Is Protest a Luxury?
Evidence from Post-ISIS Iraq

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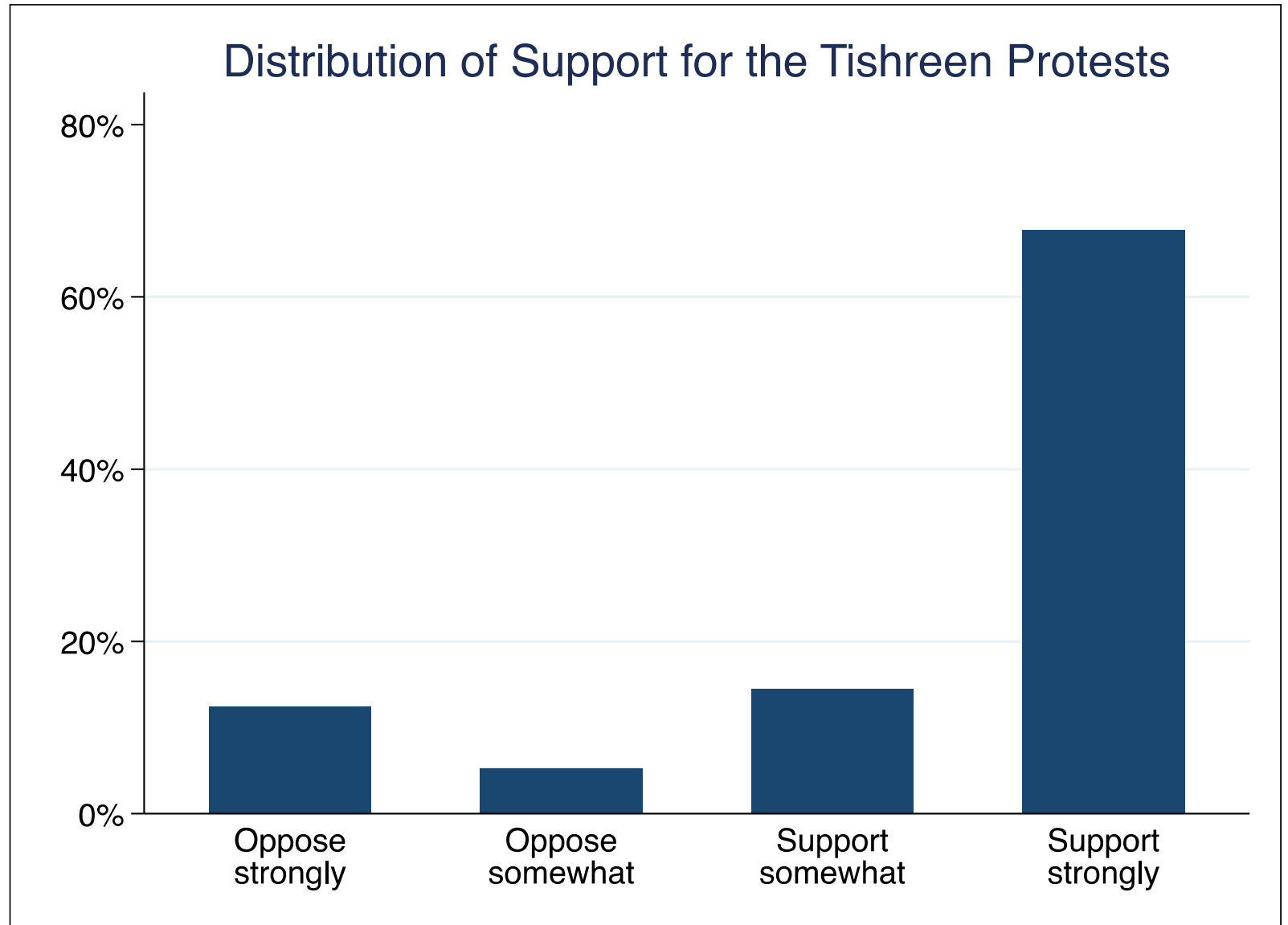
Introduction

Empirical focus: support for the October/Tishreen Protest Movement in Iraq (2019-21)
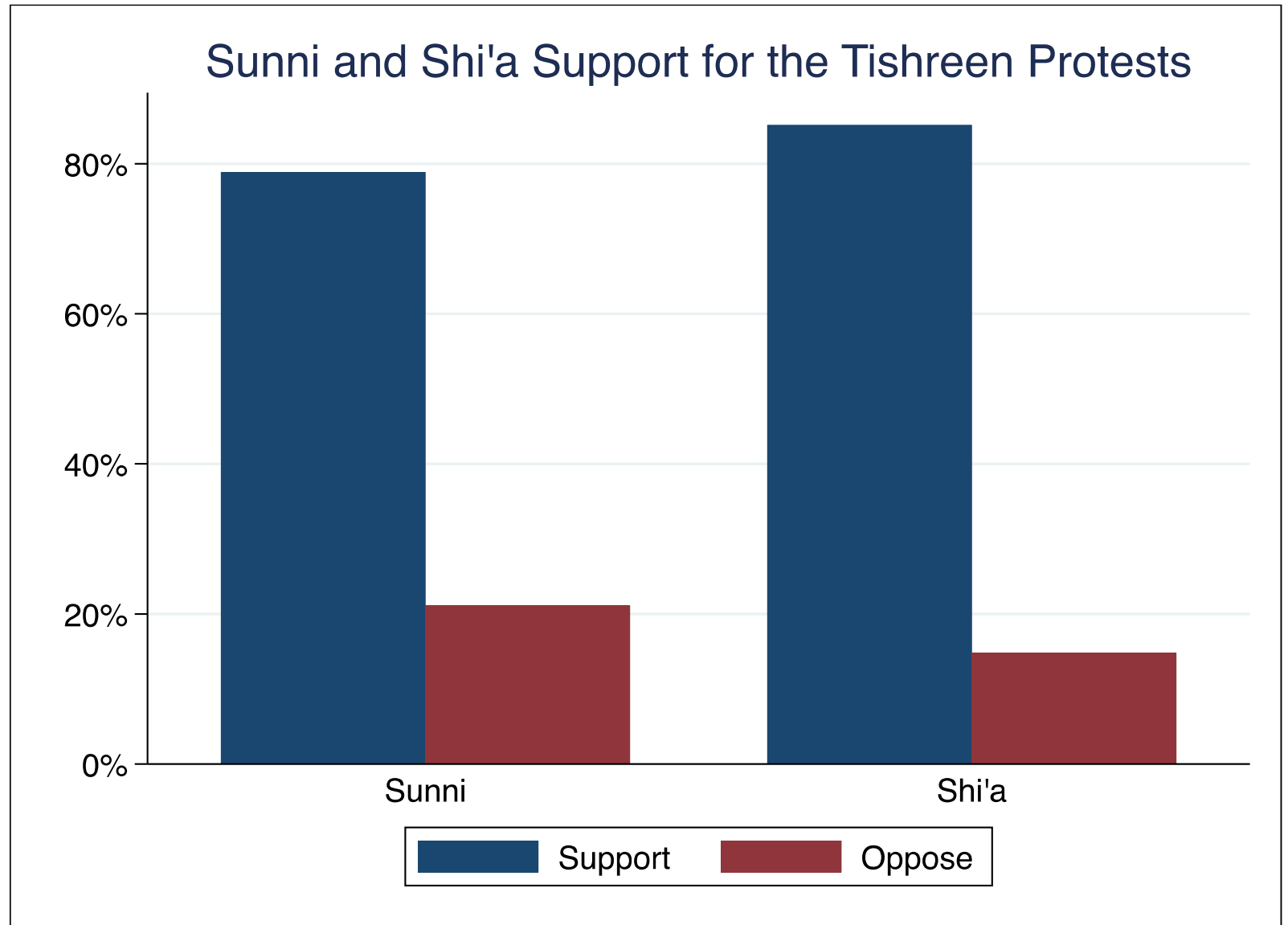
- **Our Research Questions:**

  o Why do some people support protests?

  o Why do citizens back movements like this in insecure and wartorn societies like Iraq?

- Protest support is key to shaping politics in many societies, including fragile ones

Introduction

Distribution of Support for the Tishreen Protests

Introduction

Sunni and Shi'a Support for the Tishreen Protests

Literature

- **Grievances**
  - Gurr 1970, 1993
  - De Juan and Wegner 2019
  - Justino and Martorano 2019

- **Opportunities**
  - Schock 1999
  - Slater 2009
  - Acosta 2019
  - Clarke and Kocak 2020

Theory

- Human needs drive behavior (Maslow 1943)

- Unmet needs create distress

- **The Three S's Model**
  - Security
  - Sustenance
  - Significance

  ❑ An individual is most likely to support protests when the protests hold the promise of fulfilling unmet needs

  ❑ People who lack a basic level of security are less likely to support protests

  ❑ When survival is at stake, protest is a "luxury"

Hypotheses (Significance)

- **H1a:** *The more Iraqis perceive their government as corrupt, the more likely they are to support the ongoing protests.*

- **H1a:** *The more Iraqis think that foreign powers are meddling in Iraq, the more likely they are to support the ongoing protests.*

- **H1c:** *The more Iraqis believe in a pan-sectarian form of politics, the more likely they are to support the ongoing protests.*

Hypotheses (Sustenance)

- **H2a:** *The less Iraqis perceive their lives as materially comfortable, the more likely they are to support the protests.*

- **H2b:** *Unemployed Iraqis are more likely to support the protests than employed Iraqis.*

Hypotheses (Security)

- **H3a:** *The more negatively Iraqis perceive the security situation in their area, the less likely they are to support the protests*.

- **H3b:** *Iraqis who have been displaced from their communities due to conflict are less likely to support the protests than those who have not been displaced*.

- **H3c:** *The closer Iraqis live to areas where there have been ISIS terrorist attacks, the less likely they are to support the protests.*

Data and Variables

- Survey fielded by experienced and reputable Iraqi survey firm IIACSS in April and May of 2020 in the Sunni Arab and Shia Arab-dominated regions of Iraq.

- A sample of 1822 Iraqi adults collected through proportional probability sampling.

- The sample was well-balanced and broadly representative in terms of the demographics of the areas surveyed.

- Our hypotheses are operationalized through the following variables:

Data and Variables

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Primary Variables Used in the Analysis

Variables	Mean	Min-Max	N	Std. Dev.
Dependent Variable				
Protest Support	2.4	0-3	1,811	1.0
Independent Variables				
Security				
Poor Security Situation	1.5	0-3	1,822	0.76
Displacement Status	0.18	0-2	1,822	0.40
ISIL Terror Proximity	-1.2	-2.5-2.9	1,822	0.87
Significance				
Foreign Meddling Scale	24.8	0-36	1,693	7.51
Government Corruption	3.0	0-4	1,809	1.4
Pan-Sectarianism	2.5	0-3	1,817	0.89
Sustenance				
Not Comfortable	1.15	0-3	1,822	1.1
Unemployed	0.13	0-1	1,776	0.33
Demographic Controls				
Age	31	18-84	1,811	12
Female	0.49	0-1	1,822	0.49
High School	0.37	0-1	1,822	0.48
Shi'a	0.54	0-1	1,822	0.50

Source: IIACSS Iraq Survey April-May 2020

Empirical Results

Table 2: Predictors of Iraqi Support for the Tishreen Protest Movement

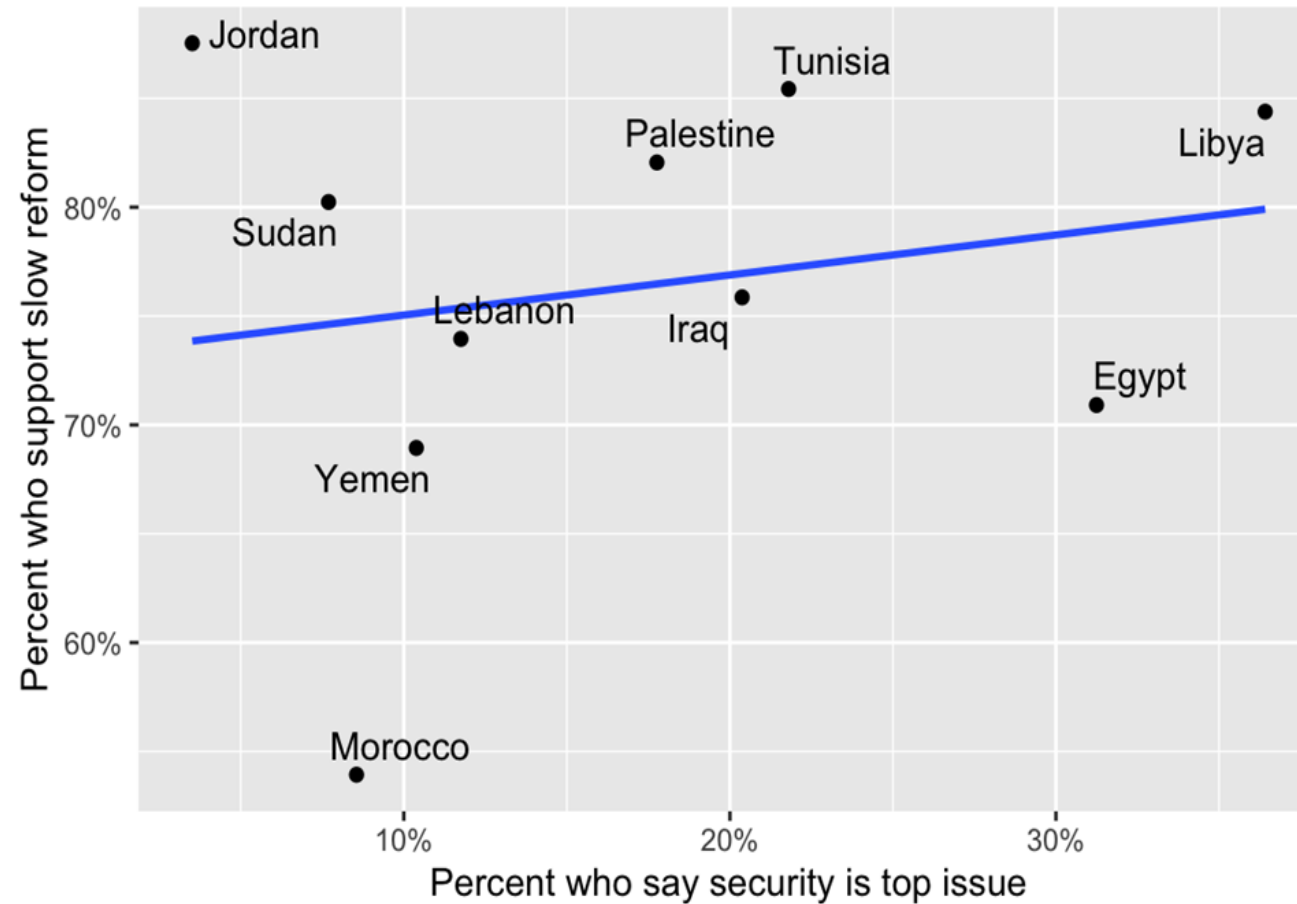|	(M1) Protest Support	(M2) Protest Support	(M3) Protest Support	(M4) Protest Support
Significance				
Government Corruption	0.24***	0.22***	0.22***	0.21***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Foreign Meddling Scale	0.03*	0.03*	0.02*	0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Pan-Sectarian Orientation	0.18***	0.15***	0.16***	0.16***
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Sustenance				
Not Comfortable		0.04	0.04	0.04
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Unemployed		0.08	0.16	0.17
		(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.17)
Security				
Poor Security Situation			-0.11*	-0.13*
			(0.05)	(0.05)
Displacement			-0.34+	-0.33*
			(0.19)	(0.14)
ISIS Violence Proximity			-0.16*	-0.18**
			(0.07)	(0.07)
Demographics				
Age				-0.01*
				(0.01)
Male				0.03
				(0.13)
Shi'a				0.07
				(0.14)
High School				-0.01
				(0.05)
Cutpoint 1	0.31	0.32	0.14	-0.18
	(0.35)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.45)
Cutpoint 2	0.75*	0.75*	0.57	0.25
	(0.35)	(0.37)	(0.38)	(0.44)
Cutpoint 3	1.58***	1.59***	1.42***	1.10*
	(0.34)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.45)
Observations	1,675	1,636	1,634	1,634

Results from ordinal generalized linear models with a logit link function and neighborhood clustered standard errors.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Evidence Beyond Iraq?

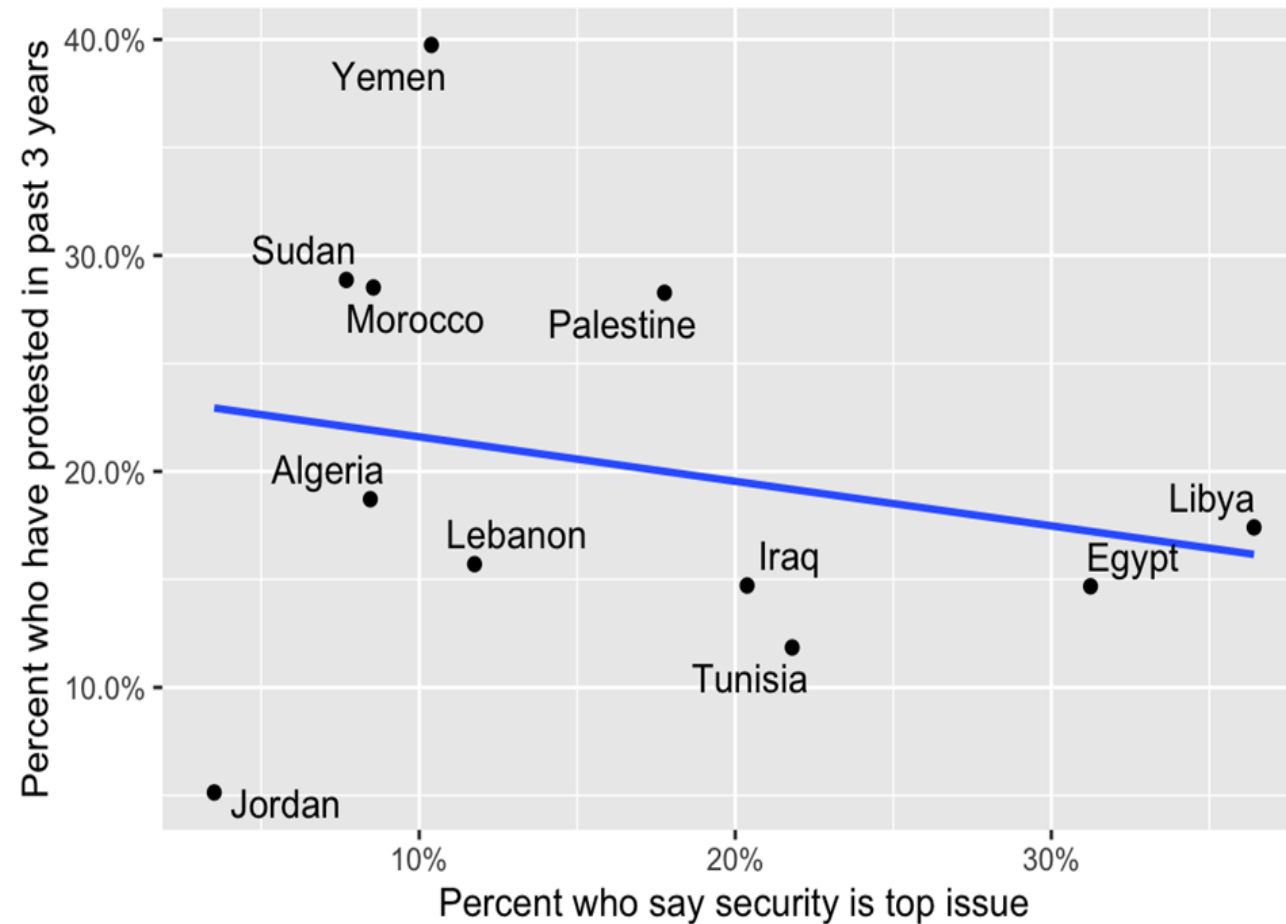Importance of Security vs. Preferred Pace of Reform
Data from Arab Barometer survey, wave 5

Evidence Beyond Iraq?

Importance of Security vs. Protest Participation

Data from Arab Barometer survey, wave 5

Conclusion

- Significance needs – perceived corruption, foreign meddling, and systemic sectarianism – substantially fueled support for the protests.

- Yet security needs tend to undercut protest support.

- Fears of societal destabilization among the mass public need to be taken seriously as an obstacle to political reform.

- Those interested in promoting protest movements for political reform in places like Iraq should be wary of state efforts to foment and manipulate internal security threats.