Civic Engagement of Youth
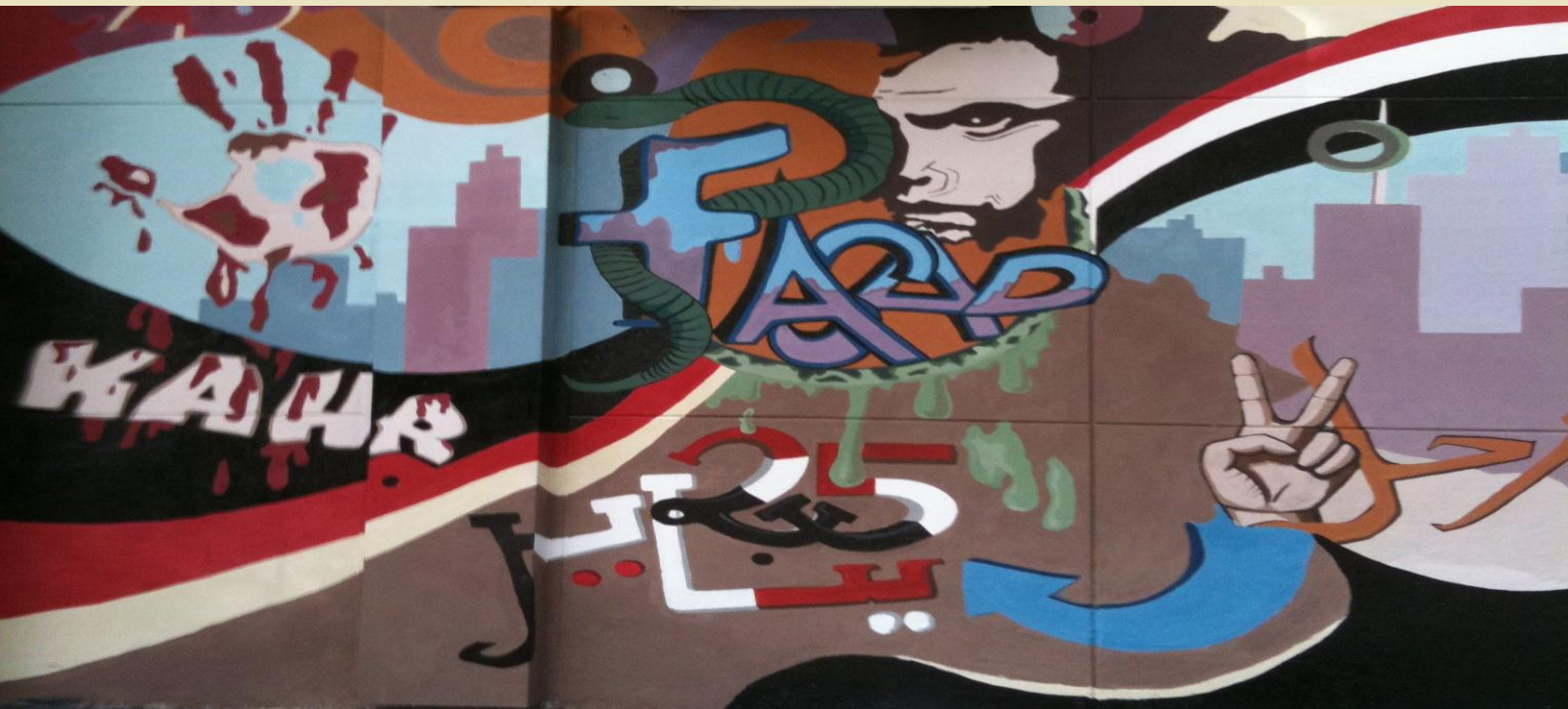# in the Middle East and North Africa:
An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes

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MercyCorps

Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: Rebecca Wolfe / Mercy Corps, 2011

Executive Summary

Rationale and Purpose

Youth have been at the heart of the many of the recent movements for political change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Harnessing this recent surge in public activism among youth, and broadening the base of youth civic engagement in MENA are seen critical pathways towards political reform and more equitable development in the region. Specific outcomes believed to be linked with increased involvement of youth in civic activities include:

- Greater political activism and voice;
- Stronger social and civic values, which are important foundations for good governance and peaceful co-existence;
- Decreased likelihood of involvement in violent and extremist movements;
- Increased employability among the youth who are civically involved.

However, these assumed relationships are largely untested within the current context of the MENA region. As a result, planners and policymakers lack reliable evidence on which to base their strategies for promoting civic engagement among Arab youth. Mercy Corps undertook this research to fill this knowledge gap and help answer the question: What benefits can realistically be expected from increased youth civic engagement in MENA – both to the youth who participate, and their broader societies?

Methods

This study employed a program theory driven approach. The research first made explicit the theories of change underlying typical youth civic engagement programs in the MENA region. To test these theories, existing data from recent, independent surveys of youth in seven countries in the Middle East and North Africa were analyzed. Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to determine the existence and strength of relationships between the hypothesized drivers and outcomes of youth civic engagement. Existing qualitative data sources, including from interviews with youth participants of Mercy Corps civic engagement programs in MENA, were used to help interpret and put into context the quantitative findings.

Key Findings

Socio-economic status is major factor that predicts levels of civic participation among Arab youth. Young women and youth who are less educated, unemployed, and from rural areas are the least likely to be civically engaged. It is often these very groups whose voices are underrepresented in public debates and decisions, contributing to their further marganilization.

Civic participation is highest among Arab youth who take an active interest in politics, who regularly follow the news, and who use the internet. There is strong evidence to support the hypothesis that if young people gain greater media literacy and access to internet communication technologies (ICTs), they will use it to obtain information about and express their views on political and other public debates. The internet appears to be a particularly promising vehicle, with a large untapped potential for increasing the scope and impact of civic participation among youth in the region, including women and those in rural areas.

Arab youth who are involved in civic activities in their communities are more likely to be actively engaged in political life. The evidence points to young people's participation in local civic groups as an effective "seedbed" for greater electoral and political participation. It follows

that investment in programs that provide youth opportunities for volunteerism and activism in their communities can also drive greater youth engagement in the political reform and democratization processes currently taking place in many countries in the MENA region.

Civic engagement among Arab youth does not appear to contribute to greater social capital, in the forms of political trust, tolerance of others, respect for pluralism and diversity, or a sense of shared identity. Rather, youth frustration with government institutions, especially their performance around employment creation, was found to be a key driver of unconventional forms of participation, such as petitioning and protesting.

Attitudes among Arab youth that may indicate their propensity towards political violence are not significantly influenced by their levels of civic participation. This brings into question the role that increasing civic engagement by itself can play in motivating Arab youth to choose peaceful channels over violent means to address their political grievances. Rather, economic opportunities appear to be more closely linked to Arab youth's attitudes toward the justification of use of violence for political causes.

It is not clear whether civically engaged youth gain skills that make them more employable. In a majority of the countries studied youth who were members of civic groups or recently involved in civic activities were more likely to be employed than their non-civically engaged peers. However, since the causal direction of this relationship remains unclear, it is not possible to conclude that simply getting Arab youth to participate in civic groups or actions is likely to improve their chances of securing a job.

Conclusions

The findings make evident a number of important implications for government, donor, and development agencies' thinking and priorities regarding youth policies and programming in the MENA region, and for additional avenues of research:

- To contribute to more equitable development in the MENA region, civic engagement programs will need to make efforts to reach youth from rural areas and young women. This will require adapting their outreach and program strategies, which are typically geared toward more educated youth and those already civically inclined or involved.

- As Arab countries begin to emerge from the current political transitions, a greater supply of social capital may prove essential for enabling more participatory governance and a functioning civil society to take root. There is a pressing need for research into what does contribute to support for pluralism, political trust, and other forms of social capital among Arab youth, so that the evidence can be used to inform programs and policies in the near term.

- The findings lend support to the current emphasis on programs to expand youth employment in the Middle East. But to have an influence on young people's likelihood of engaging in politically motivated violence, employment programs would need to effectively target the small percentage of youth that appear to be at risk of such actions. For civic engagement programs to expect to impact young people's economic opportunities, they must include deliberate activities geared towards preparing youth for the job market.

1.   Introduction

1.1. Rationale

Youth have been at the heart of the many of the recent movements for political change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). These movements include the dramatic revolutions in places like Egypt and Tunisia, as well as less visible yet significant calls for reform in countries like Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine. Young people's involvement in the protests and demonstrations has stemmed largely from their frustration with the existing institutions and norms that have denied them economic and social opportunities and political voice.

Young people have high expectations that these movements will bring with them greater and more equitable access to decent jobs, relevant education, engagement in the public realm, and more responsive and accountable governance (Khouri and Lopez, 2011). Failure by national governments to make timely and tangible progress in these areas – or at least demonstrate a real effort to do so – risks pushing more youth towards violent means to achieve the types of change they seek (Mercy Corps, 2011a). The recent demonstrations in Cairo against the continued rule by the Egyptian military are an example of this impatience. Yet addressing the endemic corruption, nepotism, political oppression, and other deep-seeded issues that lie at the roots of youth marginalization in MENA countries will not happen simply as a result of a new head of State or even a new constitution.

What appears to be important to youth in MENA is to have an influence on the changes taking place in their societies, and in particular to their economic and political landscapes (Khouri and Lopez, 2011). Mercy Corps, along with other agencies engaged in youth development in the MENA region, have been working for years towards this end by promoting young people's civic participation, and by extension their sense of agency, voice, and opportunities for activism. Such efforts are a core part of Mercy Corps' work to develop inclusive and effective civil society groups. Programs that increase young people's opportunities to be civically engaged can play a critical role in enabling more participatory governance to take root in the wake of the Arab Awakening, especially given the history of repression of civic society in many countries in the region.

Further expanding and broadening the base of youth civic engagement in MENA is a major priority among donors and development agencies at present, as it is seen as a possible pathway towards political reform and more equitable development in the region. Yet there is little evidence on what factors contribute to different types of civic participation among young people in MENA. A number of positive outcomes are believed to be linked with increased involvement of youth in civic activities. These include:

- Decreased likelihood of involvement in violent and extremist movements;
- Stronger social and civic values, which are important foundations for good governance and peaceful co-existence;
- Increased employability among the youth who are civically involved[1].

However, these assumed relationships are largely untested, especially within the current context of the MENA region[2]. Lacking reliable evidence, program planners and policymakers are

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[1] The logic underlying each of these outcomes is explained in the section 2.2 of this paper.

left to rely largely on assumptions and conventional wisdom when designing strategies for promoting civic engagement among Arab youth.

1.2. Purpose and Scope

Mercy Corps undertook this research to help better understand what benefits can realistically be expected from increased youth civic engagement in MENA – both to the youth who participate in civic activities, and their broader societies. To do this, the research made explicit and tested key theories of change underlying Mercy Corps' youth civic engagement programs in the MENA region. Through extensive analysis of existing data, the research set out to examine two primary questions:

1) What are the ***determinants*** of youth civic engagement in MENA? These were broken down into:
   - Factors that are typically influenced by Mercy Corps projects, such as life skills, civic knowledge, and access to information; and
   - Socio-demographic factors, including gender, age, (family) income levels, and education levels.

2) What are the ***outcomes*** of youth civic engagement in MENA? Specifically, the study examined the extent to which is it is linked to :
   - Political voice, including young people's confidence in being able to influence government, and actions taken towards this end, such as petitioning and demonstrating,
   - Social capital, including a shared sense of identity, tolerance for others, trust in local officials and institutions, and attitudes towards democracy,
   - Peacebuilding-related outcomes, such as attitudes towards the use of violence for political causes; and,
   - Employment-related outcomes, such as employment status, type, and job satisfaction.

Mercy Corps undertook this research across multiple countries within MENA with the intent of generating answers to the bigger question with which Mercy Corps, donors, and other development actors are struggling: What can we do to harness the recent surge of self-assertion and expression by Arab youth to promote peaceful social and political change within the region? The results are aimed at promoting learning among key staff within Mercy Corps and other agencies involved in youth development regarding what motivates youth to be civically involved. The findings on why and how youth civic engagement matters seek to contribute to greater evidenced-based decisions among donor and policy makers regarding priorities and approaches for youth programming in MENA.

1.3. Conceptual Framework

Civic engagement, as defined by this study, includes both community service activities and political actions. Civic participation can take many forms: volunteering in a community service project; being involved in an organization working to address a social issue, like corruption; voting; and joining with others to raise concerns, such as through protesting. Indicative

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[2] Much of the theory and existing evidence on these hypotheses is based on examples from OECD countries.

examples of the types of youth civic participation that Mercy Corps has supported in recent and current programs in the MENA region include:

- In Lebanon, through the support of Mercy Corps' Supporting Youth Advocacy Program, young men and women gained skills and opportunities to work with their local municipalities on prioritizing their needs and developing projects that respond to them. The successful advocacy and volunteer work by the participants resulted in more and higher quality public spaces for youth engagement and recreation, such as youth centers in their communities.

- Through the Palestinian Youth Advocacy for Equity and Employment project, Palestinian youth-led advocacy organization increased their cohesiveness and abilities to network with other groups. They then went on to collaborate with vocational training institutes, and ICT private sector actors to demand and deliver job skills for vulnerable Palestinian youth.

- Through the Global Citizen's Corps program, hundreds of youth in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and West Bank/Gaza have developed life skills, gained awareness of critical global and local social issues, and connected with youth across the world to build relationships and share experiences. Youth have applied their knowledge and competencies to undertake hundreds of civic actions. For example, research and advocacy by youth participants in Iraq resulted in the construction of a dam to ensure access to water for several villages facing a critical water shortage.

- The Advancing Civic engagement in Tunisia program is strengthening the capacities of youth and women's civil society organizations to effectively fill the newly opened space for public participation as the country undergoes reform.

A core set of strategies and intended outcomes are common across a number of Mercy Corps youth civic engagement projects. The conceptual framework developed for this study, presented in Figure 1, attempts to capture these elements and the relationships between them[3]. It illustrates the main assumptions believed to connect the program interventions to their intended intermediate and longer-term outcomes.

Based on the conceptual framework, and a review of literature and existing studies on youth civic engagement, the researchers developed a set of theories of change that reflect the contributions that greater civic engagement among youth is believed to make to the key expected outcomes. The research explored if these theories appear to hold true within the current MENA context. The theories of change tested are:

Theory 1 - Political Voice: If young people are involved in civic activities in their communities, they will be more likely to be actively (and non-violently) engaged in political life.

Theory 2 - *Social Capital:* If young people are civically engaged, they will be more likely to develop and exhibit forms of social capital that are conducive to the functioning of democracy, and to peaceful co-existence.
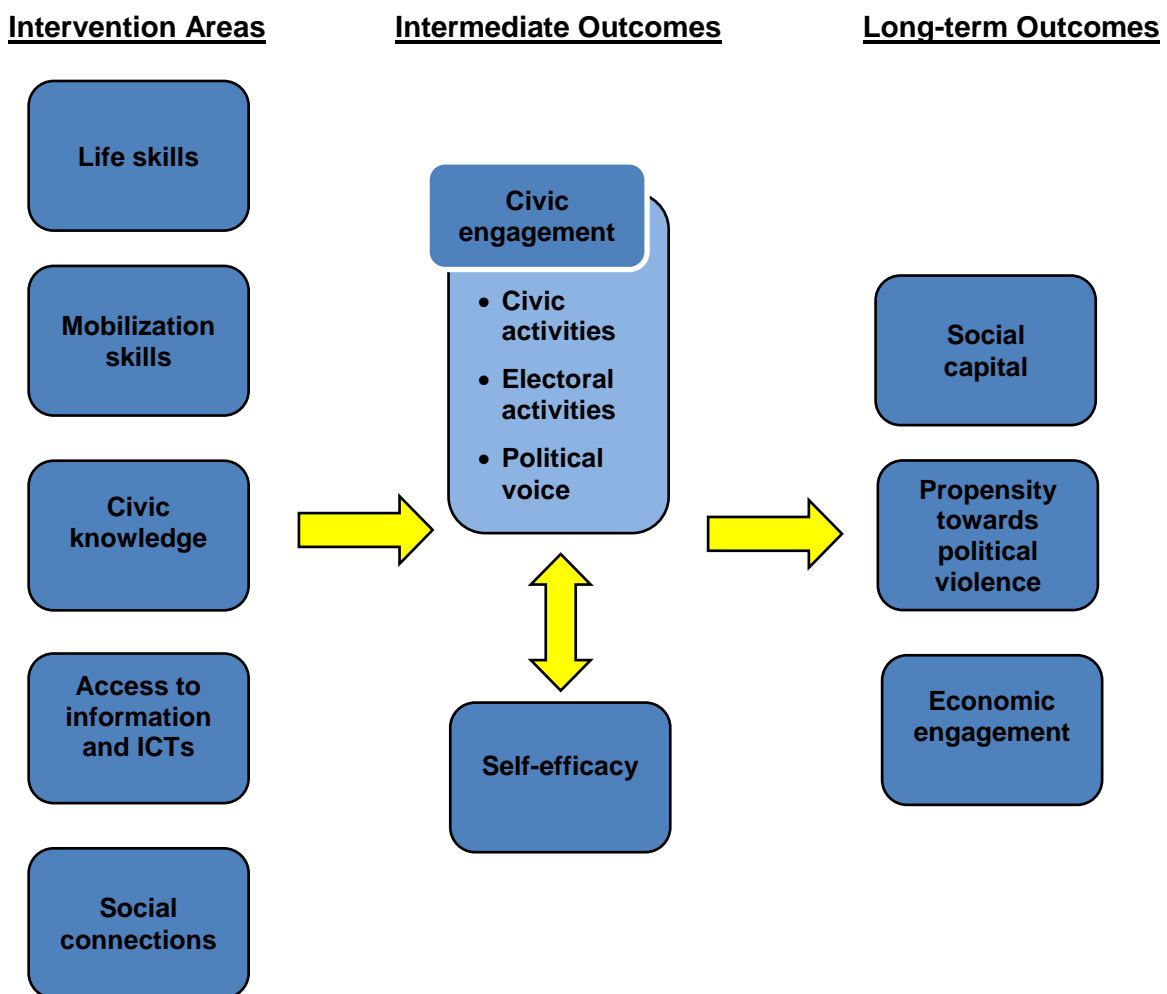
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[3] These are elements across multiple Mercy Corps projects. Few projects attempt to include them all.

Theory 3 - Propensity Towards Political Violence: If young people are civically engaged, they will be less likely to become involved in or support the use of violence to promote political objectives.

Theory 4 - Economic Engagement: If young people are civically engaged, they will gain important skills, contacts, and experience which make them more employable, or attractive to potential employers, than their non-civically engaged peers.

Measures of these constructs were developed using data from the sources described below. Definitions of the key concepts within the conceptual framework, and how each of them were measured within this study can be found in Annex 1.

Figure 1:   Conceptual Framework[4]

Intervention Areas	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes

- Life skills
- Mobilization skills
- Civic knowledge
- Access to information and ICTs
- Social connections

Civic engagement
- Civic activities
- Electoral activities
- Political voice

Self-efficacy

Social capital

Propensity towards political violence

Economic engagement

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[4] Mercy Corps programs work most directly on promoting youth involvement in local civic activities. It is show in this framework as an outcome, but would often be considered part of the intervention.

1.4. Methodology

This research utilized exiting sources of data, including previous studies and recent surveys of youth in the Middle East to answer the research questions. The decision to rely on quantitative analysis of secondary data as the main approach to the study was based on a number of factors:

- The lack of solid evidence on the factors that most consistently predict young people's participation in civic groups and actions, and the main outcomes linked to such participation;
- The availability of several data sets containing relevant and recent measures of the variables of interest among youth in countries in MENA; and
- The desire to minimize costs and the time demands placed on program personnel in Mercy Corps country offices.

The three major sources of quantitative data analyzed by the study were:

- Arabbarometer Round 1 surveys for Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen conducted during 2008[5];
- The Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) conducted by the Population Council in 2010[6]; and
- Surveys from 2010 on the Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) in Lebanon, Yemen, and Morocco, commissioned by International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR)[7].

This study relied on the following main data collection and analysis methods:

Literature review: The first step was to search for current literature on the key concepts and theories being examined, as well as evidence from recent studies regarding the predictors and outcomes of youth civic engagement. In addition to external sources, the literature review included relevant Mercy Corps proposals, reports, evaluations, and guidelines. The literature review was initially limited to studies and programs conducted within the MENA region, but later broadened to include other countries for which relevant sources were available. The key findings from literature are summarized under each of the theories of change in the Findings section, below.

Identification of theories of change to test: Most Mercy Corps youth civic engagement programs are based on some explicit causal logic, often reflected in the project proposal. Through taking stock of the design documents for a number of these programs, the research was able to develop an overall, generic model reflecting the main, common outcomes and assumed links between them[8]. Based on this model, and findings from the literature review, the researchers defined a set of broad theories of change, which appear to be applicable to many Mercy Corps youth civic engagement programs.

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[5] http://arabbarometer.org
[6] http://www.popcouncil.org/projects/SYPE
[7] http://swmena.net
[8] This approach of reconstructing program theory is increasingly practiced as part of program evaluation (Donaldson, 2007; Leeuw, 2003)

Analysis of secondary quantitative data: The researchers developed operational definitions for the key concepts in the theories of change, and then identified available datasets that could be used to measure the concepts and analyze the relationships between them. Measures were developed and statistical tests were used to determine if there were significant interactions between the key factors being examined and the strength of the relationships. The choice of the tests to use was based on the type of data for each variable, and included loglinear and logistic regressions, independent sample t-tests, and chi-squared tests. The researchers considered several potential moderators of these relationships and associations, including gender, level of education, employment status, and country, as well as for urban/rural status.

Interpretation and contextualization of findings: The researchers solicited input from experts – both subject-matter and Middle East specialists – to aid in identifying the most plausible explanations for the results. Key regional and technical Mercy Corps staff were also engaged in determining the implications of the findings for its programs and strategies, and recommendations for it and other agencies working on youth development in MENA.

Limitations

Data to measure several of the main components of Mercy Corps' youth civic engagement programs was not available within existing data sources. This included data for life skills, mobilization skills, and young people's social networks. As such, the research was not able to examine the influence of these factors on levels and types of youth civic participation. Attempts were made to use several sources of data from Mercy Corps' youth civic engagement programs in the Middle East, which contained measures of life skills and other potential 'drivers'. However, the existing data was not suitable for the types of inferential analyses required to answer the research questions posed within this study[9]. In some cases, the measures used did not fully reflect the concepts being studied. For example, the best measures of civic knowledge available for use were interest in and awareness of news about politics and government. In these cases, the associations found, or lack thereof, may not be an accurate reflection of reality.

It is not possible to attribute causality based on the cross-sectional data used in this study. Where significant relationships between factors were found, the direction of the relationship is unknown. To try to explain the causal directions, this research relies on the strength of the underlying theory, as evidenced by the existing studies and literature. For some of the hypotheses there is well established theory, for example that supports the contributions that participation in civic associations makes to individuals and groups political efficacy. For other hypotheses where the theoretical basis is thinner, such as the contributions of civic engagement to future employment, it is more difficult to make strong claims regarding causality.

A strength of the study was that the data analyzed were taken from representative samples of youth in multiple countries in the MENA region, using standardized instruments and questions. This contributed to the external validity of the findings. However, the lack of usable data from Mercy Corps programs may limit the generalizability of the findings to the specific groups of youth being targeted by such programs, who may differ in significant ways from the overall youth population in the countries.

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[9] In response, Mercy Corps' is working to develop and pilot improved tools for use in evaluation of its civic engagement programs.

2. Findings and Discussion

## 2.1. Determinants of Youth Civic Participation in MENA

Socio-Demographic Attributes of Civically Engaged Youth

Understanding the current state of civic engagement among youth, and which youth are currently the most and least involved is a critical starting point for designing strategies to boost the levels and impact of civic participation. Arab youth are generally as active in a range of civic activities as those from other regions. They are more active politically, with Arab youth having nearly twice the average rates of involvement in protesting or demonstrating (28.9%) than the world average (15.2%). But they tend to participate less in civic groups (19% of Arab youth compared to 32% of youth in Africa) and in electoral actions (48% of Arab youth compared to a 59% globally.)

By Gender

As shown in Figure 2, young men are much more likely to be civically engaged than young women, with the exception of electoral participation where the difference is quite small. The widest gender gaps in terms of civic group memberships are in Palestine, and the most equal levels between young men and women in Algeria (see Figure 3, below). This supports the findings of other studies showing gender disparities in civic participation are highest in the low-income countries in the region (Gallop, 2010).

Figure 2:   Percentage of youth who are engaged in civic activities or group, by sex and activity type
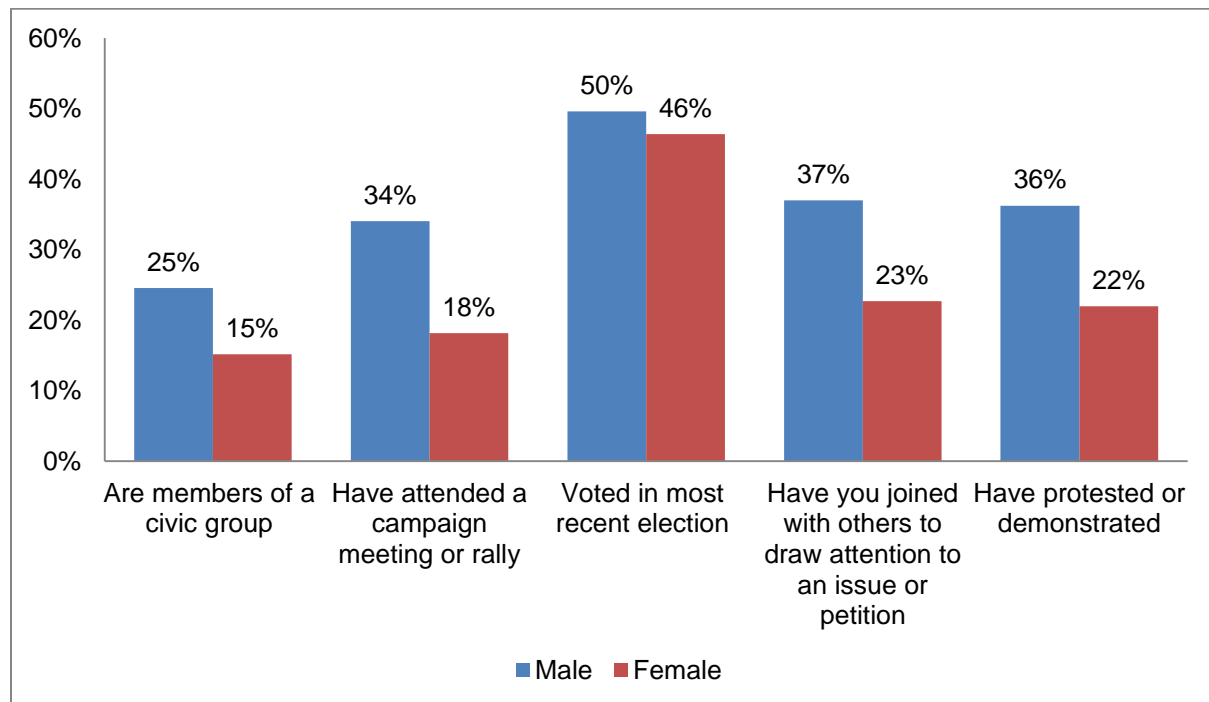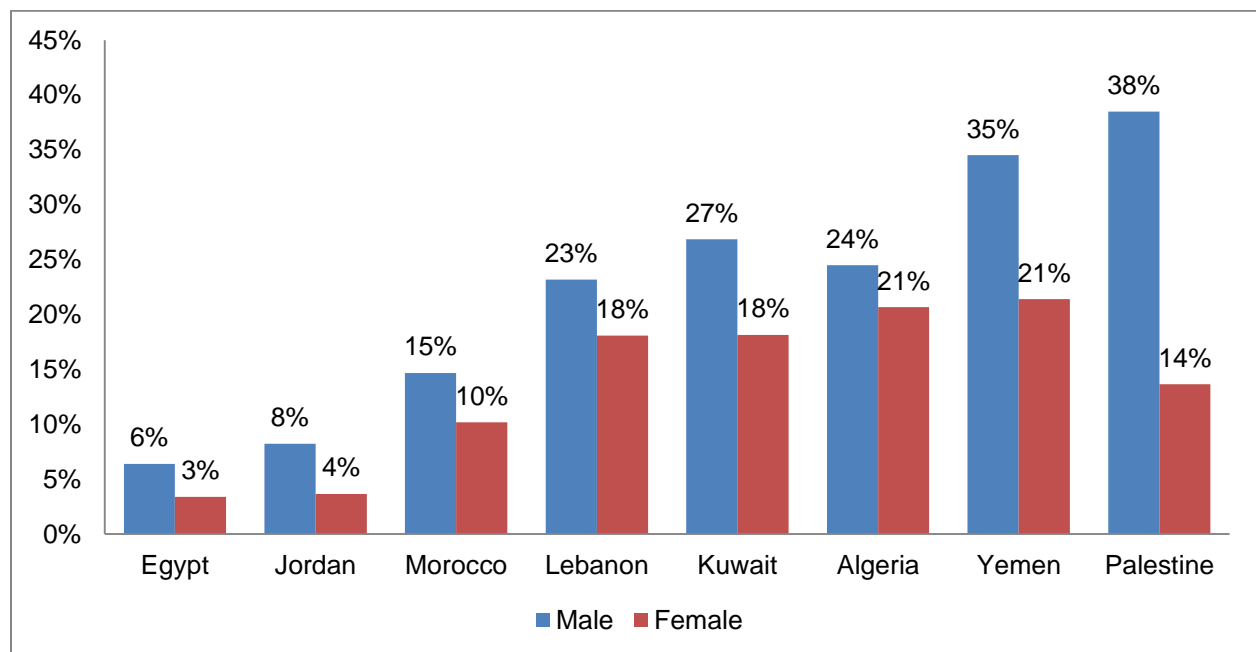

n=4266, Source: Arabbarometer Round 1 Surveys

When examining women's engagement in civic organizations more closely, it is higher among single women and those without children (SWMENA, 2011). On this surface, this would appear to be due to the cultural norms that restrict women's participation in public life in many Arab countries, especially once they become married. But poverty may also be driving early marriage among young women, which is more common in poorer nations in the region. This may indicate that civic participation is constrained more by socio-economic status than by values or religion, which are similar across the poor and rich countries in the region (Gallop, 2010).

By Country

While civic engagement among youth in MENA as a whole is essentially on par with the rest of the world, within several countries in the region the levels are extremely low. In Egypt and Jordan only a very small percentage of youth are member of civic groups (4.9%, and 5.8%, respectively). Civic group membership is a good indicator of how engaged youth are in their communities; and rates of other forms of civic participation follow similar patterns across countries in the region. Figure 3 suggests that the economic status of the countries does not determine overall levels of civic engagement. Palestine and Yemen are considered low-income countries, and the others all middle income countries, except Kuwait which is high income.

Figure 3:   Percentage of youth who are members of civic groups, by sex and country

n=4358, Source: Arabbarometer Round 1 Surveys

By Education Level

The likelihood of Arab youth being civically active generally increases with higher education levels. As Figure 4 shows, participation in protests and demonstrations is highest among youth with a university education. However, in controlling for education levels in the tests run for this study, it did not turn out to be a significant determinant of youth civic participation. This is likely because a large majority of the respondents fall into the "secondary education" category, making this variable relatively constant.

Figure 4: **Percentage of youth who have participated in protest marches or demonstrations, by education level**

MA or higher: Female 3%, Male 5%
BA: Female 32%, Male 29%
College Diploma- two years: Female 10%, Male 10%
Secondary: Female 25%, Male 26%
Primary: Female 17%, Male 18%
Elementary: Female 10%, Male 9%
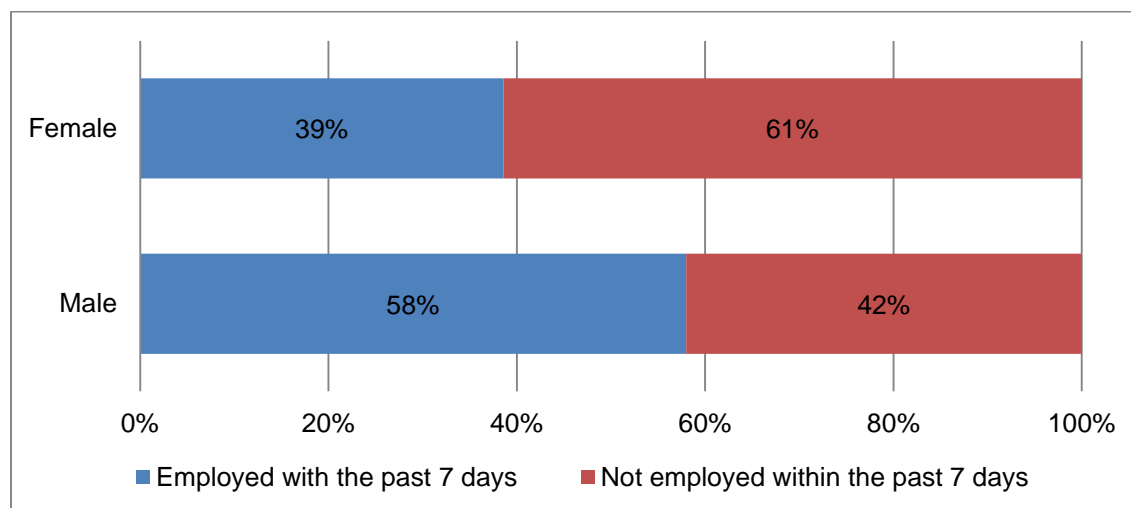Illiterate: Female 2%, Male 3%
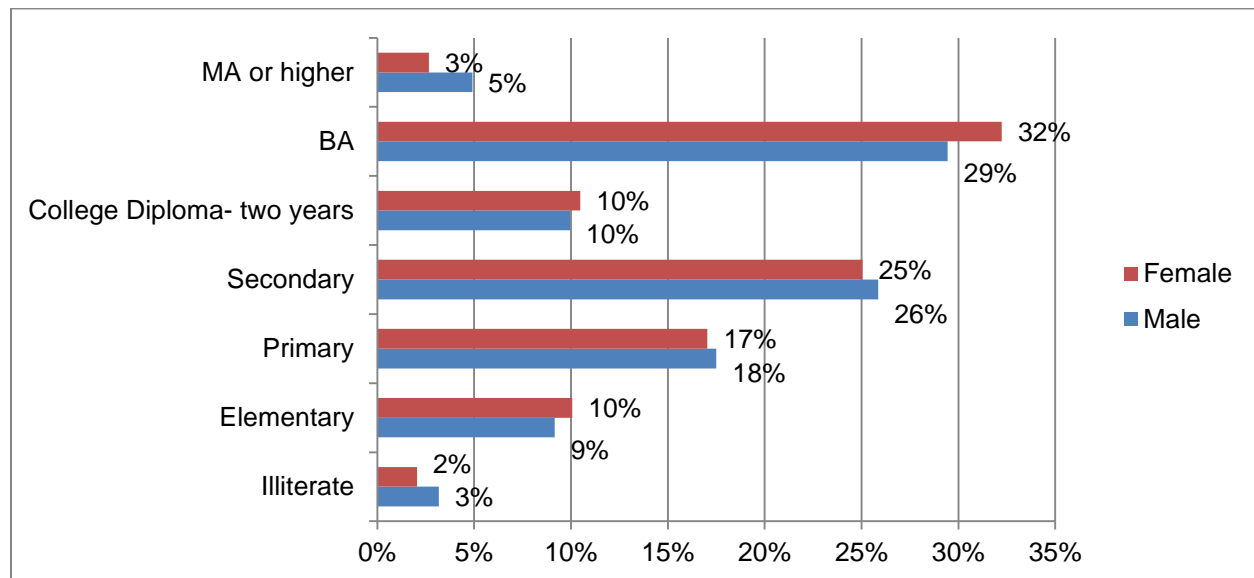
n=4306, Source: Arabbarometer Round 1 Surveys

By Wealth and Employment Status

In Egypt, civic participation is primarily an urban phenomenon among youth from better off families. Though it becomes more broad-based among rural and economically disadvantaged youth in countries where overall civic participation rates are higher (SWMEMA, 2011*).* Wealth data was not available for respondents in all the countries included in the study. However, looking at employment levels, on average youth who are civically engaged tend to be more likely to be employed than those who were not. There were some exceptions to this, by country, gender, and urban/rural status, which are discussed under the findings on the 'economic engagement' theory of change below.

Figure 5: **Percentage of youth who have joined together with others to draw attention to an issue or petition, by employment status**

Female: Employed with the past 7 days 39%, Not employed within the past 7 days 61%
Male: Employed with the past 7 days 58%, Not employed within the past 7 days 42%

n=4303, Source: Arabbarometer Round 1 Surveys

Other Determinants of Youth Civic Engagement

Some factors typically addressed by civic engagement programs were found to be closely related to Arab youth's likelihood to be active civically. The findings for these determinants are organized below around the factors in this study's conceptual framework to which they most closely relate[10].

Civic Knowledge

The majority of the civically engaged youth in the region are those who take an active interest in learning about politics and government. On average, Arab youth who are interested in politics, or follow the news about politics and government are 2.5 to 3 times more likely than those who are not interested in or do not follow news about politics to engage in the following forms of civic engagement examined by this study:

- Be members of civic associations
- Have recently joined together with others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition
- Have recently attended a political campaign or rally
- Have recently attended a demonstration or protest march

The findings show the potential contribution to youth civic engagement that can be made by efforts to encourage young people's interest in and understanding of political and governance issues. This conclusion is supported by other studies which have shown that young people in the US who have higher levels of political knowledge are more civically engaged in their communities (Amadeo, et al, 2002).

Access to and Consumption of Information and ICTs

It is believed that access to accurate and timely information enables people to participate more effectively in the public processes that affect their lives (Mercy Corps, 2011b). This assumption appears to holds true, at least among Egyptian youth for whom data was available. Those who regularly use any news or media sources to obtain information – and not just information about politics – were:

- Three times more likely to engage in volunteer activities than those who don't follow the news (χ^2(1)=30.031, $p<0.05$);
- Eight times more likely to be a member of a civic group (χ^2(1)=193.81, $p<0.05$); and
- Twice as likely to have voted in the last election (χ^2(1)=92, $p<0.05$).

Access to and use of the internet is also strongly and positively correlated with civic participation among youth across the region. Arab youth who use the internet are at least 2 times more likely than those who do not to:

- Belong to a civic group (χ^2=49.6(1) $p<0.001$);
- Have recently joined together with others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition (χ^2(1)= 63 $p<0.001$); and
- Have recently attended a demonstration or protest march chi-square (χ^2(1)= 64.7, $p<0.001$).

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[10] Data was not available for measuring of the following factors in the conceptual framework: Life skills, mobilization skills, and social connections.

Youth who report using the internet or SMS as their most important source of information about politics show even higher tendencies to be engaged in the above forms of civic action than those who rely on other sources (e.g. newspaper, radio) for such information. The frequency of internet use, measured by numbers of hours spent online, did not appear to make any difference.

ICTs are no longer only a potential tool for civic action among urban youth. High penetration of cellphone use and internet access in the region have made it possible for greater numbers of rural youth to gain information and communities through ICTs. Within the middle-income countries in the region, 69% of youth reported having access to the internet in their homes or communities in 2010, up from 63% in 2009. Though in low-income countries like Yemen, this figure is much lower, averaging 38% (Gallop, 2011).

Much has been written about the power of ICTs to be used to promote more responsive and accountable government (Arab Social Media Report, 2011). There is growing evidence of how youth have employed them effectively as part of recent social movements in MENA (Beges, 2011). ICTs present a particular opportunity to enable greater participation of young Arab women in civic and political activities, as they do not require people to leave home or gain permission to use them to voice their opinions on public debates (Khouri and Lopez, 2011). Taken together with the results of this study, there is strong evidence to support hypothesis that if young people gain greater media literacy and access to the internet, they will use it to obtain information about and express their views on political and other public debates.

2.2. Outcomes of Youth Civic Participation in MENA

For each theory of change explored, evidence from the literature and other studies is presented first, in an attempt to determine if there are theoretical, logical, or existing empirical bases for the theory of change. This is followed by the results of this study's tests, and a discussion of possible explanations for the key findings.

Theory 1: Political Voice

If young people are involved in civic activities in their communities, they will be more likely to be actively (and non-violently) engaged in political life.

Theoretical Basis

The logic underlying this theory is well developed. The major factors believed to connect civic engagement and political participation are civic skills, political efficacy, opportunities for interaction, and social trust. People who participate in civic activities develop skills, such as the ability to organize a meeting and articulate demands, which increases their sense of political efficacy (Wilson and Musick, 1999). They are also more likely to have opportunities for engaging in political discussions with other association members (Knoke, 1990). Putnam's (2000) influential theory is that active membership in voluntary associations contributes to the social trust that is necessary for people to organize effectively and act collectively in the wider political sphere.

Existing Evidence

Past studies have shown strong relationships between youth's participation in civic activities, such as volunteering and membership in civic associations, and levels of political activism. Analysis of data on high school students in the US found that those who volunteered were more

likely to be engaged in voting and working on political campaigns, than those who did not volunteer (Wilson and Musick, 1999). A recent study of political behavior in the Arab world found that people who are involved in civic associations are more likely to extend their involvement to the political realm, in both conventional (e.g. voting) and unconventional (e.g. rallying) forms of participation (Tessler, et al, 2008).

However, not all forms of participation in every kind of association demonstrate these links. Being highly active in a voluntary organization, such as serving as a leader, is more strongly associated with being active in political life (Knoke, 1987). Political participation is also higher among members of political and economic associations than for those in personal interest or cultural groups (Stolle and Rochon, 1998). There is convincing evidence on the contributions of community service to political self-efficacy, such as that showing Americorps' graduates turn out more confident in their abilities to influence local and national issues than their comparison groups (Zaff and Michelsen, 2002).

Results

The data analyzed by this study strongly support the 'political voice' theory of change. Membership in civic associations[11] was found to be significantly and positively associated with both electoral and political activism. Compared to non-members, youth across the seven Arab countries[12] included in the study who are members of civic associations were:

- 7 times more likely to attend a political campaign or rallies (χ^2= 228.2 (1), p<0.001), with men being approximately 2.5 times more likely to have done so than women (χ^2=74.3 (1),p<0.001);
- 2.3 times more likely to have voted in the last election (χ^2(1)=8.57,p<0.05);
- 4 times more likely to have joined others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition (χ^2=161.6(1) p<0.001); and
- 3.5 times more likely to attend a demonstration or protest march (χ^2=136.5(1), p<0.001), with men being 2 times more likely to do so than women ($\chi^2$2=55.4 (1),p<0.001).

Civic engagement among youth in the region was also found to be strongly and positively correlated with political efficacy. Youth were significantly more likely to feel that citizens have the power to influence government policies and activities if they were members of a civic organization ($\chi^2(1) = 22.32, p < 0.05$), had joined with others to raise an issue or sign a petition ($\chi^2(2) = 15.95, p < 0.05$), had attended a campaign rally ($\chi^2(1) = 28.49, p < 0.05$) or recently protested or demonstrated ($\chi^2(2) = 33.38, p < 0.05$). These findings are illustrated in Figure 6.

In addition to electoral participation, this study was interested in determining whether youth with higher levels of civic engagement prioritized different factors when voting for candidates for political office. No associations were found between youth's level of civic engagement and the likelihood that they would vote for a candidate based on their qualifications and policy views over their party, religious, or tribal affiliations.

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[11] These included: Political parties, living cooperatives or local societies, religious organizations, sport and entertainment clubs, cultural organizations, associations or workers' unions, farmer unions, professional unions or associations economic organizations or associations, entrepreneurial organizations, parent-teacher associations, or other voluntary organizations.
[12] Morocco, Algeria, Kuwait, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen. Findings on Egypt were from a separate dataset, and are noted on their own throughout this report.

Discussion

The findings show strong connections between all the different forms of civic engagement measured. However, this does not necessarily imply a cause-effect relationship – i.e. that increasing youth's involvement in civic activities in their communities will lead to them taking on more political actions. There may be underlying, unmeasured factors, such as personal motivation, that drive Arab youth to both participate in civic groups and to vote and demonstrate.

Figure 6:   Associations found for the 'political voice' theory of change[13]
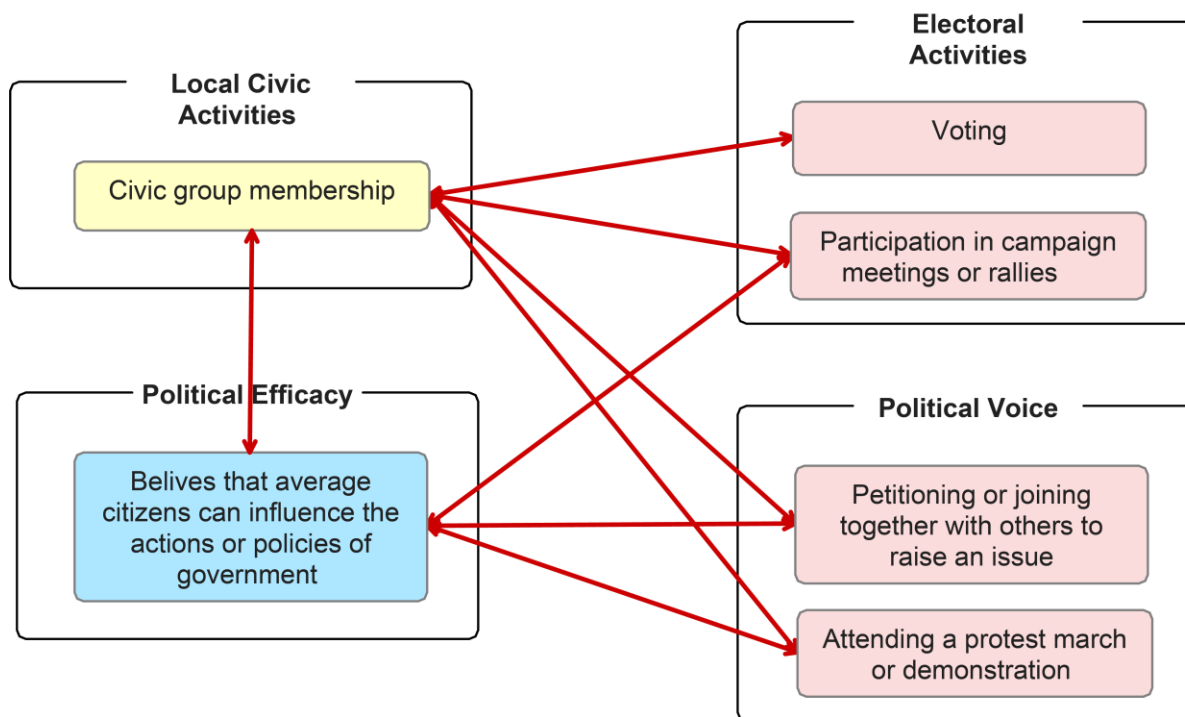
The findings on political efficacy suggest that membership in civic groups may indeed be an important contributing factor to political activism. (Findings under the social capital theory of change presented below do not show the same to be true for political trust.) Though it cannot be determined from the data if the skills and experience gained from participating in civic groups is contributing to youth's confidence to influence governance, as theorized. It may be that initial higher levels of political efficacy are driving all the forms of civic actions.

Logically, youth participation in local civic actions is a natural stepping stone to other forms of civic engagement, and past studies have shown they lead to higher electoral and political participation later in life. The combined evidence lends support to the efficacy of youth volunteering and service projects to contribute to youth political voice.

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[13] This and the subsequent diagrams illustrating the associations found can be interpreted as follows: When connected by arrows, the variables on the left hand side are significantly and positively associated with the variables on the right hand side. Lack of arrows means no significant interactions were found.

Theory 2: Social Capital

If young people are civically engaged, they will be more likely to develop and exhibit forms of social capital that are conducive to the functioning of democracy, and to peaceful co-existence.

Theoretical Basis

The literature review found many theories which assert that civic participation can contribute to social capital, and by extension to more responsive and accountable governance. However, some require certain leaps of logic. The basic premise is that civic groups are important "seedbeds" of democracy, which bring people together, expose them to information and ideas, and increase their motivation and capacity to improve their societies (National Conference on Citizenship, 2009).

The types of social capital of interest to this study are the values and attitudes associated with being a good citizen, including social and political trust, and tolerance of others, respect for pluralism and diversity, and a sense of shared identity. A significant supply of these forms of social capital within a population is believed to be necessary for a functioning civil society, good governance, and to peaceful co-existence (Grootaert, 2003). The theory also points in the other direction, with a political system needing to establish a threshold of trustworthiness in order to foster civic and political participation among young people (Torney-Purta, et al, 2004).

A healthy voluntary sector has long been thought to be vital to participatory democracy, with civic associations acting as essential intermediary bodies between the individuals and government (De Tocqueville, 1945). Volunteering, especially among young people, can foster social responsibility and people's trust in others and government institutions (Putnam, 1995). Civic engagement is assumed to be linked to norms of tolerance and respect for pluralism, because participation often increase people's interaction with people whose backgrounds and opinions differ from their own (Inglehart,1997).

Existing Evidence

Previous research has produced a mixed picture of support for the links between civic engagement and key forms of social capital. Evidence from several studies in European countries has shown that participation in civic associations is not strongly correlated with levels of inter-personal or political trust (Wilson and Musick, 2000). Other studies have found the existence of such links depends on the type and mission of the civic group, with members of cultural, personal interest, and community organizations (and not economic or political ones) exhibiting higher generalized trust and reciprocity with neighbors than non-members (Stolle and Rochon,1998). Across Africa, higher levels of volunteering, such as to help a neighbor or one's community have shown to be linked to greater social capital and other forms of civic activism (CIVICUS, 2007).

Within the Arab world, conventional forms of political participation, such as voting, have been found to be consistently linked to higher trust in government institutions. However, unconventional forms, such as petitioning, were not; reinforcing other findings that citizens in non-democracies often perceive elections primarily as a way for authoritarian rulers to further legitimize their rule (Tessler, et al, 2008). Building social capital among Arab youth is critical at present, as evidenced by studies which have shown that citizens in countries with recent political transitions tend to have lower levels of trust in political institutions (Klingemann, 1999).

Results

The vast majority of findings from the data analyzed do not uphold the social capital theory of change within the MENA context. No significant associations were found between levels of civic engagement among youth across the seven countries and a number of forms of social capital measured:

- Levels of tolerance for others
- Level of trust in government institutions
- Shared identity
- Respect for pluralism and diversity
- More approving or positive perceptions of democracy
- Support for gender equality or non-traditional roles for women

However, three factors tested under this theory of change were found to be significantly associated with levels of civic engagement among youth, as illustrated in Figure 7.

The first significant finding is related to interpersonal trust. Youth who have joined others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition are more likely to feel that people can be trusted, than those who have not ($\chi^2(2) = 9.13, p < 0.05$). This was only the case for those who had done so multiple times in the past three years, indicating that one-off participation in such actions is not enough to contribute to building trust of others. This parallels other findings on youth development efforts as a whole, and has important implications for civic engagement programs.

The second relates to youth's perceptions of government performance. Youth who had joined together with others to draw attention to an issue or sign a petition were more likely to feel that their government fails to provide all citizens with services, compared to youth who did not (χ^2=10.4 (1), p<0.05). The same was true for youth who had attended a recent protest or demonstration (χ^2=14.2 (1), p<0.05). Along similar lines, youth who believe that the government is performing badly in their responsibility to create jobs are more likely to have petitioned and protested than those who feel the government is managing this role well. These findings indicates that youth frustration with their government's ability to meet people's basic needs, and employment needs in particular, may be a driver of certain forms of civic participation.

The third significant finding was on young peoples' attitudes towards domestic violence, with the logic that this may be a reflection of more liberal social attitudes. Egyptian youth who are civically engaged were found to be half as likely to think that a husband is ever justified in beating his wife than those who are not ($\chi^2(1) = 10.92, p > 0.05.$). However, when controlling for gender, it was found that this was only the case for women. There were no links between any other measures of youth's attitudes towards gender equality and civic participation. This may be a case where an unmeasured variable, such as family upbringing, explains most of the differences found.

Discussion

Overall, it does not appear that civic participation of youth in MENA countries helps to instill the values considered to make youth better citizens. This does not mean that greater youth civic participation does not make an important contribution to strengthening the foundations of good governance in the region. But the results do bring into question whether political trust and other forms of social capital are important mediators of the relationship between local and political forms of civic action, as assumed by Putnam, and discussed in the first theory of change above.
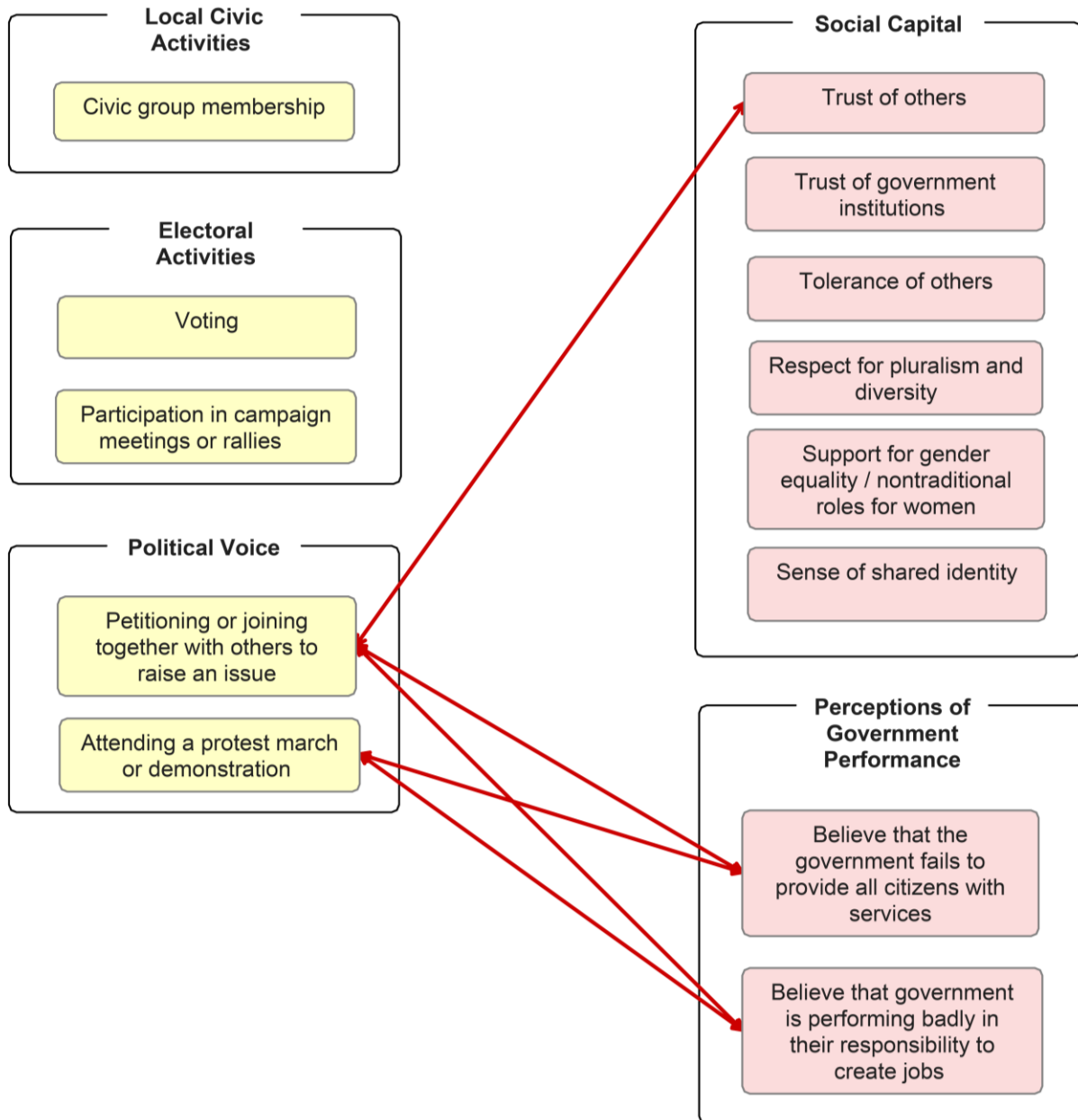
The findings raise the question of why civically engaged youth do not look different on most of these measures than their non-civically engaged peers, as assumed would be the case. Based on the lessons from previous studies, conducting separate analyses by the types of civic groups in which youth are involved might have produced different results. For example, it is likely that youth sports and cultural groups would contribute to higher social trust, while economic associations would have greater political trust (Stolle and Rochon, 1998). But when treating the various types of civic groups together as a whole these differences may be lost.

Measures for many of the types of social capital analyzed are uniformly low across the region. Among Egyptian youth trust of other people stands at 10%, compared to an average of 22%

among youth worldwide. It may be the social and political systems in many Arab countries have failed to generate sufficient quantities of political and interpersonal trust to motivate youth to be civically engaged.

Outcome Theory 3: Propensity Towards Political Violence

If young people are civically engaged, they will be less likely to become involved in or support the use of violence to promote political objectives.

Theoretical Basis

This theory of change is firmly supported by the literature on youth exclusion. Where youth feel alienated from decision making and political processes, they may turn to violence to have a voice (McLean and Fraser, 2009). This is particularly a risk in fragile political and economic contexts, such as many countries in MENA at present, where it can be more difficult for youth to gain opportunities for decision making and responsibility, effectively blocking their transition to adulthood (Assaad, et al 2010; Dhillon, et al, 2009).

Civic engagement is presumed to be positively associated with people's levels of political self-efficacy and likelihood to use established channels to voice grievances, and thus negatively associated with use of violence (Bhavnani and Backer, 2007). Expanding young people's civic participation can play an important role in making youth less susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups and exploitation by political elites (Mercy Corps, 2011c; Alessi, 2005). In post-conflict contexts, structured civic engagement opportunities can help youth to see themselves as resources for positive social change, and can allow them contribute to reconstruction (Chae, et al, 2007).

Existing Evidence

Previous studies have demonstrated the validity of the theory of change on youth propensity towards political violence across multiple contexts. Recent research by Mercy Corps found that youth in Kenya and Liberia who are civically engaged and took action to try to address local or national governance problems are less likely to engage in or be disposed towards political violence (Mercy Corps, 2011c). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, political alienation was among the strongest predictors of violent rebellion, with youth who did not feel represented by or support any political party being two to three times more likely to join violent movements, voluntarily or involuntarily (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Mercy Corps' experience in Lebanon demonstrated how engaging youth in positive social outlets is central to converting youth frustration away from violence and social unrest toward positive civic participation (Mercy Corps, 2011b).

Results

Only one among several of the findings supports the theory of change on propensity towards political violence. Youth who have joined others to draw attention to or petition about an issue more than once are less likely to agree that US involvement in the Middle East region justifies armed operations against the US everywhere. This finding is more an indication of the links between civic involvement and extremist views among youth, and reflects less on their propensity toward violence as a means for achieving political objectives within their own country. Here again, the association was not found to be significant among youth who had only been involved in petitioning once, indicating that a certain threshold of participation in such civic actions is necessary to influence youth's attitudes toward this form of violence. No other forms

of civic engagement were found to be associated with measures of Arab youth's attitudes towards violence.

The majority of the results did not show any significant associations between youth's levels of civic engagement and propensity towards political violence for any of the countries included in the study. This included the following measures, all of which were uniformly low:

- Justification of the violation of human rights in the name of promoting security and stability
- Justification of attacking civilians in Iraq to resist the American occupation
- Inter-personal violence, including physical fighting and use of weapons[14]

Tests were run for several additional factors that might provide insights into the extent to which potentially extremist or anti-Western views are linked to young people's levels of civic engagement. The following measures were not found to be different between youth who do participate in civic activities and those who do not:

- Perceptions of US foreign policy, specifically its promotion of democracy in the region
- Perceptions of US / Western culture (positive versus having a harmful effect)

These largely null results raised an important question: What factors do contribute to propensity towards political violence among youth within the MENA region? While this question was outside the original scope of this study, it was explored due to the critical importance to Mercy Corps and other development actors working with youth to mitigate conflict and promote peaceful change in MENA at present.

The results reinforce the findings of other studies which have shown that economic conditions and opportunities are significant predictors of proclivity towards political violence among youth (Mercy Corps, 2011c; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Barakat and Urdal, 2008). Notably, Arab youth who are unemployed are more likely to:

- Agree that the violation of human rights is justifiable in the name of security and stability (χ^2=4.4(1), p<0.05)
- Agree that armed groups are justified in attacking civilians in order to resist American occupation (χ^2=5.84(1), p<0.05)

Among employed youth, attitudes towards the factors above did not differ based on the type of job they held or full versus part time employment status. Further, youth who believe that the government is performing badly in their responsibility to create jobs are more likely to agree with the above statements, as well as to agree that US involvement in the region justifies armed operations against the US everywhere. These findings are summarized in Figure 8.

Discussion

From the factors analyzed, it is possible to conclude that there are few links between levels of civic engagement among Arab youth and their tendencies towards extremism or politically motivated violence. This contradicts much of the existing evidence, including findings from previous Mercy Corps studies. One explanation for these results may be that the attitudinal measures used were not the most ideal for gauging youth propensity towards political violence.

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[14] This data was only available for Egypt. These are not measures of political violence, but rather of violent behavior that is often thought to be linked to greater risk of organized violence, such as in gangs or extremist groups.

Other studies have shown that there is little relationship between young people's self-reported attitudes and their behaviors towards political violence; those who admit that they have participated rarely respond that they feel such actions are justified (Mercy Corps, 2011c). In addition, the measures did not get directly at the forms of political violence aimed at young people's own governments, which are often of most concern from a stability perspective.

Figure 8: **Associations found for the 'propensity towards violence' theory of change**
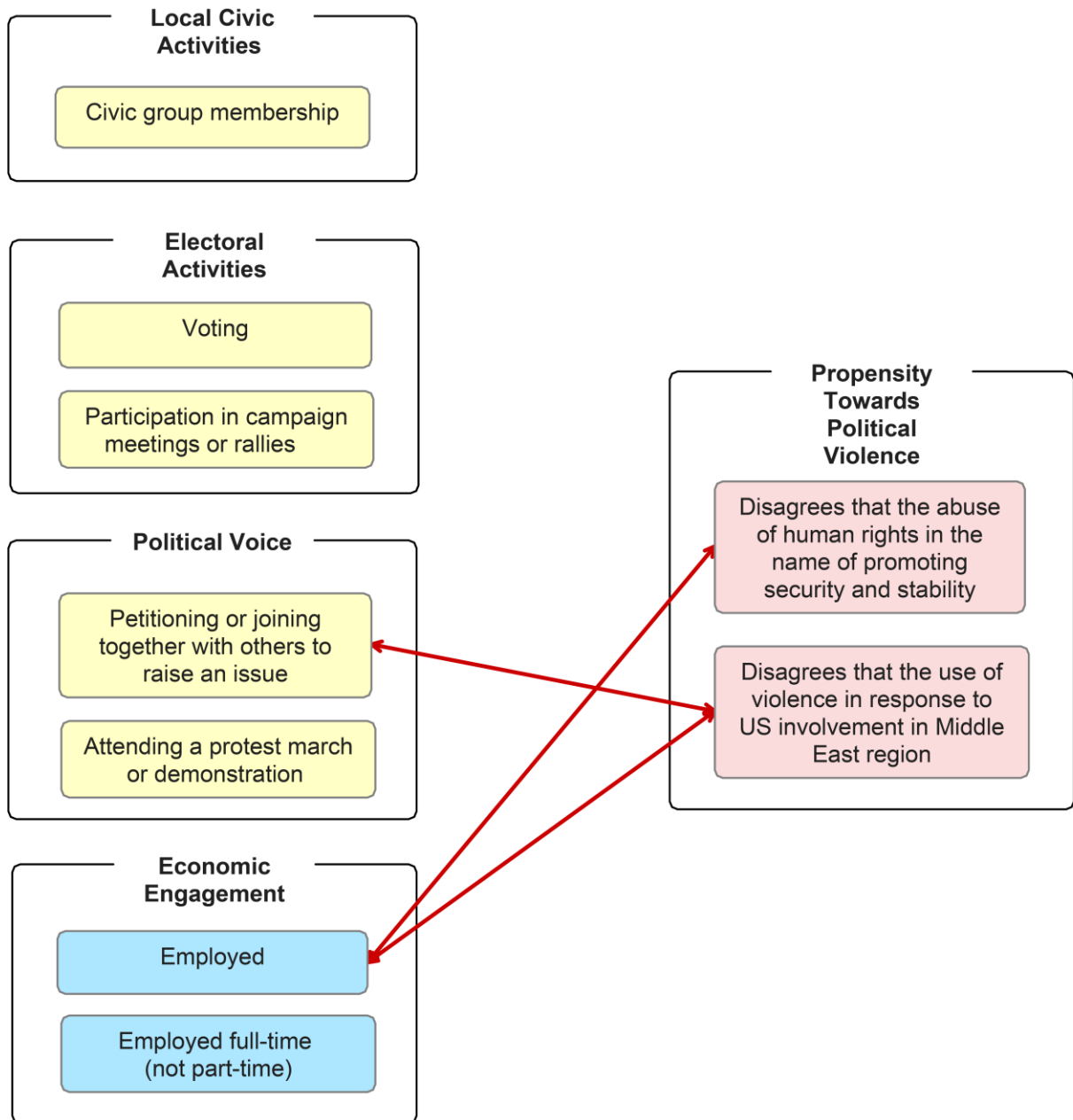
Another possible reason for the largely null findings for this hypothesis is that the percentage of youth who hold views that may indicate a propensity towards engaging in political violence is relatively small. Civic engagement programs would need to deliberately and accurately target such youth to have the potential to impact their risk of becoming (further) involved in extremist

groups or violent actions. In practice, the opposite is typically the case, with youth self-selecting into the program who are already more inclined towards or even involved in non-violent civic engagement (IREX, 2011).

What does appear to influence Arab youth's attitudes toward political violence is their employment status and perceptions of their government's efforts to address unemployment. The combination of lack of economic opportunities, rising cost of living, and frustrations over government inaction on these fronts, were primary factors that drew youth to the streets as part of the Arab Spring revolutions (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2011). And job creation has consistently been cited by youth across the region as their number one priority for their governments to address (Gallop, 2011). The findings indicate that such conditions, if not addressed, have the potential to contribute to greater propensity towards violence among Arab youth.

There has been considerable debate and conflicting findings from other research on if and under what conditions joblessness contributes to young peoples' involvement in violent movements. Based on this study's findings, working to expand access to meaningful employment among youth in MENA may be a more promising pathway to reduce their likelihood of engaging in violent behaviors than efforts to promote youth civic engagement. Doing so in a way that addressed youth grievances against their governments related to economic opportunities, such as by partnering with local government on job creation, may be even more influential.

Outcome Theory 4: Economic Engagement

If young people are civically engaged, they will gain important skills, contacts, and experience which make them more employable, or attractive to potential employers, than their non-civically engaged peers.

Theoretical Basis

There are a growing number of sources asserting that increasing youth civic engagement holds the potential for improving the employability and economic opportunities of the young people involved (Douglas and Alessi, 2006). Volunteering is often believed to be a stepping stone to paid employment by both researchers and youth themselves. Among Egyptian youth who are members of civic groups, major motivations to join include finding a job (11%), advancing their career opportunities (19%) and learning a skill (54%) (Population Council, 2011). The main mechanisms assumed to connect civic participation and employment outcomes are the development of social capital, human capital, and job-related self-efficacy.

Membership in civic groups can expand young people's contacts and social networks, thus increasing the chances they will be exposed to information about (better) job opportunities (Wilson and Musick, 1999). Through participating in civic activities and programs youth can gain skills, such as leadership and decision-making, as well as important attributes, like social responsibility and a sense of initiative, which employers across a range of sectors have been found to value (Douglas and Alessi, 2006). Such skills and attributes are also seen as essential for entrepreneurship and developing new enterprises (Gallop, 2010). Being civically engaged, for example through contributing to a community service project, can provide youth with a sense of achievement and boost their confidence in their abilities to bring about positive change (Douglas and Alessi, 2006). This can translate to the economic sphere in that youth with higher self-esteem and self-efficacy are likely to aspire to and apply for better jobs.

Existing Evidence

Much of the existing evidence related to this theory of change points towards the contributions of being employed and earning higher incomes to increasing levels of volunteerism and civic participation (Douglas and Alessi, 2006). A few longitudinal studies have shed light on the impact of volunteering on employment and job success, though none on youth in the Arab world were found. Among women in the US, consistent early volunteering was not found to make a difference in whether they were employed later in life, but it did contribute to more prestigious employment amongst those who were in the labor force (Wilson and Musick, 1999). An eight year impact evaluation of the Americorps program in the US showed that participation boosted volunteers' employment prospects within the public service sectors, including non-profit organizations, especially among youth from low-income backgrounds (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2008). Findings such as these are particularly relevant for the MENA context where youth from low-income families and minority groups often struggle the most to find decent jobs.

Graduates of a national youth service program in South Africa were found to be more likely to secure gainful employment than their non-participating peers, with roughly 60% of graduates employed compared to a national youth average of 36% (Patel, 2007). Although self-selection bias may explain part of this difference. Adding to the evidence, strong positive correlations were found between state and local levels of civic engagement in the US and resilience against unemployment during the recent economic downturn (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2011).

Within the Arab world, a strong relationship has been found between entrepreneurial inclination and civic engagement. Aspiring youth entrepreneurs are more likely to have volunteered and expressed their opinion to a public official in the past month than youth who do not plan to start a business (Gallop, 2010). "These results suggest a vibrant civic society may be the foundation of a vibrant business environment" (Gallop, 2010, p28).

There is solid evidence supporting the contributions that civic participation makes to the factors believed to connect it with employment outcomes. Volunteering has been found to be positively correlated to the number of social contacts people have (Wilson and Musick, 1999). Evaluations of youth civic engagement initiatives in multiple countries have shown that participants acquire competencies, often through hands-on experience, making them more qualified for work in many fields, including healthcare, education and social services (Corporation for National Service, 2008; IREX, 2011).

Results

The data analysis yielded mixed support for the economic engagement theory of change. Through analysis of the Arabbaromter data, no links were found between any of the types of civic engagement and the following measures of youth economic engagement[15]:
- Employment status (employed or not)
- Full-time versus part-time employment
- Perceptions of family's economic situation

The results from the SYPE data on Egyptian youth yielded some significant associations:

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[15] These analyses excluded youth who are students or housewives, and therefore not expected to be employed.

- Egyptian youth who volunteer are twice as likely to be employed as those who do not (x^2 (1)=26.43, p<0.05);
- Egyptian youth who are members of civic groups are 1.6 times more likely to be employed (x^2 (1)=18.83, p<0.05);
- Egyptian youth who are members of civic groups are 2.6 times more likely to have a permanent (versus temporary) job, than youth who are not members (x^2 (1)=25.9, p<0.05).

There were no significant differences in employment status based on the frequency of civic participation in Egypt. For example Egyptian youth who volunteer once a week were not necessarily more likely to have a job than those who only volunteer once a year. No associations were found between Egyptian youth's participation in civic groups and their levels of job satisfaction.

Analysis of the SWMENA data produced a number of significant findings illustrating strong relationships between civic engagement and employment-related outcomes. Compared to their non-civically engaged peers, youth in Morocco, Yemen, and Lebanon who belong to civic groups and/or have participated in one or more civic activities[16] in the past year:
- Were on average over 4 times more likely to have compensated work[17]; and
- Were on average over 2 times more likely to have plans to pursue a career[18];

The results of additional analyses were not conclusive across all countries, though still provide some insights. In Yemen and Morocco, the analysis shows that people who are involved in civic groups are more likely to have monthly salaries in a higher bracket than those who are not[19]. Also, in Lebanon, civically active youth seem to have access to better formal employment. Specifically, they are more likely to have salaried employment and less likely to be self-employed or employed in casual, informal, in-kind, unpaid jobs than their non-civically engaged peers. The summary findings from all the data analyzed are illustrated in Figure 9.

Discussion

The findings point to a meaningful relationship between civic participation and economic engagement among Arab youth. However, the significant relationships found are difficult to interpret[20]. Findings from this cross sectional study cannot answer the question of whether civic participation contributes to greater employment among Egyptian youth or employment leads

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[16] The activities included: Contacted or visited a public official – at any level of government – to express your opinion; Called in to a radio or television talk show or written to a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on a political or social issue; Sent in an SMS vote to express your opinion on a political or social issue; Signed a written or email petition; Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration; Contributed to a blog or internet site to express your opinion on a political or social issue

[17] For Lebanon, this was only the case for youth involved in civic actions, not members of civic groups.

[18] In Yemen, this was only the case for rural youth. In Morocco, only youth involved in civic actions, not members of civic groups. And in Lebanon, only youth who are civic group members but not involved in civic actions.

[19] In Yemen more than 40,000 Riyals (appx182 USD), and in Morocco more than 5,000 Dirham (appx 590 USD).

[20] It is not typical to treat employment and other economic factors as outcome variables in single cross sectional studies. They are generally used as controls alongside other socio-demographics such as age, sex, and education.

them to be more civically active. The lack of any congruency between the frequency of civic participation and employment-related measures does not help in determining possible causality.

Looking at the demographics of Egyptian youth who are civically involved, it is clear that they tend to be from more urban areas and wealthier families. Egyptian youth from the highest wealth quintile are over 5 times as likely to participate in civic groups as those from the lowest quintile, and urban youth are nearly twice as likely to do so as those from rural areas. This points strongly to socio-economic status, including employment, as a predictor of civic engagement levels, rather than a result of it, as shown in the findings on determinants.

While multiple associations were found, it would be a stretch to conclude that simply getting Arab youth more involved in civic groups or civic actions will improve their chances of securing a job. The types of civic participation programs that have succeeded in influencing employment outcomes tend to have some unique characteristics. They facilitate actual work experience, such as through extended placements of volunteers in social service agencies, and intentionally set out to develop job-related skills. The implication is that, to have the potential to increase youth employment, civic engagement projects must be designed with that as a goal (Douglas and Alessi, 2006).

Figure 9:   Associations found for the 'economic engagement' theory of change
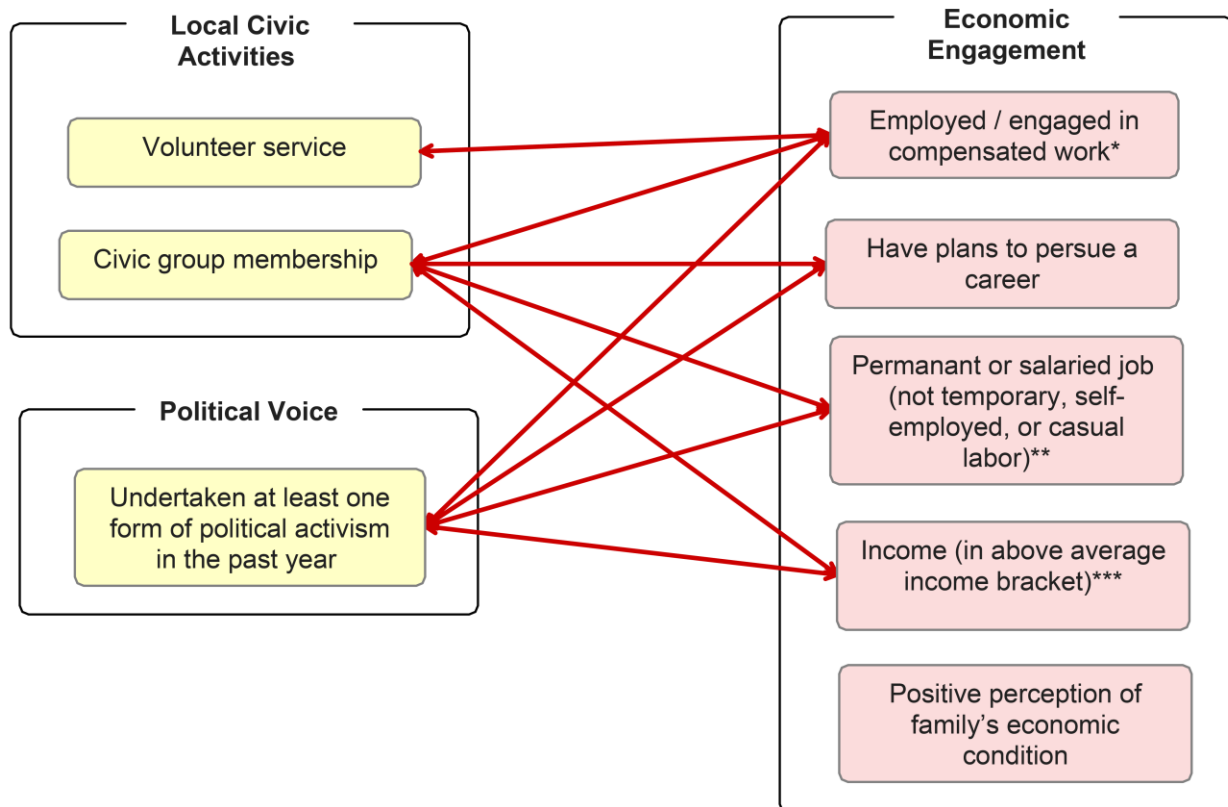
* Data only available for Egypt
** Only the case for youth in Lebanon and Egypt
*** Only the case for youth in Morocco and Yemen

3.   Conclusions and Implications

Who is civically engaged?

While overall levels of civic participation among youth across MENA are comparable to other regions, several countries and groups lag significantly behind. Youth in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco are among the least civically engaged in the region. Neither the economic status nor degree of political repressiveness of a country appear to determine levels of civic activity[21]. Rather, household socio-economic status stands out as a major factor that predicts levels of civic participation among Arab youth, with young women, and youth who are less educated, unemployed, and from rural areas the least likely to be civically engaged. It is often these very groups whose voices are underrepresented in public debates and decisions, contributing to their further marganilization. To engage these hard to reach youth, civic participation programs will need to adapt their outreach and program strategies, which are typically geared toward more educated youth and those already civically inclined or involved.

Civic participation is highest among Arab youth who take an active interest in politics, who regularly follow the news, and who use the internet. As such, increasing young people's understanding of political and governance issues, and their access to news and the internet stand out as promising strategies for promoting greater youth civic engagement. The internet appears to be a particularly valuable vehicle with a large untapped potential. For instance, in Egypt the most common form of civic participation is in youth clubs or centers, though very few youth report using the internet at these centers (Population Council, 2011). Use of the internet for participating in political movements also remains very low -- around 2% in Egypt, which has some notable examples of use of ICTs to organize public protests (e.g. the boycott of April 6, 2008). Taken together with the expanding access to the internet in the region, including to rural areas, this illustrates the opportunity that further use of ICTs presents to increase the scope and impact of young people's civic participation, including women and those in rural areas.

What difference does civic participation make?

This study's findings yield a mixed picture of what benefits can be expected from increasing the participation of young Arab men and women in civic actions and groups. There is strong support for the 'political voice' theory: If young people are involved in civic activities in their communities, they will be more likely to be actively engaged in political life. The evidence points to the expansion of young people's participation in local civic groups as an effective "seedbed" for greater electoral and political participation. Political self-efficacy appears to be the main factor connecting these two forms of civic engagement, wherein civic involvement in their own community contributes to greater confidence among youth in their abilities to influence broader issues, which they then apply in the political realm. It follows that investment in programs that provide youth opportunities for volunteerism and activism in their communities can also drive greater youth engagement in the political reform and democratization processes currently taking place in many countries in the MENA region.

Civic engagement among Arab youth does not appear to contribute to greater political trust, tolerance of others, respect for pluralism and diversity, or a sense of shared identity, as assumed in the 'social capital' theory. Rather, frustration with government institutions appears to have recently been a force in motivating youth to engage in petitioning and demonstrations –

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[21] Levels of political repression are based on the Human Rights Index scores from the Fund For Peace.

key forms of civic action. This may indicate that during periods of political transitions – which are characterized by changes to the status quo – higher levels of social capital are unlikely to be an outcome of greater civic engagement among youth. As Arab countries begin to emerge from the current transitions, a greater supply of social capital may prove essential for good governance and peaceful co-existence to take root. There is a pressing need for research into what does contribute to support for pluralism, political trust, and other forms of social capital among Arab youth, so that the evidence can be used to inform programs and policies in the near term.

By in large, attitudes among Arab youth that may indicate their propensity towards political violence or extremism are not influenced by their levels of civic participation. This brings into question the role that increasing civic engagement by itself can play in motivating Arab youth to choose peaceful channels over violent means to voice their political grievances. Rather, economic opportunities appear to be more closely linked to Arab youth's attitudes toward the justification of use of violence for political causes. In light of this, donors and policy makers' current emphasis on programs to expand youth employment in the Middle East appear to be well founded. However, to have an influence on young people's propensity towards the use of politically motivated violence, employment programs would need to effectively target the small percentage of youth that appear to be at risk of such actions.

In many of the countries studied civically engaged youth were found more likely to be employed than their non-civically engaged peers. However, the causal direction is unknown, leaving it unclear whether civically engaged youth gain skills that make them more employable. When taking into account the findings of other studies, the results imply that for civic engagement programs to have an impact on young people's economic opportunities, they need to include deliberate activities geared towards preparing youth for the job market. These may include business development skills and extended apprenticeships or volunteer placements through which youth can gain practical experience. It remains an open question whether such activities fit well within youth civic engagement projects, or are more appropriately designed as part of youth employment projects.

Additional research planned

In sum, it appears that simply getting more youth involved in civic groups or activities is unlikely to significantly influence their civic values and attitudes, their outlook towards the use of violence for achieving political objectives, or their employability. However, this conclusion is based only on the potential contributions of expanding the civic engagement of Arab youth – in the forms of participation in civic groups, and electoral and political activities – on the various outcomes explored. The findings do not reflect the potential contributions of increasing young people's life skills, civic knowledge, social awareness and connections, and other short-term outcomes that are typically sought through youth civic engagement programs. Further evaluate research within the context of a youth civic engagement program in the region is needed to understand the influence of these factors, and to produce evidence on the causal relationships between the program strategies and any observed changes.

Furthermore, results regarding the causal direction of the links between civic engagement and employment among Arab youth were largely inconclusive. Further testing of this hypothesis is warranted in light of the heightened interest among actors in MENA in identifying effective policies and programs for expanding economic opportunities for youth.

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Annex 1: Definitions and Measures of Key Concepts

Concept	Definition	Measures Used
Civic participation	Civic participation is primarily about fostering citizen voices in governance processes (Mercy Corps, 2011b). This study examined three main types of civic participation among youth:	
	1. ***Civic activities:*** These generally focus on improving ones' local community or society in general.	Volunteer service; participation in civic groups
	2. ***Electoral activities:*** These concentrate on the political process and include activities such as voting, persuading others to vote, or volunteering for a political campaign.	Voting in the most recent election; participation in campaign meetings or rallies
	3. ***Political voice:*** These are things people do to express their political or social concerns and opinions in a non-violent and constructive manner.	Joining together with others to raise an issue or petitioning; attending a protest march or demonstration
Social capital	For this study, defined as the characteristics associated with being a good citizen. Specifically, values and behavior that contribute to good and responsible governance.	Trust of others; trust of government institutions; tolerance of others; respect for pluralism and diversity; support for gender equality and nontraditional roles of women; perceptions of democracy; and sense of shared identity.
Propensity towards political violence	The likelihood of becoming involved in or supporting the use of violence to promote political objectives, including through violent or extremist groups.	Attitudes towards the use of violence in response to US involvement in Middle East region; attitudes towards the abuse of human rights in the name of promoting security and stability.
Economic engagement	Encompasses multiple forms of potentially economically productive activities.	Employment status (including full-time versus part-time), job satisfaction, and job security

Self-efficacy	Refers to an individual's belief that they are capable of doing or accomplishing something (Bandura, 1997). Levels of self-efficacy influence how people feel about themselves and the types of activities they choose to engage in (Flanagan, et al 2007).	Political self-efficicacy: Perceptions of the extent to which average citizens can influence the actions or policies of government
Civic knowledge	The types of understanding necessary to effectively participate in civic life. This includes young people's understanding of their rights and responsibilities as members of society, how decisions are made, and ways they can enter the process. Mercy Corps also places emphasis on young people's understanding of critical global and local social issues.	Levels of interest in politics; awareness of news about politics and government.
Access to information and ICTs	The freedom and ability to receive and impart information and ideas through any media, including print, radio, and television. Mercy Corps places emphasis on expanding access to and use of ICTs, including mobile phones and the internet, to enable youth to connect with others, express themselves, and obtain valid information about opportunities for development and influencing political and other public debate.	Print and other media consumption; levels of internet use (generally, and as a source of information about politics).
Life skills	Life skills are the capabilities that young people need to make informed decisions, develop relationships, and solve problems. Important life skills for youth to engage in civic activities include: Leadership, critical thinking and analysis, communication, and negotiation.	No measures of these concepts were available in the usable datasets analyzed by this study.
Mobilization skills	Mobilization skills are capabilities for identifying priorities, resources, needs and organizing solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, and peaceful change. These include advocacy, facilitation, organizing, project planning, fundraising, and financial management skills.	No measures of these concepts were available in the usable datasets analyzed by this study.