

Tribal Customary Law in Contemporary Jordan: Conciliation and security through Bedouin justice

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Customary legal practices have worked alongside, under the authority of, or in competition with modern state laws in many Arab countries. The form of legal pluralism adopted can be tokenistic, used by dictators to bolster their regimes, or to fill vacuums in nations that are racked by war or where state justice systems have collapsed. This paper examines the tribal justice in Jordan in comparison with other countries. It reveals the striking resemblance of the customary law system yet the uniqueness of Jordan's model which is based on partnership between tribal leaders and state officials. The paper identifies the conditions that led to the current partnership between tribal and state law in Jordan and evaluates whether lessons from Jordan can be applied elsewhere. It finds that while the concept of partnership between state officials and traditional leaders may be relevant in other countries, the relative success of the arrangement in Jordan may be the result of fortuitous historical circumstances including a long period of relative stability - something most of Jordan's neighbours did not enjoy - plus a mutual dependence of the monarchy and the tribes on each other's support.

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