

Social Capital and Dispute Resolution in Informal Areas of Cairo and Istanbul

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Abstract How do female residents of the Middle East’s largest cities solve their everyday problems? And under what conditions do women use the state to resolve local disputes? Squatter settlements and other “informal” neighborhoods often exist outside of effective state authority, leaving residents to develop parallel forms of legality. This is particularly true for female residents of these neighborhoods who may experience marginalization as a result of their socioeconomic status as well as prevailing gender norms. This article examines avenues for problem solving and conflict resolution employed by women in the low-income neighborhoods of Cairo and Istanbul—the region’s largest megacities. Using an original survey of 2400 women in four low-income neighborhoods across the two cities, we find that women in Turkey are much more likely than their counterparts in Egypt to turn to the state to handle local problems, especially for issues associated with criminality. When Egyptian women do choose to use state channels for dispute resolution, they only do so when they are well-connected to local elites, suggesting the critical mediating role played by a woman’s social capital. Religious authorities are not seen as a primary tool for conflict resolution in any of the sampled neighborhoods, challenging the conventional wisdom about the role local Islamic interlocutors play in low-income Muslim communities.

Keywords Women · Informal areas · Dispute resolution · Social capital · Middle East

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Introduction

During the last 50 years, rapid industrialization and mass urban migration have resulted in the proliferation of informal neighborhoods at the edges of all major cities in the developing world. From Delhi to Cairo, São Paulo to Istanbul, a growing population of the world's poor live in informal neighborhoods that lack infrastructure and legal status. Increased competition for urban space in the city center, which some attribute to the rise of neoliberal economic policies (Brenner and Theodore 2002), has led to the emergence of what one researcher has called a “planet of slums” (Davis 2006). The informal neighborhoods of Cairo and Istanbul have followed this global trajectory. Typically built on agricultural or state-owned land from the 1950s on, these “haphazard” communities, referred to as *gecekondu* in Turkish and *‘ashwa’iyat* in Egyptian Arabic, were not developed as part of a formal urban planning effort. By the 2000s, nearly one third of Istanbul’s 12 million residents and around two thirds of Cairo’s 17 million residents lived in informal areas (Içduygu 2004, p. 944; Kipper and Fischer 2009).

The urban poor living in informal areas experience distinct forms of social exclusion as a result of the tentative legal status of their dwellings, their frequent employment in the “shadow” economy, and the poor state of public infrastructure in these areas (de Sousa Santos 1977; Roberts 1978; Bayat 1997; Chatterjee 2004, p. 137; Davis 2006; Holston 2008). Because of the state’s weakened influence in such neighborhoods, informal areas are often caricatured as chaotic and lawless spaces that are hotbeds of crime and political radicalism (Kramer 2005, p. 7; Erman 2004; Ismail 2006, p. 1; Demirtaş and Şen 2007; Singerman 2009). Yet, as many scholars have shown, such places are hardly without order (Ismail 2006, p. 33 and 46; Bayat 2010). Rather, informal mechanisms establish social and moral control, at times in opposition to and at times in adaptation to state legality (De Sousa Santos 1977; Holston 2008). The existence of large swathes of the urban landscape that may be only weakly controlled by traditional state structures raises the question of what types of order emerge in locations of limited state infrastructural power.¹

The growth of informal neighborhoods, inhabited by millions of individuals who live in housing with only tentative legal status, provides a particular burden on women: women often have limited access to formal education and employment, affordable child care is limited, and decision-making structures often exclude women.² In addition, women may experience high expectations for modesty and cleanliness that are difficult to meet in areas with shared facilities and that discourage interactions with strangers (Adaman and Keyder 2006, pp. 8-9; Davis 2006, p. 140; Işık and Pinarcioglu 2001, p. 294). These processes restrict women’s mobility. According to the Arab Human Development Report, women living in the urban periphery are less likely to be aware of their legal rights and may lack the

¹ Infrastructural power can be thought of as a state’s capability to exercise control and implement policy in the areas it governs (Mann 1986, 1993; Soifer and vom Hau 2008).

² Bibars (2001, p. 8) has argued that in developing countries like Egypt, state policies have an important impact on poor women as most social welfare programs are administered through the state.

identity papers necessary to access certain services (UNDP 2006, p. 120).³ In sum, female shantytown dwellers in Middle Eastern cities tend to be marginalized for a variety of reasons—as a result of their gender, their poverty, and their illegal or quasi-legal residential status. Given the many vulnerabilities of this population, what are the strategies they use to negotiate the problems they encounter in their everyday lives? And to what extent does the state offer meaningful and accessible channels to low-income women in the resolution of everyday problems?

Investing in social capital would seem to be one strategy the urban poor might pursue as a way to weather the uncertainties of poverty and informality (Roberts 1978, p. 143). Recent scholarship suggests that social capital—or the network of social relations that individuals cultivate—is associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as economic development and improved governance (Putnam 1993; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Boix and Posner 1998; Putnam 2000; Mitra 2010). For low-income women, investments in economic or human capital may be less tenable options than cultivating a rich network of social relations to be deployed when needed. Indeed, the existing literature in Middle Eastern studies tends to emphasize the importance of local, social relations in solving everyday problems. These networks are often thought to be controlled by Islamic activists, who act as important intermediaries for low-income women (Mubarak 1995; Hassan 2000; White 2002; Wickham 2002; Clark 2004; Singerman 2004; Tuğal 2009). In this paper, we investigate which women are more likely to have dense social networks, the extent to which density of networks shapes access to the state, and the role of religious elites in mediating local residents' relationship with the state or in offering unofficial alternatives

We use an original survey of 2400 women in four low-income neighborhoods in Cairo and Istanbul, coupled with a series of focus groups drawn from the same population, in order to draw our conclusions. This research design enables us to make comparisons at multiple levels of analysis—differences across capital cities of two countries, across low-income neighborhoods within those cities, and across individual women living in those neighborhoods. We find that while the density and determinants of social networks in the two cities are very similar, the value of local contacts differs dramatically across the cases. For poor women in Egypt, we find that there exists little consensus regarding how to deal with common, everyday problems but that the density of a woman's local network leads her to employ state channels at higher rates for virtually all types of disputes. For the urban poor in Turkey, however, there exists a much greater consensus regarding optimal channels of dispute resolution and the density of a woman's social relations is not a predictor of her willingness to use the state to help solve local problems. This evidence is suggestive of a broader point of comparison. A well-institutionalized state—like that which exists in Turkey—encourages homogeneity of response to potential legal problems and reduces the value of personal networks in negotiating outcomes, even for marginalized populations of low-income communities. For women in states with weaker forms of institutionalization—like Egypt—uniform norms of response are less likely to

³See also Bibars (2001, p. 18) who finds that poor women in informal communities in Egypt often lack the social identity cards which permit them to get access to basic state services.

emerge while social connections are a precondition for engagement with state channels. The findings of this paper also suggest that religious figures and organizations are far from a hegemonic presence in low income, informal neighborhoods. Indeed, local religious figures are rarely deployed as intermediaries for dispute resolution, according to the participants in our study.

Scholars have long argued that there exists a connection between the quality of governance and important economic, political, and social outcomes. Rule of law is a core aspect of good governance and one of particular importance to poor women who may struggle to find formal and informal institutions responsive to their needs. The resolution of interpersonal disputes in wealthy societies typically relies on legal action in a court of law or formal modes of mediation. Yet, citizens of poor, informal societies in the developing world often have only limited access to such avenues of redress and arbitration. The existence of culturally legitimate, locally accepted norms of dispute resolution has the potential to significantly reduce the incidence of interpersonal violence in poor societies by offering access to justice, which is associated with a host of positive externalities.

The paper is organized as follows. The section “[Urban Informality and Dispute Resolution](#)” discusses theories of disputing behavior in socio-legal studies and arguments on urban informality in the Middle East context. The section “[Urban Development in Informal Cairo and Istanbul](#)” describes the history and political geography of the neighborhoods examined in this study as well as the summary findings associated with the surveys. The section “[Social Connections and Conflict Resolution](#)” empirically examines hypotheses linking social capital to strategies of dispute resolution. A final section concludes.

Urban Informality and Dispute Resolution

The first wave of writing on informal networks in the less affluent districts of Middle Eastern cities stressed the empowering role of these networks in accessing resources. For instance, Diane Singerman (1994, pp. 175–176) argued that women in poor neighborhoods of Cairo use informal networks to find jobs, join savings groups and acquire financial autonomy, access goods and services, arbitrate conflicts, deal with the state bureaucracy, and educate their children. Informality, according to Singerman, constitutes an avenue for participation and access to power. Informal networks begin with the family and extend to others within the “popular classes.” While the family is the central institution through which resources are allocated and disputes are arbitrated, the informal networks of members of the popular classes also incorporate local bureaucrats and provide access to political elites (Singerman 1995, p. 133).

Sema Erder reaches similar conclusions in her study of Ümraniye, one of the older shantytown neighborhoods of Turkey. Erder writes that local officials, such as *mukhtars*, who were recent migrants and shared place-of-origin ties with the residents, often served as first-instance courts for the residents, arbitrating disputes between husbands and wives, neighbors, and other residents. These local officials also provided access to more distant officials, such as the municipalities, by contacting the municipality on behalf of the residents and following their paperwork

(2006, pp. 74–79). Informal networks, in this perspective, provide avenues of participation and facilitate access to public resources (Michelson 2007). In time, they may also build a collectivity with substantive demands for justice and the beginnings of an oppositional consciousness among the urban poor (Singerman 1995; Bayat 1997; Chatterjee 2004; Aslan 2004).

Recently, studies of urban informality and social capital cultivation have shifted to the role played by Islamic political activists in poor neighborhoods. This literature suggests that in the Muslim-majority countries of the contemporary Middle East, low-income areas in cities like Cairo and Istanbul have been cultivated by Islamist organizations as locations where alternative forms of governance might be developed. Especially during the 1980s and 1990s, when Islamists were frequently excluded from national politics and legally “recognized” civil society, the inability of the state to control everyday life in slum neighborhoods created an opportunity for Islamic counter-elites.⁴ For instance, Jenny White attributes the success of Islamist mobilization in Turkey to networks of trust and reciprocity through face-to-face relations, an ability to be “intimate,” which she describes as “vernacular politics,” in contrast to the impersonal, ineffective, and obtuse bureaucracy of the state. Indeed, much of the literature on Islamic mobilization attributes the success of Islamist activists to their assuming responsibility for key socioeconomic problems, from dispute resolution to service provision, in neighborhoods with little state presence (Clark 2004; Wiktorowicz 2004; Roy 2011).

The question of when and why individuals prefer informal channels of dispute resolution over formal channels has also been widely debated in law and society scholarship. One argument within this literature concerns the ways modernization, particularly the creation of anonymous urban communities, transforms the ways individuals approach conflict resolution. In small, face-to-face settings where relationships are multi-faceted and individuals expect to stay in long-term relationships, disputes are often resolved through mediation by informal elites while official channels are reserved for dealing with strangers (Collier 1973; Engel 1984; Ellickson 1991; West 2002). In modern, anonymous communities, on the other hand, adjudication and avoidance of the relationship are the dominant disputing strategies (Felstiner 1974). Adjudication may be limited due to lack of resources such as legal literacy, income, education, organizational resources, and insider connections. Furthermore, dominant ideologies and hierarchies of class, gender and race may inhibit “naming, blaming, claiming” in certain kinds of disputes (Felstiner et al. 1980, 1981; Miller and Sarat 1980, 1981; Ewick and Silbey 1998; Nielsen 2000, 2006), making “avoidance” the dominant strategy for the less-advantaged members of modern urban communities. Based on socio-legal scholarship, then, we might expect informal mediation in contexts characterized by ongoing relationships, and either adjudication or avoidance in contexts where relationships are anonymous and short term.

Yet, even for women living in areas with limited access to state institutions, the importance of social capital and personal networks in assisting dispute resolution

⁴See Blaydes (2014) and Meyersson (2009) for more on Cairo and Istanbul, respectively.

will vary as a function of the dispute type and the effectiveness of state institutions. Saddiqi and Sandefur (2014) find that, in rural Liberia, women facing a disadvantageous dispute pairing (i.e., being in a dispute with a man) are more likely to seek out the formal legal system and are relatively happier with their outcomes for having done so. Blattman et al. (2014) advocate for training communities in alternative dispute resolution practices—which appear to enjoy considerable efficacy—given the fact that it can take decades for formal dispute resolution institutions to reach legally underserved societies. Since the quality of formal dispute resolution mechanisms are closely tied to a society's other institutions (Blattman et al. 2014), issues like state infrastructural power (Mann 1986, 1993; Soifer and vom Hau 2008) and quality of government (Rothstein 2011) are highly relevant for understanding when disputants seek out state versus non-state avenues for dispute resolution.

The existing literature, then, suggests a variety of hypotheses to be tested. One stream in the ethnographic literature stresses the importance of informal networks in assisting low-income women who face social and economic challenges everyday. A second stream of research suggests that Islamic social and political organizations have come to play a meaningful role in dispute adjudication in informal areas. A third stream emphasizes the interaction of social capital and personal networks with economic modernization and forms of state development. We believe that the low-income neighborhoods of Istanbul and Cairo constitute a compelling set of cases to explore these hypotheses.

Urban Development in Informal Cairo and Istanbul

The haphazard communities of Cairo and Istanbul share a common narrative of informality born of rural-urban migration, a declining role of state in society, and the rising influence of Islamist activism. Why examine Cairo and Istanbul? Cairo and Istanbul are two of the largest cities of the Middle East, each containing large informal housing neighborhoods. While there exists tremendous variation in the size, infrastructural quality, and demographics of inhabitants within informal neighborhoods, most informal housing areas share key characteristics including the quasi-legal status of dwellings and the density of population.

We examine two large, informal neighborhoods in each city where our goal was to select areas that were broadly representative of the phenomenon of urban informality. By selecting two areas from each city, we guard against drawing inferences from a single neighborhood which may have its own idiosyncratic characteristics. The neighborhoods are also highly comparable on a number of dimensions, making comparisons across neighborhoods plausible. In Istanbul, we examine two neighborhoods—Sultanbeyli and Bağcılar—which are similar in being low-income neighborhoods that receive a large number of immigrants. In Egypt, we examine the neighborhoods of Imbaba and Bulaq al-Dakrur. Both are densely populated neighborhoods located at a relatively close proximity to the city center (see Fig. 1). Imbaba—in Greater Cairo—and Sultanbeyli—in Greater Istanbul—were each selected because of their experiences with Islamic activism. While Bağcılar and Bulaq al-Dakrur have also, historically, witnessed forms of Islamist mobilization, Islamic political



Fig. 1 Maps of Greater Istanbul (*top*) and Greater Cairo (*bottom*) with surveyed neighborhoods identified

movements have been more influential and formally organized in Imbaba and Sultanbeyli and a large scholarly literature describes these developments.

This section begins with a narrative discussion of the two Istanbul and Cairo study neighborhoods. We next discuss some of the summary findings from the original surveys conducted in these areas.

Istanbul: Sultanbeyli and Bağcılar

Informal neighborhoods began to emerge in Istanbul during the 1950s as a result of rapid industrialization and mass rural-urban migration. During the 1950s and 1960s, illegality and informality were seen as processes that had to be reversed by government action. As the size of the shantytown neighborhoods grew rapidly in the 1970s, these neighborhoods began to become integrated into urban voting machineries, resulting in the emergence of a populist discourse, the deepening of patron-client ties, and the selective provision of infrastructural services and legalization of titles in exchange for political support.

Economic policies of the 1980s delegated greater authority to local municipalities; as a result, squatter areas ceased to be purely “self-help” housing for the poor and began to acquire commercial value (Buğra 1998; Keyder 1999; Işık and Pınarcıoğlu 2001; Kuyucu 2009). Most recently, entire neighborhoods have been cleared for large-scale urban renewal projects resulting in the eviction and relocation of the former residents to newly built mass housing complexes on the city’s periphery (Kuyucu and Ünsal 2010). During the 1990s, the forced displacement of the Kurdish population from their villages in Southeastern Turkey changed the profile of newcomers to the city. These changes have introduced new patterns of stratification within the neighborhoods, transforming some of their residents into a burgeoning middle class, while pushing others into deeper poverty.

Sultanbeyli is an inland district built on two sides of the Trans-European Motorway (TEM) on the Anatolian bank of Istanbul. It is located to the east of an earlier shantytown and is located roughly 20 miles to the city center. Before the construction of illegal housing in the 1980s, Sultanbeyli was a village with 3700 residents. During the 1980s and 1990s, Sultanbeyli’s population rose dramatically and reached 500,000 around 2012. The availability of cheap land and rent attracted immigrants, many of whom came from the Black Sea region and the Kurdish areas (Tuğal 2009, p. 59).⁵

According to Cihan Tuğal, Sultanbeyli constituted one of the biggest experiments to build an Islamic society in Turkey. The early comers included the religious publishing sector and individuals associated with Necmettin Erbakan’s Islamist Welfare Party. They were joined by *sufi* networks, radical organizations, and informal

⁵The neighborhood initially experienced infrastructure shortages typical of shantytown areas. One woman in a focus group we conducted in Sultanbeyli said that, until recently, she had to switch between six or seven public transportation vehicles to visit her relatives on the European side of the city. Another woman who moved in 1992 to Sultanbeyli recalled that initially, there was no electricity or water, nor a place to buy milk for her infant daughter. By 2002, two thirds of the district had access to water, thanks to a deal with the Istanbul metropolitan municipality (Neuwirth 2007, p. 7). Some of the Kurdish women in our focus groups still did not have access to water, however, as of 2010.

discussion groups. Several Koranic schools started operating in the early 1980s, from which the activists recruited new members. The initial settlers invited their networks and families to purchase land in Sultanbeyli and Sultanbeyli's Islamist mayor, Ali Nabi Koçak, promised he would grant everyone permission to build homes (Tuğal 2009, pp. 59–68; 102–108; 115–118).

Tuğal describes the initial strategy of the Islamists as attempting to establish dual power through the charismatic authority of figures like Koçak, on the one hand, and by Islamizing everyday life, on the other. Koçak had been a mufti for many years before his service as mayor (1989–1999) and commanded great popular legitimacy. Tuğal (2009, p. 84) quotes him as saying, “before I was elected, people did not go to court, but invited me as a *muftu*, and we solved the problems with the *fetva*... Even when a man was going to divorce a woman, he came to the municipality.” During his tenure, the municipality functioned as a court house, while also organizing wedding ceremonies, and distributing coal, food, and clothing. It was also during Koçak's tenure that the municipality became a focal point in the secularist military's crackdown on Islamist groups.⁶

Located on the European side of Istanbul, Bağcılar is an industrial district roughly 14 miles from the city center and bordered on the west by a connection highway. Since the mid-1990s, the district is linked to the city center with a tram line that enables the residents to access the city center rapidly. Before gaining municipal, and later, district status, Bağcılar was a low-income neighborhood of Bakırköy, a large, middle-class, and predominantly secular district. Unlike the rest of Bakırköy, Bağcılar always received immigrants and its diverse population rose rapidly. Like Sultanbeyli, the main immigrant groups came from the Black Sea region, Eastern Anatolia, and the predominantly Kurdish southeast (Balaban 2011, p. 148). Bağcılar also has an Alevi population, even though many are reluctant to identify themselves openly, while the Alevi population in Sultanbeyli is very small. Unlike Sultanbeyli, Bağcılar is a major industrial district, with most of its active work force employed in the garment industry (Balaban 2011, p. 164).

While Islamist parties have had strong showings in local and national elections in both districts, support for Islamist parties has been stronger in Sultanbeyli, and social democratic parties have done better in Bağcılar. Kurdish nationalist parties have also performed relatively well in both districts, better than their national average. In 2010, the population of Sultanbeyli had reached over 400,000, while that of Bağcılar neared one million.⁷ Both districts surpass the Istanbul average for household size, with families reporting more than six inhabitants constituting 20 % of households in Sultanbeyli and 11 % of households in Bağcılar (compared to 7 % for Istanbul).⁸

⁶For example, when a military commander from a neighboring district attempted to put a statue of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk on Sultanbeyli's main boulevard to remind the residents of Turkey's secular heritage, Koçak had the statue removed to a less visible location. The military commander responded by sending tanks through the district. A year later, the military unseated Welfare Party through a soft coup followed by a widespread crackdown on Islamist actors in political and civil society institutions.

⁷These figures are drawn from the local *muhtarlık*, which are more up to date than census data.

⁸These figures are drawn from the Turkish Statistics Institute (*Ekonomik ve Sosyal Göstergeler*, TUIK).

Cairo: Imbaba and Bulaq al-Dakrur

The growth of informal settlements in Greater Cairo has been most commonly characterized as the urban poor's solution to Egypt's housing crisis following the introduction of Sadat's open-door economic policy (El-Batran and Arandel 1998). The informal communities of Cairo tend to be inhabited by relative newcomers to the city, particularly migrants from rural areas, in contrast to the neighborhoods of Cairo's old quarters which have not witnessed comparable in-migration (Bayat and Denis 2000). Dwellers of these shantytowns, particularly in the 1980s, did not enjoy access to government infrastructure like piped water, sewerage, electricity, and paved roads, and typically occupied the lower rungs of Egypt's socioeconomic ladder. Dorman (2009) argues that the Egyptian government has both tolerated and, to some degree, tacitly encouraged the growth of informal settlements as a way of avoiding public demands for housing and services. Ismail argues that Cairo can be thought of as a "city administered by the communities inhabiting it" (2006, p. 13) in the absence of a strong state presence.

Located to the west of Dokki and Agouza in the governorate of Giza, Bulaq al-Dakrur is geographically close to the city center but peripheral to the city in terms of "social distance" (Ismail 2006, p. 7). There also exist important forms of physical separation between Bulaq and other parts of the city as a result of geographic barriers like train tracks, fences, and canals (Ismail 2006, p. 9). Ismail argues that residents of Bulaq al-Dakrur have historically believed either that there is no state presence in their area or that they live in a state-within-a-state (2006, p. 33). In response, she finds that residents of Bulaq have developed "community-based forms of organization" to deal with issues of common concern (Ismail 2006, p. 33). For example, in Bulaq, informal credit associations which rely on "trust and face-to-face contact" rival more conventional savings and credit institutions (Ismail 2006, p. 30). Ismail also finds that in the absence of a strong state, "mechanisms of conflict resolution have developed" to handle local disputes including referral to "elders in the area" or the use of local customary or arbitration councils (2006, pp. 35–36). There is a sense that residents of the area do not expect much to be gained by bringing a problem to the attention of the police or government authorities as once a problem is introduced to the government, it may be difficult to get the government out of the situation down the line (2006, p. 39).

Both Bulaq al-Dakrur—2006 population around 460,000—and nearby Imbaba—2006 population around 490,000—were built on agricultural land on the edge of the city that new migrants favored as they sought cheap housing (Ismail 2003, 2006).⁹ Imbaba is also located in Giza, north of Mohandiseen, bordered by the Nile River on the east. Informal areas of Imbaba—like the poverty-stricken neighborhood known as Western Mounira—had no public schools, hospitals, clubs, sewerage, public

⁹Illiteracy is about 19 % in Bulaq al-Dakrur and 22 % in Imbaba, according to the 2006 Egyptian census. This is slightly lower than in Egypt as a whole, perhaps not a surprising fact given that these are urban areas.

transportation, or police station in the mid-1980s, leading Ibrahim to describe the area as “Hobbesian” (2002, p. 75).

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Imbaba became the location for the Islamic Group’s most successful penetration of a Cairo neighborhood. Analysts attributed the Islamic Group’s success in the area to the “chronic absence of the state” (Denis 1996), which meant that the group would not need to contend with local police and political authority as it sought to extend its influence. The area was also poorly served in terms of local public goods provision and the Islamic Group offered local residents with important assistance in this regard. This included direct financial assistance through the group’s social work committee (Mubarak 1995, p. 261; Hassan 2000; Ismail 2003, p. 100; Hafez and Wiktorowicz 2004) as well as health assistance through a network of clinics located at local mosques (Beinin 2005).

Islamic Group activity in Imbaba during the late 1980s and early 1990s also included arbitrating conflicts and “the control of public space” particularly with regard to the group’s moral code (Ismail 2003, p. 80). The group also controlled the boundaries of the community and introduced networks for surveillance (Ismail 2003, p. 108), often employing its own personnel to carry out these activities (Hafez and Wiktorowicz 2004, p. 76). The nature of the Islamic Group activity in Imbaba have led analysts to characterize the Islamic Group’s hegemony before its December 1992 expulsion from the area as a state-within-a-state or society existing in parallel to the one being administered by the state (Murphy 2002; Dorman 2009). According to Singerman (2009, p. 130), Imbaba represents a case of the creation and enforcement of “nonlegal forms of normative ordering” where the Islamic Group promoted its “visions and norms... through various educational, religious and provisionary activities.” The government’s retaking of the neighborhood in December 1992 brought renewed attention to the plight of residents of informal urban quarters of the city.¹⁰

Data Collection and Summary Findings

Most of what we know about the coping strategies of the urban poor comes from high-quality ethnographic research. Indeed, Jha et al. (2007, pp. 230–232) argue that much of the quantitative research and data collection on global poverty has focused on rural development while our knowledge of urban poverty relies to a greater extent on ethnographic studies.¹¹ One contribution of this project involves basic data collection about the everyday conditions of women living in poor, urban neighborhoods.

The quantitative data analyzed in this paper were collected in two waves. The data from Egypt were collected in July–August 2009 by a Cairo-based polling firm. The 1200 ever-married women aged 18–64 years old selected for the interviews

¹⁰See Blaydes (2014) for more on the role of Islamist political organizations in Imbaba.

¹¹This is not to say that urban areas are not surveyed as part of government censuses but rather that international development institutions have been more likely to collect quantitative data on rural populations.

constitute a random, representative sample of each of the two areas under study—Imbaba and Bulaq al-Dakrur— where not more than one woman per household was interviewed.¹² The data from Istanbul neighborhoods Bağcılar and Sultanbeyli were collected in July–August 2010 in the same manner by an Istanbul-based marketing research company.¹³

To complement the 2400 surveys across the two cities, we also conducted a series of focus groups of the target populations around the same time the surveys were in the field. Focus group participants in both countries were of a variety of ages, though most are in their 30s and 40s. While there was some variation in educational level and occupational status, most of the women were from a lower socioeconomic background. The focus groups took place in different locations including at the home of a participant, at a local youth center and, in some cases, at the offices of the survey firm. While we do not seek to make inferences from the focus group material, we do believe that it provides important context for the survey results.

Urban Demographics of Cairo and Istanbul

How do these neighborhoods compare, both across Cairo and Istanbul as well as within each city? The mean age of women in the Istanbul sample was younger by almost 7 years than the Cairo sample (see Table 1). Women in the Cairo sample were also much less likely to be of rural origin (about 19 %) compared to the Istanbul sample (about 67 %). Within Istanbul, Sultanbeyli women were more likely to be of rural origin compared to their counterparts in Bağcılar. Sultanbeyli had a higher percentage of Kurdish residents compared to Bağcılar (about 26 and 18 %, respectively). The overall percentage of Coptic Christians in the Cairo sample was about 5 % with more Christians in Imbaba than in Bulaq. Women in both the Cairo and Istanbul sample reported, on average, that they are between “highly” and “somewhat” religious. The educational level of women in the Cairo sample was higher than in the Istanbul sample, though in both cases, the average level of educational attainment was low. More women were currently working in the Cairo sample than in the Istanbul sample. There was very little difference between the two samples in terms of the age of first marriage.

Table 1 also points to the levels of social capital enjoyed by the women in the different neighborhoods. Women in the Turkish sample, for example, are more likely to interact with both municipal council members and community elders compared to women in the Egyptian sample. On the other hand, women in low-income areas of Cairo appear to be more likely to interact with bureaucrats (both senior and junior) and religious leaders when compared to women in low-income areas of Istanbul.

¹²Quota sampling was used within households. Households were selected after each neighborhood was divided into 20 proportionally-populated segments. Thirty households were targeted in each segment with the goal of achieving 1200 total respondents. A random walk method was used for household selection. The survey, which included a variety of other questions, took about 60 mins to complete.

¹³For the Istanbul-based sample, target samples were drawn from 15 segments in Sultanbeyli and 22 segments in Bağcılar. Like in Cairo, ever-married women, aged 18–64, were surveyed.

Table 1 Summary statistics for each of the four sample neighborhoods and aggregated values for Istanbul and Cairo samples

	Sultanbeyli	Bağcılar	Istanbul sample	Bulaq al-Dakrur	Imbaba	Cairo sample
Age (years)	34	37	35	41	43	42
Rural origin (%)	73	60	67	20	17	19
Life in community (%)	29	28	29	62	65	63
Kurdish population (%)	26	18	22			
Christian population (%)				3	7	5
Religiosity	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.3
Education level	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.9	1.7
Currently employed (%)	6	8	7	11	14	13
Age of first marriage (years)	19	20	20	20	21	20
Owens a home (%)	70	54	57	46	33	40
Interacts with: (%)						
Council members	28	24	26	5	4	5
Community elders	14	28	21	9	3	6
Political party employees	3	11	7	2	2	2
Religious leaders	6	12	9	29	10	20
Senior bureaucrats	1	4	3	9	8	8
Junior bureaucrats	5	11	8	53	32	43
Police officers	14	25	19	22	11	16
NGO staff	3	9	6	2	5	3

Percent life in the community is the years a woman reports as living in her current community divided by her age. Religiosity is measured on a 4-point scale where a value of 4 is high. Education is measured on a 6-point scale where 6 is high; a value of 1 corresponds to an elementary education. Questions about whether a woman interacts with a particular local figure were asked as “Do you know and interact with the following?”

Despite a tendency to interact with different elites for low-income women in Cairo and Istanbul, average *overall* levels of interaction in the two samples are very similar.

Determinants of Social Capital Density

Based on the existing literature, one would expect that women living in low-income areas would seek to develop social networks in order to help them when a need might arise. Women living in informal areas of Cairo, for example, came to know of pro-poor government programs as a result of informal, personal channels (Bibars 2001, p. 98) and sought to cultivate relationships with relevant powerbrokers with the goal of seeking their assistance in the future (Bibars 2001, p. 130). Yet, there exists considerable variation across women in terms of the extent to which they interact with local

community figures. What factors are associated with the density of social capital enjoyed by women in low-income areas of Cairo and Istanbul?

We measure social capital as the density of interaction with various local elites—like municipal council members, religious leaders, bureaucrats—in the community. The dependent variable in this section, then, is the percentage of local figures that each woman “knows and interacts with.” Many women in both samples do not interact with any of the local actors about whom they were queried. Those that do interact with local elites report that they know and interact with one or two, typically. The number of women who interact with more than two of the queried categories is relatively small in both samples.

We find that the density of a woman’s ties to various local elites is systematically related to a series of individual attributes of the women in the sample. The individual attributes we consider in our analysis include a woman’s age, the percentage of her life that she has lived in her current community, her identification as either Kurdish (in Turkey) or Coptic Christian (in Egypt), her level of religiosity (measured on a 4-point scale), whether or not she had ever attended school, whether or not her household owns a car (a proxy for socioeconomic status) and the neighborhood in which she lives (a dummy variable for Sultanbeyli in Turkey and Imbaba in Egypt). Density of social capital is positively associated with percent of life lived in one’s community and wealth for the Istanbul sample; for the Cairo sample, density of social capital is positively associated with age, education, and wealth (Table 2). On the other hand, religiosity is negatively associated with the density of networks in both the Cairo and Istanbul samples (though the negative association is not statistically significant in Cairo), a result at odds with elements of the existing literature which suggest Muslim social networks are dense for poor women.

Table 2 Coefficient estimates with standard errors (in parentheses) for a relationship between a series of demographic and socioeconomic factors and density of social capital based on an OLS regression

	Density of social capital Istanbul	Density of social capital Cairo
Age	0.000 (0.001)	0.001*** (0.000)
Community	0.088*** (0.025)	0.011 (0.015)
Kurd	0.011 (0.014)	
Christian		−0.016 (0.021)
Religiosity	−0.028*** (0.009)	−0.012 (0.009)
Education	0.015 (0.017)	0.061*** (0.010)
Car	0.025* (0.013)	0.067*** (0.018)
Constant	0.188*** (0.038)	0.085*** (0.033)
Neighborhood FE	YES	YES
Observations	1,174	1,168
R ²	0.06	0.08

The dependent variable is the percentage of local figures that each woman answers “yes” to for the question that she “knows and interacts with”

Social Connections and Conflict Resolution

This section considers the relationship between a woman's density of social capital and her strategies for dispute resolution, controlling for a series of demographic and socioeconomic factors. First, we discuss our approach for collecting information about dispute resolution. Whenever possible, we include contextual details gleaned from the focus groups held in each city. Next, we consider how a woman's density of social capital influences her willingness to use state channels for dispute resolution in informal areas of Istanbul and Cairo, respectively. A final section discusses the implications of our findings for the existing literature on modernization and the state in developing countries.

Avenues of Dispute Resolution

Women in informal areas of Cairo and Istanbul describe everyday conflicts as common, in part, because of the close quarters in which people live as well as the stress felt by women living under difficult economic conditions. In Cairo focus groups, women discussed conflict over neighborhood drug use—described by many as very common—particularly when used on balconies, upsetting the sensibilities of neighbors. They described quarrels that broke out over mundane things, like one woman throwing dirty water in front of another woman's home. Quarrels between children playing in the streets were also described as commonplace; when young men fought, women described more serious forms of violence and use of weapons including knives and switchblades. According to one woman from Imbaba, observing neighborhood conflicts through her window represented a form of entertainment. She attributed the quarrelsome nature of women in her area to their rural background.¹⁴

Women in the Turkish neighborhoods described similar conflicts. In Sultanbeyli, most conflicts involved fights between children that spilled over to adults and disagreements between neighbors over shared spaces and responsibilities. Women complained of conflicts that arose from leaving the trash in front of one another's doors or disagreements on cleaning common areas, like staircases. Many of these disputes seemed to involve a subtle competition over status between neighbors. Some disputes over children's behavior also involved deeper conflicts over ethnic status as, for instance, when Turkish children used ethnic insults against Kurdish children. When queried about security in the neighborhood, women mentioned youth taking drugs or drinking alcohol in construction sites. In Bağcılar, in addition to conflicts

¹⁴Anthropologists conducting fieldwork among women in Cairo slums in the 1970s describe the constant, public quarreling in such neighborhoods (Wikan 1980, p. 11). Wikan (1980, p. 19) writes that "there is hardly a day without vehement confrontations for one reason or other." She attributes the conflict, in part, to the close quarters and lack of privacy characteristic of such areas. Conducting anthropological fieldwork two decades later, El-Kholy (2002) describes a similar dynamic where fights between families were frequent and the anthropologist was constantly asked to serve as mediator for disputes. Such disputes could often escalate into physical violence; for example, neighbors might engage in a physical confrontation if an unmarried daughter was insulted in a way that could damage her marriage prospects (El-Kholy 2002, p. 84).

with neighbors over children's behavior, women talked about property crimes, such as car theft and house robbery, and various kinds of street crime, such as fist fights, harassment of young women, street gangs demanding extortion money, and violent incidents. In Bağcılar, too, fights among children and youth sometimes acquired ethnic dimensions.

One module of our survey asked respondents to identify the person, group, or organization most likely to be contacted for help in resolving a relatively low-level dispute. A variety of potential conflicts were described to respondents in the form of short vignettes. The use of vignettes is preferable to less concrete questions about avenues of dispute resolution as vignettes help to ensure greater response consistency across the two country cases.¹⁵ One potential drawback of using vignettes is that since individuals are asked about what they would do in a given situation, they may try to provide the appropriate answer instead of reporting what they would most realistically have done. Given the difficulty of identifying common disputes that respondents have actually experienced and our inability to verify response strategies, we believe the use of vignettes to be the most effective way to probe respondents' likelihood of using different intermediaries in a variety of situations.

The vignettes included in the survey cover a number of different areas and draw inspiration from the existing ethnographic literature. The ten vignettes included as part of the survey are below, categorized as they relate to criminality (items 1 and 2), family issues (items 3–6) and financial matters (items 7–10).¹⁶

1. There is a youth in the neighborhood that has started to sell drugs.
2. There is a local widow who entertains many visitors in her home. There is some evidence of immoral behavior on her part.
3. Your son has gotten into a fight with another local child. The other child has injured your son, who now has permanent damage to one eye.
4. You live on the second floor and your neighbor on the third floor is allowing dirt and water to fall onto your balcony.
5. Some neighbors are spreading unfavorable rumors about your daughter that are not true.
6. Someone in another clan has insulted the reputation of your family.
7. Someone has hit your car with their vehicle causing minor damage.
8. You own a small kiosk which you rent out to a local vendor. He has not paid his rent in 2 months

¹⁵See King and Wand (2007) for more on this point.

¹⁶The categorization of these vignettes into issues related to criminality, family, and financial matters is not unproblematic. In particular, there exists considerable overlap across issue areas where an insult to family reputation might have important economic implications or a landlord's failure to acknowledge receipt of rent might be considered a form of economic crime. We have sought to categorize the vignettes based on our reading of the dominant dimension associated with the vignette while acknowledging that many of the prompts relate to overlapping areas of concern. It is also of relevance that the two issues that we categorize as associated with criminality do not connect the incident directly with the woman or her family. As a result, while the family and financial concerns might be thought of as "personal" issues, the criminal issues are only personal insofar as they are happening in the neighborhood of the woman.

9. Your landlord will not acknowledge that he received the rent that you paid him for the previous month.
10. You have loaned some money to a neighbor and that individual is behind schedule on repayment.

Respondents were offered a number of options for whose assistance they might seek in resolving the described situation. These options included seeking help from relatives, religious figures, judge and/or police intervention (i.e., state channels), political party representatives, local council members, or other neighborhood figures, including local elders. Respondents were also given the option of answering that they would solve the problem themselves or do nothing in response to the situation. While not all of the vignettes describe situations that would normally be taken to formal legal authorities, we have included low-level disputes in the questionnaire both because these kinds of disputes came up in the focus group and because we sought to explore a full range of relevant social conflicts. Respondent reaction to the conflict prompt was categorized as falling into one of four strategies: (a) do nothing, (b) handle by self, (c) employ state channels, and (d) use local intermediary (where that intermediary might be a local politician, neighborhood figure, or other non-state actor). While in some cases, local intermediaries may hold state positions, the category “employ state channels” only refers to use of the police and the judiciary.

There exist important differences across the two cases in terms of typical response to forms of low-level conflict. The most striking difference between the Turkey and Egypt samples on these vignettes is that Turkish women demonstrate much greater homogeneity of response while women in the Egyptian sample display a broader set of responses, in which the use of informal channels is considerably more pronounced (see Fig. 2). In Turkey, most women resolve their disputes themselves or choose to utilize the official system. Very few mobilized informal networks. In Egypt, various intermediaries, including relatives and neighborhood elites, play a role in the resolution of disputes. Women in Egypt are also significantly more likely to have “no response” to the problem or situation than women in Turkey. The Turkish women’s tendency to resolve by self-help or through official channels is true across all issue areas and is striking considering the fact that many of these women had come recently from the countryside in contrast to the larger number of women in the Egyptian sample who spent most of their lives in the community.

Important differences exist across issue areas in both country contexts. In Turkey, criminality is universally dealt with via state channels, suggesting both the efficacy of the state in handling such issues as well as a confidence that “whistle-blowers” would not be penalized for contacting authorities. While women in the Egyptian sample were most likely to reference the state with regard to criminal issues, almost twice as many women said that they would prefer to do nothing than to report problems to state authorities.

How can we interpret the large numbers of “do nothing” answers in Egypt? Individuals who feel disempowered and isolated often respond to grievances by “lumping it” (Felstiner 1974, p. 81; Merry 1979; Felstiner et al. 1980, 1981; Miller and Sarat 1980, 1981). In the Cairo focus groups, women repeatedly said that they try to mind their own business and avoid problems out of fear that a third-party “solution” would

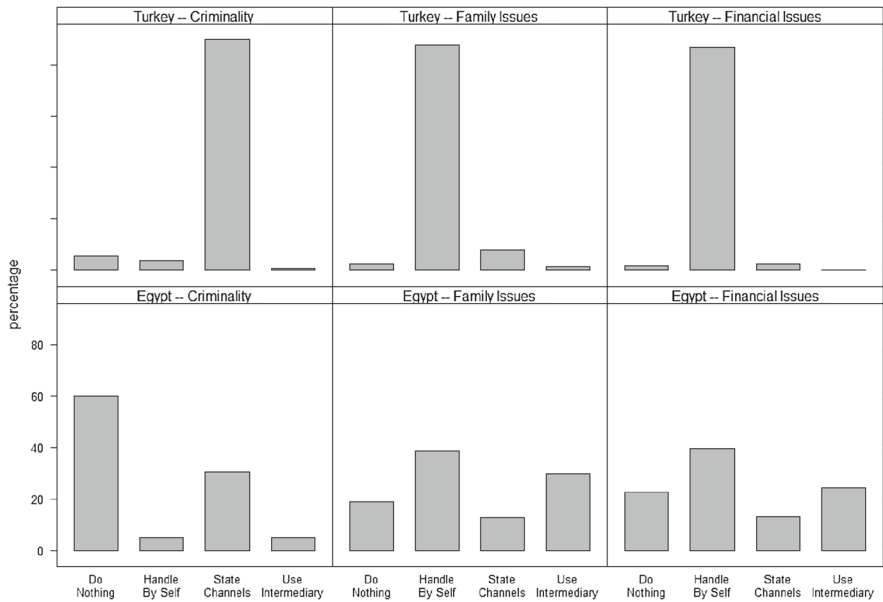


Fig. 2 Histograms of modal response across women in Turkey (*top*) and Egypt (*bottom*) for issues related to criminality, family and finances

prove to be worse than the problem itself. For example, Cairo women raised serious questions about the efficacy of courts in dealing with their problems. They said that when a dispute is referred to court, both parties might be forced to pay large sums of money and could both end up in jail. This interpretation is supported by accounts by anthropologists. Bibars, for example, finds that Egyptian women tended not to think highly of the government (2001, p. 99) and dreaded going to government offices “unless they had already established personal connections” with someone there (2001, p. 95). As a result, low-income women in Cairo would avoid having to deal with the state (Bibars 2001, p. 157).

Focus group discussions in Cairo reflected a number of the trends which appear in the quantitative data. Women in the Cairo sample said that historically, when outside intervention was sought, women preferred the assistance of a local elder to resolve disputes. They also suggested that such “chiefs” are a less dominant presence today than in the past. Multiple women talked about the use of relatives as intermediaries in conflict resolution. Most women agreed that only very serious crimes—like murder—would warrant contacting state authorities. Indeed, one woman said that police only got involved in disputes when the violence has already been perpetrated (i.e., someone has been killed and the killing has been avenged).¹⁷ The majority of women in the Cairo sample condemned the practice of vendetta, or score settling, as a strategy for dealing with disputes but at least one woman believed that if wronged by another party, one was justified in seeking vengeance. When asked about the role

¹⁷One woman argued that men tend to contact the police more often than women in her neighborhood.

of religious leaders, Cairo women argued that while conservative religious principles are widespread in their neighborhood, religious elites do not play a role in settling local disputes.

Women in the focus groups in Turkey mainly discussed interpersonal disputes with neighbors that they resolved on their own. For instance, women complained about gossip as the channel through which they heard of neighbors' complaints about themselves. In such cases, they said that they either visited the woman in question and tried to talk the matter over or avoided the relationship until both sides forgot about what had initially started the dispute. When issues could not be resolved, women in Sultanbeyli reported calling the police or the municipal officials. One woman in Sultanbeyli mentioned a woman who was beaten by her husband and rejected by her family for talking to another man on the phone. In this case, after giving the battered woman advice on how to "behave properly," the focus group participant planned to contact the municipality. Women in Bağcılar said they took advice from their family members in figuring how to approach neighbors with whom they had problems. They associated the police with only serious crimes like house robbery, car theft, and fights between men. When queried about neighborhood figures who resolved disputes, women in Sultanbeyli said "that was in the old days, going to an elderly person for mediation. These days, our youth are more practical than the older generation." One woman in Sultanbeyli said that "in the old days," parties to blood feuds would seek help from her father, who was a trusted member in the community.

The vast majority of women in the Turkish sample agreed that issues related to criminality should be referred to the state while family and financial matters should be dealt with autonomously. This finding is consistent with a long-standing line of research in law and society scholarship that avoidance of the relationship, as opposed to both mediation by informal elites and adjudication through formal mechanisms, is the most common solution to disputes in modern societies (Felstiner 1974). On the one hand, this finding suggests that women in low-income neighborhoods in Turkey have direct access to the state and are, therefore, more empowered than their Egyptian counterparts. On the other hand, the "resolve by self" answer, which is dominant for all non-criminal issues, suggests that on most everyday disputes, Turkish women have far fewer options than Egyptian women. Although self-help may be effective in resolving minor disputes over shared spaces and children's fights, self-help is less likely to be effective in resolving financial disputes that require enforcement. In such disputes, the ability to access neighborhood figures who command widespread respect and who can act as third party enforcers may be more empowering than attempting to resolve the problem on one's own.

Social Capital Density, Dispute Resolution, and the State

What factors predict a woman's propensity to use a particular dispute resolution strategy? And what impact does a woman's "connections"—or density of social capital—have on her willingness to use the state as a mediator for disputes? We run a series of multinomial logit regressions which allow us to predict response strategy as a function of covariates, including social capital density, to try to answer these

Table 3 Coefficient estimates with standard errors (in parentheses) from multinomial logit regression for four possible outcomes over three issue areas (the omitted outcome is “handle by self”)

	Istanbul				Cairo			
	Criminality	Family issues	Financial issues		Criminality	Family issues	Financial issues	
No response								
Age	-0.007 (0.026)	0.024 (0.019)	-0.028 (0.026)		0.004 (0.015)	0.013 (0.008)	-0.003 (0.007)	
Community	-0.499 (1.084)	0.821 (0.823)	0.745 (0.948)		0.080 (0.496)	0.175 (0.285)	0.257 (0.267)	
Kurd	0.316 (0.500)	-0.238 (0.391)	0.064 (0.587)					
Christian					-0.569 (0.653)	0.383 (0.402)	-0.238 (0.391)	
Religiosity	-0.708 (0.293)	-0.708** (0.293)	-0.208 (0.366)		-0.201 (0.303)	0.021 (0.172)	0.244 (0.164)	
Education	-0.224 (0.547)	-0.224 (0.547)	-0.506 (0.642)		-0.146 (0.362)	-0.159 (0.193)	-0.468** (0.189)	
Car	-0.009 (0.583)	0.088 (0.447)	0.529 (0.482)		-0.745 (0.659)	-0.594 (0.365)	0.028 (0.313)	
Social capital	-0.986 (1.044)	-0.986 (1.044)	0.980 (0.992)		2.164 (1.536)	0.068 (0.680)	0.068 (0.549)	
Constant	-2.078 (0.644)	-1.817 (1.349)	-2.265 (1.631)		2.197 (1.114)	-2.078 (0.644)	-2.160*** (0.613)	
Employ state channels								
Age	0.013 (0.021)	0.011 (0.017)	0.005 (0.009)		-0.006 (0.015)	0.014 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.009)	
Community	0.244 (0.819)	1.257* (0.602)	0.611* (0.367)		0.199 (0.515)	-0.458 (0.320)	0.371 (0.327)	
Kurd	-0.127 (0.449)	0.558 (0.371)	0.171 (0.225)					
Christian					-0.6594 (0.694)	0.078 (0.534)	-0.043 (0.473)	
Religiosity	-0.508* (0.308)	-0.154 (0.242)	-0.111 (0.138)		0.492 (0.315)	-0.188 (0.195)	0.360* (0.201)	
Education	-0.687 (0.660)	0.454 (0.493)	0.312 (0.276)		-0.409 (0.376)	0.450* (0.240)	-0.258 (0.234)	
Car	0.348 (0.446)	-0.215 (0.372)	0.072 (0.195)		-0.313 (0.687)	-0.034 (0.363)	-1.163** (0.562)	
Social capital	-1.898** (0.660)	-0.526 (0.875)	0.540 (0.420)		5.515*** (1.543)	3.383*** (0.579)	0.887 (0.631)	
Constant	5.395*** (1.487)	-3.872 (1.157)	-2.184*** (0.641)		-0.243 (1.174)	-1.797 (0.724)	-3.161 (0.759)	

Table 3 (continued)

	Istanbul			Cairo		
	Criminality	Family issues	Financial issues	Criminality	Family issues	Financial issues
Use local intermediaries						
Age	0.039 (0.042)	0.029 (0.021)	0.052 (0.048)	-0.015 (0.021)	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.007)
Community	0.624 (1.755)	0.667 (0.958)	-0.723 (3.100)	1.327* (0.727)	0.094 (0.232)	0.365 (0.258)
Kurd	0.132 (0.988)	0.420 (0.550)	23.065*** (3.907)			
Christian				35.208 (0.000)	0.549 (0.359)	0.064 (0.375)
Religiosity	-0.628 (0.633)	-0.215 (0.361)	-0.963 (1.151)	0.018 (0.435)	0.324** (0.147)	-0.002 (0.161)
Education	-0.078 (1.346)	0.392 (0.571)	-0.508 (1.044)	-0.154 (0.528)	0.134 (0.170)	-0.403** (0.186)
Car	-0.599 (1.167)	0.421 (0.469)	0.765 (1.194)	-0.012 (0.972)	-0.372 (0.310)	-0.188 (0.334)
Social capital	-1.823 (2.244)	-1.187 (1.192)	-0.346 (2.475)	4.240** (1.826)	1.756*** (0.510)	-0.055 (0.542)
Constant	-0.295 (3.094)	-3.545 (1.594)	-24.529 (0.000)	-0.724 (1.656)	0.407 (0.533)	-0.918 (0.588)
Neighborhood FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	884	1171	1164	860	1135	1138
Pseudo R ²	0.10	0.00	0.03	0.09	0.05	0.07

questions. The dependent variable in this section is constructed by taking the modal response strategy for each woman across each of the three issue types.

Some general observations can be made about the results of the regression analysis (see Table 3). For women in the Istanbul sample, the most robust empirical relationships suggest that women who have lived in the community for a longer percentage of their lives are more likely to use the state for help in dealing with family and financial disputes. Religious women are less likely to do nothing for various dispute types. Finally, Kurdish women in the sample prefer to use local intermediaries to help deal with financial problems. In the Egyptian sample, we observe that better educated women are less likely to do nothing when confronted with a financial dispute and are also more likely to use state channels to help deal with family-related conflict. Also, the longer a woman has lived in her neighborhood, the more likely she is to use local intermediaries to help deal with criminal issues.

One of the most striking results, however, concerns the differential impact of social capital density in the two samples, particularly as it impacts a woman's willingness to use the state to help resolve disputes. Density of social capital—measured by the percentage of local elites that a woman said that she “knows and interacts with”—is almost identical in the two samples (12.1 vs. 11.7 %). For Egyptian women, social capital is correlated with much greater willingness to use the state to mediate local conflicts. This is even after controlling for a woman's level of education, length of time in the community, religiosity, and education. When we subdivide this by type of conflict, we see a positive association with social capital for all three categories (criminal, family, and financial disputes) but with the strongest and largest effects for criminal and family affairs. Looking at the individual ten conflicts described in the vignettes, social capital had a positive and statistically significant (or marginally significant) effect in eight of the ten categories of dispute.¹⁸ In Turkey, on the other hand, social capital density does not predict willingness to use state channels for any of the dispute types. Figure 3 plots the predicted probability of using state channels for the three broad types of disputes for the Cairo and Istanbul samples.

The need for social connections as a precondition for working through state channels of dispute resolution in Egypt has been emphasized in existing scholarly work. Bibars, for example, argues that because state employees have considerable discretion regarding which citizens should or should not be helped by the state, being “connected” is critical (2001, p. 18). As a result, women invest in the development of social ties before attempting to even gain access to the basic services of the state (Bibars 2001, p. 2).

Interpretation

There is no obvious normative interpretation based on the evidence that we have provided. On the one hand, female residents of informal areas in Cairo appear to be less isolated and more likely to draw upon neighborhood contacts for dispute resolution when compared to their Istanbul counterparts. On the other hand, the necessity of

¹⁸Results available upon request.

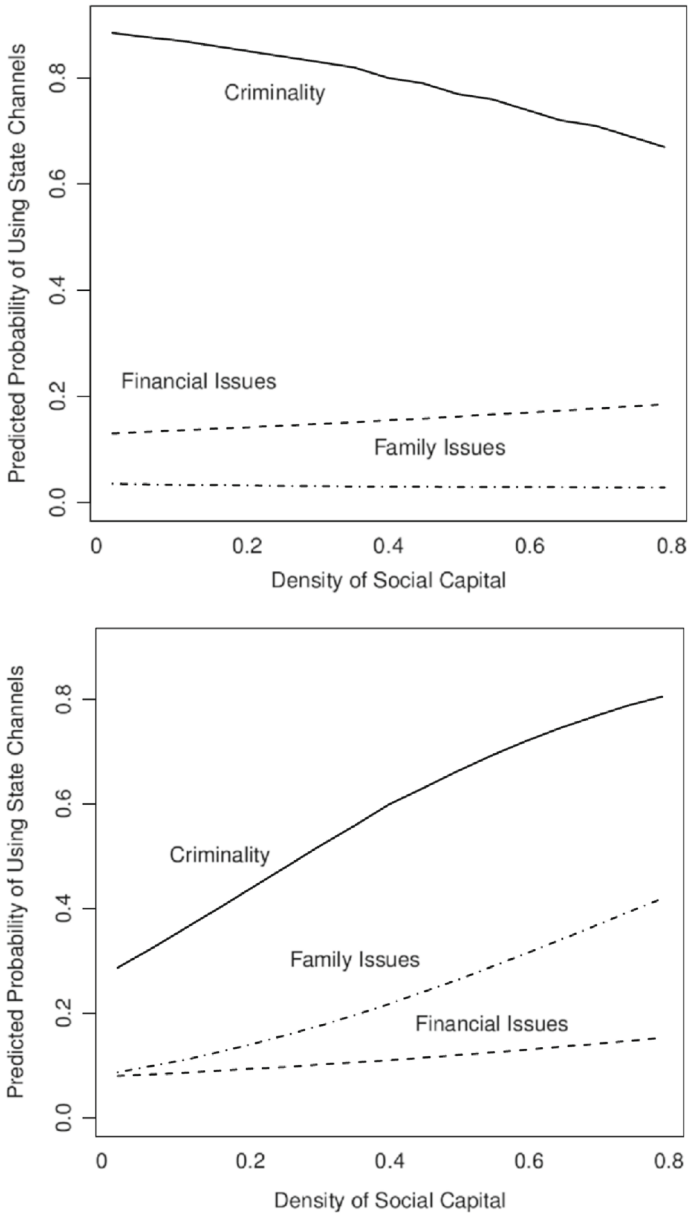


Fig. 3 Predicted probability of using state channels of dispute resolution for Turkey (*top*) and Egypt (*bottom*) samples across three types of disputes

having elite contacts as a precondition for using the justice system suggests that poor women in Cairo may be shut out from certain avenues for conflict resolution. In such a setting, informal mechanisms may not only be a substitute for official channels,

but may also increase access to official channels. In this section, we seek to interpret some of the findings we have presented in light of existing comparative politics scholarship.

Modernization and Dispute Resolution

One plausible explanation for the differences between Istanbul and Cairo relates to processes of modernization and the expansion of state infrastructural power. The greater propensity of women in Turkey to use official channels in comparison to Egyptian women, according to this interpretation, can be attributed to Turkey's more "modern" society, where modernization is understood to encompass a variety of changes including economic development, political democratization, and improved governance. Indeed, Turkey is nearly twice as wealthy as Egypt and has higher national-level adult literacy rates. Moreover, on almost all governance indicators compiled by the World Bank, Turkey outperforms Egypt, although this difference is a relatively recent phenomenon. A modernizing state and society as in Turkey, then, seems to dichotomize dispute resolution options between the self and the state, even for some of society's most vulnerable citizens. Women in the Istanbul sample are more likely to deal with local disputes than to lump it, but find themselves less likely to call upon social networks when attempting to do so. Traditional governance forms appear to be more prominent for women in the Cairo sample where it is not unreasonable to suggest that Egypt is less developed on conventional modernization metrics.

Such an explanation would be broadly consistent with both socio-legal theories of dispute resolution and with Robert Putnam's argument that social capital decreases with accelerated modernization. While this interpretation may be able to account for why women are more likely to use official channels and their own resources in Turkey, in comparison to Egypt, it does not tell us much about whether modern avenues for dispute resolution are effective or empowering.

Evolving Forms of Local Governance

A key component of a well-institutionalized state is effective local government. How is it that even in informal areas of Istanbul, the state came to offer an effective means of dispute resolution? We believe that informal neighborhoods in Turkey have undergone a process of increasing state influence over time. A similar trajectory has been observed in Cairo, but to a lesser extent.

How has the state come to take on a more effective role in informal areas of Istanbul? As an increasing share of Istanbul's population came to consist of recent migrants concentrated in informal neighborhoods, the residents of these neighborhoods were able to achieve forms of political power. This is despite their experiences with spatial exclusion, economic marginalization and even forms of cultural domination. With the election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the Mayor of Istanbul in 1994 and the unprecedented success of the Islamist Welfare Party in Istanbul's municipalities that year, the residents of the informal

neighborhoods became the determining vote in local elections. While the Istanbul mayoralty had alternated between center-right and center-left parties (and occasional generals appointed during military interregnums) until 1994, the Islamist party entrenched itself in the Greater Istanbul municipality as well as many of the smaller municipalities in four successive elections over a period of 15 years.

The success of the Islamist party in local elections suggests a previously unrealized level of satisfaction with local government services on the part of Istanbul's residents, many of whom hail from the informal neighborhoods. Indeed, one of the more revealing differences between the Istanbul and Cairo neighborhoods is that the residents of Istanbul's poor neighborhoods interacted most frequently with municipal council members while those of the Cairo neighborhoods interacted most frequently with low-level bureaucrats, representatives of Egypt's central state. The "revolutionary" transformation of local government in Turkey beginning in 1994 may account for how the bureaus of a centralized state were brought closer to the less advantaged residents of poor neighborhoods and why, instead of evolving into counter-elites institutionalizing an alternative set of norms, Islamic activists in Turkey became municipal council members offering services.

Limited Reliance on Religious Actors

One of the outcomes of our study that diverges from our prior expectations relates to the very limited reliance on religious elites as an avenue for dispute resolution for women in either the Cairo or Istanbul sample. This is consistent with Ghannam's (2002) argument that there has been a tendency in the literature to over-emphasize the role of religion in urban spaces. One possible reason for this divergence is that religious leaders have been more involved with religious education and service provision than with dispute resolution. Based on our focus group discussions, when outside assistance is sought for dispute resolution, particularly in Egypt, community elders are preferred to religious leaders. It is also possible that had we conducted our study on a sample of men, we might have found that males were more likely than females to seek out assistance from religious figures given societal norms.

It is also possible that the reason religious actors do not figure prominently in our results is because religious actors appear in the lives of the women in our study as party officials and council members, and are thus not thought of as "religious leaders." This is more likely to be the case in Turkey, where religious political parties compete freely in the formal political sphere than in Egypt, where religious activists find it harder to penetrate public offices. This interpretation is consistent with our finding that women in Istanbul neighborhoods interacted more with council members and party employees (who come from the ranks of Islamist political parties) than women in Cairo, while women in Cairo interacted more with people they described as "religious leaders" than women in Istanbul. If this interpretation is correct, we cannot rule out the possibility that religious actors played a role in local dispute resolution. This interpretation, however, is consistent with our broader argument about

modernization: a strong and effective state reduces the variety of channels for dispute resolution. In a modern setting, it is no longer religious charisma but effective governance that enables religious actors to play a role in local conflicts, whereas in a less modern setting, religious actors can draw their legitimacy from their own charisma and ability to enforce non-state norms.

Conclusions

Studies of informal neighborhoods in the world's megacities have shown that these communities are more than a collection of anonymous individuals. With unique challenges related to population density, underdeveloped infrastructure and uncertainty regarding state responsibility for governance and development, residents of urban informal areas would seem to have strong incentives for civic engagement. Partha Chatterjee, for example, has argued that a crucial element of the politics of squatter groups is to transform populations into "communities" with moral claims (2004, p. 57). The same factors that might spur citizens toward greater civic engagement could also serve as a hindrance to participation, however. Life—particularly for women—in informal communities is described as stressful for residents who struggle with the daily grind of poverty, underemployment, drug abuse, violence, and limited access to legal and other state protections.

The ethnographic literature on informality in the Middle East has provided rich and compelling accounts of how informal channels emerge and function in the low-income communities of urban metropolis. The existing literature largely suggests that the state is not effective in such neighborhoods. Our findings, however, suggest that the state's effectiveness varies and examines the conditions under which informal channels are selected over formal ones. We explore how female residents of such neighborhoods resolve their everyday problems and find considerable homogeneity of response to local conflict among informal neighborhood residents in Turkey; in Egypt, however, there existed a great deal of heterogeneity. Women in the Istanbul sample either resolved problems on their own or referred the situation to the official justice system. In the Cairo sample, women used a variety of methods, including informal intermediaries, and they largely avoided state channels. We also explore the determinants of social capital and the extent to which social capital empowers women to use state channels as a strategy for dispute resolution. We find that the density of women's local networks are shaped by socio-economic factors, women's ethnic/religious identity, and their "urban capital," such as how long the woman has lived in the neighborhood. While density of social ties is associated with increased willingness to use state channels in Egypt, in Turkey, no such relationship exists. We attribute the greater homogeneity of response and weaker reliance on social capital in Istanbul to Turkey's higher degree of modernization.

Acknowledgments Funding for this project has been provided by a Hewlett Faculty Grant and United Parcel Service Endowment Fund Grant. We thank Hazem Kandil and Fatih Savaşan for their helpful comments. All errors are our own.

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