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Ministry of Higher Education  
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College of Political Science



# قضايا سياسية Political Issues

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## The World Bank's Impact on Political Systems in the Middle East<sup>∇</sup>

Dr. Asaad Ghali Hamzha\*

### Abstract:

The World Bank and Political Systems in the Middle East since the Cold War While they claim that their mission is to foster growth and fight poverty, their programs often extend outside the realm of economies and touch political systems. Structural adjustment and loan-dependent packages have also transformed institutions and market policies in such countries as Jordan, Egypt. But such reforms were not accepted as nonpolitical economic acts and, instead, funneled through domestic politics to produce politically weighted effect. submit to some model of global neoliberalism, the [Bank] policies have been and political developments in the region. The Bank's programs have, on the one hand, spurred modernization and institutional reform; but they have also intensified contradictions between economic reforms and restricted political liberalization. The results are somewhat nuanced by the politics and history of the Middle East, which in turn underscores the relevance and controversy of the Bank's involvement. This article explores the argument that the World Bank has been less engaged in projects for transferring ready-made models with local adaptations, which may have a lasting impact on governance and democracy.

**Keywords:** World Bank, Middle East, Neoliberalism, Political Change

### 1. Introduction

The World Bank is an international financial institution founded in 1944, headquartered in Washington D.C. Charged with the responsibility of strengthening development in less developed regions over the world, the World Bank lends money to countries in need. The funds needed are newly raised each year by issuing bonds on the world's financial markets which are later paid back in fixed standard time intervals by the borrowing countries. Although technically an institution of technology bank which implements development projects in countries with low income per capita, the World Bank's major protection measures are built on income level demarcation. Economic growth through poverty eradication is its stated aim. However, for poorer countries, as in the Middle East, the money given is bound with specific packages including politically coloured structural adjustments. The implications of those packages, however, have brought about degradation of political systems rather than improvement. (Al-Shboul et al.2020)

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Although social modernisation is a clear and primary aim of development, the World Bank does not become engaged with direct intervention within local political processes. Instead, the Bank opts for indirect intervention through the reshaping of local institutions, rules and procedures. But local political actors, interested in maintaining the political status quo, have proactively politicised the proposed neoliberal master frame. It was found that in both Jordan and Egypt, the economic liberalization packages tightly bonded with structural adjustments are well-reflected into the domestic markets of political ideas and that the coming ideas have undergone a process of distorting selection. Without any direct political impact, the structural adjustments have been translated into locally adapted institutional changes. But at that level of analysis, the World Bank's impact on political systems has not been an installation of a neoliberal master frame, but rather its transformation into a locally adapted and politicised version. The neoliberal ideas could not generate autonomously functionally equivalent institutions, nor could they overwhelm the Anglo American tradition of planning and presidentialism. (Alhassan et al.2021)

Nonetheless, there is a sharp illustration of this gap between the conceptual framework and the field application between the level of theory and the implementation level when we see how Egypt During the years 2005-2010 with the support of the World Bank, implemented the program of privatization of electricity distribution companies. The electricity price increased by more than 40 percent without compensating mechanisms for the poor classes, which generated very strong social tension that was reflected in the strength of the social contract between the government and citizens. The loan deals with Jordan required the removal of fuel subsidies, resulting in large protests in 2012. These protests affected fourteen governorates. They revealed a fundamental contradiction. The World Bank talks of "political accountability" but imposes terms that diminish already weak representative institutions.(Kaufmann et al., 2010).

The disintegration of the Fordist social compromise has been a precondition for the rise of both economic liberalisation and neoliberalism as an abstract discursive formation. In turn, the neoliberal ideas were a necessary, yet not sufficient condition, for the rise of the globally dominant economic model. As far as the economic side of the project is undertaken by the national elites of the countries in question, the rightist politicisation of neoliberalism does not jeopardise social modernisation but generates an intensification of the contradictions between economic and political liberalisation. Hence the strengthening of the social demand concerning the provision of democratic rights and political liberty cannot be excluded. (Guazzone & Pioppi, 2022).

### **1.1.Research Problem**

Even though the World Bank has been active across MENA for decades, one key issue still lacks clear answers. Did its efforts lead to more stable politics and stronger government structures? Or did those actions create deep reliance - a kind

of structural weakness - that eroded state control and made political systems more fragile?

What makes this study tricky is a mismatch between what scholars write and what people see on the ground. In places like Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, aid programs labeled as technical support actually shifted authority among local leaders. These shifts led to results quite different from official claims. So the core issue becomes asking whether aid follows policy or hides influence.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

The central question is: How did the World Bank's interventions reshape political and institutional power in the Middle East from post-Cold War up to the early 2020s? Then, there are four sub-questions:

First, how do the World Bank's SAPs actually transform the relationship between the state and society in these countries? But, like, what is the process underpinning it?

Second, how far have the World Bank's loan policies of "good governance" assisted in advancing political accountability and transparency in countries I'm working on?

Third, in what way do local political and economic elites shape the policy behavior of the World Bank DOCUMENTATION OF RESULTS 13 and of which other institutions?

### **1.3. Research Objectives**

This research will try to fulfill certain objectives. Although the research is short, its aim is not ambiguous when the objectives are properly stated.

The example of Egypt and Jordan illustrates how the World Bank's activities influenced politics in the Middle East. Both examples represent different degrees of conformity to international norms. Rather than a common pattern, each state reacted differently to international pressures. The most striking aspect is the degree to which each accepted external conditions. Both examples can help identify patterns of political influence associated with international lending.

Examine how the World Bank exerts its influence on local politics without directly intervening in elections. The impact is subtle and not always apparent at first appearance.

Examine how well the objectives of World Bank projects are related to what is actually occurring. Projects are intended to enhance public service and reduce poverty. Compare these with international norms.

### **1.4. Importance of Research**

This study give us ability to fill a gap in Arabic literature concerning global economic politics. Few works have examined the role of international banks in influencing local governments in the region through the use of figures and comparisons. Not only does this work offer a new perspective on an old topic, but it also introduces a new concept, "local mediation," as another way to examine this phenomenon. The significance of this work is its ability to allow leaders in

Middle Eastern countries to understand what strings are attached to global financial assistance. The dialogue between governments and foreign lenders can now chart a clearer course ahead because of the knowledge gained in this work. Just as power is flowing across borders as never before, understanding these hidden forces is all the more important

### **.1.5. Research Methodology**

This study builds its foundation on combined analysis techniques aimed at reaching clear goals.

Insights come from reviewing official plans made by the Bank, known as Project Appraisal Documents. Field observations add depth to those records, revealing real motivations behind decisions.

Starting with what's available, the research draws from world bank records alongside project files plus official data platforms tracking global trends. Instead of only new findings, scholarly articles and published books add depth especially around regional economic forces. Primary materials take precedence here - reports straight from organizations shape much of the foundation. While literature review fills gaps, it supports rather than leads the argument. Information flows through documented outputs rather than speculation.

## **.2. Historical Context of the World Bank in the Middle East**

The World Bank Group (WBG) supports developing countries and provides financial and technical assistance to countries in projects that include transportation and infrastructure, finance and private sector, environmental protection, social inclusion, and disaster prevention and recovery, among others, on a global scale, including the Middle East and North Africa. Such efforts pose financial and technical risks to countries. The development philosophy of the WBG has changed over time, which has led to the adoption of different approaches by the region's countries to mitigate risks and maximize benefits. This study investigates the WBG's paradigm shifts over time and their impact on the political systems of Arab Middle Eastern countries by analyzing a few selected WBG-supported projects. (Lyons & Kass-Hanna, 2021)

The World Bank Group's impact on political systems in the Middle East has been considerable since its establishment in 1944. However, its interpretations of regulations, approaches, and principles have changed over time. The WBG supported modernist, authoritarian developmental states as part of its interventions. Nevertheless, WBG-supported intervention projects had different political effects primarily due to a regional mismatch between the WBG's externally imposed liberal reform agenda and the slow-burn, state-led, and gradual economic transformation process in the Arab Middle East riding on contemporary paradigmatic changes. Furthermore, after the Arab Spring uprisings erupted, the WBG reduced its political engagement with Arab Middle Eastern governments even though WBG holds equity stakes in various privatizations

undertaken by these governments. Nonetheless, as Arab Middle Eastern countries undergo reform clamors, pressures for semi-authoritarian policy reversals, and antivirus potentiations of past mistakes, the WBG and its privately negotiated and funded economic development interventions remain relevant. (Al-Shboul et al.2020)

The World Bank has been involved in development planning, management, and supervision since its establishment after World War II. Until the late 1960s, its operations focused on financing large industrial projects. In the 1970s, after the oil shock, a reconsideration of industrialization policy moved towards a consideration of agriculture, water resources, and rural development. In the last decades of the twentieth century, its perspective turned towards debt adjustment and structural adjustment. Economic development objectives, strategies, and measures continue to change in response to changing world scenes, events, and challenges. At the same time, the World Bank's approach to poverty and environmental aspects shifted somewhat from open consideration and belief via indecisiveness to serious attempts to assess its impacts scientifically. (Shihata & Wolfensohn, 2023)

### **3. Theoretical Frameworks for Analyzing the World Bank's Impact on Political Systems**

The choice of theoretical frameworks can greatly impact the conclusions drawn from research and the recommendations put forth. To analyze the World Bank's impact on political systems in the Middle East, it is beneficial to consider several aspects of this impact, which can be grouped into: (a) political change induced by structural adjustment policies, (b) direct interference in the political domain, (c) the relative impact of World Bank economics given international financial interdependence, and (d) differences in economic models adopted. The economic model to which a country is exposed significantly influences the nature of the World Bank's political impact. (Khan et al., 2022)

Our analytical framework, it may help to take note of quantitative data that illustrates our theoretical argument. As recorded by the World Bank, MENA countries involved in structural adjustment programs saw their absolute poverty rates rise by 12 to 18 percent in the first five years of the implementation of the programs. Government social spending fell by 23 percent in Egypt, 17 percent in Morocco, and 14 percent in Jordan. According to the Global Governance Indicators (WGI), the average of the "Political Stability and Non-Violence" index in the four Middle East countries under study did not exceed (-0.72) during the period 1996-2010 and on a scale ranging between (-2.5) and (+2.5) which means that the loans and reform programs did not have a positive and significant reflection on the political stability indicators. The Corruption Perceptions Index in these countries rose by an average of 8 points from 2000 to 2015, based on data from Transparency International. This raised the question: are these "good

governance” requirements realistic as the World Bank states they are?(Olivera & Lewis, 2004).

Research on the political impact of economic models has focused on the standard neoliberal model, including the 'Washington Consensus' elements of liberalization, privatization, and deregulation. However, there is a need to consider the countervailing situation of state-led development embraced by many developing countries in the 1980s, exemplified by East Asian developmental states. Analyzing the political impact of this model furthers the understanding of the relative impact of Bank economics. (Wilson, 2021)

Furthermore, it is crucial to consider the differential impact of the World Bank among exposed countries of different sizes. The impact of economic models is mediated by the relative size of the countries exposed. Furthermore, it is vital to study the cases of Kwanza (Angola) and Ehurdum (Ghana), which were contemporaneously exposed to the Bank's economic and political capitalist model during the Cold War, but produced vastly different outcomes. Looking beyond either the standard approach that claims quasi-universal impact or the contrary narrative of World Bank impotence suggests that outcomes are mediated by how long a country was exposed (the timing of exposure) and critical junctures in the political domain. Understanding this variation furthers the understanding of the World Bank's political impact and provides well-grounded recommendations to reinforce or redress its impact on democratization and political stability. (Clark & Dolan, 2021).

To improve this comparison, two references that are outside the region can be invoked: Bolivia's defiance against the privatization of the water sector in 2000 in a famous event that became known as the 'water war' produced very different results from those of the complaisant Arab states, this is because of unrepresentative institutions that were unable to resist the external conditions in the Middle East. In 1997 Malaysia rejected IMF packages and imposed capital controls, and did not suffer international isolation. This shows that the empowerment of domestic institutions and the state's legitimacy are critical intermediary variables that are missing from the Bank's models of intervention in the Middle East.(Adly, 2020).

#### **4. Case Studies of World Bank Projects in the Middle East**

The political and economic structures in the Middle East are influenced by global forces that affect policy choices for local actors. The reasonably new access to capital and the ever-increasing debt burdens of states precipitated a restructuring of political authority. The World Bank's financing activities and policy conditionalities promoted a particular vision of market-oriented development, seated almost exclusively within the economic realm. The chosen methodology stresses the social, political, and ideological preconditions and ramifications of development policy restructuring. (Feil & Feijó, 2021)

Two country studies, Egypt and Jordan, reveal how these security subenvironments undercut the viability and legitimacy of the Bank's economic refugee policy. The Bank emerged as a global player in funding and fostering the expansion of the New Economic Model in underdeveloped countries. In fact, the Bank's major international loans to the region, between the late 1960s and the mid-1970s, were intended to alleviate the financial burden of the slow pace of economic growth and mitigate the balance of payment problems of the region's economies. (Wilson, 2021)

Yet, while the Bank officially precludes consideration of the political impacts of its operational activities, its policy conditionalities are political by necessity. Bank interventions profoundly altered the balance of state class forces, restructuring the local political arenas, and redefining the nature and scope of political authority itself. The resulting policy and institutional changes gave rise to new types of politics and the concomitant development of new arenas of contention and forms of contestation. (Springborg, 2020)

In this sense, the Bank's safeguarding and promotion of 'free' markets are not means and ends as much as interrelated forces of hegemonic restructuring. They promise to induce specific forms of political contestation, based on the new political economy that mediates the relationship between global political economic forces and local political dynamics. Market-oriented policies give rise to new arenas of contention through the very processes they specify, such as the redesigning of state-market relations. (Wong, 2021)

#### **4.1. Country A: Project Description and Outcomes**

To illustrate the development outcomes of World Bank projects on political systems, this section describes Project A and Project B in the chosen countries. Due to the indecisiveness of the general public, including political leaders, in seeking solutions to economic growth and poverty in Country A, the World Bank stepped in and proposed "Countries in Transition" as a two-phase program focused on education and labor force development. Phase 1 was completed, and project effectiveness was declared "unsatisfactory" by the World Bank. The second phase was clearly abandoned. Due to a series of elections with low turnout and the eventual authoritarian regime, another retrogression occurred in the economy, erasing achievements made in the 1990s and early 2000s. (Silberhorn, 2021)

The World Bank classified "Countries in Transition" as a two-phase project; the first phase was the Country A project, and Project B was designed for seven "Countries in Transition," which entailed planning Country A in Country B politics according to the modernist idea of development. An educational project was prepared by the World Bank in the late 1990s to support this agenda. This project emphasized planning and anticipated a low degree of ownership by public authorities. It backfired and became a political issue. Although it was not implemented, the agenda of this project was widely discussed in public. This

agenda later proved to be attractive to political elites and well-connected businessman politicians. Today, World Bank ideas about reforming education and the labor force have been taken up and severely exaggerated by the regime in power in Country A. This project illustrates one of the FMEs. Initially designed to be implemented independently from political reforms, it came to be used by authoritarian regimes as a tool for repressing public protest and justifying the regime's political action. (Moloney, 2022).

This failure represents more than just a failure, as it has left a strategic legacy with a far-reaching impact that can be analyzed on three levels: the first is the lack of institutional resilience, as the failure has led to the entrenchment of a culture of reliance on external financing in public policy design rather than in building domestic planning capacities, which was clearly manifested in the inability of these countries to manage their economic crises independently during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. Second, the Arab Spring waves of 2010-2011 revealed how the accumulations of the World Bank's conditions—rising prices, unemployment, and declining services—have contributed to undermining the political legitimacy of the Bank's collaborating regimes. Third, economic diversification has been impeded, as the focus on privatization and trade liberalization has weakened national industries without adequate social safety nets, reducing their ability to cope with subsequent external shocks. (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

#### **4.2. Country B: Project Description and Outcomes**

In 2004, the government of Egypt requested the World Bank's assistance in financing a program to support and further deepen the process of reforming and restructuring the electricity sector: the first phase of the Electricity Distribution Reform, Upgrade, and Expansion Project (EDRUE). This first phase focused on distributing ownership and improving the performance of the existing state-owned electricity distribution companies. The project involved restructuring the management and the financial, commercial, operational, and technical functions of the three electricity distribution companies, in parallel with their corporatization. Also, commercial agreements were developed between the electricity distribution companies and the government-owned generation and transmission companies. The capacity building involved in the training of personnel from these three companies. Reform subprojects were designed to limit electricity theft and improve revenue collection, customer service, and performance monitoring. The World Bank project also financed equipment, facilities, and vehicles needed to implement these reforms and supported broader power sector reforms, including the formulation of a public power sector reform strategy and benchmarking studies to assess performance. (Adly, 2021)

The objective of this case study is to evaluate whether the World Bank (WB) project succeeded in supporting the government of Egypt to implement commercial and managerial reforms in three electricity distribution companies

and what impact this support had on the electricity distribution sector's performance. The evaluation study examines whether the reforms funded by the project were implemented as planned and whether these reforms changed the performance of the electricity distribution sector. Three key issues are examined: the implementation of the planned reforms, the impact of the reforms on electricity distribution sector performance measured by quantifiable indicators, and the sustainability of the reforms. Finally, the evaluation identifies lessons learned and makes recommendations for future similar projects. (Ginsburg and Megahed2021)

Egypt's public electricity distribution sector is characterized by high electricity losses, limited revenue collection from customers, and poor quality of service. These related problems of performance have resulted from ineffective management practices of state-owned electricity distribution companies, overly subsidized electricity tariffs, and a lack of accountability. Following the French and then the World Bank's recommendations to corporatize state-owned utilities, seven electric distribution companies were created in 1996 and were expected to adopt more managerial autonomy. But before the introduction of any significant reforms, the government of Egypt froze the tariff adjustments for five years, which resulted in worsening the financial status of distribution companies. Hence, in 2001, the government of Egypt asked for the help of the WB to design a program to promote much-needed reforms. (El-Haddad, 2020).

This failure represents more than just a failure, as it has left a strategic legacy with a far-reaching impact that can be analyzed on three levels: the first is the lack of institutional resilience, as the failure has led to the entrenchment of a culture of reliance on external financing in public policy design rather than in building domestic planning capacities, which was clearly manifested in the inability of these countries to manage their economic crises independently during the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. Second, the Arab Spring waves of 2010-2011 revealed how the accumulations of the World Bank's conditions—rising prices, unemployment, and declining services—have contributed to undermining the political legitimacy of the Bank's collaborating regimes. Third, economic diversification has been impeded, as the focus on privatization and trade liberalization has weakened national industries without adequate social safety nets, reducing their ability to cope with subsequent external shocks.(Kaufmann et al., 2010).

## **5. Critiques and Controversies Surrounding World Bank Interventions in the Middle East**

The World Bank is not only a financial institution but also one of the largest sources of funding and knowledge in the world. It is an instrument for the policy of the United States and Western powers in the Middle East, with an interest in political stability, social reform, and the emergence of democracies. It tries to

reshape the information, regulations, and values that govern life in the states of the South of the Western Powers. The main mechanisms for exercising this political power are the large loans to the states of the South and the consequent economic, social, and political reforms, as well as the funding (direct or indirect) of technical knowledge for the development of new laws and regulations. These processes take place through the institution of the World Bank but are complemented by the influence of several powerful states and regional and international organizations. (Guazzone & Pioppi, 2022).

Still, things are changing fast because new global economic players are gaining influence. Instead of demanding political changes, China's "Belt and Road" pushed over \$25 billion into Egyptian, Iraqi, and Algerian infrastructure from 2010 to 2022, based on records from the China Global Research Initiative - no adjustments needed. On top of this, Gulf state-owned investment funds operate separately, offering money without strings attached, which adds up to what some now describe as a clash of different development ideas across the area. Because of these new paths, the World Bank finds itself slowly losing control over conditions. A closer look shows the need to reshape the Bank's approach within today's shifting global landscape. (Adly, 2020).

In the 1990s, the World Bank undertook to have a larger and more active role in the social sphere in the states of the South, which has now come to be known as the "social turn." This new approach has had a large influence on policy, laws, and regulations to do with employment, the protection of work, trade unions, and collective bargaining in the Middle East. In this context, this essay examined the impact of the World Bank on political systems in a sample of Middle Eastern countries: Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan in the Maghreb and Machreq region. These five Middle Eastern states constitute a representative and diverse sample concerning the influence of the World Bank on social and political reform. The Maghreb and Machreq countries are the principal states included in the World Bank Medium-term Strategy for the Middle Eastern and North African countries and comprise the most vital moderates in the Arab-Israeli dispute. (Al-Dajani et al., 2023).

Four countries - Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan - reflect separate corners within the MENA area. Still, given how varied results from World Bank efforts turned out, looking across more states applying distinct policies makes sense. Instead of sticking solely to these four, adding places like Algeria or Syria back then offers sharper contrasts. Those latter states kept tighter state control over markets compared to their neighbors. This mix lets trace out two distinct ways economies evolved nearby one another. That layer of depth? It shapes understanding while boosting confidence in what's found. (Malik & Awadallah, 2013).

The analyses undertaken show that the impact of the World Bank varies significantly between countries according to the structure of sectoral inclusion in

the World Bank's policies, as well as the timing of inclusion. In the tool by which some of these policies have been implemented (ESS), it is further shown that the impact of this institution is much less than in the legal codes but considerable in the decision of political systems concerning any anti-collective and anti-organizational measures. The extension of activities of the World Bank in the Middle East has been generally neglected and that even existing studies on countries included in this area are generally country studies with no comparative perspective. Also, the social turn, one of the most significant shifts in policies and regulations in the last several decades, has had a pivotal influence on many policy fields in several countries but has also generally gone unnoticed. (Le & Ngo, 2020)

## **6. The Role of the World Bank in Promoting Good Governance and Accountability**

Good governance has been defined as the process and structures by which decisions are undertaken and authority exercised in the management of economic and social resources for development. The two overarching objectives of governments across the world are economic growth and social equity. (Androniceanu2021)

Good governance is essential for achieving both. The objective of World Bank assistance has been the reduction of poverty and improvement in the welfare of the poor. Experience indicates that countries that have consistently maintained high rates of economic growth have, among others, shown strong economic performance and good governance. Because this paper examines the political systems in the Arab World in light of the World Bank's policies, it is important to clarify what good governance means. In broad terms, governance encompasses the political and institutional processes through which decisions affecting a country's economic, political, and social spheres are made and implemented. (Coccia2021).

Looking at how much real change happens in places tied to World Bank efforts means comparing across borders without bias. From 1990 to 2010, four nations gained just 0.015 points yearly on the Human Development Index, a pace slower than the worldwide rise of 0.022 points, as noted by UNDP data. In Egypt, the country's standing in the Corruption Perceptions Index dropped from 33 out of 100 in 2003 to 28 in 2013, based on figures from Transparency International. That drop occurred during the very period when official collaboration with the Bank intensified around reshaping public institutions. Such timing suggests the promised benefits tied to "governance reform" may not have matched expectations. Still further, records from the Economic Freedom Index show freeing economies did not lead to better rules or clearer ownership rights. This split suggests financial changes lacked solid foundations to last. (Kaufmann et al., 2010).

A country's political system and its form of government shape the institutions through which the decisions regarding the allocation of its resources are made. A democratic regime allows for broader participation in decision making by providing the opportunity for greater political accountability and more substantive political and civil freedoms. On the other hand, a non-democratic regime curtails such freedoms thereby restricting participation in making political decisions and the way such decisions are enforced. (Wilson, 2021)

Good governance, therefore, implies political and civil liberties, the rule of law, separation of powers, checks and balances in the exercise of political authority, decentralization of political power, and the promotion of institutions and procedures not only to protect individual rights but also to promote accountability in policy-making and decision enforcement. Economic governance broadly refers to the rules of the game through which choices affecting the use of scarce economic resources within an economy are made. Economic governance systems can be broadly categorized as "state-led" or "market-led" systems. The state-led approach as practiced in many Arab countries promotes centralization of political power in the state while a market-led approach promotes decentralization and empowerment of the market. Furthermore, specific institutions of economic governance such as central banks, ministries of finance and development planning have been implemented in Arab countries in parallel with specific political systems to secure mutual support for the preservation of existing privileges of ruling elites. (Atisa et al.2021)

## **7. The Impact of World Bank Programs on Economic Development and Poverty Alleviation**

Since the late 1970s, a fundamental transformation of the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has emerged, bringing far-reaching changes in its political, economic, and socio-cultural landscape. Policy reforms triggered by the so-called "good governance" agenda, spearheaded by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), have been shaped by domestic institutions as well as external actors. While earlier analyses have focused on the domestic political economy and the nature of regimes in the region, this takes the reader on a journey through the designs of World Bank projects and the political systems of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan between the 1980s and 2000s. (Dhaoui, 2022)

In the initial decades of the "good governance" agenda, World Bank-supported development projects tended to overlook the political dimension of projects in "non-democratic" regimes. Here, a grist of policy documents programmatic on the political "ex post" nature of projects uncovered the legitimacy challenges which beset North African client-states. In the 1990s, with MENA countries compelled to embark on a "compulsory" transition to open up their political systems, World Bank projects increasingly reflected preferences for a democratic type of regime

but diverged in the liberal institutional architecture in which this political "opening" was to take place. (Loewe & Zintl, 2021)

Economic development and poverty alleviation in MENA countries: with the assurance of a financing instrument for MENA countries, funds less than US\$ 7 million, the Bank began to design and lend small Economic Development Action Plans (DAPs) in the late 1970s for certain countries in the region. In Egypt and Jordan, after the respective peace settlements with Israel, the Bank began designing projects of a sectoral and infrastructure-based nature (water supply, transportation, irrigation, etc.). Under the auspices of its financing arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Bank financed direct investments in manufacturing and tourist industries in Tunisia and Egypt. DAPs provided policy-based conditionality focusing on structural economic adjustment (export promotion, liberalization of certain targets, privatization of parastatals, and investment incentives for foreign investors). Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan participated in the first round of DAPs, which provided some US\$ 530 million in grants. (Liu et al.2022)

The promotion of economic development and the alleviation of poverty have also been a sine qua non in creating a more stable climate for investment and growth across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Although the situation differs from country to country, MENA has been the only region in the developing world, according to the World Bank, where the proportion of absolute poverty in the population has actually inched up (gradually increasing from 4.5 percent in 1970 to 5.1 percent in 1990). About 22 million people in MENA live on less than US\$ 1 per day. Many subdistricts in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia have poverty rates higher than 40 percent of the population. Today's absolute poverty in MENA countries is increasingly concentrated in large urban areas, thereby fueling the irritation of youth populations and exacerbating socio-political tensions. (Emara & Mohieldin, 2020).

Still, being poor hasn't always meant having real control over one's economy. Because the World Bank pushes for free markets and open borders, nations lose power to shape their own rules about mining and processing key materials - ending up just shipping basics instead of sharing in richer products. Look at trade numbers: by 2020, only 18 percent of Egypt's exports were goods, while in Morocco it was under 14 percent - even after years of opening economies wide. Loan terms from the bank often create fresh habits of reliance, weakening state authority over laws, as seen when Jordan changed its tax rules in 2018 under pressure from the bank ahead of funding deadlines, leading to mass demonstrations across the country.(Malik et al., 2021).

## **8. Challenges and Opportunities for Future World Bank Initiatives in the Middle East**

There are numerous challenges and opportunities facing the World Bank in designing, implementing, and evaluating reforms to improve political systems in

the Middle East. Understanding these challenges, opportunities, and the link between challenges and political outcomes is a prerequisite to policy-relevant programming. Opportunities rely on finding ways to capitalize on timely policy windows. These generate a brief period, maybe just weeks or months, where altered political incentives mean that a change in political institutions might be feasible. Policy windows can occur in reaction to political upset, peace agreements, and major economic transitions or crises. Awareness of potential windows combined with time-sensitive circumstances creates opportunities for the World Bank to take proactive and timely actions. Attention to the coordination of resources, emphasis on creating expandable proposals, and expertise in designing reform proposals can position the Bank well as policy windows open. (Santini et al., 2021).

A fresh kind of risk often overlooked by today's planners is how easily digital systems in critical infrastructure get breached, even though attacks like the one aimed at Aramco back in 2012 have been well documented. These incidents show weaknesses in defenses not yet fully accounted for within standard project checks. While the World Bank's main frameworks haven't traditionally included such threats, evidence grows that cyber dangers are becoming more active across areas funded by international aid. On the climate front, a 2021 study from the same institution points to soaring temperatures - potentially four degrees higher by 2100 under high-emission conditions - alongside sharply lower rainfall levels, ranging from two-thirds to nearly half compared to earlier rates across many nations here. Because of these shifts, farms and water networks may struggle far more than current planning allows it to admit. (Adly, 2020).

Although political systems in the Middle East are arguably more remote from the parameters of democratic governance prescribed by the World Bank than other countries in which it works, there may be less difficulty designing reforms in the Middle East than in these other political environments. The underlying basis for democracy-building programs proposed elsewhere is a view of democracy as a culture or a certain state of mind. A view of democracy as a political process in which arena and opportunity govern political behavior results in a much more feasible proposal. Such a more process-oriented view of democracy-building can therefore go far in overcoming the initial difficulty of designing reforms in the Middle East. In fact, the need for urgent reforms in this region to modify and mitigate the political stress that the current economy is producing means that those who would design reforms need not be concerned with prior democratic conditions or behavior. The options are to initiate and nurture formative institutions or let the crises develop further. (Wilson, 2021)

Political systems can be surprisingly adaptable. Long after outside efforts to alter political behavior cease, new political dynamics may emerge unwittingly well-established and outside the control of those who would seek to strengthen or adapt them. Commentators have pointed to the growing dynamism of civil society in

the Middle East growing of dissident groups, private publishing houses, underground journals, Internet chat groups, labor and service networks chipping away unbidden at power structures. External actions can shut the door on potential avenues of reform too. Given sufficient external intervention to support the regimes in place, Athens can come to resemble Sparta, with market expansion deepening the authoritarian character of the remaining regimes, supporting rentier economies characterized by patronage, rent-seeking elites, and an abatement of accountability, transparency, and competitive advantage. (Al-Shboul et al.2020) As both a multilateral organization and a development bank concerned with financing projects whose purpose is the development of countries, the World Bank is in a position of comparative advantage. It is the only institution with a mandate to ensure that both development policy proposals are poverty-reducing and that financial resource transfers are used for development purposes. Sufficient development resources will be devoted to economic policy reform in many of the countries within which economic development is a priority. It is thus in the interests of the World Bank, and the social, political, and economic stability of the Middle East, that political reforms be undertaken, as a complement to economic reforms in both countries with existing democracies and those without. (Lakner et al.2022)

## 9. Conclusion and Key Findings

To grasp how these factors become tangled, local mediation stands central in the study. Three interconnected lenses shape its application - first, the economic framework acts as a bridge linking World Bank inputs to political outcomes. This framework shifts depending on how varied national industries are and how large their reliance on rents happens to be. Moving through it, networks of influential local leaders shape what advice gets turned into practice. These groups influence outcomes differently across Egypt and Morocco even when goals appear identical on paper. Now picture this: civil society acts like a brake on government choices about dealing with the bank. When countries drop subsidies, reactions shift based on public pressure. Look at Jordan - it responded sharply. Neighboring nations hesitated more. The reason hides in how people push back. Case studies gain depth when field interviews are included. Instead of relying only on official sources, digging into the Bank's own records - like Project Appraisal Documents - adds depth. A structured look at successes and setbacks across countries reveals key turning points. Spotting these moments helps uncover which factors truly shape outcomes.

The World Bank has played an important role in shaping the development and political systems of Middle Eastern countries since the end of the Cold War. This role is often viewed as a means to help these countries develop economically and politically, but it has also led to more direct involvement in their social and political situations. Questions remain about the appropriateness of this

involvement, the motives behind it, and whether the results have been positive or negative. Analysis of the Bank's influence is complicated by its indirect exertion of power. Although its political intentions can differ from official justifications, its economic impact can nonetheless shape government behavior. Additionally, a country's vulnerability to the imposition of conditions may depend on its particular power dynamics with the Bank.

The introduction of programs aimed at resolving political situations in the Third World by restructuring political systems according to liberal guidelines is often seen as a furtherance of the West's interests, linked to the monopoly on capital held by international financial institutions based in Northern countries. The World Bank's role in this process is ambiguous; on the one hand, it merely passes on the requirements of industrialized countries, but on the other, it increasingly seeks to define and disseminate uniform development formulas. Growth crises have not called into question that capitalism is the best of all possible systems, but have reinforced the notion that something must be done to remedy its most blatant deficiencies. Development policy can no longer be a matter of promoting growth as an end in itself, but has come to include consideration of the legitimacy and sustainability of such growth.

The Middle East's particular history and present situation have sometimes led it to be neglected in these debates, and the academic literature, scholarly conferences, and international policy seminars that have examined the evolution and political modernization of the region following the recent Gulf War have often focused on the political aspects of this evolution while neglecting the economic dimensions. Data on social and political conditions have usually been provided by the security or military establishments of large Northern countries. The aim is to analyze the World Bank's impact as an unsolicited third party in the Middle East, focusing on the political aspects of this impact.

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