

Transcription of GovernanceUncovered, episode 45: Political Turmoil in Tunisia, The Political Legacy of the 2022 World Cup, and an Economic Shock's effects on Male Marriage in the West Bank.

Hello and welcome to Governance Uncovered a podcast by the Governance and Local Development Institute at the University of Gothenburg. This podcast is supported by the Swedish Research Council.

In this episode of Governance Uncovered, Mohamed Dhia Hammami helps us understand the current political situation in Tunisia and the discontent with President Kais Saied.

We should expect several other elections this year. That's what Saied liked doing, and he already budgeted a huge amount of money. I think more than four times more than the budget for the last year, and so that may reveal how unpopular he is.

Then we'll hear from Dr Danyel Reicheto about what impact the FIFA World Cup in 2022 might have had on domestic politics in Qatar and its influence beyond.

Sports serves as a tool of interconnectedness. So with sports all the time, international athletes here, or representatives from sports governing bodies, politicians who watch the competitions, etc. So all of this connects Qatar with the rest of the world and by doing so also contributes to the national security.

Finally, Ayhab Saad talks about his recent study on declined marriage rates in the West Bank, as one result of the economic shock caused by the closure of the Israeli labour market for Palestinian commuters in 2001.

When this economic shock happens negative, it impacted the groom and also impacted the brides family because that the social norms surrounding the the marriage ceremony is very rigid in terms of expense.

As this podcast was recorded via Zoom, the audio quality is at times not at its best. We do apologize for this and recommend you to have a look at the transcript if needed. Other than that, we hope that you enjoy the episode and don't forget to like, share and subscribe if you do.

We'll start by covering the political crisis in Tunisia, since President Saied seized absolute power in 2021. Mohammed Dhia Hammami, PhD student in political science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, joined GLD's founding director, Ellen Lust, to discuss the low voter turnout after the first round of Tunisia's parliamentary elections in December

2022, as well as the country's high unemployment rates and the general disappointment in president Saied among Tunisians.

A disclaimer is that this episode was recorded on January 23rd before the second round of the parliamentary runoffs on January 29th.

So I want to just start by recapping very briefly for those who aren't following Tunisia closely. The events, probably since you know a couple of years in July about a year and a half ago, I guess it would be, and pp till now so that we can give a lay of the land for the listeners.

In the middle Of the COVID crisis, As the number of deaths in Tunisia were at their top president, Kais Saied decided to stage what we call a self coup. Meaning he deployed the military to prevent members of the parliament from joining the parliament, announced its temporary suspension and then dissolved it a few months later. He also suspended parts of the constitution and suspended the entire constitution later, and since then, Tunisia has been going through political crisis and unprecedented political crisis that was coupled later with and also unprecedented economic crisis.

He suspended the constitution and then held a referendum. A constitutional referendum right, and then recently held legislative elections. As well, like parliamentary elections, which are notable because they've had single digit turn out and probably historically low turn out not only for Tunisia, but but frankly very globally, which suggests a real demobilization of the population. Can you tell us a little bit more about how you see that? Why do we see people turning away so strongly it means almost seems like there's almost nobody on board. What does that mean?

Right after the coup, polls were showing that Saied's action had very high level of support. But as you were saying, now the numbers are extremely low. Official polling data are banned, so the only way to know about the level of support is through the ballots. He got only 30% of the population to vote in the referendum on the Constitution that he drafted unilaterally. But more recently in December, 8% only of the population showed up to the polls and this has to do with several factors. The very first one is that Tunisians did not really support the coup initially because they wanted to him to implement his alternative local project, with no political parties. They wanted that crisis COVID to be over and also they were expecting that he will bring the change that leads through during the last years did not. In addition to that, the main factor that may have contributed to this very low level of turnout, is the massive disengagement of political parties who've been calling for boycott of the, both the referendum and the elections, and NGO's and civil society in general who usually we see them participating a lot in the mobilization of voters. Same thing regarding the media. Usually the media focus on raising people's awareness on the importance of votes and this time it was the opposite. People were talking much more about the problems with the new constitution, how Saied has failed to present and to keep up with his promises. And in addition to that, there is a general discontent from politics. It's not only about reaction to calls for boycotts. We can talk about broken social contracts. People had high expectation after the revolution and, every time someone comes and promises to deliver and and then fail, and Saied was the last one, and that's why we we probably seeing such an unprecedented level of turn out. And in addition to that, we can even talk about this sudden increase of intentions of migrations reflected in the polls as well

that exceeds the numbers that we are used to see in Latin American countries where there are usually concerns about migration. All these factors reflect one major phenomenon that goes across the elites and the mass, which is a large defection of everyone from the political system.

You're right, I mean if you talk to Tunisians, right, one of the things that comes across is the both the interest in leaving right, which you've pointed to, and that seems to come across different classes. And it's not only the poor or what we might think of as kind of Latin American migration, but really people who have done quite well in the past also see very little future and have become very disenchanted. But also, you know this kind of this continued concern about the economy and the failure of it to to really bounce back or rejuvenate. But I want to focus just a few more minutes on the political changes and sort of this notion of disbanding parties of having kind of politics without parties. Often we think of parties as being the engines of mobilizing voters of mobilizing political portents and supported platforms. Obviously, that's not always what they do in in the Middle East. And we're very well aware of that. But to what extent do we understand where mobilization and political actors.. who was supposed to take that role, I guess, is my question.

Expecting anyone to take that role, he is an expression the intermediary, but it's Arabic is the term that is used among his supporters, close allies to describe any organization like unions, civil society, organization and I think that all these organizations are corrupting democracy. They think that the people should be able to have direct access to institution and should not be manipulated by these intermediary institutions. So we should get rid of them and we find some of these ideas. In fact, in some interpretations of Rousseau, which is the idea of the general will that in order to have a true democracy, we need people to go and vote directly without having their minds brainwashed by people who want to advance their own corporate interest. And so Saied that is coming from this perspective of believing in the democracy that would work without any intermediary institution. So a rational autocrat would first of all develop a political party to be control of the assets, or to distribute goods, or to coops elites. But his ideologically against that, and that's why We're not seeing anyone taking the place of political parties of civil society organization.

Very interesting and we also are perhaps seeing that this notion that people will directly engage doesn't work as well as we might expect, right? That we're not seeing a lot of direct engagement of the Tunisians in the democratic processes and practices, right? Partly, disenchantment. But partly also a lack of, of mobilizing bodies. Both of those could potentially help to explain the differences we see across the country. Obviously the voting turn out is very low across the country, right? So when you're looking at less than 10% of the voters coming out, we don't expect there's gonna be huge huge populations voting anywhere. Of course, GLD is very interested in understanding Local variation, so I have to ask you to what extent do we see differences across Tunisia in terms of engagement attitudes towards side to the extent that we can them in other ways of understanding where there might be pockets of support among pretty massive disenchantment?

Difficult to see variation because of the very low level of turn out. But there are two indicators. For example, in Saied's neighborhoods in near the level of turn out was around 5%. Which is half of the general turn out and it shows that even with his personal presence, in fact he showed up after a visit

abroad, I think it was Saudi Arabia, that he showed up to show to support the one of his candidates campaign and they did not get more than 5%. So that's a factor. But also another indicator that might be useful is the number of candidates by district. In the main districts in the great Tunis, in a Goulette or Tunis one or Tunis two, we see an extremely low number of candidates. In fact, one of the oldest parts of Tunis, there was only one candidate who was elected automatically. But at the same time, in historically marginalized, both economically and politically, regions as gasoline or jendouba, we see an extremely high number of candidates in small district. And that to a division of votes and makes the election very competitive. We're still not clear why we see that this may have to do with the resilience of some of Saied's network support, but we need to wait for the second round of the election to see if these patterns are persistent and if there is any variation across the country.

And I want to end on the issue of the next elections, which are the 29th and this may end up airing right after the elections. But do we see any differences in terms of the regime strategy moving into those elections as they're an attempt to really try to get people to come out to vote? I mean it's a bit embarrassing the the low turn out and the, the resounding disinterest in the last election round right? So do we see differences in terms of mobilization efforts from the regime this time?

I'm not sure if mobilization is the most appropriate word in this case, because the regime is not really using any of these intermediary institutions, but the Electoral Commission is deploying new strategies to bring more attention to the candidates. They think that the reason why users did not go to the ballots the last time is because they don't know that who the candidates are. So they are organizing debates between them, they are broadcasted every day in the main national television. But I'm not sure, if this is effective and also they started broadcasting them this week, which is very late. I don't think that it's possible to create mobilization in the last few days before the election, so there is no momentum. It's really difficult to believe that we may see a very huge difference between the first round and the 2nd. But also it shows how the regime is really struggling to understand why the level of support is extremely low.

So I know you don't have a crystal ball and I'm not asking you to predict the outcome of this election, but if you're looking forward, what are your expectations or what do you think are the things to really pay attention to? When we're thinking about where Tunisia is headed.

So we should expect several other elections this year. That's what Saied like doing, and he already budgeted a huge amount of money. I think more than four times more than he had budget for the last year to run these elections, and so that may reveal how unpopular he is. In addition to that regarding the composition of the Parliament, we will probably end up with a Parliament very fragmented. With people, no consistent ideologies and where decision making would be difficult. But there is an important pattern that we will probably notice that the majority of people who are getting elected seem to be from similar background, mostly public officials coming from positions in the executive, meaning the executive has the leverage over them in their career. Most of them may not be reelected in the future so that also should be taken into consideration. We know already that that kind of background middle class state dependent middle class is not the most democratic and

this factor may contribute to the weakening of the Parliament and the strengthening of the executive.

I suspect that you're right. It's of course depressing for Tunisia and Tunisians. I think it's depressing for many people who've watched the the region kind of more generally right. Everybody's talked about it, but Tunisia had been the the bright light of democracy in the post 2011 or the post Arab Uprising period. And seeing it struggle and seeing the the difficulties and particularly in a kind of a global climate where there's not a lot of attention paid and not a lot of resources and energy being put into into support, I think is also very, very difficult. So I wish you and and all Tunisians actually all the best. And thank you so much for joining us.

Thank you for having me.

When recording this, it's been about six weeks since the FIFA world Cup in Qatar ended. But what impact did the tournament have on domestic politics and its influence beyond Qatar? GLD colleague and football fan Thabit Jacob met with Dr Danyel Reicheto to discuss the politics of sports. Focusing on last year's World Cup in Qatar. Danyel is a visiting associate professor at Georgetown University in Qatar. He has Co edited 2 books, which came out recently. The first one is Qatar and the 2022 FIFA World Cup: Politics, controversy and change. And the second one is the Handbook of Sports in the Middle East.

Danyel, welcome. Good to have you on the show.

Thank you Thabit for having me.

So let's start by discussing the controversy around the World Cup in Qatar. I mean the tournament was marked by controversy around a number of issues. You know, from poor treatment of migrant workers, Qatar's human rights records, concerns about LGBT rights, among other things. We saw teams like Germany and Denmark very vocal about these things. Some people were accusing Qatar of sport washing its authoritarian image. In a piece you wrote last year, you stated that all this was hypocrisy and double standards. Could you say more on this?

Yeah, I mean we need to differentiate between sports specific and general political concerns. When it comes to sports specifics, critics then one issue certainly is that the World Cup for the first time took place in winter, at least in like as a European winter. For some other people, in the southern hemisphere it was their summer, but so it interrupted like major leagues like the the British Premier League. Then there were accusations of corruption in the bidding process. But I think it's important to mention that there were in all World Cups for the last 30 years, including the one in my home country, Germany 2006 accusations of corruption. And I think the problem is that as there was a very small group of people, the FIFA executive Committee comprised of 24 many old men, who

would make such a major decision - Who's becoming the next World Cup host? so systems where few people make major decisions are tentative for corruption, so I don't know what happened specifically around this bit. But again, we had like discussions about corruptions with with, like all previous World Cups and maybe 1 positive legacy of this World Cup is also that, after the controversial awarding of the World Cups, Turkey and Russia, 2018, 2020, FIFA changed its entire governance system and future World Cup hosts will be selected by the entire FIFA General Assembly, so not anymore by 24 members of the FIFA Executive Committee, now by all 211 FIFA Member states, everybody has one vote. Which I believe will be a system where corruption will Less occur than in the past. Then of course we also have some broader political issues and after Qatar was awarded the World Cup in December 2010, one big issue became the situation of the migrant workers in Qatar who built his entire infrastructure, the living and working conditions of them became a major issue, but also other issues like like women's rights like LGBTQ etc. What maybe was not always fairly communicated to global audiences, was that many of these issues are not Qatar specific. They occur in the entire region. For example, is a kafala system, which human rights organizations would describe as a system of modern day slavery. This is a gulf thing and not a Qatar thing so but I think yeah that were like the the critical issues that have been discussed in the lead up to the World Cup 2022.

Great, so it's good to know that as you said, at least, this controversy have kind of inspired reforms within FIFA. So we're going to see a more transparent process going forward.

Definitely, yeah.

So let's discuss another thing which kind of really became an important topic, and this is the issue about the World Cup as a catalyst for domestic reforms in Qatar. A lot of people have been saying that the World Cup somehow kind of helped to to reform Qatar in some ways. I mean, this is a very small country, famous for its LNG Industry is among one of the world's top natural gas producers. It's also known for things like Qatar Airways, but apart from that this is the kind of that is not known very well. Has the World Cup changed the country in some ways?

Yeah, I think it did. But to be fair to Qatar, not everything that's changing here in the country can be related to FIFA. So Qatar started to change already in the mid 1990s there was a leadership change in the early 1990s. Qatar started to export liquefied natural gas in the end 1990s, so when we look at Al Jazeera, the groundbreaking media network, and Qatar Airways, and Education City where I work, all of this was set up in the 1990s, so it cannot be linked to FIFA. But certainly when the World Cup was awarded to Qatar in December 2010 as this put spotlight on Qatar and shed light specifically on the situation of the migrant workers. And human rights groups, international media would report about the situation. And even the emir last year in a big interview with the French newspaper admitted that the situation was not great and changes were needed and that spotlight had to to do changes. And certainly one could argue that some of the changes took too much time, but particularly in the last two years we have seen a plethora of of reforms and and and social changes. So the kafala system was dismantled so the ILO's International Labor Organization says not abolish it says dismantled, why? So because the sponsorship system is in serious stay in place. But now one can change jobs without needing the approval of the employer and one can leave the country without needing an exit permits from the employer, so there are two major changes. Then the first minimum wage in the region was introduced and very important also, since 2021, outside work is

not permitted anymore in the summer months, so there was already a rule in place before, but it was extended now from early June and to mid of September. Outside work is not permitted anymore from 10:00 AM to 3:30. PM So all of these are certainly ground breaking changes that also set new standards here in this part of the world.

Great so it looks like change has already been underway in so many ways.

Certainly, but of course it remains now to see how sustainable these changes are, but I think that Qatar's motives to lose these changes are not changing, so I expect them to continue and even to improve.

Great, let's chat a little bit about football and sport in general as a foreign policy and geopolitical tool. So we know for many years, Qatar has been using its reach, energy, resources, oil and gas in particular as a vehicle for promoting its foreign policy and geopolitical ambitions. But Qatar left OPEC in 2018. OPEC is the organization for petroleum producing countries. It looks like sports is emerging as an important geopolitical tool, you know, I think the the performance of the Qatari national team was very poor on the pitch, but it looks like Qatar secured some really important geopolitical wins throughout the tournament. Could you say more?

Yeah, I think Qatar is certainly doing better in international affairs as a stage than its National Football team as the World Cup. But sport was used from the very beginning as a domestic and foreign policy tool. So Qatar hosted its first international sporting event in 1993 when an 80P men's tennis tournament took place in Qatar. So there is now a path of like 30 years of international sporting events in the country. And there were always two motives. First of all, to contribute to domestic development because all the infrastructure that has been built now is a made for the airport support, etc. None of this because of the World Cup. The World Cup just set a timeline to accomplish the major goal of Qatar is to become an advanced country by 2030. That's the goal stated in the Qatar national vision. That's one. But is also a foreign policy tool. Qatar is a small state and for small states what matters is visibility in international affairs. Without support, nobody would know Qatar. And Qatar is also vulnerable because it cannot defend itself. It's surrounded by two big powerful countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia and sports serves as a tool of interconnectedness. So with sports all the time, international athletes here are representatives from sports governing bodies, politicians who watch the competitions, et cetera. So all of this connects Qatar with the rest of the world and by doing so also contributes to the national security.

Fascinating, I mean, it was really fascinating to see during the opening game between Qatar and Ecuador, when there was this photo of the Emir of Qatar together with the president Erdogan and President Sisi of Egypt. I don't know if you remember that?

Yeah, I mean there were a number of high-ranking politicians here. We did not witness a diplomatic boycott as it's the Winter Olympics in China, for example. But it's not just that the World Cup we also

see at other events that took place. You know, for example, I'm a handball fan, I'm from Germany. I remember 2015 when the handball World Cup was here, there was a governor from my state in Germany here, so yeah, there are always politicians members from international federations here around sporting events and certainly sport is also a diplomatic tool and a tool for engagement.

Finally, let's talk a little bit about the legacy of the 2022 World Cup for Qatar. Again, in terms of football, the World Cup will be remembered for for so many things. One would say for instance, Messi cemented his position as the greatest player of all time. You know Morocco becoming the first African and the first Arab nation to reach the semi final of the World Cup. But for Qatar you know what will be the legacy of the World Cup?

You mentioned already some important events at the World Cup. I would also add the win from Saudi Arabia against Argentina. The later world champion and what was remarkable that on the day afterwards, Qatari emir was wearing a Saudi scarf and it's remarkable since there were just until 1 1/2 years ago, a blockade from Saudi against Qatar, so this will hopefully contribute to better relations in the future. And I think for Qatar the main legacy as a small state is that it's now on the map. Everybody knows now Qatar. It's a state that is punching far above its weight in international affairs, not only because of the World Cup also because of other developments like last year helping to evacuate refugees from Afghanistan, and now some Western embassies having relocated from Kabul to Doha, contributing to other countries energy security with state owned companies we mentioned before like Qatar Airways, Aljazeera, the Qatar Foundation. So I think the legacy is that Qatar is known all over the world and that it shows that a state a small state can punch far above its weight and be an influential actor in international affairs. But we also see a shift from what means periphery and center in international affairs, both in sport and in politics in general. And this has been also like global South where support for Qatar, not only the Arab world but also in many countries of the global world, global south who are proud that a small state from the global south, a young. Country that just you know starts to started to develop in the last 30 years is capable of hosting such a big event.

Thanks a lot Danyel for this conversation. We will include some of the pieces you've wrote in the notes for our audience to check them out. But really, really great to have you and and thanks for this conversation.

Perfect. Yeah, my pleasure. Thank you very much.

The effects of a negative shock on male marriage in the West Bank - that is the title of Ayhab Saad's recent paper that we will cover as our last segment for this episode. Ayhab is an associate professor of economics at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and in this paper of his, which is co-authored with Amr Ragab, marriage rates among young men in the West Bank are compared before and after the sudden closure of the Israeli labour market for Palestinian male commuters from the West Bank in 2001. Ellen Lust met with Ayhab to talk about how the economic shock following the

labor market closure has affected the decision to get married for both men and women and also how social norms play a part in the declining marriage rates.

Thank you Ayhab for joining us and I'm glad to be able to talk to you about a paper that's been recently published in the review of economics of the household and that I understand is published with Professor Ragab. It's called the effects of negative economic shock on male marriage in the West Bank, and in it you're taking a look at how the closures of 2001 in Israel and Palestine affected not necessarily just the economy, but really also affected kind of social institutions and social expressions and and marriage particularly. And so I wanna start by just asking you to explain a little bit why we might expect that economic shocks or closures would have an impact on marriage?

Great, so this idea of economics and marriage is being floated for for a while right now and started with the the famous economist, the Chicago Economist Baker, and he has a theory of marriage actually and basically columnists say we can use economic theory to study anything we want. And many economist called even marriage market. To give it a sense, like you know, the decision to to marry is just like any other decision whether to invest or. The idea started, you know whether we want to get married or not, depends on the benefits of getting married. If the benefit is larger than staying single, so you go ahead and and you get married. And basically the idea revolved around the division of labor.

Okay.

The marriage involves some division of Labor or specialization: Who's going to stay home? Who's going to take care of the kids and who's going to go and earn income to be the the supporter of the the family? So the kind of economic shock will change the benefit of this division of labour. If we have a negative economic shock that impact the male income, for example. So males become less attractive in this equation, right? So females are saying right now I cannot specialize, for example, or stay home because, males whether or not with earners they cannot support me if I stay home. So this might change the benefit of getting married, so this is like a kind of simple intuition of the economic theory of marriage. I hope it's clear.

No it is. And I think what's important about it is it goes beyond just a notion of can you afford the celebration? Because that's not what you're really talking about.

Yes, that that's completely right. So this is the classical model. The classic model of marriage. And here it mostly applies to advanced, kind of It's mostly, because we think about division of labor, so there is an assumption that both women and men, and we can't see this. The labor force participation for women in the. US or Europe is really high. Applying this theory in the MENA region, for example Middle East. It's a little bit tricky. Why is that? Because when you look at the labor force participation for women it's very low. So women aren't working, So I'm not sure whether we can use this notion of specialization of division of Labor.

And so what you're doing in this case is you're looking at the 2001 closures, and you're using that as a way to think about how communities though might be differentially impacted by the closures themselves, right? So let's start by just thinking about why you have some variation in the level of economy. Can you say a little bit more about that?

Yeah, so that's a great question. To test the relationship between economic conditions and marriage. It's not as easy as it looks, because people are, like you know, concerned about causality. So we need to find a good way to understand which it dictates or where the causation goes from. Is it from market to marriage or from marriage to income. So this is kind of the basic idea, so sometimes it's hard to come up with clear identification we call it if I'm allowed to use an economic jargon, right? the idea we started with in 2001, the second Intifada started. So for people who don't know what the second Intifada is, it's the Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation following the then Prime Minister Sharon. So it started as peaceful demonstration and then erupted to one of the most violent episodes between Israel and Palestine. What happened basically because you know the West Bank, the economy there is relatively poor compared to the Israeli economy. So for example, right now the GDP is \$3000 or 3500. The GDP in Israel is around, it's 10 times, 15 times more than this. You can have said this is a huge, large economy, that's dominating a very small economy, so most of the people, most Palestinians workers used to work on a daily basis. Just to commute to work in Israel and they go back overnight to to the West Bank. So that's why I call them commuters. Because you know they go work and then they go back. Before the 2nd, around 35%, sometimes up to 40% of Labor force in Palestine work in Israel. So that's can imagine like the number I think reached 100 even before that was in 1999, one 100,000 workers. Palestinian workers working in databases in Israel.

Right, and going back and forth on a daily basis.

And going back and forth on a daily basis, you know they're just close to each other. So Israel decided after the uprising, to close to boarder. Palestinian workers aren't allowed to work in Israel anymore. Overnight, the number of Palestinians work in Israel dropped from 100,000 to around 10-15 thousand. That's around the first quarter of 2001. So obviously this is a huge shock, it's shock like in terms of Labor markets. You just destroy the labor markets. Many people lost their job and lost their income, so that's why we call it negative economic shock or negative income shock if you want. So the question is, we could just do simply, like you know, start looking at the marriage rate in Palestine and West Bank.

Before and after.

Just over time, it's all the time. So this is if we see some decline in the marriage rate this is because of the closure, but that's not 100% right because many things can change over time. Education, how people think about marriage. You know there is a decline, but it's worldwide...

And stress, right?

...yeah, worldwide, even without disclosure – the marriage rate might be declining, right? So that's why I'm saying it's tricky sometimes. You just yeah here look, but there is something we can explore here. We've noticed that we look at the localities. Like labor localities or villages if you wish, in the West Bank. We've noticed that their exposure to the Israeli labor market varies a lot. What I mean by exposures, some localities, some villages, used to send like 80-90% of their labor force their workers to Israel. Some localities did almost send nobody because why? For different reasons, mainly geographical reason it working and so on. Then there is a differential effect of the disclosure on the localities. It didn't impact everybody in the same way, so the way we start thinking about it, we have two almost identical localities in terms of marriage rate. They don't have to be the same or trends, not necessarily the same level, but the trend is the same before maybe is declining in the same way. And suddenly after this closure, the trends start diverging. So it must be because of this of this closure, and this is exactly what we did and we start comparing these localities. The marriage rate across these localities before and after the shock. And one good thing to mention that why we study this marriage on male, not female I think, and this is the the question was, we got many many times. So one reason is that you know, most commuters are men. 98-99% of commuters, Palestinian commuters working are males. And they are younger than the rest of the labor force and less educated. So we say this is a major economic, negative income sharp for a certain type of workers. Young male uneducated workers.

Which nicely is your marriageable population aslo right?

Yes, yeah exactly.

So that's one thing, and the second thing it's a bit technical. It was very hard to study this for female marriage for two reasons. Frist, in the Palestinian communities, like when female members, most likely they move across. The, the marriage migration is high, so we cannot read localities as separated isolated. There will be a spill over. But this is not the case for the male marriage, mostly male when they get married, they stay in the same locality. Sometimes the same household. And the second reason, like you know some policies policing authorities start to adopt after the closure because they want to absorb a large number of unemployed people. They start expanding the public sector. So this expanding of public sector, in fact, benefited women more than men in terms of employment. So we have a high level of education for women, but low labor force perservation. When the Palestinian started targeting expanding the public sector, this benefited educated people more because they wanted more teacher and health system and so on and so on. There were some a certain cut off of education they asked for to be eligible. This increased the labor force persuasion for females, they're becoming more economically independent, empowered. This might reduce the marriage rate among them for reasons unrelated to the closure. At the same time, we know they face competition from richer comuters, so we don't know how also, this impacted the wages for the whole economy and its general effect. So it was a little bit tricky to identify the effect of that logic per se on.. or to isolate this effect from other factors that might impact on this.

Interesting I mean. And also I think particularly interesting thinking about how things like the closure differentially impacted men and women and how the mechanisms underlie why women might decide to get married may be different from those affecting...

This is where our mechanism comes in at play, and we think this is what I think makes our paper kind of interesting. We talk about the social norm surrounding the marriage and how rigid it is. And also about the decision of getting married for male and female in the West Bank. So the paper studies marriage from 2001 up to 2006 around 10. So we have also extended analysis this around like maybe 10 to 15, 20 years ago and I'm pretty sure like the situation was much different than today, marriage is still, but it was even more kind of in a traditional way. So mostly men will propose. Yes, women will have a say, but you know still the family is involved in that decision heavily involved I would say, right. And this depends on whether you live in a rural or urban place. Even a rural, it's more, it's a family decision. Especially with this low labor force participation for women, right? So they are economically dependent on their family. When this economic shock happens negative, it impacted the groom and also impacted the bride's family because that the social norms surrounding the marriage ceremony is very rigid in terms of expenses. And we checked this, like you know, kind of the wedding costs are really huge and they didn't go down to our shock they didn't go down so.

The expectations stayed the same, yeah?

So it's yeah exactly. So we're saying, you know right now, people who got affected they cannot afford it. This might be one reason why they're not getting married. But the other reason say OK, but maybe the family right now they have interest in reducing these costs. Accepting a less lavish like wedding ceremony or whatever course, and so on. And to marry off kind of their daughters, but we can't, we didn't see this. If this was happening, we wouldn't see this huge effect of shock on marriage. And what we found, we found really the marriage rate really declined after the shock. So community that were very exposed there experienced a larger decline in marriage for males compared to the other communities. And I think what's interesting here is reading social norms as a mechanism to explain why there is impact of this economic shock. In addition to the traditional theory, or classical theory of economics. And I think what's also interesting in our paper, if we compare this to other studies, there were studies that done almost the same thing, their economic shock is coming stemming from the variation in rainfall in Africa and East Asia. And once they find that, under negative economic shock, marriage rate will actually will decrease in Africa because in those societies, the marriage tradition is the kind of a bride price. OK. So it's a transfer from a groom's family to the bride's family. The sending of the shock will have opposite effect on marriage, will increase marriage rate. In society is dominated by dowry. Where the bride's family pay the cost or pay money or transfer money to the groom's family. In Africa they found that the marriage rate increase, in Asia it declined so we yes.

In Asia, it declines?

Yes.

OK, OK.

So when we have a bride price, it will increase. We found the opposite. Even in this society, we have bride price but, and they get an economic shock actually decrease the marriage rate.

And do you think that's in part because of the policy that ends up absorbing a lot of the women? I mean because I'm trying to think of what explains that we still have the same kind of interest, potentially of the family, to marry off at a lower price, which should make the marriage increase. I mean, that's the African example, right?

Exactly some African examples.

Exactly why our results are different, even though we still have some aspect of the surrounding similarity norms.

Some similar norms, yeah?

So OK when we talk about norms, marriage norms, we cannot utilize in one single aspect. Which is bride price or dowry, right?

Dowry prices. Yeah yeah.

In our society, the nature of the Mahar - this is the what we call the bride price in Islamic tradition - in our society in West Bank, we've noticed it's very, very small. It's almost insignificant.

It's sort of symbolic, often more than it's real.

So what, yes where where the costs come from, it's not even they're not transmit from the wedding ceremony cause itself.

OK.

And we found this is very rigid. And why was it rigid? Because you know, this is something everybody can notice everybody can see, so it's a symbolic of the social status of the groom families, and the bride families, so both of them were reluctant to accept something less than then norm.

You know, I think it goes beyond your paper, but one interesting distinction that I've noticed has been that in many African societies and communities, wedding costs are borne by a much larger set of people, right? So they set up wedding committees and the wedding committees may be friends, and they may be influential people and, who you can get together to sort of help contribute to paying the wedding cost. I've never seen that in the Middle East. I mean, I may be missing it, but it does seem like it's much more the nuclear family and maybe a few who help out to do it, but not this kind of broad committees that that contribute.

I agree. And what's interesting to me, because I was in Palestine in the second intifada. There were many calls to reduce the wedding cost.

Oh interesting, explicitly discussed?

You know, you know we need to reduce the cost. It's really, you know, perhaps the cost right now among everything going on the economy is experiencing, negative GDP growth, and the costs were so rigid. And what's interesting to me over time right now, when I go there and see, I see Oh, even though people not really discussing this explicitly, you see some guys, some people right now. Some variations.

Okay, okay.

Some people starting to take... yeah.

People can't choose to not exactly follow the norm in terms of ceremony and celebrations, this was really interesting to me to see. Like even though people tried very hard during the shock to reduce this to change it and was very rigid, but right now it's changing by itself. And for me as I said why this is, I like this paper, we've kind of opening new door to look at the impact of the Israeli dominance over like the economy of Palestine. So actually this is my second paper and in this kind of area the 1st paper did the same thing about education. I want to see how this closure impacted education? I also used the economic theory, I thought you know what, before the closure, high schoolers can just drop out from high school and go and earn a wage that's four or five times the ways they could earn, even by going to Israel they can age like twice as much as if they just go to college and graduate and get a job in the West Bank. So it's a kind of increase up in the cost of education. We notice that after the closure, the high schools drop out actually declined. Because right now in the opportunity costs of education decline, you cannot afford right now to go to just you know quick.

And I would presume, particularly among men, right? Because...

Yes, we did the same kind of strategy and comparing localities with. Yeah, we didn't see large effect of the closure on women. Because you know, it's kind of stable. And this is actually surprising to all scholars who work on the region. And I think even they call it some paradox, I forgot the name, that's why we have a high level of women education that's very low. Very low labor force, female participation. But yes, education for women was constable.

My theory on why the women stay in school is because they don't have the benefit of dropping out and then getting a job. They're not going to do better as your sort of young men do in Israel. They have the most freedom by going to school and coming back, particularly by going to university, if I'm a woman and I'm not yet married, then for me it's much more interesting to go to university and hang out with my friends, come back in the evening, then it is not to go. So it almost feels like, for women, education has a whole set of benefits to it, that for men it doesn't. It has nothing to do with the future stream of income because you're educated. It has everything to do with the present enjoyment of life that while I'm waiting for a proposal, let me go hang out with my friends at the university and spend some time.

I got agree. This that's one plausible explanation, actually, I mean, and it's right, we we know that it is... Yes, education provides something else more than just a career future career for...

Right, more the knowledge in the classroom.

Even yeah, even providing the opportunity to meet their future husband. In this traditionally closed societies conservative where pre marriage relationship is prohibited, so maybe this is when you just to get to know people around you. And people are more tolerant when it comes to the kind of relationship not in in the US definition but like Western definition through educations or colleges.

What is exciting and interesting is to think about both these questions of how different sets of social norms, whether we're talking about dowries, or whether we're talking about roles that women and men can play and whether they can travel to work in Israel or not. But also that, like we just said, I mean that getting education going to the university or getting married can mean very many different things to people, right? And keeping that kind of in the forefront of our minds, I think is very useful.

I I agree with you. And might mean also very different things for their parents. As well so.

Yeah, and I think you know a lot of times when, say, if you're thinking about development practitioners that are trying to find programs to increase education or to.. There's a lot of of these factors that really need to be thought about and taken into account.

Always studying like culture, putting in economics and this is something very hard. I mean, that's what we're doing here. Political culture also you can see like to me is the 1,000,000 question right now with this causation issue.

Yeah.

Which is causing which, and it's obvious that Doctor Azmi has a strong opinion, It's the other way around having to worry.. more kind of, also he's playing around it, like sometimes like controlling for elections, saying supporting the results, maybe on the other part of the talk, say these are the valleys that support Democrats. So it is kind of tricky.

Yeah, no, it's a hard one, it's a really hard one.

Yeah, and we don't know what the confounding factor is. I mean, this is the question as applied economist or social scientist, this is now the question I keep asking myself. How can we test this? We can do our RCTs but that's not..

But what does that mean? Yeah.

...beyond if I don't want to do or RCTs, what are the confounding factors that can control for and help me you know, kind of get close to this disposition story, but it's...

And even if you're doing RCTs, I mean what does these things mean, right? I mean like....

So I can, I can change, I can change a factor, I can, you know, have a program where some people are randomized in and some people aren't. But you know what it's still like under not underlying it, what's? The real mechanisms. That are causing things are often not necessarily.

Yes, I agree with you, yeah. It's it's very hard to generalize.

Now I just want to thank you so much for taking time to talk to me and for meeting me and also the great work and and a fabulous institute that you have all created here. It's it's really wonderful.

Thank you for the opportunity. I really enjoy it, it's always nice when you talk about all the research, right? You feel they are alive, not just on paper. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Thank you for listening. We hope that you enjoyed this episode. The work of all our guests are provided in the episode description, and if you are interested in working with or collaborating with GLD, then head over to our website. We have a lot of opportunities out right now.