EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of environmentally sustainable public utilities in the Middle East is an improbable topic for a Washington think tank study.

Yet, many countries in the Middle East face serious challenges providing utilities in any manner to their populations, and the failure to do so is an increasing flash point for public dissatisfaction. This study finds that providing more environmen-

tally sustainable services in the Middle East would be an effective way to address many citizens' grievances which go beyond the reliability of those services. It would also help ameliorate deep dissatisfaction with the quality of governance and help build trust between citizens and their governments.

This study examines three sectors—power, water and sanitation, and solid waste—in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia. While the three countries are different in many ways, each faces increasing challenges providing services to their citizens. Providing these services in an environmentally sustainable way would also crucially increase each country's resilience and diminish their vulnerability in a chronically unstable region.

Jordan has the most centralized system of providing these services. Efforts to ensure service provision have often locked the government into arrangements that are expensive and protect elite interests at the expense of sustainability. In the case of water, the issue is existential for the desert country.

Lebanon has a very decentralized system, but aspects of it have been captured by sectarian actors and business interests who prioritize maintaining their economic and political power.

Tunisia emerged from a revolution a decade ago with a keen interest in moving beyond the centralized control of the previous dictatorship. It has found, however, that fledgling institutions are often incapable of implementing durable change, especially when legacy institutions seek to guard their existing prerogatives.

All of the governments under study strain to provide services today, and while they have all expressed interest in environmentally sustainable solutions, each has also faced challenges in implementation. The vignettes in each chapter explore consequential experiments, many of which were successful and point the way for replication in individual countries and region-wide.

This study found that the provision of environmentally sustainable services would have a number of salutary effects: it would provide services economically, it would do so in ways that minimize pollution and conserve vital resources, and it would help empower local authorities that are closely connected to their citizenry. But perhaps even more importantly, providing local, environmentally sustainable services would address the yawning trust deficit between millions of citizens and their government. The halo effect of effective governance would, in the estimation of the study's authors, spread to many other aspects of public life.

The topic seems mundane, technical, and not worthy of high-level attention. Instead, it should be seen as the more persistent ways many citizens in the Middle East see their government. Success in this endeavor would not only preserve the environment for future generations but also contribute to lasting social peace as well.