

INVESTIGATING SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL ACTION IN THE MIDDLE
EAST

by

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the relationship between social capital and political action in the Middle East. The research uncovers indicators of how social capital correlates with democratic action. Using data from the 2005 World Values Survey, the examination centers on indicators of trust and membership in civic organizations and how they relate to political action in the region. The paper concludes with discussion of how trust-building and reciprocity can be interpreted within the political context of the Middle East, and how the relevance of social capital will be an unavoidable consideration in the transition away from autocracy in the region, especially when considering recent events.

For Nina.

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INTRODUCTION

The examination of how, when, and where democracy thrives—or why it fails to ever take hold—has a central place in political theory. At certain points in the past decades, the suggested explanation came in the form of a single factor, such as high national income, that the wealthier nations of the world are more democratic, simply summarized (Lipset 1960). No single-serving explanation of why political action of the kind conducive to and characterized by popular democracy has appeared, though, at least not a conclusive one. As part of this long inquiry, many scholars have explored the concept of social cohesion and the function it serves within the overall structure of a democracy. The essential deduction is that the absence of a strong social fabric undermines political culture, thus weakening the foundations of a democracy (Fukuyama 2001). Conversely, the presence of a strong social structure can produce an ingredient that is considerably valuable to the potency of political culture: social capital.

This concept engages a variety of ideas. It does not have a uniform, standard definition, but it does introduce a framework built around the basic idea of resources and expenditures, as it includes the key concept of “capital” as defined in the economic sense. These resources are identifiable at the individual level by the ideas of trust and reciprocity. Working upwards, social capital incorporates the idea of institutions, and the durability of the networks that facilitate the expenditure of social capital (Coleman 1988). These institutions also

relate to common practices, the societal ideals that trust and networks of social capital can tacitly influence, or as they may be called in a word, norms.

Moreover, affixing the word capital to the study of social trust and cohesiveness brings in the possibility of theorizing how to invest in social capital, in a sense. It is in many ways a public good. Even though it obviously rests on the idea of a private expression of trust in others, it can be said that suboptimal levels of social capital might be considered as an area deserving investment, in the policy sense. Researchers have identified robust reserves of social capital as nearly indispensable with regards to the vigorous performance of a democracy. Greater levels of social capital have been shown to increase public safety, produce greater wealth, promote national levels of psychological well-being, and raise the quality of electoral competitiveness (Fedderke, Dekadt, and Luiz 1999; Portes, 1998 2000; Seligson 1999; Stark, 2003; Lindstrom and Mohseni, 2009). Social capital helps to produce the bulwarks of a strong society especially by how it produces the norms by which society functions, it is argued. These may be assessed for their standalone value, in that they promote widely accepted definitions of what is good and bad, what can be approved and allowed, and also how to sanction actions that are deemed wrong (Fukuyama 1999). Moreover, social capital produces strong social organizations that can help improve the overall efficiency of society, even when the nature of the organization seemingly

might not appear to have much importance to the grand concepts of democracy, equality, and national cohesion (Putnam 1993).

Today, with the issue of democratic development in the Middle East continuing to attract almost daily attention, the question of how social capital works in the Arab world deserves greater focus. I examine now the pertinent variables currently encouraging or retarding the onset of wider political action in the Middle East, with a special interest in the role social capital plays, if any. Specifically, I examine data representing attitudes related to social capital and democratic action with an interest in the strength of their relationship and combined effect on political action. With this target, I aim for a succinct account of how closely related these factors are, with a particular interest in whether the association between social capital and political action remains strong when analyzed in the presence of other considerations. To be specific, I examine political action that is focused on collective, shared aims, for example joining a boycott or signing a petition. This is opposed to political action that is non-democratic, for example authoritarian political action that might be aimed towards violence or oppression towards a specific group. This is how democratic action will relate to the political activity examined herein. In countries with healthy levels of democracy, there are ready-made indicators of democratic activity, such as voting rates or party registration. However, since there is a narrower range of

democratic activity to study within the Middle East region, I examine individual political activity that aligns with democratic intent.

In the first section I summarize the genesis of social capital research and how it relates to current discussions of political action. There are two main fields of scholarship to review: social capital formation and the unique aspects of politics in the Middle East region. This also involves the introduction of political activity and democratic culture. When introducing literature on Middle East politics, I select studies that discuss specifically how the political culture both influences and is influenced by the concept of social capital.

In discussing these topics, please note both the common precepts behind social capital studies and how it relates to political action, as well as the distinct characteristics of the regional setting examined herein. It will be noted that the literature on social capital has relevance to many disciplines and that there are a wide range of approaches to defining how relations between individuals informs aggregate political analysis. Although to date is no universal, unchallengeable definition and instrumentation of social capital in scholarly research, it is possible to draw conclusions on how to analyze it in the context of political action in the area.

Next, in the data and methods section, the coding, hypothesis, and testing itself will be presented. This research employs a multinational study of political and social behavior, which presents the possibility of close comparison and

investigation. Following that, an analysis in the results section will cover the implications of the testing and address the importance in understanding how social capital functions in the Middle East with regards to political activity. It will be argued that the specific features behind the relationship will require focused analysis, as it reveals how the mechanism of democratization works in the region. In particular, the discussion of how best to research the relationship between social capital and political action in light of recent events in 2011 will be addressed.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL ACTION

The roots of scholarship on social capital and its effects can be found well into the past. As Farr (2004) points out, Karl Marx referenced the concept over one hundred years ago. He named the *gesellschaftliche Kapital* (individual capitals formed together for production) as an integral part of society. Since then, research into social capital has explored a variety of perspectives. Below, the rational, psychological, and network explanations are presented, as well as the part education plays in social capital formation. Then, in the next section of this research, literature specific to the Middle East region will be discussed.

Before commencing the literature review, a discussion of what social capital and trust mean in the context of this paper is appropriate, as there are already numerous and inconsistent ways to conceptualize the terms, as evidenced by the literature itself. It is possible to state broadly, though, that a review of the topic shows that the concept of trust and social capital obviously engages the concept of human relationships. This occurs at the most basic level between two people, but it also concerns social relations between groups of people as a whole. Whenever there is interaction, it is usually for a purpose, namely to achieve a single or perhaps joined set of identifiable goals. In this study, I will examine social capital in terms of how individuals—or collectives of individuals—extend trust with the aim of achieving predetermined goals.

Second, discussion of how social trust is amassed and spent necessarily concerns an amount of abstraction. Trust cannot be monetized into a pocketable currency. When people decide to engage others out of trust, be it one-on-one or by participating in a civic association, they do not end up with a bottom-line accounting of losses and gains. They abstract when they figure the value of social capital, and in this research (as well as the wider literature) there is a need to figure in rough terms how social capital is expended at different times and different circumstances without being able to treat it as a specific, measurable commodity to the decimal. This of course involves relaxing the strict use of the word “capital” as it can’t be measured like a standard asset in the economic sense. Rather than being employed as a unit of account to be measured for growth or contraction over daily or monthly periods, like a financial instrument, it will be used to operationalize and measure the institutional, group, and network activity surrounding the establishment and exchange of trust and civic engagement.

Thirdly, this research focuses on social capital as a predictor in propensity for political action and proceeds with the assumption that there is a certain consistency and reliability behind the matter. In this study, political action is identified by selecting measurements from the data set that directly relate to actual activity. As the methods section discusses, the survey instrument used herein contains many questions relating to political activity, including voting,

boycotting, lobbying, and so on. However the operationalization here will be on political activity that aims to satisfy a need for collective goals. It must also be noted that there a number of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reasons for why, especially on an individual level, social capital can be important one day and meaningless the next with regards to unified political action. However, for the purposes of this study, the analysis proceeds by treating trust as steady and reliable, not purely ephemeral; that is, when and where it exists, it can be examined and discussed for a correlation with political action. For the purpose of empirical analysis, it must be accepted that it is reliable enough in the sense that it is not just a fleeting construct, to be held only momentarily and independent of any attitudes towards or instances of political engagement.

Rational Choice Explanations

Exploring social capital and the mechanisms of trust has led many researchers to evaluate discussions of rational choice. The concepts of reason and explorations of game theory are a common thread throughout such discussions. This approach is beneficial to the exploration of social capital because it in effect presents an opportunity for theoretical experimentation. As the discussion to follow shows, the rational choice approach allows for the inquiry into trust and engagement to be distilled into a “game” that can have rules and replicable features. This is a powerful tool; it allows for close examination of

decision-making and choice, the how and exactly why behind behavior. What's more, when this approach is incorporated, different aspects of how social capital may accumulate in different situations/environments can be more closely examined.

As an example, Olsen (1965) notably illuminates how the concept of repeated interaction itself develops accountability with regards to trust. When people physically interact—as is often the case the smaller a group is—they essentially incentivize participation over time, and thus accountability. The reason for this has to do with the idea behind rational behavior itself. At its essence, this concept involves the idea that people will take predictable actions based on a normative, ideal strategy to achieve their aims. Collectively, when they encounter one another and begin applying their rational strategy, they will also operate on the presumption that others are rational. In other words, when they share information, or signal trust, or attempt to understand someone else's goals, they are applying some level of confidence that is discrete and rule-governed rather than purely natural and chaotic.

Coleman (1990) provides a rigorous description of how the underlying processes of decision-making behind trust play out. He presents the choice behind taking the option to trust instead of reject as a constant, ever-present part of social interaction. There is always a trustor, who has to extend herself and decide the value to be won from placing trust in another. The calculation is based

on probability; if the expected net gain realized provides a better outcome than deciding not to extend trust, then the trustor would and should make the rational decision to extend trust. Social capital as expressed by trust is furthermore self-enforcing and circular when viewed in this manner. A cumulative effect becomes apparent working both positively and negatively. On the positive side, the rewards gained by trusting and coming out ahead compound the utility of extending trust. On the negative, there is a possibility of a vicious circle occurring if trust breaks down; once the norms of reciprocity are replaced with a stagnant standard of disorder and dereliction, it is hard for a society to beat back feelings of isolation and mistrust (Coleman 1988).

Another documentation of rational choice and trust by Möllering (2006) echoes the calculations implicit behind the decision to trust. The rationalist paradigm he describes encompasses the incentives and risks involved. Since trust is a bare "matter of reason" when all is reduced, Möllering states that the clearest indicators of trustworthiness have to be based off an understanding of rationality. There are credible promises that people make to each other, precommitments that lead to desired and expected pay-offs, and inferences that may seem altruistic and unrealistic but are not necessarily irrational (2006).

In particular, reasoning when one can or cannot trust depends on a rational understanding of risk. More often than not, the need to trust arises during circumstances where there is evident danger to simply gambling on the

expectation that others will be reliable. Once the decision is made, though, trust can be extended to absolute strangers despite the risk involved, and in these instances the personal investment in monitoring and enforcing their compliance heavily informs the decision to trust (Levi, 1996). A helpful example to consider with regards to this investigation is the trustworthiness of a civic association. If a group exists to serve some positive, public goal—improving awareness of an overlooked social issue, say—and it does so consistently and transparently, then it may often attract more members, and attain greater relevance and importance. This is worthwhile in considering the efficacy of civic associations in the Middle East, as independent civic groups may not have the same level of public recognition, a point that might influence the depth of civic activity and consequent political action.

The valuation of trust in the context of social capital involves not only the rationality behind trusting but considerations of *will*. There are stages along the way to measuring the will of the other party as well as self-testing on the part of the trustor. At each point, there are different processes and procedures at work, according to Doney, Cannon, and Mullen (1998), and at each stage, the will to trust is tested. They identify a calculative process first, in which one party judges whether the other is a cheater, and even if they are, whether they have the audacity to cheat and risk being caught. If not, then they can therefore be trusted, at least in one limited interaction. It is helpful to be able to predict the potential

strength of conviction, to further reinforce and justify to the trustor that they can confer trust justifiably. The will to act honestly is measured right up to the point where the trust is actually transferred. A rational evaluation of trust, in their analysis, involves the awareness that the capability and resolve to hold steadfast, to resist the urge to cheat, is always part of the picture.

Rationalist perspectives on social capital and trust are also important in how they move the discussion away from cultural or ethno-centric perspectives on the matter into evaluations of its actual function. This is the heart of a rational choice approach to the basic question of where and how social capital is formulated. A purely cultural perspective implies that there is an underlying transmutation that occurs, and it happens by virtue of culture alone. Certainly, culture has a relationship to social capital networks (this discussion is expanded in the following section on that literature). In other words, rather than simply stating that some societies have it and others do not--as Fukuyama does when he pronounces that it is unnatural to expect non-democratic societies to develop social capital (2001)--building a thorough rationalist discussion of social capital out provides the opportunity to explore the actual mechanisms as they operate. However, some scholars stop short of such strong emphasis on this point, i.e. they do not believe that these mechanisms are running at such a constant and intense level at all. For example Rothstein (2000) questions just how possible it is for human beings to engage in such continuous, churning calculations over trust.

The cognitive and predictive capabilities are just to taxing, he notes. If the amount of information A has to acquire and analyze about B is really that complex, then it would be expected that trust would become a truly exceptional outcome, one to be expected very little of the time. Fragmented information has to be part of the decision-making tree, due to the high costs of constantly processing information every time you contract with others. So, trust can often be subsumed by shorthand calculations based on historical knowledge and belief in norms, and it does not always run off never-ending streams of calculations (2000).

Psychological Explanations

So much of the inquiry into social capital depends on a thicket of issues concerning the psychological qualities behind the concept. The emotional elements must be considered alongside all the discussion of the cognitive, rational components. In short, just as with other research attempting to gain insight into the predispositions of a vast collection of individuals, how the concept can be interpreted uniquely by many different, real human beings matters strongly. This serves as a major sticking point for those who have a pronounced opposition to the value of social capital research. Newton, for one, argues that it is dangerous to assume uniformity when examining trust (1999).

There is an expansive body of literature that addresses this very matter by bringing in the relevance of individual psychology. Uslaner presents the issue with an analogy using chicken soup: while it is a common comfort and does "all kinds of good things" the way it actually works remains mysterious (2002).

It might have more to do with hope, for one, rather than trust, i.e. the hope that things will just be all better in the future. So, for a certain category of individual, trust in others flows from a fount of personal well-being and happiness, rather than a calculation of rational choice. Supportiveness and optimism are forged together to produce the hope amongst some that they can influence their environment through sheer will alone (Uslaner 2002). Thus the idea of rational trust--measuring interactions, gauging reciprocity, focusing on the perils, rewards and costs--becomes patchy and incomplete when held against an overriding mantra that if you are good, things will just get better.

Jones (1996) similarly emphasizes the affective nature of trust. She suggests that the attitude of optimism is integral to understanding trust. Furthermore, this optimism gives rise to beliefs that are highly resistant to bare evidence, i.e. it can be self-confirming (1996). Trust thus becomes hope in the goodwill of others. In addition, "projecting" in the form of a psychological mechanism can accompany this hope (Levi, 1996). Being optimistic and trusting, an individual can project this sentiment onto others. This heuristic replaces any

sort of calculation, and a trustworthy person comes to believe that it is likely, acceptable, and reasonable to assume that others are naturally the same way.

Life experience also comes into play and can influence how trust is expressed in different stages of growth. Kocher and Sutter took a sample of differing cohorts from ages eight on through to retirement age in order to assess the development of trust (2007). They used an experimental design in which the participants were observed during staged interactions. In their conclusion, Kocher and Sutter point out that the results indicate a linear rise in trust from early childhood to adolescence. This climb continues and then peaks at around 30 to 40, following which the observed measurement declines. By the time retirement age approaches, the curve has returned to just above what it was during the early stages of life. They observe that this can be attributed to shifts in altruistic preferences, attitudes towards risk, and changes in self-centeredness. Generally speaking, this is an agreeable observation from the results as discovered through their study and analysis. With respect to political action, this would indicate that social capital can matter more or less depending on the age of citizens, with the indication being that trust climbs as it reaches early adulthood. In terms of the Middle East, there is a key, relevant observation to make here, i.e. that the demographic makeup of the region can possibly inform observed levels of trust. The region has a fast-growing share of greater numbers of youths under the age of 30. In connection with the Arab Spring and future

events, the supposition to be made could be that those deeper, more substantive levels of trust due to the life experiences and attitudes of Arab youth may inform social capital and political action in the region.

Network Explanations

Citizens choose to belong to a variety of networks, which are within both official state-sponsored institutions and loose civic collectives. Social capital can be viewed, then, as the cultivation and expenditure of trust within the context of networks. This can be observed in a wide array of regime types and different societies. Furthermore, interaction can occur across many levels and varieties of institutions and networks. There may be official arrangements that engender and demand trust in others. Alternatively, networks may be totally informal, and can produce different qualities and features in the manner citizens gather together and rely upon each other. As Farell (2005) summarizes, the formal networks which exist under official imprimatur have written rules that can be enforced by a higher power; however, informal networks—which are often more numerous—have more informal standards that are usually enforced by closer relationships between participants. These networks rely on such factors as reputation to hold trust together.

This is an important distinction. In a formal network, the rules are rules, recorded with specific expectations of how participants are supposed to act. If they do so in an unexpected or unallowable manner, then there are consequences laid out ahead of time. However, if there are deviations from the expectation of how participants will commit to each other—or break their commitment and trust—then formal networks can prove brittle. In the context of informal social networks, though, there is wider leeway for handling non-standard occurrences. Even though the rules are less precise, and there is less of a formal law-enforcing authority overseeing all the interaction, the informal networks are more adaptable (Farrel 2005). The insight that may be taken away from all this is that even though informal networks are not bound tightly by formal structure, they can still be relevant to the more formal conduct of politics, by virtue of how the adaptability and momentum for change that might arise from informal associations can influence political action. Delving deeper into the recent events of the Arab Spring, it may be observed that informal networks both helped citizens to experience the type of open interaction that may have spurred on the desire to take political action, and furthermore when the actual time came for protest, the response to government attempts at repression was more adaptable and perhaps considerably more honed due to the very flexibility that helped contribute to the movement's momentum in the first place.

Putnam (1995) explores informal networks in his work, particularly how the decline of informal civic arrangements have harmed the quality of American democracy, in his view. His “Bowling Alone” work drew a connection between the downturn of civic engagement by citizens as neighbors and members of and a how a resulting bluntness in the sharpness of the overall social arrangement seemed to arise. Putnam warns that the networks that produce and sustain healthy civic engagement—even if not expressly political in concept and purpose—are so essential that without them, democracy itself is unsustainable. Democracy needs those reserves of social cooperation in order to avoid a crumbling death. According to Putnam, these reserves are built up whenever and wherever people meet and cooperate in social networks, so it isn’t hard to maintain a healthy level of social capital. In his titular example—bowling teams—there is after all nothing that directly relates a leisurely activity to the preservation of America’s constitutional democracy. However, it doesn’t matter why people meet and what they decide to do; with regards to social capital and its hypothesized relationship to political activity, what matters is that people interact, period (Rothstein and Stolle 2003).

Network explanations of social capital often lean towards an all-or-nothing view of social capital. Following Putnam, Rice and Ling (2002) put forth an analysis examining the links between democracy and social capital. Culture is an essential part of the explanation, in that it both helps to create social capital and

ensure that it does not wither between generations and over centuries of history. Since it bears so much of the explanatory load, Rice and Ling further point out that making the move to democracy with full and complete levels of social capital can be challenging; culture, in other words, is hard to move away from, and shedding the old for a new replacement isn't always simple. Socioeconomic modernization doesn't expressly require the accumulation of social capital as a prerequisite, but it does enter the discussion, particularly with regards to considerations of how newer, broader networks of cooperation and interaction continue to emerge.

It is important to note here also some cross-regional differences between how trust may be conceptualized within say American culture and the Middle East. The determinants of trust may be compared in an empirical and anecdotal sense. At the outset, perhaps the most obvious scale of comparison would be to consider how the two differ on the line of individualism versus collectivism. This dimension has frequently been employed in prior research studies. As Hofstede (1980) summarizes, the more individualistic type of culture is bound by a "loosely knit" web of ties, where self-reliance is the order of the day and all are concerned with their own lot and perhaps that of their family members. They do not have to swear allegiance to any larger group, and commonly there wouldn't be a great number to profess fealty towards in the first place. A collectivist society, on the other hand, is distinguishable by broader groups of individuals. Whether through

clans or extended kinship, people are expected to identify with and maintain loyalty towards who they consider their "own" people within the framework of a more sharply delineated society, one where there are clear differences between groups.

When it comes to a discussion of how this difference in culture impacts trust, a further suggestion is to consider how trust may be formed in one form of society versus the other. In an individualistic culture, the lone actor will tend towards a thoroughly calculative evaluation of whom to trust and when. By comparison, a more collectivist culture may produce trust based more on judgment of signals and merits. In other words, the measure of a person becomes less a calculation based on their individual resume at the point of giving trust, but rather who they are, where they come from, what group/clan/tribe they identify with, and how all of those identities can be transferred as proof and justification for their respectability and trustworthiness (Done et al 1998).

Bohnet et al studied this exact question by surveying citizens in different areas of the Middle East and staging two-person trust experiments (2010). Consistent with cultural expectations, they found that trust did hinge on expectations of what costs betrayal would bring. As opposed to American cultural expectations, where breach of trust has individual, often times monetary or legal impact, the respondents in the Middle East emphasized heavily betrayal as a much greater concern. In other words, the respondents in the Middle East were

more likely to judge whom to trust, and considered extending trustworthiness in light of what everyone would stand to lose. By contrast, the authors point out that people in the United States were willing to trust based with much less to go on, even in identical situations, as they were comfortable with the damages coming through ordinary legal or monetary remedies.

Education, Social Capital, and Democratic Values

Besides the associations people voluntarily join and the workplaces they have to occupy for the greater part of their adult lives, people spend a lot of time in school. It would follow, then, that researchers have examined what part the educational environment plays in social capital formation and exposure to democratic ideals.

Brehm and Rahn (1997) in an empirical analysis of exogenous causes of civic participation find that level of education is the single strongest predictor for whether an individual joins social groups and has generalized interpersonal trust in others, above and beyond such factors as income, party identification, hours spent watching television, and whether or not an individual lives in an urban or rural environment. Regarding education, Brehm and Rahn examine subjects with zero years of education all the way up to twenty total. What occurs over these two decades of learning is an increase in such factors as tolerance and open-mindedness, the researchers theorize. A person who is exposed to education

year in, year out will broaden their viewpoints and become less suspicious of people who are different (Brehm and Rahn, 1997).

There are other things occurring in the educational environment that both directly and indirectly affect social capital formation, according to Warwick (1998). He also identifies education as a causal factor in his analysis. He argues that, for one, the direct indoctrination of norms that comprises so much of education influences trust. Moreover, there are indirect processes of socialization that occur in the course of education, and these also impact the development of trust.

In the following sections, research addressing the specific context of this transition in the Middle East will be presented. The summary focuses on questions regarding the acceptance or rejection of democracy in the Middle East, specifically literature that evaluates political, social, and cultural variables relevant to social capital theory.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE MIDDLE EAST CONTEXT

Having organized an understanding of how social capital is discussed in the literature—as an attribute starting with individuals, with rational, cognitive, and psychological foundations, then impacting wider networks and societies—it is important to introduce literature on the Middle East context. This chapter will review the concepts identified in the literature that are most relevant to social capital formation in the area of concern. There are a variety of approaches to understanding Middle East politics in general; these can be tied to numerous historical, social, and religious discussions. However in this section, the literature selected for discussion will be those preexisting studies that best relate to the formation of social capital in the region.

A Clash with Democracy?

To some researchers, there is the basic question of whether the basic building blocks of social capital just aren't present within the region. Norris and Ronald (2002) examine whether any quantitative evidence can be discovered in support of the “clash of civilization” thesis. This theory regarding global relations was first published by noted researcher Samuel Huntington following the end of the Cold War. His understanding of the calamitous events following the devolution of the superpower standoff focused on the likelihood that multiple

civilizations would soon align themselves against each other in the absence of the U.S.-Soviet divide. Perhaps most famously, he predicted a clash between Islamic civilization and Western powers. Huntington's work relies heavily on primal logic, though, and builds descriptions of the two civilizations that departs almost entirely from palpable, measurable features and latches on to the (supposed) irrefutable nature of Western and Arab identities. The substance of disagreements between these two societies—one democratic and free, the other unquestionably stagnant—is thus explained by Huntington's firm, insistent tautology that the disputants are diametrically opposite, in terms of their nature, and thus will naturally oppose each other. Norris and Inglehart (2002) establish the goal of understanding the differences between the allegedly unrepentant and undemocratic Middle Eastern world and the West by evaluating whether all these differences touted by Huntington (amongst others) are entirely political differences as opposed to social separations. Norris and Inglehart (2002) do examine measurements of how public opinion in the Muslim and Western worlds compare when it comes to acceptance of authoritarian rulers and preferences for democracy as a form of government. But, they also monitor levels of social opinion. Specifically, they examine differences of opinion on issues such as sexual freedom and gender equality. They find that Western and Arab countries track closely when it comes to their opinions on democracy—quite closely, in fact, in their preferences for democratic rule—but then depart when it comes to matters of social orientation (Norris and Inglehart, 2002).

Moreover, these separate viewpoints are in fact more strongly expressed within the Arab and Muslim world than between it and the outside West, i.e. it is more often an issue of the younger generations of Arabs and Muslims diverging from their elders when it comes to social issues. It is this cultural cleavage, the two authors argue, and not an issue concerning an alien Middle East facing down the West, that best characterizes the supposed Islamic rejection of democracy. They argue against the hypothesis that the undemocratic Muslim part of the globe will naturally conflict with the democratic West; instead, they conclude that democracy is in fact endorsed by a clear majority of the region, and that irreconcilable differences over social matters deserve greater attention over all-out fears of political divide (Norris and Inglehart 2002). This is important to the discussion of social capital formation, specifically the concept that is culturally present or not present, simply.

The Religious Context

In a study of differences between Arab and Muslim countries, Stepan and Robertson (2003) construct a model to evaluate the democratic performance of the two groups over the last three decades. They begin with the observation that Muslim-majority yet non-Arab countries have achieved different levels of democratic achievement than their fellow Arab-majority countries, even though all of these countries share the same Islamic faith. Next, they define electoral

competitiveness as the target measure of democratic achievement, and they rightly noted that holding elections doesn't necessarily mean that a country should be considered entirely free and democratic. Still, they write, "electoral competitiveness is always a necessary condition for democracy, and thus always a central factor to consider when evaluating prospects for future democratization." (2003)

Stepan and Robertson use two data sources for their study. Their results are—as they themselves put it—“striking.” Out of the 29 non-Arab but Muslim nations, nearly half showed significant levels of democratic achievement. Out of the Arab nations, only one, Lebanon, experienced a measurable level of democratic performance. From this, Stepan and Robertson concluded that holding Islam solely responsible as the explanatory factor for low levels of democracy in the Arab world is, for all purposes, scientifically misleading. Their findings were met with rejection by some scholars, who questioned how they could defensibly separate out subsets of non-Arab majority from Islamic nations and Arab-majority countries from the Islamic population so cleanly (Lakoff 2004). This rejection is built around the dispute over what really qualifies as an Arab country that is non-Muslim or a Muslim country that is non-Arab, especially in terms of rating democratic vitality. For example, the selection of Comoros as a Muslim but not Arab democracy is questionable, as it is only a small fraction of the global Muslim community. Even choosing Malaysia, which is the world's

largest Muslim state, and terming it a democracy as Stepan and Robertson do can be considered a tenuous coding. Even though there are elections in Malaysia, there is still a strong authoritarian element to the national government, so much so that it may be best termed a transitioning democratic nation.

Still, as far as particularities important to further study of the issue of Middle East democracy, the authors do highlight that isolating the other factors unique to the region—outsized levels of defense spending and the effect of their intractable conflict with Israel, among other issues—would better explain the matter, and not a blanket view that religion is the sole explanatory variable. The further take-away is that there is no reason to believe that such issues should be considered absolutely irresolvable. Despite immediate issues surrounding the seemingly intractable question of why free societies have yet to take root in the Middle East, the supposition they somehow never will, and that instead there should only be acceptance for further decades of democratic blight is wrong-headed, they conclude (Stepan and Robertson 2003).

With this general matter of religion brought into consideration, the more exact question of where and how social capital makes an impact can be considered. The religious makeup of the Middle East can be examined for influence on the question of social capital formation, as it would regardless of what specific religion or region is under examination. In examining social capital and civic/political engagement, the connection to religious participation has

already come under consideration (Smidt 1999, Tolbert et al. 1998). The conclusions thus far indicate that the community building nature of religious activity do overlap with the very same considerations of mobilization, information sharing, and calls to action that social capital theory address. The bonds aren't so exact as to say that trust is begat of religion and thus religion breeds automatic trust. However the connection between worship and engagement with a religious community is worth remembering with regards to how it might lead to eventual political action (Wilson and Janoski 1995). It may promote activity, but there is also the matter of the possible fractious nature of religious behavior, i.e. the in-group versus out-group impact of religious observance (Altmeyer 2003). This is quite obviously a constant consideration when approaching what may seem like outwardly homogenous countries in the Middle East. One need only mention the phrase "Sunni vs. Shia" to prompt considerations of how religious ethnocentrism can preempt any discussion of social capital contributing to political action.

To expand, assuming that levels of religiosity in the Middle East region leads automatically to a platform for increased social capital is not well-advised, at least as far as support in the literature. For example, Putnam (1993) addresses this question of religiosity in studying Catholicism in Italy. He finds that church attendance actually contributes to less civic engagement. When time

spent worshipping goes up, associationalism goes down. Putnam explains it as follows:

Organized religion, at least in Catholic Italy, is an alternative to the civic community, not a part of it. Church-goers ... seem more concerned about the city of God than the city of man. (Putnam 1993, pp. 107--109).

Internal Conflict and Oil Wealth

Sørli, Gleditsch, and Strand (2002) focus on internal conflict for their investigation of Middle East politics. They ask the specific question of why the Middle East is one of the most conflict-prone regions in today's world. Building on a previous study constructed by Collier and Hoeffler covering economic sources of conflict in Africa, the authors investigate why the Arab world is characterized by weak political institutions and strong amounts of tension. They refine an important perception concerning why there is so much civil disruption in the region. First, there are high levels of grievances over the state of affairs in Middle East countries. Citizens are beset with very real problems in their polities, particularly issues over economic inequality, political disenfranchisement, ethnic conflict, and spiritual polarization. In the midst of all this exists the central concern over natural resource dependence, specifically the influence of oil on the political and economic systems of Middle East nations. Although the region differs from Africa in that there aren't (yet) rebel groups engaged in armed strife

and “loot-seeking” over oil resources, the region is characterized by heavy amounts of “rent-seeking” throughout. Middle East regimes have become quite adept at holding off calls for economic and political reform. They’ve achieved expert proficiency in using the “carrot and stick” of oil revenue to keep their citizens pacified. Sørli, Gleditsch, and Strand conclude that without improved management of natural resources, as well as improvement in the political institutions that have so far developed entirely around oil spigots, the Middle East will not now or in the immediate future see a sudden flowering of transparent, legitimate democracies (2002).

This key factor of oil wealth is often referenced in discussions over political transformation, especially in the Middle East. Three separate causal mechanisms act in combination inside entire states. The first effect is the aptly-named rentier effect. This takes effect through the government’s use of fiscal power to negate the public’s attempts to express political will. When the public demands amendments to the how the government rules—in the few cases where there may even be a published constitution to begin with—the authorities can literally outspend the public and pacify the outspoken amongst them, overpowering the effects of broad social capital. Through patronage, authorities can buy off political opponents while also purchasing outright the support of more complicit, pliable elements of the public. This can have a possible dilatory effect on social capital, as trust is replaced by expectations and reliance on outright bribery.

Governments in the Middle East have enormous resources when it comes to budgeting efforts to secure patronage (Ross 2001). They can also point out to the public that since they don't collect any taxes (as is often the case in oil-wealthy states) there is no reason for the citizenry to complain in the first place about how the government rules. This is a key element of the entire effect; policies that trim the reliable, unchecked sources of wealth for governments and force them to tax and spend wisely will in turn boost calls for transparency and openness (Ross 2004). Running through all of this, also, is the consideration over who might pressure the government in the first place, i.e. whether or not the public can actually exert combined pressure on the ruling authorities. The entire effect knocks the legs out from underneath public opposition before it can even form through the precise use of government largesse. Authorities can squeeze out attempts for group formation anywhere in between the level of the state and individual, leaving only the family or tribe as the sole units of social cohesion (Ross 2001). Even when it comes to official government branches, like the legislature, ruling regimes can decide to appoint members rather than hold open elections; this is an extreme case of patronage at work, if nothing else.

This leads to the importance of the repression effect, wherein resource wealth in rentier states is used for the all-out extermination of political disobedience. Such harsh measures as secret investigations and official torture are alive and well in many Arab and Islamic countries (they seem to be on the

comeback trail here as well, but that's another matter). Moreover, the nature of how oil is extracted and delivered leads to despotism, scholars argue. By way of explanation, consider that natural resources such as oil don't flow as easily as some may metaphorically wish; rather, in the course of extracting and securing oil, states have to work strenuously to suppress (or sometimes even promote) ethnic, communal, or sectarian tensions. They also have to guard their natural bounty against greedy neighbors, who might be inclined to invade and occupy their precious oil fields. In light of this, it's no stretch to understand why oil-wealthy nations spend heavily on both their internal and external security apparatuses (Ross, 2001).

Thirdly, rentier states exhibit strenuous resistance to the democratization effects that other transitioning states may enjoy, at least partially. Scholars have outlined the direction and impact of social and cultural changes on the adoption of democracy. Economic wealth plays a key part in this process, in that it is through the wider work of market mechanisms that individuals and groups grow beyond restrictive state systems, thus demanding representation and freedom. It is important to stress here that this is a social process, not a purely political one. If there was a direct line of causation between economic wealth and democracy, then rich states such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would have become rapturous democratic havens. But they are not, because of the hypothesized effect of oil wealth as an active constraint on democratization. As discussed above, the

inhibiting effects override any contribution to broad development of social capital. Rather than helping match trust and civic engagement to political activity, oil wealth may have a disruptive effect (Ross 2001). In particular, the manner in which the rentier system shifts the emphasis between deep trust and reciprocity by repeated interactions to tight bonds of communication and reward between the privileged few is essential to the query of whether wide reserves of social capital can impact political action in the Middle East.

Gender and Social Capital

In assessing the literature on social capital, the matter of gender difference appears often, both as a subject of experiments comparing female and male behaviour in game-theory types of situations as well as a point of interest when discussing broad differences between how men and women engage in voluntary associations. Below, I address literature on trust formation and then civic engagement in associations where gender differences come into focus.

Innocenti and Paziienza (2006) looked for variation in results of an experimental game played by a group of men and then women. Their study examined whether women trusted to give more and expect less than men, and they did, as it turned out. As the authors explain, differences in attitudes towards risk and observable disparity in altruism between the two test groups indicated that, at least in the context of a turn-based psychological experiment, men and

women behave differently. Similarly, Chaudhuri and Gangadharan (2002) found that expectations of reciprocity, specifically, differ between the two genders. In keeping with the formulation that trust is built largely on expectations of return, they experimented with subjects playing an investment game. Men and women differed when it came to how much they trusted to give and how much they expected in return.

Other scholars have conducted different types of experimentation, and there does remain controversy on whether a final answer could be given to whether one gender trusts more than the other, crucially. Bonein and Serra (2006) raise the point that it all has to do with “sex solidarity” between the genders, ultimately. It suffices to say that there are differences. This debate in the literature is not entirely integral to the research question in this paper, though. The concern is less over whether women will only trust women, or men only men, but rather whether generalized trust in combination with civic associationalism can lead to political activity.

A more relevant aspect of gender differentiation is how men and women engage their social surroundings differently when it comes to volunteering in associations. Going back through the decades, studies of population samples have repeatedly shown a difference in amount of civic engagement, type, and frequency between genders. For example, Scott (1957) found that the descriptive statistics showed a pronounced gap. Of all men, twenty percent more were part

of a voluntary group when compared to women (the difference was 75-56). Men have a higher number of average civic memberships, volunteering for an average of two groups at the time, whereas women only were members of one and a half groups on average. Furthermore, men made greater appearances at group meetings and events month to month. Women and men also differed in the variety of group; men engaged in fraternal and professional organizations (often ones open to only them) such as unions and professional groups, and women as a group committed themselves most to religious organizations.

Moving forward a decade and a half later, the situation appeared mostly the same. Men and women differed in the types of groups they chose to associate with (or were allowed to associate with, one must consider). Men had opportunities to join organizations to their field, and did so in higher numbers. Women belonged to different types of civic associations, and interestingly had more long-term memberships in organizations (Babchuck and Booth, 1969).

The disparities seem to have held up all the way through to today. Lin (2000) finds that when the type of association is scrutinized, there are marked differences between male and female engagement. Males have access to and enjoy membership in organizations that are different in terms of size and influence. Lin points out that this likely has much to do with homogeneity of these associations, i.e. men will have membership in associations with lots of men, and furthermore if there is a hierarchy to be climbed within the association, men can

more readily move up. For women, there is an observed difference. The types of voluntary groups are comparatively weaker and less influential, in other words disadvantaged by comparison. Interestingly, the relevance of child-rearing does appear in the comparison, and it is different by gender. The fact that a man has a child seemingly did not have an impact on propensity to engage in voluntary membership in associations, but for women, there was a negative effect when child-rearing became a part of their lives. It appears that traditional gender roles can translate to engagement with voluntary associations. Where the assigned task of child-rearing falls to women, a society may have imbalanced levels of civic engagement. This is highly relevant to discussions of social capital, as the concept of trust and civic engagement are theorized to work in tandem, reinforcing each other. Ironically, when women and men do not work in tandem on the task of childrearing, it appears that the accumulation of social capital decreases.

Popular Support for Reform: Information and Motivation

Previous research also speaks to the specific issue of whether Muslim and Arab populations truly desire a change in their collective lot. Reporting on his analysis of public opinion polls in the Middle East, Tessler (2005) finds that although the region is known for high levels of conflict and authoritarianism, it should also be recognized for high levels of support for democracy, both in

absolute, raw affection for democracy amongst citizens of the Middle East and also their desire relative to the rest of the world. He operationalizes and measures this by employing individual survey data taken in four Middle Eastern countries. To assess support for democracies, he uses a summary of questions that relate to rating democracy as a political systems above or below other possible forms. One question asks outright for the respondent's support for democracy, asking them to state whether it is a good or bad way run a country. He also includes survey questions that ask for ratings of whether a "strong leader who does not bother with elections" is appropriate, as well as if "having the army rule the country" is appropriate. In addition, he asks respondents if they agree that "democracies are good at maintaining order" and also for their direct opinion on whether they are "better than any other form of government" (Tessler 2005, 85). The useful part of this approach to measuring support for democracy is that it takes recognized characteristics—such as a government formed by election, and independent rule by civilians, rather than the army—and directs the question towards actual sentiment. This better establishes the real, practical understanding of what it means to support democracy as an actual desire, rather than a remote concept.

Tessler finds pronounced Arab support for democratization. Still, as Tessler himself points out, the matter is not so open and shut. There is still the question of whether people in the region really do visualize democracy in the

Middle same way we might conceptualize it. In other words, democracy in an Islamic light may be closer to what Arab respondents may in fact envision. In his analysis, Tessler finds that there is in fact a division between whether or not people support secular democracy per se or if they favor Islamic democracy; the division is roughly equal. Despite a difference of opinion over the role Islamic faith should play in the Middle East, support for democracy far outstrips preference for authoritarianism.

This point is relevant to a discussion of social capital as it rounds back to the matter of its basic worth and value in a democracy (or a democratizing region). This essentially pushes back against the supposition that social capital is purely a product of regional culture, and that it can't be measured or studied in any worthwhile because it can never said to exist at all, for civilizational relations. Specifically, the rational choice and network arguments indicate that where there is a possibility of support for democratic engagement, social capital can fortify two essential elements of the equation: motivation and information.

It has long been established that political information as a measurable, identifiable commodity can be found in certain expected places. Some are obvious—newspapers, television news media, radio, official ministries, and so on. Yet even the seemingly most apolitical and innocuous of interactions can be considered part of the process of political engagement. A casual remark between coworkers, a discussion about a campaign button someone may be wearing, an

article shared between students, all of these scenarios reinforce the argument that political information appears when individuals interact with each other within some social structure (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1987). It is more the sum of the whole that becomes relevant to a discussion of how individuals learn and express their political opinions. Even if not every last social interaction can be classified as politically relevant, when considered cumulatively, the information that emerges from the “social matrix”—especially if it comes through membership in an organization—should be included in discussions of political behavior (Eulau 1986).

The quantity of associational engagement and robustness of the emerging social ties has been shown to influence political behavior aimed at reform. Early in America’s history, de Tocqueville identified the presence and popularity of open social organizations in the newly-established nation. He opined that Americans were beginning to express greater feelings of duty and commitment to their democracy with their increased social participation, particularly due to the regular civic exercises (1990).

Later in history, MacAdam and Paulsen (1993) examined whether membership in civic organizations influenced commitment to high-stakes political protests (in their study’s case, the decision to join civil rights protests in 1964 Mississippi). They assessed activism within the context of civic associationalism, i.e. whether the later was salient to the decision to engage in political action. The

conclusion was that exposure to political issues, and the awareness and consumption of information, was relatable to individual engagement in a social group, even if it wasn't a strictly political organization. It may have been religious, civic, or educational, but the effects on political action could be assessed in a similar fashion.

Above and beyond the exposure to information, there is the matter of how intellectual assessment of political issues can be expanded by social engagement. Again, even if individuals take active membership in an organization that isn't an absolute political group dealing exclusively with purely political discourse, sometimes discussions over politics might arise. This leads to debate and exposure to differing opinions. When this occurs, regardless if it leads to greater interest or commitment to a given political topic, the simple increase in awareness is relevant to future action (Mutz 2002). Thus, the intellectual flexibility acquired through civic activity is relevant to a discussion of democratization, as it connects to why individuals might come to understand the importance of free political expression in the first place.

Furthermore, the matter of trust in the source of information bears relevance. If the access to alternate sources of information is considered just by itself, without venturing into the topics of salience, strength, influence, and so on, then that alone bears relevance to the inquiry. Overall trust in information, then, bears importance to the discussion of how social capital relates to motivation. If

citizens do take on the challenge of political action, then there arises an entry point into the assessment of social capital and democratization, i.e. how both their collective and individual trust and confidence is tied to social capital. Put another way, trust in others borne out of the creation and utilization of social capital will impact motivation. John and Klein noted this in their study of boycotts, where the entire underlying reason for even attempting a boycott rests explicitly on the idea that others will actually act for the perceived common good of all (2003). There is also a cycling component, similar to the individual, repeated cycles of trust-formation in terms of individuals (discussed above) that is relevant to the collective level as well. Uphoff (2000) theorizes that social capital becomes in a way an investment that can pay out greater dividends as more and more citizens build relationships and trust through repeated interactions. This social investment itself brings returns of more formidable levels of motivation and trust in such a manner that the social well-being of all becomes realized at increasingly higher levels, it may be argued.

DATA AND METHODS

Having reviewed the literature on social capital formation and the general state of politics in the Middle East region, I can proceed beyond defining concepts to identifying and operationalizing relevant data for analysis. As advised in previous studies, the variables used in this research will be employed as part of a “most different systems” approach (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). I will use as broad a sample as possible, but look for causal patterns originating at the individual level. Building upon the lowest unit of analysis, I will inspect for individual-level activity to see how that influences the assessment. So, I employ surveys of individual viewpoints through the Middle East region and will further evaluate whether the same relationships hold by including a regional-level comparison.

Dependent Variables

I utilize a popular, long-established, and publicly-available database for both the dependent and independent sections of the analysis. The World Values Survey is part of a global initiative focused on recording how different people view selected social, cultural, and political issues. It is cross-disciplinary in that it addresses issues relevant to multiple academic fields and has a considerably large sample size. The survey instrument—which is carried out in multiple

“waves” every five years—is designed so that the same concepts can be operationalized in a variety of different languages and regions. The surveys are carried out locally by trained, professional social scientists in collaboration with a world-wide network of researchers. A single advisory board creates the initial survey, which is then tailored to all eighty countries included in the WVS. Once collected, all data is posted freely on the Internet. The WVS affords the opportunity to include individualized as well as aggregated data in studies of political and social temperament. With regards to social capital and political action, even though the questions as designed are not necessarily pure considerations of social capital and specific activity as far as date, time, and place, they are many choices that can be assembled into reliable proxy indicators.

Petitions, boycotts, and lawful demonstrations are the three dependent variables pulled from the WVS for this inquiry. They are chosen because they specifically measure propensity and desire to take democratic action. Crucially, this measurement must focus on actual will, as the overall aim of this research is to see whether generalized trust and civic engagement will translate into actual political activity. The variables used come from the response to this question:

I’m going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it, or would never, under any circumstances, do it. 1) Sign a petition, 2) Joining in boycotts, 3) Attending lawful demonstrations.

The response range for these questions is set up in the WVS so that each corresponds to a numeric value. A value of zero is the lowest willingness to take democratic action, i.e. “would never do” any of the three activities. A value of three denotes the highest propensity to take political action, in other words, a respondent has exhibited the most desire or actual activity with regards to political action. I sum the responses together so that there is a maximum score given to those who have done all three.¹

Independent Variables

I focus on putting the concept of social capital into measurable form by selecting two independent variables related to features of trust and civic engagement. I also include education, as it has relevance to political action.

In the literature, the idea of defining and measuring social capital has been reviewed and discussed extensively. I follow the approach put forth by Putnam (1993, 1995), who emphasizes two adjoining concepts underpinning social capital: *civic associationalism* and *trust*. The two components emerge from the treatment and definition of social capital as the elements that feature most often

¹ See Appendix A for frequencies on all variables

² The “free” countries are Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

when we think of social life—that is, the cultural precepts and networks that together encourage and engender association and cooperation amongst people bonded in some way by local community and wider nationhood.

The WVS includes an extensive panel of questions dealing with aspects of civil life and trust. I take two that engage directly with the matters of civic participation and generalized trust in others. One question reads:

In general would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can never be too careful when dealing with people? 1) Most people can be trusted 2) Can't be too careful/Have to be careful

The cognitive and behavioral aspects behind why people trust and whether they will extend this trust to taking democratic action does raise relevant considerations of how a survey can fully encompass individual perceptions for wider comparison. Social capital as expressed in the levels of trust involves the examination of a multi-faceted notion, one that can be distilled in a variety of different ways even when the respondents are from the same region, nation, or household, for that matter. Still, as Hardin (2006) points out, there is utility in asking the same question about trust, for comparative purposes, especially if the question does not include the suggestion of theorizing what trust constitutes one or way another. Appropriately, the question used in the WVS leaves the theorizing about circumstances, risks, and utility of trust itself to the respondent. This allows for the possibility of broader analysis. Furthermore, it is helpful that this survey question touches on concepts of generalized trust, by including that

necessary, elemental key word. As discussed in the literature review, generalized trust occupies a slightly separate space than other forms of trust. As Ulsaner (2002) points out, trust can be thought of in exclusively moralistic terms. People may decide to trust others out of moralistic duty, in other words. However, for purposes of this investigation, generalized trust must be operationalized. This is trust in others that is not based on concrete ties in concrete contexts, built on an unshakeable moral base. Rather, it is trust of the type that people share with strangers, and it is given at a level beyond the belief that it is simply benevolent and good to do so.

The question touching on civic participation is presented to the subjects of the study as follows:

Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member, or not a member of that type of organization?

There are eight responses given as possible choices, including an “other” category. These include local community organizations, women’s-oriented groups, general recreational groups, specific sporting associations, professional organizations, youth groups, and social welfare groups. A higher count of memberships (between inactive and active both) will be assembled to give a score of civic participation. This spotlight on how participation—also referred to as civic associationalism—can influence the propensity to take political action is one of the more widely-recognized themes in social capital research. Paxton

(2002) views the interdependent relationship between civic associationalism and democracy as an important feature of established democracies. Participation and civic engagement affords the opportunity for citizens to explore associational life as volunteer participants, and all the attendant experiences that go along with such activity serve as a sort of test-bed for political action. Groups of people participating working on issues of interest with each other, especially in the context of associations dealing with issues they view as germane to their quality of life, engages discourse and mobilization that becomes a critical part of democratization (Paxton, 2002). So, I choose every variety of association covered in the World Values Survey, to see if membership correlates with the motivation and will to take political action.

There is an important debate regarding whether social capital—both in terms of network trust and civic associationalism—is really just a function of *education*. Democratic action, in other words, does not occur thanks to social capital but rather education, since that is what produces the atmosphere for enlightened civic engagement. So, I include a WVS survey response regarding education, in order to ascertain the part it plays. Specifically, I choose the measure of education attained. This starts with none at the low end and rises through ordinal responses until reaching full completion of a university diploma at the high.

Hypotheses

My hypotheses are arranged around the research question of how social capital impacts democratic action in the Middle East. I wish to establish the direction and strength of social capital in terms of trust and civic associationalism. Where there is data on individual engagement in group activities as well as trust in others, the aim is to establish whether proclivity towards political action changes. I employ statistical analysis using Spearman's rho to provide a measure of correlation between the independent and dependent ordinal-level variables in this study. The coding of results in this research is done by categories, essentially, and they are ranked from most to least. Using this measurement of association, the resulting tables will show whether a positive or negative relationship exists, i.e. whether a rise in one will produce a decrease in the other, or an increase in correlation. It can be applied to this sample accurately since it does not have stringent requirements for minimum size or specific equal grouping of results. When the results are reviewed in the coming section, the expectation will be that a perfect 1.00 shows perfect agreement, a -1.00 indicates perfect disagreement, and a 0 signifies that there is no relationship at all.

To summarize:

Hypotheses One: This is the influence of generalized trust on democratic action. The more trust a respondent has, the more likely they will be to take political action.

Hypothesis Two: The second hypothesis assesses the influence civic associationalism has on democratic action. A greater amount of civic activity will have a positive effect on political action.

Hypothesis Three: This hypothesis brings in education, namely the possibility that education does a better job of explaining democratic action rather than civic associationalism or generalized trust.

I also include a comparison between two models, one for the three countries selected from the Middle East and another using established democracies. This regression model looks at civic associationalism and trust as predictors of democratic action. For the collection of democratic countries, I rely on the ratings published under Freedom House, an independent organization, to select 41² countries rated “free” in 2010. For the model covering the Middle East,

² The “free” countries are Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Northern

I use the three countries covered in the World Values Survey. All are authoritarian governments that fall under the “not free” category in the Freedom House ratings. They are further characterized by low levels of political openness. Although Egypt and Jordan in particular have active elections, as a group, according to Freedom House, none of them are countries in which the citizenry can democratically choose which party or leader they want in power. So, by comparing the two models, I can test the conjecture that trust and civic associationalism have different impacts in the Middle Eastern authoritarian states than in established democracies.

Ireland, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and the United States.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This assessment is an investigation of how social capital relates to political action in the Middle East region. In the first section to follow, the crosstabulation for each independent variable against the political action variable is presented, with the aim of understanding where, if any, the concentration of responses may be. Next, the correlation between the variables will be analyzed, in order to see how the measurements from the WVS can be tied together, if at all. From this analysis, it will be possible to determine the significance of these concepts with regards to the region. A discussion of the results and overall conclusions to be made follows in the next chapters.

Crosstabs

The general distribution of the survey responses is shown in the following tables. Each is a cross tabulation showing percentage and count at each level of response, with a column showing combined values for all three countries. By examining each crosstab, the dispersion of survey responses can clearly be seen.

In Table 1, the count for the civic associationalism survey question is shown by country as well as the region. Recall from the previous section that this part of the survey asks respondents to give a count of their group membership.

The greater number of professional, civic, health, educational, and other groups the respondent volunteers with, the higher his or her count will be when this variable is computed. I sum them together, with the lowest possible score being a zero (in other words, no civic associationalism to be found) and the highest being sixteen. Also, note that inactive membership is also examined, so the highest response means active participation in every variety of civic group, not just past membership. In examining the crosstab, it appears that overall membership in voluntary organizations is quite low. In each country, the great majority of responses combine together in the no participation area of the table. There are respondents who do engage in at least one civic association, and have active membership. This is a much smaller population, but still, it is present and they are accounted for in this wave of the World Values survey, as shown in the table.

In Table 2, the cross tabulation between trust and country is shown, along with the total for the region again. The survey question chosen essentially becomes a yes or no answer. If the respondent answers that most people can be trusted, then they are indicating that they exhibit trust. If they respond instead that one must be careful, then they are considered in another category.

Table 1: Crosstab of Civic Associationalism by Country/Region

	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Combined</i>
0 Count	1070 (89.2%)	841 (71.4%)	2590 (84.9%)	4501 (82.9%)
1 Count	0 (0%)	102 (8.7%)	229 (7.5%)	331 (6.1%)
2 Count	105 (8.8%)	120 (10.2%)	136 (4.5%)	361 (6.6%)
3 Count	0 (0%)	37 (3.1%)	34 (1.1%)	71 (1.3%)
4 Count	14 (1.2%)	43 (3.7%)	24 (.8%)	81 (1.5%)
5 Count	0 (0%)	9 (.8%)	9 (.3%)	18 (.3%)
6 Count	6 (.5%)	16 (1.4%)	10 (.3%)	32 (.6%)
7 Count	0 (0%)	1 (.1%)	2 (.1%)	3 (.1%)
8 Count	0 (0%)	4 (.3%)	7 (.2%)	11 (.2%)
9 Count	0 (0%)	2 (.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (.0%)
10 Count	2 (.2%)	2 (.2%)	2 (.1%)	6 (.1%)
11 Count	0 (0%)	1 (.1%)	1 (0%)	2 (0%)
12 Count	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.0%)	1 (.0%)
13 Count	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.0%)	1 (.0%)
15 Count	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (.0%)	1 (.0%)
16 Count	3 (.2%)	0 (0%)	4 (.1%)	7 (.1%)

Table 2 shows that generalized trust is not a widely held concept in the region. Country by country, the greater share of those surveyed indicated that they would not be too careful in trusting others. Jordan is the most trusting, where almost a third of those surveyed said that most people can be trusted. Still, this seems to indicate that generalized trust is not a widespread resource in the region. Again, the next section of the research will discuss correlation between those who do trust others and their political action—that is, how one variable may predict the other—but for now, it appears that there are low levels of trust, overall. The combined total is eighty percent say that one can't be too careful, and twenty percent exhibit generalized trust, as operationalized in this survey question.

Table 2: Crosstab of Trust by Country/Region

	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Combined</i>
Most people can be trusted	373 (31.3%)	153 (13.0%)	561 (18.4%)	1087 (20.1%)
Can't be too careful	818 (68.7%)	1024 (87%)	2484 (81.6%)	4326 (79.9%)

The crosstab shown in Table 3 covers the amounts of political activity as measured by the WVS. As discussed previously, this question is used as a measurement of propensity to take political action that would be best considered democratic nature, i.e. not violent, and with the aim of achieving a shared,

collective goal. The distribution throughout the table, as with the previous cross tabs, shows that there is great concentration in one area, but there are still responses and counts in different cells. On the whole political action is low, as measured by this operationalization of the concept.

Table 3: Crosstab of Political Action by Country/Region

	<i>Jordan</i>	<i>Morocco</i>	<i>Egypt</i>	<i>Combined</i>
1 Count	10 (.9%)	54 (6.3%)	91 (3.1%)	155 (6.1%)
2 Count	36 (3.2%)	42 (4.9%)	261 (8.9%)	339 (6.9%)
3 Count	1030 (90.4%)	606 (70.9%)	2373 (80.8%)	4009 (81.3%)
4 Count	6 (1.2%)	17 (3.7%)	21 (.8%)	44 (.9%)
5 Count	23 (2.0%)	20 (2.3%)	160 (5.4%)	203 (4.1%)
6 Count	14 (1.2%)	66 (7.7%)	6 (.2%)	86 (1.7%)
7 Count	7 (.6%)	15 (1.8%)	15 (.5%)	37 (.8%)
9 Count	1139 (0%)	2 (.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (.0%)

Correlations and Regression Model

The correlations between the variables dealing with generalized trust, civic associationalism, and education are presented in Table 4 through Table 6.

The results in Table 4 show that the statistical significance does not meet an appropriate level for all three countries when considering trust and democratic action. This does not support the hypothesized expectation presented above. Without significance to at least the .05 level, the correlation between the two variables is not reliable. Furthermore, the coefficient's low values in the case of each country—as well as the combined sum—leads to the conclusion that there are low amounts of correlation.

Table 4: Correlation between Democratic Action and Trust

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient (ρ)</i>
Egypt (n=2,930)	-.027
Jordan (n=1,133)	-.011
Morocco (n=837)	.008
Combined (n=4,900)	-.017

In Table 5 Jordan, Morocco, and the combined sample show significance to the .01 level when evaluating the correlation between membership in civic organizations and propensity to take democratic action. The value for Egypt does not have statistical significance. The highest coefficient comes in Morocco, with a value of .346 there. There is correlation, then, between respondents who are members of voluntary, civic-oriented organizations and taking democratic action as defined by participating in boycotts, petitions, and public protests. Still, though,

the overall value of coefficients are not in keeping with the hypothesized expectations. In short, even though it appears that respondents do have generalized trust in others, that trust is not doing much by way of its correlation with democratic action.

Table 5: Correlation between Democratic Action and Civic Associationalism

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient (p)</i>
Egypt (n=2,936)	-.029
Jordan (n=1,139)	.117**
Morocco (n=849)	.346**
Combined (n=4,924)	.102**
Notes: *-Significant at the .05 level **-Significant at the .01 level	

Table 6 shows the correlation between political action and level of education. Again Morocco shows the highest value and the coefficient does have significance to an acceptable level. Overall, though, the correlation coefficient for the combined total of all countries at .017 is low. Taken alongside the results from the first two tests, this indicates that the hypothesized relationships shown

in these three tables are not showing through clearly, i.e. there is weakness in the relationship.

An additional step is taken in Table 7 to compare two models, one consisting of the sample in the Middle East and another consisting of established democracies, so that the predictive strength of the independent variables can be examined.

Table 6: Correlation between Political Action and Highest Education Attained

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient (ρ)</i>
Egypt (n=2,936)	-.047*
Jordan (n=1,139)	.069*
Morocco (n=855)	.233**
Combined (n=4,930)	.017*
Notes: *-Significant at the .05 level **-Significant at the .01 level	

In Table 7 the analysis shows that there is significance for both the model with Middle Eastern countries and also the model with democracies. There is a large difference in the sample size—over 140,000 responses for the aggregate democratic countries and 5,000 for the Middle East region—yet the disparity in

comparative size does not take away from interpreting the results. The p value is below .01 for the Middle East model, so it is significant. The predictor based on civic associationalism has strong significance ($P < 0.01$), while the trusting variable does not have significance. Trust has a positive sign, but it's not significant ($p = .706$), and thus assigning statistical value to the coefficient would not be advised, as it is a weak predictor for the model.

Table 7: Regression model of Political Action versus Trust and Civic Associationalism

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>MidEast</i>	<i>Democracies</i>
Constant	3.063 (.064)	3.624 (.033)
Civic Associationalism	.174** (.011)	.327** (.041)
Trust	-.013 (.035)	.471** (.021)
No. of Observations	4894	140311
R ²	.046	.402
Notes: *-Significant at the .05 level **-Significant at the .01 level		

What's striking and important to the comparison is that the R² is much lower when compared to the model with established democracies. This value shows how much the two selected measurements of social capital can explain variance in the amount of political activity among respondents. In this linear

regression, a value of 1.0 means perfect prediction, while a value of 0 implies that knowledge of the social capital variables have no predictive value with regards to the model. Certainly, the value leaves much to be desired in the Middle East model. It is .046 there, while for the other model of democratic nations, it is .402, a much higher value. In terms of the predictors themselves, they both perform better in the model consisting of democratic nations, also. Civic associationalism has a value of .327 in the model. Trust has a positive coefficient, .471, and also has significance at the .01 level, which is not the case in the Middle East model. In other words, trust is a better predictor of political action in the model composed of non-Middle East countries. It carries a greater share of explanatory value, comparatively, when it comes to assessing the variance in political action by respondents. Similarly, civic associationalism stands to explain more the democracies in the model.

DISCUSSION

The most noticeable result emerging from the tables and figures above is the discrepancy in the amount of explanatory, predictive share found in the Middle Eastern model versus the model covering democracies. The directions of the two effects differ between models, also. Whereas prior studies of the hypothesized relationship between social capital in the form of trust and civic engagement have revealed a tight bond with political action, it is apparent that the two factors are not doing the same work in explaining variance in the Middle East. The results in the democratic model reinforce past observations that trust and civic associationalism work in concert inside democratic nations to influence political activity. The two predictors explain a substantial amount of variation, which can be interpreted as an indication that good democratic citizenship is predicated on trust in others and civic engagement.

Something entirely different is occurring in the Middle East model. This is in keeping with expectations regarding how social capital may work in authoritarian environments. It appears that even though there are people who have generalized trust and engage in civic pursuits by volunteering in public organizations, they do not take actions associated with political action. This might have to in part with the inertia pushing back against taking that next step. Putnam, Pharr and Dalton (2000) describe this as a “heavy rain” that prevents the all-important moment when social capital translates into democratic action. In

a sense, this becomes an overriding environmental factor. The strength of the environment constricts and prevents the full impact of social capital on political activity. Put simply, it may be that no matter how strongly individuals in the Middle East hold to the precepts of trusting others and extending themselves into civic pursuits, the authoritarian environment surrounding them may prove an insurmountable barrier. Poor confidence in being able to affect their governments and decades of dismal performance by authoritarian leadership may compound difficulties to the point where disenchantment overwhelms any possible stirring power of social capital. The propellant is thus washed out in the rain.

Returning to the vicious and virtuous circles, it is worth considering this split in light of how social trust and civic engagement in democracies came out so differently in the two models. Again, the argument is that higher levels of social capital can influence democratic performance through the way that generalized trust and widespread civic participation help to solidify the aggregation and articulation of popular sentiment (Putnam, 2000). When the circle is virtuous, as is the case in the model with developed democracies, trust and civic engagement feed back on themselves, leading to more democratic action. However when stocks of social capital are low, as they are in the Middle East model, the circle becomes vicious, and the reciprocal effects are no longer positive.

There is contextual evidence supporting this observation from other studies of social capital in non-democratic environments. Robteutscher (2002)

examined the quality of civic associationalism with regards to democratic ideals in an undemocratic environment, namely early twentieth-century Germany. He observes that the quasi-automatic assumption that proper, healthy, and efficiently-functioning civic associations have recognizable, positive influence on democracy in general is misleading. If the overall atmosphere is undemocratic to begin with, then the associative life itself will reflect this lack of overall democracy. It is true that the absence of associations would foreshadow dangerous warning signs for democratic culture, as extreme individualism and egocentrism are not conducive to democratic ideals. But, even with strong associations, there is always the consideration that they reflect general trends, and the trends were not democratic in Germany at the time, to say the least. In the case of the authoritarian states of the Middle East, just because there is sociability on some level in the form of civic participation does not seem to be causing any clamor for democracy, in a sense.

Stepping back again to the wider issue, there is still the matter of how much and to what extent associational enterprises can influence and inspire democratic ideals in the first place. This is part of a larger debate in the scholarly community, one that has already appeared when discussing political transformations in different regions of the world, for example post-Communist transformations in Eastern Europe or transitions to democracy throughout the Latin American region. The cleavage can be identified between arguments for a

hopeful view of the utility of social capital generated by associational engagement, and a less optimistic camp that remains unconvinced about the possibilities of a relationship in the first place.

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, the analysis of the above data and findings will be summarized and examined. The formation of social capital and the investigation of the Middle East context will be discussed in light of the empirical results. Also, a summary of how the latest events must be considered with regards to formulating improvements to future research is included as part of the summation.

Broadly speaking, there are several conceptual aspects to social capital that will be highlighting. The network features of social capital—how networks contribute to the accumulation of social capital, especially—are relevant considering the events of this year so far, the “Arab Spring” of 2011. Also, there is the matter of how the finer aspects of social capital can be best conceptualized and characterized in the future, considering how differently ideas such as civic associationalism can be reconsidered in an era where voluntary engagement can take many new, alternate forms, thanks to advances in online social interaction.

Summary of Findings

Research into how social capital impacts political action in the Middle East is obviously going to expand considering recent events. In this paper, I have presented an analysis of how trust in others and civic associationalism predicts

the likelihood of political action in the Middle East. The substance of the results indicates that social capital does not work the same way in the authoritarian environments there as it does (or is expected to do) in other developed, well-established democracies. To start with, this makes the question I raise in my introduction of how to aid the process of democratization a decidedly tough one. Even in the context of countries with healthy stores of social capital and solid histories of democracy, it would be hard to see what policy conclusions to take from an investigation of the causal relationships behind trust and democratic action. There are broad recommendations that can always be suggested—improving education, directing funds to voluntary organizations, ensuring the proper, necessary legal background for trust to flourish—but these can be made independent of any advanced understanding of how the mechanisms of generalized trust and civic togetherness function. So, I can't address conclusively how to break what appears to be a vicious cycle of low social capital and lack of broad political action in the Middle East.

Based on the findings, though, there are indications of how the analysis can be refined and further validated. It is apparent from the pallid connections between social capital and democratic action in the Middle East model that there are further details which require attention. The civic associationalism predictor was significant, so civic activity is producing some amount of explanatory impact in the regression model. If it isn't raising propensity

for democratic action, though, then it may be that within the Middle Eastern countries a different quality of social capital is being produced in civic associations. The organizations flourishing there should be further examined. If they are cultivating the types of social bonds that are not cross-cutting and helping to bridge differences between people, then they might instead be producing social capital of the bad, “thick” variation. Putnam (2000) points out that it can be quite detrimental if the type of civic association only serves to reinforce narrow, heterogeneous membership and aims, and this may be the case within authoritarian countries of the Middle East. There simply may not be a wide enough base of civic associations, and this fact is crucial to the evaluation. Again, the connection between social capital and possible later developments is built upon a claim that, in its purest essence, trust breeds trust. The state can manufacture trust—and as often the case with authoritarian nations, they aim to do this exclusively—but it is the informal interaction that may occur in a sports league, book of the month club, or volunteer health organization that leads to greater trust and *cooperation* amongst strangers (Levi 1996).

The trust component of the model itself requires amplification, then. Since it is not acting as a catalyst for political action according to the data—as is apparent by the poor job generalized trust does in explaining variance in the regression model—then it may not be producing healthy social capital. The “oil curse” and associated impediments to democratic action may be standing so

firmly in the way that social capital withers as a useful fuel for democratization. Jamal (2007) reflects upon this, pointing out that the severe restrictions on freedom and movement mightily impact the vitality of civic associations in the Arab region. While organizations can survive in the context of wide-spread authoritarian repression, he observes that their actual impact on democratic action is hampered by the multiplicity of barriers arrayed against free expression and movement. There are other historical parallels to consider, as well. Just because there is active associational engagement within a society, built on widespread trust and reciprocity, does not mean that widespread, free flowing political action must result. Again, the impediments may be too large, especially within a constrictive overall setting. Consider that between the two World Wars, as mentioned earlier, there were hugely diverse and potent social organizations in Germany, organized from the top-down, covering every variety of family, sport, cultural, and social pursuit. And yet, as the organizations and the engagement were ultimately arranged for a single purpose, no matter how strong the linkages and growth in trust, it cannot be said that social capital had an independent, objective, positive impact by most observers (Berman 1997).

In a way, social capital is a multiplier for possible good political action and possibly bad; or, put another way, high social capital doesn't itself automatically, independently become the antidote for repression. Recall that in the WVS panel study the respondents were asked about their participation in a political

demonstration, which is used as part of the dependent variable in this study. A respondent may have participated in a demonstration with express political purposes—say a protest over a foreign policy issue, perhaps concerning the state of Israel or US involvement in the Middle East—but they may have done so on orders to do so. In other words, independent social capital that could have contributed to political interest and desire to take action may have had little to do with it, and attendance at a demonstration may simply have been compulsory.

Study Limitations and Future Research

In order to further explain the puzzle, then, it would be necessary to open the details of social capital formation in the region up for inspection, as trust and civic engagement as operationalized by the WVS data do not stand alone in this investigation as the driving factors behind political action in nondemocratic environments. Rather, it appears that the stamina of the region's long-standing authoritarian regimes remained undiluted in 2005, despite the social capital factors that are theorized to have such an important contribution to democratic societies.

What appears to be different now, perhaps, and what has broken through, is the method and mode of social interaction. The data as addressed here was culled from a period before the onset of new, different types of social

collaboration that may not have been expressed during the first half of the 2000s. Specifically, the intensification of online social interaction through the Internet has been referred to as integral in discussions of why social protest arrived with such suddenness this year. This wasn't necessarily an expectation or prediction, but there has been a growing amount of scholarly focus on the way the potent capabilities of social capital are amplified when the web is introduced as catalyst (Shirky 2008, Rheingold 2002). That being said, there are still those that argue against giving any sort of credence to the idea of blogging, tweeting, and Facebooking as total game-changers, and remind us that online culture for the most part remains transitory. To expand, the arguments against overloading on the importance of social media and online interaction center around the increasing shift away from engaging forms of networked communication to the generic, diary-like communication that encourage socializing online just for the sake of visibility and pseudo-celebrity. With regards to political expression, the argument is that online interaction thus becomes less about communication and informational discourse—the elements behind social capital—and more about bland broadcasting and phatic communication (Marwick and Boyd 2011; Grant et al 2010, Miller 2008).

Even so, the concept deserves attention, and in the context of surveys of political behavior, it can be operationalized and added to such studies as the WVS used here. This is the major limitation of this research project, yet also the

most opportune area for testing the relevance of social capital developed through online media, as it were. Since each successive mass protest and revolution this year in the Middle East—starting with Algeria and spreading to almost every other country on the map in both directions—came after the widespread appearance of the Internet and online forms of social engagement, then the addition of this variable may prove helpful. I would suggest that the next panel of the WVS include just such a measurement, i.e. a survey question to elicit more information on whether civic engagement and trust developed through the use of social media has correlation with political action and subsequent democratization. It may be further beneficial to inquire along these lines in order to learn how the vitality of online civic associationalism in the context of the Middle East might work differently. If we suppose that groups of interested citizens have online outposts where they can engage each other, learn to trust one another, go through the cycles of motivation and reciprocity that reinforce the strength of social capital, then that may inform the relationship between the variables addressed in this study. To be specific, I would form a question along these lines for use in the next wave of the WVS:

I am going to read of a list of different social networking applications. For each, please respond if you have ever created a personal profile on the site: 1) Facebook 2)Twitter 3) MySpace 4) Google+

The aim of such a question would be to gather data on social networking use. This would be an opening to then further tease out facets of group

membership and online political participation as measurements that can be considered alongside traditional scales of civic associationalism and generalized trust.

What is opportune about recent events, also, is that they essentially provide a mass natural experiment from which to draw data. This introduces the opportunity to shift away from survey methods of inquiry, even beyond such broad comparative datasets such as the WVS. While it may not be possible to reproduce with absolute fidelity the motivations behind why so many individuals in the Middle East decided to take political action, it would be possible to reconstruct whether social capital influenced matters.

As an experiment, it would be possible now to examine retrospectively whether generalized trust in others and a desire to join in public demonstrations and boycotts were identifiable as individuals began to engage each other through the Internet. The most direct way to do this is to examine what they themselves might have declared online, as data points can now be built based on what individuals themselves expressed day to day or even moment to moment as the revolutions built steam. Thankfully, with the increased adoption of social networking tools comes the increasing opportunity to collect people's opinions, as they are often quite willing to offer it up, unprompted. Taking openly available information, it would be possible to ascertain what motivations were expressed by what segments of the Arab public, and at what point in each case; harvesting

this information would be a matter of searching and collecting, then analyzing and computing for content and sentiment (Shah and Yazdani 2011). Certainly, there will be no shortage of new information emerging from the Middle East region on how social capital informs political action in the coming years, particularly social capital as expressed through new media. What is tantalizing about online social capital is that the technology itself affords certain self-sustaining characteristics to the discussion. Online social interaction can be measure to exact seconds, and recorded and reviewed in a much more expansive fashion. Even if it's largely anonymous, and there's no guarantee of who anyone is in real life, there are still reputational aspects to online social interaction. In other words, it's possible to know who you are communicating and collaborating with, as how much to trust them, based on someone's standing within a virtual social network. Plus, in a way online social interaction can eliminate the roadblocks to social capital building in person. People don't have to dress appropriately and judge or be judged by their fellow group members, for example. They can meet online, at any time of the day, and the various issues that may impede interaction in person become less of a concern when there is zero sensory interaction going on (Resnick 2002). People can choose to participate fully in an online social group without ever needing to disclose a single thing about themselves, something that just isn't possible when they have to meet and organize in person (Ellison and Lampe 2007).

In terms of baseline demographics, the presence of online social venues is highly relevant to an examination of the Middle East region. There is today one consistent feature of this part of the world: in every country, there are far more young people under the age of 30 than there are older citizens, and amongst these youth, there are far higher levels of education. Following that, there is a widespread, vocal desire amongst these members of society for greater opportunity and access to employment, advancement, and an overall stake in the future of their respective nations. Many of these youths are also become well-versed in online social media as communication tools, and are learning to interact online in new and different ways. To clarify, there is a distinction between surveying individuals and teasing out their commitment to volunteering for organizations and their trust in others and on the other hand how they might engage each other online. However, there is an opportunity to capture the motivations of those who might contribute to and benefit from social capital even if they don't do it in a traditional manner. Put another way, there will always be people who are joiners and volunteers, as trite as it is to note this, and there are people who aren't (Klesner 2007). What's more, the people who aren't necessarily quick to join up and volunteer traditionally, in person (who may be the smart ones, considering the dangers of doing so in an authoritarian setting) may be taking their activity online, where their activity can be assessed and examined in a similar manner. It bears repeating that the primary, bold type concept behind the social capital argument is that it does not matter what form of group

participation is taking place. Rather, if it's happening, period, then it may be hypothesized that it contributes to greater things down the road, as membership in any form of organization builds the type of collective vitality that can lead to wider political action.

There are many ways in which this has happened in the Middle East, during the so called "Arab Spring" of the first half of 2011. Speaking broadly, the online engagement and collaboration came about and was sustained through a multitude of virtual venues. There were collaborative initiatives, of the sort where individuals could participate anonymously and in a turn-by-turn fashion to strategizing their political action. Early on during the Egyptian protests, groups of individuals began to share open Google documents containing protest tactics and demands. Crucially, these declarations and strategy resources could be edited by anyone, at any time, and they were not traceable or identifiable with a single person or group (Wolman 2011). There were also many blogs, a basic type of content-sharing tool authored and controlled by a single source but available to multiple users, and again—crucially—a type of focal point for virtual engagement. Most importantly during the Arab Spring, these blogs became heavily video-based, beyond just text and article types of reports. For example, soon after Libyan rebels took hold of the "second capital" of Benghazi, a blog appeared with daily video updates of events within the city. In effect, this blog became a de facto TV broadcast, even providing instant video transmissions

when available (Wells 2011). Again, this was all anonymous, decentralized, and openly available, which afforded the opportunity for other interested individuals to comment, contribute, maybe even just observe, but again, build the sort of social interaction and trust that may (or may not) have contributed to further political action. On a slightly more complex level, there was also the presence of so many social networking users during these events, average citizens on Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and the like. Now, the relationship to be examined here isn't just that they went online to these sites to learn about the protests, or where and when to engage in them. Instead, the question is whether before there were even any discussions of protesting, whether or not their engagement with fellow citizens over groups and common interests that had nothing to do with politics served as a test process for consequent action.

It is possible to assess whether the advantages of online social networking are consistent with expectations of what traditional models of social engagement might offer (in other words, the social clubs, civic groups, and community organizations referred to in the social capital literature). The Internet allows for a different way of organizing and engaging, with less cost and trouble, and in the case of authoritarian environments, with less risk and personal danger. It is plausible and reasonable, then, to study how new tools and information outposts might replicate the mechanisms of traditional social capital formation.

Previous researchers have engaged this question. Skoric et al (2009) examined the relationship between online social capital and political activity, albeit in a different part of the world, amongst the citizens of Singapore. Despite the regional difference, though, Singapore is actually a fairly useful area in which to make a comparison, as there are considerable restrictions on civil and political activity. Skoric et al first established that there were densely knit communities of Singaporeans online, and there were noticeable levels of group awareness of identity. Crucially, bonding online serves an important role, they find. There are the organizational and mobilization aspects, certainly, but there's also the matter of rejuvenation, in a sense. The new forms of sociability over the Internet translate into real life, even if they only appear initially in a supplementary fashion. However, this again is what Putnam and other theorists propose, that even if a bowling league doesn't have much to do with healthy political engagement, on the face of things, it does in fact matter.

Similarly, Feezell et al (2009) have evaluated online social networking to see if online interaction translates into offline activity. They evaluate the Groups functionality of Facebook specifically, to see how they might foster political engagement. They find that in terms of utility, online group activity can and does mirror what one might expect from traditional civic associationalism. The applications built for Facebook use involve similar uses and serve similar purposes, for example with regards to information gathering and exchange of

ideas, just as real-world groups might. Certainly, there may be shortfalls when the quality and stock of deliberative discussion, say, is examined between the online and real worlds. Using content analysis, they find that online interaction can often times lack a certain coherence and substance. Still, they conclude that being a political participant in this new era can and will have much to do with these new forms of interaction.

As shown by recent events, the newly-available social spaces accessible to citizens of Middle East countries afforded opportunities for discussion, engagement, dissent, and eventually in-person protest. It is too early to see how this will all end up, historically speaking, but the opportunities for study are great. The combined variables of political action and social capital as is traditionally theorized can be successfully joined in the context of the Middle East for further investigation and exploration, as shown by this study. This serves as an appropriate starting point, also, from which to further investigate how new forms of social capital will influence future events.

APPENDIX: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Democratic Action

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total Percent</i>
0	376	4.6
2	533	6.5
3	5117	62.8
4	183	2.2
5	376	4.6
6	209	2.6
7	114	1.4
8	91	1.1
Valid	6999	85.9
Missing	1153	14.1
Total	8152	100.0

Civic Associationalism

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total Percent</i>
0	4501	55.2
1	331	4.1
2	361	4.4
3	71	.9
4	81	1.0
5	18	.2
6	32	.4
7	3	.0
8	11	.1
9	2	.0
10	6	.1
11	2	.0
12	1	.0
13	1	.0
15	1	.0
16	7	.1
Valid	5429	66.6
Missing	2723	33.4
Total	8152	100.0

Generalized Trust

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total Percent</i>
Most people can be trusted	2130	26.1
Can't be too careful	5838	71.6
Total	7968	97.7
Missing	184	2.3
Total	8152	100.0

Highest educational level attained

	<i>Frequenc y</i>	<i>Total Percent</i>
Inadequately completed elementary education	3036	37.2
Completed (compulsory) elementary education	1068	13.1
Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type	323	4.0
Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type	485	5.9
Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type/	524	6.4
Complete secondary: university-preparatory type	1476	18.1
Some university without degree/Higher education - lower-level	349	4.3
University with degree/Higher education - upper-level tertiary	868	10.6
Total	8129	99.7
Missing	23	.3
Total	8152	100.0

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