give its ministers, governors, and other intermediary figures life-long tenures (Batatu, 1999), Hussein made his intermediaries’ positions competitive by ceasing to guarantee them permanent tenure (unheard of before the 1960s) and by increasing their numbers - in other words, by instituting the practice of “elite shuffling,” which has been noted by other studies (Bank & Schlumberger, 2004). The second and more important piece of the strategy however, which has been less noted in the literature, is that the regime kept the positions competitive by setting tough criteria by which it rotated
intermediaries specifically, by requiring intermediaries not only to demonstrate loyalty to the monarchy and to abstain from oppositional political activity, but also to show some skill at bargaining with their constituent base, which was also the regime’s rural popular constituency. The regime did not force individuals to march in goose-step with the regime the way the Baath sought to do, but let them decide how loyal or oppositional they wanted to be and what kind of a relationship they wanted to build with their constituent base – while making it clear that they would get more if they played by the regime’s rules. The criterion of skillful bargaining with the constituent base is worth dwelling on because it explains why the regime’s popular base became part of a bargaining process, even though it originated as a feature of elite politics (i.e. bargaining between the regime and the old sheikhly elites). To keep the intermediaries in check, the regime conditioned intermediaries’ tenure and rewards on their ability to use state resources to reproduce a loyal, apolitical mindset among ordinary Transjordanians. By tying the intermediaries’ fortunes to the behavior of their local rural Transjordanian constituency, the regime enabled the latter in their turn to bargain with the intermediaries over compensation for their “loyal” behavior (Lust-Okar, 2008 captures part of this three-way dynamic between the regime, intermediaries, and citizens in her study on Jordanian MPs). Since both the elites and the popular base had bargaining power, the task of “controlling” society fell less on the ruling regime structures and mukhabarat as it did in Syria, but on the communities themselves: intermediaries had an incentive to cultivate a politically loyal constituency, and constituents in turn kept in check the intermediaries.
2.6 ORIGINS OF SYRIA AND JORDAN’S DIVERGENT INSTITUTIONAL DESIGNS

The foregoing discussion begs a logical question: why did the Syrian and Jordanian regimes build different institutions at the time of state-building? In Chapter 1 I argued that autocrats tend to select institutional systems as a “best response” to different economic and military threats from pre-existing elites. Rulers construct Top-Down institutions when they have the opportunity and the need to crush pre-existing elites, such as when the elites are economically more powerful but militarily weaker, because the TD approach gives the regime maximal immediate control over policy and resources, and, in theory, alleviates its concern that the hostile old elites could come back to challenge its hegemony. By comparison, I argued that rulers construct Institutionalized-Bargaining institutions when the old elites are militarily too strong to be crushed or when the new regime finds it beneficial to coopt their rivals, such as when the latter are economically and militarily weak.

The empirical evidence from Syria and Jordan support my theoretical predictions. When the Baath came to power in 1963 it faced a powerful class of landed and industrial elites whose wealth far surpassed its own\textsuperscript{139} and who were moreover hostile as they represented the conservative elements that had opposed the Baath’s political agenda during the 1950s (Hinnebusch, 2012; Waldner, 1999). At the same time, the old elites had a weakness: they lacked militarily capabilities, since during the mandate period the French had recruited most local police and military units from rural areas,\textsuperscript{140} and the Baath had an advantage here since many of its supporters and members were in the armed services. The combination of an existential threat and opportunity to eliminate that threat led the Baath to crush the pre-existing elites and establish a Top-Down system of rule. Upon coming to power the new regime decimated the old landowning
and industrial class by stripping them of their wealth. Within two months of the May 1963 coup, the Party expropriated the old elites’ land; nationalized their major productive assets including banks, oil distributing companies, and about 70 percent of export and import trading firms;\textsuperscript{141} and bent to its will the wealthy religious endowments (awqaf) and clergy. Under the policy, over three thousand of the country’s biggest landowners and businessmen lost their landholdings and assets (Ahsan, 1984; Chatty, 2010).\textsuperscript{142} TD institutions were strategically the best – and possibly only – choice for the Baath given the profoundly insecure position it found itself in following the coup and the expropriations: its assault on the property rights had naturally alienated the business class and caused a flight of capital from the country,\textsuperscript{143} but more importantly the coup had tarnished its democratic credentials and it even “suffered from a deficit of political legitimacy” among the rural population which it had wanted to be its popular base (ICG, 2004; Batatu, 1999a).\textsuperscript{144} By giving the regime a degree of autonomy from the various social actors, the TD system offered the regime the best chance of survival; an IB approach, which would have required the Baath to negotiate with the powerful old elites and the rural base, was unlikely to keep it in power since the new regime at the time had neither the resources nor the political legitimacy to manage and steer a sophisticated bargaining game in its favor.

The evidence from Jordan also appears in line with my theory. When Hussein began to build his new state in the late 1950s and early 1960s, he faced a class of rural notables that was both economically and militarily weak. Once fearsome warriors and wealthy landowners or pastoralists, the sheikhs declined economically and militarily after the 1920s as a result of devastating droughts during 1926-34 and late 1950s and a host of other exogenous changes (N. N. Lewis, 1987). Sheikhs of fallahi (agricultural) tribes, who were never wealthy, saw their modest income further slashed by the drought and meager harvests; and many of the once-
powerful elders of bedu (nomadic/semi-nomadic) tribes “were reduced to penury” when, among other things, 80% of the livestock died in the droughts, when the introduction of motor vehicles to Jordan put an end to their lucrative camel transportation business, and when restrictive new colonial borders undermined their pastoral activities by truncating traditional grazing cycles (Layne, 1994; Lewis, 1987). From Hussein’s viewpoint, the combination of the sheikhs’ economic and military weakness made the alliance politically feasible and strategically smart, for it allowed the regime to exploit the sheikhs’ desperation to “buy” their loyalty and to use their pre-existing authority and social networks to extend the power of the state further into society. Thus, instead of rejecting pre-existing rural elites and building a new technocratic administrative system the way the Baath had done in Syria, Hussein starting in the late 1950s began to proactively court the sheikhs and elevated them to be his core intermediaries. Hussein’s creation of an Institutionalized-Bargaining system went hand in hand with his strategy to coopt the old elites, because the commitment to govern through the old notables forced him to leave them some room to negotiate governance matters instead of imposing policy through the top.

Could there be other ways to explain why the Syrian and Jordanian regimes adopted different institutional systems? The explanations offered by the existing literature are not entirely convincing in the cases at hand. One explanation argues that the difference was in the ideological orientation of the two regimes: that the Baath dispossessed the wealthy landed and business class and constructed a top-down state because of its professed socialist ideals, while Hussein pursued the opposite approach because he was the head of a conservative capitalist monarchy. While on the surface the argument appears to have merit – and indeed in the case of Syria, many of the early Baath members were “youthful [socialist] visionaries” (Batatu, 1999a) who fought to “do away with [bourgeois and] tribal interests in the progression to a higher socialist vision”
(Chatty, 2010; Schoel, 2011)\textsuperscript{147} – the ideology-focused explanation is unsatisfying for two reasons. One, it is endogenous: an ideological party like the Baath gained ground in Syria in the first place because the country was torn by inequalities, due to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a small elite\textsuperscript{148} - which still brings us back to the original explanation involving the wealth of the pre-existing elites. And two, many have argued that ideology was a secondary consideration for the Baath (Waldner, 1999) since it was not motivated to expropriate all “bourgeois” and “feudalist” elements, only the wealthiest and most politically threatening (George, 2003; Hinnebusch, 1984; Owen & Pamuk, 1998).

A second competing explanation is that the Baath’s and Hussein’s strategies were a path-dependent continuation of a pre-existing policies: that the Baath’s move to crush the old elites was really just a continuation the “socialist” policies Gamal Abdel Nasser had launched during the short-lived United Arab Republic (1958-61), while Hussein’s incorporation of rural sheikhs into his expanded state merely formalized the monarchy’s relationship with Transjordanian tribes going back to the 1920s. The evidence does not support these claims. Nasser’s Land reform law of 1958 and “Socialist Decrees” of 1961 certainly created a precedent and eased the Baath’s radical land expropriation and nationalization campaigns (Heydemann, 1999; Owen & Pamuk, 1998; Waldner, 1999), but historians have argued that the Party’s “radical” course was decided before the union with Egypt (Waldner 1999) and in fact went much farther than Nasser’s initiatives (Ansari 1988, Ahsan 1984). As far as Hussein’s pre-existing alliance with the sheikhs, the argument fails to hold up because before Hussein’s state-building the tribal chiefs were the militarily and economically stronger party in the relationship, as they commanded independent economic resources\textsuperscript{149} and “independent bases of support [that] constrained [King Hussein’s]
power” (Tal, 2002); in fact, before the 1960s they dealt with the King as autonomous equals not as state-dependent coopted intermediaries (Baaklini et al, 1999).

Finally, a growing literature suggests that institutions are shaped by colonial legacies. Could Syria’s and Jordan’s contrasting institutional choice be explained by the fact that Syria was colonized by the French while Jordan by the British? The explanation bears further research but at least on the surface there do not appear to be obvious “French” and “British” institutional footprints on either country because, as I argued earlier, both colonies were ruled in a similar “indirect” fashion.

2.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have detailed the origins and characteristics of the contrasting institutional designs that Syria’s and Jordan’s authoritarian regimes nurtured from state-building until the eve of the 2011 uprisings: a Top-Down design in the former and an Institutionalized-Bargaining model in the latter. The cases illustrate that even though these modern authoritarian regimes were similarly centralized and strove for similar goal – long-term regime survival – their strategy differed, as seen in the way they envisioned the role of regime intermediaries, the way they approached distributive politics, and the way they sought to exercise control over society. The key question for this dissertation is what effects the different institutional approaches had for protests following exogenous shocks. The remaining chapters pick up on this question, building chronologically from a close look at the effects of institutions on intermediate predictors, to the proximate causes, and finally to the 2011 protests themselves.
CHAPTER 3. INSTITUTIONS, LOCAL GOVERNANCE, AND CITIZEN AFFECT.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

For many years studies of Arab politics had accentuated the similarities between Arab regimes such as Syria and Jordan— their similarly high levels of repression, rampant corruption, large bureaucracies, weak civil societies, and lasting authoritarianism (Bellin, 2004; Ayubi, 1996)153— while downplaying their differences. In this chapter, I use the cases of Syria and Jordan to illustrate how the countries’ contrasting institutional designs conditioned important differences in governance and state-society relations on the ground, years before the protests of early 2011. The evidence from Syria and Jordan provides an excellent illustration of two theoretical propositions made in Chapter 1. First, it illustrates the insight that Top-Down institutions are systematically more likely to exclude citizen voices and permit extensive abuse of power than Institutionalized-Bargaining systems: I trace how Syrian state-builders’ attempts to remain autonomous from society generated more exclusive and antagonizing forms of governance than Jordan’s bargaining-based forms of rule. Second and related, it lends preliminary support to my theory that in modern autocracies governance has a significant impact on mass constituencies’ affect towards the state, which I had argued is a key intermediate cause of protest escalation after major shocks. I demonstrate that since the 1960s many rural Syrians became alienated from their government because it shut out their voices and let its officials engage in various abuses of power, while rural Jordanians drew close to their state because it was more responsive and generated “kinder,” less antagonizing forms of local governance.
3.2 INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

The institutional designs I described in the last chapter were the “rules of the game” by which state-builders wanted their societies to play. These rules were important not only because they gave a glimpse of rulers’ motives and insecurities, but most crucially because they framed how states actually governed on the ground – specifically, what bargaining power the states allowed their popular constituencies and what forms of everyday governance they cultivated at the local level.

3.2.1 Bargaining power of the mass base

An important structural feature of Syria’s Top-Down institutions was that they created a highly unequal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. By striving to protect its autonomy from society and by recruiting and promoting state intermediaries based on the latter’s faithful execution of top-down directives rather than the quality of their interactions with citizens, the regime left its rural base without any leverage over government officials and, in effect, “at the mercy …of the government” (Goheer & Seifan, 2009).154

Jordan’s Institutionalized-Bargaining system had the opposite effect. By tying intermediaries’ tenure and prestige to their ability to generate loyalist mass support, the IB system gave the rural constituency significant leverage over local officials and the ability to bargain over local administrative and distributive affairs. If an intermediary’s bargain “offer” or services were not up to par, the constituents could threaten to switch their support to another candidate.155 Interestingly, many rural Transjordanians were conscious of the fact that in playing
this game they reinforced the survival of the Hashemite state, and reminded both the local
brokers and even higher-level officials in the mukhabarat and the Royal Court, that the system
“owed” them for their continued cooperation – a strong position, that reflected a strong sense of
leverage.\textsuperscript{156}

3.2.2 Forms of local governance

The second practical difference between the two institutional designs is that they generated
different incentives for state officials and thus dissimilar forms of local governance on the
ground – particularly in three areas: the way intermediaries responded to constituent needs,
forms of local control, and forms of corruption. It is worth spending some time on each form of
governance because, as we will see shortly, they played an important role in the way citizens
came to see their state. Overall, I find that the Syrian regime’s overriding interest in ensuring
state autonomy and top-down control generated incentives – partly intended and partly
unintended – for intermediaries to remain aloof from the population and to predate on its weaker
elements, including the regime’s rural constituency. The system discouraged intermediaries from
responding to constituent needs, and encouraged heavy-handed forms of control and extortionary
forms of corruption. Jordan’s institutions generated the opposite incentives. By endowing the
regime’s mass constituency with leverage, Jordan’s system rewarded intermediaries that made an
effort to woo constituents – who responded to local needs, helped without the expectation of
side-payments, and exerted political control through subtle incentives rather than blunt threats.
The responsiveness and “customer service” aspects of Jordan’s system should not be overstated,
for it remained autocratic and centralized and the spaces for bargaining were limited to non-
substantive non-strategic aspects of local administration and distribution of state goods, and the state still held the power of the purse. My point here, however, is that Jordanian institutions produced significantly more citizen-friendly governance relative to the Syrian alternative.

3.2.2.1 Responsiveness

Syria’s and Jordan’s institutional systems generated different incentives for intermediaries to cater to local needs. Syrian administrators had limited incentives or ability to respond because their careers depended on faithful execution of government orders and because the top-down system offered them little operational discretion in practice. Most career-minded bureaucrats and union administrators chose to “ignore community interests” (Ziadeh, 2011; Hinnebusch, 1976). Even candidates for elected office faced no incentive to woo grassroots communities because both formal laws and informal practices ensured that their electability depended only on the approval by the Party and the mukhabarat, not on popular support. (An exception to this general trend were rural Bedouin tribes, which were allowed to have more competitive elections and constituency service, but this group constituted only 5-6% of the population during 1960-2010.) In addition to having few incentives to tend to constituent needs, intermediaries were also constrained in their ability to do so. Local Baath and union officials, although officially hired to “give voice to the grievances of the poorer [masses],” were “subject to discipline and removal” if they veered from central government policies. Ministry offices and service providers, especially in the provinces, had their hands tied since governors had the final say on everything “from the largest multi-million [dollar] project to …where to hammer a nail in the wall of a [government] office.” Paradoxically, elected officials had perhaps the least opportunities to respond to constituent needs, as the government gave them no discretion over
resources or local administrative decisions, and blocked opportunities for clientelistic service by meritocratizing the bureaucracy after 2000. In 2000s, when I was doing my fieldwork in Syria, there were “no service MPs” and most mayors “just follow[ed] orders.” While studies are right to note that the state’s unresponsiveness increased during the 2000s, the evidence suggests that it had been systemic long before (even in the 1970s-80s observers noted the government’s lack of “locally adjusted” policy-making (Lernel, 1980)) and therefore plausibly shaped by long-term institutions rather than by the regime’s policies at a given time.

In contrast to Syria, Jordan’s system generated much more responsive governance towards the regime’s rural constituency, both because it gave intermediaries an incentive and ability to woo this key political group. Hussein’s Institutionalized-Bargaining system gave intermediaries strong incentives to court constituents because, as discussed in Chapter 2, it made their tenure competitive (due to their slashed term limits and enlarged ranks) and contingent on their ability to negotiate the loyalty of rural grassroots constituencies. If they failed to build a large loyalist grassroots base, they would lose the political and financial support of the regime; and if they lost the support of the regime, they would have fewer discretionary powers and would lose the cooperation of the constituencies – and vice versa. In response to these incentives sheikhs, non-ideological mayors, MPs, and other intermediaries bent over backwards to serve and win the approval of their communities. During my interviews, all sheikhs confessed that they spent most of their time calling up influential people to help resolve their constituents’ problems, such as finding jobs. Elected officials, too, worked hard to build a reputation for “serv[ing] people … and …bring[ing] home the goods,” since elections usually consisted of “a simple exchange of votes for services…one for one.” Jordanian MPs became known as “service MPs” (nawwab khidmeh) (Lust-Okar, 2008), and mayors “twist[ed] themselves into pretzels to help
constituents before elections”\textsuperscript{174} and kept their “phone and house …always open… twenty-four hours, seven days a week.”\textsuperscript{175} To underscore the service mentality, one former mayor even joked that “if a voter comes to them and he is injured, they [mayors] will bandage his leg!”\textsuperscript{176} It is possible that the serviceability of elected officials was aided by Jordan’s electoral rules (the Single Non-Transferable Vote) which are known to strongly favor the “personal vote” (Swindle, 2002; Cox & Thies, 1998) but I would argue that this explanation is secondary to institutional incentives for several reasons. One is the evidence that sheikhs acted in ways similar to the mayors and MPs even though they were not elected. Another is the evidence that the volume of elected officials’ constituency services has over the years systematically expanded and contracted in response to institutional incentives for such service, such as the consolidation or expansion of electoral districts, all while the SNTV system remained a constant.\textsuperscript{177}

### 3.2.2.2 Forms of control /repression

Even though in the years prior to 2011 both Syria and Jordan were strong centralized autocracies, equipped with highly capable military and security apparatuses, they differed in the way they exercised that repressive capacity. Syria’s coercive style before 2011, while not Orwellian, was often associated with a high degree of violence and heavy-handedness against Syrians of all backgrounds and creeds;\textsuperscript{178} disappearances of the politically outspoken were not uncommon, and even politically cautious members of the regime’s rural base faced daily harassment from the Baath and corporatist unions which acted as the regime’s watchdogs in the countryside. Although the Baath and the Peasant Union brought peasants a range of new farming technologies, electrification, schools, health centers, and a range of other modern services,\textsuperscript{179} they did so in exchange for “spying out” and disciplining peasants’ political behavior and
compliance with government policies – in all areas of Syria and with peasants of all backgrounds (Perthes, 1995; Waldner, 1999; Ziyadeh, 2011; Hinnebusch, 1984). There were three reasons why the Baath’s top-down institutions led to this heavier style of control. The Baath’s violent consolidation of power in 1963 created enemies and fed the regime’s insecurity and vigilance; the regime’s obsession with faithful implementation of its policies required “tight control” over intermediaries and the mass constituency to “[enforce] adherence to …procedures” (ICG 2004); and finally and most importantly, the regime was heavy-handed because its autonomous top-down governance allowed it to be. Since citizens had no way to keep state officials accountable and no one watched over the ultimate “watchdogs” of the regime, the security agencies, the latter were free to harass, intimidate, and extort from citizens as they pleased (Stacher 2012) with impunity, especially after 2000 when Bashar gave them more power in the provinces.

Jordan, whose security apparatus was not weaker than Syria, developed a significantly “lighter” approach to social control after the 1960s. The Physical Integrity Index, one of the few cross-national indices of the style (violence) of repression, shows the Syrian regime scoring consistently higher on brutality than the Jordanian since the 1980s. Qualitative evidence from existing research and my own observations point to the same conclusion: instances of violent repression existed in Jordan, but they were significantly rarer than across the border in Syria. There were several reasons why this lighter touch could be traced back to Jordan’s Institutionalized-Bargaining system. One is that the regime was not haunted by lingering conflicts and mistrust with portions of society since it had built its state on cooptation rather than destruction of the old order. Another is that it had no need to obsessively monitor and enforce compliance since it had no pre-determined plans to enforce. Finally and most importantly, the regime had a light touch because it outsourced the task of disciplining and reproducing a
politically loyalist rural base to its central rural intermediaries – the sheikhs, and local elected officials, and let them do the heavy lifting. Since the intermediaries’ own fortunes depended on constituent support, they could not apply heavy-handed control. Instead, they made political behavior a key bargaining item to be negotiated with constituents, rewarding more loyalist constituent behavior with more services - knowing that many constituents would take this “carrot” in the context of an IB system that made most jobs and services available only through intermediation (Ramahi, 2008; Lust-Okar, 2008). In order to increase the incentives for large numbers of constituents to behave in a loyalist fashion, starting in the 1970s intermediaries – very likely on cue from the monarchy – began to invent or reinvent tribal identity structures (Layne 1994), in particular an institution called the tribal diwan or guest-house (Oudat, 2005). Although in the past diwans had connoted a simple tradition of hospitality among migrating Arab nomads, in their resurrected form diwans became political machines that intermediaries used for clientelistic deal-making and political decisions. By tying their services to membership in the diwan and the tribe, the intermediaries encouraged the corporatization of their tribes and a form of communal responsibility. The corporatization of tribes helped intermediaries: in addition to providing them an efficient way to mobilize votes or other forms of support in a context of a country where other institutionalized forms of mobilization such as political parties were blocked, it created a cheap mechanism for policing loyalty. The more individual tribesmen’s access to wasa services became tied to the political behavior of the tribe, the more incentive they developed to police each other’s political loyalties to ensure that a single faux pas did not undercut the fate of the entire tribe. The system of mutual accountability was not foolproof, but it was often effective. Conversations with ordinary Transjordanian voters at polling stations reveal that people understood that “if [they] break with [their] tribe [on political
issues], [they] will lose everything” (Luck & Freij, 2010b), and admitted to having “no freedom to [engage in politics and] vote how [they] want” (Farawati, 2007; Luck & Freij, 2010b).192

3.2.2.3 Forms of corruption
A final governance parameter on which Syria’s and Jordan’s autocracies differed very distinctly was the dominant form of corruption they generated prior to 2011. An extensive literature has shown corruption to be a central aspect of local (mis)governance that can profoundly affect citizens’ relationship with the state, but most existing studies have focused exclusively on levels of corruption rather than their type. I find that even though in the late 2000s Syria and Jordan both had high levels of corruption,193 their dominant forms of corruption differed in two main ways. “Low-level” corruption in Syria took the form of bribery, while in Jordan - influence-peddling or wasa.194 Figure 3.1 illustrates using survey data from a Spring 2009 Gallup poll (given the illicit and secretive nature of corruption, surveys may present the best source of quantitative evidence). It presents marginal effects graphs from logistic regressions, showing the predicted probabilities with that male Syrian and Jordanian survey respondents from rural areas (and from other backgrounds) stated that wasa was important for getting ahead / making a living and that they had faced a bribe situation in the past twelve months. The exact questions they responded to were: “In general do you agree that …knowing people in high positions is critical to getting a job in your country (wasta)?” and “Sometimes people have to give a bribe or a present in order to solve their problems. In the last 12 months were you personally faced with this kind of situation?” (See Appendix for coding.) The results were substantively and statistically strong, especially for the regimes’ mass coalition – the “rural” group (which partly overlaps with “poor” and “bureaucrat”). Rural Jordanians were, on average, 50% more likely to
believe that wasa is important than their Syrian counterparts, while rural Syrians were 300% more likely to report facing a bribe situation than rural Jordanians.\textsuperscript{195}

**Figure 3.1** Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men believe wasa is important for getting a job and that they experience a bribe situation (95% conf. interval), 2009.

Source: Gallup World Poll, Spring 2009
Qualitative evidence from the late 2000s supports the patterns revealed in the surveys. In Syria petty graft transactions were “ubiquitous” (Noueihed & Warren, 2012: 31). Conversations with ordinary Syrians and independent reports suggest that bribes were necessary “to get anything done with the government” – whether it was to obtain a routine government service, or special accommodations such as a job transfer or relief from military service. In municipalities, heads of property directorates solicited bribes from those wanting business permits or property deeds – a practice that took a particular toll on small business owners, including recent rural migrants in the informal sector. In the public health sector, nurses expected baksheesh (small payment), and ministry officials took bribes from doctors wanting a license to open a private clinic. Syria’s bribe economy had been booming long before the 2000s (Hinnebusch, 1976), but reports and my own interviews with rural Syrians suggest that it became an increasing problem for rural families after 2000 when the mukhabarat took over day to day governance in the provinces. The pervasiveness of bribery did not mean an absence of patronage services or wasta - surveys from the mid- and late-2000s found that approximately half of young Syrians found their jobs through relatives or friends, and there was a certain amount of patronage within the Baath Party itself - however, unlike in Jordan, wasta was “irregular,” and often paired with the expectation / payment of bribes.

My interviews in Jordan also confirm the results in Figure 3.1. All ordinary Jordanians (non-officials) I spoke with were adamant that “bribery [was] not a big problem” in the country – something I can at least superficially attest to from my own personal experience of living in the country for a year. Wasta, however, was a “way of life” for most Jordanians (Outdat 2005:2): according to a survey, 90% of Jordanians used it whenever they needed anything from the government (Arab Archives Institute, 2000). Intermediaries helped clients to bypass bureaucratic
red tape, to find government jobs, to facilitate bank loans, to procure funds for medical treatment (Loewe et al, 2007) – and while all these favors were expected to be repaid at some point, the form of desired repayment was usually political loyalty rather than monetary compensation.

Existing literature rarely notes, let alone explains, the stark differences in Syria’s and Jordan’s dominant form of corruption, partly because there are no comparative studies that attempt to synthesize differences into a broader theory. Studies on Syria usually blame its high levels of extortion on low government wages (Boissière, 2005), while studies of Jordan usually attribute wasta to that country’s unique tribal culture (Ramahi, 2008) – but these arguments do not stand up to scrutiny when we look at the countries in comparative perspective. Syria’s average public wages were no lower than Jordan’s in purchasing parity terms (more on this in Chapter 4), and, as discussed earlier, Jordan’s “tribal” character and wasta were not unique “cultural” attributes but largely political constructs manipulated by the regime. Instead, the evidence suggests that the logic of corruption was embedded in the countries’ institutional designs. Syria’s bribe economy was intimately linked to the incentives embedded in Syria’s Top-Down institutional approach: by striving to maintain the state’s autonomy from social pressures, the system allowed intermediaries abuse their power - to “sell” services they were supposed to provide free of charge, and charge money for their patronage services to better cover their tracks. What is important to understand here is that the extortionary behavior was largely unintended. Although some have argued that the regime deliberately encouraged bureaucratic corruption (Khatib, 2011), I have found more evidence to the contrary: namely that leaders struggled against the practice almost since state-building because it undermined their control over policy implementation and alienated large parts of their constituent base. (There are many examples of the regime’s sincere struggle against bribery during the 1960s-90s and the
and I experienced the struggle firsthand during 2009-2010 when, in light of a new anti-corruption campaign in ministries, one cautious ministry official refused a token gift (chocolates) I had brought him in appreciation for our multiple interviews and his generous help with statistical data.\footnote{207} The reason the extortionary forms of corruption persisted despite the regime’s wishes is that the Top-Down institutions created strong incentives for it, but no reliable checks against it since the ultimate monitors of corruption – the mukhabarat – were corruptible themselves. Just as Syria’s top-down institutions shaped the country’s bribes economy, so in Jordan the infrequency of extortion and the dominance of wasta was molded by the incentives embedded in its IB institutions. Jordanian intermediaries had no incentive to extort because they depended on popular opinion; wasta, on the other hand, was a win-win strategy for them because it was encouraged by the regime and was an effective tool for purchasing the loyalty of local constituents.

A second difference between Syria and Jordan concerns theft and extortion by high-level officials and regime cronies: while common to both countries,\footnote{209} it was unmistakably more brazen in Syria. In Syria, cronies close to the pinnacle of power used their connections to snatch up the biggest state contracts (Batatu, 1999: 264), to monopolize sectors of the economy, to draw quick profits from ventures that devastated the livelihoods of others, and to downright embezzle funds (George, 2003). There were many examples of Syria’s unbridled cronyism after the 1990s,\footnote{210} but perhaps the most prominent was the shady business of Rami Makhlouf, a maternal cousin of President Assad who by age 40 (in 2010) was the richest man in Syria with an estimated fortune of over $3 billion (Brynen et al, 2012: 46)\footnote{211} and who reportedly said that “I want a cut from… every dollar that comes into the country.”\footnote{212} This level of corruption was not seen in Jordan. Although there were cases of embezzlement,\footnote{213} the “most high profile [case]”
involved $40 million of misappropriated funds (Khalidi, 2012) – not the billions that Makhlouf extracted through his monopolies. To explain the difference we must once again turn to the countries’ institutional designs. Syrian high-level officials engaged in more brazen corruption because they could get away with it,\(^{214}\) and Bashar became progressively less able to stop these abuses by the late 2000s.\(^{215}\) In Jordan, corrupt officials could not usually get away with as much,\(^{216}\) and overall high-level corruption involved less money and was less unabashed.\(^{217}\)

### 3.3 INSTITUTIONS AND MASS CONSTITUENCY’S PRE-PROTEST AFFECT

The expansion of the Syrian and Jordanian states since the 1960s into the countryside as machines of mass employment, distribution, and administration brought the countries’ rural populations for the first time in direct contact with their governments. Villagers, whose only local government official had previously been a lonely mukhtar (mukhtars had limited administrative duties, such as recording births, deaths, marriages), suddenly saw a proliferation of state directorates, schools, clinics, post offices, and police stations – and for the first time, the “state” began to shape rural lives in systematic and profound ways. If my theory is right, then, in the post-state building era, the differences in local governance engendered by Syria’s and Jordan’s post-1960s institutions should have left a distinct imprint on their mass constituencies’ conscious or subconscious affective reading of the state. Rural Syrians should have developed a highly negative affect towards their state since it attempted to control their lives and productive activities by depriving them of voice and agency and subjecting them to humiliating predatory forms of governance, while rural Jordanians should have developed a more positive emotional
predisposition towards their state since it gave them some leverage over local administrative and distributive affairs and cultivated “friendlier” forms of governance.

The evidence mostly supports these intuitions. Testimonies from Syria prior to the 2011 uprising suggest that most rural Syrians remained profoundly skeptical and mistrustful of the state. The observation that “many, if not most, Syrian citizens [were] alienated from their government” (Heydemann, 1999) and acted “as if” they supported the regime while quietly subverting its symbols of power (Wedeen, 1999), rang as true in 2010 as it did in the 1990s – and, I had predicted, this outlook had a lot to do with the Baath’s style of governance. First, rural Syrians felt a sense of distance due to the “absence of any role [the government left] for … people”218 in local affairs, and by the arrogant and contemptuous manner in which state officials imposed policies and dealt with constituents. Complains about the “lack of communication [and] respect … accorded [by government] staff at all levels” were common during the 2000s, particularly in provincial towns (Kefri, 2006). Second, many rural Syrians were alienated by the unresponsive, extortionary, and heavy-handed manner of governance that they experienced in their everyday interactions with state officials. The habit of government agencies to “take measures…that affect[ed] the core of the agricultural sector or of peasant life without consulting [the relevant communities],” such as a number of land and irrigation policies which caused catastrophic water shortages for small farmers219 (more on these policies in Chapter 6), led to a lasting “aversion to dealing with [state] agencies” among Syrian peasants (Batatu, 1999; Lawson, 2012: 13). Extortion and graft in the public administration – the fact that “[officials] exploited their power for personal profiteering [and] bribe-taking”220 - cast an additional shadow over the public sector in the eyes of farmers,221 both because it imposed a direct financial burden and because it caused people to “completely los[e] respect” for government institutions, including the
Baath Party. Finally, the arrogance with which the regime sought to monitor and control the population bred both a “trust deficit” and “fatigue [among] many if not most Syrian citizens” (Heydemann, 1999); poorer farmers and rural migrants in particular kept their distance from local government offices since many officials and mayors were hizbi (members of the Baath Party) and people were afraid to “unduly attract the Big Brother’s gaze.” Before 2011 few Syrians talked openly about their misgivings towards the regime or pointed fingers, fearing retribution (in the words of one interviewee, the question of who takes decisions and bear the blame was “the most political question you could ask”). But people who were willing to talk invariably blamed not only specific officials but also the nizam (system) which bred and protected corrupt administrators and unresponsive and sometimes downright despotic governors and mukhabarat.

The outlook was quite different across the border, in Jordan. Even though many rural Transjordanians felt no “unconditional loyalty” towards the king and were often critical of the government for the poor state of the economy and lack of employment opportunities, national public opinion polls and my own interviews suggest that most had a relatively positive overall emotional reading of their regime and believed that the king was doing good things for them. One key reason for this was that they felt the system gave them a sense of voice and agency over the government - even if, in reality, the range of issues over which they had leverage was limited. Many individuals I interviewed in rural areas beamed with pride as they recounted the “clever” ways they had managed to negotiate a job from a mayor, financial help from a parliamentarian, and other services from a sheikh. Since Jordan’s institutions let people decide how to play the bargaining “game,” people took pride in the sense of agency in figuring out what moves to make and what strings to pull to get the most out of the system.
The second reason why many rural Transjordanians had a more positive affective reading of their regime was its gentler forms of governance - the state’s perceived responsiveness, non-extortionary corruption, and subtler forms of repression. Many Transjordanians I interviewed expressed a sense of comfort from knowing that there were wastas who were “available 24 hours, 7 days a week” to whom they could bring their grievances, and from whom they could obtain advice and receive some comfort, even if not always direct substantive help; the simple emotional comfort of having a support system in place was very important to people. In the same way, wasta, which most Transjordanians acknowledged to be a form of corruption, was not perceived to be a burden the way extortion was in Syria, but a “magic wand” associated with the prestige of having successfully leveraged patronage services (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993). My interviews suggest that people who expressed frustration with wasta usually did so not because they opposed the practice on principle but because they lacked good wasta connections. Attitudes were positive even towards the security apparatus. Unlike in Syria, where the mukhabarat was profoundly mistrusted and kept at arm’s length, in Jordan the majority of rural Transjordanians were aware of the agency’s extensive powers but did not fear it and believed that it was staffed by “good, respectful people” who could be bargained with and even manipulated as wasta. Additionally, one of the reasons affect towards the regime as a whole remained mostly positive is that Jordan’s IB system deflected a substantial part of the blame for governance malpractices from the central regime onto the communities themselves, since, unlike Syrians, rural Jordanians had a lot of agency in choosing their own intermediaries, influencing local allocative outcomes, and policing their group’s political loyalty. Rural Transjordanians who lacked services often blamed themselves and their own tribe for not selecting the most dexterous wastas; those who were frustrated by corruption blamed other
families or tribes for extracting too many wasa benefits for themselves; and those who felt their political or personal freedoms were cramped, blamed its own clan, which was often more vigilant about policing political loyalties than the mukhabarat (in 2004 survey young people named their family as the single most important reason they did not join political parties241).

Although the above discussion provides important qualitative intuitions about differences in Syrian and Jordanian mass constituencies’ affect before 2011, the skeptical reader might ask whether the insights reflected systematic national trends. Quantitative measures of affect are scarce in hard autocracies like Syria and Jordan because questions about “how people feel about their regime” are extremely political and almost always excluded from national surveys (and even if included, are unlikely to elicit truthful responses). The only way to measure affect is indirectly – and, if my theory about the connections between affect and governance is correct, a good indicator would be a survey question that asks how well individuals rate their state’s local governance. Perceptions of governance should be a valid indicator of affect for two reasons: they capture people’s subjective reaction to governance, which is what we want, not the objective state of governance itself; and they measure a general evaluation of the government’s governance, not an individual’s political approval of the state which is a related but distinct concept.

Few comparable nationally-representative surveys tap perceptions of governance in Syria and Jordan in particular; the only one that has regularly fielded questions in both countries is the Gallup World Poll.242 Although the GWP is a standardized poll mostly designed to help commercial firms and governments track changes in countries’ political and investment climates, and its questions are therefore not always ideal for the purposes of theoretical comparative
political research, two questions can be used as decent proxies for perceptions of governance:

“In general, does the government make paperwork and permits easy enough for anyone who wants to start a business, or not?,” and “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?.” Neither asks about perceptions of governance point blank, but both capture certain dimensions of it. The first question is a decent proxy for perceived government responsiveness (responsive): the belief that the government makes paperwork easy would suggest that it responds quickly and readily to people’s needs (in this case, for paperwork), and vice versa. The reason this is a good measures is that paperwork processing is one of the most basic services over which individuals come in contact with the government (after all, governments processes passports, birth certificates, marriage licenses, property transfers, wills, and many other documents). Although the question here is framed as a “business need,” it was posed to all respondents regardless of whether they had or ever considered starting a business, and thus approximates general public perceptions of government expediency and helpfulness in facilitating vital services – which is close to the way I had defined responsiveness.

The second question is a good proxy for perceived freedom or the opposite of experiencing repression (freedom). Although the question is worded somewhat vaguely, I believe it provides an excellent way to get at perceptions of government repression because it was asked at the end of a battery of questions about the government’s role in various social issues including government efforts to preserve the environment and to provide quality jobs – and thus, respondents were primed to think about government actions when asked about freedom. In other words, the question could be interpreted as asking respondents whether they believe the government gives them sufficient freedom to do what they want with their lives. Given the political sensitivities involved in inquiring about repression in hard autocracies like Syria and
Jordan, I suspect that Gallup’s approach – vague wording, coupled with contextual priming – may have been the only way to extract more or less truthful responses from survey participants on this touchy subject.

What do the survey data show? If my qualitative intuitions were correct and rural Syrians in fact did have lower affect than rural Jordanians before 2011, we should see this reflected in their perceptions of regime responsiveness and repression: namely, Syrians should be more likely to see their regime as unresponsive and repressive, and this difference should be substantively and statistically significant. The data in fact supports these propositions. The marginal effects graphs in Figure 3.2 depict the predicted probability that an average Syrian and Jordanian male in the regime’s mass constituency believes that their government is responsive and not-too-repressive, measured across four waves of the Gallup Poll between early 2009 and November 2010. The graphs show that already before the 2011 uprisings, an average Syrian in the reference group was far less likely to report the belief that the government is responsive (38% less) and non-repressive (14% less) than his Jordanian counterpart, and that these gaps were substantively and statistically significant for almost all pre-2011 waves. Unfortunately the Gallup Poll does not contain data on ethno-sectarian or clan affiliations of respondents, which does not allow me to check for variation within each regime’s popular base, such as differences between rural Alawi and rural Sunni attitudes in Syria or differences across Transjordanian clans. However, even without the ethno-sectarian data, we can see from Figure 3.2 that whatever differences in views may have existed within each country’s mass constituency, they were not very large because the confidence intervals around the point estimates are quite tight.
Figure 3.2 Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men believe the government is responsive and not repressive (95% conf. interval).

DV: Affect measured by perceived responsiveness (belief that government makes paperwork easy)

Source: Gallup World Poll

DV: Affect measured by perceived freedom (belief that government gives sufficient freedom to choose what to do with one’s life)

Source: Gallup World Poll
3.4 ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR DIFFERENCES IN PRE-PROTEST AFFECT

Can we be sure that the systematic difference in affect between Syrian and Jordanian rural constituencies was driven by institutional variation, rather than by other factors? The observational data used in this chapter does not permit definitive causal claims, and I will leave a deeper exploration of causality to Chapter 6, where I employ a quasi-experimental method. However, comparing prominent explanations against the evidence from pre-2011 Syria and Jordan, I find that none are inherently more convincing than my institutional theory.

One prominent explanation for differences in citizens’ emotional appraisal of autocratic states, which has become prominent in the literature on Arab politics since the 2011 Arab Uprisings, stresses the importance of autocratic regime type. It argues that monarchies are more likely to generate emotional support from their popular base than republican regimes because they have superior symbolic legitimacy (Daadaoui, 2013; A. Lewis, 2011), build broader mass coalitions (Yom & Gause III, 2012), and, in the Arab world, tend to have access to larger quantities of economic rents (Ross, 2011). All three arguments are problematic when applied to Jordan and Syria. The first is problematic because Syria, like Jordan, invested in a wide range of political symbols to boost legitimacy – and a symbolic area where the Syrian republic had a clear advantage over Jordan was with its principled anti-Zionist policy stance, which was popular among the Syrian public, and which the Hashemites could not claim after their 1994 Treaty with Israel. Even if we conceive of symbolic legitimacy in the sense of religious authority – an area where the Jordanian regime had an advantage given the Hashemites’ claims to prestigious sharifian descent (Tell, 2001) – there is little evidence that it shaped people’s emotional
rapport with the regime; indeed existing literature and my own research strongly suggests that it did not. Without my asking, many of my Jordanian interviewees insisted that rural Transjordanians supported the ruling regime because it provided them with material security and did not overburden them, not because of the Hashemites’ noble descent. (Studies on other monarchies, with even longer roots and deeper investment in political symbolism than Jordan, support this general insight.) The argument that monarchs have more legitimacy because they built broader mass coalitions also does not sit well with the evidence because, as I discussed in Chapter 2, the Hashemites’ coalition was narrower than the Baath’s: both in the 1960s and in 2010, rural Transjordanians comprised a smaller percentage of the population than the peasants did in Syria. Finally, the argument concerning economic rents is not persuasive because both the Syrian and Jordanian regimes had relatively comparable access to rents before 2011: Syria benefited from small oil/gas reserves and some foreign aid from the European Union, Arab Gulf states, and Russia, while Jordan received higher but still relatively modest levels of development assistance from the U.S. and again the Gulf. In any case, what really mattered was not the volume of rents but how the governments used them – and here too, as I will show in the next chapter, one could not say that the Jordanian regime significantly outperformed the Syrian.

A second prominent explanation suggests that the extent to which a popular constituency has a favorable view of its dictator has to do with the level of state coercion, which is usually proxied in the literature by the state’s capacity for repression and which is distinct from the form of control/coercion (one of my measures of governance). This literature notes that, because people dislike being coerced, they will have a more favorable view of a dictator who is less coercive and vice versa (Wintrobe, 2000); since Jordanians had a more favorable view of their government, this literature would expect that they lived in a state with lower capacity for coercion than
Syrians. However, the data shows just the opposite. In the years prior to 2011, Jordan’s impressive security apparatus topped Syria’s in size, expenditure, and capability. Jordan was known to have the largest mukhabarat and military (proportionally to the population) in the Arab world, and according to the Correlates of War database its security sector expenditure during the 2000s decade was between 50% and 500% higher than Syria’s (Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3 Annual Syrian and Jordanian security expenditure/capita, USD, 2000-2007.**

Source: Correlates of War.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence illustrating two important theoretical claims I had made in Chapter 1: that Syria’s and Jordan’s distinct institutional designs would condition distinct forms of local governance on the ground, and that the governance would shape major differences in mass constituencies’ affect towards their states. I showed that Syrian state-builders’ attempts to remain autonomous from society generated more exclusive and
predatory forms of governance than Jordan’s bargaining-based rule, and that this differences – rather than other factors, such as autocratic regime type or level of repression – led rural Syrians to have a significantly less favorable appraisal of the state than rural Jordanians, long before the 2011 protests. The results provide important evidence for what I had argued is a key intermediate predictor of protest escalation – and the general patterns line up: rural Syrians, who ended up intensifying their protests far more than rural Jordanians, had much lower affect. Still, to show how affect, a diffuse long-term emotional disposition, connects to protest escalation we need to investigate the three more proximate causal predictors, namely the rural constituencies’ politics, vested material interest in their states, and potential for horizontal solidarities – topics which I discuss in Chapters 4 and 5.
CHAPTER 4. INSTITUTIONS, CITIZEN APPROVAL, AND CITIZEN VESTED INTEREST IN THE STATE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, I theorized that in autocratic regimes the two most proximate predictors of the escalation of protest demands after major shocks are the levels of regime constituency’s political approval and perceived vested interest in the regime, that these levels should differ systematically between Top-Down and Institutionalized-Bargaining regimes, and that they should be shaped by the constituency’s affect towards the state. Leaving aside for now the discussion of the first prediction – whether pre-protest political approval and vested material interest actually shape protest demands (a discussion I take up in Chapter 6) – I use this chapter to investigate the second and third propositions. Using a range of qualitative and quantitative data from pre-2011, I find broad support for both. I find that Syria’s mass constituency had much lower levels of political approval and vested interest in the state than the Jordanian already before the outbreak of protests in 2011, and that the differences were systematically correlated with the constituencies’ levels of affect rather than with a range of other factors suggested by competing explanations.

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 explains the data and methodologies used for my empirical analyses throughout the chapter. Section 3 demonstrates that rural Syrians and Jordanians had different levels of political approval of their states prior to 2011, and shows how the difference was driven by affect rather than by other factors. Section 4 provides evidence for an important divergence in pre-protest vested material interest among Syria’s and Jordan’s mass
constituency, and once again demonstrates that the difference was linked to affect rather than other causes such as the objective attractiveness of the autocrat’s distributive handouts. Section 5 concludes.

4.2 DATA AND METHODS

To empirically test my theory and the various competing explanations discussed in this chapter, I draw on a broad range of data. My qualitative data includes original interviews and on-the-ground observations during 2009-2011 in Syria and 2010-11 in Jordan; follow-up interviews outside the countries between 2011 and 2014; and secondary sources including local and international newspaper clippings. Quantitative statistics include original data from a range of Syrian and Jordanian ministries obtained by the author with government permission, and several general and specialized individual-level surveys from both countries. Many of my survey analyses come from the Gallup World Poll, the Demographic and Health Surveys, and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys – some of the few reliable multi-year individual-level polls that were run in both Syria and Jordan and that therefore permit systematic comparison. Since the reliability of government data in authoritarian regimes like Syria and Jordan might be questioned, I verified the methodologies and sources whenever feasible with independent experts. To ensure that the empirical analyses spoke to my theory, I subset the data where possible on the regimes’ popular rural base. More specifically, I focused on rural young men, who in each country was the most prominently represented group in the 2011 protests and who had therefore a collective “veto power” over the nature and escalation of protest demands. (I
describe the construction and rationale behind this “reference group” in more detail in the Appendix.) For analyses of vested material interest, I concentrated on the labor and health sectors for several reasons: because jobs and medical care were the most important distributive benefits Syrian and Jordanian regimes used to buy public support, because they represented a mix of targetable and communal goods, because they were the kinds of goods where individuals had a choice of sector/provider and which could therefore realistically reveal interests or preferences, and because from a practical perspective the two sectors were easier to research than many others.

4.3 AFFECT AND PRE-PROTEST POLITICAL APPROVAL

In Chapter 1, I argued that one of the proximate predictors of the escalation of protest demands after exogenous shocks was the extent to which the regime’s popular base (RPB) politically approves of the regime, and that it is shaped by the RPB’s general affective disposition towards the autocratic system. In this section I explore the evidence for both propositions and demonstrate that there were in fact important differences in Syrian and Jordanian RPBs’ political approval prior to 2011, and that these differences were shaped by affect rather than by other factors.
4.3.1 Comparing mass constituencies’ political approval

If my theory is correct in predicting that a Top-Down system like Syria would cultivate lower political approval of the regime among its mass constituency than an Institutionalized-Bargaining regime like Jordan, we should see this reflected in the data. Exact quantitative estimates of political support for the Syrian and Jordanian regimes do not exist due to the extreme political sensitivity of such data, but several indicators can paint a partial picture: the level of RPB’s participation in national or local electoral contests, and qualitative estimates of the prestige members of the RPB attach to leading regime institutions or conversely regime opposition figures/parties. The advantage of the electoral participation-based indicator is that it is quantifiable and that the data exists for both Syria and Jordan; on the face of it the indicator is not ideal because it may be driven by factors other than political approval, especially by the prospect of exchanging votes for clientelistic services (Magaloni, 2006); however in fact this is not a major obstacle because in my theory clientelistic exchange, which is a dimension of individuals’ bargaining power vis a vis state officials, is a predictor of how people view the state. The other indicators of political support are more straightforward: broader support for regime institutions and weaker support for oppositional entities signal stronger political approval of the state.

Data on voter participation lend preliminary support to the theoretical expectation that political approval of the regime among rural Syrians was lower than among rural Jordanians. Unofficial estimates of voter turnout in Syrian parliamentary elections shows that only 10% of eligible voters participated in the March 2003 and 4-10% in the April 2007 polls (Abdellatif, 2007; Ziadeh, 2011: 56), compared to over 70% in rural Jordan. In the 2007 municipal
races, the last to take place before 2011, the nationwide turnout was 46% among Syrians compared to 62% among Jordanians - a 34% gap, which held also at the governorate level. (For a discussion of data reliability, see Appendix.) Qualitative and ethnographic evidence points to similar broad differences. Observers of Syria’s parliamentary and especially municipal contests recorded very “high levels of popular apathy” (Abdellatif, 2007), and during my own research in rural areas (in Lattakia, Aleppo, Sweida, and Homs governorates) I found that few locals remembered when the last election had taken place, let alone cast a ballot (which suggests complete indifference rather than active boycott) and that even mayors admitted “turnout is usually fairly low.” (One notable exception to the rule were some bedouin communities, whose participation was said to be above average.) The apathy of rural Syrians contrasted with very high voter mobilization among Jordan’s rural constituency. I was in Jordan during the November 2010 elections and witnessed firsthand the both well-attended pre-election diwan meetings and campaign speeches, and the election-day crowds.

The prestige that mass constituencies attached to regime institutions and opposition figures could only be measured qualitatively, and the preliminary evidence suggests that rural Syrians and Jordanians also differed significantly on this measure. In the late 2000s when I was doing my fieldwork, the politics of rural Syrians towards the ruling Baath party was generally critical: in many places the Baath’s reputation was so weak that the term hizbi (literally, a person who was in/with the Party) had a distinctly negative connotation; calling someone hizbi meant he was either a soulless apparatchik or a mukhabarat collaborator, and therefore someone to be kept at arm’s length. At the same time, since at least the 1990s many rural Syrians became attracted to figures that were independent or even oppositional to the regime. In parts of the countryside, tribal sheikhs who had been expropriated by the Baath in the 1960s rebuilt a significant “social
following.\textsuperscript{263} And rural migrants in larger cities in Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs became increasingly drawn to Islamist religious figures,\textsuperscript{264} some of them with direct or indirect ties to the regime’s old political foe, the Muslim Brotherhood. In Jordan, political preferences were reversed. Since the 1970s rural Transjordanians began to consider connections to the Royal Court to be the pinnacle of prestige,\textsuperscript{265} and to shun oppositional figures and parties. Even though the regime (re)legalized ideological political parties in 1992, most failed to inspire a grassroots following (Oudat, 2005: 80)\textsuperscript{266} and surveys in the late 2000s found that “fewer than 1 per cent of Jordanians [were interested in joining] political parties” (Luck, 2011a).\textsuperscript{267}

4.3.2 Affect as cause of political approval

The evidence makes it clear that affect, along with the governance mechanisms that shaped it, played a big part in the shaping differences in Syrian and Jordanian constituencies’ political approval of their regimes. Syrians stayed away from elections but rural Jordanians flooded to the polls because of their different perceptions of leverage and bargaining power vis a vis the candidates and the state. Many rural Syrians “never voted”\textsuperscript{268} because neither the regime nor the candidates needed their support, and people felt they could not leverage their votes for any purpose – they “gain[ed] nothing out of the process” (Abdellatif, 2007; Bender, 2007). Jordanians, on the other hand, as I explained in Chapter 3, saw elections as prime arenas to “sell” their support and negotiate a range of personal benefits and privileges. Studies by Lust, Fathi, and others provide excellent insight into the delicate negotiations between candidates and the electorate that belie Jordanian parliamentary elections (Fathi, 1994; Lust & Hourani, 2011; Lust-Okar, 2008). Affect is also important for understanding constituents’ support (or lack thereof) for
political opposition figures. My interviews suggest that in Syria, the politically independent tribal sheikhs gained popularity among the regime’s rural constituency specifically because of their “independent views and distance from the government” [emphasis added], while Islamist religious leaders gained a following among urbanized villagers because they filled needs that the technocratic and corrupt Baathist state did not fill, with their message of compassion and morality, their strong support network, and “close [interaction] with …the neighborhoods” (Khatib, 2011). Rural Transjordanians for the most part stayed away from opposition politics because they saw the regime in a positive light and wanted to get closer to it, not to withdraw from it through oppositional activity.

4.3.3 Alternative explanations for political approval

Could other factors, besides affect, explain why rural Transjordanians had higher political approval of their state than rural Syrians? The most common theoretical explanation for the first indicator of political approval, the level of electoral turnout, has emphasized voters’ substantive policy preferences: if voters feel strongly about a particular policy issue, they are more likely to come out to the polls to ensure that a candidate who represents their views gets elected (Adams & Merrill, 2003). This argument may be helpful for understanding electoral dynamics in consolidated democracies, but it cannot explain the difference in turnout among Syrians and Jordanians because the Jordanian regime, like the Syrian, was highly centralized and left substantive and strategic matters up for negotiation (Lust & Hourani, 2011). A large and growing literature on the second measure of political approval, support for oppositional political figures in autocratic regimes, focuses on incentives embedded in electoral rules: for instance in the case of
Jordan, scholars often blame the weak appeal of programmatic – including oppositional ideological – party politics since the 1990s on the country’s Single Non-Transferable Voting system (Posusney, 2005: 97). Although the argument has presented an important new way to understand the role of electoral institutions in autocracies, it has one major gap: namely, it leaves unexplained why Jordanians complied with the regime’s perverse electoral incentives in the first place – why people came out to vote and to shun political parties, rather than stay away from the rigged polls the way Syrians did. The puzzle can only be resolved if we consider Transjordanians’ high affect towards the state. In other words, the only reason the regime could successfully manipulate Jordanians’ electoral behavior was because they were willing to participate in its political game in the first place.

4.4 AFFECT AND PRE-PROTEST VESTED MATERIAL INTEREST

In Chapter 1, I had argued that one of the proximate predictors of the escalation of protest demands after exogenous shocks was the extent to which the regime’s popular base (RPB) politically approves of the regime, and that it is shaped by the RPB’s general affective disposition towards the autocratic system. In this section I demonstrate that there were in fact important differences in Syrian and Jordanian RPBs’ approval of their regimes before 2011, that these differences were shaped by affect, and that alternative theories are not as convincing in explaining differences in political approval.
4.4.1 Comparing mass constituencies’ vested material interest

In Chapter 1, I argued that autocrats can gain political dividends by distributing goods to their popular base, but only if the popular base places high subjective value on the goods they distribute. The level of subjective value that the regime’s constituents attach to its goods, in turn, is a function of affect: positive affect “disproportionately” raises citizens’ valuation of state goods (and hence vested interest) while negative affect depresses it, even if the goods are exactly the same in both cases. In this section I provide preliminary qualitative and quantitative evidence for the connections between affect and vested material interest, focusing particularly on the labor and health sectors. In Chapter 1, I argued that “vested interest” in the regime is best thought of the value that people attach to government- or government-supported goods (jobs, services), compared to alternatives. Vested interest is high when a large portion of the regime’s constituency primarily looks to government sector options, and it is low when many of the RPB take public sector handouts opportunistically in parallel with- or while waiting for better alternatives. I show that Syrians in fact had low valuation of state goods and low vested interest in the regime long before the 2011 protests, while Jordanians prized state goods and over time became extremely dependent and invested in the state.

4.4.1.1 Preferences in the labor sector

Since state-building, rural Syrians and Jordanians faced a choice of three sectors of employment: private agriculture, small private business, and the public sector, including the civilian bureaucracy and military. The prevailing assumption in the literature has held that in both countries many of the regimes’ rural base became “beholden to the …state” (Hinnebusch, 1995)
since the 1960s because they had been seduced either by government careers and developed “a strong preference for public sector jobs” (Wazzan & Zovighian, 2013). I find, however, that the preferences of the Syrian and Jordanian mass base were quite dissimilar, and that Syria’s mass constituency was much less appreciative of- and reliant on public sector jobs than rural Jordanians despite similar objective benefits and trade-offs.

Ethnographic studies of Syrian society and my own research in the country in the late 2000s suggest that since at least the 1980s many of the regime’s rural popular base attached progressively less value to public sector employment. Evidence since at least the 1980s suggests that rural Syrians approached government jobs with an opportunistic mindset: that they took the jobs because most required little effort and guaranteed a pension, but did not see them as their main ambition. Since these 1980s, many Syrian bureaucrats – most of them originally of peasant descent – treated “the public sector [as] …a temporary placement until a better-paid job turns up,” and a “significant portion” ended up running a private business such as a small workshop or store alongside their government “day job” (Longuenesse, 1985) – a practice that was at least as, if not more, prevalent in the late 2000s during my fieldwork in Syria. In 2010, my informal conversations with older lower-skilled ministry staff – many of them of rural origin – revealed that many did not want their sons to work for the government altogether.

Peasants who still remained in agriculture were also much more self-reliant than often assumed. During the 2000s, many worked as small business owners, hired themselves out as construction workers in commercial establishments (Hinnebusch, 1995: 224; Batatu, 1999), or migrated to the Arab Gulf or to Lebanon to make earnings and remitted to their families. And farmers often forfeited the government’s generous subsidies and loans in favor of private loans. The orientation towards the private sector was even more apparent among recent rural
migrants to cities. After 2000 fewer migrants signed up for the government bureaucracy or for military careers, which were open to all and provided a steady (even if low) income, and went to work for- or even opened their own micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the informal sector - in light manufacturing, construction, tanneries, car repair workshops, and other blue collar trades. Starting in 2003, the beginning of a large wave of rural-to-urban migration, the data shows a perfect substitution between private agriculture and the MSME sector, while government employment remains flat (Figure 4.1) – suggesting that the regime’s historic rural constituency which had traditionally migrated to cities for government work now went almost entirely into the private sector.

Figure 4.1 Percent of Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in private MSMEs, private agriculture, civilian public sector, 1999-2010.

The situation in Jordan could not have been more different, where the majority of rural Transjordanians strove exclusively for public sector careers and had little interest in the private sector. Even though realistically most people could not get hired due to the constrained size of the government’s budget (according to government statistics, only 3-6% of applicants received
positions in a given year), the strong preference for public sector employment fueled a steady flow of hopeful applicants (Rad, 2012; Razaz & Iqbal, 2008). The “addiction to public sector jobs” among rural Jordanian communities was paired with an “aversion to private [sector employment and] entrepreneurship.” Surveys in the late 2000s found that the vast majority of unemployed Transjordanians – even those with lower skills – preferred to remain unemployed while waiting for a government position, than take a job in private agriculture (70%), construction (80%), services (70%), or industry (54%) (Razzaz & Iqbal, 2008). As already in the mid-1980s approximately “three-fourths of [agriculturalists] … thought government employment would constitute the best future career for their sons” (Abu Jaber et al 1987: 102), agricultural employment rapidly shrunk from 80% of the population in the 1960s to less than 5% in the 2000s. By the late 2000s mayors of rural towns grumbled that unemployment was sky-high “mostly because nowadays people don’t want to work anywhere besides the public sector.” Transjordanians became averse not only to agriculture but to work in private sector companies and to starting their own businesses. The government’s Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) failed in their intended goal of lowering unemployment among the regime’s rural constituency (ILO, 2008) because even the most unskilled Transjordanians refused the positions (Razzaz & Iqbal, 2008), and only “the most desperate” took the jobs. Similarly, despite the government’s efforts during the 1990s-2000s to jumpstart the micro- and small enterprise sector (MSMEs) through specialized grants and a range of microfinance options, MSMEs inspired “little interest … among young Jordanians,” and several mid-level officials in Jordan’s leading microfinance banks told me that most rural microfinance projects ended in failure. Finally few poor Transjordanians chose to migrate abroad in order to support their families through remittances, a key form of
private income in Syria: in rural governorates like Maan “less than 3% of families [benefited] from remittances from abroad” (CSS, 2003).

Over time, different individual-level valuations of public sector jobs translated into different aggregate societal levels of material dependence and vested interest in the regime. Specifically, the data dispel a long-held myth in the literature that through the late 2000s Syria had “[a] classic eastern-bloc communist” economy (Henry & Springborg, 2010: 148) and fostered a strong “culture of dependency on the state” (Saghir, 2011) while Jordan was a “globalizing monarchy” that nurtured a dynamic independent private sector (Henry & Springborg, 2010).

Aggregate data on Syrian and Jordanian employment from the 1980s-2000s shows that Syrians grew progressively less dependent and less invested in the regime as they diversified into the private MSME economy, while Transjordanians became progressively more dependent and invested as they continued seek out and rely exclusively on state jobs. **Figure 4.2** presents two graphs depicting the percentages of Syrian and Jordanian workers that were materially dependent on the public sector (work for the government) and independent (work in MSMEs or private agriculture) during the 2000s. The graphs show a dramatic contrast between the two countries: in 2010 twice as many Syrians worked in non-government professions that in the government sector (53% vs 27%), while in Jordan the balance was almost exactly reversed (38% to 27%).

Time-series data graphed in **Figure 4.3** shows that the gap in aggregate rates of government employment had been negligible in the 1980s but grew over time, such that by 2010 the Syrian rate was 50% lower than the Jordanian (23-26% vs over 36%). The contrast was even starker among rural constituencies where 300% more rural Jordanian men worked for the government than their Syrian counterparts in the late 2000s (70% vs 20%).
Figure 4.2 Percent of Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in civilian public and in private sector, 2000-2010.

![Graph showing percentage of Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in public and private sectors, 2000-2010.](image1)


Figure 4.3 Percent of total Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in public sector, 1984-2010.

![Graph showing percentage of Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in public sector, 1984-2010.](image2)


The contrast is also clear when we compare the fraction of the Syrian and Jordanian labor force that worked in the private sector. Figure 4.4 illustrates conservative estimates for employment in MSMEs as a composite of those employed in retail trade and light industry.
(Unfortunately the data was not sufficiently fine-grained to give percentages of MSME workers in the rural segment of the population.) The graph shows that Syria’s MSME employment began to outstrip Jordan’s after 2003-4, the year when Syrian peasants began flooding en masse to cities, and by 2011 it was almost double that of Jordan’s. Clearly, different individual-level preferences for entrepreneurship had made a mark at the level of equilibrium outcomes: an explosion of extremely “dynamic” (Kadi, 2011) MSMEs in Syria and a decline in business dynamism in Jordan, most of it managed by Palestinian Jordanians (Ronsin, 2010).

Figure 4.4 Percent of total Syrian and Jordanian labor force employed in private MSME sector, 1998-2010.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that individual-level preferences for public sector jobs generated different equilibrium levels of unemployment. During the 2000s unemployment among Jordanian young males (as a percent of the total young male labor force) was approximately twice as high among the Syrian. Syria’s youth unemployment rates were low in large part because young Syrians were willing to embrace entrepreneurship, while Jordan’s rates were sky-high because most rural Transjordanians wanted only government positions and were
“willing to remain unemployed while they wait[ed] for an opportunity in the public sector” (Rad, 2012).

### 4.4.1.2 Preferences in the health sector

My findings for the health sector mirrored those for labor: Syrian mass constituencies attached a lower intrinsic value to public health providers than the Jordanian. Qualitative evidence from Syria suggests that by the late 2000s the country saw a gradual exodus from the governmental health sector and rising demand for private health services, not only among the rich and the middle class but even among the rural poor, the constituency for which the government had originally designed the programs in the 1960s (WHO, 2006b). According to an individual who worked closely with the regime on rural health issues, villagers often preferred to visit a private clinic or hospital than a government-run facility “[because] people [didn’t] have much trust in the public health system.” Independent reports in the mid-2000s even noted that “[although] some government facilities… provide excellent service and are outperforming the private sector … there is a belief in the minds of people that the private sector provides better services” (Khatib, 2006) and government clinics had become “second choice providers” even for peasants and government bureaucrats (WHO, 2006b). Jordanians, by contrast, attached significant value to public health services. Several MPs recounted that one of the main requests they had faced over the years from their constituents was for the construction a new government polyclinic in their district. Residents of Tafileh governorate had for more than a decade lobbied their MPs to construct a public hospital (Ammon News, 2011d).

Over time, the different individual-level valuations of public sector jobs translated into different aggregate utilization rates and levels of vested interest in the regime on the eve on the
2011 uprisings. My interviews and data show that by the late 2000s the majority of rural Syrians gravitated towards the private health sector (United Nations, 2005) while the same segment in Jordan used public facilities (which explains why rural Syrians had higher average out-of-pocket health expenditures than rural Jordanians, despite the fact that their government provided universal free care). The most detailed and credible comparative statistics, which come from household health surveys conducted by the UN Development Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and which look at the choice of facility for child birth, clearly demonstrate the trend. The left panel in Figure 4.5 shows a large and widening gap in overall usage of government facilities by rural Syrian and Jordanian mothers over the twenty-year period between 1990 and 2009, from a 50% difference in usage in 1990 (90% vs 60%) to a 80% difference by the late 2000s (85% vs 50%). To check if the difference was statistically significant, I went back to the original data from the latest surveys that UNICEF used to calculate its estimates, the 2006 MICS (Syria) and 2007 DHS (Jordan) surveys, and ran a logit regression (using only respondent characteristics that mark them to be in my reference group, as covariates). Figure 4.5 graphs the resultant propensities of Jordanian and Syrian mothers who opted for a formal health facility to choose public health facilities for their last child. The graph confirms that the gap in usage was indeed highly statistically significant. Further tests (not shown) confirmed that the difference was not driven usage of special public facilities such as Royal Medical Services in Jordan, but by preferences vis a vis regular MoH facilities.
Figure 4.5 Estimated usage of public health facilities for birth of last child, among rural Syrian and Jordanian mothers.

Point estimates for 1990-2009

Regression estimates for 2006-7

Sources: Left panel - UNICEF. Right panel - Original MICS 2006 and DHS 2007 surveys.

Figure 4.6 Percent of rural Syrian and Jordanian pregnant women using antenatal care at governmental primary health centers, 2002-2009.

Daraa

Northeast governorates


Other usage data confirms the gradual dropoff in the utilization of public facilities among Syrians. Original data on the proportion of pregnant women using free antenatal care at public primary health centers (PHCs) during 2002-2009, obtained by the author from the Primary Health Directorate of the Syrian Ministry of Health, shows a steady decline in reliance on
government services even in remote agricultural governorates that the Baathist regime intended to be the prime beneficiaries of PHC services, such as Daraa and the agricultural Northeastern provinces.\textsuperscript{312} Figure 4.6 illustrates.

4.4.2 Affect as cause of vested material interest

The discussion above begs an explanation for what caused the visible long-term divergence in economic preferences. My data lends preliminary support for the hypothesis that the explanation could be the countries’ dissimilar governance and people’s affect towards the state. Although more research needs to be done to establish definitive causality, the data does rule out the main competing explanations which suggests that the affect-based theory at least offers the most plausible of the existing accounts.

4.4.2.1 Labor sector

Available evidence from the 1990s-2000s suggests that one of the main reasons that Syrian government jobs lacked prestige, even in the eyes of the regime’s rural base, is that people associated the government with corruption, with cumbersome technocratic rigidity, and unpopular policies. According to several young men from provincial towns, in the late 2000s “the public sector didn’t have as much appeal [due to] rampant corruption” inside the bureaucracy and the fact that the mukhabarat expected a cut from every bribe other officials took; many people did not want to be part of this environment and to deal with the security services.\textsuperscript{313} Young Syrians from the provinces were also repelled by the uncreative technocratic nature of government work. Focus groups with Syrian youth found that many preferred to work
in private business because they associated entrepreneurship with “something productive and exciting” while government work with “unproductive and boring” execution of top-down orders (Goheer & Seifan, 2009: 40). Finally, Syrians who already worked for the government found that “identification with the regime [was] not necessarily an asset… especially when [they] were called upon to enforce unpopular policies” (Hinnebusch, 1984: 113). In the agricultural sector, peasants avoided interacting with state agents for the same reasons: corruption and stifling control. Already in the 1980s, many agriculturalists chose to “withdraw [or] boycott…the local [agricultural] union” because of the manifestly …corrupt practices [of] party and state [officials]” (Hinnebusch, 1984: 113) and the subsequent “unpopular[ity]” of the regime (Sadowski, 1988: 182). This situation became more common after 2000, when corruption among Party branches and mukhabarat in the countryside increased. Most farmers also refused the government’s relatively generous subsidies and to take out private loans in order to sidestep the bureaucracy, avoid government regulations and control, and to have the freedom to decide what to cultivate, since accepting government aid came with the obligation to plant the government’s chosen crops and being monitored by Peasant Union for adherence to government-imposed cultivation, crop rotation, and marketing plans (Minot et al, 2010)). The Peasant Union’s drive to enforce compliance with production plans led to “resistance or indifference to the regime …in the village” (Hinnebusch, 1984: 121), and even “an aversion to dealing with [government] agencies” (Batatu, 1999: 253).

The positive affect of rural Transjordanians had the opposite influence on employment preferences. Public sector jobs were “the dream of young Jordanian[s]” not just because they were scarce – they were scarce in Syria, too – but because they were not associated with the predatory kind of corruption and tedious technocratic routine that pervaded the Syrian
bureaucracy, and to the contrary because they increased the prestige of the job holder and his family by placing them in the orbit of the respected central regime (Oudat, 2005: 41-42) and by signaling that they had superior wasata over the local intermediaries who procured the jobs.  

By the same token, rural Transjordanians lacked interest in business because it required hard work and merit, and was perceived to be for those who lacked the social prestige to circumvent these “cumbersome” requirements. “The system [of competitive wasata employment],” lamented some of my more politically-critical interviewees, “destroyed all spirit of ambition and entrepreneurship” in the country and raised the prestige of government positions that were unproductive over more productive and gainful activities in entrepreneurship.

To test whether the qualitative evidence that I just presented is in fact indicative of a systematic relationships – that is, whether affect systematically influenced the Syrian and Jordanian mass constituencies’ valuation of state jobs and vested interest based on employment – I turned to pre-2011 individual survey data collected by Gallup, the same dataset that I had used in Chapter 3, focusing again on the spring 2009 wave of the poll because it included the largest number of relevant measures. The Appendix contains detailed descriptions of the measures and methodologies used for the regressions, but let me mention the most important pieces here. I measured my dependent variable (vested interest in the labor sector) using a question from Gallup about preferred sector of employment: “Assuming the pay and conditions were similar, in general, where would you prefer to work?” The variable is not an ideal proxy because it does not capture the actual value that respondents attach to those positions, however it is close enough for my purposes. For my independent variable, affect, I used three proxies: perception of government (un)responsiveness, perception of freedom (repression), and perception of corruption. I had used the first two proxies in Chapter 3 (perceived government responsiveness
was measured by government helpfulness in processing paperwork, and perceived freedom was measured by the perceived freedom to choose what to do with one’s life, where the government’s role in limiting those freedoms is likely implied by the placement of the question on the questionnaire). The third proxy for affect was measured by perceptions of how widespread corruption was throughout the government. Additionally, I included five controls pertaining to location of residence, gender, age, education, and income, and held them constant at the following values: rural, male, young, below-tertiary education, and lower-income – the standard “reference group” I discussed in Section 2.

Given the measures available in the Gallup dataset, the actual proposition I am testing in these quantitative analyses is whether individual perceptions of “bad” governance – unresponsiveness, corruption, repression – have different effects on preferences for government jobs among Syrian and Jordanian respondents. Since corruption, unresponsiveness and lack of freedoms are associated with government predation and negative affect in Syria but in Jordan take a different form and are not always blamed on the state, I would expect that perceptions of these forms of “bad” governance to depress preferences for state employment among Syrian respondents but not among the Jordanians. I ran four logistic regressions (see Appendix for more details on methodology) - a baseline control regression (without affect, and only controls as IVs), and three models with the three different measures of affect as IVs. Figure 4.7 presents the results, with all four regression outputs in a single graph for ease of comparison. The bars depict the predicted probability that a person in the standard reference group strictly prefers public sector employment. The results weakly confirm my theoretical prediction; although none are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, the direction of the change is consistent with my theory. Comparing the bars in the “control” column on the left with the three sets of results
for affect, we see that Syrian respondents were more sensitive to governance than Jordanians. Without the affect as independent variable, Syrian and Jordanian preferences were identical, but when Syrians perceived the government to be unresponsive, corrupt, and repressive, their desire for government employment dropped while Jordanian preferences remained unchanged. The widest difference between Syrian and Jordanian responses – over 10 percentage points – is in response to perceptions of high levels of corruption, and it is almost statistically significant. Syrians also responded noticeably to unresponsiveness and somewhat to repression, although the differences are smaller.

**Figure 4.7 Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men prefer public sector employment (95% conf. interval), 2009.**

Although the overall change is in the expected direction, obviously there is a limit to what the results can tell us. First, they are not statistically strong – and I suspect this is partly due to the imprecise measure of my DV which captures only the extent to which people want state jobs but not how much they value those jobs, a subtle but important difference since qualitative evidence
suggests that Syrians and Jordanians wanted/took government jobs for different reasons. Second, the survey dataset unfortunately lacks specialized questions that could have enabled me to test the mechanisms through which affect influences valuation of goods. For instance, I cannot test whether Syrians were more sensitive to governance because they were more likely than Jordanians to blame the government for whatever malpractices (e.g. repression) they felt burdened by. One mechanism that I can partially infer from the data relates to individuals’ interpretation of “corruption.” As I showed in Chapter 3, Syrians were more likely to report bribes-based corruption while Jordanians – wasa-based corruption, which suggests that the differential effects of corruption on job preferences in my regressions may be driven by the different types of intermediary behavior that Syrians and Jordanians associated with corruption in their countries. Still, in the final analysis, the consistency and the substantive (if not statistical) significance of the divergence in Syrian and Jordanian preferences in response to governance/affect suggests that the two variables may have been closely related, possibly causally.

4.4.2.2 Health sector

Existing sources suggest an even tighter connection between affect and mass preferences in the health sector. Many Syrians I interviewed for this study told me that they chose private facilities because they believed them to be “less corrupt” than the public and because they could “get the services they wanted” – in other words, that the state’s corruption and unresponsiveness affected their preferences.\textsuperscript{321} A WHO report in the mid-2000s confirmed this trend, noting that the frequent “[mis]match” between where and how the government offered its services and the demands of the population “had a negative effect on public acceptance and utilization of health services” (Malas, 2004). In Jordan, positive affect shaped the opposite set of preferences.
Jordanians believed that “the public health system [was] decent” because it was cheaper than the private alternative and in addition not extortionary and responsive to needs. True or not, most of my interviewees perceived that they could get services expedited through wasita, and none had experienced or heard of anyone paying a bribe to obtain services.

The qualitative evidence for the association between affect and vested interest in the health sector is strongly supported by my quantitative analyses using Gallup survey data. As for the labor sector, I used the spring 2009 wave and employed the same control variables and proxies for my independent variable, affect. I measured the new dependent variable (vested interest in the health sector) using a question from Gallup about satisfaction with local public health services: “In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality health care?” (Although the question does not specify the sector of provider, for my rural focus/reference group local providers were almost always public, since private clinics and hospitals were usually concentrated in cities.) The proxy is not ideal since it does not directly compare the public and private, but it has some validity since it at least measures people’s valuation of the public sector.

As before, I ran four logistic regressions - the baseline control regression and three models with the three different measures of affect as IVs. Figure 4.8 presents the results, with all four regression outputs in a single graph for ease of comparison, and with each bar depicting the predicted probability that a person in the standard reference group is satisfied with local health services. The results strongly confirm my theoretical prediction. Comparing the bars in the “control” column on the left with the three sets of results for affect, we see that Syrian respondents were more sensitive to poor governance than Jordanians. Without affect as independent variable (first column), the predicted valuation of public health services is
statistically indistinguishable for the average rural Syrian and Jordanian male. However when Syrians perceived the government to be unresponsive, corrupt, and repressive, their valuation of government health services dropped precipitously, while Jordanians registered no change, leading to a statistically and substantively significant difference between the two. The largest gap (almost 30 percentage points) was for affect proxied by perceived responsiveness, followed by repression (20 percentage points), and corruption (13 percentage points). The systematic differences in the response of rural Syrians and Jordanians suggest to governance/affect suggest that affect and valuation of public health services might be related in the way predicted by my theory.

**Figure 4.8** Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men are satisfied with local health services (95% conf. interval), 2009.

Source: Gallup World Poll, Spring 2009
4.4.3 Alternative explanations for vested interest

The literature suggests a number competing explanations for citizens’ economic preferences and vested material interest in autocratic regimes. In this section, I briefly examine some of the main arguments and show why they are either incomplete or unpersuasive in light of the evidence from Syria and Jordan.

4.4.3.1 Culture

One explanation for the observed differences in preferences in the labor sector has to do with culture. Syrians’ diversification into the private sector is often explained by the country’s supposedly “strong tradition of entrepreneurship” before the 1960s (Henry & Springborg 2010: 17) while Jordan’s proclivity for the public sector - by that country’s traditional shunning of all service and trade professions or so-called “culture of shame” (*theqafet ‘eib*). While it is true that Syria had a tradition of urban commerce, the vast majority of entrepreneurs after the 1980s and especially early 2000s represented a completely new demographic represented mostly by the regime’s rural base (as illustrated earlier, in Figure 4.1), not the “traditional” urban merchant class. Likewise, there is no evidence that culture predestined preferences among Jordanians. Historical accounts show that under Ottoman rule Transjordanian villagers did their utmost to avoid government service and conscription because they saw the Ottoman administration as usurperous (Farrag, 1977: 235-8) and that Jordan had a “very dynamic… private sector before the early 1970s” (Said, 2000), suggesting that the “shame” of working in the private sector and the “addiction” to government jobs are new phenomena. Indeed, conversations with older Transjordanians make it clear that as recently as in the 1960s and 1970s, Jordanians had not lacked “Syrian” entrepreneurship skills, and “who were not ashamed to [work as] farmers or
menial workers… to carry bags of sand or work as cleaners [but] this changed when the
government began to hire people into the bureaucracy.”328 One man recalled, “when I was a little
boy, I worked as a shepherd and learned that that kind of work is not shameful because work is
work. But the outlook among the young today is different.”329

4.4.3.2 State rhetoric and expectations

A second explanation, which is popular in the literature on Arab politics and political economy,
suggests that vested interest in the state is a function of public expectations, which are(conditioned by government rhetoric. It argues that in populist regimes, which tend to promise a
range of entitlements, constituencies come to value and depend on the state’s distributive
handouts and hence develop a stronger vested interest in the state, while in “residualist” regimes
which do not make many commitments constituencies remain less invested in the system. As we
saw earlier, the evidence from Syria and Jordan points to just the opposite. In populist Syria the
rural constituency diversified its income and service base since at least the 1980s, which suggests
that it did not become dependent on state handouts and did not sit back expecting to be served.
Meanwhile in Jordan’s “residualist” state, the rural constituency developed an inflated sense of
entitlement (Rad, 2012; Razzaz & Iqbal, 2008): since rural Transjordanians felt they had
leverage over officials and believed that intermediaries and the central regime “owed” them for
their continued loyalty,330 came to “expect jobs as a right.”331 In fact, expectations were so high
that even “people [who] don’t have qualifications and don’t want to work, …demand[ed] a big
title and an executive chair so they can feel important,”332 and “unemployed youth from the
lower socio-economic layers [were] unwilling to take [menial private sector] jobs” because they
felt entitled to a government desk job (Baldridge et al, 2009).
4.4.3.3 Business environment

Third, an explanation for the observed draw (or lack thereof) of the private sector, which is often proposed by literature in economics and political economy, has to do with conditions for entrepreneurship (Batra et al, 2003; Gnyawali & Fogel, 1994). This literature would suggest that rural Syrians were more entrepreneurial and oriented towards the private sector (particularly for jobs) than Jordanians because during the period in question Syria had more a favorable general business environment than Jordan. This argument is simply not supported by the evidence. Rural and ex-rural Syrians who considered starting a business faced a much more uncertain property rights regime, less access to credit, and more bureaucratic red tape and extortion, than Transjordanian entrepreneurs. Baath’s nationalization and expropriation policies in the 1960s, although directed at large industrialists and bankers, engrained a profound fear of expropriation even among small Syrian entrepreneurs and many avoided expanding or formalizing their businesses so as not to be targeted. Syrian businessmen had little access to credit because government, which until the early 2000s monopolized the banking sector, opened few lending facilities for small private entrepreneurs (Wazzan & Zovighian, 2013: 117-119). Finally, Syria’s difficult bureaucratic procedures, huge red tape and extortion by predatory tax collectors and municipal police added to the list of “disincentive[s] for pursuing entrepreneurship” (Bahout, 1994; Goheer & Seifan, 2009). There is no question that the business environment was objectively better in Jordan. Property rights were relatively secure, extortion was rare, and starting in the 1990s the government made positive efforts to spur private sector employment by investing in its flagship “Qualified Industrial Zones” (QIZ) and encouraging the growth of microfinance companies and business incubators to support MSME development, especially in rural areas. Some Jordanian officials and media outlets
argued that the reason for the weak interest was that Jordan’s domestic market was simply too small to make any business worthwhile.\textsuperscript{344} The reasoning, however, does not stand up to scrutiny because this argument was used even by people who lived in larger towns of 80,000 inhabitants or more,\textsuperscript{345} and because since the 1960s Jordan’s Palestinian areas hosted “booming markets” filled with retail trade, service-, and light manufacturing enterprises (Ryan, 2005)\textsuperscript{346} – markets into which Transjordanians were free to enter.\textsuperscript{347} The main point is that Jordanian entrepreneurs faced an objectively much more favorable business environment than the Syrians, and the business-environment explanation cannot clarify why Jordanians became “addicted” to the public sector while Syrians were such dynamic entrepreneurs.

4.4.3.4 Objective attractiveness of state’s distributive goods

Finally, the most prominent stand of scholarship that explains citizens’ vested material interest in authoritarian states is a cluster of theories that look at the objective attractiveness (volume, quality, accessibility) of the states’ distributive handouts. This cluster of theories includes, most prominently, the literature on “authoritarian bargains”\textsuperscript{348} which is closely related to, and to some extent subsumes, literatures on absolute deprivation (Smelser, 1962), relative deprivation (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970),\textsuperscript{349} and inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), as well as a strand of research that judges the objective attractiveness of government goods relative to alternatives.\textsuperscript{350} Perhaps Syrians moved away from their public sector while Jordanians streamed towards theirs because Jordan’s government offered its mass constituency a better “authoritarian bargain” – for example, better-paid government jobs, or higher-quality social services, or simply options that were better relative to private sector offerings? In this section I examine the proposition that the Jordanian government provided a better distributive package than Syria
against a wide range of data from the countries’ labor and health sectors, and find no support for the hypothesis. The Baath offered a better welfare package to its mass constituency than the Jordanian regime, partly because its more centralized and technocratic distributive approach “g[ave] the regime a penetrative capability much superior to [the] patron-client” system of the sort the Hashemite regime had nurtured in Jordan.\textsuperscript{351} On the eve of the 2011 uprisings, the Baath-led economy generated proportionally more job opportunities; sustained a broader and more inclusive public health system; delivered better employment and health outcomes; and presented a relatively more attractive public sector distributive package compared to private sector alternatives, particularly to the poor and middle classes that formed the largest portion of the population and the regime’s base.

A comparison of the objective volume of benefits the Syrian and Jordanian governments provided in the health and labor sector prior to 2011 does not support the hypothesis that this parameter was a close predictor of vested interest in the state. In the labor sector both governments struggled to safeguard employment to keep up with demand, but the Syrian appeared to perform better, despite facing a larger and faster growing young labor force (see Appendix). While cautiously opening up the economy after 1985 and promoting greater private sector role in job creation after 2005,\textsuperscript{352} the Syrian regime did not slow down recruitment into the state bureaucracy (Hinnebusch 2009) and “ruled out… wholesale privatization [of] state-owned enterprises (SOEs)... to safeguard jobs” (OGB 2010: 146).\textsuperscript{353} The Jordanian government, by contrast, even while continuing to hire en masse, laid off thousands of workers during the 1990s-2000s after deciding to privatize its giant SOEs (like phosphates, cement, electricity, telecom).\textsuperscript{354} A number of mayors, MPs, and sheikhs I interviewed in 2010-2011 complained that since the early-mid 2000s they struggled to find jobs for their clients: one MP lamented that while in 1993
he helped over 400 people find various government jobs, in the late 2000s he “only found jobs for 20 people.” Columns 3 and 6 in Table 4.1 illustrate the different outcomes that followed the two approaches: Syria’s rate of job creation in the public bureaucracy more or less kept pace with the rate of labor force growth, while Jordan’s (25%) was far below labor force growth (33%), meaning that Amman was progressively less able to satisfy net new labor demand.

Table 4.1 Public sector job creation and labor force growth, 2001-2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1,130,404</td>
<td>229,617</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>4,999,305</td>
<td>1,020,279</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>241,860</td>
<td>59,629</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>1,250,315</td>
<td>409,847</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Jordanian Department of Statistics, World Bank’s WDI.

The data also reveals that the Syrian government did more specifically for its poor rural mass base. In 2010, almost half (47%) of new male hires into the Syrian public sector had no high school diploma, compared to only 35% in Jordan, and the gap was even wider for individuals without college education - 82% in Syria, 62% in Jordan. The gap partly reflected differences in educational achievement among the two populations, but most probably also deliberate recruitment criteria, since in my interviews a number of Syrians noted that public sector jobs were easier to obtain for people with lower qualifications. In Jordan, we can be sure that most government jobs and especially most low-educational-attainment jobs went to Transjordanians; for Syria detailed employment data by sectarian / identity groups is not available (given the political sensitivity), but if there were any differences across identity groups they were not likely due to systematic government policy. Through the years “the regime and Party [had] not…shown
…sectarian bias in their social policies” (Sadowski, 1988) and during the 2000s the region populated by the president’s Alawite sect was the second poorest and most underdeveloped in the country (ICG, 2011; Watfa, 2012). In terms of public sector benefits, I find that in the years leading up to 2011 the Syrian government provided no worse - and in some cases better - than Jordan’s. Both governments guaranteed similar pensions, social security, insurance, and paid leave (ILO, 2009). Meanwhile, in the late 2000s Syrian wages were better: while both governments froze wages (and pensions) from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s, Table 4.2 shows that Syrian government wages recovered more quickly and that by 2007-8 both average (column 3) and minimum pay (columns 4-5) surpassed Jordan’s in international dollars (PPP), using both the income- and expenditure-based methods of calculating wages - numbers that broadly align with my qualitative findings.

Table 4.2 Average government wages and wage growth, 2003-2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Average mo. gvt. wage 2003 (PPP USD)</th>
<th>(2) Net increase in average gvt wages 2001-7</th>
<th>(3) Average mo. gvt. wage 2008 (PPP USD)</th>
<th>(4) Ave mo. HH expenditure (single earner works for gvt) 2007-8 (PPP USD)</th>
<th>(5) Minimum gvt wage 2007 (PPP USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>$183-$324$^{364}$</td>
<td>&gt;125$^{365}$</td>
<td>$679$^{366}</td>
<td>$1055$^{367}</td>
<td>$262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>$213-$486$^{368}$</td>
<td>61%$^{369}$</td>
<td>$657$^{370}</td>
<td>$1024$^{371}</td>
<td>$234</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: (Aita et al., 2005), (Aita, et al, 2008), (BSS, 2008), (Fortuny & Husseini, 2010), (Kabbani, 2009), (Kabbani & Habash, 2008), Syrian Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2007, Jordan Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2008

In the health sector, the evidence also weighs in Syria’s favor. Damascus lived up its commitment to deliver universal care by providing all public health services, including complex surgery and prescription drugs, free of charge; this was not the case in Jordan, where even...
the use of Ministry of Health facilities required insurance and co-pays as well as out-of-pocket fees which were not capped (Halasa, 2008). This meant that in the mid-2000s 40-50% of Jordanians (many of them rural Transjordanians) were uninsured and “at risk of both deficient access and serious financial burden” (Jordan Ministry of Health, 2000); indeed a 2007 survey of rural Jordanian women discovered that over a third found the financial burden of medical costs to be always a major problem and barrier to services.

Beyond financial access, the Baath’s push to expand health infrastructure into rural areas also ensured objectively better physical access to health care for its rural population, than Jordan’s more ad hoc approach did for its rural Transjordanian base. According to comparable income and expenditure surveys from 2008-2010, almost 90% of rural Syrian households compared to only 71% of rural Jordanian families reported living within walking distance (less than 5 km) of a health facility, and the difference was statistically significant. (I should note that, although the surveys do not specify if the “nearest health facility” is in fact government-operated, my research on the geographic distribution of health providers suggests that these numbers indeed refer to public health infrastructure since “private hospitals don’t open in rural areas [and] most, if not all, health facilities … are run by the public sector.” Similar differences in access were reflected in data on the ratio of citizens per bed in Ministry of Health-run hospitals. Table 4.3 shows that in 2010 the country-wide (and governorate-by-governorate) ratio of citizens per MoH bed was lower in Syria (913) than in Jordan (1398), and had been falling faster since at least the 1990s (Figure 4.9).
Table 4.3 Ratio of total population per Ministry of Health hospital bed, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYRIA</th>
<th># Hospitals – MoH</th>
<th># people / MoH bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damascus</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Dam.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aleppo</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hama</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idleb</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lattakia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tartous</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassakeh</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deir Ezzor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raqqa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daraa</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweida</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quneitra</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
<td><strong>913</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JORDAN</th>
<th># Hospitals – MoH</th>
<th># people / MoH bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zarqa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mafraq</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balqa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irbid</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerash</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajloun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madaba</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karak</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tafileh</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No beds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma'an</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>572</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqaba</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No beds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>1398</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Original data obtained by author from Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Health; Jordanian Ministry of Health.

An important reason for Jordan’s higher person-to-hospital-bed ratio was the unevenness of Jordan’s medical infrastructure. In 2011 two of the country’s large governorates, Tafileh and Aqaba, still lacked a general public hospital (the gaps can be seen in Table 4.3), not to mention the many rural districts that lacked access to a more basic polyclinic (Halasa 2008: 27). Although Jordan’s citizen/bed ratio improves if we count non-MoH “public” hospitals like the Royal Medical Services hospitals and university hospitals, these facilities are not a good indicator of the breadth and equitability of Jordan’s health system because they were not open to all members of the public. 383
Although systematic data on the objective quality of public health care\textsuperscript{384} is scarce, existing data suggest that the two systems faced similar challenges and were approximately on par. My conversations with more than two dozen doctors and country-based international health specialists in Syria during 2009-2010 painted a consistent set of concerns: absenteeism among medical staff in rural areas,\textsuperscript{385} shortage of free medicine and equipment in some hospitals and health centers, and problems with basic hygiene.\textsuperscript{386} The same concerns came up in Jordan. In independent academic survey of rural Jordanian users of public facilities, 79% complained about the absence and “irregular working hours for doctors and nurses,” 41% - about shortages of subsidized medications at health facilities, and 13% - about sanitation standards (Alkhaldi, 2008). Additionally, Jordan’s rural health facilities were deemed “appalling” and “unsuitable” for use due to chronic “lack [of] qualified physicians to conduct even the simplest surgeries” (Luck & Freij, 2010a; Neimat, 2007).\textsuperscript{387}

Preliminary evidence on the \textit{objective breadth and equitability} of distribution also yields Syria higher scores than Jordan, suggesting that this objective indicator too is not a good
predictor of vested material interest in the state. The latest pre-2011 labor and health survey data indicates that Syria had a more pro-poor employment structure, and substantially lower wealth-related inequality in access to care than Jordan (Table 4.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child mortality</th>
<th>Q1 (poorest)</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5 (richest)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation (inequality)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jordan 2007</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria 2006</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNICEF / childinfo.org.

Syria also performed better on objective outcomes. In the years leading up to 2011, it had some of the “lowest…adult [and youth] unemployment rates…in the region” (Kabbani & Kamel, 2007) while Jordan had some of the highest (Rad, 2012), and the wide gap among young men (my comparison group) was sustained at least fifteen years preceding 2011 (see Figure 4.10). My own observations on the ground support the statistical trends: unemployment was a concern in Syria, especially for recent rural migrants, but in rural Jordan it was, as some mayors put it, “at crisis levels.” “most men” in rural districts were “without jobs.”

In the health sector, too, since at least the 1990s Syria performed better on the most important comparative indicators of population health and health systems effectiveness: infant- and child mortality rates (IMR, CMR). Figure 4.11 shows that the gap was statistically significant (the confidence bands do not overlap after 2000), and my conversations with health economists from ESCWA and health statisticians from UNICEF suggest that these statistics are credible (see Appendix for discussion of data reliability). The difference in CMR is also reflected in other indicators of population health, including: average life expectancy, which was slightly higher for Syria in 2010, and predictors of infant and child survival, including
antenatal and neonatal care\textsuperscript{395} and rates of vaccination (Table 4.5). According to the UN and WHO, Syria’s rapid improvements in particular were related to the government’s systematic push to extend health services infrastructure and vaccination coverage to rural areas (Hatim, 2010; WHO, 2006b).\textsuperscript{396} Although it is beyond this overview to explain the causes of the disparities in health outcomes, one major reason was the nature of public health expenditures in the two countries. During 2000-2010 Jordan spent more on health than Syria’s as a percentage of total government outlays (Figure 4.12), but most of this was current accounts expenditure – mainly salaries;\textsuperscript{397} meanwhile Syria prioritized capital investment in health infrastructure and equipment, the approach deemed most important for boosting long-term health results (Table 4.6).

\textbf{Figure 4.10 Unemployment among Syrian and Jordanian young men in regional context, 1995-2010.}

Source: World Bank Indicators.
Figure 4.11 Estimated national child mortality rates, 1996-2010.

Table 4.5 Percent of Syrian and Jordanian mothers and children receiving professional antenatal/postnatal medical care, 2006/7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>JORDAN %</th>
<th>SYRIA %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received professional antenatal / neonatal care</td>
<td>71.05</td>
<td>88.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received tetanus toxoid vaccine</td>
<td>26.36</td>
<td>37.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child has vaccination: BCG</td>
<td>69.75</td>
<td>97.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child has vaccination: polio</td>
<td>92.48</td>
<td>98.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child has vaccination: measles</td>
<td>72.59</td>
<td>89.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever breastfed</td>
<td>92.22</td>
<td>93.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Vitamin A supplements for under-5 child | 29.94 | 23.01   

Lastly, relative deprivation does not appear to be a good predictor of vested interest in the state, as Syria did not score worse on this parameter than Jordan. The best measures I could find were two questions in the 2009 Gallup poll: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of
“living, all the things you can buy and do?” – where “dissatisfied” measured of the extent to which citizens perceived themselves deprived relative to an objective minimal living standard; and “Right now, do you feel your standard of living is getting better or getting worse?” – where “getting worse” measured perceived levels of deprivation relative to an objective benchmark level of wellbeing (see Appendix for coding). Figure 4.13 presents the results of logistic regressions, with each bar graph plotting the predicted probability that an average person in the Syrian and Jordanian reference group feels relative deprivation, and shows that rural Syrians felt no more deprived than rural Jordanians.

**Figure 4.13 Predicted probabilities of rural Syrian and Jordanian men reported relative deprivation, 2009.**

Turning briefly to the more nuanced ‘authoritarian bargains’ literature which stressed the importance of comparing the attractiveness of the autocrat’s distributive goods relative to the private sector, we again find evidence that rural Syrians objectively had no less reason to feel invested in their regime than Jordanians. In the labor sector, rural Syrians and Jordanians faced essentially similar trade-offs between the public and private sectors when it came to job
opportunities (the private sector generated more jobs) and relative wages (the public sector paid more). When it came to job security, Syria’s public sector had the edge: while on paper the trade-off seemed equal (protection for government workers was better than that for private sector employees (Charmes, 2010)), since Jordanian government jobs were tied to patronage and the tenure of Jordanian patrons was not secure. In light of these numbers, it is hard to defend the claims made by some studies that Syrians moved progressively into the private sector due to low real government wages (Boissière, 2005; Hinnebusch, 2011) - because Jordanians under similar conditions had difference preferences: the fact that they strongly “prefer[ed] [government] jobs, even when other jobs pay[ed] more,” and rarely even tried to combine work in different sectors the way the Syrians did.

The data for the health sector tell a similar story. Although both Syria and Jordan had well-developed and active private health networks, on all the major parameters health economists usually believe to influence provider choice – price, geographic accessibility, and quality - the Syrian public sector looked more favorably relative to its private equivalent than the Jordanian did relative to its private sector because the gap between what the public and private sectors offered was wider. Syria’s public sector was objectively more attractive on the basis of cost because it was free and the gap between that and the expensive private sector rates was larger than the gap in Jordan where government health providers required some cost-sharing. The Syrian public sector also had an edge when it came to accessibility. Since private facilities clinics in both countries were clustered in profit-rich and densely-populated urban areas, the deeper reach of Syria’s public health centers into rural areas (discussed earlier) made them objectively more attractive than Jordan’s. Finally, the gap in service quality between the public and private providers was lower in Syria than in Jordan where the private health sector boasted “world
class facilities, which should have pulled proportionally more cost-sensitive low-income individuals towards the public sector in Syria than in Jordan. All in all, the health indicators point to the same conclusion as those from the labor sector: that relative to private sector alternatives the Syrian public sector looked more enticing than the Jordanian, inviting the misleading conclusion that rural Syrians should have developed a stronger vested interest in their regime than rural Jordanians.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter showed how the contrasting institutions created by Syrian and Jordanian state-builders in the late 1950s-early 1960s conditioned important differences in what I have argued to be proximate predictors of escalation in protest demands, the level of political approval and vested material interest in the state among key regime constituencies. I demonstrated that the Syrian regime’s popular base had much lower political approval and vested interest in the state than the Jordanian before 2011, and that the differences were systematically correlated with the respective constituencies’ levels of affect: that by generating antagonizing forms of governance and instilling negative affect, the Syrian regime alienated its base politically and economically, while Jordan’s rulers, by pursuing the opposite approach, pulled their constituents closer towards the state. While I will leave to Chapter 6 the discussion for whether and how these differences shaped the divergent evolution of Syria’s and Jordan’s actual protest demands in early 2011, in this chapter I have demonstrated that if they were in fact good predictors of the divergence, they were measurable already before the “Arab Spring” began and signaled the differences to come.
Interestingly, an indicator of the fact that the differences mattered for escalation was the importance attached to them by regime leaders before the 2011 uprisings. In particular, Syrian regime officials had for decades worried about their tenuous control over their constituents’ political and economic “hearts and minds,” and made strident but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to prevent the private sector from them “luring away.” One such attempt was a law prohibiting government officials from moonlighting in the private sector (Boissière, 2005), and another was a regulation forcing private health providers to charge for services above a certain price floor – a rule that doctors believed was designed “to prevent competition” for the regime’s poorer mass clientele. These kinds of measures were not taken by Jordanian authorities, partly because they knew they could count on stronger political support and economic buy-in from their constituent base.
CHAPTER 5. INSTITUTIONS AND CITIZEN SOLIDARITIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, I theorized that in autocratic regimes one of the key proximate predictors of broad “protest movementization” after major shocks is the regime constituency’s potential for broad-group solidarities before the protests. I had further predicted that mass constituencies in TD and IB states should differ systematically in their potential for solidarities and that this difference should stem from the constituencies’ dissimilar affect towards the state. In this chapter, I use a range of data from pre-2011 Syria and Jordan to test these propositions, and find that they are supported by the evidence. I consider several alternative explanations for the divergent bases of solidarities in the two populations, besides affect, and find that they are either inconclusive or contradict the data.

5.2 PRE-PROTEST POTENTIAL FOR BROAD SOLIDARITIES

If my theory is right, and if in fact TD authoritarian states over time cause their societies to develop greater potential for broad cross-cutting solidarities than IB states, we should see this reflected in the data: Syria’s mass constituency should have shown a significant advantage on this parameter over Jordan’s prior to 2011. How do we measure and compare the “potential for broad-group solidarities”? Unlike standard markers of solidarities used in the literature, such as the count of registered civil society organizations (Putnam, 1993), my indicator is more difficult
to quantify because it foregrounds “latent” or “imagined” collective identities. I suggest that the best indicator is the relative popularity among the regime’s popular base of organizations or trust networks based on inclusive cross-cutting collective identities (such as values or class) compared to those based on exclusive parochial identities (such as clan or sect). The more the regime’s popular base identifies with broad and inclusive identities and networks, the stronger its potential for broad solidarities, and vice versa.

5.2.1 Comparing mass constituencies’ potential for broad solidarities

The evidence from Syria and Jordan supports my theory that already before 2011 the Syrian mass constituency participated in more inclusive cross-cutting networks and identities than the Jordanian. One indicator on the Syrian side was the growing popularity among ex-peasants / rural migrants of grassroots Islamic prayer circles (Line Khatib, 2011). These large partially-underground decentralized networks were inclusive as they were based on shared values, such as faith and opposition to the “godless” and corrupt Baathist state. Although most were cautious to screen members to avoid infiltration by the mukhabarat, they welcomed members from all backgrounds and in fact actively pushed to extend the movement into new communities. Another indicator of inclusive identities in Syria was the country’s largely underground charitable movement, which starting in the 1990s grew in popularity among the MSME / merchant class, and which by 2010 counted over 1500 formal charitable entities serving poor families across Syria’s governorates and across urban and rural areas. Unlike the large government-sponsored “civic” organizations seeded by the country’s First Lady, this growing charitable phenomenon attracted immense grassroots support and participation, particularly from small and medium-size
entrepreneurs, including the ex-rural migrants who had joined the sector since the 1990s. The merchant families provided generous donations (the wealthiest charities reported budgets of up to $3.5 million a year, and these numbers were usually understated417) and volunteers, allowing the charities to expand dramatically in size and reach and, by the late 2000s, to run a vast array of social projects consisting of large hospitals, schools, retired people’s homes, sports facilities, and housing projects, in addition to millions of dollars a year in direct aid (money, food, clothes)418 to the poor.419 Although most charities drew on donations and volunteers from the neighborhood where they were based, their services were not exclusive or parochially-oriented – many “Christian” charities I interviewed served Muslims, and city-based charities aided rural families.420 The charities’ main criterion was need,421 and there appears to be truth to the assertions of many of my interviewees both inside and outside the charitable sector that their work was driven by “social solidarities” and desire to “do good” (‘aml al-kheir) for the less fortunate422 - rather than by private benefits such as the prestige of the family or sect, or favorable tax incentives - because most donors gave anonymously423 and volunteers put up with harsh government harassment and restrictions.424

Comparable indicators for Jordan paint a very different picture. Rural Transjordanians invested little money or effort in inclusive networks, such as religious study circles and need-based charities; few donated or volunteered for organizations such as the large Islamic Charitable Center Society, which provided social welfare for the poor across the country (the main community that gave regularly were Palestinian-Jordanians).425 Instead, Transjordanians were very active in the country’s more than 2000 exclusive parochial clan-focused associations.426 On paper, these associations looked just like the Syrian charities – they provided housing, sports facilities, women’s workshops, food baskets, and direct cash support for medical procedures and
university tuition, to needy families. A closer look at their membership and target beneficiaries, however, reveals a major difference: that most were “family businesses,” dominated by a single tribe and designed to serve only members of the tribe. According to studies in the late 2000s, this obsessive focus on the tribe produced not only “exceptionally low… level[s] of [broad] ‘interpersonal trust’” and solidarity (Said & Harrigan, 2009) but full-on enmity among members of different tribes, as demonstrated by ever more frequent and violent “inter-tribal feuds across the country” which required the intervention of anti-riot gendarmerie and curfews over whole neighborhoods (Reuters, 2011).

The qualitative differences between the Syrian and Jordanian mass constituencies are partially captured by quantitative survey data. The closest measure of my indicator (the extent to which people empathize or identify their interests with those outside their narrow familial/parochial circle) that was available in the Gallup poll was a question asking respondents: “Other than your family members, is there someone you trust enough to make your partner in starting a business?” The measure, while not exact, is a good proxy for several reasons. First, “trust” is closely identified with solidarities, empathy, and perceived shared identities; indeed, it is a prerequisite for feeling empathy and solidarity. Second, the question specifically asks about trusting someone outside the family, which captures at least partially the respondent’s level of non-kin/non-parochial solidarities. Third, it asks about a concrete situation rather than about “trust” in the abstract, which is more likely to elicit useful answers—particularly since the question requires the person to imagine doing something as high-stakes as trusting someone with part of his income and livelihood through a joint business project.

Analyses of the Gallup data strongly support my qualitative intuitions that rural Syrians had higher potential for broad solidarities than Jordanians. The marginal effects graph in Figure
5.1 depicts the predicted probability that a Syrian and Jordanian male in the regime’s mass constituency (same reference group as in Chapters 3–4) trusts a person outside their family as a partner in a business, measured across four waves of the Gallup Poll between early 2009 and November 2010. The graphs show that already before the 2011 uprisings, an average member of the Syrian reference group was far more likely to trust non-kin (27% more) than a Jordanian, and this substantively large difference is also statistically significant at the 95% confidence level for the fall 2009 and 2010 waves and almost significant for the spring 2009 wave.

Figure 5.1 Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men trust non-kin as partners in business (95% conf. interval).

Source: Gallup World Poll
5.2.2 Affect as cause of potential for broad solidarities

What explains the visible differences in potential for broad solidarities among rural Syrian and Jordanian mass constituencies before 2011? In Chapter 1 I had argued that it is shaped both directly and indirectly by constituencies’ affect. Let me examine this proposition against the existing data.

5.2.2.1 Direct effect of affect on potential for broad solidarities

Qualitative evidence from Syria and Jordan suggests that affect had an important direct effect on potential for broad solidarities. In the case of Syria, mistrust and disaffection towards the top-heavy state were major factors creating pre-2011 proto-camaraderie among the regime’s rural and ex-rural constituency. One of the main reasons the quasi-underground religious study groups and charitable movement attracted the MSME class, including growing numbers of rural migrants, was that they provided, in the words of their members, a shared “safe space” – “liberalized zones… not penetrated by snooping regime informants” (Khatib, 2011). The largest charitable organizations were linked to clerics known for their political independence from the Baathist state, and businessmen gave more money to these organizations precisely because the government had the least political control over them (Pierret & Selvik, 2009: 599, 610). Outside of these institutions, negative affect also shaped solidarities through humor. Both everyday discourse (Wedeen, 1999) and a rapidly growing menu of popular television sitcoms since the 1980s lampooned the “absurdly cold logic [of] monolithic” ministries, “Nazi-like” bureaucrats, rampant corruption by the mukhabarat, and other facets of life under the Baathist state – and the jokes and televised satirical sketches had tremendous a “mass resonance”
because they “[captured the essence of] actual experiences of millions” (Dick, 2007). In Jordan, the absence of strong negative feelings towards the state meant that rural Transjordanians lacked a basis for developing latent broad solidarities. Inclusive religious study circles and charitable organizations had no following because Transjordanians did not need the “safe spaces” from the state, and felt they were better off investing in tribal diwans. And Syria’s biting political satire and other forms of critical cultural production which could build solidarities around a shared subtle rejection of the state had no equivalent in Jordan’s popular culture primarily because of the weak demand for such satire among the regime’s constituent base. Since rural Jordanians supported the regime, their most popular cultural genre after the 1970s was government-sponsored music and art glorifying the country’s tribal heritage and unbreakable bond with the Hashemite monarchy (Massad, 2001).

The qualitative intuition for an inverse relationship between pre-protest affect and potential for broad solidarities is supported by quantitative analyses. Using Gallup’s spring 2009 surveys, I regressed affect (measured by 3 proxies, as in Chapter 4) on potential solidarities (trust) to test the hypothesis that perceptions of negative governance practices (unresponsive, repressive, corrupt) would increase solidarities among Syrians but not among Jordanians. Figure 5.2 presents the results of the four main logistic regressions - the baseline control regression (without affect), and three models with the three different measures of affect as IVs – with all four regression outputs in a single graph for ease of comparison. The height of the bars captures the predicted probability that a person in the standard reference group trusts a person outside their family as a partner in a business. The results systematically confirm my prediction. Comparing the bars in the “control” columns on the left with the three sets of results with affect, we see that Syrian respondents were more sensitive to governance than Jordanians. Compared to the control
model, perceptions of “bad” governance (bureaucratic unresponsiveness, repression, corruption) significantly increased the probability of generalized trust among Syrians from the baseline control of 77% - to 80%, 83%, and almost 90% depending on the measure of affect, but the same perceptions had no effect on Jordanians - and in some cases even decreased their trust. In other words, affect caused the predicted levels of trust to move in different directions among Syrians and Jordanians, and increased the gap between the two groups from 6 percentage points (control regression), to a strongly statistically significant 12-15 percentage point difference in the three models with affect.

Figure 5.2 Predicted probabilities that rural Syrian and Jordanian men trust non-kin, as function of affect/perceived governance (95% conf. interval), 2009.

Source: Gallup World Poll, Spring 2009.

5.2.2.2 Indirect effect of affect on potential for broad solidarities

In the first chapter I had theorized that the second, indirect way in which affect shapes horizontal solidarities is through the material preferences of the regimes’ mass base. I had argued that the relationship between valuation of state goods and potential for broad solidarities is inverse
because when a popular base values regime goods it can be more easily divided by the autocrat using distributive incentives, and vice versa. Qualitative and quantitative evidence from Syria and Jordan are generally in line with this proposition. In Syria communal identities, although still prominent, were not divisive in the late 2000s the way they were in Jordan and did not obstruct the development of inclusive solidarities, because the state’s distributive largesse was not a source of small-group rivalry.\textsuperscript{437} One reason for this was that the state never tried to splinter the population on the basis of identity groups – quite the converse\textsuperscript{438} - and provided basic social services on a universal basis. However this was not the only cause, because many goods such as jobs were by necessity rivalrous. The second and more important reason was that at least since the 1980s the distributive goods themselves were not as vital to rural Syrians as they were to rural Jordanians: since Syrian peasants did value the jobs and the services too highly and were not very economically dependent of the state, their solidarities could not be splintered by the state as effectively. The situation in Syria contrasted with Jordan where the IB system succeeded since the 1960s in “addicting” its rural base to state largesse and in exploiting that addiction to entice the constituency to focus all its energies on exclusive narrow clan identities. Rural Transjordanians found it advantageous to invest in their hamula (clan) because the clan offered the most effective path to washta and regime goods and privileges (Farrag 1977): by clustering into clans they believed that they could magnify the “purchasing power” of their lobbying efforts (electoral and otherwise) and “strengthen… their position in public life” (Oudat 2005: 7),\textsuperscript{439} and that they could better leverage concessions from intermediaries who had strong incentives of their own to hand out government patronage predominantly to their native clans.\textsuperscript{440} The more Transjordanians came to value state goods, the more they came to associate their interests with exclusive kinship groups, and the more they retreated from broad inclusive identities. In a
national survey fielded in May 2011, East Bank Jordanians overwhelmingly indicated that the most important determinant of a successful career and decent living was “belonging to a large [cohesive] tribe”\(^{441}\) and having strong “tribal backing” (\(\text{da’}m \ ‘\text{asha‘iri} \))\(^{442}\).

To test the relationship between vested economic interest and potential for broad solidarities more systematically, I turned again to Gallup’s spring 2009 poll. As measures of my dependent variable, potential for broad solidarities, I used the same question as before (trusting non-kin). As measures of my independent variable, valuation of state goods, I used the same two proxies as in Chapter 4 – preference for government jobs and satisfaction with local health services – but this time focused specifically on responses that in an IB state like Jordan could indicate rivalry for state goods. The most “rivalrous” response to the question about job preferences was a strict preference for a government job, and for the health question – lack of satisfaction with health services, since it may connote the respondent’s inability access those resources and therefore a state of competition for them. I used the standard control variables I had used to produce the reference group (age, gender, rural residency, education). If my theory is correct, we should see a wide gap in solidarities between Syrian and Jordanian respondents who state a preference for government jobs and lack of satisfaction with health services, because rivalry for these goods should drive down generalized solidarities in an IB state like Jordan but have no effect on solidarities in a TD state like Syria. Figure 5.3 presents the results of three logistic regressions in a single graph with broad solidarities (trust non-kin as business partner) as the dependent variable. The baseline “control” regression on the left does not take economic preferences into account, while the two models to the right include economic preferences proxied by preference for government jobs and satisfaction with health services. The height of the bars captures the
predicted probability that a person in the standard reference group trusts a person outside their family as a partner in business.

The results confirm my main predictions and offer additional unexpected insights. First, they corroborate the prediction that valuation of (and rivalry for) state goods increases the gap in generalized trust/solidarities between respondents from the TD state and the IB state. Predicted levels of broad trust/solidarity were statistically indistinguishable among Syrians and Jordanians in the reference group in the control regression and (not shown) when their employment and service needs were met; however the predicted levels starkly diverged when the respondents were dissatisfied with health services or were looking for a government job. Second, the results also confirm the prediction that the increased gap between Syrian and Jordanian solidarities would be driven by a decrease on the Jordanian side. Finally, the data suggest a trend I did not expect: a rise in solidarities among Syrians. There seems to be a simple way to explain this for the health-related result: namely, that among the Syrian respondents lack of satisfaction with government services captures a partial rejection of the state/state services, and that solidarities are stronger because people who reject the state make a conscious move to connect to others who share their outlook (such as by way of underground groups). The result for Syrians with a preference for government jobs is more difficult to rationalize - it is not immediately clear why they would have higher trust; however it is significant that the effect of wanting government jobs on solidarities is opposite for Syrians and Jordanians, since it suggests that state largesse may actually mean different things to these two groups.
5.2.3 Alternative explanations for potential for broad solidarities

The literature suggests a number of competing explanations for citizens’ potential for broad solidarities in autocratic regimes. In this section, I briefly examine some of the main arguments and show why they are either incomplete or unpersuasive.

5.2.3.1 Strength of civil society

A large and growing literature explains a society’s level of generalized trust and solidarities in terms of the numerical weight and vibrancy of a country’s civil society (McAdam et al, 1996; Putnam, 1993; Slater, 2009) and virtual networks. This literature would have predicted stronger potential for broad solidarities among Jordanians not Syrians, since Jordan boasted a
numerically larger and apparently more vibrant civil society\(^{444}\) as well as stronger virtual connectivity (due to higher rate of internet penetration (see Appendix) and fewer restrictions on social media\(^{445}\)) – the opposite of actual observed trends.

### 5.2.3.2 Baath’s inclusive corporatism

A number of studies have argued that the Baath’s inclusive corporatism since the 1960s played a role in uniting the ethnically and religiously fragmented country (Batatu, 1999b). Could the presence of corporatism in Syria and its absence in Jordan explain why the Syrian mass constituency was oriented towards broad inclusive social identities while the Jordanian towards narrow parochial ones? I certainly agree with the argument that the Syrian regime’s policy of downplaying communal identities may have weakened their social prominence while the Hashemites’ conscious “tribalization” of Transjordanian society foregrounded that exclusive type of identity there. However, the corporatism argument by itself is insufficient. The real or imagined inclusive networks that characterized the potential for broad solidarities among the Syrian regime’s base, such as the religious study groups and charities, were not formed under the umbrella of Baathist corporatist unions and Party, but in opposition to these structures. And the Jordanian regime would have been unable to manipulate tribal identities in a game of divide-and-rule in the first place had its rural base not been “addicted” to its distributive goods.

### 5.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter showed how Syria’s and Jordan’s contrasting institutions conditioned important differences in what I argued is a key proximate predictor of protest movementization: the
potential for broad solidarities among the regime’s mass constituency. I demonstrated that the
Syrian mass constituency, despite facing more stringent limitations on civic organizing than its
Jordanian counterpart, had a stronger foundation for developing broad generalized solidarities
already before 2011, and that the difference was driven both directly and indirectly by the
constituencies’ affect. The potential for broad solidarities was high among rural Syrians because
of their shared negative affect towards the regime and their lower valuation of state goods, and
they were low among rural Transjordanians because they lacked a common grievance against the
state and valued state goods, which enabled the Hashemite regime to play divide-and-rule. More
generally, the chapter showed that if the two mass constituencies’ potential for generalized
solidarities was in fact a good predictor of their potential for protest coordination, the predictor
was measurable long before 2011 and signaled that a divergence in protest movementization in
2011 was very likely.
PART THREE: PROTEST DYNAMICS IN THE WAKE OF THE ARAB SPRING
CHAPTER 6. INSTITUTIONS AND PROTEST ESCALATION IN 2011: EVIDENCE FROM A NATURAL BORDER EXPERIMENT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two chapters I presented a variety of qualitative and quantitative evidence which showed that already prior to the outbreak of protests in 2011 Syria’s politically-pivotal constituencies scored higher on predictors for protest escalation than Jordan’s, and that the differences between the two societies were systematically linked to affect and governing institutions. While the findings are statistically strong and in line with my theoretical predictions, they do not actually prove my causal story for two reasons. First, they only look at predictors of protest escalation from the pre-protest \( (t_{-1}) \) period but do not take us into the protest period itself, and second even the pre-protest data is observational which cannot definitively prove my claim that the role of affect and institutions is causal.

The concern about the causal connection between institutions and propensities for protest escalation is serious because my entire theory is built around the mechanism. The main worry here is not with reverse causality\(^{446}\) but rather with the possible presence of “confounders,” variables that could have caused both the original choice of institutions and protest escalation and whose presence could mean that an observed association between institutions and protest escalation is spurious. What is an obvious confounder in my study? A prime candidate is the economic power of pre-1960s elites. As will be recalled from Chapter 2, late 1950s Syria and Jordan differed tremendously on this parameter: the former had powerful agrarian elites and a highly unequal distribution of wealth, while the latter - a declining class of rural sheikhs and a
relatively egalitarian landholding structure. In Chapter 2 I had argued that the difference accounted for Syria’s and Jordan’s dissimilar institutional designs since state-building in the 1960s; but it could have also conceivably shaped direct predictors of escalation such as citizens’ affect towards the state - for instance, Syria’s domineering exploitative pre-Baath elites could have sowed lasting public mistrust of authority figures while Jordan’s weak elites could have cultivated lasting favorable views of the state. If differences in the power of pre-state-building elites indeed shaped both ruling institutions and lasting citizen perception of state authority, we may have a confounder. Figure 6.1 visually illustrates the potentially endogenous three-way relationship between the explanatory variable (institutions nurtured since state-building, $t_{-2}$); the dependent variable (predictors of protest escalation on the eve of protests, $t_{-1}$); and the confounder (strength of competing elites prior to state-building $t_{-3}$) – and how it can cause us to question the causality between institutions and predictors of escalation.

![Figure 6.1 Causal model with confounder]

The ideal way to get around possible endogeneities and to truly “test” the causal relationship between institutions and predictors of protest escalation is to stage an experiment, which assigns institutions to countries at random and measures their average effect on outcomes, many years later. Ethical concerns aside, such an intervention would be impractical since institutions cannot be superimposed on countries at will. Given the constraints, natural experiments offer the best
compromise: they are both more causally-precise than ordinary observational analyses, and more feasible than intrusive lab experiments. In essence, natural experiments consist of a comparison of micro-regions that were close to identical but were placed under different institutions by an accident of history. The accidental superimposition of different institutions on close-to-identical communities approximates experiment-like random assignment (because the features of the communities are plausibly orthogonal to the nature of institutions) and allows us to (maximally) rule out the influence of confounders and move from a model where causality is uncertain (Figure 6.1) to a model where causality is more plausible (Figure 6.2). The most common type of natural experiment involves a comparison of communities divided by an artificial political boundary, because if a boundary is truly arbitrary – if it cuts through space irrespective of social and topographic features on the ground – the communities it bisects should have close-to-identical profiles at the time of division (Diamond & Robinson, 2010; Posner, 2004).

Figure 6.2 Causal model without confounder

In this chapter, I fill in the two major gaps left unaddressed in Chapters 4 and 5, namely the question of causality, and the links between pre-protest citizen attributes at $t_{-1}$ and protest escalation starting at $t_{2}$. First, I test with greater precision for the existence of a causal relationship between institutions and predictors of protest escalation at $t_{-1}$, by exploiting a natural experiment. The “experiment” consists of tracing the effect of exogenous national institutions on local outcomes in a microregion around the Syrian-Jordanian border, called the
Hawran; the region once constituted a single cultural, socio-economic, and political unit, but was divided by an arbitrary colonial border and placed under different (Syrian/Jordanian) ruling institutions. I find that institutions did in fact have a causal effect on key pre-protest predictors of protest escalation. At the time of state-building, regime constituencies on the two sides of the Hawran had indistinguishable types of solidarities and affect-, political approval-, economic vested interest in the regime, yet diverged - in predicted ways - after the imposition of different governing institutions in the 1960s. Second, I use this chapter to examine the connection between pre-protest citizen attributes (at $t_{-1}$) and actual protest escalation dynamics once the protests start ($t_2$ to $t_4$) that I had hypothesized in Chapter 1, using the Hawran during the winter-spring of 2011 as my detailed empirical laboratory. I find strong evidence for the hypothesized relationship between $t_{-1}$ and $t_2$, and for even the precise causal mechanisms linking the two, including the nature of protesters’ demands and solidarities at the beginning of collective action, the regime’s strategies to control the protests, and, finally, protesters’ responses to regime actions.

The chapter is organized as follows. Sections 2-4 focus on the pre-2011 period. Section 2 discusses why the Hawran region is uniquely suited for a natural border experiment and for the study of long-term causal effects of institutions. Sections 3 and 4 describe, respectively, the footprint of Syria’s and Jordan’s national institutions on the two halves of the Hawran before 2011, and the effects of the contrasting systems of governance on the pre-2011 proximate and intermediate predictors of protest escalation. Here I demonstrate the independent causal effect of institutions on the affect, politics, material preferences, and solidarities of the regime’s local popular base. Section 5 presents a detailed micro-level comparison of protest dynamics in the Syrian and Jordanian Hawrans during the spring and winter of 2011. Using qualitative and some
quantitative evidence, I show how pre-protest traits of Daraa’s and Irbid’s citizens systematically shaped the regions’ different protest paths in the wake of the same exogenous shock. In Section 6, I discuss common competing explanations for protest escalation as applied to the Hawran region; I show why they are insufficient for understanding the cases at hand and how my theory can help to address some of the puzzles they leave unresolved. Section 7 concludes.

6.2 NATURAL EXPERIMENT IN THE HAWRAN: EXPLOITING AN ARTIFICIAL COLONIAL BORDER

The Hawran region, which encompasses modern-day Daraa governorate in Syria and Irbid province in Jordan, presents a fruitful quasi-experimental laboratory for studying the effect of institutions on protest dynamics.447

Figure 6.3 Daraa and Irbid on modern political map of Eastern Mediterranean.
This densely-populated ancient agricultural region, home to a million inhabitants on each side of the border in 2010, and famed for its long-standing shared “Hawrani” identity, was bisected by a colonial-era border that for the most part took no account of local topography or population. The map in Figure 6.3 locates the region within the contours of modern Syria (red) and Jordan (blue) and the broader Eastern Mediterranean.

6.2.1 Arbitrary border

Although “natural experiments” offer a powerful empirical tool for the comparative study of institutions, they are rare. Not all border regions qualify for such “experimental” comparisons because not all colonial boundaries are arbitrary: many follow rivers, mountains, pre-existing tribal territories and landholdings, which can mean that communities on each side of the divide differ in meaningful ways, and institutions remain endogenous (Dunning, 2012; McCauley & Posner, 2014). Most of the 375km-long Syrian-Jordanian border, despite being drawn by the hand of foreign colonial administrators, does not fall in the artificial category: in many places, it snakes around mountains (rather than randomly cutting across them) and envelops communities of a particular heritage to ensure they stay on the same side of the border (rather than obliviously bisecting them).

The Hawran stretch of the Syrian-Jordanian border is in many ways exceptional for its arbitrariness. Finalized by the 1931 “Protocol between France and Great Britain,” the boundary was, in the assessment of independent geographers, an “essentially artificial” line (U.S. Department of State, 1969) – an assessment confirmed by existing ethnographic and topographic evidence. Micro-level research and journalistic reports from the Hawran frequently mention that...
the border cuts across landholdings and properties, stranding families with half of their plots on the Syrian side and half on the Jordanian. Topographic maps in Figures 6.4 and 6.5 provide complementary evidence.

**Figure 6.4** Syrian-Jordanian border overlaid over topographic map of rivers, streams, and Hejaz railway line.

![Map of Syrian-Jordanian border](http://gaialab.asu.edu/Jordan/#)

**Figure 6.5** Syrian-Jordanian border detail overlaid over contour map.

![Contour map of Daraa and Ramtha](http://gaialab.asu.edu/Jordan/#)

The first map demonstrates that, besides the Western-most stretch of the border where it briefly traces the Hejaz railway and Yarmouk river, most of the boundary in the Hawran region does not follow any recognizable man-made or natural topographical features: east of the village of Tal Shahab, it splits from the river and railway, and thereafter liberally cuts across hills, streams, and other features. The second map depicts in more fine-grained detail the boundary’s arbitrary path, and, as a result of the arbitrariness, the similar topographies of the Syrian and Jordanian areas above and below the line.

6.2.2 Exogenous national-level institutions

Although the overall patterns of Syria’s and Jordan’s landholding and wealth distribution differed dramatically at the time of modern state-building in the 1960s, as I described in Chapter 2, these aggregate differences masked significant subnational variation – and in some regions the differences between the two states were not very pronounced. In the Hawran, the average size of landholdings was very similar on both sides of the border at the time of partition in the 1930s through the 1960s: farms tended to be small-medium sized, and the land owner base was broad (Batatu, 1999a). The fact that Daraa, like Irbid, was “not characterized by large concentrations of ownership in land” and did not have powerful pre-existing landed elites (Batatu, 1999a) meant the institutions the Baath and King Hussein superimposed on the regions – the first designed to crush threatening landed elites, the second to incorporate pre-existing local powers – were largely exogenous. The Baath’s top-down institutions in particular were a by-product of its struggle for power against wealthy landowners in other regions of Syria (such as rural Damascus, Hassakeh, Homs, Aleppo, and Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, where the regime
expropriated large tracts of land) and that they were imposed on Daraa despite its small and egalitarian landholding structures.\textsuperscript{452}

### 6.2.3 Populations with shared historic, economic, and communal identities

In addition to similarities in landholdings, the Syrian and Jordanian sides of the Hawran shared imagined historical, economic, and communal identities. The colonial border bisected communities that had for centuries existed as - and imagined themselves to be - a single, tight-knit unit. Administratively, Hawran had been ruled as a single political district continuously since the 700s under the Umayyad dynasty through the end of Ottoman rule (Oudat, 2005; U.S. Department of State, 1969). Ottoman maps consistently demarcate the sanjak (district) of Hawran as a subregion of the Damascus province, and suggest that it encased modern-day Daraa and Irbid. Figure 6.6 depicts an 1899 Ottoman map with the Hawran sanjak marked in blue-green and Irbid and Daraa marked in white (the letters “H-a-u-r” are still discernible on the map, and the district “Hauran” is also listed in the original map key at the bottom). Figure 6.7 overlays the outline of the Ottoman Hawran sanjak from Figure 6.6 over modern Syrian and Jordanian borders, to show how the latter bisects what was once a single province.

Beyond a common political history, the people of Hawran shared a strongly felt regional identity as agriculturalists, as bearers of a common Hawrani dialect, and members of the same locally-rooted tribes and kinship groups. Conversations with locals on both sides of the border reveal that even in the late 2000s – and much more so during the 1930s-50s – a central part of Hawrani identity in the late 2000s was the self-identification as agriculturalists, even among those who no longer worked in agricultural professions.\textsuperscript{453} The tight connection in the local
Figure 6.6 Ottoman map of Hawran, 1899.

Figure 6.7 Modern Syrian-Jordanian border overlaid over administrative boundary of Ottoman Hawran.
Figure 6.8 Districts of modern Daraa and Irbid overlaid over administrative boundary of Ottoman Hawran.

Figure 6.9 Geographic distribution of Hawrani peasants in the 1930s, overlaid over modern Syrian-Jordanian border.

Source: (Cantineau, 1940) (data collection from 1933-6).
imagination between Hawrani identity and settled agriculture has several sources, the main one being the natural geography of the region. Ottoman Hawran and modern-day Irbid and Daraa were centered on the fertile “Hawran” plain (Figure 6.8, shaded in light green) which, since antiquity, had served as a bread basket for the Eastern Mediterranean (Oweiss, 2011; Batatu, 1999). That this peasant identity applied to both sides of the border at the time of the region’s partition is captured in a 1930s map drawn by a French cartographer, which delineates “Horan” as the area inhabited by paysans horanais or “Hawrani peasants” – a group that visibly spanned the modern national border (Figure 6.9). Confirming the continuation of these cross-border similarities into the 1960s is a 1969 study on the physical geography of the area, which notes that “north and south of the boundary area … topography and land structure are similar in
Syria and Jordan, [as] is land use [with] considerable cultivation of wheat, barley, maize, lentils, and legumes” (U.S. Department of State, 1969).

Finally, Syrian and Jordanian Hawrani communities shared strong real or imagined kinship ties. Many of the prominent Hawran clans\textsuperscript{456} - for example, the Zoubi, Rifa’i, Miqdad, Masalmeh, Abazeed, and Hajj Ali clans, as well as the Sharaa and Khatib families – spanned the colonial border. A 1930s map depicting the concentrations of some prominent Hawrani families (Figure 6.10) visually illustrates the similarity of clans on both sides of the line, and even in 2010-2011 tours of the neighborhoods of Daraa and its twin Jordanian city, Ramtha, “reveal[ed] …shop fronts bearing the names of the same clans and families separated by… the British and the French colonial rulers” (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2011). In some cases the colonial border divided not only clans but nuclear families: many “members of the Zu’bi,… Sharaa, Nasr, Al-Sameirat, Waradat or other clans… living in Ramtha [have] cousins on the other side of the border,” and they remained connected through a dense network of interaction and intermarriage (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2011).\textsuperscript{457}

6.2.4 Twin identities until state-building

Although temporally the partition of the two Hawrans came several decades before state-building in the 1960s, the close similarities of the twin regions observed in the early 1930s persisted up to state-building because, as discussed in Chapter 2, before the 1960s both the Syrian and Jordanian states did not extend their power into their peripheries in meaningful ways and relied mostly on indirect rule. The limited reach of the central governments, combined with a (until the 1950s) relatively porous national border\textsuperscript{458} meant that the socio-economic practices and identities of the Hawran – namely, the patterns of land ownership, the dominance of the farming economy, as
well as the shared markets, dialects, familial connections, and other features – remained largely undisturbed from the 1930s through the early 1960s. Of course, I would exaggerate if I said that the two communities were strictly identical in the early 1960s – no two villages or even families ever are. But for my purposes is it not important that they were exact clones; what is important is that at the time of state-building in the 1960s they were extremely similar on the types of features that caused the Baath and the young king Hussein to opt for different national framing institutions, and that the national institutions were therefore plausibly exogenous.

6.3 INSTITUTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN THE HAWRAN AFTER 1950s

The ambitious push by the Syrian Baath and Jordan’s young King Hussein after the 1950s to extend state power into peripheral provinces superimposed on the twin Hawrans a contrasting set of institutions and governance practices. Let’s briefly take a look at their footprint in the two regions, before moving to a discussion of their effects.

6.3.1 Post-1950s institutions and governance in Daraa, the Syrian Hawran

The institutional system superimposed on the Syrian Hawran after 1963 mirrored the system I described in Chapter 2, for the rest of Syria: it was centralized, top-down, and designed to maximize the state’s control over all aspects of policy and implementation. Even as the powerbrokers that dominated provincial government changed over time, shifting from the Baath Party (1960s-90s) to the office of the provincial governor (muhafez) after 2000, the TD nature
of rule remained relatively constant. The system’s overriding interest in furthering state control had two main implications for the nature of governance on the ground: it deprived the regime’s local mass constituency – mainly rural farmers or ex-farmers – of voice and leverage over provincial state intermediaries, and it allowed top state officials to engage in predatory behavior vis a vis the local population.

Weak bargaining power of mass base. As in other parts of the country, regime decision-makers in Damascus sought to subordinate their local mass constituency to the central directives of the state, and to block formal or informal channels of grassroots interest representation that could derail their policies and subvert their control. “Daraawis” (as Daraa residents are called in local Arabic) interviewed for this study in 2011-13 affirmed that in their memory, both before and after 2000, there had been few influential individuals or organizations to which they could turn with their problems and needs. Daraa’s branches of the corporatist Peasant Union and Baath Party, although designed as vehicles for local interest representation, in fact acted as extensions of central control and mukhabarat. Ministers, members of parliament, mayors, and other men who had risen to power from the ranks of ordinary Daraawis did little for their constituents because they had little career incentive to perform constituency service: Daraawis who became close to the regime, like Farouq Sharaa (Syria’s Vice President in 2010), Faisal Miqdad (Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Rustom Ghazzaleh (Chief of Military Intelligence) rarely visited the province or responded to local requests for help. Daraawis had even less leverage over the provincial governors, who “were the most influential figures in the province” along with the mukhabarat and who (as in other provinces) were recruited from outside Daraa. Governor Kalthoum (2006-2011) and his predecessor Walid Othman (2000-2006) were notorious for their neglect of local needs and their corruption.
Predatory governance. The centralization of power produced the same governance pathologies that I had documented in Chapter 3 for the country as a whole: extreme unresponsiveness, unbridled and burdensome forms of corruption, and brazen repression. Unresponsiveness, although rarely openly discussed or documented in Syria before 2011, pervaded all levels of government administration before 2011. One former high-level civil servant who had emigrated and could therefore speak out more freely summarized a sentiment I heard others express informally. “For citizens,” he wrote in 2006 online publication in the form of a letter to the newly appointed governor of Daraa, Faisal Kalthoum, “the experience of visiting [local bureaucratic] offices is burdensome because even minor services entail many superfluous steps in the bureaucratic process, leading to frequent abuses by civil servants… Officials bully citizens… just to assert their power… And they frequently stop or delay their services [for citizens] because… the work does not take priority in their lives” (Kefri, 2006). He pleaded with the new governor to change practices and discipline officials to make them treat citizens with more sensitivity and respect.

Corruption in the province was widespread and took mostly the form of petty bribery and high-level graft. Locals interviewed for this study admitted that as long as they could remember they had “needed to bribe some official… to get anything done” and that extortion by civil servants and local Baath and Peasant Union officials were routine. Many sensed that “the source of all corruption [was] the governor and his aides” because they controlled everything in the province. Locals came to see the governor’s office as the snake pit of venality particularly as a result of its policies on land and water, two areas that critically affected Daraa farmers. During the 2000s, both governor Kalthoum and Othman used a national edict (Law of Borderlands) to expropriate land from farmers whose plots were close to the international border.
with Jordan – supposedly for military training and installations, but in reality to sell the land and pocket handsome sums of money. The corruption was obvious: farmers could see that their land was used to build villas rather than the fictitious military bases.\textsuperscript{467} The same governors also reportedly diverted scarce piped water that had been used by farmers for irrigation to reach crony friends-turned-agribusiness investors, and exploited the resultant water shortage to extract bribes from other users for the “privilege” of drilling wells.\textsuperscript{468}

Finally, the Syrian regime’s presence in Daraa was strongly colored by a militaristic form of repression that was deeply antagonizing for residents. In addition to the country-wide state of emergency that had curtailed ordinary Syrians’ freedoms since 1963, the 2000s saw an increased role of the security forces in Daraa (as in other rural provinces) to offset the declining reach of the Baath party - and this reflected on everyday governance (Abouzeid, 2011). The appointment in 2008 of Atef Najib as head of political security in Daraa crystalized this militaristic, heavy-handed style: Najib, as Kalthoum’s right hand man, ruled with what residents perceived to be an “iron fist;” “he used to tell us,” locals recalled, “that, ‘In Daraa, I am God’” (Sands et al 2014). With the increasing shift of state presence in Daraawis’ lives from the Baath’s corporatist control to the predatory military and security services, many felt an ever tightening “grip of the security forces” on their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{469}

\section*{6.3.2 Post-1950s institutions and governance in Irbid, the Jordanian Hawran}

The institutions superimposed on Irbid after the 1950s mirrored the Institutionalized-Bargaining model observed elsewhere in Jordan: a centralized system that, however, within the bounds established by regime leadership, institutionalized a rigorous process of citizen-state negotiation
over local policy decisions and implementation. The system’s focus on bargaining had two main implications for the nature of governance on the ground: it gave the regime’s local power base – Rabdawis (the term used for “residents of Irbid,” in local parlance) of rural Transjordanian descent – significant leverage over local regime intermediaries and local policies, and it encouraged state intermediaries to woo the mass constituency and engage client-oriented forms of governance.

**Strong(er) bargaining power of mass base.** The emphasis of Jordan’s IB institutions on bargaining gave the regime’s popular base excellent access and leverage over key state intermediaries and the resources they controlled – especially individuals elected or selected by the communities, such as sheikhs, mayors, and parliamentarians.\(^\text{470}\) (Centrally-appointed figures like governors played a less central day-to-day role, and the mukhabarat was less visible although it always remained a key powerbroker behind the scenes.)\(^\text{471}\) Irbid’s popular base had this power because it controlled political “resources” that key local brokers like parliamentarians, mayors, and sheikhs needed for career advancement: namely, political support which (after the reintroduction of elections in 1989) mainly took the form of electoral votes, and demonstrated loyalist political credentials, such as abstention from oppositional political activity including participation in demonstrations and political parties blacklisted by the regime. During Irbid’s parliamentary and municipal campaigns, constituents exercised their power by rigorously scrutinizing and pre-screening their future intermediaries on the basis of past service; and candidates that had not satisfactorily proven themselves were kicked out of office at the end of their terms or sidelined (even non-elected sheikhs were at times “demoted” in this way).\(^\text{472}\)

**Client-oriented governance.** The second feature of the institutionalized bargaining system was that it promoted relatively client-oriented behavior by local intermediaries, including
significant responsiveness to citizen needs, and not overly antagonizing forms of corruption and control. Over a dozen mayors and sheikhs interviewed for this study in Irbid during 2010-2011 stressed their round-the-clock availability to their rural Transjordanian constituents. “My door is always open,” insisted a sheikh from Koura; “my phone is on twenty-four hours a day,” boasted the mayor of Mazar Shamali; Sheikh Azzam from Wastiyeh claimed that he spent most of his day visiting families “feeling out … the major needs of people in my district.” These statements did not seem to be crude exaggerations, since I was able to observe their hospitality and clientelistic services in action. During my interviews with mayors and sheikhs, many of which took place in these men’s own homes and offices, I witnessed people come in – unaware of my visit – and wait until we were done to express some urgent need or complaint. I used these opportunities to ask questions about local needs and services rendered. Many intermediaries admitted that while they were unable to honor many of the requests for help due to limited resources, they were always available to listen and to place a phone call. The visibly close contact between intermediaries and constituents in Irbid contrasted with the distant relations in Daraa.

Another key distinction between local governance in Irbid and Daraa was the prevalent form of corruption. Graft by prominent local officials was less common and less visible than in Daraa since the most egregious cases involved high-placed cronies outside the province, in Amman (Sadiki 2012). Meanwhile patterns of lower-level corruption resembled those I described for the country at large: bribery of the kind seen in Daraa was “very rare” but wasa or string pulling was used for every need, suggesting that Rabdawis and Daraawis experienced corruption in qualitatively different ways.
Finally, the heavy-handed “grip of security services” that defined governance in Daraa was all but absent in Irbid. Although the mukhabarat were active in the province and kept their fingers on the pulse, their interference was usually subtle.\textsuperscript{475}

\section*{6.4 INSTITUTIONS AND PRE-2011 PREDICTORS OF PROTEST ESCALATION}

In this section I explore whether Daraa’s and Irbid’s dissimilar institutional systems had an independent causal effect on intermediate and proximate predictors of protest escalation. To the extent that my controlled comparison permits me to make historical causal claims, I find that institutions indeed had a palpable effect, in the expected direction. In the 1960s, when the institutions were introduced, the regime’s popular base (RPB) on both sides of the Hawran had similar affect towards the state, and near-identical levels of political approval, perceived material (in)dependence, and horizontal solidarities. By the mid-late 2000s, however, the two Hawrans were on completely different paths: Syria on a path resembling the top panel of Figure 1.6 in Chapter 1 while Jordan on a path that resembled the bottom panel of the same figure. Although natural experiments do not offer perfect experimental controls and therefore do not automatically rule out other explanations, I show why institutional and governance differences offer a logical and compelling explanation – and, later in the chapter, discuss why the main alternative theories are less convincing.
6.4.1 Institutions and mass constituency’s affect pre-2011

In the late 1950s, directly prior to the construction of Syria’s and Jordan’s ruling institutions, the two sides of the Hawran were near-identical on many socio-economic and political parameters, including what I had argued to be the main intermediary predictor of protest escalation after exogenous trigger events: the regime constituency’s affect towards the state. Hard data on the affect among rural Daraawis and Rabdawis in the 1950s is scarce, but circumstantial evidence suggests that neither community had reason to have strongly-defined feelings – positive or negative – towards their central governments, since at that time they were predominantly subsistence farmers with limited contact with “the state” (E. Thompson, 2000; Waldner, 1999; Alon, 2007).

By the 2000s, Daraawis’ and Rabdawis’ affective feelings towards their states had become markedly different. Although quantitative survey-based measures of affect (of the type used in Chapter 3) are unavailable at the provincial level, qualitative accounts from the years immediately preceding the 2011 uprising provide some insights. They showing signs of profound disaffection towards authorities among rural Daraawis, including a “dearth of trust” and even “anger” (Abbas, 2011; Harling, 2011b), but an overall positive predisposition among Irbid’s rural constituency, despite occasional frustrations at specific local distributive decisions or appointments.

Daraawis’ anger stemmed less from a sense of being “neglected” by the government than by the major governance pathologies that I just described: from exhaustion with state corruption and repression, and sense of powerlessness in the face of abuse (Hilleary, 2011). This anger increased during the 2000s because during that decade the government’s push towards economic
liberalization increased bureaucratic corruption, and regime’s increased reliance on mukhabarat and on corrupt governors Othman and Kalthoum (despite the public’s repeated calls for their dismissal) tightened the “grip of security forces [on the region]” and squeezed farmers with burdensome land and water policies.

Rabdawis’ more positive feelings towards their state in the late 2000s were buoyed in large part because the types of governance pathologies that depressed affect in Daraa were rare. While many Rabdawis grumbled about high-level corruption, most crony deals took place in Amman, outside the province, and did not affect and irritate Rabdawis in the same way that Faisal Kalthoum’s theft of land and water hurt rural Daraawis. The dominant everyday form of corruption in the province was wasta, which was associated with prestige and which predisposed locals towards the regime rather than pulling them away from it: many of my interviewees beamed with pride as they recounted their latest masterful manipulation of string-pulling to obtain a wasta-related economic or political favor. Finally rural Rabdawis retained a positive affect towards their state because they did not feel burdened down by intrusive security forces: mukhabarat, which was despised and feared in Daraa, was perceived in Irbid as a respectful organization that was not feared and that was noted for having “good… people.”

6.4.2 Institutions and mass constituency’s political approval pre-2011

The divergence in Syrian and Jordanian Hawranis’ affective outlooks produced a parallel divergence in pre-protest political, economic, and social preferences - the three proximate predictors of escalation. Political approval, like affect, cannot be estimated with precision for the pre-survey of the late 1950s, however it is safe to assume that communities on both sides of the
border felt similarly indifferent towards their distant nominal rulers given their relative political isolation before state-building. The similarity of their political outlooks gave way to increasing differences after the 1960s, and certainly by late 2010. Although most Daraawis would have been too afraid to publicly share their true political beliefs before the uprisings, in my interviews after 2011 many shared that on the eve of 2011 farmers and lower-income Daraawis were extremely politically disaffected with the regime. Even among the regime’s rural peasant base, many people “completely lack[ed] respect for the Baath Party,”\textsuperscript{486} the central political organ of the Syrian regime, and many accorded the greatest respect (ibtiram ‘ali) and moral authority (quwwa ma’nawiya) to individuals “[who] did not have links to the Syrian state,” such as local tribal sheikhs.\textsuperscript{487} The politics of rural Rabdawis could not have been more different. Few could think of bodies that connoted more prestige than the Royal Court, the nerve center of the Hashemite state.\textsuperscript{488} Older and more politically-minded Rabdawis lamented that in the course of fifty years, from the 1950s to the 2000s, the Jordanian regime had successfully erased all traces of ideological political activism in the province and turned Irbid into a “quiet, boring, loyalist” region.\textsuperscript{489}

Daraawis’ and Rabdawis’ different politics found even more visible expression immediately after the shock of regional uprisings but before their own protests began. The political struggles of Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries found profound resonance in Daraa. According to eyewitness accounts, the “regional turmoil…changed [the outward] behavior” of the local population (ICG, 2011), and even weeks before Daraa’s first demonstration in March 2011 - in late January and February - anti-regime discussions among locals became more common, bold political slogans appeared on walls in numerous villages across the governorate, and the atmosphere grew tense as the streets in some towns became “filled with rumors of protest”
(Leenders, 2012; ICG, 2011). All these actions were previously unimaginable in a country whose hard authoritarian regime had successfully cowed the population into silence and driven all oppositional politics underground. In Irbid, the response to the regional events was very different – weaker and less political. No graffiti appeared calling for the downfall of the regime in provincial towns and villages in response to Tunisia’s and Egypt’s revolutions; to the contrary, locals insisted that their country was not and would not be like Egypt and Tunisia “[because] [they] like the system [they] have.”

6.4.3 Institutions and mass constituency’s vested economic interest pre-2011

The divergence in Hawranis’ affect also shaped a divergence in preferences towards the state’s distributive goods and hence a divergence in the communities’ vested interest in the state. The data shows that directly prior to state-building the two sides of the Hawran were practically indistinguishable economically: both employed approximately 90% of the population in private agriculture, had “similar…land use… north and south of the boundary area,” and benefited from similar natural resource endowments (such as soil quality and water sources for irrigation) (U.S. Department of State, 1969) – essentially, both were self-sufficient and had equal potential to remain self-sufficient and economically not invested in the state. Starting in the 1960s, however, both individual economic preferences and collective vested interests diverged. On the eve of 2011 rural Daraawis in the regime’s mass coalition placed little value on state goods. While “not morally opposed to working for the government” or using its services, many found the prospect significantly less attractive than their cousins in Irbid, who saw government careers and services as the pinnacle of prestige – even though, in many respects, the Syrian state was a more
generous and competent provider of goods and services than the Jordanian (I compare the generosity of state distribution in Daraa and Irbid detail in Section 6 of this chapter). The contrast in preferences was perhaps most poignant in the choice of employment. A view I heard from numerous lower-middle and middle-class rural Daraawis was that: “I don’t want my son to work for the government when he is older… It used to be what people wanted to do, but not anymore.” Meanwhile many Rabdawis I interviewed, both old and young, preferred to forfeit opportunities in the private sector to wait for a lower-paying – but, in their view, more esteemed – administrative job in a local ministry directorate or municipality.

The dissimilar preferences led to divergent economic behavior: despite starting out with near-identical economic profiles in the early 1960s, by the mid-late 2000s Daraawis were much more likely to work in the private sector and were economically more self-reliant than Rabdawis. Detailed district-level data (two levels below governorate level) from original household income and expenditure surveys, displayed in Figures 6.11-6.13, illustrate the trends in 2008. They show that rural working Daraawis were three to five times more likely to work in private industry than working rural Rabdawis; that rural working Daraawis were two to three times more likely to be employed in private agriculture; and that rural working Daraawis were significantly less likely to work for the government. (The Jordanian government employed fewer people in the total adult population but more in the working population, since other employment options were less popular.)

The role of institutions in shaping these different patterns of aggregate employment is clear from my interviews and from historical accounts. For critical Jordanian observers, the crushing dependence on the state sector in Irbid was not a question of endowments or opportunities for private sector work, but the lack of entrepreneurship. Older Rabdawis I interviewed painfully
noted that the increasing pull of government jobs after the 1960s “decimated agriculture” and interest in any other kind of private enterprise. A similar process is documented by historians of Irbid (Oudat, 2005: 36-7). “Modernization” cannot explain Daraa’s and Irbid’s divergent patterns, for Irbid lagged behind Daraa in all types of private employment – not only in “backward” private agriculture but also in “modern” private activity like industry.

Figure 6.11 Percent of Daraa’s and Irbid’s total labor force employed in private industry, by district, 2007-8.

Sources: Original Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, obtained by author from Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and Jordanian Department of Statistics.
Figure 6.12 Percent of Daraa’s and Irbid’s total labor force employed in private agriculture, by district, 2007-8.

Figure 6.13 Percent of Daraa’s and Irbid’s total labor force employed in public sector, by district, 2007-8.
The different levels of material dependence on the two sides of the Hawran were also apparent in non-labor sectors, health being a prime example. **Figure 6.14** shows that rural mothers in Irbid were more than twice as likely to utilize public health facilities for the birth of their latest child in 2006-7, than mothers in Daraa, controlling for their income, education, and other factors that could affect provider choice.

My qualitative interviews on health choice in Daraa and Irbid complement this picture by showing that the mechanism behind the behavior was a difference in affect. According to Rabdawis, locals were keen on government services because they perceived them to be, at the very least, adequate. Daraawis, however – even the rural poor – preferred private medical providers, despite their higher cost and (often) less convenient geographic access, because they associated the public sector with negative experiences like corruption and poor customer service and respect (Kefri, 2006). True or not, they perceived that private services to be better.
6.4.4 Institutions and mass constituency’s potential for broad solidarities pre-2011

Finally, differences in affect conditioned a divergence in the potential for broad solidarities after the late 1950s. Prior to the construction of Syria’s and Jordan’s ruling institutions, the two sides of the Hawran shared dominant clan-based forms of social organization and solidarity and hence similar (low) potential for broad-group solidarities. Communities on both sides of the border belonged to the same tribes and families, and their social ties and solidarities were structured in essentially the same way. After the 1950s, however, under the influence of different institutions, they evolved in distinct ways: by the late 2000s Daraawis had reduced the prominent clan-based ties in favor of a dominant regional and national identity, while their Jordanian cousins, to the contrary, had reinforced and invested in ever-narrower circles of blood relations – which put Daraawis at a relative structural advantage for mobilizing broad collective action.

Although Daraa locals did not recollect farmers engaging in significant organized collective action (‘aml jama‘i) before 2011, the regime’s heavy-handed policies appeared to nurture some proto-solidarities: farmers, even though usually too afraid to stand up to the governor or the mukhabarat, helped each other where they could and developed a form of proto-solidarities in their common struggle against the state.500 These proto-solidarities stretched beyond immediate family and clan. Other broad proto-solidarities based on a large regional identity were also strong. According to one young Daraawi, even though most locals belonged to clans and families, in the late 2000s “[clan] identity was weaker than the belonging (intima’) we felt towards the Hawran region as a whole, which unites us through a shared set of customs, traditions, and dialect.”501 These broad solidarities survived in part due to the nature of Baathist policy before 2011 – not due to its drive to unite Syrians under corporatist and Party umbrella
structures (as already discussed, these institution were neither hugely popular nor effective tools of social engineering), but because the state never actively promoted divisive communal identities the way the Hashemites had done.\textsuperscript{502}

Indeed, across the border in Irbid, the potential for broad social solidarities was much weak because the Jordanian regime had actively undermined incentives for cooperation outside narrow clan identity groups. By creating dependence on state goods and conditioning access the coveted goods on zero-sum competitive bargaining, the regime turned Rabdawis into rivals. My interviews suggest that rural Rabdawis in fact saw each other as competitors: “here,” said one, “each tribe and family is out to fight for itself… people compete with each other… They count how many positions every tribe receives in a given year in a ministry or at the Royal Court [and] they see other people’s loss as their own gain.”\textsuperscript{503} In short Rabdawi society was structurally disadvantaged for mobilizing broad collective action because people saw others who were outside their narrow familiar circle as adversaries.

\textbf{6.5 EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONS ON DIVERGENT PATHS OF PROTEST ESCALATION IN 2011}

The wave of uprisings that swept over the Arab region in early 2011 served as a major exogenous shock for Syrian and Jordanian societies alike: it triggered protests on both sides of the border, including in the twin Hawran regions. Yet despite the similar trigger and context, the “Arab Spring” protests born in Daraa and Irbid took starkly different turns early on. Daraa became the cradle of the Syrian revolution against Bashar Assad’s regime. Its protests, which began on March 18, 2011,\textsuperscript{504} and which were driven by rural\textsuperscript{505} youth from the full spectrum of
Dara’a’s clans—Assad’s popular base—gained pace rapidly. Within days, protesters began to call for the downfall of the Assad regime, and within weeks the protests transformed into a cohesive class-based opposition movement attracting rural and ex-rural lower-income youth across the country. The path of Irbid’s early Arab-Spring protests—or hirak—could not have been more different. Despite surface similarities to the outburst of collective action across the border in Syria, such as its rural base, the hirak never coalesced into a unified oppositional coalition and never raised calls for regime change (Abu-Rish, 2011). Why were Dara’a’s and Irbid’s experiences so different?

In this section I use empirical evidence from the Hawran to examine the hypotheses I had made in Chapter 1 about the connections between the three proximate predictors of protest escalation at $t_{-1}$ and protest escalation after the trigger event at $t_0$. I find that citizens’ pre-protest political approval, material vested interest, and potential for broad solidarities indeed shaped the paths of protest in the two Hawrans, through the mechanisms that I had hypothesized. The discussion that follows traces the effect of pre-protest predictors on each of the two dimensions of protest escalation.

6.5.1 Effect of institutions on the escalation of protest demands

In Chapter 1, I had theorized that, in the context of collective action following an exogenous trigger, the escalation of demands at or after time $t_2$ is shaped by citizens’ pre-protest political approval of-and vested interest in the state at $t_{-1}$, and that the causality runs through three related paths: (1) protesters’ goals at the outset of the collective action; (2) the regime’s response to protesters’ initial protest claims, in particular the regime’s balance of carrots (economic
inducements) and sticks (hard repression) and (3) protesters’ response to the government’s actions. The mechanisms are visually summarized in Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1.

My structured comparison of Daraa and Irbid lends systematic support to these theoretical intuitions. I find that the overall more politically-oppositional and materially independent Daraawis began their collective action with bolder protest slogans, which invited a more aggressive and violent government response, and in turn reinforced the protesters’ emotional and hostile attitude and made them unwilling to accept the government’s concessions. Meanwhile the less oppositional and more materially-invested rural Rabdawis had less politically charged initial demands, which invited an overall less violent government response and rendered the protesters more responsive to the regime’s “carrots” and more tolerant of its provocations.

6.5.1.1 Escalation of protest demands in Syria’s Daraa

Daraawis’ initial goals. The starting goals and slogans that took rural Daraawis to the streets in mid-March provide an important clue as to why their demands rapidly intensified to calls for revolution. When rural young men first marched in Daraa city on March 18th 2011, their chants, if not outright oppositional, were decidedly politicized and intended as a challenge to the prevailing status quo. Material factors and expressions of identity were, according to many observers at the scene, “very much secondary;” eyewitnesses I interviewed simply “could not remember people chanting ‘We want jobs’” or asserting Sunni Islamist slogans (which became more prevalent in later stages of Syria’s uprising). Rather, the main message that demonstrators carried to the streets was their desire to “change the rules” of their relationship with the state: from one based on one-sided imposition and subordination, to one where citizens stood on a more equal footing, and had greater say and opportunity to defend themselves against abuse. These initial demands contained the seeds of escalation because they asserted a desire
for fundamental change in the way the regime deployed its power, and drew heavily on symbols and grievances accumulated over many years prior to 2011.

The young demonstrators envisioned several systemic changes to the status quo. One was to be accorded basic human dignity; indeed, the very first protest, on Friday March 18th, became informally known as the “Friday of Dignity.” The arrest of several children in Daraa city by Atef Najib two weeks prior to the protest crystalized the demand for greater respect, but its roots went far deeper. According to local activists, the details and even the veracity of the story with the children had been less important than the widespread belief that the regime was capable of the worst. “It was hard to figure out what had actually happened,” one of the locals I interviewed told me, “[but] there was so much distrust between the government and local society, that people were ready to believe many things,” and even the rumor of Najib’s insulting behavior sufficed to draw many to the demonstration.

Another key goal – and chant that protesters shouted as they began to march – was for personal and political freedoms. Many Daraawis insisted that “the most important factor behind the outbreak of protests” had been the country’s continued emergency rule and “the grip of security forces.” People wanted to curb the government’s arbitrary interference, and to maintain full ownership over decisions that affected their livelihoods – such as whether to sell or buy land, or how to irrigate their crops. These issues were particularly important to Daraa’s protesters because most were marginalized farmers who “had borne the brunt of [the governor’s and mukhabarat’s] harmful policies.”

The demands for freedom dovetailed with calls for justice and an end to corruption. From the first day, demonstrators shouted against the unfair local water policy and the Law of the Border Lands, which governor Kalthoum and local high-level mukhabarat officials had abused for
personal enrichment. Water shortages stirred ire because, contrary to the government’s persistent claims (later picked up by Western press\textsuperscript{516}), local farmers saw that the main cause of the shortages was not poor rainfall but government policy;\textsuperscript{517} and the land law remained a central demand weeks into the protests.\textsuperscript{518} Protesters also denounced specific regime cronies, first and foremost the president’s multi-billionaire cousin Rami Makhlouf, whose ownership of numerous lucrative monopolies (such as telecommunications) allowed him to charge exorbitant rates. In fact, in a highly symbolic move protesters torched a local branch of Makhlouf’s infamous SyriaTel company in the center of Daraa city on the third day of demonstrations (Mroue & Karam, 2011).

Finally, even though many of the protest slogans and complaints focused on specific issues and officials, there were signs from the outset that the discontent ran deeper. Undeniably, the protests started in part as “a revolution against Atef Najib [and] Faisal Kalthoum.” On March 18 people went out to protest against the notorious duo\textsuperscript{519} and to demand their sacking; some chanted “there is no God but God” as a salvo at Najib who had notoriously boasted that “in Daraa, [he was] God” (Sands et al, 2014); and some even physically attacked their offices (Mroue & Karam, 2011; Macleod, 2011a). But even as they attacked Kalthoum and Najib, the rural young demonstrators also aimed at the larger system. From day one, they “loudly denounced the regime” (Leenders, 2012) that had empowered and protected corrupt men like Kalthoum and Najib.\textsuperscript{520} Even more tellingly, on March 20 they torched the provincial headquarters of the ruling Baath Party, which played no direct role in the events leading up to the protests or thereafter but which symbolized the ruling regime.

Since we cannot observe the historical counterfactual, we cannot know for sure whether these politically-charged initial actions and slogans alone would have eventually spiraled into calls for
revolution, absent any additional provocation by the regime (more on this shortly). What we do know and what the foregoing discussion does suggest, however, is that the protests began by asking for profound political change and that these demands were but a few steps short of revolutionary. We also know that the regime’s response, which appeared to have been triggered by the protesters’ bold stance, hastened the very outcome it was designed to counteract.

**Endogenous regime response.** While confidently declaring to the Wall Street Journal in late January that his people would never revolt, Assad began to prepare for just that contingency – and his response to Daraa’s initial marches played a crucial role in the escalation of Daraawis’ demands. Assad’s response took three main forms: attempts to coopt protesters through material and non-material concessions, attempts to negotiate with them using local mediators, and repression of marches by force. The regime’s heavy reliance on the last method – violent repression – distinguished its approach from the path taken by the Jordanian government, and played a crucial role in reinforcing and speeding up escalation.

To nip the protests in the bud, Assad made a range of economic and political concessions for his large lower-income constituency which, as we will see shortly, were at least on par with those made by the Jordanian government in light of the hirak. In January and February 2011, he announced the establishment of a $250 million “National Fund for Welfare” to help 420,000 lower-income families (or almost one in ten Syrian families); the creation of a large number of ministry jobs; and pay raises and heating allowances for over two million public servants and pensioners (AFP, 2011; ICG, 2011). The government also slashed taxes on basic foodstuffs (AFP 18 Feb 2011; Oweis 2011) and announced $14 billion worth of development and infrastructure projects over the following five years (ICG, 2011). When protests got under way, the regime
again stepped up both programmatic and targeted distributive transfers, to mollify protesters. On March 23 and March 25 it announced a new tax cut, an additional 15-25% raise in state salaries,\(^{523}\) and creation of still more public sector jobs (Ain News, 2011k). It also encouraged governors to pursue more “targeted” local measures, such as greater lenience towards rural migrants building illegal housing on the outskirts of cities\(^{524}\) and greater responsiveness to citizen complaints; in Daraa, state and Party officials visited villages in which they had never before set foot and offered to build a soccer field or a road (ICG, 2011).

In addition to economic concessions, the regime approved a number of political changes. On the third day of protests, president Assad sent a high-level delegation to the restive city to communicate that he had satisfied most of the protesters’ initial demands: released the detained children, fired governor Kalthoum (effective later that week), repealed the hated land law, and promised to abolish the emergency law and to prosecute those responsible for killing protesters during the previous two days (NYT, 2011a). Six days after the first protest, Assad fired Atef Najib, and confirmed that he had taken steps to end the emergency law, to prepare a draft law on political parties, and to develop new mechanisms to fight corruption. Ten days into the crisis, on March 29, Assad fired his cabinet to demonstrate that he meant to turn a new leaf.

While some of the concessions were announced formally, in the official press, in parallel the regime pursued informal channels and dispatched a range of mediators to negotiate with the Daraa protesters, in the hopes of getting the latter to back down. The mediators included both local authorities and high-level emissaries. For instance, on March 18, the head of the Daraa Peasants Union went to meet with the protesters in downtown Daraa to persuade them to quit their protests (Khazen, 2012), while two days later the president sent the Vice President and Chief of Military Intelligence to the restive city to convey his most significant concessions.
concerning the firing of unpopular local officials, repeal of the hated land law, and creation of new local jobs.

Finally, in parallel with concessions, the government used force. The regime began shooting on the first day. Security forces at first used water cannons and batons, but then opened fire (Mroue & Karam, 2011), killing three. The next day, security killed three more at the funeral procession organized to bury the dead from the first day’s march, and a handful more each of the following days, thus facilitating the familiar grim cycle where daily protests turned into funerals turned into protests again (Leenders 2012). Given that the regime’s resort to naked force angered the crowds and intensified their demands, why did decision-makers choose to use it?

On the surface, Assad’s resort to the power of the gun may seem puzzling, for several reasons. First, it was clear from the outset that the violence would only add fuel to the fire, since anger and indignation already ran high among Daraa’s crowds. Second violent repression appeared to have backfired on most Arab leaders in early 2011, even those who had successfully used it to squash popular challenges in the past (for instance, Tunisia’s Ben Ali, Egypt’s Mubarak, Libya’s Gadhafi) – so if there was a lesson to be learned from these cases for Assad, it was that 2011 was not the 1960s or the 1980s, and that in the new context of the “Arab Spring” violence was counterproductive. Finally, as just discussed, Assad had a range of non-coercive tools in his toolbox, including relatively generous economic incentives (objectively at least as generous as those distributed by the Jordanian government) and numerous attempts at negotiation. In brief, from an objective perspective, antagonizing violence did not appear to be the most effective strategy for Assad.

Although we will never be able to get inside the minds of Syrian decision-makers, micro-evidence from the ground suggests a fairly clear logic for the regime’s resort to force. It suggests
that the regime did not have a choice because other, possibly “better,” options were ineffective given the nature of protesters’ initial protest demands and pre-protest political predispositions. First, the regime was frightened by Daraawis’ initial demands – and a close look at the micro-evidence suggests that the regime always initiated violence defensively - in response to acts of protest that it considered to be threatening. The timing of the first shots on March 18 is telling. According to reports on the ground, when protesters first took to the streets calling for the release of the detained schoolchildren, the security limited their response to the use of batons and water cannons; it was only when the slogans changed to calls for political freedoms and became more clearly anti-government that security began to shoot (Mroue & Karam, 2011). In other words, the regime reacted harshly because the initial demands had crossed red lines, not the other way around. The same pattern could be observed on the second Friday of protests: according to a reporter who was present at the scene, there was an agreement that day between the government and the people that security forces would hold back – and security in fact respected this agreement, until protesters set fire to the statue of the late president Hafez al-Assad in the center of town, which was a clear red line. “It was in response to this [provocation],” the reporter notes, “that the security forces opened fire.” They feared that if they took a more conciliatory approach, demands would increase even faster. But the antagonistic nature of Daraa’s initial protest slogans is only part of the explanation for regime’s violent strategy. The second and related reason is that the regime’s non-coercive mechanisms for de-escalation were ineffective – and the regime, as one journalist put it, “likely had to use violence” because it faced a threatening force that it “could not control.” Why were the regime’s non-coercive strategies ineffective? To answer this question, we need to see how protesters responded to government various measures of de-escalation.
Protesters’ antagonistic response to regime strategies. The third factor that pushed Daraa further down the path of escalation was the protesters’ hostile reaction to the regimes’ strategies to counteract that very scenario: their categorical rejection of the regime’s non-coercive overtures, and their emotional and angry response to the regime’s violence. The first forced Assad to fall back on violence, and both fed the cycle of violence and emboldened demands. The hostile reaction itself was a direct outcome – and continuation – of the protesters’ initial bold protest demands, and indirectly of their pre-protest predispositions; regime violence reinforced it, but, as I have argued, rather than being an independent cause it was endogenous to protesters’ tactics.

Evidence from Daraa suggests that Assad’s economic gestures did little to de-escalate protest demands not because they were insufficiently generous but rather because they were rejected by protest participants. For instance, in response to the government’s numerous job creation initiatives, pay raises, tax cuts, and other both programmatic and targeted distributive transfers, Daraawi not only continued their marches, but many reportedly shouted, “The people from Daraa are not hungry!” and “We do not want your bread, we want dignity” (Ain News, 2011k; Leenders, 2012; Macleod, 2011; SyrianRevolution.org, 2011b). The reason is that material concessions had never been a central goal for the protesters in the first place. As I had discussed in Section 4, many Daraawis including the lower-income rural youth that drove the protests, had rejected state goods and worked and lived outside the state economy long before the uprising, and their main initial demands in March 2011 focused on dignity and freedom, not on bread and butter issues. Ayman, one of the protesters, voiced this outlook poignantly: “They think,” he said, “[that] we want new roads or a new hospital. No! We want them to lift the state of emergency … We want to buy and sell our land without permission from state security…My uncle is suspected of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and so was forced to live in
Saudi Arabia. Every day my grandmother prayed to God that she could see her son, but she died without ever seeing him again. What we want now is freedom” (Macleod, 2011). The protesters’ a priori rejection of the state’s distributive largesse already prior to 2011 blunted the regime’s ability to de-escalate protests by means of these positive inducements.

Protesters also rejected Assad’s political concessions, including those he communicated via his high-level delegation to Daraa on March 20, such as the release of the detained children, removal of governor Kalthoum, and repeal of the hated land law, because they did not trust the regime’s promises. Many were also upset that the children that were freed at the president’s request bore signs of torture: this, in their eyes, outweighed the gestures of goodwill. As the envoys departed, a large gathering assembled in Daraa’s streets shouting that they wanted not only what the regime had already promised but also additional guarantees going forward: an end to oppression by security forces, respect for property rights, a release of detainees, and guarantees for the freedom of expression (Macleod, 2011a; AlJazeera, 2011). The same day large angry crowds set fire to the Daraa Baath party headquarters, the courthouse, the governor’s office, and a branch of Rami Makhlouf’s telecommunications monopoly, SyriaTel, and pelted a poster of a smiling President Bashar Assad with stones (Leenders, 2012; Yazbik et al, 2012; Abouzeid, 2011). Subsequent concessions too failed to appease: for instance, Assad’s removal of Atef Najib and his affirmations on March 24 that he had taken steps to end the emergency law and amend other laws to allow greater political freedom and fight corruption, were “immediately rejected [and] activists …called for [stronger] demonstrations” (Ain News, 2011j). “If they think this will silence us,” one Daraa resident said to a reporter, “they are wrong!” (Karam, 2011). This categorical rejection of the government’s concessions bespoke rural Daraawis’ profound alienation from the state – alienation that had been a deep and open wound for a long time.
Protesters, rightly, did not believe that firing the governor and local head of security would solve their problems without an accompanying change in the way these types of positions were filled and a broader reconsideration of the balance of power between state and society.

Public alienation also undermined the regime’s efforts to calm the situation through mediation: the public had so little trust in the state that it dismissed all its envoys as stooges. On March 18, the head of the Daraa Peasants Union, Osama Adi, was booed away when he went to the old center of Daraa to calm the protest (Khazen, 2012). The following day Ayman Zoubi, “one of the Daraa elite” and a regime loyalist, was beaten by the young men leading that day’s protest when he came to call for restraint (Yazbik et al., 2012). The high-level delegation which the president sent to Daraa on March 20 was perhaps the most spectacular example of failed attempts at mediation: its members, including Vice President Farouq Sharaa and Chief of Military Intelligence Rustom Ghazzaleh, were all Daraa natives, yet had no credibility on the street. “[These men] don’t represent us,” said numerous Daraa residents in anonymous interviews on the day the delegation arrived; “they would never represent the families of those killed [in the protests]” because they represented the regime.529

The lack of trust between the regime and the protesters was mutual, and mediation efforts failed not only on account of the protesters’ one-sided rejection of the regime’s good-will offers but also the government’s fear-induced intransigence. For instance, the government squandered the unique opportunity of president’s visit to Daraa at the end of March to wiggle itself out of the difficult situation, when out of the 25 local invitees to the meeting it handpicked fifteen loyalists who voiced concerns (such as the permission for local women to wear full-face niqabs) that did “not [represent what] the people of Daraa had… asked for” (Yazbik et al., 2012: 123). Similarly, Daraa’s representatives in parliament, far from building trust, only enraged the crowds by
dismissing their peaceful marches as the work of “gangs” and foreign “Islamists” (Abouzeid, 2011). State officials also rejected mediation efforts by local figures who were trusted by the protesters. For instance, the regime repressed the voices of men such as former Daraa MP Nasser Hariri, Daraa mufti Rizq Abu Zeid, and prominent member of the Daraa municipal council Yaman Miqdad – men who had served in the government but also increasingly enjoyed public support as they became more sympathetic to the uprising. Hariri’s case offers the best example. A few days before the city’s first protest, he led a delegation of elders to Atef Najib’s office to plead for the release of the detained school children; as a man of sheikhly descent, he took off his ‘aqaal (headband), which in local clan tradition means “you can’t refuse my request.” But Najib insulted Hariri by refusing to release the children and ordering the symbolic ‘aqaal to be thrown in the trash (Leenders, 2012). By April, Hariri and other notables found themselves under arrest and were given “no… role in mediating” between the state and the protesters.

Last but not least, the escalation of demands was strongly reinforced by protesters’ emotional and hostile response to regime violence, which was a direct outcome of their already-charged initial demands and their frustrations predating 2011. The progression of demands, recalled local men, “was just emotional and simple;” after years of experiencing the mukhabarat’s interference in their daily lives, “people went crazy…when [they] saw violence.” On the first day of protests, after “only” three casualties, the young rural demonstrators attacked the office and residence of their hated security chief Najib and governor Kalthoum and threatened to burn down the headquarters of the army and security forces in the city (Mroue & Karam 2011). Demands rose even further on the second day, Saturday March 19, as hundreds of protesters – a small but significant minority – began to shout “Revolution, revolution!” (Sinjab, 2011). In the following days political demands and calls for revolution spread and became more assertive as
demonstrators began to hold Assad, as commander-in-chief and head of Syria’s centralized political system, to be “personally culpable for each of the… murders;” as more people were shot down “[all demands] were transformed into a single demand: the fall of the regime” (Yazbik et al., 2012: 67).

While, in retrospect, most Daraawis who had participated in the protests were themselves taken aback by the speed of escalation to calls for regime change – within days of the first protest – they were not shocked that it had happened in general. Given their estrangement and relative economic independence from the state prior to 2011, rural Daraawis were able to push for maximal claims and to shake off the regime’s concessions and attempts at negotiation because they were driven by anger and because most felt they “had nothing to lose.” In the words of a Daraa resident, “no[one] had …calculated on the downfall of the regime” but in the context of people’s fraught relationship with the government, “the violence …[and] political victories in Tunisia and Egypt… people [were] driven…to demand complete liberation.”

6.5.1.2 (Non-)escalation of protest demands in Jordan’s Irbid

Rabdawis’ initial goals. Just as Daraawis’ political frustrations with- and low economic investment in the regime shaped their hard-hitting starting protest slogans and provided a fertile ground for escalation of demands, so Rabdawis’ politically non-oppositional outlook and economic dependence on the state led to tamer claims whose purpose was to extract limited concessions but explicitly avoid escalation.

Irbid’s hirak protests began on January 14, 2011, a week after the country’s first hirak march in the city of Dhiban, about one hundred miles south of the capital, Amman (Fahim, 2011). Although many contemporary observers declared that the street marches signaled growing cracks in the regime’s stability, seeing that they were driven by the regime’s rural popular base, a
closer look at the protests’ direct and indirect messages reveals their inherently reactionary loyalist character and weak likelihood of escalation a priori. The identity of the protesters and their relationship with the state goes a long way towards explaining the non-threatening nature of their demands. Most hirak participants in Irbid (and elsewhere in the kingdom) were the rural poor – a constituency that, on the eve of 2011, strongly backed the regime and was deeply entangled in its patronage, but that either historically or more recently under the country’s neoliberal policies came to receive a lower share of regime resources and privileges. These have-nots – the awlad al-harrasseen (literally “sons of the ploughmen”) as they called themselves – took to the streets in early 2011 not to fundamentally change the “rules of the game,” but to exploit the regime’s temporary vulnerability in light of the regional turmoil to extract more clientelistic benefits, which they considered the ultimate marker of prestige and success. Although some scholars have insisted on distinguishing between the different generational streams of the hirak, my research suggests that the streams differed mostly in the form of their demands but not in their larger goal: to maintain the status quo system, and to gain a better foothold within it – or, as one local colorfully put it, “to pull the blanket closer to their side of the bed.” Let’s take a closer look at the economic and “political” demands and the non-threatening motivations behind them.

In contrast to Daraa, the initial demands of Irbid’s hirak were, at their core, economic. On their first day of protests on January 14, which coincided with the region’s first successful revolution, in Tunisia, Rabdawis marched holding loaves of bread, calling for their government to lower prices on basic commodities, and shouting “The loaf of bread is a red line!” (AinNews, 2011). A few days later, while many around the Arab world celebrated the fall of the Tunisian dictatorship, Irbid’s demonstrations asked for more government presence and help with various
local concerns. Health infrastructure was a common source of complaints. On January 17, a few dozen residents of Irbid city staged a sit-in in front of a local public hospital demanding that the government increase its medical and nursing staff to prevent long waiting times, extend official visiting hours, supply better equipment, and improve heating inside the facilities (ArabellaNews, 2011); similar grievances were also echoed by residents of Yarmouk district in relation to their local public hospital, and by residents of Ramtha and surrounding villages concerning local health clinics - complaints that also reverberated in other parts of the country. Local infrastructure concerns were also prominent. In the days following the resignation of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt – an event that inspired many would-be revolutionaries around the region – several Irbid towns and villages demonstrated about the frequency of municipal trash collection, the quality of public transportation, and to voice their displeasure at potholes and median dividers on local highways. When I asked Rabdawis about the reasons for the consistently local focus of their hirak demands throughout early 2011 and beyond, many gave the same reason: people’s heavy material dependence on the state, and their need, as a matter of survival, to snatch more resources for their areas.

While economic concerns dominated the hirak airwaves, they were interspersed with political slogans that on the surface appeared threatening but in fact were a form of sabre rattling designed to leverage economic concessions. A good example was the demand for the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Rifa’i, which began to be voiced on the first day of Irbid’s hirak. In the international media and analyses, the demand was widely interpreted as a swipe at the monarchy itself (since the king had personally appointed Rifa’i) and potentially the first step towards calls for revolution. In reality, conversations with Rabdawis revealed that the demand was a means to a much more modest end: to reclaim economic privileges that had been endangered by Rifa’i’s
fast-track neoliberal economic reforms since 2009. Protest banners made this clear as well: they accused Rifa’i of placing them “at the mercy of World Bank economic policies” and called for his resignation so people could live “a decent life” (Hazimeh & Ben Hussein, 2011). In contrast to Daraawis, who resented the state’s interference in their lives and shunned the state economy, Rabdawis protested for increased state presence to reverse neoliberal reforms that shrunk the government and bring back the more dirigiste state of the pre-liberalization era.

Another example of the non-threatening nature of the demands was the protesters’ persistent lambasting of corruption (Almadena News, 2011a). Although protesters swiped at powerful government enterprises and prominent figures including even those affiliated with the Royal Court, according to local observers most of these protestations occurred “not because [rural Rabdawis] opposed … corruption, but because they want[ed] more corruption coming their way” (emphasis added). Even officials at former state-owned enterprises and intermediaries expressed this view. The director of the formerly state-owned electricity authority (who personally had not been accused of corruption, but who had seen others in that position) put it thus: “People say they are angry at privatization because the deals were corrupt… but in reality they are angry because the companies don’t hire as freely as they used to [before privatization]. Private companies work on a profit principle and hire one worker where there used to be twenty… This is why people are angry… Most of the inquiries I get from people are not about improvements in [electricity] services but about employment.”

A third example was the hirak’s grumblings about the mukhabarat’s interference in local affairs (Halaby 2011). Although, on the surface, this demand appeared to resemble the angry politicized message at the heart of Daraa’s revolt, it was driven by a very different motive. Mukhabarat interference upset the young rurals who drove Irbid’s hirak not because it stole their
property or repressed their dignity but because it privileged established tribal families and often frustrated the efforts of their own, less powerful families – the harrasseen – to win access to prestigious positions and patronage.

In the words of one Rabdawi, most protesters cared about the issue mostly “in so far as [it affected their] access to state jobs and goods.”

In brief, although hirak youth taunted the regime with political-sounding slogans, they fundamentally accepted its hegemony and used mobilization to get ahead within the system rather than to destroy it. “The goal [of the protests],” in the words of one participant, was “not to undermine the monarchy, but rather to … put [the monarch] back on the straight and narrow” (Zecchini, 2011). “When we…mention… the king [in our protests]” said another, “[it is] because we want to get his attention on what [our needs are]… It’s like when you go to the hospital, and a nurse …gives you a shot that won't help, so you start calling for the doctor” (Seeley, 2012).

“Generational” differences in demands between older and younger hirakis were mostly tactical: the young emphasized more “political” demands while the old focused more on direct calls for economic transfers; however both were intimately “connected with currents …within the political authority,” including the mukhabarat, and used their protests to “negotiate … personal and closed-circle benefits” (Bustani, 2012).

Endogenous regime response. King Abdullah’s response to the protests was based on the same three basic prongs as Assad’s – material and political concessions, mediation, and coercion – but it differed in one crucial way, which reinforced the low-key character of the protests in Irbid: its more sparing reliance on violent repression. The regime thus avoided the cycle of antagonism that had added fuel to the proverbial fire of protest in Daraa.
In the area of material and political concessions, Abdullah’s approach was strikingly similar to Assad’s, both in its content and generosity. Just like Assad, when unrest began in the first “Arab Spring” country of Tunisia, Abdullah preemptively pushed through a number of populist economic measures, which strongly resembled those implemented simultaneously by his Syrian counterpart. The measures included the creation of new public sector jobs, a raise in public sector salaries, an increase in allocations to poor families through the National Aid Fund, and a range of tax reductions and food subsidies.\(^\text{562}\) Two weeks later, the government introduced an even larger package worth $425 million to boost these initiatives.\(^\text{563}\) and like Bashar, Abdullah supplemented these general measures with targeted aid to specific regions and communities.\(^\text{564}\) Although Jordan received new foreign aid infusions in light of the unrest, especially from the Arab Gulf states and from the United States, these infusions did not make a big difference to its ability to “buy” support during the crucial January-March early protest period under investigation here (and even later) since its new social transfers were almost identical to Syria’s.

Amman also addressed some of the hirak’s biggest politically-tinted demands. The main one entailed firing the unpopular neoliberal Prime Minister Rifa’i and replacing him with a pro-dirigiste ex-military colonel Maarouf Bakhit, on January 31, 2011, two weeks into Irbid’s protests. Other measures included moves to tackle high-level corruption and electoral unfairness.\(^\text{565}\)

Like its Syrian counterpart, the regime used a range of unofficial channels to negotiate its concessions. A range of local notables stepped up to mediate between Irbid’s rural demonstrators and the government, most importantly: respected elders, parliamentarians, mayors, and the mukhabarat.\(^\text{566}\) In many parts of the country, sheikhs played a leading role in persuading activists to lower their slogans: they were often the first to arrive at a scene of protest, and to attempt to
negotiate down demands and to disperse the protest (Ammon News, 2011a). Irbid’s parliamentarians and mayors likewise stepped in to help the government calm protests. Many met with constituents, communicated complaints to the government, and announced local state-sponsored projects. For instance, in mid-January 2011, in light of the first protest in his home district, Irbid parliamentarian Fawwaz Zoubi urged fellow MPs to “please the people” by legislating “a tangible increase in employee wages” (Jaraysheh & Jagheer, 2011), and MP Ali Atoum went even further by personally participating in the march and calling, alongside the demonstrators, for the sacking of the unpopular Prime Minister Rifa’i (Ain News, 2011a).

Mayors responded to their protesting constituents even more directly. For instance, within a day of sit-ins calling for better roads in the village of Rafid, the mayor arranged for the necessary repairs with the director of public works (Almadena News, 2011e; Almadena News, 2011f). Another mayor stepped in to diffuse a tense situation that followed the accidental injury of a protester at the hands of a member of security services (Jordan Times, 2011b). Finally, the mukhabarat “[kept its] feelers on the ground [to gauge] which families [were] upset” – and, although it preferred to stay behind the scenes and mostly acted through the mediation of sheikhs and other individuals inside the communities, it sometimes stepped out of the shadows by calling protesters’ families and asking them not to participate in the marches.

Finally, in parallel with concessions, the government occasionally used force to contain or intimidate the hirakis. Numerous instances of regime-sponsored violence were recorded during early 2011 in Irbid and other parts of the country: for instance, during Irbid’s very first protest in January, several protesters were injured by knife-wielding thugs (AinNews, 2011); in Ramtha (north Irbid) police allegedly tortured to death a youth in their custody (Varulkar, 2011); and, by some reports, the mukhabarat arrested hundreds of hirak youth in Irbid and elsewhere for
“violating public order” (Yom, 2014). But, crucially, the Jordanian regime used force more sparingly than the Syrian, and never fired live ammunition into the marching crowds (Fahim 2011). Given the objective similarities between Abdullah’s and Assad’s non-coercive strategies towards the protests – namely, the type and volume of their economic and political concessions, and their attempts to reach agreement through mediation – why did Abdullah use less coercion?

Although, as with the Syrian case, we may never find out the real thought process behind the decision-making in Jordan, existing evidence suggests a clear logic, which is that the regime did not need to use overwhelming force. For a start, the initial protest demands were more economic than political, and carefully avoided crossing red lines; thus, the regime was never threatened by the hirak in the same way that Assad was threatened in Daraa. Second, Abdullah’s non-coercive tools were much more effective than Assad’s, and these also made violence unnecessary. The government, as one Rabdawi observer put it, “did not need to use force” because most of the regime’s rural base was materially dependent and could be bought off with limited material concessions; “the regime,” argued another, “[was] not afraid of tribes because [they] think in … parochial terms [and] don’t have a political position … They just want services, and can be easily tamed.” To understand why the Jordanian regime’s non-coercive strategies were effective, we need to see how protesters responded to government various measures of de-escalation.

Protesters’ cooperative response to regime strategies. The third factor that kept the demands of Irbid’s hirak low-key and prevented escalation was the protesters’ cooperative response to regime actions: their ready acceptance of the government’s various concessions and mediation, and their relatively forgiving attitude towards instances of regime violence. The first aspect of
protesters’ response increased the marginal effectiveness of the government’s non-coercive tools for de-escalation and allowed Abdullah to diffuse protests without resorting to violence. Meanwhile the second aspect helped to ensure that the few instances where violence was used did not spiral out of control.

Given that Irbid’s hirak protests were driven mostly by economic concerns, the government was able to either extinguish the protests or keep demands low-key through the aforementioned material transfers. The economic concessions it announced in January, while not large in absolute terms, reassured many of the protesters. For instance, the government’s announced pension increase quietened the military veterans in Irbid (and elsewhere) (Yom, 2014). Protests in Dhiban died down in the spring-summer of 2011, after the king personally visited the area to unveil 1500 new job openings for local men and more than $200 million worth of development projects. And the multitude of localized protests in various Irbid villages – for improved trash collection, for road repairs, for medicine at health centers – also died down as soon as the government took care of their demands or was seen to make an effort to do so.

The regime also successfully neutralized the hirak’s main “political” demand by replacing the unpopular neoliberal Prime Minister Rifa’i with the pro-dirigiste Maarouf Bakhit. Although the measure offered no structural changes, it broke the hirak’s momentum. Hirak leaders in Irbid and elsewhere “cheered [Bakhit’s] appointment” (Bustani, 2012) because it signaled the regime’s willingness to retreat from some of its neoliberal economic policies, which had been their main concern, and most even suspended their protests for several weeks to give Bakhit the opportunity to follow through on his economic pledges (Ben Hussein, 2011; The Economist, 2011).
An additional de-escalating element was Rabdawis’ acceptance of regime mediators. Given the economic focus of the protesters’ demands, local patron-brokers who had traditionally mediated the flow of distributive goods to rural Transjordanian communities, were well placed to negotiate with the hirakis and to put out potential fires. Sheikhs did not have – and never had – absolute authority over their tribesmen, but they often succeeded in negotiating down protest demands or even dissuading protest organizers from holding their event altogether due to their dexterous manipulation of particularistic benefits. Although numbers are difficult to confirm, some of the elders I interviewed in the spring and summer of 2011 claimed to have been able to hold back protesters about 70% of the time in their locale. The same went for MPs and mayors. Seeing the outpouring of public grievances and demands, these men, to defend their electability in the next elections, made visible efforts to put on their most responsive client-friendly face, and their efforts often paid off. Local protests stopped when MPs or mayors addressed their particular need, such as road repairs (Almadena News, 2011e). And at least in one case, their intervention was critical to resolving a tense situation following an accidental injury of a protester at the hands of a policeman: reportedly, after many hours of negotiation and the mayor’s promises to take up the protesters’ demands with higher-level officials, the crowd agreed to drop their charges against the policeman and dismantled their protest tents and went home (Jordan Times, 2011b). Finally, the mukhabarat was often effective at de-escalating protest situations directly, for several reasons. It was usually polite when it called people to ask for their “cooperation:” in the words of one Rabdawi, “they make the message clear [but] they are nice and polite to people.” Also, protesters believed that the mukhabarat, as a “super” patron-broker with access to large quantities of state largesse and privilege, could help them either directly or by “convey[ing] the message to the king.”
Last but not least, the non-escalation of demands was helped by protesters’ relatively forgiving attitude towards instances of regime violence which, although fewer than in Syria, were nonetheless notable. In particular, Rabdawis showed relatively little reaction to the provocations that did occur and that appeared to be sufficient to fan the flames of uprisings elsewhere in the region, including Daraa. Several examples stand out. One was the violence reportedly unleashed by thugs on protesters during the very first protest in Irbid city, where several protesters were injured by sharp objects. The incident, coming as it did on the day of Tunisia’s revolution, could have provided the occasion for an outpouring of outrage and intensification of protest demands, but instead tempers cooled and no one even went out to protest the following day (AinNews, 2011). Another example was the torture and death of a Ramtha (north Irbid) youth in police custody; the incident was analogous to Atef Najib’s detention of children in Daraa – and in some ways worse since the Ramtha boy died – and yet it generated far fewer waves. For a day, members of the boy’s tribe rioted in the streets of Ramtha and burned tires and vehicles, but the commotion died down after the second day (Varulkar, 2011). Finally, the arrest of hundreds of Irbid’s hirak youth by the mukhabarat during 2011, for “violating public order” (Yom, 2014), were the types of acts that had inflamed tensions and raised protesters’ demands in Daraa, but did not fan escalation in Irbid (Abu-Rish, 2011).

The most important reason why Irbid residents responded with such measure to provocations that had infuriated Daraawis, was that Irbid’s protests were not initially fueled by anger and emotion. From the very beginning, they were cool-headed strategic acts used to bargain for better access to distributive goods and privilege, not expressions of moral outrage; and hirakis were therefore able to absorb a significant level of provocation without “boiling over” the way Daraawis did. A closely related reason for the measured response, which I discussed in Section
4, was the common perception among Transjordanians that the police and security forces were approachable and could be negotiated with (in fact, it had been one of the reasons their protest demands had not been rabidly oppositional in the first place). When violent incidents occurred in early 2011, many locals felt they could settle them quietly because “the distance between the security and the general population [had always been] small” prior to 2011.578

Over the course of 2011, especially in February and in spring, the demands of the Irbid-based hirak diminished. The reason for this was not King Abdullah’s political dexterity or personal charisma579 but rather because Rabdawis’ pre-2011 positive politics and high material dependence on the state preempted the emergence of far-reaching political demands, and endowed the regime with effective non-coercive tools for “buying off” the crowds and to calming tense situations that could have led to escalation.

6.5.2 Effect of institutions on the movementization of protests

Turning to protest movementization, I had theorized in Chapter 1 that in the context of collective action following an exogenous shock, the likelihood that protesters would form a cohesive collective movement is shaped, directly or indirectly, by the potential for broad solidarities among the regime’s popular base prior to the protests and by their initial protest demands, through three inter-related paths, summarized in Figure 1.5 in Chapter 1: (1) the basis of protesters’ organization and solidarities at the outset of the collective action; (2) the nature of the regime’s response to protests; (3) protesters’ response to the government strategies to divide the movement. My comparison of Daraa and Irbid lends systematic support to these theoretical intuitions. I find that rural Daraawis, who had broader pre-protest solidarities and more far-
reaching initial protest goals, began their protests in a more coordinated manner, provoked a more violent response from the state, and developed even stronger generalized solidarities in response to president Assad’s violent assault. Meanwhile rural Rabdawis, whose dominant solidarities had revolved around exclusive small-group identities and whose initial protest demands were less politically-charged, were deeply divided from the outset, did not provoke a violent state response, and grew even less cohesive after receiving several carefully-chosen distributive concessions from the Hashemite regime.

6.5.2.1 Protest movementization in Syria’s Daraa

The rapid transformation of the protests that began in Daraa city into a broad oppositional movement was evidenced most clearly by their numeric and geographic growth, and especially their ever-impressive coordination.

Numerically, the protests set in motion by Daraa’s first march grew exponentially. Within the city of Daraa itself, the first protest on Friday the 18\(^{th}\) attracted three or four thousand out of the town’s 113,000 residents (one million total in the province) (Ain News, 2011h); this doubled to at least ten thousand on March 19, and doubled again the following day (Ain News, 2011g; NYT, 2011b), reaching an estimated 50-100 thousand demonstrators on March 24 and 100-200 thousand on March 25 (Khodr, 2011; Yzbik et al., 2012). By Friday April 1, journalists estimated that Daraa crowds surpassed 700,000 people, and that most of the governorate had been mobilized and additional supporters streamed in from other provinces (Yzbik et al., 2012). Figure 6.15 graphs these numbers for Daraa city during the first two weeks of protests, revealing a distinct (exponentially) rising trend.
The uprising also rapidly expanded geographically, as Daraa’s bold protests inspired ever larger numbers of demonstrations in other parts of the province and country-wide. Starting March 19, “thousands” marched throughout the governorate in solidarity with Daraa city, including the neighboring towns of Jasim, Dael, Sanamayn, and Inkhil. Protests also spilled beyond the province: after March 18 protests they also began in Lattakia, Aleppo, Raqqa, Zabadani on the border with Lebanon, and the Damascus suburb of Douma, to name but a few. By mid-2011, over 400 demonstrations took place “throughout the length and breadth of the country” as the uprising “won over the majority of the inhabitants,” not only in the Syrian Hawran but also in provinces such as Homs, Hama, and rural Damascus (Abbas, 2011).

Finally, beyond the impressive numbers and geographic expansion, the key feature which distinguished Daraa’s (and Syria’s) multitude of protests from Irbid’s was that they made active
attempts to coordinate, and by late spring 2011 coalesced into a “remarkably broad-based, cohesive …movement” (Harling, 2011a). Countrywide, protesters not only emulated Daraa’s marches but also explicitly connected their particular local grievances to a broader national struggle for freedom and dignity: slogans such as “Freedom for Daraa! Freedom for Syria! Freedom for Homs!” or “Freedom for Syria! Freedom for Aleppo!,” were common across Syria’s protest landscape (BBC Arabic, 2011c; Ziyadeh, 2011). Despite the difficulty of communicating sensitive information in Syria’s harsh authoritarian environment, activists from different locales found ways to harmonize their protest tactics and messages, to make sure they hit the regime with one powerful voice.

Daraawis’ broad initial solidarities. One important reason for the rapid movementization of Daraa’s protests was the fact that they mobilized predominantly along broad, class lines: namely, the country’s large lower-income rural and ex-rural population. As mentioned earlier, most of the individuals who had launched Daraa’s first protest on March 18 and populated all the subsequent protests in the city, were rural young men from villages surrounding Daraa, not local city folk. In most other cities, too, the majority of also came from the countryside: for example, in Homs – most protesters were recent migrants from “underprivileged… peripheral neighborhoods” (ICG, 2011); and in Aleppo – students “living in the dorms [who] were …from [Aleppo’s] countryside …and the dustbowls around Hassake and Qamishli.” Damascus suburbs, which saw some of the largest and vociferous demonstrations in the spring of 2011, including Douma, Darayya, Berzeh, and Moadamiya, were home to rural migrants and “it was mainly [these] people…who demonstrated.” As a class, the rural population was beyond doubt the country’s largest single identity group comprising in 2010 an estimated 44-45% of Syria’s
not counting the large numbers of people who had migrated to cities during 2000-2010 and who no longer counted as “rural” in official statistics (informal estimates suggest they numbered at least 2 million or 10% the population). Although it was not a given that many Syrians of rural/ex-rural extraction – the regime’s popular base – would mobilize in 2011, there was clearly enormous potential for large-scale mobilization given the size of the group.

To be clear, my claim is not that class was instrumentalized as a rallying tool in Daraa or other parts of Syria, the way that it had been for instance in Russia’s communist revolution of 1917; to the contrary, the early risers avoided references to specific identities to make their movement less polarizing, and political parties of any stripe or color – including those that might have championed class warfare – played no role in the first weeks and even months of the uprising (Abbas, 2011). Instead, my claim is that for various reasons (discussed below) protests naturally attracted disproportionate numbers of rural low-income Syrians; and that class solidarities dominated other interests and solidarities, including those attached to clan- and other small-group identities. Even though many Daraawis were invited or inspired to join the marches by close kin, they did not join in order to campaign as a family, to advance their family’s or clan’s standing (as we will see shortly, this was a major point of difference with Irbid’s/Jordan’s rural hiraks). For example, according to my informants from Daraa, the rural villagers who led the city’s first demonstration and who most persistently demanded that Atef Najib release the detained schoolchildren, were not motivated by close family ties, as most were not closely related to the urban-born children. Also, as discussed earlier, tribal notables played little role in either instigating or recruiting for the protests. Similarly, the Local Coordinating Committees, which after March 18 became the activists’ most important mobilizing tool in Daraa and country-wide (more on LCCs shortly), consciously drew volunteers from different sectarian,
professional, and tribal backgrounds, to ensure a maximally inclusive leadership and member base.589

Given that the large size of the rural population mobilized in Daraa (and Syria), one might ask: how did their protests coalesce into a cohesive movement? The obvious organizations that may come to mind in light of the discussion in Chapters 2 and 3 are the corporatist Peasant Union and the Baath Party; these organizations, as direct extensions of the regime, may not have encouraged the agitation, but perhaps as organizations that sought for decades to incorporate and organize Syrian peasants, they left a social infrastructure that peasants could have used for anti-regime mobilization? This question is difficult to answer with certainty as there may have been some regional variation, but the Daraa residents and protest participants I interviewed for this study doubted that the former corporatist networks played any role, as by the mid-late 2000s few Daraa farmers were card-carrying Party- or Union members.590 Other pre-existing networks, such as the underground charitable- and religious study circles that I described in Chapter 5 played a more important role, providing material support for the work of the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs) in Daraa and elsewhere (especially to pay for medical assistance for injured protesters and their families); however many of their members stayed away from the street protests.591

Most importantly, the underground network of Local Coordinating Committees or tansiqiyyat, which became Daraawis’ (and Syrians’) main tool for mobilizing and coordinating protests across the country – and which, veritably, streamlined Syria’s protests into a movement – developed spontaneously. Most of its hundreds of locally-grown branches, which mushroomed within days and weeks of March 18 across the Syrian countryside,592 were formed by people with no prior connections (Harling, 2011a; Shadid, 2011).593 For example Daraa’s local
The coordinating committee was established on 18 March “by 82 men who had met each other on the frontline of the confrontation with security forces” that same day [emphasis added] (Leenders, 2012). Most of the other LCCs in the governorate coalesced in the same spontaneous way, “on the battlefield” and were similarly diverse and inclusive (Leenders, 2012).

The spontaneity of the cooperative ties between protest flashpoints can be seen from demonstrators’ visible and deliberate efforts to establish new connections and mobilize other locales. For example, on March 19, the rural youth that led the protests in Daraa chanted, “Revolution, revolution! Rise up Hawran!” (Sinjab, 2011), calling on neighboring towns and villages to stand with them by virtue of their broad common identity as Hawranis. Many rural Daraa youth also hitched rides to towns in other parts of the country, to agitate in person. Lacking pre-existing connections outside their village, many rural activists went to mosques – not because they wanted a “Sunni” uprising but because mosques were the only places where citizens were legally permitted to gather in large numbers on a regular basis (and which were, at the time, not heavily patrolled by state security. A young man I interviewed from a poor neighborhood in Damascus recalled how one Friday in April 2011 he noticed hundreds of strangers who “looked like they had come from rural areas,” at the weekly prayer in his neighborhood mosque. It turned that they were from Daraa, and had come because “they had heard that some people in our neighborhood had been thinking about a march… and they wanted to encourage people to come out to [protest] … That Friday we had the first large protest.”

Similar spontaneous outreach efforts took place in other parts of Damascus and its suburbs. Despite their spontaneous beginning, the LCCs quickly established themselves as hubs channeling protest messages, information, people, and funds; although they worked in a decentralized manner to avoid detection, according to observers on the outside and inside, “their
organizing methods evidence[d] good coordination between local[es]” such that each knew what was happening inside areas under lockdown and in the farthest-thrown areas of the country (Ziyadeh, 2011; Starr, 2012).

To explain the broad inclusive organization of Daraa’s protests, we need only take a look at the dominant forms of local society’s organization and solidarities prior to 2011 and at the protesters’ original goals at the launch of protests in mid-March 2011. As discussed earlier in this chapter, before 2011 many Daraawis already identified more readily with the broadest of their identities, namely the million-strong region in which they lived (the Hawran), than with the smallest, such as their family or clan. Daraawis’ preference for the broad and inclusive over the parochial saw clear continuity when protests began.

The second complementary explanation for why “the opposition [understood] the need to organize and come with a unified voice” (Shadid, 2011) had to do with the protesters’ goals. According to several Daraa activists, protesters quickly realized that given their bold political demands and the strong likelihood that the regime would attempt to crush them, they could not take on the regime by themselves and needed to build a movement to stand with them. This reasoning was visible, for instance, when on the second day of protests Daraawis called on their Hawrani brethren to join them in their revolution, shouting: “Revolution! … Rise up Hawran!” (Sinjab, 2011). The desperate search for support was also the reason the rural activists called for a nation-wide march of “steadfastness and solidarity” (al-sumood wa al-tadamun) on 24 March, and why starting in April they began to hitch rides to Damascus and other large towns to “encourage people to come out to support Daraa’s uprising.”

None of these mobilizing efforts, however, would have paid off if the message conveyed by Daraa’s rural youth – by word of mouth and beamed by satellite television channels like Al
Jazeera – had not found a large sympathetic audience, even before the regime unleashed its violent force. The reason why the message did fall on fertile ground, and why it resonated most strongly with Syria’s rural and ex-rural population, is that this economically and socially vulnerable group had taken the biggest hit from the government’s predatory practices and had become politically and economically alienated from the regime.\footnote{If you look closely,” noted a Syrian journalist I interviewed in 2013, “the early protests were started by farmers... from border areas, where local officials had expropriated land under the cover of the Border Lands Law. As in Daraa... farmers in Idleb, Homs, Aleppo... had lost land... Many of the university students who protested in Aleppo were Kurdish, from the area... border[ing] Turkey. In Homs, many of the protesters were rural migrants whose land had been taken away to build ...villas ... for regime cronies.”} In other places, the rural poor mobilized because, like Daraawis, they had grievances against their governors and were outraged by “the injustice and humiliation practiced [daily] by the security services” (Yazbik et al., 2012; ICG, 2011). In Homs, a key mobilizing chant was “Ya Abu Hafez, ghayyar al-muhafez!” - Oh Bashar, change the governor! Joining protests in Syria was extremely risky, and most of the country’s middle and upper class chose not to join because they felt that their lives under the Baathist regime, while often burdened by corruption and restrictions on freedoms, were not so bad as to necessitate urgent change.\footnote{But for the rural poor, the protests permitted an emotional and desperate outburst in response to an untenable and deteriorating situation, where predatory and corrupt governors and mukhabarat continued to gain power and tighten their grip over the countryside. Many of the activists I spoke with told me that many of the rural poor joined the uprising because they felt they had “little to lose” and because they realized that there were hundreds of thousands of others in a similar situation and “on the same side” (Yazbik et al., 2012). Daraa’s protests}
launched a national rural-class movement not only because participants felt emotional solidarities through their shared grievances but also because they realized that they had set themselves a high goal and had to fight together to win the battle “for the benefit for all” Syrians (Yazbik et al., 2012).

Endogenous regime response to divide protesters. To prevent Daraa’s protests from spiraling into a popular oppositional movement, Assad took measures to divide and isolate the activists. His method of choice was violent physical force. As we will see shortly, this approach both differed from King Abdullah’s, and backfired on Assad as it helped to strengthen oppositional solidarities and speed up the creation of a unified anti-regime movement.

First and foremost, Assad’s security forces used physical violence to isolate Daraa’s protesters from the rest of the local community. They fired on street demonstrators and, later, on funeral processions organized to bury those who had fallen the previous day, to scare citizens and thus to sap activists’ ability to recruit reinforcements. For the same reasons, the regime detained injured hospitalized protesters and civilians who tried to help them, and after a week of protests imposed “an undeclared curfew” on the city; its logic was that if the protesters were out of sight, they would be out of mind. When these tactics backfired and Daraa’s protests began gathering momentum, the regime stepped up its tactics to strangulate the movement by gradually sealing the whole city. After March 19 it began shooting at young rural men streaming to Daraa from nearby towns and villages to lead protests (Mroue, 2011); and in April, it imposed a full-blown siege on the town, cutting off all power, water, and communications, and blocking traffic and aid supplies from the outside.
Why did the Syrian regime pursue a brute-force approach to dividing the budding protest movement? We cannot know for sure, but the circumstantial evidence suggests that the regime did not have much choice, given the nature of protesters’ initial solidarities and goals. First, the visibly broad solidarities that underpinned Daraa’s protests at their very outset presented an urgent threat to the regime, and required decisive action; violence afforded the fastest and most decisive form of response. Second, protesters’ goals made a difference. The fact that Daraa’s protesters refused the regime’s distributive concessions (see discussion in Section 5.1) deprived Assad of the ability to block the movementization of protests through the most effective non-coercive strategy for dividing the opposition: namely, “divide-and-rule.”

Increased solidarities after government attempts to divide. Finally, the movementization of Daraa’s protests was conditioned by the protesters’ angry and defiant reaction to government attempts to divide them.

Although, superficially, the regime’s brute-force method appeared to work in preventing million-man marches throughout the country during the early weeks of protests, in a deeper sense the brutality backfired for “death,” many Syrians told me, “united people.” Violence provoked public anger and accelerated recruitment into the opposition movement to the point that by mid-summer of 2011 people did in fact pull off million-strong rallies in several cities, including Homs and Hama (Abbas, 2011).

The regime’s violence and denial of medical assistance to the wounded brought people together as “everyone [worked to] help each other” (Yazbik et al., 2012). Since hospitals and clinics quickly became no-go zones for demonstrators, LCCs set up clandestine field clinics in private homes. Young doctors volunteered medical assistance despite the “extreme… danger” to
their own lives, and many people smuggled provisions to Daraa from neighboring towns once the city came under blockade. The account of a man from Bosra (a town 25 miles east of Daraa) who worked in several smuggling operations of this kind captures the spirit of solidarity that prevailed in late March and early April of 2011:

“We were able to pass through Salkhad because there were no soldiers there. In the village of M. there was a man with a pick-up truck in which we could carry food and medicine [to Daraa]. The people were so …helpful. When we had to perform surgery once at two in the morning, the young men went to ask one of the pharmacists for assistance and he opened the pharmacy so they could take whatever they needed without asking them a single question.”

Community members also collaborated to ensure the secrecy of LCCs’ makeshift hospitals. By one account, an elderly woman once spotted government tanks outside one of the secret clinics in downtown Daraa and, fearing that they would find it, decided to distract the soldiers: “she picked up a rock and threw it at the tank, then moved forward… [It] turned out the tanks …were cruising [and] never discovered the …clinic but the Hajjeh [respectful term for old woman] stayed where she was until they were gone” (cited in Yazbik et al., 2012).

The defiance and sacrifice required to stand up to the regime became a powerful mobilizing tool during the early weeks of the uprising: according to participants, it “[fed] the revolutionary spirit [that propelled] ordinary citizens [to] continue to take to the streets despite the very real threat to their safety” (Abbas, 2011). Images of daily heroism and defiance also crept into songs, music, dance, and daily humor. One vivid image, disseminated over Facebook and LCC networks during the first week of the uprising (Figure 6.16) – clearly aimed for consumption beyond the Daraa province – depicted the outline map of Syria colored in the tricolor national flag with blood dripping from the bottom edge of the country, the geographic location of Daraa. The writing across the top and bottom that read: “Daraa is bleeding [sacrificing] for you, Syria”
The acts of sacrifice for the collective movement, invited more individuals to fight and sacrifice for the collective. For example, news from villages that their “young men [had] stood shirtless …in front of the snipers and the tanks” and sacrificed for a collective cause roused – to some degree, even shamed – rural young men from other towns to join the marches (Yazbik et al., 2012).

Figure 6.16 “Daraa is bleeding for you, Syria” drawing by Hawran activists, 25 March 2011.

New protest hotspots across the province and the rest of the country made explicit connections between their local grievances and Daraa’s suffering at the hands of the regime. For example, a March 19 protest in the village of Dael, about 10 miles from Daraa, marched under the slogan “Dael and Daraa will not be humiliated!” – connecting the fates of the two towns. In the nearby town of Hirak (not to be confused with the name of the Jordanian protests), protesters invoked even broader regional solidarities, shouting for “solidarity of the tribes of Daraa and Hawran!” (Hariri, 2011). Perhaps the most important protest cry that became instrumental to the rapid mobilization of Syria’s broad nation-wide movement was the chant “With our spirit, and our blood, we [are ready to] sacrifice for you oh Daraa” (bil ruh, bil damm, nafdiki ya Daraa). All
these cries epitomized solidarities in shared grievances and outrage that transcended region or background, and above all in their willingness to pay the ultimate price – their lives – for those who had already departed and for those who still remained and would fight for a new Syria.

6.5.2.2 (Non)movementization in Jordan’s Irbid

In stark contrast to rural Daraa, which from the beginning appeared poised for escalation, several features of Irbid’s rural hiraks suggested that they was unlikely to develop into a powerful movement: their low and declining turnout, and especially their cacophonous messages and weak coordination.

Figure 6.17 Estimated number of protesters in Irbid city, January 14-March 18, 2011

Sources: Scraping of national and local (Irbid-based) Arabic-language newspapers.610
Although the footprint of Irbid’s rural hirak quickly spread across the province after the initial January 14 march in Irbid city, the protests quickly reached their peak and stalled by late January and early February when turnout dropped and marches became irregular (some weeks went by without a single demonstration\textsuperscript{611}). Turnout is difficult to appraise exactly and the best available estimates, especially for cities, are almost definitely inflated;\textsuperscript{612} however even with the inflated figures, the downward trend is clear. The graph in Figure 6.17 plots the estimated numbers for Irbid city (for comparison to Daraa city, in Figure 6.15) during the first three months of the hirak, based on a scraping of local and international media sources.\textsuperscript{613} Consistent with eyewitness accounts, the graph shows that Irbid’s hirak started with a fairly small crowd (half of Daraa’s crowd on the first day), and rapidly declined, never mobilizing - even at its peak - more than a few thousand (out of the governorate’s one million residents).\textsuperscript{614} Demonstrations were even rarer and smaller (usually no more than a few dozen people) in towns and villages outside Irbid city (not shown).\textsuperscript{615}

Besides their falling numbers, what distinguished rural Rabdawi protesters from their Daraa counterparts was their lack of overarching common goals, besides the resignation of Prime Minister Rifa’i. Indeed, the demands of the hirak’s different groupings were often not only distinct but contradictory. For one, the rural hirak competed for attention with political parties, which attracted mostly urban middle-class Transjordanians and which staged their own independent protests in major cities. The relations between the two protest “camps” were “awful” because they bombarded the regime with opposing demands (Luck, 2011d): the parties wanted political reforms, including constitutional amendments to limit the king’s powers (Luck, 2011b; Habib, 2011), while most hirak activists agitated for economic concessions and actively resisted any political change (Luck, 2011c).\textsuperscript{616} Disagreements ran so deep that during a 28
January protest in Irbid city, tribal youths allegedly shouted at participants form the Islamic Action Front party to stop their march and threatened them with daggers (Ain News, 2011b). The more significant schism, however, was within the hirak itself (Sadiki, 2012). While most hirakis across Irbid’s various protest flashpoints appeared to have broadly similar goals – a push for economic concessions and resistance to major political changes – they showed no attempts to collaborate and act collectively in any way (Sadiki, 2012; Yom, 2014).617

Rabdawis’ narrow initial solidarities. One important reason why Irbid’s rural hirak did not grow into a broad movement in early 2011 (or later for that matter) was the narrow basis of hirakis’ organization and solidarities. While both Daraa’s and Irbid’s protests had a distinctly rural flavor, the latter – in contrast to Daraa’s inclusive, class-based mobilization – was driven by- and in the interest of exclusive identity groups, namely clans. The names the various hirak groupings took to define themselves give away their tribal organizational basis: for instance, in one district protests were led by the Hirak of the Youth of the Khalaila clan (Hirak Shabab al-Khalaila); in another – by the Reform Group of the Sons of the Bani Sakhr tribe (Tajammu ‘Abna’ Qabilat Bani Sakhr li-l-Islah); and in a third – by the 25th of May Reform Movement of the Sons of the Naimat tribe (25 Ayyar Abna’ al-Naimat lil Islah), to name but a few.

The tribal organization of Irbid’s hiraks impeded their ability and willingness to collaborate because, as discussed earlier, since the 1960s clans became chief vehicles for Transjordanian families’ access to scarce distributive spoils and a key source of social cleavages and rivalries. As a result, each clan formed its mini-hirak that acted as an “autonomous social network” (Yom, 2014) – which advanced its own parochial interests (manifested primarily in fighting for government attention and favor) and which remained aloof and jealous of competing clan-based
hiraks. Indeed, in my interviews with members of several Irbid tribes I discovered that most clan-based hirak clusters saw each other as competitors, and “direct[ed] their energies towards fighting each other, not [towards fighting] the government.”

Why were Irbid’s hirak protests organized around parochial and clan clusters in the first place? My theory suggests that to find the answer, we need consider the dominant forms of organization/solidarities in local society prior to the protests and the protesters’ original goals. As described in Section 4 (and, more generally, in Chapters 2 and 5), between the late 1950s and the late 2000s, Jordan’s political system successfully institutionalized a neo-tribal organization of rural Rabdawi society that perpetuated itself over time by ensuring that rural Rabdawis depended on clan membership for access to basic distributive spoils and even took pride in it. When the exogenous shock of the Arab uprisings hit Jordan, nothing changed: clans remained the dominant accepted unit of socio-economic organization in Transjordanian society, and rural Transjordanians “naturally” turned to them as their vehicles for protest.

In addition to these organizational continuities, the second closely related factor reinforcing the insularity of hirak protests was the nature of protesters’ motives. Since most clans initiated protests to obtain better access to state goods and privileges, and since these benefits could only be obtained through competition, they had little incentive to join forces with other protesting clans. Since they were not driven by anger or emotions, Rabdawis remained unfazed even by strong emotional events, such as acts of self-immolation (several occurred between late January and early April) or calls for “regime change,” that had mobilized movements in Daraa, Tunis, and elsewhere in the region. Many Irbid residents I interviewed attested that “if you say, ‘[The people want] the downfall of the regime’ in the street, no one will support you.”
Endogenous regime response to divide protesters. Leveraging the *hirak’s* initial divisions and predominantly economic goals, the regime pursued a non-violent strategy that drove a deeper wedge between the participating parties and further secured the regime from threatening collective action. Indeed, as one Rabdawi observer put it, the government “did not need to use force” because most of its rural base was too “dependent” on the regime and “too divided” to build an oppositional movement.  

The regime’s non-violent strategy consisted of two prongs. First, to draw a wedge between the hirak and the political opposition parties, it fired the unpopular Prime Minister Rifa’i – the major political demand on which the two camps had agreed. (As discussed in Section 5.1, this policy concession also served to de-escalate protester demands.) Second, to sow divisions within the rural hirak itself, the regime leveraged selective material benefits in a way that exacerbated competition and jealousies among the different clan-hirak clusters – a time-tested strategy of divide-and-rule. After January 2011, the government visibly stepped up its distributive efforts in rural areas, in the form of both “pork barrel” transfers and individual targeted benefits. Every few days, it satisfied some pressing economic demands of a particular family or clan – repaired a road, offered a few jobs, promised a clinic in their district. The regime’s intention was not only to inspire public goodwill and confidence in the crown’s ability to deliver at a time of political upheaval, but also to increase rivalry among the vast majority of families who were waiting in the wings for their share of the benefits.

Fall in solidarities after government attempts to divide. The government’s efforts to divide Irbid’s hiraks succeeded. First, as predicted, the removal of PM Rifa’i widened the gulf between the hirak groups and the political parties, as it swept away their only shared goal (Luck, 2011c).
Shortly after the announcement, the two camps split over whether to continue the
demonstrations: most rural hirak activists stopped demonstrating while they awaited concessions
from the new PM; meanwhile the parties continued their marches, seeing the change in unelected
and unaccountable prime ministers as the most superficial of all their demands (Ben Hussein,
2011). These divisions continued throughout the spring of 2011, and beyond.

Second, the government’s selective distributive concessions succeeded in exacerbating
divisions within the hirak camp (Bustani, 2012). The words of one MP I interviewed for this
study in mid-2011 capture the connection between regime concessions and clan rivalry: “There
is anger [among my constituents] [because] the king opened 1500 or more jobs for the people of
Dhiban …and offered free medical care in Tafile [southern province]. My constituents also need
jobs and health care! [Now] they are …putting pressure on me to get them the same benefits.”

6.6 EXISTING EXPLANATIONS IN THE HAWRAN CONTEXT

In the foregoing sections I have argued that the differences in protest escalation between the
Syrian and Jordanian Hawrans were predicated on their dissimilar governing institutions since
state-building. However Daraa and Irbid also came to differ in other ways, besides governance,
since the 1950s – and indeed, competing explanations proposed by the literature have tapped
some of these. As applied to the twin Hawran provinces, they include: the level of regime
violence against protesters in the respective province; autocrats’ objective distributive generosity
towards their local popular base; the province’s historical relationship with the central
government; the vibrancy of local civil society; and the inherent usefulness of local communal
identities for broad-based mobilization. Could these factors explain the observed divergence in escalation in the two Hawrans, better than institutional factors? In this section, I briefly examine the competing arguments and show why they are either incomplete or unpersuasive in light of the evidence from the Hawran.

6.6.1 Regime violence against protesters

One of most popular explanations that scholars have used to interpret differences in protest escalation during the 2011 Arab uprisings focuses on the regime’s use of violence against protesters (Barany, 2011; Bellin, 2012; Saideman, 2012). Studies of Daraa’s uprising, in particular, have focused on the linkage between the regime’s onslaught on marchers and the apparent spurt in popular mobilization and demands (Leenders, 2012).

While it is difficult to deny the ostensible correlation between regime brutality at the time of the protests and the acceleration of oppositional collective action across the Arab region (including Syria and Jordan), I have argued throughout this work - and presented evidence in this chapter - that violence is not an exogenous cause of escalation in autocracies, but rather an endogenous outcome of the relationship between the autocratic regime and its popular base, which in turn was shaped over many years by the countries’ governing institutions. I showed that the Syrian and Jordanian governments used different levels of violence in the Hawran because they faced different threats from their main constituent base and different abilities to neutralize those threats through non-coercive means, a priori. My argument suggests a possible answer to a major puzzle left unanswered by studies that propose regime violence as an independent explanation for protest escalation: namely, why some autocrats resort to violence to stomp out
popular collective action while others do not, even under similar circumstances and even if they have similar repressive capabilities and similar past histories of successful violent repression.\textsuperscript{630}

\textbf{6.6.2 Foreign aid and protest demands}

It has been widely publicized that in 2011 King Abdullah benefitted from a number of generous foreign aid packages totaling almost $1 billion, from the Arab Gulf states and the U.S.. Can this infusion of aid after the beginning of collective action explain Abdullah’s better ability to contain domestic unrest and, in particular, explain the effectiveness of his non-coercive, distributive strategies?

I suggest that there are several reasons to believe that the rent made little difference to either the effectiveness of Abdullah’s “soft-power” strategies or the eventual escalation paths. First and most importantly, Jordan received most of the aid tranche after late spring / summer of 2011, after the regime had already contained and divided the hirak. Second, the overall amount was not so high as to dramatically boost Jordan’s distributive capabilities: even if we account for Syria’s larger population (three times that of Jordan), the $1 billion that Jordan received is approximately equivalent to the $12 billion package that Syria had planned to spend on poverty relief between 2011 and 2015 alone (and that tranche was only one of several large transfers on which Assad had signed). Third, Assad also received foreign support from his allies (mainly Russia and Iran) during 2011.\textsuperscript{631} Finally, the evidence I presented earlier in the chapter, suggesting that rural Daraawis placed relatively little value on government largesse, suggests that an aid package would not have appeased the protesters, and hence would not have changed the path of escalation. This brings me to the next competing explanation, relating to citizens’ economic dependence on the regime.
6.6.3 Authoritarian bargains and protest demands

In Chapter 4, I discussed that an important competing explanation for the escalation of demands focuses on the attractiveness of the distributive bargains that authoritarians offer their constituent base, on the eve of the protests. In that chapter, I found that the explanation was not persuasive when comparing Syria and Jordan as wholes, as rural Syrians had objectively more attractive public sector employment and service options, both in both absolute terms and relative to private sector alternatives. But might the explanation perhaps fare better at the subnational level, if we compare the two Hawrans on the eve of the 2011 uprisings? The evidence suggests, no. Based on most of the objective parameters I examined in Chapter 4, Daraawis should have had greater economic stake in their system and therefore been less likely to escalate protests than Rabdawis.

Figure 6.18 Percent of Daraa/Irbid population with access to modern sewage system, by district, 2007/8.

Sources: Original Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, obtained by author from Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and Jordanian Department of Statistics.
Household surveys and census data from the mid-late 2000s present several clues. They show that Daraa residents enjoyed better and more equitable access to modern infrastructure (modern sewage facilities), a key lifestyle indicator in developing countries (Figure 6.18), and that they were also three to four times less likely to be unemployed than Rabdawis (Figure 6.19). (See Appendix for discussion on the accuracy of government survey and census data).

In many developing countries, unemployment statistics are notoriously inaccurate – however, qualitative accounts suggest that even if the point estimates are off, the data captures the correct trends. Daraawis interviewed for this project stressed that before 2011 “the living situation [for rural families] was reasonably decent,” as most men (and some women) found relatively profitable work in farming, and many men found well-paying seasonal work in the Gulf or Lebanon and supported their families through remittances.632 The claim that life was relatively decent for Daraa’s rural families is consistent with a comprehensive study of Syrian poverty and inequality prior to 2011, which found that in southern regions of the country, including Daraa, “inequality [had] improved” and the “incidence of poverty [had] decreased rapidly… especially in rural areas” since the 1990s (Laithy & Ismail 2005: 1). By contrast, Rabdawis interviewed for this study, from different parts of the governorate, complained of crippling levels of unemployment and the devastation of agriculture.633 The majority of mayors in rural districts estimated that over 40% of local men and 80-90% of women sat without jobs,634 suggesting that total unemployment rates topped 60-70%. These local back-of-the-envelope estimates are in line with the official numbers (68-73% in the average district) shown in Figure 6.19.
Public sector employment data suggests another objective reason why Daraawis should have had a stronger economic stake in their government: it provided more jobs. Daraa’s public sector supported in 2007-8 almost twice as many jobs as Irbid’s, employing 26% of the province’s total population compared to Irbid’s 15%; the difference was consistent across most districts (meaning that the trend was not driven by outlier-districts); and finally Daraa’s jobs were “available to all” and carried approximately the same benefits and salaries as in Irbid. Figure 6.20 presents the district-level data, illustrating the abrupt discontinuity at the border.
Figure 6.20 Percent of public sector employees in Daraa’s and Irbid’s total adult population, by district, 2007/8.

Sources: Original Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, obtained by author from Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and Jordanian Department of Statistics.

Preliminary data from the health sector tell an analogous story – that Daraa’s public sector providers were more attractive for the rural poor than Irbid’s, and should have given Daraawis a higher stake in the system. Daraa’s public hospital infrastructure was both cheaper (cost-free, compared to Jordan’s mandatory insurance and co-pays) and provided objectively better access for the rural poor since, for the same population (one million inhabitants lived in both Daraa and Irbid, in 2010), it offered a larger number of hospitals (10 compared to Irbid’s 8) and more importantly a larger number of hospital beds, which translated into a lower individuals/bed ratio. The chart in Table 6.1 summarizes the comparative statistics.
Table 6.1 Cost and accessibility of Daraa’s and Irbid’s Ministry of Health hospitals, 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governorate</th>
<th>Hospital cost</th>
<th># Hospitals</th>
<th># people / MoH bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daraa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irbid</td>
<td>&gt;&gt; 0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1402</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Health; Jordanian Ministry of Health.

All the indicators I cited above collectively intimate that Daraawis should have had a greater vested interest in preserving the status quo; the fact that they did not follow this objective “incentive” suggests that objective measures of material stakes are, under some conditions, not very good predictors of escalation.\(^{636}\)

6.6.4 Daraa’s special relationship with regime and protest demands

If differences in absolute deprivation and attractiveness of authoritarian bargains do not explain Daraa’s and Irbid’s divergent paths, might relative deprivation provide an answer? Numerous studies have linked Daraawis’ angry outburst in March 2011 to their sense of being let down by the state after years of enjoying a privileged position within the Baathist state (R. Hinnebusch, 2012).

Existing evidence gives at least two reasons to be skeptical of the “relative deprivation” argument. First, throughout at least the 1990s and 2000s rural Daraa consistently hovered around the national (rural) average on major indicators of well-being, such as household income, educational attainment, and unemployment, which means that there was no sudden deterioration that could have led to feelings of betrayal. Second, if we take “privileged relationship” to mean the Baath’s historical selection of disproportionate numbers of Daraawis into top state positions, we are stumped again for the disproportionate selection continued into
the late 2000s. Of course, as discussed earlier, powerful Daraawis passed on very few of their “benefits of office” to ordinary rural Daraawis – and this was one reason they were unable to mediate effectively when popular protest began in March 2011 – but this had been the case for years. In fact, the point about Daraa is that was not special: it was an average governorate, and Daraa city was “Anytown, Syria” (Abouzeid, 2011). The “feverish atmosphere” that prevailed there in the wake of the regional uprisings was indicative of the mood observed “throughout Syria” (Leenders, 2012). And, as many have surmised, if the uprising had not started there it probably would have started elsewhere.

6.6.5 Jordan’s Palestinian population and protest demands

A final argument pertaining to the escalation of demands, made by numerous observers both inside and outside Jordan, suggests that Jordan’s – including Irbid’s – “[hirak] protests did not achieve the intensity or breadth of [protests] in [other Arab states] because of the Transjordanian/Palestinian rift in Jordanian society.” The main claim here is that Transjordanians were afraid to push for major “democratic” change because democratization would have empowered the Palestinian majority (over 60% of Jordan’s population) and deprived them of their political privileges.

Although the argument is persuasive, local observers argue that the Palestinian issue was not the reason protests remained low key. One Rabdawi academic insisted: “The nature of protests [in Irbid] has nothing to do with the size of the Palestinian population living in the area... Yes there is a lot of anti-Palestinian rhetoric and bravado in the protests, but really the hirak is about local concerns.” Laurie Brand, a long-time scholar of Jordan, concurred: “ethnic polarization and fear mongering based on ethnic identity has long been an important rhetorical tool and
narrative stoked by the monarchy itself… but actually it was less important for understanding the hirak than distributive politics and the way the regime played off and bought off key groups.\textsuperscript{644}

6.6.6 Vibrancy of civil society and protest movementization

In Chapter 5, I discussed that an important competing explanation for the movementization of protests focuses on the dynamism of formal civil society associations. In that chapter, I found that the explanation was not persuasive for Syria and Jordan as a whole, because on the eve of 2011 Jordan’s civil society was larger and freer. But perhaps the explanation holds out better at the subnational level, if we compare the two Hawrans? The evidence, again, suggests no.

Figure 6.21 Number of civil society organizations registered in Daraa and Irbid, 2010.

As Figure 6.21 shows, on the eve of 2011 Irbid had a larger and more networked civic sector, and therefore appeared more “movement-ready,” than Daraa. In addition to hundreds of tribal diwans, which did not exist – at least not in the same active organized form – in Daraa, Irbid in 2010 had more than fifteen times the number of formal civic associations (154 compared to Daraa’s mere 10) despite an exact same population total.\textsuperscript{646} (The fact that 80% of Irbid’s
associations were located in rural areas\textsuperscript{647} means that the difference was not driven by a large number of urban organizations founded by Palestinian-Jordanians, who made up 30\% of Irbid city’s population in 2010, but due to differences in civic organizing among the regimes’ core rural constituencies.)

My theory helps to explain why the count and apparent dynamism of civil society is not a good predictor of movementization. I showed that what matters for the creation of movements is not just whether people are connected, but how - on what basis. If ties are strong but focused on narrow exclusive groups they can be divisive, as they tended to be in Jordan.

\textbf{6.6.7 Communal identities as mobilizable resource}

Finally, a common explanation of the rapid mobilization and cohesiveness of Daraa’s protests has focused on the “tribal” nature of Daraa’s society. The province’s “strong clan-based or tribal social structures” were said to have served as a “glue” for collective action – because they “provided a sense of solidarity… against which…mobilization took place.”\textsuperscript{648}

The limitation of this explanation is apparent when we consider Daraa in the broader socio-geographical context that is the Hawran region. As discussed earlier in the chapter, both the Syrian and Jordanian parts of the ancient region had essentially the same “tribal” legacies and even many of the exact same clans and families, yet saw different paths of protest escalation. Clearly, tribal organization cannot logically explain escalation if it restrained movementization on one side of the border (Irbid) but acted as a key mobilizing resource on the other (Daraa).
6.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I exploited a natural experiment in a microregion around the Syrian-Jordanian border, the Hawran, to explore with more precision the connection between long-term ruling institutions and protest dynamics after an exogenous shock, the regional uprisings of early 2011. Through my micro-level controlled comparison of these two once-near-identical provinces, I was able to show how, over time, Syria’s and Jordan’s different governing institutions conditioned systematic differences in local society, particularly in three key predictors of protest escalation: citizens’ politics, citizens’ economic stake in the regime, and citizens’ solidarities. Next, by carefully tracing the day-to-day developments following the outbreak of protests in winter-spring of 2011, I showed how the three pre-protest predictors, in turn, conditioned predictably different paths of protest escalation on the two sides of the border, in early 2011. My findings offer a number of new empirical and theoretical insights that could be tested in settings beyond Syria and Jordan, including insights on why some autocracies fiercely repress collective action while others do not, and, most importantly, insights on how we can predict and measure the relative likelihood of protest escalation in different authoritarian settings a priori.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL LESSONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT AND FINDINGS

In this dissertation I presented a new theory that explains variation in protest escalation in resource-poor autocracies in the wake of major exogenous shocks, and illustrated it with an in-depth structured comparison of the Syrian and Jordanian experiences in the wake of “Arab Spring” unrest. In Chapter 1, I explained the logic of the argument and how it dialogued with existing literature. My central contention was that in resource-poor autocracies the likelihood of protest escalation into rebellion is determined by the nature of the country’s ruling institutions, because institutions shape the relationship between the autocratic regime and its popular base before protests begin. I argued the key institutional characteristic that predicts the likelihood of protest escalation is the extent to which autocrats institutionalized mechanisms for their popular base to bargain with them over non-strategic everyday political and distributive matters. I predicted that regimes that do not institutionalize bargaining and seek to rule by decree are most vulnerable to protest escalation because they foster forms of governance that alienate their popular base, while autocracies that leave spaces for negotiation lower the chance that popular protests will escalate into rebellion because they foster “kinder” forms of governance that draw the regime’s mass base closer to the regime, even if objectively they offer people fewer tangibles.

Each succeeding chapter applied the theoretical argument to evidence from Syria and Jordan, using a structured comparison. In Chapters 2-5, I focused on the pre-“Arab Spring,” pre-protest period. Chapter 2 discussed the historical geneses of Syria’s and Jordan’s modern autocratic
regimes, their popular coalitions, and the origins and designs of their ruling institutions as intended by their respective state-builders. While both autocracies centralized power and built their rule on similar rural mass constituencies, they opted for the opposite arrangements when it came to institutionalizing spaces for citizen bargaining: Syria’s regime chose a top-down approach that left no space for bargaining, while Jordan’s conversely wove citizen bargaining deeply into the fabric of its rule. I showed that the distinct institutional arrangements originated from the particular combination of elite threats that regime leaders faced at the time of state-building: an economically powerful but militarily weak class of competing elites in Syria, and an all-around weak stratum of notables in Jordan.

The discussion in Chapter 2 set the stage for Chapters 3-5, which traced how the contrasting institutional designs conditioned predictable and significant differences in the way the two states actually governed, and how the forms of governance over time molded relationships between the regime and the popular base. Chapter 3 showed the institutions and governance systematically shaped the mass constituencies’ affect towards the state - a key intermediate predictor of protest escalation. I showed that already before the 2011 protests rural Syrians were emotionally more alienated from their state than rural Jordanians. This finding fed into Chapters 4 and 5, where I showed that the divergence in affect shaped major differences in mass constituencies’ political approval of the state, their vested material interest in the regime, and their potential for broad solidarities – factors that I had argued were proximate predictors of protest escalation. I demonstrated that even prior to 2011 Syrians were noticeably less invested in their regime both politically or economically, and were more likely to identify with inclusive identities and solidarity structures than Jordanians.
Finally, Chapter 6 bridged the pre-protest and protest periods. It exploited a natural border experiment to demonstrate with more causal precision the causal linkages between institutions and predictors of protest that I discussed in Chapters 3-5, and traced how the pre-protest predictor variables – affect, political approval, material vested interest, and potential for broad solidarities – systematically shaped Syria’s and Jordan’s paths of escalation during the early stage of both countries’ “Arab Spring” demonstrations, during the winter-spring of 2011.

7.2 CONTRIBUTION

My research contributes to the literature on authoritarian maintenance, collective action, and distributive politics, in several ways. My most important overall contribution is in providing a comparative general theory of protest escalation, that generates testable predictions and that is explicitly designed to explain variation across autocratic societies. Since dominant existing explanations and variables are specific to the experience of advanced democracies and since studies of collective action in autocracies for the most part draw on single country cases, this type of comparative theory fills an important gap.

Additionally, my work makes several specific contributions. First, it extends research on social movements which suggests that the publics of different authoritarian regimes can have different a priori thresholds for joining protest movements (Kuran, 1991, 1995; see also Lohmann, 1994). Like these studies, I find that the thresholds for mobilization and escalation can be strongly conditioned by a range of longer-term and proximate pre-protest factors. Where I
contribute is in theorizing precisely why the thresholds vary across authoritarian societies and how we can predict their relative parameters before collective action begins.

Second, as I discussed throughout this chapter, I build on a number of micro-foundational theories of collective action, but push that literature further by suggesting how the micro-dynamics that are often billed as entirely spontaneous and idiosyncratic might in fact be systematically and predictably connected to macro-level phenomena – namely, institutions – and how an understanding of the latter can help us to interpret and even partially predict the former. For instance, I extend the framing and emotions literatures by showing how knowledge of macro-level institutions and governance practices can help to predict why oppositional frames and broad collective identities will appeal to mass constituencies in some places but not others, and why in some settings protests from the outset have a higher emotional content – and thus higher propensity for escalation – than in others. By connecting the macro and micro explanations, I both “humanize” the large institutional mechanisms and demonstrate under what conditions the individual-level dynamics such as frames and emotions do (or do not) travel across autocratic contexts.

Third, by blending insights from political economy and political psychology literatures, my study complements and extends an important body of work on the role of autocratic distributive strategies of buying public support and dividing activists to avert rebellion (Blaydes, 2010; Magaloni, 2006; Acemoglu et al., 2004). Like existing accounts, I find that autocrats’ distributive efforts matter: they can give dictators the opportunity to buy broad mass support and to undercut collective action, even after major exogenous shocks that weaken their regimes. However, a major contribution of my work is in showing that the effectiveness of distribution in de-escalating protests is contingent – and that autocrats with more “citizen-friendly” governance
practices can (ceteris paribus) get more political “mileage” out of their distributive efforts. My work qualifies the standard view, that generous distribution will automatically buy the support of autocrats’ low-income popular constituencies (Magaloni, 2006; Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007; Calvo & Murillo, 2004), and helps to explain why states with objectively more generous and equitable distributive policies can be at greater risk of protest escalation than states with inferior distributive “bargains.”

Fourth, I build on the intuition provided by Bayat and others that broad extra-organizational solidarities may present a key to understanding the potential for mobilization and construction of movements in authoritarian regimes (Bayat, 2010), but use my comparative theoretical and empirical approach to extend this literature in two ways. First, I demonstrate the mechanisms through which latent broad solidarities can drive mobilization and, conversely, how narrow small-group solidarities can prevent the construction of movements. Second, I propose an explanation for why the publics of some authoritarian societies develop stronger foundations for broad solidarities than others, in the first place. My theory may help to explain a key paradox left unanswered and for the most part unproblematicized by the dominant literature, which theorizes mobilization primarily in terms of pre-existing civil society networks, movement entrepreneurs, and protest repertoires (Diani, 2004; Jenkins, 1983; McAdam, 2004; Staggenborg, 2011) – namely why societies with more constrained civil societies and protest repertoires can sometimes mobilize more powerful protest movements than those with freer civic sectors and more experienced activists.

Finally, my work counters a popular argument in contentious politics literature that governments’ response to protests, whether it is violence or clever manipulation of divide-and-rule, is an independent cause of protest escalation or de-escalation (Francisco, 1995; Johnston,
While I agree with the existing argument that government violence can enhance action-reaction spirals and that divide-and-rule can dampen the same spirals by splintering protesters, both my theory (illustrated in Figures 1.4 and 1.5) and evidence suggest that neither is a stand-alone explanation but rather that both are endogenous outcomes of citizens’ initial protest organization and demands, of their pre-protest relationships with the state, and, ultimately, of historical institutions. Governments are most likely to resort to violence when they are pressed against the wall: when they face a cohesive opposition, threatening political demands that they can neither meet nor “buy off” with distributive largesse, and protests that appear poised to escalate even without their intervention. And they use a non-coercive approach when protesters are divided, non-threatening, and can be bought off – that is, when coercion is unnecessary to begin with. A small number of theoretical studies have noted the possible endogeneity (Pierskalla, 2010), but to my best knowledge few have attempted to demonstrate it empirically.

7.3 FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

My comparative theory and empirical research suggest several fruitful new research directions. First, they provide an excellent basis for extending the research on protest escalation to a broader range of empirical cases, and for exploring whether institutions really do have important explanatory power independent of other variables like autocratic regime type. I believe that three excellent cases for comparison from the Middle East region would be Morocco, Egypt, and late 1970s Iran. All three saw collective action after exogenous shocks: Morocco and Egypt in the
wake of the “Arab Spring” unrest, and Iran in the wake of the 1970s oil crisis. But each had different institutional designs: Morocco had Jordan’s institutional approach, Egypt’s – a mixed design, and Iran – a model close to Syria’s end of the spectrum. Given the institutional variation, these cases would allow me to test whether different institutional patterns systematically map onto different collective action dynamics. Furthermore, the case of Iran, which during the 1970s unrest was a monarchy with a top-down Syrian-style system of governance, may help to clarify why institutions can be more important predictors of protest dynamics than autocratic regime type. In addition to Middle Eastern cases, a useful source of historical comparisons might be developing states that experienced protests during the so-called “third wave of democratization” during the 1980s and 1990s. These states varied both on their institutional design and on my dependent variable, protest escalation: for instance in Africa, some countries were engulfed in flames of protest while others “managed doggedly to avoid outbreaks [or intensification of] political protest” (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997).

Second, my theory suggests numerous directions for research on authoritarian societies, beyond collective action. One important finding of my dissertation is that different autocracies may breed systematically different forms of corruption. If this is true, and there are systematic patterns beyond Syria and Jordan, this finding would have important implications for the literature on autocratic governance as well as for donors and policy-makers. I have access to survey data on corruption for all Arab states between 2009-2012 and hope to extend my analyses at least to this important subset of autocracies, before expanding to other regions. Another piece that merits more exploration is the paradoxical finding that more inclusive and business-friendly mixed economies breed less vibrant private sectors and civil societies than top-down states. Given the increasing interest among scholars as well as practitioners in spurring business
development and civil society growth in the Arab region, it would be interesting to see if my result travels across the region and, if so, to probe further some of the mechanisms. Finally, my research suggests the importance of further exploration of the relationship between citizens’ perception of governance and their political and economic preferences, particularly as survey data becomes gradually more available across the Arab region. Since public preferences in autocratic regimes have for a long time been black-boxed and proxied with high-level objective variables such as the level of repression or a state’s access to rents, more individually-focused analyses that infuse comparative-political theoretical intuitions with insights from political and cognitive psychology are bound to open a new perspective on political life under authoritarian regimes. In my view, a particularly fruitful new direction would be the study of public preferences for states’ distributive goods – not only because these goods are necessary for autocratic survival, but also because their uptake may affect important social outcomes, including economic, health, and educational inequalities.
A.1 REFERENCE GROUP

To ensure that the empirical analyses spoke to my theory, I focused my analyses (where possible) on individuals a) who were part of the regime’s traditional political constituency, b) whose escalation of protest demands would have been most damaging to the regime’s legitimacy, while still keeping the criterion broad so as not to make the reference group too narrow. My four main criteria for the reference group, in the order of importance, were: 1) rural or recent ex-rural, 2) young, 3) male, 4) no higher education.

The first criterion was the most important because both the Syrian and Jordanian regimes legitimized themselves through the support of rural mass constituencies. Uprisings are staged by the young – and we know that youth, not the middle aged or the old, drove the 2011 uprisings throughout the Arab region. I focus on males (when possible) for two reasons: they tend to be more risk-taking and more likely to make bold anti-regime slogans (they were in most Arab countries in 2011), and they tend to be the breadwinners, so it is their economic choices that reflect the functioning of the authoritarian bargain. Finally, for tests using Gallup data I included education as a criterion and chose to focus specifically on the “secondary school or below” group because – even though it has been fashionable to portray Arab Spring protesters as internet-savvy college-educated middle class individuals – I am interested in the behavior of mass constituencies, not the most visible activists (and most mass constituencies in Arab countries outside capital cities were not college educated – they certainly were not in Syria and Jordan). Furthermore, statistically I lose very little data by subsetting to individuals with less than tertiary education (college-educated males constitute only 4% of male Syrian respondents in 2009 and 2011).
Overall, the 4 criterial I selected were not very restrictive: in the Gallup Poll data, over 50% of all male respondents in both Syria and Jordan fell in the reference group in all waves of the survey.

Some datasets used in the chapter were more detailed than others (Gallup was the most detailed); when the data was too aggregated to subset on all four characteristics by which I defined my reference group, I focused on at least one key measure, such as “rural.”

A.2 CODING REFERENCE GROUP, USING GALLUP WORLD POLL DATA

1. [rural] Place of residence
   Binary: 1 = rural ("farm," "small town/village," "suburb of a large city"), 0 = urban

2. [youth] Age of respondent (Gallup respondents ranged from 15-85 years)
   Binary: 1 = 15-35* years, 0 = 36-85 years
   *There is no consensus on the age range of the protesting Arab “youth,” but most frequently the term has been applied to individuals in their late teens through early thirties, so I code youth as a binary indicator which takes the value of 1 if the respondent is 15-35 years old. The bottom bracket is 15 because the age variable in the Gallup poll ranges from 15 to 85.

3. [male] Respondent’s gender
   Binary: 1 = male, 0 = female

4. [educ] Respondent’s education
   Binary: 1 = up to and including secondary school, 0 = any higher education
A.3 CODING REFERENCE GROUP, USING DHS/MICS (HEALTH) SURVEYS

1. [rural] Place of residence
   Binary: 1 = rural, 0=urban

2. [youth] Age of respondent
   Binary: 1 = 15-35 years, 0 = all other ages

3. [female]
   All DHS/MICS respondents were female (mothers); however I do not think that
   ipso facto the response is “gendered” since the data is on actual usage – rather
   than preferences for – facility for childbirth, and actual usage often reflects joint
   decision-making by the husband and wife since men will likely have a say on
   issues of cost or transportation (to the facility).

4. [educ] Respondent’s education
   Binary: 1 = up to and including secondary school, 0 = any higher education

A.4 REGRESSIONS WITH GALLUP WORLD POLL DATA

To explore many of the hypothesized effects of affect on citizens’ quiescence and perceived
vested interest empirically, I employ Gallup World Poll surveys from 2009-2012 for Syria and
Jordan. The data consists of seven waves of surveys conducted between March 2009 and March
2012. Given the paucity of comparative polling data in authoritarian states, and the Arab region
in particular (Tessler 2006), I am extremely fortunate to have access to these multi-wave,
nationally-representative, individual-level surveys, and am grateful to Silatech (Qatar) and to the
Egyptian Research Forum (Egypt) for making the data available to me free of charge.
The Gallup data provide a uniquely suitable tool for my study because they allow me to 1) examine individual preferences and behavior at the appropriate level of analysis (individuals in the regimes’ mass coalitions) and to 2) draw comparisons across countries (and across time), given their standardized questions and interview techniques (face-to-face interviews, with the same question wording, in the same language Levantine Arabic dialect). For my analyses of the pre-shock, I use the March 2009 wave of the Poll since it is the only one that includes questions about valuation of local health services, general perception of corruption, bribes, and wasa.

A few words on Gallup’s methodology and reliability. Each wave of the Poll includes information on approximately 1000 individuals (the March 2009 wave contains 1082 individual interviews with Syrians and 1015 with Jordanians); each face-to-face interview lasted approximately an hour, and Syrian and Jordanian respondents were asked the same set of questions in their local language. The samples covered the entire country, including rural areas, and the sampling frame represented the country’s entire civilian population aged 15 and older based on the latest census data.

- Primary Sampling Units (clusters of households) were stratified by geography (rural/urban), and selected based on probabilities proportional to population size.
- Sampled households were selected by “random route.” If members of a selected household were not available for an interview the first time, interviewers made up to two additional attempts to revisit the household.
- Within the selected households, respondents were selected at random. Interviewers first made a list of all eligible household members and their ages, and chose respondents by means of a Kish grid.
Gallup vouches for the scientific objectivity and reliability of its data, and its methodological handbook describes in detail the steps it took to ensure that its data met that highest quality bar for Syria and Jordan as well as other countries (Gallup, 2012). First, Gallup vouches that it is “not associated with any political orientation, party, or advocacy group and does not accept partisan entities as clients.” Second, in every country and for every poll, Gallup maintains full responsibility and oversight over the “management, design, and control” of the surveys; in other words, it does not outsource survey design and data collection to third parties, whose methods and motivations are unknown. Third, it claims that it has a rigorous process of selecting and training in-country survey teams; it conducts in-depth training sessions with local field staff prior to the start of data collection on the questionnaire and field procedures. Finally, before publicly releasing the data, Gallup conducts several tests to ensure data quality, including an initial check for data consistency and stability by a regional survey director (e.g. for Middle East), and checks for logical consistency and trends over time by a team of Gallup scientists. Once the data are vetted and cleaned, weights are assigned to ensure that the sample for each country is nationally representative.

Prior to estimation, I prepared the data in two ways. First, I subset the data to nationals since I was interested in the attitudes of politically relevant domestic constituencies, not migrants. Second, I imputed missing values for my selected variables using standard multiple imputation techniques for survey data, in Stata. This was a critical step because Stata listwise deletes entries where even a single value is omitted. To simplify estimation, I also imputed “don’t know” and “refused to answer” responses for non-politically sensitive questions such as age, and for
politically sensitive questions I imputed “don’t know” but assigned a substantive value to the
“refused to answer” responses based on qualitative priors.

Table A1 Coding of politically-sensitive questions, for imputation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imputation strategy</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Coding for “Refused to Answer”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political answer / sensitive:</td>
<td>responsive</td>
<td>(refused to answer treated as “no”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corrupt</td>
<td>(refused to answer treated as “yes”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freedom</td>
<td>(refused to answer treated as “no”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>proprights</td>
<td>(refused to answer treated as “no”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table presents the summary statistics for the spring 2009 Gallup wave, after
imputation (the number of observations includes the original dataset and 9 multiply imputed
datasets).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Statistics</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Syria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obs.*</td>
<td>Mean</td>
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<td>institutions</td>
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<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jobpref</td>
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<td>0.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>healthsat trust</td>
<td>9987</td>
<td>0.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsive</td>
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<td>0.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>freedom</td>
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<td>0.752</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
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<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>educ</td>
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<td>0.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>goodentrep</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>proprights</td>
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<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pain</td>
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<td>0.443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongrelig</td>
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<td>0.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongfam</td>
<td>9955</td>
<td>0.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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A.5 MEASURING AFFECT (GALLUP DATA)

As proxies for affect I used the following questions on public perceptions of governance from the Gallup World Poll surveys:

1. **[responsive] Perceived responsiveness**: “In general, does the government make paperwork and permits easy enough for anyone who wants to start a business, or not?”
   
   Binary: 1= yes, 0= no

   Perceived responsiveness is not specifically measured by Gallup, so as a proxy I use the closest question that gets at the helpfulness of government officials to citizen requests for services: this question is whether individuals believe the government makes paperwork easy for those wanting to start a business (responsive). (Perceptions that the government makes paperwork easy suggest responsiveness, and vice versa.)

2. **[freedom] Perceived freedom (binary)**: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your freedom to choose what you do with your life?”
   
   Binary: 1= yes, satisfied, 0= no, dissatisfied

   The surveys do not ask people about repression directly – to do so in authoritarian settings such as Syria and Jordan would not have been feasible (survey questions in both countries had to be approved by the government) and / or would not have received truthful responses. The proxy question I use, asks individuals whether they feel they have the freedom to choose what to do with their lives.

3. **[corrupt] Corruption (spring 2009 Gallup wave only)**: “Is corruption widespread throughout the government or not?”
   
   Binary: 1= yes, widespread, 0= no, not widespread
A.6 MEASURING PERCEIVED VESTED INTEREST (GALLUP DATA)

As proxies for perceived vested interest I used the following questions:

1. \([\text{jobpref}]\) Preference for public sector jobs: 
   “Assuming the pay and conditions were similar, in general, where would you prefer to work?”
   Binary: 1= strict preference for government, 0 = preference for non-government (private business, self-employment, non-profit organization) or no preference

2. \([\text{healthsat}]\) Satisfaction with local health services* (binary): “In the city or area where you live, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the availability of quality health care?”
   Binary: 1= satisfied, 0= unsatisfied

A.7 MEASURING GENERALIZED SOLIDARITIES (GALLUP DATA)

As a proxy for generalized solidarities I used the following question from the Gallup World Poll:

1. (Spring 2009-spring 2012 Gallup waves) 
   \([\text{trust}]\) Trust people outside the family: “Other than your family members, is there someone you trust enough to make your partner in starting a business?”
   Binary: 1= yes, 0= no
A.8 MEASURING EXTORTION / WASTA (GALLUP DATA)

Measures used from the Spring 2009 Gallup World Poll:

[bribes] Experience of extortion: “Sometimes people have to give a bribe or a present in order to solve their problems. In the last 12 months, were you, personally, faced with this kind of situation, or not (regardless of whether you gave a bribe/present or not)?”

Binary: 1= yes, faced bribe situation, 0= no, did not face bribe situation

[wasta] Wasta: “Knowing people in high positions (wasta) is critical to getting a job in this country.”

Binary: 1= yes, 0= no

A.9 MEASURING RELATIVE DEPRIVATION (GALLUP DATA)

Measures used from the Spring 2009 Gallup World Poll:

1. [relativedep1] Relative deprivation 1: “Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your standard of living, all the things you can buy and do?”

Binary: 1= yes, 0= no

2. [relativedep2] Relative deprivation 2: “Right now, do you feel your standard of living is getting better or getting worse?”

Binary: 1= better or same, 0= worse
A.10 ADDED CONTROLS FOR REGRESSIONS WITH GALLUP DATA

In addition to the variables that figure centrally in my models - affect, perceived vested interest, measures used to construct the reference group - I include several control variables (to minimize the effects of potential pre-treatment confounders). For regressions with jobpref as my dependent variable (DV) I use three controls: one for beliefs about how good the area where the respondent lives is for entrepreneurship (goodentrep) because it might affect both the DV and also IVs (for instance, demand for business paperwork and resulting experience with corruption). A second control is security of property rights (proprights), and I include it for reasons similar to those for goodentrep. A third control is religiosity (strongrelig) because, given the history of tense relations between sympathizers of Islamist currents and incumbent regimes both in Jordan and Syria, individuals’ professed religiosity may affect their level of affect as well as their perceived vested material interest on the government. For analyses with healthsat as the DV, I include just one control for individuals’ self-reported health and experience of pain in the last twenty-four hours (pain) – since pain may sway judgment about the quality of medical care, on the particular day the survey was conducted. For regressions with trust as DV, I include two additional control variables, which may be potential pre-treatment confounders: the general strength of family ties / importance of family to the individual (strongfam) and religiosity (strongrelig). Individuals who value family so much that they place it above everything else may be predisposed to trust only kin; excluding this personal predisposition from the regression may bias results, and so it should be in the model. Meanwhile, religious individuals may be more trusting as they may view social relationships less in narrow parochial terms than in encompassing categories (such as religious umma, or Arab nationalism). Below is a summary of the controls for each dependent variable:
Controls for regressions with jobpref as DV

1. [goodentrep] Local market conditions for starting business (alternative to public sector): “Is the city or area where you live a good place or not a good place to live for entrepreneurs forming new businesses?”
   Binary: 1 = good place, 0 = bad place

2. [proprights] Private property rights / security: “In this country, if someone wants to start a business, can they trust their assets and property to be safe at all times?”
   Binary: 1 = yes, 0 = no

3. [strongrelig] Religiosity: “What is the most important thing for you in the next 10 years: career, family, faith, or something else?”
   Binary: 1 = faith alone is the most important thing

Control for regressions with healthsat as DV

1. [pain] Illness/pain at time of poll: “Did you experience the following feelings during much of the day yesterday? How about physical pain?”
   Binary: 1 = yes, 0 = no

Controls for regressions with trust as DV

1. [strongfam] Strength of family ties: “What is the most important thing for you in the next 10 years: career, family, faith, or something else?”
   Binary: 1 = family is the most important thing, 0 = something other than family

2. [strongrelig] Religiosity: “What is the most important thing for you in the next 10 years: career, family, faith, or something else?”
   Binary: 1 = faith is the most important thing, 0 = something other than faith
A.11 RELIABILITY OF MINISTRY DATA (HEALTH, LABOR)

The reliability of ministry data is always an issue in authoritarian regimes, and Syria and Jordan are no exception. Western scholars might be particularly inclined to question the veracity of Syrian data, since the country for many years (until Hafez Assad’s death in 2000) closed itself to international – especially Western – influences and organizations, and after 2005 was further isolated by international sanctions. Added to this was the fact that Hafez Assad built his regime with the aid of- and partly on the model of his Soviet /socialist allies in Eastern Europe – countries that were known for their opaqueness and for fabricating data to suit their agendas.

My sense is that this common view was true of the pre-2000 period, however after 2000 Syrian socio-economic data (but not political) became more trustworthy and indicated, if not the accurate point estimates, at least the correct order of magnitude and relative standing in comparison to Jordan. I have several reasons for believing this. First, the director of social statistics at the Central Bureau of Statistics, who was well-respected among statisticians at donor agencies and international organizations with which he ran joint surveys, told me openly during our first meeting that I should not use their pre-2000 data since it was “bad” (he did not say why, but probably because it was manipulated or incompetently collected) but that the post-2000 data was “good.” The same was confirmed to me later by an independent labor economist.655

Second, I witnessed the processes by which Ministry of Health data was collected and entered, and they seemed genuine. I visited the Ministry regularly, some weeks on a daily basis, and numerous times sat (while waiting for someone to help me with data requests) in the room where teams of officials entered health data from recently fielded surveys or from health directorates in the governorates, by hand. I also sat next to officials while they downloaded or printed the files for me, directly from the ministry server. And in every one of the eight or so
MoH offices where I came to request data, I was greeted with surprise, as ministry staff had never before seen a foreigner collecting health data directly in their offices. All these observations – the laborious and meticulous data entry, the direct transfer of data from the databases without prior “preparation,” and the disbelief that I had the Minister’s permission to access to the data – indicate to me that the data was in fact genuine and as accurate as the data-entry competence of the ministry staff.

Finally, economists have argued that Syrian unemployment data is credible (Aita, 2009: 113) more so than the Jordanian, which excludes long-term unemployment (among the highest in the world (Rad, 2012)) and thereby underestimates the real unemployment rate. At the very least, labor experts are confident that the data reveals useful information about relative unemployment trends in the two countries, which is the main purpose of my analyses.

A.12 RELIABILITY OF CHILD MORTALITY RATE (CMR) DATA

It is important to address the reliability of estimates of infant mortality rate (IMR) and child mortality rate (CMR) that I am using for this study, since researchers believe that data quality varies across countries and is sometimes compromised either due to the weakness of national data-collecting agencies or due to political manipulation by governments.

To my best knowledge – based on conversations with statisticians responsible for CMR and IMR statistics at UNICEF headquarters, the Director of Social Statistics at the Central Bureau of Statistics in Damascus, a senior economist at UN’s Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and a labor and demographic economist at ILO – there are no major
concerns with IMR/CMR data reliability for these two countries. Both countries have reliable and unreliable kinds of IMR/CMR data. Vital Registration Records (records of infant deaths collected by hospitals, health centers, and funeral homes) are considered unreliable because many poor rural households neglect to report infant deaths. However statistics collected via large national surveys in conjunction with international agencies such as UNICEF (MICS surveys) and/or USAID (DHS surveys) are considered reliable in the case of both Syria and Jordan. The UNICEF statistician told me that she had “no doubt at all that the data for Syria is reliable” because in addition to internal data-quality checks (the data for Syria was internally consistent), UNICEF was extensively involved in the actual data collection in the field and in the post-field data processing. The ESCWA economist similarly argued that “MICS data [on infant and child mortality] is…of good quality… Doubtful [that] the government manipulates such data.”

A.13 RELIABILITY OF MUNICIPAL VOTER TURNOUT DATA

In authoritarian regimes, political data is the type of data that is most likely to be manipulated. On this particular measure – voter turnout – I trust Jordanian data more than the Syrian because I had ample confirmation from my interviews with a broad spectrum of (local) elite and non-elite Jordanians, as well as my own observation of one electoral event (November 2010 parliamentary elections) that Transjordanians were truly enthusiastic about casting their ballots because so much was at stake (prestige for their tribe if they got someone elected, prestige for them personally, and access to material goods).

The credibility of Syrian voter turnout data is difficult to establish. On the one hand, the data came from an internal ministry document, given to the author in 2010 by the director of the
donor-run Municipal Administration Modernization (MAM) program, which collaborated closely with the Ministry of Local Administration (which oversaw municipalities and municipal elections). The fact that it was a ministry document may give it some credibility. Also, some of the patterns in the data – such as very low turnout in major cities (Aleppo, Damascus) and high turnout in eastern governorates with larger “tribal” populations (Deir Ezzor, Raqqa) – conform with expectations. On the other hand, the numbers seem too high in light of my qualitative findings about extreme voter apathy, which leads me to conclude that they are probably somewhat inflated.

A.14 LABOR FORCE TRENDS

Figure A1. Total labor force, 1990-2010.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank.
A.15 INTERNET USAGE

Figure A2. Internet users, per 100 people, during 2005-2010.

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank.
REFERENCES
INTERVIEWS

This work draws on information from 369 interviews - 144 with Syrian informants and 225 with Jordanians.

The Syrian interviews can be categorized as follows:
- 24 with government officials (including 1 former governor and 23 with high- and mid-level bureaucrats)
- 13 with elected figures (1 MP, 1 mayor, and 11 municipal members)
- 15 with representatives of international aid agencies
- 8 with donor-funded semi-governmental applied research and policy organizations
- 12 with civil society groups (including 6 charities and 6 government-sponsored NGOs)
- 12 with doctors
- 8 with business owners
- 15 with academics
- 5 with journalists
- 32 with ordinary Syrians, many originally from rural areas, selected (non-randomly) by snow-ball method.

The Jordanian interviews can be categorized as follows:
- 42 with government officials (including 1 senior Royal Court official, 2 mukhabarat, 1 parastatal director, 2 ministers, and 36 staff of government ministries/ agencies)
- 39 with elected figures (including 5 active in opposition parties)
- 12 with tribal sheikhs
- 9 with representatives of international aid agencies
- 22 with civil society groups (including 10 rural charities, 9 governmental “Royal” NGOs, and 3 union officials)
- 5 with doctors
- 31 with business sector representatives (including 21 micro/small entrepreneurs, 5 large business owners, and 5 microfinance banks)
- 23 academics and think tank researchers
- 43 ordinary Jordanians residing in rural areas (including 13 demonstrators), selected by snow-ball method.

In accordance with Human Subjects Review standards and practices, interviewees who requested anonymity are not publicly identified in any way. The following interviews were wholly or in part on the record.

Ababsa, Myriam. Senior researcher at IFPO. Amman, spring 2011.

Abu Rumman, Mohammad. Senior Researcher, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. Amman, spring 2011.

Aita, Samir. Consulting economist for ILO. Phone interview, February 2015.

Altaqi, Dr. Samir. Former executive director of al-Mushtahed hospital and former Member of Parliament. Damascus, March 2010.


As’ad, Yousef. President of Doctors’ Union. Damascus, September 2010.


Bahnasi, Bana. Program Manager at Municipal Administration Modernization Program. Damascus, May and June 2010.


Bakfalouni, Dr. Talal. Director of Planning, Ministry of Health. Damascus, May and July 2010.


Barout, Jamal. Senior researcher at IFPO. Aleppo, November 2010.


Brand, Laurie. Professor at University of Southern California. Cambridge, Massachusetts, fall 2014.


Coutts, Adam. Consulting expert with ILO and ESCWA. Correspondence, spring 2010.


Diaa Sha’ir. Doctor and former resident of Daraa. Correspondence, November 2013.


Habashneh, Tawfiq. Director General of Agricultural Credit Corporation, Amman, spring 2011.
Jaradat, Abdelfatah. Director of Poverty Unit, Department of Statistics. Amman, April 2011.
Kassab, Dr. Samir. Doctor at private hospital and private practice. Lattakia, January and April 2010.
Khatib, Walid. Director of Surveys, Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. Amman, November 2010.
Khawaja, Marwan. Chief of Demographic and Social Statistics, UN-ESCWA. Correspondence, March 2015.
Lutfallah, Dr. Nader. Doctor working in a public hospital and a private clinic. Ibn an-Nefis Hospital, Damascus, spring-summer 2010.

Maani, Musa. Former Minister of Municipal Affairs and former mayor, Maan city. Maan, July 2011.


Masri, Mohammad. Senior researcher at the University of Jordan. Amman, spring-summer 2011.


Melhem, Yahya. Harvard University libraries. Cambridge, Massachusetts, October 2013.


Momani, Mohammad H. Professor of Political Science, Yarmouk University, Irbid. Amman, fall 2010.


Rantawi, Oraib. Director of Al-Quds Center for Political Studies. Amman, spring 2011.


Sawaie, Mohammad. Professor at University of Virginia. Phone conversation, October 2013.
Sheikh, Aref. Program Officer, UNIFEM. Damascus, May 2010.
Tawalbah, Aref. Program Officer at Partnership for Democracy Center, Madaba. Madaba and Amman, spring-summer 2011.
Telfah, Osama. Program Officer at International Republican Institute. Amman, July 2011.
Tell, Nawwaf. Director of Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. Amman, spring 2011.
Zoubi, Najaha. Program Officer, Jordanian Women’s Union. Amman, July 2011.

MICRO-LEVEL DATASETS

Throughout the dissertation I use a range of original micro-level quantitative data. Replication files can be accessed here: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi%3A10.7910%2FDVN%2FVZ1QD. Some of the data is freely available. The Gallup World Poll data is proprietary; I obtained it through the generous sponsorship of Silatech and the Economic Research Forum, but it can also be purchased directly from Gallup. Micro-level data from Syrian and Jordanian ministries is classified but can be obtained by special permission from the respective governments; I was gained that access with the much-appreciated help of the IFPO in Syria and the American Center for Oriental Studies and Center for Strategic Studies in Jordan. The main micro-level datasets are:


CLASSIFIED DIPLOMATIC DOCUMENTS

Throughout the dissertation I use and reference information from over a dozen classified diplomatic cables from the U.S. Embassy in Amman, leaked and published by WikiLeaks (Accessed at http://www.cablegatesearch.net/). Specific citations from this archive are cited in the bibliography under “U.S. Embassy, Amman” as author.

GOVERNMENT SERIALS


**INTERNATIONAL DATABASES**


**BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND CHAPTERS**


Ain News. (2011e, March 15). Ramtha resident and his family scour the streets to protest against corruption and to demand a job after waiting for 18 years since graduation. Retrieved from http://ainnews.net/?p=70338


Daadaoui, M. (2013). It’s good to be king. Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Middle East Studies Association, New Orleans, LA.


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ENDNOTES

1 Note, by “escalation” I do not mean descent into violence. While protesters may resort to violence as a strategy or means of self-defense against regime repression, I use the term “escalation” in the political sense, to connote an increase in the momentum or power of protest movements as a function of their demands and breadth.

2 According to Freedom House, in 2013, 57% of the global population – almost four billion people – did not enjoy full political rights and civil liberties free (Biddle, 2013).

3 A comparison of protest escalation under free and non-free regimes is beyond the scope of this study, as my goal here is to establish a research agenda for protest escalation in autocracies. It is my hope, however, that my foundational research here can serve as a basis for future comparative work on protest escalation across different regime types.

4 For the literature stressing the role of coercive capabilities and resource levels for authoritarian survival, see for instance (Bellin, 2004; Ross, 2001).

5 See Jamal on the theoretical distinction between centralized and decentralized clientelism, and Stacher on centralized and decentralized authoritarian governance (Jamal, 2007; Stacher, 2012). Although my research does not support Stacher’s arguments about decentralization of governance in Bashar Assad’s pre-2011 Syria, his larger theoretical argument is important.

6 To borrow Steven Heydemann’s term (Heydemann, 2007).

7 A number of scholars have noted that one of the reasons it is so difficult to predict protest outbreaks is that the triggers can take so many different forms: even a seemingly “ordinary” form of behavior, which took place for many years and never sparked a protest, can one day become a trigger for mass collective action (Kuran, 1995).

8 For instance, the 1989 protests in Eastern Europe are widely believed to have begun after Moscow’s repeal of its repressive “Brezhnev Doctrine” towards its satellite states (Kuran, 1991).

9 An instance of insulting and extortionary behavior by police in a small provincial Tunisian city supposedly “sparked” Tunisia’s uprising in 2010-11, even though the behavior was “ordinary” and had been endured by the city’s residents for years on a daily basis (Abouzeid 2011).

10 Major unexpected shocks place autocrats in a more vulnerable position than small and endogenous (planned) “focal” events because governments can generally handle smaller events more easily than major national triggers, and because (for obvious reasons) they can prepare for scheduled events such as elections better in advance than for unexpected shocks. See (Beissinger, 2007; Karklins & Petersen, 1993) for a discussion.

11 See, for instance, (Tarrow, 1994; Benford & Snow, 2000).

12 Literature on quiescence and authoritarian bargains includes, among other, (Ayubi, 1996; Richards & Waterbury, 2008; Sadiki, 2000); related literatures on quiescence and absolute deprivation (Eckstein & Merino, 2001; Goldstone et al., 2010); “unearned” state rents as a counter to absolute deprivation (Beblawi, 1990; Lacroix, 2011; Ross, 2001); relative deprivation (Davies, 1962), (E. P. Thompson, 1971) and (Gurr, 1970); and inequality (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Alesina & Perotti, 1996; Boix, 2008; Muller & Seligson, 1987).
The theory of relative deprivation arose partly in reaction to the theory of absolute deprivation, and argues that “it is not the most deprived groups that engage in collective action” but those whose expectations rise faster than actual improvements (Staggenborg, 2011).

Research from advanced democracies has shed doubt on the assumption of a close link between the boldness of collective action and both objective and relative deprivation (Marx & Wood, 1975; McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

The Iranian Shah’s “munificent” wealth did not save his regime from powerful anti-regime protests in 1978-9; the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe faced uprisings in the late 1980s despite providing some of the most generous distributive packages in the history of dictatorship; and Tunisia’s growing economic power and Bahrain’s oil wealth did not shelter those governments from strident oppositional demonstrations in 2010-11.

Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates.

Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen. Another Arb republic, Lebanon, is not counted as it is usually classified as a weak democracy rather than as an autocratic regime.

See, among other, (Babb, 1996; McAdam et al, 2001; Snow & Benford, 2000).

See also (McAdam, 2004; Edwards & McCarthy, 2008; Polletta & Ho, 2006; Putnam, 1993; Wiktorowicz, 2004).

On emotions and collective action, see also (Petersen, 2011; Wood, 2001).

See also (Turner & Killian, 1987; McAmmon, 2001; Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

A number of SMT scholars have themselves noted that existing research has hardly looked at the way macro-level factors condition the subjective experience of protest participants and the micro logic of collective action (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

The literature on relative deprivation is often seen to be more sensitive to subjective perceptions than studies of absolute grievances, however as social movement theorists have remarked, even this theory “typically infer[s] psychological states of relative deprivation from objective indicators such as unemployment rates” (Staggenborg, 2011; Jenkins, 1981).

Indeed, this has led some a variety of SMT scholars to call for more attention to psychology and perceptions, for understanding the emergence and evolution of movements (Oliver, Cadena-Roa, & Strawn, 2003; Kurzman, 2008).

In doing so, I take up Tucker’s call for thinking about protest from the perspective of the participants (Tucker, 2007: 536).

Autocratic RPBs can shift with changes in the country’s socio-economic profile, but in many cases since this profile changes slowly the shifts in RPB are slow also.

Most existing studies rely on data from cases where important social coalitions are materially self-sufficient and therefore have little direct material interest in the state’s survival, without the corresponding counterfactual.

See (Magaloni, 2006) and (Skocpol, 1979, 1982). For example, in her 1979 work on social revolutions Skocpol writes that “peasant communities in France, Russia, and China enjoyed a considerable degree of …autonomy from direct supervision by landlords which enabled peasants to revolt against landlords following the breakdown of central administrative and military controls.”

Unlike Mueller I see the period of latency potentially extending far – years or even decades – in advance of the collective action.
I use the term alienation in the sense commonly used in literature on authoritarian regimes (Bayat, 2010; Wickham, 2002), not in the classical Marxist sense.

The “appraisal theory” branch of the social movement literature finds that individuals have tend to have more negative emotional responses to events when they feel they have little control “over the consequences of the event” (Van Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

In discussions of the causes of the Arab uprisings, for instance, many observers noted the yearning for “democracy” (Gelvin, 2012) and “political freedom” (Gause, 2011) and struggle against “political powerlessness” (Nouiehed & Warren, 2012).

See also (Dodds et al, 1991; Erdem et al, 2006).

The concept of “brand” or reputation is partly related to the concept of framing (see Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).

On the effects of seemingly irrelevant events, situations, and attributes on individuals’ decisions, see also (Lerner et al, 2004; Achen & Bartels, 2004; Healy et al, 2010).

Although the way individuals evaluate state goods may be bound up with their particular economic needs as well as the historical trajectory of their communities’ economic development, my prediction is that if we control for these factors—that is, if we compare RPBs from the same income group and similar economic setting—we should see levels of vested interest vary with affect.

The movement managed to bring together millions of Poles on the basis of their common opposition to Communist rule and common vision of society “as strongly polarized between ‘us’ (‘society’, people) and ‘them’ (authorities)” (Ekiert & Kubik, 2001).

Bayat’s and Kurzman’s part-ethnographic accounts describe the distinct sense of “social solidarity” among the urban Egyptian underclass and the urban bazaar / ruhaniyat, respectively (Bayat, 2007; Kurzman, 1996).

On autocratic regimes and divide and rule see (Acemoglu, Verdier, & Robinson, 2004).

In Chapter 2, I discuss how post-World War II autocracies differ in this respect from older models of authoritarian rule.


Often TD systems are found in republican regimes with hegemonic parties, but not always. In a separate paper, I examine why regime type and presence of dominant party are as second-order attributes, and why distributive institutions are more important.

Farazmand, a specialist of public administration and organization, compares “top-down,” “bottom-up,” and “institutional” approaches to administrative reform and development. He argues that in the 1960s Shah Reza Pahlavi reigned in a decidedly “top-down” fashion, whereby he “select[ed] policy choices for desired change and reform” and ignored the input of the common people. As direct result of this fashion of government, the Shah “had no legitimacy among [most] people” (Farazmand, 2001).

Although, to my best knowledge, no other work has explicitly used the term “Institutionalized Bargaining” to describe a specific phenomenon, a number of political economy studies have looked at the role of “institutions” in facilitating “bargaining,” usually among political elites. For instance Jennifer Gandhi has looked at the way
parliaments and political parties facilitate political bargains between autocrats and the opposition (Gandhi, 2008), and Lisa Blaydes has looked at the role of parliaments in mediating mainly among competing segments within the authoritarian elite (Blaydes, 2010). My use of the term “Institutionalized Bargaining” is distinct, and should not be confused with these approaches. The institutions I am interested in are broad systems of rule rather than specific organizations like parliaments and parties; and the bargaining I look at takes place primarily between the elite and the regime’s non-elite mass base, not within the high power circles.

A large literature has found state autonomy and programmatic politics to be beneficial for development performance and welfare outcomes. Amsden suggests that autonomy leads to better development outcomes because it permits states to enforce “performance standards;” indeed, she finds that in the case of Asian Tiger economies like Korea “relative autonomy of the state [among other] from popular masses… was decisive [for] rapid growth” (Amsden, 1990). Becker and Haggard, similarly, argue that “an autonomous state is needed” because “the state is the only …actor [that can] act on behalf of universalistic interest” and in order to do so it “must be insulated from societal pressures and empowered to pursue the policies it finds best” (Becker, 1983; Haggard, 1990). Of course, as North and Przeworski and others point out, state autonomy does not guarantee that authoritarian governments will pursue socially-oriented programmatic and developmentalist policies (North, 1990; Przeworski & Limongi, 1993), but the point is that they are in a better position to do so than autocracies beholden to bargaining with a variety of particularist interests.

Abuse of power, such as extortion or heavy-handed forms of control, hurts lower-income groups more than others because they usually cannot “buy” or wiggle their way out of the worst abuses with money or connections, the way wealthier and more connected individuals may be able to do.

Existing literature shows that “politicians engineer [broad, programmatic] redistribution …so as to …increase the size of their [political] coalitions” (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007: 11).

Although institutions are more easily changed in authoritarian regimes than in democratic, they are always at least somewhat endogenous and thus may reproduce themselves long after first being created (Geddes 2006). On the historical “stickiness” of institutions see also Thelen (1999, 2002), Pierson (1993, 2000).

Carey summarizes this point well: “What is set down on parchment may be endogenous to a set of social conditions at the moment of institutional foundation, but [it] may endure even as the social conditions change [because] re-coordinating around an alternative set of institutions is difficult” (Carey, 2000).

In the narrow sense, they are specimens of undemocratic rule; in the broader sense, their systems are, by Juan Linz’s typology (Linz, 2000), distinct from totalitarian regimes in that they permit limited pluralism and lack a dominating ideology. Since state-building both regimes tolerated limited political, social, and economic activity outside the state, including (since the 1970s in Syria, and since the 1990s in Jordan) a range of political parties that occasionally clashed with the respective ruling regimes. Both Jordanian and Syrian regimes lacked a pervasive ideology; Syria’s ruling Baath Party, while motivated by ideological ideals in the 1950s-60s, ceased to be an ideological organization after Hafez Assad’s pragmatic “Corrective Movement” starting in 1970 (Batatu, 1999a). Jordan has been time and again used as a “typical” case of stable authoritarianism (Lust-Okar, 2006; Yom & Momani, 2008), and long-time observers of Syria note that the country “never developed into a totalitarian … state” (Perthes, 2004; see also Wedeen, 1999).

A number of scholars have argued that, long before 2011, Syria and Jordan, like other Arab states were “intimate[ly] link[ed] in a single public space” (Lynch, 2012a), especially after the advent of the popular Al Jazeera satellite television channel, which united viewers in a common “imagined community” through its region-wide region-focused broadcasts, in a single common language, with a multi-national Arab-speaking team (R. Hinnebusch, 2012).

(Beissinger, 2007) argues that these and other structural factors increase the likelihood of “modular revolutions.” In other words, given these characteristics, Syrian and Jordan were both good candidates for (protest escalation into) an uprising in early 2011, following Tunisia’s (and Egypt’s) example.
This includes an estimated 0.5 million ethnic Palestinians in Syria and approximately four million ethnic Palestinian citizens in Jordan. World Bank 2010.

Many other cases of protest under authoritarianism lack these methodologically fortuitous features. For instance, former Communist states of Eastern Europe, whose ‘velvet revolutions’ became textbook cases for the study of collective action under dictatorship, lacked significant variation on institutions (all were Top-Down regimes); meanwhile the “Colored Revolution” states of Serbia, Georgia, Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan varied (to some extent) on institutions but their protests were non-simultaneous and triggered by endogenous country-specific events, such as scheduled national elections). See (Beissinger 2007: 263; Tucker 2007:540-1; Fairbanks 2004; Eckstein 2001; Way 2008; Ash 2011) for the role of scheduled national elections in authoritarian regimes as a potential trigger for collective action.

Jordan’s King Abdullah II, a western-oriented monarch, was the butt of many jokes among Jordanians as he lacked personal charisma and spoke poor Arabic (learned as a second language).

My period of focus comes long before the onset of Syria’s armed insurgency, which begins in the mid-summer/fall of 2011.

The name derives from the country’s geographic location across – or “trans” – the River Jordan, fromPalestine. The terms “West Bank” (Palestine) and “East Bank” (Jordan) also stem from their locations relative to the same River.

Officially, Syria was put on the map in 1920 and Jordan in 1922.

France thereby recreated the mediated state through which the Ottomans had ruled Syria before 1918 (E. Thompson, 2000; Waldner, 1999).

Waldner argues that after 1920 French colonial officials had considered creating a more direct forms of rule, but changed their mind after facing widespread unrest in the 1920s culminating in the large-scale revolt of 1925-7 (Waldner, 1999).

In 1920, French occupying forces chased out the Saudi-born Prince Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein of Mecca and one of the key leaders of the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule, who had installed himself in Damascus after the withdrawal of the last Ottoman administrators in 1918.

(Waldner, 1999: 76; Hinnebusch, 1989).

Although formally Jordan’s founder was Abdullah I of Jordan (1922), King Hussein (1952-99) became the main architect of the modern state of Jordan as it stood on the eve of 2011.

The Gulf States began to supply aid to various countries across the region following the regional oil boom from the 1970s -early 1980s which saw the quadrupling of oil prices. Jordan benefited from high levels of development assistance: $2 billion for the years 1974-1978, and nearly $3.5 billion for the years 1979-1983 (Wils 2004, see also Baylouny 2008).

Since the 1960s, more than 50% of Jordan’s public sector expansion was financed by foreign aid (Said 2000). Although some scholars have made a similar argument about the impact of remittances (Bligh 2002), this is in fact not accurate since remittances are usually transferred by hand to private households and in the process by-pass the official financial system and the regime’s coffers. For an elaboration see (Vodopyanov & Yom, 2009).

Some of the groundwork for the Baath’s institutional engineering was laid by Gamal Abdel Nasser during Syria’s short-lived union with Egypt when the two became a single United Arab Republic, during 1958-1961. However most of Nasser’s changes much less far-reaching than the Baath’s, and many were in any case undone under the anti-Nasserist government that ruled for two years (1961-3) in the aftermath of UAR’s dissolution.
67 Aflaq and Bitar were themselves educators, as were many of the founders of the party’s branches and sub-branches were concurrently founders or principals of private schools (Batatu, 1999a).

68 The Baath expanded its share of seats from a meager 1 in 1949 to 22 out of 142 seats in 1954 (Khatib, 2011).

69 The Baath Party’s official slogan was “Unity, Freedom, Socialism.”

70 Hawrani’s “very grassroots-focused movement, with politically conscious peasant leaders paying a key role in agitating at the village level,” extended the Party’s organizational net to the countryside, so that by the mid-1950s it had 10,000 formal members and at least 40,000 informal supporters most of whom were peasants and educated sons of peasants. (Batatu, 1999a).

71 In 1958 Syrian lawmakers voted to unite Syria with Egypt under the leadership of the dynamic Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser.

72 A group of Nasserites who attempted to overthrow the Baath in July 1963 were executed (Khatib 2011: 31).

73 Abdullah’s son and Hussein’s father, King Talal, ruled only briefly during 1951-2 and was forced to abdicate early due to mental illness.

74 Although Baathist ideas had already began circulating in the East Bank in the late 1940s, Nasser’s populist message after 1953 “found fertile ground among the increasingly politicized Jordanian and Palestinian populations [alike]” (B. S. Anderson, 2005). The popularity of the leftist and nationalist parties “reflected not simply the …frustration of ex-Palestinians…but also [the] new Arabism preached from Cairo and Damascus” (Vatikiotis, 1967).

75 Leftist parties in particular channeled popular disenchantment with unemployment and material hardship to mobilize for broader political demands; they managed to orchestrate massive protests with a large turnout particularly among workers, rural migrants, and the unemployed (B. S. Anderson, 2005).

76 Several plots were hatched between 1954-7 to overthrow the monarchy (Vatikiotis, 1967).

77 I should note, however, that even in the security establishment the regime recruited many Sunnis. Under Bashar especially, more Sunnis began to appear within the security services: for instance, in late 2000s the head of intelligence and the head of the police force were Sunnis (ICG 6 July 2011).

78 Nicolaus Van Dam (2011) is the exception in the established literature, with his argument that the regime was sectarian in its make-up and policies.

79 The Baath “channell[ed] rural migrants…into the bureaucracy, popular organizations, and army” by providing them with a secure, salaried, respectable living (Waldner 1999: 91), and at the same time recruited among the youth, the first generation to move to cities and obtain an education. Even in the 2000s, after decades of rural to urban migration, one out of three hires in public administration was still of rural origin (Khawaja, 2002).

80 World Development Indicators, World Bank, 1963.

81 In the late 2000s, rural migrants comprised over 40% of larger cities like Damascus and Aleppo (Dupret & Ferrier, 2012; Minot et al, 2010).

82 In an apparent move to explicate the 2011 uprisings, some observers began to question the regime’s continued commitment to its popular base, albeit without providing convincing new evidence. For instance Raymond Hinnebusch in a 2012 piece argued that the regime “jettisoned its former popular constituency” (Hinnebusch 2012). This stood in contrast to his pre-2011 writing where he had argued the opposite (e.g. Hinnebusch, 2011).
“The government has continued the subsidies because otherwise there will be a revolution.” Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, Senior Correspondent, Al-Hayat -Damascus Bureau, Damascus, 19 April 2010.

Palestinians were pushed out of the state bureaucracy and officer corps where they had once been prominent due to their higher levels of education (Brand 1995: 158); health care services were skewed towards the regime’s mass base while “poor Palestinian areas [remained] outside the formal healthcare system” (Baylouny, 2008); and government anti-poverty projects were blatantly biased towards rural Transjordanian areas.

In the area of employment, Civil Service Bureau statistics from the 2000s reveal that the ratio of successful applications for government jobs was 2-3 times higher in districts with an exclusively ethnic Transjordanian population such as the Central and Southern Badia (11% and 17% job acceptance rates) than in Amman (5%) where the majority of residents were Palestinian (Civil Service Bureau 2009, data obtained by author).

World Development Indicators, World Bank, 1963.

In fact, this “welcoming” reception is a national myth created and perpetuated by the regime. Historical accounts suggest that many Transjordanians tribes were extremely wary of Abdullah and sought to expel him on multiple occasions during the early years of his rule (Vatikiotis, 1967).

The shift in policy becomes apparent considering the evidence that during the late 1940s-early 1950s King Abdullah I had annexed (what remained of) Palestine in 1950 and courted the growing Palestinian population in his territories, and that throughout the 1950s King Hussein continued his grandfather’s efforts to integrate Palestinians into his regime’s mass coalition by “underscor[ing] the Hashemite regime’s equal commitment to native Transjordanians and Palestinians” (Baaklini et al., 1999: 138). The change in this approach after the late 1950s was a strategic choice. Hussein decisively pivoted his focus towards the Transjordanian segment of the population in the context of Palestinians’ political radicalization during the 1950s and especially after the PLO-led armed insurgency against the regime in 1970 (The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was founded in 1964 as a transnational political movement to fight for the liberation of Palestinian lands and establishment of a Palestinian state.). Even though in reality political sympathies for ideological parties and for the PLO crossed Palestinian-Transjordanian ethnic lines (Ronsin, 2010), the regime created a narrative that framed Palestinian-Jordanians as fifth columnists while extolling the supposed patriotism of Transjordanians (Massad, 2001) partly because Transjordanians on the whole were seen to be less educated and purportedly more politically pliable than Palestinians. Vatikiotis, for instance, shows that at the time rural Transjordanians, and Bedouin populations in particular, “unlike individuals from cities and the educated classes, …were less likely to have political party affiliations and therefore could be rendered more loyal” (Vatikiotis, 1967); this was also the main reason why after the 1950s the regime recruited proportionally more rural Transjordanians into its military and security forces (Massad, 2001; Jureidini & McLaurin, 1984). (For an alternative perspective, see (B. S. Anderson, 2005)).

Author’s interview with George Hartman, Syria Local Development expert at the German Development Agency and formerly with Municipal Administration Modernization Program, Damascus, June 2010. See also (Batatu, 1999).

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), the path to employment in the Syrian bureaucracy before 2011 was based on institutionalized processes and “relatively meritocratic” criteria that officially sought to minimize “backdoor” hiring (Alta 2009, ILO 2013).

Author’s interview with George Hartman, Damascus, June 2010.

Even after the “radical” Baath policies of the 1960s period, including aborted experiments with collectivization, by the end of the 1960s decade more than 78% of agriculture remained private; after 1970 that fraction rose to over 90% (Hinnebusch 1991: 38; Havens 1980: 13).

Even though most of the agricultural sector remained in private hands, farmers who needed to take advantage of government subsidies needed to abide by its agricultural plans (Minot et al 2010: 138) and were encouraged to
produce according to “the crop pattern[s] and objectives set forth in the state production plan” (Batatu 1999) (those who refused could lose access to subsidized government loans, seed, machinery, and other inputs) (Minot et al 2010: 138, Heydemann 1999). Although the regime loosened some control after the 1990s, the system retained its to-down character: in the late 2000s, the Ministry of Agriculture still monopolized agricultural credit, regulated sales of certain “strategic” crops, and set the prices on major crops such as cereals, potatoes, and sugar (Minot et al 2010).

Even the young president Bashar Assad, who after taking power in 2000 began to market Syria to investors as an increasingly market-friendly economy, stressed his commitment to programmatic planning (Hinnebusch, 1991; Ziyadeh, 2011). “Planning with a free market” was the title of a brochure issued by the Syrian State Planning Commission in 2005, and given to the author during interviews in 2010.

The plans were extremely detailed documents, written in small font on thin paper, bound in thick volumes. Budget items recorded the cost of building each new hospital and clinic, the amounts to be spent on equipment and medical supplies, the labor costs required for specific infrastructural repairs in a given region, and the price of agricultural fertilizer or seed that needed to be purchased in a given year.

Author’s interview with George Hartman, Damascus, June 2010; author’s conversations with MoH employees; (GoS, 2000; Lernel, 1980).

“Education is a right guaranteed by the state. Elementary education is compulsory and all education is free” (Article 37, 1973 Constitution).

“The state guarantees cultural, social, and health services. It especially bring these services rural areas in order to raise their standard of living.” (Article 47, 1973 Constitution).

“Work is a right and duty of every citizen. The state undertakes to provide work for all citizens. Every citizen has the right to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work. The state must guarantee this...” (Article 36, 1973 Constitution).

When the Baath came to power in 1963 it faced a deeply divided society: ethnically – between Arabs (85%) and various non-Arab minorities such as Kurds; religiously – between Sunnis (74%), Alawis (12%), Christians (10%), and various smaller sects (George 2003: 4); and communally – between various tribally- and non-tribally organized groups. A significant portion of Syria’s rural population in 1960 identified with a tribal or clan identity; the majority of these were settled agriculturalists, while a relative minority (about 5% of the total rural population in the 2000s) identified as nomads (Batatu 1999, Chatty 2010).

A secondary reason for the Baath’s open war on parochialism might have been to allay fears that the Baathist regime might be driven by minority bias, but in 1963 this was the least important consideration given that the Baath’s top ranks were dominated by Sunnis (Baath founders Salahaddin Bitar and Michel Aflaq were Sunni and Christian, respectively) and the party’s rank-and-file was broadly cross-sectarian.

Charities proliferated during the Ottoman and French periods, since at that time they were only required to submit a simple letter to the authorities confirming their existence and field of activity. (Official Gazette, Government of Syria 1922-2010; (Harding 2010)).

In in 2010 the charities that survived since the 1950s still formed 65% of all the 1074 civic non-profit organizations registered in the country. (Official Gazette, Government of Syria 1922-2010; author’s interview with Jamal Barout, Senior researcher at IFPO, Aleppo, Nov 2010.)

According to a Syrian NGO expert, the charitable sector was self-sufficient; the government provided practically no financial support, besides a largely symbolic annual contribution of $20 per charity (Author’s interview with Syrian NGO expert at donor-funded organization, Damascus, June 2010).
Some endowments were brought under government control already in the 1950s; author’s interview with Jamal Barout, Senior researcher at IFPO, Aleppo, Nov 2010.

Some have argued that the government could not stamp out the charities altogether, both because they were popular and because they redistributed resources and thus relieved the government of some of the effort. (Author’s interviews with Abdelqader Husrieh, businessman and adviser to the Ministry for Social Affairs and Labor, Damascus, August & October 2010.)

Officially the groups were regulated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, but in reality they were monitored directly by the Ministry of Interior and security services. (Author’s interviews with official close to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, Damascus, fall 2010.) See also (Human Rights Watch 2007). In a sharp departure from the relatively lax Ottoman and even Mandate-era laws, the repressive Law of Associations gave the regime unprecedented powers to withhold licenses from new organizations, to dissolve others at will, to merge associations doing similar work, to replace their board of governors, to block them from holding activities or certain kinds of fundraising, at will and without explanation (AAI 2007, Human Rights Watch 2007).

The government’s proposed partnership with civil society was a key theme of the 2006-2010 Five Year Plan. However its pronouncements were not matched by its actions. It privileged the “modern” civic associations set up by the First Lady Asma Assad, such as FIRDOS (a rural development agency created in 2001), SHABAB (an organization focused on fostering cultural entrepreneurship among the country’s youth created in 2005), and Syria Trust for Development (an umbrella organization for research and practical interventions created in 2007) (Haidar 2010). But at the same time it tightened the screws on grassroots “communal” society, including religious charities, and some believe that the sudden change in policy was precipitated by perceptions in regime circles that the independent civic sector was getting too strong (Author’s interviews with official close to the Minister of Social Affairs and Labor, Damascus, fall 2010). My research does not support the idea that during the 2000s the state was using charities to “offload” its social responsibilities (Ruiz de Elvira 2010), for the security/political imperative always overrode the economic, and when charities became visibly wealthy and powerful the state did not hesitate to freeze their activities or even shut them down.

Other prominent unions included unions of craftsmen, students, youth, women, sports leagues, writers, journalists, and teachers (Sadowski 1988, Hinnebusch 1989).

Assad sought from the outset to render the organization more representative of the people as a whole, affirming in 1970 that the party “will not be the party of the elect” and should attract into its ranks “all the citizens, all the strugglers who in principle are the whole people” (Batatu 1999: 179).

Membership in the Peasant Union was highly attractive for peasants because the Union distributed cheap credit as well as a range of other material perks including partial relief from taxes on production, a 5% rebate on supplies purchased from state institutions, a 25% reduction on the cost of transporting agricultural machines and equipment” by railway or other public means, and appreciable discounts by on spare parts for tractors and harvesters purchased through the Peasants’ Union; peasants were “undoubtedly better off as members of associations than if left to fend for themselves” (Batatu 1999: 251).

Author’s interview with George Hartman, Damascus, 2010.

Although historically sheikhs had used material patronage (usually in the form of distribution of land morsels and gifts of livestock) to assert their status within the tribe and reinforce external alliances, it was usually one of many such tools and not always the most important (others included their role as warriors, protectors of the tribe, and mediators of disputes). Hussein therefore partially redefined the sheikhs’ power to be about economic patronage by regularly meeting with them to ascertain material needs, and by stressing the material element of their role above others (Gubser, 1988).

The power of the Royal Court derived from the fact that it acted as a source of all national legislation and major government decisions and also concentrated vast wealth, but was constitutionally unaccountable to parliament or
other social or political bodies (Oudat 2005: 95). The Tribal Advisory Council became “the most important department” within the Royal Court (Mutawi 1987).

114 The Arabic phrase for “Royal Court,” Diwan Malaki, contains the word “diwan” or council, which Arab tribes traditionally used to describe both the physical space and the process employed for collective decision-making and conflict resolution.

115 Historians agree that despite the prominence of tribes in Jordan’s history, “much of what passe[d] for …tribal… tradition [after the 1950s] [was] invented by the state” (Fathi, 1994; Massad, 2001).

116 “Bedouin” themed soap operas began to appear regularly on Jordanian television (Shryock, 1997). Songs were infused the language appropriating “bedouin” dialects and vocabulary (Massad, 2001), for example the word nakhweh which connotes magnanimity used to strengthen kin relations and tribal alliances: “[If] an ‘ashira [clan] is without nakhweh, ” a saying went, “it is without nobility and…credibility” (Oudat 2005: 48).

117 The contrast between the Baath’s and the Hashemites’ approach is illustrated poignantly by their treatment of Sheikh Faisal of the large Hadidiyin tribe from Syria’s Northeastern steppe. In 1967, sheikh Faisal was imprisoned by the Baath on charges of resisting land redistribution and, upon his release, told to leave the country. Faisal moved to Jordan where, according to accounts, “he was welcomed by King Hussein, offered a stipend of 3000 Jordanian dinars, and given land around Mafraq for himself and his family” (Chatty 2010: 39).

118 In Jordan, mayors were a reconfigured version of the old Ottoman-era position of village mukhtar or local notary. In 1965 the position became elected (Farrag, 1977).

119 Hussein suspended parliament in 1967 and did not allow for it to be reelected until 1989 (Ayubi, 1996; Bligh, 2002). However, even during the twenty-two year hiatus, “parliament” existed in the form of an appointed National Consultative Council (NCC) composed mainly of sheikhs handpicked by the King.

120 Until the 1980s, many mayors were sheikhs or sons of sheikhs but this changed in the 1990s as more and more candidates came from other backgrounds; many were former school teachers, businessmen, retired army officers. The change occurred in the case of parliamentary candidates (Layne 1994: 112-113).

121 Public pronouncements regarding the King’s policy decisions, both large and small, often made sure to stress that he made them after “extensive consultation on matters of mutual concern and interest” with a range of tribal leaders and other intermediaries (Jureidini & McLaurin 1984: 39). This was as true in the 1980s as in the 2000s. For example, during a routine visit to a governorate north of Amman in late 2010, King Abdullah I imparted on local community leaders their share of responsibility for local welfare. “You all have a role in making your future,” the King announced, including in your choice of development projects and the parliamentary candidates to best serve their governorate (November 2010 parliamentary elections were around the corner) (Ghazal, 2011).

122 One 3-Year Plan and four Five-Year Plans were formulated during 1972-1998. The plans were formulated by the National Planning Council (NC), renamed in 1984 as the Ministry of Planning.

123 The law required applicants to go through the formal application procedure only for public sector positions designed for university graduates, but since the majority of available government positions were for holders of secondary school diplomas (or less), most applicants could legally by-pass the formal application procedure. A number of officials I interviewed confirmed that most employment in the civilian bureaucracy is discretionary. (Author’s interviews with public officials at 7 prominent ministries; author’s interviews with Mamdouh Srour, Director General of Coordination Commission for Social Solidarity, Amman, June-July 2011.)

124 Author’s interviews with mayors; author’s interview with Mamdouh Srour, Amman, 28 Jul 2011.

125 Intermediation was a sine qua non both during 1968-1992, when there was no universal conscription (Massad 2001:241), and after conscription was reinstated in 1992 because the number of applicants was always higher than
the number of openings, even for Transjordanians: a 2003 U.S. intelligence report estimated that in an average year “18,000 Jordanians [applied] to fill the roughly 2,000 new available slots in the JAF” and that “wasta … played [the most] important role in the selection process” (U.S. Embassy Amman, 2003). Indeed, almost all mayors and sheikhs I interviewed in 2011 confirmed that they regularly pulled strings to get local young men into the military and petitioned the king whenever he visited their area to “open the doors [to] the army” (Author’s interview with Rana Hajaya, mayor of Hasa, Tafil (2003-11), Amman, 22 April 2011).

Author’s conversation with officials; many were upfront about the fact that “the Ministry [did] not have a strategic plan.”

Including natural resources (mainly phosphate), industry, metallics, electricity, agriculture, transport and communications, housing and tourism, trade, supplies, and finance (Ayubi 1995: 368).

While the webs of informal influence and lobbying are difficult to track, the instances when the King actually imparts his makrumeh are widely reported by the Jordanian media. For instance, a typical report from 2007 documents that “during a visit to [the] Northern Badia area…the King instructed the government to start work on a new hospital by the beginning of next year since the area until now has been served by a mobile hospital” (Neimat, 2007). Or, “After visiting Al Mazar Primary Healthcare Centre, an overcrowded rented facility short of medical supplies and in need of maintenance, King Abdullah instructed the government to establish a fully equipped comprehensive healthcare center.” (Ghazal, 2011).

Author’s interview with former MP, July 2011, name withheld by request. RMS services were mainly intended for military personnel and Royal Court staff, but patients could also be referred by special favor, by the Royal Court (Halasa 2008:27).

Intermediaries were also designed to help ordinary rural Transjordanians with a host of other services, such as skipping long waiting lines for medical procedures at public hospitals. (Author’s interview with former MP, July 2011, name withheld by request.)

Since the mid-1960s Jordan’s public sector services providers required insurance and charged fees and co-pays. Families of government employees had access to discounted insurance through the MoH (civil servants) or RMS (military), but the costs of premiums, co-pays, and out-of-pocket incidentals could add up especially since emergency care was not covered by insurance (Halasa, 2008).

In the education sector, intermediaries such as sheikhs and MPs were supposed to steer government decisions on school locations and staffing (Ghazal, 2011), and to help constituents obtain college admission and scholarships because, unlike their Syrian counterparts, Jordanian public universities charged high tuition fees (Author’s interview with Nawwaf Khawaldeh, former MP of Mafraq, Bal‘ama (Mafraq), 23 Jul 2011). Researchers estimate that about 40% of the total number of university seats in Jordan are allocated through intermediaries (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993)).

The Royal Court and Tribal Council controlled the flow of benefits to sheikhs. Municipalities raised local taxes but the central Ministry of Municipalities decided what percentage mayors could keep, how many people they could hire, what projects they could undertake, and whether their district would be granted the status of a Poverty Pocket. Resources available to MPs were also centrally controlled, as mukhabarat often “instructed” ministry officials on which MPs should be served more. (Author’s interview with mid-level ministry official, Amman, January 2011.)

After the late 1950s, Hussein ceased the practice of recognizing sheikhs as life-long representatives of their tribes, and his prestigious Tribal Advisory Council withdrew titles as easily as it bestowed them (Author’s conversation with officer in the Jordanian mukhabarat, Amman, various dates - July 2011.) See also (Layne 1994, see also Farrag 1977). A similar change occurred for MPs and mayors, which had previously been life-long positions (Farrag, 1977; Gubser, 1984).
For instance, after martial law was lifted and parliamentary elections were reintroduced in 1989 the government encouraged hundreds of new candidates—most of them from “new” families—to enter the fray (Farrag, 1977; Gubser, 1984).

The concept of loyalty, *ula’*, has a long and contested history in Jordan. Ideological parties of the 1950s had understood “loyalty” as sacrifice for the nation but not for the monarchy; after the late 1950s Hussein worked hard to make the monarchy the singular object of popular loyalty (Author’s conversation with officer of the Jordanian mukhabarat, Amman, various dates - July 2011). The specific benchmarks of this “new loyalty” differed from one type of intermediary to another, but one common thread was their willingness to work closely with-and at the direction of-the mukhabarat and the Royal Court. Tribal sheikhs were expected to make frequent visits to Royal Court and Tribal Council to reconfirm their loyalty to the King (Bank & Schlumberger, 2004; Mutawi, 1987), and to work with mukhabarat directorates in order to “feel…the social issues in [their] district” and “calm down any [tense] situations” (Author’s interview with Sheikh Mohammad Azzam, sheikh of Azzam clan, Qamm village, 20 Jul 2011; author’s interview with Awad Na’imat, sheikh of Na’imat tribe, Maan city, 14 July 2011). The loyalty of parliamentarians was measured by their willingness to rubberstamp substantive government laws and policies for which the government needed formal approval, such as those having to do with foreign relations and major economic decisions (Fathi 1994), and by their willingness to work with the mukhabarat. MPs I interviewed recalled being frequently asked for a quid-pro-quo by the secret services: “if you vote for such and such a new law… we’ll give you what you want” (Author’s interview with MP, name withheld by request, southern Jordan, July 2011). The same went for mayors: one admitted, “[the mukhabarat] want mayors to be pliable. They say: ‘Why are you straining yourself [leish ghalbak halak]?’ They want us …just to sit quietly and do as told” (Author’s interview with Dr. Ahmad Zoubi, former mayor of M’raad (Jerash), Jerash, 24 Jul 2011).

Given the oppositional stance of principled ideological parties in the 1950s and during Jordan’s brief civil war in 1970, the regime rewarded intermediaries who avoided party politics, particularly activism with ideological political organizations. Many of the more progressive MPs and sheikhs I interviewed in 2011 noted that mukhabarat distrusted political parties so much that it was even suspicious of former party activists. (Author’s interview with MPs and sheikhs; author’s interview with members of oppositional/leftist parties, summer 2011.). The regime was particularly careful to block the election of Islamists, the most organized oppositional bloc in parliament that since the early 1990s had clashed with the government on many issues.” (Author’s interviews with MPs from different governorates, a retired senior official, and mukhabarat officers, summer 2011.)

Author’s interviews with Abdelkarim Zyoud, Hashemiya, 23 Jul 2011; author’s interview with Hammad Shbailat, former mayor of Lebb and Mlih, Madaba, 25 Jul 2011; author’s interview with His Excellency Musa Maani, Maan, 13 July 2011; author’s interview with MP, name withheld by request, summer 2011.

It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate how Syria’s pre-existing elites—especially landed notables—became so powerful in the first place. The short answer is that it was a combination of (mostly exogenous) factors, having to do with opportunities for the accrual of profitable agricultural land. First, for a number of exogenous geological and climatic factors, significant tracts of Syrian territory were both naturally fertile and conducive to intensive profitable farming, and proximate to markets and trading ports. This, in combination with a 1858 Ottoman law which permitted Syrians (and all other subjects of the Ottoman empire) to register land as private property, led to the concentration of landholdings because it allowed tribal sheikhs, large farmers and urban speculators to register previously communally-held profitable territories under their personal name and/or to buy land cheaply from indebted smaller peasants (Hinnebusch, 1991; Moaddel, 2002).

The French did this deliberately. They recruited from rural areas in order to suppress uprisings against their rule in Syrian cities, especially Damascus.

The regime also nationalized insurance companies and all major productive industries, the largest of which were cotton-ginning factories around Aleppo.
Author’s conversations with several descendants of dispossessed landowning elites from Aleppo and rural Damascus confirmed the hardship on which many such families fell after the land reforms of the 1960s, not having other sources of income or professions to fall back on.

The expropriations had frightened even the professional middle classes which had previously been sympathetic to the Party’s nationalist and welfarist message; fearing the same fate as the larger firms, even the less wealthy hastened to smuggle whatever assets they held out of the country, and withheld from investing (Khatib, 2011).

Batatu argues that even before 1963 the “Baath as an organization, [had] not str[uck] deep roots in the villages” (Batatu, 1999a) as many peasants remained more sympathetic to competing leftist and nationalist parties such as the Nasserists. Even in the areas where the Party had gained some peasant following it was mostly due the extensive grassroots campaigning by the charismatic Akram Hawrani who had joined the Baath in the early 1950s and “attached [to Hawrani] personally” (Batatu, 1999a). After Hawrani left the Party in March 1963 due to political disagreements, the Baath lost most of its support base in the villages.

Another reason is that British colonial administrators put an end to intertribal raiding (by 1931) from which bedu had sometimes drawn handsome income.

Ajami captures this ideological commitment in his description of Baath members’ voluntary social work in the 1950s: “No village was too remote for the young Baathists. There were villagers who had never seen a physician before, and the Baathist physicians called on these forlorn peasants and treated them for free” (Ajami, 2012).

See also (Ahsan, 1984; Pinto, 2003; Schoel, 2011).

As Hinnebusch, a long-time Syria observer, noted: the Baath’s rise to power in the 1960s cannot be understood except as an outcome of the “class inequities” and “social and nationalist struggles of the 1950s” (R. Hinnebusch, 1991, 2012).

Although British authorities prided themselves on their gradual success at “taming” the tribes by buying off the powerful sheikhs with small gifts, some sheikhs were too wealthy to be bought off (Shryock, 1997) outright tribal rebellion may have ceased after the 1920s, but the regime was for years .

In the mid-1920s Sultan Adwan, paramount sheikh of the Adwan tribe, made an agreement with King Abdullah that while the latter could control the government and relations with other states, “the shaykhdom and the tribal leadership belonged to the ‘Adwan [because] they were kings in this land before [Abdullah]” (Shryock, 1997).

Studies in comparative politics and political economy literature have suggested the importance of colonial legacies for institutional development, and have drawn differences between the “French” and the “British” experience. See for example (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2000; Grier, 1999).

Specifically, the French, who are typically known for their “direct” style of governance, in Syria ruled indirectly, the way the British did in Jordan.

Economists have noted that by the 1990s MENA had the largest share of public sector workers in the labor force of any developing region: in most Arab states over a quarter of the labor force worked in the public sector, compared to a worldwide average of only 11 percent (Kabbani & Habash 2008).

Seale, writing in the early 1990s, expressed a very similar idea, suggesting it was systemic rather than specific to the post-2000 period under Bashar Assad: citizens, Seale wrote, were “virtually defenseless vis-à-vis the state [no matter] how…prosperous or…eminent” (Seale, 1991:108).

I found much evidence on this during my interviews in rural Jordan. One ideological mayor (Baathist) I interviewed, for instance, recounted when he refused to give out patronage jobs in the municipality, his clan mounted a campaign to unseat him that went all the way to the Prime Ministry – and the clan eventually succeeded.
See also Cunningham and Sarayrah for ethnographic sketches of wasta in Jordan. The authors describe the case of Mazen, the son of a prominent sheikh who had spent most of his life in Amman, away from his father’s village, and later failed to win village support for his candidacy for parliament since he had not “earned” local credibility (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993).

One MP interviewed for this study, who preferred to stay anonymous, summarized this idea very clearly when speaking of his relationship with the government and the mukhabarat in particular: “I keep them close to myself to protect myself from their interference. They need me and I need them… They need my help” (Author’s interview with MP, summer 2011, name withheld by request).

Although Baathist Syria has sometimes been called a “patronage-based” regime (Sadowski, 1985; Stacher, 2012), I suggest that the term mischaracterizes the government’s sensitivity to grassroots affairs since its top-down approach militated against institutionalized constituency service, and most of the state’s so-called “patronage” consisted either of programmatic distribution to broad social classes. (Waldner, 1999), among others, uses the term “patronage” exactly in this sense.

Of course, there were exceptions; some cadres remained “only superficially oriented to the regime’s …goals [and] evade[d] the center’s demands” (Hinnebusch 1976) but such cases were not the norm since significant insubordination was usually punished.

Syria began holding municipal and parliamentary elections in the 1970s.

Several formal electoral laws discouraged constituent service. Both parliamentary and municipal contests followed open-list proportional representation and with large electoral districts – the type of electoral system that gives the least weight to client service. The government also passed strict campaign financing laws, which prohibited candidates from providing “services and financial assistance” to constituents prior to elections, limited campaign spending, and obliged candidates to use an accountant to supervise expenditures during the election (Arab Reform Bulletin, 2007). Finally, the regime reduced candidates’ incentives to reach out to constituents by reserving two thirds of parliamentary and municipal seats (a supermajority) for the Baath and “friendly” leftist and Arab nationalist parties.

For example, the regime fixed the lists of Baath and “friendly” candidates ahead of time (Author’s interview with Hassan Abbas, researcher, IFPO, Damascus, 14 May 2010; see also (Abdellatif, 2007), (Stacher, 2012)), and handpicked the remaining independent candidates on the basis of criteria that were almost never the candidates’ popularity and service in the community (Author’s interview with Syrian political and social analyst at donor-funded organization, Damascus, May 2010; Author’s interview with independent Syrian academic, Damascus, May 2010.)

Author’s interview with former member of municipal council, Homs, June 2010; author’s interview with independent Syrian academic, Damascus, 14 May 2010.

Partly as a reward for the support some bedouin tribes had lent the regime during its fight against the Islamists in the 1980s, the regime favored men from some of these communities for top positions in the Ministry of Agriculture and turned a blind eye when they used those positions to push for policies and employment favorable to their communities (Chatty, 2010). Several Syrian politicians and independent academics I interviewed noted that the inhabitants of the badia in eastern Homs and the Jazeera regions were the only groups in Syria that had “service MPs” who systematically worked to bring government investment, hospitals, schools, and other services to build local clienteles (Author’s interview with Jamal Barout, Aleppo, November 2010; author’s interview with Lina Rifa‘i, Homs, 31 July 2010). However in the grand scheme of things, the bedouin groups benefiting from such an arrangement were politically and numerically marginal: in the mid-late 2000s Syria’s total bedouin population constituted less than 6% of the country’s total (Chatty, 2010).

(Batatu, 1999: 253; Heydemann, 1999: 202; Stacher, 2012: 126; Hinnebusch, 1984: 111-2; APS, 2004). As discussed in Chapter 2, regime intermediaries were subjected to various forms of organizational supervision and control, by special cadres within the Baath party and the security apparatus.
In an effort to streamline the large bureaucracy, Bashar introduced a new set of exams for applicants at all grade levels, in addition to preexisting qualifying tests. This, according to a prominent labor expert, made it relatively difficult to “game” the system completely since all job applicants “had to sign up with a local labor office and take the official test… [and] since there were so many filters to pass through [to get the job], it was difficult to bend them all [through wasata].” (Author’s conversation with Samir Aita, consulting economist for ILO, France, February 2015.) The same held for job transfers within the public sector. According to a prominent Syrian labor economist, “transfer[s] within and among public sector institutions [are] difficult. [They are made] by a Committee decision [where] Committee members consist of the director of the concerned establishment, a syndicate representative and a Baath Party representative… [It] is …a complicated process. A committee with similar representatives also takes decisions on accepting incoming labor” (Sukkar, 2006).

Sheikhs began to compete over membership in the prestigious Tribal Advisory Council at the Royal Court. With the reintroduction of parliamentary elections in 1989 unprecedented numbers of new candidates entered the fray, and turnover rates skyrocketed. Fewer than 17% of MPs from the 2007 parliament were reelected in 2010 (rates consistent with past trends) and most mayors elected during the 2007-2011 cycle were new.

The regime expanded the ranks of sheikhs dramatically by giving the title not only to heads of large tribal confederations, as had been the case previously, but also to leaders of hundreds of sub-clan units (hamula) (Layne, 1994), and by implanting about 50-60 “new sheikhs” from non-sheikhly but politically loyal families in each district. Numbers of sheikhs skyrocketed from a few dozen paramount sheikhs (1-3 per clan) in the 1950s to “thousands” in the late 2000s. (Layne, 1994, author’s interview with Salem Hawawsheh, former mayor of Dhiban, Madaba, 25 Jul 2011). The regime achieved the same result for the positions of MP and mayor by encouraging large numbers of candidates (Farrag, 1977; Gubser, 1984) and promising many (usually falsely) regime support.

During my interviews, sheikhs, MPs, and mayors consistently pointed out the regime’s “double standard” (izdawajiyeh), in rewarding intermediaries with more “loyalist” politics and stronger personalities with more prestigious positions and discretionary redistributive benefits than others. (Author’s interviews with Jordanian academics and journalists; author’s interview with Jamil Hshoush, former MP, Ghor al-Safi, Karak, 10 July 2011; author’s interview with Rana Hajaya, mayor of Hasa, Tafile, 22 April 2011; author’s interview with Salem al-Hawawsheh, former mayor of Dhiban, Madaba, 25 Jul 2011.)

The Jordanian government consolidated municipal districts from 700 small units in the 1990s to 230 units in 2003 to 93 units in 2007, but left the general electoral system largely unchanged. My conversations to Ministry officials and access to the original budget documents from this period revealed that between 1990 and 2007,
“municipal spending increased more than ten-fold, without [simultaneous] increases in the quality or quantity of services,” and that the sole reason behind the increase was that “mayors have begun spending more and more on salaries” to win public support. (Author’s conversation with Tareq Jaradat, Budgets Information Officer, Cities & Villages Development Bank, Amman, 24 May 2011.)

178 Author’s interview with Hassan Abbas, IFPO, Damascus, 14 May 2010. Pre-2011 studies referred to the regime’s “tight grip” over society (ICG, 2004).

179 For details, see (Batatu, 1999a; George, 2003; R. Hinnebusch, 1991; R. A. Hinnebusch, 1989).

180 See (Heydemann, 1999: 189-190; Batatu 1999: 239).

181 The four were political security, general intelligence, military intelligence, and air force intelligence. The agencies overlapped and there were no clear rules for which agency took the lead in a particular arrest or interrogation case (Batatu 1999, HRW 2009).

182 Human Rights Watch reports note that each of the four agencies had “unlimited authority to carry out arrests, searches, interrogation, and detention” (HRW, 2009), and even operated its own prisons and interrogation centers in near-complete independence from the judicial and penal system (ICG, 2004).

183 Independent reports showed that during the 2000s, “security services [had] essentially administered the [rural northeastern provinces]” (ICG, 2011). See also (Ajami, 2012: 73). The regime’s increasing reliance on intelligence agencies and praetorian guard units mean that it had to “tolerat[e] their …immunity from the law” (Hinnebusch, 2011).

184 A letter King Hussein wrote to his Prime Minister in 1962 expressed his wish that Jordan become a “model homeland” where “the regime’s legitimacy [is achieved] by ensuring … a socio-economically contended community of citizens, not unduly harassed or oppressed by government” (emphasis added) (Anderson, 2005: 195), and it reveals both Hussein’s intent to avoid heavy-handed governance, and the connection between the heaviness of repression and distribution. Several events capture the historical moment when the regime visibly pivoted from a more violent and punitive approach to policing to a more conciliatory and incentives-based approach. Starting in the mid-1960s the regime began a new policy aimed to coopt (materially) rather than repress regime opponents, both elite and non-elite. In 1964-5 Hussein pardoned Ali Abu-Nuwwar, Abdullah al-Tall, Al-Hiyari, Radi al-Hindawi, and the Free Officers who had attempted coups against him in the 1950s. Many received prominent political appointments (Abdullah al-Tall was made Senator and Governor through the Ministry of Interior. Ali Abu-Nawwar, Ali-Al-Hiyari, and Radi al-Hindawi were all appointed ambassadors. Ahmad Khasawnah and Mahmud al-Rusan became members of Parliament). Eighty percent of the rebellious Free Officers were given jobs in the police or the mukhabarat (Massad, 2001: 203). In 1965, Hussein released 2000 political prisoners.

185 Instances of violent repression existed, but they were significantly rarer.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports from various years during 2000-2010 note the Jordanian government’s tight control over print and online media, prohibitions on peaceful gatherings, the occasional persecution of activists and journalists, and occasional cases of torture in Jordanian prisons. However, reports also suggest that the practice of torture and other violent punishment was infrequent, and that unlawful killings and politically motivated disappearances were even rarer (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

186 Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports from various years during 2000-2010 note the Jordanian government’s tight control over media, prohibitions on gatherings, the occasional persecution of activists, but suggest that unlawful killings and politically motivated disappearances were rare (U.S. Department of State, 2011). In her 1999 book, Brand notes that Jordan “we never saw levels of domestic violence … seen in some of Jordan's neighbors” such as Syria (Brand, 1999).
As discussed earlier, Hussein had reinvented a series of his own diwans as a way to tribalize politics, including the most powerful institution in the country, the Diwan Malaki or Royal Court. It is not clear to what degree the institution was actively implanted by the monarchy or initiated by the sheikhs themselves, in mimicry of the regime’s approach.

See also Lust (2008), Fathi (1994) for a discussion.

The institutions were an innovation. Although they had a history in traditional Bedouin culture, they were completely new to most Jordanian tribes, especially the settled fellahi clans. Some Jordanian groups had barely even identified as tribes at all – and yet, these groups, too, began to construct diwans after the 1970s. For instance, Jordan’s Circassian and Chechen minorities had no history of tribal organization in recent memory but they “create[d] a tribe” for themselves (Fathi, 1994) and in 1979 set up a Circassian-Chechen Tribal Council to represent their interests and elected new tribal sheikhs (Massad, 2001).

Many emphasized this logic: “If a candidate gives out 3-4 jobs, he can get a hundred clansmen to vote for him… Jobs are difficult to obtain, and people are grateful if the candidate helped a brother, cousin or uncle, and feel obliged to return the favor… They may also hope that by voting for this candidate they can establish a relationship with him and induce him to give them the same services, next time.” (Author’s conversation with a Jordanian young professional from a rural family, Amman February 2011, name withheld by request. Similar points were raised in other conversations. Author’s conversation with Mohammad Masri, University of Jordan, Amman, March 2011; author’s interviews with mayors.)

The regime’s imposition of martial law and ban on political parties crushed the strong political currents of the 1950s. Many former party activists fled into exile, and those who remained went underground. The Muslim Brotherhood, the only party-like movement that had been allowed to operate (as a social organization) during the decades 1960s-80s because it had stood with the regime in the 1950s, became increasingly marginalized after the mid-1990s when the Jordanian regime signed the Wadi Araba Peace Treaty with Israel.

Similarly, out-loud voting was common in rural areas. Many voters with high school diplomas pretended to be illiterate so that they speak their choice out loud and publicize their support for the tribe’s agreed-upon candidate (Author’s interviews with mayors, several residents of rural areas. See also Layne 1994: 115).

Observers of pre-2011 Syria noted that the country’s public sector suffered from a severe problem of corruption (Achy, 2011; Hinnebusch, 1984: 114; Sadowski, 1985). The same observation was made in the 2000s of Jordan (Loewe, Blume, Schoenleber, & Seibert, 2007; Ramahi, 2008; Said, 2000; Said & Harrigan, 2009).

Although I am cognizant that some scholars of wasta and influence-peddling, especially from fields like anthropology, would be loath to categorize it as corruption and would rather describe it as a form of traditional gift exchange, my interviews in 2010-11 and national surveys of Jordanians during the 2000s very clearly show that in the minds of ordinary Jordanians, wasta is corruption. In one survey, where Jordanians were asked “Do you think wasta is a form of corruption?,” 85% answered affirmatively (Arab Archives Institute, 2000).

This statistic, if anything, likely underestimates the true differences because Syrians may have been more hesitant to admit to a bribe situation for two reasons: because the Syrian regime was more repressive and the population overall felt less free to talk about political topics such as corruption; and second, because in 2009, the year the survey was conducted, the government rolled out a large anti-corruption campaign that sought to deter and punish all types of corruption (no equivalent campaign was run in Jordan).

The one exception to this rule were certain bedouin tribes. Several former politicians and independent local researchers I interviewed mentioned that the only areas where sheikhs, MPs, mayors, and other local officials do play the role of recognized patron-brokers between the state and communities, and perform their wasta without charging bribes, are those who come from rural areas in the badie (steppe). “They help to find their men work [in the public sector,] and direct government resources towards their communities… to build schools, clinics…” (Author’s interview with Jamal Barout, Aleppo, Nov 2010). The different modus operandi among these communities,
however, was only partly related to their identity as tribes per se; I will expand on this idea in greater detail in Chapter 5.

197 Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, journalist and Daraa native, summer 2014; author’s conversation with Samir Aita, France, February 2015; author’s interview with Dr. Nader Lutfallah, Ibn an-Nefis Hospital, Damascus, 18 March 2010.

198 Author’s interview with former members of municipal councils, Damascus and Aleppo, June 2010.

In addition to corrupt municipal officials, small businesses faced a range of other agencies that extorted heavily from them, including tax collectors and, for those who imported or exported goods, customs authorities. Starr describes the case of one small entrepreneur who imported generators from Turkey, who complained in early 2011 that to import wares he had to pay not only the official customs tax on the Turkish wares, but also “a bribe to get my products out of the port…to the free zone near Damascus [and] then another bribe to get them out of the free zone and into the market… Only then can I begin to make money” (Starr 2012: 128).

199 Author’s interviews with doctors in Damascus, rural Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia, winter-summer 2010; Author’s interview with Dr. Nader Lutfallah, Damascus, 13 April 2010.

200 For example, accounts from the 1970s record the common practice among bureaucrats, and union and Party officials to “disregard local needs… [and] use [their] access …to extort illegal ‘baksheesh’ from locals” (Hinnebusch, 1976).

201 As I will discuss in Chapter 6, farmers found themselves paying bribes for everyday transactions they needed for their livelihoods, such as the right to buy or sell land or to drill new wells (a need that rose in some agricultural areas in the first place as a result of corrupt mukhabarat practices, including speculation on land and water rights) (ICG, 2011).


204 There is a gap on the topic in the literature. I am in the process of writing an article that addresses this lacuna.

205 I should also note that since the state expressly worked to prevent intermediaries from developing clienteles and since elections were “sham,” there were few forms of compensation other than money that ordinary Syrians could have given officials in return for their services.

206 The regime drilled its “almost obsessive [message about] adherence to institutional procedures” (ICG, 2004) into students in schools, in training institutes for public administrators, and in the workplace. When educational measures failed, in the 1960s the Baath fanned out “rectification committees” to root out corrupt local officials in the provinces; in 1977 launched disciplinary measures against leaders of peasant union branches who “paid more attention to doing individual favors than to working for broader union programs” (Hinnebusch, 1984: 113); and in 1980 – when the question of corruption reached the agenda of the country’s top decision-making assembly, the Baath Regional Congress – took measures to “screen [public officials’] movable and immovable assets” (Batatu, 1999: 215).

207 According to senior health officials, the government piloted hai’at hospitals (handful of public hospitals that charged small fees) in the early 2000s not as a way to raise capital but mostly because it was desperate to reduce theft and bribery. It was hoped that by allowing hospitals to raise some of their own revenues from user fees corruption and theft could be reduced, since both were usually facilitated by the opaqueness of MoH hospital budgets (Author’s interview with Director of Planning, Ministry of Health, 9 May 2010).
According to ICG, in the late 2000s a senior official suggested that the regime profoundly worried about the problem of “pervasive corruption” in the country and felt that “something serious needs to be done” because it “undermine[d] [the regime’s] efforts” (ICG, 2009).

Since embarking on gradual economic liberalization in the late 1980s, both countries saw the rise of a class of crony capitalists that made fortunes from speculation, embezzlement of state funds, and lucrative state contracts that they obtained as a result of their cozy relations with the state.

Prime Minister Mahmoud Zoubi’s suicide in 2000 has been linked directly to the discovery of his role in a $52 million embezzlement scandal (Kilani, 2011). Meanwhile, the regime’s mass-scale sale of state lands after 2003, which some have called the “counter-agrarian” reforms (Ababsa, 2006), benefited a “narrow circle of opportunistic investors [whose overexploitation of land led to the] pillaging of local resources” and depletion of water, which forced thousands of farmers off the land (ICG, 2011).

Makhlouf not only amassed monopoly ownership rights to Syria’s telecom providers, the country’s largest port, numerous factories, hotels, and duty-free shops, and owned the country’s largest trading company, but after the mid-2000s also began to use his political connections to prey on smaller companies, forcing entrepreneurs that appeared to be successful to sell him shares and hand over some of their profits.

This was conveyed to me independently by several individuals from prominent Damascene Sunni merchant families, most of whom were angry that Makhlouf mooched off of their businesses (Author’s interviews, 2011-2013). ICG researchers reported a similar pattern, noting that Makhlouf’s “appetite grew… nothing was too small to warrant his interest… the sale of a minor plot of land in Damascus, a sub-sub-contract on a development project, or the manufacture of basic goods” (ICG, 2011).

Conversation between a very senior regime official and Makhlouf, reported to author by a close associate of the senior regime figure, name withheld by request.

Extensive embezzlement and fraud was found on projects associated with state-owned enterprises, such as the Disi water aquifer project (Hazaimeh & Ben Hussein, 2011). Other high profile cases of fraud involved a former Prime Minister, who allegedly received over $20 million in bribes from businesses in exchange for a state contract (Kilani, 2011); the director of the mukhabarat, who was jailed for embezzling almost $35 million in public funds, engaging in money laundering, and facilitating a range of shady business deals during his time in office (BBC, 2012); and even the royal family itself (including the appropriation of state-owned lands by the King’s real estate companies, and illegal sale of petroleum gifted to Jordan by the government of Kuwait to help meet its energy needs in 2004 (Mualla 2008)).

While Hafez and Bashar themselves were thought to remain relatively clean, some branches of their family (like Makhlouf) and security agencies abused their political connections, and the state’s autonomy from society created vast opportunities for abuse of power.

As he increasingly came to rely on mukhabarat for everyday governance in the provinces, he was forced to “tolera[te] their corrupt practices and immunity from the law” in order to retain their loyalty (Hinnebusch, 2011).

According to a former elected official, many high-ranking officials engage in hugely corrupt schemes “because they think that the very fact that they got their position [means] that they are protected by the regime and can get away with anything” (Author’s interview with the former mayors of a prominent provincial city; author’s interview with retired senior official, spring-summer 2011.)

A key mechanism was the (re)invented tribe. Tribes kept ministers, MPs, and even mukhabarat officials in check because the tribe’s reputation and access to resources depended on the sound behavior of each of its members, including its elite members.

These were the words used by critics at the Union of Writers and Journalists in October 1979.
This pattern was especially visible in the country’s rural northeastern provinces (Ababsa, 2006; R. Hinnebusch, 2012; ICG, 2011).

Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, summer 2014.

(Sadowski, 1988; Batatu, 1999; Brynen et al, 2012: 46).

It is worth noting here that Syrians’ perception of extortion sometimes depended on the social position of the corrupt official: it was perceived to be more illegitimate in the case of high-level officials, but in the case of more modest functionaries it may be considered a form of charity, a way to make up for their low salaries. My findings here are similar to (Boissière, 2005).

Author’s interview with former member of municipal council of Homs, Damascus, summer 2010; author’s interview with Syrian political and social analyst at a donor-funded organization, June 2010; author’s interview with a (Syrian) officer at prominent donor agency working on municipal projects, Damascus, May 2010; author’s interview with several businessmen of medium-sized enterprises, Damascus, October 2010; (Goheer & Seifan, 2009: 40).

Author’s interview with Samir Altaqi, Damascus, March 2010.

Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, summer 2014.

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents, fall 2013.

Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, native of Irbid, Professor at University of Jordan, 6 October 2013.

Author’s interviews in provinces; author’s interview with political analyst Mohammad Masri, spring 2011; author’s interview with Walid Khatib, University of Jordan, 11 November 2010. See also (Bronner, 2011).

Author’s interviews, 2010-2011.

The same psychological emotional effect has been noted by studies in other countries (Gunes-Ayata, 1994).

According to a nationally representative poll conducted by the Arab Archives Institute, 86% of Jordanians felt that wasta was a form of corruption (Arab Archives Institute, 2000).

A poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI) in a selection of Jordan’s major municipalities found that wasta was very low on the list of public complaints about municipal services, even though it was the chief reason for inequalities in access to services (JCSR, 2007).

“Residents in Madaba …described wasta as a ‘magic wand’ promising job opportunities, access to loans, cash assistance from NAF and access to better, discounted health services. Those without wasta expressed their frustration and helplessness. One poor villager from Dana [southern Jordan] concluded: ‘Without wasta, we cannot live!’” (UNDP, 2004).

Cunningham and Sarayrah found that many Jordanians took pride in not “put[ing] forth little individual effort to achieve the desired goals [and rather to] sit back and depend on wasta” (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993).

Author’s interview with ordinary citizen from town in rural Jordanian Hawran (border Irbid/Ajloun governorate), name withheld by request, September 2013.

I should note that small numbers of ideologically-inclined Transjordanians, who were sympathetic to opposition parties, decried the “heavy mukhabarat presence” in political life, but they were by far in the minority (Author’s interviews, (U.S. Embassy Amman, 2002c)).
Most people believed that “the mukhabarat can make or break a career” (Author’s conversation with Walid Gharaibeh, 29 July 2011; See also (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993)).

Author’s interviews with Waleed Gharaibeh, 2011-2013; author’s conversation with Irbid academic, name withheld by request, Sept 2013. The difference between Syrian and Jordanian public attitudes towards the mukhabarat was very apparent to me as a researcher from the way people talked about the agency in daily conversations. While Syrians hushed their voices when speaking of the secret services, rural Jordanians I observed spoke openly about their interactions with the agency and some even did not shy away from criticizing it.

Author’s conversation with Irbid academic, name withheld by request, Sept 2013.

Author’s interviews with Waleed Gharaibeh, 2011-2013; author’s interview with Abdelkarim Zyoud, former candidate for mayor in Hashemiya (Zarqa), Hashemiya, 23 Jul 2011.

Author’s interviews, various, Jordan, 2009-2010. Other authors find a similar dynamic. Cunningham and Sarayrah also find that “the wasta who fails to produce is blamed” (Cunningham & Sarayrah, 1993), and an older study by Abu Jaber and co-authors note that the clansmen they studied were furious at a local “sheikh [who was only] after his own vested interests and not theirs……[The] sheikh’s sons and daughters had received a college education while village boys cannot find a secondary school nearby” (Abu Jaber, Gharaibeh, & Hill, 1987: 28).

In the survey, 88% of young respondents said the main barrier was their family, compared to only 63% who said it was government policies and 57% - their own lack of interest (Rantawi, 2004). In the same vein, independent reports during the 2000s pointed to mounting “frustrat[ion] among…Jordanian youth” as a result of “being bound to live in the shadows of the family, tribe and community [and being] prevent[ed] from living their lives as freely as they would like in deciding what they study, where they work, how they live, how they vote… [due to] familial expectations and tribal ties” (U.S. Embassy Amman, 2002b).

The most authoritative comparative polls conducted in the Arab region, including the Arab Barometer, the Pew Global Trends, and the World Values Survey polls, have never fielded questions in Syria.

My “independent variables” in the regression – rural residence, young, male, low educational status - are binary, which requires a logistic regression. I use marginal effects bar graphs for a more straightforward presentation since, unlike tables with standard logistic regression coefficients which cannot be interpreted directly, marginal effects bar graphs directly show the predicted probability of the outcome variable taking the value of 1, given a chosen value of the binary IV, with 95% confidence.

Calculated by dividing the difference between Syrian and Jordanian probabilities by the lower (Syrian) probability.

For responsiveness, the gap was statistically significant for all waves except November 2009 - which was almost significant. For repression, the gap was statistically significant for the March and November 2010 waves but not the 2009 waves.

As an extension to this project, it would be interesting to ask whether within the Syrian base, attitudes were more positive among minority groups than among rural Sunnis, and whether in Jordan some rural clans viewed the Hashemite regime more positively than others given distinctive histories of alliances and privileges.

The sharifs were considered to be direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammad.

Talk by Dr. Tariq Tell, Jordanian historian, ACOR, Amman, March 2011. Author’s conversations with Jordanian academics and interviews with rural tribal leaders.

Author’s conversation with citizen from a town in rural Irbid/Ajloun, name withheld by request.
Author’s phone interview with young academic from Irbid, October 2013.

For instance, according to Abdellah Hammoudi, a long-time scholar of monarchical symbolism in Morocco, in general and “in periods of crisis… nobody seems to care about [the monarch’s] grace or religious titles” as much as about the “regime’s political and economic choices” (Hammoudi, 1997: 25, 12).

The Gallup World Poll data is proprietary, and was given to the author at no charge in exchange for participation in a series of workshops on the “Pulse of the Arab Spring,” which incorporated the uses of survey methods to analyze socio-economic developments in the Arab world since the mid-2000s. I thank the Economic Research Forum (Cairo) and Silatech (Qatar) for making the data available to me.

Studies deem that targetable goods, particularly public sector jobs, are more effective at buying support for the autocrat, because they can be more credibly withdrawn (Acemoglu, Verdier, & Robinson, 2004), which might explain why large public sector bureaucracies are so common in autocracies (Geddes, 1994). On the other hand, other studies suggest that autocrats need “diversified portfolios” of targetable and communal goods (Bueno de Mesquita et al, 2002; Desai et al, 2009; Magaloni, 2006).

Many services, including education or utilities, are often either de jure or de facto state monopolies.

My strong impression was that both the Syrian and Jordanian governments perceived the labor and especially health sectors to be less “political” than a range of other social sectors, including education, and were consequently more willing to share data, which was crucial to the completion of this project.

Participation rates in majority-Transjordanian areas during the November 2010 parliamentary elections topped 80% in many rural voting districts (NDI, 2010). I am grateful to the NDI for sharing detailed parliamentary voter turnout data for 2010; unfortunately voter turnout data for the 2003 and 2007 parliamentary elections was not available.

Syria’s elections were held on 26 August 2007, Jordan’s on 31 July 2007.

These statistics almost certainly underestimate the true gap between Syrian and Jordanian rural mass constituencies, because they combine rural and urban turnouts but in Jordan rural Transjordanians tended to be far more enthusiastic voters than the country’s predominantly Palestinian urban population (Lust-Okar, 2008; Tell, 2012).

Ministry of Local Administration, Syria; Ministry of Municipal Affairs, Jordan. Note: Amman is excluded from the Jordanian tally because it is governed by a separate administrative body (Greater Amman Municipality).

Likewise, the UNDP characterized turnout in Syria’s municipal elections as “almost invisible” (POGAR, 2009).

Although exact data on voter participation in bedouin areas was not available, several government officials and academics confirmed that it was an open secret that the bedouin were more enthusiastic voters. A former mayor of Homs city, the capital of the Homs governorate which has a large bedouin population in the east, argued that his had to do with the particular relationship between some of those communities and the state: “in the Eastern badia tribes vote more, because they get more” (Author’s interview with Lina Rifa‘i, Homs, 31 July 2010).

Author’s interview with Syrian political and social analyst at donor-funded organization, Damascus, May 2010.

Even parliamentary candidates who were not already Baath members considered “joining the party [to be] an undesirable move” and a political liability (Stacher, 2012: 142).

Author’s interview with Malath Zoubi, a native of Daraa, August 2013.
One visible sign of the sheikhs’ popular following was the fact that the government “court[ed] sheikhs… in the hopes that their popularity will …convince people to support its policies” whenever it faced resistance (Author’s interview with Aref Sheikh, UNIFEM Program Officer specializing in local governance/municipal affairs, Damascus, 19 May 2010).

I should note that, although the Islamist sheikhs grew in popularity among rural migrants to cities, they for the most part “lack[ed] the ability to mobilize the villages” (Hinnebusch, 2000; Khatib, 2011; author’s interviews).

Many older Jordanians I interviewed noted a qualitative generational change in attitudes towards party politics from the more “political” era of the 1950s/60s (Author’s interviews with Najaha Zoubi, Program officer at Jordanian Women’s Union, Amman, 30 Jul 2011; Author’s interview with Falak Jam’ani, former MP for Madaba, Amman, 27 Jul 2011).

Although independent observers estimated that the country’s major opposition party, the Islamic Action Front, would “win at most 22% of parliamentary seats in free elections” in the mid-2000s, most of that support was expected to come from Palestinian Jordanians rather than Transjordanians (U.S. Embassy Amman, 2002a).

Author’s interview with Iyad Mohsen, small business owner, Damascus, October 2009.

Author’s interview with Malath Zoubi, a native of Daraa, August 2013; author’s interview with Aref Sheikh, UNIFEM, Damascus, 19 May 2010.

A schoolteacher’s account for how she first became attracted to the movement captures this mentality: “When I grew up,” she notes, “we were forced to shout slogans at school against the Muslim Brotherhood. Not having any idea who they were or what they stood for, we began to like them because it was the regime that was making all our lives miserable” (ICG, 2004).

Author’s conversation with Mohammad Masri, Amman, 24 March 2011.


This became very apparent (and occasionally exasperating!) in the course of my research in Syria, as my appointments at ministries were frequently crammed into short morning hours before staff left their desks for their second jobs at a local convenience store.

Author’s interviews.

Author’s conversation with Director of Social Statistics at the Central Bureau of Statistics, spring 2010; author’s interview with Etab Altaqi, Program Manager, UNFPA, Damascus 27 May 2010.

One man from a rural area of Daraa explained, “most poor [rural] people in Daraa [governorate] dreamed of going to work in the Gulf states, where there are jobs …and where it’s possible to make a lot of money in a relatively short time due to the difference between the value of the Syrian pound and the Gulf currencies” (Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, a native of Daraa, summer 2014).

A World Bank report in the late 2000s assessed that most microfinance loans in the country are going towards a rural clientele, for agricultural purposes (CGAP, 2008).
Unlike the secret services, the Syrian military was not “sectarianized” and did not have a reputation of being so (Author’s conversation with Samir Aita, Economist and President of Circle of Arab Economists, France, February 2015).

Author’s correspondence with Marwan Khawaja, labor and health economist, ESCWA, March 2015; author’s interview with Samir Aita, economist, February 2015.

The “substantial substitution between agriculture and manufacturing” was also noted by the Oxford Business Group in its special publication on the Syrian economy (OBG, 2010).

Author’s interview with Khaled Dhmour, former mayor of Karak city, 9 July 2011.

In other words, 70% preferred to remain unemployed and have no income over a job in agriculture, and, respectively, less than 30% said they would take a job on a farm.

(Gubser, 1988) cites a similar statistic.

According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey study, in the early 1960s “approximately four-fifths [80%] of the population derive their livelihood from agriculture” (Kurtzig, 1972).

He recalled that just a few decades ago, in the 1970s-80s, over half of the district used to be shepherds and make a living off of sheep herding. (Author’s interview with Mamdouh Rfou’, former mayor of Bseira, Tafile, 12 July 2011.)

Ministry of Labor statistics suggest that in 2008-2010 the vast majority of QIZ workers came from India, China, Nepal, and Egypt, and less than 20% were Jordanian.

Author’s interview with Khaled Dhmour, former mayor of Karak city, 9 July 2011; author’s interview with Rana Hajaya, mayor of Hasa, Tafile (2003-11), Amman, 22 April 2011.


Author’s conversations with employees of several major microfinance banks, names withheld by request, May-July 2011.

Other assessments, too, have found micro and small enterprises in Transjordanian-majority areas to have “limited potential for employment generation” (Rad, 2012).

As in Syria, there were no barriers to labor migration abroad.

Jordan’s national levels of remittances consistently topped 22% of the country’s GDP (Saif & Rayyes, 2009), but surveys showed that most remitting families were urban middle-class Palestinian-Jordanians (Baylouny, 2008; Saif & Rayyes, 2009). I would argue that the concentration of remittances in the Palestinian segment of the population is not coincidental, but partly a result of their exclusion from the government’s coalition since the 1960s. Their inability to rely on government patronage in the ways Transjordanians forced this population to seek independent sources of earnings.

Notable exceptions are long-time observers of Syria, including (Batatu; Heydemann; Hinnebusch).

(Aita, 2009: 44).

(Fortuny & Husseini, 2010). The Jordanian statistics almost certainly underestimate the true rate of public sector employment since they exclude military career employment, which in the 2000s was very high among rural Jordanians but significantly less common among Syrians. My interviews in over a third of Jordan’s rural districts as
well as interviews with independent political and economic analysts suggest that in most rural districts, the military employed anywhere between 40-80% in rural districts; according to former Jordanian Prime Minister Abdelrawwuf Rawabdeh, “40% or more” of Transjordanians are employed in military, in “seen or unseen ways” (Author’s interview with Abdelrawwuf Rawabdeh, former Prime Minister (1999-2000), Amman, 30 Jul 2011). This may explain why a 2004 United Nations report estimates public employment to be closer to “60% of total employment” (United Nations, 2004a) rather than the 35-40% used by the Jordanian Department of Statistics and by (Fortuny & Husseini, 2010).

My calculations based on original data from Jordan’s 2008 Household Income and Expenditure Survey suggest that 69.2% of rural Jordanian males worked in the public sector in 2008. Similarly, a study found that in the early 2000s more than 65% of families in rural governorates like Maan depended on government salaries or pensions as their main income (CSS, 2003).

Khawaja’s survey-based study in 2000 finds that less than 20% of Syrian rural males worked in the public sector (Khawaja, 2002). According to Khawaja, the percentage remained at approximately that level or lower through the late 2000s (Author’s conversation with Marwan Khawaja, Beirut, February 2015). My calculations based on original data from Syria’s 2007 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, support this view: they suggest that rural employment in the government sector in 2007 was at most 20-25%, and probably lower. The dataset did not include a variable indicating rural/urban residence, so I tried 3 proxies (“lacks access to improved sewage,” “lacks access to piped water,” and “lacks regular garbage disposal”) which numerous independent researchers told me are good measures of rural. I suspect that in fact the 20-25% estimate is high because my proxies likely capture not only rural but also suburban areas (many suburbs also had little access to improved sewage, piped water, and garbage disposal), and there is a lot of evidence that rates of government employment were higher in the suburbs than rural areas.

Naturally, some businessmen who fell into these categories were not independent of the state; they were state cronies and owed their immense wealth to patronage by key figures in the regime (George, 2003; B. Haddad, 2004). However the portion of businesses in this category was extremely small. Surveys conducted throughout the 2000s show that MSMEs consistently made up over 96% of the Syrian private sector (Damiani & Ayub-Arbashe, 2007; Goheer & Seifan, 2009) and over 98% of the Jordanian private sector (Rad, 2012). Large companies constituted less than 2-4% of all private sector companies, and of these an even smaller fraction were crony businesses. Non-crony MSMEs usually “lacked connections and influence” (Goheer & Seifan, 2009: 35) and, in Syria were at the mercy of extortionary bureaucrats (Author’s interview with Frank Maul, Liaison to Damascus Chamber of Commerce, German Embassy, 29 July 2010).

The estimates are conservative because a large number of MSMEs are in the service sector (restaurants, hotels, etc), but I excluded services from my measure of MSME employment because the available data pooled private and public sector service employment, and I wanted to make sure that my measure only reflected private sector jobs.

Although the data does not indicate if these are for MSMEs per se, surveys show that over 90% of employees in these private professions worked in MSMEs.

Numerous studies have argued that the informal Syrian sector is at least as productive as the formal (Kattaa & Hussein 2010).

Firm censuses and surveys estimate the number of informal enterprises to have reached over 200,000 by the late 2000s (Damiani & Ayub-Arbashe, 2007; Goheer & Seifan, 2009).

The difference in unemployment rates was almost exactly the same for the remaining (non-youth) adult male population in the two countries. This actually underestimates the gap since the statistics disguise the severity of unemployment in Jordan because “[Jordan’s] labor participation rates [were] some of the lowest…in the world” (Rad, 2012). In the late 2000s, labor force participation rate among Syrian adult men was 77%, while among Jordanian men only 66% (Ovensen & Sletten, 2007).
For instance, a young man from a sprawling poor Damascus suburb told me: “Dareyya had 0% unemployment before 2011… All young men worked in crafts, in workshops, or in trade of some kind.” (Author’s conversation with Osama Shurbaji, December 2013.)

Sen and Faisal, among others, note that the “emerging middle classes in particular prefer to utilize the rapidly expanding private hospitals and clinics” (Sen & Faisal, 2012).

Author’s interview, Damascus, April 2010.

Author’s interview with Dr. Samir Kassab, Lattakia, April 2010.

Author’s interview with Nawwaf Khawaldeh, former MP for Mafrak, Bal’ama (Mafrak), 23 Jul 2011.

The only facility serving the whole governorate was a Royal Medical Services hospital which did not admit patients without special insurance.

According to a 2002 PAPFAM survey, only 13.8 percent of pregnant women seek health care at public health centers (United Nations, 2005).

Conversation with ordinary citizen from town in rural Jordanian Hawran (border Irbid/Ajloun governorate), asked name to be withheld, October 2013.

I exclude those that opted for informal arrangements, such as home birth, for greater comparability and since the results do not change; in fact, my analyses showed that the Syria-Jordan contrast is even stronger when informal arrangements are included because more Syrians use them.

The main reason why the results are not influenced by these special facilities is that they are much less used by the rural and poor. For instance, in the DHS survey, only 13.5% of poor Jordanians and 17% of rural Jordanians who used a public sector facility, delivered in an RMS hospital; the remaining 86.5% and 83% delivered in a regular MoH hospital.

I trust that this data because the MoH officials I worked with downloaded the data in front of my eyes directly from the MoH server – I sat next to them at the computer and saw where they clicked, and can attest that no portions of the data were cut or modified in the process.

Author’s correspondence with Malath Zoubi, a native of Daraa, summer 2014.

Author’s correspondence with Malath Zoubi, 2014. Hinnebusch also makes a similar point (Hinnebusch, 2012).

Author’s interview with Samir Aita, economist, February 2015.

Author’s conversation with Mohammad Masri, Amman, 24 March 2011.

Author’s interview with Khaled Dhmour, former mayor of Karak city, 9 July 2011.

Author’s conversation with Mohammad Masri, Amman, 24 March 2011.

Two questions that would have been better, would have asked which sector of work the individual preferred if they could only work in one sector, and on a scale of one to ten how much prestige they attached to employment in the public sector versus private sector.

I set the income variable to the bottom three quintiles of the income spectrum in each country (the income cut off points were almost identical in Syria and Jordan so I am sure that I am comparing the same income groups).
Author’s interview with Samir Altaqi, Damascus, March 2010.

Conversation with ordinary citizen from town in rural Jordanian Hawran (border Irbid/Ajloun governorate), asked name to be withheld, October 2013.

Conversation with ordinary citizen from town in rural Jordanian Hawran (border Irbid/Ajloun governorate), asked name to be withheld, October 2013.

The “culture of shame” rhetoric in public and private fora was pervasive in Jordan during the 2000s. It was used to explain why Jordanians shunned agricultural work (Omari, 2011), and for the lack of interest in light industry and arts and crafts. One man who wanted to start a soap-making business could not find anyone willing to work for him because “[people] would rather sit at home without any jobs than do a menial job” (Author’s interview with Ahmad al-Jaradin, clerk at municipal court, ‘Is, Tafile, 12 July 2011).

The “original” urban small-business sector in the 1960s was very small. There are no detailed statistics on the size of the sector, but it is possible to estimate the economic “weight” of the SMEs indirectly. In 1967 the private sector held a 19% share of total investment in the economy; since in the mid-late 1960s the only (or the majority of) private businesses remaining in Syria after Baathist purge of large business were MSMEs, we can assume that these enterprises contributed 19% of total investment – not a very large share (data from Heydemann, 1999: 192).

These were both the original rural migrants who had joined the public bureaucracy in the 1960s-90s and the more recent migrants who left the village after 2000.

One mayor flat out told me: “Jordanians are not like Syrians… My grandmother was Syrian, and she used to tell me this Syrian proverb: illi beshtughel bis-sina’ a bisaken bi qalaa.[‘he who works with his hands lives in a castle’]. Jordanians don’t like menial labor. There’s a culture of shame” (Author’s interview with Rana Hajaya, mayor of Hasa, Tafile (2003-11), Amman, 22 April 2011).

Author’s interview with Khaled Dhmour, former mayor of Karak city, 9 July 2011.

Author’s interview with Ahmad al-Jaradin, ‘Is, Tafile, 12 July 2011.

One of Jordan’s most famous patron-brokers, Abdelrawwuf Rawabdeh, who had served as prime minister and MP in multiple parliaments, put it clearly: “There is a strong belief that employment in the public sector is a right… In the private sector, employment is a favor” (Author’s interview with Abdelrawwuf Rawabdeh, former MP, Amman suburb, 30 Jul 2011.)

Several of my interviewees confirmed that Jordanians had very “high …expectations [that intermediaries] can help them find a job” (Author’s interview with former mid-level official at Ministry of Public Works, March 2011). Rad also notes “[high] expectation of civil service jobs… particularly for those with low levels of education” (Rad, 2012).

Author’s interview with Ahmad al-Jaradin, ‘Is, Tafile, 12 July 2011.

Author’s interviews, Syrian-European Business Council (SEBC), Damascus, spring 2010.

My informal conversations with a few small business owners during 2009-2010 confirmed this mindset. Henry and Springborg, similarly, note that businessmen believed that “capital [was] not safe in Syria” (Henry & Springborg, 2010). See also (Hinnebusch, 1995).

Until the early 2000s the Baath had no SME policy (Damiani & Ayoub-Arbashe 2007).

The most important initiative was the creation of the Agency for Combating Unemployment (ACU) in 2002 as a pilot credit institution and business support network for MSMEs. During its short four years of existence between
2002-6, the ACU distributed almost 81,500 soft loans (worth $2000-$60,000) both to new and established entrepreneurs, establishing business incubators, and contributed to the creation of an estimated 185,000 jobs (Aita, 2009: Goheer & Seifan, 2009). Other institutions could not fill ACU’s place for MSMEs: private commercial banks, which sprang up in the early 2000s, geared most of their financing towards high-income business clients with large formal companies, not smaller or informal businesses (OBG 2010); and even microfinance-lending institutions which appeared after 2007 (including the First Micro Finance Institution Syria (FMFI-S), FIRDOS, the Village Business Incubator, the People’s Credit Bank (PCB), and the Agricultural Cooperative Bank) had little impact since most of their limited credit focused on the agricultural sector (Goheer & Seifan, 2009: 27-29; OBG, 2010).

337 In Syria, it took, on average, three months to start a business, four years to close one, and three years to enforce a business contract (Goheer & Seifan, 2009).

338 In the mid-late 2000s, just to open a business cost $500 for individual traders, $1400 for an ordinary partnership, and around $3000 for a small limited liability company (Goheer and Seifan 2009:35). The extortion cut into time and profits. According to one entrepreneur interviewed in 2011, an ordinary person wanted to open a business had to “give the government 51% ownership [in addition to] another 10% of the profits so essentially they have 61% of the company” (Starr, 2012: 156).

339 The main purpose for this was to relieve the government of some of the burden of providing jobs for its mass constituency, since it could not keep up with demand.

340 The QIZ program was the showpiece of Jordan’s Free Trade Agreement with the United States in 2001. Under the agreement, manufacturers were given preferential terms for investing in Jordan and setting up factories in specially designated industrial zones, from which they could export tariff free to the U.S market by meeting precise sourcing requirements, including partial use of Israeli inputs (Baldridge et al, 2009).

341 Microfinance companies include the Ahli Microfinance Company (AMC), Tamweelcom, National Microfinance Bank, and Microfund for Women (MfW).

342 Prominent examples include the Jordan Innovation Centers (JIC) Network and the Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation (JEDCO), both created in the 2000s to help SMEs. JIC included eight incubators designed to help entrepreneurs “start sustainable enterprises, support spin-off ideas, …identify and exploit markets, hire skilled staff, and graduate as viable stand-alone businesses,” while JEDCO offered a range of free services including strategy consultation, help with government licensing, financial support (including grants), and advocacy [http://www.jic.jo/](http://www.jic.jo/) [http://www.jedco.gov.jo/](http://www.jedco.gov.jo/).

343 Most of these microenterprise grants were funded by international donor money, which the central government distributed to local intermediaries through its large “governmental NGOs.” (The “governmental NGOs” – often dubbed the “Royal NGOs” in Jordan – were large sophisticated welfare organizations patronized by different members of the royal family; the chief Royal NGOs included the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD), Jordan’s largest Royal NGOs, the Jordan River Foundation, Noor Al-Hussein Foundation, Queen Zein Al Sharaf Institute for Development (ZENID).) The central role of intermediaries in helping the Royal NGOs find “worthy” clients for their grants was clear from my conversations with the NGOs’ staff. For instance, a representative of the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development confessed that “sheikhs …help us the most in identifying community needs… After sheikhs the second most important are mayors.” (Author’s interviews, July 2011.)

344 In the words of one prominent official at a government-linked research institution, “the Jordanian market is too small to support a strong private sector… it’s smaller than Syria’s, and there is no guarantee that the enterprise will succeed.” (Author’s interview with Mamdouh Srour, Amman, 22 June 2011.) I heard similar arguments from several MPs (Author’s interview with Aiman Majali, MP Karak, June 2011).

345 Author’s interview with Dr. Mohammad Rawashdeh, former mayor of Hizman, Karak, 9 Jul 2011; author’s interview with Abdullah Quram, former mayor of Mafraq city, Mafraq, 21 Jul 2011.
The main reason Palestinians have dominated Jordan’s commerce since the 1960s was their systematic exclusion from the public sector (Ryan, 2005). See also (Shryock, 1997: 58).

Author’s interviews; (Tell, 2012).

See (Ayubi, 1996; Richards & Waterbury, 2008; Sadiki, 2000).

Although the relative deprivation theory is often seen an approach that is sensitive to citizens’ subjective perceptions, I along with other studies classify it here with theories examining “objective” characteristics of the state’s distributive handouts because in reality studies that use the theory “typically infer psychological states of relative deprivation from objective indicators such as unemployment rates” (Staggenborg, 2011; Jenkins, 1981).

The argument is implicit in the literature on the politics of post-colonial Arab states, which explain the tenacity of Arab dictatorships (until 2011) in terms of the relative attractiveness of their public sector employment and service options compared to the private sector (Ayubi 1995); in studies of autocrats’ uneasy relationship with autonomous private sectors (Richards & Waterbury 2008); and in accounts of way after the 1970s Arab authoritarian bargains came under threat from affordable high-quality non-state service providers, many of them linked to political opposition groups such as various shades of Islamist parties (Wiktorowicz 2004).

(Hinnebusch 1984: 121).

This was one of the tenets of the government’s envisioned “social market economy,” whose concept it unveiled in the Tenth Five Year Plan of 2006-2010.

Conversations with analysts of private sector development confirmed the government’s stubborn efforts to safeguard SOE jobs. According to Faten Tibi, Director of Business for Development program at the UNDP in Damascus, “public sector companies are losing money… but the government is keeping them open to keep Labor Unions happy” (Faten Tibi, Damascus, 22 April 2010).

(Bennett, 2003; U.S. Embassy Amman, 2002d). In 1996, the Jordanian government created the Executive Privatization Unit in 1996 (later renamed the Executive Privatization Commission) and in 2000 passed the Privatization Law paving way for these changes.

Author’s interview with Jamil Hshouh, former MP, Ghor al-Safi, Karak, 10 July 2011.

A number of other MPs had a similar experience. One noted that “in 2003… we could just ask the government for 500 jobs [but] after 2007 it became harder” (Author’s interview with Wasfi Rawashdeh, MP for Maan, interview in Amman, July 2011).

Some mayors related a similar frustration: “three or four years ago [in 2006-7],” noted one, “there was plenty of room (al-majal kan malfou7) [for hiring]… but not now” (Author’s interview with Abdullah Shboul, former mayor of ‘Is, Tafile, 12 July 2011).

The estimate of labor force growth is likely to be on the lower side because, according to both statisticians at the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics and independent Syrian labor economists, official labor surveys excluded – mostly for logistical reasons – rural-to-urban migrants, a growing segment of the population. There are no exact estimates of the size of this population, but unofficial figures suggest it was close to 10-20% of the rural population, which in the mid-late 2000s constituted 45% of Syria’s total population – so rural-to-urban migrants were probably 4.5%-9% of the total population in the mid-late 2000s. While this is a significant number of people, their inclusion would probably only raise the labor force growth estimate by a few percentage points. Economist Lahsen Achy, who was generally critical of Syrian economic policies, estimates that during the 2000s government employment a fairly consistent proportion of demand (Achy, 2011).
Author’s conversations with young Syrians from Hassakeh and rural Damascus (largely agricultural provinces), spring 2010.

The timing of Syria’s and Jordan’s crises coincided partly because both were affected by the regional oil crisis of the 1980s; however other contributing / underlying factors differed. In Syria’s case, a contributing factor was an exhaustion of the ISI model of development and drop-off in Soviet aid after the mid-1980s. Jordan’s financial crisis was also precipitated by an exhaustion of the public sector-heavy economy, and by a drop in aid and remittances from the Arabian Gulf.

International dollars or purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars are dollar amounts adjusted for the local cost of living. A loaf of bread might cost $3 or more in the U.S. but only $0.50 in Syria; for this reason, a monthly salary of $300, which is too low to survive on in the U.S., may be completely reasonable in Syria where the cost of food, rent and other expenses are only a fraction of U.S. costs.

Economists often prefer the expenditure method for calculating income because studies in both developing and developed economies have shown that individuals tend to underreport their income when asked about it directly, but self-reported expenditure provides a more accurate indicator.

Informal conversations with Jordanian public sector workers in 2010-2011 suggest that salaries for university graduates were in the JD250-300 range ($507-608 in PPP international dollars). One man who had a master’s degree and had worked for the government for 25 years shared during our interview, without my prompting, that his salary was “only JD300 a month” (by way of saying that it was too low given his qualifications and experience) (Author’s interview with Mamdouh Rfou’, mayor of Bseira, 12 July 2011).

Minimum government wages (in international PPP dollars, in 2007) for both Syria and Jordan from (Fortuny & Husseini, 2010: 17). The authors, in turn, rely on calculations in ILO’s Global Wage report 2008-9.

(Aita et al., 2005) find that the average wage is around 4,500 Syrian Pounds per month for a full-time worker with little or no education, 6,200 Syrian Pounds for a worker with a secondary education, and around 8,000 Syrian Pounds per month for those with university degrees. This translates to $183-$324 in international dollars, using the World Bank’s PPP conversion rate for Syria.

(Kabbani & Habash, 2008) also find that the average public sector wage “more than doubled” (i.e. increased by over 100%) between 2001 and 2006 (Kabbani & Habash, 2008).

(Fortuny & Husseini, 2010)’s calculations, based on the 2008 Syrian Labor Survey. The authors calculate the average national (for all sectors) wage to be 178 Euro, which at the 2008 exchange rate equals 14240 Syrian Pounds or $578 international PPP dollars. Since average public sector wages in 2007-8 were 22% higher than average private sector wages (Kabbani, 2009) and since we know that approximately a quarter of employed Syrians worked in the public sector, a simple calculation shows that the average public and average private wages come out to be $679 and $556, respectively.

Author’s calculations, based on original Syrian Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2007. Average household expenditure of family house head works in public sector, converted from Syrian Pound (SP26014) using World Bank’s PPP conversion factor (LCU to international dollars).


(Fortuny & Husseini, 2010 - Table 12).
Author’s calculations based on original Jordan Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2008. Simple average of monthly household income with one earner who works in the public sector. Converted from Jordanian Dinar (JD324) using World Bank’s PPP conversion factor (LCU to international dollars).

Author’s calculations, based on original Jordan Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2008. Average monthly household expenditure of family house head works in public sector, converted from Jordanian Dinar (JD505) using World Bank’s PPP conversion factor (LCU to international dollars).

Syria was able to provide free drugs because for decades it had invested in domestic pharmaceutical industries and by the 2000s become mostly self-sufficient in that sector. In 2010, 4 large public and 63 private pharmaceutical companies together covered 90% of the country’s needs.

Officially, the cost-free system was starting to change with the government’s expressed hope, since the early 2000s, to turn a small portion of public hospitals into so-called “hai’at” or quasi-independent entities that would charge a modest fee for their services; however in practice the implementation of this policy was slow and by the late 2010 only two hospitals had begun to charge fees (which were in any case far below private sector fees).

Families with MoH insurance paid an estimated average of $75-100 a year, while families with RMS insurance paid $52-77 per annum. The costs break down in the following manner: families with MoH insurance paid an annual premium of approximately $30 a year (the exact sum depended on the number of dependents (spouse and children under 18, the charge was $7.5-$15 per each dependent). Additionally, they were charged a co-pay for all services (providers usually enforced these because their own salary partially depended on the fees) and a range of out-of-pocket expenses, such as on pharmaceuticals, which came to $45 per annum. Military families with RMS insurance paid the same fees, except that their annual premium was lower, capped at $7 (Halasa, 2008; Jordan Ministry of Health, 2000). Since the average Jordanian household tended to have only one breadwinner, who received a monthly salary of $150-200, even these “routine” non-emergency costs could be substantial.

One major out-of-pocket cost was emergency care, which was not covered by most public insurance schemes (Halasa, 2008).

In rural areas, where most employed men worked for the armed services (and where 90% of females were unemployed and listed as dependents), RMS insurance coverage reached only 48% (JMoH 2000: 71). In my own interviews in 2010-11, several intermediaries from rural districts confirmed that many locals lacked insurance (Author’s interview with former MP, July 2011, name withheld by request).

Original census data obtained by the author from the Department of Statistics suggests that approximately 50% of the population had no health insurance of any kind in 2004. This is close to estimates obtained in a 2000 government survey - 40% (JMoH2000), and Baylouny (2008) - slightly under half of the population.

Some uninsured qualified for discounted MoH insurance as certified poor or disabled, but the majority had to pay higher rates for insurance premiums and full price for pharmaceuticals (Halasa, 2008; WHO, 2006a) and as a result their overall out of pocket expenditure on health was 50% higher than among the insured (Jordan Ministry of Health, 2000). Surveys from the early 2000s suggests that 37% of those who were ill did not seek professional care – many of them because “the cost was too high” (Jordan Ministry of Health, 2000). All this led independent experts to call for urgent “cost containment to improve access” (USAID, 1997).

Most interviewees (74-88%, depending on the service) received services exclusively from a public sector hospital or health center (Alkhaldi, 2008).

At the time when the surveys were conducted (2008 in Syria, 2010 in Jordan), the rural population of Syria stood at 9.2 million and 46% of the total population, while in Jordan at 1.1 million and only 18% of the population.

Author’s calculations, using original household income and expenditure surveys (HHEIS) for Syria (2008) and Jordan (2010). Both surveys included data on “distance to nearest health facility,” and I calculated the estimates for
rural respondents. (For Jordan I used the 2010 HHEIS, instead of the 2008 HHEIS as I did for Syria, because for some reason that survey did not collect data on the distance to health facility.)

My findings are consistent with other independent studies. For instance, a WHO study on Syria found that over 90% of rural households lived within close proximity of a government primary health center and over 70% within easy reach of a government polyclinic or hospital (WHO, 2006b; similar statistics reported by Galdo, 2004; United Nations, 2004). Meanwhile studies on Jordan find that more than a third rural Jordanians felt long distance and transportation to medical facilities to be always a major problem (Alkhalidi, 2008).

Author’s interview with Dr. Samir Kassab, Lattakia, April 2010. The evidence for spatial segregation is fairly consistent. A look at the locations of private hospitals (lists obtained by author from the Directorate of Hospitals, MoH, Damascus) confirmed that private hospitals were only located in towns and cities, and the same point was made to me separately by the Director of Planning at the Syrian Ministry of Health, in whose words “almost all private health facilities are located in large urban areas” (Author’s interview with Director of Planning, MoH, Damascus, 9 May 2010). A Library of Congress study (LoC, 2005) notes a similar spatial pattern.

They were not accessible to the large number of rural Transjordanians – in many districts over 40% - who were unemployed and therefore lacked insurance (I will discuss unemployment trends later in the chapter), who worked did not work for the government, and even those who worked for the civilian public sector, unless they had significant wasta.

Before 2011 neither government collected such data systematically. The Jordanian Ministry of Health had a special “Quality control” division but its annual health quality surveys were conducted mostly in non-representative samples of health centers (few hospitals were assessed) and were filled out by medical and administrative staff of the same centers rather than by independent assessors or users.

Many freshly minted doctors resisted the government’s efforts to move them for a two-year rotation to rural areas, preferring to stay in cities where they could receive a better salary and have a better lifestyle. Therefore, some bribed their way out of the requirement, or, even if they did move to a village for two years, opened a private practice and spent more time in the latter than in the public facility they were supposed to service – which naturally resulted in shortage of personnel at the public facility. Hinnebusch reports a similar challenge already in the late 1980s (Hinnebusch 1989). Absenteeism is perhaps the reason why the ILO assessed some Syrian facilities to have “poor human resources” (ILO 2013).

Author’s interview with Dr. Nader Lutfallah, Damascus, 18 March 2010.

In the outlying regions such as Maan (a southern governorate, whose capital is approximately 250km south of Amman), reports suggest “is a frightening lack of doctors at Maan Public Hospital [such that] even …the simplest surgeries” are unavailable (Luck & Freij 7 November 2010).

The poorest 66% of Syrians in the sample population held 65% of the jobs – an almost one-to-one correspondence – while the poorest 66% of sampled Jordanians held only 46% of the jobs, suggesting that Jordanian poor were disproportionally likely to end up unemployed and/or to not participate in the labor force. (Author’s calculations, based on original census and survey data obtained from ministries. Sources: 2004 Census, Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria; 2008 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, Department of Statistics, Jordan.)

Unemployment statistics are notoriously inaccurate. In this case, the numbers in Table 8 most likely underestimate the gap between Syria and Jordan because Jordan’s real unemployment rate is often masked by the vast numbers of long-term unemployed workers who are “dropped” from the labor force and thus not counted in the unemployment statistic. Many labor economists point out that “the severity of the unemployment challenge in Jordan is disguised by the low labor participation rates [which are] some of the lowest…in the world” (Rad, 2012) – significantly higher than Syria’s (Ovensen & Sletten, 2007).

Author’s interview with Samir Aita, February 2015.
Author’s interview with Abdullah Sboul, former mayor of ‘Is, Tafile, 12 July 2011.

Author’s interview with Dr. Mohammad Rawashdeh, former mayor of Hizman, Karak, 9 Jul 2011.

IMR and CMR are among the best indicators of population health in general because many “the causes of infant [and child] mortality are strongly related to …economic development, general living conditions… that affect the health of entire populations;” and they are also good indicators of the strength of health systems in particular because many of the factors affecting infant and child survival depend on professional medical care before and after birth, including antenatal care, safe birth, immunizations at infancy and early childhood (Reidpath & Allotey, 2003).

Average life expectancy in 2010 was 74 years in Syria compared to 72 in Jordan (OBG, 2010).

As according to a recent Lancet study, antenatal and neonatal care was one of the major factors distinguishing Syrian and Jordanian CMR since 2000. Neonatal care-related causes were found to account for 65% of under-5 deaths in Jordan while only 49% in Syria (Liu et al 2012).

According to the WHO, Syria’s “well accessible” system of providers, especially in primary health, constituted “a remarkable strength of the MoH [Ministry of Health]” (WHO, 2006b). Also, author’s interview with Dr. Isaac al-Mankabadi, Co-Director of Health Systems Modernization program (HSMP), Damascus, Syria, 18 November 2009

Already in 1997, a USAID report strongly hinted at Jordan’s failure to invest in long-term improvements when it wrote that “Jordan’s health sector is … highly inefficient and expensive … raising concern that the country’s … gains in health …will begin to decline” (USAID, 1997).

During 2001-2010, both countries’ private sectors generated more than twice as many jobs annually as their public sectors. (Author’s calculations based on data from World Bank’s WDI, ILO, Syria’s Central Bureau of Statistics, Jordan’s Department of Statistics.)

In 2010, Syria’s public sector wages were 22% higher than private (Achy, 2011; Kabbani, 2009) while Jordan’s were 20% higher (Statistical Yearbook 2010, Department of Statistics, Jordan).

In Syria, the 1959 Labor Code and subsequent legislation made it virtually impossible to dismiss workers from government jobs (Kabbani, 2009). In Jordan, many public sector jobs were also “a no-risk occupation regular income” (Fortuny & Husseini, 2010; Oudat, 2005: 42).

Even if labor laws had extended to the private sector, they would have been difficult to enforce since small businesses – over 90% of private enterprises in both countries – rarely declared their employees (Charmes 2010). Furthermore, in Syria new labor legislation proposed in 2006 aimed to further reduce labor protection by “render[ing] the labor law…more flexible for the business environment” (Aita, 2009). The only mechanism that gave private sector workers some limited protection was a “cultural norm against laying off” (Kabbani, 2009).

Most mayors interviewed for this study admitted that after they were elected, they “retired” a portion of municipal staff to make room for new workers – usually their close kin and other loyal clients. Since Syrian hiring was more meritocratic (Aita, 2009) and since intermediaries who may have influenced hiring decisions had long tenures (e.g. ministers, mid-high level Baath party officials), Syrian government jobs were relatively more secure.

This issue came up in my interviews with several mayors. The mayor of Jneid in northern Ajloun insisted that “agriculture here earns pretty good income [but] most people still prefer government work;” the former mayor of Karak maintained that in the fertile even in agricultural areas around Karak “no one wants to work in agriculture, even though it pays 17 dinar a day” (which was 40% higher than the average government wage); and the mayor of Lebb and Mlih lamented that his district was “an ancient agricultural area [with] good soil [and] good infrastructure [but still] everyone works for the government.” (Author’s interview with Khaled Dhmour, former mayor of Karak city, 9 July 2011. Also, author’s interview with Fakhri Momani, former mayor of Jneid, Ajloun, 24 Jul 2011; author’s interview with Hammad Shbailat, former mayor of Lebb and Mlih, Madaba, 25 Jul 2011.)
The Baathist regime did not nationalize the private hospitals that it inherited in 1963 and permitted the construction of new hospitals and clinics through the late 2000s, mostly because private providers were thought to complement government efforts by satisfying demand among wealthier users while allowing the government to take care of its mass base. In 2009 there were 370 private hospitals and thousands of private health clinics in the country (Roster of hospitals obtained by author from the Directorate of Hospitals, Ministry of Health, Damascus, spring 2010). Jordan had also historically had a flourishing private health sector; in 2010 its private facilities included 61 hospitals with a total of 3888 beds, in addition to hundreds of specialized private clinics, most of them concentrated in the country’s three major cities - Amman, Irbid, and Zarqa (MoH Jordan, 2010).

Price is the most widely cited determinant of choice, especially among the poor who have little disposable income and can ill afford to feed themselves let alone pay for expensive medical care (Deiniger, 2003; Glick & Sahn, 2006; S. Haddad & Fournier, 1995).

Studies show that the physical accessibility of public and private facilities is a key consideration in the choice of provider among poor and rural households in developing countries (Noor et al, 2003; Stock, 1983; Tanser et al, 2006).

Studies suggest that even the poorest consumers are willing to pay more for vital services such as health care, and especially so if the gap in quality between the cheaper and more expensive care is large (Alterman & Lavy, 1996; Andaleeb, 2000).

The choice of health providers for most rural Syrians and Transjordanians came down to a choice between public and private facilities. The charitable sector, while increasingly active in the medical field, was relatively negligible in comparison to the others in the late 2000s.

As described in Chapter 2, Syria’s public sector health offered services and medicine completely “free of charge… without [the] requirement of a social security number” or insurance (EU 2003, Fortuny & Husseini 2010).

While Syrian private providers usually boasted better facilities, the quality of actual professional medical services were not always much better than those in the public sector for two reasons. First, in contrast to Jordanian doctors, most Syrian doctors worked in both sectors and thus public sector providers were literally served by the same quality of medical personnel as the private (Author’s interviews). Second, the private sector was “largely unregulated” and “lacked [the] standardized care and quality assurance” that was (at least partly) enforced in the public sector (Kherallah et al, 2012) (Hatim, 2010; also UNFPA, 2007: 9) (Fouad & Maziak, 2007).

Foreign patients who came to Jordan for treatment used private facilities (Kaldewei, 2010; WHO, 2006a).

Author’s interview with Hassan Abbas, IFPO, Damascus, 17 Aug 2010.

Author’s interview with Dr. Nader Lutfallah, Damascus, 7 Nov 2009; author’s interview with Dr. Samir Kassab, Lattakia, April 2010.

Author’s interview with presidents and members of several charitable societies; author’s interviews with Abdelqader Husrie, Damascus, August & October 2010. See also (Pierret & Selvik, 2009: 598).

Author’s interview with Khaled Bitar, Syria Trust for Development, Damascus, 17 June 2010.

Although the most pronounced growth in the charitable movement during the 2000s took place in urban and suburban areas, interviews with founders of charities and Ministry of Labor officials responsible for overseeing the charitable sector suggest that after 2000 increasing numbers of charities began activities in rural areas. In some cases, Syrians who had made money through work abroad founded a small charitable society or clinic in their old village to help the poor in their community. In other cases, urban-based charities opened up branches in the countryside: for instance, the Charitable Association for Social Care in Hama opened several branches in the villages around Hama, offering food, everyday household supplies, and small stipends to the neediest. (Author’s
Many funds were not reported.

Author’s interviews with presidents and members of several charitable societies; author’s interview with Lina Rifai, mayor of Homs city 2005-9, Homs, 31 Jul 2010; (Birr Charitable Association, 2009).

By conservative estimates, six of the larger charities alone served upwards of 350,000 individuals a year, with an average $500 per beneficiary in the late 2000s (Khatib, 2011; Damascus Charities Union, 2009).

Author’s interview with Rana Khashoo, Doctor at polyclinic for the Lady of Lattakia Charitable Society, Lattakia, 26 April 2010.

Author’s interviews with charities (various); author’s interview with Abdelqader Husrie, Damascus, August 2919; author’s interview with Lina Rifai, mayor of Homs city 2005-9, Homs, 31 Jul 2010.

Author’s interview with Lina Rifai, former mayor of Homs, Homs, 31 Jul 2010; author’s interview with Jamal Barout, Senior researcher at IFPO, Aleppo, Nov 2010.

Author’s interview with Jamal Barout, IFPO, Aleppo, Nov 2010.

According to Barout and several other Syrian researchers, most large charitable benefactors could easily win thousands of votes if they wanted to because of their charitable work, “but they do not use their influence for politics… most do not have political ambitions.”

One academic noted sarcastically that the donors and volunteers “have to be driven by [the sheer desire to] do good … because it’s tough work [to operate charities] given the government’s restrictions.” (Author’s interview with an independent Syrian academic, Damascus, spring 2010.)

In the late 2000s, the ICCS ran 2 hospitals (1 in capital, 1 in the southern governorate of Aqaba), 15 medical centers, 41 nurseries and schools, 2 community college, clinics and health care centers, sewing centers, orphanages, in addition to distributing cash to the poor (Stemmann 2010; Brand 1995).

Author’s interview with Ahmad Awad, Director of Phoenix Center, Amman, 24 November 2010.

Author’s interview with Osama Telfah, Amman, 28 Jul 2011.

(Hisa & Masri, 2010); author’s interview with Walid Khatib, Amman, 11 November 2010.

I chose against a number of other measures, such as donating money to charity, because, as just discussed, in Jordan charities are predominantly parochial / tribal networks and therefore not a good indicator of generalized solidarities.

Everyone is likely to say that they feel “solidarity” if asked point blank, but many may not be willing to take the leap of faith of trusting someone on a joint project.

My “independent variables” in the regression – rural residence, young, male, low educational status - are binary, which requires a logistic regression. I use marginal effects bar graphs for a more straightforward presentation since, unlike tables with standard logistic regression coefficients which cannot be interpreted directly, marginal effects bar graphs directly show the predicted probability of the outcome variable taking the value of 1, given a chosen value of the binary IV, with 95% confidence.
Calculated by dividing the difference between Syrian and Jordanian probabilities by the lower (Syrian) probability.

The Spring 2009 wave is just 0.01 percentage points short of significance.

In explaining her interest in the Islamic study groups, a schoolteacher recounted that she first became attracted to the movement because “when I grew up we were forced to shout slogans at school against [Islamists]. Not having any idea who they were or what they stood for, we began to like them because it was the regime that was making all our lives miserable” (ICG, 2004).

One prominent example was the prominent cleric Sariya Rifa’i, a leader of the formidable Zayd charitable movement.

Some of the more prominent examples include the daring political TV sketches like Yomiyyat Mudir ‘Am (Diary of a Director General), or Maraya (Mirrors), or Buq’at Daw’ (Spotlight).

In the 1980s, Hinnebusch noted that since the 1960s in many rural areas the “political game of clan rivalry” had become less frequent (Hinnebusch 1984: 115). Individuals I interviewed in 2010 and after 2011 from traditionally “tribal” rural areas in the south of Syria also noted that while people belonged to families and clans this belonging was in fact “weaker than the relationship …towards [the broader geographic and historical] region” which was home to many clans. (Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, former Daraa resident, 12 November 2013.)

The fact that the Baathist regime never attempted to splinter social groups certainly played an important role in the weak political salience and divisiveness of communal identities. For instance, its decades of efforts to “suppress [tribal] solidarity and cohesiveness” (Chatty, 2010) and to replace parochial bonds with allegiance to the regime’s large corporatist structures did take the edge off the more divisive aspects of pre-existing communal cleavages. Interviews with independent academics as well as elected and non-elected officials in 2010 revealed a consistent perception that the regime took particular care to balance sects in its hiring decisions to all public offices, from bureaucratic directorates to municipal councils.

A similar logic for the cohesion of communal groups has been described in other contexts by (Chandra, 2004) in India or (Waterbury, 1970) in Morocco. Waterbury argues: “if a group were to lose its cohesion, it would be incapable of protecting its patrimony [from being] seized by a rival” (Waterbury 1970: 6).

Intermediaries faced this incentive for two reasons. One is that the state passed to them many distributive goods on the basis of “tribal quotas:” sheikhs and MPs, for instance, were given access to prestigious jobs and university scholarships for redistribution solely to their tribes. The second and more important reason, which I briefly touched on earlier, is that in the absence of strong political parties in the country, elected officials found it advantageous to invest in tribes to serve the mobilizational role of parties. (Author’s interviews, various.)

The poll was administered by the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. I gratefully acknowledge the Center’s generosity in letting me add a few questions to the standard questionnaire to probe how people understood wasa, prestige, and success in life and in careers.

For many Transjordanians, belonging to a politically weighty tribe also became inextricably linked to personal pride and prestige. Members of small tribes envied the strength and confidence of larger tribes: one member of a smaller (formerly bedouin) clan vented about his difficulties obtaining access to scholarships and good employment, “all because I come from a small clan.” When I jokingly suggested that his tribesmen just need to have more children, his eyes lit up. He loved the idea. “That’s it! We need to have more babies!”

See (Nasr, 2005; Yom, 2005; Gubser, 2002). I was able to verify the claims of these broad studies using detailed registration / closing records for civil society organizations from both countries’ Official Gazettes (Official Gazette,
Government of Syria, 1922-2010; Official Gazette, Government of Jordan, 1919-2010.). Since the Official Gazettes record the registration as well as closing of each civil society organization in the country, I was able to compile an approximate list of still-active CSOs in 2010. My list was similar to lists obtained from government ministries and supports the overall picture painted by the broad comparative studies: that CSOs significantly were more numerous in Jordan – approximately three times as many, if normalized for the size of the countries’ population.

445 Until February 2011 Facebook, Skype, and other popular social media were officially banned in Syria.

Other authors have noted the limitations of the “social media” theory; the theory was based on the experience of a certain class of technology-savvy Egyptian activists in Tahrir, but it did not generalize to the whole region (Kurzman, 2012) or even much beyond major cities in Egypt itself (Abu-Lughod, 2012). This makes sense, since the mere presence of technology says nothing about how it is used.

446 Reverse causality would mean that there is a chance that propensities for protest escalation in 2011 caused 1960s-era institutions – a temporal impossibility.

447 Although similar methodologies have been applied by researchers in other regions (e.g. Posner in Africa, Robinson et al in Europe, and Diamond in Latin America), to my best knowledge this is the first study to use it systematically in the Middle East-North Africa context.

448 In 2010 both Daraa and Irbid had approximately 1,090,000 inhabitants, each. (Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria; Department of Statistics, Jordan.)

449 For instance, the border to the east of the Hawran separates the mountainous Syrian province of Sweida from Jordan’s flat semi-desert badie. The former is populated predominantly by settled agricultural communities belonging to the Druze faith, while the latter is mostly home to nomadic or semi-nomadic Sunni Bedouin tribes.

450 The Hawran part of the border was left open in the May 1916 secret Sykes-Picot Agreement, which famously first partitioned Ottoman Arab lands into French and British mandate zones (Amadouny, 1995).

451 “In numerous cases, there is Jordanian-owned land on the Syrian side, and vice versa. [T]here is a security arrangement that farmers can cross over …several times a year to cultivate their land and wait until the harvest, although some farmers on both sides preferred to cultivate their land with olive trees because the tree does not need the care and irrigation and are only harvested once in year… which they do under the supervision of the border guards” (Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 2011).

452 Baathist land reforms “only lightly ruffled the pattern of land tenure” in Daraa. During the most radical phase of redistribution campaigns only 27 Daraa landlords lost their land, compared to over 1060 in the eastern governorate of Hassakeh and 608 in Aleppo. Daraa was not unique: Lattakia, Tartous, and Sweida governorates, which also had more egalitarian land ownership structures, had a similar experience (Batatu, 1999a).

453 Author’s interviews, September 2013.

454 I wish to thank Dr. Waleed Gharaibeh for sharing this resource and for his invaluable insights related to the geography and historical identity of the Hawran.

455 Since the nineteenth century, Hawranis also emphasized their peasant identity partly to differentiate themselves from formerly nomadic tribes that had settled on the fringes of the region (like Mafraq, in Jordan).

456 Unlike the peasants in other areas such as around Damascus or Idleb, the agriculturalists on both sides of the Hawran were historically organized as clans (Batatu, 1999a).

457 Author’s interviews, 2010-11 Daraa, 2011-2012 Irbid.
The border was mostly symbolic and poorly policed until at least the 1940s.

On Daraa see (Batatu, 1999a); on Irbid I am thankful for conversations Walid Gharibeh, Amman, 2011-2013.

Daraa and Irbid were not unique in this sense, but certainly differed from some other regions, such as in Syria’s western coast or Jordan’s south, where economic hardship in some cases due to unexpected climatic changes (in the case of southern Jordan - due to severe and prolonged droughts), particularly in the 1920s-30s, forced significant numbers to migrate to cities or to flock into state militaries as a way to escape poverty. The Hawran’s basic economic and social fabric by contrast remained relatively undisturbed due to the region’s egalitarian land structure and rich agricultural land.

Governors always came from another governorate - in theory, to ensure impartiality in adjudicating local affairs.

Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, a native of Daraa, summer 2014.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, October 2013.

Author’s correspondence with former Daraa residents and activists, 2012-2014.

Kafri was former director of the Office of the Daraa Governor. [http://www.mushakis.net/?p=5068]

Author’s correspondence with Malath Zoubi, summer 2014. Similar reports also from researchers at ICG (ICG 6 July 2011).

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer-fall 2013.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, October 5. 2013; Lecture by Sadiq al-Azm, Harvard University, 21 February 2013.

Author’s correspondence with medical doctor and activist, a native of Daraa, November 2013; Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, October 5. 2013; (Abouzeid, 2011).

Author’s interview with a former Daraa resident, November 2013. See also (Ajami, 2012: 73).

Often these were retired ministers or other high-ranking officials.

Author’s conversations with mayors and academics from Irbid, 2011-2014.

Author’s interviews with Irbid residents, Irbid 2010-2011; author’s interviews with mukhabarat officers, Amman, summer 2011.

Author’s interviews.

Author’s conversations with a range of Irbid residents, 2011-2013.

Author’s conversations with a range of Irbid residents, 2011-2013.

The quantitative survey-based measures of affect that I had used in Chapter 4 are unavailable at the provincial level.

Author’s conversations with a range of Irbid residents, 2011-2013.

Hinnebusch has argued that one of the reasons for the uprising in Daraa was the Syrian regime’s “neglect of areas outside the main urban centers” (R. Hinnebusch, 2012).
Although Othman and Kalthoum came from President Assad’s (Alawi) sect and were close family friends, according to locals the real reason for popular rage at the governors was not perceived sectarian favoritism but rather the way the men governed. Residents were angry at the men for their corruption in the sale and acquisition of properties and for “preventing farmers from drilling water wells for irrigation” (AlJazeera, 2011); author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer-fall 2013; (Arab Thought Club, 2007).

Oudat’s ethnographic study of several communities in Irbid from the early 2000s also shows that wasa at that time was associated with having high connections (“anta wasil”) and with having somebody to support you (“anta md’um”) (Oudat, 2005).

According to Ramahi, who conducted a study of wasa in rural Irbid in the early 2000s, one poor villager reportedly exclaimed, ‘Without wasa, we cannot live!’ (Ramahi 2008).

Oudat’s ethnographic study of several communities in Irbid from the early 2000s also shows that wasa at that time was associated with having high connections (“anta wasil”) and with having somebody to support you (“anta md’um”) (Oudat, 2005).

It was not without irony that these developments occurred at a time (January 2011) when Syrian President Bashar Assad claimed in an interview with The Wall Street Journal that his regime was “immune” to the revolutionary fervor of nearby Arab states because he was so “close… to the … people” (WJS, 2011).

The three main administrative levels in both Syria and Jordan were governorate (muhafeza), super-district (qada), and district (mintaqa).

Industry includes mostly agricultural / food processing, light industry and workshops such as car repair.
Since the state provided basic social services on a universal basis, access to services was non-rivalrous; and goods that were more competitive, such as jobs, were available on the basis of merit rather than divisive identity-group membership. Several people I interviewed stressed that there were no “tribal” rivalries over jobs or services – and to many my question was even puzzling.

Daraa’s first protest is conventionally taken to be the first “official” protest of the uprising not only in the province but in Syria as a whole.

Even though the largest protest flashpoints in the province were cities (e.g. city of Daraa), the actual marching crowds came from surrounding villages. (Author’s interviews with journalists who had reported from Daraa in the first month of the uprising, fall 2013.)

Many accounts from different parts of the country suggest a strong rural and class dimension of the uprising.

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of protesters were Transjordanian (Bank, 2012; Tell, 2012). Jordanians of Palestinian origin did “not take part in protests for regime change as they fear the possibility of civil war and of being accused of trying to take over Jordan” (Andoni, 2011).

All local observers interviewed for this study agree that religion was not one of the concerns in the early demonstrations. Moderate Islamists became more active “a few weeks into the uprising… especially after June [2011]” but that in itself was “part of the regime strategy [to] Islamize the uprising” as a way to discredit it. And it was not for another twelve or more months that conservative Islamist groups like Jibhat al-Nusra began appearing. (Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.)

Zeina Khodr, who reported from Daraa during the first week of the protests, noted that many of the people she talked to wanted to “change the rules” by which the state engaged with citizens (Khodr, 2011).

Daraa protesters began their march on March 18 with the chant, “God, Syria, Freedom!” (Mroue & Karam, 2011).

Author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, 13 Jan 2013.
Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013. (See also Mroue & Karam, 2011; ICG, 2011).

A flurry of pieces were published in large media outlets linking Syria’s uprising to “global warming” and droughts. See for instance, (The Telegraph, 2015), The Washington Post (Plumer, 2013), and (Femia, 2012).

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Indeed, investigative articles published after 2011 confirmed that the problem had been man-made. Châtel, for instance, showed that, despite a period of drought during 2006-7, Daraa’s “precipitation levels [had] recovered to average levels in 2008-9 and exceeded the average in the 2009-2010 season” (Châtel, 2014).

According to Ibrahim Hamidi, it was one of the most important issues under discussion during President Bashar Assad’s one-time audience with protesters two weeks into the crisis. Hamidi interviewed the men who had attended the late-March meeting. (Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.)

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013; (Sands et al 2014).

Contributing to the anger at the regime for protecting the reviled local authorities was the fact that Najib was a relative of Bashar Assad and that the government had kept Kalthoum (and Walid Othman before him) in his post despite persistent calls from the Daraa public to remove him.


Each family was to receive a $10-$70 monthly stipend effective immediately (AFP, 2011).

Cash payments previously had been handed out in the impoverished north east but more funds were released now) (Sands, 2011). The measure was not entirely out of the blue – several officials I had interviewed in mid-2010 at the State Planning Commission mentioned that the Fund was due to be unveiled and begin its work within a year; however it subsequently became clear that this timetable was shortened in light of the regional unrest in early 2011.

Salaries were raised by 1,500 Syrian pounds ($32.60) a month (Macleod, 2011).

According to an observer who was in Syria at the time, “cement prices skyrocketed during these months” as construction picked up pace (Author’s interview with Christina Lassen, October 2012).

Reports on the number of dead varied but latest consensus appears to be on three (Sands et al 2014).

Author’s interview with Zeina Khodr, 4 October 2013.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013. (NYT, 2011a).

Indeed, Daraawis had good reasons not to trust these men: in the weeks after the delegation’s visit, Rustom Ghazzaleh helped the regime to plan and execute its brutal siege and crackdown on Daraa in April 2011. (Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, October 5, 2013)

These were the words of Daraa MP Khaled al-Abboud. MP Mohammad Safouk Nassif, meanwhile, denied that his tribe had joined in the protests altogether (Abouzeid, 2011).
In late March, Hariri resigned from parliament live on Al-Jazeera television. Speaking with BBC Arabic in late March, Hariri placed the blame for the massacre happening in Daraa squarely on the shoulders of the regime, and said that the president of the republic should be responsible for ending the violence (BBC Arabic, 2011a).

The headband is the symbol of manhood and chivalry in tribal traditions. Therefore, by taking off their headband when making a request, tribesmen expect the other party to reply positively (Dukhan, 2012).

The most prominent figures that were arrested included Sheikh Mohammad Abazid, Sheikh Sayasna, Sheikh Abdulrahim Abazid; MP Nasser Hariri, before being forced to flee the country, was placed under house arrest.

Author’s email correspondence with Malath Zoubi, journalist and activist from Daraa, summer 2014. Hinnebusch differs on this point slightly, he argues that: “increasingly [people] approached tribal, sectarian or religious notables… for redress or access” (Hinnebusch 2012).

Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, a native of Daraa, 12 November 2013; author’s interviews with Daraa activists, summer 2013.

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer 2013.

Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, a native of Daraa, 12 November 2013.

See, for example, (ICG, 2012; Sadiki, 2012; Sabaileh, 2011; Yom, 2014).

According to Rabdawis, since the founding of the kingdom, the monarchy had privileged certain tribes and sub-clans (afkhad) within major tribes that had shown the greatest loyalty to its founder, Abdullah I. For instance, prominent Irbid tribes such as Batayneh or Zoubi had one fakhd (sub-clan) each receiving a disproportionate number of privileges and positions since the 1920s (e.g. in the Zoubi clan, it was the fakhd that were the descendants of Fawwaz Zoubi) (Author’s interview with Mohammad Sawaie, 7 October 2013).

To my best knowledge, claims that most young hirak activists were employed and educated are not substantiated by the data. Yom who among others makes this claim (Yom, 2014) does not give any statistics on the background of the activists – how many were employed, their average household income, or their level of education. If the rural young activists he interviewed were indeed employed and educated, they were very much a minority, because as discussed in Chapter 4 the vast majority of rural East Bankers were either jobless or worked for the government, and many of them had relatively low qualifications.

Yom, for instance, has called for a distinction between two elements of the hirak: the older “tribesmen” such as retired military servicemen, and the young generation (Yom, 2014).

Author’s interviews with independent journalists and academics in Jordan, summer 2011.

The Dhiban protests themselves were an outgrowth of ferment which pre-dated the “Arab Spring,” namely the strike by port workers in Aqaba in late 2009, strikes by government teachers and day workers that agitated for better working conditions, and the intervention of disgruntled ex-military servicemen and other segments of Transjordanian communities. These elements all wanted economic concessions, and they were at the forefront of the hirak demonstrations that kicked off in January 2011 (Tell in Abu-Rish 2012b).

Author’s interviews with Irbid residents; author’s interview with Mohammad Sawaie, 7 October 2013.


For instance, in the governorate of Tafile, the hirak’s most urgent demand in early-mid 2011 was the construction of a new public hospital (Ammon News, 2011d).
Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.


Author’s interviews with rural Rabdawis; author’s interview with Mohammad Sawaie; (Tell, 2012). One interviewee’s answer was very direct: “there is no culture of self-reliance.” (Author’s interview with Nawwaf Tell, Amman, spring 2011.)

See, for instance (Lynch, 2012b).

Author’s interviews with tribal notables and local politicians across Jordan’s 12 governorates, summer 2011.

(Schwedler, 2012) also makes this point.

During the January 21 and 28 marches slogans at the Irbid protests read “We want independence from capitalist business!” and “They sold our homeland for pennies!”

These included, most prominently, companies affiliated with the state-owned enterprise Mawared, such as the Disi water aquifer project (Hazaimeh 2011).

On February 5, thirty-six leaders of some of the most important Jordanian tribes published an open letter addressed to the Jordanian monarch King Abdullah II accusing his wife, Queen Rania, of “stealing money from the treasury” and of unlawfully taking “land and farms [that] belong to the Jordanian people” to distribute to her relatives and to build her own school (Zecchini 2011, Pelham 2011). The direct nature of the charge against a member of the royal family was unprecedented (Author’s interviews with academics, spring and summer 2011).

Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

Author’s interview with Hassan Dhneibat, Executive Director, Electricity Authority, Karak, 11 July 2011.

As Yom puts it, the youth “alternative opposition” adamantly criticized broader electoral procedures as they stood because under the old system “tribal elders blocked their ascent” to retain their authoritative sway (Yom, 2014).

Author’s interviews with Irbid academics and sympathizers of opposition parties, 2011-2014.

Calls for regime change did exist in isolated pockets, but they were either never heard or quickly put out. A former mayor from a small municipality about 300km from Amman told me that in his municipality people (including himself) had called for the monarch’s abdication “for years,” but few people in the major cities knew that such sentiments existed (Author’s interviews, June 2011).

According to one interviewee: “They mobilize when they want more jobs and services…They are taunting the regime” (Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013).

See also (Bustani, 2012; Khalidi, 2011a); (Sadiki, 2012).

The state reduced taxes on oil derivatives (e.g. for gas and heating oil), and extended an additional $28 million for food subsidies in state-run supermarkets and $28 million for new income-generating projects in rural areas.


According to a contact at the mukhabarat, the agency collected detailed data on demonstrations and alerted ministries and the king to respond to their demands (Author’s conversations with two mukhabarat analysts, Amman, July 2011).
It started legal proceedings against some former officials who had been chosen as scapegoats, and established a national dialogue committee to arrive at new electoral legislation.

Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

Author’s interviews with tribal sheikhs and mayors across Jordan’s governorates, summer 2011.

Author’s interviews with Irbid mayors, sheikhs, and academics 2011-2014.

Examples from governorates outside Irbid abound. In one case, Jordanian security services pelted protesters with stones at a street protest in downtown Tafile; in an amateur video recording, a man filming the incident shouts “Look at the security forces! Look, people… how the darak are hurting the people! Look!” (TafilaChannel, 2011). In another case, plain-clothed assailants ruthlessly attacked demonstrators with sticks and stones in plain view of the police at a March 2011 protest in Amman, causing one death and over 120 injuries (The Guardian, 2011).

Author’s interviews with Jordanian academic from Irbid, summer 2011 and fall 2013.

Author’s interview with a senior government official and mukhabarat officers, summer 2011.

Author’s interview with Falak Jam’ani, former MP for Madaba, Amman, 27 Jul 2011; (Ammon News, 2011e).

According to Mohammad Masri, a prominent Jordanian political analyst, “the king, by appointing Bakhit, [sought] to calm an influential constituency that defines its interests within the traditional state bureaucracy and feels threatened by excessive free market policies” (cited in Khalidi, 2011b).

Sheikhs admitted that their discretion over distributive benefits were fundamental to their social power in the communities; and reports about their regular “consultations” with the King about new local employment and development projects also point to this mechanism (Author’s interview with Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad al-Khatib Fanatsa, Maan, 14 July 2011); (Ammon News, 2011d).

Author’s interview with Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad al-Khatib Fanatsa, Maan, 14 July 2011.

Conversation with citizen from rural town on Irbid/Ajloun border, name withheld by request, 2013.

Author’s interviews with Irbid residents; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

Author’s interviews with Irbid residents; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

Most Jordanians I interviewed in Irbid and elsewhere in the provinces did not have a particular love for Abdullah II. They thought the young king lacked his father’s charisma and ability to connect with the people. Some even joked about his inability to speak proper Arabic, which he had learned as a second language.

On March 21 “thousands” marched in nearby towns of Inkhil, Jasim, Nawa, Sheikh Miskeen (Akhbar Daraa wa Hawran, 2011; BBC Arabic, 2011; Coordination Committee of Nawa, 2011), and on 23 March even larger numbers protested in the Daraa towns of Nawa, Al-Kashef, Jasim, Khirbet Ghazaleh, Al-Hirak, Al-Harra (Akhbar Daraa wa Hawran, 2011b; SyrianRevolution.org, 2011a).

A number of close Syria observers have called Syria’s uprising a “predominantly a peasant and working-class movement” (Pierret, 2012), (see also Dukhan, 2012). My interviews with protest participants and observers of protests in different parts of the country, paint the same picture - a strong rural dimension to the uprising. For instance, a young professional from Idlib recounted how in the first weeks of the uprisings, people from a village called Jabal al-Zawiyeh walked seventeen miles to Idlib city and to the town of Arisha to protest and most other protesters there also came from villages. Another interviewee told me that most protesters in Aleppo had come from the countryside, and that it was them who later fought in the battle for Aleppo in the fall of 2012. (Author’s

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013; (Starr, 2012).

Author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 January 2013.

World Bank Indicators, 2010. The standard rural/urban classification is based on the size of an individual’s residence. Here persons are classified as “rural” when living in a settlement of 5000 or fewer residents.

Author’s conversations with Director of Social Statistics, Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus, spring 2010.

The initial Daraa demonstrators were young, non-ideological, and non-sectarian. They did not belong to any traditional ideology or political party, and in some ways even consciously “avoid[ed] affiliation with any political party” so as not to divide their movement (Ziyadeh, 2011; see also Abbas, 2011).

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer-fall 2013.

According to locals, tribal and religious sheikhs played “essentially no role” in the mobilization; the only partial exception to this may have been Sheikh Sayasna (Sheikh of Daraa’s old Omari mosque), as his fiery sermon on Friday March 18 inflamed the worshippers’ sentiments, winning him the nickname the “Sheikh of the Revolution” (Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, a native of Daraa, 12 November 2013; author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 January 2013; see also Khazen, 2012 and Yazbik et al, 2012).

Author’s interview with member of ICG research staff, November 2012; see also (Shadid, 2011).

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer-fall 2013. See also (Ajami, 2012: 73).

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Branches had many responsibilities, the most important ones being organizing demonstrations within their community, and coordinating the flow of funds, supplies, people, and information to and from other protest locales.

There were exceptions, but they were relatively few. For instance, in Darayya (village/suburb on the Damascus-Daraa road) the LCC was started by a local quasi-oppositional youth network, and in a handful of other locales Shadid finds that the groups were begun by friends and colleagues (Shadid, 2011).

Darayya’s youth network was led by a popular oppositional imam, Sheikh Saeed, who had been a proponent of “non-violent resistance” and community organizing. The sheikh had a large following among Darayya youth, and many of his followers strongly disliked the regime for its corrupt and repressive nature. In 2004 the network’s youth organized an anti-corruption protest with a “symbolic ‘cleanup’ of neighborhoods – picking up trash in the streets, but also symbolizing the cleanup of the country.” Many who participated in this peaceful, community-based event were arrested (Interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 Jan 2013).

Author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 January 2013.

Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, a native of Daraa, 12 November 2013; author’s interviews with Daraa activists, summer 2013.

Aleppo, Homs, and many smaller towns around the capital and in other governorates specifically “declare[d] solidarity with the residents of the city of Daraa” (BBC Arabic, 2011c). The words “we sacrifice for you oh Daraa” echoed in many home-made videos uploaded that day by protesters from various parts of the country.

Author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 January 2013.
Author’s interviews with Syrian activists and journalists. See also (Pierret, 2012).

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Literally, “father of Hafez” – in Arabic it is affectionate to call a man by the name of his firstborn child.

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Overall, the movement had less resonance among some of the country’s minorities and the middle- and upper classes – the latter mostly because middle and upper classes had done relatively well under the Assad regime (Pierret, 2012) – although there were many exceptions. For instance, some of the most committed and daring activists during the early stages of the rebellion (before being imprisoned or killed or exiled) belonged to the Alawi and Christian sects (Yazbik et al, 2012); and, as discussed earlier, many young LCC activists, especially in larger cities, were technology-savvy students, doctors, and other professionals (Shadid, 2011; Ziyadeh, 2011).

Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, a native of Daraa, 12 November 2013; author’s interviews with former Daraa activists, summer 2013; author’s interview with Mohammad Bardan, Boston, 13 January 2013. See also (ICG, 2011)

For instance, on March 20, the third day of protests, security prevented ambulances from taking injured people to the hospital after a protest, and “occupied the [main Daraa] hospital so any wounded person [who tried to check in] would be either detained or shot” (Yazbik et al., 2012; Macleod, 2011b).

Soon after March 18, authorities began arresting anyone who collected supplies for the wounded as well as any doctors who were caught treating the injured. “The regime,” reported many eyewitnesses, was “[clearly] targeting those who are trying to send help” (Sandels, 2012).

“Whenever troops [saw] four or five people gathered,” reported eyewitnesses from the ground, “they open[ed] fire” (Blomfield, 2011).

Author’s interview with Ibrahim Hamidi, 5 October 2013.

Doctors who were caught helping were often either imprisoned or shot (Sandels, 2012).

Cited in (Yazbik et al., 2012).


Author’s interviews with Irbid residents; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

My conversations with government officials suggest that the government keeps very careful statistics on the protests; however, given the sensitivity of the information, it does not make the figures public. The best available estimates come from local and international media sources. These tend to overestimate the count of protesters, especially in larger cities like Irbid city, because their tallies usually do not distinguish between the numbers of hirakis and the supporters of political parties, whose demands and constituency (mostly urban Transjordanians) differed significantly from the hirak and which staged their own separate protests. (The most prominent of the parties was the Islamic Action Front, Jordan’s main Islamist party, and leftist Wehda party, in addition to a smattering of nationalist and leftist parties such as the Iraqi Baath and the Jordanian Communist party.)

Given the relative paucity of accurate information about protests in Jordan and in outlying provinces like Irbid in particular in official and unofficial sources (e.g. police reports and protester testimonies) alike, I followed (Beissinger, 1998) by using a “blanketing strategy” to collect the most comprehensive list possible from the types of
print and online resources that were most likely to report protests including a large variety of local, national, and international newspapers; Facebook pages of the various hirak groups; and blogs.

614 My own interviews with locals, as well as many qualitative accounts, confirm this trend. See for example (Tell, 2012). The spike in mid-February was driven by a large protest staged by the Islamic Action Front party which, as already mentioned, was not part of the rural hirak – and unfortunately, none of the available news reports the period were not detailed enough to separate out the two.

615 Rabdawis from smaller villages and towns reported either not seeing a single protest in their home town or village, or one every few months that raised specific local concerns – such as a demand for the municipality to take away trash, if the collection routine had for some reason been impeded – and stopped when the demands were met. (Author’s interviews with Irbid residents and academics; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.)

616 “The poor,” announced one of the hirak leaders, Mohammad Sneid, in early February 2011, “need to eat and have shelter [and] political reform doesn’t fill the stomach” (Luck, 2011c).

617 Separately, the rural hirak protesters also shunned collaboration with urban East Bank activists in Amman, such as the March 24 Movement, because “they perceived these wealthy urbanites to be out of touch with tribal realities” (Yom, 2014).

618 Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, Amman, 2011.

619 Author’s interviews with sheikhs, residents of Irbid, summer 2011; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, Amman, August 2011.

620 As I argued in Chapter 2, many aspects of modern Transjordanian “tribal” identity and practices were not “traditional” but invented in the 1950s/60s by the Hashemite regime to suit its political project.


622 My interviews in Irbid and elsewhere (especially in the south of Jordan) suggested that there were voices raising the specter of ending the monarchy, but they were mostly limited to (the small numbers of) sympathizers of leftist and nationalist political parties, and found no resonance among the vast majority of the hirakis. See also Only a “small group of independent activists …rais[ed] the specter of ending the monarchy, but they [found] only limited support” (Schwedler, 2012; Yom, 2014).

623 Author’s interviews with nine rural Irbid residents and academics, 2011-2014; author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013; author’s interview with Mohammad Sawaie, 7 October 2013.

624 Author’s interviews with Jordanian academic from Irbid, summer 2011 and fall 2013.

625 The government-controlled press also visibly exaggerated the slogans at IAF rallies during the early months of 2011, and managed to vilify the Islamists as “radicals” bent on subverting the country’s political order (despite the fact that the latter had loudly declared their pro-regime position (Bustani, 2012)).

626 “Pork” is a standard term in the literature used to describe the provision of locally-targeted collective goods to districts, at a cost to other districts or national policy (Carroll & Lyne, 2006; Stokes et al, 2013).

627 Author’s conversation with Fakher Da’as, deputy chair of Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity (Wehda) Party, 10 March 2011; author’s interview with Royal Court official, summer 2011.

628 Author’s interview with MP, name withheld by request, July 2011.
A large literature outside of the Arab region makes a similar argument. See, for example, (Ash, 2011; Eckstein & Merino, 2001; Lee et al, 2000; Lichbach, 1987).

Existing studies rarely answer this question. Some surmise that Assad’s response simply followed a historical “script:” that, since his father had brutally crushed a three-year-long uprising in the late 1970s-early 1980s, Bashar Assad must have believed that only a brute-force approach would work for him, also (Harling, 2011b). This answer is unsatisfying because Jordan’s King Abdullah also inherited from his father a legacy of violence, including decades-long rule by martial law (1957-89) and brutal repression of large-scale oppositional protests and rebellion (1950s, 1970). If both the Syrian and Jordanian leaders had (successful) episodes of violent repression inscribed in their historical “playbooks,” their different strategies in 2011 are difficult to explain. Another explanation claims that the Syrian and Jordanian regimes acted differently because they extracted different lessons from other “Arab Spring” experiences, such as the downfall of Tunisia’s Ben Ali and Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak. The argument here is that Assad resorted to violence because he concluded that Ben Ali and Mubarak fell because they had used insufficient force to subdue their challengers (Abbas, 2011), while King Abdullah used restraint because he concluded that Ben Ali and Mubarak had used too much force. But this line of reasoning still leaves one wondering why the two leaders extracted such different lessons from the same events. Finally, studies have reasoned that Assad may have simply miscalculated. “Had Assad reacted with democratic concessions instead of repression,” argued long-time Syria observer Raymond Hinnebusch, “he might have weathered the crisis” (R. Hinnebusch, 2012). Political blunders are always possible but the explanation is neither easily falsifiable (we cannot get inside Assad’s head) nor logical: since Syria was the last Arab country to experience protests, Assad had longer than any other Arab leader to study other countries’ experiences – and to see that regimes that had shot at demonstrators had been most likely to witness escalation and full-on rebellion.

Unfortunately, the exact amount of aid is unknown since the Syrian government tended to be more secretive about these transactions than Jordan’s, but it cannot be ruled out that the aid was comparable (adjusted for population size) to Jordan’s.

Author’s interviews with former Daraa residents and activists, summer-fall 2013.

Author’s interviews with MPs, mayors, sheikhs, a range of educated Rabdawis, fall 2010- summer 2011.

Author’s interview with Raafe ‘Aqaileh, former mayor of Khaled bin Walid, Irbid, 20 Jul 2011.

A Sunni resident of Daraa attested: “government jobs and scholarships were more or less available to all. Only top positions…in intelligence were not” (Author’s correspondence with Diaa Sha’ir, 12 November 2013).

The indicators used here – poverty levels, inequality, unemployment, availability of government jobs and services, infrastructural development – are certainly by no means exhaustive. However, as I argued in Chapter 4, according to existing political economy/development economics literatures, they do tap some of the most important dimensions of well-being and performance of public distributive systems.

Using the more reliable “expenditure” method. See Chapter 4 for discussion of the greater reliability of the expenditure method.

(Hatim, 2010); (Laithy & Abu-Ismail, 2005); Central Bureau of Statistics, Syria; Department of Statistics, Jordan.

Between 1966 and 1970 Daraawis constituted more than 20% of the membership of the Baath Party Command compared to their relatively small proportion (5%) in the country’s total population (Van Dam, 1996). Syria’s prime minister from 1987-2000, Mahmoud Zoubi, had been a Daraa native (Batatu, 1999).

As we saw earlier, on the eve of the uprisings the country’s Vice President, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Chief of Military Intelligence, in addition to numerous other posts, were held by Daraawis.
For instance, some have suggested that the uprising could have easily started in another rural town in Idleb or in one of the North East provinces, or in the commercial Harih district of old Damascus on February 16 when a spontaneous protest that gathered there: had the police fired at the crowd, “the uprising could have started then and there” (ICG, 2011).

(Bank, 2012: 32; see also Schwedler, 2012; and Susser, 2011).

Author’s interview with Waleed Gharaibeh, 6 October 2013.

Author’s conversation with Laurie Brand, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 6 November 2014.

I thank Nader Kabbani for sharing this data.

Although this is not the focus of my discussion, an interesting additional insight from Figure 19 is that Daraa appeared to have the absolute lowest count of CSOs of all Syrian provinces, while Irbid the second highest in Jordan; it is not clear why this is the case.

Author’s calculations, based on detailed breakdown provided by Jordanian General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS). In GUVS lists, associations were sorted by location and marked as either “rural” (rifiya) or “urban” (hadhariya).

(Leenders, 2012; Leenders & Heydemann, 2012; Dagheem, 2011), author’s interview with Zeina Khodr, 6 October 2013.

Many scholars of contentious politics and social movements, including (Davenport et al, 2005) and those listed above, acknowledge that regime repression and by protest tactics are “interactive;” however, to my best knowledge, most if not all studies assume that the “interaction” or “action-reaction cycles” start with government violence, then entail a change in tactics by the challengers, followed by a reaction from the government and so on. In other words, the initial act of government violence is assumed to be exogenous.

While I am not the first to note that authoritarians are prone to resort to violence when they are weak and vulnerable in general – Nazih Ayubi, for instance, famously noted that “the …state is… violent because it is weak” (Ayubi, 1996: 450) (see also (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2004; Eisenstadt, 1987; Scott, 1972) – my contribution here is in showing that this mechanism applies to protest situations in particular and that their vulnerability is not necessarily for lack of material goods but rather their ineffectiveness in purchasing support.

The renowned scholar of the Arab state, Nazih Ayubi, made a similar theoretical claim about authoritarian “fierceness” albeit in the context of everyday authoritarian governance rather than in times of protest: autocratic states, he claimed, are “violent because [they are] weak” – that is, is because they “lack the ability to work with and through other centers of power in society” (Ayubi, 1996: 449-450).

The observational data used for these analyses will not allow me to establish causal claims, only to look for consistency between the hypothesized mechanisms and the data.

The data is unfortunately not longitudinal, as a new nationally-representative sample of individuals was drawn for each wave of the poll. However, I treat the data as if it were longitudinal because each poll was carefully designed to be nationally-representative and asked the exact same questions.

Ideally, I would have also liked to subset the data to Jordanians of East Bank origin, since they are the popular base of the Hashemite regime, but Gallup did not have an indicator for respondents’ ethnic origin; however, if there is any bias in including Palestinians in my analyses, it should only work against my hypotheses since qualitative evidence suggests that most Palestinian-Jordanians have very low buy-in into the public sector.

Author’s interview with Samir Aita, February 2015.
Aita argues that “Syria is one of the rare countries [in the Arab region] that officially reports the reality of unemployment and underemployment in its official statistics” (Aita, 2009: 113).

Author’s correspondence with Marwan Khawaja, Chief economist for demographics and social statistics at ESCWA, March 2015.