

Jordan: A Negative Case in a Tumultuous Region

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Middle East Conflict

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Jordan: A Negative Case in a Tumultuous Region

Abstract

International media brings attention to the worst conflicts worldwide. When ISIS beheads journalists, like Foley and Sotloff (Vourvoulias, 2014) journalists around the globe turn their editorial dockets to these heinous actions. Yet, it is easy to pay attention to conflict when it becomes severe, i.e., escalates to the level of war. It's no wonder that the Arab/Israeli conflict has such a plethora of literature and media attention while tensions in places like Jordan, right next door, have not. However, Jordan is an example of a negative case: a country that has, despite its significant tensions, not experienced large-scale violence in the tumultuous post Arab-Spring context of the Middle East. The importance of studying negative cases cannot be overemphasized. Not only are these cases traditionally overlooked in academic literature and the media alike, they provide important insights as to what is really going on in terms of conflict. What factors keep states like Jordan from devolving into large-scale violence?

Not only did Jordan not experience large-scale Arab Spring revolts but it has also not experienced war, whether that be civil war as seen in Syria or "international" war as seen in Iraq. Understanding the absence of conflict in Jordan will not only fill a gap in conflict prevention, but discovering the factors that have contributed to Jordan's stability can be practically applied to other states as a conflict prevention strategy.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to conflict literature from the lens of conflict prevention as opposed to post-conflict contexts. Often, by the time areas of the world gain media attention and are studied, it is too late in the sense that violence has already been committed. If areas are studied *before* violence occurs, it can be prevented. Similarly, if countries with an absence of violence are studied, the factors contributing to this absence can be determined. Discovering the factors that cause violence in the Middle East, or in the case of Jordan, that prevent violence, can be applied to other areas of the world as a conflict prevention strategy. Causation, not correlation, is essential to this study. Only by identifying causes of violence can those causes be addressed. Thereafter, conflict can be prevented.

Puzzle

Traditional conflict literature points to any number of factors as causing violence. These may include regime type, political freedom, standard of living, religious or ethnic cleavages, and even social media usage, (especially in light of the Arab Spring). However, Fearon and Laitin argue that ethnic and religious tensions are not the most accurate predictors of civil war in a post-Cold War context (2003). Rather, poverty (along with political instability, rough terrain, and large populations) is the most important causal factor. Since this research has been so widely cited, it will be utilized for this paper. Jordan will be the “control factor” as a country that has not yet erupted into large-scale violence but that has had very small scale protest and violence.

Fearon and Laitin demonstrate their findings with a logit analysis (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 82). The result is per capita income being “strongly significant in both a statistical and a substantive sense” with “the estimates of the effect of ethnic and religious fractionalization...substantively and statistically insignificant” (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, p. 83).

Therefore, Jordan's per capita GDP must be analyzed to determine its significance regarding conflict.

Jordan's per capita GDP is \$6,100 (CIA Factbook). This is not unique for the Middle East. The per capita GDP for Syria is \$5100, for Iraq \$7,100, and for Egypt \$6,600 (CIA Factbook). These countries are geographically close and culturally similar, but Syria is experiencing civil war, Iraq, international war, and Egypt, Arab Spring, while Jordan has experience none of the aforementioned. Thus, per capita GDP is an insufficient indicator of conflict in the Middle East.

Furthermore, when a general linear model is utilized to assess the same factors that Laitin and Fearon used in their original 2003 study, none of their predictive factors are significant when applied to the Middle East. A table produced by the statistical software R is reproduced below to demonstrate this fact:

Call:

```
glm(formula = onset ~ warl + gdpenl + lpopl1 + lmtnest + ncontig + Oil + nwstate + instab + polity2l + ethfrac + relfrac, family = "binomial", data = fl)
```

Deviance Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-0.6335	-0.2034	-0.1457	-0.0876	3.0174

Coefficients:

Estimate Std. Error z value Pr(>|z|)

(Intercept) -6.812e+00 2.711e+00 -2.513 0.0120 *

warl -1.578e+00 1.077e+00 -1.466 0.1428

gdpenl -6.401e-02 1.235e-01 -0.518 0.6043

lpopl1	5.530e-03	3.150e-01	0.018	0.9860
lmtnest	8.147e-01	4.229e-01	1.926	0.0541 .
ncontig	-1.413e+01	1.373e+03	-0.010	0.9918
Oil	6.652e-01	8.431e-01	0.789	0.4301
nwstate	9.883e-01	1.158e+00	0.854	0.3932
instab	7.806e-02	7.008e-01	0.111	0.9113
polity2l	6.601e-03	5.140e-02	0.128	0.8978
ethfrac	6.701e-01	1.565e+00	0.428	0.6685
relfrac	1.276e+00	1.388e+00	0.919	0.3579

Signif. codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

(Dispersion parameter for binomial family taken to be 1)

Null deviance: 158.63 on 844 degrees of freedom

Residual deviance: 141.36 on 833 degrees of freedom

(65 observations deleted due to missingness)

AIC: 165.36

Number of Fisher Scoring iterations: 15

Since poverty is a poor predictor of conflict in the Middle East, and Jordan is not a poor country, why Jordan has yet to experience large-scale violence and uprising, even in a post-Arab Spring context with almost every state surrounding it going through phases of intense conflict?

Background: Jordan

Jordan is a small state with few natural resources and an overwhelming refugee problem, as well as internal societal cleavages, principally between “Jordanian Jordanians” aka

Transjordanians, (those who lived in the region before any influx of refugees from Palestine), and “Jordanian Palestinians” (Palestinians who live in Jordan due to migrations or border redrawings). Thus, there could be several reasons why Jordan could have fallen into conflict, and yet it has not. Why has Jordan stayed relatively stable in such a tumultuous region while many of its neighbors have experienced civil or international war?

Jordan is being used as a “control” because it is an excellent example of a society that has deep cleavages yet has not experienced violence, especially among culturally similar countries of the Middle East. This study includes countries that are majority Arab, Muslim, and Arabic-speaking to control for this cultural similarity. Jordan has yet to experience large-scale violence and uprising, even with almost every state surrounding it, (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine), going through phases of intense conflict and war. Why has this happened? Is it King Abdulla’s seemingly authoritarian benevolence causing stability in an otherwise tumultuous society? Is it that Jordan cannot afford violence, literally, as refugees from Iraq and Syria stream in its borders, increasing the demand for resources on top of already contending with constant water shortages? Why has this tiny country in this tumultuous region managed to remain stable when, by all accounts, it shouldn’t have? What makes Jordan different? (Hubbard, 2014; the Economist, Nov. 2013; the Economist, Mar. 2013)

Much conflict in Jordan could not only stem from resentment against King Abdullah and a lack of resources, but from ongoing resentment between Jordanians and Jordanian-Palestinians. These individuals still experience problems when entering the Jordanian political realm along with other forms of discrimination (Reiter). While they have been granted Jordanian citizenship, they are treated like second-class citizens, often experiencing discrimination in travel, work, and education (Al Abed, 2004). This is coupled with cultural discrimination with adages like,

“Mansef (Jordan’s national dish) made from chicken (considered to be “lower-class” than lamb or goat) is not fit for Jordanians.” Clearly, there is ethnic tension in Jordan, but it is not sufficient to cause a war. It still may, however, be a causal factor when taken in combination with certain other factors, such as King Hussein’s leadership. These factors will also include governance, fertility rate, per capita GDP, and social media use and must be further explored in order to identify what combinations cause violence to escalate.

Jordan’s Would-Be Causes of Large-Scale Conflict

Jordanian Jordanians v. Jordanian Palestinians

In beginning this research, I assumed there would be some discussion of the conflict between Jordanian Jordanians and Jordanian Palestinians, and I was right. However, I also expected there to be a discussion of resource scarcity, whether it be water that seems to be a perpetual struggle in states with largely desert climates, or other resources, namely from the fact that Jordan has experienced frequent and ongoing influxes of refugees, ironically ongoing because of the Syrian crisis next door. One would think that these constraints would squeeze the society into conflict, or at least be factors that could potentially cause conflict, but this literature review did not come to that conclusion. One commonly-discussed conflict causing factor was the rift between Jordanian Jordanians and Jordanian Palestinians (Abu-Odeh; Dupont & Passy; Reiter; Lucas; Nevo; Koprulua). This **was** the most widely discussed potential conflict causing factor (Shiblak, 1996; Abu-Odeh, 1999; Dupont & Passy, 2011; Reiter, 2004; Lucas, 2003; Nevo, 2003; Koprulua, 2014).

Nevo (2003) discusses multiple types of cleavages, from a North that considers itself culturally related to Syria, to nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples, and a “backward South whose population was demographically rooted in the Arabian Peninsula.” He does not mention

Jordanian Jordanian/Jordanian Palestinian by name. This seems to be an oversight considering the prevalence of this rift. Along the same lines, Dupont and Passy (2011) mention “multiple salient cleavages” which does acknowledge the fact that there is more than one cultural divide in Jordan, but it fails to capture their specificity. Furthermore, Reiter (2004) talks about the Jordanian Jordanian / Jordanian Palestinian rift, mentioning it in terms of cleavages (ethnic, economic, political) but not in terms of conflict. Lucas (2003), however, discusses Jordanian / Jordanian Palestinian relations that could “make for a societal divide that threatens to exacerbate whatever domestic tensions may arise over regional political developments.” The word “exacerbate: makes this description the most accurate in that Jordanian Jordanian/Jordanian Palestinian relations were not enough to cause conflict, as these relations have clearly been present and the conflict clearly has not.

The rift between Jordanian Jordanians and Jordanian Palestinians can perhaps best be described in terms of political rights. Jordanian Palestinians do not seem to be discriminated against economically, (a stark contrast with their Syrian counterparts), and in fact contribute substantially to Jordan’s economy (Zahran, 2012).

This question boils down to a confusing argument about citizenship. Jordan is unique in that it is one of the only countries in the Middle East that has offered Palestinians citizenship (Zahran, 2012). While this is true, the situation is more complicated and Palestinians still experiences deflated rights in Jordan. Although citizenship is offered, it comes at a cost. Naturalization is possible, but requires a fee that not all people can afford (El Abed, 2006). Furthermore, there is a distinction between distinction between 1950’s & 1960’s Jordanians and Gazans, both of whom are Palestinians (El Abed, 2006).

Even though Jordanian Palestinians are offered Jordanian citizenship, they may maintain their Palestinian citizenship as a way to maintain the notion of a Palestinian state. This may actually give Jordanian Palestinians more mobility than Jordanian citizens (Zahran, 2012). El Abed (2006) argues that the need to renew residency permits with Jordanian authorities means “their (Jordanian Palestinian’s) administrative vulnerability can lead to curtailment of rights to political participation and membership of trade unions enjoyed by Jordanian citizens.” This is evidenced by the fact that less than 10% of Jordanian office holders are Jordanian Palestinians, a particularly frightening statistic given that over half of Jordan’s population is Jordanian Palestinian (Zahran, 2012). There is also a visa question; Jordanian Palestinians may have visas that expire in 5 years or two (El Abed, 2006).

The question of citizenship, residency permits, and visas is fundamentally connected to which rights Jordanian Palestinians receive, which in turn fuels internal divides. Obviously, autonomous travel is one of those concerns, but there are others to contend with, such as taxes (El Abed, 2006).

Syrian Refugees

Could the Syrian refugee influx cause conflict in Jordan? Jordanian Palestinians essentially function as Jordanian citizens with limited political rights dependent upon the political identity they choose to employ. Syrian refugees in Jordan are refugees in the traditional sense of the word, living out of refugee camps and depending on governmental or international aid because they are not allowed to work (Welsh, 2015). This is a stark contrast to the Jordanian Palestinians who call Jordan their home (Zahran, 2012). In fact, these two groups are so different, they almost should not be considered in the same category of “refugees.” While Syrians are

certainly putting a strain on Jordan (Welsh, 2015) there is no direct relationship has been studied between their presence and Jordan's stability.

Authoritarianism

While Jordanian's leadership may be a reason for its stability, its government type may cause its demise (Zahran, 2012; Abu-Odeh, 1999; Seeley, 2013; Lucas, 2003). Authoritarianism is associated with an increased risk of war. Gause (2011) says authoritarian stability is a myth. Jordan's political system is what makes it a true authoritarian regime. The king, being the chief executive and appointing his own cabinet, also has the ability to appoint half the legislature (the senate). The other half is elected, but the king has the ability to resolve parliament as he sees fit, as he did when other Arab nations were experiencing their "spring awakenings" (Lucas, 2003). Even the half of parliament that is elected isn't truly democratic. Election is often connected to patronage (Lust-Okar, 2006).

Furthermore, several authors cite an apparent liberalization of Jordan's political system as King Hussein was waning in his ruling years, (Lucas, 2003; Clark, 2006). Lucas even says Jordan is close to resorting to martial law, having a strong military infrastructure. On plenty a street corner in Jordan can be found policemen with fully automated weapons at their disposal. However, Jordan has seen some cross-cooperation in parliament and does have female representation in Congress (Clark, 2006).

Resource Scarcity

There was a surprising lack of literature on resource scarcity in Jordan. While high food prices is a phenomenon, especially regarding meat, there was no substantial literature to support

this. Water scarcity, however, was documented as a factor that could contribute to conflict (Zahran, 2012).

Factors contributing to Jordan's Stability

Leadership

The overarching literature points to decisions of particular leaders, in this case of King Abdullah of Jordan, as a major factor contributing to the scale of conflict (Dupont and Pass, 2011; Yom and Al-Momani, 2008; Tobin, 2012; Lucas, 2003; Nevo, 2003; Carpenter, 2013; Zisser, 2006; Stiglitz & Bilmes, 2008; Kull, Ramsay & Lewis, 2003; Post, 2005).

Tobin (2012) points out King Abdullah's legitimacy was never called into question when the country did experience small scale protests, although decisions he was making certainly were. Lucas (2003) fleshes out this theory by discussing King Abdullah's "liberalization/deliberation tactics" i.e., giving Jordanians certain freedoms and civil liberties so that they remain content and then yanking them away when he sees fit in order to maintain control. This can especially be seen when he dismisses the assembly at will, which is already ultimately managed by the king per Jordan's law (Tobin, 2012).

King Hussein is also cited as contributing to Jordan's particular political situation in having the ambition to "form" a nation without actually taking the stability of that nation into account by grouping together somewhat disparate ethnic and cultural groups (Nevo, 2003).

US Support

Jordan is one of the United States' best diplomatic partners in the Middle East, arguably the best after Israel. President Obama maintains a good friendship with King Abdullah, and the US has been known to provide aid to Jordan. Could U.S. support make enough of a difference

for a regime to remain in power? Sean L. Yom and Mohammad H. Al-Momani (2008) cite it as a major factor. Furthermore, Dupont and Passy (2011) acknowledge these factors as causes of conflict.

Growing Middle Class

Tobin (2012) cites this as a major reason for Jordan's stability, while also mentioning the myriad reasons Jordan could slip into conflict. This approach is more credible since it takes into account the desires and motives of the people along with the leadership, instead of discrediting the people in favor of leadership as the other articles seem to. Moreover, Jordan's growing middle class may be an important factor regarding its stability, especially in light of economy and income per capita being so widely cited as factors causing conflict. There are many countries and regions of the world that have experienced a growing middle class which has subsequently been linked to stability and/or democratization. Latin America is one such region. The middle class in Latin America has been growing for the better part of the 20th and 21st centuries. With this came a wave of democratization where "Middle Class groups are insisting that their governments perform better, deliver promised services, and represent broader societal interests" (McCoy, 2008, p.19). These same groups would then express their grievances at the ballot box, or even "force(d) out their leaders prematurely" (McCoy, 2008, p.19). Since Jordan is also experiencing middle class growth, similar patterns of engagement and subsequent regime change could emerge. India is another example where the middle class has provided stability, even during periods of poverty (Niu & Hong, 2003, p. 52). "In particular, political stabilization was achieved in part because of the great strength of the middle class" (Niu & Hong, 2003, p. 52). Jordan's middle class may be providing similar stability, or at the very least adding to it.

Implications for Further Research

It seems that information about wars only becomes interesting to pragmatist scholars *after* the war has started. The plethora of information about Jordan seems to contradict this notion, but Jordan is interesting within itself because of the *absence* of war that the conflicts in the region have made apparent. In this way, Jordan too is a victim of attention in a post-conflict context (regionally) even though it, itself, is in a pre-conflict context. Pragmatist scholars should more often consider a pre-conflict society as a means of conflict prevention strategy, which could ultimately save the lives of those involved in said conflicts. This does not mean studying “high risk” areas due to a post-conflict context, as this defeats the purpose in that violence has already been wrought and attention is being paid so that violence isn’t repeated. Rather, societies with interesting cleavages, like Jordan, should be identified and studied more thoroughly in an effort to acclimate oneself with the culture, which can only increase knowledge and public diplomacy, but also provide adequate information if a conflict were to arise. Factors that often lead to conflict already identified in the literature can be coded in R for countries worldwide. Multiple regressions in R can be utilized frequently to identify societies that are currently experiencing combinations of factors that are likely to cause conflict. This would be a literal conflict prevention model that can be made available online for researchers and peoples alike to access.

Ethical Considerations

All of the data utilized for this study is open-source and publicly accessible. Since the researcher will not be interacting with human participants in any way, such considerations are not applicable. However, the intent of this research is to affect those individuals in the countries studied. It is meant to produce a conflict prevention model that can forecast conflict in countries

in the Middle East and beyond. This will ultimately serve to help the individuals living in those countries as an early warning system for violence. Eventually, this research should be published to give those individuals notice of potential violence, hence giving them an opportunity to affect change and/or escape it. The foremost ethical consideration of this study is to those individuals living in conflict-prone countries as a way to serve them in times of distress. Giving those individuals access to this research is the best way to serve them in that regard.

Policy Proposal

The real solution for the issue is to have the media and academia pay attention and report on places that are not yet in conflict. If conditions in relatively peaceful societies are monitored, then when those combinations of conditions that are likely to cause violent conflict are met, the various actors involved in international conflict prevention can be alerted. Once attention is drawn to these places, conflict prevention strategies can be implemented there.

First, academia needs to craft a strategy or research on what exactly are the combinations of factors that can cause conflict. Who is going to take up this research? It is not outside of the realm of possibility for an individual professor, think tank or research group to attempt to answer this question. Yet, coordinating professors for this effort may somewhat derail their autonomy as academics. Every researcher has the freedom to do what he or she finds interesting, and that freedom shouldn't be infringed upon. However, if academics freely take up this question and decide to coordinate their efforts, the ethics of this coordination would not be an issue.

Once this happens, academics should inform the various actors involved in international conflict resolution. However, this means the burden of alerting these various bodies falls on academics, ie think tanks and professors. These people may see this as fundamentally outside of their scope

of interest and responsibility and may choose, actively or not, to not alert anyone about their research findings in the context of being conflict prevention strategies.

The next problem is determining who “counts” as an actor involved in implementing a conflict resolution strategy. Since this burden is falling on academia, individual actors in the academic realm would be making this decision about who counts separately, unless some kind of guidelines are established among them as previously discussed. There is much room for actors to feel slighted or excluded if academia does not alert everyone who “should be” alerted. Furthermore, a strategy would need to be developed about which actors are indeed the most necessary to be alerted about these potential conflicts.

Also, it must be determined who is allowed to implement these solutions. The problem with implementing outside solutions in general is that it’s generally disrespecting and unlawful for one body or nation to direct the activities of another. Implementation can be seen in this light. Advice can certainly be given but nothing can actually be done unless a state agrees to it. Otherwise, this strategy can be seen as highly unethical.

Last, while there is a substantial body of literature about conflict prevention strategies, it must be determined which conflict prevention strategies are best suited for various potential conflicts. Again, the burden falls on academia and the quality of their research in these matters. Another method that should be considered is with conflict prevention strategy research and areas at risk for conflict not falling on academia but instead on an NGO, IO, or even a corporation. The entity would need to be dedicated to the research question regarding causal combinations and also to questions about which conflict prevention strategies are best suited to which circumstances. While this has no theoretical issues, there is an obvious pitfall that academia would not have to contend with in the same way: financing. Because of this, this entity would

fall into the same pitfalls that NGOs often face: the difference between making their issues compelling and accurately representing the issues using empirical data.

Compounding these issues is the fact that media pays attention to places specifically because they're compelling-war is compelling. Conflict prevention can be an equally compelling narrative as conflict. Saving lives can be just as important on informing the world on lives lost. The same principal can be applied to the pain and violence that stems from conflict. However, said organizations or academia could find themselves in conflict between trying to maintain interest for their causes and fudging empirical data, purposefully or not, to maintain said interest (Hafner-Burton, Cohen & Hoover Green). Thus, conflict prevention strategies could be subjected to the same pull for attention that conflicts themselves do. Media attention not only feeds into conflict, but the actual strategies that could ameliorate said conflicts.

Thus, there is a specific research methodology I would pursue to track potential conflict worldwide. First, I would survey all countries for factors that could potentially contribute to conflict based on literature already present in the field. Then, I would code these factors as I have done here for the Middle East. Subsequently, I would make a model using whatever kind of regression is appropriate based on the factors I coded. Then, I would use my model to predict the probability of each factor influencing conflict.

This research is feasible but not particularly plausible. First, if the research is done on a worldwide basis, each country would need to be carefully studied to see what factors are strongly present. This would require significant resources in terms of time and funds. The situation could be somewhat alleviated by creating research teams or breaking countries into regions. Finally, the effectiveness of this research would need to be tested by implementing the findings. Once the most significant factors contributing to conflict are identified, again, the actors that

could assuage these should be alerted and implement the strategies that research supports to mediate these factors. The factors previously discussed would obviously get in the way, and some may be nearly impossible to “fix” (such as one country’s interest in declaring war on another or differing leadership styles). Nevertheless, after the strategies are implemented and time passes, the same factors could be coded again to determine whether the implementation

The most likely causes of conflict for this study are:

- Leadership-Install better leadership, aggressive leadership styles like those of al Assad or Hussein seem to worsen the conflict context.
- A tad of liberalization-The Jordanian case seems to imply when people are given a certain amount of freedom in an authoritarian regime, they respond by not toppling said regime.
- US interventionism-a double edged sword, not just in the US’s decision (damned if we do, damned if we don’t) but US intervention as helping to prevent conflict and at the same time, cause it.

The real conclusion of this research is that conflicts are too often studied in a post-conflict context. If attention can be drawn to areas in a pre-conflict context as opposed to a post-conflict context, the factors that potentially contribute to conflict can be analyzed in for conflict prevention efforts. Ultimately, attention is drawn to the areas because they are compelling. Conflict is compelling. Death is compelling. Really, life is compelling, and should be valued with the same fever as war.

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