

integrity or reliability of a survey may form only once an interview has begun, introducing survey error not only through systematic nonresponse but also response bias and motivated underreporting.

Encouraging public confidence in surveys. Another way that negative views of survey reliability and intentions may form in MENA populations is through exposure to unscientific polls and/or surveys designed to support a particular political agenda.⁴ Such unscientific or politicized surveys are unfortunately a common occurrence in the Arab world, enabled by a lack of institutional capacity and monetary incentives to carry out high-quality surveys. As a result, survey research is too often exploited to promote the domestic and foreign policy aims of MENA governments and outside political actors, with the aim of creating the false impression of public support for or opposition to an actor or policy position.

Our finding that Arabs in Qatar are especially reluctant to participate in surveys conducted by commercial polling firms and international organizations, compared with a university or government institution, suggests that these types of sponsors are associated with negative survey purposes. In this way, hesitation to participate in surveys in the MENA region may stem from generalized worry that survey results will be manipulated or used for nefarious purposes, rather than a survey's sponsor or topic itself. While much work remains to be done to understand the root causes of attitudes toward surveys in the Arab world, it is hoped that this research can set the agenda for the next wave of studies.

TRUST AND ACTIVISM IN THE MENA

By Nadine Sika, American University in Cairo

Political trust is essential for stability in authoritarian regimes. It is an individual's evaluation of how well the government operates, according to their expectations.⁵ Political trust includes confidence in state institutions like the

executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the police and can respond to short-term evaluations of social and economic life, changing across time and space.⁶ When political institutions do not meet their citizens' expectations, trust is likely to decline.⁷ Political trust is also an indicator of political stability.⁸ During the past decade, political trust has been decreasing in all regime types, while contentious activities like participation in demonstrations, strikes, boycotts, and online activism has been increasing.⁹

Within a context of rising authoritarianism, repression, censorship, and self-censorship, finding empirical evidence for state-society relations becomes a challenge. Working in conditions with such increasing restrictions for fieldwork, I have found that surveys can be a valuable tool. Below, I will review some methodological opportunities and challenges from my years of conducting surveys in the Middle East and North Africa, then highlight the results of one survey that changes our understanding of how increasing state repression affects political trust and participation in contentious events.

Trust and contentious politics in changing regimes

Top-down approaches to understanding authoritarian politics demonstrates that a regime's capacity to repress its opposition is essential for its survival.¹⁰ However, during my past seven years of fieldwork in the region, it seems that repression helps regimes in maintaining their power *only in the short term*. In the long term, the excessive use of violence might be adding to their volatility. A major puzzle for me as a scholar is whether the excessive use of force against political opposition and activists impacts citizens' trust in their political institutions and whether political trust is related to contentious politics in regimes undergoing political transitions. The literature on political trust and participation is primarily on democratic regimes. Some scholars have analyzed the relationship between trust and participation in formal institutions like political parties and civil society organizations in authoritarian regimes.¹¹

However, the relation between trust and participation in contentious activities in regimes that are democratizing or reverting back to authoritarianism needs further analysis.

In this article, I explore political trust and contentious participation in Turkey and Tunisia. Do citizens' political trust levels impact their participation in contentious activities? Turkey and Tunisia are both undergoing political change: the former has been gradually sliding back to an authoritarian political system, while the latter has been gradually transitioning to democracy. However, in each case, I demonstrate that the increased reliance on the security apparatus—especially the police force repressing opposition—leads to more street demonstrations and activism against the regime. Preliminary analysis of survey data suggests that activists are motivated to participate through unconventional means, like demonstrations, as a result of their low levels of trust in the police force.

How can we measure and analyze trust in Arab regimes?

The Arab uprisings of 2010 to 2011 were followed by an surge of field research in the region. Scholars who have been working for years on authoritarian resilience and politics from above, revisited their analysis and started developing new lines of inquiries on state-society relations.¹²

During this period, I was involved in two major research projects on young people in the region, which required much quantitative and qualitative fieldwork. For the first project, “Arab Youth: From Engagement to Inclusion?” sponsored by the Volkswagen Foundation, I conducted fieldwork in Egypt and Morocco during 2012 to 2013.¹³ For the second project, Power2Youth,¹⁴ sponsored by the European Commission I was part of a research team that conducted fieldwork in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, Palestine, and Tunisia from 2014 until 2016.

The difference between the fieldwork experience for both projects is stark, especially for a scholar living in and working on the region. Fieldwork for

the first project, especially semi-structured interviews and surveys, was smooth and enjoyable. The majority of our respondents were enthusiastic to participate and were eager to provide our research teams with substantial information on their perceptions of the Arab uprisings, their role as youth in socio-political change, and their main challenges as young people during the transitional phase. Conducting survey analysis in universities was also a positive experience, with many students eager to participate in the survey analysis and with no security intervention in the content of the survey questions.

The second project, on the other hand, was implemented almost three years after the “Spring,” as the countries under analysis had already started to revert back to authoritarianism (Egypt), autocratize (Turkey), democratize with institutional difficulties (Tunisia), remain autocratic (Morocco and Palestine), or experience large episodes of contentious events (Lebanon). Doing fieldwork for the second project was not an easy task, especially for the research teams in Turkey, Palestine, and Egypt. For instance, convincing participants to take part in focus groups was complicated, as many young people felt uncomfortable discussing their attitudes toward the ruling elite. Some did not refer to the political opposition groups in name, they would just describe the work of “the opposition” generally. Finding interview partners was also complicated, especially in Palestine and Egypt. In Egypt, only 50 percent of young people who were approached to be interviewed agreed to take part in the research. The survey study was another hurdle in Egypt and Palestine. The problem was not conducting the survey project itself, but in being granted permission to implement it in the first place. Questions on trust in institutions were not permitted in the Gaza Strip or in Egypt.

Methodology

I test the relationship between participation in contentious activities and political trust by analyzing the results of the survey study that was conducted in Turkey and Tunisia as part of the Power2Youth research project.¹⁵ In Turkey, the

survey was carried out from January 2 through February 10, 2016. The sample size was 1804 young people ages 18 to 29. The survey included 226 clusters, which represented all regions in addition to all metropolitan, non-metropolitan, and rural districts. In Tunisia, the sample size was 1022 young people ages 18 to 29, and the survey was conducted from July 23 to August 29, 2016. The sample was drawn from the 2014 population sample frame in which enumeration areas served as clusters.

We selected these cases because both have been undergoing political change. Tunisia has been democratizing since the Arab uprisings, while Turkey has been undergoing an autocratic reverse wave since the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the 2016 coup attempt.

My main hypothesis is that low political trust levels lead to participation in contentious activities in authoritarian regimes and in regimes that are undergoing political transitions. To test for this hypothesis, I constructed a “contentious activism” index in which the different modes of contentious activities were tested. The questions were dichotomous variables for which the interviewees were asked whether they ever participated in peaceful demonstrations, protest movements, strikes, boycott activities, or online activism. The answers are coded either “yes” or “no.” The index is composed of these six variables. In Tunisia the Cronbach alpha is at 0.79 and in Turkey it is 0.69. An OLS regression model for each country was constructed, where the dependent variable is the contentious activism index, and the independent variables are the political trust variables, i.e. trust in the army, police force, courts, parliament, central and local government, and political parties. We controlled for gender, unemployment, and education level.¹⁶

Survey results

The survey results demonstrate that political trust levels vary in these two countries and according to the political institutions. For instance, trust in the army is very high in Tunisia at 84 percent and in Turkey with 68 percent. Trust in the police

force is also somewhat high in both at 58 percent in Tunisia and 62 percent in Turkey. On the other hand, trust in the parliament and political parties is much lower, with almost 8 percent trust in the parliament in Tunisia and 38 percent in Turkey. Trust in the central government is also very low in Tunisia, with almost 11 percent, while it is at 50 percent in Turkey.

“ *activists are motivated to participate as a result of their low levels of trust in the police force.* ”

The results of the OLS regression models demonstrate that there is a strong negative correlation between contentious activism and trust in the police force, the political institution which mostly directly represses citizens. These results are partial confirmation of the hypothesis that activism is a result of low political trust levels. The results only confirm that low trust levels in the police force cause participation in contentious activities. Hence, in regimes where the police force is either known to have repressed political activists in the past (Tunisia) or in which police force is increasing its repression in the present (Turkey), there is a negative relation between contentious activism and trust in the police. This implies that even if trust levels in a certain political institution is high amongst citizens at large, activists are motivated to participate in contentious activities as a result of their specific distrust of the repressive apparatus.

Conclusion

The preliminary results for this survey analysis demonstrate that low trust levels in the police force motivate individuals to participate in contentious activities. This finding needs to be further explored by scholars studying authoritarian institutions, democratization, and autocratic reversals, since one of the main assertions in this line of analysis is that regime repression is one of the tools for authoritarian resilience.¹⁷ While authoritarian regimes increase repression to promote stability and survival, this study shows that the more a regime uses repression against activists, the more likely they distrust the police force and that contentious

activities will ensue. The preliminary results also demonstrate that scholars should not only focus on the socio-economic grievances faced by citizens as a main cause for instability and contentious activities, but should also analyze other political and trust variables, which have an important impact on contentious participation. Regimes that are undergoing authoritarian reversals need further investigations, especially in regards to the rise of contentious activism and its relation to political trust. The case of Turkey here begins to shed light on this relation, but more analyses should be conducted in other regimes for more generalizations.

“THEY MAY REVEAL THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE GOVERNMENT”

STUDYING POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN AN INCREASINGLY CLOSED REGION

By Yael Zeira, University of Mississippi

In 2011, ordinary citizens across the Middle East and North Africa took to the streets to demand greater freedom and accountability from their governments. Yet, even in the countries that saw the largest protests, most citizens did not participate. What explains individual participation in risky anti-regime resistance? Under which conditions will anti-regime movements achieve the wide participation necessary for their success? Answering these questions requires individual-level survey data on citizens' political behavior. Yet, due to the difficulties of data collection, few such surveys have been conducted. As a result, we know little about the drivers of mass participation—and, therefore, also about why unarmed protest occurs and succeeds—even in key cases like the first Palestinian intifadah. My recently released book, [*The Revolution Within: State Institutions and Unarmed Resistance in Palestine*](#) (2019), helps fill this gap by drawing on a unique survey of Palestinian participants and nonparticipants in unarmed resistance against Israeli occupation.¹⁸ With an innovative design developed to mitigate common pitfalls of survey research in difficult environments, the survey suggests new

methodological directions for MENA researchers working in an increasingly closed region.

Using surveys to study mass political behavior

The Arab uprisings brought questions regarding mass political behavior and attitudes to the forefront of comparative politics research on the Middle East. Long used to study political participation in advanced industrialized democracies, survey research offers several advantages for studying such questions. First, while surveys vary in their sample size, well-powered surveys typically include sample sizes of hundreds or thousands of citizens. Second, these surveys also typically include both participants and nonparticipants in anti-regime resistance or other political behaviors of interest—key to comparing the two groups and determining why their behavior differs. Third, and perhaps most critically, survey respondents are randomly selected from—and therefore reflect—a country's overall population. As a result, if properly designed, the inferences drawn from survey research can be generalized from the survey sample to the broader population of a country. Finally—as evidenced by the recent explosion in survey experiments in the MENA (see e.g. Corstange and Marinov 2012; Benstead, Jamal, and Lust 2015; Bush and Jamal 2015; Masoud, Jamal, and Nugent 2016; Shelef and Zeira 2017) and beyond—surveys can be easily combined with experiments, in-depth interviews, and other methods, complementing their traditional strengths.¹⁹

At the same time, survey researchers working in the MENA region face a number of challenges even when compared to researchers working in other developing regions. Due to the shrinking of civic and political space across much of the region, questions regarding the protection of survey respondents and the reliability of their answers have grown ever more acute. Survey researchers working in the MENA region typically require official approval from government actors (including, often informally, intelligence services), which is increasingly difficult to obtain. Even when granted, approval often comes at the cost of near-debilitating restrictions on the scope

ENDNOTES

Gengler notes:

- ¹ J. Gengler, M. Tessler, R. Lucas, and J. Forney. (2019). 'Why Do You Ask?' The Nature and Impacts of Attitudes toward Public Opinion Surveys in the Arab World. *British Journal of Political Science*. The study was made possible by a grant (NPRP 9-015-5-002) from the Qatar National Research Fund, a member of The Qatar Foundation. The statements herein are solely the responsibility of the authors.
- ² G. Sjoberg. (1955). A Questionnaire on Questionnaires. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 18, 423-427.
- ³ E.g., D. Corstange. (2014). Foreign-sponsorship effects in developing-world surveys: Evidence from a field experiment in Lebanon. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 78, 474-484.
- ⁴ J. Gengler (2017). The dangers of unscientific surveys in the Arab world. *Washington Post*. October 27.
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- ⁵ Marc Hetherington, "The Political Relevance of Political Trust, *American Political Science Review* vol. 92, no. 4 (1998): 791-808.
- ⁶ Eric Uslaner, "The Study of Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, by Eric Uslaner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 3-13.
- ⁷ Jack Citrin and Laura Stoker, "Political Trust in a Cynical Age," *Annual Review of Political Science* vol. 21 (2018): 49-70; William Mishler and Richard Rose, "What are the Origins of Political Trust? Testing Institutional and Cultural Theories in Post-communist Societies," *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 1 (2001): 30-62. 2001).
- ⁸ Kenneth Newton, "Social and Political Trust," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, by Russel Dalton and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (Oxford: oxford University Press, 2007): 342-61.
- ⁹ Mark Beissinger, "'Conventional' and 'Virtual' Civil Societies in Autocratic Regimes," *Comparative Politics* vol. 49, no. 3 (2017): 351-372.
- ¹⁰ Johannes Gerschewski, "The Three Pillars of Stability: Legitimation, Repression and Co-optation in Autocratic Regimes," *Democratization* vol. 20, no. 1 (2013): 38-57.
- ¹¹ Amaney Jamal, "When is Social Trust a Desirable Outcome? Examining Levels of Trust in the Arab World," *Comparative Political Studies* vol. 40, no. 11 (2007): 1328-1349; Justin Gengler, Mark Tessler, Darwish Al-Emadi and Abdoulaye Diop, "Civic and Democratic Citizenship in Qatar: Findings from the First Qatar World Values Survey," *Middle East Law and Governance* vol. 5, no. 3 (2013): 258-279.
- ¹² See for instance Joshua Stacher, "Fragmenting States, New Regimes: Militarized State Violence and Transition in the Middle East," *Democratization* vol. 22, no. 15 (2015): 259-275.
- ¹³ For more information on the project see: <https://uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/faculty-of-economics-and-social-sciences/subjects/departement-of-social-sciences/ifp/institute-of-political-science/people/middle-east-and-comparative-politics-professor-schlumberger/projects-and-services/arab-youth-from-engagement-to-inclusion-vw/project-description/>
- ¹⁴ For more information on the project see: <https://www.iai.it/en/ricerche/power2youth-freedom-dignity-and-justice>

- ¹⁵ The research design and the implementation of the survey study was conducted by the Fafo Research Foundation in Norway. For more information on the survey results and methodology please see: <http://power2youth.iai.it/survey.html>
- ¹⁶ For a full regression table, please email the author at: nadinesika@aucegypt.edu
- ¹⁷ Johannes Gerschewski, op.cit; Mark Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation? The Puzzle of Aggregate Studies of Repression and Dissent," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 31, no. 2 (1987): 266-297.
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- ¹⁸ Zeira, Yael. *The Revolution Within: State Institutions and Unarmed Resistance in Palestine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- ¹⁹ Corstange, Daniel, and Nikolay Marinov. "Taking sides in other people's elections: The polarizing effect of foreign intervention." *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 3 (2012): 655-670.
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- Nugent, Elizabeth, Tarek Masoud, and Amaney A. Jamal. "Arab Responses to Western Hegemony: Experimental Evidence from Egypt." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, no. 2 (2018): 254-288.
- ²⁰ While the Palestinian Territories does have well-established and regarded survey firms, perhaps the best-known firm, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), does not generally accept commissioned research from outside scholars. Due to the international presence and interest in the Occupied Territories, hiring a survey firm is also often prohibitively expensive for Ph.D. students and junior scholars. As such, working with Al-Maqdese, I put together my own survey team and did much of the logistical and administrative work typically carried out by a survey firm myself.
- ²¹ Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. *Survey methodology*. Vol. 561. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.
- ²² Corstange, Daniel. "Sensitive questions, truthful answers? Modeling the list experiment with LISTIT." *Political Analysis* 17, no. 1 (2009): 45-63.
- Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr, Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. *Survey methodology*. Vol. 561. John Wiley & Sons, 2011.
- ²³ Scacco, Alexandra. "Anatomy of a Riot: participation in ethnic violence in Nigeria." *Book Manuscript, New York University* (2012).
- ²⁴ Belli, Robert F., William L. Shay, and Frank P. Stafford. "Event history calendars and question list surveys: A direct comparison of interviewing methods." *Public opinion quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2001): 45-74.
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