

## **The effect of Foundational state design processes, Transitional political processes & Election support on a Sense of belonging**

Effect: No effect (attributed to a lack of effective state design, transitional processes, and credible elections)

Confidence in study findings: Low (one study, low confidence)

### **Short summary**

The study suggests that civilian actors, focused on local service provision, tend to promote local identities, while armed groups, often aiming for territorial expansion, prefer more abstract identities like ethnicity or nationality. This highlights the impact of actor interests and local dynamics on identity salience in states experiencing a breakdown. Additionally, the research concludes that ineffective state design, transitional processes, and elections had no impact on sense of belonging.

### **Long summary**

#### *The intervention*

The study highlights the link between institutional control and identity salience. Civilian actors, focused on local governance, often promote local identities. Conversely, armed groups, seeking broader control, tend to favour abstract, often national or ethnic identities. This study contributes to understanding how identities are shaped in areas of state failure.

#### *How is the intervention expected to work*

The key argument presented is that the interests of those who build institutions and seek authority in the absence of the state determine which identities are promoted and potentially adopted by the population.

- 1) Gilbert argues that civilian actors are more likely to promote local identities, such as those tied to a clan or tribe, as their objectives often centre around providing essential services and maintaining local order within a limited geographic area (p. 24).
- 2) Armed groups, on the other hand, tend to promote more abstract or space-based identities, such as ethnic or national identities, as their goals often involve expanding their control over territory and establishing a new political order
- 3) External actors can also influence identity outcomes by supporting or undermining local actors capacity for institution building. For instance, international aid directed towards a specific group can bolster that group's legitimacy and help them promote their chosen identity. Conversely, military intervention targeting a particular group can hinder their ability to establish institutions and exert influence (p. 22-24)
- 4) Building a shared national identity through Institutions and processes such as constitutional provisions, which define the state's values and principles and outline citizens' rights and responsibilities, to foster a sense of shared purpose and belonging (p.116)

### *The evidence base*

There is one qualitative study assessing the effect of **Foundational state design processes, Transitional political processes & Election support on a Sense of belonging in Syria**. This study is by V., Gilbert. (2019). *Identity in The Wake of the State: Local, National, and Supranational Dynamics of the Syrian Conflict* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania). All references are from that study.

### *The evidence*

To examine how actors in Syria, operating in areas where the state has retreated, use institutions to promote different identities, the author analyses three case studies: Ma'arat a-Nu'man (civilian rule), the Jazira Canton (Kurdish-led rebelocracy under the Democratic Union Party, or PYD), and Eastern Ghouta (rebelocracy under the Islamist armed group Jaish al-Islam).

- 1) content analysis of social media posts to examine the types of identities promoted by local institutions. Text and images from Facebook pages of local councils, judicial councils, and armed groups, focus on references to national, ethnic, religious, and local identities. For instance, in Ma'arat a-Numan, the local council's Facebook page uses local historical figures and symbols to promote a local identity. In Jazira Canton, the PYD's social media presence emphasizes both the Kurdish national identity and a broader Syrian identity. In Eastern Ghouta, the Judicial Council's Facebook page heavily relies on religious identity, using Quranic quotations to legitimise legal decisions (p.133-138)
- 2) The evidence also comprises visual elements used by local institutions, such as logos. For instance, the Ma'arat a-Numan Local Council's logo features a historical artefact, symbolising local history and identity. In contrast, the Judicial Council of Eastern Ghouta's logo incorporates Islamic green colour schemes and geometric patterns, visually reinforcing their religious identity. These visual cues provide additional insights into the identities that institutions seek to project (p. 84-85, 178-179)

### *Confidence assessment*

Overall confidence: Low Confidence Qualitative Study (It is unclear whether the study uses an established small n approach; the theoretical framework is not presented)