Research Paper

Social Contracts: A Pathway for More Inclusive Societies

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About the Author

Erin McCandless is an Associate Professor in the School of Governance at Witwatersrand University in South Africa and a Research Associate with the German Development Institute. A widely published scholar and policy advisor, she has near three decades of experience working on and in conflict affected settings, broadly on issues of peacebuilding, statebuilding, development, and resilience - and their intersections. Her current research focuses on forging resilient social contracts, and the role of social cohesion, in countries affected by conflict, fragility and fraught transition, building upon a multi-country research and policy dialogue project that she directed from 2015-2018. Professor McCandless is author of more than 100 publications, including several influential, policy-shifting United Nations reports, and she is a founder and former Chief Editor of the Journal of Peacebuilding and Development. www.erinmccandless.net, www.socialcontractsforpeace.org.

About the Grand Challenge

Inequality and exclusion are among the most pressing political issues of our age. They are on the rise and the anger felt by citizens towards elites perceived to be out-of-touch constitutes a potent political force. Policymakers and the public are clamouring for a set of policy options that can arrest and reverse this trend. The Grand Challenge on Inequality and Exclusion seeks to identify practical and politically viable solutions to meet the targets on equitable and inclusive societies in the Sustainable Development Goals. Our goal is for national governments, intergovernmental bodies, multilateral organizations, and civil society groups to increase commitments and adopt solutions for equality and inclusion.

The Grand Challenge is an initiative of the Pathfinders, a multi-stakeholder partnership that brings together 36 member states, international organizations, civil society, and the private sector to accelerate delivery of the SDG targets for peace, justice and inclusion. Pathfinders is hosted at New York University's Center on International Cooperation.

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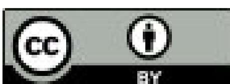

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Executive Summary

States and societies are in crisis around the world, as questions arise around the nature and quality of existing social contracts. COVID-19 has laid bare profound vulnerabilities within and across societies. The global pandemic is revealing deep failures in policy visions, institutional fragility, and incapacities of states to harness societal compliance where trust and a sense of national belonging is weak. At the same time, our interdependencies have never been so clear, as all countries, developed and underdeveloped alike, confront similar challenges. Crisis, however, offers opportunity to do things better, to build *forward* better – strengthening social contracts at all levels. How then, can social contracts, and compacting in times of crisis, offer pathways to address inequality and exclusion?

This paper considers how social contracts can offer frameworks to foster new thinking and shape transformative policy to build more inclusive societies. Such frameworks should tie bold new policy visions to robust and resilient institutional arrangements that uproot harmful structural legacies with lasting effect for inclusive and peaceful societies. They must also offer means to address material conditions of inequality, and those related to recognition, identity, and dignity. The cases of South Africa, Tunisia, Colombia, and South Korea reveal that, while not easy nor predictable, such pathways exist. Key findings in this briefing include:

- Inequality and exclusion stem from policy choices and are fueled by corruption; they undermine foundations of inclusive and resilient national social contracts, e.g. trust in government and societal willingness to consent to difficult policy choices;
- Participation in formal electoral processes is declining while protest is rising, indicating a lack of faith in existing politics and institutional mechanisms for resolving conflict and fostering consensual politics; and
- Civil society movements in and across countries are advancing more inclusive social contracts that tackle vulnerability and risk through a variety of innovative means that deserve greater support.

Key pathways of inclusive, resilient social compacting are needed to support building better, more inclusive and resilient social contracts. These include:

- Fostering national visions with conducive development frameworks that target vulnerabilities and transform structural legacies;
- Building and strengthening inclusive coalitions and governance platforms to drive transformative change; and
- Placing trust and solidarity considerations at the center of COVID responses and wider structural policy efforts to tackle exclusion and inequality.

1. Introduction

The viability and prosperity of peaceful and resilient states and societies rests on robust and resilient national social contracts. However, many countries exhibit deep divisions. Political and societal polarization is escalating. Violent conflict is on the rise[1]. Conflict is intermixing with violence, fragility and crisis in ways that defy traditional peacebuilding approaches and undermine development progress. Inequality and exclusion are also rising,[2] both inflamed by these processes, and contributors to them, adversely affecting economic growth and human development as they shape contestation and increase[3] the risk of violence. The global COVID-19 pandemic has heightened inequalities and many forms of crisis, as the world's vulnerable have been hit hardest.[4]

This briefing explores how social contracts–at the most basic level "dynamic agreement[s] between state and society, including different groups in society, on how to live together"[5]—can support inclusion and tackle inequalities. Reflecting on four case studies—South Africa, Tunisia, Colombia, and South Korea—the evolution and health of the national social contract is considered, and how COVID-19 responses reflect "crisis compacting" or the resilience of the contract. Ultimately, we are keen to know: *how can COVID-19 responses support building back better and, in the process, strengthen national, resilient social contracts?*

What might such contracts look like? Presumably, they are concerned with inclusion politically and economically and consider both redistributive, material elements of inequality, and recognition elements that strive to ensure mutual trust as well as a sense of dignity and respect in everyday life. These can be evidenced by low and reducing levels of inequality, alongside strong and growing citizen satisfaction and trust in the state and its policy choices—e.g. where citizens are willing to participate in formal political processes such as national elections. Prior research[6] shows that such a social contract grows from inclusive political settlements and requires robust, responsive institutional arrangements and mechanisms, and a broadening and deepening of social cohesion.

2. What are Social Contracts?

In political philosophy the social contract has historically been understood as an agreement—consensual or tacit—reflecting the mutual rights and obligations of states and society, or individuals and groups within society, and the necessary trade-offs that such agreements entail. Classical notions embraced by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau all shared a basic concern around the relationship between the ruler and the ruled in upholding an agreement designed to create peace and stability, and the mechanisms required to do this. Over time, critical theorists have sought to ensure greater inclusiveness to the concept. Marx and Hegel for example argued that the social contract must not serve only the interests of the capitalist class, nor merely individuals. Others sought to bring fairness and identity[7] more centrally to the discussion, e.g. from a feminist perspective or to address racial justice.

Social compacts are generally conceived more narrowly than the social contracts. Compacts have been used to describe pacts between key stakeholders—notably government, business, labor, and civil society—on key development priorities or sectoral issues.[8] Such compacts, also conceived at global and transnational levels, generally require partnerships and tend to be the outcome of an extensive dialogue processes. Historically

such compacts have often emerged following financial downturns or other crises and most typically between state, labor, and capital. Examples abound of social compacts in Scandinavian countries from the 1930s to South African and Korean social dialogue processes and compacts from the 1990s.

In recent years the social contract concept has experienced a renaissance with policymakers and scholars as a lens or framework to address conflict,[9] fragility,[10] and fraught transition. Policy efforts[11] have sought to better understand issues of state legitimacy and capacity, the expectations of society, and the political processes through which bargains are struck. Others have argued that agreement sustainability requires adaptation and responsiveness to crisis and change.

Policy actors around the world are freshly engaging the social contract concept to frame and guide new thinking and practice. As COVID-19 tests the viability of social contracts globally, leaders are calling[12] for new social contracts. The crisis offers opportunity—it is suggested—to rework the rules of the game, rethink collective visions and agreements, uproot poor governance structures, and transform institutional arrangements, ultimately cultivating greater social cohesion in and across societies to strengthen the inclusiveness and redistributionary side of social contracts.

3. Negotiation of Social Contracts and Compacts: South Africa, Tunisia, Colombia and South Korea

Bearing in mind the increasing appeal of the social contract as a policy tool, what can we learn from the experiences of South Africa, Tunisia, Colombia, and South Korea?[13] This section considers aspects of inequality and exclusion through a range of issues: the health of the economy and well-being (economic growth, inequality and human development); service delivery (trust in institutions); forms and levels of consent (participation and protest, and responses to policy choices); treatment of vulnerable groups, and levels of trust in the state and sense of belonging in the national project.

South Africa

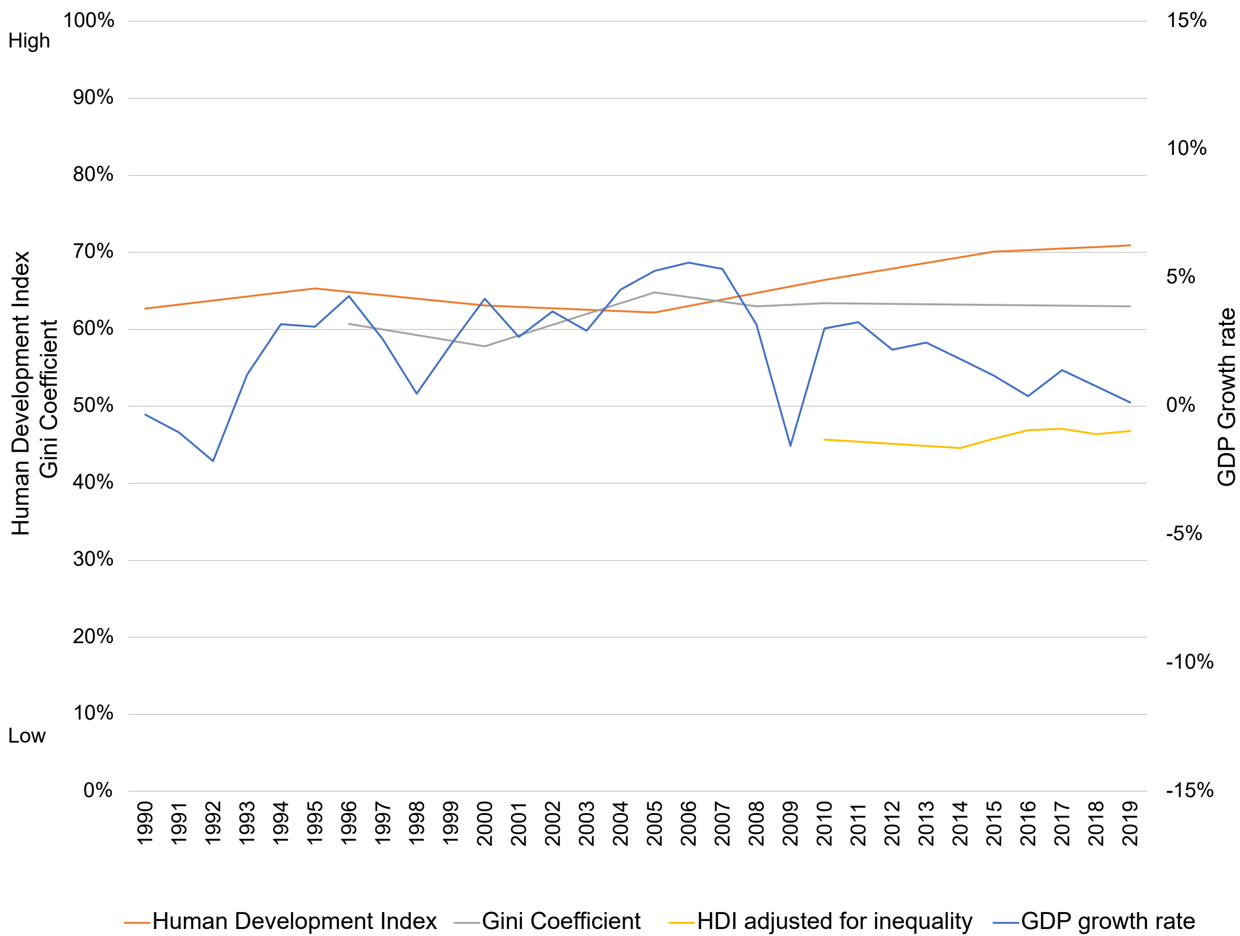
South Africa has embodied social contracts with varying levels of buy-in over time. Apartheid offered the white minority, exclusively, a sense of national identity, along with economic security, quality jobs and service delivery. For people of color this was not a social contract, but coercion and subjugation. The transition to non-racial democracy, fueled by widespread protests, ushered in a new vision and agreements, including the development of a new constitution; a Truth and Reconciliation Commission; an ambitious Reconstruction and Development Programme and a unifying identity and related narrative around a "Rainbow Nation" to support national cohesion. In 1994 the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) was established through one of the first Acts of the new democratic Parliament. It was set up in the spirit of forums, dialogue and negotiations inherited from the anti-apartheid movement with the clear mandate to advance dialogue and negotiate policy for reconstruction and reconciliation.

Despite intentions to address the structural legacies of apartheid, provisions made within the political settlement to protect individual property rights and white owned businesses clashed with efforts to realize more transformative socio-economic and redistributive goals. And while the 1996 Constitution[14] is broadly regarded as highly progressive, envisaged reconstruction and development was soon challenged by institutional weaknesses, low growth, political disagreements and power battles, corruption and what is now broadly referred to as "state capture" in South Africa, and beyond.

NEDLAC has played an important role in fostering multi-stakeholder social dialogue and agreements around labor relations, greening the economy and climate change and a national minimum wage. It has confronted great challenges however in achieving its ambitous mandate, which some attribute to a mismatch between its high level strategic goals and structure,[15] deep distrust between stakeholders, grievances around sufficient, quality inclusion[16] and power imbalances in the project, and poor capacity to implement agreements.

While human development indicators have improved (from 62% in 1990 to 71% in 2019), South Africa maintains one of the highest levels of inequality in the world—largely unchanged[17] in the post-apartheid context. Between 2011 and 2015, the proportion of the population living in poverty[18] increased from 27.3 million people to 30.4 million people (56% of the population). Despite moderately impressive economic gains under the Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki presidencies, growth has been weak since the 2009 financial crash and remained under 2% since 2013.

Figure 1: Development, Growth, and Inequality: South Africa, 1990-2019

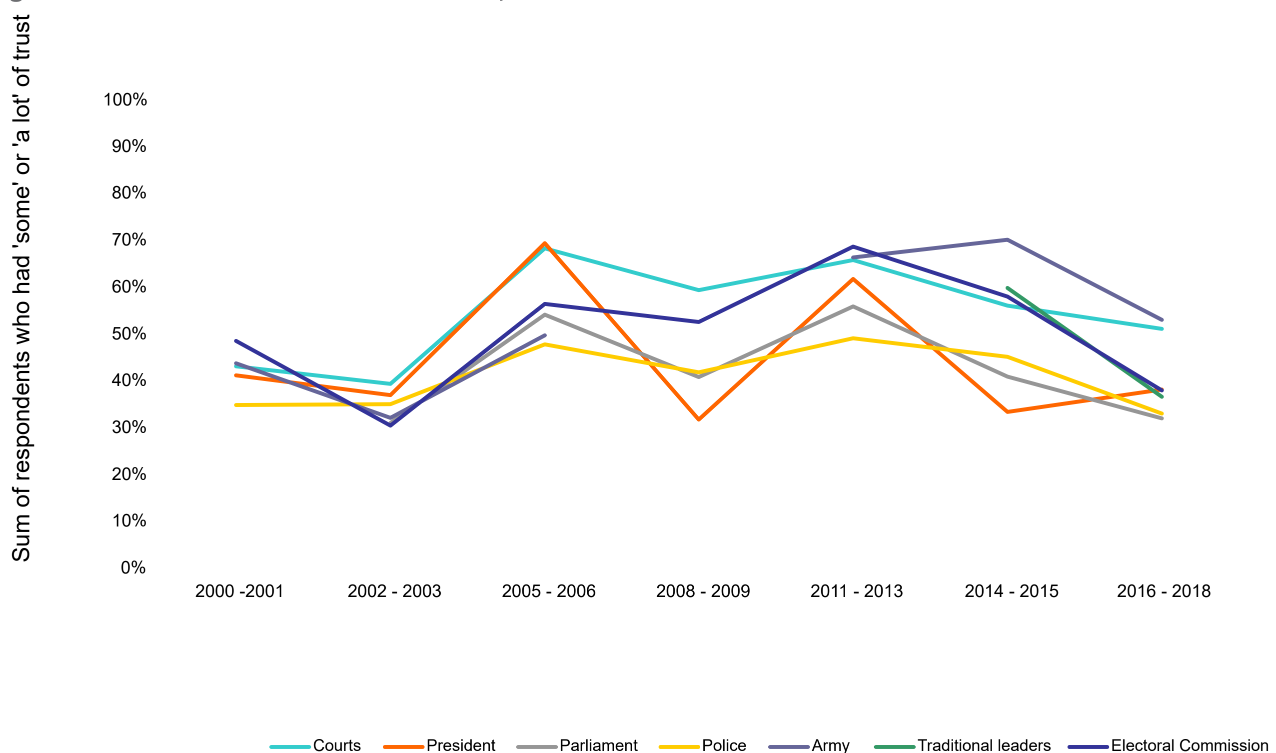


Source: World Bank 2021 - GDP growth rate and Gini Coefficient; UN Human Development Report - HDI 2021

Note: HDI and HDI adjusted for inequality are presented as a percentage in these figures; the actual indexes are represented on a scale from 0-1.

Effective and fair service delivery at the heart of grievances and needed transformation has also improved over the years, in spite of a dive in life expectancy with the HIV crisis.[19] Despite impressive scoring in women in parliament, women earn 30% less[20] than men on average, and black women experience higher levels of poverty than black men. Gender-based structural inequalities are compounded by soaring rates of gender-based violence.[21] Improvements are seen in areas of social services such as access to piped water and electricity[22] although there remain strong grievances around the pace and quality[23] of service delivery at local levels. A 2015 survey[24] illustrates variances in the approval of local government service deliver: white South Africans (51%), Mixed Race ("Coloureds") (46%), Indians (37%) and Blacks (33%). Service delivery inequality differs widely,[25] across municipalities. Rural and poorer South Africans[26] have more negative perceptions of service delivery, likely. This undermines citizen trust in institutions and reinforces feelings of relative deprivation.

Figure 2: Trust in Institutions: South Africa, 2000-2018



Source: Afrobarometer 2021[27]

Trust in government has declined from 70% in 2005-2009 to under 50% in 2010-2014 during a time when corruption became more prominent and economic growth plummeted. Despite the expansive efforts by President Ramaphosa's administration (2018-current) to investigate public sector fraud with a Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, corruption remains high. South Africa ranks third on the Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey[28] and local governments struggle with corruption, weak fiscal management, noncompliance with government laws, and unresponsiveness of local leaders—resulting in community marginalization, declining participation and trust.[29]

South Africa' thriving civil society has persistently pushed[30] to build a more accountable state. Illustrative of this is in the early 2000s where the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) led-fight for accessible and affordable anti-retrovirals resulted in the securing a universal AIDs treatment program, now the world's largest and widely revered.[31] Society remains engaged in deliberation over policy issues and was instrumental in building momentum to investigate state capture.[32] Participation in formal political processes, however, e.g. voting in national elections, has declined from post-transition high of 87% to 66% in 2019. Particularly

sharp for youth, between the 2014 and 2019 elections there was a 47% drop[33] in registered 18-19 year-olds. Inequality and challenges in socio-economic services delivery combined with a strong civil society help explain why South Africa is considered a protest hotspot[34] globally. Beyond civil society's momentous role in pushing to end apartheid, protest action has continued to play a significant role in shaping politics. From 2004 service delivery[35] protests grew with frustration around poor municipal governance, and the "fees must fall" movement. By 2013, during the Zuma presidency, there were 2.26 protests (on average) daily. Numbers dipped in 2018 with the incoming Ramaphosa administration, yet by 2019 they rose to 2.5 protests per day.[36] High levels of violence are evident, undermining protest legitimacy[37] although protesters tend to believe violence achieves results.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the social contract between state and society in South Africa. The government has applied social compacting, as it has guided strategic policy initiatives across sectors since the 1994 transition. Productive[38] steps to address the adverse effects of the pandemic were taken, including engaging top scientists with stakeholders to craft initial public policy responses, crafting online resource[39] portals to enhance transparency, and offering a stimulus package to target hunger, alongside social distress, and support for companies and workers. Societal critiques soon emerged, around information being hidden,[40] the questionable value of the stimulus package,[41] insufficient engagement[42] with civil society, and heavy-handed security sector[43] responses invoked primarily in black townships affecting compliance.[44] Corruption remains a stark challenge; two-thirds of supply and distribution related COVID-19 contracts are under investigation.[45] Developing effective crisis response platforms and mechanisms has proved challenging. The ad hoc National Coordinating Command Council (NCC) set up to coordinate efforts has been accused[46] of having circumvented parliamentary, constitutional and legal oversight. And people place higher value to issues like jobs, industrialization, crime and corruption, as reflected also in the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan[47] negotiated by NEDLAC. South Africa has also been hit with a particularly vicious variant of the virus. A third wave is being tackled with vigor[48] by the government and there are emergent, tentative signs of economic recovery.[49] Civil society is heavily engaged in solidarity efforts[50] to reach vulnerable populations. They are playing a critical role in hunger relief[51] where government has lacked capacity, and advocating[52]—especially with labor and through NEDLAC—to extend the duration and reach of social grants. The government too, has a solidarity fund[53] that has raised some USD $22 million (April 2021) in contributions by non-profit and corporate donors, amongst others.

Despite a highly inclusive and progressive 1994 political settlement, and a transformative agenda to redistribute resources at the core of the National Development Plan,[54] massive challenges remain, particularly regarding inequality and exclusion. Some analysts argue that transformation is obstructed by the elite compact[55] formed in the pre-1994 transition deal, and that fresh thinking[56] is required to make good on the transition promises of redistribution and recognition.

Tunisia

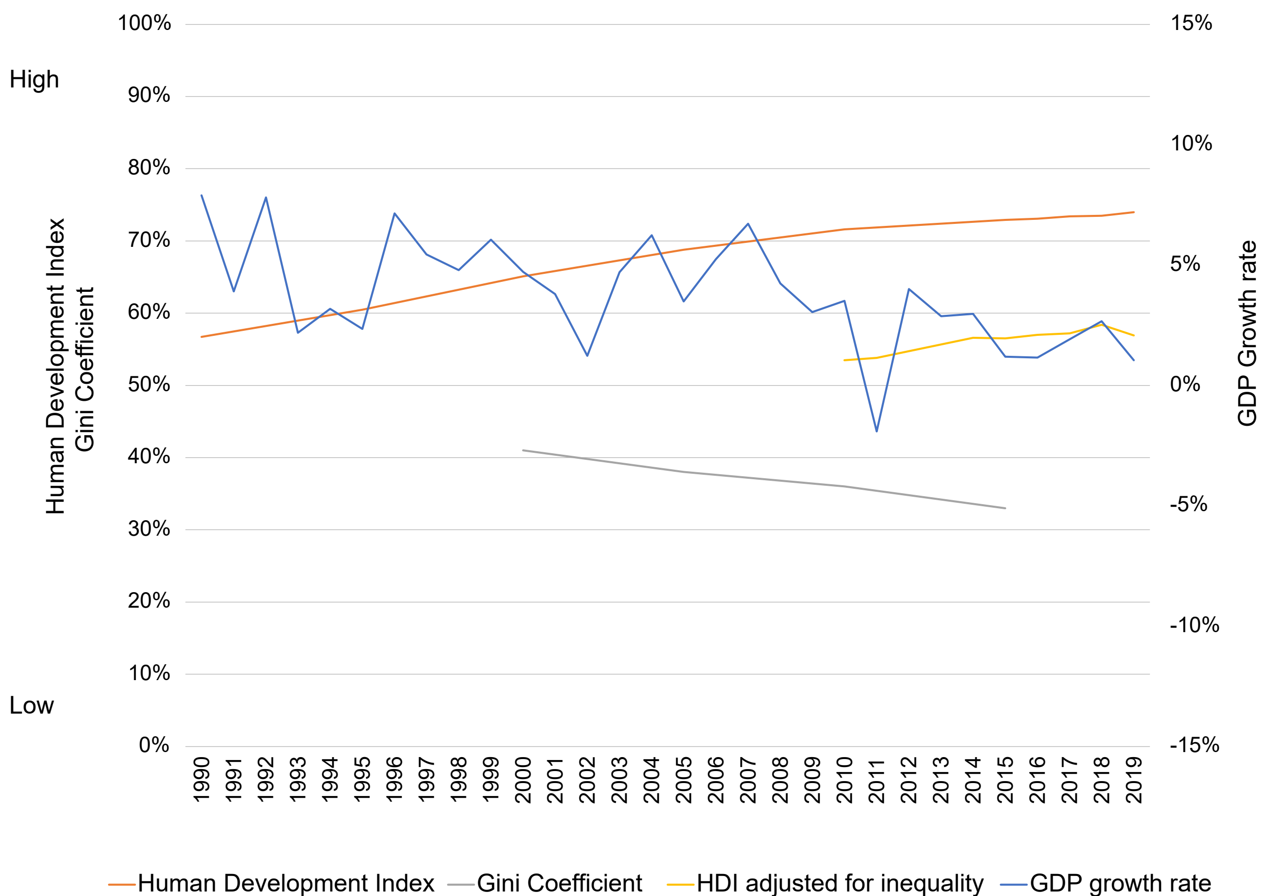
In the decades following Tunisia's independence in 1957, the post-colonial social contract, like others in the region, reflected an interventionist yet authoritarian state—one that provided services and expected citizens would accept limited state accountability and political participation. In 2011, protests sparking the Arab Spring began in Tunisia, with demands for ''Employment, Freedom, Dignity!"—equated with a new social contract rooted in social justice with stronger accountability and participation, by Arab scholars.[57]

Tunisia's revolution and transition process was facilitated by an inclusive civil society coalition led by the 'National Dialogue Quartet.' This grouping of human rights activists; private sector bodies, labor unions and lawyers was instrumental in crafting a democratic transition process to overcome deep political polarization

between various political groupings and between Islamicists and secularists, which later was acknowledged with the Nobel Peace Prize Prize[58] (2015). The development of mechanisms supporting inclusive social contracting helped to reconcile competing governance visions and suggests reason for Tunisia's transition success relative to other Arab Spring countries. The Higher Political Reform Commission, an elected constituent assembly, and a constitutional reform process resulting in a constitution with unprecedented popular support, were pivotal. Leadership legitimacy was built, notably through a government of national unity.

Despite these considerable efforts, poor economic opportunities and livelihoods—key grievances driving the revolution—have not sufficiently improved since 2011 to quell discontent. Well-being indicators reveal complexity, with GDP under pre-revolution levels, despite inequality and unemployment declining[59] and human development improving – though the latter two at a slower rate than pre-revolution years (World Bank 2020). Tunisia ranked first[60] in Africa toward achieving the UN's SDGs. At the same time, there is volatile inflation[61] and a dramatically depreciating Tunisia dinar[62]—which perhaps explain ongoing societal grievance. Analysts debate reasons for poor economic progress—as due to resilient aspects of the rentier state[63] versus the pernicious effects[64] of the global political economy. Uneven development prevails, following decades of public policy favouring the coastal regions that marginalized the North-West and Centre-East territories.[65]

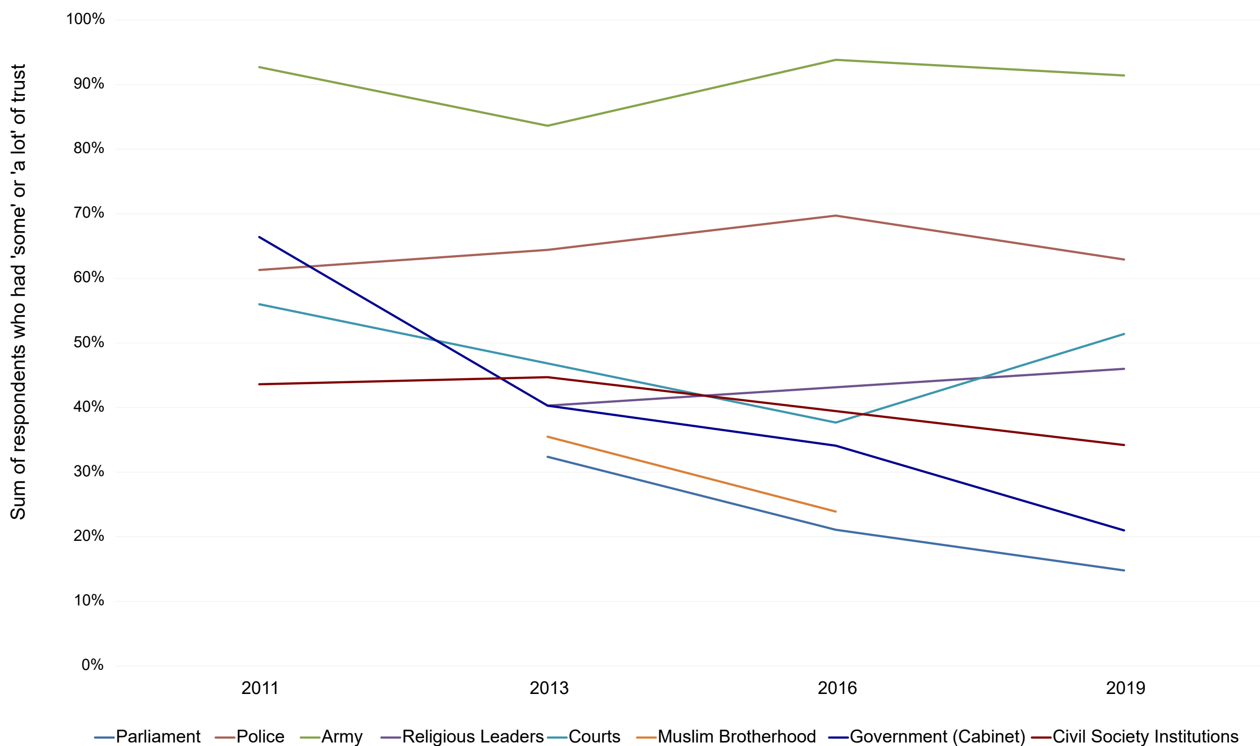
Figure 3: Development and Inequality: Tunisia, 1990-2019



Source: World Bank (2021); UN Human Development Report HDI 2021

Trust in Tunisia's institutions is generally declining, and in government significantly, with youth accounting for lower levels (Ceyhun, 2019:3-5). The army has long garnered the highest trust, aligning with other Arab Spring countries where militaries worked with protesters to remove presidents in revolutions. Similarly, support for the courts is higher than parliament, suggesting loyalty to systems that facilitated the revolution. Contemporary political institutions are seen as marked by infighting between parties and agreement deadlocks, notably around transforming economic conditions (Ceyhun, 2019:3-6). Ten governments in eight years[66] and growing awareness of corruption[67] feature. In 2010 60% of Tunisians identified corruption in national institutions, rising to 90% in 2018; fewer (that pre-Revolution) also think government is working to address it (Arab Barometer, 2019:2,5).

Figure 4: Trust in Institutions: Tunisia, 2011-2019



Source: Arab Barometer 2021[68]

Voter turnout has plummeted from 90% in 2009 to 60% in its next presidential election in 2014. By 2019 it was down to 56% (See Figure 13), while voting for parliament plummeted from 90% in 2011 to 42% in 2019 (IDEA, 2021). These drops reflect disillusionment[69] with political institutions. At the same time, protests have increased[70] starkly from 2016 to 2019 around inflation and increased taxes. They continue, motivated by disappointment[71] around economic malaise and police brutality.[72] Civil society in Tunisia is nonetheless considered thriving,[73] with more attention to holding the state accountable, compared to the pre-revolution era.

Pandemic response efforts by government illustrate many of the same transition trends. The government acted swiftly to address the spread of the pandemic, working with trade unions and employer associations to develop an agreement to support business, workers[74] and vulnerable groups. It developed a National Coronavirus Response Authority (NCRA), manned by ministers reporting to the Prime Minister, to centralize and unify measures in response to COVID. Municipal councils established local crisis committees, collaborating with CSOs and political parties to control local outbreaks, with regular and transparent communications occurring between central and governorate authorities.[75]

Health systems however have lacked capacity[76] to cope as the virus's reach deepens, instigating common adverse affects on the economy, and informal economy[77] workers in particular, domantly women. The poor quality and reach of digitalization has obstructed remote work and continuity of services, with many citizens unaware of what institutions are providing. Justice and service delivery have largely been suspended,[78] affecting employment issues in the historically marginalized[79] interior regions. There are also concerns that the state is employing overly securitized responses, deepening[80] tensions between state and society, reactivating pre-revolutionary dynamics.

Solidary efforts have nontheless flourished, with civil society, unions,[81] and the private sector working with government to support the recovery efforts, targeting vulnerable populations and under-resourced regions. Community-police relations are being strengthened through civil society efforts[82] to support communication between youth, unions, city leaders and police, and violence prevention. And CSOs and women parliamentarians are collaborating[83] in response to rising gender based violence.

Tunisia's transition challenges[84] remain formidable, particularly in garnering political and economic policy consensus—challenges that have deepened with the pandemic. Nonetheless a pathway is growing towards a more inclusive, participatory and liberal social contract—one that is making space for civil society broadly in political decision-making.[85]

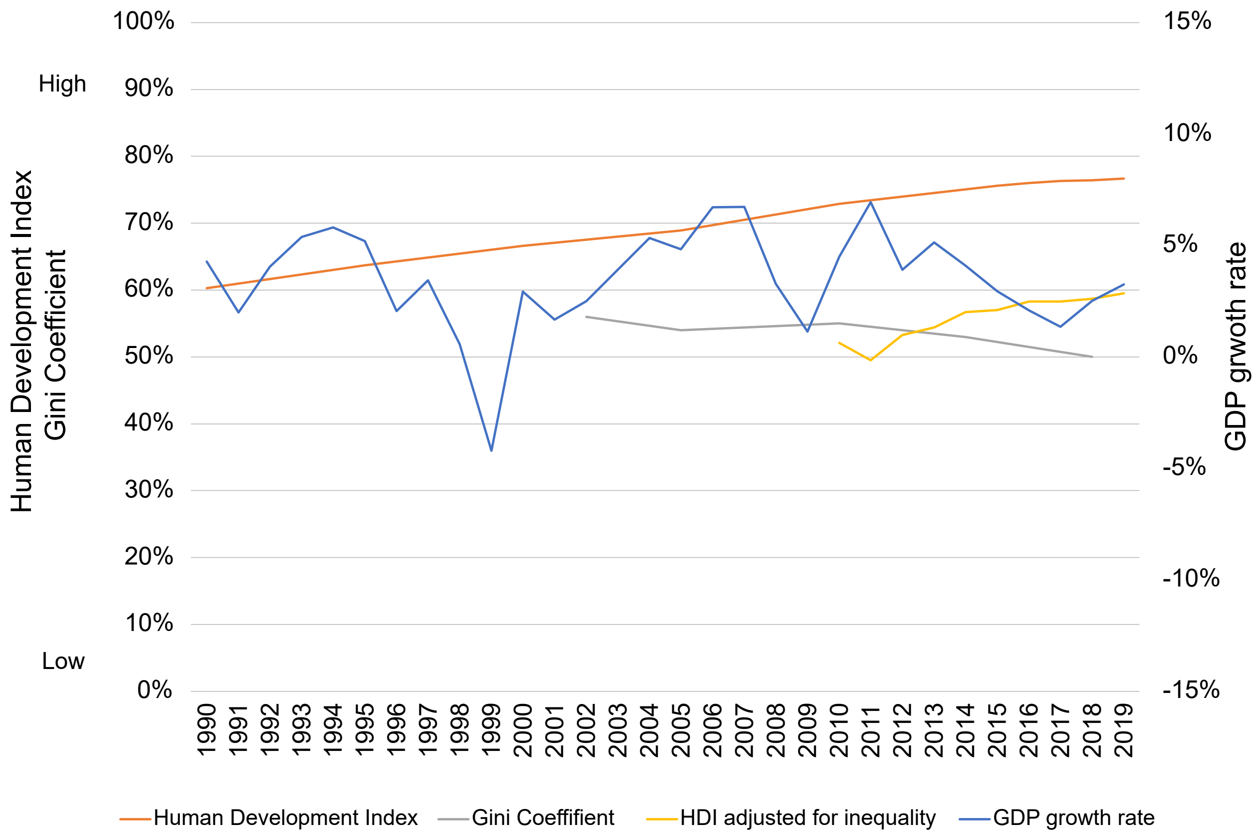
Colombia

Colombia's near fifty-seven year internal conflict saw the development of numerous armed opposition groups, propelled by widespread grievances around the unequal distribution of power and resources. The two party (liberal/conservative) system was widely viewed as highly ineffective during this period, marginalising societal participation and fostering an environment where political violence and illicit economies flourished. A new constitution was developed in 1991—which many would argue is the basis of Colombia's social contract—by a National Assembly with strong stakeholder participation. It brought territorial rights for indigenous people and Afro-descendants, and political and cultural rights for social and religious minorities. It also enhanced citizen participation opportunities in social and political life. This progressive constitution, comparatively in the region, was viewed as a foundation for the new peace pact.[86] It did not however, end violent conflict and soaring violence.

The historic 2016 peace agreement between the government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) formally ended the conflict and created scope to reshape existing political power dynamics, especially at the sub-national level, for more broadly shared results. It addressed key conflict issues of rural reform, illicit crops, demobilization and transitional justice, and political participation of minorities. The agreement also drew a fault line[87] in Colombian politics between those wanting to address historical inequalities, and conservative forces antagonistic to the concessions made to the FARC. Despite land featuring in the agreement, rural landowner resistance and contestation across land issues has blocked progress. Further, illicit economies are being addressed as a development issue despite the complex socio-political dynamics underpinning production.[88] International cartels and global supply and demand present external challenges to any national agreement.

While HDI measures have been growing and inequality declining, GDP volatility and extremely high levels of regional inequality[89] are a persistent source of ongoing grievance.

Figure 5: Development and Inequality: Colombia, 1990-2019

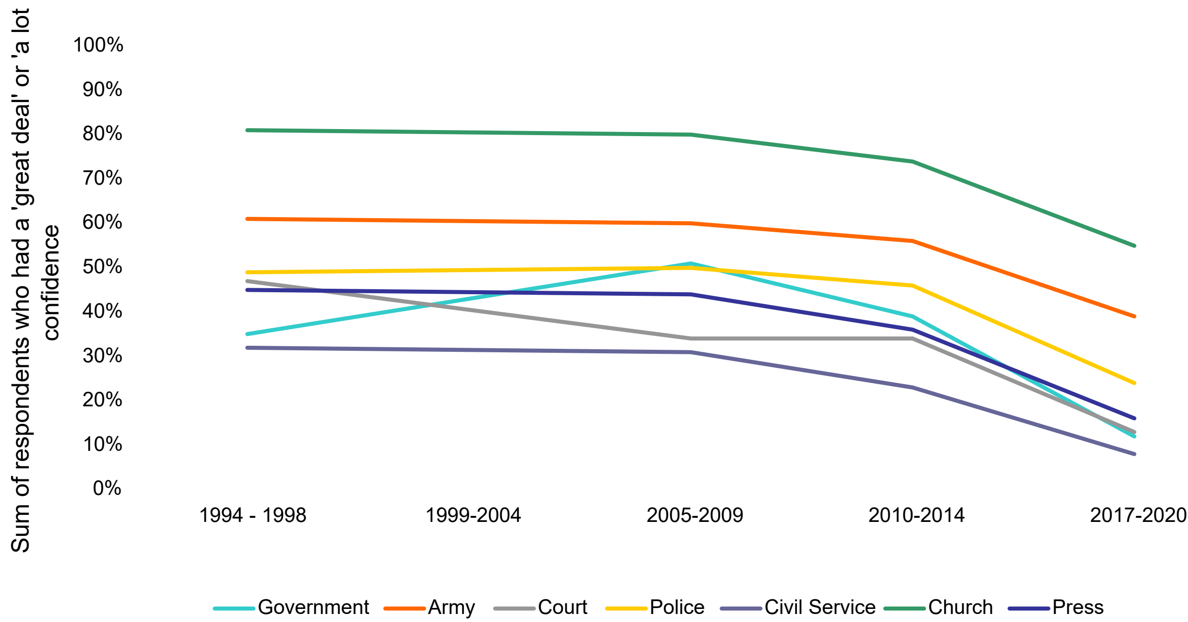


Source: World Bank 2021; UN Human Development Report HDI 2021

The peace agreement put many local-level programs in place to support territorial development—informed by consultative processes with municipalities—particularly in 2017-18. Despite enhanced support from government, residents still face profound insecurity given continued[90] armed group violence. Where infrastructure is lacking, the reality is that communities still derive a better living through illicit economies.

Trust in institutions has declined heavily over the last decade, even following the 2016 accord.[91] The downward trend from 2009 is associated with increasing public outrage against corruption and illegal wiretapping, and the slow pace of judicial decision-making.[92] While public services have improved (See Figure 16), rising expectations with the peace agreement may explain declining trust. The 2019 Global Corruption Barometer[93] found that 94% of Colombians believe government corruption is a big issue. In 2020, a 2-point increase in the corruption perception index (CPI) to 39 brought Colombia in line with the high Latin American average (TI, 2021).

Figure 6: Trust in Institutions: Colombia, 1994-2020



Source: World Values Survey 2021

While political conflict is increasingly channeled through politico-legal avenues,[94] challenges remain. Addressing regional uneven development lies at the core of building state legitimacy and enabling more effective service delivery, formalizing illicit economies, reducing violence, and achieving sustainable peace. This will require confronting entrenched vying interests and informal actors, and enhancing coordination and inclusion across diverse regions with varied political, economic, fiscal and administrative structures.

The social contract in Colombia is threathened by major political disagreements, deep polarization and high levels of violence. These conditions help to explain low voter turnout levels historically (hovering around 45% in the first decade of this century and rising only to 53% in the first post-peace accord election) (See Figure 13) compared to regional averages of 69% in this period.[95] While violence levels have declined (e.g. homicide rates[96] steadily decreased from 84.2 per 100 000 people in 1991 to 25.3 in 2018), high levels of violence, concentrated[97] in particular areas persist. From the signing of the 2016 accord until the end of 2020, 571 new cases of people missing because of armed conflict and violence have been reported.[98]

Colombia has a thriving civil society that exhibits significant resilience capacities to address shocks, including armed attacks. A growing civic agency is reflected in anti-government protests, including successive student protests[99] in 2011 and 2018 responding to rising[100] university fees and proposed privatization of education. In November 2019, reflecting trends globally and across parts of Latin America, unprecedented marches[101] involving major unions, indigenous and student movements were met with massacres and the assassination of social leaders, including 300 demobilized[102] FARC soldiers. Initially sparked by proposed cuts to pensions, agendas of protesters broadened[103] to encompass education, transformation, health, poor peace agreement implementation and government's failure[104] to protect social leaders from violence. The protests lost momentum[105] with the pandemic's arrival, and a growing range of agenda items[106] challenging a clear direction.

Colombia implemented one of the the strictest lockdowns[107] globally, with targeted interventions to vulnerable[108] populations and rapid expansion of testing labs. The efforts initially resulted in low mortality[109] rates and support[110] for the government, but by early 2021 infection and mortality numbers were skyhigh. As elsewhere adverse economic impacts[111] have resulted in hitting the vulnerable

harder. Heavy handed security responses[112] and increasing violence against social leaders have accompanied persistent corruption[113] scandals. Protests increased again during lockdown around issues of security sector brutality, poor jail conditions, lack of effective pandemic provisioning for communities, and concerns[114] for workers' rights. In April and May 2021, widespread protests over a tax reform proposal met with with strong police repression[115] resulting in civilian deaths—and the government was forced to revise[116] the contentious proposal.

Despite the profound struggles the pandemic has presented for Colombians, a silver lining, some suggest, may be an easing of polarization[117] as the crisis brings partisan forces to unite around the common challenge. The ruling party still however expresses deep scepticism about the peace agreement, which has hindered peace agreement implementation. Pandemic related challenges and high levels of protests are likely to further strain the peace process.

The pandemic provides deeper insights into the strengths and weaknesses of Colombia's social cohesion. While Colombians tend to comply with national dictates in crisis, their perspectives[118] reflect strong distrust toward government, and a preference for informal rather than official information around the pandemic. Regarding social solidarity, 25% express desire to support local communities in crisis response efforts. For instance, Bogota Mayor Claudia Lopez' call upon the public[119] to donate towards the pandemic response raised USD$13 million—over double the goal.

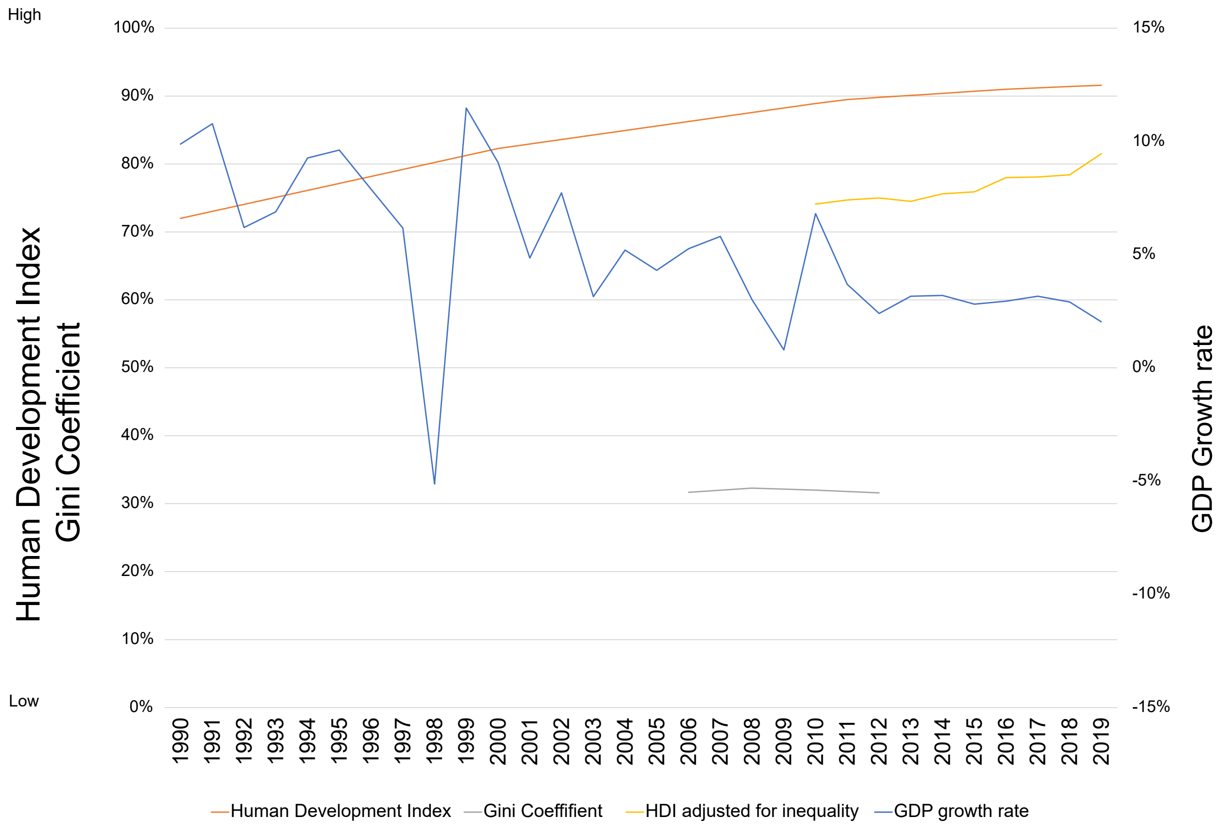
South Korea

Established in 1945 through separation from North Korea, South Korea's social contract history is well illuminated through its regime history.[120] The Park regime (1963-79) stood out for its brutal authoritarianism, yet achievement of high levels of economic growth and reduction of poverty and inequality. Trade unions and opposition parties were suppressed while nonstate actors and rural and industrial communities were mobilized and co-opted, ensuring their support in the development project—if they remained apolitical. Business' co-optation fueled a corrupt but effective monopoly capitalism, while civil servants and policy experts were co-opted government partners. Welfare provision became the responsibility of business, communities and aid groups, who in return, received subsidies, tax relief and funding—referred to as "mixed governance."[121]

In 1980 nation-wide protests[122] for democracy led by students and trade union activists met with military repression. Eventually government relinquished, liberalizing the polity in 1983. Civic space was opened, a direct presidential election system implemented, and social insurance and welfare programs expanded. Union bargaining power was strengthened and the networks between the state and the family run conglomerates the chaebol[123] weakened—all of which supported rising wages and reduced inequality. The corporatist ethos underlying South Korea's mixed governance however continued, blurring boundaries between civil society and government as the former became a partner in the state's grand development and modernization project.[124] This was not to last however. Following the Asian financial crash in 1997-1998, the Korean state moved in an increasingly neoliberal direction with financial liberalization and labor market flexibility. Government aligned with the upper middle classes and abandoned its broad social base.[125]

Despite significant volatility (e.g. with the financial crisis), GDP per capita[126] has risen dramatically from $158.24 in 1960 to over $31,000 in 2019, albiet with lower levels in the last decade. The country has profoundly transitioned, with structural transformation of farming and industries from the 1950s. HDI has seen sustained growth over the last two decades. At the same time, not all benefit equally. For every dollar earned by a man, a woman in South Korea earns 67 cents,[127] opposed to the OECD average of 87 cents.

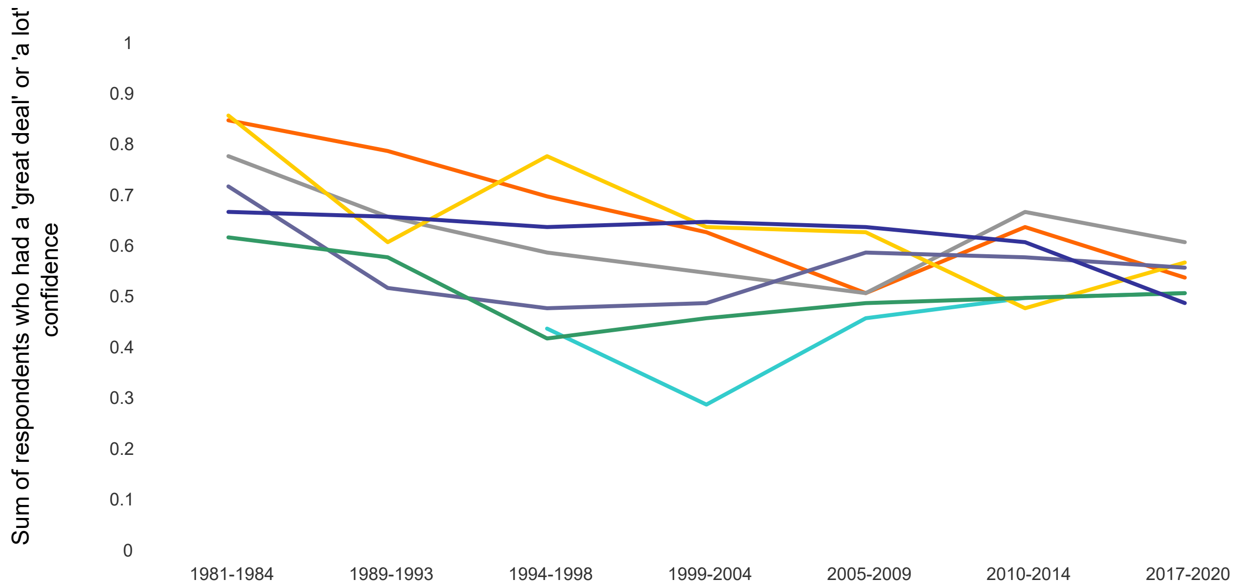
Figure 7: Development and Inequality: South Korea, 1990-2019



Source: World Bank 2021; UN Human Development Report HDI 2021

South Korea has highly effective public services with widespread access for the population (See Figure 12). 56.4% of South Koreans express confidence in the civil services, consistent with global and East-Asian country averages (WVS 2021). Well-functioning public services are attributed to the demands of strong civic movements in the 1990s.[128]

Figure 8: Trust in Institutions: South Korea, 1981-2020



Source: World Values Survey 2021

South Korea's corruption is considerable compared to other major democratic powers, while declining over the last decade. In 2020 it ranked as the 33rd least corrupt country in the world (CPI, 2021) (See Figure 11). While all four[129] living presidents have been convicted, or are being investigated for corruption, convictions may give rise to more citizen confidence in the state. Corruption stems from historic corporate – political sector relationships, notably the chaebols[130] and the state, with tax breaks and financial assistance to the former, and political funds to incumbent leaderships of the latter.

South Korea's strong and consensual social contract has much to do with its engaged civil society, nurtured by minimal state repression and high levels of civic operating space.[131] High voting levels parallel high levels of society engagement in policy making[132] and high protest levels (See Figure 14). Massive protest action in recent decades has occurred around demands for impeachment for illegal electioneering, and against the United States in response to trade protections on beef.[133] Protests spiked in 2016 when 2.3 million people[134] protested against corruption-accused President Park Guen Hye, and in 2018-2019 over a corruption scandal related to current President Moon Jae-In.

South Korea's ability to act swiftly and elicit strong societal compliance meant that a lockdown was not required[135] and the economy could remain open. Key success response factors included early action[136] on the pandemic, with innovative, science-led responses, taking rapid action[137] across all levels[138] of government and concerted collaboration with civil society[139] and business. Critically, the government incorporated lessons[140] from the 2003 SARs and 2015 MERS outbreaks—e.g. ensuring that transparent and well communicated crisis response measures were integrated into its health care system. Despite a strong stimulus plan with a multi-dimensional package, vulnerable populations, women and workers, particularly foreign,[141] have been hit harder. The government's new vision and policy framework—the Korean New Deal[142]—aims to support sustainable economic recovery in the context of structural transformations needed to address the adverse effects of pandemic, notably by strengthening social safety nets and fostering jobs—that target transformation towards a digital and green economy. Targetting inequality it establishes a universal employment insurance system and lays a pathway towards net-zero emissions.

High compliance with government's policy prescriptions indicates strong vertical social cohesion—trust in the state and its institutions. Transparent information[143] with effective community engagement have fostered societal willingness to voluntarily comply, including accepting a surveillance policy.[144] Compliance is influenced by cultural factors and shaped by the country's state-society relationship over time. A high burden of civic responsibility is placed on the individual to uphold the common good.

Beyond compliance, there are high levels of collaboration between state, business and civil society. This is reflected in high levels of public-private collaboration in the running of the top-rated health care system to ensure universal,[145] well resourced health care. Civil society has worked closely[146] with local service providers to identify care gaps, and community volunteers are providing support where local governments lack capacity. Reflecting New Deal aims, 530 NGOs aligned to create the Civil Society Counter-measure Committee to the COVID-19 Societal and Economic Crisis—aiming to protect the vulnerable, promote the expansion of safety nets and a sustainable economy. Civic efforts focus on the vulnerable,[147] notably worker[148] and foreign workers[149] needs and rights. South Korea's political culture of mixed governance where citizens and organized civil society both collaborate with the state and effectively hold it to account,[150] appear to be supporting broader national ownership in the social contract.

4. Pathways for Inclusive and Resilient Social Contracting

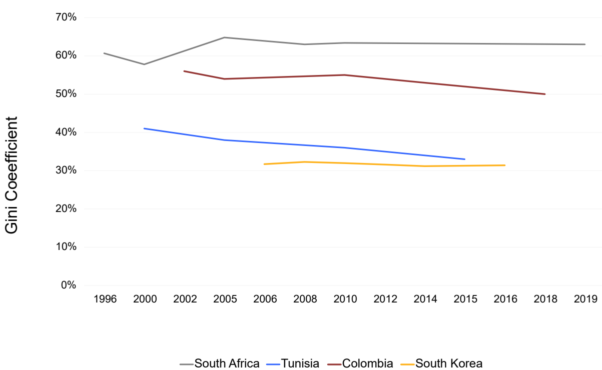
South Africa, Tunisia, Colombia, and South Korea have all come through challenging transition processes, having to transform political cultures affected by scourges of violence, militarism, authoritarianism, towards achieving more consensual and inclusive social contracts. While there is no formula for how to manage such processes, nor agreement on how to measure the health of a social contract, the cases and comparisons allows us to draw insights about possible pathways for inclusive and resilient social contracts.

4.1 High inequality and declining trust: obstacles for consensual social contracts

As discussed from the outset, we would expect to see trust and participation increase and social contracts become more consensual and resilient as inequality declines and more inclusive outcomes are realized. Likewise, if inequality increases, we would expect tensions to raise and trust to decline.

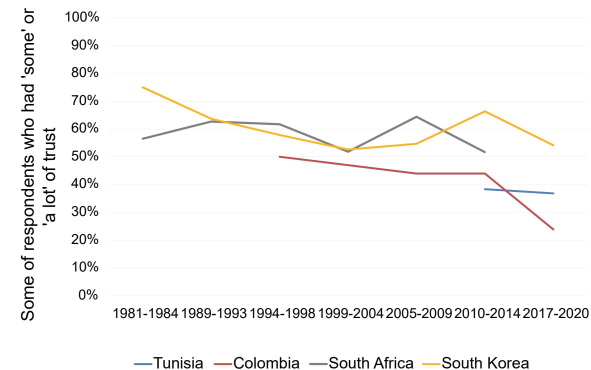
Trust in institutions is declining globally, in relation to the management of the pandemic,[151] but also due to rising concerns about inequality.[152] Trust in government, according to Edleman surveys[153] averages 53% globally yet is much lower in South Africa (27%) and Colombia (33%), and slightly lower in South Korea (50%). Tunisia is not covered in Edleman, though high levels of protest and declining participation in elections suggests rising disillusionment with government. Trust in institutions is declining in all four countries, even where corruption markers and service delivery are improving. Trust in institutions is linked[154] to values (integrity, openness, and fairness) and performance (responsiveness and reliability, in service delivery, and meeting citizen needs).

Figure 9: Inequality 1996-2019



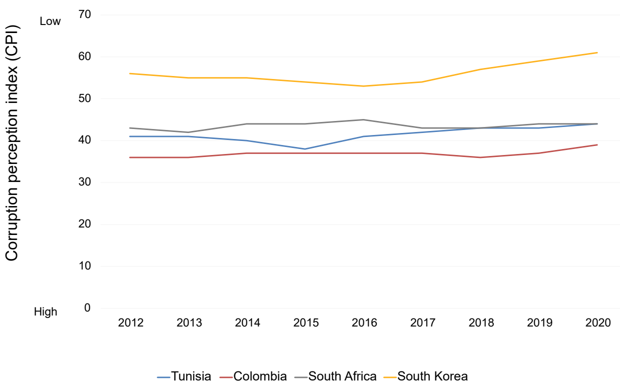
Source: World Bank (2021) (Gini Coefficient)

Figure 10: Trust in Institutions 1981-2020



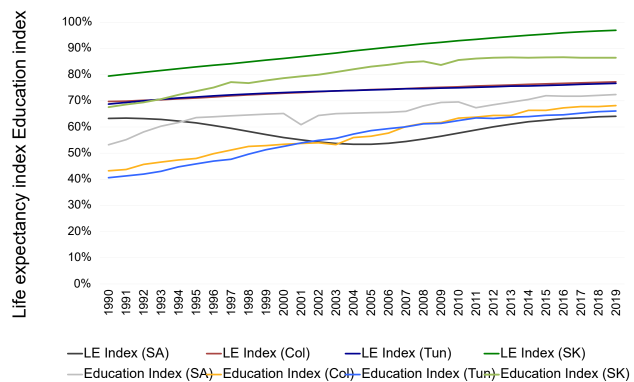
Source: WVS (2021) (confidence in institutions)[155]

Figure 11: Perceived corruption 2012-2020



Source: Transparency International CPI (2021)[156]

Figure 12: Public services 1990-2019



Source: UNDP HDI (2021)[157]

What then explains declining trust? Undoubtedly persistently high levels of inequality play a role (Colombia, South Africa), particularly where transition contracts and compacts make promises to address this (all these countries). Rising and unmet expectations demand more attention—particularly in transition contexts which are fundamentally about change. It is also likely that heightened civic agency, manifesting through rising protests, is raising awareness around issues of both values and performance—and the unfairness of uneven development and resulting inequalities. The role of the media[158] in polarizing public opinion and reducing trust is also garnering attention.

Critically, we must observe the limitations of data sets, as the case analysis above revealing more nuance, suggests. For example, service delivery may be improving overall, yet unevenness, quality, and speed and scope of improvement will shape perceptions of satisfaction and fairness. Corruption also requires a deeper look. At is core, corruption involves fraudulent or dishonest conduct by those in power, and by definition undermines trust, and a consensual, inclusive social contract. Corruption is particularly precarious in crisis contexts[159] where resources are flowing and fund disbursement rules are circumvented more easily. Corruption adversely affects redistribution and recognition goals; it affects the financial well-being of the state, feeding inequality,[160] and undermining the state's capacity to redistribute resources and meet development goals, and, it is an afront to human dignity. These are intertwined in complex ways. Illustrative, for example, is that about 83% of South Africans believe corruption harms ordinary people more than it harms decision-makers, and 84% that reconciliation is not feasible while corruption continues unabated.[161] There is little doubt that the systematic nature of state capture in South Africa over decades has deeply undermined the state's capacity to deliver on its development goals and citizen expectations. South Korea, alternatively, with lower levels of inequality and relatively low and improving levels of perceived corruption may create more faith in the institutions. South Korea's corruption has been met with massive societal protest and swift and sharp government and legal responses, holding corrupt leaders responsible—likely accounting for the relatively good score. There is hope that South Africa's ongoing anti-corruption efforts[162] will bear similar fruit, particularly as President Ramaphosa chips away at the entrenched intersts in the ruling ANC that obstruct action[163] on corruption.

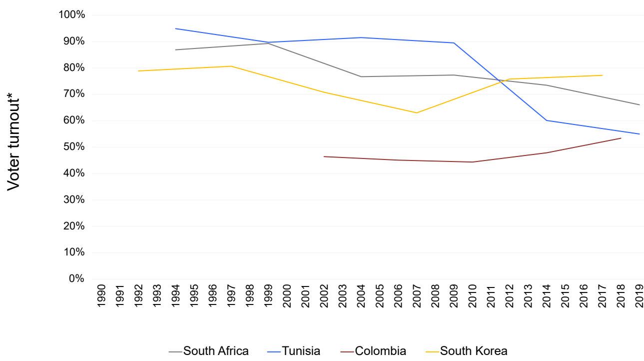
The four countries all have high levels of national belonging, which, alongside trust, is an important element of social cohesion—a key driver of resilient and inclusive contracts.[164] In the 2017-2020 world values survey (WVS 2021), 92% of the respondents registered proud to be Colombian, 81% of South Koreans, 88% of Tunisians, and in the 2010-2014 round, 89% of South Africans. At the same time, it is worth noting that their sense of national belonging is decreasing in all four countries.[165]

4.2 Declining Participation in Formal Politics, Rising Protests, and Demands for More Inclusive Social Contracts

All four countries have thriving civil societies, playing active roles in shaping politics towards greater inclusion. While diverse civic strategies are evident, protests are rising and viewed as an impactful way to engage leaders. This is occurring as participation in national elections declines, suggesting disillusionment with formal political processes. Three governments in focus have generally low levels of civil society repression,[166] supporting civil society engagement in different forms, Colombia maintains alarming levels of state repression, even following the peace accord.[167]

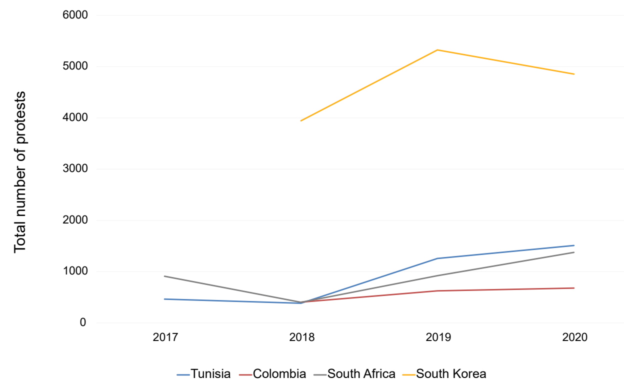
South Korea exhibits extraordinarily high, but not rising levels of civil protest. In all three other countries, protests are escalating—reflecting global trends;[168] between 2009 -2019[169] protests grew globally (by 11.5% annually). Meanwhile, participation in formal electoral processes is declining. Voter turnout has declined from above 70% in the 1980s, to 61% (Africa), 68% (Asia) and 69% (Americas), as per 2015 statistics.[170] In Tunisia and South Africa with the most significant declines, unmet transition expectations are likely a central factor—particularly where institutions are improving in actual delivery.

Figure 13: Participation in Elections 1992-2020



Source: IDEA (2021) (presidential elections)
South Africa (parliamentary elections)

Figure 14: Protests 2013-2020



Source: Acled (2021) (South Korea, Tunisia, Colombia)
Institute of Security Studies (2021) (South Africa)

Protests signal challenges with existing social contracts and offer apertures to develop more inclusive ones. While they are perceived as a challenge for governance systems, Chenoweth and Stephan[171] revealed that nonviolent resistance actually supports peace sustainability more than violent resistance.[172] Non-violent protests also result more often, in their view, in state transitions that sustain inclusiveness, through democracy and respect for minority rights.

Every country has its own unique history, cultural contexts and dynamic set of social and political forces in play. South Korea, with a longer transition trajectory, reflects strong positioning and is lauded for its COVID response at the center of which has been its ability to wield societal compliance, peacefully, while keeping the economy open. South Africa, coming on to three decades of its transition from apartheid faces continuous challenges in endeavouring to transform historical legacies, tackle inequality, build accountable and trusted institutions, and advance social cohesion across societal groups. Tunisia, still young in transition terms, faces similar core challenges in ensuring livelihoods and the well-being of all within society as revolutionary ambitions and unmet expectations drive widespread grievance. Colombia's relatively much more recent peace process confronts polarized visions for peace and well being, amidst still thriving, entrenched illicit economies that undermine implementation of the peace accord.

While all four countries have powerful civil societies demanding more inclusive social contracts across political, social and economic realms, as these cases reveal, these processes take time. South Korea and Tunisia, while certainly representing different models of state-society relations, arguably have managed to build more structured mechanisms for collaborative civic engagement that have survived and are thriving beyond initial stages of transition. South Africa, like Colombia, is deeply challenged with high levels of inequality, and corruption, which affects trust—a key ingredient for garnering societal consent. Consent has also suffered in both countries from the use of overly militarized responses—yet society does not seem much deterred to protest in response, despite evident risk.

Inequality and exclusion (and associated declines in trust and participation in formal political processes) are ultimately tied to policy choices of governments and their outcomes for citizens. Yet states are not islands unto themselves, but part of a global political economy and history with accompanying structural legacies—all of which has shaped the nature of inequality and exclusion. Developing new, resilient and inclusive social contracts requires confronting these realities. To address both recognition and redistribution aspects of inequality, we need to build a stronger evidence base and associated policy consensus around the issues, and incorporate this awareness into forward thinking policy solutions that underpin trusted contracts—at all levels.

4.3 Building Back Better Social Contracts In and Through Crisis

What might be garnered about *building back better* from the pandemic—in ways that forge or strengthen national, resilient social contracts that hold promise for tackling exclusion and inquality? Doing this in ways that strengthen or forge resilient, inclusive social contracts, it is suggested, occurs in three primary ways:

4.3.1 Fostering national visions with conducive development frameworks that target vulnerabilities and transform structural legacies

While many countries have crafted stimulus packages addressing vulnerabilities, they do not appear to go far enough,[173] tackling structural legacies of conflict and inequality and current multi-dimensional risks. The cases above reveal this, suggesting areas for heightened attention. South Africa faces polarization around the budget and related economic policy approaches[174] reflecting competing "elite" and "everyday" interests as well as high levels of corruption that effectively prevent the state from meeting its commitments. Colombia confronts similar challenges, yet some are optimistic that the pandemic has created space to repair tensions between polarized parties. Similarly Tunisia faces deep divisions around economic visions, and government is engaging in dialogue to build consensus around this dimension of its social contract. South Korea has seized apertures created by the crisis in framing its Green New Deal—a development vision tackling vulnerabilities and inequality while pursuing sustainability.

Building bold new national policy visions tied to fit for purpose policy frameworks must be reinforced by efforts to do the same at global level. The United Nations (UN) Secretary General Antonio Guterres is calling for new visions and development models, i.e. that reflect the transformational goals of the Susainable Development Goals (SDGs). His "new social contract for a new era"[175] must target inequality, starting with global institutions. Such movements by leaders acknowledge our interdependent vulnerabilities; no-one is safe until everyone is safe.

Bold new visions need to target the unevenness of development across region and social groups—often difficult and politically sensitive to measure. Colombia, Tunisia, and South Africa will need to address high levels of regional inequality (that intersect with race and other identities). To address recognition aspects of exclusion,[176] such policy visions need to be cultivated in ways that foster robust national ownership.

4.3.2 Building and strengthening inclusive coalitions and governance platforms to drive transformative change

Crisis-driven governance platforms can provide opportunities to transform weak or corrupt institutions and processes towards more adaptive, inclusive and accountable ones. Multi-leveled[177] coordination bodies are important. Such efforts must go down to community level, where distrust of government[178] has fueled community innovation and self-reliance, and effective responses must be informed by local epidemiolocal knowledge. They also need to engage transnationally and regionally to ensure coherence and collaboration across borders, which pandemics ignore.

South Korea is lauded for its highly efficient health institutions and other public services, and adapting systems based on learning from past crises. A high level of collaboration, cooperation, and trust between sectors of Korean society, combined with strong compliance by the public, have been crucial to combatting the virus. The country has pursued a corporatist political economy model of development. While Asian development models have invited Western critique, robust and effective Asian responses to the pandemic are arguably rooted in this history, and in existing state-society relations reflecting considerable trust in government institutions. The dynamism in South Korea's social contract reflects a history of strong civil society efforts to keep government in check, to imprison corrupt leaders, and to ensure equitable development.

Tunisia illustrates the power of inclusive crisis platforms that support state-society collaboration—a likely reason for its top performer status amidst Arab Spring countries. Tunisia illustrates the development of myriad dialogue—or 'social contracting' processes—being put into place to tackle structural legacies around the economy, violence against women, and security in communities in historically marginalized regions. Its municipal level crisis committees reveal coordinating efforts to ensure effective sub-national responses. These processes are dealing with both recognition and redistribution issues—building trust between state and society, and between sectors, as they tackle structural issues driving Tunisia's transition. The need for greater inclusion of non-coastal regions, facing historic marginalization, is core to building broader trust in the state. So to, and like South Africa and Colombia—the competing social contracts around how to transform the economy need to be reconciled.

Building resilient institutions capable of implementing transformative policies requires curtailing and preventing corruption. In addition to putting requisite laws and standards in place to prevent corruption and end impunity, partnerships and coalitions[179] are needed to create demand for accountability and empower action. Valuable, multi-stakeholder political initiatives to tackle corruption, often driven by civil society, should be supported and empowered. In South Africa, the Budget Justice Coalition[180] formed by civil society actors during the pandemic seeks to ensure the responsible use of COVID funds and stricter oversight to prevent corruption. In South Korea, civil society mobilized 2.3 million[181] people cross economic divides to protest corruption by the former president. In Tunisia, protest action has succeeded[182] in forcing legal proceedings against several corrupt politicians and businessmen.

Ensuring exclusion is tackled in politics and decision-making processes does not automatically guarantee inclusive outcomes in the economy. The harsher impacts of COVID-19 on women, and minority communities, reflects the deeply structural and intersectional nature of the challenge.

4.3.3 Placing Trust and Solidarity at the Center of Response Efforts

Poor economic growth, inequality, and conflict are correlated with poor social cohesion and, conversely, high per capita income and employment are correlated with strong social cohesion.[183]

Building relationships and bonds between people usually requires addressing existing structural legacies between them, in redistributive ways. Placing considerations of vulnerability and risk at the forefront of crisis response efforts ties crisis compacting to transformative outcomes—building better, more resilient and inclusive social contracts. This means mainstreaming such concerns into policy and programming efforts across all sectors, with commitment at the highest policy levels. Similarly, social cohesion efforts (focusing on issues of trust, belonging, participation, and solidarity), need to be factored across policy and practice sectors and realms. South Africa is undoubtedly ahead of most governments in spearheading a social compact on social cohesion. A key challenge, however, lies in meaninfullly linking these efforts, which currently sit in the government's Department of Sports, Arts and Culture,[184] to wider government efforts to tackle inequality (both objective, and subjective elements).

Overly militarized[185] responses in the COVID-19 context undermine trust in state institutions—particularly where they are deployed in uneven ways across geographically diverse spaces. They suggest a contract of coercion rather than consent.[186] As corruption[187] breaks trust, violating 'the sacred contract between the

people and their elected representatives', the notion of care should alternatively be at the center of social contracting. Driving policy, this could support redistribution and recognition healing divisive polarizations occurring globally within countries, and also globally.

Finally, the notion of social solidarity—at the heart of social cohesion—can drive recognition efforts, while serving material needs. Solidary efforts are evident and demand more attention. At national level this means engaging and supporting communities centrally in response efforts—as witnessed in Colombia and South Africa. Such efforts can greatly support national response strategies, while strengthening government legitimacy and a sense of belonging to the nation in the process. Global solidarity efforts are also vital, notably around ensuring vaccine access and justice.[188] Such efforts should be viewed as paramount to confronting the interdependent nature of our common crisis, and driven by principles of fairness and responsibility, not charity.

Conclusion

Achieving inclusive and resilient social contracts is not easy, as evidenced by the scale of conflict, crisis, and polarization gripping many states and societies. But there are key pathways that can be nurtured. The panemic offers apertures to do things differently, and better —towards the development of resilient, inclusive social contracts, while addressing the grand challenge of inequality and exclusion. Together, these pathways described above offer means to address both material conditions of inequality, and those related to recognition, identity and dignity. Building healthy relationships horizontally within society, and vertically—between state and society—rests on progress in these areas, and ultimately provides a basis to confront crisis and forge resilient and inclusive social contracts.

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