

**ACLED Working Paper No. 6  
Collective Action in North Africa**

**Introduction:**

Sustained collective action in the lead up to, over the course of, and in the fallout from, the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 has resulted in a rising trend of riots and protests, and an intensification in the violence witnessed across these events (see Figure 1). The multiple social movements that emerged in the wake of 2011 have experienced different patterns of diffusion and varying mobilisation dynamics, with some countries witnessing largely nonviolent challenges to the state whilst others have escalated into more organised violent movements with multiple, competing actors. Despite adverse economic conditions, Tunisia organised a successful parliamentary election on the 23 October 2014 to lead the country towards a stable transition. Egypt’s attempt to establish a representative leader has created a protracted protest movement and a remote insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, whilst Libya’s initial civic uprising rapidly evolved into an armed rebellion requiring NATO-intervention and has most recently resulted in a bifurcated political landscape where two rival parliaments backed by a complex network of political militia alliances compete for political influence.

The movement from nascent collective action such as nonviolent protests, rallies and mass demonstrations to armed group rebellion is an understudied concept. Earle (2011) argues that “armed groups have often begun as a smaller subset of individuals within a mainstream move-

ment who are willing to pursue more radical strategies for political and social change by opting for violent means” (2011: 11). With this in mind, this paper seeks to identify the political opportunities available to social movements and organised groups and the mobilisation structures that condition the trajectory of collective action. The paper address how conflict dynamics in Egypt and Libya have transformed in the post-Arab Spring period with particular focus on the changes in contentious political strategies in response to changing institutional structures. In order to do this a number of thematic questions are explored within three sections of this working paper.

The first section will identify how modes of collective action and the actors involved have changed in Egypt and Libya since the Arab Spring as a response to changing elite-mass relations. The second section will provide a ‘during conflict’ perspective on how key state policies have affected modes of collective action since the Arab Spring. This section will review Egyptian state policies since 2013 to understand how state force engagement with demonstrators (both violent and non-violent) has changed since the Arab Spring and what impact this has for social cohesion, actors involved and types of collective action. The third section will concentrate on the spatial distribution of organised political violence and geographical patterns of escalation in Egypt from 2011-2015.

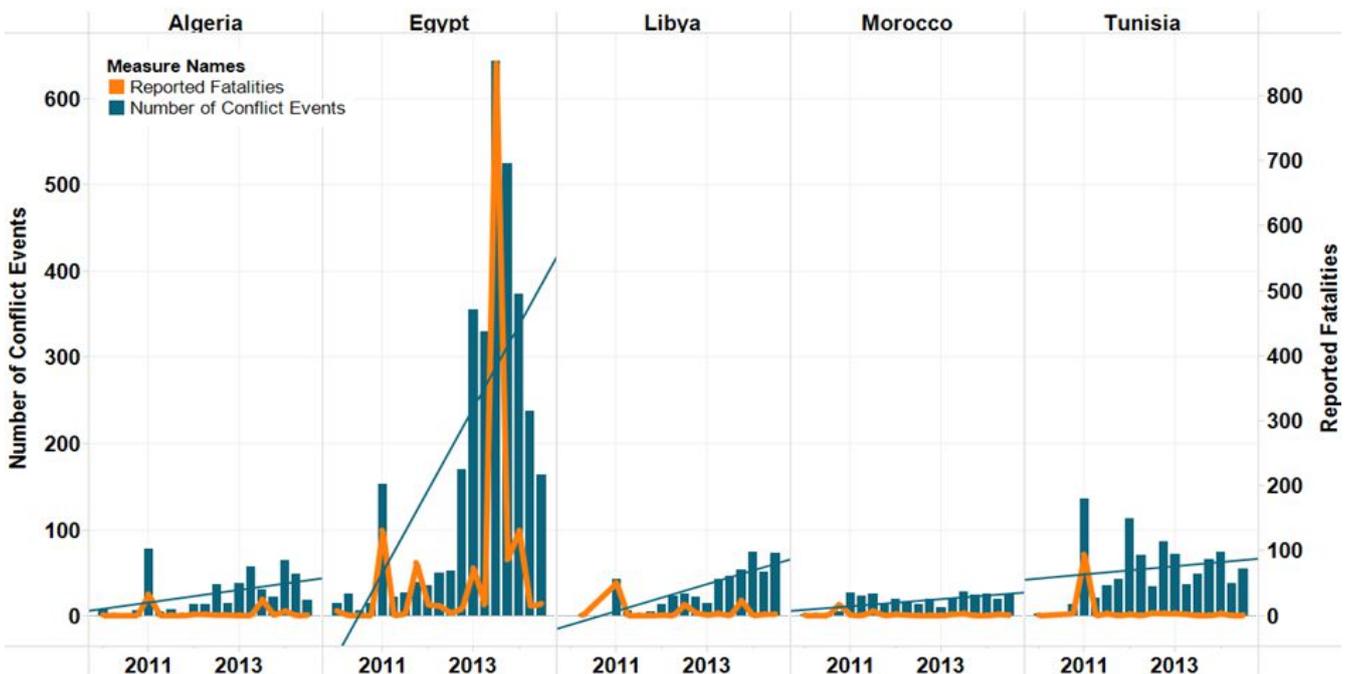


Figure 1: Number of Riots and Protest Events and Reported Fatalities by Quarter in North Africa, 2010-2014.

## Collective Action and Social Movements

To capture the diverse forms of contentious political action observed in North Africa, this paper applies Sidney Tarrow's definition of contentious politics as "collective activity on the part of claimants –or those who claim to represent them--relying at least in part on non-institutional forms of interaction with elites, opponents or the state" (1996a: 874). This allows scope to analyse challenges to political processes that are not always sustained movements or purely anti-statist in nature, but nevertheless are important political phenomena such as low-level riots and protests, that occur before, during and after major cycles of protest. Operationalising Tarrow's definition is salient in the post-revolution period as it bridges the conceptual/theoretical gap between studying civil war and collective action by enabling critical reflection on the multitude of strategies adopted by civic actors. As a consequence, this definition more appropriately reflects the diverse political environments in the post-Arab Spring episode.

Riots are violent, spontaneous groupings that target people or property perpetrated by more than one non-state actor. Protests are non-violent spontaneous organisations of civilians for a political purpose where no violence is employed. For the purpose of studying the escalation of non-violent events into violent activity, ACLED classifies events as violence against civilians when either rioters engage in violence against unarmed civilians, or protesters are the victims of violence by state forces or other armed actors. This distinction enables an understanding of collective action by highlighting potential barriers to participation in civic movements. For example, sustained violence against peaceful protesters may catalyse further uprisings as a response to government suppression. Moreover, when political organisation and a unified identity of actors is weak, state control may condition less violent activity through fear of reprisal.

## Changing Modes of Collective Action

The mechanisms employed by collective action groups vary across time and space. How a group mobilises to challenge established authority can explain both the precipitating conditions that led to the underlying grievance

and can illustrate the political opportunities and resources available to those actors in challenging their adversaries. Both of these conditions influence the strategies employed by social movements to coordinate and achieve goals, as well as the potential responses from opposition actors such as state forces. As an extension of this, a state

-society perspective on revolutions identifies how changes in the organisation and interests of political elites influences the extent of mobilisation of non-elite collective actors (Sellers, 2011).

This elite manipulation to pursue their own material interests alters the rewards of revolutionary mass action, reflected through changing group tactics and state responses. Researchers can explore the interactions of state-society actors to understand *how* and *why* political actors react to changing conditions and how this feedback process results in divergent transition outcomes. This section will explore collective action dynamics across Libya and Egypt to identify how they have

changed from the period 2010-2014, how they project distinct regional characteristics, and elucidate some of the key drivers of their shifting conflict patterns.

### Egypt

The transformation of contentious politics in Egypt is best understood by conceptualising three distinct timeframes. These are: (1) the period leading up to the initial uprising on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 (from the years 2010 – late 2012; (2) a second wave of more intense mobilisation from early 2013 – December 2013; and (3) 2014 - present day (see Figure 2).

Each of these periods witnessed changing forms and intensities of collective action in response to key state policies introduced by the Egyptian government and emerging non-state groups such as Ansar Beit-al Maqdis, an Islamist militant group largely operating in the Sinai Peninsula.

The initial swell in 2011 is largely attributed to organised nonviolent protests by civil society in response to dissatisfaction with the Mubarak regime that culminated in 'Million Man Marches' in public squares in Cairo. This period is characterised by police repression, human rights abuses, corruption and nepotism. Some of this violence was orchestrated by "Baltagiya", or people contracted by police forces to intimidate protesters. Although political par-

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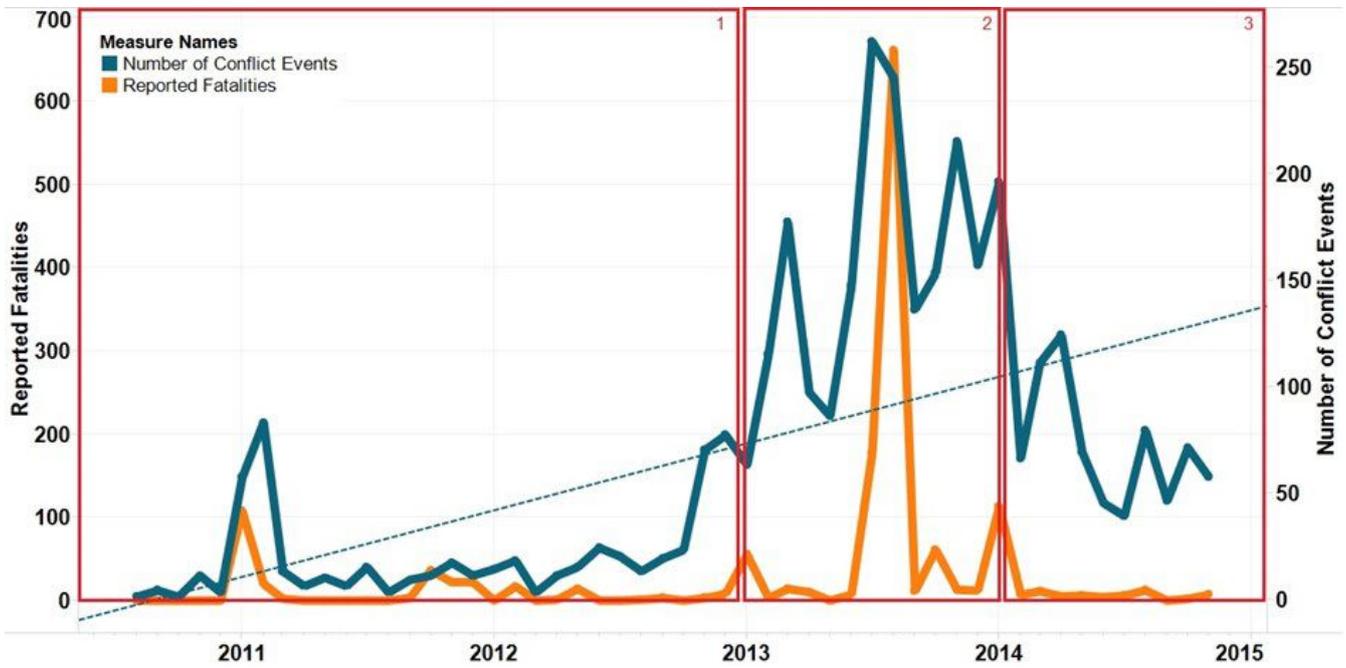


Figure 2: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities in Egypt by Stage, August 2010 - November 2014.

ties were largely obsolete in the 2011 uprising (Kuasch, 2012: 1), various social movements mobilised in the build up to this period including the April 6 Movement and Kefaya Movement, initially set up to contest a perceived succession move by Mubarak to transfer his post to his

son, Gamal Mubarak. During this period, Freedom House’s political rights and civil liberties index designated Egypt as ‘Partially Free’ from ‘Not Free’. Following the ousting of Mubarak, protests and riots returned to pre-revolution levels up until late 2012 (see Figure 3).

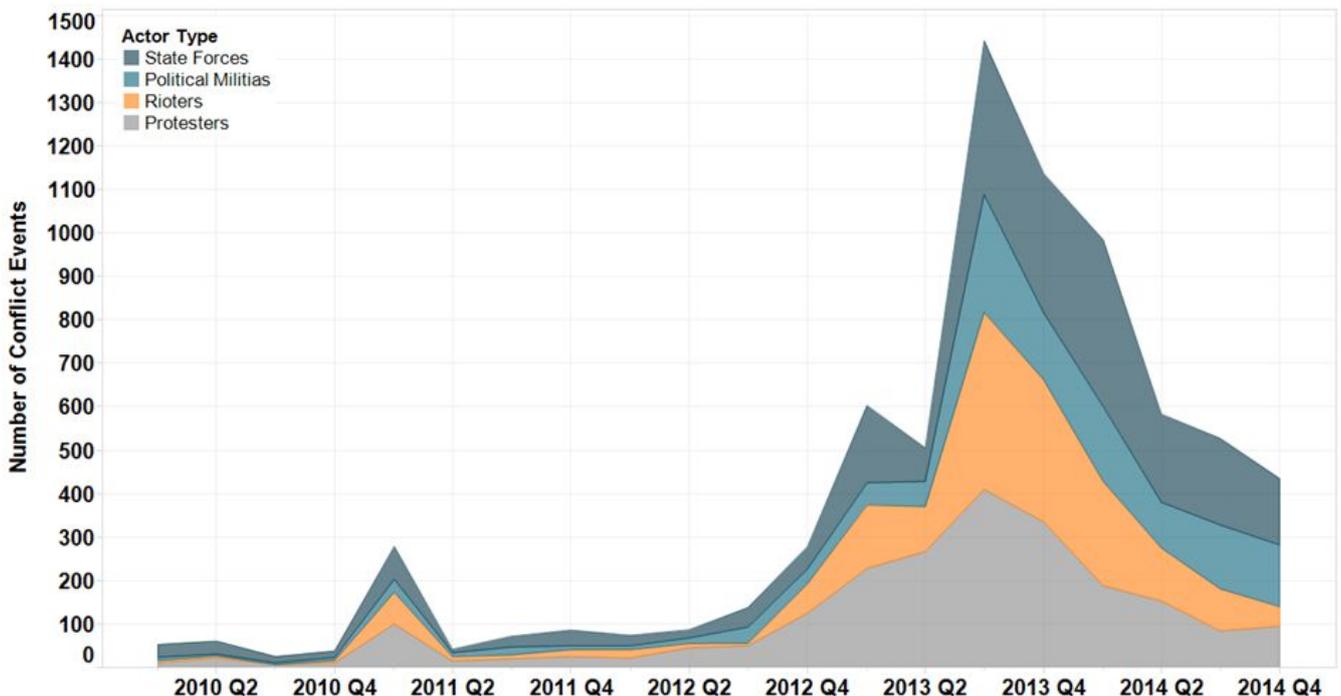


Figure 3: Number of Conflict Events by Actor Type by Quarter in Egypt, 2010 - 2014.

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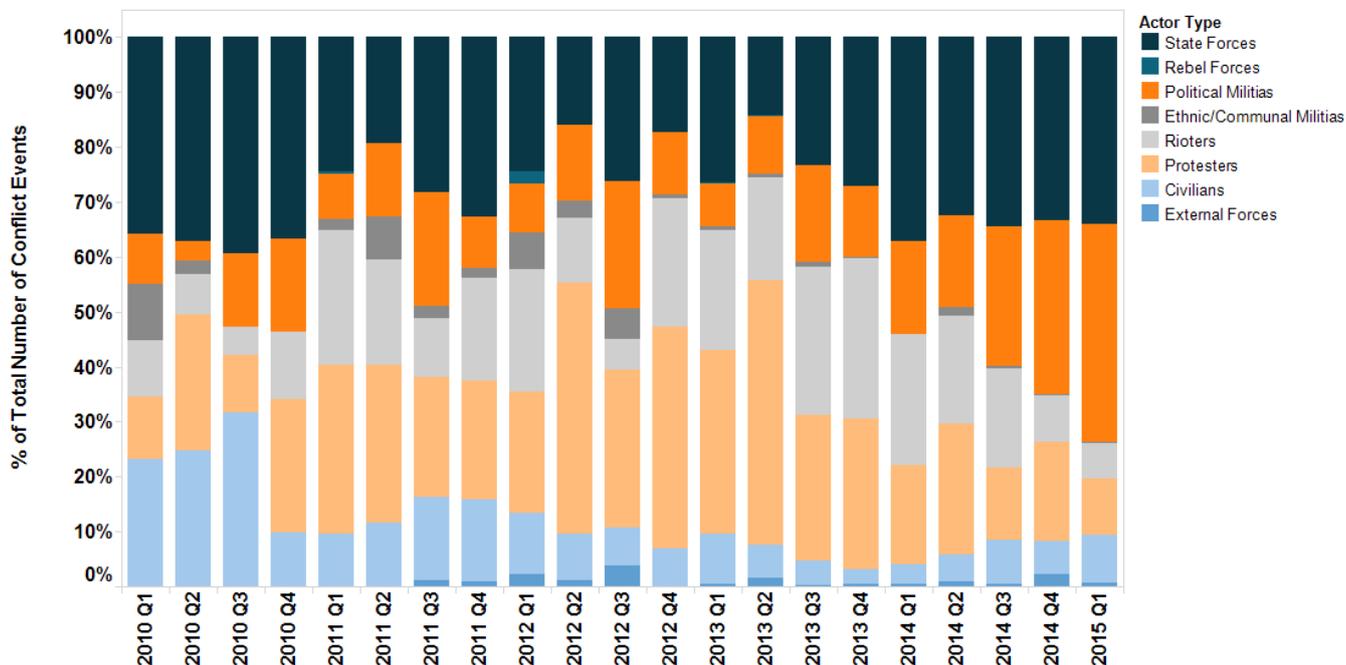


Figure 4: Percentage of Conflict Events by Actor Type by Quarter, in Egypt, Q1 2010– Q1 2015.

After the second quarter of 2013, protests declined, immediately being replaced by more violent acts of rioting. This drop in protest activity continued up to the third quarter of 2014 where they fell to their lowest levels since late 2010, constituting under 15% of all political events in Egypt. Most notably, this trend occurred concomitantly with higher levels of militant activity in the country with the emergence of violent Islamist groups and political and armed insurgent groups (see Figure 4).

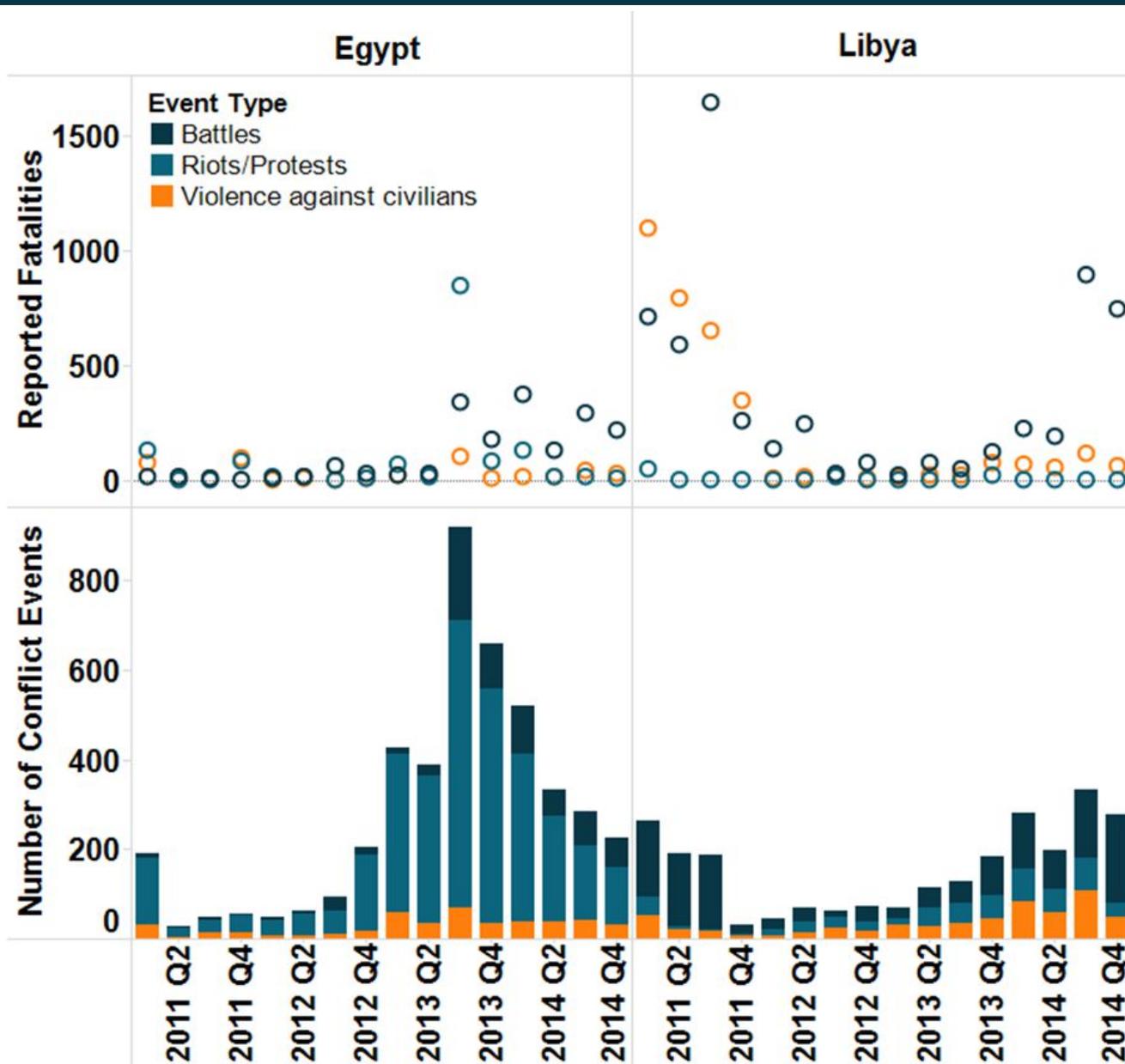
### Libya

Whereas in Egypt, continued confrontation of sustained protest by state forces drove the resurgence of Islamist militancy, from 2011-November 2014 Libya witnessed far fewer social movements in comparison (see Figure 5). However since 2011, Libya has seen a continuous, incremental rise in the number of riots and protests (see Figure 6) similar to the levels observed in Algeria (see Figure 1). This steady increase followed the ousting of Mu’ammār al-Qadhafi, who, through his ‘divide and rule’ policy that instituted tribalism, effectively prevented the formation and organisation of any opposition political institutions. This governance practice has had key impacts upon the development of collective action in Libya following the ‘opening of political space’, resulting in the emergence of multiple, competing actors, with diverse ideological, political and religious agendas. After the 2011 civil war, the National Transitional Council (NTC) allowed the estab-

lishment of 130 political parties (Al Jazeera, 3 July 2013). However, many of these entities were local in nature, lacking national representation and reflecting the informal networks of patronage established under Qadhafi’s rule (although this was partly addressed through the political isolation law of 2013).

Whilst Libyan protests level show a similar path to Algeria, the average number of battles is 119% higher. More prescient than the gradual rise in civic demonstrations is the explosive confrontations between an increasing number of political militias; violence against civilians has taken a more central role in the tactics of non-state actors. The destabilising impact of these armed groups have played a large role in catalysing the observed increase in riots and protests as many Libyan cities have witnessed demonstrations in support of, or denouncing the non-institutionalised nature of the Libyan security sector.

There are multiple ways to understand why Libya has witnessed such a radical variation in conflict patterns vis-à-vis the rest of North Africa. “Mobilisation into social movements varies as opportunities for collective action open and close, allies appear and disappear, political alignments shift, and elites divide and cohere” (Tarrow, 1996b: 54). Building on this idea, the following sections will identify changes in the political environment that provided opportunities for nonviolent and violent political groups to emerge and escalate from one form to another.



Figures 5: Number of Conflict Events and Reported Fatalities by Type in Egypt and Libya, Q1 2011-Q4 2014.

### Changing Actors in Collective Action

It is well documented that divisions within the dominant elite classes provide the opportunity for non-elite revolutionary action to emerge, but the changing influence and positions of these groups, once the autocratic leaders have been deposed, has been less explored.

Office-seeking theories contribute to our understanding of the interactions between political adversaries during regime transitions by drawing attention to the motivations of elites and their bargaining processes to attain power in

the executive (Riker, 1962). However, these models often relegate the role of collective actors in contributing to changing governance and institutional structures.

A leader's survival depends on institutions, access to free resources and revolutionary threats (Buono de Mesquita (2010: 949). As existing institutions and elite structures are revised, and the spoils of office are open to contest during transition periods, it is logical to examine how elite-non-elite relations have been reconfigured, to understand how the initial regime challenges have been redi-

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rected by the subsequent competition for power post-uprising.

A comparative study of Egypt and Libya demonstrates how and why collective actors mobilise in response to changing power relations, providing a foundation to understand how state-society configurations effect the movement from non-violent to violent collective action. By focusing on the positions of elites vis-à-vis other autonomous collective actors, this section will focus on how the consolidation or divergence of power bases after the 2011 uprisings has both enabled and restricted the emergence of new actors, facilitated shifting alliances, and impacted the performance of power that shapes the forms of collective action.

**The Muslim Brotherhood and Marginalisation from the Formal Political Process**

Figure 7 shows the most active groups identified as being involved in riots or protests in each year from 2011-2014. The graph reveals that, since 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood accounted for the highest proportion of riots/

protests, rising to 61.5% in 2014. In 2011 however, they initially exhibited reluctance to participate in protests, occupying a much smaller role than the Kifaya movement, police forces and Christian groups who dominated the political space (see Figure 7).

Across the Arab region, “Islamist discourse that was expected to dominate social movements has been challenged by much simpler yet more profound frames centred around basic individual rights and freedoms” (Joffe, 2011: 516) such as economic and civil rights reflected in Egyptian demands for ‘bread, freedom and social justice’. Acknowledging that the Muslim Brotherhood leadership did not initiate the first calls for socio-economic reform and the casual distinctions between secular and religious groups are insufficient in understanding what motivated participants in the revolutions (Fadel, 2011) what explains the progressive rise and subsequent dramatic fall in Muslim Brotherhood backed protests?

I argue that counter to ideological or social motives, the Arab Spring acted as a pivotal moment of institutional transformation that provided fertile ground for the Muslim Brotherhood to maximise their political position within

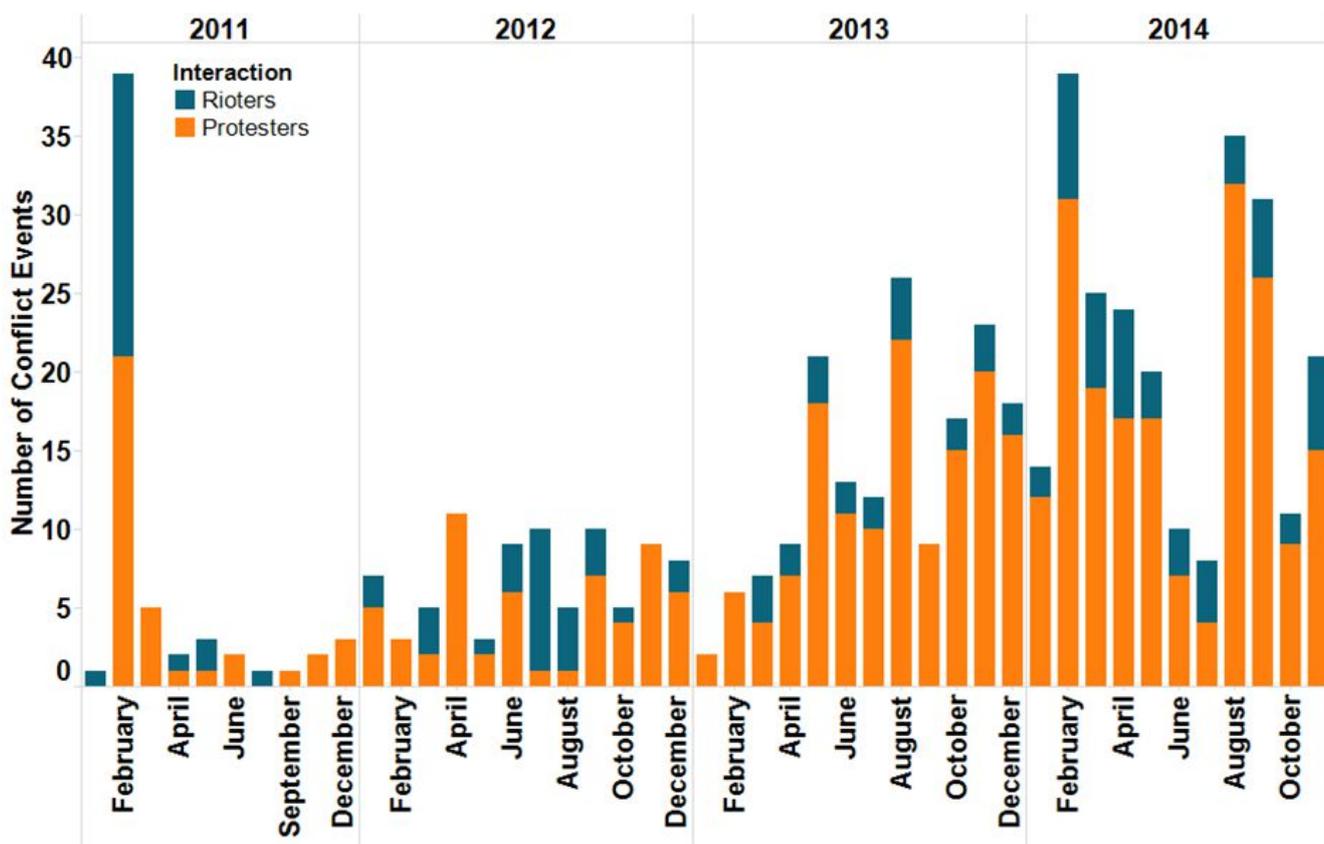


Figure 6: Number of Conflict Events by Rioters and Protesters in Libya, 2011 - November 2014.

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the emerging system of governance. The conflict dynamics that resulted were informed by pre-revolutionary political realities and reflected political bargains that developed out of regime breakdown. As such, the contentious rise in Muslim Brotherhood protests since 2011 relative to other organised groups and political parties holds important lessons about the shifting centres of power and real drivers of change, namely the Egyptian military forces.

Under the Mubarak regime, the Muslim Brotherhood were excluded from the political decision-making process and their members were subject to harassment and abuse. Under this marginalised position, the movement utilised grassroots networks and played a significant role in informal Egyptian life. With the ousting of Mubarak in February 2011, the opportunity structure shifted and their organisational capacity was superior to the fragmented liberal opposition parties, enabling them to occupy a dominant electoral position.

A similar process of unfamiliar political competition occurred in Tunisia where political parties flourished after the revolution with over 100 participating in the legislative election in October 2011 (Kausch, 2012). Yet, whilst both Tunisia’s Ennahda party and the Muslim Brotherhood had significant grassroots influence and opportunities to seize power, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to consolidate that opportunity into power, due to their myopic desire to capture power rather than a coordinated transition with oth-

er groups. This led to the eventual ousting of Mohamed Morsi that provoked sustained and violent riots with security forces culminating in the Rabaa Square Massacre in August 2013.

Power was never truly captured by Egyptian citizens who demanded political representation. Although the transitional process achieved the ousting of Mubarak, power ultimately resided with former-regime cadres and the military forces. State elites marginalised the ‘revolutionary groups’ who characterised and catalysed the initial uprising – political movements and activists, lawyers, citizens, journalists, students – from the formal political process and repression of state challengers has reduced the leverage with which non-violent groups can act. As a result of

this, from 2012-2014 the demographic of nonviolent collective action broadened, with student groups voicing their dissatisfaction across university campuses nationwide (see Figure 7).

This relative stability of elite alignment (McAdam, 1996) compared to Libya may also explain why these same protesters have not shifted their strategies to large-scale violence as witnessed in Libya. More recently, protests and riots have started to feature less as repertoires of contention for social actors, and leading up to the final quarter of 2014, political militias have taken on a more prominent role in Egyptian conflict.

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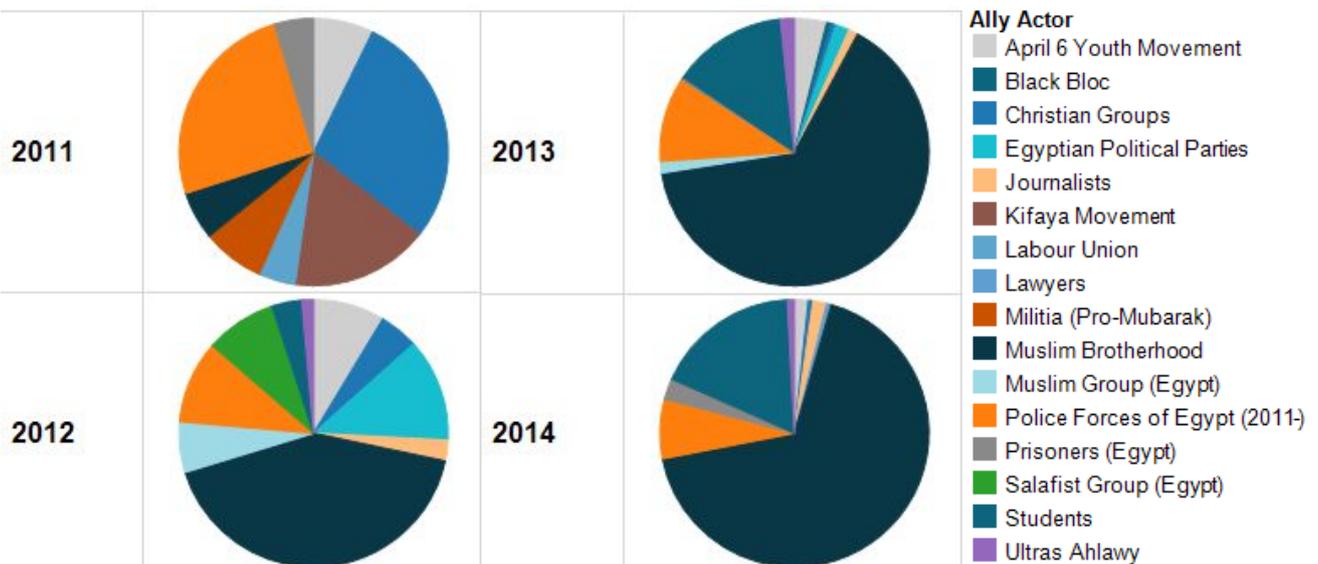


Figure 7: Number of Conflict Events by Actor in Egypt, 2011-2014.

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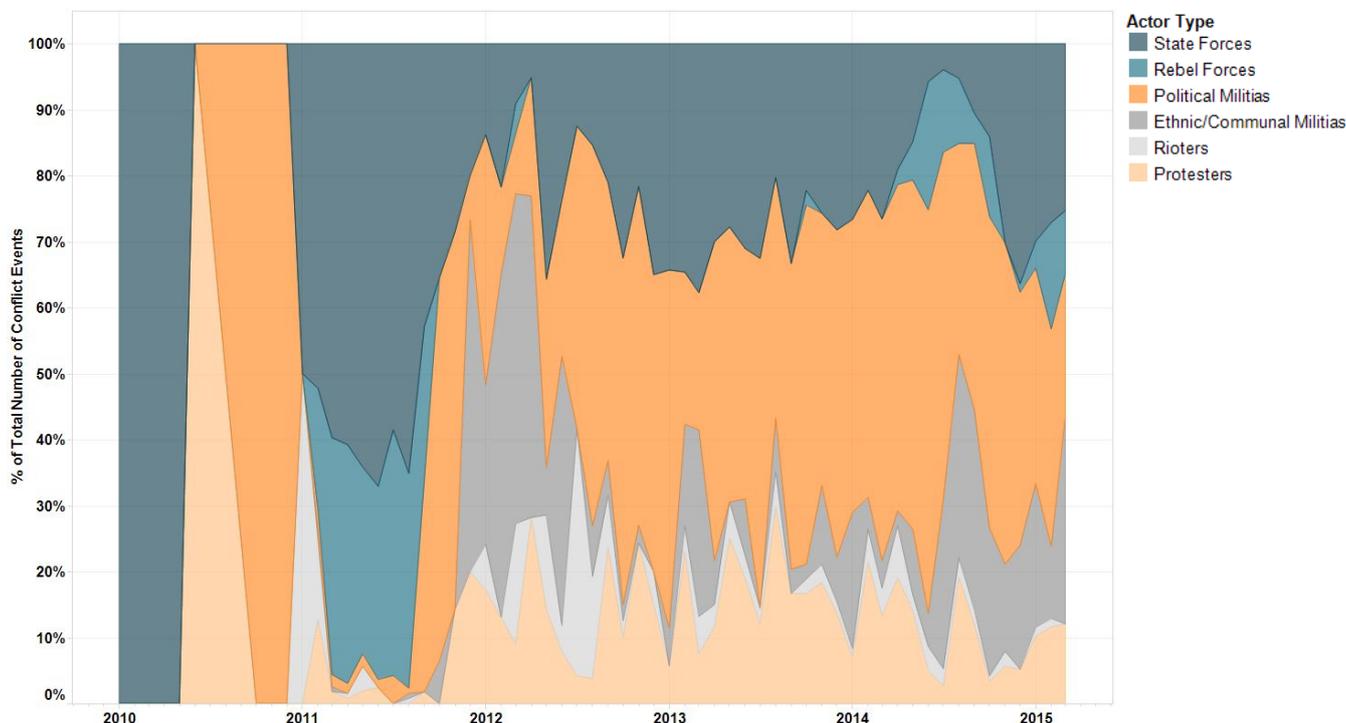


Figure 8: Percentage of Conflict Events by Actor Type in Libya, 2010 - March 2015.

**Libya - Militia Rule?**

The variation in the forms and perpetrators of collective violence across Egypt and Libya and the strategies pursued by organised groups are a product of change and continuity in the elite structures and the effect this has on political settlements.

In Egypt, the coherent unified challenge from the Muslim Brotherhood resulted in a strategy of accommodation followed by a policy of exclusion, as their relative strength increased and the distributions of power and governance were altered. In Libya, the National Transitional Council (NTC) was unsuccessful in severing the old elite system of power, failing to address pervasive patrimonial ties. Rather, the NTC adopted an inclusive political settlement to ‘buy-off’ revolutionary and other brigades from the uprisings to placate the multitude of demands after the fall of Qaddafi. Consequently, the perceptions of entitlement entrenched in the conscience of Libyan citizens (Vandewalle, 2012) from the preceding regime were sustained in the post-revolutionary period. With the official military in a state of flux from defections and the monopoly of violence undermined, this institutional stasis incentivised collective actors to mobilise along military lines as the means to violence were highly distributed.

In Libya, a coherent civil society was never established under Gaddafi and no political structure was in place that

could be built on after the regime fell, resulting in multiple competing groups resorting to violent tactics to maximise their positions during disorder. Brian McQuinn identifies that “the critical distinction in the formation process is how unregulated brigades acted after the fall of Tripoli on 20 August 2011” (2012), indicating that power resided with fragmented non-state groups who are semi-institutionalised or acting autonomously from the state.

Figure 8 shows that after October 2011, the date that the National Transitional Council was recognised as the representative leader of Libya, militia activity was subject to very volatile periods and has sustained levels much higher than riots or protests combined. In terms of political representation, whilst citizens have been pushed to the periphery in Egypt’s political process, protesters take precedent over militia groups as there are opportunities to collectively organise on a nonviolent basis. In Libya however, the fractured society led to ethnic and political militias dominating conflict (see Figure 8) and the creation of hybrid power structures whereby community leaders administered security, support, logistics and financial backing, for example through the formation of local military and civilian councils such as the Misrata Military Council (MMC).

The establishment of these decentralised units signals a cleavage in Libyan elites and ethnic identities, with mobili-

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sation occurring around town and city affiliation. McQuinn further argues that “as a result, tensions quickly devolve into communal conflict fought by amorphous groups on behalf of their city or ethnic group—rather than distinct post-revolutionary brigades with a defined leadership structure” (2012: 30).

This performance of power has had a critical impact on the escalation of armed conflict in 2014 and 2015 with a resurgence in ethnic-tribal clashes in the southwest region between Tebu and Tuareg militias and the bifurcation of alliances since May 2014 involving armed groups supporting Operation Libya Dawn and forces under General Khalifa Haftar’s ‘Operation Dignity’ coalition (see Table I). Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) have expressed tacit or explicit support for the rival coalitions that demonstrate two drivers of escalation. Firstly, as UN Peace Negotiations continue in Skhirat, Morocco, the inclusive political settlements provide these groups—ranging from revolutionary brigades and military units to criminal networks—incentives to be included in the transitional unity government. Hence, expressions of violence are used to maximise positions in any future political order. Secondly, processes of radicalisation within these groups, through tactical differentiation (Tarrow and Della Porta, 1986) have sustained confrontations, as elites within both camps split over nonviolent vs. violent resolutions.

**Key State Policies and Collection Action post-Arab Spring**

Institutional changes condition state-dissident interactions and fundamentally alter the responses of nonviolent and violent contentious actors (Moss, 2014). Understanding the role of the dominant elites in a state, in relation to the changing forms and patterns of conflict will help inform government policy, the expected responses of state elites to resistance, and will contribute to conflict monitoring in NGOs to mitigate the intensification and risks of violent organised political conflict in the future. This section offers an explanatory analysis of the dynamics of competition at the centre of Egyptian regime politics. To understand how opportunities for collective action have been shaped, the actions and motivations of the government, Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and non-elite protesters for political hegemony are explored.

These interactions are analysed through the implementation of three key policies:

1. President Mohamed Morsi’s constitutional decree;
2. The introduction of a protest law in November 2013; and
3. The designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a ‘terrorist organisation’

<b>Umbrella Group</b>	<b>Operation Libya Dawn [supporting GNC]</b>	<b>Operation Dignity [supporting HoR]</b>	<b>Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC)</b>
<i>Affiliated Actors</i>	Misratah Militia 166 Battalion (Operation Sunrise) Third Force	Military Forces of Libya (Saiqa Special Forces) [air force units]	Ansar al-Sharia
	LROR: Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room	Zintan Militia Al Sawaiq (Thunderbolt) Al Qa’qa Brigade	February 17 <sup>th</sup> Martyrs Brigade
	Gharyan Militia	Wersheffana Militia (joint forces with Zintan forces labelled ‘Tribes Army’)	Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade
	Tuareg Militia	Tabu Militia	Shura Council of Islamic Youth
	Zawia Militia	PFG (Defense Force of Cyrenaica)	Libya Shield Brigade
	Janzur Knights Militia		Brega Martyrs Brigade
	Al-Faruq Brigade (Ansar al-Sharia)	Battalion 101 (Tajoura Militia)	Islamic State (Cyrenaica Province)
	Zuwarah Militia		

**Table I: Operating Armed Groups and Affiliated Actors in Libya since May 2014.**

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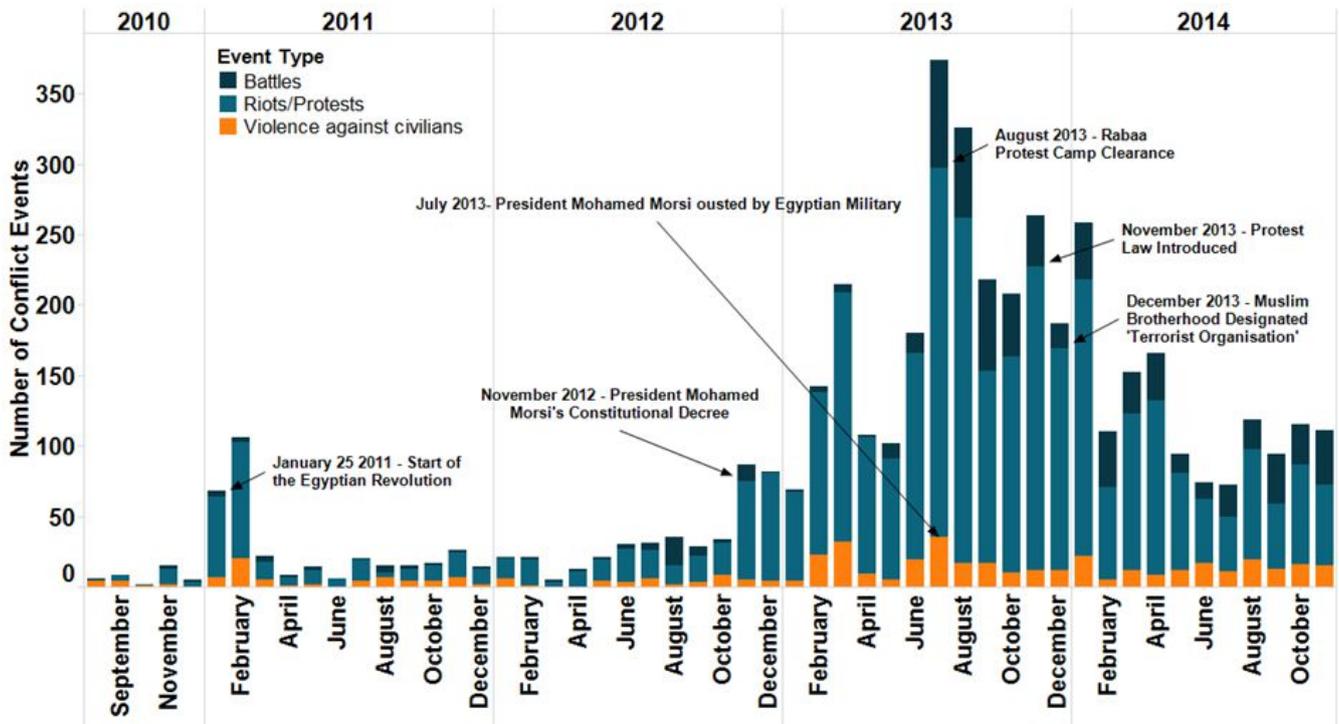


Figure 9: Conflict Events by Type and Key State Policies in Egypt, 2010-2014.

**Morsi's Constitutional Decree**

Constitutional amendments create political opportunities for elite groups to exploit, as a number of parties competing for power can drive further tensions and undermine a coherent transition (ACLED 12 November, 2014). In November 2012 when Mohammed Morsi granted himself immunity in a constitutional declaration, a large spike in the number of riot and protest events was witnessed with vast street protests nationwide (The Guardian, 22 November 2012). This period of dramatic escalation from November 2012-August 2013 (see Figure 9) reflected divisions within the elite and a chaotic bargaining process where President Morsi attempted to strengthen his own position vis-à-vis the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).

Whilst it may be inferred that this instability diverted state attention away from suppressing protesters to internal organisation of elites, the concomitant increase in state forces suppression of rioters belies this fact (see Figure 10). Instead, stronger mass participation by civic groups was a product of shifting power between contending groups. Anti-Morsi (regime) protesters were widespread and catalysed by the fear of an Islamist counter-revolution, but pro-Morsi protests signalled the changing cooperation of the Muslim Brotherhood with the military.

Before this unilateral move, protest levels were significantly lower. Suspected of acting in a coalition of conven-

ience (Maugiron, 2011) with the Muslim Brotherhood after the military stepped in to replace civilian institutions after 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011, it is believed that the Egyptian army initially utilised the legitimacy the Brotherhood had developed through their rhizomatic reach into civil society. This was primarily motivated to protect regime cadres in order to secure their patronage benefits and far-reaching influence within the Egyptian economy, commerce and agriculture. The symbiotic relationship established by both blocs enabled the MB to strengthen their electoral advantage whilst placating anti-regime protesters that challenged the military's role in Egypt's political future.

The effects of this relationship are seen through the direction of violence. The Egyptian state force's role in political violence diminished in the second quarter of 2011 (see Figure 4) and it was reported that the Muslim Brotherhood leadership actively encouraged its members to quell anti-military protests. Albrecht and Bishara argue that "there was no apparent reason to fundamentally change the fabrics of civil-military relations so long as the military's influence over politics and its economic privileges were secured" (2011: 19); hence the lack of repressive activity.

However, the Muslim Brotherhood's acquiescence to the military disintegrated as Morsi's undertook a "purging of

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the governance networks loyal to the former regime” (Slaughter and Isakhan, 2014: 157). Immediately accused of being a strategy to secure outright power, it may well have been the case that he was attempting to fortify his position as President to carry out reforms, against the gaze of the threatened SCAF. Whatever Morsi’s motives were, the military would have perceived this attempted power grab as an acute threat to their interests. This is reflected through the growing presence of the military forces and their competition for political dominance over the Muslim Brotherhood which acted to subvert the goals of the revolution. As Morsi’s Freedom & Justice Party (FJP) gained status in the legislature and executive, the Muslim Brotherhood movement started to evolve into a new elite class. This negatively impacted the ability of the military to autonomously manage the transition, resulting in a transformation in how the military perceived its political role.

Albrecht and Bishara (2011) argue that “the officers increasingly saw themselves as “servants of the state rather than of the government in power” (2011: 19). In essence, this indicates a shift in loyalty from the regime to Egyptian society and the perception of nation. I depart from their use of ‘servants’ to understand the military as ‘puppeteers of transition’ - when existing regime fails to protect military interests they either try to establish security and patronage in the coming regime or establish control over the

political system to usher in a new government aligned with their interests. As a result, the political contest was reframed from a threat to the military establishment to a threat to the nation, operationalising violent Islamist narratives that threatened to destabilise the country as a whole. Consolidating their power through elite cohesion, widespread security crackdowns against Brotherhood leaders and mass arrests and detentions acted to undermine their political support whilst spurring reactionary riots and protests.

**November 2013 Protest Law**

Overall, riots and protest events have decreased since November 2013. This coincided with the introduction of Egypt’s new protest law which Human Rights Watch claimed “would effectively give the police carte blanche to ban protest in Egypt” (HRW, 30 October, 2013) by requiring protesters to obtain several permissions to publicly demonstrate. This episode has been characterised by a switch in event dynamics from largely peaceful protesters demonstrating without any engagement with police forces, to an increasing proportion of riots/protests involving clashes between rioters and state forces (see Figure 10). In July and August 2014, this was the most common interaction associated with demonstrations, occurring in almost half of all recorded riots/protests events, although rates of clashes in September to date have been lower.

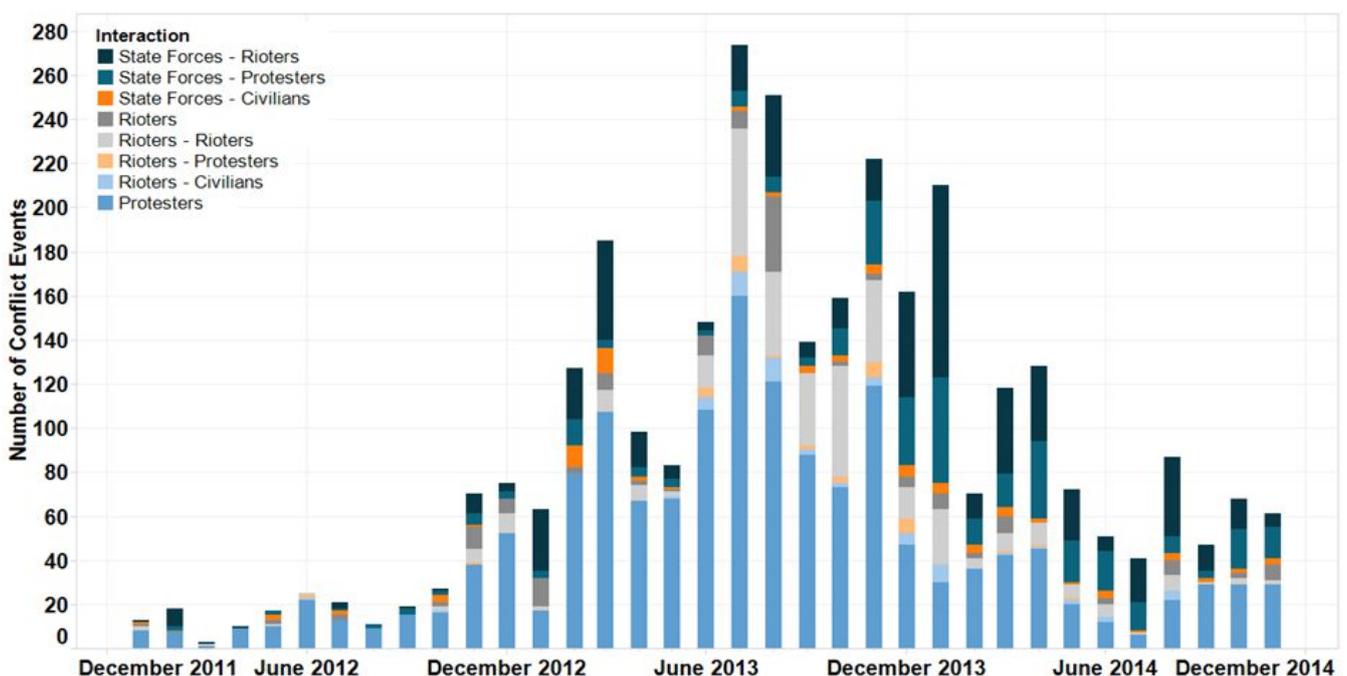
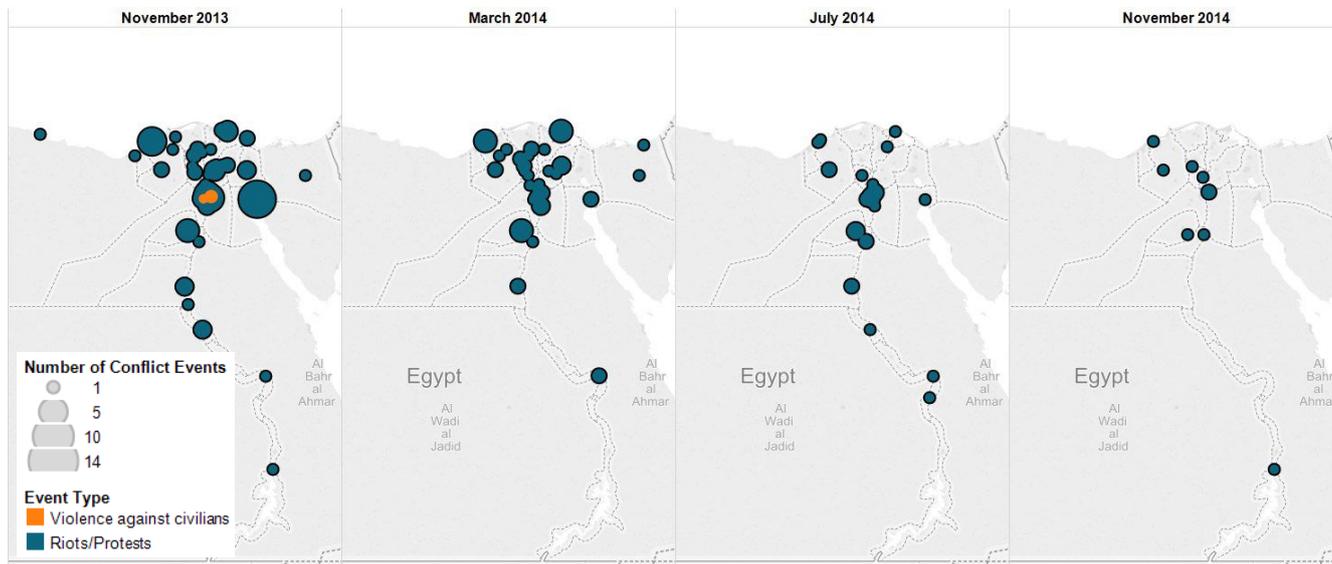


Figure 10: Number of Riots and Protests after Egypt’s November 2013 Protest Law, 2012-2014.

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**Figure 11: Riots and Protests Involving the Muslim Brotherhood after Designation as a ‘Terrorist Organisation’ in Egypt, November 2013–November 2014.**

**The Designation of the Muslim Brotherhood as a ‘Terrorist Organisation’**

The decrease of riots and protests from December 2013 to November 2014 is attributable to the increasing barriers to collective action and the organisation of social movements since the Muslim Brotherhood was designated a ‘terrorist organisation’ by the Egyptian government in December 2013. This has led to police forces conducting routine drag-net arrests and detaining Muslim Brotherhood members, while heavy prison sentences have been given to political activists who have violated its terms.

This has applied pressure to the coordination of collective action nationwide with a decline in the frequency of Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations, especially those held in Cairo (see Figure 11). Similarly, following the violent dispersal of Cairo protest camps in August 2013, less-mobilised political groups may be reluctant to engage in sustained government opposition, due to fear of being subjected to violence.

These patterns appear to validate concerns among civil society and human rights organisations that the legislation would prompt greater restrictions on the civil liberties of

Egyptian citizens, although there is less evidence that security forces have acted on a feared “free rein to use excessive force, including lethal force, against demonstrators” (Amnesty International, 25 November 2013).

Whilst it certainly seems that the protest law has acted as a deterrent to participation in protest movements, it may

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be that this has had more to do with mass detentions and perceptions of police violence than a subsequent increase in violent state repression of peaceful protests. Restrictions on demonstrations and assembly may also have catalysed greater violent action by demonstrators themselves – itself, a prospect that could undermine stability – but a clear pattern of increasing violence against peaceful demonstrators is not strongly evident in the data.

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**Spatialities of Collective Action in Libya and Egypt**

The capacity of state elites and non-elite actors not only condition the expected forms and outcomes of conflict but can also explain the distribution of collective action across countries. The spatialities and geographical distribution of violent and nonviolent movements can inform policy practitioners on whether conflict escalation is motivated by location-based characteristics such as local governance or a specific set of socio-economic conditions, or whether the organisational dynamics of groups contesting power influence the geography of violence.

Arce and Mangonnet (2012) examine the effects of electoral and partisan competition that make subnational provinces more protest-prone. Expanding on this framework, this section identifies how the changing power relations identified in the previous sections have affected the geographical distribution of violence across Egypt from 2007-2014. Essentially, how has the location of collective action changed temporally and how does elite-non-elite competition lead to greater levels of violence in some are-

as rather than others *within* the same country? Three patterns are identified:

1. A net increase in remote violence activity and the diffusion of this violence from peripheral regions to urban centres from 2011-2015;
2. The role of tribal leaders in sustaining insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula; and
3. Heightened riot and protest activity and violence against civilians in Upper Egypt in 2013.

**Centre-Periphery Remote Violence**

The most striking dynamic is the higher incidence of remote violence from 2011-March 2015 and the movement of these events away from peripheral areas towards the locus of state power such as Cairo and Alexandria (see Figure 12). The increased frequency of bombings reflects the asymmetric interactions collective actors faced as the military reconsolidated power. The Supreme Council of the Armed Force’s schizophrenic stance towards the transition provided opportunity for nonviolent protesters to

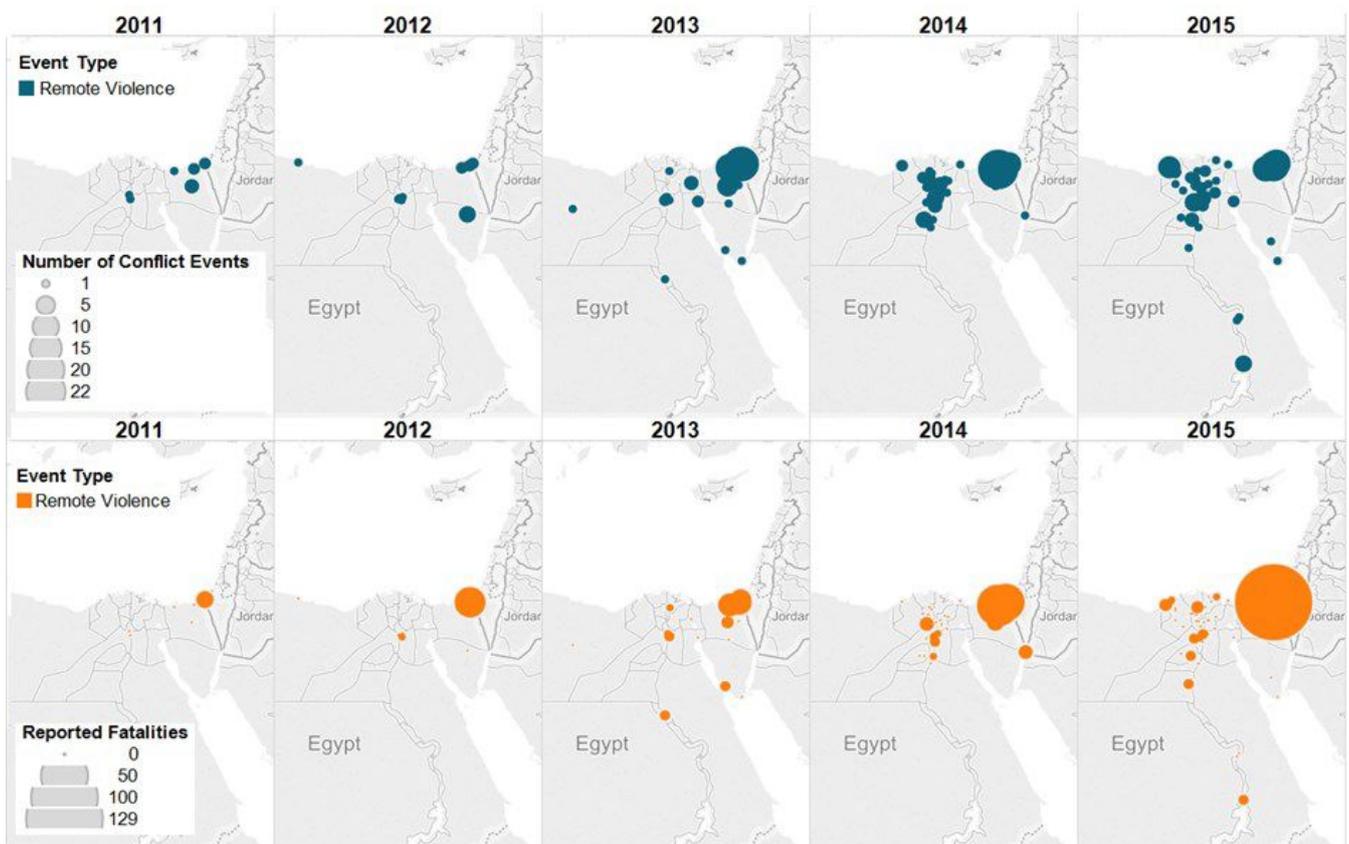


Figure 12: Number of Remote Violence Events and Reported Fatalities by Location in Egypt, 2011-March 2015.

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mobilise but after Abdel Fattah al-Sisi became President in June 2014, executive-military relations unified. This removed the space for a sustained nonviolent campaign by civil society and the Muslim Brotherhood and a sharp drop in riot/protest activity was observed.

This has led to a rise in insurgent violence similar to violence perpetrated by Al-Jama'a Al-Islamiyaa and Al-Jihad in 1987-90s. The violent Islamist groups Afnad Misr and Ansar Beit-al Maqdis claim responsibility for the majority of attacks, purportedly in response to rising state repression. Until recently, these attacks have been concentrated in the Sinai Peninsula but from 2014-early 2015 incendiary devices, bombings on infrastructure such as train stations and security compounds have occurred in urban areas. More interestingly, an increasing number of bombings are not claimed by these discrete groups rather uncoordinated armed resistance groups such as the 'Popular Resistance' movement and 'Revolutionary Punishment'.

Compared to violence in the Sinai, attacks in the Nile Delta region incur fewer fatalities, use rudimentary explosive devices, target energy installations and infrastructure and have witnessed a number of militant casualties due to failed attacks. This emerging dynamic indicates the infor-

mal organisation of insurgents and goes some way in supporting Della Porta and Tarrow's (1986) hypothesis that de-mobilisation and the reduced space to collectively organise has occurred simultaneously with a radicalisation of elements within a group, whereby tactics have shifted from nonviolence to sporadic low-level insurgency.

### Sinai Peninsula (2012-2014)

From 2012 to 2014 the incidence of battles in the Sinai Peninsula appears to expand and contract in unison with riot and protest events in the Nile Delta region (see Figure 13). In 2014, the intensity of battle-related deaths in the Sinai Peninsula surpassed levels in 2013 and were 380% higher than in 2012.

The main perpetrator of violence in Sinai has been the Salafi-Jihadi militant group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis. The extent to which the group is driven by the establishment of a caliphate, its support and financing structure and leadership are relatively poorly understood (Welby, 2014). However, the post-revolution surge in activity concentrated in the Sinai reflects regional opportunities that are intrinsically linked to the revolutionary process.

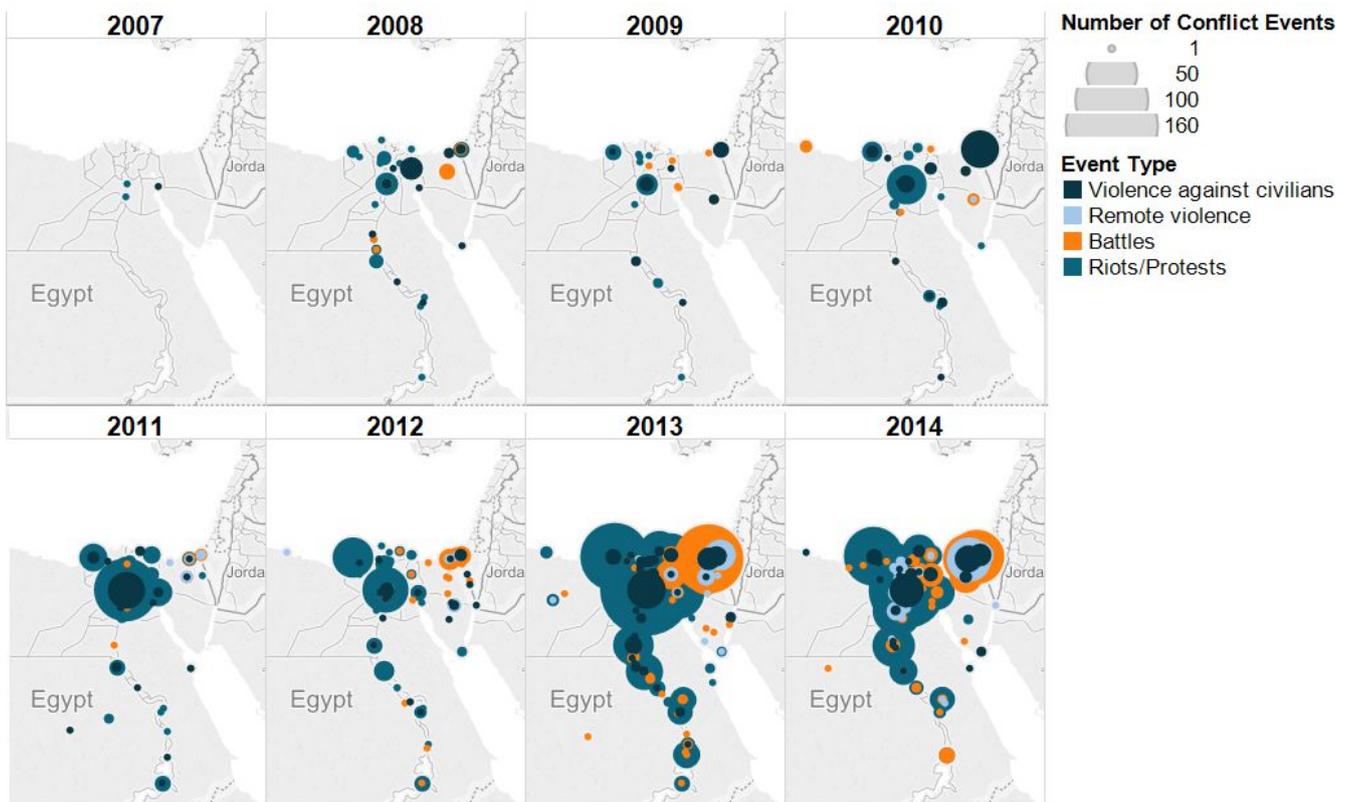


Figure 13: Number of Conflict Events by Type and Location in Egypt, 2007 - November 2014.

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Firstly, following the Tahrir Revolution, the security vacuum enabled the Sinai to become a ‘hotbed’ for recruitment and training due to the sparsely populated topography and the release of Mubarak-era prisoners with renewed vigour for mobilisation. But to understand what propelled the violent escalation from 2011 onward, the interests and goals of the group, the state activity elsewhere in the country, and the declining role of tribal elders all play a role.

**An underexplored mechanism driving escalation in the Sinai Peninsula is the declining role of tribal elders and the lack of political representation perpetuated through centre-periphery relations.**

Activity involving Ansar Beit al-Maqdis seems to be inherently linked to state violence targeting demonstrators in cities such as Cairo, Alexandria and Minya. Having recently changed their name to ‘State of Sinai’ after pledging allegiance to the Islamic State, the group claims they act in response to state repression of protesters following the ousting of Mohammed Morsi in 2013. Retaliatory attacks against military forces using IEDs and remote violence has significantly increased as nonviolent social movements continue to be written out of the revolutionary process.

An underexplored mechanism driving escalation in the Sinai is the declining role of tribal elders and the lack of political representation perpetuated through centre-periphery relations. The integration of tribal leaders into formal state institutions has created a feeling of alienation in the daily lives of Bedouin ethnic groups. Local elites are seen less as intermediaries between localities and the central administration but are instead accused of serving their own interests over tribe and family (Al-Monitor, 17 April, 2014).

This breakdown in social cohesion through local co-optation and elite bargaining is exacerbated by the fact that North Sinai has traditionally been plagued by economic grievances and poor governance which Fielding and Shortland (2010) contend promotes insurgency. Through changing local power structures, a crucial channel of representation may be severed, reducing the local populations’ willingness to cooperate with the Egyptian governments’ counter-terrorism operations. This receives support from Aronson *et al’s* (2014) theory that a rebel groups’ ability to secure shelter and protection amongst local communities increases the chances of sustained escalation.

**Riots in Upper Egypt (2013)**

Further illustration of how elite-non-elite competition shapes the spatialities of violence is the inflammation of sectarian tensions in the Upper Egypt region in 2013. Southern Egypt is home to 18-19% of Egypt’s Coptic Christian population who “largely remained staunchly behind the interim military-led government that ousted President Mohammed Morsi” (The Guardian, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2013).

Following the military coup of Morsi on 3 July 2013 and the violent dispersal of the Rabaa square sit-in, violent reprisal attacks spread across the provinces of Fayyum, Beni Suweif, Minya, Assiut, Luxor and Sohag targeting Coptic churches, shops and infrastructure by Islamist groups.

Although positioned within historical religious tensions, these attacks were inherently political. Changes in the use of coercive tactics to targeted violence illustrates the changing power of the Islamist bloc from 2011-2014. As the Muslim Brotherhood rose to dominance from 2011 onwards, Tadros (2014) found that a new form of violence developed whereby Islamist members in Upper Egypt imposed protection rackets on Copts.

**Sectarian clashes have not occurred to the same intensity in the Upper Egypt region since the competition in the elite classes was closed following the ousting of Morsi.**

They asserted their power to subordinate a weaker opposition by ‘selling loyalty’ in a newly created political marketplace (de Waal, 2009) which amplified their sense of persecution. This also had a pronounced effect on mobilisation of protesters in the 2013 demonstrations to oust Morsi, with a higher rate of participation by Upper Egyptians than in the initial 2011 revolution (Tadros, M. 2014: 9). This highlights how Islamist groups on the subnational level perceived their dominant role in Egyptian society as the Muslim Brotherhood developed into an elite actor on the national scale.

As their grip on power slipped with the July 2013 military coup, riots and Molotov cocktail attacks demonstrated the reversion of Islamist groups back to non-elite actors. Sectarian clashes have not occurred to the same intensity in the Upper Egypt region since the competition in the elite classes was closed following the ousting of Morsi.

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### Conclusion

This working paper has identified how patterns of collective action have transformed in the post-Arab Spring period in their form, intensity and emergence of key agents of change. By analysing elite-civilian interactions from 2010-2015, it assesses how competition for power is structured in transitional states and how this competition promotes distinct forms and patterns of violence. The paper contends that state-dissident interactions are situated within cycles of contention that create incentives and disincentives for collective actors to escalate their demands in more violent forms of conflict.

In assessing the direction of state and non-state violence and organisation of collective action in Egypt, this paper proposes a three-stage framework to understand how changing distributions of power between contentious political actors has shaped the outcomes of political violence. Through a case study analysis of the political game for dominance between the Egyptian government, the military and the Muslim Brotherhood movement, the paper highlights how the strategies of opposition groups, the targets of political violence and the spatial distribution of collective action is shaped by prevailing institutional structures.

It distinguishes between the nature of regime breakdown in Egypt and Libya by examining the extent to which pre-revolutionary governance practices were displaced or maintained and how varying capacities of collective actors interacted with these transformational environments. By contending that both nonviolent collective actors and violent insurgency groups behave rationally, it demonstrates how feedback mechanisms influence the range of strategies adopted to achieve political goals.

Adopting a state-society perspective of revolutions, the paper establishes that “shifts in societal interests and movements over time are often a consequence of the feedback effects from earlier policies and institutions” (Sellers, 2011: 137). A critical study of key state policies in Egypt offers a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of elite-mass competition. The shift from largely nonviolent resistance to large scale riots and a dramatic rise in remote insurgency in Egypt in 2015 illustrates how perceptions and incentives of non-elites are

shaped by state interests and the ways that “power relationships can shape and even reshape state policy” (Sellers, 2007). This contributes to our understanding of the conditions that promote escalatory conflict patterns and prompts further discussion of the critical impact that policy adoptions can have on framing the nature and trajectories of a conflict.

Finally, the paper has demonstrated the importance of taking account of the multitude of political actors that interact with systems of governance and how changing practices of power on the national level inform the interests and behaviour of actors on the subnational level. The role of tribal leaders in the Sinai Peninsula draws attention to how relations between elites at the centre-periphery of a state may influence the ability of insurgent movements

to flourish. Just as importantly, it highlights the agency of non-elite actors in creating ‘enabling environments’ for certain types of violence to be established.

Further knowledge of how the distribution of power at the national scale is reflected on a provincial level is welcome to contribute to our understandings of the mechanisms that effect the geographical diffusion of violence and the rationale of different conflict actors. The case outlined in the Upper Egypt region focuses on how the fluctuating dominance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the legislature had varying outcomes on the nature of sectarian tensions. Protection rackets were used by Islamist groups to

‘nonviolently’ co-opt minority sects during their rise to power, contrasting with targeted attacks as their national influence waned.

Finally, more specific conceptualisations of the ways in which conflict escalates from nascent civil activity to organised violence is required to understand whether escalation of armed conflict is attributable to the same actors that are involved in protest activity or whether new agents of change emerge. This will aid our understandings of the role social networks play in developing new forms of resistance and how collective actors organise to achieve their political aims.

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