The Unpredictability of Conflict

A reconceptualisation of political instability and its potential for forecasting conflict

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Abstract

This thesis is dedicated to developing a concept that allows for predicting the magnitude of political instability periods. To that end existing literature is consulted to explore the most appropriate definitions and explanatory models for creating a elaborated approach to political instability. On the basis of this refined concept, that defines political instability as a latent condition rather than an occurrence, hypotheses are devised. These hypotheses are tested by employing a exploratory correlation analysis on a limited sample, which yields results that encourage confidence in the predictive potential of the developed concept. As suggested in the explanatory framework the analysis finds that the magnitude of conflict, resulting from political instability, is positively correlated with social fragmentation and individual deprivation, while being negatively correlated to military professionalism. A fourth explanatory component - viable alternatives to conflict - was not found to have any effect.

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1. Introduction

The civil strife, commonly referred to as ‘Arab spring’, took most observers by surprise. Even the institutions that make their bread and butter with predicting such situations, namely the intelligence agencies, seemed to have been totally unaware of the dynamics that transpired throughout the Arab world, commencing in late 2010\(^1\). Further, many international actors seemed to have been blindsided by the gravity of the events and the ensuing dynamic that developed unforeseen momentum. Being caught off guard, academics in relevant disciplines produced a wealth of research on the issue of civil conflict and political instability and on, the issue of their predictability (Bayat, 2013; Gause III, 2011). While some advocate the position that the onset and locus of political instability events can be predicted (Asongu and Nwachukwu, 2015; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Hegre et al., 2016), others have a more sceptical stance towards forecasting instability (Goodwin, 2015; Kuran, 1995; Yiu and Mabey, 2005).

This paper can be seen as contribution to that wider discourse. It is set to investigate the issue of failed predictions as well as political instability more generally. There are models in place that are designed to predict and flag political instability events. The Fragile State Index, for example, published by the think-tank Fund for Peace, is meant to anticipate conditions that lead to conflict and to reveal which states are especially vulnerable to it. At a glance, we might look at the assessment of the six countries most affected by the dynamics of the ‘Arab spring’ for 2010, in order to evaluate the predictive power of the Fragile State Index. What we learn is that of 177 countries only three of the six countries most affected - Yemen, Syria and Egypt - are situated in the lower half of the ranking and just one of them - Yemen - finds itself in the lowest quarter\(^2\). The other three - Libya, Tunisia and Bahrain - are ranked in the higher half between, and even above, some European Union member states, implying a profound level of stability. This, together with the unreadiness of major intelligence agencies, is indicative to how little powerful the predictions of political instability were in late 2010.

The way in which the conflict dynamic spread through large parts of the Arab world, can be seen as a demonstration as to how difficult, impossible maybe, it is to predict the course of such dynamics.

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There is, however, literature that supposes civil unrest is predictable. The research conducted by Simplice A. Asongu and Jacinta C. Nwachukwu suggests that the ‘Arab spring’ could have been predicted as early as 2007 (2015). In an attempt to forecast the development of civil conflicts Håvard Hegre et al. devise a model based on what the authors consider the most powerful explanatory variables for civil conflict, namely large population, history of conflict and socioeconomic development. The latter, is further compartmentalised into economic performance and educational attainment (Hegre et al., 2016). On the other side of the argument we find the likes of Timur Kuran and Jeff Goodwin, which conclude that it is not possible to anticipate the time and location of political instability materialising (Goodwin, 2015: 453; Kuran, 1995). Kuran argues that in order to predict civil conflict, one would need to know the population’s attitude towards the regime or certain societal actors more general. Information about this attitude, he insists, cannot be obtained, due to its fluidity and preference falsification (Kuran, 1995: 1548). Likewise, Yiu and Mabey question the usefulness of early warning resources and assess that neither time nor place can be reliably predicted (2005). Ernest A. Duff and John F. McCamant take a turn in another direction by stating: “The seriousness of these crises depends upon the instability present in the system, and knowledge of this condition will allow one to predict the probable seriousness of future manifestations and to understand past manifestations (1126).” As the real world events starting in late 2010 in Tunisia are a striking demonstration of the difficulty to predict political instability and revealed the weakness of existing forecasting models, the paper at hand will be guided by this perspective on the issue. Its underlying realisation, opens up a chance to newly assess these models and to revisit the theoretical concept of political instability more generally. This is were the current thesis departs, by raising the question whether political instability can be predicted at all and if so, with what means can it be done?

This question bares profound implications for states affected by political instability and the international community more generally. This is because unstable states are likely to display a certain level of dysfunction that may manifest itself in what the literature generally refers to as instability events (Blanco and Grier, 2009). Dysfunctional states ensue a variety of likely repercussions internally, for the adjacent region and possibly for the international community as a whole. The challenges associated with such states encompass, inter alia, migration of displaced peoples, the creation of operational spaces for criminal organisations, economic shocks and worsened general living conditions, especially access to clean water and hygienic conditions, and its consequential increased likelihood of pandemics/epidemics. These dynamics might have their

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3 We will not further elaborate on their work as predicting past-future events somewhat circumvents the challenge associated with prediction.
starting point in one dysfunctional state but can theoretically spread, through a spillover effect and globalisation, to any region on the planet (Hewitt, 2008: 5; Collier et al., 2003: 33). Jonathan Winkelfeld notes the direct link between state instability⁴ and regional, or global respectively, security (Wilkenfeld, 2008: 67). Winkelfeld further remarks, that unstable states have a disproportionately high involvement in international crisis (2008: 70). Identifying these states and intervening before instability unfolds, is a main objective for the international community⁵. The costs associated with dysfunctional states, and the dynamics potentially emanating from them, is considerably higher than the cost of preventive intervention (Hewitt, 2008: 5; Yiu and Mabey, 2005: 1). Political instability is related to increased defence spendings, the decrease of economic performance and related decline in human development (Saputo, 2012; 16). Civil war, arguably the most extreme representation of political instability, ensues drastic cost for the effected populations, which bare its burden long after the war is over (Collier et al., 2003: 2). The economic losses start with an increase in military expenditure. This diversion of resources, however, produces a multiplied effect when used for violence. In an active civil war setting, large parts of the economic live stalls, infrastructure is destroyed, assets are looted and foreign investments wither (Collier et al., 2003: 13-17). The human cost that goes hand in hand with civil war is represented, in its most absolute form, as fatality counts. Nonetheless, there are many other dramatic effects lurking in the shadow of civil war. Mass rape used as weapon and its manifold consequences, the deterioration of general health standards, displacement as well as collective and individual traumas decrease the general state of human development in conflict affected regions (Collier et al., 2003: 17-20).

If we were to find models that reliably flag the condition of political instability that make countries susceptible to severe civil conflict, the international community could circumvent the worst excesses, by intervening appropriately when, or even before, conflict ignites.

1.1 Structure
Initially this paper sought to answer the question of why the existing models of political instability could not pick up the dynamic of the ‘Arab spring’. This question constitutes the outset for a revision of the existing concepts of political instability, as those will have to be explored before any assessment of their predictive power becomes viable. Based on the literature, a revised concept of political instability is put forward, on the basis of which hypotheses are devised. This hypotheses proposes, that rather than the probability, researchers should attempt to predict the possible

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⁴ Here defined as the occurrence of revolutionary or ethnic war, adverse regime change and genocide.
magnitude of potential instability events. Further, an explanatory model is developed that proposes a relationship between some explanatory variables and the expression of political instability. Thereafter, the validity of this relation is tested by employing a correlation analysis, calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient for the four explanatory variables in relation to the response variables. To that end, the chapter following this introduction will investigate existing concepts of political instability and the ways in which the concepts are defined and explained. The second chapter closes with advocating for a revised concept, that diverges from the existing ones in terms of its definition and explanatory framework. The third chapter is dedicated to the methodological considerations attached to the exploration of the conceptual framework established in the end of the second chapter. It includes several sections on sampling, the temporal scope and the operationalisation of the different variables. The analysis is laid out in detail in the fourth chapter, which presents the results of the correlation analysis and discusses their implications. The paper concludes with the fifth chapter, that reiterate and condenses the entire paper, to extract its main findings and contributions.

2. Review of the literature on political instability

Political Instability is a broad term that has no clearly defined conceptual borders. In the public discourse, as well as in the academic one, political instability is associated with diverse phenomena, ranging from peaceful demonstration and parliamentary motions of no confidence to rebellion and full scale civil war. This ambiguity makes it difficult to talk about political instability as a unified concept. Concepts of political instability vary in many ways. Their definition as well as the theoretical depth of their explanatory framework diverges fundamentally, depending on their authorship. In this section we shall try to unravel the conceptualisations of political instability. In order to do so, existing literature on the topic will be reviewed. To facilitate a structured assessment, the definition’s core idiosyncrasies will be distilled and common trends identified. To this end the different concepts will be dissected into their definition and explanatory framework. This is done to work towards establishing a working concept for our own analysis, which will be introduced in the last section of this chapter. This working concept shall follow certain criteria:

1. The definition should be comprehensive and abstract enough to encompass all phenomenon associated with political instability.
2. The explanatory framework has to make logical claims about the causes of the phenomenon and
3. The operationalisation should lead to variables that represent the causal relationship established before as well as being measurable precisely to reduce ambiguity.
2.1 Definitions of political instability

The ‘political’ in political stability will be ascribed to the unit of analysis. As political scientists we analyse the stability of political systems. Thus we ask for the political stability of a regime or indeed for the stability of a political regime. As Ake points out, every act is potentially political (Ake, 1975: 271), which leaves us in the familiar position to have to define an abstract potentially ubiquitous concept. And as was true for stability, something is considered ‘political’ in a specific context, as no entity is inherently political. But before drifting up into purely philosophical contemplations, this paper limits the political nature of the stability we are investigating to the unit of analysis being a political entity, in its ‘classical’ sense. By determining the unit of analysis as a nation state, this is the unit the present paper is interested in, we peel off the first layer of abstraction in the pursuit of exposing the concrete core of this analysis. Some of the approaches cited here, refer to political stability. These concepts will be treated based on the proposition, that by talking about stability one inevitably makes statements about instability as its antitheses.

The varying concepts of political instability all find a different starting point in their definition. The extent to which scholars disagree about what actually constitutes political instability is, very frankly, stunning. There is neither a consensus about what can be considered political instability nor whether it describes a condition, a dynamic or an event. Various actors define the concept in diverse ways, depending on their vantage points and in accordance with the prerequisites posed by their professional background. Economists, for example, might reasonably equate political stability with the longevity of government, insofar as that mayor economic policies are likely to exhibit a fair level of stability under the same government. From the perspective of international security scholars, on the other hand, alternating governments do not by itself represent political instability as long as they do not stir up civil unrest or provoke a coup d’etat. This illustrates how varying approaches might be powerful tools to aid considerations about one dimension of political instability but not another. The target directed character of the definitions means, that their adequacy can only be assessed according to their intended purpose. These approaches represent different angles on sometimes broadly different issues. In contrast, the definition suggested by the present work intends to adopt a perspective abstract enough to incorporate as many insecurity phenomenon as possible. Thus, to untangle some threads of this academic discourse, and in order to assess them according to their applicability to the present work, the definitions will be organised in three groups based on their level of abstraction.
The first group contains approaches to political stability that, even though theorising about it, do not explicitly define the concept. Arend Lijphart, for example, a Dutch political scientist best known for his work on constitutional designs, consociationalism and consensus democracy in particular, dedicates a fair share of his work to system stability. In the context of his contributions, political stability is an attribute to a democratic system. He does not, however, define stability explicitly. In *Patterns of Democracy*, he borrows the Worldwide Governance Indicators’ definition of their ‘political stability and absence of violence’ indicator\(^6\) without further theoretical elaborations (2012: 269). Similarly, Taylor and Herman in their work on government stability, testing a hypothesis established by A. Lawrence Lowell, fall short in producing any definition of political stability. They explicitly denote however that their observation only deals with one kind, of possibly many, versions of political stability. The only qualification they offer is the statement that the different versions of stability might vary independently (1971: 29). Yet another example of this omission is Bruce M. Russett’s ‘Inequality and Instability: The Relation of Land Tenure to Politics’ (1964), in which Russett analyses the correlation between unequally distributed wealth and political instability. He notes the difficulty of defining political instability and goes on by operationalising his undefined concept. In his opening statement to the first chapter of *Political Man*, Seymour Martin Lipset mentions the concept of stable democracy. Nonetheless his extensive sociological work does not feature a clear definition of political stability, instability respectively. One more approach will be mentioned here, which differs somewhat from the foregone versions but consequently has the same result for the analysis that is based upon it. This approach does define political instability, but doing so by simply equating it with a distinct phenomenon\(^7\). Ivo K. Feierabend and Rosalind L. Feierabend in ‘Aggressive Behaviors within Polities, 1948-1962: A Cross-National Study’ equate political instability with the degree of aggression displayed within a political system. Same as Taylor and Herman, they appreciate political instability to be a multifaceted concept, of which they analyse only a distinct part (1966: 250). Nonetheless, they do not attempt to clarify, either how their interpretation of the concept relates to other existing interpretations, nor do they develop an overarching conceptualisation of political instability. To sum up, the mentioned approaches either refrain from defining political instability all together or, explicitly or not, equate it with observable events that might be reasonably be considered symptoms, or instability events, rather than an adequate definition by its own right. By the same token, a stone falling towards the floor is as little helpful of a definition for gravity, as is a casualty count for political instability.

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\(^6\) This measurement is based on the perceived likelihood, that a government is disrupted by violent means.

\(^7\) Whether this is the result of logical carelessness, which we find to be unlikely, or the consequence of simplification in aid of the analysis, without due proclamation, will be irrelevant here.
Approaches clustered in the second group establish their own explicit definitions of political instability. These definitions, in contrast to most approaches in the forgone category, define political instability as a condition or dynamic, rather than an event. Ernest A. Duff and John F. McCamant, for example, invoke a notion of political stability as the capacity to resolve conflict and facilitate change, within the constraints of an existing political structure (1968: 1125). Conversely instability is the absence of such capability. Hence, and in contrast to the approaches mentioned before, change is not identified as instability per se. Given, it is effectuated adhering to social institutions, change, and especially the ability to manage it, is associated with resilience. This definition is not uncommon and can be found, in varying wording, in the works of Hurwitz (1973) as well as Mabey and Yiu (2005). This approach resolves some of the challenges affecting the definitions mentioned before. By allowing for ‘regular’ social contestation and change, these approaches do not inflate the significance of the destabilising effect of phenomenon, such as peaceful demonstrations and constitutional changes of government. The definition by Duff and McCamant constitutes political instability as a condition and describes its materialisations as instability events.

The next group encompasses definitions, that establish political instability, broadly speaking, as the divergence of the formal and the informal, within a political structure. These definitions are all-encompassing and arguably abstract enough to include all possible scenarios remotely related to political instability. Claude Ake, a political scientist with a personal interest and professional fulcrum in the African continent, establishes his main body of work on democratic development in the context of modernisation and state building. Regime stability plays a central role here and is a recurring topic in his articles (Ake, 1967, 1973, 1974, 1975). Ake defines political instability comprehensively and develops an in-depth explanatory framework. He starts off by defining political acts as any act that potentially relates to the distribution of power within society (Ake, [1975: 271]). The actors engaged in these acts have interactions which Ake calls political exchanges. These exchanges follow a pattern that is deemed ‘regular’ within a specific social context (Ake, 1975: 274). The ‘regular’ pattern of political exchange is defined through the concept of ‘roles’ and ‘role expectations’. Political actors represent ‘roles’ which are associated with expected patterns of political exchange. These expected patterns define the limits in which this role is considered to act ‘regular’. Ake groups the expectations into three categories: duties, rights and capabilities. Acts infringing the limitations imposed by the role expectations can be considered to have a destabilising effect on the political system (Ake, 1974: 586). Conversely, any act that does not deviate from the ‘regular’ pattern can be seen as having a stabilising and reenforcing effect (Ake, 1973: 357). Further, the condition of political stability, according to Ake, does not apply to the actors...
themselves, but rather to the political interaction, the exchanges (Ake, 1974: 585). He clarifies that stability, or the absence of it, is not idiosyncratic to a certain interaction, rather an exchange has to be assessed within its situational context. Similarly, David Sanders defines political stability to be related to the continuity in patterns of social contestation. A stable system, according to Sanders, is characterised by the adherence to, and continuity of, a ‘normal’ pattern established by an authority (Margolis, 2010: 232). If the change of, or the challenge to, the government follows previous established patterns a system is considered stable. By building on the two forgone concepts, by Ake and Sanders, J. Eli Margolis defines political instability to be the variance between the formal and informal in society (Margolis, 2010: 232). Margolis emphasises political instability being a potential, instead of an occurrence. This is the core addition to the other two concepts that describe political instability as an occurrence. What the other two approaches interpret as political instability, the disregard for role expectations or the previously established patterns of contestation, Margolis sees as possible symptoms of instability (Margolis, 2010: 233). By the virtue of their abstraction these concepts requires extensive interpretation, on the basis of due deduction, before they can be operationalised and quantified. From the unit of analysis to the question of what constitutes formalisation, every part of their definitions need more elaboration which can introducing extreme ambiguity. The processes of formalisation and codification by itself are highly interpretive and abstract issues. It is easy to see how this level of vagueness adds a fair amount of complexity to an already complex concept, which ensues further challenges.

2.1.1 Refined definition of political instability

A definition represents the starting point for any analysis. It clarifies the issue at hand and demarcates what is relevant for the concept from what is not. It really is the first stone in the theoretical edifice, on which the other conceptual parts rest and it stipulates the methodological alignment of the research. The definition determines how something can be explained and how it can be measured. In the context of this function its level of abstraction has profound implications. As the level of abstraction decreases so does the inclusiveness of the definition. The definitions in group one, for example, exclude all other aspects that might reasonably be associated with the concept, by equating political instability with concrete phenomenon. On the other hand, high levels of abstraction make a definition more inclusive but as well, require considerable further elaboration to serve the analysis. It dictates extensive inference in order to be explained and operationalised. Researchers employing abstract definitions will have to content with the problem of increasingly introducing ambiguity. In our third group we, find definitions that run along the line of defining political instability as the divergence of the formal from the informal. Now, instead of being closer to understanding political instability the reader will have to wonder what exactly determines
something that is formalised in contrast to something that is not - by itself not at all an 
uncontentious question.

The present work aspires to a definition, that is comprehensive and abstract enough to encompass 
the range of phenomenon commonly associated with political instability. At the same time it should 
be sufficiently concrete, to serve the research as clear starting point, that sets the direction for 

Definitions clustered in the second group, seem to best satisfy this prerequisite by managing the balance between the abstract-concrete pendulum. In the pursuit for a working 
definition, the present work will thus adopt central ideas formulated most explicitly by Ernest A. 
Duff and John F. McCamant.

In ‘Measuring Social and Political Requirements for System Stability in Latin America’ (1968) 
political stability is defined as a system’s ability to manage change. The source of instability is 
described to be the system’s perceived lack of legitimacy and / or effectiveness, informed by its 
inability to meet popular demands. What sets Duff and McCamant apart from most other reviewed 
authors, with the exception of Margolis, is to qualify political instability as a condition and a 
potential rather than an event or an occurrence. In this context Duff and McCamant state that 
“Stability/instability is a condition of the political system at a particular time which may manifest 
itself differently in different system. […]” On other occasions instability may remain latent or 
unexpressed (1968: 1125).’ The second sentence emphasises the potentiality of political instability, 
which is a prominent feature of the paper’s contribution. This assessment also suggests that 
instability might not result in any observable event at all. Furthermore, how instability materialises 
does not follow regular patterns, Duff and McCamant argue. They further elaborate that the manner 
in which it does, depends on the respective political culture. These two characteristics, if taken 
seriously, have profound methodological implications that we will return to again in the section on 
methodology.

Building on, and in large parts coinciding with, Duff and McCamant political instability is defined 
here as follows; A necessary condition for the integrity of a political system, in relation to its ability 
to uphold its functions, is a generic consensus among its principle components (e.g. citizenry, 
institutions and interest groups). This consensus does not relate to every single policy but rather to 
an agreement about how the system itself functions. The lack of such consensus may lead to 
 fractionalisation, which in turn may lead to defiance of the system. How this condition (breakdown 
of consensus) translates into action, however, depends on a multitude of socio-political factors. The 
interplay of those factors represents the level of political stability. This, however, does not imply a
mechanic if-then function, as the resulting outcome, e.g. occurrences of instability events, is determined by various intricate social and psychological factors. Due to this complexity, this paper argues, that one cannot predict either the temporal occurrence of this outcome nor the form it will take. The level of political stability - the interplay of factors - merely informs the possible magnitude of potential instability events. The lower the level of factors facilitating stability, the higher the possible magnitude of potential instability events. This magnitude is what we can detect, even though only with a crude measure.

Put simply, factors fostering a high level of political instability do not determine how often, when or in what form instability events happen, but instead they relate to the potential intensity of such events. Thus, an instability event is not a version of political instability, rather its influencing factors are facilitated by instability. It maybe useful to think about it in terms of the effect that temperature has on chemical reactions, described by the Arrhenius equation. Hence measuring political instability cannot be done by measuring the quantity of instability events, the magnitude should be considered instead. As mentioned earlier, political instability, as defined by this paper, does not necessarily lead to instability events that could be recorded. This leaves us with the scientific challenge of how to collect data on the dependent variable. Consequential, the sample has to consist of cases that have experienced instability events, so their magnitude can be compared. Only in these cases the dependent variable becomes observable and its correlation with independent variables can be tested.

After we have learned how past research had defined political stability and adopted our own working definition, the next section will look at the explanatory frameworks that other authors have employed in order to analyse the concept.

### 2.2 Explanatory frameworks of political instability

The varying definition described above represent the starting point for approaches that employ very different explanatory frameworks. They can be organised along epistemological axioms, directing their explanatory models. These trends will be related to the groups established earlier. Defining an abstract concept inevitably ensues, made explicit or not, latent epistemological assumptions. As Nick Mabey and Chris Yiu point out in regard to different approaches to political instability, “As such, all necessarily make assumptions about the underlying structure of the world (though not all make these assumptions explicit)” (2005: 8). Epistemologically, the concepts can be organised

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8 Extremely simplified: the chemical reaction rates increase and decrease analog to increasing and decreasing temperature.
loosely along a continuum stretching between two poles. The approaches that equate political instability with distinct variables can be associated with empiricism, while the approaches featuring more abstract definitions are closer related to scientific realism. This relationship is by no means completely congruent but describes a tendency consequential to the definitions’ epistemological implications.

The concepts on the empiricism side of the spectrum reviewed here, aligned with their epistemological presupposition, do not build on causal relationships. The relationship between political instability and its explanatory variables is described purely in terms of correlation. Further, in its most rigid form, empiricism only takes into account the directly observable. To explain a concepts itself as abstract as political instability, without invoking unobservable parameters, risks over-simplification, which in turn leads to diminished explanatory power. It also must be noted, that some of these approaches do not pursue to offer any explanation at all and simply operationalise the phenomenon equated with political instability. Russett, for example, postulates a positive correlate between inequality and instability as given by alluding to past writers like Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Plato and Merle Kling (1964: 442-443). Tylor and Herman build on existing literature as well, by referring to A. Lawrence Lowell’s hypothesis that proposes a correlation between the number of parties and the cabinet stability. Interestingly, Margolis falls into this group as well. This is particularly incongruous, because Margolis’s definition is extremely abstract and hence calls for extensive explanation in order to be operationalised coherently. One more example is offered by Mabey and Yiu, who do not offer any explanatory framework. In their case, however, this can likely be ascribed to the character of their work, being a policy report rather than a academic paper in an classical sense. Even though these papers differ in their general take on the topic as well as the degree they adhere to the axioms of empiricism, a commonality is the lack of any underlying explanation, for how the variables relate and interact with each other.

2.2.1 A posteriori correlations

Another group, distinct but related to the preceded one, consists of approaches that offer no explanation at all but rather establishes correlations of indicators measured a posteriori (Blanco and Grier, 2009). Their empiric foundation give these approaches some appeal but as they do not attempt to make causal claims about the relationship between the variables they will not be discussed in any more detail. The discovery of an empirical correlation can only be the starting point for causal explanation and otherwise bares little power in itself. As Margolis has noted, these approaches treat political instability as an occurrence and not as a dynamic or attribute (Margolis, 2010: 330), which further hampers their usefulness in the context of the current analysis.
Similarly, diversity in perspective, structure and style is exhibited on the other side of the spectrum. While Lipset approaches the topic from a sociological angle, Lijphart’s work focuses on political institutions and constitutional design. Feierabend and Feierabend, on the other hand, invoke a physiological theory as explanatory framework. Ernest A. Duff and McCamant as well as Ake make use of approaches rooted in economic theory. Ernest A. Duff and McCamant explain their concept by juxtaposing the government’s utility in satisfying the population’s demands and its coercive capability with the level of the social mobilisation within the population. Ake on the other hand, explains his concept with what he calls the ‘propensity to invest’, which denotes the individual’s commitment to a political goal. All these approaches differ in the way they seek to explain political instability but what they share is an expanded explanatory framework. This has profound implications for how these concepts can be operationalisation. A logic and elaborate explanation is an asset to finding meaningful variables, that enable the measurement of the phenomenon under investigation.

For the current work, we will have to develop a thorough explanatory framework that makes logic interferences about the causal factors that, in our estimation, determine the level of political stability. To this end, the following section will focus on concepts leaning towards scientific realism in order to investigate how they explain the phenomenon. Moving from the explanatory meta-structure to the concrete explanations, we can identify different ‘camps’ of explanatory approaches, some of which will be detailed in the following. Even though most research on political instability does employ multi-causal explanations, they tend to give primacy to one or several explanatory modes:

1. **Economic models**: Economic factors, for example, can be found in most studies in some form, certain studies however build their arguments predominantly or exclusively on economics.
2. **Institutional models**: these contributions heavily emphasis the importance of constitutional design, political institutions, power sharing arrangements and political culture.
3. **Fragmentation models**: even though inconsistent in their results, these models explore the relevance of social fragmentation for political instability. The fragmentation may be economical, religious, ethnolinguistic, cultural, demographic or else.

### 2.2.2 Explanations informed by economic variables

As mentioned above, economic factors are taken into account in most studies on political instability in some form or the other. Some studies, however, base their explanation primarily on economic factors. Most employ a combination of explanatory modes and describe a multitude of channels
through which economic factors are thought to effect political instability. Some of these models put
emphasis on the populace’s demands, attitudes and frustrations, while others stress more the
government’s capabilities. Many studies, however, employ a combination of those channels, by
juxtaposing the needs and wants of the citizenry with the governments ability to satisfy them, or
react to them more generally. Researchers employ different concepts to that end, such as ‘want
formation’ and ‘want satisfaction’ (Feierabend and Feierabend, 1966), or ‘social mobilisation’ and
’societal welfare’ (Duff and McCamant, 1969) but ultimately they rest on the same principle: The
population has demands, aspirations and expectations which, if not met, lead to social unrest and
political instability. On one side of the equation these models refer to how economic development
effects political stability through its implications for certain state capabilities. A nationstate might
use economic strength to underpin legitimacy, to pacify the population with welfare spendings or to
coerce it with well funded security forces (Duff and McCamant, 1969: 1128; Hegre et al., 2016: 5).
On the other side of the equation, these models stress factors that have the potential to mobilise the
population. One argument assumes that, put simplistically, individuals with little to lose are more
willing to engage in system-defiance and subsequent instability events. This dynamic can be
summed up under the term ‘opportunity costs’ (Saputo, 2012: 9). An individual is more likely to
engage in civil disobedience of some form, if the outcome can reasonably be expected to be better
than the current situation, so it states. The lower the assets - palpable and non-palpable - currently
held, that could be lost, the higher the chance for the future situation to constitute an improvement.
Following this logic poverty is described to facilitate mobilisation, as a fundamental precondition
for conflict escalation (Fearon and Laitin, 2003: 75). A related position is expressed by Seymour
Martin Lipset in his extensive work Political Man (1960), which explicitly refers to the stability of
democratic regimes. He lays out the positive correlation between system stability and economic
development, here defined in line with modernisation theory. This correlation is partly due to a
higher propensity of uneducated and destitute parts of the society to fall pray to political extremism
(1960: 61). Another argument makes a case for grievances, held by different part of the population
against each other, to play a crucial part in explaining political instability. Grievances are believed
to be the result of an unequal distribution of wealth within a community (Alesina and Perotti, 1995;
Russett, 1964) and are thought to be a crucial enabler in plotting parts of the population against each
other. However, the assumption that inequality results in political instability is by no means
uncontroversially consistent with the data (Lichbach, 1989: 432). In fact different studies reach
conflicting results, with some studies verifying a positive, some a negative, some a mixed and
others no correlation at all (Lichbach, 1989: 439).
The vast empirical data on the issue overwhelmingly suggests that economic factors are profoundly substantiating for political stability. Thus, the explanatory framework developed in this paper will take into account an economic dimension as well. Existing arguments are adopted, by stating that the magnitude of a potential societal conflict is determined by the people’s propensity to invest, which in turn results from the opportunity cost ascribed to the engagement. The opportunity costs could be conceptualised according to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1954).

2.2.3 Explanations informed by power sharing

Approaches clustered together here identify constitutional design and political institutions as the prime determinant of political stability, or the absence thereof. Developed to explain democratic stability in some fragmented societies in Western Europe, consociational theory can be considered the first generation of power sharing theory (Lijphart, 1969). Since then, a continuous academic engagement with the theory has yielded a wealth of different conceptualisations, often describing very different perspectives, pooled under the umbrella term power sharing. Even though diverse in perspectives, power sharing approaches converge on the preposition, that system stability is promoted by restraining the power an individual societal group can hold (Strom et al., 2017: 165). Different avenues are suggested towards this end, including dispersive, inclusive and constraining power sharing mechanisms (Strom et al., 2017). In turn, those avenues are facilitated through certain institutional designs that mitigate extremist tendencies and instead promote moderation within the political system. The institutional features usually characterising these systems are, among others, broad political parties, grand coalitions, a proportional electoral system, cooperation among elites, minority rights, decentralisation and an independent media. Fundamentally, as Arend Lijphart has stated, it is about maximising the number of actors taking part in the political process, having a stake in government respectively (2012: 2).

In the course of decade-long literature accumulation extensive empirical work has been done on the topic of power sharing. Nonetheless, the effect of its practical application is by no means undisputed (Norris, 2008: 210). Proponents and critics can refer to a myriad of studies, either asserting or dispelling the stability facilitating effect of power sharing (Binningsbø, 2013: 90). One reason for the contradictory findings is the arbitrariness of the concept itself. Power sharing is interpreted very differently by the various authors. In some research, power sharing is conceptualised as a comprehensive regime of institutional arrangements, while in other studies it is reduced to the characteristic of one political institution (Binningsbø, 2013: 95). Some studies include ‘vertical power sharing’ - hierarchical arrangements based on location or group affiliation - while other do not (Binningsbø, 2013: 96-97). The dissent does not stop here, however. In addition
to the inconsistency concerning the scope of power sharing, its function is equally disputed. While power sharing institutions are perceived to be the appropriate device to settle peace deals by some, others view it as the appropriate constitutional basis for a transition towards democracy. Some authors attest power sharing to effectuate both (Gates et al., 2016), while others claim it does none of it (Binningsbo, 2013: 98-103).

By its proponents, power sharing is thought to have a stabilising effect on societies emerging from conflict. It is assumed that power sharing arrangements have a unique potential to transition conflict torn societies from antagonism to cooperation. Power sharing does so by integrating all relevant actors into the political process, so it is argued. It is generally held that power sharing arrangements are most beneficial for post-conflict societies with a high degree of societal fragmentation. Nonetheless, it is thought to be also favourable towards stability in political systems lacking these idiosyncrasies (Gates et al., 2016: 24).

Among its critics, on the other hand, power sharing is challenged to neither bring about peace nor strengthen democracy. Au contraire, it is described to have a negative correlation with one of the two, or both. In regard to its aptitude for facilitating peace agreements, some of its critics emphasise the difficulties associated with power sharing settlements. Horowitz, for example, emphasises what he calls the ‘adoption problem’. This problem refers to the difficulty for the relevant parties to agree on a peace accord based on power sharing provisions. Horowitz claims that in a situation in which a majority is faced with a minority, both groups have inherently contradictory interests. While the majority has no incentive to opt for anything but a majoritarian political regime, the minority likely prefers a system that secures minority guarantees and vetoes (Horowitz, 2003: 15; Horowitz, 2014: 8). In addition, a post-conflict negotiation is likely influenced by extraordinary conditions. Such conditions could be the intervention of an external actor or actors, a party to the treaty being weakened or the increased willingness for concessions, due to war-weariness. As time passes these conditions may lose their potency and the political actors likely come to question, and ultimately oppose, the political arrangements negotiated earlier. In a situation in which one actor would benefit from changing the existing arrangement, one can assume that the other actor or actors have no interest in such modification. In this context, the juxtaposition of static power sharing institutions with shifting power dynamics may well lead to new conflict (Horowitz, 2014: 12). Matthijs Bogaards, echoed by other scholars, notes that the relation between power sharing and democratic values has increasingly been questioned (2006: 119). Jai-Kwan Jung goes as far as to suggest that power sharing arrangements, implemented to end conflict, fundamentally contradict democratic values (2012: 487). They conflict with the long-term goal of peace-building, Jai-Kwan Jung states...
In this regard, a critique levelled against power sharing in general, and consociationalism in particular, relates to something that is best represented by Arend Lijphart’s notorious remark “[ . . .] good social fences may make good political neighbors [. . .] (Lijphart, 1969: 219).” What Lijphart alludes to is the concept of elite consensus in contrast to a societal one. On that basis, power sharing is charged with undermining democratic values, instead of promoting them (Bogaards, 2006: 120-121). Furthermore, on a practical level this prescription seems to be beset by a serious problem. Without cooperation among the social groups it is unlikely that they approximate over time. That means at any given time, when elite cooperation collapses, they may be plotted against each other once again. Additionally, critics have long pointed out the unintended consequences proportional election systems, that are often central components of post-conflict settlements, entail. The low electoral threshold, meant to allow for the political representation of minorities, does not incentivise parties to appeal to groups outside their base constituency (Horowitz, 2003: 15). It may actually motivate politicians to keep salient group differences and thereby freeze or petrify the cleavages along ethnolinguistic lines (Bogaards, 2006: 120-121; Jung, 2012: 498).

Power sharing reserves a prominent position within the literature on political stability. As a concept, however, it is rather ambiguous, as the foregone section has pointed out. No scientific consensus has been established about what the concept includes and what it does not. In relation to the current analysis an explanatory framework based on power sharing seems not to be satisfactory. As of now, our preposition is that the magnitude of instability events, resulting from the collapse of social consensus, is determined by the people’s predisposition to invest in conflict. This predisposition, on the other hand, depends on the level and kind of deprivation they suffer, the availability of reasonably viable alternatives and the feasibility of the system defying action. Power sharing could inform the alternatives to system-deviance, by offering political channels through which to influence the status quo. However, a few idiosyncrasies make it unfit to serve this function. First, the concept of power sharing is tailored to democratic, western institutions and thereby does not relate to political systems classified otherwise. Secondly, power sharing relates to a codified reality and not to an experienced one. For people to consider political institutions as an viable alternative, however, their perception of its utility, rather than its legal framework, matters. Sometimes, the realities within a political system bare very little resemblance with the constitutional framework that establishes it (Horowitz, 2014: 7; Strom et al. 2017: 171). In such scenarios examining institutional power sharing arrangements is likely to provide little insight. To employ a measure of political participation, influence respectively, will certainly be more useful to determine whether a viable
alternative to conflict exists. The question of how to operationalise political participation sensibly will be returned to in the methodology chapter.

2.2.4 Fragmentation

The general assumption underlying the approaches discussed in this section is that more societal fragmentation bares significance for the stability of a political system. Broadly speaking, societal fragmentation is thought to influence political instability mainly through two channels. The first relates to grievances between social fractions. When cleavages run along ethnolinguistic and/or religion boundaries they are believed to be particularly potent. Those grievances do not necessarily have to be rooted in conditions prevalent in the current political system but might be remnants of ancestral, tribal conflicts. The other channel through with fractionalisation may take effect, is mobilisation. It is argued that in fragmented societies, actors opposing the political system may mobilise along societal fault lines with more success than in homogeneous societies. This increased feasibility for civil upheaval may render the society more politically unstable. Through these two channels, fragmentation would inform motives for conflict and its feasibility. In addition, fragmentation is proposed to have a negative impact on economic growth. Through its impact on economic growth fragmentation is thought to have an indirect effect on political stability (Karnane and Quinn, 2017: 19), that is if one accepts the preposition that economic development is negatively correlated with political instability.

As in the case of political instability itself, the notion of societal fragmentation is not unambiguously conceptualised and hence studies within that area of analysis come to reach different, and at times contradictory, conclusions (Karnane and Quinn, 2017: 4; Kustov, 2015: 663). The inconsistency starts with the definition. Within a society fractions can be constructed along potentially infinite lines of devision. Most studies, however, define the fractions on the grounds of either ethnic, linguistic, religious or class differences, or a combination of those. The scholarship has not reached a consensus about what dimensions should be included or how they relate to each other. Ethnic fractionalisation has arguably been the most prominent category and attracted most research. Its correlation with political instability has been subject of numerous empirical studies. The result of such studies have taken every thinkable form, from concluding that the variables have no effect, to positive and negative correlations, to non-liner bimodal and unimodal distributions (Blanco and Grier, 2009: 77). This bares some resemblance to the literature on economic inequality in regard to its effect on political instability (Karnane and Quinn, 2017: 4-5).

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9 Fragmentation is here used to denote the general notion of a compartmentalised society. Fractionalisation, distinct from polarisation, refers to an approach of how to conceptualise societal fragmentation.
A theoretical permutation to fractionalisation is represented by the concept polarisation. This concept is a reaction to the empirical stalemate produced by research based on fractionalisation (Kustov, 2015: 663). This approach proposes that political instability actually decrease with an increasing number of subgroups (Kustov, 2015: 663; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). With more fractionalisation less fractions are potentially powerful enough to challenge the political system as a whole. Proponents of the polarisation concept argue that high polarisation occurs at medium levels of fractionalisation and this combination describes a situation conductive to political instability (Karnane and Quinn, 2017: 6). The least stable situation is one of medium fractionalisation, in which a majority is faced with a large and influential minority (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005: 797). Predictive models based on ethnic polarisation are more powerful than their fractionalisation counterparts, so at least argue the researches constructing them (Kustov, 2015: 663; Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005: 812). Kustov’s agent-based simulation predicts that polarised societies, in contrast to fractionalised ones, suffer civil conflicts less frequent but when they occur the conflicts tend to be more severe (Kustov, 2015: 670). Further, he concludes that the crosscutting between ethnic groups - the level of group membership overlap - reduces the frequency of civil conflict but increases its intensity as well (Kustov, 2015: 671).

In the end, however conceptualised, ethnic differences are highly subjective and might play only a very limited role in some societies, while being of paramount importance in others (Kustov, 2015: 672). This holds true for all the other factors by which societies may be divided into subgroups. This illustrates the general limitations of any fragmentation variable. Its cultural contextuality and conceptual equivocation makes these variables, at least, difficult to investigate. The clear distinction between ethnicities and linguistic groups is a challenge. As is the measurement of religious fellowship and the affliction with a political group or a social milieu. Kustov proposes that no demographic alone is sufficient to initiate conflict (2015: 672). While others have suggested that ethnolinguistic and religious fragmentation has no impact on the onset of civil conflict at all (Fearon and Laitin, 2003: 75). The fragmentation approaches explain civil unrest, in part or wholly, as a consequence of societal tension induced by fractionalisation / polarisation - be it ethnic, religious, economic or ideological. This rational is captured by Collier and Hoeffler remark: “[…] inter-group hatreds must be greater in societies that are fractionalized than in those which are homogenous (2004: 571).” We refute the unsubstantiated notion of this automatism and instead turn to a more functional perspective on fractionalisation and political instability. Collier and Hoeffler as well employ such perspective, describing fractionalisation not in terms of motivation but as informing the feasibility of civil unrest. Their argument, however, is directed towards explaining the
probability of conflict. In this context, they argue that fractionalisation inhibits rebel groups organisationally, due to a lack of cohesion. Considering that small groups of militants may sustain a severe level of insecurity through violence - given favourable conditions - this line of thought seems, if at all, only applicable to hypothetical cases of extreme fractionalisation. The current approach, on the other hand, intends to predict the possible severity of a potential conflict. Given this different angle, mobilisation is a crucial component, as the question to be answered is not whether or when people engage in conflict but rather how invested they are. The success of mobilisation may be facilitated by grievances against other actors in society. Arguably, grievances can be created against any social group, especially if needs - particularly basic needs - are deprived. However, for maximum potency it might be expedient to tap into, or activate, grievances according to already existing psychological categories.

2.2.5 The rest

While the explanatory models described above received extensive attention, some of the other variables commonly employed to explain political instability will not be omitted completely. Corruption and regime type are two of those variables, that will be discussed briefly hereafter. Additionally connector concepts will be mentioned, before closing this chapter with a refined explanatory framework.

The regime type is assumed to effect political instability indirectly through its implications for political freedom and economic development (Tusalem, 2015). Cox and Weingast, for example, argue that horizontal democratic constrains on the executive, through the legislative, profoundly reduce the economic decline associated with a change in political power. Through this economic consistency political stability is maintained (2017; 280). Luisa R. Blanco and Robin M. Grier find that democracy is negatively correlated with political instability (2007: 87). A noteworthy exception is provided by Goldstone et al., who argue that the regime type directly effects political instability and dismisses other factors commonly used to explain the phenomenon, like economic development and demographics, as baring little explanatory power (2010: 204). In ‘A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability’ Goldstone et al. (2010) conceptualise regimes according to a four-fold taxonomy as, full democracies, partial democracies (with or without factionalism), partial autocracies and full autocracies. Their research finds a correlation between a regime’s respective position within the taxonomy and its proneness to adverse regime changes and civil war.

Another common explanatory variable is corruption. Corruption is considered to impair economic development (Mauro 1995; 705; Tusalem 2015: 2), fuel grievances, cripple bureaucracy (Mauro,
Many approaches to political instability utilise connector concepts to explain how their explanatory variables relate to instability. Some research even makes them a explanatory centrepiece (Ake, 1973; Ake, 1974; Hurwitz, 1973; Lipset, 1959; Lipset, 1960; Margolis, 2010). These connectors translate the measurable variables into the attitude towards a regime, through psychological constructs. They convert eg. a poor economic performance or a certain institutional design into the people’s propensity towards civil conflict. Examples for these connectors are, inter alia, legitimacy, grievances and expectations. These concepts have no quantifiable reality but exist only as a subjective perception, which portends to the challenges accompanying their use. As alluded to earlier, the sheer level of abstraction introduces enormous analytical difficulties due to ambiguity and vagueness. It is difficult, however, to avoid these connectors altogether as their abolishment would create a disconnect between certain conditions and the behaviour associated with them. One way of mitigating the extreme subjectivity is to rely on connectors that are based on universal psychological mechanisms, increasing their universality. Humans that suffer malnutrition, for example, can reasonably be expected to have a increased willingness to change the status quo, irrespective of their cultural background or ideological affiliation. On the other hand it is less clear how people perceive the absence of political freedom and thus what reaction, or attitude, results.

2.2.6 Refined explanatory framework

The current work adopts an explanatory framework that characterises variables according to their escalation potential, without specifying whether this potential is predicated on incentives for, or the feasibility of, civil conflict. The dichotomous categorisation of variables into grievance and opportunity (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004), grievance and feasibility (Fearon and Laitin, 2003), triggers and feasibility (Saputo, 2012) proves to be unapt in the context of the present argumentation, mainly for two reasons. First, they have been established to explain the occurrence of political instability events, to predict their probability respectively, and thus being governed by a different rational. Secondly, it is unclear in how far the categories are factually distinct and analytically useful. Motives and opportunities might reciprocally effect each other and conflate in certain incidents. This is not only suggested by the common idiom ‘opportunity makes the thief’, but as well by literature on criminology (Clarke, 2012). The example of group grievances helps to illustrates this issue. Grievances can be viewed as incentive for conflict but at the same time might have a pronounced effect on its feasibility through mobilisation. So instead of organising the explanation according to this categories the fundamental question underlying the current
explanation asks, what variables meaningfully increase or decrease the escalation potential. The first variable describes the opportunity costs facing an individual that engages in civil conflict. It sketches the conditions that makes people invest in escalating civil conflict. In ‘Explaining Political Instability in New States’, Claud Ake theorises about what he calls ‘propensity to invest’, in a similar manner. Ake describes the notion as the level of political contestation. This level depends on the individuals’ perception about the importance of a political objective in respect to its well-being and relates to the level of resources that are willingly invested. Now, according to Ake, who seems to consider a macro perspective, as the propensity to invest increases, so does the disregard for norms in the pursuit of the political objective. The explanatory framework laid out here, largely accepts Ake’s prepositions, with a few adjustments. In contrast to Ake it is argued from the vantage point of the individual, that is concerned primarily with securing its livelihood, instead of gaining political office or power. Ake describes the propensity to invest to be informed by how much the actor is willing to dispense, in order to achieve the political objective. The more the personal welfare is believed to be dependent on this objective, the more people are willing to invest. The current model takes another line of argumentation. By combining Ake’s ‘propensity to invest’ with the economic concept of ‘opportunity cost’, it is suggested that the willingness to invest not only depend on the value attached to the objective, but as well on what can be lost in the process. The uncertainty of civil conflict might not seem to be a potent incentive but for someone who has nothing to lose only the potential for some change might be promising enough. In this context it is proposed, that the deprivation of basic needs - borrowing from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs - leaves individuals in a situation, in which most possible projections for the outcome of a conflict promise to be an improvement. In such situations individuals are likely to invest heavily, if an alternative outcome seems feasible. To capture this condition the variable will have to represent the resources available to such individuals. In contrast to Ted Robert Gurr’s relative deprivation assumption, this variable will have to capture absolute deprivation. This is not to deny the merit of relative deprivation, but goes back to the concern for the escalation potential in contrast to the cause of conflict. Relative deprivation might explain well why people are discontent and seek conflict over a relevant matter but absolute deprivation, it is argued, is more instructive in explaining why people risk their lives to potentially violently escalate a conflict. What follows is hypothesis one;

**H1**: The number of people within society, deprived of basic needs, is positively correlated with the potential magnitude or possible conflicts.

The next explanatory variable relates to alternatives that individuals may choose over conflict. Alternatives to violent conflict, that are perceived viable may reduce the escalation potential. If
individuals have such an alternative with a plausible prospect of changing their situation to the better, which reduces their expected opportunity cost, they are likely to abstain from further escalating a conflict. Political contestation can serve as such option, given people can participate and believe that the political system is responsive to their needs. Hypothesis two follows;

**H2: A political system responsive to the needs of its citizens reduces the potential magnitude of possible conflicts.**

The third variable, and one discussed in the last chapter, is social fragmentation. Fragmentation is proposed to facilitate mobilisation. Already established social categories are presumably easier to activate for the sake of mobilisation. If these categories are based on political inequality or other salient socioeconomic differences they seem to be highly effective (Kustov, 2015: 662). Presumably, fragmentation can be established on the basis of any real or alleged distinction between groups. Most commonly, however, ethnic, linguistic and religious differences are the basis for societal fragmentation. Strong ideological affiliations - political, clan or social, e.g. - may also be used to construct subgroup identities but will be disregarded, due to increased complexity and the difficulty of accurate distinction. The third hypothesis reads as follows;

**H3: Increased levels of social fragmentation, represented by a high fractionalisation score, are positively correlated with the potential magnitude of possible conflicts.**

Another device to explain the escalation potential of civil conflict is the strength and unity of the military apparatus. This factor is crucial insofar as the military has the potential to suppress popular upheaval with force before it further exacerbates. In instances where rival societal fractions are embroiled in a conflict that deteriorates ensuing increased violence, the military may seize power in order to prevent any further escalation. This potential, for the military to have such stabilising effect, depends on its deterrence and strength. This presuppose that the military remains reasonably united when faced with a societal conflict. This is no value statement about domestic military interventionism but purely a preposition that, due to its dominance in lethal force, the military can provide a stabilising effect within the context of inter-state violence. The relevance of the military as an actor in a internal conflict situation, is not limited to its stabilising potential. Depending on the military’s unity, it might have an adverse effect in terms of its escalation potential. If the military fragments in the course of a state-internal conflict and as a result disperses military power among hostile fractions, violence is likely exacerbated and the conflict further escalated. The forth
hypothesis reads:

H4: The ability of the military to remain united in situations of conflict is negatively correlated with the potential magnitude of possible conflicts.

The subsequent chapter is dedicated to the methods employed to test the explanatory framework laid out here.

3. Methodology

This chapter will answer the question of how to test the hypothesis developed in the foregone section. The question why the ‘Arab spring’ was not predicted led this thesis to a new conceptualisation of political instability, cumulating in the preposition that the lack of sufficiently reliable data makes it unlikely to foresee the timing of an instability event onset. What can be predicted, so it is argued, is the possible magnitude, the escalation potential, of potential instability event, based on the political instability present in the system. Consequent upon the explanatory framework advanced earlier, the hypothesis states that individual economic wellbeing, the existence of political alternatives to conflict and central military power are negatively correlated with political instability, while social fragmentation is positively correlated with the same. In order to test this hypothesis a correlation analysis will be devised on a small sample of appropriate cases. This analysis can be seen as an effort to lay the foundation for more extensive regression analyses in the future. The chapter will proceed with a discussion of the sampling process, the operationalisation of the variables and the justification of the method as well as contemplations about the scientific limitations of this study.

3.1 Sampling

The sample consists of those countries that experienced severe instability events in the wake of the ‘Arab spring’. This non-random sampling is a corollary of the theoretical framework developed in the first chapter. According to that framework, the level of political instability determents the possible intensity or potential instability events. This is a highly probabilistic concept which ensues considerable challenges for its quantifiability. As a result the sample is reduced to the cases in which instability events have materialised and thus become observable. Further, this paper represents a pilot study, attributed to its scope and limitations. As such the sampling is conducted in a way that limits differences between cases, that potentially influence the relation between the
variables measured. The cases selected display a reasonable level of homogeneity in regard to time, geographic location as well as cultural, religious and historical background (considered the possible level of homogeneity between countries). After establishing a political instability concept and its explanatory framework, the rest of this paper is dedicated to put this framework to an empirical test. This chapter will briefly describe the temporal scope of the observations, the cases being selected for analysis and the methods employed to do so.

3.2 Temporal scope

Data for the independent variables has been collected for the year 2010 or, if data was unavailable for that year, as close to the onset of the ‘Arab spring’ as possible. Ideally we would use data that represent the situation right the moment the dynamic commences, without being distorted through a feedback loop. As most data used in this paper is available as an annual sequences, data from 2010 seemed to be the most prudent choice. The decision about the temporal scope for the dependent variable is maybe more controversial, but will be justified in the following. First, until now, and consistent with other literature on political instability, instability events were referred to as the expression of the instability immanent to a system. This notion is analytically expedient as one can determine a starting and an end point. However, it could distort the fact that instability finds expression constantly within societies and that this materialisation might be conceptualised more prudently as a latent current. This would mean however, that there would not be any line to meaningfully demarcate a instability episode. The argument is made that the momentary conditions inform the instability parameters, that in turn translate the constant contestation about the societal consensus into a latent level of instability output. This theoretical concept, however, is impossible to measure. An practicable alternative is to base the time frame of observations on data availability instead of the inherent logic of the concept. Therefore it was chosen to consider data on the dependent variable for the year 2011, as the fatality counts freely available are organised in years. For a more comprehensive regression analysis in the future, a model that defines the instability period in terms of e.g. minimum people killed per month or year is would be advisable.

3.3 The cases

The question of whether civil conflict can be predicted was once again ignited following the events widely referred to as the ‘Arab spring’. Among academics, in the public sphere and most probably among geopolitical planners and intelligence agencies, the seemingly unexpected events bagged the question to why no-one seemed to have anticipated them. The conundrum of the ‘Arab spring’ was the initial starting point for this paper’s considerations about political instability and it will be
returned to it in order to test the hypothesis developed in its course. On the 17th of December 2010 a Tunisian street vendor took his own life by self-immolation, as the most drastic expression of his protest against what he perceived to be the regime’s despotism. This event sparked wide-spread protests in Tunisia, which shortly after swapped through large parts of the Arab world in the Middle East and northern Africa. The outcome of this pan-Arabian upheaval differed greatly between the effected countries. In Libya, Syria and Yemen the protests cumulated in full scale civil war while in Egypt and Bahrain the protests were met with force and eventually died down. In the case of Egypt, the military eventually took control and toppled the government that had succeeded Hosni Mubarak’s regime. In Bahrain the Peninsula Shield Force military intervention stabilised the ruling monarchy, which eventually lead to the end of the instability period. In Tunisia the protests lead to the end of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali’s rule, with him fleeing the country and initiated a process of democratisation. In Tunisia, the country in which these dynamics started, the levels of violence were comparatively mild and the situation relaxed relatively quick after Ben Ali fled the country. The dynamics of the ‘Arab spring’ affected all surrounding Arab countries but were expressed considerably less violent in most. In such countries as, Algeria, Oman, Djibouti, Sudan, Kuwait, Morocco, Mauretanien, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the Palestinian Authority protests were translated into political action, from change of governments to introduction of new policies.

3.4 Operationalisation

No own data was collected, thus the challenge was to find datasets that best proxy the variables deemed relevant, in the light of the theoretical framework developed earlier. The proxies had to fit the timeframe, which was narrowly defined as the year 2010, 2011 respectively, to most accurately describe the situation right before the outbreak of the instability period. As these events commenced very late in December 2010, it can be reasonably assumed that they have not distorted the indicators measured for that year. To work with existing data, especially when the time frame is so explicit means that, more often than not, the data does not ideally capture the developed concepts. However, in appreciation of the current work’s limitations the most suitable data available has been utilised.

3.4.1 Dependent variable I (magnitude)

To operationalise the magnitude of the instability phenotype is a daunting task. One of the challenges is to define what actually constitutes an expression of political instability. Anti-government demonstrations, for example, are commonly used as a proxy for political instability. This would prove difficult, in the context of the current analysis, due to the notion of political instability, developed in this paper. Further, there are at least two major argumentative issues with demonstrations as a proxy for political instability. First, the difference between anti-policy and anti-
government demonstrations is generally difficult to assess, which prompts the question of how to evaluate such incidents. Secondly, and this is another issue of interpretation, the significance of such events might vary profoundly depending on the country-specific context. Mass demonstrations in the streets of Paris may very well be interpreted differently compared to the same situation occurring in Moscow. This is due to political culture, that frames the narrative through which people choose to interpret such events. The meaning of e.g. demonstrations is highly contextual which makes it difficult to use them as proxies for the same concept, across countries. This is true not only for demonstrations but for most potential expression of political instability.

This consideration has led to the utilisation of fatality counts as proxy for the magnitude of materialised political instability. With this strategy the problem of contextually was alleviated as much as possible. Regardless of the cultural background, people being killed in the course of political instability can reasonably be considered a marker of conflict intensity that holds across countries. Thus the proxy consists of fatality counts from three open sources; The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project\(^{10}\), the Political Instability Task Force Worldwide Atrocities Dataset\(^{11}\) and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program\(^{12}\). The observations of fatalities for 2011, provided by these three datasets, differ substantially, due to diverging data collection methods and data sources. In addition, not for all of the cases observations were available in all three datasets. To mitigate these shortcomings the mean of the available observations was taken for all six cases. When a interval was indicated in the dataset, the lowest number was recorded. For the value “dozens”, found in the dataset from the Political Instability Task Force ten fatalities were counted.

No distinctions were made between one-sided violence, state-sponsored violence or other forms. This aggregated approach to the fatality counts is due to the impracticality of distinguishing fatalities that directly resulted from social conflict from those that do not. To proxy the magnitude of political instability with a single indicator is extremely minimalist and risks oversimplification. In ‘Contemporary Approaches to Political Stability’, Hurwitz makes precisely this point and criticises such univariate measurement to not do justice to a concept as complex as political instability (1973: 450). For reasons laid out elsewhere in this thesis, however, this method was chosen with confidence in its ability to decrease ambiguity for the price of simplicity. When using data on fatalities it was decided to consider a absolute number instead of a ratio per capita. The

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\(^{10}\) The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, retrieved 24.09.2018 from [https://www.acleddata.com/](https://www.acleddata.com/)


\(^{12}\) Uppsala Conflict Data Program, retrieved 10.10.2018 from [http://ucdp.uu.se/](http://ucdp.uu.se/)
preposition backing this decision is that, a fatality count is a meaningful indicator irrespective of the country’s total population, as its significance remains unchanged. A notable alternative to a fatality count is a measure of magnitude that includes more facets of the concept represented. One such measure is used in the Major Episodes of Political Violence, 1946-2017 dataset\textsuperscript{13}, published by the Centre for Systemic Peace. This measure of ‘magnitude of societal-systemic impact’ includes indicators about, inter alia, area and scope of destruction, displacement of peoples and state capabilities. The issue with this specific tool is the lack of ample gradients. The magnitude is categorised into five levels and it is not sufficiently fine-tuned to pick up any episode of violence in Bahrain and Tunisia for the year 2011. The development of a measure of magnitude, based on several indicators, sensitive enough to be applicable to more cases, would prove to be a valuable asset to further research on this topic.

3.4.2 Independent variable I (Individual deprivation)

The last chapter has described that most literature on the topic assumes economic factors to have a profound effect on political instability. The theoretical framework developed in this thesis takes a microeconomic perspective on this relationship. As a result the notion of opportunity cost is employed to explain the translation of microeconomic factors into levels of instability. This approach demands the economic variable to be operationalised in a way that captures the share of the population that is likely to escalate civil unrest, due to the considerations laid out in the foregone chapter. A measure of absolute poverty in purchasing power parity (PPP) would be the most effective proxy to represent the amount of people who’s opportunity costs for escalating civil conflict is extremely low. The data provided by the World Bank for the period 2000 to 2011, however, is unavailable for three of our six cases. Another source of data on poverty, the measure of multidimensional poverty as supplied by the Human Development Index (HDI), is missing two cases for the relevant time frame. Due to this lack of reliable data on poverty, the variable will be represented with the measure of unemployment and the inflation rate. The rate of unemployment can reasonably be used as a proxy for the variable of individual deprivation. This is because in the countries under investigation no extensive welfare regime exists, with the notable exception of Bahrain. The inclusion of inflation is due to the adverse affect inflation has especially on the poor (Easterly and Fischer, 2001). As low income households spend most of their income on food, there is no financial buffer to offset an increase in inflation, thus effecting directly the calorie intake available. The rate of unemployment for 2010 will be taken from the Work Bank database\textsuperscript{14}, while

\textsuperscript{13} http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html
the inflation rate is retrieved from the World Bank country profiles. As the economic condition of a country may change rapidly, it was crucial to find data for 2010.

3.4.3 Independent variable II (social fragmentation)

Societal fragmentation can be conceptualised in a virtually infinite number of ways. In the context of this thesis fragmentations matter insofar as it is assumed to facilitate mobilisation efforts. That implies that self-identified differences between groups are relevant, irrespective of whether they are factual or not. This rational departs from approaches that explain group differences as a result of relative distance between them. Such examples include the biological perspective of genetic distance employed by Vanhanen (1999) and the concept of cultural distance utilised by Fearon (2003) as well as Kelly Labart (2010). The most common fractionalisation variables examined in the literature on political instability denote to ethnic, linguistic, religious and social determinants and will be considered separately hereafter.

The correlation between ethnolinguistic fractionalisation and political instability has been the subject of an extensive body of literature. A widely used source for empirical data is the *Atlas Narodov Mira* published in the year 1964 in the Soviet Union. Manifold studies on this matter (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Collier and Hoeffler and Sambanis, 2005; Easterly and Levine, 1995; Fearon and Laitin, 2003) ground their analysis on the fractionalisation data provided by the atlas or indices based on it (e.g. ethnolinguistic fractionalization index). As Benjamin Reilly points out, however, the quality of the data set is controversial and it displays fundamental weaknesses (Reilly, 2000: 183). José G. Montalvo and Marta Reynal-Querol also propound the possibility that the fractionalisation data in the atlas is constructed incorrectly (2005: 796). Another issue with this dataset concerns the conceptual distinction between ethnicity and language. Both have mostly been compounded in measures of ethnolinguistic fragmentation. There is a technical reason for this conflation, which illustrates the general difficulty in defining and identifying ethnic differences. Anthropologists take language as a determining factor for ethnicity into account (Alesina et al., 2003: 159). That is, in some countries ethnicity is constructed along linguistic lines. That however, holds not true for all cases. This difference can be examined when considering the differences between societies that have a longstanding history of immigration and the ones that are predominantly organised in accordance with triable affiliations. The United States and the United Kingdom, for example, have experienced major immigration for decades, centuries respectively. In many cases this means that the subsequent immigrant generations predominantly, or even exclusively, communicate in English, while their ethnic background remains salient. This phenomenon finds expression in the diverging language and ethnicity fractionalisation scores
produced by the disaggregate fractionalisation index constructed by Alesina et al. (2003: 189). In contrast the individual scores of Ethiopia and Kenya, two countries in with the construction of ethnicity relates strongly to language, display a profoundly higher degree of harmonisation between the scores. In the light of the current paper both factors, ethnic and language differences, prove to be relevant. This follows from the preposition, that societal fragmentation facilitates mobilisation along social fault lines. Further these cleavages, so it is argued, matter in terms of self-identification, irrespective of their factuality. Language, for example, plays a profound role in identity building (Hall, 2011: 34). While ethnicity proves to be a potent vehicle for establishing the psychological categories of the self and the other (Zur, 1991). In addition, religion, as an ubiquitousness cultural factor, has arguably a pronounced role in creating salient differences in cultural practice and has an historical recored as basis for conflict.

These variables will be extracted from the fractionalisation index established by Alesina et al. (2003). The data relevant for our sample was collected from Levinson (1998), The World Factbook15, the World Directory of Minorities16 and the Encyclopedia Britannica17, from 1991-2001. This constitutes a fairly large time interval but it can be assumed that the levels of societal fractionalisation stay reasonably stable over time and only change incrementally (Alesian et al., 2003: 160). The values for ethnic, linguistic and religious fractionalisation will be added to create a composite index. This method has the potential to overestimate overall fractionalisation, when comparing states in which ethnic and linguistic groups coincide with states in which they do not (see explanation above). In order to reduce this effect the mean of the three fractionalisation dimension will be taken to represent the combined level of fractionalisation. This method of index construction does not eradicate the potential for overestimation completely but it does moderate it. When turning to social differences a similar challenges of defining and categorisation arises. It is very difficult to define and measure affiliation with political groups or economic categories. To measure the distribution of income, as a proxy of socioeconomic fractionalisation, the Gini coefficient would be appropriate. However, the Gini index data, provided by the World Bank18, is missing for three of our six cases (Bahrain, Libya and Syria). As a consequence this component will be dropped and a composite index of general fractionalisation as the average of the other three components constructed as follows:

\[
\text{index} = \frac{\text{frac}^{\text{ethn}} + \text{frac}^{\text{lang}} + \text{frac}^{\text{rel}}}{n}
\]

---

It has to be noted, that fractionalisation is not the only measure of societal fragmentation. Somewhat analogous to the principle of the Gini coefficient, a measure of polarisation represents the relative distribution among social groups. With two equally large subgroups the measure of polarisation would be at its maximum, while a society with many small subgroups would display a low level of polarisation (but a high level of fractionalisation). José G. Montalvo and Marta Reynal-Querol argue that the measure of polarisation is more powerful in predicting political conflict (2005). They calculate the level of polarisation based on data from the World Christian Encyclopedia. For the sake of completeness their polarisation data will be used to investigate a possible correlation with the magnitude of political instability. It has to be noted however, that Montalvo and Reynal-Querol use a different dataset from Alesian et al., 2003, and adhere to a method which is in conflict to the one proposed in this thesis. They do take ‘genetic distance’ between groups into consideration, as proposed by Tatu Vanhanen (1999).

### 3.4.4 Independent variable III (military unity)

Central military power is included as a variable due to the military’s potential to either exacerbate or stabilise a situation of political instability. A high degree of political instability is likely to translate the collapse of societal consensus into escalating civil violence. Violence itself is a determining integral of the severity of an instability period. In most countries the security forces in general, and the military in particular, hold the primacy of force. As such the military hold a key role in determining the escalation potential. The factor most important, is the military’s unity in a given conflict situation, regardless of the position it may take in regard to the political situation. A united military represents a deescalating factor and reduces the risk of escalating conflict. This is usually the case, as the power balance is skewed so pivotal in favour of the position that the military supports, that meaningful opposition is futile. On the other hand, if the military cannot sustain unity and experiences a schism, power is distributed among the opposing parties and the escalation potential increase. Whether a given military can sustain unity is in itself a complex and intricate question, not easily answered. However, it can be assumed that it is related to the general concept of professionalism, as it reduces the impact of tribal affiliations and shifts loyalty towards the military as an institution rather than to individual commanders. This paper will borrow the C1: Security Apparatus variable\(^\text{19}\) from the Fragile State Index, published by The Fund for Peace. This indicator

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\(^{19}\) The Fund for Peace, Fragile State Index, C1: SECURITY APPARATUS, retrieved 10.10.2018, form [http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/indicators/c1/](http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/indicators/c1/)
proxies best the concept of professionalism for the countries in our sample. Its aggregated nature introduces factors less relevant for our consideration but nonetheless, no feasible alternative exists at the time of writing.

3.4.5 Independent variable IV (alternatives)

The theoretical framework developed earlier suggests that the availability of a viable alternative to escalating conflict may influence the level of political instability in a given system. Democratic agency can represent such alternative, given it is perceived to allow the citizenry to meaningfully influence politics. The operationalisation of this variable demands a proxy that describes the perceived vitality of the democratic regime. Voter turnout, an indicator often used to proxy political participation, does not satisfy the prerequisites dictated by this framework. First, some states, one of them being sampled here - Egypt -, have in place compulsory voting regimes, which would render this proxy meaningless, due to the distortion introduced by this asymmetry of factors motivating people to vote. Secondly, by no means is it obvious how to interpret a certain level of voter turnout. Besides legislation that requires the constituents to vote, political culture may as well influence weather and why people turn up to vote. Different models have been established to explain and interpret voting behaviour on the basis of e.g. altruism and rational choice but no final consensus has been reached yet. Therefore we will have to turn to another proxy for this variable. In the absence of relevant opinion polls for our sample, there will be reliance on a sub-score of the Freedom in the World index, published by Freedom House. The sub-score ‘Political Rights’ includes three sets of indicators concerning, A. The Electoral Process, B. Political pluralism and Participation as well as C. Functioning of Government. The category can take a score from one to seven, one being ‘most free’ and seven being ‘least free’.

3.5. Method

This work aims at exploring the data relevant to the hypothesis resulting from the reconceptualisation of political instability. To that end a correlation analysis is employed in order to produce empirical evidence that potentially establishes a correlation between the variables, that have been suggested on the basis of the foregone theorising. This can be seen as a pilot study, which is limited to a first examination of the hypothesis’s validity. Based on the results presented in the next chapter, further theoretical elaboration will have to be conducted and variables will likely have to be refined or changed, to allow for a more comprehensive empirical investigation in the future.

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As a result of the concept developed in the course of this thesis any result remains highly probabilistic.

4. Analysis

This chapter is divided into a section presenting the results of the correlation analysis, and a section in which these results will be put into perspective. The first section will be rather prosaic and limit itself to the technical presentation of the variables examined as well as the values for the respective Pearson correlation coefficient and the coefficient of determination. The second section gives more room for the reading of the results and its implications.

4.1 Findings

A correlation analysis has been conducted to find out whether there is any correlations between the operationalised variables suggested in the last chapter. The analysis was computed with Excel, which was deemed sufficient for the first exploration of the data. Table 1.0 shows the variables tested.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fatality_mean</td>
<td>Fatality counts from ACLED, UCDP and Political Instability Task Force Worldwide Atrocities Dataset for 2011 were summed up and the mean was calculated. All three values represent total number killed by civil convict, excluding homicide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude</td>
<td>The CIVTOT variable from the Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) and Conflict Regions, 1946-2016 dataset for 2011. The value is described in the codebook as, ‘Total summed magnitudes of all societal MEPV’. The variable may take a value between 1 (smallest) and 10 (greatest). These values refer to the magnitude of conflict, taking into account indicators such as area and scope of death and destruction and population displacement. For full description find codebook: <a href="http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html">http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Unemployment figures from the Work Bank dataset, for 2010. The indicator is described: ‘Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>Rate of inflation taken from the Work Bank country profiles, for 2010. The indicator is described: ‘Inflation as measured by the annual growth rate of the GDP implicit deflator shows the rate of price change in the economy as a whole. The GDP implicit deflator is the ratio of GDP in current local currency to GDP in constant local currency’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frac_index</td>
<td>Fractionalisation scores as calculated by Alesina et al., 2003. The three values calculated by Alesina et al. on ethnic, linguistic and religious fractionalisation were added up and the mean was calculated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polarisation</td>
<td>Polarisation score as calculated by Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political_Rights</td>
<td>Political rights sub-score as provided from Freedom House, Freedom in the World dataset, for 2010. The scale ranges from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). The sub score Political rights includes the three indicators: A: Electoral Process, B: Political Pluralism and Participation and C: Functioning of Government. For full description find methodology: (<a href="http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html">http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html</a>).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The correlation analysis for Fatality_mean with all other seven variables did not yield meaningful results. The Pearson correlation coefficient ranged from -0.091 to 0.628, with most of the results located in the lower half of that range. Only the variables Fatality_mean and Political_Rights, with the coefficient of 0.628 and a R2 value of 0.3947 showed to have a strong correlation. This lack of meaningful findings is likely related to the data quality of the Fatality_mean variable. The three datasets on which the variable is based, display stark inconsistencies. The fatality counts for the same year and country differ in the most extreme case at 4000%. This illustrates the general difficulty to acquire reliable data on fatality counts, due to different data collection methods and to the problematic data availability in regions of conflict. This issue will be returned to in the next section. For further analysis the Fatality_mean variable was dropped and instead the remaining variables were tested against the Magnitude variable. This change allowed for adding two more cases to the analysis. Iraq and Jordan are two of the Arab countries in the Middle East that have a value >0 for the CIVTOT variable taken from the MEPV and Conflict Regions, 1946-2016 dataset for 2011 (Bahrain and Tunisia were admitted as cases, on the basis of qualitative considerations, in spite of not satisfying the condition CIVTOT= > 0). The data was tested for outliers without identifying any. The correlation coefficient for the variables Magnitude - Unemployment; Magnitude - Inflation; Magnitude - Frac_index; Magnitude - Polarisation; Magnitude - Political_Rights; Magnitude - Security_Apparatus are provided by table 1.1.

Table 1.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Pearson correlation coefficient (r)</th>
<th>Coefficient of determination (R²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude - Unemployment</td>
<td>0.1733</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude - Inflation</td>
<td>0.6058</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude - Frac_index</td>
<td>0.3308</td>
<td>0.1095</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The correlation analysis reveals that of out six variables only two can be said to be meaningfully correlated with the Magnitude variable. The variables Security_Apparatus is correlated to Magnitude at .5864, while the variable Inflation has a correlation of .6058 with Magnitude. Nonetheless, both of the variables have a R2 value above .3. Given the complexity concept investigated, explaining > .3 of the variance represents a meaningful result. The next stronger correlation can be found between Magnitude - Frac_index with .3308 correlation coefficient. This value indicates a rather weak correlation and in addition R2 is only at .1095. The other to results show no or a very weak correlation and have correspondingly low R2 values. Due to the small sample size, that is consequential to the exploratory character of this research, no further statistical tests of significance have been executed.

4.2 Discussion

The discussion is dedicated to the results of the correlation analysis, as they present themselves at the current data availability, and it implications. Further, this section is going to touch upon technical challenges that might have influenced the analysis and what can be learned for future investigations into political instability.

It will be difficult to relate the findings presented here to existing literature, as the variable investigated has not been a prominent subject of research before. What can be said, is that the strong correlation of the Magnitude - Inflation variables can be interpreted to support the first hypothesis, stated in the end of the second chapter. This finding is consistent with Ted Gurr’s observations that similarly assume a positive correlation between deprivation and the magnitude of civil conflict (1968: 1123). The second variable to proxy individual deprivation, Unemployment, does not prove to be relevant. Even though suggested by Saputo (2012: 30) and Collier et al. (2005: 110), among others, to increase the likelihood of civil conflict materialising, the rate of unemployment seems not to have a profound effect on the magnitude of conflict. The second hypothesis does not find expression in the results presented here. In fact, the data on the Magnitude - Political_Rights variables does not lend itself to an interpretation that would support the second
hypothesis. The result for the Magnitude - Frac_index relation, gives reason for cautious optimism to hypothesis three bares some explanatory merit. Further, and proposed in the relevant section of chapter two, the measure of fractionalisation performs profoundly better than its polarisation counterpart. This result would support our rational, that suggested fractionalisation to be a more appropriate indicator, explaining the intensity of conflict. This rational states that, as more fragmented a society is, the easier it becomes to mobilise fractions for conflict. The argument, made by Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005), that higher fractionalisation bares less potential for severe conflict, due to the relative weakness of the individual groups, is called into question on a theoretical and an empirical level. On a theoretical level the argument may be refuted by the following objection: The relative weakness of the individual groups is only relevant if one would assume that there is no possibility of inter-group alliances. In conflict situation previously hostile groups regularly join forces to face other adversaries. In addition, in a situation of prevalent social fragmentation, represented by a high fractionalisation score, conflicts become more messy and a increased number of interests complicates reconciliation. On an empirical level, and as well in contradiction with a preposition made by Kustov (2015), the finding presented in the foregone section suggest that higher fractionalisation lead to more intense societal conflict, while polarisation has no measurable effect. Kustov had stated that societies with higher levels of polarisation experience internal conflict less frequent but the conflicts are more severe (2015: 670). The solid performance of the military professionalism variable, gives way to the interpretation that the effect of the military on conflict magnitude depends on its unity, rather than on its coercive capability. This interpretation would be aligned with the fourth hypothesis. However, the possibility that military professionalism is itself a proxy for, or at least correlated with, coercive capabilities cannot be overlooked. Future research on that issue will have to address this eventuality. The results of the correlation analysis, in its current form, do only partly support the explanatory framework suggested at the end of the second chapter. The data seem to underpin hypothesis one, four and three, three to a lesser extent, but no evidence supporting the second hypothesis could be extracted.

Until now, most literature on political instability has been explanatory in nature. The efforts that were made towards predictive models, have predominantly focused on predicting the timing of insecurity onsets. This paper suggested, based on a refined concept of political instability and its implications, that instead of timing the potential magnitude of possible conflicts can and should be predicted. In order to proceed in this direction, however, a clearly defined concept of conflict magnitude and related data will have to be produced. A fatality count is a fairly crude, although quite common, measure of conflict intensity. In addition, and illustrated by the Fatality_mean indicator used in this analysis, the availability and quality of fatality counts is very limited. One
reason, besides the ones mentioned earlier, is the sensitivity of such data. In a conflict situation most actors have an interest in skewing the known fatality count according to their own interests. In spite of their problematic availability fatality counts have some conceptual advantages over other proxies, as laid out earlier. They do not, however, represent the entirety of what is commonly associated with the magnitude of a conflict. When conceptualising the magnitude or intensity of a conflict one will have to define the corresponding reference point, on which the effect is measured. The intensity of a conflict can be reasonably defined in its relation to its effect on societies functionality. In this context indicators of e.g. infrastructure destruction, impairment of economic activity, displacement of peoples, state operability and casualties instead of fatalities would be useful components of an overall measure of magnitude. The Magnitude of societal-systemic impact and Warfare Categories variables from the MEPV dataset provide a promising example of such an approach. Nonetheless, this tool needs further adjustment in order to pick up low intensity conflict, as is shown by its failure to pick up and conflict in Bahrain and Tunisia for the year 2011.

A clearly defined concept is a prerequisite for meaningful research. A lot of the research on political instability is difficult to compare and reaches contradictory conclusion, merely because no unified definitions is taken as a basis. If we do not agree on common concepts, one looses the ability to meaningfully exchange ideas and progress the theories that could potentially aid us in catastrophes in the future.

5. Conclusion

The conundrum of the seemingly unpredictable dynamics of the ‘Arab spring’ prompted the investigation presented in this thesis. The question of why no scientific models of political instability could predict the ‘Arab spring’ represented the starting point for a thorough investigation into the theoretical concept of political instability. The revision of the relevant literature cumulated in the reconceptualisation of political instability, ensuing a refined definition and explanatory framework. This thesis defined political instability as the interplay of factors, that translate a collapse of societal consensus into an outcome. Knowing the socioeconomic variables constituting the level of political instability, so it is hypothesise, allows for predicting the possible magnitude of potential conflict. The explanatory framework is organised according to the variables’ probability to increase or decrease the escalation potential. These factors include, the individuals’ propensity to invest, informed by the associated opportunity costs. The opportunity cost, in turn, depends on the level of deprivation an individual suffers as well as on the availability of viable alternative.
Additionally, social fragmentation and military unity are taken into consideration as two factors that might profoundly influence the escalation potential. This new adaptations had profound implications for the concepts application as a predictive tool as well as for the methods appropriate for quantifying it. Consequential to the approach’s idiosyncrasies, the level of instability represents a potential latent to a political system. When political instability materialises as conflict, the conflict’s magnitude can be observed and allows us make inferences about the level of instability present in the system. Hypotheses where developed to test the explanatory framework. In order to investigate the merits of the refined concept and its explanation, an exploratory study with limited cases was conducted. Such a limited analysis does not allow for inductive generalisations, but it does provide a first test of the arguments’ plausibility and gives orientation for more extensive future analyses of the topic. The correlation analysis gave reason for cautious optimism, concerning the validity of the concept. Two of the four explanatory variables exhibited a strong correlation with the magnitude of conflict. Another variable was weakly associated with conflict intensity, while the fourth one did not show any relation with the dependent variable. This findings may be used in a variety of ways to further sharpen the theoretical concept, the explanatory framework and the tools to measure it. The variable representing the alternatives to civil conflict either needs to be dropped for future analyses or a different proxy will have to be established. Another realisation relates to the development of the depended variable and its proxies. This concept might, if further developed, result in a model that allows us to predict the potential magnitude of future conflicts and as such would contribute greatly to the research on political instability. The effect that political instability exhibits through conflicts have devastating effects on individual lives and human development as a whole. If we were to develop models to reliably identify the potential magnitude of future conflicts, the international community could react appropriately when a conflict ignites and allocate resources to alleviate the worst consequences.

6. Bibliography


