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Essays on Political Elites and Violence in Changing Political Orders of Middle East and Africa

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of Sussex

March 2020

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to this or any other University for the award of any other degree.

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I confirm that I am the sole author of Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7.

Chapters 5, 6 and 8 include co-authored work. I confirm I am the sole author of Chapters 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, and 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, and 8.5.

Signature:.....

Andrea Carboni

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Thesis summary

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This research project addresses the question of how political elites' behaviour varies when competition among them is heightened. Focusing on changing political orders across Africa and the Middle East, it seeks to understand how political elites facing internal and external challenges manipulate local power structures for political survival purposes, resulting in distinct political trajectories. The thesis argues that local political and conflict environments are conditional on the nature of competition among elites. Volatile political transitions, intense popular unrest, and militarised environments all create distinct incentives and constraints which shape political orders, and determine the inclusion or exclusion of select elites in the resulting political settlement.

Using a mixed-method research design which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the thesis consists of five essays exploring select topics and three in-depth case studies. The essays address two cross-cutting themes. First, they show how elites reconfigure institutional structures to cement alliances and survive internal or external challenges when power is being contested after a change in the leadership, or when facing popular mobilisation. Bargaining occurs through ministerial appointments or purges which aim to consolidate political settlements and secure power holders from rivals. Examples from Tunisia and recent episodes of leadership changes from across Africa are presented together with original datasets of ministerial appointments. Second, the essays illustrate how patterns of violence within states are indicative of the fragmented nature of the political environment of the political competition therein taking place. Findings from Libya and Yemen are presented to demonstrate that localised fragmentation produce subnational geographies of conflict which reflect the strategies and the mobilisation capacity of armed groups and elite actors.

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1. Introduction

Across societies, elites occupying positions of authority are critical actors for the stability of political orders. By either promoting or stalling change, elites can steer the political trajectory of a state, and shape the nature of the political or conflict environments where they operate. Yet this relationship is not unidirectional: political orders within states create incentives and set constraints for distinct forms of contentious politics at the national and subnational levels. Indeed, political elites – even those sitting in the highest positions of authority – are often faced with external constraints. They operate in highly competitive environments, populated by formal political institutions and rival elites struggling for survival and access to power. As a result of this interaction, elite behaviour both shapes and is conditional upon the political orders in which these actors operate, producing distinct political and conflict trajectories.

This research project is concerned with how the behaviour of political elites varies when competition between them is heightened, and includes either the use or the threat of violence. It aims to understand how emerging political orders and elite structures could shape different trajectories of conflict, explaining why certain actors resort to different forms of violence, and how conflict clusters along specific subnational geographies. It also explores how processes of bargaining among elites produce inclusive or exclusive political orders, and at which institutional or extra-institutional levels this competition unfolds. Two dominant themes are discussed. First, how elites in Africa and the Middle East behave when power is being contested and they face internal or external challenges, namely after a change in the leadership or amidst increased political unrest. Second, how geographies and patterns of violence within a state reflect the cohesive or fragmented nature of the political environment and of the political competition taking place therein.

This chapter provides an introduction to the research project, outlining the main themes and the context, setting out the structure, and summarising the key arguments and findings.

1.1. Understanding political elites and violence

1.1.1. Context

Over the past twenty years, several African and Middle Eastern states have experienced major socio-political transformations. These include: the revival of authoritarian practices in states expected to be democratising; the end of long-standing rulers followed by the

rise of competitive authoritarian regimes and controlled democracies; the outbreak of protest movements which sparked volatile political transitions; major demographic changes which upset established governance practices within and across states; and the rise of regional powers aspiring to extend their arc of influence through a mix of hard and soft power (Levitsky and Way 2010; Cheeseman 2011, 2015; Achcar 2013; Way 2016; Cheeseman and Klaas 2018).

Among these is also a surge in armed conflict, a reflection of violent political competitions taking place within states. Despite a lower risk of civil war onset, different forms of violence dominate the political landscape of several countries in Africa and the Middle East (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Across the region, violent conflict is often an endemic component of political struggle, resulting in protracted local insurgencies, sustained rates of civilian violence, and highly fragmented conflict environments characterised by a variety of armed groups struggling for access to power and financial resources along with a widespread use of violence by state agents (Raleigh 2012a, 2016; Stacher 2015; Raleigh and Kishi 2018). Shifts in perpetrators and modes of civilian targeting particularly reveal the increasing volatility of these conflict environments, pointing to the worrying victimisation of civilians in modern conflict (Raleigh 2012). Additionally, state breakdown, as experienced by Libya and Yemen among many other countries in the region, demonstrates the risk of prolonged states of unrest escalating into domestic conflicts with wider regional implications (Polese and Santini 2018).

Amidst widespread unrest and endemic violence, domestic political elites continue to steer the political trajectory of states in the region. Intense popular mobilisations, the rise of domestic and transnational armed groups, the emergence of multiple threats to the established authority: these trends all aim to challenge the legitimacy of incumbents to hold power over their citizens, forcing elites to design survival strategies through which they seek to safeguard their power and influence. These new challenges have produced a reconfiguration of power structures within states signalling attempts by incumbents to secure the support of elite groups deemed to be vital for their continued grip on power.

Despite common perceptions about the persistence of uncontested ‘big man’-style governance practices (Haber 2006), most political orders are sustained by volatile alliances between political elites who agree to cooperate for their mutual benefit (Raleigh and Dowd 2018). As a result, the majority of the most monolithic authoritarian regimes

have institutional arrangements which, at least on paper, are supposed to regulate and restrain the supremacy of the ruler and their authoritarian drifts (Svolik and Boix 2007). An important consequence is that formal and informal practices of power co-exist in most political orders. Patronage and clientelist networks are often co-opted within state structures, which in turn reflect the variegated alliances that sustain the regime. Access to state institutions is often seen to regulate competition among elites by minimising the risks related to succession and elections while providing a stable access to rents (De Waal 2015). Across the region, examples of this institutionalised elite competition are rife: recent managed leadership removals in Algeria and Sudan were followed by struggles over the control of interim governing bodies; questionable or ostensibly rigged elections in Algeria, Egypt and Ethiopia were instrumental in providing a façade of democratic legitimacy to entrenched authoritarian regimes; the proliferation of state institutions in Libya and Yemen sought to accommodate highly hostile elites through the allocation of state positions; while the proposed extension of presidential term limits sparked new struggles in Algeria, Burundi and Uganda.

Taken together, these multiple forms of political competition and contestation require an explanation of how elites operate in such circumstances. Struggles over who dominates a political order have the potential to spark armed violence and shape specific geographies and patterns of conflict while determining the relative inclusiveness of its governance institutions.

1.1.2. Debates

Much of the academic scholarship on African and Middle Eastern political elites has been dominated by debates centred on the notions of rentierism, neo-patrimonialism, kleptocracy, big-man rule, and other concepts that fail to adequately account for the changing nature of political competition across the region (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). At the same time, an oversimplified conceptualisation of the state as a unitary actor advancing a coherent political agenda falls short of explaining divergent state-building trajectories. Within this framework, formal institutions, consisting of the state and its articulations, typically operate in parallel with, or in opposition to, informal governance, which displays an independent and alternative logic (North 1990; Bratton 2007; Razo 2014). States permeated by informal institutions or captured by non-state actors are therefore assigned labels of ‘fragile’, ‘weak’ or ‘failed’, underscoring wider implications for regional security and stability (Raleigh and Dowd 2013). By accepting these state-

centred perspectives focused on ‘failure’, the persistence of informal governance is viewed as a ‘temporary situation’, which is set to disappear as the state retakes its fully-fledged ‘Weberian’ statehood.

Importantly, studying the behaviour of ruling elites is crucial to our understanding of the evolution of conflict dynamics, domestically and regionally. Essentialist explanations of conflict have obscured the role of elites in using violence for political purposes. These would typically highlight the power of ideology, sectarianism and culture to drive conflict, and construct binary divisions between supposedly opposing immutable blocs (Cohen 2013). However, existing research has demonstrated the inadequacy of these wholesale arguments in explaining the onset of violence, revealing how violent activity instead responds to dynamics rooted in local political environments (Dowd 2016; Durac 2019).

Additionally, starting from the 1990s, and again in the aftermath of the uprisings that have swept across the Arab world since 2011, the ‘democratic transition’ and ‘authoritarian retrenchment’ paradigms have often catalysed academic and policy-making debates, overlooking the mechanisms through which elites may use different means, including violence, to influence the political process and shape emerging political orders (Huntington 2009; Linz and Stepan 2013). Underlying these analytical frameworks was the assumption that transitions from authoritarian rule are intrinsically moments of uncertainty, intense competition and heightened conflict, which will either generate (semi-)functioning democracies or revert to authoritarian regimes (Carothers 2002). Nevertheless, these paradigms are unable to explain the divergent patterns of violence witnessed in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, as well as elsewhere in Africa (Valbjørn 2012; Stacher 2015). Over the past decade, academic research has nevertheless paid increasing attention to the study of elites for understanding the logic of conflict. The introduction of new frameworks in elite studies, and the greater availability of large datasets, have provided original insights into previously ill-defined notions of patronage (Arriola 2009), political order (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009), cohesion (Levitsky and Way 2012), and regime instability (Kroeger 2018).

Building on these debates, there are several reasons why a study dedicated to understanding how elite competition works is relevant.

First, elite competition should not be viewed through a merely dichotomous perspective that pits formal and informal institutions against each other, but rather as something that unfolds across these levels producing innovative institutional arrangements incorporating both logics. In these political systems, power arises from the combination of multiple sources of influence and the distinction between formal structures and informal governance is more nuanced, warranting explanations that consider the heterogeneous and non-hierarchical nature of the state. Drawing from perspectives that highlight the networked (Brass and Krackhardt 2012) and transactional (De Waal 2015) nature of power relationships, this research project aims to contribute to the study of contemporary ‘political marketplaces’ understood as political orders regulated by transactions between elites.

Second, elite competition regulates the logic of inclusion and exclusion in political settlements. Although it is a common perception that ‘big-man’ rule is the rule in most authoritarian regimes, all leaders are surrounded by a network of influential actors whose support is vital to ensure regime survival (Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* 2003). Hence political survival is managed through the strategic inclusion (or exclusion) of key political elites in governance structures, which provides these actors with regular access to power and rents (Arriola 2011). Recent research has further confirmed that contemporary political orders display overall high levels of socio-political inclusion, albeit disproportionately among groups and within the hierarchy of the state (Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd 2020). The research project aims to address this key debate, presenting new empirical evidence as to how elite inclusion and exclusion are used strategically in changing political orders.

Third, within a context of persisting political fluidity across Africa and the Middle East, elite competition continues to be a main driver of intrastate violence (Gledhill 2012). Envisioning this political turmoil as an open-ended process of political transformation, I identify its roots in a context of regime re-making, in which the weakening or the fragmentation of regimes creates incentives for militarised inter-elite bargaining and multiple forms of political violence. In some contexts, situations of protracted conflict produce distinct ‘wartime political orders’, in which armed groups negotiate their access to political power and authority through the use or threat of violence (Staniland 2012). This interpretation further builds on Charles Tilly’s seminal work on state-building and

violence (1985), which described the strategic role of violence in the making of new regimes and states.

A fourth key debate concerns the implications of fragmented political environments, and whether these are conducive to more unstable political settlements and conflict escalation. Existing studies have examined the consequences of fragmentation in relation to civil war spaces (Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour 2012; Pearlman and Cunningham 2012; Brenner 2015) as well as states and their agents (Raleigh and Dowd 2018; Raleigh and Kishi 2018). I seek to contribute to this scholarship by exploring the link between subnational geographies of violence and local political orders, and how fragmentation impacts on the capacity to effectively carry out collective action.

1.1.3. Research questions

The overarching research question guiding this project is: how do the survival strategies of political elites shape conflict environments amidst periods of rapid change? The question is explored with reference to political orders in the contemporary Middle East and Africa regions, in which several countries have recently experienced dramatic transformations resulting in different conflict patterns and divergent political trajectories. Where does inter-elite bargaining occur? How is political violence linked to elite struggles for domination over the political settlement? Which geographies of violence and power are set to emerge amid heightened political mobilisation?

This thesis seeks to analyse how distinct processes of elite bargaining can create incentives for specific forms and patterns of political violence at local, regional and national levels and ultimately shape the resulting political and institutional outcomes. It responds to calls for a better integration of theoretical frameworks about political elites and violence (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Choi and Raleigh 2015; De Waal 2015), while also addressing the geographic and spatial contexts in which they are situated (Raleigh and Dowd 2018). This includes a discussion on the interaction between the state and its constituent elite actors as well as on the specific governance structures arising from this networked relationship.

In drawing from multiple case studies from Africa and the Middle East (with Yemen representing the only case outside of the African continent), the research project is less interested in deriving regionally-situated conclusions than it is in understanding elite survival strategies in states under stress. The selection of the cases serve to illustrate how

processes of bargaining among elites are not restricted to a region (Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, or else) but occur widely within and beyond the African continent, illustrating its common political underpinnings (George and Bennett 2005). Additionally, all cases included in the thesis share common institutional arrangements (i.e. a republican form of state) and have a recent history of political violence or protest, or a combination of both that produces unique challenges for incumbents. The inclusion of Yemen among cases lying largely within Africa follows the examples of recent studies that compare its practices of power with those observed in Africa, and particularly in the Horn (De Waal 2015; Lewis 2015; Phillips 2019).

Two main sub-questions are discussed. Each considers a dimension of the relationship between political elites and the respective conflict and political environments in which they are situated. First, this research interrogates how elites in Africa and the Middle East behave when power is being contested and face internal or external challenges, namely after a change in leadership or amidst heightened political unrest. Through this question, I seek to understand how incumbents attempt to consolidate a political settlement that has come under contestation by rallying the support of prospective allies and neutralising potential rivals. To do so, I analyse the political and geographic architecture of the regime as a reflection of an elite environment responding to internal and external challenges. The three articles included under this theme will explore the role of non-party ministers for consensual politics in Tunisia's contemporary history, the appointment of 'crisis cabinets' in response to unrest across Africa, and the reconfiguration of elite environments in the aftermath of leader removals in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

Second, the following sub-question asks how geographies and patterns of violence within a state reflect different topographies of power at the local level. More specifically, it analyses how the structure of local conflict spaces, which is revealing of the cohesive or fragmented nature of the political environment and of the political competition taking place therein, shapes trajectories of conflict at the local level, determining violence intensity and outcomes. To this end, I focus on the concepts of fragmentation and cohesion in relation to armed groups and political elites in civil war contexts. The two articles presented under this theme will explore subnational patterns of armed group fragmentation in the Libyan civil war (2014-2017) as a reflection of distinct wartime political orders, and how elite fragmentation frustrated collective action amidst an attempted uprising during Yemen's civil war.

1.2. Scope of the research

This research project assumes that political elites are rational actors whose behaviour is predominantly driven by concerns of political survival (De Waal 2015). Consequently, I argue that the use of violence is rooted in the specific conditions of local conflict environments which can incentivise or inhibit armed conflict, and less so in cultural, ideological, tribal, or ‘irrational’ factors. To avoid conceptual vagueness (Sartori 1970), in this section I define the scope and the contours of the analytical categories applied throughout the research project, as a prelude to a wider discussion in the following chapters.

1.2.1. Defining political elites

This research is concerned specifically with domestic *political elites*, a concept that broadly refers to a restricted group of individuals holding positions of political authority within a country. While there is no agreement in the existing scholarship about what political elites are or what this category includes (Zartman 1974; Putnam 1976; Higley and Burton 2006), I adopt Volker Perthes’ definition, which identifies ‘politically relevant elites’ as “those individuals, groups, and networks [...] in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of ‘national interests’), and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues” (2004: 5).

This definition allows extending a country’s politically relevant elites beyond government and military officials to also include top party officers, professional associations, trade unions, media, interest groups, socio-political movements and other powerful organisations. A full discussion of elites who do not hold positions of authority in the political sphere is beyond the scope of this study. Importantly, non-politically relevant elites have featured prominently in academic debates on the role of elites within and across states, attesting to the interplay between political, economic, humanitarian, bureaucratic, and media elites in all political system (Best and Higley 2018).

A second dimension of the analytical approach adopted in this thesis concerns the role of the elites as opposed to the ‘mobilised publics’ (Asseburg and Wimmer 2016) and external actors. Specifically, the research project speaks to the large body of scholarship that identifies elites as the key actors driving political transformations. Public masses

have indeed the potential of sparking change and forcing elites into making significant concessions, as the recent popular uprisings across Africa and the Middle East testify. Likewise, the involvement of external actors such as foreign armies, transnational political and economic elites and international financial institutions can ultimately change the balance of power in domestic politics, often feeding narratives about hidden agendas and conspiracy theories. However, I contend that neither popular masses nor international actors are able to determine durable political outcomes without taking into account the priorities and the behaviour of domestic political elites. In fact, a country's political trajectory is determined by its domestic political elites, which may co-opt protest movements, accept foreign support or antagonise them in pursuit of their own political agendas or survival strategies. Nevertheless, the analyses presented in this thesis consider the transformative role of mobilised publics and external actors, especially in their relation to their impact on elite choices.

1.2.2. Defining violence

Additionally, the research focuses specifically on *political violence*, which is understood as “the use of force by a group with a political purpose or motivation” (Raleigh *et al.* 2010). Physical manifestations of political violence are only one form of a broader phenomenon, which also has significant symbolic, structural and systemic ramifications (Galtung 1969; Arendt 1972; Habermas 1986; Bourdieu 1990; Fanon 2004). While not directly addressed in this study, these dimensions of violence are considered in relation to governance practices and the wider dimensions of power.

Violence is considered in relation to its political dimensions and its larger impact on domestic and transnational political stability (Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Raleigh *et al.* 2010). This includes a variety of manifestations of violence perpetrated by states, rebel groups, and armed militias operating independently or at the behest of state and local elites, which target other violent agents and civilians. Incidents of violence that are predominantly interpersonal, criminal and social (for example, gender-based violence) in nature are not the focus of this research project. In several contexts, however, the boundaries between these different forms of violence are blurred, as examples of state agents and armed groups tolerating or sustaining organised criminal networks illustrate (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus and Vlassenroot 2008; Reno 2009; Herbert 2018; Gallien 2019).

1.3. Outline of thesis

Chapter 2 provides a review of the existing scholarship on political violence and elites, outlining the theoretical framework of the research. The chapter highlights the political significance of violence, drawing attention to how inter-elite relations dictate the functioning of the political orders. The main approaches, existing gaps, and unresolved issues are discussed. Chapter 3 delineates the research design.

The empirical chapters 4 to 8 address the substantive issues of the research, touching upon two main themes. Chapters 4 to 6 are devoted to the analysis of elite behaviour in changing political orders, including the use of consensus-based politics in Tunisia between 2011 and 2018 (Chapter 4); the appointment of ‘crisis cabinets’ following heightened unrest across Africa (Chapter 5); and elite positioning in the wake of leadership changes in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe between 2017 and 2019 (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 and 8 instead look at the structural component of the elite dimension to understand how the fragmented or cohesive nature of conflict spaces can influence violence trajectories in civil war contexts. The proposed case studies include an in-depth investigation of political elites in the Sana’a-based government in Yemen (Chapter 7) and an analysis of armed group fragmentation in 2014-2017 Libya (Chapter 8). A summary of the articles is presented below.

1.3.1. Non-party ministers and consensual politics in Tunisia

Authors: Andrea Carboni

Publication status and target journal: Submitted to *The Journal of North African Studies*

Non-party ministers have constituted a defining feature of contemporary Tunisia. Often boasting a technocratic profile, these ministers have served in an increasing number of ministerial positions under Ben Ali and in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The article aims to explain why Tunisia’s incumbents have routinely selected non-party ministers over the past thirty years, and how these choices reflect diverging strategies of government. It contends that non-party ministers are critical components of Tunisia’s changing political orders, whose role changed dramatically before and after 2011 despite an ever more prominent presence in the executive. While under Ben Ali the participation of non-party ministers reflected the president’s attempt to neutralise opponents

depoliticising the executive, after 2011 their increasing involvement in government contributed to consolidate a consensus-based pact between different political forces. Using an original dataset of ministerial appointments between 1987 and 2018, the analysis intends to provide a more nuanced understanding of Tunisia's current order and political settlements more broadly.

1.3.2. Crisis Cabinets and the influence of protests on elite volatility in Africa

Authors: Andrea Carboni and Daniel Wigmore-Shepherd

Publication status and target journal: Submitted to *Research & Politics*

Appointments in senior government are one of the many tools leaders can use to ensure their political survival. Leaders regularly reshuffle their cabinets outside of election periods in an effort to prevent, or manage, challenges to their leadership. However, how different types of threat lead to different types of change within the senior government remains largely unexplored. Using an original dataset of African cabinets, we examine whether public protests can influence leaders to make changes to their government to mollify public discontent, and whether these changes take a particular form. The findings demonstrate that protest movements alone are rarely conducive to the appointment of 'crisis cabinets' unless elites capitalise on the unrest to mount a challenge against the leader. We also highlight that cabinet reshuffles instituted in response to intense protest tend to address protest demands through a 'changing of the guard' and the dismissal of long-standing elites heavily associated with the regime. Through this analysis, the article seeks to provide a more granular understanding of regime reactions to protests, and to contribute to a growing focus on African executives.

1.3.3. Rebooting the System. Regime Cycles, Elites, and Succession in African States

Authors: Andrea Carboni and Clionadh Raleigh

Publication status and target journal: Submitted to *Journal of Modern African Studies*

Theories of regime change in Africa often rely on various ‘single moment’ approaches. The ‘coup’ literature posits internal revolutions come from removing the leader; the ‘uprising’ literature suggests change comes from public protest external to the regime; and the ‘transitology’ literature explains how trajectories towards or away from democracy often arise as a consequence of elections. A common assumption across these explanations is that regimes do significantly change after a coup, public uprising or significant election. Yet, across multiple African regimes that recently experienced a significant regime rupture, we see continuity in the people, systems, policies, and political relationships that populate and structure new governments. What can explain the subtle yet significant shifts that occur between senior elites and authorities after a regime crisis? We posit that regime crisis is best understood as one of several elite dynamics that commonly occur within an authoritarian regime cycle. We argue that the cycle evident across African authoritarian regimes is driven by a process of elite contestation and consolidation, and dynamic are defined by expectations as to when leaders may leave office. These dynamics therefore indicate the leader-elite relationships are at given time, and suggest when regimes may expand, contract, purge, and fracture as political interests within alter a leader’s claim on power. We focus here on four dynamics of crisis, accommodation, consolidation, and factionalisation, and apply our cycle explanation to recent regime changes in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe.

1.3.4. Taming the snakes. The Houthis, Saleh and the struggle for power in Yemen

Authors: Andrea Carboni

Publication status and target journal: Preparing for submission to *Middle East Studies*

This article analyses the events surrounding the collapse of the alliance between Ansar Allah and the faction of the General People’s Congress aligned with former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh in December 2017. Comparing the structure of their respective elite networks, the article argues that different levels of cohesion among elites were key in determining the outcome of the failed Saleh-inspired uprising. Reflecting a patronage-based support base, higher fragmentation within Saleh’s camp hampered its

capacity to mobilise and coordinate elites in a critical juncture, and left it subsequently exposed to repression and co-option. The article further highlights how power relations were not dictated by institutional power-sharing arrangements, but are rather a function of how elites are situated within the network and the strength of the ties they share.

1.3.5. Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War

Authors: Andrea Carboni and James Moody

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After nearly four years of civil war, Libya continues to be described as an ‘ungoverned space’ where the collapse of state institutions reignited tribal, political, religious, and ideological tensions. These accounts, however, obscure Libya’s complex subnational governance, and the role of non-state armed groups in shaping the emerging political orders. By contrast, we contend that distinct subnational political orders have emerged in Libya since 2014 in which actors engage in state-making practices driven by local interests. Using empirical evidence to explore the activity of non-state armed groups during the Libyan civil conflict, we highlight that the local conflict environments in eastern, western, and southern Libya provide specific incentives that shape the process of armed group splintering and patterns of violence. The findings demonstrate that claims to authority and notions of statehood extend far beyond the state whereby governance relations are negotiated between state and non-state actors. Conflict patterns, (in)stability and the prevailing political order are therefore conditional on the nature of the dominant actor, their strategies, and modes of violence within their areas of influence. Through this analysis, the paper provides a more granular understanding of the local political dynamics that drive violence in Libya and civil wars more generally.

1.4. Main findings

The findings that emerge from this research project relate to three main areas. First, I present evidence of the heterogeneous nature of conflict spaces and corporate groups among several examples from Africa and the Middle East, to demonstrate how their relative fragmentation (or cohesion) affects violence onset and intensity. I further show that the elite-conflict nexus is multidirectional, and plays out at the national, regional and

local levels. Second, elite inclusion should not be viewed as a mere issue of institutional representation which concerns the distribution of political offices among key socio-political constituencies. Rather, it involves the degree to which these groups are able to maintain access to power in different political arrangements. Third, political survival animates the behaviour of elites in changing political orders, requiring a combination of accommodation and repression according to the circumstances.

1.4.1. The elite-violence nexus

I show that conflict patterns in civil war contexts are indicative of the fragmented nature of the political environment and of the political competition taking place therein. These conflict spaces are populated by highly heterogeneous groups competing with each other for political influence and power, and with political elites whose support is deemed essential to secure survival. Drawing from the examples of Libya and Yemen, I argue that the vanishing of state institutions did not produce ‘ungoverned spaces’, but rather wartime political orders characterised by subnational state-making practices, volatile alliances and distinct geographies of violence.

Using different methodologies, I show that the fragmentation of these wartime political orders can influence conflict intensity and onset in various ways. First, conflict geographies are embedded in the nature and modes of domestic political competition. In Libya, subnational variations in violence levels are a product of the interaction between national and local political considerations, which inhibited or incentivised fragmentation and violence intensity. The emergence of wartime political orders – each characterised by distinct levels of fragmentation and violence – therefore reflects locally-situated governance relations between armed groups and the dominant power holder. Second, fragmented groups find significant constraints to mobilise and secure support from local elites. The ability to conduct successful collective action – ranging from coup attempts to uprisings – rests on the ability of the leadership to mobilise its loyal supporters. During a regime’s existential crisis, the absence of a cohesive support base risks leaving elites more exposed to repression, co-option and defection; a fate that many incumbents and power holders from Sudan and Zimbabwe to Yemen came to realise.

Theories positing a link between elite or armed group fragmentation and violence argue that when fragmentation is higher, the risk of violence and instability are also greater (Cunningham 2012; Levitsky and Way 2012). However, the examples from Libya and

Yemen reveal that fragmentation alone is not a predictor of violence patterns. Despite arguments highlighting the purely sectarian, regional, or state-centred motivations of conflict, the research project emphasises the importance of local political conditions and power relations in providing domestic elite groups with incentives to escalate violence and seek access to power.

1.4.2. Elite inclusion

A second set of findings concerns the notion of elite inclusion in political orders. Existing literature on this subject typically assumes that political power reflects the institutional representation assigned to key constituencies. As a result, in states regulated by patronage-based mechanisms, the distribution of political offices according to socio-political criteria – such as region, ethnicity, or tribe – signals the leadership’s willingness to cement coalitions with the groups represented in the state’s apical political institutions. In fact, the notion of inclusion is multidimensional, and political power cannot be measured solely as a matter of representation (Rocha Menocal 2017).

I show instead that this relation is more complex. In some contexts, elites may decide to deliberately renounce to government positions in order to maximise political power or rule by consensus, explaining the rise of non-party ministers that would otherwise be impossible to explain through patronage-based arguments (Chapter 4). The reconfiguration of existing political alliances is otherwise shown to occur following existential challenges faced by a regime, requiring a reshuffle in the composition of its governing elites (Chapters 5 and 6). Chapter 7 further highlights that institutional representation is a poor indicator of a group’s relative power. Indeed, power-sharing agreements may result in unbalanced political settlements when some key political brokers, by virtue of their position within wider elite networks, are able to exercise disproportionate power either individually or as part of a corporate group. Signalling a desire for greater inclusion in the distribution of rents, armed groups acting at the behest of local elites may resort to different forms of political violence, often without requiring escalation (Chapter 8). In such cases, power is conditional on their ability to use violence to extract rents, including political representation in the state’s governance institutions.

Additionally, I emphasise the importance of understanding the conditions in which political power is exercised. One-size-fits-all solutions prescribing the application of institutional arrangements in different political contexts are unlikely to produce the same

political outcomes but can instead exacerbate existing power imbalances. Notably, the popular branding of Tunisia's technocratic governance as a model for governance in conflict-ridden states such as Yemen (Al-Akhali, Al-Rawhani and Biswell 2019) rests on the assumption that non-party governments are inherently apolitical, leaving government affairs to highly competent technocrats while sidelining the real power holders. Instead, the Tunisia example analysed in Chapter 4 shows how governments consisting of non-affiliated ministers are also the outcome of highly political processes and ostensibly inclusive and accepted elite settlements.

1.4.3. Political survival in changing political orders

A third key finding arising from this research project is the importance of understanding elites' political survival strategies in changing political orders. I show that elites employ a variety of strategies to ensure their continued access to power, ranging from making political concessions for opponents to using repression and violence against rivals. This political bargaining, aimed at securing survival, in power often occurs through cabinet appointments, requiring the reconfiguration of ruling coalitions to weather volatile political transitions or popular mobilisation. These are moments of intense political fluidity (Banegas 1993), mutating shared expectations over the regime's or the leader's survival and exacerbating defections or alliance switches. In response to these changing circumstances, changes in the regime's hierarchy can either be cosmetic, when intended to placate unrest through co-option or facilitating demobilisation, or can significantly alter the composition of the ruling coalition in an effort to broaden the regime's support base or purge the most restive among the allies.

I show that similar mechanisms occurred in the aftermath of three leadership changes in Africa when the elites orchestrating the leader's removal faced the challenge of anchoring the regime in society and among the elites (Chapter 6). This required a broad reconfiguration of existing alliances and power structures which, however, left the seizing group's leading role uncontested. In Chapter 5, I also find that events of popular unrest across Africa rarely trigger a drastic overhaul of the cabinet, epitomising a widely shared attitude when resisting change. Instead, when such accommodation occurs, this reflects the survival-oriented political calculations and strategies of elites.

2. Literature review

In recent years, a growing body of scholarly literature has investigated the drivers, forms and consequences of violent conflict across the globe. Studies have increasingly addressed the political dimension of conflict in an effort to understand the political processes underpinning violence onset, diffusion and continuation. The role of elites has been the subject of renewed scrutiny, particularly in response to stalled democratic transitions and authoritarian retrenchment in Africa and the Middle East. The project addresses these debates, seeking to understand how inter-elite competition shapes political orders and trajectories of conflict.

Each of the analytical chapters in this thesis includes a brief discussion of the relevant literature which serves as theoretical framework to a specific research question and findings. This chapter instead aims to bring together the different literatures that apply to the project as a whole to provide a succinct overview of the larger academic debates and establish a coherent intellectual foundation. I address four main – and largely interconnected – themes. First, I discuss the determinants of political violence, and in particular its strategic dimension in political processes. The second section addresses the notion of political elites, tracing its evolution in scholarly debates and discussing the main empirical challenges. The third section discusses the notion of ‘political marketplaces’, situating elites within contemporary systems of governance in Africa and the Middle East. The fourth part concludes with a wider discussion on elite fragmentation, cohesion and exclusion in these political orders, examining their impact on conflict trajectories.

2.1. Understanding political violence

Explanations of political violence typically refer to two main schools, one that ascribes violence to state capacity (or the lack thereof) and one that describes violence as functional to political strategies.

Theoretical approaches focusing on state capacity connect the onset of violence to the breakdown of state structures. In establishing a link between institutional characteristics and the onset of collective contentious action, these arguments suggest that weak or transitional regimes offer incentives to non-state actors for organising and using violence, while the government is unable to contain behavioural challenges effectively. Recent research has studied the relationship between regime characteristics and civil war onset to conclude that weak governments and mixed regimes, or anocracies, are more

vulnerable to violent collective action and insurgencies (Hegre *et al.* 2001; Fearon and Laitin 2003;).

Violence is therefore the product of chaos, exacerbated by pervasive state failure and weakness in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War (Kaldor 1999). Across much of Africa and the Middle East, instability is primarily driven by the proliferation of failed states, territorial entities characterised by an inadequate exercise of sovereign authority and the predominance of non-state actors over institutional structures (Rotberg 2002). Tackling domestic and regional insecurity therefore requires that a government can establish its monopoly over the use of physical force, restoring the necessary condition of statehood.

Hence the ‘failed state’ argument, which was popularised in academic debates and in the practice of states and international organisations (Thürer 1999; International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001), reduces the onset of violence within a territory to the mere capacity of a state of exercising sovereign authority. This arises from the predication that functioning states possess fully-fledged Weberian statehood, whereby the state is able to enforce its authority across the territory. However, the reality of many African and Middle Eastern states is different, because political institutions are characterised by uneven ‘topographies of power’ (Boone 2003) and the spatial and temporal persistence of ‘areas of limited statehood’ structured along unconventional governance hierarchies (Risse 2017; Polese and Santini 2018). While uneven state outreach may provide incentives for the emergence of armed non-state actors, the notion of ‘ungoverned spaces’ bears little resemblance to reality and ignores the “local and national contexts and mechanisms that promote violence within a state” (Raleigh and Dowd 2013: 11).

Additionally, by treating states as unitary entities, these approaches have limited the analysis of violence onset to specific national and structural characteristics, failing to address how subnational geographies of power can produce different institutional outcomes or conflict patterns across countries. They also do not account for how political elites may activate or de-activate violence domestically and for how conflict may cluster in specific subnational geographies. The absence of the state – and not intra-elite dynamics – are key to determining the manifestation of instability.

A second school interprets violence as a strategic tool serving political goals. Within this framework, authors either ascribe violence to the ideological agendas of specific political groups (*see* Dowd 2016: 42; Durac 2019) or explain the role within wider political processes. According to the ‘political opportunity’ argument developed in the work of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, the form and the timing of contentious politics are conditional on the political opportunities arising from the institutional and power structures of a given political system (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 2007; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). These political opportunities relate to the characteristics of a regime, and include the presence of multiple centres of power, the coercion capacity, the degree of opening, the cohesion of the ruling coalition and of the opposition, and the level of repression. The authors therefore link the emergence of specific forms of contention to institutional frameworks that can prescribe, tolerate or prohibit such collective action and enforce their authoritative in a more or less effective way (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 72-74).¹ Changes in the political opportunities structure of a specific regime can thus explain variations in the emergence and modes of collective action across time and space focusing on the interaction between state and non-state actors.

Despite the limitations of the ‘political opportunity’ framework, including its reliance on measures of democracy to explain the likelihood of regime accommodation and repression (Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010), it importantly highlights how violence is situated within a wider quest for power involving multiple political groups. Violence is a tool of political bargaining that actors use for several political goals, including to signal resources and interests, eliminate political opponents or frustrate collective action and mobilisation (Birch, Daxecker and Höglund 2020). Its onset is facilitated when ruling elites are fragmented and unable to act collectively, or when the stakes of political competition are high: this strategic perspective is used to explain, among other things, electoral violence, where violence becomes one of the tools that candidates and groups use to achieve electoral ends (Hafner-Burton 2014).

¹ High-capacity non-democratic regimes typically repress any form of active dissent, outlawing a wide range of repertoires of contention and making it more likely that political conflict will occur clandestinely, outside institutional borders (what the authors term ‘transgressive contentious politics’). At the other side of the spectrum stand low-capacity non-democratic regimes, where the government is typically unable to repress non-state contentious action and lethal conflicts are therefore a likely outcome. Suffering from chronic instability and institutional weakness, low-capacity democratic regimes are prone to military coups, ethnic, political or religious uprisings, and other violent forms of contentious action. Finally, high-capacity democratic regimes create the conditions for social movements to emerge and organise their claims (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

The conceptualisation of violence as a tool for political bargaining implies that a multitude of actors have access to it. In many contexts, governments, political militias, rebel groups, party chiefs and local authorities have access to violent means, and do not hesitate to use force, or threaten to use it, to achieve political goals. Before explaining how this negotiation occurs, and how violence upholds armed political settlements, I now turn to discuss the notion of political elites, the key notion underpinning this research project.

2.2. Understanding political elites

Political thought has long grappled with the notion of elites, in an effort to explain the emergence of a ruling class in society (Pakulski, in Best and Higley 2018: 9). However, systematic studies on elite behaviour appeared only in the early twentieth century, largely thanks to the pioneering work of European liberal authors confronting the increasing bureaucratisation and segmentation of society (*see*, among others, Mosca 1939; Schumpeter 1942; Michels 1959; Pareto 1966; Weber 1978). These early elite theorists pointed out the existence of a homogenous, autonomous and self-perpetuating ruling class wielding power over the masses. In complex societies characterised by growing division of labour and social stratification, effective governance requires the existence of a segmented and skilled ruling class, according to an ‘iron law’ that perpetuates the power of the elites.

A new generation of scholars started to question the premises of classical theory after WWII, criticising the internal homogeneity and the limited size of elites postulated by classical elitism. Theorists as diverse as Charles Wright Mills (1956) and Robert Dahl (1961) shed new light on elite behaviour, highlighting that inter-elite interactions are far more complex, and that power is broadly distributed across society. In their studies of elites in the United States, Wright Mills and Dahl showed that power was a resource not held by a single, homogenous power elite, but by a composite set of competing elites who ally and wield varying influence over decision-making processes. In other words, elites do usually control only certain resources, and can be found at any level of society. These “functional elites” are therefore far more pervasive than the “hegemonies” controlling all resources, which constitute instead a rare occurrence in modern political systems.

A question that has long puzzled elite theorists concerns the definition of what actually makes up an elite. Despite a long tradition in social sciences, there is little consensus on

which groups constitute elites and how they exercise their power in wider society. Early attempts to provide an empirical determination of elites focused upon their ability to influence the decision-making process and the allocation of resources across society thanks to their disproportionate power (Quandt 1969; Waterbury 1970; Dekmejian 1971; Zonis 1971). These definitions, however, were often more concerned with issues of definition than issues of fact (Putnam 1976: 5), fighting “boundary wars” and seeking “ultimate concepts” (Zartman 1974: 470). Nevertheless, these efforts at defining elites as a powerful class reveal that elite studies are a complex and contentious matter (Higley and Burton 2001: 182): elite boundaries are unclear and change according to the definition and the lens we adopt; their behaviour is elastic and its influence often hard to determine empirically; inter-elite relations are similarly complex, as are relations with the rest of society. This makes the task of determining the real impact of elites on society academically challenging, as elites are never the only factor that explains change but are always combined with other social processes (Lasch 1995).

In general terms, elites are defined by the relative power they exercise, or are accorded, in society (Salverda and Abbink 2013: 1). They include *all* influential individuals who occupy a position of authority in a community and seek to preserve this privileged status. In other words, a definition of political elites that embraces the complexity of domestic power structures should not only include the persons in highest offices, but a wider range of “governors, provincial chairmen, and mayors, as well as village chiefs, headmen, and leaders of party cells” (Paige 1977). In his seminal study on political elites in the Middle East, Volker Perthes (2004: 5) reaches a similar conclusion by introducing the concept of ‘politically relevant elites’ to identify

“those people in a given country who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision-making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of ‘national interests’), and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues”.

This definition has important theoretical implications, and is also used as the theoretical formulation underpinning the concept of elites for this research project. First, it implies that power is not restricted to those who occupy nominal positions of power, but also includes those individuals or groups who exercise power outside formal institutional arrangements. Elite status is indeed the result of the accumulation of multiple sources of power, and the ability of converting and projecting that power in a political environment

(Malejacq 2019). Second, it understands power as a resource distributed across several circles, wielding varying degree of influence on the political process. Around the immediate core are a number of operatives who contribute to the survival of the regime, such as rank-and-file party members, government officers, business and bureaucratic elites. They share the ability of influencing political discourse and defining political norms, enabling the implementation of regime policies. A third important implication concerns the dynamic nature of the concept. Rather than an ascribed, immutable attribute, elite status – and the resulting distribution of power – is subject to changes in the external environment. Internal unrest, economic downturns, international realignments: they all contribute to change the strategic considerations of individuals and groups as well as their bargaining power vis à vis other domestic actors (Asseburg and Wimmen 2016).

In the last few decades, the study of elites has developed to incorporate more empirical approaches. Empirical studies have largely focused on the social composition of elites, patterns of intra-elite conflict, how leaders distinguish themselves from the rest of the elite, how elites are recruited and vary over time (Blondel and Muller-Rommel, in Klingemann and Dalton 2007: 818-832). These new perspectives on elites have paid more attention to identifying the individuals occupying top positions in decision-making institutions, thus making inferences on the social characteristics (such as age, education, gender, or social background) of elite circles. Additionally, they have benefitted enormously by the compilation of publicly available datasets and elite surveys, which allowed systematic comparative analyses of different political systems (Hoffmann-Lange, in Klingemann and Dalton 2007: 910-927).

As the interest in more empirically grounded elite studies grew, so did the demand for addressing the boundary problem: in other words, where should we look to study elites? The boundary problem carries important theoretical and practical consequences, since studying either 30 or 300 elites assumes different understandings and research methods (Laumann, Marsden and Prensky 1989). In the absence of a uniformly applicable definition for elites, elite studies must be spatially and temporally situated, and assign public and reproducible criteria to the category of “political elites” (Zartman 1974: 469).

Another important dimension of elite studies is their geographical focus. Despite continuing interest in elite groups in social sciences, empirical research has focused largely on Western societies, where the abundance of data has allowed the compilation

of large-n datasets. By contrast, there has been much less research on non-Western elites (Salverda and Abbink 2013: 2). This is partly explained by the fact that power in much of the developing world is often understood to reside outside the established formal institutions, which makes it difficult to identify influential power holders by merely looking at top government positions. This is especially true in Africa and the Middle East, where official public institutions have been traditionally kept weak in favour of more informal, private-like systems of governance (Bayart 1993; Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999; Owen 2012). Nonetheless, the early processes of democratisation along with the growing institutionalisation of political practices in many African and Middle Eastern states starting from the 1990s has attracted growing academic attention in terms of elite behaviour and its wider impact on political stability (Goldsmith 2001).

The role of elites as agents and factors of change to explain domestic instability was further explored in several studies on political (Posner and Young 2007; Arriola 2009; Barkan 2009; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015; Osei 2015) and military (Barany 2011, 2013; Albrecht 2015;) institutions in Africa and the Middle East. This research has shed new light on the internal mechanisms of formal institutional structures in the developing world. In line with Asseburg and Wimmen (2016), I seek to make sense of elite behaviour in states under stress, where inter-elite struggles over power and competition for influence can sometimes constitute an existential threat to the status of incumbents.

Indeed, by restricting access to the central decision-making institutions and presiding over the allocation of scarce resources, domestic elites are instrumental in shaping the political trajectory of a state. Elite groups always compete with one another, and with other groups outside the elite network, to control power and resources. However, whereas some elites agree on the rules of the game to ‘tame’ political competition (Sartori 1995), others resort to violent means in order to settle their divergences and preserve their position within networks of power. In this latter case, intra-elite conflict is likely to shape the political environment, and conflict patterns thus reflect the degree of integration or disintegration of ruling elites.

2.3. The ‘political marketplace’ framework. Political elites as business managers in Africa and the Middle East

Political elites do not operate in a vacuum, but are situated in a wider political framework that regulates the interactions between them through norms and institutions with varying

degrees of formalisation. In Africa and in the Middle East, the practice of politics is typically understood through the language of neo-patrimonialism and rentierism. According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1994: 458), the concept of neo-patrimonialism describes political systems where the exercise of political power mostly serves the private interests of the ruling elite. Despite the presence of formal institutions, bureaucratic offices and binding norms, public officials exercise power using personal patronage to award personal favours and bolster popular support among certain societal groups. In a similar fashion, Hazem Beblawi (1990) identifies the heavy dependence on external rents as the single most important characteristic of rentier states. This reliance on rents (which usually derive from natural resources or other strategic assets, such as military aid) exerts a negative effect on the country's economic and political development, as it does not provide incentives for creating an efficient bureaucracy, stimulating the domestic productive sector and increasing institutional accountability. As a consequence, efforts at democratisation are undermined in both systems of governance.

Dominating much of the academic and policy discourse in recent decades, these frameworks arguably described (and still do in many cases) several political realities across Africa and the Middle East. However, new trends emerging across the region seem to have changed the political landscape of many states (De Waal 2014: 1-2). First, despite major international efforts and sustained socio-economic growth, states have become more fragmented than in the past. Second, the decrease in the number of civil war and large-scale killings has not been matched by greater stability and peace. Third, international interventions, far from stabilising countries, are generating more insecurity, both domestically and regionally. Finally, identity markers maintain their importance despite the decreasing influence of tribal, ethnic and subnational authorities. Acknowledging this changing reality, Célestin Monga (1996) wrote two decades ago that the neo-patrimonial framework was no longer relevant when describing the contemporary systems of governance in the developing world.

Indeed, political systems have undergone profound transformations. Driven by the emergence of transnational financial networks, the introduction of new telecommunications technologies, and the multiplication of sources of rents following new systems of international intervention across the world (aid, counter-terrorism, cooperation against international organised crime are just a few examples), the forms of political power have come to reflect a new reality in which the control over the means of

coercion is increasingly dispersed and political bargaining is conducted through violence, or the threat thereof. To describe the changing realities of politics in Africa and the Middle East, Alex De Waal applies the notion of the ‘political marketplace’ in relation to:

“a contemporary system of governance, characterized by pervasive monetized patronage, in the form of exchange of political loyalty or cooperation for payment. The countries where this occurs share three principal features, namely (a) the dominance of inter-personal political bargaining over formal rules and procedures, (b) pervasive rent-seeking by members of the political and business elite, and (c) integration into a global patronage order. The political marketplace is not a transitional or outdated system that is about to be replaced by Weberian states, but a flexible and dynamic governance order.” (De Waal 2014: 1).

Describing state formation in the Arabian Peninsula, Uzi Rabi (2006: 3) similarly observes that “[T]he state should not be seen as an independent political actor but rather as a ‘political field,’ i.e., an arena in which diverse actors compete for influence and resources. States in this context should not be seen in a fully-fledged ‘Weberian’ manner, dominated by a rational bureaucratic model.” The political marketplace framework conceives political elites as akin to business managers acting in a political market, where political bargaining is conducted primarily through the exchange of cooperation for reward and the price of loyalty is set by the intersection between demand and supply (De Waal 2014: 1). In this context, political entrepreneurs use money, coercion (or the threat thereof) and all other resources at their disposal to ensure that their competitors comply with the rules of the system. Politics is therefore mostly driven by material, personal interests, with very little room for elements such as ideologies, law and formal rules.

The political marketplace thus creates opportunities for alternative forms of political bargaining and imposes constraints on the behaviour of the political elites. Within this framework, politics varies along four main dimensions: political finance, degree of centralisation of the tools of coercion, the nature of the political bargaining, and the integration with transnational markets (De Waal 2015). These variables influence the mechanisms of political bargaining by creating incentives for existing elites to stage rent-seeking rebellions, by opening up spaces for new actors to join the marketplace or by increasing or limiting the amount of resources available to the political entrepreneurs. Since such mechanisms are reproduced at all levels, persistent instability and turbulence shape the dynamics of the political marketplace. Failure to meet the expectations of intermediate or local elites may result in struggles between elites seeking to extract their

share of resources or in the collapse of the existing marketplace and the subsequent replacement of the incumbent.

The fragmentation that characterises the dynamics of these regimes multiplies the challenges faced by political leaders. According to Joel Migdal, whether a narrow core elite is indeed in control or is forced to negotiate with peripheral centres of power is unclear in most authoritarian regimes (Migdal 2001: 36). A typical outcome of such situations is the militarisation of the political marketplace. Alex De Waal observes that this is a common situation in the Horn of Africa, where control over the means of coercion is decentralised and a wide range of political actors or groups use violence to extort rents and negotiate loyalty to the ruler. (*ibid.*: 16). This was also the case of Yemen, where President Ali Abdullah Saleh ruled for over three decades in a highly fragmented country, where local, tribal armed militias vying for power and patronage periodically used or threatened violence to claim their share of rents.

However, political marketplaces do not display the same degree of pervasive militarisation. Alternating violence and accommodation, political entrepreneurs may resort to alternative strategies to placate rent-seeking elites, with violence only used as a last resort. Typical expressions of tamed, neo-patrimonial political bargaining include patronage and coup-proofing, whereby rulers seek to reward intermediate elites to buy their loyalty and deflect any challenge to the leadership. Patronage refers to the practice of granting material benefits to specific groups of people to enhance regime stability (Arriola 2009: 1340). It includes the allocation of funds or the creation of public sector jobs in strategic constituencies, the systematic co-opting of targeted groups into the bureaucracy or the distribution of government posts among certain regional or ethnic communities. As such, patronage has constituted a central component of African and Middle Eastern governance for decades (Bayart, Ellis and Hibou 1999; Erdle, in Perthes 2004; Alley 2010; Liddell 2010; Owen 2012: 49-53). Coup-proofing describes instead the variety of strategies that rulers use to prevent existential challenges from arising within their own regime (Svolik 2009). Ruling elites across Africa and the Middle East have long tried to mitigate risks to their leadership by establishing ethnic or communal ties between officers and incumbents, creating parallel security institutions (otherwise known as counterbalancing), rotating military and bureaucratic officials frequently, distributing material incentives and exploiting communal ties (Heydemann 2007; Pilster and Bohmelt 2011; Makara 2013; Albrecht 2015; De Bruin 2018).

However, there is still some ambiguity about the relationship between these phenomena and political stability. Arriola (2009) points out that the concept of patronage has been used to explain both the endemic political instability and the enduring survival of African regimes. Bratton and Van de Walle (1994: 462-463) argue that elites in neo-patrimonial regimes fracture over access to limited resources, exploiting ethnic, regional or other identity markers. Pervasive patronage undermines democratic procedures – where in place – as leaders may capitalise on divisive identities to secure popular support, while generating grievances among underprivileged elite groups. These may be tempted to use violence in order to be included in patronage networks or negotiate a better position. The events of the Arab uprisings seem to suggest that coup-proofing does not always ensure regime survival, nor stability (Barany 2011). At the same time, Huntington (1968: 70), Bayart (1993) and Van de Walle (2007) point to the stabilising effects of patronage, which allows the maintenance of cross-cutting elite clientelist relations and the creation of a cohesive ruling coalition. Both patronage and coup-proofing seek to tie the fate of certain groups to the survival of the regime to ensure their loyalty and prevent regime overthrow (Makara 2013: 230). Indeed, the proliferation of ministerial positions and security bodies is intended to reward key constituencies and like-minded elites, while keeping possible competitors weak and disorganised.

2.4. Linking elites, political orders and patterns of violence

The political marketplace framework attempts to provide a model of political governance dominated by militarised inter-elite bargaining to explain trajectories of conflict and state-building. It is concerned with a variegated class of politic elites motivated by self-enrichment, in which access to domestic and transnational rents increases the political budget, the price of loyalty, and regime dependence from intermediate elites. Whilst intended to tame and regulate conflict, the patronage-based network exposed in De Waal's argument results in the emergence of a violence-ridden state hostile to development.

De Waal's model, however, is dominated by a transactional logic of political bargaining that has not found universal application, even in states supposedly described as emblems of a militarised political marketplace like South Sudan (Watson 2016: 189). In its essence, the political marketplace argument is a revisited version of the 'greed-not-grievance' approach popularised by Collier (2000), which explains violence as a mere consequence of elite predation. Militarised political marketplaces are therefore the outcome of a

corrupted form of state-building: this resonates with similar arguments that identify a sequential pattern in the development of political orders, which are set to improve their developmental credentials as they transition from limited to open access orders (North *et al.* 2013).

Despite these limitations, and a largely hazy vocabulary, the ‘political marketplaces’, ‘political orders’,² ‘political environments’,³ ‘political (un-)settlement’⁴ literatures constitute a valid attempt to move beyond hierarchical and state-centred accounts of power and statehood, and ‘good governance’ agendas popular in policy circles (Pospisil and Rocha Menocal 2017; Polese and Santini 2018). These approaches refute both the binary distinction between formal and informal institutions suggested by the institutional and state-building literature, and the ‘hybrid order’ tradition that situates elites within an elusive, all-encompassing concept of informality (Phillips 2019). They are instead concerned with unpacking the ‘rules of the game’ that govern political orders to understand the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the balkanisation of power and governance, and the subnational patterns of violence.

Existing scholarship has argued that political orders predicated on elite exclusion are more prone to civil war onset and often associated with widely shared authoritarian practices (Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug 2013). Contemporary regimes display high rates of inclusion, and tend to include most socio-political groups in the highest ranks of office (Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd 2020). At the heart of these arguments is the idea that inclusive political settlements are key to preventing the onset of conflict and promoting long-term socio-political development (Lindemann 2008; Acemoglu *et al.*

² According to North *et al.* (2013), developing societies manage violence through the manipulation of economic interests by the political system and the creation of rents which discourage influential groups and individuals – the ‘elites’ – from using violence. These mechanisms define ‘limited access orders’, social arrangements that, in societies where violence is latent and a viable option for political groups, disincentivise the use of violence by elites. Paul Staniland formulates an alternative definition of political orders in civil war contexts, which “refers to the structure and distribution of authority between armed organizations: who rules, where, and through what understandings” (Staniland 2012: 247).

³ Political environments describe the state and dynamics of political power as it is expressed and experienced over locations across a country. In states under stress, environments are shaped by relationships between national and subnational elites. See Raleigh and Dowd (2018).

⁴ Political settlements are characterised by a balance of power underpinning political institutions, which is successful in managing violence and delivering some economic and political development (Khan 2010; Rocha Menocal 2017). Akin to De Waal’s political marketplace, political unsettlement is characterised by violent political bargaining taking place in parallel with a political order that continues to exist within formal and informal institutions (Bell and Pospisil 2017: 581).

2012; North *et al.* 2013). As a result, the recurrence of violence in seemingly inclusive political orders presents an apparent paradox.

The problem lies in the way that inclusion is defined. Inclusion is a multidimensional concept, which addresses both processes and outcomes. Measuring inclusion only in terms of processes – the degree of representation of decision-making institutions – obscures how developmental outcomes are shared across societal groups (Rocha Menocal 2017: 562). Policy efforts aimed at promoting stability often assume that designing broadly representative institutions, consensus or technocratic governments and elections may automatically deliver distributional outcomes or limit violence. In fact, these approaches ignore the fact that power is not a mere function of a group's institutional presence (for instance, the number of ministries a group controls), and that institutional changes may not be sufficient to alter the actual practices of power. Recent examples from Libya and Yemen – partially discussed in the following chapters – show how ostensibly inclusive power-sharing agreements failed to avoid the recurrence of violence and transform existing power relations, resulting in further exacerbating hostilities and reproducing exclusionary political settlements.

In addition, the civil war literature has provided further insights into how the organisation and structure of domestic political orders dictates patterns of intrastate violence. Some arguments highlight the importance of state-insurgent relations. In civil war contexts, variations in territorial control and cooperation between states and armed groups shape the contours of the 'wartime political orders' in which violence is used (Staniland 2012). In other words, violence is a function of the form of political competition and bargaining which occurs at the local level. Rather than conflict spaces characterised by all-out violence, civil wars see a range of bargains, deals and negotiations among political elites that shape patterns of violence and governance.

Notions of fragmentation and cohesion have also been applied to explain conflict duration and escalation, as well as regime breakdown. In particular, the proliferation of armed groups and elites is shown to increase the risks of conflict escalation through the multiplication of spoiler groups attempting to maximise their access to power and rents and the increasing difficulty of committing actors to stop violence (Driscoll 2012; Cunningham 2013). Conversely, other authors highlight the stabilising effects of factional cohesion, which enhances cooperation and trust among elites. I apply these concepts to

explain both the emergence of subnational geographies of violence and the outcomes of elite struggles in highly volatile political orders.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Methods

This chapter outlines the overarching research design used in this research project, illustrating the methodologies applied, data sources and collection process, and the relevant ethical considerations. Each of the substantive analytical chapters below provide further detail on the specific methodology used to answer particular research questions.

The research project uses a mixed-method design which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies to the study of elites across Africa and the Middle East. Elite studies have long lacked a systematic methodology, suffering from “argument and confusion over key terms, a relative dearth of testable hypotheses, a failure clearly to separate normative from empirical theory and, not least, the lack of a firm data base in which the latter could be solidly grounded.” (Moyser and Wagstaffe 1987: 1). New data collection techniques, along with methodological and conceptual developments, contributed to broaden the scope and depth of elite research.

Elite studies employ a variety of research methods, which follow a tripartite classification according to the object of the research (Semenova, in Best and Higley 2018). A first group is concerned with how institutions affect the behaviour of elites, involving the application of a wide range of quantitative methods (i.e. social network analysis, cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis, fuzzy sets, etc.) to the study of elite survival and careers in different institutional settings. A second group of research methods adopts an inductive approach to draw inferences about political outcomes from elite behaviours. Experiments, elite surveys and archival research are among the methods most widely used in studies that fall into this group. The third group focuses on interaction of elite groups, and is common in anthropological and ethnographic studies concerned with the interpretation of elite behaviour through observation techniques and in-depth interviews.

The three categories outlined above are not mutually exclusive, and this research project uses a combination of them to answer a variety of questions. Indeed, the substantive analytical chapters are interested in understanding the impact of institutions on elite behaviour, how elite behaviour produce different political outcomes, and the interaction between elite groups themselves. Quantitative methods are therefore used along with qualitative techniques in an effort to explain the causal mechanisms underlying empirical observations and generate causal inferences (King, Keohane and Verba 1994).

The research project adopts a nested approach to comparative analysis, which combines large-n quantitative data with small-n process-tracing to corroborate causal inferences (Lieberman 2005). Quantitative analysis serves as the starting point for the study, contributing to guide case selection through the identification of patterns or statistical relations. Data collection will be calibrated as to maximise the number of observations and the validity of measurements, ensuring the reliability of data-collection techniques and the replicability of the data collected. Large-n quantitative analysis also requires that contested or elusive concepts, such as political violence, political elites or patronage, can be measured empirically, and their methodological boundaries made explicit.

The use of Social Network Analysis (SNA) techniques in this study deserves further considerations. All social interactions are ‘socially situated’ in wider networks of interpersonal relations and individual motives alone are insufficient to explain the behaviour of social agents. The notion of embeddedness (Granovetter 1985, 1992) assumes that behaviour of individual and collective actors is constrained by spatial-temporal networks of social relations. Importantly, SNA has contributed to power analysis through an empirical understanding of how social actors develop strategies to consolidate or increase power within the network, and how these relational structures provide in turn constraints and opportunities for elite agents (Brass and Krachardt 2012). Through the notion of networks, the focus is on how individual elites are connected between each other and on how the organisation of such connections influence the power and politics. While operational definitions of networks may vary according to the methodology used (Keller, in Best and Higley 2018), power is interpreted as a resource gained and lost through relations, whereby elites engage in transactions through their positions within wider networks of influential actors. This systemic perspective suggests that governance institutions and corporate groups – the state, the parties, the tribes, the economic corporations, the militias – are populated and defined by the networks of relations that their constituent actors have with other political elites. In other words, power is a function of the network of relationships individual elites entertain with others, rather than a mere reflection of their individual attributes or institutional hierarchies.

As a result, the SNA approach has enormously enhanced empirical research on elite structures, as it allows researchers to analyse relations among elite agents and their interaction with the wider political environment and provide empirical mapping of power distribution (Knoke 1993; Hoffmann-Lange, in Klingemann and Dalton 2007: 910-927;

Marks and Stys 2019). In recent years, SNA techniques have been applied to study the dynamics of a variety of collective actor networks, including criminal gangs in the United States (Radil, Flint and Tita 2010; Papachristos, Hureau and Braga 2013), informal trade in developing countries (Walther 2015), transnational networks of armed Islamist groups (Walther and Christopoulos 2015; Walther and Leuprecht 2015) and cross-sectional or longitudinal elite networks (Moore 1979; Gil-Mendieta and Schmidt 1996; Kostiuchenko 2012; Osei 2015; Keller 2016; Woldense 2018).

The selection of the quantitative method is conditional on the specific research question. In Chapter 5 and 8, large-n statistical analysis is used to observe correlations between political violence and elite behaviour or armed group fragmentation. In Chapter 4, a large-n dataset is used to study the profile of ministerial elites in a single country, and analyse its changes over time. In Chapter 7, SNA is the starting point for understanding how the relative density and fragmentation of elite sub-networks impacts institutional and conflict outcomes.

Supplementing large-n and quantitative analysis, process tracing is used in this research project to analyse and explain causal mechanisms. Social sciences typically resort to multiple methods to develop research hypotheses, distinguishing between inductive (theory-building) and deductive (theory-testing) techniques (George and Bennett 2005). Among them, process tracing aims at making robust inferences about causal explanations from historical cases. Process tracing provides the foundation to make inferences, which refers to the process by which we use the facts we know to learn about facts we do not know distinguishing between the systematic and the non-systematic components of the phenomena under analysis (King, Keohane and Verba 1994: 46).

While descriptive inference provides an accurate historical summary of the events, selecting the information and the data at our disposal and discerning between the systematic and the non-systematic components, causal inference refers to the process through which researchers explain the causal mechanisms that generate a specific outcome. This research requires a solid combination of both descriptive and causal inferences. In fact, structured, focused comparison is complementary to good description rather than competitive with it (*ibid*: 45). As such, each of the substantive chapters below includes a description of the relevant elite environment along with a summary of the crucial events that are relevant to understand the dynamics under examination. Research

hypotheses are further tested on in-depth country-based case studies focusing on Tunisia, Yemen and Libya, analysing the local conflict and elite environments to explain political outcomes and elite behaviour. Applying process-tracing methods to case study analysis allows investigating “the intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place and whether and how it generated the outcome of interest” (Bennett and Checkel, 2014: 5).

3.2. Sources and data collection practices

This thesis draws from a number of original and existing sources. Elite data were collected under the ‘Violence, Elites and Resilience in States Under Stress’ project, which supported the recording and classification of thousands of individual political elites across the African continent and the Middle East. For each of the political elites, relevant socio-political identities were identified, in an effort to isolate patterns of inclusion and representation in the highest political offices. Importantly, the boundary problem in elite studies requires that elites are selected according to explicit and reproduceable criteria. In this thesis, the temporal and functional scope of the elite data vary according to the specific research question and methodological considerations, and is discussed in each of the analytical chapters presented below.

Data collection was conducted using publicly available sources, including monthly bulletins of cabinet composition as well as official government documents and online media articles. Information were triangulated in order to verify their reliability and further supplemented with interviews with experts. In Chapter 4, data on government ministers and secretaries of state in Tunisia from 1987 through 2018 were collected using the weekly issues of the ‘Official Journal of the Tunisian Republic’ (*Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne*, abbreviated as JORT) to reconstruct the monthly composition of the cabinet, along with international and local magazines providing information around the socio-political profile of the cabinet members, including political affiliation, regional origin, socio-professional background and age. Hard copies of Tunisian magazines were available in the library of the Centre d’Études Maghrébines à Tunis where I conducted fieldwork from January to April 2017. Data on African cabinet ministers in Chapter 5 were drawn from the African Cabinet and Political Elite Dataset (ACPED), which tracks political and ethno-regional identities in several African countries from 1997 and 2018. In Chapter 7, difficulty of getting full, consistent information about wartime Yemeni political elites suggested that the focus of the paper was limited to a few dozen *national*

political elites, i.e. individuals occupying a position in one of the political, military and security institutions in the Sana'a-based government. However, data collection for Yemen extend to hundreds of wartime political elites affiliated to all camps and active between January 2018 and June 2019.

For violence data, used extensively in Chapters 5 and 8, the main source is the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), which collects geo-referenced data on conflict events in African countries from 1997 to real time (Raleigh *et al.* 2010). ACLED data are collected using a variety of local, regional, national and international news sources, constituting the most comprehensive public collection of disaggregated conflict and protest data for African states. Events are disaggregated by date, location, type, and groups involved, allowing for analyses of overall violence levels, subnational patterns of violence and individual armed groups' activity.

ACLED data were used in recent studies analysing several dimensions of conflict, including electoral violence in Africa (Wahman and Goldring 2020), territorial control in civil wars (Bhavnani and Choi 2012; Reeder 2018), social unrest in North African countries (Ketchley and Barrie 2019), changes in subnational power structures (Raleigh 2016; Raleigh and Dowd 2018), and armed group fragmentation (Dowd 2015). The use of a rigorous and transparent coding methodology reduces the risk of reproducing reporting and coding biases through consistent inclusion criteria and extensive sourcing (Raleigh and Kishi 2019).

In addition, interviews with selected members of Tunisian and Yemeni political elites were carried out during fieldwork in Tunisia and Lebanon between January and April 2017, and in two rounds in June 2018 and October 2019. In total, around forty semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with current and former cabinet members, high rank party officials, members of parliament, and a variety of tribal, civil society and policy actors engaged in the political process in Tunisia and Yemen. The results of the interviews were interpreted taking into consideration the position of the researcher vis à vis foreign elites, and the potential agendas each of the elites might pursue in meeting with external researchers (Herod 1999). Three interviews with Algerian experts were conducted via email in relation to the Algeria section for Chapter 6. Additionally, participation to parliamentary sessions in Tunisia and passive attendance to workshops and public events, as well as informal discussions with elites and experts,

provided further benefits to the research during fieldwork. Whilst not all of these interviews are not included in this research project due to ethical considerations, they nonetheless provided a unique opportunity to engage with the wider socio-political context of these two countries, and to verify and cross-check information obtained in other interviews. A list of all interviews cited in this thesis is provided in Chapter 10.2.

The most substantial fieldwork period was conducted between January and April 2017 in Tunis, with the support of the Centre d'Études Maghrébines à Tunis which I joined as visiting fellow. During this time, I adhered to the ethical and security standards set out in the policies of the University of Sussex. I obtained ethical approval to conduct fieldwork in Tunis based at the Centre d'Études Maghrébines, avoiding research-related travel in areas south of the country as a result of a travel warning issued by the Foreign Office in the aftermath of multiple terrorist attacks targeting foreigners in Tunisia. I also obtained a security briefing from the Centre d'Études Maghrébines in Tunis, in which I stated the intention to only carrying out in the Greater Tunis area.

Interviewees were contacted upon arrival, either via email or through the intercession of a parliamentary officer with contacts across the political spectrum. The latter channel, in particular, was key to speeding up the organisation of interviews with members of the Tunisian Parliament, and gaining the trust of the prospective interviewees. As a result, these included members of Tunisia's main political parties, as well as former ministers, non-party political figures, and investigative journalists. With one notable exception – a former minister with no public office at the time of the interview – all interview meetings took place in official settings, whether was this the Tunisian Parliament hall, party headquarters, or media offices.

During this fieldwork, all interviews were conducted in French or Italian, with no translation assistance. A set of standard open questions, with slight variations, were prepared for each interviewee, although the semi-structured nature of these meetings meant that this list could be changed or supplemented depending on the direction of the interview. Prior to the interview, each respondent was asked to sign a standard consent and information security form – drafted in English and French – to uphold research ethics standards. These forms outline that the interviewee would agree to be recorded and the information used for research purposes only and stored safely. Importantly, a unique ID number was assigned to each consent and information security form, to ensure that any

notes – taken either electronically or on paper – would not be linked to the interviewees and therefore keep their identity anonymous.

Anonymity was a key component of all interviews I conducted for this thesis, not limited to those collected during the fieldwork between January and April 2017 in Tunis. All of the interviewees' identities have been anonymised at their request due to the sensitive nature of the domestic political and security environments and the possible repercussions that the attribution of controversial statements may cause. In addition to the fieldwork described above, other interviews were conducted in Beirut and Tunis during the 'Exchange' sessions organised by Middle East Wire in Tunis and by the Sana'a Centre for Strategic Studies in Beirut, which provided arenas to meet a wide range of political elites under 'Chatham House' rule during roundtables and privately. Additionally, these sessions allowed verifying and cross-checking sources to avoid over-relying on unilateral information. Despite their short duration – around one week – the 'Exchange' sessions and the lack of control from the researcher over the individual elites invited to them, they contributed to obtain valuable insights into the dynamics under examination in this research project.

4. Non-party ministers and consensual politics in Tunisia

4.1. Introduction

In recent years, analyses of the Arab uprisings have attracted a large body of scholarly interest highlighting the volatile and precarious character of these political processes. Among these are studies exploring the causes for the collapse of some regimes (Barany 2011; Hale 2013; Makara 2013), the changing nature of contentious politics taking place within states (Barany 2013; Lynch 2014; Stacher 2015), or the micro-repertoires of protest movements across the region (Mekouar 2014; Bamert, Gilardi and Wasserfallen 2015; Ketchley and Barrie 2019). Other works have emphasised the institutional transformations produced by the uprisings, heralding these events as potentially democratic breakthroughs and focusing on the changing electoral and partisan dynamics (Brownlee, Masoud and Reynolds 2015). Taken together, these discussions have shown how the political transitions inaugurated in several Arab states have included contradictory elements of change and continuity, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of their wider political and societal implications (Valbjørn 2012).

Typically overlooked in the literature on Middle Eastern politics (Schlumberger 2000), the academic scholarship has increasingly started to investigate the evolution and transformation of political elites, particularly in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings (Perthes 2004; Owen 2012). The role of elites is indeed crucial during political transitions: according to Banegas (1993), political transitions represent periods of intense fluidity that unsettle the existing social and political order and the relations between social groups. In these critical moments, old regime elites may cling to power, while aspirant incumbents face the question of whether re-integrating members of the old regime and how to influence the political process. Through the manipulation of parochial interests, political elites have leverage on, and secure the loyalty of, political, military, religious, regional, ethnic or other communities. As a result of this process, a political regime hinges on a mutually beneficial relationship whereby rulers are dependent on elites to hold onto power, and elites on rulers to influence the political process and access state resources (North *et al.* 2013).

Despite an increasingly polarisation of the political spectrum and widespread elite entrenchment, calls for the appointment of independent executives in senior government positions have grown popular across Africa and the Middle East. In 2019 only, transitional governments largely consisting of independent figures and technocrats were

appointed in protest-hit Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan. Technocrats also joined governments in Egypt, Morocco and war-torn Yemen. The magnitude of this trend was largest in Tunisia: oscillating between polarisation and consensus, three heads of government out of six since 2011 were independents, two cabinets were formed entirely by non-party ministers, and overall around 50% of the ministers appointed between 2011 and 2017 were not affiliated to any political party. This raises the question of how are government elites changing across the region and, further, how are these choices embedded in the domestic elite environment?

Although they make up an increasing share of total government positions, the existing academic discussion has often overlooked the role of non-party ministers in cabinet formation and elite politics. First, most works on political elites in the developing world focus on patronage and clientelism to predict the ministerial choices of incumbents. However, typical predictors of inclusion and exclusion – party affiliation or ethno-regional identities – are unable to explain why incumbents appoint independent ministers in government. Second, non-partisans are often linked to a technocratic mode of governance, which privileges experts over politicians. This notion overlooks the political function of non-party ministers, and how their role varies according to the specific political order in which they operate. Third, there are questions over the degree of support enjoyed by governments with a large proportion of independents. Indeed, while parties may accept to appoint independents to address technical challenges, their ability to garner electoral support is arguable. These frameworks do not seem able to adequately explain the logic behind the increasing recourse to non-party ministers in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Focusing on Tunisia, I argue instead that far from constituting ancillary figures, non-party ministers have been an integral component of the domestic political environment. Drawing on a dataset profiling more than four hundred ministerial appointments between 1987 and 2017 and several interviews with party officials, former ministers, journalists and civil society activists, I show that the increasing participation of non-party ministers in government responded to distinct logics of consensual politics, reflecting the different governing strategies pursued by incumbents. While the participation of independent ministers between 1987 and 2011 was motivated by Ben Ali's attempt to consolidate his domination over the party and the government, their broad participation in government after 2011 points to a different logic of including political groups in order to sustain the

political settlement emerged after the revolution. In other words, while Ben Ali imposed consensus through the neutralisation of the opposition, the post-2011 political landscape is characterised by consensus-based politics negotiated between the main political forces. During these distinct periods, non-party ministers represented important political elites with varying levels of influence and power.

This chapter is therefore intended to be an investigation into the changing profile and role of political elites in Tunisia. In analysing the transformations of the country's governments from 1987 to the present day, the paper seeks to address the debate over the wider political consequences of its democratic transition, and to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the patterns of change and continuity in this context. Additionally, it lays the basis for further analysis of how political elites manage and regulate access to the executive in changing political orders, and the wider implications for their emergence and consolidation.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section explores the relevance of political elites in times of transition, highlighting how cabinet formation affects inter-elite struggles. I then focus on non-party ministers, a category that has typically received little attention in the study on political elites in North Africa and the Middle East. In the following section, ministerial choices between 1987 and 2017 in Tunisia are analysed to show how political affiliations, regional origin and socio-professional background have been instrumental in influencing the selection of cabinet members both under Ben Ali and during the democratic transition.

4.2. Political elites and non-party ministers

During political transitions, elite struggles over who is included in the emerging architecture of power are critical to determining the (in-)stability of political regimes (Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1993). The existing literature has extensively discussed the problem of how it is possible to mitigate the damaging effects of elite struggles – including the use of violence by political elites – on social and economic development (Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* 2003; North *et al.* 2013). Incumbents engaging in co-optation will resort to providing financial and political incentives that benefit restive rent-seeking elites (Goldsmith 2001; Arriola 2009). As long as the rents extracted from a peaceful setting exceed those extracted from a conflict situation, those elites will find it more convenient to cooperate with the incumbents than to defect (North *et al.* 2013: 6-7).

Among the incentives that incumbents use to secure the loyalty of elites are inclusion in state positions within the government, the bureaucracy or the military (De Waal 2015). Outsourcing of state-like functions to para-state groups, creation of informal institutions operating in parallel with formal state bodies and appropriation of economic resources belonging to the state, are also common. The expansion of the role of government into society since World War II has resulted in a dramatic increase in ministerial posts throughout the world (Blondel 1985: 2). In constituting an easily accessible resource, ministerial positions allow politicians to redistribute material and symbolic rents from the centre to the periphery, strengthening the ties with their regional and political constituencies. Providing broad government representation to multiple elite groups may ultimately increase the size of the cabinet through the creation of new ministerial portfolios, but is also found to negatively affect government performance (Haass and Ottmann 2017).

Because of their importance, ministerial positions are not allocated randomly, but according to criteria that typically respond to specific party affiliations, ethno-political attributes, regional origin and gender (Altman 2000; Arriola 2009). The importance of each criterion varies depending on the political environment in which they are embedded: in a government dominated by a single party, ethno-political or regional identities may determine the different allocation of ministerial positions. In other contexts, political parties encapsulate multiple interests and ethno-regional identities, and inter-party dynamics are therefore often used as a criterion to explain cabinet formation and composition in both parliamentary and presidential regimes (Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub 2007).

Yet not all ministers are selected based on these criteria. Non-party ministers are increasingly influential actors in a variety of political systems across the world (Amorim Neto 2006; McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2015; Schleiter 2015; Lee 2018). In Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia, non-affiliated technocrats have taken office as heads of government, while others occupy cabinet portfolios without being members of a political party. Likewise, technocratic governments consisting entirely of independent ministers have been appointed in the wake of acute political and economic crises. Their selection is said to reflect a weakening democratic process, which fails to enjoy electoral legitimacy and where their appointment alienates voters from democratic institutions (Runciman 2018).

Non-party ministers are described as “cabinet members who do not act on behalf of a party in government” (Schleiter 2013: 35). Unlike technocrats who are defined by the lack of political experience and by the technical expertise they bring to the government (McDonnell and Valbruzzi 2015: 657), non-party ministers include all cabinet members without a recognised party affiliation, such as figures hailing from social organisations like trade unions or human rights groups or having held public office under the banner of a political party before their current appointment. Despite not having technocratic competence, these ministers selected from outside the political parties may be acting in a personal capacity, responding directly to the head of state or the head of government. When referring to ministers, the terms ‘non-party’ and ‘independent’ will be used as synonyms in this study.

These figures have typically attracted little scholarly interest compared to other political actors. Academic literature has long focused on party governments, producing limited theoretical work on the subject of non-party ministers and non-party governments (Rose 1969; Blondel 1985; Blondel and Cotta 2000). Non-party members of the cabinet are therefore treated as a residual category, whose profile is often associated with technocrats, with the latter term typically highlighting the technical competencies that justify the appointment of a minister or of an entire government from outside the parties (Cotta and Verzichelli 2002: 145). The use of the term ‘technocrat’, however, has been conflated to describe all ministers appointed according to their technical competencies, creating some theoretical confusion over the exact definition of this concept (Camau and Geisser 2003).

Over the past decade, academic research has increasingly addressed the figure of non-party ministers, with a strong focus on European, Latin American and Asian cabinets (Amorim Neto 2006; Schleiter 2013; Lee 2018). Incumbents are typically believed to appoint independents in contexts where the executive enjoys a strong negotiating power compared to the legislative assembly (Bermeo 2003; Amorim Neto 2006). These include an under-institutionalised party system (a common element in countries undergoing democratic transitions), complex technical policy challenges requiring specific expertise, or incumbents capable of imposing their rule over the parliamentary assembly (Schleiter 2013: 35). Despite the increasingly technocratic nature of several governments across the region (Kenner 2010), academic studies have typically overlooked the role of non-party ministers in Africa and the Middle East or explained it as a result of exogenous or contingent circumstances. The involvement of technocratic elites in politics was often

related to changing authoritarian techniques (Heydemann 2007), the implementation of neoliberal economic policies (Bogaert 2013) and political scapegoating by shrewd politicians (Thurston 2018). At the same time, inter-elite struggles over access to power have gone hand in hand with an increase in the number of non-party ministers appointed in cabinet. How can we reconcile these two seemingly contradictory trends in political systems where cabinet formation is typically understood in terms of patronage and clientelism?

To address these puzzles, this study situates the rise in the appointment of non-party ministers in Tunisia within changing logics of polarisation and consensus. In Tunisia, ministerial positions allocated to independents began to increase in the early 2000s, although they became leading political actors only after Ben Ali's demise and the emergence of the democratic institutions. Today, they continue to account for a large share of total cabinet appointments. However, despite an abundance of studies that explore the nature of political elites in Tunisia (Latif-Béatrix 1988; Charfi 1989; Camau and Geisser 2003; Erdle, in Perthes 2004; Erdle 2010; Heurtaux 2014; Kchouk 2017; Buehler and Ayari 2018), non-affiliated cabinet members have largely remained at the margins of scholarly analysis. Rather, attention has more often focused on Tunisia's democratising trajectory, the role of Islam in Tunisian politics, and the country's electoral performance (*see*, among others, Gana, Van Hamme and Ben Rabah 2012, 2016; Stepan 2012; Cavatorta and Merone 2013).

In the following section, I examine the profile of all members of the cabinet appointed between 1987 and 2017, before discussing the incentives informing the selection of non-party ministers under Ben Ali and under the new democratic regime. The data, collected using weekly issues of the 'Official Journal of the Tunisian Republic', local media sources, archival resources and other publicly available documentation, provide a monthly breakdown of all 404 Tunisian cabinet ministers and secretaries of state since 1987. It should be noted, however, that cabinet ministers constitute only a subset of a country's political elites, and that socio-political affiliations and characteristics also influence appointments in other sectors, including the local administration, national authorities and public companies. While these data do not allow determining whether the same considerations also applied to other domains, the selection of ministerial elites is typically viewed as replicating the dynamics regulating how key political groups are

included or excluded from ruling coalitions (Bratton and Van De Walle 1994; Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* 2003).

4.3. Ministerial elites in Tunisia, 1987 to 2017⁵

Prior to the early 2000s, non-party ministers were an exception in Tunisian politics. The government had been typically dominated by the ruling Socialist Destourian Party (*Parti Socialiste Destourien*, PSD) and by its successor, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (*Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique*, RCD) set up by Ben Ali a few months after his rise to the presidency. Bourguiba had established a one-party, authoritarian system that marginalised opposition parties and trade unions while expelling potential challengers within his own party, the Neo Destour, starting with former independence leader Salah Ben Youssef (Henry 2007: 312). Trade unions and other opposition movements – the latter legalised in 1971 – continued to exist, yet they never constituted a substantial alternative to the ruling party. Within this system, Bourguiba had increasingly centralised power around himself.

Cabinet members had responded directly to the President until 1970, when a constitutional amendment created the post of Prime Minister, which possessed, however, virtually no autonomous powers. As such, the government was regarded as an ancillary institution to the Presidency, in which the President could exercise control over his ministers and, through his party and the ministries, over Parliament, the military and the police (Barany 2011). The domination of the PSD over the cabinet was formalised at the eighth party congress, where an amendment to the statute stipulated that all cabinet ministers were also members of the party's central committee. By reversing the traditional mechanism whereby ministers are recruited from the party executive body, Bourguiba turned the PSD into a para-state structure operating in parallel with the government (Charfi 1989: 52).

In line with its predecessor, the RCD largely monopolised cabinet appointments: following its formation, Ben Ali preserved the confusion between party and state by requiring that all ministers also serve in the executive bodies of the party (Camau and Geisser 2003). At the grassroots level, thanks to a pervasive presence throughout the country, the ruling party operated as both an arm of the police state, and a clientelist cartel providing its members with lucrative opportunities (Erdle 2010: 216; Hibou 2011; Wolf

⁵ The figures cited in this section are reported in the Appendix.

2018). At the government level, preference for technocratic officials resulted in an expanded role for non-affiliated ministers and secretaries of state, starting with Ben Ali's first cabinets (Murphy 1999: 184). As the number of cabinet members grew over time, so the percentage of non-RCD ministers increased (Figure 4.1). While the first cabinet led by Hédi Baccouche in 1987 comprised thirty-one members of the ruling party and only two independents, Mohamed Ghannouchi's cabinet in January 2011 was composed of thirty-seven RCD members and seventeen independent ministers. By then, nearly one third of cabinet members had no partisan affiliation.

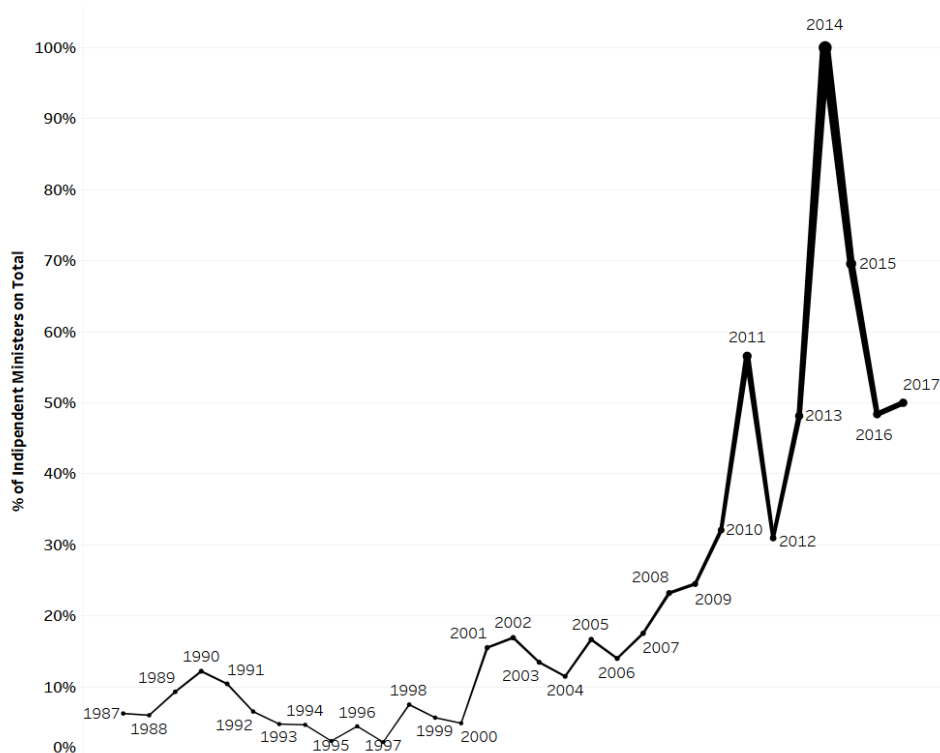


Figure 4.1: Percentage of Tunisian non-party ministers on total cabinet ministers, from 1987 to December 2017

The allocation of ministerial positions to non-party figures increased markedly after 2001, during the first government led by Mohamed Ghannouchi – himself a technocrat affiliated to the RCD. His cabinet epitomised the nature of Ben Ali's system of governance, deprived of a strong political character that could overshadow or challenge the leader's centrality. Non-party ministers were typically assigned economic portfolios – Industry, Economic development, Planning, International Cooperation, and Information Technology among others – tasked with the implementation of the neoliberal economic policies negotiated with international financial institutions. By contrast, the RCD continued to maintain a tight grip on the *ministères regaliens* (Foreign Affairs, Interior,

National Defence and Justice) and on all ministries that were considered key to the distribution of patronage.⁶

In the post-Ben Ali era, the involvement of non-party ministers in government has substantially increased compared to the previous decades. Two governments out of seven – the Essebsi cabinet in 2011 and the Jomaa cabinet in 2014 – consisted entirely of non-partisans, enjoying initial external support from the wider political spectrum and the trade unions. With the exception of the cabinet chaired by Ennahda's member Hamadi Jebali, at least half of the cabinet members were not affiliated to a political party. In spite of their alleged technocratic profile, these figures point to the political role that independent ministers have played in the post-2011 scenario. Contrary to the Ben Ali era where technocrats often occupied positions in economic ministries, non-party ministers and secretaries of state have seen their roles widening significantly since 2011. Non-party members have occupied a wide range of positions, with some ministries – Culture and Religious Affairs – reserved exclusively for non-affiliated figures, also by virtue of their importance for the highly controversial cleavage separating Islamists and secularists.

Characterised by marked political instability and frequent cabinet reshuffles, the post-revolutionary context has witnessed an alternation of technocrat-led and coalition governments, which coincided with different phases of the emerging political settlement (Boubekeur 2016). The abrupt collapse of Ben Ali's regime left Tunisia with a government led by his long-time Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi. His government, which included members of the dissolved RCD, technocrats and opposition figures,⁷ faced widespread popular opposition that forced him to resign at the end of February 2011 (Willsher 2011). The crisis was solved when Tunisian interim President Fouad Mebazaa replaced Ghannouchi with Béji Caid Essebsi, an experienced former

⁶ A notable example is the secretary of state for National Solidarity Funds. All Tunisians – individuals and businesses alike – were required to contribute to a national fund for development projects managed by Ben Ali himself and an *ad hoc* Secretary of State, typically a close collaborator of the president like Kamel Haj Sassi, an RCD member from the coastal town of Sfax who served in government almost continuously from 1993 to 2008 (Beau and Tuquoi 2011). Through the National Solidarity Funds, otherwise known as the “26.26 account”, he could discretionally invest millions of francs each year in a multitude of projects in Tunisia's rural regions, enhancing the image of Ben Ali – who was typically reported to be the prime sponsor of these projects – and of the RCD across the wider population.

⁷ Three members of Tunisia's largest trade union confederation, the *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT), resigned on 18 January before taking office due to strong criticism of their collaboration with members of the RCD (Ben Achour 2016: 101).

minister under Bourguiba who formed a caretaker government which was in charge until the first democratic elections were held in late 2011 (Ben Achour 2016: 102).

Ennahda, a moderate Islamist party, won the parliamentary elections, but lacking an absolute majority in the constituent assembly (*Assemblée Nationale Constituante*, ANC), formed a coalition government – popularly known as *Troika* – with two junior secular partners, the Congress for the Republic (*Congrès de la République*, CPR) and Ettakatol (Gana, Van Hamme and Ben Rabah 2012). The leaders of these two parties – Moncef Marzouki and Mustapha Ben Jaafar – would become President of the Republic and of the ANC respectively, while Ennahda would appoint the head of the government. In 2013, amidst a deteriorating economic situation and increasing political violence, Ennahda adhered to the National Dialogue, a roadmap brokered by the main political and social forces to placate political tensions and facilitate the approval of the new constitution. Under this agreement, Ennahda consented to cede power to a technocratic government that would lead the country until the new elections. After the ANC adopted the new constitution in January 2014, the President of the Republic designated former Industry Minister Mehdi Jomaa new head of government, which enjoyed the support of 149 ANC members out of 194 (Business News 2014).

Nidaa Tounes – a secular party created in 2012 by former Prime Minister Essebsi bringing together several factions opposed to Ennahda – obtained the majority in the 2014 parliamentary elections, while its founder became head of state (Gana, Van Hamme and Ben Rabah 2016). Despite its strong anti-Ennahda rhetoric, Nidaa Tounes entered a coalition government, under the auspices of President Essebsi, with its ostensible archenemy and other smaller formations, contributing to party splintering (Marks 2015). Essebsi appointed Habib Essid, former Secretary of State in the early 2000s and then Interior Minister during the transition, as head of the government. Essid, affiliated to no party, lacked a strong political backing and was eventually replaced in the summer of 2016 by Local Administration minister Youssef Chahed, a member of Nidaa Tounes (Le Monde 2016).

As non-party figures were allocated an increasing share of ministerial positions, the composition of the cabinet also reflected the inclusion or exclusion of key political elites. Since independence, regionalism has represented a key determinant for the selection of ministers in Tunisia (Charfi 1989: 28). This practice, which Michel Camau and Vincent

Geisser have termed '*regionalism pour soi*' (2006: 199), has been instrumental in reproducing pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and shaping the nature and the forms of the ruling elite. Ben Ali typically privileged individuals from his home region of Sousse when assigning important ministerial positions. Data show that ministers and secretaries of state from the Grand Tunis and Sahel⁸ areas made up nearly half of the cabinet members under Ben Ali. By contrast, the regions of the interior – which have often been hotbeds of protest in Tunisia's contemporary history – have largely been marginalised. Le Kef, Sidi Bouzid and Tataouine had only one minister in twenty-three years, while Zaghouan and Kebili had no ministerial representation.

These trends have radically changed since 2011. With the exception of the southern region of Tataouine, all governorates have enjoyed government representation, pointing to more geographically inclusive cabinets. The change is even more striking considering that the period under consideration is six years, while Ben Ali ruled for twenty-four years. Within this period, Ennahda has been the most inclusive party appointing cabinet members from almost all governorates. According to some observers, this shows the attempt made by the party to extend and reshuffle its historical constituency (International Crisis Group 2017a: 8). Importantly, although non-affiliated ministers continue to boast a stronger urban profile compared to the rest of the government, the percentage of non-partisans drawn from Grand Tunis and coastal areas declined from more than 70% under Ben Ali to around 50% after 2011 (*see* Figure 4.2). Hence, a more balanced regional representation was achieved in the post-2011 landscape, in accordance with an ostensibly inclusionary logic that also permeated ministerial selection in technocratic cabinets (Ben Hammouda 2016: 19).

⁸ The Sahel is a coastal region encompassing the governorates of Sousse, Monastir and Mahdia, the traditional hometown of Tunisia's autocratic rulers.

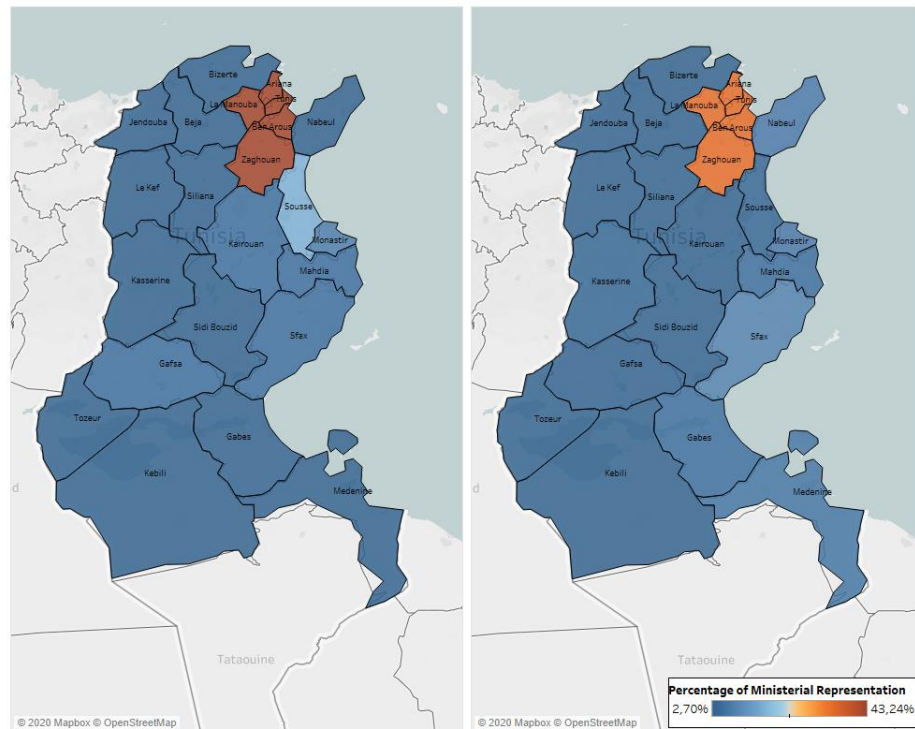


Figure 4.2: Regional background of Tunisian non-party ministers in 1987-2010 (left) and in 2011-2017 (right)

The public administration constituted the main professional *milieu* of Ben Ali's cabinets, in line with those of his predecessor (Latif-Béatrix 1988; Charfi 1989). At least 50% of ministerial appointments were *hauts fonctionnaires*, including diplomats, magistrates and high-ranking officials in the state ministries. Another 25% were university professors and schoolteachers. By contrast, despite the liberal economic policies promoted by Ben Ali, only nine cabinet members came from the private sector.

At the same time, Ben Ali continued to limit the political involvement of the country's military and security institutions.⁹ No more than five ministers were recruited from the army or the security services. Despite being an army official himself and retaining supervision of the police, Ben Ali increasingly promoted the professionalisation of the security services while keeping the army deliberately marginal in regime politics (Barany 2011; Brooks 2013). Members of the security services close to Habib Bourguiba were

⁹ Ben Ali, appointed Interior Minister in 1984, was called in October 1987 to form a new government that would deal with the growing Islamist threat. The new Prime Minister, who had previously served in the intelligence services and directed National Security, represented an exception in Bourguiba's long-time policy to keep the military out of politics. He was indeed the first minister with a purely military background since 1956 (Charfi 1989: 63).

purged¹⁰ while Ben Ali's closest affiliates were promoted to influential cabinet positions (Camau and Geisser 2003: 206). Army generals, such as Abdelhamid Escheikh and Habib Ammar, were appointed to ministerial positions in the earlier years of Ben Ali's presidency, but only for short periods of time or with secondary portfolios.

These figures are consistent with the professional profile of non-party ministers, who were largely drawn from the state bureaucracy and academia. This 'non-political' route to cabinet – which was not a well-practiced tradition in governments across the world until the 1980s (Blondel 1985: 58) – served different functions. These technocrats could boast several years of professional experience in the state apparatus and in academia prior to their appointment. Lacking considerable political or party background, however, civil servants were promoted to a political position but did not possess the political capital to challenge Ben Ali.

One of the most notable examples of bureaucrats serving in the executive is former Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, who graduated in social sciences from the *École Nationale d'Administration* in Tunis before beginning his career at the Ministry of Planning. After the coup in November 1987, he was appointed Delegate Minister of Planning, then promoted to full minister in July 1988. Often described as a technocrat, Ghannouchi took office as Minister of Finance and of International Cooperation, until his nomination as prime minister in 1999. In March 1988, he quickly joined the RCD after Ben Ali dissolved the PSD, of which he had never been a member.

The professional background of ministers and secretaries of state is also revealing of the changes that have involved political elites in Tunisia since 2011. While the vast majority of cabinet members have continued to come from the public administration, this share has decreased from 50% to 35% (*see* Table 2). Post-2011 cabinets have promoted a larger involvement of the private sector – twenty-four cabinet members were corporate managers, entrepreneurs or bankers compared to the only nine in nearly thirty years of Ben Ali's rule – and of professional figures traditionally excluded under Bourguiba and

¹⁰ The case of Chedly Hammi, alias Mohamed Larbi Mahjoubi, is emblematic. Hammi had long served in the Ministry of Interior under Bourguiba, having a marginal role in the *coup d'état* that ousted the old president. He was nevertheless appointed Secretary of State in the Interior Ministry in the government of Hamed Karoui but arrested five months after his nomination for the assassination of Palestinian leader Khalil Al-Wazir. Hammi was allegedly tortured and eventually condemned to four years in prison by a military tribunal (Kéfi 2011).

Ben Ali. The army and the security services have also continued to play a limited role, as only two army and police officers were appointed to a ministerial position.¹¹

Regarding trade union membership, whereas Bourguiba's ministers had often been members of the Destourian party and of national organisations – and especially the UGTT (Charfi 1989: 49) – Ben Ali was more likely to appoint ministers who had little or no experience in a national organisation or a trade union (Henry 2007: 311). Only a few ministers were militants of the UGTT, and none of the *Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat* (UTICA). These organisations were able to exercise little or no direct political influence, while the space for political contestation became increasingly limited as their leadership colluded with the government. Nevertheless, Ben Ali co-opted the leadership of the national organisations, which were an integral part of his extensive patronage network (Camau and Geisser 2003: 213, 222).¹²

By contrast, the political participation of trade unions, human rights groups and other national organisations has represented the distinctive character of the Tunisian democratic transition (Boubekeur 2016). As many as nineteen organisations and trade unions took part to the Higher Authority for Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution, Political Reform and Democratic Transition (HIROR, or *Haute Instance pour la Réalisation des Objectifs de la Révolution, de la Réforme Politique et de la Transition Démocratique*), tasked with reforming state institutions in the wake of the demise of Ben Ali's regime and in preparation for the first democratic elections (Séréni 2011). The National Quartet consisting of the UGTT, UTICA, the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH, or *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme*) and the lawyers' organisation, played a key role in the political crisis that followed the assassinations of Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013. Additionally, in 2016, the UGTT and the UTICA adhered to a document sponsored by the President of the Republic known as the Carthage Agreement, stipulating policy guidelines on the economic, social and security fronts (Jeune Afrique 2016).

¹¹ These are: the former chief of the National Guard Lotfi Braham, Minister of Interior in the Chahed cabinet between September 2017 and June 2018; and Rafik Chelly, former director of presidential security under Bourguiba, later appointed Secretary of State in the Ministry of Interior (Ghorbal 2015).

¹² By virtue of their proximity to Ben Ali, members of the Trabelsi, Mabrouk, Zarrouk, and Chiboub families owned several public enterprises; Hedi Djilani, who chaired UTICA for almost twenty-four years, was father-in-law to Leila Trabelsi's brother; prominent businessmen Neji Mhiri and Lotfi Abdennadher were also personal friends of the presidential couple. According to a World Bank study, by late 2010 Ben Ali's family network had captured nearly 20% of Tunisia's private sector profits (Rijkers, Freund and Nucifora 2014).

This wider political role has reflected in the trade union' participation in government. While only four ministers in the Essebsi cabinet hailed from the unions (although they were involved in the concomitant HIROR), their increased involvement in the political process continued under the *Troika*. Around one third of the Ennahda-led cabinets had been members of a national organisation, mainly Islamist-leaning students' organisations, human rights groups or the UGTT. However, the vast majority of them were also party militants, which actually explains their participation in the cabinet. When considering non-affiliated ministers only, the participation of trade unions and national organisations has become more systematic under the ESSID and Chahed cabinets, each of them including no less than five members hailing from the UGTT, UTICA, and other women or fishermen's organisations. These figures marked a dramatic shift from Ben Ali's non-political cabinets, and point to a new and more dynamic role assumed by the unions in the post-2011 period.

The data point to the different mechanisms regulating cabinet formation and ministerial selection in Tunisia. Dominated by the president, Ben Ali's cabinets functioned according to an exclusionary logic structured along political, subnational and socio-professional lines. By contrast, cabinets in the post-2011 environment reveal an attempt to include a broad spectrum of political forces. Within this context, non-party ministers have constituted an increasingly large component of the government. In the next sections, I seek to illustrate which function independent ministers have served before and after 2011, and what the rise of these figures can tell about elite politics.

4.4. Ben Ali and the politics of exclusion

The changing composition of the cabinet under Ben Ali, and the increasing allocation of ministerial portfolios to non-party ministers, responded to two main logics shaped by domestic political calculations and external constraints. On the one hand, appointing ministers without a strong political connotation allowed Ben Ali to preserve his power by neutralising politics and preventing the emergence of a political challenger (Erdle, in Perthes 2004: 230). Elites who had served under Bourguiba were marginalised, privileging loyal officials to cultivate public support (Buehler and Ayari 2018). Ben Ali's party was tasked with the representation of societal interests vis à vis an increasingly depoliticised government, whereas any form of opposition was discouraged or actively repressed through the use of force. His last cabinet – which was forced to resign as a consequence of the popular protests that rocked the country in December 2010 and

January 2011 – comprised ministers who had minimal political profile and were essentially subordinated to the president, thus constituting the natural outcome of the appointments he had made over the previous twenty-four years.

Notably, strategic decisions were taken in the presidential palace in Carthage by Ben Ali and his closest advisers who acted like shadow ministers (Camau and Geisser 2003: 193; Wolf 2018: 254). The predominance of Carthage over Tunisia's other political institutions was also demonstrated by the active role of Ben Ali's family members, who were among the closest advisors to the president and managed to manipulate the day-to-day bureaucratic machine and ministerial appointments alike. At the same time, the penetration of the RCD in the bureaucracy was instrumental in centralising the administrative structure, as all initiatives were required to have the final approval of the Presidency (Hibou 2011: 329).

Additionally, Ben Ali managed to control access to elite status through the domination of the government, the party structures and the security services, thus allowing the president to promote loyalists and exclude possible rivals from influential positions (Erdle, in Perthes 2004: 214). The former president privileged a wide range of highly qualified technocratic figures and security experts who lacked a strong and independent political base. These elites included long-standing ministers like Abdallah Kallel, Ali Chaouch and Abdelwahab Abdallah as well as his special advisor Abdelaziz Ben Dhia, security official Mohamed Ali Ganzoui and the long-standing leader of the Tunisian Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts (*Union Tunisienne de l'Industrie, du Commerce et de l'Artisanat*, UTICA) Hédi Djilani. Ben Ali also operated frequent cabinet reshuffles to prevent elite members from occupying a ministry for too long, while holding regular party congresses – five in twenty years – that guaranteed regular turnover within his RCD. Although these strategies prevented competitors from alternative cultivating centres of power to the Presidency, they frustrated political ambitions and aroused dissent within the RCD (Wolf 2018). Despite this, no defections occurred among key party figures, and loyalty to the regime endured until Ben Ali's eventual departure, precluding the eventual regime collapse (Kchouk and Mamuji 2019).

On the other hand, international financial institutions had increasingly promoted a model of technocratic governance to implement economic reforms in Tunisia. Cabinet members under Ben Ali were largely selected from the bureaucratic or academic spheres,

possessing little or no political experience and hardly any popular support. Their names were often unknown to the general public, obscured by the ubiquitous public figure of Ben Ali. Co-opted into government, these groups were considered to have the necessary competence for implementing the liberal economic policies of the new regime while nurturing modest political ambitions. By contrast, only a few members of the cabinet were picked from the private sector, the army and the security services, thus excluding from politics groups with possibly conflicting agendas.

Unsatisfied with slow economic liberalisation, in 2000 the World Bank encouraged the Tunisian government to improve economic governance by removing the political obstacles obstructing reform (Perkins 2013: 39). Despite the seemingly positive economic performance, a highly centralised decision-making process was detrimental to the private sector while “conditions seem[ed] right for a more active participation of civil society in the development process” (World Bank 2000: 26). In this sense, the presence of ministers not affiliated to the ruling party, whose pervasive occupation of institutional positions was perceived as an obstacle to achieving effective liberalisation, seems to have facilitated the ‘selective borrowing’ (Stone 2012) and implementation of economic packages negotiated with the international institutions, with the aim of preserving the rentier economy that flourished around Ben Ali and his family (Rijkers, Freund and Nucifora 2014). The appointment of non-affiliated, technocratic ministers in key economic portfolios therefore allowed Ben Ali to formally address external concerns while maintaining his tight grip on the cabinet and on the economy.

Despite Ben Ali’s attempt to neutralise regime change from within and stifle popular dissent, his regime proved unable to weather critical junctures (Hibou 2011). The belated dismissal of secondary regime figures on December 29,¹³ followed by a pledge to hold legislative elections and step down in 2014, failed to placate the unrest that had spread across Tunisia. The ultimate identification of the state institutions with the figure of Ben Ali and the RCD allowed little margin for political manoeuvring and no alternative to the departure of the leader and his closest associates. As a result, the RCD was soon dissolved; Ben Ali and his family fled into exile or were arrested; and several ministers

¹³ Among the dismissed were the Ministers of Communication, Commerce and Religious Affairs, along with the governors of Sidi Bouzid, Jendouba and Zaghouan (cited in Kchouk and Mamuji 2019: 902).

and secretaries of state with ties to the ruling family faced trial on charges of corruption and embezzlement.¹⁴

4.5. The politics of consensus in post-revolutionary Tunisia

Under Ben Ali, the appointment of non-party ministers was motivated by the President to impose his logic of consensus over the decision-making process, his own party and the opposition. On the contrary, their increasing involvement in post-revolutionary Tunisia is a function of an inclusionary, consensus-based political environment which signals the attempt by the main political actors to seek mutual recognition and broader legitimacy (McCarthy 2019). Within this context, independents have been a key factor in building trust between the main political forces and sustaining the current political order.

As early as March 2011, interim Prime Minister Béji Caïd Essebsi formed a cabinet consisting entirely of non-affiliated ministers to replace the government led by the outgoing Mohamed Ghannouchi, who was forced to resign after widespread popular protests. However, the role of non-party ministers became apparent after the *Troika* took power, and tensions with opposition forces began to surface. In the summer of 2013, Ennahda agreed to leave the government after the tensions that followed the assassinations of two leftist politicians and the inception of the National Dialogue. Habib Essid, a former Secretary of State under Ben Ali with no party affiliation, was appointed Prime Minister in 2015 after Nidaa Tounes won the majority of seats in the parliamentary elections of October 2014. Similarly, key cabinet portfolios likely to ignite inter-party tensions, like Cultural or Religious Affairs, were often assigned to independent ministers.

Importantly, Ennahda opted for a less divisive approach after March 2013 and the resignation of former Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali. According to senior party officials, in October 2012, the then Prime Minister had unilaterally proposed that his party would leave government, which faced the difficulty of reconciling three parties, and support an independent technocratic cabinet.¹⁵ The party's central council rejected his proposal and forced him to resign after the assassination of Chokri Belaïd in February 2013. Faced with mounting criticisms over its management of internal security and accusations of having undermined democracy, Ennahda backtracked on his previous position and formed a new

¹⁴ Notable examples include Leila Trabelsi's nephew Imed, former ministers Abdallah Kallel, Tijani Haddad and Samira Khayach Belhaj, and Secretary of State for National Solidarity Funds Kamel Hadj Sassi.

¹⁵ Author interview with members of Ennahda, March 2017 and June 2018.

government led by former Interior Minister Ali Laarayedh, which relied on independents for more than half of the cabinet. A few months later, Ennahda would cede power to a technocratic government.

Not only did Tunisian political forces rely on several occasions on non-affiliated figures to placate heightened tensions between opposing factions (Ben Hammouda 2016: 29), they also created formal and informal arenas to reach a compromise over high-profile political issues. Among these was the so-called Consensus Commission, an unofficial parliamentary committee composed of a single member for each party in the assembly tasked with finding a compromise between the different positions.¹⁶ The commission, which had existed already under Ben Ali, assumed a new role in the ANC as all major policies would be informally adopted consensually. By setting the stage for a collusive competition (Boubekeur 2016: 123), this practice is accused of having hampered Parliament's ability to adopt efficient policies while outsourcing responsibility for decision-making and policy implementation from the political parties to the technocrats.¹⁷ At the local level, Ennahda similarly opted for a non-confrontational, consensual approach on local administration well after 2011 (Gobe 2017).

All political forces thus have a strong incentive to appoint non-party ministers. While still virtually competing and publicly reluctant, the two main political forces in the post-2011 political landscape – Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes – opted to join coalition governments that allowed them to remain in power without assuming full responsibility for the policies adopted by the government. Both parties are suspicious that if their counterpart takes too much power, it could be used to exclude them from political competition or to undermine democracy. According to Ennahda officials, the party has deliberately adopted a “low visibility” strategy renouncing ministerial positions in favour of independents to dispel scepticism over its allegedly authoritarian goals.¹⁸ At the same time, the Presidency has also privileged the appointment of non-party ministers in the *ministères regaliens* allowing him to play a more assertive role in some key policy domains, like internal and foreign affairs (Santini and Tholens 2018).

¹⁶ Author interviews with MPs in the ANC and in Parliament, March 2017 and June 2018.

¹⁷ According to a civil society activist critical of consensual decision-making, “you cannot take consensus accountable”. Author interview with civil society activist, June 2018.

¹⁸ Interview with Ennahda officials, February 2017.

There is, however, an additional dimension as the nature of the non-party ministers also marked a radical change from the past. Contrary to Ben Ali's practice of elevating technocratic figures who lacked a marked political connotation to exclude potential rivals within the RCD, the appointment of cabinet officials outside the existing political parties represented a visible attempt to include a wider range of socio-political categories into decision-making. Rather than merely occupying cabinet positions, political leaders have at times opted to recruit ministers from outside the existing parties, resulting in a more direct role for those social organisations that have directly participated and invested in the political process following 2011. This applies, for example, to Tunisia's main trade union, the UGTT, which several parties see as a potential competitor.¹⁹ From this perspective, non-party ministers have acquired a more direct, significant political role since 2011.

Consensual politics and the increasing involvement of independent figures were a direct consequence of the structural weakness of the Tunisian political system and of its parties. Not only were they unable to fully exercise power, they also operated largely as electoral cartels with little organisational structure or popular support (Grewal and Hamid 2020). Several political parties had long conducted their activities clandestinely or in exile, and likewise did not possess any experience in local politics, which was largely dominated by state-appointed bureaucrats (Mohsen 2016: 164). As such, lacking the necessary expertise to run the government, incumbents opted for independent technocrats with experience in the public administration and in the private sector for the negotiation of highly technical international agreements in the security and economic fields (Santini and Tholens 2018). At the same time, those who could boast previous political experience had typically served under Ben Ali, and their reintegration in cabinet could only come about under a technocratic label in order to avoid the public uproar that would accompany the return of the old regime.²⁰

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the role of non-party ministers in sustaining Tunisia's political orders has changed since 1987. The increase in the number of independent ministers appointed in government positions reflects the changing strategies of domestic

¹⁹ Author interview with members of Al Irada and Nidaa Tounes, June 2018.

²⁰ By the end of 2018, only three ministers had served under Ben Ali. These were former Prime Minister Habib Essid, Education Minister Hatem Ben Salem, and Finance Minister Ridha Chalgoum. Several others had collaborated at various levels with Ben Ali's regime (Bobin and Haddad 2018).

political elites before and after 2011. Ben Ali relied on non-partisans to exclude rivals and centralise power around himself and his close circle. This form of ‘political micromanagement’ (Owen 2012), exemplified by cabinet appointments, reveals that, far from undertaking political liberalisation, Ben Ali acted to neutralise challengers to his power. His style of rule was based on a combination of repression and co-option, whereby the former was used to crush organised protests and silence the opposition and the latter to buy out key elites into the regime. Within this system, patronage became an essential instrument to anchor the regime into society by providing material benefits to selected social groups.

In contrast, independent ministers in the post-revolutionary political environment were critical to placating inter-party tensions and consolidating the pact between Ennahda and Nidaa Tounes. The demise of Ben Ali’s regime saw the participation of previously marginalised or outlawed actors in Tunisia’s political life and a limited reshuffle of the country’s political elite. While a wide range of Islamist, leftist and secular organisations were eventually reintegrated as they participated in the transition, members of the elites linked to Ben Ali managed nonetheless to maintain prominent positions in the political elite networks. The late president Béji Caïd Essebsi was himself a representative of the old regime, having served under both Bourguiba and Ben Ali. The interaction between Islamists and old regime forces, swinging between polarisation and compromise, resulted in a bargained competition that restricted access for political actors outside elite networks. These considerations challenge frameworks that try to explain the transition only as a reflection of an Islamist-secularist cleavage, and highlight the gradual alignment of these rival political parties.

It is unclear, however, whether these attempts at regulating political competition through a top-down, controlled reshuffle of the political elites have been successful in reinvigorating the regime. Ben Ali eventually failed as popular pressure, coupled with a lack of support from those elites that he helped to sideline, forced him to resign and flee in January 2011. Today, low voter turnout in the latest national and local elections and continuing unrest across the country show that years of consensual politics have eroded popular trust in the ability of political parties to implement sound policies. Whilst partially reining in party polarisation, the politics of consensus has contributed to stall legislative activity and frustrate real political competition, potentially undermining the consolidation of Tunisia’s democratic institutions (Kubinec and Grewal 2018).

As such, the increasing participation of independents and technocrats in government points to a need for further research into their role and the wider implications for political systems across the region. The extent to which non-partisans are changing the composition of cabinets in Africa and the Middle East is still under-explored, as is their impact on traditional party politics. Indeed, if political parties exist because they are able to formulate policy proposals and direct electoral legitimacy, independents may lack the former ability, thus contributing to shrinking the popular support of the government. Finally, future research may also address how independent ministers are selected and how they operate, shedding further light on the internal functioning of government institution. The appointment of independent ministers often challenges popular understandings of politics in Africa and the Middle East as mainly driven by clientelist or corrupt practices. While party, ethnic, regional and other attributes still influence the allocation of ministerial positions, the growing incidence of non-party ministers is embedded in a recurring logic of managing inter-elite struggles through inclusion and exclusion in cabinet.

5. Crisis cabinets and the influence of protests on elite volatility in Africa²¹

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5.1. Introduction

Cabinets are the locus of government policy decision-making and state patronage opportunities, and cabinet changes are an important tool for sharing power and managing competing elites, groups and interests (Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015; Quiroz-Flores and Smith 2011). An increasing body of literature interprets the appointment, reshuffling and dismissal of senior government officials as a tool of political survival (Arriola 2009; Quiroz-Flores and Smith 2011; Martinez-Gallardo 2014; Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán 2015; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015; Kroeger 2018). However, this logic is often focused only on internal machinations within the regime and party. But events – such as political crises, disasters or elections – can mean previously effective elite power-sharing strategies become ineffective at ensuring political survival.

Regimes and leaders across the world find themselves in positions where the composition of the elite within the government becomes unstable and threatens the political survival of either the leader or the regime. In democracies, governments frequently fall due to internal competition between parties or rival figures within the government, and leaders may apply drastic changes to their governments to retain the confidence of either the public or their party (Saalfeld 2008; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Indridadson and Kam 2008). Other studies have similarly examined how volatility in the ruling elite has emerged from political crises such as scandals, intra-elite conflict, drops in popularity and economic stress (Roessler 2011; Martinez-Gallardo 2014; Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán 2015).

This study introduces the notion of ‘crisis cabinets’, defined as instances in which regimes drastically reorganises ruling coalition in response to political crises, outside of the routine cabinet changes caused by elections or democratic regime change. It seeks to contribute to the existing literature that explores the composition and functioning of executives within and across African states, as well as their interaction with political

²¹ An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the European Conference of African Studies in Edinburgh, 11-14 June 2019.

crises. Existing studies which examine how regimes alter their coalitions in response to crises focus on European and Latin American governments, and largely overlook dynamics in African states (Saalfeld 2008; Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008; Indridadson and Kam 2008; Martinez-Gallardo 2014; Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán 2015).

Specifically, this study examines the effect of a specific form of crisis that is occurring more frequently across Africa. Recent events such as the 2011 Arab Spring means that there is growing international interest in mass protest movements as a force for change, echoing the academic interest which followed the Third Wave of Democratisation in Africa and former Soviet Republics in the 1990s (Carothers and Youngs 2015). Protest movements involving large parts of the civilian population for an extended period of time, occur in part because the participants believe that these actions can affect the composition and direction of national, senior government. We investigate the effects and efficacy of protest movements on the formation of crisis cabinets, and specifically inquire how regimes change the composition of ruling elites to address the threat posed by mass protests.

Recent events in Africa have increased this interest and suggested protest movements do impact senior, national government composition. April 2019 saw the toppling of two of Africa's longest serving autocrats – Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Sudan's Omar al-Bashir – following weeks of sweeping popular protests that brought millions of people to the streets (Kushkush 2019). Both leaders attempted to placate protesters through the mass dismissal of senior government officials, including cabinet ministers and local governors but were ultimately unsuccessful in securing their own leadership (Abdelaziz 2019; Africa Confidential 2019b). Subsequently, segments of the wider regime elite debated and competed over what form a successor government should take to address the crisis.

Examples like these may seem to suggest that protest movements do cause changes within the elite, but there is little firm evidence about whether this is the exception or the norm, and what kind of changes protests force on the regime. While there have been studies examining mass protests in Africa (Bratton and Van de Walle 1992; Carey 2002) and others analysing cabinet instability (Arriola 2009; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015; Kroeger 2018), existing studies have not examined the relationship between the two. Cross-national studies of African protests have tended to focus on the composition of

collective movements (De Waal and Ibreck 2013), the urban-rural divide (Isaacman 1990) or the links between different forms of contestation (Branch and Mampilly 2015), but have failed to systematically account for the impact of protest movements on cabinet instability, government composition and the regime's use of elite accommodation strategies. Through an exploratory study of a selected number of African executives, this study aims to provide a better understanding of how regimes tailor their ruling coalitions to mitigate political crises and try to ensure their survival.

This study proceeds by reviewing the literature on cabinets as tools of coalition building and mitigation mechanisms for political crises. Using quantitative data on African cabinets and protests, we examine whether there is a strong correlation between public protest and cabinet volatility, and whether protests are a common trigger for 'crisis cabinets'. We then investigate whether protest-motivated crisis cabinets differ from other forms of crisis cabinet and, if so, what unique features they possess. Finally, we examine how the protests studied succeeded in forcing the regime to significantly change their coalition and how the cabinet changed in response to protester demands.

Overall the study finds that protests are not robustly correlated with cabinet volatility and are responsible for only a sixth of the crisis cabinets studied. It does suggest however that when, in rare cases, protests do spur the creation of crisis cabinets, regimes create cabinets specifically designed to mollify and address protester demands. The cases where protests are influential in prompting crisis cabinets are those where the nature of the protests causes a split within the ruling elite, making the leader vulnerable to internal threats and the regime liable to disintegration.

5.2. Cabinets as coalition building and crisis mitigation

Existing literature describes the process of cabinet formation and ministerial appointment as transactional. Studies on cabinet composition in Western democracies highlight that leaders appoint ministers who can provide loyalty or ideological cohesion to strengthen cohesion of their governments, or expertise to improve performance (Indridason and Kam 2008). In other cases, ministers from outside parties can be brought into the government to allow the leader to form a viable government (Huber and Martinez-Gallardo 2008).

In Africa, cabinet appointments are often explained as key positions in the regime's web of patronage. Ministerial appointments are used strategically to counter external threats by bringing political elites and 'big men' into the regime's patronage network, while the

newly incorporated elites deliver votes or political support from their network (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994; Arriola 2009; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015). The composition of the cabinet therefore provides insight into which groups and constituencies the regime considers integral to their coalition and political survival.

The composition of the cabinet also reflects the threat posed by potential allies within the ruling coalition. Included elites can use the state's resources to cultivate a base to rival the leader or can try to depose the leader (Choi and Kim 2018). Consequently, African leaders attempt to coup-proof their regimes by creating arrangements that raise the costs of elite coordination and hinder elite threats (Casper and Tyson 2014). Examples include purges (violent and non-violent) and the rotation of elites among different positions to prevent the cultivation of separate powerbases (Jackson and Rosberg 1992; Geddes 2003; Roessler 2011; Albertus 2012; Powell 2012; Woldense 2018).

Elite volatility within the cabinet which happens outside 'expected periods', such as post-electoral cabinet changes or democratic alternations in power, is therefore indicative of the regime reconfiguring itself to mitigate against internal and external threats. Political crises or upheavals will necessitate changes to the ruling coalition when changes in the demands and political strength of different subgroups or elites cause changes to what constitutes a 'stable bargain'. Former allies may begin to become a threat to the leader, necessitating their removal (Roessler 2011). Rent-seeking elites, ideological movements at odds with the regime and dissatisfied ethno-regional communities may engage in protests or political violence to coerce the regime into granting them more state resources or more positions in government (De Waal 2009). A drop in public support may weaken the leader's legitimacy, making them vulnerable to being ousted by either the opposition or rivals within government (Alesina *et al.* 1996; Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* 2003). In her study on the effects of economic crises and falling regime popularity on ministerial stability in Latin America, Martinez-Gallardo describes the relationship between senior government composition and the political environment outlining how:

“[u]nexpected events over the course of a government's life will change these conditions and make bargains that were previously “stable” no longer viable. Appointments are an explicit political strategy that presidents will use to face these unexpected challenges.” (Martinez-Gallardo 2014: 5).

Economic crises, scandals, internal factionalism or mass protest all exert pressure on regimes to redistribute the balance of power among elites inside and outside of

government (Martinez-Gallardo 2014; Camerlo and Pérez-Liñán 2015). Leaders managing divided or unruly governments, or who are under siege from opposition forces and widespread popular disapproval, are more likely to dismiss ministers who pose an obstacle to their hegemony, making changes to the ruling coalition to secure their political survival (Martinez-Gallardo 2014). Regimes which have become fractured or lost public confidence may need to implement a ‘changing of the guard’ to demonstrate a willingness to reform (Bratton and Van de Walle 1992; Rivera 2000; Albertus 2012)

The notion of ‘crisis cabinets’ developed here identifies those instances in which leaders or regimes which are confronted with an existential political crisis are forced to operate non-routine cabinet reshuffles involving mass ministerial turnover. Crisis cabinets occur outside periods in which a large-scale change in personnel would be instituted as a formal government procedure, such as the resignation of the cabinet during electoral periods or the democratic transition from one regime to the next.

5.2.1. The dangers of protests

Politics in Africa is frequently portrayed as a process of continual bargaining between the leader and rival elites within and outside the government (De Waal 2009; Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015; Bagayoko, Hutchful and Luckham 2016). In contrast, the non-elite masses are ascribed secondary importance as resources to be mobilised by elites hoping to enhance their place within the political hierarchy (Ndegwa 1997; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Langer 2005; Quiroz Flores and Smith 2011). However, demonstrations of discontent among a large section of the non-elite can damage a regime’s legitimacy and can embolden rival elites. Historically large-scale protests have provided elites within the government the opportunity to use the regime’s weakened legitimacy to launch a coup or extract concessions (Volpi 2013; Casper and Tyson 2014). During the early 1990s, opposition politicians or former insiders returning from exile sought to co-opt the pro-democracy movements that spread across the continent against the existing autocratic regimes (Bratton and Van de Walle 1992).

It is well established in the literature that regimes rarely rely on repression or force alone to quash protests as these strategies may in fact cause escalation (Levitsky and Way 2002; Sambanis and Zinn 2005; Josua and Edel 2015). As a result, regimes employ a range of accommodation strategies when dealing with threatening protests, including national

dialogues, constitutional changes or important changes to the senior elite through crisis cabinets (Bratton and Van de Walle 1992; Thurston 2018).

The recent large-scale cabinet reshuffles in Sudan and Algeria are both examples of the regime instituting crisis cabinets to mollify popular discontent. In the aftermath of the leaders' ouster, factional struggles arose as elites attempted to reorganise the ruling coalition into a stable bargain which would ensure at least part of the regime's political survival. In Algeria, President Bouteflika dissolved his cabinet in March in a last effort to contain popular protests, and appointed a technocratic caretaker government. As public support continued to wane, Army Chief of Staff Ahmed Gaïd Salah, previously a Deputy Minister of Defence, moved on to oust the aging president and purge his faction while retaining key allies in the old guard (Africa Confidential 2019b, 2019c). Similarly, Sudan's Omar Al-Bashir fired his government and all his regional governors after declaring a one-year state emergency in February, two months after demonstrations against the rising cost of bread had erupted across the country. Weeks later, a segment of the military ousted most political elements loyal to Al-Bashir, including members of his National Congress Party, and eventually agreed to a transition timetable with the protesters (Abdelaziz 2019). Other examples include Mubarak dismissing claims that his son would succeed him and firing the government led by long-standing Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif in an attempt to appease the Tahrir Square protester, or King Hassan of Morocco's dismissal of his unpopular Prime Minister as a concession to opposition parties (Lust-Okar 2004; Josua and Edel 2015).

These examples show that regimes will offer change in the senior government and turnover in the elite as a concession in return for peace. Existing large-N studies have attempted to approximate regime accommodation strategies through conciliatory rhetoric (Carey 2006; Bhasin and Gandhi 2013), while country-specific investigations have looked at how individual regimes have attempted to mollify protest through legal reform, policies and a change in the elite (Lust-Okar 2004; Volpi 2013; Bogaert 2015; Josua and Edel 2015). But there are no comparative studies examining the relationship between public unrest and volatility within the ruling elite.

We aim to address this gap in the research through isolating 'crisis cabinets' and determining which are preceded by popular protests. Through this process, we aim to

determine whether protests are a common cause of crisis cabinets, and whether these crisis cabinets are distinctly tailored to address protester grievances.

5.3. Protest, cabinet volatility and crisis cabinets in Africa, 2007-2018

The above section ties the concept of ‘crisis cabinets’ to both the level of turnover in the cabinet, and the non-routine nature of the reshuffle. We therefore define a crisis cabinet as any reshuffle which results in the dismissal of over half of the cabinet and occurs outside of the post-electoral period, where large-scale reshuffles are routine.

The first step is to assess whether protest is related to ministerial volatility. To explore this proposed relationship, we use ACPED, a dataset providing monthly list of cabinet ministers in twenty-two African states from 1997-2018 (Raleigh and Wigmore-Shepherd 2020). Each entry includes every minister’s name, position, ethnicity, home region and affiliated political party, along with their respective status in the cabinet. This is compared against protest data provided by ACLED (Raleigh *et al.* 2010). ACLED records disaggregated information on conflict and protest events across Africa, with data available from 1997 to the present. Available information includes the precise geographical coordinates of the event, the identity of actors and the type of event, and the outcome of the conflict. These features are ideal for the study, enabling accurate analysis of the geography of the protests.

ACLED data are used to create multiple metrics to assess the intensity and geography of protest. There are multiple ways in which a regime may interpret protests to constitute a ‘crisis’. Regimes may be most concerned by the escalation in protest – and the potential ‘snowball’ effect than aggregate protest numbers (Yin 1998). Alternatively, regimes may be more concerned with protest deaths due to their potential to cause a crisis of domestic and international legitimacy (Josua and Edel 2015). Consequently, we use multiple metrics to capture these various methods by which a regime may assess whether protests represent a serious threat:

1. The number of demonstrations in the previous six months
2. The number of fatalities arising from the protests
3. The percent change in the number of protests
4. The percentage of demonstrations involving state forces
5. The percentage of all conflict events demonstrations account for

6. The number of distinct geographical clusters of protest²²

Combining these two datasets, we surveyed cabinet changes in 20 African states between 2007 and 2018.²³ Figure 5.1 shows the relationship between change in the cabinet (calculated as the number of dropped ministers as a percentage of the previous cabinet's size) against ACLED's various protest measures. Figure 3 also highlights crisis in blue.

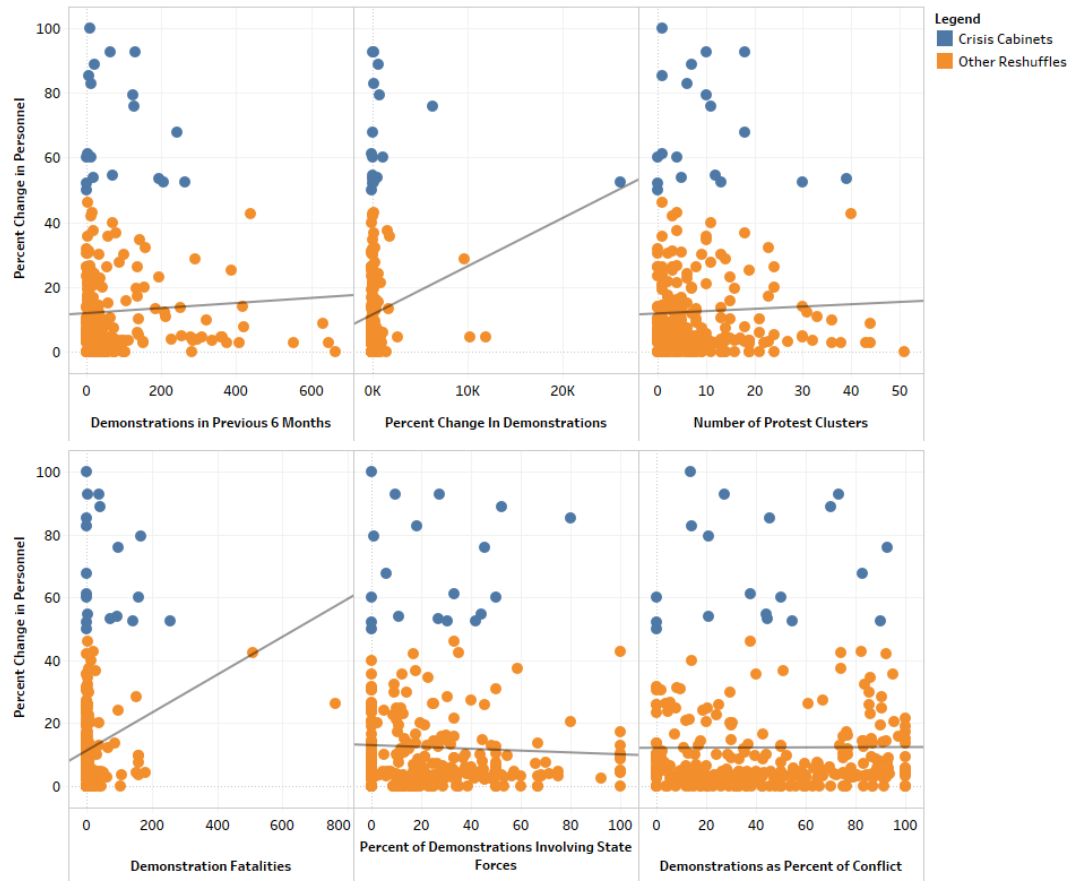


Figure 5.1: Protest Correlated against Ministerial Volatility

Overall, there is a weak correlation in all measures apart from percent change in the number of protests and the number of protest-related fatalities, where a seemingly strong relationship is driven by only a few extreme observations. Reshuffles which occur amidst a context of intense, escalating or geographically dispersed protest are not guaranteed to

²² A more detailed explanation of each variable is included in Table 1 (*see* Appendix).

²³ Rwanda is excluded due to the high percentage of ministers who were born in Uganda and so have no home region, while South Sudan is excluded due to gaining independence mid-way through the period under study. Despite the data covering a larger timespan, the period of 2007 to 2017 is used to control biases due to the wider coverage of protest events in later years.

involve more turnover in personnel. Furthermore, crisis cabinets are frequently created during times of low-intensity protest activity.

Overall, the data suggests that regimes do not reliably engage in a drastic reshaping of the cabinet when facing large-scale protests. Although this finding seems to contradict recent events in Algeria and Sudan, both countries had weathered previous large-scale protests – Algeria in 2011 and Sudan in 2013 – through a mixture of repression, bolstering the loyalty of regime elites and enacting superficial reforms (Volpi 2013; Berridge 2020). Figure 5.1 shows that events such as the recent protests in Algeria and Sudan or the crisis cabinets during the Arab Spring are the exception rather than the norm.

These exceptional events are studied by isolating episodes of severe elite volatility. This will allow us to examine what factors led to the success of the protests in these select instances, how regimes implement crisis cabinets to mitigate the unrest and how the changes witnessed in protest-motivated crisis cabinets differ from other types of crisis cabinet.

5.3.1. Variations in Crises and Crisis Cabinets

A total of eighteen cabinet reshuffles were found to match the criteria for a crisis cabinet. The contexts of the sixteen crisis cabinets are laid out in Table 2 in the Appendix. However, a cursory look at some of the cabinets shows that a large range of crises can lead to drastic changes in the ruling coalition.

There are cases where a victorious faction emerges from an internal struggle within the regime, and purges the government of their internal rivals. One example is Joyce Banda ascending to the presidency of Malawi after the death of President Mutharika. Banda had fallen out of favour with Mutharika's party but gained the presidency in accordance with the constitution. She used the opportunity to expel all ministers loyal to Mutharika from the cabinet (Dionne and Dulani 2013). There are cases where mass changes to the cabinet are used to integrate a threatening opposition. Examples include Bozize's attempt to create a unity government with the Seleka rebel coalition in early 2013 in the Central African Republic, to try to deter their march towards Bangui (Bradshaw and Fandos-Ruis 2016). The crisis cabinets also include three coups – Zimbabwe 2017, Mali 2012 and Guinea 2009 – which cause significant volatility as the new regime tries to consolidate power and undermine elites associated with the old regime.

This raises a serious issue of how to accurately, and without bias, select which crisis cabinets were created as a direct reaction to protests by the regime or leader. To address this problem, we rely on the Worldwide Integrated Crisis Warning System (ICEWS). The ICEWS is an event dataset which consists of coded interactions between socio-political actors (Boschee *et al.* 2015). The main advantage of ICEWS is that the dataset records a large array of non-violent political interactions between actors such as criticisms and denunciations, attempts at mediation and diplomatic or material cooperation. The dataset is also considered to be more reliable and have fewer false positives than GDELT, the other main political interaction dataset (Ward *et al.* 2013).

To assess which crisis cabinets were likely to be created in response to protest, we isolated instances in which the government explicitly yielded to or cooperated or negotiated with protests in the six months prior to the formation of the crisis cabinet.²⁴ Using this classificatory mechanism only three out of the sixteen crisis cabinets, just under a fifth, were motivated by protest. They are:

1. Guinea 2007
2. Tunisia 2011
3. Ethiopia April 2018

The fact that only three crisis cabinets, a sixth of all isolated crisis cabinets, can be convincingly tied to demonstrations shows that popular protest is not a common cause of crisis cabinet formation. This supports the finding in figure 1 that high protest – defined by either aggregate protest events, fatalities or geographic dispersion – is not normally correlated with elite volatility within the cabinet.

There are also crisis cabinets which are formed in high protest environments, yet the formation appears to be due to other political factors. Appendix Table 3 breaks down all crisis cabinets by ACLED protest metrics. For example, protest is high in the six months before the crisis cabinets which accompany the Zimbabwe 2017 coup or Goodluck Jonathan’s purge of the Nigerian cabinet in 2010. This raises the questions of what features and strategies define protest-motivated crisis cabinets, and what factors cause protests to be successful in forcing crisis cabinets. These questions are addressed in the

²⁴ Using the ICEWS classification, we consider the following government-protester interactions to be indicative of a ‘protest-motivated crisis cabinet’: engaging in diplomatic cooperation, mediating, and yielding.

next two sections through comparing patterns of cabinet change in the protest-related crisis cabinets to those in the remaining fifteen crisis cabinets, and through a qualitative investigation of the events preceding the three protest-motivated crisis cabinets and how the cabinet changes were specifically tailored to address protester grievance.

5.3.2. Comparing Crisis Cabinets

The crisis cabinets are compared using a number of metrics derived from the ACPED data to measure the degree of change and volatility. These metrics measure the following:

1. Change in personnel in the cabinet;
2. Change in personnel in the ‘inner circle’, the most important posts in the cabinet;²⁵
3. Change in the regional representation of the cabinet and inner circle;
4. Change in how proportionally cabinet and inner circle posts are allocated among a country’s regions;
5. The average length of time served by ministers dropped from the cabinet.²⁶

Table 4 shows the comparison between crisis cabinets formed in response to protest and those formed in response to other crises. The average metrics for all cabinet reshuffles²⁷ are also included for reference. Crisis cabinets, by our definition, have a much higher turnover of personnel than most reshuffles. But crisis cabinets motivated by protest have a higher turnover of personnel in both the cabinet at large and the inner circle than other types of crisis cabinet. The mean the tenure of dismissed ministers is much higher for protest-motivated crisis cabinets than other types of crisis cabinet and the average cabinet reshuffle.

Due to the rarity of protest-motivated crisis cabinets and the low number of observations, it is impossible to draw statistical conclusions. However, this finding does corroborate with the argument that protesters often seek a visible change in the ruling elite. This can include a widespread changing of the guard or the dismissal of key ministers deemed emblematic of the regime’s failures or excesses. The interests of embedded regime elites frequently rely on the maintenance of the status quo and as a result are seen as obstacles to reform or change within the regime (Bratton and Van de Walle 1992; Rivera 2000; Albertus 2012). Therefore, the jettisoning of longstanding elites is an effective strategy

²⁵ The concept of the inner circle is borrowed from Lindemann (2011a) and Francois, Rainer and Trebbi (2015). The inner circle typically consists of posts such as

²⁶ A more detailed explanation of the variables is outlined in Appendix Table 4.

²⁷ Includes all reshuffles, including crisis cabinets and post-electoral reshuffles.

for the regime to signal that it is willing to engage in substantial reform and trade major concessions – in the form of key allies – for peace.

All types of crisis cabinet involve larger shifts in regional representation and disproportion than the average reshuffle, suggesting that crisis cabinets frequently involve a recalibration in the regime's regional power sharing strategy. Feelings of regional disenfranchisement have driven protests, rebellions, coups and internal struggles, all of which are potential triggers for crisis cabinets (Langer 2005; Boggero 2009; Lindemann 2011a; Amin and Takougang 2018). Regional representation declines for crisis cabinets created in response to protest, while the inner circle becomes only marginally more inclusive compared to other types of crisis cabinet. These differences are less dramatic than those seen in ministerial turnover or the tenure of dropped ministers. This could show that issues of representation are less important in protest-motivated crisis cabinets compared to the widespread dismissal of enduring elites. However, further analysis in the next section shows that although overall regional representation does not drastically change, protest hotspots do appear to reap a boost in representation in the crisis cabinet.

The final major difference is in the electoral quality of the regime overseeing the crisis cabinet. Electoral quality is measured by the Varieties of Democracy (VDEM) electoral component index, an ordinal variable (0-1) which measures the “responsiveness and accountability between leaders and citizens through the mechanism of competitive elections” (Pemstein *et al.* 2017). Crisis cabinets in general on average occur in regimes with a lower VDEM score. This finding corroborates with the existing literature on anocracies and autocracies which describes elite rotation as part of the ruler's ‘toolkit’ to ensure political survival (Roessler 2011; Albertus 2012; Woldense 2018). However, crisis cabinets made in response to protest occur in drastically less democratic environments than other crisis cabinets. Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix illustrate how the correlation between ministerial volatility and ACLED protest metrics is stronger in more autocratic or electorally dominant regimes.

Less democratic regimes are generally understood to be more vulnerable to protest. In more democratic or competitive regimes, the legitimacy of government and leader is continually critiqued and protests against government actions are perceived as ‘politics as usual’ (Schedler 2013). In these settings, the political opposition has a greater chance of either gaining the leadership through elections or capturing a significant amount of

power through the legislature and so have an incentive not to support protests calling for radical change (Lust-Okar 2004; Trejo 2014). In contrast, in more autocratic regimes, the public's perception that the regime is invulnerable is a major political asset. This perception is fed through supermajorities in elections, repression or popular mobilisation (Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2013; Arriola and Lyons 2016).²⁸ Accordingly, protest-motivated crisis cabinets occur in settings where the regime dominates parliament, occupying on average over three quarters of the lower house.

Within these settings, public protest can inform would-be dissenters that dissatisfaction with the regime is widespread and could encourage cascading protests against a weakened and delegitimised government (Kricheli, Livne and Magaloni 2011). Major protests in authoritarian regimes provide useful information for rival elites, showing that public loyalty to the government is low, reducing the cost of launching a coup (Magaloni and Wallace 2008; Caspar and Tyson 2014). In short, large-scale protests form a more severe political threat to the regime in autocratic governments, necessitating drastic changes in the elite coalition to mitigate the political threat and satisfy the public's demand for change.

The dramatic changes seen in protest crisis cabinets can be interpreted as a pre-emptive revolution, in which widespread changes to the elite coalition are implemented, albeit under the stewardship of the regime. Out of the three protest crisis cabinets, only in Guinea did the incumbent retain power. In Ethiopia the ruling party remained in charge but under a new leader, while both the incumbent and the ruling party were ousted in Tunisia.

In the following section, the three protest-motivated crisis cabinets are qualitatively investigated to show how the protests caused a fissure within the ruling elite, leading to dramatic change in the ruling coalition; and secondly, how the resulting crisis cabinets were specifically tailored to address the protesters' grievances.

²⁸ For example, during the 2010 Egyptian Parliamentary elections, President Mubarak's National Democratic Party increased its share of seats to occupy 81% of parliament. In Burkina Faso, President Blaise Compaoré won 80% of the presidential vote in 2010 and 55% of the parliamentary vote in 2012. Both Mubarak and Compaoré would be ousted through mass protests within the next few years.

5.4. The politics of crisis cabinets after mass protests

5.4.1. Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, a number of cabinets were created between 2016 and 2018 by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) to address the widespread protests and violence that had occurred since late 2015. The protests were concentrated in the Oromia region in response to the Addis Ababa Master Plan which would expand the boundary of the capital into farms in the surrounding area, leading to fears amongst Oromo farmers that they would lose their land (Fisher and Gebrewahd 2018). The EPRDF's use of repression and coercion during the previous elections in 2005, 2010 and 2015 had demonstrated that the regime could not be removed at the ballot box (Arriola 2013; Arriola and Lyons 2016). The government reacted to the protests with repression, a tactic used during previous post-election protests (*ibid.*). The crackdown led to a widespread loss of life while a state of emergency led to a restriction of rights and civilians being arrested for social media posts.

The government also sought to assuage protester demands by suspending then scrapping the Master Plan in early 2016. In spite of this gesture, other regions harboured grievances against the EPRDF and the perceived Tigray domination of the supposedly multi-ethnic ruling coalition (Fisher and Gebrewahd 2018). As a result, the protests spread to the Amhara region and the Southern Nations and Peoples region. Though these protests were largely rooted in ethno-regionalist grievances, protesters from different regions began to associate their struggles with each other. The regime then engaged in a reshuffle in late 2016 in which the number of Oromo ministers increased, but longstanding party loyalists retained important posts in Defence, Telecommunications and the Deputy Premiership, while Tigrayans continued to dominate the senior military and intelligence sectors (Africa Confidential 2016). These changes were perceived as token or cosmetic by the opposition.

The government crackdown on Oromo and Amhara protesters eventually created a split within the EPRDF regime. The Oromo People's Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) – members of the ruling EPRDF coalition – eventually openly criticised the government in order to retain some connection with their protesting constituents (Fisher and Gebrewahd 2018). Furthermore, the EPRDF's use of repression was condemned by the US through a bipartisan bill in the House of Representatives (Jeffrey 2018). Internal factionalism and external condemnation of the regime eventually led to leader Hailemariam Desalegn resigning

under pressure from his own party as the regime tried to restore its legitimacy with a new power configuration.

Abiy Ahmed, an Oromo, was elected the new leader of the EPRDF at the start of 2018 in an internal election which was marred by open conflict between the coalition's constituent parties (Africa Confidential 2018a). Abiy was presented by the regime as a reformist who could placate the protester's demands for renewal. Abiy announced his inaugural cabinet in April 2018.

Abiy's cabinet showed a high degree of 'renewal', representing the largest turnover in cabinet personnel in a Ethiopian reshuffle outside elections recorded in ACPED (52.5 percent, against a previous average of 7.9 percent). Many of the ministers who were fired were longstanding stalwarts of the now discredited regime. Out of the 21 dismissed ministers, three had been in cabinet since the 1990s and ten had been in cabinet before 2012, when Meles Zenawi was in power. Zenawi was seen as the architect of both Tigray domination within the EPRDF and the 'developmental state' system which prioritised economic development over political consensus and deprived people of their land (Záhořík 2017). It was also during the latter part of the Zenawi era that repression became the method by which the regime held onto power (Arriola and Lyons 2016).

Another major change was a regional rebalancing of the cabinet. The protests had been stirred by largely regionalised grievances against the state, though the complaints of the different groups – primarily Oromo and Amhara – resonated with other groups critical of the regime. Figure 5.2 shows that the crisis cabinet regionally rebalanced the allocation of posts to mollify these two restive regions. The Amhara region saw its representation in the cabinet at large increase from 23 to 30 percent. The crisis cabinet also allocated more than half of the important inner circle posts to the Oromo region. Outside of the more visible executive, Abiy Ahmed also reduced Tigray influence in the security sector which the protesters held responsible for the government atrocities during the crackdown (Africa Confidential 2018b).

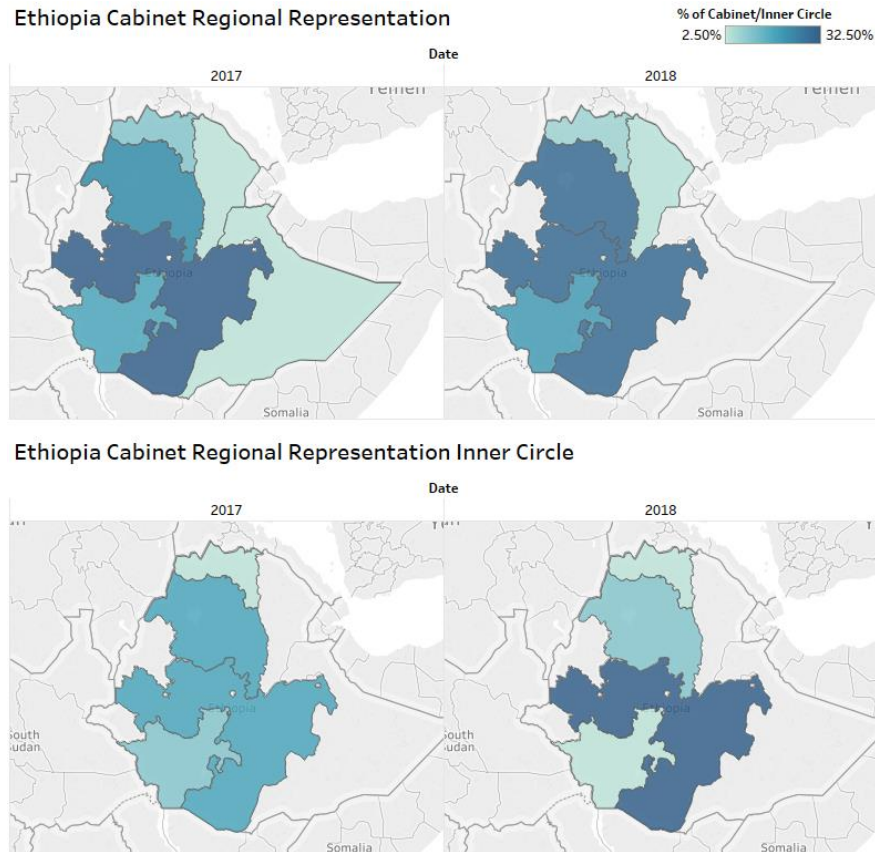


Figure 5.2: Regional Changes in Representation - Ethiopia

In short, the Abiy's crisis cabinet (and the EPRDF's appointment of Abiy as the party's leader) was tailored to address the demands of the protesters. The dismissal of long-term ministers and the appointment of a new leader satisfied the protesters demands for significant change, short of the replacement of the EPRDF regime, from a government that was perceived to be both unwilling to cede power and unwilling to consult its citizens or constituent parties. The rebalancing of the cabinet and inner circle towards more Oromo and Amhara representation addressed the repeated accusations that the EPRDF was merely an extension of its Tigray faction, and did not represent the interests of all Ethiopians.

5.4.2. Guinea

In Guinea a crisis cabinet was appointed after a year of highly organised strikes and protest against the regime lead by a coalition of two large trade unions, the *Union syndicale des travailleurs de Guinée* (USTG) and the *Confédération nationale des travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG). The regime of long-time president Lassana Conte had lost much of its popularity due to decreasing wages and rampant inflation during the 2000s. Since the introduction of elections in the 1990s, the opposition had failed to

present a credible alternative to the Conte regime and most opposition parties boycotted elections. The different opposition parties were overwhelmingly believed to represent particular ethnic or subnational interests (Engeler 2008). In contrast, trade unions retained a national identity due to their role in the independence struggle and managed to encourage passive strikes in early 2006 which were observed by the population at large (McGovern 2007).

Following these strikes, two relatives close to Conte were convicted of embezzling \$22 million from the treasury, prompting Conte to overtly intervene on their behalf and break any pretence of separation of powers within his government. This prompted the USTG and CNTG to launch a strike in January 2007 which lasted nineteen days and was widely supported by the Guinean population. Protests in Conakry were violently repressed by the military and Conte declared a state of emergency which imposed martial law (*ibid.*) Conte tried to placate union demands for new leadership by returning substantial powers to the post of Prime Minister. However, he appointed Eugene Camara, a close ally, as the new Prime Minister. This half-hearted attempt at negotiation led to the unions renewing their protest while the National Assembly – previously a rubber stamp parliament – reasserted its independence by refusing to prolong the state of emergency (Engeler 2008). This signified a break within the regime elite and the increasing political isolation of Conte.

No longer able to rely on the regime elite and facing pressure from the strong Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to resolve the issue, Conte capitulated and selected the unions' preferred candidate, Lansana Kouyate, as the new Prime Minister and a new cabinet with much of the old guard purged. The new cabinet, appointed by Kouyate, was constructed to project the impression of renewal, efficiency and integrity. The number of ministers was cut from 28 in December 2006 to 21 in March 2007.

Nearly all former ministers tied to Conte were dropped, resulting in the highest turnover of personnel in the cabinet and inner circle – 88.9 and 85.7 percent respectively – recorded during Conte's reign. This changing of the guard included a candidate to be Conte's successor, Minister-Secretary General to Presidency, Fodé Bangoura.

The Guinea case differs from Abiy's crisis cabinet in that the dropped ministers did not have particularly long tenures, averaging a tenure of just over two years. This is because Conte pursued a personalist strategy of repeatedly rotating elites to prevent independent

bases of power from forming (Roessler 2011; Kroeger 2018).²⁹ Nevertheless, the dismissal of his possible successor showed that Conte was willing to replace core members of his elite circle to placate the protesters.

The main complaints against Conte's regime were corruption and ineffectiveness at rectifying the country's economic problems, as opposed to ethnic or regional complaints. Nevertheless, Kouyate's cabinet expanded regional representation within the inner circle (*see* Figure 5.3). The opening of the political space was also demonstrated by the political backgrounds of the new ministers. The majority were technocratic professionals who were unconnected to Conte's clique, the ruling party or the opposition. These technocrats occupied the key ministries of Finance and Justice (Wikileaks 2007). Ministers associated with the unions secured the positions of Financial Oversight and Transparency, Labour and Administrative Reform, and Education. However, the military and security apparatus managed to gain the Defence and Internal Security portfolios.

²⁹ In the previous ten years Conte had enacted eight large-scale reshuffles outside of the post-election period.

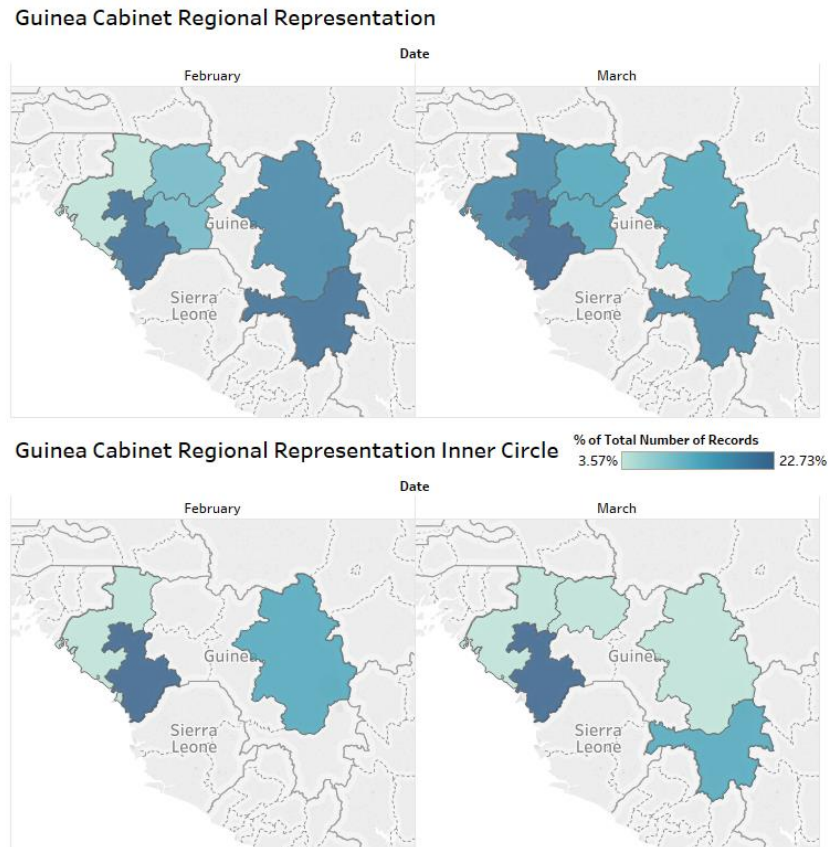


Figure 5.3: Regional Changes in Representation - Guinea

All these factors meant Kouyate’s cabinet was interpreted as a “victory for the people over a totally discredited power – a real revolution” (Engeler 2008). Kouyate’s crisis cabinet was designed to address the grievances that had driven the protest. The turnover of most of the cabinet including Conte’s potential successor signalled government would no longer be stuffed by loyalists. The appointment of technocrats and union officials demonstrated that the new government would be staffed by those who could fix Guinea’s economic issues and effectively represent the populace. Finally, by ceding a large amount of power Conte had held onto the presidency and the ability to get the regime back under his control.³⁰

³⁰ Just over a year later Conte fired Kouyate and packed the cabinet once again with loyalists. Kouyate’s new government had failed to resolve the cost of living issue while soldiers and police rioted over salary arrears (Engeler 2008). Furthermore, Kouyate had launched an independent audit into embezzlement by the president’s relatives (Africa Confidential 2008). Conte and the old guard reacted as soon as Kouyate’s support among the general public and unions was waning, enabling Conte to retain control until his death at the end of 2008.

5.4.3. Tunisia

In Tunisia, the appointment of two crisis cabinets in January and February 2011 was a direct consequence of the protests that spread across the country starting in December 2010, when a street vendor set himself on fire in the city of Sidi Bouzid. Demonstrations were held in several cities, quickly coalescing into a large protest movement against Tunisia's long-time ruler Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The response to the sweeping unrest consisted of a mix of repression and accommodation.

While security forces were responsible for killing dozens of people between December 20 and January 14, Ben Ali also attempted to mollify the demonstrators by firing ministers and local governors in late December, announcing job creation plans and pledging to hold legislative elections and step down in 2014. The reshuffle announced on December 29 involved changes to minor cabinet portfolios, including the communications, trade, religious affairs and youth ministers, which ultimately failed to placate the protesters who continued to mobilise well beyond the autocrat's departure on January 14.

Furthermore, the protests caused a splinter in the regime. Both the Minister of the Interior and Chief of Presidential Security chose to mutiny against the regime, and some security service units mobilised to arrest members of the Ben Ali family (Holmes and Koehler 2018). Ben Ali subsequently fled to Jeddah. Three days after Ben Ali left the country, the long-time technocratic Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi announced a crisis cabinet composed of members of the dissolved ruling party, technocrats and opposition figures, many of whom resigned before taking office to express their unhappiness about the continued presence of associates of the former regime. Although only five ministers from the previous regime were reappointed and the most unpopular figures had left the government, demonstrations continued unabated for over a month with protesters denouncing the continuity of the interim government and demanding more radical changes. On February 27, Ghannouchi announced his resignation, leaving the post of Prime Minister to Béji Caid Essebsi, a former ambassador and minister in the 1970s who formed a caretaker government consisting entirely of non-party ministers (Ben Achour 2016).

In the months between December 2010 and March 2011, widespread, persistent unrest pressured Tunisian elites to make significant changes to the government and to increase its overall representation. By March 2011, all ministers associated with the Ben Ali

regime had been purged from the cabinet, representing an unprecedented level of turnover. Previous reshuffles outside of elections resulted in an average 8.5 percent change in personnel. The first attempt at a crisis cabinet in January 2011 resulted in the dismissal of three quarters of the cabinet, and the subsequent reshuffle in February 2011 resulted in half of the new cabinet being dropped. Some of Ben Ali's closest associates, including members of his extended family, the head of presidential security Ali Seriati and the former Interior Minister Rafik Belhaj Kacem, were arrested and faced judicial charges for their role in the crackdown of the uprisings.

The continuation of the protests following Ben Ali's departure contributed significantly to the ongoing changes in the cabinet (Boubekeur 2016). Despite Prime Minister Ghannouchi expelling Ben Ali's loyalists from the executive's inner circle and his own technocratic profile, he was himself still tainted by his association with the former regime, and demonstrators accused him of retaining some of Ben Ali's ministers to water down the outcomes of the revolution. As a result, popular pressure mounted between January and February 2011 to also expel ministers that, despite their alleged technocratic profile, had served under Ben Ali, in some cases for more than a decade. The role played by the protests during the interim period therefore explains the high rate of observed ministerial turnover, as well as the relatively long average tenure – five and a half years – of the dismissed ministers.

At the same time, the protests also contributed towards modifying the cabinet's geographical representation. Under Ben Ali, ministerial positions were disproportionately distributed among elites from Tunisia's coastal areas, and particularly from his home region of Sousse (Camau and Geisser 2003). In December 2010, the Prime Minister, as well as the Defence, Foreign Affairs and Agriculture ministers, were all from Ben Ali's region. By contrast Tunisia's inner regions, which had been a hotbed of protest, had often been marginalised, sparking highly contentious popular grievances. Among these regions, Zaghouan and Kebili never enjoyed ministerial representation, while Le Kef, Sidi Bouzid and Tataouine had only one minister each in twenty-three years (*see* Figure 5.4).

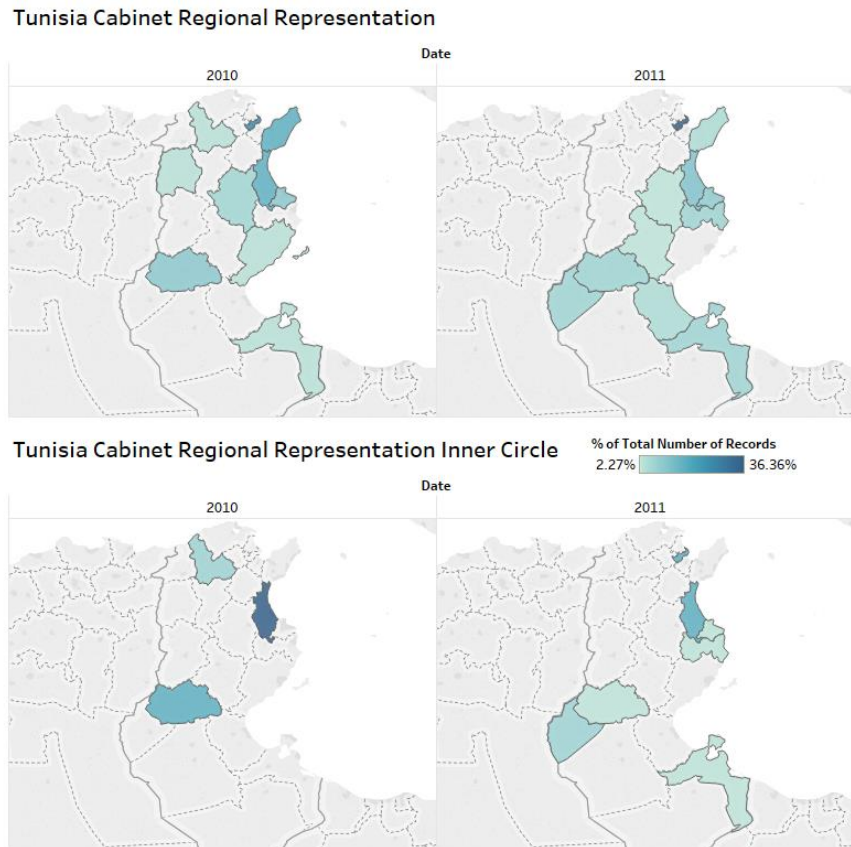


Figure 5.4: Regional Changes in Representation - Tunisia

It is therefore not surprising that one of the main goals of the protest movement was to ensure more equitable political representation. As shown in Figure 5.4, the cabinet appointed by Essebsi in March 2011 was more geographically diverse, in spite of the number of available ministerial posts being reduced by one third and the technocratic profile of many of its ministers, who typically came from the capital and the largest urban centres. The government's inner circle, comprising ministers appointed to the most influential portfolios, also became more representative as a consequence of the expulsion of Ben Ali's Sousse clan which had traditionally monopolised these positions.

In sum, the appointment of two consecutive crisis cabinets in Tunisia was a consequence of the protest movement that led to Ben Ali's ousting in January 2011. The pressure exerted by popular protests pressured transitional elites into appointing more inclusive governments and breaking with the authoritarian past by dismissing ministers that had been part of Ben Ali's cabinets. At the same time, hostility to Ben Ali's former prime minister heading the transitional government led several opposition figures to resign from Mohammed Ghannouchi's government in January 2011, and to cease any collaboration

with former regime members, who were eventually banned from running in the subsequent elections.

In Tunisia, as in the other two cases, the protests caused a split in the ruling elite when members of the regime recognised that peace was unattainable while Ben Ali remained in power and that the old regime was unsustainable. In Ethiopia, the protests and the violence of the government crackdown forced internal elites to confront the regime on the behalf of their constituents while providing disgruntled factions in the regime with the opportunity to become dominant. In Guinea, the protests enabled a previously pliant legislature to start imposing its authority on the leader and demanding that the regime negotiate with external elites to end the violence.

5.5. Conclusion

This study illustrates how regimes react to existential challenges through the appointment of crisis cabinets, using the example of mass protest. The cabinet constitutes one of the main arenas where democratic and non-democratic leaders renegotiate the bargains that sustain their regimes, and are therefore vitally important during times of political stress. It investigated how non-routine mass cabinet reshuffles enable regimes to increase their chances of survival during periods of acute crisis.

This study adds to the literature on political survival strategies through focussing on how actions external to the regime elite can drive change. Much of the current literature on leadership transitions and elite volatility emphasises the role of elite decisions and internal rivalries (Lindemann 2011a; Roessler 2011; Albertus 2012; Albertus and Menaldo 2012). Yet how external events, such episodes of popular unrest, inform elite decisions is rarely studied.

Protests have the potential to exacerbate internal splits within the government, weakening the perceived strength of the leader and the regime. External elites can then pressure a fractured regime for concessions, as shown in Guinea. Factions within the regime can capitalise on public discontent to improve their position in the political hierarchy, as shown in Ethiopia. Mass protest can convince regime elites that the existing order is destined to fall and can encourage insiders to steward a managed transition, as shown in Tunisia. This study demonstrates that, although crisis cabinets in Africa are rarely made in response to protests, the occasions where protests do result in substantial cabinet

turnover is when the unrest changes the political calculations and strategies of elites both inside and outside of the regime.

Existing literature on protests and government response has typically focused on the timing and the geography of repression, but has often failed to account for strategies of regime accommodation or co-option. When accommodation has been examined, the lack of data on political appointments means that researchers have had to use regime/opposition rhetoric to approximate for concessions (Carey 2006; Bhasin and Gandhi 2013). Protest-motivated crisis cabinets, albeit rare, are influential and display high rates of ministerial turnover, the removal of long-tenure ministers and increased representation of regional centres of unrest. These substantial changes represent a dramatic shift in the distribution of political power. This in turn signals to the protesters that the regime is changing the status quo and is willing to engage in significant reform.

Because of the limited sample used for this study, this analysis cannot infer causal claims about the origin of cabinet volatility in Africa, but should be best viewed as a theory-building exercise to generate hypotheses. More stringent statistical studies covering a wider sample of country-year cases could test the theories outlined in this paper to better assess the impact of protests on cabinet composition in the medium and long term.

6. Rebooting the System. Regime cycles, elites, and succession in African States

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6.1. Introduction

Authoritarian regimes continue to be a reality in many African states. While regimes have incorporated a variety of democratic institutions to regulate political competition and succession, autocratic practices of power are widespread across the continent. Several leaders have survived for decades by limiting any successful opposition, curtailing dissent, extending presidential term limits, foiling attempts to curtail central power through constitutions, and recycling loyal elites in different roles. Hence, rather than assuming that African states represent an 'institutionless' space (Cheeseman 2018), regimes are creating and adapting institutions as a vehicle for elite management and to perpetuate power. The result is a paradox: African states have institutionalised, yet a perpetual cycle of regime crisis, factionalisation and senior elite power appear to drive internal authority and stability.

The 'modern authoritarian' literature argues that leaders stay in power because they distribute power and authority to senior elites and engage in successful strategies to repel threats (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003; Haber 2006; Magaloni 2006; Svolik 2009). However, the integration of elites requires careful management and containment (Quinlivan 1999), as authoritarian leaders face their most substantial threats from within their inner circle than those from rebels, opposition leaders or popular masses. Elite management under autocracies is a rich area of investigation, yet conclusions often suggest that survival begets survival, until it does not. What is missing is an explanation of internal regime shifts that acknowledges the cyclical nature of elite management and change.

In contemporary Africa, extra-constitutional regime changes occurs less frequently through traditional coups orchestrated by senior army officers establishing military juntas (Albrecht 2015), and more often by removing established autocrats through 'constitutional coups' in an effort to appease domestic and international publics alike (Manirakiza 2016). Examples of such removals include the recent cases of Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe where recalcitrant leaders faced intense pressure to leave power. In these

cases, regime change did not follow the patterns of traditional coups, nor were the result of protest movements demanding the ouster of the leader. Despite being heralded as successful revolutions, no revolution in government has occurred and there is a striking continuity of people, systems, policies, and political relationships. Incumbents were ousted by internal regime apparatchiks, who previously were supporters of the former leaders. In the post-removal environment, this has resulted in select elites entrenching their own authority and ‘restarting’ processes of elite accommodation and consolidation. We argue that repeating the same process of centralizing authority will lead to further factionalisation and eventual crisis. Indeed, far from constituting a pre-determined itinerary towards an ultimate outcome, political transitions often include contradictory elements of change and continuity: in the words of Fred Halliday, “there are two predictable, and nearly always mistaken, responses to any great international upheaval: one is to say that everything has changed; the other is to say that nothing has changed” (Halliday 2002: 235).

In this article, we argue that regime changes in African autocracies are a part of a regime cycle driven by a process of elite contestation and consolidation, and stages are defined by expectations as to when leaders may leave office. We use this framing to review the recent regime changes in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe. In all cases, we find that the crisis moment that removed the leaders was spurred by processes of factionalisation that preceded the rupture. In turn, these were triggered by the leader’s political relationships that created fault lines for senior regime elites to see opportunities to remove a recalcitrant incumbent.

We argue that the lessons and similarities in these recent removals offer a far more coherent narrative for how regimes change in modern African states. The first is that inner circles and the factions that arise therein are threats to leaders, but these same select elites are the building blocks of future governments (Luttwak 1969; Haber 2006; Geddes, Frantz and Wright 2018). These elites hold onto power during periods of change, rather than incorporating the public or the country’s political opposition in any meaningful way. Other elites are ‘reorganised’ into a hierarchy that reflects an initial process of accommodation to gain legitimacy. This is followed by a process of narrowing, as consolidation and centralisation processes with a smaller cadre of senior elites remove senior and junior regime elites. The competition that emerges within the narrow elite

cabal can limit any possibility of future development or democratic transitions: claims of ‘managed democracies’ maintain a veneer of legitimacy and implied ‘temporary’ nature of oversight by security forces. This process also creates factionalisation across the remaining elites, who build networks to protect themselves from future purges. In turn, these factions look for opportunities to replace the leader, which reignites the cycle beginning with crisis.

Our analysis suggests that this guide to authoritarian politics may serve as a roadmap for what is likely to occur in other African states dealing with upcoming leadership succession. What do the elites of these states see when they observe the cases of Zimbabwe, Sudan and Algeria? What clear incentives and disincentives have become evident? Unless succession is managed carefully by leaders, and the successor can quickly centralise and consolidate power – such as in Angola and Ethiopia – disorder and contestation at the senior level will continue and metastasise into further elite instability and violence throughout the state.

6.2. Explanations of regime change in Africa

Academic literature often tends to explain drastic political changes, like a leader’s removal, by focusing on the characteristics and impacts of critical junctures. An example of such work is ‘coup politics’, which explores the conditions and immediate logistics that lead to the forceful removal of a leader. The existing scholarship tells us that coups are relatively rare, and especially so amongst established leaders (Svolik 2009; Singh 2014; Albrecht 2015). Yet modern regime changes are increasingly deviating from typical coup dynamics (Souaré 2014) and displaying irregular patterns (Geddes, Frantz and Wright 2018). Additionally, the form of irregular replacement and power seizures from within are underspecified. If coups no longer follow the patterns of a standard military takeover, and often do not remove the regime but simply the leader, what facets of coup literature remain as useful to explain modern regime change? Further, outside of these variations in form, the literature on coups emphasizes the minutia of coup strategy, but is silent on what happens in its aftermath. This implies that the ‘moment’ is somehow suspended within the political environment, changing everything but with little reference to the regime politics that created its conditions.

Another body of literature highlights the revolutionary function of social movements, and their transformative impact on regime change (Carothers and Young 2015; Yarwood

2016). This thesis is summarised by Hollyer, Rosendorff and Vreeland, who argue that “the collapse of autocratic regimes is often brought about through large scale mobilization and collective action by elements of the populace” (2014: 764). In elevating the role of protest movements as catalysts of political change, these arguments resonated widely in relation to the 2011 Arab uprisings, where mass protests are said to have caused the collapse of regimes across the region (Ishay 2013; Khatib 2013; Asseburg and Wimmen 2016). These cases, however, do not seem to suggest that the organised opposition and the public have had more relevance in bringing about a leader’s removal and determining the political trajectory of a state, than senior domestic elites (Barany 2011; Albrecht and Ohl 2016). Despite this reality, the role of protestors and civil society has been pushed as the key factor of change in several cases across the African continent, including both Sudan and Algeria (Kushkush 2019; Thomas 2019; Welborn 2019). Again, the presence and magnitude of protests is neither a necessary nor a sufficient factor in explaining the likelihood of regime change. If it did, we would expect far more regimes to integrate civil society into new dispensations, and significant change in the composition, policies and politics of subsequent governments who submit to popular will. There is little evidence to believe this has happened either in the Arab spring cases, or in the recent transitions across Africa.

A third debate arises from the ‘transitology literature’, which interprets regime change as evidence of a trajectory towards or away from supposedly democratic or autocratic models (Huntington 1991; Geddes 1999; Dresden and Howard 2016; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Inspired by the political transformations ushered in after the end of the Cold War, this body of work explains regime changes as either a transition towards Western-style democracies, or an inverse backsliding into authoritarianism. These arguments presume a teleological trajectory from one regime to another, interpreting political changes in either direction as an oscillation towards ideal-typical regimes. In contrast, failure to consolidate new regime practices is evidence of continuity. Often coupled with an emphasis on democratic practices and democratisation (Hall and Ambrosio 2017), the specifics of regime change are dismissed in favour of the number and quality of political junctures such as elections, without reference to the composition, politics and perseverance of elites and their manipulation of institutions (Magaloni 2006; Blaydes 2010).

While they single out key political processes, these frameworks fail to situate the occurrence of regime changes, public protests and regime transitions within a state's political environment. These approaches instead explain change by "chasing events, rather than explaining or anticipating them" and subsequently categorise these events as ideal-type examples or deviations (Hale 2005: 134). This has led to misinterpretation of important dynamics within regimes that precede and follow regime crises. In particular, we suggest that the changes occurring after a leader's removal are slight but significant: far from constituting a revolution of the existing political order, the alterations in elite jostling, leadership, senior composition and agendas are fundamental to understanding the future actions and stability of subsequent governments.

During recent removals across Africa, neither the 'coup', 'protest' or 'transition' frameworks explain the activity that preceded and followed the leader's removal. In Zimbabwe and Sudan, Mugabe and Bashir, respectively, reshuffled frequently in the months before their removal. They sought to shore up their political leverage by securing the loyalty of subnational elites, rather than appealing to public support. They both vacillated between emphasizing inclusivity and loyalty to placate the elite class, not the public. In Algeria and Sudan, robust public protests did not result in producing democratic breakthroughs, nor in 'authoritarian backsliding' (Dresden and Howard 2016; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019). Sudan, in particular, integrated civil society elites but significant political power remains in the hands of former loyalists of Bashir.

But these removals did have several common elements, including the structure, incentives and behaviour of the authoritarian elite that spurred these regime changes. The most senior elites who conspired to overtake leaders established a 'dictatorship by committee' before moving onto stages of purging and brutal selection. The results across all three states are volatile transitions oscillating between the entrenchment of new leaders and senior elites, the degradation of governance institutions, and limited openings of the political space.

We argue that insights from the political survival literature offer a more coherent narrative for explaining change as a component of the overall political cycle. In particular, a common misperception of African polities is that a single leader – a 'big man' – orchestrates a hierarchical patronage network of elites who exploit, suppress and extract from citizens, while not subject to any external constraints (Tullock 1987; Kuran 1991;

Wintrobe 1998). When these leaders are replaced, so too are their ‘networks’. However, modern African autocracies have institutions that restrain the ‘tyrannical’ tendencies of any single ruler, and regulate competition among regime insiders more so than from external and opposition elements (Levitsky and Way 2002, 2010; Boix and Svolik 2007; Heydemann 2007).

In such systems, the power structure requires constant strategic manipulation and management because the survival of the leader is dependent on the willingness of those around them – his ‘rival allies’ – to support continued rule. In other words, regime elites are the foundation of the incumbent’s political survival (Raleigh and Dowd 2018). In turn, leaders privilege two practices: spreading power around to keep it, and co-opting enough of the ‘right’ elites to sustain a mutually beneficial commitment (Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* 2003). This framing emphasizes that power is transactional, and that the relationships between the leader and elites determines the level and distribution of power to be shared (Van De Walle 2007; Bove and Rivera 2015). Yet the practices of power require great dexterity and political flexibility by leaders and senior elites: a leader’s elite management strategies to arrange association, loyalty, and alliances are variously illustrated in the work of several scholars as ‘political bargaining’, ‘political calculus’, ‘ethnic balancing’, and ‘political marketplace’ (Benson and Kugler 1998; Goldsmith 2001; Arriola 2009; Lindemann 2011b; Svolik 2012; De Waal 2015). Each detail how leaders accommodate powerful elites and communities, who in turn leverage their local influence for rewards and recognition by regimes. Failure to consolidate, centralisation and accommodate power between powerful elites will create opportunities to remove a leader (Geddes, Frantz and Wright 2018).

Rather than debating whether a revolution or no change is the result of a regime crisis, we argue that this moment reboots a cycle of elite dissension and consolidation. It creates a reconfiguration of power structures in which members of the former regime assume new roles, and integrate new elites to build legitimacy. Following the fall of a long-term leader, remaining senior elites then cooperate, consolidate, and curtail each other’s power. The result is a volatile, unstable, and autocratic structure which creates incentives for future factionalisation.

6.3. The authoritarian regime cycle

In following Hale's work on post-communist regimes (2005), we aim to extend regime cycle research to African states by introducing a logic of elite collective action to explain political change in African authoritarian states. This work is based on the consideration that political changes display cyclical qualities, rather than progressive or regressive trajectories, and that variations in the relations among elites dictate regime change (Higley and Burton 1989). Within a regime cycle, the expectation as to when a leader may leave office shapes elites' strategies of political survival. This expectation underlies the politics and determines the form and magnitude of contestation between leaders and elites that emerge in each stage of the regime cycle.

By introducing the notion of regime cycles, we suggest that critical junctures in a regime's lifetime are unlikely to determine the collapse of the existing political order, or a dogged persistence of the same political actors. Rather, regime crises produce a controlled reconfiguration of existing power structures that injects new legitimacy into the system through the disposal of the old leader, the co-option of elites, and a limited opening of the political space (Gerschewski 2013). These processes are, however, a prelude to the future centralisation of political power in the hands of a narrow ruling coalition.

We identify four stages in the political cycle of authoritarian regimes that culminates with the removal of the leader (*see* table 6.1). These include factionalisation, crisis, accommodation, and consolidation. Factionalisation and crisis are signs of dissension and breakdown; accommodation and consolidation are episodes when leaders engage in strategies to build elite coalitions. These dynamics do not necessarily follow a chronological order, but rather reflect the logical sequence of elite collective action. Across all dynamics, there is minimal, if any, attempt to meaningfully integrate the opposition or the public.

Factionalisation. The gravest threat facing dictators is a potential coup or usurpation by high-level individuals organised in factions (Wintrobe 1998; Egorov and Sonin 2011; Svoboda 2012; McMahon and Slantchev 2015). The central driver during a factionalisation phase is the assumption that a leader's power is overly centralised and suppressing the authority of surrounding senior elites. Leaders are dependent on their 'elite court' to assure their continued survival. Therefore, ruptures in the senior regime elite coalition suggest significant problems for a leader's continued power. In pushing collaboration

among factions, elites seek to renegotiate and bargain their combined access to power through the threat of their own collective action.

Stage	Elite expectations	Logic	Mechanism	Composition of senior ranks
Factionalisation	Maximisation of power	Differentiation	Tactical alliances	Rival allies
Crisis	Leader's removal	Replacement	Takeover of power	Dictatorship by committee
Accommodation	Co-option	Integration	Distribution of rents / positions	Broad inclusion
Consolidation	Controlling internal competition	Centralisation	Purge	Leader-dominated coalition

Table 6.1: Dynamics of Authoritarianism

In turn, leaders limit alternative power centres in ‘rival ally networks’ and manage risks through purging detractors, controlling political appointments, selectively sanctioning, abusing, forcing retirements, imprisoning and exiling elites associated with the potentially rival factions (Cheeseman and Klaas 2018). Likewise, leaders can increase the coordination costs among the potential factions through institutional duplication and counterbalancing (Diaz-Cayeros and Magaloni 2001; Lust-Okar 2004; Haber 2006; Magaloni 2006; Myerson 2008, 2015). Because of these tactics, senior elites prepare to seize opportunities to replace the leader. Some common opportunities include economic downturns endangering distributive rents, a leader’s illness requiring an impromptu succession, geopolitical tensions, and increasing domestic unrest following an escalation in violence or the emergence of mass protest movements (Tilly and Tarrow 2007).

Crisis. Regime crises can occur at any point after, when the factional band of rival allies seizes power ousting the leader. Once initiated, removals can follow patterns that are described in the classic texts from Luttwak (1969), and in more updated interpretations from Geddes, Frantz and Wright (2018), but may also result in forced resignations, constitutional coups, or in power-sharing agreements depriving the deposed leaders of any executive power. However, a commonality across modern removals is that a ‘seizing

group³¹ locates and controls the central nodes of power, disenfranchises or disassembles those who could possibly organise against the group, and quickly work to reassure other elites and assuage the mobilised publics in the event of mass uprisings (Haber 2006).

While the duration of this interim phase can vary, the elite bloc who conspired to remove a leader share power in an interim ‘dictatorship by committee’. Once the leader is deposed, uncertainty surrounds the regime’s political trajectory, as well as the intentions of the new incumbents, but this small group consisting of key regime figures typically seeks to ally with military and security elites at this stage in order to make decisions about subsequent governance structures.

Accommodation. In the accommodation stage, many of the former regime’s positions are vacated, and elites begin competing for offices. The cardinal rule of modern authoritarianism is that, to keep power, you must spread it around (Haber 2006). This requires building elite coalitions, which aims to co-opt the most authoritative and coordinated group of highly networked individuals in positions of power, with the ultimate goal of selecting a public leader. The focus at this stage is to incorporate subnational elites, expand the beneficiaries of the new regime, and stabilise the coalition. Aspiring to increase its legitimacy and reach, the resulting coalition is therefore broadly inclusive and comprises a variety of elites. This elite pool includes a number of recycled figures such as loyalists who turned, competitors who waited, strongmen who conquered, and technocrats who abstained. However, the ultimate power to appoint, authority, rents and monopoly of force remain centralised amongst the very senior elites.

Following the initial phases of accommodation, the new powerholders begin to unveil their political survival strategies. Common measures are to restrict the distribution of political rents, remunerate their own loyalists, counterbalance security institutions to secure their rule and access to armed forces, engage in mock trials, often around ‘rooting out corruption’ campaigns targeting loyalists of the former regime, and purge disposable elites. Those who remain may become the new ‘rival allies’ within the coalition: these are typically elites whose independent leverage is important to the legitimacy and reach of the government, but whose authority and strength may compete with the leader. The

³¹ Several terms are used to describe the group that initiates a coup, including ‘seizing organization’ (Geddes, Frantz and Wright 2018); ‘launching organization’ (Haber 2006); plotters (Wig and Rød 2016). Here we use the term seizing group to denote the known participants at the senior regime level.

overall result is an inconsistent transition, entrenched elites, and the continued manipulation and degradation of governing and economic institutions as new leaders and senior elites extract in order to build their power bases (Geddes, Frantz and Wright 2018).

Consolidation. Processes of consolidation occur when leaders seek to control competition within their coalition (Bueno de Mesquita *et al.* 2003). The ultimate objective of this stage is to create an “unbalanced equilibrium” between a dominant leader and his coalition of rival allies. The power of leaders rests in their ability to coalesce a team of elites that includes loyalists and rivals who individually cannot overthrow them, or who are unlikely to cooperate due to mutual mistrust and difficulty. In this stage, a gradual realignment of power occurs within the elites, with leaders consolidating their grip on the regime and new groups struggle to emerge as potential spoilers or challengers (Frantz and Stein 2017). The elites continue to learn about each other's leverage, actively build their own networks and patronage opportunities.

Leaders often have multiple strategies that limit the degree to which senior elites can coordinate (Powell 2012). Among these is to engage in transactional loyalty in packing cabinets, governorships, military positions and intelligence positions: while this may decrease the degree of competence in positions, as loyalty is bought but merit may not be a priority, it also acts as a survival mechanism (Sudduth 2017). Loyalists are unlikely to be key allies of conspirators and therefore can work towards mitigating coup actions in the early period. As a result, this is the height of a leader's independent power and the lowest risk of his being removed.

We apply the observations of a cyclical process to three recent cases in Africa where long serving leaders were removed from office. Each regime is at alternatives stages of the cycle outlined above, but display multiple reference points to the practices relating to factionalisation, crisis, accommodation and consolidation.

6.4. Reassembling the regime: The Army's power grab in Algeria

In February 2019, the official announcement that the incapacitated president Abdelaziz Bouteflika would seek re-election for a fifth presidential term sparked a wave of unprecedented protests in contemporary Algeria. As the demonstrations gained momentum drawing thousands of Algerians across the country to demand Bouteflika to step down, the regime's stakeholders – a collection of ageing civilian and military elites

that have ruled the country since the end of the civil war – faced increasing internal and external pressure to abandon Bouteflika. As minor concessions failed to quell the mounting discontent,³² the army's secretive chief of staff Ahmed Gaïd Salah publicly manifested his support for the protests, just a few weeks before calling for Bouteflika's formal impeachment. Faced with increasing pressure from the elites and the public, Bouteflika was forced to resign on April 9, succeeded by the president of the Algerian Parliament's upper house Abdelkader Bensalah.

The Algerian protests undoubtedly contributed to break a political deadlock and force the country's entrenched political elite into concessions. Described as a bulwark of stability and an emblem of exceptionalism and apathy in a region that has experienced sustained turmoil since 2011, Algeria has rarely seen meaningful political transformations over the past twenty years (Bouandel 2016). Increasing mobilisation across the Algerian public over the past years and the fading memory of the civil war, which had long prevented direct challenges to the regime, were signs that the country was ripe for change (Wolf 2019). The protests precipitated the crisis of the regime, which already faced a deteriorating economic situation and a long-time political stasis.

As the crisis kicked in, Algeria's army positioned itself as the institution most capable of orchestrating and stalling change. Indeed, the army has stamped all presidents since independence, and until today continues to be the main power broker despite a less visible role played in the last two decades. Upon achieving independence in 1962, Algerian armed forces turned from National Liberation Army into its current denomination of National Popular Army. The country's leading military institution, invested with revolutionary legitimacy, cultivated a symbiotic relationship with the Algerian state, receiving extensive constitutional prerogatives (Calchi Novati and Roggero 2018: 197).³³ Despite a constitutional amendment in 1989 that limited its participation in the political process, the army's societal and economic role had ballooned, growing increasingly bigger during the civil war years (Joffé 2002).

³² Two weeks after the protests began, Bouteflika fired his unpopular campaign director and former prime minister Abdelmalek Sellal, and replaced him with the technocrat minister of Transport Abdelghani Zaalane. The following week, Bouteflika announced he would not seek a new term but did not resign.

³³ According to Article 8, the army would protect national territorial integrity and contribute to the country's political, economic and social activities. This mandate was amended after President Chadli Bendjedid passed the new constitution in 1989, limiting the army's role to protector of territorial integrity.

Accommodation followed the initial crisis stage. Since the onset of the demonstrations, the army continued to publicly side with the protest movement by reinstating its nature of people's army and guardian of the nation while attempting to assuage and manipulate popular demands for political change. Initial resistance to the uprisings, largely motivated by General Gaïd Salah's support for Bouteflika's candidacy, rapidly faded as opposition to the outgoing president risked dragging the army into the political dispute. Later, when plans for a managed transition faced the protesters' hostility due to the proximity of the proposed candidates to the regime, the army's Chief of Staff increasingly stepped up his public appearances voicing support for the demonstrations and ultimately calling for Bouteflika to resign (Cristiani 2019). What motivated the army's decisions between March and April is difficult to say with certainty, as its decision-making structures are notoriously shrouded in secrecy. However, this behaviour seems to be a reaction to an emerging scenario in which the army faced the risk of either losing its role of custodian of national stability, thus plunging the country into heightened conflict, or of being outmanoeuvred by its 'rival allies', chiefly Bouteflika and his most proximate clan consisting of family kin and business elites.

These dynamics highlight how the pact that has propped up Algeria's regime since 1999 had become increasingly unsustainable, igniting a tug-of-war between its constituent elite networks. Typically described as cliques in constant competition between each other over patronage and power, these networks included the army, the security services, and Bouteflika's civilian component, along with a variety of party, civil society and bureaucratic elites that have contributed to sustain and legitimise the regime across the wider society (Roberts 2003; Werenfels, in Perthes 2004). In recent years, Bouteflika – and as his health deteriorated, his increasingly influential clan – attempted to centralise power to the detriment of the military and security elites striking tactical alliances for contingent political gains (Calchi Novati and Roggero 2018). These switching alliances, which previously brought the presidency to tactically side with either the security services or the military depending on the circumstances, succeeded in removing hostile elites such as the former army leader Mohamed Lamari in 2004 and intelligence chief Mohamed Mediène 'Toufik', forced into early retirement in 2015, and in dissolving the country's powerful intelligence agency, the *Département du renseignement et de la sécurité*, DRS (Fabiani 2015; Arezki 2016). In the months preceding Bouteflika's ouster, several military officials were arrested on charges of corruption and abuse of power, allegedly in

an effort to purge the senior levels of the army more hostile to Bouteflika's fifth mandate (Ghemrassah 2018).

While the president's past manoeuvres managed to partially shift power from the military and security apparatus and to bring them under closer civilian supervision, these same tactics failed in March 2019. As calls for Bouteflika to step down increased, the president's clan attempted to defuse the crisis seeking support from the security services for a technocratic government that would sideline the army (Alilat 2019; Poletti 2019). The subsequent resignation of Bouteflika and the concomitant downfall of his clan – including Bouteflika's brother Saïd and some of his prominent political and business associates – highlight how this faction was critically dependent on the army's ultimate support, and the latter's pivotal, continued role in Algeria's power politics.

With Bouteflika eventually ousted, the conspirators' goal consisted of identifying and co-opting new allies from across the political landscape, entering the consolidation stage. Despite his decisive contribution to the removal of the ailing president, the army has not opted for a clear-cut, "risky power grab" (Africa Intelligence 2019a). The army has instead orchestrated the selection of the post-coup regime elites supporting an extensive anti-corruption campaign to liquidate political and business elites closely associated with the former president and his clan, while recycling technocrats and politicians who had mildly opposed Bouteflika into a new, army-dominated political settlement (Ghanem 2019). To do this, the army has used formal institutions, namely the judiciary and the executive, which fell under its virtual control. Dozens of Algeria's most prominent politicians and businessmen – including the former prime ministers Abdelmalek Sellal, Youcef Yousfi and Ahmed Ouyahia, Saïd Bouteflika and former intelligence chiefs Toufik and Athmane Tartag, among others – were arrested in the weeks following Bouteflika's departure, facing years-long corruption charges (Akef 2019). Their arrests helped shore up the army's popularity among the public but were also instrumental in purging potentially dangerous opponents.

At the same time, the army has orchestrated the centralisation stage through the co-option of elites believed not to constitute a threat to its hegemonic position. State bureaucrats like Abdelkader Bensalah – former President of the Constitutional Court – and Nourredine Bedoui – former governor and Minister of Interior – were appointed as interim President and Prime Minister, while a new interim cabinet largely consisting of

non-party ministers was sworn in few days after Bouteflika's resignation. Jockeying around the presidential elections, initially scheduled for April 2019, followed shortly, with a new vote first announced for July and then called off for the lack of credible candidates. After further pressure from the army, presidential elections were eventually called for December 12 (Agence France Presse 2019). The screening process retained five presidential candidates, four of which served in Bouteflika's cabinets, although none of them was part of his inner circle.³⁴ These elite reshuffles reveal that the army did not intend to dismantle the political settlement that has ruled Algeria since the end of the civil war. It rather sought to reassemble the regime through the removal of the most proximate threats for its stability – i.e. the Bouteflika clique, unpopular among the public and perceived as an increasingly volatile rival in the ruling coalition – and the shaping of a political class largely consisting of individuals and groups who lack a strong support base and the resources to challenge the army's dominant position through divide-and-rule strategies (Cristiani 2019). As such, the election of the independent candidate Abdelmajid Tebboune as the country's new president is unlikely to shift the power balance within the regime.

The army is likely to retain its role as leading force in Algeria's "controlled democracy" (Daoud 2015), in which power is nominally exercised by a civilian government under a closer tutorship of the army and the security services. In Algeria's current political landscape, the country's ruling elites – and among them, the army's top brass – have manipulated opposition to Bouteflika to sustain the nascent political settlement. In this context, dissent is tolerated as far as it does not challenge the pillars of the regime or calls for a radical overhaul of the system. The escalation of the army's repressive tactics and of the arrest campaign, which have targeted Amazigh activists and opposition leaders, suggests that dissenting voices who have not accepted to be co-opted are not contemplated in the new political order.

6.5. The power being the curtain: Managing the transition in Sudan

The events surrounding the overthrow of President Omar Al Bashir on 11 April 2019, and the subsequent negotiations for power, are often reported through the lens of the popular,

³⁴ Ali Benflis – former Prime Minister and head of the ruling Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) –run against Bouteflika in 2004 and 2014 presidential elections, even though his candidacy was destined to fail. Abdelmajid Tebboune served as prime minister for three months in 2017, before being sacked by Bouteflika for his zealous anti-corruption campaigns. Azzedine Mihoubi and Abdelkader Bengrina also served in ministerial capacity during Bouteflika's presidency. See Africa Confidential (2019f).

public protest movement known as Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC), which swept across Sudan since December 2018. The movement arose in response to the dire economic and human rights conditions that characterised Bashir's latter rule. The level of protest was unprecedented in Sudan, with hundreds of cities experiencing sustained mobilisation against the regime (Matfess 2019a, 2019b). In the aftermath of the transition, the movement's strength resulted in Abdallah Hamdok negotiating the key position of Prime Minister. But this success should not obscure that the power in Sudan, and the dynamics of the removal, were closely related to the internal machinations of the Bashir regime. In turn, Bashir's removal was determined by select members of his inner circle and did not constitute a revolution, but an internal crisis.

At the end of 2019, a power sharing agreement stipulated that Sudan is to move towards a 'managed democracy' led by a civilian government, with the military exercising veto power over economic, security and political policies. The 39-month transition agreement period has the first 21 months chaired by the military council; the latter 18 months is civilian-led. A Sovereign Council (SC) oversees both legislative and minister councils, and has five military and five civilian members; the eleventh member is a jointly agreed civilian. The military members all sat previously in the 'Transitional Military Council' (TMC) formed during Bashir's removal, and were also members of Bashir's security committee (International Crisis Group 2019). All sitting members in any council of the transitional government have procedural immunity for past events. As a consequence of these combined agreements, Prime Minister Hamdok appears to wield little to no power over politics and force in Sudan, which remain firmly in the hands of the former regime's inner circle (Berridge 2020).

Two members of the SC are key to understanding the current regime and its 'dictatorship by committee': Abdel Fattah al-Burhan is the current head of the SC, and his deputy, Mohamad Hamdan Dagalo "Hemedti". They are strongly allied, in part due to the inability of either to seek the 'front' position as leader, due to their discrediting pasts. Instead, they have reorganised the Sudanese regime to their benefit. Burhan led the notorious National Intelligence Security Service, now General Intelligence Services (GIS). Hemedti is instead the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) military unit: once a pro-government militia that worked with the NISS since 2013 in Darfur, the RSF transformed from a semi-autonomous entity to be attached to the regular army in 2017.

Its budget and abilities were greatly increased, and their actions were placed under the direct control of President Bashir who branded Dagalo his “protector” or “Hemedti” (De Waal 2019). The RSF is now Sudan’s best equipped and largest military force at 70,000, which assumed control of Khartoum at the time of the removal. Both the intelligence services and RSF were crucial elements in the previous protection of Bashir, as well as in his subsequent fall.

Promoted by Burhan, Hemedti and other members of the SC, a dramatic series of events eventually led to Bashir’s removal. This had originated as a quiet faction, built from frustration within Bashir’s inner circle as the president proved unable to control his regime’s mounting external and internal crises. The competition amongst the senior echelon of military leaders, and strong influence of Islamists around Bashir, contributed to a typical autocratic environment of distrust and elite volatility. The factionalisation that resulted put Bashir at high risk of replacement, to which he responded by removing different senior leaders. For example, a previous NISS leader, Salah Gosh, was ousted in 2009 and imprisoned in 2011 before being released and reinstated in a senior position in 2018 (Middle East Monitor 2018). Bashir’s former Chief of Staff, and close advisor, Taha Osman al-Hussein was accused of working on behalf of the Saudis, removed from his post, only to return during the coup as a Saudi representative. Bashir’s excessive counter-balancing had weakened the security services, and paramilitary organisations were increasingly prominent towards the end of the Bashir’s tenure. Paramilitary leaders like Hemedti became closer to Bashir through transactional loyalties: they were bought with better terms that they could secure elsewhere.

Of those elites who populated Bashir’s later regime posts, few remain. Burhan and Hemedti soon constituted a ‘dictatorship by committee’, and were reluctant to distribute authority, appointments or rents much further than those who composed the first TMC. The SC’s military members are closely associated with the exceedingly small group that removed Bashir, consisting of Burhan, Hemedti, Salah Gosh, Taha Osman, Ibn Auf, the new head of NISS General Abu Bakr Mustafa “Damblab” (Africa Confidential 2019a), and the head of police Ibrahim Othman. Others suggest that the Military Council still includes figures who have sympathies to the Islamist Movement including Jalal Eddine El-Sheikh, deputy head of the intelligence service, and Omar Zein El-Abidine, chairman of the political committee in the Council (Jo 2019). All of these elites served in Bashir’s

government. Between them, they hold the monopoly of force, the power to appoint, the control of rents and total discretion over economic, security and political policies. However, they made concessions to create a public face of the regime, including the co-option of members of civil society with little authority or decision-making power.

For these reasons, the accommodation dynamics of the current Sudanese government are conducted as two separate engagements: a public front populated by various members of civil society and resuscitated parties who vie for renewed recognition, and those who engage with the key members of the Sovereign Council. Sudanese accommodation dynamics are therefore characterised by purges as much as co-option. While Burhan and Hemedti are engaged in strategy of accommodating regional elites and forces, and high value senior elites, hundreds of arrests have taken place during a purge of the security services (Africa Intelligence 2019b).

At the same time, during the post-coup period, several TMC members reiterated the importance of Hemedti – a seemingly junior elite outside of the Khartoum power structure – due to his control of force (Africa Intelligence 2019c). His role as the power-broker between post-Bashir political elites is built on both his monopoly of violence but also his claim to peripheral bridge-building. Given the support for Hemedti, how did he not capture power and become leader, as is seen in both the Algerian and Zimbabwean cases? The limits of his immediate support are evident: he hails from the Mahariya Rizeigat ethnic group straddling the Chad-Sudan border, and despite his role in the Janjaweed and his continued violent service to the regime in Darfur, he was not accepted into the fold of paramilitary or military elites due to his ethnicity and his lack of formal military education. But outside of the constraints of the formal military system, Hemedti flourished. His relative political, economic and military independence from Bashir proved vital to his continued rise, especially as Bashir culled senior leaders due to ongoing palace politics.

Hemedti emerged as the most important political figure in Sudan as deputy leader of the TMC that ruled Sudan between April and August. His control of the RSF, extensive economic rents through mining revenues and payments for Sudanese participation for the war in Yemen from the Gulf countries, and his political backing from the Saudi and UAE

governments give him significant authority.³⁵ His power of appointments is not consolidated, but he exerts significant veto power and purging abilities.

Hemedti has cleverly positioned his ‘populist’ alliance by bolstering the representation of Darfur, including the Darfuri Sudan Liberation Army-Minni Minawi, Abdelaziz Al-Hilu of the SPLM-North, and possibly JEM support; engaging with Kordofan, as he met with Nuba chiefs in Dilling where he reportedly hired youth for the RSF in exchange for support; and winning support from other tribal authorities who were previously rebuked by many senior military elites. He has courted previously peripheral or removed players in Sudanese politics by engaging with armed movements and now disbanded National Congress Party (NCP) Islamists; and former military officers. This coalition is unknown in Sudan as Bashir focused largely on security professionals (De Waal 2019).

However, Hemedti knits together fragments of the larger political environment that had been distorted and suppressed, and all suffered from an economic crisis that prevented serious attempts at political transactions and consolidations. In the last days of Bashir, his firing of all governors, ministers and mayors, and their replacement with rank loyalists strained the perception that a united front would support those inside the tent. Instead, Hemedti and Burhan have generated a multi-ethnic, cross regional, group with no individually powerful members. Both are unlikely to be removed through any public or elite processes: they have increased their co-dependence, while generating a wide, inclusive and violent coalition to support their continued power. When the transition period elapses, this unique powerbase may be deployed against the supporters of a civilian government. Therefore, Hamdok continues to be vulnerable to charges of mismanagement or a failure to quell crises (Appiah-Mensah 2019), and may function as a ready ‘fall guy’ for the continuing problems of Sudan.

6.6. Zimbabwe’s Second Republic is indistinguishable from the First

In November 2017, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe was ushered out of power in a series of military and party “assisted manoeuvres” that culminated in the Presidency of Emerson Mnangagwa and the elevation to Vice President for General Constantine Chiwenga (Fabricus 2018). Two years after ascending to power following Mugabe’s

³⁵ Hemedti supplies 10,000 of his Rapid Support Forces soldiers to the Gulf Cooperation Council for the war in Yemen. The RSF earns USD 3,000 per month for each fighter it rents to the UAE-Saudi Arabia coalition in the Yemen war. See Africa Confidential (2019d).

removal, Mnangagwa has presided over further economic ruin, the deaths of over a dozen protestors, and a questionable election in 2018. Yet, he successfully navigated both political accommodation and consolidation by securing key allies in posts and co-opting vital interests, eliminating many rivals and neutering the opposition.

Mnangagwa came to power through senior positions in both the ZANU-PF party and Mugabe's regime. From his last post of Vice President (2014-2017), he created the 'Lacoste' faction, which openly recruited amongst the most senior political elites in Mugabe's government, involved the co-option of multiple provincial coordinating committees, and integrated the War Veterans and military elites (Raleigh 2017). The faction openly contradicted Mugabe's personalisation of power through his centralisation of authority in his family and inner circle (Allison 2017). The period of factionalisation and decline in Mugabe's regime was characterised by purges, high level firings, suspicious deaths, questionable election totals, a bankrupted economy, land seizures for political elites, firing and replacements of local and provincial level officials and episodes of targeted violence (Dzirutwe 2014; Times Live 2016; Cheeseman and Klaas 2018; Raleigh 2018).

To limit the power of internal challengers, Mugabe rewarded loyalty, replaced ambitious contenders and threatened the position of others. The 'pro-Mugabe' faction were commonly referred to as G-40, or 'Generation 40', and characterised by their relative youth compared to senior party members, the lack of ties to the liberation struggle, their disagreements and disrespect for the War Veterans group, the senior military command, and their attempted co-option of both the Police and Central Intelligence Organisation. The leaders of this faction included Grace Mugabe, Saviour Kasukuwere, Jonathan Moyo and Patrick Zhuwao. Mugabe placed each in key positions to create obstacles for Lacoste to advance threatening Mnangagwa's position in power. Crises arose when Mugabe, facing illness and advanced age, did not have the means to placate, pay for and otherwise fund the loyalty of his chosen elite circle (De Waal 2015). Following patterns outlined in Bueno De Mesquita *et al.* (2003), these circumstances encouraged Lacoste's ambitious elites to replace their ineffective leader. The removal and crisis, when it finally occurred in November 2017, was largely farcical: Mugabe attempted to accommodate the interests of the Lacoste faction, and resisted leaving until the parliament was posed to vote for his replacement (Graham-Harrison and Burke 2017).

The group that initiated the crisis included Mnangagwa and the former head of the security services, Constantine Chiwenga. Chiwenga had recruited amongst the top echelons of the armed forces, and Generals Anselem Sanyatwe, Douglas Nyikayaramba, Shebba Shumbayawonda, Martin Chedondo were central to the events in November 2017. Mnangagwa and Chiwenga entered into a phase of accommodation soon after assuming their positions of President and Vice President. The Lacoste faction were well placed in senior positions, as were elites with significant leverage in other political networks, regions or potential voting areas. Many of the co-opted elites had served in Mugabe's previous cabinets.³⁶ While these elites were not originally in the Lacoste faction, their positions amassed their individual clout for the stability of the new government, and their inclusion sent a message that not all pro-Mugabe ZANU-PF party elites would be purged.³⁷ Only those who had strong ties to the now defunct G-40 faction – who had openly challenged Mnangagwa – were initially expelled in November 2017 and largely remain so. However, no representatives from the opposition or civil society were included. Further, Vice President Chiwenga widely appointed military figures to civilian cabinet posts, such as Terrance Shiri's (former head of the Airforce) undertaking of the Ministry for Agriculture; and Sibusiso Moyo holding the ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The Vice President was also the Minister of Defense for the first eleven months of the new government.

The accommodation at the early part of the transition government suggested that the new government favoured a 'stability-elite' pact: it benefitted both Mnangagwa and Chiwenga to pursue their respective goals by distributing power to others, rather than centralizing it. These actions were designed to settle the political class, and to pursue the early election agenda. The 'dictatorship by committee' understood that to keep power, they needed to share it with others, and they successfully navigated through the elections of 2018.

That election secured Mnangagwa's position into the near future and ended accommodation. The president made several sweeping changes to the composition of senior regime circles in the post-election consolidation phase. The election resulted in the loss of fifty-two 'reliable' ZANU-PF seats, which indicated that Mnangagwa would need

³⁶ These include Kembo Mohadi, Oppah Muchiguri, July Moyo, and Joram Gumbol.

³⁷ These include Simbarashe Mumbengegwi (Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and Monitoring Government), David Parirenyatwa (Minister for Health and Child Welfare), Sithembiso Nyoni (Women and Youth Affairs) and Obert Mpofu (Home Affairs and Culture).

to fortify and consolidate his regime into a smaller, more loyal group to continue his agenda. Several elites were purged when they no longer served an electoral purpose, and were not a threat to government.³⁸ The most significant change in this consolidation phase is the removal of Chiwenga from the Ministry of Defence (Chan 2019). Chiwenga was removed from this crucial position as other former generals retained their positions in government. Mnangagwa had become less dependent on the Vice President and his network to retain the position of President. Both had come to government with their own cliques to support and 'feed'. Mnangagwa's group were senior ZANU-PF heavyweights, strong leaders of the business and international communities. Chiwenga's support included the former military personal and middle level security service figures who depend on the kickbacks and patronage of the service to continue. Mnangagwa sought to replace senior members of the security service, suggesting that loyalty to him is necessary to survive the near future.

The result of the consolidation process is that Mnangagwa's power is largely unchecked by political elites: the former faction of Lacoste has been integrated, the opposition is unmoored and unable to gain traction in any formal positions, and Vice President Chiwenga has lost the power to challenge or contest the president. Mnangagwa loyalists now dominate cabinet (Africa Confidential 2019e). These moves confirmed that the President will use his superior authority to lessen or remove the influence of close elite, thereby securing his own consolidated authority. The next step in this process is the factionalisation of the regime, which may be hastened by the desperate economic situation of the state. Recent reports confirm that the competition between Mnangagwa and Chiwenga are hastening deep factional divides within the state (Africa Confidential 2020).

6.7. Conclusion

Understanding regime shifts and reconstitution through a logic of elite collective action is useful to explain recent crises across Africa. The leaders of Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe had a combined ninety years in power: their removals were not the reflection

³⁸ Among those purged are Simon Kaya Moyo of Matabeleland South, David Musabayana of Mashonaland West, David Parirenyatwa of Mashonaland East, Martin Dinha of Mashonaland Central, Mike Bimha of Mashonaland East, Mirriam Chikukwa of Harare, Obert Mpofu of Matabeleland North; Patrick Chinamasa of Manicaland; Petronella Kagonye of Mashonaland East, Pupurayi Togarepi of Masvingo, Simbarashe Mumbengegwi of the Midlands, Supa Mandiwanzira of Manicaland, Terrance Mukupe of Harare and Webster Shamu of Mashonaland East.

of sudden rise in instability, nor they were overthrown by organised oppositions, violent non-state groups or public protest. While these events may have occurred during these regimes' crises, they did not significantly affect the subsequent reconfiguration of power. Rather, state leaders were each removed by members of their own inner circles, who went on to reconstitute regimes that follow similar practices and policies.

Rather than regime breakdowns, the crises culminated with the ouster of Algeria's Bouteflika, Sudan's Bashir and Zimbabwe's Mugabe are best viewed as moments in a regime cycle where senior elite actors have capitalised on ripe factionalism to seize power and reconfigure inter-elite relations. In no cases have regimes been cleansed of their previous powerholders, with the exception of the ousted leaders and their closest loyalists. Powers of appointment and veto, control of violent means, and means of rent allocation still resides in the hands of senior elites that previously collaborated with the outgoing leaders. These regimes are not transitioning towards democracy, nor entrenching into full-fledged autocracies, but are rather following largely predictable patterns of regime cycles consisting of several interlocking stages of elite factionalisation, change, accommodation and consolidation. This regime cycle is produced through authoritarian practices and based on political survival logics.

Autocratic leaders are consistently at risk for irregular removal, but in some stages of the authoritarian cycle, they are far more likely to be overthrown than others. At each stage, regime elites respond to the vulnerability of a leader for removal, and calibrate their expectations accordingly. For example, during a factionalisation phase, elites collectively organise to seek opportunities to remove a weak leader. Elites in political factions are not necessarily close or cooperative: they recognise each other's leverage and accept the transactional costs of association. Their alliance is based on incomplete and volatile circumstances.

During a crisis, leaders attempt to renegotiate power distributions with strong factions to reinforce their positions. In the cases covered here, all leaders engaged in significant reshuffles, replacements, firings and counterbalancing to sustain their tenure. But these practices, although central to political survival, traded one risk for another, rather than mitigating threats. In Algeria, during the months prior to the uprisings, Bouteflika's clan purged hostile elements from the intelligence services and the army. Rather than seizing power directly, the army assembled a coalition of bureaucrats and political figures loosely

associated with the regime through which it could assuage the masses and keep control on the country's national institutions. In Sudan, Bashir changing his cabinet and all regional governors in the months preceding his ouster. However, he did little to alter the structure of the armed forces, in part because he had extensively counter-balanced those forces before, and continued to rely on them. A combination of his most senior elites in intelligence and paramilitary forces quickly removed him. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe shuffled elites, purged the ambitious, arrested for corruption those he believed in opposing factions, supported the rise of other factions, side-lined long-term allies, contained the political ambitions of his wife, and so forth. Mugabe kept enemies close both to observe their behaviour, but also because he was vulnerable without them: they were highly component senior members of his government. A ready-made shadow state replaced him.

In each of the cases noted, the senior elites who replaced the leaders pursued extensive accommodation to increase the legitimacy and elite 'buy-in' for the new regime. In Algeria, this occurred through the appointment of technocratic governments consisting of old regime members and the holding of controversial elections won by former Prime Minister Tebboune. In contrast, original factional members in Sudan and Zimbabwe garnered significant positions and were complemented by an inclusive cast of elites to bolster the new regime. At this stage of the cycle, the new regime is vulnerable to counter-removals, and co-opts widely to integrate and leverage the multiple power centres across the state. When secure in their positions, new leaders will consolidate their power by removing any elements of their regime who may counter their authority going forward. This stage represents the height of a leader's powers, and the most unstable period for regime elites, as leaders purge and move elites to suit their centralisation agenda. Excessive personalisation and consolidation, in turn, produces the impetus for elite collective action to check the power of the executive through factions, thereby restarting a process of instability and possible leader removal.

We suggest that the three cases of regime change discussed may come to constitute a template for future regime transitions across the continent. Several African authoritarian states – such as Burundi, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda – currently oscillate between the consolidation and factionalisation phases. Rather than these regimes transitioning into

democracies when their established leaders fall, we suggest that these are likely to be reconstituted as slightly more unstable versions of their current facets. While the occurrence of public protests, elections, and coups that deviate from the cycles cannot be ruled out, interpreting political trajectories through the notion of cycle represents a more fruitful way to understand regime change in Africa.

7. Taming the snakes. The Houthis, Saleh and the struggle for power in Yemen³⁹

7.1. Introduction

The war in Yemen is one of the most devastating conflicts of the modern era, having killed dozens of thousands of people and resulting in a severe humanitarian crisis (Moyer *et al.* 2019). Escalated in 2014 after the end of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), the war pits the internationally recognised government of Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi against the Houthis, an armed group hailing from northern Yemen that has intermittently been at war with the central state since 2004 and that seized the Yemeni capital Sana'a in 2014. In March 2015, a coalition of states led by Saudi Arabia launched a large-scale air campaign in support of the Hadi government, forcing the Houthis out of Aden, Yemen's second largest city. Simultaneously, armed insurgents linked to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula managed to capture large swathes of Yemeni territory, including the port city of Mukalla, while secessionist militias linked to the Southern Transitional Council and supported by the United Arab Emirates exercise *de facto* control over southern Yemen.

Existing studies on the war in Yemen often interpret these dynamics through a sectarian lens (Durac 2019). On the domestic level, the conflict is a result of the essential incompatibility between different versions of Islam; on the regional level, it is described as the by-product of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies and Iran (Juneau 2016; Brandt 2017: 2). According to these narratives, the internationally recognised government is regarded as a mere appendix of its powerful regional sponsors lacking any agency of its own, while the Houthis are anything but an Iranian surrogate. Other accounts of the conflict privilege a state-centred perspective, branding Yemen as a 'weak' or 'failed' state whose chronic instability requires external intervention (Clausen 2019). Such explanations eclipse the agency of local actors, and tend to view the emergence of local political orders as either the mere reflection of geopolitical or sectarian logics or as a 'temporary situation' that is set to retake its 'Weberian' statehood (Baron and al-Hamdani 2019). Further, they obscure the practices of power that exist in these virtually 'ungoverned spaces', failing to capture how violence is used to advance local political interests, the behaviour of domestic armed groups and the prospects for peace (Raleigh and Dowd 2013).

³⁹ An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the 'Political Elites in Yemen: Agency, Structures, Networks' workshop in London, 4 July 2019.

Indeed, institutional approaches often adopt an artificial distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ institutions, whereby the state is treated as an actor existing independently from, or in opposition to, the societal forces that populate it. Paradoxically, despite a ‘state of chaos’ nationwide (Salisbury 2017), in wartime Yemen “the state has all but ceased to exist” (United Nations 2018a: 2). Its resilience is reflected in the proliferation of state and quasi-state agents and institutions operating independently or on behalf of the different warring statelets (United Nations 2018b). Many of these groups are formally recognised as state actors, yet in practice they behave like militias responding to local elites or to self-styled governments. Consequently, rather than a conflict pitting a state and a non-state actor, Clausen (2018) has suggested that the war in Yemen reflects a violent competition between multiple actors for the control of the state, in which the fragmentation of its conflict landscape has had disastrous consequences for the chronically weak Yemeni state.

Rather than uniform institutional entities, Yemen’s wartime institutions are better seen as networks connecting influential elites in perennial competition with each other, which transcend the boundaries between the formal and informal arenas. Governing institutions are marred by internal power struggles involving competing elites and their respective power networks. In some cases, such rivalries turned violent. In the south, rifts between the Hadi government and secessionist elites escalated in several armed clashes. In the capital Sana’a, months of increasing tensions in the power-sharing government born out of an agreement between the former president Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthi movement culminated in December 2017, when Saleh attempted to spark off an uprising against the Houthis (Brandt 2017). The alliance materialised in 2015 amidst widespread surprise, since Saleh he had fought the Houthis in six rounds of war between 2004 and 2010, outplaying both his friends and foes. The bid ultimately failed, leading to the killing of the president who had “danced on the head of snakes” for over thirty years in the outskirts of the capital (Clark 2010).

In both these cases, leaders attempted to mobilise their respective networks of allies making use of patronage, ideological, and economic resources. Some were more successful than others, raising the question of what factors determined their eventual success or failure. Focusing on Saleh’s failed uprising in 2017, I argue that the low cohesion of Saleh’s camp hampered his ability to mobilise and coordinate elites in a critical juncture, leaving them exposed to repression and co-option by the Houthis. The

vulnerability of his camp lied largely in the depletion of the patronage network centred around the General People's Congress (GPC), the big tent party founded by the former president in 1982, leaving Saleh unable to sustain the uprising and ultimately doomed to a debacle.

Using an original sample of political elites that served in national institutions under the Sana'a-based regime in 2017 and 2018, I apply social network analysis (SNA) to compare the structure of the Houthis' and the GPC's elite networks. I show how the Houthis used appointments in political and military bodies to overrun Saleh's historical patronage practices and populate the state hierarchy with a cohesive network of elites, many of whom had strengthened links during the Sa'dah wars or shared strong ideological ties. By contrast, the GPC's fragmented network, consisting of weaker and sparser ties, reflected the patronage-based, pragmatic nature of Saleh's support base, whose vulnerability proved crucial in December 2017 when Saleh unsuccessfully tried to mobilise loyalists against the Houthis. Although the alliance between Saleh and the Houthis was indeed based on a power-sharing agreement between the two camps, mutual power relations were not organised hierarchically according to the positions occupied in the state nor dictated by power-sharing arrangements, but were rather a function of how elites are situated within the network and of the strength of the ties they share.

This chapter begins with a discussion of elite networks, highlighting how elite cohesion is conducive to distinctive political outcomes. After providing an overview of patronage politics and elite bargaining in Yemen under the regimes of Ali Abdullah Saleh and Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi, it explores how the Houthis seized the country's political and military institutions, overthrowing the internationally recognised government and forging an uneasy alliance with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The following section introduces the elite data sample and the methodology used to construct the elite network of the Sana'a-based regime. The cohesion of the two elite networks are also analysed. Finally, the chapter discusses the results of the analysis focusing on the role of elite cohesion in influencing the outcome of the December 2017 attempted coup, and the wider implications for state trajectories in Yemen.

7.2. The role of elite cohesion

Within the civil war scholarship, the notions of cohesion and fragmentation are widely used to explain the rise and duration of conflict. The cohesive or fragmented nature of

conflict spaces can affect the onset, intensity, and modalities of violence in civil war (Pearlman and Cunningham 2012; Brenner 2015; Warren and Troy 2015; Carboni and Moody 2018). Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour (2012) show that variations in the fragmentation of non-state armed groups in civil war contexts can explain the onset of infighting within internally split movements. These studies typically focus on how rebel groups, self-determination movements or ethnically based militias interact with state structures. However, in situations of protracted or endemic conflict, political elites routinely negotiate access to political power through the use or the threat of force. Hence, elite fragmentation can produce specific incentives to use violence as a means to achieve political goals (Raleigh and Dowd 2018). The resulting scenario is the emergence of subnational ‘wartime political orders’ oscillating between active cooperation and collusion to coexistence or open conflict (Staniland 2012), and displaying distinct patterns of violence and hierarchies of power (Carboni and Moody 2018).

The role of elites is indeed of great significance in shaping the trajectory of political orders (Burton and Higley 2001). Elite behaviour is widely understood to determine fundamental political changes, and ultimately to explain patterns of stability, regime transformation and violence (North *et al.* 2013). Elite cohesion constitutes a pillar of regime stability (Magaloni 2006). Different levels of elite cohesion are associated with distinctive regime types, in which the unified or divided nature of the elites dictates how power is organised and exercised. Elite scholars Burton and Higley distinguish between four types of political elites based on their levels of *integration* – the extent to which they share common ties and values – and *differentiation* – the extent to which they are specialised functionally and significantly plural (Higley and Burton 2001). According to their typology, four elite types and related regimes are identified: *consensual elites* are highly integrated and possess extensive functional differentiation, producing stable representative regimes; *ideocratic elites* are highly, and often forcibly, integrated but the organisation of power allows little extensive functional differentiation and autonomy, producing stable unrepresentative regimes; *fragmented elites* operate across several functional domains but are weakly integrated, producing unstable representative regimes; *divided elites* have limited functional specialisation and actively seek to destroy their rivals, producing unstable unrepresentative regimes. Changes in the levels of cohesion trigger political elite transformations that generate new elite types and political practices.

Reflecting the distribution of power among elites and consequently the nature of the relations between key political actors, elite cohesion is defined as the “rulers’ ability to maintain the loyalty and cooperation of allies within the regime” (Levitsky and Way 2012: 870). When cohesion is high, key political actors are expected to support the regime resulting in low levels of defection or insubordination. As a result, united elites are more likely to ‘tame’ politics by agreeing on the norms that regulate political competition (Sartori 1995). By contrast, when cohesion is low, elites are less likely to collaborate with the regime, which is subject to a variety of threats such as elite splits, coup attempts and rebellion. Unity is said to enhance the success of collective action by maximising the elites’ ability to enforce coordination and restraint among the adherents (Luttwak 1969; Pearlman 2012).

In short, higher coordination among groups and individuals raises an elite’s ability to survive existential crises. Highly united elites can leverage entrenched partisan identities consolidated over years of conflict, military party bodies, uncontested leadership and an effective control over the means of coercion to successfully mobilise supporters and fighting resources (Levitsky and Way 2012: 872). By contrast, disunited elites face typical coordination problems related to the aggregation of a variety of groups, relying mainly on patronage for their mobilisation. Indeed, patronage is not a substitute for stronger non-material ties. As highlighted by Levitsky and Way, “although the distribution of material resources is a critical component of authoritarian durability, it is hardly the only one, and in times of crisis, it may not be the most important one” (Levitsky and Way 2012: 880). The absence of strong ties hinders elite cooperation as mutual trust is low and access to rents or public office is scarcely institutionalised. When non-material sources of cohesion are absent or weak, incumbents can enhance elite unity through patronage, the creation of formal institutions or repression, or further obstruct coordination through institutional fragmentation and elite circulation (Lutscher 2016; Woldense 2018).

The elite network paradigm provides a theoretical framework to explain the emergence of distinct wartime political orders in Yemen. Nationally, Yemen resembles the divided elite model, with multiple camps fundamentally opposed to each other engaging in a violent competition over the control of the state. Networks are weakly connected, reflecting the deep divisions that separate them. At the same time, each of these camps conforms to the fragmented elite model, whereby elite pluralism offsets the absence of

unifying ties preventing an all-out conflict within the warring blocks. While multiple groups possess the capacity to use violence, no faction is strong enough to seize authority, privileging an uncomfortable cohabitation over a violent struggle (Higley and Burton 2001: 187).

When conflict escalated within these camps, thus triggering a transformation from fragmented into divided elites, different levels in elite cohesion between the warring factions contributed crucially to their success or failure. This was the situation prior to the rebellion that broke out in Sana'a in December 2017, following the collapse of the alliance between the Houthis and Ali Abdullah Saleh. Before turning to the analysis of this case, I trace the evolution of elite networks in Yemen under the presidencies of Saleh and Hadi.

7.3. Patronage politics and elite cohesion in Yemen

Ali Abdullah Saleh became president of North Yemen in 1978, and of unified Yemen in 1990, until his final ousting in 2011 when he agreed to transfer power to his long-standing vice president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. During his thirty years of rule, Saleh, who hailed from the small Sanhan tribe, forged a political settlement regulated by a “politics of permanent crisis” alternating repression and co-option (Phillips 2011). Describing his ability to weather several political, security and socio-economic threats, Saleh himself compared ruling Yemen to “dancing on the heads of snakes” (Clark 2010). Saleh’s regime constitutes an example of ‘limited access order’, where leaders control and restrict access to the system for non-elites in order to create rents and distribute patronage to selected elite groups (Phillips 2011: 59). Generating expectations that the rents extracted under peacetime conditions exceed those extracted through the use of violence, this mechanism is an essential means to control violence, limit competition and secure the survival of the regime (North *et al.* 2013: 38).

Under Saleh, the Yemeni elite was comprised of several groups holding uneven levels of power and influence (Phillips 2011). The regime’s inner circle, a shadowy clique that included the president himself, his closest relatives and the Sanhan tribal elite, occupied key positions in the army and the security services while also controlling large sectors of the national economy. A disparate network of tribal and religious leaders constituted the outer circle of the regime’s core, which also disproportionately benefitted from the regime’s patronage. Finally, selected political dynasties, business and political party

elites, technocrats and co-opted opposition groups were included in the patronage system, and retained intermittent political influence, as long as they accepted the informal rules of the game and provided a minimum level of support to the regime (Alley 2010).

Although patronage was distributed broadly, it sowed discontent among excluded elites and the wider population, which saw little in the way of trickle-down effects from state patronage. It also resulted in the manipulation of Yemen's tribal system (Phillips 2011). By elevating prominent tribal shaykhs to senior government and military positions, Saleh bolstered the tribal order in order to eradicate Hashemite and southern influences from northern and southern Yemen (Clark 2010: 154). While the system allowed shaykhs to extend their influence well beyond their traditional tribal fiefdoms,⁴⁰ it created disparities and made them increasingly dependent on state patronage, supposedly insulating central government from the threat posed by heavily armed tribes (Brandt 2017: 57). Their political influence was limited, and patronage typically consisted of privileged access to contraband trade or the regular payment of stipends, which often alienated them from the communities they claimed to represent (Phillips 2011: 53). According to Higley and Burton's framework, Saleh's elites are identified with an ideocratic model centred around a highly cohesive inner circle, largely consisting of family kin and tribal allies which created a relatively stable but unrepresentative regime.

The collapse of Saleh's regime in 2011 was the result of two concomitant and interacting factors. On the one hand, the popular belief that without Saleh and his regime the country would disintegrate dissolved, and millions of Yemeni citizens followed the steps of protesters in other Arab countries (Alwazir 2011). On the other hand, Saleh's attempts to centralise power and groom his son Ahmed Ali as successor, prompted the defection of key military and tribal elites, including army chief and designated successor Ali Mohsin al-Ahmar and the paramount shaykhs (*shaykh mashaykh*) of the Hashid and Bakil tribal confederations. Saleh could nevertheless rely on the elite Republican Guard, Central Security Forces, and other loyal army units, whose commanders included his sons and nephews (Barany 2011: 33). After months of protracted negotiations and mounting international pressure, Saleh agreed to sign an agreement brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to hand power to his former defence minister and vice president Hadi.

⁴⁰ Brandt (2014) referred to the northern shaykhs serving as army officials as *colonel shaykhs*.

Lacking popular support and an autonomous domestic power base, the new president turned to the influential patrons who had previously defected from Saleh's regime, including Ali Mohsin and the al-Ahmar clan whose influence extended over the Hashid confederation and the former opposition al-Islah party (Transfeld 2016). Their support was critical to pushing military and bureaucratic reforms aimed at curbing Saleh's influence within state institutions and the GPC: Hadi's appointments in government, the judiciary and military bodies reveal how the transition process sought to eradicate Saleh's centralised patronage system to replace it with "a political order with multiple patrons and power centres" (Thiel 2018: 123). However, Hadi also attempted to reduce his dependence on Ali Mohsin and al-Ahmar by steering the NDC – of which he had laid down the rules and imposed significant presidential quotas – and later dismissing senior government officials close to his patrons.

At the same time, Saleh resisted Hadi's military reforms that would eventually result in sidelining him and his loyalists. As the new president purged his predecessor's family members under the pretext of restructuring the army, Saleh mobilised his extensive patronage network which stretched across the party system, the media and the tribes against Hadi and his allies (Carvajal 2015). As a result, Saleh successfully blocked reforms undermining his family interests in the NDC while also establishing contacts with the Houthis through mediation committees and *qat* chews (Transfeld 2016: 163; United Nations 2016a: 16).

Mutual distrust and profound divisions therefore marked elite relations between 2012 and 2014. While Saleh had managed to craft a cohesive inner circle largely consisting of kin, fellow tribesmen and loyalists, Hadi's bid to consolidate his power clashed with the interests of Islah-aligned political actors. Contrary to the Saleh era, no actor or group was now able to exercise a monopoly in the political marketplace (De Waal 2015), and elites increasingly attempted to co-opt outsider actors to overcome their relative weaknesses and gain leverage vis à vis their rivals. In this context, the Houthis emerged as Yemen's critical power broker. The transitional period's elites therefore conform to the fragmented elite model, where weak institutionalisation and conflictual elites resulted in an unstable but more representative regime.

7.4. The Houthi-Saleh alliance

Traditionally marginalised under Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthis assumed a new political role in the aftermath of the revolution that unseated the former president in 2011. Amidst a heightened fragmentation of central political power, the group, which began to be known as *Ansar Allah* after the 2011 revolution, laid the foundation for the takeover of the state, completing their transformation from local insurgents into a political force extending its influence across northern Yemen (Ardemagni 2017; International Crisis Group 2014). They also took advantage of their experience in mediation committees and in-depth knowledge of tribal networks to co-opt local tribal actors who estimated that they would gain from allying with the Houthis (Knights 2018: 17).

They were not alone in enabling the Houthis' rise to power. Through the mediation of Saleh, the Houthis concluded several ceasefire agreements with armed tribes in Amran, Dhamar and Sana'a, which proved critical to undermining Islah and overrunning army units loyal to Ali Mohsin (United Nations 2015: 27). Hadi also contributed to this outcome, most notably in refusing to deploy the army against the Houthis in Amran in a supposed attempt to weaken Ali Mohsin and al-Ahmar (Transfeld 2016: 163), and in pushing through fuel subsidies cuts sponsored by the International Monetary Fund. Capitalising on a wave of protests that rocked the capital against the government's economic policies and the political stalemate, the Houthis, ostensibly aided by Saleh's loyalists (Hill 2017: 269), overran Sana'a facing little or no resistance.

Whilst distrustful of their intentions, many domestic actors saw in the Houthis' ascendance a way to weaken their respective adversaries (Day and Brehony 2020). Yet the calculation that the group could ultimately be controlled badly backfired. On the political level, Ansar Allah replaced local authorities with Houthi loyalists and local shaykhs in territories falling under their control, while also appointing shadow officials, or "supervisors", to oversee political and military authorities after the signing of the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) with the government in November 2014 (United Nations 2015: 23). The PNPA stipulated the appointment of a new inclusive, technocratic government led by Khaled Bahah to implement the outcomes of the NDC (Hill 2017: 266). However, the initiative failed after a technical commission appointed by Hadi formulated a six-region federal plan that by-passed the NDC, facing fierce opposition from Ansar Allah and the southern opposition al-Hirak movement (Transfeld

2016: 163). By the end of 2014, the Houthis exerted de facto control over the state institutions, but they had not formalised the takeover.

This process was completed in early 2015. Under the pretext of lack of progress on the new constitutional draft, Houthi militias abducted the president's chief of staff, Ahmed bin Mubarak, and put Hadi, Bahah and several ministers under house arrest. A constitutional crisis ensued when the government resigned, as the Parliament was prevented from voting on the president's resignation. This allowed Ansar Allah to dissolve the government, and issue a constitutional declaration establishing a new executive body, the Supreme Revolutionary Committee (SRC), chaired by Mohammed Ali al-Houthi (United Nations 2016a). The new state institutions comprised members of Ansar Allah and of the GPC wing loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh, as well as of smaller political parties allied to both factions. This alliance indeed constituted an integrated "hybrid armed group" advancing the interests of Yemen's northern elites (*ibid.*: 16).

The pact between Ansar Allah and Saleh lasted for almost three years. Whilst seeds of infighting were present from the onset of the alliance as reflected by sporadic clashes around Sana'a between Saleh's loyalists and Houthi militants in the first half of 2015, the launch of the Saudi-led *Operation Decisive Storm* eclipsed the breakup (Alley 2018; International Crisis Group 2016). However, despite the consolidation of the alliance and the creation of new state institutions in the second half of 2016, distrust between began to mount throughout 2017, and escalated in August when Houthi armed men killed a Saleh loyalist in Sana'a (United Nations 2018a: 71). Concerns arose over a supposed attempt by the Houthis to isolate Saleh and the GPC and consolidate their control over the state.

The events precipitated in December, as the former president called on his supporters to fight against the Houthis and reached out to the coalition for military support. After two days of intense fighting in and around the capital Sana'a, Saleh and his closest associates were killed on December 4 and the attempted coup suppressed. Although Saleh has still been able to count on several loyal fighters, his camp was structurally vulnerable, hindering its ability to mount a successful revolt against the Houthis. In the next section, I apply SNA to understand how differences in elite cohesion between the two groups can help explain the outcome of the events.

7.5. Methodology and data

All interactions between individuals are ‘socially situated’ in wider networks of interpersonal relations that are the basis for the formation of social capital. The notion of embeddedness (Granovetter 1985) assumes that the behaviour of individual and collective actors is constrained by complex networks of social relations. Through the study of network properties and actors’ positions within a network, SNA allows the investigation of complex elite interactions, their configurations and the distribution of power across elites (Keller, in Best and Higley 2018). Within the abundant scholarship on political elites, studies of elite networks have investigated interactions between powerful political actors, enhancing understanding of how power is distributed in political systems and enabling empirical analyses of elite cohesion (Moore 1979; Gil-Mendieta and Schmidt 1996; Kostiuchenko 2012; Osei 2015; Keller 2016).

The first methodological challenge is how to identify political elites, which is known in the literature as the boundary problem (Laumann, Marsden and Prensky 1989). Political elites typically describe a wide set of individuals, groups, and networks in a given country “who wield political influence and power in that they make strategic decisions or participate in decision making on a national level, contribute to defining political norms and values (including the definition of ‘national interests’), and directly influence political discourse on strategic issues” (Perthes 2004: 5). This definition, however, does not solve the boundary problem; rather it requires us to explicitly assign the term “elite” to a group of people with specific characteristics (Zartman 1974).

In this study, I focus on a subset of political elites – the *national state elites* – which include 77 individuals (*nodes*) who occupied a senior position in one of the political or military state institutions under the control of the Sana’a-based government in the year preceding the December 2017 events. After identifying the members of the elite, I then identified relevant biographical characteristics using official government and UN documents, relevant books, open-source material detailing the elites’ background, and supplementing these documents with further interviews with experts. National state elites consequently include the members of the Supreme Political Council – an executive body consisting of five members nominated by Saleh and five by Ansar Allah – senior government ministers and their deputies, as well as senior officials serving in either the military and security committees or in one of the senior military bodies (such as the army, the National Security Bureau, or the military intelligence).

Due to the difficulty of determining the boundary for the inclusion of non-state elites and of collecting relevant biographical information for elites holding junior government positions, political leaders without a formal state position,⁴¹ and civil or military elites serving in lower levels of the state hierarchy were not included, despite the relative influence they can exercise over decision-making. However, this subset makes up the actual core of the Sana'a-based government, and can be considered a good approximation of the wider socio-political coalition that supports the regime, as individuals appointed in executive bodies are typically associated with the role of “super-representatives” who serve in government to protect the interests of the communities on behalf of which they claim to operate (Bratton and Van De Walle 1994).

Table 1 in the Appendix summarises the relevant institutional affiliations of the sample in 2017 and 2018. Although only 77 and 69 individual elites were recorded in the two years, some of them served in multiple institutions.⁴² It can be seen that the number of political elites appointed in these institutions declined between 2017 and 2018, largely as a result of a number of defections and dismissals. The high number of cabinet members is explained by the appointment, in November 2016, of an inclusive National Salvation Government comprising members of the GPC, Ansar Allah and smaller political parties. The cabinet did not include most influential members but was largely seen as a step towards the consolidation of the Houthi-Saleh alliance (United Nations 2017a). In November 2017 and in the year following the attempted uprising, the Houthis occupied most senior positions in the military and in security, while members of the GPC and of smaller political parties were relegated in the cabinet and in the Supreme Political Council, suggesting that small-size, homogenous security institutions were crucial to coordinate the ongoing war efforts (*see* Table 2).

The second methodological challenge lies with the identification of the network *ties*. Due to ongoing conflict and the relatively shadowy nature of the institutional structure, collecting first-hand information on the relations between members of the Yemeni elites in Houthi-controlled territories is difficult or impossible. To determine such relations, I therefore adopt a structured approach introduced by Keller's study of Chinese political

⁴¹ These include Ansar Allah leader Abd al-Malik al-Houthi and former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, who did not hold formal state positions as of 2017.

⁴² Notable examples include Deputy Interior Minister Abdulhakim al-Khaywani, Deputy Prime Minister Jalal Ali al-Ruwayshan and Transport Minister Zakaria Yahya al-Shami, who all served on the Military and Security Committee.

elites (Keller 2016). The analysis infers ties based on the existence of shared characteristics between individuals, such as common provincial origin, revolutionary legacies and alumni and co-worker ties, which are more easily identifiable when analysing large elite networks and help to mitigate information bias. According to the author, these ties create a social structure among elites, “which grants some individuals easier access to others, and facilitates alliance formation between two individuals that share such a tie” (*ibid.*: 22). As a result, elites may “activate” these ties to form alliances with other groups or factions, expanding or shrinking their coalition depending on strategic considerations.

This is particularly relevant in Yemen, where regional, tribal, sectarian and party ties may not constitute cohesive corporate groups in themselves, yet dictate inclusion within the wider political elite and in institutional structures (Phillips 2011). In this study, I include several structural ties. Actors are connected if they were born in the same province, if they belong to the same tribal confederation, if they share family ties and if they have a common social status.⁴³ These attributes are all found to be relevant factors in attributing elite status and determining patterns of co-option in contemporary Yemen (vom Bruck 2005; Alley 2010; Day 2012; Bonnefoy 2016; Brandt 2017; Thiel 2018).

As shown in Figure 7.1, Houthi elites (in yellow) occupy the centre of the network, while the GPC elites (in purple) are relatively marginal. Members of smaller political parties (highlighted in different colours) are also included, but the relatively small number of their affiliates appointed in state institutions prevents the creation of clusters. Furthermore, the size of each node is proportional to its *degree centrality*, in other words the number of connections each node shares with others. Houthi elites have also the highest levels of degree centrality, reflecting the multiple ties they share with other nodes in the network.

⁴³ Hashemite, or *sayyid*, background in particular seems to play a role in the selection of state officials appointed in Houthi-controlled institutions. Hashemites ruled over northern Yemen for centuries until 1962, claiming direct descentance from the Prophet. The Houthis, along with several other prominent families, are Hashemite and support the revival of Zaydi Shiism. It is important to note that although many among its core members share Hashemite Zaydi origins, the Houthi movement does not represent all Yemeni Zaydis. As a matter of fact, Zaydi elites are also found in the GPC and in other minor parties (Alley 2010; Brandt 2017).

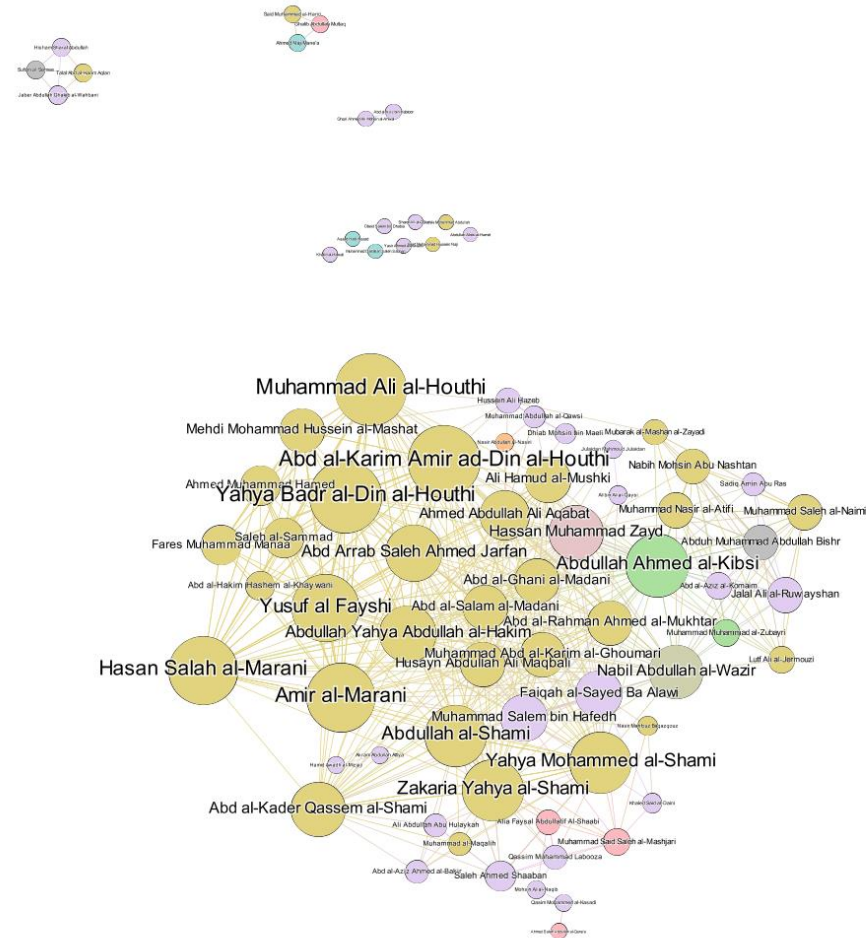


Figure 7.1: Political Elite Network of 2017 - by Political Party

The metrics of the network prior to December 2017 are summarised in Table 3. Measures of density, average degree centrality, average path ratio and clustering coefficient point to whether a network is composed of highly clustered nodes connected by strong ties – a “provincial” structure – or of distinct sub-networks with low levels of clustering and weaker ties – a “cosmopolitan” structure (Borgatti, Everett and Johnson 2013; Walther and Christopoulos 2015: 503). The graphs shown in Figures 7.2 and 7.3, along with Table 3 in the Appendix, show that the GPC network largely conforms to a cosmopolitan structure, suggesting that it is far less cohesive than the Houthi network. This difference is explained by the existence of fewer ties connecting members of the GPC compared to the Houthis: the latter – and particularly the movement’s inner circle – share several ties, including regional origin, social status and tribal background, while the former does not possess a similarly cohesive core group, as they typically consist of elites recruited from

a more diverse social background. In other words, the data attest the GPC's lower elite cohesion in the run-up to the coup attempt.

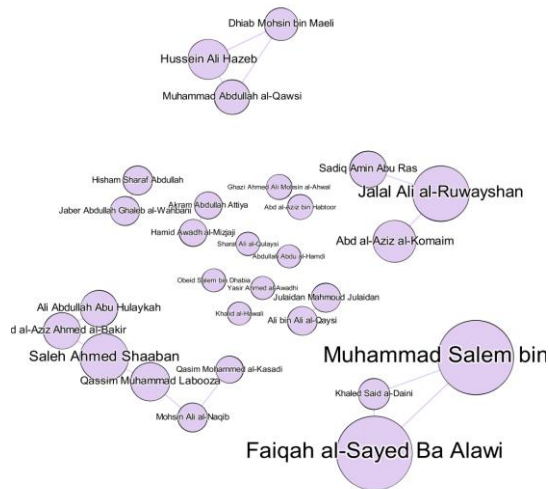


Figure 7.2: GPC Elite Network of 2017

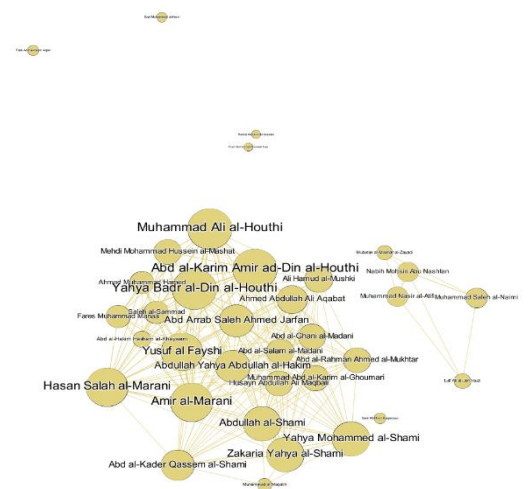


Figure 7.3: Houthi Elite Network of 2017

It is possible that structural connections linking GPC members not included in this analysis may influence the results, artificially driving down the GPC's overall cohesion. Educational or co-working ties were shown to have a significant influence on a multitude of elite networks (Keller, in Best and Higley 2018), while others, such as shared life experiences, common military background or joint institutional exchanges, may help to cement connections between individuals. Whilst this remains plausible, the structural nature of the GPC makes it unlikely that other relevant ties were omitted from the analysis, skewing the results. The GPC is typically described as a big tent party, whose supporters are united by a loose republican ideology and are drawn from several regions and social groups (Bonnefoy 2016). Indeed, the party's leadership consists of elites hailing from different backgrounds, including technocrats, tribal shaykhs and Saleh's kinsmen, who have little in common other than loyalty to Ali Abdullah Saleh.

7.6. Elite cohesion and the crumbling of the Houthi-Saleh alliance

The network data presented in the previous section illustrate the differences in elite cohesion between the Houthi and the GPC factions at the outset of the coup attempt in December 2017. Houthi state elites consist of a cohesive inner circle including individuals sharing multiple ties, such as regional background, social status and family kin, and an

outer circle made up of satellite parties and a limited number of tribal figures. Ansar Allah occupy positions across multiple institutions, creating an institutional network through which they effectively run the state. By contrast, the GPC subnetwork presents low levels of clustering and weak ties, reflecting the wide patronage-orientated support base of the party. Although the co-option of several tribal shaykhs enables the inclusion of several local elites into the state structure, GPC elites are largely concentrated in the cabinet, resulting in an institutionally isolated and structurally vulnerable network.

Such imbalances in the distribution of power within and across the GPC and Houthi subnetworks helped to determine the outcome of the December 2017 events in a number of ways. Firstly, the erosion of Saleh's patronage network and his increasingly weaker grip on state institutions undermined the GPC's ability to mobilise its disparate support base. The gradual depletion of Saleh's financial and patronage resources, a process started after stepping down from the presidency and accelerated after formalising the alliance with the Houthis as a result of an international asset freeze, seems to have fatally weakened the GPC's mobilisation capacity (Bonney 2016: 57). In absence of solid ideological ties, relying merely on patronage fails to ensure strong elite cohesion and cooperation in times of crisis (Levitsky and Way 2012).

By contrast, the Houthis could capitalise on a stronger ideological cohesion and on a wide range of identities, norms and structures forged under violent conflict. Several members of Ansar Allah's inner circle had participated in the Sa'dah wars that the Houthis fought against the central government between 2004 and 2010 (Salmoni, Loidolt and Wells 2010), while many others had long opposed Saleh's regime. Although many that joined the Houthi movement did not pledge to the still loose ideological tenets of the movement, they had turned into an increasingly effective insurgent group capable of engaging in guerrilla warfare, seizing territory from the central government and rallying local consensus in Sa'dah as well as in Al Jawf and Amran (Knights 2018). As a result, the Houthis succeeded in taking advantage of the widespread discontent among the marginalised tribes of Bakil and Khawlan bin Amir, further threatened by the government's violent tactics and the deployment of Hashid tribal militias fighting alongside the regular army (Brandt 2013).

This 'social capital', accumulated in years of insurgency and strengthened after the Saudi-led intervention, which they frame as foreign aggression, was crucial to maintain elite

unity after seizing the state. Narrative and discursive resources can indeed contribute to greater political stability, even in the absence of functioning state and non-state institutions (Phillips 2019). To this end, Ansar Allah's leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi has on multiple occasions stressed his loyalty to those who fought alongside him during the Sa'dah wars (Nevola 2019). Through the control of state institutions and the appropriation of profitable wartime revenues, the Houthis also acquired patronage resources to distribute among their support base (Salisbury 2017). In contrast to Saleh and his GPC, however, patronage did not represent the only source of elite cohesion, rather it further contributed to the consolidation of Houthi dominance in the state.

Secondly, the Houthis could hinder the GPC's mobilisation capacity by disrupting the movement of, and the communication between, the party elites. In times of crises, communication and movement are essential to enable elites to coordinate and organise collective action, especially when they do not form a cohesive network (Levitsky and Way 2012). After the escalation of August 2017, the Houthis were reported to have placed checkpoints across the capital Sana'a and its outskirts to prevent GPC fighters organising militarily (United Nations 2018a: 71). Additionally, several GPC ministers were put under virtual house arrest before and after the coup attempt because it was suspected that they may leave Sana'a and defect to the internationally recognised government.⁴⁴

In the same vein, the persistence of the revolutionary committee and of the supervisory system in the ministries was not intended to merely oversee the ministers' work from inside the administration, but to also supersede the decision-making process by operating as a shadow government (Nevola 2019). Reports emerged of Houthi supervisors (*mushrif*) entering the ministries in Sana'a shortly after the Houthis occupied the capital and signed the PNPA with the government. Between February 2015 and August 2016, the Houthis retained most of the existing administrative structure, including several ministers operating in acting capacity under the close supervision of Houthi delegates (United Nations 2017a: 10). After the appointment of the Supreme Political Council and of the National Salvation Government in late 2016, Houthi supervisors continued to be stationed in offices run by non-Houthi ministers, including those of the Interior and International

⁴⁴ An example, among many, is Said Muhammad al-Hariri, former member of the Military and Security Committee. Al-Hariri was put under house arrest in May 2017, accused of looting salaries from the 5th Military District in Hodeidah. Al-Hariri, a former al-Hirak militant who later joined Ansar Allah, was then replaced by Houthi loyalist al-Madani.

Cooperation.⁴⁵ This pervasive control of state institutions was crucial in preventing Saleh loyalists in the bureaucracy, far more experienced in running the state, from coordinating or taking control of the state's ministerial infrastructure at a critical time.

Thirdly, the GPC's structural weakness left the party prone to the Houthis' selective co-option of national and local elites. Several leading GPC supporters, including the Prime Minister of the Sana'a-based government, Abdulaziz bin Habtoor, and the influential GPC leader, the shaykh Sadiq Amin Abu Ras, reportedly did not support Saleh's move, and quickly rallied their followers in support of the Houthis.⁴⁶ At the same time, prominent Houthi leaders Abdullah Yahya al-Hakim and Mohammed Ali al-Houthi – both holding senior positions in the state architecture – were reported to have held meetings with senior tribesmen traditionally allied with Saleh outside the capital Sana'a in an effort to convince them to withdraw their support to the former president (United Nations 2018a: 11). The eventual capitulation of Saleh is largely seen as a result of the unsuccessful mobilisation of tribes in Sana'a and across northern Yemen, which pragmatically chose to either remain neutral or to tacitly support the Houthis as the latter side started to gain the upper hand (Salisbury 2017: 14; Schmitz 2018).⁴⁷

In other words, taking advantage of the GPC's fragmenting support base, the Houthis implemented a careful divide-and-rule strategy which paradoxically replicated governing tactics under Saleh's rule. During his presidency, Saleh used political appointments and co-option to fragment the opposition and defuse political challenges (Alley 2010). While such manoeuvres had been instrumental in sustaining his regime until 2011, they seem to have ultimately enabled the Houthis to isolate Saleh and his supporters and foil the coup attempt. In the weeks following the events of December 2017, the Houthis further orchestrated a campaign of arrests and purges to break what was left of Saleh's network

⁴⁵ In April 2017, an altercation erupted between the then Minister of International Cooperation, Hisham Sharaf Abdullah, and his supervisor, Houthi loyalist Yahya al-Babili, after the former refused to be placed under supervision. Reports also emerged showing that Abdulhakim al-Khaywani, appointed supervisor in the Interior Ministry, quickly acquired a higher military rank than the minister he was supposed to supervise, Muhammad Abdullah al-Qawsi. Throughout 2017, anti-Houthi outlets similarly reported episodes of violence and harassment in other ministries.

⁴⁶ According to some sources, neither men did not respond to Saleh's call in the days of the uprising. Weeks later, the Houthi-allied faction of the GPC elected Sadiq Amin Abu Ras party leader and pledged support to the Houthis during a party conference in Sana'a.

⁴⁷ This pragmatic behaviour is a reflection of the non-hierarchical character of tribal structures, in which the authority of the shaykhs is conditional upon their ability to provide the tribes with regular access to resources. Shaykhs enjoy only chequered control over their groups, and indeed splits within tribes have not been rare instances during the war. For a further discussion on the role of tribes and tribal shaykhs in the civil war, *see* Al-Dawsari (2020).

from the state (United Nations 2018a: 20). Several cabinet ministers were dismissed and replaced with Houthi loyalists and Houthi-aligned GPC members, leaving the party founded by Saleh in a largely ancillary role.⁴⁸

The data reported in Table 4 also illustrate that the GPC's position has continued to decline in the post-uprising period and that despite a shrinking coalition, the cohesion of the GPC's network continues to be significantly weaker than that of the Houthis. The elite network has overall higher density levels, which may be a by-product of the shrinking number of elites (only sixty-eight occupied senior state position at the end of 2018, as opposed to seventy-seven in the previous year). Indeed, by the end of November 2018, at least ten members of the GPC had left state positions, bringing the party representation in national state institutions from twenty-eight to a mere eighteen. Several ministers, including the holders of the Oil and Finance portfolios, left the cabinet in the immediate aftermath of the coup, while other party members defected to the coalition months later fearing reprisals or further purges. Similarly, the position of vice president of the Supreme Political Council was not filled until January 2019 after two of Saleh's loyalists also defected. However, while the number of GPC elites has markedly declined as a result of defections and purges, the subnetwork's density has not increased, suggesting that the surviving elites share very few connections. In other words, rather than constituting a strong, cohesive junior coalition partner, data confirm that since 2018 the GPC has lost much of its leverage capacity and it is unable to exercise any effective influence on decision-making.

On the other hand, higher levels of network density and elite cohesion indicate that the Houthis have increasingly consolidated their power through appointments in state institutions. The network has evolved towards an increasingly "provincial" structure, where the appointment of well-connected elites has contributed to higher rates of cohesion despite the higher number of Houthi members in the state network. Members of the Houthi family, or drawn from allied Hashemite families, were appointed to key state positions strengthening the movement's control over the state.⁴⁹ While in earlier months the Houthis had recruited state elites from a wider spectrum of social and political forces,

⁴⁸ Examples include the ministers of the Interior, Communications and Information Technology, Oil and Mineral Resources, Finance, Information and the Deputy President of the Supreme Political Council.

⁴⁹ Among these are the Deputy Interior Minister Ali Husayn Badruddin Amiruddin al-Houthi, son of the movement's founder, the new Health Minister Taha al-Mutawakkil, and the newly appointed president of the Supreme Political Council, Mehdi al-Mashat, promoted after an air strike killed his predecessor Saleh al-Sammad.

these later developments, which have followed changing war dynamics, may indicate a less inclusive approach to political appointments, and an increasingly important role of family and Hashemite ties in the Houthi-controlled state institutions. Using Higley and Burton's typology of elites introduced in Chapter 2, elites in Houthi-controlled Yemen have evolved from the fragmented and divided model into an ideocratic elite that dominates a largely stable but unrepresentative regime.

7.7. Conclusion

Through an empirical study of the national state elites in northern Yemen's wartime political order, this paper has sought to explain how differences in elite cohesion shaped political dynamics within the Houthi-Saleh alliance during the events of December 2017. Capitalising on an ideologically cohesive elite, the Houthis are effectively in control of the country's main institutions and have engaged in extensive institutional remaking and elite reshuffling. The group has transformed from an insurgent organisation into the actual power holder in the country's capital. The comparatively less cohesive configuration of Saleh's GPC network and its reliance on what was left of the former president's patronage resources have instead proved crucial in undermining the party's ability to coordinate and mobilise elites, as well as to resist co-option, during the uprising against the Houthis.

While patronage may prove useful to anchor elites to a regime and cement a coalition in normal times, patronage-based elite networks are unlikely to strengthen collective action and prevent defections when crises erupt. The outcome of the December 2017 events shows instead that cohesive groups, which combine patronage resources with non-material sources of cohesion, are likely to be more effective and capable of enforcing repression, and less vulnerable to internal splits or defection in times of crisis. Structure, however, does not inhibit agency, and increasing crackdowns against suspected dissidents can potentially fuel even more destructive infighting in the future.

The limitations of this study should be acknowledged. It focused on a relatively limited sample of elites that have occupied a position in one of the main national institutions controlled by the Houthi-Saleh coalition, which I considered to be an approximation for its broader support base. While this choice helped address the boundary problem, extending the sample to other state and non-state elites may provide further insights into the internal dynamics of the coalition – provided that it is possible to collect socio-biographical details concerning individuals in lower levels of the state hierarchy, and

therefore to identify the ties linking the nodes in the network. A second limitation concerns the limited number of ties considered in the analysis. For the purpose of this study, I only considered provincial, tribal, family and social ties, in addition to identifying the political affiliation of the state elites. While it was highlighted that additional educational or co-working ties are unlikely to have played a role in the creation and consolidation of networks among members of the elites – and especially within the GPC – it cannot be ruled out that other factors contributed to elite cohesion. In particular, further research may shed light on how shared institutional experiences, such as participation in tribal mediation committees (Brandt 2017) or institutional collaboration (such as in the National Dialogue Conference), have cemented links between Ansar Allah and GPC members during the transition.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights four additional points. First, the Yemen crisis indeed reflects the combination of global, regional and local dynamics (Day and Brehony 2020). A multitude of foreign powers vying for influence have meddled in Yemeni politics for years, often drawing Yemen into a wider regional battleground. Despite years-long military interventions and massive financial investment, external actors have rarely determined political outcomes, and reading Yemen through a mere proxy war lens risks overlooking important dynamics. In reality, concerns of political survival drives the struggle for power in Yemen, and domestic actors have a long history of manipulating foreign support to serve their own political agendas. The study of local elites, their alliances, networks and structures is therefore key to understand political developments, especially at critical junctures like the one observed in December 2017.

Second, inclusion in government or in other state institutions does not equate power. Power-sharing agreements that focus merely on how political appointments are distributed across party lines often overlook the role of informal networks in creating ties between elites and affecting the stability of political orders. As such, institutional arrangements stipulating an equal division of government positions may still result in an unbalanced distribution of power and produce grievances among the elites. This seems to be a recurring theme in contemporary Yemen, where institutional structures designed to guarantee an equal access to power to various groups in the aftermath of national unity in 1990, the 2011 uprisings and the current civil war have generated further instability. Far from reining in predatory elites or uprooting pre-existing elite networks, they have often

exacerbated mutual distrust and instead produced perverse incentives to state capture for the more powerful groups.

Third, analyses that describe political systems merely as pervaded by informal networks fail to acknowledge how formal institutions also matter. Patronage-based systems regulated by transactional mechanisms are more vulnerable when an authoritarian leader is ousted from power or is forced into a cohabitation with a more cohesive political ally. Expectations that the ousted leader – especially if subject to sanctions or intense external pressures – may run out of patronage resources and not sustain their networks can influence the behaviour of intermediate elites, leading them to switch allegiances. Pragmatic actors, like Saleh's long-time tribal allies, are likely to withdraw their support to a leader or a party should they find a new and more credible power broker. In particular, the GPC's ancillary position left the party more vulnerable to internal splits while Saleh's depleting political and financial capital hindered his capacity to weather an existential political crisis.

A final consideration concerns the stability of the government in control of northern Yemen. Based on a pragmatic power sharing agreement from the outset, the Houthi-Saleh alliance capitalised on the looming threat of the conflict and the Saudi-led air intervention to garner popular support and unite restive elites. Requiring regular resource extraction and capital accumulation (Tilly 1985), the Houthis' war effort has been crucial to the emergence of the wartime political order centred in Sana'a. The survival of that order, however, may face new challenges should the risk of conflict escalation fade or become less pressing. The evolution of the regime since December 2017 seems to suggest that, if challenges to Houthi rule are to emerge, these are unlikely to come from the centre. Unless simmering tensions over strategic interests exacerbate divisions within Ansar Allah's leadership, the concentration of power in the hands of a restricted, family-based inner circle seems to rule out the possibility that splits from marginal elites, such as what is left of the GPC, could weaken the ruling coalition. On the contrary, widespread discontent in the periphery over Ansar Allah's repressive practices may induce local elites and groups to defect or rise up against the regime, as increasingly observed throughout 2019 (Carboni and Nevola 2019; al-Deen 2019). The extent to which such outcomes are likely is, however, unclear and will be influenced by the ongoing conflict dynamics.

8. Between the cracks. Actor fragmentation and local conflict systems in the Libyan Civil War⁵⁰

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8.1. Introduction

The fragmentation of non-state armed organisations is closely related to patterns of state failure in post-Cold War Africa and the Middle East: rebel groups contesting the legitimacy of the central state fail to consolidate power, and are susceptible to internal divisions. The result is a high level of opposition fragmentation that prolongs and complicates violent political transitions. Armed group fragmentation often goes hand-in-hand with the decentralisation of security and territorial control. The ‘lawlessness’ of armed militias is perceived to prevent enduring peace settlements by disrupting the economic sector, violating human rights, and episodic clashes (Cunningham 2013; Willcoxon 2017).

Armed group fragmentation is also seen as a major cause of conflict escalation in Libya, where the state is highly contested. State building projects from 2011-2013 fell short of their intended consequences due to their state-centric focus on elections, governance and capacity building. The establishment of a transitional government, the General National Congress (GNC) contributed to the fragmented political landscape by institutionalising a process of political isolation, itself a product of a Weberian concept of ‘statehood’ (Lamont 2016). In the absence of authority over the legitimate use of force, attempts to centralise the ‘rules of the game’ lacked nation-wide legitimacy and enabled the emergence of post-revolutionary groups to contest the developing and nascent political order.

Despite the presence of two parliaments and three governments, no central authority has emerged to govern and administer the political functions of the Libyan state. Academic and policy analyses alike characterise Libya as a failed state with the near total collapse of state institutions and the country divided along multiple tribal, political, religious, and

⁵⁰ An earlier version of this manuscript was presented at the ‘Conflict, Borders and Contested Space Postgraduate Conference at the University of Exeter, 24-25 May 2017. The article was published in *Small Wars and Insurgency*: Carboni, A and Moody, J. (2018). Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 29(3): 456-490.

ideological cleavages that have exacerbated tensions into an all-out conflict escalation. These analyses portray Libya as an ungoverned space that provides non-state armed groups with a safe haven and easy access to weapons, and where its prolonged crisis risks reverberating across neighbouring countries (Lacher 2016). As such, explanations that Libya is on the brink of, or has slid into, a protracted period of escalation abound.

Contrary to civil war studies that treat the state as a unitary entity, where armed groups operate uniformly, and which give precedence to national configurations of power, we suggest that local state-building processes are key in determining the conflict landscapes that develop. Through a case study on the Libyan Civil War (2014-2017), this paper demonstrates that armed group fragmentation does not lead to conflict escalation on the national level. Despite sustained rates of violence throughout the war, actor proliferation and violence escalation are only correlated in the localised conflict environment of southern Libya. How can we begin to understand why the proliferation of non-state armed groups, particularly during developments in the political settlement, has not led to a nationwide increase in the overall levels of violence as expected? What is the logic of these groups emerging if they do not sustain their violence levels?

We interpret this subnational variation in armed group fragmentation and conflict activity as an indicator of the presence of areas of limited statehood across Libya. In each of these subnational conflict environments, violence signals an attempt to renegotiate and contest the existing political order on the local level. National and local political considerations interact to motivate or constrain armed groups from fragmenting and perpetrating violence. Consequently, the relationship between violence and armed group fragmentation is the product of locally-situated political opportunities.

The paper begins with an overview of the existing literature on limited statehood to discuss the role of non-state actors in wartime political orders, and their contested relationship with state actors. The following section explores how the proliferation of armed groups in civil wars is critical for influencing wider conflict dynamics and fuelling violence escalation. After briefly introducing the fragmented nature of the Libyan conflict, we analyse patterns of violence escalation and armed group fragmentation during the second Libyan civil war, from May 2014 to April 2017. The paper then explores how armed groups have emerged and used violence both nationally and locally, comparing the different patterns observed across the Libyan territory. Finally, the discussion explains

how these discrete conflict dynamics are relevant to the emergence of local political orders, and to a broader understanding of the relationship between fragmentation and escalation in civil wars.

8.2. Governance: limited statehood, political order and non-state authority

Classifying conflict-ridden states as a failed or fragile overlooks the multiple arenas of governance that are operational within the states' territory. Scholars have instead explored the multiple and unconventional forms of statehood (Boege, Brown and Clements 2009) through the concept of 'Areas of Limited Statehood' (ALS) (Risse 2017). Thomas Risse contends that ALS "refer to those parts of a country in which central authorities (governments) lack the ability to implement and enforce rules and decisions and/or in which the legitimate monopoly over the means of violence is lacking, at least temporarily" (*ibid.*: 6-7). In such scenarios, non-state and state actors compete for resources and the support of the population through *hierarchical* and *non-hierarchical* governance.

Applying the concept of ALS to conflict dynamics, Staniland argues that the existing academic scholarship on civil wars fails to illustrate 'the nature of authority, politics, and order in a particular area or war at any given point in time.' In short, research falls short of explaining the formation of what Staniland terms "wartime political orders"; the structures of power and authority that emerge during a violent conflict and are sustained by armed actors (Staniland 2012: 247). While the link between state building and violence is well established, little empirical insight has been developed into the configurations of power between state and non-state actors and how this impacts processes of war-making, state-making, extraction and protection (Tilly 1985). Raeymaekers, Menkhaus and Vlassenroot (2008) advance Tilly's concept of state building in historical European contexts to contemporary African wars and extend the process to non-state political agents. They highlight how rather than anarchy, disorder, and chaos, "state and non-state actors are making systematic attempts to control economic activity by establishing modes of rent-creation and elaborating systems of capital accumulation that have significantly altered the balance of power among social constituencies" (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus and Vlassenroot 2008: 13). Other studies have explored how territorial control increases the prospects of acquiring resources and popular support focusing on the rivalry between state and non-state actors (Krasner and Risse 2014; Risse 2017).

Ana Arjona further applies notions of ALS to sectoral and social dimensions of governance through her definition of a ‘wartime social order’. This is “the set of rules that structure human interaction in a given community during wartime, allowing for that predictability to exist” (Arjona 2014: 1374), which in turn shapes the incentives, payoffs and strategies employed by political groups contesting power in ALS. Investigating the social institutions established in rebel-held areas, including schools and administrative systems, highlights the diverse nature of rule-enforcement that go beyond traditional Weberian notions of statehood. Arjona’s framework relates specifically to principal-agent problems of legitimacy between states and citizens in areas of rebel governance⁵¹ while Staniland focuses on state-insurgent interactions. In Libya, state versus non-state actors is only one of many conflict dyads, as militia and communal groups have been locked in local and regional contests with each other preceding 2014.

In traditional Weberian statehood, relationships between state and non-state agents are organised hierarchically, with the state maintaining the ability to unilaterally enforce rule and order. The position of non-state armed groups vis à vis the state creates a landscape of hierarchical power that influences the modes and patterns of violence (Raleigh 2012a). In ALS, governance can be enforced by non-state agents who have a greater coercive capacity than their counterparts. Furthermore, alternative political orderings exist outside of hierarchical relations. Non-hierarchical ‘steering’ occurs when no actor possesses the coercive capacity to enforce its will on other political actors (Risse 2017: 9). Here, Olson’s ‘logic of appropriateness’ induces actors to internalise new rules and norms - not through the threat of coercion - but through networks of persuasion and self-regulation that impact the cost-benefit analysis of armed groups.

However, even this private, non-hierarchical rule-making is not always free from the influence of public, hierarchical modes that exist underneath. In most instances, even when the state is not fully functioning, the *total* decentralisation of power or complete absence of rules is not a feature of the political landscape. This is because either the state *remains* one of several actors in a system of interaction between groups competing for power, or non-state agents dictating the rules-of-the-game operate in the ‘shadow of hierarchy’ if they possess enforcement capacity. In these scenarios, political hierarchies

⁵¹ Further studies on rebel-citizen interactions include Wood (2012) and Mampilly (2011).

can be seen as ‘devolved’ from the centre whereby armed groups engage in the “reproduction” of state governance within territorially-bounded units.

8.3. Insurgent fragmentation and conflict dynamics

Renewed attention to the practices of power and governance in developing and fragile states have reinforced the relationship between political institutions and violent conflict at the subnational level (Snyder 2001; Raleigh *et al.* 2010; Raleigh and De Bruijne 2015). Political institutions in Africa are characterised by an uneven projection of state authority, reflecting the unequal outreach of the state across its territory (Boone 2003). In most instances, the state in Africa possesses a quasi-monopoly on the use of violence, exercising it in coordination with, or parallel to, a plethora of non-state actors, intermediate elites and local strongmen. Consequently, the spatial distribution of violence clusters along distinctive subnational geographies producing substantial differences in the nature and use of violence by armed actors.

However, disaggregating civil wars by their constituent arenas of violence can be guilty of fetishizing the local, removing the possibility for trajectories of violence to be directed by practices of power above the local level and abrogating any rationale behind coalition building. A geographical analysis of violence at the subnational scale reveals patterns of conflict that indicate multiple processes of governance and state building that are neither independent of nor subsumed by national scale developments. The suggestion that localised politics supersedes macro-level tensions in driving conflict patterns sits uncomfortably to the realities of contemporary violence in developing and fragile states. In these settings, the state remains one of many non-uniform actors vying for political control, service provision, bureaucratic administration, and military domination (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus and Vlassenroot 2008: 9).

Within the civil war literature, there is a general consensus that the proliferation of armed groups increases conflict and the duration of civil wars⁵². Existing theories of armed group fragmentation predominantly explore how rebel groups and self-determination movements contest the state (Bakke, Cunningham and Seymour 2012; Pearlman and Cunningham 2012; Brenner 2015). However, in recent years across Africa, up to one third

⁵² Studies of non-state actor strategies are well-developed in exploring the trajectory of civil conflict and has been shown to influence the onset (Cunningham 2012); resolution (Driscoll 2012; Staniland 2012), modalities and intensities of violence (Boyle 2009; Balcells 2010; Raleigh 2012b) and direction of civil wars (Clayton and Thomson 2015).

of all armed conflict is attributed to militia groups, a trend that is changing the nature of contemporary warfare on the continent (Raleigh 2016). Armed militias perform a range of functions and conduct violence on behalf of political elites, at times of heightened inter-elite competition for power and resources (Raleigh and Kishi 2018). These findings thus challenge the Weberian notion of state sovereignty, whereby the state exercises a monopoly on the use of legitimate force.

Two mechanisms explain the relationship between armed group fragmentation and conflict (de)escalation: the role of spoilers and credible commitment problems. Fractured opposition movements and a large number of armed groups experience increased commitment problems that obstructs de-escalation (Cunningham 2013: 660). As more armed groups enter the fold, attempts by spoiler groups to derail the peace process increase. Similarly, governments can capitalise on fragmented non-state groups by offering selective concessions to moderate groups, isolating them from their radical allies. Whilst this is expected to establish better prospects for a peace agreement to be achieved, exclusive political settlements rarely address the underlying issues that motivated tensions in the first place, increasing the risk that states relapse into violence (Brenner 2015).

Findley and Rudloff challenge the destabilising effect of spoiler groups on civil war duration (Findley and Rudloff 2012). Combatant fragmentation can rupture the existing calculus of factions, establishing a new logic in which a negotiated settlement is a more favoured solution to fighting. In this scenario, weaker hard-line elements are sidelined from the transitional process when inter-group bargaining between moderate factions is more easily negotiated. Despite this, the expectation that armed group fragmentation increases the risk of conflict escalation and the continuation of civil wars remains influential across conflict studies, governance and political science.

Insurgent fragmentation and escalation have also been shown to be contingent on bargaining processes and the states' ability to co-opt warlords (Driscoll 2012). According to these interpretations, fragmentation represents the process of selective incorporation of militia leaders into the state apparatus as the civil war subsides. In this sense, "the state" can be treated as a semipermeable membrane for violence entrepreneurs, who weigh their life opportunities as social bandits against their life opportunities as agents of an internationally recognised sovereign (Driscoll 2012: 12). Rather than commitment

problems leading to the extension of fighting, rebel fragmentation was one path towards a peace settlement. Fewer studies consider how variation in fragmentation across space produces and is produced by the political environment in which it is situated.

8.4. Contested statehood and violence in the Libyan Civil War, 2014-2017

The second Libyan Civil War that broke out in May 2014 pitted two rival political administrations against one another for control of resources and authority. These are the House of Representatives (HoR) based in Beida and the GNC headquartered in Tripoli. Each of these parliaments has gained de facto support from splintered armed groups that offer security in exchange for concessions. These groups either emerged during or after the 2011 revolution and many had their origins in the security apparatus of the transitional government following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi.

Competition and polarisation between multiple armed and political groups in the post-2011 political setting led to rising tensions culminating in a wave of assassinations of civil society activists, security officers and political figures in Benghazi from late 2013 to early 2014. In May 2014, tensions conflated as General Khalifa Haftar, who had mobilised his self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) against the GNC, launched a military offensive to clear Benghazi of armed Islamist groups. Against this backdrop, a constellation of actors supporting the GNC – including the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room (LROR) and militias from Misrata – attempted to wrest control of Tripoli International Airport by forcing out anti-GNC Zintan militias (Collombier 2016; Costantini 2016). While the political crisis between the GNC and HoR escalated in the summer of 2014, forcing the HoR to relocate to Tobruk and side with Haftar, local tensions between Tuareg and Tebu tribes resurfaced around the town of Ubari in the south. UN-backed attempts to restore political unity under the Government of National Accord (GNA) resulted in the partial dissolution of the GNC but have not led to a comprehensive settlement between the two competing authorities.

At the same time, explaining the Libyan civil war as a mere dispute between two rival governing authorities based in the east and the west, or between secularist and Islamist fronts, reduces the nature of a multifaceted conflict to a two-sided confrontation. The nature of territorial control shows significant variation between regions in Libya. In the north-west, local, ‘turf-war’ territorial challenges are more common than all-out attacks to control the capital. In contrast, eastern Libya has witnessed counter-insurgency warfare

aimed at fighting predominantly Islamist groups in Benghazi, whilst control of resource areas and strategic routes defines violence in the south of the country. Taken together, these conflict dynamics and political developments on the ground suggest that a series of local political orders have emerged in Libya in which “violence is not simply used to mount or repress total military challenges to state power, but instead is a flexible tool in pursuit of numerous political, economic, and social goals (Staniland 2012: 255).

Additionally, by the end of 2013, the failure of demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) plans had enabled the proliferation of a number of armed militia groups including revolutionary brigades, political militias, criminal gangs and quasi-legitimate non-state forces that could offer support or resistance to the two different governments (Stacher 2015; Collombier 2016). Several factors were conducive to this outcome. The fracturing of the government went hand in hand with the disintegration of the security sector. The resulting security vacuum led to an explosion of non-state armed groups organised along city, tribal and ethnic lines that fought against Gaddafi’s forces in 2011 to protect local communities.

Weak state capacity during the transition consolidated armed group mobilisation, reinforcing a hyperlocal security dilemma. Revolutionary groups established ‘Military Councils’ as the National Transitional Council (NTC) was unable to move away from decentralised military operations, and in some instances these councils – particularly the Misrata Military Council – went on to be resistant to the UN-backed Presidential Council (PC). The complex web of pro-regime and revolutionary brigades that prevailed in post-Gaddafi Libya thus prevented a ‘monopoly of force’ from being established and “having lost in constitutional politics, jihadists and federalists capitalized on the state’s military weakness to violently pursue their agendas.” (DeVore 2014: 464). The absence of central authority and governance motivated politically-minded elites and regional power players to represent themselves through armed groups pursuing their own local agendas. Rather than characterised by a lack of governance, the political landscape in Libya is constrained by an “overproduction of governance” whereby the language of politics is violence (Costantini 2016).⁵³

We explain these multiple, distinct patterns of violence within civil conflict by exploring the localised political incentives that shape strategies of insurgents, governments and the

⁵³ A critical reading of the failed state discourse is also proposed in Raleigh and Dowd (2013).

nature of political contention and violence. We suggest that by studying one element of armed group behaviour within different institutional settings – fragmentation – we can build a better understanding of the trajectory of violence in civil wars and how this reflects Tillean functions of state activity in ALS. In other words, we seek to understand whether the presence of more conflict agents contributes to increasing violence, and why these actors resort to armed violence to advance their interests.

To analyse the interaction between actor fragmentation and conflict escalation during the Libyan civil war, we use data from ACLED (Raleigh *et al.* 2010). ACLED records information on conflict and protest events across Africa, with data available from 1997 to the present. Each ACLED event is disaggregated by the location of the event, the date it occurred, the name and the type of actor involved, the type of violence and the number of fatalities. Non-violent events involving conflict actors are also coded to record strategic developments in a country's conflict environment.

We surveyed the first thirty-six months of the Libyan civil war, from its outbreak in May 2014 to April 2017 (*see* Figure 8.1 below). The primary characteristic of the violence recorded in Libya belies most expectations. During this period, ACLED recorded 2,728 violent events and 8,433 conflict-related fatalities. These high numbers notwithstanding, the conflict environment has demonstrated remarkable stability since mid-2014, and in particular between June 2015 and March 2017. Despite sporadic peaks coinciding with the military campaigns to liberate Sirte and Benghazi from Islamist militants, the total number of events has gradually decreased during the period of study from an average of 98.5 events per month to 55.75 in 2017. Similarly, although two peaks in conflict-related fatalities in June and December 2016 are discernible, fatalities have exhibited a downward trend since October 2014, in which over 560 fatalities were recorded that month.

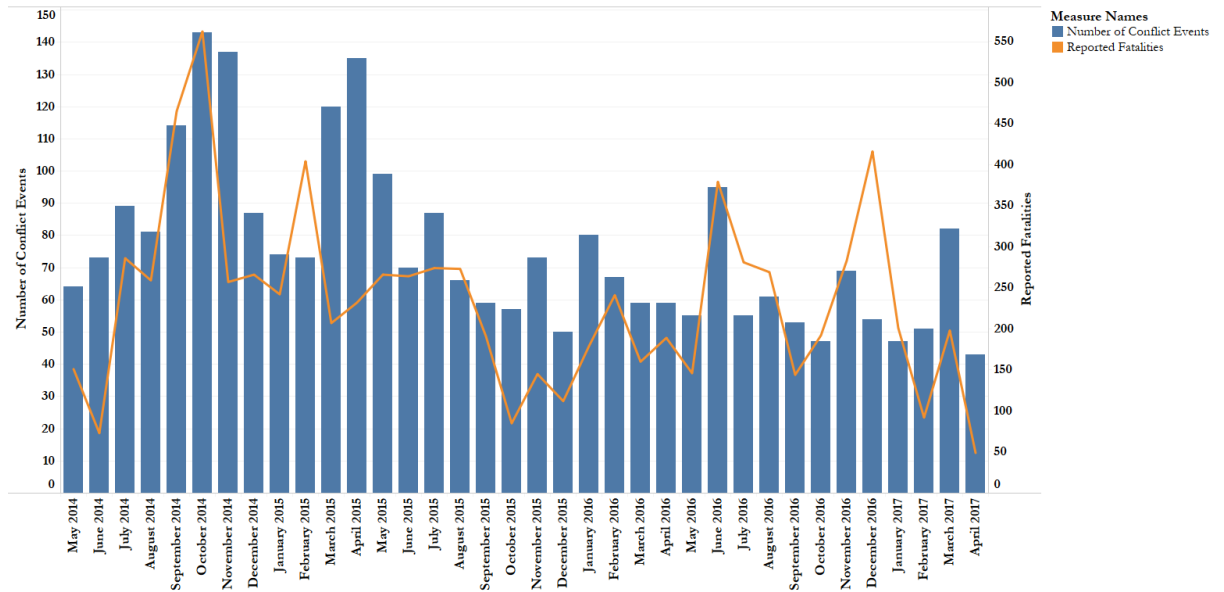


Figure 8.1: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

Overall, state-insurgent and intra-insurgent clashes, violence against civilians and remote violence activity do not indicate a significant shift in the ‘on the ground’ realities that have played out. Battles between armed groups made up half of total violence recorded in Libya since May 2014 (*see* Figure 8.2). Whilst armed confrontations have periodically intensified – like in Benghazi in late 2014 or in Sirte in June 2016 - this share has remained stable over time. Air strikes, artillery shells and other forms of remote violence constituted around one third of total conflict events, although they rarely hit areas that did not witness ground battles. Violence against civilians, a signal of intra-militia competition and communication of group strength to be co-opted by governments (Raleigh 2012b), began to increase after December 2016 but does not seem to represent a radically new approach employed by non-state armed groups.

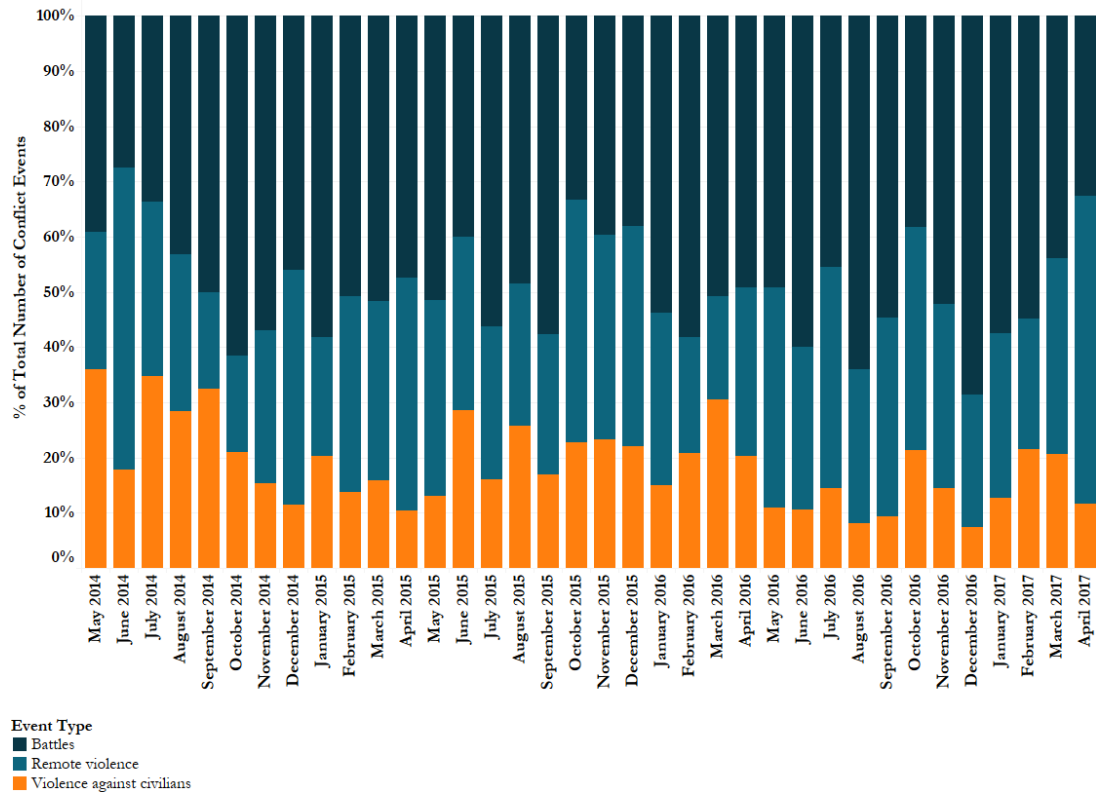


Figure 8.2: Percentage of Conflict Events by Type of Violence in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

Analysing attacks by armed group type further supports the theme of stability. Between May 2014 and April 2017, ACLED identified 127 distinct non-state actors as active in at least one violent or non-violent event, whereas only 115 were responsible for using violence in at least one event. Figure 8.3 shows that political militias are the most active non-state conflict agent in the country, with their activity constituting more than half of the violence perpetrated by armed groups across Libya. The most significant trend is the decrease in communal militia activity as militia brigades from Misrata, Zintan and groups based around Jebel Nafusa in the north-west have integrated into military coalitions affiliated with competing governments. For example, the Misratan militia that spearheaded “Operation Sunrise” to wrest control of the central oil terminals from Operation Dignity forces in December 2014 and March 2015 later united under the armed wing of the GNA to defeat the Islamic State. Similarly, Zintan and Wersheffana militias affiliated with the “Tribes Army” based in western Libya operated under the remit of the Operation Dignity coalition.

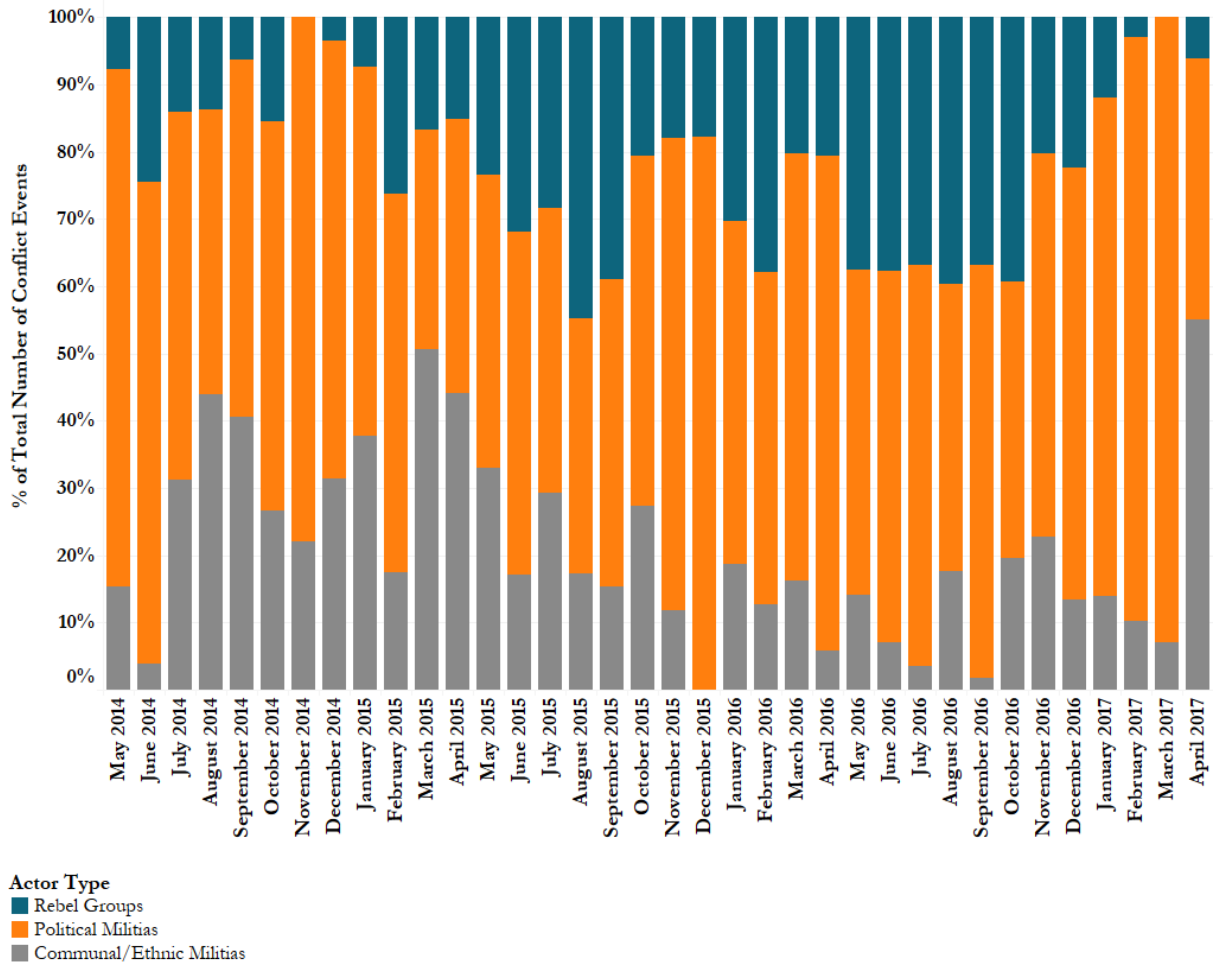


Figure 8.3: Percentage of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

The data display another counter-intuitive trend. The number of conflict agents contributing to violence has periodically fluctuated, but has not increased significantly since the outbreak of the war. The months in which the number of armed groups was highest seems to be characterised by a higher number of attacks, suggesting that splintered movements contribute to the perpetuation and escalation of civil wars. However, when employing an actor fragmentation index that accounts for the share of violence armed groups are responsible for, the relationship disappears (*see* Figure 8.4).

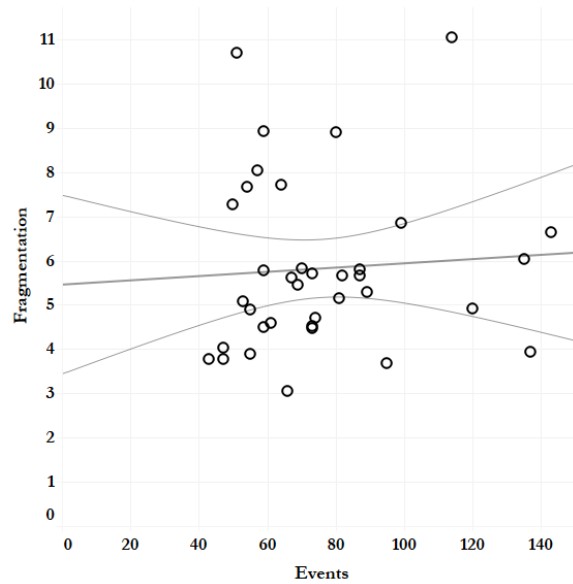


Figure 8.4: Armed Group Fragmentation and Levels of Political Violence in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

Instead of merely counting the single agents active in a certain month, this indicator allows capturing the share of violence each actor is responsible for, as measured by the number of politically-violent events they engaged in (Dowd 2015).⁵⁴

Rather than implying an absolutist understanding of the conflict process where many ‘frenzied’ militias concomitantly escalate violence, national-level data do not support the claim that the proliferation of non-state armed groups has increased overall levels of violence in the Libyan conflict from 2014-2017. From this scale of analysis, the Libyan conflict does not conform to the expectation that internal divisions fuel civil conflict (Cunningham 2013). By contrast, data indicate that a handful of influential armed actors are responsible for driving increases in violence, and these are often those that relinquish arms in favour of a prominent position in post-transition polities. In short, violence is concentrated in the hands of specific groups of actors who tactically escalate their activity,

⁵⁴ This index is drawn from Laakso and Taagepera’s electoral study of party systems’ fragmentation (1979), and is calculated using the following equation: $N = \frac{1}{\sum_e (A_e)^2}$ where A_e stands for the number of events for which a single non-state actor e is responsible. For example, a fragmentation index of 1 – the lowest in the scale – indicates that a single armed group is responsible for all violence in one month. By contrast, higher values are evidence of more actors becoming active and contributing to a higher share of violence. In order to capture a wider range of non-state actors that have become politically active but have not resorted to violence, we decided, contrary to Dowd (2015: 3), to also count political agents responsible for non-violent activity, such as disruptions, roadblocks, prisoner exchanges, peaceful transfers of territory or peace talks.

suggesting a process of political bargaining that does not occur uniformly across the territory.

Therefore, scaling down our analysis to the subnational level may provide further insights on patterns of conflict within Libya. In doing so, we begin to build a more complete picture of the structures of contestation, the agents responsible for violence and their relationship to other armed groups and to the state, as well as the distinct geographies in which civil war violence clusters (see Figure 8.5). Our analysis investigates levels of conflict activity and actor fragmentation using ACLED's first-level administrative divisions, which correspond to Libya's districts (*sha'biyat*) between 2001 and 2007. We grouped different districts showing similar patterns to create three separate conflict environments: Tripoli and the West; Benghazi and the East; and Southern Libya⁵⁵.

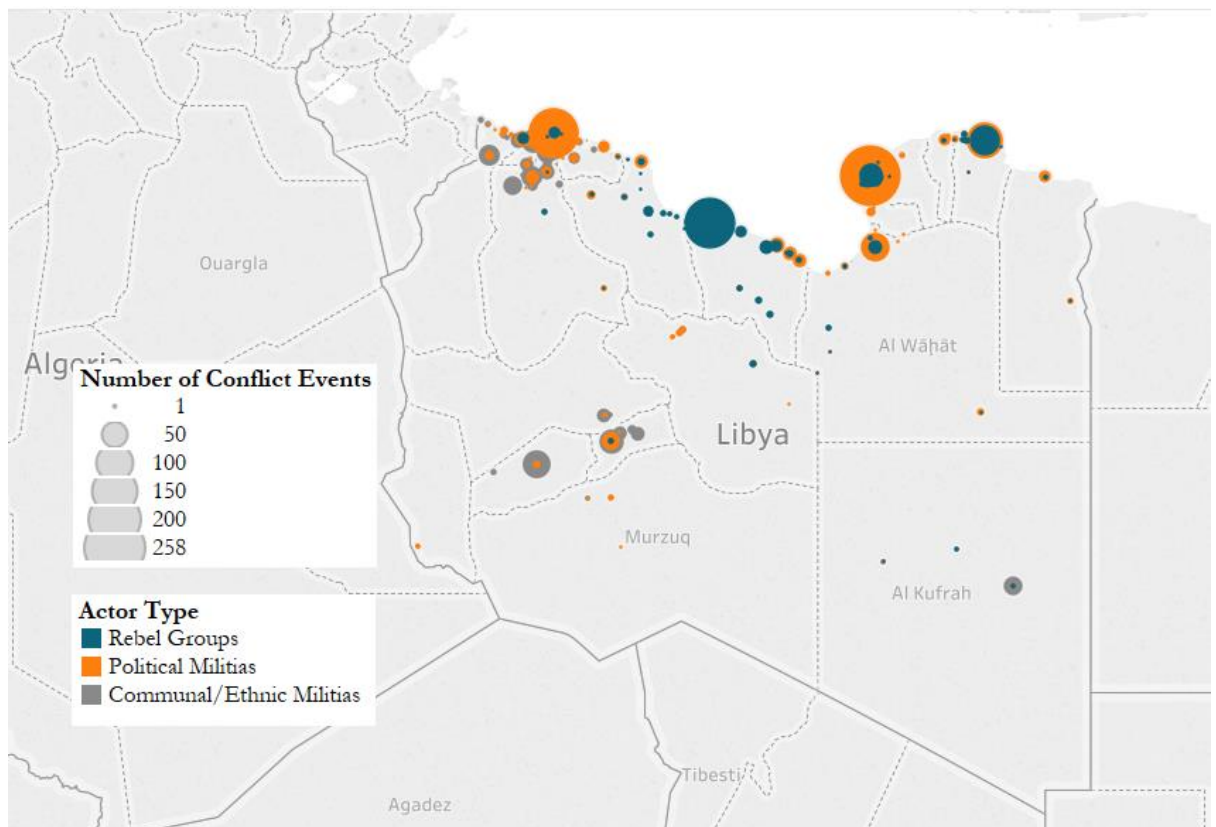


Figure 8.5: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type and Location in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

⁵⁵ Western Libya includes the capital Tripoli and the districts of Al Jabal al Gharbi, Al Marqab, An Nuqat al Khams, Az Zawiah, Ghadamis, Gharyan, Jafara, Misratah, Mizdah, Nalut, Sabratah Surman, Surt, Tajura wa an Nawahi al Arba, Tarhunah-Masallatah and Yafran-Jadu. Eastern Libya roughly correspond to the historical administration of Cyrenaica, and is composed of the districts of Ajdabiya, Al Butnan, Al Hizam al Akhdar, Al Jabal al Akhdar, Al Marj, Al Qubbah, Al Wahah and Darnah. Southern Libya, which includes the historical Fezzan region, extends across the districts of Al Jufrah, Al Kufrah, Ash Shati, Ghat, Murzuq, Sabha and Wadi al Hayat.

We argue that each of these regions currently constitutes a distinct wartime political order, in which the configuration of power provides armed groups with different incentives to use violence (Staniland 2012). We expect each of these political orders to be characterised by specific conflict patterns and different levels of actor fragmentation. These distinct regional conflict environments, however, were not a by-product of the civil war but they were reactivated by the civil conflict. Their emergence is anchored in Libya's tortuous state-making process during which the delegation of powers to subnational administrative divisions was instrumental in the consolidation of local elites and armed groups (Turki and Loschi 2017: 8-10). In Eastern Libya, for instance, widespread opposition to Gaddafi's exclusionary rule was key to rallying support for the revolutionaries in Benghazi and across the region, despite its diverse tribal and ethnic composition (Wehrey 2014).

8.4.1. Armed group fragmentation in Libya's wartime political orders

30 of the 32 districts of Libya have, to different degrees, experienced varying forms and levels of political violence and non-violent activity during the period of investigation. This non-uniformity in conflict coverage is consistent with developments in spatial analyses of civil wars (Raleigh, Witmer and O'Loughlin 2009) and challenges the assumption that civil wars take place primarily in peripheral regions far away from the country capital (Aas Rustad *et al.* 2011). Additionally, the forms of political activity are not confined to insurgent activity that pits governments against opposition rebels. Violence against civilians, rioting behaviour, non-violent militia posturing, tribal bargaining and ceasefire agreements also contribute to localised patterns of power contestation.

The graph shown in Figure 8.6 reveals significant variations in the fragmentation of armed groups recorded in Eastern, Western and Southern Libya. The regions around the capital are more likely to see higher fragmentation than the rest of Libya. The average share of political violence attributed to non-state armed groups is 5.5, with regular spikes in the months preceding the establishment of the PC led by Fayeze al-Sarraj in Tripoli. By contrast, average actor fragmentation for the same period was 2.73 in the East and 2.28 in the South.

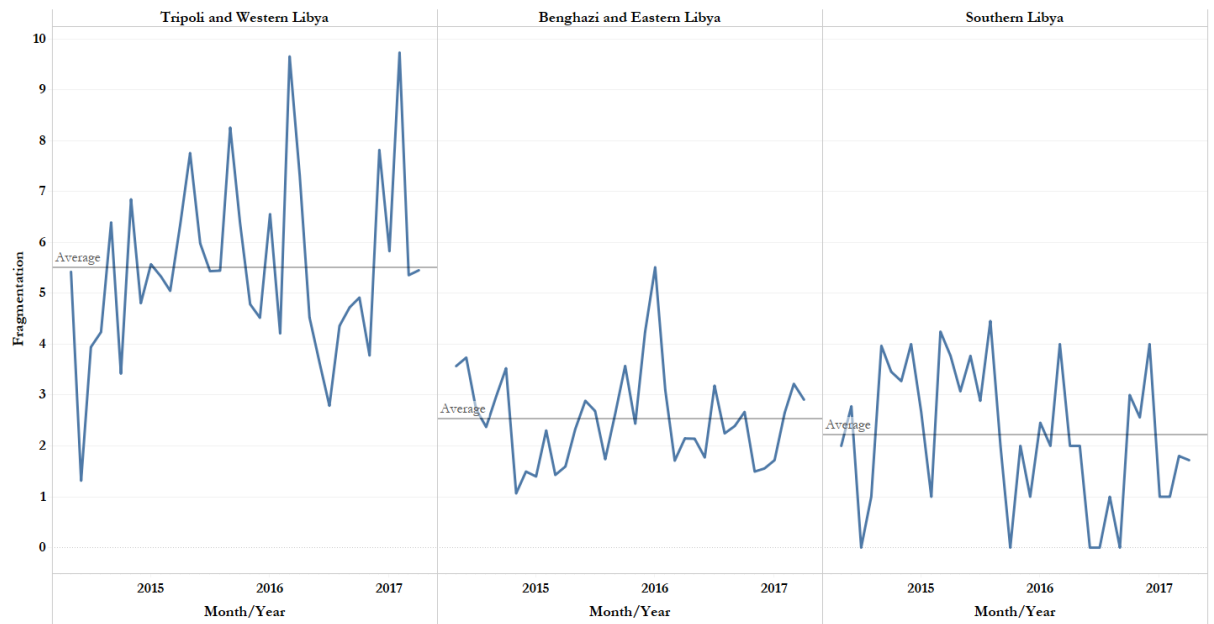


Figure 8.6: Armed Group Fragmentation by Region in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

In Western Libya, actor fragmentation is overwhelmingly driven by the emergence of armed militias who typically act as local security providers at the city or district level. These non-state actors, which include communal and tribal militias as well as a variety of military brigades that have mobilised in the years since 2011, have often performed state-like activities, replacing governmental authorities for providing security and extracting taxes.⁵⁶ Their activity reflects the different outreach, capabilities, and goals of these actors. Whereas only some of these groups, such as the Tripoli-aligned militias from Zintan and Misrata, or those from Wersheffana and Gharyan, have operated across multiple administrative divisions, nearly 80% of the non-state armed groups present in the Western region were recorded as being active in one or two second-level administrative divisions, pointing to a highly volatile conflict environment (*see* Figure 8.7). The presence of these localised militias in Tripoli and its surrounding regions has contributed to perceptions of Libya being characterised as a “country of small wars” (al-Esha 2016).

⁵⁶ Examples were cited in Jebnoun (2015); Jeursen and van der Borgh (2014); and Raghavan (2016).

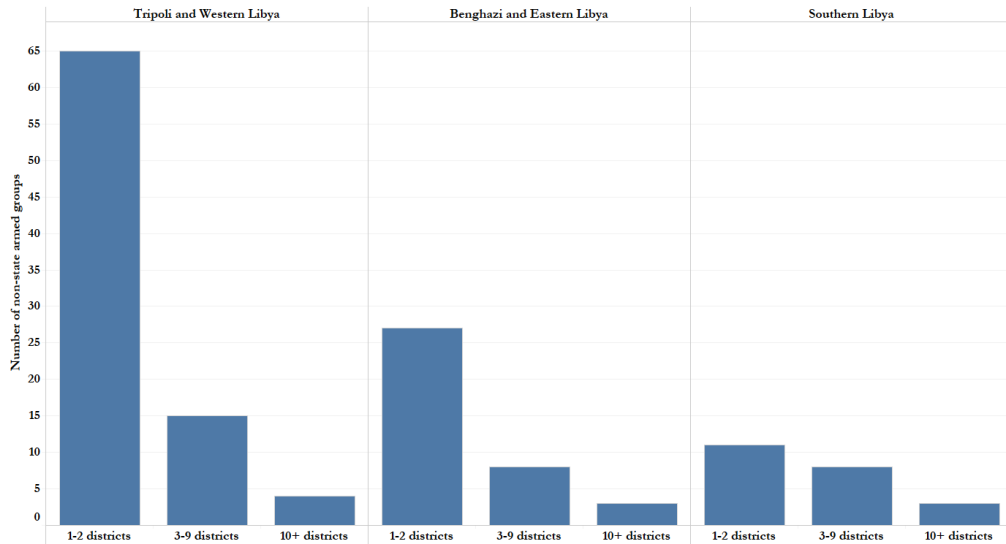


Figure 8.7: Non-State Armed Groups in Libya's Regions per Activity Outreach from May 2014 to April 2017

In addition to the militias, the Islamic State (IS) organisation played a major role in Sirte and the wider Tripolitania region. Despite being active across the whole of the Libyan territory, the local branches of IS were the actor most frequently involved in conflict events in Tripolitania. Events involving IS were also the most lethal, as one third of total fatalities in the region were recorded in events where their militants participated in the fighting. This finding seems to suggest that the other regional conflict actors were not as likely as IS to escalate violence, instead adopting a more restrained behaviour that followed a local logic.

By contrast, actor fragmentation has been significantly lower in Eastern Libya. Here, conflict dynamics have largely been influenced by the conflict that has pitted General Khalifa Haftar's LNA against Islamist militias in Benghazi and Darnah. Ansar al Sharia, the Islamic State and the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council make up for more than half of all non-state violence in this region between May 2014 and April 2017. Haftar's emergence as the strongman in the East has shaped the local conflict environment, cementing local and international alliances and preventing substantial challenges to his predominance over the region and the proliferation of armed groups as witnessed in North-West Libya (Lewis 2017).

Compared to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, the South has seen fewer conflict events and, therefore, fewer conflict actors have been active in the area. Primary perpetrators of violence were the local Tebu, Tuareg, Awlad Suleiman and Qadhadhfa militias, which

have regularly fought around the southern towns of Ubari and Sabha, along the trans-Saharan commercial routes. Nevertheless, non-local actors have sporadically contributed to non-state violence in southern Libya, including Misratan militias fighting Haftar's forces, Sudanese and Chadian rebel groups and militias and the Islamist Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi (Profazio 2017).

Table 1 (*see* Appendix) shows that the behaviour of non-state actors also present significant variations in the three regions. Intra-militia fighting is the most common form of violence in Western Libya, making up more than half of all events recorded by ACLED in the region (647 events). Here, security forces interact with militia groups in only 9% of cases, an evidence of the security vacuum that has made political and communal militias the dominant conflict agents in the region. Fighting between opposing militias also constitutes the largest share of the violence in the South, where, however, government forces have more frequently engaged in violence with local non-state armed groups. These actors, which control profitable sites in Libya's south, have battled the forces of Haftar's LNA and the GNA in more than 20% of events. By contrast, government forces fighting militia and rebel groups were the most common actor dyads in the East, pointing to the military and political relevance of Haftar's allied forces in eastern Libya.

This analysis leaves the question of whether actor fragmentation leads to conflict escalation unanswered. We have thus tested our initial hypothesis using a simple linear regression model shown in Figure 8.8. The graphs illustrate how varying forms of actor fragmentation at the regional level result in different levels of political violence measured in the number of both conflict events and reported fatalities. We find that months where armed group fragmentation is higher are not correlated with more violence in Western and Eastern Libya, while actor fragmentation is correlated with escalating conflict in southern Libya only.

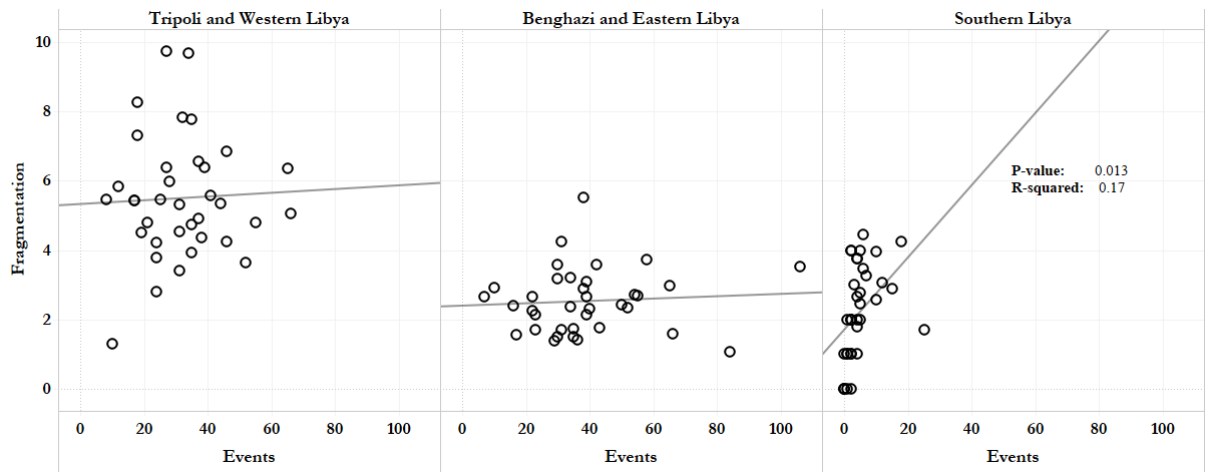


Figure 8.8: Armed Group Fragmentation Index and Levels of Political Violence by Region in Libya from May 2014 to April 2017

The interaction between armed group fragmentation and conflict escalation displays spatial heterogeneity whereby local dynamics contribute to shaping specific subnational conflict environments. The next section discusses what factors shape the local conflict environments to explain the abovementioned differences in actor fragmentation and conflict escalation. Why is actor fragmentation driving escalation in the Fezzan region, and not in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania? What explains the comparatively low escalation of violence around Tripoli, despite the concomitant presence of multiple agents of conflict? How has the presence of General Haftar managed to contain the proliferation of armed groups?

8.5. Understanding Libya's political orders

The findings demonstrate geographic variation in insurgent fragmentation in Libya and indicate that actor fragmentation by itself does not lead to higher levels of armed conflict. As such, fragmentation is not a sufficient predictor of violence patterns. A lack of state capacity, disintegration of the security sector and proximity to the capital city are posited as motivation for insurgents to escalate violence and contest for state power. By capturing the remnant machinery of political authority, non-state groups are able to (re)distribute resources, privilege and power to favoured elite groups and constituents. These explanations, however, fail to explain the observed variations in patterns of political violence at the regional level. To overcome this, we outline the logic of civil war in each region that shapes the political opportunities and incentives for armed groups to fragment and the nature of violence they employ.

While all these features are present within Tripoli – a paralysed unity government struggling to establish unity and a quasi-institutionalised military force – this explanation is predicated on the mobilisation of a rebel group that actively seeks to reproduce forms of established political authority, playing into a Weberian concept of statehood. By contrast, we find that the majority of armed groups within this region are political militias who compete to become the dominant local security provider at the city or district level. The high proliferation and fluidity of militias, including Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, Abu Salim Brigade, and Salah al-Burki militia, is tempered by the limited geographic scope of their violence, which is predominantly localised to the city of Tripoli and does not diffuse or expand beyond the capital.

Therefore, Tripoli is not a typical insurgent environment insofar as the goal of the conflict agents is not maximalist. Violence is overwhelmingly characterised by occasional, short-lived kidnappings, roadblocks, and tit-for-tat street clashes that did not escalate into all-out confrontations. Emboldened by earlier successes in influencing the political process during 2013, militia groups became aware of their leverage that “paved the way for further use of force to manipulate the mechanisms of government for political gain.” (Collombier 2016: 232-234). The violence these groups undertake does not threaten the takeover of the state, although they may continue to undermine its capacity to function by exacerbating the intractability of the conflict through “positional bargaining” (Fisher and Ury 1983). Indeed, the *raison d'être* is less about governing or establishing an alternative ruling coalition and more focused on maintaining short-term patrimonial relations with the PC and shoring up a patchwork of local territorial control to influence the political process in Tripoli.

Several overlapping logics contribute to the local conflict system in Tripoli: the most conventional explanation is that violence is a consequence of the immediate response to local insecurity in which new and antagonistic rival groups threaten the prominent social, economic, and political position these armed brigades have secured for their elite sponsors. This dynamic plays out through temporary coalition-building between Tripoli-based militias to defend the PC against the burgeoning threat of the Khalifa Ghwell's resurrected National Salvation Government (NSG) and the disparate armed groups that

back it⁵⁷. Local security dilemma explanations are unable to explain what motivated the emergence and intense fragmentation of the defensive armed groups in the first place.

A second mechanism builds on the diverse nature, aims and types of militia; some are predatory, acting as low-cost, low-risk proxies for dominant and abusive states (Mason and Krane 1989) whereas others mobilise to defend and protest local and often minority communities (Barter 2013). In Tripoli, neither typology accurately describes on-the-ground dynamics where governing institutions are for the most part absent and local communities frequently protest against destabilising and unlawful militia activity⁵⁸. Instead, a mutual process of signalling and co-optation characterises this cycle of low-level violence. For example, in July 2017, fighting erupted between rival members of the same militia, the Al-Buni brigade, which controls Libya's Mitiga airport in Tripoli. Antagonisms initially developed after a dispute over the distribution of income from operating the terminal but rapidly drew the attention of armed brigades stationed nearby. It was reported that members of the Special Deterrence Force, a Salafist-leaning anti-crime force that operates as an independent department directly under the Ministry of Interior (MOI) and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, whose official security structuring is more obscure, were sent to quell tensions.⁵⁹ The opportunity this intra-group fighting provided to other armed groups to demonstrate their military capability and prowess was compounded by the transitional government's inability to quash powerful non-state groups, who instead are intermittently tasked with varying levels of responsibility under the rubric of the PC. These include the above security provision at major installations such as airports, banks and gas and oil sites, thus producing a 'market for violence' and heightened inter-factional competition.

The third logic moves beyond city-based interactions to examine the effect of broader national antagonisms. Locally-driven patterns of contestation in the West are simultaneously influenced by the Tripoli-based administration's preoccupation with power projection across the Libyan territory in an act of defiance against the eastern power base of General Khalifa Haftar. At the beginning of June 2017, the PC announced the unilateral decision to establish seven military zones spanning the West, East and

⁵⁷ Reports of these temporary alliances were published in Fornaji (2017).

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch (2013) reported that militias from Misrata fired upon peaceful demonstrators outside the militia base in Gharghour, southern Tripoli on 15 November 2013, leaving 43 people killed. Since then, militias and their politician allies have been blamed for cutting fuel and electricity supplies inducing power and water crises in the capital. *See also* Moutaz (2017).

⁵⁹ On Tripoli's militias, *see* Pack (2017) and Libya Herald (2017).

South, in a move widely deemed to be lacking jurisdiction and credible commitment to enforce due to the difficulty it faced from multiple militias operating in Tripoli alone. As the GNA struggles to form a unified ‘bloc’ to confront the dominance of Haftar, these same groups also periodically form and dissolve tacit coalitions to nominally support the PC. These ‘signalling’ measures demonstrate to the PC that their co-optation will contribute to wider stability, i.e. by absorbing non-state groups into a single-chain of military command that will bolster the position of the GNA in its standoff with the rival HoR administration and Haftar’s eastern forces.

In Benghazi and the wider Cyrenaica region, the conflict environment is characterised by bipolarity with sustained high levels of violence but lower armed group fragmentation. In contrast to the Tripoli administration’s weak capacity to manage internal threats, patterns of violence in the east conform to the four processes of war and state-making identified by Charles Tilly: war-making, state-making, protection and extraction (Tilly 1985). Haftar has positioned his LNA as the dominant force in the region, tentatively containing local challenges from powerful tribal groups in the east such as the Magharba tribe and absorbing city, tribal and ethnic-based armed groups into a regional military force⁶⁰. He has been adept at forging more stable alliances that avoid the short-term fluctuations that frustrate state-building efforts in Tripoli. In developing an armed force, local prerogatives have been carefully managed by embedding influential tribal and regional members into prominent positions and capitalizing on their wider societal influence. For example, Colonel Wanis Boukhamada, a member of the Magharba tribe remains leader of the Al-Saiqa (Thunderbolt) Special Forces, a strong ally of Haftar in the fight for Benghazi. Popular support for the Sa’iqa forces contains the threat of internal social divisions in the east and mitigates against a rival armed organisation. Similarly, Saleh al-Ataiwish, a prominent Magharba tribal leader, is reported to have played a pivotal role in the LNA’s takeover of the ‘Oil Crescent’ region in September 2016 by negotiating with fellow tribesmen within the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) to not resist the advance by the LNA.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Local challenges in Cyrenaica have not resulted in spill over fighting but careful balancing and mediation between eastern tribes remains tense and fragile with defections of support a possibility. *See* Maghreb Confidential (2017).

⁶¹ Reports of PFG’s inaction against the LNA were published by Menastream media agency (<https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/794534309520670722>).

The resultant monopolisation of violence in the East has prevented the decentralised conflict environment witnessed in Tripoli from taking hold. Asymmetric coercive force has deterred the proliferation of multiple local violent challenges by increasing the risk of total elimination to challenger groups. As such, fighting has converged around a central node with fighting between Haftar's LNA and Ansar al-Sharia being the primary conflict dyad in the East. Alliance building between Islamist militants was a key feature of the early stages of conflict as the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) brought together a constellation of groups including the February 17th Martyrs Brigade and the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade⁶² in fighting that devastated Benghazi. This dominant political order set the stage for actors to fight for the control of territory rather than to be co-opted into patrimonial networks resulting in intense periods of fighting to dislodge militants holed up in residential areas of Benghazi.

Rather than being preoccupied with *building* an army, Haftar is concentrating on *consolidating* his position. By expanding his military force and territorial reach, at the same time as stepping up his campaign for broad civic appeal to win the backing of influential tribal entities in the region, violence reflects his attempt to establish national legitimacy. Acquiring control of extractive resources is crucial for financing war-making practices, although, the logic behind the takeover of oil terminals has been to demonstrate authority to international states and Haftar's responsibility as head of the LNA. When the LNA took control of the Oil Crescent in September 2017 and March 2017, his forces immediately handed over control to Mustafah Sallah – the head of the National Oil Corporation (NOC). This repertoire appears to have influenced the decision of the LNA's opponents, the Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi (BDB), who adopted the same repertoire by immediately handing over oil sites they took control of to the NOC (al-Jazeera 2016; Lewis 2016).

Libya's South is the only region where a strong positive relationship between the fragmentation of the conflict environment and the escalation of violence patterns exists. Local actors, however, do not seem entirely responsible for this upward shift in violence. Although the local Tebu and Tuareg militias, who have rivalled for the control of

⁶² The Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade originated as a battalion of the 17th February Martyrs Brigade and under Prime Minister Ali Zeidan were integrated into the Libyan Army. Following their split, rumours of frictions between the groups have circulated though no violent confrontations have been observed in the ACLED dataset. They have since been reported fighting alongside Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi against the LNA.

profitable trade routes particularly since the collapse of Gaddafi's regime,⁶³ are among the main perpetrators of violence in the region, conflict escalation is higher when actors from neighbouring regions participate in conflict across the region. This correlation is thus explained by the spillover of national dynamics into the South, transforming the disputes over local economy into a proxy of the civil war (Murray 2017).

Militias from Misrata and Benghazi, rebel groups from Chad and Sudan, along with communal militias allied with the GNA and the LNA, have all been active in southern Libya. These have often acted in conjunction with the armies of the Tripoli- and Darnah-based governments, suggesting that the control of main towns in the South has become a vital economic and political resource for either Libyan administration. Authority over Libya's border flows can not only ensure a regular flow of financial resource, but also carry considerable clout with European donors concerned with immigrants (International Crisis Group (2017b)). This dimension of the Libyan conflict thus contrasts with popular interpretations of modern civil wars represented as essentially criminal, depoliticised, private, and predatory (Kaldor 1999; Kalyvas 2001). By contrast, the scale of the violence is constantly negotiated, and even violence attributed to regional actors respond to developments in the national peace process. Reported frustration among Tebu and Awlad Suleiman communities over lack of support from Haftar's LNA have resulted in increasing factionalism and divided loyalties, with military officers from the same group fighting on opposing sides (United Nations 2017b).

These conflict patterns suggest that understanding variation in the trajectory of violence in the Libyan civil war is not best undertaken through national indicators of escalation, fragmentation and diffusion currently employed but a multi-level approach. At first glance, this appears to support Staniland's argument, according to which you cannot explain the political state of a civil war by looking at violence only, as it does not necessarily represent the exercise of power on the ground (Staniland 2012). Variations in violence do not occur at the national level but at the local level. We identified distinct conflict environments that demonstrate how different configurations of power incentivise the use of violence by armed groups and inform patterns of violence. Taken together,

⁶³ Criminal networks are reported to have flourished in post-revolutionary Libya, sustaining the war efforts of several armed groups. *See* the final reports of the Panel of Experts on Libya submitted to the United Nations Security Council in 2016 and 2017 (United Nations 2016b; 2017b).

these local conflict arenas contribute to the maintenance of an apparent stability at the national level.

Therefore, the physical patterns of violence *respond to* but are not entirely subsumed by national-level agendas. While politically influential actors and elites organised at the local level (Lacher 2016), the city and regional dynamics have been influenced by the interaction between local political geography and varying political opportunities at the national-level. The fragmentation of Libya's political space traces its roots in the post-2011 armed mobilisation, where social ties and strategic considerations reassembled alliances and enmities between local communities (Lacher 2020). Militias in Tripoli use violence to inform the regional power player – the GNA that their groups have access to weapons, logistics, and the ability to coordinate in a way that could threaten the chances of local stability *or* the GNA's attempts at regional unity. This multifaceted conflict environment reflects locally-driven desires for security, survival, and the consolidation of a mercantilist relationship with the regional powerhouse, incentivizing the wholesale proliferation of multiple armed groups capable of waging warfare within a limited scope of action. This confirms that “micro-level tensions were neither purely a consequence of macro-level manipulation, nor were they merely criminal or humanitarian problems” (Autesserre 2010: 137). It is the establishment of this competitive political order where actors fight for extraction/material gain that produces low-level fighting.

8.6. Conclusion

This contribution seeks to further understandings on the relationship between actor fragmentation and violence escalation in civil war contexts. It investigated the incentives and the constraints armed groups face when deciding to use violence in order to advance their interests and consolidate their positions in the political hierarchy. By analysing armed group fragmentation, this paper has demonstrated that geographic variation in patterns of violence are the result of locally-situated political opportunities that are produced through interaction between national, regional, and local-level political developments.

These findings demonstrate that claims to authority and notions of statehood extend far beyond the state. Governance relations are not simply the product of non-state actors' reactions to state-led imperatives, but are actively negotiated between politically-relevant actors within the state. Across Libya, armed groups encounter different incentives and

constraints when deciding to use violence in order to advance their interests and consolidate their positions in the political hierarchy.

Studies of civil war dynamics have made several notable developments in overcoming reductionist accounts of the agents, modalities, and motivations for violence.⁶⁴ While the failure of state building initiatives in transitional states has driven the shift away from national-level determinants towards the local drivers of political conflict, empirical work linking the destruction of a central state to specific processes of violence still has a long way to come. As armed group fragmentation remains intimately bound up to explanations of conflict escalation and de-escalation, political ecology explanations offer a useful toolset with which to interrogate the emergence of local conflict systems.

Both across and within states affected by civil war, we can identify instances in which armed group fragmentation increases and decreases levels of conflict. Rather than being bound by path-dependence or “imprinting”, scholars must interrogate the conditions under which combatant fragmentation leads to escalation of violence and its spatial variation by exploring the political structures of the state within which they operate. While characterised as a ‘failed state’ with armed groups acting in a power vacuum defined by the absence of stable governance, it is more fruitful to view Libya as a ‘mediated state’ (Menkhaus 2007) where the state exists as one of several socio-political constellations contesting to establish authority (Migdal 2001). As such, a national-level framework falls short of understanding the trajectory of civil violence and state-building; Libya is not defined by a lack of governance but by violent contestations for power that create and are created by uneven governance.

In addition to non-state armed groups, state agents are also engaged in the process of renegotiating the political order. To understand the trajectory of the Libyan state, further research is required into the institutionalisation of these non-state armed groups into formal state structures, including ministries, military brigades, the outsourcing of state functions to non-state armed groups and security enforcement.

⁶⁴ See for example Paul Richards’ response to the “New Barbarism” lens on violent conflict in Sierra Leone (Richards 1996).

9. Conclusion

Over the past couple of decades, dramatic changes in state-society relations have contributed to reshape the political landscape of several states in Africa and the Middle East. Amidst these changing political orders, domestic elites across the region face heightened competition that threatens their political survival. The strategic use of political violence, often resulting in endemic intrastate conflict or all-out civil wars, is understood as the by-product of inter-elite competition for political power and influence. Manifestations of this violence – including its geographies, overall levels, actors and modes – are therefore assumed to somehow reflect the underlying political motivations behind its use.

Drawing on several cases from across the region, this thesis has sought to provide a more nuanced understanding of elites' role in changing political orders in an effort to explain observed patterns of violence and political transformations. Rather than conforming to uniform political practices, regimes across the region are organised along distinct political orders characterised by heterogenous patterns of elite fragmentation, competition, and violence. The research project was motivated by an attempt to explain political transformations in transitioning states through the lens of domestic political elites, as opposed to alternative approaches privileging regional, sectarian, or purely transactional explanations. As such, the overarching research question is how political elites' survival strategies shape conflict environments in changing political orders across the contemporary Middle East and Africa regions. Relatedly, where does inter-elite bargaining occur? How is political violence linked to elite struggles for domination over the political settlement? Which geographies of violence and power are set to emerge amid heightened political mobilisation?

These questions are answered in relation to two main themes. First, what institutional strategies political elites across Africa and the Middle East use to protect their position in the power hierarchy when they face competition from within or outside the regime. I explored this theme with reference to the rise of non-party government ministers epitomising consensus-based politics in Tunisia (Chapter 4), the use of cabinet reshuffles in the aftermath of political unrest across Africa (Chapter 5), and the reconfiguration of power structures following the removals of long-standing state leaders in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe (Chapter 6). Second, what local configurations of power are conducive to subnational geographies and patterns of intrastate violence. Notably, this theme seeks to

understand the extent to which local conflict environments reflect the cohesive or fragmented nature of political competition driving violence. This is explored in relation to two contemporary civil war contexts, including the relative cohesion of elite networks involved in an attempted uprising during Yemen's civil war (Chapter 7) and the emergence of distinct wartime political orders in Libya between 2014 and 2017 (Chapter 8).

9.1. Summary of findings

The thesis comprises five analytical chapters, whose findings are outlined in Chapters 4-8. In addition to these specific research questions, several cross-cutting contributions deserve further consideration.

9.1.1. The elite-conflict nexus

In understanding violence as a strategic tool for political competition, its empirical manifestations illustrate how such competition occurs. Violence does not occur in 'ungoverned spaces' but rather in political orders characterised by the presence of multiple political elites competing with each other over access to power and resources. Moving away from the 'failed state' framework, the role of elites is explored in relation to their contribution to subnational state-making practices and the emergence of local alliances and geographies of violence.

As analysed in Chapter 8, conflict patterns are conditional on the nature of the political competition that takes place in distinct political orders. Armed group fragmentation does not inevitably lead to higher conflict escalation when violence is used for signalling purposes, such as the local elites' desire to extract political or economic rents from the government. This embeddedness reveals how local actors entertain political relations with regional and national elites, producing subnational political orders and governance spaces. Further, chapter 6 and 7 investigates how cohesive support bases are key to weather existential regime crises, allowing incumbents to effectively mobilise allies and supporters during coup attempts or anti-regime uprisings. Whilst not a guarantee of ultimate success, leaders relying on a fragmented support base face higher mobilisation costs which patronage resources (or expectations among local elites that such resources may dry up in the near future) are unable to sustain. Under the political marketplace framework, the relative cohesion of fragmentation of elite networks intensifies the volatile and instrumental nature of alliances.

9.1.2. Understanding elite inclusion

The research project also emphasised the importance of understanding inclusion as a multidimensional concept that does not merely relate to institutional representation. Indeed, it shows that inclusion in state institutions is a poor indicator of elites' relative power. Inclusion is instead interpreted as the ability of elite groups to maintain access to power hierarchies within or outside the state. Examples from across the region show that patronage-based practices aimed at co-opting key elites and constituencies through the conferral ministerial posts are unable to explain the rise of technocratic-led, consensus-based politics (Chapter 4); that regimes facing heightened unrest or succession challenges may reconfigure the ruling coalition through cabinet reshuffles or alliance upgrades, yet leaving the regime's dominant position unscathed (Chapter 5 and 6); that power-sharing institutional arrangements are unlikely to be successful if a section of the elites are able to exercise disproportionate power through extra-institutional channels (Chapter 7); and that a desire of inclusion in the distribution of political and economic rents may produce subnational governance relations sustained by a latent threat of violence and a mercantilist relation between local elite groups and the regional power holder (Chapter 8).

These considerations call for a more nuanced understanding of the relation between inclusion and political stability. Focusing exclusively on institutional inclusion may indeed create channels for greater elite interaction and familiarisation but carries the risk of undermining political participation and create grievances both among the insiders and the outsiders, echoing situations of 'political unsettlements' and 'stable instability' (Pospisil and Rocha Menocal 2017).

9.1.3. Strategies of political survival

When facing heightened political competition, a variety of political survival strategies are available to political elites seeking to maintain their access to power. In the political marketplace, elite competition occurs among insiders seeking to negotiate a more advantageous position, or with outsiders striving to be included in the existing political settlement and benefit from rents distribution. To achieve these goals, political elites are shown to make significant or cosmetic concessions in order to appease their rivals, as well as to unleash violence when their requests are not accommodated.

Among the case studies proposed in this research project, I show that technocratic governance over the past three decades in Tunisia served to neutralise the emergence of

political opponents and tame political competition through consensus-based politics. At the same time, accommodation strategies through large-scale ministerial reshuffles (i.e. *crisis* cabinets) are not common across the African continent (Chapter 5), but a wider reconfiguration of the ruling coalition along with other political concessions – civilian-led political transitions (at least nominally in some cases), technocratic governance, elections – took place following the elite-led removal of long-standing leaders in Algeria, Sudan and Zimbabwe (Chapter 6). In these cases, however, the removal of the leader was key to preserve the seizing group's role uncontested.

9.1.4. How to study elites

In recent decades, elite studies have benefitted from the greater availability of datasets and empirical approaches, and from efforts towards improving conceptual clarity. Throughout the thesis, I used original datasets on elites from across the region applying a variety of methods to the study their changing composition and behaviour. A large-n dataset was constructed to support an in-depth, country-based study of ministerial elites in Chapter 4; quantitative methods were used to draw inferences from correlations between violence patterns and elite and armed group fragmentation in Chapter 5 and 8; while SNA techniques in Chapter 7 provided a background to study how the relative cohesion of subnational elite networks influences violence outcomes. Attention was paid to delineate their scope and applicability, and to define what type of political elites were analysed and why.

Taken together, these analyses show that empirical analyses of elite structures across Africa and the Middle East – which have long suffered from a dearth of empirical data and often relied on anecdotal information – can shed light on the interaction between political actors and domestic instability. This includes, among other things, the mechanisms regulating political appointments in state institutions, government responses and strategies of accommodation, as well as how political power arising from network positioning can undermine or consolidate institutional hierarchies. An additional dimension concerns the way in which regimes further subnational penetration and consolidation through the co-option of local elites, moving away from pure nationally-situated studies. Importantly, this is explored in Chapters 7 and 8, where the emergence of distinct subnational political orders, characterised by limited statehood and local practices of governance, is studied in relation to the civil war environments of Libya and Yemen.

9.2. Implications for future research

The thesis seeks to contribute to future research in several ways. First, the potential for elite studies to be extended to cases beyond those analysed here is one of great interest to this author. The lack of systematic data collections on elites has long plagued elite studies outside Western Europe: analyses of elite behaviour were more often based on assumptions, albeit valid, than on evidence-grounded arguments (Perthes 2004). Today, the greater availability of data means that it is possible to draw inferences within and across states, providing a more extensive and nuanced understanding of how elites operate in a variety of contexts. Elite studies would benefit not only from the widening of its scope, but also from a vertical integration of elites at multiple levels of the power hierarchy. In particular, incorporating local elites into the analyses is of great relevance for understanding how power is negotiated and exercised around specific policy issues.

This research project has highlighted the changing nature of contemporary political elites across Africa and the Middle East. Independent, non-party elites, greater hybridisation between formal and informal institutions, and an overall greater ethno-regional inclusivity mean that the region's elite landscape is characterised by an ostensible heterogeneity of political actors that has transformed deeply-rooted practices of power. Understanding how these domestic dynamics are reproduced, and to what effect, is key to identify future patterns of change. Additionally, while not specifically addressed in this study, interactions with increasingly transnational political economies and changes in international alliances are also of great significance: appropriation of military, development and humanitarian aid, integration into international energy and commodities markets, and geopolitical shifts are only some of the ways in which domestic political elites are being constrained, and likewise manipulating, these dynamics. Future research should further investigate the conditions and modes of such interactions.

Second, for decades, discourses on democracy and democratisation meant that the academic literature has emphasised studies of democracy over autocracies. Reflecting a widely shared ideological bias, “much of [this literature] is saturated with the dubious assumption that democratization is a natural, normal, and even inevitable process that all states everywhere would undergo if only certain pesky barriers were removed” (Lynch 2004: 341). A focus on a regime's atomic elements – its political elites – instead allows studying the factual dynamics of power, beyond the specific regimes in which they are situated or supposedly progressive or regressive trajectories of democratisation and

autocratisation. In Chapter 6, the thesis has shown that understanding political change as a cyclical process could better explain why states have often deviated from these teleological movements towards democracy or autocracy.

Future research should further interrogate whether the dynamics explored in this research are indeed a distinctive feature of this region, or rather constitute a recurring element of elite behaviour across the globe. Existing scholarship on democratic and authoritarian learning (Hall and Ambrosio 2017) has highlighted how regime elites absorb political survival practices from others in an effort to weather acute crises. The greater availability of both disaggregated conflict and elite data should make it possible to extend the scope of the investigations – in this research limited to a specifically defined region – and to also make broader generalisations into elite behaviour.

Third, the relationship between elites and violence has wider implications for state-building discourses. Although academic and policy audiences have increasingly incorporated institution- and state-building priorities in their agendas, the ways in which state-building processes can contribute to the greater militarisation of political and social orders, along with the entrenchment of violence, are still under-explored. In particular, this thesis has argued that, in order to understand these processes, it is crucial to further explore how collusive exchanges between state and non-state agents are transforming governance institutions in conflict or post-conflict settings. Evidence of this is the emergence of areas of limited statehood, in which sovereign authority, state functions and law enforcement are exercised beyond the boundaries of the state. Rather than reflecting state failure, this is a sign of fragmented conflict environments populated by elites competing for power.

Emphasis on the role and the behaviour of elites is equally significant for peacebuilding and conflict management policies in violence-affected societies. Policy responses that fail to appreciate the networked and relational dimension of power, are unlikely to create lasting conditions for the reduction of violence. In doing so, power-sharing agreements often design institutional arrangements that are broadly representative on paper, but in fact crystallise unequal relations of power and end up exacerbating mistrust among elites and groups. This partially explains the failures of international mediation efforts in Libya and Yemen, and the ostensibly intractable character of these conflicts. Without adequate attention to the local configurations and practices of power, and to the role that spoilers,

mediators and stabilisers can play in these contexts, the result will be highly volatile political settlements characterised by the continued deterioration and manipulation of governance institutions.

In sum, this research project has sought to demonstrate the heterogeneity of political elites across Africa and the Middle East, and how domestic political violence is embedded in local competitions for power. In doing so, it has explored several cross-cutting themes using a comparative approach, along with a variety of case studies arising from the region, singling out their significance, limitations and comparability. Future research should continue to further combine comparative work with in-depth case studies, bridging the gap between a focus on locally situated contexts and wider generalisations across the region and beyond. A more integrated approach that takes into consideration both the local, specific conditions of elite behaviour, and the broader political patterns and environments in which elites operate, would greatly benefit the understanding of the mechanisms of power.

10. References

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10.2. Interviews

- A. Al Irada senior officials, Tunis, 18 June 2018
- B. Afek Tounes official, Tunis, 8 March 2017
- C. Afek Tounes MP, Tunis, 20 June 2018
- D. Civil society activist, Tunis, 3 March 2017
- E. Civil society activist, Tunis, 20 June 2018
- F. Ennahda MP and former minister, Tunis, 14 February 2017
- G. Ennahda MPs, Tunis, 20 February 2017
- H. Ennahda senior official, Tunis, 10 March 2017

- I. Ennahda senior officials and MPs, Tunis, 21 June 2018
- J. Ennahda activists, Gafsa, 23 June 2018
- K. Former minister, Tunis, 27 March 2017
- L. Machroua Tounes official, Sfax, 23 June 2018
- M. Nidaa Tounes MP, Tunis, 13 March 2017
- N. Nidaa Tounes MP, Tunis, 14 March 2017
- O. Nidaa Tounes MP, Tunis, 19 June 2018
- P. Nidaa Tounes official, Sfax, 24 June 2018

11. Appendix

11.1. Non-party ministers and consensual politics in Tunisia

Table 1: Ministers without party affiliation

Year	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
Number	2	3	4	5	5	3
Number (%)	6.06%	5.88%	9.09%	11.90%	10.20%	6.38%
Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Number	2	2	1	2	1	3
Number (%)	4.65%	4.55%	2.33%	4.35%	2.17%	7.32%
Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Number	3	2	10	12	7	7
Number (%)	5.56%	4.76%	16.95%	18.18%	13.21%	11.29%
Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number	9	7	10	13	12	17
Number (%)	16.36%	13.73%	17.24%	22.81%	24.00%	31.48%
Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number	56	13	26	29	48	30
Number (%)	56.57%	30.95%	48.15%	100.00%	69.57%	48.39%
Year	2017					
Number	28					
Number (%)	50.00%					

Notes: the table shows the total number and the share of cabinet ministers without any recognised party affiliation.

Table 2: Ministerial portfolios by political affiliation under Ben Ali

Ministerial portfolios	Non-affiliated	Party members
Education	8	27
Industry, Trade and Tourism	7	16
Communications	6	12
Foreign Affairs	5	18
Agriculture	4	15
Development and Cooperation	4	9
Culture	2	11
Environment and Transport	2	22
Economy and Finance	1	11
Employment	1	8
Health and Social Affairs	1	28
Justice	1	9
Public Service	1	3
Women, Family and Youth	1	16
Human Rights		4
Interior		15
National Defence		10
Religious Affairs		5
State Property		4
Other	1	17

Notes: the table shows the total number and the share of cabinet ministers by their respective professional background. (Source: author's own elaboration).

Table 3: Regional origin of ministers and cumulated length of ministerial tenure

	All ministers				Independent ministers			
	Number	Share (%)	Months in office	Share of months in office (%)	Number	Share (%)	Months in office	Share of months in office (%)
Grand Tunis	56	27.45%	2595	21.63%	16	41.03%	655	48.77%
Sousse	25	12.25%	2087	17.39%	6	15.38%	198	14.74%
Monastir	15	7.35%	1161	9.68%	3	7.69%	136	10.13%
Nabeul	15	7.35%	845	7.04%	1	2.56%	13	0.97%
Kairouan	12	5.88%	542	4.52%	2	5.13%	80	5.96%
Sfax	11	5.39%	859	7.16%	2	5.13%	102	7.59%
Gabes	8	3.92%	482	4.02%		0%	0	0%
Gafsa	7	3.43%	242	2.02%	2	5.13%	41	3.05%
Medenine	7	3.43%	601	5.01%		0%	0	0%
Mahdia	6	2.94%	197	1.64%	3	7.69%	72	5.36%
Bizerte	6	2.94%	185	1.54%	1	2.56%	17	1.27%
Tozeur	4	1.96%	525	4.38%		0%	0	0%
Beja	3	1.47%	169	1.41%		0%	0	0%
Jendouba	2	0.98%	129	1.08%	1	2.56%	4	0.30%
Kasserine	2	0.98%	208	1.73%		0%	0	0%
Siliana	2	0.98%	145	1.21%	1	2.56%	5	0.37%
Le Kef	1	0.49%	199	1.66%		0%	0	0%
Sidi Bouzid	1	0.49%	18	0.15%		0%	0	0%
Tataouine	1	0.49%	108	0.90%		0%	0	0%
Kebili	0	0%	0	0%		0%	0	0%
Zaghuan	0	0%	0	0%		0%	0	0%
Unknown	21	10.29%	702	5.85%	1	2.56%	20	1.49%
Total	204	100%	11,999	100%	39	100%	11,999	100%

Notes: the table reports the total number of ministers and the cumulated length of ministerial tenure and their respective share on the total for all Tunisian governorates.

Table 4: Ministerial portfolios by political affiliation between 2011 and 2017

Ministerial portfolios	Non-affiliated	Party members
Education	9	5
Industry, Trade and Tourism	19	13
Communications	1	2
Foreign Affairs	9	9
Agriculture	8	4
Development and Cooperation	7	5
Culture	7	0
Environment and Transport	14	13
Economy and Finance	10	4
Employment	4	5
Health and Social Affairs	10	11
Justice	6	1
Public Service	3	2
Women, Family and Youth	12	8
Human Rights	3	2
Interior	9	3
National Defence	4	1
Religious Affairs	7	0
State Property	3	2
Other	5	7

Notes: the table shows the total number and the share of cabinet ministers by their respective professional background. (Source: author's own elaboration).

Table 5: Regional origin of ministers and cumulated length of ministerial tenure (January 2011 – December 2017)

	All ministers				Independent ministers			
	Number	Share (%)	Months in office	Share of months in office (%)	Number	Share (%)	Months in office	Share of months in office (%)
Grand Tunis	64	29.41%	854	27.12%	47	33.33%	518	29.77%
Sousse	16	7.24%	189	6.00%	5	3.55%	59	3.39%
Monastir	13	5.88%	212	6.73%	10	7.09%	127	7.30%
Nabeul	15	6.79%	241	7.65%	10	7.09%	129	7.41%
Kairouan	5	2.26%	90	2.86%	3	2.13%	60	3.45%
Sfax	18	8.14%	253	8.03%	12	8.51%	119	6.84%
Gabes	10	4.52%	124	3.94%	7	4.96%	81	4.66%
Gafsa	7	3.17%	57	1.81%	4	2.84%	27	1.55%
Medenine	18	8.14%	254	8.07%	9	6.38%	110	6.32%
Mahdia	8	3.62%	142	4.51%	7	4.96%	115	6.61%
Bizerte	8	3.62%	164	5.21%	3	2.13%	64	3.68%
Tozeur	6	2.71%	107	3.40%	3	2.13%	66	3.79%
Beja	3	1.36%	50	1.59%	1	0.71%	19	1.09%
Jendouba	4	1.81%	67	2.13%	1	0.71%	8	0.46%
Kasserine	7	3.17%	95	3.02%	5	3.55%	76	4.37%
Siliana	2	0.90%	27	0.86%	2	1.42%	13	0.75%
Le Kef	4	1.81%	80	2.54%	3	2.13%	55	3.16%
Sidi Bouzid	5	2.26%	57	1.81%	3	2.13%	33	1.90%
Tataouine	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
International	1	0.45%	10	0.32%	1	0.71%	10	0.57%
Kebili	1	0.45%	11	0.35%	1	0.71%	11	0.63%
Zaghuan	1	0.45%	25	0.79%	0	0%	0	0%
Unknown	4	1.81%	40	1.27%	4	2.84%	40	2.30%
Total	221	100%	11,999	100%	141	100%	11,999	100%

Notes: the table reports the total number of ministers and the cumulated length of ministerial tenure and their respective share on the total for all Tunisian governorates.

Table 6: Professional background of ministers, November 1987 - January 2011

Professional background	Total Number	Total Number (%)	Non- affiliated	Non- affiliated (%)
Public administration (diplomats, magistrates, ministerial officials)	103	50.74%	17	43.59%
Teaching, research	49	24.14%	15	38.46%
Private sector (corporate managers, entrepreneurs, bankers)	9	4.43%	2	5.13%
Army, police	5	2.46%	0	0.00%
Other (physicians, engineers, pharmacists)	23	11.33%	5	12.82%
Unknown	15	7.39%	0	0.00%

Notes: The table shows the total number and the share of cabinet ministers by their respective professional background. (Source: author's own elaboration).

Table 7: Professional background of ministers, January 2011 - December 2017

Professional background	Total Number	Total Number (%)	Non- affiliated	Non- affiliated (%)
Public administration (diplomats, magistrates, ministerial officials)	77	35.16%	59	42.14%
Teaching, research	57	26.03%	37	26.43%
Private sector (corporate managers, entrepreneurs, bankers)	24	10.96%	14	10.10%
Lawyers	15	6.85%	5	3.57%
Army, police	2	0.91%	2	1.43%
Other (physicians, engineers, pharmacists)	42	19.18%	21	15.00%
Unknown	2	0.91%	2	1.43%

Notes: The table shows the total number and the share of cabinet ministers by their respective professional background. (Source: author's own elaboration).

11.2. Crisis cabinets and the influence of protests on elite volatility in Africa

Table 1: ACLED Variables

Variable	Description
Demonstrations in Previous Six Months	The number of discreet events involving riots or protests in the previous six months.
Percent Change in Demonstrations	The percent increase or decrease between the number of demonstrations in the previous six months and those in the prior six-month period.
Demonstrations as a Percent of Conflict	The proportion of total conflict events in the previous six months which are demonstrations.
Number of Clusters 100km	This counts the number of distinct clusters of protest. Demonstrations within 50km or 100km of each other are counted as the same cluster. ⁶⁵
Herfindahl Index of Clusters	A Herfindahl index which captures the degree of fragmentation among the clusters. A high value shows that one cluster is responsible for the majority of demonstration events while a low value shows an even distribution of demonstrations across clusters.

⁶⁵ This is achieved through hierarchical clustering methods with the distance (in kilometres) between events used to dictate the cutting threshold.

Table 2: ‘Crisis Cabinets’ in Africa, 2007-2018⁶⁶

	Ministerial Turnover (%)	Preceding Crisis
Burundi (2007)	52.17	Following the resignation of Vice President Martin Nduwimana, Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza creates a ‘government of national consensus’ which includes opposition parties.
Central African Republic (2008)	50.00	Prime Minister Elie Dote resigns after a threatened vote of no confidence following a public sector strike over payment arrears.
Central African Republic (February 2013)	82.76	President Bozizé forms a unity government in an attempt to stall the territorial gains of the rebel Séléka coalition.
Central African Republic (April 2013)	53.85	Séléka political leader Michel Djotodia becomes president after the ouster of Bozizé.
Central African Republic (2014)	79.31	Michel Djotodia steps down amid escalating sectarian violence. The recently created National Transitional Council elect Catherine Samba-Panza as the interim president.
Ethiopia (April 2018)	52.50	Ahmed Abiy is elected leader of the ruling Ethiopia People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and appointed Prime Minister following the resignation of Hailemariam Desalegn amid ongoing protests.
Ethiopia (October 2018)	53.33	Abiy makes another large cabinet reshuffle in the face of continued protest, ethnic violence and a potential attempted coup by the military.
Guinea 2007	88.89	Protests force President Lansana Conte to name a new Prime Minister from a shortlist of candidates selected by unions and civil society groups. The trade union candidate, Lansana Kouyate, is appointed.
Guinea 2008	60.00	After the launch of a corruption audit by the executive, President Conte fires Prime Minister Kouyate.
Guinea 2009	85.29	After President Conte’s death, a faction of the military led by Captain Dadis Camara launches a coup.

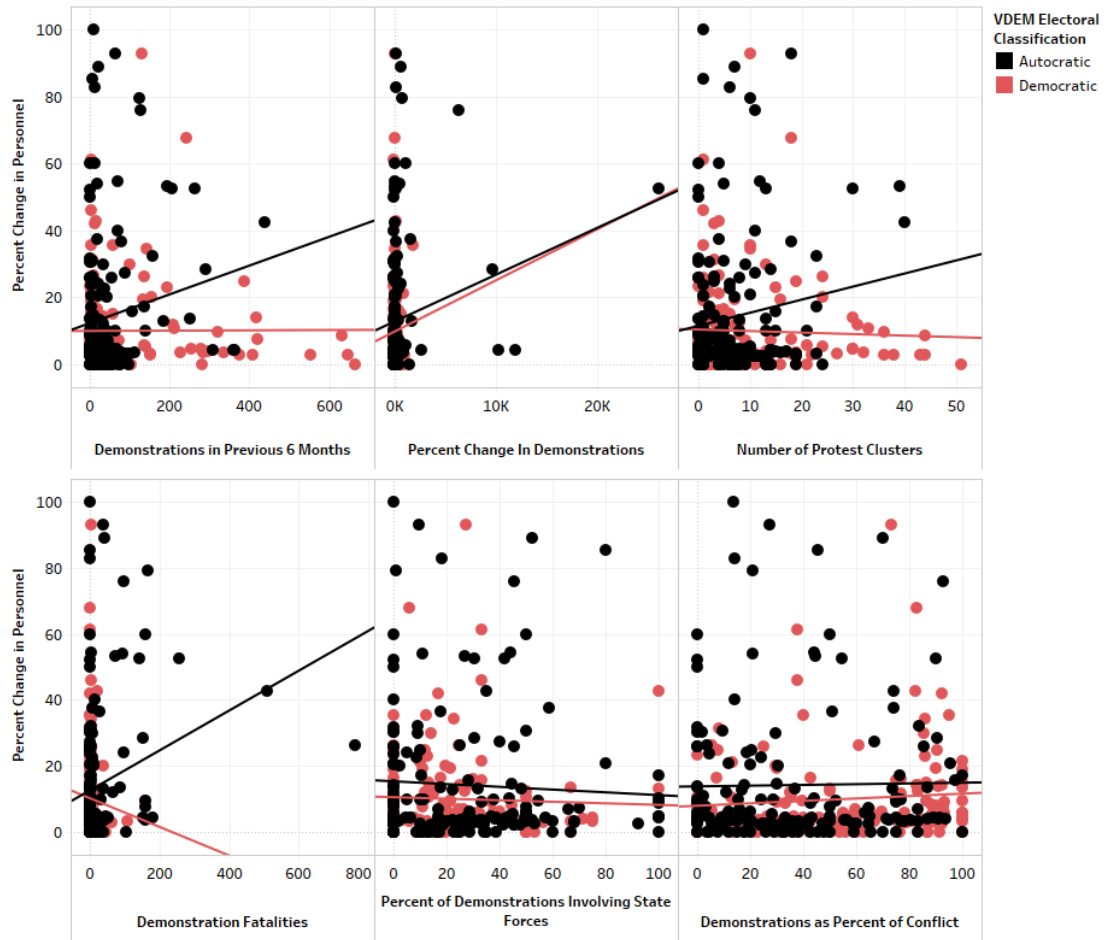
⁶⁶ Only Ethiopia includes 2018 data.

Guinea 2010	60.00	Defence Minister Sekouba Konate becomes interim President after Dadis Camara is injured by a former aid amid ongoing unrest.
Malawi 2012	61.11	President Mutharika dies in office. Vice-President Joyce Banda takes over as leader. Banda had been expelled from the ruling party after failing to support Mutharika's plan to nominate his brother as successor.
Mali 2012	100.00	Soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo launch a coup after the army is routed by Tuareg rebels in the north of the country.
Nigeria 2010	100.00	Acting President Goodluck Jonatan removes cabinet ministers loyal to the ailing President Musa Yar'Adua.
Tunisia 2011	100.00	Widespread demonstrations force long-time president Ben Ali to flee the country. An interim government takes over.
Tunisia 2014	92.86	Ennadha government resigns as a part of a political agreement with opposition parties to break Tunisia's political deadlock.
Tunisia 2016	67.74	Prime Minister Habib Essid is voted out in a parliamentary vote of no confidence.
Zimbabwe 2017	54.55	President Robert Mugabe is deposed by a coup led by the former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa and his military allies. The coup comes after years of tensions within the ruling party over who would succeed Mugabe.

Table 3: Cabinet Volatility in Crisis Cabinets

	Protest-Related Crisis Cabinets (N = 3)	Other Crisis Cabinets (N = 18)	All Reshuffles (N = 417)
Percent Change in Personnel	87.65	69.72	16.21
Percent Change in Inner Circle	79.76	70.12	19.12
Change in Representation	-3.31	-0.50	0.09
Change in Inner Circle Representation	6.25	4.19	0.19
Change in Disproportion	-1.22	3.19	0.00
Change in Inner Circle Disproportion	0.59	0.49	-0.06
Mean Tenure of Dropped Ministers	61.98	24.87	35.84
Regime Legislative Seats at Previous Election	75.23	65.31	56.82
VDEM Score of Democracy	0.18	0.40	0.51

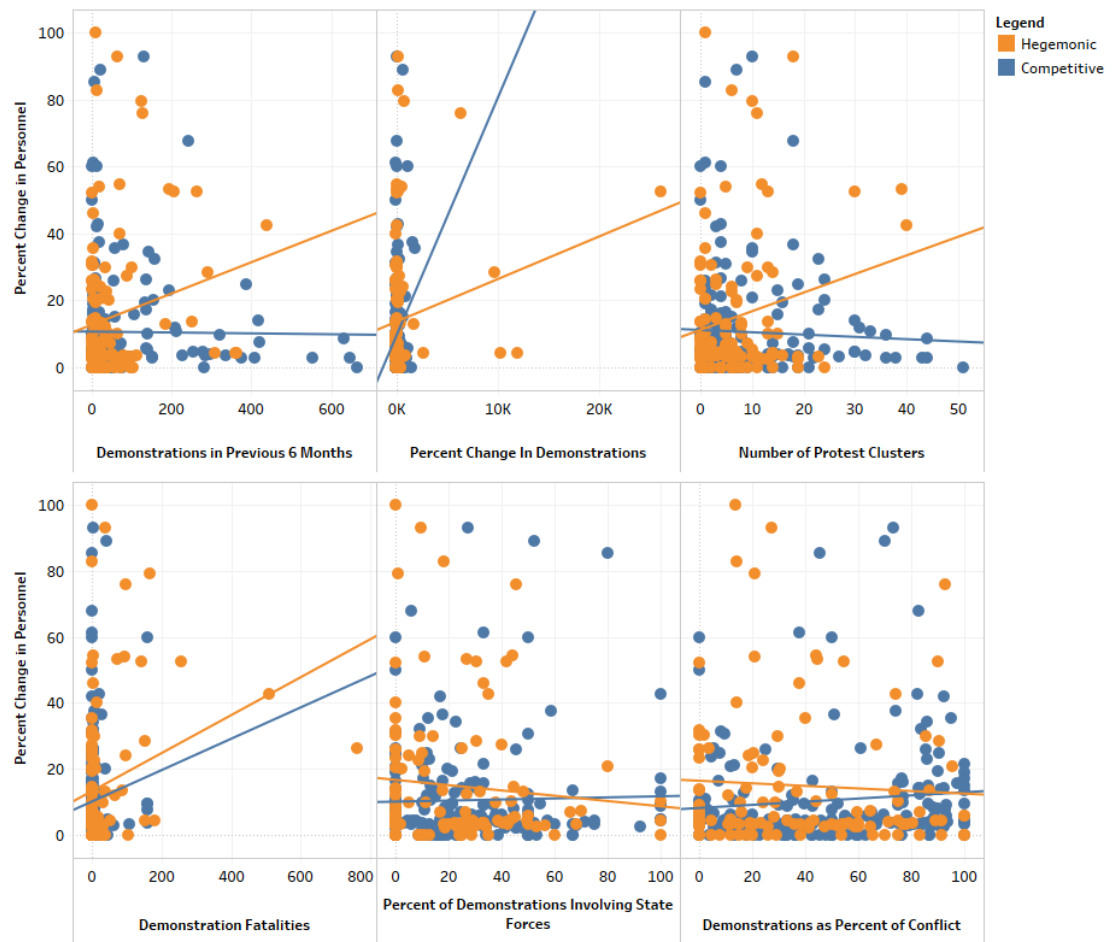
Figure 1: Protest against Ministerial Volatility – Autocracy vs Democracy⁶⁷



⁶⁷ Democratic observations have a VDEM score of 0.5 or over, Autocratic observations have a VDEM score of under 0.5.

Figure 2: Protest against Ministerial Volatility – Hegemonic vs Competitive Regimes

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⁶⁸ Hegemonic observations have a regime which occupies more than two thirds of the seats in the lower house, while competitive regimes occupy less than two thirds.

Table 4: ACPED Variables

Variable	Description
Percent Change in Personnel/Percent Change in Inner Circle	<p>Calculates the number of dropped ministers as a percentage of the previous cabinet's size. Can also be applied to more important posts known as the 'inner circle'.⁶⁹</p> $PercentChange = \left(1 - \frac{P - D}{P}\right) * 100$ <p>P represents previous cabinet/inner circle size, while D represents the number of ministers dropped from the cabinet/inner circle.</p>
Change in Representation	<p>Government 'representation' is assessed by calculating the percent of primary administrative divisions which have a representative in cabinet. The index assumes a value between 0 and 100, where 100 means total representation of all politically relevant regional in the population. This variable is applied to the whole cabinet and the inner circle. During cabinet reshuffles, a change in representation measure is created through subtracting current representation against the previous cabinet-month's value.</p>
Change in Disproportion	<p>The disproportion measure calculates whether representatives in a cabinet have a share of the seats that reflects their regional population. The measure is an indication of whether power in a cabinet is balanced between included groups and adapted from studies by Samuels and Snyder (2001).⁷⁰</p> $DIS = \left(\frac{1}{2}\right) \sum_{i=1}^n x_i - y_i $ <p>Sigma indicates the summation over all region i, x_i is the percentage of all cabinet positions allocated to province i, and y_i is the percentage of population living in region i. This measure is applied only to identity groups occupying at least one post within the cabinet. During cabinet reshuffles, a change in disproportion measure is created through subtracting current disproportion against the previous cabinet-month's value.</p>

⁶⁹ All cabinet posts are not of equal importance and existing studies on cabinet composition agree that different posts hold different degrees of importance (Francois, Rainer and Trebbi 2015). Consequently, posts in the cabinet are further separated into the inner circle posts, representing posts which hold significant power over the state apparatus, and outer circle posts which generally deal with service provision and cultural issues.

⁷⁰ A score of 10 would indicate that 10 percent of cabinet posts are allocated to groups that would not receive them if posts were distributed purely on population.

Mean Tenure of Dismissed Ministers	An average tenure (in number of months) of ministers dropped from the cabinet prior to their dismissal.
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11.3. Taming the snakes. The Houthis, Saleh and the struggle for power in Yemen

Table 1: Number of political elites by institutional affiliation

Year	Cabinet	Supreme Political Council	Military	Security	Total
2017	50	14	10	6	80
2018	48	10	8	7	73

Table 2: Number of political elites by institutional affiliation and political party

Year	Cabinet	Supreme Political Council	Military	Security	Total
GPC	15	3	0	1	19
Houthis	23	5	8	5	41
Others	9	2	0	1	12

Table 3: Political elite network's summary metrics in 2017

Measures	Overall network	GPC	Houthis
Number of nodes	77	28	35
Number of links	598	20	335
Number of isolates	9	5	5
Density ⁷¹	0,204	0,053	0,563
Average degree ⁷²	15,532	1,429	19,143
Average clustering coefficient ⁷³	0,813	0,694	0,914
Average path length ⁷⁴	2,166	1,607	1,261

⁷¹ Density measures the proportion of actual ties in a network over the highest number of possible connections. In other words, density indicates the probability that a tie exists between any pair of nodes.

⁷² The average degree measures the average number of connections each node has.

⁷³ The clustering coefficient is a measure of the extent to which nodes tend to cluster together. The higher the value, the more likely nodes create groups with a high number of ties.

⁷⁴ The average path length ratio is the average number of links in the shortest path that are necessary to connect a pair of nodes in the network.

Table 4: Political elite network's summary metrics in 2018

Measures	Overall network	GPC	Houthis
Number of nodes	68	18	37
Number of links	626	9	382
Number of isolates	7	6	3
Density	0,275	0,059	0,574
Average degree	18,412	1	20,649
Average clustering coefficient	0,879	0,778	0,909
Average path length	1,777	1,2	1,513

11.4. Between the Cracks: Actor Fragmentation and Local Conflict Systems in the Libyan Civil War

Table 1: Actor dyad by region

	Western Libya		Eastern Libya		Southern Libya		Total	
	Event	Share	Event	Share	Event	Share	Event	Share
	s	(%)	s	(%)	s	(%)	s	(%)
Militia	52	4.15%	36	3.22%	11	4.89%	99	3.81%
Militia vs. Militia	647	51.59%	47	4.20%	143	63.56%	837	32.23%
Militia vs. Private Security Forces	19	1.52%	6	0.54%	4	1.78%	29	1.12%
Militia vs. State Forces	110	8.77%	610	54.56%	46	20.44%	766	29.50%
Rebel Groups	25	1.99%	15	1.34%	0	0%	40	1.54%
Rebel Groups vs. Militia	210	16.75%	297	26.57%	17	7.56%	524	20.18%
Rebel Groups vs. Private Security Forces	40	3.19%	4	0.36%	1	0.44%	45	1.73%
Rebel Groups vs. State Forces	151	12.04%	103	9.21%	3	1.33%	257	9.90%
Grand Total	1'254	100.00%	1'118	100.00%	225	100.00%	2'597	100.00%

Table 2: Whole Libya

	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014
Events	64	73	89	81	114	143
Fatalities	151	73	286	259	465	562
Actor Count	13	12	10	10	18	23
Fragmentation	7.70667	4.46897	5.29125	5.15751	11.05200	6.63680
	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015	April 2015
Events	137	87	74	73	120	135
Fatalities	257	266	242	404	207	232
Actor Count	21	17	10	10	17	18
Fragmentation	3.94404	5.79570	4.69967	5.71018	4.91124	6.03348
	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	August 2015	September 2015	October 2015
Events	99	70	87	66	59	57
Fatalities	266	264	274	273	191	85
Actor Count	19	21	17	16	21	15
Fragmentation	6.86136	5.82902	5.65399	3.06383	5.76901	8.04103
	November 2015	December 2015	January 2016	February 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Events	73	50	80	67	59	59
Fatalities	145	112	179	241	160	189
Actor Count	15	15	23	11	22	15
Fragmentation	4.53097	7.26744	8.90161	5.61938	8.91910	4.49284
	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	August 2016	September 2016	October 2016
Events	55	95	55	61	53	47
Fatalities	146	379	281	269	144	192
Actor Count	16	13	10	13	10	13
Fragmentation	4.88219	3.67249	3.90173	4.58816	5.06931	3.76578
	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017
Events	69	54	47	51	82	43
Fatalities	283	416	201	92	198	49

Actor Count	15	15	14	15	12	14
Fragmentation	5.45455	7.67041	4.04192	10.68905	5.65166	3.76578

Table 3: Tripoli and Western Libya

	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014
Events	17	10	35	46	39	31
Fatalities	17	1	104	126	318	193
Actor Count	6	2	6	7	9	6
Fragmentation	5.42169	1.31579	3.94224	4.23693	6.39183	3.41993
	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015	April 2015
Events	46	55	41	31	66	65
Fatalities	100	144	141	101	109	109
Actor Count	16	10	6	6	9	10
Fragmentation	6.84725	4.80501	5.57017	5.32719	5.04793	6.36068
	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	August 2015	September 2015	October 2015
Events	35	28	17	25	18	27
Fatalities	90	33	7	197	33	40
Actor Count	14	14	9	11	14	10
Fragmentation	7.75637	5.97931	5.43478	5.44444	8.25714	6.38801
	November 2015	December 2015	January 2016	February 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Events	21	19	37	24	34	18
Fatalities	20	43	124	111	83	28
Actor Count	8	10	14	6	16	12
Fragmentation	4.78505	4.51867	6.55527	4.21053	9.65563	7.31429
	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	August 2016	September 2016	October 2016
Events	31	52	24	38	35	37
Fatalities	120	255	155	157	90	157
Actor Count	10	10	5	8	7	8
Fragmentation	4.52566	3.62862	2.78884	4.36017	4.72289	4.91546
	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017
Events	24	32	12	27	44	8
Fatalities	85	341	114	39	89	20
Actor Count	7	9	9	12	9	5
Fragmentation	3.77753	7.81679	5.82759	9.73128	5.35542	5.45161

Table 4: Benghazi and Eastern Libya

	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014
Events	42	58	54	34	65	106
Fatalities	110	59	182	133	129	352
Actor Count	6	9	6	6	9	14
Fragmentation	3.56790	3.73563	2.72544	2.37097	2.97674	3.52574
	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015	April 2015
Events	84	30	29	40	36	66
Fatalities	143	122	83	302	49	111
Actor Count	3	4	4	4	6	5
Fragmentation	1.06608	1.49492	1.39821	2.30233	1.42857	1.59494
	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	August 2015	September 2015	October 2015
Events	52	38	55	35	39	30
Fatalities	151	220	182	60	128	45
Actor Count	6	4	4	2	6	7
Fragmentation	2.32718	2.88615	2.68528	1.73727	2.64522	3.57143
	November 2015	December 2015	January 2016	February 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Events	50	31	38	39	23	39
Fatalities	110	69	37	97	76	159
Actor Count	6	5	9	4	4	5
Fragmentation	2.43682	4.23348	5.51145	3.09715	1.70940	2.14536
	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	August 2016	September 2016	October 2016
Events	23	43	30	22	16	7
Fatalities	26	124	124	104	47	35
Actor Count	4	5	6	4	4	3
Fragmentation	2.14074	1.77301	3.18421	2.24561	2.39024	2.66667
	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017
Events	35	17	31	22	34	10
Fatalities	170	65	86	49	109	9
Actor Count	4	3	5	5	4	4
Fragmentation	1.49492	1.55556	1.71930	2.65138	3.21905	2.90909

Table 5: Southern Libya

	May 2014	June 2014	July 2014	August 2014	September 2014	October 2014
Events	5	5	0	1	10	6
Fatalities	24	13	0	0	18	17
Actor Count	2	3	0	1	5	5
Fragmentation	2.00000	2.77778	0.00000	1.00000	3.96703	3.45714
	November 2014	December 2014	January 2015	February 2015	March 2015	April 2015
Events	7	2	4	2	18	4
Fatalities	14	0	18	1	49	12
Actor Count	5	4	3	1	6	5
Fragmentation	3.27273	4.00000	2.66667	1.00000	4.24561	3.76923
	May 2015	June 2015	July 2015	August 2015	September 2015	October 2015
Events	12	4	15	6	2	0
Fatalities	25	11	85	16	30	0
Actor Count	4	4	5	5	2	0
Fragmentation	3.07273	3.76923	2.88589	4.45455	2.00000	0.00000
	November 2015	December 2015	January 2016	February 2016	March 2016	April 2016
Events	2	0	5	4	2	2
Fatalities	15		18	33	1	2
Actor Count	2	1	3	2	4	2
Fragmentation	2.00000	1.00000	2.45455	2.00000	4.00000	2.00000
	May 2016	June 2016	July 2016	August 2016	September 2016	October 2016
Events	1	0	1	1	2	3
Fatalities	0	0	2	8	7	0
Actor Count	2	0	0	1	0	3
Fragmentation	2.00000	0.00000	0.00000	1.00000	0.00000	3.00000
	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017	March 2017	April 2017
Events	10	5	4	2	4	25
Fatalities	28	10	1	4	0	20
Actor Count	4	5	1	1	2	5
Fragmentation	2.56000	4.00000	1.00000	1.00000	1.80000	1.71930

Table 6: Number of first-level administrative divisions in which non-state actors were recorded active

	Western Libya	Eastern Libya	Southern Libya	Grand Total
Misratah Communal Militia (Libya)	10		5	15
Islamic State (Cyrenaica Province)	4	8	2	14
Zintan Ethnic Militia (Libya)	8	3	2	13
Islamic State (Tripoli)	9	2		11
Gharyan Communal Militia (Libya)	8			8
Tabu Ethnic Militia (Libya)		2	6	8
Ansar al-Sharia		7		7
Libya Shield Brigade	5	1	1	7
Militia (Ibrahim Jadran)	2	2	3	7
Wershefana Communal Militia (Libya)	7			7
Libyan Rebel Forces	2	4		6
Operation Libya Dawn	6			6
Brigades for the Defence of Benghazi	2	2	1	5
Zawiya Communal Militia (Libya)	5			5
Al Qaqa Brigade	4			4
Omar Mukhtar Brigade		3	1	4
Tuareg Ethnic Militia (Libya)			4	4
101 Battalion (Tajoura)	3			3
Awlad Suleiman Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1		2	3
Janzur Communal Militia (Libya)	3			3
JEM: Justice and Equality Movement		1	2	3
Margahni Clan Militia (Libya)	3			3
The Steadfastness Front	3			3
Zuwarah Communal Militia (Libya)	3			3
Abu Obeida Brigade	2			2
Al-Barasa Ethnic Militia (Libya)		2		2
Al-Kanni Brigade	2			2
Ali Hassan Al-Jabar Brigade		2		2
AQIM: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb		1	1	2
BRSC: Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries	1	1		2
El-Mashashia Ethnic Militia (Libya)	2			2
Henish Clan Militia (Libya)	2			2
Janzur Knights Brigade	2			2
LROR: Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room	2			2

Rafallah Sehati Brigade		2		2
Sabratha Communal Militia (Libya)	2			2
Tajoura Communal Militia (Libya)	2			2
Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade	2			2
Zawiya Martyrs Brigade		1	1	2
Abu Ghilan Brigade	1			1
Abu Raawi Brigade	1			1
Abu Salim Brigade	1			1
Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade		1		1
Ahmad Al-Sharif Battalion			1	1
Ajdabiya Border Division		1		1
Ajdabiya Martyrs Brigade		1		1
Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council		1		1
Ajilat Communal Militia (Libya)	1			1
Al Farouq Brigade		1		1
Al Hasawna Ethnic Militia (Libya)			1	1
Al Qaeda		1		1
Al-Bla'za Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1			1
Al-Buni Brigade	1			1
Al-Burayqah Martyrs Brigade		1		1
Al-Fateh Al-Jaded Party			1	1
Al-Keba Brigade	1			1
Al-Raqaiat Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1			1
Ali Ibn Abi Talib Brigade	1			1
Arab Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1			1
Arouba Brigade	1			1
Artillery and Missiles Brigade	1			1
Awlad Garbou Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1			1
Bab al-Tajoura Brigade	1			1
Basbusa Clan Militia (Libya)	1			1
Bashir Sadawi Brigade	1			1
Ben Nayal Ethnic Militia (Libya)			1	1
Berber Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1			1
Brega Martyrs Brigade		1		1
CCA: Counter Crime Agency		1		1
El-Farouk Brigade	1			1
El-Marsa Brigade	1			1
February 17 Martyrs Brigade		1		1

Firjan Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1		1
Free Libya Martyrs Brigade		1	1
Furq Al-Sadisa Battalion	1		1
Furqan Brigade	1		1
Ihsan Brigade	1		1
Islamic State (Fezzan Province) and Islamic State (Fezzan)		1	1
Islamist Militia (Algeria)	1		1
Jibreel Abaya Militia	1		1
Khadrawi Clan Militia (Libya)	1		1
Kiklah Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Libya Misratan Mujahideen	1		1
Libya National Guard and Libyan National Guards	1		1
Militia (Pro-Government)		1	1
Misrata Martyrs Brigade	1		1
Msallata Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Muslim Militia (Libya)	1		1
Nahaj Clan Militia (Libya)	1		1
Najaa Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1		1
National Mobile Force (Libya)	1		1
Nawasi Brigade	1		1
Obeidat Ethnic Militia (Libya)		1	1
Private Security Forces (Italy)	1		1
Private Security Forces (Sudan)	1		1
Qadhadhfa Ethnic Militia (Libya)		1	1
Revolutionaries of the Western Area	1		1
Sahawat Forces		1	1
Salah al-Burki Brigade	1		1
Shaafyin Ethnic Militia (Libya)	1		1
Sharikan Militia	1		1
Shield Militia		1	1
Shura Council of Darnah Mujahidin		1	1
Shura Council of Islamic Youth		1	1
Shura Council of the Mujahideen Surman	1		1
Sixth Security Brigade	1		1
SLM/A-Minnawi: Sudan			
Liberation			
Movement/Army	1		1
(Minnawi Faction)			
Special Deterrence Forces	1		1

Subol Al-Salam Brigade		1	1
Surman Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Tarhouna Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Tariq Ibn Ziyad Brigade		1	1
Tawhid al-Salafiya		1	1
The Rapid Intervention Force	1		1
Those Who Signed in Blood	1		1
Tiger Militia	1		1
Tripoli Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (First Division)	1		1
Truth Martyrs	1		1
Zintan Martyrs Brigade		1	1
Zliten Communal Militia (Libya)	1		1
Zwai Ethnic Militia (Libya)			1
