

# In Plain Sight

## The Neglected Linkage between Brideprice and Violent Conflict

Valerie M. Hudson  
and  
Hilary Matfess

**S**trapped to a gurney and visibly shaken by the bloodied bodies of his fellow terrorists strewn about, Mohammed Jamal Amir Kasab, aged twenty-one, begged his police interrogators to turn off their cameras. They refused, and Kasab's recorded confession provided the world with a glimpse into the individual motivations of the young men behind the four days of attacks in Mumbai, India. Kasab explained that he "joined the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba only for money."<sup>1</sup> His was not solely an individual decision, however, and the money he earned from participating in the attacks was not intended to be discretionary income. According to Kasab, his father had urged him to join so that Kasab and his siblings could afford to marry.<sup>2</sup> Kasab recounted that his father had told him that his participation would mean that the family would no longer be poor and that they would be able to pay the costs required to finalize a marriage contract. One of the police officers, seemingly ignoring Kasab's response, pressed, "So you came here for jihad? Is that right?" Crying, Kasab asked, "What jihad?" Lashkar-e-Taiba deposited the promised money in his father's account after the successful attack; for his participation, Kasab was hanged in 2012 by the Indian government. Whether his siblings were subsequently able to contract marriages as a result of the funds provided by Lashkar-e-Taiba remains unknown.

In many ways, Kasab's story lends itself to the narrative that terrorist recruitment is a function of poverty and a lack of opportunity for young men. Indeed, Kasab joined Lashkar-e-Taiba's network while engaged in petty

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*Valerie M. Hudson is Professor and holds the George H.W. Bush Chair in the Department of International Affairs at the Bush School of Government and Public Service, Texas A&M University, where she directs the Program on Women, Peace, and Security. Hilary Matfess is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science, Yale University.*

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1. Vikas Bajaj and Lydia Polgreen, "Suspect Stirs Mumbai Court by Confessing," *New York Times*, July 20, 2009, [www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/world/asia/21india.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/21/world/asia/21india.html).

2. Mumbai Gunman Video, Channel 4 (India), n.d., <http://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid1184614595?bctid=27874456001>.

criminality and working as a laborer for a mere 60 cents a day. While in custody, he told police, "If you give me regular meals and money I will do the same for you that I did for them."<sup>3</sup> Kasab's decision to join Lashkar-e-Taiba, his motivations for participating in the Mumbai attack, and his confession after being captured all suggest that the appeal of membership in a terrorist organization was material, rather than ideological.

Yet there is something else in this anecdote that helps explain the motivations of young men who take up arms not only for terrorist groups, but for the broader purpose of engaging in group violence for political ends. Kasab's story casts light on something hidden in plain sight: poverty alone cannot explain participation in such organized groups because the vast majority of poor people do not turn to violence.<sup>4</sup> Rather, poverty and social marginalization must manifest themselves in particularly vexing ways for grievances to lead to such terrible violence. Kasab's confession points to one such factor, which we explore in this article. Across much of the world, especially in the shatter belts of the Global South, customary law requires that young men and their families pay a brideprice to marry.<sup>5</sup> In this article, we identify the role of marriage market obstruction caused by inflationary brideprice as an additional factor beyond those already identified in the literature as predisposing young men to become involved in organized group violence for political purposes, including terrorism, rebellion, intergroup aggression, raiding, and insurrection. Furthermore, we argue that this factor is critical not only in a theoretical sense but also in a policy context.

The extant literature points to deprivation, identity, and socialization as primary risk factors for why young men take up arms. Most modern analysis posits that it is not absolute poverty that motivates rebellion, but rather relative deprivation.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars theorize that greed, rather than grievance, animates conflict entrepreneurs to rebel against governments when it is financially viable or beneficial to do so, thereby tying natural resource wealth to conflict.<sup>7</sup> Micro-level explanations also suggest that peer-group pressure to

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3. "Know More about Ajmal Amir Kasab," *India TV*, November 21, 2012, <http://www.indiatvnews.com/news/india/know-more-about-ajmal-amir-kasab-18703.html?page=3>.

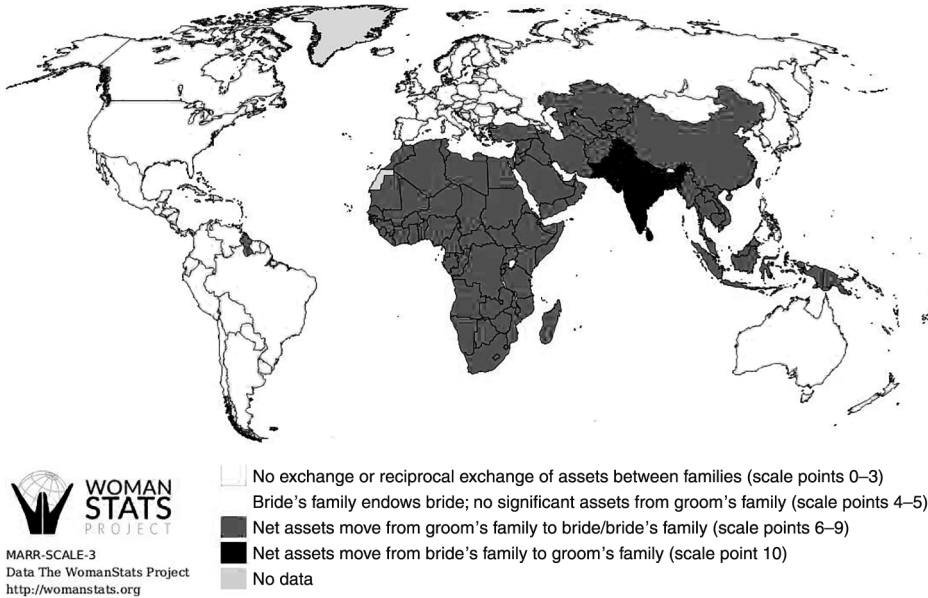
4. Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Maleckova, "Education, Poverty, and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (November 2003), pp. 119-144, doi:10.3386/w9074.

5. The term "brideprice" refers to an overall net transfer of assets from the groom's family to the bride's family. This includes brideprice, bridewealth, and bride-service. It also includes dowry, which should not be confused with dowry. Dowry refers to an overall net transfer of assets from the bride's family to the groom's family.

6. See the seminal work by Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970).

7. Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars" (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001), doi:10.1093/oep/gpf064.

Figure 1. Brideprice/Dowry/Wedding Costs (Type and Prevalence) Scaled 2016



join armed groups is a significant motivating factor for young men; in-group members are able to justify otherwise unacceptable actions through the benefits thereby obtained by the group.<sup>8</sup> This new sense of identity, in turn, incentivizes rebellious activity.<sup>9</sup>

Our research adds to this literature by analyzing how inflationary brideprice contributes to marriage market obstruction. In many cultures, marriage is much more than a social formality; it marks the transition to culturally defined manhood. When marriage includes brideprice, it is also an expensive economic transaction. In these cultures, females are exchanged between kinship groups in return for assets, whether those assets be cash, cattle, gold, or other goods that serve as currency in the society. The map in figure 1 highlights the prevalence of this arrangement in the twenty-first century; in a sense, the world is divided by this custom into two almost equal parts.

The map suggests three patterns: one economic, one regional, and one cultural. First, more developed countries generally do not practice brideprice or dowry. Second, Jack Goody notes that brideprice is common in all continents

8. Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Faith, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists* (New York: Ecco, 2010).

9. See, among others, John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

except America.<sup>10</sup> Third, the practice of brideprice is less common in predominantly Christian cultures. Sub-Saharan Africa is an interesting case in this regard; despite a strong Christian presence (38 percent), the practice of brideprice is endemic to the region (see figure 1). With minority status, brideprice, though discouraged by most Christian denominations in Africa, may be a practical necessity to contract marriage through customary law.<sup>11</sup> Overall, roughly 75 percent of the world's population lives in regions where this practice is prevalent. It is important not to underestimate the prevalence and importance of this custom in the twenty-first century; although the United States and many of its closest security partners do not practice brideprice, they have security interests in many societies that do.<sup>12</sup>

Brideprice and its trajectory are an important cause of marriage market obstruction, producing grievances among young males that have been linked to violence and political instability.<sup>13</sup> We begin our examination of this phenomenon with a discussion of the logic and dynamics of brideprice and its potential to obstruct marriage markets. We then illustrate our argument using three case studies of countries that have been grappling with rising brideprice—Nigeria, South Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. We conclude with recommendations for policymakers interested in tracking and mitigating the risks associated with brideprice, and we offer suggestions for further scholarly research.

### *Marriage in Patrilineal Cultures*

Patrilineality is a social system wherein persons are accounted kin through the male, or agnatic, line.<sup>14</sup> A millennium ago, the overwhelming majority of societies were organized along patrilineal lines. In the twenty-first century, by

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10. Jack Goody, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia," in Goody and S.J. Tambiah, *Bridewealth and Dowry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 51.

11. Bob Seidensticker, "Christianity Becomes an African Religion, Islam Overtakes Christianity, and Other Upcoming Changes," *Patheos*, May 11, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/crossexamined/2015/05/christianity-becomes-an-african-religion-islam-overtakes-christianity-and-other-upcoming-changes/>.

12. This statistic comes from our estimates of the percentage distribution of world populations by continent, which tally nearly 60 percent of the world's population as residing in Asia and more than 16 percent as residing in sub-Saharan Africa.

13. See, for example, Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea M. Den Boer, *Bare Branches: The Security Implications of Asia's Surplus Male Population* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004); and Bradley A. Thayer and Valerie M. Hudson, "Sex and the Shaheed: Insights from the Life Sciences on Islamic Suicide Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Spring 2010), pp. 37–62, doi:10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.37. Raiding for resources to marry is typical in societies with obstructed marriage markets. Because the obstruction is worst for poor, unskilled young men, less violent types of resource raiding are not feasible alternatives.

14. Linda Stone, *Kinship and Gender: An Introduction* (Boulder, Colo: Westview, 2013).

contrast, the international system is composed of states whose societies are arrayed along a spectrum from nonpatrilineality to strong patrilineality, with a sizable number of countries reflecting a more mixed profile in transition from one pole to the other.

Patrilineality is, at heart, a security-provision mechanism. In an anarchic world, patrilineality solves the social cooperation problem for a given group of men, providing them with natural allies in conflict situations because of the trust created through blood ties among male group members. That is, the first priority in assuring security for the group requires managing males' propensity for risk-taking, violence, and aggression and harnessing these predispositions for pro-group ends, lest they destroy the group. With its focus on prioritizing male kinship, patrilineality is the solution to which human societies have, generally speaking, historically resorted, with the vast majority of traditional societies organized along agnatic lines. In a sense, the purpose of patrilineality is to create a fraternal alliance system of brothers, cousins, sons, uncles, and fathers capable of countering threats to the group. Although it is not the only means of creating fraternity—fraternity can also be created in matrilineal societies or, somewhat less successfully, through ideological ties—patrilineality is the most straightforward and robust means of achieving the fraternal alliance necessary to provide group security.<sup>15</sup>

Women, however, move between kinship groups in exogamous marriage and thus, in a sense, are not full kin in patrilineal societies. Patrilocal marriage, in which a bride moves to her in-laws' household, becomes the norm, and the patriline acts to retain all significant assets, particularly land and livestock. This situation typically precludes the conferral of significant property rights or marital rights on women. Not just physical security for men, then, but economic security is afforded by the system of extended male kin groups. Women, on the other hand, suffer from a lack of both physical and economic security.

This system of social organization is still in use today. In a context in which the state is virtually nonexistent and cannot provide security for its citizens

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15. For example, some matrilineal systems, such as those in Melanesia, also practice brideprice. Although patrilineality makes male control over assets, women, and power more straightforward, males are still able to exert almost the same level of control in brideprice-practicing matrilineal societies, and brideprice plays a role in creating grievances that lead violence in these societies, as well. We are indebted to Sue Ingram of the Australian National University for this insight. Additionally, ideology is not as sturdy a basis for fraternity as kinship is, which is why some ideologically based groups attempt to shore up that fraternity with marriages that make men not only ideological brothers, but in-laws and therefore kin. Osama bin Laden, for example, attempted to have his top lieutenants marry sisters to better ensure they would remain loyal to each other. See Thayer and Hudson, "Sex and the Shaheed."

(e.g., Somalia), or in which it is profoundly indifferent to human security, the most viable alternative for an individual is to rely on extended kin groups for basic security needs.

The status of males in patrilineal societies is strongly linked to marriage. Not only does marriage mark the transition to manhood in patrilineal societies, but it establishes the male as a source of lineage and inheritance within the larger patriline. The marriage imperative is thus deeply felt among males in such cultures. And yet, marriage is unobtainable without assets. In *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development*, the World Bank observed: "The main social requirement for achieving manhood in Sub-Saharan Africa—for being a man—is attaining some level of financial independence, employment, or income, and subsequently starting a family. In much of Sub-Saharan Africa, brideprice is commonplace, and thus marriage and family formation are directly tied to having income or property."<sup>16</sup>

These descriptions and conclusions are generalizable to many societies, but they take on an intensified meaning in more strongly patrilineal societies. Although it is possible to be unmarried and still be regarded as an adult man in, say, the United States, it is not possible in a strongly patrilineal society. Marriage, then, is obligatory for men living in such societies. It is through marriage and having legitimate male offspring that men maintain into the future a kindred "presence" in the lineage. It is also the only way to claim a just share of the patriline's assets and rents, which are distributed to families and not individuals. Further, in this context males are not considered to be full adults until they marry. Only then will they have a significant voice in the male collective, making marriage an important socialization ritual in addition to a valuable economic practice.

Marriage in patrilineal societies is accompanied by asset exchange, wherein brideprice offsets the cost to the natal family of raising the bride.<sup>17</sup> The consequences for women that grow out of this system, however, are deeply detrimental to their security and status. In addition to patrilocal marriage and the lack of female property rights mentioned above, these societies are characterized by arranged marriage in the patriline's interest; a relatively low age of marriage for girls; profound underinvestment in female human capital; intense son preference, resulting in passive neglect of girl children or active fe-

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16. Ian Bannon and Maria C. Correia, *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2006), p. 161, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/7029>.

17. If we turn our attention from brideprice to dowry, dowry is intended to offset the cost to the groom's family of feeding and sheltering the bride, who is viewed as nonproductive (i.e., only reproductive).

male infanticide/sex-selective abortion; highly inequitable family and personal status law favoring men; and chronically high levels of violence against women as a means to enforce the imposition of the patrilineal system on often recalcitrant women. Consider the findings of a report by a Tanzanian women's organization following an extensive survey that, "due to brideprice," women suffer "insults, sexual abuse, battery, denial of their rights to own property, being overworked and having to bear a large number of children." The report notes that "women also complained of some men's tendency to reclaim the bride price when marriages broke up, saying fear of this outcome forced women to cling to their marriages even when abused."<sup>18</sup>

There are two variants of this patrilineal syndrome that are worthy of analysts' attention, given their effects on the status of women overall. First, where women's work is considered productively valuable, such as when women provide the preponderance of agricultural labor, brideprice and polygyny are often prevalent. Given that marriage is patrilocal and inheritance passes through the patriline, buying or exchanging women between kinship groups becomes essential, and brideprice becomes established. Goody finds that 78 percent of the patrilineal cultures he has studied practice brideprice, and a further 6 percent practice bride-service, a variant thereof in which a young man works off the brideprice to compensate his father-in-law.<sup>19</sup> Richer men within the kin group can afford to pay the brideprice for more than one wife, and thus are assured even greater returns on their investment than poorer men. This brideprice-with-polygyny-for-the-rich system is by far the most prevalent variant of patrilineality, according to Goody.<sup>20</sup>

A second, less frequent variant of the patrilineal system occurs when women are not valued for their productive labor; in this case, women are seen as a burden, and the family providing the bride must be prepared to compensate the groom and his family for assuming this burden through payment of a dowry. Goody explains that brideprice "is more commonly found where women make the major contribution to agriculture, whereas dowry is restricted to those societies where males contribute most; this is the difference between hoe agriculture and the use of the plough, which is almost invariably in male hands."<sup>21</sup> The practice of brideprice differs from that of dowry in its effects on the status of women; tellingly, dowry is often associated with female infanti-

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18. "Human Rights Study Links Payment of Bride Price to Abuse of Women," *IRIN*, May 16, 2006, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/59032/tanzania-study-links-payment-bride-price-abuse-women>.

19. Goody, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia," p. 50.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, p. 52.



cide because families can be bankrupted by the birth of daughters whose dowries they will be required to pay in future years.<sup>22</sup>

Patrilineality, therefore, cannot exist without the subordination of women to the interests of the patriline. Women are either economic boons or burdens, passed from one man to another with compensation for the economic loss incurred by her birth family if her labor is considered valuable or by the groom's family if it is lacking in value. A woman who wants to choose her marriage partner, divorce, own land, or invest in her daughters is, in a very real sense, undermining patrilineality and the security mechanism it offers male kin groups. A fierce and often violent reaction against such women is typical.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere, Valerie Hudson and others have argued that patrilineality, though arguably effective in providing individual security for men in many circumstances, produces, generally speaking, an inherently unstable society prone to violent conflict and rentierism.<sup>24</sup> While historically prevalent, patrilineality is linked to a host of destabilizing tendencies that have also been historically prevalent, including food insecurity, demographic insecurity, annihilative violence, economic predation, and corruption.<sup>25</sup> Both this system of security provision and the instability and violence it inevitably creates have existed through millennia. The linkage we document here is not new or hidden, but has to date been rendered invisible by conventional explanations. Although the broad-ranging effects of patrilineality on security is our overall research aim, we focus in this article on the patrilineal custom of brideprice and trace its destabilizing effects on society.<sup>26</sup>

#### BRIDEPRICE AND MARRIAGE MARKET OBSTRUCTION

In patrilineal systems, brideprice is essentially an obligatory tax on young men, payable to older men. The young man's father and male kindred may help him pay the tax, but the intergenerational nature of the tax should be understood, especially as regards poor young men whose male relatives may likewise be too poor to help. The framing of brideprice as a tax and of

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22. Hudson and Den Boer, *Bare Branches*.

23. See, for example, David Jacobson, *Of Virgins and Martyrs: Women and Sexuality in Global Conflict* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

24. Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, "Clan Governance and State Stability: The Relationship between Female Subordination and Political Order," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 109, No. 3 (August 2015), pp. 535–555, doi:10.1017/S0003055415000271. "Rentierism" refers to an economic system based on appropriation of resources that produce rents, which are then used to govern and control society. Rentier powers govern, in the first place, through corruption.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Valerie M. Hudson et al., *The First Political Order: Sex, Governance, and National Security*, Texas A&M University and Brigham Young University, 2017.



marital exchange as a market eschews the kind of moralizing that often accompanies discussions of unfamiliar social rituals and clarifies the functioning of this market.

Important in this conceptualization is evidence that brideprice acts as a flat tax—for the most part, brideprice is pegged to what is considered the “going rate” for a bride in a particular society at a given point in time. The brideprice is nudged slightly upward or downward at the margin according to the status of the bride’s kin, but it is not influenced greatly by the status of the man responsible for paying it. If the cost of brideprice rises, it will rise for every man, rich or poor. The flat-tax nature of brideprice has been noted across such geographically diverse states as Afghanistan, China, and Kenya.<sup>27</sup>

The tendency toward a consistent brideprice within a community is understandable. As Goody suggests, “In bridewealth systems, standard payments are more common; their role in a societal exchange puts pressure towards similarity.”<sup>28</sup> The reason is that men pay for their sons’ brideprices by first collecting the brideprice for their daughters. Such transactions are another force pushing down the age of marriage among girls in brideprice societies, in addition to the desire to stop providing for daughters who, socially, will become the responsibility of another family. Unless a family is very wealthy, daughters in general must be married off first, so that the family can accumulate enough assets to pay the sons’ brideprices. Quoting anthropologist Lucy Mair, Goody remarks, “When cattle payments are made, the marriage of girls tends to be early for the same reason that that of men is late—that a girl’s marriage increases her father’s herd while that of a young man diminishes it.’ . . . [M]en chafe at the delay, girls at the speed.”<sup>29</sup> If brideprice were not standardized within the society, families could not count on the brideprices brought in by their daughters being sufficient to cover the costs of their sons’ marriages. Thus, over time, a fairly consistent brideprice emerges for the community at any given time, though the actual cost may vary somewhat over time depending on local conditions.

Many accounts suggest that men are highly sensitive to new trends in brideprice, and that the societal brideprice level is easily pushed upward but very difficult to push downward. Quoting Mair once more, Goody notes, “Every father fears being left in the lurch by finding that the bridewealth which he has accepted for his daughter will not suffice to get him a daughter-in-law; therefore, he is always on the lookout for any signs of a rise in the rate,

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27. Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen, “Clan Governance and State Stability.”

28. Goody, “Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia,” p. 18.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

and tends to raise his demands whenever he hears of other fathers doing so. This means in general terms that *individual* cases of over-payment produce a *general* rise in the rate all around."<sup>30</sup>

Almost universally, then, the amount required for an acceptable brideprice rises continually over time. The result of this persistent brideprice inflation is that marriage is either delayed or even put out of reach for many young men, particularly in situations of economic stagnation, rising inequality, or both. A summary of the average brideprice from a number of different periods and countries found that the burden equated to as much as twelve to twenty times the per capita holdings of large livestock or two to four times gross household income.<sup>31</sup> As Bradley Thayer and Valerie Hudson note in an article on marriage market obstruction and suicide terrorism in Islamic societies:

Delayed marriage has become a new norm in the Middle East. For example, in Egypt, one study documents that families of young adult males must save five to seven years to pay for their sons' marriages. From 2000 to 2004, wedding costs in Egypt rose 25 percent. As a result, the average marriage age for Egyptian men has risen sharply, from the early twenties to the late twenties and early thirties. In one study, nearly 25 percent of young adult males in Egypt had not married by age twenty-seven; the average age was thirty-one. In poverty-stricken Afghanistan, wedding costs for young men average \$12,000–\$20,000. . . . In Saudi Arabia, men usually are unable to marry before age twenty-nine; often they marry only in their mid-thirties. In Iran, 38 percent of twenty-five-year-old to twenty-nine-year-old men are unmarried. Across the Middle East, only about 50 percent of twenty-five-year-old to twenty-nine-year-old men are married, the lowest percentage for this group in the developing world. Whether in Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, or the United Arab Emirates, the exorbitant costs of marriage have delayed the age at which Muslim men marry.<sup>32</sup>

Given the tendency toward brideprice inflation, an unequal distribution of wealth will amplify market distortions by facilitating polygyny.<sup>33</sup> Wealthy men are able to pay even when poor men cannot. Because additional wives produce greater wealth for their husband both through their productive labor and through the birth of additional daughters who will fetch a brideprice for their father, brideprice inflation may cause a rise in the average number of wives in

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30. Ibid, p. 5 (emphasis in the original).

31. Siwan Anderson, "The Economics of Dowry and Brideprice," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 151–174, doi:10.1257/jep.21.4.151.

32. Thayer and Hudson, "Sex and the Shaheed," p. 54.

33. Polygyny is also a custom that has not died out to the extent that some would imagine. For a visual representation of the prevalence of polygyny in the world today, see "Prevalence and Legal Status of Polygyny," WomanStats Project, 2016, <http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/PW-SCALE-1-2016.png>.

the households of such wealthy men. This, too, feeds into the predisposition to push down the age of marriage for girls where brideprice is present. Goody remarks, "Polygyny . . . is made possible by the differential marriage age, early for girls, later for men. Bridewealth and polygyny play into each other's hands. . . . [T]he two institutions appear to reinforce each other."<sup>34</sup> Polygyny is also a marker of higher social status, and it is practiced even in societies where women's labor is not considered valuable (e.g., in the United Arab Emirates).

A final source of marriage market distortion often found in brideprice societies is higher female mortality. To the degree that patrilineal-based societies profoundly devalue the lives of women and girls, resulting in significant underinvestment in women's health when resources are scarce and poverty is endemic, one sees higher rates of morbidity and mortality for females after marriage. In no area is this more evident than in that of maternal mortality. Given both low investments in women's health and the early age of marriage for girls in these societies, maternal mortality rates in most patrilineal societies tend to be egregiously high.<sup>35</sup> If a young wife dies in childbirth, the logic of the patrilineal syndrome dictates that she will need to be replaced, usually by a girl the same age the first wife was when she married. Despite the economic cost of having to pay brideprice once again when a woman dies in childbirth, adequate attention to the physical well-being of women and girls is often not culturally supported within the society.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, brideprice helps to reinforce and justify this underinvestment in women: as a women's rights activist in Uganda noted, women "cannot negotiate safer sex because of brideprice. They cannot limit the number of children that they have because of brideprice. They cannot go to school and do their own thing because they were bought."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, both polygyny and higher rates of post-marriage female mortality increase the ratio of marriageable males to marriageable females. Sometimes this scarcity produces extreme downward pressure on the marriage age of girls in a

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34. Goody, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia," p. 10.

35. That is not the case in some patrilineal societies. For example, in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, there are sufficient resources to justify the expense of investing in maternal health care. Furthermore, the average age of marriage has been creeping upward in these societies. For both these reasons, maternal mortality in these Gulf States tends to be lower than in other patrilineal cultures. China, too, has made a successful push toward lowering maternal mortality rates, and it strictly regulates both fertility and age of marriage.

36. This phenomenon is difficult to explain in solely economic terms. Whereas in some regions with brideprice (such as sub-Saharan Africa), childhood sex ratios are normal, indicating that families understand the economic value of keeping girls alive until married, in other regions with brideprice (e.g., Pakistan and Albania), childhood sex ratios are abnormal and favor males.

37. Jessica Heckert and Madeline Short Fabic, "Improving Data Concerning Women's Empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Studies in Family Planning*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (September 2013), p. 335, doi:10.1111/j.1728-4465.2013.00360.x.

given society, with some marrying off girls as young as eight.<sup>38</sup> In most societies, however, the alteration in sex ratio results in a greater number of young men unable to find wives, even if they could afford the brideprice.

The patrilineal syndrome, therefore, is primed to produce chronic marriage market obstruction because (1) brideprice acts as a flat tax on young men that they cannot refuse to pay without suffering profoundly adverse social consequences; (2) brideprice catalyzes polygyny among the wealthier segments of society; and (3) the devaluation of women's lives leads to high female mortality

Marriage market obstruction, in turn, can be an important factor driving young men to join violent groups. The flat and inflationary nature of brideprice guarantees that poor young men will be hard-pressed to marry. Like Jamal Kasab, they may not be able to raise the funds for brideprice without resorting to desperate measures. These young men are not taking up arms against the institution of brideprice. Rather, at the individual level, a young man engages in violence to become more successful within the patrilineal system. At the group level, it is merely the identity of the men who dominate the sociopolitical system that the group wishes to change, and not the system of male-bonded security provision itself: the recruits hope one day to replace those wealthy, powerful men themselves.

Furthermore, if a family has many sons, it may strive mightily to get the first son married, but then the younger, higher birth-order sons (such as the third, fourth and fifth sons) are typically expected to find their own sources of funding to pay brideprice. As Goody notes, these younger sons often "leav[e] the countryside to swell the growing population of the towns. . . . [I]t is people with a high bridewealth payment that have the highest rates of labor migration."<sup>39</sup> In sum, then, the marriage market in brideprice societies is obstructed for poor young men and sons of higher birth orders.

#### YOUNG MALE GRIEVANCE

The destabilizing effects of a "youth bulge" in some countries have received scholarly attention, but would profit from a concomitant analysis of marriage markets.<sup>40</sup> According to scholars investigating this phenomenon, a large co-

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38. Cynthia Gorney, "Too Young to Wed: The Secret World of Child Brides," *National Geographic*, June 2011, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2011/06/child-brides/gorney-text/1>; and George Thomas, "India's Innocent: Secret Weddings of Child Brides," *CBN News*, August 24, 2015, <http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2012/June/Innocence-Lost-Indias-Children-Marrying-at-Age-8>.

39. Goody, "Bridewealth and Dowry in Africa and Eurasia," pp. 8–9.

40. Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (September 2006), pp. 607–629, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2006

hort of young adults may feel aggrieved when they experience high unemployment and diminished future prospects. What is left unsaid is that the young for whom such grievances may turn explosive are overwhelmingly male. Furthermore, to have a youth bulge in the first place, a country must have a high fertility rate. Only in certain countries—that is, predominantly patrilineally based cultures where women enjoy few rights of possession, even over their own bodies—will one find such high fertility rates.<sup>41</sup> If such destabilization is found primarily in patrilineally organized countries, we argue that the youth bulge literature would benefit from examining the close relationship between young male grievance and obstructed marriage markets in patrilineal cultures. An overlay of maps indicating where brideprice is practiced and where there are significant youth bulges is revealing (see figure 2), and should be noted by security analysts for likely synergistic effects.

Glimpses of the linkage between young male grievance and marriage market obstruction do occasionally surface. For example, one commentator noted in 2011, “Communications recently made public by WikiLeaks reveal that U.S. diplomats identified delayed marriage as a source of discontent in Libya two years ago. Other scholars have called the problem a regional ‘marriage crisis,’ born out of low incomes and the high cost of marriage. They point out that in conservative Middle Eastern countries, unmarried young adults are generally denied intimate relationships, and the social status that comes along with being an adult.”<sup>42</sup> Without an understanding of the dynamics of brideprice, explanations of the sources of instability in societies that practice brideprice are woefully incomplete. Being unemployed is never good, but being unemployed in a society where you can only become an adult man by marrying and in which marriage requires significant financial resources produces a clear intensification of vexation and desperation.<sup>43</sup>

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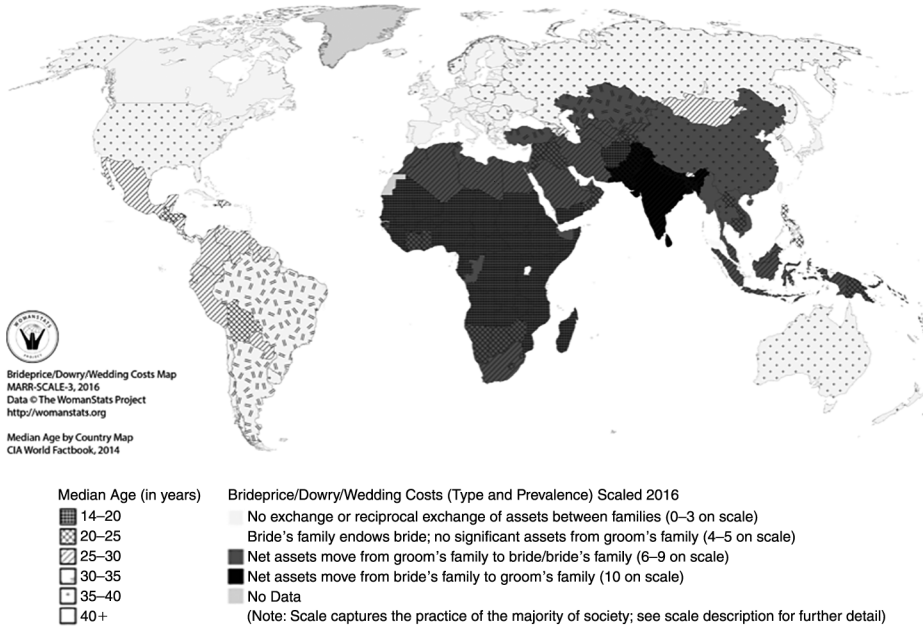
.00416.x; Justin Yifu Lin, “Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Demographic Bomb in Developing Countries?” (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2012); and Ragnhild Nordås and Christian Davenport, “Fight the Youth: Youth Bulges and State Repression,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (April 2013), pp. 926–940, doi:10.1111/ajps.12025.

41. Compare our scaling of birth rates and our scaling of patrilineal clan governance in the following two maps: “Birth Rates, Scaled 2015,” WomanStats Project, 2015, <http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/BirthRates2015correctedstatic.png>; and “Clan Governance Index (Degree of Female Subordination in Marriage/Family), Scaled 2015,” WomanStats Project, 2015, [http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/ClanGovernanceIndex\\_2correctstaticmiddle.png](http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/ClanGovernanceIndex_2correctstaticmiddle.png). All countries in the highest two categories of birth rates also score in the highest category of patrilineal clan governance.

42. Heather Murdock, “‘Delayed’ Marriage Frustrates Middle East Youth,” *Voice of America*, February 22, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/a/delayed-marriage-frustrates-middle-east-youth-116744384/172742.html>.

43. Interestingly, a report by Nava Ashraf, Natalie Bau, Nathan Nunn, and Alessandra Voena found that increasing girls’ education may raise the rate of brideprice in the community. Noting

Figure 2. Incidence of Brideprice/Dowry/Wedding Costs and Global Median Age



Journalist Michael Slackman notes that “in Egypt and across the Middle East, many young people are being forced to put off marriage, the gateway to independence, sexual activity, and social respect. . . . In their frustration, the young are turning to religion for solace and purpose, pulling their parents and their governments with them.”<sup>44</sup> One Egyptian young man whom Slackman interviewed, stated, “Sometimes, I can see how it [this frustration] does not make you closer to God, but pushes you toward terrorism. Practically, it killed my ambition. I can’t think of a future.”<sup>45</sup> The competition to fund brideprice, though most immediately an economic one, often translates into intergenerational resentment because it is older men who are typically in a financial position to acquire more wives. According to the World Bank, “The concentration of power in the hands of big men and male elders leads to power struggles be-

this unintended side-effect is not meant to discredit girls’ education as a development objective, but rather highlights how girls’ gains may feed other sources of female oppression as well as marriage market obstruction. See Ashraf et al., “Bride Price and Female Education” (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016), <http://www.nber.org/papers/w22417.pdf>.

44. Michael Slackman, “Stifled, Egypt’s Youth Turn to Islamic Fervor,” *New York Times*, February 17, 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/world/middleeast/17youth.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/world/middleeast/17youth.html).

45. *Ibid.*



tween older and young men, and is related to some insurgencies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The institutionalized stratification of age groups frequently puts younger men at the service of elders, and the control of property and women by older men creates a structural conflict between younger and older generations of men. A major tension is over access to women."<sup>46</sup>

High levels of grievance open up an opportunity for anti-establishment groups to exploit young men attempting to gain the status and the assets needed to marry. Delayed marriage and, importantly, the threat that one may never father a son in a culture defined by patrilineality are common elements exploited by groups seeking young adult men interested in redressing the injustice they feel on a personal level, by force if necessary.

It is fascinating to see how many terrorist and rebel groups are so concerned about the marriage prospects of the young men in their ranks. For example, Diane Singerman notes, "To mobilize supporters, there were many reports of radical Islamist groups in Egypt in the 1990s arranging extremely low-cost marriages among the group's members."<sup>47</sup> In the 1970s, Black September, a terrorist offshoot of the Palestine Liberation Organization, offered its members brides, cash, apartments in Beirut, and even a baby bonus of \$5,000 if they had a baby within a year of marriage.<sup>48</sup> In 2008 Taghreed el-Khodary wrote that " Hamas leaders have turned to matchmaking, bringing together single fighters and widows, and providing dowries and wedding parties for the many here who cannot afford such trappings of matrimony."<sup>49</sup> The Islamic State also provides its foreign fighters with opportunities to marry that they may not have had in their own country. In one such campaign, the group offered "its fighters a \$1,500 bonus to go towards a starter home along with a free honeymoon in their stronghold city of Raqqa."<sup>50</sup> Ariel Ahram found that "ISIS foreign fighters paid \$10,000 dowries to the families of their brides," suggesting that the group was attracting foreign fighters by promising resources (and available women) to marry.<sup>51</sup> Esther Mokuwa and her colleagues have

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46. Bannon and Correia, *The Other Half of Gender*.

47. Diane Singerman, "The Economic Imperatives of Marriage: Emerging Practices and Identities among Youth in the Middle East" (Dubai: Wolfensohn Center for Development at the Dubai School of Government, 2007), p. 49, [http://www.meyi.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32012989/singerman\\_-\\_the\\_economic\\_imperatives\\_of\\_marriage-\\_emerging\\_practices\\_and\\_identities\\_among\\_youth\\_in\\_the\\_middle\\_east.pdf](http://www.meyi.org/uploads/3/2/0/1/32012989/singerman_-_the_economic_imperatives_of_marriage-_emerging_practices_and_identities_among_youth_in_the_middle_east.pdf).

48. Bruce Hoffman, "Gaza City, All You Need Is Love: How the Terrorists Stopped Terrorism," *Atlantic*, December 2001, <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2001/12/hoffman.htm>.

49. Taghreed El-Khodary, "For War Widows, Hamas Recruits Army of Husbands," *New York Times*, October 31, 2008, [www.nytimes.com/2008/10/31/world/middleeast/31gaza.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/31/world/middleeast/31gaza.html).

50. "ISIS Fighters Get Marriage Bonus, Including Honeymoon," CBSNews, May 26, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/isis-fighters-get-marriage-bonuses-including-honeymoon/>.

51. Ariel I. Ahram, "Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS," *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (May 2015), pp. 57-78, at p. 69.



Table 1. Cross Tabulation of Brideprice (Yes/No) with (Rounded) Global Peace Index, 2016 (N = 163)

Brideprice	Global Peace Index (1 is most peaceful)				Total
	1	2	3	4	
No (0)	16	53	8	0	77
Yes (1)	0	68	14	4	86
Total	16	121	22	4	163

described the great success of rebel-group recruitment in those areas of Sierra Leone with high rates of polygyny. In such areas, where wealthy older men can easily afford multiple wives, impoverished young men have little hope of marrying.<sup>52</sup>

#### SUMMARY

Having identified patterns of patrilineality, brideprice, marriage market obstruction, and young male grievance, we illustrate in the next section how these forces have played out in three recent conflicts. To set the stage for the case studies, we performed a prefatory exploratory empirical analysis. The associations are significant: for example, in a one-way ANOVA using as the dependent variable the 2016 multivariate Global Peace Index score operationalized by Vision of Humanity to scale how stable and peaceful a society is,<sup>53</sup> and the four-point version of the 2016 WomanStats Brideprice Scale as the independent grouping variable (N = 163),<sup>54</sup> the results were significant at the 0.0001 level.<sup>55</sup>

We also performed a cross tabulation between those same variables, with brideprice here discretized as a simple “no” or “yes” indicating whether any form of brideprice is practiced, and the Global Peace Index discretized by rounding to the nearest whole-number scale point.

The results of this cross tabulation are striking (see table 1): no society with brideprice fell into the most peaceful quartile of this sample of 163 nation-states. No society without brideprice fell into the least peaceful quartile of the

52. Esther Mokuwa et al., “Peasant Grievance and Insurgency in Sierra Leone: Judicial Serfdom as a Driver of Conflict,” *African Affairs*, July 2011, pp. 339–366, doi:10.1093/afraf/adr019.

53. “Global Peace Index, 2016” (New York: Vision of Humanity, Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016), <http://visionofhumanity.org/indexes/global-peace-index/>.

54. “Brideprice/Dowry/Wedding Costs (Type and Prevalence), Scaled 2016,” WomanStats Project, 2016, [http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/Brideprice\\_Dowry\\_Wedding\\_Costs\\_2correctstatic.png](http://www.womanstats.org/substatics/Brideprice_Dowry_Wedding_Costs_2correctstatic.png).

55. Results can be found at doi:10.7910/DVN/SPZSJZ/.

sample. Additional exploratory statistical results can be found in the supplemental material online.<sup>56</sup>

These exploratory empirical results are interesting, but only suggestive. Process tracing is required to understand the causal mechanisms at work, prior to conducting any confirmatory analysis, and that requires a more detailed examination of relevant cases.

### *Case Studies*

In this section, we describe the linkages between marriage market obstruction and the resort to organized violence with the help of three case studies. We chose these cases as plausibility probes of the thesis that brideprice can destabilize societies. The first two cases, Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and various militias in South Sudan, illustrate the dynamics of brideprice and rebellion in practice. These are cases in which observers and participants have explicitly acknowledged the role of brideprice in the emergence of group-based violence. The third case, Saudi Arabia, demonstrates how some states, having recognized the risk posed by brideprice, are attempting to mitigate that risk through the creation of programs and policies to prevent or ameliorate the destabilizing effects of brideprice inflation.

#### HOW BRIDEPRICE BOLSTERS BOKO HARAM'S RECRUITMENT IN NIGERIA

Inflationary brideprice in northern Nigeria led to, and then continued to fuel, the rise of the Salafi-jihadist group Boko Haram. The group first gained international attention following its abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, a town in the northeastern state of Borno in Nigeria, in April 2014. Although this episode, and the international community's rallying behind efforts to free the girls, thrust Boko Haram onto the global agendas of Western countries and human rights advocates for the first time, the group has been active for more than a decade. Thus far, Boko Haram-related actions have claimed more than 35,000 lives and have led to the displacement of an estimated 2.5 million people throughout the Lake Chad Basin. As one of the most lethal insurgencies in Africa, Boko Haram is responsible for one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.<sup>57</sup>

Despite a renewed military offensive against the group in 2015, the conflict

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56. *Ibid.*

57. Nigerian Social Violence Project dataset, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Washington, D.C., <http://www.connectsaisafrica.org/research/african-studies-publications/social-violence-nigeria/>.

is ongoing. Boko Haram continues to engage in bombing campaigns and has thwarted the government's efforts to exercise control over much of Borno State. It also has expanded its activities into neighboring Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, drawing on existing trade and kinship networks.

As part of its recruitment strategy, Boko Haram has continued to organize inexpensive weddings for its members, a practice dating back to the group's founder, Muhammad Yusuf. Given rising brideprice, underemployment, and polygamy-related bride scarcity, many of the young men who marry in these weddings would have probably remained bachelors.<sup>58</sup>

According to S.P. Reyna, brideprice in Nigeria's Lake Chad Basin serves to "partially socialize younger men into their mature economic roles."<sup>59</sup> The region's marriage market constitutes a reward system in which men are incentivized to become economically productive and thus socially significant. Although the past three decades have witnessed changes in Lake Chad Basin social norms, Reyna's 1985 observation about the town of Bama, in Borno State, still holds true for the larger region. He writes, "The crucial point is that the spoils of deference cannot begin to accrue to a man until he has married."<sup>60</sup> Within the social strata, the older, married men receive the most respect, then younger, married men, and lastly unmarried men. As Reyna describes, "There are gatherings of men that convene in each ward every day. Though informal, these sessions play a vital role in communicating information and formulating opinions about affairs that touch village and ward. Mature, married men sit on cushions or stools in the center of large mats laid out beneath trees. Younger, married men sit on these mats, but on the edges and without stools or cushions. Young, unmarried men sit in the dirt beside the mat."<sup>61</sup>

This sort of social hierarchy also appears in anthropological accounts of the Kanuri ethnic group, whose members are thought to have made up a significant proportion of Boko Haram's organization and leadership, particularly in its early years. Among the Kanuri and other ethnic groups in the Lake Chad Basin, prestige is tied to the size of a man's family and household unit, which includes his family and other members of the community who live under his care. This system further incentivizes the taking of multiple wives and the expansion of patronage systems. Young men are often taken under the wing of a

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58. Hilary Matfess, interviews with persons who wish to remain anonymous, North East Region, Nigeria, 2015–16.

59. S.P. Reyna, "Bridewealth Revisited: Socialization and the Reproduction of Labor in a Domestic African Economy" (Durham: University of New Hampshire, 1985), p. 1, [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNAAX355.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAAX355.pdf).

60. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

local “big man,” whose wealth and social status facilitate the process of finding them wives. In return, the young men pledge loyalty to their patron—a commitment that often entails the younger men providing labor.<sup>62</sup> Only after taking a wife is a young man able to act as a “real man,” exercising autonomy and accumulating social capital.<sup>63</sup>

In northern Nigeria, obtaining the financial resources to pay brideprice has become increasingly difficult. The country’s oil wealth has disincentivized investment in the manufacturing sector and made non-agricultural, non-oil sector employment difficult to obtain. Youth unemployment remains a constant concern; less discussed is the impact of the lack of jobs on the psychology of unemployed young men. A 2015 survey found that, for 57 percent of Nigerian men, “insufficient income” was a source of stress; 44 percent experienced stress as a result of “not having enough work.” Despite these economic stressors, 98 percent of the men surveyed reported that “bride price is important and should remain [so]”; 29 percent reported that “a real man in Nigeria is one with many wives.”<sup>64</sup> These high percentages are all the more striking when one considers that the survey included regions in Nigeria where polygamy is not widely practiced, as well as regions with higher employment statistics and annual incomes.<sup>65</sup>

According to the spiritual leader Khalifa Abulfathi, in the communities surrounding Maiduguri, where Boko Haram was founded, the cost of “items required for [a] successful [marriage] celebration kept changing in tune with inflation over the years.”<sup>66</sup> The Kanuri and Shuwa Arabs, two prominent ethnic groups in the area, “primarily demand payment of dowries in gold coins.”<sup>67</sup> Increases in the price of gold over time have made it difficult for young men to pay brideprice, further adding to their strain.

Maiduguri has also witnessed shifts in the marriage practice known as *Toshi*

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62. Ronald Cohen, “Marriage Instability among the Kanuri of Northern Nigeria,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (December 1961), pp. 1231–1249.

63. Ronald Cohen, “The Analysis of Conflict in Hierarchical Systems: An Example from Kanuri Political Organization,” *Anthropologica*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1962), pp. 87–120.

64. If brideprice is quick to rise, why is it so resistant to falling? First, individuals and families want to maintain social face and standing in the male hierarchy. Which man wants to be the first to accept a lower-than-normal brideprice for his daughter? Similarly, perhaps to a lesser degree, which family wants to be the first to pay a lower price for a bride, signaling potential economic woes? Second, an economic calculus helps maintain high brideprices: those who have already paid the going rate, and those who have daughters of marriageable age, will see their investment degraded by lowered brideprice and will resist any decrease. Voices 4 Change, *Being a Man in Nigeria: Perceptions and Realities* (London: UKAID, 2015), p. 22, [www.v4c-nigeria.com/being-a-man-in-nigeria-perceptions-and-realities/](http://www.v4c-nigeria.com/being-a-man-in-nigeria-perceptions-and-realities/).

65. *Ibid.*

66. Hilary Matfess interview with Khalifa Abulfathi, email correspondence, 2016.

67. *Ibid.*

(literally, “blocking”), in which the fiancé, often with his family’s support, provides gifts to his fiancée and her family to ward off other suitors. According to Abulfathi, “the Toshi became monetized and progressively included the funding for the Turaren wuta (scents) and kayan lalle (henna),” which women use in the wedding ceremony.<sup>68</sup> He noted that “these were later included in the brideprice that resulted in a spike in the bride-price in the 2000s.”<sup>69</sup> It was during this period that “economic hardship began playing a role in the marriage processes in Borno.”<sup>70</sup>

It was also during this period that Boko Haram came into its own, with founder Mohammed Yusuf breaking away from his patron, Ja’far Adams, and establishing his own mosque in 2002. Yusuf had been put in charge of the youth wing of Adams’s politically connected Salafist group because of his skill in mobilizing young men. In exchange for building political support for the governor of Borno State, Adams and Yusuf influenced the terms under which Borno State adopted and implemented Sharia law. Over time, however, Yusuf became increasingly frustrated with what he perceived as the government’s inadequate implementation of Sharia law. This frustration would eventually lead him to reject the legitimacy of the government at both the state and federal levels, as well as Western institutions and influences.

In the early days of Boko Haram, Yusuf provided the types of social services that Borno State, the federal government, and traditional authorities had failed to supply. In addition to increasing access to education and farmland, the group helped to arrange marriages for young men. A resident of the Railroad neighborhood of Maiduguri, where Yusuf established his mosque, recalled that in just a few years, Yusuf had facilitated more than 500 weddings. The group also provided support for young men to become “okada drivers,” who gained popularity for their affordable motorbike taxi services. Some even saved enough to marry. At this time, Boko Haram was a relatively nonviolent group that focused its aggression toward local political and religious figures who criticized the group’s rejection of the government’s legitimacy on religious grounds. Violence ramped up, however, when the police began targeting okada drivers for not wearing protective helmets, which the drivers argued interfered with their religious head-dressings. In 2009, government forces killed 700 suspected Boko Haram members in a massive security sweep in Maiduguri that included door-to-door raids and the extrajudicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf. Following this crackdown, the group went underground

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68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*

for a year or so before re-emerging with a deepened sense of grievance and a new leader, Abubakar Shekau.<sup>71</sup>

Under Shekau, Boko Haram has engaged in a wholesale war against the Nigerian state. Through raids in rural areas, suicide bombings, attacks on military posts, and the bombings of cities, the insurgency has killed more than 35,000 people and displaced more than 2.5 million.<sup>72</sup> Hundreds of suicide bombers have detonated their devices against civilian targets such as bus stations and markets, killing thousands.<sup>73</sup> In rural areas, fear of Boko Haram has been so pervasive that farmers have left their fields fallow, contributing to a regional food security crisis thought to have affected 11 million people in the Lake Chad Basin. The World Bank estimates that Boko Haram has caused \$9 billion worth of damage throughout the country's north since 2010.<sup>74</sup>

Under Shekau, Boko Haram also has begun to abduct women to be "wives" for its members. In many cases, these women are essentially sex slaves. Amnesty International estimated in 2015 that the group had abducted more than 2,000 women, and it is likely that this figure has risen since then. In interviews, women who voluntarily joined Boko Haram reported that they were often attracted to the group because the brideprice, though smaller than those accompanying "traditional" weddings, was paid directly to the women, not to their fathers. At least in the beginning, however, a token brideprice was left for the fathers of kidnapped girls: one man recounted how Boko Haram kidnapped girls in his community, "tossing 5,000 naira [about \$25] on the floor as a brideprice." Another offered the following account:

Bawagana, a shy 15-year-old living in Sanda Kyarimi camp, one of the official Internally Displaced People sites, said that a Boko Haram fighter had come to her home in Dikwa, 90 kilometres east of Maiduguri, and asked, "Do you love me?"

Of course I answered, "No!" she said, with her eyes fixed on the ground. The boy got very angry and said, "If you do not come with me, I will kill your father, but if you come with me I will let him live."

I followed to save my father. The boy left 10,000 naira (about \$50) on the floor. It was a bride price in Boko Haram's eyes.<sup>75</sup>

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71. The description of the sect's evolution is drawn from author fieldwork and from Andrew Walker, *"Eat the Heart of the Infidel": The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram* (London: Hurst, 2016)

72. Nigerian Social Violence Project dataset.

73. Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, "Trends and Demography in Boko Haram's Suicide Bombings," Harvard University and Center for Democracy and Development, Abuja, Nigeria, 2017.

74. Michael Olukayode and Yinka Ibukun, "Boko Haram Caused \$9 Billion Damage in Nigeria's North," *Bloomberg*, March 6, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-06/boko-haram-caused-9-billion-damage-in-nigeria-s-north-un-says>.

75. Hilary Matfess, "Boko Haram Is Enslaving Women, Making Them Join the War," *Newsweek*,

Those familiar with Boko Haram's practices state that women are given to fighters to reward them for their service and to cultivate loyalty. A fifteen-year-old who worked as a driver for Boko Haram before defecting to the Civilian Joint Task Force (a vigilante group that assists the government's forces against Boko Haram) reported that "wives are 'earned,' they are a reward for those who stay six months." Once you have proven your commitment to the group, "if you see someone who you like, you can pick the wife you want."<sup>76</sup> The women are often groomed before becoming wives, a process that can involve days of "Quranic education," in which they are subjected to lectures on Boko Haram's ideology. Women who were married before being abducted are told to forget their "infidel" husbands and accept a Boko Haram husband. Although the media often describe the abductions of women and girls who later become wives of insurgents as cases of purely sexual and physical violence, reports suggest that the process of marrying an insurgent is always formalized for purposes of legitimation. The fifteen-year-old driver-turned-vigilante reported that marriages are often accompanied by a large ceremony; the young man observed that a Boko Haram wedding is "like a regular marriage."<sup>77</sup>

Since its founding as a dissident sect through its transformation into one of the most lethal insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa, Boko Haram has recognized the importance of marriage to young men, and has capitalized on male grievances related to brideprice inflation. By providing members access to wives, and thus a sense of self as "real men," Boko Haram has gained a following of 3,000–5,000 young men, with shockingly few reports of defection. "These men can take a wife at no extra charge," explained Kaka, a young woman orphaned, captured, and raped by Boko Haram members. "Usually it is very expensive to take a wife, very hard to get married, but not now."<sup>78</sup>

In sum, the intergenerational nature of the brideprice tax in Nigeria's Lake Chad Basin, coupled with other grievances common to the region's young men, has galvanized some of these men to obtain wives (and social standing) in ways that have destabilized the state and augmented the power of anti-state groups. The most visible of these groups is Boko Haram. Without taking into account the effect of brideprice, one cannot fully understand why Boko Haram emerged, why it persists, and how it could be successfully challenged.

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February 8, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/2016/02/19/nigeria-boko-haram-buhari-chibok-girls-424091.html>.

76. Hilary Matfess, fieldwork, North East Region, Nigeria, 2015–16.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Matfess, "Boko Haram Is Enslaving Women, Making Them Join the War."



BRIDEPRICE, CATTLE RAIDING, AND CIVIL WAR IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is another state where brideprice inflation has had destabilizing effects by incentivizing violence. It is the world's newest state, its population having voted overwhelmingly to declare independence from Sudan in a 2011 referendum after decades of violence and instability. Even before the referendum, the dynamics of marriage markets in the region had contributed to insecurity in areas now a part of South Sudan by incentivizing young men's participation in armed groups. One such group, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA)—a key participant in the 1983–2005 Second Sudanese Civil War—acknowledged the importance of marriage to its members. Although the SPLA's recruitment efforts might not have been explicitly predicated on access to women, in practice, members were rewarded with wives. As Clemence Pinaud observed, "Although John Garang," the leader of the SPLA, "had just one wife (Rebecca), he was an exception; most SPLA commanders had multiple wives. They were reputed to marry numerous women—as many as 51 in some cases—especially in the countryside, where levels of scrutiny were lower than in the towns."<sup>79</sup> Commanders were not the only ones to use their "war wealth" to increase their number of wives. The SPLA hierarchy allowed subordinates to marry multiple wives, leading one awestruck interviewee to observe that SPLA soldiers "married from each location! They had so many wives!"<sup>80</sup>

Since the 2011 referendum, the violence plaguing the young country has taken a number of forms. In addition to ongoing border disputes between Sudan and South Sudan, the country has been wracked by a civil war since December 2013, aggravated by continuing inter-ethnic violence from the age-old practice of cattle raiding and resulting vengeance feuds. Having roots in the distribution of power under the country's constitution, as the result of manipulation by President Salva Kiir and Vice President–cum-rebel leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition Riek Machar, the civil war consuming the country pits the Dinka and the Nuer against each other, and has led to a regional humanitarian crisis.

Ethnic differences, coupled with governmental dysfunction, created an opening for nonstate security groups; for decades, the region has witnessed the proliferation of militias. As James Copnall has observed, "Ethnic militias and community 'defense forces' are not new in what is now South Sudan.

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79. Clemence Pinaud, "South Sudan: Civil War, Predation, and the Making of a Military Aristocracy," *African Affairs*, April 2014, p. 203, doi:10.1093/afraf/adu019.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

They are a consequence of an ethnically divided society, with a long and destabilising history of conflict, and Khartoum's divide and rule tactics. It was hoped that separation from Sudan would, over time, create the conditions in which ethnic militias would not flourish. In the three years since independence, the opposite has happened."<sup>81</sup>

The war's politicization of ethnicity, as well as the massive influx of small arms into the region, has devastated South Sudan. Since 2013, an estimated 50,000 people have been killed and 1.6 million displaced by the various participants in war. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), which is dedicated to tracking political violence in developing countries, much of the violence is driven by rebel targeting of civilians; this "communal violence" is thought to be linked to "post-war tensions over administrative and traditional leadership, resource distribution, and access to services and opportunities (e.g. education, employment)." ACLED also identifies "pressures on service systems and land and other resources, [which] increased with the return of displaced populations after 2005," as having driven violence.<sup>82</sup> Frequently overlooked, however, is the role that rising brideprice has played in encouraging cattle raiding and the spiraling intercommunal violence stemming from it.

Throughout the region's history, the Dinka and the Nuer have raided each other's cattle herds, often stealing cattle in the night, without the conflict expanding much beyond localized violence. According to the Environment, Conflict, and Cooperation (ECC) Platform, a clearinghouse for information on the intersection of environmental, economic, and social stability, "Cattle raids and conflicts over pastures and wells between the Dinka and Nuer, South Sudan's two largest ethnic groups, have a long history, although, at times, relations between both communities have been marked by intermarriage and cooperation."<sup>83</sup> In the context of South Sudan's post-independence civil war, however, cattle raiding has become even more deadly, driven not only by the militarization of the region but also by skyrocketing brideprice and ensuing economic desperation. Where once a bride would cost twelve cows, marrying an educated woman in South Sudan after the referendum would require fifty

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81. James Copnall, "Ethnic Militias and the Shrinking State: South Sudan's Dangerous Path," *African Arguments*, August 21, 2014, <http://africanarguments.org/2014/08/21/ethnic-militias-and-the-shrinking-state-south-sudans-dangerous-path-by-james-copnall/>.

82. Armed Conflict & Event Location Data Project, "Country Report: Sudan and South Sudan" (Sussex, U.K.: University of Sussex, 2015), p. 7, [http://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ACLED-Country-Report\\_Sudan-and-South-Sudan.pdf](http://www.acleddata.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/ACLED-Country-Report_Sudan-and-South-Sudan.pdf).

83. "Conflict between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan" (Berlin: ECC Platform Library, 2014), <https://library.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/natural-ressource-conflict-south-sudan-dinka-vs-nuer>.

cows, in addition to 60 goats and 30,000 Sudanese pounds (in 2011, the equivalent of \$12,000 in cash).<sup>84</sup>

Cattle, masculinity, and livelihoods have been inexorably connected in the region's history; the civil war is now being woven into this political and economic tapestry. According to Hannah Wright, "Owning a gun and participating in a cattle raid are rites of passage for adolescent boys, and for men these are symbols of manhood and virility which confer social status."<sup>85</sup> Those who successfully carry out cattle raids are doubly rewarded: first, stealing cattle gives them the ability to afford a now-exorbitant brideprice. Additionally, those who steal another tribe's cattle enjoy the social standing conferred through livestock ownership, including being honored in public ceremonies in which women praise them in song.

Although brideprice is sometimes paid in cash or through a mixture of livestock, the use of cattle as the primary measurement of brideprice remains widespread. One pastoralist in South Sudan states simply, "You cannot marry without cows, and you cannot be called a man without cows."<sup>86</sup> According to the ECC Platform, "Traditionally, cattle raids are a livelihood sustaining practice, which allows restocking herds after droughts" and also serves an important social function, "as it provides the means for young men to get married."<sup>87</sup> And as in Nigeria, polygamy is practiced across South Sudan, and social status is linked to the number of wives a man has. Indeed, as a male elder explained, "One of the reasons for polygamy is that when you have ten daughters, each one will give you thirty cows, and they are all for [the father]. So then you have three hundred cows. That is why one marries very many wives: so that you can have very many daughters. If you have a wife who can only give you one child, then you must get another wife."<sup>88</sup> Thus, in South Sudan there has been an upward pressure on brideprice that, coupled with economic stagnation and the prevalence of polygyny, has incentivized participation in intercommunal violence.

According to a report by Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, "Male and female youth must marry to be recognized as adults; however, male youth are

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84. Matt Richmond and Flavia Krause-Jackson, "Cows-for-Bride Inflation Spurs Cattle Theft in South Sudan," *Bloomberg*, July 26, 2011, [www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-26/cows-for-bride-inflation-spurs-cattle-theft-among-mundari-in-south-sudan.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-26/cows-for-bride-inflation-spurs-cattle-theft-among-mundari-in-south-sudan.html).

85. Hannah Wright, *Masculinities, Conflict, and Peacebuilding: Perspectives on Men through a Gender Lens* (London: Saferworld, 2014), p. 7, [www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens](http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens).

86. Marc Sommers and Stephanie Schwartz, "Dowry and Division: Youth and State Building in South Sudan" (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), p. 4, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/11/dowry-and-division-youth-and-state-building-south-sudan>.

87. "Conflict between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan."

88. Sommers and Schwartz, "Dowry and Division," p. 5.

under severe pressure to meet escalating dowry [brideprice] costs.”<sup>89</sup> An unpublished report by the United Nations Development Project found that brideprice rose by 44 percent in the five years after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005. Brideprice inflation occurred even though economic opportunities in the country had stagnated and, in some places, contracted; not only was employment increasingly difficult to obtain, but cattle were also becoming scarcer. Interviews conducted by the UN Development Project revealed that “a single traditional marriage would cost a family up to 100 heads of cattle—a very high amount for a typical family.”<sup>90</sup> In Bahr al Ghazal, a region in northwestern South Sudan, a man needs 200–300 head of cattle to pay for a wife. For young men, the acquisition of so many cattle through legitimate means is nearly impossible—extended families can provide only so much support, and legitimate economic opportunities are scarce. Cattle raiding is often the only way that young men can afford to pay for a wife. A 2012 report by the Institute for Security Studies, a think tank focused on security in Africa, concluded that “with the current market rates of \$300 per head, the cost usually ranges between \$10,000 and \$60,000. Taken from these figures, one would therefore conclude that South Sudanese marriages . . . are no doubt some of the most expensive marriages in the world.”<sup>91</sup> A young man trying to pay the brideprice for his future wife expressed the frustration of many in South Sudan: “It took me to work three years basically, to be able to afford the 100 cows. I’ve tried everything I could because I really want to marry my wife.”<sup>92</sup>

Participation in cattle raiding and militias is both a means of economic advancement that enables marriage and a valuable social outlet for men denied the rite of passage that marriage provides. As Hannah Wright notes, not only is participation in militias/military activities one of the few economic opportunities available in the region, but “recruitment into the SPLA or non-state armed groups is closely linked with masculinity, and can provide a sense

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89. *Ibid.*, p. 4. In this case, “dowry” is being incorrectly used by the authors as a term for dower or brideprice.

90. South Sudan Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control, South Sudan Peace and Reconciliation Commission, United Nations Development Programme, “Community Consultation Report, Lakes State, South Sudan” (Juba: United Nations Development Programme, 2012), <http://www.ss.undp.org/content/dam/southsudan/library/Documents/CSAC%20Reports/UNDP-SS-Lakes-consult-12.pdf>.

91. Ding Yual, “The Complex Causes of Cattle Raiding in South Sudan” (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies Africa, 2012), <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/the-complex-causes-of-cattle-raiding-in-south-sudan>.

92. Rising brideprices also fuel corruption, as families of government officials turn to government coffers for the needed funds for their sons to marry. See “Negotiating for a Wife: The Australian Men Paying Dowries So They Can Marry,” *Special Broadcasting Service*, September 22, 2015, <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/thefeed/story/negotiating-wife-australian-men-paying-dowries-so-they-can-marry>.

of identity and self-worth which would otherwise be difficult to find.”<sup>93</sup> That identity is dependent on the group’s ability to facilitate the accumulation of brideprice assets. Frank Langfitt similarly observed that young men “used to steal cattle with spears, but now they use AK-47s left over from the war. The result is carnage.”<sup>94</sup> Cattle-stealing raids often produce revenge attacks, and given the clan structure of South Sudan, the violence can quickly escalate. It was estimated that in 2009—before the acceleration in violent conflict—more than 2,500 people died in tribal violence in the region, often as the result of cattle raids and retributive attacks.<sup>95</sup>

According to Sommers and Schwartz, in addition to joining militias and cattle raids, some young men “seek wives from different ethnic groups or countries” where brideprice may be lower or no longer practiced.<sup>96</sup> Other young men have attempted to avoid the trap of brideprice inflation by eloping. Although a risky proposition, it is not unheard of; communities in South Sudan, however, have developed systems to disincentivize the practice. The UN mission in South Sudan reported that “if marriage begins with elopement or pregnancy, considered illegal and embarrassing among the Dinka, other steps are followed to legalize the union.”<sup>97</sup> Such inauspicious courting practices are referred to as “coming through a window” and are punished through the levying of fines payable in cattle, essentially increasing the brideprice.<sup>98</sup> If a young man is caught eloping with a woman, custom requires that “[the] boy’s family to pay an expectant heifer (*akolchok*) each to the girl’s father and mother and bulls (*adhiamhotkou*) to young men helping the father search for a daughter who had eloped. . . . If a boy had eloped with the girl but denied impregnating her, he was fined five cows. . . . But when he accepts responsibility for the pregnancy and his father is hesitant to pay the bride price, traditional law requests that he make available 30 heads of cattle . . . (for) the family of the girl and his son receives the girl as his wife.”<sup>99</sup> After this, “the normal procedure [including the payment of cattle as brideprice] is conducted.”<sup>100</sup>

The consequences of elopement are not always so civil, and many families

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93. Wright, *Masculinities, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, p. 7.

94. Frank Langfitt, “Cattle Rustling a Deadly Business in Sudan,” *NPR*, April 17, 2011, [www.npr.org/2011/04/17/135486358/cattle-rustling-a-deadly-business-in-sudan](http://www.npr.org/2011/04/17/135486358/cattle-rustling-a-deadly-business-in-sudan).

95. Skye Wheeler, “Tribesmen Kill 139 in South Sudan Raid: Official,” *Reuters*, January 7, 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-south-tribal-idUSTRE6061NC20100107>.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

97. Felix Waya Leju, *Marriage and Cattle* (Juba: United Nations Mission in Sudan Public Information Office, 2010), p. 5, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:5IOLPfd8XMsJ:docplayer.net/29814883-United-nations-mission-in-sudan-january-marriage-and-cattle-published-by-unmis-public-information-office.html+&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ng>.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

99. *Ibid.*

100. *Ibid.*

resort to vigilante justice. Sommers and Schwartz describe extrajudicial killings as a frequent response to this social trespass. And according to one government official, "If the girl is found with a boyfriend, her family can kill her. If she is impregnated by a boyfriend, she can be beaten to death."<sup>101</sup> Another man stated, "If you elope and you're caught, [the male youth] will be killed." Sommers and Schwartz concluded that "stories of male youth who attempted to elope and were captured by the family of their new brides were commonplace and gruesome."<sup>102</sup>

In South Sudan, brideprice inflation and the wide availability of small arms have resulted in increasingly violent cattle raids and facilitated the proliferation of militias. Together, these forces have fueled an intercommunal conflict that has destabilized the young country. A comprehensive security analysis would of necessity acknowledge the significant role that brideprice has played in fostering instability in South Sudan since independence. Policymakers in South Sudan and its international partners must find a way to circumvent the instability resulting from brideprice inflation if the country is to break the cycle of violence.

#### STABILIZATION EFFORTS IN SAUDI ARABIA'S MARRIAGE MARKET

There is at least one state that takes brideprice inflation as a serious policy issue: Saudi Arabia. And arguably, the Saudi regime has seen some measure of success from its efforts in addressing this concern. Despite the intersection of regime characteristics and population indicators that would suggest Saudi Arabia is ripe for violent rebellion, the country has been remarkably stable. Saudi Arabia's stability is rightly puzzling, given the thesis of this article. Although there are a number of important differences between Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Nigeria and South Sudan, on the other, all three countries have strong brideprice traditions. Additionally, as in the Nigeria and South Sudan case studies, concepts of masculinity and social standing in Saudi Arabia are deeply connected to a man's ability to take a wife. Polygyny is also a feature of the marriage market in Saudi Arabia, which could be expected to have the same sorts of effects on the distribution of potential wives as in Nigeria and South Sudan—and thus to pose the same threat to intergenerational relations. Similarly, all of these countries have experienced the inflationary pressures in brideprice that threaten obstruction of marriage markets.

There is, however, at least one critical difference between Saudi Arabia and Nigeria and South Sudan: the Saudi regime's activism on the issue of

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101. Sommers and Schwatz, "Dowry and Division," p. 5.

102. *Ibid.*

brideprice inflation and its recognition of the threat to national stability from marriage market obstruction. Unlike the Nigerian and South Sudanese governments which have largely refrained from intervening in the marriage market to dampen brideprice inflation—whether because of a lack of interest or a lack of capacity—Saudi Arabia, through both the government and civil-society groups, has undertaken vigorous efforts to cap brideprice and reduce the cost of weddings. Although marriage and marriage markets are infrequently discussed in purely economic terms by governments, it is clear from the Saudi Arabian case that, just as in other economic markets (e.g., housing and credit), targeted governmental intervention is possible and helpful.<sup>103</sup>

In the early 2000s, brideprice in Saudi Arabia was on the rise. One anecdotal account reported that the average price for a virgin bride was 70,000 SAR (more than \$18,500). By 2015, there were reports of brideprice payments “as high as SR100,000.”<sup>104</sup> Following consultations with religious leaders, the government released a decree asking for local cooperation with enforcement of a ceiling for brideprice. Ostensibly the government framed its legislative cap on brideprice—limiting the payment for a virgin bride to 50,000 SAR and a previously married woman to 30,000 SAR—as a means of combating the rise in unmarried women. The government claimed that “the number of spinsters in Saudi Arabia [had] surged from around 1.5 million at the end of 2010 to more than four million” in 2015.<sup>105</sup>

The government’s actions following the decree generally met with approval, at least in the media coverage. One young man named Fahd, interviewed by *Arab News*, asserted that the cap “shows the authorities are concerned about a situation where marriage expenses are too high.”<sup>106</sup> Others suggested that the cap did not do enough; Wafa, a housewife quoted in the *Saudi Gazette*, complained that 50,000 SAR was still too heavy of a burden for many men, asserting “middle-income men find it difficult to afford all these expenses.”<sup>107</sup> In

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103. Although both Nigeria and Saudi Arabia subsidize fuel, and South Sudan has subsidized food in the past, only Saudi Arabia has intervened to control the rising costs of this other critical household expenditure.

104. Carol Fleming, “What Is a Typical Dowry in the Kingdom?” *American Bedu*, June 23, 2008, <https://delhi4cats.wordpress.com/2008/06/23/what-is-a-typical-dowry-in-the-kingdom/>. “Dowry” is the wrong term here; “dower” or “brideprice” would be more accurate.

105. Mugdha Variyar, “Saudi Arabia Sets Dowry Limit for Virgin Brides to Combat Rise in Spinsters,” *International Business Times*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/saudi-arabia-sets-dowry-limit-virgin-brides-combat-rise-spinsters-643419>. Again, “dowry” is the wrong term here; “dower” or “brideprice” would be more accurate.

106. Raid Qustia, “The High Cost of Tying the Knot,” *Arab News*, August 3, 2003, [www.arabnews.com/node/235181](http://www.arabnews.com/node/235181).

107. “Lightening the Dowry Burden,” *Saudi Gazette*, October 15, 2015. Again, “dowry” is the wrong term here; “dower” or “brideprice” would be more accurate.



addition to the ban, there are also loans and grants available to young men from local charities to help cover the cost of marriage and brideprice.<sup>108</sup>

Saudi Arabia's government and civil society have also sought to move away from holding large, elaborate weddings, combatting some of the social norms that inflate brideprice by, for example, holding mass marriages. The Charity Society for Simplifying Marriage and Family Care of Ahsa alone has organized thirteen mass marriages for nearly 2,000 young men and women. The chairman of the group, Nasser Al-Nuaem, argues that "mass marriages promote the values of cooperation and social solidarity between different social categories in the Kingdom." At some of these mass weddings, charities reward low brideprices with cash prizes. In Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, the couples with the lowest brideprice exchange were given 15,000 SAR (nearly \$4,000) "to help newlyweds start their families."<sup>109</sup>

To further ameliorate the destabilizing effects of brideprice, the government has begun to promote the concept that brideprice must be proportional to the man's economic situation, thus dampening somewhat the regressive nature of brideprice. In 2015, Morgan Windsor reported that "the average dowry for middle-class families in Saudi Arabia is SR30,000 or \$8,000, but it can be hundreds of thousands of riyals for the wealthy."<sup>110</sup> Although this sum still constitutes a significant burden, a sliding scale of brideprice would reduce the concentration of wives in the hands of the few and the obstruction of marriage markets by opening up the possibility of marriage to a wider range of social classes. In addition, heavy government subsidization of health care has brought about an enviably low rate of maternal mortality in the kingdom, reducing the typically high mortality rates of married women of childbearing age seen in other strongly patrilineal cultures.

Some analysts would suggest that the relatively high number of Saudi Arabians joining terrorist organizations undermines the thesis of this article. It was estimated in 2016 that more than 2,500 Saudis were fighting for the Islamic State.<sup>111</sup> Although the Saudi government has taken steps to address bride-

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108. One interviewee, insistent on anonymity, asserted to Hudson that it was well known that the Saudi military pays the brideprices for its recruits so that there will be no brideprice-related discontent in the ranks. We have not been able to independently verify that claim, but offer it as an intriguing assertion worth investigating.

109. Morgan Windsor, "Saudi Brides Demanding Lowest Dowry Are Rewarded with Cash Prize at Mass Wedding," *International Business Times*, June 3, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/saudi-brides-demanding-lowest-dowry-are-rewarded-cash-prize-mass-wedding-1951522>. Again, "dowry" is the wrong term here; "dower" or "brideprice" would be more accurate.

110. *Ibid.*

111. Ashley Kirk, "Iraq and Syria: How Many Foreign Fighters Are Fighting for ISIL?" *Telegraph*, March 24, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isil/>.

price's destabilizing effects, the capped level is still relatively burdensome even for middle-class families. Brideprice is certainly not the only reason a young Saudi man would join an insurgent group, but in the absence of the government's efforts to cap brideprice, the figure cited above could be much higher.

### *Conclusion*

The brideprice system associated with patrilineality is an important underlying cause of chronic instability within some societies. Like other marketized commodities, brideprice is subject to destabilizing inflation, obstructing marriage markets by pricing marriage out of the reach of many young men. This tendency toward marriage market obstruction is aggravated by polygyny, an early age of marriage for girls, and the high post-marriage female mortality rates that typically accompany brideprice systems. These structural problems incentivize violence to obtain brideprice resources, as we have demonstrated in the case of South Sudan, and offer insurgent groups a ready-made recruitment tool, as we have shown in the case of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria.

Brideprice functions as a profoundly regressive tax, disproportionately affecting poorer and higher birth-order young men and creating a large, aggrieved base from which violent groups can more easily recruit. The demands of brideprice in places where the economy is stagnating or jobs are scarce leave young men with few options. Without an income, they cannot get a wife; without a wife, they cannot be regarded as so-called real men in their patrilineal society. For many young men, the only means to accumulate the assets needed to marry may be looting, raiding, or joining a rebel or terrorist group.

This analysis offers two important takeaways. First, no comprehensive security analysis of many of today's conflicts can be complete without an examination of how the structuration of male/female relations affects those conflicts. How those relations are structured has cascading effects on macro-level state phenomena, as the case of brideprice demonstrates. Marriage market obstruction, fueled by brideprice and polygyny, can destabilize nations by incentivizing violence and facilitating recruitment into insurgent groups. As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has asserted, "The subjugation of women is a threat to the common security of our world and to the national security of our country."<sup>112</sup>

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112. Hillary Clinton, "Remarks at the TEDWomen Conference," Washington, D.C., December 8, 2010.

Scholars in the field of security studies and analysts in the state security sector must begin to gather the type of information necessary to include these important factors in their analysis, and consider the linkages between the security concepts conventionally employed and the structuration of male/female relations. Given the role of brideprice inflation in facilitating grievance, violent conflict, raiding, and even insurrection, monitoring fluctuations in marriage markets is a critical task for the security analyst—and yet such monitoring is not taking place. That must change. Part of this neglect no doubt stems from conventions in security analysis circles, which assign what are too often considered “soft” social issues a lower priority. Marriage, with all of its associations with women and family, perhaps seems to those in these circles to be a far cry from the logic of conflict. Concerned with the movements and weapons of violent nonstate actors, national security scholars and analysts in the United States and around the globe may thus unintentionally overlook the social forces that prompt so many young men to take up arms.

Similar to the development of early warning systems for mass atrocities, indicators related to marriage market dynamics should be conceptualized and monitored by those seeking early warning of destabilization. In particular, marking the rise in brideprice should be as much a part of predicting instability as increases in the cost of bread and fuel. Brideprice trajectory should be a metric adopted alongside other indicators of social stability to improve the international scholarly and analytic community’s ability to predict and respond to violent social unrest. Cultivating partnerships with community leaders and social institutions to convey this information is crucial—not only for integrating marriage market dynamics into stability and risk assessments, but also as a way of improving human intelligence capabilities generally. Tracking changes in brideprice and marriage market obstruction requires little formal training or human capital, and can help cultivate relationships between the central government and subnational formal and informal governing structures (including state governments, traditional leaders, and members of civil society) through regular interaction.

Lack of data stymies analytic progress, and overcoming that obstacle must be the first priority. For example, we did not include the Islamic State and al-Qaida in our case studies given the lack of sufficient information to create full case studies. We challenge scholars who research these groups to begin to collect the information that would tease out whether marriage market obstruction through customs such as brideprice is a factor in recruitment and retention. While information on brideprice trends is critical, there is ancillary information that would also be helpful. For example, what is the birth order of foreign jihadis fighting for these groups? Are they first- or second-born sons for whom their family has a better chance of raising brideprice, or are they

third, fourth, or fifth sons for whom there is no chance of familial provision of brideprice? One looks in vain at databases on known terrorists for any such information, and so these important research questions cannot be answered.

Furthermore, the confluence between the destabilizing effects of the global youth bulge and those of brideprice is another phenomenon hiding in plain sight because the conceptual lenses to make the connection have been missing: that is, the subjugation of women is not only effected through practices of brideprice and polygyny, but also engenders unsustainably high fertility rates. For example, the countries and regions anticipated to be most affected by the youth bulge are among the least capable of providing social services and economic opportunities for young men in need of resources to pay brideprice. The limited resources that these states can muster (and the foreign aid that they receive) must be used as effectively as possible.

The second major takeaway of our analysis is that even though marriage is a deeply socialized practice, governments are not powerless; they can act to mitigate the heightened risk of destabilization caused by brideprice inflation, as the Saudi case makes plain. Given the linkages among brideprice inflation, grievance, and violent conflict, governments can, for example, place caps on brideprices or subsidize marriage costs to avoid marriage market obstruction. Initiatives to end child marriage and make it harder to contract polygynous marriages take on even greater significance once their relevance for national stability and security are recognized. This sort of regulation represents a market intervention that not only protects the rights of girls and women, but inhibits the market's tendency toward concentration and inequality.

Civil society groups also play an important role in curbing harmful brideprice practices. In Uganda, a fifteen-year campaign to end harmful brideprice practices marked a victory when in 2015, the high court ruled that the practice of refunding brideprice in order for a woman to get a divorce was unconstitutional. The campaign continues with the hope that brideprice, which has hurt the status of women and made "marriage a competition that many young people cannot afford to enter," will be banned entirely one day.<sup>113</sup> In rural Afghanistan, efforts to lower brideprice (dower) have been effective; a group of young teachers in Dawlatywar observed the deleterious impact of the high cost of marriage and put pressure on community leaders to informally cap the cost, leading to a 40 percent reduction in brideprice.<sup>114</sup> Related efforts to dampen polygyny are also useful, given its role in brideprice inflation. Nota-

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113. Eliza Anyan, "Imagine Having to Pay to Divorce Your Abuser," *CNN*, August 19, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/19/africa/bride-price-uganda-mifumi-atuki-turner/>.

114. Ali M. Latifi, "Giving Women in Rural Afghanistan a Seat at the Table," *Muftah*, September 7, 2015, [muftah.org/rural-afghanistan-women-table](http://muftah.org/rural-afghanistan-women-table).

bly, the emir of Kano—a province in Northern Nigeria that has been the target of attacks by Boko Haram—is trying to ban polygyny. His rationale? “Those of us in the north have all seen the economic consequences of men who are not capable of maintaining one wife, marrying four. They end up producing 20 children, not educating them, leaving them on the streets, and they end up as thugs and terrorists.”<sup>115</sup> In addition to this type of direct policy initiative against brideprice and polygyny, efforts to reconceptualize gender norms to attempt to culturally disconnect manhood from violence in the context of frustration are also valuable.<sup>116</sup>

All these initiatives are worth resourcing from national security funding. Not only will affected nations benefit from this expenditure, but also third-party governments concerned with international and regional flashpoints. Efforts to cap brideprice, raise the marriage age of girls, and curb polygyny are hard security matters in many shatter belts where spillover threats easily destabilize entire regions and where military intervention by great powers may one day be contemplated. The time has come to recognize what has been hiding in plain sight.

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115. “Why Does a Nigerian Muslim Leader Want to Ban Polygamy?” *BBC News*, February 22, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-39038459>.

116. See, for example, Julie Pulerwitz et al., “Changing Gender Norms and Reducing Intimate Partner Violence: A Quasi-Experimental Intervention Study with Young Men in Ethiopia,” *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (January 2015), pp. 132–137.