Helpdesk Research Report: Policies to counter sectarianism in MENA countries
27 May, 2011

Query: What policies have been tried to counter sectarianism in MENA countries and what evidence of success has been found?

Enquirers: DFID, MENAD

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1. Overview

The usual method employed by Middle Eastern states to counter sectarianism\(^1\) has been the use of force. Under authoritarian governments, discriminatory policies regarding service delivery and political representation and the threat or use of violence have proven effective in countering sectarian opposition. It is also important to note that Middle Eastern regimes have tended to pursue a policy of underestimating the size and consequently strength of minority populations, as political elites have tended to benefit from minority exclusion (see helpdesk report on inequality and religious identity). Some scholars argue that, whether morally acceptable or not, this policy of repression has led to the alignment of minority group identity with national identity in some cases (Ziadeh, 2009).

The implication of this pattern of repression is that very few other policies have been tried to counter sectarianism, especially social and economic policies. Consequently few evaluations of these policies have been conducted, leaving the literature on the issue of countering sectarianism in the Middle East extremely limited.

Social, legal and economic policies that have been tried in the Middle East include constitutional guarantees, employment quotas, special education provisions for minorities, initiation of religious dialogue and media campaigns. While these policies may address some of the grievances felt by sectarian groups, they often seem to be more cosmetic than progressive. However, by easing grievances these policies may still have important consequences for countering mobilisation along group lines. The limited literature available on these initiatives makes this point in need of further study.

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\(^1\) For the purpose of this report, the concept of sectarianism has been defined as the mobilisation of individuals along religious identity lines to counter grievances
Political representation quotas

The most comprehensive policy that has been tried is quota allocations in the political, economic and institutional arenas. Lebanon is a prime example of a comprehensive quota system being used to ensure representation of all groups. The Lebanese confessional system relies on a power sharing agreement where the executive power is divided between a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister and a Shi‘a Speaker of Parliament, all of whom hold vetoing powers. The remaining political positions are allocated between groups. A similar system has been established in Iraq, with quotas allocated to ethnic groups according to their size.

However, despite strict representation, sectarian issues are rife in both countries. Minority groups continue to push for (legitimately or illegitimately) increased access to power. This has led some scholars to argue that confessional systems in Lebanon and Iraq actually perpetuate sectarian divisions by making them more tangible. This in turn hampers the formation of a unified national identity (Peteet, 2008; Torpie, 2010). These scholars argue that in order to counter sectarianism the state should aim to encourage individuals to identify with the good of the nation as a whole, rather than competing for resources along sectarian lines.

Employment quotas

The Lebanese confessional model also extends to the civil service and the job market. While the notion of diversity in the workplace is positive, its implementation appears to be a source of grievance among some sections of the population which are negatively affected by the quotas (Al Ariss 2010; Subotic 2011). Without a merit based system of recruitment individuals are quickly able to blame sectarian dimensions for their struggle to integrate into the job market. This has lead Al Ariss (2010) to argue that “religious diversity policies at both organisational and institutional levels should focus on enhancing moral issues such as tolerance in society and freedom of religious practice rather than improving representation of people from diverse religions” (p 67).

In addition, while it may be expected the seventy years of diversity discourse in Lebanon would have resulted in an inclusive approach to diversity, this has not been the case (Al Ariss, 2010), as women continue to be systematically disadvantaged in the workplace.

In Iraq following the overthrow of the Baathist regime the policy of de-Baathification had the unintended consequence of alienating Sunnis from both the new government and the job market, through a ban on hiring current or former Baath party members. This in many cases resulted in the exclusion of the best people for the job and had economic consequences for the reconstruction effort. It was also a source of grievance for Sunnis who felt that there was not enough of a distinction made between Sunnis and Baathists. This was exacerbated by the fact that during the Hussein years many professionals had to cooperate with the Baathist party, despite holding different beliefs or political ideologies, in order to move ahead professionally.

Constitutional guarantees

While most Middle Eastern countries have constitutional provisions that cater for at least some minority groups, in reality most of these rights are ignored or implemented unsystematically. While constitutional protection of minorities is a positive step, there is still a need for constitutional changes relating to the alignment of Middle Eastern countries with Islam as the state religion. This alignment ensures that Muslim discriminatory practices, such as lack of non-Muslim representation, are entrenched into the political system and prevents minority groups from accessing their rights. In addition, in order to ensure that existing rights
are upheld without discrimination there is a need to strengthen the implementation and the respect for the rule of law in the region.

While constitutional provisions can serve to bridge sectarian tensions by granting minority rights, there is also a risk that if they are not implemented appropriately grievances may become more salient.

**Education policy**

Educational concessions including increased mother tongue provisions and religious education diversification for minorities have been the main educational policies tried in Iraq to counter sectarian tensions. However, in Iran, educational policies that have catered for religious minority groups, have been used as a method of state building. While the state has granted minorities the right to study their own religion, the aim has not been to support minority faiths but rather to combat ‘disbelief’ among these communities. The Iranian state considers the lack of religion, rather than any religion, a threat to its power (Kheiltash and Rust, 2009).

**Religious dialogue**

The use of religious dialogue has been used to some extent in the region to combat identity based groups. However, while this policy seems to have potential for further exploration, the focus to date appears to have been to bridge the gap between Islamic fundamentalists and mainstream Sunni/Shi’a Muslim, rather than between minority religions and Islam.

**Civil society interventions**

Civil society organisations have also proved important to bridge the gap between sectarian groups. Religious organisations often serve important functions in communities by providing important welfare provisions to their members. Hezbollah, for example implements an extensive welfare programme targeted at Shi’as in Lebanon. However, this type of religious service provision may also serve to entrench religious identities and create a ready audience for sectarian political messages.

Some scholars take a more positive view and point out that some sectarian groups, such as the Sunni Muslim Future Movement, also provide welfare services for out-groups, that is groups or individuals that are not linked to their cause (Cammett, M and Issar, S., 2010). These scholars have found a positive relationship between elections and out-group welfare provisions. Where elections are the rule of the game and where out-group members constitute important voting blocks, sectarian parties are forced to cater to their non-traditional support base in order to win votes and become a legitimate political force (Cammett, M and Issar, S., 2010). It appears therefore that in some instances democratic policies may have some merit in countering sectarian identities and there is thus an argument to be made for ensuring that democratic transition should be a long-term goal of the region. The democratic transition, however, must be well managed in order not to institutionalise sectarian divisions and differences in the process.

**Benefits of sectarianism**

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that while there are extensive sectarian divisions and strong group formations in the Middle East, there are numerous groups that have legitimate claims for state recognition of their rights. Without the formation of groups along these lines, one must question whether minority rights could ever be adequately protected.
2. Ensuring minority representation

https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/15597/TF_SIS495C_2010.pdf?sequence=1

This article gives a historic overview of how the consociational political system in Lebanon was established. It argues that sectarian representation contributes to inhibiting the formation of a national Lebanese identity. It also provides an overview of United States involvement in the country and draws out lessons learned.

The major divisions in Lebanese society are among religious lines. There are three major groups - Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shi‘a Muslims. The National Pact of 1943, agreed upon by Sunni and Maronite leaders, stipulated that both the Christian and Muslim communities should identify with the Lebanese state rather than the West or the pan-Arab movement. The agreement also outlined a consociational political system in which no single sect would be able to dominate. The author argues that this institutionalization of the sects leads to solidifying identities within the political system without addressing the concerns and tensions between them. According to the Pact, the president would always be Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shi‘a. The Pact also stipulated consensus among the groups in key national decisions, a severe limitation on the Lebanese government.

Eventually, the social tensions generated by the still salient sectarian divisions in Lebanese society, played an enormous role in destabilizing the state and accelerating it into civil war. As the country collapsed into civil war in 1975, factional groups emerged fighting for control of the state. While the semblance of a single state remained, the institutionalised fractionalisation rendered the state all but powerless and represented a major difficulty in ending the war. This was further complicated by some groups profiting from the protracted fighting.

The Ta‘if Accord recalibrated political power among Lebanon’s various confessional communities. The Accord allowed certain members of the elite to remain in power but also granted some warlords and militia chiefs some decision-making power for postwar Lebanon. Moreover, the Ta‘if Accord stipulated a power-sharing structure of governance with the intent of promoting moderate and cooperative behavior among sects. Equal representation for the Muslim and Christian communities was introduced, a change from the previous system where the Maronite Christians claimed that they were the majority of the Lebanese population. Another change was in the dispersion of power among the three heads of state forming the ruling troika. The Sunni Prime Minister and the Shi‘a Speaker of Parliament gained greater powers while the Maronite President’s constitutional powers were diminished. The office-holders were also given the power to veto one another. While this was meant to ensure consensus at all times, it also created an opportunity for political stalemate.

Sectarian identities have become even more prominent after the end of the civil war. As the war destroyed many public spaces, such as parks, market places, and neighborhoods in general, many places associated with inter-sectarian interaction disappeared. The civil war, because of its sectarian nature, also damaged the overall Lebanese national identity that was in the process of formation. The war thus ultimately heightened sectarian identities and simultaneously emphasized conflicting sectarian aspirations. In addition, the article argues

2 This movement advocates for a unified Arab state on the notion that Arabs are a distinct people with a common language, history, and culture.
that the sectarian divisions in political and administrative posts perpetuate the divisions in society. In addition, despite the Ta‘if Accord’s success in bringing the civil war to an end, the political reconstruction that followed has not been democratic and sectarianism remains firmly rooted in Lebanese political culture.

The article concludes by arguing that in order to counter sectarian divisions and build a Lebanese national identity, the state needs to convince civil society to identify with the good of the nation as a whole rather than fighting for the power of each individual sect. One important policy that should be adopted by the Government is a more inclusive development approach, that diversifies away from the existing focus on urban development. With rural communities lagging behind in the economic development, these communities constitute a ready source of grievances that can be exploited for sectarian divisions.

Moving towards a unified national identity will require a gradual cultural and political break with past modes of behavior as well as changing the political system. However, this will require time and conscientious planning.

https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/15597/TF_SIS495C_2010.pdf?sequence=1

This article looks at the history of Iraq, the US invasion of Iraq and how some of the early decisions made by the United States have fuelled sectarian tensions and conflict. It focuses on the decisions made by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) during 2003-2004 and the subsequent Iraqi elections of 2005.

Iraq is made up of 60-65 per cent Shi‘a, 32-37 per cent Sunni, 15-20 per cent Kurdish and 5 percent other ethnic groups. Both the Kurds and the Shi‘as have been historically repressed in Iraq.

In order to create stability in Iraq after the invasion, the United States chose to bar the mainly Sunni Ba‘athist party and not hire any current or former Ba‘ath party members. While this may have helped to avoid the formation of a new government with strong ties or alliances to Hussein, in many ways it also crippled the economy and infrastructure of Iraq. Baath party members were in many instances those most qualified for the jobs. During the Hussein years many professionals, in order to move ahead professionally, had to cooperate with the Baathist party regardless of their own beliefs or political ideologies.

In addition to negative economic effects, the de-Baathification also had the consequence of alienating Sunnis from the new government. Sunnis felt that de-Baathification did not distinguish enough between Sunnis and Ba‘aths and felt targeted by the US. This was made worse by the United States favouring Shi‘a political exiles in the formation of the new government. The Sunnis felt that the people being elected to government were pawns of Iran and the United States. Many Iraqis in general also felt that those shaping their government were out of touch with the needs of modern day Iraqis. This was further exacerbated by the rushing of the formation of the Iraqi constitution, another area the Sunnis felt excluded from. One of the consequences was that one of the largest Sunni political parties boycotted the 2005 election, thus giving the Sunnis a low voter turnout rate.

Aside from the Sunni insurgency that followed the de-Baathification of Iraq, Shi‘as and Kurds have also been sources of violence. Despite seats being allocated to each sectarian group in the new Government, the root cause of sectarian violence in Iraq is ultimately the struggle for power. Therefore, political systems that cater to sectarian divisions should not be seen as a panacea for bridging sectarian divisions.
The article argues that the United States has two options for how to counter sectarian tensions in Iraq. One possibility would be to partition the government and create three mainly autonomous federated regions along ethnic lines, with a strong central Iraqi government. The author argues that “by understanding that mixing ethnic groups causes conflict, it becomes clear that forming a cohesive and fully inclusive government may not be the best or most effective method of governance” (p. 270). The second option for the United States would be to promote diplomatic discussions between sects and ensure a proper consensus on the Constitutional arrangements.


This short essay examines the concept of ‘sect’ in the Middle East. The author uses the example of Iraq’s post United States invasion political representation to question whether it is indeed useful to see political representation spread along sectarian lines. After the invasion of Iraq the United States established the Iraqi Governing Council composed of thirteen seats. These were divided along sectarian lines with thirteen seats allocated to Shi’as, five to Sunnis, five to Kurds, one to Turkmen and one to Assyrian Christians. The author argues that by activating these constructs, formerly latent social formations and affiliations became tangible, and thus rather than countering sectarian identities solidified them.

The author also examines the state’s role in sectarian identities. She argues that the state and its resources are crucial for sects to survive. In Lebanon, a state that also operates a consociational government structure where representation is governed along sectarian lines, sects and their leaders thrive because of this division. Thus the “success of sectarian organisations can be seen as a mark of the weakness of the state. At the same time a strong, repressive state that terrorizes its citizenry can also promote sectarianism, tribalism, and family solidarity. Sects become strategic sources of protection from state violence and are reinforced as arenas of safety and trust. The author concludes that “we must not overlook the violence that has compelled people to seek safety in sectarian and tribal enclaves and identities or underestimate their resistance to this process” (p. 552).

3. Social policies and constitutional concessions

Constitutional Guarantees


This article discusses the tensions inherent between the Egyptian constitution and the protection of minority rights. It finds that the constitution, through its identification with Islam as the primary religion in Egypt, impacts negatively on its protection of minority religions. It also finds that even where the Constitution guarantees rights for religious minorities, they are either not systematically implemented or restrictions on rights are enforced more forcefully among minority groups than among Muslims.

The Egyptian constitution guarantees freedom of belief through Article 46 “The State shall guarantee the freedom of belief and the freedom of practice of religious rite”. However, as the Egyptian Constitution identifies itself with Islam, which has its own set of rules and laws, it is
important to look at how basic human rights and specifically the freedom of other beliefs and religions under Islamic Sharia Law could be adversely affected. While the Constitution accepts other religions, this article points out that it also discriminates between minority religions. While Judaism and Christianity are considered under Islam to be “heavenly religions”, other religions such as the Baha’i, Hindu, and Buddhist faiths are considered non-heavenly religions and are thus prohibited from practice in Egypt.

An implication of the hierarchical religious system in Egypt is that a person from a minority faith is unable to hold a position of leadership in Egypt, as this would contradict the well-established principle in all Islamic Jurisprudence schools that there can be no leadership of a non-Muslim over Muslim in public life. There is thus a tension between the constitutional rights the state has granted Coptic and Jewish minorities in Egypt and the reality which is governed by religious discrimination.

**Employment policies**


This article uses Lebanon as a case study to challenge the notion that there needs to be greater religious diversity in the workplace. It argues that recognizing and valuing differences among employees can only be successful if coupled with merit-based policies.

In Lebanon recruitment into public institutions is regulated by confessional diversity. In the private sector, which in Lebanon is characterised by small family businesses, recruitment is often conducted along religious lines. The article finds that neither education, training nor professional experience seems enough to overcome the sectarian lines of the particular organisation.

The author finds that despite a long history of confessional policies in the workplace, the diversity discourse in Lebanon has rather surprisingly completely excluded women. Despite a national policy of the acceptance of diversity among religious groups, women continue to be discriminated against and suffer reduced career opportunities and unequal pay for the same work.

The author finds that confessionalism is salient to individuals’ work and life experiences. The lack of merit based appointment works to obstruct some career oriented individuals’ integration in the job market and affects career progression. This causes grievances among individuals who consider themselves negatively affected by quotas and increases the propensity to emigrate. Importantly the article finds no evidence that confessional discrimination is particularly prominent among certain groups, but rather that there is a general trend of grievances among all sects over the recruitment practices in the job market. The confessionalist policy to guide recruitment in order to bridge sectarian tensions has thus become a further source of grievance in Lebanon.

The article concludes by arguing that “religious diversity policies at both organisational and institutional levels should focus on enhancing moral issues such as tolerance in society and freedom of religious practice rather than improving representation of people from diverse religions” (pp 67).

**Subotic, S, 2011. ‘Lebanon: Enhancing Meritocratic Recruitment Within the Senior Civil Service’, The World Bank and the Dubai School of Government**
This article gives an overview of the confessional system governing the recruitment in the civil service in Lebanon. The article also gives an in depth analysis of the merit based reforms that were attempted between 2005 and 2009 and why they failed when put to a vote in front of the Council of Ministers.

The Lebanese civil service faces numerous challenges including unqualified and underperforming staff and severe understaffing. In mid-2009, (excluding security personnel and teachers), there were a total of 24,000 official civil service positions, out of which 10,000 were vacant due to either the post-war hiring freeze or disagreements over confessional appointments.

While various small scale initiatives have been attempted to improve the civil service, the attempted reforms of 2005-2009 have been the most ambitious. The reforms aimed to restructure the recruitment system to one based on meritocracy rather than confessionalism and included suggestions on best practise recruitment methods. The author argues that “the civil service reform comes closest to challenging the confessional nature of the Lebanese system and, as such, faces the strongest resistance” (p 8).

The reform faced both strong support and opposition. Its support were based around a talented professional class, a numerous and educated diaspora, a clear recognition that Lebanon's traditional recruitment, practices were dysfunctional and woefully inadequate for the future, and a dedicated and committed prime minister, fortified in the knowledge that meritocratic principles are at the core of all modern high-performing public sectors. The opposition, however, included the political elite which benefit from a nepotistic system of recruitment.

The failure of the reforms can be attributed to:
- Lack of political will among traditional confessional elites; and
- Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Development (OMSAR) failed to interact appropriately with Parliament, civil society, NGOs, and international organizations, choosing instead to focus on the technical aspects of the recruitment process rather than advocacy and lobbying.

**Dialogue**


This paper offers an evaluation of a 2002-2005 Yemeni pilot project that aimed to use dialogues to convert imprisoned radical Islamists to a moderate and peaceful understanding of Islam. The Yemeni state based these dialogues on a common understanding of Islamic Law as a source for legitimacy. Similar projects have been tried in other countries in the Middle East including Saudi Arabia.

The content of the dialogues focused on a number of goals of which the most often cited was the rejection of violence, respect for the rights of non-Muslims (Dhimmi), protection of foreign interests when these were protected by treaties or agreements sanctioned by the president and finally respect for the constitution and laws of the country.
The dialogues were carried out as group sessions where the dialogue committee met several times with detainees to engage in serious debates over religious questions based on a common reference to Islamic law. By the end of the dialogues and as a condition for their release, the detainees had to sign a declaration that they would commit themselves to project goals.

However, the author concludes that these dialogues had limited impact because of three fundamental problems. The first problem with the project was that there was very limited evidence that the detainees were in fact guilty of the acts they were detained for. Rather many detainees revealed that they had turned radical only after having been detained after having been held for extended periods of time based on very weak evidence.

The second problem lied in the lack of legitimacy of the dialogue committee and the state it represented. While the state advocated for the detainees’ conversion to a belief in human rights, the state itself committed rights violations against detainees, including torture.

The third issue was that the project never meant to genuinely engage in mutual dialogue but more to build a platform for a state-monologue from where the state could persuade and convert the individuals who held “erroneous views”. Coupled with a strategy of stringent security measures to provide more tangible protection, the state’s commitment to the project was in doubt.

The article concludes by arguing that though a strategy of dialogue might be a useful means for countering radical identity formation, it will require a genuine environment where the wider issues of the state’s legitimacy vis-à-vis its citizens has been addressed.

**Education**


This report provides a good overview of educational policies towards minorities in the Middle East. It argues that “the relationship between language, ethnicity and the concept of the ‘nation’ has meant that minority language issues have become increasingly politicized and sensitive” (p. 202). This has led states throughout the region to put considerable energy into creating uni-lingual public spaces. As the lack of mother tongue education is widely considered to be detrimental to students’ achievement of their potential, the results for linguistic and ethno-linguistic minorities have been dramatic.

Minority groups throughout the region have been targeted and in some cases violently repressed for campaigning for the right to mother tongue education. The continuing trends of forcibly adopting majority-language education, providing fewer resources for the education of minority groups, and actively persecuting those who try to maintain minority educational activities will further threaten, challenge and marginalise minorities throughout the Middle East.


[http://www.turkmen.nl/1A_Others/mrgiraq2010.pdf](http://www.turkmen.nl/1A_Others/mrgiraq2010.pdf)

An essential aspect of providing quality and appropriate education is mother-tongue education. In conflict and post-conflict situations, this need becomes more crucial, since
education systems that support minority languages and promote a positive curriculum in history and other subjects can have a direct impact on building understanding between minority and majority cultures and religions. This process in turn creates a more tolerant society. The Iraqi constitution now recognizes the right to education in a mother tongue and there has been significant progress in delivering this for most minority groups, with access available to 60% to 88% of people in most groups, with the notable exception of Shabaks (8%) and the Kurdistan region in general.

In the Kurdistan Region, significant steps have also been taken to provide primary education for Christian minorities in their mother tongue, such as Armenian and Syriac. While the first Syriac and Armenian primary schools were opened as early as 1993 there are now 62 primary and preparatory Armenian and Syriac schools in Erbil and Dohuk, with nearly 7,000 pupils.

http://www.springerlink.com/content/l412t5t76u5l6672/

This article examines Iran’s educational system from the perspective of religious and ethnic minorities and from a gender perspective. It finds that while some religious minorities are accommodated to some extent, this is less the case with ethnic minorities. The article concludes by arguing that the national curriculum has contributed to ethnic minority groups identifying themselves with the Iranian state.

Official references to minority groups in Iran tend to refer almost exclusively to religious minorities (only Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity are officially recognized) and virtually ignore ethnic minorities, although up to half of the population belongs to an ethnic minority.

Standard textbooks either do not give any attention to the fact that religious or ethnic minorities are part of the population, or portray them in a negative light. The concessions granted to religious minorities are not an attempt at fostering national unity and bridge sectarian differences, but a policy to tolerate the presence of some minority religions.

The article finds that the nationalistic educational mission of Iran has had a noticeable effect on its minority peoples. Interviews with Azeri and Kurdish minority teachers suggest that they are proud of having both an ethnic and an Iranian identity. While this was reflected among all ages, younger teachers appear to have a greater sense of pride in being Iranian than the older teachers, indicating some nationalizing effect.

4. Civil society

http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/routledg/mes/2009/00000045/00000001/art00007

This article examines the position of the Coptic minority in Egypt, how the group has been affected by Egyptian state policies and how it has coped with these policies. The article argues that despite the formidable obstacles to civil society organization in Mubarak’s Egypt, in addition to the natural subordination of Christian voices within a majority Muslim society,
Christians have created a vibrant and resilient civil society apparatus. This can partly be explained by the foreign relations the Coptic minority has chosen to cultivate with international mainstream Christian groups which has made it more difficult for the Egyptian regime to attack the Copts without repercussion. However, it should also be seen in light of Christians being unlikely to ever pose a security threat to the regime and instead form a convenient pet concern for Egypt that justifies a strong security state.

Religious organisations have increasingly been subject to more stringent government control, as they are seen as a threat both to the regime and to social peace and stability. The state occasionally seeks to co-opt religious feeling, but this hardly seems likely to benefit the marginal and largely powerless Christian population. In addition, the Egyptian regime does not consider the Copts as a major security threat, but rather sees Islamists as the greatest threat to its stability.

Dealing with the Islamists is more troublesome for the state. Interfering with civil institutions to counter Islamists, causes a disruption to the services that these organizations provide and causes pressure on the state to assume the services provided by non-state actors. However, this dilemma is absent in the case of Christian organizations.


This article examines the conditions under which sectarian groups begin to cater and form alliances with other religious communities (out-groups). It compares the welfare programs of the predominantly Sunni Muslim Future Movement and the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah in Lebanon.

There are large differences between the two organisations despite operating under the same institutional rules and economic contexts as well as boasting the largest welfare programs in their respective communities. The Future Movement aims to serve a broader array of beneficiaries, including non-Sunnis, whereas Hezbollah focuses more exclusively on Shi’a communities. The authors explain this by the distinct political mobilization strategies— whether electoral or nonelectoral – used by the groups for service delivery.

The article shows that parties make efforts to serve out-group members in some electoral districts and therefore, that elite arrangements do not uniformly undercut the incentive to compete for votes throughout the national territory. However, a party's behavior toward out-group members varies from district to district depending on its strategic interests. Where out-group members constitute important voting blocks, parties are more likely to cater to them.

The establishment of welfare agencies provides a window onto the political mobilisation strategies of sectarian parties. However, the degree to which sectarian parties cater to members of out-groups also reflects the types of political mobilization they prioritise. In polities where the basic rules of the game are contested, sectarian parties may engage in both electoral and nonelectoral politics. They may also engage in different types of mobilisation, including contesting elections, organising public protests, and engaging in militia warfare. Where parties prioritise winning votes, they are most likely to distribute services across sectarian lines. Nonelectoral mobilization, on the other hand, limits benefits to in-groups.

The authors argue that the predominantly Sunni Future Movement’s long-standing emphasis on vote buying thus helps to explain its more extensive targeting of out-group communities. Hezbollah’s more ambivalence toward electoral politics, has led it to favor high-density Shi’a areas.
The article concludes by looking at determinants of electoral versus nonelectoral mobilization. It identifies three factors that may be central to a broader theory of the conditions under which ethnic or sectarian parties favor electoral over nonelectoral strategies:

- Military defeat may leave the organization with adopting a more mainstream, electoral approach to political mobilisation as the only viable option;
- Intragroup dominance by a single party may lead to a move towards electoral mobilisation as the organization is not at risk of alienating member of its own community or risk defection to opponents; and
- In-group status advancement may free parties to look beyond their own communities. If perceptions of the relative deprivation of the in-group vis-à-vis other groups dissipate, then parties and their nonparty affiliates can seek support from outgroup members without incurring blame for neglecting the needs of their base communities.


This article challenges the notion of the rentier state as the primary classification of state involvement in social welfare and seeks to propose new understandings of role that religion plays as a source of solutions to modern-day social problems in the Middle East. The author argues that religious identity should also be seen as a source for development.

5. Nation building

The use of force


This article examines the situation of the 1.5 million Kurds in Syria. It outlines the many ways in which the Syrian state aims to counter the Kurdish identity, including through curtailing their cultural, education, employment and political rights. The article also explains how the state has divided Kurds into three major demographic categories: Syrian Kurds, foreign Kurds, and ‘concealed’ Kurds. Since 1962 foreign Kurds have been stripped of citizenship and registered in official archives as foreigners; in 2008, there were about 200,000 of them. Concealed Kurds are denationalized Kurds who have not been registered in official records at all and whom Syrian authorities characterize as concealed. Nearly 80,000 people belong to this category. This includes tens of thousands of Kurds who were born in Syria, despite the Syrian constitution granting all children born in Syria, including Kurds, the right to citizenship.

The article examines the discrimination faced by Kurds in relation to
- The job market
- Freedom of association and assembly
- Cultural life
- Political representation

The lack of equal opportunity in social, political and economic life creates a vast climate of frustration among denationalized Kurds, particularly youth. State discrimination makes them feel more like a burden to society than active members in it and deprives them of hope for the
future. Not surprisingly therefore, disillusioned youth comprise the bulk of supporters of secessionist Kurdish parties.

However, despite this discrimination, the article finds that Kurds still feel Syrian. The article concludes that the psychological effects of isolation, marginalization, and deprivation of rights that denationalized Kurds experience has affected the relationship between the Kurds and the Syrian state, and Kurds and non-Kurdish Syrians.

**The (mis)use of electoral reforms**

Schwedler, J., 2010, ‘Jordan’s Risky Business As Usual’. Middle East Research and Information Project
http://www.merip.org/mero/mero063010

This article gives a good account of Jordan’s political system and the way in which the regime attempts to use democratic elections to hamper sectarian clan and ethnic identities. The author argues that the Jordanian elections perpetuate a cycle of instability: “new elections law, new parliament, stalemate on economic reforms, dissolution of parliament, flood of temporary laws, repeat”.

While Jordan is more accurately called a liberalized autocracy, the elections in November 2010 are not irrelevant. The government hopes that by holding elections there will be, at least a temporary focus of attention away from growing economic problems and clan-based violence that has spread into Amman. Elections are a tried quick fix when the regime needs to reorient political discourse. This time the regime will use them in a similar way as in 1989: “to placate the public in times of economic hardship, as well as to deflect attention from the increasingly ambient fears that more Palestinians from the West Bank will be permanently settled in Jordan as part of a Palestinian-Israeli peace”.

Despite a growing Palestinian majority, the Jordanian political system is skewed in favour of the Transjordanian population. The article quotes one observer commenting that “if Jordan seems beset with violence now, the conflict would double in intensity if Palestinians were allowed fair representation in Parliament”.

While several Palestinians hold high positions in government, a fact that draws constant grumbling from prominent Transjordanian families, this has not led to acceptance of the Palestinian majority.


This report provides a comprehensive overview of human security in the Arab states. The report looks at human security through a variety of means including economic security, violence, health and resource pressures.

Chapter three argues that while Arab states have hardly perfected their transition to good governance, or the further refinement of democracy that respect for minority rights represents, they have taken steps to adopt and apply the concept of citizenship under the law and in practice. This should be seen as a first step to managing diversity in Arab countries. However, it must be noted that reforms introduced by Arab governments are mostly driven by the concern to maintain control over the population rather than to enhance human security.
This chapter focuses more on the inclusion of Islamic movements rather than religious minorities. However, how regimes have dealt with these movements may have an impact on the way they interact with religious minorities.

To date Arab governments have implemented a number of different policies to deal with Islamic movements. These include adopting some of their demands and allowing them the right to organise and participate politically alongside other political parties, as is the case in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Yemen. Non-party Islamic associations are also present in Bahrain and Kuwait. In addition, the Egyptian government allows individuals belonging to the Muslim Brotherhood to take part in elections as independents. Despite these progressive reforms Arab governments have nonetheless taken precautions against a possible victory of Islamic movements in parliamentary elections. This has included both legal (using their majority in representative assemblies), and administrative methods, to prevent them from coming to power.

6. Additional information

Author
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Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, UNOHCHR

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