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## Time and the Growth of Trust under Conditions of Extreme Uncertainty

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# Time and the Growth of Trust under Conditions of Extreme Uncertainty. Illustrations from Peace and Conflict Studies

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**Abstract.** The article studies civil wars and trust dynamics from two perspectives. It looks, first, at rebel governance during ongoing armed conflict and, second, at mass mobilisation against the regime in post-conflict societies. Both contexts are marked by extraordinarily high degrees of uncertainty given continued, or collective memory of, violence and repression. But what happens to trust relations under conditions of extreme uncertainty? Intuitively, one would assume that trust is shaken or even substantially eroded in such moments, as political and social orders are questioned on a fundamental level and threaten to collapse. However, while it is true that *some* forms of trust are under assault in situations of civil war and mass protests, we find empirical evidence which suggests that these situations also give rise to the formation of *other* kinds of trust. We argue that, in order to detect and explain these trust dynamics in contexts of extreme uncertainty, there should be more systematic studies of: (a) synchronous dynamics between different actors and institutions which imply trust dynamics happening simultaneously, (b) diachronous dynamics and the sequencing of trust dynamics over several phases of violent conflict or episodes of contention, as well as long-term structural legacies of the past. In both dimensions, micro-level relations, as well as their embeddedness in larger structures, help explain how episodes of (non-)violent contention become a critical juncture for political and social trust.

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**Keywords.** civil war, contentious politics, Middle East and North Africa, rebel governance, social movements, temporality

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## Introduction

What happens to trust relations under conditions of extreme uncertainty, such as in situations involving large-scale protests, the toppling of a government or a revolution, or during armed conflict and war? Intuitively, one would assume that in such moments, trust is shaken or even substantially eroded, as political and social orders are questioned on a fundamental level and threaten to collapse. However, while it is true that *some* forms of trust are under assault in situations involving mass protests and civil wars, these moments also give rise to the formation of *other* kinds of trust. By 'extreme uncertainty', we are referring to situations in which the basic organisation of society and/or politics is fundamentally challenged or (violent) contestation reaches a degree that threatens the lives of individuals or groups of people, or even endangers the reproduction of society. That said, such instances have not only been suspected of undermining

social and political trust. Some authors argue that they even jeopardise "the ability to place trust and to produce correct judgments concerning the trustworthiness of others" (Hartmann 2015: 20). However, not only does existing quantitative research of trust levels indicate a more nuanced picture, but we also hold that not *all kinds of trust* are undermined in situations of extreme uncertainty. Rather, we assume that existing trust relations may also be transformed, and new forms of trust may emerge, *in and through* conflict.

In this article, we discuss the complex relationship between the decline and growth of different forms of trust in contexts of armed conflict and mass protests. We argue that trust needs to be studied from a *temporal* perspective in order to detect transformations of the distinct but interdependent forms of trust, as well as the complex constellations of providers and addressees of trust. Therefore, we disentangle synchronous and diachronous trust dynamics, using examples from the study of intra-state conflict and contentious politics in post-conflict societies. More precisely, we investigate trust in the context of rebel governance during ongoing violent conflict, and mass mobilisation against the

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regime in societies with recent histories of civil war. While studying different types of conflicts, we focus on the same region, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in order to ensure similar context variables. We generally echo Irene Costantini's call for the study of violent and non-violent contention in conflict societies to not remain isolated from one another but be brought together to facilitate fruitful exchange (Costantini 2021: 833-834).

Both contexts of civil war and mass protests have so far been underrepresented in the study of trust and conflict in International Relations (IR). However, these contexts of extreme uncertainty are particularly dynamic with regard to the reconfiguration of trust relations and therefore promise nuanced and varied insights into the complexity of the growth, decline and reconfiguration of trust during conflict. Studying these dynamics with a focus on their temporality adds a new perspective to the field of trust in (post-)conflict societies, which is dominated by quantitative studies and their oftentimes static view of aggregated trust levels. Moreover, the study of intrastate (post-)conflict situations can be an important addition to IR which suffers from a systematic lack of comparative studies of trust-building, as both great powers and war among them are (currently) rare (Ruzicka & Keating 2015: 21). Further, the "cooperation bias" of trust research implies that IR, and (political) trust research more generally, have so far focused on Western democratic contexts and rarely analysed authoritarian or Global South contexts (Rivetti & Cavatorta 2017). Examining trust during civil war as well as post-conflict societies not only corrects for these biases in IR. It also holds important insights for the study of trust in global politics and interstate war, having gained new relevance in the context of the Russian war on Ukraine.

In IR, trust is commonly defined as "the belief that a person will not be harmed when his or her fate is placed in the hands of others" (Rathbun 2018: 688). As "actual trusting seems to be quite specific" (Cook, Hardin & Levi 2005: 7), different trust types can be distinguished. The most important distinction is between political (vertical), and interpersonal and social (horizontal) trust. The former refers to trust placed in political institutions. Social trust refers to the trust placed in other individuals—further differentiated between particularised or personal trust (trust in the people one knows) and generalised trust, i.e., trust in strangers (Uslaner 2018). A third horizontal type is trust in members of the same identity group (ingroup vs. outgroup trust; Kramer 2018). Hence, we take a closer look at *political trust* in the case of *rebel governance* and *social trust* (in its dynamic relation to political trust) in the case of *protests*. Disentangling relevant relations, as we do in this article, allows us to combine their analysis with different vertical and horizontal trust dynamics. To date, there has been no systematic attempt to do this, either in social movement studies or in the rebel governance literature, and we contend that it would enrich both (see section 2).<sup>2</sup>

2 Temporality as such has, of course, repeatedly been acknowledged as crucial in the scholarly debates we deal with. For the latest contributions in IR, see, e.g., Hom 2020; for rebel govern-

Conversely, with their strong emphasis on agency, the fields of rebel governance and contentious politics can hold important insights for trust research which tends to underestimate actors' strategic, sometimes manipulative, use of trust-building. Incumbents, particularly in authoritarian contexts, seek to erode social trust, and divide and rule the opposition (Badescu & Uslaner 2003; Lust-Okar 2006; Wang & Alder 2017), including with a "repertoire of counter-contention" against social movements (Weipert-Fenner & Wolff 2016; Bishara 2015; Franklin 2009). Active trust-building can also be attempted by protesters, as happened, for instance, in the symbolic fraternisation between protesters and the army during the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Ketchley 2017). During armed conflict, too, there are lot of incentives for parties to the conflict to build trust among the populations under their control, trying to reduce costs by choosing non-coercive means of interaction (Mampilly 2015). Beyond this rather instrumentalist view, gaining the population's trust might be part of a larger project of building and legitimising an alternative political order (Pfeifer & Schwab 2022).

To show how trust can grow under conditions of extreme uncertainty during conflict, the paper proceeds as follows. (1) First, we give a brief overview of research on trust in the MENA region as a background to our study of trust in MENA conflicts. (2) Second, we discuss trust and its relation to uncertainty, theorising about the potential impact of extremely high uncertainty on trust and its development over time. We illustrate these propositions by analysing (3) civil war and rebel governance, and (4) contentious politics in post-conflict societies with regard to the temporal aspects of trust. (5) In the conclusion, we discuss how our findings can advance the debate on trust in IR and highlight what we consider to be fruitful avenues for future research.

## 1. Overlooked Contexts: Trust in MENA

Trust research in broader political science and sociology primarily analyses democratic societies. One implication of this is that the mainstream understanding of political trust is very much shaped by the Western, and in particular the US, context (Marien 2011: 14). As Rivetti and Cavatorta (2017: 53) argue, the concept of political trust has an "implicit normative character" which makes its applicability to non-democratic contexts limited. In the study of the *origins* of trust, this leads to misconceptualisations, sometimes even the reproduction of highly problematic forms of knowledge, MENA being a case in point. Culturalist approaches emphasise the role of religion or other cultural formations, often understood as unchangeable. They deem political trust unnecessary in a situation of unquestioned religious authority. Such approaches risk essentialising and reifying certain features of a society, falling into the trap of "othering" and "Orientalisation". Institutionalism, the main alternative explanation, on the other hand traces changes in political

ance, see, e.g., Pfeifer & Schwab 2022, for social movements, see, e.g., Schwedler 2022.

trust (and other attitudes) back to changes in institutions themselves: Institutional support derives from a belief in the ability of institutions to perform (Rivetti & Cavatorta 2017: 53). However, the evaluation of performance is connected to norms and expectations associated with institutions that need to be studied in the respective context and are also open to change within a regime (Weipert-Fenner 2020). Survey results across the MENA region underline this point: while trust in parliaments and parties is generally low, trust in governments varies greatly—despite the fact that the evaluation of the economic and social situation tends to be on the negative side (Kayyali 2020).

Existing studies of trust in and from the MENA region also suggest that normative assessments and expectations regarding the alleged *consequences* of trust differ from findings for Western contexts. Authors agree that social trust is generally low in the region. Jamal argues that this “should in fact be seen as conducive to a democratic political culture”, as higher trust levels “produce greater legitimacy for authoritarian regimes” (Jamal 2007: 1344; 1329). This raises the question of how trust evolves during and after political transitions away from authoritarianism. For the context of the Arab uprisings, Spierings (2017) found that both interpersonal and political trust had already been declining before 2010. Both briefly increased in the countries that saw the fall of dictators and then decreased again once it became clear that expectations would remain unfulfilled. Hassan, Lorch and Ranko (2019) investigate interpersonal trust among rival political elites and its role for the prospects of democratisation. Analysing the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, they argue that the existence of fora in which inter-elite trust can be built is a precondition for such trust to actually emerge, and this, in turn, makes successful transitions more probable. Alijla (2020) investigates social trust in divided societies and finds that low levels of interpersonal trust are a result of the make-up of formal and informal institutions.

These studies from MENA and other contributions to trust research point to the *interrelatedness* of political and social trust. According to one line of reasoning, democracies require high social trust, which, in turn, increases political trust.<sup>3</sup> In the other direction, scholars have identified positive effects of high political trust on social trust.<sup>4</sup> As Arab Barometer data and other measures suggest a rather high variation in political trust in regard to political institutions, an institution-specific view on political trust in MENA is required. Sika found that low trust in the coercive apparatus increases the probability of contentious actions, but that the authoritarian state may actually exploit low levels of generalised trust in the population to weaken protest movements through infiltration and divide-and-rule tactics (Kayyali 2020). None of the studies, however, looks at how trust evolves *within* protest movements, which points to the importance of studying these trust dynamics in depth, as demonstrated in section 4. The debate so far also lacks

any significant empirical contributions regarding the study of trust *during* armed conflict—a striking research gap that should be filled.

## 2. Trust and Time under Conditions of Extreme Uncertainty

Our main argument is that conflict contexts marked by high uncertainty reveal that some kinds of trust decline while others grow, that trust transforms and diversifies, and that complex dynamics evolve between different forms and addressees of trust. This can only be understood through synchronous and diachronous analysis of trust. As laid out in the introduction, we build on the understanding that trust needs to be analysed in its specificity. In addition to the existing literature, we follow a novel concept according to which trust is “*relational and dynamic processual*” and as “an intersubjective *experiential relationship*, localised in certain social contexts” (Forst 2022: 3; emphasis in original). This can be described as: “A trusts B in context C in relation to D” and “the trust situation is reiterative, to be understood as a *circular process* (...) (...) or *learning process*” (Forst 2022: 4; 3; emphasis in original). Reformulated using the same terminology, this article asks: How can trust between (different) trustors (A) and (various possible candidates for) trustees (B) arise under conditions of extreme uncertainty (C) with regard to the provision of public goods and governance (D1) and contentious collective action (D2)? Secondly, we combine this understanding of trust with Luhmann’s take on how trust evolves through, and relates to, different contexts of uncertainty. Luhmann agrees with others that there is a constitutive relationship between trust, and uncertainty and vulnerability (Luhmann 2017: 48; Rathbun 2018: 688). By “strengthen(ing) constancies (...) (trust) makes it possible to live and act with greater complexity” (Luhmann 2017: 17). Trust has an intrinsic relationship to time: The future is “characterized by more or less indeterminate complexity” (Luhmann 2017: 17). Through trust, “certain possibilities of development can be excluded from consideration” (Luhmann 2017: 28), which allows for action in the actual present in the face of a multitude of possible “future presents” (Luhmann 2017: 15).

However, trust is not simply a social mechanism for reducing complexity—it simultaneously allows for “increased possibilities for experience and action, (...) (i.e.,) an increase in the complexity of the social system” (Luhmann 2017: 9). In this sense, trust is what allows societies to become more complex (and differentiated) in the first place. This, in turn, creates a greater need for trust which can only be met with a different form of trust than those in less complex societies. In this sense, Luhmann introduces the notion that both sources of and the need for trust evolve together with the complexity of society and, thus, the level of uncertainty. Trust presupposes and gains its ability to reduce complexity from being rooted in “taken-for-granted familiarity. (...) On the basis of familiarity with the everyday world, trust is principally interpersonal trust (...) (and) is defined in primarily emotional terms” (Luhmann 2017: 23; 25). However, once social orders

3 For an overview and a critique of this argument, see Gibson 2001.

4 For a discussion and more differentiated effects by social group, see Herreros Vasquez & Criado Olmos 2008.

become more complex, this familiarity becomes more fragmented and thus can no longer provide a stable basis for trust. “Yet the very complexity of the social order creates a greater need for trust, a need which is now decreasingly supported by familiarity” (Luhmann 2017: 23). So, while the need to reduce complexity through trust increases because uncertainty is exacerbated, the provision of trust through familiarity becomes precarious. For Luhmann, this is the moment when system trust comes into play, i.e., the assumption that a “system is functioning and (...) trust in that function and not in known people” (Luhmann 2017: 55). System trust is no longer based on familiarity with the environment or individual people but is “primarily performance based” (Luhmann 2017: 25). What we learn from Luhmann’s analysis is that situations of higher uncertainty are characterised by a greater need for trust, while it is precisely this heightened uncertainty which undermines previously tried and tested sources of trust. This, in turn, might lead to a search for new, and a diversification of, sources of trust. Luhmann also reminds us that trust is a factor in enabling more complex relations *and* one way to cope with the uncertainty that the indeterminate number of possible futures brings about.

We argue that armed conflict and mass protest can be identified as moments of *extreme uncertainty*. By extreme uncertainty, we are referring to situations in which the basic organisation of society and/or politics is fundamentally challenged or (violent) contestation reaches a degree that (potentially) threatens the lives of individuals or groups of people, or even endangers the reproduction of society. Similarly, in their investigation of acts of exposure, such as terrorist attacks, Hentschel and Krasmann (2020: 15; 28) identify those “critical moments in which something decisive happens, moments when the fragility of social and political life becomes particularly felt and articulated” as bringing about “radical uncertainty” and vulnerability. Two important characteristics of extreme uncertainty that can be derived from their work are of particular relevance for this paper. First, extreme uncertainty arises in and as moments in time, and is thus a *temporarily bounded* rupture. Acts of exposure, they claim, “fade away and dissolve after some time” (Hentschel & Krasmann 2020: 28). Second, extreme uncertainty has not only disruptive but also productive effects: it “alter(s) the possibilities and perceptions of social and political relatedness” (Hentschel & Krasmann 2020: 18), allowing for an affective self-constitution of a new “We”. In the trust literature more narrowly, disruptive events of this type, such as terrorist attacks, are also debated. These works highlight, third, that some moments or phases of extreme uncertainty may create the need for re-orientation at another level. For this uncertainty not only undermines previously existing forms of interpersonal and system trust, it may also lead us to revise “our policies and habits of trusting” (Jones 2004: 11; Hartmann 2015: 20). It is thus helpful to assume that a kind of commonsensical understanding of whom can be trusted with regard to some matters, and whom should definitely not be trusted with regard to others, can be temporarily suspended in phases of extreme uncertainty.

In the remainder of this article, we discuss two such

moments or phases of extreme uncertainty. The first is armed conflict, more precisely: the phenomenon of rebel governance in civil war. While one of the core concerns of the rebel governance debate is to move beyond the idea that armed conflict results in a mere collapse of order, ongoing civil war as a whole can nevertheless be thought of as phase of extreme uncertainty. The second is contentious politics in post-conflict societies. Mass protests against ruling elites are periods marked by high uncertainty, particularly in contexts with high levels of state repression and a significant presence of armed non-state actors, as well as (relatively) recent histories of civil war. Both of these contexts of extreme uncertainty represent a rupture in previously existing trust relations, which is, however, not generally irreversible. Nor do the trust orders that emerge after this initial breakdown have to be completely new. The degree of continuity and rupture is an empirical question—as is whether and in what forms (interpersonal or system trust) trust can grow anew. But as the literatures on rebel governance and contentious politics show, phases of extreme uncertainty are also periods of agency.

Neither strand of the literature, however, has so far spelled out what happens to trust relations and how actors engage in reshaping them. While social movement scholars have clearly shown the importance of pre-existing ties, social capital, networks and trust for the emergence of mobilisation (Diani & McAdam 2003; Volpi & Clark 2019; Berriane & Duboc 2019) or alluded to the importance of trust networks for political regimes (Tilly 2005), they have barely touched on what happens to trust relations during episodes of contention. Focusing on the concept of trust in the social movement context is helpful as it allows us to analyse how social trust dynamics affect political trust and vice versa, both simultaneously as well as over time, as we will show in section 4. Further, using the concept of trust allows us to assess both the affective and cognitive side of social and political relations at the same time.

The same holds true for the studies of armed conflict that so far have mainly dealt with the question of trust *after* armed conflict, and generally lack “a systematic distinction between the different types of social trust analysed and the corresponding type of underlying conflict” (Fiedler & Rohles 2021: 14). At the same time, the rebel governance literature has highlighted the importance of popular support beyond mere coercion (Malthaner & Malešević 2022: 9). While this body of literature has discussed non-coercive means of rule in the context of legitimacy, we argue that trust, political trust for that matter, is an important dimension to capture the relationship between rebels and civilians. While legitimacy usually refers to a larger order and its normative foundations, or the script of how institutions, practices and rule should be organised, political trust is a building block in the achievement of legitimacy of a political order or an “antecedent normative condition” (De Juan & Pierskalla 2016: 69). It operates at lower institutional levels and within more concrete practices of rule (Thomassen, Andeweg & van Ham 2017). Trust relations can capture very different constellations of, and relations with, providers of public goods. Studying the dynamics of

trust erosion, trust-building attempts and the transformation of trust relations under rebel rule thus promises to provide important insights for the debate on rebel governance, too, as we demonstrate in section 3.

To sum up, extreme uncertainty interrupts and undermines existing trust relations and norms. It brings about increased complexity by rendering a plethora of possible futures conceivable as “future presents”, thereby creating an even greater need for trust. But it also creates a window of opportunity for actors with offers of trust and for the constitution of new trust communities, which can emerge spontaneously and grow into sustainable, ever more routinised trust practices. To detect these different trust dynamics in the context of extreme uncertainty and thereby further develop our understanding of trust in conflict scenarios, we foreground the need to apply a temporal lens when analysing trust (in conflict settings).

In the next sections, we analyse rebel governance in civil war and contentious politics in the MENA region. While the specific literature we look at is relatively new (studies on rebel governance have been emerging since the 2010s, and research on the 2019 uprisings in post-conflict societies in MENA is very much ongoing), it offers sufficient material given the general trend to disaggregate actors, institutions, space, and time in the analysis of both armed conflict and protests (Weipert-Fenner 2021; Haer, Vüllers & Weidmann 2019). In our empirical analysis, we scrutinise the relationship between trust and time under conditions of extreme uncertainty with regard to two aspects: (1) synchronous dynamics between different actors and institutions which imply trust dynamics happening simultaneously, (2) diachronous dynamics or the sequencing of trust dynamics over several phases of violent conflict or episodes of contention, as well as long-term structural legacies of the past. In both dimensions, micro-level relations as well as their embeddedness in larger structures need to be explored in order to understand the potential for episodes of (non-)violent contention to become a critical juncture for trust.

### 3. Temporality in the Study of Civil War and Rebel Governance

This section asks what recent scholarship on rebel governance in civil war, or “the set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political, and economic life of noncombatants during civil war” (Arjona, Kasfir & Mampilly 2015: 3), can teach us about the temporal aspects that have to be accounted for when studying *political trust*. While there are some (ambivalent) findings on the legacies of violence for political trust (e.g., De Juan & Pierskalla 2016), non-violent practices, such as institution-building or the provision of goods and services, have not been studied with regard to their effects on political trust<sup>5</sup>—even though “the idea that popular support is essential for victory has been stressed

by rebel theorists, military historians, and scholars alike” (Arjona 2016: 4). Indeed, the question: “whom should I trust now and how can I gain the trust of others?” is pressing for both rebels, as those who want to establish a new order with limited resources and are under constant threat from other conflict parties, notably the state; and for civilians, as those who have to organise their everyday life and improve their chances of survival in the midst of armed conflict. Civil war creates an urgent need for trust; rebel governance can be understood as one offer of trust which attempts to respond to that need.

In what follows, we will reconstruct the temporal aspects of the rebel governance debate and spell out their implications for political trust, i.e., trust in institutions, with a focus on synchronous and diachronous perspectives respectively. Examples from MENA will serve as the main illustrations, although the global scope and often comparative outlook of the rebel governance paradigm mean that we will occasionally also refer to non-MENA cases.

#### 3.1. Synchronous Analyses

##### *Political Trust across Different Sites of Rebel Governance*

In the literature, synchronous perspectives are discussed in the guise of two spatial debates. The first concerns the variance in civilian-combatant relations within one armed group across different communities with different experiences of violence and governance (Arjona 2017: 8; De Juan & Pierskalla 2016). Studying rebel-civilian relations in terms of how they are organised in *divergent* ways at the *same* point in time demonstrates the *context-boundedness of trust* with regard to trustor-trustee dynamics. Only a third of all rebels start governing when they take over territory (Huang 2016) and not all of them do so successfully (Cunningham & Loyle 2021: 6). Similarly, rebels seek political trust to varying degrees, depending on how ambitious their governance project is. Some do not seek political trust at all, as they are not pursuing an order-building project. Those rebels with a long-term horizon, however, have good reason to establish some form of social contract, as this “leads to greater civilian cooperation – both in the form of obedience and spontaneous support – as well as to larger benefits” (Arjona 2016: 48). In this sense, political trust, as the belief that rebels and the institutions they build are “able and willing to deliver on (their) promises”, is an important component of rebels’ order-building strategy, as it can be considered “as an antecedent normative condition of value-based legitimacy” (De Juan & Pierskalla 2016: 69). Rebels, like all rulers, need to strike a fine balance between coercion and non-coercive mechanisms to ensure rule compliance, such as legitimacy or political trust (Malthaner & Malešević 2022).

How exactly rebels organise this balance as well as their institutions varies across different sites and communities: “(At) any given moment, multiple orders can exist across the entire area of rebel control as the existing local political landscape can necessitate the construction of a different political arrangement” (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 22). As

5 One exception here is Idler and Boesten (2021) who briefly touch upon trust relations between armed non-state actors and communities in the Colombian civil war.



Loyle (2021) shows, the level of civilian support, the most important proxy for political trust, influences the institutional choices rebels will make. Conversely, the local institutional conditions an armed group encounters in a particular community when governing a territory will influence how broadly the group intervenes in civilian life and whether or not, and to what degree, it will leave “local affairs in the hands of others” (Arjona 2016: 3)—thus also impacting the rebel group’s ambition to seek trust. In her seminal study on rebel governance in the Colombian civil war, Arjona (2016) shows that a rebel group will govern quite differently across different communities (see also Cunningham & Loyle 2021). Depending on the legitimacy and effectiveness of previously existing institutions at a particular site, rebels can expect more or less (successful) organisation of civilian resistance and will thus choose either a modest form of control over civilian life, *aliocracy*, or a comprehensive one, *rebelocracy* (Arjona 2016: 159–211). We should therefore assume that “there is great variation in how neighboring communities within a province experience war” (Arjona 2016: 8).

The great diversity in institutions offered by one and the same actor in different places means that the institutions (and personnel, which is sometimes replaced, sometimes kept on) in which civilians can place trust varies greatly, too (Mampilly & Stewart 2021). For the study of political trust, this has two implications. First, political trust is context bound and needs to be studied as such. Second, this calls for disaggregation in the study of political trust, as measuring “national” trust levels in “state institutions” neither accounts for local variation nor for institutional competition.

#### *The Ambiguity of Political Trust and Trust Markets*

The question of how rebel governance relates to other, simultaneously available offers of governance is negotiated in the second synchronous debate, on “multi-layered governance” (Kasfir, Frerks & Terpstra 2017). This debate interrogates how a variety of actors across scales operate simultaneously, cooperatively or in competition with one another (Berti 2020; Mampilly 2011; Idlear & Boesten 2021). Taking a bird’s eye view on a certain conflict phase in such a way brings actors outside the narrow rebels-civilians relationship into view. This allows us to observe *competition on a trust market* as part of the struggle for authority among various actors.

The most obvious competitor for rebels is the central government against which they rebel—but with which they can still sometimes cooperate in certain governance activities and fields (van Baalen & Terpstra 2022). Similarly, with regard to rival armed groups, rebels may choose to disregard the future and opt for cooperation in certain situations, where the necessities of the military here and now are too pressing, as Schwab shows for the Syrian case (Schwab 2021). Obviously, these relationships do not have to be based on trust. However, one implication of this for political trust is that it may not always be easy for civilians to attribute institutional performance to one governance provider—and thus to give an account of *whom* they actually trust. Matters are further

complicated, first, due to the fact that war zones are not neatly demarcated from the outside, given the transborder activities and often transnational character of the armed groups active in civil war (Salehyan 2009), which further calls into question the study of political trust through a lens of methodological nationalism. Second, international actors are part of multilayered governance arrangements and may also provide goods and services, e.g., in the form of foreign aid, as in the case of the Syrian civil war (Carnegie et al. 2021), or they may be the addressees of rebels’ governance activities (Cunningham & Loyle 2021; Clément, Geis & Pfeifer 2021). Rebels’ activities are not only embedded in a narrow national conflict setting, but also in a regional (Roessler & Verhoeven 2016) or even global order context, as has been argued in the case of the Lebanese Hezbollah (Pfeifer 2021).

Of course, the standard case is that rebels are in a competitive relationship with other actors, their governance provision (or enforcement)—and their offers on the political trust market: For instance, “civilian perceptions of the quality of governance provided by an incumbent state (affect) the displacement decisions of civilians living in territory captured by a rebel group that offers them a competing political order” (Revkin 2021a: 50), and the same might be true for the ability and willingness of competing rebel groups to produce outputs, as perceived by civilians. As Revkin (2021a) shows for the rule of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Iraq, specifically Mosul, the group was partly successful in gaining political trust because it provided goods and services the quality of which was perceived as better than those provided by the Iraqi central government. Even though ISIS allowed civilians living in Mosul to leave the city during the first months of its rule there, “an estimated 75% of Mosul’s pre-IS population of 1.2 million was still living (there) eight months after the group’s arrival” and “staying may have been an indicator of civilian preferences for IS’s system of governance over that of the Iraqi state”, at least in some cases (Revkin 2021a: 47).

At the same time, however, the incumbent state may actively try to undermine rebels’ efforts to build trust through institutions. For instance, the Iraqi government reacted to ISIS’ reorganisation of the education sector by declaring “education taught in the regions (under ISIS’s control) to be null and void” (Arvisais & Guidère 2020: 505). This points to the importance of analysing the agency involved in political trust-building attempts. At the same time, political trust may involve an attribution problem for potential trust-givers. If political trust is understood as individual trust in (the performance of) institutions, the question for contexts of violently contested authority is thus: what institutions?

### 3.2. Diachronous Analyses

#### *The Sequencing of Political Trust-Building as Interaction*

Micro-level analyses of rebel-civilian relations understand trust-building as a non-linear and dynamic process with different sequences, corresponding to the phase of rebel governance. These studies identify the need for trust and



offers of trust, thereby shedding more light on the agency of rebels and civilians as both trustors and trustees. The need for trust may be more or less urgent in specific institutions at a certain point in time during rebel governance. Zooming in on the phase in which rebels hold territory in a relatively stable way and manage the civilians under their rule, trust priorities, as well as the institutions for and through which rebels try to build trust, become visible, as does their change over the course of the period of governance.

Mampilly and Stewart (2021: 22) develop a model of “how rebels take steps to create political institutional arrangements, given certain rebel group attributes as well as pre-existing local and wartime conditions”. Rebel political institutional development is a sequential process in which rebels take decisions about institutions and relations with civilians at different stages (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 21-29).<sup>6</sup> Whether or not rebels move on to the respective next stage depends on ideological and strategic considerations, but also on the level of civilian support (or political trust) upon which the group is able to build, especially with regard to integration with pre-existing civilian institutions (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 25-26). Revkin’s (2021: 301) account of ISIS’s institution-building in Syria and Iraq shows that the group “generally established legal institutions, courts and police before it imposed other more extractive and unpopular policies like taxation” or forced conscription to the military. It is also plausible that education is important for rebels that aim at a longer-term state-building project, as it plays a crucial role in the reproduction of a collective identity that supports their order and the socialisation of new elites into state ideology. Together with healthcare, education is also particularly conducive to “incrementally build(ing) popular support over time” (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 22, Fn. 9), i.e., conducive to building political trust. It may thus be a priority in the first phase of rebel governance to “create a relatively safe and stable environment” (Terpstra 2020: 1162), and to build trust in the institutions necessary for this, whereas trust in education is more important in the long-term view.

Rebel institution-building is also iterative and sometimes cyclical (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 22). Therefore, a potential learning curve, which may occur between each cycle of “longitudinal governance”, has to be taken into account (Bamber-Zryd 2022: 2). Bamber-Zryd (2022) shows that ISIS has so far gone through four governance cycles, each consisting of four phases (insurgency, gaining territory, building governing institutions and territorial loss). From cycle to cycle, ISIS not only governed more territory for a longer period but also developed more complex governing institutions. This points to the need to think about trust in grades and shades, in thinner and thicker forms, rather than in absolute terms. As can be seen here, rebel governance must therefore be contextualised in long-term social and political structures.

6 (1) Whether to share power with civilians, (2) whether to integrate with pre-existing civilian institutions, (3) to what degree to innovate upon these institutions, and (4) how inclusive to make these institutions and whom to include (specific, especially formerly excluded, groups or broad inclusion).

### *Institutional and Trust Legacies*

A *macro-analytical* diachronous perspective investigates what sources of trust can (no longer) be drawn upon in a situation of extreme uncertainty. It connects present trusting to the past through the (trust) legacies of, and path dependencies with, previous social and political orders. Recent literature on rebel governance has turned to both the institutional and normative legacies that the previous political order leaves for rebels who try to build a new social order (Arjona 2016: 160), and, conversely, what traces of rebel governance remain for the post-conflict order, including social and political trust (Martin, Piccolino & Speight 2022; Kocak 2022; Kao & Revkin 2021; Dirkx 2020).

With regard to rebels’ trust-building endeavour, the following legacies are relevant. First, rebels inherit an identity order, including cleavages and mechanisms of exclusion, which they may reproduce and capitalise on to gain civilian support (Arjona 2016: 53) or which they may try to challenge and overcome, for instance through reconfiguring inclusion (Mampilly & Stewart 2021: 27-29). In both cases, rebels need to deal with pre-existing trust orders and adapt their “trust work” accordingly. As Heydemann (2018) argues regarding the ongoing civil wars in Libya, Syria and Yemen, there may be significant continuity between the governance practices of the pre-war order and those that both state and non-state actors pursue during armed conflict. This means that rebel groups may benefit from the political trust placed in previously existing institutions and practices by continuing them. Conversely, however, what the incumbent state or previous authority lacked in legitimacy can also become an armed group’s advantage in its trust-seeking enterprise. Rebels who encounter weak existing institutions may thus not only pursue more ambitious ordering projects but also find it easier to gain political trust for their own order (Arjona 2016: 7). Finally, colonial legacies can serve as a potent source of distrust with regard to order being provided by foreign interveners, whose interference rebels can easily frame as a (postcolonial) continuation of the history of Western interventionism in the MENA region (Terpstra 2020; Pfeifer 2021). This also gives a boost to rebels’ legitimacy claims and makes their trust offers more attractive.

Moreover, rebels can mobilise their own “trust credit” from past governance cycles in present governance attempts. For instance, the “post-2001 Taliban insurgency was not new to governing; it used prior networks, claims, and experiences” to draw on legitimacy and trust resources from the past (Terpstra 2020: 1162). In what has so far been the “most successful” governance cycle from 2010 to 2018, ISIS reached its territorial and institutional peak in 2014 and 2015 (Bamber-Zryd 2022). As Revkin (2021b) argues, ISIS was able to gain some legitimacy and trust among the population by prioritising legal institutions. This was successful mainly because the former regime’s (and incumbent state’s) institutions, such as the police, judges and other officials, were known for being notoriously corrupt, thus making it easier for ISIS to build trust. But as Revkin also shows, ISIS’s promise to act differently also set the bar against which it was measured: When its officials became more corrupt

and began to abuse their power, this undermined ISIS's legitimacy and contributed to its eventual collapse (Revkin 2021b: 301).

## 4. Contentious Politics in Post-Conflict Societies in MENA

Turning to mass protests in post-conflict societies, we show that they can teach us important lessons about *social trust* and its dynamic relationship with political trust. Most importantly, they show that trust can, indeed, grow in unexpected ways under conditions of extreme uncertainty.

The last decade was marked by mass protests all over the globe, driven by political and socio-economic grievances and characterised by protesters from different generational, gender, socio-economic, ethnic, religious, ideological and political backgrounds. Strategic alliances and coalitions formed across different social and political conflict lines (Carothers & Youngs 2015). We also witnessed this in the MENA region during the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. People from different backgrounds mobilised against dictatorship as well as for a life of dignity: Muslims and Christians, Sunnites and Shiites, rich and poor, women and men all protesting side by side, secular and Islamist groups joining forces in alliances against the ruling regimes (Berriane & Duboc 2019; Buehler 2018). Although mobilisation in several countries was followed by civil war, the rise of terrorist groups and authoritarian backlash, mass mobilisation in MENA continued. From 2015 on, there was widespread contention from Morocco to Iraq against corrupt political regimes that were unwilling or unable to provide fair access to basic goods, public services and jobs. In 2019, during the so-called second wave of the Arab uprisings, Algerians and Sudanese toppled their respective dictators, while Iraqis and Lebanese forced their governments out of office (Muasher 2015; Dunne 2020). Remarkably, this occurred in four societies deeply divided along religious and ethnic lines with relatively recent histories of civil war—a fact that has been used to explain the absence of mass protests in these countries in 2011 (Lynch 2014). In addition, political violence in its various forms after 2011 had a strong identity component and led to the public impression of an increasingly sectarian MENA region (Hashemi & Postel 2017).

Lebanon and Iraq are particularly interesting—and therefore analysed in more detail here—because protesters also demanded changes to the political system that would have ended the distribution of political power along ethno-religious lines, the so-called *muhasasa* system (Majed 2019). The offices of the president, the prime minister and the speaker of parliament are distributed along ethno-religious lines, as are the posts of ministers, senior civil servants and ministerial directors, a system which favours clientelism and corruption (Bogaards 2019; Dodge 2020). Both countries experienced civil wars along ethno-religious lines (Lebanon 1976-1990, Iraq 2014-2018). This entailed militias providing security to their own ethno-religious group. To this day, resource distribution remains in the hands of identity-based

elites. Rebelling against this system thus entails the risk of being without protection in the event of a return of violent conflict and without access to services and jobs distributed by clientelist networks of one's ethno-religious group.

However, it is exactly these legacies of violence and different forms of inequality that mass protests were directly criticising. Against the background of generally low trust levels in divided societies in the region (Alijla 2020), the anti-sectarian protests were remarkable. Protesters relied on each other, assuming that there would be no mutual harm, but rather that they would contribute to everyone's well-being (by achieving the goal of the protest—in short: they trusted each other. They also put trust in a new socio-political order where society as a whole could be trusted and distrust towards other ethnic groups was overcome. In the following sections, we focus on social trust. Yet, the interrelatedness of this and political trust (or distrust) is important, as is the role of emotions. We thereby shed light on how conflict with state actors intensified trust relations within the protest movements of 2019/2020, and even towards society and helped build new trust in the future. At the same time, legacies of distrust in leadership shaped the trust relations within the movements, too.

### 4.1. Synchronous Trust Dynamics: The Interplay of Trust, Distrust and Emotions

Although unconnected, the mass protests in Lebanon and Iraq in 2019 started at about the same time and are therefore both referred to as October revolutions. In her comparative reading of the mass mobilisations, Rima Majed finds many similarities, although the initial catalysts differed (the introduction of a WhatsApp tax in Lebanon, protests by unemployed graduates as well as the demotion of a top military commander in Iraq, Majed 2021). Both protest movements faced violence from either state actors or militias but remained nonviolent themselves. They were both successful in bringing down the respective prime minister. Both movements remained leaderless and were brought to a (temporary) end by the Covid pandemic and worsening economic situations.

Looking at the various trust dynamics that might be at play here, it is clear that both movements built on and expressed a deep distrust in the political system and all associated institutions, which in turn impacted social trust both in a cognitive and affective way. Attempts by some protesters to use a rights-based approach to make their claims clashed with low levels of trust in the legal system of both countries (Majed 2021). In Iraq, distrust was fuelled by the brutal responses of security forces, which killed more than 600 people and left 20,000 wounded in the first six months of the revolution (International Crisis Group 2021). Against the background of the population's traumatic experiences of violence between religious groups, particularly in 2006-2007, and with the rise of the ISIS in 2014, it is clear why state security violence was a moral shock for the movement. At the same time, the violence was also strategically used by activists to construct an image of sharp contrast with the

joyful, peaceful, inclusive nature of the protest movement and their vision of a new “inclusive ‘Iraqiness’” (Lovotti & Proserpio 2021: 656). The affective community built among protesters allowed for a completely different imaginary of the national state to evolve, one “that will protect its citizens and treat them equally and justly” (Majed 2021: 4-5), in brief: a state one could trust.

The state and the nation were also actively reinterpreted when it comes to identity divisions. Although the Iraqi protests were dominated by Shiite protesters, they had a clear anti-sectarian stance. Building on the experiences of the 2015 protest movement, “(f)or Iraqi protestors individual freedom, especially the freedom not to belong to a religious and sectarian group is considered as essential as economic equality” (Ali 2021: 539). It is interesting to note that Shiite symbols, such as the Imam Hussein flag, were carried next to the Iraqi flag, “freeing a revolutionary symbol from the control of the ruling parties, which have long claimed to represent it” as “the two identities were integrated separately from Islamist ruling parties and the Iranian regime’s version of Shiism” (Mustafa 2022: 7). It was thus an intra-Shiite conflict that led to trust in the Iraqi people as a whole, hence constituting yet another example of how conflict can generate trust. This enabled Sunnis to join the protest movement, adapting chants and protest actions to express their rejection of sectarianism (Mustafa 2022: 11-12). At the same time, while trust among protesters and society as a whole grew and developed into anti-sectarian symbols and demands, the huge distrust in any political or religious leader spilled over to the movement itself. The association of parties and politics in general with being dishonest and dirty meant that even leadership within the movements was rejected (Majed 2021).

Also for Lebanon, Bou Khater and Majed (2020) find anti-cleavage mobilisation at the beginning of the protest cycle. The first hint of intentional challenges to sectarian divisions can be found in the early protests held in cities all over the country during which protesters chanted the names of other cities—in Lebanon, since the ethno-religious segregation during the civil war, religious identity has been strongly linked to the place of residence. When protesters chanted the names of other cities, Saab and Ayoub read this as “comraderie (...) across sectarian (boundaries)” (Saab & Ayoub 2020: 19), as an indication of indirect support for other identities. After the first stages of mobilisation, then prime minister Saad Hariri gave a televised speech, offering dialogue, but at the same time mentioned a 72-hour deadline for political parties to solve the crisis. This triggered huge amount of activity on the streets and online raising the demands of the movement. Over the three days, these were boiled down to four major demands: resignation of the existing government and forming a new technocratic, freezing politicians’ assets, and, most importantly, drafting a new electoral law for parliamentary elections that would abolish the quota system along the ethno-religious division of power (Saad & Ayoub 2020: 121). The latter, a clear anti-sectarian demand thus emerged at an early stage of the protest movement, at a time when trust among different identity groups

was lived, felt and performed. Yet, at least for the more than 60 percent of participants who were first-time protesters (Bou Khater & Majed 2020: 16), trust could not be based on, e.g., experiences of joint activism or other forms of successively grown, previously existing sources of trust. That said, the trust that did exist was enough to enable the movement to abolish the existing power distribution and to rely on the other ethno-religious group’s good faith in the future.

The role of emotions, both negative and positive, is crucial, and not only for explaining the decision to join mass protests (Dornschneider 2021). It is also important to help us understand the exceptionality of the situation and the implications this has for trust: “The intensity of the experience in the squares, the collective mode of being and coalescing in the crowds during protests, and the ‘collective effervescence’ that usually emerges out of an auditory experience of chanting or clapping forms the extra-ordinariness of the revolutionary experience” (Majed 2020: 309). The emergence of an affective community allows for instantaneous trust-building, which explains why anti-sectarian positions developed so rapidly within the movement (although diachronous developments are also important, see below). Studies on the—relatively short 18-day—Egyptian uprising underline the rapid emergence of a situation conceptualised as liminality: “we depart from ‘normality’; enter a liminal state in which different possibilities can be entertained, a kind of subjunctive state; and then reenter a new normality” (Armbrust 2019: 4).

By examining processes that occur in this state of liminality, we argue that, when strong emotions meet high uncertainty in mass protest, this brings protesters to trust not only the fellow activist on the street, but society in general, and to trust the future that suddenly seems open to being shaped, in these cases in a pluralist, inclusive way. New trust in a bright future (contrary to the images of “doomed Iraq” for instance, Lovotti & Proserpio 2021: 656) further fuels mobilisation. Although it can never be entirely possible to overcome centuries of divisions in a single moment, as Donatella della Porta (2020) put it, eventful protest can still lead to a series of critical junctures. Affective communities that are built during these protests show higher trust levels that allow them to transcend existing social divides. Yet, it is also important to understand that trust in the 2019 protests did not appear completely out of the blue. It was mainly built on experiences of a decade of protests from 2011 on. Diachronous trust dynamics based on trial and error shaped the October revolutions.

#### 4.2. Diachronous Trust Dynamics: Trial and Error towards the 2019 Anti-Sectarian Stance

Lebanon and Iraq have a history of evolving protests particularly after 2011. Both countries saw small, short-lived protests in the course of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011 and different forms of protest until 2019 that show a clear development towards more inclusive protest movements. The decade can also be seen as comprising experiences of trusting as well as (decidedly) not trusting.



In the case of Lebanon, mobilisation saw three major waves leading up to the 2019 protests, starting with the 2005 protests against Syria as the informal ruler in Lebanon whose security regime was blamed for the assassination of then prime minister Rafiq Hariri. For the first time since the end of the Civil War, Lebanese citizens poured into the streets in masses expressing their outrage in the form of protest. The second wave of mobilisation, this time with a domestic agenda, was in 2009-2010, when activists lobbied for a civil marriage law and against confessionalism, a protest which remained limited to urban upper and middle-class activists (Khattab 2022: 7). Nevertheless, these activists became one of the central social networks in the movement against the garbage crisis in 2015, analysed in-depth by Geha (2018). She traced the various networks and their social ties that developed during this wave of mobilisation and afterwards. The movement tried to bring together socio-economic demands (specifically a functioning waste management service provided by the state) with calls to end sectarianism. The latter found its expression in the general rejection of all politicians and their clientelist networks that lined their own pockets without providing for the Lebanese people. *Killon ya'ni killon*—all means all (politicians that needed to leave)—appeared here and became a one of the main slogans of the 2019 protests. In 2015, this led to conflicts within the movement as some groups defended “their” politicians. It was also used for a relatively successful counter-narrative developed by the political elites that portrayed the movement as a threat to a stable, peaceful order.

However, networks remained sufficiently stable because relations between activists beyond the leader level had intensified and activists had learned from internal and external conflict. Making their demands more specific was one solution that kept the activists together and helped them stick to their anti-sectarian stance. This allowed a new form of activism to emerge ahead of the municipal elections: activists formed the *Beirut madinati* list that won 30 per cent of the vote in Beirut's municipal elections in 2016, an astonishing result for the first non-sectarian list. Similar networks helped a non-sectarian list (*Naqabati*) win the election for the council and presidency of the Order of Engineers and Architects in 2017 (Geha 2018). Intense experiences, including conflicts within the movement, had thus become new forms of cooperation. This required trust in fellow activists, as well as people from other identity groups in general, as non-sectarian politics were put into practice for the first time. These diachronic trust dynamics all became important in the mass protests of 2019.

For Iraq, Costantini (2021) analysed mobilisation after the invasion. The 2011 protests were inspired by the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. In February 2011, protesters expressed their discontent with the socio-economic and political development of the country in demonstrations of thousands of Iraqis in Baghdad and of several hundred in a number of other cities across the country. Repression and concessions brought the contention to an end. In 2012-2013, there were more protests in some Sunni provinces against the pro-Shiite government of Nouri al-Maliki in an alliance

with Sunni religious and tribal leaders. The sectarian basis of the protest movement (and internal splits) proved to be its undoing. The next protest cycle was in the Shiite-dominated governorates, where, for the first time, protests against the *muhasasa* system were combined with socio-economic demands for better infrastructural services (2015-2016). Only as the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr gained influence in the movement was its cross-sectarian appeal lost, which led to splits and demobilisation (Ali 2021: 534). Activists in the 2019 October revolution recalled this experience and tried to learn from it, remaining a non-hierarchical movement without leaders, and particularly with no prominent role for political actors. Lovotti and Proserpio describe this approach as being driven by distrust towards political actors, as a result of a sense of having been betrayed in earlier protests (Lovotti & Proserpio 2021: 651).

In 2018, protests in the Sunni province of Basra, against poor infrastructural services despite the wealth of natural resources, was seen as a predecessor to the 2019 protests: leaderless protests, developing into a general critique of the 2003 order, including the significant Iranian influence on domestic politics, particularly since the Iran-backed militias' success against ISIS (Mustafa 2022). These protests remained restricted to the local level, partly because of brutal state repression. This decade-long history of contention clearly shaped the 2019 protests: the secular identity of the movement, the combination of political and socio-economic demands, the minor role of political and identity-related groups and organisations. The dedication to non-violence in the 2019 protests was, as Mironova and Whitt have shown, directly related to protest experience (Mironova & Whitt 2022). It required high trust in the fellow protester, particularly in the context of a highly repressive security apparatus like Iraq's, that had grown in previous contentious actions.

Lebanon and Iraq show how repertoires of contention (Tilly 2006) developed until the 2019 upheavals and how they were shaped by trusting as well as perceptions of betrayal and distrusting. It also becomes clear that conflicts within movements and disagreements about trustworthiness caused frictions in the moment, but led to a change of strategy and ultimately, fortified trust relations among activists on which the 2019 revolutions could build.

## Conclusion: What IR Can Take Away from Analysing Trust during Conflict(s) in MENA

This analysis of two types of literature from the field of peace and conflict studies has revealed the need for, but also the potential of, disentangling synchronous and diachronic trust dynamics in the field of civil war and mass protest. The study of rebel governance demonstrates that political trust can be and is built under conditions of civil war—and sometimes by unexpected actors. Political trust-building attempts are likely to be made in conflict scenarios if candidates for trustees have a long-term perspective and if it is easier or cheaper (for strategic reasons) or suggests itself (for ideological reasons) to establish a social contract. Political trust-

building happens incrementally and sequentially, without necessarily being a linear process. Trust-builders may have the hope of gaining legitimacy for the order to come. They set priorities in accordance with practical necessities and ideological preferences, but also previous experiences with trust-building. And they do so not in a vacuum but rather by—positively or negatively—referring to previously existing institutions and political trust order.

As the debate on multilayered rebel governance and political trust in the context of civil war shows, the question of which institutions to place political trust in is not easy to answer. In IR, similar issues have been raised with regard to potentially conflictual overlaps between institutions of global governance (Kreuder-Sonnen & Zürn 2020). In the global political system, including contested authority and institutional pluralism, political trust should thus also be conceptualised as ambiguous. For international conflict, the analysis of political trust under conditions of rebel governance in civil war teaches us that we should pay attention to non-violent, non-coercive strategies of winning political trust. Gaining support through trust rather than coercion might be cheaper and one way to avoid the overstretching and overburdening of military capacities.

Key findings from the study of contentious politics in post-conflict societies highlight the ambivalent nature of uncertainty. Uncertainty itself is one of the reasons why trust is needed in the first place. When uncertainty is extreme, yet accompanied by intense emotions (both negative ones, such as the anger and outrage caused by a moral shock, and positive ones from the solidary, joyful, festive collective action of protesting), the uncertain future is turned into a positive, potentially utopian vision. During the conflict with ruling elites, interpersonal and generalised trust increases rapidly, and is even translated into demands for a new political order based on trusting others. The initial deep political distrust is turned into great political trust in a future system. Overcoming divisions in moments of high uncertainty and intense emotions may be a pattern that is also relevant when studying conflicts between states and the interaction between state leaders. The analysis of trust under conditions of contentious politics also shows that different forms of trust can mutually shape each other in ways so far unnoticed, even unconsciously. Deep political distrust led to distrust in any form of leadership in an organisation or movement. This could be studied for international organisations as well, examining whether and how far a state's trust relations with one IO shapes its trust relations with another.

Finally, in our analysis of trust in MENA, the case of Iraq was prominent in both empirical parts. This gave us the chance to look at the complex trust dynamics at play during the time and in the space that ISIS ruled, and during the mass mobilisation of 2019. As the discussion showed, trust relations in each phenomenon should be studied from their respective context and logic. Yet, bringing the two perspectives together, it becomes clear that trust relations stemming from the ISIS period and the struggle against it also shaped the trust relations in the 2019 uprising in the form of legacies of distrust (against Iran and Iran-backed militias). The

example of Iraq thus urges us to systematically control for the interconnectedness of conflicts and potential spillover effects in regard to trust relations. This might be just as important for the context of international relations, as states can also be involved in several conflicts at the same time. ●

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