

Regional comparisons,
preventing violent
extremism

D8.2

**Working Paper on a
comparison of
'enabling
environments',
drivers and
occurrence/non-
occurrence of
violent extremism
in the Balkans and
the MENA region**



Project acronym:	PREVEX
Project full title:	Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the Mena: Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environment
Grant agreement no.:	870724
Type of action:	Research and innovation
Project start date:	01.01.2020
Project duration:	36 months
Call topic:	H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2019
Project website:	http://www.prevex-balkan-mena.eu
Document:	Working Paper
Deliverable number:	D8.2
Deliverable title:	Working Paper on Occurrence/Non-Occurrence of Violent Extremism
Due date of deliverable:	31.03.2022
Actual submission date:	30.06.2022
Re-submission date:	
Editors:	Kari Osland, Morten Bøås
Authors:	Gilad Ben-Nun, Ulf Engel
Reviewers:	Morten Bøås, Kari Osland
Participating beneficiaries:	ULEI, NUPI
Work Package no.:	8
Work Package title:	Regional comparison, preventing violent extremism
Work Package leader:	Ulf Engel
Work Package participants:	ULEI, NUPI
Estimated person-months for deliverable:	6 months
Dissemination level:	Public
Nature:	Report
Version:	1
Draft/Final:	Final
No of pages (including cover):	22
Keywords:	Non-occurrence, Violent Extremism (IVE), unemployment, Arab Barometer



1. Introduction and research architecture

The following working paper presents a cross-sectional and cross-regional comparison of the findings by PREVEX project partners across their three respective regional domains: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the Balkans, and the Maghreb-Sahel, as stemming from their studies into the question of the occurrence and non-occurrence of violent extremism (VE). PREVEX deals with both ethno-nationalist and Islamic violent extremism (IVE).

The concept of ‘non-occurrence’ bids the question as to why violent extremism (VE) *does not* occur in places and societal contexts which would otherwise be conducive to its flourishing. Underpinning queries regarding non-occurrence lies the notion of ‘enabling environments’. These imply the existence of past grievances, detrimental economic conditions, the lack of options for better livelihoods due to unemployment, young median ages, and other structural conditions that are favourable to the rise of VE. PREVEX’s query here is singled out by its counter-intuitive approach – stressing why violence *does not* prevail or occur in places where one would typically have expected it to do so. Drawing primarily from PREVEX reports D.5.2 (on the Balkans), D6.2 (on the Maghreb-Sahel) and D7.2 (on the MENA), this report attempts to amalgamate findings and present some overarching ideas concerning occurrence and non-occurrence of VE, using a cross-societal, cross-regional comparative optic.

At the heart of this report lies the nexus between detrimental economic conditions and high unemployment and their alleged possible relation to the rise or proliferation of VE. A cardinal part of the questionnaires elaborated by PREVEX partners in their respective research on the Balkans, MENA, and Maghreb-Sahel have revolved around this nexus.¹ The challenge laying before the authors of this working paper is one of cohesion. The attempt to synergise the different findings from these three different regions, while trying to identify general ‘red threads’ which might yield more generalised theorems for the prevention of violent extremism (PVE), runs to the heart of this paper’s findings.

Looking to widen the scope of enquiry in search for common ‘red threads’, the findings presented in this working paper were generated via the application of a three-staged research sequencing. In the first instance, the inquiry was restricted to the three PREVEX working papers mentioned above, subjecting them and their questionnaires to ample cross-comparative scrutiny. At a second stage, several hypothetical ‘red threads’ which might help explain regional and societal divergences were laid down and examined also against research work conducted by EU Commission funded ‘sister projects’ to PREVEX: the CONNEKT and PAVE research consortiums.² This, along with cross examination against other sources, brought us to abandon

¹ See: PREVEX Report D7.2: Working Paper on ‘enabling environments’, drivers and occurrence / non-occurrence of violent extremism in the Middle East, see especially fig. 4 (p. 28), PREVEX Report D5.2: Working Paper on ‘enabling environments’, drivers and occurrence / non-occurrence of violent extremism in the Balkans, see especially fig. 5 (p. 59) as well as fig 1 & 2 (p. 33). PREVEX Report D6.2: Working Paper on ‘enabling environments’, drivers and occurrence / non-occurrence of violent extremism in the Maghreb and the Sahel, see especially figure on p.20.

² See the work of the CONNEKT Consortium at: <https://h2020connekt.eu/> . For the PAVE Consortium project, see: <https://www.pave-project.eu/>



some of our assumptions, and focus our scrutiny further, finally identifying at least one clear ‘red thread’ as to the nexus between detrimental economic conditions and VE, which we see as most plausible. A final stage of this research, which looked to further validate our now-honed findings, compared our final results to that of Amaney Jamal at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, in her pioneering work over the ‘Arab Barometer’.³

The resulting ‘red thread’ which has been identified here, with regard to resilience towards VE concerns the relationship between stable and socially-credible governance structures that provide long-term betterment of economic conditions, which rests upon strong politico-religious legitimacy of government. The most notably visible example of this phenomenon concerns the remarkable resilience shown by Cherifian kingdoms Morocco and Jordan to the detrimental effects of IVE. In a sense, Morocco and Jordan provide for macro-level examples of non-occurrence of VE, paralleling the micro-level findings from local community studies presented in PREVEX’ regional studies of the Balkans, MENA and Maghreb/Sahel. As this paper traces the reasons for this ‘macro-level non occurrence’, it also offers some lessons learnt for future EU policies aimed at PVE.

2. A comparative overview of country findings: Non-occurrence under the predicaments of enabling environments

In all three regions examined by PREVEX, an interplay between the historic-structural nature of states concerned, and the economic conditions within them can be observed. Yet the weight allocated to each of these two factors, in the determination of occurrence or non-occurrence of VE, differed between states and indeed between the three regions.

In the Maghreb (Morocco and Tunisia), and far more so in the Sahel (Mali and Niger) it was: ‘poverty, marginalization, and the lack of economic opportunities at the margins of the state that are key drivers of violent extremism’.⁴ Morocco, which has had the best long-term economic performance out of the countries examined in this region has demonstrated the most significant case for non-occurrence – at the country level. Mali and Niger have demonstrated far more challenging cases as countries who display the crude nexus between bitter economic conditions and the rise of IVE.

That said, there were also cases of *non-occurrence* in both Mali and Niger, alongside comparable examples from Nineveh province in Iraq,⁵ and from the village of Swedan in Syria’s Deir Ezzor province, in contrast to other more extreme examples there.⁶ In Mali, the case of Mopti’s higher levels of violence, in contrast to Segou’s moderation was also notable. In Niger, much of the same can be said of the differences in the occurrence of VE, between Tillabéri’s violence and Agadez’ moderation.⁷

³ See: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/>

⁴ PREVEX Report D6.2, p. 62.

⁵ PREVEX Report D7.2, pp. 26-36.

⁶ PREVEX Report D7.2, pp. 21-25.

⁷ PREVEX Report D6.2, pp. 16-39.



Connecting these experiences from the rather vastly different contexts of the Sahel vs MENA, one trait pointed to by PREVEX scholars about weak state structures such as Mali, Iraq or Syria has to do with the prevalence of local leadership in areas remote from these countries' capitals. The further away one goes from the capital in any of these states, the less manifest is the government's centralist ability to project means of control. Under such circumstances, the roles of local leadership in remote areas come to play a significantly higher role in determining either VE or moderation preponderance. This idea of traditional authority and local community resilience runs deeper than merely the Sahel or Iraq and Syria in the MENA and can also be starkly observed in the workings of moderation in remote Muslim communities in Bosnia.⁸

A second batch of findings has much to do with political opportunity structures (POS), as utilised by states and extremist groups and identified by PREVEX partners in their respective studied country contexts.⁹ On the side of states, there has been a tendency, most notably seen in Kosovo, Tunisia, and Albania, to push extremist groups to go and perform their fighting outside of these countries – as foreign fighters in places such as Iraq and Syria. In turn, this tendency has seemed to work in favour of increasing these countries' internal resilience towards VE.¹⁰ The usage of political opportunity by these states has to do with their identification of the calling their extremists adhere to and their active push of these extremist to go and execute their calling elsewhere, as opposed to unleashing their wrath in-country.

Yet the usage of POS is undoubtedly not restricted to actions of states and are just as salient in the considerations of jihadi-Salafi extremists whether or not to undertake VE actions. Indeed, as PREVEX research from Egypt and Algeria demonstrate, under such highly repressive regimes where the armed forces control (if not outright own) the state, agents wishing to execute VE perform an acute calculus of their meagre realistic chances of success, as they weigh in these states' preventive powers. The result is a reduction in the threat of VE, not because of a drop of incentive, but rather – due to a significantly reduced possible space for execution, given the state's overbearing powers of coercion.¹¹

A third batch of findings concerns countries with remarkable resilience vis-à-vis the challenges posed by VE. These are Muslim constitutional monarchies – Morocco and Jordan. Cutting across different regions, different historical trajectories, and significantly different economic and demographic facets, in our sample, Morocco and Jordan have shown the greatest capacities to tackle IVE within their realms. Indeed the words of PREVEX researchers concerning the

⁸ Diana Mishkova, Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, and Kjetil Sekvik, 'Traditional authority and local community resilience: Bosnia, Iraq and Syria', in Morten Bøås *et.al.* (eds.), *Systematising the PREVEX Knowledge Base*, London: Hurst Publishers 2023 (forthcoming).

⁹ Broadly taken, POS argues that change instigated by social movements or agents is dependent upon political opportunities they identify, which they act upon. Known proponents of this theory have included political sociologists Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam and others. See Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001.

¹⁰ Simeon Evstatiev and Francesco Strazzari, 'The exporting radicalisation and strengthening resilience: Albania, Kosovo, and Tunisia', in Bøås (2023) *Systematising the PREVEX Knowledge Base*.

¹¹ Georges Fahmi and Djallil Lounnas, 'Cultures of non-violence and violence in Jihadist groups: Egypt and Algeria', in Bøås (2023) *Systematising the PREVEX Knowledge Base*.



Moroccan kingdom are well worth noting here:

‘the role of the Kingdom, as a politico-religious institution in Morocco...which remains legitimate in the eyes of socially conservative populations, seems to be a *bastion of resilience to violent extremism*’.¹²

An attempt to decipher this mutual feature shared by Morocco and Jordan, as in the possible reasons for the stability and prosperity of these kingdoms in stark comparison to virtually all other states in the Maghreb/Sahel and the MENA features further below in this paper. Suffice it to note, at this stage, that these kingdoms’ long-term governance credibility, coupled with their étatist ability to provide consistent improvement of economic realities in terms of unemployment reduction and via their significant investments in infrastructure – something which is only possible under long-term governance stability – these factors, when amalgamated with longstanding religious heritages and inherited political legitimacy, all play favourably in this explanation.

The last important PREVEX finding regarding VE, which is also mirrored by findings of other EU-funded consortiums, concerns specifically the Balkans and has to do with the alarming rise of ethno-national extremism, most prominently in Bosnia’s República Srpska.¹³ Whether through the propagation of ‘the most harmful form of far-right extremism in Bosnia’ or through the overt construction of semi-military outfits where Russian fighters train Serb teens at ‘Military-Patriotic’ camps, Balkan-Serb extreme ethno-nationalism, as covered by PREVEX scholars is arguably *the* most dangerous VE threat to the EU, if only because it is taking place in a country vouching for prospective EU membership.¹⁴ One should note here that two months *after* PREVEX’s Balkan report, which alarmingly highlighted this ethno-nationalist threat emanating from the Western Balkans, the EU’s counter-terrorism outfit CT-MORSE, signalled out the Western Balkans, along with Turkey and South Africa, as the three most dangerous countries in terms of ethno-nationalist VE threats.¹⁵ Importantly, this EU counter-terrorism *report explicitly quotes PREVEX’s work, and alarm bells sounded* as per the research conducted by PREVEX researchers Diana Mishkova and Simeon Evstatiev, published in December 2020.¹⁶

3. The nexus between economic woes, unemployment, and religious radicalisation: A gender perspective

¹² PREVEX Report D6.2, p. 63. Italics added.

¹³ Edina Bećirević and Predrag Petrović, ‘Ethno-nationalism and religious radicalisation: Serbia and Bosnia’, in Bøås (2023) *Systematising the PREVEX Knowledge Base*.

¹⁴ PREVEX Report D5.2, p. 16 n. 40.

¹⁵ Claudia Wallner and Jessica White, *Global Violent Right-Wing Extremism: Mapping the Threat and Response in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and South Africa*. London: EU Counter Terrorism Monitoring, Reporting and Support Mechanism (EU CTMORSE), February 2022. Available at:

<https://ct-morse.eu/resource/global-violent-right-wing-extremism-mapping-the-threat-and-response-in-the-western-balkans-turkey-and-south-africa/>

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21 n. 150. PDF document available at:

https://kbb9z40cmb2apwafcho9v3j-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/global-vrwe-threat-and-response-mapping_think-piece_final-17022022.pdf



A consecutive reading of the results of PREVEX questionnaires and the analysis of their data by PREVEX scholars reveals its inconsistency. On the one hand, when asked what they feel is the most salient factor driving people towards VE, an overwhelming majority of respondents both in the Maghreb/Sahel, the MENA, and the Balkans have stressed meagre economic conditions and, more specifically, harsh unemployment (especially for youth and people up to 35 years of age) as *the* cardinal reason for VE's surge. In the surveys conducted in the Maghreb/Sahel, most respondents saw poverty and lack of employment as the two key reasons driving support for VE groups and actions.¹⁷ Asked as to whom might have the highest tendency to support VE groups, an overwhelming and outstanding majority of answers signalled unemployed youth as the group most susceptible to be attracted to VE.¹⁸ And yet, as the authors of PREVEX's work on the Maghreb/Sahel stress – dismal economy, in and of itself, cannot be *the* driver towards VE, given the overt examples of non-occurrence in places such as Segou and Agdez.

Much of a similar conundrum is visible in the Balkans. In Kosovo, PREVEX authors write: 'socio-economic conditions, including poverty, are widely perceived as a driver of VE, particularly on the individual level'.¹⁹ Indeed, while unemployment has dropped over the years from 60 to about 20 per cent, youth unemployment is alarmingly high, hovering around the 50 per cent benchmark.²⁰ While conditions in other Balkan countries are slightly better than that of Kosovo, high unemployment continues to remain a challenge. Yet, PREVEX authors conclude that: 'the relation between poverty and radicalisation/VE is indirect and depends on a combination of various other factors'. 'Poor socio-economic conditions are not a sufficient explanation for Kosovo's high radicalisation, recruitment, and mobilisation rates of its foreign fighters'.²¹ The detailed examination of Kosovo's data revealed that the most foreign fighter exporting communities are *certainly not* those with the lowest HDI (Human Development Index) in Kosovo. VE, in this case, has to do with an *amalgamation* of socio-economic conditions with political and religious ones.

In all probability, nowhere is the model of the *amalgamation* of factors leading to radicalisation more clearly represented than in *gender-oriented perspectives*, as seen through the radicalisation, departure to ISIS, and eventual return of Maghrebian women back to their home countries. If ever there was an epitomic example of how economic woes and unemployment tie into religious radicalisation and then get 'charged' by gender discrimination inequalities, resulting in the most acute form of radicalisation (travel abroad to join ISIS), than the story of returning ISIS Tunisian women is probably it. Detailed in a 400 page master-study published by the regional organisation Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA), and funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) – this study really helps our understanding of how gender interplays with

¹⁷ PREVEX Report D6.2, graph on p. 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, graph on p. 21.

¹⁹ PREVEX Report D5.2, p. 32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, graph on p. 33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.



IVE.²²

Between 2011 and 2018, Tunisia and Morocco were the two largest ‘exporters’ of foreign fighters to Iraq and Syria, with 3,000 Tunisians and 1,600 Moroccans respectively leaving their countries and joining the fight in the eastern MENA.²³ Within the Arab world, only Jordan and Saudi Arabia superseded these countries.²⁴ Of these, some 700 women were part of these 3,000 Tunisians, and some 275 Moroccan women of the 1,600 mentioned, representing a rough ratio of 1:6 when adjusted to Moroccan and Tunisian demographics (Morocco’s population being roughly three times that of Tunisia).²⁵

For years it was Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Morocco and Palestine, that served as models for the evolvement of women’s’ empowerment in the Arab world. Indeed, Tunisia lead in women’s share of higher (tertiary) education, reaching a staggering 68.9 per cent of women graduating from the total number of graduates in the academic year 2018–2019.²⁶ In parallel, Tunisian women rose from 11 per cent to 47 per cent of total academic teaching staff in universities in the country between 1987 and 2012.²⁷ It remains the only country in the Arab world with a constitutional right for women to opt for abortion by choice, which was freely available via state clinics. In a world where women die due to their inability to abort already dead foetuses still inside their wombs in Poland (an EU member state),²⁸ and where the US Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, it is Tunisia’s conduct which seems more conducive to the promotion of women’s’ rights than certain ‘western’ countries.²⁹ Yet, these formal indicators are only part of the story. The other part has to do with the persistent discrimination of women in Tunisia, and their resulting frustrations – which was at the heart of the reasoning behind Tunisian women’s joining of ISIS.

²² Layla Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women Belonging To Violent And Extremist Groups From The Hotbeds Of Tension*, Tunis: Union du Maghreb Arabe and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (April 2021). Available off the official FES website at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/tunesien/18244.pdf>

²³ Lisa Watanabe, *The Next Steps of North Africa’s Foreign Fighters*, Zurich: Centre for Security Studies – ETH, March 2018, p. 3. Available at:

<https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/bitstream/handle/20.500.11850/321514/CSSAnalyse222-EN.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²⁴ Hafida Benchehida and Mohamed Kerrou, ‘The Maghrebi strategy of combating and preventing the phenomenon of the return of Maghrebi women from conflict zones’, in Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women* 2021), graph on p. 53.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 46 n.2.

²⁶ Wagdy Sawahel, ‘Tunisia: Women outnumber men at universities, yet lag in employment,’ in *University World News: Africa Edition*, 3 December 2020. Available at:

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20201201123459402#:~:text=The%20percentage%20of%20female%20graduates,Higher%20Education%20and%20Scientific%20Research.>

²⁷ World Bank: Tertiary education, academic staff (% female) – Tunisia. Available at:

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.TCHR.FE.ZS?end=2012&locations=TN&start=1973>

²⁸ Weronika Strzyżyńska, ‘Polish state has ‘blood on its hands’ after death of woman refused an abortion’, in *The Guardian*, 26 January 2022. Available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/26/poland-death-of-woman-refused-abortion>

²⁹ Michael Shear and Adam Liptak, ‘Leaked Supreme Court Draft Would Overturn *Roe v. Wade*’, in *The New York Times*, 2 May 2022. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/05/02/us/roe-v-wade-abortion-supreme-court#roe-v-wade-abortion-supreme-court>



To begin with, patriarchal structures of Tunisian society have implied a stark discrimination against women and a preference for male employment, especially in the more disadvantaged poorer southern and western regions. Indeed:

‘... gender plays a huge role in labour market outcomes: women are less likely to participate in the labour force, are more likely to be unemployed, and receive lower wages. In addition, youth and educated women in lagging regions are particularly disadvantaged because they are less likely to find a job and may not have the option of moving to places where employment prospects are better’.³⁰

It is with this perspective in mind that one should read the motivations behind Tunisian women’s disproportionate propensity for traveling to hotbeds of IVE. With 32.4 per cent unemployment of women, most of whom actually attained a ‘a fairly high level of education’ (i.e., tertiary),³¹ living in a country whose GDP per capita nosedived since the beginning of the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ was one thing.³² Add to that a built-in and *structural preference for men in governmentally-funded state employment training programmes* – and one gets a toxic mixture of gender discrimination coupled with Islamic extremism.³³ If after all the hard work and uphill battles for Tunisian women to acquire tertiary education, they still found themselves discriminated in their ability to find jobs so as to provide for their mere livelihoods, then absent any job opportunity prospects, their subsequently embraced extremism would at least result in their acquisition of a socio-ethical moral standing.

A parallel reading of Morocco and Tunisia’s measures towards returning Maghrebian women from hotbeds of extremism, as these emerge from the UMA/FES study is revealing. On the one hand, the profile of Moroccan women returning from ISIS’ strongholds differs considerably to that of Tunisian women; the latter pertaining to significantly higher levels of education. More importantly, and as Mustafa Rezrazi explains in his exposé about Morocco’s state responses, the Cherifian kingdom’s approach towards returning extremist women is far more imbued with notions of clemency, pardon, and forgivingness, as opposed to the much harsher approaches advocated for by Tunisia. The prevalence of ‘Musalaha’ (مصالحة) in Morocco over Tunisia’s harsher approaches, denotes a the former’s combination of state-power and mercy, as opposed to the latter’s weaker governance which is then accompanied by a higher degree of social strife.³⁴

³⁰ Lucia Hanmer, Edinaldo Tebaldi, and Dorte Verner ‘Gender and Labour Markets in Tunisia’s Lagging Regions’, in Ragui Assaad and Mongi Boughzala (eds.), *The Tunisian Labour Market in an Era of Transition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018, p. 140.

³¹ Benchehida & Kerrou in Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women 2021*, p. 48.

³² On the analysis of Tunisia’s GDP per capita trajectory versus Morocco, Jordan and other countries in the region see Section 4 below.

³³ Amel Grami, ‘Return of Maghrebian women belonging to violent and extremist groups from the hotbeds of tension’, in Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women 2021*, p. 21.

³⁴ Mostafa Rezrazi, ‘violent extremism amongst women and pathways of Moroccans returning from hotspots’, in Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women 2021*, pp. 179-292 at pp. 273-275. Cf. Khaoula Matri, ‘Women returning from areas of tension Tunisian case’, in Hassen (ed.) *Return Of Maghrebian Women 2021*, pp. 293-350.



4. Cherifian kingdoms and prosperous macro-economics: Morocco and Jordan

The major differences in state approaches towards returnees, Morocco and Tunisia, underscores a far bigger phenomenon, highlighted earlier in this paper, namely: the role of Cherifian kingdoms as a politico-religious institution, which becomes a ‘bastion of resilience to violent extremism’ (above p: 6).

The question is why? What is it about the Cherifian kingdoms of Morocco and Jordan that has caused them to fare far better over the decade after the popular uprisings in North Africa and beyond (2011–2021), in comparison to other Arab states ?

That they have fared better than fragile Arab democracies such as Tunisia, Lebanon, or Iraq, or better than oppressive regimes such as Algeria and Egypt (an autocracy-turned-democracy-turned-autocracy) is *not* in question. As Amaney Jamal, dean of Princeton’s School for Public and International Affairs, has demonstrated in her work over the past decade, and via her more recent research at the ‘Arab Barometer’, it is first and foremost thanks to economic despair that democracy has completely failed Middle Eastern peoples since 2011.³⁵ As Jamal pertinently notes:

“‘Bread, freedom, and justice’” was the protest slogan often heard in Cairo... and there is a reason bread comes first on the list... pro-democracy passions and movements failed to produce durable democratic governments. Perhaps *more important, however*, it also failed to produce the kind of *economic change* that people across the Middle East desperately craved’.³⁶

Jamal points to a direct relationship between economic destitute and regime fragility which was at the heart of the popular uprisings. Yet the corollary – of the rise of IVE and regime fragility is just as salient. The rise of ISIS and of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, would have been inconceivable during the hard reigns of Hafez al-Assad and Saddam Hussein, respectively. The same can be said for Libya’s current stature as a IVE hotbed, following Gaddafi’s downfall. As Jamal clearly notes, the Arab Spring’s regime fragility was premised upon the economic frustrations of a better-educated yet unemployed younger generation. Arabs’ preference towards Chinese economic development models that marry authoritarianism with economic growth mirror this understanding. To claim that IVE thrived between Tunisia and Iraq thanks to Arab governmental fragility since 2011, and that this fragility derives from economic fragility – would probably be an understatement.

Within this sea of change, which is the MENA, where countries such as Libya and Yemen have split into two or three sub-states, where countries such as Egypt and Tunisia have flip flopped from autocracy, to Islamic democracy and back, and where other countries such as Lebanon have basically fallen off the deep end into semi-failed statehood, the stability and growing

³⁵ Amaney A. Jamal and Michael Robbins, ‘Why Democracy Stalled in the Middle East: Economic Despair and the Triumph of the China Model’, in *Foreign Affairs* 101 (2) 2022, pp. 22-29. Available at:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2022-02-22/why-democracy-stalled-middle-east>

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22. Emphasis added.



economic prosperity offered to Moroccan and Jordanian people by their constitutional monarchical regimes is nothing less than remarkable.

Figure 1: GDP per capita trajectories in the MENA and the Maghreb regions, 2011–2021



A comparative overview of GDP per capita trajectories from 2000 until 2020, between Rabat and Amman is rather illustrative.³⁷ To begin with, the only two Arab countries (excluding oil-rich ‘Khaleeji’ (Gulf states), who have manage to retain a consistent uptrend of their GDP per capita’s, above and beyond the ‘Arab Spring’ that started in November 2011 (*de facto* in these graphs in 2012) are Morocco and Jordan. Factually, in all other Arab countries of this region (Egypt being the single exception)

contemporary *GDP per capita* are significantly lower than those before the ‘Arab Spring’s commencement.

The two first pairings above (Morocco/Algeria, and Jordan/Lebanon) roughly correspond to

³⁷ All GDP per capita data are taken from the website of the World Bank at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>



demographic and regional similarities of each of the two countries within each pair. Egypt and Tunisia have been paired both for their regional and political trajectory similarities since 2011. Located both in North Africa, both countries have seen a similar political trajectory of civil unrest which toppled an autocratic regime (Ben Ali and Mubarak, respectively), followed by Islamic democracy, with a final return to military autocracy in Egypt (already in 2014), with a more recent similar development in Tunisia's more recent dissolution of parliament, and increased power grab by president Kais Saied.³⁸

With the exception of the COVID-related dip at the far right end of their GDP curves, Morocco and Jordan's economic performance, and the consequent betterment of their citizens' lives since 2000, especially considering the onslaught of the 'Arab Spring' over the past decade, is remarkable. Indeed, in Jordan's case this economic development is even more staggering, given that the country has had to accommodate a seven per cent rise in its population as it has become the third biggest host of Syrian refugees housing some 760,000 of them in refugee camps across the country, while stringently continuing to uphold their right of asylum. As the UNHCR has recently noted, Jordan is: 'at the forefront of global efforts to give both refugees and host communities access to decent work', as it has continued its standing practice of issuing a record number of working permits to Syrian refugees present in the country.³⁹ One should note that Jordan's remarkable hospitality towards Syrian refugees has been consistent since the very beginning of the war in Syria.⁴⁰

Over and above Jordan's economic performance during the last decade of the 'Arab Spring', Morocco's dovetailing of economic performance and governance improvement has shined between the Maghreb and MENA regions. And while Morocco's staggering economic progress during the decade of the popular uprisings is remarkable in and of itself, when one considers other Arab countries' economic downturn during this period, the coupling of its economic ascendance with its steep rise in good governance and global democracy indicators over this period –marks Morocco as an exogenic outlier against virtually all its other MENA and Maghreb peers.⁴¹

Morocco's numbers evidence the drama. The population living below the World Bank national

³⁸ Mongi Saidani, 'Tunisia's President Dissolves Suspended Parliament', in *Asharq Al Awsat*, 31 March 2022. Available at:

<https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3564226/tunisia%E2%80%99s-president-dissolves-suspended-parliament>

³⁹ 'Jordan issues record number of work permits to Syrian refugees', *UNHCR Press Release*, 25 January 2022. Available at:

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/1/61effaa54/jordan-issues-record-number-work-permits-syrian-refugees.html#:~:text=Jordan%20hosts%20760%2C000%20refugees%20and,per%20capita%20globally%20behind%20Lebanon.>

⁴⁰ For comparisons between Middle Eastern and European refugee receptions and GDP per capita capabilities, evidencing Jordan's remarkable refugee hospitality see Gilad Ben-Nun and Frank Caestecker, 'Modern Refugees as Challengers of Nation-State Sovereignty: From the Historical to the Contemporary', in *Comparativ: Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 27 (1) 2017, pp. 12-14.

⁴¹ On Morocco's considerable improvement in governance and democracy indicators see below Conclusion of this paper & figure 2.



poverty line of USD 2.15 per day fell from 15.3 per cent in 2001 to 4.8 per cent in 2014. During this same period, urban poverty was virtually eradicated with only 1 per cent of the urban population living under poverty, while poverty in rural areas declined by 16 per cent, from 25 per cent in 2001 to about 9 per cent in 2014.⁴² While these numbers are for the period going into the ‘Arab Spring’ (began 2011), Morocco’s more recent economic data continues its upward trend, in spite of the corona pandemic. Reversing a 6.3 dip in GDP due to COVID-19 in 2020, Morocco’s real GDP growth for 2021 is projected to rebound to 5.3 per cent.⁴³ This GDP growth on 2021 is the highest in the MENA region, outpacing Egypt (+5.1% in 2021), Saudi Arabia (+3.5%), Jordan (+3.3%), Qatar (+3%), Tunisia (+2.9%) and Algeria (+2.6%, after a 15.1% drop in 2020).⁴⁴

Behind Jordan and Morocco’s increased GDP numbers lies the open economic secret which is as old as Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ and Keynesian economics: massive public infrastructure investments. Between 2001 and 2017, Morocco’s total annual investment into infrastructure ranged between a staggering 25 and 38 per cent of total GDP, rendering the country one of the highest governmental self-investors in infrastructure anywhere on the globe.⁴⁵ Jordan’s investment into infrastructure, while differing in its technical vehicle from Morocco, has also been remarkably high. Opting more for Public-Private-Partnership models (PPP), as opposed to Morocco’s preference for charging its State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) with the execution of its infrastructure projects, in 2020, Jordan was one of the most active countries worldwide in promoting and executing infrastructure projects in its realm, reaching an average rate of 4.8 per cent of GDP annually invested into infrastructure, thus making it: ‘the highest ranked country in the Activity driver for Infra-Compass 2020’.⁴⁶ Little surprise that Egypt has gone down the same path as Morocco and Jordan’s massive infrastructure investments, as it began building its \$58 billion mega projects of a new capital city for the country, 45 kilometres east of Cairo.⁴⁷

The point here is obvious, yet its implications are fundamental. Understanding that the ‘Arab Spring’ broke out first and foremost due to economic frustration and chronic unemployment, Arab governments have opted for large-scale infrastructural projects precisely because these are magnets for massive employment via their humongous draw of working hands and their

⁴² World Bank: *Morocco Infrastructure Review May 2020*, p. 1. Available at:

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33965>

⁴³ World Bank: *Morocco’s Economic Update*, 7 October 2021. Available at: [Morocco’s Economic Update — October 2021 \(worldbank.org\)](#)

⁴⁴ Oumaima Latrech, ‘World Bank: Morocco To Record the Highest GDP in MENA Region’, in *Morocco World News*, 8 October 2021. Available at:

[World Bank: Morocco To Record the Highest GDP in MENA Region \(morocoworldnews.com\)](#)

⁴⁵ World Bank: *Morocco Infrastructure Review*, May 2020, p. 1.

⁴⁶ See G20’s Global Infrastructure Hub, under its Infra-compass initiative data tool’s page on Jordan’s infrastructure at: https://infracompass.github.org/ind_country_profile/jor/#country-overview-data

⁴⁷ Aidan Lewis and Mohamed Abdellah, ‘Egypt’s new desert capital faces delays as it battles for funds’, in *Reuters News Agency*, 13 May 2019. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-new-capital-idUSKCN1SJ10I>

One should note that the overtly declared policy of the Egyptian government is to rely upon ‘local labour forces’, which would probably mean a targeting of young people’s unemployment here.



lure of hard foreign currencies, which can be attracted from outside investors such as the World Bank, IMF, Bank of International Settlements etc.

Lo and behold: the fundamental silver lining for any governmentally-instigated mass infrastructure projects is a simple prerequisite – temporal and governmental longevity and stability, irrespective of regime quality. Demanding long and time consuming attention for planning and execution and depending upon the trust of foreign capital markets, countries without reliable, stable long-term governance structures are simply hampered in their capacity to execute major infrastructural projects. Morocco can afford its long-term investment in its agricultural sector with mass irrigation and electric gridding projects since its governance as a Cherifian kingdom is solid. When the recent global spark in food prices comes along (due to COVID-19, rising inflation, the war in Ukraine etc.), this long-term investment in a structural sector such as agriculture suddenly (and massively) pays off. With its reciprocal revolutions and regime changes, Egypt has found it challenging to convince international investors of the investment solidity of its mega-city capital project, running into financial difficulties of capital raising.⁴⁸ The spiralling cycle then becomes clear – weakly trusted governments increase the fragility of their economies, unable to embark on massive infrastructural projects, thus further exacerbating unemployment, which, when paired with Islamic extremism, becomes socially explosive. It is little wonder that most Egyptians have preferred the stability of the Sisi regime over and above the chaotic years after Mubarak’s downfall. As Amaney Jamal noted: China’s model, which would have been anathema to protesters in Tahrir square, has suddenly begun to shine, as ordinary Egyptians simply ‘consider their alternatives’ for stability.⁴⁹

5. That Most illusive of Measures: Public and Popular Trust in Governance

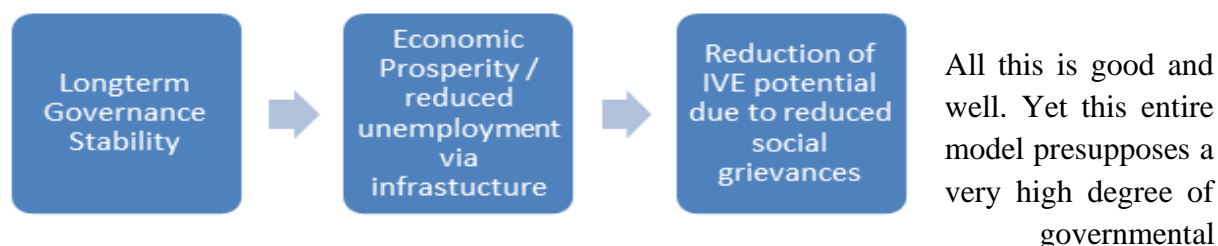
That Morocco and Jordan have been relative outliers to the MENA’s woes during the popular uprisings during the 2010s, including their suffering from IVE, is clear cut. That this also intertwines with their relative economic prosperity in comparison to other states in the region and that this prosperity has been partially fuelled by these countries’ ability to harness mass infrastructural projects to their societies’ advantage is also relatively clear. Reading PREVEX’ reports on both Algeria and Morocco, or both Jordan and Tunisia, one could equally explain any country’s arrival at reduced IVE in the following way, assuming all such governments have a similarly consistent variable of strong state security apparatus. Granted: when one couples stringent security apparatuses with a formula for economic amelioration via the embarkation upon major infrastructural projects, one more often than not arrives at reduced IVE. That is at least the overt linkage which has prevailed in the minds of governments such as Morocco, Jordan, and now Egypt. The following diagram helps explain their rationale and theory of change toward reduced IVE:

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ ‘El-Sissi loyalists lead polls as Egyptians vote’, in *Deutsche Welle News*, 24 October 2020. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/el-sissi-loyalists-lead-polls-as-egyptians-vote/a-55383354>



Figure 2: From governance stability to IVE reduction⁵⁰



stability, where long-term economic policy can be mirrored by the inauguration of major infrastructural projects. And these, in turn, invariably depend upon the availability of international funding for such projects, which again implies – a steep belief in governmental stability of the regimes in these countries. That is: *in public and popular trust in government in these places*. If there is one thing we have learnt from the ‘Arab Spring’ decade – it is that repression itself – is not enough to for the deliverance of governmental stability – no matter how oppressive the regime might be. The Assad and Gaddafi regimes of Syria and Libya were probably as oppressive as one could get, yet they still could not hold back massive public discontent. In turn, most experts would agree that the Sisi regime in today’s Egypt is ever more repressive than the Mubarak regime ever was. And yet, as public data has emerged, following the horrible experiences endured by the Egyptian public since the fall of Mubarak, and the rise and fall of the Muslim Brotherhood Mursi presidency, the majority of Egyptians today support Sisi far more than any other contemporarily-existent governmental option.⁵¹

Indeed, a view of different public barometers for the measurement of trust confirm much of what has been said on Egyptian, Moroccan, and other streets vis-à-vis the issue of public trust. Indeed, across both the Maghreb and Jordan, no institution enjoys as much trust as the armed forces to in these countries:

Figure 3: Trust in institutions – The Maghreb and Jordan (2020)⁵²

	Morocco	Tunisia	Libya	Egypt	Jordan
Government	29	20	10	66	38
Parliament	21	14	9	30	14
Judiciary	60	48	37	79	65
Political parties	18	9	4	21	7
Islamist parties	25	16	9	17	14
Army	78	90	59	84	95

⁵⁰ Graphic copyright Gilad Ben-Nun©PREVEX 2022

⁵¹ Above n. 49.

⁵² Respondents expressed ‘a great deal’ or ‘a lot’ of trust in the above institutions (in per cent).

Sources: Arab Barometer 2020. URL: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2020/06/the-arab-worlds-trust-in-government-and-the-perils-of-generalization/>, <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2020/05/arab-political-parties-and-the-dual-challenge-of-trust/>



One should note that the picture emerging from the ‘Arab barometer’, as to the crisis in trust in parliaments and political parties is not reserved for the Maghreb and Jordan. A similar picture can be drawn, albeit less definitively, for the Balkans, as observed in the following table:

Figure 4: Trust in institutions – The Balkans (2017 vs. 2021)⁵³

	Albania		Bosnia & Herzegovina		Kosovo		North Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia	
	2017	2021	2017	2021	2017	2021	2017	2021	2017	2021	2017	2021
Courts and judiciary	13	32	23	32	46	31	33	26	45	35	31	50
Parliament	22	31	15	29	40	27	35	27	42	44	25	48
Government	27	41	15	26	32	26	36	30	42	46	31	58
Local authorities		46		36		35		40		41		51
Political parties		27		20		22		26		26		26
Ombudsman	35	50	21	39	59	39	40	36	42	40	34	48
Supreme audit institution	30	54	22	33	47	37	35	29	61	34	30	46

Figure 5: Trust in institutions – African Maghreb & Sahel (2015 & 2021)⁵⁴

	Algeria	Egypt	Mali	Morocco	Niger	Tunisia
	Round 6 (2015)	Round 6 (2015)	Round 8 (2020)	Round 8 (2021)	Round 6 (2015)	Round 8 (2020)
President	47	82	46.8	35.9	81	74.8
Parliament	31	n.a.	36.9	34.5	73	21.8
Local government	32	35	54.6	37.1	75	30.6
Ruling political party	32	52	38.1	35.3	71	29.1
Opposition parties	28	25	26.3	26.9	56	23.9
Police	47	61	54.5	74.6	86	69.0
Army	57	80	81.6	83.0	92	93.9
Courts of law	36	65	35.9	58.4	82	66.4
Traditional leaders	44	35	82.7	25.4	88	37.2
Religious leaders	59	64	78.0	63.4	92	52.4

As one clearly notes, different countries in the Balkans have different attitudes towards the institutions they trust most. While in Kosovo, Albania and Bosnia people tended to trust the state Ombudsman and supreme audit institutions over other governance entities, Serbs have seen a rise in their trust towards both national and local governmental authorities. Yet while clearly differing in their preferences, if there is one trend somewhat consistent throughout the Balkans – it has to do with whom *the people* do not trust: *elected parliaments and political parties*. Indeed, a look back at Figure 3 above confirms the very same trend – the lowest levels of public trust are reserved for elected parliaments and political parties also between the Maghreb and Jordan. A similar trend can be observed when taking a more African-centred perspective, using data that emerges from the Afrobarometer, with Niger being the single

⁵³ Combined percentages for answers to the question ‘How much trust do you have in certain institutions?’ – ‘tend to trust’ and ‘totally trust’. Earlier versions of the Balkan Barometer either did not ask for the 2021 set of seven institutions or did not break down answers as per country. Source: Balkan Barometer 2017 (p. 124) and 2021 (p. 119). See the EU-funded Balkan Barometer at: <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/home>

⁵⁴ Note: Respondents expressed ‘somewhat’ or ‘a lot’ of trust in the above institutions (in per cent).

Source: Afrobarometer. ‘Summary Results of Afrobarometer Round’. Available at:

<https://www.afrobarometer.org>



outlier, in virtually all other countries surveyed here by the Afro Barometer, elected parliaments were –the *least* trusted institutions within the states listed here.

6. Public Trust in Governance, Societal Resilience to IVE, and Democracy: Morocco vs. Jordan.

Morocco and Jordan have exhibited similar trajectories in their approach to PVE. Rather than relying solely on sheer brute force (which they certainly do tend to resort to when necessary with little qualms for quells), both countries have insisted on maintaining high levels of trusts between their government structures (constitutional monarchies) and their citizen-subjects. Let there be no doubt: Morocco’s kingdom is arguably more embedded into the life and innate psyche of Moroccans than the Hashemite monarchy is to Jordanians. As Sciences Po’s Stéphane Lacroix has recently reiterated to the authors of these lines, Jordan’s kingdom is far more fragile than that of Morocco.⁵⁵ One would be hard pressed to imagine Morocco openly hosting jihadi arch-ideologues such as Abu Muhammad Maqdisi or Abu Qatada al-Filastini, irrespective of whether or not they would ‘let the Moroccan kingdom of their hook’ as they have done for Jordan.⁵⁶ Yet when compared against the conduct of Algeria’s repressive kleptocracy, Egypt’s army that owns a country, Tunisia’s recent absolution of parliament or in the worst of cases – Assad’s vile regime in Syria, the Jordanian monarchy’s record shines through. Ask some 760,000 Syrian refugees who have enjoyed that monarchy’s warm welcome for a decade now – and the difference crystalizes. At the end of the day, Jordan enjoys a rather high degree of trust between sovereign and subjects.

Morocco’s story is probably more remarkable. For above and beyond the outstanding economic improvement that kingdom has managed to afford its citizen over the decade of the ‘Arab Spring’, during that very same period, the Moroccan kingdom has ceased to be considered as an ‘authoritarian regime’ and has moved up two full measures to the status of ‘hybrid regime’ in the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index.

Economist Democracy Index Categories			
Category	Type of Regime	Score	Countires in Category
A	Full Decomracies	9.01-10	Norway
B	Full Decomracies	8.01 -9	Uruguay
C	Flawed Democracies	7.1-8	Italy
D	Flawed Democracies	6.1-7	Brazil
E	Hybrid Regimes	5.1-6	Morocco (2021)
F	Hybrid Regimes	4.1 - 5	Pakistan
G	Authoritarian Regimes	3.1-4	Morocco (2011)
H	Authoritarian Regimes	0-3	Syria

In 2011, at the start of the ‘Arab Spring’ both Jordan and Morocco shared roughly the same aggregated democracy score, placing them squarely in the upper rubric of authoritarian regimes (G), one above the worst grouping H which would include countries such as Venezuela or

⁵⁵ Authors’ conversation with Stéphane Lacroix, Copenhagen, 5 May 2022 (at the PREVEX partners’ 2022 workshop at the University of Copenhagen). See: <https://www.prevex-balkan-mena.eu/prevex-workshop-in-copenhagen/>

⁵⁶ PREVEX Report D7.2, pp. 18-20.



Afghanistan. Elapsing the decade of the ‘Arab Spring’, and while Jordan maintained her score in group G with a very mild deterioration, Morocco had managed to climb two full rubrics, so as to be placed, in 2021, in rubric E which is the upper more positive rubric of hybrid regimes, just below the lower rubric of flawed democracies (D – housing countries such as Croatia or Indonesia).

Let us reiterate the point here: while the democracy score of virtually all other countries in MENA has radically deteriorated in the decade of the ‘Arab Spring’, Jordan’s basic consistent maintenance of her democracy score is, in and of itself, a remarkable achievement. Couple that with its continuing growth in GDP per capita, in contrast to the free fall of this measurement by virtually all other countries save Morocco, and one sees just how special Jordan’s governance really is. For during the same period, Egypt descended 2 full rubrics from a hybrid regime in 2012, to the lowest form of authoritarianism (rubric H) in 2021.

Lebanon has followed the same pattern (from E to G), as has Mali (D to G), Iraq and Niger (F to G). To this extent, Jordan resembles far more Muslim countries outside MENA (such as Bosnia or Indonesia) who have consistently maintained their same democracy score. As with her GDP performance, Jordan then – the outlier to MENA.

And if Jordan is the outlier, then Morocco – with its sharp ascendance towards democracy, and its remarkable economic performance – seems to have begun to take off away from the MENA’s grid altogether. In 2022, elapsing a decade since the ‘Arab Spring’s beginning, the MENA’s two Cherifian kingdoms, have fared far better. If anything – Morocco – is almost in a league of its own.

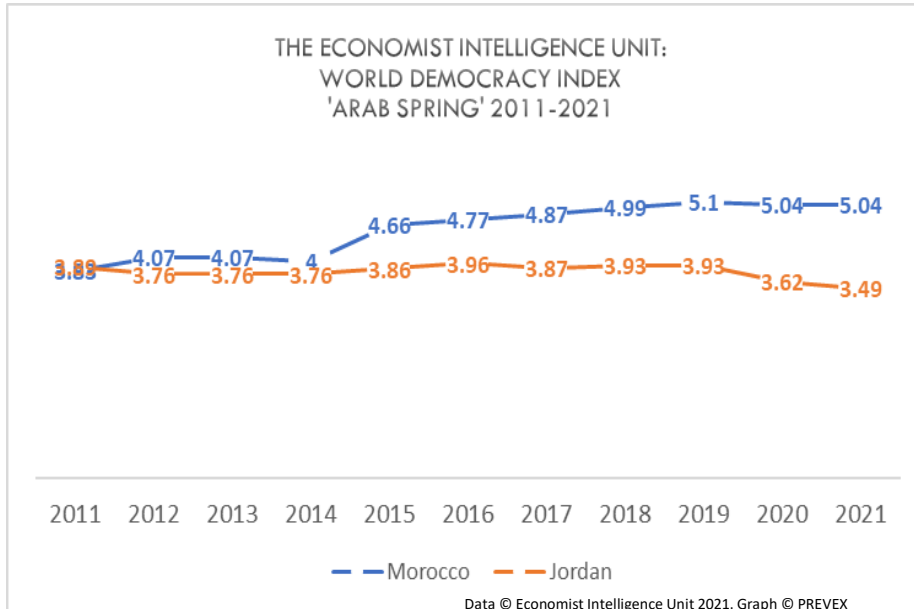
Jordan, and even more so Morocco, could well be considered as places where non-occurrence has reached country-wide proportions. This certainly does not mean that these countries do not experience IVE, or that they are not challenged by it. On the contrary – the threat of IVE lays bare before their doorsteps at all times. What it does mean, is that each of these two countries has articulated its own composite recipe for combating IVE, thus bringing about its respective non-occurrence within their realms. When compared against IVE’s *occurrence* in most other PREVEX-researched countries in MENA and the Maghreb, Jordan and Morocco’s *non-occurrence* simply shines through.

Some of the ingredients of the Cherifian kingdoms’ recipe for their IVE resilience have been shared by both Jordan and Morocco. Both countries have put a strong emphasis upon the long-term economic development of their populace. Both have dreaded the horrendous consequences of mass youth unemployment, and as a consequence – both have consistently opted for the launching of major infrastructure projects that require masses of working hands. Both have certainly relied on a harsh state-based harsh security apparatus which is extremely powerful, and whose prerogatives and broad and wide. At the level of governance, both kingdoms have not shied away from the swift reshuffling or ousting and switching prime ministers and governments when the need seemed to arise. Lastly, both kingdoms have laboured tirelessly to maintain, enhance and enlarge their international standings, understanding full well that that



standing, when associated with their governmental stability, would ensure them the access to capital markets and international development banks they so vitally require for their infrastructure-based economic growth.

Figure 3: Morocco’s and Jordan’s democracy score, 2011–2021⁵⁷



It is this element, probably more than any other, which has provided these countries with the blessed governmental stability they have enjoyed – the very stability that has enabled economic ascendance for both Jordan and Morocco, and the consistent climb in the

Economist Democracy Index for the latter.

7. Conclusion: The EU’s PVE policies and VE’s non-occurrence – More focus on public trust, less focus on elections.

This paper began with an comparative exposition of the concept of non-occurrence of VE, along with an exploration of micro-level examples within PREVEX’ three different geographical regional contexts (MENA, Balkans, Maghreb/Sahel), where such non-occurrence has been clearly observed. It has concluded with two macro-level examples of countries which might well be considered as examples of the more general shift towards non-occurrence writ large: Jordan and even more so – Morocco.

As the work of PREVEX across its three regions demonstrates it is economy, social stability, and long term governance prospects which are seen as most important in the eyes of publics from the Balkans to the Sahel and from the MENA to the Maghreb. Above and beyond the conundrums of why non-occurrence takes place in places equally poor to those where IVE is rampant, in the eyes of local populations: unemployment – especially of younger people – is

⁵⁷ *Economist Democracy Index 2021*. In this index, the Economist measures the following five factors: civil liberties, political culture, political participation, the functioning of government, and electoral processes and pluralisms. The index has 8 placing rubrics in 4 regime types: Full democracies (A, B), flawed democracies (C, D), hybrid regimes (E, F), authoritarian regimes (G, H). Available at: <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2020/>



seen as the VE's major driver.

Not surprisingly, Jordan and Morocco's successes in keeping IVE at bay have had much to do with these countries enhanced focus upon economic development and the creation of jobs via their engagement in massive infrastructural projects. And it is safe to say that following suit in their footsteps, Egypt, with its mammoth-like embarking upon the construction of its new capital city has adopted Jordan and Morocco's model.

Yet the underlying condition for any such economic development is always political stability of the state. And this stability rests upon the public's trust in the state's governance institutions. The more such trust exists – the more stability is at hand. The more stability at hand – the more possibilities for economic development via infrastructure and job-creation, thus reducing VE. This is the cycle as it is seen in the eyes and imaginations of MENA, Maghreb' Sahel and especially Balkan peoples, above and beyond the theoretical questionability of possible causalities as these are posed by social scientists.

Therein lie three major lessons and one query.

The first lesson concerns the nexus between governmental stability, economic prospects, and the reduction of VE. Elapsing a decade since the beginning of the so-called 'Arab Spring', Arab societies are tired of talk of 'democracy' and are much more geared towards regimes who can furnish them with better economic futures. The nexus between the fact that most Arab and Maghreb countries today are worse off in terms of their GDP per capita than before the Arab Spring, and rise of IVE is clear. Indeed the outliers to this trend, Jordan and Morocco – have also been the places where IVE has been most on the defensive.

The second lesson concerns what, who and whom people trust. Across the board, people trust most the governance institutions which can offer them *long-term governmental stability*. Often, this translates into a high degree of public confidence in the armed forces. This is most certainly true for the monarchies and Kings themselves within Cherifian kingdoms such as Jordan and Morocco, yet it is equally true vis-à-vis state presidents as in Egypt and Tunisia, or ceremonial state presidents as in Israel. So while counties can hold elections as such, and these might well be concluded to be transparent and largely clean of corruption, their *resulting elected parliamentarians are simply not trusted* – be it in the Maghreb/ Sahel, MENA or the Balkans.

Therein lies a strong lesson for EU policy makers looking to combat VE. For far too long, when faced with public shifts in the MENA, Maghreb/Sahel, Western occidental officials have sought refuge in their demand for '*clean and fair elections*', as a messiah-like antidote which can offer all-out deliverance from so many intertwined problems at hand. Obama's 'Mubarak must go' line, and his insistence on the need for immediate elections – as if these could have delivered some magic cure to all of Egypt's woes back in 2011, should serve as a stark warning to EU policy makers.⁵⁸ Over ten years later, and given Egypt's stark return to a rise in its GDP per

⁵⁸ Christiane Amanpour, Jake Tapper, Huma Khan, and Kirit Radia, 'Barak Obama Urges Hosni Mubarak's Departure, Calls Egyptian Protestors 'Inspiration' in *ABC News*, 1 February 2011. Available at: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/egypt-uprising-jordan-king-abdullah-sacks-cabinet->



capita and its corresponding job-creation (see figure 1 above, p. 11), it is little wonder that most Egyptians continue their stark support of their president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

The third lesson, and query, concerns the EU's own policy making vis-à-vis its neighbouring regions. Back during the 1990s, the EU's major answer to questions which later emerged during the 'Arab Spring', revolved around notions of 'structural stability' (EU 1996, 1997, 2011).⁵⁹ In fact, what Jordan, Egypt, and primarily Morocco are currently engaged in, via their efforts towards governance stability leading to economic improvement via the enactment of infrastructural projects, already strongly goes into the right direction when it comes to achieving structural stability as elaborated in the EU's own concept. Yet investment in economic and social infrastructure is not yet a conscious effort to *build-up social cohesion and IVE resilience*. Hence, we are still left with the need to discuss the nexus between the two further. Only when this nexus is fully understood, would we be able to consider high levels of structural stability.

As PREVEX's questionnaires and Amaney Jamal's work at the Arab Barometer clearly demonstrate, economic betterment and the lowering of unemployment are *sine qua non* preconditions for the prevention of VE. Yet other determining factors are no less important. These include: stable and benevolent government, huge investment in economic infrastructure and ultimately: the state's constructive efforts towards the enhancement of social cohesion. We might not yet be able to answer the question: how do you build structural stability?

Yet we can now say with more certainty what *not* to focus on primarily: elections as a silver bullet in an otherwise not conducive environment, and what to focus on: economy and political stability. To this end, European readers should consider the fact that since February 2021, from the onslaught of the COVID pandemic, Italy has been run by a presidentially *nominated* and clearly non-publicly-elected Prime Minister Mario Draghi. In December 2021, *The Economist* chose Italy as its 'country of the year' as the state which improved most in 2021.⁶⁰ At the end of the day, even in Europe – during times of crisis – good governance is far more appreciated by the public, than mere elections.

8. Policy Recommendations

I. Return to the EU's Structural Stability approach (1996):

In order to advance PVE efforts, the EU would do well to adopt an holistic attitude to that marries economy and developmental thinking, with trust in governance, and

[cairo/story?id=12809623](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/18/egyptian-support-for-el-sisi)

⁵⁹ See EC 1996. The European Union And The Issues Of Conflicts In Africa: Peace-Building, Conflict Prevention And Beyond (= Communication from the Commission to the Council). SEC(1996)332. March 16. Brussels: EU Commission; EU Council 1997. Common Position concerning conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, adopted on June 2, 1997 [Brussels] (mimeo); and EC 2001. Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention. COM (2001) 211. April 11. Brussels: EU Commission.

⁶⁰ *The Economist*, 18 December 2021. Available at: https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/12/18/which-is-the-economists-country-of-the-year-for-2021?utm_medium=social-media.content.np&utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=editorial-social&utm_content=discovery.content



security considerations. Almost three decades ago, in its approach to conflicts in Africa, the EU strongly adopted an approach which centred around its very solid concept of ‘STRUCTURAL STABILITY’, which back in 1996 the EU Commission defined as:

“...a situation involving sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy social and environmental conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resort to violent conflict.”⁶¹

The authors of this paper urge the EU to return to this holistic approach, and prefer it to pin-pointed and narrowly defined approaches to PVE, which fall short of incorporating ideas of economic development and trust in governance into their core workings.

II. Trust in governance – over and above elections:

PVE efforts seem to go hand in hand with conditions whereby publics display trust in certain structures of their own governance. The EU should identify these governance structures whom local societies trust, and carefully assess and question any immediate and ‘automatic’ tendency in favour of elections. The mistrust of MENA, Balkan, and Maghreb/ Sahel societies of their own openly elected officials, as this clearly appears in the data – should serve as a note of caution.

⁶¹ *THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ISSUE OF CONFLICTS IN AFRICA: PEACE BUILDING, CONFLICT PREVENTION AND BEYOND*, Communication from the EU Commission to the EU Council, Brussels, 6th March 1996, EU Doc. SEC (96) 332- Final. P.2. Available at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/4280/1/4280.pdf>

