THE REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Impact of Subnational Identities on National: A Comparative Analysis of Jordan and Lebanon

Ph.D. Dissertation

Ali HIJAZI

Department of Middle East Studies

Ph.D. in Middle East Studies

August 2025

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the defense examination for the dissertation titled "The Impact of Subnational Identities on National Security: A Comparative Analysis of Jordan and Lebanon" prepared by Ali Jihad Mohammad Hijazi with student number 195451202 studying in the field of Middle East Studies (Interdisciplinary) Department, Ph.D. in Middle East Studies (English) Program has been conducted in accordance with the related clauses of the Graduate Studies and Examination Code of YÖK (Council of Higher Education) on 01/08/2025 at 15:00, and has been approved by the majority of votes/unanimous vote.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my mother, for her endless love, and to the loving memory of my father

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This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance, support, and encouragement of many individuals and institutions to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

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Ethical Compliance Declaration

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing academic research involving human participants. The research project, titled *"The Dynamics of Sub-National Identities on National Security in the Middle East: A Comparative Analysis of Jordan and Lebanon (2018–2019)"*, received formal ethical approval from the **Institutional Ethics Committee of Social Sciences and Humanities Research and Publication** at **Social Sciences University of Ankara** (T.C. Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi) on **28 November 2023**, as documented in Decision No. 97190.

The research involved interviews and focus groups and was carried out with the full informed consent of all participants. Participants were informed of their rights, the purpose of the research, and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the process.

The study fully complies with the ethical guidelines of the university and the broader standards of academic research integrity. No deception, coercion, or harm was involved at any stage of the research.

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the impact of subnational identities (SNIs) on national security in the Middle East, with a comparative focus on Jordan and Lebanon in the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings. It explores how SNIs—defined as ethnic, sectarian, tribal, or regional affiliations that exist below the level of the nation-state—interact with state institutions, political structures, and social dynamics to influence national security outcomes. The study advances the argument that in fragile or hybrid regimes, subnational identities are not peripheral forces but central actors that both reflect and shape the legitimacy, stability, and cohesion of the state.

Drawing on a constructivist framework and employing qualitative comparative analysis, the research deconstructs the evolving relationship between identity-based mobilization and state responses in both case studies. Jordan and Lebanon serve as illustrative cases due to their divergent political systems, identity configurations, and post-2011 trajectories. Through a multi-dimensional model incorporating historical, institutional, and sociopolitical variables, the study reveals how identity-based grievances, perceptions of exclusion, and contestations over power and representation become securitized and politicized in different ways, often resulting in fragmented authority, weakened state legitimacy, and new modes of governance.

In Jordan, the interplay between tribal affiliations and national narratives is examined against the backdrop of a centralized monarchy and institutionalized loyalty mechanisms. In contrast, Lebanon's confessional power-sharing system highlights how entrenched sectarian identities can both stabilize and destabilize the state, producing parallel authority structures and enabling external interference. The comparative lens reveals shared patterns of identity-politics-driven instability, as well as distinct trajectories shaped by institutional design, elite strategies, and regional dynamics.

Ultimately, the dissertation offers a nuanced theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of national security in deeply divided societies. It argues for a reconceptualization of security frameworks in the Middle East to include the role of internal societal actors, identity-based cleavages, and the multidirectional relationship between state and society. The findings provide both scholarly insights and policy-relevant implications for understanding and addressing the security challenges arising from identity pluralism in the contemporary Arab world.

Keywords

Subnational Identities (SNIs); National Security; Middle East; Jordan; Lebanon; Arab Uprisings; Comparative Politics.

Özet

Bu doktora tezi, Arap Ayaklanmaları sonrasında Orta Doğu'da alt-ulusal kimliklerin (etnik, mezhepsel, kabilevi veya bölgesel aidiyetlerin) ulusal güvenlik üzerindeki etkilerini incelemektedir. Ürdün ve Lübnan örnekleri üzerinden yürütülen karşılaştırmalı analiz, bu kimliklerin devlet kurumları, siyasi yapılar ve toplumsal dinamiklerle nasıl etkileşim kurduğunu ve ulusal güvenlik sonuçlarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ele almaktadır. Çalışma, kırılgan veya melez rejimlerde alt-ulusal kimliklerin marjinal değil, bilakis devletin meşruiyeti, istikrarı ve toplumsal bütünlüğünü doğrudan etkileyen temel aktörler olduğunu savunmaktadır.

Yapılandırmacı bir kuramsal çerçeveye dayanan ve nitel karşılaştırmalı analiz yöntemiyle yürütülen araştırma, kimlik temelli toplumsal hareketlenmeler ile devletin bu hareketlere verdiği tepkiler arasındaki çok katmanlı ilişkiyi analiz etmektedir. Ürdün ve Lübnan; farklı siyasal sistemleri, kimlik yapılandırmaları ve Arap Ayaklanmaları sonrası yaşadıkları özgül dönüşümler sebebiyle karşılaştırma için uygun örnekler olarak seçilmiştir.

Ürdün örneğinde, merkezi bir monarşi çerçevesinde kabilevi aidiyetlerin ulusal kimlik söylemiyle nasıl bütünleştirildiği incelenmiştir. Lübnan'da ise mezhepsel güç paylaşımı sistemi, mezhep kimliklerinin hem istikrar sağlayıcı hem de istikrarsızlaştırıcı etkilerini ortaya koymakta; devlet otoritesinin parçalanmasına ve dış müdahalelere zemin hazırlamaktadır. Karşılaştırmalı yaklaşım, kimlik temelli istikrarsızlık dinamiklerinde ortak eğilimleri ve kurumsal farklılıkların güvenlik politikalarına etkilerini ortaya koymaktadır.

Bu tez, bölünmüş toplumlar bağlamında ulusal güvenlik çalışmalarına hem kuramsal hem de ampirik katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Orta Doğu güvenlik paradigmasının yeniden düşünülmesi gerektiğini savunarak; kimlik çoğulluğu, toplumsal aktörlerin rolü ve devlet-toplum ilişkilerinin güvenlik üzerindeki etkilerine ışık tutmaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, hem akademik literatüre katkı sunmakta hem de karar vericiler için yapıcı güvenlik stratejileri geliştirilmesine yönelik pratik çıkarımlar sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Alt-Ulusal Kimlikler (SNIs); Ulusal Güvenlik; Orta Doğu; Ürdün; Lübnan; Arap Ayaklanmaları; Karşılaştırmalı Siyaset

Transliteration Statement

This dissertation follows the transliteration system adopted by the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IJMES) *see transchart in Appendix*. Diacritical marks are used for the transliteration of key Arabic terms upon their first mention. Well-known historical names and place names are rendered in standard English spelling after initial transliteration when needed. This approach ensures consistency and academic accuracy in representing original Arabic terminology throughout the study.

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List of Key Abbreviations

EU	European Union
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
IAF	Islamic Action Front
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
ISec	International Security
LAS	League of Arab States
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
NSAs	Non-State Actors
NSAAs	Non-State Armed Actors
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SNIs	Subnational Identities
SPS	Sectarian Power-Sharing
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
US	United States
WMDs	Weapons of Mass Destruction
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction and Background

The Middle East, characterized by its intricate tapestry of diverse ethnicities, religious sects, and tribal affiliations, has long been a region marked by complex sociopolitical dynamics. In recent years, the interplay between Subnational Identities (SNIs) and national security has emerged as a pivotal concern, shaping the trajectory of states within the region.

This dissertation embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these dynamics, with a particular emphasis on the tumultuous years spanning. Against the backdrop of a rapidly changing Middle East, this research seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between SNIs and national security through a comparative analysis of Jordan and Lebanon. In a region where the coexistence of ethnic, religious, and tribal identities frequently intersects with political fault lines, examining these dynamics is crucial not only for advancing scholarly understanding but also for informing responsive and inclusive security strategies. With particular emphasis on the turbulent period following the Arab uprisings, this study aims to highlight how identity have reshaped the contours of state-society relations and recalibrated the very foundations of national security frameworks.

This introductory chapter sets the stage by delineating the objectives of the dissertation, presenting the overarching research questions and hypotheses, acknowledging the study's limitations, outlining the chosen methodology, and providing a structured overview of the subsequent chapters.

The subject of security, undoubtedly of paramount significance, has commanded extensive scholarly attention, occupying the thoughts of researchers, policymakers, and academics alike. Over the course of human history, the pursuit of security has remained an enduring and unwavering endeavor. In navigating the dynamic and ever-evolving global landscape, the concept of security is subject to a complex interplay of theories, historical events, and contemporary dilemmas. A comprehensive understanding, critical assessment, and pragmatic decision-making are paramount when confronting the myriad challenges confronting modern nation-states.

The traditional concept of security, historically anchored in the state's military prowess (Johanson, 2022), falls short in addressing the intricacies and emerging complexities of the contemporary global landscape in the 21st century. In this era characterized by interconnectivity, globalization, climate volatility, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

(WMDs), and epidemics, the contours of the security paradigm have been fundamentally redefined.

Accelerating globalization and the growing interdependence among states through complex economic, political, and technological networks have significantly complicated the global security landscape. Disturbances in one region can now produce far-reaching consequences, highlighting the urgent need for a comprehensive understanding of security dynamics. This shift has coincided with the evolution of threat typologies, which are no longer confined to conventional military threats but now encompass terrorism, transnational crime, cyberattacks, and the proliferation of WMDs—necessitating the adoption of holistic security approaches.

In this context, human security has emerged as a central pillar, alongside the strong interlinkage between security and economic stability. This has made the protection of critical infrastructure and economic interests indispensable. Transboundary challenges have also compelled states to strengthen regional and international cooperation, drawing on lessons learned from historical experiences. Meanwhile, rapid technological advancements—including artificial intelligence and biotechnology—have necessitated a reevaluation of traditional security paradigms and exploration of emerging threats. This, in turn, has reinforced the importance of continuous academic inquiry in the field.

Within the overarching context of security, it is imperative to acknowledge the following pivotal point, the existence of two intrinsic dimensions within the domain of national security. Firstly, there is an objective facet characterized by discernible components and elements that lend themselves to quantitative evaluation. Secondly, there exists a moral dimension intrinsically linked to the morale of individuals and their level of dedication to the prevailing political order. A comprehensive and all-encompassing analysis mandates the simultaneous consideration of both dimensions, recognizing their symbiotic relationship within the overarching context of security.

In the context of the Middle East, a term that gained widespread usage primarily during the Cold War era and remains a subject of ongoing debate regarding its precise definition (Andelson, 2012, pp. 47-50), the region presents a significant conundrum in terms of security instability. This instability is particularly pronounced within the Arab region, where the roots of conflicts run deep. Moreover, due to its geopolitical significance, any conflicts that arise within or between states in the Middle East have the potential not only to destabilize the entire region or disrupt the fragile balance of power but also to send shockwaves that reverberate globally, impacting global stability.

The security of Arab states is influenced by a multitude of factors, encompassing historical legacies, intricate political dynamics, and complex social issues. Arab states are inherently situated in a volatile region characterized by enduring conflicts, geopolitical tensions, and a mosaic of diverse ethnic and religious communities. These contextual factors, coupled with additional complexities such as economic fragility, authoritarian governance structures, and governance weaknesses, collectively contribute to the intricate web of security challenges confronting these nations (Fawcett, 2013).

In terms of political dynamics, the Arab countries have encountered significant obstacles in their pursuit of a comprehensive national project that aligns with the interests of the entire nation, similar to their challenges in realizing their state-building endeavors. These countries continue to grapple with outdated and fragile states that lack the necessary autonomy to make substantial political decisions. Despite the presence of modern urban infrastructure and enhanced connectivity facilitated by communication and media, the region still witnesses divisions along religious, social, political, and economic lines, often accompanied by instances of ethnic discrimination, thereby impeding the establishment of cohesive civil societies (Maliki, 2006). Moreover, the Arab states, both collectively and individually, have failed to attain even the most basic level of national security. This can be attributed to a combination of strategic breaches across various territories within the Arab region and structural weaknesses within their military establishments, which have experienced setbacks and infiltrations since the inception of the Arab nation-states (Rabie, 1984, p. 29).

The contemporary security landscape in the Arab world is shaped by a range of complex and evolving challenges. While multiple factors have contributed to the region's volatility, one critical and often underestimated dimension is the role of SNIs—particularly sectarian, ethnic, and tribal affiliations—in shaping national security dynamics. Rather than viewing national security solely through the lens of external threats or traditional military concerns, it is increasingly evident that internal sociopolitical fractures present equally pressing risks. Sectarian and ethnic divisions, when politicized or left unaddressed, can undermine social cohesion, erode the legitimacy of state institutions, and fuel cycles of instability. These identity-based cleavages often transcend borders, further complicating the regional security environment and providing fertile ground for both domestic and transnational conflict.

The disintegration of the Arab system is just one dimension contributing to the state of affairs in the Arab world. A more specific and profound factor is the breakdown of the intellectual framework related to identity dilemmas and the role of civilization. This disintegration can be primarily attributed to the enduring legacy of colonialism, which imposed divisions upon the Arab lands, resulting in divergent political identities. Consequently, the Arab population itself became fragmented into various partial identities, leading to disparities in distinct oppressive cultures that fostered particular policies. These policies encompass theocratic cultural approaches, tyrannical cultural policies, and rentier state policies, each with its unique consequences.

The Arab Uprisings: A New Era in Middle Eastern Studies

The Arab uprisings, as noted by Asaf Bayat (2017), are characterized as "revolutions without revolutionaries."[1] These uprisings have ushered in significant political consequences, prompting a critical reassessment of the prevailing assumptions that underpin Middle Eastern security. This reassessment focuses on the historical fracture line between power elites and societies that became evident during the Arab uprisings. Additionally, the emergence and proliferation of violent Non-State Actors (NSAs), particularly their unprecedented capacity to engage in both competition and cooperation with state actors, demand a comprehensive reconsideration of Middle Eastern security across its multifaceted dimensions.

We can consider that the Arab uprisings have highlighted and intensified the pre-existing divisions and shortcomings in the Arab world's political and intellectual framework. The Arab uprisings, accompanied by the fragility or collapse of numerous Arab regimes, exposed the vulnerability of major states to identity-based conflicts across borders. Defensive sectarian rhetoric led to divisions and the displacement of broader Arab and Islamic identities, permeating down to the grassroots level. With Islamist ideologies gaining prominence as the most effective recruitment tool following the militarization of their ranks. At the grassroots level, the "security dilemma" emerged as people retreated into familiar groups and justified violence based on identity (us versus

[1] Asef Bayat explores why the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world did not result in significant structural changes in power. Bayat argues that the Arab Uprisings was distinct from previous uprisings due to its lack of revolutionary leaders and the absence of a clear ideological agenda. Instead, the uprisings were driven by a collective sentiment among citizens that the state did not truly represent the interests of the populace as a whole but rather catered to the interests of a select few. Bayat traces the contours of the 2011 uprisings and illuminates their meaning, providing a theoretical and empirical study of the Arab Uprisings. He argues that the uprisings were marked by spectacular mobilization, spreading within and between countries with extraordinary speed. However, the uprisings caused limited shifts in structures of power, leaving much of the old political and social order intact.

them) (Fawcett, 2013, p. 194). Simultaneously, a war economy emerged as resource owners attracted individuals who had lost their livelihoods due to the civil war. Those with significant resources in terms of arms and funding capitalized on the opportunity to propagate jihadist sectarian rhetoric. By mid-2015, the regional power struggle had significantly influenced subnational identity dynamics. The weakness of the state and its failure to address the resurgence of SNIs (sectarian and ethnic) and competing supra-state identities (Nationalist, Islamic, Sunni, and Shia) seemed to diminish the ability of regional states to secure the loyalty of their people (Lynch, 2022).

Subnational dynamics played a significant role in shaping this era trajectory. Sectarian divisions influenced the protests and complicated subsequent government formation due to the country's power-sharing arrangements based on sectarian identities. In contrast, regional disparities and tribal affiliations influenced the protests also. The protests during this era represented pivotal moments of unrest with significant implications for national security. The responses of their respective governments, the economic contexts, external influences, and subnational dynamics all contributed to shaping the course of events and the outcomes of these critical periods in their histories.

Understanding these complexities is imperative for addressing the root causes of the protests and fostering long-term stability and security in the region. Protests serve as a crucial lens through which to analyze the dynamics and power struggles within political systems. By closely examining the various actors and their strategies during moments of societal unrest, valuable insights can be gained into the efficacy of political regimes and the effectiveness of their challengers (Allam, Berman, Clarke, & Schwedler, 2022). The study of protests allows for an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of different governance structures, identifying patterns of resistance and potential avenues for transformative change, through rigorous empirical analysis and theoretical exploration, to shed light on the intricate interplay between protesters and political regimes, ultimately contributing to our understanding of democratization processes and the development of more resilient and inclusive political systems (Allam, Berman, Clarke, & Schwedler, 2022).

In light of these considerations, there has been a resurgence of arguments put forth by Bahgat Korany in the 1980s, highlighting a crucial distinction in the Arab world. It is now evident that the security interests and needs of states and societies in this region do not always align (Korany, Noble, & Brynen, 1993, pp. 1-23; Korany, 1986).

1.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The dissertation's primary research question is as follows: *What is the impact of SNIs on national security of Middle Eastern states during the Post-Arab Uprisings Era?* This central question leads me to some secondary questions: Do Middle Eastern states perceive threats from their respective SNIs? To what extent do these SNIs contribute to national security challenges in Jordan and Lebanon? How do SNIs influence the dynamics and motivations behind protests in Jordan and Lebanon during the post-Arab uprisings era? Are there any common patterns or divergences in the impact of SNIs on national security challenges between Jordan and Lebanon during the specified time period? What strategies have Jordan and Lebanon employed to address the national security implications of subnational identity-driven protests?

The dissertation's primary hypotheses are:

Hypothesis 1: Religious, sectarian and ethnic identities in states have an important impact on the state's national security policies. Partial loyalties of subnational groups are often used within the state to circumvent the law and protect their interests as a priority, which negatively affects the achievement of national security independent of sectarianism and ethnicity, as well as global and regional powers. As a result, states' national security policy will employ multiple security strategies, particularly given the dilemma of developing a unified national identity that encompasses all SNIs and partial loyalties within the community.

Hypothesis 2: It is crucial to acknowledge that security policy often fails to align with the genuine national security interests or the systemic and structural imperatives faced by states in the region. Instead, the idiosyncrasies of individual states, as well as the prevailing ideologies and interests of societal and state actors, frequently hinder statesmen from effectively responding to the demands posed by the internal and international environments.

Hypothesis 3: I argue that the paramount interest of the ruling regime lies primarily in the preservation of local power by the political elites. Consequently, these elites fail to share the same security concerns as are relevant to other segments of society. It is the triumph of the regime's self-interest that shapes the political system into what can be characterized - a system devoid of a social pact and hence bereft of internal legitimacy.[2] In order to sustain the prevailing order, this system

[2] In this context, it must be clarifying that there is intricate interplay between the political elite and regime interests in Middle Eastern states, that can be characterized as a complex and multifaceted dynamic. This interaction is deeply

resorts to employing mechanisms of internal coercion, exhibiting external favoritism, and assuming the responsibility of ensuring security. Conversely, the sphere of security and foreign policy formulation, governed by the political elites, remains detached from the notion of "devolution" through which individuals bestow legitimacy upon state authority. Consequently, the state itself assumes a secondary role, overshadowed by the system, while outwardly projecting a facade of unity within the global arena.

1.3. Case Selection: Jordan and Lebanon

As a means of examining and validating these hypotheses, the dissertation will utilize Jordan and Lebanon (delineated in Figure 1.1.) as compelling case studies. Both countries experienced significant protest movements, making them ideal cases for scrutiny. By meticulously scrutinizing the influence of SNIs on national security, as exemplified through the examination of these protest movements, we aim to shed light on the intricate interplay between identity-based dynamics and national security challenges. These two cases, though geographically close, exhibit distinct socio-political structures and compositions, allowing us to draw meaningful comparisons and enrich our understanding of this complex phenomenon within the broader context of the Middle East.

The protest movements in these countries are relevant to the research question about how Middle Eastern regimes respond to threats to national security in the context of SNIs. The protests in both Jordan and Lebanon had elements of subnational identity mobilization, and understanding how regimes responded to these is crucial. In contrast, Jordan and Lebanon differ in terms of their socio-political structures, sectarian and ethnic compositions, and political systems (will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6). These differences provide an opportunity to examine how distinct factors influence responses to protests and national security policies. However, it's important to recognize that while these cases offer valuable insights, they also have their unique complexities. It's essential to acknowledge the specific limitations and nuances of each case in the research. These nations epitomize the contemporary landscape of low-capacity welfare states, distinguished by a conspicuous mobilization of sub-state identities. It is imperative to underscore that the regions

embedded in the region's political landscape. The political elite, often composed of influential figures, high-ranking officials, and power brokers, play a central role in shaping the policies and decisions of the regime. Their vested interests, which can range from economic gains to maintaining power and influence, are deeply intertwined with the stability and continuity of the regime.

encompassing Jordan and Lebanon offer an intriguing panorama, where the mobilization of SNIs intertwines intricately with prevailing security.

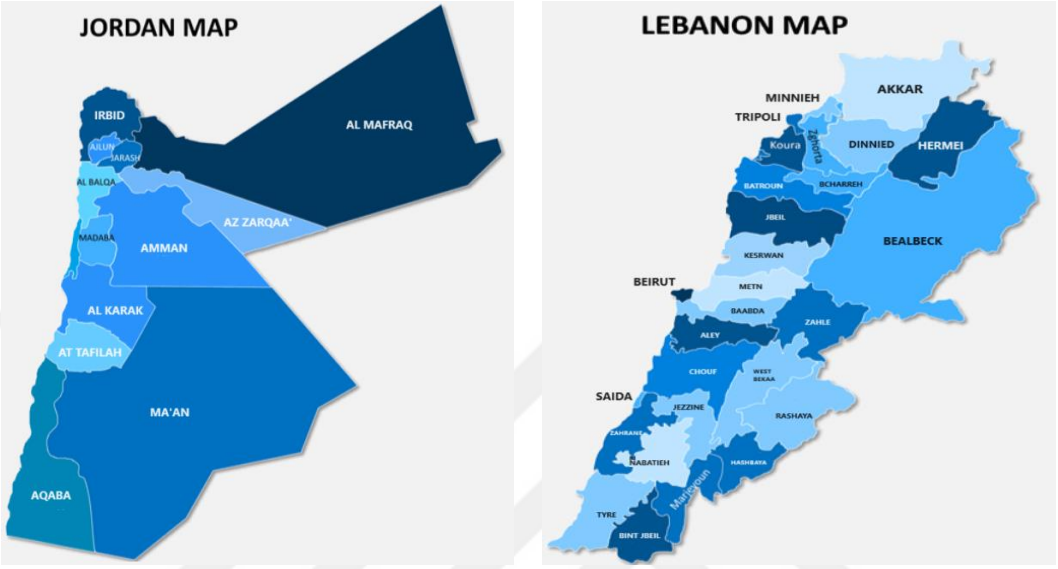

Figure 1.1 Maps of Jordan and Lebanon

To methodologically underpin this inquiry, a purposive sampling technique has been judiciously employed. Jordan and Lebanon have been selected as emblematic cases for rigorous analysis, predicated upon their distinct encounters with SNIs and the attendant implications for the realm of national security. The temporal scope has been meticulously chosen, strategically aligning with the post-Arab Uprising era and the consequential challenges that unfolded in the aftermath.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

Two significant limitations can be identified for research on the dissertation topic. The first one is the sensitivity of the topic is a limitation. While the mechanisms relevant to Jordan and Lebanon are likely to apply to other states in the region, we lack comparable data to reflect the proper relationship between society components on one side, and security policies themselves on the other. However, based on the limited data available, the thesis makes some comparative observations, and the extent to which the findings can be generalized and contributed to the literature. The difficulty of obtaining the official database in the Arab countries and relying on

what is published by research centers or what are called think tanks in research, analysis and reaching conclusions in their light.

The second one is the reliability of the sources has also put a limitation on our study. This is one of the objective difficulties in studying this topic, particularly given the limited access to resources, censorship, and harassment of scholars, as well as the lack of actual application of the right to obtain information, whether from official or unofficial bodies, but it can be achieved in part through the rough systematic use of primary and secondary data collection. It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations of this research. The selected case studies may not be fully representative of all Middle Eastern countries, and the chosen time frame may limit the generalizability of the findings. The study's reliance on available data sources may introduce biases or gaps in the analysis. However, these limitations will be acknowledged and discussed transparently to ensure the validity and reliability of the research.

Although a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the fieldwork process—targeting political stakeholders, civil society representatives, and individuals affiliated with subnational identity groups—the data collected were ultimately not incorporated into the empirical analysis chapters. This decision was driven by three main factors. First, the sample lacked sufficient diversity in terms of geographical, sectarian, and political representation, limiting its potential for comparative insight. Second, logistical and time constraints during the data processing phase hindered the comprehensive transcription, coding, and thematic integration required for rigorous qualitative analysis.

1.5. Methodology and Data

This dissertation will employ a comparative politics method to examine the dynamics and policy responses of Middle Eastern regimes to threats to national security following the waves of protests that occurred after 2011. The methodology will encompass several key components to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between SNIs and national security challenges. A comparative analysis will enable the identification of common patterns and divergences in the impact of SNIs on national security challenges between the two countries.

Data Collection: The research will rely on a combination of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data collected through interviews, focus groups, open-ended questions and discussions designed within a specific framework with relevant stakeholders such as government

officials, policymakers, security personnel, civil society representatives, and members of subnational identity groups. Secondary data gathered from scholarly articles, books, reports, policy documents, and media sources. The use of mixed-methods data collection provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter; the collected data undergo a rigorous analysis using qualitative techniques.

The research adopts two contrasting yet complementary methodological frameworks: The analytical approach and the systemic approach. The ***Analytical Approach*** breaks down complex topics into smaller, manageable parts for isolated examination. It follows a structured sequence—from simple to complex—while imposing an artificial hierarchy where needed and conducting comprehensive reviews to ensure thoroughness. This approach is marked by precision, detail, and clarity in mapping interrelations. However, it faces limitations in capturing the full complexity of social and identity-based realities in the Middle East, especially given the historical lack of studies exploring intersections among identity attributes (Barot, Bradley, & Fenton, 1999).

In contrast, the Systemic Approach focuses on the interconnectedness of identity dimensions, analyzing overlaps and accumulations among them (Donnadieu, Durand, Neel, Nunez, & Saint-Paul, 2018). It argues that complex systems cannot be fully understood by studying isolated components alone. Instead, it emphasizes the importance of understanding relationships within the system and with its environment, integrating multiple perspectives and cognitive frameworks. This approach overcomes the limitations of the analytical model by embracing complexity and interdependence. The following table shows a comparison between the analytical approach and the systematic approach.

Table 1.1 Comparison Between the Analytical Approach and the Systematic Approach

Analytical approach	Systemic approach
A traditional approach reduces the information system to its simplest basic components	It looks at the information system as a whole, with all its complexity and dynamics
Linear approach – Sequential - One-dimensional	Non-linear - Evolve over time - Multidimensional
Seeking to understand the problem	Seeks to understand the components of the system
Seeks to define responsibilities	Seeking to identify influences
It attempts to change individuals through awareness of causes	It attempts to influence the relationship between actors rather than individuals
Seeks to introduce order within a specific model	Seeks to determine the system by looking at a specific goal
Better knowledge of details, but less precise goals	Know the goals, but the details are less clear
fractional, interested in knowing the reasons (why)	Holistic purposes, it is concerned with knowing the destination (to where)

Proposed Analytical Model: Integrating Identity and Security in Jordan and Lebanon

To analyze the divergent dynamics of SNIs in Jordan and Lebanon, this study employs a dual-framework approach: Horizontal structural analysis for Jordan, and Vertical sectarian stratification for Lebanon. In Jordan, SNIs—particularly tribal and East Jordanian—are integrated into state structures, supporting a horizontal analysis across social, political, and security domains. The post-Arab Uprisings era and the influx of Syrian refugees further shaped these dynamics, highlighting the state's cohesive mechanisms.

In Lebanon, SNIs are deeply embedded in sectarian, economic, and geopolitical layers. They function not only within national borders but also through transnational alliances, necessitating a vertical analytical lens to capture the complexity of identity-based power structures amid economic collapse and regional interference. Rather than analyzing each country in isolation, the study proposes a composite model based on:

- Historical-Institutional Trajectories: Evolution of identity structures in each state.
- Levels of Identity Politicization: Degree to which SNIs are mobilized politically and in security frameworks.
- Permeability to Regional Influence: Extent to which identity groups facilitate foreign interventions.

This model treats SNIs as strategic actors—not merely social constructs—shaping national security in hybrid state systems of the Arab Mashreq.

Table 1.2 Comparison of Methodologies Between Jordan and Lebanon

Jordan: Analytical Methodology	**Lebanon: Analytical Methodology**
Tools: • Structural Analysis: Examines how tribal and national identity supports regime stability. • Threat Analysis: Identifies tensions, e.g., between East Bankers and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, and the impact of Syrian refugees. • Policy Analysis: Reviews state strategies to mitigate identity-based divisions.	Tools: • Sectarian Analysis: Evaluates the confessional system's impact on security and governance. • Foreign Intervention Analysis: Assesses the security implications of sectarian-based alliances with external actors. • Crisis Intersection Analysis: Analyzes how economic and political crises reinforce sectarian fragmentation.
Approach: • Horizontal Analysis: ○ *Social*: Tribal identity's role in social cohesion	Approach: • Vertical Analysis: ○ *Sectarian*: Sect-based structuring of politics and security

○ *Political*: Support or challenge to political authority ○ *Security*: Influence of identity on national security • Temporal Focus: Post-2013 developments, especially the Arab Uprisings and Syrian crisis.	○ *Economic*: Identity's interaction with economic collapse ○ *Regional*: Influence of foreign actors on domestic instability • Interactive Analysis: Interplay between internal sectarian dynamics and external pressures

This composite approach allows for interpreting **cross-cutting identity-security interactions**, which are not strictly horizontal or vertical. In addition, integrating the **historical-temporal dimension** to explain the origins of structural patterns. Furthermore, accounting for **external variables**, such as regional influence, NSAs, and formal/informal security institutions. Finally, ensuring **comparative generalizability**, making the model applicable to other Arab cases like Iraq, Bahrain, or Yemen.

Table 1.3 Example Applying the Composite Model

Dimension	Jordan (Horizontal Model)	Lebanon (Vertical Model)	Composite Framework
Identity Type	Tribal-National	Sectarian-Ethnic	Evolves over time
Relation to State	Integrative with institutions	Competitive over state power	Shaped by power dynamics
Security Impact	Emerges through loyalty and resource control	Manifests in armed balance and deterrence	Shifts based on regional politics and interventions

1.6. Objectives of the Dissertation

The research has three core objectives: To examine the complex relationship between national identity and SNIs and how it affects state stability, to investigate the socio-political factors shaping these identities through an interdisciplinary lens—drawing from sociology, political science, and psychology, and to analyze whether identity-driven protests and tensions follow similar patterns in Jordan and Lebanon, using SNIs as the independent variable and national security as the dependent variable.

The significance of this study lies in the Middle East's diverse ethnic and sectarian makeup, where identity-based divisions often fuel conflict, demands for autonomy, or struggles over power and resources. These dynamics pose direct challenges to national security. By analyzing factors such as grievances, territorial disputes, ethno-religious tensions, and political factionalism, the dissertation aims to develop new theoretical frameworks and contribute original insights to the academic discourse on identity and security in hybrid Middle Eastern states.

1.7. Plan of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into a series of thematic chapters that build cumulatively toward the central research question. Following the introduction, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are established (Chapter Two and Chapter Three), followed by a critical review of the relevant literature.

Subsequent chapters present the comparative case studies of Jordan and Lebanon, analyze the post-Arab Uprisings security environment, and examine the role of SNIs in shaping national security. Chapter Five synthesizes the empirical evidence from both case studies and identifies cross-cutting themes and contrasts in how SNIs manifest, are mobilized, and affect national security across Jordan and Lebanon. Chapter Six offers an expanded comparative reflection in light of regional dynamics. It contextualizes the findings within broader post-Arab Uprisings transformations, interrogates the regional patterns of SNI-based mobilization, and considers implications for regime durability, state fragmentation, and future stability across the Middle East.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Seven) synthesizes the key findings and outlines implications for both theory and policy. It also provides an overview of the research's implications and contributions to the field.

CHAPTER TWO: NATIONAL SECURITY AND SNIs: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War era marked the emergence of several indicators signaling a shift from modernity to postmodernism, presenting a critical standpoint. Among these indicators, four are particularly noteworthy (Hajjaj, 2003, p. 143). (1) The crisis of the nation-state, accompanied by ethnic revolutions and separatist movements, has challenged traditional state structures and boundaries. (2) Civil society has gained prominence as a counterforce to the state's dominance over the public sphere, fostering new dynamics in governance and activism. (3) The resurgence of religious movements in Christianity, Islam, and Judaism has exerted a profound influence on the global political landscape. (4) The growing significance of identity and cultural factors has become a salient aspect in shaping international relations and politics.

In recent times, there has been a prominent discourse exploring the significance and interpretation of national security for states, as well as the interplay and intersection of identities within them. This debate has assumed a central position within the theoretical framework of security studies, aiming to discern the contemporary logic of security in global politics at large and regional politics in the Middle East specifically. This endeavor moves beyond the initial emphasis on foundational concepts associated with the realist model and the traditional understanding of security, which revolved around safeguarding the state against internal and external threats. In light of these circumstances, the study will be undertaken to construct an enhanced theoretical framework for the national security of states in the Middle East, drawing upon four primary indicators aligned with contemporary trends.

The first dimension is the psychological dimension of security perception. This dimension pertains to the emancipation from feelings of insecurity as an alternative to the potentiality of security threats. It involves the perception of security as the liberation from fear and the absence of threats, constituting an emotional state in which a state perceives itself as secure in terms of its existence and survival. Thus, we encounter a subjective aspect of security closely connected to the sentiments of individuals and societies.

The second dimension is the political dimension in the formation of the security value. Due to legal and political considerations, upholding the centrality of the state as an autonomous entity

with full sovereignty over its territory holds utmost importance as a primary security value when compared to other values. Consequently, the concept of security has become intertwined with political connotations and dimensions. Within the endeavors of states to safeguard their security, two distinct types of targets can be discerned: (a) Subjective targets: These encompass the pursuit of defensive measures, including the establishment and maintenance of military forces, to protect against potential threats. (b) Adaptive targets: These pertain to transforming the international community's stance from aggression towards the state to a more favorable and non-threatening position.

The third dimension is the developmental dimension of the security operation. Within this context, development is recognized as a fundamental determinant of the security concept, as certain levels of stability cannot be achieved without significant degrees of development. The relationship between development and security is characterized by a direct proportional correlation, illustrating their functional complementarity. Robert McNamara is acknowledged as a leading proponent of this proposition and a notable critic of the traditional approach to security. He endeavors to expand security studies beyond the narrow confines of the military sphere (McNamara, 1968, p. 149).

The fourth dimension is the social connotations of constructing security. The social structures within a state exert a significant influence on its security, either positively or negatively. The consolidation of political and social unity, along with the management of internal diversities such as ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences, serve as a means of fortifying security upon which the state relies. In this context, the state is consistently regarded as the fundamental unit of analysis, and it deliberately defines the concept of security within specific social contexts.

This delineation or differentiation of security as a concept separate from the realm of war studies and military history has provided liberal and constructivist scholars with the opportunity to draw upon the sociological tradition, which focuses on sub-state civic interactions, as well as the critical tradition that encompasses structural violence and other critical security studies influenced by postcolonial, feminist, and critical perspectives. This transformative process has reshaped the conceptual foundations of the field. Consequently, this study places human existence (human security), non-human aspects (environmental security), and social structures (such as the global economy and collective identities of different races) at the core of its security analysis, reflecting a broadened perspective on security considerations.

2.2. Structural Framework of National Security and the Levels of Analysis

Both traditional and contemporary approaches have struggled to construct a definitive framework in which the concept and practice of security are fully articulated. Hence, it is possible to identify three primary characteristics when establishing a foundational concept for security. The first is the relativity adjective. The pursuit of security by a state occurs through interactive relationships with both the internal and external environments, comprising various actors. Consequently, the concept of security remains in a constant state of flux, contingent upon the magnitude of changes in these two environments. As a result, security becomes a relative matter, as it cannot be achieved in an absolute sense due to the ongoing potential threats faced by states within the international system.

The second one is the reflexive adjective. The reflexive nature of security signifies that behind the description and attainment of security, states aim to safeguard deeper goals related to the preservation of specific interests and values. The extension of these interests and values is considered a potential threat to the state's physical existence. Consequently, a state's defense of its territorial integrity implicitly reflects the defense of these cherished values, emphasizing the intrinsic connection between security and the preservation of core principles.

The third one is the dynamic adjective. Security assumes a dynamic and evolving characteristic, marked by rapid and permanent transformations that necessitate proactive adaptations. It is a fluid concept that resists static definitions and cannot be instantly achieved or secured by a state. Instead, security is an ever-changing concern, influenced by internal developments within a state as well as the evolving dynamics of the international system. This dynamic nature of security underscores the need for continuous assessment and adaptive responses to effectively address emerging challenges.

In contrast, in the post-Cold War era, fundamental shifts have emerged, the state encountered challenges in maintaining a balance and effectiveness in its bureaucratic functioning, leading to a perceived decline in its capacity to address significant issues, as articulated by the renowned social scientist Daniel Bell. Bell captured this sentiment with his renowned statement that the state is less effective in dealing with major problems, yet disproportionately engaged in addressing minor issues (Czempiel E.-O. , 1989, pp. 236-245).

According to John Ruggie, there is a notable absence of a comprehensive vocabulary or dictionary capable of adequately capturing and describing the novel forces that are driving the ongoing transformation in contemporary global politics (Walt, 1998, p. 36). Increasingly, international relations have been framed by internal currents and dynamics that transcend national borders and require reactions from governments whose ability to operate within a "sovereign" framework is gradually diminished (Brzezinski, 1993, pp. 91-92).

In light of the aforementioned, the core interest in patterns of security issues associated with new threats such as terrorism, the environment, poverty, development, and humanitarian issues represented in issues of migration, refugees, human rights, intervention, etc. It makes us to observe and realize another value and a crucial element in approaching with the field of security knowledge, namely, the deconstruction of the dialectical relationship between the international system, the state, society and individuals in its sociological, political, economic and value dimensions, which intertwine significantly influences the formation of national security for states and shapes their operational frameworks.

2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This theoretical framework seeks to delve into the intricate interplay between SNIs and national security in the specific context of Middle Eastern nations, specifically concentrating on the case studies of Jordan and Lebanon. By comprehensively analyzing the dynamics of SNIs within these countries, significant and enlightening observations can be gleaned regarding the intricate and multifaceted issues that emerge when diverse identities intersect with national security imperatives. To provide a robust foundation for this study, an examination of various theoretical perspectives will be conducted to elucidate the intricate dynamics at play between SNIs and national security. The theoretical frameworks encompass a broad array of theories that closely align with the subject matter under investigation. However, as elucidated later in this study, the constructivist theory will serve as the overarching theoretical framework, offering a comprehensive basis for rigorous scientific exploration and analysis.

Given the intricate and multi-dimensional nature of SNIs and their intricate connections to national security, this study endeavors to offer a comprehensive comprehension of the dynamics within Middle Eastern states. By conducting a thorough analysis of the specific cases of Jordan and Lebanon, we aim to explore the applicability of various theories to these case studies and their

potential to unveil invaluable insights pertaining to the interplay between SNIs and national security in the Middle East. This will be accomplished through insightful comparisons and a compelling rationale for the selection of a particular theory over its counterparts, thus shedding light on the complex dynamics at hand. Subsequent sections of this research will delve into these aspects in detail.

It is important to acknowledge the existence of numerous theoretical frameworks that may initially appear suitable for this study. However, they were deliberately excluded for specific reasons that will be elucidated later (clarifying the rationale behind selecting the constructivist theory as the theoretical framework for this research). Several noteworthy theoretical frameworks, among others, are briefly outlined below.

1. Theories of nationalism: These theories emphasize the influential role of identity in shaping political behavior and the formation of cohesive or fragmented national societies. They recognize the coexistence and potential conflicts between SNIs and dominant national identities, which can create tensions impacting the stability and security of the nation-state.
2. Identity Politics Theory: This theory explores the politicization and mobilization of SNIs within the political and social contexts of the Middle East. It sheds light on power dynamics, grievances, and struggles for recognition as different subnational groups assert their interests based on identity, providing insights into their implications for national security.
3. Theories of separation and ethnic conflict: These theories are employed to analyze the potential of SNIs to challenge state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Given the presence of diverse ethnic, religious, and sectarian groups in the Middle East, they offer valuable perspectives on how SNIs intersect with national security concerns, potentially leading to tensions, violence, or demands for autonomy or independence.

Within the field of security studies, various theoretical trends have emerged and evolved over time. The existing literature on security studies categorizes these trends into two main classifications (as identify the sources). The first classification recognizes the need to expand the concept of security beyond national boundaries. This perspective acknowledges that security encompasses not only military concerns but also extends to other entities, such as individuals, societies, and specific dimensions like the environment, social factors, and the economy. In this view, these dimensions are treated as distinct entities in their own right, rather than being solely

dependent on the military dimension (Collins, 2016, p. 76). The second classification differentiates between traditional and non-traditional security theories based on the origin of threats. Traditional security theories primarily address military threats originating from other states and propose military responses as a means of addressing them. On the other hand, non-traditional security theories encompass threats that do not originate from states, are not solely military in nature, and cannot be adequately addressed through military means alone. These threats include issues such as epidemic diseases, illegal immigration, the consequences of war or instability, environmental pressures, human trafficking, drug smuggling, water security, and energy security (Ayoob, 1995, p. 174).

Accordingly, theories in the field of security studies are commonly classified based on four interconnected factors that serve as key elements in the categorization and analysis of theories within the realm of security studies (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, pp. 189-191). Firstly, they examine the distinction between issues that constitute security concerns and those that do not. Secondly, these theories consider the actors who are identified as the subjects of the threat, whether it is the state, individuals, or society as a whole. Thirdly, they analyze whether the security threats originate internally or externally to the entity under consideration. Lastly, these theories contemplate the various dimensions of security that hold significance, such as the military, economic, or political aspects. It is crucial to emphasize careful consideration of variables and the direction of causation, which should be determined based on the research question, available data, and underlying theoretical frameworks. In the context of this discourse, the dependent variable will be the national security of Middle Eastern countries. The ensuing discussion will encompass an exploration of constructivism, securitization, realism, liberalism, providing distinct perspectives on the intricate relationship between SNIs and national security. Specifically, the focus will be on comprehending how identities, as an independent variable, exert influence on national security, shaping perceptions of security threats, informing security strategies, and influencing state behavior.

2.3.1. Constructivist Perspective: The Main Theoretical Framework for the Study

The emergence of constructivism as a novel perspective in the realm of security studies can be attributed to the extensive debates that took place in international relations during the 1980s and early 1990s, where rational and reflexive approaches were at the forefront. This distinction tends to reflect the traditions of American sociology more prominently than European ones. During

that period, European trends, such as critical security studies and particularly the Copenhagen School, were characterized by their strong connection to normative and political concerns, along with their criticism of Peace Research. On the other hand, American constructivism evolved as a response to the ongoing debates between rationalism and reflexivity in the field of security studies (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 191).

These discussions proved instrumental in acquainting constructivists with the comprehensive elements and variables of the theory, facilitating the development of an integrated perspective that lays the foundation for a cohesive and inclusive theory of international relations. Notably, constructivism has been lauded as a bridge that bridges the gap between positivist and post-positivist trends (Building a bridge between the two directions (the neoliberal/neorealist debate and the rational/reflexive debate), effectively bringing together diverse paradigms in the field of international relations (Wendt, 1992, pp. 394-396).

Constructivism and Security

Constructivism has yielded captivating research on the concept of security, particularly concerning epistemological and ontological aspects. It embodies a social approach or theory that extensively investigates the notion of security. Among the notable constructivist studies, two hold particular significance for their exploration of security in connection with various variables. The first noteworthy work is Wendt (1992) as he argues that anarchy is not an inherent characteristic of the international system but rather a social construct created by states, he contends that the behavior of states is shaped by their shared beliefs and norms, which are created through social interaction. Therefore, the international system is not a fixed structure, but rather a dynamic and evolving social system. Wendt's argument is based on the idea of intersubjectivity, which refers to the shared understanding of the actors within a social system (Wendt, 1992, pp. 410-412). The second is the research conducted by Peter Katzenstein. In this book, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium*, Katzenstein explores the role of regions in shaping world politics. He argues that regions are socially constructed and that they play an important role in shaping the behavior of states (Gourevitch, et al., 2008).

Security as a Social Construct: The Impact of Identity and Norms

According to the constructivists approach, the concept of security, like other notions, with a keen awareness of the diverse historical and social contexts that shape the process of social interaction among actors. By emphasizing ideal and immaterial factors such as identity, norms, and culture in the construction and enactment of security, constructivists introduce novel analytical elements distinct from traditional, abstract, and particularly liberal or realist analyses of security. This perspective enriches the understanding of security dynamics, offering a more nuanced and contextually grounded approach to security studies (Williams, 2008, pp. 61-63).

The second focal point of constructivist analysis revolves around the pivotal role of identity, as elucidated by Hopf (1998). On a local level, identity serves three essential functions. Firstly, it defines the self and the other, shaping perceptions and interactions. Secondly, it encompasses a crucial set of interests and preferences, significantly influencing behavioral choices and individual domains. On the international stage, identity enables countries to comprehend each other based on the identity attributed to them, thereby influencing their preferences and behaviors. Simultaneously, this process perpetuates their own identity through routine social practices. This emphasis on identity provides a profound understanding of how it influences both local and international dynamics, shedding light on the reciprocal relationship between identities and behavior (Hopf, 1998, pp. 174-175).

In his examination of the interplay between identity, culture, and national security, Peter Katzenstein (1996) introduces cultural and institutional factors to augment the prevailing concept of the international system's environmental structure. He identifies three levels of international cultural environments that influence the process of formulating national security policies. Firstly, he highlights the significance of official institutions and security systems such as NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation, and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Secondly, Katzenstein emphasizes the existence of a global political culture encompassing norms of sovereignty, international law, standards related to statehood establishment, and principles pertaining to the integration of political and social methodologies facilitated by professional advisory networks. Additionally, transnational political discourse, fostered by international social movements like Amnesty International, plays a role in shaping these cultural environments. Lastly, international patterns of friendship and enmity are infused with notable cultural dimensions. As evidenced in the cases of Canada and Cuba, although both countries possess comparable material

capabilities in their relations with the United States (US), Canada is perceived as an ally, while Cuba is perceived as a source of threat, indicating the influence of cultural factors in defining their security dynamics (Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996, pp. 37-39).

The cultural environment profoundly influences not only the behavior of states but also their identity and security interests. This impact becomes evident in two distinct aspects. Firstly, the very existence of states as entities is shaped by the international community's recognition of their legal sovereignty, enabling even weaker states to persist. Secondly, the global system's dynamics are subject to change over time due to evolving international norms and local contextual factors. An illustrative example is the evolving perception of "war" as a measure of state strength, which has shifted from being viewed as an effective test in the late 1990s to becoming a "necessary evil" in contemporary times. These insights underscore the significance of the cultural environment in shaping states' identities and security considerations within the international arena (Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996, p. 52).

Critical Constructivism

In contrast to traditional constructivism, critical constructivism directs its analysis of the relationship between identity and security towards national identity narratives. It examines how historical presentations of identity and its dominance in specific contexts have served to legitimize certain political behaviors. Within this framework, identity is viewed as inherent, unstable, and subject to continuous contestation. The concept of security and threat assumes a central role in this approach, as it helps delineate the boundaries between "us" and "others" and identifies the sources of perceived threats. Departing from the conventional state-centric structural analysis, critics of critical constructivism have shifted their focus to include new actors, notably the notion of the security group as a novel means to achieve security.

In the realm of linguistic tradition within critical constructivism, many scholars argue that fundamental realist concepts, such as the national interest, are not inherent or fixed but are discursively shaped by representations of states, individuals, and linguistic elements. Through an analysis of these representations and their implications for political practice, constructivists reveal that central realist concepts, like the national interest, assume a rhetorical form, influenced by linguistic elements such as nouns, adjectives, and metaphors. As a result, foreign and security policies do not emerge solely from an objective national interest; rather, they are legitimized

through specific constructs that are not mere words but rather conform to the rules of a particular discourse. This perspective highlights the dynamic and constructed nature of political concepts and their significance in shaping policy decisions and practices (Buzan & Hansen, 2009, p. 198).

The theoretical framework adopted for this thesis centers on the constructivist perspective in international relations, emphasizing the significant role of ideas and norms in shaping the dynamics of national security. According to constructivists, the identities and interests of states are not fixed or predetermined; rather, they are malleable and influenced by social and cultural factors. Moreover, constructivists contend that identity plays a pivotal role in shaping international relations. States, as actors in the international system, possess adaptable identities, which can be influenced and transformed through interactions and relationships with other nations. These identities, in turn, impact their behaviors, decision-making processes, and overall engagement in global politics (Sussex, 2022, pp. 36-38). Employing a constructivist lens, this research aims to illuminate the dynamic interplay among ideas, norms, and identity in the realm of national security. By conducting a thorough examination of these factors, this study seeks to advance our comprehension of the intricate and diverse nature of global politics, while offering valuable insights for policymakers and researchers alike.

2.3.2. Theoretical Framework: The Dominance of Constructivism

When contemplating a theoretical framework for a dissertation investigating the intricate relationship between national security (as the dependent variable) and SNIs (as the independent variable), constructivism emerges as a compelling and robust choice. The constructivist perspective offers a comprehensive lens through which to delve into the social construction of identities and their profound impact on security dynamics. Its emphasis on shared identities, norms, and beliefs aligns harmoniously with the focus on SNIs and their implications for national security. This theoretical framework enables a critical examination of how SNIs are constructed, negotiated, and interplay with national security concerns. Employing constructivism allows for an exploration of how these identities shape perceptions of security threats at both the individual and group levels, and how they influence a country's behavior, security strategies, and policies implemented in response to security challenges.

Furthermore, the constructivist emphasis on socialization and the diffusion of norms offers researchers the opportunity to explore the impact and transformation of SNIs through interactions

with other identity groups, institutions, and international actors. This analytical lens provides valuable insights into the factors that influence security behavior among subnational groups and sheds light on the dynamics that may lead to either conflict or cooperation. Moreover, constructivism offers an apt framework for examining how state responses to SNIs impact national security. This entails analyzing the ramifications of securitizing specific SNIs on state policies, the legitimacy of security measures, and potential implications for social cohesion and intergroup relations. Overall, constructivism provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for investigating the complex relationship between national security and SNIs. It facilitates an in-depth exploration of the construction and negotiation of identities, and their influence on security dynamics at various levels. Adopting this framework enables the development of a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between national security concerns and SNIs, thereby enhancing the existing body of knowledge in this domain.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL SECURITY AND SNIs: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the elements previously discussed within the study plan, the literature review will be organized into two primary categories. The first will encompass studies pertaining to national security, while the second will delve into SNIs research. This structuring is intended to enhance and refine the conceptual framework. Each study within these groups will be presented chronologically to provide a clear historical perspective.

3.1. Literature Review: Existing Studies on National Security and SNIs

To further enrich the theoretical framework, we can introduce the idea of cross-pollination between these two distinct domains. This cross-disciplinary approach may offer valuable insights into the interplay between national security and SNIs, shedding light on how changes in one sphere can influence or be influenced by the other. Additionally, we can emphasize the importance of exploring how shifts in SNIs may impact a nation's approach to national security and vice versa. Thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of these two aspects within the broader context of our research.

Nevertheless, the forthcoming section diverges from the customary structure of a literature review. Rather, it constitutes a reconfiguration of the viewpoints articulated by several prominent scholars, all framed within the intricate model of dimensions. As a result, the contributions of certain authors will be encompassed in diverse sections of the analysis. It takes the form of a comprehensive restructuring of the theories and perspectives advanced by renowned scholars within the domain of security and identity studies. Consequently, the insights of esteemed figures such as Barry Buzan will be across various segments of this analytical framework.

3.1.1. An Overview of National Security Studies

The concept of national security is a multifaceted and perpetually evolving construct, as well as a multidisciplinary field that encompasses the study of threats to a nation's sovereignty, stability, and well-being. The dynamic challenges to national security are in a constant state of flux, necessitating a perpetual recalibration of state responses. Notwithstanding these fluid circumstances, the fundamental objective of national security remains unaltered: the safeguarding

of a state's intrinsic interests and the welfare of its citizenry (Holmes, 2014). The scholarly discourse on national security is extensive and continues to burgeon, scholars and researchers in this field explore various dimensions of security, including military, political, economic, environmental, and human security. Among the seminal works within this domain, our study will navigate a dual focus, encompassing a comprehensive examination of national security principles in a broader context, while also scrutinizing the specific intricacies of the Middle East region. The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of thinking about security, with scholars expanded the notion of security beyond military concerns to include societal, economic, and environmental dimensions. The following tabular representation systematically categorizes the extant body of literature based on the comprehensive scope of research endeavors.

Table 3.1 Systematically Categorizes the Extant Body of Literature Based on the Comprehensive Scope of Research Endeavors

Main Scope and Theme	Selected Key Sources (or Sub-Scope) and Details about the Sources
Conceptualizing National Security **Understanding the concept of national security is foundational to the field. Notable works in this area include:**	Buzan and Wæver (2003) emphasizes the importance of regional security complexes and how they shape national security dynamics Baldwin (1997) focuses on the conceptual issues of "security" as opposed to other normative and empirical concerns. Amartya Sen's (1999) human security perspective expands the concept to include individual well-being, freedom, and the reduction of vulnerabilities. Posen's (1993) work discusses the security dilemma, which explains how states' efforts to enhance their security can inadvertently lead to conflict. Hughes and Lai (2011) compiles various articles and chapters written by different authors on the topic of security studies. Finally, Gray (2011) provides an in-depth analysis of policy and strategy for national security.
Security Threats and Challenges **National security studies examine a wide range of threats and challenges. Some significant areas of research include:**	Terrorism Studies: Researchers like Bruce Hoffman (2017) and Martha Crenshaw (1981) have made substantial contributions by analyzing the motivations, tactics, and counterterrorism strategies. Cybersecurity: Works by scholars like Richard Clarke (2010) explore the evolving threats in cyberspace and strategies for securing critical infrastructure. Environmental Security: Environmental issues, such as climate change and resource scarcity, are increasingly seen as security threats. Prominent scholars like Dalby (2022) examine the intersection of environmental change and national security.
Geopolitics and International Relations	Realism and Neorealism: Scholars like Waltz (1979) have contributed to the realist school of thought, emphasizing the role of power and great power competition in shaping national security.

The field of national security is closely tied to international relations. Researchers have explored:	Constructivism: Wendt (1999) has influenced constructivist perspectives, which emphasize the role of ideas, norms, and identity in International Security (ISec). Transnational Threats: The rise of NSAs, such as transnational terrorist organizations and criminal networks, has spurred research on new security challenges.
National Security Policies and Strategies **Research in this area delves into how states formulate and implement national security policies:**	National Security Strategy Documents: Policy documents, such as the U.S. National Security Strategy, are analyzed to understand a nation's priorities and strategic outlook. Deterrence and Arms Control: Researchers like Jervis (1979) have explored deterrence theory and arms control agreements in the context of nuclear security. Humanitarian Interventions: Debates surrounding the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian interventions have gained prominence in national security discourse.
Contemporary Issues and Emerging Trends **Recent developments in national security studies include:**	Cyber Deterrence: Scholars are exploring the concept of cyber deterrence and the challenges of deterring cyber threats. Artificial Intelligence and National Security: Research on AI's impact on military capabilities, intelligence, and decision-making is gaining traction. Pandemic Preparedness and Health Security: The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted discussions on the intersection of public health and national security.

Dissertation's Thematic Scope

In this discussion, the dissertation will investigate various dimensions of national security, focusing on two distinct thematic groups. The first group explores the dynamics of SNIs and their impact on national security. This investigation begins with Anderson's (1983) seminal work which delves into the concept of nationalism and its role in the formation of national identities. It provides a foundational understanding of the relationship between identity and national security. Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde (1998) offer a novel perspective on security analysis, expanding beyond military security to encompass economic, political, and social dimensions. Neumann (1992) seeks to bridge the literature on nationalism and state legitimacy with interstate security, presenting a potential starting point for empirical research. Additionally, Abd Al-Wahid (2014) emphasizes the critical importance of defining and understanding "national security" elements, especially within the context of a nation's goals and objectives. Murad (2017) further examines the transformations

in international dynamics, particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, with a focus on the US' role in reshaping global power dynamics.

The second thematic group focuses on national security focusing on regionally theme. Gerges (2005) investigates the rise of transnational jihadist movements and their impact on national security in the Middle East, highlighting the internationalization of SNIs as security concerns. Gelvin (2011) offers a comprehensive historical context for understanding SNIs development and their consequences on national security. Korany (2011) challenges the perception of the Middle East as a stagnant region and explores the evolving regional dynamics. Kamrava (2014) analyzes the effects of the Arab uprisings on national security and regional order changes, considering the Arab perspective. Azar and Moon (1984) offers a non-traditional approach to national security, focusing on economic fragility, environmental scarcity, ethnic diversity, and local coping strategies in developing nations. Shibley and Barnett (2002) delves into the shaping of state and national identities, exploring their impact on foreign policy actions in Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, and Syria. Additionally, Rabie (1984) and Mustafa (2016) contribute to defining and analyzing Arab National Security, addressing both local and international threats.

These works collectively provide a comprehensive foundation for our research, helping us explore the intricate interplay between SNIs and national security in both a global context and the specific regional dynamics of the Middle East. It worth to mention the valuable insights presented in Schewe (2022), which offers a comprehensive overview of the evolution of security studies, thereby providing a significant intellectual foundation for my dissertation.[3]

3.1.2. Study of SNIs (SNIs)

The literature review embarked upon in this scholarly endeavor constitutes a comprehensive exploration of the multifaceted domain of SNIs. This inquiry into SNIs necessitates a meticulous examination of a diverse spectrum of research streams, ranging from the broader conceptualizations of identity and national identity to the intricate contours of SNIs. This review's overarching framework is designed to encompass studies across a global spectrum that probe identity, national identity, and SNIs. The initial facet of this comprehensive review entails a survey

[3] Schewe's meticulously curated chronological offers a methodological blueprint that situates the evolutionary trajectory of security studies within its historical context. This discerning approach serves as a strategic tool, and illuminating the field's progression while accentuating the burgeoning array of critical perspectives that have since become integral to the landscape of contemporary scholarship in this domain (Schewe, 2022).

of seminal works and contemporary scholarship that delve into the conceptual underpinnings of identity and national identity. It is imperative to elucidate the foundational concepts that underpin the subsequent analysis of SNIs, thereby providing a solid theoretical basis for the subsequent investigations.

This inquiry encompasses a global perspective, considering studies that elucidate identity dynamics transcending national boundaries, emphasizing the universality and ever-evolving nature of these constructs. Furthermore, this literature review takes cognizance of studies with a Middle East-focused lens, recognizing the region's unique sociopolitical context and historical intricacies. In doing so, it seeks to unravel the intricate interplay between identity, national identity, and SNIs within the Middle Eastern milieu. Such studies shed light on the region's nuanced identity dynamics, providing invaluable insights into a complex geopolitical landscape characterized by diverse ethno-religious communities. This review aims to distill essential insights into the role of SNIs in shaping sociopolitical landscapes and intercommunal dynamics within specific nation-states. The following key studies and literature references collectively provide a multifaceted perspective on the centrality of identity in international relations. They underscore the nuanced ways in which identity shapes state behavior, influences conflict dynamics, and informs foreign policy choices. From foundational concepts to regional analyses and policy implications, these works collectively illuminate the intricate role of identity in the ever-evolving landscape of international and national politics.

Table 3.2 References Collectively Provide a Multifaceted Perspective on the Centrality of Identity in IR

Key Theme	Title and Main Information
Identity	While primarily a work in social psychology, Tajfel (1982) research on social identity and intergroup relations has been influential in understanding how group identity can affect international relations. It provides insights into the dynamics of in-group and out-group behavior. Smith (1991) is a prominent scholar in the study of national identity. In this book, he delves into the historical and cultural roots of national identity, examining how it shapes the behavior of states in the international system. Sen (2006) explores the relationship between identity and conflict, arguing that narrow identity markers can lead to violence and conflict. It emphasizes the importance of plural identities and the need for a broader understanding of identity in international relations.

National Identity	Gellner (1983) examines the relationship between nationalism and the emergence of nation-states, providing insights into the role of national identity in international politics. Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) examines how national identities are often constructed and reinforced through invented traditions. Enloe (1989) explores how gender and national identity intersect in the context of international relations. Wendt (1992) argues that national identities and norms shape state behavior in international relations. Steele (2008) explores the concept of ontological security and its influence on state behavior and national identity in international relations. Fukuyama (2018) presents the main points regarding identity and dignity, their interconnectedness, and traces the developments that have occurred in identity following the transformations in recent centuries. These developments have been influenced by the deteriorating economic conditions in the Western world, which have impacted the reputation and image of liberal democracy. This has brought the issue of identity and dignity back to the forefront
SNIs	Anderson (1983) explores the idea of nationalism and how it shapes collective identities, including SNIs. It is a foundational text for understanding the development of identities. Hastings (1997) examines how religion and ethnicity contribute to the formation of SNIs, impacting international relations. Brown et. al (2001) brings together various authors to examine the role of SNIs in ethnic conflict and nationalism. It offers insights into how SNIs contribute to political tensions and conflict. Herb and Kaplan (2008) offers a range of perspectives on nationalism, including the role of SNIs in contemporary politics. Across the globe, spanning from the era of the French Revolution to the contemporary moment, a consistent pattern has persisted. "The Sectarian Question and the Manufacturing of Minorities in the Arab World" (2017) comprises 28 research papers that stem from a growing concern. The excessive sectarianization of politics across the Arab world, especially in the Greater Arab Levant, along with the increasing sectarianization of regional conflicts, has prompted Arab scholars to reevaluate and enhance their conceptual and analytical frameworks. Bishara (2022) urges a contemplative examination of the notion of identity. Its aim is to elucidate the manifold interpretations and the underlying causes for its widespread prevalence, both within the Arab world and on a global scale. This proliferation has led to the concealment of significant issues beneath what is commonly referred to as the "identity crisis." Ghalioun (2012) addresses that undoubtedly, sectarianism stands out as a perilous challenge confronting nations, eroding their very foundations. Its divisive alignments sow seeds of societal fragmentation and threaten civil harmony, ultimately leading to stagnation across cultural, intellectual, social, economic, and political spheres. Salloukh (2023) contends that the expansion of the public sector, delineated along sectarian divisions, transformed it into a conduit for political benefits. The author proceeds to infer, based on an examination of the elevation in hierarchical positions, its timing, and the extent of associated taxation, that this expansion emerged as a consequence of a populist consensus spanning different sectarian lines among political leaders. This consensus was forged with the aim of preserving the quota-based governance system that originated from the Taif Agreement. Mahdi (2002) addresses the significance of ethnic pluralism in relation to conflicts observed in societies and countries worldwide. Ethnic pluralism has been a catalyst for societal collapses, prolonged wars, political regime changes, crises, and political divisions in various regions.

These specific studies and authors represent a fraction of the extensive body of literature on SNIs in international relations. They illustrate the diversity of perspectives and approaches within the field, reflecting the complex and evolving nature of SNIs and their impact on global politics. However, studying SNIs in the Middle East after the Arab Uprisings has become increasingly important as the region undergoes significant political, social, and cultural transformations. Malmvig (2013) maintains that even in the post-2011 era, the study of Middle East regional politics continues to revolve around norms and identity politics. However, it also contends that the rise of identity-based politics and increased regional instability necessitate the incorporation of insights from securitization theory Yossef and Cerami (2015) provides an in-depth treatment of the subject matter and is a valuable resource for those interested in understanding the geopolitical implications of the Arab Uprisings in the Middle East. It includes chapters that analyze the role of identities in the post-Arab Uprisings context.

Moreover, several studies have illuminated the intricate interplay between SNIs, sectarianism, and political change in the post-Arab Uprisings Middle East. Ongoing research endeavors persistently delve into these themes, adapting to the evolving dynamics of the region, and consistently yielding fresh insights within the realm of Middle Eastern studies. Hinnebusch (2016) discusses multiple identities in the Middle East, located at sub-state (communal minorities, tribes), state, and trans/supra-state (Pan Arabism, Pan-Islam) levels. Fanar Haddad (2020) delves into the contemporary dynamics of sectarian identities, specifically focusing on Sunni/Shi'a divisions, and how they intersect with nationalism in the Middle East. Majed (2020) suggests reevaluating the study of sectarianism in the Middle East by addressing lingering primordia list ideas that have persisted despite claims of their decline in academia since the 1960s. It highlights three common conceptual pitfalls: the assumption of enduring sectarian identities, the belief in strictly divided and homogeneous sects within societies, and the presumption that sectarian diversity inherently leads to conflict and violence.

3.1.3. Evaluation of the Literature Review

The following comments can be added after analyzing the content of literary studies on the subject of national security for small states that are related to the subject of study in the Middle East, and using Jordan and Lebanon as case study. First of all, redefining “security” has recently become something of a cottage industry, with most efforts focused on redefining nation-state

policy agendas rather than the concept of security itself. This frequently manifests itself in proposals to prioritize issues such as human rights, economics, the environment, drug trafficking, epidemics, crime, or social injustice, in addition to the traditional concern in security in particular from external military threats.

Recent events have transformed the international system, posing new challenges to national security and diplomacy, today's world is fundamentally different from the one we knew since the end of the Cold War. Some scholars argue that states and other players in national security games are rational actors seeking to maximize their own interests, and security is an interest/meta-interest that allows other specific interests to be protected from loss; the security interest is the state's first need. During the Cold War, security studies predominantly focused on Western nation-states and their responses to warfare, reflecting a Eurocentric perspective. This Eurocentric bias often led to the neglect of the experiences and concerns of the Third World in security studies. The international system was viewed as an extension of the European territorial state, and national security was considered a universal model. As a result, Western studies tended to assess security issues from a Western standpoint, linking the interests of other nations, especially in the Third World, to Western interests while overlooking their unique national security challenges. However, it's essential to recognize that the field of security studies has evolved and diversified since then. Region-specific security studies, such as those in the Middle East, have gained importance in elucidating region-specific national security challenges.

According to the literature, the concept of national security, a cornerstone of statecraft and governance, lacks a universally accepted, singular definition. Nevertheless, it is generally construed as the capacity of a sovereign entity to safeguard its fundamental interests, encompassing the well-being of its populace, the integrity of its territory, the assertion of its sovereignty, and the preservation of its distinct way of life. At its core, national security encapsulates the paramount duty of a state to shield itself from a spectrum of potential threats, both internal and external, and thereby ensure its continued existence and stability.

Contemporary national security paradigms acknowledge a multifaceted landscape of challenges. In this intricate tapestry, threats emanate not only from conventional military adversaries but also from a host of non-military actors and factors. The contemporary panorama of national security considerations encompasses a comprehensive spectrum, embracing the likes of terrorism, cyberwarfare, economic fragility, environmental degradation, and pandemics, to

name but a few. These challenges reflect the evolving nature of global risks, which traverse the conventional boundaries of military confrontation and infiltrate the very core of a nation's resilience.

In the 21st century, national security has encountered a distinctive array of novel and emerging challenges, each bearing unique complexities and implications. One prominent facet of this evolving landscape is the ascendance of NSAs, exemplified by terrorist organizations, which pose formidable threats to state security. These entities, often operating on the periphery of conventional state structures, have demonstrated the capacity to instigate profound disruptions and exert influence on a global scale. Moreover, the contemporary era is characterized by an unprecedented level of interconnectedness among nations, facilitated by rapid technological advancements. This interconnectedness, while fostering positive global collaborations, also engenders vulnerabilities as threats can swiftly traverse borders, exploiting the interwoven fabric of our global society. Furthermore, the nature of warfare itself is undergoing a profound metamorphosis, marked by asymmetry and unpredictability. The conventional paradigms of warfare are no longer adequate to comprehend the intricacies of contemporary conflicts, where adversaries operate in unconventional ways, blurring the lines between combatants and civilians, and engaging in tactics that defy established conventions.

It is noticeable that most Arab studies face attempts to propose the idea of collective national security, dealing with Arab and Gulf states as a single unit. This issue does not reflect the complexities of current politics, security, and geopolitics, which manifest in several key points, most notably the differences in priorities and interests among Arab or Gulf states. Therefore, achieving comprehensive consensus on collective national security for these states is challenging, especially with variations in political systems, values, and political orientations among Arab or Gulf countries, leading to disparities in security goals and policies. This makes it difficult to unify perspectives and deal as one entity in this context. Thus, this challenge underscores the urgent need for further research and discussions among Arab and Gulf countries to achieve a deeper understanding and greater cooperation in the field of national security, while considering the unique characteristics and challenges of each country in this context.

The scarcity of comprehensive studies examining SNIs collectively, especially within the context of Middle Eastern or security-related research, contrasts starkly with the abundance of specialized investigations focusing on specific aspects of SNIs like sectarianism or nationalism.

This research highlights the crucial significance of bridging this gap by comprehensively analyzing SNIs in all their forms and understanding their profound implications for national security. It underscores the complexity of the Middle East's sociopolitical landscape, where numerous SNIs with unique historical, cultural, and political dimensions intersect and interact. This study aims to fill this scholarly void by unraveling how SNIs influence security perceptions, inform policy decisions, and occasionally present security challenges within a broader national security framework, emphasizing the need for a more holistic approach to understanding their multifaceted impact on security dynamics.

There is a noticeable dearth of studies that have delved into the analysis of potential relationships and interactions among the various facets comprising individual identity on the individual level. Until just a few years ago, the potential intersections between individual identity attributes were seldom subject to in-depth examination within social sciences. Undoubtedly, any single identity attribute has the capacity to exert an independent influence on an individual's life at any given time. However, there is an evident need for heightened scrutiny of the interplay between identity attributes within a social or cultural context.

National security challenges vary significantly across regions and cultures. There is a need for more comparative research that examines how different countries and regions perceive and respond to security threats, taking into account cultural, historical, and political factors. Geopolitical tensions and regional conflicts continue to shape national security dynamics. Contemporary issues like the South China Sea dispute, the conflict in Ukraine, and Middle East conflicts emphasize the importance of regional and cultural variations in security studies.

The literature on security studies reveals two predominant theoretical orientations. The first orientation categorizes security theories into those that narrow the concept of security, primarily restricting it to military dimensions and state-centric perspectives, and others that broaden and deepen this notion. The latter perspective extends its purview beyond the traditional state-centric model, encompassing various entities such as individuals, communities, women, and other facets, treating them as independent dimensions. These encompass environmental, social, and economic dimensions, each viewed as distinct facets in their own right. On the other hand, the second orientation distinguishes security theories based on the source of the threat. It discerns between “traditional security,” where threats possess a military nature originating from other states, thus allowing for military responses, and “non-traditional security.” The latter encompasses threats not

sourced from states, lacking a military character, and thereby immune to military solutions. Examples encompass pandemics, irregular migration, challenges arising from conflicts or instability, environmental pressures, human trafficking, drug smuggling, and the security of water and energy resources.

In the realm of academic security studies, two principal dimensions emerge as pivotal considerations. Firstly, there is the inquiry into the ultimate purpose of security (what should be protected), whether it pertains to the condition of a state, encompassing its political system and the safeguarding of its territorial boundaries, this falls within the purview of what is commonly referred to as the national security paradigm, or for those who residents in this state, ensuring the safeguarding of their fundamental requirements in areas such as healthcare, education, employment, and various other aspects falls within the purview of the human security approach. The second dimension pertains to whether the need for security is based on objective factors (i.e., there is an actual necessity for the existence of these security policies), and whether these policies have been suggested by individuals and organizations within the society. Previous studies on the crisis of identity in the Middle East have primarily focused on the conflict between two major currents in an attempt to address the identity crisis facing the nation-state. These two currents are the Islamic and secularist movements. Conversely, specialized features of identity in a general sense have been addressed, meaning that sectarian differences between one sect and another have been discussed while overlooking the social, sectarian, and political differences occurring among supporters of the same current or subnational identity. The current study seeks to circumvent this issue by examining Arab interactions in the formulation of a unified state identity.

3.2. Conceptual Framework: National Security and SNIs

Scholarly research underscores the intricate and multifaceted nature of national security, emphasizing its pivotal role in shaping a state's policies and actions. Nonetheless, the conventional interpretation of national security tends to overlook the significance of SNIs within the state when analyzing national security dynamics. This oversight carries profound implications for national security, particularly in the context of the specific study under examination in this doctoral dissertation.

The prevailing body of literature concerning national security predominantly centers on the state as a cohesive entity, often disregarding the diverse range of identities and interests that exist

within it. This research, through an exploration of the complex relationship between SNIs and national security, aims to contribute to a nuanced reevaluation of these established definitions. It seeks to construct a refined conceptual framework that offers a more holistic comprehension of the elements influencing national security dynamics in the context of this study. This framework is poised to shed light on the ways in which SNIs impact national security policies, perceptions of threats, and overall stability.

In the course of investigating the impact of SNIs on the national security of Middle Eastern countries, it becomes imperative to address and clarify several key concepts. The first concept to define is national security. The study aims to establish a comprehensive definition of national security within the Middle East context. This definition will encompass both traditional and non-traditional security threats. Moreover, it will elucidate how national security interrelates with critical factors such as the stability, sovereignty, territorial integrity, as well as the social and political cohesion of Middle Eastern nations.

The second concept is national identity and SNIs. This involves defining SNIs within the Middle East context, encompassing regional, ethnic, linguistic, tribal, and sectarian identities. A comprehensive examination of their historical development, emergence, and dissemination in the region is crucial. Furthermore, the role of external factors in reshaping national identity and transforming SNIs will be thoroughly examined. Prominent scholarly works on this subject will be critically reviewed. In addition, a nuanced examination of the intricate dynamics surrounding SNIs and their impact on individuals, communities, and state institutions will be undertaken. This exploration will involve clarifying the intricate relationship between these SNIs and the broader concept of national identity.

This dissertation will introduce a fresh perspective for understanding the concept of nation, considering its dual nature, inclusive and exclusive. The nation, in this context, should be viewed as an entity engaged in a bilateral or multifaceted relationship, rather than as an isolated, self-contained unit. Identity, a pivotal element, is shaped and reshaped under the influence of "significant others," referring to other nations or ethnic groups perceived as potential threats to the nation's distinctiveness, authority, or independence. It is worth noting that we are not delving into the precise definition of all the terms and concepts to be discussed in this chapter, including their connotations, components, and variations. Instead, we have presented these definitions because of their relevance to the subject of this study, which explores the crisis of SNIs and conflicts in the

Middle East—a region experiencing a well-defined crisis of identity and national security. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of these concepts, we can better understand the complex challenges facing the region and develop a comprehensive framework for analysis.

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that the broad conceptual and analytical framework serves as a starting point for the analysis of threat construction within the domain of national security. The factors and mechanisms to be discussed here, such as ideas and identity, should not be regarded as possessing equal explanatory value in every instance and context. Instead, the contextual dependence of these elements within the conceptual framework must be underscored. Nevertheless, this dissertation contends that the comprehensive conceptual and analytical framework is indispensable because it has the potential to uncover multiple relationships (or impacts) that a single-causal analysis may fail to elucidate.

3.2.1. National Security: Conceptual Foundations

Despite the paramount importance of the concept of national security and its widespread use, it is considered a relatively modern concept within the field of political science. The term's usage traces back to the American tradition in the post- World War II (WWII) era when the U.S. National Security Council was established in 1947 (Holmes, 2014, p. 19). To strengthen the principle of comprehensive security, the military was integrated into the economy, and the National Security Council was tasked with advising the President on the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies related to national security, in a manner akin to the functions of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (Holmes, 2014).

Nonetheless, the elements of this concept seemed to crystallize in Lippmann's work published in 1943 (Garrity, 2008). The concept, commonly found in political discourse in its Western American origins, carried political objectives, emerging as the focal point of foreign policies for superpowers during the Cold War era and international polarization. Since then, the use of the concept has proliferated at various levels, contingent upon local, regional, and international circumstances.[4] The concept of national security evolved into a well-established field of study within political science, with a systematic approach applying the principles of

[4] One might speculate that the shift from “defense” to “security” was necessitated to escape the material and regional boundaries imposed by the semantic legacy of “defense,” as its narrow military connotation proved inadequate for the comprehensive scope required today.

epistemology, from the formulation of hypotheses to the selection of appropriate research methodologies, scientific verification tools, rules of evidence, refutation, and the potential development of a comprehensive theory or a governing law governing the phenomenon of national security (Al-Mashat, 1993, pp. 14-17).

The Cold War era marked a pivotal period during which attempts were made to craft theoretical approaches and institutional frameworks, culminating in the use of the term "National Security Strategy." Terms such as containment, deterrence, balance, and peaceful coexistence dominated these approaches with the aim of achieving security and peace, thus avoiding the devastating wars witnessed in the first half of the 20th century (Muhammad, 2022). In the post-Cold War era, civil wars increasingly emerged as the predominant form of armed conflict, supplanting interstate wars. This shift had a profound impact, as it expanded and deepened the traditional concept of security. In response to these developments, academic institutions with a focus on national security issues began to emerge. These institutions encompass a wide range of sources, components, and measures aimed at safeguarding national security. The U.S. National Security Council serves as the foremost and most exemplary model of such institutions.

National security has evolved to encompass a multidimensional and intricate phenomenon, demanding the application of a wide array of methodological approaches and a heightened level of interdisciplinary synergy. The focus on the concept of national security has shifted from Western countries to other nations. Several reasons underlie the global significance of national security and the circumstances and factors driving interest in this phenomenon across different countries. Some of the key factors include the following concepts (Al-Mashat, 1993, pp. 14-17):

The first concept is the shift in the concept of national interest. The concept of national interest has transformed into one of ensuring well-being, encompassing the securement of resources. Consequently, national security emerged as an expression of both well-being and the effort to secure external resources, as well as protect internal arrangements conducive to increased prosperity. The second one is the escalation of violence and direct conflicts. The rise in violence and the escalation of direct conflicts, which have the potential to escalate into wars, have spurred interest in national security. Periods of heightened conflicts at both regional and international levels have corresponded with increased attention to national security concerns.

The third concept is internal concerns and tensions, which may manifest in various forms of instability and insecurity within countries have gained attention. Many nations grapple with major

issues in production and resource distribution, potentially leading to frustration and engagement in acts of violence against the political system. The fourth one is the post-Cold War ideological shifts. The intellectual vacuum resulting from the collapse of communism, particularly the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, has prompted the search for alternative ideologies, some of which have taken on extremist characteristics, whether secular and nationalist or fundamentalist and radical. The fifth one is the transformation of political systems. The transition from nation-state systems to broader, more inclusive systems like federalism or international economic groupings such as the European Union (EU), NAFTA, the Asia-Pacific Group, and others, has raised questions about the fate of national security for individual nation-states or newly formed entities. These questions include issues related to control over national security components, especially military forces and equipment, as well as the protection of newly formed entities and the assurance of their citizens' safety.

The last one is the dissolution of major powers. The disintegration of major powers, particularly federal entities transitioning into independent sovereign nation-states, has underscored the paramount importance of national security. It prompts critical questions about the management of national security components, notably military forces and equipment, in addition to the safeguarding of newly established nations and the assurance of their citizens' sense of security. Instances of historical and contemporary disintegration and dissolution, such as the post-Soviet Union's successor republics and the former Yugoslavian states, vividly demonstrate the profound challenges posed to both national and regional security. This underscores the intricate and ever-evolving landscape of contemporary national security concerns.

Undoubtedly, these circumstances collectively underscore the paramount importance of studying national security. In recent decades, internal divisions within states have taken on various forms of conflicts, involving NSAs in confrontation with the conventional state military. as seen in cases such as Chechnya (Mirovalev, 2014). In addition, multiple non-state units may engage in conflict with each other, as exemplified by the situation in Somalia (EUAA, 2023). These diverse entities are often labeled differently, such as ethnic militias, insurgents, warlords, terrorists, freedom fighters, among others, representing ethnic minorities, nationalities, religious factions, regions, and ideological movements. Additionally, other factors have emerged, such as international crime, multinational corporations (MNCs), interest groups, and global environmental issues. These NSAs and transnational issues also present diverse challenges to nation-states,

defying national laws and institutions. This complexity and dynamism in international politics reflect the observation that "global politics has entered a turbulent phase" (Rosenau, 1995, p. 194).

National security, as suggested by Wolfers (1952, p. 483), can become dangerously elusive if used without proper definition. The purpose of this section is to delineate certain specifications that can facilitate the rational analysis of national security policy. The following part explores various aspects related to defining the concept of national security and identifying its dimensions. This is achieved by examining several topics, including the definition of the national security concept, reviewing major schools of national security, i.e., the different theories and approaches that have addressed the study of national security from various perspectives (military, economic, societal, etc.). Additionally, it investigates the multiple levels of national security, whether at the domestic or external (regional and global) levels, and the boundaries of overlap and interplay between these levels.

Linguistic and Terminological Definition of Security

The concept of national security has sparked substantial disagreement, as it carries different interpretations for various stakeholders. Conventional definitions of national security have historically centered on safeguarding against external aggression, predominantly framed as the provision of military defenses against military threats. However, this narrow viewpoint has proven to be insufficient. National security encompasses a broader spectrum of considerations beyond the preparation and deployment of military forces in response to military threats.

In pursuit of a more comprehensive definition that integrates economic, diplomatic, and societal dimensions, Wolfers (1962, p. 150) articulated the following perspective: "Security, as viewed subjectively, gauges the absence of threats directed towards acquired values, while its objective interpretation signifies the absence of apprehension regarding potential attacks on these values" Henry Kissinger (1969, p. 46) characterizes it as "any measures by which a society seeks to uphold its entitlement to survival." Meanwhile, McNamara (1968, p. 149) asserts that "security is intrinsically linked to development, and without development, security remains unattainable. States that do not progress essentially cannot sustain their safety." However, Buzan (2016, pp. 28-29) acknowledges the inherent complexity of this concept, rendering it resistant to precise definition. Nevertheless, this inherent ambiguity provides a substantial margin for strategic analysis and the utilization of power.

Trager posits that “the objectives of national security aim at creating favorable local and global political conditions for safeguarding and enhancing national vital values” (Lee, 1989, p. 78). Wolfers (1952) suggests that “national security, objectively, is characterized by the absence of threats to established and enduring values, while subjectively, it is the absence of fear regarding potential threats or dangers to these values.” *The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (1968) defines national security as a nation's ability to protect its internal values from external threats, focusing only on external threats to internal values. This perspective, however, is limited as threats are multifaceted and multidimensional (Romm, 1993, pp. 5-6). According to Jordan and Taylor (1981) national security goes beyond physical harm and encompasses the protection of vital economic interests that could threaten the fundamental values and vitality of the state. Maier (1992) defines national security as the capacity to control domestic and foreign conditions that the public believes necessary for self-determination, autonomy, prosperity, and well-being. However, the concept of self-determination can challenge the needs of weaker states, and majority votes might not always meet security requirements.

Based on the preceding analysis, the concept of national security has undergone two pivotal phases in response to global dynamics. First, the initial phase adopted a restricted strategic perspective, primarily oriented towards repelling military threats, safeguarding territorial integrity from external encroachments, and preserving national sovereignty. Second, in the subsequent phase, states encountered the imperative to provide comprehensive security for their citizens, encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, to counteract the multifaceted threats arising from extensive engagement with the modern world.

In addition, “security”, in its broader sense, represents a psychological state rooted in a sense of confidence and readiness to deter potential aggression. It embodies the absence of moral or ideological threats and is intertwined with various facets of human existence, societal processes, and interactions within both society and the natural environment. This fundamental notion of national security aligns with how political scientists often employ it. From an evolutionary viewpoint, security can be understood as a biological mechanism, reflecting an organism's innate drive for survival and adaptation to environmental hazards. The deliberate pursuit of a state of security constitutes a cultural and civilizational construct that encompasses all aspects of contemporary life on regional, national, international, and global scales. Hence, security may be defined as follows. A conscious human endeavor aimed at establishing a state of security through

organized social activity within a suitable framework, and a foundational and essential element of society, ensuring the balanced material, psychological, and overall well-being of individuals and the broader community, while also considering relations with other societal entities.

The Arabic Interpretations of "Security"

Concerning the Arab interpretation of security, it is imperative to acknowledge that the Arab perspective on security is multifaceted and influenced by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors. The Arab comprehension of security extends beyond the conventional Western notion of national security, encompassing a broader spectrum of considerations. The Arab outlook on security places significant emphasis on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of individual Arab states. This viewpoint is deeply rooted in the historical experiences of Arab nations, marked by colonialism, external interventions, and regional conflicts. Consequently, Arab security thinking prioritizes the protection of national borders and the preservation of political independence. Moreover, the Arab concept of security embraces social and economic dimensions. Social stability, economic progress, and the welfare of Arab citizens are regarded as integral facets of security. This holistic approach acknowledges that a secure nation must grapple with internal challenges related to economic disparities, social equity, and political stability.

Conversely, the concept of national security, akin to numerous other constructs within the realm of social sciences, confronts the intricate issue of interweaving with various other concepts, a discussion of which will follow in due course. Equally significant, national security has encountered internal challenges that imperil the integrity and cohesion of the state, such as the perils of ethnic tensions and separatist advocacies. Furthermore, the prevailing socio-economic disparities, particularly prevalent in the Third-World nations, introduce an added layer of complexity to the landscape of national security. These internal challenges, in conjunction with external threats, contribute to the formidable task of formulating an all-encompassing definition of national security. This inherent complexity aligns with the inherent nature of the social sciences at large.

In the Arabic language, "security" is linguistically understood as the opposite of "fear." In Arabic, the trilateral verb related to the word "أَمِنَ (*ʾamina*)" signifies the attainment of safety

(secure) and the calmness of the soul, bringing about a state of peace of mind.[5] At the terminological level, the concept of security generally alludes to the establishment of a state characterized by the absence of fear and the presence of both psychological and physical well-being (Murad, 2005, pp. 19-31; Rabie, 1984, pp. 33-38). The sensation of security represents an inherent and indivisible human right, irrespective of whether the underlying causes are social, ethnic, or of another nature. In his lectures on "Political Values Theory," Hamed Abdullah Rabie defines the concept of national security as "the collection of principles that serve as the minimal guarantee framework for any adversarial political movement" (Rabie, 1984, p. 40)." Essentially, every society must strive to establish a comprehensive framework governing its political interactions with neighboring states. This framework sets a minimum threshold, beyond which any political action related to its territory and boundaries cannot transgress.

From this perspective, we can elucidate the characteristics of the concept of national security as follows. Firstly, national security embodies politically relative, dynamic, and adaptable values as they revolve around the political entity, subject to temporal and spatial determinants. Secondly, it serves as the nexus where domestic and foreign policies intersect, as its aim is to safeguard the internal political entity through the lens of foreign policy. Thirdly, when viewed through the lens of national security, domestic policy becomes not only an extension of foreign policy but also a reflection of the stance influenced by the competing international powers and regional dynamics that encompass the state in question. In essence, national security serves as the genuine cornerstone that facilitates the establishment of interconnections, integration, and coherence between collective and individual values. We still have to address the concept of "national," which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section of the conceptual framework when examining the topics of identity and nationalism.

Dimensions of National Security

Moving away from the narrow concept of national security centered solely on military aspects and the importance of increasing the military dimension, and also considering the world's increasing interconnectedness and the impact of international relations on the concept of national security, the role of the state has evolved. There are now multiple dimensions that fall under the

[5] *See*: Almaany.com https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/أمن/ and Cambridge Dictionary: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-arabic/security

umbrella of the national security concept. In this study, we will identify seven paramount dimensions that a state must protect. First, the ***political dimension*** of national security primarily involves safeguarding the unity and territorial integrity of the state. This dimension comprises two aspects: firstly, the internal aspect, which encompasses maintaining the unity of the nation within and its loyalty to the nation-state, its institutions, and acceptance of its ideology. Secondly, the external aspect involves protecting the state's borders from any external aggressions that may lead to the disintegration of the state's unity or encroachment upon its territory.

Second, the ***economic dimension*** of national security has gained prominence due to the increasing threshold and cost of military options, particularly for major powers. Consequently, countries, including the US, have shifted their focus towards the economic aspect in their relations with other nations. Major powers have begun using economic sanctions as an alternative to military force when seeking to influence the foreign policies of other countries. With the growing importance of economic tools and interdependence in the modern world, economic power has become a vital factor in a state's overall strength. This economic strength reinforces a country's military and political capabilities while enhancing its external influence. States can entice other nations to support their interests through various forms of economic aid. An essential historical example of the economic dimension's significance is the massive economic assistance provided to Eastern European countries to transition from the collapsed socialist system to a capitalist one (Neu & Wolf, 1994, pp. 25-27).

In recent times, the U.S. has increasingly emphasized the economic dimension of its national security. President Trump, for instance, viewed China as a significant economic threat to U.S. national security. This perspective was reflected in documents issued in December 2017 and January 2018 that stressed the need to protect the U.S. economy through protective trade measures (Brookings, 2017). The current U.S. administration has engaged in a trade war with China and pressured NATO member states to increase their defense spending, as the US, which was previously the alliance's largest contributor, now sees its economic security as vulnerable (Zakheim, 2023; McInnis & Fata, 2023). Globally, economic security has become a fundamental concern for most countries, as evidenced by the efforts of many third-world countries to implement sustainable development plans in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Even Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, have started long-term plans to diversify their economies,

particularly in response to recent oil crises that have impacted their economies (Kabbani & Ben Mimoune, 2021).

Third, the ***social dimension*** aims to provide security to citizens to a degree that enhances their sense of belonging and loyalty. Without ensuring social justice by bridging socioeconomic disparities and developing essential services, national security is put at risk. This dimension is also closely tied to bolstering national unity as a primary requirement for the well-being of the state's population. It supports national will and consensus among the people on the interests and objectives of national security, fostering their alignment with the political leadership. Social injustice, particularly the oppression of specific social strata or the increasing percentage of citizens living below the poverty line, poses a genuine internal threat to national security that becomes challenging to control. This is especially true in the face of escalating issues related to unemployment, housing, healthcare, education, and social insurance.

Fourth, the ***military dimension*** of national security, historically synonymous with the concept itself, has undergone significant transformations over time. In the past, some definitions of national security solely revolved around the military aspect, emphasizing the importance of strengthening a state's military capabilities and ensuring its readiness to protect its borders. This pursuit of strategic superiority often led to arms races, international tensions, and the potential for multiple wars. However, with the advent of the nuclear deterrence era and the rise of ideological factors, the military dimension somewhat receded in importance compared to economic and ideological dimensions. Nevertheless, this shift did not diminish states' commitment to enhancing their military capabilities and ensuring their security from military threats. Even though the superpowers recognized that direct warfare between them could have catastrophic consequences, they continued to bolster their military capacities, both conventionally and strategically. The competitive atmosphere persists to this day, especially among the US, Russia, and China.

Fifth, the ***cultural dimension***, which revolves around protecting ideologies, beliefs, customs, and traditions. It ensures the preservation of national values and secures the sources of national power across various domains in the face of external threats and internal challenges. It also widens the base of freedom, dignity, national security, and citizen well-being, continuously improving their financial conditions. The cultural role is of paramount importance in fortifying the nation against cultural globalization and clashes of civilizations. When considered comprehensively,

including ideology, culture, education, media, arts, and literature, national security means "empowering the people to exercise their value system on their independent land."

Sixth, the ***ideological dimension***, which gained increasing importance during the Cold War era when the world divided into two camps: one socialist and the other capitalist. Consequently, the ideological dimension became one of the most crucial aspects of national security. It depends on a state's ability to protect its internal ideological values and preserve them against doctrinal subversion. It also entails disseminating these values in the external world as a tool to extend influence. Presently, Iran is one of the most significant countries utilizing the ideological factor to expand its external influence. Gulf countries are particularly vulnerable to ideological threats due to the Shiite minorities, which are religiously connected to Iran, alongside Yemen, which poses a threat to Saudi national security from the south.

Seventh, the ***cybersecurity dimension*** of national security, which is the most recent addition to national security considerations. The significant technological advancements in the contemporary era have made states vulnerable to threats, especially with the proliferation of cyberattacks. One of the most notorious cyberattacks was the breach of the Democratic Party's email servers in the US, which led to the leak of sensitive information from Hillary Clinton's personal email account, impacting the outcome of the presidential elections. Due to these escalating electronic threats, states have begun to prioritize cybersecurity as one of the dimensions of national security. This is because such threats can cause significant damage to critical infrastructure.

These dimensions collectively underscore the complexity of national security in the modern era, encompassing not only traditional military concerns but also cultural, ideological, and cyber aspects, among others. Understanding these facets is crucial for any nation seeking to secure its interests and safeguard its citizens in an increasingly interconnected and digitally dependent world.

Clarifying Core Concepts: Working Definitions

Turning to the key aspect of the issue, as established through the preceding conceptual discussion, this dissertation adopts the following working definition of ***National Security***: "*the dynamic capacity of the state to preserve its political sovereignty, territorial integrity, institutional legitimacy, and societal cohesion, in the face of both conventional and non-conventional threats, with an emphasis on internal disruptions rooted in SNIs and transnational influences, and the*

preservation of its identity and standing in the world. This concept extends beyond traditional military defense to encompass the resilience of the state's economic foundations, ideological consensus, cultural identity, and multi-dimension infrastructure, acknowledging the multidimensional nature of modern threats and the fluid boundaries between domestic unrest and geopolitical instability. In this context, national security is not a static condition but an ongoing process of negotiation, adaptation, and governance, shaped by the interplay between identity politics, state capacity, and regional power dynamics."

The formulation of this operational definition constitutes a foundational step in constructing the conceptual and analytical architecture of the dissertation. Its significance is multifold: First, the temporal relevance to the post-2011 period, the definition reflects the paradigm shift by re-centering the analysis on internal fractures and non-state dynamics that have emerged as primary sources of insecurity. Second, the repositioning internal actors as security threats by expanding the referent object of security beyond the state, this definition foregrounds the role of internal societal actors as potential sources of national insecurity. It recognizes that SNIs—when politicized or mobilized against the state—can function as agents of fragmentation, civil conflict, or de facto secessionism, thus presenting existential challenges to the state's monopoly over coercion and legitimacy. Third, integration of multiple security dimensions, this enables a multi-layered analysis of how identity-driven divisions interact with broader structures of governance, development, and sovereignty. Fourth, alignment with constructivist theories, by adopting a constructivist lens, the definition situates the analysis within a rich theoretical tradition that interrogates how security is discursively constructed. It challenges materialist or realist assumptions that equate threat exclusively with military power and instead explores how identity, belonging, and societal narratives shape the production of insecurity. This aligns the study with key contributions from the *Copenhagen School* and *Securitization Theory*, which emphasize the role of identity in defining security agendas. Fifth, provide a framework for comparative and contextual analysis. The operational definition also serves a critical comparative function. It provides a flexible yet robust analytical framework that can be deployed across multiple case studies, facilitating an evaluation of divergent trajectories in state responses to identity-driven threats. It allows the study to move beyond state-centric assessments and engage with variegated patterns of securitization, resilience, and collapse across Arab states post-2011.

To earnestly achieve the utmost degree of national security, the state's mission lies in: (1) Preserving its sovereignty and stability through the development of political strategies aimed at achieving a just distribution of freedoms and national income. This approach also necessitates enhancing international relations and diplomacy to bolster the state's ability to confront external challenges. (2) Caring for state institutions and ensuring their continuity and sustainability. These institutions should be capable of dealing with crises and taking necessary actions to protect citizens and maintain the state's stability. (3) Diligently striving to strike a balance between the hard and soft dimensions of power and security while preserving the state's strategic value on the national, regional, and international stages. This is the path to ensuring the psychological and physical well-being of both citizens and state institutions alike.

3.2.2. SNIs: The Elucidation of the Notion

The concept of identity poses a formidable challenge within the realm of scientific inquiry. Scholars have grappled with defining it, elucidating its characteristics, and delineating its components, resulting in a spectrum of diverse perspectives. Moreover, theories attempting to expound upon this phenomenon have diverged to the point of paradoxical interpretations. This intricate scientific dimension, though, is only one facet of the issue. From a pragmatic and political standpoint, identity assumes an even more critical role, as it wields a direct and profound influence on the national security and cohesion of sovereign states. Identity, inextricably interwoven with the political, security, cultural, social, and economic dimensions, mandates comprehensive consideration when examining the national identity of any given state.

Identity is a multifaceted concept shaped by a multitude of variables, particularly those of a societal nature, which evolve and exert their influence on human cognition. It is a term that bears linguistic significance and finds applications in philosophical, social, psychological, and cultural contexts. As aptly articulated by Ghalioun (2006, pp. 28-29) “A group or an individual cannot embark on any endeavor, regardless of its nature or scale, without first comprehending its own essence, determining its place, role, and the legitimacy of its distinct existence. To rise, it must first know itself.” The absence of a clear identity leaves individuals estranged from their social and cultural milieu, and in some cases, estranged from themselves entirely. Moreover, without a lucid comprehension of the 'other,' one's own identity remains elusive and undefined.

Within this context, identity assumes profound significance in shaping human existence. It presents a genuine quandary for individuals belonging to diverse identities within a single nation-state, for instance, they grapple with the tension between adherence to homeland or religious identity and a preference for harmonious integration within a society that offers freedom and security. It raises questions about the fervor for national or sectarian identity, stemming from a fear of existential threats or the looming specter of identity dissolution within a broader society. Consequently, the question of identity stands as a vexing scholarly challenge. Researchers have engaged in protracted debates concerning its definition and the elucidation of its characteristics and components.

From a scholarly perspective, theories have grappled with explaining this phenomenon, at times diverging to the point of contradiction. Over the past decades, it can be argued that four fallacious assumptions regarding identity have persistently haunted scholars (Shaban, 2013): The first illusion is that industrialized countries (developed nations) have solved the issue of identity. The second illusion is that achieving citizenship pushes the identity conflict back. The third illusion is that the former socialist countries solved the issue of identity. The erroneous belief is that the clash of identities is restricted to the Third World. However, these illusions have been shattered by the stark reality of the proliferation of identity-related issues worldwide in recent decades. From a political perspective, identity assumes a critical and perilous dimension owing to its immediate ramifications for the national security and cohesion of states.

Identity is intrinsically intertwined with the realms of politics, security, culture, society, and even economics. Therefore, any examination of a nation's identity must take into account these domains, given the intricate interplay between them and national identity. For instance, the conflicts in Eastern Europe, exemplified by the military dimension in Yugoslavia's disintegration into six entities and the dissolution of the Soviet Union into 15 distinct entities, underscore the intricate relationship between identity and political stability. Similarly, identity-related conflicts persisted in Western Europe, including regions like Ireland (in relation to Britain), Quebec (in Canada), Corsica (in France), the Basque Country (in Spain), and southern Italy, among others (Shaban, 2013).

The challenges that researchers and public policymakers face regarding the subject of identity and the perception of cultural diversity and commonalities within society are multifaceted. They revolve around a set of fundamental questions that require thorough investigation: First is

the accumulation and competition of identities. Researchers need to explore where, how, and why different types of identity accumulate or compete within a specific context. This involves understanding which identities can coexist and which might come into conflict with each other. Second is the emergence of new identities. It is crucial to examine the nature of new identities or adaptations that emerge as a result of the competition between existing identities. These new identities may reflect changing societal, cultural, and political dynamics.

Third is the cross-cultural patterns. Researchers must investigate the patterns that appear within a specific society and whether similar patterns can emerge in different social or cultural contexts. Understanding these patterns and their variations is essential for a comprehensive analysis. Fourth is the explanation of patterns. Explaining the underlying factors and mechanisms that drive these identity patterns is another critical aspect of research in this field. Researchers should delve into the socio-economic, cultural, and political forces at play. Fifth is the impact on intellectual and social security. Finally, it is essential to assess the impact of the crowding and accumulation of identities on intellectual and social security. This involves considering how identity-related dynamics may influence societal cohesion, stability, and security.

While individuals possess distinct identities, it is essential to grasp that these identities are not static or independent entities. Rather, they are deeply embedded within a contextual framework. They exhibit adaptability and undergo continuous transformations in response to evolving social, economic, cultural, and political circumstances. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate tapestry of human identity, researchers must embrace a holistic approach that considers the dynamic interplay between various identity components. This approach not only acknowledges the complexity of identity but also underscores its contextual, adaptive, and ever-changing nature (Kurzwelly, 2019).

3.2.3.1 Identity and Its Construction

The process of constructing one’s identity is a matter of paramount significance. In the realm of psychology, identity is conventionally dissected into internal and external domains. The internal sphere, often referred to as the core, encapsulates an individual's entire personality. In contrast, the external facade of identity delineates the bounds of one's personality and exposes the individual to external perceptions (Bishara, 2022, pp. 29-41). The outwardly projected “I” essentially underpins one's public identity – the persona as perceived by others. Positioned between the outer facade and

the core lies a sub-system of identity, which encapsulates an individual's relationships and diverse social roles. This encompasses their associations with nationality, religion, state, profession, family, and various other aspects (Côté & Levine, 2002, pp. 22-33). Each individual tends to accentuate a particular facet of their identity and accords it greater significance than other facets.

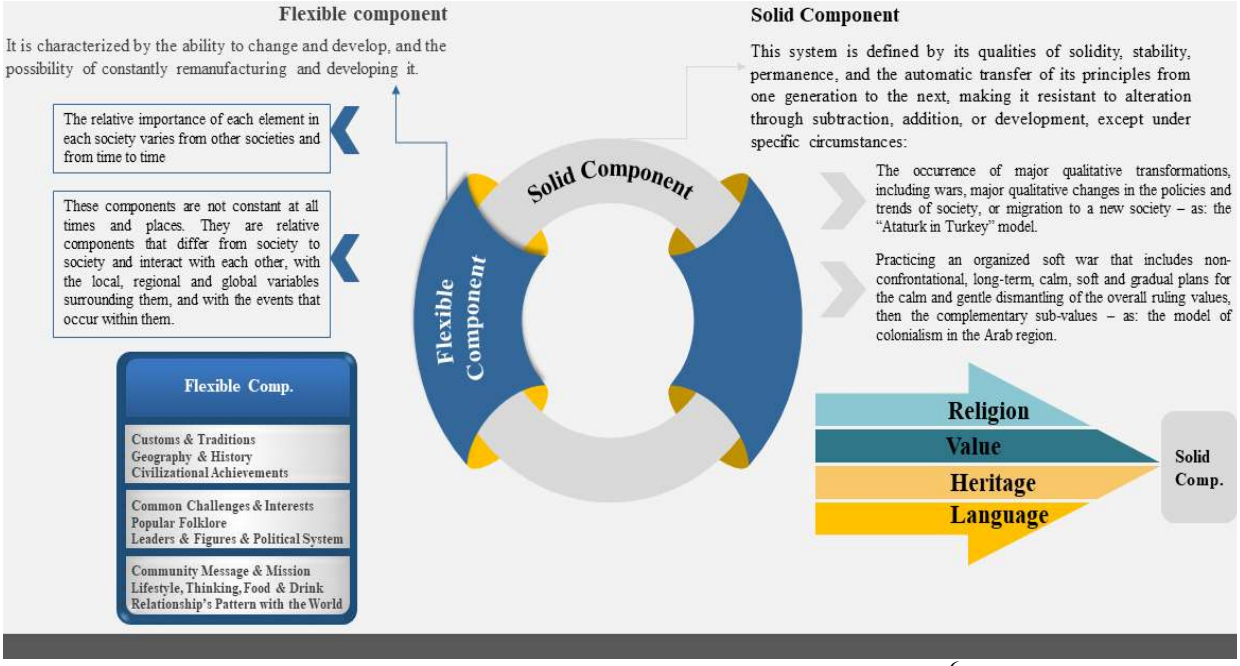

Figure 3.1 The Components of Building Self-Identity[6]

The diversity of identity signifies its inherent differences, which inherently vary from one individual to another. Consequently, a person cannot be confined to a singular identity. There exist three fundamental perceptions of diversity that collectively shape one's identity or, rather, identities (Anca & Aragón, 2018): (1) Demographic diversity encompasses the characteristics that distinguish an individual from birth throughout their lifetime, constituting their foundational identity. (2) Experiential diversity pertains to an individual's life journey and the experiences they accumulate. These experiences govern their emotional life, influencing their preferences and aversions, and contribute to the formation of emotional communities. (3) Cognitive Diversity: Cognitive diversity is linked to an individual's propensity to seek out other minds to complement their thoughts or ambitions. It can also be described as the identity of ambition.

Given the significant importance of the concept of identity across various disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, and political science, it is not surprising that there

[6] Developed by the author, using selected data from: (Deeb, 2020, pp. 24-25)

is no single uncontested conceptualization regarding its meaning and tangible attributes. However, in light of the research focus of the current study, the goal is not to delve into deep conceptual discussions about the meaning of identity and how the concept has been used in theoretical and empirical research. Instead, the essence and crucial differences between the concepts of exclusive and multiple identities are succinctly delineated, and the implications of each concept are discussed for the experimental analyses to be presented subsequently.

Definition of Identity Across Various Academic Disciplines

The concept of identity has held a fascination for scholars across various academic disciplines, encompassing sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science. Interestingly, there exists no universally agreed-upon definition of identity among philosophers, thinkers, political scientists, sociologists, and other experts. Instead, the concept's definition varies depending on the specific field of human and social knowledge under consideration. The meaning of identity evolves as it transitions from one field of study to another, each approaching the issue of identity through distinct research and analytical lenses.

Identity, fundamentally, springs from the intrinsic human need for belonging and provides individuals with a framework to interpret their social surroundings and form their self-concept. Moreover, identity functions as a mechanism for social cohesion. Shared identities establish bonds among individuals and cultivate a sense of unity within groups. This unity, in turn, enables collective endeavors toward common goals and aspirations (Burke P. , 2021; Yilmaz, 2019). Identity, in broad terms, can be elucidated as the distinctive qualities, personality traits, beliefs, and other attributes that serve to characterize or define an individual or entity. At its core, identity represents an individual's self-perception, firmly anchored in their unique characteristics, affiliations, and societal roles (Yilmaz, 2019). It serves as a means to express an individual's distinctiveness and their connection to various groups, be they religious, national, ethnic, or otherwise. Identity encompasses multifaceted dimensions, including but not limited to professional, religious, national, ethnic, racial, sexual, educational, generational, and political identities, among others (Dien, 2000; Bellon, 2019).

In the Arabic language, the term "identity" carries linguistic significance, being derived from the third-person pronoun "هُوَ (*huwa*)" which means "he/him", added to it the relative adjective "ي (yā)" which denotes the actual existence of the subject, along with all its inherent characteristics

and features that define it.[7] In this context, identity represents the designation of an entity or existence precisely as it is, signifying the existence of an individual, group, or nation as characterized by specific components, specifications, and traits that allow the possessor of the identity to recognize it unambiguously and distinguish it from other entities (Bin Noman, 1996, p. 21).

Identity is a term grounded in an empirical distinction between "us" and "them," often implying that an individual's identity is a reflection of the identity of the "other." In contemporary political science, the notion of identity stems from Hegelian and Marxist premises, positing that identity is not inherent but rather evolves through interactions with others and the acquisition of their recognition (James, 2015, pp. 184-189). Moreover, within the realm of psychology, identity is intricately connected to personality, which is shaped by two fundamental aspects. First, an aspect characterized by abundance and change, encompassing the components of biological, psychological, and social personality, along with all elements subject to fluctuations, alterations, and potential disappearance. Second, an aspect distinguished by unity and stability, centering on the unchanging core self or ego that retains its constancy. The self or ego represents an individual's identity and subjectivity. In terms of personality, unity harmonizes with multiplicity, and change coexists with constancy without contradiction. This implies the presence of a fixed self or ego that undergoes transformations and exhibits multiplicity in various conditions and attributes.

In the realm of politics and ideology, the concept of identity displays significant variation across different ideologies and trends. Consequently, identities are multifaceted and diverse, shaped by various components inherent to a nation. These components include language, culture, geography, history, religion, race, and common destiny. Identity can be determined by a single component or by a combination of multiple components. For example, the identity of the Islamic nation is predominantly rooted in the Islamic religion. Within this Islamic nation, there exist numerous identities such as the Sunni identity, Shiite identity, Kurdish identity, and others. Conversely, in Western contexts, identity is often defined by homeland and language, resulting in distinctions like the French identity, English identity, and more within Europe.

[7] *See*: Almaany.com, on: https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/هوية/

The Arab Intellectuals' Notions of Identity

The emergence and contemplation of identity among Arabs saw a notable resurgence at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, marked by the adoption of specific terminologies like freedom, revolution, nation, nationalism, equality, and homeland. During this period, Arab individuals began to articulate and delineate their sense of identity in a modern context, deeply influenced by the prevailing dynamics imposed upon them by Western powers. This newfound impetus had a dual aim: first, to liberate themselves from Western hegemony, and second, to extricate themselves from various manifestations of class exploitation, despotism, tyranny and internal oppression. It's worth noting that while there are variations, the concept remains fundamentally consistent, especially when considering its cultural or social dimension.

Furthermore, identity can be understood as how individuals define themselves or their nation, often taking shape through language, culture, and religion. It tends to steer away from singularity and purity, leaning towards a pluralistic, complementary approach when managed effectively, and a confrontational one when neglected and misunderstood. Language, in particular, holds the potential to serve as a unifying and developmental force, but it can also become a factor that dismantles and tears apart the social fabric, which is typically established through a shared language (Belhabib, 2013, pp. 247-248).

The above examination reveals that identity can be categorized into two primary forms (Pertinent to the research objectives). The first is the individual identity. This encompasses all the regular characteristics inherent to an individual, grounded in their principles of values and behavior, which serve to differentiate them from others. This aspect of identity centers on the concept of "the self," which represents an individual's unique being. It comprises their temperament, nature, inherited traits, as well as the accumulation of memories and experiences that constitute their personal history, affirming their distinctiveness. Despite an individual's pursuit of distinctiveness and independence within their identity, it is often influenced by group identity and its orientations. This influence arises from interactions, coexistence, and integration with other members of society. Additionally, the perception of an individual by others can also affect their self-identity. Thus, individual identity can be described as a person's sense of belonging to a group or a broader human framework that shares a common system of values, emotions, and tendencies. In this context, identity represents an individual psychological reality linked to prevailing culture and the process of socialization.

The second one is the collective identity. This term refers to the comprehensive depiction of the interactive relationships among members of a particular society. It allows for the differentiation of one group's or society's identity from another through the framework of their values, customs, intellectual pursuits, and cultural orientations. Some argue that collective identity is a manifestation of the self, resulting from individuals' awareness of their affiliation with specific social groups. It is expressed through the emotional significance of this affiliation and leads to the integration and positioning of individuals within their social environment. This integration is materialized through participation in public institutions, which serves as the most prominent mechanism for individuals to enact their socially defined roles. Both individual and collective identities are integral to the process of human interaction, contributing to the development and continuity of identity in both thought and behavior.

In its simplest form, the concept of identity emerges from the interplay between individual and collective perceptions, cultivated through dialogue between an individual's self and their social selves within a system of intellectual and behavioral patterns. This system encompasses beliefs, moral values, customs, and traditions deeply rooted in the individual and the group. Through interactions, a specific set of these elements is collectively established, constituting the shared foundation among all individuals belonging to a particular society. This shared foundation shapes the nature of their identity and sets them apart from other societies' identities.

Bernd Simon outlines the roles of collective human identity as follows (Bishara, 2022, p. 32). Initially, it provides individuals with a profound sense of belonging to a particular group or community. Simultaneously, it instills in them a feeling of distinctiveness, setting them apart from others. Secondly, collective identity aids individuals in positioning themselves within the intricate social landscape. It prompts them to contemplate their place relative to others. Who do they align with? Who are they affiliated with, and conversely, who are they not connected to? Thirdly, a sense of identity contributes significantly to an individual's self-esteem and dignity.

In essence, individuals are vehemently opposed to any encroachment upon what they perceive as their identity. The notion of identity, in such cases, encompasses both their individual sense of self and their collective affiliations, both of which they hold in high regard. When external forces attempt to impose an alternate identity, it is perceived as an affront to their dignity and a catalyst for protest. This is particularly evident in situations commonly referred to as identity crises, which occur when there is a lack of confidence in the stability of prevailing cultural norms

amidst social upheaval and change. Conservative elements within society also leverage identity politics as a means to mobilize sentiments of anger, framing any tampering with their symbols as an attack on emotions and dignity. In certain instances, those who resist assaults on their affiliations may embrace characteristics that have been used pejoratively against them. They take pride in these characteristics, thereby forging a defiant identity that serves as a shield against derogatory stereotypes. This strategy underscores the boundaries of identities, in contrast to the call for abstract equality that transcends differences.

Tajfel and Turner (2004) have delineated three cognitive processes that contribute to the division of groups into “us” and “them”. The first is social classification (categorization). The initial step involves categorizing individuals into various social groups. The second one is social identification. Individuals then form a sense of solidarity and social identity with a specific group, essentially adopting an identity through their affiliation. The third one is social comparison. This process leads to the construction of positive and negative group images as individuals compare themselves to others.

While categorization is a natural and, at times, necessary cognitive process to understand societal and natural surroundings, it can give rise to two fundamental issues. First, categorizing people into groups may lead to the erroneous belief that group characteristics apply universally to individuals, potentially fostering stereotypes. Second, the division into “us” and “them” within societies, even among what may be considered national communities, can hinder the formation of a common societal identity, such as citizenship. This sectarian division can obstruct the development of a rational perspective on the broader societal interest, particularly in modern nation-states where citizenship should ideally transcend sectarian divisions. Even more concerning is that this division into “us” and “them” can supplant moral value judgments. Within this framework, vices of individuals belonging to the “We” group are often excused, while virtues exhibited by those in the “They” group may be met with skepticism. This can lead to a situation where the moral evaluation of individuals is contingent upon their affiliation, potentially leading to the tolerance of wrongdoing and the dismissal of virtues. In such cases, moral judgments become elusive, to the detriment of society as a whole.

Human identity is a complex construct intricately woven into a network of relationships, encompassing shared cultural traits and commonalities, it is grounded in geographical and historical affiliation, with a shared historical homeland forming the core foundation. This identity

is further strengthened by a collective historical memory, uniting individuals in a shared heritage. Cultural unity, transcending social boundaries, plays a vital role, as does a system of shared rights and duties governing interactions among individuals and between the state and its citizens. Additionally, economic interdependence, characterized by interconnected economic activities and regional affiliations, is a significant facet of this intricate human identity. Whether at the individual or collective level, it extends beyond mere material aspects to encompass a diverse array of elements (Rasheed, 2006).

It is imperative to acknowledge that identity, personality, and character all pertain to an individual's self-perception, yet they diverge in their nuanced meanings and implications. The intricate interplay between identity, personality, and character contributes to the intricate tapestry of an individual's self-concept and their interactions with the surrounding world. As individuals navigate the challenges and opportunities of life, their self-perception evolves, influenced by both introspective contemplation and external circumstances. Collectively, identity, personality, and character mold an individual's perceptions, motivations, and responses to the multifaceted facets of existence. When delving into the concept of identity, it is easier to focus on aspects related to self-esteem, self-image, and personal identity. These considerations include the following: Racial or gender identity, religious beliefs, ethnic background, occupation, and it can extend further than just behavior associated with one's role.

Identity Dimensions

Identity can be comprehensively examined through various dimensions, each representing a distinct facet of an individual or group's self-concept and their sense of belonging. These diverse types of identity encompass the following. Social identity dimension is rooted in an individual’s affiliation with various social groups, spanning race, nationality, religion, gender, ethnicity, occupation, and other affiliations (Howard, 2000). It fosters a sense of belonging and shared characteristics among those within the same group, promoting camaraderie and common purpose among diverse citizens within a nation.

Cultural identity revolves around shared beliefs, customs, traditions, language, and values stemming from one's cultural heritage. It significantly shapes an individual’s worldview and influences their interactions with individuals from both similar and diverse cultural backgrounds.

Cultural identity is instrumental in defining a nation's collective heritage and traditions, evoking pride and belonging among its citizens (Pitre & Clarke, 2017).

Ethnic identity represents an individual's self-identification with a specific ethnic group and its cultural identity (Epstein & Heizler, 2015). It is a measure of one's sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group, with the understanding that this identity can evolve and fluctuate based on life circumstances and encounters with ethnically diverse individuals.

Religious identity pertains to an individual's connection to a particular religion or belief system. It profoundly shapes an individual's values, moral principles, and sense of purpose, serving as a guiding framework for understanding the world and dictating personal behavior (Etengoff & Rodriguez, 2023).

Political identity encompasses an individual's political beliefs, affiliations, and ideologies, including alignment with political parties, ideologies, or social movements. It plays a significant role in shaping an individual's political inclinations and preferences, with the potential to influence the narrative and values associated with national identity (Archetti, 2013, p. 76).

National identity emphasizes an individual's allegiance to a specific nation or country, emphasizing common citizenship, loyalty to national symbols (such as the flag and national anthem), and a collective awareness of historical legacy and national destiny (Liu & Turner, 2018).

In summary, these various facets of identity collectively contribute to shaping an individual's overall self-concept. Each dimension plays a unique role in an individual's identity, and together, they form a complex and dynamic construct that influences their perceptions, behaviors, and interactions. This understanding is grounded in empirical research on the multifaceted nature of identity.

Accumulation of Identities

Identities have a tendency to accumulate and sometimes even compete with each other. Rather than remaining isolated, these identities often jostling among themselves "intersections" or pile up on top of each other "overlaps", both for individuals and groups. It's important to note that the accumulation or competition of identities in a specific case or context is primarily influenced by the nature of the relationships between these identities within a particular social context. A Muslim woman wearing the hijab may face discrimination based on both her gender and religion,

also working-class women may face discrimination based on both their social class and gender (Runyan, 2019).

In contract, overlap implies that the intertwining effect between two or more characteristics is minimal or almost nonexistent. Some identities may take precedence over others, either in terms of significance or chronology. For example, among Arab Islamists, Islamic identity may take precedence over Arab identity, while among Arab secular nationalists, the opposite may be true. In terms of chronological precedence, Arab identity may precede Islamic identity. This interplay among identities can either strengthen one trait over another or imbue it with additional meaning. In some cases, this interplay may create strong connections between two or more traits or even give rise to a new composite trait that differs from the original identities that contributed to its emergence.

Identity patterns can vary significantly. While various identity models acknowledge the possibility of individuals or groups having multiple identities simultaneously, the arrangement of these identities based on importance and proximity to the central identity has remained a relatively unexplored area of study. Similarly, the impact of potential connections between these identities often remains unclear, leading many researchers to overlook them. To address these complexities, recent research has suggested adopting multidimensional models of identity that allow for the visualization of more than three dimensions simultaneously (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

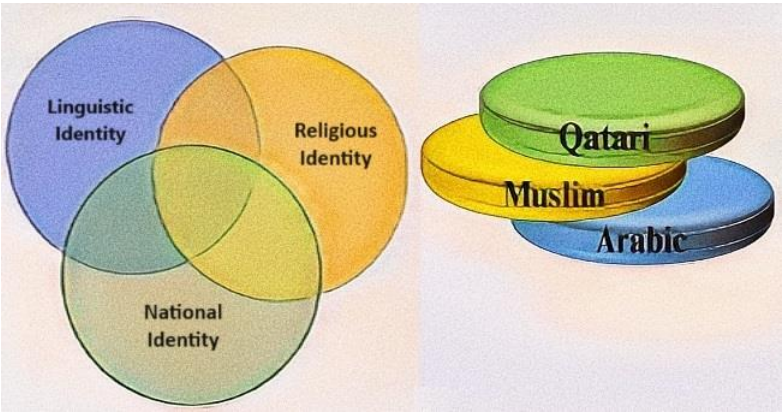

Figure 3.2 Overlapping of Identities

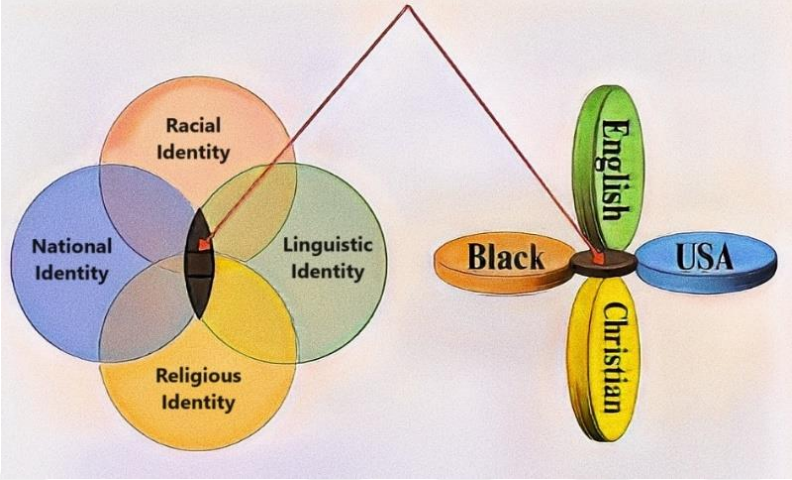

Figure 3.3 Intersections of Identities

To conclude, this study seeks to delve into the intricate realm of national identity, with a specific focus on conducting a comprehensive analysis of its constituent elements. Furthermore, it aims to provide an in-depth examination of the dynamic interplay between national identity and multiple SNIs coexisting within the individual's psyche. Subnational identity, the central point of interest in this scholarly inquiry, necessitates meticulous dissection, elucidation of its construction, exploration of its modes of expression, and careful examination of its profound influence within the broader context of societal dynamics.

3.2.3.2 SNIs

SNIs, often referred to as regional identities, constitute a significant aspect of the socio-political landscape in numerous nations. This dissertation endeavors to establish a comprehensive and scholarly definition of SNIs by scrutinizing their historical underpinnings, expressions, and repercussions. SNIs represent complex constructs rooted in the historical, cultural, and political experiences of distinct geographic regions within a nation-state. This dissertation asserts that SNIs are dynamic and evolving forces with considerable influence over the social cohesion, governance frameworks, and political dynamics of contemporary states. Additionally, it explores the intricacies involved in managing SNIs within the framework of a unified nation, underscoring the significance of acknowledging and accommodating these identities for effective governance and societal harmony.

Definition and the Concept

SNIs denote affiliations individuals hold towards their province, state, or place of origin, distinct from their connection to their country of origin (Melnick, 2020). The concept of SNIs encompasses the array of identities that individuals and communities associate with smaller geographical areas or administrative units within a larger nation-state. These identities are shaped by various factors, including historical legacies, cultural diversity, linguistic distinctions, economic variations, and political autonomy. SNIs manifest themselves diversely, encompassing regional patriotism, cultural distinctiveness, and even calls for heightened political self-governance or, in some cases, secession.

SNIs pertain to identities specific to particular regions or subnational entities within a broader nation-state. They can be influenced by a myriad of factors, encompassing cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts. SNIs encapsulate a sense of belonging and identification with a particular region or locality within a larger nation (Schnaudt, Walter, & Popa, 2016; Roniger, 2011). These identities often find their roots in the socio-historical representations of national citizenship, as well as shared notions regarding who qualifies as members of the nation and the criteria for inclusion within the community of citizens. In multinational states, different regions may harbor distinct conceptions of community membership, thus shaping the content of their national identity and, consequently, its relationship with sentiments of anti-others nature (Banting, Harell, Kymlicka, & Wallace, 2019). SNIs may coexist harmoniously with a national identity or exist as separate entities from it (Schnaudt, Walter, & Popa, 2016).

SNIs encompass the identities that emerge within specific regions or territories within a larger nation-state. These identities are profoundly influenced by a confluence of factors, including cultural heritage, language, historical narratives, and geographic delineations, and they contribute significantly to the tapestry of diversity within the overarching nation. The strength and manifestations of SNIs can vary widely, encompassing attachments to local, regional, and national levels, and they can also be shaped by transnational influences and the dynamics of globalization. Investigating the representation of SNIs in various contexts, such as within the realms of cinema and geopolitical scenarios, can yield valuable insights into the intricate processes of identity formation. Furthermore, the study of SNIs provides a nuanced perspective on the interplay between regional affinities and broader concepts like European identity.

In essence, SNIs pertain to the innate sense of belonging and identification that individuals and communities establish with a particular region or sub-region nested within a larger state. These identities often draw deeply from socio-historical constructs of national citizenship and collective beliefs regarding the criteria for inclusion within the community of citizens. Within multinational states, distinct regions may harbor disparate conceptions of community membership, thus shaping the content of their respective national identities and influencing their stance towards sentiments of anti-immigrant nature (Slomczynski, Wesolowski, & Tomescu-Dubrow, 2013). SNIs can coexist harmoniously with a broader national identity or operate as distinct and separate entities from it. The intricate relationship between SNI and the perception of ethnic threats has been a subject of examination in various contexts, including regions like Flanders, Wallonia, Spain, and Canada, renowned for the robust presence of SNIs. Notably, the potency of national identities, with particular emphasis on SNIs, is recognized as a potential catalyst for demands related to the construction of national identity. The regionalization and regionalism find expression in the economic and security domains (Dowley & Silver, 2000).

The identification and analysis of SNIs require a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the multiple factors that contribute to their formation and persistence within nation-states (Schnaudt, Walter, & Popa, 2016; Roniger, 2011). One of the foundational components is the ***cultural and linguistic dimension***, which often serves as the most visible marker of differentiation. SNIs typically emerge around distinct linguistic dialects and cultural attributes that distinguish one region from the national mainstream. These attributes may include localized culinary traditions, unique artistic expressions, ritual practices, and rich oral folklore that reinforce a sense of collective belonging rooted in the everyday cultural experience of the community. Language, in particular, functions not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic marker of identity, often tied to regional pride and historical narratives of autonomy or resistance.

Equally significant is the role of ***historical legacies*** in shaping SNIs. Past events—such as regional uprisings, episodes of marginalization, colonial-era divisions, or periods of autonomous governance—become embedded in the collective memory and influence how a community views itself in relation to the broader national identity. These historical experiences can foster a sense of distinctiveness and solidarity, especially when perceived injustices or exclusions remain unaddressed. In some cases, such legacies may also serve as mobilizing tools for political expression or even demands for greater autonomy.

A third factor that contributes to the depth and persistence of SNIs is the degree of ***regional autonomy*** within the state. When certain regions are granted devolved powers, legislative independence, or unique administrative structures, it often strengthens their sense of political distinctiveness. Autonomy does not merely reflect institutional differentiation; it can also affirm cultural particularism and reinforce identity narratives that see the region as a quasi-sovereign entity within the national framework. Federal systems or asymmetrical decentralization arrangements often institutionalize these distinctions, providing the formal scaffolding for identity articulation and preservation.

Lastly, ***regional boundaries***—both natural and administrative—play a critical role in delineating the space within which SNIs are constructed and maintained. Geographic features such as mountain ranges, rivers, and deserts can create physical separations that limit interaction with other regions and foster localized cultures. Simultaneously, administrative boundaries imposed by the state (such as provinces, governorates, or cantons) often become containers for identity formation, particularly when they coincide with ethno-linguistic or cultural divides. These spatial delineations, whether inherited or strategically designed, significantly shape the contours and intensity of subnational identification.

Dynamics between National Identity and SNIs

This section delves into a comprehensive comparative examination of national identities and SNIs, shedding light on their distinct characteristics and highlighting areas of convergence and divergence. Both forms of identity are integral components of the intricate tapestry of human affiliation and belonging within the context of nation-states.

National identity and subnational identity stand as pivotal elements within a nation's social cohesion and political landscape. While national identity serves as a unifying force, bringing together diverse communities under the banner of common citizenship, SNIs enrich the nation's tapestry by celebrating regional diversity and preserving unique heritage. Striking a harmonious equilibrium between these identities is imperative, as it bolsters national unity while upholding the autonomy and distinctiveness of various regions. Effective governance necessitates the acknowledgment and incorporation of both these identities, recognizing that a robust national identity can seamlessly coexist with thriving SNIs, ultimately contributing to the development of a prosperous and cohesive nation. Embracing this diversity of identities paves the way for a future

characterized by inclusivity, unity, and a deep respect for regional variations. The table that follows highlights how identities interact as fundamental layers in the multifaceted structure of belonging and collective association within nation-state systems.

Table 3.3 How Forms of Identity are Integral Components of the Intricate Tapestry of Human Affiliation and Belonging Within the Context of Nation-States

	National identity	SNIs
Historical Development	The evolution is an intricate and protracted process spanning centuries, intricately interwoven with historical occurrences, shared collective experiences, and the emergence of a cohesive cultural, linguistic, and political entity. This multifaceted construct is deeply entwined with the narrative of nation-building, encapsulating the hopes, endeavors, and struggles of a populace in the quest to forge a unified identity that transcends regional and ethnic boundaries.	Deeply entrenched in the annals of regional history, stemming from localized customs, traditions, and historical injustices that have given rise to distinctive and diverse identities within the overarching national framework. These identities frequently mirror unique historical trajectories and local interactions, fostering a profound sense of attachment and allegiance to particular regional communities.
Cultural Diversity	Imbued with a profound appreciation for the diverse tapestry of cultures within the nation's borders, celebrating the enrichment brought forth by the myriad of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups. It fosters a collective recognition of the inherent value of multiculturalism and pluralism, acknowledging that the interplay of these multifarious identities fortifies the nation's vibrancy and resilience.	Stand as fortresses preserving the rich tapestry of cultural diversity inherent in various regions. They serve as a testament to the safeguarding of distinct languages, artistic expressions, and culinary heritage, instilling a profound pride in the multifaceted mosaic that defines the nation.
Political Representation	Central to the concept of national identity is the existence of a unifying political system that endeavors to harmonize the myriad aspirations and interests of its citizens. It seeks to cultivate a shared sense of citizenship that surpasses regional affiliations and champions the collective welfare of the entire nation.	They often emerge as voices clamoring for recognition at the regional level, advocating for decentralized governance, regional autonomy, or the implementation of federal structures that can more effectively address localized concerns and interests.
Economic Disparities	National identity places an imperative on its citizenry to embrace shared accountability in addressing economic disparities that may exist within the country's boundaries. It underscores the communal commitment to advancing inclusive economic growth and equal opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of their regional or ethnic backgrounds.	Frequently sensitive to region-specific economic challenges and aspirations, potentially giving rise to distinct economic agendas aimed at meeting the unique needs and developmental requirements of specific regions. While such an approach can yield localized prosperity, it necessitates careful coordination with the overarching national economic framework to maintain coherence and stability.
Tensions and Conflicts	In moments of crisis or when confronted with external threats, national identity assumes the role of a cohesive force, fostering a sense of unity among citizens. It rallies individuals together to confront challenges and safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation	In contrast, if not adeptly and comprehensively managed, SNIs have the potential to inadvertently fuel tensions or exacerbate preexisting conflicts within the nation. As regional identities assert themselves, there exists the possibility of discord and separatist movements, which could pose a formidable challenge to national unity and territorial integrity.

International Relations	Notably, national identity wields significant influence over a country's foreign policy and international engagements, serving as the embodiment of the collective will and interests of the entire nation. It stands as the vanguard of diplomatic interactions, advocating for the nation's values and aspirations on the global stage.	Furthermore, SNIs, in their own right, wield an influence in shaping international relations. They can bolster transnational ties, encouraging cross-border interactions with neighboring regions or countries, giving rise to local initiatives for cooperation and development.
Education and Media	The dissemination of national identity often occurs through formal education and media channels, with a particular emphasis on shared historical narratives, cultural heritage, and national symbols. The educational curriculum is designed to instill a sense of patriotism and allegiance to the nation, while promoting a cohesive narrative of national identity.	Conversely, SNIs may find expression through regional educational and media platforms, safeguarding and enriching local languages, historical narratives, and cultural practices. By taking pride in these regional identities, they aim to ensure the perpetuation of unique traditions and a profound sense of belonging among individuals in specific regions.

Striking a balance between preserving SNIs and fostering a robust national identity stands as a delicate yet imperative task for nation-states, particularly in heterogeneous societies. Achieving this equilibrium involves a multi-pronged approach that integrates institutional, cultural, and political strategies aimed at inclusion rather than assimilation.

Characteristics of "National Security" Concept in this Study

Based on the previous analysis, this study will delineate several characteristics that distinguish the concept of national security within its objectives. This study aims to delineate several distinctive characteristics that define the concept of national security within its scope. First is interaction of internal, regional, and international factors. National security emerges as a product of intricate interactions between internal, regional, and international dynamics. Internally, it entails safeguarding society from internal threats influenced by external forces, contingent upon the alignment of the political system's objectives with the genuine values of the populace. Regional factors relate to the state's relations with neighboring countries in its geographical vicinity. On the international stage, it encompasses the nature of a state's global relationships, alliances, and interactions with major world powers.

Second is the dual dimensions of national security. National security exhibits two facets: An objective dimension that allows for quantitative identification of its components and elements. A moral dimension intertwined with the morale of the populace and their connection to the political system. A comprehensive study must holistically consider both dimensions.

Third is the dynamic nature of national security. National security, as a phenomenon, is inherently dynamic and constantly evolving. It does not represent a static state that a nation reaches and remains in perpetuity. Security is not a fixed reality that a state achieves through a specific set of measures and actions; rather, it is an ongoing process of adaptation to the ever-changing regional and international environments. States continually modify their conditions and strategies, enhancing their strength to maintain the desired level of security. National security, therefore, consists of both constants and variables, endowing it with a dynamic quality.

Fourth is the relativity of national security. Throughout history, no country has achieved absolute control over global resources, establishing complete security. Absolute security, defined as the absence of threats from all neighboring and even neutral states, remains unattainable. States invariably seek to enhance their relative national security, considering the security of neighboring

and closely connected nations. Ideologically, the concept of national security is also relative, as changes in governance systems or shifts in the ideologies embraced by ruling elites can significantly impact a state's understanding of national security.

Fifth is the influence of identity on national security. Collective identities naturally evolve and change in response to internal and external developments. These changes can be seen as either existential threats or as part of identity evolution, depending on whether the collective identity groups adopt a relatively closed or open perspective regarding the formation and preservation of their identity. The ability to maintain a language, reproduce cultural practices, or preserve racial purity can all be factors affecting a group's survival. It's important to recognize that the essence of national or cultural values (tied to identity) is not fixed but variable, contingent on specific contexts that determine the evaluation and judgment of these values. In this sense, defining vital national values by aligning them with high-level political factors is a reductionist fallacy.

It is crucial to consider that in defining the concept of national security, what truly matters are the self-perceptions of the state's leadership and the identities that constitute the state within its society. Additionally, it involves interpreting these identities within the context of dynamic environments and understanding the interactions between the state's tangible and intangible institutions. Consequently, the essence of national values or their surrounding framework, inherently linked to identity, remains fluid rather than fixed. It adapts to specific contexts where these values are evaluated and assessed. In this sense, attempting to align vital national values solely with high-level political factors represents a reductionist fallacy.

This study has comprehensively discussed the concept of national security, considering various sectors that encompass both actor-based issues (e.g., hostile states or groups) and non-actor-based issues (such as pandemics or climate change) within the realm of national security. While it is essential to avoid an overly broad definition of national security to maintain clarity, the inclusion of issues like pandemics does not imply that every type of threat should be viewed as a concern for national security. This aligns with Buzan's proposition that national security entails recognizing and managing conditions that could jeopardize the three pillars of a state: its materiality territorial and population base, its state institutions, and the shared idea of the state among its citizens (Buzan, 2016, pp. 74-76).

Clarifying Core Concepts: Working Definitions

Based on the conceptual discussions developed in Chapter Three, this study adopts the following working definitions to ensure analytical consistency across the empirical sections. SNIs are defined as: "*socially and politically salient forms of collective affiliation that exist within, and in partial distinction from, the overarching framework of national identity. These identities—rooted in ethnic, sectarian, tribal, regional, or linguistic affiliations—derive their significance not merely from historical continuity or cultural uniqueness, but from their capacity to shape political loyalties, influence social mobilization, and redefine perceptions of legitimacy, sovereignty, and state authority*."

SNIs, in this regard, are not treated as fixed or inherently antagonistic to national unity. Rather, they are conceptualized as fluid constructs that acquire political relevance when activated within contested state–society relationships, institutional asymmetries, or perceived exclusionary practices. Their expression may vary from benign cultural affirmation to assertive political claims that challenge the cohesion of the national polity. In fragile or transitioning states, particularly in the post-2011 Middle East, these identities have often functioned as both adaptive responses to governance vacuums and as vectors for external influence and proxy competition.

Furthermore, SNIs are analytically important because they blur the boundaries between identity and interest, culture and power, internal and external. Their mobilization can result in the formation of parallel social contracts, the fragmentation of state authority, or the securitization of communal affiliation. As such, this dissertation views SNIs not as static categories, but as historically embedded and politically instrumental constructs that are shaped by structural inequalities, discursive frames, and strategic calculations by both local and international actors.

Within the post-2011 Middle Eastern context, SNIs have become dynamic political instruments that interact with both domestic power structures and external geopolitical interventions. Their activation, whether through institutionalized representation, populist discourse, or sectarian conflict, has direct implications for national unity, internal stability, and the strategic orientation of states. Consequently, SNIs are conceptualized in this study not as fixed or primordial constructs, but as evolving and context-sensitive social formations, whose salience is shaped by historical grievances, perceived marginalization, and the broader regional and international political environment.

This study builds on the premise that SNIs, as defined herein, constitute a primary source of internal contestation that reshapes the national security paradigms of several Arab states. Also, the fragmentation of state legitimacy in the Middle East illustrates how SNIs—sectarian and ethnic in nature—operate as competing sources of political authority.

In the realm of national security studies, there exists a paradigm that challenges traditional notions of state-centric security. This paradigm represents a novel approach to understanding and addressing contemporary security challenges. Identity-Centric Security seeks to explore the profound impact of SNIs on national and ISec dynamics. It recognizes that in today's interconnected and diverse world, SNIs are not mere peripheral factors but central forces shaping the security landscape. Building upon the conceptual distinctions between SNIs, national legitimacy, and political representation, the following analytical table illustrates the causal linkages proposed by this dissertation. It highlights how identity-based fragmentation operates through specific mediating variables to produce distinct national security outcomes.

Table 3.4 The Causal Linkages Proposed by this Dissertation

Independent Variable (SNIs)	Mediating Variable	Security Outcomes
SNIs	State Weakness	Fragmentation of Decision-Making
Politicized Identities	Legitimacy Gap	Militarization of Political Discourse
Ethnic Fragmentation	Sectarian Dominance	Internal Security Fragility

This model captures the layered causality underpinning security deterioration in hybrid and divided states. Rather than treating SNIs as static categories, this framework contextualizes them within broader patterns of state performance and legitimacy erosion.

CHAPTER FOUR: DYNAMICS OF SNIs AND DRIVERS OF SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

4.1. The Middle East: The Working Concept and Turning Points

The academic study of the Middle East is a relatively new field, intricately linked to the historical shifts post-WWII, the onset of the Cold War, and the gradual decline of British and French colonial influences.[8] The term "Middle East" is a geopolitical construct with a relatively recent origin and an evolving definition that reflects the complex interplay of regional dynamics and global politics. Defining the Middle East will enable us to determinate on the distinct social, political, and economic dynamics intrinsic to this region. The fluidity of the term "Middle East" has significant implications for academic studies and policy-making, as it encompasses a region with vast diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, and political systems. This diversity must be carefully considered in analyses and when formulating national security or identities to avoid oversimplification and to acknowledge the complex realities of the region.

Figure 4.1. The Middle East. (Adapted from (United Natios, 2011))

[8] Historically, diplomats and scholars, particularly from Britain and to some extent France, used the terms Near East or *le Proche-Orient* (Choueiri, 2005, p. 1). These terms were flexible enough to encompass studies on a wide range of topics from ancient civilizations to the modern impacts of industrial changes (Mansfield & Pelham, 2004). Over time, as American and Soviet geopolitical interests reshaped the world, these traditional terms were replaced by the "Middle East" (Lewis, 1995). This broader scope is now embraced by many studies that employs diverse theoretical frameworks to interpret significant historical and socio-economic transformations within the region.

This term is a product of historical and political processes that reflect power dynamics and cultural perceptions. Edward Said's seminal work, Orientalism (1979), offers a critical examination of how Western scholarship has historically constructed the "Orient"—encompassing regions like the Middle East—as an exotic, backward, and homogeneous entity. Said argues that this construction served to justify colonial and imperial ambitions by portraying Eastern societies as inherently inferior and in need of Western intervention and governance.[9]

To ensure conceptual clarity and analytical coherence, this study adopts a geographically and culturally delimited understanding of the term "Middle East." This dissertation intentionally narrows its focus to the Arab Mashreq. This designation encompasses countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq, in addition to the Arab peninsula, where interlinked historical trajectories, cultural commonalities, and political configurations create a coherent unit of analysis. Focusing on the Arab Mashreq offers several methodological advantages. First, it allows for greater depth in examining the interaction between identity, governance, and security within states that share colonial legacies, sectarian dynamics, and post-independence state-building experiences. Second, the Mashreq serves as a microcosm of many of the challenges associated with Middle Eastern politics more broadly such as authoritarian resilience, identity fragmentation, and the contestation of national narratives while remaining sufficiently bounded to support comparative and context-specific analysis. This delineation also aligns with the core research questions of the study, which seek to interrogate subnational identity formations and their implications for national cohesion and regional security in a post-2011 landscape.

The Middle East has witnessed several critical turning points that have fundamentally shaped its contemporary landscape. Albert Hourani characterized the modernization of the 19th century Middle East as a complex interaction between the preservation of existing cultural values and the necessary adaptations for survival in a modernizing world. He wrote "*It would be better... to see the history of the period as that of a complex interaction: of the will of ancient and stable societies*

[9] Said argues that this construction served to justify colonial and imperial ambitions by portraying Eastern societies as inherently inferior and in need of Western intervention and governance. Said's critique is deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge. Foucault posits that knowledge is not objective but is intertwined with power structures; it is produced and utilized to control and dominate. In the context of the Middle East, the Western production of knowledge about the region—through academic disciplines, literature, and media—has often reinforced stereotypes and justified political agendas. In scholarly discourse, the term "Middle East" has been critiqued for its Eurocentric origins and ambiguous geographical scope.

to reconstitute themselves, preserving what they have of their own while making the necessary changes in order to survive in a modern world" (Hourani, 1993, p. 4).

As the 21st century began, these historical reflections continued to be highly pertinent. They informed the region's political and international relations as it grappled with the implications of its colonial past, a fragmented modern history, and various encounters with globalization (Fawcett, 2016, p. 16). With the conclusion of World War I (WWI) and the subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by the dissolution of the caliphate. These events eliminated the primary barriers to the formation of nation-states. The concept of the nation-state began to crystallize within the Arab world, albeit slowly. Discussions on the construction of modern states gained prominence, occupying a substantial realm in both intellectual discourse and practical application. These discussions were driven by the aspirations for national independence, self-determination, identity formation, global presence, and the realization of each nation's and people's civilizational and cultural roles (Taleb, 1999).

The historical evolution of the Middle East can be comprehensively understood through the examination of several pivotal milestones. The first turning point is the discovery of oil (early 20th century). The discovery of oil, first in Iran in 1908 and subsequently in other Gulf states, transformed the Middle East's economic and geopolitical standing, drawing intense foreign interest and intervention that continues to influence the region (Luciani, 2016). The second turning point is the establishment of the mandate system and the rise of Islamist and nationalist movements (the interwar period). The mandate system had far-reaching implications for regional politics and social structures. It altered traditional governance models, introduced new legal and educational systems, and reshaped economic landscapes (Rogan, 2016). This period witnessed the rise of Islamist and nationalist movements across the Middle East, driven by anti-colonial sentiments and aspirations for self-determination.

The third turning point is the eruption of key conflicts and Shifts in regional power dynamics. The mid-20th century was marked by significant conflicts and shifts in power. For instance, (1) the proclamation of the state of Israel (1948) and the ensuing Arab-Israeli conflict have been central to regional geopolitical discourse, shaping alliances and conflicts in the Middle East. (2) The 1956 Suez Crisis, sparked by Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, underscored the waning influence of European powers and the ascendancy of nationalist movements. (3) The Six-Day War in 1967 further reshaped regional geopolitics, with Israel's territorial gains deeply influencing the

Palestinian struggle for statehood and regional alliances (Sluglett, 2016). (4) The Iranian Revolution of 1979 represented a pivotal moment, overthrowing the Shah and establishing an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. This revolution not only redefined Iran's domestic policies but also had profound implications for U.S.-Iran relations and the broader Middle Eastern power dynamics (Mandaville, 2016).

The fourth turning point is the contemporary challenges (from the Gulf Wars to the Arab Uprisings). The late 20th and early 21st centuries introduced new challenges and continuities. The Gulf Wars (1981, 1991, 2003) dramatically altered the international and regional order, influencing a broad spectrum of inter-state and intra-regional relations (Legrenzi, 2016). The Arab Uprisings (2010-2012) brought a wave of anti-government protests that challenged entrenched authoritarian regimes, leading to significant political upheavals and, in some cases, prolonged conflicts (Sadiki, 2016). The rise and subsequent fall of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (2014-2019) further destabilized the region, eliciting substantial military and political responses from global and regional powers (Chulov, 2019). These events, among others (as the following table shows), have contributed to the intricate mosaic of the Middle East, shaping its political frameworks, economic conditions, and social structures, thus continuously influencing both regional and global affairs.

Table 4.1 The Main Periods of the Modern Middle Eastern Regional System

Time Period	Internal Dynamics	External Interference	Number of Conflicts (IS/I/TN)	Gulf Cluster	Mashreq Cluster
2018-2024 Age of Fragmentation	Post-Arab Uprisings instability, resurgence of authoritarianism	High (U.S., Russia, Iran, Turkey)	12 (3/5/4)	Persistent instability, Gulf states asserting independence	Syrian civil war, Iraq's struggles, Lebanon's crises
2010-2017 Age of Arab Uprisings	Popular uprisings, state crackdowns	High (weakening U.S., growing Russia)	5 (0/1/4)	Instability	Instability
1991-2010 Age of Pax Americana	Relative stability turning into deepening transnational crisis	High (American)	9 (2/4/3)	Dual containment, instability after 2003	The rise and fall of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Turkey's re-emergence
1975-1990 Age of Realism	State consolidation and international instability	Relatively low	9 (4/3/2)	Almost constant wars	Lebanese civil war, first intifada
1970-1975 Age of Arab Nationalism	The crisis of Arab nationalism	Relatively low	3 (1/1/1)	Losing British umbrella, twin pillar policy	Israeli-Arab tensions, leadership changes in Egypt and Syria

(*IS - Interstate Conflicts*: These are conflicts that occur between two or more sovereign states. *I - Intrastate Conflicts*: These are conflicts that occur within a single state, often involving different groups within the country, such as civil wars or internal rebellions. *TN - Transnational Conflicts*: These conflicts cross national borders but are not strictly interstate wars. They often involve NSAs and may include issues such as terrorism, insurgencies, or cross-border criminal activities. This information has been collected from various sources.)

This sustained involvement has endowed the Middle East with several shared characteristics: whether political (low levels of liberation/high levels of authoritarianism), economic (rentier economies/low levels of economic liberalization), or cultural (mostly Arab/Islamic) (Gause, 1999). Thus, we can consider the Middle East as a distinct unit or a "subsystem" within the larger international system. It also shares a common security dilemma, making it a "complex" for regional and national security.

The geopolitics, regional and international conspiracies, and rivalries often dominate the Middle East's analyses. However, it is the local conditions that form the core of every national conflict, providing the fragile spark that can be easily ignited by both foreign and domestic actors (Anderson, 1987, p. 10). Halliday identifies three primary attributes of the Middle East. First, the region's development and international dynamics have been significantly influenced by external intervention. Second, despite the artificial and problematic nature of state-building processes, the institutional form of the state has persisted, with efforts to dismantle and replace these structures generally failing. Nonetheless, Middle Eastern states remain inherently weak. The third attribute, closely linked to the second, is the disproportionately substantial role played by NSAs in the region's international politics (Halliday, 2009, pp. 6-10).

Thus, understanding Middle Eastern politics necessitates considering both the material and non-material structures within the region. Conflicts, wars, and external interventions have led to the emergence of new NSAs that operate across state borders, challenging the established foundations of the region (Watkin, 2016). Furthermore, in the contemporary era, the political architecture of the Middle East is marked by a diverse array of governance models, ranging from monarchies and theocracies to republics (Heydemann, 2007). This political diversity is further complicated by a web of alliances, rivalries, and enduring conflicts, each influencing and reshaping the regional power dynamics. Economically, the region is equally diverse, characterized by economies heavily reliant on oil juxtaposed with those striving for diversification through tourism, agriculture, and other sectors (Kabbani & Ben Mimoune, 2021). In addition, central to understanding the region's complexity is an exploration of SNIs. The historical evolution of these identities, influenced by national developments, regional dynamics, and global factors, reveals the depth of the region's socio-cultural divisions (Bengio, 2012). The emergence of deeply divided societies, shaped by ideological underpinnings and institutionalized sectarianism, underscores the significance of SNIs in the Middle East (Makdisi, 2000, p. 25).

The process of state formation and the establishment of national security structures have been profoundly influenced by these underlying identities (Stetter, 2008). One of the primary factors in understanding state formation in the Middle East is the role of regimes. The consolidation of power by ruling regimes, their governance structures, and the criteria by which they prioritize national security have been pivotal in shaping the region's political landscape. The success and resilience of regimes often depend on their ability to manage and navigate the complex web of SNIs. Conversely, the decline and failure of regimes can frequently be attributed to their inability to address or accommodate these diverse identities. The distinction between the state and the regime becomes particularly salient in the Middle Eastern context, where national security is often perceived and prioritized differently by state apparatuses and ruling regimes (Hassan, 2023).

Furthermore, ideology plays a crucial role in shaping SNIs and their interaction with national security structures (Wastnidge, 2019). Various ideological currents, including Islamism, nationalism, sectarianism and secularism, influence the awareness and self-identity of subnational groups. These ideologies can either foster cohesion within a state or exacerbate divisions, depending on how they resonate with the population and how they are leveraged by political actors. The interplay between ideology and identity is thus a significant factor in the dynamics of security and conflict in the region.

Additionally, the Arab Uprisings of 2011 serve as a critical juncture for examining the impact of SNIs on national security. Initially driven by demands for political reform and economic opportunities, these uprisings quickly unveiled the deep-seated sectarian, ethnic and tribal divisions within many Middle Eastern states (Darwich & Fakhoury, 2017). The uprisings led to civil wars in countries like Syria and Iraq, where sectarian identities played a crucial role in shaping the conflict dynamics. The involvement of external powers, leveraging these identities to exert influence and pursue their interests, further complicated the security landscape. The post-uprising era has seen regimes adapt their control mechanisms and governance strategies in response to the challenges posed by these movements (Smith, et al., 2013).

The relationship between SNIs and national security is multifaceted and nuanced. SNIs can undermine national security by fueling internal conflicts and creating vulnerabilities to external manipulation. For example, sectarian divides can be exploited by external powers to weaken a state, as seen with Iran's support for Shia militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia's backing of Sunni groups in Syria and Yemen (Barak, 2018). On the other hand, when

managed effectively, these identities can contribute to national security by fostering inclusive governance and social cohesion. Recognizing and accommodating diverse identities within a state can mitigate conflicts and build a more resilient society (Wildeman, 2021).

4.2. SNIs in the Middle East

The Middle East is characterized by a rich tapestry of intersecting and overlapping identities and SNIs that intricately shape its socio-political landscape. To comprehend these identities, one must adopt a nuanced approach that considers historical, cultural, religious, and political factors. The region hosts various layers of identity, including national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities, which coexist and sometimes conflict within individual states (Bishara, 2018). At the individual level, there is a deep-seated crisis of identity and belonging that affects many individuals. This crisis is largely due to the Arab individual's simultaneous allegiance to various, often conflicting social constructs such as tribe, religion, state, and ethnicity. With its complex web of local and national loyalties, the Arab world is marked by a distinct misalignment where geographical boundaries do not mirror "feelings" boundaries, nor do political borders align with the spiritual and cultural boundaries of the *ʾumma* (nation, community). This misalignment is attributed to the fact that the formation of Arab states was largely unnatural, artificial and influenced heavily by external forces, particularly in the creation of international borders (Watfa, 2013). Moreover, the pursuit of a cohesive national identity has been a significant challenge following the political transformation of the Arab world, particularly during the Cold War era. A notable conflict arose between factions: one side comprised of political movements that eschewed national belonging in favor of transnational ideologies to assert political authority, and the other founded on the principles of national belonging, emphasizing the defense and development of the nation.

The ongoing transformations in the Middle East have brought the complexities of identity, especially SNIs, into sharp relief, pushing some states towards fragmentation, with some having already succumbed. However, it is crucial to address several misconceptions about identity as outlined by Shaban (2013). Firstly, the notion that industrialized nations have resolved identity issues is an illusion. Secondly, the belief that citizenship alone can resolve identity conflicts is unfounded. Thirdly, the assumption that former socialist countries have settled identity matters is

incorrect. And finally, the idea that identity conflicts are exclusive to the Third World is a misconception.

4.2.1. The Dilemma of Identity in the Middle East

The formation of modern Middle Eastern states has often been influenced by colonial legacies, which imposed artificial boundaries that did not necessarily reflect the pre-existing ethnic, religious and tribal divisions. The concept of national identity in the Middle East is thus a relatively recent construct, superimposed upon older, more deeply rooted SNIs. As Salameh (2011) points out, the Western tendency to conflate national identity with language, state and ethnicity has led to a misunderstanding of the region's inherent diversity. This simplification overlooks the multiplicity of Middle Eastern cultures, ethnicities, languages and nationalities. While there is certainly a dominant Arab ethnos, significant numbers of Middle Eastern peoples and nationalities possess historical memories and ethno-cultural bonds that challenge the dominant Arabist paradigm. This complex interplay between imposed national boundaries and pre-existing identities has significantly shaped the contemporary Middle Eastern political landscape. In analyzing the region's national identity, it's crucial to understand how the colonial legacies and subsequent state-building efforts have influenced individual and collective affiliations.

The intricate relationship between national identity and state-building in the Middle East is further complicated by how state institutions manage the concept of citizenship. This dynamic interaction between imposed boundaries and indigenous identities highlights the tension between state-driven and subnational affiliations, which is crucial in understanding the robustness and fragility of national identity in the region. In his discourse on national identity, Bishara (2023) emphasizes that its robustness and fragility are contingent upon how state institutions interact with individuals. When individuals are treated as citizens, national identity is fortified. Conversely, if individuals are categorized based on tribal, regional, ethnic, religious, sectarian or other affiliations, national identity becomes tenuous. Bishara argues that in such scenarios, society is susceptible to fragmentation under significant stress, as individuals will retreat to their primary affiliations for security. This dynamic has been prominently observed in the Arab world, where state failures in providing security and essential services have driven individuals to seek alternative sources of protection to feel secure (Gause F. , 2013).

In another framework, the state's alienation from society constitutes a strong incentive in deepening the identity crisis and the community's return to pre-state formations. Identity-based rhetoric relies on two pillars. The first relates to the internal dynamics of the group, represented by its ability to mobilize and provide legitimacy, and the second relates to its external ability to delineate the geographical or social boundaries of the problem. This contributes to establishing a new circle of interests, defining potential allies and adversaries. Every social demand and every activity group forms a circle of interests with defined and potential friends and foes (Chenine & Kherroubi, 2020). Al-Ghathami (2011), in his lecture "Cultural Identities and Root Identities," discusses the deadly meanings in identities, where the identity-self defines itself by negating the other. These deadly meanings are ideas created by identity components and then imprisoned within them through repetition, forming identity walls that represent this social component and may shape its behaviors towards the other.

Intolerance becomes one of the mechanisms for preserving identity when every identity-based incident "added value" (Burke, 1991). Lerner (1958) believes that traditional societies generally struggle to adapt to cultural and social changes, and this inability is fundamentally due to a cultural factor characterized by a lack of diversity and a strong tendency towards similarity and unity. This unity drives the individual to form a close attachment to their social environment, viewing it as the sole framework for truth and righteousness, and considering other systems inferior in comparison (Lerner, 1958, pp. 43-50).

From the above, we conclude that the contexts and factors leading to divisive actions in the Middle East are multiple. The importance of the failure of social integration and the evocation of historical narratives with societal wounds based on discrimination and marginalization interact with a reality where division is a policy and practice, prompting components to retreat to their social strongholds and establish a new reality of "pluralistic society" resisting the current system. Thus, the Middle East became based on concepts and values central to the political, cultural and ideological definition of this geographical area and its inhabitants that is closely linked to ethnic affiliation, religious belief, cultural specificity, and identity difference.

The pluralistic society, as defined by Lijphart (1977, pp. 3-5), is fragmented by religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural or ethnic divisions. In all societies, transformations lead to changes in individual identities, social status, and aspirations, inevitably leading to the emergence of new demands, different social balances, and unfamiliar cultural expressions. This is particularly

reflected in the relationships between individuals and groups on one side and centers of power and influence on the other. People's sense of self and their distinctiveness increases, along with their insistence on the national community and the state recognizing these distinctivenesses as rights (Saif, 2013, pp. 34-44). In the Middle East, this fragmented social environment embodies the societal potential for employing authoritarian practices that invest in SNIs internally and externally for multiple purposes, not least of which is disrupting political reform and making demands for power-sharing a threat to the security of groups against each other. This is because it allows the minority to rule or equalizes citizens in resources or portrays the regime as the sole guarantor of the groups' security against each other.

In the Middle East, for instance, tribal identities hold significant importance, as tribal communities maintain their social structures, customs and loyalties, influencing political dynamics and power structures. Arabism as a transnational identity seeks to unify Arab states, emphasizing shared cultural and linguistic heritage. Similarly, Islamic unity aims to unify Muslims worldwide, transcending national borders and emphasizing common religious identity. Sectarian identities, particularly Sunni and Shiite, have historical, religious and political dimensions that shape social and political dynamics. Maalouf (2015, p. 165) suggests, to settle this, that curbing the deadly deviations of identity requires understanding and controlling it, not through persecution or collusion. We must change our perspective towards others and ourselves, freeing others from their narrowest affiliations. Only by eliminating hierarchical judgments among identities and recognizing that each identity is original and others are mere copies can we achieve peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among different identities.

The Historical Narrative

Prior to the Cold War, the Middle East was primarily shaped by the legacies of colonialism and the struggle for independence. The artificial boundaries drawn by colonial powers, particularly after WWI, did not align with the existing ethnic, religious and tribal divisions, leading to the creation of modern states with diverse and often conflicting identities. The imposition of colonial rule by European powers, especially Britain and France, played a crucial role in shaping the identities of Middle Eastern states. These powers often promoted sectarian and ethnic divisions to maintain control, exacerbating pre-existing tensions. For instance, the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 divided the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces into British and French spheres of influence,

creating new national boundaries that disregarded ethnic and sectarian compositions (Fawcett, 2016).

The interwar period saw the rise of nationalist movements across the Middle East, driven by a desire for independence and self-determination. These movements often drew on pre-existing ethnic and religious identities, leading to the formation of new national narratives. In Egypt, for example, nationalist leaders like Saad Zaghlul mobilized broad support by appealing to national identity. In contrast, the Arab nationalist movement sought to unify the Arab world based on shared linguistic and cultural heritage. This movement gained significant traction in countries like Syria and Iraq, where leaders like Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar promoted the idea of a united Arab nation. However, Arab nationalism often clashed with local identities and interests, leading to tensions and divisions within the movement (Rogan, 2016). During this period, many movements begun following the steps of imperial powers and opting for regional expansions against their smaller and weaker neighbors. When their national identity remained unclear, they sought to expand their regional borders, hoping to present themselves as leaders of the Arab world. Kumaraswamy (2006) provides an example of this is Jordan, where King Abdullah I aspired to realize the idea of Greater Jordan, and the annexation of the West Bank was merely a first step in his grand plan, which included parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq.

This expansionist tendency was not always successful, which led some to seek a transnational solution to the identity crisis, ideas of Arab and Islamic nationalism were presented. They sought to overcome the difficulties related to developing national identity by focusing on shared cultural and religious backgrounds. Thus, the overarching Arab/Islamic identity came into conflict with exclusive national interests, making tension inevitable. Conflicts between Arabs-Islamic states became more severe than the conflict with the external world. The Arab stance towards Egypt following the Camp David Accords epitomizes this dilemma, as Egypt was isolated from the League of Arab States (LAS) for pursuing “narrow national interest” and abandoning the larger “Arab interest” (Ajami, 1979).

The Cold War period was marked by intense superpower rivalries between the US and the Soviet Union, which significantly influenced the political and identity dynamics of the Middle East. Both superpowers sought to expand their influence in the region, often supporting different factions and movements to further their geopolitical interests. The US and the Soviet Union viewed the Middle East as a critical battleground in their global struggle for supremacy. The strategic

importance of the region, due to its vast oil reserves and pivotal geopolitical position, made it a key focus of the Cold War policies. Both superpowers sought to align with local regimes and movements, often exacerbating existing conflicts and creating new ones.

The US primarily supported conservative and pro-Western regimes such as those in Saudi Arabia, Iran (before the 1979 revolution) and Israel. In contrast, the Soviet Union backed leftist, nationalist and anti-imperialist movements, including those in Egypt, Syria and Iraq. This alignment with opposing factions deepened ideological and sectarian divides in the region. Edward Wastnidge (2019) explores how Turkey and Iran used appeals to transnational identities in their foreign policy during the Cold War, leveraging their historical, religious and cultural ties to influence regional politics and enhance their geopolitical standing.

The Cold War era saw the manipulation of identity politics by both local regimes and external powers. Nationalist and socialist ideologies often intersected with SNIs, creating complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics. In Egypt, for instance, Gamal Abdel Nasser promoted Arab nationalism and socialism, while simultaneously navigating the country's diverse religious and ethnic landscape. In Iraq, the Ba'ath Party, under leaders like Saddam Hussein, used Arab nationalism to consolidate power while suppressing Kurdish and Shia identities. The Kurdish struggle for autonomy or independence, led by figures like Mustafa Barzani, clashed with the central government's efforts to maintain a unified Arab state. This conflict was further complicated by external support from the US and the Soviet Union at different times. The end of the Cold War brought significant changes to the Middle East, including the emergence of new challenges and the resurgence of identity. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the reduction of direct superpower intervention created a power vacuum, leading to increased regional competition and internal strife.

The post-Cold War era saw the reconfiguration of alliances and the emergence of new power dynamics in the Middle East. The U.S. emerged as the dominant external power, continuing to support allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia while engaging in military interventions, such as the Gulf War of 1990-1991. These interventions were often justified by appeals to national and ISec but had significant implications for regional identity dynamics. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by a US-led coalition toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, unleashing long-simmering sectarian tensions and leading to widespread violence and instability. The power vacuum created by the invasion allowed the rise of extremist groups like ISIS, which exploited sectarian divisions to gain support and territory (Fawcett, 2016; Rogan, 2016).

The post-Cold War period witnessed a resurgence of identity politics, driven by a combination of internal and external factors. The Arab Uprisings of 2011, for example, highlighted the deep-seated grievances and aspirations of various ethnic, religious, and political groups across the region. With the role of media and technology, these uprisings challenged authoritarian regimes and sought to reshape national identities, often leading to violent confrontations and prolonged conflicts (Hinnebusch, 2013).

Reciprocal Role of Factors on SNIs

It can be explored that the various factors influencing SNIs in the Middle East, which are deeply rooted in complex interplay elements, shaped by the reciprocal roles and interactions of these diverse influences. Understanding these factors is crucial to comprehending the intricate tapestry of subnational affiliations in the region, these myriads of factors that can be broadly categorized into national developments, regional dynamics, and global factors. The interplay of these factors creates a highly dynamic and often volatile identity landscape in the Middle East. Authoritarian regimes' attempts to suppress SNIs frequently backfire, leading to resistance movements that further entrench these identities. Regional rivalries, particularly between Sunni and Shia powers, leverage and exacerbate sectarian divisions for strategic gain. Global factors, from colonial legacies to modern interventions, add additional layers of complexity, often destabilizing efforts to build cohesive national identities.

National Developments

The following national developments influence the structure and effectiveness of SNIs in the Middle East. The first national factor that influences SNIs is *Authoritarianism and State Repression*. Authoritarian regimes in many Middle Eastern states have a long history of using repression to maintain control, often targeting specific ethnic or sectarian groups. This practice has reinforced SNIs and created complex social dynamics within these countries. Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes have historically used excessive force to suppress ethnic, sectarian and social disparities, which has led to sustained grievances and the rise of civil rights movements demanding democratic transformations (Salamey & Pearson, 2012).

Besides, the mobilization and manipulation of sectarian identities are key strategies for regime survival. This tactic helps maintain authoritarian control by creating divisions within the

population, making unified opposition more difficult (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). Also, authoritarian regimes in the Middle East employ various strategies, including blunt repression and divide-and-rule tactics, to disrupt opposition coalitions and maintain their power. This includes targeting minorities and fostering sectarian tensions (King, 2007). In addition, state violence and repression are organized at multiple levels, from national to local, with various actors such as police, militias, and informal enforcers playing roles in maintaining control. This hierarchical and lateral organization creates openings for oppositional actions but also ensures continuous surveillance and repression (Johnston, 2012).

The second national factor that influences SNIs in the region is *Economic Policies*. Inequitable economic policies that favor certain regions or groups over others can exacerbate existing divisions and reinforce SNIs in the Middle East. Inequitable economic policies have led to significant disparities in the Middle East, fostering social inequality and reinforcing SNIs. Policies that favor specific regions or groups have exacerbated these divisions, leading to tensions and conflicts within countries. Unequal access to economic opportunities and resources has contributed to a sense of disenfranchisement among disadvantaged groups. This lack of equitable opportunities has reinforced SNIs, as individuals align more closely with their ethnic, sectarian, or regional groups. The historical development of economic policies in the Middle East, influenced by colonial and post-colonial arrangements, has often favored specific regions or groups. This has entrenched economic disparities and solidified SNIs, as seen in various Middle Eastern countries (Yousef, 2004).

The third national factor that influences SNIs is the *Role of Elites*. Political, economic and religious elites in the Middle East often manipulate SNIs to consolidate power and influence. Political elites in the Middle East frequently mobilize and manipulate sectarian identities as a strategy for regime survival. This tactic is used to create divisions among the populace, making it easier for authoritarian regimes to maintain control (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). In Lebanon, economic elites aligned with political factions play a crucial role in reinforcing sectarian divisions through economic patronage. These business elites control significant resources and use economic patronage to secure support from specific ethnic or sectarian groups (Clark & Salloukh, 2013). In addition, religious leaders significantly impact sectarian identities by promoting specific religious interpretations and practices. For instance, the Shia clerical establishment in Iran shapes Shia

identity and mobilizes political support, while Sunni religious leaders in Saudi Arabia promote Sunni identity and influence regional politics (Malmvig, 2019).

The fourth national factor that influences SNIs is *Characteristics of Arab Society*. The social structure in the Arab world is complex and diverse, characterized by a strong presence of kinship groups such as clans, which are based on blood ties, shared religious beliefs, or common language and ancestry. These social structures existed before the advent of the modern state and have maintained their influence even in the modern era. Loyalty often gravitates towards these kinship groups rather than the state, a phenomenon that is particularly evident in situations of civil wars and tribal conflicts (Hourani, 2013). Arab individuals often find it challenging to break free from these social structures, as Arab society heavily relies on a hierarchical system that fosters relationships of loyalty and obedience between younger and older members, whether it be within the family, the clan or between rulers and the ruled. These relationships manifest in various forms of allegiance to leaders, including tribal chiefs and state rulers. These diverse social groups have successfully preserved their distinct identities, avoiding assimilation into the national identity that the state aims to build. Consequently, these groups have become obstacles to the formation of a unified national identity, as local and kinship loyalties tend to overshadow allegiance to the state and the rule of law.

It is worth noting that the "*Fanaticism*" in the Arab context relates to intense allegiance to SNIs, such as sects or tribes, leading to a closed value system that challenges the formation of a unified national identity. Fanaticism creates a closed system of values, making it difficult for national values to penetrate and unify society (Hourani, 2013). This results in segmented identities that resist broader national affiliations. The phenomenon of tribal and religious fanaticism has historical roots and persists as a major factor in social and political dynamics, often undermining national unity (Abdul Hamid & Elhrabi, 2017).

Regional Dynamics

There are two significant dynamics that influence SNIs in the Middle East. The first regional dynamic is *Interstate Rivalries* in the region, which have often played out along identity lines, exacerbating SNIs and contributing to regional instability. The geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has, that led to the support of proxy groups, significantly influenced sectarian identities across the Middle East. This competition, which often manifests through proxy wars, has

deepened sectarian divides and reinforced SNIs in countries like Syria, Yemen and Iraq (Calabrese, 2020). The rivalry between these regional powers has not only fueled conflicts but also shaped the security dynamics of the Middle East. The competition for regional dominance has led to increased militarization and instability (Kinsella, 1995). The second regional dynamic is *transnational movements* active in the region. The rise of transnational movements such as political Islamism and Kurdish nationalism has also influenced SNIs. These movements often transcend national borders, uniting individuals around shared religious or ethnic identities. Transnational settings and dynamics play a crucial role in the construction, negotiation, and reproduction of identities. Individuals and groups often negotiate their identities within social worlds that span multiple places (Vertovec, 2001). Transnationalism reshapes key concepts of local and global identities, influencing how individuals perceive their connection to both localities and broader transnational communities (Yeoh, Willis, & Fakhri, 2003).

Global Factors

Three global factors influence SNIs in the Middle East. The first of these factors is the *colonial legacy*. The colonial-era borders and administrative practices have left a lasting impact on SNIs in the region. The colonial legacy in the Middle East created a poor fit between state boundaries and the identities of the people living within them. This incongruence has contributed to persistent conflicts and the rise of separatist movements within the region (Hinnebusch, 2013). In regions where nationalist agitation during colonial times was limited to urban centers, post-colonial military regimes often replaced traditional elites, shaping new national identities. The impact of colonial legacies on political identities continues to challenge post-colonial regimes, particularly with the rise of religious identities (Henry C. M., 2018). The imposition of the European colonial borders has led to the development of nationalism that often defines itself against internal and external 'others,' further complicating the political landscape and identity politics in the Middle East (Cole & Kandiyoti, 2002).

The second global factor that influences SNIs in the region is *globalization*. Increased global interconnectedness has both positive and negative impacts on SNIs. On the one hand, it provides marginalized groups new platforms to voice their grievances. On the other hand, it can also exacerbate inequalities and cultural tensions. Globalization fosters the development of bicultural or transnational identities, where individuals integrate aspects of their local culture with global

cultural elements. This can lead to richer and more diverse identities but may also cause identity confusion, particularly among youth in non-Western cultures (Arnett, 2002). In addition, global connectivity facilitates the formation of transnational networks that support hybrid identities, blending elements from both home and host cultures. This can help maintain cultural ties while integrating new influences, creating complex identity dynamics (Saw, 2018).

The third global factor that influences SNIs is *Foreign Interventions* into the regional crises. Foreign interventions, both military and diplomatic, have significantly shaped the identity of the Middle East. The US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, for example, dismantled the Ba'athist state structure, leading to a power vacuum that exacerbated sectarian divisions (Ledford, 2019). Foreign interventions have often destabilized the region by disrupting existing political structures and creating conditions for conflict. These actions have reinforced identity, making it difficult to achieve lasting peace and stability (Portada & Billet, 2019).

4.2.2. The Impact of SNIs on the Middle Eastern States

Divisions of SNIs are particularly salient in the Middle East, where diverse groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Persians, Turks, Sunnis and Shiites coexist within the same national boundaries. These divisions are frequently exacerbated by political elites who manipulate SNIs for their gain, further entrenching divisions and fostering environments conducive to conflict. The rivalry between Sunni-majority and Shiite-majority states, exemplified by the geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, underscores the significance of sectarian identities in regional politics. Moreover, tribal and clan affiliations continue to wield considerable influence in many Middle Eastern societies, often superseding national loyalty. Tribal networks provide social support and security, but they can also serve as sources of resistance against central authority, complicating efforts to build cohesive and stable nation-states. In countries like Iraq, Yemen and Libya, tribal dynamics have played pivotal roles in both perpetuating conflict and facilitating conflict resolution. The following table aims to provide a comprehensive overview of these SNIs, including Arabs, who are the most significant ethnic group in the Middle East.

Table 4.2 SNIs in the Middle East (By the author)

Identity	Primary Regions	Subgroups/Dialects	Distinctive Features
Ethnic Identities			
Arabs	Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Gulf States	Bedouins, urban Arabs, rural Arabs	Arabic language, rich cultural heritage, influence of tribal affiliations and local customs
Kurds	Southeastern Turkey, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, Western Iran	Sorani, Kurmanji	Kurdish language, distinct cultural practices, strong sense of national identity, aspirations for autonomy
Persians	Iran	-	Persian (Farsi) language, significant cultural and historical influence, distinct national identity
Turks	Turkey	-	Turkish language, Ottoman heritage, modern secular nationalist ideologies
Bedouins	Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Gulf Countries, Palestine	Various tribes (e.g., Bani Sakhr, Ruwallah)	Nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, tribal structure, traditional customs and attire
Circassians	Jordan, Syria, Israel	Various subgroups like Adyghe, Kabardian	Ethnic group originally from the Caucasus, distinct language and culture, significant diaspora presence
Religious Identities			
Sunni Muslims	Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Gulf States	Various schools of thought	Largest branch of Islam, diverse local practices and interpretations
Shia Muslims	Iran, Southern Iraq, Lebanon	Twelvers, Ismailis	Shia-specific religious practices, clerical hierarchy, significant sites like Karbala and Najaf
Alawites	Syria	-	Branch of Shia Islam, unique practices, significant political influence in Syria
Druze	Lebanon, Syria, Israel	-	Monotheistic religion with secretive beliefs, distinct social structure
Christian Communities	Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Syria	Maronites, Copts, Assyrians, Armenians	Distinct liturgical languages, traditions, and historical churches
Transnational Islamic Identities	Region-wide	Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Salafi, Wahhabi	Various interpretations of Islam that transcend national boundaries, often linked to broader religious movements
Linguistic Identities			
Arabic	Widespread across the Middle East and North Africa	Numerous regional dialects	Official language in many countries, diverse dialects
Kurdish	Kurdistan regions across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran	Sorani, Kurmanji	Kurdish language, significant regional dialects
Farsi (Persian)	Iran	-	Official language of Iran, rich literary heritage
Turkish	Turkey	-	Official language of Turkey, unique alphabet and grammar
Political and Ideological Identities			
Arabism	Region-wide	-	Ideology emphasizing the unity and identity of Arab countries and peoples
Arab Nationalism	Region-wide	-	Political movement advocating for the unity and independence of Arab countries from colonial powers
Political Islam	Region-wide	-	Political movement advocating for the unity and independence of Muslim countries from colonial powers

All of these SNIs, minorities and majorities, create “sociopolitical dynamics” refers to the interplay between social and political factors within a society or region. In the context of the Middle East, it encompasses various aspects such as ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities, political ideologies, economic conditions and external influences. This diversity can lead to both rich cultural exchanges and significant social tensions and conflicts, as different groups vie for political power and recognition. Various interpretations of Islam such as Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Salafi and Wahhabi movements, often transcend national boundaries and influence regional politics and conflicts. In addition, long-standing SNIs conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Syrian Civil War, and the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, are central to the region's sociopolitical dynamics. Alliances and rivalries, often along sectarian lines (e.g., Sunni-Shia divide), play a significant role in shaping regional politics and security. The following table shows the drivers of sectarian conflict in the Middle East.

Table 4.3 Drivers of Sectarian Conflicts in the Middle East, Adapted from RAND (2017).

Reduced Risk of Sectarian Conflict	Driver	Increased Risk of Sectarian Conflict
Nonsectarian identities (e.g., nationalism, localism, class loyalties) are dominant	**Self-identity**	Sectarian identities are dominant
Religious leaders espouse tolerance of other sects and faiths	**Character of religious discourse**	Religious leaders promote an adversarial relationship between sects
Nonstate actors operate as bridge builders	**Nonstate actors**	Nonstate actors mobilize around sect
Regional states are working to reduce sectarianism	**Regional states**	Regional states push a sectarian agenda
States deliver good governance without discrimination among religious communities	**Quality of governance**	States fail to provide basic services or discriminate in their delivery of services based on sectarian affiliation
Economic growth relieves pressure and benefits are shared	**Economic conditions**	Economic pressure feeds division, and religious groups feel economically disenfranchised
Conflict resolution reduces violence in the region	**Conflict trends**	Conflict in one setting spills over and feeds conflict in other settings
Extraregional actors prioritize stability	**Extra-regional actors**	Extra-regional actors seek influence by playing on identity politics

In this context, it is essential to analyze minority identities and challenges alongside the concept of “deeply divided societies” in the Middle Eastern States to provide a comprehensive understanding of the region’s intricate social fabric and its implications for national security and identity. Minority identities play a crucial role in shaping the political, economic and social landscapes of regional countries, often influencing national policies and intergroup relations. By examining the challenges faced by these minority groups, we can uncover the root causes of socio-

political tensions and conflicts within the region, which are directly linked to national security concerns. Societies deeply divided along ethnic, religious, or cultural lines are often more vulnerable to internal strife, external manipulation, and instability, posing significant challenges to the cohesion and security of the state. Furthermore, analyzing the phenomenon of deeply divided societies offers insights into how historical, cultural, and religious differences have fostered divisions that impact state stability and governance. This dual focus not only enriches the discourse on identity in the Middle East but also highlights the interconnectedness of subnational and national identities, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced and holistic perspective on regional dynamics and the vital relationship between subnational identity and national security.

Minority Identities and Challenges

Approximately 77 years ago, historian Albert Hourani posited that "majorities and minorities do not constitute complete societies with each other" (Hourani A. , 1947, pp. 109-112). The events of the Arab Uprisings have substantiated this assertion, illustrating that those who engaged in the movement's nascent stages harbored aspirations extending far beyond the authoritarianism they largely encountered. Despite the potential naivety of the protesters, they embodied a broad and diverse spectrum of Arab societies, yearning for a future marked by democracy, enhanced freedoms, and tolerance, albeit not necessarily emulating Western models (Parker & Nasrallah, 2017, pp. 3-4). Ultimately, these movements, which aimed to dismantle the yoke of despotic rulers, inadvertently facilitated the rise of Salafists and other extremists. This shift has resulted in either covert theocracies or significant instability, including civil wars. For minorities in the Middle East, their prosperity and security have historically been tied to a general allegiance to ruling regimes, predicated on the belief that governmental protection is preferable to its absence. The Arab Uprisings has underscored that even in the most favorable conditions, the relationships between minorities and majorities have often been precarious (Parker & Nasrallah, 2017). The past decade can undoubtedly be characterized as "the worst of times," raising critical questions: Who will protect the minorities, and what might become of them in an increasingly intolerant Middle East? Is their fate solely dependent on external powers, or do minorities play a role in determining their own destiny? Moreover, how do minorities perceive themselves and their role within society? What does the future hold for them?

The issues facing “minorities” in the Arab world are also issues facing the majority. There is no solution for minorities that is not also a solution for the majority. Consequently, minorities cannot be liberated except through the liberation of the majority from the minority mentality and sentiments, by which I mean SNIs. These are value judgments and ethics governed by the minority’s feelings of being treated unfairly by the majority itself—a mentality alienated from the state and distinct from actual circumstances, relying instead on an identity-based imagination that despises the other. SNIs are fundamentally a minority issue, but when the majority acts according to SNIs, it reinforces and reproduces the mechanisms through which these identities are constructed and turns the minority's sense of being threatened into a real fear, thereby reinforcing its own existence (Bishara, 2021, pp. 25-28).

When the political majority overlaps with the subnational majority, political minorities and majorities emerge, which previously were merely social realities. This occurs today when a broad social class is unable to achieve its citizenship in the state and fails to change the state or itself. Unlike the emergence and development of nations, the majority seeks to solve its problems not only politically but also socially. When the social majority becomes a political minority in a state, it returns to society where it can exercise the informal power it holds as a result of its position as a religious or subnational majority. In the regional state, the concepts of majority and minority evolved based on the reference framework in which the differentiation occurred. Thus, the population was divided into ethnic majorities and minorities or religious and subnational majorities and minorities. The latter case is rare in secular societies, as I have explained. Meanwhile, the democratic terms “majority” and “minority” emerged within political bodies and institutions, not necessarily as an expression of demographic reality. Elections themselves are one of these institutions, as are parliaments, parties, and unions.

When citizenship created a unified framework for individuals as citizens in a democratic state, political majorities and minorities were divided based on support or opposition to the political positions of parties or leaders, driven by rational and irrational motives, conscious and unconscious interests—the same factors that govern human behavior in general. In this context, majorities and minorities are variable, at least theoretically. It is assumed that the individual voting for elected party or union bodies votes based on conviction (whether on the basis of principle or interest). The described political system relies on this theoretical assumption. Of course, there are other factors that govern voting preferences, including individual identities (Bishara, 2021, pp. 25-

28). In further context, the phenomenon of minority groups ruling regimes in the Middle East presents a unique dimension to the region's political landscape, characterized by the complex interplay of ethnicity, religion, and political power. These dynamics are particularly evident in countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Bahrain, where minority rule has had profound implications for governance and stability.

In Syria, the Assad family, part of the Alawite minority, has maintained control since 1971. The Alawites, constituting roughly 12 percent of the population, have held significant power disproportionate to their demographic size. This minority rule has led to a reliance on a strong security apparatus to maintain control and suppress dissent. The regime's survival strategy has involved fostering loyalty through patronage networks within the military and intelligence services, predominantly staffed by Alawites. This has created deep sectarian divisions, exacerbating the civil conflict that erupted in 2011 (Anderson, 2013). Bahrain, a small Gulf state, also illustrates the dynamics of the minority rule. The ruling Al-Khalifa family, who are Sunni, governs a population that is predominantly Shia. The government's policies have often marginalized the Shia majority, leading to periodic uprisings and calls for greater political representation and rights. The Bahraini regime has responded to these challenges with both repression and limited reforms, often supported by fellow Sunni-majority GCC states (Posusney, 2005, pp. 4-6).

The persistence of minority rule in these regimes can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the construction and maintenance of robust coercive apparatuses have enabled these regimes to suppress opposition effectively. The loyalty of military and security forces, often drawn from the same minority group, is critical to regime stability. Secondly, the strategic use of patronage and economic incentives has secured the loyalty of key elites and segments of the population. Lastly, the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, marked by external interventions and alliances, has often bolstered these regimes. For instance, both Syria and Bahrain have received substantial support from regional allies—Russia and Iran in Syria's case, and Saudi Arabia in Bahrain's (Picard, 2012).

In conclusion, minorities in the Middle East face a myriad of challenges in contemporary times. Political instability, armed conflicts, and the rise of extremist groups have exacerbated the vulnerabilities of these communities. For instance, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent rise of ISIS led to severe persecution of Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities. The Syrian civil

war has similarly devastated minority populations, leading to mass displacements and the destruction of cultural heritage. These conflicts have not only threatened the existence of these communities but have also eroded the rich cultural diversity of the region. The minorities of the Middle East, despite enduring significant hardships, continue to contribute to the rich and diverse cultural fabric of the region. As the region navigates its complex socio-political landscape, the preservation and inclusion of minority communities will be crucial for its stability and security. There exists a significant threat not only to "minorities" but also to "majorities," and by extension, to the entire Arab world. This threat is embodied in the Arab world's adherence to a singular, dominant identity, to the exclusion or significant marginalization of other identities. Such marginalization results in these other identities becoming peripheral, devoid of substantial influence in social, cultural, and economic spheres. To mitigate this threat, it is imperative for all sectors—cultural, religious, and formal/security—to collaborate in providing comprehensive protection. This protection should be understood in its broadest sense: ensuring real security, abundant dignity, and a promising future for all minorities. These minorities are integral to the human fabric of the Arab world and represent a valuable source of diversity. Their presence enriches the Arab world, both inherently and through their contribution to fostering religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural openness and diversity.

"Deeply Divided Societies" in the Middle Eastern States

The concept of "deeply divided societies" is particularly relevant to the Middle Eastern context, where SNIs cleavages are pronounced and have significant socio-political implications, and where historical, ethnic, religious, and sectarian divides have profound implications for politics and society. Deeply divided societies exhibit entrenched divisions that frequently result in ongoing conflict and instability. The Middle East exemplifies these characteristics, which have significant implications on SNIs. The first is ethnic and sectarian fragmentation. Countries like Lebanon, Iraq and Syria exhibit profound ethnic and sectarian fragmentation, with power often distributed along these lines. The second is political inflexibility. Deep divisions lead to rigid political systems where power-sharing arrangements are necessary but often unstable. The third is social polarization. Deep divisions foster social polarization, with communities living in segregated enclaves and limited inter-group interaction. The fourth one is chronic conflict. These

societies are prone to chronic conflict, as seen in the recurring sectarian violence in Iraq and the protracted civil war in Syria (Stetter, 2008).

Governance in deeply divided societies often requires complex power-sharing arrangements to ensure representation and maintain stability. However, these arrangements can also entrench divisions and hinder effective governance. For example, Lebanon's consociational system aims to maintain the balance power among its religious communities but has led to political paralysis and corruption. These societies frequently grapple with political instability as competing factions vie for dominance and resources. Lebanon's confessional political system, intended to balance power among religious communities, has instead precipitated political paralysis and recurrent crises (Fakhoury, 2014).

Ethnic and sectarian divisions often escalate into civil conflict, as evidenced in Syria and Iraq. The Syrian civil war has intensified sectarian and ethnic hostilities. In Iraq, the emergence of ISIS underscored the volatility of identity politics, with the group attempting to enforce a singular Islamic identity over a heterogeneous region (Marthinsen, 2018). Governance in deeply divided societies presents formidable challenges, as states endeavor to accommodate diverse constituencies. Effective governance necessitates inclusive policies and power-sharing arrangements that address the aspirations of all communities. Post-2003 Iraq's power-sharing framework among Shias, Sunnis and Kurds has encountered substantial obstacles, resulting in political deadlock and violence.

Rima Majed (2019) offers a critical perspective on the concept of "deeply divided societies" in the Middle East. She argues that this model, which emerged in the aftermath of WWII, is rooted in Western political science's focus on democracy and stability in post-war societies. This model, heavily influenced by the works of political scientists like Arend Lijphart, evolved from discussions about different political systems to a broader classification of societies themselves. Majed contends that the notion of deeply divided societies oversimplifies complex social realities and mistakenly attributes the causes of violence to inherent social divisions rather than political manipulation. Majed's critique of the "deeply divided societies" model presents a significant challenge to prevailing perspectives in sociopolitical analysis. Her argument that political manipulation, rather than inherent social divisions, is the primary driver of conflict in the Middle East is both compelling and provocative. This response aims to critically analyze her points,

considering the complexities of Middle Eastern societies from both sociological and political perspectives.

The “deeply divided societies” model emerged in the post-WWII era, influenced by political scientists like Arend Lijphart. This model was initially designed to explain the stability of political systems in ethnically or religiously fragmented societies. Lijphart’s consociational democracy theory proposed power-sharing arrangements as solutions to potential conflicts in divided societies (Lijphart, 1977). However, the application of this model to Middle Eastern societies has often led to a simplistic understanding of the region's complexities.

Societies in the Middle East are inherently divided along ethnic or sectarian lines. She argues that political actors exploit these divisions for their own gain, suggesting that the root causes of conflict are political rather than social, aligns with the findings of scholars like Fearon and Laitin (2003) and Collier and Hoeffler (2004), who have shown that the determinants of civil wars are not significantly different for ethnic conflicts compared to other types of conflicts. According to the role of political elites in exacerbating social divisions. In Lebanon, for instance, the confessional system, which allocates political power based on religious affiliation, has often been manipulated by political leaders to maintain their own power (Salamey, 2014). This manipulation can lead to political paralysis and conflict, as seen in the recurring crises in Lebanon's political system (Nagle, 2016).

However, while Majed’s arguments present a compelling alternative view, it is also important to consider the counterargument that supports the traditional understanding of the Middle East as a region characterized by profound and entrenched divisions. From a sociological standpoint, the concept of deeply divided societies is supported by significant empirical evidence. Sociologists like Sami Zubaida (1993) have argued that the historical and cultural trajectories of Middle Eastern societies are distinctly shaped by deep-seated social divisions. Zubaida emphasizes that the prominence of Islamic politics, such as the Iranian revolution, reflects these entrenched divisions and challenges modern political theories that attempt to homogenize these societies. Furthermore, Lisa Anderson (1987) notes that Middle Eastern states are often seen as arenas of socially engendered conflict, driven by tribalism, sectarianism, and regionalism. These elements contribute to the perception of the state as an instrument of familial, sectarian, or class domination rather than a cohesive national entity.

Politically, the deeply divided societies model is reinforced by the recurring patterns of conflict and instability in the Middle East. The region's political landscape is often characterized by fragmented authority and contested sovereignties. This fragmentation is evident in divided cities like Jerusalem and Beirut, where conflicts over space and identity go beyond typical urban disputes to encompass ethnonational and spiritual dimensions (Silver, 2010). Moreover, scholars like Frederic Volpi argue that the political transformations in the Middle East, particularly those involving regime changes, often fail to produce holistic societal changes. Instead, entrenched identities and power structures continue to shape political interactions and outcomes (Volpi, 2011).

Historically, the Middle East has seen numerous instances where deep social divisions have led to prolonged conflicts. For example, the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the ongoing sectarian violence in Iraq illustrate how religious and ethnic cleavages can drive prolonged and intense conflict. Daniel Pipes underscores that the Arab-Israeli conflict and internal divisions within Arab states often exacerbate these conflicts, making them appear as manifestations of deep societal divides. The importance of SNIs in shaping Middle Eastern politics cannot be overstated (Campbell, 1989). Raymond Hinnebusch argues that identities such as Arabism, Shi'ism and Islam play crucial roles in shaping both the interests of political actors and the broader structures of conflict and cooperation in the region. This dual focus on identity and interests helps explain the persistence and intensity of regional conflicts (Hinnebusch, 2016).

While Majed rightly points out that political actors manipulate social divisions for their own gain, this does not negate the existence of deep societal divides. Political manipulation often exploits existing divisions, making it difficult to disentangle the two. For instance, in Syria, the Assad regime has manipulated sectarian identities to maintain power, but the underlying divisions have roots in historical and social contexts that precede contemporary political strategies. To develop effective policies and governance strategies for the Middle East, it is essential to adopt a balanced perspective that recognizes both the role of political manipulation and the reality of deep social divisions. Policymakers must address the root causes of political exploitation while also fostering inclusive governance that mitigates social cleavages.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have meticulously laid the foundation for understanding the intricate tapestry of national security and SNIs within the Middle East. The intricate relationship between

SNIs and national security in the Middle East, especially in the context of historical and contemporary dynamics, forms a crucial aspect of understanding the region's political and social landscape. This chapter's comprehensive analysis highlights how SNIs—whether ethnic, religious, tribal or sectarian—shape and are shaped by various socio-political factors, often impacting national security in profound ways.

The Middle East's historical trajectory is marked by colonial legacies, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent imposition of artificial state boundaries. These boundaries often ignored pre-existing ethnic, tribal, and religious divisions, leading to complex and sometimes contentious identity politics. The concept of national identity in the Middle East, therefore, is a relatively modern construct superimposed upon older, more deeply entrenched SNIs. The arbitrary borders drawn by colonial powers like Britain and France, particularly after WWI, disregarded the ethnic and tribal compositions of the region. This led to the creation of states with significant internal diversity and, in many cases, discord. These new political entities had to contend with a mosaic of ethnicities, religions, and sects that often clashed with the imposed national identities.

The Arab Uprisings 2011 further complicated the landscape of SNIs. These uprisings, initially driven by demands for political reform and economic opportunities, quickly revealed the deep-seated sectarian, ethnic, and tribal divisions within many Middle Eastern states. In countries like Syria and Iraq, the uprisings led to brutal civil wars that were heavily influenced by sectarian divisions. In Syria, the conflict pitted the Alawite-dominated regime of Bashar al-Assad against a predominantly Sunni opposition, with various ethnic and religious minorities caught in between. This sectarian dimension not only prolonged the conflict but also attracted external interventions from regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia, each backing different sides based on sectarian affiliations. In Yemen, tribal and regional identities played a crucial role in the post-uprising conflicts. The power vacuums created by the fall of authoritarian regimes in these countries led to fierce competition among tribal and regional groups for control. In Yemen's conflict similarly involves a complex interplay of tribal, regional, and sectarian identities, exacerbated by external interventions from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The interplay between SNIs and national security is multifaceted and profound. SNIs can both undermine and, paradoxically, strengthen national security, depending on how they are managed by the state and other actors. SNIs often undermine national security by fueling internal conflicts and creating vulnerabilities to external manipulation. Sectarian divides, for example, can

be exploited by external powers to weaken a state. Iran's support for Shia militias in Iraq and Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia's backing of Sunni groups in Syria and Yemen, illustrate how sectarian identities can be leveraged to exert influence and destabilize rivals. Tribal affiliations can also pose security challenges by fostering rival power centers that challenge the authority of the central government. Conversely, when managed effectively, SNIs can contribute to national security by fostering inclusive governance and social cohesion. Recognizing and accommodating the diverse identities within a state can mitigate conflicts and build a more resilient society. For instance, Lebanon's confessional system, despite its flaws, seeks to balance power among different religious groups, thereby preventing the domination of any single sect and maintaining a fragile peace. Moreover, tribal leaders can play a crucial role in local governance and conflict resolution, leveraging their authority and networks to maintain order and mediate disputes. In Jordan, for example, the monarchy has historically relied on tribal support to bolster its legitimacy and maintain stability.

SNIs in the Middle East, whether ethnic, religious, tribal or sectarian, significantly impact national security. These identities are deeply embedded in the region's history and continue to shape its socio-political dynamics. The Arab Uprisings highlighted the fragility of national identities and the enduring strength of subnational affiliations, often leading to conflicts that undermine national security. However, when effectively managed, these identities can also contribute to social cohesion and stability.

One of the most important effects that SNIs create is their impact on national security. This dynamic will be studied in detail in the next chapter through a rigorous analysis of events and interactions that demonstrate this relationship. By examining specific case studies and empirical data, the next chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of how SNIs influence national security outcomes in the Middle East, offering insights into potential pathways for achieving sustainable peace and stability in the region.

4.3. Regime Dynamics and State Security: Power and Governance in the Middle East

Achieving statehood represent the most profound and pivotal moment in the history of political society. This process is formalized into two types: the first is the "state-building" which entails a deliberate effort to construct an apparatus of control, and the second "state-formation," which is characterized as a historical process resulting from a largely unconscious and

contradictory interplay of conflicts, negotiations, and compromises among diverse groups (Berman & Lonsdale , 1992, p. 5). Naturally, practice shows a mixture of both processes in the Middle Eastern context.

The process of state formation in the Middle East is intricately tied to the dynamics of regime power and the establishment of governance structures. The region's historical and contemporary political landscapes are characterized by the complex interplay between ruling regimes and the broader state apparatus.

Ghalioun contends that the history of the Arab state cannot be directly derived from the history of society, as was the case in the past or as it is in modern European countries. The gradual integration into the modern global system since the last century has created a divergence from the general trajectory of Arab and Islamic history. This has resulted in a distinction between the history of the state and the history of society (Ghalioun, 2015, p. 120). However, this does not imply that the state operates on entirely different values from those of society. Rather, it means that modern values, technologies, and institutions within the state are separated and not subject to the same conditions that govern the development of modern values and demands within civil society, as seen in modern European countries.

In the Middle East, the national security is often perceived and prioritized differently by state apparatuses and ruling regimes. Understanding this divergence is essential for comprehending how national security policies are formulated and implemented. Furthermore, the success and resilience of regimes in the Middle East often hinge on their ability to manage and navigate the diverse and complex web of SNIs, including ethnic, religious, tribal and sectarian affiliations. Conversely, the decline and failure of regimes can frequently be attributed to their inability to address or accommodate these diverse identities, leading to internal strife and external vulnerabilities.

4.3.1. The State vs. Regime Formation in the Middle East

The process of state formation in the Middle East has been shaped by a confluence of historical, socio-economic, and political factors. This region, with its rich history of empires and tribal structures, presents a unique case for examining the emergence and development of modern states. The interplay between colonial legacies, indigenous social structures, and external geopolitical interests has profoundly influenced state-building efforts in the Middle East. The colonial powers established administrative practices that prioritized control and resource

extraction over the development of indigenous political institutions. This legacy has contributed to the persistence of authoritarian regimes and weak state-society relations in many Middle Eastern countries (Hinnebusch, 2018).

The post-colonial period in the Middle East has been characterized by efforts to consolidate state power, manage diverse populations, and navigate Cold War dynamics. These are nationalism and state-building, authoritarianism and state capacity, and impact of external actors. (1) In the immediate post-colonial period, many Middle Eastern states pursued nationalist agendas to unify diverse populations and legitimize their rule. Leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt championed pan-Arabism and state-led development projects (Schayegh, 2013). (2) The persistence of authoritarian regimes has been a common feature of state formation in the Middle East. These regimes have employed various strategies to maintain power, including the use of repression, co-optation of elites, and the manipulation of identity politics (Kamrava, 1998). (3) The involvement of external powers, particularly during the Cold War, has also shaped state formation. The competition between the US and the Soviet Union for influence in the region led to the support of various regimes and movements, affecting internal state dynamics (Schayegh, 2013). These dynamics reveal a core pattern: regimes often prioritized their survival over building inclusive national states. Where SNIs were integrated, security and stability improved; where they were excluded, fragmentation and insecurity followed—underscoring the central role of identity management in national security.

State vs. Regime

In political science, the terms "state" and "regime" are often used interchangeably, despite their distinct meanings. The state refers to the permanent political entity that includes a defined geographical area, a settled population, and sovereign governing institutions. It encompasses the structures and institutions responsible for enforcing laws, providing public services, and maintaining public order. The state's legitimacy derives from a combination of legal-rational legitimacy and traditional or charismatic sources of power (El-Mahdi, 2018). In contrast, a regime is the set of rules, norms and institutions that determine how the state is governed. It encompasses the political system in place, such as democracy, authoritarianism, or monarchy, and the methods through which power is acquired and exercised. Regimes are more fluid than states, changing more readily in response to internal and external pressures (Kamrava, 1998).

In the Middle East, the state represents the permanent institutions and structures that provide governance, enforce laws, and ensure the continuity of administrative functions. These institutions include the bureaucracy, military, judiciary, and other key components that collectively maintain order and deliver public services. The state is an enduring entity that outlasts individual leaders and regimes. Conversely, the regime refers to the group of individuals and elites who hold power and control the state apparatus at any given time. Regimes are often characterized by their political ideologies, strategies for maintaining power, and methods of governance.

Middle Eastern states possess complex institutional frameworks that include executive, legislative, and judicial branches. However, the effectiveness and independence of these institutions vary significantly across the region. In some countries, the executive branch wields significant power, often overshadowing the legislative and judicial branches, leading to a concentration of authority. In others, the institutional balance is more equitable, but the independence of these institutions can still be compromised by political influences and external pressures. The state's role in providing public services, such as education, healthcare and infrastructure, is critical to its legitimacy and stability. The ability to deliver these services effectively can significantly impact public perception and support for the state (Kamrava, 1998).

Maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity is a core function of the state. In the Middle East, this function is frequently challenged by external interventions, internal conflicts and the presence of NSAs. Many states in the region face significant threats to their sovereignty from both regional and international actors seeking to influence or control their internal affairs. Additionally, internal divisions and conflicts, often along ethnic or sectarian lines, further complicate the state's ability to maintain territorial integrity and assert full control over its borders (Fawcett, 2017).

According to the mechanisms of control and legitimacy, regimes in the Middle East employ various mechanisms to control their populations and legitimize their authority. The first is repression. The use of security forces to suppress dissent is a common feature of Middle Eastern regimes. This includes surveillance, imprisonment, and, in extreme cases, violent crackdowns on opposition movements, and they employ propaganda to shape public opinion. The second mechanism is ideological control. Regimes also rely on ideological narratives to legitimize their rule. This can involve nationalist rhetoric, religious legitimacy, or the promotion of modernity and development as justifications for authoritarian governance (Polat, 2014). The third one is economic patronage. Many regimes use state-controlled resources to distribute economic benefits and create

dependency among their citizens. This patronage system helps to build loyalty and reduce the likelihood of collective action against the regime (Bayat, 2002).

Authoritarian regimes often rely on repression,[10] co-optation of elites, and control over media to maintain power. The political dynamics within regimes include the relationships between ruling elites, the military, and other influential groups. In many Middle Eastern regimes, the military plays a crucial role in maintaining regime stability, either through direct control or as a powerful ally. Patronage networks are often used to secure loyalty from influential individuals and groups, distributing resources and positions in exchange for support. Security apparatuses are also employed to monitor and prevent opposition and dissent, ensuring that any potential threats to the regime are swiftly addressed. These dynamics create a tightly controlled political environment where regime survival is prioritized over democratic processes and political freedoms (Heydemann & Leenders, 2013, pp. 19-22). Using all of these sources is to reinforce their rule and justify their governance structures. This multifaceted approach to legitimacy helps regimes sustain their control and mitigate challenges to their authority. As a result of these dynamics, the primary actor in international politics in the Middle East is often not the state itself, but the regime (Brichs & Lampridi-Kemou, 2012).

Based on the current data, it is imperative to highlight the following key points. (1) State Stability vs. Regime Stability: A stable state does not necessarily imply a stable regime, and vice versa. States can endure regime changes without collapsing, as seen in Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Uprisings. Conversely, a regime might remain in power while the state's institutions weaken, leading to fragility and potential state failure (El-Mahdi, 2018). (2) Impact of Regime Change on the State: Regime changes, especially those resulting from revolutions or coups, can significantly impact state institutions and governance. The Arab Uprisings highlighted how regime change could lead to either democratic transitions or further authoritarian entrenchment, depending on the state's institutional resilience and external influences (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004). (3) Regime Adaptation: Many regimes in the Middle East have shown remarkable adaptability, changing policies and strategies to maintain power. This includes controlled political

[10] The Middle East features a variety of regime types, including monarchies, authoritarian republics, and theocratic states. Monarchies such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan often base their legitimacy on historical and religious traditions, maintaining power through hereditary succession and traditional authority. Authoritarian republics such as Egypt and Syria rely on centralized control. Theocratic states like Iran integrate religious authority with political governance, where religious leaders hold significant influence over state affairs (Derichs & Demmelhuber, 2014).

liberalizations, economic reforms, and the use of new technologies for surveillance and control. The following table clarify comprehensive details about regime vs. state in the Middle East.

Table 4.4 Regime vs. State in the Middle East

Aspect	Regime	State	Similarities	Differences
Definition	A regime refers to the form of government or set of rules, cultural or social norms that regulate the operation of a government or institution.	A state is a political entity with a defined territory, population, government, and sovereignty.	Both are fundamental to political analysis and governance.	Regime is more about the governing framework; state is the overarching political entity.
Political Structure	Can be authoritarian, democratic, theocratic, or hybrid.	Can host various regimes within its structure.	Both involve governance and the exercise of political power.	The regime is the operational system within the state framework.
Governance Dynamics	Includes the distribution of power, decision-making processes, and institutional interactions.	Involves the overall sovereignty, territorial integrity, and international recognition.	Both influence how laws and policies are implemented.	Regime dynamics focus on power and control mechanisms; state dynamics involve broader sovereignty issues.
Legitimacy	Derived from ideological, religious, or military power; often maintained through propaganda and coercion.	Derived from legal-rational authority, international recognition, and sometimes historical or cultural legitimacy.	Both seek legitimacy to maintain stability and control.	Regimes may rely more on coercive power; states on legal and international norms.
Economic Systems	Controlled economy, market economy, or mixed; regime influence on economic policies is significant.	Can be capitalist, socialist, or mixed, often influenced by global economic trends.	Economic policies are critical for both regimes and states.	Regimes might implement economic policies to maintain control; states have broader economic responsibilities.
Social Structures	Influenced by regime type (e.g., class, sect, ethnicity); often reinforced by regime policies.	More comprehensive social structures including class, ethnicity, religion, and cultural dynamics.	Both have complex social structures that influence political stability.	Regimes may manipulate social structures for control; states must manage diverse social dynamics.
Legal Systems	Often tailored to support the regime's power; can include arbitrary or politically motivated laws.	Established legal frameworks based on constitutional law, civil law, or Sharia law.	Legal systems provide order and governance for both.	Regime laws might be more fluid and repressive; state laws are typically more stable and institutionalized.
Human Rights	Often compromised in authoritarian regimes; human rights abuses can be systematic.	Human rights are protected to varying degrees; international pressure influences compliance.	Both are subject to international human rights standards.	Regimes may prioritize control over rights; states face international scrutiny on human rights issues.
Foreign Policy	Driven by regime interests, often focused on regime survival and ideological goals.	State interests, including national security, economic interests, and international relations.	Both engage in diplomacy and international relations.	Regimes may have more ideological or self-preservation-focused foreign policies; states prioritize broader national interests.
Military Role	Often central in authoritarian regimes; used for internal control and external defense.	Integral part of the state's defense and sovereignty.	Military is crucial for security and stability in both.	Regimes might use the military for internal repression; states primarily use it for national defense.
Media and Communication	Controlled or censored in authoritarian regimes; used for propaganda.	Can be free or state-controlled; influenced by state policies and international standards.	Both utilize media for information dissemination.	Regimes use media for control; states may allow more freedom of the press.

Civil Society	Restricted or co-opted in authoritarian regimes; limited space for independent organizations.	Civil society can be robust with NGOs, community organizations, and advocacy groups.	Both have civil society components that influence governance.	Regimes often restrict civil society; states may support and regulate it.
Education and Ideology	Education systems often used to propagate regime ideology; curriculum controlled.	More diverse educational frameworks; influenced by national policies and global standards.	Education is vital for both regime and state stability.	Regimes use education for indoctrination; states aim for broader educational goals.
Economic Resources	Controlled by the regime; used to maintain power and control.	Managed by the state for national development and welfare.	Economic resources are critical for development and governance.	Regimes may use resources for patronage; states focus on broader economic development.
Public Services	Provision influenced by regime stability and control.	State responsibility to provide public services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.	Both are responsible for public service provision.	Regimes may prioritize services for loyalty; states aim for equitable distribution.
Elites	Often composed of military leaders, political figures, business magnates, and religious leaders who support the regime.	Includes a broader spectrum of influential figures such as bureaucrats, technocrats, academics, and business leaders.	Elites play a crucial role in maintaining and influencing power structures.	Regimes rely heavily on elite support for survival and control; states manage a wider array of elite interests and influence.

Despite their symbiotic relationship, tensions can arise between state institutions and the ruling regime. When state institutions seek greater autonomy or resist regime control, conflicts can emerge. This is particularly evident in instances where state officials or military leaders challenge the authority of the ruling elite. Such tensions can lead to political instability, coups or regime change. Furthermore, sectarianism and identity politics are significant challenges in the Middle East. Regimes often exploit these divisions to maintain control, but this strategy can backfire, leading to prolonged conflicts and weakening state cohesion. Iraq and Lebanon are notable examples where sectarian divisions impact both state and regime stability (Hashemi & Postel, 2017).

The process of state formation in the Middle East is fraught with numerous internal dilemmas that complicate the establishment of stable and effective governance. This complexity is exemplified by the ongoing tension between regimes and state structures, which manifests differently across various countries in the region. For instance, while political parties and CSOs exist in Jordan, their impact is curtailed by state repression and manipulation, leading to a controlled and limited political environment (Wiktorowicz, 1999). It is imperative to address a fundamental concept that warrants thorough discussion about *regime survival vs. state building*. Middle Eastern regimes often prioritize their survival over the development of a cohesive and legitimate state. This focus on regime survival can be seen in the actions of leaders.

One of the primary tactics used by regimes to ensure survival is the *concentration of power*. Leaders centralize authority to prevent challenges from opposition groups, whether they are political rivals, ethnic minorities, or other potential threats. (Cammack, et al., 2017). Second, repression is a common tool used by Middle Eastern regimes to maintain control. Security forces are frequently employed to suppress dissent, intimidate opposition, and control the population. (Dunne & Cammack, 2017).

Third, Middle Eastern regimes often *manipulate ethnic, sectarian, and tribal divisions* to sustain their rule (Bishara, 2018). By exacerbating these divisions, regimes can prevent the formation of a unified opposition. This manipulation of social divisions not only helps the regime maintain control but also deepens societal fractures, making state-building efforts more challenging. Fourth, in many Middle Eastern regimes, the state is often viewed as *an instrument for personal and familial enrichment*. This perception is rooted in historical practices where rulers saw the state's resources as their private domain (Lust, 2009). The concept of the state as a public

entity serving the common good is thus weak. Instead, regimes engage in widespread corruption and patronage, distributing state resources to loyal supporters to secure their power base. This practice undermines the development of strong and independent state institutions (Hinnebusch, 2018).

Fifth, *corruption* is endemic in many Middle Eastern states, where public officials use their positions for personal gain. *Patronage* networks are established to reward loyalty and maintain control. These networks distribute jobs, contracts, and other benefits to supporters, ensuring their continued allegiance (Cammack, et al., 2017). Finally, regimes in the Middle East are acutely aware of their *external legitimacy*. The international community's recognition and support often play a crucial role in a regime's survival. As a result, regimes might project an image of statehood that aligns with international norms while internally maintaining authoritarian practices. For example, many Gulf states present themselves as modern and progressive to the outside world while maintaining strict control over political dissent at home (Abdullah, 2004). These external images often mask internal authoritarian practices, such as restrictions on political freedoms and human rights abuses.

The Middle Eastern state is often seen as an entity that provides security and basic services in exchange for loyalty, but not as a representative body accountable to its citizens. This perception affects how people relate to the state and participate in its political processes. The fundamental issue in national policies within Arab countries is that the state, which is represented by the regime *actor*, as an organization and administration of power, monopolizes the political process entirely. Instead of acting as the main center for the maturation, assembly, redistribution, and dissemination of decisions among all active social forces, the Arab state has become a participant in social conflicts. Instead of playing the role of the primary agent in managing and resolving social contradictions, it has become a dependent entity, lacking the minimal independence necessary to positively influence political and social life. The weakness of the modern Arab state is primarily due to its political frailty, as it functions as an instrumental state rather than a nation-state that embodies the will of its citizens and a free society. This is compounded by its lack of sovereignty, which further undermines its effectiveness (Ghalioun, 2015, pp. 124-125).

Furthermore, states in the Arab world currently encounter significant challenges stemming from the influence of three domestic groups, namely the ruling elite, opposition elites from across the political spectrum, and local sectarian and tribal fanaticisms. These challenges highlight

profound issues in the power dynamics between authorities and various segments of society. The primary reason is there is no functioning state; rather, there exists an authority that imposes its security measures on the social fabric and reality, failing to fulfill the true role of a state. However, the authority alone does not bear responsibility for these problems, but rather all societal forces share the responsibility (Haseeb, 2011, pp. 28-33).

The state, through its various agencies, practices, and policies, fails to represent the interests, goals, and aspirations of the diverse social forces that constitute it. The modern Arab state has adopted an approach to managing society that aligns with its own policies and ideological orientations. This is particularly evident in its general refusal to permit the emergence of political forces and social organizations capable of competing with the state in managing public affairs.

This dynamic manifests in a systematic policy aimed at undermining most elements of civil society, either by eliminating them or severely restricting their independence through direct and indirect control by state institutions. Such a policy continues to dominate the mentality and behavior of the modern Arab state, revealing an overt and covert determination to neutralize, weaken, or entirely abolish civil society and its vital forces. This is especially true in relation to political life and the state's policies towards society. The absence of a sound and constructive relationship between the state and society has led to the dominance of the state's centralist character in the political sphere. Consequently, this has resulted in the decline, if not complete absence, of meaningful political participation from society. As a result, numerous political and social movements have resorted to protest and political violence as means of expressing their demands. These methods reflect the reactive nature of state-society relations, where acts of violence and armed resistance by opposition forces are responses to the state's oppressive and suppressive measures against society and its political and civil entities. This, in turn, has undermined the state's ability to maintain the unity and cohesion of its society.

The national state could not build a system that transcends tribal, sectarian, and clan affiliations, rises above primitive ethnic connections, and overcomes divisions based on SNIs. Modern Arab states are still in the process of developing their components in the contemporary sense, both in terms of institutional structures and autonomy from the ruler's persona, regardless of their authority or method of attaining power. This incomplete institutional development has significantly hindered the state's stability in social and political consciousness and its legitimacy in legal awareness. The failure to fully establish the institutional framework of the modern Arab

state has led to numerous issues at various levels. One of the most significant problems is the state's transformation into a tool for ensuring the continuity of existing regimes, thereby impeding the free, democratic, and social circulation of power. This has entrenched traditional patterns of governance, such as familial, tribal, and religious rule, or superficial democracy. Consequently, overt and covert repression, along with a lack of fundamental political and social freedoms, has become the primary method for maintaining the stability of ruling regimes (Abbas, 2016). Al-Ansari argued that the distortion in the development of the modern Arab state stemmed from its failure to distinguish between power regime and the state during its formation and historical evolution. He posited that the Arab state did not establish itself as the nurturing entity for authority; rather, authority played the nurturing role for the state. This implies that dismantling this nurturing authority threatens the very existence and stability of the state (Al-Ansari M. , 1995, pp. 189-190).

4.3.2. The Role of SNIs in Statehood: National Security Criterion of Modern Arab Regimes

The modern Arab state is entangled in a complex web of socio-political challenges, where the interaction of SNIs plays a pivotal role in shaping its stability and security. Contrary to the simplistic view that identities are a mere byproduct of society diversity, the rise of SNIs is deeply rooted in the broader crisis of state governance. These identities, encompassing tribal, regional, and ethnic affiliations, emerge and intensify under conditions that transcend the presence of multiple religious sects. These identities, encompassing religion, tribal, regional, and ethnic affiliations, are manifestation of deeper structural and systemic issues within the state. Bishara (2018) argues that the persistence of sectarian identities as powerful socio-political forces underscores the challenges faced by modern Arab states in achieving genuine statehood security. The entrenched competition for state resources and representation perpetuates a cycle of instability and conflict, often leading to civil strife and weakened governance structures. Even, in the absence of multiple sects, similar conditions might lead clans, districts, or any group on which authority relies for loyalty and sympathy to evolve into a “sect.” This transformation turns such groups into socio-political entities within the context of loyalty to the regime. Conversely, opposition groups may also turn into sects by relying on specific identity groups in their opposition to the regime.

All these dynamics occur within the broader struggle for power within the state. Researchers have erred by using the Khaldunian model of *ʿaṣabiyya* to explain the utilization of a minority sect by a ruling regime and the transformation of the majority into a sect opposing it. While this model

explains the rise of a dynasty to power through defeat, it is not suitable for understanding the dynamics of modern states (Bishara, 2018). The modern state is supposed to represent the entirety of society. In reality, the regime in the Middle East might create a dynasty or a subnational group to serve its interests, not the other way around. The competition depicted as occurring between SNIs is actually a struggle for state quotas, characterized by a spoils-and-seize mentality among those who see themselves as representatives of these identities.

In conditions dominated by SNIs, quota-based conflicts can become a sustainable form of latent or overt civil war. This reflects the darker side of "coexistence" and "brotherhood" between SNIs, which, without preceding regulation of the relationship with the state based on citizenship and recognition of pluralism, leads to continuous conflict. If balance (consensus) is achieved, it can prevent the dominance of one identity group and ensure participation and rights for all, setting limits for the state and protecting individuals. However, this mechanism can also suppress individual rights and weaken the state's ability to fulfill its responsibilities. If consensus does not arise from adopting democracy and citizenship rights but rather from power-sharing among elites of identity groups and their political forces, it results in a sectarian system. This process, as a complex historical-social-political phenomenon, involves differentiation between scientific knowledge and belief, and between state logic and identity thought.

In another context, to properly analyze the intricacies of national security in the Middle East, it is essential to delineate state security and regime security. State security encompasses the protection of a country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and overall stability. It includes traditional security concerns such as defense against external aggression, maintaining public order, and safeguarding critical infrastructure. The primary focus of state security is the long-term survival and functionality of the state apparatus (Martin, 2000). Conversely, regime security centers on the survival and stability of the current governing authority or political system. It involves protecting the ruling elite from internal threats like coups, uprisings, and political opposition. Measures for regime security often include controlling dissent, managing political rivals, and maintaining the loyalty of security forces (Smith, et al., 2013).

The military and internal security forces play crucial roles in both state and regime security. These forces often serve dual purposes: protecting the state from external threats and the regime from internal dissent. The relationship between the military and the ruling regime can significantly impact their effectiveness and loyalty (Hazen, 2014). The concept of "deep states," involving

networks of influential military, intelligence, and political actors operating behind the scenes, is relevant in many Middle Eastern countries. These actors often prioritize regime security and can undermine democratic processes and state institutions (Barak, 2018).

Accordingly, state politics should be more accurately conceptualized as "regime politics," as their primary objective is to serve the interests of the ruling elite against rival power groups. The Middle Eastern state is far from being cohesive; instead, it is fragmented (Hinnebusch, 2014, pp. 1-2). There are at least three types of local actors influencing policy: primary elites (those holding the largest share of political and economic power), secondary elites (subordinate social groups that are still part of the competition), and the general public, who typically lack the power to influence decisions and often become the object of power struggles. However, population support can also be considered a type of resource (Brichs & Lampridi-Kemou, 2012, pp. 14-18).

One of the most significant sources of national insecurity is the SNIs dilemma. This arises when efforts by groups to enhance their security—by reinforcing their identity—provoke fear in other groups, prompting them to also bolster their security. This creates a vicious cycle where efforts to increase security ultimately diminish it. This dilemma is particularly pronounced in contemporary Arab societies due to political and security instability, leading to a resurgence of based-SNIs conflict, caused undermining the overall security of the state and regime, and weakening societal security resilience. In sum, the multifaceted security challenges in the Middle East are intricately tied to both internal and external factors, creating a complex and often volatile environment. Internally, the sectarian and ethnic divisions, as seen in the cases of South Sudan and Iraqi Kurdistan, along with the complete or partial state collapses in Yemen, Libya, and Syria, underscore the fragile nature of national cohesion.

In the next section, we will examine the role of ideology in shaping SNIs. We will explore how ideology fosters awareness and self-identity among subnational groups within the national context. Specific ideological influences such as Islamism, nationalism, sectarianism, and secularism will be analyzed to understand their impact on the socio-political fabric of the Middle East.

4.4. Ideology and Its Interplay with Shaping SNIs

Ideology plays a crucial role in shaping identity awareness and self-perception in the Middle East. On one hand, numerous states have fragmented into a mosaic of sub-state or trans-state

identities, including tribal affiliations, city-based identifications, and ethnic affiliations, particularly among non-Arabic-speaking minorities such as the Kurds in Iraq. On the other hand, supra-national and SNIs have also competed with the newly established states. Indeed, many of the most influential social movements and ideologies have been supra-state in nature. Various ideologies, including nationalism, Islamism, and secularism, intersect with identities, influencing national security dynamics. They are often constructed and mobilized by political elites to serve their interests, leading to the politicization of SNIs. Beyond national borders, trans-ideologies play a significant role in shaping the Middle East's socio-political landscape. These identities can be religious, ethnic, or political and often transcend the boundaries of the modern nation-state. For instance, Iran uses appeals to this in its foreign policy, demonstrating how these effect identities to serve as a vector for strategic narratives and cultural diplomacy (Wastnidge, 2019).

This section will explore three pivotal ideologies that have significantly shaped the dynamics of SNIs and profoundly impacted national security structures and policies in the Middle East, with the objective of countering stereotypes and overgeneralizations. The discussion will address Islamism (along with its associated sectarianism), nationalism (and its related Arabism), and secularism. These ideologies encompass at least three dimensions through which identity expression is shaped in Middle Eastern societies: (1) a future-oriented sense of belonging in a transcendent, universal, religious, or political context; (2) a past-oriented self-conception determined by racial identity, rooted in lineage and ancestry; and (3) a historically oriented notion of membership defined by national identity, constituting an "imagined community" among the nation's members (Bush & Keyman, 1997).

4.4.1. Religious Ideologies: Islamism and Sectarianism

The Middle East has been a fertile ground for the development and proliferation of Islamist ideologies due to its historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts. Nationalist movements, both secular and religious, emerged in response to the colonial rule. The failure of secular nationalism to address the socio-economic and political needs of the people eventually led to the rise of Islamist movements as alternative forms of resistance and identity (Banhakeia, 2017). The contemporary wave of Islamism began to take shape in the early 20th century, influenced by intellectuals and activists who sought to revive Islamic principles in response to the perceived failures of Western modernity. Key figures such as Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, and

Sayyid Qutb, an influential Islamist thinker, played pivotal roles in articulating the vision of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law (Mozaffari, 2007).

Islamist movements have had varying degrees of success in gaining political power across the Middle East. In some cases, they have achieved significant political influence through democratic means, while in others, they have been met with repression and violence. In Iran, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 marked a significant turning point, leading to the establishment of the Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini. This event demonstrated the potential for Islamist movements to seize state power and implement their vision of an Islamic state. Iran's revolution inspired Islamist movements across the region, reinforcing the idea that political Islam could serve as a viable alternative to secular nationalism and Western influence (Zubaida, 2011, pp. 2-4).

It is important to recognize diversity within Islamist ideologies. While some movements advocate for a gradual, peaceful approach to achieving their goals, others endorse more radical and militant strategies. Salafism, a puritanical interpretation of Islam, has given rise to both non-violent and violent movements. Salafi-jihadism, exemplified by groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, seeks to establish an Islamic state through violent means, often targeting both local governments and Western interests (Turner, 2012). In contrast, movements like the Ennahda Party in Tunisia and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco have pursued political Islam through democratic processes, emphasizing the compatibility of Islam with modernity and democracy (Meddeb, 2019).

The impact of Islamism extends beyond national borders, influencing international relations in the Middle East. Islamist movements often engage in transnational networks, collaborating with like-minded groups across the region. The rise of transnational Islamist networks has been facilitated by modern communication technologies and the shared grievances of Muslims worldwide. These networks play a significant role in shaping regional dynamics, often complicating foreign policies of Middle Eastern states and their interactions with global powers (Mandaville, 2016). For example, Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and various Shia militias in Iraq and Syria has reinforced its influence in the region, challenging the dominance of Sunni-majority states like Saudi Arabia. This sectarian rivalry has been a major factor in the region's ongoing conflicts (Alaaldin, 2018).

Despite their successes, Islamist movements face significant challenges. Internal divisions, ideological rivalries, and external pressures from both regional and global actors complicate their

efforts to achieve their goals. Asef Bayat, a prominent sociologist, offers a unique perspective on the evolution of Islamism in the Middle East. He introduced the concept of "*post-Islamism*," which he first applied to the context of Iran in the early 1990s. Post-Islamism, according to Bayat, represents a shift from the traditional Islamist agenda towards a more nuanced and pragmatic approach that integrates democratic principles and respects pluralism. Bayat's concept of post-Islamism is rooted in the recognition that the rigid implementation of Sharia and the establishment of an Islamic state often fail to meet diverse needs and aspirations of contemporary Muslim societies. Instead, post-Islamism emphasizes the importance of individual rights, social justice, and inclusive governance. This shift is seen as a response to the failures and limitations of earlier Islamist movements, which often resulted in authoritarianism and social discontent (Bayat, 2013, pp. 7-9).

Islamist ideologies often exacerbate sectarian tensions by framing political conflicts in religious terms. Hezbollah's identity as a Shia militant group positions it in direct opposition to Sunni groups, both within Lebanon and regionally. ISIS, by contrast, sought to establish a Sunni caliphate, targeting Shia communities and other minorities. The ideological framing of conflicts as sectarian struggles deepens divisions and complicates efforts at reconciliation. This indicates that religion as political ideology plays a dual role in the state formation process in the Middle East.

Shifting focus and sectarian ideologies construct and reinforce sectarian identities by emphasizing historical grievances, religious differences, and communal solidarity. These constructs shape how individuals perceive themselves and others, influencing their social interactions and political behavior (Bahout, 2016). Political elites frequently use sectarian ideologies to mobilize support and consolidate power. In Iraq, both Sunni and Shia political leaders have invoked sectarian narratives to rally their bases and legitimize their authority. This politicization of sectarianism exacerbates divisions and fuels conflict (Hinnebusch, 2013). Political leaders and regional authorities have historically employed sectarianism deliberately, either to sustain their positions of power or to augment it. Similarly, ordinary citizens have leveraged sectarianism to secure essential services through corrupt institutions that proliferated in the absence of state patronage. Consequently, sectarianism is not merely a matter of entrenched emotions or cultural identities but represents a rational phenomenon from which its adherents derive benefits, irrespective of how irrational it may appear to some (Majed, 2016).

The most salient characteristic of the phenomenon termed sectarianism in the modern era is as follows. First, sectarian affiliation supersedes all other individual identities. The religious sect was not produced by the modernity; it has existed historically at a local level. However, in its contemporary manifestation as sectarianism, it conflicts with other individual identities. This occurs in an era where individuals possess multiple affiliations and a social consciousness capable of prioritizing one identity above all others, thereby subordinating the rest. Second, in the age of mass society, sectarianism emerges as an imagined community. It appropriates the vocabulary, terminology, and inherited symbols of traditional religious sects but employs them to forge an imagined group. This group does not form a homogeneous social entity nor does it have common interests; rather, it is sustained by a sense of belonging alone, constructing the concept of collective interest based solely on the unity of sectarian affiliation (Bishara, 2018, pp. 79-81). However, sectarianism is neither an ever-present nor an ancient phenomenon, nor does it have its origins in the historical struggles over the Islamic caliphate. Sectarianism is a modern development that infiltrated the Arab region alongside the rise of capitalism while the colonial powers played a pivotal role in fostering sectarianism by employing identity politics to differentiate and govern various groups. They further institutionalized sectarianism through state mechanisms, embedding it within the very fabric of state institutions (Majed, 2016).

The dangers of sectarianism, as Ghalioun highlights, extend beyond merely undermining the state's legal framework and transforming its institutions into tools and its forces into militias serving the ruling sect. It goes further to dismantle civil society itself. When a tribe or religious group successfully controls the state and its agencies, neutralizing the rule of public law, it acquires the means to subjugate other groups, dismantle their civil organizations, and suppress any resistance they might offer, whether rooted in traditional sectarianism or modern libertarianism (Ghalioun, 2007). Consequently, the state, which is intended to serve as a legal framework ensuring the operation of citizenship law, equality, and the primacy of public interests while balancing private and social interests, becomes a potent tool for the ruling sectarianism. It uses this tool to dissolve and destroy other sectarian groups, subjugate their members by force, and co-opt them to serve its own goals.

Sectarianism, whether manifested through divisions within a single religion or through a religious basis among people of different faiths, is a consequence of the crisis of Arab identity. Ghalioun notes that sectarianism often begins with partial divisions and conflicts, soon acquiring

cultural and political significance, and becoming a reference and identity for individuals. In this way, the value of sectarian and religious differences is rediscovered and transformed into a foundation for societal bonds, forming political or quasi-political associations. Sectarian or religious sectarianism attempts to compensate for the lack of solidarity and social cohesion. The prominence of sectarianism in the political and cultural spheres is the most visible sign of the failure of national policies. On a related note, sectarian ideology is constructed and perpetuated through the ongoing interplay of four dimensions (Haddad, 2020):

1. Doctrinal: Pertaining to the level of religious beliefs and truths, functioning as a global or national identity defined by a specific set of religious doctrines.
2. Subnational: Serving as a framework for mediating social and power relations within a specific national context.
3. Nationalism: Operating at the nation-state level, providing a lens through which national identity is interpreted and mediated.
4. Transnationalism: Acting as a prism for international relations, encompassing inter/transnational solidarity and geostrategic competition.

In conclusion, the intricate dynamics of sectarianism within political practice highlight a multifaceted phenomenon that transcends mere cultural identities, instead reflecting a rational strategy employed by both leaders and ordinary individuals to navigate power and access essential services. The modern era sees sectarianism evolve into a political tool amid the democratization of politics and simultaneous obstruction of legitimate political engagement. The debate on sectarianism within contemporary Arab discourse reveals three primary trends. The first approach emphasizes a democratic and rational political solution over secularism. The second approach ties sectarian issues to broader crises of authority and advocates for a state of citizenship. The third approach underscores the inherent necessity of secularism within the Islamic context and calls for the integration of democracy and secularization. These perspectives collectively underscore the complexity of addressing sectarianism and the imperative for nuanced, context-sensitive solutions that recognize the interplay between religion, politics, and society.

4.4.2. Arab Nationalism and Arabism

Nationalism has been a pivotal force in shaping modern states and societies. In the Middle East, the concept has manifested uniquely due to the region's historical, cultural, and political contexts. Arab nationalism has played a crucial role in the region's socio-political development, emphasizes the shared culture, language, and history of Arab people and advocates political unification of Arab countries. In Turkey, nationalist ideology under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk sought to create a homogeneous Turkish identity. This involved significant efforts to assimilate ethnic and religious minorities, particularly the Kurds (Donmez, 2007). While nationalism has the potential to unify diverse populations, its implementation in the Middle East has often been exclusionary. Arab nationalism marginalized ethnic and sectarian minorities, leading to resistance movements.

The intellectual underpinnings of Arab nationalism were significantly influenced by early 20th century thinkers like Sati' al-Husri and Michel Aflaq. Al-Husri emphasized the importance of language and culture in forging a collective Arab identity, while Aflaq's work laid the ideological groundwork for the Ba'ath Party. The Nahda played a crucial role in this intellectual ferment, with a revival of interest in Arab heritage, literature, and history fostering a sense of shared identity. Sati' al-Husri, often regarded as the father of Arab nationalism, argued that language and culture were the primary determinants of national identity. He believed that the Arab nation was defined by its shared language and cultural heritage, rather than by geographical or political boundaries. This cultural nationalism laid the groundwork for a broader political movement aimed at unifying the Arab world (Satik, 2019).

On a related discussion, the formation of the LAS in 1945 marked a significant milestone in the institutionalization of Arab nationalism. The LAS was established with the aim of promoting economic, cultural, and political cooperation among Arab states. It provided a forum for Arab leaders to coordinate their efforts and advocate for Arab unity on the international stage. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the charismatic leader of Egypt, emerged as a central figure in the Arab nationalist movement. Nasser's vision of pan-Arab unity resonated with many across the Arab world. He championed the cause of Arab independence and sovereignty, and his policies and rhetoric inspired nationalist movements throughout the region (Hinnebusch, 2013).

It is crucial to distinguish between two aspects in the formation of nationalisms in the Middle East. The first aspect is the differentiation between the nation as a complete social entity, inclusive

of its civil societal institutions, and the nation as a legal political entity, determined by the governing system and recognized by other states. The second aspect is the differentiation between two stages of nationalism (Murad & Fayyad, 2017, pp. 116-122). The first stage of nationalism is characterized by a defensive national culture, where there is a mechanical cultural defense through adherence to traditional religious and cultural beliefs, as opposed to those of the colonial powers. The second stage is the foundational national culture stage, which aims to build the national state apparatus according to a political culture that transitions national consciousness from a defensive posture to one of political and social construction. The Arab nation's cohesion evolved through three main phases:

1. Kinship Arabism: Early identity was based on a shared ancestry, language, values, and history, though this kinship link weakened over time due to mixing with other groups.

2. Arabism with Islam: From Islam's rise to the Ottoman Empire's fall, Arab identity was closely tied to Islamic identity. The Qur'an's revelation in Arabic strengthened Arab self-awareness, but Ottoman Turk nationalism later marginalized Arab identity.

3. Modern Arabism: Emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this phase shifted toward building a modern national state, moving from defensive nationalism to active political and social development.

From another perspective, the relationship between Arab nationalism and Islamic movements has been complex and multifaceted. Arab nationalism and Islamism both sought to address the issues of identity, sovereignty, and social justice in the Middle East. However, they approached these issues from different ideological perspectives. Arab nationalism emphasized secularism and cultural unity, while Islamism sought to establish an Islamic political order based on religious principles (Zubaida, 2004).

The discourse of Arabism and Arab nationalism has long been dominant in the Middle East's regional relations. In his analysis of the relationship between nationalism and minority issues, Ghalioun argues that nationalism precedes democracy. The Arab countries experienced nationalism primarily as an ideological movement rather than a tangible reality. This nationalist philosophy embodies a paradox: it promotes equality among individuals regardless of their affiliations, yet it denies the distinctiveness of their collective identities. Consequently, the

dominant group imposes its language and culture on the unified state (Ghalioun, 2003, pp. 215-216).

In modern times, Arab societies suffer from a profound estrangement between community and politics, leading to a deep sense of historical disappointment and misery. This disjunction between cultural and political boundaries persisted through the 20th century, marked by the Sultanate and the emergence of the "national" state model. National and nationalist policies have also failed to build effective solidarity frameworks, particularly within the tribal cultures of Arab states (Cammack, et al., 2017). Bishara contends that cultural Arab nationalism evolved into Arab political nationalism to achieve self-realization and transform into nation-states. However, contemporary nationalism still lacks self-determination and the transformation into nation-states. The incomplete transition led nationalism to revert to an ideological movement, seeking to achieve political nationalism or, in some cases, transforming into subnational states. The disparity between ideological fervor and the reality of national institutions, especially the state, caused nationalism to regress to its initial cultural stage (Bishara, 2007, pp. 209-211).

Bishara defines Arab nationalism as an imaginary yet real and actual community, shaped by language, education, publishing, and the press. This shared Arab history, both pre- and post-Islam, contributes to identity formation. The imagined sense of belonging to a unified Arab group, despite conflicting realities, underscores the need to transform cultural nationalism into political nationalism and eventually into nation-states. He emphasizes that the ultimate goal is not nationalism per se, but the creation of democratic nation-states that encompass all citizens.

In summary, the crisis of modernity in Arab society and the state, underscores the complex interplay between nationalism, cultural identity, and political realities. This interplay reflects the ongoing struggle to reconcile ideological aspirations with the practical challenges of building cohesive and inclusive nation-states.

4.4.3. Secularism in the Middle East: A Concise Discussion

Secularism, as a contemporary ideology and political structure, was introduced to the Middle East during the colonial era and has since become a fundamental principle in the politics of numerous countries within the region, despite the diversity in their political systems. The term was first utilized by George Holyoke to describe "a variety of utilitarian social ethics aimed at the betterment of humanity through reason, science, and social organization." Holyoke advocated for

a state that maintains neutrality in religious matters and tolerance towards all religious and philosophical doctrines (Wu, 2007).

The intellectual endeavors of Arab secular thinkers were not monolithic; they spanned a spectrum from moderate to radical interpretations of secularism. This diversity reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of secular thought in the Middle East, shaped by interactions with global ideologies and local traditions. These thinkers sought to carve out a space for Islam within a secular framework, advocating for a model that respected religious heritage while embracing modern governance principles. Contemporary debates on secularism in the Middle East continue to draw on these early intellectual efforts, reflecting ongoing struggles to reconcile religious and secular values. The resurgence of Islamist movements and the persistence of authoritarian secular regimes highlight the enduring relevance of these debates.

Secularism has been adopted as a state principle in many Middle Eastern countries as part of their development and modernization agendas. The implementation of aggressive secular policies often served to consolidate personal power while marginalizing Islam (Hatem, 1994). Measures taken to secularize the political system included the abolition of Sharia courts, the closure or restriction of Islamic religious institutions, the banning of the hijab, and the suppression of religious scholars. The post-colonial Tunisian president Bourguiba, like many other regional leaders, viewed “Islam as representative of the past” and considered “the West as the only hope for a modern future.” In practice, secularism in the Middle East frequently translated to the privatization of Islam, the reinforcement of authoritarian state power, and the implicit perpetuation of European economic and political interests. Consequently, secularization in the Middle East emerged as a state-driven political project intertwined with tyranny and the marginalization of national history and traditions (Haynes & Wilson, 2019).

It is noteworthy to mention that the societal conservatism, deeply rooted in traditional and religious values, impedes the advancement of secularism in the Middle East. In many societies, religion plays a central role in personal and communal identity, making secularism appear as an alien and disruptive force. The strong influence of religious leaders and institutions further entrenches conservative attitudes, making secular reforms difficult to implement and sustain. Efforts to promote secular education, gender equality, and legal reforms often face significant resistance from conservative segments of society who view such changes as threats to their cultural and religious heritage (Kepel, 2009, pp. 343-344).

The aggressive secularization policies implemented by Middle Eastern regimes often led to significant social upheaval and resistance. The marginalization of Islamic institutions and traditions fueled discontent and opposition, giving rise to Islamist movements that challenge state authority. These movements, in turn, highlight the resilience of religious identities and the limitations of state-imposed secularism. In examining the legacy of secularism in the Middle East, it is essential to consider the broader geopolitical context. The alignment with European economic and political interests often undermined national sovereignty and fueled anti-colonial sentiments. This historical backdrop continues to shape contemporary politics, as Middle Eastern societies navigate the complex interplay between secularism, religion, and national identity. The challenge for Middle Eastern societies lies in finding a balance between secular and religious values that respects cultural heritage while embracing modernity.

4.5. The Arab Uprisings: Outcomes and Aftermath

The Arab Uprisings, which began in late 2010 and swept across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, marked a significant period of political upheaval and transformation of all dimensions, profoundly reshaped the political landscape of the Middle East. The state's retreat from its core functions towards society, specifically in the domains of health, education, and social welfare, has profoundly altered the dynamics of internal conflicts and restructured societies on new bases. This transformation has been driven by the global order and its financial instruments such as the IMF. The state's withdrawal from these essential functions has resulted in an increased emphasis on security roles and the denial of the existence of numerous social groups, exacerbated their hardships (Abu-Ulbah, 2017).

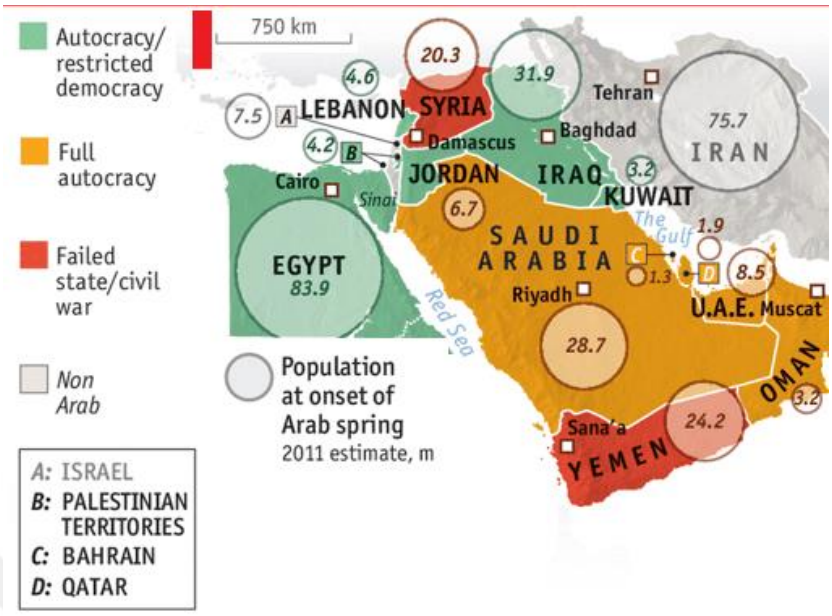

Figure 5.1 Country status of Middle Eastern countries in 2016

The uprisings were characterized by their rapid spread and varied responses from different regimes. While some countries saw relatively peaceful transitions, others descended into violent conflict and prolonged instability (Shehata, 2014). Social media and new communication technologies played a significant role in mobilizing and organizing protestors, facilitating the spread of revolutionary fervor across borders. The aftermath continues to shape the political, social, and economic landscapes of the affected countries, leaving a legacy of both hope and disillusionment (Hinnebusch, 2015). Considering a different angle, the Arab Uprisings, naturally, faced opposition from traditional adversaries, including power elites, regime authorities, and external powers. Transitioning from outdated political regimes to fundamentalist ones, re-embracing socialist (Marxist) political systems, or endorsing jihadist ideologies were all seen as unreasonable. It was also unacceptable for the regional power vacuum to be occupied by a specific Arab civil renaissance project. There was a necessity to take measures to thwart the Arab Uprisings and its potential impacts.

These projects employed multiple methods to suppress revolutionary movements and democratic aspirations. Tactics included fostering terrorism to generate fear and security crises, strengthening the military's dominance in governance, reviving the role of the individual as a charismatic leader, exploiting state institutions—especially the judiciary—for political purposes, and using the media to shape narratives, fuel hopes and fears, and justify state actions. They also

sought to revert the state to its foundational sectarian, tribal, and ethnic divisions, while leveraging political capital for corruption and exploitation, serving as a means of containment through adaptation and tailored instruments.

When examining the Arab uprisings, it becomes evident that in no country were the revolutionaries able to completely dismantle an authoritarian regime; instead, they merely succeeded in removing their leaders. This partial success enabled the surviving repressive regime, the entrenched deep state (primarily the military), or counter-revolutionary forces to endure and devise a counter-strategy. This counter-strategy leveraged authority, resources, foreign support, and expertise to reorganize, resist, and ultimately reclaim power from the emerging new leadership (Bakir, 2024, pp. 132-133). In instances where the regime or the deep state could not decisively defeat the rebels, they often engaged in tactical agreements with the new forces. These arrangements were designed to buy time, undermine the new leaders from within, or utilize them as part of a containment strategy to diffuse public dissent. In countries where such strategies were implemented, the general populace eventually grew disillusioned with the new leaders due to their inability to fulfill initial promises. Consequently, the failure to deliver tangible improvements led to widespread frustration and disappointment among the citizenry.

Cherkaoui (2019) argues that with the beginning of 2019, it's clear that most Arab countries seem stuck inside a dark and suffocating triangle that generates pressure due to the convergence of its three sides. (1) Religious of political discourse: a metaphor for the role of political Islam movements that devote an ideological trend that exploits the tolerance of religion to achieve political ambitions. (2) The savage of power: in reference to the resistance of those with political and financial influence on the project of change and the return of the deep states, and their justification for the policy of betrayal, demonization, and exclusion of their opponents, whether they are Islamists or others, under the pretext of "resisting extremism" or "fighting terrorism." (3) The decline of national identities in most Arab countries and the emergence of new fanaticisms centered around sect, sect, ethnic origin, or language and various small differences between Shiites versus Sunnis, Islamists versus modernists, Arabs versus Westernizers, Amazighs versus Arabs, and other types of identity entrenchment.

These uprisings, driven by widespread dissatisfaction with autocratic rule, economic stagnation, and social injustice, brought to the forefront various SNIs that have since played crucial roles in shaping the region's national security dynamics. Ethnic and sectarian identities were

pivotal in shaping the trajectories of the uprisings and their aftermaths. In countries like Syria, Bahrain, and Iraq sectarian divisions between Sunni and Shia Muslims played crucial roles in the conflicts that emerged during and after the uprisings. In addition, Regional and tribal identities also played critical roles in shaping the outcomes of the Arab Uprisings (Dalacoura, 2012).

4.5.1. The Impact of SNIs on National Security in the Arab Uprisings

The Arab Uprisings, despite its widespread appeal among the Arab masses, resulted in increased fragmentation, particularly along sectarian lines. Political Islam has filled spaces once dominated by Arab nationalism, but it too has emerged as a divided force that must coexist with, rather than replace, the existing state system. Additionally, extremist groups like the so-called ISIS, which it aimed to dismantle the state system entirely, have surfaced (Fawcett, 2016, p. 6).

The role of SNIs significantly influenced the trajectories and outcomes of the uprising movements that their demands bring greater political freedoms. SNIs, including ethnic, sectarian, tribal, and regional affiliations, played a critical role in both mobilizing support for the uprisings and in shaping the post-uprising political landscapes. In many cases, these identities provided organizational structures and networks necessary for collective action (Phillips & Valbjørn, 2018). On a related note, Islamist movements, which were not at the forefront of the initial uprisings, have emerged as significant political players in the post-uprising landscape. In Tunisia, the Islamist party Nahda played a crucial role in the political transition, while in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood briefly held power before being ousted by the military. The rise of Islamist groups has been a contentious issue, often polarizing societies and complicating the democratization processes (Sadiki, 2016).

Prior to the Arab Uprisings, the traditional segmentation of the Arab geopolitical landscape was largely defined by binaries associated with the Arab-Israeli conflict, the regional map was once defined by binaries such as “resistance versus moderation” or “peace camp vs. resistance axis,” or “settlement versus resistance.” However, this paradigm was disrupted after 2011, leading to the emergence of new patterns characterized by entirely different binaries. The emerging alliances that will shape the region are likely to revolve around new sets of dichotomies. These new dichotomies include “change versus stability,” or, in other terms, revolutionary versus conservative (or reactionary) states”. Another key binary is “State-centric (*quṭriyya*) versus nationalism,” and potentially “Islamic versus Arab” or “Sunni versus Shiite.” (Rashed, 2011, p.

53). In this light, the region is entering a new-old regional configuration, new in its structure, alliances, and axes, yet old in the substance of its divisions and underlying issues. Shifting focus, the Arab revolutions demonstrated that the state is no longer the sole entity capable of directing and determining its trajectory, nor does it retain exclusive control over the future of the nations involved.

One of the most visible impacts of SNIs during the Arab Uprisings was their role in shaping the dynamics of proxy wars. The conflict in Syria, which evolved into one of the most complex and devastating wars in modern history, serves as a prime example. The Syrian civil war quickly became a theater for multiple proxy wars, involving both regional and global powers. These conflicts were not merely political or strategic but were deeply rooted in the SNIs of the involved groups. Phillips and Valbjørn (2018) argue that the content of these identities significantly influenced the dynamics of these proxy wars.

The relationship between the rise of subnational identity groups and post-Arab Uprising regional transformations yields on significant reasons (Yeşiltaş & Kardaş, 2018, p. 263). Firstly, the Middle East's deteriorating economic, political, and security structures have experienced a profound erosion of trust and competence. In this fragile context, the proliferation of violent subnational identity groups has fundamentally undermined state institutions, governance structures, and regional security arrangements. Historical and political competition among regional state elites has evolved into a friend-versus-enemy dynamic among societal actors. Conflicts that were once inter-state and trans-border have now infiltrated social boundaries, increasingly demarcated along ethno-sectarian lines. The emergence and decline of ISIS exemplify the heart of these repercussions, likely ushering in a new “complex regional-real system” for the region. Thus, the threats and challenges posed by ISIS and similar anti-national security agents must be understood not only in terms of the groups themselves but also within the broader crises involving great power interventions and the global political economy. ISIS, originating from an international political crisis in Iraq, grew partly due to the decline of state structures.

Secondly, the ongoing conflicts among various ethnic and sectarian political communities, represented by subnational identity groups, have fostered a new collective consciousness centered around the “discourse of resistance” (e.g., Kurdish resistance, Sunni resistance against Shiites, Shiite resistance against Sunnis, Houthi resistance). This has engendered a new form of social interaction that destabilizes the regional balance of power, increasingly defined by the role and

legitimacy of existing borders and unstable social and political structures. Consequently, new cross-border interactions led to the emergence of a novel concept of regionalism, disrupting the foundational structures of the existing regional order. The complex nature of this ongoing transformation and changes in "patterns of cross-border loyalty" facilitated the proliferation of subnational identity groups in the Middle East.

Considering a different angle, the violence, driven by SNIs, has precipitated mutual reactions. More critically, identities have permeated the grassroots as failed states lost the ability to maintain order, triggering a security dilemma. Ordinary people were compelled to rely on their primitive communities for protection, amidst fears of sectarian "cleansing" and massacres, as observed in Syria and Iraq. Jihad and martyrdom were normalized as the war economy emerged, where sectarian warlords provided the means of survival (Hinnebusch, 2019). The most fervent fighters, motivated by subnational fervor and hatred, attracted the most funding from external sponsors. Amid high levels of violence, extremist subnational voices, whether on social media or among armed factions on the ground, have marginalized those in the middle, including non-sectarian secularists, Sufis, or even the modernist political Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the later years of the uprising, the terms of conflict were transformed, somewhat reversing or qualifying these initial effects. The sources of insecurity in the Middle East distilled into five interrelated categories.

First, the region's security architecture itself is a structural source of instability. Historically premised on the exclusion of Iran and anchored in U.S.-led external balancing, this framework operated under the assumption that Iran lacked legitimate security concerns. This approach shifted under the Obama administration, culminating in the 2015 nuclear agreement with Tehran despite resistance from Saudi Arabia and Israel. However, the Trump administration's reversal of this policy reignited U.S.–Iran tensions (Kamrava, 2019, p. 54). Second, the persistent neglect of non-military security threats, particularly the rise of identity politics and sectarianism, has deepened societal fractures. Sectarian narratives have empowered both states and NSAs to legitimize their agendas, positioning themselves as defenders of threatened communities (Kamrava, 2019, p. 54).

Third, the assertiveness of regional actors has further destabilized the security landscape. Regional hegemonic ambitions, power projection strategies, and middle-power aspirations, often reinforced by sectarian divisions and weak political systems, have fostered intense competition and mutual undermining among states. Fourth, antagonistic foreign and security policies

perpetuate the security dilemma, whereby defensive measures by one state heighten the insecurity of others, prompting reciprocal countermeasures. This dynamic sustains a highly volatile regional security complex characterized by chronic tensions, diplomatic rifts, deep mistrust, and recurrent armed conflicts. Since 2011, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and others have exhibited heightened diplomatic and military activism, exploiting the vulnerabilities of fragile states to expand influence in arenas such as Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya.

Fifth, the contradictory relationship between security provision and the state is exacerbated by the rise of non-state armed actors (NSAAs). As the state transitions from a provider of security to a source of insecurity, subnational ethnic and religious groups have established their own governance mechanisms, as seen in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. This shift resulted in conflicts that turn many countries into "failed states." For instance, in Iraq, the efforts of Kurds, Turkmen, Shiites, and Sunnis to secure their own interests have further weakened the state. Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya exemplify the emerging micro-geopolitical struggles involving major regional actors. Collectively, these factors underscore the mutually reinforcing nature of Middle Eastern insecurity, where structural imbalances, identity-based fragmentation, competitive regional politics, and state weakness converge to sustain volatility and link the region's instability to broader global security dynamics.

On a final note, the Arab uprisings have significantly heightened SNIs sentiments across the Middle East, profoundly influencing the regional public sphere. These sentiments, however, do not adhere to predictable patterns of mobilization, conflict, or congregation among social movements and political governments. The rise of sectarian identities has been exacerbated by forced migrations, which states have employed as tools of statecraft to construct and deepen subnational divisions. Consequently, this has led to the fragmentation of societies and the categorization of populations into homogenous ethno-sectarian enclaves, thereby inhibiting the development of cohesive national identities (Haddad, et al., 2022). The rise of SNIs has profound implications for national security. The societal fragmentation along sectarian lines led to increased tensions and conflicts, destabilizing the region and posing significant challenges to national security. The ongoing conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen illustrate how subnational rivalries can escalate into serious national security threats. These divisions not only fuel internal strife but also created opportunities for external actors to exploit sectarian tensions, further complicated the security landscape and undermining efforts to establish stable, unified states.

4.5.2. The Post-Arab Uprising Era: Analyzing Ongoing Regimes and Control Mechanisms

Over a decade later, the political landscape of the region remains complex, with varying outcomes across different countries. Some states have experienced regime restoration, while others continue to grapple with instability or have transitioned towards hybrid governance models. In the aftermath of the Arab Uprisings, many regimes have resorted to coercion and repression to maintain control. This includes the use of security forces to suppress protests, widespread surveillance, and the imprisonment of political activists and journalists. In countries like Egypt and Bahrain, state apparatuses have been fortified to prevent any potential resurgence of uprisings. The use of emergency laws and anti-terrorism legislation has been a common tactic to justify repressive measures and stifle dissent (Klocek, Ha, & Sumaktoyo, 2022). Another strategy employed by regimes is cooptation through patronage networks. This involves distributing economic benefits, public sector jobs, and political favors to secure loyalty from key segments of society, including military elites, business leaders, and influential social groups. In Algeria and Jordan, for instance, the ruling elites have effectively used patronage to stabilize their regimes by ensuring the support of critical constituencies (Josua, 2016).

Economic strategies have also been employed by regimes to maintain control, including patronage systems, economic reforms, and control over key economic sectors. The Jordanian monarchy has employed a combination of economic reforms and foreign aid to manage the impact of the Arab Uprisings (Yeşilyurt, 2014). The role of elites in maintaining control has been pivotal in many post-uprising regimes. In Egypt, the military elite has played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape. Following the ousting of Hosni Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took control, positioning itself as the guardian of the state.

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, a significant structural defect emerged within the governance frameworks of the regimes: the escalating dominance of executive, military, and security authorities over legislative and judicial institutions. This imbalance resulted in the concentration of power within the executive branch, effectively transforming it into both the creator and enforcer of laws. Such a shift represents a profound constitutional and political anomaly, undermining the principles of separation of powers and rule of law. In response to widespread societal unrest across the region, a novel co-monarchy strategy emerged. This

approach fostered an alliance among monarchies, motivated by the monarchs' mutual interest in preserving and enhancing their popular legitimacy.

Domestically, this goal has been pursued by reproducing traditional narratives (ethnic, religious, and civil) to support the legitimacy of the responsible regime. For example, the king of Jordan is a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh). In a similar vein, Saudi Arabia opened eight new state television channels after the uprisings, each dedicated to celebrating specific components of the kingdom's history. Attempts to revitalize local narratives of the legitimacy of power in Arab monarchies have been accompanied by exceptional welfare measures, particularly top-down resource distribution, in order to curb or contain social and economic injustices (Calculli & Legrenzi, 2016, pp. 225-226).

In conclusion, both new and established regimes have implemented numerous localized and incremental measures to mitigate or preempt conflict, thereby securing their political survival. Generally, these concessions have been confined to social and economic improvements targeted at constituencies that either participated in protests or were anticipated to mobilize in the streets. The political reforms implemented by the established regimes were, at best, minimal. Despite these efforts, the underlying structural issues that prompted the unrest remain largely unaddressed, leaving the potential for future instability. Long-term stability in the region will likely require more comprehensive and substantive reforms.

CHAPTER FIVE: SNIs AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN JORDAN AND LEBANON

5.1. Jordan: Identity Transformation in Postcolonial Contexts

Identity is not a fixed essence, but rather a political product influenced by multiple and variable factors. When we engage in the process of authenticating the historical narrative of Jordanian national identity, it, like various Arab identities, is an integral part of trans-national identities, for example, the Arab and Islamic.

The discourses that have addressed Jordanian national identity suffer from the problematic nature that characterizes the discourse itself. Discourse typically seeks to promote certain concepts at the expense of others, resulting in narratives that align with predetermined viewpoints. These attempts often aim to adapt the discussion around a concept to support specific ideologies. Consequently, discourse in this case becomes a tool for reinforcing predetermined perceptions rather than providing a comprehensive objective analysis that reflects the complexities and diversities inherent in the concept itself.

Since its inception, the Jordanian state and its identities have faced profound challenges. Jordanian identity has been characterized by its distinctiveness within a complex historical and geographical context, where it was viewed by some as a product of colonial will, creating deep problematics regarding the acceptance of this identity and the acknowledgment of its legitimacy. Although other Arab identities also emerged under the influence of colonial will, Jordan was distinguished by a unique experience due to the geographical and demographic changes that the state underwent, which directly affected the formation or imagination of national identity. This changing geographical and demographic reality led to continuous reconsideration of the state's identity and borders, and whether these borders reflected a national reality that could be adopted by society.

Additionally, there was the issue of Hashemite legitimacy and the continuity of the Jordanian state, which formed a central axis for the policies and political orientations of the Jordanian regime and elite—issues not faced by other countries such as Syria or Egypt. In these countries, whose political and ideological conflicts occurred within a stable and internationally recognized framework, Jordan was dealing with challenges related to the very foundations of the state's existence. In Jordan, there were questions about the extent of the state's continuity and society's

need to belong to a broader state, which made the challenges faced by the Jordanian state uniquely complex to a large extent.

Especially since the absence of real borders allowed local residents to maintain, at least to some extent, traditional commercial, family, and tribal relationships across the Jordan River, and contributed to preserving the sense of shared identity among them (Maffi, 2011). Particularly as the region, as Rutile discusses, did not constitute an important cultural and political center in the area during the Ottoman period, and local intellectuals played a secondary role in cultural life and in the emergence of the Arab nationalist movement, unlike what happened in Lebanon and Syria. All these factors contributed to creating a political and cultural ambiguity that became a constant feature of Jordanian identity, at least until the end of the 1980s when King Hussein announced the administrative and legal separation between Jordan and the West Bank (Rogan & Tell, 1994). When studying the historical construction of Jordanian identity, we find three types of narratives.

The first narrative is ethnic (Arab nationalist) narrative. While theorists of this movement describe Jordan as a "historical absurdity" created by colonial powers, archival evidence, particularly the Umm Qais Conference of September 1920, contradicts this claim. As Anderson (2005, pp. 33-37). notes, the conference's demands for an independent Jordanian government, prevention of Zionist migration, formation of a national army, and legislative autonomy, demonstrate the presence of national consciousness prior to colonial intervention. These demands, as recorded by Corbett (2006) illustrate that Jordanian identity emerged from indigenous aspirations rather than solely from colonial design.

The second narrative is religious discourse in Jordanian identity. Rooted in Jordan's affiliation with the wider Islamic ummah, this narrative highlights how the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate and the rise of Turkish nationalism led to marginalization and persecution of the region's inhabitants. The Jordanian response, as documented by Salibi (1998, pp. 39-50), was expressed in early revolts such as the Shoubak Revolt of 1905 and the Karak Revolt of 1910, preceding the Great Arab Revolt. These uprisings reflected a defense of dignity and justice, contributing to the formation of a Jordanian identity that complemented, rather than replaced, religious identity.

The third narrative is Jordanian national discourse. With the collapse of Arab governance in Damascus, Transjordan entered a political and security vacuum, facing British and Zionist-backed proposals for annexation to Mandatory Palestine. Jordanians rallied around Prince Abdullah, who initially arrived in Maʿan with the aim of liberating Syria. As Méouchy, Neveu, and Ababsa (2013)

observe, his mission shifted toward founding the Emirate of Transjordan, marking the institutionalization of a distinct Jordanian national identity.[11]

These three narratives highlight the disparity in interpreting subnational Jordanian identities among different discourses, and reflect the complexity of the historical and political landscape in forming a national identity for Jordan. Especially since the "founding" King was not a founder in the literal sense, but rather arrived in a national condition that had been established before his arrival. This contradicts the historical documents and discussions that the Hashemite monarchy has attempted to adopt for decades that it is the "founder" of Jordanian national identity.

The issue of Jordanian national identity, although not directly or visibly apparent at many times, permeates numerous domains. This matter is not solely related to the question of East Jordanian and Palestinian origins of Jordanians, but extends to all SNIs, often taking religious, economic, and geographical dimensions (Abu Rumman M. , 2021). Paradoxically, the issue of identity has long been used as a scarecrow against political reform, development, and modernization pursued by the Jordanian state since the early 1990s. When the topic of the civil state was raised, it was said to be designed to undermine the "tribal social structure." When a previous government introduced the term "new social contract," it was accused of seeking to implement the World Bank's program to strike at Jordanian national identity. When the Political System Modernization Committee was formed, it was accused of seeking resettlement, then a segment of politicians and intellectuals raised considerable uproar against the term "inclusive national identity." Interestingly, there remains a political current that still argues there is no need to address the issue of identity and citizenship, claiming we do not have a crisis, as if the requirement is that there should be no solutions or answers to questions that actually now require a clear national framework (Bani Salameh, 2018).

[11] It must be taken into consideration that the Prince's meeting with Churchill in Jerusalem (as will be discuss later) posed a challenge to Jordanian nationalists who sought to establish a political entity emerging from free popular will (Wilson, 1990, pp. 60-64). This meeting resulted in the marginalization of Jordanian national leaders in favor of Arab nationalist figures, which provoked the anger of nationalists and led to multiple uprisings such as the uprising of Sheikh Kuleib Al-Shuraidi and the Balqa Revolution (Alon, 2007, pp. 54-56), which raised the slogan *al-ʾUrdun lil-ʾUrduniyyīn* (Jordan is for Jordanians). The Prince's response was to seek British assistance in suppressing these movements, which helped consolidate the Emirate's control over education and curricula, and reformulate the historical narrative of Jordanian identity in accordance with the interests of the ruling authority. This authoritarian discourse, despite being imposed, found indirect support from ethnic nationalist and religious discourse, as neither recognized the existence of a Jordanian identity before the establishment of the Emirate, which helped entrench the authority's vision of Jordanian identity.

Therefore, the most important question in the context of studying SNIs in Jordan remains: Why does the issue of national identity continue to be a subject of controversy and significant problematic? What makes the concept of national identity provoke all these mutual concerns and fears among various sub-components? Why has the state not taken clear steps to adopt a national consensus based on a strong narrative that encompasses all these SNIs? Why does this issue remain shrouded in ambiguity, which in turn affects the concept of citizenship, which itself intertwines with SNIs, leading it to ambiguous and undefined territories?

Abu Rumman (2021) poses more precise questions: Could this debate reflect a "fragility" in the internal fabric of Jordanian society? Has the state avoided addressing this issue directly because of its connection to larger regional issues, such as the Palestinian cause, the right of return, and the final solution? Or has the subject been deliberately left without a rational, comprehensive, consensual national approach? Is it reasonable for this issue to remain suspended and nebulous despite its paramount importance in achieving genuine societal stability based on the recognition of plurality and difference within the framework of national unity?

In this section and the following sections, we will work on studying and classifying SNIs in Jordan, then exploring the difficulty of the state providing a comprehensive answer that combines recognition of the citizenship of everyone who holds a Jordanian national number and the inclusivity of national identity for all. How can the state provide an answer that recognizes SNIs? We will also study the possibility of disentangling state identity in a way that balances between it being a modern, civil, democratic state that accommodates everyone, and recognizing the role of social identities in building national identity.

5.1.1. National Identity in Jordan: The Process of Forming the State of Jordan

The development of national identity in Jordan is a complex process influenced by historical events, colonial legacy, social and political changes, and cultural narratives. Jordanian history is a fundamental part of Jordanian national identity, and therefore SNIs in Jordan cannot be understood and perceived apart from the historical background of Jordanian society, because the process of establishing the Jordanian state imposed a dual reality represented in dismantling historical relationships and establishing new alternative connections first, and linking different regions with each other within a new political framework second. This process led to the creation of new political borders for the state and framing different regions within this newly created state. As a

result, the vital administrative centers of existing communities witnessed major transformations, and new administrative centers emerged, most notably Amman, which became the capital of Jordan. It can be considered that the beginning of the twentieth century is the political time in which the Jordanian national identity began to crystallize, specifically in the Karak Revolution of 1910 as an initial attempt to form a local national identity for the union of Arab tribes against Ottoman rule (Bani Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016, p. 987).

The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the Establishment of Transjordan

Jordan, historically known as Transjordan, was part of the Ottoman Empire from the early 16th century until the end of the WWI. During the Ottoman period, the Ottoman administration in Transjordan was minimal, primarily focusing on maintaining order and collecting taxes. This period was characterized by a largely tribal and Bedouin society with limited urban development. In the region known as Transjordan, there was no administrative unit called Jordan, and consequently, there was no Jordanian political community in the true sense of the word. A person's identity was determined on the basis of tribal affiliation, narrow geographical boundaries (the village), or as part of a religious entity (Bani Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016).

According to the Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France, which laid the foundation for the establishment of new political entities in the Middle East, including Transjordan (Massad, 2001), and following the San Remo Conference of 1920, the League of Nations granted Britain a mandate over the territories of Palestine and Transjordan. During this period, some local governments and tribal administrations emerged with regional, territorial, and isolationist characteristics, but they were unable to bear the burdens of governance and form a central government (Bani Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016).

This was because the establishment of the state was not a response to national sentiment, national symbolism, and national consciousness that developed over time and paved the way for the creation of a state that expressed it. On the contrary, the Transjordan region was one of the poorest and least developed areas of the Levant in terms of economic and natural resources (Wilson M. , 1990; Massad, 2001). In the periods preceding the establishment of the state, there were no signs of the emergence of local leaders capable of developing their influence and establishing control over the rest of the region, such that they would transform into a regional elite. Rather, these leaderships remained distinctly local elites, and their local influence increased and decreased

as a result of their own local circumstances and their internal interaction with those local conditions. It was natural for Transjordan to go through a period of political vacuum after the fall of the Arab government in Damascus and British attempts to build an administrative alternative. This resulted in the establishment of seven local governments that clearly reflected the reality of multiple leaderships and their weak influence beyond local boundaries (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

The Emirate of Transjordan was established in 1921, with Prince Abdullah I, a member of the Hashemite family, appointed as the ruler of the Emirate of Transjordan. This appointment was part of the British strategy to stabilize the region and counter French influence in neighboring Syria and Lebanon. Abdullah's leadership was crucial in consolidating the authority of the new state and laying the foundations for its future development (Salibi, 1998). On the other hand, British colonial administration significantly influenced the formation of Jordanian national identity as well. The establishment of the state in Jordan necessitated a series of important historical transformations that dismantled the connection between the Levant and Transjordan in particular. This meant, in itself, abandoning Arab aspirations to establish an independent state within a single geographical region, to consecrate the San Remo Conference's division of the region into four new entities: Transjordan, Palestine, Syria, and Greater Lebanon (Massad, 2001). For Jordan, this meant separation from its natural environmental geographical connection to the framework known as the "Levant," and the gradual collapse of centuries of economic and social relations and communication with different regions or territories based on spatial geographical connection, or simply the feeling that the entire region was unified, and that there were no dividing boundaries within it (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

From the Emirate to Independence

Prince Abdullah visited Jerusalem to request from the British State Minister for Colonial Affairs, Winston Churchill, the establishment of a local government administration in Transjordan. Abdullah's primary objective was to exalt his modest state (Massad, 2001).[12] Their meeting

[12] While Damascus was his primary target, Abdullah cultivated ties with prominent Syrian nationalists, including Dr. Abdul Rahman Shahbandar, and with Druze leaders in southern Syria. His vision of a "Greater Syria," however, faced firm resistance from both the French Mandate authorities and most Syrian nationalists. Seeking strategic access to the Mediterranean, Abdullah also looked toward Palestine, but his swift endorsement of the 1937 partition proposals provoked widespread criticism across the Arab world.

continued for three days (March 28-30, 1921) before Abdullah returned to Amman to establish the first Jordanian government on April 11, under the name "Council of Advisors,"[13] which is considered in official Jordanian narratives as the founding date of the first Arab government in the Emirate of Transjordan. There was only one "Jordanian" in it, Ali Khalqi al-Sharayri, appointed as the advisor for security and discipline (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

The Hashemite family, under the leadership of Prince Abdullah, played a pivotal role in strengthening the authority and identity of the new state. The British supported Abdullah's efforts, providing financial and military assistance. This period witnessed the establishment of key institutions and the beginning of nation-building efforts (Massad, 2001).[14]

The institutional formation of the state, particularly its legal and military bodies, was central in its influence on the process of producing and suppressing identities and cultural practices within the newly drawn borders. During this period, a local national Jordanian self-emerged in contrast to a configuration of non-local others—British, the Prince, and Hijazi, Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi government officials and politicians (Massad, 2001). This conference, which took place in September 1920 with the meeting of representatives and leaders of Jordanian tribes in the city of Umm Qais and in the presence of a British representative, is considered one of the most important milestones regarding the component of Jordanian national identity before the establishment of the Emirate (Bani Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016).

On another level, coinciding with the formation of modern states in the Middle East, of which Jordan is a part, most Middle Eastern countries chose an identity centered around religion, and in other cases, religion gradually became the prominent national identity. This emphasis on religion is more evident when some ruling dynasties attempted to justify their claims of belonging to the Quraysh tribe, to which Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) belongs; like the Hashemite ruling family in

[13] Under the leadership of the last ruler of the Arab province of Aleppo during the period of the Arab government in Damascus, Rashid Talaa.

[14] It is important to consider that the establishment of the state in the Transjordan region was not a response to the economic and social development experienced by the region, nor was it a result of the accumulation of surplus requiring the development of a state apparatus to perform the necessary functions for managing the existing society. It was not a result of the development of local elites whose influence extended to the entire region to become a ruling elite and thus build natural links and mutual connections. The region that forms the modern state of Jordan was not in a state of hostility with other surrounding areas, which would have compelled it to develop a protective military apparatus contributing to the establishment of the state. On the contrary, these communities did not witness any transformations, and the inhabitants of these regions did not feel changes justifying any shift in their lifestyles or change in their economic and social conditions; rather, they considered themselves an extension (as communities) of other regions in the Levant. Perhaps the convening of the "Umm Qais Conference" in 1920 expressed this in their demands for the establishment of an Arab state (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

Jordan, and this was the basis of their quest to claim religious loyalty as religious and political legitimacy in establishing their rule over East Jerusalem and in the region (Kaci, 2019).

According to Massad (2001), during this stage, the British also imposed some identity markers, such as legal definitions of citizenship and the establishment of territorial boundaries. They also established a framework for governance that included a central administration, a legal system, and a military force known as the Arab Legion, which, under the leadership of British Officer Sir John Bagot Glubb, played a pivotal role in maintaining order and security in the Emirate.[15] The mandate period also witnessed the development of infrastructure, including roads, schools, and hospitals, which laid the foundation for modern Jordan. They exerted significant pressure to purge the heart of the local administration of Arab nationalists and independence fighters from the three main currents of the Arab movement at that time: the *fatḥāt* (Arab Independence Party), the *al-ittiḥād* ("Syrian" Union), and the former Supreme National Committee in Damascus. Jordan also witnessed the rise of entity-based nationalism, resistance to the mandate, rejection of the "Balfour Declaration," and demands for national independence, (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2021).

Britain recognized the Emirate of Transjordan as a state on May 15, 1923, and ratified with Prince Abdullah the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty of 1928. According to this treaty, financial and military matters and foreign affairs remained in the hands of a British "resident." (Etheredge, 2011, p. 210) This played a crucial role in shaping the identity and traditions of the population in Jordan, which were integrated into the framework of national identity (Tell, 2013, pp. 74-80). The separation of the regions of Transjordan from their natural surroundings and their confinement within the borders of a newly established entity led to the emergence of new relationships that replaced the previous ones. This process of replacement was neither easy nor smooth; rather, it took a long time to unfold. Even at the level of collective consciousness, it was difficult to alter the mutual relationships between the local communities in Transjordan and the rest of the Levant region.

Following 1920, the territories that would form Transjordan were separated from their longstanding economic, social, and administrative connections with regions incorporated into the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon. This division by new political borders placed the areas

[15] Glubb's investment in a certain Bedouinization process of what became Jordan played a fundamental role in defining the country's national identity; he literally invented national cultural boundaries and a gendered national character that always blended imperial ethnic and class concepts regarding its behaviors and aesthetic taste (Massad, 2001).

under disparate administrations, and the consolidation of internal ties within Transjordan proved slow and uneven. The regions were not always geographically contiguous, nor well-acquainted with each other's social and economic structures or local leadership, leaving intra-Transjordanian connections weaker than prior cross-border relationships. The emergence of the Emirate did not immediately produce a cohesive Jordanian political identity, as prevailing national and religious affiliations remained rooted in the broader Arab nationalist movement opposing Western imperialism and Zionist expansion (Hourani A. , 2013, pp. 425-426). This pan-Arab solidarity was particularly visible during the Palestinian Revolt (1936–1939), when Transjordanian authorities faced public agitation. Tribes along the Jordan River strongly supported the revolt, with many offering protection to armed groups and, in some cases, participating directly in the fighting (Alon, 2007).

In this context, it is essential to highlight that the prevailing notion of independence and Arab nationalism (which emerged in the period following the end of Ottoman rule) was represented and embodied by the same social class of notables and elites who had held local power during the Ottoman era (Niva, 1999, pp. 157-158). In other words, the class of notables and elites who wielded influence and authority in Arab societies under Ottoman rule continued to maintain their dominance even after these states gained independence. It was this very class that adopted and propagated the concept of Arab nationalism.

Hourani (1983, p. 345) notes that this group, which was deeply influenced by Western orientations, had a narrow perspective on the West's dilemma in the region. At the time, independence and sovereignty were understood as achieving internal autonomy and joining the League of Nations. However, this perspective implicitly—if not explicitly—accepted the continuation of a relationship with the former colonial powers. This included maintaining military bases, economic and cultural ties, and subordinating key foreign policy decisions to these external relations. Arab nationalism, in this framework, was understood more as a cultural orientation rather than an ideology with direct political consequences. Contrary to the common misconception, Arab nationalism was not, nor is it necessarily, synonymous with pan-Arabism—that is, the idea that all Arabs should live in a single great Arab nation-state (Khalidi, 1991, p. 1365).

The 1930s and 1940s witnessed a steady expansion of the administrative apparatus. In contrast to the first decade, the majority of government positions were held by local Jordanians instead of imported officials. Government jobs became an important source of income, and more

importantly, they involved local actors in state affairs for the first time, increasing their connection to the state framework. The process began with the inclusion of three regional notables in the Council of Ministers in October 1929. Until then, there had been only two locals holding ministerial positions as symbolic representatives (Ali Khalqi from Irbid in the early 1920s and Adeeb Wahba from Salt in the period 1926-1929). The employment of foreigners had been a point of contention between the government and the local elite since the establishment of the Emirate. One of the main demands of the emerging national movement was to hand over government positions to "the sons of the country." (Wilson M. , 1990) The state's efforts to contain Bedouin leaders were also accompanied by efforts to integrate the general Bedouin population into the national state economy. While the general Bedouin population was recruited into the Desert Force in the Arab Army, their leaders were introduced into state structures, specifically in the Legislative Council and tribal courts (Massad, 2001).

The 1940s also witnessed major transformations in the country; the merchant class in Transjordan, most of whom were of Syrian and Palestinian origins, benefited from the war years. As for the Transjordan army, the Arab Army, mostly composed of Bedouins, it gained an international role through its intervention in Iraq and Syria on behalf of the British government, and an internal role represented in controlling the Bedouin population themselves by integrating them into state structures. Transjordan itself transformed from an emirate under mandate to an independent kingdom in 1946; as its ruling prince crowned himself king (Niva, 1999). In 1946, the Treaty of London was signed, granting Transjordan its complete independence from British rule. The Emirate was later renamed the "Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan", and Prince Abdullah I became its first king. This marked the beginning of a new era, characterized by efforts to build a modern state with stable political and economic foundations (Salibi, 1998).

The Formation of National Identity after the Independence

During the 1948 war, a new generation of politically active youth matured in the cities of Transjordan. Afterward, they began to challenge Abdullah's paternalistic methods and his continued reliance on Great Britain. The politicization of this younger generation was characterized by the development of two competing trends. The first, the Faisali Party or the Youth Party led by Suleiman Nabulsi, was a secular and Arab nationalist party. These young men considered Abdullah's administration "non-benevolent despotism." They were angered by the tight

restrictions imposed on political expression and social and cultural discourse in Amman, where one could be fined one hundred pounds for listening to Syrian broadcasts.

The other significant development was the growth of the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. King Abdullah viewed this movement favorably, as he believed it "reminded the younger generation of their religious duties and obligations, and was therefore valuable in curbing the spread of communism in Transjordan, Abdullah used the term "communism" broadly to describe any opposition movement with a progressive or secular orientation. He not only tolerated but even encouraged the Muslim Brotherhood, seeing it as a counterbalance to movements such as the one led by Suleiman Al-Nabulsi. However, when it came to the issue of Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood strongly opposed Abdullah's policies, just as Nabulsi and his supporters did. Ultimately, Abdullah did not gain any lasting benefit from his support for the Brotherhood against Nabulsi (Wilson M. , 1990).

After the signing of the Rhodes Agreement between Jordan and Israel on April 3, 1949, the decision for the unity of the two banks was taken in 1950, which changed the demographic and social structure in Jordan. The West Bank and East Jerusalem, an area of about 2,100 square miles (5,400 square kilometers), came under Jordanian rule, and nearly half a million Palestinian Arabs joined half a million inhabitants of Transjordan (Etheredge, 2011, pp. 211-212), and a middle class of professionals and craftsmen began to grow and expand in the country. This class developed political awareness because of the "Nakba," where a general feeling of frustration, despair, and hatred for the West in general and Britain and America in particular prevailed as a result of their support for the Zionist movement, while the traditional Jordanian political leadership and successive governments failed to absorb the radical social change witnessed by Jordanian society. Those in power also failed to make room for new groups coming from rural areas, popular neighborhoods, and camps to participate in power, thus earning their enmity (Mahafzah, 2021).[16]

In 1951, King Abdullah was assassinated, the assassination had a dual effect on the structure of the Jordanian state. First, the enormous tension that prevailed between Jordanians and Palestinians, because many Palestinians felt that Abdullah had received his just punishment, yet they had no political alternative to continue life within the Jordanian framework. Second, the death

[16] It is worth mentioning that Arab states and most of the world opposed the King's action. Only Britain and Pakistan recognized the annexation. The annexation of Palestinians from the West Bank to Jordan, as well as a large number of refugees hostile to the Hashemite regime, resulted in severe economic and political consequences (Etheredge, 2011).

of King Abdullah contributed to a heightened sense of self-awareness in the West, which was crucial for the continued existence of Jordan. His assassination served as a reminder to Britain—and later, its successor in the region, the US—of their role in supporting and maintaining Jordan and its Hashemite dynasty. Prince Talal returned home and was crowned king on September 6, 1951. Within one year, the Jordanian parliament declared him mentally incapable of ruling. He abdicated the throne to his eldest son Hussein (Massad, 2001). Hussein was crowned king on his eighteenth birthday, May 2, 1953. His policies during that period were shaped to secure his throne and retain the West Bank (Etheredge, 2011).

The Era of King Hussein

The era of King Hussein, which continued until his death in 1999, was characterized by efforts to modernize Jordan and navigate the complex political landscape of the Middle East (Salibi, 1998). We can identify the mid-1950s as perhaps the formative political experience of the post-war Jordanian monarchy in terms of internal political arrangements. When Hussein assumed his constitutional powers in May 1953, Glubb Pasha led the army along with several other British officers. However, this situation, amid the fevered politics of the Arab world in the mid-1950s, made Hussein appear as an instrument in British hands in the eyes of neighboring Arab powers and his own people (Salibi, 1998; Massad, 2001). In 1956, Hussein decided to emerge from behind British protection and attempt to survive on his own. He dismissed Glubb Pasha and Arabized the army's senior leadership. Within a year, the army attempted a coup against the throne. It largely failed because Glubb Pasha had left behind a valuable legacy: he had recruited Bedouins (rather than city dwellers or Palestinians) into the ranks of combat units. The rank and file chose their king over their officers in 1957 (Herb, 1999, p. 226).

In the mid-1950s, a strong anti-colonial movement swept across Jordan, demanding complete independence from the British and advocating for democratic reforms. Influenced by the broader anti-colonial forces and the recent victories of anti-imperialist movements in neighboring Arab countries, this movement gained significant momentum (Massad, 2001).

Jordan’s involvement in the Palestinian issue not only brought it into direct confrontation with Israel but also led to a struggle with Egypt over the future of the kingdom. Jordan was repeatedly forced to navigate a delicate balance in its relations with various Arab states, the Palestinians, the West, and Israel. As a result, popular demonstrations, especially in the West Bank,

were actively suppressed to maintain stability. During this period, Egypt exerted considerable pressure on Jordan, particularly to dissuade it from signing the Baghdad Pact in 1955 (Etheredge, 2011).

The monarchy, along with the king's inner circle of family and close associates, grew increasingly anxious that this rising tide might eventually engulf the monarchy itself. This fear intensified in April 1957, when members of the National Guard, many of whom were from the West Bank, attempted a coup. In response, King Hussein, with the support of his loyal Bedouin forces from the East Bank, launched a sweeping crackdown. He purged the legislature of Palestinian nationalists, banned political parties, and established a royal dictatorship as a means of curbing internal unrest (Etheredge, 2011). The Anglo-Jordanian Treaty was formally terminated y at the beginning of I957, leading to the withdrawal of British forces from the military bases they had occupied (Ashton, 1997). During this same period, the government of Suleiman Al-Nabulsi was dismissed, martial law was imposed across the country, and all political parties were dissolved except for the Muslim Brotherhood, which, despite being tolerated, remained largely inactive until 1992.

This period described as marking the end of Jordan's liberal experiment and the beginning of an era of political repression, which lasted for the next three decades –and, in many ways, continues to this day (Massad, 2001). The anti-colonial moment in Jordan also had profound implications for the country's national identity and cultural framework. During this critical juncture, the Jordanian self was positioned in direct opposition to the British colonial "other" (Massad, 2001). During this time, Jordanian identity remained fundamentally Arab, and no distinct national Jordanian identity had yet emerged. Even the military was officially referred to as the "Arab Army" rather than a uniquely Jordanian force (Rawabdeh, 2023). However, the early stirrings of a Jordanian national identity began to take shape during this period, largely as a reaction to the emergence of another identity within the country.

During this period, multiple coup plots against the regime were allegedly uncovered, involving officers within the Jordanian army. These discoveries were followed by extensive purges within both the Jordanian Armed Forces and the Public Security Directorate, targeting officers with political affiliations or personal ambitions for political influence. The goal was to retain only professional military officers who were loyal to King Hussein. As a result of these coup allegations, the power and authority of Jordan's intelligence apparatus significantly expanded. The

intelligence services were granted exceptional powers that persisted for decades. From 1957 to 1992, they played a decisive role in state affairs, even influencing the appointment of government employees. Any individual seeking employment in state institutions or companies with government stakes had to secure the approval of the General Intelligence Directorate. By 1959, Jordan's prison population had reached approximately 1,800 inmates, 30 percent of whom were political prisoners. Among them, 260 individuals were detained without trial (Foad, 2021; Mahafzah, 2021).

As King Hussein dealt with his internal crisis, a larger and more complex challenge emerged on the broader Arab and international stage. Nasser began increasingly using the Palestinian issue as a tool against King Hussein. On January 13, 1964, the Egyptian president sent out invitations for the first Arab summit in Cairo, with King Hussein being the first to receive an invitation. When the summit concluded, two decisive decisions were announced that would directly impact the Jordanian monarch: First, the establishment of a joint Arab military command to address potential Israeli aggression. Second, the creation of a new independent body to represent the Palestinians, which would later become the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). These decisions marked a significant shift in the Arab political landscape, sidelining Jordan's role in the Palestinian cause and challenging King Hussein's influence within the broader Arab world. The formation of the PLO, in particular, created tensions, as it provided a more independent Palestinian voice that could undermine Jordan's political position and its direct involvement in Palestinian affairs.

By the end of May 1964, discussions regarding the formation of the Palestinian National Council took place at a conference held in Jerusalem. King Hussein not only attended the meetings but also delivered a speech in which he conveyed his personal message and expressed his serious concerns, given that Jordan hosted the West Bank, its largest territory. For Jordan, this meant that half of its population would be under the control of the PLO. In response, the PLO pledged not to intervene in Jordan's internal affairs or with Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin. The formation of the PLO in 1964 came about through a series of concessions from both sides (Abu Doulah, 2017).

5.1.2. The Legacy of Jordanian Identity Formation and the Impact of SNIs

The Jordanian national identity has evolved into a composite structure comprising two primary elements: East Jordanians and Palestinians. These two components have historically

converged through national struggle and resistance, with one of the most significant outcomes of this unity being the promulgation of the 1952 Constitution,[17] followed by a period of political openness (Muasher, 2021). The Jordanian national identity represents an intricate fabric woven from multiple components, shaped over decades of shared experiences and diverse challenges. While East Jordanians and Palestinians constitute the backbone of this composite identity, their integration has been solidified through a history of national struggle and resistance against colonialism and occupation, contributing to the establishment of a nation founded on the values of belonging and dignity.

In this section, we will examine the key historical events that have played a fundamental role in shaping Jordanian national identity, beginning with resistance against colonial rule and extending to the political and social developments that have taken place in Jordan.

Political Challenges and Regional Conflicts: The 1967 War

King Hussein ruled in an authoritarian manner. He abandoned free elections and reorganized his regime around Bedouin and East Jordanian elements. The loyalty of these groups allowed Hussein's monarchy to suppress nationalist and Palestinian opposition rather than seeking a political settlement with them. The emergence of the PLO and the armed Fatah movement in the late 1960s posed a potential threat to both Jordan's sovereignty over the West Bank and Israel (Massad, 2001). In early 1965, with support from Egypt and the Ba'athist government in Syria, Fatah launched a series of raids against Israel from Jordanian territory, causing significant casualties and property damage. In response, Israel carried out retaliatory strikes on the West Bank in an effort to deter these operations. Tensions quickly escalated, leading to deteriorating relations between Jordan, Syria, and Egypt, as well as between the Palestinians and the Jordanian government (Tell, 2013).

The June 1967 War was a turning point in the modern history of Jordan and the entire Middle East. Within 48 hours, Israeli forces swept across all territories west of the Jordan River, capturing Bethlehem, Hebron, Jericho, Nablus, Ramallah, Jenin, and the city of Jerusalem. Jordan suffered significant losses, losing a third of its most fertile land. Furthermore, its already burdened economy

[17] At the dawn of the 1950s, the issuance of the 1952 constitution marked a pivotal moment, laying the foundation for a state aspiring toward democracy and political openness. This constitution not only reflected the aspirations of the Jordanian people for an independent state but also embodied the national unity among the country's various societal components.

had to support tens of thousands of newly displaced refugees. Despite these consequences, King Hussein viewed entering the war as the lesser of two evils. He believed that if he had not joined Egypt and Syria in the conflict, they would have supported the Palestinians in overthrowing his regime. The loss of the West Bank and Jerusalem, despite their devastation, was, in his eyes, a preferable outcome to losing his kingdom (Etheredge, 2011).

The most significant long-term consequence of the war was Israel's occupation of what remained of Arab Palestine: Jerusalem, Gaza, and the western part of Jordan (commonly known as the "West Bank"). As a result, more Palestinians became refugees, while others came under Israeli rule. This occupation reinforced the Palestinian sense of identity and the conviction that they could ultimately rely only on themselves. It also posed a significant challenge for Israel, the Arab states, and the global powers (Hourani A. , 2013, p. 440). Following the June War, King Hussein faced three major challenges due to the demographic and territorial contraction imposed upon him as a fait accompli (Etheredge, 2011): First, recovering from the economic losses caused by the war. Second, managing the reality of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the annexation of East Jerusalem. Third, preserving the Hashemite throne in the face of a rapidly growing and increasingly antagonistic Palestinian population.[18] King Hussein resumed his secret negotiations with Israel regarding the future of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Consequently, Jordan's relationship with Israel became closely tied to the fate of the Palestinian people (Salibi, 1998).

After the June 1967 war, Jordan opened its doors to Palestinian guerrilla activity, and until 1971, different dynamics dominated the cultural and social landscape in Jordan. During this period, opposition parties resumed their political activities, coming under the leadership of the Fatah Organization. However, they paid little attention to the political, economic, and social demands of the Jordanian people, focusing solely on defending the guerrilla struggle (Mahafzah, 2021) During this time, the Battle of Dignity (*maʿrakat al-Karāmah*), fought between Jordan and Israel in 1968, occurred. The Jordanian military was aware of Israeli movements aimed at occupying Karama,

[18] In November 1967, the UN Security Council successfully adopted Resolution 242. However, just months earlier, at the Khartoum Summit in Sudan (August 1967), Arab leaders had issued the "Three No's" Resolution: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. Yet, even this stance left room for different interpretations. For Egypt and Jordan, at least, the possibility of a negotiated settlement remained open (Hourani A. , 2013, pp. 440-441).

which was a hub of Palestinian guerrilla activity, and alerted them. All Palestinian guerrilla forces retreated into the mountainous areas, except for the Fatah movement (Massad, 2001).

The victory in the Battle of Karama led to a rift within the state regarding the guerrilla factions. The event, which initially symbolized unity and cooperation between the two sides, transformed into an opportunity to leverage the victory to consolidate influence on the ground. This shift resulted in a downplaying of the Jordanian army's role, despite its possessing the necessary military strength to confront the Israeli forces (Shafiq, 2024). A propaganda campaign was carried out focusing on one of the following points: First, the performance and victory were attributed to the Palestinian guerrilla fighters; Second, the claim was made that the Jordanian army arrived too late; and third, it was asserted that the army's role in the battle was contrary to the opinions and orders of the Jordanian regime (Rawabdeh, 2023). The Arab people, with Jordan as a part of them, became convinced of the ingenuity of the guerrilla struggle, which attracted numerous leaders and a large number of individuals. These leaders moved from the Jordan Valley to the cities, where they began to form a real challenge to the regime.

The Black September

The importance of supporting the monarchy in East Jordan, and opposing the Palestinians, became more evident during the civil war of 1970, when King Hussein's army defeated the Palestinian militias that had taken control of parts of Jordanian territory (Herb, 1999). In 1970, Jordan experienced a short but intense civil conflict known as Black September, when tensions erupted between the Jordanian government and Palestinian factions, particularly the PLO, escalating into violent clashes. The conflict ended with the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan (Massad, 2001), but it left lasting scars on the political landscape of the country to this day.

The leftist groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), whose revolutionary Marxist ideology, demand for Jordan to be part of Palestine were in direct opposition to the conservative monarchy and the territorial sovereignty of the Hashemite Kingdom. The PFLP grew increasingly confident and was preparing to launch armed action against the Jordanian regime with the aim of seizing power and ending the ceasefire that existed between the Arab states and Israel. The goal was to provoke a much broader confrontation between the two sides (Wagemakers, 2021, pp. 194-196).

King Hussein's relations with the PLO, led by Yasser Arafat, reached a crisis point in September 1970. These relations were challenged by the PLO's growing influence, which threatened the king's control over East Jordan. Arafat feared two major events that could undermine Palestinian unity and the PLO's leadership. The first was the emergence of a local internal leadership within Palestine itself that would take charge of the Palestinian cause, potentially sidelining the PLO's role and authority. The second was the right of Jordan to reclaim territories in the West Bank, which were considered to be land occupied by Israel but historically part of Jordan. This would mean that any future settlement would likely see the West Bank returned to Jordan rather than remaining part of a potential Palestinian state (Shafiq, 2024).

The PFLP hijacked four international passenger planes and blew up three of them at Dawson Airport, an abandoned airstrip in the Jordanian desert (Etheredge, 2011, p. 215). In this context, the conflict was not a struggle between two identities –the Jordanian identity and the Palestinian identity– as often portrayed. Many analysts view the conflict as a struggle between a legitimate regime and the chaos caused by the guerrilla organizations. This is evidenced by the fact that the guerrilla groups included many East Jordanians, while the Jordanian army itself contained many individuals of Palestinian origin. This indicates that the conflict was not purely about identity, but rather about political control and order versus the disruptive influence of the militant factions (Rawabdeh, 2023). These factions, with their growing influence, posed a direct challenge to the central government's authority, leading to an internal power struggle that contributed to the destabilization of the state. This situation further highlighted the tension between the government's sovereignty and the militant groups' ambitions, turning Jordan into a battleground for competing political forces.

The Jordanian government moved to try to curb the emerging Palestinian state within the state and to re-impose its authority. The circumstances required submission to numerous balances. The proportion of Palestinians to the total population, in addition to the presence of Fedayeen, posed a fundamental challenge to the structure of the Jordanian state and its national identity. This was the moment of internal explosion for the state, which had a profound impact on national redefinition. The regime gained the support of many of the country's elites, including the Jordanian-Palestinian elite, and the Fedayeen resistance movements were defeated (Massad, 2001).

The Jordanization campaign, which had begun before the civil war, reached its peak. The "other" opposite to the Jordanian was no longer the British colonizer, but an internal "other," the Palestinian Jordanians. The army, which had been in the hands of East Jordanians since the Arabization process, continued to be the greatest force at the regime's disposal. Discriminatory policies against Palestinian Jordanians (who constitute more than half of the population) increased and took an institutional form, with reduced government representation, employment in the public sector, academic opportunities, and access to public funding (Massad, 2001).

From a geostrategic perspective, it was crucial to maintain the stability of Jordan. Therefore, decision-makers in the US, recognizing the importance of the Jordanian monarchy and the geopolitical significance of the country, concluded that supporting King Hussein was essential. The event (referring to the internal conflict in Jordan) proved to be an embarrassment for Jordan, prompting the formation of an international coalition that applied pressure on King Hussein to eliminate the resistance movements. This external pressure aimed to stabilize the situation in Jordan by ensuring the elimination of the Palestinian militant factions that had grown in strength and influence (Al Jazeera, 2011; Rawabdeh, 2024).

This final confrontation shook the foundations of the Hashemite regime, which had remained stable since 1957. The regime utilized widespread internal repression, supported by extensive military and financial aid from the US, to maintain control. This external support played a crucial role in ensuring the survival of the regime, but it also marked a significant turning point in Jordan's political dynamics, as the government sought to consolidate its power by relying on a specific social group and external intervention to suppress internal opposition (Massad, 2001).

After the events of Black September, a peace agreement was signed between King Hussein and Yasser Arafat in Cairo on September 27, 1970. By July 1971, King Hussein forced the fighters of the PLO to leave Jordan. This marked the culmination of a tense and violent period during which the Jordanian government sought to regain control over its territory and restore stability, while the Palestinian factions, particularly the PLO, were trying to establish their own influence within the country. The forced expulsion of the PLO from Jordan marked a decisive moment in the relationship between the Jordanian monarchy and the Palestinian resistance (Etheredge, 2011, p. 75; Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009, p. 44).

The events of September 1970 revealed to the Arab world that two competing national identities—Jordanian and Palestinian—could not coexist within Jordan. The rise of Palestinian

nationalism, following the defeat of the protesters and the expulsion of the PLO to Lebanon, illustrated the failure to assimilate the Palestinian revolutionary identity into the more conservative Jordanian nationalism and the emerging Jordanian national identity. These events undermined the Jordanian national identity by stirring up unrest among the Palestinian population and raising questions about their loyalty to the Jordanian government. These events marked a significant turning point in the formation of the Jordanian national identity.

After 1970, Jordan refocused its national direction around a more distinctly Jordanian identity, which led to the marginalization of the Palestinian element to a secondary status. It became increasingly clear to all that the firm and revolutionary Palestinian identity, in the aftermath of the 1967 War, could not be absorbed into the Jordanian narrative that emphasized Hashemite traditions, tribal customs, and East Jordanian nationalism. From that point onward, following the civil war events of 1970-1971, the Jordanian government embraced a new Jordanian nationalism based on East Jordanian tribal and Islamic traditions, loyalty to the Hashemite royal family, and allegiance to the Jordanian king and his armed forces. This shift consolidated a distinct Jordanian identity, which positioned Palestinian identity as secondary, creating a clear divide between the two nationalities within the political and social fabric of the country (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009, pp. 45-47).

The 1980s and the Disengagement (Fakk al-Irtibāt)

The 1980s witnessed even greater transformations; Jordan's economy began to teeter on the brink of collapse in the middle of the decade. As for the Palestinian Intifada in the West Bank, it was not only against the Israeli occupation, but also against the Jordanian presence in the West Bank itself, where the insistence on its Palestinian identity was reinforced more strongly than ever before (Massad, 2001). An emergency meeting of the LAS in June 1988 granted the PLO financial control over the support provided to the Palestinians, thus effectively recognizing Yasser Arafat as their spokesperson. In response, King Hussein had to take a bold step to safeguard Jordan's long-term interests. He renounced all Jordanian claims to the West Bank and announced the disengagement, severing official ties between Jordan and the territory (Etheredge, 2011). With this contraction, the moment of the state's expansion came to an end. After the disengagement, King Hussein envisioned two critical roles for Jordan: 1) to be the “old brother” of the Palestinian state, and 2) to play the role of mediator between the Israelis and the Palestinians. In terms of Jordanian

national identity, this step was the logical next move to establish a geographically homogeneous and strong nation, where the primary loyalty would lie with the Jordanian state (Abdul-Hadi, 2016, pp. 46-59). Ultimately, in the 1980s, Jordan redefined its national identity to adopt a more liberal and people-oriented understanding of nationalism.

On July 31, 1988, King Hussein announced in a political speech the legal and administrative disengagement from the West Bank. In that speech, King Hussein reassured Jordanians of Palestinian origin residing in Jordan, saying:

> "*It should be understood clearly and without any ambiguity or doubt that our actions regarding the West Bank are solely related to the occupied Palestinian territory and its people, not to Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. These citizens have full rights of citizenship and all the corresponding obligations, just like any other citizen, regardless of their origin.*"[19]

As a result of this decision, the people of the West Bank became stateless, but under the administration of the PLO amidst the Israeli occupation. Jordan did not issue any laws specifying the details of the disengagement; instead, the Ministry of the Interior issued instructions for disengagement. Article (2) of those instructions stated that Jordanian citizenship would be revoked for residents of the West Bank, specifying that "any person residing in the West Bank before July 31, 1988, is considered a Palestinian citizen, not a Jordanian" (Massad, 2001).

The April Uprising (Habbat Nīsān) and the Following Events

The structure of governance itself underwent a transformation with the onset of a liberal period in 1989. The 1990s marked the beginning of a new liberal era, which stirred up previously suppressed tensions surrounding the issue of identity. East Jordanians, who had long been excluded, began to voice their discontent and demanded an "Jordan for East Jordanians only." This new discourse added a layer of resentment toward Palestinians, a sentiment that had been nurtured and legitimized by the state since the events of September 1970. Some of these essentialist claims even cast doubt on the Jordanian identity of the royal family itself (Massad, 2001). This occurred after what became known as the "April Uprising," which conservatives referred to as a "blessing from heaven," convincing the Jordanian leadership of the need for reforms to allow greater

[19] "King Hussein's Address to the Nation On Severing Ties with the West Bank", King Hussein's Address to the Nation On Severing Ties with the West Bank. For details: https://www.palquest.org/en/historictext/30208/king-hussein%E2%80%99s-address-nation-severing-ties-west-bank

political freedom and restore some vitality to democratic life. This “uprising” manifested itself in a series of popular protests and demonstrations demanding improvements in living conditions, following a severe economic crisis in Jordan during the second half of the 1980s, which saw the country's external debt and fiscal deficit soar (Rawabdeh, 2024).

In November 1989, Jordan held its first parliamentary elections in 22 years. Opposition groups, particularly the Islamist group –in the form of the Islamic Action Front (IAF)– secured more seats than government-backed candidates. The newly elected Prime Minister, Mudir Badran, promised to lift the martial law that had been in effect since 1967, a promise that was not fully fulfilled until July 1991 (Etheredge, 2011).

An important event that greatly impacted the formation of the collective identity within Jordan was the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990 and the subsequent Gulf War. This situation forced King Hussein to choose between two allies: The US and Iraq. King Hussein leaned heavily towards President Saddam Hussein, who also received enthusiastic and outspoken support from the Jordanian people. Furthermore, trade with Iraq represented one-fifth of the kingdom's GDP. Immediately, Kuwait's allies cut off all aid to Jordan, imposed a naval and air blockade, and condemned King Hussein's actions. To make matters worse, between 200,000 and 300,000 refugees were either expelled from Kuwait or fled (returning) to Jordan (Etheredge, 2011).

In 1994, the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty imposed its terms, marking a significant turning point in the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. The treaty, officially known as the “Wadi Araba Agreement,” was signed on October 26, 1994, after years of negotiation and diplomatic efforts. (Mahafzah, 2021). Some scholars argue that identity was a crucial factor in the outcome of the peace treaty. Among all the justifications put forward for reaching the treaty, the most significant achievement was ensuring the existence of Jordan as a distinct entity. The treaty established Israel’s eastern borders for the first time in history and ended the rhetorical conflict in the international public sphere: Jordan is not Palestine.

To clarify further, the treaty provided official Israeli recognition of the consensus on identity that was reached between Jordanians and Palestinians following Jordan’s severance of ties with the West Bank in 1988 through the disengagement. The varying responses to the term “Jordan is not Palestine” became a key element in reshaping Jordanian identity. It signified that “Jordan has nothing to apologize for, either as a nation or as an ethnicity.” This emphasis on identity was critical, as it solidified Jordan's separation from the Palestinian cause and reinforced the

distinctiveness of its national narrative. The peace treaty with Israel, by clarifying these boundaries, marked a significant shift in both Jordan's domestic identity and its foreign relations.

The shift in the concepts of Jordanian state identity and the implications of its preferences in peace negotiations represents an important dimension in the reconstruction of Jordan's identity. Firstly, Jordan's identity changed with the severing of ties with the West Bank following the disengagement in 1988. Secondly, Jordan's preferences changed by dropping the issue of refugees, which made the possibility of a final status agreement feasible. Thirdly, this change defined Jordan's strategies in negotiations, positioning Jordan as a different player in many respects from the Jordan that discussed potential settlements with Israel in the 1970s and 1980s. This acceptance of Jordan's identity helped legitimize and publicly accept its interests. Finally, the focus on Jordanian identity within the Jordanian public sphere made the expression of Jordan's specific interests and justifications more defensible normatively. In other words, since the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, Jordanian national identity has become clearer and more expressive of Jordan's national interests. It has evolved along a distinct path focused on East Jordan, without referencing the Palestinian dimension of Jordan prior to 1988.

Identity during the Reign of King Abdullah II

Shortly before his death in February 1999, King Hussein announced his son Abdullah as his successor, instead of his brother Hassan, who was the crown prince. Essentially, King Abdullah II continued implementing the policies of his father and emphasized that the new government he formed in March would focus on integrating economic reforms and improving Jordan's relations with its Arab neighbors (Etheredge, 2011). King Abdullah also continued his father's policy regarding Israel and the peace process, with King Hussein's emphasis on Jerusalem as a priority for Jordan seemingly disappearing. The Jordanians did not appear to miss it (Muasher, 2009, p. 108). However, the king faced several challenges, including a growing wave of domestic opposition regarding the country’s close relations with the US and its continued diplomatic ties with Israel. In the following years, the new king adopted a strong foreign policy that generally reflected his original objectives. Strong political and economic ties were formed with neighboring Arab countries, especially Egypt and Syria. The king reshaped his government on several occasions while trying to modernize and invigorate the economy. Security forces thwarted numerous violent attacks carried out by Islamist extremists (mostly targeting the security forces

themselves), and parliamentary elections were held in 2003. The new parliament was largely composed of independents, but the IAF party received the highest percentage of votes among organized parties (Etheredge, 2011).

Popular protests and political activism in Jordan continued in the following years, sometimes quieting down and sometimes intensifying. After the events of the Arab Uprisings, Jordanians found new motivation to take action, demanding their rights, though this occurred within the context of reform activism rather than revolution against the regime. Political opposition regained some of its momentum, and the demands of the movement broadened to include political, economic, and social issues, with this activism spreading to all cities and villages across the country. Some of its demands were met, though the most significant ones have yet to be fulfilled, depending on the region.

While expressing his dissatisfaction with the conflict, King Abdullah called for a peaceful resolution before military operations began in March 2003, Jordan joined the U.S.-led coalition. Its official contributions were limited to agreeing to host Patriot missile batteries on its territory. In secret, Jordan allowed the US and British special forces to operate from remote desert bases near the Iraqi border. A similar arrangement was adopted during the previous U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, when Jordan, a declared ally of the U.S. in the "War on Terror," remained distanced from the conflict, except for providing a hospital. This was sufficient to satisfy both the US and Britain on one hand, and the domestic public opinion on the other. Despite violent protests erupting in Amman and other cities, the government intensified security measures to prevent them from spiraling out of control. As a result of the violence in Iraq, around 500,000 Iraqis fled to Jordan as refugees, placing immense pressure on the country's financial resources (Fanak, 2012).

5.1.3. SNIs in Jordan

Since the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom in 1946, the Jordanian regime has sought to create a hybrid identity, centered on the commitment to the monarchy, Arabism, Palestine, and the unity of the demographic majority in Jordan (Brand, 1995, pp. 50-51). This also includes the Bedouin tribal groups, the ruling Hashemite elite integrated into the state apparatus established by the British, and the Circassians, who found themselves enlisted in the state's activities. The most significant division among the future Jordanians was based on lifestyle and economy, whether pastoral or agrarian, rather than ethnic or religious diversity. The total population of East Jordan,

excluding the Ma'an and Aqaba governorates, was approximately 225,000: 54% were classified as settled, while 46% were considered Bedouins (Wilson M. , 1990, p. 55).

In our study of SNIs within Jordan, we must first discuss the components of Jordanian society and how these components developed until they converged into the unified Jordanian fabric that we see today. It is essential to emphasize that through examining these groups, a certain degree of importance is placed on the political calculations and other social, political, and economic elements that were "influential" during the conceptualization and implementation of the Jordanian state.

Jordanian society consists of ethnic and religious groups that have been present on the same land since before the establishment of the Jordanian state in its current form. The vast majority of the population is Arab, with most of them being Sunni Muslims. Jordanian society also includes ethnic minorities, such as Circassians, Kurds, Turkmen, Chechens, and Armenians. There is a significant number of Christians in Jordan, the second largest religious group. There is also a small Druze community. The Jordanian state supports all the major cultural, religious, and ethnic components to a large extent.[20] In addition to the Bedouins, who are the descendants of tribes living in the southern, central, and northern Badia regions, the urban tribes *al-ḥaḍr* and the villagers who depend on agriculture also contribute to the social structure.[21] After the partition of Palestine, the Nakba, and the subsequent 1967 defeat, the Palestinian component became a key part of Jordanian society culturally, socially, politically, and economically.

Legally, the nationality law defines who is Jordanian, as follows: Article 1, Section 3 of the Jordanian Nationality Law of 1954 states that a Jordanian is: (1) A person who has acquired Jordanian nationality or a Jordanian passport under the provisions of the Jordanian Nationality Law of 1928 and its amendments, and the 1954 law. (2) Any person who held Palestinian nationality prior to May 15, 1948, and resided permanently in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan from December 20, 1949, to February 16, 1954. (3) A person born to a Jordanian father. The 1954 Citizenship Law was issued to give substance to the Jordanian constitution, which was amended in 1952 to accommodate the significant political change brought about by the 1948 war. The constitution stipulates that "all Jordanians are equal before the law. There is no discrimination between them in rights and duties on the basis of race, language, or religion." This law serves as the foundation for Jordanian citizenship, regardless of national origin.

[20] *For more details*: https://fanack.com/jordan/population-of-jordan/

[21] The term /*al-ḥaḍr*/ refers to settlements with a population of 5,000 or more (the urban (sedentary) population), as defined in the 2004 census (Petra, 2024)

This study relies on classifying Jordanian SNIs into components that can be divided into two main groups, as following:

Table 5.1 Jordanian SNIs Components

Group 1: Subjective-Identities	**East Jordanian Identity**	Tribal Identity	Includes tribes that are considered part of the core social and political fabric.
		Bedouin Identity	Pertains to Bedouin communities that maintain their distinctive traditions and lifestyle.
	Hashemite Identity	Royal Hashemite Identity (Religious)	Refers to the religious identity of the Hashemite monarchy.
		Hashemite Elite (Political, Economic, and Military)	Refers to the elite class that maintains significant influence in Jordan's political, economic, and military spheres.
	Minority Identities	Ethnic Identity	Includes minorities like the Circassians, Chechens, and others who preserve their cultural and linguistic heritage.
		Religious Identity	Includes religious minorities such as Christians and Druze, who enjoy religious freedom within the Muslim-majority Jordanian society.
Group 2: Transnational Identities	**Arab Nationalism**	Baathist Nationalism	Associated with the ideology of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, considering Arab nationalism as a fundamental aspect of the Arab unity project.
		Nasserist Nationalism	Associated with the thought of Gamal Abdel Nasser, viewing Arab nationalism as a cornerstone for liberation from colonialism and strengthening Arab solidarity.
	Islamism	Political Islam	Represented by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, which seek to integrate religion into politics and implement Sharia law, as well as Salafists.
		Traditional Islam	Represented by the popular Islamic identity, which focuses on religion as part of daily life and social values, without necessarily engaging in politics.
	Palestinian Component	National Palestinian Identity	Maintains allegiance to the Palestinian cause and the right of return, expressing a strong sense of belonging to Palestinian land
		Jordanian Palestinian Identity	Represents an attempt to reconcile Palestinian identity with integration into Jordanian society, while preserving cultural and political distinctiveness.

These groups encompass identities shaped by various factors, whether related to political elements that determine individuals' loyalties toward the state or political parties, or social factors concerning different social groups such as tribes or cultural and religious minorities, in addition to economic factors that influence individuals' identities based on their economic status and interests. This classification allows for a deeper understanding of how these different identities intersect and form the social and political fabric of Jordan, helping to identify the challenges and opportunities

that arise from this diversity.[22] Notably, some may argue that Palestinian Component falls within the self-related classification. As explained in my understanding, it is divided into two parts: the first part, the national Palestinian identity, certainly falls within the transnational framework. However, the Jordanian Palestinian identity could be classified within the self-related group. Nevertheless, the researcher has chosen to place it under the transnational category due to the cultural and social specificity of this identity, which is connected to a component outside the boundaries of the Jordanian state.

East Jordanian Identity

The East Jordanians, especially the Bedouin tribes, were historically viewed as the cornerstone of the Jordanian national identity. The Hashemite monarchy relied on their loyalty and support to maintain stability and control. All Jordanians of East Bank origin, who are ethnically Arab and either Muslim or Christian, are part of a tribe, whether it is a historically settled tribe, a semi-nomadic tribe, or a fully Bedouin tribe (Abdul-Hadi, 2016). The Bedouin identity is characterized by tribal affiliations, traditional customs, and a strong sense of loyalty to the monarchy. This group has been integrated into the state apparatus, particularly the military, which has further strengthened its significance in the national identity (Layne, 1994, pp. 42-44). The tribes were integrated into the military and bureaucratic structures of the state since the establishment of the Emirate in the 1920s (Hijazi, 2024).

Before the Hashemite monarchy, nearly everyone in East Jordan was identified by their family, clan, and tribal affiliation. This social organization reflected the low level of urbanization in the region and its marginal relationship with centers of power such as Damascus (Wilson M. , 1990). The society was organized along lines of genuine or mythical kinship, and daily life adhered to tribal concepts and customs. Among these cherished concepts, personal and collective independence was one of the most desired ideals. Although this society was never static, but rather in continuous evolution, it retained what anthropologists refer to as a certain “mental state” (Alon, 2007).

What primarily distinguishes East Jordan is the issue of political distinction imposed by Colonial powers, rather than geographical, cultural, or ethnic factors. The existence of East Jordan

[22] These identities are entirely based on the division of ethnic, religious, and political groups within the boundaries of the modern Jordanian state. Two or more groups may share multiple identities, whether they are self-related or transnational. Therefore, they are referred to as SNIs.

was based on European interests, not on a local or regional logic (Wilson M. , 1990, pp. 58-60). Regarding the Bedouins, who distinguish themselves from certain rural and urban populations that also define themselves as belonging to tribal heritage, they were subjected to a new set of laws starting as early as October 1924 (Massad, 2001). In this regard, Beck states: “My policy was to create a force of urban Arabs or village Arabs who could develop the ability to control the Bedouins, thus enabling an Arab government to rule the country without fear of interference from tribal leaders.” The Bedouins remained subject to special “supervision” by the state until 1976, when their full integration into the nation-state was completed (Massad, 2001).

On the other hand, tribal chiefs played a prominent role in increasing state control. Tribal chiefs received a salary of 240 Palestinian pounds to strengthen the state's hold over their tribes. Among their responsibilities was maintaining public order by ensuring the proper behavior of their tribal members under the threat of losing or having their salaries reduced if they failed in their duties (Massad, 2001).

During his reign, King Hussein actively promoted a sense of history and a distinct Jordanian national identity, aiming to solidify Jordan’s image as a nation-state (Satloff, 1986, p. 64). In the wake of the civil war, growing divisions emerged between Jordanians of Palestinian origin (post-1948 citizens) and those of pre-1948 origin—a divide popularly, though inaccurately, perceived as “Jordanians versus Palestinians.” Recognizing the importance of national cohesion, the government advanced the concept of “the one Jordanian family” as an inclusive framework for unity. As part of this effort, the state sought to harmonize the “customs” of all Jordanian tribes through the establishment of the 1971 council and the 1973 system, which were ultimately consolidated under a formal agreement with the royal palace (the protocol). With this understanding in place, the government determined that special laws for the Bedouins were no longer necessary, leading to their complete abolition in 1976—despite resistance from many tribal leaders who had favored amending, rather than removing, these provisions (Massad, 2001).

This was the period in which the palace held a series of tribal conferences aimed at unifying the country's tribes, culminating in the “Palace Protocol,” a document that represented an agreement between the palace and the tribes regarding their role in the country. The presence of the military in people's lives and in national culture grew significantly since the early 1970s. The culture created by the army for its members began to spill over into society, accompanied by cultural products from other state institutions, particularly state-controlled media.

The Hashemite Identity and the Rolling Elites

The flexibility of national identity and state boundaries in Jordan is largely reinforced by the monarchy, which has played a central role in shaping a unifying national identity that transcends traditional divisions between Jordanians and Palestinians. This fusionist character is attributed to both structural and ideological factors promoted by the state and the opposition alike. In the Jordanian case, the Hashemite monarchy has contributed to the construction of a national identity based on two key dimensions: a commitment to Arab Nationalism as a unifying cultural and political framework and a strong association with the Palestinian cause as a national issue necessitating solidarity and integration.

Despite the deep social and cultural interconnection between Jordanians and Palestinians, historical and political contradictions have complicated the formation of a cohesive national identity. However, this very contradiction provided the Hashemites with an opportunity to redefine Jordanian national identity beyond conventional notions of belonging by integrating both Jordanians and Palestinians into a unified national framework centered on loyalty to the Hashemite throne and incorporation into the Jordanian state project while maintaining a central focus on the Palestinian cause (Maffi, 2011). In doing so, the monarchy has successfully reconstructed a national identity distinct from the traditional Jordanian identity associated with East Bank tribal and Bedouin heritage, as well as from the Palestinian identity with its independent nationalist character (Abu Odeh, 1999).

What is the nature of Hashemite authority in Jordan, and what are the true sources of its power, particularly in terms of how the monarchy maintains control over its followers from East Jordan? The Hashemite monarchy's power in Jordan is rooted in a complex interplay of historical legitimacy, tribal loyalty, institutional dominance, national identity construction, and international alliances. While the monarchy’s traditional base of support has come from East Jordanian tribes, it has skillfully managed internal and external pressures to maintain its authority. By balancing these various elements, the Hashemites have sustained their rule in a region marked by political upheaval and shifting allegiances.

In the case of Jordan, the flexibility has been a defining feature of the Hashemite system, enabling it to navigate regional instability and internal demographic shifts. The monarchy has strategically balanced modern state-building efforts with traditional governance mechanisms,

ensuring its survival by fostering both loyalty and adaptability. This selective and pragmatic approach to governance has shaped Jordanian society, reinforcing the monarchy's role as a stabilizing force while maintaining an evolving national identity that accommodates diverse influences.

The evolution of Hashemitism in Jordan is deeply intertwined with the political, social, and historical developments that shaped the nation's identity. The Hashemites' earlier losses of the Hejaz and later Iraq, both tribal societies similar to Jordan, underscore that Bedouin or East Bank support for Hashemite rule was neither automatic nor guaranteed. This historical context sets the stage for understanding how King Abdullah I's policies were pivotal in consolidating the monarchy's influence and strengthening Jordanian civil society. His efforts helped weave the fabric of a national identity that, although initially fragmented, became increasingly aligned with Hashemite rule (Anderson, 2005, pp. 18-21).

At the heart of this evolution is the concept of "Hashemitism," which, as discussed by scholars, is not a fixed or static term but one that has shifted in meaning over time, shaped by changing local and regional conditions. Hashemitism broadly refers to a national identity defined by the state and the elite, encompassing the people within the territories the Hashemite monarchy aimed to govern. According to Nannis, Hashemitism, in its most inclusive form, represents a unified Jordanian identity under Hashemite leadership, transcending Subnational identity divisions within Jordanian society (Nanes, 2010). For Abu Ouda, Hashemitism "ultimately represents the inherent equality of being above the sub-differences and identities within Jordanian society," creating a cohesive identity under the monarchy's guidance (Abu Odeh, 1999, pp. 278-280).

However, Hashemitism was never a fully compelling or complete identity for most Jordanians. It was only through the political and social integration of the East Bank Jordanians that it became an essential component in defining the state itself. The meaning and strength of "Hashemitism" expanded and contracted in parallel with the expansion and contraction of Jordan's borders. Betty Anderson situates "Jordanian Hashemite nationalism" among the three competing national identities in Jordan during its formative years, alongside Palestinian and Arab nationalism. In the early stages, these identities were still in flux and often distinct, with "Jordanian" being a vague and contested category, largely associated with a small elite resistant to foreign influence. Despite the emerging idea of "Jordanian," it did not yet possess a strong, unified Hashemite character (Nanes, 2010).

Hashemite identity firmly established itself as a state-centered narrative, supported and promoted by the monarchy, despite its dominance being contested in 1948. The 1950s and 1960s were pivotal decades that allowed the Hashemite dynasty to craft a new identity for a newly established nation. In order to achieve this project, the monarchy utilized a repertoire of myths and stereotypes inherited from the colonial powers, to which they added newly created elements (Massad, 2001; Maffi, 2011). Anderson emphasized the king's ability in coping with hurdles of state-building, by establishing valid institutions, social integration, basic game rules for a state, and/or myths (or a historical narrative) on which it can draw (Kostiner, 2000, p. 8).

The diversity produced by this creative process was inherently hybrid in nature, this hybrid Jordanian identity contains four key characteristics: First, the king is seen as the father of the large Jordanian family. Second, the Hashemites' commitment to Arabism, as demonstrated in their leadership of the Arab Revolt. Third, the regime's declared commitment to Palestine, particularly its defense of Jerusalem during the 1948 war, the ongoing Hashemite support for Islamic holy sites, and the provision of refuge for Palestinian refugees. Finally, the unity of the two banks and the two peoples. The expanding Hashemite discourse emphasized that Jordanians form "one Jordanian family, with two branches: Jordanians and Palestinians," and that "Jordanians come from all origins and places of birth." This Jordanian identity, by definition, included both East Jordanians and Palestinian Jordanians (Nanes, 2010).

The Hashemite project of creating a Jordanian national identity facing two main challenges: the first is the formation of a strong Palestinian identity, which had been primarily established during the colonial period, and the second is the emergence of an East Jordanian nationalist movements. This movements come as a reaction to the Hashemite policies, led to the development of alternative national identities and historical narratives different from those proposed by the Hashemites (Anderson B. , 2005).

The Hashemite regime goes beyond direct communication with the Jordanian people—both as individuals and groups—by seeking to sway public opinion, win popular sentiment, and impose a form of coerced reconciliation with the influential forces within the state. As another researcher notes: "A segment of the influential forces within Jordan is composed of political parties and professional syndicates, which maintain a certain level of mutual interests and reciprocal protection with the state. Their corruption is no less pervasive than that found within the state itself, regardless of the origins of their members" (Hijazi, 2024).

In this context, many Jordanians of East Jordanian origin feel that the national identity formed by the Hashemite monarchy has marginalized their political and cultural identity. They argue that this identity clearly reflects Hashemite interests at the expense of the national interests of the Jordanians. From their perspective, the identity of the Hashemites is synonymous with the state of Jordan itself, making Jordan appear as an entity inseparable from the royal family. Consequently, the history and achievements of the Hashemites are seen as the legitimate foundation of the state, which weakens the sense of an independent national identity for Jordanians. These individuals believe that their identities are not fully represented in the national narrative, which is seen as being framed around the legitimacy and history of the royal family rather than the collective history and identity of the Jordanian people. Tensions stemming from this have manifested in critiques of the monarchy, with some individuals asserting that the focus on Hashemite identity marginalizes the Jordanian national identity. In fact, this discontent is expressed through various media and social platforms, where some argue that the attack on the regime is not only a call to assert the separation of identities but also a call to strengthen an independent Jordanian national identity. Among the symbols used by these critics is the former Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tal, who is regarded as a symbol of Jordanian national identity and his connection to the Palestinian cause (Hijazi, 2024).

In the context of the Hashemite-led construction of Jordanian national identity, the role of political, social, and military elites emerges as a pivotal area of study in understanding the complexity of the Jordanian state. These elites, encompassing influential figures from political, economic, and social spheres, played a central role in shaping the trajectory of the state, not only through internal policies but also in navigating regional and international interactions. The political elites, composed of ministers, advisors, and party leaders, formed the backbone of the political system, working to reinforce the Hashemite monarchy's legitimacy through policies aimed at ensuring both internal stability and external recognition.

In parallel, the social elites, particularly tribal leaders, played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and cultivating social bonds that contributed to the unique character of Jordanian national identity. The tribal system, despite its internal diversity, represented a well-organized social force that supported the monarchy and was instrumental in securing the social fabric of the state. Furthermore, the military elites, consisting of officers and commanders, were indispensable in fortifying the Jordanian state, both in terms of maintaining its sovereignty and safeguarding its

political stability. These military leaders contributed significantly to shaping political directions and addressing security challenges that emerged throughout the kingdom's history. The survival of the monarchy in Amman is not only explained by the personal qualities of King Hussein but also by the cohesion of the Jordanian elite, the loyalty of the military, and Jordan's strategic position in the Arab East (Tell, 2013).

Thus, the roles of these political, social, and military elites were fundamental in advancing the project of Jordanian national identity. Their coordinated efforts were manifested in their collective role in the construction of state institutions. These elites also played a crucial part in striking a balance between the pursuit of specific national interests and the broader goal of building consensus around the foundational principles of the modern state. Therefore, analyzing the impact and interaction of these elites is essential to understanding the political and social dynamics of Jordan and how they influenced the development of the country's national identity and its future trajectories (Huneidi, 2014; Colombo, 2024).

Politically, the elites in Jordan have frequently been characterized by their commitment to maintaining the status quo, particularly through a form of governance that emphasizes stability and gradual reform rather than radical change. This political culture has been shaped by the country's history of external threats, as well as the monarchy's desire to maintain control over both internal and external challenges. Within this framework, the elites have managed to suppress movements that call for significant political reform or the redistribution of power. Their ability to navigate the delicate balance between accommodating popular demands and preserving the power of the monarchy has allowed them to maintain their dominance. However, this stability has often been at the expense of broader political participation, with many citizens feeling excluded from the decision-making processes that shape their lives. Despite the monarchy's efforts to integrate various segments of society, the political elites remain a small, tightly-knit group with significant control over the nation's future direction (Hijazi, 2024).

Minority Identities in Jordan: Ethnic and Religious Diversity

Jordan, a small country strategically located in the heart of the Middle East, has long been a crossroads of civilizations, cultures, and religions. Despite its relatively small size and predominantly Arab Muslim population, Jordan is home to a diverse array of minority communities. These minorities, through the centuries, have maintained their distinct ethnic and

religious identities while contributing to the broader Jordanian society. The Kingdom of Jordan has developed a unique societal structure that accommodates various ethnic and religious groups, providing them with spaces to preserve their traditions and practices within the framework of a predominantly Arab Muslim nation. This balance between unity and diversity has allowed Jordan to build a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society that is rooted in inclusivity, although the status of minorities in Jordan has been shaped by historical, political, and social factors.

The region was much more homogeneous compared to other mandate states in the Middle East. The most significant division among the future Jordanians was based on lifestyle and economy, whether pastoral or agrarian, rather than on ethnic or religious diversity. In addition to Jordanians and Palestinians, Jordan is home to various ethnic and religious minorities, including Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, and Christians. Each group has its unique cultural and historical background, contributing to the rich fabric of Jordanian society. These minorities have generally been well integrated, yet they continue to maintain distinct identities that are recognized and respected within the broader national context (Bani Salameh & El-Edwan, 2016). They are divided as follows (Tell, 2013; Salibi, 1998; Fanak, 2012):

Circassians: The primary non-Arab ethnic group in Jordan is the Circassians, who constitute less than five percent of the population. Their population in Jordan is estimated at around 200,000. They fled persecution in the late 19th century, leaving the Caucasus region for the Ottoman Empire. The Russian invasion of Turkey during the 1877 war forced them to move once again, this time to Syria and East Jordan. The first to settle in what is now Jordan were members of the Shapsug tribe in 1878. They speak their own language and maintain their unique traditions; they are Sunni Muslims. Their music and dance are very popular among other Jordanians. They have integrated fully into Jordanian society through intermarriage and education. Like other minorities, they enjoy full citizenship and equal political rights. This demographic minority quickly became assimilated into the state apparatus and military bureaucracy, thus also aligning with the British Hashemite government's policies and its exercise of power.

Kurds: It is estimated that around 30,000 Kurds live in Jordan, including those who settled in the country during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as those who came as refugees from Palestine during the 1948-1949 and 1967 wars. The Kurds, residing in various cities and towns across the country, form an integral part of Jordan’s social, political, and economic fabric. The majority of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims.

Turkmen: The Turkmen belong to the Qara Tekkeli tribe and initially moved to Adana in 1870 following conflicts between tribes. They later moved to Damascus, then to Haifa, and finally to Balqa in 1874. Most of them chose to return to Turkey in 1935, but some families remained in Jordan. Their population is estimated to be under 25,000, and they are Sunni Muslims.

Chechens: The Chechens, like the Circassians, migrated to Jordan from the Caucasus, particularly from the forested mountains where living conditions were harsh. They fled their homeland after clashes with the Russians in 1905 and spent a year in Anatolia before arriving in Jordan in 1907. The majority are Sunni Muslims and followers of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, one of the two main Sufi schools in Sunni Islam. Their population in Jordan is estimated to be around 15,000.

Druze: The Druze population in Jordan is estimated to be around 15,000. Most live in the Azraq area, an oasis in the western desert of Jordan, with the rest residing in Amman and other major cities. The Druze began migrating to Jordan from the Druze Mountain (near Azraq in southern Syria) due to deteriorating conditions during the French occupation of Greater Syria between the two world wars. Although they have integrated into Jordanian culture, the Druze maintain a strong sense of identity and culture. The Druze maintain a strong sense of religious and cultural identity, and their communities are tightly knit. They have their own religious leaders and institutions, and their religious practices and rituals are an important part of their social life. Despite their small numbers, the Druze community in Jordan has a strong sense of loyalty to the country and its leadership, and they have been an important part of the Jordanian military and government since the country's founding.

Armenians: The Armenians began migrating to what is now Jordan due to the persecution and political turmoil of the Ottoman Empire in the final years, particularly during WWI. By 1948, their numbers were estimated to be around 16,000. Many left Jordan for the US, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia in the early 1970s due to high unemployment rates, reducing their population to around 4,000. Despite integrating into the broader national culture, like other minorities, Armenians have retained a strong sense of identity and have preserved their original language and culture. This integration is evident at various levels, including the acceptance of intermarriage and participation in Arab social institutions. Most Armenians in Jordan are Armenian Orthodox Christians.

Christians: Christians in Jordan have deep historical roots, as it is believed that Jesus Christ was baptized here. Christians have been present in the region since the early centuries, blending well

with others of different faiths, including Muslims. It is difficult to distinguish between Christians and Muslims in Jordan, as they share many customs and cultural traits. Christians live throughout Jordan, with significant communities in cities such as Ajloun, Al-Hisan (in the north), Madaba, and Al-Fuheis (around the capital), as well as Karak (further south). The majority of Jordanian Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. To ensure adequate representation of the Christian community in various political bodies, the electoral law allocates seats for Christians and some other minorities. Christian representation is also guaranteed in the Parliament, Cabinet, diplomatic corps, and other high-ranking governmental positions and the armed forces. Christians play a vital role in all areas of public life in Jordan, and their contributions far exceed their numbers. They maintain schools, churches, and social clubs, and they have the option to register in the national public education system. There are around 100 churches in Jordan. Christians are respected and protected, and there have been no reports of violations against Christian sacred places in Jordan. King Abdullah, Britain and the making of Jordan. Today, Christians make up about 6-8% of the Jordanian population, with the majority residing in urban areas such as Amman, Salt, and Irbid. The Christian community in Jordan enjoys a high degree of religious freedom, which allows them to practice their faith openly. Christian religious sites, including churches and monasteries, are important parts of the country's cultural heritage and attract both local and international visitors. The Jordanian constitution guarantees religious freedom, and Christians in Jordan are able to participate in the political process, hold public office, and enjoy the same rights as Muslim citizens. Christian religious leaders also play a role in political life, particularly in terms of advocating for the rights and interests of their communities. Despite the small size of the Christian population, they have a long history of coexistence with their Muslim neighbors, and the relationship between the two groups is generally harmonious.

Transnational Identities as a Component of SNIs in Jordan

Jordan's social and political landscape is deeply influenced by the complex interplay between national and SNIs. Among the most significant aspects of this dynamic are transnational identities, which transcend state boundaries and are shaped by regional and ideological affiliations. In Jordan, transnational identities coexist alongside national and local identities, often overlapping and intersecting in ways that reflect historical, political, and social realities. These identities, rooted in

broader Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian affiliations, have played a critical role in shaping Jordan's political culture, societal structure, and identity discourse.

The presence of transnational identities within Jordan underscores the extent to which national identity is not static but rather a fluid and contested construct, continuously shaped by regional and global forces. Throughout Jordan's modern history, different ideological currents—such as Arab nationalism, Islamism, and Palestinian identity—have emerged as powerful influences, often intersecting with state policies and national identity frameworks. The state has historically managed these affiliations through various means, including political accommodation, co-optation, and at times, suppression, depending on the prevailing regional circumstances and domestic imperatives.

1. Arab Nationalism and Its Influence on Subnational Identity

Arab nationalism has historically been one of the most influential transnational ideologies in Jordan. In the mid-20th century, the rise of Baathist and Nasserist nationalism resonated deeply within Jordanian society, especially among intellectuals, military officers, and segments of the urban population. The Jordanian state, under the Hashemite monarchy, had a complex relationship with Arab nationalism. While the monarchy itself emphasized its Arab credentials, it was also cautious of the potential subversive effects of radical pan-Arab movements that sought to diminish the sovereignty of individual Arab states in favor of broader unity.

One of the most notable aspects of Jordan's identity formation has been its strategic ambiguity, particularly under King Hussein, who skillfully shaped and reshaped the country's national identity to suit political needs. During the Arab Cold War, when Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to establish Egyptian regional hegemony under the banner of Arab nationalism, Jordan took a different path. The Hashemite monarchy, wary of Nasserist expansionism, defended the primacy of state-based nationalism, even forming alliances with figures such as Kassem Abdul Karim, the leader of the coup that violently ended Hashemite rule in Iraq. This pragmatic approach reflected King Hussein's ability to navigate shifting political currents, allowing Jordan to maintain a distinct national identity while simultaneously invoking pan-Arab rhetoric when beneficial (Hinnebusch, 2013; Tell, 2013).

The influence of Arab nationalism on Jordanian identity was particularly strong during the height of Nasserism in the 1950s and 1960s, when many Jordanians sympathized with Gamal

Abdel Nasser's vision of Arab unity and resistance to Western imperialism. Similarly, the Baathist ideology, which emerged as a powerful force in Syria and Iraq, found adherents within Jordanian society, particularly among segments of the political elite and military officers. Although these movements never fully dominated Jordan's political scene, they shaped public discourse and contributed to the country's ideological diversity (Hinnebusch, 2013; Massad, 2001).

While Arab nationalism has waned as a dominant force in contemporary Jordan, its legacy persists in political rhetoric, cultural identity, and the ideological orientations of various social groups. The concept of Arab unity continues to be invoked in political discourse, even as practical realities have led to a more state-centric approach to governance and identity formation in Jordan. Scholar R. Taylor posed a fundamental question regarding the inevitability of Jordanian nationalism: If Jordan was to exist as a state, what form should its nationalism take? (Anderson B. , 2005, p. 34) This question was particularly pressing for all Jordan's kings, who had to convince the inhabitants of the established state that it had the right to exist. To achieve this, he worked to link between the Arab nationalism and the Hashemite monarchy legitimacy with the destiny of the Jordanian state.

2. Islamism: A Persistent Transnational Identity in Jordan

Political Islam represents another major form of transnational identity in Jordan, with a long-standing presence in the country's social and political fabric. The most prominent expression of this identity is the Muslim Brotherhood, which has operated in Jordan since the 1940s and has historically maintained a complicated relationship with the state. Unlike in some neighboring countries where Islamist movements have faced outright repression, the Jordanian monarchy has generally pursued a strategy of controlled engagement, allowing the Brotherhood to participate in politics while keeping its influence in check.

The Muslim Brotherhood represents a transnational Islamist identity that transcends national borders, linking Jordanian Islamists to broader movements in Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere. This affiliation has influenced domestic politics, particularly through the IAF, the political wing of the Brotherhood, which has actively participated in Jordanian elections and legislative processes. The appeal of political Islam in Jordan is not solely ideological but is also driven by social and economic factors, as Islamist movements often provide essential social services, including education and charity work.

Tensions between the Hashemite regime and the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood grew increasingly pronounced due to the Palestinian issue, particularly following the emergence of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood within Jordanian territory. After the 1948 war, the West Bank became part of Jordanian lands, consequently bringing the Palestinian Brotherhood under Jordanian jurisdiction (Abu-Amr, 1994, pp. 4-6). While the Jordanian Brotherhood clearly held differing views from King Abdullah I regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Boulby, 1999, pp. 47-48), these disagreements did not necessarily lead to direct confrontation. In fact, the Brotherhood perceived the Palestinian cause through the broader framework of imperialist dominance prevalent at the time (Boulby, 1999, pp. 55-56). The organization successfully embedded its anti-Zionist rhetoric within a wider anti-imperialist discourse, which to some extent aligned with the Hashemite rulers' own positioning.

This same blend of ideologically driven loyalty and political pragmatism led the Muslim Brotherhood to support the regime in times of international crises, yet also brought them into direct opposition on other occasions. One such instance was the Baghdad Pact, where public pressure compelled the regime to abstain from joining the alliance (Aruri, 1972, pp. 122-128). A significant portion of this public opposition came from the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Amoush, for example, asserts that: “The Jordanian people rejected the pact, denouncing it as an imperialist scheme, and took to the streets in mass protests. [...] The Muslim Brotherhood was at the forefront of the opposition to the pact.” Similarly, Al-Obaidi recounts the Jordanian rejection of the Baghdad Pact and states that the Muslim Brotherhood played a leading role in the demonstrations, resisting the pact with unwavering determination. Their opposition resulted in the imprisonment of the Brotherhood's General Supervisor in Al-Mahatta prison in Amman, with several members suffering injuries during the protests (Al-Ubaidi, 1991, pp. 161-162).

By the late 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan experienced a renewed surge in political relevance, largely shaped by the kingdom’s domestic economic crisis and the broader regional upheavals. The 1989 political liberalization process, initiated in response to widespread protests over austerity measures, opened the political arena to greater competition and freedom of expression. The Brotherhood, through its political arm, the IAF, capitalized on this environment, securing a significant victory in the 1989 parliamentary elections. This electoral success was facilitated by the movement’s deep grassroots networks, its reputation for integrity, and its provision of social services in underserved communities. The Brotherhood framed its platform

around issues such as combating corruption, promoting Islamic values in governance, and defending national sovereignty, which resonated strongly with both urban and rural constituencies. At the same time, the Jordanian regime saw value in engaging the Brotherhood within an institutional framework, viewing their parliamentary presence as a way to channel Islamist activism into controlled political participation rather than confrontation.

However, the early 1990s brought new tensions between the Brotherhood and the Hashemite monarchy, particularly in the aftermath of the Gulf War and Jordan's subsequent alignment with the peace process. The Brotherhood strongly opposed the 1994 Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel, seeing it as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a normalization of relations with an occupying power. This opposition placed the movement in direct conflict with the regime's foreign policy orientation, leading to a gradual erosion of the cooperative relationship that had characterized earlier decades. The government responded with measures aimed at curbing the Brotherhood's influence, including changes to the electoral law in 1993 that weakened their parliamentary representation. Despite these challenges, the Brotherhood maintained its role as one of Jordan's most organized and enduring political forces, continuing to mobilize around a transnational Islamist identity that linked domestic activism with broader regional struggles, while navigating an increasingly constrained political landscape.

Beyond the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism has also gained traction in Jordan, particularly in recent decades. While some Salafist groups focus purely on religious conservatism and social values, others have been drawn to more radical and militant interpretations. The Jordanian state has been particularly vigilant in managing Salafist movements, especially in the context of regional conflicts and the rise of extremist groups in neighboring countries.

A number of key features can be observed in the ongoing extensive research on Salafism over the past fifteen years, particularly since the events of September 11. Many would agree that one of these key features is the influential article by Wiktorowicz (2006), through his ethnographic studies on Islamic activism in Jordan, he highlighted the broad diversity within the Salafi community. His interpretation suggested that Salafists are united by a shared religious method and doctrine, yet they differ in how they apply it to contemporary issues, particularly in relation to politics, apostasy, and violence. These variations in contextual understanding have given rise to three principal Salafi currents: purist Salafis, political Salafis, and jihadi Salafis.

In fact, the rise of Salafism in Jordan is a result of processes that cannot be confined solely to the kingdom. It depends on regional dynamics that intersected with national events. On a local level, the pivotal figure is Mohammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914-1999) (Lauzière, 2015, pp. 195-198). Al-Albani represents the "quietist" Salafi current in the country and what he sought to achieve. Firstly, the idea that he and his followers should engage in Sufism and education, meaning purification and instruction. Secondly, in this regard, al-Albani issued a famous fatwa in which he declared that "leaving politics is politics." In this sense, al-Albani viewed "politics" as inherent to Islam, already determined by Islamic law (Sharia) Therefore, opposing politics only meant opposing institutionalized official policies that were seen as illegitimate imports from non-Islamic (Western) societies (Abu Rumman & Abu Hanya, 2012, pp. 150-155). Contributed to the spread of quietist Salafism throughout the country, and gained significant popularity, particularly in the country's poorest areas: the slums of East Amman, the nearby cities of Al-Rusayfa and Al-Zarqa, and southern areas, notably the city of Ma'an (El Muhtaseb, 2020).

At this stage, regional events and local developments intervened to shape the subsequent trajectory of Salafism in Jordan (Wiktorowicz, 2000). This was exacerbated by an event associated with the end of the Cold War, specifically the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. King Hussein hesitated to join the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq, and Kuwaiti authorities quickly expelled Jordanians and Palestinians (many of whom held Jordanian documents) residing in their country. Suddenly, Jordan faced a wave of immigration from Kuwait, which included many Salafists whose presence in the Gulf emirate had been firmly established (Otvick 2014).

Two additional developments contributed to the politicization of Salafism in Jordan. The first is the rise of *al-ṣaḥwa* movement in Saudi Arabia, led by Salman al-Ouda and Safar al-Hawali, who opposed King Fahd's decision to allow U.S. forces to be stationed in the kingdom. Though rooted in the Saudi local version of quietist Salafism, this movement chose to intervene directly in political affairs. The second is the Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993), which was welcomed and supported by the vast majority of Jordanians, contributed to creating a highly charged political environment in the country.

It was in 1993 that the first political Salafists emerged on the Jordanian scene with the group Association of the Book and the Tradition of the Prophet *(jamʿiyyat al-kitāb wa-l-sunnah*). Unlike their quietist counterparts, they did not shy away from forming an official organization. Their relations with the quietist supporters became strained from that point onwards. Jordanian political

Salafists believed they should engage in more than just “purification and education” (Ramaioli, 2021, pp. 212-213). In their early years at least, key figures within the group, such as Hassan Abu Haniya, Marwan Shhadeh, and Omar Mahmoud Othman, adopted a more jihadist stance, taking a firmer position against the regime.

The general social mood in the country today is more conservative, religious, and aligned with the Salafism that has spread and proliferated for both internal and external reasons. The most significant factors include Jordan’s proximity to Saudi Arabia and the success of the Saudi Salafi missionary movement, which enjoys considerable support and access to various channels and tools. Today, this religious jurisprudence and vision dominate the popular social culture in Jordan (Abu Rumman & Abu Hanya, 2012, p. 38). It is not surprising, therefore, that the regime is deeply concerned about the rise and spread of Salafism. In the eyes of the regime, Salafism could leverage its cultural and social importance to make significant strides in the political arena. The regime must either co-opt, restrict, or suppress these social forces. The scale of the efforts the regime expends in this regard underscores the modern state's awareness of the power of such social formations: “The state must contain the masses, for the masses contain the state” (Ramaioli, 2021, p. 214).

Alongside political Islam, traditional Islamic identity remains a significant transnational affiliation that influences Jordanian society. Unlike politically motivated Islamist movements, traditional Islamic identity manifests through cultural and religious practices, shaping social norms, education, and public morality. While not inherently political, this identity still intersects with national identity, as the Hashemite monarchy itself derives legitimacy from its religious heritage.

3. The Palestinian Component: A Central Transnational Identity in Jordan

Perhaps the most complex and deeply embedded transnational identity in Jordan is the Palestinian identity, which has been a defining feature of the country’s demographic and political landscape since the mid-20th century. Jordan is home to a significant Palestinian population, many of whom arrived as refugees following the 1948 and 1967 Arab-Israeli wars. The integration of Palestinians into Jordanian society has been a central issue in national identity formation, with ongoing negotiations between full assimilation and the preservation of distinct Palestinian identity markers.

Within this context, two primary expressions of Palestinian transnational identity exist in Jordan. The first identity is the National Palestinian identity, which remains strongly tied to the Palestinian cause, advocating for the right of return and self-determination. It is upheld by many Palestinian-Jordanians who maintain a deep connection to their ancestral homeland, engage in political activism related to Palestinian statehood, and identify with Palestinian national institutions such as the PLO. The second one is the Jordanian-Palestinian identity, which represents an attempt to balance Palestinian heritage with integration into Jordanian society. Many Jordanian citizens of Palestinian origin navigate a dual identity, actively participating in Jordanian political, economic, and social life while simultaneously maintaining a strong sense of Palestinian belonging. This hybrid identity is particularly pronounced among younger generations who were born and raised in Jordan but remain connected to their Palestinian roots.

Palestinians in Jordan, who make up a significant portion of the population, have a distinct identity shaped by their history and experiences as refugees. Jordan is the only Arab country that has treated the Palestinian refugees it welcomed on its soil as full citizens, granting them Jordanian nationality and allowing them to integrate into Jordanian society, influencing and being influenced by the country's economic and social conditions, without forcing them to abandon their national identity. However, the subsequent relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians has been marked by tension and conflict, particularly during the Black September conflict in 1970-1971. This event highlighted the deep-rooted divisions and challenges of integrating the Palestinian identity within the broader Jordanian national framework (Tuastad, 2014).

The influx of Palestinian refugees not only altered the demographic map of Jordan but also had a significant impact on its political, social, and economic life. In the late 1940s, Jordan's population ranged between 200,000 and 250,000. After the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli War and the annexation of the West Bank, Jordan granted citizenship to about 400,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank. Many refugees settled east of the Jordan River (Bickerton & Irvine, 2025). Between 1949 and 1967, Palestinians continued to move eastward in large numbers. After the 1967 war, an estimated 310,000 to 350,000 Palestinians, most of them from the West Bank, sought refuge in Jordan. Migration from the West Bank continued at lower rates thereafter. During the Gulf War (1990-1991), an additional 300,000 Palestinians fled (or were expelled) from Kuwait to Jordan.

The Jordanian state has approached the Palestinian identity issue with a delicate balancing act, ensuring integration without completely erasing the distinctiveness of Palestinian heritage. While Palestinians in Jordan enjoy full citizenship rights, political sensitivities surrounding the Palestinian question have, at times, led to restrictions on political expression and debates over national belonging. In this context, many Palestinian Jordanians from the East Bank feel a sense of satisfaction in being both Jordanian and Palestinian. They recognize that their Palestinian identity has been significantly shaped by their upbringing within the Jordanian national context, and for the majority, Jordan is the only homeland they have ever known. They strongly reject the recent attempts to strip them of their Palestinian identity through an exclusionary Jordanian nationalism. In this regard, there are three groups (Abdul-Hadi, 2016, pp. 46-59). The first group consists of the refugee camp residents who were displaced from their homes in 1948 or 1967. The sense of belonging to Palestine is stronger among this group. The feeling of being Palestinian rather than Jordanian remained prominent until King Hussein's withdrawal from the West Bank in July 1988. This group's Palestinian identity was, in part, defined in opposition to or antagonism toward the Jordanian identity. However, it is important to note that years of residence have also made Jordan a home, but not necessarily their homeland.

The second group includes the Palestinian middle class, such as small traders and low-level government employees. In reality, their sense of identity is strong, but as a group that has achieved a certain level of economic success and integration, their hostility toward the Jordanian identity is less pronounced, except for those who played a role in the Palestinian liberation movement. This group has achieved a satisfactory level of social and economic stability. Palestinians in Jordan enjoy property rights and feel connected to Jordan as their adopted country and a place of stability, but they still aspire to rebuild an independent Palestine. Palestinians regain their sense of Palestinian identity during periods of invasion, unrest, and flashpoints along the borders. In short, while the Palestinian identity remains latent, and there is some attachment to Jordan as their home, this group is still aware of its distinct national characteristics.

The third group consists of those Palestinians who have achieved notable success in business. Following the fighting in 1970 and 1971, it seems that this Palestinian bourgeoisie accepted political calm in exchange for the stability provided by the regime, which was conducive to financial prosperity. This group is the least emotionally connected to Palestine, as it is the most integrated, although not fully assimilated into the Jordanian state. Another way to look at this is

that this group stands to lose the most should any radical changes occur in the current situation. This group has much to lose if conflicts with Israel were to resurface. Therefore, due to the social and economic benefits this group has gained, it is the one that has fully reconciled with the Jordanian national identity in the political sense, while also retaining its Palestinian identity in the cultural sense. This troubled relationship between the two neighboring countries, which emerged in the early 20th century, highlights the inherent contradictions and dualities between nationalities, leading to identity crises and distorted relations between Jordanians and Palestinians within the Hashemite Kingdom. Since the disengagement in 1988, the difficulty of reconciling Jordanians and Palestinians within a single national identity has led to puzzling distortions of the original Jordanian national identity.

The Jordanian state has effectively used Palestinian Jordanians since 1948 as a "other" to consolidate a Jordanian national identity, an identity it designed and nurtured. However, it failed to control the independent momentum that this identity gained, which could potentially turn against the royal family itself, redefining the Jordanian state that was fundamentally organized around the royal family since its inception. In fact, the state's attempt to "*Jordanize*" Palestinians, at various points since 1948, has always contradicted its official policy, which exacerbated divisions between East Jordanians and Palestinians (particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s) in order to prevent any class alliances between the two groups that could turn against the royal family itself (Massad, 2001; Alon, 2007). Yet, despite the fact that the presence of Palestinians was necessary to create a cohesive exclusionary Jordanian identity, this role has now evolved beyond merely the Palestinian presence. The Jordanian national identity, like all national identities, is in a state of continuous transformation today. As a reactive identity, like all identities, it seems to define itself more by what it is not than by what it is.

While the majority of Palestinians have integrated into Jordanian society, they sometimes face barriers within institutions and the wider community that limit their economic opportunities and political representation. Palestinians who do not hold Jordanian citizenship face significant challenges in securing jobs or participating politically, especially those residing in refugee camps. However, the fact remains that Palestinians' impact is deeply embedded in various aspects of Jordanian life. A 2004 study discussing the relationship between the economy and population demographics in Jordan found that the core of 500 companies in Jordan consists of Palestinian-origin businessmen, specifically in the real estate and financial markets. Some of them are credited

with contributing to the development of Jordan, such as the Arab Bank (Hijazi, 2024). Although there are no precise figures on the investments and wealth of these individuals, they are estimated to be worth billions of dollars. They also play a role in the country's cultural and artistic movements. Palestinians are often portrayed in popular and political narratives as farmers, symbolizing their connection to the land and their struggle for it.

If we reflect deeply on the history of Jordan and its often tumultuous relations with Palestinians, we see at least six essential categories for those living in the kingdom, with widely varying rights. Jordanian passports in themselves do not confer nationality or residence rights to their holders. Citizenship is indicated through a civil identification number. Citizens have the right to reside. Residence rights for holders of other passport categories are indicated by different colored cards (Fanack, 2012).

The real dilemma is that Palestinian Jordanians, who have simultaneously become a group outside the Palestinian political process and have a distinct identity within the Jordanian state, are both integrated and yet not integrated, forming a unique phenomenon in light of identity and integration problems. Democracy, by its nature, limits the absolute power of the Hashemite monarchy over authority and sovereignty. Consequently, these ideas, fears, and interests apply to the original Jordanian people, particularly to the elites who form the tools of governance and leadership in the right-wing national stream (Tell T. , 1996).

The Jordanian-Palestinian relationship is perhaps the most influential factor in Jordan's reality and its future, due to the size of the Palestinian component, which represents one side of this relationship, the complex historical dimension of this relationship, and the fact that the Palestinian cause remains unresolved and volatile. The Palestinian issue is central to the Arab and Islamic world and to the Middle East, which keeps it under the international spotlight. Moreover, the magnitude of Israel's ambitions, along with Zionism, global Judaism, and its influence in Western societies, particularly the US, further complicates the situation. Finally, the centrality of the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship is crucial to the future of Jordan’s national identity, its potential to overcome a weakened or absent identity, the future of the Jordanian state and its sovereignty, and whether it will merge with a potential Palestinian entity. It also shapes the future of Jordan's political system and its institutional structure.

A Jordanian of Palestinian origin in Jordan lives in an exceptional condition. He exists within social and political contexts that pull him toward a rigid Palestinian identity. The Palestinian

identity plays a central role in the lives of many individuals in Jordan, leading to social and political contexts that encourage the strengthening of their Palestinian identity. This situation sometimes generates internal contradictions and individual conflicts. Some individuals experience such deep internal dissonance that it leads them to withdraw completely from political engagement, unable to bear these contradictions. Massad (2001) describes this phenomenon: many Palestinian Jordanians in the East Bank are content with being both Jordanians and Palestinians at the same time. They recognize that their Palestinian identity is fully reflected in its development within the Jordanian national context. For the majority of them, Jordan is the only material homeland they have ever known.

5.1.4. The National Security of Jordan

Jordan presents a compelling case study in exploring the intersection between subnational identity and national security. The unique historical and political evolution of the Jordanian state provides rich analytical material to understand how internal social structures and external geopolitical pressures converge to shape national security policies, because its security architecture has evolved significantly and been shaped by regional rivalries, international interventions, and internal threats. For over four centuries under Ottoman rule, Jordanians did not experience centralized governance in the modern sense. Instead, political authority was largely decentralized, with tribal sheikhs maintaining localized control. As a result, the early political leadership during the Emirate period naturally emerged from among tribal leaders, prominent urban notables, educated individuals, and professionals from liberal vocations (Mahafzah, 2021).

With the unification of the East and West Banks in 1950, a notable transformation occurred in Jordan's political landscape. Educated professionals -doctors, engineers, pharmacists, lawyers, and teachers- began to emerge as parallel leadership figures, standing alongside traditional tribal elites. Political parties were established and began to absorb a growing number of educated individuals and high school students, contributing to a genuine educational renaissance. This period saw a rise in political awareness, especially among the youth, who increasingly became the backbone of political activism (Mahafzah, 2021). These internal components began to interact with external political dynamics to shape the course of Jordanian policy to preserve its legitimacy and existence.

Security policy in Jordan, as representative models of Arab states, is inherently complex. The Arab context involves both external and internal challenges, encompassing material and immaterial dimensions. In other words, when an Arab state seeks to enhance its security in response to external threats—such as regional hostilities or geopolitical rivalries—such actions may inadvertently exacerbate domestic tensions, including increased friction with internal social or political groups or the emergence of domestic security threats. The debate surrounding SNIs and their impact on national security in Jordan reflects a broader set of challenges shared by other states in the region, where SNIs —tribal, ethnic, sectarian, or ideological—intersect with national and international interests.

In Jordan, the regime's security perspective continues to treat external threats as a critical variable in shaping national security policy. However, it also incorporates two additional and equally vital factors that challenge Arab regimes more broadly: (1) domestic politics, including perceived internal security threats, and (2) political economy. These dimensions are essential, as they form the material foundations for the preservation of Arab regimes, their security, and their long-term political survival (Ryan, 2015). To explore the impact of SNIs on Jordan's national security, it is necessary to adopt a "regime security" framework, which offers a more comprehensive and realistic alternative to conventional approaches. This paradigm allows us to understand Jordan's security policies by analyzing the interaction between internal challenges and external threats. It recognizes that Jordanian politics and security do not emerge solely in response to military or regional threats, but are also shaped by the need to maintain internal balance, especially in relation to SNIs such as tribal affiliations and the Palestinian component, which have been integral to the state's structure since its inception.

Within the regime security framework, Jordan is not viewed as a unified actor responding uniformly to external threats. Rather, it is understood as a political system actively engaged in the construction of internal alliances to secure its stability and sustainability amid complex local and regional transformations. In this context, SNIs are not peripheral or secondary; rather, they are central to the formulation of state policy. The Jordanian regime strategically incorporates these identities into its national policies, aiming to secure their loyalty and support, and in doing so, avoid internal conflicts that might otherwise jeopardize national security.

What makes the internal dynamics even more consequential is their entanglement with external perceptions and calculations, particularly from actors like Israel, which tends to view

Jordan either as a de facto ally or, in certain strategic discourses, as a potential alternative to a Palestinian state. This geopolitical lens adds another layer of complexity to Jordan's domestic governance. In response, the Jordanian regime seeks to mediate these multifaceted interactions by navigating between diverse internal identities and regional external expectations, ultimately with the goal of preserving national security and regime continuity. To this end, the ruling system actively promotes selective conceptions of national identity that align with its strategic interests. Nevertheless, opposition movements and political actors can utilize these SNIs to challenge official state narratives, offering alternative visions of national interest and security policy. This dialectic reveals the fragile nature of Jordan's national identity, which is not fixed but continually shaped by domestic pressures and shifting regional dynamics.

This section will explore the structure of Jordan's national security, analyzing the geographic, political, social, and economic elements that define both challenges and opportunities for the state. It will examine the multi-dimensional nature of national security—local, regional, and international—while highlighting the factors that distinguish Jordan in the broader Middle Eastern landscape. Special attention will be paid to the dynamics of SNIs and their influence on national policy formation and social cohesion. Finally, the discussion will focus on the strategies adopted by the Jordanian state to enhance national security, including the effective management of identity plurality, the balancing of international alliances, and the pursuit of economic and social reforms. These strategies aim to achieve long-term internal stability in a volatile regional environment, positioning Jordan as a case study of a state that maintains relative equilibrium despite its exposure to complex internal and external challenges.

National Security Structures in Jordan

The political map of Jordan is shaped by several key factors that intersect and influence its domestic and foreign policies. Jordan is situated in a geographically sensitive region, a location that grants it strategic importance while also imposing significant challenges in regional relations and security policy. For instance, its borders with Israel and the West Bank notably influence its policies regarding the Palestinian cause and its relations with neighboring countries and the international community. As we have previously discussed, Jordan's diverse demographic composition plays a critical role in shaping domestic politics. This diversity creates a complex

political reality that requires the state to adopt policies that combine pluralism and integration to achieve a balance among the various segments of society and to strengthen national security.

The Jordanian political system is a monarchy that prioritizes stability as a primary goal. To achieve this stability, the regime relies on forming alliances at multiple levels: internally, with tribal groups and political elites to ensure internal cohesion, and externally, with significant strategic and financial support from external powers, such as the US, Europe, and the Gulf countries, to enhance its stability. These dynamics expose the regime to political pressures, forcing it to balance the influence of these alliances on its sovereignty and the independence of its decision-making (Aldabas, 2023).

In this context, the concept of Jordanian national security transcends the traditional framework that limits security to protection from external threats. Instead, it adopts a more comprehensive, complex, and dynamic approach. National security in the Jordanian case revolves around the preservation of the Jordanian state, the safeguarding of its legal and international persona, and the protection of its national components from all forms of threats—whether internal or external. Central to this concept is the continuous effort to uphold the legitimacy and continuity of the political regime, which serves as the institutional embodiment of political and societal stability, and reflects the state's ability to respond to the shifting challenges and pressures in its surrounding environment.

This security perspective reflects a realist vision in which national security is a dynamic process that interacts with local, regional, and international contexts. The role of the state, therefore, extends beyond the reactive confrontation of conventional threats, to encompass the proactive construction of a comprehensive and evolving national security system. This system aims to reinforce internal and social stability and to create a resilient and adaptive environment that sustains the regime and ensures state cohesion. As such, Jordanian security policies increasingly focus on crisis prevention rather than mere crisis management. They rely on strengthening societal cohesion, expanding regime legitimacy, and institutionalizing relations with various societal components.

Jordan’s national security is shaped by a complex interplay of geographical, political, economic, and social factors that collectively determine the country’s strategic priorities and policy orientations. These characteristics are not static or isolated; rather, they are closely intertwined with domestic, regional, and international variables that significantly influence the decision-

making process of the Jordanian leadership. Given its highly sensitive geopolitical position in a region fraught with persistent instability and volatility, Jordan pursues a security approach that seeks to reinforce internal stability while safeguarding its sovereign decision-making capacity, drawing on a multidimensional strategy that encompasses SNIs, regional interactions, and strategic alliances.

Geographical Characteristics of National Security: Jordan's strategic location at the heart of the Levant places it at the crossroads of major transportation routes connecting Egypt with Syria and the Arabian Gulf with Mesopotamia. This geostrategic positioning has historically rendered the country a nexus of civilizational interaction and geopolitical contention. The centrality of the Palestinian issue in Jordan's foreign policy derives not only from historical solidarity but also from geographic proximity and deep demographic entanglement. Furthermore, Jordan's proximity to oil-rich states situates it within the broader framework of energy-related rivalries and geopolitical competition. The Port of Aqaba, being Jordan's only maritime outlet, further enhances the strategic imperative of maintaining security and stability along this critical access point.

Economic Characteristics of National Security: Jordan's economy exhibits the typical features of small, open economies—highly susceptible to regional and global fluctuations. Although the kingdom has benefited in certain periods from Gulf oil booms and capital inflows associated with waves of forced migration, it remains heavily reliant on foreign aid, remittances, and international financial support. In response to this structural vulnerability, Jordan has adopted economic reform programs aimed at fostering greater self-reliance, expanding its productive base, and engaging in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements to stimulate growth and diversification. These measures are not merely developmental but are also considered vital to national security, especially in terms of economic sovereignty.

Social Characteristics of National Security: Jordanian society is characterized by a significant degree of ethnic and cultural diversity, including Jordanians of Palestinian origin, Circassians, Chechens, Christians, and Bedouins. Managing this diversity requires a deliberate and balanced state approach aimed at fostering national cohesion and reinforcing internal unity. The government's emphasis on national identity, equitable citizenship, and the promotion of human rights reflects its recognition that social cohesion is a foundational pillar of national security. Political rhetoric frequently underscores the importance of moderation and the rejection of

extremism, reinforcing these values as critical to societal resilience against internal fragmentation and external ideological infiltration.

In the same context, Jordan's national security framework rests on several strategic pillars, each reflecting a nuanced understanding of the threats and opportunities facing the state. First, the principle of *Pan-Arab Security* underscores Jordan's belief that its national security is inherently tied to Arab collective security. The kingdom consistently advocates for Arab unity and solidarity, particularly with regard to central regional issues such as the Palestinian cause, and views support from fellow Arab states as fundamental to its own stability. Second, the commitment to *Political Sovereignty* is evident in the state's emphasis on consolidating internal legitimacy and fostering loyalty, which are seen as vital tools for resisting external pressures and preserving independent policymaking. Third, the pursuit of *Military Modernization* remains a key objective for the Jordanian Armed Forces, which continue to enhance their professionalism and readiness in order to confront a wide spectrum of traditional and non-traditional threats.

Fourth, the importance of *Economic and Social Security* is reflected in the state's efforts to stimulate development and improve welfare conditions, thereby reducing dependency on external actors and addressing structural weaknesses that could undermine national cohesion. Fifth, Jordan has institutionalized a model of *Democratic Governance* through procedural democratic reforms aimed at increasing citizen participation and reinforcing trust in public institutions, all while maintaining the core authority of the monarchy. Though limited in scope, this system is strategically utilized to legitimize state power and foster engagement within managed political boundaries. Sixth, the emphasis on *Regime Legitimacy* is particularly critical in a socially diverse society like Jordan's. Ensuring that the regime is perceived as legitimate helps build public trust in the political order and reduces the risks of internal unrest or opposition movements that could destabilize the state and threaten its overall national security.

Against this backdrop, Jordan adopts a pragmatic approach aimed at reinforcing internal stability and safeguarding the independence of its political decision-making, while maintaining its position as a limited but influential regional actor. This is reflected in the flexibility of its security policies and its reliance on a multi-level strategy that integrates both internal and external dimensions. The strategy is built on smart alliances, careful management of social diversity, and the strategic use of both hard and soft power instruments. Based on the foregoing analysis, the main threats to Jordan's national security can be understood across three interrelated dimensions.

Table 5.2 Dimensions of Jordan's National Security

Dimension	Key Challenges/Elements
Internal (Domestic) Dimension	· Influence of diverse political parties and multiple identities (tribal, Palestinian, religious, and subnational). · Ideological divisions that weaken national unity. · Weak centrist parties and low public participation leading to increased divisions and declining trust. · High unemployment rates and accumulating public debt that pressure economic stability. · Unequal opportunities in education and the labor market between urban and rural areas, leading to developmental gaps. · Widespread corruption and nepotism adversely affecting essential services.
Regional Dimension	· Combating terrorism and extremism, especially with the rise of groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. · Security challenges resulting from conflicts in neighboring countries (Syria, Iraq) and their impact on border stability. · Influx of refugees (Palestinian, Iraqi, Lebanese) affecting public services and social cohesion. · Jordan faces potential threats from groups allied with Iran operating near its borders. Iran's support for various armed factions in Iraq and Syria has raised concerns in Jordan about the extension of proxy wars to its own territory. · According to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jordan's proximity to Israel and Palestine places it in a sensitive position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Jordan maintains a peace treaty with Israel, signed in 1994, ongoing tensions, including conflicts in Gaza, complicate this relationship. The Jordanian regime is aware that any forced displacement of Palestinians into Jordan could destabilize the demographic, social, and security fabric of both the regime and the country as a whole.
International Dimension	· External interventions by global powers (the US, Russia, China) influencing the regional security landscape and Jordan's strategic policy. · Presence of foreign military bases on Jordanian territory and the challenge of maintaining national sovereignty. · The impact of superpower rivalry (e.g., during the Cold War and beyond) on the country's foreign policy.

As previously noted, Jordan prioritizes the preservation of its internal stability above all other national objectives. Security and stability are regarded as the foundational pillars for the success of both economic and social development, in addition to reinforcing the Kingdom’s regional standing. Jordan’s national security strategy is thus primarily oriented towards achieving cohesion within the domestic front while maintaining balanced and pragmatic relations with neighboring countries and global powers. This delicate balance—encompassing geographic, economic, social, and political dimensions—forms a comprehensive framework for Jordan’s national security. It enhances the state’s resilience in the face of both internal and external challenges, ensuring the continuity of its stability and the preservation of its strategic relevance in the region.

Through the lens of the security model, this study will focus on SNIs as a central element in understanding the social and political dynamics that influence security and stability in Jordan. This

emphasis on SNIs enables a deeper comprehension of how these identities shape state-society relations, and how they are either mobilized or marginalized within the framework of national security.

The Impact of SNIs on Jordanian National Security

Jordan's national security is intricately intertwined with issues of identity and internal cohesion. SNIs have played a significant role in shaping the Kingdom's domestic politics and its responses to regional crises. Historically, Jordan has managed to contain and navigate tensions between its citizens of Palestinian origin and those of East Bank (East Jordanians or Bedouin) descent. However, the successive waves of refugee inflows—most notably from Syria—have introduced new layers to Jordan's social fabric, thereby influencing the dynamics of national security. These demographic shifts have further complicated identity relations and placed additional pressure on state institutions and resources.

This section explores the impact of SNIs on Jordanian national security through the lens of the security model, which emphasizes tribal affiliations, regional loyalties, and the challenges posed by transnational ideologies. This analytical framework is critical for understanding how the Jordanian regime has dealt with identity-based tensions, particularly in a context marked by regional instability and internal socio-political transformations.

The East Bank Jordanians, primarily composed of tribal communities, are regarded as the original inhabitants of the Kingdom. As previously discussed, the Hashemite regime has historically relied on tribal loyalty as a foundational pillar for cultivating political legitimacy and ensuring state stability. East Bank Jordanians maintain strong cultural and symbolic ties to the monarchy and are disproportionately represented in Jordan's political and military institutions. This foundational relationship has traditionally provided a stabilizing effect, with the Hashemite monarchy perceived as a unifying authority that respects and upholds established social hierarchies. The enduring loyalty of tribal communities to the monarchy has contributed significantly to the stability of the state, as these groups constitute the backbone of Jordan's military and security apparatus (Massad, 2001). Accordingly, the tribes hold a central position in the national narrative surrounding defense and security. They view themselves not only as protectors of the Jordanian state but also as guardians of Hashemite rule and national identity, particularly in the face of perceived political encroachment by Jordanians of Palestinian origin.

This sense of guardianship has been reinforced by the continued dominance of East Bank Jordanians within the coercive apparatus of the state, where they perceive their role as critical to safeguarding not only national sovereignty but also the legitimacy and continuity of the monarchy itself. This dynamic has entrenched tribalism as a cornerstone of the Jordanian security structure and has contributed to the persistence of identity-based divisions within the broader socio-political landscape (Hassan, 2020).

However, this close relationship has also led to social and political patronage, where East Bank Jordanians are granted privileges in accessing government positions, land ownership rights, and political representation. While this system has provided stability, it has also created divisions between East Bank Jordanians and other identity groups, particularly Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who experience varying degrees of political inclusion. Additionally, these tribal affiliations present their own set of challenges, as tribal politics sometimes conflict with the broader interests of the state. Tensions can arise between tribal leaders and government authorities, particularly in relation to the distribution of resources and political representation (Alon, 2007). The monarchy strategically engages with tribal leaders to maintain loyalty, often through high-level government appointments, military positions, and economic incentives. This relationship enhances national security by ensuring that powerful social groups within Jordan have a vested interest in the stability of the regime. In times of crisis, tribal alliances act as a buffer against potential unrest, with tribal leaders mobilizing their communities to support the monarchy. For example, during periods of economic hardship or political tension, the regime relies on these alliances to prevent uprisings and foster loyalty to the state.

Tribal alliances also play a crucial role in Jordan's internal security by supporting the monarchy's initiatives to combat terrorism. Tribal loyalty to the monarchy provides a level of social stability that helps deter extremism, as tribes maintain their traditional values and support the state's moderate stance. This loyalty is critical in countering extremist narratives and limiting the influence of radical groups that might exploit social and economic vulnerabilities within Jordan. By fostering a sense of national loyalty within tribal communities, the monarchy strengthens Jordan's internal security and reduces the risk of internal threats. This integration is both practically and symbolically significant. Practically, it ensures that Jordan's security forces are led by individuals deeply invested in the survival of the monarchy, thus reducing the likelihood of military or security coups. Symbolically, it reinforces the connection between the monarchy and

tribal communities, promoting a shared responsibility for the stability of Jordan. This shared responsibility is particularly important in the context of regional instability, where Jordan faces security challenges from neighboring countries and extremist groups.

Furthermore, the loyalty of tribal leaders within military and security institutions bolsters the monarchy's efforts to cement its legitimacy. Given the tribal emphasis on loyalty and respect for authority, tribes within the Jordanian Armed Forces and the police play a significant role in maintaining discipline. By adhering to traditional values and reinforcing loyalty to the monarchy, this contributes to a culture within Jordan's security institutions that prioritizes the regime's stability and national security. Tribalism in Jordan today plays a renewed and politicized role in contemporary discourses concerning the nature of Jordanian society and its identity. This role is particularly evident in the context of the tense relationship between East Bank Jordanians and West Bank Jordanians (Palestinian origin).

A significant portion of East Bank Jordanians view Palestinians with suspicion, perceiving them as a group that is unwilling to acknowledge the support and refuge provided by the state (Sammour, 2022). Given that social identities in Jordan are inherently fluid and flexible, the process of dialogue among tribal members, intellectuals, and the monarchy plays a pivotal role in shaping the national identity. This dialogue has resulted in a national identity that blends traditional tribal elements with modern features, contributing to a unique social and political dynamic that reflects the diversity and interaction among the various components of Jordanian society.

In this context, tribal discourse has become a tool for defining loyalty to the state and the monarchy, with frequent accusations directed at Palestinians of disloyalty to the king and the Jordanian state. This accusation stems from a widespread perception that Palestinians do not recognize the central role that tribalism plays in shaping the identity of the state and society. Thus, the concept of tribalism has shifted from being a traditional social system to a political criterion used in discussions about national belonging and political loyalty, reflecting the ongoing challenges of balancing the diverse components of Jordanian society. Currently, tribal discourse is being utilized within the context of Jordanian-Palestinian tensions within Jordanian society. When Palestinians are accused of disloyalty to the Jordanian state and monarchy, it is often because they are perceived as failing to acknowledge the tribal dimension of the state and society. This highlights the complex intersection of social identity, loyalty, and political alignment in Jordan's ever-evolving national narrative (Abdul-Hadi, 2016, pp. 46-59).

Some argue that this situation led to a sense of resentment among the Bedouins themselves, as they felt that the government only used them when it was in danger and ignored them when it felt secure. In reality, Bedouins, or those of Bedouin descent, were not as politically submissive as is commonly believed. In February 1974, a limited military mutiny occurred in Zarqa among Bedouin members of the 40th Armored Brigade, an elite force that had recently served on the Syrian front. The cause of the mutiny was the economic deterioration caused by rising living costs and inflation. The government had recently raised civil servant salaries to alleviate the burden of rising prices but had not raised military salaries. In response to this limited mutiny, the King himself returned to the country, where he had been on an overseas visit, and ordered the military salaries to be increased to the same level as those of the civilian employees, thus resolving the incident (Sinai & Pollak, 1977, p. 35). This mistake was never repeated; military salaries were increased several times between 1975 and 1981, with two significant increases in 1980 alone (Satloff, 1986, p. 19).

The urban residents also understood that the government's ability to use the Bedouins as tools to suppress the rest of society stemmed from their distinct legal status, which protected them from the mechanisms of "modern" society. As a result, they began demanding that the government integrate the Bedouins into national life (or change them) (Oweidi, 1988, pp. 118-119). However, this demand coincided with a counter-trend, which was the increasing emphasis on imposing cultural tribalism on society itself. While urban Jordanians traced their ancestry to tribal origins, they did not consider themselves Bedouins. The Circassians and Chechens, who had little in common with the Bedouins culturally, decided to capitalize on tribal affiliations by establishing the "Circassian and Chechen Tribal Council" in 1979 to represent their interests within Jordanian society. This was the second attempt to portray Circassian and Chechen families as "tribes," with the previous attempt in 1969 leading to the creation of the Circassian Tribal Council, primarily due to the political insecurity at the time. However, the council met infrequently and eventually dissolved. The new council was broader, including the Chechens as well (Shami, 1982, pp. 122-123) .

It is worth noting that the regime views any questioning of the concept of tribal origins of the Jordanian people—a concept constructed by the state—as a threat to national security (Massad, 2001). King Hussein, in defining Jordanian culture as tribal, relied on two primary strategies aimed at solidifying this concept within the national identity. The first strategy was to imbue the country

with a sense of tribalism or even Bedouinism, presenting the Bedouins as protectors of the authentic Jordanian culture and traditions. The second strategy involved reshaping the concept of tribalism and Bedouinism to encompass both the Bedouins and the urban dwellers (*hadhar*). In this context, the state redefined Bedouin culture, not just for the Bedouins themselves but for the entire society, by crafting a normative version of what it considers the "true Bedouin and tribal culture." This redefined culture was marketed as the national cultural identity, often referred to as the "true Jordanian culture." In this regard, Fathi argues that tribalism can serve as a source of shared history and a national symbol that enhances national unity. By emphasizing the unity of tribes and integrating individual tribal identities into a broader, inclusive tribal heritage, the state seeks to cement this heritage as a unifying and cohesive element, aligning it with its policies to strengthen the national identity (Fathi, 1994, p. 210).

The real issue lies in the fact that the distinction between Jordanians and Palestinians is often framed through a comparison of Bedouin traditions attributed to Jordanians versus the agricultural and urban traditions ascribed to Palestinians. However, this comparison overlooks the fact that many of the East Jordanian tribes also have agricultural and urban roots, reflecting an incomplete image of Jordanian society, which is often reduced to the Bedouin narrative. In this context, terms such as "national," and "Jordanian" have gradually become synonymous, with tribal affiliation, the claim of tribal qualities, and even the promotion of tribalism becoming tools for asserting Jordanian authenticity. This authenticity transcends the mythical boundaries of origin, connecting deeply to the history that shaped the Jordanian state. Despite analysis pointing to a decline in tribal identity, the scene is not devoid of a "us versus them" mentality, particularly in times of crisis. During such moments, individuals of East Jordanian origin are keen to emphasize their tribal authenticity through claims of tribal roots, renewing indirect loyalty to the origins of the Jordanian state and its establishment. Therefore, the loyalty of a tribesman is not merely an expression of belonging to the homeland, but a manifestation of a deep-seated desire to defend the honor of the family, the tribe, and the king (Al Oudat & Alshboul, 2010, p. 70).

Tribalism, as a force within national identity, can contribute to the stability of the regime and its longevity, but it can also be a divisive concept when confronted with other components of society. In this section, the analysis shows that while tribalism is a double-edged sword, the monarchy uses tribal connections with the community to strengthen its grip on power and gain legitimacy. The Hashemite discourse gradually appropriated the country's tribal past. Regarding

the development of Jordanian nationalism after 1988, tribalism proved to be a significant obstacle in uniting the country's diverse groups. Bedouin and tribal culture have become central to the development of Jordanian identity. While the country may today be predominantly Palestinian in its composition, the traditional dominance and loyalty of East Bank residents to the monarchy remain key factors in the stability and longevity of the Hashemite regime.

The relationship between the tribe and its members on one hand, and the state and regime on the other, operates within a framework of material interests and gains rather than national belonging or loyalty. Therefore, tribal considerations continue to dominate the state's behavior and its dealings with the tribal institution, which is supported by various means, ensuring it remains loyal to the regime. The interaction between tribal identities and national identity in Jordan is a crucial aspect of the country's social and political landscape. Historically, the Hashemite monarchy has relied on alliances with Bedouin tribes to maintain its authority. These alliances were instrumental in shaping national identity, often incorporating tribal symbols and traditions into the national narrative.

These tensions deepen feelings of social division and estrangement, as East Jordanians feel that increasing economic liberalization and political reforms have left them in a state of deprivation. In their view, Jordanians of Palestinian origin are advancing in economic and social positions, while East Jordanians, who historically formed the base of the power structure, now find themselves facing a decline in their social and economic standing. These economic reforms, which included privatization and cuts to subsidies, disproportionately affected areas populated by East Jordanians, which ignited a growing sense of deprivation among them.

The Jordanian state today faces a significant challenge in regaining the trust of East Jordanians, who feel that the state no longer shows the same loyalty to them and no longer provides the protection and support they once relied upon. A veteran politician from East Jordan expressed that the solution lies in a "personal touch" from the leadership, suggesting that King Abdullah should draw inspiration from his father, King Hussein, who was known for his direct visits to electoral districts and tribal communities in East Jordan. Such personal engagement, some believe, could restore a sense of reassurance among East Jordanians and help strengthen their connection to the state.

Jordan is a society bound together by loyalty to the state and the monarchy, with tribal members viewing the protection and service of the state as an integral part of their identity and

duty. However, in the present day, many East Jordanian nationalists feel that the state no longer values their sacrifices (Bulos, 2021). Palestinians are gradually gaining what they sought to secure during the Civil War in 1970, particularly by increasing their presence in the economic and political spheres. This development has sparked concerns among East Jordanians about losing their influence. Although the East Jordanian nationalist voice is not revolutionary, it expresses genuine frustration with the growing sense of marginalization among East Jordanians. As poverty and marginalization increase, there is a rising fear that they may eventually become sidelined in their own country. This deep sense of disillusionment is affecting relations between the two groups and exacerbating tensions between Jordanians of Palestinian origin and those of East Jordanian origin. These tensions threaten national unity and reflect clear fractures in the fabric of Jordanian society (Ryan C. , 2010).

Subnational identity formations in Jordan, particularly tribal affiliations, regional loyalties, and social and political distinctions between East Jordanians and Palestinians, have developed into strong dynamics that influence the country's security landscape. These identities, historically part of the foundational fabric of the state, have evolved from tools for governance and cohesion into multifaceted variables that challenge the stability of the Jordanian state. This shift is rooted in the state's reliance on these identities to secure political loyalty and their growing role as a means of social and political competition, as well as resource distribution.

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between tribal identities, political loyalty, and the evolving socio-economic dynamics in Jordan plays a significant role in shaping the nation's security landscape. The historical reliance on tribal alliances, especially from East Jordanian communities, has reinforced the stability of the monarchy. However, increasing tensions between Jordanians of Palestinian and East Jordanian origin, fueled by feelings of marginalization, have created social fractures that threaten national cohesion. The state's use of tribal loyalty as a tool for political stability has faced challenges, particularly as economic reforms and demographic shifts have altered the balance of power and influence. As we explore these dynamics further, it becomes crucial to focus on the Palestinian component, which has become a central element in the country's socio-political fabric. The growing role of Palestinians in the economic and political spheres, and the sense of competition with East Jordanians for power and resources, presents an important area of concern for national security in Jordan.

The term “Palestinian component” in the Jordanian context refers to Jordanians of Palestinian origin and Palestinian refugees who settled in the kingdom as a result of regional conflicts, particularly after the Nakba of 1948 and the Six-Day War of 1967. This component constitutes a significant portion of Jordan's population, with the majority being granted Jordanian citizenship, making them an integral part of the country's social and political fabric. Nevertheless, Palestinians in Jordan maintain deep ties to their homeland and their national cause, with the concepts of return and Palestinian identity remaining central to their sense of belonging.

The core of Palestinian identity generally revolves around attachment to the original village or city, a sense of loss regarding their homeland, and the profound injustice they perceive from the international community, with the idea of return being a pivotal element of their identity. The elements that define the Palestinian diaspora globally are: a) the historical catastrophe of the 1948 Nakba, which marked the decisive moment of displacement; b) a sense of a tightly-knit community formed through shared suffering, bound by religion, ethnicity, language, and land; c) the notion of homeland, whether real or imagined, and the enduring hope for return, with the belief that this homeland will be restored and preserved by the Palestinian diaspora. However, this analysis cannot be fully applied to the Palestinian population in Jordan.

Historically, the Jordanian government has succeeded in maintaining a delicate balance between integrating Jordanians of Palestinian origin and securing the support of East Jordanians. Palestinians have become prominent economically, particularly in the private sector, but they face barriers to political power, which remains largely dominated by East Jordanians. This divide is often reflected in the allocation of parliamentary seats and civil service positions, where East Jordanians are disproportionately represented in government institutions. This dynamic has led to social and political divides that continue to impact national security by creating underlying tensions within Jordanian society.

Jordanians of Palestinian origin, who make up a large percentage of the population, have demonstrated notable economic success, especially in the private sector, where they have significantly contributed to strengthening the Jordanian economy, particularly in trade, investment, and services. However, their participation in political power remains limited. This disparity in representation is due to government policies that favor East Jordanians, who occupy a significant proportion of sensitive positions in the military, security services, and maintain a dominant

representation in parliament. This pattern reflects the regime's attempt to maintain a strong political and security base by relying on East Jordanians as a primary source of loyalty to the system.

The disparity in political and economic representation deepens the sense of marginalization among Jordanians of Palestinian origin and creates social tensions between the different components of society. These tensions are exacerbated during times of economic or political crises, where Palestinians feel excluded from the decision-making process, while East Jordanians fear the loss of their traditional privileges. From a security perspective, these dynamics present a constant concern for the regime. The inequality in representation and the sense of alienation destabilize social cohesion, weakening the national resilience against internal and external challenges. These divisions could also be exploited by external actors or extremist groups to destabilize the internal order. Therefore, despite the relative success in managing these tensions, the continued existence of these dynamics without a just structural solution poses a long-term threat to Jordan's national security. Achieving comprehensive stability requires enhancing political and social inclusion policies for all groups, while maintaining the delicate balance that ensures the loyalty of the various components to the regime and preserves Jordan's stability in the face of increasing regional and internal challenges.

The presence of Palestinians in the country over the years has been a key factor in the emergence of a unique structure for Jordanian national identity and culture, which has increasingly become exclusionary, marginalizing large segments of Jordanian citizens with each passing decade. The Palestinians, who were gradually recognized by the Jordanian regime and its allies as "the other," were seen by most of the state's institutions, especially the military, legal system, and bureaucracy, as a potential threat to the established power dynamics. The regime and these institutions sought to harness their resources to solidify this definition, which would mitigate the perceived danger posed by the Palestinians, namely the emergence of a non-Hashemite Arab nationalism. The Jordanian state feared that Palestinians, given their large numbers and the desperation they faced, could upend the balance of power and undermine the Hashemite dominance. However, the state's stance on this new project was ambiguous. It was caught between integrating Palestinians into the political and social fabric while simultaneously safeguarding its traditional, Hashemite-centric national identity. This tension reflects broader concerns about the threat that Palestinian nationalism posed to the consolidation of a distinctly Jordanian identity centered around the monarchy and its regional influence.

The central dilemma faced by the Jordanian regime is what is often referred to as the "alternative homeland" myth. The Palestinian issue has long been a cornerstone of regional and international politics, reflecting the complexities of overlapping geopolitical and demographic interests. Among the most controversial solutions proposed over the decades is the idea of the "alternative homeland," which links Palestine with Jordan, positioning the latter as a state that could absorb Palestinians as an alternative to the establishment of their independent state on their historical lands. Despite the official and societal rejection of this proposal by Jordan, the potential ramifications of such an idea continue to cast a shadow over Jordan's national security, posing direct threats to the stability of the kingdom and its national unity. Over time, the complexities of this issue have deepened, involving multiple international and regional stakeholders, making it increasingly difficult to find a comprehensive and lasting solution. Among the proposals that have emerged over the years was the concept of "Jordan is Palestine," the idea of an "alternative homeland" suggesting the creation of a Palestinian state in a location other than the historical Palestinian territories, specifically within Jordan.

This concept, which dates back to the 1950s when the West Bank was part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan before the 1967 war, sparked widespread debate among politicians and intellectuals. Some viewed it as a pragmatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while others saw it as a betrayal of Palestinian aspirations. As events unfolded and the conflict grew more complicated, the question arose: can Jordan truly be considered an alternative to Palestine? And is it feasible to activate this solution in light of the current geopolitical reality? This issue raises significant strategic and political challenges and merits a comprehensive analysis of its viability and implications for the region's future.

The current security and geopolitical situation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan places it in a sensitive position. The country is facing significant internal pressures due to challenging economic conditions and cross-border movements of various groups. Additionally, it is under external pressure from major powers and regional actors to adopt specific stances on the Palestinian issue. In this context, Jordan is balancing its national interests with the external pressures being exerted on it.

Reviving the idea of "Jordan is Palestine" would place significant political, demographic, and security responsibilities on the Kingdom, potentially destabilizing its internal situation, particularly with the large percentage of Palestinian-origin residents in the country. As mutual and

often concealed negative sentiments build between various factions, the Hashemite throne perceives the Palestinian community as an ongoing threat to its stability and future, particularly with their association with the concept of “alternative homeland” in Jordan.

One of the sources of tension is the Hashemite monarchy's discomfort with the participation of Palestinians in Jordan's democratic processes. This participation is viewed as a challenge to the monarchy's hegemony, especially compared to the relative obedience displayed by Jordanians due to the social and tribal structure that characterizes Jordanian society. This unease reflects a shared concern among both Jordanians and the Hashemite monarchy: the possibility of a new wave of Palestinian migration to Jordan, which could transform the country into what some might view as an “alternative homeland” for Palestinians. This prospect threatens to make Jordanians and the Hashemites a minority within their own state, weakening their ability to maintain the Hashemite system and the benefits it represents for them.

Therefore, the delicate balance that Jordan must strike between managing internal pressures—such as demographic shifts, economic challenges, and the political influence of Palestinians—and external demands, especially related to the Palestinian issue, has profound implications for its national security. If these pressures are not carefully managed, they could potentially undermine the social cohesion and stability of the Kingdom, making it vulnerable to internal divisions that could be exploited by both external actors and internal factions. These dynamics have direct implications for Jordan's national security. The gaps between different population groups not only threaten social cohesion but also create a fertile environment for exploitation by both internal and external actors seeking to destabilize the state. The lack of equal opportunities in political and economic representation can lead to growing feelings of exclusion among Jordanians of Palestinian origin, weakening trust in the system and increasing the likelihood of protests or unrest that could threaten internal stability. Moreover, the strategy of empowering one group at the expense of another creates a form of “security fragility,” where the loyalty of the groups supporting the system becomes conditional upon their economic and social interests. If the system fails to meet these interests, these loyalties could turn into sources of internal tension, opening the door to challenges that are difficult to control.

From a national security perspective, these tensions require a comprehensive structural approach that reshapes the relationships between the different components of society. The system must adopt policies that promote political and economic inclusivity for all groups, while reducing

excessive reliance on traditional groups as the cornerstone of security. This approach can foster loyalty to the state rather than narrow loyalties, contributing to the creation of a more solid foundation of stability capable of facing both regional and internal challenges. National security is not achieved solely through strengthening security control, but by ensuring social justice and equal opportunities that preserve national unity and prevent any fractures in the social fabric. By addressing these underlying issues, the Jordanian government can build a more resilient and inclusive system that not only preserves the country's security but also strengthens its social fabric, ensuring long-term stability in the face of both internal and external pressures.

In another aspect, Religious diversity and minority groups in Jordan have a notable impact on the country's national security. Jordan is home to a mix of religious communities, including Muslims (both Sunni and Shia), Christians, and smaller sects such as the Druze. While the country has historically maintained a degree of religious tolerance and coexistence, the presence of minority groups can create challenges for national security in several ways:

1. Sectarian Tensions: Although Jordan generally enjoys religious harmony, the wider regional context, especially the Sunni-Shia divide and the rise of sectarian conflicts in neighboring countries like Iraq and Syria, can influence internal dynamics. Any spillover of sectarian violence or tensions can potentially fuel internal divisions, leading to security concerns.

2. Minority Rights and Political Representation: Religious and ethnic minorities in Jordan, such as Christians and Palestinians, often face challenges in political representation and economic opportunities. If these minorities feel marginalized or excluded, it could lead to social unrest or demands for greater political inclusion, posing a challenge to national stability.

3. Extremist Movements: The rise of political Islam, particularly the spread of Salafi-jihadist ideologies, has also had an impact on the security environment. Some minority groups might be targeted by extremist movements, or in some cases, radicalization can emerge within certain sectors of society, which can complicate the state's efforts to maintain security.

4. Regional Influences: Jordan's religious diversity is also influenced by regional powers. For instance, Iran's support for Shia communities in the region and Saudi Arabia's backing of

Sunni Islam can both play roles in shaping domestic politics and security dynamics. Any regional intervention or proxy influence could increase internal tensions, particularly if one group feels aligned with a foreign power.

However, these identities have impacted Jordan's national security through three main channels:

1. Increased Internal Polarization: Arab nationalism and political Islam have contributed to the polarization of Jordanian society around external issues, such as Arab unity or the Palestinian cause. This focus on regional and ideological concerns has weakened the emphasis on a unifying national identity. As different segments of society rallied around these external ideologies, it became harder to cultivate a cohesive national identity that transcends these competing loyalties. The internal divisions created by such ideologies have undermined social cohesion and created a fertile ground for political fragmentation, which poses a potential risk to national stability.

2. Pressure on the Political System: These ideologies have also led to internal opposition movements, pushing for political and social reforms that may conflict with the policies of the monarchy. Both Arab nationalism and Islamic political movements have historically called for more democratic reforms, greater political participation, and alignment with broader regional trends. The pressures from these ideologies have often challenged the legitimacy of the ruling regime and its control over political processes, creating tension between the monarchy’s desire for stability and the public's demand for political change. This internal pressure can potentially destabilize the regime if not properly managed, as it might lead to increased political activism and calls for constitutional reforms that could undermine the monarchy's authority.

3. Complicating Regional Relations: SNIs have also shaped Jordan's relationships with its neighbors, particularly in the context of its interactions with Nasserite and Ba'athist nationalists in Syria and Iraq, as well as dealing with the rise of political Islam, which was supported by regional powers such as Iran. The influence of Arab nationalism during the mid-20th century, and later the rise of Islamist movements, often put Jordan at odds with these neighboring regimes, which sought to export their ideologies across the Arab world. For example, Jordan’s relations with Syria and Iraq were frequently strained due to differing political orientations, especially during the rise of Ba'athism and Nasserism.

Similarly, the growing influence of political Islam, particularly from Iran and other regional actors, has presented a challenge to Jordan's stability, especially as it faces domestic pressures from Islamist movements seeking greater political power. The influence of such ideologies has complicated Jordan's diplomatic and security calculus, forcing the regime to navigate a delicate balance between regional pressures and its own national interests.

The Regime, Elites, and Jordan's National Security

The Hashemite monarchy in Jordan is widely regarded as a stabilizing force, playing a central role in maintaining national security. The legitimacy of the monarchy stems from its historical and religious roots, which have provided it with a deep connection to both the people and the region. The Jordanian political system recognized early on the need to strengthen a national identity based on unified loyalty to the King and the Kingdom in order to confront both internal and external threats, especially following the Palestinian refugee waves that followed the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. This influx of Palestinian refugees posed significant challenges to the system's continuity and identity, as the monarchy found itself having to address a large Palestinian community with a strong, distinctive national identity. To manage the various SNIs, the monarchy has promoted the narrative of unity, encouraging integration through educational reforms, social programs, and political representation. These initiatives help alleviate tensions and bolster loyalty to the state (Nevo, 2003). This approach is based on strengthening the collective Jordanian identity narrative that overrides SNIs. Through a delicate balance that includes tribal loyalties, cultivating elite support, and prioritizing stability through a controlled security apparatus, the monarchy has worked to maintain cohesion within the state.

Jordan's national security, especially in terms of securing the regime's survival, relies on complex strategies involving the manipulation and investment in SNIs to create a balance that serves the continuity and cohesion of the regime. This approach becomes particularly evident in the context of SNIs, where the Hashemite regime seeks to enhance its legitimacy by controlling social and political identities within a broader framework that balances local and regional aspirations (Brand, 1995; Alon, 2007).

For example, security concerns in Jordan have pushed the regime to avoid excessive enthusiasm towards any ideologies that might threaten its survival, whether they are Arab

nationalist, Islamic, or liberal. Instead, the regime harnesses these identities within a framework that serves the continuity of the system and prevents any potential for its overthrow. In this context, SNIs transform into effective tools for the regime; they are leveraged to weaken SNIs coalitions by keeping competition between different currents and controlling the extent of their influence. Thus, the security of the regime is not just a matter of military strength or diplomatic maneuvering, but also involves carefully managing the internal societal dynamics that could threaten its stability. The monarchy's ability to maintain this balance, particularly in relation to the Palestinian component, is crucial for the long-term security of Jordan. By carefully navigating these complex identities and fostering a sense of collective Jordanian identity, the monarchy seeks to neutralize any forces that could destabilize the regime, ensuring that national security remains firmly under its control.

In another context, the political elites, often stemming from prominent tribal families, play a vital role in the governance and security apparatus in Jordan. These elites typically occupy key positions within the government and military, facilitating loyalty to the monarchy while managing local and tribal concerns. This elite structure provides a buffer against civil unrest, as influential families align with the state's interests (Alon, 2007). Through their integration into the highest echelons of power, these elites act as intermediaries between the state and the broader population, particularly in rural and tribal areas where loyalty to the monarchy is strongly rooted. The support of these tribal leaders helps to ensure stability, as their influence can effectively mitigate potential sources of discontent, especially during times of economic or social hardship.

Jordan's economy is significantly influenced by a group of economic elites who control vital sectors such as finance, industry, and trade. These elites provide economic stability, but they also rely on government patronage. The monarchy's control over economic opportunities ensures the loyalty of these elites, who, in turn, help maintain Jordan's stability by curbing social discontent (Itani, 2013). Thus, the ruling elites in Jordan, largely drawn from the East Bank tribes and loyal families from both banks of the Jordan River, play a crucial role in the monarchy's security strategy. These elites occupy key positions within the government, military, and intelligence sectors, which has been effective in strengthening the state's security infrastructure.

The ruling elites and tribal alliances in Jordan play a critical role in the country's stability and security. The monarchy depends on a network of influential elites and tribal leaders who support the regime through loyalty and political backing, forming a fundamental base that strengthens

national security. This relationship between the ruling elites and the monarchy supports a system of patronage and resource distribution, fostering loyalty and deterring opposition. Tribal alliances, in particular, are essential to the system's stability, as tribal leaders command respect within their communities and act as intermediaries between the monarchy and the people.

The Jordanian regime maintains its power partly through a system of patronage, in which resources, benefits, and positions are distributed among the elites and tribal leaders to secure their loyalty. This patronage network is a significant aspect of Jordan's political system, ensuring that influential figures within society remain closely tied to the monarchy. High-ranking positions within the government, military, and public sector are often allocated based on loyalty and tribal affiliation rather than merit, creating a system where elite and tribal alliances are rewarded with political and economic privileges. This distribution of resources serves several purposes: It strengthens loyalty among the elites in Jordan, as their access to resources is directly linked to their support for the regime. It reduces the likelihood of opposition, as elites benefiting from the system have little incentive to challenge it. It enables the monarchy to maintain control over key sectors of society, including the military and security agencies, which are crucial for national security.

Through the creation of a network of dependent elites, the monarchy strengthens its power and ensures the neutralization of potential sources of opposition. The strategic use of patronage and tribal loyalty mechanisms serves to stabilize the regime by maintaining the support of key societal groups, thus ensuring the security and continuity of the monarchy's rule in the face of both internal and external challenges. However, while the patronage system supports stability, it also imposes long-term challenges on Jordan's security. The allocation of resources based on loyalty rather than merit can lead to inefficiency and corruption, weakening the effectiveness of government institutions. Additionally, reliance on patronage networks may limit social mobility opportunities, creating frustration among young Jordanians who feel excluded from the benefits enjoyed by the elites. Addressing these issues is critical to Jordan's national security, as dissatisfaction among the population could undermine the stability of the regime if left unaddressed.

The inefficiency resulting from the patronage system often manifests in the misallocation of resources and the appointment of individuals to key positions based on loyalty rather than competence. This leads to a situation where the government may struggle to effectively address the country's socio-economic challenges, as decision-makers may not always be the most qualified.

Over time, this undermines the trust in government institutions and erodes the legitimacy of the regime, potentially fostering a sense of disillusionment among the public. Furthermore, the limited opportunities for upward mobility within the context of patronage networks can exacerbate feelings of marginalization, especially among the youth. In a society where access to power, wealth, and resources is often determined by tribal affiliation or personal connections rather than individual merit, young Jordanians may perceive the political and economic system as inaccessible. This perception of injustice and exclusion can breed frustration, which, if not addressed, may lead to social unrest.

The exclusion of large segments of the population from the benefits of the patronage system also risks fueling sectarian or regional tensions. For instance, Jordanians of Palestinian origin or those from economically disadvantaged regions may feel that they are being sidelined in favor of the tribal elites. This can deepen social divisions and create fertile ground for discontent. If these grievances are not adequately addressed by the state, they could escalate into larger political or social movements that challenge the monarchy's authority. Moreover, the stagnation in social mobility, especially for the younger generation, poses a significant challenge for the long-term stability of the country. As youth feel that their futures are constrained by a system that rewards loyalty over ability, they may seek alternatives outside of traditional political structures, including potentially more radical movements or calls for reform. Such developments could destabilize the country and lead to a crisis of legitimacy for the regime.

In order to safeguard Jordan's national security, it is essential for the monarchy to reform the patronage system to allow for greater transparency, meritocracy, and inclusivity. By opening up more opportunities for social and economic advancement based on merit rather than loyalty, the government can address the frustrations of marginalized groups and reduce the risk of widespread discontent. This would not only enhance the legitimacy of the regime but also foster a sense of social cohesion, as all Jordanians, regardless of their tribal affiliation or background, would feel they have a stake in the country's future.

Ultimately, while the patronage system has helped preserve the monarchy’s power in the short term, its long-term viability depends on how effectively the state can balance loyalty with merit and ensure that all citizens have an equitable opportunity to participate in the nation’s political, social, and economic life. Failing to address these underlying issues could ultimately threaten the stability and security of the regime itself. To conclude, the internal dynamics in Jordan

significantly impact the stability and national security of the state. The identity conflict between East Bank Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, alongside the demographic diversity of refugees, complicates the concept of national identity and affects political representation, economic opportunities, and social integration. These challenges necessitate the adoption of flexible policies by the Jordanian government to maintain state unity without excluding any of its components.

Jordan's security model relies on a balanced strategy that integrates diplomacy, ISec relations, and internal containment, making Jordan a model of a state capable of adapting and persisting in a region rife with conflicts and crises, aiming for long-term stability that ensures a cohesive and secure future. While Jordanian national identity is firmly established in culture and public policies, the issue of Jordanians of Palestinian origin remains the most contentious in Jordanian politics. Concerns about the potential final settlement of Palestinians in Jordan reinforce feelings of division and conflicting identities within the country.

Several critical issues in Jordan, such as the electoral law, professional associations, privatization, economic reforms, and university admissions, are connected to national identity in various ways. These issues are often viewed through sectarian or identity-based lenses, with many East Bank Jordanians feeling marginalized in these matters compared to Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The prospect of Palestinian settlement remains a persistent concern for Jordanians fearful of losing their position, while Palestinians worry about losing their right of return. Despite King Abdullah II's assurance that the peace process will not lead to any citizen losing their Jordanian nationality, Jordanian nationalists see the establishment of a Palestinian state as a potential solution to clarify the status of Jordanians of Palestinian origin, thereby diminishing their influence on the Jordanian political system.

In terms of foreign policy, which serves as a platform for expressing the state's identity, the Jordanian monarchy reflects a flexible view of Jordanian identity, inclined towards understanding with regional powers like Israel. Conversely, Jordanian nationalists hold a contrasting view based on Arab cooperation and rejection of normalization, a vision that constitutes a core element of the state identity for many East Bank Jordanians, explaining the popular resistance to the idea of peace with Israel. The political system in Jordan operates through a complex patronage network that links broad segments of society to political power. The goal of political participation has shifted from genuine decision-making involvement to securing individual gains. The authorities have

managed to transform governmental institutions, including the parliament, into subservient tools, with the parliament, which once constituted a partisan government in the 1950s, now becoming a battleground for privileges and benefits.

Despite internal challenges, Jordan has managed to maintain relative stability in a volatile regional environment, thanks to its balanced security strategy, which combines diplomacy and security relations with international powers, while avoiding full engagement in regional conflicts. Jordan continues to enhance its position as a diplomatic mediator, seeking balanced relationships with major powers such as the US, Russia, and China. Regarding internal security, Jordan relies on a robust intelligence apparatus to combat terrorist threats and strengthens its stability through strategic alliances with both Western and Arab countries. Additionally, the ruling elite plays a crucial role in managing SNIs, with the regime benefiting from strengthening tribal and clan identities to reinforce national loyalty and political stability. The political system operates through a patronage network that organizes competition among political and social forces, ensuring the monarchy's continued dominance and the state's stability. The regime seeks to manage internal identity diversity in ways that prevent any shifts that might threaten the stability of the regime.

5.2. Lebanon Between Political Fragmentation and National Unity

While the Jordanian state was established as a result of colonial political arrangements, and its national identity emerged gradually as an ongoing process, Lebanon's identity had already existed in a diverse and multi-sectarian form. This led to the creation of a state that reflects this sectarian and cultural mosaic. The Lebanese national identity is the product of complex interactions among historical, cultural, and geographical factors, rendering it one of the most distinctive and multifaceted identities in the Arab world. This diversity is not merely a reflection of religious and sectarian coexistence, but also a consequence of the accumulation of layers of civilizational influences and political concepts that have developed over centuries. These influences have crystallized into a renewed and interconnected Lebanese identity, notwithstanding persistent internal and external challenges. This unique amalgamation illustrates Lebanon's capacity to absorb diversity and transform it into a constructive force—albeit within circumstances that can, at times, pose significant challenges to national unity.

Throughout Lebanon's rich and storied history, SNIs have been intricately interwoven with the broader national identity, forming a complex socio-cultural fabric. These SNIs play a pivotal

role in shaping the collective consciousness of the Lebanese society and its geographical dimensions. Lebanon, with its manifold communities and vibrant cultural hues, serves as a mirror reflecting a distinctive diversity that merges religious sects with various national affiliations. This rich heterogeneity is not merely an aspect of Lebanon's historical legacy, but also casts its influence on the country's present and future, manifesting itself in the ongoing trajectories of identity beyond the conventional national framework.

Lebanese identity emerges as a pursuit to reconcile these multiple SNIs, embodying the aspiration for unity within a homeland marked by diverse loyalties. This section delves into the nuanced dynamics that link national identity with subnational affiliations in Lebanon, and how these complex relationships contribute to either the construction the undermining of the national identity project. Over time and through historical experience, sectarianism in Lebanon has become largely normalized and widely accepted. It is now deeply embedded within the collective consciousness and national behavior. This distinguishes Lebanon from many other Arab states, where centralized models of statehood—based on a unified definition of national identity—have traditionally been the norm. In much of the region, Arab nationalism has historically held greater appeal than the concept of states built upon SNIs (Bahout, 2016).

Within the Lebanese social fabric, cultural ties are intricately interwoven with sectarian and political affiliations. In this context, the notion of Lebanese national identity appears as a seemingly endless journey—an ongoing quest to strike a balance between historical legacies and contemporary challenges, between pride in subnational affiliations and the aspiration to construct a shared future under a unified national banner. Understanding this trajectory is essential in the context of Lebanon's diversity, offering valuable insights into how SNIs influence national security in this part of the world. It also enables comparative analysis to identify effective strategies for mitigating conflicts rooted in identity divisions.

To explore this discussion in greater depth, it is imperative to examine the role of external powers in exacerbating SNIs in Lebanon. These interventions have intensified internal strife and further complicated efforts to forge a cohesive national identity. Over time, Lebanon has evolved into a theater of multi-layered foreign involvement, with both regional and international actors seeking to exploit identity cleavages to advance their strategic interests. Such sustained interference has added new layers of tension and fragmentation, making genuine stability and national integration increasingly difficult to attain. The continued influence of these external

factors casts a long shadow over Lebanon's political and social landscape, compounding existing challenges and presenting new obstacles to unity. This enduring interplay between internal fragmentation and external manipulation highlights the fragility of national identity in Lebanon and underscores the urgent need for nuanced, inclusive frameworks that can navigate and transcend entrenched divisions.

In addition, one could argue that Lebanese identity encapsulates a compelling paradox: the pursuit of openness and modernity on one hand, and the preservation of inherited traditions and customs on the other. This duality constitutes a fundamental aspect of the Lebanese character, which strives for cohesion amid a sea of rapid transformations. Accordingly, Lebanese national identity remains a work in progress—a project whose success hinges on the capacity to adapt to constant change while preserving the core values that unite the people of the nation.

Finally, it is essential not to overlook the human dimensions of this discussion. Individuals in Lebanon continue to bear the consequences of this enduring conflict in their everyday lives. These individuals are not merely passive victims of political and sectarian strife; they are also active bearers of an identity that yearns to live in dignity and peace within a homeland that is inclusive of all. Therefore, the study of SNIs and the overarching national identity in Lebanon is not merely an academic exercise. Rather, it constitutes an appeal for a deeper understanding of the principles of coexistence and human solidarity. It is also a call to chart pathways toward a brighter and more hopeful future—for Lebanon and for the region as a whole.

5.2.1. The Formation of Lebanese Identity: A Historical and Geopolitical Perspective

Lebanon's identity has been profoundly shaped by its geopolitical location and its complex religious, ethnic, and regional diversity. Situated at a crossroads between East and West, Lebanon has developed a uniquely rich cultural mosaic, resulting in a national identity that often balances—sometimes precariously—between multiple and occasionally conflicting loyalties. Unlike other Arab states, Lebanon's identity was constructed within a framework of *consociationalism*—a power-sharing arrangement designed to mediate among various sectarian groups. This context has produced a shared Lebanese identity that is continuously negotiated and redefined, molded by historical, political, and economic pressures.

The historical evolution of Lebanese identity is characterized by a series of pivotal events and influences that have shaped the collective consciousness of the nation. In contrast to

neighboring Jordan, where a centralized monarchy has guided the trajectory of national identity, Lebanon's identity formation has followed a more decentralized path. It has been influenced by a wide array of local, regional, and international actors. This history is marked by the complex intersections of religious, ethnic, and geopolitical factors, all of which have contributed to a Lebanese identity that is at once diverse, fragmented, and remarkably resilient.

The situation in Lebanon differed markedly from that of Transjordan during both the Ottoman period and the early years of the Mandate. Unlike Transjordan, which lacked significant cultural and political centers and was largely defined by a tribal structure and a predominantly Bedouin social fabric, Lebanon was a region characterized by rich social and religious diversity. It experienced more dynamic cultural and political interactions. During the Ottoman era, Lebanon was distinguished by its profound religious pluralism, with Druze and Maronite Christians constituting two of the most prominent communities vying to consolidate political influence within the Emirate of Mount Lebanon (Kisirwoni, 1980). This diversity served as a catalyst for the development of a form of administrative autonomy under Ottoman rule, allowing Lebanon a degree of self-governance and relative freedom in managing its internal affairs. Such a political arrangement fostered the rise of strong local religious and political leaderships, which possessed clear political and cultural visions and ambitions.

When Lebanon gained its independence, it did so amid a strong sense of national consciousness and the presence of a politically diverse society that was capable of navigating the challenges posed by deep-rooted sectarian pluralism. The early post-independence period was characterized by the emergence of national symbols and political orientations that simultaneously reflected pride in Lebanese identity and openness toward broader cultural affiliations. This reality stood in stark contrast to the situation in Transjordan, where a coherent sense of national identity had not yet crystallized prior to the establishment of the state. In the latter case, loyalties were largely oriented toward tribal or local sectarian affiliations rather than directed toward a unified national entity.

This section aims to shed light on the pivotal historical junctures that have shaped Lebanon's contemporary identity—an identity that reflects a complex social fabric of coexisting and, at times, contending subnational affiliations. Lebanon, officially known as the Lebanese Republic, possesses a rich and intricate history that mirrors its location at the crossroads of civilizations, cultures, and competing political forces. From antiquity to the Ottoman era and into the modern

period, Lebanon's history has been shaped by the diversity of its population and its strategic geopolitical position.

The historical roots of Lebanese national identity—marked by complexity and multilayered constructions—have evolved through a prolonged process of coexistence among diverse religious and ethnic communities, each possessing its own narrative and distinct cultural heritage. Ancient Phoenician traditions, combined with Arab and Islamic influences, have all contributed to the formation of a uniquely Lebanese identity that is defined by a delicate equilibrium between multiple cultural currents (Fanack, 2010). One of the most illustrative examples of how this diversity has historically manifested is found in the conflicts between the Maronite Christians and the Druze, which became particularly pronounced during the Ottoman period. These conflicts later had a profound impact on the state-building process and are indispensable to understanding the sectarian dynamics that continue to shape Lebanon today (Kawtharani, 1976, pp. 33-36). In this context, Lebanon's identity as a sovereign entity emerged not as a unified national project imposed from above, but rather as a negotiated outcome of internal dynamics and external pressures. The ability of the Lebanese people to maintain a functioning state amidst such diversity reflects both the resilience and the fragility of the Lebanese national project—one that continues to evolve in response to regional tensions, shifting alliances, and internal contestations.

The Ottoman Era

The roots of Lebanon's modern identity can be traced back to the end of the Ottoman era, a period during which the social and political landscape of the region was significantly reshaped. Under Ottoman rule, Lebanon was divided into distinct administrative units, Mount Lebanon, the Beqaa Valley, and the coastal cities, each of which developed unique identities and loyalties. The Ottoman millet system, which granted a degree of autonomy to various religious communities, further entrenched sectarian divisions that would later become institutionalized within Lebanon's political system (Varady , 2017). As the Ottoman Empire weakened in the 19th century, Lebanon emerged as a focal point of competing European interests, with France, Britain, and Russia each seeking to gain influence among the region's Christian and Muslim populations. This foreign intervention deepened sectarian divisions and fostered a sense of Lebanese exceptionalism, which eventually evolved into an emerging national identity (Salibi, 1971).

The Mount Lebanon Civil War of 1860, often overlooked in broader historical narratives, had profound and enduring effects on Lebanon's social fabric and sectarian divisions. The war, which culminated in widespread massacres and violence, marked a critical turning point in the transformation of Lebanon's confessional communities from primarily social-religious entities into politicized sectarian groups. This transformation laid the groundwork for the entrenched sectarianism that continues to characterize the Lebanese political system.

Bishara states that during this phase, the transformation of social sects in Mount Lebanon into a kind of political sects falls within the context of the West's redefinition—or exploitation—of the capitulatory system, and the protection of sects during the final stages of the Ottoman Empire. This eventually led to their full politicization within the only sectarian political system in the Arab region, which has existed in Lebanon from the establishment of the *muṭaṣarrifiyya* system to the present day.[23] Although the current Lebanese constitution, which stems from the Taif Accord, is based on the principle of abolishing political sectarianism, it continues to reproduce it. Even in the history of Lebanon several years after independence, sectarian distribution was more of a melody, and it was possible for an Orthodox Christian such as Habib Abu Shahla in 1947 to assume the position of Speaker of Parliament. However, the Lebanese state institutionalized sectarian quota-sharing in building its institutions, and also institutionalized the formation of sectarian councils with authority within their respective sects, in a manner far more extensive than what was practiced by the French Mandate authorities, which originally planted the roots of the sectarian quota system (Bishara, 2017, p. 43).

Thus, the events of 1860, while often relegated to the peripheries of Lebanese historical consciousness, represent a foundational moment in the sectarianization of Lebanese political life. They marked the beginning of a trajectory in which external intervention, internal fragmentation, and institutional design combined to produce a uniquely confessional state system—one that continues to shape Lebanon's political realities and challenges efforts at reform and national unity. For over 500 years, the Ottoman model of religious-based social organization provided a framework in which ethnic and religious communities enjoyed relative autonomy within their own structures. However, when the modern nation-state vision began to take shape in the Middle East, religious, sectarian, and ethnic identities were sidelined in favor of new national identities and

[23] Mutasarrifate is an Ottoman administrative division.

clearly defined political borders. This transition led to profound complications and disruptions in the stability of traditional identities in the region.

Indeed, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after WWI was a turning point that opened the door for the establishment of the modern Lebanese state (Salibi, 1971). At the time, the Near East witnessed a complex interplay of divergent nationalisms, unstable borders, and socially constructed identities. In the region of Greater Syria (*Bilād al-Shām*), identities such as "Arab," "Syrian," and "Lebanese" overlapped and diverged simultaneously, making it difficult to draw clear boundaries among them. Both ordinary citizens and intellectuals possessed hybrid identities that blended various elements of belonging. Although some powers sought to transplant the Western model of the secular nation-state, these imported identities failed to garner broad support among the population, despite the theoretical arguments advanced in their favor (Danış, 2019).

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations granted France a mandate over Lebanon and Syria. The French Mandate period (1920–1943) was pivotal in shaping the modern state of Lebanon. France aimed to establish a state that would protect Christian communities, particularly the Maronites, while managing the diverse religious and ethnic groups within the territory (Antonius, 1939, pp. 368-375).

On August 31, 1920, General Gouraud issued a decree establishing the State of Greater Lebanon, which incorporated Mount Lebanon along with the regions of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, Marjeyoun, and the so-called "Four Districts": Baalbek, the Beqaa, Hasbaya, and Rachaya (El Koukhi, 2014, p. 20). This expansion brought a significant number of Muslim populations into the newly created entity, a demographic shift that would later influence the political dynamics of Lebanon. The French Mandate period was marked by extensive manipulation of sectarian identities as a means of exerting control. French policies often exacerbated sectarian tensions, thereby laying the groundwork for future conflicts. During this period, covert negotiations and power games between French authorities and local leaders became integral to Lebanon's sectarian politics. These practices contributed to the creation of separate political entities for Druze, Alawite, Antiochian Orthodox, and Lebanese Christian communities (Harris, 2012, pp. 173-175).

The French authorities openly favored Christian leaders in Lebanon, shaping the country's power-sharing structure to privilege their allies among the Christian factions. This favoritism institutionalized sectarian preference and further cemented a political order that revolved around sectarian alliances rather than civic or national consensus. The struggle for independence from

France during the 1930s and 1940s was a decisive period in the development of Lebanese identity, as it strengthened the collective desire for sovereignty that transcended sectarian lines. However, this unity was short-lived, as Lebanon quickly descended into sectarian competition for power after gaining independence. Unlike Jordan, where the Hashemite monarchy was able to serve as a unifying symbol for national identity, Lebanon's lack of a central figure or institution to embody the nation led to a fragmented sense of belonging. This vacuum was filled by many sectarian leaders, each promoting a version of Lebanese identity that aligned with the interests of their community and historical experiences. This decentralization resulted in the emergence of multiple, sometimes competing, narratives about what it means to be Lebanese, with each sect interpreting national events and symbols through its unique historical lens and worldview. Additionally, French recruitment policy was based on the principle of "divide and rule," which confined recruitment to minority groups. There was a clear official policy to prevent the "Arab Sunnis"—the presumed majority—from joining the special forces in the Near East, which numbered approximately 12,000 soldiers between 1926 and 1939 (Fanack, 2010).

Like in Jordan, the colonial legacy left a noticeable impact on Lebanon. The post-Ottoman and post-colonial Lebanese identity was not merely the product of cohesive and unified national sentiments, but rather a construction that oscillated between the desires of regional powers and local sectarian divisions. In contrast to Jordan, where a single ruling family shaped the national discourse, Lebanon's identity was shaped by multiple influential families and sectarian leaders, often with divergent aspirations. This pluralistic system introduced a paradox: a collective desire for Lebanese sovereignty, yet fragmented in its interpretation due to the varying religious and ideological foundations of its society.

The Road to Independence

In 1926, the French mandate authorities introduced a constitution that established Lebanon as a republic with a parliamentary system "The Constitution of 1926". This constitution laid the groundwork for Lebanon's political structure, including the principle of *confessionalism*, which allocated political power among the country's religious sects. This system aimed to ensure representation and balance among the diverse sects, but it also entrenched sectarian divisions within the political system (Harris, 2012, pp. 150; 184-186). The constitution stipulated that the

President of the Republic must be a Maronite Christian, while the Speaker of Parliament should be a Shia Muslim, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Minister of Defense a Druze.

The WWII brought significant changes to Lebanon. In 1940, the Vichy government took control of Lebanon following the fall of France. However, in 1941, the Free French forces and the British ousted the Vichy regime, paving the way for Lebanon to move toward independence. The Lebanese were among the first to achieve independence. General elections were held in Lebanon in the summer of 1943, and the new parliament elected Bishara al-Khouri as president. The new government removed all French mandate powers from the constitution. Efforts by the French to arrest Khouri and his government, and to reassert their powers, met with national resistance, reflecting the policies that led to Lebanon's full independence (Rogan, 2016, pp. 56-57). Despite this, pressure for full independence grew, culminating in Lebanon's declaration of independence on November 22, 1943.

The unwritten "National Pact of 1943" agreement laid the foundation for Lebanon's sectarian political system. It established a power-sharing arrangement between Christians and Muslims, with the presidency reserved for a Maronite Christian, the prime ministership for a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament for a Shiite Muslim. The goal of this arrangement was to strike a balance between the interests of the various sects and ensure stability. However, it also institutionalized sectarian divisions and paved the way for future conflicts (Peretz, 1966). The sectarian system established by the National Pact of 1943 entrenched these divisions within the Lebanese political framework. While the system aimed to ensure representation for all religious sects, it also perpetuated sectarian loyalties and conflicts, complicating the process of forming a unified national identity (Rabil , 2011, pp. 15-16).

The Sunni leadership in Lebanon accepted the concept of an independent Lebanese state, provided it was acceptable to the Maronites, contingent on the abolition of the French mandate. Following the increasing estrangement from the French, large numbers of Beirut's Christian social and economic elites now supported the SPS arrangements within the framework of an independent Lebanese state. Moreover, the continued French presence led to a degree of reconciliation and cooperation between those advocating for Arab unity and Lebanese nationalists. Arab nationalist leaders such as Riad al-Solh and other Arab unifiers recognized the need for moderation in their approach to garner support from Christians in Lebanon, aiming to end French control. At the same time, many Maronite leaders acknowledged the necessity of accommodating Arab nationalism to

some extent, in their pursuit of self-governance and the liberation of Lebanon from colonial rule (Stewart, 2012).

However, the agreement on the simultaneous withdrawal of British and French forces was not reached until after another crisis in 1945. This was completed by the end of 1946, and Lebanon became fully independent (Etheredge, 2011, p. 95). Stewart argues that, despite the “concessions” made during this period, the achievement of independence was largely the work of foreign powers, with the Lebanese elite's compliance. Lebanon's “independence” was not created through social mobilization or collective struggle, a reality that deeply influenced the formation of nationalism and identity in the young state (Stewart, 2012). On the other hand, some countries found it difficult to accept the emergence of new states on lands that were once ruled as part of a unified territory. Syria, for example, did not reconcile with the French decision to carve Lebanon out as an independent state. To demonstrate this opposition, Syria did not open its embassy in Beirut.

Syria viewed Lebanon as part of its natural extension, clinging to the historical and geographical ties between the two countries. This perception made it see Lebanon's independence as a potential threat to its unity and regional influence, prompting continuous intervention in Lebanese affairs. This diplomatic situation did not prevent Syria from maintaining a large military presence in Lebanon until 2005 (Kaci, 2019). At that time, the issue of the “pro-Syria or anti-Syria stance” emerged as the central axis of Lebanese politics for the remainder of the 20th century (and even to this day, to some extent). Different nationalist ideologies with varying visions of identity gained increasing popularity among the people. The main issue stemmed from a conflict between three groups: Syrian nationalists, who wanted to transform Syria into a secular “Greater Syria” encompassing Lebanon, Iraq, and even parts of Turkey; Arab nationalists, who envisioned all Arabs living together under a federal structure with Syria at the center; and Lebanese nationalists, who argued that Lebanon had a distinct Western national identity independent of these structures (Harris, 2012). The roots of these three ideologies stemmed from the same source, with followers speaking the same language and coming from nearly identical ethnic backgrounds. They were accepted by the same local circle, and their shared cultural memory included common memories and “forgotten elements” (Danış, 2019).

In the early years of independence, Lebanon made efforts to develop its political and economic infrastructure. Beirut emerged as a vibrant commercial and financial hub, often referred to as the “Paris of the Middle East.” The country's free-market economy and banking secrecy laws

attracted investments, positioning Lebanon as a center for trade and finance in the region. The 1950s and 1960s were marked by relative prosperity and stability, but the underlying sectarian tensions remained (Harris, 2012, pp. 194-195). Lebanon's first president, Bishara al-Khouri, remained in power until 1952. Then, Camille Chamoun, who served as president during the 1958 crisis, played a complex role in Lebanese politics. His alignment with Western powers, opposition to Nasserism, and the subsequent U.S. intervention in Lebanon were pivotal in understanding the dynamics of the Cold War in the Middle East. The secret dealings and the extent of American influence on Chamoun's policies are areas that require further investigation (Kisirwoni, 1980). The 1958 crisis ended with a consensus that the government could not succeed without representation from the Kataeb (Christian) party and Chamoun's supporters. Moreover, the acceptance of broader representation was indicative of a shared interest in preserving Lebanon as a state (Stewart, 2012).

In light of the unstable conditions during this period, Fouad Chehab, the commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), was elected president. Chehab succeeded in restoring calm without resorting to violence. In 1963, a military coup in Syria ended the United Arab Republic, and shortly thereafter, a small group of Syrian-loyal Lebanese officers attempted a coup in Lebanon, though it was unsuccessful (Fanack, 2010).

The civil war that broke out in 1958, which collided along fault lines between these internal and external points of tension, demonstrated the fragility of the Lebanese state, while once again highlighting the resilience of traditions and allegiances that proved impregnable. The settlement that ended the conflict had far-reaching consequences in the years that followed. At the same time, the allegiances within the Lebanese government were loose and fluid, with the focus being on high-level politics, leading to political alienation and hindering loyalty to the state. Chehab's presidency, which followed Chamoun's administration, marked the beginning of a new era in Lebanese politics. However, while these efforts helped Lebanon emerge from its crisis, the fundamental question regarding the precise nature of Lebanon, years after the National Pact was concluded, remained unanswered. Instead, Lebanon settled for mere formal reforms. Nevertheless, Chehab's reforms and Lebanon's economic success during that time had an impact on nationalism. Supporters of Lebanese nationalism exploited this economic success and referenced Lebanon's Phoenician past to argue that Lebanon represented much more than just a supposed Arab entity (Stewart, 2012). This, coupled with the rise of Arab nationalism, led to a renewed polarization

between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon. It undermined attachment to the state, though not necessarily the desire for coexistence. In fact, central references of identity during the 1958 civil war remained largely tribal and familial. Despite slipping into what was described as a sectarian war, the contact between Muslims and Christians was never fully severed.

Although trust in the state required for the formation of secure identities was absent in 1958, these requirements were met through the constants of tribe, clan, and family. In this sense, the people of Lebanon had long been aware of their identities and allegiances, and the struggle for Lebanon remained in the hands of higher political interests and leaders concerned with their own self-interests. After that, the 1967 June War brought with it thousands of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon. Many of them settled in southern Lebanon, near the Israeli border. As a result, the Israeli military began launching frequent raids on Lebanese territories to target Palestinian camps, where the *fidāʾiyyīn* were carrying out military operations inside Israel. The LAF demonstrated their inability to control these camps. In this context, Nasser offered to mediate between the Palestinians and the Lebanese authorities. This led to the signing of the Cairo Agreement in 1969.

In conclusion, the post-Ottoman and French mandate period complicated the process of forming Lebanese identity. The French administration sought to promote a distinctive Lebanese nationalism that was separate from the broader Arab identity propagated by neighboring Syria and other parts of the Arab world. The French redrew the borders of Lebanon to include a variety of religious and ethnic groups, resulting in the creation of a state that was neither entirely Christian nor entirely Muslim. “Greater Lebanon” was intended to serve as a stronghold for Christians in the Middle East, but it also included significant numbers of Sunni, Shiite, and Druze populations, which paved the way for a national identity that had to reconcile these diverse elements.

In Lebanon, the intersection of sectarian identity and political representation made discussions of identity more contentious compared to Jordan. Continuous negotiations between religious and ethnic groups led to the formation of a fragile Lebanese unity, swaying between solidarity and division. Sectarian identity both protected and fragmented Lebanon, as politically structured communities provided security and representation but also limited integration between the sects. While this framework contributed to state stability, it simultaneously reinforced inherent tensions, especially when external forces or regional conflicts threatened to reorder or empower certain groups, reshaping national discourse and perceptions of belonging.

The discourse of resistance, particularly in the face of foreign intervention and regional hegemony, became a defining aspect of Lebanese identity. In contrast to Jordan, where the focus was often on internal unity and national sovereignty, Lebanese identity was largely shaped by the idea of resistance, with movements such as Hezbollah, which status as a "Non-State Hybrid Armed Actors", intertwining sectarian loyalty with a broader national discourse. This fusion of ideology and identity led to a complex relationship with the state, where national loyalty was often tested against sectarian and ideological commitments.

Sectarian Alignments and the Lebanese Civil War

Understanding Lebanese identity necessitates an examination of the complex interplay of factors that have contributed to its formation. Among these are Lebanon's long-standing openness to diverse cultures, its experience with various political systems, and the flexibility of its social fabric. These elements have coalesced to create a dynamic identity that continuously interacts with both local and regional realities. One of the most significant of these factors is the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), which stands as a pivotal moment in the shaping of Lebanon's identity. The war exposed the fragility of Lebanese unity and underscored the deeply rooted divisions within society. The civil war and its aftermath compelled many Lebanese to confront fundamental questions about the viability of a shared national identity within a state so deeply divided along sectarian lines. In the post-war period, the Taif Accord sought to address these challenges by reaffirming the principles of *consociationalism*, a power-sharing arrangement meant to maintain sectarian balance. However, it simultaneously entrenched sectarianism as a permanent feature of the Lebanese political system.

As a result, Lebanese identity remains a complex and multilayered construct, continuously shaped by historical legacies, the enduring challenges of sectarianism, and evolving regional dynamics. The legacy of the civil war continues to reverberate in the collective consciousness of the Lebanese people, reinforcing identity narratives that are often in tension with the ideal of a unified nation-state. The tension between aspiration and fragmentation remains a defining characteristic of Lebanese national identity, making its study not only a matter of historical interest but also a pressing concern for those seeking to understand the prospects for peace, stability, and cohesion in Lebanon. Lebanon entered a new phase in its deepening crisis, one rooted primarily in the structural contradictions of its prevailing economic system. These contradictions began

producing devastating effects on the national economy as a whole. Consequently, it was only natural that the socioeconomic crisis would mark the beginning of a transformative process—one in which various societal sectors, initially formulating their demands in isolation, gradually began to articulate these demands within a more integrated framework. This shift laid the groundwork for a general popular movement, wherein each stage of growth organically propelled its socio-economic struggles toward politicization—that is, toward a transition from purely material demands to broader political expression.

In the context of a country like Lebanon, where the political system tends to interpret and frame collective demands through a sectarian lens, and where systemic structures compel political mobilization to express itself along confessional lines, it was also expected that this period would witness a parallel rise in sectarian-based protest movements. These movements typically adopted slogans aimed at addressing the perceived marginalization or deprivation of specific sectarian communities. However, it became increasingly evident that such struggles, despite their sectarian appearance, were effectively narrowing the space available for broader socio-economic contestation—conflicts that, in reality, permeated every domain of Lebanese public life (Fattouni, 2013, pp. 122-124).

The Lebanese Civil War stands among the most critical internal conflicts of the modern era, with its reverberations still being felt and feared to this day. Spanning from 1975 to 1990, the war was a multifaceted and deeply entrenched conflict, driven by a confluence of political, sectarian, and economic factors. Among these, the increasing presence of Palestinian refugees and the growing influence of the PLO in Lebanon played a catalytic role in exacerbating pre-existing tensions (Smith, 2013, pp. 258-259). Clashes between Christian militias and Palestinian groups, combined with escalating political instability, triggered the outbreak of civil war in April 1975. The conflict quickly spiraled, drawing in an array of sectarian militias and foreign actors, including Syria and Israel (Hiro, 1993, pp. 15-18). What followed was a protracted and devastating war characterized by what came to be known as “identity-based killing”—the systematic targeting of individuals based on their sectarian affiliation (Fanack, 2010).

The war not only inflicted massive human and material losses but also further fragmented Lebanon’s fragile social fabric. It institutionalized sectarian divisions, disrupted state authority, and entrenched the logic of communal representation as the dominant mode of political organization. These dynamics continue to shape Lebanese politics and identity to this day, raising

fundamental questions about the sustainability of national unity and the prospects for inclusive governance in a society still haunted by the ghosts of its civil war (Hiro, 1993, pp. 18-20).

The Lebanese Civil War is frequently portrayed in overly simplistic terms as a sectarian conflict that pitted Christians against Muslims. However, such a reductionist view fails to capture the complexity and multidimensional nature of the war. In reality, the conflict comprised a series of overlapping and evolving confrontations involving left-wing and right-wing factions, along with the direct involvement of numerous external actors, including the PLO, Syria, Israel, and the US (Nagle & Clancy, 2019).

Although the origins of the conflict were not inherently sectarian, the war nonetheless accelerated a process of intense sectarian polarization within Lebanese society. The main warring parties—including state elites, proxy actors, and various militia groups—systematically manipulated and constructed ethnoreligious identities. These identities were often reinforced through extreme acts of violence, which were strategically employed to fragment society along sectarian lines in pursuit of self-serving objectives. This manipulation of identity soon gave way to widespread acts of ethnic cleansing, abductions, targeted assassinations, massacres, and retaliatory killings—all carried out under the banner of sectarian affiliation. As these practices intensified, the sectarianization of society became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sectarian group identities hardened rapidly and were politicized in ways that generated large-scale, antagonistic forms of group mobilization.

In the absence of a functioning central state, warlords capitalized on the vacuum to entrench alternative forms of governance within their sectarian enclaves. These warlords, often affiliated with militias, established de facto political fiefdoms in which they operated parallel institutions and provided a range of social services to the communities they claimed to protect. Virtually every aspect of daily life—including healthcare, education, waste collection, postal services, electricity and gas supply, and even childcare—fell under the control of sectarian militias. By supplying these basic services, the militias entrenched their coercive authority and tightened their grip over war-exhausted populations. This system of militia-based governance not only substituted for the state but also deepened the sectarian divide by reinforcing the loyalty of communities through a combination of service provision and fear. The war thus institutionalized sectarian identities in a manner that continues to shape Lebanon's political and social landscape today. While it is certainly true that the roots of Lebanon's crisis lie fundamentally in the nature of its political, economic,

and social system, and in the systemic crisis that plagued the country on the eve of the civil war in 1975, it is equally important to recognize the significant role played by Lebanon's sectarian structure in both igniting and perpetuating the war. It was, unequivocally, a civil war in the fullest sense of the term, one fundamentally rooted in a profound conflict over the existing political order and the foundational principles upon which that order rested (Fattouni, 2013).

Causes and Outbreak of the Civil War

The roots of the Lebanese Civil War can be traced to the relocation of the PLO from Amman to Beirut following the events of "Black September" in 1970, when violent clashes erupted between Palestinian factions and the Jordanian army. Once in Lebanon, the PLO established semi-autonomous bases –complete with armed fighters, military infrastructure, and accompanying families– primarily in the South and in refugee camps surrounding Beirut. These bases coexisted uneasily with long-established Palestinian refugee communities displaced in 1948.

The fragile political balance in Lebanon, long dependent on sectarian accommodation, began to unravel under the weight of this new militarized presence. The PLO's armed operations against Israel, launched from Lebanese territory, provoked deadly retaliatory airstrikes that inflicted significant harm upon the civilian population. This, in turn, triggered growing domestic opposition to the Palestinian presence, particularly among right-wing Christian factions. These factions coalesced around three influential political families: The Frangiehs in the north, the Shamouns in the Chouf region south of Beirut, and the Gemayels in the Metn area north of the capital. The latter two had already reconstituted their base of support within the Phalange Party (Kataeb), which was backed by a well-armed militia (Menargues, 2006, p. 10). Conversely, the PLO enjoyed robust support from Arab nationalist and leftist Lebanese parties—many of which were led by Christian intellectuals—aligned ideologically with pro-Moscow circles, as well as from Islamist Lebanese factions invoking Pan-Arab unity. Thus, the Lebanese landscape rapidly polarized along sectarian and ideological lines, with regional powers deepening the divide. Tensions eventually erupted into overt violence on Sunday, April 13, 1975, marking the official outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (Menargues, 2006, pp. 10-11).

The civil war can be considered to have gone through three main stages: In Phase One (1975–1978), sectarian conflict escalated and Lebanon's internal fragmentation increased. The Lebanese Civil War began in 1975 with rising sectarian and ethnic tensions. It started with the "Black

Saturday" massacre, when the Kataeb Christian militia attacked Palestinians and Muslims in Beirut in retaliation for the killing of four of its members. This sparked widespread clashes between various militia factions, leading to the de facto division of Beirut into the Christian-controlled East and the Muslim-majority West, surrounded by Palestinian refugee camps.

In Phase Two (1978-1982), Israel intervened into the conflict in the south. By 1978, Lebanon's security situation had deteriorated to the point where the country was unable to control the southern region, leading to the Israeli Operation Litani. This period also coincided with significant regional shifts, particularly Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977, which had major repercussions on the Middle East dynamics. The third variable was on the very ground of Lebanon, which became a battlefield for regional and global conflicts, with key parties occupying this arena in the form of proxy warfare. The presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon became a reality at the Riyadh Conference in 1976, with the participation of symbolic forces from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, to give these forces the status of Arab forces. Additionally, the Syrian forces facilitated the passage of Iraqi and Iranian aid.

In Phase Three (1982–1989), Israel invaded the country and committed the crimes of the Sabra and Shatila. In 1982, Israel launched Operation Peace for Galilee, aiming to destroy the PLO and expel Palestinian fighters from Lebanon. This phase saw significant shifts in Lebanon's internal and external power dynamics.

The Lebanese Civil War represents one of the most complex conflicts in the history of the Middle East. It was the result of a convergence of deep internal factors and powerful external influences. To understand the roots of this war, it is essential to analyze the internal and external factors that paved the way for external interventions, which eventually led to the outbreak of the conflict. The first factor is sectarian and confessional composition of the country. Lebanon is a country of multiple sects, and its modern establishment was based on a confessional formula that emerged during the French Mandate in 1943 through the National Pact, which distributed political positions among the main sects (Maronites, Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze). Although this system aimed to maintain a balance between the sects, it instead entrenched sectarian identities rather than creating a unified national identity. Over the years, these sectarian structures exacerbated tensions between different communities, especially with the demographic changes in the country, without any amendments to the National Pact to reflect these changes. This growing sectarian division fueled a sense of injustice and contributed to the underlying causes of the civil war.

The second factor is social and economic inequalities. The uneven distribution of wealth and development was one of the key factors that fueled social discontent in Lebanon. Rural areas, particularly those with a high concentration of Shiite and Druze communities, suffered from economic neglect compared to urban areas like Beirut, where Christian and Sunni sects were concentrated. This economic disparity led to feelings of marginalization and exclusion among some sects, fueling demands for political and economic reforms. The uneven development also contributed to growing frustration, particularly among the Shiite population, which felt politically and economically sidelined.

The third factor is political stagnation and the sectarian quota system. The political structure in Lebanon, which relies on a sectarian quota system, was unable to respond effectively to the increasing social and economic challenges. This political stagnation deepened sectarian divides and turned political conflict into an existential struggle for each sect. As a result, Lebanese political institutions became incapable of managing internal diversity effectively, creating a power vacuum that was exploited by external forces. The inability of the political system to address issues of governance, reform, and national identity further exacerbated the situation.

The fourth factor is regional and international interventions. External powers played pivotal roles in fueling the Lebanese conflict. Syria, viewing Lebanon as part of its historical sphere of influence, sought to strengthen its control by supporting certain Lebanese factions against others. On the other hand, Israel sought to eliminate security threats posed by Palestinian armed factions operating in Lebanon, which led to multiple military interventions. Additionally, international powers such as the US and the Soviet Union competed for influence in Lebanon as part of the broader context of the Cold War, turning Lebanon into a battleground for conflicting global interests.

The fifth factor is the Palestinian issue and its impact on Lebanon. After the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan during the Black September events of 1970, the organization moved to Lebanon, where it established a base of operations against Israel. The presence of armed Palestinian groups in Lebanon contributed to destabilizing the internal situation, as Lebanese factions formed opposing alliances, some in support of the Palestinian cause and others in opposition. These divisions were further fueled by external regional and international support for different Lebanese factions. The growing conflict between pro-Palestinian and anti-Palestinian groups within

Lebanon became a critical factor in the outbreak of the civil war, as it undermined the authority of the central state.

The sixth factor is the interplay of internal divisions and external influences. Lebanon's deep internal divisions, which were not only the result of domestic policies but also of a long history of external interventions, made the country vulnerable to multiple foreign influences. External powers exploited these divisions to advance their own agendas, leading to the internationalization of the conflict and transforming it into a proxy war between regional and global powers. As external actors intervened, they exacerbated existing tensions and manipulated local factions to serve their interests.

The seventh factor is the failure of Lebanese elites to reach a political settlement. The failure of Lebanon's political elites to reach a comprehensive political settlement that addressed the roots of the internal conflict left the country open to continued violence. The inability of the Lebanese political system to reform itself and adapt to changing circumstances created a situation where the war could perpetuate. With increasing external intervention, Lebanon became an open battlefield where local and international interests intertwined, making the process of ending the war incredibly complex. Years of negotiations and intense diplomacy were required to bring about a cessation of hostilities, but even after the war officially ended, Lebanon remained deeply divided, and many of the issues that caused the conflict remained unresolved.

The Lebanese Civil War was not simply the result of internal disputes; it was deeply influenced by external forces and the broader geopolitical context. Internal sectarian divisions, economic inequalities, and political stagnation, combined with the intervention of regional and international powers, turned Lebanon into a theater of conflict where local and external interests clashed. The war's complex nature highlights the challenges of managing a fragmented society in a turbulent geopolitical environment, with the lasting effects of both internal and external factors continuing to shape Lebanon’s political and social landscape.

The Taif Accord: The Second Republic (1989) and Post-Civil War Period

In the late 1980s, the term *“Lebanonization”* entered the political lexicon as derogatory term used to describe the political, social, and economic situations that seemed beyond resolution. At the same time, Beirut became a popular symbol of chaos and destruction. However, a new chapter for Lebanon's future began to unfold when the Lebanese Parliament, with some amendments,

approved the Taif Accord on August 21, 1990. The Taif Accord, which had been signed in 1989, marked the beginning of the end of the Civil War. This agreement, which was drafted by a committee headed by King Hussein of Jordan, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and President Chadli Bendjedid of Algeria (Fanack, 2010), and mediated by Saudi Arabia with support from the US and Syria, restructured Lebanon's political system. The agreement reaffirmed the principles of the National Pact but also transferred some powers from the presidency to the Cabinet in an effort to reduce sectarian tensions. It called for the disarmament of militias and the withdrawal of foreign troops, although Syrian forces remained in Lebanon until 2005 (Bahout, 2016).

The legacy of the Taif Accord is particularly significant as it represents the first in what is known as the second wave of power-sharing agreements that emerged in the post-Cold War era. These agreements such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995), Northern Ireland (1998), and Iraq (2005) differ from earlier waves of power-sharing arrangements. As noted by Bogaards, while power-sharing was once seen as a way to make democracy function in a country divided along linguistic, religious, or ethnic lines, since the end of the Cold War, it has increasingly been viewed as a means to establish peace in post-conflict countries (Bogaards, 2017). This shift required a change in the main role of consociationalism, from one aimed at maintaining peace and stabilizing democracy to a post-conflict framework that seeks to generate peace after violence and supports the (re)establishment of democracy and state-building (Nagle & Clancy, 2019).

At the end of the Lebanese Civil War and the introduction of constitutional amendments in November 1989, the Second Republic era began with the presidency of the Maronite René Moawad. However, he was assassinated just days after assuming office in a region under Syrian control at the time. The political struggle intensified with the presidency of his successor, Elias Hrawi, especially under the government of Omar Karami, which was formed under Syrian sponsorship but faced rejection from Hezbollah, which was aligned with Iran (Fanack, 2010).

The agreement was structured around three guiding principles: (1) The establishment of a new balance between Lebanon's unity and its political system and the diversity of its political and social structure, (2) the transfer of executive power from the presidency to the Council of Ministers as a collective body, and (3) the principle of equality between Muslims and Christians in Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and senior positions in the civil service, regardless of future demographic changes.

Furthermore, the Taif Accord laid the foundation for special relations between Lebanon and Syria, with significant implications for the political environment in both countries (Nagle & Clancy, 2019) On the other hand, many Lebanese hoped that the agreement would signify the renewal of Lebanon and its "Second Republic," while others viewed the document as a more conservative version of the 1943 National Pact. Despite emphasizing national unity, the Taif Accord entrenched the traditional sectarian political system in Lebanon, dividing power among the country's religious sects and legalizing Syria's dominance over Lebanon. It did not address the ongoing political, social, economic, and religious issues that had led to the war. Post-war Lebanon became a culture of forgetting and denial, where wealth accumulation, social status, and sectarian became more important than social justice and equality before the law (Bahout, 2016). Despite this, some historians argue that it was the Gulf War of 1990-1991, fought by the US and its Western allies against Saddam Hussein and his regime, that truly marked the end of the Lebanese Civil War (Fanack, 2010). In reality, the Taif Accord institutionalized sectarian dynamics. It did so by re-establishing a power-sharing arrangement that incorporated the major Christian and Muslim sects in Lebanon. However, Taif represented an updated version of a long series of power-sharing agreements designed to manage Lebanon's sectarian diversity (Nagle & Clancy, 2019).

Moreover, the Taif Accord ended Maronite supremacy, but in return, it gave rise to a growing and competitive dominance between the two main Muslim sects. This occurred even before Sunni-Shiite polarization became a distinctive feature of the Middle East. For reasons related to Syrian influence, the international parties guaranteeing the Taif Accord unanimously agreed to allow Syria to impose de facto tutelage over Lebanon and its political life. Syria played a permanent, balancing, and nuanced role between Christians and Muslims in general, and particularly between Maronites, Sunnis, and Shiites. This role contributed to the tensions that persist today, fully benefiting from the freedom of action granted to it. Most importantly, Syria's priorities solely defined its management of Lebanon. These priorities were of two types. First, regional priority is concerned Syria's position on the Middle Eastern chessboard and its relations with the Arab world, as well as the West, especially the US. Second, internal balance is related to the delicate internal balance within Syria itself, which was manipulated by then-President Hafez al-Assad, and increasingly influenced by his concerns regarding securing his succession.

Foundations and Challenges in Rebuilding the Lebanese State

The Taif Accord did not lead to national reconciliation or unity in Lebanon; rather, it remains a settlement between various factions at the expense of the Lebanese people. The political system in Lebanon continues to be deeply affected by sectarianism, with power divided among different religious sects. Although the system was designed to ensure representation and balance, it often results in stagnation and inefficiency. Political alliances change frequently, and the country has witnessed periods of cooperation as well as intense competition between its leaders.

In their analysis of the Taif Accord, both Nagel and Clancy (2019) present an idea that reflects part of the dilemma within Lebanese society. They argue that power-sharing has long provided a system designed to organize conflicting visions about the ownership of the state itself. The logic behind the successive waves of power-sharing in Lebanon is based on several interrelated principles: The nation contains an extremely high level of ethnic and religious diversity. This pluralism, if not institutionally protected, leads to conflict between groups. Power-sharing must primarily involve the political elites representing the major religious sects. Thus, power-sharing can be seen as generating dynamics that are path-dependent, institutionalizing sectarian identity as the cornerstone of state-society relations.

Table 5.3 Sectarian Composition of Post-Taif Agreement

Christians	Seats	Muslims	Seats
Maronites	34	Shi'a	27
Greek Orthodox	14	Sunnis	27
Greek Catholic	8	Druze	8
Armenian Orthodox	5	Alawi	2
Armenian Catholic	1		
Protestants	1		
Christian Minorities	1		
Total Christians	64	Total Muslims	64

As part of maintaining this balance, the quota system, in particular, reserves executive and legislative positions and distributes them strictly among the main groups, an arrangement that is reflected in the public sector. At the executive level, the positions of the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of the Parliament ("the Troika") are designated for the Maronite Christians, Sunnis, and Shiites, respectively. The quota system applies to 30 ministerial positions and 128 seats in the

national parliament. Parliamentary quotas are activated by the state's electoral law –reformed for the 2018 elections– which divides Lebanon into 15 electoral districts. A certain number of seats in each district are allocated to specific sects based on the estimated sectarian demographics of the area. The quota system is also repeated throughout the public sector. To maintain a balance of power, collective veto rights are incorporated into the power-sharing structure because a two-thirds majority is required for important decisions made by the Cabinet (e.g., international treaties and budgets) and for the parliament to pass constitutional amendments. Finally, under the terms of partial independence, the constitution transfers legal authority to the religious leaders of sectarian groups concerning a range of personal matters, including marriage, divorce, and child custody rights.

The confessional structure of the Lebanese political system is one of its most defining characteristics, having been institutionalized through two key agreements: The National Pact and the Taif Accord. The table above outlines the distribution of major political offices based on sectarian affiliation, as stipulated by both agreements, revealing the continuity of this system over time with some adjustments reflecting demographic and political changes. The National Pact, an unwritten agreement reached at the time of Lebanon's independence from the French Mandate, established a SPS formula to ensure representation of the country's diverse religious communities. According to this pact, the President must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, the Speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim, and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament a Greek Orthodox Christian. Regarding parliamentary representation, the pact granted a 6:5 ratios in favor of Christians over Muslims, reflecting the political and demographic balance at the time. Later, the Taif Accord was introduced as a means to end the Lebanese Civil War and implement significant reforms in the political system, while maintaining the core confessional framework. Although the sectarian distribution of top political offices remained unchanged, the agreement adjusted parliamentary representation by instituting equal representation between Christians and Muslims, in an effort to promote sectarian balance and political equity among Lebanon's main communities. This comparison between the National Pact and the Taif Accord highlights the persistence of Lebanon's consociational and sectarian-based governance, albeit with reforms aimed at addressing the evolving realities of Lebanese society. While such arrangements have contributed to preserving stability, they also pose ongoing challenges to the development of a civil and institutional state (Vaughan, 2018, p. 3).

Table 5.4 Confessional Requirements for Major Political Offices According to the National Pact and Taif Accord

Agreement	President	Prime Minister	Speaker of Parliament	Deputy Speaker of the Parliament	Proportion of Parliament Members
National Pact	Maronite Catholic	Sunni Muslim	Shia Muslim	Greek Orthodox	6:5 Christian:Muslim
Taif Accord	Maronite Catholic	Sunni Muslim	Shia Muslim	Greek Orthodox	1:1 Christian:Muslim

The Taif Accord prohibited any authority or policy that could undermine the "pact" of "mutual coexistence" between all Lebanese sects. This foundational clause essentially functions as a mutual sectarian veto on key internal and external policy choices. It was introduced to guide the decision-making process toward greater consensus and to protect against the domination of the system by either Muslims or Christians. Other constitutional amendments introduced by the Taif Accord changed the structure of the decision-making process in the post-war period (Salloukh, Barakat, Al-Habbal, Khattab, & Mikaelian, 2015, p. 25). The Taif Accord represents a crucial moment in Lebanon's history, as it brought an end to the civil war and set the stage for the country's post-war reconstruction. Its significance lies not only in its immediate impact but also in the way it shaped Lebanon's political system for decades to come. While the agreement succeeded in halting the violence and fostering a degree of stability, it also reinforced the sectarian divisions that had been at the heart of the conflict. As Lebanon continues to grapple with the complexities of its political system, the Taif Accord remains a foundational document, shaping the country's approach to power-sharing, governance, and national reconciliation.

5.2.2. The SNIs in Lebanon

The formation of nation-states in the Middle East was accompanied by significant risks and diversity, particularly following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which fragmented into sovereign and independent states. This transformation led to a clear intersection between religious identity and ethnic and linguistic affiliations. In Lebanon, for example, Maronite Christians sought to distinguish themselves from the dominant Arab-Islamic identity of the region. Conversely, the

Copts in Egypt adopted the Arab-Islamic national identity while maintaining their Coptic identity as a distinct ethnic and religious concept.

Since the 7th century, Lebanon has stood out as a haven for persecuted Christian and Muslim sects, contributing to the development of a uniquely diverse religious and social structure. This diversity is reflected in the country's political system, where religion and politics are intricately and sensitively intertwined. As such, the demographic composition of Lebanon's religious sects remains a matter of great significance, especially in light of the varying estimates and data surrounding the sectarian makeup. Generally, Muslims constitute the majority of the population; however, the internal sectarian distribution remains a persistent political and social focal point.

The relationship between ethnicity and religion continues to be a subject of debate in the contemporary Arab world. The rise of SNIs has often played a significant role in the weakening or fragmentation of the state. When the state fails to provide security and essential services, citizens tend to turn to communities that offer them a sense of safety and belonging. In this context, SNIs—such as sectarianism and tribalism—have played a prominent role in the politics of Arab states like Lebanon and Yemen, both of which suffer from chronic state weakness and ongoing instability (Gause, 2013).

Lebanon, in particular, represents a nation with a deeply diverse and complex social fabric, where SNIs intersect and influence every aspect of political, social, and cultural life. These identities were not formed in isolation, but rather emerged from Lebanon's unique geopolitical context, colonial legacy, and dynamic internal, regional, and international interactions. As a result, Lebanese identity has become a multidimensional construct, oscillating between national loyalty and sectarian or tribal affiliations (Mahmood, 2012). Despite the diversity of sectarian and religious identities in the Arab region prior to the 19th century, their implications were confined to the social sphere, primarily manifesting in ritual differences and traditions. These sectarian and religious identities did not become politicized or institutionalized until later, giving rise to what we now refer to as sectarianism. In this sense, sectarianism as a constructed or compounded phenomenon has had and continues to have a significant impact on the formation of societies and the organization of political and social life (Rizq, 2022).

This study relies on classifying Lebanese SNIs into components that can be divided into two main groups, as illustrated in the following table. These groups encompass identities shaped by a variety of overlapping factors—political, social, cultural, and economic. This classification allows

for a more nuanced understanding of how these identities intersect to form the complex social and political fabric of the Lebanese state, revealing the structural challenges and potential pathways for social cohesion and political stability.

Table 5.5 Lebanese SNIs Components

Group 1: Subjective-Identities	**Lebanese Identity**	Tribal Identity	Includes tribes that are considered part of the core social and political fabric.
		The Phoenician	Signifies an ancient cultural identity influencing Lebanese national and cultural narratives / Greek heritage
		Indigenous Cultural Elements	Lebanon's identity has been shaped by various civilizations, including Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman.
		Cultural Nationalism	Movements emphasizing the uniqueness of Lebanese culture, language, and traditions, distinct from others.
	Sectarian Identity	Maronite	Largest Christian sect, centered in Keserwan and eastern Beirut.
		Greek Orthodox	Second largest Christian group, primarily in Koura and Eradfieh district.
		Greek Catholic	Christian group mainly in Zahleh, historically influential.
		Sunni	Historically central in commerce and politics.
		Shia	Concentrated in the south and the Beqaa.
		Druze	An esoteric sect, mainly in Chouf Mountains and Aley.
		Alawite	Minority Muslim sect, mainly in Tripoli, politically marginalized.
		Armenian Orthodox	Christian minority, mainly in Beirut and Zahleh.
		Armenian Catholic	Smaller Christian sect aligned with the Catholic Church.
	Minority Identities	Ethnic Identity	Includes ethnic identity represents an ethnic community active within Lebanese society, such as the Armenian and the Kurdish ethnic identities.
		Bedouin Identity	Pertains to Bedouin communities that maintain their distinctive traditions.
Group 2: Transnational Identities	**Arab Nationalism**	Baathist Nationalism	Associated with the ideology of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, considering Arab nationalism as a fundamental aspect of the Arab unity project.
		Nasserist Nationalism	Associated with the thought of Gamal Abdel Nasser, viewing Arab nationalism as a cornerstone for liberation from colonialism and strengthening Arab solidarity.
	Islamism	Political Islam	Political movements advocating for the implementation of Islamic principles in governance and society.
		Traditional Islam	Represented by the popular Islamic identity, which focuses on religion as part of daily life and social values, without necessarily engaging in politics.

Distinct from the Jordanian case—where tribal, Hashemite, and Palestinian components dominate the subnational landscape—Lebanon's model is fundamentally structured around institutionalized sectarianism. Here, subnational identity is not merely a cultural or social expression but a constitutional pillar. Lebanon's consociational system formally recognizes 18

religious sects, six of which dominate the political and administrative order, each with constitutionally allocated roles in governance, legislation, and public life.

Notably, some identity components defy strict categorization. For instance, Kurdish and Bedouin identities could arguably fall within the self-related category due to their localized presence and distinct cultural heritage. However, the historical transnational experiences of these communities—especially their patterns of migration, statelessness, and marginalization—justify their placement under the transnational identity group. Similarly, tribal structures in the Beqaa and southern Lebanon, while deeply integrated into local governance and traditional authority networks, also exhibit affiliations that transcend national borders, linking them historically to broader Arab or Ottoman tribal legacies.

This typology is not intended to offer a rigid or exhaustive classification, but rather to establish a functional framework for analyzing the role of SNIs in Lebanon's political economy. It enables a contextual exploration of how identities are mobilized in electoral politics, how they interact with regional geopolitical dynamics, and how they shape perceptions of state legitimacy and national belonging. In doing so, the study highlights the critical role identity plays not only in representing societal diversity but also in constituting both resilience and fragmentation within the Lebanese state.

Religious Sects in Lebanon

Lebanon is highly diverse in terms of its religious and ethnic composition. The country officially recognizes three main religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and the Lebanese government acknowledges 18 different sects, each represented by members of the parliamentary council. This diversity has led to frequent disputes and conflicts, with the geographical realities of Lebanon exacerbating a clear trend of isolationism. Lebanon constitutionally recognizes eighteen religious sects, yet six of them dominate the political and social spheres by virtue of their demographic weight and institutional role. These main sects are divided into two primary groups –Christian and Muslim– alongside the Druze sect, which is constitutionally classified with the Muslims.

The largest Christian sect is the Maronite Christians. The Maronites play a central role in the political and societal spheres. The Maronites remain the largest Christian sect in Lebanon, constituting approximately 28.8% of the population. Their roots trace back to the 5th century,

when the Maronites settled in Mount Lebanon and benefited from France's patronage, which helped raise their cultural and educational standards. They hold prominent political positions, most notably the presidency, and have 30 seats in the Lebanese parliament. Their main concentration is in Keserwan and eastern Beirut. The second largest Christian group is Greek Orthodox Christians. This sect is primarily located in the Koura region in northern Lebanon and the Eradfieh district in Beirut. They represent approximately 9.7 percent of the Lebanese population. The third one is Greek Catholics, who accounts for roughly 5.9 percent of Lebanon's population and is predominantly found in the city of Zahleh. Then Armenian Catholics and Armenians of the Orthodox Church come as fifth and sixth sects. Armenians have been present in Lebanon since WWI, with their population estimated to range between 70,000 and 160,000. They are predominantly located in Mount Lebanon and Beirut and are affiliated with the Armenian Church in Rome. They also have a significant presence in Zahleh.

The largest Muslim sect is Shia Muslims, who primarily inhabit the southern regions of the country, the Beqaa Valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Historically marginalized, the Shia have gained substantial political influence in recent decades, especially with the rise of Hezbollah. This shift has changed the political landscape of Lebanon, as the Shia have advocated for their rights and engaged in both social services and military activities. Under the National Pact, the Speaker of the Parliament is a Shia Muslim, reflecting their significant role in Lebanon's power-sharing arrangements (Rabil , 2011). Shia Muslims constitute approximately 27 percent of the Lebanese population and are mostly concentrated in southern Lebanon, the western and northern regions of the Beqaa Valley, Jbeil, Baalbek, and the southern suburbs of Beirut.

The second largest Muslim sect is Sunni Muslims, who historically have had an important role in the commercial and political life of Lebanon, are concentrated primarily in cities like Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon. According to the National Pact, the office of Prime Minister is reserved for a Sunni Muslim, reflecting their significant influence in the governance of Lebanon. The Sunni identity in Lebanon is also shaped by broader Arab nationalism, with deep historical connections to the Ottoman Empire and interactions with regional powers (Rabil , 2011). Sunnis make up around 27% of Lebanon’s population and are mainly located in the north, the center, especially in Tripoli, Beirut, the region of Al-Khroub, and the area of Al-Arqub.

The Druze and Alawites are considered as the third and fourth Muslims sects. The Druze community is a unique religious group with esoteric beliefs, primarily found in the Chouf

Mountains. Historically, the Druze played a pivotal role in Lebanese politics and have often acted as power brokers in the country's complex political system. They have maintained their influence through strategic alliances and involvement in various political coalitions (Salibi, 1971). The Druze trace their origins to the Kurdish Al-Ma'ani tribe and are primarily located in the Shouf and Aley regions of Mount Lebanon, as well as in Hasbaya in the Wadi al-Taym Valley. They represent approximately 5.6% of Lebanon's population. The Alawites are officially recognized by the Lebanese state in 1936. A portion of the Alawite community resides in the Jabal Mohsen area of Tripoli, and they represent around 1% of Lebanon's population.

This complex religious mosaic has shaped Lebanon's social and political fabric, with each sect contributing to the nation's rich diversity but also participating in a fragile power-sharing arrangement that has often led to conflict and tension. This breakdown reflects the approximate distribution of religious communities in Lebanon as of 2004, showcasing the dominance of Muslim sects, with Sunni and Shiite Muslims comprising the majority, while Christians are represented primarily by Maronites, Greek Orthodox, and other smaller groups.

Table 5.6 An unofficial census of the religious sects in Lebanon was conducted in 2004

Sect	Percent (%)	Sect	Percent (%)
Muslims	**58.92%**	**Christians**	**41.07%**
Sunni	26.44%	Maronites	22.19%
Shiite	26.06%	Greek Orthodox	7.86%
Druze	5.63%	Greek Catholics	5.20%
Alawites	0.79%	Armenian Orthodox	3.01%
		Armenian Catholics	0.67%

Ethnic and Social Composition of Lebanon

Ethnically, the Lebanese population is a blend of several distinct elements, including Phoenician, Greek, Armenian, and Arab origins. Within the broader Lebanese society, there are also ethnic minorities, such as the Armenian and Kurdish communities. The official language of Lebanon is Arabic, although a smaller proportion of the population speaks Armenian or Kurdish. Additionally, French and English are widely spoken, particularly among educated sectors. Syriac is used in some Maronite churches (Roman Catholics following Eastern rites). The Lebanese

ethnic and social structure is thus shaped by a diverse array of linguistic and cultural influences, which is reflected in both the country's demographics and its political system (Fanack, 2010).

According to the Armenian population in Lebanon, it is divided into three main religious groups: Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholics, and Evangelicals. They reside in various regions of Beirut, particularly in neighborhoods such as Bourj Hammoud and Dora, where there is a significant Armenian presence. Armenians are also concentrated in Zahleh and Keserwan, regions they settled in after WWI. By the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the Armenian population in Lebanon was approximately 270,000, making up 7% of the country's total population. The community strongly resists being classified as a minority, and over time, many Armenians migrated to the US and Canada, like many other Lebanese, which reduced their number to around 200,000. Of these, 116,000 were eligible voters, and they were represented in the Lebanese Parliament by six deputies and in the government by one minister (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2001).

On the other hand, the Kurdish community in Lebanon has long faced marginalization and is often treated as second-class citizens. Despite their presence in Lebanon for thousands of years, some Kurds feel compelled to hide their ethnic origins to avoid discrimination in Lebanese society. The lack of constitutional recognition for the Kurds stems from the political, social, and sectarian issues that Lebanon has faced throughout its history. Lebanon's social system is based on ethnic and sectarian divisions, which has led to the dominance of certain groups over others, such as the Kurds. This system has intensified the political and social challenges for the Kurdish community (Fanack, 2010). Due to these circumstances, combined with the poor economic conditions faced by many Kurds, a significant portion of the Kurdish population has chosen to migrate to Europe, while others have opted to settle in Turkey. Although some Kurds have lived in Lebanon since the 1920s, they have never been granted Lebanese citizenship. Although exact statistics on the Kurdish population in Lebanon are not available, estimates range from 100,000 to 150,000. However, these Kurds do not have the right to a dedicated seat in the Lebanese Parliament. The absence of constitutional recognition of the Kurds as a minority, like other recognized groups, is the main reason for their lack of political representation. Consequently, many Lebanese Kurds feel deprived and excluded, which has hindered the development of their community and their sense of belonging to the national fabric of Lebanon.

In addition, the Bedouins are significant component in Lebanon community, the eastern borders of Lebanon, where Bedouin communities live, represent complex, cross-border identities: displaced and settled, socially invisible yet increasingly politically influential. The Bedouin communities predominantly reside in the Beqaa Valley, a fertile plateau situated between Mount Lebanon (to the West) and the Eastern Lebanon mountain range (to the East), which separates the modern state of Lebanon from Syria (Chatty, Mansour, & Yassin, 2013). The emergence of Arab nation-states at the end of the British and French mandates in the mid-20th century saw the continuation of policies marginalizing the Bedouins and pushing them toward settlement. The ethnic identity of the Bedouins in the Beqaa has evolved over the past five decades, adapting to the colonial partition of the region and focusing on documented citizenship. New patterns of networks and spatial, social, and economic movements have emerged, intersecting with both rhetorical and physical borders, and involving both governmental and non-governmental actors within Lebanon and Syria

In Lebanon, many Bedouins face challenges in obtaining official recognition, as the majority do not hold Lebanese citizenship, placing them in a complex legal and political position. Estimates suggest that the Bedouin population in Lebanon is around 150,000, but only about 50,000 hold full Lebanese citizenship. Over the years, Bedouin leaders and their political representatives have strived to improve their conditions and secure their presence in Lebanese society, leading to the creation of diverse and complex identity categories among the Bedouins. These “disparities” in legal and citizenship statuses have clear political implications, particularly within Lebanon’s confessional political system, where identity and citizenship play a significant role in the distribution of shares and political representation.

Another dimension that warrants attention is the Tribal Communities in Lebanon, each with deep historical roots and significant socio-political influence. While Lebanon is often associated with its sectarian divisions, these tribes represent a vital, yet often overlooked, component of the nation’s socio-political fabric. The tribes of Lebanon, particularly in rural areas such as the Beqaa Valley and southern regions, have evolved through centuries of historical, cultural, and political transformations. This narrative aims to explore the origins, evolution, and contemporary role of tribal communities in Lebanon, shedding light on their continued relevance in Lebanon’s ever-changing political landscape (Chatty, Mansour, & Yassin, 2013).

Tribalism in Lebanon traces its origins back to the Arab and Ottoman eras, with some tribes having established roots in the region even before the advent of Islam. These tribal groups, primarily in the Beqaa Valley, southern Lebanon, and parts of northern Lebanon, have long relied on kinship ties, loyalty, and shared traditions to maintain cohesion within their communities. The concept of "tribes" in Lebanon often overlaps with extended family networks, religious sects, and ethnic communities, each with distinct identities and geographic centers. The tribes of Lebanon are diverse, representing a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including Arabs, Kurds, Bedouins, and others. Their geographical locations are equally diverse, with the Beqaa Valley serving as the heartland for many agricultural and pastoral tribes, while southern Lebanon is home to numerous Shiite Muslim tribes (Antoun, 2025; Yaghi, 2015).

In the Beqaa Valley, the land is fertile, surrounded by the imposing mountain ranges of Lebanon. This area has historically been the domain of many tribal communities, such as the Shamar, Bani Khaled, and Al-Muqaddam. These tribes have maintained a deep connection to the land, engaging in both agriculture and livestock herding. Over time, these tribal groups have become integral to the economic and political life of the region, shaping local governance and playing key roles in maintaining order within their communities.

In southern Lebanon, tribes such as the Al-Darazi and Ma'arouf have also made their mark on the region's history. These tribes are particularly notable for their ties to the Shiite Muslim community, which has played a significant role in the political and social dynamics of southern Lebanon. Historically, these tribal groups acted as intermediaries between the state and the rural population, ensuring their communities were adequately represented in the national political sphere. In northern Lebanon, tribal groups have historically been influenced by regional dynamics and larger geopolitical forces. These tribes, often smaller in number than their counterparts in the south and Beqaa Valley, have nonetheless played an important role in shaping local governance. Many of these northern tribes have deep historical ties to the broader Arab world, with some tracing their origins to neighboring Syria or Iraq.

Political Division of Lebanese Sectarian Groups: March 14 Alliance and March 8 Alliance

When discussing political division in Lebanon, it is impossible to overlook the role of sectarian political activity. Political parties and various political movements in Lebanon adopt programs that range from general political platforms aimed at promoting the culture of the party

itself, to others that explicitly promote sectarian agendas with the intention of expanding the influence of a specific sect. This blending of politics with sectarian identity has been a central feature of the Lebanese political system, which has remained intricately tied to the religious and sectarian affiliations of its people.

After 2005, the political atmosphere in Lebanon became increasingly tense, marked by heightened sectarian divides and the growing influence of external actors fueling these tensions. This period witnessed a deepening of sectarian polarization, not only within Lebanese society but also in the political arena. The result of these mounting sectarian tensions was the formalized division of Lebanon's political landscape into two opposing camps: The March 14 Alliance and the March 8 Alliance.

The March 14 Alliance includes several political factions, namely the Sunni Future Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party representing the Druze community, the Lebanese Forces and the Phalange Party representing the Christian Maronite community, the Democratic Renewal Movement, the Democratic Left Movement, and two Armenian minority parties, namely the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak).

The Future Movement was established in 2007, with the issuance of the political statement no. 191, which led to the formation of an association named the Future Movement, headquartered in Beirut. The founding members include Saad Hariri, Nader Mustafa Hariri, Salim Abdel Rahman Diab, Samir Fouad Doumit, Abdel Ghani Abdel Latif Abbara, Fadi Kouzai, Fawaz Aray Khegam, and Ghattas Simaan. The representative of the movement to the government is Mr. Salim Abdel Rahman Diab.

The Progressive Socialist Party is a Lebanese political and national progressive organization founded by Kamal Jumblatt, the father of Walid Jumblatt, in 1949, influenced by democratic socialism in India and Britain. The party played a significant role in the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) under the leadership of Kamal Jumblatt. Its militia controls parts of Mount Lebanon and Chouf, with their main enemy during this war being the Maronites and the Phalange Party. On March 16, 1977, Kamal Jumblatt was assassinated, and his son Walid Jumblatt inherited the leadership. Walid took retaliatory actions against the Christians, in response to the massacres committed by the Lebanese Forces against the Druze community, expelling the Christians from areas of Mount Lebanon with the assistance of the Syrian army and Palestinian armed groups.

The Lebanese Forces Party is a political party and militia founded by Bashir Gemayel in 1976, it was one of the major parties in the Lebanese Civil War, engaging in several battles against the Lebanese National Movement and Palestinian organizations. The party underwent several leadership changes after the assassination of its founder Bashir Gemayel in 1982. It then became independent from the Lebanese Front and entered into a major conflict with the Lebanese Army between 1989 and 1990. After the Taif Accord, the party disarmed and transitioned into a political party, led by Samir Geagea.

The Phalange Party is a right-wing party belonging to the Maronite Christian sect, founded in the early 1930s with encouragement from France as a sectarian response to the spread of the Arab movement in Lebanon and the growth of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Pierre Gemayel is considered the spiritual leader of the party. The party played a leading role during the Lebanese Civil War in opposing the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese National Movement, calling for the suppression of Palestinian presence in Lebanon by the Lebanese state since 1969. Currently, the party is headed by Amin Gemayel, the son of Pierre, after his father was assassinated in November 2006. Amin was briefly replaced by Karim Pakradoni before he returned from exile. The Democratic Renewal Movement is a political movement established in 2001, with its political bureau consisting of 14 members. The current president of the movement is Nassib Lahoud.

The Democratic Left Movement is a Lebanese political movement founded in September 2004 by a group of left-wing activists who previously belonged to the Lebanese Communist Party. Prominent founding members include Elias Attallah, leader of the Lebanese National Resistance Front, former President of the Communist Party National Council Naim Abdel Samad, and journalist Samir Kassir. Abdel Samad was elected as the head of the movement's National Assembly, while Attallah served as the Secretary-General and head of the Executive Office. Both were re-elected to these positions in 2007.

The Armenian Political Parties is among the three Armenian political parties, two are part of the March 14 Alliance: The Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar) and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak). The Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar) is a political party active among the Armenian diaspora in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon and Syria. It is present in areas such as Beirut and Mount Lebanon, where it defends communist ideology, in contrast to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which is aligned with U.S. politics. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak): A political party with a democratic

liberal ideology, founded in 1921 in Van, Turkey. The party has a revolutionary liberationist stance aimed at defending the Armenian people. Armenians accuse the Ottoman Empire and present-day Turkey of committing massacres against them. In Lebanon, the party represents the third segment of the Armenian community, with its main stronghold in Beirut. The party's official publication, *Zartonk*, is published in Armenian and serves as the party's spokesperson.

March 8 Alliance includes several key movements, including Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, which represent the Shiite sect, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), which belongs to the Christian sect under the leadership of General Michel Aoun, the largest Armenian party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak), the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Popular Nasserist Organization, and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party.

The Amal Movement was established by Imam Musa al-Sadr in 1975 under the name *Amal* (*Lebanese Resistance Brigades*), the movement served as the military wing for the Shiite community, also known as the "dispossessed movement," to defend their interests. During this phase, its slogan was "Israel is the absolute evil." Hezbollah emerged from the Amal Movement, and the two groups engaged in intense conflict. The conflict ultimately ended in a division of political representation between the two factions.

Hezbollah is a primarily military organization before being a political one, Hezbollah began its rise following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The group successfully expelled Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in 2000 and fought a significant war against Israel in 2006, inflicting severe losses on the Israeli military. Hezbollah's principles are rooted in the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979. The party views itself as aligned with the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution, and in a 1985 statement, Hezbollah declared its commitment to the commands of a wise and just leadership embodied by Khomeini, whom they regard as the instigator of the Muslim revolution and the architect of their resurgence.

The FPM was established in 2005 upon General Michel Aoun' return from exile in Paris. Upon his return, Aoun formed alliances with the Marada Movement and Hezbollah, despite previously being one of the fiercest opponents of the Syrian presence in Lebanon, which supported Hezbollah.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnak), founded in 1890, is the largest and most influential Armenian political party in Lebanon, especially among the Armenian diaspora. It is a right-wing political party that traditionally follows an anti-communist, pro-Western policy. This

stance puts it in opposition to its rival, the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (Ramgavar), which is more sympathetic to socialist ideologies.

The Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), a political party with regional ambitions, was founded in November 1932 by the late Anton Saadeh. The movement began with students from the American University of Beirut. The party's primary goal is to establish a new system in the natural Syria, which spans from the Taurus Mountains in the northwest, to the Bakhthiari Mountains in the northeast, and from the Suez Canal and the Red Sea in the south to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including Cyprus. The party also claims parts of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf region. The SSNP's ideology is heavily rooted in nationalism, advocating for the unity of the Arab Levant and neighboring regions.

The Popular Nasserist Organization is a pan-Arab nationalist organization founded by Ma'arouf Saad in 1973. After his death in 1975, his son succeeded him as the head of the party. The Nasserist organization was involved in the Lebanese Civil War, aligning with the Lebanese National Movement. Its base of support is primarily in the city of Sidon, and the current leader of the movement is Osama Saad.

The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, whose origins in Lebanon date back to 1935, held its first congress in 1956. The party experienced a significant split in the 1960s in Syria between factions led by Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad, on the one hand, and Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar, on the other. This division was mirrored in Lebanon, with the faction loyal to the leadership of the Syrian Ba'ath Party aligning itself with the Lebanese National Movement. The party's influence grew significantly after the Syrian Army entered Lebanon in 1976, further solidifying its position within the Lebanese political landscape.

Comparative Analysis of the March 14 and March 8 Alliances

The political landscape in Lebanon has long been shaped by complex alliances between various sectarian and ideological groups. Two of the most significant and opposing political coalitions in Lebanon are the March 14 Alliance and the March 8 Alliance. These alliances represent a diverse range of political ideologies, religious sects, and historical narratives, which have been central to Lebanon's political dynamics, particularly since the early 2000s. The following comparison examines the key components, political ideologies, historical roots, and

alliances of the two groups, while highlighting the contrasts and commonalities that define their roles in Lebanon's post-Civil War political structure.

When we look at the historical roots and origins of these two coalitions, we see that the March 14 Alliance emerged in response to the political landscape shaped by the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, which lasted from 1976 to 2005. The alliance was formed after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, which galvanized mass protests known as the Cedar Revolution. This movement sought to end Syrian influence over Lebanon and to assert Lebanon's sovereignty. The alliance's foundation is heavily influenced by the pro-Western factions within Lebanon, particularly the Sunni, Christian, and secular forces who were opposed to Syrian and Iranian influence, epitomized by Hezbollah and its allies. The March 14 coalition includes the Future Movement (led by the Hariri family), the Lebanese Forces, the Phalange Party, and the Progressive Socialist Party, among others.

The March 8 Alliance, on the other hand, was created in direct opposition to the March 14 Alliance, emerging from the political context of the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the subsequent shift in political power. The alliance took its name from March 8, 2005, when a rally was organized to support Syrian-Lebanese relations and resist the influence of the US and the West in Lebanon. The March 8 coalition is often seen as a pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian bloc, particularly since it includes Hezbollah and Amal Movement, both of which are strongly aligned with Syria and Iran. Additionally, the FPM joined the coalition, marking a significant shift in his political alignment, as Aoun had previously been one of the most vocal critics of Syrian intervention in Lebanon. This alliance also incorporates smaller sectarian groups, including the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party.

Political ideologies of the two political coalitions are largely different. The March 14 Alliance is characterized by its pro-Western stance, advocating for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, particularly from Syrian and Iranian interference. This coalition supports a free-market economy, secularism, and Western-style democracy. The Future Movement emphasizes Sunni political and economic interests, while the Lebanese Forces and Phalange Party represent Christian Maronite interests. These parties have often sought to position Lebanon as a westernized and secular state within the context of its Arab environment. While the alliance includes a diverse range of groups, they are united primarily by their opposition to Hezbollah and its political and military influence in Lebanon.

In contrast, the March 8 Alliance is aligned with Syria and Iran, both politically and ideologically. This alliance is grounded in resistance politics, which is largely framed around opposition to Israeli occupation and Western influence in the region. The most prominent member, Hezbollah, adheres to the ideology of Islamic resistance, derived from the Iranian Revolution, and adheres to the principles of */wilāyat al-faqīh/* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist). The Amal Movement represents the Shiite political establishment, while the FPM represents Christian interests, especially the Maronite community, and has been critical of the Lebanese political establishment's inability to provide equitable power-sharing among sects. The coalition has also advocated for a more nationalist stance, supporting the idea of a Greater Syria and regional resistance against perceived imperialism, particularly Western and Israeli interests. This includes a shared commitment to resisting Western interventionism and opposing the influence of Israeli aggression in the region.

Both coalitions have influential political actors. In the March 14 Alliance, the Future Movement represents the Sunni community and has a pro-Western orientation. The Future Movement is deeply invested in promoting Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, and it has historically opposed Syrian interference in Lebanese affairs. The Lebanese Forces represents the Maronite Christian community and is strongly supportive of Lebanon’s sovereignty and independence from foreign influence, particularly Syria and Iran. The Progressive Socialist Party represents the Druze community and has traditionally supported Lebanese sovereignty while maintaining some pragmatic relations with Syrian officials, despite historical tensions.

Hezbollah, which is closely aligned with Iran and supports the Wilayat al-Faqih ideology, is the most powerful and influential group in the March 8 Alliance. It plays a dominant role in Lebanese politics, particularly in the areas of defense and security, where it operates a strong militia. The Amal Movement represents the Shiite community alongside Hezbollah, and it has been involved in Lebanese politics for decades. Amal's emphasis is on social justice and maintaining the rights of the Shiite population in Lebanon. The FPM was historically aligned with the opposition to Syrian control but shifted towards an alliance with Hezbollah in the 2000s. It has a large base of Christian support and advocates for Lebanese nationalism. Smaller but significant components of the March 8 coalition, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party espouses a regional nationalist ideology that aligns with Syrian interests, while Dashnak represents the Armenian community and supports Lebanon-Syria relations.

Both coalitions form regional and international alliances. The March 14 Alliance maintains strong relationships with the US, France, and other Western nations, as well as Arab countries that advocate for Lebanon's sovereignty and independence from Syrian and Iranian influence. The alliance has often sought to integrate Lebanon into a broader Western-oriented regional order, promoting free market policies and democratic governance.

The March 8 Alliance, particularly Hezbollah and Amal, is closely aligned with Syria and Iran, both of whom provide substantial political, military, and financial support. This alliance is also heavily involved in regional resistance movements, particularly against Israel and Western influence in the Middle East. The Iranian model of governance has a strong influence on the political ideology of Hezbollah and its allies.

The March 14 and March 8 Alliances represent two diametrically opposed political and ideological camps in Lebanon. The March 14 Alliance stands for Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and Western-oriented policies, while the March 8 Alliance advocates for regional resistance, aligning closely with Syria and Iran, and upholding Lebanese nationalism rooted in resistance politics. In the context of Lebanon's complex sectarian politics, these alliances reflect broader regional struggles, particularly the competition between Iranian-backed groups (e.g., Hezbollah) and Western-oriented factions. The ongoing rivalry between these two alliances continues to shape the Lebanese political scene, influencing both domestic governance and Lebanon's position in the broader geopolitical landscape of the Middle East.

The sectarian and ethnic makeup of Lebanon, along with the geographical distribution of these sects, has created a highly complex political and social situation. The deep-rooted sectarian and confessional affiliations have marginalized a unified Lebanese national identity, exacerbating conflicts and increasing the fragility of the state. This has also facilitated the influence of external powers on Lebanon's policies. The challenges Lebanon faces in achieving stability and growth are ongoing, as the country strives to balance sectarianism with its national identity. Lebanon remains a unique model that seeks to navigate the delicate balance between sectarian interests and national unity, making it highly susceptible to regional developments and their repercussions.

In conclusion, Lebanon's sectarian dynamics, combined with the political rivalry between the March 14 and March 8 Alliances, continue to shape its political landscape. The enduring influence of sectarianism in the state's political structure and its susceptibility to external forces make Lebanon's journey towards stability and nation-building both challenging and complex.

5.2.3. The National Security of Lebanon

The concept of national sovereignty stands at the core of modern statehood, embodying a state's ability to exercise full control over its territory, enforce the rule of law, and protect its citizens from both internal fragmentation and external interference. However, this ideal remains elusive in deeply divided societies with fragile political structures such as Lebanon. Despite the formal end of the civil war over three decades ago, Lebanon continues to struggle with profound institutional dysfunction rooted in sectarian fragmentation and a lack of consensus on key issues of governance. Among the most critical manifestations of this dysfunction is the absence of a unified national defense and security strategy. The state's inability to formulate and implement such a policy reflects broader structural weaknesses within the political system and underscores the contested nature of national authority in Lebanon. In this regard, Lebanon serves as a compelling case study of the difficulties faced by pluralistic states in achieving effective sovereignty and coherent national security governance.

The primary challenge facing Lebanon lies in its lack of a unified national defense and security policy capable of safeguarding the country's collective interests. Lebanon is divided into four major communities that are often in competition with one another, making it exceedingly difficult to impose genuine sovereignty across the entirety of its territory. Each of these communities maintains its own internal and external alliances, further complicating the country's political and security landscape. The absence of a cohesive defensive strategy reflects a profound gap between the central state and the sectarian groups, which operate with quasi-autonomous authority and exercise control over their respective regions and social bases. This fragmentation has led to the empowerment of NSAAs, most notably Hezbollah, which has assumed roles typically reserved for the state. As a result, the authority of the central government has been significantly undermined, leaving it incapable of asserting full sovereignty.

In contrast, official state institutions suffer from a lack of sufficient support to effectively exercise their power, exacerbating internal divisions and prompting each sectarian group to seek protection and influence from external actors. This dynamic has given rise to the March 8 Alliance, led by Hezbollah and representing the Shiite community, in opposition to the March 14 Alliance, which includes Sunni and Druze factions. These political formations have intensified sectarian tensions, effectively turning Lebanon into a theater for proxy conflicts, where each sect pursues its own interests, often at the expense of national unity. Such dynamics have rendered Lebanon a

fragile state, dependent on delicate and often unsustainable balances that leave it highly susceptible to disruption (Raphaeli, 2009). Consequently, the country has become hostage to regional political agendas. National decision-making is no longer driven by the interests of Lebanon as a sovereign state, but rather shaped by the strategic priorities of external actors.

In this context, scholars analyze the intricate relationships among Lebanon's sectarian forces and their impact on national security. In his study, *Reflections on Lebanon*, Harris argues that Lebanon, due to its diverse and pluralistic societal composition, constitutes an exceptional model in which local actors strategically employ external powers as patrons to secure and maintain their influence (Harris W. , 2009). Similarly, Fawaz emphasizes that the diversity of communal identities, the country's segmented geography, and its complex political history have together produced a unique situation characterized by a de facto decentralization. This reality stands in contrast to the conventional notion of a centralized nation-state (Fawaz, 2009). In addition, Farha asserts that demography plays a crucial role in shaping the Lebanese political order. The three dominant sectarian groups constitute a demographic triad in which no single group can easily assert hegemonic control (Farha, 2009). This configuration results in a complex sociopolitical landscape that impedes the emergence of a cohesive national identity.

While it may appear that pluralism has reached its zenith in Lebanon, the country's geopolitical configuration only adds layers of complexity to its already fragile security environment. Lebanon is confronted with multifaceted security challenges that are exacerbated by its regional circumstances. These challenges manifest in several distinct ways. Sharing borders with both Syria and Israel, Lebanon is particularly vulnerable to the ripple effects of regional conflicts, including the Syrian crisis and the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. These borders often serve as conduits for the infiltration of militants and the smuggling of arms, which significantly undermine national security. Furthermore, Lebanon has long served as a battleground for regional and international rivalries. External actors such as Iran and Saudi Arabia provide financial and military support to opposing domestic factions to advance their strategic interests, thereby intensifying internal political and security fragmentation. The spillover from the Syrian conflict has disrupted Lebanon's delicate sectarian and political balance. The rise in sectarian extremism and the immense pressure resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees have overwhelmed the country's already fragile infrastructure and heightened social and political tensions. Lebanon's geopolitical reality is deeply intertwined with its intricate sectarian structure, rendering national

security a matter that necessitates a fine balance between domestic interests and foreign influence. The absence of a unified national identity and the persistence of sectarian loyalties compromise efforts to construct a coherent and inclusive security framework.

Consequently, Lebanon remains a deeply complex state, where sectarian balances are inextricably linked with shifting international alliances. Its future remains closely tied to the interplay between internal factions and regional powers. This raises a critical question: Can Lebanon achieve genuine stability and establish a national security framework that is independent of sectarianism and resilient to foreign intervention? Lebanon's national security is shaped by its geopolitical location, its fragmented internal political landscape, and the influence of regional and international actors. It is a dynamic security environment that is persistently affected by internal divisions and external pressures. The country continues to grapple with severe security challenges arising from its demographic diversity, its active sectarian constituencies, its proximity to volatile neighbors such as Syria and Israel, and the ongoing presence of foreign-backed armed groups.

The structural dilemma facing Lebanon is not merely the absence of a unified national security doctrine but a deeper crisis rooted in its sectarian-based political architecture and the country's geopolitical vulnerabilities. One of the core issues in Lebanon is the coexistence of state and non-state military authority, most notably with Hezbollah. This duality in power dilutes the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force, an essential criterion of statehood as defined by Weberian principles. In practice, Hezbollah operates as a "state within a state," maintaining independent security structures, foreign policy links, and social service networks that often outcompete state institutions. While its presence is often justified by its role in "resisting Israeli aggression," its involvement in regional conflicts, particularly in Syria, has contributed to further entrenchment of sectarian divides and provoked counter-reactions among Sunni communities.

From a geopolitical standpoint, Lebanon is positioned at the crossroads of regional conflicts. Its proximity to both Syria and Israel places it in the immediate vicinity of two of the most protracted and volatile conflict zones in the Middle East. The Syrian civil war and its spillover effects have severely stressed Lebanon's infrastructure and security apparatus. The border with Israel remains a flashpoint for potential escalation, particularly due to the Hezbollah-Israel confrontation dynamics. Additionally, the proxy dimension of Lebanese politics is critical. Iran, Saudi Arabia, the US, and France have historically competed for influence in Lebanon, often using domestic political actors as proxies. This externalization of internal politics means that Lebanese

national interests are frequently subordinated to the agendas of regional powers. The 8 March and 14 March alliances mirror these international cleavages more than they reflect coherent domestic platforms. Another key point of analysis lies in the demographic stalemate, the fact that no single sectarian group commands a decisive majority creates a political paralysis that both prevents domination and inhibits reform. In this context, power-sharing becomes both a solution and a trap: it ensures representation but also blocks structural transformation, especially in the realm of security sector reform.

National Security Structures in Lebanon

Lebanon's national security architecture is a deeply complex and multi-dimensional system that cannot be fully understood without accounting for the country's distinctive historical trajectory, entrenched sectarian composition, precarious geopolitical environment, and the entanglement of both formal state institutions and influential NSAs. This architecture has evolved not through the deliberate design of a centralized state apparatus, but rather through a series of historical contingencies marked by civil conflict, foreign occupation, and protracted political instability. Unlike conventional state models where national security is organized through hierarchically unified institutions under the direct control of the central government, Lebanon's security structure is inherently fragmented. It mirrors the broader societal divisions along sectarian and political lines, which are institutionalized in the country's consociational political system. This fragmentation manifests in the coexistence of multiple security actors, each with varying degrees of legitimacy, autonomy, and foreign alignment.

At the core of this structure are the official security institutions, including the LAF, the Internal Security Forces (ISF), General Security, and State Security—each tasked with a range of responsibilities from border protection to internal policing and intelligence gathering. However, the effectiveness of these institutions is often compromised by political interference, resource constraints, and overlapping jurisdictions. More critically, their authority is challenged by powerful NSAs such as Hezbollah, which maintains its own paramilitary and intelligence capacities, often operating independently of -or even in contradiction to- the central state's security agenda. This duality within Lebanon's national security landscape -where the formal state apparatus exists alongside and is frequently subordinated to extra-institutional power centers- creates a systemic ambiguity regarding the monopoly on the legitimate use of force. It also

perpetuates a security dilemma in which different sectarian communities perceive the central state as either partial or ineffective, thus justifying the maintenance of their own protective structures. Moreover, the continuous involvement of regional and international actors in Lebanon's internal affairs—whether through military aid, political patronage, or direct intervention—further complicates the sovereignty and cohesion of the national security system.

In sum, Lebanon's national security framework is less a coherent system and more a patchwork of institutions and actors, shaped by competing identities, shifting alliances, and external pressures. Any comprehensive analysis of Lebanese security must therefore move beyond traditional state-centric paradigms to consider the intricate interplay between formal and informal networks of power that define the country's approach to security and sovereignty.

In addition, Lebanon's national security is shaped by a multifaceted interplay of historical, sectarian, geopolitical, and socio-economic factors that collectively define the country's strategic posture and internal policy dynamics. These factors are neither static nor compartmentalized; rather, they are deeply interwoven with domestic fragmentation, regional power rivalries, and international interventions that profoundly shape the decision-making processes of the Lebanese state. Situated at the intersection of long-standing regional conflicts and internal sectarian tensions, Lebanon adopts a security paradigm that prioritizes the maintenance of fragile internal equilibrium while navigating complex external pressures. This approach relies on a multidimensional strategy that engages subnational actors, manages confessional power-sharing arrangements, and balances between competing regional and international alliances, often at the expense of developing a cohesive and centralized national security doctrine.

Lebanon's geographical characteristics play a critical role in shaping its national identity, strategic relevance, and security posture. Located along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Lebanon occupies a pivotal position at the crossroads between East and West. This strategic location has historically granted the country significant geographical leverage, enabling it to serve as a vital conduit for regional and international trade, while also exposing it to the ambitions and interventions of external powers. The country's climate and topography further enhance its geostrategic value. Lebanon boasts a richly diverse landscape, with mountain ranges, expansive coastlines, and fertile plains that not only offer natural defensive advantages but also provide fertile ground for investment in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and real estate. These geographical features have made Lebanon an attractive destination for economic development, although such

potential has been undermined by political instability. Moreover, Lebanon's geopolitical borders significantly influence its security dynamics. Bordered by Syria to the north and east, and Israel to the south, the country is located at a volatile regional fault line. This proximity to enduring conflicts, particularly the Arab-Israeli dispute and the Syrian civil war, renders Lebanon especially susceptible to cross-border threats, foreign influence, and regional power rivalries. Consequently, Lebanon's geography is both a strategic asset and a source of vulnerability, deeply entangled with its broader political and security landscape.

Lebanon's political landscape is shaped by a unique and intricate system designed to accommodate its diverse sectarian makeup. At the heart of this structure lies the consociational system, a political framework based on SPS. In this system, key political offices and parliamentary representation are distributed among the country's major religious sects, Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Druze. The purpose of this arrangement is to maintain a delicate political balance, ensuring that no single group can dominate the governance of the country. However, this system has its challenges, as it can often reinforce divisions and hinder the development of a cohesive national identity.

Adding complexity to Lebanon's political system is the notion of hybrid sovereignty, where the state shares authority with powerful NSAs, the most significant of which is Hezbollah. This armed group operates with substantial political and military influence, often acting independently of state institutions. As a result, Lebanon's political system can be seen as a hybrid, with power split between the formal governmental institutions and these NSAs, creating a dual authority structure that complicates state sovereignty and internal governance.

Lebanon's foreign policy, encapsulated by its doctrine of "dissociation", aims to maintain a neutral stance in regional conflicts and safeguard internal stability. Despite this official policy, Lebanon's internal affairs are deeply influenced by regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, each of which backs different political and sectarian factions within the country. This external influence, combined with Lebanon's internal divisions, complicates the country's ability to maintain true political neutrality.

A prime example of the challenges posed by NSAs is Hezbollah, which holds considerable military and political power within Lebanon. This group, which operates with significant autonomy, has a profound impact on the country's internal security dynamics, often influencing the direction of national policy and Lebanon's stance on regional issues. The presence of such

powerful NSAs shifts Lebanon's internal balance of power, sometimes sidelining state institutions in favor of their own agendas.

Finally, Lebanon's role in regional security cannot be overlooked. As a member of the LAS and a participant in international peacekeeping frameworks, Lebanon is engaged in broader regional and global security dynamics. This is particularly evident through its participation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which operates in the southern region along the border with Israel. This international peacekeeping presence underscores Lebanon's complex security situation, as the country is not only managing its internal divisions but also navigating its position in a volatile regional context.

Lebanon's economy is rooted in a liberal economic model, characterized by a free-market orientation that has historically positioned the country as a prominent financial and commercial hub in the Middle East. This open-market philosophy has facilitated Lebanon's role as a regional leader in banking, trade, and investment, attracting both local and international capital. The country's commitment to free trade, deregulated banking, and relatively low barriers to foreign investment has allowed Lebanon to develop a competitive edge in the Middle Eastern economy, particularly in finance and real estate.

A key pillar of Lebanon's economic resilience lies in its diaspora integration. The Lebanese diaspora, with its widespread global presence, plays an essential role in the country's economy, particularly through remittances. These financial transfers provide a crucial influx of foreign currency, significantly supporting the country's balance of payments and acting as a vital lifeline for many Lebanese families. In the face of domestic economic difficulties, these remittances have been one of the most stable sources of income for the country, cushioning Lebanon from external shocks and contributing to national economic stability.

The service and banking sectors are major contributors to Lebanon's economy. The service sector—comprising tourism, education, healthcare, and banking—has long been a focal point for both regional and international investment. Lebanon's banking system, in particular, has traditionally been one of the most sophisticated and developed in the region, offering services that attract foreign investors and regional clients. Additionally, Lebanon's cultural appeal as a tourist destination, its highly regarded educational institutions, and its robust healthcare system have all played vital roles in its economic structure. However, political instability, fiscal challenges, and

financial crises have occasionally undermined these sectors, resulting in periods of economic contraction and slower growth.

Socially, Lebanon is defined by its sectarian and cultural pluralism. The country officially recognizes 18 religious sects, which makes it one of the most religiously diverse countries in the Middle East. This diversity, while contributing to Lebanon's rich cultural fabric, also complicates the process of national unity and governance. The sectarian system, rooted in the historical division of political and social power among different religious groups, often hinders the formation of a cohesive national identity, as political and social loyalties tend to align more closely with sectarian affiliations than with a unified Lebanese state.

In this context, SNIs play a significant role in shaping Lebanon's socio-political landscape. Sectarian ties are deeply entrenched in both political and social dynamics, often superseding any sense of a unified national identity. These SNIs contribute to Lebanon's fragmented political system, where competing sectarian groups vie for power and influence. The persistence of these divisions, while contributing to the vibrancy of Lebanon's social fabric, also reinforces the challenges to political cohesion and stability.

Despite these divisions, Lebanese society demonstrates notable forms of social integration. Across various sectors, such as education, commerce, and urban life, individuals from different religious and communal backgrounds coexist and cooperate. In cities like Beirut, communities of varying sectarian affiliations live in close proximity, often engaging in collaborative endeavors that transcend their sectarian divides. However, this social integration remains fragile, contingent on broader political stability and the maintenance of balance within the sectarian system. Any disruption to the political equilibrium, such as during periods of conflict or instability, can strain social cohesion and unravel the tenuous integration across sectarian lines.

In the same context, Lebanon's national security framework is built on several strategic pillars, each reflecting the complex interplay of internal and external challenges, as well as the unique opportunities and vulnerabilities facing the state. Lebanon is part of Arab national security, but its geographical location and sectarian crises have made it more susceptible to the policies of regional and international blocs than an element of Arab stability. The support of Arab countries, particularly the Gulf states, remains central to enhancing Lebanon's economic and political stability. The Palestinian issue also has a significant impact, as Lebanon hosts a large number of Palestinian refugees, which presents both an economic and security challenge.

Lebanon strives to maintain its political independence, but it faces difficulties due to regional and international dominance over its decisions. Sectarian divisions contribute to undermining this independence, as some local factions are heavily influenced by external powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, making its sovereignty fragile. The LAF seek to strengthen their capabilities, yet they face significant challenges, most notably the existence of non-state armed groups such as Hezbollah. In this context, the Lebanese military continues to focus on maintaining internal security and combating terrorism, heavily relying on international military aid, particularly from the US and France.

Lebanon's economic and social security suffers from structural crises linked to corruption and mismanagement. The economy heavily depends on remittances from the Lebanese diaspora and foreign aid. Social crises, arising from class disparities and unemployment, further heighten internal tensions, which negatively impact national security. Despite having a democratic system, Lebanon struggles with "procedural democracy," where democracy is used to distribute power among sects rather than to enhance citizenship. This approach reinforces divisions rather than promoting national unity, undermining trust in institutions and threatening internal stability. Lebanon's political system derives its legitimacy from SPS, which remains a fragile solution. When any sect feels marginalized, it leads to political and security crises. This delicate balance heavily relies on regional and international interventions to ensure its continuity.

Table 5.7 Dimensions of Lebanon's National Security

Dimension	Description and Details
Domestic Dimension (Local)	- Counterterrorism and Extremism: Lebanon faces significant terrorist threats emanating from both domestic and foreign extremist groups, particularly those linked to the Syrian conflict and jihadist factions (Saab & Ranstorp, 2007). - Economic Pressures and Social Unrest: The economic collapse, escalating unemployment, and declining living standards have culminated in widespread unrest. - Political Stability and Public Sentiment: Chronic sectarian and political divisions impede the formation of stable governments while escalating public discontent with pervasive corruption and entrenched political elites (Bahout, 2016). - Challenges of the Confessional System and Elite Domination: The entrenched sectarian model reinforces internal divisions within public institutions through discriminatory allocation of services and resources, undermining transparency and accountability (Salamey & Noujaim, 2021). - Macro-Economic Vulnerabilities: The economy is increasingly fragile due to corruption and sectarian clientelism, compounded by regional conflicts that have severely strained national resources and hindered public financing for security and essential services (Sarkis, 2021). - Inefficient Public Administration and Inadequate Infrastructure: Widespread nepotism in public appointments and deteriorating infrastructure (electricity, water, communications) significantly hamper developmental progress.

	- Disparities in Human Capital and Challenges in Education and Employment: Marked disparities in educational and employment opportunities across regions undermine the development of a cohesive national human capital. - Security Crisis and Geopolitical Challenges: Incidents such as the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and subsequent international resolutions (e.g., UN Security Council Resolution 1559) have exacerbated internal political fragmentation and weakened national security capabilities.
Regional Dimension	- Cross-Border Counterterrorism and Extremism: Owing to its proximity to Syria, Lebanon experiences the spillover of armed groups and extremist elements (Sarkis, 2020). - Border Security and Regional Stability: Lebanon's borders—especially the southern frontier adjacent to Israel—are perennially exposed to threats. - Refugee Crisis and Its Socio-Economic Impact: Hosting a substantial number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees affecting its domestic stability. - Regional Conflicts and Proxy Wars: Lebanon has evolved into a battleground for proxy conflicts, notably between Iran and Gulf states (Bahout, 2016). - Syrian Influence and Border Security Concerns: Despite the formal withdrawal of Syrian military forces following the Cedar Revolution, Syria continued to exert influence through political allies like Hezbollah. - The Conflict with Israel: The direct impact of the Palestinian issue maintain a state of de facto war, with intermittent border clashes and violations that continually threaten Lebanon's stability (Harris W. , 2012).
International Dimension	- External Interventions: Global powers, notably the US and France, actively intervene in Lebanese affairs under strategic, economic, and ideological pretexts. These interventions often exacerbate internal divisions by supporting particular political factions, thereby complicating Lebanon's ability to maintain a unified national security policy (Masters, 2025) - Impact of Great Power Rivalry: Lebanon has become a proxy battleground for the geopolitical contest between the US and Iran. In this context, Hezbollah functions as an extension of Iranian influence. Moreover, other international actors such as Russia and China, through their economic and political engagements, further recalibrate the balance of power in the region, affecting Lebanon's sovereign decision-making and security posture.

The domestic arena is perhaps the most multifaceted, as it encapsulates the interplay between security challenges and economic, political, and social factors. The confessional system, which continues to underpin governmental structures, fosters significant inter-sectarian rivalries that hinder the formation of stable governance. This fragmented political environment diminishes coordination among security forces, thereby reducing the overall efficacy of counterterrorism initiatives. Additionally, the economic crisis, compounded by rampant corruption, intensifies social grievances and erodes public confidence in state institutions. These domestic factors necessitate profound institutional reforms and an overhaul of governance mechanisms to establish a cohesive and resilient national security framework.

Lebanon's strategic location in a volatile region further complicates its security landscape. Cross-border tensions, particularly with Israel, and the spillover effects of the Syrian conflict have continuously destabilized Lebanon's borders. The nation's extensive refugee burden adds another layer of complexity, straining already limited resources. Moreover, Lebanon has been drawn into

regional proxy conflicts, with Iran and Saudi Arabia using Lebanese factions to further their own geopolitical agendas. These dynamics not only aggravate internal divisions but also impede the state's ability to assert its sovereignty and maintain stable border security.

The international dimension is characterized by external interventions and the broader geopolitical contest among global powers. The involvement of countries such as the US and France, while sometimes aimed at fostering reform, has often deepened internal divisions by aligning with particular sectarian or political interests. The persistent rivalry between the US and Iran, manifesting prominently through Hezbollah's activities, further complicates Lebanon's security dynamics. As global powers continue to compete for influence in the region, Lebanon finds itself caught in a web of external pressures that undermine its capacity to formulate and implement a coherent national security strategy.

In summary, the table and analysis presented above elucidate how Lebanon's national security is shaped by a confluence of domestic, regional, and international factors. Each dimension contributes to a complex and interdependent security framework, which requires comprehensive reforms, enhanced institutional capacity, and the reconciliation of internal divisions to achieve long-term stability and sovereignty.

The Impact of SNIs on Lebanese National Security

In countries marked by sectarian and ethnic diversity, where the influence of a unified state is often weakened, sentiments of suspicion and anxiety frequently emerge among different communities. These communities begin to perceive one another as existential threats (Antosh, 2016). Such dynamics resemble what is described in the "security dilemma" theory in international relations, wherein each group's pursuit of self-protection heightens the suspicions of others, thereby deepening levels of mutual distrust. As the role of the central government and its security apparatuses deteriorates, this mutual distrust between communities becomes intertwined with an increasingly tense and unstable environment—making the achievement of security an ever-growing challenge.

At times, such tensions escalate into civil war; however, they more commonly foster a persistent climate of fear and mutual apprehension. In this context, understanding the diverse security perceptions of different communities becomes essential to gaining deeper insights into the nature of perceived security threats, the divergence between real and imagined fears, and the

underlying causes of these concerns. These insights not only enhance communal understanding of security but also enable policymakers and stakeholders engaged in security sector reform to recognize the actual challenges and develop effective mechanisms for addressing them.

Lebanon stands as a salient case study in this regard—an exemplary context for examining complex security relations within a multi-actor environment, comprising both state and NSAs, and characterized by SNIs that operate across national borders and play varying roles in the realms of security and insecurity. Although Lebanon is frequently categorized as a "weak state" due to its internal and regional challenges, its pluralistic system has demonstrated a certain resilience in managing both internal and external threats. This resilience, often overlooked, offers a novel theoretical framework for exploring how security can be achieved in multi-communal and multi-identity states and societies.

Sectarianism is the best example. The sect is not isolated from the broader dynamics of national social conflict; rather, it constitutes one of its principal expressions. Sectarian conflicts pose significant challenges to governance and the regulation of social and political life, as well as to national security. Political systems in such contexts often strive to preserve their continuity through *"Biopolitical"* mechanisms that reinforce sovereign power. In Lebanon, efforts to regulate societal life are embedded within the framework of a sectarian political economy, which exacerbates social inequalities and complicates conflicts tied to religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic forces. Furthermore, political tensions have entrenched authoritarian tendencies and fueled identity-based politics, thereby rendering post-conflict transformation and the achievement of national security considerably more complex (Mabon, 2020).

Lebanon's modern history serves as a paradigmatic example of a complex environment marked by persistent instability and recurring conflicts. These conditions stem from deep internal divisions, divergent loyalties, and the significant influence of external factors that continuously contribute to undermining the country's stability. Within this volatile context, security challenges have represented one of the most intractable issues, severely limiting the state's capacity to establish a stable and secure environment. The multidimensional and highly politicized nature of this sensitive subject has remained largely confined to the discourse of a narrow circle of researchers and political actors (Wannis, 2014).

When analyzing Lebanon as a model of a state grappling with internal conflicts rooted in sectarian diversity and enduring political crises, national security emerges as a profoundly intricate

issue, deeply entangled with SNIs. The sectarian system in Lebanon is not merely a traditional political arrangement; rather, it is a structure born of finely tuned power balances between religious sects, where sectarian identity takes precedence over national identity. This configuration presents a formidable challenge to Lebanese national security and raises critical questions about the prospects for stability in a context defined by multiple, and at times competing, loyalties and affiliations.

Lebanon's experience reflects a profound case of institutional fragility, wherein the weakening of central authorities has significantly undermined state sovereignty and obstructed the realization of comprehensive national security. The problem of central authority disintegration has largely fallen into the hands of sectarian militias—or more broadly, NSAs—who have emerged as de facto substitutes for the state in providing protection to their respective constituencies. This phenomenon severely compromises the capacity to construct a coherent national security framework, as each sectarian group finds itself compelled to establish autonomous mechanisms of "self-protection." The Taif Accord introduced a power-sharing arrangement among the three major sects by allocating the highest state offices accordingly. However, this model of so-called "consociational sectarianism" did not dismantle sectarian dominance; instead, it institutionalized and reinforced it. The resultant structure promoted a "troika" dynamic—an informal distribution of influence rather than a genuine devolution of power—resulting in an imposed coexistence among the heads of state institutions (Yusuf, 2025).

Consequently, leadership in Lebanon shifted from being an institutionalized function serving the unified interests of national security to becoming a sphere of segmented influence. This shift weakened the autonomy of official state institutions, rendering them largely ineffective in addressing Lebanon's escalating security challenges. Rather than fostering a centralized and impartial security apparatus, the political system produced fragmented mechanisms of authority that reflect, and at times exacerbate, the underlying sectarian divisions. The outcome has been a persistent erosion of state capacity, a proliferation of competing power centers, and an enduring vulnerability to both internal discord and external interference.

Some scholars argue that the transformation of Lebanon's national resistance movement against Israeli occupation into a sectarian-oriented force led by Hezbollah reflects a deep tension between national and sectarian objectives (Kawtharani, 2011, pp. 374-375). While the early stages of resistance represented the aspirations of the Lebanese people across sectarian lines, over time,

it evolved into a component of a broader sectarian apparatus supported by regional powers. This shift contributed to the fragmentation of Lebanon's security landscape, exacerbating its vulnerability to external interventions and recurring internal conflicts. The issue of SNIs in Lebanon emerges as a key factor in explaining the crisis of national security. Sectarian communities have increasingly come to constitute powerful SNIs that often supersede national loyalty. This reality imposes a complex array of challenges to national security, particularly in the context of fragmented allegiances and sharp societal divisions.

Clientelism and patronage networks further intensify this crisis. Access to state positions and resources is predominantly mediated through sectarian and personal connections, rather than institutional or meritocratic mechanisms. As a result, feelings of marginalization and inequality deepen across sectarian lines. This system diverts individual and communal loyalty away from the state, redirecting it toward sectarian leaders or local patrons. Such dynamics sharpen internal divisions and weaken the prospects for forging a unified national consensus on critical security issues (Kawtharani, 2011, pp. 378-384). Despite these structural challenges, Lebanon has demonstrated a relative capacity to contain internal crises. However, this containment remains fragile and highly contingent on delicate political balances. Rather than dismissing Lebanon as an exceptional or anomalous case, its experience may offer valuable insights for the development of new theoretical frameworks on how to enhance national security in states characterized by multiple SNIs.

The Lebanese model underscores the necessity of profound reforms aimed at cultivating genuine national unity—one that transcends sectarian and political divides and serves as the foundation for a cohesive national security strategy. Understanding and addressing the intersection between identity and security is thus imperative for envisioning sustainable peace and resilience in pluralistic societies.

Why Focus on Sectarianism While Studying SNIs in Lebanon?

In the context of studying national security in Lebanon, and the intricate interplay between SNIs and the sectarian political system, the depth of Lebanon's structural complexities becomes increasingly apparent. Since its independence in 1943, Lebanon has operated on the basis of sectarian power-sharing (SPS) (*muḥāṣṣaṣa ṭāʾifiyya*, sectarian quota system) which is most clearly manifested in the allocation of top political offices: the presidency to a Maronite Christian, the

prime ministership to a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of parliament to a Shiite Muslim. This system, often described as a form of consociational democracy, was originally intended to prevent domination by any one sect and to avoid political fragmentation. However, over time, it has evolved into a fundamental obstacle to building a modern and stable state. Each sectarian group has come to control key levers of influence, effectively holding the state hostage to sectarian calculations.

As outlined earlier, Lebanon stands as one of the most religiously diverse countries in the Middle East, with 18 officially recognized sects coexisting within its borders. The challenges Lebanon faces today did not emerge overnight; rather, sectarianism predates the formation of the Lebanese state itself, functioning as a deeply embedded socio-political system. This structure has divided Lebanese society, intensified competition for political and economic power among sects, and further entrenched internal divisions. Lebanon has experienced three historical phases of sectarianism (Magdy, 2023). The first phase is stable sectarianism within the framework of the Ottoman millet system. The second phase is sectarianism as shaped by the European colonial project, which deliberately stoked sectarian sentiments to create sectarian-based states. The third phase is destructive sectarianism that culminated in the Lebanese Civil War.

While the Taif Accord laid the groundwork for relative post-war stability, it did not resolve the fundamental dilemma of sectarian power competition. On the contrary, it institutionalized sectarian bargaining and rendered the state vulnerable to both internal opportunism and external manipulation. The confessional quota system has effectively transformed each sect into an autonomous political actor, pursuing its own interests irrespective of the national interest. Consequently, the Lebanese state has come to be governed by sectarian leaders who exploit communal grievances and loyalties to consolidate their personal power (El Baba, 2024). In this context, sectarianism is not merely a feature of the political landscape—it is the underlying pathology permeating the very fabric of the state. It undermines national cohesion, obstructs institutional development, and perpetuates a fragmented security environment where subnational loyalties trump collective interests. Thus, focusing on sectarianism in the study of SNIs in Lebanon is not simply a matter of analytical preference—it is a necessity. It provides the key to understanding the systemic impediments to state-building, national security consolidation, and the prospects for long-term political reform. Lebanon serves as a compelling case for examining how entrenched identity can both reflect and reproduce structural fragility in pluralistic states.

In the context of studying SNIs in Lebanon, sectarianism constitutes a central axis that cannot be overlooked. It is not merely a feature of cultural or religious diversity, but rather the structural foundation of Lebanon's political and social system. The focus on sectarianism not only reflects an entrenched social reality but also unveils the intertwined structural and political mechanisms that perpetuate divisions and obstruct the development of a modern national state. Within this framework, the significance of examining sectarianism becomes evident as a means to understand Lebanon's national security crisis and the dynamics of its SNIs, for the following reasons.

First, sectarianism is a foundational principle of the Lebanese political system. Since Lebanon's independence in 1943, sectarianism has been embedded in the political structure through the "National Pact." This pact stipulated a SPS arrangement: the presidency would be reserved for a Maronite, the premiership for a Sunni, and the speakership of parliament for a Shiite. While this system was intended to preserve a balance of power and prevent the dominance of any single sect, it effectively institutionalized the division of authority along sectarian lines, rather than establishing a civil state grounded in meritocracy and citizenship. Consequently, the sect has evolved into the primary unit of political organization, surpassing national identity in its mobilizing and political effectiveness.

Second, sects are transformed into independent political actors. Due to the nature of this sectarian system, religious sects in Lebanon are no longer simply socio-cultural entities—they have become autonomous political actors with their own leaderships, institutions, and interests. Some even operate parallel security structures and social services. From a national security standpoint, this evolution is perilous, as it engenders a competitive landscape of divided loyalties—loyalty to the sect versus loyalty to the state. Given that the state is often governed through negotiated arrangements among sectarian leaders, national interests are frequently subordinated to parochial or externally-aligned agendas. This further entrenches fragmentation and weakens the coherence of state institutions.

Third, sectarianism is a barrier to institutional reform. Although the Taif Accord ended Lebanon's civil war and sought to rebalance political representation, it did not eliminate sectarianism; rather, it constitutionalized it. Political and administrative posts continued to be allocated based on sectarian affiliation, making any effort to pursue institutional reform or transcend sectarianism encounter resistance from entrenched political elites benefiting from the status quo. These elites rely heavily on clientelism as a mechanism to distribute benefits and secure

political loyalty, thereby exacerbating the central government's fragility and undermining the rule of law.

Fourth, sectarian divisions significantly deepen the fragility of Lebanon's security architecture. Each sect often seeks to secure its own protection autonomously—this is exemplified by the existence of powerful sectarian militias like Hezbollah and various unofficial security formations operating beyond the state's control. Such a reality impedes the formation of a cohesive national security strategy and renders the state vulnerable to foreign interference. Regional powers exploit these sectarian divides to expand their influence by supporting particular factions. Thus, sectarianism, originally intended as a mechanism for power-sharing, has morphed into a tool for both internal and external manipulation.

Fifth, sectarianism is a persistent source of instability. Beyond weakening central authority, sectarianism fosters a climate of persistent mistrust among Lebanon's diverse communities. Political and economic initiatives are often perceived through a sectarian lens, leading to decision-making paralysis and continuous shifts in internal alliances. This perpetual volatility impedes political stability and renders every political crisis a potential existential threat. As such, sectarianism has become a structural ailment within the Lebanese state. Remedying this condition necessitates a profound reconfiguration of the political system—one that embraces citizenship as the core basis of belonging and implements foundational reforms aimed at transcending sectarian fragmentation in favor of genuine national unity.

This sectarian reality clearly reflects the broader crisis of the modern state in the Arab region, which Ghassan Salamé famously referred to as the "*Original Sin*." (Salame, 1987, p. 3) In this context, political elites seek to ensure their survival by structuring public life according to the logic of biopolitics—a form of governance whereby the state relies on social and economic structures to regulate the lives of citizens in ways that ultimately serve the interests of sovereign power. This dynamic is particularly evident in the political economy of sectarianism in Lebanon, which contributes to the reinforcement of social inequality and the deepening of complex conflicts rooted in religion, geography, and regional geopolitics (Mabon, 2020).

In this context, sectarian practices have become a primary tool for political elites to tighten their grip on the state, complicating the process of political transformation post-conflict and rendering peacebuilding a complex endeavor in itself. Political sectarianism has produced a form of flexible despotism, where the state is governed according to sectarian interests and calculations,

rather than policies that serve the nation as a whole. In this regard, the works of scholars such as Mahdi Amel and Amin Maalouf serve as essential references for understanding sectarian identities and their destructive role. Amel specifically warned of the dangers of political sectarianism, describing it as an obstacle to the creation of a modern national state and cautioning against the structural diseases that could afflict the Lebanese state due to this approach (Ben Masoud, 2018).

In addition to the aforementioned considerations, Bishara distinguishes between political sectarianism, which treats the state as a spoils system and its citizens as mere pawns, and social sectarianism, which is seen as a supportive phenomenon that provides social support networks for the community. This social sectarianism can be crucial in offering welfare and educational services, yet it does not reach the political complexity that exacerbates divisions and undermines the very concept of citizenship. Political sectarianism, however, epitomizes the struggle for power and erodes national unity (Bishara, 2023). In another context, the sectarian system in Lebanon, unlike many other Arab countries, forms the foundation of the political system, the unity of power, and social peace. However, Lebanon's current crisis does not lie in sectarianism itself, but rather in the collapse of the pluralistic sectarian system that had been in place since independence, especially after the civil war and successive foreign occupations. This has stripped sectarianism of its essence and balance.

This political reality has led to a paralysis in Lebanese political life, leaving the stage to two main sides: the public, which expresses its rebellion against the sectarian system and its disappointment with traditional political parties through protests and demonstrations, and the political elite, which has become a group of politicians accepting to work within partisan frameworks. This leads us to a reality far more complex than mere traditional sectarian division or competition for power; rather, we face a situation of state disintegration and the collapse of Lebanon’s official sectarian structure.

In the context of this dominance imposed by the crumbling sectarian system, each sect has carved out its own role and established multiple channels of communication with external actors. For instance, the Shia community in Lebanon did not have significant political power in the early days of the sectarian system, but developments in the Lebanese-Israeli conflict granted the Shia sect substantial influence, particularly through Hezbollah, which adopted the role of resistance and positioned itself as the protector of Lebanese territory. In this context, southern Lebanon became the arena where resistance, led by Hezbollah, took shape, with the party forming an alliance with

the Amal Movement, leading to the creation of the “March 8 Alliance” against the “March 14 Alliance” of Sunni factions. This distribution enhanced the power of the Shia sect and gave it an exceptional role in Lebanon's sectarian balance, as it became the core of the resistance and a tool for Iranian regional influence. On the other hand, the March 14 Alliance, which was formed as a reaction to the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005, represented the forces opposing Syrian and Iranian dominance in Lebanon. This alliance was primarily composed of Sunni forces, represented by the Future Movement led by Saad Hariri, some Christian parties such as the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea, and the Kataeb Party, along with Druze forces under Walid Jumblatt’s leadership at a certain stage.

This alliance adopted a political discourse based on Lebanese sovereignty and the rejection of foreign interventions, focusing on holding accountable those responsible for political assassinations and establishing a state of institutions free from the dominance of arms outside the framework of the state, especially Hezbollah’s weapons. In the regional context, the March 14 Alliance aligned itself with the Western and Arab axis, led by Saudi Arabia, which provided it with political and financial support to counter Iranian influence through Hezbollah. However, over time, the March 14 Alliance gradually weakened due to internal divisions and its inability to confront the growing influence of the March 8 Alliance, particularly as the latter utilized decisive military and political tools. Additionally, the sectarian and regional divisions in Lebanon hindered the full implementation of the alliance’s agenda, turning it gradually from an opposing force to a defensive position, increasingly relying on external support rather than unified internal strength within Lebanon.

The relationship between the two alliances can be summarized as a struggle for internal influence in Lebanon, closely linked to regional and international alignments that reflect the larger agendas of the supporting states. Consequently, almost every sect in Lebanon has developed its own political apparatus and independent stances, working according to its agendas and external affiliations. Meanwhile, patronage and clientelism dominate the distribution of positions and privileges, deepening feelings of distrust and division among community components and exacerbating the political and security environment. This entire discussion underscores the rationale behind prioritizing sectarianism as a focal point when examining SNIs in Lebanon. Yet, when approached from a strategic and security-oriented perspective, a different dimension

emerges: The Lebanese context has facilitated the proliferation of SNIs that now constitute a substantial impediment to the realization of national security.

The SNIs are no longer merely social entities; they have transformed into political units operating independently from the state, directly connected to external powers, and utilizing their resources to enhance their influence at the expense of national unity. This contradictory distribution of power within Lebanon makes the state incapable of controlling security conditions, rendering it susceptible to external interventions that exploit this division to strengthen their own influence. These identities have evolved into independent units functioning apart from the central authority, subject to loyalties that transcend national borders, which makes Lebanon vulnerable to foreign interventions, exacerbating its security and economic crises. These SNIs are not merely a political phenomenon but also a social and cultural one, influencing every aspect of life in Lebanon. Thus, the Lebanese model presents a complex case of sectarian fragmentation and political division, raising questions about the future of the modern state in the Middle East. It reveals that sectarian coexistence, if not carefully regulated through radical reforms, could lead to the collapse of the concept of the state within the region.

To further unpack the complexities of SNIs dynamics in Lebanon, it is essential to address the challenges facing Lebanese national security from a comprehensive perspective that includes the identity-related, political, regional, and international aspects affecting Lebanon's stability. We will focus on analyzing the structural causes that have made SNIs an obstacle to building a cohesive national security framework, in addition to the impact of these identities and regional and international conflicts on Lebanese state sovereignty. We will explore a set of key axes that form the foundation for understanding the impact of SNIs on Lebanese national security. These axes will be examined with precision, focusing on the dynamics that have contributed to the complexity of the Lebanese landscape. The discussion will include the following themes: sectarianism, consociationalism (or the power-sharing system), subnational actors such as Hezbollah as a parallel military force and Christian communities, religious and political elites, and clientelism in Lebanon.

Between Nation and Sect: Security Implications of SNIs in Lebanon

The entrenchment of SNIs in Lebanon such as sectarian and ethnic affiliations has historically had a profound impact on the country’s national security. These identities,

institutionalized through Lebanon's political system, have perpetuated competition among various groups, each prioritizing its collective interests over the broader goals of national cohesion. In the context of security, the prioritization of sub-loyalties over allegiance to the state erodes public trust in national institutions. This fragmentation weakens the central government's capacity to enforce law and order, as different groups establish their own security mechanisms, at times in direct opposition to state authority. For instance, militias or community-based security networks often operate in parallel with state institutions, challenging the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. This dynamic not only destabilizes national security but also exposes Lebanon to foreign interventions, as external powers may exploit these internal divisions to advance their own interests. This indicates the order of precedence among identities, in which the communal trumps the national (Harris W. , 2009, p. 9).

Majed (2016) claims that anyone with even a basic understanding of Lebanon recognizes that its reality is far too complex to be reduced to simplified categories. Christians, for example, do not constitute a single unified group. Internal divisions within major parties that claim to represent "Christian" constituencies have prevented this identity category from becoming the foundation of a broader collective formation. In other words, while sectarian identity remains an officially institutionalized category for identifying individuals, it does not necessarily translate into socially and politically homogeneous groups in society. Therefore, identifying oneself as "Christian" no longer necessarily reflects a specific political stance, nor does it make sense to refer to "the Christians" as a single bloc in general political discourse. This fragmentation is evident in the failure of Christian-based Lebanese parties to reach a consensus on electing a president—a position reserved for Maronite Christians. In addition, the supporters of Hezbollah, drawn largely from the Shiite community, differ significantly from those of the Amal Movement, which also has a Shiite base. Likewise, supporters of the FPM, with its Christian base, differ from their rivals in the Kataeb Party.

Majed poses an important question: Is sectarian identity capable of transcending class, regional, and political divisions? In other words, does sectarian affiliation exist independently of class dynamics, or does it interact with them and reinvent itself within those dynamics? Indeed, her observation that Christian political fragmentation undermines the notion of a unified sectarian bloc is well-founded. Yet, the persistence of sect-based electoral systems, confessional quotas, and community-based mobilization strategies suggests that sectarian identity retains a performative

and structural function that often supersedes class and regional affiliations. This does not imply that sectarianism exists in a vacuum, detached from material realities. Rather, it is precisely its ability to interact with, absorb, and reproduce within class and regional divisions that secures its resilience. In this sense, sectarian identity may not always dictate political behavior, but it consistently shapes the boundaries of political imagination, coalition-building, and institutional access. Thus, to challenge sectarianism solely on the basis of internal fragmentation might risk overlooking its strategic adaptability and symbolic utility in a deeply polarized polity.

Sectarianism in Lebanon does not merely reflect a pattern of identity affiliation; it serves as the primary organizing logic behind the rise and persistence of subnational actors. These actors—whether political parties, militias, or communal leadership structures—draw legitimacy, resources, and mobilization capacity from their sectarian embeddedness. Hezbollah, for instance, transcends the conventional boundaries of a political party to operate as a fully-fledged subnational actor with military, social, and economic arms rooted in Shiite communal identity. Similarly, the Lebanese Forces and the Amal Movement have historically consolidated their influence by appealing to sectarian solidarity, often bypassing or even challenging state authority. In this configuration, sectarianism becomes a vehicle for political agency outside formal institutions, allowing subnational actors to negotiate power not within a unified national framework, but through parallel structures of representation and service provision. This fragmentation of sovereignty, deeply entrenched in the logic of sectarian distribution and loyalty, complicates any project aimed at establishing a cohesive national security apparatus or a unified civic identity. Hence, sectarianism is not simply a cultural or historical residue, but it is a functional infrastructure that sustains subnational power and reconfigures state-society relations.

However, many scholars, such as Joseph Bahout in his study of the disintegration of the Taif Accord, argue that political sectarianism in Lebanon is linked to more recent developments. These include the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the subsequent internal and external events that fueled sectarian conflicts. Such scholars emphasize that sectarianism in Lebanon is not merely a reflection of ancient religious conflicts, but rather a symptom of state-building failures and foreign intervention. Thus, sectarianism is better understood not as a root cause, but as a manifestation of deeper structural dysfunctions—a symptom, not a cause (Kabalan, 2019).

Sectarian loyalties have increasingly superseded national allegiance, with loyalty to sectarian leaders often replacing trust in official institutions. This is particularly evident in the widespread

adoption of clientelist politics, where personal and sectarian loyalties are prioritized over comprehensive national policies. These authoritarian enclaves embedded within Lebanon's nominally democratic system perpetuate social fragmentation and hinder the establishment of genuine democratic institutions (Salamey & Tabar, 2012). This patronage system has led to the development of parallel security structures, where sectarian groups provide protection and services to their members, bypassing state institutions. Such arrangements not only weaken the state's monopoly on the use of force but also create enclaves of security that are insulated from national oversight.

Based on these considerations, the Lebanese sectarian system represents a significant challenge to national security. The system faces both internal and external political and security threats stemming from the intensification of sectarian loyalties and their entanglement with foreign interests. The strained relationships among the major sectarian factions—combined with the external support some of these groups receive from regional powers—have led to a gradual erosion of state authority and transformed Lebanon into an arena for competing international interests. As a result, Lebanese national security remains fragile amid the persistence of these sectarian power balances, which effectively render each sect a "state within the state."

The Role of Sunni, Shi'a and Druze Communities in National Security

The Sunni and Shi'a communities represent two of Lebanon's largest religious groups, each with distinct political allegiances, regional alliances, and divergent perspectives on security issues. Generally, the Sunni community aligns with Saudi Arabia and other Arab states with predominantly Sunni populations, whereas the Shi'a community—most notably through Hezbollah—enjoys a close alliance with Iran. This dichotomy introduces external dynamics into Lebanon's internal security framework, creating a dual structure of power that complicates the government's authority over national security. This dual power structure not only undermines state sovereignty and internal cohesion but also hampers the government's ability to formulate a unified security strategy. Many within the Sunni community view Hezbollah's activities as primarily serving Iranian interests rather than those of Lebanon. Such sectarian polarization fosters loyalty to religious leaders and their foreign allies over allegiance to the state, thereby weakening the country's overall security architecture.

Moreover, these sectarian alliances lead to conflicting security perspectives: while the Shi'a community regards Hezbollah as a bulwark against both internal extremist threats and external aggressions, the Sunni community considers alliances with states like Saudi Arabia essential for counterbalancing Iranian influence. This divergence exacerbates internal political divisions, further restricting the government's capacity to build robust, independent security institutions. On another hand, the Druze in Lebanon have historically occupied a unique role, often acting as mediators between conflicting factions. Their flexible alliances have contributed to periods of stability by facilitating dialogue and de-escalating tensions. Nevertheless, the Druze's external affiliations—particularly with Syria and other regional actors—underscore that even these pragmatic alliances are not free from the influence of broader geopolitical dynamics. As a result, while the Druze play a stabilizing role, they also maintain security priorities that may occasionally diverge from a unified national agenda.

The Role of Hezbollah as a Parallel Military Force

Lebanon has witnessed recurring waves of political and security tensions since the Taif Accord, with Hezbollah emerging as a dominant force in both political and military spheres. Over time, Hezbollah has facilitated Lebanon's transformation into a state heavily influenced by external powers, especially Iran, thereby undermining the pluralistic sectarian system and destabilizing internal balances (Ghalioun, 2021). Hezbollah's significance is underscored by several factors. Beyond its political engagement, Hezbollah functions as a well-equipped and militarized organization funded by Iran. Its advanced military capabilities, which include an extensive missile arsenal and combat experience gained in regional conflicts such as the Syrian war, position the group as a "state within a state". This parallel military structure limits the Lebanese government's monopoly on legitimate violence and compromises state sovereignty.

Hezbollah's control over significant portions of southern Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley, where it exercises both security and administrative authority, further erodes the state's capacity to enforce a unified security policy. Its involvement in regional conflicts (e.g., in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen) increases the likelihood of external interventions and complicates Lebanon's diplomatic posture. Hezbollah's military campaigns have been central to the expulsion of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in 2000 and its subsequent role in the 2006 conflict. Although these actions have earned the group considerable popularity among many Lebanese and regional observers as a force

of resistance, they also pose significant risks by potentially dragging Lebanon into broader conflicts.

The organization operates an extensive network of social institutions, including hospitals, schools, and charitable organizations—particularly in under-served regions. While this has helped mitigate the deficiencies of state-provided services, it also reinforces Hezbollah's standing as an alternative authority to the government. Hezbollah's involvement in illicit trade and its circumvention of international sanctions have had direct repercussions on Lebanon's economy. For instance, allegations regarding the facilitation of financial operations through institutions such as Jammal Trust Bank have intensified economic pressures, exacerbating the nation's vulnerability on the international stage.

Hezbollah's dual role as both a political actor and an independent military force thus presents a formidable challenge to Lebanese national security. Its autonomous military actions—often conducted independently of government oversight—risk precipitating broader conflicts, particularly with Israel, and underscore the pressing need for either integration into the national armed forces or a robust recalibration of its autonomy.

Christian Communities and the Politics of Religious Identity

Lebanon's Christian communities have historically wielded significant political and cultural influence. Under the National Pact and the Taif Accord, the presidency is reserved for a Maronite Christian, reflecting the community's pivotal role in the nation's political architecture. Traditionally aligned with Western allies such as the US and France, many Christian leaders have supported policies that reinforce Lebanese sovereignty while counterbalancing the influence of Hezbollah and Iran.

However, the Christian community is not monolithic. Political divisions exist: for example, the FPM, led by figures like Michel Aoun, has at times allied with Hezbollah as a counterweight to Sunni dominance, while other factions, notably the Lebanese Forces, vehemently oppose Hezbollah's influence. This internal diversity complicates the formulation of a unified national security strategy. Moreover, alliances with external powers add further layers of complexity, as Western support can be perceived by other sects as exacerbating domestic divisions.

While the current confessional system guarantees political representation for Christians, it also perpetuates sectarian rivalries that hinder the development of a comprehensive national

identity and effective state institutions. Resolving these internal contradictions is essential for Lebanon to overcome its chronic political stalemates and enhance its national security.

Ethnic SNIs and the Issue of Palestinian Refugees

Lebanon's demographic landscape is further complicated by the presence of a significant number of Palestinian refugees. Although contributing to the country's ethnic diversity, this community also presents unique challenges to national security. The influx of refugees has strained Lebanon's economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion, intensifying tensions between host communities and refugee populations. Political and social marginalization of Palestinian refugees has led to concentrated areas of deprivation and discontent—conditions that are conducive to radicalization and social unrest. Overcrowded camps, such as Ain al-Hilweh, have not only become epicenters for criminal activities and extremist ideologies but also continue to suffer from chronic underinvestment in basic services.

The failure to integrate Palestinian refugees politically and socially exacerbates existing sectarian divides. Diverse Lebanese factions hold conflicting views on the implications of integrating these communities, with some fearing that full integration could disrupt the delicate sectarian balance, while others argue that improved living conditions might contribute to national stability. Moreover, the militarization of some Palestinian camps—where the proliferation of arms remains a persistent security concern—highlights the vulnerability of Lebanon's internal security landscape to external and domestic destabilizing influences.

The Bedouins and Their Role

The Bedouins have become increasingly involved in both local and national politics, with this involvement becoming more prominent following the 1994 naturalization law. This engagement began to flourish after 2005, when the Lebanese political landscape shifted following the Syrian military withdrawal from the country. The political image of the Bedouins has changed significantly over the past two decades. In the parliamentary elections of the 1990s, the image of naturalized Bedouins as "simple country folk" being bussed to polling stations was widespread. Bedouin men and women were often seen as blocks of votes "purchased" by the powerful elites to tilt the balance in their favor, a perception that was always met with protests from competing political factions. However, this image has changed since 2005. The shift is evident in the public

discourse surrounding “Political Bedouins” and in the realities on the ground—political mobilization among the Bedouins.

As a result, political parties and movements began to recognize the Bedouin constituency in their electoral strategies. The practice of patronage politics in Lebanon gradually infiltrated the Bedouin communities of the Beqaa. Political services have increased in the form of community projects and individual assistance. More and more, the discourse surrounding the Bedouins as a distinct cultural subgroup has become more assertive. In 2008, on the eve of the 2009 parliamentary elections, Bedouin mobilization reached its peak with what was termed the “Tribal Uprising.” While not an uprising in the traditional sense, this forum created a new political discourse surrounding Bedouin distinctiveness and rights. Representatives of the tribes gathered to protest the “marginalization” of the Bedouins of the Beqaa (Chatty, Mansour, & Yassin, 2013). The attempt to appoint a Bedouin deputy from the Beqaa failed, but the Bedouin vote played a crucial role in the victory of the March 14 coalition, led by the Future Movement, in the Zahle district. Bedouin mobilization also became more effective in municipal and local elections, with seven Bedouin councilors and elected representatives becoming the first to be elected in the history of local elections in the Beqaa, in towns and villages throughout the region (e.g., Qab Elias, Marj, and Trablous). This largely reflects the Bedouins' growing sense of belonging to the area that they had previously been considered marginal to.

One result of the Bedouin political mobilization has been the development of additional layers of their already multifaceted identity. The first layer aligns with their local identity as “political citizens” in the towns and villages of the Beqaa. Another reason for this involves the national political landscape of Lebanon. They are now either aligned with the March 14 coalition or potentially with the March 8 coalition. They are also Sunni Muslims, with the right to political representation within the confessional political system. This system is largely defined within Lebanon's political structure, reinforcing a sense of “us” and “them.” For the Bedouins of the Beqaa, as their Sunni identity solidifies, the “other” becomes Christian or Shiite in neighboring cities. These emerging layers add complexity to the already intricate tribal identities.

In conclusion, the Bedouin communities of Lebanon, once marginalized and overlooked, are increasingly becoming a force in Lebanese politics. Their journey from social invisibility to political engagement highlights the changing dynamics of Lebanon’s multi-ethnic, multi-religious

society, where identity, citizenship, and political representation play crucial roles in shaping both local and national power structures.

Tribalism in Lebanon

Tribalism is deeply intertwined with the country's unique political system, which is based on SPS. Lebanon's consociational democracy, established by the National Pact of 1943, divides political power along religious lines, with different sectarian groups controlling various institutions and government positions. Within this framework, tribal communities have struggled to maintain their autonomy and influence, but they have nonetheless managed to assert themselves in local and national politics. While larger political parties and sectarian groups have overshadowed tribal influences over time, tribal communities in Lebanon still wield considerable power in specific regions, particularly in the Beqaa Valley and southern Lebanon. In these areas, tribal leaders remain integral to local governance, serving as key intermediaries between their communities and the state. These leaders hold considerable sway over local elections, with tribal loyalty often determining voting patterns. As such, tribal groups in Lebanon have become an important constituency for political parties seeking to maintain or gain power, particularly in rural areas where traditional kinship ties remain strong (Najm, 2020).

However, the political power of tribes in Lebanon has been increasingly diminished by the rise of modern political parties, particularly after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Political movements such as Hezbollah and Amal have gradually replaced traditional tribal leadership in many areas, particularly in the south. Despite this shift, many tribal communities continue to rely on their traditional leaders for local governance, protection, and dispute resolution. Due to the confessional structure in Lebanon, tribes, as kinship-based groups, have often found themselves caught between the larger sectarian divide, struggling to assert their identity within the broader framework of Lebanese politics (Gulick, 1965). In this context, tribal loyalty often plays a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape, especially in rural areas. For example, in the Beqaa Valley and southern Lebanon, tribal groups have historically aligned themselves with larger political movements that reflect their sectarian identity. In some cases, tribes have supported political factions that claim to represent their interests, either as a means of maintaining local influence or in response to larger national political developments (Gause, 2013).

Beyond politics, tribal communities in Lebanon continue to play an important role in the country's economy, particularly in rural areas. Agriculture and livestock herding have historically been the primary means of livelihood for many tribal groups, and these practices remain central to their way of life. However, modernization, urbanization, and the effects of climate change have gradually eroded traditional livelihoods, leading many younger members of tribal communities to migrate to urban centers or seek opportunities abroad.

The social role of tribes in Lebanon is equally important, as they provide a sense of identity and belonging to their members. In a country where sectarian and political divisions run deep, the tribe represents a stable source of solidarity. This sense of kinship and mutual support has allowed tribal groups to withstand political and economic crises, including the Lebanese Civil War and the ongoing political instability in the region. However, the erosion of traditional tribal structures, due to urbanization and modernization, poses a challenge to the preservation of tribal identities. As younger generations leave rural areas in search of better opportunities, the traditional bonds of kinship and loyalty that have long defined tribal communities are being weakened. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges, as tribal communities strive to balance their historical roots with the demands of a modern, globalized world.

To conclude, the tribal communities of Lebanon, though often overshadowed by the larger sectarian and political forces in the country, continue to play a vital role in shaping the political, social, and economic landscape. From their origins in the fertile lands of the Beqaa Valley and southern Lebanon to their contemporary role as important political players, tribal communities have endured through centuries of social, cultural, and political change. While tribalism in Lebanon has been increasingly challenged by the rise of political parties and the dynamics of Lebanon's sectarian system, these communities remain resilient, asserting their influence in local governance, elections, and social life. As Lebanon continues to navigate the complexities of its political and social structures, tribal communities will likely continue to be an important force, contributing to the broader national conversation about identity, citizenship, and the future of the country.

The Social and Economic Impact of SNIs

The social and economic landscape in Lebanon is deeply influenced by SNIs divisions, with each sect occupying distinct social and economic positions that contribute to inequality, social

unrest, and weakened security. Economic disparities between sectarian groups in Lebanon are both a result of and a reinforcement for sectarian identity, as opportunities and public services are often distributed along sectarian lines. These disparities create grievances that can fuel resentment, extremism, and a lack of cohesion within Lebanese society, ultimately impacting national security. This can be summarized as follows.

First, the sectarian political system in Lebanon is among the most influential factors affecting its national security. Under this system, key governmental positions and parliamentary seats are distributed among the country's major religious communities, including Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Druze. While this arrangement is intended to ensure balanced representation, it has instead led to political paralysis, weakened national unity, and significantly limited Lebanon's ability to effectively respond to security threats. Sectarian identities exert a dominant influence on Lebanese politics, shaping everything from electoral outcomes to foreign policy alignments, thereby generating complex and volatile security dynamics.

Second, the power-sharing arrangement among sectarian groups often results in political gridlock, as sectarian leaders prioritize the interests of their communities over national goals. Lebanon's parliament, with seats allocated along sectarian lines, frequently suffers from paralysis due to intense competition among factions. This gridlock is particularly evident in the formation of key government appointments, where disputes between sectarian leaders can delay cabinet formation for months or even years. For instance, following the 2018 parliamentary elections, it took nine months to form a government due to disagreements among sectarian factions. This political deadlock has severe repercussions for Lebanon's national security. The inability to form a unified government prevents the state from implementing comprehensive security policies or responding to internal and external threats in a timely manner. Furthermore, the repeated delays and disputes undermine public trust in the government, as citizens perceive the state as ineffective and beholden to sectarian interests. This erosion of public trust hampers the government's ability to garner national support for security initiatives, thereby weakening Lebanon's resilience in the face of internal unrest and foreign intervention.

Third, the influence of sectarian identities extends into Lebanon's security apparatus, where loyalties are often fragmented along sectarian lines. The LAF and other security institutions are composed of personnel from diverse religious backgrounds, reflecting the country's demographic composition. However, recruitment, promotion, and leadership structures within these institutions

are frequently shaped by sectarian considerations, which undermines their ability to function as cohesive national forces. For example, Shia members of the LAF may exhibit greater loyalty to Hezbollah, a powerful Shia militia and political party, than to the state itself. Hezbollah's status as a "Non-State Hybrid Armed Actors" operating within Lebanon creates a dual authority structure that limits the power of the LAF, particularly in southern regions where Hezbollah maintains significant influence. This dual loyalty complicates the LAF's ability to uniformly implement national security policies across the country, as it must balance its official mandate with the de facto control exerted by Hezbollah. Divided loyalties within Lebanon's security institutions weaken the state's monopoly on the use of force and create vulnerabilities in the national defense system. In the event of a conflict involving Hezbollah, the LAF's capacity to maintain neutrality or assert authority would be compromised, as sectarian allegiances could trigger internal divisions within the military. This fragmentation undermines Lebanon's ability to present a unified front against external threats, thereby eroding its sovereignty and national security.

Fourth, Lebanon's sectarian political system renders it particularly susceptible to foreign influence, as regional powers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia support specific sectarian groups to advance their strategic interests. Iran's backing of Hezbollah exemplifies how external actors exploit sectarian identities to project influence in Lebanon. By providing financial assistance, weapons, and military training, Iran has bolstered Hezbollah's position within Lebanon's political and security landscape, enabling it to operate independently of the Lebanese government. This support has deepened the divide between the Shia and Sunni communities, further polarizing Lebanon's political environment.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia has historically supported Sunni political factions, such as the Future Movement, to counterbalance Hezbollah's influence and promote a pro-Saudi agenda in Lebanon. This rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia often plays out in Lebanon's political arena, where sectarian leaders align with foreign patrons to gain support, thereby exacerbating internal divisions. Such foreign intervention undermines Lebanon's sovereignty, as decisions regarding national security are frequently influenced by external interests rather than domestic priorities. The influence of foreign actors on Lebanon's sectarian groups complicates the country's diplomatic relations and constrains its ability to adopt a neutral stance in regional conflicts. Lebanon's attempts to maintain a policy of "dissociation" from regional disputes are often thwarted by sectarian leaders who prioritize the agendas of their foreign backers. As a result, Lebanon struggles

to implement a coherent foreign policy, which affects its internal stability and exposes it to the risk of entanglement in external conflicts.

Fifth, sectarian divisions in Lebanon also hinder the country's counterterrorism efforts, as different communities perceive security threats through varied lenses. While the LAF and intelligence agencies are officially tasked with countering terrorism, sectarian affiliations can affect their effectiveness in combating extremist groups. For instance, Hezbollah's focus on fighting Sunni extremist organizations like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra aligns with its own strategic interests, as such groups pose a direct threat to Shia communities. However, Hezbollah's counterterrorism initiatives are primarily driven by its loyalty to Iran and its own political agenda, rather than a unified national security strategy.

The sectarian fragmentation of Lebanon's counterterrorism efforts undermines the state's capacity to combat extremism effectively, as the government lacks a cohesive approach that addresses threats across all communities. This fragmentation also increases the risk of radicalization among marginalized populations, as some individuals may perceive state-led counterterrorism measures as biased or sectarian. To enhance its counterterrorism capabilities, Lebanon must adopt a unified security approach that transcends sectarian interests and focuses on the collective security of all citizens.

Sixth, Lebanon's social fragmentation is deeply intertwined with its sectarian political system, which entrenches divisions among various religious and ethnic communities. This system has perpetuated a cycle of identity-based politics, where allegiance to sect or community often supersedes national loyalty. As a result, political competition revolves around securing resources and power for sectarian groups rather than promoting a unified national identity. The sectarian nature of Lebanese politics has exacerbated economic inequalities and hindered social mobility. Public resources are frequently distributed along sectarian lines, leading to inefficiencies and corruption. Essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure are often delivered through sectarian networks rather than centralized state institutions. This perpetuates disparities and deepens divisions, as communities compete for scarce resources instead of cooperating toward collective development.

Seventh, the political and economic structures in Lebanon are significantly influenced by patronage networks, where political elites use their influence to distribute resources and services based on sectarian lines. These networks undermine state authority by creating a parallel structure

in which access to public goods is contingent upon loyalty to specific sectarian leaders, rather than adherence to national institutions. This patronage system not only deepens social and economic divides but also weakens the state's ability to govern effectively, as public resources are often allocated based on sectarian patronage rather than national priorities.

Reliance on sectarian leaders for economic support reduces citizens' loyalty to the state, as individuals identify more strongly with their sectarian communities than with the national government. As a result, insecurity in the realm of economic welfare becomes linked to sectarian loyalty, leading to the erosion of state legitimacy and a decline in public trust in state institutions. This dynamic poses a security threat, as a weakened state becomes less able to address internal divisions, enforce the rule of law, and respond to security challenges. Strengthening state institutions and reducing dependence on patronage networks are essential steps in addressing Lebanon's social and economic divides. By promoting transparent governance, implementing anti-corruption measures, and allocating resources based on merit rather than sectarian affiliation, Lebanon can work towards a more just and cohesive society. Building an inclusive, accountable state would reduce reliance on sectarian networks, enhance loyalty to the national government, and bolster Lebanon’s capacity to maintain internal security.

The Elite, Clientelism, and Challenges of the Consociational System

The Lebanese power-sharing system enshrines the division of authority among the major religious groups, with the presidency allocated to the Maronite Christian, the prime ministership to the Sunni Muslim, and the presidency of parliament to the Shiite Muslim. This structure was designed to foster balance and prevent sectarian domination. However, it has also institutionalized sectarianism, embedding it deeply into Lebanon's political framework and creating a scenario where national unity is often sacrificed in favor of sectarian interests, this system, although intended to preserve stability, has often reinforced political fragmentation and hindered the development of a cohesive national identity (Wiesner, 2020; Cammett, 2019).

Lebanon's political system is a textbook example of consociational democracy, in which major state offices are distributed among the three principal sects (Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shiite Muslims) based on a “grand coalition.” Each sectarian leader represents their community and negotiates with others, and the political system is fundamentally based on consensus and cooperation among sectarian leaders. A key manifestation of this system was the election of Michel

Aoun following a prolonged presidential vacuum, where in some cases, the recourse to military leaders became necessary due to the scarcity of Maronite leaders who could command both popular support and the endorsement of multiple sects (Farha, 2012; Salamey & Tabar, 2008).

Through this consociational arrangement, Lebanon's national security evolved in accordance with a multifaceted network of sectarian alliances and power balances. While the Taif Accord reduced the powers of the Maronite president and increased the authority of the Sunni prime minister and the Shiite parliamentary speaker, it simultaneously bolstered Syrian influence in Lebanon. Syria was perceived as the guarantor of stability, managing the rivalries between sectarian elites (Fakhoury, 2016), as indicated by Haddad (2002) and Lijphart (1977). However, a stark division emerged between those who supported Syrian presence in Lebanon and those who opposed it, particularly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. This event triggered the withdrawal of Syrian forces under both domestic and international pressure, further entrenching the rift between the March 8 Alliance, pro-Syrian, and the March 14 Alliance, which opposed Syrian influence (Vaughan, 2018).

The consociational system in Lebanon has, over time, proven to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it has contributed to a relative degree of stability over the decades by ensuring that power is shared among Lebanon's major religious sects. On the other hand, this same system has hindered the development of the state and weakened its democratic institutions. As the gap between sects widens and crises grow more complex, the consociational model seems increasingly incapable of addressing Lebanon's deep-rooted challenges. This has led to an urgent need for either a radical reform of the system or the search for an entirely new alternative. However, achieving such a change in a deeply sectarian society remains a monumental challenge.

Lebanon's national security faces the delicate task of balancing sectarian equilibrium with national independence. As long as Lebanon continues to rely on sectarian and regional alliances, its national security will remain vulnerable to external and internal fluctuations. Stability continues to depend on the political elites' ability to reach consensus and protect Lebanon's higher interests within the confines of the consociational framework. However, the very nature of the consociational system means that these compromises often come at the expense of national interests in favor of sectarian agendas. As a result, Lebanon's security policy remains fragmented, susceptible to both external pressures and internal factionalism.

In the context of Lebanon's political system, clientelism emerges as a persistent phenomenon that not only shapes the behavior of political elites but also reinforces sectarian divisions within society. Numerous studies highlight that clientelism is not a temporary phenomenon but rather a long-standing feature, even in advanced democracies. "*Clientelist Patrons*" in Lebanon provide services to members of their sects, and sometimes even to individuals from other sects (Hamzeh, 2001, p. 172). This practice contributes to the formation of imagined collective identities that are often framed around sectarian lines. As a result, clientelism exacerbates social inequalities between sects, deepening societal divisions. The provision of social welfare, through this clientelist lens, becomes a tool for cementing sectarianism, where access to social safety nets is often determined by sectarian affiliation (Cammett, 2015, p. S85).

Clientelism significantly influences the behavior of Lebanon's political elites, transforming patronage into an essential part of the political process. These elites focus on securing state resources and distributing them among their sectarian bases to solidify political support. Some argues that the terms "consociationalism" and "clientelism" in Lebanon have become interchangeable, further complicating the structural crisis of Lebanon's national security. This intertwining of patronage with power-sharing not only complicates the governance process but also weakens the state's ability to maintain stability and security.

The alliances between political elites in Lebanon, which are rooted in elite diplomacy and consociational arrangements, represent one of the most significant challenges to Lebanese national security. Some studies argue that cooperation between political elites forms the foundation for successful consociational systems. However, despite this cooperation, the absence of genuine willingness among community elites to reach meaningful agreements between sects remains a major obstacle. Due to the effectiveness of a consociational system is directly tied to the elites' ability to create a unified societal framework based on community-wide consensus. This has not materialized in Lebanon, further aggravating the fragility of national security.

The Lebanese system is thus characterized by a constant tension between cooperation and division. Although political elites work together within a framework of consociational governance, their deep reliance on sectarian loyalties prevents the formation of a cohesive national identity. This fragmentation within the elite class results in political gridlock and impedes any progress toward resolving the country's structural issues. Consequently, the security and stability of

Lebanon become subject to the whims of sectarian political deals, where each sect strives to secure its own interests at the expense of the collective national good (McGinn, 2018).

In Lebanon, political elites play a central role in shaping the country's stability and national security. The Lebanese political system, which relies on sectarian consensus and power-sharing, enhances the influence of sectarian elites in formulating both security and economic policies (Salamey & Tabar, 2012). These elites are often linked to powerful political families, such as the Hariri family for the Sunni community, the Jumblatt family for the Druze, and Hezbollah's leadership for the Shiite community. These elites are a fundamental part of Lebanon's political and social structure, directly influencing political and security decisions in the country. The exploitation of identity by political elites and its impact on national security.

In Lebanon, political positions are often allocated based on sectarian affiliation, which deepens the sectarian divide and exacerbates the fragmented nature of the Lebanese state. This sectarian division becomes particularly evident in the distribution of key political offices, such as the presidency being reserved for a Maronite Christian, the prime minister for a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament for a Shiite Muslim. This institutionalization of sectarianism complicates the state's ability to form a coherent national strategy, especially in addressing security challenges. Elites often prioritize their sectarian interests over national concerns, which undermines the capacity of the Lebanese government to tackle security threats effectively.

Patronage networks, which are supported and managed by the Lebanese political elites, extend deeply into the security sector. These networks are built on sectarian loyalty rather than merit, where appointments within the security services are often made based on sectarian affiliations. This undermines the integrity of institutions and erodes trust in the state's security apparatus. As highlighted by the work of the LSE Blogs, the influence of sectarian elites within the security sector means that loyalty to sectarian leaders often takes precedence over loyalty to the state, which weakens Lebanon’s ability to address security threats cohesively.

Political elites in Lebanon, drawn from powerful sectarian families, control significant political and economic resources, including the security sector. Through these patronage networks, they distribute resources and services to secure the loyalty of their sectarian constituencies. While this system has helped maintain stability within sectarian communities, it contributes to the fragmentation of Lebanon’s national identity, making it increasingly difficult for the state to implement a unified national security strategy. Furthermore, this system opens the door for foreign

intervention, as sectarian elites often align themselves with external powers that support their respective sects.

Sectarian populism in Lebanon represents a significant barrier to the construction of a unified national state. Politicians often exploit sectarian sentiments to garner popular support, playing on religious and cultural sensitivities to reinforce sectarian loyalty. This strategy has led to the rise of sectarian leaders as “saviors” of their communities, and has created authoritarian pockets within Lebanon's democratic framework, making it increasingly difficult to establish a fair and stable political system. This populist rhetoric intensifies sectarian divisions, which not only undermines national unity but also complicates the formulation of a cohesive national security policy (Salamey & Tabar, 2008).

Patronage networks supported by Lebanon's political elites are deeply embedded within the security sector, where appointments are frequently made based on sectarian loyalty rather than merit. This practice weakens the effectiveness of security institutions, as decisions are often driven by sectarian considerations rather than the national interest. The use of patronage to secure political and economic advantages for sectarian groups exacerbates the fragmentation of the security apparatus, making it difficult for Lebanon to respond to internal and external security challenges in a unified manner. The influence of sectarian elites in the security sector also creates a situation where some groups operate independently or in parallel with the state, further weakening the government's control over its security forces.

Economic elites in Lebanon also play a crucial role in maintaining national stability by providing jobs, funding infrastructure, and supporting community development. However, they also maintain significant political power through economic patronage, which can exacerbate corruption and weaken state institutions. Lebanon’s dependence on economic stability driven by these elites contributes to systemic inequality, making the country more vulnerable to economic shocks, which can, in turn, impact national security. The concentration of economic power in the hands of a few elite families has created a system where economic security is often tied to sectarian loyalty, further deepening Lebanon's divisions.

Patronage networks have profound implications for national security in Lebanon. By linking economic benefits to sectarian loyalty, these networks create a situation where individuals are more closely aligned with their sectarian group than with the state. This reliance on sectarian leaders weakens public trust in the state and reduces citizens' loyalty to Lebanon as a unified

nation. The insecurity surrounding economic welfare, tied to sectarian affiliations, erodes the legitimacy of the government and diminishes its authority to implement national security policies that transcend sectarian interests.

The power and influence of sectarian elites contribute to the fragmentation of Lebanon's security landscape. Competing elites often pursue different security agendas that align with the interests of their sectarian constituencies, complicating the government's ability to formulate a unified security strategy. For example, Sunni leaders may prioritize confronting Hezbollah's influence, while Shiite leaders may view Hezbollah as a legitimate force for resisting external threats, particularly from Israel. This division within the political elite results in competing security priorities, making it difficult to build a cohesive national security strategy. This fragmentation extends into Lebanon's security institutions, where sectarian loyalties often influence recruitment, promotion, and decision-making. The LAF, like other security services, reflect Lebanon's sectarian diversity, but sectarian affiliations play a significant role in shaping recruitment and promotions. This further divides the security sector and hinders its ability to function effectively. The influence of sectarian elites within the security apparatus undermines the state's control over security forces, limiting its ability to enforce national security policies consistently.

The influence of sectarian elites in Lebanon extends beyond domestic politics, as many of these elites align themselves with foreign powers that support their respective sects. Regional powers such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Syria have historically exploited sectarian divisions in Lebanon to exert influence, providing financial and military support to local factions. This foreign support deepens internal divisions, as elites prioritize the interests of their foreign patrons, further complicating Lebanon's national security. Such external alignments threaten Lebanon's sovereignty and reduce the government's ability to pursue a cohesive national security strategy that prioritizes internal stability over regional rivalries. For example, France has historically played a central role in Lebanese politics, particularly in its relationship with the Christian sects, especially the Maronites. This connection dates back to the French Mandate period after WWI. France has traditionally been a strong ally of the Christian communities in Lebanon, particularly the Maronites, with whom it shares deep cultural and historical ties. This alliance has faced criticism from other factions within Lebanon, particularly those who view French influence as a remnant of colonialism that aims to preserve sectarian balances to serve specific interests at the expense of Lebanon's national sovereignty.

Conclusion

The Lebanese political system, deeply rooted in clientelism and confessional arrangements, embodies a dual relationship between patrons—typically elite political figures or sectarian leaders—and their clients, comprising citizens or groups who rely on these patrons for material or symbolic resources. In this system, resources are allocated based on sectarian allegiances, especially during electoral periods, where the promise of support is exchanged for political loyalty. Such a model engenders an unequal distribution of wealth and benefits, which exacerbates existing social divisions and perpetuates a dependency that underpins the stability of the confessional order.

Clientelism operates as an unofficial parallel structure alongside formal state institutions, thereby complicating the political landscape. These entrenched networks of patron-client relationships become so integral that they resist any attempt at dismantling, thereby ensuring the persistence of sectarian dominance. This duality has significant implications for national security: the concentration of resources and authority in the hands of sectarian leaders creates a form of political dependency that undermines the cohesion of national identity and, by extension, the state's ability to effectively address security challenges.

Given these conditions, Lebanon's national security strategy must evolve to transcend the traditional confessional system, which relies heavily on clientelistic ties. Political elites are called upon to move away from sectarian-centric politics and towards building a comprehensive national identity that prioritizes the state’s interests over narrow sectarian concerns. A truly effective confessional system requires genuine cooperation among the political elite—a cooperation that is often stifled by persistent narrow sectarian interests. Without such collaboration, the confessional model not only fails to deliver sustainable political stability but also aggravates security dilemmas.

Scholars argue that Lebanese democracy is “pseudo” or incomplete. Power struggles often bypass formal democratic channels, manifesting in street protests, riots, and even militia conflicts. The ever-shifting electoral policies, coupled with the sectarian allocation of parliamentary seats, curtail genuine electoral representation and further entrench the dominance of major sects. Hezbollah’s ascendance within this framework exemplifies how sectarian allegiances can skew the political playing field, whereby the Shiite community supports the government while other groups such as Christians and Druze express dissent (Cammett & Issar, 2010; Worrall, Mabon, & Clubb, 2015). Although the confessional system is touted as a mechanism for reflecting Lebanon's

religious and cultural diversity, it simultaneously undermines the principles of liberal democracy and individual rights. The rigid classification of citizens along sectarian lines inhibits the formation of an inclusive national identity and entrenches societal divisions. Consequently, state institutions are often relegated to serving sectarian interests rather than those of the nation as a whole.

A critical feature of the confessional model is the unwritten but deeply entrenched principle of mutual veto, which allows any sect to block political decisions perceived as detrimental to its interests. This mechanism, while initially designed to maintain balance among diverse groups, now hinders significant institutional reform and debilitates governmental efficacy. Cabinet formation relies on broad sectarian coalitions that distribute ministerial portfolios and public positions according to predetermined sectarian quotas, thereby stymieing any substantial shift in power dynamics. The situation is further complicated by external interventions and regional dynamics. Lebanon's internal sectarian fault lines are often exploited by regional powers, with sectarian factions in the country acting as proxies in broader geopolitical conflicts. The ongoing Arab-Israeli confrontation, coupled with the Iranian-Western rivalry, has positioned Lebanese sects on opposite ends of these conflicts, making national security more contingent on regional developments than on domestic governance. This intertwinement of local and regional politics exacerbates the state's vulnerability to external pressures, as foreign powers manipulate sectarian allegiances for their own strategic ends.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is a state whose institutions remain weak, mired in a cycle of sectarian patronage and political inertia. The persistence of clientelistic practices and the overemphasis on sectarian loyalties have stifled the development of a robust, unified national identity. In such an environment, national security is compromised, with the state often resorting to sectarian loyalties rather than meritocratic or civic principles in its governance. This dependency not only hinders effective policy implementation but also opens the door to further foreign interference. Moreover, the Lebanese identity crisis, which has been compounded since the inception of the second Lebanese state, reflects the broader challenge of reconciling national, pan-Arab, and religious identities. While some Arab states have endeavored to forge a unifying national identity, Lebanon's deeply ingrained sectarian system has precluded a similar process. The inability to forge a cohesive national identity continues to fuel internal discord and diminishes the state's capacity to enact comprehensive reform.

In conclusion, the Lebanese confessional system, underpinned by clientelistic practices, presents a dual-edged challenge. On one hand, it has historically served to mitigate open sectarian conflict by ensuring representation of diverse groups. On the other hand, it reinforces divisions and undermines the state's ability to build strong, impartial institutions capable of enforcing the rule of law and ensuring national security. Overcoming these obstacles necessitates a radical political and institutional reform—one that emphasizes national citizenship, equitable resource distribution, and the depoliticization of state functions. Only by transcending the parochial loyalties of sectarianism can Lebanon hope to foster a unified national identity and build a resilient framework for national security in the face of both internal and external threats.

Despite Lebanon's attempts at consensual governance to mitigate sectarian division, sectarian populism continues to threaten these efforts, exacerbating national divisions and reinforcing autocratic leadership that subordinates the state and sects to its own interests. This is also evident in Iraq, where sectarian populism has led to the polarization of the population and the fragmentation of society. These consensual arrangements have hindered the parliament's ability to form strong governments or appoint state leaders, resulting in prolonged periods of political vacuum and weak central authority. In the absence of a unified and effective state, both Iraqis and Lebanese increasingly turn to sectarian protection rather than national unity, relying more on sectarian populist leadership instead of fostering inclusive democratic institutions.

It is difficult to imagine a democratic transition in deeply divided societies, especially within a framework of consensual governance and sectarian populist leadership, where the reverse seems to be a prerequisite for democratic change. Therefore, any vision for security sector reform in Lebanon must consider this profound divergence in identities and affiliations. Reform should go beyond merely focusing on the development of security agencies to include the creation of a political and social environment that ensures fair representation of all factions and works to strengthen national loyalty. This vision requires a holistic approach, treating national security as part of a larger system that involves promoting social justice, rebuilding institutions on a non-sectarian basis, and working to reduce the influence of external actors who exploit sectarian fragmentation to further foreign agendas.

CHAPTER SIX: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JORDAN AND LEBANON

The Arab world has witnessed unprecedented and profound transformations following the outbreak of the Arab uprisings in 2011. These transformations extended beyond the political realm to reshape the social and economic structures, fundamentally altering the relationship between individuals and the state. Amidst these sweeping changes, SNIs emerged as a pivotal factor that redefined public discourse across numerous Arab countries and contributed significantly to shaping national security in the post-uprising era. These SNIs —whether sectarian, tribal, ethnic, or religious—played a dual role. On the one hand, they fragmented internal societal cohesion; on the other, they were instrumentalized either to entrench or destabilize political regimes, depending on the socio-political context of each state.

The uprisings repositioned the core issues within Arab political discourse. Demands for democracy, social justice, and human rights took center stage. As the Arab uprisings gained momentum in 2011 and the Syrian regime responded with brutal suppression of peaceful protesters, the political landscape and collective identities of the region underwent fundamental change. In the post-2011 order, traditional issues such as Palestine, Israel, and relations with the West receded in relative importance, giving way to debates on legitimate forms of governance, sectarian divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, ideological rivalries between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, and broader tensions between secularists and Islamists (Malmvig, 2013). Some scholars have even argued that internal divisions rooted in SNIs have overtaken previously dominant concerns—such as the Palestinian cause—as the region's central conflict (Abdo, 2013).

Lebanon and Jordan stand as two prominent cases for examining the impact of SNIs on Arab national security in the wake of the uprisings. Despite their distinct political and social histories, both countries are characterized by diverse societies composed of multiple identities and affiliations. However, the methods through which these identities have been managed and incorporated within state structures have significantly influenced each country’s internal stability and national cohesion. Lebanon epitomizes a deeply sectarian political order based on power-sharing arrangements that institutionalize identity-based divisions, while Jordan has traditionally relied on a delicate balance of tribal and geographic dynamics to maintain domestic stability.

Nevertheless, both models faced serious challenges in the aftermath of the uprisings, as SNIs reemerged as influential forces shaping domestic and foreign policies.

In Lebanon, sectarianism has long been embedded in a political system built on meticulously structured confessional quotas, rendering SNIs a central feature of governance. This model, in place for decades, has not been immune to crises; rather, it has often deepened divisions among Lebanon's various sectarian communities instead of fostering a cohesive national identity. Following the Arab uprisings and their regional repercussions, sectarian affiliations in Lebanon were further politicized, with certain sects becoming proxies for foreign influence. This external entanglement significantly undermined state sovereignty and national stability, with various sectarian actors aligning themselves with regional powers.

Conversely, Jordan has pursued a different strategy in managing SNIs. Its political system is predicated on maintaining equilibrium between tribal and geographic components, which has contributed to relative stability over several decades. However, the spillover effects of the Arab uprisings have strained this balance. Regional upheavals and mounting economic pressures have revitalized subnational loyalties within Jordanian society. While these identities were once used to reinforce loyalty to the regime, they now pose a potential threat to national unity, particularly if not handled with prudence.

Undoubtedly, internal tensions have reemerged in the post-uprising era. Compared to the pre-2011 period, identity-based conflicts have grown in intensity and expanded in scope. The actors involved are no longer limited to pro-Western Sunni Arab leaders who promoted sectarian narratives to delegitimize Iran and its allies through the rhetoric of the “Shiite Crescent.” Civil society groups, populist religious leaders, and other NSAs have increasingly engaged in identity-driven mobilization. Sectarian fearmongering has proliferated across Arab satellite television channels, social media platforms, and everyday discourse, reinforcing societal divisions (Malmvig, 2013).

Any analysis of national security in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings must begin by acknowledging the regional power struggle that followed. This competition can be understood as a continuation of the “new cold war” that unfolded in the late 2000s, as it employed similar tactics, particularly cross-border battles for political legitimacy. However, the core concern in the post-2011 context shifted from external alignments with the West to the internal threats and opportunities generated by the uprisings themselves. Key regional powers—namely Turkey, Iran,

and Saudi Arabia—possessed sufficient resources, domestic cohesion, and resilience to capitalize on the post-uprising political vacuum and employ legitimacy narratives across national borders. Despite not experiencing large-scale uprisings akin to those in Egypt, Syria, or Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan were nonetheless vulnerable due to their fragmented societies and non-centralized regimes, making them prime targets for regional power projection (Hinnebusch, 2019).

In Lebanon, the security landscape deteriorated as sectarian tensions intensified with the escalation of the Syrian crisis and increasing intervention by regional and international actors. Each domestic faction came to be backed by external patrons, which further entrenched internal divisions. Hezbollah, as the dominant representative of the Shiite community, deepened its alignment with Iran, thereby exacerbating tensions with other sectarian groups and destabilizing the broader political order. The interweaving of domestic sectarian politics with regional power dynamics rendered Lebanon's national security increasingly contingent on volatile external alliances.

Jordan, while avoiding revolutionary upheaval, did not remain immune to the broader regional fallout. The influx of Syrian refugees and the economic burdens associated with regional instability exposed existing fissures within Jordanian society, particularly tribal and geographic disparities. These developments challenged the state's ability to equitably distribute resources and meet the expectations of its diverse constituencies. As a result, some segments of the population reverted to subnational affiliations in search of protection and support.

Although the discourse of the Arab uprisings initially appeared to prioritize universal demands for rights and freedoms across all backgrounds (Jaafar, 2021), SNIs continued to be leveraged for political mobilization. Various actors used identity politics to increase influence, obscure pressing socioeconomic issues, or solidify support bases. Even in instances where grassroots protest movements transcended sectarian or ideological divisions—such as in Lebanon, Algeria, and Iraq in 2019— (Haynes, 2013, p. 2) political elites were often compelled to follow the lead of popular movements they had initially dismissed. Nonetheless, identity-driven mobilization remained the dominant mode of organization in most cases.

This pattern is particularly evident in Arab political systems where security forces, especially in Lebanon and Jordan, have come to serve as protectors not only of ruling elites but of an entrenched political and economic order. The upper echelons of these security apparatuses often function as instruments of the regime, tasked with preserving the status quo and shielding the

privileges of various elite factions. In doing so, they contribute to a security paradigm more focused on regime survival than on fostering inclusive national stability.

This condition was compounded by the fact that civil societies across the Arab world have generally remained weak and fragmented—a reality that did not emerge by chance, but rather as a direct result of authoritarian political strategies aimed at weakening the public sphere and preventing the rise of organized forces capable of challenging state authority. This structural weakness complicated the relationship between state and society, rendering civil societies incapable of driving comprehensive and sustainable political transformation, even in the face of the widespread popular momentum witnessed during the Arab uprisings.

Authoritarian regimes in the region deliberately fragmented societies along sectarian, ethnic, and tribal lines, thereby dismantling communal solidarity and undermining civil and political movements. Internal divisions were not only encouraged but institutionalized in order to weaken opposition and prevent the formation of unified fronts against ruling elites. Governments imposed restrictive legal frameworks governing the operation of civil associations, labor unions, and non-governmental organizations, severely limiting their capacity for independent action. Legal registration and financial regulations were used as tools of control, while civil movements and activists were systematically targeted through surveillance, arrests, and smear campaigns.

At the outset, the uprisings displayed a remarkable unity of purpose against autocratic rule. However, this initial cohesion soon gave way to political fragmentation, most notably between Islamist and secular factions. The ensuing power struggle during the post-uprising transitional phase diluted the popular momentum and either reinstated elements of the old regimes or led to fragile compromise arrangements. Civil movements lacked unified leadership capable of steering change or managing transitional processes effectively. This organizational void enabled traditional political elites and, in many cases, military institutions to reclaim control over political trajectories.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, SNIs were instrumentalized as political tools to undermine opposition movements, which themselves were often rooted in these very identities. Authorities exploited existing communal divisions to discredit and destabilize dissent, strategically pitting different groups against one another. Economic privileges and access to public services were leveraged to reinforce subnational loyalties, thereby entrenching the political status quo and impeding the development of a cohesive national opposition capable of mounting a serious challenge to incumbent regimes.

A comparative analysis between Lebanon and Jordan reveals a central issue concerning the role of SNIs in shaping the trajectory of national security in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings. In both cases, these identities have become instruments of internal contestation, weakening the overarching sense of national identity and negatively impacting state stability. However, the ways in which the two states have managed these identities reflect divergent political and social approaches. In Lebanon, the sectarian system—originally designed to maintain balance among the country's diverse communities—has instead become a source of division and fragmentation. Religious sects have evolved into proxies for regional and international conflicts, severely impeding Lebanon's ability to achieve sustainable stability or construct an effective national security strategy. In Jordan, despite the regime's longstanding success in managing tribal and geographical diversity, the economic and social crises that followed the Arab uprisings exposed the fragility of this model. Although Jordan did not experience internal collapse, SNIs remain a latent threat to future cohesion.

6.1.The Case of Jordan

Jordan shares with other Arab countries many of the factors that contributed to the emergence of popular movements, such as high unemployment rates, declining living standards, the absence of social justice, as well as the spread of corruption and the lack of accountability. However, the specificity of the Jordanian case lies in the intersection of internal and external factors, where geopolitical considerations play a pivotal role in determining the trajectories and possibilities of the movement (Sunik, 2013; Ababneh, 2019). The Jordanian movement during the period of 2011–2013 was a social and political protest movement born out of discontent in peripheral areas that had long been considered strongholds of unwavering support for the regime in Jordan. The foundations of the movement were laid in the spring of 2010 through the Jordanian military veterans' movement, which combined East Bank nationalism that criticized the government's approach to the Palestinian issue with opposition to the neoliberal economic reforms that had come to dominate policymaking under King Abdullah II (Tell, 2015).

The motives behind the Jordanian movement varied between economic demands—such as improving living conditions and increasing wages—and political ones related to constitutional reform and expanding political participation. The nature of the actors involved in this movement

also differed; while some segments were led by independent activists, political parties, professional unions, and tribal groups also played a role in mobilizing the Jordanian street.

In the preceding phase, the period between 2007 and 2008 witnessed an intersection between the global financial crisis and the rise in prices of basic commodities, which exacerbated the state of discontent among public sector employees, particularly those living in the remote areas of the East Bank. By the spring of 2010, the protest movement intensified with the involvement of military veterans, who were negatively affected by the government's plans to restructure the armed forces and rationalize military spending. In this context, the National Committee of Military Retirees, driven by the support of opposition elites in the East Bank with Jordanian nationalist orientations, joined the wave of protests led by port workers and teachers who rejected the rapid privatization policies and educational reforms.

After the Gendarmerie Forces failed to suppress the protests of Aqaba Port workers in 2009 (Doughan, 2020), Jordan witnessed a qualitative shift in protest movements against neoliberal policies. The crisis at the time centered around plans to sell the port to investors from the UAE, a move that would have resulted in the cancellation of workers' housing. The commander of the military in Aqaba played a decisive role by intervening to protect the workers who had taken refuge in the military hospital, thereby contributing to the failure of the repressive measures backed by the Royal Court. This intervention marked a pivotal moment, demonstrating the workers' capacity to resist neoliberal economic policies through local support networks and military connections. Meanwhile, the National Committee of Military Retirees began to emerge as a significant political actor. Encouraged by figures such as the writer Nahed Hattar, the committee became directly involved in supporting public sector protests, particularly in the areas of Karak, Ajloun, and Salt. These areas witnessed demonstrations involving both students and teachers. The slogans promoted by the committee increasingly adopted a nationalistic tone, influenced by a broader nationalist discourse that linked protest against social and economic injustices to major national issues, such as the rejection of what was described as “Zionist schemes” to liquidate the Palestinian cause.

Criticism of the regime’s neoliberal policies and the hostility of certain political elites in the capital, Amman, led to the formation of a heterogeneous coalition. This coalition included Jordanian-Palestinian businessmen, anti-normalization activists, opposition parliamentarians, and defenders of the Wadi Araba Treaty. Despite their varied political backgrounds, these actors united

in their efforts to confront the radical nationalist discourse espoused by the National Committee of Military Retirees (Ryan, 2011).

On May 1, 2010, the National Committee of Teachers issued a decisive statement in coordination with nationalist figures from the East Bank and dissenting elements within the Jordanian elite. The statement warned against a “soft transfer” of Palestinians across the Jordan River, alleging the existence of a plan to liquidate the Palestinian cause at Jordan’s expense. It also criticized the domination of what it described as a “narrow and unrepresentative group” over political decision-making, while simultaneously affirming loyalty to King Abdullah II. Nevertheless, the Royal Court did not escape criticism, as the statement implicitly targeted Queen Rania as well. With the outbreak of the Jasmine Revolution and the uprisings that swept the Arab world in 2011, these social movements evolved to form the nucleus of what came to be known as East Bank Hirak (Tell, 2015). The first mass mobilizations in Jordan erupted in November and December 2010. This coincided with the intensification of labor activism and protests related to workers' rights, reflecting a growing state of discontent even before the demonstrations transformed into a regional wave in 2011.

The Jordanian political scene between 2011 and 2013 witnessed a clear openness in terms of political freedoms, manifested in the permission to organize marches and events that raised specific reform demands. This openness came in light of internal developments, most notably economic and social challenges, alongside regional changes imposed by the democratic revolutions in the Arab world, as well as international pressures—particularly from the US—that pushed toward qualitative political changes. These combined factors constituted an exceptional historical moment in which internal and external dynamics overlapped, placing political reform at the top of both the official and popular agendas in the country (Barari, 2013; Ababneh, 2019; Seeley, 2013).

Amid escalating protests and mounting public pressure, the Royal Court and its neoliberal allies found themselves on the defensive. This opened up space for military veterans to assert a more prominent political presence. In this context, the National Committee of Military Retirees supported the Muslim Brotherhood’s boycott of the parliamentary elections held in November 2010. This move significantly undermined the electoral legitimacy of Prime Minister Samir Rifai’s government, especially in light of growing tensions over neoliberal policies and the lack of adequate political representation.

Following the November 2010 elections—which were marred by tribal violence in Ma'an, Karak, and Salt due to allegations of electoral fraud—popular mobilization surged across the East Bank. In the final quarter of 2010, the progressive Jordanian movement led a new wave of political and social activism. The youth affiliated with this movement successfully formed an alliance with leftist youth of Palestinian origins who were active in the Social Left Organization, as well as with Islamists from East Jordan affiliated with the youth wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Irbid. These unconventional alliances resulted in a more organized and powerful protest movement, later named *The Jordanian Campaign for Change* (*jāyīn, we are coming,* جايين) which solidified its position as a major player in the popular mobilization. In December 2010, a demonstration in front of the parliament forced newly elected lawmakers to distance themselves from the newly elected Speaker of the Parliament and former Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez, who had opposed calls for the creation of a Teachers' Syndicate (Bustani , 2011; Crisis Group, 2012).

The Jordanian popular movement was not merely an immediate reaction or a conventional response to the wave of Arab revolutions, but rather it coincided with them in terms of timing, bearing in mind that Jordan preceded many Arab countries in organizing demonstrations and popular demands calling for a change in governmental approaches. This period can be viewed as a pivotal phase in Jordanian political mobilization, as it reflected the complexities of the political and social landscape and the challenges facing reform in a turbulent regional environment (Sunik, 2013). This movement began to gradually take shape in response to a set of political, economic, and social challenges facing society. This movement produced multiple frameworks, some of which were purely demand-based in nature, while others adopted broader political and reformist demands. In light of these facts, it became necessary to analyze the Jordanian movement within its general context, highlighting the factors influencing its dynamics and challenges.

The success of the Aqaba protests inspired other social sectors to join the wave of demonstrations, including temporary government workers who demanded better living conditions. Simultaneously, public school teachers—constituting a significant social force with over 105,000 members—began escalating their mobilization to demand the reestablishment of the Teachers' Syndicate, which had been banned since the 1950s. These demands posed a direct challenge to the regime, particularly because reclaiming public control over educational policy represented a tangible threat to the authority of the monarchy. Prime Minister Samir Rifai rejected mediation offers, prompting the teachers to adopt bolder, street-based mobilization strategies (Tell, 2015).

The first mass demonstrations erupted on January 14, 2011, Day of Rage, this marked the beginning of widespread protests in Jordan, with thousands demonstrating against rising commodity prices, unemployment, and corruption, and then spread to various professional sectors, with the engineers', doctors', nurses', and teachers' syndicates organizing strikes and sit-ins (Phillips, 2019). The protests began to spread both within Amman and beyond, with demonstrations appearing in several cities such as Dhiban, Tafila, Ma'an, and Karak. Protesters focused their demands on the removal of the Prime Minister and his government due to privatization policies and neoliberal economic reforms, which many saw as undermining the social safety net and causing unwanted economic and social transformations. These protests did not target the king or the Hashemite regime personally, but protesters walked a fine line between calling for political reform and avoiding crossing the "red lines" in Jordanian politics.

In the wake of the January 2011 protests in Amman, al-Tafayilah neighborhood (*Hayy al-Ṭafāʾila*) emerged as a site of dual significance: prior to March 24, 2011, it was known for producing youth who acted as regime-aligned "thugs" to help security forces break up the sit-in at the Ministry of Interior Circle—serving effectively as instruments of state repression. On the evening of March 24, however, those very same young men joined the assault on the sit-in, provoking widespread public outrage and transforming their image from loyal regime supporters into active opponents. Weeks later, in early March 2011, a group of unemployed residents of al-Tafayilah neighborhood staged a sit-in at the gate of the Royal Palace to demand jobs and educational opportunities. When officials handed them JOD 200 checks in aid, they tore them up, declaring, "We did not come here to beg!"—a clear repudiation of the royal patronage system that reduced citizens to supplicants (Doughan, 2020; Yom, 2014).

This political shift reflected a realignment of the regime's priorities in the face of increasing internal challenges, with the pressure from popular movements serving as a key factor in reshaping the political landscape of Jordan during this period. Since the onset of protests in Jordan following the Arab revolutions in 2011, the country witnessed a diversity of political and societal forces participating in those protests, which added complexity to the Jordanian political scene and influenced the stance of the monarchy. While the popular movement initially appeared to be limited and quiet, the rapid development of the situation and the movement's gaining support from various social sectors, including retired military personnel and Jordanian tribes, posed a genuine challenge to the regime. Initially, participants in the protests were from liberal and youth groups,

who organized demonstrations through social media platforms such as “March 24 Movement” and “April 15 Youth”, which aimed to sharply criticize the government. Together, these date-named movements marked the birth of Jordan’s Arab Uprisings: pioneering online organization, non-partisan youth leadership, and direct sit-in tactics that reverberated through later nationwide strikes, protests, and ultimately influenced the government’s subsequent reform packages.

Several Jordanian cities emerged as key centers of the movement, with Dhiban and Tafila playing pivotal roles from the outset, while protests continued in Ma’an, Karak, and Irbid with steady momentum. As public momentum grew, the movement gradually raised its demands, asserting that the constitutional amendments offered by the authorities fell short of popular aspirations. The movement rejected government changes that brought no substantive change, such as the replacement of the government of Ma'ruf al-Bakhit with the government of Awn al-Khasawneh. The demands increasingly expanded to include the restoration of popular sovereignty and the formation of an elected government (*constitutional monarchy*) that would reflect the popular will (Christophersen, 2013; Bustani , 2011).

Although marches and demands for reform persisted since the launch of the “Dhiban March” on January 14, 2011, and despite the participation of both traditional and new forces in these movements, the differences in priorities and demands were evident in the speeches, statements, and slogans raised by the various protest movements across the kingdom. However, the political shift in Jordan was not the result of a radical change in public sentiment, but rather a reflection of changes within the political system itself, as the official response to these movements affected the dynamics of the political scene more broadly.

These developments coincided with the intensification of the Arab Uprisings waves across the region. With the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's regime and the influence of the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, King Abdullah II unexpectedly dismissed Prime Minister Samir Rifai in an attempt to contain the crisis. The King appointed Ma'ruf al-Bakhit, a former general who had engaged in dialogue with the National Committee of Military Retirees, as the new Prime Minister. Al-Bakhit formed a new government that included figures sympathetic to the nationalists in the East Bank, signaling the regime's response to popular demands and the mounting pressure from the growing movement (Al-Khalidi, 2011).

As part of the regime’s efforts, the royal leadership supported the formation of a National Dialogue Committee, chaired by the President of the Senate and former Prime Minister Taher al-

Masri. This committee was tasked with reforming the electoral system, which had long been a point of criticism. A second committee was also formed to review constitutional amendments, including those dating back to the 1950s during King Hussein's rule. These amendments had expanded the powers of the executive branch at the expense of the parliament and judiciary, sparking prolonged debates over the balance of powers in the Jordanian political system. Despite these initiatives, their impact on public opinion in the East Bank was initially limited. On February 5, 2011, around thirty prominent figures from the East Bank tribes issued a statement that marked a significant escalation in rhetoric. The statement included accusations against the Queen and her family of financial misconduct and warned of external conspiracies aiming to naturalize Palestinians and create an alternative homeland for them in Jordan. The statement was considered a serious escalation in political discourse, with the National Committee of Veterans pointing out that the historical contract between Jordanians and the Hashemite family had been violated.

Unlike the capital-based opposition, many Hirak groups in north and south crossed sensitive red lines. They openly criticized King Abdullah II, comparing him to ousted regional autocrats like Mubarak and Qadhafi, and in some cases chanted the revolutionary slogan (*ash-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām*, the people want to overthrow the regime). In southern towns, protest songs and traditional dances were reworked to accuse the royal family of corruption and call for reform. However, these bold stances came at a significant cost. The state responded with a mixture of coercion and co-optation. Intelligence agencies (*mukhābarāt*) exploited tribal divisions, spread rumors branding Hirak members as Palestinian infiltrators, and pressured tribal elders (sheikhs, *shuyūkh*) to rein in youth activism. In some cases, counter-mobilization occurred, with more loyalist tribes publicly denouncing the protests and even threatening violence against activists. Notably, intra-tribal clashes broke out in areas like Salhub, as some clans actively suppressed dissent from within their own communities (Yom, 2014).

However, King Abdullah II met with the Muslim Brotherhood in the early months of the protests, discussing with them the possibility of amending the constitution, strengthening the role of parliament, and improving media rights. On March 15, 2011, he pledged to form a 53-member committee, comprising both government and opposition representatives, with the goal of drafting new laws to regulate parliamentary elections and political parties. He also set a three-month timeline to “modernize” the political system. On June 12 of the same year, the King announced his intention to relinquish his right to appoint prime ministers, emphasizing the importance of

granting the elected parliamentary majority a central role in forming future governments. He also launched a series of "discussion papers" aimed at stimulating public debate on various aspects of reform and change (Gupta, 2023).

Although the cabinet reshuffle and the launch of the electoral campaigns temporarily slowed the momentum of popular mobilization during the autumn months, the Committee continued its efforts. It initiated broad dialogues with activists from diverse backgrounds and local tribal leaders in preparation for the Sixth Jordanian National Congress. The goal of this initiative was to revive Jordanian national identity by drawing inspiration from the Arab nationalist policies adopted by the original Jordanian National Congress between 1928 and 1933. However, this agenda sparked considerable controversy, as it was perceived by some as promoting an exclusivist "Jordanian-only" identity, leading to divisions over its nature and underlying motivations. However, despite the rise of radical rhetoric in the East Bank, the Teachers' Committees and the National Committee of Teachers began to scale back their protest activities. With the new government's approval of the establishment of a Teachers' Syndicate, these committees sought to build friendly relations with the government. The National Dialogue Committee later included Al-Hashashneh, one of the movement's leaders, and King Abdullah II held a series of high-level meetings with a group of retired military personnel, providing an unprecedented opportunity for activists to express popular grievances openly.

Notwithstanding the public commitment to a policy of "soft security," there were some notable exceptions, most notably during the July 15, 2011, protests in downtown Amman (Gupta, 2023). In August 2011, a set of constitutional amendments was proposed, which were claimed to be in response to the demands of the reform movements and the Jordanian public. The committee appointed by King Abdullah II recommended four major amendments to the 1952 Constitution. The first amendment involved the establishment of a *Constitutional Court* tasked with reviewing the compatibility of laws and regulations with the Constitution, thus replacing the Supreme Court, which was considered less independent. The second amendment called for the creation of an independent body responsible for overseeing elections, to replace the Ministry of the Interior, and to play a key role in ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. The third amendment focused on strengthening civil liberties, criminalizing human rights violations, prohibiting torture, and committing to the abolition of media censorship. The fourth amendment aimed to limit the

government's ability to issue temporary laws without parliamentary approval and restricted its powers to dissolve parliament unless it had resigned (Gupta, 2023).

This period also witnessed the emergence of calls to reinstate the 1952 Constitution and to establish a constitutional monarchy—ideas that gradually began to infiltrate mainstream political discourse since 2010. The opposition coalition succeeded in disseminating widely circulated online petitions advocating for national unity. Meanwhile, the growing influence of the National Committee of Military Retirees contributed to shifting political momentum toward hardline nationalist currents, which increasingly shaped the contours of political mobilization. As a result, Jordan's political landscape began to move toward heightened polarization among factions with divergent visions and interests. By the end of 2011, the protests had succeeded in breaking many political taboos in Jordan. King Abdullah II began taking steps to address reform demands, including the appointment of a new prime minister and the implementation of constitutional reforms. Nevertheless, the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition forces continued to monitor developments closely, hoping to push the regime toward deeper reforms in the future.

In the context of escalating protests, the Jordanian government's decision to raise fuel prices in November 2012 marked a significant turning point in the course of the movement. Large-scale demonstrations broke out across various governorates, condemning the decision and demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. As a result, many political forces and popular figures, both opposition and pro-government, called for civil disobedience starting November 3, 2012, organizing protests demanding the king's intervention to annul the decision. The authorities took measures to prevent protesters from gathering around government buildings and sensitive areas (Al Jazeera, 2012). Despite the challenges facing the regime—including corruption allegations that implicated senior officials such as Prime Minister Marouf al-Bakhit and Finance Minister Bassem Awadallah, in addition to long-standing criticism directed at Queen Rania—the monarchy demonstrated a degree of responsiveness to these demands. King Abdullah II announced his anti-corruption campaign at the beginning of 2012, in an attempt to quell mounting criticism directed at the royal family by opposition movements.

By early 2013, the momentum of participation in the protests had begun to subside, both among advocates of reform and their opponents. This shift was largely driven by mounting fears of instability and violence that had swept through neighboring countries, particularly Syria. Both the regime and the opposition became increasingly aware of the severe consequences of the Syrian

civil war, which directly influenced how they approached the protest movement within Jordan. The broader regional context, marked by major transformations following the Arab uprisings, further heightened the sense of caution toward any escalation that might lead to outcomes similar to those witnessed in other countries. The waning of protest activity in Jordan by early 2013 cannot be viewed as a defeat for the reform movement. Rather, it marked a strategic recalibration in response to both domestic and regional dynamics. The pursuit of reform became more nuanced and embedded in a broader effort to balance the imperatives of change and stability—an equation that would continue to shape Jordan's political trajectory in the years that followed.

From January 2011 to August 2013, More than 8,000 protests, marches and sit-ins were organized (Tell, 2015). However, the movement, which was predominantly led by Jordanians, failed to form a unified leadership or adopt a common national program. Instead, its activities were characterized by decentralization, with local coordination committees and youth activist networks, relying on social media, driving the core of the movement.

In some instances, the movement succeeded in triggering popular anger against the regime, such as the attack on King Abdullah II's motorcade in Tafileh in the summer of 2012 and the massive protests that erupted in response to fuel price hikes imposed by the IMF in November of the same year. However, these movements lacked continuity and sufficient organization, leading to their eventual decline over time. Following waves of rebellion, repression, foreign interventions, and escalating sectarian tensions, the region was confronted with grave security threats. Chief among these was the growing influence of jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. These developments triggered real concerns among Jordanians, who became more intent on preserving internal stability. As a result, many activists temporarily scaled back their demands, opting for a more restrained and strategic approach.

These shifts contributed to the emergence of a new perspective among Jordanians regarding their internal situation. There was a growing appreciation for the relative political stability that Jordan continued to enjoy, especially when compared to countries that had descended into chaos. This newfound awareness led protesters to a critical juncture, presenting them with two main options: the first was to attempt to overthrow the regime, with all the inherent risks of chaos and instability; the second was to safeguard political stability by continuing peaceful protests aimed at achieving gradual reforms. In light of the escalating regional turmoil, the increasing influx of refugees, and the growing threat of terrorism, it became clear that many Jordanians now prioritized

security over the pursuit of radical change. This was not necessarily an endorsement of the status quo, but rather a pragmatic recognition of the delicate political and security landscape. Consequently, activists were driven to avoid extreme escalation in their protests, favoring stability while still advocating for reform (Gupta, 2023).

The broader geopolitical developments had, in essence, reshaped the parameters within which political expression and dissent occurred in Jordan. The fear of replicating the Syrian scenario, where civil unrest had spiraled into a full-scale humanitarian and security disaster, loomed large in the minds of many Jordanians. Thus, the emphasis shifted from revolutionary transformation to incremental change, from confrontation to negotiation, and from widespread mobilization to more localized and cautious forms of activism. This transformation in public sentiment and activist strategy also reflected a deeper understanding of the limits of protest in the Jordanian context. Unlike in some neighboring states, the monarchy in Jordan had maintained a certain degree of legitimacy among broad sectors of society, particularly due to its historical role and the relatively inclusive political discourse it had attempted to promote. In this environment, a middle path seemed increasingly attractive: one that sought reform within the framework of the existing system rather than through its complete dismantlement.

Despite the reduced scale of protests, calls for reform did not disappear. They evolved, becoming more focused and sophisticated, often channeled through parliamentary debates, civil society initiatives, and media discourse. The demand for accountability, transparency, and participatory governance continued to resonate, albeit within a more restrained and calculated political climate.

Analysis of the Movements

The movements initially emerged in response to a situation that developed on the ground, beginning with the participation of clearly defined partisan actors. Over time, however, it evolved to include a group of young individuals from diverse political backgrounds who cooperated for a period. The Jordanian movement was characterized by its peaceful nature and the adoption of national slogans. It succeeded in promoting freedom of expression and breaking through many of the red lines that had previously constrained political discourse in the country.

During this phase, coordination extended beyond mere organizational aspects and encompassed a shared political discourse. However, with the passage of time, disagreements began

to surface and intensify, ultimately leading to the gradual decline of the movement until it was reduced to a very limited number of individuals. This dwindling ultimately resulted in the movement's complete dissolution. Despite the widespread participation, the Jordanian movement did not reach the same scale, scope, or dynamism as the protests witnessed in some other Arab countries. This can be attributed to the particularities of the Jordanian context, where political, economic, and social considerations intersect in a manner that makes the development of a comprehensive movement capable of effecting a fundamental transformation of the regime highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the broader regional context presents a valuable opportunity for implementing substantial political reforms—not merely as a response to street demands, but as a necessary step to ensure the stability of the regime and reinforce political legitimacy in the future.

Most of the protests followed a repetitive pattern: demonstrators would gather, march along predetermined routes, chant for a few hours, and then disperse, returning the following week, often after Friday prayers. Unlike the protests in Egypt and Bahrain, Amman did not witness a continuous occupation of public squares, with the exception of the March 24 Movement, which attempted to establish a permanent presence in Jamal Abdel Nasser Square, commonly known as the Interior Circle.

The Hirak represented one of Jordan's most ambitious attempts to emulate the protest models seen in other Arab capitals. The Interior Ministry (*al-dākhiliyya*) was chosen for its symbolic value and strategic location. The protesters came from various political affiliations and wore the red *Keffiyeh "red Shemagh banner"*, a symbol of traditional Jordanian identity. Despite the nationalistic nature of their demands, which emphasized democracy and reform, the movement faced repression. It was attacked by thugs wielding sticks and pipes, reportedly with implicit support from the police. The confrontation led to numerous injuries and the death of one protester, significantly diminishing the momentum of the protest movement as a whole. Accordingly, Jordan did not witness dramatic political transformations akin to those seen in Tunisia or Egypt. Nevertheless, the protests exerted consistent pressure on the political system, compelling it to introduce some limited reforms in response to the demonstrators' demands. Although the scope of the protests remained relatively contained, they revealed a growing societal demand for reform and accountability—an undercurrent that left a discernible imprint on Jordan's political landscape in subsequent years (Ryan, 2018, pp. 215-216).

In its initial stages, the popular movement in Jordan was limited in both scale and influence. It primarily revolved around slogans calling for political reform and the fight against corruption (Muasher, 2014, p. 114). The reform movement in Jordan began in early 2011, calling for fundamental changes in the way the state was governed. The movement emphasized the need for deep constitutional and political reforms, culminating in the formation of parliamentary governments through a modern electoral law. Such a law would overcome the limitations of the one-vote system, which had long favored tribal candidates and traditional figures at the expense of political parties and reform-oriented candidates. This system significantly curtailed the effectiveness of the House of Representatives, undermining its legislative and oversight roles and thereby weakening its representative function. The movement also demanded that security apparatuses withdraw from political and public life, and called for the safeguarding of civil and political liberties as well as the achievement of justice among citizens.

Among its most prominent demands was the effective fight against corruption, through the prosecution of corrupt individuals and the enactment of policies aimed at promoting transparency and accountability. The movement's demands coalesced around a central slogan: "The people want to reform the regime," a phrase that echoed similar slogans used in other Arab countries experiencing uprisings that aimed to topple their regimes. This reformist movement arose as a result of accumulated criticism of the state's governance model and was a direct consequence of Jordan's exposure to the Arab uprisings. It managed to articulate a set of shared features between Jordan's governance style and that of the regimes in Arab Uprisings countries. While the movement initially adopted a moderate goal—preserving the regime—it simultaneously called for fundamental reforms that would alter the substance and mechanisms of governance. These reforms included expanding the powers of elected representatives, particularly through making the executive branch an elected body, and reducing unilateral decision-making processes.

In the first three months of 2011, the movement bore an elite character, with its organization and supervision largely in the hands of established political forces—both from existing political parties and emerging youth groups that had been inspired by the protest movements across the Arab world. Nonetheless, the movement was on the verge of evolving into a broader popular movement, a shift that was clearly manifested in the call for an open-ended sit-in on March 24, 2011. This call represented a turning point, marking the transformation of the movement from an elite-driven initiative into one that resonated with the broader Jordanian street (ACRPS, 2012).

On another front, the Jordanian popular movement between 2011 and 2013 witnessed a wide array of ideological and political affiliations, which rendered the unification of perspectives and positions a notably challenging endeavor. Among the participants in the movement were large segments of individuals who did not belong to any organized political current. Their opposition to the regime stemmed primarily from socioeconomic grievances, rather than ideological or doctrinal alignments. These individuals expressed their dissent in response to perceived class-based oppression, without subscribing to leftist or Marxist ideologies. Their demands did not focus on clear political concepts but instead revolved around pressing economic and social issues, which many regarded as manifestations of systemic "public looting" and exploitation of national resources. These concerns formed the core of their objections.

Furthermore, the political and partisan stances within the movement were complex and multifaceted. In addition to class disparities, there existed a visible ethnic divide between Jordanians of East Bank origin and Jordanians of Palestinian descent. This tension added an additional layer of fragility to the internal dynamics of the movement. The divide was not limited to differing attitudes toward the Palestinian resistance but extended to divergent views on the Oslo Accords and the varying political positions associated with them. These differences also encompassed attitudes toward the Jordanian military, further compounding the internal tensions.

This diversity in outlook led to tangible divisions within the movement. For instance, when public discourse turned to military strikes on Syria or to the "Eager Lion" joint military exercises, protestors split into opposing factions. The issue of the Jordanian army proved particularly divisive, with some viewing it as a national institution deserving of support, while others saw it as complicit in regional or international agendas, especially those aligned with Western powers. Such divergence in opinion significantly hindered the capacity of movement actors to act in concert, rendering coordination between groups an ongoing challenge. Another pivotal factor in the fragmentation of the movement was the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood. Their repeated entry into and withdrawal from the movement created instability within the protest landscape. At a certain point—particularly in the aftermath of events in Egypt—the Brotherhood's stance became the subject of widespread controversy. Growing calls emerged for the adoption of an unequivocal rejection of the Brotherhood, not only as an organization but also targeting individuals who had participated in the movement under its banner. These individuals were increasingly

perceived as representatives of an unacceptable political project, and some were even accused of "betrayal," a label that further exacerbated rifts within the protest ranks (Ryan, 2018, pp. 74-76).

From this, one may infer that the ideological, political, and social diversity among participants had a profound impact on the cohesion of the Jordanian movement. It hindered the development of a unified strategy focused on common goals. Despite these internal fractures, however, the movement reflected the complexity of Jordan's broader social and political reality. It laid bare the challenges faced by various political forces attempting to engage with popular demands in the context of a highly volatile regional and international environment. On another level, divisions over the issue of the Palestinian presence in Jordan increased, as there was a prevailing position that adopted the idea that Palestinians in Jordan should not be treated in a "preferential" manner that would lead to the abandonment of the right of return. This reflects the fears of some Jordanians about the impact of the Palestinian presence on the political balance in the country. These positions were linked to a broader question about citizenship and equality between Palestinians and Jordanians in the context of the protest movement. Some parties pointed to the necessity of equality between Palestinians and Jordanians in political and social rights, but without this implying the renunciation of their fundamental rights as refugees. These discussions overlapped with the issue of the right of return to Palestine, which is a sensitive topic in Jordanian political discourse. Some participants in the movement believed that insisting on the right of return does not mean refraining from participating in Jordanian society as full citizens. These positions reflected a divergence in views on the concept of "citizenship" and its impact on the Palestinian cause, as some Palestinians in Jordan believed that involvement in Jordanian political life should not contradict their support for the Palestinian resistance and the right of return.

As for other political currents, such as *ʾabnāʾ al-ḥarrāthīn* (Sons of the Peasants), which adopted opposing stances toward equality between Palestinians and Jordanians in rights, there emerged problems in coordination between these parties within the movement. It was evident that these groups adopted divergent ideologies regarding national identity and equality, which led to further divisions within the political movement (Al-Najjar, 2012). When referring to the *ʾabnāʾ al-ḥarrāthīn* or the supporters of the thinker Nahed Hattar, the issue is not necessarily a strict division based on Jordanian-Palestinian identities. A large portion of the "Sons of the Peasants" are of Palestinian origin. However, the core of the issue lies in how Palestinian presence in Jordan is perceived. This is sometimes associated with a view that tightening the noose on Palestinian

refugees in diaspora countries may push them to relinquish their right of return. This perspective can be observed in countries such as Lebanon or Syria.

The protest movement in Jordan cannot be classified into the traditional binary of Palestinian and Jordanian, but rather represents a collective expression of individuals concerned with altering the existing state of affairs in the country. These individuals can be divided into two main categories: reformists, who aim to improve the system without altering its structural framework, and revolutionaries, who argue that genuine change cannot occur without a fundamental overhaul of the current system. Regardless of national affiliations, both groups share a common concern regarding the urgent need to address the country's economic issues, but with the understanding that these problems are integral to the structure of the system itself. Therefore, it is believed that it is impossible to improve the economic situation without simultaneously changing the political system that contributes to its deterioration.

As for the demands raised, they cannot be confined solely to Palestinian issues, although this remains an important dimension. For instance, discussions about amending the electoral law or addressing the representation of Palestinians in Parliament were not limited to concerns specific to Palestinians, but rather pertained to broader issues affecting the political balance within the country. These matters were not exclusive to Palestinians, but rather represented widespread concerns related to the overall political equilibrium in the kingdom and the mechanisms by which various segments of society are represented within the political system. On the other hand, many of these positions were expressed at the individual level, with people voicing their opinions without necessarily receiving support from political parties. Regarding these parties, it was difficult to identify a cohesive or positive stance, whether in opposition to the regime or in support of it. In other words, political parties often lacked a clear strategic vision that reflected the true aspirations for change in Jordan.

When the country witnessed new waves of protests, primarily driven by public anger towards the economic and social policies adopted by King Abdullah II. This anger coincided with regional political tensions, leading to more radical protest movements compared to previous ones. However, the movement quickly proved to be a new force in Jordan's political landscape. Many of its members openly criticized the Hashemite family, calling for King Abdullah to abdicate the throne and for the current system to be dismantled. This shift in positions had a significant impact on the political stability of the Hashemite family. For the first time since the establishment of the

Jordanian monarchy (excluding the “Black September” events in the 1970s), the role of King Abdullah II and the Hashemite family as the “heads of the greater Jordanian family” was publicly questioned.

In November 2012, Jordan witnessed a series of popular protests that swept across the country. These protests erupted after the government's announcement of a fuel price hike, leading to large crowds pouring into the streets of major cities, demanding the downfall of the regime. These demonstrations were unprecedented in size, attracting a large number of people from various social backgrounds, reflecting a growing sense of public anger. In response, the government reacted swiftly by deploying tear gas in some cities and launching widespread arrest campaigns across the country. Despite this, the protests continued, with the “Iraqi Movement” organizing demonstrations in Palestinian-majority areas of Amman, calling for the regime's overthrow. This demand reflected a new social and economic consciousness emerging within Jordanian society.

These protests represented a shift in national political awareness, where the people became the central focus of Jordan's political system, rather than King Abdullah and the Hashemite family being the center of power. Slogans were raised demanding the regime's fall and emphasizing social justice, marking a shift in the mindset of Jordanians, including the Palestinians residing in Jordan.

The Diversity of Movements and Their Objectives

During the Arab Uprisings period (2011-2013), Jordan witnessed the emergence of several protest movements and political initiatives. These groups varied in their composition and objectives, reflecting the diverse socio-political landscape of the country. While some movements were well-documented, others were more localized and less formally recognized. These movements collectively contributed to a dynamic period of political activism in Jordan, reflecting a growing public engagement with issues of governance, economic policy, and civil rights.

The Jordanian movements can be classified on several levels. First is sectoral demand movements. This type of movement was represented by professional and sectoral protests that called for improvements in working conditions, such as protests by teachers, workers, and public sector employees. Second is political reform movements. This stream included political parties and independent activists who sought constitutional and structural reforms within the governance system, such as expanding the powers of the parliament and enhancing judicial independence. Third is tribal or regional movements. Some movements carried regional or tribal demands, often

linked to issues of resource distribution and uneven development among the governorates. Fourth, unstructured youth movements. Youth movements without partisan affiliation, influenced by the "Arab Uprisings" experiences in neighboring countries, emerged. However, these movements lacked a clear organizational structure and long-term strategy.

The Jordanian government has drawn six key "red lines" in response to recurring protest movements, aiming to control dissent and prevent widespread mobilization. The first red line is criticism of monarchy. Criticizing the king or royal family is illegal under Lèse Majesté laws.[24] Protesters usually target the government instead, especially the prime minister, even though policy is shaped by the monarchy. While some have crossed this line since the 2011–2012 protests, most refrain and focus on reform rather than regime change (Ryan C. , 2019). Second is no insults to key allies. Jordan is especially sensitive to criticism of Arab Gulf states, like the UAE and Kuwait, whose financial and political support is crucial. Activists have faced arrests for derogatory remarks about these allies, while criticism of European allies is less harshly policed (Ryan C. , 2019).

Third is no long-term protest encampments. Since 2011, the government has allowed short-term protests but strictly prohibited occupation of public spaces. Authorities have altered urban design to prevent gatherings in traditional protest zones, such as the Fourth Circle near the Prime Ministry (Ryan C. , 2019). Fourth is no linking of Amman to the governorates. Authorities have cracked down on attempts to connect protests in the capital with movements in outlying regions. Physical and logistical barriers are used to prevent coordination, reflecting fears of a unified national movement (Ryan C. , 2019). Fifth is no cross-class or cross-sector alliances. The 2019 teachers' strike alarmed officials because it resonated with broader middle-class struggles. The regime fears such movements could inspire other sectors to strike or unite in solidarity. Particularly concerning would be alliances involving groups like the influential retired military veterans (Ryan C. , 2019). Sixth is no unauthorized online mobilization or criticism. Under the Cybercrime Law, authorities routinely monitor and criminalize social-media posts that criticize government policy or key allies. Journalists, activists, and ordinary users have been detained or harassed for online comments deemed subversive or insulting. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented multiple cases where vague provisions were used to silence dissent on platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

[24] Laws against insulting the monarch.

Although protests remained mostly peaceful, Article 149 of the 1960 Penal Code was invoked to label protest activity as "terrorism" if it entailed "undermining the political regime" or "inciting resistance." Starting in 2011, dozens of Hirak activists faced State Security Court trials on these charges, facing harsh penalties despite the nonviolent nature of their demonstrations.

Challenges Faced by the Movements

Despite the momentum of the movement in its initial stages, it faced several challenges that hindered it from achieving its desired goals, the most significant being: (1) Divergence in Priorities and Goals: The lack of a unified vision led to fragmentation between economic and political demands, preventing the formulation of an effective strategy. (2) Security and Media Suppression: The state resorted to various means to limit the movement's impact, including security crackdowns and the use of media to distort its image. (3) External Interventions: Some components of the movement were linked to external entities, whether through funding or directives, which affected its credibility among certain segments of society. (4) Weak Internal Organization: Some youth movements relied primarily on social media, without building a solid popular base or strong organizational structure, making them susceptible to divisions and internal conflicts. (5) "Containment Without Evolution" Strategy: Some analyses suggest that certain official bodies aimed to keep the movement within certain boundaries without allowing it to evolve to a point where it could threaten the political system, benefiting from the external support the kingdom received in exchange for its political stability.

While the Jordanian movement did not manage to bring about a radical change in the political scene, it contributed to some significant effects, including: (1) Raising Political Awareness: The movement led to increased citizen engagement with political issues and contributed to the strengthening of a culture of demanding rights. (2) Improvement of Some Government Policies: The protests prompted the government to adopt limited economic reforms, such as wage increases and some tax exemptions. (3) Reforming the Relationship Between the State and Society: The movement forced the state to reconsider some of its policies toward citizens, particularly in terms of how to deal with opposition.

The Jordanian movement represents part of the broader political landscape in the Arab region, reflecting ongoing social and political movements in response to the state's economic and structural challenges. Despite the difficulties it faced, the movement still serves as a pressure force

for change, albeit gradually. Therefore, the future of political stability in Jordan depends on the state's and society's ability to engage with reform demands in a way that balances stability with the desired change.

Many discussions surrounding the Jordanian political scene, regardless of their specific topic, ultimately lead to debates about identity. Many point to the centrality of identity within Jordan, which is clearly evident in the structural division of the economy between the private sector, dominated by Palestinians, and the public sector or state institutions, controlled by elites of East Jordanian origin. As the process of economic liberalization and privatization continued, reducing the role of the public sector and strengthening the influence of the private sector, some social groups that had traditionally supported the regime began to feel marginalized and excluded from national development projects.

For decades, the tribes of East Jordan formed the most important social base for supporting the Hashemite regime, but the rapid economic, social, and political transformations Jordan has experienced made the assumption of continued loyalty no longer taken for granted. As highlighted in previous chapters, the Hashemite regime has faced increasing criticism from various political factions, including tribal leaders from the East Bank, retired military officers, youth movements with an East Jordanian character, as embodied in the “movement” framework, in addition to Islamic, leftist, and liberal democratic activists.

Identity have reasserted themselves as a central element in discussions of political mobilization in Jordan. However, tensions surrounding national identity, rights, loyalty, and citizenship were not new to the Jordanian political landscape; rather, they have been part of the political dynamics since the establishment of the state. Therefore, the pivotal point lies not merely in acknowledging the existence of identity but in analyzing how they interact and impact the context of the Arab Uprisings and its aftermath. Jordanian politics cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between Jordanians and Palestinians. However, this division, though largely manufactured, is continuously activated and often utilized by conservative and reactionary forces within the Jordanian political system to obstruct reform and change. Despite its fragility and manufactured origins, identity, particularly its negative deployment, remains a fundamental weakness in Jordan's political landscape.

The Post Arab Uprisings Era

Between 2014 and 2021, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan faced a series of security challenges that directly impacted its internal stability and security. These challenges varied, including terrorist threats, pressures arising from regional crises, and emerging economic and security issues. Below are the key security milestones the country encountered during this period. First, in 2016, Jordan was subjected to a series of terrorist attacks carried out by the ISIS organization, the most notable of which was the attack on a security center in the Al-Baqa'a camp, which resulted in the deaths of five Jordanian intelligence officers. These attacks represented a severe threat to the kingdom's security infrastructure and highlighted the challenges posed by extremist groups to the state's security. These threats prompted security agencies to reinforce their counter-terrorism strategies and adopt stringent preventive measures.

Second, since the onset of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Jordan has hosted a large number of Syrian refugees, placing tremendous pressure on its infrastructure and economic resources. Despite the humanitarian efforts made by the state to support the refugees, the crisis raised security concerns, particularly with the increased likelihood of extremist elements infiltrating among the refugees. This prompted the government to tighten security monitoring and take measures to ensure the crisis was not exploited for terrorist purposes. Third, given its strategic geographic location, Jordan shares long borders with countries experiencing security instability and conflict, such as Syria and Iraq. This situation led to an increase in smuggling operations and illegal arms trade, posing a direct threat to the country's security. Jordanian security agencies worked to intensify efforts to monitor the borders and enhance security cooperation with neighboring countries to address these risks.

Fourth, like many other countries, Jordan witnessed a rise in cyberattacks targeting its vital institutions. In 2019, the country's electricity grid was attacked in a cyberattack that caused widespread power outages in several areas, revealing the vulnerability of its digital infrastructure to electronic threats. This threat prompted authorities to strengthen their cybersecurity capabilities and invest in modern technologies to protect critical systems. Fifth, the Jordanian economy faced structural challenges, including high unemployment rates, rising public debt, and inflation, contributing to growing social discontent. These economic difficulties led to waves of protests that threatened internal stability, prompting the government to enhance social support policies and implement economic reforms aimed at alleviating social pressures.

In this analysis, we will focus more on the issues that have directly threatened Jordan's national security. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has witnessed a series of security challenges that required effective responses at both the domestic and foreign policy levels. These threats came from various sources, whether stemming from regional developments or internal issues that have had deep effects on the stability of the kingdom. Therefore, in this analysis, we will address these security concerns in more detail, focusing on their interrelated impacts and how they have affected Jordan's national security. We will also aim to clarify how the Jordanian authorities dealt with these challenges, the decisions they made regarding both internal and external security, and the consequences of these events on the political and social stability of the kingdom.

It is important to note that there were several other issues that the Jordanian regime suffered from internally, not just the popular movements. The kingdom faced many political and social challenges that directly affected the stability of the regime and its national security. While the popular movements were one of the most prominent manifestations of protests during that period, other critical internal issues also played a significant role in shaping the political landscape.

The Muslim Brotherhood Split

Internal pressures began in 2014 with the arrest of Zaki Bani Rashid, the Deputy General Supervisor of the Muslim Brotherhood, and his subsequent sentencing to prison after criticizing the UAE on Facebook (Sweis, 2014). In 2015, the Jordanian authorities requested that the group "organize its legal status," which sparked significant internal controversy and led to major divisions within the organization. The primary pressure came from the demand to register the group as an association, which would mean losing its political role. Despite the group's refusal to comply with this request, the Jordanian political scene witnessed several internal splits, with the formation of the new Muslim Brotherhood Association in 2015, followed by the Partnership and Rescue Party in 2018, as well as the "Zamzam" initiative in 2012, which focused on the Jordanian national agenda.

The Jordanian authorities continued to exert pressure by withdrawing the group's official license in 2015, leading to legal disputes over its assets. Many analysts considered this move as part of a strategy to fragment the group and strip it of its legitimacy, especially after associating it with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the international council of the group. However, the Brotherhood still enjoys considerable social and political influence, continuing to gain ground in

parliamentary and municipal elections, while maintaining control over many professional syndicates. Amid these challenges, the group adopted a discourse that emphasized its historical legitimacy and political moderation. It also strengthened its social, charitable, and educational activities, which helped maintain a significant popular base. Its strategy shifted from confrontation to negotiation with the authorities, avoiding participation in protests without official approval, and strengthening its political alliances with forces loyal to the regime.

Within the group, two main currents emerged: the hardline faction, which rejects political concessions, and the moderate faction, which advocates for a more conciliatory approach, including the idea of separating the party from the movement. These internal tensions led to the victory of the hardline faction in the recent internal elections for leadership of the party. Despite the internal divisions, the group remains committed to its organizational unity and continues its efforts to maintain a role in Jordan's political landscape.

The 2018 Crisis

The political and economic crisis that emerged in Jordan in 2018, sparked by the introduction of the Income Tax Law project to Parliament, is one of the most complex crises in the modern history of the Kingdom. Its repercussions were not limited to the economic sphere, but extended to the political and social dimensions, leading to a widening of protests and growing popular anger against government policies. The crisis deepened further due to the decline in regional support for Jordan, which increased the economic pressures on the state. This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the crisis's background, the nature of the controversial law, and the political and economic factors that contributed to the escalation of protests, as well as reviewing the proposed solutions to resolve the crisis (Al Jazeera, 2018).

In late May 2018, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan witnessed a wave of widespread protests in response to economic policies imposed by the government, most notably the Income Tax Law project and the rising prices. These protests were not the first of their kind, as similar movements had occurred in 2012 following the hike in the prices of basic goods. These demonstrations exerted significant political pressure, which ultimately led to the resignation of Prime Minister Hani Mulki and the appointment of Omar Razzaz to form a new government.

The protests expanded in Amman and other cities in June 2018, attracting large crowds from diverse social backgrounds. Demonstrators called for the resignation of the Prime Minister and the

withdrawal of the proposed tax law. The protests were notable for their peaceful nature and the high level of organization by civil society groups, including labor unions and professional associations (Tahboub & Abuelghanam, 2023).

The direct cause of the 2018 protests was a proposed tax law endorsed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), aimed at increasing income taxes and reducing government subsidies. The proposal sparked widespread anger, as it was viewed as exacerbating the economic burdens on ordinary Jordanians without addressing core issues such as corruption and unemployment (Kikkawa, 2021). The roots of these protests can be traced to a combination of economic and social factors, as the Jordanian government implemented economic reforms dictated by an IMF program, which had approved a $723 million loan for Jordan in exchange for a series of austerity policies aimed at reducing public debt from 94% to 77% of GDP by 2021. These measures included imposing new taxes and cutting subsidies on some basic goods, which adversely affected the poor and middle classes. These protests marked a turning point in the political and economic landscape in Jordan, as they forced the government to backtrack on some of its decisions and compelled the Prime Minister to resign. Many entities, including the Capital Governorate Council, called for an inclusive national dialogue on the proposed tax law, aiming to reach a national consensus that would protect the interests of the poor and middle classes. In response to the protests, the new government led by Omar Razzaz withdrew the proposed tax law and began a series of consultations with civil society groups. These consultations aimed to draft a new tax law that would be more acceptable to the public. Additionally, the government announced measures to address corruption and improve the efficiency of the public sector (Tahboub & Abuelghanam, 2023).

The government also recognized the need for long-term strategies to address the economic and social challenges. These included efforts to diversify the economy, reduce dependency on foreign aid, and create more sustainable job opportunities. Furthermore, the emphasis was placed on enhancing transparency and accountability in governance as a means to rebuild public trust (Kikkawa, 2021). As the crisis deepened, the demands of the protesters expanded beyond rejecting the income tax law to include the resignation of the government and the dissolution of Parliament (BBC News Arabi, 2018). This was due to the belief that Parliament was responsible for passing the state's budget, which included price hikes and increased taxes. Additionally, citizens felt that the Parliament did not represent their demands, considering that Parliament's approval of the economic measures was seen as an endorsement of the government's austerity policies. The

protests that took place in Jordan in 2018 significantly affected the legitimacy of the government, as it lost the trust of the street due to its economic policies. The government-imposed economic policies, such as tax hikes and the reduction of subsidies on basic goods, led to a deterioration in citizens' trust in the system, exacerbating feelings of dissatisfaction. When large segments of society feel that the state does not meet their economic and social needs, they resort to alternative identities, such as tribal or union-based affiliations, which weakens the political system.

The Issue of Sedition (*Qiḍyat al-Fitna*)

On April 3rd, 2021 Jordan announced that it had thwarted a conspiracy aimed at overthrowing King Abdullah II and destabilizing the country (Vohra, 2021). Jordanian officials claimed that foreign entities had conspired with Prince Hamzah bin Hussein to depose the king, but after two weeks, the royal palace presented no concrete evidence to support these allegations. As time passed, it became evident that the story lacked credibility, raising questions about the true background of the incident. The most plausible possibility is that we are witnessing an age-old story regarding the battle for succession among royal siblings. In a move to secure his throne, King Abdullah II placed his half-brother, Prince Hamzah, and the former crown prince, under house arrest along with 18 others suspected of involvement in the conspiracy. However, rather than Prince Hamzah being the instigator of sedition, these events revealed authoritarian behavior from a king who felt insecure (Rubin & Dadouch, 2021).

At the same time that Jordan was facing a political crisis with the detention of nearly twenty officials over the weekend, Prince Hamzah bin Hussein, the king's half-brother, was placed under brief house arrest. The Jordanian foreign minister had vaguely referred to "sedition" without providing clear details, alluding to foreign intervention. While some pointed to Israeli involvement, others speculated a connection with Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, Prince Hamzah had sharply criticized the regime for widespread corruption, incompetence, and authoritarianism—criticisms that were difficult to refute.

In a video recorded by Prince Hamzah, he said, "Even criticizing a small aspect of the policy leads to arrest and abuse by the security services. It has reached the point where no one is able to speak or express an opinion about anything without being bullied, arrested, harassed, and threatened."[25] Despite later mediation, during which Prince Hamzah pledged allegiance to King

[25] The Guardians: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92aNviCNUsg

Abdullah, his statements continue to cast doubts on the stability of the regime. Nevertheless, the US, a key ally of Jordan, as well as neighboring countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia, quickly declared their full support for the Jordanian regime. At one point, the U.S. State Department spokesperson affirmed that "King Abdullah is a key partner of the US and has our full support." This position reflects the West's desire to maintain stability in the region and prevent political unrest in another Middle Eastern country. However, it is surprising that the US continues to support the repressive Jordanian regime despite growing corruption and inefficiency in governance.

According to reports from international media outlets such as *The Guardian* and some Jordanian news agencies, among those who supported Prince Hamzah were several of his close aides within the royal circle, who were believed to have been working on preparing an alternative position for him. Names such as Bassem Awadallah and Sharif Hassan bin Zaid were mentioned among the group that contributed to planning an attempt to overthrow the king, within the context of the "sedition" case that emerged in early April 2021. Although these individuals did not officially announce their stance as supporters of the prince, the evidence gathered from phone recordings and correspondences revealed shared tendencies to exploit the dissatisfaction of certain groups with official policies; thus, Prince Hamzah's close circle became an internal network that was neutral or even implicitly opposed to the existing regime.

It can be argued that some members of the royal circle who were connected to Prince Hamzah saw his rhetoric and criticisms of corruption and mismanagement as indicators of a desire to change the traditional governance model. This desire might resonate with certain segments of the political and tribal elites. In this way, the personal assistance and close advisors contributed to creating a partial and ambiguous support base that did not manifest publicly, but rather appeared through internal dealings and private communications within royal circles. On the other hand, Jordanian society is heavily reliant on tribal affiliations, which play a significant role in shaping political and public consciousness. Prince Hamzah capitalized on this reality by addressing a wide audience from the lower classes, relying on the image of the prince as a figure close to the people, who criticizes corruption and poor governance. Through his statements and video clips, he managed to stir enthusiasm among some sectors that suffered from poor services and opaque administrative practices, leading certain members of society to feel that there was an alternative capable of fulfilling their demands for justice and transparency.

This popular support was not organized formally but represented scattered public endorsement among groups tied to tribal and clan identities, with some of them considering that Prince Hamzah might carry a reformist message that addresses the gaps left by the current system. Such a popular movement, nourished by criticism of current economic and social policies, formed part of the support for Prince Hamzah, embodying a desire among some societal segments for radical change, even if that opposition was aimed at the official authorities.

Prince Hamzah also gained part of his support through his media strategy, using social media platforms to present an alternative view of the political reality in Jordan. Some of the prince's statements were shared in video clips and recordings, some of which directly criticized corruption and mismanagement, prompting some intellectuals and opposition elites to support his stance, considering that there was a need to reconsider the prevailing policies. These statements were used as a means to garner support from the public by employing clear and symbolic language that expressed a transformative ambition. As these messages were repeated through alternative media and social media platforms, they became a driving force for supportive groups seeking to reshape the governing policies in Jordan. These statements were used as a means to garner public support by employing clear and symbolic language that expressed a transformative ambition. As these messages were repeated through alternative media and social media platforms, they became a driving force for supportive groups seeking to reshape the governing policies in Jordan.

It is clear that the developments in Jordan indicate a greater complexity than just a power struggle within the royal family. Social tensions, shifts in tribal identities, internal divisions, and regional interactions all contribute to making it difficult to predict what will happen in the future. Maintaining stability in Jordan requires finding political and social solutions that strengthen national unity and preserve the stability of the monarchy, away from internal conspiracies and personal interests. We can say that the sedition issue has sparked deep internal divisions within Jordanian society, with these divisions manifesting across several axes related to political loyalties, tribal traditions, external influences shaped by the government’s discourse, as well as differences in the assessment of power, transparency, and the demand for reform. Below is a detailed explanation of how Jordanian society has been divided over this issue:

On one side, a large segment of the elite and supporters of the current regime have taken a position of complete loyalty to King Abdullah II, considering that the overthrow of the regime or tarnishing its image poses a threat to the country's stability in a region filled with regional

challenges. These individuals relied on the official narrative, which attributes the conspiracy to foreign interventions and the exploitation of figures from within the royal family, thereby emphasizing the necessity of security repression to maintain the system and the stability of the kingdom. On the other hand, opposing movements emerged, especially those advocating for political reform and transparency, with some members viewing the sedition case not merely as an attempt of external intervention to justify repressive measures, but as a reflection of deep internal issues such as corruption, mismanagement, and autocracy. Some voices and youth activists highlighted that the use of violence and empty security measures to prevent public discourse on SNIs and internal differences would exacerbate social divisions and discourage genuine civic participation. The Jordanians almost unanimously agree on one thing: the support for the country's stability under the Hashemite rule, in addition to supporting the Jordanian army and the people in fighting corruption and recovering looted funds.

The 2022 Crisis

In 2022, Jordan witnessed a new wave of protests and strikes led by truck drivers, bus drivers, taxi drivers, and workers in the transportation sector. In December 2022, the kingdom saw a series of widespread protests, which were a direct result of the sharp rise in fuel prices, particularly gas and gasoline. These protests began amid a wave of public discontent resulting from significant increases in the cost of living, as the Petroleum Price Committee approved price hikes ranging from 40% to 46% on fuel in November of the same year. This included a 46% increase in the price of diesel compared to 2021, as well as a 40% increase in the price of heating gas. The increase was not limited to fuel alone but also affected gasoline, which saw a 10% rise, placing an additional burden on citizens, particularly public transport operators and truck owners (ArabicPost, 2022).

In southern Jordan, particularly in cities such as Ma'an and Karak, transport workers went on strike, demanding government intervention to halt the rise in prices, as the escalating operational costs threatened their livelihoods. This occurred within the context of a long-standing economic crisis characterized by high inflation and unemployment rates, especially among the youth, making the cost of living higher than ever, particularly regarding food, housing, and fuel. The strike carried out by workers in the public transport sector, truck drivers, and fuel tankers was the spark that ignited these protests. These strikes began in the city of Aqaba in southern Jordan at the beginning of December, before spreading to several other governorates, including Ma'an. In cities such as

Madaba and Dhiban, bus drivers announced strikes demanding a reduction in fuel prices. Despite calls from the Fuel Syndicate for dialogue with the government, the authorities remained silent and issued no official statements regarding the strike or the protesters' demands. Later in the same month, specifically from the night of December 10 and 11, protesters closed the main roads between Irbid and Amman, setting tires on fire and blocking traffic in protest of the fuel price hikes. The protests continued to spread to various regions, particularly in the governorates of Ma'an and Salt, where demonstrations gradually escalated into riots and violent clashes in some areas, resulting in fatalities.

Traditionally, protests in Jordan began in the south of the country, where local communities suffer from high poverty rates, and quickly spread to other parts of the kingdom. Cities like Irbid, Zarqa, and Amman saw the protests expand, with traders expressing solidarity with the striking workers by closing their stores. As has occurred in previous instances, these protests were accompanied by road blockades using tires set on fire. This pattern of protests is part of a historical recurrence, where economic austerity measures are imposed in response to conditions set by the IMF, leading to waves of public anger due to the financial burdens placed on the most economically vulnerable groups. While such protests are not new, what distinguishes the most recent round is the violence accompanying them, with several police officers being killed while handling the unrest. In the town of Al-Husayniyah, Colonel Abdel-Razzaq Al-Dalabih was killed during clashes with protesters, prompting security forces to launch security operations that resulted in the deaths of three other officers, along with the main suspect (Christou, 2022). During these protests, the opposition broadened to include a diverse range of political and social factions, including leftist and nationalist parties, professional associations, as well as Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The “haraq” movement also emerged as a protest phenomenon led by youth, especially in the eastern bank, with the south being a central hub for these movements. These movements raised concerns within the regime, particularly as the participants were from traditional communities that had long formed the base of support for the state.

While the protesters demand improvements in their living conditions, security forces view the situation from another perspective, seeing in certain areas, such as Ma'an, a potential security threat, especially due to concerns about the presence of Islamist extremists. The armed confrontations that led to the deaths of police officers have drawn comparisons to events that occurred previously in Irbid and Karak in 2016, when clashes took place with extremist groups.

However, most participants in the current strikes are not extremists but rather citizens suffering from the consequences of the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the state often tends to approach protests from a security perspective, which complicates the overall situation.

Conclusion

The protests represented a significant challenge to political stability in Jordan. The initial government response, which included a heavy police presence, escalated tensions. However, the decision of King Abdullah II to replace Prime Minister Hani Mulki with Omar Razzaz, who promised to reconsider the tax law, temporarily eased the situation (Kikkawa, 2021). The economic dimensions of the protests highlighted the fragility of Jordan's economic security. The reliance on foreign aid and the conditions set by the IMF have limited the government's ability to address local economic issues independently. The protests also underscored the need for a more balanced approach that considers both fiscal responsibility and social justice (Badarin, 2020). The protests revealed deep societal divisions within Jordan. While the protests were primarily driven by economic concerns, they also highlighted issues of political representation and social justice. They demonstrated the ability of various social groups to rally around their grievances and express their growing demand for more inclusive governance and accountability (Schwedler, 2012).

Professional syndicates emerged as key players in the protests, organizing strikes and demonstrations against the economic policies that directly affected the middle class. This professional solidarity strengthened the popular movement, as the professional identity transcended tribal and regional divisions, uniting the protesters around common economic demands. On the other hand, during the protests, the tribes did not adopt a unified stance. Some supported the protests due to the impact of economic policies on their members, while others maintained a pro-regime position. However, any decline in tribal loyalty to the state could pose a direct threat to national security, as the state heavily relies on the tribes to maintain internal stability. Regarding the Palestinian component in the protests, this group played a role in the popular movement, but their demands were purely economic, which reduced the potential for exploiting identity divisions to fuel internal conflicts. Nonetheless, any disruption in this balance could affect the political stability of the state, especially given the tense regional circumstances.

Jordan's political landscape faces increasing complexity, with a divergence between government policies and influential institutions within the state. Analysts believe that the executive

authority clashes with a solid base within decision-making circles that oppose its policies. Opponents have pointed out that the administration of the country is effectively divided into three governments: The Royal Court, the intelligence apparatus, and the official government, which citizens view as the weakest among these entities. In this context, political analyst and researcher at the Center for Strategic Studies, Mohammad Abu Rumman, argues that the state is facing an escalating political impasse, the repercussions of which were deepened by the recent Mafraq events. In a statement to Al Jazeera, he pointed out that statements by the Minister of State for Media Affairs, Rakan Majali, regarding the existence of "counteracting forces" working against the regime and government, along with pressure on media outlets to withhold coverage of the Mafraq events, clearly reflect the scale of the crisis between the government of Awn Khasawneh and other influential institutions within the state.

The protests witnessed in Jordan in 2022, due to the rise in fuel prices, along with the ensuing riots and clashes between protesters and security forces, carry significant implications related to the impact of identities on national security in countries facing complex economic and social challenges. Through these protests, we can examine the relationship between social and political identities and state security, and how tensions linked to different identities can affect the stability and security of the state. The protests in Jordan were largely a result of the increasing awareness of public anger towards economic policies that do not align with the daily needs of citizens. This type of protest reveals the intersection of social and economic identities of citizens and their challenges in confronting rising costs and the state's inability to meet their needs. These protests demonstrate how the economic identities of individuals and groups can become a trigger for social conflict, which threatens the state's stability and national security.

On the other hand, these protests can be seen as part of an ongoing identity struggle between the government and the citizens, where the government sees itself in a position of authority and organization, while citizens view themselves as victims of economic policies that place them in opposition to the state. Thus, national security becomes threatened when the social and economic identities of citizens collide with the interests of the state, which could lead to increased political and social polarization, thereby threatening internal stability.

Ultimately, these protests show how economic, geographic, and political identities can be key factors influencing national security. These identities become drivers of internal crises when their interests conflict with government policies, threatening the country's social and economic

stability. In this context, addressing the challenges associated with these identities requires comprehensive political strategies based on strengthening national unity and resolving economic and social issues in a manner that meets the demands of all social groups.

From the perspective of Jordan's regime security, the protests witnessed in December 2022 can be analyzed by focusing on the challenges the state faces in maintaining internal stability and safeguarding national security in the face of a range of complex economic, social, and political factors. These protests represent a real test of the regime's ability to manage internal crises and maintain the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the Jordanian citizen, at a time when Jordanian society is experiencing increasing polarization and social tensions. We will analyze these challenges and their impacts on Jordan's regime security according to traditional and modern security standards that states adopt to protect their stability.

6.2.The Case of Lebanon

The year 2011 marked a pivotal turning point in contemporary Lebanese history. It was not merely the year that witnessed the emergence of the civil movement demanding the abolition of the sectarian system, but rather the culmination of preceding political and social accumulations, and the beginning of a phase of profound transformations. This period coincided with a sharp escalation in sectarian tensions and internal divisions over sensitive national issues, most notably the Special Tribunal for the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, Hezbollah's arsenal, and the repercussions of the Syrian crisis—factors that collectively turned Lebanon into a theater for intertwined conflicts with domestic, regional, and international dimensions.

Before 2011, Lebanon experienced armed sectarian confrontations that brought the country to the brink of relapsing into the conditions of the civil war (1975-1990). These clashes were symptomatic of escalating intercommunal tensions and profound political cleavages over highly contentious national issues—most notably, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the status of Hezbollah's military arsenal, and the reverberations of the Syrian conflict within Lebanese borders. Collectively, these dynamics transformed Lebanon into a locus of intersecting regional and domestic struggles.

Within this volatile context, any grassroots mobilization aimed at challenging the confessional structure of the political system was perceived by the entrenched political elites as a destabilizing force threatening the delicate equilibrium that had preserved their power-sharing

arrangements. Rather than being viewed as expressions of democratic aspiration, such movements were frequently framed as existential threats to communal stability and national security—an interpretation that served to justify the repression or co-optation of reformist demands. Accordingly, this year represents a watershed moment in Lebanon's political and social trajectory. The interaction between preceding dynamics and subsequent developments contributed to structural shifts that affected the state and its institutions, reshaping the Lebanese landscape with all its sectarian, political, and security complexities.

In 2011, Lebanon witnessed a series of political and social events that exposed the depth of the structural contradictions embedded within its political system (Al Jazeera, 2011). The capital, Beirut, became the stage for a demonstration involving nearly 8,000 Lebanese citizens protesting against the sectarian system. These popular protests coincided with rising sectarian tensions and a complex entanglement of regional interests with domestic conflicts. The demonstrations held under the slogan "*pride in Secularism*" expressed widespread rejection of an entrenched system that dictates individuals' lifestyles (Moaddel, Kors, & Gärde, 2012). This phenomenon reflects the growing influence of sectarian populism, which has exacerbated the vertical fragmentation of Lebanese society and reinforced political polarization.

Analyzing the Lebanese landscape during 2012 and 2013 requires a deconstruction of the dialectical relationship between the domestic scene and regional transformations. Lebanon was not merely a marginal arena passively affected by regional upheavals; rather, it often functioned as an active theater for the complex interplay between internal and external forces.

The Structural Crisis

The Lebanese protests of 2011 epitomized the structural crisis that has afflicted the Lebanese state since its establishment. Any meaningful reading of these protests must be situated within the deep historical context that shapes the nature of the Lebanese system. These demonstrations were not merely a spontaneous reaction to immediate conditions, but rather an expression of long-standing political, economic, and social grievances that have accumulated over decades.

When demonstrators took to the streets in 2011 demanding the abolition of the sectarian system, it represented a direct challenge to the foundational principles of the Lebanese political order. However, the country's sectarian composition prevented the unification of the Lebanese public around a common demand. Instead, various political factions responded to the protests in

accordance with their sectarian interests, rather than embracing them as a collective national cause. The year 2011 also witnessed a sharp escalation in tensions between the Future Movement, representing the Sunni community and led by Saad Hariri, and Hezbollah, the Shiite power backed by Iran. The confrontation centered around several contentious issues, most notably the Special Tribunal for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Both sides exchanged accusations of foreign allegiance. The Future Movement accused Hezbollah of acting as an Iranian proxy aiming to destabilize Lebanon, while Hezbollah countered by accusing the Future Movement of aligning with the West and Israel against the resistance. This mutual hostility deeply impacted the Lebanese political scene, rendering any serious attempt at political reform or the dismantling of sectarianism extremely difficult. Such efforts consistently collided with the entrenched power of the major sectarian forces, which continue to dominate political decision-making in the country. In this context, sectarian political parties played a dual role. On the one hand, some attempted to exploit the popular movement to attack their political rivals. On the other hand, other parties resorted to portraying the movement as a conspiracy targeting a specific sect or political entity, which ultimately led to the decline in the momentum of the protests and their inability to bring about tangible change.

Analyzing these protests necessitates a multi-layered approach. It begins with understanding the structural framework that governs the Lebanese system—as thoroughly discussed in the earlier sections of this thesis—before moving on to the economic and social factors that triggered the outbreak of protests. Finally, the analysis must consider the outcomes of these movements within the broader local and regional equations.

The Context of the Arab Revolutions

The protest movement in Lebanon during this period cannot be analyzed in isolation from the broader wave of the Arab Uprisings, despite the particularities of the Lebanese model. Unlike many Arab states where the regime was personified by an authoritarian leader whose downfall symbolized political transformation, Lebanon lacks a singular “head of state” to be overthrown. Instead, it is governed by an intricate network of sectarian leaders who rotate positions of power and remain entrenched within a complex system that ensures their continuity, even as their legitimacy wanes. Accordingly, the study of these protests goes beyond characterizing them as mere episodes of popular unrest; it necessitates a deeper understanding of their relationship with

the sectarian political order, regional dynamics, and the structural constraints that prevented them from evolving into a movement capable of effecting radical change.

In the Arab countries that experienced uprisings in 2011, the term "regime" generally referred to an authoritarian president who exercised centralized control over state institutions and policies. In Lebanon, by contrast, the "regime" is not embodied in a single individual, but rather in a complex alliance of sectarian political forces that govern through a delicate balance of power. This made the notion of toppling the regime an ambiguous and unattainable goal through conventional protest mechanisms.

What further complicated the Lebanese landscape in 2011 was the deepening division over the Syrian revolution. Lebanese political forces split between supporters of the Assad regime—such as Hezbollah and the FPM—and those backing the uprising, such as the Future Movement and its allied factions. This division deeply influenced how each political camp perceived and responded to domestic protests: rather than viewing the demonstrations as an authentic call for internal reform, each side interpreted them through the lens of its regional alliances and strategic interests. The repercussions of the Syrian conflict quickly began to reverberate inside Lebanon, as political factions aligned themselves based on their stance toward the Assad regime. Hezbollah and its allies maintained strong support for Damascus, while the Future Movement and its affiliates endorsed the opposition. This polarization permeated political and media discourse, with various parties framing the events in Syria as extensions of their internal struggles against domestic adversaries.

It is not a novel observation to view Lebanon as a natural extension of Syrian transformations; the relationship between the two countries extends beyond geographical proximity to encompass deeply intertwined political, security, and economic structures. These structural interdependencies mean that any shock to Damascus inevitably sends tremors through Beirut. However, what distinguished the period between 2012 and 2013 was the transition from indirect influence to actual entanglement. This was evident not only in political positioning but also in the direct military involvement of Lebanese actors in the Syrian conflict.

The official Lebanese stance during the Syrian crisis was characterized by the policy of "self-distancing" /*an-naʾī bi-l-nafs*/, which, on the surface, appeared to be an attempt to preserve internal stability. However, in essence, it proved to be no more than a fragile, superficial posture. The state lacked the capacity to control the unofficial interventions of Lebanese actors in the Syrian conflict.

Hezbollah, as part of the so-called "Axis of Resistance," did not confine its support to political backing of the Assad regime. Rather, it became increasingly militarily involved, culminating in its pivotal participation in the battle of al-Qusayr in 2013, a strategic turning point that cemented its overt entanglement in the conflict. Conversely, the Future Movement's support for the Syrian opposition extended beyond political discourse. It was accompanied by logistical and financial backing, most notably in the form of arms transfers to Syrian rebel factions. This support was highlighted in media leaks surrounding figures such as Okab Sakr, who was allegedly involved in coordinating such operations. These revelations underscored the extent to which Lebanese factions were acting as proxies within the broader regional conflict.

The divide over Syria thus became a continuation of Lebanon's internal political rift, expanding the cleavage between the March 8 and March 14 alliances beyond domestic concerns to reflect the broader struggle among regional power blocs. Lebanese investigations into figures such as former minister Michel Samaha, whose case revealed plans to carry out assassinations in coordination with the Syrian regime, were not merely legal matters. They reignited political tensions, especially amid counter-accusations from Damascus that Lebanese allies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar were supporting the Syrian opposition. As a result, Lebanon transformed into an arena for a security-political conflict that far exceeded its geographical boundaries.

In June 2012, the National Dialogue Committee, chaired by President Michel Suleiman, adopted the Baabda Declaration. This document emphasized the need to shield Lebanon from regional and international conflicts. It advocated for a neutral foreign policy stance by urging a "refrain from aligning with regional or international axes" and emphasized the importance of "protecting Lebanon from the negative repercussions of regional crises in order to safeguard its supreme national interests, internal unity, and civil peace." The declaration also recommended tighter control over the Lebanese-Syrian border and called for preventing the use of Lebanese territory as a corridor for the smuggling of weapons and fighters.

Despite the Lebanese government's formal adoption of the Baabda Declaration as an official frame of reference, its implementation encountered significant obstacles. Hezbollah MP Mohammad Raad dismissed the declaration as "nothing more than ink on paper," signaling the party's disregard for its provisions. In practice, Hezbollah continued its military engagement in Syria, playing a key role in supporting the Assad regime in several decisive battles, particularly the battle of al-Qusayr in 2013. This contradiction between official state policy and the actions of

influential political-military actors such as Hezbollah further eroded the legitimacy of state institutions. It highlighted the limitations of Lebanese sovereignty and exposed the state's inability to function independently from the agendas of dominant sectarian forces. Consequently, Lebanon's proclaimed neutrality remained largely rhetorical, while the country became increasingly embroiled in a regional conflict with profound implications for its internal stability and the future of its fragile sectarian system. On the other hand, although the Syrian crisis led to a wave of refugee flows into several neighboring countries, the situation in Lebanon was particularly complex due to its geopolitical positioning and fragile sectarian balance. By April 2013, there were 356 thousand (UN News, 2014), placing the country in the midst of an unprecedented crisis for which it was woefully unprepared—politically, economically, and socially.

One of the most immediate and tangible repercussions of the Syrian war on Lebanon was the mass influx of refugees, which placed extraordinary pressure on the country's already strained infrastructure and public services. The burden fell heavily on sectors such as education, healthcare, housing, and sanitation, exposing deep flaws in the state's capacity to manage large-scale humanitarian challenges. However, beyond the logistical and humanitarian dimensions, the refugee crisis assumed a highly politicized and sectarian character. The demographic implications of such a sudden and substantial population increase were perceived by many Lebanese factions as a threat to the delicate sectarian equilibrium that underpins the political system.

Unlike neighboring Jordan and Turkey, the Lebanese government opted against establishing official refugee camps, citing both security and political concerns. The primary fear was that the refugees, predominantly Sunni Muslims, could eventually become a politically active demographic bloc, reminiscent of the Palestinian refugee experience in Lebanon, which had long-term ramifications for the country's internal balance and stability. Instead, the absence of a coordinated refugee policy led to the uncontrolled dispersion of refugees across Lebanon's territories, particularly in underprivileged regions such as the North and the Beqaa Valley. This chaotic distribution exacerbated existing socio-economic tensions and fostered resentment among local communities, who often competed with refugees over scarce resources and employment opportunities.

The refugee file did not remain a neutral humanitarian issue; rather, it quickly became entangled in Lebanon's deeply polarized political landscape. For the March 14 alliance, the influx of refugees was framed as irrefutable evidence of the Assad regime's brutality and the urgency of

its downfall. In contrast, the March 8 alliance approached the issue with suspicion, fearing that the refugees could serve as a support base for armed Syrian opposition groups operating within Lebanon. This politicization was compounded by the involvement of religious and Islamic charities in providing aid and support to refugee communities—efforts that, while filling a critical void left by the state, also created fertile ground for the emergence of extremist ideologies. This phenomenon was particularly visible in northern Lebanon, especially in cities like Tripoli, where Salafi and jihadist currents found an opportunity to gain influence amid the vacuum of state authority. The overlap between humanitarian aid, religious outreach, and political mobilization blurred the lines between relief work and ideological propagation, allowing radical actors to entrench themselves in vulnerable communities. Consequently, what began as a humanitarian crisis gradually evolved into a multidimensional challenge with profound implications for national security, intercommunal relations, and the overall trajectory of Lebanese state-society dynamics.

In this context, Lebanon's refusal to formalize refugee accommodation not only failed to contain the crisis but inadvertently facilitated the emergence of parallel structures of authority, further undermining state sovereignty. The refugee crisis, therefore, served as both a symptom and an accelerant of Lebanon's broader political dysfunction, exposing the extent to which the country's sectarian system remains ill-equipped to handle transnational shocks without slipping into internal fragmentation. This massive wave of refugees presents a significant challenge to the fragile sectarian balance in Lebanon, with divisions between Sunnis and Shiites growing day by day. This is reflected in the increasing concern over the spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon, as the headlines depict a rise in sectarian strife, border clashes, kidnappings, and politically motivated assassinations (Salem, 2012, p. 1).

Furthermore, political polarization in Lebanon has reached unprecedented levels, with the country divided between supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime, thus threaten the stability of the entire political system. The old saying, "*Whenever it rains in Syria, the Lebanese must open their umbrellas*", aptly summarizes the deep interconnection between the Lebanese and Syrian crises. A significant portion of the challenges faced by Lebanon lies in the structural similarities between sectarian relations in both countries. The Syrian regime, led by Bashar al-Assad, represents the Alawite minority, a branch of Shiite Islam, while the majority of the Syrian opposition is composed of Sunni Muslims. This situation mirrors the Lebanese scene, where Lebanese Sunnis feel marginalized due to the rise of the Shiite bloc of Hezbollah, supported by

Syria. In this context, Lebanese Sunnis express deep solidarity with the Syrian opposition, with their identity transcending national affiliation to become more sectarian. This loyalty is exemplified in cases where Lebanese Sunni fighters crossed into Syria to fight alongside opposition factions, with one notable example being a group of thirteen young men from Tripoli, who were killed after joining a militia linked to the Fatah al-Islam organization (Al Jazeera, 2013).

From a security standpoint, the border areas have turned into battlegrounds between the Lebanese Army and extremist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. These confrontations were not mere isolated incidents; rather, they reflected, to a large extent, Lebanon's internal division regarding the Syrian conflict. This was clearly visible in the city of Tripoli, where the Bab al-Tabbaneh Sunni area, supportive of the Syrian opposition, frequently clashed with the Alawite-majority Jabal Mohsen, which remained loyal to the Syrian regime. What is striking here is that these clashes were not simply a natural consequence of border tensions, but rather a clear extension of deeper political polarization, reflecting the link between the Syrian conflict and Lebanon's political and sectarian dynamics (Fakhoury, 2016).

Economic and Social Crises:

The economic crisis has played a decisive role in the outbreak of protests, as Lebanon has been suffering for decades from a rentier economic model based on financial and banking services, with the absence of a productive sector capable of generating sustainable employment opportunities. It is estimated that the unemployment rate among Lebanese youth about 17% in 2011 (Macrotrends, n.d.), a high rate for a small country whose economy depends on remittances from abroad. However, unemployment in Lebanon was not merely an economic crisis; it was part of a political equation used as a tool for control, where sectarian patronage networks impose themselves as a necessary intermediary for obtaining employment opportunities, thereby strengthening political and economic dependency on sectarian parties.

Furthermore, the rising cost of living and the deterioration of purchasing power made citizens more susceptible to economic marginalization, especially with the soaring prices of basic goods and fuel, which increased social tensions. The widespread corruption and nepotism further rendered state institutions incapable of meeting the basic needs of citizens, as public services, such as electricity, education, and healthcare, were subject to political and sectarian considerations rather than being recognized as citizens' rights.

The Turning Point in 2011 Events

On February 27, 2011, hundreds of Lebanese people responded to calls via social media to protest against the sectarian system. However, despite large calls for participation, the number of protesters did not exceed a few hundred. These protests were not merely a rejection of sectarianism as a political system, but an attempt to establish a civil, democratic state based on social justice and equality. The core issue, however, was the lack of a unified political force to carry these demands. There was no clear leadership or comprehensive political project capable of effecting actual change in the structure of the system. As weeks went by, the protests began to expand, with over 10,000 protesters taking to the streets of Beirut on March 6, marking a significant increase compared to the initial demonstration. The choice of *Electricité du Liban* (Lebanese Electricity Company) as the starting point for the march carried clear symbolism, as the electricity crisis represented the chronic failure of the sectarian political system to provide basic services due to conflicting sectarian interests.

One of the most significant features of these protests was their sectarian-crossing nature, which the demonstrations sought to establish. Protesters raised the slogan "Lebanese... neither Muslim nor Christian," in an attempt to redefine national identity beyond sectarian divisions. Other human rights issues were also raised, such as granting Lebanese women married to foreigners the right to pass on their nationality to their children. This indicates that the protests were not confined to political demands but also extended to issues of social justice and women's rights.

On March 13, the "March 14 Alliance" organized a massive demonstration with the participation of hundreds of thousands, but it was not an extension of the February 27 and March 6 protests. Instead, it came in a completely different context, raising the slogan of disarming Hezbollah and restoring state sovereignty—political demands that align with the ongoing conflict between the March 14 and March 8 alliances. Despite the large size of this demonstration, it was not a national, sectarian-crossing protest like the previous ones. Rather, it was a re-production of the existing political polarization, with Hezbollah supporters viewing it as an attempt to target the resistance, while March 14 supporters considered it a continuation of the Cedar Revolution and its stance against Syrian-Iranian influence in Lebanon.

On June 17, violent clashes broke out in Tripoli between armed groups from the Alawite-majority Jabal Mohsen and the Sunni-majority Bab al-Tabbaneh, triggered by a mass rally in

support of the Syrian protests. The clashes resulted in the deaths of seven people and the injury of dozens, including a Lebanese Army soldier. These events were the first clear indication that the Syrian crisis was beginning to infiltrate Lebanon, as the Lebanese became divided between supporters and opponents of the Syrian regime, leading to an escalation of sectarian violence, particularly in the northern regions close to the Syrian border. These clashes were not merely isolated incidents but marked the beginning of a series of confrontations that would later escalate with Hezbollah's direct involvement in the Syrian war in 2013.

In October and December 2011, Syrian forces carried out several incursions into Lebanese territory, resulting in casualties and creating tension within the Lebanese government led by Najib Mikati. The government dealt cautiously with these incursions, with Mikati attempting to downplay the severity of the situation by referring to the "permeability of the borders," in an attempt not to provoke the Syrian regime, especially since Lebanon at that time was under significant influence from Damascus and Hezbollah.

The year 2011 also witnessed several strikes and economic protests, the most notable of which was the teachers' strike on December 15, with over 5,000 participants, which paralyzed the country's educational system. These protests coincided with a worsening economic crisis, as Lebanese citizens began to feel a decline in their standard of living, rising unemployment rates, and poor public services. The year 2012 was filled with events that further complicated the Lebanese scene, but the assassination of Major General Wissam al-Hassan, head of the Internal Security Forces' Information Branch, marked a pivotal moment. This assassination was not merely a security targeting but a profound political message that affected internal power balances. The assassination deepened the political crisis, with March 14 forces calling for the overthrow of the government, holding it politically responsible for the continuation of assassinations. Meanwhile, the government, supported by Hezbollah and its allies, rejected the pressure, leading to a new political impasse that further paralyzed the institutions of the country.

Protests of 2013: The Crisis of Parliamentary Extension and the Reproduction of Power

Najib Mikati resigned in March 2013 due to several political disputes, the most prominent of which was the controversy over the parliamentary election law. Hezbollah feared a repeat of the results of the 2009 elections, in addition to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis and its impact on Lebanon. An agreement was reached to assign Tammam Salam to form a new government, but he

was unable to achieve this, which led to Mikati's government continuing to run the country's affairs in a caretaker capacity until a new government was appointed.

Amid political deadlock, the parliament decided to extend its term by 17 months in an attempt to reach a consensus on the parliamentary election law. This decision sparked widespread controversy regarding the constitutionality of the extension and the legitimacy of the parliament's continued existence. Moreover, with the approaching end of President Michel Suleiman's term in May 2014, it became clear that the absence of a legitimate parliament would make the election of a new president even more complicated, further exacerbating the political crisis in the country.

Lebanese people returned to the streets in 2013 following the parliament's decision to extend its term, citing instability as the reason for postponing parliamentary elections. While the official justifications spoke of security concerns, the extension was essentially a move to block any political change that could lead to a reshaping of the system. This fueled the perception among the Lebanese that the ruling class was fortifying itself against any accountability. In addition to being contrary to democratic principles, the parliamentary extension reflected the logic of sectarian quota sharing. No single political party was able to make a decision unilaterally; instead, the extension was the result of agreements between various forces to ensure their continued hold on power. This reinforced the impression that the Lebanese system was akin to a closed entity governed by internal balances that were difficult to break.

Some Lebanese activists continued to cling to the rhetoric of dismantling the sectarian system, utilizing media, demonstrations, and various forms of popular mobilization. This trend became particularly evident following the Lebanese parliament's decision in 2013 to extend its term, which was seen as a violation of the constitution and the popular mandate granted to the deputies. This decision triggered a wave of protests in downtown Beirut, marking the first time the term “haraq” (movement) was used to describe such protest activities. It was accompanied by an extensive media campaign under the hashtag “#No_to_Extension (*lā lil-tamdīd*)”, aimed at pressuring lawmakers to cancel the extension and hold parliamentary elections on time according to a proportional electoral system (Halabi, 2019).

On May 24, 2014, the term of the twelfth Lebanese president, Michel Suleiman, ended, and he left the presidential palace without a successor being elected, leading Lebanon into a new phase of political paralysis and vacancy. The Lebanese parliament failed to elect a new president, a situation that had not occurred before in Lebanese political history, as the country had experienced

three previous instances of presidential vacancies. Lebanon witnessed a political breakthrough in 2016 when Michel Aoun was elected president following a political settlement that involved agreements between the competing parties. After his election, Saad Hariri assumed the position of prime minister.

Limited Impact and Structural Challenges

It can be argued that the Lebanese movement was unable to achieve a breakthrough similar to what occurred in other Arab countries, due to several reasons, including the sectarian nature of the system, the absence of unified leadership, and the lack of broad consensus among the protesting groups regarding the nature of the required change. Despite the momentum witnessed by the protests, they failed to bring about a radical shift in Lebanon's political structure. This failure can be attributed to several factors, the most prominent of which are:

- The Strength of the Sectarian System: Traditional political forces managed to absorb the wave of popular anger and reassert themselves through rhetoric that linked stability to the existing system.
- The Absence of a Political Alternative: There was no comprehensive political project capable of offering a clear vision for a post-sectarian future, which made the popular movement unable to transform into an organized political force.
- Regional Factors: Lebanon, at that time, was deeply affected by regional developments, especially the war in Syria. This resulted in a decline in attention to the protests in favor of more urgent security and political issues.

When the “March 14 Alliance” organized a massive demonstration in March 2011, it became clear that sectarianism is not just a legal framework or political system, but a tool used by political forces in their conflicts. This made any attempt to break away from this system face structural difficulties, as sectarianism was employed to contain any reform movement and recycle it within the traditional sectarian divisions. What distinguishes these protests is that they were not sectarian in nature, but rather socio-economic protests that reflected growing anger at state policies. This demonstrates that the crisis in Lebanon is not only a political one but also an economic crisis resulting from corruption and mismanagement—factors that would later contribute to the explosion of conditions in 2019.

Despite the significant protest momentum in Lebanon in 2011, the sectarian structure of the political system prevented any real change. While some youth movements attempted to push towards a civil state, the sectarian political conflict continued to undermine any attempt at reform. Furthermore, regional interventions, particularly from Syria and Iran, turned Lebanon into a battleground for external conflicts, which further complicated the situation. Thus, it can be said that 2011 was not a year of change, but rather a year in which the Lebanese people exposed the depth of their crisis, without having the actual capacity to overcome it.

2015 Protests: The Waste Crisis as a Revealer of Political Corruption

In July 2015, the slogan "*Down with the regime*" echoed once again in the streets of Beirut, marking the second day of the "#You Stink (*ṭilaʿat rīḥitkum*)" movement, which was a reaction to the government's failure, under the leadership of Saad Hariri, to address the waste crisis in Beirut and its suburbs. As the crisis worsened, popular demands escalated, moving beyond the call for a solution to the waste problem to demands for the overthrow of the regime, due to the lack of trust in the ruling class's ability to implement any substantial reforms. The summer of 2015 witnessed a large-scale popular movement led by independent groups and opponents of the traditional political elite. This movement was characterized by significant organizational development, allowing it to achieve a broader impact compared to previous protest initiatives (Halabi, 2019).

Unlike the 2011 and 2013 protests, the "You Stink" movement in 2015 was distinct in that it originated from a tangible environmental crisis: the accumulation of waste in Beirut due to the government's failure to find sustainable solutions. Although the protests began as a reaction to a service-related crisis, they quickly transformed into an expression of anger against the widespread corruption in the state. The Lebanese people realized that the waste problem was merely a symptom of a political system that was incapable of effective governance.

The Lebanese Protests of 2015 were a popular protest movement that began on August 22, 2015. The primary grievance was the accumulation of waste in the streets of Beirut and other areas, coupled with the political leaders' failure to address the crisis in the short period prior. Protesters called for the resignation of the government due to the rampant political corruption among politicians and leaders, each representing a specific sect within the contemporary Lebanese society. Despite widespread popular support, the movement collided with the sectarian system, as political forces attempted to contain it through their traditional channels. They also employed

repression and internal infiltrations to dismantle the movement. Ultimately, the protest did not succeed in imposing radical changes, but it set an important precedent by leading the Lebanese people to step beyond sectarian divisions in demanding accountability from the ruling class.

The waste crisis was not a typical political issue, but it impacted a broad segment of the Lebanese population, regardless of their political affiliations or social and economic backgrounds. This made the protests a general expression of dissatisfaction with the government's performance (Halabi, 2019). The groups organizing the movement, as well as the activists involved, possessed accumulated experience that helped them surprise the political elite and reach a wide range of citizens, especially the middle class. Digital platforms played a pivotal role in spreading the movement's ideas and mobilizing public support, thanks to influential activists in both the political and social spheres. This contributed to an unprecedented spread of protest messages. The decision by parliament to extend its mandate further fueled public discontent, leading to an escalation of demands from simple government and administrative reforms to calls for the overthrow of the existing political system. The movement was based on the slogan "All of them means all of them," which targeted the entire ruling political class without exception, including all sectarian leaders. This slogan gained wide popular acceptance as it reflected a general rejection of the ruling elite and their collective accusations of corruption and mismanagement.

Unlike previous protest movements, the 2015 protests received extensive media coverage, which helped highlight its demands and broaden its popular support base. During this period, the role of civil society emerged clearly, being viewed as an independent alternative to traditional political parties. Many associations became active in areas such as governance, transparency, elections, human rights, and the environment, which enhanced public engagement with issues of political and administrative reform. One of the most significant outcomes of the movement was the emergence of a new generation of Lebanese youth, who demonstrated a noticeable liberation from the dominance of traditional sectarian leaders. This reflected the beginning of a new political awareness based on citizenship rather than sectarian affiliations. After the movement waned, there was a near consensus among activists and protesters during discussions and dialogue forums that the demands should have been more realistic and achievable in order to ensure tangible political gains. From this standpoint, there emerged an implicit understanding that the overthrow of the system was a long-term goal, while hope remained focused on the potential for reforming the

system or improving its performance through continuous pressure and sustained popular mobilization.

A number of analysts believed that while the protests expressed the concerns and pains of the Lebanese people, especially the youth, and despite being wrapped in an attractive facade that appealed to various segments of society, they were, in reality, a settling of scores between the FPM, backed by Hezbollah, and the Lebanese government, represented by Prime Minister Tammam Salam. What drew attention, according to these analysts, was the timing of the protests, as the political clash between the government and the leader of the FPM, General Michel Aoun, seemed to be nearing a resolution. Additionally, it was noted that the protesters intentionally avoided including an image of Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hassan Nasrallah, alongside the pictures of other Lebanese leaders whom they were demanding to be held accountable, even though Hezbollah is the most sectarian and influential Lebanese party in public affairs and the only one with a military presence and involvement in regional conflicts since 2005.

On the other hand, some pointed to the support and solidarity with the protesters in their demands for the resignation of the government and the parliament, considering the government ineffective and the parliament failing to perform its duties properly. The parliament had been unable, for over a year and three months, to elect a new president after the term of President Michel Sleiman ended. However, these individuals simultaneously rejected the immediate resignation of the government and parliament, as they believed it would prevent the election of a new president, the formation of a new government, and the election of a new parliament, which would ultimately lead to the complete collapse of the country.

The 2019 Protests: The October 17 Revolution

The October 17, 2019, uprising in Lebanon was distinguished as the first large-scale protest movement to witness widespread popular mobilization across various Lebanese regions in a decentralized manner, thus surpassing the traditional model of local or sectorial protests. Despite the long history of protest movements in the country, this uprising represented a fundamental shift in patterns of political mobilization, as it erupted simultaneously across the entire country, with significant participation from the working classes, combining both spontaneity and harmonious organization (Karam & Majed, 2022).

The protests in Lebanon were triggered by the accumulation of crises in the weeks leading up to them, where economic, environmental, and social challenges intensified, deepening public discontent. Among the most significant of these crises was the wave of wildfires that ravaged several areas, including Chouf and Saadiyat, leading to the destruction of vast areas of Lebanese forests, which are considered part of the country's environmental identity. These fires caused substantial damage to homes and put the lives of many citizens at risk. In response to this disaster, the Lebanese government failed to respond effectively due to the unpreparedness of its planes to extinguish the fires, forcing it to rely on aid from Cyprus (The Economist, 2019).

However, these reasons were merely the direct causes of the movement; its core slogan was a call for the complete overhaul of the ruling political class: “All of them means all of them,” in Lebanese dialect. This was reflected in the primary goals that led the movement. The first was the fall of the government, which was achieved when Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned on October 29, 2019. The second was the formation of an interim government of technocrats with exceptional powers for six months, a goal that does not appear to have been met with the formation of the government of Hassan Diab on January 21, 2020, which succeeded Hariri's government. The third was the call for new parliamentary elections, and the fourth was the recovery of looted funds, alongside judicial independence—goals which, of course, were not achieved. It was clear that the aim of these goals was to change the ruling political class and produce a new class in the hope of establishing a new vision of governance that would pull Lebanon out of its economic crises and transition the country to a state of recovery, not just survival (Choucair, 2020). The financial crisis that erupted in 2019 was not a surprise but rather the inevitable result of decades of mismanagement and corruption. The banks found themselves unable to provide dollar deposits and began imposing withdrawal restrictions, which pushed the Lebanese people to the streets, demanding a fundamental change in the system.

In the days leading up to the protests in October 2019, a series of around 100 wildfires broke out in various regions, notably in Chouf and Kharroub, leading to the displacement of hundreds of people and causing severe damage to the environment and wildlife. This catastrophe exposed the Lebanese government's failure to manage the crisis, as it was unable to use firefighting equipment due to neglect in its maintenance, forcing it to request assistance from neighboring countries like Cyprus, Jordan, Turkey, and Greece (Azhari, 2019). Amid this accelerating decline, protests began in late September 2019 with limited numbers in Beirut, before quickly spreading across the

country, reflecting growing public anger at corruption, mismanagement, and the continuous deterioration of essential services (Gulf News, 2019). What distinguished this uprising from previous ones was its radical nature. The protesters adopted a revolutionary rhetoric that reasserted the demands that emerged during the 2011 Arab uprisings, particularly the call for the overthrow of the existing political system. This was reflected in the chanting of slogans with strong symbolic significance, such as "all means all" (*killun yaʿnī killun*), a slogan that first emerged during the 2015 protests amid the waste crisis and the "YouStink" movement, only to later resurface as a mobilizing tool targeting the sectarian structure of the Lebanese system, viewed as a multi-headed entity based on an agreement between sectarian elites.

The ruling class in Lebanon continued its approach of power and wealth sharing, without taking any real steps toward reform, which only exacerbated the crises instead of addressing them. The election of Michel Aoun to the presidency, after more than two years of a presidential vacuum, did not lead to any tangible progress or provide the necessary solutions to the administrative, economic, and judicial crises plaguing the state. Similarly, the parliamentary elections held in May 2018 did not represent a decisive turning point, as the Lebanese had hoped. They did not result in any fundamental change in the political landscape or improvements in living and economic conditions. Instead, the elections reproduced the same political class, with Hezbollah and the FPM securing the majority and forming a coalition government that included various political forces. However, this government failed to address the escalating crises, particularly the economic crisis, deepening instability and fostering feelings of frustration among citizens.

In addition to the radical nature of the movement, the uprising carried a clear class dimension, with protesters successfully linking economic and political crises, directing their rhetoric against both the sectarian elite and the oligarchic dominance. This socio-economic dimension redefined the political conflict equation by adopting the binary of "us" versus "them," where "us" represented the popular classes and marginalized groups, while "them" positioned the political and financial elites responsible for the deterioration of economic and social conditions.

On a cultural and rhetorical level, the early days of the uprising were marked by the adoption of a shockingly unconventional language of protest in the Lebanese political arena. Protesters resorted to using sharp and direct language in their chants to express their anger towards the ruling elites. These chants targeted prominent figures, including Gebran Bassil, the son-in-law of the president, as well as other banking and political figures such as Riad Salameh and Hassan

Nasrallah. This departure from traditional rhetorical norms, evident in the use of language unconstrained by protocol or sectarian considerations, was one of the factors that reinforced the radical character of the movement, transforming it into a rebellious protest moment against all forms of authority, not only in terms of the content of the demands but also in terms of methods of expression and confrontation. Thus, the 2019 uprising was not merely a new wave of protests, but rather represented a fundamental shift in the methods of mobilization and rallying. It transcended the traditional frameworks of Lebanese protest movements and presented a new vision for political and social conflict, one that sought to confront the sectarian-economic structure of governance from a more inclusive and radical perspective.

As the economic crisis intensified, the momentum of the protests waned, particularly with the security forces' use of violence to suppress demonstrators. However, the explosion that occurred on August 4, 2020, reignited popular anger, with thousands of Lebanese taking to the streets demanding immediate accountability for the ruling class. They regarded the explosion not as a mere accident, but as a direct result of the state's negligence and corruption (Hamadi , 2019).

Despite the massive outpouring of anger, the popular movement faced significant challenges, the most prominent being the lack of unified leadership and divisions among the various forces. Additionally, the political system attempted to absorb the protests through symbolic measures, such as the resignation of the government, without any fundamental change in the power structure.

Outcomes and Aftermath

These protests led to an unprecedented political crisis, exemplified by the resignation of Prime Minister Saad Hariri on October 29, who adopted the protesters' demands for the formation of a government composed of independent professionals. However, many other politicians who were targeted by the protests remained in positions of power, contributing to the continuation of political and social instability in the country (Kabboul, 2019). Yet, Hariri's resignation was more of a political tactic to distance himself from the crisis and place the blame on his allies, particularly the FPM and Hezbollah. The resignation created a power vacuum and highlighted the fragility of the political system (Saouli, 2019). Moreover, the inability to quickly form a new government exacerbated the crisis, leading to further instability. The economic dimensions of the protests highlighted Lebanon's dire financial situation. The collapse of the banking sector, the loss of public

trust, and rising inflation all threatened the country's economic security. The protests also disrupted economic activities, weakening an already fragile economy (Makdisi, 2021).

The 2019 protests showcased the potential for social cohesion in Lebanon and the challenges it faces. While the protests were non-sectarian and unified people from diverse backgrounds, underlying sectarian tensions remained. The protests also revealed deep social divisions, with different communities experiencing the crisis in varying ways (Ghanem, 2021). In response to the protests, the government announced a series of economic reforms aimed at addressing some of the protesters' demands. These measures included anti-corruption efforts, reducing public spending, and improving economic conditions. However, many saw these reforms as too little, too late, and insufficient to address the root causes of the crisis.

At the onset of the popular movement, the ruling class realized that the sectarian system, which had formed the foundation of governance in Lebanon, was under threat, not only from the streets but also due to the fragility of the economic model reliant on borrowing and financial rents. Consequently, the banking sector, with the support of the Central Bank of Lebanon, took on the task of protecting the financial system through a series of measures that clearly reflected its bias towards major vested interests at the expense of the popular classes and small depositors. Among the most prominent of these measures were (Karime, 2020). First is informal restrictions on withdrawals and money transfers: Between October 17 and December 31, 2019, banks imposed informal restrictions on withdrawals and transfers, which led to the freezing of small depositors' funds, while large depositors and politically influential figures were able to smuggle their money abroad. These actions revealed the discriminatory nature of the banking system, which did not handle the crisis according to fair principles, but rather used it as an opportunity to strengthen the influence of the groups controlling financial decision-making.

Second is Delay in regulating the exchange market and the absence of effective intervention. The Central Bank allowed the Lebanese pound's exchange rate against the US dollar to deteriorate without taking stringent measures to curb speculation in the parallel market. It did not require currency exchange institutions to link the exchange rate to officially set rates until months after the crisis began. This delay allowed certain influential groups to make enormous profits from the fluctuations in the exchange rate, exacerbating economic contraction and increasing the cost of living for citizens. Third is the manipulation of financial disclosures by banks. The Central Bank granted banks exemptions to delay quarterly financial disclosures, allowing them to conceal the

extent of their losses for an extended period. This decision was not merely an administrative measure, but rather a strategic tactic to protect banks from accountability and delay any attempts to address the structural crisis in the banking sector.

In response to the rising public anger, traditional political forces resorted to a tactical withdrawal from the scene, promoting a narrative that the solution lay in the formation of a "technocratic government" to manage the crisis, independent of political calculations. However, this step was merely an attempt to alleviate public pressure while maintaining the core of the ruling system (Halabi, 2019). Political forces attempted to absorb popular discontent by promoting laws to combat corruption and recover stolen funds, demands that were central to the rhetoric of the popular movement. However, these initiatives remained superficial and were not accompanied by any real measures to hold those responsible for widespread corruption accountable, reflecting the political system's lack of genuine will for reform. Although Hassan Diab's government was presented as an "independent" government, it was, in fact, an extension of the arrangements made by traditional political forces, as it was supported by the March 8 Alliance. This made it incapable of garnering international support. This failure to gain external trust was not merely a result of the government's political position but was also linked to its inability to present a convincing reform plan capable of pulling Lebanon out of its structural crisis.

Amid growing financial pressures, the government found itself facing a difficult choice: either implement radical reform measures that would threaten the interests of economic elites, or resort to external borrowing through the IMF. In March 2020, the government announced a suspension of Eurobond payments, marking a turning point in Lebanon's approach to its financial crisis. The decision to suspend Eurobond payments, theoretically, dealt a blow to the dominance of major depositors over the financial system. However, a closer look at the details reveals that large investors, including some Lebanese banks, had managed to sell most of the bonds to foreign financial institutions prior to the decision, thus reducing its actual impact on local capital. Consequently, the decision was not so much a break from the previous economic model as it was a step towards reshaping it within a new international framework.

With the suspension of debt payments, the government began negotiations with the IMF, seeking financial support conditioned on austerity-driven economic reforms. Despite the government's claims that its plan would not affect the poor, the history of IMF programs in the

region shows that most of its reforms tend to focus on reducing public spending, raising taxes, and cutting subsidies—measures that exacerbate social inequality rather than reduce it.

Beirut Port Explosion: The Major Shock

The Beirut Explosion of 2020, also known as the Beirut Port Explosion or August 4 Explosion, was referred to as "Beirutshima".[26] It was a massive explosion that occurred in two stages in Warehouse 12 at the Beirut Port on the afternoon of Tuesday, August 4, 2020 (Abu-Fadil, 2020). The explosion resulted in a huge mushroom-shaped smoke cloud accompanied by a shockwave that shook the capital, Beirut. This caused extensive damage to the port and shattered the glass facades of buildings and homes in most neighborhoods of Beirut. The Lebanese National News Agency reported that the number of injured was vast and incalculable. The Lebanese Ministry of Health later confirmed the death of more than 218 people, including those who went missing and whose whereabouts were unknown, and over 7,000 others were injured. It was also reported that around 50,000 residential units were directly affected, leaving approximately 300,000 people homeless. The Governor of Beirut estimated the material losses caused by the explosion to be between 10 to 15 billion US dollars.

The damage extended to thousands of homes kilometers away from the explosion site, and Lebanese security authorities revealed that the cause of the explosion was "highly explosive materials" that had been stored at the port for over six years, contrary to the media's speculation about fireworks or weapons being involved. Beirut's Governor, Marwan Abboud, declared the capital a "disaster-stricken city," describing the explosion as "similar to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." Meanwhile, President Michel Aoun called for an emergency meeting of the Supreme Defense Council at the Baabda Palace on the evening of August 4 to discuss the explosion. The meeting resulted in a recommendation to the government to declare a state of emergency, and on Wednesday, August 5, 2020, Prime Minister Hassan Diab declared a "National Day of Mourning."

The explosion represents one of the largest explosions in modern history, resulting in hundreds of deaths, thousands of injuries, and widespread displacement. This explosion was not merely an accidental disaster; it was a direct consequence of the deep-rooted mismanagement within state institutions, the absence of accountability mechanisms, and the collapse of a

[26] In comparison to the devastation caused to Hiroshima by the nuclear explosion.

governance structure that had become incapable of responding to any crisis. It was the direct outcome of a combination of political sectarianism, structural corruption, and administrative neglect. The Lebanese state was not only absent in addressing the crisis but was also complicit in creating the conditions that made this event possible—whether through administrative neglect, allowing an unsafe environment within the port, or through public policies that failed to provide even the basic level of safety for its citizens.

The term *"Disaster Capitalism"* as some have described it (Daher, 2020), was evident in the way the international community responded to the crisis. Instead of offering fundamental solutions, there were attempts to exploit the crisis to reshape the balance of power within the country. On one hand, there were parties trying to preserve the existing sectarian system, while on the other hand, there were forces attempting to modify it without disturbing its core.

The consequences of the explosion cannot be separated from the financial and economic crisis that Lebanon has been suffering from for years. The Lebanese economy relies on a rentier model that is non-productive, heavily dependent on external capital flows, remittances, and the banking sector. With the onset of the economic crisis in 2019, Lebanon entered a phase of financial collapse that it had not experienced since the Civil War, with the Lebanese pound losing more than 80% of its value, citizens' purchasing power eroding, and the economic cycle grinding to a halt (Harvey, 2021). The explosion was not only a humanitarian catastrophe, but it also delivered a fatal blow to an economy already suffering from compounded crises. The Beirut Port, which had been a major economic lifeline, became incapacitated, deepening the supply chain crisis and increasing Lebanon's reliance on imports amidst the collapse of foreign currency reserves.

The aftermath of the explosion led to a wave of widespread public anger, as many Lebanese people believed that the political class was not only corrupt and incompetent, but also posed an existential threat to society. The protests were not just against corruption; they were against the very nature of the system itself, and against the way in which the crisis was perpetuated through SPS mechanisms. The popular movement that began on October 17, 2019, and which escalated again after the explosion, witnessed significant shifts in its political rhetoric. Initially, the demands centered on overthrowing the political system, accountability, and ending corruption. However, over time, especially after the explosion, the rhetoric became more radical. The demand for "accountability" was no longer sufficient; there was now talk of "revenge" and the necessity of rebuilding the state from the ground up.

Among the core issues facing the affected region, particularly in Gemayzeh and Mar Mikhael, is the matter of reconstruction, which threatens the unique heritage character of these areas. As a result of the economic crisis and the lack of urban planning, restoration efforts are being carried out haphazardly without regard for the architectural identity of the area. Official authorities were supposed to issue permits and oversee these operations to ensure that the rebuilding process preserved the area's identity. Before the explosion, Lebanon was already undergoing a severe economic crisis, with the government failing to repay its debts, the Lebanese pound depreciating, and the poverty rate rising to more than 50%. In addition, the burdens imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic caused many hospitals in Lebanon to suffer from shortages in medical supplies, rendering them almost incapable of admitting patients, in addition to being unable to pay staff salaries due to the ongoing economic collapse.

In late August 2020, Bassam Al-Qaisi, the newly appointed director of the Port of Beirut, announced that the port had resumed operations at full capacity. He reported that during the previous two weeks alone, the port had handled approximately 78,000 tons of grain, flour, wheat, and corn. This rapid restoration of functionality was seen as a symbolic and logistical necessity for a country heavily reliant on imports for its food security and basic needs, particularly in the aftermath of the devastating explosion.

Despite efforts to return to normalcy, a series of smaller fires erupted in the damaged sections of the port. On September 10, 2020, a major fire broke out in a warehouse storing cooking oils and food parcels owned by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The flames quickly spread to a nearby stockpile of rubber tires located in the port's free zone. The sight of thick black smoke rising once again over the Beirut skyline triggered widespread panic, as many feared a second explosion. This fear prompted residents to flee from the city center. The fire was eventually contained by ground-based firefighters and helicopters from the Lebanese Air Force, which conducted aerial water drops over the blaze.

Although the immediate aftermath of the explosion gradually subsided with the formation of a new Lebanese government in September 2021, the country continued to grapple with deepening economic and civil crises. One of the most alarming developments was the near-total collapse of the Lebanese energy sector, triggered by severe fuel shortages. On October 9, Lebanon experienced a nationwide blackout that lasted for 24 hours after the depletion of fuel supplies at

its primary power plants. This event underscored the scale of infrastructural failure and the state's inability to provide basic services (BBC, 2021).

The security situation further deteriorated on October 14, 2021, when deadly clashes erupted in Beirut. Armed confrontations broke out between factions aligned with Hezbollah and opposing groups, resulting in the death of six individuals (Karam & El Deeb, 2021). The violence was sparked during a protest organized by Hezbollah and its allies, which was directed against the lead judge investigating the 2020 Beirut port explosion. The demonstration took place near the Palace of Justice—ironically, a symbol of legal accountability—located along a historically tense fault line that had once separated Shiite and Christian neighborhoods during the Lebanese Civil War. The return of sectarian violence in this context exposed the fragility of Lebanon's political equilibrium and the persistent threat posed by unresolved grievances stemming from the explosion.

By January 2022, the crisis in Lebanon had further deepened, with the value of the Lebanese lira continuing to decline and the scheduled general elections expected to be postponed indefinitely (BBC News, 2022). During the same month, a nationwide general strike was organized by public transport and labor unions across the country (Independent, 2022).

In the 2022 Lebanese general elections, many activists and former organizations expressed their intention to run for office, aiming to replace the entrenched political class and reform the country (Hijazi, 2022). A number of traditional and longstanding parties also joined the lists associated with the October 17 movement, such as the historically prominent National Bloc, the Lebanese Communist Party, and other major parties that claimed to be part of the movement, including the Kataeb Party, the Independence Movement, and the Popular Nasserist Organization.

Conclusion: Analysis of the Impact of Protests

Following the culmination of political disputes in Lebanon—where domestic, regional, sectarian, and national dimensions became inextricably intertwined—it was hardly surprising that the ruling elite proved incapable of managing their conflicts in a manner that served the public interest or, at the very least, did not negatively impact the administration of public affairs. The frequency of institutional paralysis and constitutional dysfunction during this period may serve as an indicator of this broader failure, without the need to delve into the intricate details of Lebanon's political landscape.

Specifically, in the post-2005 phase of the Taif Agreement era, political consensus among sectarian party representatives became the de facto prerequisite for the functioning of constitutional institutions. This dynamic became increasingly difficult to sustain in the absence of Syrian tutelage, which had previously played the role of an external arbiter. As a result, the Lebanese Parliament extended its mandate twice between 2013 and 2017, citing political deadlock, while the last parliamentary election prior to that had been held in 2009. This created a democratic vacuum in which nearly nine years passed between two electoral cycles (June 2009 – May 2018), effectively rendering the sectarian ruling elite the de facto representatives of the Lebanese people.

Instances of political paralysis became frequent at the executive level as successive governments either resigned or remained in caretaker capacity for extended periods. Among the most notable cases: (1) The Fouad Siniora Government: Entered a caretaker phase from late 2006 to mid-2008 following the resignation of Shiite ministers amid heightened sectarian tensions. (2) The Najib Mikati Government (March 2013 – February 2014): Operated in a limited caretaker capacity after its resignation due to sharp political divisions over electoral laws and senior administrative appointments. (3) The Tammam Salam Government: Functioned as a caretaker government following the presidential vacuum in 2014. It failed to effectively address pressing national challenges, most notably the waste management crisis, and continued in this limited capacity until late 2016. (4) The Second Saad Hariri Government (May 2018 – January 2019): Operated in a caretaker status amid protracted political consultations that delayed cabinet formation for several months following the 2018 parliamentary elections.

On the presidential front, Lebanon witnessed two major episodes of executive vacuum: (1) The first occurred between November 2007 and May 2008, after the end of President Émile Lahoud's term, due to the inability of political factions to reach a consensus on his successor. (2) The second, and longest since the signing of the Taif Agreement, extended from May 2014 to October 2016. This vacuum stemmed from Hezbollah and the FPM's insistence on electing Michel Aoun as president, a position opposed by several other factions. The stalemate ultimately lasted for two and a half years and was only resolved through a political settlement in which the FPM, led by Aoun himself, struck successive agreements—first with the Lebanese Forces and later with the Future Movement. This arrangement paved the way for Aoun's election as President of the Republic and, in turn, enabled Saad Hariri to assume the premiership once more. Nonetheless, the government formation process remained fraught, taking nearly nine months following the May

2018 elections to finalize. This cabinet eventually resigned just thirteen days into the popular uprising in October 2019, under pressure from mass demonstrations –or, as it was officially stated, in response to the demands of the people (Choucair, 2020).

In another context, the uprising that erupted in Lebanon in October 2019 emerged within a complex political and social context. Unlike previous protests, this uprising was characterized by its inclusion of various sects and regions, posing a direct threat to the political elite, which had long relied on sectarian divisions as a means of maintaining power (Majed, 2020). This was not merely a transient protest movement seeking to achieve purely economic demands, but rather an expression of a deeper identity crisis and a political model incapable of delivering social justice and sustainable development. Within this framework, the analysis of the uprising necessitates a focus on several key dimensions, including the re-framing of the relationship between national identity and sectarianism, the role of neoliberalism in reproducing the power structure, and the resulting legitimacy crisis within the consociational system that has long dominated Lebanon's political scene.

The events of October 2019 cannot be understood without referring to a series of economic and social policies that exacerbated unemployment rates, increased tax burdens, and were accompanied by widespread institutional corruption and the deterioration of essential services. In this context, popular anger was not simply a reaction to the imposition of new taxes or the rising cost of services, but rather a reflection of years of government neglect and patronage that had sidelined institutions from fulfilling their core functions. This manifested in the Lebanese state's failure to redistribute wealth equitably, which gave the protest movement a revolutionary dimension that transcended economic demands, culminating in a broad call for a complete overhaul of the political system.

The issue of identity occupies a central role in understanding the Lebanese uprising, as it highlights the tensions between what is referred to as national nationalism and traditional sectarian coalitions. In the Lebanese system, based on power-sharing along sectarian lines, the national discourse could no longer be a mere synonym for national unity; it became a battleground for forces seeking to restore their legitimacy through the appropriation of an identity that redefines the nation in a way that transcends sectarian divisions. In this context, one could argue that the demand for a "homeland" or "nation" is not a call for the eradication of differences, but rather an attempt

to reshape political identity in a way that can confront the negative effects of the consociational democracy model, which thrives on sectarian quotas and foreign influence.

However, the primary challenge faced by the movement was its lack of clear leadership and an alternative political program, which allowed the ruling system to maneuver and continue its policies. Nevertheless, the persistence of the movement, despite political repression and sectarian mobilization, reflects a shift in the political consciousness of the Lebanese people, where the issue was no longer merely about partial reforms, but rather a fundamental reconsideration of the state structure and the existing economic model (Karime, 2020).

Most of the writings that have addressed the Lebanese uprising of 2019 have overlooked an important aspect concerning citizens who, despite their dissatisfaction with the system, held on to certain aspects of it, which contributed to its continuity (Al-Amine, 2022). Since the outbreak of protests on October 17, 2019, supporters of the ruling parties were not mere bystanders, but played a pivotal role in shaping the course of events, either through their participation in the protests or by working to protect their political interests within the system. While party narratives appeared to fluctuate between supporting the popular movement and safeguarding their gains, they generally sought to justify the status quo rather than offering a true vision for change. Despite its momentum, the uprising faced structural obstacles that limited its ability to bring about radical change. These obstacles can be analyzed on several levels. First, despite the mass character of the uprising, it lacked a unified political leadership capable of formulating a clear strategy. This horizontal structure, while allowing for broad participation, weakened the ability to make decisive decisions in the face of the regime.

Second, the authorities responded to the uprising through various repressive strategies, starting with direct repression using security force violence, and extending to more complex strategies such as co-opting some of the movement's demands or demonizing it in the media. Third, with the worsening economic situation and rising unemployment rates, economic priorities began to dominate the lives of citizens, making the continuation of the movement difficult amid the struggle of people to survive. Third, Lina Khatib argues that, unlike the Cedar Revolution of 2005, which focused on supporting the main aspects of the political struggle with political parties and the social and religious divide between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Lebanon, the Lebanese protests of 2015 began to include criticisms of leaders within the anti-Hezbollah community. She stated that the 2019 protests went beyond this social divide, describing them as "part of a real

popular movement not guided by any political party... crossing sectarian lines in a way broader than that of 2015... happening all across Lebanon, not just in Beirut." Khatib considers the protests as an "existential threat" to both the "Lebanese government and political elite," and described the protests as "the revolution." She interprets the nature of the 2019 protests at the societal level as "the seed" of the Lebanese protests of 2015 (Khatib, 2019).

Fourth, in contrast to the Cedar Revolution of 2005, where the main political struggle aligned with political parties and the social and religious divide between Sunni and Shia in Lebanon, the Lebanese protests of 2015-2016 began to include critiques of leaders within the anti-Hezbollah community. The 2019 protests surpassed this social divide even more, as they became part of a genuine popular movement not directed by any political party, transcending sectarian lines in a way broader than what had occurred in 2015, and taking place across all of Lebanon, not just in Beirut. The protests posed an existential threat to the Lebanese government, political elite, and the revolution itself. The nature of the societal-level protests in 2019 had its seeds in the 2015-2016 protests (Assi, 2021). Although these protests were not decisive and did not achieve their primary goal of dismantling the political system as intended, they were valuable on multiple levels (Khatib, 2019).

Components of the Uprising

The path that led to the eruption of the uprising inevitably reflected its components and the nature of its relationship with the sects and the ruling political parties. These two factors— the components of the uprising and the way it interacts with the ruling parties— will, in turn, determine its future direction. A number of key segments participating in the uprising can be distinguished based on this description. The first group is the unaffiliated Lebanese public, which constitutes the largest portion of the uprising's participants, most of whom are from the lower-middle class, poor, and some from the upper-middle class. A large portion of this group had not previously engaged in any political activity. The participation of this demographic gives the uprising its significance, as it includes men, women, children, and the elderly, particularly during the peak of the protests which had broad social and political demands.

The second group is feminist associations and women's participation. The participation of women, in general, was striking and highly effective in the uprising. Women from all ideological, intellectual, and social backgrounds played a pioneering role in this movement. This shift in the

role of women within Lebanese society further enhanced the legitimacy of the uprising on the international stage. Third is labor unions, workers, and sectoral demands. Unions and professional groups, such as teachers and other labor categories, along with retired Lebanese army personnel, joined the uprising and played an essential role in it. Calls for liberation from some unions (not all) and the creation of permanent or temporary alternatives, or a restructuring of unions –many of which are infiltrated by the state or subject to the influence of sectarian parties– also emerged within the protest. This reflected a broader dissatisfaction with the political system.

Fourth is demand-based civil society activist groups, activists who are not affiliated with the ruling political parties or traditional ideological parties in Lebanon. Some of these groups emerged during the recent crisis, while others existed before it but aligned with the same national grievances against the economic policies and corruption of the ruling parties. They transitioned into political action with a local-national approach. Notable examples include *Bayrūt Madīnatī* (Beirut is My City), the *li-Haqqī* movement from Mount Lebanon and Beirut, and *Hāris al-Madīna* (City Guardians) in Tripoli. Some of these groups grew to resemble political parties, such as "Citizens in a State," or even declared themselves as a party, such as "The Seven Party." These groups contribute to the uprising's resilience and continuity.

Fifth is the Lebanese left. While there are other ideological trends present, the Lebanese Left's presence, particularly regarding economic and human rights issues, was more notable than others. It was especially influential in the southern regions of Lebanon and made its presence felt across the uprising's broader discourse. The Left played a significant role in fueling the protests against banks and sectarian rhetoric, intensifying the protest movement's tone.

Sixth is the new Islamists. This term does not refer to a particular faction of dominant political Islam in Lebanon but rather to a conservative class, some of which are ideologically Islamic. This group has engaged politically from a social and national perspective, addressing demands related to living conditions. Some belong to parties outside of the ruling political sphere, such as the Islamic Group, or to Sunni or Shia Islamic associations. Among them, followers of the late Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (a prominent Shiite cleric) were notable, particularly within the Sunni community where their influence was more pronounced. This stream played a pivotal role in facilitating the uprising's infiltration into the Sunni community, especially since the Future Movement did not support or yield to the protests.

The Regionally Interactive Protest Movement in Lebanon

One of the most significant developments brought about by the Lebanese protest movement was the inclusion of various popular Lebanese factions into the political equation, creating an opening for new political and intellectual elites, as well as diverse social orientations, to reshape Lebanese nationalism. The movement, instead of confronting the ruling political parties face-to-face, shifted its focus to local demands, primarily in the regions, though the ruling parties sought to resist this shift. This regional focus allowed the protest to continue and expand, avoiding the trap of sectarianism. In this way, each region rebelled against its own political and sectarian leaders, marking a key aspect of the protest's resilience and ability to avoid sectarian divisions (Choucair, 2020).

Tripoli: Tripoli, a historically marginalized city, took advantage of the state's neglect and its preoccupation with other matters. The city, home to many of Lebanon's poor, became a central hub for the protest movement. While other regions such as Beirut or the south experienced periodic setbacks, Tripoli's protests were strong and sustained. This was largely due to the fact that Tripoli did not fall under the influence of any major political sectarian party, making it less susceptible to the forces that sought to suppress the movement. However, there were concerns that Tripoli might be labeled as a center of terrorism and religious extremism, so the protesters in Tripoli refrained from sectarian rhetoric and focused on broader national demands.

The South and Baalbek: In the predominantly Shiite areas of southern Lebanon and Baalbek, the protest movement expressed discontent with the political class, but without directly confronting the Shiite political parties, specifically Hezbollah and the Amal Movement. Although these areas criticized the deep-rooted state structures and the financial sector, the protesters were careful to avoid criticizing the "Resistance" (a reference to Hezbollah's military arm), understanding that the issue of resistance was a non-negotiable line for the Shiite community. The protesters from the south emphasized the need for a Lebanese state that served all its citizens equally, without abandoning the historical struggles and concerns of the Shiite community.

Greater Beirut: Beirut, along with its suburbs, had long been a battleground for sectarian and political conflicts, especially in the last decade. Although the Beirut protests were not immune to the pressures of sectarian discourse, there was a significant and growing willingness among the city's inhabitants to persist in protest, even in the face of security forces' repression or attacks from political party militias. Initially, supporters of Hezbollah and Amal participated in the early days

of the protest, which highlighted the fractures within the political sectarian base. If the social and political pressures on these groups were to subside, there was hope that they would rejoin the broader protest movement, further strengthening it.

The Christian-majority Areas: The Christian-majority areas, which were marginalized under the Taif Agreement, displayed two distinct stances toward the protest movement. The first group, part of the ruling elite, sought to regain the power lost during the early years of the post-Taif period (1990-2005), when figures like Samir Geagea were imprisoned, and Michel Aoun was in exile. They had historically struggled with a lack of strong political representation within the ruling class. The second group, led by the FPM under Michel Aoun, positioned itself as the true representative of Christians, yet their rise to power did not lead to greater empowerment or stability for the Christian community in Lebanon. Another important faction in the protest was composed of individuals who distanced themselves from the traditional Christian parties, particularly after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon post-2005, and chose to engage with civil society movements that were critical of the established order.

The General Trends in the Protest Movement: A common theme throughout the protest movement was the rejection of working with established sectarian parties. This reflected a broader disillusionment with the sectarian political system that had governed Lebanon for decades. Economic grievances were a central driving force behind the protests, especially given the deteriorating economic situation, rising unemployment, and increasing poverty. Furthermore, generational shifts and cultural transformations in Lebanese society led many to abandon sectarian loyalty in favor of broader national and civil demands, signaling a desire to avoid the recurrence of the civil war's devastating effects.

The Lebanese protest movement was marked by its regional, sectarian, and political diversity. Various Lebanese regions and sects contributed to the resistance against the sectarian political class, united by the shared goal of seeking deep structural change. Despite the many challenges faced by the movement—such as political repression and sectarian tensions—the collective will to break free from the ruling elites and demand a more inclusive, secular, and functional state remained a defining feature of the movement. This allowed the protest to persist and expand, providing a glimmer of hope for a national awakening capable of transcending the divisive forces that had long held the country back.

According to Beirut explosion and the protests that followed, despite the momentum generated by the protests, the popular movement faced several challenges, including the lack of unified leadership, internal divisions within active groups, and the violent repression exercised by the security forces. Additionally, the political system managed to exploit sectarianism to reproduce itself, by inflaming sectarian fears, using violence, and manipulating political discourse.

The absence of effective state management in dealing with crises led to the proliferation of non-governmental organizations that took on roles that should have been performed by official bodies. Amid this chaos, we find ourselves facing a lack of coordination between various concerned parties, which contributes to exacerbating the crisis rather than solving it. Had there been a centralized administration overseeing the relief and reconstruction process, we would not have needed the vast number of non-governmental organizations whose roles and responsibilities are difficult to define (Harvey, 2021).

It becomes clear from the Beirut Port explosion disaster that the Lebanese state is unable to exercise its sovereign authority over its territory. Instead of an effective governmental response, we witnessed a near-total absence of the state, with relief and rescue efforts turning into initiatives led by civil society. The state's failure to manage the crisis stems not only from poor administration but also reveals a deep-rooted crisis related to the weakness of the state's institutional structures, which have been hollowed out in favor of sectarian power brokers.

On the other hand, the popular response formed a sort of self-organization as an alternative to the state, with youth groups and civil organizations taking on rescue, relief, and reconstruction operations. These dynamics resemble the practices of a “parallel society” that emerges in failed states where communities fill the vacuum left by the state. However, this form of organization carries an inherent paradox: On one hand, it shows the ability of society to overcome the state's failure, but on the other hand, it could be used by the political system to justify its withdrawal from responsibilities, reinforcing the logic of neoliberalism, where public services are managed through individual initiatives rather than state institutions.

The Beirut Port explosion exposed the failure of the Lebanese state to perform its role as a sovereign actor. Official institutions were completely absent in the response, prompting civil society to fill this gap through volunteer relief initiatives. The absence of the state reflects not only the weakness of its institutions but also suggests that the sectarian system was not designed to function as a modern state, but rather as a coalition of sectarian leaders who distribute benefits

among themselves, without the need to build an effective bureaucracy. The paradox is that while the state was absent when it came to relief, it was strongly present when it came to security repression. In the days following the explosion, the authorities showed no interest in holding those responsible accountable, yet they used excessive violence against the protesters, showing that the tools of the state were mobilized to protect the existing system, not to serve society.

In the Lebanese context, this dynamic has materialized in a sequence of protests—beginning with early manifestations in 2015, escalating with the transformative uprising of October 2019, and subsequently evolving in the wake of the catastrophic Beirut Port explosion in August 2020.

The protests that emerged in 2015 marked an initial expression of widespread dissatisfaction with Lebanon's entrenched sectarian regime and its neoliberal economic policies. Though comparatively less extensive than later mobilizations, the 2015 demonstrations signaled a collective awakening among diverse segments of society. Participants—drawn not only from traditional opposition groups but also from previously disengaged citizens—voiced grievances over systemic corruption, the socio-economic marginalization engendered by a rentier state, and the manipulation of power along sectarian lines. These early protests laid the groundwork for subsequent mobilizations by framing the struggle not merely as an economic contest but as a deeper challenge to the state's sectarian apparatus (Bishara, 2019).

Building upon the discontents of 2015, the October 2019 uprising represented a watershed moment in Lebanese political life. The mass mobilizations transcended traditional sectarian divisions, uniting citizens from disparate social and religious backgrounds in a unified denunciation of the ruling elite. Here, the situation reached its zenith: the burgeoning popular movement managed to paralyze the state for weeks, compelling the prime minister to tender his resignation and momentarily disrupting the established order. However, the trajectory of the uprising was significantly influenced by the success of counter-revolutionary strategies. The regime's adeptness at reconfiguring power through the revival of sectarian narratives, the deployment of repressive security forces, and the strategic manipulation of political discourse ultimately contained the revolutionary momentum. In this milieu, despite its transformative potential, the uprising's impact was mitigated by the dual dynamic of overt popular mobilization and the state's recourse to force and sectarian legitimization.

The devastating Beirut Port explosion on August 4, 2020, introduced a further, critical dimension to Lebanon's ongoing crises. In the aftermath of this disaster, popular protests evolved

into a potent expression of public frustration with not only the longstanding sectarian patronage of state apparatuses but also with the acute absence of effective state management during times of catastrophe. The explosion underscored the state's inability to exercise its sovereign authority and to coordinate relief and reconstruction efforts, which, in turn, catalyzed a rearticulation of power. With government institutions conspicuously absent from immediate disaster response, civil society and grassroots initiatives stepped forward to fill the vacuum—thus creating a form of self-organization that parallels the characteristics observed in "failed states." At the same time, however, the state's demonstrable readiness to mobilize security forces against protestors –while simultaneously neglecting its remedial obligations– revealed a paradox inherent in the contemporary Lebanese political system: the state remains a protector of the established order, even as it abdicates its role as a provider of public services.

Together, the protest episodes of 2015, 2019, and those emerging in the wake of the Beirut explosion reveal a layered, complex struggle over the reconfiguration of state authority in Lebanon. Despite differing in scale and immediate outcomes, share common roots in the deep-seated structural crisis of the Lebanese state –one marked by sectarian fragmentation, economic mismanagement, and institutional decay. The dual power dynamics, in which a popular movement challenges the state while the latter deploys both repressive measures and sectarian narratives to reassert control, underscore the multifaceted nature of Lebanon's ongoing contestation over its political future.

In sum, this integrated analysis demonstrates that Lebanon's protest movements are not isolated phenomena but interconnected episodes within a broader historical trajectory. They collectively signal an enduring struggle between a revolutionary impulse for radical change and the resilient, albeit adaptive, structures of a sectarian political order that continue to shape the nation's governance and future prospects.

6.3. Comparing Jordan and Lebanon

Regional Turmoil and Its Impact on the Protests

By early 2013, the pace of participation in protests in both countries had notably declined—among both proponents of reform and its opponents. This was largely due to escalating fears of instability and violence that had swept across neighboring countries, particularly Syria. Both the regime and the opposition became acutely aware of the potential repercussions of the Syrian civil

war, which significantly shaped their respective approaches to domestic protest movements. The broader regional context, marked by major transformations following the outbreak of the Arab uprisings, further reinforced a general sense of caution towards any escalation that might yield outcomes similar to those experienced in other conflict-ridden states. In the wake of widespread rebellions, brutal crackdowns, foreign interventions, and escalating sectarian tensions, grave security threats emerged. Chief among these was the growing influence of jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. These developments ignited serious concerns within both countries, leading to an increased emphasis on preserving internal stability. Consequently, many activists began to scale back their demands, at least temporarily.

This shifting context contributed to a new awareness among Jordanians regarding their domestic situation. There was a growing appreciation for the relative political stability the country enjoyed compared to others that had descended into chaos. Based on this realization, protesters were faced with two primary options: first, to attempt to overthrow the regime, risking a descent into chaos and instability; and second, to maintain political stability by continuing peaceful protests aimed at gradual reform. Amid rising regional unrest, an influx of refugees, and escalating terrorist threats, it became increasingly clear that security had become a top priority for many Jordanians, rather than embarking on a path that might lead to state collapse and widespread violence. However, this shift did not signify acceptance of the status quo so much as it reflected a nuanced understanding of the fragile political and security environment, prompting activists to avoid extreme forms of escalation in their protests (Gupta, 2023, pp. 143-156).

In Lebanon, similar dynamics were at play. These regional developments fostered a renewed perspective among Lebanese citizens toward their own internal conditions. There was a growing recognition of the country's inherent political fragility, particularly when contrasted with states that had plunged into full-scale civil wars. This awareness forced protestors to weigh two critical paths: one involved escalating their confrontations with the ruling elite, despite the high risks of sectarian violence and security breakdown; the other centered on adopting a peaceful protest approach aimed at gradual reform, without destabilizing Lebanon’s intricate and delicate political system.

Given the surge in regional instability, foreign interventions in Lebanese affairs, the worsening Syrian refugee crisis, and growing domestic terrorist threats, it became evident that for many Lebanese, preserving the country’s fragile security was paramount. Pursuing radical change

was seen as a gamble that could potentially lead to state failure or the rekindling of armed conflict. Yet, as in Jordan, this did not equate to passive acceptance of the prevailing order. Rather, it reflected a mature recognition of the complexity of Lebanon's political and security realities. As a result, activists tended to avoid sharp escalations in their protests, continuing instead to demand reforms that would deliver at least a minimal level of social justice and economic stability.

From the monarch's perspective, the Arab Uprisings represented a timely opportunity for Jordan to emulate the regional trajectory of reform and transformation—without succumbing to instability or revolutionary turmoil. It served as a necessary catalyst to reinvigorate previously stalled reform efforts and to launch new initiatives aimed at addressing long-standing political, social, and economic grievances. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to ascertain the extent of the king's genuine commitment to deep democratic reform and structural changes at both the political and economic levels. What is indisputable, however, is that the Jordanian regime demonstrated a degree of flexibility and political acumen that set it apart from other regimes in the region.

In contrast to the violent and repressive tactics adopted by some authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, the Jordanian leadership sought to adapt its methods by offering limited freedoms to protestors and avoiding excessive use of force. Rather than relying on violent suppression, the king employed a symbolic discourse aimed at the public, while implementing superficial reforms intended to placate demonstrators. When opposition groups—including Islamists, leftist currents, and human rights activists—called for the lifting of restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, the king responded with promises of legal amendments. For instance, on February 15, 2011, the Jordanian Minister of Interior announced reforms to the Public Gatherings Law, granting freedom of expression without the need for prior approval from the regional governor. This approach closely echoed the response adopted during the 1989 "bread riots," when King Hussein introduced a series of reforms, including lifting martial law and expanding press freedoms and political liberties.

Amid the unfolding Arab Uprisings, King Abdullah II emphasized that maintaining security and stability was of utmost importance, declaring that the government would refrain from interfering with protests and would allow demonstrations to conclude peacefully. As a result, levels of violence and injuries were kept to a minimum, enabling the regime to claim that it respected its citizens' rights to express their views. This strategy helped prevent the escalation of protests,

especially in contrast with the harsh repressive measures adopted by other Arab regimes, which often fueled public outrage and strengthened opposition forces.

Political Reforms: Strategic, Tactic or Genuine Transformation?

From the perspective of the Jordanian monarchy, the swift response of the regime during periods of political unrest has been portrayed as a demonstration of its commitment to democratic advancement and political reform. However, a 2011 report suggests that the practice of replacing governments was neither novel nor exceptional under King Abdullah II. Since ascending to the throne, the king had dismissed eight cabinets within a span of twelve years—a pattern that reveals the regime's reliance on rapid governmental reshuffles as a mechanism for maintaining political stability and defusing mounting crises.

These frequent political adjustments are deeply embedded in Jordan's governance tradition. Historically, Jordanian monarchs have employed this tactic to construct an image of political and economic reform, while avoiding any substantial changes to the core structures of power. Although King Abdullah II has repeatedly expressed a desire to steer the kingdom toward more "authentic reform," critical questions persist regarding the depth and impact of these measures (Gupta, 2023). Were these reforms indicative of a sustainable transformation of the Jordanian political landscape, or merely strategic maneuvers intended to postpone more fundamental demands for change?

The case of Lebanon offers a parallel—if not more pronounced—example of how repeated cabinet changes can serve as a conventional strategy for maintaining political equilibrium and absorbing societal tensions without altering the essence of power structures. Since the end of its civil war, Lebanon has witnessed the formation and dissolution of numerous governments. However, such frequent governmental turnover has rarely translated into meaningful institutional reform. Instead, it reflects the ruling elite's dependency on superficial reforms to preserve their authority and mitigate threats to the status quo.

As public protests intensified –especially during key moments like the October 17, 2019 uprising– the Lebanese political establishment resorted to rhetorical and symbolic measures aimed at quelling public anger, while leaving the underlying sectarian system untouched. In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, the government resigned under pressure from the street. Promises of reform followed, including proposals for electoral law revisions, anti-corruption campaigns, and forensic audits of the central bank. However, these initiatives remained largely

symbolic and failed to target entrenched centers of power or trigger any fundamental shifts in the state's policies or its economic structure. In an effort to absorb the pressure from protest movements, Lebanese officials called for a "national dialogue" on reforms. The ruling factions also put forth surface-level proposals for political change, including discussions on a new electoral law, reducing corruption, and enhancing judicial independence. Yet, these efforts did not move beyond performative gestures. They functioned primarily as tools to alleviate domestic unrest and meet minimal international expectations—without posing any real threat to the interests of the entrenched political elite.

In both Jordan and Lebanon, these reform processes underscore a broader regional pattern: regimes frequently employ reforms as tactical tools rather than pathways to genuine transformation. In Jordan, the monarchy has skillfully managed to maintain control by offering limited concessions that project responsiveness, without opening the political system to true democratization. Similarly, in Lebanon, reforms have been wielded as instruments of crisis management—providing just enough of a response to temporarily pacify the population, without dismantling the deeply rooted networks of sectarian patronage that define its political economy.

This raises a fundamental question regarding the nature of political reform in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian contexts: To what extent can reforms be considered genuine if they are enacted primarily in response to protest movements, lack institutional depth, and ultimately preserve existing power dynamics? The cases of Jordan and Lebanon suggest that reform, in such contexts, often functions less as a vehicle for transformation and more as a strategic mechanism for regime survival. These "managed reforms" are designed not to redistribute power or restructure governance, but rather to create a facade of change that can appease both domestic constituencies and international observers.

In conclusion, while reformist discourse in both Jordan and Lebanon has been a central feature of political strategy –especially during periods of unrest– its implementation has been constrained by the overarching imperative of regime preservation. As long as reform continues to be used as a tactical response rather than a sincere endeavor toward inclusive governance, the prospects for substantive political change remain limited. The challenge moving forward lies in transforming reform from a reactive measure into a proactive framework that empowers citizens and reconfigures the very foundations of political power.

The Problematic Nature of Superficial Reforms: Between Appearance and Reality

Despite being promoted as a democratic transformation within the structure of the political system, these reforms have failed to bring about genuine change in the balance of power. The King of Jordan has continued to exercise absolute authority in appointing prime ministers, members of the Senate, and senior officials in the security and judicial sectors. Although some reforms aimed to limit the interference of security agencies in political affairs, the General Intelligence Directorate (GID) still wields extensive influence and plays a central role in public life.

While the King's engagement in dialogues with opposition groups and his willingness to discuss reforms has been perceived positively –especially when compared to other Arab regimes– the practical outcomes of such initiatives have reinforced the executive authority's dominance over state institutions. The parliament remains weak, and press freedoms are severely constrained. These reforms, in effect, constitute a "political maneuver" designed to project the image of a flexible and reform-minded monarch, yet they primarily serve the purpose of buying time and preserving the regime's grip on power, without making any substantial concessions that could jeopardize its authoritarian structure. Supporters of these policies argue that this strategic approach has bolstered regime stability, defused waves of protest, and increased popular support for the monarchy. Nevertheless, this does not imply the absence of reformist demands within Jordan's political landscape. There are ongoing efforts within the government, the royal court, and the bureaucratic apparatus to tackle corruption and initiate gradual changes. However, these initiatives often lack a comprehensive vision and a serious commitment to enacting meaningful reforms that could lead to a genuine democratic transition.

In Lebanon, despite continuous reformist rhetoric, political elites have maintained their dominance over state institutions by exploiting sectarian balances as a mechanism for power reproduction. Key decision-making centers, from the presidency to the central bank and judiciary, remain governed by sectarian-based agreements that perpetuate the crisis rather than resolve it. Even when "technocratic" governments were formed under popular pressure, they remained subject to the influence of traditional political actors, which resulted in the persistence of economic collapse and the absence of concrete measures to rescue the country from its worsening crises. In this context, the promised reforms were little more than "political ploys" aimed at absorbing popular discontent and reasserting the foundations of the existing system. While some believe that this strategy helped avert total security breakdown, others argue that it entrenched political

deadlock, exacerbated economic collapse, and deepened the crisis of trust between citizens and the state.

In Jordan, the strategies adopted by the Hashemite regime to contain large-scale protests and prevent their escalation played a decisive role in shaping the character of popular mobilization during the Arab Uprisings. The General Intelligence Directorate employed a range of tactics – including communication, surveillance, interrogation, and negotiation– with the aim of establishing contact with protest leaders and activists. Surveillance operations included phone tapping and monitoring social media platforms, with collected data being recorded and analyzed. Moreover, indirect intelligence-gathering techniques, such as offering bribes to activists' colleagues, were used to gather information and closely monitor future protest movements.

Furthermore, Jordanian authorities employed restrictive strategies targeting activists by limiting their access to resources, compelling reform-oriented NGOs to revise their agendas and rhetoric in alignment with government-led initiatives. During the Arab Uprisings, both the Jordanian government and public security forces adopted a policy of avoiding direct confrontation with demonstrators. According to a Jordanian analyst cited in a press interview, the security apparatus established a form of "social contract" with citizens –allowing peaceful protests within acceptable limits in exchange for adopting a policy of "soft security," which emphasized restraint and avoided the use of force.

However, pro-democracy activists contend that the authorities, in reality, employed more sophisticated repressive tactics. These included defamation campaigns, legal prosecutions, media censorship, as well as direct threats, physical violence, and the targeted harassment of activists and their families. This complex web of strategies illustrates the broader regional pattern in which regimes, under the guise of reform, employ calculated and performative measures to manage dissent while preserving authoritarian control. Reforms, in both Jordan and Lebanon, have been deployed not as instruments of democratic transition, but rather as tools of crisis management—reinforcing elite dominance and maintaining systemic resilience in the face of growing demands for structural change.

Overall, the repressive strategies employed by the Jordanian regime contributed significantly to the creation of an atmosphere of fear and hesitation among citizens, which in turn curtailed popular participation in protest movements and reinforced a security-first approach at the expense of political and civil liberties. The regime's reliance on surveillance, legal restrictions, and the

intimidation of activists discouraged large-scale mobilization, fostering a climate where political engagement was viewed as risky and often futile. This securitized environment, while effective in preventing large-scale unrest, has deepened the divide between the state and its citizens. By prioritizing stability and control over genuine reform, the regime has risked entrenching long-term political stagnation. The marginalization of political opposition and civil society, combined with restrictions on free expression, has eroded the space for democratic dialogue and undermined public trust in the possibility of peaceful change.

In Lebanon, the ruling authorities deployed a variety of strategies to weaken the momentum of the popular uprising. These ranged from permitting limited freedom of expression and protest to adopting more covert and indirect forms of repression. Security agencies engaged in surveillance and wiretapping, summoning activists for interrogation, and exerting pressure on their places of employment as a means of intimidation. Protesters also reported being followed or monitored in their daily activities, creating a pervasive sense of insecurity among the activist community.

A particularly insidious tactic involved the use of so-called "civilian groups" aligned with political parties, which were mobilized to confront and intimidate demonstrators. In many cases, these groups physically attacked protesters with little to no intervention from official security forces—highlighting a troubling pattern of collusion between the state and NSAs in suppressing dissent. This phenomenon was especially visible during the events following the October 17, 2019 uprising, when peaceful demonstrations were met with increasing hostility from partisan groups seeking to discredit or dismantle the protest movement.

Although security institutions publicly adhered to a rhetoric of "restraint," notable exceptions challenged this narrative. The most flagrant instance occurred during the initial weeks of the October uprising, particularly in Beirut, where a wave of repression included mass arrests and physical assaults on demonstrators. In several areas, demonstrators were violently attacked by party-affiliated thugs, with no serious efforts by the authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable –further reinforcing perceptions of systemic impunity and state complicity. These strategies, while temporarily effective in diminishing the scale and visibility of the protest movements, failed to eliminate the underlying grievances that fueled popular mobilization. In fact, the persistence of economic collapse, coupled with the deepening of political deadlock and growing international scrutiny, has maintained pressure on the political establishment. As socio-economic conditions

continue to deteriorate and public disillusionment grows, the likelihood of renewed mobilization remains high, unless genuine concessions and structural reforms are undertaken.

What both the Jordanian and Lebanese cases illustrate is a broader regional trend in which regimes respond to popular unrest through a calculated mix of superficial reform and sophisticated repression? These strategies aim not only to contain dissent in the short term but also to reshape public expectations about the limits of political change. In doing so, they reinforce a culture of fear and political apathy, while entrenching the power of entrenched elites and their affiliated networks.

However, the sustainability of this approach is increasingly in question. In an era of heightened digital connectivity, greater international visibility, and worsening socio-economic conditions, authoritarian resilience based solely on repression appears increasingly fragile. Both regimes face a growing imperative to move beyond temporary measures and engage in genuine political restructuring—lest they risk a deeper crisis of legitimacy that could, over time, destabilize the very order they seek to preserve. Thus, while repressive tactics may provide short-term relief from the pressures of protest and unrest, they do not resolve the core issues of governance, accountability, and social justice. Without meaningful reform, the cycle of crisis and containment is likely to continue, with potentially more disruptive consequences in the future.

A Convergence Point: The Transformative Impact of Protest Movements

The protest movement in Jordan delivered a significant blow to the traditional political and economic elites. Despite the varying degrees of its impact across different power structures, the movement placed all ruling forces under public scrutiny, solidifying a popular mechanism for accountability and protest that is unlikely to fade easily. It introduced a renewed vision for political and economic reform whose resonance extended beyond Jordan's borders. This was reflected in mounting international pressure –especially from global financial institutions– which linked financial aid to the implementation of concrete economic reforms. These demands were often accompanied by calls to reform the electoral system, strengthen the rule of law, and ensure judicial independence.

Moreover, the movement filled a socio-political and cultural void, creating new platforms for dialogue and engagement among diverse segments of Jordanian society. It managed to transcend the traditional boundaries separating tribal, Islamist, and civic movements, forging a more inclusive and dynamic political space. In contrast, traditional political parties struggled to

respond effectively to the momentum of the protests; many saw their influence diminish or disappear altogether, ceding space to more agile and grassroots protest formations. This shift suggests the potential emergence of a new political arena, regardless of its eventual size or influence—particularly with the growing political participation of youth and independents who had previously been marginalized from public life. Even if the protest movement were to recede, its legacy will likely persist in the form of sustained demands for reform and social justice.

The core demand of the Jordanian protest movement has been political reform, guided by a clear awareness among its activists that the process is inherently complex and requires time and continuous popular pressure. Fundamentally, the movement seeks to initiate a new political trajectory –one that redistributes power more equitably and challenges the longstanding monopoly of traditional elites. Decades of rentier economic policies and dependency on foreign aid have widened socio-economic disparities and failed to deliver sustainable development or economic justice. The protest movement thus aspires to dismantle this entrenched system and lay the foundation for a more inclusive and accountable political order.

Similarly, the Lebanese protest movement confronted the ruling political class with unprecedented intensity. Despite some political factions benefiting from or being more adversely affected by the unrest, the movement collectively placed the entire establishment under scrutiny. It established a popular framework for accountability and critique that is unlikely to disappear, and introduced a transitional vision for Lebanon that resonated internationally. This was evident in the Paris meeting of the International Support Group for Lebanon, whose final communiqué echoed several key demands of the protestors—including the formation of a government independent from regional conflicts, and a six-month reform agenda focused primarily on economic recovery.

The Lebanese uprising also filled a profound cultural, social, and intellectual vacuum. It created new forums for political dialogue and encounter across all regions of Lebanon, surpassing the entrenched sectarian divisions that the traditional political parties had either failed to address or had actively perpetuated. These parties, unable to adapt to the new dynamics of political engagement, gradually receded from the forefront of public discourse –paving the way for the possible emergence of a new political sphere. Whether this space will evolve into a robust alternative remains uncertain, but its very existence signals the possibility of a reconfigured political landscape. The movement succeeded in drawing previously marginalized groups into the

heart of political life. Even if it were to end today, it has already planted the seeds of political renewal.

At the heart of the Lebanese movement lies the demand to abolish sectarianism in politics. Activists recognize that this is an arduous and protracted endeavor, one that surpasses the capacity of the current wave of mobilization alone. However, their ultimate aspiration is to set in motion a transformative path that transcends the current ruling class. This class, born from a hyper-sectarian interpretation of the Taif Agreement, has institutionalized a distorted economic system that prioritizes clientelism over equity. The movement envisions the emergence of a new political class –one that better reflects the aspirations of the Lebanese people and is capable of addressing the deep structural imbalances at the heart of the country's crises. In both cases, the protest movements have illuminated the potential for popular mobilization to challenge entrenched systems of power and catalyze broader transformations. While the path ahead remains fraught with challenges, the legacy of these movements is a testament to the enduring power of collective action in shaping the future of governance and public life in the region.

Table 6.1 Comparative Analysis of the Protest Movements in Jordan and Lebanon

Criterion	Jordan	Lebanon
Nature of the Movement	A socio-economic protest movement focused on reform, anti-corruption, and improving living conditions, without advocating for radical political transformation.	A comprehensive socio-political-economic movement calling for a fundamental overhaul of the sectarian political system, transcending traditional party and sectarian lines.
Social Composition	Includes youth, middle class, and public sector workers (e.g., teachers), in addition to tribal segments economically affected.	Encompasses diverse social strata, particularly the poor and middle classes, unions, women, leftist forces, and independent civil society groups.
Role of Women	Relatively limited participation, mostly confined to sectors such as education and human rights organizations, with no significant leadership roles.	Unprecedented engagement, with women taking on leadership roles in organizing demonstrations, managing protest activities, and confronting security forces.
Organization and Leadership	Lacks centralized leadership, relying heavily on social media, making it more susceptible to fragmentation.	Characterized by multiple well-structured civic initiatives (e.g., "Beirut Madinati", "Lahaqi", "Harras el-Madina") that enhance coordination and sustainability.
Union Involvement	Trade unions played a central role, particularly the Teachers' Syndicate, which led major protests but faced intense government pressure.	Unions were significantly active, notably the Bar Association, which elected a civil society representative, lending additional legitimacy to the movement.
Geographic Distribution	Mainly concentrated in major cities like Amman and Irbid, with regional disparities in participation and visible tribal influences.	Broadly distributed across regions, from the marginalized north (Tripoli) to the politically entrenched south (Sidon, Nabatieh), reflecting varying social and political dynamics.

Interaction with Political Forces	Largely independent from political parties but vulnerable to infiltration by Islamist and nationalist movements.	Seeks to transcend traditional sectarian parties but faces resistance from dominant actors such as Hezbollah and Amal Movement.
Relations with Security Forces	Characterized by cautious security responses, including arrests and indirect pressure to limit mobilization.	Security repression varies across regions, often influenced by sectarian-political affiliations and local balances of power.
Core Demands	Economic reforms, anti-corruption, and service improvement without calls for regime change.	Deep political and economic reforms, including toppling the ruling elite, ending sectarianism, and recovering stolen public funds.
Key Challenges	Absence of unified leadership, security pressure, lack of continuity, and limited capacity to effect real change.	Sectarian divisions, inconsistent repression, foreign interference, and difficulty in evolving into a coherent political alternative.

Analytical Discussion

Nature of the Movement: The Jordanian protest movement is predominantly reformist, focusing on socio-economic grievances rather than political revolution. Its demands are framed in a way that preserves institutional continuity, rendering it less confrontational and, consequently, less threatening to the regime. In contrast, the Lebanese movement challenges the core structure of the sectarian political system. It explicitly questions the legitimacy of the ruling elite and seeks a systemic transformation. This inherently places it in a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis the ruling establishment.

Organization and Leadership: Jordan's movement remains largely decentralized and spontaneous, mobilized through social media. This lack of formal structure makes it vulnerable to dissipation, particularly under state pressure or during periods of decreased momentum. On the other hand, the Lebanese uprising demonstrates a higher degree of organizational maturity. The existence of coordinated grassroots initiatives with semi-structured leadership networks enhances the movement's sustainability and strategic coherence.

Security and Political Challenges: In Jordan, the regime has employed a strategy of controlled containment—opting for indirect repression such as arrests and legal intimidation rather than overt violence. This has allowed the state to manage dissent without escalating into widespread unrest. In Lebanon, however, the response has been inconsistent and regionally differentiated, reflecting the decentralized and factionalized nature of power. In areas controlled by dominant political-militant groups like Hezbollah, the movement has faced overt repression and intimidation, highlighting the complex and fragmented nature of authority.

Societal Engagement: The Jordanian movement struggles to broaden its base among economically marginalized communities, many of whom remain hesitant to confront the regime due to fear of reprisals or lack of political alternatives. Conversely, the Lebanese uprising has succeeded in bridging sectarian divides to an extent, creating rare moments of national unity. However, it continues to face opposition from constituencies that benefit from the current sectarian system, which complicates its efforts to institutionalize political change.

The comparison between the protest movements in Jordan and Lebanon reveals divergent trajectories shaped by distinct political contexts. Jordan's movement is reformist in nature. While it has raised awareness and generated significant public discourse, it faces considerable obstacles in sustaining momentum and translating its demands into tangible political influence, primarily due to its organizational limitations and the cautious but persistent repression by the state. Lebanon's movement is revolutionary in its aspirations, aiming to dismantle an entrenched sectarian order. Despite its fragmentation and the significant challenges posed by internal and external actors, it represents a critical juncture in Lebanon's political development. Its ability to challenge deeply rooted structures suggests a potential path toward foundational reform. In both cases, these movements have created new political imaginaries and have redefined the relationship between state and society. They underscore the region's shifting political landscape and the growing unwillingness of citizens to remain passive in the face of economic collapse, corruption, and exclusionary governance. The future of these movements will depend not only on their ability to endure but also on their capacity to evolve into structured, inclusive, and strategic forces for change

Table 6.2 Analytical Table of the Components of the Jordanian Popular Movement and its Operational Mechanism

Component/Element	Description and Analysis	Role in the Movement and Its Impact	Challenges and Opportunities
Unaffiliated Segments (Youth and Marginalized Groups)	This segment comprises the majority of the demonstrators, including young people from the middle and lower classes, often unemployed or facing increasing economic pressures. They have not previously been part of any traditional political network, which makes their involvement in protests a result of spontaneous collective anger and frustration.	They represent the driving force of the popular movement, expressing increasing rejection of economic policies and corruption. Their participation creates a pressure environment on ruling authorities to adopt immediate reforms.	The challenge lies in transforming this spontaneous momentum into an institutionalized organization capable of formulating clear and coherent demands. However, the opportunity lies in recruiting a politically conscious new generation and establishing a grassroots base that supports long-term reforms.
Women's Participation	They have participated at varying levels in different phases of the movement, despite existing cultural and social constraints. Their involvement is particularly notable in civil initiatives and protests, with a focus on women's rights and social development.	Women add a humanitarian and symbolic dimension to the movement. They highlight social change and act as a supportive force for demands related to equality and justice. They contribute to breaking stereotypes and offer a model of civic empowerment.	The challenge involves facing social and conservative restrictions that may limit their leadership roles. However, their participation provides an opportunity to reshape female identity and raise awareness of the importance of women's roles in political and social life.
Labor Unions and Workers' Segments	Labor unions from both the public and private sectors have been active, organizing protests against low wages and poor working conditions, in addition to demanding greater social justice and wealth distribution transparency.	Labor unions are a key organizational element that reflects the demands of the working class. They highlight the income disparity and push the government to reconsider labor and wage policies.	Stem from pressure from the state and the need to protect the interests of the ruling system. Nevertheless, unions present an opportunity to establish a professional movement that can enhance reform demands if they manage to achieve unity and coordination among different workers' segments.
Political Left and Opposition Forces	Jordan has left-wing political currents and opposition forces that attempt to offer intellectual alternatives and criticize official policies, despite the restrictions imposed on the political space. These forces rely on reformist discourses, criticizing corruption and monopolies within the system.	These forces enrich the political discourse by offering comprehensive reformist views and supporting the popular movement with demands for change that go beyond superficial reforms. This adds additional pressure on the regime for greater transparency and democracy.	The limited political space available due to royal dominance and the existing regime. However, these forces represent an opportunity to redirect the political discourse toward a more just and equitable vision if they can unify their ranks and coordinate with other popular segments.
Independent Civil and Demanding Groups	A number of independent civil initiatives and groups have emerged that do not belong to traditional political parties. They rely on a youth-based civil organization focused on fighting corruption and achieving structural reforms within state institutions.	These groups play a central role in organizing and mediating between popular mobilization and official authorities. They help organize events and initiatives and work on formulating clear demands that serve as a bridge for communication with political actors.	Lies in the weak organizational structure and limited financial resources due to the lack of institutional support. However, they present an opportunity to establish a new model of civil activism based on decentralized participation and direct communication with the public.
Regional and Tribal Characteristics	Protests in Jordan vary between urban areas, such as Amman, and peripheral areas like Irbid, Zarqa, and Ma'an. Economic, social, and tribal disparities play a role in shaping the protests.	These regional characteristics influence the forms and nature of the protests. In urban areas, the focus is on improving services and transparency, while peripheral areas demand greater development and social justice, as well as more equitable resource distribution.	Developmental and administrative disparities between regions, which may lead to fragmentation within the movement. However, these differences present an opportunity to adopt regional policies that consider local disparities and work toward enhancing national unity.

The table above demonstrates that the popular movement in Jordan is multi-dimensional, with each segment contributing to a comprehensive protest picture. Amid a political system based on monarchy and relatively stable institutions, Jordanian protest movements arise from the frustration caused by economic and social pressures, pushing youth and marginalized groups to engage in protests demanding tangible reforms.

Women play a pivotal role despite cultural constraints, their participation serving as evidence of social transformation and supporting the desire for change that goes beyond symbolic representation, aiming for real policy shifts. On the union front, the activity of labor unions in both public and private sectors provides a clear voice for social justice, exerting pressure on the government to reconsider its wealth distribution policies.

Left-wing political forces, while limited in scope, contribute by offering intellectual alternatives and critical perspectives on the system, which aids in reshaping political discourse toward supporting reforms. Independent civil groups are central to organizing protests on the ground, acting as intermediaries between spontaneous public mobilization and the formal authorities, translating collective demands into actionable initiatives. Lastly, regional and tribal characteristics in Jordan reflect diverse protest experiences. The disparity between urban and peripheral areas calls for the adoption of regional strategies that acknowledge local differences while fostering national unity, providing opportunities for effective reform and development.

In conclusion, while the Jordanian popular movement faces numerous challenges due to political constraints and systemic limitations, it holds significant potential for establishing a popular force capable of pushing for political and economic reforms, provided that different segments of society unify and channel their collective anger into a well-organized, sustainable political entity.

Table 6.3 Analytical Table of the Components and Functioning of the Lebanese Protest Movement

Component / Element	Description and Analysis	Role in the Movement and Its Implications	Challenges and Opportunities
Unaffiliated Social Segments	This includes the majority of Lebanese citizens from the middle and lower classes who had not been involved in organized political activism before. Their participation became especially prominent during the October 17 protests, which featured widespread involvement from men, women, children, and the elderly—highlighting a shared rejection of the existing political system.	These unaffiliated groups constitute the backbone of the protest movement, as they channel authentic public frustration and exert direct pressure on the political establishment through mass mobilization, particularly during critical phases of the uprising.	Lies in converting this spontaneous momentum into a coherent set of political demands. Nevertheless, this group represents a critical opportunity to develop a populist discourse centered on national unity and a reimagining of political engagement beyond traditional party frameworks.
Women's Participation	Women marked unprecedented levels of engagement in the protest movement, transcending political and social affiliations. They played essential roles not only in logistical and organizational aspects but also in direct confrontation with security forces and in facilitating constructive dialogue aimed at protecting demonstrators.	Women's involvement shattered traditional societal barriers, contributing to gender-balanced representation on the streets. This reinforced the legitimacy of the protesters' demands and positioned women as symbols of social change and empowerment.	Despite these accomplishments, women continue to grapple with sociocultural constraints rooted in tradition. However, their participation opens up significant opportunities for redefining women's roles in public life and presents a replicable model for other countries in the region.
Labor Unions and Worker Sectors	This component includes trade unions representing workers, educators, and military retirees, many of whom called for internal reforms due to the entanglement of union interests with the sectarian political regime. These groups have sought alternatives to the status quo, such as electing representatives from civil society—exemplified by developments within the Bar Association.	Labor unions serve as a vital conduit between the working class and the political system. They contribute to raising organizational awareness among workers and advocate for restructuring the mechanisms of resource and power distribution, thereby increasing pressure on the regime to pursue substantive reforms.	These unions are often targeted by the ruling system, which seeks to maintain control over them to safeguard its interests. Still, this struggle offers a significant opportunity to reorganize union activism in an independent manner that can better advance fair socio-economic demands.
The Lebanese Left	The Left constitutes a politically and intellectually prominent force, particularly in southern regions. It is characterized by its critical stance towards the political and economic system, advocating for social justice and opposing exploitative economic policies.	The Left enriches the discourse of the protest movement by offering critical analyses of existing policies and advocating for structural reforms that go beyond superficial changes. This enhances the movement's capacity to push for transformative political and economic change.	Despite its intellectual strength, the Left is hindered by internal fragmentation and the dispersal of its efforts. Nonetheless, it holds potential to unify and repurpose its discourse into a more inclusive and popular vision if it manages to consolidate its ranks and collaborate with other protest factions.
Civic Demand-Based Groups	These groups operate independently from traditional political parties and unions, having emerged in response to the recent crisis. They exhibit strong organizational skills through grassroots efforts like setting up tents, distributing food, and coordinating across regions—for example, "Beirut Madinati" and "Guardians of the City."	They embody the spirit of grassroots initiative, translating protest demands into institutional and organizational structures with the potential to evolve into viable political entities capable of competing electorally.	While facing obstacles related to weak organizational infrastructure and limited resources, these groups offer a promising avenue for reconstructing Lebanon's political fabric on new, non-sectarian foundations.
Regional and Sectarian Dynamics	The protest movement shows regional variation in its expression: in northern cities like Tripoli, it is driven by anger over marginalization and poor development; in the South, it takes a more cautious tone due to the influence of Hezbollah and Amal. In Christian-majority areas, sectarian factors and political underrepresentation shape protest behavior.	These regional features yield localized protest styles that reflect the specific socio-economic and political challenges of each area. Collectively, they enrich the national movement by grounding it in diverse local realities and reinforcing its unifying potential across Lebanon.	Regional disparities in development and governance pose challenges to cohesion. However, they also offer strategic opportunities for adopting region-specific approaches that can help redistribute power and enhance participatory governance on a national scale.

The table above illustrates the diverse composition of the Lebanese protest movement, revealing the varying roles and interactions of its components in accordance with Lebanon's complex socio-political and environmental landscape. In the absence of a centralized organizing body, the movement derives its initial momentum from unaffiliated segments of the population who articulate a deeply rooted discontent, thereby sustaining continuous pressure on the ruling regime.

Women's participation emerges as a central factor in redefining the traditional contours of Lebanese society. Their active engagement not only legitimizes protest demands but also broadens the scope of societal transformation by challenging entrenched gender norms and promoting inclusive civic engagement. Simultaneously, labor unions and worker associations inject an organizational dimension into the protest dynamic. These structures present opportunities to reorganize labor representation in ways that transcend sectarian clientelism, thus contributing to more equitable models of socio-political demand articulation. The Lebanese Left, although intellectually rich and ideologically coherent, faces fragmentation that hampers its effectiveness. Nevertheless, it remains a vital force for recalibrating the movement's political discourse by championing systemic reforms and advocating for economic justice.

Civic demand-based groups exemplify an emerging form of political agency rooted in horizontal organization, community solidarity, and innovation. Their field activities reflect a shift towards bottom-up political renewal that, if sustained and institutionalized, could significantly reshape Lebanon's political scene. Regional particularities play a dual role. While they may fragment the movement's structure, they also highlight the potential for crafting decentralized strategies that respond to the unique realities of different areas. For instance, the defiant stance of marginalized communities in Tripoli contrasts with the more cautious approach in southern regions, where political affiliations constrain protest strategies. Taken together, these components suggest that the Lebanese protest movement harbors significant potential for transforming the country's political and social fabric –provided that it can overcome the deeply entrenched sectarian and political divisions that continue to obstruct the formulation of a unified national vision.

This analytical table is thus more than a structural overview; it maps the dynamic interrelations among various actors within the movement, highlighting their respective contributions, limitations, and prospects. As such, it serves as a valuable framework for anticipating future developments and formulating strategic interventions that could foster a more

just and participatory political order in Lebanon. Both countries integrate diverse SNIs within their governance systems. In Lebanon, this is formalized through a SPS model, while in Jordan, it is achieved through strategic alliances between the monarchy and major tribal and ethnic groups, particularly those of East Bank Jordanian origin. Each country has developed unique methods for managing internal divisions in order to maintain stability, with Jordan relying on tribal loyalty and Lebanon on sectarian quotas. The main similarity between the two lies in their management of internal SNIs within a geopolitically fragile environment. Both countries are heavily influenced by sectarian, ethnic, and religious divisions, and both address these complexities through systems designed to preserve internal balance.

Despite their geographical proximity and shared regional context, Lebanon and Jordan exhibit both clear differences and significant similarities in how their political systems, ruling elites, and SNIs impact national security. These elements interact with each country's political structure, security strategies, and social fabric. An analysis of these similarities and differences offers insights into the stability and vulnerabilities of each country.

Key Similarities

Reliance on Sectarian and Ethnic Balances for Stability: Both Lebanon and Jordan integrate SNIs into their governance structures, albeit through different frameworks. Lebanon's power-sharing model formally divides power based on religious sects, while Jordan balances tribal and ethnic identities within a centralized monarchical system. In both cases, the ruling authorities rely on incorporating or coopting diverse religious and ethnic groups to foster stability. In both countries, elites exert significant influence within their communities and foster loyalty through patronage networks. Lebanese sectarian elites control communal resources, shape security policies, and secure loyalty. Similarly, in Jordan, the monarchy strategically allies with tribal elites from the East Bank, integrating them into state institutions, particularly in the military and security sectors, which builds a stable support base for the regime.

Role and Impact of Religious and Ethnic Identities on National Security: Lebanon's political and security structures are deeply sectarian, with religious identity directly tied to political power. This sectarian model shapes security policies, where each sect maintains distinct political and sometimes armed alliances, such as Hezbollah's Shiite faction and Sunni alliances with Saudi Arabia. This fragmentation makes Lebanon susceptible to sectarian conflicts and external

manipulation. In contrast, Jordan, though ethnically diverse, manages its SNIs with more cohesion. Ethnic identities, such as those of East Bank Jordanians and Palestinians, exist, but the monarchy has handled these divisions by incorporating Palestinians into the economy while largely retaining political and security roles within the East Bank Jordanian community. Lebanese political elites frequently exploit sectarian identity to rally support and secure loyalty, a practice known as "sectarianism." This approach intensifies identity-based divisions and often pits sects against each other, undermining national unity and heightening security risks in Lebanon. In Jordan, however, identity policies are managed more delicately. The monarchy employs symbolic integration and economic incentives to maintain loyalty, particularly from Bedouin tribes, avoiding divisive rhetoric that could destabilize the regime.

Impact of Regional Conflicts and Foreign Influence on Domestic Security: Lebanon is directly affected by regional conflicts, especially in Syria, and through Hezbollah's involvement with Iran. Hezbollah's role in Syria and alignment with Iranian interests places Lebanon in conflict with Israel and strains relations with Gulf countries, leading to recurrent political crises. Conversely, Jordan's foreign policy is more balanced and cautious, maintaining neutrality whenever possible to avoid entanglement in regional conflicts. Despite being impacted by the instability in Syria and threats from ISIS, Jordan's central security apparatus and alliances with the US and Gulf countries enable it to manage these challenges more effectively.

Jordan enjoys a degree of independence in its foreign policy decisions, benefiting from its relationships with Western allies to maintain stability. In contrast, Lebanon's foreign policy is constrained by internal sectarian pressures and Hezbollah's influence, which aligns with Iranian interests. This alignment complicates Lebanon's diplomatic relations and often brings the country into the crosshairs of broader regional rivalries, further destabilizing its internal security.

By early 2020, the momentum of protests in both countries had significantly diminished due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the repressive measures implemented by political forces. However, the unprecedented scale of these protests and their radical demands prompted some ambitious political elites to attempt to organize themselves into a political opposition to the existing sectarian system. This led to the emergence of hundreds of local groups, including several new political parties such as "my right (*ḥaqqī*)", /*al-muntashirīn*/ (the spreaders; those who are spreading) and /*at-taqaddum*/ (progress; advancement). Members of these groups often referred to themselves as "Children of the October Revolution," emphasizing their commitment to the

principle of “all means all.” These groups, however, faced the same challenges that earlier uprisings encountered. Sectarian identities remained pivotal in shaping political alignments. Without a fundamental ideological shift, these new groups were either relegated to a limited scope of opposition or gradually adapted to the sectarian polarization. This dilemma became particularly evident when some of their members succeeded in winning parliamentary seats in 2022, under broad slogans calling for change and accountability. This success presented them with a real test of their ability to transcend traditional sectarian divisions and achieve meaningful political reform.

An analysis of the rhetoric surrounding the Jordanian protests reveals profound shifts in national identity and political struggle. The debate over Jordanian identity is no longer confined to the traditional dichotomy between the regime and the opposition. Instead, a new conception has emerged, affirming the independence of this identity in the face of various forces that sought to dissolve or marginalize it. This rhetoric is not merely a transient political stance; it reflects a deeper transformation in the political and social consciousness of Jordanians. The national identity is no longer solely defined by loyalty to the regime or through the lens of the Palestinian cause. Instead, it is shaped by an independent, grassroots struggle that represents the marginalized groups who have long been politically and economically excluded. The tribal movement in Jordan marks a significant shift in the political landscape. No longer limited to supporting the regime, it now advocates for clear reformist and economic demands. While this development could offer an opportunity to strengthen the partnership between the state and society, it could also pose a challenge to national security if the causes of frustration and marginalization are not addressed. Therefore, achieving comprehensive political and economic reform that accommodates the tribes' demands and enhances their participation in decision-making is a strategic necessity for maintaining Jordan’s stability and long-term security.

In final notes, both Lebanon and Jordan have experienced waves of protests that posed significant challenges to their respective political regimes. However, the nature of the responses to these movements varies according to the unique social, economic, and political structures of each country. In Lebanon, traditional analyses of protest tend to focus on the actors advocating for change, often overlooking those groups striving to preserve the existing system, whose actions may contradict the reformist demands. On the other hand, in Jordan, the regime employed a comprehensive strategic approach, incorporating partial responses, security measures, and governmental changes to contain the popular movement.

Table 6.4 Strategies employed by each state to manage and respond to popular unrest

	The Dynamics of Protest	Reproduction of the System versus Absorption of Change
Jordan	**Strategies of the Regime in Containing Popular Uprisings:** The Jordanian regime faced the protests that erupted in the context of the Arab Uprisings with integrated methods that combined partial responses to demands, security measures, and the reorganization of the political scene. Some of the most prominent strategies included: **Strategic Responses to Protests:** The regime employed a combination of partial reforms, elite rotation, and political containment strategies to address public dissatisfaction without causing significant structural change. This included constitutional amendments, government reshuffling, and involving opposition parties in political dialogue, while also reinforcing security measures to maintain control. **Exploiting Divisions and Providing Economic Relief:** The regime utilized societal divisions and portrayed the protests as influenced by external forces, reinforcing the "stability versus chaos" narrative. Additionally, economic aid, such as financial assistance and salary increases, was provided to alleviate deteriorating living conditions and calm certain segments of society.	• The Jordanian regime relied on multi-dimensional policies to absorb popular pressures without disrupting the political foundation. • Through partial concessions and the rotation of elites, the regime was able to reduce the intensity of rebellion, redistribute loyalties by containing the opposition, and dismantle opposition alliances. • Security and legal strategies, along with exploiting societal divisions, formed barriers against field escalation, which granted the regime a greater ability to maintain its stability despite demands for change.
Lebanon	**Internal Division and Justification of the Status Quo:** In Lebanon, it is observed that the uprising, despite its initial unity among Lebanese citizens from various sects and backgrounds, quickly faced internal fragmentation. The demands shifted from a general rejection of corruption to targeting specific political figures, which led to the emergence of all-encompassing slogans such as */killun yaʿnī killun/* (all means all) This divergence contributed to the formation of three main axes: 1. Independent citizens advocating for the overthrow of the entire system. 2. Parties that restructured their discourse to align with the demands of the uprising. 3. Parties that viewed the movement as a direct threat to their existence. **The Impact of Sectarian Identity and Patronage:** Political loyalties in Lebanon are based on a complex network of social and economic relationships, where allegiances are tied to the access to job opportunities and essential services. This patronage system, along with sectarian affiliations, underscores that the continuity of the system relies not only on political leadership but also on the reproduction of collective identities and material interests, making radical change a complicated matter.	• Despite the emergence of the uprising as a slogan for the overthrow of the sectarian system, political forces were able to exploit sectarian affiliations and party loyalties to secure their survival. • Some parties adopted a dual discourse: they supported the reform demands while maintaining their legitimacy, which led to contradictions in the positions of various factions. Some saw the uprising as a conspiracy aimed at dismantling their identities and protecting their interests. • This mix of social and economic incentives contributed to the reproduction of the system, even though it seemed incapable of providing fundamental solutions to structural problems.

This table compares the internal dynamics of protests in Lebanon and Jordan, highlighting the different strategies employed by each state to manage and respond to popular unrest. The comparison underscores the contrasting ways in which the political systems in both countries navigated the complexities of social, political, and economic pressures. Ultimately, although the Jordanian protests did not result in radical political change, they succeeded in fostering a new awareness of national identity. This may have long-term effects on the future of Jordanian politics. It is expected that this debate over national identity will continue to shape Jordan's position within the region and its role in surrounding conflicts.

6.4. The Impact of SNIs on National Security

Although the state of discontent in Jordan has posed a challenge to the monarchy, it has not reached the level of a significant threat due to its limited scope and political objectives. The protests arising from this discontent primarily sought to capture the king's attention, making their containment possible through royal visits or intervention by the General Intelligence Directorate, which relied on patronage policies within parliament. In the absence of elite support, protest movements in the remote areas of the East Bank failed to form organized political parties or cohesive social movements, instead devolving into a state of social corruption and non-compliance with the law (Tell, 2015).

The security services in Jordan found themselves facing unprecedented challenges due to the widespread nature of the protests, which spread across most regions of the kingdom. This led to a clear inability to handle such a large-scale uprising, prompting the authorities to resort to the use of force to disperse the protesters, in addition to launching large-scale arrest campaigns that targeted hundreds of protesters and activists, including minors, with more than 200 activists still in detention. In the recent protests, citizens from various

backgrounds, particularly from the major cities, became involved. Additionally, the shift from local and regional demands to unified national issues undermined the regime's reliance on the neutrality of certain social components, surprising and unsettling the ruling institutions in their handling of this crisis (ACRPS, 2012).

The official rhetoric failed to calm the situation, especially in the early days of the protests. This wave contributed to introducing new terms into the Jordanian political scene, revealing citizens' ability to transcend traditional social divisions in defense of their economic and political interests. It also highlighted that the reliance on SNIs to ensure the stability of the regime was no longer guaranteed and showed the limited effectiveness of the security approach in controlling the street or silencing public discourse about the system of governance. In contrast, the traditional tools of the political system emerged in managing the crisis, characterized by reliance on conventional methods and a limited media discourse, especially claims of "infiltrators" and suspicious foreign relations. The protests also revealed the limited influence of opposition political forces, which failed to capitalize on the momentum of the street to transform public anger into a political force with clear vision and programs. Although most of the protesters raised the slogan "The people want to overthrow the regime," this does not necessarily reflect a shift in the Jordanian street towards a comprehensive confrontation with the regime. The slogan is more likely used as a pressure tactic to achieve substantial reforms, whether at the constitutional level or in legislation related to political activity. Thus, the scene remains open to multiple possibilities, the most prominent of which is the back-and-forth between street pressure and the regime's response to implement real political changes (ACRPS, 2012).

By June 2015, on Army Day, which coincided with June 10, when the red Hashemite flag was raised to replace the national flag inherited from the *Faisalian* Syrian period, it seemed like an implicit declaration of King Abdullah II's commitment to a Hashemite nationalism based on the royal family. This

vision is clearly at odds with the radical Jordanian nationalism that had dominated the political scene during the uprisings and protests. Focusing on the limited objectives adopted by these movements obscures the profound impact they had, despite the fact that the mobilization of military retirees marked a qualitative shift in Jordanian politics. This shift succeeded in politicizing the identity divisions that the monarchy had long relied on to maintain its internal balance. It also contributed to breaking the sacred aura that had long surrounded the Jordanian monarchy, making it less immune to public criticism. These intertwined factors represent a challenge to Jordan's national security, as the continued absence of political and economic reforms enhances the system's vulnerability to future crises that may destabilize the state. Thus, achieving a balance between the legitimate demands of the people and maintaining the stability of the regime becomes an urgent necessity to ensure the survival of the state in the face of growing regional and domestic challenges.

The recent protests in Jordan were marked by concerning characteristics that reflected on the political and security landscape. On one hand, some demonstrations were characterized by violence, raising questions about the nature of the movement and its future direction. On the other hand, the protests were supported by the silent majority, who played an indirect role by their absence from the scene, helping to amplify the impact of the active movements. The most dangerous aspect was the shift in criticism from targeting the government to directing it towards the king himself, a development that carries profound implications for the changing nature of the relationship between the regime and society (Al Jazeera, 2012).

Despite the reform initiatives announced by the king, these developments have raised widespread concern in regional and international circles. Some analyses in Israel, the US, and elsewhere now discuss the uncertain future of the Jordanian political system. This pessimism reflects growing fears that the proposed reforms will fail to calm public anger or provide an effective response to the challenges of the current stage. There are several aspects that must be

considered when evaluating the impact of this popular movement on the stability and security of the Kingdom.

First of all, the popular movement led to internal security challenges, notably increasing tensions between the government and some opposition forces. Initially, the protests were peaceful; however, as the number of events grew and the demands escalated, political and social rhetoric intensified, creating a tense environment within the major cities. At times, protests escalated into confrontations between security forces and demonstrators, especially in areas such as Ma'an and Tafileh, where social and economic tensions had been rising. While the government succeeded in avoiding large-scale bloodshed, the movement contributed to heightened security measures and increased alertness in certain areas, posing a challenge to the state's ability to maintain internal security peacefully.

Second, the popular movement contributed to deepening social divisions within Jordanian society, leading to rifts between supporters and opponents of the government. These divisions threatened the stability of the domestic front and opened the door for exploitation by political or ideological factions that could benefit from the social turmoil. Moreover, the disparity in social and political stances helped to fragment the unity of Jordanian society, making it more vulnerable to other types of security threats, such as the recruitment of extremists from certain youth groups who felt disillusioned by the movement's failure to meet their aspirations. Third, at the level of national security, the popular movement posed a challenge to the stability of the Jordanian political system. The monarchy in Jordan relies on internal political stability and the strength of the military and security services, both of which were threatened by the growing protests and the state's inability to simultaneously address all political and economic demands. Despite the limited reforms introduced by the regime, the failure to fully meet the movement's demands led to a loss of popular support for the government. This situation threatened the country's international

image and impacted the regime's ability to manage its political and economic alliances with regional and international powers.

Fourth, regionally and internationally, the movement in Jordan affected the country's image in its surrounding environment. The protests were monitored by neighboring countries, especially given the volatile regional situation in the Middle East. The events in Syria had a significant influence on the movement in Jordan, as some Jordanian political circles expressed concern about the spillover effects of the Syrian crisis into Jordan, which represented an additional threat to national security. Furthermore, the Jordanian movement influenced the country's relations with Western nations, particularly the US. The political reforms initiated by the Jordanian regime were an attempt to reassure Western allies, who were pushing for democratic changes in the region. However, at the same time, the regime was tasked with maintaining internal stability and avoiding developments that could impact the kingdom's overall security.

Fifth, in the context of the popular movement, there was a risk of exploitation by extremist organizations. Some radical groups took advantage of public anger and social discontent, with certain leftist and Islamist factions attempting to steer the movement toward their own agendas, potentially escalating tensions and threatening national security. There were also concerns about the impact of the movement on security in the border areas with neighboring countries, as armed groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, closely monitored the situation in an attempt to exploit the political or social vulnerability.

Key Messages Drawn from the Popular Movement in Jordan

The popular movement in Jordan sent several key messages, both for the political and societal reform movements, as well as for the political parties and the political system itself. The first message was sent to the popular movements. After months of protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations, a fundamental question

arises: what has been achieved by these movements on the ground? This question warrants a thorough analysis, including a critical evaluation of the reasons why the movement failed to achieve its goals. Despite the efforts made, no significant changes occurred in terms of addressing corruption, which remains a major challenge and is still immune to accountability. On the contrary, by strengthening the control of corrupt forces over state institutions, the popular movement has been driven toward more divisions and chaos, including the use of illegal methods such as thuggery, a phenomenon that has increased to a dangerous extent.

Second, one of the factors that contributed to the failure of the popular movement in achieving meaningful progress was the lack of coordination and unity among the various movements. Each movement or political initiative carried a different slogan and had divergent objectives, leading to fragmentation and an inability to form a unified front capable of effectively pressuring the authorities. Given the diversity of political movements, it became difficult for the average citizen to follow these movements or even distinguish between them.

Third, a central issue faced by the popular movement was the ambiguity in the political stances of opposition parties, especially the IAF. Although it is one of the largest and most important political parties in Jordan, the party has suffered from a noticeable decline in popularity due to several factors. One of the main reasons for this decline is the abandonment of principles by some party leaders in exchange for government positions, which negatively impacted its image in Jordanian public opinion. At the same time, regionalism emerged as one of the challenges facing the party, with some perceiving it as a representative of the Palestinian community in Jordan. This perception has reinforced divisions within Jordanian society, harming national unity. Therefore, the party needs to review its policies to distance itself from any confinement within a specific social or geographical framework and avoid addressing the issues of the Jordanian people from a narrow perspective.

In recent years, SNIs in Jordan, particularly the tension between Jordanians of Palestinian origin and those of indigenous Jordanian descent, have intensified due to economic policies that have weakened traditional patronage relations between the state and its citizens. This tension became particularly evident when Jordanians began to feel marginalized by the system, leading to increasing dissatisfaction with policies that ignored their economic and social needs. Additionally, growing discontent among Jordanians of Palestinian origin due to widespread corruption in government institutions contributed to escalating protests. This division in national identity posed a threat to internal cohesion and led to a lack of trust between the government and large segments of the Jordanian population. Furthermore, the growing influence of SNIs has had a significant impact on national security. While the government strives to unite the people under the Jordanian state's banner, tribal and Palestinian identities have begun to emerge as decisive factors, deepening internal divisions. The decline in the power of the old patronage system, which relied on offering support to certain groups in exchange for loyalty, has made it difficult for the government to satisfy these various groups in the face of escalating popular protests.

One of the foremost challenges facing Jordan's national security is the politicization of identities and their use as tools for mobilization or exclusion. For example, the media played a significant role in reframing the protests, which were initially reformist in nature, as movements driven by Islamic or even Palestinian agendas. This narrative amplified fears among certain groups that these protests could threaten the existing power balance within the state. Similarly, the disparity in the way security forces handled protests based on geographic location and tribal affiliations created a rift in trust between the state and its citizens, fostering a sense of injustice and discrimination. The tribal identity also influenced the security response, with police presence being notably heavier in the capital, Amman, compared to the southern governorates, which have a more homogenous tribal composition. This unevenness in

response led to a disparity in the escalation of protests, with some areas being more receptive to demonstrations, while others witnessed more intense clashes.

On a regional level, Jordan's international alliances further complicated internal dynamics, as seen in the arrest of Zaki Bani Ershid following his criticism of the UAE. This incident highlights how foreign relations can impact internal security, placing the state in a difficult position between fulfilling its international commitments and maintaining domestic stability. These circumstances have led to significant challenges for Jordan's political system. On one hand, the protests expressed a broad desire for reform and the fulfillment of basic citizen needs such as public services and employment. On the other hand, the influence of SNIs, which sought to advance the interests of specific groups, made it difficult for the government to achieve a broad consensus. The inability to balance these divergent identities had a direct impact on the stability of the system.

Additionally, the growing public awareness of political and economic corruption posed a new threat to the regime. Through these protests, economic demands took center stage, weakening the government’s ability to retain support from the social groups that traditionally formed the backbone of the regime. While the security forces maintained a relatively restrained approach, many reform activists pointed to collusion between security forces and pro-regime groups that regularly participated in counter-protests. Activists saw these groups as tools used by the state to reshape protest spaces and undermine their legitimacy. Evidence of prior coordination between regime supporters and the police led to doubts about the neutrality of the state's security apparatus. Moreover, there were clear geographical disparities in law enforcement tactics, with Amman receiving heavier security attention compared to areas like Karak, where local police were influenced by tribal networks, imposing informal constraints on their handling of protests.

The repercussions of these tensions were not confined to political dimensions alone but had direct implications for Jordan's national security. The

manipulation of SNIs, whether by the state or the opposition, deepened societal divisions, thereby increasing internal instability. The mobilization of identities—whether through official discourse that emphasized distinctions between "East Jordanians" and "Palestinian Jordanians," or through the invocation of ideological and religious identities by Islamist groups—contributed to a politically volatile environment. In this context, the state itself became a factor of polarization, relying on divisive strategies in the distribution of resources and political opportunities.

Ultimately, the use of identities in Jordanian political disputes does not only pose a threat to social cohesion but extends its impact to national security itself. When identity becomes a tool for conflict rather than a framework for shared belonging, security challenges are exacerbated, and apparent stability is undermined by an underlying fragility that can erupt at any moment. Therefore, overcoming this crisis requires genuine political reforms that go beyond security responses, including redefining the relationship between the state and society on more inclusive and just foundations (Ryan, 2018). These events clearly demonstrate how intertwined identities—whether tribal, religious, or national—play a decisive role in shaping the political dynamics and their impact on national security.

In conclusion, the interaction of multiple identities in Jordan, whether Islamic, tribal, or national, directly shaped the dynamics of the protests and the security responses to them. The core challenge for the state remains how to implement genuine reforms that address economic and social inequalities without disrupting the delicate balance governing the political and security landscape. Furthermore, the situation becomes even more complicated in light of the regional instability, with the Israeli war on Gaza, the civil conflict in Syria, political crises in Lebanon, and the unrest in Iraq and the West Bank. This intertwined regional context places the Jordanian regime under increasing pressure, as its potential collapse would not only be an internal event but would have far-reaching consequences that could exacerbate regional crises.

These dynamics make Jordan a focal point for international powers, which recognize that any further escalation within the country would lead to greater instability in the region. As such, maintaining Jordan's national security requires a comprehensive response that not only addresses internal challenges but also accounts for regional interdependencies. This entails fostering trust between the government and the people through genuine reforms that meet citizens' aspirations while simultaneously adopting a balanced foreign policy that enables Jordan to mitigate the impact of regional tensions on its internal situation.

Key Messages Drawn from the Popular Movement in Lebanon

In the case of Lebanon, the roots of dysfunction and mismanagement, which were among the primary factors leading to the eruption of protests, trace back to the sectarian political system enshrined by the Taif Agreement of 1989, nearly three decades before the protests began in 2019. The Taif Agreement institutionalized a power-sharing model, where political positions are allocated according to the religious affiliations of public officials. This system is seen as a tool exploited by Lebanese politicians to consolidate their influence. Many of these politicians were former militia leaders during the Lebanese Civil War, who continued to hold official positions after the conflict's end. They benefitted from a system that granted them immunity from accountability, thereby contributing to the persistence of corruption and the entrenchment of sectarian dominance over the state and its institutions (The Economist, 2019).

Accordingly, the reasons behind the eruption of the popular movement in Lebanon are manifold, with the foremost being the economic and social crisis that weighed heavily on the citizens and directly impacted their livelihoods. The Lebanese pound suffered a severe collapse, leading to a substantial loss in purchasing power for a large segment of the Lebanese population, which in turn resulted in unprecedented rates of poverty and unemployment. Alongside this, corruption within state institutions worsened, further deepening the sense of distrust between the people and the ruling authority. The Lebanese were

confronted with a complete lack of transparency and mismanagement of public funds, making corruption a primary factor in fueling popular anger.

Another significant factor contributing to the persistence of the popular movement is Lebanon's entrenched sectarian system, which plays a pivotal role in determining the country's political and social identity. However, this very system acts as a barrier to implementing fundamental and comprehensive reforms. Consequently, the Lebanese street became divided between supporters and opponents of the movement, with some sects fearing a loss of influence should any radical changes occur in the structure of the existing political system. Additionally, regional and international interventions played a substantial role in shaping events within Lebanon, as external powers influence political decisions by supporting specific factions within the political landscape, which further complicated internal divisions. The waves of the popular movement have reflected directly on internal stability and social cohesion, leading to increased political and sectarian divisions. This resulted in violent clashes between security forces and protesters, contributing to the deterioration of the security situation and the escalation of violence in certain areas.

Moreover, the protests exposed the fragility of Lebanon's state institutions and their inability to effectively manage recurring crises, weakening the legitimacy of the political system and triggering frequent instances of political vacuum, as evidenced by the resignation of successive governments and the failure to form a government capable of implementing genuine reforms. The repercussions of the movement were not confined to the political and security spheres; they also extended to the economic domain, which is a cornerstone of national security. The worsening economic crisis led to a massive wave of emigration, especially among the youth, which poses a threat to the country's future by depleting the human resources necessary to rebuild the national economy. Furthermore, the rising rates of poverty and unemployment contributed to an increase in organized crime and the growing influence of

militias and armed groups, which further complicated the security landscape and weakened the state's authority.

The protests also revealed the fragility of the proclaimed "national unity," as some sectarian parties (such as Hezbollah and the FPM) attempted to frame the protests as being directed against a particular sect, which led to the escalation of counter-sectarian rhetoric. Unlike in Jordan, where violence was limited, Lebanon witnessed deadly confrontations between protesters, security forces, and sectarian militias (such as the clashes in the Tayouneh area in January 2021), highlighting the state's inability to contain violence amidst the dominance of armed militias (like Hezbollah) over its security decision-making. The failure of the state to investigate the Beirut Port explosion (2020) deepened the rift between the people and the political elite, turning security institutions (such as the army and general security) into tools for suppressing protests rather than protecting citizens.

On the other hand, the interaction among various political parties has had a significant impact on the power landscape. Internal divisions contributed to a state of political stagnation that hindered reform and modernization efforts, resulting in government instability and exacerbating economic and social crises. This reality did not only impact parliamentary or constitutional politics but extended directly to economic performance, as seen in the worsening problems of administrative corruption and its effects on resource allocation and investment efficiency. This deepened the gap between social classes and contributed to the erosion of economic initiative and investment spirit.

From the perspective of government and administrative policies, the period after 2014 witnessed significant challenges related to crisis management and overcoming institutional obstacles that hindered the reform process. This manifested in cases of administrative instability and a lack of coordination between various governmental bodies, which led to delays in making crucial decisions and negatively impacted the effectiveness of government action amidst increasing pressures. It became clear that the institutional and

organizational gaps that appeared during this period required fundamental reforms that went beyond superficial measures and addressed the core decision-making processes and distribution of powers. This situation led to an overlap of policies and decisions in a way that weakened the ability to balance the interests of different groups and contributed to reinforcing divisions within the governmental apparatus.

The relations between various political actors have become more complex, with paths that intertwine the interests of traditional forces with the aspirations of the youth and the ambitions calling for a fundamental change in governance and management. This overlap of visions and concerns led to a redistribution of roles and tasks among political forces, impacting the system's ability to present a comprehensive vision aligned with citizens' needs and national aspirations. This resulted in a state of hesitation and caution in adopting genuine reform policies, as forces aiming to preserve the status quo imposed constraints on the reform process, making it more difficult to overcome the institutional challenges facing the state.

Lebanese data indicates that the issue of administrative and financial corruption remains one of the most prominent factors contributing to the exacerbation of crises hindering the reform and change process. These movements revealed gaps in oversight and accountability mechanisms, which led to a deterioration of trust in state institutions and increased the sense that the system was based on narrow interests that outweigh the public good. This situation also impacted the investment climate and the stability of economic relations between the public and private sectors, highlighting the urgent need to rebuild oversight systems and activate transparency mechanisms as a fundamental step to restore lost trust. This context indicates that reform in the field of anti-corruption is no longer a choice, but a strategic necessity that imposes itself on the responsible authorities in light of growing internal and external pressures.

Amid these complexities, several scenarios emerge for the future of Lebanon's national security. The existing system may persist by patching up crises (such as forming symbolic governments), but this would come at the cost of escalating sectarian violence and the further deterioration of services. Protests may escalate into armed confrontations between the people and militias, especially with the deepening poverty and the weakening of the army. Regional or international forces might intervene (under the pretext of preventing collapse) to restructure the system, but this could risk dividing Lebanon into sectarian cantons.

Lebanon today faces an existential dilemma: the sectarian system, which was supposed to ensure stability after the civil war, has turned into a mechanism for the internal destruction of the state. Lebanon's national security is now threatened not only by external conflicts but also by a systemic internal collapse. The only solution lies in redefining the social contract based on citizenship rather than sectarianism, but this requires the absent political will and international support that is not available amidst geopolitical competition. So far, the situation remains open to all possibilities, but the only certainty is that time is running out, and Lebanon is rapidly approaching the brink of collapse, threatening its transformation from the "Switzerland of the East" to a fully-fledged "failed state."

The impact of these movements manifested in a redefinition of the relationship between the state and civil society. The waves of protests and popular expressions challenged the established political practice, contributing to a reshaping of citizens' demands for justice, transparency, and accountability. These movements emerged as a collective outcry demanding a reassessment of the regulatory and oversight frameworks on state institutions, leading to an erosion of trust between citizens and authority, and fueling a sense of frustration with governmental performance. This, in turn, affected multiple levels within Lebanon's social fabric, as institutional problems became central issues

influencing decision-making processes and creating a complex framework for interaction between internal political forces.

The Lebanese social fabric is considered one of the most complex elements in this context, as it intertwines identities, sectarian and tribal divisions with demands for change and administrative reform. This interweaving has led to the creation of a state of intellectual and emotional polarization within society, which has negatively impacted the ability of social actors to reach a unified vision aligned with the aspirations of the people for achieving social justice and comprehensive development. In this context, the movements have played a pivotal role in fueling a collective sense of frustration and affirming the perception that the traditional political structure no longer represents enough hope to overcome the challenges facing Lebanon.

In terms of social and political relations, these movements have impacted the redefinition of national identity and the sense of belonging. Calls to overcome traditional divisions have emerged, along with efforts to find a new space that transcends sectarian divides. This shift in social consciousness carried with it a call for national reconciliation and structural reform, but it faced resistance from those who benefited from the existing system, resulting in the fragmentation of the political scene and a redistribution of influence between traditional forces and new actors. The resulting social restructuring had a profound impact on mutual trust among members of society, creating gaps of skepticism regarding the system’s ability to meet basic needs and achieve the desired change.

The significance of these movements lies in reconsidering the governance system and the relationship between the executive and legislative authorities, as they led to internal pressures to reshape the political contract based on more transparency and credibility. This shift impacted citizens' perception of the performance of the authorities and led to an increasing demand for structural reform and sound management of public resources. In this context, calls arose to activate the role of oversight bodies and enhance their independence from

political influences, pointing to a conceptual shift towards models of governance based on efficiency and justice rather than traditional affiliations and loyalties. These calls did not remain confined to political expression alone but extended to multiple aspects of public, political, and social life, demanding a comprehensive response from all involved parties.

In terms of media and cultural communication, the media and digital space played a central role in transmitting the voice of the movements to the national level and conveying the citizens' demands to the responsible authorities. This media role contributed to creating collective awareness about citizens' suffering and highlighted the contradictions between what is officially declared and what citizens feel in their daily lives. The media became a mirror reflecting internal conflicts and the lack of coherent policies that ensure social justice, creating an environment for collective dialogue about Lebanon's future and its potential to overcome these complex crises. This media role extended beyond merely reporting events to framing the public discourse and reshaping the concepts of governance and accountability within Lebanese society.

From this analysis, the primary effect of these movements appears to be the creation of a critical reflection within Lebanese society, which led to calls for comprehensive change and the restructuring of existing systems to align with current realities and the demands of the times. This critical awareness, embodied in the civil society's demands for more accountability and transparency, has resonated across various areas of public life, expanding the discussion about its importance in building a future grounded in justice and equality. Despite the complex challenges facing the reform process, the emergence of these calls represents an important step towards reshaping the relationship between authority and the people, signaling the possibility of a gradual transformation in governance methodologies, provided there is political will for real change.

While the political and social landscape continues to redefine its contours, the need for enhancing internal dialogue among different stakeholders remains prominent, with institutional stability as the foundation for rebuilding national

trust. The process of restructuring the relationship between authorities and institutions requires collective effort involving all political and social actors, making it necessary to adopt comprehensive policies that ensure alignment between various parties on the principles of sound governance and sustainable development. This holistic approach requires overcoming divisive policies and outlining clear paths to ensure citizen participation in shaping public policies, which represents a crucial step toward achieving a level of stability that could return Lebanon to a path of comprehensive development and social stability.

It is evident from these insights that the effects of the movements that followed 2014 have impacted the political, administrative, and economic structure in a deeply intertwined manner, requiring a reevaluation of the foundations of the relationship between the state and society and the role that institutions must play in achieving social justice and economic development. This context calls for looking to the future by reassessing national priorities and focusing efforts on reforming systems that suffer from weak oversight and an unequal distribution of resources, while reinforcing the concept of active citizenship that transcends traditional divisions and works to build a bridge of trust and cooperation between all components of society.

The analysis of these movements confirms that the outcomes arising from them are closely linked to Lebanon's ability to overcome institutional barriers and implement transparency in addressing the structural issues that undermine the foundations of sound governance. The challenges posed by this reality require a comprehensive review of public policies and a reevaluation of partnership models between the state and society, with the need for officials to adopt new methodologies ensuring the achievement of the desired goals within an environment marked by multiple challenges and complexities. This new approach requires the establishment of genuine participation mechanisms that give citizens a voice in the decision-making process, thereby reshaping the relationship between political forces and placing it on a foundation of trust and mutual commitment.

Considering the interconnected effects of these movements, it becomes clear that the outcomes are not limited to political or economic changes alone but extend to deep social dimensions that affect the cultural and civil fabric of Lebanese society. These movements have revitalized community discussions on human rights and social justice, contributing to the reformation of national identity based on more inclusive and accommodating principles of cultural and political pluralism. This reality indicates that the changes after 2014 represent a bold challenge that requires all concerned parties to rethink the concepts of national belonging and how to translate them into policies and actions that ensure social stability and sustainable development.

The path of change witnessed in Lebanon in the wake of these movements requires us to focus on the necessity of collective efforts in confronting the common challenges posed by a divided and complex reality, where the demands for reform extend beyond traditional policies to address deeper issues related to identity, belonging, and justice. This context calls for reconsidering the relationship between citizens and institutions and outlining new paths that ensure the realization of a comprehensive vision that restores Lebanon's position among countries making steady progress towards development and modernization. Recognizing that this reform process is not easy, it requires strong political will and broad societal commitment to confront the forces that seek to maintain the status quo.

In light of the available information, it is clear that these movements continue to play a central role in shaping the political and social landscape, with societal forces continuing to demand further reforms that go beyond the superficial and reach the core of administrative and political processes. This reality obliges concerned parties to reconsider governance models and adopt more open policies towards citizens' demands, requiring the redistribution of powers and the activation of effective participation mechanisms that ensure citizens' voices reach the heart of decision-making. In this context, enhancing principles of transparency and accountability is key to achieving political and

economic stability that supports development efforts and mitigates the impact of the divisions that have threatened social cohesion.

SNIs in Protests

Issues related to national, social, ethnic, and religious identity played a significant role in shaping the nature and scope of protests during and after the Arab uprisings. Regime supporters often used identity-based classifications to describe popular movements. In Jordan, for example, protests were labeled as "Palestinian" or "Islamic," attempting to question the loyalty and national affiliation of activists. The political system in Jordan successfully contained protest movements by relying on several strategies. In Jordan, these strategies included exploiting identity divisions and distributing "royal privileges," which were material advantages funded through Gulf aid. These tactics ensured the loyalty of the military retirees' movement while weakening the challenge posed by a diverse coalition of nationalists in the East Bank, who united around the National Committee of Military Retirees. With the rise of counter-revolutionary movements led by Gulf countries to oppose the Arab uprisings starting in 2011, the Jordanian regime backtracked on its promises of transitioning towards a constitutional monarchy. Instead, the government implemented superficial political and constitutional reforms aimed primarily at isolating and containing both the National Resistance Council and the popular movement. These efforts culminated in a decisive victory for the authoritarian elements within the regime after their representatives succeeded in the parliamentary elections held in January 2013 (Tell, 2015).

In Lebanon, the Lebanese economy became an instrument used by sectarian political parties to strengthen their control over society. This system, known as "sectarian capitalism," is based on clientelistic networks where individuals receive jobs, services, and social aid through political parties rather than state institutions. The ruling class uses the economy as a means of subjugating citizens, where access to basic services is tied to political and

sectarian loyalty. Under this system, public projects and international aid are allocated in a manner that ensures continued dependency on political elites. Consequently, any real economic reform would not only require financial policy changes but also dismantling the sectarian structure that prevents the development of a productive and fair economy. The observer of the political regime's approach to handling protests in the early stages will find that the Jordanian political system was not surprised by the occurrence of protests against price hikes. However, it was taken aback by the scale of these protests, their diverse range of participants, and the widespread scope of their effectiveness. Furthermore, the nature of the slogans raised and the direct targeting of the king in Jordan, as well as the leaders of sectarian groups in Lebanon, were additional sources of surprise.

The Jordanian monarchy has relied on a complex security apparatus to strengthen its stability and consolidate its authority, with the General Intelligence Directorate playing a pivotal role. This agency has been instrumental in managing the political field in various ways, including limiting the influence of opposition figures by restricting their access to vital government positions, ensuring that key institutions remain under the control of forces loyal to the regime. Moreover, the Directorate has played a role in crafting a political and social discourse that enhances the king’s stature and imbues his figure with symbolic sanctity, thereby fostering loyalty to the regime as the cornerstone of national stability.

In the absence of a clear strategy to address this wave of protests, the state resorted to three concurrent methods. First, security forces withdrew from certain areas to avoid confrontation with the protesters or for reasons that remain unclear. Second, security and local leaders mobilized segments of society to participate in pro-regime marches, which were media-referred to as the phenomenon of “thuggery” or “street gangs.” Third, the security forces’ approach fluctuated between containing the protests and responding to them with violence. These measures were coupled with an official discourse that

sought to differentiate between peaceful protests and incidents of riot, while claiming the involvement of foreign interference and non-Jordanian elements among the protesters. Additionally, the Muslim Brotherhood and other political groups were blamed for exploiting the crisis to achieve factional goals or sabotage the parliamentary elections. These security policies, despite their apparent effectiveness in previous periods, resulted in mixed long-term outcomes. On one hand, they helped fortify the regime against immediate threats and ensured the continuity of political institutions. On the other hand, they heightened popular resentment due to what was perceived as the concentration of power in the hands of a specific faction and the exclusion of opposing competent figures from decision-making positions. This, in turn, deepened the divisions between the political elite and society, presenting a challenge to Jordan's national security, particularly as the sense of marginalization grew among large segments of the population.

Moreover, the practices of political exclusion and the deification of leadership figures contributed to enhancing the image of the regime as a centralizing force. However, these practices simultaneously weakened the state's resilience to economic and social crises. When popular protests erupted, as seen in recent years, the security response became more complicated due to the accumulated feelings of injustice and exclusion. Additionally, reliance on security agencies to manage the public scene reinforced the authoritarian nature of the government, undermining public trust in the regime's ability to implement genuine democratic reforms.

Considering the impact of these policies on national security, it can be argued that focusing on security control and the deification of symbols may provide temporary stability but exposes the regime to long-term risks. Such approaches can lead to a gradual disconnection between the regime and society, particularly in light of the regional and international transformations that demand a more open and inclusive approach. Therefore, strengthening Jordan's national security requires a reconsideration of these policies, ensuring the

involvement of various political forces in decision-making, easing restrictions on public freedoms, and rebuilding trust between the state and its citizens to guarantee true and sustainable stability.

Since the onset of the protests, the Lebanese state has resorted to multiple repressive strategies to prevent any drastic change in the system. Security forces used excessive violence against protesters, including the use of rubber bullets and tear gas, as well as arbitrary arrests targeting activists and journalists.

Following the Beirut port explosion, the state appeared more aggressive in its response to the movement, declaring a state of emergency in Beirut, which granted the military broad powers to suppress any popular movements. The judiciary was also used as a political tool, with legal actions being taken against activists and CSOs to intimidate them. However, the repression was not only physical or legal but also media-based. The ruling forces launched disinformation campaigns to tarnish the image of the protesters, labeling the movement as a "foreign conspiracy" or claiming it sought to "weaken the state." These strategies were not new but reflected the regime's fragility and its inability to offer any genuine solutions to the crisis. As the popular movement intensified, independent and alternative media played a crucial role in exposing the state's policies and revealing the corruption of the ruling elites. New media platforms emerged, providing critical content that highlighted social and economic issues, often far removed from the official discourse dominated by traditional political parties.

Alternative media contributed significantly to shedding light on the suffering of the most affected groups, such as migrant workers, refugees, and the working class, while also exposing the state's mechanisms of repression and its attempts to silence opposition through harassment of journalists and activists. Despite the pivotal role played by these platforms, official media still exerts its influence through its alliance with traditional political forces, making it difficult to reach broad segments of society. The primary challenge facing alternative media today is its ability to sustain itself amidst financial and political pressures,

especially as censorship and repression against opposing voices continue to escalate. In final notes, The Jordanian regime successfully contained the popular movement by combining partial reforms, recycling elites, security pressures, exploiting societal divisions, and offering some economic concessions. Although the movement managed to break many political taboos in its discourse, it did not achieve substantial changes to the regime's structure. The state was able to gradually regain control of the political scene and weaken the momentum of the protests, benefiting from the unique circumstances of Jordan compared to other Arab Uprisings countries.

In the context of the popular movement in Jordan between 2011 and 2013, the role of the monarchy's leadership became clearly evident in trying to absorb the political and social transformations taking place on the Jordanian scene. King Abdullah II sent several reformist messages addressing political, social, and economic issues through various media, reflecting the leadership's engagement with the demands of the Jordanian street. King Abdullah presented his reform ideas through four working papers published gradually, with the fourth paper being the most significant in stimulating public debate. These papers were not final decisions or instructions but an open invitation for discussion and intellectual exchange on the means of reform, demonstrating the leadership's commitment to transparency and allowing all political factions to participate in a constructive dialogue about the country's future.

This royal approach to presenting reform ideas reflected not only a desire to modernize the political system but also an awareness of the urgent need to unify Jordanian society in all its factions, whether politically or socially. King Abdullah was cognizant of the importance of accommodating emerging forces, especially the youth, who had become a vital part of the popular movement during that period. This awareness underscores the leadership's recognition of the need to involve young people in the reform process as part of a broader strategy to build a sustainable political future. This royal orientation coincided with the national popular movement, where there was relative alignment

between the royal proposals and the aspirations of citizens who demanded political and economic reforms. Through this interaction between the leadership and the people, the regime sought to push the reform process in a calculated and organized manner, contributing to steering the country towards a new phase of growth and political development within the framework of stability and national unity.

The king's alignment with popular proposals, whether through public democratic institutions or various media platforms, helped define political directions and clarify the future vision for Jordan. This approach not only represents a reform process but also a step towards strengthening the democratic path, where opinions and ideas are shared openly, helping to illuminate the path toward a better future for Jordanians. In this context, it can be argued that the Jordanian leadership did not merely respond partially to popular demands but sought to find comprehensive solutions based on gradual reforms that ensure the enhancement of political and social stability, while opening the door to political and social diversity that would help avoid chaos and contain internal and external challenges. Finally, the Jordanian intelligence services, with their controversial reputation, succeeded in containing the protests without resorting to excessive force. To achieve this, they exploited internal divisions within the movement, infiltrating government agents into the ranks of the protesters and spreading rumors that the "Iraqi movement" was merely a Palestinian attempt to overthrow the regime and establish a Palestinian state.

However, the November 2012 protests represented an unprecedented moment of popular unity and convergence among various Jordanian factions under the banner of radical political change. This cohesion, even if temporary, helped reduce political tensions between what was considered the "Palestinian minority" and the "Jordanian majority." The participation of Palestinian refugees in the camps, alongside the involvement of Jordanians of Palestinian origin in these demonstrations, marked one of the most notable changes that represented a break with Jordan's modern political history.

The Jordanian regime succeeded in strategically leveraging the recent popular movement, despite initial impressions suggesting that the Jordanian street had won after the ousting of former Prime Minister Hani Mulki due to popular protests. Although the official stance seemed positive in addressing the movement's demands and fulfilling some of them, the state was able to turn these protests into a tool for sending messages to the outside world, particularly to its traditional allies. These messages served as a reminder to the international community of Jordan's role as a key player in the region, especially concerning its religious legitimacy and custodianship over Jerusalem, as well as its firm stance against the "Deal of the Century."

Amid these developments, the Jordanian state found itself at a difficult crossroads, where it had to use these protests as a means to attract the much-needed political and economic support, given the mounting pressures from regional and international forces. This challenge became more pronounced with the changing geopolitical landscape and new alliances that coincided with the arrival of a new U.S. administration and its growing relationship with the Gulf states. In this context, Jordan faced the greatest challenge of all: it was impossible for the kingdom to distance itself from the Gulf axis due to security threats along its borders with Syria and Iraq, as well as its position as a cornerstone for regional stability.

On the other hand, the Jordanian economy faces clear dependence on two main sources: foreign aid, which is increasingly threatened by the current regional situation, and the Jordanian citizen, who has reached the limits of his economic capacity due to accumulated debts, inflation, and unemployment. While Jordan relies heavily on the assistance of its traditional allies, it faces increasing challenges under these economic and political pressures.

Despite the Jordanian regime's attempt to engage with the popular movement at one stage, it was not in a position to continue down this path without taking into account the security and political situation in the region. Therefore, the Jordanian movement emerged as a dual message to both the

internal and external audiences. The message to the street reflected the government’s support for the movement and its citizens' right to express their demands, while the message to the outside world served as a reminder of Jordan’s strategic importance in the region and its role in maintaining stability. In this context, the Jordanian government showed a shift in its approach to handling protests compared to the 2011 movement. The current demonstrations were dealt with more flexibly, with authorities guiding the exercise of restraint and allowing citizens to express their anger. These positions came at a challenging time when the Jordanian citizen was suffering from an acute economic crisis, placing the regime in a difficult position.

Regarding regional alliances, it appears that Jordan prefers to maintain its traditional alliances with Gulf countries rather than seeking new allies, such as Turkey, given the potential consequences this could have on regional security and stability. Despite these alliances, the Jordanian regime finds itself facing new rivalries, particularly regarding its religious legitimacy in the region, amid growing competition for political and religious influence, especially in the context of the “Deal of the Century” supported by the US, Israel, and some Arab countries. Thus, it is clear that the Jordanian regime seeks to smartly rearrange its political and regional cards by strategically investing in the popular movement and integrating it into broader strategies aimed at ensuring the country’s stability and protecting its vital interests in the region.

In a country where the king holds extensive powers over all branches of government, his public frustration with the stalled reform efforts raises questions about the reasons hindering the current situation's development. The reform process initiated by the king a decade ago has largely been ignored by the entrenched elite who seek to preserve their own interests. The contradiction between the king's directives to the seven prime ministers who have formed governments over twelve years of his rule and the actual reform record achieved under their leadership points to a structural problem that is often overlooked.

While the analysis that attributes the slow pace of reform to the ruling elite is valid at its core, it is somewhat reductionist, as it focuses primarily on the traditional figures who have played a prominent role in Jordanian politics over the past decade. In reality, liberals bear significant responsibility for the failure of reforms, if not more than that. They favored a more authoritarian government, believing it would help expedite the implementation of liberal economic reforms, particularly in the area of privatization. In 2008, the Jordanian media began to highlight the role of liberal politicians in the poor economic management, particularly former Royal Court Chief Bassam Awadallah. The intense campaign against Awadallah led to his resignation, but only after his policies had eroded public trust in the state.

When comparing the protests in Jordan to those in other countries during the Arab Uprisings, which were often more violent and destructive, the Jordanian protests appear more subdued. However, this impression can be misleading. Jordanians had begun protesting before the first protests erupted in Tunisia, marking the beginning of the Arab Uprisings. These protests were more organized and planned than those seen in other countries in the region. Prominent opposition figures, including several former government officials, participated in these protests. On May 1, 2011, a group of retired military officers issued a statement that angered political circles in Jordan, pointing to the negative role played by the king's wife in weakening the kingdom. They also noted that economic policies, such as investment, were leading to the destruction of the country, stressing that the national movement aimed to protect Jordan from Israeli and American interventions. These developments should have served as an alarm bell for the Jordanian government, but it failed to respond to this warning. Instead of communicating with the generals, who had more credibility in certain circles than the government, the authority accused these officers of pursuing their own interests, which reduced the likelihood of the movement turning into a popular protest. Moreover, organized national protests had occurred in Jordan several times in recent history, notably the 2010

teachers' protests, which demanded the establishment of a teachers' union and spread across several Jordanian cities.

Despite the increasing size of the protests, they were not violent, and this can be attributed to several reasons. One of the most important reasons was that the state adopted a prudent policy of not using excessive force against protesters. At the same time, the protesters hoped for the possibility of working with the king to achieve reform, as they believed that violence would harm their negotiating position and undermine the chances of real reform. In this context, the fall of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak marked a turning point for both the protesters and the government in Jordan, as the "invincible power" mentality that the Jordanian regime clung to collapsed. Under street pressure, the king dismissed his government in February 2011 and began implementing a new strategy to deal with these challenges. The priority was to contain the popular movement through rapid reforms, as the king announced the necessity of "taking practical and swift steps to launch real political reforms and enhance democratic momentum."

In March 2011, the king formed a National Dialogue Committee consisting of 52 members from political parties and civil society, tasked with drafting an electoral law and a law for political parties. A royal committee was also formed to review the constitution and propose necessary amendments. These tasks were carried out relatively quickly, earning praise from local and international observers. However, despite the cautious welcome by Jordanians to the recommendations of these committees, Prime Minister Ma'rouf al-Bakhit's government became a burden in the government's efforts to regain public trust. Bakhit was an individual uninterested in reform and showed a lack of commitment to the committees' recommendations, prompting the king to dismiss him and appoint a new government after the failure to meet expectations.

The protest movement in Jordan, which witnessed a notable escalation in recent years, is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be divided into three main

categories, reflecting the diverse social and political trends within Jordanian society. The first category includes small groups of independent activists who are not affiliated with traditional political parties and typically adopt political stances closer to socialism. The second category consists of several socialist and nationalist political parties, while the third represents the Islamic revival movement associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.

It is noteworthy that the role of independent political actors in the protests, whether related to demands of the working classes or advocating for democratic change, is particularly interesting within the historical context of Jordan. Political activities in Jordan had been for many years under strict suppression and restrictions by the ruling regime, making participation in political work risky, particularly for the youth. Consequently, most political activities took place in secrecy or within traditional frameworks that relied on “patron-client” relationships that required financial resources to remain within the system. In Lebanon, no protest or movement can be understood outside the persistent context of sectarian, social, and political equilibrium, a balance enshrined by the Taif Agreement since 1989. Therefore, expanding the political and social understanding of Lebanon requires first grasping the structure of consociationalism that underpinned the post-civil war state, then analyzing the role of the main sects in managing state institutions, leading to the traditional party conflicts that today constitute the essential knot of Lebanese politics.

The power-sharing system in Lebanon has been known as a reciprocal mechanism for distributing authority, granting each sect its political and economic weight, with fixed quotas in parliament, government, and high-level positions. For instance, the Christian (Maronite) president holds the constitutional right to elect the head of state, while the Sunni Muslim serves as prime minister, and the Shia Muslim chairs the parliament. These implicit arrangements, extending even to the judiciary, military, and internal security, affirm Lebanon's identity as a sectarian institution rather than a civic state. The impact of consociationalism is not limited to official power distribution but

stretches into the economy, whereby institutions and public contracts are awarded to affiliates of sectarian leaders, regulated by networks of patronage linking business elites and politicians to party machinery.

Each sect's influence fluctuates according to its historical position and demographic weight: Maronite Christians, despite demographic decline, continue to maintain political clout through leadership of parties such as the Lebanese Forces, Marada Movement, and the FPM. The Shia community, through Hezbollah and Amal, occupies a central role in decision-making structures, drawing strength from a social base organized around resistance and service networks. The Sunni sect, meanwhile, oscillates between Future Movement and its adversaries like the FPM, along with smaller familial parties, in a political arena marked by rivalry over regional leadership and Gulf sponsorship. Other groups like the Druze, Ismailis, Eastern Catholics, and minor sects collectively form diverse electoral blocs, often treated as bargaining chips in political negotiations.

At the core of this system, sectarian actors do not merely serve symbolic roles; their influence extends into the operation of institutions empowered to enforce internal security, collect revenues, and distribute public services. The General Security Directorate under the Ministry of Interior, the Internal Security Forces under the Cabinet, and State Security under the President, together constitute an entrenched apparatus aligned with ruling political centers. These bodies are attuned to detect dissent early, resisting any attempt to bypass consociational norms or propose a civic alternative. Thus, security agencies become shields and barriers against structural reform, especially when such reform is linked to the demands of independent youth or civil movements that challenge traditional sectarian divisions.

In terms of dismantling the architecture of repression, Lebanon hosts entrenched security and legal institutions dating back to the civil war, designed to preclude any drift toward a genuine civic state. In addition to the aforementioned agencies, there are hybrid security forces and formal

frameworks for investigation and military trials, often invoked under emergency provisions, such as the state of emergency declared after the Beirut port explosion. These institutions, enjoying consistent funding and direct political backing, operate without real accountability before civilian courts or parliament, granting them wide latitude to enforce emergency laws and suppress freedoms of assembly and expression. The 2017 electoral law, although removing the "sectarian affiliation" from candidate lists, preserved district boundaries aligned with sectarian cartography, guaranteeing electoral permanence for traditional parties. This law exemplifies the reproduction of SPS in a superficially democratic guise. The redrawing of smaller districts clustered around tight sectarian majorities encouraged collective protection of the sect rather than the safeguarding of voter rights as equal citizens.

In response to these entrenched security and legal mechanisms, Lebanon witnessed in mid-October 2019 the emergence of a sweeping protest movement known as the "October 17 Revolution." This movement swept the streets in rejection of the political class benefiting from consociationalism and corruption. Its defining feature was its initiation by youth from outside traditional party structures, rejecting sectarian leadership and demanding accountability for corruption and a complete systemic overhaul. Protesters poured into key locations like Riad El Solh Square, Martyrs' Square, and major tunnels, transforming repressive conditions into symbolic spaces of solidarity: street coverings between construction sites and sidewalks, with protesters walking barefoot and unafraid, became a vehicle for voicing the pain of the disenfranchised.

Lacking trust in the executive and judiciary, demonstrators established grassroots networks of popular committees and "logistics support" groups focused on supplying water, medicine, and food –operating independently of party influence. They repurposed "open spaces" in front of schools and universities as emergency coordination hubs, organizing nonviolent action strategies and managing interactions with security forces. This movement was

a sincere civic endeavor aimed at transcending sectarianism through slogans like "All of them means all of them" and "You Stink," affirming that the problem was not with specific sects or parties, but with the corrupt system as a whole. In terms of mobilization tools, protesters rejected the dominance of state-aligned media, which is controlled by the same power-sharing parties. Instead, independent media platforms emerged across social media and digital outlets (such as "Alf" and "News Yemen"), undertaking investigative efforts to expose banking scandals and the looting of depositors' funds, as well as political connections to public contracting deals. YouTube and Facebook allowed open streaming of live events, enabling protesters to bypass the official media blackout and push the partisan narrative to the margins.

In retaliation, regime-affiliated channels spread misinformation, accusing protesters of being "foreign agents" or of inciting "sectarian slogans," reminding the public of supposed threats to "stability." Yet the weakness of traditional media, compared to the strength of direct popular documentation, granted the movement greater legitimacy and sharpened focus on local realities in villages and towns –far from the hegemonic discourse of party-owned stations.

Conclusion

The uprisings in both Jordan and Lebanon reflected a landscape of political fragmentation and pluralism, encompassing a wide array of societal groups –including youth, labor segments, and Islamist and nationalist factions. Despite these internal divisions, the Jordanian monarchy has remained resilient, maintaining cohesion through strategies such as symbolic power-sharing and the partial accommodation of social demands. In contrast, Lebanon presents a more complex scenario due to its SPS system, which ties political stability to a fragile balance among competing sectarian and political actors. This system often results in recurrent political paralysis, as any party can obstruct critical decisions if their interests are compromised.

Nevertheless, the core challenge facing both the Jordanian and Lebanese regimes lies in managing internal divisions in a manner that safeguards state stability and promotes development amid mounting socio-economic pressures. To maintain cohesion, both governments have largely relied on provisional settlements, external pressures, and the economic interests of entrenched elites, rather than adopting clear, centralized reform strategies.

Like Lebanon, Jordan is a geopolitical construct shaped by imperial powers—both are small states located in a volatile region, which subjects them to significant political and economic vulnerability (Ryan, 2018). Jordan's apparent relative stability masks an underlying fragility driven by economic strain, ongoing regional conflicts, and the burdens of successive refugee influxes. In pursuit of greater resilience, both Jordan and Lebanon have adopted periodic reform agendas, pursued active diplomacy, and embraced flexible foreign policies. Stability has been a central concern of the Jordanian leadership since the onset of the Arab uprisings, with the monarchy adopting a strategy of "soft security" –minimal coercion paired with controlled liberalization.

Both countries have favored a governance model grounded in political compromise, external mediation, and adaptability to regional dynamics. The ruling elites prioritized preserving domestic equilibrium during the Arab uprisings by employing a strategy of "political containment": offering limited concessions and defusing public dissent through reform promises that, more often than not, remained unfulfilled.

Unlike the dramatic upheavals seen in neighboring states, the Arab Uprisings reached Jordan and Lebanon with relatively less intensity. In Jordan, protests were intermittent and focused on specific grievances. The protest movement mainly consisted of two groups: East Bank youth from tribal backgrounds (al-Hirak) and Islamists affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Hirak represented a cohort of politically savvy activists adept at using social media, advocating for economic and political reform while invoking national symbols to mobilize popular support –even going as far as questioning the

monarchy itself. In contrast, the Islamists adopted a more moderate stance following the uprisings, shifting from rigid positions toward a gradualist reformist approach.

In Lebanon, the protest movement was composed of two primary groups: civil activists affiliated with youth and independent movements, and opposition political parties that sought to capitalize on public anger to advance their own agendas. The civil activists represented a cohort of tech-savvy youth who embraced diverse political visions and advocated for economic and political reforms, employing slogans such as "*All of them means all of them*" to garner widespread public support—even calling into question the entire ruling class. In contrast, some traditional political forces adopted a more cautious approach, abandoning direct confrontation in favor of a gradual reformist stance aimed at securing gains within the existing system without challenging its core structure, the Lebanese case reflects the difficulty of forging a unified front among political actors, due to the sectarian nature of the system and the conflicting interests among various groups.

While some parties acknowledged the need for reforms—such as electoral law amendments and anti-corruption measures—they diverged sharply over major issues such as Hezbollah's arms and Lebanon's foreign alliances. The regime's response relied on mechanisms of political containment, including the formation of consensus governments and the deferral of critical decisions whenever possible. For the ruling elite, the protests of 2015 and 2019 posed a direct threat to the dominance of traditional power structures, prompting superficial concessions aimed at diffusing public anger without enacting substantial change. In Jordan, the protest movement stayed largely peaceful and tightly focused on discrete demands. Demonstrations unfolded as intermittent sit-ins, social-media campaigns and controlled marches, with security forces showing restraint and avoiding heavy-handed tactics. Clashes were rare and usually confined to brief scuffles or symbolic acts of civil disobedience. Even when al-Hirak activists pressed hard on economic and political reforms –at

times questioning the monarchy's decisions– the overall atmosphere remained one of spirited debate rather than street violence.

By contrast, in Lebanon the uprising frequently erupted into intense confrontations. What began as a broad, tech-savvy youth movement rapidly spilled into the streets, where protesters and security forces engaged in full-blown clashes. Barricades of burning tires, volleys of tear gas and rubber bullets became fixtures of Beirut's downtown and provincial cities alike. The heavy use of force by police and army units, combined with protesters' more aggressive tactics, underscored how Lebanon's sectarian fracture lines and institutional paralysis turned a reformist movement into a volatile, and often violent, contest for power.

In Jordan, demographic divisions continued to shape the political landscape. A longstanding divide persists between Jordanians of Palestinian origin—primarily concentrated in the western part of the kingdom and active in the private sector—and East Bank Jordanians, who form the core support base of the regime and dominate state institutions. This divide was further entrenched by privatization policies and neoliberal reforms, which altered the balance of economic and political power. While Jordanian politics cannot be reduced to a simple "Jordanian-Palestinian" dichotomy, this fault line remains a key vulnerability for the state –one that resurfaces most prominently in the contested narratives surrounding the events of Black September, alternately framed as evidence of state brutality or betrayal of the Palestinian cause, depending on the perspective.

Beyond domestic challenges, Jordan remains highly susceptible to regional and international developments. The Syrian crisis, in particular, imposed significant security and economic pressures, as the kingdom absorbed hundreds of thousands of refugees, straining its already fragile infrastructure. The rise of ISIS further complicated the security environment. Jordan adopted a balanced stance toward the Syrian conflict: it did not sever ties with the Assad regime, but at times supported segments of the opposition. It also cooperated

with the EU in managing the refugee file, seeking to strike a balance between security concerns and humanitarian obligations.

In Lebanon, sectarian and regional divisions have remained a key factor in shaping the political landscape. Socioeconomic elites are largely concentrated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, while traditional sectarian parties continue to dominate state institutions and security agencies. These divides have deepened due to the persistent use of confessional quotas and clientelist practices, which have reinforced sectarian influence rather than strengthening national institutions. Although Lebanese politics cannot be reduced to a simple binary of "Muslims versus Christians," this dichotomy continues to pervade political discourse –especially when invoking historical milestones such as the civil war and the Taif Agreement, which are alternately framed as necessary compromises for balance or as mechanisms of entrenched division, depending on the narrative espoused.

In addition to domestic challenges, Lebanon is continuously shaped by regional and international dynamics. The Syrian crisis introduced profound security and economic challenges, with Lebanon hosting over one million refugees, placing immense strain on its infrastructure and labor market. The rise of ISIS and unrest along the eastern border further complicated the security landscape. Lebanon adopted a fragmented stance toward the Syrian conflict, with political forces split between support for and opposition to the Assad regime, and this internal divide shaped state policy. Meanwhile, successive governments attempted to coordinate with the international community on refugee management, but political fragmentation impeded the development of a coherent national strategy capable of balancing security concerns with humanitarian obligations.

Many state officials emphasize the economic dimension as the primary driver of unrest and public discontent in both countries. However, this perspective often overlooks the deeply political nature of such discontent. Public frustration is not limited to economic deterioration; rather, it extends to direct

accusations against the political authorities themselves. While the severe economic crises have undeniably impacted the majority of citizens, it is misguided to reduce the current turmoil to economic grievances alone. Notably, corruption has remained the most consistent and unifying theme across protest movements in both Jordan and Lebanon—often more so than austerity measures or democratic reform.

This raises a fundamental political question: whom does the public hold responsible for corruption and economic mismanagement? In both countries, most citizens assign blame to senior government officials—or more broadly, to the political system itself. In Jordan, some go further, holding the monarchy directly accountable. Others approach the issue through an identity-politics lens, directing criticism at technocratic elites of Palestinian origin who are perceived as advancing neoliberal agendas. Conversely, an opposing narrative places blame on the traditional tribal elite of East Bank Jordanians—including elements of the intelligence and security apparatus—accusing them of sustaining a rigid entitlement system that preserves their privileges.

In Lebanon, most citizens blame the entrenched sectarian political system for corruption and misgovernance. While some view all political and sectarian leaders as equally culpable, others focus their criticism more narrowly, blaming the post-civil war ruling class for monopolizing power and reinforcing clientelism at the expense of genuine reform. Still, others interpret the crisis through a sectarian lens, targeting specific political factions—such as those with foreign backing or control over key economic sectors—and accusing them of impoverishing the country in pursuit of regional or personal interests. An opposing view, however, attributes the collapse to the financial elite and their alliance with powerful politicians, pointing to fiscal mismanagement and unsustainable debt as the root causes of Lebanon's economic downfall. Caught between these competing narratives, the Lebanese public remains divided: some demand the wholesale removal of the political class, while others prefer a more

pragmatic, gradual reform that preserves the country's delicate sectarian balance.

The core grievance among ordinary citizens in both countries is the sense of injustice stemming from being asked to make disproportionate economic sacrifices while believing that the political and economic elite remain insulated from similar hardships. This perspective is widely shared across social strata and reflects a growing consensus that the crisis—despite its deep economic roots—is ultimately a crisis of trust in the political system itself. The issue is not merely the lack of economic justice but also the absence of equal opportunities and rights. Injustice has become normalized in public life, even though it remains fundamentally unacceptable. The popular anger is always on the verge of explosion, needing only a small spark to ignite long-standing feelings of despair and hopelessness in the absence of any real prospects for reform. Thus, radical reform is no longer a luxury—it has become an urgent necessity.

The decline of the Arab uprisings' momentum in subsequent years brought a sense of relief within the Jordanian and Lebanese political establishments. Nonetheless, events following 2015 continued to underscore the fragility of the political order—an awareness shared not only by regime opponents but also by many regime supporters (Ryan, 2018).

Yet, a collective intuition and consciousness have linked political allegiance based on SNIs with the entrenched corruption of the ruling elite (Bishara, 2019). The political, military, and economic elite—through their alliance with the prevailing political system—have plundered national resources, forming patronage networks that divide up state assets and even public sector positions. In this system, loyalty based on subnational identity often outweighs merit and productivity, obstructing meaningful development and hindering the modernization of state institutions. The regime has consistently prioritized the interests of traditional elites over popular demands for social justice and sustainable development.

Some scholars argue that while both Jordan and Lebanon faced significant post-uprising challenges related to SNIs, the outcomes diverged due to differences in political systems, state authority, and refugee crisis management. Jordan's centralized monarchy enabled a more coherent and effective response, whereas Lebanon's fragmented sectarian model exacerbated existing vulnerabilities. This contrast underscores the crucial role that governance structures play in managing SNIs and safeguarding national security.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1. Overview of the Study

This concluding chapter serves as a final analytical juncture, aiming to synthesize the core findings of the dissertation in direct relation to its central research question: How do SNIs affect national security in Middle Eastern states, specifically in the cases of Jordan and Lebanon during the post–Arab Uprisings era? By conducting a comprehensive examination of the political, social, and security-related variables in both countries, the study has rigorously tested its three foundational hypotheses and offered nuanced insights into the complex interplay between sectarian, ethnic, and tribal affiliations on one hand, and national security frameworks on the other.

Accordingly, this chapter highlights the principal theoretical and empirical conclusions of the comparative analysis, with particular emphasis on the convergences and divergences in how SNIs are negotiated, instrumentalized, or contested within each state's security architecture and political system.

Jordan and Lebanon, although both located in the Middle East and sharing certain aspects of regional influence, differ markedly in their political systems, their approaches to national security, and the challenges they face regarding SNIs. Both countries operate within a complex social fabric, and while they have confronted economic hardships and refugee-related challenges in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, identity issues have been exacerbated by the fragmentation of a unified national identity, the security architecture of the ruling regime, regional rivalries, and other contributing factors.

In terms of political systems and governance, Jordan functions as a constitutional monarchy with the Hashemite family at its helm. The monarchy wields significant authority over both domestic and foreign policy. Jordan's political system includes limited democratic elements, such as a parliament, yet the monarchy retains ultimate power over national decisions. This centralized structure enables the King of Jordan to make swift decisions concerning national

security and foreign affairs. The monarchy supports a centralized political framework that empowers the king to implement security policies more effectively. This system has allowed Jordan to maintain stability and exert moderate control over various social factions by integrating tribes and elite groups into the state apparatus.

In contrast, Lebanon operates as a parliamentary democracy with a consociational (power-sharing) system based on sectarian quotas. Key government positions are allocated to different religious groups (the president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim). This division is intended to prevent any single group from dominating but often results in deadlock, as policies and decisions require consensus among sectarian elites. Such a system impedes the swift formulation and implementation of national security decisions and complicates efforts to establish unified governance.

The decentralized power structure in Lebanon complicates national security, as the various groups have divergent interests and often align with different foreign powers, thereby undermining Lebanon's ability to implement cohesive security policies. The core distinction lies in the fact that Jordan's monarchy provides a stable and centralized system with clear authority, whereas Lebanon's power-sharing arrangement is more fragmented, frequently weakening the authority of the state and complicating security efforts.

With respect to national security and military structure, Jordan maintains a strong, centralized military establishment that is largely loyal to the monarchy. The Jordanian Armed Forces are professional and receive substantial support from the US, aiding in counterterrorism operations and border security. The Jordanian Armed Forces, along with the General Intelligence Directorate, are robust and centralized institutions that exert considerable control over security matters. The monarchy directs these bodies, allowing Jordan to maintain a coherent security policy and to respond effectively to both internal and external threats. Conversely, Lebanon's security structure is fragmented and deeply

affected by sectarian divisions. Although the LAF officially operate under state authority, Hezbollah functions as a parallel force with significant autonomy. This issue of "dual authority" complicates Lebanon's ability to uphold unified national defense policies, especially since Hezbollah's allegiances align closely with Iran. The LAF receive some international aid, but their operational independence is limited due to the influence of various political factions and Hezbollah.

While Lebanese security institutions, including the army, are generally respected, they face significant constraints in areas dominated by Hezbollah. Despite being seen as a neutral force, the limited presence and authority of the LAF in these regions hamper the implementation of a unified security strategy. The fragmented nature of control undermines Lebanon's ability to address security threats in a coherent manner. The key distinction: Jordan's centralized security institutions reinforce national unity, whereas Lebanon's divided security apparatus struggles to achieve coherence due to Hezbollah's independent operations.

Turning to SNIs and social cohesion, Jordan possesses a more unified sense of identity compared to Lebanon, despite underlying divisions among Jordanians, as previously mentioned. The monarchy has worked to integrate citizens in order to construct a relatively stable, albeit stratified, social fabric, in which loyalty to the Hashemite monarchy often supersedes identity-based divisions. In stark contrast, Lebanon is highly fragmented along sectarian lines. Religious identity serves as a primary marker of social and political affiliation, and the consociational system reinforces this segmentation. The influence of external actors such as Iran (which supports Hezbollah) and Saudi Arabia (which backs Sunni groups) further intensifies sectarian divisions. Social cohesion in Lebanon is fragile, with loyalties often divided between sectarian and national identities.

In terms of foreign relations and regional influence, Jordan maintains a balanced foreign policy, seeking amicable relations with the US, neighboring

Gulf countries, and Israel. The peace treaty between Jordan and Israel has bolstered Jordan's role as a mediator in regional conflicts and attracted substantial foreign aid, particularly from the US, which supports Jordanian stability and security. Lebanon, by contrast, is heavily influenced by regional powers due to its sectarian composition. Iran's support for Hezbollah has placed Lebanon squarely within the broader geopolitical rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, creating internal challenges. Hezbollah's involvement in Syria on the side of the Assad regime has strained Lebanon's relations with other Arab states and entangled the country in regional conflicts, despite its official policy of neutrality. Lebanon also hosts a large number of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, further complicating its domestic and foreign policy landscape.

Elites in Jordan, particularly those from prominent tribal families, wield significant influence in both the political and economic spheres. The monarchy maintains their loyalty through systems of patronage, ensuring that these elites remain aligned with the state's security objectives and broader goals of national stability. Economic and political elites in Jordan are typically integrated within the state structure, which reduces the likelihood of fragmentation or the emergence of rival power centers. In contrast, political and economic elites in Lebanon are frequently affiliated with specific sectarian communities and exert substantial authority within their respective groups. Influential families and leaders such as the Hariris, the Gemayels, and the Jumblatts maintain networks of patronage with their followers. This structure often incentivizes elites to prioritize sectarian interests over national unity, thus rendering Lebanon's security landscape highly susceptible to elite-driven divisions.

The key distinction lies in the fact that Jordanian elites are more unified under the monarchy, thereby contributing to national stability. In Lebanon, however, elites are divided along sectarian lines, making national cohesion significantly more difficult to achieve. Both Jordan and Lebanon share several internal and external structural and policy characteristics. Both Jordan and Lebanon are situated in a turbulent region of the Middle East, bordering

countries that are either experiencing ongoing conflicts or have recently emerged from them (Jordan borders Iraq, Syria and Israel; Lebanon borders Syria and Israel). Their proximity to conflict zones places them within complex regional dynamics, compelling them to navigate delicate relations with powerful neighboring states. Both countries function as buffer states in broader regional power struggles, positioning themselves strategically to avoid direct involvement while simultaneously being affected by the surrounding conflicts.

Jordan and Lebanon both heavily rely on external aid to sustain their economies and bolster national security. Jordan receives substantial financial and military support from the US and Gulf countries, while Lebanon benefits from assistance provided by various international organizations and Western allies, particularly in support of the LAF. This dependency shapes their internal policies and influences foreign relations, as both states must align themselves—at least partially—with the agendas or interests of external powers to secure continued aid. Both nations host significant refugee populations due to ongoing regional conflicts, most notably from Palestine and Syria. These communities place tremendous strain on national economies, infrastructure, and social services, generating potential security risks due to limited integration and marginalization. Refugee camps in both countries are vulnerable to extremism and unrest, exacerbated by poverty and a lack of access to adequate services. This reality increases the risk of destabilization, especially in contexts where state institutions are already under pressure.

In Jordan, the monarchy carefully balances tribal loyalty with national unity by integrating tribal elements into the military and government structures. Lebanon, by contrast, manages its multi-confessional society through a sectarian political system. Despite these differing frameworks, both governments face the fundamental challenge of unifying diverse population groups and managing the political influence of sectarian or tribal identities in a manner that preserves national security. Both countries must navigate these identity dynamics

cautiously, as fragmentation can pose serious threats to social cohesion and long-term stability.

Jordan and Lebanon both pursue neutral foreign policy strategies to shield themselves from internal destabilization. Jordan adopts a balanced stance to avoid entanglement in regional conflicts –particularly the Saudi-Iranian rivalry– while Lebanon officially adopted the "disassociation policy" in 2012 to avoid direct involvement in regional power contests. This commitment to neutrality stems from the necessity of maintaining internal equilibrium and avoiding alienation of key domestic constituencies, many of which maintain cultural or political affiliations with different regional powers.

Both countries face significant internal challenges due to the existence of parallel power structures that challenge central authority. In Lebanon, Hezbollah operates as an autonomous militia and political entity with significant military capacity and external alliances, particularly with Iran. In Jordan, tribal networks exert considerable influence in governance and loyalty structures, occasionally challenging the centralization of authority. These parallel structures complicate the ability of the state to enforce uniform policies and may limit the government's control over national security. Their presence introduces internal constraints on sovereignty and governance, making it more difficult for the state to present a unified front in the face of both internal and external threats.

In sum, while Jordan and Lebanon differ in their political frameworks and levels of institutional centralization, they converge in many structural realities and policy orientations. These shared features –ranging from geostrategic positioning to internal sociopolitical dynamics–highlight the complexity of governance and security management in small, resource-constrained states operating in a highly volatile regional environment.

7.2. The Impact of SNIs on National Security

Our study focuses on the politics of SNIs under circumstances where these identities—such as ethnic, religious, or tribal identities—become central to

conflict and national security. The primary focus is on the subnational level. In early approaches to social science literature, essentialist or "primitive" approaches prevailed, which assumed that SNIs are the fundamental basis for belonging and loyalty, and thus the primary source of tensions and conflicts between groups. According to this approach, ethnic and religious conflict is viewed as reflecting "ancient" and deeply rooted hatred that is difficult, if not impossible, to quell.

Although these interpretations are common in the media and mainstream narratives about identity-based tensions in the Middle East, such explanations are widely rejected by social science scholars. The truth is that identity-based conflicts rarely emerge in a continuous manner, and when they do, they tend to explode at specific times and in specific areas, undermining the assumptions based on essentialist concepts of identity. Instead, social sciences and contemporary histories adopt perspectives that see the politicization of SNIs as not being inevitable, even in regions where multiple groups coexist within the same political system. The main challenge in this context lies in explaining how subnational identity divisions arise in certain places or periods of time. Here, we offer answers with overlapping dimensions about how SNIs become politicized and, consequently, how such tensions can be alleviated in favor of a more inclusive and tolerant national identity.

For this study, in situations where states suffer from weakness or a lack of security, SNIs tend to become more politically prominent. Thus, they significantly affect state-building processes and the dynamics that unfold within them. In environments characterized by a strong state capable of enforcing its power over its territory, SNIs usually have less influence, as there is no need to politicize these identities. The first dimension discussed here in the Middle East concerns the absence of institutional support, such as social or security protection, leading people to resort to SNIs as a means of ensuring safety and access to resources. In authoritarian environments where civil action is restricted, identity-based communities become the only structure capable of

functioning relatively independently, making them a primary source of social and security order.

States with strong institutional capabilities that exercise actual sovereignty over their territory tend to reduce identity-based politicization. Conversely, when a state fails to provide protection to its citizens, either through social services or security guarantees, individuals may turn to other political alternatives, such as religious institutions. This dynamic is more pronounced in authoritarian environments that impose strict restrictions on the work of civil organizations, making religious communities often the only organizations capable of providing social services and economic support relatively independently. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Lebanon, where the role of the welfare state intersects with sectarianism.

The second dimension, based on the constructivist perspective, primarily focuses on the policies and practices employed by colonial ruling powers, notably the "divide and rule" principle, where colonial forces favored one ethnic or religious group over another, leading to the reshaping or entrenching of SNIs in new ways. These policies significantly contributed to creating a political and social environment based on division, fueling identity-based conflicts in the post-colonial period.

The third dimension is linked to the rise of identity-based politics because economic and political interests are the primary drivers of political mobilization on subnational identity grounds. Political actors, particularly elites, utilize symbols and discourses rooted in SNIs to achieve specific goals, often political or security-related. This pattern is clearly evident in the Middle East, where strategic dimensions are followed by political elites in exploiting identities for their own benefit, making them more flexible and subject to change based on political and economic interests.

Lebanon stands as a prominent example of a sectarian political system, where the Lebanese political system is designed in a consensual manner, distributing government positions according to sectarian affiliations. Although

this system was seen before the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 as a successful model of consensual governance, its heavy reliance on sectarianism exacerbated political and social tensions. Additionally, prior political agreements between sectarian parties weakened the effectiveness of any incentives that encouraged politicians to attract support from outside their sects, leading to the entrenchment of sectarianism and enhancing the prominence of religion in political life.

The real dilemma lies in the development of SNIs in the post-establishment phase of political systems and states in the Middle East. To serve the interests of elites, people have tended to divide the world into categories such as “us” versus “them” (the Other), leading to the reinforcement of biases between different groups. These biases intensify when a group's identity is perceived as threatened, prompting individuals to cling more strongly to their collective identity. The impact of these dynamics is particularly evident in armed conflicts, where identity-based discourses escalate during crises. In brief, the dynamics governing the escalation of tensions surrounding SNIs are influenced by a range of factors, including past colonial policies, the weakness of state institutions, political elites' strategies, as well as the institutional design of political systems.

Now, how do perceptions of threat, whether real or imagined, enhance political prominence of SNIs? In other words, when a particular group feels threatened –whether by the state, other groups, or as a result of political or economic circumstances– individuals within that group tend to cling more strongly to their subnational identity, thereby increasing the politicization of that identity. But what are the sources of these threats? The answer requires considering the broader political context, that is, how national and regional factors shape these threats and amplify the importance of subnational identity. The political system in the Middle East expands the definition of threats and security risks, introducing new dimensions in the use of security issues to serve purely political agendas. Security has become a strategic tool in the hands of

some political entities, which seek to marginalize their opponents by portraying them as sources of existential threats, whether at the individual, communal, or even national security level. This usage is an extension of the concept of "securitization," as proposed by Barry Buzan, who argues that transforming any issue into a security issue is achieved through a discursive process based on political language. This language aims to establish a certain perception that there is a serious threat to the survival of a given entity, whether it be an individual, a group, a state, or even a cultural or religious identity.

Lebanon is used here as a model for understanding how political sectarianism evolved under colonialism and its aftermath. The sectarian political system, along with the sectarian-based welfare system, has contributed to reinforcing religious identities as a primary factor in politics and social life. In other words, the state itself—through its institutions and laws—helped entrench sectarianism rather than working to reduce it.

In Jordan, SNIs play a complex role in shaping political and social dynamics. The Jordanian society is characterized by a diversity of sects and ethnicities, yet the Jordanian national identity remains the overarching framework that the political system seeks to reinforce. At the same time, there are strong influences of tribal and ethnic identities, with tribal members forming a significant part of the population and leadership in Jordan. In this context, tribal identities have a clear impact on local politics, particularly in certain regions such as the eastern and southern areas, where the challenge lies in balancing relationships between the tribes and the state. While the Jordanian political system aims to maintain political stability within the framework of a centralized state, SNIs can be exploited by certain political actors to enhance their power within the state, particularly by leveraging their tribal and ethnic connections. This is evident in the role of tribes in parliamentary elections, where they are often a central factor in determining political outcomes, contributing to the entrenchment of these identities and strengthening their influence in Jordanian politics.

Sectarian, doctrinal, ethnic, and tribal pluralism in Arab and Islamic societies does not inherently represent a fundamental issue or structural barrier in itself; rather, it is a manifestation of diversity that enriches societies and strengthens their integration. The problem arises when this diversity is subjected to an ideological perspective, leading to the emergence of a group as a result of an exclusionary discourse that seeks to negate and eliminate the "other." Consequently, SNIs become ideological tools used to achieve political influence at the expense of the national identity, marginalizing the common elements that contribute to the consolidation of social unity and stability, and thus achieving the minimum levels of required national security.

Even after the Arab uprisings, ideologically-driven SNIs remain deeply rooted in Arab societies to this day, as these identities become positioned within the state structure and exploit it at the expense of national interests. The dilemma today lies in the fragility of the Arab reality, which has made these conflicts more dangerous, as they are no longer confined to tensions between the authority and society or to competition within the political elite. Rather, they have transformed into an extended conflict within the fabric of the entire national community, affecting neighborhoods, regions, and even familial relationships, making them akin to what Belkeziz describes as *fitna* (sedition; civil strife). While the uprisings or popular movements undermine the foundations of the state and authority through a conflict between the ruler and the ruled, *fitna* causes a deeper rupture by tearing apart the social fabric itself and transforming society into an internal battleground (Belkeziz, 2008, pp. 132-157).

These groups represent closed systems that lead to the fragmentation of the nation and its transformation into warring entities, reinforcing isolation between individuals. The "other" is seen as a separate or even rival entity. As a result, loyalty to the state diminishes in favor of sub-loyalties, whether sectarian, tribal, doctrinal, or religious, weakening the concept of citizenship and leading to the absence of equality in rights and duties. This results in the emergence of

artificial social structures based on class differentiation and discrimination between societal components.

Many people in the Arab world still feel that their primary affiliation is with the family, tribe, sect, or ethnicity, rather than with the nation-state. This phenomenon is clearly evident in countries like Jordan and Lebanon, where certain groups and identities have become more firmly established than the state itself, and loyalty to them surpasses loyalty to the homeland. This fragmentation is largely due to the failure of the system to establish a national identity capable of achieving political, cultural, and social integration, which led it to derive its legitimacy from traditional structures based on identity, practices of exclusion, monopolization, and the promotion of religious, tribal, or sectarian allegiances. Furthermore, the absence of democracy, the spread of authoritarianism, and economic backwardness have contributed to a decline in the sense of belonging to the state, opening the door for alternative loyalties to emerge.

In light of these developments, the region has witnessed profound transformations in the concept of identity, which is now defined according to concepts and values rooted in ethnicity, religious creed, cultural particularity, and sectarian differences, contributing to deepening internal divisions. This division has been reflected in religious and cultural discourses, influencing individual behaviors, where people now live in isolation from the "other," even in places that are supposed to be hubs of interaction, such as universities. This isolation has contributed to the entrenchment of stereotypes and the strengthening of mutual perceptions that depict the "other" as an adversary or threat, further intensifying social, political, and security polarization.

In this context, imperial powers no longer need direct military intervention to extend their influence in the region; it suffices to employ ideologically-driven SNIs as tools to achieve hegemony and expand control. Minorities or competing identities in the Arab world have become one of the most dangerous weapons used by external powers to dismantle societies and weaken states, as clearly evidenced in many Arab countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. Thus,

ideological identity becomes the most effective means to control the fate of Arab societies, in light of the ongoing and systematic policies of fragmentation and depletion.

Jordan's National Security Response Strategies

Jordan's national security strategy aims to integrate SNIs into a national project that preserves security and stability. However, this strategy may also rely on confrontation or the use of force during crises. In addition to negotiation and containment as key mechanisms for pursuing a policy of de-escalation and reconciliation, the government seeks peaceful solutions and crisis management methods that prevent escalation. However, it also incorporates proactive and restrictive measures when the state perceives direct threats to the security of the regime.

It is clear, therefore, that the Jordanian strategy strikes a balance between several elements, which include:

1. Containment: The state frequently resorts to containment strategies to avoid open escalation, especially in sensitive crises of a social or political nature.

2. Limited Confrontation: The regime may resort to direct confrontation and arrests, particularly in situations where activities are considered a direct threat to the stability of the regime or are seen as incitement to chaos.

3. Proactive Measures: Security agencies take proactive steps to monitor and control political activities, especially when they are oppositional or considered anti-state.

4. Restricting Freedom of Expression: The regime implements measures to limit certain political activities, including political arrests when necessary, to curb the spread of discourse perceived as a threat to

stability. Thus, Jordan's approach blends containment and diplomacy on one hand, with restrictions and confrontation during major crises or when crossing sensitive "red lines" as defined by the regime.

5. Balancing National Identity through Education and Public Policy: The Jordanian government has worked to strengthen a unified national identity, with a focus on "Jordan First" campaigns to enhance loyalty to the Hashemite monarchy. Educational reforms and public service announcements emphasize unity and diminish the importance of divisive narratives, particularly concerning Palestinian versus Jordanian origins (Al-Sharafat, 2023). Jordan has also attempted to integrate Jordanians of Palestinian origin, including through economic initiatives aimed at improving access to job opportunities. However, challenges remain in achieving a balance between integration and the political sensitivities surrounding representation (Muasher, 2021).

The Jordanian government has adopted a dual approach to managing SNIs, promoting a unified national identity while maintaining the distinctiveness of different groups. Efforts to strengthen the sense of Jordanian unity are reflected in government discourse, national educational curricula, and public celebrations of Jordanian heritage. At the same time, the government acknowledges the importance of accommodating identity-based differences, particularly between East Bank Jordanians and Jordanians of Palestinian origin, to prevent alienation and dissatisfaction. However, these integration policies are not always sufficient to overcome historical divisions and economic disparities between identity groups. Political representation remains biased in favor of East Bank Jordanians, and refugee groups remain marginalized in Jordanian society, relying heavily on international aid for survival. Addressing these disparities while enhancing social cohesion is critical to Jordan's national security, as unresolved identity-based issues may lead to social fragmentation, unrest, and the weakening of national identity.

Lebanon's National Security Response Strategies

Lebanon's national security strategy is based on the principle of sectarian consensus, which is one of the fundamental pillars of the stability of the Lebanese political system. In times of crisis, the Lebanese system relies on several tools, including containing sectarian tensions, negotiating, and making concessions to maintain balance among the sects. However, the system may resort to restrictive measures and proactive actions when certain activities are considered a direct threat to the stability of the system. Key elements of the Lebanese strategy include:

1. Containment: This is often used in times of severe sectarian crises to prevent the escalation of violence, while seeking to avoid open confrontation between the conflicting parties.

2. Negotiation and Compromise: The policy of political concessions and sectarian settlements is an urgent necessity to maintain stability between different sects, as it allows for the preservation of social and political balance.

3. Limited Restriction: The government or influential parties may impose restrictions on activities perceived as a threat to the sect or its interests.

4. Proactive Engagement: Political and security forces utilize proactive measures to prevent activities that might destabilize the sectarian balance, such as monitoring sectarian political activities.

5. Violence: The use of both legitimate and illegitimate violence: Violence, whether within the framework of official laws or outside of them, represents a controversial tool in Lebanon's national security strategies. It is sometimes employed to control situations or achieve political and security objectives. In the Lebanese context, the lines between legitimate and illegitimate violence often blur. For instance, the state may turn a

blind eye to certain acts of violence carried out by armed factions linked to specific sects as part of an unspoken policy to avoid broader confrontation. This overlap reflects the complexity of Lebanon's political and security system, where the state does not hold a monopoly on the use of force in all regions.

6. Political Containment: The state adopts moderate policies to avoid political exclusion, particularly during sensitive sectarian crises, thus preventing the escalation of internal tensions.

7.3. Final Remarks

By conducting a comprehensive examination of the political, social, and security-related variables in both countries, the study has rigorously tested its three foundational hypotheses and offered nuanced insights into the complex interplay between sectarian, ethnic, and tribal affiliations on one hand, and national security frameworks on the other.

The comparative analysis reveals that while Jordan and Lebanon exhibit distinct historical, institutional, and demographic trajectories, both states face persistent challenges in integrating SNIs into a cohesive national framework. In Jordan, SNIs—especially tribal affiliations and the East Bank–Palestinian divide—are often co-opted into the state apparatus, serving as both a stabilizing force and a latent source of tension. In contrast, Lebanon's confessional system entrenches sectarian identities as the formal basis of political organization, rendering the state highly vulnerable to fragmentation, external interference, and chronic governance paralysis.

The dissertation's findings confirm the first hypothesis: that SNIs exert a profound influence on national security policymaking, often shaping or constraining the state's capacity to act independently of ethno-sectarian loyalties. In both countries, partial loyalties are not merely social realities but have become entrenched mechanisms through which political power is

contested and allocated. This undermines the construction of an inclusive national identity and fosters a fragmented security landscape.

The second hypothesis—that security policies often diverge from objective national interests due to the ideological or strategic preferences of dominant actors—was also substantiated. The study found that security strategies in both Jordan and Lebanon are frequently shaped less by systemic imperatives than by the ruling elites' attempts to preserve power, placate dominant identity groups, or balance competing domestic and international pressures. As a result, subnational dynamics are often securitized, instrumentalized, or ignored depending on regime interests rather than national cohesion.

The third hypothesis, which posited that regimes prioritize self-preservation over collective security by manipulating identity-based divisions, was particularly evident in the Lebanese case. Lebanon's political elites have consistently reinforced sectarian divisions through patronage networks and institutional power-sharing arrangements that serve their own interests. In Jordan, while the monarchy has projected a more cohesive national vision, it has nonetheless relied on tribal patronage and identity-based loyalty structures to maintain regime stability—especially during times of regional or internal unrest.

Theoretically, the dissertation contributes to constructivist scholarship by demonstrating how identity is not merely a background variable but an active agent in shaping security outcomes. SNIs in the Middle East are socially constructed through historical narratives, institutional frameworks, and political instrumentalization. These identities are reconfigured in response to both internal state dynamics and regional power contests, particularly in the post-2011 environment. The interplay between identity and security is therefore recursive and contingent, rather than static or unidirectional.

Methodologically, the study employed a composite framework combining horizontal structural analysis (in the Jordanian case) and vertical sectarian stratification (in the Lebanese case). This dual approach allowed for a more

textured understanding of how different forms of identity (tribal, ethnic, sectarian) operate across varied political systems. It also helped illuminate the broader patterns and divergences in state responses to identity-based challenges.

In practical terms, the findings underscore the urgent need for Middle Eastern states to adopt inclusive security strategies that transcend identity-based exclusion and sectarian patronage. Fostering civic national identities, reforming governance institutions, and promoting equitable political participation are essential to mitigating the risks posed by subnational fragmentation. However, such reforms must be accompanied by regional de-escalation and a reduction in external manipulation of identity politics.

Ultimately, the dissertation concludes that SNIs, while not inherently destabilizing, become security threats when they are marginalized, politicized, or manipulated by state and NSAs. The durability of national security in Jordan, Lebanon, and the broader Arab Mashreq will depend on each state's capacity to renegotiate the social contract in ways that accommodate diversity without entrenching division. This requires moving beyond short-term regime survival strategies toward long-term nation-building efforts grounded in legitimacy, accountability, and pluralism.

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Appendices A - CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Karar: 97190

KARAR(ISSUE NUMBER): 28.11.2023/

T.C.
ANKARA SOSYAL BİLİMLER ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
SOSYAL VE BEŞERİ BİLİMLER ARAŞTIRMALARI
VE
BİLİMSEL YAYIN ETİK KURULU
(SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA
INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS COMMITTEE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND
HUMANITIES RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION)

ETİK ONAY BELGESİ
(CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL)

Araştırma Yöntemi (Research Method)	Mülakat Diğer : Focus groups
Araştırmanın Adı (Study Title)	THE DYNAMICS OF SUB-NATIONAL IDENTITIES ON NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF JORDAN AND LEBANON (2018-2019) Orta Doğu'da Ulusal Güvenliğe Alt Ulusal Kimliklerin Dinamikleri: Ürdün ve Lübnan'ın Karşılaştırmalı Analizi (2018-2019)
Sorumlu Araştırmacının Adı Soyadı (Principal Researcher Name Surname)	ALI HIJAZI
Karar (Committee Decision)	UYGUNDUR

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. M. Hakan TÜRKÇAPAR
Başkan (Chair)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Aslı AKAY
Üye(Member)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Ejder OKUMUŞ
Üye(Member)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Mustafa ÇEVİK
Üye(Member)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Sutay YAVUZ
Üye(Member)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. İsmail ÇAKIR
Üye(Member)

e-imzalıdır
Prof. Dr. Mehmet Emin BİLGE
Üye(Member)

Belge Takip Adresi : https://turkiye.gov.tr/ebd?eK=5451&eD=B544KE1V7Z&eS=97190

Bu belge 5070 sayılı Elektronik İmza Kanununun 5. Maddesi gereğince güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

Appendices B - IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM CHART

IJMES TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC, PERSIAN, AND TURKISH

Consonants

A = Arabic, P = Persian, OT = Ottoman Turkish, MT = Modern Turkish

	A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT		A	P	OT	MT
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ʾ	—	ز	z	z	z	z	ك	k	k *or* g	k *or* ñ	k *or* n
ب	b	b	b	b *or* p	ژ	—	zh	j	j				*or* y	*or* y
پ	—	p	p	p	س	s	s	s	s				*or* ğ	*or* ğ
ت	t	t	t	t	ش	sh	sh	ş	ş	گ	—	g	g	g
ث	th	s̲	s̲	s	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ṣ	s	ل	l	l	l	l
ج	j	j	c	c	ض	ḍ	ż	ż	z	م	m	m	m	m
چ	—	ch	ç	ç	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	t	ن	n	n	n	n
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	h	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	z	ه	h	h	h[1]	h[1]
خ	kh	kh	h	h	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ʿ	—	و	w	v *or* u	v	v
د	d	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	g *or* ğ	g *or* ğ	ي	y	y	y	y
ذ	dh	z̲	z̲	z	ف	f	f	f	f	ة	a[2]			
ر	r	r	r	r	ق	q	q	ķ	k	ال	[3]			

1 When h is not final. 2 In construct state: at. 3 For the article, al- and -l-.

Vowels

	ARABIC AND PERSIAN		OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH
Long ا or	ـا	ā	ā
	ـو	ū	ū
	ـي	ī	ī
			words of Arabic and Persian origin only
Doubled	ـيّ	iyy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	ـوّ	uww (final form ū)	uvv
Diphthongs	ـَو	au *or* aw	ev
	ـَي	ai *or* ay	ey
Short	ـَ	a	a *or* e
	ـُ	u	u *or* ü / o *or* ö
	ـِ	i	ı *or* i

For Ottoman Turkish, authors may either transliterate or use the modern Turkish orthography.