When Domestic Politics and International Relations Intermesh: Subordinated Publics’ Factional Support Within Layered Power Structures

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Using social dominance theory and structural balance theory to analyze the political and psychological perspectives of subordinated peoples, we argue that struggles between dominant and subordinated polities are embedded in layered power structures. In such contexts, it is important to examine publics’ political desires and interests in relation to their political elites’ positions or choices of political tactics and allegiances. To illustrate these arguments, we used random urban samples surveyed in March 2010 to examine Lebanese and Syrian citizens’ favorability toward their governments and Hezbollah (a quasi-government faction with significant relations to the governments of Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and the United States). As theorized, citizens’ favorability depended on (i) how much they view their government as providing services for them, (ii) opposition to general group dominance, (iii) opposition to US oppression, and (iv) their governments’ alignments vis-à-vis the US. Implications for political psychology and international relations theory are discussed.

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In a handful of powerful sovereign nations such as the UK and the United States, the political coalitions that vie for citizens’ support are largely domestic and autonomous. That is, political parties are indigenous to those nation-states and may be banned from receiving material or other support from outside their nations. This situation, however, does not characterize much of the world, or even much of the history of nations. For example, during the American Revolution, the opposing sides were provided with financial, material, strategic, and ideological support from France, Britain, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Nations) and other Native Americans, and other colonies. Further, that revolution did not equally serve the elite, non-elite, and oppressed members of the nascent American society, in large part because of the alliances between internal political factions and external ones (cf. Zinn 1980/2003). More recently, the US armament of the Taliban to drive the Soviets from Afghanistan and US support for the Contras to defeat the socialist Sandinistas in Nicaragua are two cases in which external political entities provided significant military, financial, and ideological support to sides engaged in domestic power struggles (see Plisuk and Zatti 2006 for other examples). Liberation movements provide cross-border intellectual support to one another as well (e.g., Alquwaizani 2011). These examples problematize the traditional assumptions (Marsh, Jennings, Croft, Wincott, and Buller 1999) that domestic political contests and international relations are separate, that the only significant power struggles are those among the “great powers” or “inter-core” international relations (as in Waltz 2010; Ikenberry 2011), and that dominant politics are necessary for the stability of the world order (e.g., Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998). Rather, many contemporary political conflicts must be understood as stemming jointly from the power struggles between political factions within nations and those factions’ intertwined relations to external political entities, who may themselves be engaged in a power struggle (e.g., Starr 1994; Hinnebusch 2002; Fakhoury 2011).

In other words, many contemporary political dynamics can have multiple simultaneous sources of influence at work: (i) “domestic” contests between more and less powerful groups or elites and non-elites within nations or regions, (ii) “liberation” contests in which client states and nonstate factions struggle for self-determination with superpowers and former colonizers, (iii) support of domestic factions from external entities such as other political organizations, other governments, or corporations, and (iv) contests between external hegemonic powers. As such, a number of counter-dominance movements can be viewed simultaneously as (i) indigenous struggles for self-determination and economic betterment of non-elites, (ii) significantly inspired by and supported by “foreign” factions, and (iii) responses to or involvement by proxy in the larger geopolitical hegemony in which developed nations have dominated and fought over “Third World” nations (e.g., Henley 1995; Suso 2010). Analyses of contemporary politics, especially in the developing world, must acknowledge that political factions are likely to have multiple potential roles, goals, and audiences because they are situated in a layered power structure.

To fully understand such political dynamics, the beliefs and attitudes of the people in the center of such complex power struggle structures cannot be overlooked, for even the most brutal dictatorial regime relies on the support of at least some of the populace (Kinne 2005; Geddes 2006). Collective (public) motivations, interests, norms, perceptions and beliefs, power, and engagement are all elements of the popular influence on foreign policymaking (e.g., Entman 2004:13). Social psychology is well suited for studying these components of public support, because it focuses on psychological characteristics that are inherently social and binding for a group, such as identity, normative frameworks, and shared power environments (e.g., Goldgeier and Tetlock 2011). In fact, elite mobilization of constituents and constituents’ participation in collective action
have been shown to depend on the motivations, sense of efficacy, norms, goals, expected outcomes, and moral narratives that the public holds or is positioned by elites to hold (Azzi 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Rubin, Pruitt, and Kim 2004; Chong and Druckman 2007).

An accounting of popular influence on foreign policy is especially important for nations under the influence of “core” nations (the so-called “periphery”), because for them, there is no clear distinction between domestic and international politics. For low power nations, foreign policy involves dealing with and being dependent on menacing dominant nations (e.g., Goldgeier and McFaul 1992), a situation quite distinct from that of “core” actors. This makes foreign policymaking critical to the everyday citizen and to intrastate and nonstate factions, more so than in the politics of highly powerful nations.

Just as understanding international relations (IR) by considering only “great powers” and their elites is inadequate, so too is simply documenting public opinion without understanding where support for various political factions comes from; that is, what needs, interests, and desires supporters of particular factions hope to fulfill with their allegiance. This sometimes-forgotten public’s political factional preferences can be expected to reflect both their domestic concerns, such as whether their government or local factions provide opportunities, justice, rights, and security and how such parties are situated in the international balances of power. For example, Lebanese and Syrian citizens’ support for their own governments and regional political factions such as Hezbollah may be influenced proximally by perceptions that the organizations provide physical and economic security. Support for domestic and regional political factions may also be influenced more distally by those factions’ perceived relations with external political actors such as Russia, Iran, the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Citizens’ support or opposition to such factions in turn influences geopolitics. Understanding the situated psychology behind the political factional preferences of people living in countries enmeshed in such international webs is an important element of both domestic and international politics. In the next section, we consider the psychological situation of subordinated peoples and what goals they have before examining our specific case.

Counter-Dominance Desires among Oppressed Peoples

For citizens in this layered power structure, their support of political factions may be especially informed by their psychological orientation toward group-based dominance. Such orientations stem from their position in the group hierarchy (e.g., Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle 1994). As social dominance theory predicts, there is empirical evidence around the world that people in subordinated group positions, such as oppressed ethnic, racial, or religious groups and women, reject group hegemony more than people in dominant group positions (Lee, Pratto, and Johnson 2011; Pratto, Sidanius, and Levin 2006; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). Likewise, some studies show that members of lower economic classes reject group dominance more than members of middle and upper economic classes (Pratto et al. 1994; Pratto and Stewart 2012).

From the standpoint of the subordinated, we can understand how some oppressed people adopt a “liberation” psychology resisting not only domestic oppression (e.g., Montiel and Rodriguez 2009) but also the international power dynamics that produce oppressive environs. Like other people, subordinated people are aware of their own survival needs (e.g., Braizat 2002; Davies and Pro Poor Centre 2007). Their experience of struggling to meet those needs in the face of the exclusionary and discriminatory practices and policies of group dominance systems help them to both recognize power inequality and to reject ideologies and frames that would legitimize it (e.g., Pratto 1999; Sidanius, Henry, Pratto, and Levin 2004; Pratto et al. 2006). Group dominance systems also tend
to segregate dominant and subordinate groups and to emphasize the different-
ness and un-deservingness of subordinates (e.g., Pratto and Stewart 2012). This
has an important socio-political consequence that is contrary to group dominance,
namely awareness of subordinate social identity (e.g., Hartmann, Gerteis, and
Croll 2009) and of the discrimination that accompanies it (e.g., Operario and
Fiske 2001). When subordinated groups recognize their subordinate identity and
its contrast to the reputation and material power position of dominant groups,
they recognize the injustice of the denial of their group’s needs and rights (Major
1994). Considering how their group position compares to that of superior groups
increases subordinated people’s identification with and commitment to their own
group (Ouwerkerk and Ellemers 2002) and makes them more likely to reject dom-
inant ideologies that disempower and obfuscate their groups’ needs (e.g., Lee
et al. 2011). In short, group dominance systems have inherent structural qualities,
including power-linked identities, dominant ideologies, and group inequality, that
provoke psychological processes such as social comparison, identity salience, and
rejection of dominant ideologies among subordinated groups. Such psychological
processes can lead people in subordinated situations to develop liberation or
counter-dominant psychologies.

Balance Theory

We draw upon one other general social-psychological theory to understand the
attitudes citizens in multi-layered power structures may hold toward political fac-
tions, namely balance theory (Heider 1946). Our explication of social dominance
theory suggests that citizens of subordinated (“periphery”) nations may have a
mostly negative orientation toward dominant (“core”) nations. For example, sur-
evys of Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Indonesia, and Pakistan have repeatedly
shown near consensual disapproval of US foreign policy toward Muslim and Arab
nations, toward US relations to Israel and Palestine, and of US dominance over
world affairs and lack of attention to Arabs’ and Muslims’ interests (e.g., Kohut
2005; Wike and Poushter 2010; Pew Global Attitudes Project 2011). When citizens
of a subordinated nation have negative orientations toward a “core” nation, if the
“core” nation has a positive relationship to a given domestic political faction, bal-
ance theory implies that citizens will have a negative orientation toward the faction.
Likewise, if citizens have a negative orientation toward a “core” nation and the
domestic political faction also has a negative orientation toward the “core” nation,
balance theory predicts that citizens will have a positive orientation toward the fac-
tion. Should relations between the attitude objects change, citizens’ political orien-
tations and actions are also likely to change (e.g., Visser 1994). Should a faction
have a complex or ambivalent relationship to a “core” nation, balance theory
implies that citizens’ orientations toward the faction will also be complex or ambiv-
alent (Heider 1946). Such ambivalence may weaken the strength of attitudes pre-
dicted by balance theory. To summarize, for citizens in subordinated nations who
live in layered power structures, we posit that their preferences for domestic politi-
cal actors may be informed by their views of how well those actors help them meet
their basic needs, by those actors’ external alliances with hegemonic nations, as
well as citizens’ own tolerance or intolerance of group dominance. To illustrate
our theoretical argument, we compared Lebanese and Syrian citizens’ favorability
toward their governments, because at the time of our study, the governments dif-
fered substantially in how opposed they were perceived to be toward the United
States. We also measured their favorability toward Hezbollah, a significant political
actor which has positioned itself as a defender of Arabs against Israeli and US hege-
mony. To understand whether counter-dominance motives influence attitudes
toward these political actors, we measured citizens’ general orientation toward
group dominance and their concerns about US hegemony.
Before explaining our predictions, we summarize the political contexts of Lebanese and Syrians. Although Syria and Lebanon share a long cultural and political history, their twentieth-century treatment by Western colonial powers differs, and indeed this is partly what led to their division by the West into separate states (Tibawi 1969:329–337). For over four decades, Lebanon has been repeatedly interfered with, invaded, and bombed by the United States and its ally, Israel (e.g., Richman 1991). Thus, a significant portion of Lebanese find US influence and/or interference reprehensible and any hints of allegiance by their government to the United States as unacceptable (e.g., El-Husseini 2010). This “rejectionist” camp however faces a different sector of society that has historically viewed themselves as more Western-oriented than other Arabs are (e.g., Levin, Henry, Pratto, and Sidanius 2003; Sidanius et al. 2004) and have typically derived political (or military) support from the West, including the United States. Although in previous decades, these camps have split along sectarian lines, more recently, the ideological divisions do not map well to religious sects. Where levels of external intervention and domestic fragmentation are high, the central government of a nation is likely to be lacking in legitimacy and strength (Schock 1996). This has certainly been the case in Lebanon, as evidenced by the succession of ephemeral coalition governments since 2005 (see also Failed States Index ratings for Lebanon, Fund for Peace 2010).

At the time of our study in March 2010, the Lebanese government was divided between the “March 14” and “March 8” coalitions, with a parallel divide in the populace reflecting each camps’ stance toward the United States and its influence (see top panel of Figure 1). Applying balance theory to each of the agents, each small triad is balanced (e.g., March 14 and March 8 camps oppose one another, with March 14 tolerating the United States and March 8 rejecting the United States), but all of the larger triads (e.g., March 14 coalition’s governing faction, March 14 supporters, and March 8 supporters) contain ambivalence, as shown on the diagonals in Figure 1 (top). Thus, the only balanced, and therefore stable, relationships are predicated on Lebanese internal divisions. By implication, US political influence in the region contributes to divisions within Lebanon, and such divisions in turn hamper the legitimacy and effectiveness of Lebanese governments in the eyes of Lebanese citizens.

During the past four decades, Syria was often allied with enemies of the United States, including USSR and Iran, and has opposed US influence in the region far more than Lebanese governments have (e.g., Samii 2008; Colombo 2011). The strength of the Syrian government depends on the control of the military and internal security and intelligence agencies, which police citizens’ speech and enforce displays of approval of the government (e.g., Wedeen 1999). As the Syrian government positions itself as rejecting the United States (El-Husseini 2010), which we expect is compatible with citizens’ views of the United States, Syrians can approve of their government’s policies regarding US influence (see bottom panel of Figure 1). Further, the compatible stance that the Syrian government and Hezbollah take toward the United States and toward each other enables Syrian citizens’ rejection of the United States to lend favorability to both their government and Hezbollah (see bottom panel of Figure 1).

Given these Lebanese and Syrian relations with the United States, especially prior to the 2011 Syrian rebellion when the present data were collected, one would expect Syrians to mistrust the United States and its influence more than Lebanese on average. However, citizens in both nations could be expected to dislike their own governments to the extent these governments were perceived to endorse and appease the United States. In this sense, citizens’ favorability toward their domestic government is also an international issue. Using balance theory
structurally to consider citizens, domestic factions, regional factions, and “core” powers can identify likely political divisions and instability across all levels.

Hezbollah is a significant, if complex, political actor in the Levant. One could argue that Hezbollah was born of a kind of reactive nationalism (Henley 1995)—a regional nationalism in response to colonialism, and a response to social and economic inequality between Shi’a and other Muslims within the Arab subordinate relation to Israel and the United States (Salamey and Pearson 2007). Hezbollah’s support thus also connects inextricably to both the domestic and international domains.

Hezbollah can be factually characterized in multiple ways (Norton 2000; Arsan 2006; El-Husseini 2010). Hezbollah is simultaneously a large non-governmental provider of social and religious services within Lebanon, a para-military organization, and a significant party bloc within Lebanon’s democratically elected parliament (e.g., Early 2006). Hezbollah’s social services include providing education, health clinics, support for war veterans, and financial assistance to the destitute in southern Lebanon (e.g., Flanigan and Abdel-Sadr 2009), and city planning and neighborhood reconstruction in Beirut following the 2006 war with Israel (Fawaz 2009). The US State Department classifies Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, and in part because of Syria’s support of Hezbollah, also classifies Syria as

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**Fig. 1. Balance Theory Diagram of Relationships between Citizens and Political Factions in Lebanon (Top Panel) and Syria (Bottom Panel)**

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a state sponsor of terrorism (US State Department 2008). Among numerous other anti-US or anti-Israeli violent actions, as part of the “July War” between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, Hezbollah rocket-bombed northern Israel and killed and captured Israeli soldiers. This war garnered considerable international and regional attention for Hezbollah. Moreover, many Arabs viewed Hezbollah’s efficacy at getting Israel to abandon its occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000 as a significant means of restoring Arab pride and respect (e.g., Norton 2000). Given Hezbollah’s military capabilities and control of some areas of Lebanon (e.g., Burkholder 2006), the national Lebanese government does not monopolize control of violence or territory. Although other sects also maintain militias and function semi-autonomously from the government, Hezbollah is widely seen as having substantial influence (e.g., Saad-Ghorayeb 2002). In fact, some view Hezbollah as functioning as a quasi-government in that it has de facto control over territory, and provides infrastructure (e.g., urban planning and reconstruction) and civic organization as well as social services and security (e.g., Early 2006; Fawaz 2009). Hezbollah also enjoys popular support in the electorate. At the time of our data collection, Hezbollah or its close allies held 11 of 30 Cabinet ministries, enough to collapse the government by withdrawing, as it did in January, 2011.

Hezbollah’s anti-Israeli and anti-US rhetoric and behavior may, at first glance, seem to indicate a desire to harm dominants. The broader geopolitical context, however, problematizes such simplistic interpretations. This kind of speech and action is inherently connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Arabs’ perception of the US bias toward Israel, and the US-maintained imbalance of power perceived between Israel and the Arab world (e.g., El-Husseini 2010). A different goal that is widely understood by Arab scholars is one of returning things to balance, of providing Palestinians, and by extension, Arabs, with a viable face-saving sovereign territory to re-establish the shattered Palestinian nation and ease the humiliation and oppression of invasion and occupation (e.g., Early 2006; El-Husseini 2010). These motives are more consistent with egalitarian resistance goals. Other rhetoric and political positioning, especially coming out of Syria in recent decades, speaks of autonomy striving—accepting isolation, sanctions, and marginalization rather than submitting to the dominant West (Hinnebusch 2005). Thus, to some segments of the Lebanese and Syrian publics, Hezbollah may be viewed as a promoter of Arab pride and respect, a developer of Arab societies, and as an attenuator of international hegemony.

Testing Counter-Dominance Motives in Citizens’ Favorability toward Political Factions in Lebanon and Syria

Starting from the viewpoint of people in subordinated situations, we theorized that their preferences for certain political factions would depend on how well they perceive the power exercised by those factions as enabling citizens to meet their needs and on the factions’ external alliances as fulfilling their goals regarding counter-dominance. These goals inform people’s sensitivity to and relative acceptance or rejection of both domestic and international hegemony. In our historical context (data were collected in March 2010), Syrians and Lebanese lived in functioning nation-states in which citizens expected their governments to provide important things to their societies, including security, economic opportunity, and justice. To the extent that citizens viewed their governments as fulfilling this domestic contract, we expected them to support their governments.

However, we also expected the external political alliances of Lebanon vs. Syria to produce different attitudes in their publics regarding the factions in relation to their counter-dominance motives. In March 2010, the Syrian government and its public posture could be said to be decidedly anti-United States, so we
expected Syrians concerned about American oppression to support their
government. We predicted that—due to “international concerns” related to the
hegemony of the United States over Lebanon and Syria—people who oppose
group-based dominance in general, that is, are low on social dominance
orientation (Pratto et al. 1994), would support the anti-US Syrian government,
but would weakly oppose the Lebanese government, which was split in terms of
its stance toward the United States. In other words, we expected different net
effects of being counter-dominance oriented on favorability toward the Syrian
versus the Lebanese governments.

In both Syria and Lebanon, given Hezbollah’s antagonistic history with both
the United States and its ally, Israel, we expected those most concerned about
US dominance to favor Hezbollah most. Further, because people low on social
dominance orientation should oppose the global hierarchy in which Arabs are
subordinated (e.g., Sidanius et al. 2004), and because Hezbollah, in both words
and deeds, has positioned itself as a defender of oppressed Arabs against the
United States and its allies, we expect them to support Hezbollah, but this
should happen mainly through concerns over US oppression. These patterns
can be shown in correlations among our measures.

Hypotheses
Our theorizing leads us to hypothesize that the Syrian and Lebanese publics’
favorability toward various political factions will be influenced by those factions’
relations to one another. We tested whether participants’ attitudes toward the
US government, their own national government, and Hezbollah correlated in a
way compatible with relationships among those factions. According to balance
theory, the product of the signs of these three correlations should be positive if
the relationships are stable. Further, we hypothesized that citizens’ favorability
toward domestic factions will be underlain by their orientation toward inter-
group dominance, mediated through concerns about American hegemony. How-
ever, we also predicted that the national government’s relation to the United
States would moderate this effect. Participants should be more favorable toward
the Syrian government the more opposed to group dominance in general and
the more concerned over American oppression they were. On the other hand,
we expected Lebanese people low on social dominance orientation to have con-
cerns about US oppression, but given Lebanon’s impotent security apparatus
and divided government, we expected a weaker and negative relationship
between concerns over US oppression and favorability of government in contrast
to the positive relationship in the Syrian sample. This sign change between the
Syrian and Lebanese samples should be apparent in the structural equation
models we tested.

In both Lebanon and Syria, we expected a pathway from low social dominance
orientation to opposition to US oppression to favorability toward Hezbollah. Omit-
ting a direct path between favorability of government and favorability of Hezbollah
in both models, lets us test whether their expected positive (Syria) and negative
(Lebanon) correlations are accounted for by concerns over US oppression.

Further, our models included a means of testing whether citizens’ attitudes
toward their government depend on their orientation toward the domestic con-
tract. In both samples, we expected citizens’ perceived provision of government
services to predict favorability toward the government. However, given the cor-
rupt, laissez-faire government of Lebanon, which serves Lebanese elites more
than others (Zaazaa 2010), and its majority appeasing the United States, we
expected that social dominance orientation would be positively related to favor-
ability toward the government. People higher on social dominance orientation
in Lebanon should view the government as providing better services, which in
turn should predict favorability of the government.
Method

Procedure and Participants

Under our instructions, Zogby International interviewed 158 residents of Beirut, 17 residents of Tripoli, 12 residents of Tyre, and 11 residents of Aley, Lebanon (N = 198 Lebanese citizens) and 200 residents of Damascus, Syria in March 2010. Participants were selected randomly from strata designed to guarantee religious and gender diversity in the samples; one participant in each household was randomly selected using a Kish grid (next-birthday method). Among the Lebanese participants were 100 men and 98 women; they identified their religious sects as Sunni (n = 61), Shi’a (n = 29), Druze (n = 13), non-specified Muslim (n = 11), Maronite Christian (n = 61), Roman Catholic (n = 9), or Orthodox Christian (n = 14). Among Syrian participants were 100 men and 100 women. They identified their religious sects as Sunni (n = 118), Shi’a (n = 6), Druze (n = 3), non-specified Muslim (n = 35), Roman Catholic (n = 26), Orthodox Christian (n = 11), or other (n = 1). Interviews were conducted in Arabic by a same-gender interviewer; the translation from English was provided by Zogby and checked by us. Interviews lasted approximately 1 hour. Only those measures relevant to the present hypotheses are explained here.

Measures

Favorability Toward Own Government, the US Government, and Hezbollah

Participants indicated how they felt about “the government in this country,” “the American government,” and “Hezbollah” as very unfavorable (1), unfavorable (2), neutral (3), favorable (4), or very favorable (5). Favorability toward own government and Hezbollah served as our main outcome measures in our models. Participants from Lebanon (M = 3.60, SD = 1.43) and from Syria (M = 3.70, SD = 1.35) did not differ reliably in their favorability toward Hezbollah, F < 1. However, Damascenes favored their government (M = 4.22, SD = 0.99) more than Lebanese favored theirs (M = 3.26, SD = 1.19), F (1, 395) = 75.5, p < .001, η² = 0.16. Both samples had unfavorable ratings of the US government, though the Lebanese less so (M = 1.74, SD = 1.05) than the Damascenes (M = 1.56, SD = 0.87), F (1, 398) = 3.96, p < .05, η² = 0.01.

Perceived Government Services

Participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with two statements, “People like you are treated unjustly by the government,” (reverse-coded) and “The government provides the things you and your family need” as strongly disagree (1), disagree (2) are neutral (3), agree (4), or strongly agree (5; α = 0.75 in Lebanon, α = 0.80 in Syria). On average Syrians felt their government provided more services to them (M = 3.93, SD = 1.11) than Lebanese did (M = 2.72, SD = 1.05), F (1, 398) = 123.51, p < .001, η² = 0.24.

Concerns About US Oppression

Using the same response scale, all participants rated their agreement with the following two statements: “I oppose American dominance in the world,” and “Arabs deserve more respect from the American government” (reversed; α = 0.66 in Lebanon, α = 0.74 in Syria). Participants from both Lebanon (M = 4.25, SD = 0.82) and Syria (M = 4.32, SD = 0.86) agreed with these statements on average, and samples did not differ, F < 1.

Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance orientation was measured using six of the 16 items from the social dominance orientation scale (Pratto et al. 1994) assessed on the same
5-point agree–disagree response scale as previous items. The three con-trait items, which were reversed coded, were “Group equality should be our ideal,” “We should increase social equality,” and “It would be good if all groups could be equal.” The three pro-trait items were “Superior groups should dominate inferior groups,” “Inferior groups should stay in their place,” and “It’s probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.” The scale was internally reliable in Lebanon (α = 0.90) and in Syria (α = 0.84). These items were administered after unrelated personality and religious identification measures, and before the measures concerning the United States, own government, or Hezbollah, to avoid priming/framing effects. As the means were low (M = 1.75, SD = 0.83 in Lebanon, M = 1.73, SD = 0.75 in Syria), this measure can be considered to assess counter-dominance motivations.

Participants were also asked to name their religious sect and favorite political party. A majority of the Syrian sample and 20% of the Lebanese sample did not name a party, so we were unable to use this measure in our analyses. Given the frequencies of religious sects, we were unable to test for sectarian differences in Syria. In Lebanon, contrasts between each major sect (Shi’a, Sunni, and Maronite) and the others showed that while there were predictable mean differences between sects in terms of concern over US oppression and support for Hezbollah (with larger means among the Shi’a), there were no moderating effects of sect on the relationships modeled.

Results

Balanced Attitudes Regarding “Core” and Regional Political Factions

Many of our hypotheses are predicated on the assumption that our participants hold the US government in negative regard. In fact, the mean scores of favorability toward the American government show that participants were decidedly unfavorable. One simple means of testing whether balance theory applies to citizens’ orientations toward political factions is to correlate attitudes toward the United States, own national government, and Hezbollah. Figure 2 shows correlations for the Lebanese and Syrian samples. As we anticipated, there was a weak but positive correlation between favorability toward the Lebanese and US governments and a negative correlation between favorability toward the Syrian and US governments. For both samples, the sets of relationships are balanced, but in different configurations. Although both Syrian and Lebanese participants were more supportive of Hezbollah the less they supported the US government, the relationship between Hezbollah attitudes and own government attitudes was positive for Syria and negative for Lebanon. All three sets of parallel correlations were reliably different between the Lebanese versus Syrian samples, Zs > 4.44, ps < .001.

A weakness of our study is that we did not separately measure citizens’ support of the domestic and the foreign policy stances of different domestic factions. However, we did measure participants’ orientations toward dominance, both in terms of social dominance orientation and in terms of concerns over US oppression, and their perception of how well their governments provide services to them. Our structural equation models employ these variables to predict support for one faction (Hezbollah) in comparison with support for national governments.

Counter-Dominance and Attitudes Toward Political Factions

Correlations among the variables in our model (see Table 1) confirm our predictions. In both samples, as expected, people more opposed to group-based
Syria

US Government

Own national Government

-.39

-.30

Hezbollah

.58

Lebanon

US Government

Own national Government

.15

-.64

-.15

Hezbollah

FIG 2. Correlations among Favorability toward the American Government, Own National Government, and Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria Samples (All \( p < .01 \))

dominance in general also were more concerned about US oppression of Arabs. In Syria, social dominance orientation correlated negatively with favorability toward government and toward Hezbollah. In Lebanon, social dominance orientation correlated positively with favorability toward government and negatively with favorability toward Hezbollah. Further, in Syria, the more participants were concerned about US oppression, the more they liked both their government and Hezbollah. In contrast and as expected, in Lebanon, the more participants were concerned about US oppression, the more they favored Hezbollah and slightly disfavored the Lebanese government.

Our theoretical analysis suggested a slightly different model for Syria than for Lebanon. Both, however, included social dominance orientation as the most fundamental variable, and attitudes toward Hezbollah and toward government as the final measures, mediated by perceived government services and concerns over US oppression. For comparability, the measurement models used the same measured variables for the latent constructs of government services (two items), social dominance orientation (six items), and concerns over US dominance (two
items) as described above (see Table 2) for both samples. We correlated the errors of the pro-trait items for social dominance orientation to account for method variance as recommended by Xin and Chi (2010). We used maximum likelihood estimation in Amos 18.0 to test the fit of the structural equation models separately in the Lebanese and Syrian samples.

Our model for the Syrian sample positioned social dominance orientation as exogenous, which predicted both perceived government services and concerns over US oppression. Both these mediators were allowed to predict favorability of government, and concerns over US oppression were allowed to predict favorability of Hezbollah. The path from social dominance orientation to perceived government services was unreliable, \( p > .10 \), so we removed it from the final model. The final model described the data adequately; the ratio of \( \chi^2 / df \) was under 2.0, and several other fit indicators were within generally accepted ranges (see Figure 3). The path coefficients shown in Figure 3 show that people who were more counter-dominance oriented were more concerned about US oppression, and this was a strong positive predictor of favorability of government and
favorability of Hezbollah. Perceived government services also predicted favorability toward government. These results show that concerns over US oppression were sufficient to account for the covariance between favorability toward each faction. Further, adding direct paths from SDO to favorability of either the government, or Hezbollah, or both did not change the RMSEA more than 0.008. (Further, the high collinearity between SDO and concerns over US oppression make the mediated model most parsimonious in the Syrian sample.) In other words, as predicted, concerns over US oppression fully mediated the influence of SDO on favorability of both factions.

As was the case for our Damascene sample, we expected Lebanese who were counter-dominance oriented to be concerned about US oppression, which in turn should predict favorability toward Hezbollah. Unlike in Syria, we expected concerns over US oppression to be negatively but weakly related to favorability toward the (divided) government. As in Syria, we expected perceived government services among Lebanese to predict favorability toward the government, although in Lebanon, we expected people higher rather than lower on social dominance orientation to perceive that the government provides for them. The results shown in Figure 4 confirm these predictions. The model described the data adequately (see fit indicators in Figure 4). Further, when we added direct paths from SDO to favorability of either or both factions, the direct paths were unreliable, $p > .09$, and models did not fit substantially better than the mediated model, $p > .05$. Therefore, as with the Damascene sample, the influence of SDO on favorability toward Hezbollah and the government was fully mediated.

People who sympathize with Hezbollah might be more likely to adopt its rejectionist ideology (El-Husseini 2010). Therefore, we also tested alternative models in which favorability toward Hezbollah drove concerns over US oppression and favorability toward the government, keeping other aspects of these models the same. Results showed that model fits in both samples were inadequate (e.g., RMSEAs > .08; $p$close < .008).
**Discussion**

Given that sub-state political factions have changed the foreign policy of great powers (e.g., the US withdrawal from Lebanon following the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut), it should be non-controversial to assert that international relations must incorporate not only nations of the “periphery,” but regional, sub-state, and popular political desires (see also Starr 1994). The question theoretically is how to frame these relations. We asserted that understanding the layered power structure and the dynamic potential of actors at all levels, the ways those power structures afford or thwart the meeting of human needs and desires, as well as the psychological motivations of the public, can help account for the cross-level links between domestic and international politics. Drawing on balance theory, we argued that citizens’ stances toward different political factions would be mutually compatible, but would depend on the perceived quality of the relationship between the factions. This is why we predicted that results in the Syrian and Lebanese samples would differ due to their governments’ different relations with the United States. We also argued that people in oppressive contexts may be especially sensitive to group-based dominance and that such an orientation, combined with people’s view of the various factions’ alliances in the domestic, regional, or global political hegemony, would also influence what factions they favor. In discussing the case examined in the present study, we illustrate how attending to the sources of publics’ support for factions, as well as to their ideological and strategic allegiances, is essential to understanding political dynamics.

**Support for Government**

Most simply, citizens in functioning states should support their government to the extent they perceive it as providing for their needs. We found that both Lebanese and Syrian samples showed a strong relation from the perception that the government provides services for its citizens to favorability toward that...
government. Governments differ in how broadly or narrowly they serve publics or domestic elites, and this posture appeals to different leanings in the public. The correlations in Table 1 showed that Syrians favored their socialist government more if they were low on social dominance orientation, whereas Lebanese participants favored their laissez-faire government more to the extent they were high on social dominance orientation. These results replicate studies in other countries showing that social dominance orientation correlates positively with attitudes toward political parties or governments who favor elites versus subordinates domestically (see Pratto et al. 2006 for a review).

Support for Regional Factions in International Power Context

Further, we argued that citizens in the “periphery” must be concerned with the international power structure that also influences them. Two sets of analyses followed from this assertion. First, we used balance theory to reason that citizens’ attitudes toward their government and Hezbollah would depend in part on the relationship between those factions and the United States. In fact, both samples showed balanced triadic correlations of attitudes, but each sample had a different configuration that reflected the degree of enmity between its government and the United States. The correlations between attitudes toward the United States and own government were mildly positive in Lebanon and distinctly negative in Syria, reflecting the degree of enmity between these governments and the US. Likewise, there was a strong positive correlation in the Syrian sample between attitudes toward Hezbollah and one’s government, but a weaker and negative correlation in the Lebanese sample. These attitudinal associations reflect the stated stances of the governments and Hezbollah toward each other. The signs of correlations among them show which are psychologically compatible as well as politically compatible.

Second, employing social dominance theory, we predicted that citizens’ preferences for political factions would also depend on whether factions’ perceived alliances with “core” powers reflect citizens’ own preferences regarding dominance. The correlations and net effects confirmed that those lower on social dominance orientation favored the anti-US Syrian government and disfavored the more pro-US Lebanese government. They also had more concerns over US oppression in both countries. More pointedly, concerns over US oppression were an equally strong positive predictor of favorability toward Hezbollah in both samples, whereas such concerns were strongly positively predictive of favorability of the Syrian government and weakly negatively predictive of favorability of the Lebanese government. In both samples, this variable reliably mediated the influence of SDO on both factions. Together, both sets of results fit our theorizing about how citizens of subordinated nations’ attitudes’ toward local political factions may be partly based in how they perceive those factions in relation to “core” powers and in their orientations toward group dominance.

Hezbollah

For those with sympathy for Hezbollah’s victims or for those who suffered at the hands of Hezbollah’s enemies, Hezbollah’s violent actions and rhetoric are understandably likely to garner the most attention and to frame their understanding of Hezbollah. An important finding of this study is that support for Hezbollah was found outside the Shi’a community and apparently driven by opposition to American oppression of Arabs. People may sympathize with Hezbollah for other reasons, such as its provision of social services and defense not provided by other governments (Norton 2000, 2007; Early 2006; El-Husseini 2010). It is plausible that people who sympathize with Hezbollah then adopt
Hezbollah’s anti-Western ideology, but the results of our alternative models showed no support for the notion that support for Hezbollah drives concerns over US oppression.

Concerns over American Oppression

Arab concerns over American oppression must be understood in the context of Arab subordination in the world, especially by the United States. The litany of Arab complaints of disrespect from the United States is long and polyphonic, going back to the broken promises of Arab independence after World War I and coming from multiple nations and competing political parties. The United States has supported Muslim ruling elites who have suppressed Shi’a and other sects in several nations (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Bahrain), and no government protected southern Lebanon from the US-backed Israeli violence over the past 60 years, particularly during and after the 1975–1990 Lebanese civil war. The nature of Arab-US relations is inextricably connected to the United States’ pro-Israeli intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict (e.g., Fakhoury 2011), as well as to the echoes of the Soviet-era struggle over Lebanon and Syria between the United States and Russia (through allies such as Saudi Arabia and Iran; e.g., Lasensky and Yacoubian 2006). Moreover, the “double-standards” that the United States and other Western entities are perceived to apply when considering violations of humanitarian law and political aspirations provide a sore contrast point for many Arabs (e.g., Richman 1991; Saad-Ghorayeb 2002; Kohut 2005; Salamey and Pearson 2007; El-Husseini 2010). Indeed, we found that in both samples, opposition to US oppression was a direct predictor of participants’ favorability toward Hezbollah. This finding highlights the importance of understanding regional and domestic faction preferences as nested within the global hegemony, but also of studying ordinary citizens’ opinions, values, and understandings of their political situations and choices.

Although the internal social-political and external relations of each Arab state differ, there is consistent historical and contemporary evidence that Arabs desire an end to US dominance in their region and greater respect. Indeed, large random surveys conducted in late June, mid-July 2010 in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Lebanon, and Morocco show that 70–97% of those publics said that the United States could improve relations with the Arab world by better understanding Arabs and respecting Arab values or by changing their policies toward the region (Zogby and Zogby 2010). Aside from certain political elites, Arab people in many nations consensually favor greater respect for Arabs from the United States and less US dominance of Arabs. This motive is an important influence in what factions and policies they are likely to support.

This is not to say that Arabs place all the blame for their problems externally; public opinion polls show that they are disturbed by corruption, political scandals, and missteps by their politicians and political parties too (e.g., Arab Barometer Lebanon Report 2007; Pew Research Center 2010). We would argue that it is precisely because domestic political factions are coerced—or can choose—to serve external interests that the political choices of citizens in these layered power structures are complex and frequently experienced as problematic.

Oppression, Repression, and Instability

Our results illustrate the difficult political choices the people of Lebanon have. If they reject the dominance that characterizes their domestic, regional, and global political situation, they view neither their government nor the United States as concerned about them, and tend to favor Hezbollah, which may provoke more enmity from the United States. If they tolerate group dominance, they may
indeed benefit more from the government (as they perceive it). But they must also tolerate disrespect and dominance in the international political context from US foreign policy, and that has not protected Lebanon from violent attacks, occupation, or domination by Syria or by Israel.

Syrian choices have a different complexity. For several decades, Syria positioned itself as the sole national defender of Arabs against US-Israeli repression. In situations of external threat, politicians can build up their legitimacy and tolerance for internal repression by invoking the people’s fears (Campbell 1965). Thus by invoking Syrians’ concerns over US interference, the Syrian government maintained a fragile balance between dissent over their repressive internal practices and admiration for the strong rejectionist stance (e.g., El-Husseini 2010). Our results, from Damascus in March 2010, are consistent with the supposition that Syria’s international relations are the pivotal means through which the Syrian government has appealed to legitimacy among its people, because opposition to US oppression was the only necessary mediator of political opinions. This situation makes the government’s position as a trustee of the social contract with its people very fragile (see also Wedeen 1999, 152). For example, economic engagement with the West on the one hand provides development that the public desires, and on the other, compromises the principle of rejectionism and opens it to external interference (e.g., Hinnebusch 2005). Thus, Syria, like Lebanon, has faced choices both internally and externally, which in terms of balance theory cannot be stable.

From this theorizing, we surmise that if Syrian people question their regime’s foreign policy credentials, or find a better means of realizing Syrian’s anti-Western sentiments than tolerance of the Al-Asad regime, or if a flagrant violation of the social contract (such as state-sponsored violence against the people) were to occur, our analysis suggests that the foundations of Syrians’ tolerance of their government should prove weak indeed. In line with these assertions, the Syrian public’s angry reaction to their government’s forcible repression of protests in 2011 indicates a fundamental loss of trust in the state and rejection of its legitimacy. Further, the now 2-year old extremely bloody violence between government and rebel forces certainly reveals the instability of the regime’s dominance.

Neither domestic nor international concerns, then, are more influential for understanding the political dynamics of the “periphery.” Rather, unstable international situations are precisely what call up the various psychologies of dominance and counter-dominance, which are likely to produce political schisms within the public, nation, and region, and then feedback as increased international tensions. Social-psychological research demonstrates that lack of respect for another group facilitates aggression against that other (Rubin et al. 2004), and when a group’s desires for respect are suppressed by the experience of oppression, they are unlikely to be able to reconcile with oppressing groups (Janoff-Bulman and Werther 2008). The implication is that respect of publics’ needs, rather than dominance or control dynamics enacted by elite policy, may lead to more stable and less conflictual relations among groups. As we have argued, subordinated people in contested power situations, with the most need, are actually those most opposed to hegemony.

**Structural Balance Theory**

Empirical studies on structural balance theory (Cartwright and Harary 1956) confirm that the most common and stable triadic relationships are “balanced” and that from balanced networks of triads emerge large-scale camps of allies who are enemies of other camps (Szell, Lambiotte, and Thurner 2010). However, there tends to be more structural/strategic instability and imbalance (and consequently conflict) in dyads and triads containing major powers, due
partly to opportunism and “core” nations’ status/reputation and balance of power concerns (Maoz, Terris, Kuperman, and Talmud 2007). Thus, in contrast to hegemonic stability theory, our theoretical analysis and results, psychological research on intergroup conflict, and structural balance theory all imply that the layered power hierarchies that characterize “periphery” subordination by “core” powers can all too easily become destabilizing and conflict-inducing at both domestic and international levels (see also Gurr and Lichbach 1986; Jenkins and Schock 1992; Ikenberry 2011).

Applying structural balance theory to the parties discussed in this paper—the United States, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and Hezbollah—demonstrates the inherent instability of the region’s political relationships. For example, if a Lebanese government developed a positive relationship with its neighbor Israel, it could also have a positive relationship with the United States and that triad would be balanced. However, following Syria and Israel’s negative relationship, this would imply that a Lebanese government could not maintain a positive relationship to its other neighbor, Syria, nor with Hezbollah. If Lebanon has a negative relation with its neighbor Israel, then it could enjoy a positive relation with its neighbor Syria and with Hezbollah, but this would require a negative relation with the United States, a difficult situation for small nations without more powerful allies. This example demonstrates that the current set of relationships is highly unstable, and of course, this analysis could be extended to include other important actors (e.g., Iran, Russia). Thus, considering the international context, and that ordinary citizens as well as elites can try to respond to it with their own agendas, it is not surprising that Lebanon has been embroiled in a long civil war, continual political upheavals and has difficulty in maintaining both a cohesive, functioning government and its own sovereignty (see Fakhoury 2011), or that the relationship between the Al-Asad dynasty and Lebanon has been so troubled for decades (see also Samii 2008). The external structural situation cannot help but divide Lebanese political opinion and produce ambivalence in its people. With Syria, however, internal instability stems from the tension between government repression and protection of the public, whereas instability in foreign relations stems from the fact that the government has reason to want both positive and negative relations with the same “core” powers. Further, maintaining external enmities may legitimize the government, but only insofar as such enmities do not hamper the government’s ability to provide desired services or to protect the people. In Syria as in Lebanon, then, domestic and international relations are inherently connected and yet mutually destabilizing.

As our theorizing and results show, to fully understand the international relations in the region, one must also consider the role that regional and domestic factions and also citizens play, for nations do not act as exogenous and monolithic entities. Likewise, and as recent events from the Arab uprisings and elsewhere (e.g., Chile, Peru, Greece) show, states are not independent of these influences. This highlights the need for international relations and foreign policy analysis to incorporate the agency and goals of nonstate actors and citizens in their own right (Smith 2000).

A second important implication is that the prediction of foreign interventions’ effectiveness in “periphery” nations, and the definition of success in such maneuvers, must be evaluated with the presence of layered power structures in mind, as well as the feedback processes that exist between levels of analysis in such structures. Nationalists and conservatives in the West sometimes claim that power centralization and projection, or outside control of “peripheries,” is necessary to maintain stability (e.g., Braithwaite 2004; Rathbun 2008). Liberals make similar claims under the assumption that imposition of Western political and socio-economic developmental paths would lead to progressive liberalization, democratization, and/or cooperation under the international order (Kayaoglu 2010; see
Ayoob 2002; Ikenberry 2011). Both sides assume that hegemony is the most stable form of open international organization in a unipolar system (e.g., Katzenstein et al. 1998). But, as others have argued from various perspectives (e.g., Ravenal 1973; Snidal 1985; Richman 1991; Tickner 2003; Kayaoğlu 2010), hegemonic stability as envisioned theoretically may not be enacted or perceived as such, especially in nations of the “periphery” (e.g., Hinnebusch 2005). The policies used to enact hegemonic stability have not manifested the theoretical ideal because they tend to ignore translevel effects, nonstate actors and indulge in counter-productive exploitation of power asymmetries. Whereas these complexities may play a more minor role in inter-“core” foreign policy, they play a major role in “core”,“periphery” relations given the layered power structure that so distinctively influences “periphery” nations. Our results and theoretical analysis strongly imply that hegemonic power projection and interventionism, if taken unilaterally, with unbalanced motives or goals, or without consideration of translevel consequences and feedback, is likely to be destabilizing, not stabilizing.

It is precisely the imposition of unbalanced and insensitive outside control that may lead to extremes of helplessness or hostility among people, and further to divisions, radicalization, and/or conflict between factions and between nations. In our specific context, it is not difficult to conclude that if “great power” and regional/proxy actors’ foreign policy regarding the Levant remains the same, the chronic frustration of popular needs and desires by elites in the Levant and their foreign “sponsors” will maintain a continually volatile and potentially escalating situation there.

References


