Ties that Bind
Family, Tribe, Nation, and the Rise of Arab Individualism

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Executive Summary

Social changes around the world are having a disproportionate impact on Arab societies. Loyalty and obligation have played a particularly strong role in how Arabs relate to each other and to their rulers, and a rising individualism in the region poses challenges for family patriarchs, tribal elders, and government leaders.

Networks of trust are a universal phenomenon. They have been particularly influential in the Arab world in part because of cultural and religious affinity but also for practical reasons: sustained security challenges, limited government capacity, and limited mobility. Arabs have committed time and money—and sometimes blood—to sustain ties with family and tribe.

Arabs increasingly report that these networks no longer serve their interests and are too time consuming. They live farther from extended families and work longer hours, and they seek to devote more time to friends and immediate family. Communications and social media have also given them alternative sources of information and alternative entertainment options. Technology also gives people privacy, and individuals seek it much more than in the past. As Arabs feel more economically strapped, and as a sense of individualism grows, families and tribes become less consequential. Some people are more willing to put their faith in government; more simply feel a need to become more self-reliant.

This study concludes that it is a mistake to assume that loyalty plays the same central role in Arabs’ lives that it did a generation ago. There are places and circumstances in which it does, but loyalty is a variable and not a constant. We conclude that individualism is on the rise in the region, affecting the way people relate to power and to each other. We also conclude that individuals constantly make cost-benefit calculations about adhering to expected norms of behavior. Most still want an extended network to rely on in extreme circumstances, but they are more likely to rely on friends and colleagues day to day. We find that people are much more likely to rely on tribe and family in circumstances where security, government capacity, and mobility is low. Urban elites in safe areas have a different set of attitudes than the poor and vulnerable. Finally, we find that young people are showing a much wider range of attitudes toward loyalty and obligation than their elders, partly because of technology and partly because of economics.
Introduction

The frontier looms large in the American memory. Schoolchildren are brought up on stories of real-life nineteenth-century pioneers like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone and fictional ones like Paul Bunyan. Westerns were the most popular genre of films in the first half of the twentieth century, telling stories of small bands of cowboys or gunslingers roaming the American West. One of the most iconic U.S. presidents, Abraham Lincoln, made much of his origins in a one-room log cabin, a reminder both of his humble origins on the frontier and his independent streak.

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY before there was a United States, descendants of Europeans set out to tame the North American continent. They hunted and fished, cleared land, and practiced subsistence agriculture. Land was free, but it was quickly exhausted. Pioneers pressed westward from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Forged by this environment, Americans came to prize a certain coarseness, and a certain practicality. The Europe from which many descended revered its aristocracy and its customs. Americans had little time for either. As the historian Frederick Jackson Turner observed almost a century ago, “the frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control. The tax-gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression.”

If the United States has a strong chord of memory with the frontier, Arab societies have a similar focus on the desert. Where Americans have viewed pioneers on the frontier as their mythical model of probity, Arabs have often looked to Bedouins. Arabs focus on the desert despite the fact that the Prophet Muhammad was a city-dweller. Arab cities have produced untold splendors—medieval Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus all were jewels of civilization. Even so, the desert has endured in Arabs’ imagination as a place of purity and simplicity, and they have venerated the Bedouin, who rely on like-minded kin to both shelter and fight for their own.
“If the United States has a strong chord of memory with the frontier, Arab societies have a similar focus on the desert.”

And for more than 800 years, Arabs have been complaining that it is all going to pot. The great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun lamented in 1377 that urban residents “have become used to laziness and ease,” entrusting their security to others and soon becoming “like women and children, who depend on the master of the house.”2 Ibn Khaldun lionized “savage Arab Bedouin” for their fortitude, and he looked down upon those who follow man-made laws that “weaken their souls and diminish their stamina.”3 It is almost as if he shared the rugged frontier mentality that conquered the North American continent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But whereas Americans on the frontier prized individualism, Ibn Khaldun argued for a fierce collectivism, pursued by teams led by a chief or leader and bound together by blood ties. He judged that tribal militias comprising courageous young relatives would be feared because their adversaries would know they could count on each other. He argued that “one feels shame when one’s relatives are treated unjustly or attacked, and one wishes to intervene between them and whatever peril or destruction threatens them. This is a natural urge in man, for as long as there have been human beings.”4

Although Arab culture—like U.S. culture—is both dynamic and diverse, ties of obligation, often through family and tribe, have been a consistent theme in Arab history. In general,
strong states have been rare, institutions have been weak, and rulers’ remit has been circumscribed. Pledges of loyalty, either made directly or building upon those made in earlier generations, have sustained power for centuries.

Much of this changed in the twentieth century, and still more is changing in the early part of the twenty-first. Modernity has changed the roles and capabilities of states, and it has created state obligations to citizens that are unprecedented. The order of Arab life is changing.

Some of the changes are the same ones that Ibn Khaldun complained about 800 years ago, as cities and states have grown and given rise to laws and police to enforce them. The customary law of the desert no longer prevails. Four out of five Saudis lived in rural areas in 1950; only one in six do today. Some changes are newer, as mobility has spread even nuclear families over great distances and diminished both the support that family members can give to one another as well as the supervision that elders can exercise over their younger relatives. And some changes are very new, as communications technology exposes individuals to new ideas and grants individuals an unprecedented level of privacy and autonomy.

This paper will analyze how Arabs’ ideas about their obligations to each other, to their families, to their tribes, and to their states are changing. It also will analyze how states are responding to those changes. It is based on recent fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Tunisia, where three CSIS researchers met with 111 individuals for semi-structured interviews between February and May 2018. Most of the interviews were with individuals, but we did at least one group interview in each country. Interlocutors came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, although elites were over-represented in the sample. We interviewed 47 women and 64 men, mostly in Arabic or English, although some of the Tunisia interviews were conducted in French. We met with people inside capital cities and outside of them, and although our sample size skewed toward individuals between the age of 15 and 35, we met with people of various ages.

Our findings reflected that diversity. There is no single perspective within states, let alone among them. Many younger people see things differently than do older people, the wealthy see them differently than the poor, and urban dwellers see them differently than people in the countryside. Ideas about tribal identity and tribal commitment also vary markedly from person to person and from place to place. There is no formula to understand how these obligations are applied. What we did find, however, is a relatively consistent set of drivers of change, and an evolving framework to understand them that this paper will lay out.
In general, the research revealed that the sense of obligation to family, clan, and tribe is diminishing in the Arab world. Many of the causes of this change are identical to trends occurring worldwide. Young people feel busy and impatient, and they want to spend more time with friends. They don’t see older forms of association—with extended family, with religious communities, and with neighbors—advancing their interests. They live farther from family and get around more easily than any generation of the past, and they take advantage of their freedom to associate with whomever they wish.

One of the products of the changes underway is a striking rise in individualism across the region. Some citizens appear to believe that they need to take their fate in their own hands, as no one else will protect their interests. In pulling back from primordial ties, these individuals are placing a large bet on the effectiveness and efficiency of the state and on the state’s ability to enforce the rule of law to protect the interests of all of its citizens equally.

But withdrawing into individualism is not the only response to these changes. In an alternative response, voluntary ideological affiliations have taken the place of blood ties in some instances. We have seen this reflected in the Arab uprisings of 2011, where ideological ties among diverse populations bound activists together in heterogeneous groups. We also have seen it in the proud ethnic and national diversity of groups such as al Qaeda and the Islamic State group (ISG), and also in the Muslim Brotherhood, which is relatively homogeneous in each state in which it exists. These sorts of ties fulfill many of the same needs and generate many of the same benefits as the hereditary affinities of an earlier age, but their discretionary, voluntary, and potentially dynamic nature creates different incentives for groups and different choices for members. There is no obvious endpoint to this process. We expect that tribes and families will continue to matter in the Arab world and that different states will take different approaches to shaping such identities to serve state interests. Overall, however, we see the relative influence of such ties diminishing, and we see clear signs that they are diminishing sharply among young people. We see three factors that will be

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most important in shaping how this trend develops in different countries.

One is economic austerity, which has been rising in the Middle East. It takes increasing resources to secure loyalty, and resources are not growing as fast as they used to in the past.

The second is states’ ability to develop capacity. Where states cannot provide security or services or a pathway to employment, individuals will have a tendency to seek some sort of collective identity to pursue their interests. Analyzing present-day Yemen, Nadwa al-Dawsari argues that tribal leadership is conferred not by birth but by success at solving problems. “A person becomes a sheikh if tribesmen acknowledge him as a leader after repeatedly requesting his assistance with tribal problems…Sheikhs gain their legitimacy and accreditation through their ability to resolve conflicts and safeguard the tribe’s interests without resorting to coercion. If a sheikh proves incapable of attending to or providing for his community, tribesmen simply turn to another.”6 Where states are the principle providers of assistance and protection, the attraction of non-state groupings diminishes and the costs of maintaining such a non-state-centered system become more objectionable.

The third is the state’s own ambitions. They are different. In places like the United Arab Emirates, the state seems to seek to supplant tribal identities, while in Saudi Arabia the state seems to be seeking to build its strength alongside deepening ties

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between the state and tribal leaders. Tunisia tried to de-emphasize tribal ties more than a half-century ago, and some say tribes are now resurgent, perhaps as a refutation of Tunisia’s 55-year experiment with authoritarian modernization.

Although we would expect to see significant variation between states, we also expect to see variation within states. Elites in capital cities long ago bought into individualism, and urban centers have rewarded individualism (and produced a great deal of anomie) for many years. Such trends will continue. In areas on the economic and political periphery, we see a number of factors at work that will continue to drive people toward membership in large trust networks. For years to come, we see people in such areas operating under a different set of rules. Most importantly, we expect to see ongoing negotiations—between individuals, families, tribes, states, and other groups—to shape how ties of loyalty and obligation evolve, how they are rewarded, how they are enforced, and how they matter to the everyday lives of people.
How Affinity Works

Ibn Khaldun viewed family loyalty both as an innate quality and one necessary for survival. The American poet Robert Frost captured the mood when he wrote, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” Ibn Khaldun believed that family networks were not the only basis for ties of loyalty, but that forming bonds of true loyalty required sustained intimacy. Family ties were just one way to develop “social intercourse, friendly association, long familiarity, and the companionship that results from growing up together, having the same wet nurse, and sharing the other circumstances of death and life.”

NETWORKS PREMISED ON A DEEP SENSE of mutual obligation and loyalty are present in most societies around the world, and most do not rely on lifelong bonds. Militaries are just one kind of association that rely on creating such ties relatively quickly; gangs are another. In many cases, people who somehow feel vulnerable are the most likely to pursue membership in such a group. They can be overt or covert—such as the Old Order Amish or the Freemasons—and they can be based on identity at birth, personal choice, or some combination of the two. Ultimately, a utilitarian calculation is behind such networks.

Sometimes the motive is profit, such as financial or trading networks sustained by members of a religious minority to ensure reliable credit. Sometimes the motive is spiritual or ideological reward. More commonly, though, such groups are defensive. For groups facing discrimination or persecution, having a network to protect individuals’ interests increases the security of individuals, as well as the security of the community as a whole. For the sociologist Charles Tilly, the equation fundamentally comes down to one of trust. Membership in such a group requires a willingness to place “valued outcomes at risk to others’ malfeasance, mistakes or failures.” In a significant number of cases, the consequences of failure for other members of the network are death. Typically, membership in such a network involves accepting sustained costs. Those costs may be financial, but they may also require commitments of time, an obligation to use influence, a
willingness to commit violence (or be subject to violence) on behalf of the group, to profess or otherwise act on what one doesn’t personally believe, and so on. In return, “faithful participants in trust networks commonly get personal attention, help with personal difficulties, long-term reciprocity, and cushioning against possible disasters or disabilities—benefits they cannot ordinarily acquire elsewhere.”

One necessary aspect of networks that is not often appreciated is their policing of their boundaries. Being in a network requires ensuring that others remain outside of it, and it requires the distinction between insiders and outsiders to be clear. Tilly argues that “trust networks that fail to mark, maintain and monitor sharp boundaries between insiders and outsiders shrivel or disappear.” In extreme cases, deviance can be punishable by death, but it can also result in punishments ranging from harsh words to excommunication. The necessity of trust networks to impose penalties for non-compliance is an important indicator that calculation is at the heart of all such networks. The costs of defection must remain significantly higher than the potential benefits of defecting, especially given the costs such defection imposes on the broader network.

A vivid example of this in Iraq is described in Anthony Shadid’s book, *Night Draws Near: Iraq’s People in the Shadow of America’s War*. Shadid, then a reporter for the *Washington Post*, recalls a town’s revulsion when a deformed thumb and yellow sandals gave away the identity of an informer identifying insurgents among U.S. prisoners. A child and two men died as a result, and the informer’s tribe insisted that the informer’s family kill him in order to prevent the outbreak of tribal warfare. The two adult victims’ families were clear: “Either they kill Sabah, or villagers would murder the rest of his family.” One morning, before dawn, the informer’s father and brother led him behind his house and killed him with AK-47s.

For a person contemplating defection, the costs are especially high in situations where mobility is constrained. To live ostracized in a village for decades carries a high price. So, too, does being pushed out of a protected environment into a wilderness such as a desert, in which solitary survival is a struggle. In each case, the boundaries a group can erect are clearly defined and impenetrable.

In the Middle East in the last half-century, rapid urbanization has diminished the effect of many of those boundaries. Jordan, for example, went from 51 percent urban in 1960 to 91 percent urban in 2017, and Tunisia went from 38 percent to 69 percent in the same period. Urbanization not only allows individuals to live more anonymous lives in cities, but it also allows people to live far away from members of a network who might seek to control their actions, and it creates greater opportunities for individual
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Emiratis are believed to form just 11.5 percent of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) total population, the vast majority of which is made up of migrant workers. With such a large foreign population, the government has recently launched a huge drive to foster national cultural identity among the Emirati population. This drive has shaped citizens’ obligations, expectations, and loyalties in various respects, although various interviewees expressed uncertainty about how they should react to this drive.

Most state messages are aimed at the younger generations of Emiratis. Keen to move away from a culture of entitled citizens who are unproductive, the government is now attempting to build citizens’ capacities so that they can contribute to the nation and be prepared for a globalized world. However, an Emirati academic noted that government messaging can be contradictory, and that this is having a psychological toll on young people.

The UAE is a confederation of seven emirates, each with its own ruler and government, which were only unified in 1971. Despite the government drive to foster a common national identity, local and tribal identities remain strong. There are significant wealth disparities between the different emirates, and the northern emirates are generally more conservative than Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Although each emirate continues to enjoy a degree of independence, all have grown closer to the central government in Abu Dhabi in recent years. New transportation links facilitate greater mobility and the UAE is better connected than ever before. Before, traveling between emirates entailed a long and dangerous journey, but now many Emiratis commute between emirates. Spaces emerged, such as malls, which facilitated new kinds of social interaction.

Yet, biases and restrictions endure. One interviewee remarked that your home emirate continues to have a bearing on your job opportunities if you seek employment outside your emirate. Another said that many families do not allow their daughters to work in another emirate.

The pace of societal change in the UAE has been rapid, and interviewees highlighted several watershed moments. Internal family dynamics that had long been largely unchanged then shifted very quickly after modernization. Families started living further apart and expectations of women’s roles shifted, in part because of the influx of domestic workers who took on many domestic chores. Although the UAE’s oil wealth has allowed it to provide generous benefits to its citizens and protect it from widespread public discontent, the Arab uprisings of 2011 marked a turning point as the threat of violent extremism increased. The state began to extend itself more forcefully into the domestic domain, exerting significant social pressure on families of extremists to publicly renounce their relatives. A government employee described the state’s criminalization of sympathy for Qatar as part of a broader pattern of the shrinking room for “grey area” on controversial issues. The UAE’s intervention in the conflict in Yemen was also described as a “pivotal social moment” as it redefined citizens’ role within the state. The government depicts casualties as national martyrs and decreed Martyrs’ Day an annual public holiday.
success and failure absent group support. Trust networks clearly operate in urban environments, and urbanization lends them a complexity and plasticity that is unthinkable in rural areas.

Even in rural areas, though, the way these trust networks operate is not completely straightforward. In small towns, individuals often are simultaneously members of several such networks at once. The anthropologist Lawrence Rosen, having closely studied a community of about 20,000 outside of Fez, Morocco, argued that his subjects were constantly evaluating partners and potential partners based on the wide variety of networks each was a part of, as well as each individual’s personal attributes. Rosen observed that residents of this community do not simply seek to engage the most with individuals with whom they have the most ties or the closest ties. Instead, he argues that individuals seek what is essentially a portfolio of ties and obligations to secure debts and constrain creditors, all of which are arranged “in order to gain the highest possible degree of predictability, if not control, over the actions of others.”

The impulse to rely on networks appears to be a response to the environment. Individuals’ insecurity drives them to band with others to become more secure. The more insecure an individual feels—and it can be physical insecurity, economic insecurity, or social insecurity—the more he or she is willing to sacrifice in order to gain security. Although not completely transactional, a calculation is at the heart of the behavior.

It stands to reason, then, that different environments would create different incentives for individuals to form trust networks. In particular, less government capacity to enforce agreements and secure the public pushes individuals to participate in trust networks that can provide enforcement and protection. Such an environment would encourage people to exhibit the sorts of behaviors trust networks require: special preferences given to fellow members of networks, side agreements that may not comply with the law, and extra-judicial violence. Low mobility also fosters such networks by increasing the period of time individuals feel the network will protect their interests and by increasing the costs of defection.

The opposite is also the case. Greater government capacity reduces the incentive to participate in such net-
works, especially when clear and enforced rules govern the distribution of services, conditions of employment, and physical protection. So, too, do conditions of relative plenty, where access to adequate resources is taken for granted and individuals feel less in need of intercession for survival. Finally, greater mobility means that individuals may not want to invest in a network that he or she may be far away from in time of need, or which he or she can simply walk away from.

As Middle Eastern governments generally have gained more capacity in the last three-quarters of a century, they have taken different attitudes toward the presence of trust networks in their domain. In some cases, such as Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, they have sought to exacerbate differences between groups in order to emerge as the powerful and unchallenged arbiter between claimants. Others, such as Egypt and Tunisia, have sought to downplay these networks and build governmental capacity to replace them. Three countries under study here—the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan—have taken an intermediate position, with the Emiratis seemingly the most eager to replace group identity with a superseding national identity, and the Jordanians feeling that, for much of the country, sustaining salient tribal and family ties is necessary, even if they sometimes feel undesirable. Saudi Arabia has sought to modernize such ties, seeking to institutionalize ties of obligation through tribal chiefs that leads to the Al Saud as the clear top of the pyramid.

Other institutions can reinforce or undermine the importance of such trust networks. State-sponsored religious institutions anywhere are conservative, almost by definition, and in the Middle East they have tended to preserve such networks. The education and guidance they provide, especially in the Arab world, reinforces traditional trust networks by legitimizing hierarchical institutions and emphasizing respect for authority. Some argue that Islam lends itself especially strongly to notions of loyalty and obligation—not only because the word “Islam” itself means “submission,” but also because orthodox Islam contains a great deal of theological justification for obedience to authority. The authority of state-sponsored religious institutions themselves is under threat, however, because a combination of widespread literacy and access to a wide variety of religious authorities—on the Internet, on satellite television, and in print—gives individuals alternatives to state-sponsored doctrine. In addition, the state’s role supporting and appointing the leadership of religious institutions has bred doubts about their independence. One student at Al-Azhar, Cairo’s millennium-old seminary, was disgusted by what he saw there. He told a reporter that “the institution is ‘penetrated’ by Egypt’s security agencies and pro-government thinking, and that it teaches about Sha`ria Islamic law but doesn’t
implement it.” His response was to yearn for an unadulterated Islam, which he expected to find by joining the Islamic State group.\(^\text{16}\)

Conservatives have long emphasized that schools must join religious institutions in reinforcing patterns of obedience. Pedagogy in most schools in the Arab world stresses rote memorization, and the scientific method and self-discovery are rarely covered in curricula.\(^\text{17}\) As is true anywhere in the world, providing alternative modes of pedagogy is politically fraught, and conservative voices oppose them.

Yet, economic imperatives are pushing governments to consider revising teaching methods. The need to pursue workforce development goals, grow the private sector, and engender a more innovative and entrepreneurial—and more economically productive—population all militate for different schooling methods. Governments, however, find themselves needing to balance the economic benefit of more liberalized education against the political consequences of students who may feel more individually empowered and more independent than their predecessors.

The Middle East has not been immune to most of the forces changing twentieth-century life around the world, and there are few forces found in the region that are not found elsewhere. Yet, the impact of many of those changes has been greater in the Middle East than it has been elsewhere. Trust networks—and the loyalty they demand—have been particularly embedded in Middle Eastern societies, and most states have been relatively slow to displace them and exert control. The relative wealth of the region has spurred an uncertain kind of modernization in which a growing number of individuals free themselves from trust relations based on primordial ties, while states have tried to expand their grasp with uneven results. The Arab world has had unusually robust networks, and many of them are increasingly frayed. The changing nature of ties between individuals, groups, and states is one of the central changes underway in the Middle East, and it is not nearly over.
Objects of Loyalty

One could read the design of some societies in the Middle East as a straightforward pyramid. Individuals feel obligations to their families, who feel obligations to clans, who feel obligations to tribes, who feel obligations to the ruler and the state. Such a clear design gives each individual a hierarchical set of relations that binds him or her both to everyone else in that chain of relations and gives presumed authority to those higher in the chain to mediate disputes between people below them. The family is at the base of all of this, and a microcosm of the way the broader society works.

Families

This is not to deny the presence of liberal families that de-emphasize hierarchy or give tremendous autonomy to family members, or families in which cousins play a vanishingly small role in the worldview of members. But in most Arab families, everyone has a role, each role has duties attached to it, and many of them are time-consuming. Family life is one of the first places we would expect to see change in how Arab societies work, and we would expect that change to ripple upward.

Although loyalty and obligation are conventionally discussed as masculine pursuits, arguably, females’ roles within Arab families provide a clearer perspective on obligations than do the roles of men.

Women, after all, are expected to obey their fathers, be loyal to their husbands, and care for their children. Increasingly, women also are expected to bring in income while fulfilling those obligations. But women also play a very important role in extended families, visiting relatives (often on weekends) and helping prepare food for communal meals. Traditionally, the entire family would commit to family visits. Fathers, wives, and children alike would attend gatherings, and although each would socialize separately, each would be present. Now, and to our surprise, young men reported that they were often excused from those obligations as long as they were available by phone when they were needed. Women were not, and spent hours preparing for such gatherings and then participating in them. That is to say, the extended family networks are largely sustained by women, and as part of them, women form their
own vibrant networks that entail both mutual obligation and protection.

As will be described below, economic pressures are changing family relations, but that is not all. Women are playing a dramatically different role in society, becoming more educated and increasingly likely to work outside the home. Since much of the burden of family life has relied on women and on networks of women, the movement of women into the world of wage labor has diminished the support available for family ties. One Emirati woman seemed almost embarrassed to point out that, in the last three years, it has become common for women to bring packaged food to family gatherings rather than spend time cooking.18 As a working mother of four, even with domestic help she feels stretched to her limit. Younger people said they felt much closer to friends than family, and they strongly preferred spending time with friends rather than family.19

In fact, one Jordanian explained that young people are “fleeing” family spaces for the comfort of friends.20 An older Jordanian admired the creativity of the kinds of friends’ networks that social media helps foster, but he expressed sadness that these new networks don’t really afford their members communal benefits because they are often online and often so virtual.21

Throughout the interviews, people complained that family visits were much more time consuming than they could afford. A young Emirati explained that his principal connection with his family was through WhatsApp and Snapchat. “I don’t visit more because every visit is at least 90 minutes. Everyone is fine with this except my grandmother, who doesn’t understand why I don’t come in person.”22 One Saudi male said that he felt most extended family engagements were just a kind of formalized flattery. He said he felt connected to his immediate family, but he’d be much more likely to turn to friends than his extended family if he needed to borrow money.23

Some young people seek to fulfil their family duties from afar. Rather than spend time visiting with older relatives, they involve themselves in other ways. One young Emirati male volunteered that he searches online and compares prices for services for family gatherings as his way of being involved.24 Males reportedly have much more freedom to avoid family gatherings than females do. Females are expected to maintain some sort of schedule, and they have come to con-
CASE STUDY

Saudi Arabia

Saudi society is living through a period of rapid changes, the trajectory is uncertain, and adaption strategies are still being developed. Interviewees in Saudi Arabia linked the changes with the rise of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and his ambitious Vision 2030 program, saying the pace of change has increased dramatically in the last several years. However, the impact of many of the new policies for which MBS is considered revolutionary has not yet been fully realized.

Shifting economic conditions in Saudi Arabia have driven changes in people’s social networks and obligations to one another in recent decades. The oil price boom from 2003 to 2013 allowed the state to increase public spending exponentially, and Saudi citizens became increasingly dependent on state benefits. The state increased welfare while also working to co-opt alternative centers of power, reducing Saudis’ reliance on and accountability to traditional kinship networks such as family and tribe. Interlocutors disagreed on the likely impact of future rollbacks in state benefits, saying they could either make people turn inwards to focus on their own needs, or could result in a resurgence in traditional kinship networks.

Rapid urbanization and new housing policies also have contributed to weakening kinship relations. Whereas in the past, extended families would live in large compounds and interact on a regular basis, family members are now often spread more widely and see each other much less frequently.

However, one government employee noted that the family remains the basic unit of Saudi society. Even if relations with extended family have weakened, various interlocutors described their enduring obligations within the family. Tribal obligations continue to matter when it comes to marriage.

Saudi Arabia’s authoritarian political environment is a powerful factor shaping people’s perceived options, incentives, and disincentives. Interviewees noted that MBS has centralized political power and the state has become more directive in recent years, especially in the social and familial arena. Some mentioned that in cases of friction with the state, both norms of trust and expectations of support from family and friends have shifted as the population has grown increasingly nervous about crackdowns on dissent.

Saudi interviewees were aware of a strong government-led drive to create a specific Saudi identity but struggled to articulate that national identity. They described state efforts to construct national identity in opposition to other identities, such as a broader Muslim identity, Iranian identity, or specific regional identities. Saudis largely ridiculed efforts to instill nationalism in the curriculum at school. Some Saudi interviewees argued that the lack of a strong national identity means that Saudis do not tend to value public spaces, although this is beginning to shift.

Technology is facilitating the formation of new networks between Saudis who would previously not have had opportunities to mix, including between boys and girls. However, interlocutors were keen to underscore that Saudi Arabia remains a deeply conservative society, and that new ideas-based or chosen networks lack the resources to supplant ties based on kinship.
stitute a strong majority of attendees at weekly family gatherings in the UAE. Males, by contrast, are “free to just absent themselves,” and they often take advantage of the opportunity.

In addition to being less present, younger people are reportedly less obedient than their parents had been. One Emirati expressed some wonderment that traditional rules of family decorum had evaporated. “Before,” he said, “you’d never eat before the grandfather or interrupt him.” Now, people have less deference and think little of confronting or contradicting their elders. Across the interviews, we heard stories of children rebelling more, and refusing to follow their parents’ advice—even on issues as central as marriage.

The decline of deference is part of a liberalizing trend among many families. Most families continue to have conservative members, but when those conservatives are in the minority, they no longer have a veto power over what family members do. But the opposite is also the case. We heard one story of a liberal Emirati father who was happy to have his daughter study overseas, but whose agreement to do so was vetoed by more conservative family members, including his wife.

It is important to note that the diminishing influence of family control is compared to 20 or 40 years ago in these countries, not to Western societies. Family elders still hold considerable moral sway, especially when they decide to exert their influence.

The stories people related about the diminishing centrality of family were notable to our interlocutors because they represented a departure from an accepted norm. It is worth remembering that for many young Arab mothers, not seeing their mothers at the same time at least once a week for several hours would be unthinkable, just as making time to do so would be unthinkable for many young American mothers.

**Tribes**

The diminishing centrality of the family in many Arabs’ lives is replicated by the decline in the roles of tribes. Tribes ruled the rural areas of the Arab world for centuries and they remain relevant in many places. Tribal leaders helped lead the “Anbar Awakening” in Iraq in 2006, for example, and Bedouin tribes remain dominant in much of the Sinai Peninsula. But the relationships between tribes and the state, the role of tribes in society, and most importantly, the relationships between tribes and their members, all are in transition. Historically, rulers won the allegiance of tribes in order to secure their rule. When the Hashemite family left the Hijaz region of the Arabian Peninsula to form—and lead—the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, they were able to do so because they won the allegiance of the tribes already in the area. Similarly, when the Saud family united much of the Arabian Peninsula under its leadership in the early twentieth century
to form the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, that unification was achieved through tribal alliances, some of which were shaped by royal marriage and others by military conquest.

To some, tribes still undergird any sense of order in the Middle East. One Jordanian from a tribal area in the south argued that “the order you see on the streets is because of tribalism.” In this reading, the knowledge that every member of every tribe shares responsibility for the action of every other member creates a sense of shared responsibility. An Emirati teenager said it was his tribe that made him feel Emirati, and that his tribal awareness came from his grandfather’s accounts of his past; a Jordanian from the tribal south argued that Jordanians feel much more attached to their tribes than the nation. A Western academic who has spent decades in Saudi Arabia argued that tribal identity is resurgent in the Kingdom, perhaps because people are looking for something familiar in times of great uncertainty.

Tribes have a clear and prominent role in elections in Jordan (as they do in Kuwait). Tribal candidates run to secure resources for the tribe, and members feel an obligation to vote for other members solely on the basis of identity. Tribes also mobilize voters. As one Jordanian remarked, in times of elections, “You vote for your cousin even if you don’t talk to him.” Tribes also dominate university elections in Jordan. Such tribal voting pays off, securing benefits for tribal areas. In Tunisia, an academic complained that such tribal politics create inefficiencies. For example, building a school in an area requires building a school in a neighboring area for another tribe, whether the second school is needed or not.

Many tribes in the Middle East cross national borders, and tribes can be an instrument of regional policy. Saudi Arabia is the home of the Shammar tribe, for example, but the tribe is also one of the most powerful in Iraq, and it reaches deep into Syria. Tribal networks and tribal emissaries give Saudi Arabia additional tools to seek to affect the politics and diplomacy of surrounding states. Some see the Gulf as a fading booster of tribalism in the Levant and North Africa. A Jordanian reported that, in the past, the King of Jordan would visit his fellow monarchs in the Gulf, then return home and distribute bonuses to the military, which is comprised mostly of Jordanians with tribal backgrounds. In addition, Saudi Arabia would pro-
vide funding directly to Jordanian tribes. Saudi Arabia has also poured billions into Yemeni tribes, using such payments to secure loyalty from the 1970s onward.

Tribes are careful to ensure that no one encroaches on their turf. Oftentimes, they have close relations with security services, and some even have created “no-go” zones that the security services cannot enter. When international NGOs started working in Ma’an, an impoverished area in southern Jordan, the tribes were initially resistant out of fear that the NGOs would undermine local political and economic networks.

But young people often complain that the tribes are letting them down. Where economic demands are most intense, tribes have a hard time delivering, and they are suffering. Once people hit the job market, tribes have not been able to deliver jobs at the scale they once did so, and that is draining some of the loyalty that some people feel for them. “Tribes mean nothing any more to young people,” a civil society leader in Jordan explained. “What people expect from tribes is opportunities,” an international NGO leader in Amman said, but there aren’t nearly enough jobs, and many of the tribal candidates aren’t qualified for them. In exasperation, one young Jordanian complained that tribes are “fake” (switching from an Arabic conversation to use an English word). He said they don’t help at all and are “useless.” Another Jordanian said that people were so preoccupied looking out for their children, siblings, and very close cousins, they had no spare capacity to help their tribe. A young Jordanian member of a prominent tribe suggested that people turn to their tribe more in times of disaster than times of joy—and related a story of when his cousin was involved in a murder and even young tribesmen had to produce almost $500 to help bail out the cousin. The relevance of tribes is not clear to all. A pair of long-time European residents of Abu Dhabi argued that the “tribe is very artificial” and not part of the lived experience of most younger Emiratis. Although some individual families are prominent and well-net-worked, tribal salience is diminishing. In Jordan, one community leader said that tribes struggle for meaning among what he called the “generation of civilization and technology.”

In some ways, tribes have found ways to adapt to a changing media environment. Tribal message boards, often spanning several countries, draw widespread participation. According to one article, more than 30,000 members of the Shammar tribe have registered with an online Shammari message board that has perhaps 1,300 active users, and more than 70,000 members of the Mutayr tribe (which is largely in Saudi Arabia with branches in Kuwait and the Emirates) have registered on their own message board. The topics range from history to sports, and participants range from the serious to the bored.
To some, the loss of tribal centrality represents a loss not only for the tribes, but for citizens in the Arab world as well. One young tribesman in Riyadh said he believes that the emasculation of tribal power in Saudi Arabia 70 years ago, combined with the disempowerment of the clergy in the years following 9/11, has been a major setback. Now, he said, there are no “channels” for citizens, and no checks against central power. Although states often seek to enlist the tribes as instruments of state power, the opposite is also true. Seen this way, tribes not only amass resources, but represent important barriers to an overreaching state. Even if tribes cannot provide jobs to their members, they can protect those members from other tribes, and from the state.

**The Uncertain Role of the State**

For centuries, Arab societies have fostered a push toward broad communal bonds, and the trust networks that are vested in them have a clear embedded leadership—whether the leader is a patriarch, a tribal chief, or a king. Kings are something of a novelty in the Arab world because nation-states themselves are a relatively recent phenomenon. Although biblical stories are full of kings who ruled the city-states of antiquity, most of the Arab world experienced the last millennium and a half largely as part of an empire, starting with the Prophet Muhammad’s conquests in the seventh century CE and continuing through the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. The central empires (and there were more than the Ottoman) tended to rule loosely, deploying governors who rarely spoke local languages and relied on local agents mostly to collect revenues and muster troops. Local politics evolved as a mediation between the imperial center and local elites, who themselves had ties to broad populations.

The Ottoman system came under growing strain in the nineteenth century, in part because of vigorous trade with the expanding empires of Europe, and in part with the rise of professionals—soldiers, bureaucrats, journalists, and the like—who were increasingly independent of the old elites and impatient with the status quo. When the Mandate Powers inherited the ruins of the Ottoman Empire after the war, they placed these new professionals at the core of the new states that arose. Their counterparts were often at the forefront of nationalist movements that sought to expel the European powers. Yet, there often was not much to build from and professional cadres remained small.

The move toward improved local governance in the Arab world has increased rapidly in the last half-century, but the demands on governments have increased even more rapidly. From a low base, governments sought to build entire health systems, expand agriculture, end illiteracy, electrify the countryside, and provide clean
CASE STUDY

Jordan

Shifting economic and political conditions have strained traditional support networks in Jordan and few interlocutors felt that viable alternatives exist. Although Jordanians renegotiate, or even disengage from, traditional kinship affiliations, these shifts also are provoking broader questions about the foundations of the state’s demands of loyalty.

The deteriorating economic situation was mentioned by almost all interviewees in Jordan as a critical factor affecting expectations and obligations. Traditional support networks, such as families, extended families, and tribes have fewer resources and so are less able to act as a support network. Jordanians described no longer being able to rely on families to support them with financial burdens, such as the costs of education and marriage. In northern Jordan, interlocutors described how farmers are selling their land to pay for their children’s education in a desperate hope that it will help them find a job.

Most interlocutors also stated that tribes have come to play a much less pronounced role in daily life, although they remain more salient in the south of the country. Some interviewees linked their reduced importance with the decline in revenues, especially from Gulf countries. Various interviewees said that Jordanians can only expect to rely on families in extreme cases of legal or physical insecurity. However, expectations for their roles at home remain largely unchanged, especially in rural areas, meaning they continue to have significantly more stringent obligations and restrictions than men.

A number of Jordanians described how they are building alternative trust networks, such as friendship groups, and turning to these relationships in times that before they would have more naturally turned to their family for emotional support. However, these new solidarities often lack the resources to provide any kind of material support.

Various interviewees linked the weakening of family ties and the uncertain nature of other sources of support for young people to their vulnerability to negative influences. These include criminal gangs, drugs, and even extremist radicalization.
water and sanitation to their populations. They built telecommunications grids, thousands of miles of roads, more than 100 airports, and expanded port facilities. Cities grew like Topsy, with the Cairo metropolitan area now housing nearly 15 million people, approximately the population of all of Egypt in 1934.

For the modernizing elites, old patterns of communal life were a form of backwardness. Tunisia worked to disempower tribalism more than a half-century ago as part of the country’s broad modernization effort. Tribalism has not gone away, however, and some argued that regionalism has replaced tribalism and reproduced many of the same effects. Tunisians from the interior reportedly feel disenfranchised and disrespected by coastal elites. Sometimes, protests erupt over the extraction of resources that “belong” to individual regions without providing benefits to the inhabitants. The Tunisian state has not replaced the tribe as an object of loyalty, and many Tunisians, especially younger ones, resent what they see as the ineffectiveness of the state. Young Tunisians report a high degree of alienation from any higher authority, meaning that most of the pyramid of loyalty simply is absent for them.

In poorer states, there is dissatisfaction that the state has displaced institutions such as tribes and clans but has abandoned the responsibilities those institutions had. One young Jordanian complained that the government seems more concerned with refugees than Jordanians like him and another saw government-led privatization efforts as a threat to Jordanians’ employment. One Tunisian NGO leader suggested that his country had destroyed mediating institutions, making “us feel we are a group of individuals living on the same territory” but without connections to each other or to the state. He said simply, “What connects me to the state is my ID card.” Another argued that young people define Tunisia not by what it is, but by what is missing, and they express hope in being able to move abroad.

In Tunisia especially, where politics have changed since the 2011 revolution, young people express their rejection of the status quo through political disengagement, individualism, and an almost gleeful rejection of authority—on issues as varied as traffic enforcement and littering. Anecdotally, drug use is up, and young people are spending much more time online. The idea of working in concert with
others increasingly is associated with a time of corruption and submission, and Tunisians told us that a growing number of their young compatriots view the hope of working for change as a futile endeavor. Seen broadly, at this stage of Tunisia’s history, new bonds between a more democratic state and a young population have not grown to replace the old coercive ties between the authoritarian state and the public. Because the authoritarian state had severed many of the subnational ties in its own half-century in power, what is left seems to be a high degree of individualism combined with alienation.

The Saudi government has taken a different path. Rather than modernizing the state by severing ties between individuals and subnational groups, it has sought to modernize the Kingdom by modernizing the ties between the state and the tribes. The anthropologist Nadav Samin, who wrote a book on genealogy in Saudi Arabia, notes that the Saudi state “has breathed new life into tribal identity, rendering it one of the only meaningful forms of civic association available in the Kingdom.”59 The Saudi state has fostered tribal identities, worked explicitly through tribal leaders, and administered significant payments as a form of patronage. In a further regulatory step, it created the position of mu’ar-rif, or “identifier,” who would act as an interior ministry delegate to his kinship group. Oftentimes, the state chose a competitor to the acknowledged leader of the group, establishing a check on independent tribal power and essentially giving the state a second instrument of influence in tribal affairs.60

But the modern Saudi state does not operate only, or even principally, through the tribes. Saudi state influence is channeled mostly through employment. Since approximately 80 percent of Saudi nationals in the workforce work for the state, the state has tremendous coercive control over most of the population (although Saudis also marvel at the difficulty of firing non-performing employees). Since employment and security are two of the most important things that people seek from subnational groups, the prominence of the Saudi state in delivering them is a source of state power. One young Saudi lamented that the relationship between state and society is narrow and rigid, with a simple trade-off of loyalty for material rewards—meaning that the state treats its population as “subjects” rather than “citizens.” He added that because people in the Gulf attribute material improvements in their lives to the state, that weakens their reliance on, and accountability to, each other.61

The mood in Saudi Arabia is clearly shifting, especially with efforts by the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, to reshape power in the Kingdom. Within that change, however, is an effort to reinforce the state as the pre-eminent power. Saudi Arabia quite visibly clipped the wings of the
Kingdom’s religious morality police, the mutawaʿa, in April 2016. The mutawaʿa (or, more formally, the Committee to Protect Virtue and Prevent Vice) acted in many ways as state-sponsored vigilantes, enforcing often-subjective societal norms on the spot and having little accountability. With the state’s new requirement that the mutawaʿa operate through the police and the judicial system rather than in place of it, some Saudis see the state returning the responsibility for social order to the public, and the longstanding insistence on the necessity of the mutawaʿa is “a lie that has been uncovered.”

The arrests of several hundred prominent Saudi princes, businessmen, and others in November 2017 sent a strong signal that no one is immune from the reach of the state. Saudis interpreted this both positively and negatively. A Saudi academic told visiting scholars in March that Saudis’ willingness to face authorities on behalf of relatives, kinsmen, and friends had declined precipitously in the Kingdom. He pointed to two examples. First, the arrest of a prominent tribal sheikh had passed without much public comment, and that was a big change. Second, his father told him that if he got into trouble, he wouldn’t help him. “My dear friends wouldn’t tweet on my behalf,” he said, “and I don’t blame them.”

And yet, some Saudis saw the diminution of impunity as a sign that Saudi Arabia was becoming not only a more normal place, but also a more effective one. A woman prominent in a quasi-governmental organization said with wonder that, after the arrests, “I woke up thinking the light of the sun is not the same.” She added that her mindset before the arrests was to ignore malfeasance because she was powerless to change anything, but she now sees both the possibility and responsibility to correct errors she sees because the state has a renewed emphasis on accountability.

Although state power is mostly uncontested in Saudi Arabia, it is less clear that Saudis are willing to sacrifice on behalf of the state. The state, after all, has made relatively few demands on its citizens. It has an all-volunteer army, very light taxation, and subsidies on everything from housing to water to fuel. Loyalty to the king and the royal family is drummed into Saudi citizens from early childhood, but the Saudi state has been much more ambivalent about creating a sense of national identity. The concern has been that a strong national identity would compete with or undermine Saudis’ Muslim identity, which the state’s religious ideology insisted was necessarily paramount. There is evidence of a growing willingness to foster a Saudi national identity that goes beyond tribal and family ties, although some Saudis express concern with the shape it is taking. One suggested that the most important pillar of the emerging national identity is hostility to Iran, which could marginalize the five to ten percent of the
CASE STUDY

Tunisia

After decades of authoritarian rule under Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia’s revolution in 2011 not only created new political freedoms; various interviewees described how it also allowed Tunisians to question their obligations and expectations in other parts of their lives. The political environment that has emerged is significantly more open than those in the other countries included in the study. The Tunisian state lacks the resources and authority to be able to shape and manipulate networks as others do, meaning it stands apart from the other cases.

New forms of political association have emerged, but levels of participation in political life are low. Still in their relative infancy, interviewees argued that the main parties have failed to coalesce the loyal support of a broad base of voters in Tunisian society. Multiple interviewees cited examples of people defecting from parties to support independent candidates after failing to receive the benefits they had hoped for.

Many Tunisians described the revolution as a rebellion against authority and noted that as well as spurring an unprecedented and ongoing protest movement, it also has prompted debates about authority within families, in schools, and in the workplace. These debates reveal a stark generational divide in attitudes in Tunisia. Younger Tunisian interviewees said their generation takes credit for toppling Ben Ali’s regime, accusing their elders of having enabled the dictatorship, and they feel more empowered to challenge figures of authority. But now, many are disillusioned with politicians’ failed promises and have disengaged from politics. Many young people have so little optimism in Tunisia’s future that they are trying to do whatever they can to leave the country in pursuit of opportunities abroad.

In contrast, older Tunisians criticize the younger generations for their lack of responsibility or sense of civic obligation, believing that young people gave up too quickly and did not demonstrate the necessary patience and perseverance to make a success of Tunisia’s new political environment. The older generation has a fundamentally different relationship to power, having largely submitted under Ben Ali and maneuvered within the system to gain advantages where possible.

Although the state lacks the resources to provide sufficient economic opportunities and benefits to citizens, interviewees remarked that kinship networks generally are weak, so individuals have few options in times of need. In most parts of Tunisia, tribal identities are much less salient than in other countries studied in this report. Former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba enacted family law policies to dismantle historically based kinship ties, emphasizing a regional organization of the country instead to weaken rival power centers that could challenge the state. Regionalism increased as a result and remains strong in Tunisia. Interviewees cited regional identities as an important factor in marriage matches and the formation of professional and social trust networks, and at times even as having a bearing on individual economic choices. However, for the most part regional identities are diffuse and do not confer material benefits to their members in times of need.
Saudi population that is Shi`a.

Perhaps the most ambitious effort in the Middle East to reshape relations between individuals and the state is in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE shares features with Saudi Arabia, as both are rentier states that employ many of their nationals. In fact, the Emirati state may bestow even more generous benefits on a national population that is perhaps only five percent the size of Saudi Arabia’s. As one Emirati explained plainly, “If you’re not connected somehow to the state-led economic ecosystem, you will not survive.”

However, the UAE leadership has been working for more than 15 years to build a greater sense of national identity, seeking to reduce feelings of entitlement and increase the willingness to sacrifice. According to one Emirati living in Dubai, the emirate’s ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, began to stress meritocracy in Dubai not only to pursue excellence but also to diminish the sorts of primordial ties that contribute to a sense of entitlement. The UAE declared 2008 “the year of national identity,” part of a broader effort to delineate what distinguishes Emiratis from others.

The most visible aspect of this push is the growing attention paid to National Day. In the early 2000s, National Day iconography stressed images of the rulers of all seven Emirates, clearly indicating that the national identity grew out of the emirate-centered one. Scarves, pins, and other paraphernalia carried images of each emirate’s ruler. By 2016, National Day had not only clearly elided many of the constituent parts; it also had become much more martial, reflecting the UAE’s active participation in an ongoing war in Yemen. Not only were children’s UAE military uniforms widely available with a camouflage print, but so, too, were girls’ dresses and women’s housecoats.

While the shift toward a more concrete and reciprocal national identity was underway before the Arab uprisings of 2011, events of that year accelerated it. A high school program intended to mold young Emiratis with an increased sense of discipline and sacrifice through a quasi-military structure that was piloted in 2008 had expanded to more than 160 sites by 2013 and formed the foundation for a national conscription program that was announced in 2014. The ongoing military intervention in Yemen, launched in March 2015, has result-
ed in an unprecedented number of battlefield casualties—drawn disproportionately from the poorer, northern emirates—and created a greater sense of urgency to recast identity as being more than a beneficiary. One Emirati in his thirties suggested that the generation of Emiratis born after 2000 is eagerly absorbing a sense of hyper-nationalism that is emerging in the Emirates. It sometimes manifests in an attitude that is simultaneously privileged and chauvinistic, which the political scientist Calvert Jones has characterized as “the entitled patriot.”

In addition to its efforts through the school system and military institutions to create a sense of national identity, the UAE government also is extremely active on social media. Leaders not only engage through their own accounts, but the government also seeks to shape the social media space by courting individuals with large audiences. Leaders also curate lists of phone numbers that Emiratis can call for help. Seen broadly, the Emirati state has sought to highlight the boundaries between who is a citizen and who is not, and it has sought to shape the conversation between and among citizens to reflect its ideal for society. In this ideal, individuals are responsible to the state and loyal to their leaders. At least one poll reportedly bears this out. According to an Emirati researcher, a recent poll asking what drives people’s sense of belonging to the Emirates revealed a deep split between foreign workers and nationals. Among the former, rule of law was seen as guaranteeing their place in society, but among Emiratis, it ranked only third. Family was second, and the leadership—i.e., the country’s ruling families—was first.
Contravening Forces

Inside the Arab world, rising economic austerity after decades of relative plenty affects all manner of social obligations. One might see economic pressures creating a greater push toward interdependence. Economic vulnerability arguably creates a need for a support network to avoid falling into crisis. In many cases, however, individuals see economic trends driving Arabs apart.

Economic Pressures

One reason is that as the sorts of social obligations tied to old traditions become more monetized, they become unaffordable. A Jordanian even joked that people are becoming hesitant to go to a place where they might know someone because they’d be obliged to invite them to coffee or to share a meal.75 A community leader from Karak, a town in southern Jordan, estimated that 90 percent of bank loans are for weddings—and such loans represent expenses rather than investments. The leader of another organization in Karak lamented that Jordan has become a consumer society, with “consumer families” and not “productive families.” He said that productive families value traits like hard work, cooperation, perseverance, and they create things. “Now we just consume things, but we don’t have the economic means to do so,” he said.76

Several interlocutors said economic pressures are even more pernicious. In Tunisia, one woman noted that her peers increasingly complain about others who do not pay their debts and reported that economic tensions are eroding solidarity between neighbors and within extended families. Arguing that a new culture of selfishness is seeping into Tunisian society, she observed that even religious people are less generous than they had been.77 A group of Saudi women who work on youth empowerment for a quasi-governmental organization suggested that economic pressures were affecting how people were willing to spend their time. They noted that when Saudi Arabia imposed new taxes in 2017, volunteer participation dropped.78

But the most important impact of economic change is how it has changed housing patterns. For millennia, most Arabs have lived in the areas where they were born, but that has been changing. In the most obvious cases, shrinking agricultural employment combined with the demise of small-scale manufacturing in outlying areas is pushing young people to
work in the Arab world’s growing cities.\textsuperscript{79} According to the World Bank, the number of people living in Arab cities almost quadrupled between 1977 and 2017.\textsuperscript{80} Economics also have driven people overseas in search of work, and those who have lived in the West often return home with different ideas and different values.\textsuperscript{81}

But even in wealthier countries in which economic hardship is a rarity, urbanization and mobility mean families are living farther apart than ever before. When we spoke with most people about their grandparents, we heard about different living arrangements, but they almost always involved people living surrounded by relatives. One Saudi man said that in his grandfather’s time, 120 of his relatives lived in a single compound in the northwestern town of Hail. When an uncle moved his family across town, the whole extended family packed up and joined him.\textsuperscript{82} Emiratis, too, used to live in family compounds. The rise of “popular housing” in the 1960s and 1970s meant most families suddenly lived farther apart, and the traditional family compounds have become obsolete. An increasing number of Emiratis—perhaps 20 percent now—live outside their home emirate, a trend partly due to military deployments, partly to Abu Dhabi granting residency to those from other emirates, and partly to inter-emirate marriages (which increasingly arise from mixed-gender workplaces and some university environments).\textsuperscript{83} These factors combine to mean that a growing number of Emiratis live several hours’ drive from their families, dividing them still further.\textsuperscript{84} Some neighborhoods in the UAE are still known for having many members of an extended family, but such arrangements are unusual.\textsuperscript{85}

Within neighborhoods, people report having much less contact with neighbors, even in the same building.\textsuperscript{86} It is partly a consequence of apartment life, with closed doors and no common space. It is also a reflection of people feeling they have less time to socialize. One Jordanian woman argued that now, in fact, there are no neighbors. She explained, “You might see a moving truck outside and not know who is moving.”\textsuperscript{87} Another Jordanian observed, “Before, everyone would know when someone else was getting married, but now you might only know a wedding is happening from hearing cars honking.”\textsuperscript{88}

To some, especially in the Gulf, these new living patterns represent plenty.
They are associated with the oil boom, and they afford the luxury of privacy. Individual villas or private apartments, with hired help replacing the extended family, create “down time” when one need not be alert to the demands of close relatives. The absence of the extended family has a downside, however. One young mother we spoke with in Saudi Arabia noted that she had grown up surrounded by an extended family, but lamented that her children were losing that opportunity because her mother-in-law rejected the idea of living close by. Several people spoke about adults’ rising insistence on privacy and children’s increasing demands for one-on-one time with their parents that would have been uncommon in years past. The sorts of broad communal ties that formed the foundation of Arab society are fraying, and time is increasingly allocated from one individual to another.

A common theme, reflected in numerous conversations we had, was that scattering families in far-flung apartments that are often in different cities diminishes the authority older family members have over younger ones, and in particular diminishes the authority of family patriarchs. As one young Emirati intellectual explained, “If you’re not always connected to a person, the respect erodes.” In a sign of how much things have changed for older relatives, an older man in northern Jordan said that when children move from the countryside to Amman, they insist their parents visit them rather than the traditional, opposite pattern. “[The children] say that it is too expensive, the road is dangerous, and they are too busy with work.” In an earlier age, such an attitude would have been unthinkable.

**Networks of Choice**

As the traditional networks of trust in the Arab world have weakened, some Arabs have turned toward networks of trust that are not based on heredity ties but on choice. Like the trust networks of the past, these voluntary networks (ranging from professional associations to jihadi-salafi groups) emerge out of a search for utility, and they demand the sort of loyalty and obligation that have characterized traditional social organization in the Middle East for centuries. Reporting suggests that many individuals who join jihadi groups are those who have felt marginalized or oppressed by the state and isolated in their com-

“Scattering families in far-flung apartments that are often in different cities diminishes the authority older family members have over younger ones, and in particular diminishes the authority of family patriarchs.”
munities. They despair that they lack opportunities to change their fortune. Their search for agency, legitimacy, and a chance to reinvent themselves brings some to believe that disconnecting from their kinship networks and joining a radical organization is the answer. In Tunisia, which has produced the largest number of foreign fighters in the Arab world, interviewees most commonly cited despair and a desire to take revenge on a society that has failed them as the main motivators of radicalization.

Other recruits are motivated by their states’ perceived inability or unwillingness to defend their communities. News of atrocities against fellow Muslims, especially in Syria and Iraq, led some recruits to radical organizations to view it as a personal and social obligation to defend weaker members of their sect against the oppressors. In contrast to common motives for joining other kinds of chosen networks, individual recruits to radical organizations rarely appear to be motivated by financial gain. Some radicalized individuals are highly educated, such as engineers and doctors. For these disenfranchised individuals, a radical ideology can also provide an intellectual appeal. Providing a potent blend of Islamic hermeneutics, history, and politics, some view jihadi-salafi ideology as a coherent intellectual framework in a world that they consider lacking an ethical ballast.

Recruitment often operates through close trust networks, spreading more commonly among close groups of friends and family than it does in mosques. Recruiters instrumentalize potential recruits’ position within their social networks, targeting charismatic individuals who have close relations with family members and large groups of friends. In that way, these groups capitalize on trust networks to break apart ties with the broader family, reconstituting them with the ideological family.

Radical groups have various strategies to maintain the cohesion of their members and to increase the costs of defection. For groups that held physical territory, such as the Islamic State group (ISG), threats of extreme violence, including summary executions, would dissuade its members from defecting. But these groups also offer significant material incentives for recruits to remain. For example, the ISG strived to provide better public services and salaries than the Iraqi and Syrian states previously had offered. Education and indoctrination through sophisticated systems of propaganda also help achieve individuals’ ideological loyalty to the cause.

It is worth pointing out that ideological groups sometimes embed themselves within tribal groups, providing protection and resources to hosts who are indifferent to their ideology. In southern Yemen, tribal hostility to the northern Houthis has resulted in alliances of convenience between local tribes and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), de-
spite the fact that in the absence of the Houthis, the tribes had effectively pushed AQAP from the region just a few years before.\textsuperscript{100}

Of course, ideologically based organizations need not be radical to be effective. Throughout the Arab uprisings of 2011, individuals joined groups that had ambitious social and political agendas that attacked the status quo. Although interviewees across the four countries spoke of broad, ideas-based mobilization as desirable, in practice they have proven difficult to sustain. Whereas jihadi groups have been able to manage a diversity of ideas and forge some sort of consensus, the broader political uprisings of 2011 often collapsed under the weight of sharply different priorities and agendas. Sometimes states get in the way as well. In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the political environment restricts citizens’ ability to form associations based on shared ideas. Technology has allowed certain forms of interest groups to form online, such as creative clubs, but these groups have low barriers to entry and no barriers to exit, and they provide no form of material support. As such, they do not represent significant networks of solidarity.\textsuperscript{101}

However, even in more open political climates, ideas-based mobilization in the Middle East is limited. In Jordan, groups exploring new forms of political association have had little success in mobilizing supporters. An Islamist activist said that groups

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\textit{“Trust networks in the workplace have come to play a similar role to networks that are based on kinship, providing their members with mutual benefits and obligations.”}
attempting to campaign on ideas consistently fail to gain traction. A recent exception is the success of non-Islamist groups in Jordan’s recent engineering association elections. This experience and others like it suggest that limited forms of ideas-based mobilization are beginning to emerge there. In Tunisia, most non-Islamist political parties have struggled to develop loyal bases of followers. A former government official described how Tunisians more commonly switch party affiliations for transactional benefits rather than because of ideological conviction.

Interviewees across the four countries described how trust networks in the workplace have come to play a similar role to networks that are based on kinship, providing their members with mutual benefits and obligations. Citing a private Facebook group for professional women in Amman in which members share job opportunities and professional advice, one Jordanian said, “Now I have [business] connections, they are my new tribe.” A business management expert in Jordan argued that a “tribal mentality” permeates all aspects of the workplace in the Arab world, with employees banding together into networks with trusted peers to achieve benefits, undermining established structures of authority.

Strong feelings of loyalty also form between some team members that function well together. In Saudi Arabia, a government employee said managers place great importance on
To understand how all of these changes are affecting everyday life for Arabs, it is worth examining what for many of them is the manifestation of loyalty to family, clan, and tribe: “wasta.” The word “wasta” comes from the Arabic word meaning to be “in the middle.” One of the necessary ingredients for wasta is a tie that might be seen as creating an obligation. This can be from birth or by association. Many see the willingness to provide wasta as a sort of social obligation, and many also see it as shameful to refuse a request. For many in the Arab world, government capacity has always been lacking, and people have resorted to intermediaries between a claimant and the person or group with something of value.

Wasta is a common phenomenon throughout the Arab world (and, arguably, throughout the world more broadly) and it takes several forms. In some cases, wasta refers to the way that powerful individuals invoke their relationship to the ruler or to prominent officials in order to circumvent the bureaucracy. Someone with business ties to a minister, for example, would expect leniency from that minister’s bureaucracy, and families close to a king might expect government inspectors to ignore regulatory violations. Leading families are able to place their children in prestigious government jobs and receive privileged access to scarce resources, such as irrigation water. Outside of elite circles, a more common type of wasta involves a relative or a fellow tribesman intervening to deliver an outcome that the government is unwilling or unable to deliver directly.

Some feel that the two types of wasta are one and the same—the domain of those who are already privileged becoming even more so. A Jordanian community leader from a rural area north of the capital said with some frustration, “There is no wasta for simple people. It is only government people who benefit from wasta.”108 But for many, wasta is both an everyday occurrence and a necessity when the government cannot perform the way it should. One interlocutor said people turn to wasta because “you can’t get justice from the government.”109 One Tunisian told us about being unable to renew a passport even after returning to the same office for several months, until her father asked a friend and he told her whose name to invoke. Upon doing so, the passport was issued on the spot. In another case involving the same woman, her mother helped her jump a two-month queue for surgery because of a connection to the surgeon.110 Even in wealthier countries, people talked about the importance of wasta in getting a job, especially with the government. One Jordanian woman complained, “Even to get in the army, you need wasta.”111

To some, wasta is just a glorified form of corruption—what a Jordanian journalist called “the most dangerous corruption in our society.”112 Others limited the term “wasta” to mean helping the unworthy at the expense of the worthy, while arguing that there is a broad, religiously based obligation to help those with some connection to you.113 Government officials often embrace the supposedly victimless nature of wasta as a sign of its benign nature. A Saudi finance and customs official argued that after investigating cases of smuggling and illicit trade, many turned out to be people being pressured by family or kin rather than petty or personal corruption.114

CASE STUDY

Wasta Under Attack
Because the provider of services did not benefit, his action became excusable.

Several trends are underway throughout the Arab world that are altering this pattern. First, there is rising resistance to it because of a sense that it has grown out of control. A young Saudi professional explained that people who refuse to engage in wasta are increasingly seen as honorable, clean, and uncorrupted. Twenty years ago, Saudis would see the same behavior as a sign of selfishness. In Tunisia especially, after a revolution that discarded tradition in hopes of a better future, there is disgust that wasta not only has persisted but may have increased. One Tunisian professional complained that before Tunisia's 2011 revolution, "at least wasta was regulated." Now, she said, it is completely unmanaged. A Tunisian activist said wasta is spoken of more openly, and more disparagingly, than it was before the revolution. She expressed hope that more young people would reject it.

Second, Arabs increasingly believe that wasta is an unaffordable luxury, especially in the private sector. An executive at a Jordanian start-up company said that small and medium enterprises are under constant pressure to maximize results, adding, "If you are a company owner, you'll never make a choice outside the company's interests." He said that larger enterprises such as banks have more complicated operations and more room for inefficiency, so there may be more willingness to allow the use of wasta. Yet, the years of plenty are ending even in wealthier states. Emiratis noted that cutbacks at the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) not only led to the dismissal of about 30 percent of the foreign staff, but also a sharp rise in Emiratis' difficulty getting jobs, regardless of the connections one had. In the words of an American who lives in the UAE, under current conditions, employers "can't afford to have more people who aren't contributing."

Third, rising government capacity and automation are drying up the areas where wasta used to flourish. A Saudi government official said that the personnel-heavy system of the past led many to hunt for intermediaries to act as allies, but automation attacks such a function in two ways. In part, an automated system can work quickly, reducing the opportunity for intercession. But automation also makes it harder to bend the rules, dismiss charges, or provide undeserved benefits without leaving fingerprints.

Changing attitudes toward wasta are an important indicator of how individuals regard their obligations in the Arab world. Once seen as a necessary lubricant that advances interests, a growing number of Arabs see it as an irritant that contributes to corruption and inefficiency. Driven perhaps by a sense that those who can benefit from wasta are in the minority, many share an urgency to have the government and its services work for everyone rather than the select few. A diminishing deference to wasta would undermine the sorts of inherited affiliations on which wasta thrives and create pressure for institutions to deliver equal results widely and fairly. Although wasta abounds elsewhere in the world and has proven enduring, its centrality in the Arab world appears to be eroding, and expectations for the quality of government services are rising.
Conclusion

Many of the factors that are upending the social structure in the Middle East are common around the world. Almost 20 years ago, the Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam made a stir when he wrote a book entitled *Bowling Alone*, about the decline of communal civic activities in modern American life. Although this paper has focused mostly on the decline of obligatory activities—family visiting, tribal gatherings, and the like—and Putnam mostly described the decline of voluntary activities, the drivers of both are similar: modernity has led to a growing sense of busyness; an information explosion; a sense of relative poverty amidst rising incomes; increasing amounts of time spent traveling to and from work, home, and recreation; and a greater focus on privacy and on the nuclear family.

**COMMUNITY HAS WARRED** incessantly with individualism for preeminence in our political hagiology. Liberation from ossified community bonds is a recurrent and honored theme in our culture, from the Pilgrims’ storied escape from religious convention in the seventeenth century to the lyric nineteenth-century paeans to individualism...to the latest Clint Eastwood film.

The hagiology of the Middle East, by contrast, has had no such tension. As described above, it has prized community, and out of that community it built a robust hierarchical structure that sought to root every relationship in society from the individual to the ruler. The individual homesteader has no place in the Middle Eastern pantheon. Instead, as Ibn Khaldun noted, Arab societies have prized the tribesman and the sense of social order that the tribesman considered vital to his survival. The difference is partly one of simple history. The United States was largely founded by immigrants who left their extended families behind, whereas extended families, tribes, and clans remain salient throughout the Middle East. In addition, most of the earliest European settlers in North America were hostile to the notion of any sort of established nobility, and Americans have chafed against it for almost four centuries. The U.S. Constitution bars the United States
government from bestowing any titles of nobility and bars U.S. government officials from accepting any title from a foreign government.\textsuperscript{123}

By contrast, Arabs have continued to honor lineage, not only in the numerous sheikhly families throughout the region, but also in the way in which Muslims have bestowed the honorific title of “sayyid” on the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. In the context of historically placing a strong value on family and community, the sorts of social change that are common throughout the world are especially disruptive in the Middle East. Rather than shift the balance between the poles of community and individualism (in Putnam’s description), these changes threaten to unmoor Middle Eastern societies from their foundational sense of community and set them adrift.

In practical terms, this unmooring means that senses of obligation and loyalty that undergirded Middle Eastern societies for centuries are contested. They have not gone away, and they are still prized in many places. But one no longer can take them for granted, and they provide a far more imperfect guide to personal behavior than was the case even a generation ago.

Although we encountered tremendous diversity in our research, what emerged out of more than 100 conversations in four countries was a relatively consistent set of trends. They are proceeding at different rates and sometimes in different directions because of different contexts, but the drivers behind them seemed remarkably consistent.

**First, Individualism is on the Rise** in the Middle East. Because of a number of factors—including but not limited to education, the information revolution, and urbanization—people around the region increasingly conceive of their interests and ambitions in personal terms. This trait is especially prevalent among young people, for whom technology has created an individualized world that seeks to be endlessly engaging (or, perhaps, distracting) and allows for unprecedented privacy. It is also growing among adults, who find themselves held responsible and accountable for what they individually are able to do on behalf of their immediate family, in the workplace, and elsewhere. The role of the family patriarch is receding, and patrons seem to have a diminishing place in public life. More individuals see themselves as the unique product of multiple identities, and they navigate multiple worlds in a single day, stressing different aspects of their identity according to the circumstances. Although this is not wholly new, the scale, scope, and speed of this change is unprecedented.

One of the great uncertainties unleashed by the Arab uprisings of 2011 is how more individualistic citizens will interact with their governments in the future. As more individuals interact more regularly and more directly with the state, how will states adapt, and how will citizens adapt? How will
publics address their grievances, how will they rally for change, and will they insist on a louder voice in decision-making than they currently have? Will leaders maintain their legitimacy in societies that are less ordered and more demanding, and will they be able to adapt to a more dynamic citizenry?

The bet that most Arab governments are making is that coercion can drive most of the public out of the business of politics. The ongoing violence in Yemen, Libya, and Syria that followed efforts at political change gives them some security. Whether that security will prove to be enduring following an economic downturn, ineffective governance, or even an example of change gone well, is less clear.

SECOND, INDIVIDUALS IMPLICITLY—AND SOMETIMES EXPLICITLY—MAKE COST-BENEFIT CALCULATIONS about their time and resources and they are increasingly willing to abandon trust networks. In rural or nomadic settings, the option of abandoning such networks is often unattractive because it makes individuals vulnerable in inhospitable circumstances. The same is true when one owes his or her livelihood to a family group or tribe. Yet, in more urban settings that grant greater mobility and greater anonymity, and in workforces where employment is increasingly divorced from origin, primordial ties of obligation and loyalty can become discretionary. Such ties have not become irrelevant. After all, members of prominent tribes can use their tribal names (or choose not to use their names) to advance their interests even in meritocratic contexts, and some institutions, such as the Saudi National Guard and the Jordanian military, remain heavily tied to family, tribe, and sect. Although sectarian lines can be hard to cross because of state-issued identification cards, many individuals believe they can modulate and often negotiate their fealty to family and tribe. A number of people told us that family and tribe are mostly a security net of last resort, for truly catastrophic circumstances. As such, their willingness to contribute to the cause of tribal or family solidarity is weaker than was the case a generation or two ago.

THIRD, PEOPLE ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO RELY ON TRIBE AND FAMILY IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE SECURITY, GOVERNMENT CAPACITY, AND MOBILITY IS LOW. Where governments perform well—delivering security, distributing services, helping create jobs that go to qualified applicants—the salience of trust groups such as extended families and tribes diminishes. Individuals feel responsible for their own outcomes, and in such circumstances, the price of membership in such a group is seen almost as a tax. When governments perform poorly, individuals are far more willing to pay for the security that such groups provide. This has long been the case in parts of Iraq and Yemen where security has been hard to ensure, and in parts of Jordan where jobs are scarce. We heard a great deal of reporting that confidence in government fairness and effectiveness was situational—that jobs in the army
required family intervention, for example, but the same was not true for the police.

Importantly, none of the people we spoke with felt completely alienated from trust networks. Although such individuals surely exist—and one variant is jihadis who sever ties with their families in order to build ties with their jihadi peers—everyone with whom we spoke fell onto a spectrum of obligation and was aware of how much of an obligation he or she felt, to whom, and on what issues.

**FOURTH, YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SHOWING A MUCH WIDER RANGE OF ATTITUDES TOWARD LOYALTY AND OBLIGATION THAN THEIR ELDERS.** As is the case in most places (and in most times), young people are leading social change in the Middle East. Although young people in any society have a greater tendency to be experimental than older people, young people have felt especially acutely that the benefits that their older relatives received from patterns of obligation and loyalty are not available to them. The growth of an online world has given them an alternative, and it has been growing more robust and attractive at a rapid rate. In fact, a number of people with whom we spoke looked with wonder at how relatives just five years younger than them use media differently, leading to new social patterns forming right before their eyes. One could even speak of “micro-generations” emerging in the Middle East, as patterns of behavior are changing between three-year cohorts rather than 20-year cohorts.

At the UAE’s war memorial Wahat al-Karama, or “Oasis of Dignity,” the museum display could not be clearer. The UAE is comprised of seven emirates, and the museum’s designers chose seven qualities that define what it is to be a patriotic Emirati. Plaques list them as giving, dedication, bravery, sacrifice, tolerance, chivalry, and loyalty. Each plaque contains a description of the quality and a quotation from the leader about it. Each one also contains a physical object that exemplifies the quality. Each quality, each quotation, each object extols forgoing something of value in service of the greater whole.

And on each plaque is a line directed toward the individual viewing it. “What can you give to your own community or to those in need?” “How might you show bravery in service to your community and nation?” “How might you embody chivalry through your life and work?” The exhibit is a stark reminder that the most basic communal values rely on the actions of individuals. The museum was an effort to capture these communal qualities and pass them on to a new generation.

No one we spoke with in the Emirates was aware of the exhibit, and the museum was largely empty when we visited it one afternoon in March 2018.
Endnotes

3 Ibid., 97.
4 Ibid., 98.
10 Ibid., 13.
11 Ibid., 57. Emphasis in the original.
12 For an example of a father killing his son for violating tribal codes, see Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq’s people in the shadow of America’s war* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005), 242-44.
16 Ibid.
18 Interview with Emirati academics, Greater Dubai area, UAE, February 22, 2018.
19 Interview with Tunisian civic organization leaders and youth volunteers, Kairouan, Tunisia, May 15, 2018.
22 Interview with Emirati civil society representatives, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, February 20, 2018.
23 Interview with Saudi journalist, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 18, 2018.
24 Interview with Emirati civil society representatives, Ras Al Khaimah, February 20, 2018.
25 Interview with Emirati academics, Greater Dubai area, UAE, February 22, 2018.
26 Interview with two longstanding European residents of the UAE, Abu Dhabi, UAE, February 19, 2018.
27 Interview with Emirati civil society representatives, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, February 20, 2018.
30 Interview with Emirati academics, Greater Dubai area, UAE, February 22, 2018.
Interview with Jordanian youth from Ma`an and Jordanian Bedouin from Karak, Amman, Jordan, May 7, 2018.
Interview with Western academic, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, March 17, 2018.
Interview with Jordanian leader in international NGO, Amman, Jordan, May 6, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian research center director, Tunis, Tunisia, May 16, 2018.
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According to one report, the Saudis were paying two-thirds of Yemen’s tribal leaders in the 1990s, with one prominent leader receiving $3.5 million/month. Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 219.
Interview with young Jordanian member of prominent East Bank tribe, Amman, Jordan, May 7, 2018.
Interview with Jordanian leader in international NGO, Amman, Jordan, May 6, 2018.
Interview with Jordanian director of Zarqa civil society organization, Amman, Jordan, May 7, 2018.
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Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
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Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
Interview with Bedouin academic and activist, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 19, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian research center director, Tunis, Tunisia, May 16, 2018, and reinforced by interview with a Nidaa Tunis official, Tunis, Tunisia, May 16, 2018.
Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
Interview with young Jordanian Islamist activist, Amman, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian youth NGO leader, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian civic organization leaders and youth volunteers, Kairouan, Tunisia, May 15, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian academic, Tunis, Tunisia, May 16, 2018.
Interview with Tunisian youth NGO leader, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
Ibid., 189.
Interview with Saudi Bedouin academic and activist, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 19, 2018.
63 Interview with Saudi academics, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 20, 2018.
64 Interview with Saudi quasi-governmental organization team, Riyadh, March 20, 2018.
65 Interview with Emirati think tank director and two Emirati researchers, Dubai, UAE, February 20, 2018.
66 Interview with Emirati think tank director and two Emirati researchers, Dubai, UAE, February 20, 2018.
68 Author’s visit to Madinat Zayed Mall, Abu Dhabi, UAE, November 20, 2016.
72 Jones’s argument is succinctly captured in “Social Engineering in the UAE” (CSIS Gulf Roundtable Summary), May 17, 2018, https://www.csis.org/events/gulf-roundtable-social-engineering-uae.
73 Interview with Emirati civil society representatives, Ras al-Khaimah, UAE, February 20, 2018.
74 Interview with Emirati think tank director and two Emirati researchers, Dubai, UAE, February 20, 2018.
75 Interview with Jordanian college graduates and director of community-based organization, Karak, Jordan, May 10, 2018.
77 Interview with Tunisian civic rights organization director, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
78 Interview with Saudi quasi-governmental organization team, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 20, 2018.
79 Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
80 In cities in the Gulf, migrant workers constitute part of the growth of the urban populations; in Jordan, refugees do. See https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL?end=2017&locations=1A&start=1977&view=chart.
82 Interview with employee in Saudi ministry of economic planning, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 17, 2018.
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85 Focus group with Emirati youth, Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, February 20, 2018.
87 Interview with a group of Jordanian women, East Amman, Jordan, May 10, 2018.
88 Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
89 Interview with Saudi quasi-governmental organization team, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 20, 2018.
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98 Interview with Jordanian leader in international NGO, Amman, Jordan, May 6, 2018.
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101 Interview with Western academic, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, March 17, 2018.
102 Interview with young Jordanian Islamist activist, Amman, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
103 Interview with Jordanian leader in international NGO, Amman, Jordan, May 6, 2018.
104 Interview with Tunisian former government adviser, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
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108 Interview with Jordanian director of community-based organization in Ajloun and male staff and volunteers at the center, Ajloun, Jordan, May 9, 2018.
110 Interview with Tunisian researcher and activist, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
113 Interview with Saudi professionals, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 19, 2018.
116 Interview with Tunisian former government adviser, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
117 Interview with Tunisian researcher and activist, Tunis, Tunisia, May 14, 2018.
119 Interview with American analyst, Abu Dhabi, UAE, February 19, 2018.
120 Interview with employee in Saudi ministry of economic planning, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, March 17, 2018.
122 Ibid., 24.
Cover photo Portrait of two Bedouin camel drivers during an annual meeting of the royal family on January, 2003 in Om Rogheiba, Saudi Arabia. (Photo by Reza/Getty Images)