Chapter 1
Setting the Scene

Abstract The MENA region is characterized by numerous crises. These range from the Covid-19 pandemic sweeping through the region to religious fundamentalism, violent sectarianism, vast economic discrepancies, pressing environmental challenges, the intrusions of external actors in the region, and a debilitating authoritarian culture. All of these variables are exacerbated or ameliorated by globalization – a reality that no state can wish away. These challenges can be mitigated by political elites engaging in robust institution-building creating structures fit for purpose whilst at the same time laying the foundation of values amongst citizens like trust in those institutional structures.

Keywords Globalization · Instability · Institution-building · Values

1.1 Introduction

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its recent prediction,¹ now expects the global economy to contract by 3 percent in 2020, much worse than during the 2008–2009 financial crisis. This scenario assumes that the pandemic fades in the second half of 2020 and containment efforts can be gradually unwound. The advanced economies will shrink by −6.1 percent, while China and India still will experience some sort of economic growth by <2.0 percent, while the Middle East and North Africa will shrink by around −3.3 percent. The world will thus be confronted with the largest economic depression since the Great Depression of 1929. The sense of crisis is palpable throughout a MENA region convulsed by the crisis brought about the by the Covid-19 pandemic. The sense of desperation and grief is evident as families lose loved ones and as the economic costs escalate on families and the fiscus. To be frank, though, the region has been in crisis and turmoil

¹https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2020/04/14/weo-april-2020
for some time. Consider the following, with the passing of the Prophet Muhammed in 632 CE, debate ensured as to who was to succeed him. This political debate on succession was to result in an enduring shiism in the Middle East between Shia and Sunni Islam. The second legacy which remains with us from this first century of Islamic history is the rise of Islamic fundamentalism seen in the emergence of the Kharajites – one of whom assassinated Caliph Ali – the fourth Caliph. Such fundamentalism continues to rear its head in the MENA region whether on the correct status of women in Muslim society or whether electoral democracy is permissible in Muslim countries.

The prophet was eventually succeeded by the Rashidun or rightly guided Caliphs. Three of these four Rashidun were assassinated however (Solomon 2013). This added another dimension of turbulence to Muslim society seen in coups, jockeying for power and palace intrigue that has become the norm of Arab states throughout much of its post-independence history. Such turbulence was given added momentum by the democratic deficit existing in these societies. Whilst an authoritarian impulse always existed in these societies, it was given added momentum when the Ottoman Empire under Selim the Grim began its systematic conquest of the Middle East. Despite the fundamentalist penchant to romanticize Ottoman rule as some sort of Islamist nirvana, the truth is that the Ottomans fashioned their rule less on Islamic principles and more on the Byzantine model of absolute monarchy (Solomon 2013). As a consequence of authoritarian rule, socio-economic tensions could not be resolved politically through means of an escape valve such as changing the political guard through the ballot box. As a result, tensions simmered and would periodically erupt as seen in the Arab Spring uprisings or protests currently unfolding on the streets of Beirut, Baghdad and Tehran.

There is one final element that one needs to examine in an effort to come to grips with this crisis-ridden region, the intrusion of foreigners into the MENA region. The Crusades which occurred intermittently between 1091 and 1291 helped to shape Middle Eastern attitudes towards Westerners immeasurably (Rogerson 2010). Perhaps more than anything else, the nature of interactions with foreigners shaped Arab society in fundamental ways. When invading Mongol armed forces entered Baghdad on the 13 February 1258 and unleashed a massive orgy of violence and destruction against its hapless citizens, it had a profound effect on the political thought of the thirteenth century scholar Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah whose treatises went on to shape the ideology of the adherents of Political Islam to this very day (Solomon and Tausch 2020). In similar fashion, Napoleon Bonaparte’s sudden invasion of Egypt on 1 July 1798 with 400 ships and 54,000 men and his routing of Egyptian forces so thoroughly and quickly gave rise to deep soul searching within Muslim society (Solomon 2013). Do we reform and become more like the technologically advanced West or do we retreat seeking to maintain our cultural “purity” as we seek to re-create a seventh century Islamist utopia? The problem with such utopia is whether it is falling oil prices, global climate change or the corona virus, no place can be an isolated island. We are all interconnected. No retreat is possible.

What this book attempts to do then is to offer the reader critical insights of a region in crisis, exploring different facets of the crisis from governance to gender to...
the politics of identity, the challenge of the environment and the enduring impact of
demographic variables and technological change. Crises, as is their wont, do not
only provide challenges but also opportunities. These opportunities allow one to
reset the clock, to do things differently, to make alternative choices and to arrive at
different outcomes. Nothing is pre-determined. Whilst exploring the nature of the
crises, then, we also explore how policy-makers have responded to these and what
other alternatives there are in overcoming challenges posed. Whilst recognizing the
enormity of the crisis currently engulfing the region, the tone is also hopeful.
Challenges need not be insurmountable, alternative paths can be taken, new leader-
ship and new forms of governance can take hold. Whilst the focus is on the Middle
East North Africa region as a whole, we are well aware of the unique characteristics
of individual countries. Hence the book examines regional trends whilst also con-
scious of the national specificities of each country. In combining the general with the
particular, the book approaches its subject matter from both a quantitative and a
qualitative perspective allowing one to understand regional trends and country-
specific peculiarities.

In the following, we briefly describe the country groups, used in the present book.

1.2 Definitions of the Regions Used in This Essay

1.2.1 Arab League

Our first country grouping is defined by the members of the Arab League (Map 1.1).
Algeria; Bahrain; Comoros; Djibouti; Egypt; Iraq; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Libya; Mauritania; Morocco; Oman; West Bank + Gaza; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Somalia; Sudan; Syria; Tunisia; United Arab Emirates; Yemen.²

1.2.2 MENA Countries

The second country grouping is the MENA countries, according to the World Bank
definition (Map 1.2).
Algeria; Bahrain; Djibouti; Egypt; Iran; Iraq; Israel; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Libya; Malta; Morocco; Oman; West Bank + Gaza; Saudi Arabia; Syria; Tunisia; United Arab Emirates; Yemen.³

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Member_states_of_the_Arab_League and http://www.lasportal.org/
Pages/Welcome.aspx. The choropleth maps of this chapter were drawn using the free software
developed by Robert Mundigl, available at https://www.clearlyandsimply.com/
³https://data.worldbank.org/region/middle-east-and-north-africa
In the vast literature on economic and social development, there has been a recent emphasis on building institutions and laying the foundations for values, such as trust, as a precondition of a successful development process, thus reiterating earlier modernization theories and economic theories of development (Alesina and Ferrara 2000; Alesina and Giuliano 2015; Alesina et al. 2015; Barro 1998, 2012; Davidov et al. 2011; Grinin et al. 2018; von Hayek 1960, 1998, 2012; Hofstede et al. 2010; Lipset 1959; McCleary and Barro 2006; Minkov and Hofstede 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011).

1.3 Globalization: The Defining Process of MENA Politics and Economics

In the vast literature on economic and social development, there has been a recent emphasis on building institutions and laying the foundations for values, such as trust, as a precondition of a successful development process, thus reiterating earlier modernization theories and economic theories of development (Alesina and Ferrara 2000; Alesina and Giuliano 2015; Alesina et al. 2015; Barro 1998, 2012; Davidov et al. 2011; Grinin et al. 2018; von Hayek 1960, 1998, 2012; Hofstede et al. 2010; Lipset 1959; McCleary and Barro 2006; Minkov and Hofstede 2011; Norris and Inglehart 2011).
In the present book, we are well aware of these processes, and indeed would like to contribute our own, state of the art measurement scales on just where the MENA countries, especially the Arab League member countries of the MENA region are to be located on sophisticated, multivariate maps of global values, based on standard and freely available global surveys and multivariate analyses derived from them (Davidov et al. 2011; Grinin et al. 2018; Solomon and Tausch 2020). In that respect, this work continues earlier attempts in this direction, presenting latest insights, data and strategic evaluations on a global scale and for Europe (Tausch and Obirek 2019).

But the angle, from which we look, now also systematically takes into account the process of globalization, which has been at the centre of other recent development literature. The KOF data series, collected at the ETH Zurich in Switzerland, is one of these outstanding attempts, largely received in global social science literature (Grinin et al. 2018). And in general terms, especially Swiss social science has developed methodologies and measurement scales to grasp the effects of globalization on socio-economic development (Bornschier 1980, 1983; Bornschier and Ballmer-Cao 1978, 1979; Bornschier and Chase-Dunn 1985; Gygli et al. 2019; Müller and Bornschier 1988; see also Chase-Dunn 2019; Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2015; Tausch 2012, 2018, 2019; Tausch and Heshmati 2012, 2013). Based on the mentioned KOF-Index of globalization, arguably the best single instrument to measure today the complexities of the phenomenon, we will evaluate in Chap. 3 the relationship between globalization, value development and overall development patterns in a generalized global factor analytical model. We will present the results of this model for the countries of the MENA region.

1.4 What We Aim to Achieve

Chapter 2, written by Hussein Solomon, examines the nature of the states in the region, the arbitrariness of its origins, poor governance, ineffective institutions, the toxic inter-relationship between religion and politics, and perhaps most problematic of all the dearth of democracy. The latter has allowed political leaders to escape accountability for corruption and nepotism. The rise of non-state actors and the intrusion of external actors within state’s domestic affairs has also served to erode the sovereignty of these states. Despite this, there are signs of hope given the demographic variables and technological revolutions in these societies which has witnessed more younger people more open to democracy, more secular in their attitude towards faith and more tolerant of the proverbial other.

Chapter 3, written by Arno Tausch, assesses the overall picture of the development processes in the region 1960–2019, including inequality rates, measured by the University of Texas Inequality Project. In particular, the development performance of the countries of the region according to international development indicators is measured (Tausch and Heshmati 2013). By cross-national comparison, gender, freedom and democracy are the real deficits of the region.
Chapter 4, written by Arno Tausch, attempts to close a gap in the recent literature on Arab MENA countries economic development: how globalization affected human values in this part of the world. First, the overall picture of the degree of globalization according to the Zurich KOF-Index data series, affecting the MENA countries, and the effects of this globalization on inequality rates, measured by the University of Texas Inequality Project, is being assessed. New comparable indices of global value development derived from the latest set of World Values Survey data are used to determine the Arab MENA countries’ place on a new factor analytical index of Global Civil Society, building on Grinin et al. (2018) and Solomon and Tausch (2020). We relate these results (country factor scores) with macro-economic and social and political indicators, presented in Tausch and Heshmati (2012) and Tausch (2019), and the globalization indicators of the KOF-data series (Gygli et al. 2019). Our comparisons reveal that gender and freedom remain the true development challenges of the region for the twenty-first century, and that the Arab MENA countries would be well advised to further social globalization.

Chapter 5, written by Hussein Solomon, examines patriarchy in the MENA region. The ancient states of the region bequeathed modern polities gender discriminatory legislation as it sought to control women sexuality. Contemporary governments have weaponized sexual violence as a form of political intimidation. Despite the MENA region displaying the largest gender gap of all regions politically, socially and economically, there is hope. Women are increasingly seeing the connection between their daily struggles and that of larger societies and are making common cause in the fight against political authoritarianism and economic exclusion. As surveys from the Arab Barometer indicates, attitudes and values are changing and a post-patriarchal future is increasingly becoming possible.

Chapter 6, written by Hussein Solomon, examines the politics of identity and sectarianism in the MENA region. Whilst some states, notably Iran, is fuelling such divisions as a path to geo-strategic influence in the region, such an approach is ultimately self-defeating as it merely becomes an added vector of instability in the region. The chapter explores how countries are attempting to create more inclusive polities through secession, federalism, consociationalism and nation-building approaches. Each of these approaches are evaluated and assessed in light of empirical realities.

Chapter 7 on Political Islam was written jointly by Hussein Solomon and Arno Tausch. It uses Arab Barometer Survey data (5) to analyse the phenomenon. Political Islam has been a major force across the MENA for much of the twentieth century. Reaching the zenith of their political ascendancy in the immediately aftermath of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, it is clear that Islamism is on the wane across the region. Opinion polls demonstrated that the Arab street, in particular the youth, are becoming more secular, less conservative in their attitudes and more suspicious of the role of religion in the public sphere. What is driving this disenchantment with Islamist parties relates to their aligning themselves with anti-democratic forces, the endemic corruption and nepotism they have demonstrated once in ofﬁce, their inability to govern and their internal divisions. A post-Islamist future beckons the region and those Islamist parties who make the successful adaptation to this new reality will
thrive. Those who do not will be confounded to the dustbin of history. Our 24 empirical indicators are analysed by non-parametric and parametric indicator construction, and we can show that Tunisia and Lebanon are relatively free from “Political Islam”, while it still receives strongest support in Sudan and Yemen.

Chapter 8, written by Hussein Solomon, examines the constrained environmental context in which MENA countries are operating in. With global climate change a reality and desertification and water scarcity being the norm, we explore the challenges posed to individual countries and how these countries are responding to a region that is expected to be uninhabitable by 2050. Climate change is further complicated by the rapid urbanization in these countries as well as the youthful demographics. Whilst climate change is real, its negative impact can be mitigated by effective governance. Unfortunately, political elites have often failed their citizens by embracing short-term solutions as opposed to seeking longer-term more sustainable approaches. The latter, however, depends on greater inclusivity and more decentralized policies which authoritarian states do not want to embrace.

Chapter 9, written by Hussein Solomon, examines the political, social and economic impact of the Covid-19 virus on the MENA region. It also examines the governments’ responses to the threat posed. It argues that the effectiveness of governments’ responses is not merely shaped by health infrastructure and broader governance but also by the legitimacy of incumbent political elites. The pandemic, it is argued, will have long-term repercussion for regimes across the region – new inclusive polities need to be reconfigured and new forms of economic and social organization is needed if the region is to survive in the post-pandemic future.

Chapter 10, the conclusion, winds up our analysis.

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