

TIES THAT BIND:

Family, Tribe, Nation and the Rise of Arab Individualism

The Arab world is experiencing a revolution. States have relied on pyramids of authority that reach down through society, often through tribes into families. Yet those ties are fraying, and individualism is rising. The connections between states and their citizens are in transition.

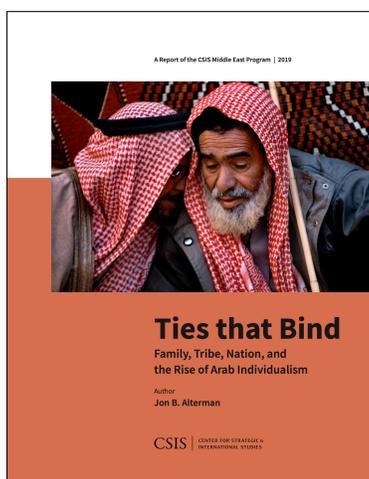
Some of the drivers of this change are widely recognized. Smart phones, for example, put a newspaper, a television, a communication device, and an encryption device in everyone's pocket. But other drivers of change are less well recognized. Citizens are feeling more economically stressed, and social groups are struggling to provide for their members. People live further from their families and spend less time with them, and they spend more hours at work. Job markets are becoming more transparent, and nepotism is less potent. Governments have become more capable, and physical security is less of a threat. As a consequence, Arabs feel forced more than ever to rely on themselves and their immediate families.

IN THIS NEW WORLD:

- **STATES WILL NEED TO CHANGE THE WAYS THEY RELATE TO THEIR POPULATIONS.** It will be harder to persuade people to sacrifice for the common good. Governments will have to

change their approaches to politics as they find citizens in general less obedient and less compliant. Citizens will challenge governments more based on their individual interests, and governments may seek to use coercion more.

- **YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LIKELY TO GROW MORE ALIENATED.** As they feel unprotected and adrift, young Arabs feel less reason to conform, and they will choose allegiances based on their beliefs and activities, rather than their parentage. Jihadi groups are likely to benefit to an extent, but some young people will merely move into angry opposition.
- **SOCIETIES WILL BECOME MORE VISIBLY DIVERSE, AND AT LEAST INITIALLY, CONFLICTS WILL RISE.** Interest groups will clash in new ways, and structures to resolve differences between interest groups will need to be developed. Similarly, tribes will need to reinvent themselves to be relevant in the 21st century.



TIES THAT BIND, a new report from the CSIS Middle East Program, explores these changes in the Arab world. Based on interviews with more than 110 people in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Tunisia, this report analyzes the impacts of rising individualism on individuals, their societies, and their governments. Compared to the United States, where individualism has been a societal value for hundreds of years, Arab individualism is a relatively sudden and disruptive force. Its impacts are likely to increase over the next several decades.

The report was written by Jon B. Alterman, based on fieldwork by Dr. Alterman, Will Todman, and Margo Balboni.