Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East

Lessons from the Arab Spring

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The "Arab Spring" has proven astonishing and exhilarating to Middle East analysts and activists alike. Starting in Tunisia and spreading quickly to Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya, Syria and beyond, a wave of political protest, unprecedented in scope and ambition, swept the region in 2011. In short order, two deeply entrenched authoritarian rulers were jettisoned from office,[1] and by early summer the leaders of at least three other Arab regimes appeared to be in grave jeopardy.[2] In the wake of this wave, nearly every authoritarian regime in the region scrambled to concoct the "right" mix of repression and cooptation in the hope of stemming the protest. And even authoritarian regimes as distant as China took nervous notice of developments in the region.[3] For Middle East specialists, the events of the Arab Spring proved especially jarring, even if welcomed, because of their extensive investment in analyzing the underpinnings of authoritarian persistence, long the region's political hallmark. The empirical surprise of 2011 raises a pressing question—do we need to rethink the logic of authoritarianism in the Arab world or, even more broadly, authoritarian persistence writ large?

What follows is a reconsideration of the "robustness of authoritarianism" in the Arab world and beyond. The surprises of the Arab Spring, and especially the internal variation within the region, suggest new theoretical insights as well as new empirical realities that govern the dynamics of authoritarianism in the twenty-first century. At the same time, recent events confirm some long-held truisms about the dynamics of authoritarian durability. In addition, the events of the Arab Spring suggest insights into a host of other issues, including the dynamics of military defection; the logic of social mobilization; the complementary roles of structure, agency, intention, and contingency in complex political phenomena such as political uprisings (and, consequently, the limits

of their prediction); and the relationship between authoritarian breakdown and democratic transition. What follows is, at best, a preliminary investigation of these issues, suggesting as many questions as answers, and is undertaken with the intention of charting rich areas for future research.

Authoritarianism in the Arab World

Much ink has been spilled to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Scholars have focused on any number of factors to account for this phenomenon, including the weakness of civil society;[4] the deliberate manipulation and division of opposition forces;[5] the cooptation of social forces through the distribution of rent, cronyism, and stunted economic liberalization;[6] the region's cultural endowment;[7] the prevalence and peculiar logic of monarchy;[8] the embrace of liberalized autocracy;[9] and the effective manipulation of political institutions such as parties and electoral laws.[10] Seven years ago I added another volley to this debate, publishing "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective" ("ROA") on the pages of this very journal.[11] While this article did not challenge the utility of the scholarship cited above (to the contrary, I remain an active consumer of and contributor to it),[12] it did seek to focus on a question slightly different from the rest. Much of the research on authoritarian durability in the Middle East had focused on illuminating the logic of authoritarianism on a country-by-country basis (even if the insights harvested from an individual case could be extrapolated beyond the specific country under study). By contrast, my goal in "ROA" was to explore the puzzle of why the Middle East *as a region* was so extraordinarily authoritarian.[13] That is, I sought to explore the region's unusual experience of being singularly resistant to the third wave of democratization—a wave that had swept nearly every other region in the world since 1974. I sought to determine whether there was a particular constellation of qualities that distinguished the Middle East as a whole and that might account for this extraordinary exceptionalism.

My premise was that the Middle East was not singularly authoritarian because it was exceptionally lacking in the prerequisites of democratization (whether cultural, socioeconomic, or institutional). Many other regions had been similarly disadvantaged and yet had managed to make the leap to transition. Instead, I argued that what distinguished the Middle East was not the absence of democratic prerequisites but rather the presence of conditions that fostered robust authoritarianism,[14] specifically, the presence of an exceptionally muscular coercive apparatus endowed with both the capacity and will to repress democratic initiatives originating from society.

The exceptional will and capacity of the coercive apparatus to repress was in turn the consequence of the confluence of four factors, the first two exceptional to the region, the last two not. These factors included (1) the fiscal health of the coercive apparatus, exceptionally robust in many Middle Eastern countries thanks to the access many states had to petroleum, gas, geostrategic, locational, and secondary rents; (2) the maintenance

of international support networks, successfully retained by many Middle Eastern states even in the post-Cold War era because of their potential service to Western security interests (such as assuring a reliable supply of oil and gas and containing religiously inspired terrorist threats); (3) the low level of institutionalization of the coercive apparatus (low in many regional power houses such as Syria and Saudi Arabia as well as in Jordan, Morocco, Libya, Yemen, and the Gulf kingdoms but higher in such countries as Egypt and Tunisia);[15] and (4) the low level of popular mobilization that could typically be assembled to confront the coercive apparatus in the name of political reform.[16]

The first two factors—fiscal health and maintenance of international support—are crucial to determining the coercive apparatus' *capacity*, that is, the physical wherewithal to muster the men and materiel necessary to repress.[17] The last two factors, level of institutionalization and level of social mobilization, are crucial to determining the coercive apparatus' *will* to repress. If the coercive apparatus is patrimonially organized rather than institutionalized, it is likely to be less receptive to the idea of regime change because it is more likely to be "ruined by reform."[18] With its back against the wall of potential ruin, the security elite is more inclined to repress democratic reformers. At the same time, where social mobilization is high, the will to repress by the coercive apparatus is commensurately diminished. The prospect of violently repressing masses of people is a costly prospect for any security force.[19] Even if such repression is within the capacity of the coercive apparatus, the potentially high cost of this option is likely to chip away at its will to exercise it.

In short, for the Middle East, extraordinary access to rent and international support, combined with the less extraordinary proliferation of patrimonially organized security forces and low levels of social mobilization, together gave rise, in the lion's share of countries, to coercive apparatuses that were endowed with extraordinary capacity and will to repress. This capacity and will to repress accounted for the region's exceptional resistance to getting swept up in the third wave of democratization. Democratic initiatives originating in society were systematically repressed. This was the analysis put forward in the early 2000s to account for the exceptional robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East.

Reconsideration/Confirmation?

How does this analysis stand up in the face of the events of the Arab Spring? Does the sudden overthrow of two autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, the eventual ouster of Gaddafi in Libya, and the grave threat posed to the survival of two other rulers in Yemen and Syria suggest the need to rethink the robustness of authoritarianism in the region? Yes and no. Surprisingly, the pattern of events that has unfolded, especially the variation observed regarding regime collapse, regime survival, and regimes in serious jeopardy, confirms a central insight driving the analysis summarized above. Namely, the coercive apparatus, especially the coercive apparatus' varying will to repress, has indeed proved paramount to determining the durability of authoritarian

regimes in the region. In every Arab country where serious protest erupted, regime survival ultimately turned on one question: would the military defect? Or, more specifically, would the military shoot the protesters or not?[20] Faced with this choice, the military in Tunisia and Egypt chose not to shoot. Consequently, in both cases, the ruling autocrat, stormed by angry crowds demanding his departure, had no choice but to flee. In Bahrain, by contrast, the military (bolstered by Saudi assistance) stood by the ruling monarch. It repressed civilian demonstrators brutally, and the Bahraini monarch survived. In Libya, the military split, some refusing to fire on civilians, others willing to shoot in defense of Muammar Gaddafi. The result was civil war. In other countries, such as Yemen and Syria, the story is still unfolding. But in these latter cases regime survival clearly lies in whether the military will fragment (a la Libya) or whether it will manage to hold together and continue to repress (a la Bahrain).

This is not to argue that the only thing that shapes authoritarian regime survival is the stance of the coercive apparatus. Clearly, a good number of authoritarian regimes have survived the Arab Spring in large part because they have not faced massive popular uprisings. Although spurts of protest erupted in nearly every part of the region, many countries escaped massive protest at this time, including Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Algeria, and Jordan. The failure of protest to snowball in these countries is attributable to a variety of factors, including the effective cooptation of the citizenry via the regime's generous distribution of "buy-outs" (Saudi Arabia), societal exhaustion from prolonged civil war and the subsequent desire for calm (Algeria), and the successful division and cooptation of opposition elites topped off by the protective logic of monarchy (Morocco and Jordan). Insight into these strategies is provided by the "persistence of authoritarianism" literature cited above.[21] However, for those regimes that faced mass protest, survival turned, first and foremost, on the question, would the coercive apparatus defect? Would it prove willing and able to shoot on the crowds?[22]

The Coercive Apparatus—Loyalty or Defection?

The logical question that follows is this: when does a coercive apparatus defect? The answer is complex, not least because of the complexity of the coercive apparatus itself. The term "coercive apparatus" begs for disaggregation. Authoritarian regimes rely on many different institutions to serve their security needs, including the multiple branches of the military (army, navy, air force), the intelligence agencies, the police, and often a praetorian guard as well. Such disaggregation by function does not even begin to account for the full panoply of security forces that exist in most Middle Eastern countries. Most autocrats split and multiply the institutions responsible for each security function. That is, there are multiple intelligence agencies, armed forces, and police forces. Institutional redundancy is the express intention of these autocrats who rely on a strategy of "balanced rivalry" to "guard the guardians" and protect against insurrection and coups.[23]

Consequently, the question of the character and motivations of the coercive apparatus is complex. But when it comes to mass unrest such as that seen on Habib

Bourguiba Avenue or Tahrir Square, where tens of thousands of angry people assembled to demand an end to the regime in power, such mobilization usually overwhelms the capacity of the regular police and/or intelligence services. In that case, regime survival turns on the military (primarily the army) and its willingness and capacity to bring in the tanks, the heavy weapons, and the men in numbers large enough to contain a mass uprising. And so, despite the complex character of the coercive apparatus, in cases of mass protest such as seen during the Arab Spring, it is sufficient to look at the character of the military and its capacity and will to repress in order to reckon the immediate chances of regime survival.

In all of the cases of regime challenge during the Arab Spring (except, perhaps, for the case of Bahrain), military capacity, or the lack of it, was not really the pivotal issue determining regime survival.[24] The variation observed in the repression of protesters did not generally turn on the question of sufficient supply of tanks, machine guns, or men. General Amar did not refuse to shoot on the crowds in Tunisia because he lacked the men or materiel to do so; nor did General Tantawi in Egypt. Rather, successful military repression of the uprising turned on the question of will. In Tunisia and Egypt the military chose not to shoot on the demonstrators. In Bahrain, the military did choose to shoot. In Libya, the military fractured, with some units willing to shoot on the protestors and others not. The same may yet happen in Syria.

What explains this variation in will? The events of the Arab Spring confirm the analysis laid out in "ROA." As elaborated there, two factors proved primary: the institutional character of the military and the level of social mobilization.

Before expanding on the institutional character of the military and its impact on the military's will to repress, it would be useful to clarify the standard mandate that governs the decision making of military elites the world over. In nearly every country, the military sees itself as charged with three primary missions: (1) defend the country; (2) maintain security and order; and (3) look out for the military's institutional interests. The institutional interests of the military in turn may be broken down into at least three component parts: (1) maintain internal cohesion, discipline, and morale within the corps; (2) protect the image, prestige, and national legitimacy of the military (all of which depends on delivering on its role as defender of the nation); (3) secure the economic interests of the military (both the economic interests of the military as an *institution*— that is, access to first rate military equipment, as well as the economic interests of the military as *individuals*—that is, access to adequate salaries, benefits, and professional promotion opportunities).[25]

Whenever the military is asked to act, the military elite must weigh these different (and sometimes competing) imperatives in making its decisions. And when the military is asked to carry out an operation such as domestic crowd control it faces a real dilemma. Should it shoot or hold its fire? Using lethal force against civilians is problematic for the military in many ways. It challenges each of the military's core imperatives. Using lethal force against civilians threatens to undermine the image of the military as defender of the nation, especially if the crowds are representative of the "nation" and cannot be dismissed as distinctly "other" along class, sectarian, or ethnic

lines.[26] Similarly, if the crowds are conducting themselves peacefully, it is difficult for the military to justify lethal intervention on the grounds of maintaining order and security. But even more problematic for the military is the fact that engaging in lethal attack on civilians threatens to undermine the military's institutional interest in maintaining internal coherence, discipline, and morale. The more the civilians resemble the soldiers called upon to do the shooting (and the larger the number of such compatriots), the more likely lower level recruits will disobey orders to shoot and even desert their posts.[27] This, after all, proved to be the case during the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Concern about troop defections was one reason the army ultimately chose to be neutral in determining the fate of the Revolution of 1979.[28]

In short, shooting on civilians is potentially costly for the military. It can spell serious damage to the military's core institutional interests: cohesion, discipline, prestige, and legitimacy. Of course, if the civilian troublemakers are violent and their numbers are small (as was the case, for example, when religious terrorists attacked a tourist site in Upper Egypt in the 1990s to express defiance toward the regime), the military will not hesitate to intervene with lethal force. In that case the military's security imperative kicks in, and the risks to internal discipline are low because the soldiers are called upon to shoot only a few people who are clear threats to national security. By contrast, when the number of civilian troublemakers is large and the means they embrace are nonviolent, the prospect of using lethal force is much more problematic. To use lethal force against hundreds or thousands of peaceful protesters carries the whiff of massacre. And this poses a serious threat to the image and prestige of the military and may very well undermine morale and discipline within the corps. The latter is especially likely when the "troublemakers" stand for something that appears legitimate in the eyes of many recruits. Again, this logic was borne out in the case of the Iranian Revolution. Under these conditions there are good reasons for the military to hesitate in resorting to lethal force. This clearly proved to be the case in both Tunisia and Egypt. In both cases the number of protesters was large. The means they employed were largely nonviolent. And so the military leadership hesitated to use lethal force against them.

From the above it is clear why the level of social mobilization is such an important factor in determining whether the military will defect or not. If the number of civilian challengers is small, using lethal force against them is not so problematic. But if the level of social mobilization is high, then the costs of repression will be high as well, since using lethal force against large numbers of civilians will come across as illegitimate slaughter.

A second factor that shapes the thinking of the military elite as they weigh their multiple imperatives and evaluate the cost of lethal intervention against civilians is the structural character of the military. Most important is the degree to which the military is institutionalized (in the Weberian sense) as opposed to being organized along patrimonial lines.[29] This distinction is important because it determines the degree to which the military elite is personally invested in the regime's survival. Are the interests of the military elite intrinsically linked to the longevity of the regime? Where the military is institutionalized, that is, where recruitment and promotion are based on

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performance rather than politics, where there is a clear delineation between the public and the private that forbids predatory behavior vis-à-vis society, where discipline is maintained through the inculcation of a service ethic and the strict enforcement of a merit-based hierarchy rather than cronyism and/or balanced rivalry between primordial groups, where all these conditions exist, the military elite will have a sense of corporate identity separate from the regime. The military elite will have a distinct mission, identity, and career path. Under these conditions the military elite will be able to imagine separation from the regime and life beyond the regime.[30] In fact, the military elite may decide that its interests are best served by jettisoning an autocrat if that autocrat is increasingly perceived as a national liability.[31]

By contrast, where the military is organized along patrimonial lines, where military leaders are linked to regime elites through bonds of blood or sect or ethnicity, where career advancement is governed by cronyism and political loyalty rather than merit, where the distinction between public and private is blurred and, consequently, where economic corruption, cronyism, and predation is pervasive, then the fate and interests of the military's leadership become intrinsically linked to the longevity of the regime. The military elite becomes deeply invested in the regime's survival and perceives regime change as possibly ruinous. Under such conditions, the military leadership has significant reason to consider using lethal force against civilians in the name of defending regime survival. This objective will outweigh other concerns about the military's legitimacy or the mandate to defend the nation. This is why Saddam Hussein's air force did not hesitate to bomb Halabjah in 1988, despite the horrific humanitarian cost involved (3,000–5,000 killed). This is why Rifaat al-Assad, the brother of former President Hafez al-Assad, did not hesitate to massacre tens of thousands of people in Hama in 1982. When the military is deeply invested in the survival of the regime because of its blood ties, or its ethnic/sectarian ties, or its crony capitalist ties to the regime, that military has significant incentive to shoot civilians even if such action violates its other mandates. The only constraint on such behavior is the need to keep the rank and file from defecting, which is a potential challenge since the interests of the troops are not necessarily aligned with those of the military elite. Retaining the loyalty of the rank and file is less challenging in cases where they share a common ethnic or sectarian identity with the military elite that also happens to be distinct from the civilians under attack. This, for example, is the case in Bahrain, where the military elite and rank and file are predominantly Sunni while the majority of the Bahraini population is Shia. By contrast, where such commonality is not present, the loyalty of the rank and file is more difficult to guarantee and may prove fatal to the military elite's repressive project. This, for example, is the case in Syria, where much of the military elite is Alawi whereas the majority of the rank and file as well as the general population of the country is Sunni.

In sum, variation in defection by the military is governed in large part by two factors: the institutional character of the military and the level of social mobilization. The events of the Arab Spring confirm this analysis. In Tunisia the decision by the military elite to defect was the least surprising development. Tunisia was well known

for having a professional army which was small and removed from politics.[32] It was not distinguished from the general population along ethnic or sectarian lines. It was not the beneficiary of economic cronyism with the regime. For these reasons the Tunisian military was less invested in the survival of Ben Ali and his cohort. Add to this the fact that the protesting crowds were large (as many as 10,000 people assembled on Habib Bourguiba Avenue by mid-January) and that they were relatively peaceful. Consequently when the military was ordered to shoot on the crowds and face the risk of undermining its internal coherence, all without a clear security imperative, it was able to imagine sending the regime elite packing. It was not personally invested in the regime's survival, and hence it was not surprising that the military elite refused to shoot. Instead, General Ammar delivered the "velvet shove" to Ben Ali, as David Sorensen has so aptly put it. And the long-ruling autocrat was forced to depart.[33]

In Egypt the story was a bit more complex. The Egyptian military was indeed professional. It was not linked by blood or ethnicity to Hosni Mubarak and his family. In addition, the number of protesters was large and the means they embraced were peaceful. All this pointed to military defection. At the same time, however, the Egyptian military had long been deeply involved in crony capitalist links with the regime. The military's economic ventures, blessed and protected by the regime, accounted for a significant share of its economic privilege (as well as its national mission, subsequent to the negotiation of a cold peace with Israel).[34] As such, the military had strong reasons to be invested in the political status quo. These contrary impulses made the situation quite indeterminate. Would the military shoot or not? The events of late January and early February 2011 had the world at the edge of its seat. Would the protesters sustain the numbers and the nonviolent stance necessary to make the military hesitate about firing? Would the military calculate that its interests were sufficiently distinct from the person of Hosni Mubarak to deliver the velvet shove to the autocrat?[35] No doubt international factors came into play in the military's calculations as well.[36] The Egyptian story made clear how contingent the succession of events in cases like this can be. But the logic driving these calculations was never in question. In the end, the military elite decided not to shoot and Hosni Mubarak was forced to depart the scene.

The unfolding of events in Bahrain, Libya, and Syria also confirms the logic of defection described above. Bahrain possessed a small military, patrimonially linked to the monarch (by family and sect), and primordially distinct from the protesters (the lion's share of protesters were Shi'a as was the majority of the population of Bahrain; the military was composed of Bahrainis who were Sunni, as was the king, and the military was bolstered by mercenaries from abroad who were largely Sunni as well). Thus in Bahrain, the protesters were easily portrayed as "other," and in this case, as allied with Iran, and so could be seen as posing a credible threat to national security. Consequently, in Bahrain the army did not hesitate to shoot. In Libya the military's structure mirrored (and built upon) the country's tribal profile. And so, not surprisingly, when one "tribe" (citizens of Benghazi) rose in protest against Gaddafi's regime, the military fractured along tribal lines, with Benghazi units refusing to fire on their compatriots and other units remaining loyal to Gaddafi. The result was civil war.[37]

In Syria the story is unfolding. Concern about military defection has led the Assad regime to rely on those units that are wholly Alawi (such as the Fourth Brigade) to lethally subdue the protests around the country. (The ruling Assad family is Alawi; the majority of Syria is Sunni). The fate of the regime turns on whether the uprising remains small enough and sufficiently dispersed outside the urban strongholds that the regime can continue to repress it with units that are primordially linked to the regime and hence reliably loyal. Should the uprising grow and spread and force reliance on a broader swath of the military, the Assad regime will face the threat of defection by its (majority Sunni) rank and file soldiers—a mortal peril.

In this way, the centrality of the coercive apparatus to authoritarian regime survival, as well as the logic of military defection, has been confirmed by the events of the Arab Spring. In this regard, the empirical variation observed regarding regime survival and autocratic overthrow suggests little that is surprising from a theoretical point of view. But another aspect of the Arab Spring has been extremely surprising in ways both theoretical and empirical. This has to do with the social mobilization observed.

Social Mobilization

One of the inescapable facts of life in the Arab world over the past half century has been the relatively low level of political mobilization at most levels of society. Although nearly every Arab country has experienced moments of popular insurrection (labor strikes, bread riots, student protest), none had seen the massive, sustained, cross-class, political mobilization of the sort that forced regime change in South Korea, Eastern Europe, Latin America, or sub-Saharan Africa.[38] The most persuasive explanation for this failure to mobilize has been political. The severe repressiveness of Arab states long made it extremely costly for individuals to engage in political contestation of any sort. Since past performance is generally the foundation for future prediction,[39] an analytic consensus emerged that, even in the face of onerous provocation, Arab societies would not rise up to force regime change on dictatorial rulers. This consensus was given further force in recent years when even movements such as Kefaya—the Egyptian protest movement embraced by a new class of young people ensconced in the rhetoric of human rights and proficient in new social media—repeatedly proved unable to mobilize more than a few hundred protestors to denounce the political abuses of the Egyptian state.[40]

So it was an enormous empirical surprise to see tens if not hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens of diverse social origin joining in the protests for political change across the Arab world. No one expected this! Foreign analysts, not to mention indigenous intelligence agencies, were astonished at the turn out. The size as well as the cross-class character of these protests distinguished them from prior incidents of unrest (riots, strikes) in ways that proved to be political game changers in the region. The more the demonstrators mirrored the demographic profile of "the nation," and the larger their number, the more likely the military would defect and jettison the ruling autocrat, as described above.[41]

How are we to explain this sudden surge of popular mobilization? To tease out the logic driving these events, we must analyze the early cases of popular protest and then see if the causal sequence discerned can be generalized to a broader set of cases. Looking at the first countries where popular protest caught fire, Tunisia and Egypt, we find four factors were essential to setting the protest in motion: long-standing grievances, an emotional trigger, a sense of impunity, and access to new social media.

Long-standing grievances with the regime in power clearly played an important role in motivating protest in both Tunisia and Egypt. Grievances over repression, corruption, and economic hardship were especially salient. In both countries, the regime had long strangled political life. In both countries the ruling elite was implicated in extensive bribery, kickbacks, and cronyism. In both countries, economic hardship weighed heavily on the citizenry, ranging from widespread unemployment in Tunisia to punishingly high rates of poverty in Egypt.

Without doubt, these grievances were serious. But as vexing as they were, grievance alone cannot explain the sudden surge in popular protest, neither its timing nor its location. Corruption, repression, and economic hardship had plagued both countries for decades, yet never before had they sparked popular protest in any sustained way. In addition, corruption, repression, and economic hardship had afflicted nearly every country in the region, sometimes to degrees that dwarfed the experience of Tunisia and Egypt. If depth of grievance were the sole factor determining the incidence of protest, Tunisia, certainly, would have been the least likely site for launching this sudden wave of mobilization. So why did protest start now, and why here?

Three other factors proved essential to this process: the presence of an emotional trigger, a sense of impunity, and new social media.

Emotional Trigger, Impunity, and Social Media

With regard to emotional triggers, as any student of revolution knows, ordinary people do not take to the street in mass numbers thanks to protracted intellectual meditation on policy alternatives or ideology. Rather, ordinary people take to the streets when they feel compelled by some strong emotion such as anger, fear, or euphoria.[42] In Tunisia the emotional trigger that drove people to protest was outrage. This was the spark that set alight the underlying tinder of long-term economic and political grievances.

Two factors in particular sparked the outrage that brought people out into the streets. First was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi. This was the fruit vendor whose callous humiliation by state officials emblemized the disrespect so many Tunisians had felt at the hands of the state and whose experience of joblessness and reduction to unlicensed street vending captured the economic hopelessness felt by many young Tunisians. Bouazizi's plight resonated broadly in Tunisian society. The regime's culpability in his condition sparked the public's fury.

But popular outrage in Tunisia was further stoked by a second factor as well—the decision by the regime to resort to lethal force to put down the demonstrations.

Although the military ultimately refused to fire on protesters, other branches of the coercive apparatus were not so chary. In fact, from the beginning the police resorted to lethal measures in an attempt to contain the protesters. It is one thing for the state to repress protesters with tear gas and billy clubs. It is another thing to post snipers on building rooftops with orders to shoot to kill. By mid–January, reports were that Tunisian security forces had killed seventy-eight people. In fact, many more had actually been killed. This resort to lethal force further stoked outrage in Tunisian society.

In Egypt outrage also proved to be an important emotional trigger sparking protest during the Arab Spring. Outrage was stoked by a number of factors, including the regime's brutal murder of rights activist Khaled Said, widely publicized on Facebook; the stolen elections of November 2010 where opposition forces were denied any credible representation; and the mid–winter spike in the price of basic food commodities which hammered Egypt's poor.[43] But, in fact, the most proximate emotional trigger that brought people out into the streets in Egypt was probably less a negative emotion such as outrage and more a positive emotion—euphoria! The rapid fall of the dictator in Tunisia gave Egyptians the feeling that suddenly the impossible was possible. Perhaps the old autocrats could be dislodged if only the people stood together? The joy and hope generated by the Tunisian example proved as important as any other emotional trigger in motivating people to join in the protests in Egypt.[44]

The protests in Tunisia and Egypt confirmed the important role emotion plays in social mobilization. But beyond the triggers of outrage and euphoria, it is clear that the number of protesters never would have swelled to regime-challenging magnitude in Tunisia and Egypt had it not been for another factor—impunity.

Participation in mass protest is to some degree a matter of cost-benefit calculation. Most people, aside from die-hard activists, are reluctant to participate in protests if they think it likely that they will get hurt or killed in the process of participating.[45] However, if people are persuaded that the costs of participation are not grave, then they will be more likely to join in.[46] This is why one often sees a cascade effect in demonstrations. Once demonstrations reach a certain size they tend to snowball. The more people join in these protests, the lower the individual's chance of getting hurt. There is safety in numbers. In this way, the rational calculation of risk determines, to some degree, when people will mobilize.

In Tunisia rational calculation of risk led people to join the demonstrations in large numbers once one crucial fact became clear—that the military would not shoot. This became evident when a You Tube video went viral on January 13 that showed the military not only refusing to shoot at a crowd of protestors but also appearing to run interference between the police (who *had* been attacking the crowds) and the protestors.[47] As soon as this video went viral, it was clear that the game was up. Once people became persuaded that the military was hesitating in its willingness to back the regime, the risk of protesting declined precipitously. People came to believe that they could protest with impunity. The decreased sense of threat fueled massive participation in the protests. People responded in huge numbers to the call to join the protests in downtown Tunis. By January 14 more than 10,000 people had massed on Avenue Habib

Bourguiba—numbers that no police force alone could contain.[48] Consequently, when the military informed Ben Ali it would not step in to defend him from the crowds, the president had no choice but to flee.

A somewhat similar scenario played out in the Egyptian case. Early on the Egyptian military signaled that it would not shoot on the crowds. In the early days of protest, the military relied on tear gas and water cannons in an attempt to disperse the protestors. But by January 29 it was evident that the military had decided to focus on protecting government buildings rather than intervene against the demonstrators. On January 31 a military spokesman explicitly declared on state TV that "the military understood the legitimacy of (the protesters') demands" and that "the armed forces will not resort to use of force against our great people."[49] Consequently, aside from a short two days during the first week of protest when regime-sponsored thugs violently assaulted demonstrators, a sense of impunity developed. A carnival-like atmosphere prevailed in Tahrir Square. People brought their children to witness the historic moment. The number of people gathering in the public squares swelled.

A final factor that must be highlighted to explain the timing and swelling of the popular uprising in both Tunisia and Egypt is the combined role of social media and satellite television. In prior years, mobilization of political protest had been undermined by both societal collusion and state repression. Many Egyptians and Tunisians willingly bought into the "authoritarian bargain" offered by the regime in power.[50] They exchanged political quiescence for stability as well as for economic growth. But even those citizens who rejected the authoritarian bargain found their capacity to organize politically blocked. The Tunisian and Egyptian regimes did everything in their power to suppress opposition and atomize society. Political activists were arrested and brutalized. Public gatherings were controlled, if not forbidden. Speech was censored and publications (especially in Tunisia) were often shut down.

Social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, cell phones with video feed capacity) and satellite television (al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya) together enabled the mobilization of collective action in ways that had been heretofore impossible in repressive settings. Both provided a platform for conveying the stories and symbols that fueled participation in protest.[51] Both significantly escaped the control and repression of the authoritarian state—social media through its anonymity and spontaneity, satellite television through its foreign provenance. In addition, social media provided the means for coordinating and synchronizing thousands of people, making mass gatherings possible even in the absence of formal organizational infrastructure (something the regime would have worked hard to decimate). And when social media failed (for example, when the Egyptian regime temporarily shut down the internet), satellite television filled in the gap—with programming on al-Jazeera providing real-time coverage of events and alerting people to the location and tactics of the next protest.[52] More than any other factor, the combined effect of social media and satellite television explains why this wave of protest was possible *now*.[53]

The pivotal role played by satellite TV and social media in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings spotlights an important new empirical reality that will govern the

question of authoritarian resilience from now on. As Marc Lynch points out, this new media can abet contentious collective action even under the difficult constraints of authoritarian rule thanks to the media's ability to reduce transaction costs, nurture informational cascades, foster diffusion, and increase the costs of state repression (by documenting the state's excesses and exposing them to international audiences).[54] Not that the media's ability to unseat authoritarian regimes and foster democratization should be overdrawn. For example, there is nothing deterministic about social media's capacity to deliver mobilization sufficient to challenge authoritarian rule. The past failure of social media to deliver crowds of protesters to the Kefaya movement in Egypt shows that the social media's contribution is permissive, not deterministic.[55] In addition, authoritarian regimes can use this same social media to detect, monitor, divide, and rule opposition forces, illustrating its capacity to abet authoritarianism's resilience as much as undermine it.[56] Finally, even if social media can facilitate contentious collective action that can bring down an authoritarian regime, this media may be less effective at advancing the subsequent process of building democracy. To the contrary, the very qualities that make social media effective at evading authoritarian repression—anonymity, spontaneity, lack of hierarchy—may be precisely the qualities that undermine its ability to help build the institutional foundation of a working democracy. Without hierarchy, institutionalized longevity, or a clear identity, it becomes difficult for activists to identify collective priorities, negotiate compromises, and make credible commitments to those compromises. As Lynch has said, social media may best be a force for "permanent revolution," and while revolution may be an asset in bringing down autocracy, it may be less helpful in building the institutional grounding of democracy.[57] Still, there is no question that social media and satellite television constitute a new empirical reality that challenges authoritarian resilience in entirely new ways.

Theoretical Generalizations

Having traced the logic driving the surge of social mobilization in Tunisia and Egypt, can this analysis be generalized to explain the mobilization (or lack of it) in other Arab countries? And do the patterns observed suggest new theoretical insights about social mobilization, writ large?

Close observation of the region suggests that the presence or absence of the four variables elaborated above (grievance, emotional triggers, impunity, and social media) do not correlate in any simple way with the variation in incidence of protest evidenced around the Arab world in 2011. For example, the triad of grievances that motivated people to protest in Tunisia and Egypt—corruption, repression, and economic hardship—were present in nearly every country in the Arab world, and yet not every Arab country was seized with mass protest. The emotional triggers that propelled people into the streets, for example, the self-immolation of "martyrs" and the exposure to the astonishing victory of "people power" over dictators, were present in countries like Algeria, Morocco, and Jordan, yet they did not mobilize regime-challenging crowds

there. The penetration of social media was much lower in Yemen than in Tunisia and Egypt, yet this did not prevent mass protest from taking off in Yemen. Perhaps most amazing of all, the absence of impunity did not consistently extinguish enthusiasm for protest. In Syria, for example, the protesters continued to mobilize despite the military's evident intention to use lethal force against them. The military shot at the crowds, over and over again, and yet the protesters continued to reassemble, facing down the bullets.

This analysis suggests that none of the four factors identified as important in mobilizing protest in Egypt and Tunisia is either necessary or sufficient to explain the incidence of mass protests witnessed elsewhere during the Arab Spring. To some extent this observation is theoretically surprising, but not entirely. It is not surprising that incidence of grievance does not predict incidence of protest. This has long been recognized by the literature on collective action. It is a bit more surprising that lethal force did not discourage protesters from mobilizing. Although leading scholars such as Mark Lichbach have long identified the contradictory impact that repression can have on the mobilization of dissent,[58] what is unusual in the Syrian case is that the regime's employment of lethal force was consistent and unyielding—something many theorists would predict would lead to retreat on the side of the protesters.[59] Perhaps least surprising is the fact that many countries got caught up in the protest despite the fact that they lacked some of the basic conditions that facilitated protest in the first cases of Egypt and Tunisia.[60]

How do we explain this? The events of the Arab Spring illustrate a phenomenon that is well known in the literature on the politics of protest, namely, the power of contagion (or, alternatively, the power of diffusion). There are many historic examples of such contagion. Perhaps best known are the wave of student protest that spread throughout the industrialized West in the late 1960s and the wave of regime-toppling protest that brought down autocratic regimes all over Eastern Europe in 1989. What drives these waves? David Patel, Valerie Bunce, and Sharon Wochick identify two different logics: (1) the logic of deliberate diffusion, carried out via the conscious sharing of tactics and frames by activists who are linked by networks that may be transnational; and (2) the logic of demonstration effect (that is, "the power of precedent").[61]

In the case of the Arab Spring we see evidence of both these logics at work. Clearly, activists in Tunisia and Egypt engaged in deliberate diffusion. Tunisians enthusiastically shared the fruits of their protest experience with Egyptian activists, passing on extensive tactical advice. Egyptians consciously sought out the tactical guidance of Serbian activists (who had successfully brought down the Milosevic regime in 2000) and familiarized themselves with the teaching of Gene Sharp, the American guru of civil disobedience, long before the Arab protests caught fire in early 2011. Clearly such deliberate borrowing led to imitation and shaped the course of the protest wave. But in addition to such conscious sharing of elites and strategies, the course of the Arab Spring also shows evidence of the demonstration effect. The speed with which copycat protests erupted even in countries such as Bahrain, Libya, and Syria suggests the power of precedent and the importance of the demonstration effect. These were countries where political conditions differed dramatically from those in Egypt

and Tunisia in ways that made protest potentially much more dangerous.[62] But the successful overthrow of Ben Ali in Tunisia created a wave of optimism and euphoria that only gained momentum after Mubarak was deposed less than one month later. In this context, hope and euphoria outweighed rational calculation of risk, cost, and benefit. "People power" had succeeded in overthrowing two seemingly invincible autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, so why not in Bahrain and Syria as well?

How do we explain this phenomenon? Mark Beissinger provides brilliant insight, drawing on an analysis of the "Color Revolutions" of the early 2000s. Beissinger develops the notion of "analogic thinking," where, thanks to a sense of commonality across cases (such as shared history, shared culture, and common institutional context), people "make analogies …and… read relevance into developments in other contexts."[63] People "learn by example," and cases of prior success become "models for emulation."[64] Emulation leads to the borrowing of "mobilizational frames, repertoires, and modes of contention,"[65] and it accounts for the fact that phenomena such as revolution, nationalism, and democratization tend to come in waves. By exercising the power of analogy, "the seemingly impossible [becomes] possible,"[66] and people are motivated to take action they might never have considered before. It is this sense of possibility that led Syrians to protest, even if it meant facing down bullets. And it is this sense of possibility that motivated Libyans to rise up, even if they were accoutered with designer jeans and fancy cell phones. The course of the Arab Spring confirms the insight that precise duplication of structural conditions matters less than the power of analogic thinking in driving protests of this sort.

The pattern of social mobilization evidenced in the Arab world is especially interesting in at least two ways. First, it confirms a key epistemological point (clarified for me by Beissinger) that many political phenomena, including protest, democratization, and revolution, violate one of the fundamental assumptions of social science theorizing (including statistical analysis), namely, "the independence of cases."[67] Where actors can learn from prior examples and emulate them, the result is "cross-case influence."[68] This seriously challenges any ambition to build predictive hypotheses rooted solely in the analysis of the causal processes governing first cases. Timing matters.

Second, perhaps of less grand theoretical significance, but still important to beleaguered area specialists, the pattern of social mobilization evidenced in the Arab world confirms the importance of shared culture, history, and identity to explaining key political phenomena such as protest and social mobilization. Comparativists have long acknowledged the importance of "regional effects" in governing phenomena like democratization.[69] One of the best predictors of successful democratization is geographic proximity to a democratic neighbor.[70] But what the pattern of protest during the Arab Spring confirms (and what Beissinger's analysis makes clear) is that it is not "geographic proximity" which defines the parameters of contagion so much as it is shared identity, history, and culture. It is a sense of commonality that fosters analogic thinking; it is cultural and historical proximity, not geographic vicinity, which is key to emulation. This is why the wave of protest in 2011 spread from Tunisia and Egypt to countries such as Yemen and Syria, that were not geographically proximate.

By contrast, the wave of protest did not prove contagious to countries in sub-Saharan Africa that were geographically much closer to Egypt and Tunisia. Perhaps this fact provides some vindication for investment in the cultural, historical, and linguistic foundations of area studies. Area boundaries do matter for politics after all.

Still, what is evident, for this author at least, is the difficulty of distilling a simple parsimonious hypothesis that predicts the incidence of mass protest during the Arab Spring. A preliminary attempt has made clear the chasm between explanation and prediction. By retracing the course of events in the early cases of Arab protest, we are able to tease out the causal links that led to the outcomes observed. This is the essence of explanation. But elucidating these causal paths falls far short of bestowing the power of prediction in other cases because prediction assumes an element of determinism in these pathways that simply does not exist. Perhaps this is a consequence of the peculiar nature of the subject under study? Many leading scholars have elucidated the obstacles to predicting phenomena such as protest or revolution. Some, such as Charles Kurzman, attribute this to fact that the behavior of the participants in revolution is unexpected, even to the participants themselves, before they are caught up in the drama of the moment; the intersubjectivity of decision making accounts for part of this inability to anticipate an individual's behavior.[71] Other scholars, such as Timur Kuran, point to the authoritarian context in which revolution takes place and the radical occlusion of people's true political preferences in authoritarian contexts. The possibility of preference revelation and mobilization only emerges in the context of the revolution's unspooling.[72] Still other scholars, such as Beissinger, emphasize the role of radical contingency in revolution and protest, the fact that very small decisions early on can have huge and unanticipated impact on the final outcome of an uprising due to the strategic interaction of the various factors "in play."[73] How these interactions play out is quite unpredictable. Add to this the cross-case influence that is typical in cases of revolution and the challenge of making predictions about such phenomena becomes clear. This lends support to the position once expressed to me by my colleague Grzegorz Ekiert that "our goal in political science ought not to be prediction but rather portable insight." To my mind, the course of the Arab Spring confirms the wisdom of this more limited ambition. But for others of stouter heart the variation in protest mobilization observed during the Arab Spring beckons for investigation.[74]

Conclusion

The trajectory of the Arab Spring confirms earlier analyses that the comportment of the coercive apparatus is pivotal to determining the durability of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world (and beyond). The logic governing the behavior of the coercive apparatus—specifically, whether or not it will shoot on civilian protestors—follows a pattern teased out years ago. At the same time, the trajectory of the Arab Spring highlights an empirical novelty for the Arab world, namely, the manifestation of huge, cross-class popular protest in the name of political change, as well as a new factor that abetted the materialization of

this phenomenon—the spread of social media. The latter will no doubt be a game changer for the longevity of authoritarian regimes around the world from now on. Still, while some aspects of the Arab Spring seem well analyzed or self-evident, others are less so. Most notably, the variable incidence of social mobilization in the region remains significantly undertheorized, at least in the sense of developing parsimonious and generalizable hypotheses that account for the variation observed.

To conclude, let us consider two final points. First, do the events of the Arab Spring necessitate jettisoning the extensive literature that has evolved explaining the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world? No question that none of its authors (myself included) predicted the fall of authoritarian regimes witnessed in 2011. But then revolutionary events and moments of intense popular protest are always very difficult to anticipate for the reasons explored above.[75] The primary contribution of the "persistence of authoritarianism" literature has been to explain the puzzling survival of authoritarian regimes in the region, some lasting as long as thirty, forty, even seventy years. The insights developed by this literature (such as spotlighting the paradoxical effects of partial liberalization, the peculiar protective logic of monarchical regimes, and the effectiveness of divide-and-rule strategies at neutralizing oppositions) are no less valid just because two or three Arab regimes were toppled in the wake of mass protest in 2011.[76]

Furthermore, popular protest did not snowball in every Arab country. These null cases constitute a "silent spring" in the Arab world, and there is no better place to begin to explain their incidence than in the persistence of authoritarianism literature.[77] To some, these explanations might seem like post-hoc rationalization. But no area specialist with deep knowledge of these cases would begin the process of distilling a parsimonious theory of their "quietism" without considering these proven sources of regime survival and societal disempowerment.

Finally, the analysis presented above, and particularly the portion elucidating the role of the coercive apparatus in sustaining authoritarianism's robustness in the region, focuses on one specific step in this process—ensuring the survival of authoritarian regimes. But a distinction should be made between sustaining (or jettisoning) specific authoritarian regimes and sustaining (or jettisoning) authoritarianism more generally. As Barbara Geddes pointed out over a decade ago, there is a need to decouple the process of authoritarian breakdown from the process of transitioning out of authoritarianism and replacing it with democracy. Only a minority of countries that jettisoned authoritarian regimes between 1974 and 1999 had developed into stable democracies by the turn of the century.[78] And more than twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the vast majority of countries that had brought down communism were still not democracies; they are, at best, hybrid regimes.[79] Thus, while the elimination of autocracy must precede democratic transition chronologically, the two processes are analytically distinct.

What does this say for the possibility of democratic transition in the Arab world in the wake of the Arab Spring? The conditions and processes that govern the establishment of effective democracy are elaborated in a vast literature on democratic transition that cannot be reviewed here. Clearly some Arab countries are well positioned to make this leap; others are not. The process is indeterminate and its unspooling will be the

subject of passionate study over the next few years. But there is no reason for abject pessimism. For some countries, such as Tunisia, there is even reason for optimism. This should spell hope for the region as a whole. If anything, the Arab Spring has demonstrated the importance of regional effects and the power of positive example in stimulating political re-imagination. If Tunisia and perhaps even Egypt prove successful in following up their ejection of autocracy with transition to democracy, a wave of democratization may be in the wings for the rest of the region in seasons to come.

NOTES

The author wishes to thank six anonymous reviewers for their excellent critiques and comments. The first version of this article was submitted on June 24, 2011; the final version was submitted on October 30, 2011.
    1. Zine Abdine Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.
    2. Moammar Gadaffi in Libya, Ali Saleh in Yemen, and Bashar al-Assad in Syria.
    3. "Catching Scent of Revolution China Moves to Snip Jasmine," *New York Times,* May 11, 2011; "China Tightens Censorship on Electronic Communications," *New York Times,* March 21, 2011; "The Dissident's Wife," *New York Times,* March 27, 2011.
    4. Augustus R. Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1995); Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Civil Society as Social Control: State Power in Jordan," *Comparative Politics*, 33 (October 2000): 43–61; Amy Hawthorne, "Is Civil Society the Answer?" in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), pp. 81–114.
    5. John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite–A Study in Segmented Politics* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1970); I. William Zartman, "Opposition as a Support of the State," in Adeed Dawisha and William Zartman, eds., *Beyond Coercion: The Durability of the Arab State* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 61–87; Ellen Lust-Okar, "Divided They Rule: The Management and Manipulation of the Political Opposition," *Comparative Politics*, 36 (January 2004): 159–79; Steven Heydemann, "Social Pacts and the Persistence of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," in Oliver Schlumberger, ed., *Debating Arab Authoritarianism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 21–38; Eva Wegner "Islamist Inclusion and Regime Persistence: The Moroccan Win-Win Situation," in Schlumberger, pp. 75–93; Holger Albrecht, "Authoritarian Opposition and the Politics of Challenge in Egypt," in Schlumberger, pp. 59–74.
    6. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani, eds., *The Rentier State in the Arab World* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Steven Heydemann, "The Political Logic of Economic Reform: Selective Stabilization in Syria," in Henri J. Barkey, ed., *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 11–39; Alan Richards, "Economic Reform in the Middle East: The Challenge to Governance," in Nora Bensahel and Daniel Byman, eds., *The Future Security Environment in the Middle East* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), pp. 57–128; Eberhard Kienle, *A Grand Delusion: Democracy and Economic Reform in Egypt* (London: IB Tauris, 2001); Stephen King, *Liberalization against Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Pete W. Moore, *Doing Business in the Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
    7. Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political* Culture (London: Frank Cass, 1994); P. J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (New York: Croom Helm, 1987); Martin Kramer, "Islam vs. Democracy," Commentary, 95 (January 1993): 35–42.
    8. Lisa Anderson, "Absolutism and the Resilience of Monarchy in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, 106 (Spring 1991): 1–15; Michael Herb, *All In the Family: Absolutism, Revolution and Democracy in the Middle Eastern Monarchies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); F. Gregory Gause, "The Persistence of Monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula: A Comparative Analysis," in Joseph Kostiner, ed., *Middle East Monarchies* (London: Westview, 2000), pp. 167–86; Russell E. Lucas, "Monarchical Authoritarianism: Survival and Political Liberalization in a Middle Eastern Regime Type," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 36 (February 2004): 103–19.
    9. Daniel Brumberg, "The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (October 2002): 56–68.

10. Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Marsha Pripstein Posusney, "Multi-Party Elections in the Arab World: Institutional Engineering and Oppositional Strategies," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 6 (Winter 2002): 34–53; Ellen Lust-Okar and Amaney Jamal, "Rulers and Rules: Reassessing the Influence of Regime Type on Electoral Law Formation," *Comparative Political Studies*, 35 (April 2002): 337–66; Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

11. Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," *Comparative Politics*, 36 (January 2004): 139–57.

12. In fact, my prior research had expressly sought to explore the character of civil society and the role that "state sponsorship" of social forces plays in hampering democratic transition. See Eva Bellin, *Stalled Democracy: Capital, Labor, the Paradox of State-Sponsored Development* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2002); Bellin, "Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia," in Norton, pp. 120–147; Bellin, "The Politics of Profit in Tunisia: Utility of the Rentier Paradigm," *World Development*, 22 (March 1994): 427–36.

13. I use the term Middle East in the broadest sense to embrace the entire region of the Middle East and North Africa. For the sake of concision, I will use the term Middle East alone.

14. Jill Crystal, "Authoritarianism and Its Adversaries in the Arab World," *World Politics*, 46 (January 1994): 262–89.

15. By "institutionalized" I mean the degree to which the coercive apparatus is organized along Weberian bureaucratic principles rather than patrimonial ones. See the language in Bellin, 2004, pp. 145–46, as well as below, pp. 132–33. Note that the original 2004 piece identifies the military in Turkey, Tunisia, and Egypt as highly institutionalized, while it identifies Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, and Iraq (under Saddam) as examples of Middle Eastern states where the military is shot through with patrimonialism (p. 149).

16. See below, p. 135, for one explanation of this low level of social mobilization.

17. Though at times international support can prove important to sustaining the coercive apparatus' will to repress as well. For example, during the Tahrir uprising in Egypt in January and February of 2011, clear signaling on the part of the United States that it would not look kindly on a decision by the Egyptian military to massacre civilians certainly chipped away at the Egyptian military's will to repress. For more, see footnote 36 below.

18. Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict During Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics*, 29 (April 1997): 315. For explanation, see Bellin, 2004, pp. 145–46, as well as below, p. 133.

19. For explanation, see below, pp. 131–32.

20. I recognize that the military is only one component of the "coercive apparatus." For disaggregation of the coercive apparatus and the implications this has for my argument, see below, p. 130.

21. Presumably the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt had access to some of these strategies as well. Why popular protest nevertheless snowballed in these countries will be explored below.

22. The centrality of military defection to authoritarian regime survival is not unique to the Middle East. Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle point out that in Africa the position of the military was key to determining which countries would successfully transition from authoritarianism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Bratton and van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (New York: Cambridge, 1997): 83; 244–49; 211. Valerie Bunce points out that in the postcommunist world the position of the military was key to determining the pattern of the fall of communism and regime change (Intervention, POMEPS Conference, Washington, D.C., May 2011). Marc Beissinger argues that in the cases of the Color Revolutions of Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, defection of military was key to determining the fate of the revolutions. See Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of the Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics* (June 2007): 271.

23. Robert Springborg, *Military Elites and the Polity in Arab States* (Arlington, VA: Development Associates, 1998); Phillipe Droz-Vincent, "Le militaire et le politique en Egypte," *Monde Arabe Maghreb-Machreq*, 162 (Juillet-Septembre 1999); Risa Brooks, *Political-Military Relations and the Stability of Arab Regimes*, Adelphi Paper 324, London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1998; Mehran Kamrava, "Military Professionalization and Civil-Military Relations in the Middle East," *Political Science Quarterly*, 115 (Spring 2000): 67–92; Steven Cook, *Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2007).

24. Insufficient capacity was indeed an issue in Bahrain where the monarch had to resort to back up from Saudi Arabia in men and arms in order to contain the popular threat he faced.

25. One of the pioneers in thinking about the "military as institution" and the impact this has on the military's decision making is Alfred Stepan, who brought many of his observations together in *Rethinking Military Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

26. Hence the attempt by many threatened regimes to cast the protestors as "other." In Bahrain the protesters were cast as Shia traitors in league with foreign Iranian ambitions; in Libya the protesters in Benghazi were cast as "al-Qaeda" operatives by Gaddafi; in Syria the protesters were cast alternatively as sectarian haters or foreign agents.

27. Mark Beissinger, "Transformations of the Public Sphere: How the Impossible Became Inevitable: the Public Sphere and the Collapse of Soviet Communism" (Social Science Research Council, November 2009).

28. Bellin, 2004, p. 151. David Pion-Berlin and Harold Trinkunas provide a very different account to explain variation in military repression of civilians. In a fascinating comparison focused on Argentina, Bolivia, and Venezuela, the authors argue that the military's decision to shoot turns on the historical context (Had the military been prosecuted on human rights violations in the recent past? Had the military experienced corps fragmentation thanks to political intervention in the recent past?), as well as on calculations of the viability of the regime in power (By shooting at the behest of the regime would the military be "betting on the right horse?"). While the Pion-Berlin/Trinkunas piece is very different from the analysis offered here, the two share a core assumption that the military makes the decision to intervene with an eye to protecting its core institutional interests, namely, organizational cohesion, material well being, and the protection of its reputation. See "Civilian Praetorianism and Military Shirking during Constitutional Crises in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, 42 (July 2010): 395–411; esp. p. 339.

29. See above. Note that David Sorensen adopts a similar line of reasoning in analyzing the dynamics of military defection. But in contrast to the binary categorization (put forward in Bellin, 2004, and reproduced here) that characterizes the military as either institutionalized or patrimonial, Sorensen proposes a different binary model that categorizes the military as either "rent-seeking" or driven by a "professional and service" ethic (Workshop on Regional Implications of Political Change in Tunisia and Egypt, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2011). My only quarrel with Sorensen's model is that it leaves out the role of primordial alliance (blood, sect, and ethnicity) that can work, in addition to alliance of economic interest (rent-seeking), to undermine the professionalism of the military. In all other ways, the logic of the two analyses is largely the same.

30. This was elaborated at length in Bellin, 2004, p. 145.

31. Jack Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2011).

32. This was true from the very beginning of Tunisia's existence as an independent state in 1956. The founding father of independent Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, consciously kept Tunisia's military small in order to prevent the emergence of a center of power that might compete with him and his ruling party, Neo-Destour. This strategy was possible in part because the army had not played an important role in the independence movement and so did not have the claim to leadership and legitimacy that the party had. But it was also possible because Tunisia was far removed from many of the region's most important military hot spots, including the Arab-Israeli conflict. Bourguiba kept the military at arm's length until 1987 (the last year of the founder's rule) as evidenced by the fact that not a single military man was ever appointed to a cabinet position. This changed during Bourguiba's last year in office when he appointed Zine Abdine Ben Ali, a general from the intelligence branch of the military, to serve as Minister of Interior. Several months later Ben Ali oversaw Bourguiba's removal from the presidency. Interestingly, Ben Ali followed Bourguiba's lead. He too kept the military at arm's length. He neither appointed any of his colleagues to high political posts, nor lavished resources on the military. He relied on the police for coercive back up and focused resources on them, instead.

33. Intervention by David Sorensen, Workshop on Regional Implications of Political Change in Tunisia and Egypt, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2011.

34. Hillel Frisch, "Guns and Butter in the Egyptian Army," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) Journal,* 5 (June 2001); Philippe Droz-Vincent, "From Political to Economic Actors: The Changing Roles of Middle Eastern Armies," in Schlumberger, pp. 195–214.

35. Note that some analysts such as George Friedman argued that the military increasingly saw its economic interests as separable from the person of Hosni Mubarak because the persistence of the Mubarak regime was identified with the succession of Hosni's son, Gamal, to the presidency. The military disliked Gamal because Gamal was not one of "theirs" (he had never served as an officer in the military), but also because Gamal's economic policies (attachment to globalizing the economy and neoliberal reform) threatened their economic interests. For this reason, Friedman writes, the military had strong institutional interests in delivering the velvet shove to the Mubarak regime. (George Friedman, "Egypt: The Distance between Enthusiasm and Reality," February 12, 2011, Stratfor Global Intelligence Report). Even if true, it seems that the military was nevertheless hesitant about jettisoning Mubarak. This is evidenced by the significant time delay between the military's takeover of the streets (January 28) and the edging out of Mubarak (February 10). See the account of the military as "reluctant rulers" in Holger Albrecht and Dina Bishara, "Back on

Horseback: the Military and Political Transformation in Egypt," *Middle East Law and Governance*, 3 (2011): 13–23, esp. pp. 16–18. Thanks to Alan Berger for pushing me to clarify this point.

36. Throughout this period, the United States was communicating to the Egyptian military leadership, primarily via mil-to-mil contacts, that shooting on civilians would not be in the military's institutional interests. The United States possessed significant persuasive powers, not only thanks to the $2 billion in military aid that it provided Egypt each year, but also thanks to the fact that the Egyptian military's arsenal was entirely U.S. made. Consequently, the Egyptian military was entirely dependent on the United States for upgrades, spare parts, and training. To remake the Egyptian military would take years. In the meantime it had to listen carefully to the counsel of its primary supplier. (Mustapha Kamel Al-Sayyid, cited by Erik Trager in "Standing By: Why Isn't the Army Keeping the Peace in Egypt," *The New Republic* (May 23, 2011), http://www.tnr.com/article/world/88804/egypt-protest-violence-army-mubarak; Ibrahim Kairouan, Intervention, Crown Center, Brandeis University, February, 2011, "Calling for Restraint," *New York Times*, January 29, 2011.

37. Intervention on Libya by Dirk Vandewalle, Brandeis University, April 13, 2011.

38. Some readers have taken issue with this assertion of low popular mobilization, pointing to significant moments of insurrection in the Arab world such as the bread riots in Egypt in 1977, the protests in Algeria in 1988–1991, the Palestinian intifadas (I & II), and the rash of labor strikes in Egypt in the 2000s. No one would deny the importance of these events. My point is simply that massive, cross-class mobilization in the name of regime change has proven relatively rare in the region, hence everyone's surprise at the events of 2011.

39. Philip Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Dan Gardner, *Future Babble: Why Expert Predictions Are Next to* Worthless (New York: Dutton, 2011).

40. Mona Shrobagy, "Understanding Kefaya: The New Politics in Egypt," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 29 (Winter 2007): 39–60.

41. The Egyptian and Tunisian protests were distinguished from prior incidents of unrest in two additional ways—tactics and siting—that also contributed to their augmented political impact. The fact that these protests were largely peaceful in their tactics meant that the army was more hesitant to use lethal force against them, and this allowed the protests to cascade in size. The fact that the mass protests were (ultimately) sited on strategically central urban spaces (Tahrir Square, Habib Bourguiba Boulevard) meant that they were the focus of national (and international) attention. Both factors contributed to the protests' extraordinary political yield. By contrast, many of the earlier incidents of popular insurrection in the Arab world had embraced tactics that led them to be perceived as national security threats in the eyes of the coercive apparatus (for example, the bread riots in Egypt), and hence the coercive apparatus did not hesitate to contain them. Many other important incidents of contestation took place in locations that were geographically remote from the centers of power (for example, many of the labor strikes in Egypt in the 2000s). This diminished their political yield.

42. Jeff Goodwin, James Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements," in David Snow et al., eds., *A Blackwell Companion to Social* Movements (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004); James Jasper, "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements," *Sociological Forum*, 13 (September 1998): 397–424.

43. For an account of soaring food prices at this time see http://ecocentric.blogs.time.com/2011/01/31/bread-is-life-food-and-protest-in-egypt/.

44. The best evidence of this euphoria was the carnival-like atmosphere that prevailed in Tahrir Square—the singing, dancing, exuberant speechifying, and the inclusion of children in the spectacle.

45. Pamela Oliver and Gerald Marwell, *The Critical Mass in Collective* Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); James De Nardo, *Power in Numbers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

46. In the words of social movement theorists, such impunity creates a "mobilizing opportunity." Thanks to Vincent Boudreau for alerting me to this terminology.

47. http:Observer24, January 14, 2011.

48. "Tunisia Leader Flees," *New York Times*, January 15, 2011.

49. "Mubarak's Grip on Power is Shaken," *New York Times,* February 1, 2011.

50. Daniel Brumberg, "An Arab Path to Democracy?" *Journal of* Democracy, 1 (Fall 1990): 120–25.

51. The Facebook pages devoted to Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation and Khaled Said's brutalization as well as the video feeds of early rounds of demonstrations were crucial prods. Both egged on others to join the wave of protest and vastly increased the level of participation. At the same time, satellite stations such as al-Jazeera provided a historical narrative for the protests, putting them in larger context and investing them with historical significance that made participation even more compelling. (Marc Lynch, Interview on NPR Weekend Edition, 23 January 2011.)

52. Philippe Droz-Vincent, "Authoritarianism, Revolutions, Armies, and Arab Regime Transitions," *The International Spectator*, 46 (June 2011): 5–21, esp. pp. 11–12.

53. Marc Lynch, "After Egypt: The Promise and Limitation of the Online Challenge to the Authoritarian Arab State," *Perspectives on Politics*, 9 (June 2011): 301–10.

54. Ibid., pp. 304–05. Note that Ruud Koopmans also emphasizes the importance of media in fostering collective action and argues that the "discursive opportunity structure" is even more important than the "political opportunity structure" in this process (Koopmans, "Protest in Time and Space: The Evolution of Waves of Contention," in Snow et al., pp. 19–46). The events of the Arab spring provide decisive evidence of this given the important role social media played in its evolution. Further, as Mark Beissinger pointed out to me, there was no obvious political opportunity (such as division among elites, collapse of the coercive apparatus, etc.) that sparked the outburst of collective action in either Tunisia or Egypt, giving further ballast to Koopmans's claim.

55. F. Gregory Gause III, "The Middle East Academic Community and the 'Winter of Arab Discontent': Why Did We Miss It?" Paper presented at the Stimson Institute, May 2011.

56. Lynch, 2011: 301, 305; Evgeny Morozgov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011.

57. Intervention, Workshop in Washington D.C., 28 February 2011.

58. Mark Lichbach, "Deterrence or Escalation?" *Journal of Conflict* Resolution, 31 (June 1987): 266–97. For more on the puzzling, nonlinear relationship between repression and protest, see also Ronald Francisco, "The Relationship Between Coercion and Protest," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 39 (June 1995): 263–82; and Ronald Francisco, "The Dictator's Dilemma," in Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol Mueller, eds., *Repression and Mobilization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 58–84.

59. Though perhaps this phenomenon is only surprising to scholars who analyze protest through the lens of rational choice. Those who see participation in protest as governed less by strategic calculation of self-interest and more by feelings of solidarity and self-sacrifice might expect the protests to persist even in the face of lethal repression. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this insight.

60. For example, Yemenis lacked extensive access to social media, Syrians lacked impunity, Libyans lacked desperate economic hardship, yet citizens in all three cases mobilized in mass numbers.

61. David Patel, Valerie Bunce, Sharon Wolchick, "Fizzles and Fireworks: A Comparative Perspective on the Diffusion of Popular Protests in the Middle East and North Africa," Paper presented at POMEPS Workshop, May 21, 2011.

62. For example, these countries differed from Egypt and Tunisia in that the character of their coercive apparatuses held out little hope of impunity for protesters.

63. Beissinger, 2007, p. 263.

64. Hence Beissinger dubs this imitative behavior "modular political behavior," 2007, p. 265.

65. Ibid., p. 261.

66. Ibid., p. 265.

67. Ibid., p. 259. He adds that this reality undermines "both analyses based on the Millian method as well as those statistical analyses that rely on the assumption that the results of each throw of the political dice is independent of the results of prior throws."

68. As Beissinger points out, "Conscious emulation of prior successful example constitute(s) only one form of cross-case influence; spillover effects, herding behavior, path dependence, and reputational effects are other ways in which cases may be connected with one another." Ibid., pp. 259–60.

69. Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Linan, "Why Regions of the World Are Important: Regional Specificities and Region-Wide Diffusion of Democracy," in Gerardo Munck, ed., *Regimes and Democracies in Latin* America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 199–229.

70. See, for example, Jon Pevehouse, "Democracy from the Outside In?" *International Organization*, 56 (Summer 2002): 515–49.

71. Charles Kurzman, "Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution," *Philosophy of Social Sciences*, 34 (September 2004). See, especially, pp. 335–39.

72. Thanks to Nathan Brown for elucidating this for me. See Timur Kuran, "Sparks and Prairie Fires: A Theory of Unanticipated Political Revolution," *Public Choice*, 61:41–74 (1989), cited in Nathan Brown, "Constitutional Revolutions in Egypt and the Arab World," POMEPS Workshop May 2011.

73. Mark Beissinger, "The Action-Reaction Dynamic in Political Upheavals" (unpublished paper). Kurzman (2004) makes the point very powerfully: "It is possible to argue that revolutions … are explainable afterward but inherently unpredictable beforehand....Revolutions may be products of tiny initial choices and an infinity of subsequent turning points and interactions that can be narrowed down or identified only in hindsight."

Such interactive effects are evident in the analysis elaborated above. For example, whether the military shoots or not depends in part on the size of the crowds that amass. The size of the crowd that amasses depends in part on whether the military shoots or not. Since these decisions are made over time (there is not one sole decision point), there is room for terrific variation in outcome based on interactive effects that are not predictable in advance.

74. Another theoretical vein that the Arab spring suggests for mining concerns the question of intention and what this means for the perennial debate on the role of structure vs. agency in revolution. The activists involved in the Egyptian uprising have made clear that at the start of the mobilization (the organization of the demonstration on Police Day, January 25th) they had no intention to organize mass unrest that would bring down the Mubarak regime. To some degree the course of events took on a life of its own, given different opportunities and constraints that emerged. This lack of explicit intention or "blueprint" suggests some limits to the agency of these activists in driving the uprising. At the same time, the early organizers of the mobilization clearly played a guiding role in the course of events.

75. Along the same lines, did anyone "predict" the Russian revolution of 1917 or the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989?

76. Though clearly the explosion of mass mobilization needs to be explained.

77. For example, the persistence of authoritarianism literature has identified the special institutional resources that monarchies possess that fosters regime resilience and defuses public discontent. The ability of the monarch to stay above the fray of day-to-day politics, to regularly fire cabinets and ministers to take the heat off his own person, to cultivate legitimacy by appealing to tradition and distributing largesse, no doubt helps explain the failure of protests to snowball in Jordan and Morocco (See Herb, Anderson, Gause, and Lucas, note 9 above). Similarly the persistence of authoritarianism literature has identified the central role that rent-fueled patronage has played in ensuring regime survival (See Beblawi and Luciani, note 7 above). No doubt the ability of regimes like that of Saudi Arabia to distribute $36 billion economic packages in the spring of 2011 goes far toward explaining how the wind was taken out of the sails of protesters in the kingdom.

78. Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After 20 Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (June 1999): 115–44.

79. Communicated by Valerie Bunce at POMEPS Conference May 2011.