

Routledge Political Economy of the Middle East and North Africa

THE AFTERMATH OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

**TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTION,
DEMOCRACY, AND PEACE**

Edited by
Samir Makdisi and Raimundo Soto



The Aftermath of the Arab Uprisings

Unlike other books on the Arab uprisings of 2010–2011 which focus on why they occurred, this book looks instead towards the future of three countries—Syria, Libya, and Yemen—where the violence and instability initiated by the uprisings persist. It additionally examines the case of Iraq which continues to suffer from a precarious political situation introduced by the US-led invasion of 2003. The book investigates what should be done to achieve inclusive political and economic development and eventually a lasting peace. It describes the particular circumstances in each of the four countries, and analyses the common challenges facing them such as the need to achieve economic diversification, control inflation, raise employment levels, husband fiscal expenditures, control corruption, and implement transparent policies. It argues that in the four countries any lasting settlement must involve an explicitly stated new social contract that lays the foundation for inclusive socio-economic development and a genuinely democratic environment. In addition, a massive transformation is required of the institutional fabric of society, that is, the set of key institutions that helped create the conditions for conflict. Moreover, the book argues that any successful transition hinges on anticipating the potential for political and economic development that an eventual peace agreement will open. This can only be done by envisioning and planning the reforms that ought to be implemented, and building up political support for the transition phase.

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**To all those who have endeavoured, in writing or in action, to
open the doors of Arab countries to growth, justice, and freedom**



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Preface

Since achieving independence after World War II, and despite their steady development, the majority of Arab countries have generally failed to break out of the grip of their autocratic regimes¹ This failure stands in contrast with an emerging trend in other regions of the world, whereby a positive correlation between democracy and development has been widely documented (e.g., Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Acemoglu et al., 2014). While this evidence is uncontested, its interpretation is controversial. Inferring causality from correlation is notoriously difficult, but mutual causation between democracy and development is likely to be present. One strand of the literature takes an ‘optimistic view’ of the correlation whereby sustained economic development empowers the citizens and provides a counterweight to the power of elites and governments, thus creating space for a society that would promote civil and political freedoms and, in turn, democracy can increase economic growth due to its positive effect on political stability and democratic institutions (Alesina and Perotti, 1996; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006 2006). The ‘pessimistic view’ would rationalize the correlation as an indication of reverse causality whereby bad economic performance would push or catalyse the end of autocratic regimes whereas good economic performance would facilitate transferring resources to buyout the opposition (e.g., O’Donnell, 1973; Remmer, 1993; Ruiz Pozuelo et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding the evidence for other regions of the world, it remains that democracy has been largely absent from Arab countries and that it does not appear to be correlated with economic development. Several explanations have been posited to explain this failure to democratize. Of note is the role of oil resources and the prevalence of conflicts in the region, along with their consequent disruptive foreign interventions.² But also religious, cultural, societal, and historical explanations have been advanced for the lack of inclusive political participation in most, if not all, of the Arab countries.³

These explanations, nevertheless, tend to conceal the fact that there is a significant popular appetite for political inclusion and a growing demand for participation in the region, especially by women and the youth. The uprisings that the five Arab countries (Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen) experienced in 2011 vividly reflected the extent of the deep popular

discontent and the clamour for change. Furthermore, they were a stark reminder that, sooner or later, a fundamental transformation in the socio-economic and political order of the Arab countries would be in the offing.

What course such a transformation would take and what type of new social contract would emerge remain uncertain being largely dependent on how the elites of these countries respond to the popular clamour for change. Of the above five countries, Tunisia is the only one that has been, since the uprising, undergoing a process towards political inclusion via fair and free democratic elections. However, as its political crisis of 2021 has shown,⁴ the path has certainly not been easy for the Tunisians. Some observers note that the same factors that allowed its transition—including a willingness to compromise, a weak security sector, and a powerful civil society—may have, in their own ways, inhibited the consolidation of Tunisia's democracy by not allowing substantive action on political and economic reforms (Grawal, 2021). It remains to be seen whether the post-2021 phase will yet witness an overdue solid consolidation of its democratic experiment. Egypt, on the other hand, has all but returned to autocracy, largely resulting from the inability of key political actors to resolve their ideological and strategic differences and provide the country with a viable transition agenda and importantly the latent opposition of the military to having their privileges dismantled (see Quandt, 2020).

This volume focuses on the dramatic cases of those Arab countries that fell into civil wars in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. Libya, Syria, and Yemen show that the unwillingness and/or inability to respond to a popular clamour for change can quickly lead to violent conflict with devastating social, institutional, and economic consequences. They also attest to the pervasive effects that external actors can have on aggravating conflicts and inhibiting fundamental transformations that would support political inclusion and broad-based economic development. Our research also considers Iraq, a country less affected by the Arab uprisings, but that has equally struggled to reduce its level of sectarian conflict and political instability without, however, any notable success. Its experience demonstrates that *even if modernizing reforms are adopted*, non-inclusive top-down transformations may fail to ensure longer-term national peace and stability.

The ample spectrum of political and economic reforms needed for reconstruction in conflict-afflicted economies calls for the design of a comprehensive agenda whereby neither political nor economic elements become limitations to its success. Such an agenda ought to be based on a solid and sound diagnosis of the existing conditions and a thorough assessment of the institutions and policies that led to the fracturing of the social contract, so that the proposed set of reforms responds adequately to the needs of the country and articulates properly both the economic and political dimensions of the transformation.

Experience shows that the future course of countries experiencing civil conflict will largely be defined not only by the nature of the peace settlement

but also by the extent to which such settlement is capable of enticing a common vision of a possible future, by the capacity of authorities to neutralize those opposing the peace agreement, and by their response to unforeseen contingencies and external pressures.

Whatever form these settlements take, a major premise of this volume is that in today's world *any transformation leading to lasting national peace in any of the Arab countries will be conditional on laying the foundations for an inclusive form of socio-economic development in the context of a genuinely democratic environment*. The latter can be characterized by two elements: one is that it is a system of governance in which the rulers are held accountable for their actions (Schmitter and Karl, 1991) and the other is that a society can choose to replace those rulers through open, free, and fair elections (Huntington, 1991). Irrespective of the form it adopts, a democratic system, as we define it, implies a political system characterized by equality before the law, basic human rights, guarantees of minority rights, accountability, transparency, and fair competition between political parties.

A second premise of the volume is that *whatever form the new social contract takes in each Arab country, it would require a massive transformation of the institutional fabric of society—that is, the set of key institutions—that had helped to create the conditions which made a conflict inevitable*. Such transformation is not limited to reforming institutions in the political arena, but it must also deal with far-reaching economic reforms that would ensure that the benefits of the peace agreement are passed on to the population. We should keep in mind what experience has shown namely that, parliamentary elections, even if free, are not necessarily sufficient to ensure accountability in governance. Any institutional reform should allow for its regular implementation.⁵

Such a fundamental transformation is inevitable for success. Failing to materialize would signal a return to pre-conflict forms of governance with their latent instability that, we submit, sooner or later would lead to a renewed upheaval. But should it take roots in the countries emerging from conflict, it is expected to help diminish resistance to the democratization of the region as a whole which, except for a few countries, remains characterized by varying shades of autocracy.⁶ The speed of this transition (its timing and regularity), its nature (the extent and depth of reforms), and the path it takes (peaceful or not, constitutional or not) could very well differ from one Arab country to another, most likely as a result of their initial political and economic conditions as well as of the nature of any agreed settlement of the prevailing conflicts. And while the scope of socio-economic reforms is vast, given the Arab region's generally entrenched autocracy, those in the political arena assume special significance.

A major aim of this volume is, therefore, to study the conditions for a sustained political and economic transformation in countries emerging from civil conflicts, with a focus on the above four Arab countries whose conflicts are yet to be resolved and for which a fully fledged post-conflict recovery

strategy is yet to be designed and implemented. Its research is intended to contribute to improving the design of political and economic reform agendas that would eventually support the reconstruction of conflict-afflicted Arab economies, provide for democratic change, and, hopefully, achieve national peace.

The volume is divided into two main parts preceded by a detailed introduction. The first part (Chapters 1 to 3) takes up the root causes of civil conflicts as background for an argued post-conflict political model and overall socio-economic agenda for the four Arab countries. On the causes of conflicts, the effects of horizontal inequality and its conditionality on oil resources and government spending and their interaction turn out to be crucial for our understanding of the Arab uprisings and the subsequent civil wars. This is followed by an analytic review of the empirical evidence on the relationship between power-sharing institutions and post-conflict trajectories in countries that have experienced civil war. It affirms that 'constraining' power-sharing has a positive effect on the probability of democratic survival, and that in post-war settings the only type of power-sharing that produces positive outcomes on democratic stability is 'inclusive' power-sharing. In turn, the accompanying reconstruction policies should aim at changing altogether the pre-conflict institutional fabric of the country, with the aim of achieving wider economic inclusion and lesser inequality; more generally socio-economic reforms and policies ought to be in line with the establishment of an implicit or explicit new form of the social contract that incorporates the principles of democracy.

The second part of the volume (Chapters 4–7) is devoted to detailed case studies of the four countries in conflict (Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen) whose civil wars have wrought a large magnitude of human havoc and material destruction, albeit to varying levels from one country to another, and invited a multitude of direct outside military involvements most notably in the case of Syria where armed intervention by fundamentalist groups succeeded for a while in establishing their own state in the north-eastern part of the country. Accounting for the analyses of Part I, the case studies explore the causes of the respective conflicts, trace subsequent politico-economic developments, identify major national questions and issues faced in the post-conflict phase, and identify the major areas of reform that need to be implemented to achieve the objectives of equitable economic reconstruction and national peace. Looking beyond the eventual settlement of any ongoing conflict, the case studies assert that if these objectives are to be sustained, a new social contract would have to be put in place; one that would reflect socio-economic inclusivity, institutional reform, and democratic political governance that ensure equitable power sharing and accountability.

The Introduction (Makdisi and Soto) to this volume presents an overview of the underlying factors for the discontent which led to conflict; the premises of reconstruction in the post-conflict phase; and the prospects for a regional democratic breakthrough. Noteworthy is that the four countries

under study made good economic progress prior to the uprisings and managed to improve levels of human development by reducing extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. Nonetheless, other major economic factors continued to fuel social and political discontent, principally high rates of unemployment and a high level of inequality in expenditure, income, or wealth, in addition to institutional and social factors such as cronyism, corruption, and the abuse of power by public servants. The long-term durability of any post-conflict transition is founded, according to the authors, on the fulfilment of three vital premises: gearing reconstruction towards changing, improving, or in an extreme case, eliminating altogether the pre-war institutional fabric of the country; focusing economic rebuilding on achieving wider economic inclusion and reducing inequality as well as generating greater employment opportunities; and establishing a new form of social contract, implicit or explicit, that would enshrine the attributes of democratic government. Of course, as long as the multi-dimensional military conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya continue to rage, the prospects for any democratic transition are limited. But once the conflicts are settled, the path to change will lie open. Among the factors pushing in the direction of democratic change are a growing middle class, a growing incompatibility between exclusive political institutions and the greater openness of economic institutions, and an expanding popular demand for freedom, equal political rights, and social justice.

Chapter 1 (Makdisi and Soto) focuses on the design and implementation of economic reforms, which are an integral part of the process of peace and reconstruction. The challenge facing any economic reform is immense. On the one hand, economic policies should aim at minimizing the risk of conflict recurrence, restoring confidence in economic institutions, generating employment and fostering investment, and enhancing the ability of the state to provide security for communities and households, to enforce the rule of law and deliver essential services. On the other hand, since the pre-conflict economic structure did very little to avert conflict and became highly distorted as a result of the war, reconstruction policies should be primarily geared towards changing, improving, or, even in an extreme case, eliminating altogether the pre-conflict institutional fabric of the country, i.e., the set of economic institutions—and their embedded structure of incentives—that helped to create the conditions for failure.

Chapter 2 (Bodea and Houle) reviews the long-standing debate on the origins of political conflict—social grievances versus economic calculations and greed—with a focus on political exclusion and economic inequality. They argue that while the ‘greed approach’ focuses on the factors that motivate individuals to initiate conflict, the grievance hypothesis focuses on those that create the opportunity for conflict to erupt. Both issues and their interaction are crucial for our understanding of the Arab uprisings and the subsequent civil wars. Furthermore, they posit that these two approaches may not be independent. Greed-based factors, such as oil rents,

can aggravate grievances caused by political or economic inequality. By themselves, grievances may not be sufficient for conflict. A group with incentives to rebel may refrain from initiating a civil war if it does not have the opportunity to do so. In particular, Bodea and Houle find that the effects of horizontal inequality (which is associated with the grievances-based approach) on the civil war in the Arab world have been conditional on oil resources (which is associated with the greed-based approach).

The chapter provides empirical support to the notion that dwindling oil proceeds may have been at the root of the collapse of the social contract in Libya, Iraq, and Yemen. The empirical evidence indicates that horizontal inequality only increases the likelihood of civil war in oil-rich countries: countries that spend oil revenues on repression and/or cooptation are less vulnerable to civil war. Furthermore, the effect of horizontal inequality is conditional on a country's level of government spending: as government spending increases, its effect weakens. Conversely, a sudden drop in oil prices and/or exports might force the government to cut subsidies and transfers to certain groups in the population, thus igniting discontent and conflict. Such a decline in oil prices might also lead to an increasing inability on the part of the government to effectively repress discontent.

Chapter 3 (Sambanis) reviews key questions and the empirical evidence about the relationship between power-sharing institutions and post-conflict trajectories in countries that have experienced civil war. Different measures and concepts of power-sharing are discussed, and a broad set of empirical results is reviewed and replicated. The author refers to three types of power-sharing. The first is 'inclusive' which mandates the participation of several parties of groups in particular offices or in the decision-making processes; the second is 'dispersive', dividing authority between individuals in a well-defined pattern (e.g., territorial decentralization); and the third is 'constraining', limiting the power of any individual and thus protecting ordinary citizens and vulnerable groups against encroachment and abuse. He emphasizes the point that a key distinction that can be drawn is between 'inclusive' and 'dispersive' power-sharing. The conditions favourable to different types of power-sharing are considered, as are the consequences of power-sharing as regards the risk of war recurring and democratic stability. Differences between constraining and dispersive power-sharing are discussed and the pacifying effects of dispersive power-sharing are analysed, providing new insights regarding the implications of external intervention in respect of the post-war stability of power-sharing institutions.

Reviewing the literature, the author finds that only 'constraining' power-sharing has a positive effect on democratic survival and that in post-war settings the only type of power-sharing that produces positive outcomes for democratic stability is 'inclusive' power-sharing. This implies that agreements on regional autonomy, which are frequently negotiated as solutions to ethnic or separatist civil wars, have no positive effect on this outcome. This review shows, however, that it is possible to find substantial support for

the claim that regional autonomy (i.e., ‘dispersive’ power-sharing) reduces the risk of a return to conflict. Further, it shows that patterns of external intervention in the civil war will also shape the stability of power-sharing arrangements post-war. Replicating and extending a published study by Cederman et al. (2015) who use data from the Ethnic Power Relations database to study the consequences of ‘downgrading’ the political inclusion of ethnic groups, this chapter indicates that the effects of autonomy agreements are conditional on patterns of external intervention. Pro-rebel intervention provides groups with an ‘outside option’ that makes the government hostage to external interference. The more extensive the inclusion of former rebels in the power balance among intervening powers, the more it weakens the parties’ commitment to power-sharing.

Turning to the country studies, the Syrian case study (Nader and Boustati, Chapter 4) discusses in detail the various causes of the country’s conflict and identifies specific pathways to the country’s recovery in the absence of a yet comprehensive political settlement. The analysis points to the continuing ‘authoritarian bargain’ and its consequent lack of power-sharing that has characterized the country’s political regime since the 1950s, a regime that has also discriminated politically against its Kurdish population. The civil wars over the years that followed the 2011 uprising have led to devastating economic, social, and political costs, borne mostly by a few cities and towns. But until a final inclusive political settlement is reached, the implementation of a comprehensive plan for economic and social recovery does not seem feasible. Rather reconstruction efforts would necessarily have to be less ambitious focusing on identifying feasible entry points for recovery. Among others that the study identifies, this includes revitalizing the agricultural sector and supporting high-value-added export-oriented manufacturing and high-tech services. For the longer term, however, achieving lasting national peace and sustained economic recovery would call for a new social contract that embodies genuine and inclusive political governance.

The Iraqi case study (Yousif, Morrar, and El-Joumayle, Chapter 5) demonstrates how, following the overthrow of its autocratic regime in 2003, the absence of properly functioning national institutions in multiethnic countries such as Iraq perils attempts to transit from an autocracy to democracy—hence the relevance of its experience to the countries of the 2011 uprisings that are yet to settle their conflicts and aspire to traverse the road to a democratic order. The De-Ba’athification of the country following the Allied invasion of 2003, which dismantled Saddam’s authoritarian regime, initially led to the creation of a Governing Council drawn from among the returning exiles and based on a system of ethno-sectarian apportionments between Sunnis, Shi’is, Kurds, and other groups. Sectarian political groupings, however, came to dominate specific government ministries, allocating jobs and other patronage to their supporters, while the long-standing question of Kurdish self-rule has still to be finally resolved. Dismantled

institutions have remained unrepaired, while new institutions that the US created, with the help of the new Iraqi elites, have often proved fragile. In consequence, despite the country's massive oil wealth, economic rebuilding since 2003 has been slow, inequitable and inefficient, largely due to the decline of those institutions that are central to economic policy formation and implementation. Thus, the primary challenge that Iraq has been facing since 2003 is institutional reform that addresses existing ethno/sectarian divisions, permits the implementation of equitable national economic policies, and promotes the establishment of democratic governance.

The Yemen case study (Al Iriani, Hassan, and Martinez, Chapter 6) stresses the point that the equal power-sharing arrangement following the country's unification in 1990 proved unsuccessful; the country experienced years of instability, which together with existing tribal structures contributed to lack of a strong central authority. Government control outside the major cities was minimal, leading several marginalized local groups to begin speaking up against the political elite in Sana'a. As of mid-2020, the conflict seems to have reached a deadlock with neither side being able to achieve total victory and apparently no imminent prospect for a peaceful solution. The study proposes a return to the power-sharing formula adopted by the National Dialogue Conference of 2013 but not implemented when the state was dismantled in September 2014. The formula adopted postulated political (non-sectarian) power-sharing arrangements that guaranteed the inclusion of all segments of the society. This type of governance should in turn encourage the implementation of growth-enhancing and equitable socio-economic policies.

The Libya case study (Hamada, Sokmen, and Zaki, Chapter 7) points out that since the uprising of 2011 and the overthrow of the Qathafi regime the country has been suffering from a cycle of social, political, security, and economic crises, as well as tribalism, ethnic divisions, and foreign interventions, all of which have reinforced one another. They have greatly weakened state institutions and the economy, the country's oil wealth notwithstanding, and in consequence facilitated fragmentation, disunity, and dysfunction, creating a fertile ground for the growth of violence and a war-driven economy. It would be greatly desirable were a post-conflict transition model of reconstruction to embody an inclusive settlement with balanced power-sharing (e.g., the Skhirat Agreement of 2015). But this may not be feasible in the immediate future. Rather, coping with prevailing economic and political challenges might require a transitional government that brings together the warring parties. The main function of this government would be to facilitate a dialogue on establishing stability as a first step, to be followed by agreement on the form of governance to be adopted nationally through a constitutional referendum. Support from the international community for reconciliation would greatly facilitate such a process.

Notes

- 1 Lebanon with its consociational democracy established at independence in 1943 is one notable exception though its political system has not since evolved to becoming a fully fledged democracy.
- 2 See for example Ross (2012) and Elbadawi and Makdisi (2011 and 2017).
- 3 For a review see Huntington (1991) and Hinnebusch (2006).
- 4 Parliament was suspended by the President on July 25, 2021, on the promise of reforms, with consequent political turmoil. As of end 2021, the crisis had yet to be settled.
- 5 While there has been an increase in violent conflicts in a global context, at the same time, the number of societies that have adopted more inclusive forms of political, economic, and cultural governance has grown rapidly over the last 30 years. The 2018 World Bank study *Pathways for Peace, Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* argues that success in preventing violent conflicts would call, among other things, for inclusive decision-making, as well as long-term policies to address economic, social, and political issues.
- 6 According to the Economist Index of Democracy for 2020, the vast majority of Arab countries remain classified as authoritarian; a few, namely, Lebanon and Morocco as hybrid regimes; and only one, Tunisia, as a flawed democracy. A flawed democracy is characterized by free and fair elections and basic civil liberties, but suffer from problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture, and low levels of political participation. A hybrid regime is characterized by substantial election irregularities, government pressure on opposition parties, serious weaknesses in political culture, functioning of government and political participation, and widespread corruption.



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Part I

Post-Conflict Development and Democratic Governance



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Introduction

On the Causes of Conflict and the Premises for Reconstruction

Samir Makdisi and Raimundo Soto

The Arab uprisings of 2011 that initially erupted in Tunisia on 17 December 2010, spread rapidly and strongly to four other countries, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. They led to the immediate toppling of the regimes in all of them, followed by civil wars in the last three that, as of the beginning of 2022, are yet to be resolved. In addition, sustained street demonstrations also took place in Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Sudan. Minor protests occurred in Djibouti, Mauritania, the Palestinian National Authority, and Saudi Arabia. Tunisia managed to introduce democratic governance though not free from serious domestic strains, while subsequent political changes in Egypt led in 2014 to the emergence of a ruling regime that essentially reflects a return to the pre-2011 military-influenced mode of government. Thus, taken together the uprisings have not resulted in any significant move towards a genuinely Arab regional democratic order. The old social contract has not been replaced with a new one.

The intensity of the demonstrations and the speed at which the Arab uprisings spread from one country to the next are striking and attest to the existence of profound and enduring factors underlying the expression of discontent and the subsequent outbreak of armed conflict. Hence, any meaningful reconstruction plan must be based on a valid diagnosis of these factors. A quote from George Santayana expresses it eloquently: ‘those who cannot remember their past are doomed to repeat it’ (*The Life of Reason: The Phases of Human Progress*, 1905, vol. I, p. 284). Correctly recognizing the deep roots of these conflicts constitutes the first major prerequisite for identifying the counterbalancing/remedial measures that need to be implemented as an integral part of the reconstruction effort and the establishment of national peace associated, we submit, with democratic governance. In what follows we take up these issues under three headings: factors of discontent, premises of reconstruction, and prospects for a regional democratic breakthrough. They constitute an introductory background to the thematic papers and case studies taken up in this book.

1 Factors of Discontent

Cross-country research on the economic causes of civil conflicts has largely focused on the ‘greed vs. grievance’ issue: greed determinants would include mainly economic factors, such as poverty or appropriable natural resources, while grievance determinants include political exclusion, social polarization, or ethnic fractionalization. Bodea and Elbadawi (2008b) provide cross-country empirical evidence that once political violence is correctly modelled as a complex process with multiple manifestations (one of which is civil war), both grievance and economic factors are all relevant for explaining the risk of violent conflicts.

More recently, scholars have been tackling the important issue of the differences between the determinants of two types of civil resistance: violent and non-violent conflict. These are often considered to be very different phenomena, despite the accounts demonstrating close links between the two experiences. As noted by Witte et al. (2020), the relationship between grievances and uprisings is expected to be stronger in the case of peaceful uprisings than in violent revolts, largely because participation in peaceful uprisings is associated with a lower risk of violent government retaliation—and lower expected costs—than when engaging in violent rebellion, and also because it does not require the legitimization of the use of violence, nor the resources for purchasing weaponry. Possibly, the Arab uprisings are a singularity in the sense that, although peaceful at inception, they met with significant repression and, not surprisingly, turned violent very quickly.

Focusing on factors of discontent underlying the conflicts in the Arab region, we may group them into economic, political, and social categories. We refer to them in general terms leaving their deeper individual country analysis to the case studies of section II.

1.1 Economic Factors

There is an ongoing debate among scholars and politicians regarding the importance of economic factors in sparking the recent conflicts in the MENA region vis-à-vis other sociological, historical, and political determinants (see, for instance, Campante and Chor, 2012; Malik and Awadallah, 2013). Arguably, all of them are important but might have affected the events in each country in idiosyncratic ways. The country studies in this volume shed light on their relative importance and the ways in which they are connected and influence each other. This, in turn, forms the basis for the reconstruction agendas that would function as markers for the post-conflict transition period.

From a broad perspective, economic factors may not seem to be at the root of the conflicts in Arab countries. Prior to the uprisings, the region had been making steady progress towards eliminating extreme poverty, boosting prosperity, increasing school enrolment, and reducing hunger, and

infant and maternal mortality (World Bank, 2017a). The Arab countries had embarked on significant programmes of structural reform and had made progress in creating environments more conducive to private sector development and shifting their economic systems to include more private sector-market-driven approaches. It has been pointed out that in the 1990s MENA economies lagged behind the rest of the world in terms of economic reform and when reforms were implemented, they had a limited impact in terms of economic growth and job creation (Nabli and Végañzonès-Varoudakis, 2004). On the other hand, reforms implemented in the twenty-first century have been more comprehensive, thus allowing for a reduction in the over-sized and coercive style of state apparatus that was set up throughout the MENA region in the 1950s, and for increasing the role of the private sector. However, the limited liberalizing reforms undertaken lacked a clear strategic focus and have strengthened cronyism by generalizing politically oriented cooption and patronage, thereby establishing economies that are strongly averse to innovative behaviour (Malik and Awadallah, 2013; Diwan et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the Arab region's economic growth in the pre-2010 period although moderate was generally in line with growth trends in other regions of the world. For the ten years preceding the uprisings, its average rate of growth exceeded the world average as well as the averages of most other regions of the world (see Table 1).

Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, real GDP per working-age individual in the countries that experienced uprisings had increased in the two decades before 2010. Growth was, nevertheless, slow and unsteady in the two oil-abundant countries—Iraq and Libya—where the increase of GDP per working-age individual was below 1 per cent per year on average between 1990 and 2010. In the other two countries, economic growth was steady yet rather modest—around 2 per cent per year on average. In any case, these growth rates indicate that all these countries were unable to catch up significantly with those of more advanced economies.

Table 1 Average Growth in Real GDP per Capita by Region (%)

	<i>World</i>	<i>Arab World</i>	<i>Middle East & North Africa*</i>	<i>Euro Area</i>	<i>OECD Members</i>	<i>High Income</i>	<i>Middle Income</i>	<i>Low Income</i>
2000–10	1.7	2.2	2.5	1.3	1.1	1.2	4.8	1.9
2010–17	1.6	1.1	0.6	1.2	1.2	1.2	3.7	2
2000–18	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.3	1	1.3	4.2	2.2

Source: World Economic Indicators 2020, The World Bank.

Note: *excludes MENA high-income economies.

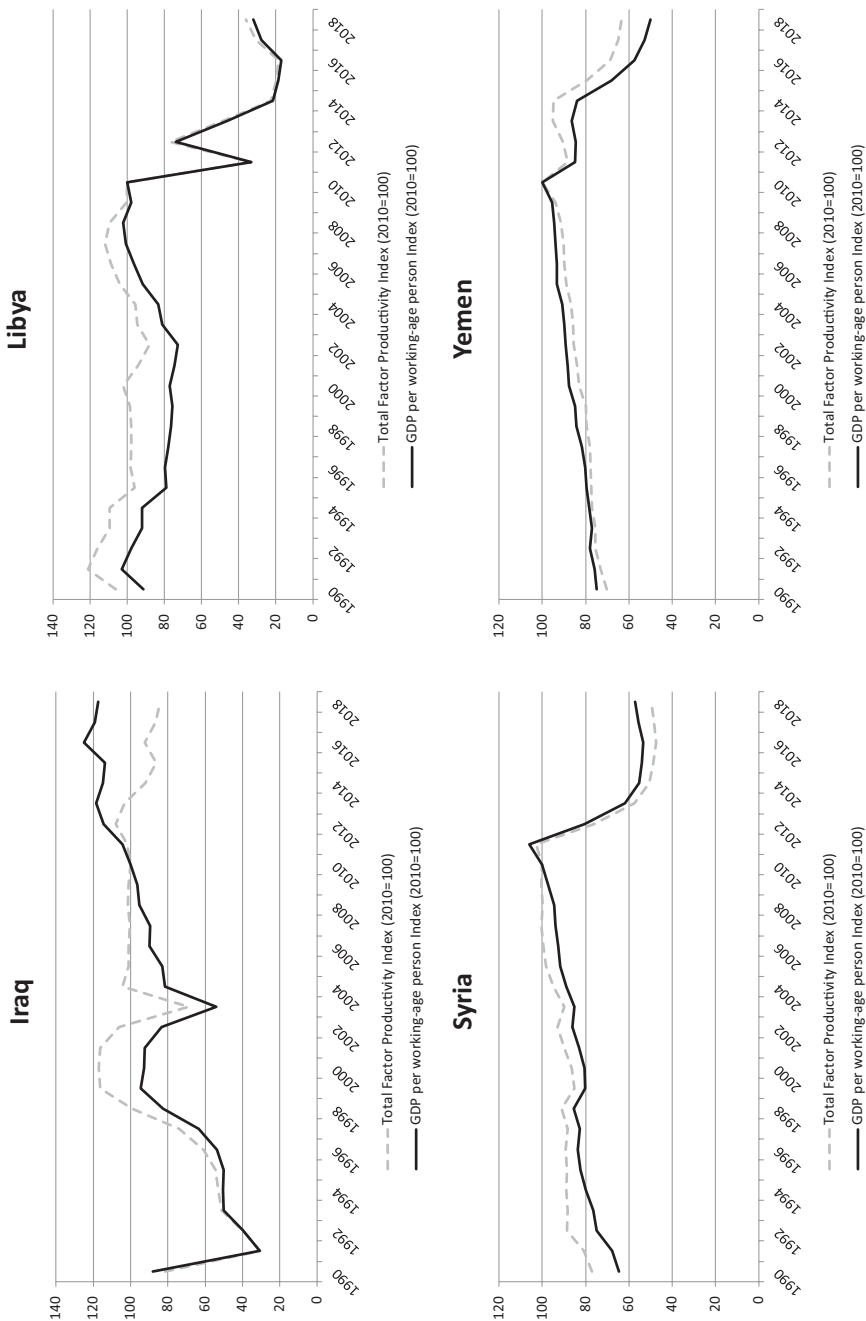


Figure 1 Real GDP per worker and total factor productivity (normalized 2010=100)

Source: Own elaboration.

More indicative of the impact of economic development on the livelihood of the population is the evolution of total factor productivity, TFP.¹ While employment is usually directly related to economic activity and GDP growth, the evolution of wages and workers' incomes is more tightly related to TFP gains. Higher productivity allows for sustainably higher wages. It can be seen in Figure 1 that TFP continued to be stagnant in the economy of every one of these countries, with the exception of Yemen, in the decade before the Arab uprising of 2011. In Yemen, TFP growth was, nevertheless, low (around 1.5 per cent). In Iraq, the combination of stagnating TFP and rising GDP per working-age person indicates that growth is largely driven by accumulating capital—and to a lesser extent employing more workers—and not by becoming more efficient at producing goods and services.

In the absence of labour market indicators—wages and unemployment rates—in these countries, TFP indices allow us to indirectly grasp the situation of the average worker. TFP stagnation suggests that social discontent may have arisen as a result of increasing dissatisfaction with the opportunities that sustained but slow growth had to offer the population.

Figure 1 also shows the extent of the damage brought on by the conflicts. It can be seen that GDP per working-age person and TFP collapsed after the Arab uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. In the latter two countries, cumulative decline in GDP per working-age individual is around 40 per cent. In Libya, the decline is significantly greater.

These countries had also made progress towards eliminating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity: although about half of the poor in these countries had moved out of poverty by the end of the 2000s, tough chronic poverty remained high; upward mobility was stronger in Syria and Tunisia, whilst downward mobility was pronounced in Yemen and Egypt (see Dang and Ianchovichina, 2018).

GDP growth is, obviously, not an all-encompassing measure of economic development or welfare that, on its own, determines the stability or instability of a given country or region. And other economic factors could have played a role in fuelling the social and political discontent that eventually led to the uprisings (Tucker, 2012; Ianchovichina et al., 2015). Two classic candidates would be: the high rates of unemployment and the high degree of inequality in expenditure, income, or wealth of the MENA region. In what follows we review the evidence.

1.1.1 Unemployment

Studies of unemployment in the countries where the uprisings broke out indicate that high unemployment, in particular youth unemployment, was one of the factors contributing to the uprisings (Elbadawi and Makdisi, 2016). Table 2 reveals that in the pre-uprising period, youth unemployment in Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia was significantly higher than elsewhere in the world with averages ranging from 19 to 30 per cent for the period 2000–2009.

Table 2 Rates of Unemployment

	<i>General Unemployment. Ages 15 and Older</i>		<i>Youth Unemployment: Ages 15 to 24</i>	
	<i>Average 2000–2009</i>	<i>Average 2010–2018</i>	<i>Average 2000–2009</i>	<i>Average 2010–2018</i>
Arab Countries	9.18	10.04	22.35	26.38
• Algeria	18.72	10.69	35.73	26.32
• Egypt	9.77	12.03	27.76	32.09
• Morocco	10.93	9.22	17.52	20.18
• Syria	9.18	8.52	19.17	20.07
• Tunisia	13.83	15.73	30.24	35.35
Sub-Saharan Africa	7.66	5.93	13.02	11.52
Latin America	8.33	6.98	16.44	15.22
Southern Asia	4.75	5.09	10.64	18.27
East Asia	4.29	4.04	9.52	10.01

Source: Own elaboration based on ILO database, ILO (2021).

High unemployment weakened the ability of the regimes to trade public goods and other economic benefits in exchange for the withholding of political rights and participation (the authoritarian bargain).

Indeed, as the table reveals, yet higher unemployment rates have continued to prevail in the post-uprising phase even in countries where political settlements have been reached, such as Egypt and Tunisia. The presence of high unemployment poses major challenges for political stability in all these countries, but in particular in Tunisia which has embarked, and in those other countries that might embark, on the road to democratic governance. Whereas, in what might be termed non-democracies high unemployment might play a role in bringing about regime change, for newly established democracies the concern would be its possible ability to undermine their democratic path.

1.1.2 Inequality

There is no consensus on the degree of inequality in the Arab region relative to what prevails in other regions of the world. Recent studies (UN ESCWA, 2019) point out that both income and wealth inequality in the Arab region are the highest worldwide.² Similarly, Alvaredo et al. (2017) argue that household survey data greatly underestimate inequality in the region and extend the types of data used in estimating income concentration in the Middle East to include national accounts, income tax data, and wealth data. Their estimates for the period 1990–2016 indicate that the Middle East is one of the most financially unequal regions in the world, due not only to an enormous inequality between countries (particularly between oil-rich and population-rich countries) but to a considerable economic inequality within countries.

The most affluent in the population (with the top 10 per cent of income levels) had appropriated around 60–66 per cent of the total income, while the share of the bottom 50 per cent of society varied between 8 per cent and 10 per cent of the total income. Thus, the degree of inequality in the Middle East is significantly higher than the highest levels in Latin America (Brazil, 55 per cent) or Asia (India, 54 per cent).

In contrast to this, the World Bank estimates indicate that the degree of income inequality in Arab countries is not much greater than in the rest of the world (World Bank, 2019d). Data provided by WIR (2018) shows that the income of the top 10 per cent of the population in the Middle East declined steadily between 1990 and 2010, whereas in all other regions in the world it either stagnated or increased sharply. Other studies similarly reveal that, prior to the Arab uprisings, inequality did not increase in Middle East countries (see Bibi and Nabli, 2010; Joffé, 2011). Looking at expenditure inequality in the Arab countries during the 2000s, Devarajan and Ianchovichina (2018) conclude it was low or moderate and, in many cases, declining. Examining the cases of Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, the UNU-WIDER database reveals that income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, declined slightly in these countries in the 2000s.

Certain researchers have assigned a key role to actual inequality in the igniting of the uprisings of 2011 (Klassen, 2018). However, there is increasing consensus that the actual high levels of income, or even wealth, inequality in the MENA region might not have been a significant underlying factor in these uprisings and the degree of political violence that followed (Joffé, 2011; World Bank, 2017a). Rather, what did play a crucial role in the social—and thereby, political—discontent were the prevailing perceptions of inequality and injustice that did not improve despite two decades of sustained growth before the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Devarajan and Ianchovichina (2018) find that measures of subjective well-being in Arab countries were relatively low and falling sharply, especially for the middle class, and in the countries where the uprisings eventually broke out. There was a growing and broadly shared dissatisfaction with the quality of life; the middle class, in particular, felt frustrated by deteriorating standards of living, lack of job opportunities in the formal sector, the poor quality of public services, and the absence of government accountability.³ According to Verme (2014), significant differences between perceived and actual income distribution emerged in Egypt between 2000 and 2008. In 2000, people viewed themselves as more affluent than they actually were, but by 2008 it was the reverse, despite income data showing that in fact Egyptians had become more affluent. Arampatzi et al. (2018) found that over time, perceptions about corruption became increasingly more important in people's assessments of their satisfaction with their lives, particularly in the countries where the uprisings were most intense.

The above review leads to the conclusion that perceived, more than actual, income and wealth inequality in the Arab region was one of the

triggers contributing to the uprisings. It gains added potency as a trigger when set alongside ethnic or sectarian inequality.

1.2 Political and Institutional Factors

A high level of income inequality and a lack of inclusion are usually the result of an economic ordering where rent-extraction dominates rent-creation: institutions are built so that a privileged few can capture the benefits of natural resources, economic growth, and overall development that would otherwise accrue to the population as a whole. The Arab countries are no exception. Usually, there is a high correlation between economic inequality and political inequality because when politicians are overly responsive to small affluent groups, policies inevitably are directed towards promoting their interests (Rosset et al., 2013). Conversely, citizens who are not part of the affluent group may become less engaged with politics. As noted by Przeworski (2015), citizens are not politically equal in economically unequal societies. When the political influence of certain individuals increases with their income and decisions are made by coalitions with greater political influence, the extent of income redistribution through taxes and transfers is always less than what is desired by the citizens (Karabarbounis, 2011). The end result is that representative institutions do not mitigate economic inequality, in the way that they would in more egalitarian systems.

The increasing unhappiness voiced during the Arab uprisings was associated with dissatisfaction with the quality of public services, the shortage of formal-sector jobs, and corruption, as well aspirations for a politically freer society. These sources of dissatisfaction suggest that the old social contract, where governments provided jobs, free health services and education, and subsidized food and fuel, in return for the rest of the population stifling its voice, could no longer be sustained (Devarajan and Ianchovichina, 2018). The Arab uprisings and their aftermath indicate that a new social contract was called for, one where the government promotes a regulatory environment that encourages the creation of private-sector jobs and accountability in service delivery, and where citizens are active and freer participants in the economy and society.

Growing dissatisfaction with the quality of life and income inequality is not the monopoly of Arab economies; most emerging economies in Africa or Latin America share similar if not deeper problems. What distinguishes our group of Arab economies from other countries in the Middle East or other regions of the world is recourse to untamed violence on the part of the authorities and other political actors.⁴ The issue of violence in the Arab World and its determinants is a long-standing debate among scholars and experts. On one hand, there is the issue of political repression. The disproportionate response of governments to popular dissent, with the widespread use of repression, is characteristic of societies where political participation is limited, reluctantly tolerated by the authorities, and/or reserved only for

the elite. As discussed in Lawrence (2016), however, identifying the impact of repression on protest presents a thorny problem because both the policing of protest and protest itself are endogenous processes and it can be difficult to assess whether police action is a cause or consequence of protests. On the other hand, there is the use of collective violence as a political tool for achieving particular objectives. As noted by Tilly (2003) there is little consensus on the appearance of violence (why does violence come in waves?), its spread once ignited (why do peaceful people shift rapidly into violence and then may shift back to relatively peaceful interactions?), and the intensity of violent acts (why do different political regimes experience different levels and forms of collective violence?).

The onset of large-scale civil violence which can escalate to civil war is, nevertheless, *prima-facie* evidence of the breaking of the social contract between the people and the government. Rougier (2014) reviews the political literature on the Arab uprisings and argues that they may well have been motivated by a common feature, that is, the lack of structural change experienced by most economies in the region during the second half of the twentieth century. To explain why economic transformation slowed down after the 1960s, a variety of cultural, geographical, political, and institutional causes have been put forward. Even though these analyses all indicate crucial obstacles to long-term growth and structural transformation, none of them really explain why, after fifty years of calm, most of the MENA politico-economic equilibria were, ultimately, so abruptly rejected. The MENA structural change deficit can therefore be considered as a symptom of the persistent lack of reform to the social contract. Rougier concludes that as a consequence of the growing gap between the socioeconomic expectations and the real opportunities available to the population, and in the absence of any willingness to significantly reform on the part of entrenched elites, relative frustration increased until people were driven to protest and, eventually, to commit to violence.

1.3 Social Factors

Social inequality—in the form of fractionalization and polarization—has also the potential to spark conflicts, both in the region and elsewhere. There is a rich literature that attempts to link different forms of social inequality (polarization, fractionalization, or Lorenz-domination) in different characteristics (ethnicity, language, or religion) to various specifications of conflict (onset, incidence, or intensity).⁵ The evidence, however, remains inconclusive. Most of the literature fails to find any significant evidence of ethnic fractionalization as a determinant of conflict (e.g., Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Hegre and Sambanis, 2006), and could not identify a link between fractionalization and conflict. The study by Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), on the other hand, revealed a significant relationship between ethnic polarization and the incidence of conflict.

It is useful to distinguish between inter-group and intra-group inequality. Religious intergroup inequality—particularly, the Sunni-Shi'a schism—has always been at the front of popular explanations for conflict in Arab countries. Ethnic or sectarian inter-group inequality, however, may have also played an important role in the increased incidence of conflict in the MENA region. Most civil conflicts are rooted in ethnic, sectarian, or other identity groups (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; Fearon and Laitin, 2003), making it important to consider arguments about how economic inequality measured with respect to groups affects their propensity to participate in civil war. Huber and Mayoral (2019) distinguish between group-based economic inequality and the onset of civil conflict, on one hand, and group-based inequality and the intensity of civil conflict, on the other. In their empirical analysis, they find that there is a robust association between intragroup inequality and conflict intensity, but a much weaker link with conflict onset.

They also find essentially no evidence to show that horizontal economic inequality is related to conflict onset and find that previous claims are not robust. Esteban and Ray (2008, 2011) argue that it is not clear why the relative wealth of a group should be systematically related to its propensity to start a war and offer an alternative rationale based on polarization and ethnicity. They take the position that 'prize-grabbing' on a large scale—often economic but possibly political, cultural, or religious in nature—is frequently at the heart of the ethnic conflict, both for the elites as well as for the masses. The 'prize' comes in the form of government 'budgets' or 'policies' that produce various public goods. Such budgets or policies may be used to benefit one class over another (e.g., public versus private health, primary versus higher education), and they may have distinct ethnic implications (e.g., funding for religions, the proclamation of 'secular' or 'majoritarian' identities). To gain control of these budgets, class-based or ethnic alliances must be formed. In this context, they show that ethnic, as opposed to class, conflict may be focal, and precisely so in the presence of economic inequality. The reason lies in the fact that a class division creates groups that display strong internal economic homogeneity and a sense of common purpose, while ethnic alliances display high levels of internal group economic inequality and open the door for redistribution conflicts.

Intergenerational inequality is another potential source of conflict, particularly when societies are polarized along ethnic or sectarian lines. Both the fact of a large proportion of young adults in the population and a rapid increase in the working-age population tends to exacerbate unemployment, prolongs dependency on parents, diminishes the individual's self-esteem, and fuels frustrations, indicating the low cost to these young adults of engaging in a violent political uprising. Paasonen and Urdal (2016) blame what they term the large 'youth bulges' in Middle Eastern economies—and the repressive response of governments—for the armed conflicts that broke out in the early 2010s. As mentioned above, before the Arab uprisings double-digit unemployment was the norm in the four countries of interest, with

youth unemployment generally above 25 per cent. It was in this context that, after the onset of the uprisings, many countries in the region seemed primed to fall into disarray. Countries become even more prone to conflict when economic conditions decline and, notably for the young, opportunities in the labour market dwindle (Urdal, 2006), or when there are abundant rents from natural resources, and the expected benefits of rebellion seem much higher than those of not rebelling (Karakaya, 2016).

Bodea and Houle (this volume) revisit the research, linking together grievances and civil war in various political regimes, institutions, and intergroup relations, as well as society-wide and group-level inequality. In contrast to the argument in the early literature that grievance is too ubiquitous to be analytically useful, they argue that measuring grievances and injustices caused by political exclusion and economic inequities at the ethnic-group level explains the onset of civil war. Their key observation is that the use of economy-wide measures of grievances fails to account for the intergroup rivalries that might lead to violent conflict. Their empirical work on the youth—which more clearly delineates the boundaries between ethnicity and inclusion in political power as well as the fact that economic inequality is overlaid with social factors—supports their argument.

While ethnicity is not a dominant issue in Arab countries, in our view it is reasonable to conclude that the high levels of exclusion from political power and economic inequality in the region must have played a significant role in the uprisings of the 2010s (Elbadawi and Makdisi, 2017). Bodea and Houle also point to another dominant factor in the MENA region that bears responsibility for fuelling the conflicts: natural resources. Grievances not only increase the likelihood of conflicts and violence but also interact with the abundance of natural resources which may serve as a catalyst for political polarization and conflict. This is certainly an issue in Arab countries where oil has become a key determinant of political and economic power (e.g., Iraq, Libya, Algeria, and, to some extent, Yemen). But it also permeates other Arab economies in various forms. Oil price volatility affects foreign currency flows to non-oil Arab countries in the form of workers' remittances and direct foreign investment. Geopolitics and foreign intervention in the MENA region have also been largely driven by oil wealth. We, therefore, argue that both economic considerations as well as grievances are at the root of the conflicts we review in this volume.

2 The Premises of Reconstruction

The above analysis of the causes of civil conflict points to a major conclusion, namely that they are the inevitable result of long-standing and deep-rooted institutional failures. Hence, in contrast to development in relatively normal times which takes place in a given political and economic structure, post-conflict reconstruction will involve a drastic transformation of pre-war economic, social, and security sectors (Tzifakis and Tsardanidis, 2006).

At the political and social levels, the main goal of post-conflict reconstruction will be to induce a major shift in the developmental ideology and operations of the political system. It encompasses state building (the creation of the institutions of the state) as well as nation building, that is, the forging of a sense of common nationhood, intended to overcome ethnic, sectarian, or communal differences, and which would counter alternative sources of identity and loyalty, and mobilize the population behind a parallel state-building project.

At the economic level, the reconstruction agenda is necessarily more broadly defined than post-war stabilization to include not only the rehabilitation or creation of basic services and infrastructure destroyed during the war, but also the modernization or creation of the basic macro and micro-economic institutional and policy framework that is necessary for creating a viable and healthy economy. Successful macroeconomic policies are the backbone of successful reconstruction: maintaining relative price stability sustains growth, permitting the provision of much-needed resources to the government so that reconstruction initiatives can be properly financed. Furthermore, sustained and vigorous growth will also result in employment and higher levels of real wages that in turn will sustain the return of ex-combatants to productive occupations.

With the above in mind, we posit that the long-term durability of any post-conflict transition is founded on the fulfilment of three vital premises, discussed in further detail in chapter one.

The first is that *post conflict reconstruction should be primarily geared towards changing, improving or in an extreme case, eliminating altogether the pre-war institutional fabric of the country, i.e., the set of key institutions that helped to create the conditions that made conflict inevitable.*

As amply demonstrated by the Arab uprisings, and those elsewhere, nation-states fail when their governments lose legitimacy (Rotberg, 2003). Failed states have flawed institutions. Democratic debate is noticeably absent. If legislatures exist at all, they are rubber-stamping machines. Only the institution of the Executive functions. The Judiciary is derivative of the Executive rather than being independent of it, and the people know that they cannot rely on the court system for significant redress or remedy, especially against the state. The bureaucracy exists mainly to carry out the orders of the Executive and to oppress the people. The armed forces of failed states are often highly politicized. Hence, eliminating altogether the pre-conflict institutional fabric of the country, i.e., the set of key institutions that helped to create the conditions for failure is an essential post-conflict endeavour.

The literature on post-conflict economic recovery shares the assumption that failed nation-states fail in their own unique way and that, accordingly, each reconstruction effort is unique (Tzifakis, 2013). Every situation differs in terms of initial conditions (including the causes of the outbreak of conflict

and the level of development of the economy); the scope of destruction; the nature of its resolution (the total (or otherwise) cessation of hostilities in the territory); and the extent of international support for the settlement, both in political and economic terms.

Consequently, one would be tempted to conclude that reconstruction plans ought to be tailor-made to the particular needs of each country. Undoubtedly, idiosyncratic political, economic, and sociological elements will largely shape the national post-conflict reconstruction work in any given country. Nevertheless, any plan for reconstruction will have to deal with a number of socio-economic challenges common to all post-conflict situations. These would include the repatriating of human and financial resources, dealing with the donor community, reversing the deterioration of human development and security conditions, overcoming the destruction of infrastructure, facing the increase in the number of people needing social assistance; coping with large fiscal deficits caused by high levels of military expenditure (usually at the expense of social services); curtailing the rise of inflation; managing the increase in debts that were not serviced during war-time; or normalizing external trade disrupted by the hostilities.

The second premise is that *reconstruction work ought to focus on achieving wider economic inclusion and less inequality as well as generating increasing employment opportunities if it is to gain legitimacy and be sustainable*. Coping with unemployment is essential for their future democratic development: importantly, non-democratic parties could exploit actual and potential popular resentment associated with high levels of unemployment in order to change the democratic political process underway.

Undoubtedly, sustained economic growth and stability are mutually reinforcing. Growth is important for achieving stability and that, in turn, stimulates investment and growth. Therefore, the prospects for stable growth are vital for reconstruction work in that such prospects will further spur the private sector to provide opportunities for investment, greater employment, and higher wages, and thus provide the government with a sustainable, steady flow of resources to support reconstruction and improve living standards.

The experiences in the Arab countries and elsewhere indicates that the benefits of growth should materialize not only in increasing levels of employment and/or worker remuneration but also in better access and quality of public goods and services. Consequently, the prospects for improving welfare conditions (i.e., economic growth benefiting the entire society and not only those in positions of power) are also vital for reconstruction.

The third premise is that if *the Arab countries are to embark on a genuinely inclusive process of reconstruction that would cement the transition to peaceful and sustainable national development, the proposed economic reforms*

and policies ought to be in line with the establishment of a new form of social contract, implicit or explicit, that would reflect the attributes of democratic governance. Of the five Arab countries where uprisings broke out, so far only Tunisia appears to be moving in this direction though it is yet to establish solid economic foundations necessary for sustaining democracy.

In this regard, economic policies deemed to be optimal from a technical viewpoint ought to be weighed against their ability to support the proposed social contract. Otherwise, they will prove unviable and politically damaging in the long run. As discussed by del Castillo (2008), war-affected countries may initially be forced to adopt sub-optimal economic policies (e.g., maintain certain non-profitable production units) in consideration of political and security requirements (e.g., the preservation of jobs). But the long-term objective would nonetheless remain the reconciliation of efficient economic policies with a democratic transition.

3 National Peace: Prospects for a Regional Democratic Breakthrough

Except in the case of Tunisia, the uprisings have not, so far, led to a democratic breakthrough in the region.⁶ Instead, the civil conflicts that have broken out in their wake are yet to be settled. This phenomenon is probably strongly linked to the fact that the major factors that account for the persistence of the Arab democracy deficit in the pre-2010/2011 period (i.e., oil, state incapacities, conflicts, and their accompanying foreign interventions) continued to prevail after 2010–2011 (Elbadawi and Makdisi, 2017). Indeed, the level and intensity of conflicts in the region, fed by growing sectarian divisiveness including the intensification of identity politics and the rise of fundamentalist groups, have since further increased. The region continues to be one of the most conflictual in the world having in the period 2011–2017, the greatest number of the world's war-related deaths (UNDP, 2018). At the same time, oil resources have continued to exert a negative influence on the political scene in the region, though perhaps to a lesser degree than before.

The eventual various outcomes of the brutal civil conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya will determine the nature of the political regimes that will follow, and to what extent, if any, these future regimes will come to reflect the attributes of democratic governance rather than those of new autocratic orders. The delay, so far, of a substantive move to democracy in Egypt is associated with the continuing political dominance of the military elite and maybe, to a lesser extent, continued political divisions there, not to mention the influence of the persisting, indeed expanding conflicts in the region with all their corrosive effects on the transition process.

These foregoing remarks raise the question of whether, after the 2011 uprisings, a successful region-wide transition to democratic governance

remains more an aspiration than a concrete reality. What about prospects in the longer run? Presumably, as long as the multi-dimensional military conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Libya continue to rage, the prospects for any democratic transition in the region are still remote. As remarked these conflicts are manifestations of a counter-revolution (partly linked to foreign interventions) intended to stifle transitions towards democratic forms of governance. But ultimately, they will be resolved, opening the door, however narrowly, to the emergence of accountable democratic political institutions.

Pushing in the direction of democratic change in the post-conflict phase are growing socio-economic and political processes that will further weaken the prevailing authoritarian regimes, their counter-revolutions or ‘authoritarian upgrading’ in the wake of the 2011 uprisings notwithstanding.⁷ These processes include: the building modernizing influences (e.g., a growing middle class,⁸ improving levels of education, and growing female participation in the economic and political domains) which the civil conflicts have slowed down or disrupted; an increasing incompatibility between exclusive political institutions and the increasing openness of economic institutions; an expanding popular demand for freedom, equal political rights, and social justice, reinforced by decreasing fundamentalist influence (Makdisi, 2021).

Furthermore, the corrosive political effects of relatively abundant oil resources will, with the passage of time, be countered by the influences forcing change, such as mounting socio-economic inequities that breed growing popular dissatisfaction, the weakening of the rentier effect due in part to changing internal economic conditions and a growing democratic neighbourhood as more and more countries tend to move to partial if not full democracies under the influence of the factors pushing for change. Moreover, to the extent that the global oil market tends to lean towards a potential long-term deceleration of prices and resulting in low ‘equilibrium’ prices will further threaten the sustainability of the authoritarian bargain, even in the richly endowed societies of the Gulf (Elbadawi and Makisi, 2021).

Were the process of democratization to unfold on a solid basis in those countries that have experienced uprisings (in 2011 as well as more recently), it would tend to gain an added momentum that would positively affect other countries in the region which are yet to democratize. The reason is that undemocratic societies that are located in democratic neighbourhoods are more susceptible to democratic transition. In turn, this would also diminish the potential threat of reversal (see Poast and Urpelainen, 2015). In the case of the Arab region, not only would the factors pushing for conflict recede but the significance of resource rents as a constraint to democratic transition would diminish, even for societies endowed with great resources.

3.1 The Challenges Ahead

The design and implementation of economic reforms are an integral part of the process of peace and reconstruction. The challenge for economic

reformers is arguably daunting. On one hand, they must succeed in instilling in a country previously unobserved levels of self-control and political generosity, intergroup confidence, and economy-wide governance. Reforms should aim at minimizing the risk of conflict recurrence, restoring confidence in economic institutions, generating employment and fostering investment, and enhancing the ability of the state to provide security for communities and households, to enforce the rule of law, and to deliver essential services. On the other hand, and concurrently with jump-starting the economy, deep structural reforms should be promptly implemented with a view to changing, improving or, even in an extreme case, eliminating altogether the pre-conflict institutional fabric of the country, that is, the set of economic institutions—and their embedded structure of incentives—that helped to create the conditions for failure.

Sustainable reconstruction requires the implementation of a balanced macroeconomic policy, one that would help overcome social discontent and so the risk of renewed hostilities. A poor macroeconomic approach might constitute a serious limitation for any hoped-for reconstruction. Another immediate and crucial concern is the resumption of economic growth and, in particular, increasing levels of employment. The political support for reconstruction work depends primarily on the population perceiving an improvement in their standard of living. Therefore, the creation of employment opportunities—particularly for the youth—ought to be at the centre of the reconstruction agenda. In most emerging economies, economic recovery from a crisis has been accompanied by the substantial creation of employment (see Stein, 2016 for the African case and Chaturvedi and Saha, 2019 for the South Asian case). This may not necessarily be the case for the MENA region mainly due to the poor performance of the labour market. It would require a paradigm shift to correct this, in which governments abandon the use of public employment as a key mechanism for generating political allegiance and instead allow a well-managed private sector to become the main source of the earned income of the family unit. Reforms to the labour market should be considered a crucial component of the reconstruction agenda.

Accordingly, this agenda must be geared towards a vigorous resumption of economic activity. Four areas of macroeconomic management are deemed crucial for the success of the reconstruction process: inflation control, fiscal policies, exchange rate policy, and physical infrastructure. First, macroeconomic policies ought to set up the institutions necessary for the establishment of a modern monetary policy framework, in which inflation control is the sole task of an independent monetary authority, accountable only to the population via a formal political procedure (e.g., periodic and scheduled reports to a congress or parliament as well as publicly available minutes of the meetings of the Central Bank on monetary policy). Second, there should be a restructuring of government finances away from military ends and towards welfare-improving programmes and the provision of public services. Reforms that guarantee fiscal stability and responsibility must

also be implemented. Building or re-establishing fiscal institutions should be aimed at strengthening fiscal solvency and sustainability (i.e., attaining sustainable levels of government deficit and debt), contributing to macroeconomic (or cyclical) stabilization (i.e., reducing fiscal policy pro-cyclicality or raising policy counter-cyclicality), and making fiscal policy design and execution resilient against government corruption and private-sector lobbying. Third, exchange rate management and the choice of the exchange regime is an essential consideration in the design of the reconstruction agenda. Exchange rate regimes influence inflation, economic growth, investment, and productivity. Furthermore, the successful provision of a stable currency lends credibility to the reconstruction process and a single, national currency can be a unifying symbol, contributing to a sense of national identity. Fourth, given a shortage of domestic resources, reconstruction of physical and institutional infrastructure would have to rely mainly on foreign resources. One important source is a foreign direct investment (FDI). Attracting FDI requires the appropriate institutional setup that provides investors with an environment in which they can conduct their business profitably and without incurring unnecessary risk.

Macroeconomic structural reforms by themselves are insufficient to generate sustained welfare gains for the population beyond the initial impact of the peace dividend. Reconstruction of institutions at the microeconomic level is vital for sustainable development and, more importantly, for the appropriation of the benefits of such development by the population. In turn, these reforms can increase the legitimacy of the reconstruction process. In Chapter 1, we identify a number of key issues that need addressing in the economic agenda. Briefly, these issues are organized along three guiding principles. First, the need to ensure the enforcement of property rights—and sometimes restore and expand them—so that the levels of economic confidence improve and the returns on an enterprise are accrued to their legitimate owners. Second, a proper distinction between those sectors best served by private sector initiatives and those where markets fail due to ‘imperfections’ such as natural monopoly power, informational asymmetries, and external factors. The latter would call for public sector intervention. Third, the design of a proper regulatory setup for each type of market. Competition in free markets will not provide advances in development and welfare unless adequate regulation and supervision are in place. Similarly, where the market fails, interventions must be designed so that efficiency is preserved, and benefits accrue to the population and not to interest groups or those bureaucrats in charge of running state-controlled businesses.

We thus submit an economic agenda for reconstruction that goes far beyond selecting policies to deal with the immediate post-conflict needs; it has to prepare the economy—and ultimately the society—to design and build the institutions needed for sustained development. If such reforms are able to align with the expectations of the population regarding the economic role of government in a post-conflict transition and can convince the elites to

direct state resources towards building up the State's capacity for providing services and towards fulfilling those expectations, then there is a good chance that the construction of a new social contract will meet with success. This will occur through the establishment of an agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities. Their successful implementation would positively align the expectations of the population as to the role of the government in the post-conflict transition and how it could contribute to the building of a new social contract between the state and society that redefines their mutual roles and responsibilities.

3.2 The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic

If the prospects for peace and development in conflict-afflicted Arab countries looked remote in the 2010s, matters have unfortunately taken a turn for the worse with the sudden and devastating effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Beyond health issues, which by themselves constitute a severe blow to the fragile political and institutional fabric of Arab countries, the economic downturn unleashed by the plague is, perhaps, the worst global shock in almost a century. No country has escaped its effects. Already fragile contexts are at risk of becoming even more so. Conflicts are typically exacerbated by natural disasters and the situation of marginalized populations could rapidly worsen, in particular migrant and displaced communities, already living in poor sanitary conditions and with limited access to public services. While the rapid development of vaccines initially raised hopes of prompt alleviation, as of early 2022 the disease is far from being controlled and successive waves of new Covid-19 strains have reintroduced health concerns as well as fears of economic distress.

Pandemics, nevertheless, are both a major challenge to fragile economies in a myriad of areas (economic activity, government finances, health, education, etc.) and yet can also provide the opportunity for much-needed economic, political, and institutional reforms.

In the economic realm, the adverse effects have taken the form of a downturn in activity, an increase in unemployment and informal activity, and in levels of poverty. Most of these effects are associated with the containment and confinement measures taken by the authorities to control the spread of the disease. While these measures proved effective (see Blanco et al., 2020 for an assessment), the downturn has been very pronounced and contrary to initial expectations, bound to last for some time. International trade and particularly tourism have been severely damaged, but matters could have been much worse if not for the vigorous expansionary fiscal policies enacted by most governments in the world. Combatting health problems, enacting emergency transfers and a reduction in tax revenue have placed a significant strain on fiscal resources forcing the authorities to increase the national debt and/or curtail public investment. The latter will have a deleterious effect on economic growth in the medium to long term. An additional challenge to the economies of Arab

countries includes the almost certain fact that the economic slowdown in the advanced economies is likely to cause a decrease in Official Development Assistance, a much-needed source of financing for post-conflict reconstruction.

On the political side, one possible outcome of a pandemic is political chaos and an increase in violence and destruction. The political opportunity theory (Tarrow, 1994) would suggest that armed groups could perceive the crisis as a chance to expand the areas under their control or to eliminate adversaries. Empirical evidence collected by Sedik and Xu (2020) suggests political unrest tends to peak two years after a typical epidemic starts and tends to be quite persistent. On the other hand, economic crises tend to bring to light the best in human nature. Government responses to the spread of the virus have led to the greater centralization of political decision-making. Emergency measures have been implemented in most of the countries suffering from the pandemic, increasing the reach of the oversight functions of the executive. Some observers have been warning about a possible surge in autocratic rule or the possible abuse of power, in particular in countries where oversight and accountability functions are insufficiently resilient. Maintaining the Rule of Law, Human Rights and compliance with basic liberties could prove to be a challenge in the coming years.

There is empirical evidence which suggests that some natural disasters—droughts or floods, for example—can operate as potential democratizing devices (Brückner and Ciccone, 2011; Aidt and Leon, 2016). Nevertheless, the support for the authorities during the pandemic does not necessarily continue in ex-post politics: most of the research on the political effects of natural disasters (Healy and Malhotra, 2009) and economic shocks (Margalit, 2019) demonstrates that those in power are often punished by events that produce a negative welfare shock on the population, even when they are beyond anyone's control.

In fact, evidence is already surfacing on the political impact of the pandemic. Amat et al. (2020) survey the population of Spain, one of the worst-affected countries in Europe, and finds a widespread demand for effective leadership, a willingness to surrender individual freedoms, and a marked increase in support for technocratic governance. In this shift, the authors fear that Covid-19 could provide an opportunity for those in power to centralize and further accumulate power, and increase surveillance and their control of society. Bol et al. (2021) take advantage of a unique representative web-based survey that was fielded in March and April 2020 in Western Europe to compare the political allegiances of those who took the survey immediately before and immediately after the implementation of the lockdowns in their respective countries. They have found that initially at any rate the lockdowns increased support for the party of the Prime Minister/President and the intention to vote for it, an increased trust in government, and satisfaction with democracy. Furthermore, generally speaking, while rallying individuals around current leaders and institutions, the lockdowns have had no effect on traditional left-right attitudes.

Gingerich and Vogler (2020) argue that the exceedingly high cost in terms of human lives of the deadliest pandemic of the last millennium (the Black Death, 1347–1351) weakened repressive regimes (notably serfdom in Western Europe) and, ultimately, led to the development of proto-democratic institutions and the associated political cultures that shaped the modalities of political engagement for generations. They find that areas in Germany hit hardest by the Black Death were more likely to adopt inclusive political institutions and equitable land-ownership patterns, and exhibited electoral behaviour indicating independence from the influence of the landed elite during the transition to mass politics.

Notes

- 1 Total factor productivity or multi-factor productivity is usually measured as the ratio of aggregate output (e.g., GDP) to aggregate inputs. Under some simplifications regarding production technology, growth in TFP becomes the portion of growth in output not explained by growth in traditionally measured inputs of labour and capital used in production. We use a Solow growth model to compute TFP.
- 2 It is argued that the Gini coefficients of income that show for 2019 comparatively low to moderate levels for most of the Arab countries are not an accurate measure of inequality in the Arab world (WIR, 2018). A more realistic assessment is given by the World Inequality Database estimates. For 2016 it reveals that the regional income inequality average is the highest of all regions. Similarly, the Arab regional Gini coefficient of wealth, estimated for 2016 at 83.9, is higher than the average for other regions. The UN ESCWA study (UN ESCWA, 2020) estimates that in 2019 the Arab region population held USD 5.79 trillions worth of wealth of which the top 10 per cent accounted for USD 4.39 trillion, or 75.8 per cent, of the total. Their average wealth was USD 182,939 compared to an average of USD 975 for the bottom 46 per cent of the population.
- 3 One study (UN ESCWA, 2014) points out that prior to the 1990s the authoritarian Arab regimes managed to gain the loyalty of the middle classes by providing them with economic privileges including well-paid jobs. Subsequently, however, declining economic opportunities along with flourishing patronage networks that favoured some groups over others and continued political repression, led the middle classes to join the 2011 uprisings (see also Cammett and Diwan, 2013).
- 4 In comparison, Latin American countries successfully transitioned from dictatorship to democracy without political unrest while having similar levels of inequality of conflict affected MENA countries, for example, Argentina and Uruguay, or much higher levels, such as Brazil or Chile where Gini coefficients are in the range of 0.50.
- 5 See, for example, Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Fearon and Laitin (2003), Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), and Østby (2008a).
- 6 For an analysis of the Tunisian case see Boughzala and Ben Romdhane (2017) and El Ouardani and Makdisi (2018).
- 7 The concept of ‘authoritarian upgrading’ refers to economic and political changes introduced by the authoritarian regimes with the objective of placating their population and preserving their rule (see Aarts et al., 2012).
- 8 In particular, the Syrian civil war has led to a greatly depleted middle class in the country but once peace is restored it will grow again.

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