

Militarization of Law Enforcement: A Look into the Middle East

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My research project investigates the militarization of law enforcement, analyzing the way in which civilian police forces have become more militarized and the way militaries have taken on law enforcement responsibilities in the Middle East. The latter is termed “constabularization.” Various features of militaries and police forces, including weapons, training, organizational structure, and jurisdiction influence key features of democracy, including citizen security, human rights, and police reform. I will work with Professor Gustavo Flores-Macías, who has worked on studying the extent of militarization of law enforcement and its political and social consequences in Latin America, as well as its broader implication on police reform and democratic backsliding. Professor Flores-Macías has primarily documented human rights complaints in Mexico, finding that complaints increased by 160% due to militarized of federal security forces. However, there is still a lack of systemically studied data that documents human rights abuses related to militarization across communities in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, Ecuador, Venezuela, and many more.

My research will more specifically focus in on the Middle East, analyzing the range of militarization of law enforcement, from militarized police, paramilitary police, and finally to the most extreme level of constabularized military forces. The Middle East offers an interesting point of analysis given the various range of governments that exist in the region, including parliamentary systems, constitutional monarchies, absolute monarchies, and military-led authoritarian governments. I will first provide a broad scope of analysis of the extent of militarization across the 16 countries considered to be part of the Middle East, as well as five countries in North Africa. I will look at how the type of government influences the extent of militarization; how the role of the military in the government influences the way it interacts with

society; the types of crimes dealt with; the types of weapons used; and finally, the consequences of such militarization on human rights. The latter often involves human rights abuses against women, children, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. I will do the same for understanding how police have become more militarized, while also looking at how police training may or may not have shaped police abuses. My research will focus on the past two decades, identifying how the extent of militarization has shifted before and after the Arab Spring, as well as current changes with the COVID-19 pandemic. This part of my research will also involve a literature review of research that has already been done on militarization, and also identify countries where data on human rights abuses is unavailable.

During the second stage of my research, I will focus in on Israel, Egypt, and Syria, three countries that offer a range and nuance of differing political, social, and geographic circumstances. Each country in the Middle East often has various forms of security forces at work – be it militias, border police, civilian guards, or militaries that often act as government officials. Often times, terrorist threats add an additional layer of security forces at work that further blur the line between the police and military. After evaluating the differences in levels of militarization, I will compare the categories of human rights abuses across the three countries, which could include police brutality and military involvement in responses to civilian protests, illegal detentions or arrests, home demolitions, forced disappearances of dissidents, and sexual violence. Analyzing how the extent of constabularization affects differing levels of human rights abuses across various minority groups, as Professor Gustavo Flores-Macías has done in Latin America, has not yet been systematically studied in the Middle East.

As an example, Israel faces issues and has received widespread criticism in the ways its police and military forces treat Palestinians, Arab-Israelis, and other minority groups. The

increased militarization has also affected Jewish-Israeli citizens, as seen often in Ultra-Orthodox riots, and has thus diminished the quality of democracy in the state. The context of Israel is particularly unique, and it is important to understand the causes and policy work that led to increased militarization in comparison to other countries in the Middle East, as well as in Latin America, and even in comparison to the United States. Confronting the biases that might exist in police systems, identifying the communities that exhibit the most police violence, the forms of such violence, and understanding the impact it has on human rights is essential to understanding the danger of the blurred line between militaries and civilian security forces.