



T.C.

ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY

**INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND STRATEGIC
RESEARCH**

**THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB SPRING ON CONFLICTS IN
THE MENA REGION: FINDINGS FROM COUNT DATA
ANALYSIS**

MASTER'S THESIS

ALI ELMALOUL

DEPARTMENT OF SECURITY STUDIES

ANKARA, 2022

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Associate Professor. IBRAHIM DEMIR

Thesis Advisor

ANKARA, 2022

Confirmation Page

The thesis “The Impact of the Arab Spring on Conflicts in the MENA Region: Findings from Count Data Analysis” submitted by Ali Elmaloul have been approved as a Master’s thesis by the committee members below with unanimity / by majority of votes at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, Department of Security Studies.

Jury Member	Institution	Signature
Assoc. Prof. Ibrahim Demir	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt	
Approve ☐ Disapprove ☐	University	
Assoc. Prof. Bayram Sinkaya	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt	
Approve ☐ Disapprove ☐	University	
Assoc. Prof. Muhammed Hüseyin Mercan	Marmara University	
Approve ☐ Disapprove ☐		

Thesis Defense Date: 07/02/2023

I certify that the conditions for a master’s thesis in Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University Department of Security Studies have been met.

Head of Institute

Assoc. Prof. Ibrahim Demir

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented following academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work, otherwise I accept all legal responsibility.

Name, Last Name: Ali Elmaloul

Signature:



Dedication

"To my mother and father,

Thank you for being my constant source of love and encouragement. Your unwavering support and belief in me have been the foundation of my success. I am deeply grateful for all the sacrifices you have made and for being my biggest cheerleaders throughout my life. Your love and guidance have inspired me to strive for excellence in all that I do.

This thesis is a testament to your love and support, and I dedicate it to you with all my heart.

With love and gratitude,

Ali Elmaloul"

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB SPRING ON CONFLICTS IN THE MENA REGION: FINDINGS FROM COUNT DATA ANALYSIS

The Arab Spring (AS) that started in 2011 was assumed to reform the prevailing regimes and bring socio-economic improvements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. However, the expected positive transformation of AS in the social, economic, and political domains have not been attained effectively. According to many researchers, the revolutions in the cases of Libya, Yemen, and Syria, particularly, failed to achieve the expected outcomes. The AS impacted various aspects of socio-economic life in the countries where revolutions took place. One of the impact areas was conflicts in the MENA region. This study aims to analyze the impacts of AS on conflicts in 16 countries in the MENA region utilizing count data analysis for the period 2000-2020. The study specifically deployed a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) estimation on the data obtained from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) database. STATA software was used in data management and analyses. Our results indicate that the number of conflicts significantly increased after the Arab Spring, after having controlled for GDP per capita, democracy score, unemployment rate, ethnic fractionalization, religious fractionalization, corruption score, and religious fractionalization.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Conflicts, Count Models, MENA Region, ZINB Model

ÖZET

ARAP BAHARININ MENA BÖLGESİNDEKİ ÇATIŞMALAR ÜZERİNDEKİ

ETKİSİ: SAYIM VERİ ANALİZİNDEN BULGULAR

2011 yılında başlayan Arap Baharı'nın (AS), Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika (MENA) bölgesinde hakim rejimleri reforme edeceği ve sosyo-ekonomik iyileşmeler getireceği varsayılmıştır. Ancak AS'nin sosyal, ekonomik ve politik alanlarda beklenen olumlu dönüşümü etkin bir şekilde sağlanamamıştır. Pek çok araştırmacıya göre özellikle Libya, Yemen ve Suriye örneklerinde yaşanan devrimler beklenen sonuçları vermemiştir. AS, devrimlerin gerçekleştiği ülkelerde sosyo-ekonomik yaşamın çeşitli yönlerini etkiledi. Etki alanlarından biri de MENA bölgesindeki çatışmalar oldu. Bu çalışma, 2000-2020 dönemi için sayısal veri analizini kullanarak MENA bölgesindeki 16 ülkede AS'nin çatışmalar üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) veri tabanından elde edilen veriler üzerinde özel olarak sıfır şişirilmiş bir negatif binom (ZINB) tahmini kullandı. Veri yönetimi ve analizlerinde STATA yazılımı kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlarımız, Arap Baharı'ndan sonra, kişi başına düşen GSYİH, demokrasi puanı, işsizlik oranı, etnik fraksiyonelleşme, dini fraksiyonelleşme, yolsuzluk skoru ve dini fraksiyonelleşme kontrol edildikten sonra çatışma sayısının önemli ölçüde arttığını gösteriyor.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Çatışmalar, Count Modelleri, MENA Bölgesi, ZINB Modeli

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ABBREVIATIONS INDEX

MENA REGION	: Middle East and North Africa Region
AS	: Arab Spring
Us	: Uprisings
ZINB	: Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression
NBRM	: Negative Binomial Regression Model
ZIP	:Zero-Inflated
PRM	: Poisson Regression Model
GDP PC	: Gross Domestic Product per capita
ED	: Electoral Democracy Score
EF	: Ethnic Fractionalization score
RF	: Religious Fractionalization score
UR	: Unemployment Rate
CS	: Corruption Score

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1. Introduction

Conflict is a common and pervasive feature of all levels of social organization, including subgroups or societal groups, which can be described as a state of dissension between individuals or groups who work together. There are number of different causes of conflict such as politics, distribution and use of resources, religious and cultural differences. Conflicts mostly result from a combination of these factors, and it is very difficult, in most cases, to sort out the main causes from the subsidiary ones.

The Arab people rejoiced in the protest movements and uprisings that they have witnessed in 2011, this process was symbolically referred to as the "Arab Spring". In reference to the 1848 "Springtime of the Peoples," a series of political uprisings that shook the very foundations of Europe's monarchs and set the stage for the democratization of the Old Continent (Lynch, 2012). The call for greater political participation, increased civil liberties, and an end to autocratic regimes frequently linked to the rules of certain families was one common topic of these protests. Young people were significantly involved in organizing and participating in the protests. The demonstrators expressed considerable concerns against the economic order, which they believed to be both unjust and insufficient, in addition to the political demands. The Arab uprising appeared to present an opportunity for major Arab states to develop more liberal and democratic political systems (Heydemann, 2016). However, all those dreams and aspirations quickly collided with multiple dilemmas that slid those protests towards violence and conflicts, and thus the Arab region entered a new episode of conflict that led to a further deterioration of the situation and ignited the flames of ethnic and religious differences that former presidents and dictators succeeded in burying, whether through force or by other methods.

At the level of state, conflicts that occurred and continue to occur between societal entities as a result of regional, sectarian, ideological and regional differences and the intersection of their interests, as well as conflicts between ruling regimes and political and societal components, when proceeding to analyze the causes of Arab conflicts, it shows the intertwining between the factors of internal conflicts in the Arab region of various kinds (political, economic, ideological, and ethnic), and their demands, whether at the internal level between its components or at the

level between the Arab countries with external factors, due to the many reasons related to the diversity and multiplicity of affiliations of the demographic components. In the Arab region, the failure of the state and society to manage internal conflicts still represents a major obstacle, especially with the emergence of new challenges all the time related to problems arising from the conflict over energy and armaments as well as the sectarian factor, in addition to conflicts related to the repercussions of the post-occupation period, as seen in Iraq which became a fragmented country after the occupation where the collapse of the regime in Iraq constituted a major factor for the complex internal problems to rise to the surface, and then sectarian conflicts emerged strongly, which resulted to thousands of Iraqis deaths. Moreover, Iran took advantage of the vacuum created after the American invasion and expanded inside Iraq.

In this study, we aim to examine the factors that contributed to the conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, as well as the impact of the Arab Spring on these dynamics. The thesis is structured into six chapters. The first provides an overview of the topic, outlining the purpose and significance of the study, as well as reviewing existing literature on the subject. The second chapter outlines the research methodology, including the data sources and statistical techniques used. The third chapter discusses the concept of the conflict, including its various forms and theoretical explanations and explores the root causes of the conflict in the region both prior to and following the Arab Spring. In the fourth chapter, we present the data and analyze it, drawing out key findings and interpretations. The final chapter summarizes the main results of the research and offers recommendations for further action.

1.1. Literature Review

The Arab Spring had a profound impact on the Middle East, often leading to unrest and instability (The Economist, 2013). The protests that began in 2011 marked the start of a long-term process of sociopolitical change in the Arab world, characterized by conflicts, economic challenges, and political turmoil. The Arab Spring demonstrated that even powerful dictators can be overthrown by popular uprisings at the local level without the need for military coups or external interference (Manfreda, 2011). By the end of 2011, the uprisings had toppled the regimes of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Even leaders who managed to retain power were

forced to address issues such as police brutality, corruption, and incompetence by implementing reforms, similar to what Algerian and Moroccan officials did.

The initial hope that these revolutions would bring about stable democracies quickly faded as significant opposition to new constitutions and political reforms emerged among the population. This opposition split into Islamist and secular camps, leading to violent civil wars over the role of Islam in politics and society (Ramadan, 2011). As a result, there was widespread mistrust among the people, who believed that whoever came to power would seek to advance their own ideology and objectives. This winner-take-all mentality left little room for compromise, demonstrating that the Arab Spring, which ignited a prolonged period of political instability, did not bring about the desired outcomes and exposed deep-seated socio-political and religious divisions within the community that had previously been suppressed by authoritarian regimes.

Five years after the Arab Spring, a movement initiated by Arab youth that sought peaceful regime change in various Arab countries, their dreams were brutally crushed through aggressive repression and detention camps, and in some cases with bloodshed. The Arab Spring was a term used to describe the uprisings that began in late 2010 and early 2011, inspired by the Tunisian revolution that followed Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's rule. The uprisings resulted in the removal of Ben Ali in Tunisia, President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen. While the Arab Spring brought about peaceful regime change in Tunisia, it also resulted in violent regime change in Egypt, Yemen and Libya, however, regime change was achieved through extreme violence that split the national army and gave rise to armed militias, turning peaceful demonstrations and slogans into armed conflicts and leading to bloody civil wars and regional power struggles. In Syria, nonviolent protests also sparked a split in the national army and the emergence of armed militias but did not result in regime change. Instead, they escalated into a devastating civil war that became a regional conflict. Açıkalın and Bölücek (2014) argue that the political interpretation of the Arab Spring downplays its importance, as it is not just a political confrontation but also a challenge to the past that hinders the transition to the future.

It is difficult to predict whether sectarian tensions and wars will arise in the Arab world, given the prevalence of Sunni and Shiite groups among Muslims in the region. Hostility between these factions has increased in the Middle East since 2005, and the Arab Spring only exacerbated these tensions. In the face of political unrest, people often sought refuge in their own religious group, leading to protests and violent outbreaks, as seen in Bahrain (where the Shiite majority sought greater political, social, and economic rights under Sunni rule) and Syria (where the Sunni majority opposed the Alawite minority government). These events illustrate the potential for conflict and division among religious minorities in the Arab world (Valbjorn, 2019).

A study by Acemoglu analyzed the impact of the Arab Spring on economic development in the region has found that the Arab Spring resulted in less efficient financial markets, leading to a decline in economic growth. The research used a panel data set with annual observations from 1992 to 2011 for 198 countries, combining World Bank trade statistics with data on armed conflicts, non-state conflicts and one-sided violence from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Acemoglu et al., 2017).

On the other hand, Aras and Falk (2015) posited that while there was an internal desire for change, external forces also played a role in driving the Arab Spring, as some of the street forces had connections to actors outside the state in terms of funding, training, ideas, and priorities (Aras & Falk, 2015).

After the first days of the Arab Spring, revolutions in many Arab countries and street forces of youth were replaced by opportunistic extremist groups, some of which had connections to foreign powers (Banerjee & Erçetin, 2014). This counter-revolution, led by extremist groups, promoted extremist and exclusionary policies, leading to continued conflict and bloodshed, the killing and displacement of citizens, the targeting and destruction of the nation's economy, and the destabilization of political and security stability, as well as further challenges to state institutions in an attempt to weaken and destroy them (Covarrubias, Lansford & Pauly, 2016). Regional and international interventions in Syria, which turned the country into a battleground, had nothing to do with the Syrian people and instead diverted attention and resources away from the core goal of the Syrian Revolution, which was to end the authoritarian system (Lynch, Freelon & Aday, 2014). According to Egyptian writer Fahmi Huwaidi, the Arab Spring was a "rare moment" that would be difficult to replicate because it was not a single-country revolution,

but a nation revolution, which was undermined by both internal and external forces (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015).

Phillips highlighted the lack of transitional conditions for a civil state in Arab nations, where the social infrastructure is ready, but the political system is not (Phillips, 2014). It was not expected that a peaceful transfer of power from the streets to a democratic government and civil state could occur after decades of lack of liberties, effectively excluding the middle class from political life. While objective circumstances certainly contributed to the unrest in Arab countries, leading to a state of tension, it cannot be ruled out that external powers played a role in taking advantage of this state of anger. These events have coincided with controversial programs that aimed to reshape the map of the Arab world by establishing a more aggressive new Sykes-Picot agreement. While the goals of great powers in relation to Arab states are clear from their strategies, it is undeniable that the accumulated gaps in Arab societies have allowed them to achieve their objectives (Haas & Lesch, 2013).

The explanation for the Arab Spring has been largely attributed to economic factors by the media and scholars. One notable example is The Economist's "Shoethrower's index", which measures the vulnerability of Arab countries to revolution (The Economist, 2011). This index is based on a number of indicators that are believed to contribute to unrest in the Arab world, such as youth population, corruption, years of government in power, GDP per capita. The results showed that the potential for unrest in the Arab world in 2010 was highest in Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Syria, while countries like Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, and Lebanon had the lowest scores.

Several scholars support the idea that the economic impoverishment of the majority of people, staggering food prices, high rates of unemployment, especially among the large youth population, are all plausible roots and causes for the Arab Spring (Salih, 2013). The deterioration of food security and living standards in the region is said to have led to the uprisings (Breisinger et al., 2011).

Studies also have shown that economic factors such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment can contribute to conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Al-Ali and Black found that poverty and inequality were important factors in determining conflict in the region (Al-Ali and Black, 2003), while Gleditsch discovered that unemployment

and low levels of development were linked to higher levels of conflict (Gleditsch et al, 2002). In addition, research by Carothers and Heydemann found that political factors such as authoritarianism, lack of political freedom and representation, and government corruption can also play a role in conflict in the MENA region (Carothers, 2002. Heydemann, 2003). It is important to note that these are just a few of the many potential drivers of conflict in the region, and that the complex interactions between various social, economic, and political factors should be considered when studying and addressing conflict in the region.

One study focuses on the youth population and discusses the Arab Spring as a "youth revolution". The high unemployment among young people in this region is seen as a major problem, with youth unemployment as high as 80% in some areas (Hoffman & Jamal, 2012). The conclusion reached is that frustration with the lack of jobs makes the youth population more prone to protest.

studies support the idea that the economic impoverishment of the majority of people, high rates of unemployment, staggering food prices, especially among the large youth population, are all contributed to the causes for the Arab Spring (Salih, 2013). The deterioration of food security and living standards in the region led to the uprisings (Breisinger et al., 2011).

Social and cultural factors such as sectarianism, ethnicity, and religion have also been identified as potential contributors to conflict in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Aghazadeh and Gleditsch found that sectarianism was a significant predictor of conflict in the region (Aghazadeh and Gleditsch, 2008), while Russett and Oneal discovered that ethnicity was an important factor in explaining conflict in the region (Russett and Oneal, 2001). However, the impact of the Arab Spring on conflict in the region is complex and multifaceted, and there is ongoing debate about its overall impact on the region. Some studies have found that the Arab Spring was associated with an increase in conflict in the region (e.g., Cederman et al., 2013), while others have found that it had a more mixed or ambiguous impact (e.g., Salehyan, 2016).

1.2. Problem Statement

The Arab Spring has varied repercussions in different countries. Many studies and political analyses were provided to determine the nature of the war and the reasons of conflict,

but the nature of the conflict was mirrored in these studies of the area, where access to accurate and valid data was difficult. On the other hand, the ongoing conflict and its evolution revealed a clearer picture of the conflict in terms of the emergence of a change in the balance of forces, which had not been seen previously, and this may help to understand more about the nature of the current situation and the causes of conflict in this inflamed region (Gause, 2014).

John Brennan, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, told the Senate committee that “violence and unrest in the Middle East have reached an all-time high, citing the region's historic vulnerability to violence”. Brennan stated that the Arab Spring, which began in the Middle East in 2011, was the initial signal for the region to fall into chaos. He also stated that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups were not the cause of the Arab Spring, but they took advantage of the chaos and gained significantly from it.

Based on the above, the research problem raises the topic of the Middle East's war circle of killing and displacement, as well as humanitarian problems, which does not end but expands and becomes more ferocious.

1.3. Purpose of study

The objective of this research is to explore the root causes of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Additionally, it aims to understand the effect of the Arab Spring on the region and its contribution to the escalation of conflicts. Given that the impact of the Arab Spring was not limited to specific countries, but was felt throughout the region, the study will examine the disparities in conflict levels between countries that experienced popular uprisings and those that did not. The examination will also include an analysis of various other variables and their impact on conflict occurrences.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the causes of conflicts, including the impact of events like the Arab Spring and the role of variables like per capita income and unemployment, this study seeks to shed light on the impact of events and factors on specific regions. The results of the statistical analysis will also provide insights into the underlying causes and consequences of popular uprisings, in the context of events similar to the Arab Spring, and the role played by internal factors such as economic, cultural, and ethnic factors.

The work in this thesis also contributes to the literature on the causes of conflicts as well as the origins of the Arab Spring. Given the importance of the Arab Spring disruptions in the last decade, we examined the MENA region countries from 2000 to 2020.

Throughout the thesis, the study aims to systematically examine these causal factors and answer the following research questions:

What are the causes of conflicts in the Arab region?

To what extent did the Arab Spring contribute to the increase in the number of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region?

Is there a discrepancy in the frequency of conflicts between countries that experienced popular uprisings and those that did not?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Type and Method

Previous research has identified a range of potential triggers for conflicts, such as economic, religious, societal, and political factors. Many of these theories have been studied globally, but their specific application to the MENA region has not always been explored. This article looks at various factors that may contribute to conflicts in the region, considering the unique regional context.

While this study was primarily quantitative, some qualitative approaches were used to test some of the hypotheses. The quantitative method was applied to some of the independent variables to give a general view of their relationship to conflicts in the region. However, due to their complexities and disputable nature among scholars, an exploratory approach was further used by analyzing qualitative data. For instance, the "minorities' control over government" and its correlation to conflicts was studied using this approach. Some scholars argue that minority control of government can lead to more inclusive and representative decision-making, as minority groups may be more likely to advocate for policies that benefit marginalized communities (William Cross and André Blais, 2006). Others argue that minority control of government can lead to divisive politics, as minority groups may prioritize the interests of their own community over those of the majority (Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, 2012). As a result, these critical elements, such as level of democracy, economic, unemployment rate, ethnicity and religious diversity, and corruption, were evaluated separately to understand their impact on conflicts.

The present thesis explores the relationship between the Arab Spring and the frequency of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa region from the year 2000 to 2020. Data was obtained from various sources for 16 countries within the region during the specified period. The aim of the study is to determine the effect of the Arab Spring on the number of conflicts and to assess the relationship between conflicts and other influential variables, such as corruption, GDP per capita, democracy, unemployment rate, ethnic fractionalization, and religious fractionalization.

The study utilizes econometric techniques to investigate the impact of the Arab Spring. Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of the factors in understanding the Arab Spring, there are many uncertainties and challenges associated with studying them. For example, the relationships between variables such as conflicts, level of democracy, ethnic diversity, religious diversity, unemployment rate, GDP per capita, and corruption score are not fully understood, and the impact of events like the Arab Spring on these relationships is not clear.

The dependent variable is the count of conflicts in each country of the MENA Region. There is considerable variance in the number of conflicts across the MENA countries and over time, which suggests that a negative binomial model is more appropriate to analyze the data. However, several countries do not have any conflicts at all, whereas other countries experience conflicts in some years, but none in other years. Because of this, a zero-inflated negative binomial regression model (ZINB) is potentially a more appropriate statistical technique.

2.2. Data Source

2.2.1 Dependent variable

The dependent variable of the research is conflict. The UCDP uses "event" as its unit of analysis, which refers to an occurrence of violence that involves the use of weapons by organized groups against other organized groups or civilians, leading to at least one recorded death within a particular time frame and location. This concept was defined by Sundberg and Melander (2013). The data on conflicts was obtained from Uppsala University, Department of Peace, and Conflict Research (UCDP) Data Program. The dataset contains detailed information regarding all three categories of organized violence state-based violence, Non-State Violence, and One-Sided Violence during the period 1946-2021.

2.2.2. Independent Variables

a. GDP per Capita (GDP_PC)

The link between armed conflicts, poverty, and underdevelopment is well established. Conflicts can have devastating effects on a country's economy and lead to a significant decrease in income and economic growth. This relationship is evident in many countries that

have experienced long-lasting conflicts and insecurity (United Nations 2005:10). The data used in the analysis were extracted from the World Bank Development Indicators database.

b. Unemployment Rate (UR)

The relationship between unemployment rate and conflicts has been extensively studied in the literature. According to a study by United Nations (2005), there seems to be a strong association between armed conflicts, poverty, and underdevelopment. The study found that countries have become profoundly poorer as a result of conflicts, with their economic activities severely stunted by persistent insecurity.

Data Source for unemployment rate was obtained from World Development Indicators. Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate).

c. Electoral Democracy Score (Ed)

There is a large body of research exploring the relationship between democracy and conflict. Some studies have found that democratization can reduce the likelihood of conflict, as democratic systems are less prone to authoritarianism, repression, and violence (Gleditsch & Ward, 2006). Other research has shown that democratization can increase the likelihood of conflict, as new democratic states may experience greater political instability and competition for power (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002).

The data for electoral democracy score is derived from Varieties of Democracy project, sometimes using Lührmann et al's (2018). The index reaches from 0 to 1 (most democratic). However, In the Model, the index used for ranking electoral democratic score was modified to range from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest level of democracy and 1 representing the lowest level of democracy. This change was made in order to make it easier to interpret the results of the analysis.

d. Corruption score (CS)

The link between corruption and conflicts is widely studied and debated among scholars and researchers. Some studies have found that corruption can fuel conflict by increasing social and economic inequality, reducing public trust in government institutions, and undermining the rule of law (Le Billon, 2001; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). On the other hand, other studies have found that corruption can help to stabilize the political system by maintaining the balance of power among different groups and reducing the incentive for conflict (Lambsdorff, 2007; Callen, 2013).

The data was obtained from Transparency International Corruption Index which is widely Recognized for measuring perceived corruption in a given country. The Transparency International Corruption Index is based on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 representing the highest level of perceived corruption and 100 representing the lowest level of perceived corruption.

e. Ethnic Fractionalization and Religious Fractionalization

Studies have shown that ethnic and religious diversity can contribute to the risk of conflict, as differences in values, beliefs, and interests can lead to tensions and competition for resources. However, it is important to note that diversity in and of itself does not necessarily lead to conflict, and other factors such as the political and economic context can play a significant role. For example, studies have found that in certain cases, diversity can be positively associated with stability, cooperation, and peace-building efforts, especially when institutions are strong, inclusive, and respect the rights of all groups (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, 2011). On the other hand, in the absence of strong institutions, diversity can lead to marginalization, exclusion, and violence (Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

The data collected measures linguistic, ethnic, and religious fractionalization by assigning a value between 0 and 1 to a population. A value of 1 indicates that the population speaks two or more languages, is ethnically diverse, or is religiously diverse. A value of 0 indicates that the population speaks only one language or not ethnically diverse (James Fearon, 2003. Alberto

Alesina; et al., 2003). The index used for ranking both Ethnic Fractionalization and Religious Fractionalization was modified to range from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest level of diversity and 1 representing the lowest level of diversity.

2.2.3. Binary Variables

The binary variable in count models is a categorical independent variable that takes on only two values, usually represented as 0 and 1, to indicate the presence or absence of a certain attribute or characteristic. These variables are frequently utilized in empirical research to analyze the impact of dichotomous variables on a dependent variable of interest. The use of binary variables helps to simplify and clarify the relationship between independent and dependent variables, enabling researchers to isolate the effect of a particular variable on the outcome of interest, such as those that experienced an event (such as a revolution or uprisings) and those that did not.

In the present study, two binary variables are utilized, namely "uprisings" (Us) and "Arab spring" (AS). The former divides the countries into two distinct categories, those that experienced popular uprisings and those that did not. The latter categorizes the countries into two separate time periods, prior to and subsequent to the Arab Spring.

2.3. Data Analysis Method and Methodological Limitations

This study used quantitative data to answer its research questions. The first step was to collect data from various sources, then review the literature to identify factors related to conflicts and develop variables related to the research questions. The conflicts data (the dependent variable) was collected using the UCDP data program. The data was analyzed using STATA software, and the ZINB regression model was applied. The results were organized into themes and cited with evidence from tables to address the research questions. This process was time-consuming, but it allowed the researcher to accurately identify the relationship between the variables and conflicts in the region.

3. Conflict: Concept and Theories

Conflict is a pervasive and enduring aspect of human society, arising from the diversity and differences that exist among individuals and groups. These differences may be based on factors such as religion, ideology, ethnicity, geography, or the desire for power or resources. Societies vary in how they manage their differences and resolve conflicts, and the level of peace and cooperation within a society is often seen as a measure of its health and stability. Conflict may be voluntary for one party and compulsory for the other, and it may be immediate or ongoing. In general, conflicts that are related to religion, ideology, identity, or essential needs are more dangerous and persistent, while conflicts over secondary or immediate issues may be less threatening unless they are exacerbated by external parties.

The diversity and complexity of conflicts and their causes have long been a focus of study for scholars in a variety of fields. Researchers have sought to understand the phenomenon of conflict and to develop strategies for mitigating its risks, which often lead to wars that claim the lives of people. As a result of these efforts, numerous theories have been developed that offer different perspectives on the nature and causes of conflict. This chapter will examine these theories by beginning with a clarification of the concept of conflict.

3.1. Conflict Definition

Definitions of conflict typically involve the presence of a difference that leads to competition between parties. For example, conflict may be defined as "a special competitive situation in which parties are aware of the incompatibility of their interests in potential future situations, and each party must adopt a position that is incompatible with the interests of the other party or parties." (Robert North, 1968). Another definition of conflict is more specific, describing it as "a state of difference that leads to overt or hidden conflict and the adoption of different positions that affect existing or potential interests." This broad definition of conflict can apply to a range of psychological, cultural, social, political, and other contexts, including conflicts between individuals, conflicts between two civilizations, and conflicts between religious groups.

In the realm of politics and international relations, conflict is often defined as "a social situation that arises when two or more parties seek to achieve opposite or incompatible goals" (Evans, Graham, and Jeffrey Newnham, 1998). Political conflict is a state of competition or conflict between individuals or political entities over power or advantages. Parties to a political conflict are often aware of differences in current or potential future positions, and one party may seek to adopt policies that are incompatible with the interests of the other party due to political differences and conflicting interests.

Political leaders often seek to use ideological, social, and human rights issues to rally their supporters and put pressure on their opponents to achieve their goals. The nature and severity of conflict can vary from one society to another, depending on the characteristics of the society, its components, the level of political awareness, democratic practice within it, and the resources and capabilities available to the parties involved. Some political systems may be able to withstand conflict, while others may collapse under the strain of even a single confrontation.

In this context, the concept of conflict overlaps with other concepts, including the concept of war, which is often equated with conflict. However, according to an academic definition, war involves the use of armed forces, particularly between states (Martin, Terry, & Steven, 2002). Conflict may also escalate into an existential conflict, manifesting itself in the formation of opposing alliances, the destruction of moral values, mutual media attacks, a lack of cooperation, and a diplomatic stalemate, among other things.

3.2. The Nature of Conflict

Conflicts of different types (cultural, economic, political, or social) are interconnected and cannot be easily separated. Economic conflicts can lead to political conflict, and political conflict can lead to cultural conflict, and so on. Society is a cohesive unit, and changes in the balance of power in favor of one party can affect the other parties. The outcomes of political conflicts can be positive or negative. On the positive side, political conflict may lead to the rejection of corrupt or unsuitable leaders and the development of leadership skills among young people. On the negative side, political conflict can lead to violence, corruption, chaos, and even wars if accompanied by the use of weapons, which can result in the loss of security and peace, and economic and social destruction. When one party has more power or support, they may be

able to resolve the conflict in their favor, regardless of their corruption or the invalidity of their ideas and actions. Agreements between opposing political powers may bring temporary political calm, although these agreements may involve concessions from both parties.

3.3. Types of Conflict

The types of conflicts differ according to the different approaches to their classification. Under each classification, there are specific types, the most important of which can be referred to as follows:

3.3.1 In Terms of Causes

(a) Dissonant relationships: characterized by a strong negative reaction, can arise due to misunderstandings, the presence of stereotypes, poor or nonexistent communication, or the repetition of negative behavior patterns. These issues may lead to unrealistic or unnecessary conflicts (Zajonc, R. B., 1960).

(b) Information: Conflicts can arise from the need to obtain technical, economic, or military information, as well as from a lack of necessary information to make informed decisions, incorrect information, disagreement about the importance of information, differences in interpretation, or radically different assessments of the same information. For example, military clashes that are quickly resolved may be the result of a lack of clear information. Even countries with conflicts or tensions may establish a "safe emergency line of communication" to prevent the spread of incorrect information that could lead to an uncontrolled military confrontation (Lewandowsky et al., 2013).

(c) Interests: Political and economic interests and the desire for influence and domination can be major drivers of conflict, potentially leading to war with the victory of one party and a rearrangement of interests based on the outcome. The intensity of the conflict may increase when the stakes are high for the parties involved (Levy, Jack S., 1988).

(d) Differences in values: Value conflicts can arise when one party attempts to impose a specific set of values on the other party or calls for a value system that does not allow for differences. The media discourse of both parties may be based on the idea of defending specific

values held by each party, such as democracy and freedoms versus perceived exploitation and violated rights (Mohammed Abu-Nimer, 1999).

3.3.2. In Terms of Styles

(a) Latent Conflicts: Conflicts that lack tangible behavioral manifestations, such as the dispute between Egypt and Sudan over the Halaib Triangle or the Syrian-Saudi conflict over the central Arab role, can be characterized by a lack of direct interests or concerns between the parties involved.

(b) Manifest Conflicts, or non-violent crises: The conflict between Turkey and Greece is one example of this, the conflict here is driven by a variety of issues, including efforts by Greece to block the influx of refugees from Turkey, disputes over sovereignty in the Aegean Sea, and the longstanding conflict over the island of Cyprus.

(c) Violent Conflicts: Like the war that broke out in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis.

(d) Limited War: The most prominent example here is the war waged by the Iraqi regime on Kuwait and its occupation of it in 1990.

(e) Border conflicts: Border conflicts often arise when the boundaries of shared lands are not clearly defined, either during the establishment of a new state or during the separation of two states that previously formed a single entity. Examples of border conflicts include the dispute between Yemen and Somalia over the Socotra archipelago and the conflict between Yemen and Oman over the Khuriya Muriya Islands.

3.4. Theories that Explain Conflict

Numerous theories have been developed to understand and explain the causes of conflicts from various perspectives. These approaches have helped to shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of conflicts and have allowed scholars to analyze the underlying motivations and factors that contribute to conflicts at the state or international level. Some of the common motives that have been identified in the literature include security concerns, fear, interests, status, and revenge. These motives often influence the strategies and tactics that parties use in

conflict, and thorough understanding them, it can be crucial for developing effective approaches to conflict resolution. Quincy Wright, who is one of the founding scholars of the field of conflict and war studies, has developed a general and comprehensive vision in which he identified the main factors and causes of conflicts, according to the following (Wright, Quincy. 1942).

(a) Moral idealism: These factors indicate that individuals and groups may be motivated to engage in conflicts and wars due to their strong belief in certain ideals, such as religion, patriotism, nationalism, or human civilization. These ideals may be used as a justification for using coercive means to protect or spread these ideals, even when faced with opposition. The factors that drive such motivations are complex and multifaceted.

(b) Psychological factors: Conflicts and wars may be fueled by individuals and groups seeking to escape or alleviate harsh, unsatisfactory, unbearable, or dangerous conditions. This may be motivated by a desire to reject suffering or other negative experiences. These factors contribute to the movement towards violence and conflicts as a means of seeking relief or change.

(c) Political factors: In some cases, violence or war may be seen as a necessary or appropriate means of implementing foreign policy or increasing the influence of a government, party, or class within a state or on the international stage. Some leaders or groups may view these actions as a way to preserve or enhance their power or status.

(d) Legal factors: There are instances where the use of violence or war may be justified due to perceived violations of international law and the rights of others. In these cases, some may argue that resorting to force or war is the appropriate solution based on legal or judicial legitimacy.

The study of conflicts and their causes has led to the development of a range of theoretical approaches, including psychological theory, realism theory, liberal theory, economic theory, basic needs theory, relative deprivation theory, Marxist theory, clash of civilizations theory, and social identity theory. These theories offer different perspectives on the motivations and factors that contribute to conflicts and have been influential in shaping our understanding of the phenomenon.

There have been many efforts to develop theories to explain conflicts at the international level, particularly in the field of international relations. These theories have evolved over time, reflecting the changing experiences and events of different nations. For example, theories developed in the period from the emergence of the nation-state in 1648 to the first World War in 1914 tended to focus on the constituent elements of the state and the need for oversight and accountability of its institutions. During the period from the formation of the League of Nations to the Second World War, idealist and then realist theories predominated, and various schools and theories emerged from these. Despite the efforts of these theories to understand the causes of conflicts and contribute to their prevention, some leaders have sought to adopt and spread their concepts using carrot-and-stick tactics, which has led to divisions and wars that have resulted in millions of casualties. Examples of these theories include Marxism, Nazism, and capitalism.

The following are the most important theories that explain the causes of conflicts with their environmental, cultural, social, and even religious backgrounds.

3.4.1. Realism Theory

The classical realist theory of international relations is based on several assumptions, including the belief that states are the primary actors in international relations, that the international system is chaotic and lacks a supreme authority, and that states are motivated to use all available means, particularly military force, to ensure their survival in the face of potential threats. In this view, the primary goal of states is to increase their military and economic power in order to protect their interests, which may differ from those of other countries. All states are thought to share the common interest of survival (Wivel, 2017).

The realist theory of international relations emerged as a response to the idealist theory that emerged after World War I, which focused on how the world should be rather than how it is. Realism gained popularity from the end of World War II through the 1980s and is characterized by the belief that the international system is characterized by anarchy, or the absence of a central legal authority. This is due to the principle of sovereignty, which establishes the legal equality of states. As a result, states must rely on their own resources, particularly military power, to protect their interests and ensure their survival in the international system.

Realist theory also recognizes that while states are legally equal, they differ in terms of their capabilities and power. This results in a hierarchy within the international system, with some states holding more power than others. In order to protect their interests and ensure their survival, states are forced to rely on their own resources, including military power. This can lead to a security dilemma, in which one state's pursuit of arms against another state or group of states leads to a perceived threat to the security of another state, leading it to also increase its military power (Morgenthau, Hans J. 1948).

3.4.2. Liberalism Theory

Liberal theory refers to a broad range of political and economic theories that emphasize the importance of individual liberty and the role of the state in promoting and protecting individual rights and freedoms (Viotti and Kauppi, 2018). Liberal theory emphasizes the importance of international institutions and cooperation in promoting peace and resolving conflicts in the framework of international relations (Harnisch and Ziaja, 2016).

The concept that economic and trade interdependence can contribute to reduce the possibility of conflict by generating mutual interests and incentives for cooperation is a basic principle of liberal theory (Harnisch and Ziaja, 2016). Countries that are economically integrated, according to this viewpoint, are less likely to go to war as they risk losing more if trade and other economic activity are disrupted (Viotti and Kauppi, 2018).

3.4.3. Economic Theory

In various studies, economic theory has been used to study violent conflicts. The first approach is to investigate the economic origins of conflicts, such as resource inequalities or economic inequality, and how these factors can lead to the emergence of conflicts.

According to Collier, resource scarcity, such as access to land, water, or other natural resources, can be a major contributor to violent conflicts (Collier, Paul, and Nicholas Sambanis, 2002). When resources are scarce, several groups may compete for them, resulting in tension and conflict. Economic disparity can also contribute to violent conflicts by causing social and

political instability, since disadvantaged individuals may feel marginalized and excluded from the economic and political systems (Collier, Paul, and Anke Hoeffler, 2004).

The second approach is to investigate the economic repercussions of conflicts, such as how they might disrupt trade, investment, and other economic activities and how these disruptions can result in economic and social costs. For example, violent conflicts can damage infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and buildings, disrupting economic activity and reducing the economy's productive potential. Conflicts can also cause people to be displaced, disrupting social and economic networks, and generating additional costs for individuals and communities. In addition to these direct economic costs, conflicts can have indirect economic consequences, such as reducing investment and trade, as well as lower economic growth. These indirect repercussions can have long-term economic consequences, even after the conflict is over (Collier, Paul, and Nicholas Sambanis, 2002).

3.4.4. Systemic Theory

Fred Kniss is a notable contributor to the theory of the systemic approach in understanding conflicts. This approach is based on the analytical framework developed by Kniss, which distinguishes between stable and unstable systems. The framework is influenced by a range of factors, including the compelling inputs or (causes of conflict), movement regulators (such as international, regional, and local institutions), environmental constraints (such as the influence and pressure of internal and external public opinion), and the final responses issued by the regime. The conflict is the result of the relationship between these forces and the other components of the system. The stronger the relationship between the movement regulator and environmental constraints, the more unstable the system becomes (Yahya Bouzidi and Idris Ali, 2018).

3.4.5. Psychological Theory

There has been significant focus on understanding the subjective motives for conflict at the individual level, as individuals play a central role in society and organizations. This has led to the development of a range of psychological theories that seek to explain conflicts through

the psychological motives and factors of the leaders or decision makers of the conflicting parties. These factors may include a desire for domination, control, and status, aggressive tendencies, revenge, frustration, disappointment, mental impressions and images, psychological emotions, and other psychological motives. These theories have played an important role in interpreting conflict behavior. Under this framework, two main approaches emerged:

First is the Harvard approach. This approach to conflict resolution focuses on the distinction between attitudes (what people claim to want) and interests (why people want what they say they want). It suggests that conflicts can be resolved when actors focus on interests rather than situations, and when they develop mutually acceptable criteria for dealing with differences. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying interests that drive behavior in conflict situations, rather than just the surface-level attitudes that are expressed (Burton, John W, 1990).

Second is the Conflict transformation approach. According to this approach, conflicts can be either constructive or destructive depending on how they are addressed and managed. Conflicts are viewed as an interaction of energies, and the focus is on different perceptions and the social/cultural context in which truth is constructed. Constructive conflict transformation aims to strengthen the actors involved and support their mutual interests. This approach emphasizes the role of perception and context in shaping the nature of conflicts and suggests that it is possible to work towards transforming conflicts in a positive way (Simon Mason and Sandra Richard, 2005).

General psychological explanations of the phenomenon of conflict at the international level often consider a range of psychological factors that contribute to conflicts. These factors can be grouped into four main trends:

First trend, Sigmund Freud and Kenneth Waltz are two influential proponents of this perspective, they believe that psychological explanations of international conflicts are the idea that aggression is an inherent part of human nature. Freud believes that conflicts and wars represent an opportunity to satisfy impulses and tendencies inherent in human nature, such as the desire for dominance and control, revenge, expansion, and risk. Waltz, on the other hand, saw human behavior, including feelings of selfishness and human stupidity, can contribute to conflict, but it is the structure of the international system that creates the conditions for conflict.

By focusing on structural factors, Waltz provides a systemic explanation for conflict in international relations, rather than attributing it solely to human behavior (Waltz, Kenneth N. 1959). These theories suggest that conflicts and wars may be driven by fundamental human motivations and tendencies that are difficult to fully control or eliminate (Westen, Drew, 1998).

The second trend is psychological explanations of international conflicts. The theory of frustration¹ suggests that conflicts may arise as a result of the frustration factor and its culmination in times of crisis. This perspective is supported by psychologists such as Flugel and Fromm. Flugel argued that states that are able to reasonably satisfy the basic needs of their people are less likely to experience conflicts or wars than those states whose people feel dissatisfied or distressed. This theory suggests that conflicts may be fueled by the sense of dissatisfaction or unfulfilled needs (Flugel, John C. 1930. Fromm, Erich. 1941).

Third trend, focusing on the national character which explains the phenomenon of conflict on the basis of aggressive national psychology as a driving force behind conflicts and wars. According to this perspective, conflicts may be fueled by the presence of aggressive national psychology in certain nations, and it may be necessary to confront and contain these nations in order to prevent the outbreak of war.

Fourth trend is national beliefs as a cause of conflict. This trend is based on the differentiation between the types of national beliefs and their relationship to the phenomenon of international conflict as follows (Munir Mahmoud Badawi,1997):

Negative pattern, one aspect of the national beliefs trend is the idea that maintaining negative thoughts about other countries can contribute to the conflict. This may involve redirecting feelings of internal frustration towards perceived hostile countries, which can increase tension and the likelihood of conflict.

Fixed pattern which consists of maintaining a fixed stereotypical idea of other nations without attempting to align these views with reality. This unrealistic perception can lead to

¹ The idea of the theory of frustration comes from a range of academic fields, like psychology, sociology, and political science. It is not a single, well-defined theory, but rather a notion that has been explored and researched by various scholars and scientists throughout history.

misunderstandings, biases, and hostile feelings that are not based on objective facts and may contribute to the escalation of conflicts.

The extremely simplistic pattern indicates an exaggerated perception of the nature of the causes of international tension and possible solutions. This usually occurs as a result of neglecting the complex structure of international relations, and the tendency to explain the causes of tension based on bad intentions or on the behaviors attributed to a particular foreign country, and then entering into a war with it instead of realistic solutions to internal problems.

3.4.6. The Theory of Human Needs

The basic needs theory is a controversial approach to explain the causes of conflicts. It suggests that conflicts may arise when basic human needs, such as physical, social, psychological, or mental requirements, are not met. Proponents of this theory argue that the inability to provide for or satisfy basic needs can lead to violence or conflict as a means of obtaining those needs. This theory highlights the importance of addressing and meeting basic human needs in order to reduce the likelihood of conflicts (Burton, John, 1990).

3.4.7. The Theory of Relative Deprivation

The relative deprivation theory is another approach that focuses on human needs. It suggests that conflicts such as revolutions, rebellions, and political or social violence may result from a state of frustration caused by the failure to meet the important needs of groups or certain societal entities, such as the denial of political participation or basic freedoms. Ted Gurr, a proponent of this theory, argued that relative deprivation is a means of pushing conflicts towards violence. This theory posits that the gap between expectations and actual performance can widen, leading to unrest and violence if it is not addressed. The relative deprivation theory emphasizes the importance of addressing the needs and expectations of groups in order to reduce the likelihood of conflicts (Gurr, 1970).

3.4.8. The Theory of Social Relations

Social conflict may arise when there is a lack of balance, harmony, or order in a particular social environment, or when there is a state of distrust and hostility between groups. It may also be driven by dissatisfaction with material resources, such as income, power, or ownership. This type of conflict can involve tensions between two or more parties or groups, whether small or large, and may occur within cities or between nations. The basic idea behind this theory is that conflict between human groups is a natural part of human life and can be found in many of the relationships within societies. Tensions resulting from these conflicts can be a constant presence in social environments (Dahrendorf, Ralf, 1958)

3.4.9. The Idealism Theory

Based on the principle of balances, comprehensive peace, the application of social security and cooperation, the theory is divided into a new ideal and an old ideal (Nadia Mustafa, 1985):

(a) The traditional school of thought in the study of international relations, known as the old idealism, is based on a set of assumptions that view conflict as the worst manifestation of the international system and believe that it can be eliminated through international efforts. This school of thought is concerned with finding ways to minimize the likelihood of conflicts occurring within the international system. Hence, it condemns the balance-of-power policies, particularly due to their failure to maintain world peace following World War I. Instead, this school of thought advocates for the implementation of collective security through organizations such as the League of Nations (predecessor to the United Nations) in order to maintain peace and security and prevent the outbreak of wars. The primary focus and motivation of the old ideal approach is the regulation of military force in order to avoid conflicts, as opposed to the balance of power, which may lead to struggles for power and the potential for wars.

(b) The new idealism: like the first, is inspired by the belief in the commonality of interests among individuals and groups as a desire for cooperation and peace due to the inherent goodness of humanity. It also believes in the futility of national military forces and the importance of international organizations as a means of resolving conflicts. This approach advocates for the

promotion of international cooperation and peace through the use of international institutions and mechanisms.

3.4.10. The Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory is a critical approach to understanding international relations that emphasizes the role of ideas in shaping beliefs, interests, and behaviors. Unlike realism and liberalism, which tend to focus on material factors, constructivism argues that states' identities and interests are largely shaped by social structures. This approach starts from the assumption that states are the main units of analysis and that they are interconnected rather than isolated within the system. In addition to states, international governmental and non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors also play a role in shaping international politics. While these actors may have some influence, they are not as powerful as states in determining the course of international relations.

3.4.11. The Clash of Civilizations Theory

According to Huntington, culture and cultural identity play a significant role in shaping the ways in which societies coexist, disintegrate, and experience conflict in the post-Cold War world. He argues that the clash of civilizations is a major threat to global peace and proposes that a world order based on civilizations would be the most effective way to prevent the outbreak of world wars. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington asserts that people are reclaiming their cultural identities in the post-Cold War era and using symbols like flags, crosses, and headdresses to represent their ancient cultural heritages. He expresses concern that these new alignments based on civilization will lead to conflict between former adversaries, as people seeking to reconnect with their cultural roots may require enemies to confirm their differences. Hence, the central theme of the book is that culture and cultural identities, or civilizations in the broadest sense, will shape the patterns of conflict, clash, and disintegration in the post-Cold War era (Huntington, 1997).

Huntington builds his book on several conclusions:

First, Samuel Huntington argues that in the post-Cold War era, people are increasingly identifying with their cultural and civilizational identities, which are becoming more important to them than other factors such as ideology or political systems. Second, these cultural identities are leading to new alignments between nations and groups, based on shared cultural and civilizational affiliations. Third, Huntington fears that these alignments will result in conflict and even wars between different civilizations. He believes that a world order based on civilizations is the best way to prevent such conflicts and wars.

Finally, Huntington's work has received both criticism and support, with some arguing that it oversimplifies the complex dynamics of international relations and others arguing that it accurately reflects the role of culture and identity in shaping global conflicts.

4. Causes of Conflicts in the MENA Region

Since the Arab world has been working towards political independence, various conflicts have emerged, including less severe ones such as those related to political alliances seeking dominance and more intense and serious conflicts, including wars like the second Gulf War. These conflicts have occurred since the countries of the Arab world began to make progress in achieving independence, particularly in the post-World War II period, continuing until the 1960s and 1970s for some countries that gained independence later and established their status, like certain Gulf states.

A variety of factors have contributed to the ongoing conflicts in the Arab world. These include the intersection of the interests of major and regional powers, which have had a significant influence on the establishment and policies of Arab countries, as well as structural issues related to the formation of the state and the authoritarian nature of many regimes in the region. These regimes often struggle to maintain control over societies that are marked by ethnic and sectarian diversity and divided by competing ideologies, including those that seek to preserve cultural traditions and those that seek to adopt a Western modernist model. This chapter will examine the various factors within the MENA region that have contributed to conflicts. It will consider the role of the internal environment, including factors at the local level, and will analyze how these have impacted conflicts. The influence of the external environment, including the role of foreign countries, will not be addressed in this chapter. The aim is to understand the complex overlap of factors within the MENA region that have fueled conflicts.

The level of analysis in this chapter will be the state level or local factors, including the interpretation derives from the characteristics of the state, the model of government (authoritarian or democratic), the economic model (capitalist or socialist), interest groups within the country, or even the national interests.

Brown presents a framework for analyzing the causes of conflict, the framework is concerned with focusing on internal conflicts without identifying specific levels of conflict. The details of this model/framework are shown in the following figure (M. E. Brown, 1996).

Table 4.1. Underlying causes of internal conflict

Underlying causes	Proximate causes
<i>Structural</i> • Weak states • • Intra-state security concerns • Ethnic geography •	Collapsing states Changing intra-state military balances Changing demographic patterns
<i>Political factors</i> • Discriminatory political institutions • • Exclusionary national ideologies • • Inter-group politics • • Elite politics •	Political transitions Increasingly exclusionary ideologies Growing inter-group competition Intensifying leadership struggles
<i>Economic/social factors</i> • Economic problems • Discriminatory economic systems • • Modernization	Mounting economic problems Growing economic inequities Fast-paced development and modernization
<i>Cultural/perceptual factors</i> • Patterns of cultural discrimination • • Problematic group histories	Intensifying patterns of cultural discrimination Ethnic bashing and propagandizing

Adapted from Brown. Introduction, op cit, p 14.

Internal factors within the MENA region such as economic inequality, political instability, and societal divides, are the main drivers of conflict. These internal issues create vulnerabilities that can be exploited by external actors, such as regional and international powers, who may seek to further exacerbate and prolong conflicts in the region for their own interests. Efforts to address and resolve conflicts in the MENA region must therefore focus on addressing these internal issues and finding ways to manage differences peacefully rather than resorting to conflict, which ultimately benefits external powers rather than the Arab people. The most important causes of conflicts stemming from the Arab local environment are as follows:

4.1. Political Tyranny

In Arab countries, both republican and hereditary regimes are often characterized by undemocratic practices, with a small elite holding power and wealth. These regimes may also suppress demands for political reform and participation in decision-making, labeling those who advocate for these changes as traitors. While some Arab countries, such as Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, and Tunisia, have allowed for some political competition, others, like Syria, have passed power down to the rulers' children. The scheme of succession to power continued in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya until the Arab Spring, which was one of its causes. The Arab Spring thwarted the succession of power, but it was unable to put an end to the political tyranny that still plagues Arab countries.

Arab regimes have often used authoritarian and singular approaches to govern state affairs in order to maintain their control. This has resulted in a lack of real democratic mechanisms, such as fair elections, political pluralism, and freedom of the media. In some cases, elections have been rigged, opposition parties have been marginalized, and the media has been controlled by the government. Civil society organizations have also been restricted in their ability to function and play a role in society. Additionally, there has often been a lack of separation between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, with the executive branch often holding a disproportionate amount of power and control over the other branches. This has allowed for the appointment of weak individuals to positions of leadership, who are often subordinates to the executive branch and may allow for the appointment of friends and relatives in political and administrative positions. There has also been a lack of oversight by competent institutions, and the use of security services to suppress opponents and violate their rights and freedoms.

Arab regimes have implemented policies that aim to divide and weaken the social fabric in order to distract people from the demand for political rights, power sharing, and fair distribution of wealth. This has resulted in numerous conflicts in the Arab region, as authoritarian leaders have engaged in reckless military adventures for the purpose of enhancing their own power and the status of their countries, regardless of the consequences or losses. Arab regimes have a history of engaging in reckless military actions to strengthen their power and status, often at the expense of their countries' resources and well-being. This can be seen in the

actions of leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser, Hafez al-Assad, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Gaddafi, who have all involved their countries in various wars and conflicts. These leaders have also used various forms of tyranny to maintain their rule and distract their citizens from demanding their political rights and a fair distribution of wealth. As a result, these actions have weakened the social fabric and national unity in the Arab region.

Muammar Gaddafi, the former leader of Libya, suppressed and executed his opponents, spread dissent among the Libyan tribes, and participated in various Arab conflicts with the support of different parties. Similarly, Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan, came to power through a military coup and has faced ongoing civil wars that led to the division of the country into two states. Despite his failures, al-Bashir has maintained on power and continued to rule in an authoritarian manner until 2019. In Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh pursued a similar strategy of suppression and manipulation. After the unification of the two systems in 1990, there was hope for improvements in freedom and the economy, but Saleh aligned himself with tribal and religious groups to maintain his power and engage in corruption and tyranny. In 1994, he launched a war on the south, allying himself with Al-Qaeda and other jihadist groups. As a result, the potential for positive change was undermined (Al-Khaznadar, 2016).

4.2. The Religious and Ethnic Causes of Conflicts

Due to its geographic location in the middle of the world and its proximity to international trade routes, the MENA region has been home to a diverse range of ethnicities and religions. While the majority of the population is Arab and Muslim, there is still a significant level of diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, and sect, which can contribute to conflicts in the region.

The MENA region is known for having multiple religious and ethnic affiliations in light of the presence of the Muslim majority, specifically the Sunni majority, which has often guaranteed the rights of minorities to practice their beliefs since the dawn of Islam. The difference and conflict were sometimes between Islamic sectarian components more than between Muslims and other religious minorities, sectarian and tribal conflicts and geographical division did not appear except in the absence of a collective identity, and in the light of an organized dismantling of the public identity, which was resulted from external interference, and internal deterioration (Rafik Habib, 2017). Currently, many countries in the region are

experiencing tension due to the rise of ethnic identification among various groups. This is partly due to the weak sense of citizenship among minorities, which has resulted in societies that are divided by different behaviors and traditions. The lack of strong political institutions that represent the needs and concerns of citizens has led to the formation of various nationalisms based on ethnicity, further weakening the region and its societies (Al-Tamer, 2014).

The struggle of the minorities based on religion, nationality, language, culture, sect, and ethnicity are not uncommon in the Arab world. However, their existence has often been suppressed and taboo, leading to a sense of non-nationalism and the emergence of political conflicts unrelated to intellectual and cultural differences. This has resulted in political polarization in societies divided by religion or ethnicity, which can be exploited as a tool for political gain and used to blame economic and social failures on certain groups. In countries like Iraq and Syria, this rhetoric has sometimes included extremist elements, leading to the justification of political or sectarian violence and creating a breeding ground for extremism and terrorism (Burhan Ghalioun, 2012).

The outcomes of these conflicts have varied, ranging from increased sectarian tension in Bahrain and Lebanon to civil wars and the collapse of the state in Iraq and Syria. The root causes of these conflicts can be traced back to various forms of identity-based conflicts, with a significant focus on the modern historical process (Cammack, 2022).

Also, The Relationship between Arabism and Islam is ongoing debate, specifically regarding which one takes precedence and the nature of their connection. This disagreement dates back to the founding of Arab countries following the end of the Islamic caliphate when the societies in the region were faced with the question of political identity to be adopted in their constitutions. The controversy revolves around the fundamental question of whether Arabism or Islam is the primary influence. The initial division arose from the decision to adopt a state as an alternative to the Ottoman Caliphate. Some favored a model that closely resembled an Islamic nation, while others rejected it completely and promoted nationalism as an alternative to religion, advocating for the creation of a Greater Arab State and Arab unity. There have also been calls for various forms of identity based on ethnicity, race, language, or religion. Some secular nationalist movements sought to reclaim pre-Islamic national identities, such as those of the Pharaohs,

Berbers, Phoenicians, and Assyrians, while others worked to create new identities. This ongoing dispute has the potential to escalate at any time (Hamed Khalil, 1998).

The idea of a single state was also complicated by the question of how to address identity within the state. Despite challenges faced by the state as a viable institution and opposition from some parties, the idea of the state was ultimately accepted and promoted. This was due in part to the success of propaganda that argued that the state was an artificial entity that could not effectively address its problems without a comprehensive Arab national framework, rather than being swayed by nationalist writings that rejected the idea of the state (Hamed Khalil, 1998).

Arab regimes have exploited this debate over Arabism and Islam to maintain their own power and control over resources. They have promoted division between Islamists and secularists in order to keep the ideological conflict going and prevent the emergence of any popular movement that might threaten their hold on power. This strategy has been used to suppress social protest, divide and fragment the population, and prevent any potential change. Secularism, which became prevalent after the independence of Arab countries and was associated with Western influence, has been met with resistance from scholars and preachers. This opposition has taken different forms in different states but has often been characterized by intolerance and a culture of hatred that further divided the society (Burhan Ghalioun 2017).

After the conflict between Islamic and secular factions decreased in some countries and attempts were made to coordinate their goals around demands for democracy and criticism of the human rights abuses and violations of freedoms committed by Arab regimes, the debate over the identity of the state resurfaced after the Arab Spring. In some cases, such as Syria, this conflict was a factor that weakened the revolution. In other cases, such as Egypt, the conflict between these factions led to the failure of the transitional period due to fears of Islamization. The duality of "liberals" and "Islamists" emerged, leading to a struggle over the identity of the state and a competition for power, as seen clearly in the case of Libya (Nofal, 2017).

Sectarian and Religious diversity in the region has led to conflicts within and between states, often with the involvement of foreign powers seeking to advance their own interests. These conflicts are fueled by the strategic importance of the region to global powers, who seek to exploit and perpetuate them for their own gain and to win over public opinion (Ali Ziyad Abdullah, 2016).

The most prominent examples of this are Lebanon and Iraq. In Lebanon, differences between Sunnis, Shiites, Druze, Christians, and Armenians contributed to a major war that spanned from 1975 to the early 1990s. Similarly, in Iraq, tensions between Arabs and Kurds, and among Sunnis, Shiites, Yazidis, Christians, and other groups, have escalated into semi-sectarian war, particularly during and after the American invasion in 2003. These internal conflicts have been exacerbated by external factors and continue to be fueled by regional powers such as Iran. Also in Yemen, where the Houthis exacerbated sectarian tensions, which Ali Abdullah Saleh exploited to maintain his rule. He fought six wars against the Houthis before ultimately being assassinated after aligning with them following the revolution.

It is worth noting that the homogeneity present in the Persian Gulf region since its establishment in the 1970s has led to a significant reduction in marginal conflicts. This homogeneity is characterized by a shared Islamic religion, mostly Sunni sect (with the exception of Bahrain, parts of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman), Arab race, tribal culture, shared borders, common economic interests, and more. In contrast, countries with significant ethnic and sectarian diversity, such as Iraq, Sudan and, Lebanon, have experienced more conflict. However, diversity does not necessarily indicate instability. The United States represents significant diversity, including ethnic, religious, and sectarian differences. However, in countries with weak political structures and poor social and political circumstances, these differences can contribute to conflicts.

4.3. The Economic Causes of Conflicts in the Arab Region

The majority of conflicts in the Arab region, as well as other parts of the world, have underlying economic causes, even if they are presented as being motivated by political or ideological factors. These economic factors can often be the main drivers of conflict, as they affect the livelihoods and concerns of citizens and can be easily mobilized by elites or individuals. While economic issues may initially appear to be secondary to political or ideological ones, they can be just as significant in terms of the motivations behind a conflict.

Despite being the target of the Arab Spring revolutions, the elites (who later became the counter-revolution) were able to control the political, economic, and ideological institutions and shape the post-2011 struggle against the Arab Spring. The proliferation of extremist violence in

the region following the revolutions was linked to the high level of disparity between groups, rather than economic disparity itself. While grievances do not necessarily lead to civil wars, protests and revolts driven by grievances can evolve into civil wars if groups align on sectarian or ethnic lines and use these grievances to gain popular support (Lili Mottaghi,2015).

Corruption, in all its forms, is a major cause of economic conflicts, as it involves the financial and administrative misappropriation of resources and conflicts over them. In addition, the economic policies of many Arab countries have failed to consider the needs and capabilities of their societies and have not been accompanied by necessary administrative reform, efforts to combat corruption, or promotion of transparency and accountability. Instead, these economic reform programs have often been used to buy the loyalty of certain elites at the expense of the wider society, leading to discontent among the majority and undermining the effectiveness and role of state institutions in serving citizens. This has resulted in limited economic development in specific sectors and geographical areas. This distorted and inconsistent development has led to widening the gap between the wealthy minority and the limited middle class, as well as a further widening of the gap between these groups and the majority of society, which is made up of the poorest who live in areas with limited services. There has been a decline in the level of education and health services, and people have had to pay more money to access quality services for healthcare, education, housing, transportation, and other essential services. There is a widespread belief among the people that hard work is not enough to overcome these challenges, and young people in particular feel discouraged by the difficulties they face in finding decent jobs and providing for their needs.

For many years, Arab regimes have operated on the basis of an "authoritarian bargain" in which citizens are provided with basic services in exchange for political subordination. However, these social contracts have begun to break down as regimes struggle to meet the rising demands of rapidly growing populations. As a result, policies that contribute to unemployment, poverty, ignorance, marginalization, feelings of humiliation and injustice have left Arab societies frustrated and vulnerable to organized crime, brokerage, extortion networks, and the recruitment of militias and groups with political or other demands (Marwan Muasher, 2015).

4.4. Tribal and Regional Fanaticism

The concepts of state, citizenship, and related ideas are relatively new in the Arab political culture, where for centuries societies were organized around the concept of the nation at the highest level and the concept of tribe and clan at the lower levels. The Arab people and their political systems have struggled to move beyond these values, which continue to shape the behavior of individuals and groups, both citizens and decision makers. Tribal relations and their cultural influences create loyalties that bind individuals and groups, but also weaken modern loyalties to the central state (Al-Salahi, 2009).

In recent decades, loyalties to regions and tribal groups have resurfaced as the security situation has stabilized. This return to the original group is evident in the behavior of political actors as they seek to solidify their positions, assert themselves, and claim the rewards of revolution. Strong loyalties to regions and parties among politicians have emerged, almost parallel to their national loyalty, with a clear tendency to assert regional presence, particularly among marginalized groups and regions. This phenomenon is driven by a desire to prove their worth after the sacrifices made by individuals and groups (Boutaleb, 2012).

4.5. The Regimes' Control over Religious Institutions

Regimes have three main concerns related to religion and the religious space in their countries. Firstly, they want to use religion to support their policies and ideologies. Secondly, they want to prevent their political opponents from using the religious space to mobilize followers in pursuit of their agendas. If they are unable to do this, they will try to monitor such activities. Finally, regimes, particularly in recent years, have shown interest in extremist groups, some of which have a transnational character.

Arab governments often exploit the differences between Islamist groups and the competition between their affiliated institutions. This includes religious differences between Muslims and Christians, as well as sectarian differences between Sunnis and Shiites. There are also differences in terms of doctrine, such as between Salafi-Wahhabi and Sufism or Ash'ari. All of these groups compete and struggle for religious representation and influence, and each of them has connections beyond their own geographical borders. In some cases, these groups are

used by governments to strengthen their position at the expense of Islamic currents that seek to compete for power. In Egypt, for example, the religious coup preceded the military coup. When the Salafist parties and a group from Al-Azhar declared the revolution (fitnah) forbidden on January 25, it later became a right for the people and the state on June 30. Religion was then used to justify the counter-revolution, so it was not surprising to see the symbols of both Islamic (Sheikh Al-Azhar) and Christian (Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church) institutions, along with the leadership of the (Salafi) Nour Party, standing alongside with the Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah al-Sisi before he assumed the presidency on 2013 (Seif El-Din Abdel-Fattah, 2017)

The leader of the coup that overthrew the first democratically elected civilian president, Mohamed Morsi, demonstrated how the deep state and counter-revolutionary forces used religious figures to mobilize their followers and legitimize the coup. This shows how Arab regimes often use their control over religious institutions to promote their political agendas against their opponents and exert a significant influence on both political and religious life. Most Arab countries have official religious institutions, which are often loyal to the government but have some autonomy due to their size and complexity.

4.6. The Fragility of State Institutions

Internal conflicts within a state between different groups with diverse identities and differing ideologies can often be supported by international powers and may result in the collapse of the state, either partially or completely. This can lead to the state being classified as a failed state, which can also contribute to international conflicts between rival states in the region or between the forces responsible for the conflict within the collapsed state and surrounding states. These internal conflicts can have negative impacts on surrounding regional states, including creating a general atmosphere of regional instability, which can cause civil wars to spread to neighboring countries or within the same geographical area. This was seen in the case of Yemen, where the conflict between local forces led to the collapse of the state due to the control of the Houthi rebel alliance and former President Ali Abdullah Saleh's forces, and the conflict then spread beyond the borders of the Republic of Yemen. The civil war in Yemen and Syria has turned into regional conflicts with international involvement due to the involvement of different parties and foreign powers. In Yemen, the Houthi group, supported by

Iran, was seen as a threat by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, leading to the involvement of the Arab alliance. In Syria, the conflict has become more complex with the involvement of various parties and countries, including Russia, the United States, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Lebanon (Hezbollah), Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Egypt. These conflicts have caused instability in the region and have had negative impacts on surrounding states (Alaa Abdel Hamid, 2015).

The conflict in Syria has had significant impacts on neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Turkey. Similarly, the conflict in Libya has involved a large number of local and international actors and has been driven by political, economic, social, and regional factors, rather than sectarian differences. One of the reasons for this is that some military and security institutions in the region prioritize local interests over their constitutional roles of protecting the sovereignty of the state and maintaining national security against external threats and interfering with the powers and functions of other state institutions.

In summary, conflicts in the Arab region can be caused by a variety of factors, including identity issues related to Arabism and Islam, the domination of minorities over the majority, religious and sectarian differences, and the weakness of state institutions. These conflicts can have significant impacts on the stability and functioning of states, leading to failed states and regional instability. Governments often exploit religious institutions and diversity within society to further their own political agendas and maintain control, leading to further conflict. In addition, the presence of external powers and their involvement in these conflicts can further complicate and escalate the situation.

4.7. The Multiplicity of Loyalties in the Military Institution

Since 2011, events in some Arab countries have highlighted the extent of disparities and low levels of satisfaction within military institutions, often due to a monopoly of leadership by a small elite (family, regional, or sectarian) that enjoys the confidence of the regime and has absolute loyalty to the head of the ruling regime. There have also been instances of conflict between military leaders, with multiple loyalties and divisions within military structures, such as in Yemen. In order to prevent coups, ruling regimes have also implemented policies of

multiple security and intelligence services that compete in offering loyalty to the head of the ruling regime and members of his family seeking political roles.

In many Arab countries, positions of power within military and security institutions are often given to people who have limited skills and loyal to the ruler's family, rather than following the constitution and laws. The competition between different factions within the regime and control of the military has been exacerbated by the ruler's family's absolute control over these institutions and the appointment of their relatives to key positions. This has led to conflicts within the military and security establishment and a lack of loyalty, making it prone to divisions. With the start of the Arab Spring revolutions and popular participation, military leaders who were affected by the policies of the ruling regimes saw an opportunity to take revenge on their rulers, although their motivations may be complex and not just driven by revenge or self-preservation, as seen in Tunisia, Yemen, and Egypt.

4.8. Minority Control of Government

Another factor contributing to conflicts in the Arab region is the issue of ethnic and racial diversity in relation to politics. When people from minority groups come to power, often through military coups, they recognize that they lack popular support and would lose power in democratic elections. As a result, they compensate for their small size compared to the majority by monopolizing all state resources, particularly in the security and military sectors, and using them against the majority. Each group tries to advance its own interests at the expense of the other, imposing its values and customs on the other group and violating their rights, leading to conflict as a tool of expressing opposition to these oppressive practices. The resistance emerges when the minority feels the weakness of the majority as a result of the internal conflict or its weakening from an external force, so it resorts to alliances with an external party to achieve its gains at the expense of the majority.

This phenomenon of minority domination over the majority has occurred in some Arab countries and has led to armed conflicts. When the minority is unable to obtain the legitimacy of the majority through free will and refuses to take its natural position within society, it resorts to the use of force to maintain its exceptional position. On the other hand, when the minority's political and cultural rights are ignored, excluded, or not recognized, or when it is persecuted, it

may also turn to violence to obtain its rights. Both of these situations have contributed to conflicts in the region (Al-Khaznadar, 2016).

4.9. The Failure of Managing the Transitional Phase

The events of the Arab Spring occurred rapidly and with great intensity, bypassing many stages of development and change in terms of knowledge and awareness, capacity building for new actors, and preparing societies for values of coexistence and participation. This rapid pace disrupted local environments and made them more vulnerable to regional and international interference, which was exploited by external parties for their own gain. These factors, along with the capabilities of the revolutionary forces, contributed to the failure of the Arab Spring experiment, although the specific reasons for failure vary from country to country. The policies of the "deep state" and its regional allies have had a major role in obstructing the political transition of power. This alliance has utilized certain Salafi and Sufi groups and exploited their hostility towards forces of change, particularly Islamic currents that focus on politics and civil society organizations.

Some regional countries supported the ruling elites, both civilian and military, or what is known as the "deep state," in countries affected by the Arab Spring, and many foreign regimes joined in these efforts to varying degrees. The local counter-revolutionary forces employed the tactic of assassinating opponents, political figures, and other actors in society in order to destabilize security and political stability and incite citizens against the forces of the revolution that were beginning to participate in the management of their countries after years of exclusion. This was done as an attempt to drive citizens to frustration and regret over the change project, so that they would not consider continuing the process of change or learning from its mistakes. While the local revolutionary forces and their supporters have achieved some of their goals, the struggle is ongoing. In Tunisia, the assassination of leftist opposition leader Choukri Belaid almost sparked a violent civil conflict. The El-Nahda Movement and other political parties active in Tunisian politics paid the political price for Belaid's assassination and led to the reshuffling of the government. In Yemen and Libya, there were numerous cases of assassinations and bombings of figures affiliated with the parties in conflict, and these incidents intensified whenever the forces of the revolution and their allies were able to bring about some

stability and restart the development process following the revolution. The targeting of the Arab Spring also aims to undermine democracy and the moderate Islamic movement. The goal seems to be the elimination of the system that connects the revolution, democracy, and the Islamic movement, through a "zero-option" strategy that seeks to eradicate the Islamic movement and thereby eliminate the Arab Spring revolutions (Habib, 2017).

Since the creation of modern Arab states, non-state actors have frequently emerged and played influential roles in many of the conflicts in the region. These include Kurdish national movements seeking to establish a state for Kurds, leftist parties and movements that were able to infiltrate state institutions and initiate military coups, and armed religious groups, including Sunni groups that have clashed with political regimes and Shiite groups influenced by the Iranian revolution.

Since 2011, non-state actors have returned to the forefront of the political scene as the Arab state has weakened and these groups have gained increasing influence. Some of these groups have even become militarily powerful enough to rival the state itself, such as the Houthis and Hezbollah in Yemen and Lebanon. The Islamic State also managed to control large areas of Iraq and Syria. In these two countries in particular, a variety of militias and armed groups with diverse ideologies have become active. In addition, tribes and clans have emerged as important players in both internal and external alliances, as the authority of the state has been nearly completely eroded.

5. Data Analysis

The argument as outlined in the previous chapters requires a modeling strategy that addresses not only the determinants of conflict but also the impact of the Arab spring and how the number of conflicts increased after the event. Furthermore, the model used makes explicit the interplay between the conflict and other variables. Hence, my empirical strategy involves a series of statistical tests of conflicts counts of all years from 2000 to 2020 evaluating the relationship between conflicts as dependent variable and GDP per capita, unemployment rate, democracy score, corruption score, ethnic fractionalization, and religious fractionalization as independent variables.

In this chapter, the dependent variable used in the analysis is outlined first. Then, the primary independent variables are described in detail. The additional variables necessary for statistical analysis, including the binary variables and the variables that inflated the model, are briefly discussed. Afterward, the estimations are outlined and the increase of conflicts after the Arab Spring and its impact on countries in the MENA Region is considered. The use of Zero-inflated negative binomial regression to analyze the dataset is explained in the closing section, and the results of tests of different count models are compared.

5.1. Description of Data

5.1.1 Dependent Variable: Conflicts

The dependent variable of the research is conflict, for the number of conflicts we use data on conflicts from Uppsala University, Department of Peace, and Conflict Research Data Program (UCDP). The dataset contains detailed information regarding all three categories of organized violence state-based violence, Non-State Violence, and One-Sided Violence during the period 1946-2021.

The study encompasses 16 countries that are considered to be in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The countries are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. However, Sudan and Palestine were not included as the former was divided into two states in 2011 and the data from before and after this separation is dissimilar. Furthermore,

the ongoing conflicts in Palestine, which have been ongoing since 1948, are not linked to the Arab Spring or the effects of the 2011 popular uprisings, and thus their inclusion in the analysis could potentially skew the results and lead to misinterpretations.

The dependent variable is the counts of conflicts in each country of the MENA Region from 2000 to 2020. There is considerable variance in the number of conflicts across countries and over time, which suggests that a negative binomial model is more appropriate than a Poisson count model. However, several countries do not have any conflicts, whereas other countries experience conflicts in some years, but none in other years. Because of this, a zero-inflated negative binomial (ZINB) is potentially more appropriate statistical technique.

The drawback of the ZINB model is that the two-stage set-up is difficult to interpret and frequently produces results sensitive to the specification of variables. In the ZINB, we use the same set of covariates in both the inflate and count equations (Long and Freese, 2006).

5.1.2. Independent Variables

(a) GDP Per Capita (GDPPC)

There seems to be a strong association between armed conflicts, poverty, and underdevelopment. Countries have become profoundly poorer as a result of conflicts, their economic activities severely stunted by persistent insecurity (United Nations 2005:10).

The data used in the analysis were obtained from the World Bank Development Indicators database.

(b) Unemployment Rate (UR)

The unemployment rates were high across the region, especially due to the surge in the percentage of youth (Goldstone, 2011). Youth unemployment rate in the Middle East has been among the highest in the world, peaking at around 24% around the time of the protests, with a similar rate in Egypt and reaching 30% in Tunisia (IMF, 2012).

The data source used for this variable was collected from the World Bank Development Indicators database (unemployment, total % of total labor force).

(c) Democracy Score (ED)

The variable provided refers to the extent to which political leaders are elected through free and fair elections with universal suffrage, and the freedoms of association and expression are protected. This is considered to be the best estimate of these factors.

The index ranges from 0 to 1. A score of 1 would represent the most democratic system, while a score of 0 would indicate a system with no democratic elements. However, In the Model, the index used for ranking electoral democratic score was modified to range from 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest level of democracy and 1 representing the lowest level of democracy. This change was made in order to make it easier to interpret the results of the analysis. The data was published by Bastian Herre as part of the Our World in Data project.

(d) Ethnic Fractionalization and Religious Fractionalization (EF) and (RF)

Some scholars have argued that ethnic conflicts, whether they are motivated by deep-seated cultural differences or more practical concerns, can create security dilemmas between competing ethnic groups or states because neither side feels that it can trust the other. This can lead to preventive wars if there is a high level of ethnic animosity or a significant imbalance of power between the two sides. In many MENA countries, such as Iraq and Syria, religious diversity has long been an important part of the social fabric. However, the rise of extremist groups has revealed the fragility of this fabric, as demonstrated by the ongoing sectarian conflicts fueled by strong emotions among different religious groups (Posen 1993; Kauffman 1996).

The data collected measures ethnic and religious fractionalization by assigning a value between 0 and 1 to a population. A value of 1 indicates that the population speaks more than one language, is ethnically diverse, or is religiously diverse (James Fearon, 2003. Alberto Alesina; et al, 2003). The index used for ranking ethnic and religious fractionalization was also modified to range from 1 to 10, where 10 represents the highest level of ethnic or religious diversity and 1 represents the lowest.

(e) Corruption Score (CS)

Corruption, or the abuse of power for personal gain, has been identified as a potential factor in conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. According to Smith (2020), corruption has been linked to conflicts in the MENA region. Another research has also suggested that corruption may contribute to social unrest (Jones, 2019).

In this regard, the data for corruption score was obtained from Transparency International Corruption Index which is widely recognized measure of perceived corruption in a given country. The Transparency International Corruption Index is based on a scale from 0 to 100, with 0 representing the highest level of perceived corruption and 100 representing the lowest level of perceived corruption.

5.1.3. Binary variables

In the model, we have two binary variables, uprisings, and the Arab spring.

Table 5.1. Two-by-two table

Conflicts

	Uprising (0)	Uprisings (1)
Arab Spring (0)	5024	96
Arab spring (1)	5254	83277
total	10278	83373

(a) Arab Spring (AS)

In order to measure the impact of the Arab Spring on the Arab countries, and after collecting the data of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa region in the period between 2000/2020, we divided the data into two groups. The first is the years preceding the Arab Spring and is represented by the number 0, and the second is the years following the Arab Spring and is represented by the number 1.

(b) Uprisings (Us)

The Arab Spring is a popular movement that emerged in 2011. Even though the impact of the Arab Spring was evident in the region, some countries in the region did not experience popular uprisings. In order to analyze the data in a more appropriate way and so that the zero data of conflicts does not affect the model, we divided the countries in the region into two parts, with 0 representing the countries that did not witness popular uprisings in 2011, and 1 represents the countries that witnessed popular uprisings in 2011.

5.2. Estimation Techniques

5.2.1. Risk

The simple way to calculate the risk of a country after the Arab spring that did not witness uprisings would have conflict and compare it to the risk of a country after the Arab spring that witnessed uprisings would have conflict. The risk here indicates the probability of the event happening.

For a country that did not witness an uprising for example, out of a total of 10278 conflicts, 5254 resulted after the Arab spring. This means that the probability of conflicts, or the risk of conflicts, is $5254/10278 = 0.511$.

For the countries that witnessed uprisings, out of a total of 83,373 conflicts, 83,277 were after the Arab Spring which means that the probability of conflicts for these countries is: $83,277/83,373 = 0.998$.

This means that the risk probability of conflicts for the countries that did not witness uprisings after 2011 is less than the country that witnessed uprisings.

5.2.2. Incidence-Rate Ratio

To directly compare the two risks, we can calculate the incidence-rate ratio by dividing the risks of the two groups, $0.998/0.511$

Incidence-rate ratio =1.95

This means that the likelihood of a country that witnessed uprisings having a conflict in the period after 2011 is 1.95 times the country that did not witness uprisings in 2011.

The incidence-rate ratio helps us to compare the risks of the two groups. However, this form of analysis alone will not provide a comprehensive understanding. The reason is that we are interested in studying the effect that several variables have on the probability of the outcome.

5.3. Data Analysis

After conducting a Poisson regression to see the relationship between our dependent variable and independent variables, the results were as shown below:

Table 5.2. Poisson regression

Conflicts	Coefficient	Std. err	z	P> z
GDPPC	-.0004	3.00	-144.40	0.000
EL	-.043	.0006	-63.38	0.000
EF	.052	.0004	115.05	0.000
RF	.045	.0003	139.79	0.000
UR	-.147	.0018	-79.57	0.000
CS	-.386	.006	-60.14	0.000
_cons	7.162	.042	170.11	0.000

After indicating the IRR code to see the incidence-rate ratio.

Table 5.3. IRR in Poisson regression

conflicts	IRR	Std. err.	z	P> z
GDP_PC	.999	3.00	-144.40	0.000
ED	.957	.0006	-63.38	0.000
EF	1.054	.0004	115.05	0.000

RF	1.046	.0003	139.79	0.000
UR	.863	.0015	-79.57	0.000
CS	.679	.0043	-60.14	0.000
_cons	1289.922	54.31	170.11	0.000

By looking at the P value of all my independent variables (significant), we have a reason to believe that our independent variables are good predictors of the number of conflicts.

5.3.1 Binary Variables

Table 5.4. Binary variables

Conflicts	IRR	Std. err.	z	P> z
1.AS	19.02	.273	204.92	0.000
1.Us	17.84	.186	275.66	0.000
_cons	4.64	.077	91.45	0.000

After conducting Poisson regression model on our binary variables, the results show that for the period after the Arab spring, which is taking the value one, the expected number of conflicts is 19.02 times the period before the Arab spring while for the uprisings, the expected number of conflicts for the countries that witnessed uprising is 17.84 more than the countries that did not witness uprisings. The P values for both binary variables are significant.

After conducting a Poisson model, Negative binomial regression was conducted on our data in order to compare the two models. The results from Negative binomial regression give the LR test (likelihood ratio test) where the null hypothesis is that Alpha is 0.

When Alpha is zero, the negative binomial model reduces to the Poisson model. If the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, a negative binomial model should be used.

LR test of alpha=0: $\chi^2(01) = 9.4e+04$

Prob >= $\chi^2 = 0.000$

Since the P value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is that Alpha is zero is rejected which indicates that the Negative binomial model should be used.

As we mentioned above, the histogram of the dependent variable showed that there might have a high number of 0 counts which justifies using the zero-inflated negative binomial model instead of using the regular negative binomial model.

The zero-inflated model is split into two parts, the first part is the count model, and the second part is the inflation model. In the inflate part, The determination of the variables responsible for the inflation of the number of zeros is an object of inquiry. The variables that inflate the number of zeros has not to be the same as the variables on the count model. In order to determine which variables are inflating the model, we will test all the variables in STATA in the inflate part.

In our analysis, we utilized the statistical packages developed by J. Scott Long and Jeremy Freese. These packages offer methods for examining count data, which entails counting the number of instances or occurrences of a specific event. These packages are specifically designed to be compatible with the popular STATA statistical software program, which is widely employed for data analysis.

In the inflation section, we will seek to identify the variables that contribute to an increase in the number of zeros. When the coefficient is positive, it indicates that the likelihood of a zero count increases. The purpose of the inflation section is to explain the discrepancy between two groups, specifically the group with zero counts and the group with non-zero counts.

After executing the command `Listcoef`, we get the risk or the probability of staying in the zero group in the e^{*b} which is equal to IRR. The variables that are significant are the variables that inflate the data. We found that the variables that inflate our model are Ethnic fractionalization, democracy score and uprisings.

5.3.2. Zero-Inflated Negative Binomial Regression (ZINB)

After conducting a histogram test, the presence of 0, 1, and 2 conflicts can be clearly observed, indicating that the data is not truncated. Furthermore, the histogram provides evidence that the zero-inflated model may be a more suitable method for analyzing this data.

After conducting all tests, it was found that out of the four tests (Poisson model, negative binomial model, zero-inflated model, and zero-inflated negative binomial model) choosing to use the zero-inflated negative binomial model is the most appropriate.

Unlike the Poisson model, the ZINB test interprets small numbers such as 0, 1, and 2. Also, due to the large number of zeros in my conflict data, the negative binomial model will not run as efficiently as ZINB model, whereas this model will try to explain why the number of zeros is high while modeling the count data.

Due to the moderate correlation (0.6077) observed between unemployment and per capita, a dual analysis was performed, taking into account both the inclusion and exclusion of GDP per capita (GDP PC). The outcomes obtained from each model were then compared and recorded in a table. The most appropriate model will be selected based on the results, and its significance will be evaluated by focusing on the lowest p value, which will signify the strongest correlation.

Table 5.5. ZINB regression model results (with and without GDP PC)

	With GDP PC		Without GDP PC	
Conflicts	Coefficient	P> z 	Coefficient	P> z
GDP_PC	-.000	0.000		
ED	-.040	0.000	-.019	0.021
EF	.0205	0.002	.018	0.007
RF	.0169	0.003	.023	0.000
UR	-.184	0.000	-.248	0.000
CS	-1.170	0.000	-1.601	0.000
1.AS	3.042	0.000	2.220	0.000
0.Us	1.319	0.037	-.440	0.296
_cons	8.046	0.000	9.507	0.000
Inflate				
ED	-.207	0.000	-.229	0.000
EF	.266	0.000	.253	0.000

0.Us	12.51	0.000	12.054	0.000
_cons	-18.84	0.000	-17.317	0.000
/lnalpha	.799	0.000	.882	0.000
alpha	2.225		2.417	

After executing the code Listcoef in STATA we get these coefficients.

Table 5.6. Coefficients of the model (ZINB)

	With GDP PC		Without GDP PC	
Conflicts	e^b	P> z 	e^b	P> z
GDP_PC	1.000	0.000		
ED	0.960	0.000	0.981	0.021
EF	1.021	0.002	1.019	0.007
RF	1.017	0.003	1.024	0.000
UR	0.832	0.000	0.780	0.000
CS	0.310	0.000	0.202	0.000
1.AS	20.951	0.000	9.213	0.000
0.Us	3.743	0.037	0.644	0.296
constant		0.000		0.000
alpha	0.7999		0.8828	
lnalpha	2.2254		2.4176	

	e^b	P> z 	e^b	P> z
ED	0.813	0.000	0.795	0.000
EF	1.306	0.000	1.289	0.000
0.Us	2.7e+05	0.000	1.7e+05	0.000
constant		0.000		0.000

And by including the IRR to the equation,

Note: Estimates are transformed only in the first equation.

Table 5.7. ZINB IRR results (with and without GDP PC)

	with		without	
Conflicts	IRR	P> z 	IRR	P> z
GDP_PC	.999	0.000		
ED	.960	0.000	0.981	0.021
EF	1.020	0.002	1.019	0.007
RF	1.017	0.003	1.024	0.000
UR	.831	0.000	0.780	0.000
CS	.310	0.000	0.202	0.000
1.AS	20.951	0.000	9.213	0.000
0.Us	3.742	0.037	0.644	0.296
_cons	3122.71	0.000	13466.83	0.000
Inflate				
ED	0.813	0.000	0.795	0.000
EF	1.306	0.000	1.289	0.000
0.Us	2.7e+05	0.000	1.7e+05	0.000
_cons	-18.84438	0.000	-17.31713	0.000
/lnalpha alpha	.7999306 2.225387	0.000		

Table 5.8. Marginal change

+1	Change	p-value	+1	Change	p-value
GDP PC	-0.059	0.005	RF	4.854	0.029
ED	-10.425	0.004	UR	-47.716	0.006
EF	4.794	0.035	CS	-195.391	0.000
AS 1 vs 0	433.192	0.000	Us 1 vs 0	80.970	0.410

5.3.3. Comparing Count Models

To see if we used the best model, we use STATA to compare the results of the tests by running the code countfit.

The graph below shows that both NBRM and ZINB are the closest from zero or the error term. However, visually it is not clear which one is better.

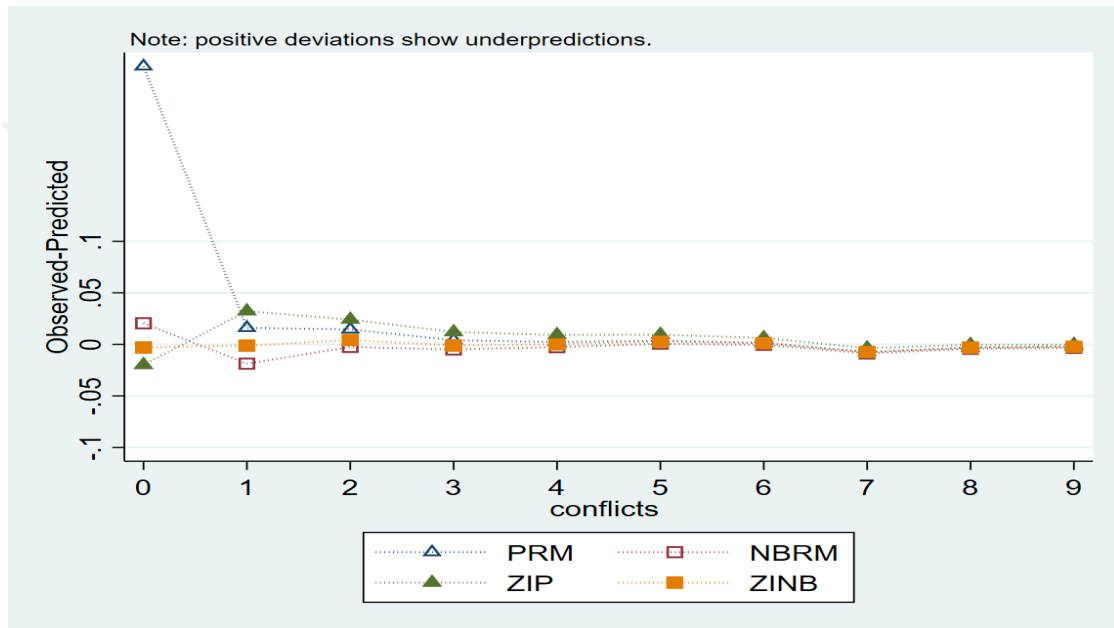


Figure 5.1. Graph of models

The next table shows the BIC and AIC results from the four models.

Table 5.9. Count model's BIC and AIC Results

	PRM	NBRM	ZIP	ZINB
BIC	68642.104	1703.221	58992.061	1634.643
AIC	68608.830	1666.250	58943.999	1582.884

As for the BIC and AIC, the model that produces the lowest is ZINB which means that it's better to use it for our data.

The table below compares the mean observed and predicted count for the four models.

Table 5.10. Mean observed and predicted count

Model	Max. Difference	At Value	Mean Diff.
PRM	0.284	0	0.033
NBRM	0.036	0	0.010
ZIP	0.031	1	0.011
ZINB	0.012	0	0.004

As we see, the lowest mean difference is produced by ZINB model (0.004).

The last table compares all four models using the BIC, AIC, and Alpha.

Table 5.11. Tests and fit statistics

PRM	BIC= 68642.104	AIC= 68608.830	Prefer	Over	Evidence
vs NBRM	BIC= 1703.221 AIC= 1666.250 LRX2=66944.580	dif= dif=66942.580 prob= 0.000	NBRM NBRM NBRM	PRM PRM PRM	Very strong p=0.000
vs ZIP	BIC= 58992.061 AIC= 58943.999 Vuong= .	dif= 9650.043 dif= 9664.831 prob=.	ZIP ZIP ZIP	PRM PRM PRM	Very strong p=.
vs ZINB	BIC= 1634.643	dif=67007.461	ZINB	PRM	Very strong

	AIC= 1582.884	dif=67025.946	ZINB	PRM	
NBRM	BIC= 1703.221	AIC=1666.250	Prefer	Over	Evidence
vs ZIP	BIC= 58992.061 AIC= 58943.999	dif=-57288.840 dif=-57277.749	NBRM NBRM	ZIP ZIP	Very strong
vs ZINB	BIC= AIC=1582.884 Vuong=.	dif= 68.578 dif= 83.367 prob=.	ZINB ZINB ZINB	NBRM NBRM NBRM	Very strong p=
ZIP	BIC= 58992.061	AIC=58943.999	Prefer	Over	Evidence
vs ZINB	dif= 57357.418 AIC= 1582.884 LRX2=57363.115	BIC=1634.643 dif=57361.115 prob= 0.000	ZINB ZINB ZINB	ZIP ZIP ZIP	Very strong p=0.000

All the tests above prefer the Zero-inflated negative binomial model when compared to other count models.

5.4. ZINB Regression Model Results

The results generated by the model, which includes the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP PC) variable, will be examined, given the significance of the Uprisings variable. As the outcome of the Uprisings variable is crucial to the hypotheses and objectives of this thesis, it was selected for further analysis and its results will be thoroughly discussed in this chapter.

Zero inflated negative binomial (ZINB) regression is a count model appropriate for the nature of the dependent variable (number of conflicts). NB permits controlling for overdispersion; ZINB allows controlling both for overdispersion and the excess of zeros in the dependent variable (Long 1997).

The zero-inflated regression procedure in the STATA was performed to calibrate the proposed ZINB regression model using the collected conflicts records. To demonstrate that the ZINB model provides the best fit to these data, another three regression models are also tested, namely the Poisson regression model, negative binomial regression model and zero-inflated regression model.

When several models are available, one can compare the model performance using the most regularly used measures such as the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). The AIC penalizes a model with a larger number of parameters and is defined as $AIC = -2 \ln L + 2q$, where $\ln L$ represents the fitted log-likelihood and q is the number of parameters for the model. The BIC penalizes a model with a larger number of parameters and a larger sample size and is defined as $BIC = -2 \ln L + q \ln(N)$, where N is the sample size. In general, lower values of the AIC and BIC statistics are preferable.

Table 5.9. gives the measures of fit comparison results of different regression models. It can be seen from the table that the ZINB regression model provides the best fit for conflict data owing to the smallest AIC and BIC statistics. These results confirm the appropriateness of using the ZINB regression technique to model the number of conflicts.

Table 5.5. gives the ZINB regression model results for conflicts in MENA Region in the period between 2000/2020. From the table, it can be seen that the coefficients for both ethnic fractionalization and religious fractionalization are positive and statistically significant at 0.002 and 0.003, indicating that ethnic fractionalization and religious fractionalization are strongly associated with conflicts. The model results also show that conflict is significantly influenced by GDP per capita, democracy score, unemployment rate, and corruption score. In the model, all the variables are statistically significant. Table 5.5. also shows that with the exception of ethnic fractionalization and religious fractionalization, the other variables GDP per capita, democracy score, unemployment rate, and corruption score have negative signs. This implies that the number of conflicts is expected to be greater when ethnic fractionalization and religious

fractionalization value is high, in contrast to GDP per capita, democracy score, unemployment rate, and corruption score. In addition, the results indicates that the expected number of conflicts is higher after the Arab Spring and for countries that did not witness popular uprisings. The negative signs of GDP per capita, democracy score, unemployment rate, and corruption score indicate that the expected number of conflicts are less when the country has a higher GDP per capita, higher democracy score, higher unemployment rate and lower level of perceived corruption.

For the model, the results of incidence rate ratio (IRR) which represents an increase or a decrease of the expected number of conflicts given a one-unit increase in the explanatory covariate. The IRR in the inflate model (inflation part) represents the relative rates of conflicts for countries with a value of 0 relative to countries with a value more than 0. An IRR of 1.0 indicates no change in conflicts, an IRR that is greater than 1.0 signifies an increase in the expected counts, and an IRR smaller than 1.0 reflects a decrease in expected counts. We detail the results of our initial analysis in Table 5.7. The second part of the table reports the analysis that directly considers the excessive zero counts. We find that the probability of the countries in the MENA Region having conflicts is higher after the Arab Spring. The IRR of 20.95 suggests a sharp increase and is statistically significant at the 0.00 level. This high number indicates that the Arab Spring greatly affected the number of conflicts in the region. Regarding the popular uprisings variable, the results are unexpected as the IRR of 3.74 for countries that did not witness uprisings shows a high likelihood of conflicts occurring in these countries. However, this result can be attributed to the fact that the countries that did not experience popular uprisings had a higher number of conflicts prior to the Arab Spring compared to countries that underwent uprisings. As a result, the incidence of conflict in these countries remained relatively unchanged after the Arab Spring, being close to the levels observed prior to the Arab Spring. The analysis considered all conflicts that occurred from 2000 to 2011, prior to the Arab Spring, and when compared to the countries that underwent uprisings (most of which had no conflicts prior to the Arab Spring), this result was obtained. This finding can be interpreted more clearly in the inflation section or the second part of the results.

We consider the independent uprisings result in more detail in the inflate section. However, STATA does not give us the results of the IRR for the inflate section, in order to

calculate IRR for the inflate section, we use e^b in table 5.6. which is equal to the IRR. The (e^b) of 2.7 indicates that the countries that did not witness uprisings have a higher probability of being in the zero group (no conflicts) than the countries that witnessed conflict and is statistically.

The results of the analysis indicate that the variable of GDP per capita has a negligible effect on the number of conflicts, as demonstrated by its IRR of 0.99. Conversely, the variable of democracy score has a notable impact, with an IRR of 0.960 suggesting that countries with higher scores on the democracy index are more likely to experience fewer conflicts than countries with lower scores. The ethnic fractionalization variable exhibits a positive relationship with the likelihood of conflicts, as evidenced by its IRR of 1.02, indicating that countries with higher levels of ethnic diversity are more prone to conflict. The religious fractionalization variable also shows a positive correlation with the occurrence of conflicts, with an IRR of 1.01 indicating that the greater the religious diversity within a country, the greater the probability of conflicts. The unemployment rate variable exhibits an inverse relationship with the number of conflicts, with an IRR of 0.83 indicating that countries with higher unemployment rates are less likely to experience conflict. Finally, the corruption score variable demonstrates a strong negative correlation with the likelihood of conflicts, with an IRR of 0.31 suggesting that more corrupt countries are more prone to conflicts. All of these results are statistically significant, as indicated by a P-value less than 0.05.

To further contextualize the results, Table 5.8 provides a marginal change analysis that illustrates the impact of a unit increase in each independent variable on the number of conflicts. The results reveal that an increase of one dollar in the unemployment rate leads to a decrease in conflicts by 0.05. Conversely, a one-unit increase in the democracy score reduces the number of conflicts by 10.42. The ethnic fractionalization variable has a positive impact, with a one-unit increase leading to a 4.79 increase in the number of conflicts. Similarly, a one-unit increase in the religious fractionalization variable results in a 4.85 increase in conflicts. Conversely, a one-unit increase in the unemployment rate leads to a decrease of 47.71 in the number of conflicts. The corruption variable has the greatest impact, with a one-unit increase in the leading to a decrease of 195,391 in the number of conflicts.

The binary variables provide further insight into the differences between two groups within each variable. The results for the Arab Spring variable reveal a significant difference, with the number of conflicts being 433.192 higher after the Arab Spring compared to before. However, the result for the uprisings variable is insignificant.



6. Conclusion

Internal factors come at the forefront of the causes of conflict in the Arab region, as they are the nucleus around which other factors interact, and they are the center of what is happening in terms of conflicts and violence in its various forms and levels. When analyzing the history of the region, up to what happened in 2011, it becomes clear that the tyranny of the Arab regimes, the oppression and persecution of peoples were the main factor for all conflicts.

The ethnic and sectarian dimension was a factor of instability and fueling conflicts, and the most prominent issues in this context are represented in the Kurdish situation in Iraq and Syria, and the Shiite-Sunni problem in the Gulf states, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, although the roots of this issue go back to the moment of establishing the national state after the First World War. It continued to aggravate the Arab situation due to the failure to reach a social contract within the frameworks of citizenship that would restore relations between them, which explode at every political crisis, including what happens during the years following 2011, and this factor will continue as one of the most important risks facing the national state and make it vulnerable to division and fragmentation.

Intellectual and ideological differences represent another aspect of the conflict that is no less dangerous than others, as conflicts in the region are almost devoid of an intellectual or religious background that directs them. Many of the civil wars in the Arab region were conflicts between political projects in which all parties tried to impose their vision by force of arms as it happened with the leftist and communist parties that led to many military coups, and later the Islamic currents, some of whose members considered that what was happening was a war against Islam and that they had to fight for its victory. In addition to the sectarian wars that took a broader turn in recent decades, especially in the Iraqi and Syrian cases.

Currently, the Arab world is standing at the crossroads, facing serious challenges and problems at once. The Arab spring, which had promised freedoms, democracy, human dignity, and social justice, ultimately failed to deliver on these promises. As a result, many countries in the region have faced internal conflicts and civil wars that have threatened their very existence. Other Arab states are also fragile and vulnerable, unable to effectively fulfill their main functions. As a result, the economic and social problems increased, political authoritarianism

has been consolidated, opportunities for development and democratic transformation were reduced, and non-state armed actors expanded.

Even though it is clear that the Arab Spring was born of a desire for more social, political, and economic freedom, the timing of the uprisings came as a complete surprise. These events provide, therefore, a unique setting for a natural experiment to analyze the impact of unexpected political event on the expected number of conflicts. The main findings presented throughout this study clearly point out that the Arab Spring had a huge impact on the number of conflicts in the MENA Region where the number of conflicts had significantly increased after the event. Moreover, the impact of the Arab Spring can be seen more when separating the countries that witnessed popular uprisings from the countries that did not witness uprisings without neglecting that the Arab Spring affected the region as a whole. The findings of the study regarding the Arab Spring reveal that the number of conflicts in MENA countries has increased compared to the period prior to the Arab Spring. On the other hand, the probability of being in the "zero group" or having no conflict was found to be 2.7 times greater for countries that did not experience uprisings compared to those that did. The results are in line with expectations and indicate that conflicts increased dramatically in the region after the Arab Spring. Also, there are some variables that led the uprisings to occur, which led to an increase in conflicts as a direct or inverse relationship. For example, we find that the variable of GDP per capita income had an inverse effect on conflicts, as the decrease in per capita income increases the probability of conflict. Secondly, the degree of democracy affected the number of conflicts, as the analyzed data in the model proved that the decrease in the degree of democracy increases the possibility of conflict, on the contrary, the analysis proved that the greater the degree of ethnic difference, the greater the number of conflicts. Also, for the variable of religious fractionalization with a similar degree, as an increase in the degree of religious difference increases the probability of conflict. The results regarding the unemployment rate indicate that an increase in the unemployment rate has a negative effect on the number of conflicts. Finally, corruption score variable results shows that the lower level of perceived corruption, the less conflicts the country will have.

While the study of conflict-event counts has grown remarkably in recent years, ambiguities remain with regard to proper model choice and count forecasting techniques. This

paper uses new conflict data from the MENA region from 2000 to 2020, which includes conflicts as dependent variable and GDP per capita, unemployment rate, democracy score, ethnic fractionalization, religious fractionalization, and corruption score as independent variables.

To demonstrate that our results are robust and independent of model specifications or assumptions included in the models, we estimated our data using a series of count models and compared the outcomes of each model to choose the most appropriate model. The statistical analyses gave a strong and robust support for the hypotheses, leading us to conclude that the Arab Spring event had an impact on the MENA region as a whole, and particularly on the countries that witnessed popular uprisings. Thus, Researchers who are interested in understanding the direct impact of certain variables on conflicts can use a zero-inflated model and include lagged values of conflict within the inflation stage of the model to reduce the bias caused by excess zeroes. This approach is beneficial because it allows the researcher to use lagged conflict variables, regardless of the time frame or unit of observation being studied.

7. References

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