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Contending Aspects of Authoritarian Survival in the Middle East and North Africa: The Durability of Material Distributions in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan

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Abstract

Most of the post-democratization literature claims that specific sets of domestic governance mechanisms and/or political institutions are sufficient to explain the survival of authoritarian regimes. This claim has been verified by the observation of large-n statistical research that the durability effect has been independent of consistent access to external oil rent revenues across time, even though higher degrees of natural resource revenues tend to prolong the durability of authoritarian regimes across countries. In short, oil bust periods created no trend toward regime crisis or instability in rent-prone states. However, this finding leaves open two important questions: First, apart from oil rent, are there other sources of revenue which have an impact on the life expectancy of political regimes? Second, when trying to explain regime survival using material legitimacy (patronage and material co-optation), why do we not concentrate on state expenditures rather than on state revenues? The paper conceptually highlights that authoritarian regimes have a multiplicity of external rent income to their disposal. It shows empirically, using four cases from the Middle East and North Africa, that state spending towards key social groups has been surprisingly stable even during times of fiscal scarcity.

1. Introduction

Most of the post-democratization literature in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) claims that specific sets of domestic governance mechanisms and/or political institutions are sufficient to explain the survival of authoritarian political regimes¹ in the MENA region. This claim has been largely verified by the observation of large-n statistical research that the durability effect has been independent of consistent access to external oil rent revenues across time, even though natural resource abundance tends to prolong the durability of authoritarian regimes across countries. In short, oil bust periods created no trend toward regime crisis or instability in rent-prone states. However, this finding leaves open two important questions: First, apart from oil rent, are there other sources of revenue which have an impact on the life expectancy of political regimes? Second, when trying to explain regime survival using patronage and material co-optation, why do we not concentrate on state expenditures rather than on state revenues?

This paper highlights the multiplicity of external rent income MENA's authoritarian regimes have to their disposal and shows, using the cases of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, that the distribution of material resources between regimes and key social groups has been surprisingly constant even during natural resource bust periods. Therefore it is concluded that perspectives solely oriented toward domestic institutional settings of authoritarian survival across time risks the flaw of oversimplification, similar to early-Rentier state theory, which has linked regime survival exclusively to external oil revenues.

After this short introduction, in a second section some of the recent perspectives on authoritarian survival in the MENA region are reviewed and criticized by overly looking at domestic-institutional factors of authoritarian survival as well as being not explicit enough in terms of weighing causal factors. In the third section a fiscal sociology perspective is outlined which suggests to look at fiscal indicators beyond oil rents on the one hand and state spending instead of state revenues in order to assess factors of authoritarian survival. The fourth chapter introduces data regarding the distribution of

¹ I use Juan Linz' definition of authoritarianism that is a political regime with limited political pluralism sharing three attributes: 1) the dominance of mentalities over ideologies, 2) the low degree of political mobilization, and 3) the rule of a leader or a small group within ill-defined but de facto quite predictable limits (Linz 1964: 297). While the terms 'authoritarian maintenance', 'survival', 'durability', or 'resilience' are all interchangeably used in this paper, they all imply the absence of democratic modes of governance.

material resources in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan and discusses some of their commonalities/differences. This chapter especially shows that there has been only limited co-variation between changes in natural resources revenues and patterns of material distribution in these four countries. The fifth and final section addresses the influence constant material distribution within authoritarian regimes may have upon theories of authoritarian survival.

2. Contending Perspectives of Authoritarian Survival in the Arab Middle East and North Africa

After a period of having asked why authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa did not democratize (Salamé 1994, Brynen, Korany and Noble 1995), it was only recently that writers started posing the question why MENA's authoritarian regimes did not collapsed until today and haven been so extremely durable during the past couple of years (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, Pripstein Posusney and Penner Angrist 2005, Schlumberger 2007).

There are at least four different, sometimes overlapping theoretical perspectives trying to explain this Arab authoritarian *exceptionalism* (Stephan and Robertson 2004). First, authoritarian survival shall be due to the exceptional resistance of an Arab-Islamic cultural mind (Tibi 1990, Gellner 1992, Kedourie 1992), which in a structural version has lead to a neo-patrimonial way of how political rule is organized within Arab societies (Pawelka 1985, Tripp 1995, Bill and Springborg 2000, Schlumberger 2006).² Second, authoritarian durability is linked towards the extraordinarily high degree of state coercion or repression within MENA regimes (Bellin 2004, Ghalioun 2004, Rivlin and Even 2004, Bellin 2005). Third, it is argued that unusually high amounts of external rent revenues have enabled MENA's political elites to stay in power through the distribution of material resources towards their societies (Luciani 1987, Rivlin and Even 2004, Schlumberger 2006, Beck 2007). Fourth, authoritarian survival depends on the robust inclusion of key social groups with the help of political institutions like for instance single party organizations (Geddes 1999, Smith 2005, 2006) or the consequent historical incorporation of rural middle classes (Waldner 2005).

² Cf. (Hudson 1995) for a carefully argued plea of *bringing back in* cultural variables into the analysis of political change.

While there is an overall lack of empirically valid and methodologically robust inquiries on the influence of cultural variables onto authoritarian survival,³ it seems to be rather difficult to directly estimate the changing degrees of state coercion in a given country. However, existing empirical research therefore mainly concentrates on either domestic political institutions or external rent resources like oil revenues.

Even though several large-n studies on oil revenues and political evolution in developing countries reveal that 'oil hinders democracy' (Ross 2001, Jensen and Wantchekon 2004) as well as 'oil increases the durability of authoritarian regimes' (Smith 2004, Ulfelder 2007) many scholars of MENA politics either doubt these findings entirely – as done by Michael Herb (2005) – or have important specifications to add. In the present debate on post-democratization and regime maintenance in the MENA one element of the discourse stands out as particularly remarkable: writings focus either exclusively on the domestic institutional and structural dynamics of authoritarian rule (e.g. Moore 2002, Bank 2004, Kassem 2004, Langohr 2004, Lust-Okar 2004, Moore 2004, Albrecht 2005, Lust-Okar 2005) or do attach only minor weight to non-domestic and fiscal influences (e.g. Brumberg 2002, Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, Bellin 2004, Pribstein Posusney 2004).⁴ To put it in a nutshell, a large part of today's comparative politics literature on MENA's authoritarian regimes seems to be primarily guided by a domestic biased research agenda, which mainly concentrates on the stabilizing capacity of specific domestic-institutional mechanisms of regime maintenance.

This is all the more astonishing since the metaphor of the Janus-faced state ranks high among comparative political sociology and international relations. This literature did indeed always acknowledge that states participate in both domestic and international environments simultaneously (e.g. Ikenberry 1986, Barnett 1990, Evans, Jacobson and Putnam 1993).⁵ While one understands this domestic focused perspective having in

³ Cf. (Beck 2002: 99-103) for a general critique on the influence of cultural variables on authoritarian survival, as well as (Hinnebusch 2006: 376-377), who suggests to use culture „... not as an independent variable which obstructs democratization but as intervening variable, in which conceptions of legitimacy which are more tolerant of authoritarian leadership under certain conditions, and surviving 'traditional' forms of association reinforce and prolong the viability of authoritarian regimes established for quite other reasons than culture.“

⁴ Only two out of eight studies in (Pribstein Posusney and Penner Angrist 2005) are bothered about external factors of authoritarian regime maintenance.

⁵ Cf. for an excellent recent overview of a perspective where the state is embedded in both national and domestic society (Gourevitch 2002). (Jackson and Rosberg 1982) seem to be the *locus classicus* of research on surviving statehood outside the OECD world. However, there are a few exceptions among

mind the 'fiscal crisis of the state' caused by the sharp fall of external revenues since the early 1980s (e.g. Luciani 1995: 212, Shafik 1997: 241, Henry and Springborg 2001: 12, e.g. Al-Sayyid 2001: 156, Moore 2002: 34, Rivlin and Even 2004: 9). However, it is by no means clear why a domestic and institutional focused perspective (alone) would be conceptually better prepared to answer the intriguing questions regarding authoritarian survival in the region.

Maye Kassem's (2004) superb account of the dynamics of authoritarian governance in Egypt provides an excellent example for the confinements of domestic based understandings of resilient authoritarian rule. She downplays international system's influence explaining the endurance and resilience of Egypt authoritarianism as "[...] it is the internal political dynamics and manipulative strategies of the authoritarian regimes themselves that predominantly determine their own survival" (Kassem 2004: 8). Patronage and co-optation, the use of exclusionary laws and the control over and by the coercive apparatus are, in her view, the three main pillars used for manipulation and domination of the political realm by the Egyptian regime. Therewith, Kassem traces back the preservation of authoritarianism in Egypt exclusively to domestic mechanisms of rule maintenance. To give a second example, Holger Albrecht (2005) revises the formerly rarely made argument that domestic dissent as an organic element of the contemporary political system in Egypt ultimately contributes to authoritarian stability (Albrecht 2005: 391). He further shows, in more detail, how the politics of a 'dynamic authoritarian equilibrium' operates in today's Egypt. Unfortunately, he remains almost entirely within the domestic-institutional context.⁶

Hence, how presupposition-free are pure domestically and institutionally based explanations of a successful management of authoritarian survival? The saying *ex nihilo nihil fit* points to the fact that social reality has always something to presuppose. Indeed, on what terms might the maintenance of authoritarian rule, being manipulative or coercive, depend? If one understands political rule as a concept of reciprocal interaction between the ruler and the ruled, two thoughts come immediately to mind: first, the idea of accepting the rule by the ruled and second the idea that the ruler needs some

MENA specialists. (Brownlee 2002) explicitly links external influence to regime survival, whereas (Hinnebusch 2003: 2) and (Halliday 2005: 41-50), which are not explicitly concerned about regime stability, base their arguments about the changing nature of statehood in the MENA one more than a domestic level.

⁶ Albrecht's only reference away from the domestic-institutional domain is on opposition's rent-seeking function towards western governments and international institutions (Albrecht 2005: 392).

capabilities to execute its rule - the latter being logically prerequisite to the former. Thus, assuming first that the durability of the political status quo depends on the acceptance of this status by the ruled, and second, that this acceptance is a function of repression and legitimacy independently of time and space, one can assess the impact rulers' capability has on the degree of the durability of a given political organization. Both modes of governance, repressing the ruled and ensuring legitimacy do indeed depend on the rulers' capability to execute these modes. Finally, the capability to rule is overly connected to the availability of resources, which are mainly of material especially financial nature.⁷ And in fact, pure domestically based accounts of enduring authoritarianism seem to ignore the issue of authoritarian ruler's capabilities to rule, which indeed shares out to the domestic as well as to the international environment of the state. What the exact influence of either of these environments might be is indeed an entirely empirical question.

Even though many of the recent contributions on durable authoritarianism in the MENA at least mention the influence of external factors, none of them combines domestic and international and institutional and fiscal influences convincingly, let alone venture to weigh the causal importance of possible determinants of authoritarian resilience. Eva Bellin (2004) argues that the mix of resources, which are partly of external origin, coincides with a specific domestic setting and therefore explains the robustness of authoritarian governance in the region. She argues that (only) if the coercive apparatus of the state remains intact and is opposed to political reform democratic transition is unlikely to occur (2004: 144). Prima facie, the will as well as the capacity of the security forces are in her view pure domestic based conditions. Looking at it again, one realizes that especially the degree of capacity depends upon the access to material resources. Bellin acknowledges this connection where "[p]laying on the West's multiple security concerns has allowed authoritarian regimes in the region to retain international support. The West's generous provision of this support has bolstered

⁷ Admittedly, there is much more than money which can be used by the state for stabilizing its power, including immaterial and symbolic resources. For an insightful recent contribution on Algeria, which uses structural concepts of elite fragmentation and combines this with Bourdieu's capital approach cf. (Quaissa 2005). For using discourses on morality to characterize strategies of power maintenance beyond money in Egypt cf. (Lübben 2003).

the capacity and will of these regimes to hold on” (2004: 149, 152). But finally she avoids weighing the different causal conditions of her approach.⁸

It was Benjamin Smith, who in a statistical analysis testing the influence of oil wealth on authoritarian survival, suggests to mix a fiscal sociology perspective with an institutional approach.⁹ He finds strong evidence that oil wealth had a positive effect on the prospect for authoritarian regime maintenance across countries. However, “[m]ore importantly, despite what Beblawi and Luciani (1987) and others have argued, the durability effect appears to have been independent of consistent access to rents with which regimes can buy legitimacy, since the bust created no trend toward regime crisis or instability in exporting states [across time, T.R.]” (Smith 2004: 242). Consequently he concludes that “... there is more to the durability of regimes in oil-rich states than patronage and coercion.” (Smith 2004: 242).¹⁰ Furthermore he suggest two institutional mechanism of regime maintenance which “... belie the weak-state assumptions associated with oil wealth” (Smith 2004: 242): first robust social coalitions and second domestic institutions which both could provide non-repressive and repressive responses to organized forms of regime oppositions.

However, it is by no means clear why this domestic-institutional focused perspective alone should be more appropriate in solving the puzzle of authoritarian maintenance in the region. Even though one can basically agree to Smith’s results that the volatility of oil revenues (variance of the independent variable) does not explain the stable character of the authoritarian states in the MENA (invariance of the dependent variable) his conclusion leaves open two central questions: First, what was and is the

⁸ Bellin connects four variables: 1) fiscal health, 2) successful maintenance of international support networks, 3) patrimonialism and 4) popular mobilization on behalf of political reform. The first and the second variable are of external origin. However, she fails to conclude which of these factors are logically prior or at least equal in weight. “Some conditions responsible for the robustness of this authoritarianism are exceptional to the Middle East and North Africa; others are not. Access to abundant rent distinguishes the region and subsidizes much of the cost of these overdeveloped coercive apparatuses. Multiple western security concerns in the region guarantee continuous international support to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa even after the cold war. But the prevalence of patrimonialism in state structures and the low level of popular mobilization are not unique to the region. Together, these factors reinforce the coercive apparatus’ capacity and prevent democratic reform” (Bellin 2004: 152). Mentioning that patrimonialism as well as the low level of popular support have not been unique to the region would have given the possibility to arrange conditions in an at least necessary-sufficient framework.

⁹ To play fair, there are a number of writers using an institutional perspective in order to explain authoritarian survival, who control for resource abundance (Geddes 1999, Hadenius and Teorell 2006, 2007). Note that (Ross 2001) as well as (Ulfelder 2007) do not control for institutional settings of authoritarian regimes.

¹⁰ This is similar to (Moore 2002: 34), who states: „After well over two decades of fiscal downturn, none of the Gulf oil-exporting countries have conformed to the expectation of regime decline.“

influence of other than oil capital, especially during oil bust periods? Second, why concentrating on state revenues instead of state expenditures while estimating the influence of patronage and material co-optation?

The paper aims contributing to these two questions: first, I suggest to concentrate on more than just oil payments and second I propose to focus on public expenditures instead of public revenues. Analyzing four successful cases of authoritarian survival in the MENA region, which vary in their endowment with natural resources as well as in their composition of domestic ruling elites, I explore government's budget expenditures since the late 1970s. In tracing back the relatively stable distribution of financial resources to structural backbones of authoritarian survival I argue that the acceptance of the political status quo hinges on the continuous flow of state expenditures (and privileges) toward these key social groups, despite oil prices busts and economic liberalizations.

3. Towards a Fiscal Sociology of Authoritarian Survival

3.1. Main Assumptions and Definitions

To start with, my analysis and subsequent argumentation presupposes a three-step theoretical assumption:

- (1) The durability (or stability) of political systems - maintenance of the political status quo - is a function of repression and legitimacy.¹¹
- (2) Patronage and co-optation of societal actors by the state are the main instruments of ensuring legitimacy over time.¹²

¹¹ Repression in this context refers to the coerced way of safeguarding acceptance, usually by force or the threat to use force, whereas legitimacy refers to the un-coerced way of achieving acceptance. Acceptance of the status quo then is the necessary as well as the sufficient condition of the stability of a political entity. Cf. for this perspective especially (Schlumberger 2002, Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004), who have reintroduced it into the MENA context recently, or in a more general perspective on developing countries in (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 9).

¹² However, for the sake of space, I leave out the influence of repression at this point. Moreover, following Max Weber's concept of three ideal-types of legitimacy (traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational) I add a fourth dimension to his framework: material legitimacy. I further assume patronage and co-optation as main strategies of reaching legitimacy through material resources. In the MENA context this is implicitly assumed by many authors, see for instance (Henry and Springborg 2001: 13, Kassem 2004, Lesch 2004). Material legitimacy, or legitimacy by success plays also a role in more general writings on democratization, cf. (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 10) or political adjustment (Ikenberry 1986: 55)

(3) Material resources or the access to them are the primary pre-requisites of successful patronage and co-optation of the relevant parts of the society.¹³

As learned from previous research on the MENA region, prosperous strategies of legitimation always depend on a satisfying degree of resources at hand. Most notably in this respect are material resources, which in the MENA case have been exclusively supplied by external rents (e.g. Luciani 1987, Pawelka 1993, Richards and Waterbury 1996, Chaudhry 1997, Rivlin and Even 2004, The World Bank 2004: 36ff).

Consequently, Rentier state theory or rentierism - the analytical framework about the way and the degree external rents influence societal and political formation domestically - characterizes a state being a Rentier if its society and economy is predominated by rent-like resources.

Since rents are, by definition, a surplus higher than the minimum that the receiver would have accepted given alternative opportunities (Buchanan 1980: 3), they typically do not originate from investment or labor – in the capitalistic sense of the word –, but are generated as the result of natural advantages and organizational skills (Schmid and Pawelka 1990, Beck and Schlumberger 1998, Beck 2002). As rents are not a result of complex forms of organizing capitalistic production, rents do not have to be reinvested into this production process. Consequently, they are at the free disposal of the state, can be allocated by purely political terms and are most often used without considering long-term economic needs.

Consequently, a fiscal sociology which is focused on rents claims that only the availability of rents leads to different structures, different processes and different outcomes compared to cases where profits would prevail. Moreover, rentierism argues that the dominance of rents fairly explains why authoritarianism survived in the MENA region until today. As long as rents prevail authoritarianism endures. The core element of this rent-driven evolution is the missing structural necessity to reinvest resources in order to maximize societal surplus. Therefore, it is argued that the access to rents made MENA states less reliant on modern more complex forms of extracting domestic societal

¹³ This is more like a commonsensical assumption based on what Giacomo Luciani has described in his *allocation state* (Luciani 1987). It is most often implicit in many writings about the MENA. Ann Mosely Lesch for instance talks about this in the Egyptian context (Lesch 2004), Eberhard Kienle ascribes Sadat's and Mubarak's legitimacy mainly to the distribution of rents (Kienle 2000: 24), as well as Diane Singermann describes the importance of the provision of goods and services to lower class people as primary for their acceptance or opposition to the government (Singerman 1997: 244f).

resources. Thus they become less dependent on demands of social formations being the agents of complex forms of production like a bourgeoisie, a middle and a working class. Instead, social classes grew up inchoate and are in addition patronized and co-opted by the state.

Such reasoning counts for two crucial observations: (1) the missing back-linkage between the ruler and the ruled (no participation without taxation), and (2) the missing intention to induce consistent and lasting economic policies according to capitalistic standards. However, the slogan of no participation without taxation describes just one side of the coin. As Giacomo Luciani has pointed out two decades ago, rents too are the primary precondition of allocation within Rentier states (1987: 68ff). That is, rents have been broadly used to buy off political consensus. In short, rents have been the most prominent preconditions for both, achieving acceptance through legitimation by allocating material resources (the un-coerced way of achieving acceptance) as well as achieving acceptance through repression or the threat to repress by maintaining the apparatus of organized state coercion (the coerced way of achieving acceptance).

3.2. The Multiplicity of Rents and the Distribution of Resources by the State

A short survey of past literature reveals that there is much more than oil which qualifies for being a rent. Going back to David Ricardo and Karl Marx, to name just the two most prominent among many, rents occur from payments to the owner of land and property (absolute rent being the basic level of this payment and differential rent being the payment for land of higher than average productivity - not including any return on additional investments in improving the land) as well as rents arise from the incompleteness of markets (rents being the difference between the market price of a good and its opportunity costs and profit being the market price equal to the opportunity costs, hence profit, in contrast, being the market price equal to the opportunity costs) (Krueger 1974, Schmid 1991, Khan and Kwame Sundaram 2000, Rivlin and Even 2004). Table 1 provides an overview of the multiplicity of rents known to be available in the region (Richter 2007).¹⁴ Classes of rents are grouped according to their substantial source (Stofflichkeit). I distinguish here between five classes of rents: (1) raw-material rents – income from selling natural resources and/or raw materials on international

¹⁴ The application of this classification is by no means limited to the MENA region, rents and especially oil rents are well known parts of the political economy all over the developing world.

markets; (2) location rents – income from the ownership of necessary and important transport routes or infrastructural facilities, like oil-pipelines or the Suez Canal; (3) strategic rents – income from geo-political or strategic geographic and/or political positions and behavior, like the (non-)alignment with international or regional powers or just the (non-)support of specific political or ideological positions of other states; (4) political rents – income from the acquisition of foreign aid given by the OECD and the Arab oil-states according to solid developmental and moral orientations; (5) migration rents – income from the participation of labor forces on OECD's and Arab oil-states' labor markets. Consequently, in order to assess the influence of rents on authoritarian maintenance, one should include additional forms of external rents available to the state.¹⁵

¹⁵ This is a demand I share with (Morisson 2005).

Table 1: The Multiplicity of Rents in the Middle East and North Africa

rent's substantial derivation (Stofflichkeit)		rent's origin (internal vs. external; private vs. governmental; regional affiliation)	rent's disposability by the state in the MENA region
raw-material rents	ownership of minerals and raw materials (e.g. oil, gas or phosphate) – selling on world markets	external; private & governmental; MENA & international	very high (immediate absorption by the state)
location rents	ownership of transportation facilities (e.g. oil pipelines)	external; private and governmental; MENA	very high (immediate absorption by the state)
	ownership of traffic routs (e.g. Suez Canal)	external; private; international	
Strategic rents	grants and soft-loans given as military and budget aid	external; governmental; OECD and MENA	high (direct incorporation to the budget or strategic segments of the state)
political rents	Total Official Flows (TOF)	Official Development Assistance (ODA)	external; governmental; OECD and MENA
		Other Official Flows (OOF)	
Migration rents	migration remittances	external; private; OECD and MENA	partial (yields directly to the civil society; but flow over the domestic banking system, therefore partially absorbed by a state owned banking system, the Central Bank, customs duties and tax on international trade)

Source: (Richter 2007)

Furthermore and maybe more importantly, what most large-n studies (Ross 2001, Smith 2004, Ulfelder 2007) had in common with many other case study work during the past decades is their focus on state revenues instead of state expenditures.¹⁶ But, if Delacroix's (Delacroix 1980) and Luciani's (Luciani 1987) observation has been right in saying that the distribution of resources makes up for the core argument on linking state and society in Rentier states, than one should rather concentrate on state spending instead of state extraction? Therefore, the selection of oil or natural resource revenues as independent variable does not represent a valid indicator to measure the degree political legitimacy has been created through the distribution of material resources (Richter 2007).

To sum up, a fiscal sociology approach of authoritarian survival should rather focus on material resources being rents (including oil and going beyond oil) in their entirety as well as on state expenditures instead of state revenues on the other hand.

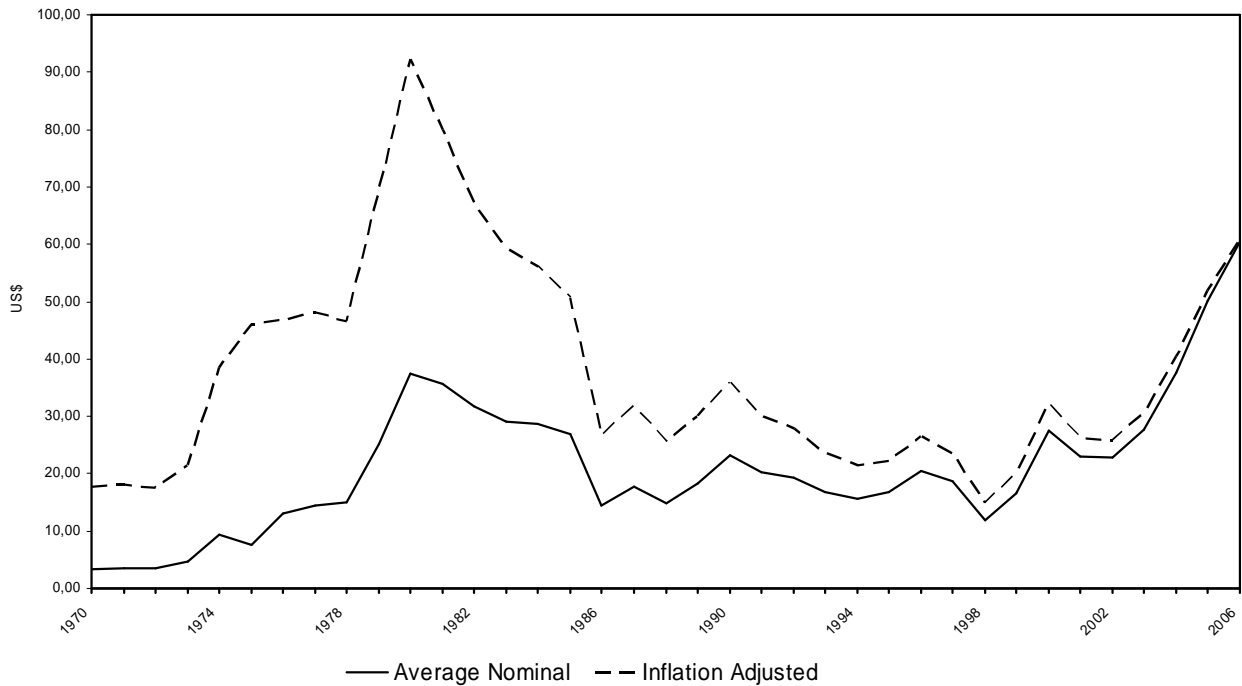
4. The Missing Dimension of Authoritarian Survival: Material Legitimization through the Distribution of Material Resources

4.1. Oil Price Oscillations

To start with, a larger cluster of literature suggests that a nation's dependency upon a leading economic sector determines a state's policy choices, because a state's institutional design and its fiscal structure has been exclusively interlocked with this leading sector demands and its revenue base (e.g. Shafer 1994, Frieden and Rogowski 1996, Karl 1997). Since especially natural resource abundance makes single-sector-dependent states extremely reliant upon volatile world markets, it is assumed that "... such an inflexible institutional [and fiscal, T.R.] design will limit a state's ability to respond to crisis arising from sectoral downturns. The political result should be regime instability, decay, and, perhaps, collapse (Moore 2002: 35). A short look at world oil prices may illuminate this argument in greater detail.

¹⁶ Ben Smith's independent variable is Oil per GDP, measuring the ratio of the oil exports to gross domestic product in a given year (2004: 235). Equally, Mike Ross's most important independent variable is indicated by the export value of nonfuel ores and metal exports as fraction of GDP (Ross 2001: 337). Jay Ulfelder uses an independent variable which measures the extent to which countries' income is derived from natural-resource depletion (Ulfelder 2007: 1002)

Figure 1: World Oil Prices 1970-2006 (US\$ per Barrel, annual US-average), ¹⁷



Looking at oil price evolutions over the last three decades or so (figure 1), one has to distinguish between four different periods: 1.) increasing prices between 1972 and 1981, 2.) decreasing prices between 1981 and 1986, 3.) volatile but low prices between 1986 and 2002 as well as 4.) again increasing prices since 2002. Even though prices are no perfect indicator of natural resource revenues a state has to its disposal, they are a good first measurement to distinguish between periods of positive and negative shocks regarding state revenues. Assuming that increasing/decreasing prices shape increasing/decreasing state revenues in resource abundant states, period 1 and 4 may be definitely succeeded by expanding state revenues and period 2 may be followed by shrinking state coffers. It is precisely this oil price decline during the second period which led writers on the Middle East and North Africa to predict that a fiscal crisis of the state¹⁸ is going to make policy adjustment unavoidable and political instability more likely. Even though a number of policy adjustments have taken place in all MENA countries, all of the Arab authoritarian regimes survived until today.¹⁹

¹⁷ Source: http://inflationdata.com/inflation/Inflation_Rate/Historical_Oil_Prices_Table.asp

¹⁸ Cf. for this mechanism for instance (Luciani 1995: 212, Shafik 1997: 241, Henry and Springborg 2001: 12).

¹⁹ With the only exception, that the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein has been removed by a massive external and military engagement.

4.2. Material Distribution in Authoritarian Regimes: Evidence from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan

The following empirical section utilizes four cases from the authoritarian Middle East and North Africa and shows to what degree selected material resources have been distributed among Moroccans, Tunisians, Egyptians and Jordanians. Using annual data from states' budgets between 1970 and the early 21st century²⁰ I find that over these three decades distributions of material resources measured by state expenditures for 1) defense and public order, 2) public wages and salaries, and 3) subsidies have been surprisingly stable. They were even growing on a nominal per capita level measured in local currencies. However, using real per capita values in US \$, which try to estimate a power purchasing parity, increments are more modest. Most interestingly, with the partial exception of subsidies, I do not find an overarching trend of booms or busts in state expenditures on public wages and pensions as well as defense and public order which might co-vary with natural resources revenues or world oil prices.

For a number of methodological and pragmatic reasons,²¹ I have chosen two monarchies (Morocco and Jordan) and two republics (Tunisia and Egypt) in order to explore 1.) what resources have been distributed by the state towards its society since the early 1970s and 2.) how does resource spending co-vary with external rent revenues and world oil prices. Figures 2 until 9 lay out respective data on state spending. I have chosen two slightly different sets of indicators showing for each country material distribution per capita and material distribution per GDP, each in a different figure. Furthermore, I have included revenues of natural resource exportation in each chart in order to compare natural resource boom and bust cycles visually with extensions and declines of material distributions. In addition to that, tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 report simple bivariat correlations among all indicators.

²⁰ Data are from IMF Archives (various years), Recent Economic Developments & Staff Reports for Article IV and XIV Consultations.

²¹ Case selection has been constrained by two pragmatic and two theoretical reasons: Pragmatic reasons were the availability of valid and reliable data as well as the limited amount of time being available for this research up to know. For all of the Gulf monarchies, perhaps with the exception of Kuwait, it was almost impossible to receive reliable data which go back to the early 1970s. 2. The theoretical reasons were that selected cases vary in terms of resource abundance and power structure. Tunisia and Egypt modestly depend on rent revenues selling oil and natural gas on world markets. Morocco and Jordan, instead, depend on earnings from exporting phosphate and potash. While in Morocco and Jordan traditional aristocratic elites and rural notables have been survived until today, Tunisia and Egypt lived through social-revolutions which brought to power modern and bureaucratic middle classes.

Morocco

Morocco as a non-oil country has enjoyed access to revenues from exporting phosphates on world markets. Morocco's phosphate boom dates back to the mid-1970s. As figure 2 and 3 indicate increasing phosphate revenues go hand in hand with expanding state spending during that period. After a short period of high phosphate revenues, earnings from this resource declined considerably. However, this resource bust was only partially followed by the shrinking of state expenditures. Especially, material distributions for defense and public order as well as for public wages have been increased thereafter continuously until the early 1980s. Followed by a period of relative decline until the mid-1980s material distributions for defense and public order as well as public wages restarted to grow until today. Bivariate correlation coefficients support this trend: only expenditures for subsidies are statistically significant related to phosphate revenues and world oil prices, even though coefficients indicate only a low relationship. However, neither state expenditure for defense and public order nor public wages are significantly related to either of the two natural resource indicators (cf. Table 2: Morocco bivariate correlations).

Tunisia

In contrast to Morocco, Tunisia has had access to revenues from exporting oil on world markets. However, Tunisia's oil boom does not significantly relate to world oil price cycles as correlation coefficients between oil revenues and world oil prices indicate. This is supported by the most often significantly negative coefficients between state spending and the world oil price indicator (Table 3). Figure 4 and 5 provide additional visualized support for the conclusion that the Tunisian oil industry was able to compensate world oil price declines with larger oil productions during oil busts periods. Most surprisingly, state revenues from selling oil only weakly relate to state spending in all three dimensions over the whole period of investigation (cf. Table 3: Tunisia, bivariate correlations). Figure 4 and 5 very clearly show that state spending in all three dimensions has been expanded, despite declining oil revenues since the early 1990s. Correlation coefficients in Table 3 support this conclusion.

Egypt

Egypt had, similar to Tunisia, access to oil export revenues. In addition to that Egypt controls a unique and constant source of location rents (Suez Canal). On a very general level, patterns of Egyptian state expenditures have been the most diverse among the four cases treated here. Whereas spending for wages and pensions strengthened during the mid-1990s, after a period of real decline during the 1980s, spending for subsidies decreased significantly in two major steps during the early 1980s and 1990s, even though it has persisted on a stable level since then. While spending for defense has been also on a relative decline over the whole period under investigation, it remains the less volatile of all three indicators of material distribution (Figure 6 & 7). Correlation coefficients of per capita data support this picture. Only state expenditures for public wages seem to be largely independent from Suez Canal earnings, oil revenues and world oil prices.²² Subsidies as well as defense and public order expenditures are significantly but most often weakly positive related to oil revenues and world oil prices. Even though this effect seems to be stronger regarding subsidies as regarding defense spending (cf. Table 4: Egypt, bivariat correlations).

Jordan

Finally, Jordan, similar to Morocco, a non-oil but phosphates exporter, which analog to Tunisia has managed to substitute declining prices on world markets with increasing production capacity. Therewith Jordan has minimized external price shocks, as estimated data on phosphate and potash export values in Figure 8 and 9 indicate.²³ On a per capita level, state spending on defense and security as well as public wages and pensions was only reduced due to the serious fiscal crisis Jordan has been hit at the end of the 1980s. Interestingly, especially subsidies increased at this point for the subsequent two years. At a broader perspective, only subsidies (per capita as well as per GDP) are positively and significantly related to world oil prices. Public wages and pensions seem to be independent of or in per GDP data even negatively related to price developments on world markets. On the other hand they do closely relate to non-oil exports (Figure 5), even though a look at figure 8 and 9 seems to indicate that during

²² Please note that public wages are negatively but insignificantly related to oil revenues and world oil prices using per capita data. In contrast to that they are positive correlated using per GDP indicators.

²³ Similar to world oil markets, phosphate rocks prices skyrocket during the mid-1970s for a short period of time and thereafter declined to previous levels.

the last couple of years spending for both defense and public wages has been disconnected from phosphate and potash earnings.

Figure 2: Morocco – Indicators of Material Legitimation and Phosphate Revenues (per capita in US\$), 1970-2004

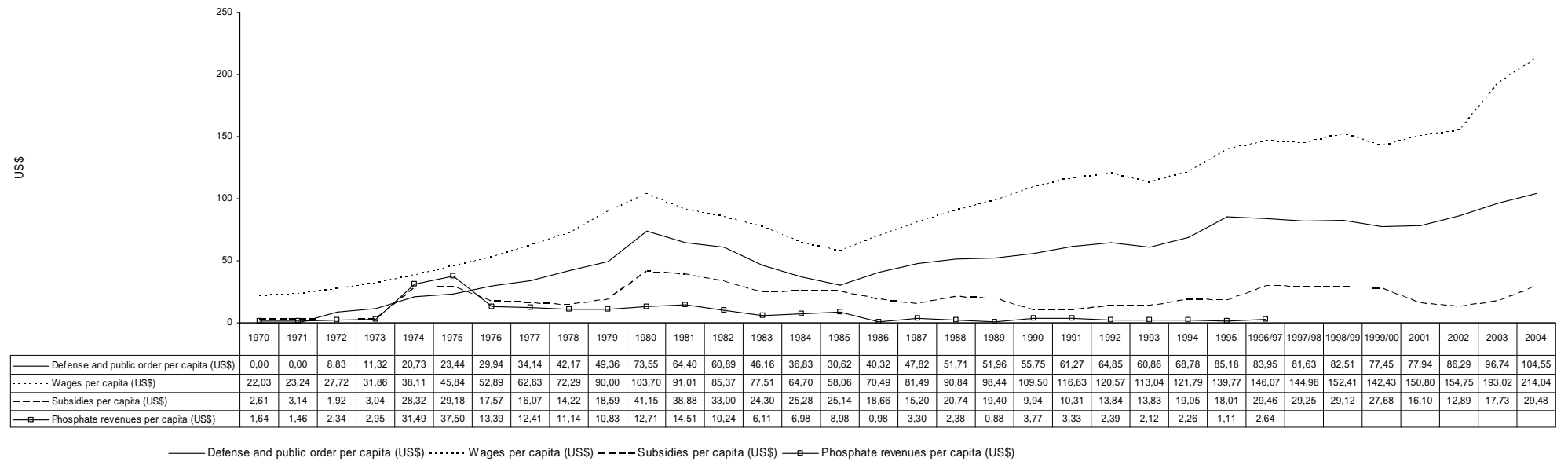


Figure 3: Morocco – Indicators of Material Legitimation and Phosphate Revenues (% of GDP), 1970-2004

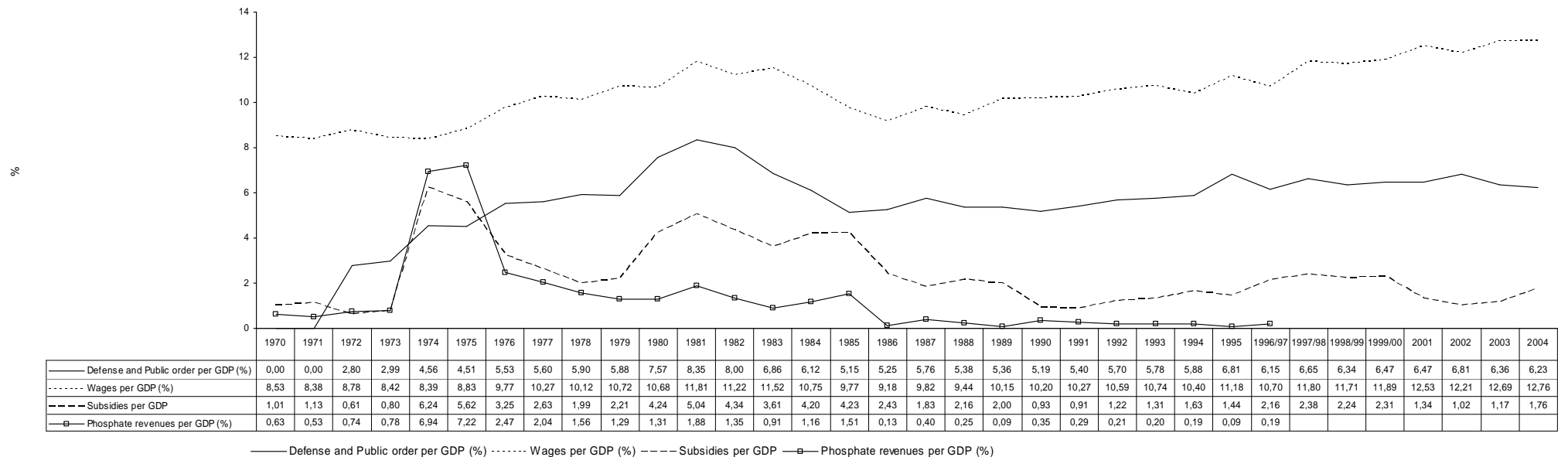


Figure 4: Tunisia – Indicators of Material Legitimation and Oil Revenues (per Capita in US\$), 1970-2004

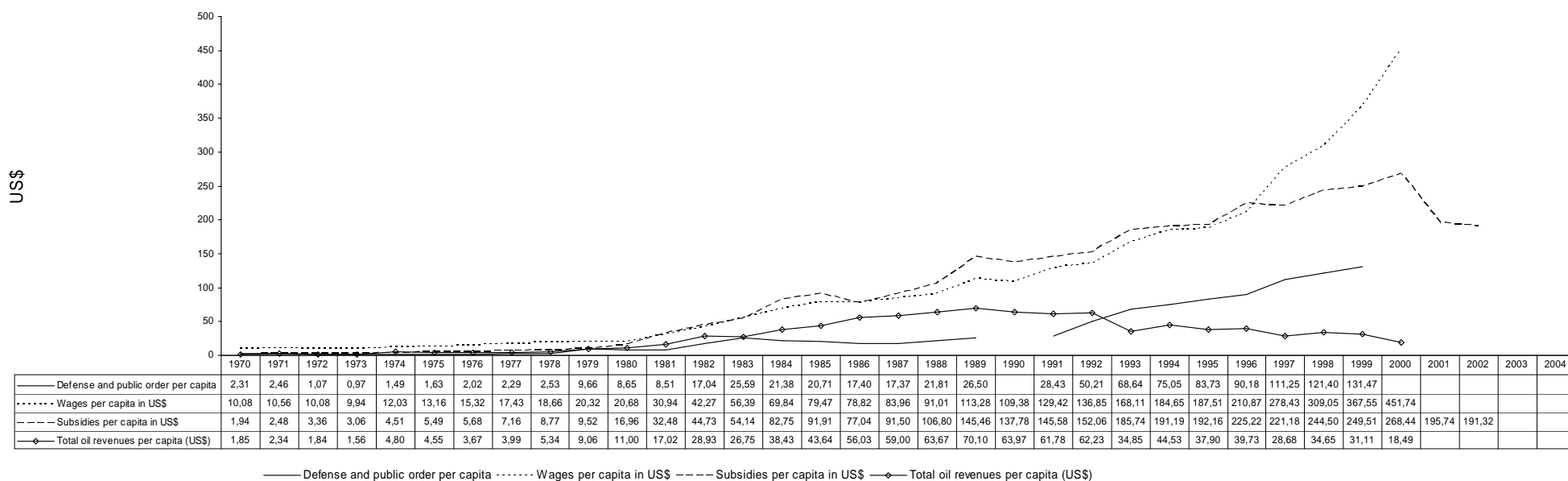


Figure 5: Tunisia – Indicators of Material Legitimation and Oil Revenues (% of GDP), 1970-2004

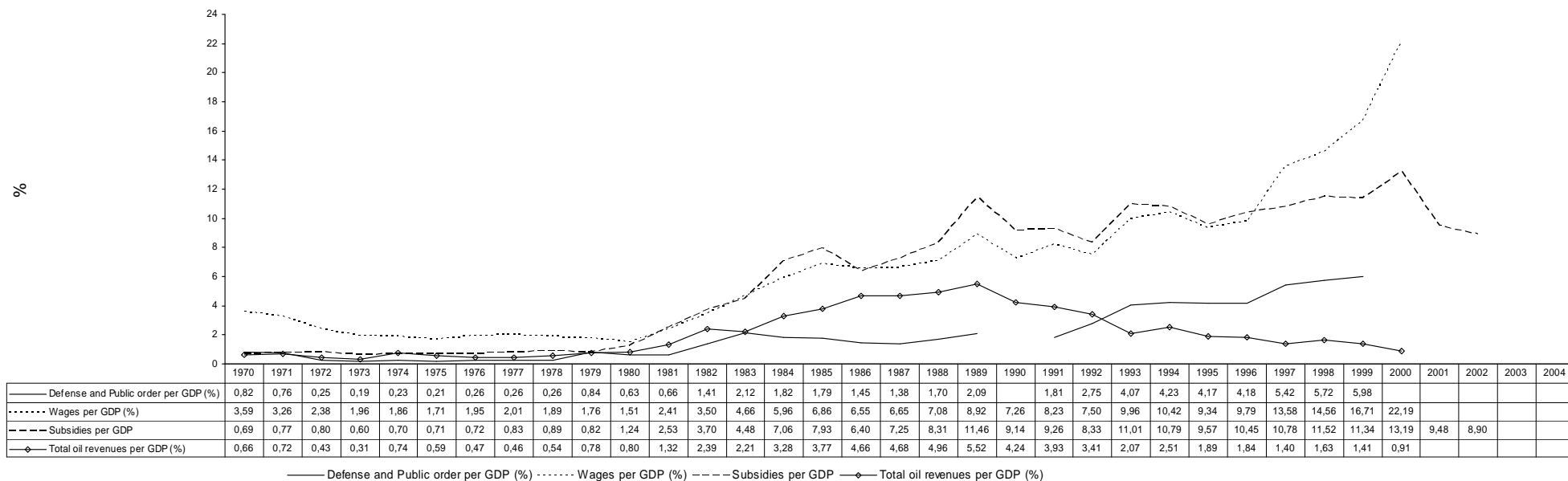


Figure 6: Egypt – Indicators of Material Legitimation, Suez Canal & Oil Revenues (per Capita in US\$), 1970-2004

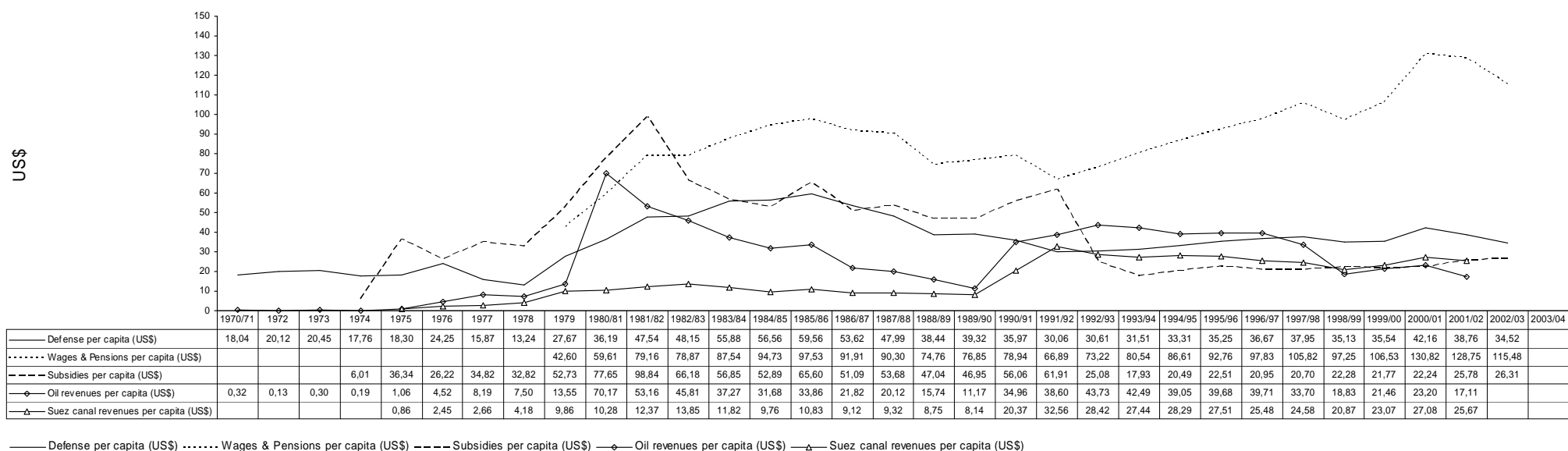


Figure 7: Egypt – Indicators of Material Legitimation, Suez Canal & Oil Revenues (per GDP in %), 1970-2004

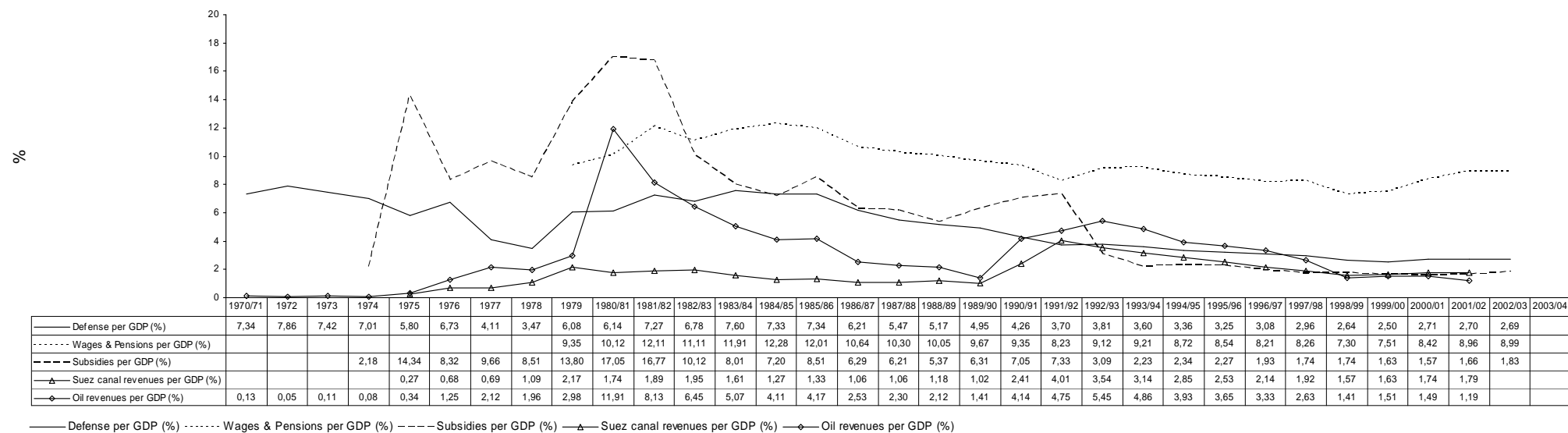


Figure 8: Jordan – Indicators of Material Legitimation, Phosphate & Potash revenues (per Capita in US\$), 1970-2004

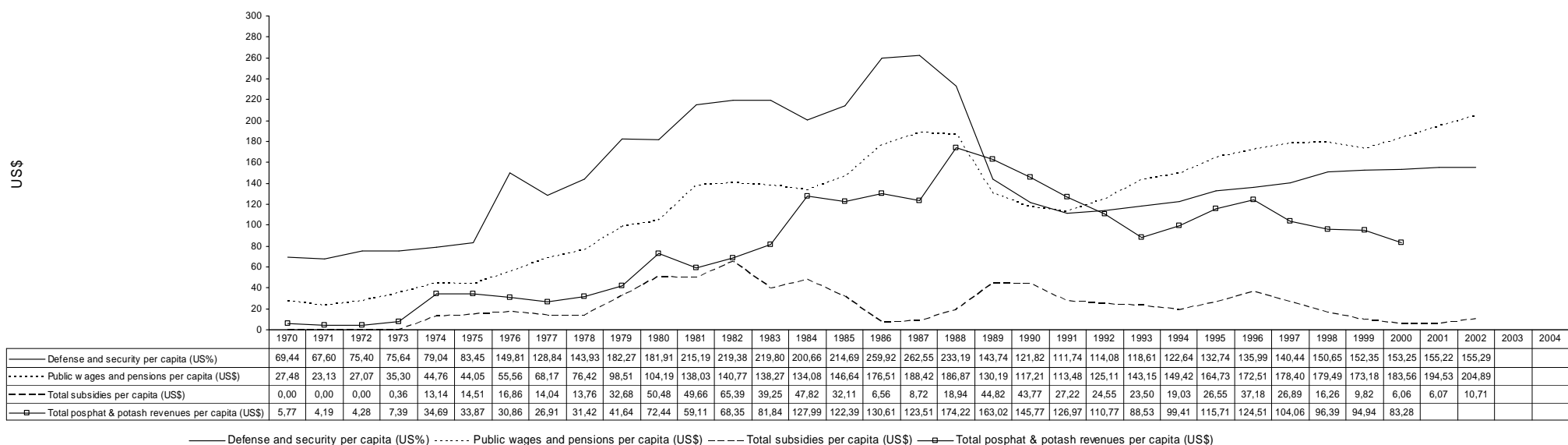


Figure 9: Jordan – Indicators of Material Legitimation, Phosphate & Potash revenues (per Capita in US\$), 1970-2004

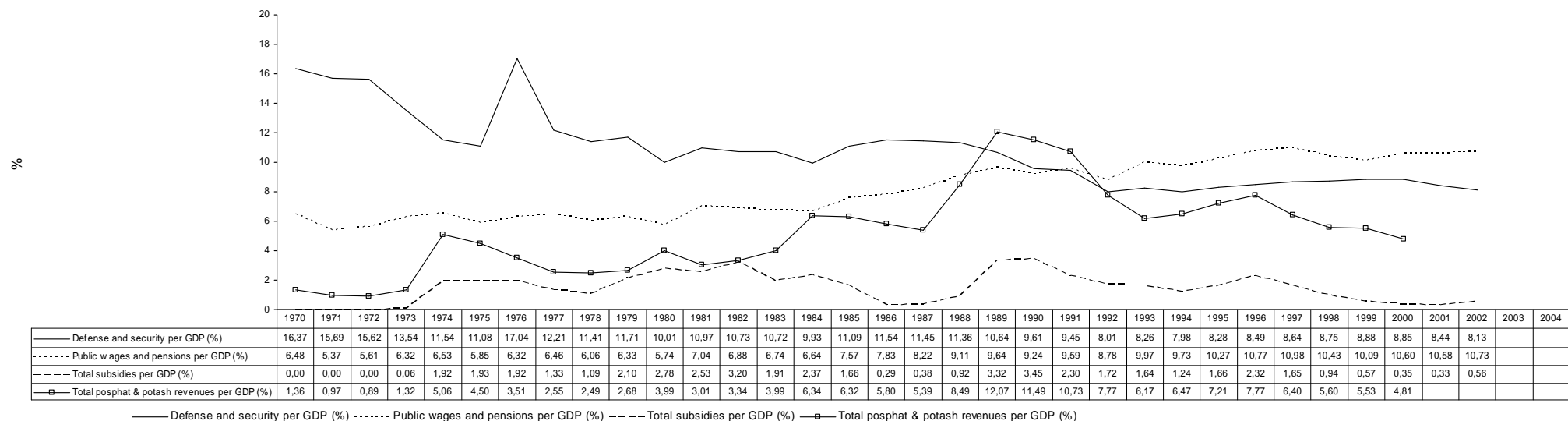


Table 2: Morocco, bivariat correlations

		Public wages per capita (US\$)	Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Phosphate revenues per capita (US\$)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)			Public wages per GDP (%)	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Phosphate revenues per GDP (%)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)
Defense and public order per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient	0,969**	0,339	-0,379	-0,162	Defense and public order per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient	0,758**	0,243	-0,016	0,464**
	Significance	0,000	0,058	0,061	0,376		Significance	0,000	0,180	0,938	0,007
	Spearman's Rho	0,975**	0,257	-0,306	-0,290		Spearman's Rho	0,854**	0,191	0,127	0,179
	Significance	0,000	0,155	0,137	0,107		Significance	0,000	0,296	0,545	0,327
	N	32	32	25	32		N	32	32	25	32
Public wages per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient		0,332	-0,317	-0,180	Public wages per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient		-0,083	-0,158	0,134
	Significance		0,055	0,107	0,309		Significance		0,639	0,431	0,449
	Spearman's Rho		0,289	-0,198	-0,158		Spearman's Rho		0,073	0,134	0,123
	Significance		0,098	0,321	0,372		Significance		0,680	0,506	0,488
	N		34	27	34		N		34	27	34
Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient			0,504**	0,580**	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient			0,807**	0,669**
	Significance			0,007	0,000		Significance			0,000	0,000
	Spearman's Rho			0,471**	0,414*		Spearman's Rho			0,670**	0,635**
	Significance			0,013	0,015		Significance			0,000	0,000
	N			27	34		N			27	34
Phosphate revenues per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient				0,460**	Phosphate revenues per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient				0,461*
	Significance				0,016		Significance				0,016
	Spearman's Rho				0,784**		Spearman's Rho				0,784**
	Significance				0,000		Significance				0,000
	N				27		N				27

** correlation significant at the 0,01 level.

* correlation significant at the 0,05 level

Table 3: Tunisia, bivariat correlations

		Public wages per capita (US\$)	Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Oil revenues per capita (US\$)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)			Public wages per GDP (%)	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Oil revenues per GDP (%)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)
Defense and public order per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient	0,982**	0,940**	0,381*	-0,438*	Defense and public order per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient	0,957**	0,868**	0,209	-0,445*
	Significance	0,000	0,000	0,042	0,017		Significance	0,000	0,000	0,277	0,016
	Spearman's Rho	0,974**	0,964**	0,720**	-0,257		Spearman's Rho	0,922**	0,909**	0,611**	-0,313
	Significance	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,179		Significance	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,098
	N	29	29	29	29		N	29	29	29	29
Public wages per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient		0,940**	0,340	-0,419*	Public wages per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient		0,893**	0,234	-0,472**
	Significance		0,000	0,061	0,019		Significance		0,000	0,205	0,007
	Spearman's Rho		0,996**	0,705**	-0,229		Spearman's Rho		0,918**	0,544**	-0,512**
	Significance		0,000	0,000	0,215		Significance		0,000	0,002	0,003
	N		31	31	31		N		31	31	31
Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient			0,572**	-0,476**	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient			0,562**	-0,442*
	Significance			0,001	0,005		Significance			0,001	0,010
	Spearman's Rho			0,702**	-0,249		Spearman's Rho			0,624**	-0,286
	Significance			0,000	0,162		Significance			0,000	0,107
	N			31	33		N			31	33
Oil revenues per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient				-0,237	Oil revenues per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient				-0,135
	Significance				0,200		Significance				0,469
	Spearman's Rho				-0,011		Spearman's Rho				0,038
	Significance				0,954		Significance				0,838
	N				31		N				31

** correlation significant at the 0,01 level.

* correlation significant at the 0,05 level

Table 4: Egypt, bivariat correlations

		Public wages per capita (US\$)	Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Suez canal revenues per capita (US\$)	Oil revenues per capita (US\$)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)			Public wages per GDP (%)	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Suez canal revenues per GDP (%)	Oil revenues per GDP (%)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)
Defense and public order per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient	0,247	0,495**	0,073	0,561**	0,441*	Defense and public order per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient	0,936**	0,657**	-0,369	0,073	0,474**
	Significance	0,244	0,006	0,719	0,001	0,012		Significance	0,000	0,000	0,058	0,695	0,006
	Spearman's Rho	0,296	0,436*	0,018	0,529**	0,360*		Spearman's Rho	0,920**	0,725**	-0,312	-0,004	0,330
	Significance	0,161	0,018	0,930	0,002	0,043		Significance	0,000	0,000	0,113	0,985	0,065
	N	24	29	27	31	32		N	24	29	27	31	32
Public wages per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient		-0,514**	0,335	-0,282	-0,370	Public wages per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient		0,634**	-0,394	0,430*	0,819**
	Significance		0,025	0,118	0,193	0,075		Significance		0,001	0,063	0,040	0,000
	Spearman's Rho		-0,465*	0,196	-0,222	-0,478**		Spearman's Rho		0,750**	-0,414*	0,441*	0,793**
	Significance		0,022	0,371	0,308	0,018		Significance		0,000	0,050	0,035	0,000
	N		24	23	23	24		N		24	23	23	24
Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient			-0,394*	0,454*	0,809**	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient			-0,303	0,505**	0,791**
	Significance			0,042	0,015	0,000		Significance			0,125	0,006	0,000
	Spearman's Rho			-0,373	0,244	0,786**		Spearman's Rho			-0,261	0,378*	0,822**
	Significance			0,055	0,212	0,000		Significance			0,188	0,048	0,000
	N			27	28	29		N			27	28	29
Suez canal revenues per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient				0,466*	-0,501*	Suez canal revenues per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient				0,410*	-0,156
	Significance				0,014	0,008		Significance				0,034	0,327
	Spearman's Rho				0,664**	-0,462*		Spearman's Rho				0,611**	-0,232
	Significance				0,000	0,015		Significance				0,001	0,244
	N				27	27		N				27	27
Oil revenues per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient					0,472**	Oil revenues per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient					0,681**
	Significance					0,007		Significance					0,000
	Spearman's Rho					0,368*		Spearman's Rho					0,599**
	Significance					0,042		Significance					0,000
	N					31		N					31

** correlation significant at the 0,01 level.

* correlation significant at the 0,05 level

Table 5: Jordan, bivariat correlations

		Public wages per capita (US\$)	Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Phosphate revenues per capita (US\$)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)			Public wages per GDP (%)	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Phosphat revenues per GDP (%)	World Oil price (inflation adjusted)
Defense and public order per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient	0,639**	0,269	0,524**	0,444**	Defense and public order per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient	-0,750**	-0,292	-0,618**	0,037
	Significance	0,000	0,150	0,002	0,010		Significance	0,000	0,099	0,000	0,840
	Spearman's Rho	0,638**	0,151	0,445*	0,490*		Spearman's Rho	-0,793**	-0,212	-0,703**	0,173
	Significance	0,000	0,426	0,012	0,004		Significance	0,000	0,236	0,000	0,334
	N	33	30	31	33		N	33	33	31	33
Public wages per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient		-0,004	0,812**	0,103	Public wages per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient		-0,002	0,697**	-0,505**
	Significance		0,985	0,000	0,568		Significance		0,990	0,000	0,003
	Spearman's Rho		-0,214	0,702**	0,133		Spearman's Rho		0,008	0,744**	-0,329
	Significance		0,265	0,000	0,461		Significance		0,965	0,000	0,062
	N		30	31	33		N		33	31	33
Subsidies per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient			0,249	0,630**	Subsidies per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient			0,522**	0,593**
	Significance			0,202	0,000		Significance			0,003	0,000
	Spearman's Rho			0,262	0,502**		Spearman's Rho			0,400*	0,678**
	Significance			0,179	0,005		Significance			0,026	0,000
	N			28	30		N			31	33
Phosphate revenues per capita (US\$)	Pearson coefficient				-0,166	Phosphat revenues per GDP (%)	Pearson coefficient				-0,202
	Significance				0,534		Significance				0,276
	Spearman's Rho				0,006		Spearman's Rho				-0,102
	Significance				0,976		Significance				0,584
	N				31		N				31

** correlation significant at the 0,01 level.

* correlation significant at the 0,05 level

Comparing the sectors in which material resources are distributed across all four cases one can conclude that state expenditures for subsidies has been the most shrinking one on a general level. With the exception of Tunisia - this might be partially due to problems in data classification - ²⁴ state spending for subsidies does most closely co-vary with oil prices cycles, or, in the case of Morocco, with booms and busts in phosphate revenues. State subsidies for food, housing and other goods extensively increased during a first boom of world oil prices until 1981 and thereafter heavily declined. Remarkably, expenditures for subsidies never completely disappeared, as data on all four cases show. In addition to that it is interesting to note that, again with the exception of Tunisia, state expenditures for subsidies seem to slightly increase at the beginning of a second period of world oil price boom since 2002, even though more actual data would be needed in order to verify this relationship. Expenditures for defense and public order as well as for public wages and pensions have been more stable over time. In neither case is state spending on public wages positively related to world oil price developments.²⁵ Only where natural resource earnings were uncoupled from world market price cycles, state spending on public wages co-varies with resource revenues (Tunisia and Jordan). This finding points to the overarching importance of public sector employment for regime legitimacy and authoritarian survival in all four cases treated here. Development on state spending on defense is non-uniform. In both Maghreb countries, defense expenditures seem to be largely independent from national

²⁴ Data on subsidies for Tunisia include not only food subsidies and other direct transfers but also some indirect subsidies covering public enterprise losses.

²⁵ The only exception to this picture are data on per GDP spending in Egypt.

resource booms and bust. Findings on Jordan and Egypt do not unambiguously support this picture. It is maybe here among the Arab front states were other and additional distributional aspects might play a role.²⁶

5. Conclusion

First and for the sake of repetition, my findings from Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan point to the durability of material distribution in Arab authoritarian states during times of fiscal scarcity. Even though this effect has been not uniform across time and countries, it seems reasonable to say that state spending for public wages and pensions as well as spending for defense, with the partial exception of Jordan and Egypt for a shorter period of time, have been independent of resource booms and bust periods during the past. This finding points to the conclusion that the survival of authoritarian regimes during oil bust periods comes not as a surprise if material resources have been distributed toward key social groups continuously.

Second, from a conceptual point of view, variations - especially the decline - of per capita spending on subsidies might indicate a reason for the ever stated crisis of legitimacy of the authoritarian regime. Without doubt, subsidy cuts represent an adjustment of state spending due to the general shrinking of the state's fiscal resources. How to interpret this development? Assuming a zero-sum model of political stability, which is a function of repression and legitimacy, suggested previously, lower levels of material allocation lead to a lower degree of legitimacy. For ensuring political stability, the state has to increase its coercive means toward society. Eberhard Kienle's (1998, 2000) descriptions of the modes of Egypt's deliberalization during the 1990s as well as John Altermans (2000) interpretation of these events provide evidence for this model-like relationship.

To finish with, the beginning of an empirical rich and conceptual substantial research on the determinants of authoritarian resilience, which includes a reformulation of the fiscal-crisis approach of authoritarian survival in the MENA region, may focus on the following: First, using indicators of public expenditures instead of public revenues might eventually lead to different findings even in large-n studies. Parts of these results

²⁶ Cf. for short summaries of patronizing the Egyptian army (Frisch 2002, Richter 2007). For a general review on Middle Eastern armies as economic actors (Droz-Vincent 2007).

might finally lead to a rejection of what Benjamin Smith and others believe to be a better explanation of authoritarian stability. Especially two empirical aspects, overly ignored in the literature so far, are likely to influence this reformulation: a) state budgets consist of more than oil rents, and b) states heavily overspend using their sovereign right to borrow on domestic and international markets. Second, as my superficial analysis on four cases in the MENA region has shown, more close inquiries on the structure of state spending over all social strata might point to more concrete mechanisms of material durability as well as other forms of manipulating material distributions²⁷ in authoritarian regimes.

NOTE: As a sort of byproduct, this paper developed from research I have done as part of my PhD dissertation on the nexus of material resources and foreign trade reforms in the Middle East and North Africa. In the future and after having completed this dissertation, I'm planning to put additional efforts into what I have called in this paper 'the durability of material distribution' of authoritarian regimes. As part of this continuing work I think of an accompanying formal model, which can be tested by the existing four or possibly some more cases. I hope to receive feedback on how to trade off between keeping the number of cases as handy as possible - given the problems of data availability and reliability, on the one hand - and keeping or extending the scope of my argument as general as possible, on the other hand.

²⁷ Cf. in this context the intriguing paper by Lisa Blaydes on how the Mubarak regime manipulates material distributions in light of the electoral calendar in Egypt (Blaydes 2007).

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