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# Desert Power: Exploring How Jordan Can Democratize Through Tribalism

Shahab A. Khan  
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Desert Power: Exploring How Jordan Can Democratize Through Tribalism

Shahab A. Khan

The University of Iowa

Academic Director: Dr. Raed Al-Tabini

Academic Advisor: Dr. Bader Al-Madi

International Relations and Economics

Amman, Jordan

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### Abstract

This independent study project will analyze tribal institutions in Jordan to understand how conducive they are to democracy. In the wake of the Arab Spring and the collapse of many burgeoning democracies in the Middle East, it is important to find ways in which pro-democracy advocates can build strong democratic states in the Middle East. Democracy allows a polity to choose who rules them. Furthermore, it has proven that peopling living in a democracy live longer, more fulfilling lives than those who do not. Given Jordan's unique history as a stable regime with a strong tribal tradition, the researcher has chosen Jordan as his field site to conduct this research. Using qualitative methods, the researcher has concluded that the best way to ensure this democratization takes place in Jordan is if pro-democracy advocates build an inclusive system around tribalism, specifically, the tribal mediation process. While the researcher has found that the structures of tribalism itself may be incompatible with democracy, he has established that the values derived from the tribal mediation process such as transparency, reliance and accessibility ought to be incorporated in a democracy.

*Keywords:*

## Desert Power: Exploring How Jordan Can Democratize Through Tribalism

### **Introduction**

It is no secret that the ideal political system is democracy. When comparing the material outcomes for people living in democratic political systems with those living in authoritarian systems, Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley (2011) finds that the average quality of life for citizens in a democracy is higher than that of someone living under an autocracy. Therefore, many people living in authoritarian regimes yearn and passionately advocate for their countries to democratize. Nowhere is this more important than in the Middle East.

In the immediate aftermath of the United States' invasion of Iraq, the US president at the time, George W. Bush gave a speech to the U.S. chamber of commerce regarding democracy promotion in the Middle East. In this speech, he remarked:

“Iraqi democracy will succeed – and that success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Teheran – that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution” (Bush, 2003)

Over 18 years after that remark was made, the global democratic revolution that the president prophesized did not happen. The 2011 Arab Spring saw brief hope that democracy would find its footing in the Middle East. Millions of Arabs, disaffected with the stagnation brought on by autocracy began to protest in droves and overthrew many of the dictatorial regimes that had been entrenched in the region for decades. For a brief, fleeting second it seemed that there was finally a democratic moment. That the states of the Middle East would be able to build functioning democracies where ordinary citizens would be allowed to choose their own representatives and be allowed to freely associate without the fear of being targeted by

authoritarian regimes . Unfortunately, this was not to be as despots in Egypt and Tunisia usurped power from nascent democratic governments. Syria, Yemen, and Libya plunged into destructive civil wars that killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced millions (Salem, 2021). Iraq, the country that President Bush touted as a future beacon of democracy, has degraded into a rump state. The U.S. invasion and the so-called democratic system they set up created a culture where sectarian violence dominates politics. In Iraq’s “democracy” power is not vested in the ballot box, but rather through the barrel of a gun (Arraf, 2021). It now seems from Damascus to Teheran; autocracy will be the future of every nation.

However, not all is lost for democracy building in the Middle East. The underlying causes of the Arab Spring, the exclusive political and economic structures, remain. Some observers believe that the second coming of the Arab Spring is not a matter of if but a matter of when (Malik, 2020).

This independent study project (ISP) is not interested in predicting when the next Arab Spring will happen. Instead, this ISP will set out to explain how democracy advocates in the Middle East can build democratic institutions by looking back on the Arab tribal traditions of conflict resolution and mediation. Specifically, the author of this ISP will be using Jordan as a field site to study this topic given Jordan’s unique situation as a stable regime as well as the rich tribal traditions that dominate Jordanian society.

Although most political scientists would classify Jordan as being far freer than its neighbors, the country is still an autocratic regime, ruled by King Abdullah II, the scion of the Hashemite dynasty. A dynasty that claims direct descent through the prophet Muhammad. Over the past 50 years, King Abdullah and his father, the late King Hussein, have worked to centralize the Jordanian state. In addition, the influx of Palestinian refugees in Jordan has greatly urbanized

the Hashemite kingdom. The tribal allegiance of these Palestinian urbanites is less prevalent than those that are descendants of Jordanian Bedouins. As a result, Brand (1995) explains that the Palestinian-Jordanians have been receptive to the centralization policies of the Hashemites even if there has been past tension between the Jordanian government and their Palestinian populations. This centralization has come at the expense of the old tribal political structure which granted much more power to tribes (Layne, 1987).

Despite this, tribal customs play a central role in Jordanian life, especially in rural villages and towns. Tribal law is recognized by the Hashemite courts as an acceptable form of jurisprudence and sheikhs still play a role in facilitating mediation between disputing parties. This mediation process is what the researcher believes is the key foundation needed to build the inclusive institutions needed for a democracy. It is for these reasons; Jordanian statesmen need to utilize tribal customs if they want to present a democratic system that allows all Jordanians to participate within civil society.

The researcher has identified several terms that will be prevalent throughout this ISP. The first of these is civil society, or the set of rules that allow the citizenry to form organizations such as political parties, interest groups, or advocacy groups. The intended purpose of these institutions is to maximize the political and social rights of the citizenry and allow them to participate in a democratic society (Ingram, 2020). The tribe is one of the most important social institutions in Jordan and the researcher operationalizes it as a social group that consists of many families that have shared blood ties, practices, and traditions (Mamandi, 2012). Tribal mediation refers to the intra and inter-tribal processes which are used to solve disputes. When the researcher discusses ideology, he is referring to the ideas and values that serve as the basis for a political system (Gerring, 1997). The next term that the researcher uses is tribalism which he

refers to as the set of customs and practices that define tribal society in Jordan (Layne, 1987).

The final term that the researcher uses is democracy. It is important to note that when the researcher conceptualizes democracy, he is referring to the idea of popular representation in conjunction with several key practices and institutions that are based off Robert A. Dahl's definition of democracy. Dahl's insights are elucidated in the literature review.

### **Hypothesis and Theoretical Framework.**

The three major themes that are guiding the researcher in this ISP are: Does tribalism allow Jordanians to build the necessary civil society institutions for democracy in Jordan? What mechanisms of the tribal mediation process could potentially be used to create civil society institutions? Finally, what values from Jordanian tribal society could be used to build a democratic regime?

From these questions, the researcher formulated a hypothesis that states that the legacy of tribal culture within Jordanian society makes Jordan conducive to democracy. If pro-democracy activists, academics, and statesmen within Jordan want to present a democratic alternative to the current authoritarian regime, they must take inspiration from the tribal mediation process as it provides the basic building block to create a Jordanian democracy and make it an appealing alternative to autocracy.

The theoretical framework that the researcher will use in his ISP will consist of synthesizing aspects of three theories. The first theory is Max Weber's theory of social change laid out in his work, *The Protestant Ethic, and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1905). Weber's thesis is that cultural values and ideas influence the economic and political systems that states create. The second theory was presented half a millennium before Weber wrote *the Protestant Ethic*. Ibn Khaldun, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Tunisian philosopher argued in the *Muqaddimah* that history

is not a linear line of progress but rather a cyclical process. To defend his axiom, Ibn Khaldun (1967) presents the concept of *asabiyyah*, or unity. In other words, governing regimes rise and maintain power if the societies they are designed to govern are united behind a set of core cultural norms. Finally, the third theory that influenced the author was laid out in the seminal work *Why Nations Fail*. Written by the economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (2012), *Why Nations Fail* presents the idea that to develop a successful nation, the political and economic institutions of said nation must be inclusive. This means that ordinary citizens must have rights to private property, freedom of movement, and political participation. Based on the theories presented in this section, the theoretical framework that this ISP will be operating under is that: Statesmen must emphasize certain cultural traditions and norms if they are to build an inclusive, and therefore successful democratic society.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Appeal of Polyarchy**

Before the researcher can explain how Jordanian tribal customs and systems are conducive to democracy, it is important to interpret the literature and operationalize democracy as a concept. Furthermore, the literature sets out to explain why Jordan does not meet the requirements to be considered a democracy.

Robert A. Dahl (1972) wrote in his influential work *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* that for a country to be truly democratic, it must meet a fundamental democratic principle. That principle is that the governing regime of a state must be responsive to the preferences of its citizens. These citizens, no matter their economic or social status, must be seen as political equals with one another. This means that they all have unalienable political rights that

the state cannot infringe on. In a later work Dahl (2005) contended that for a regime to achieve the fundamental democratic principle, it must have six key political institutions.

The first of these institutions is elected officials, or legislators chosen by the citizenry in elections. These officials would oversee the crafting of state policy. The performance of these elected officials would be evaluated by the second institution: free, fair, and frequent elections. For an election to be considered free and fair, Dahl argues that incumbents or challenging candidates cannot engage in coercive behavior over the citizenry. To contrast coercive behavior with tactics of persuasion, Dahl identifies coercion as a strategy where candidates use threats of violence or punishment to force people to vote a certain way. Third, a culture of freedom of expression ought to be established within the society. Citizens have the right to express an opinion regarding government policy, socioeconomic conditions, or political ideologies without fear of retribution by the governing polity. In conjunction with freedom of expression, citizens must be able to have access to alternative sources of information independent of state control. These alternative sources of information, whether they are newspapers, magazines, books, telecommunications, other citizens, or experts must be protected by law. The fifth institution needed for a country to be classified as a democracy is associational autonomy, or the practice of citizen participation through independent organizations. To simplify, citizen's ought to be granted the right to form their own independent organizations such as political parties and interest groups. Finally, the sixth political institution needed for a state to be considered a democracy is that of an inclusive citizenship. An inclusive citizenship means that all citizens have access to the five institutions listed above and can freely participate in political society without any structural barriers prohibiting them from accessing this right.

Compared to autocratic regimes, empirical work shows that when people live in democratic regimes that meet Dahl's conditions, their quality of life improves drastically. Frey and Al-Roumi (1999) quantify that cross-national evidence shows there is a strong positive relationship between levels of democracy within a state and high quality of life. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) corroborate these findings as they show that people living in democratic states have higher disposable incomes, better access to a surplus of goods and services, more freedom of movement, and higher life expectancy compared to individuals living in repressive, autocratic regimes.

### **Extractive Institutions: How Jordan's Economy Shapes its Political System**

When analyzing the prospects of democracy in Jordan, Roberts (1991) focuses on Jordan's political economy, more specifically, how the Hashemite Kingdom is a rentier state. Political economists describe a state as being rentier when a large portion of the state's revenue comes from abroad, whether that be remittances, foreign aid, or donations from organizations. Traditionally, Jordan has extracted its rent from its overseas diaspora and subsidies provided by the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Because the state is generating a large portion of its revenue from outside sources, it does not need to develop domestic industries which would be used to extract revenues from the populace. The absence of the necessary quid pro quo between the Hashemite regime and its citizenry leads to the arrested development of substantive democratic norms. In other words, the prevalence of rent means that the state does not need to be responsive to the will of its people, no taxation, no representation (Wiktorowicz, 1999).

For the record, Jordan does nominally have the institutions that could be considered democratic. The country considers itself a constitutional monarchy and since 1989, the kingdom

has had regular relatively free and fair elections with active political parties and other civil organizations. However, these organizations hold little to no sway on the policymaking process within the country (Wiktorowicz, 1999). Political parties in Jordan are incredibly weak and fail to communicate to voters the party platform. This also ensures that voter participation remains low as voters feel they have no true stake within the election (Lust-Okar, 2001). Furthermore, they are tightly regulated by the king and his royal court.

There is a culture of fear surrounding expressing political opinions as the state prohibits many types of large-scale public demonstrations; the press is tightly monitored by government agencies and censorship is a common practice within the kingdom as citizens have limited access to information that contradicts the official government narrative on issues. Real political power lies with the king and his royal court as they have the power to call the shots in the kingdom. In addition, because of the rentier economy, the King does not have to placate the will of his people to maintain his grip over the country (Wiktorowicz, 1999). Therefore, while Jordan certainly has more democratic elements compared to its neighbors, the kingdom is still very much an autocratic regime unresponsive to the political needs of its people.

The economic effects of Jordan's rentier system cannot be understated as the effects of non-inclusive political institutions deeply hinders an autocracy's economic development. As a result of the system, The Hashemite does not really have to appease their populace. Official government statistics have noted that 18.5 percent of the population is unemployed (O'Neill, 2022). As for the economic rights of distressed groups, Jordan hosts a large population of refugees. Until recently, the Hashemite royal court had limited refugees to a few industries where they could work, forcing many highly skilled refugees into destitution as they could not use their skills in the industry they were trained in (UNHCR, 2022). In short, the autocratic nature of

Jordan's political institutions makes it that its economic institutions are not able to functionally serve the will of its people.

### **The 1950s: Jordan's Failed Democratic Experiment**

After the conclusion of the 1948 Arab Israeli War, Jordan's annexation of the West Bank, and assassination of King Abdullah I in 1951, Jordan was facing an era of political instability as there was uncertainty as to who would succeed Abdullah. It was during this time the Jordanian constitution was drafted and established the Hashemite Kingdom as a constitutional monarchy with a parliament that would handle the governing of day-to-day affairs. For the first time, Jordanian citizens were allowed to participate in political society. In addition, the constitution made it so that the parliament (and by extension the people), and not the king would be theoretically the ultimate decision maker in Jordanian politics as the King was to be a mere figurehead. Despite this, in practice the King still maintained the right to dissolve parliament and to call elections whenever he desired. The King also had the right to dismiss the Prime Minister and cabinet whenever he saw fit. When King Hussein acceded to the throne in 1953, he presided over a period where institutions such as a free press, inclusive citizenship, and associational autonomy had become deeply fostered in the Jordanian political culture. This all changed in 1956 after the socialist parties with connections to the Egyptian strongman, Gamal Abdul Nasser, won the parliamentary elections. Fearing that the socialists would turn Jordan into a republic, the King abolished parliament and declared Martial law over the country until 1989 (Rath, 1994).

This era of Jordanian politics represents a difficult truth about building democracy. That it is a near-impossible process if it is done through specifically elite, closed off institutions. Max Weber (1905) famously argued that statesmen need to use foundational building blocks if they want to build a democratic state. Those building blocks could come from an established culture.

Fortunately for democracy advocates in Jordan, the legacy of tribal mediation processes could serve as that foundation.

### **Desert Power: The Cultural Legacy of Tribalism in Jordanian Society**

The term tribalism often comes with a negative connotation in political science circles. In a widely cited article in *Foreign Affairs*, Francis Fukuyama, a titan in American political science, warned that when politics in a country becomes tribal, politics becomes shaped around identity in contrast with ideology. The argument goes as tribalism becomes the norm in a political culture, the likelihood of that country becoming an entrenched autocracy increases as political elites can play on shared identities of a majority groups to obtain votes and demonize opposition parties (Fukuyama, 2018). Unfortunately for Fukuyama, and American political science circles, they are misunderstanding the very nature of tribalism. In an essay for the magazine *Foreign Policy*, Rosen (2018) elucidated anthropological evidence shows that tribes are not identified by strict boundaries based on compartmentalization but rather, are loose confederations of groups that share practices from surrounding tribes. In summary, tribes routinely borrow customs to enhance their own practices and values.

Rosen also goes onto describe how tribes also peacefully coexist with one another and are not inherently authoritarian entities. Inter and intra-tribal relationships are characterized by a strong mutual obligation between tribesmen. The fulfilment of this obligation between tribesmen ends up fostering strong, peaceful relations as well as cooperation between tribes in achieving mutual goals. In summary, rather than being strict identity units, tribes are more fluid units that work together to achieve shared ideological goals with other tribes. As for the governing structures of tribes, many are presented to be authoritarian and strict. Yet, ordinary tribesmen can voice concern with the leadership of the tribe and request for a change in leadership if it is found

to be detrimental to the standing of the tribe. Tribes use a variety of mechanisms to ensure that power is in the hands of many rather than the few.

The tribal system in Jordan long predated the advent of Islam and was the dominating political structure until the creation of the modern Jordanian state in 1946. These tribes were structured in a way that emphasized kinship, patriarchy, and equality (between men) amongst tribal members. Following along with the patriarchal features that are prevalent in tribes, the leader of the tribe, or a sheikh, is always a man. In addition, the position of sheikh is hereditary, meaning that it passes down from one family to another. While on the surface, this may seem anti-democratic, the powers of the sheikhs have greatly diminished in the past half century. Centralization and state building policies have eroded the power of the sheikhs and the tribes themselves. For these reasons, the political power of the tribes has diminished significantly. However, the culturally legacy and traditions of the tribal system continue to shape Jordan till this day (Rowland, 2009).

In the Jordanian context, tribal relations make up the social fabric of civil society. Layne (1987) finds that the tribal identity within the Middle East is delineated from four forms. How tribespeople themselves use their tribal ideology, history, and politics, to distinguish them from other tribes; identification tools used by states for administrative purposes; tribal customs and loyalty; and an anthropological understanding of their identity.

Layne goes onto explain that this tribal identity began to form in the 1980s largely as a byproduct of the Israel-Palestine conflict. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the right-wing Zionist Likud Party rose to power in Israel. They began to make the argument that the Palestinians did not need a state in the West Bank seeing that they already had a state to themselves in Jordan. To counteract this narrative, King Hussein began to emphasis the Bedouin

tribal identity to foster a kind of Jordanian nationalism. It is important to reiterate that Hussein played on bringing in tribal customs and traditions seeing that the Bedouin tribes were not rigid organizations, but rather a loose connection of familial units that emphasized a common set of values. A set of values (respect, resilience, trustworthiness) that were near universal to all Bedouin tribes. This tribal identity ended up becoming the basis of Jordanian civil society.

According to Antoun (2000), civil society comprises of the specific framework in which social and cultural modes of trust, cooperation, and conflict resolution manifests themselves within a state. In Jordan, the tribal framework is what provides the modes of which people tend to express themselves and build relations with one another.

Drawing back on Rosen's pontifications, Western academics often conceptualize Arab tribes as being strict, rigid social units that tend to be nomadic in nature. However, in Jordan, many of the tribal peoples are more likely to be educated professionals living in settled areas—such as villages and cities— instead of nomadic warriors. For example, the idea in Jordanian culture that the primacy of the familial unit over the individual traces its roots back to Jordanian tribal law (Al-Harouni, 2020). Furthermore, the values that Jordanian families tend to prize honor and generosity are also a legacy of Jordan's great tribal history. Many Jordanians continue to follow a tribal mode of conflict resolution that emphasizes mediation and consensus building over violence (Antoun, 2000). Al Haroumi (2020) describes this process of conflict mediation being based in Islamic principles such as Shurah, or consultancy.

When discussing the Shurah, Al Haroumi highlights how those with the most experience in the tribe, the elders often work to direct and solve the conflict. During this process, the elders come between the warring parties and attempt to persuade the parties not to use violence with one another. Instead, the Elders intend to get the warring parties to find a compromise in which

parties engage in in some sort of compromise. This compromise usually involves in both parties exchanging compensation with one another and is termed *catwa* in Arabic (Antoun, 2000). Once a *catwa* is achieved, the elders bring the now formerly warring parties together in a public ceremony known as *Sulha*. *Sulha* is meant to be a celebratory event in which the two formerly warring parties bury the hatchet and go back to peacefully coexisting with one another (Lang, 2002).

### **Methodology**

The researcher is conducting a qualitative study that will look to analyze how tribal customs centered around consensus building and conflict resolution can provide Jordan with a cultural framework to build a democratic state. It is for that reason that the researcher has scheduled interviews with various Jordanian political scientists and sociologists. In addition, the researcher also contacted Sheikh Talal of the Al-Madi tribe as well as a female social worker.

When it came to designing the questions that would explore the hypothesis of the researcher, he focused on asking questions regarding how tribal customs influence Jordanian society today. Primarily, the custom that the researcher was most interested in was meditation.

In addition, some questions were designed to ask interlocuters about their opinions regarding the opinions of sheikhs on the acceptance of democracy as a system. Since the sheikh would understand the relationship between the Hashemite royal family and tribal customs, the researcher asked the sheikh questions about this relationship. Furthermore, the researcher would also like to ask the sheikh how tribal values and customs continue to shape the cultural attitudes of ordinary Jordanians. Interviewing a political scientist and sociologist would give the researcher the opportunity to better understand the political system that Jordan currently has and how players within that system influence the ultimate decision maker, the king. The researcher

also intends to ask questions regarding how pro-democracy policy makers can build *asabiyyah* through emphasizing the need for a democratic system that is influenced by Jordan's cultural traditions. Finally, the researcher intends on interviewing the female social worker to gain an understanding of how tribal systems affect women in Jordan society. This would allow the researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of the potential benefits and limitations that tribal systems have when it comes to building the inclusive political institutions necessary for democracy. Often, the issues surrounding women are neglected in studies like these. For this reason, the researcher is making it so that he emphasizes the connections between women, tribalism, and democracy in Jordan.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, meaning that the researcher typed a list of questions and interview interlocutors based off that list. Follow up questions that may not be on the list were asked during the interview if the researcher deemed it necessary. In addition, the researcher took handwritten notes during the interviews and refrained from using recording devices. This is because Jordanian interlocutors tended to be suspicious of taking notes via technology, therefore making handwritten notes the best option for documenting conversations.

The researcher chose the semi-structured interview format described above because it best fits how research must be done in the Jordanian context. The researcher is aware of his positionality as an American male raised in an individualistic culture that might be at odds with Jordan's more collectivist and conservative culture. For this reason, the researcher did not attempt to "debate" the interlocuter during the interview process. Rather, the researcher allowed the interlocuter to speak his or her mind freely and independently. If the interlocuter went off

topic, then the researcher courteously attempted to steer the conversation back to the topic at hand.

A difficulty that the researcher has faced in conducting this study has been the inaccessibility of interlocutors due to Ramadan. Many interlocutors were difficult to reach since they were fasting and were not as enthusiastic to meet during the religious month. In addition, when the researcher interviewed Sheikh Talal of the Al-Madi tribe, he had a difficulty reaching him as the village he resided in was outside Amman. It was for that reason; the researcher scheduled a zoom interview with Sheikh Talal. Furthermore, since the researcher did not have the necessary mastery of Arabic to communicate with Sheikh Talal, he was reliant on his ISP advisor and Sheikh Talal's brother, Dr. Bader Al-Madi to translate the conversation for him. After that, another difficulty the researcher had was the duration of the ISP period itself. The one-month period constrained the researcher to the point where he could not conduct as many interviews or analyze as many dimensions regarding tribal systems. If there was more time in the ISP period, then the researcher would have looked at exploring the decision-making mechanisms in Jordanian tribal system in conjunction with traditions of mediation. This would have allowed the researcher to paint a full picture regarding tribalism and democracy as decision-making is a critical component of the inclusive political institutions needed for democracy.

As far as ethical considerations, when it comes to conducting an interview, the researcher must notify the interlocuter that they are well within their rights to not participate or request anonymity within the research study. Given that the researcher's ISP discusses a politically sensitive topic, democratization within a de facto absolute monarchy, the researcher respected the wishes of participants if they do not want to participate or request anonymity. The researcher did indeed have an interlocuter who requested anonymity during the interview process. This

anonymity was granted and discussed more in the results section. Nevertheless, the researcher did not encounter many ethical dilemmas during the interview process.

## **Results**

### **Two Incompatible Systems**

The first interview the researcher conducted was with a professor at one of the major public universities in Jordan. The professor requested to be left anonymous and will be therefore referred to as the interlocuter. The interlocuter requested anonymity largely due to their critical stance of Jordanian tribal society as they saw it as a barrier standing in the way of bringing democracy to Jordan. In their opinion, because of the decentralized and hierarchical nature of tribalism, they argued tribalism will always serve to undermine the creation of democratic institutions in Jordan.

The interlocuter first discussed with the researcher how the structure of tribal society makes it mutually exclusive from what they termed as civil society. To the interlocuter, civil society are the core set of liberal political institutions meant to unite groups with a variety of ideologies under the umbrella of one nation. In contrast, they argued that tribal society in Jordan is centered around bloodline and family relations. To simplify, tribes are a set of political-social institutions that are meant to manage the day-to-day affairs of a limited number of families. The norms that govern tribal societies are not meant to be used in the construction of a civil society.

Alternatively, the interlocuter presented Islam as a cultural foundation for democracy. They told the researcher that during the golden age of Islam (the period when the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates ruled over much of the Middle East and North Africa), there was a strong centralized state that justified its rules through Islamic principles. As a result, tribalism was not needed to maintain social and political order. The interlocuter, referencing Ibn Khaldun's

philosophy of history, went on to describe the history of Arabs as that of a cycle of fluctuation between centralization and tribalism. In the interlocutors view, the centralized Islamic empires ruled over diverse populations and allowed all populations to participate in the political institutions of the time. Meanwhile, they argued that Arab society based off tribalism used exclusive practices that fracture states because tribalism encourages division within a polity. In other words, when the tribes hold legitimate political power, the state itself becomes weak and unstable.

The second obstacle that the interlocuter described to the researcher was that the political structure of tribes made it difficult to build a democracy around tribal values. They went on to note that while tribalism does promote respect amongst the tribal peoples, the system is inherently hieratical with tribal sheikhs and elders holding most of the exclusive power. They pontified that there are no checks and balances within a tribal society meaning that if a sheikh made a decision that goes against the will of most of the tribe, the tribe would be forced to follow that decision of the sheikh regardless. In other words, the word of the sheikh is the will of the tribe, and the rest of the tribe must follow that will. In conjunction with this contention, the interlocuter observed that sheikhs in Jordan have begun to see democracy as a more palpable political system. However, this change in their position was due to state modernization policies and an increase in the access of education. To summarize the interlocutors point of view, the building of a strong, central Jordanian state will bring upon democratization, not tribalism as tribalism enshrines political power in the hands of the sheikhs and not the people.

Next, the interlocuter was also hesitant to endorse the viewpoint that the tribal mediation process could be used as a value that would be central to promoting democracy in Jordan. They noted that the tribal mediation models were still prevalent in Jordan as the current Jordanian state

is still reliant on the tribes to solve conflicts between parties largely because sheikhs and tribal judges are seen as trustworthy and accessible actors in rural areas. Normally, when deciding a ruling the sheikh would bring the two parties together and negotiate with them peacefully, they would also look at past rulings and references to make their ultimate decisions. The negotiations are built on trust and respect, the two traits that according to the interlocuter are necessary for democracy. Despite this, the interlocuter viewed the tribal law that governs these negotiations as draconian. They cited specifically how tribal rulings are often unfair to women and regulate them to being subservient to men. This is in line with what Ms. Al-Haroumi stated to the researcher about how the role of females in tribal society as they are often more scrutinized by tribal rulings and law. In short, the tribal mediation process is not compatible with democracy because the tribal law utilized during the mediation process does not grant equal rights to all citizens as in this tribal meditation system, the word of a man is more valuable than that of a woman.

The discussion between the interlocuter and researcher then turned to focus on how tribes chose their sheikhs and the electoral process surrounding the ceremony. The interlocuter mentioned that the position of sheikh is hereditary in that only members of one family can ever be considered for the position of sheikh. Very rarely, does a tribe make the decision to replace a family and allow a new one to rule over the tribe. The interlocuter used an analogy that compared sheikhs to the leaders of western political parties. If a sheikh manages the daily affairs of a tribe well, then the sheikh will be seen as a successful leader. Conversely, if the sheikh is seen as detrimental to the tribe, then he would be replaced by a more qualified candidate. This process has two steps, first, the tribal elders would look for prospective candidates from a pool of highly educated, active, and well-connected members of the tribe. Then, the tribespeople would select the candidate that they think is most likely to serve their best interests. The elected sheikh

would then become the new leader of his tribe and position would pass between the members of his family. From here, it is obvious that there are democratic processes that are used when electing a new sheikh. At the same time, the interlocuter notes that these elections do not occur frequently, and the sheikhdom remains with one family until that family is deemed not to be fit to rule. The interlocuter summarized their point of view by declaring that unless there are extreme circumstances, the sheikhdom is a position tied to family that passes down from one generation of that family to the next.

When discussing what the interlocuter thinks for democratization to happen in Jordan, they mentioned that a unique Jordanian identity centered around the belief that Jordanians are a united collective must be installed in the Jordanian society. He pointed to the Palestinians as an example of a nation that has overcome tribalism through the creation of a national identity.

However, they warned that this unity between the various Palestinian tribes was temporary as it stems from opposition to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories in the West Bank. The cracks in this identity are already beginning to show as there is a noticeable split amongst the Palestinians. Many Palestinians have already divided themselves into two camps. In one corner, there is the moderate Fatah party that is interested in reaching a peaceful two state solution with Israel. In the other, there is Hamas, a jihadist organization bent on destroying Israel through violent means. This has led to the severe weakening of the Palestinian state as Fatah and Hamas routinely clash with each other.

To avoid the fate of the Palestinians, the interlocuter recommended that the Jordanian identity be built upon several key structures if they want to succeed. The first of these institutions is to establish the rule of law. Jordan has already established the rule of law as the Jordanian state

has a monopolization of violence within its country. In addition, there is no higher power that can supersede Jordanian institutions within Jordan's borders.

Next, there needs to be good and effective governance, something that the interlocuter hinted was lacking in the current Jordanian political system as in their view, political corruption is rampant, and the economy is not working for all Jordanians.

Third, the population must have access to education. Jordanians in many rural areas are still struggling to gain the same quality of education as their rural counterparts. Fourth, the interlocuter recommended that meritocracy over nepotism should be the way in which people move up in Jordanian society. This ties back into the interlocuters point about good governance as many Jordanians in powerful positions chose to select their family members for positions instead of those most qualified. This is also a critique of the tribal system as positions of leadership are given to those related to or allied with the sheikh rather than on the basis of qualifications. Fifth, there needs to be high levels of trust between individuals and state/civil institutions.

To accomplish these goals, the interlocuter reiterated that the Jordanian citizenry must find a national identity to coalesce around. The tribal framework does not present the necessary tools needed to build this identity. Instead, the interlocuter referenced that Jordanian civil society should be based around Islamic values rather than tribal ones. While there is certainly overlap between Islamic and tribal values, the interlocuter noted that Islam promotes inclusivity and equality, the necessary components needed for uniting Jordanians under the banner of one nation. Tribes, on the other hand, incentivize division and hierarchy meaning that the structures it promotes cannot be used in creating a liberal democracy in Jordanian society.

### **... Or Are They?**

The next interview was conducted with Dr. Hani Aku Rshidah, the dean of political science and international studies at Alabyat University. Dr. Hani also belongs to the Benni Hassan, one of the largest tribes in Jordan and supposedly, a tribe that can trace its lineage back to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Due to his impressive pedigree, Dr. Hani was asked to serve on the Jordanian Royal Commission for Political Reforms. In his view, there are many misconceptions about Jordanian tribes and their acceptance of civil society. This interview helped dispel many of the key stereotypes that certain intellectuals and scholars have about tribalism and its supposed incompatibility with modern civil society.

Furthermore, Dr. Hani elucidated that tribalism as a social institution is not inherently divisive, rather the system itself has a core uniting set of values which allows people of various tribal backgrounds to coalesce and form a united identity.

When discussing the misconceptions that many scholars and politicians have about tribalism, Dr. Hani characterized their arguments as being centered around the idea that tribes are arcane institutions that is fundamentally opposed to modern civil society. In his opinion, skeptical scholars tend to justify this claim by citing that the foundational value around tribalism is identity rather than ideology. Therefore, many of these scholars claim that tribalism leads to politician to inflame tensions between the citizenry as they do not have to focus on delivering clear policy proposals to maintain power. Instead, these politicians can focus on ostracizing people of a different tribal background and blame them for problems facing the country. In contrast, the ideology of democracy and civil society is inclusive and guarantees the political rights for all people. Meaning that politicians in a democratic system engage in debate regarding defined policy proposals over marginalizing identities.

However, it is in the opinion of Dr. Hani that this is a disagreeable position largely because tribes in the immediate aftermath of Jordan's founding, created a united ideology that served as the foundation of Jordan's early political history. This founding political ideology valued trust, inclusiveness, respect, moderation, and Islam. When the researcher asked Dr. Hani to elaborate on what he meant by Islam, Dr. Hani explained that Islam, and its principals served as the religious core which tribal sheikhs used to unite the people in the tribal areas. Next, Dr. Hani dispelled the stereotype that tribes were rigid social units where identity was what kept social cohesion. In fact, Dr. Hani stated that tribes in Jordan are united by the values and rules that govern them, not blood ties. He pontified that in many Jordanian cities before centralization, tribes worked together to build strong governing institutions. This shows that the tribes are willing to work together with one another as sheikhs are not concerned about so called identity politics. Instead, Jordanian sheikhs bought into and continue to advocate for the vision of crafting a Jordanian ideology, or national identity on the condition that the ideology is inspired by tribal values such as the ones the researcher listed above. In addition, Dr. Hani also contended that these sheikhs are also advocating for democracy because they want all tribes, whether they are Bedouin or Palestinian, to have equal representation in a tribal system.

This vision of a tribal democracy is threatened by the current Jordanian state as certain interests are working to weaken the power of the Jordanian tribes. Dr. Hani notes that many of the current king's advisors are recommending that he partake in westernizing Jordan. This has led to a severe weaking of the tribal institutions in Jordan while at the same time, diminishing living conditions in the state. When the researcher pressed Dr. Hani about his pontification, he noted that as the westernizing reforms that the king has brought on have upended life in parts of Jordan as the economic policies of privatization have left many Jordanians unemployed.

Furthermore, he noted that the centralization of power around the Hashemite family has eroded the power of the tribes as they are not able to get services out to the people that need them the most. He concluded our interview by saying something particularly interesting:

“I am not against privatization or centralization. However, it must be done in the cultural context”.

When asked to elaborate on this quote, Dr. Hani argued that western concepts such as free markets, democracy, and strong centralized states are good for Jordan. It is just that these reforms must be done within the framework of Jordanian society. A framework which is tribal.

### **Complicated, divisive structures**

The researcher conducted his third interview with Farah Zaid Al Hamouri, a lecturer at the German Jordanian University and a social worker with her own organization that is lobbying to increase the capacity of social workers in Jordan. The reason the researcher chose to reach out to Ms. Al Hamouri was due to her specific expertise in the tribal mediation process as well as the social work she has done with tribes in the rural areas of Jordan. The central theme that the researcher was able to extract from his interview with Ms. Al Hamouri was that tribal society in Jordan has the cultural values that are necessary for building the civil society institutions needed for democracy. Despite this, she argued that because of the patriarchal nature of tribal society as well as its perceived backwardness, many Jordanians would be hesitant to support a democratic system inspired by Jordanian tribal values. Therefore, Ms. Al Hamouri ultimately concluded that it would be wise for Jordanians democracy promoters to look for other routes in finding a foundation for building democracy.

The first topic of interest discussed in the researcher’s interview with Ms. Al Hamouri was the brief political history of tribes in Jordan. According to Ms. Al Hamouri, until around the late

1950s and early 1960s, the Bedouin tribes played a powerful role in Jordanian politics as they ultimately gave the Hashemite family the legitimacy that they needed to rule over Jordan. This all changed with the ascension of King Hussein who wanted to build a modern Jordanian state and felt that the tribes stood in the way of modernization. For the remainder of his rule, King Hussein successfully worked to reduce the political power of the tribes and build a “modern state” akin to something in the West. For these reasons, Al-Hamouri contended that the way civil society was introduced into Jordan made it so that Jordanian tribes had to adapt to a new playing field in which they did not hold nearly the same amount of political power.

The tribes were able to successfully adapt to the new modern age of Jordanian society. Even if their status as a powerful political force has diminished, tribes, especially in rural areas continue to be seen as a valued social institution. Tribal sheikhs have worked to obtain tertiary degrees and are now some of the most educated individuals within Jordan. Sheikhs are also willing to actively use social media and technology to communicate with their tribespeople in a more accessible way. The use of social media as well as increase in education amongst the population of sheikhs has lead Al-Hamouri to make the argument that tribal leaders are very supportive of democracy as they are willing to participate in and create necessary civil society organizations. She went on to cite how many of Jordan’s political parties were started by tribal leaders to advocate for and endorse the policies that the specific tribe supports.

Next, Al-Hamouri elucidated how tribes also strive to be inclusive meaning that they work to help individuals and groups not associated with the tribe. She highlighted the example of the city of Mafraq in which there is a large population of Syrian refugees who were unfamiliar with the tribal customs developed by the Bedouin tribes located in the city. The tribespeople worked to help the refugees get situated in Mafraq and were able to help them successfully integrate into

Jordan. This is representative of Rosen's argument that tribal societies are not inherently closed off structures but rather are able to accommodate new peoples into their society.

In addition, Ms. Al-Hamouri used the example of how the large Palestinian-Jordanian community had been able to successfully integrate within Jordanian society as they too have adopted the Jordanian tribal identity as their own. However, she noted that importantly, that Palestinians have kept their own national identity and their cultures and traditions have also influenced that of the Jordanians. In a way, this makes tribal institutions inclusive and allows for the participation of citizenry in a democratic society

As for the democratic process in selecting a leader, it may seem on the surface that tribes are anti-democratic as one family rules over a tribe for as long as they want. Yet, as Ms. Al-Hamouri elucidated, Jordanian tribes are known to use democratic processes to select their leaders. If a sheikh is seen to be inadequate by a majority of the tribe, then the tribe could call a *shurah* (consultation) in which male members of the tribe would vote to replace the sheikh. The voters would choose between a group of tribal elders that meet certain qualifications. These elders must be highly educated, Muslims well-versed in Islamic Law, and come from families that have been part of the tribe for multiple generations.

Next, Ms. Al-Hamouri identified a few important cultural values that would be important in building the robust civil society required for a strong democratic state in Jordan. The first of these values she identified was transparency as Jordanian tribes are very open about how politics in their institutions are conducted. This transparency is best seen in the tribal mediation process as when two families have a dispute, the sheikh or a tribal judge is supposed to intervene and help the warring parties come to a resolution. As a result, the sheikh must be incredibly accessible to his people and must make rulings in an efficient and comprehensible manner so that the two

families can understand why the sheikh came to reach that verdict. This emphasis on transparency is what builds trust between the tribal elders and their people. It is therefore in the best interest of pro-democracy advocates in Jordan to present the institutions of a democratic civil society to be responsive to the will of the people in a way that is like how the tribes conduct mediation.

The second value that ought to be implemented in Jordanian civil society is freedom of speech. In Ms. Al-Hamouri's view, the tribes do a great job of allowing their members to express concern regarding the affairs of the tribe. She stated to the researcher that because tribal members do not have to fear repercussions from higher ranking members, it creates the conditions that promote transparency and thus trust in the tribe. Finally, Ms. Al-Hamouri talks about the tribal reconciliation process and how that can promote dialogue in inter and intra-tribal disputes. This process allows the tribes to build the necessary networks and connections needed to compromise with each other. A key value that is prevalent in all democratic systems.

Given the praise that Ms. Al-Hamouri gave to tribal institutions and their conduciveness to democracy, it is quite surprising that she did not see potential for a democratic system to be based off tribal values. When the researcher asked her to explain this belief, she cited several reasons why this is the case, chief amongst them, the patriarchal structure of tribal society. The researcher previously alluded to how only the men of the tribe are allowed to participate in the selection of a new sheikh as women are completely shut off from the electoral process. Ms. Al-Hamouri contextualized that in all Bedouin tribal cultures, women are treated as subservient to males. In addition, the tribal society also has put extra burden on the women living in these societies as it is perceived that they hold the "honor" of the tribe. The Economist (2021) confirms this, explaining the notion of honor is tied into the chastity of its female members. If a female is to engage in sexual activity, then she would bring upon shame to the tribe and thus would be targeted for repercussions.

The burden of honor placed on women in the tribal society is reflective of how tribal institutions within themselves can be anti-democratic. This caused Ms. Al-Hamouri to tell the researcher that she believes one of the big obstacles in forming democratic institutions from tribal traditions is the inherent inequality between men and women in the tribal system.

The next reason Ms. Al-Hamouri is skeptical about tribal values translating into democratic norms is because tribalism incentivizes civil society organizations to be built off “identity politics” rather than ideology. Many of Jordan’s current political parties are used by tribe as vehicle to project their limited power in Jordan’s authoritarian system. Instead of being based off a clear political ideology, these tribal parties make it so that voters are more interested in voting for their own kin rather than candidates that they agree with politically, making it so that civil organizations are fractured entities that emphasize where one comes from. In contrast, for civil organizations to be democratic, the organizations must be united behind one concrete and clear political ideology that brings different groups of people together.

The ultimate reason Ms. Al-Hamouri believes that Jordanian tribal society will not provide the framework needed for democracy is that many young and liberal Jordanians see the tribal system to be inherently antithetical to democracy. The tribal system has a reputation for being considered backwards by many educated Jordanians because of all the reasons that she has stated above. As a result, Ms. Al-Hamouri was pessimistic to the idea that tribal values could build the necessary civil society institutions required for democracy.

### **The Wise Words of a Sheikh**

The researcher conducted the final interview with Sheikh Talal of the Al-Madi tribe. The Al-Madi tribe is one of the smallest tribes in Jordan. At the same time, it is one of the most powerful in the country largely due to the reputation that Sheikh Talal has amongst the Bedouin

tribes. Given his position as sheikh, he is also one of the foremost experts in tribal law and a proponent of democratization in Jordan. In his view, tribalism is indeed conducive to democracy because tribal societies themselves are resilient and welcoming of modern civil society institutions. In defense of his point, Sheikh Talal cited how the cultural values of tribalism could be used to build the necessary civil society institutions for democracy in the Middle East.

The first topic of interest discussed between the researcher and Sheikh Talal was the relationship between the current Jordanian state and the Bedouin tribes that dominate the region. In the immediate aftermath of World War 1, when the Hashemites and their British allies expelled the Ottoman Empire from Jordan, the Bedouin tribes in the region allowed the Hashemites to rule the country first as an emirate, then a kingdom. This arrangement set up a power structure in which nominally, the tribes gave the Hashemite kings their power and could choose to remove the family if they saw fit. This dynamic changed in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the passing of the Jordanian constitution and ascension of King Hussein to the Jordanian throne. With the backing of Jordan's foreign patrons, the United States and the United Kingdom, King Hussein sought to create a strong, centralized Jordanian state which led to much of the tribes losing political power. In the era of King Hussein, all power lay with the King and legitimacy came from the support that the Jordanian king received from his Western allies.

The authoritarian centralization in Jordan has created problems for many Jordanians. Sheikh Talal noted that the authoritarian system in Jordan has stunted the economic and social development of Jordan. As a result, many Jordanians have become apathetic to the current Jordanian political system as they are shut out from the decision-making process. Sheikh Talal also added that because of poverty and joblessness, many Jordanians are also not concerned with

building state capacity as these Jordanians are more interested in fulfilling their basic needs over pursuing abstract ideals.

Sheikh Talal attributes many of the political and economic problems that Jordanians are facing to the westernized style of centralization that the Hashemite regime has implemented. He noted that the western approach of centralization and state craft has proven difficult in the Middle East as it has reduced state capacity, or the ability of the government to achieve its policy objectives and rule over their territory. This is because many Arabs view that the attitude of the western approach violates their own cultural norms and traditions. Thus, the sheikh argues that the institutions needed to build state capacity and democracy in the Middle East ought to be grounded in the cultural traditions of the Arab people; Cultural traditions that are tribal.

When asked what lessons Jordanian democracy advocates can learn from the Bedouin tribal system, Sheikh Talal pointed to the tribal mediation process and how it keeps relations between Jordanian tribes' cordial. Often, it is the sheikh that must mediate disputes between two parties. Therefore, the sheikh must have practical experience; an advanced degree from an institution of higher education; a code of ethics that incorporates Islamic ideals; and be accessible to his people. All these traits build trust between a sheikh and his people. That trust is what is necessary that gives the sheikh the legitimacy to make verdicts regarding tribal disputes and maintain order within the society. Sheikh Talal also believes that the responsiveness of the mediation process is what makes its conducive to democracy. It is thus in his view, that sheikhs must be at the forefront of building democratic norms and institutions as sheikhs are seen as trustworthy leaders amongst Jordanians, particularly those in rural areas.

Furthermore, Sheikh Talal makes the argument that tribalism is indeed conducive to democracy and civil society if civil society is meant to maximize the political and social rights

for all people living in Jordan. In his view, civil society needs to be built off of the values of trust, honor, and responsiveness, and because sheikhs have a reputation for holding all three of these qualities, they are the ones qualified to lead and build the Jordanian civil society. Sheikh Talal also contended that sheikhs would be less inclined to decisions detrimental to the greater good of Jordanian society because of their high education levels coupled with the fact that sheikhs are supposed to be entrenched within their community.

When discussing the electoral process for how sheikhs are chosen, Sheikh Talal admitted that the sheikhdom is mostly a hereditary position meaning that it passes from a sheikh to a family member. However, he did mention that there indeed is a process in which the sheikh can be removed from the position and replaced via election by the members of the tribe.

Finally, Sheikh Talal discussed with the researcher how tribes are now seen as threatening to the ruling family and therefore, are used as scapegoats whenever there are economic and political problems. In the Sheikh's opinion, the government treats the tribes as antiquated institutions that have no place in modern Jordanian society. The Sheikh pontified that the reality of the situation is that since tribes are seen as a threat to the current authoritarian order, the government often neglects the economic needs of the tribal people living in rural areas to keep them weak. To build a more inclusive democratic society, Sheikh Talal believes that sheikhs will play a role in this formulation, a role that the King sees as an existential threat to his power. As an alternative to the current political system, the sheikh proposed that a democracy that incorporates Jordanian cultures and traditions be built as it will maximize political inclusiveness and establish trust between the system and the people meant to be governed by that system.

## **Analysis and Conclusions**

Throughout the literature review and data collection process, the researcher has found one common theme amongst all the answers given by the interlocutors; the political system of Jordan must be built upon a Jordanian cultural foundation. What this means is that existing cultural institutions, such as tribes, must buy in to the political system. It is for that reason that the researcher believes that his hypothesis has been partially confirmed by the data collection process. Pro-democracy advocates in Jordan ought to look at installing values derived from the tribal mediation process such as institutional respect, trust, and inclusiveness into their Jordanian democracy. However, translating the existing political structures of tribalism into a democracy may prove difficult as the hierarchal structure of the tribes give sheikhs autocratic power. Therefore, the researcher has concluded that while his initial hypothesis— tribal mediation serves as a building block on which a democratic regime can be built— has been confirmed, he has come to the belief that tribes, in their current form cannot serve as pillars of democracy.

First, when looking at socio-political institutions and practices of tribalism and how it compares to the democratic institutions as laid out by Dahl (2005), it becomes clear that tribalism has a mixed record. When it comes to supporting free speech, tribalism does a surprisingly good job of providing this key right to the people. From Ms. Al Hamouri's interview, she stated that that anyone in the tribe has the right to criticize the decisions of the sheikh, from the most powerful elder to the weakest child. Furthermore, many tribespeople can freely use social media to voice their concerns about anything and everything. In fact, the sheikhs themselves are active participants on social media and encourage others in their tribe to use it as well. This means that tribespeople can gain access to alternative sources of information without restrictions on their social media use by the sheikh or tribal elders.

As for the electoral institutions that are in tribes, there are some glaring concerns when it comes to building democracy. Chief amongst them as elucidated by Sheikh Talal and the interlocuter was that there is no real mechanism of democratic transition in the tribes. What this means is that sheikhdom passes between generations of a family instead from one family to another in an election process. While there is truth to the fact that the tribe will replace a sheikh in an election if he is seen to be doing a bad job, these elections happen sporadically. In other words, while tribal elections might be free and fair, they are not frequent. In addition, tribal elections in Jordan are not gender inclusive as women are barred from voting or running in the election for sheikh. In fact, as Ms. Al-Hamouri stated, women are not allowed to hold any official roles in the tribe. However, when tribal elections are conducted, there seems to be no indication that Jordanian tribes rely on tactics of coercion to elect sheikhs.

When it comes to building the necessary inclusive civil society organizations, the record of tribal institutions is mixed. As Layne (1987) elaborates on, although the raw political power of the tribal sheikhs had been diminished in the time of King Hussein, the tribes still played a big role in Jordanian civil society. That has manifested itself today in the formation of Jordanian civil organizations such as political parties. Tribes are the dominating forces that make up political parties in Jordan. Despite this, Jordanian political parties have not had a very strong effect in influencing democracy in Jordan. The current Jordanian parliament holds little to no power and when election season rolls around, most people vote to keep their tribal representative in power instead of voting for a candidate that most likely agrees with their views. This is confirmed by both Wiktorowicz (1999) and the interlocuter, and Ms. Al-Hamouri. The two interlocuters argue that this phenomenon is a cause of tribes playing up identity over ideology and policy. This leads to a lack of economic development.

The researcher does not necessarily agree with this view as he is more inclined to believe the view presented by Sheikh Talal and Dr. Hani. Sheikh Talal especially argued that since the civil society organizations staffed by tribal people hold no real political power in the Jordanian system. Sheikh Talal stated that it is the role of the state to administer an ideology. As Jordan is exclusively ruled by a King, it is the responsibility of the ruler, not the tribes to institute ideology, and working policies. Nonetheless, the researcher recognizes that this could be seen as the tribes deflecting blame on Jordanian institutions. Since Jordanian tribal leaders have not constituted their own functioning civil society organizations at the forefront of statecraft, it is therefore best to say there is a lot to be desired with tribal institutions and the formation of working civil society organizations.

While Jordanian tribes do not have the best structure when it comes to establishing the necessary norms and institutions required for democracy, they do have the necessary norms and cultural values needed to serve as a foundation for democracy building. The interlocuter disagreed with my initial hypothesis about tribal values serving as a foundational building block for democracy as they argued that tribalism in Jordan utilized blood ties and had rigid social orders. In other words, Jordanian tribes are hostile to outsiders. However, the point of view the researcher received from Dr. Hani, Sheikh Talal, Ms. Al-Hamouri, and the literature contradicts this point of view. As Rosen (2018) contextualized tribes are not rigid social groups that emphasize blood ties above all things else. While blood ties do certainly play a critical role in identifying members of a tribe, he goes on to explain that in many tribes around the world, there are many members that did not initially belong to a family that had genealogical connections with the main tribe. This shows that to be a member of a tribe, one must adopt the necessary social customs of that tribe to become fully integrated.

This is best corroborated by the interviews the researcher conducted with Ms. Al-Hamouri who cited how when Syrian refugees fled to Jordan, tribespeople in Mafraq treated the refugees as their own people. They provided them with shelter, food, and clothing, and attempted to help them assimilate into the Bedouin tribal life. The second argument that Rosen made in that piece was that tribes often borrow cultural practices and norms from each other and work with one another. This was confirmed by Dr. Hani as he stated to the researcher that when the Jordanian Kingdom initially began, the tribal peoples consolidated in the cities and began to work with one another to build the necessary civil society organizations needed for Jordan.

Rosen identifies that the mediation and conflict resolution process amongst the tribes are what makes tribal values conducive to democracy. He writes those tribal relations are characterized by building trust and maintaining peaceful relations with tribal chieftains attempting to make fair rulings in disputes. In the Jordanian context, the tribal mediation process is described in detail by Lang (2002) and Antoun (2000). They both contend that Bedouin conflict resolution mechanisms are what maintains peace amongst the Jordanian and Palestinian tribes as they share similar methods of negotiation. The researcher believes that this why in large part, Palestinians and Jordanians have been able to integrate as they share many of the same cultural practices.

For example, in both Bedouin and Palestinian tribal customs, when the sheikh is litigating a dispute, they make sure to come to a fair judgement. Once that judgement is reached, a *Sulha*, or ceremony in which the disputing parties reconcile and celebrate. This is the underlying value that builds trust in the tribal system. A trust that Sheikh Talal identifies that could serve as a bedrock for the building of public institutions in Jordan.

Ultimately, the researcher believes that this value of trust is what is needed for Jordan to have a truly democratic system. From the interview process the researcher discovered that the reason many people trusted in tribal institutions was because they were responsive to the needs of the tribespeople. As discussed earlier, tribespeople are allowed to voice their concerns freely regarding issues and decisions that the sheikh makes. Furthermore, the sheikhs are seen as trusted figures within the tribe as they attempt to rule with the best interests of the people in mind. As Sheikh Talal explained, a sheikh must be a well-learned individual who is honest, respectful, and available. The researcher interpreted this as meaning that what makes a good sheikh is that he leads amongst his people. In other words, a good sheikh must be willing to listen and respond to the will of his tribe. When referring to Dahl's, original democratic principle, that a state must be responsive to the preferences of its people, an observer can see how Jordanian tribal institutions have similar principles as democratic ones. The researcher believes that at their core, that both systems are compatible with one another because of how they value the people governed by these systems.

Of course, the researcher also realizes that the current structure of tribes in Jordan is incompatible with democracy seeing that they exclude certain populations from the decision-making process, and they do not have frequent elections for positions of leadership. However, many of the interlocutors have stated to the researcher that tribal institutions are resilient, meaning that they will adapt their structures to any political system. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that the findings of this paper help future researchers interested in democratization in the Middle East by showing how tribal mediation is the fundamental piece for building an Arab Democracy. In conclusion, the researcher believes that the tribal mediation process has several key values that make it work. These values are trust, responsiveness, and resilience. Those three

values are what pro-democracy advocates in Jordan need to center around their pitch for democracy if there is any hope for Jordan to democratize soon.

### **Limitations of Study**

The researcher recognizes that there are limitations to the study that he has conducted as no study examining a complex topic such democratization can be completed in a one-month period. The researcher would have liked to interview more ordinary Jordanians about their views regarding tribalism. The Jordanian people are the ones who ought to decide if they want a democratic regime based in tribal customs to be the political system that governs Jordan. In the researchers view, democracy is ultimately successful when the people governed by the democratic regimes trust their institutions. In particular, the researcher would have wanted to conduct a survey of both urban and rural Jordanians so that he could discern their opinions regarding tribalism and democracy.

Next, the researcher realized that he did not interview as many women as he could have. The ISP only contains an interview from one woman and many men with high status. Given that tribalism impacts women in different ways than men, the researcher regrets that he was not able to interview more women during the interview process. Had the researcher had more time, he would have liked to seek out more female interlocuters. The researcher writes more on this in his section regarding recommendations for future studies.

Finally, the researcher recognizes that because of his positionality as a western-educated male, his idea of democracy and civil society was different from some of his interlocuters. After interviewing Sheikh Talal, the researcher came to the realization that civil society institutions in Jordan may not look like the civil society institutions in the United States. Rather, the goal of civil society institutions should be to maximize political rights. This realization came after the

researcher had already conducted several interviews. These interviews would have been more fruitful had the researcher realized that civil societies do not have to be constructed in one way.

### **Recommendations for future study**

Throughout the research period, the researcher has come to be satisfied with the scope and breadth of his ISP. However, there still are recommendations for further study particularly when analyzing the socio-political dynamics of Jordanian tribes. The principal focus that the researcher would like to analyze in new research is the role that women play in shaping tribal politics. Traditionally, women have played a subservient role to men in the tribal system. As a result of this patriarchy, women have been shunned from directly participating in tribal politics and face great gender discrimination. However, women do play a seemingly unassuming, yet fascinating role in shaping tribal politics. Throughout the researcher's data collection period, the researcher learned that tribal women play a role in facilitating a sheikh's kitchen cabinet, the informal meetings of advisors that shape his decisions.

Further research ought to be done on how Islam, as a religion, can shape democratic political ideologies and philosophies in the Arab world. Note, the researcher is not referring to studying political Islam as that is a brand of religious conservatism like the ones, we are most familiar with in the West. Rather, the researcher believes that new research studying Islam should focus on how the political practices born out of the religion could be seen as a source for building a kind of modern Arab liberalism. In other words, the researcher recommends that future scholarship be done on how the teachings of Islam can be used to build a political system in the Middle East that unites people of different backgrounds.

Finally, the researcher recommends that more be done to study the interactions between Bedouin tribes, Jordanians of Palestinian descent, and refugees in Jordan. Many of the

interlocutors the researcher interviewed argued that the Jordanian tribal system is accommodating to people of different backgrounds. The researcher therefore believes it is important to investigate further into these statements. The researcher recommends that any future analysis of this topic consider how the Jordanian state influences these dynamics as well.

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## Appendix 1

## Interview Questions

1. What is the legacy of tribalism in Jordanian civil society? What tribal traditions can be used to emphasize Democracy promotion in Jordan?
2. How have tribal institutions traditionally been responsive to problems facing the ordinary citizenry? Can the mediation mechanisms be used to building strong political parties?
3. What are the traits and characteristics of the tribal mediation process?
4. What cultural norms from Jordan's tribal traditions need to be emphasized in creating an identity which would be need for building democratic institutions?
5. Tribal politics have been accused by some in the west of promoting politics to be done based on identify rather than ideology. In what ways do tribal structures in Jordan contradict or confirm this notion?
6. Have tribal leaders shown acceptance to democracy? If so, why do they think democracy would increase the power of their tribes? If not, what would need to be done to convince them to become proponents of Democracy?
7. Jordan has a large population of Palestinians descendants. How would a democratic system based on Bedouin tribal traditions include Palestinians.
8. From the 1930s till the 1950s, Jordan had a strong democratic culture, in what ways did tribal leaders play in building those institutions and how can they recreate those institutions if an event like the Arab Spring were to occur.

## Appendix 2



**Title: Democratization in Jordan**

**Your Name/Homeschool: University of Iowa**

School for International Training—Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and The future of the Middle East

1. The purpose of this study is to understand how tribal institutions and a revival of tribal identity can help facilitate democracy within Jordan.

**2. Rights Notice**

**If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview.** Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.

b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.

c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

**3. Instructions:**

*Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the study. Signing below while failing to mark a preference where indicated will be interpreted as an affirmative preference. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.*

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing a descriptive case study on how tribal institutions can help facilitate democratization in Jordan

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be confidential and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [ do / do not ] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

**Date:**

**Participant's Signature:**

**Participant's Printed Name:**

**Researcher's Signature:**

*Thank you for participating!*

*Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:*

Dr. Raed Altabini, SIT Jordan Academic Director

Email: [raed.altabini@sit.edu](mailto:raed.altabini@sit.edu)

## Appendix 3

**الباحث: Shahab Khan**

مؤسسة التعلم العالمية: برنامج الجغرافيا السياسية، العلاقات الدولية، و مستقبل الشرق الأوسط

**هدف هذه الدراسة هو : The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand tribalism and**

**see if has the necessary components to create a foundation for democracy in Jordan**

1. لك الحق في الإنسحاب من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة في أي وقت شئت
  2. كل المعلومات التي سيتم جمعها هنا ستستخدم فقط لأغراض البحث العلمي
  3. لا يوجد أي مخاطر معروفة لدى الباحث تنعكس عليك نتيجة مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة
  4. لا يوجد تعويض مادي لقاء المشاركة في هذه الدراسة
  5. أنت تتفهم أن هذا البحث يجريه طالب في مرحلة البكالوريوس
  6. لن يتم استخدام اسمك أو أية معلومات تعريفية أو إقرانها بإجاباتك على الأسئلة في هذه الدراسة
  7. لديك الحق في رفض الإجابة على أي سؤال تفضل عدم الإجابة عنه
- إذا كان الباحث بحاجة لإستخدام اسمي فأني أعطيه التصريح بذلك: نعم لا
  - إنني أعطي الباحث التصريح باستخدام اسم مؤسستي التي انتمي إليها في بحثه: نعم لا
  - إنني أعطي الباحث تصريحاً باستخدام معلومات هذه الدراسة في دراسات مستقبلية محتملة له: نعم لا

توقيع المشترك: التاريخ: / /

إسم المشترك:

توقيع الباحث (Researcher Signature):

شكراً جزيلاً لك لمشاركتك في هذه الدراسة

إذا كان لديك أي أسئلة أو استفسارات أو تعليقات، الرجاء توجيهها الى الدكتور رائد التبيني المدير الأكاديمي للبرنامج

Raed.AITabini@sit.edu

Appendix 4



Student Name: Student Number: Sending School: Program:

Term:  
Academic Director:

**Independent Study Project (ISP) Assessment Summary Sheet**

Jordan: Geopolitics, International Relations, and the Future of the Middle East Spring 2022  
Al Tabini, Raed

Independent Study Project Title: Location:  
Keywords:

To be completed by AD

To be completed by AD (location where student conducted ISP)

Enter keywords here, separated by a comma

Independent Study Project	Possible	Awarded
Title / Acknowledgements / Abstract	5	0.0
Research Question / Objectives / Justification	10	0.0
Context and Literature Review	10	0.0
Methods	15	0.0
Ethics	10	0.0
Presentation of results / findings	15	0.0
Depth of analysis	15	0.0
Conclusions	10	0.0
Technical aspects	5	0.0
Effort	5	0.0
<b>80% Independent Study Project Score (out of 100 pts) 100 0</b>		
<b>20% ISP Presentation Score (out of 100 pts.) 100 0</b>		
<b>0% Other ISP components, if applicable (e.g., ISP journal) (out of 100 pts.) 100 0</b>		

**ISP FINAL NUMBER GRADE**

Deductions 0

0

ISP Comments:

Enter Independent Study Project comments here; please describe the character and quality of the student's work in the ISP course, using brief examples and illustrations in the space provided. Suggested length of at least 150 words.