Causal Recipes and the Arab Spring:
The Differential Effects of Conjoined Sociopolitical Factors on Populaces and Political Elites in the 2011 Uprisings

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Introduction

The historically distinctive features of the political awakening that swept the Arab world in 2011 are by now well known. The street protests that characterized the movement demonstrated the emergence (or re-emergence) of a "unified Arab political space."[1] Within this space, disenfranchised populaces in multiple countries found themselves — often to their own surprise — capable of conveying a unified political message immediately backed by credible coercive power. In many cases demonstrations grew quickly, achieving massive size so rapidly that they shocked both regimes and protest organizers. Demonstrations spread from country to country just as quickly, unequivocally feeding off of each other, as protestors shared slogans, coordinated dates, and used common organizational tools and techniques both online and offline.[2]

The protest movement was refracted by the idiosyncrasies of each country to which it spread. Some demonstrations were enormous — swirling, cheering democratic coalitions rose up and smote their oppressors. But other demonstrations were minimal, or were put down quickly and brutally. Some protestors demanded regime change or sweeping reforms; others demanded specific changes within existing political systems. Outcomes often depended on the differing mentalities and of Arab governments. Governments varied both in their overall strategies and in their ability to carry out effective counterrevolutionary plans. In some cases governments remained unified and decisive. In some cases politicians made critical errors resulting in popular victories; in other cases political mistakes gave other political elites a chance to assert themselves at the expense of the commons.

Diverse interest groups participated in the contest for political franchise, ranging from centuries-old political institutions to ad-hoc, digitally mediated networks of first-time agitators. Virtually all of the societies in which these contests occurred were (and remain) both economically and politically stratified. And the many competing interest groups are most readily placed into one of two categories:

i. The political elite: This group includes both individuals who make key policy decisions and individuals capable of influencing those decisions. It follows that these are the primary beneficiaries of regime policies. Titles and roles differ from country to country,

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[1] Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012, Ebook), Chapter 1.

[2] Marc Lynch, "Introduction." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 7-8.

and may include: dictators, monarchs, high-ranking military officers, bureaucrats, and party members, politically-connected businessmen, bankers, and financiers, and etc.

ii.   The populace: This group includes everyone who cannot, as an individual, influence key policy decisions.

These categories represent ideal types — opposite ends on the sliding scale of political franchise. In reality making clear distinctions between the two is difficult. Interest groups overlap. In some cases the qualifications for membership are thoroughly institutionalized. In other cases insiders identify each other by informal and idiosyncratic norms and practices. Importantly, the distribution of the genuine political franchise is dynamic. The 2011 uprisings were themselves a flare-up of ongoing political contests within Arab societies. The uprisings are notable insofar as myriad interest groups comprising an international Arab super-populace were able to coalesce into a unified aspect of political power.

Despite their surprising unity, the demonstrations only intermittently translated into effective political strength. And years later it is still too early to tell if this show of force will have a sustained impact. In most cases where major changes occurred, the political situation remains dynamic and uncertain. Where political calm and stability have returned (if they ever left), autocrats also do.

My interest is in identifying what variable factors were most important to the creation of politically unified and mobilized populaces. Factors overlap and interact with each other in numerous ways. Ultimately, these factors deeply influence (dare I say, determine) the strategic political choices of individual actors. Understanding how individual incentives are influenced by cultural pressures, political institutions, and access to financial and coercive tools makes it possible to identify what Howard and Hussain call "conjoined causal conditions," or "causal recipes."[3] The 2011 uprisings are a unique opportunity to, if not definitively identify key ingredients, at least get closer to an explanation with predictive capacity — something to tell us what the next course will be. Ideally, common aspects of the uprisings, most importantly their place in time and in a relatively unified cultural and political space, makes it easier to distinguish what variables are most important, and particularly those that cancel out other important factors.

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[3] Philip N. Howard, and Muzammil M. Hussain. *Democracy's Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106.

1: Background

A number of key facts and concepts are useful to keep in mind going forward. These concern first, the economic and political conditions most prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) the years immediately preceding the uprisings, and second, the long term trends and key events that provide the uprisings with historical context.

1.1: Economic & Political Conditions

The populaces of virtually all MENA countries were (and for the most part remain) subject to political disenfranchisement and intense economic hardship. Opportunities for economic advancement were extremely limited, and poverty was particularly crushing in countries that experienced the largest protests.

Authoritarianism

The authoritarian credentials of MENA governments prior to the 2010-2012 uprisings are well documented. In its 2009 Global Report, the Center For Systemic Peace categorized all regimes that would experience significant uprisings in the following years with the exception of Lebanon (Iraq and Palestine were not included) as either strong or weak autocracies.[4] The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2010 Democracy Index agreed, giving the relevant MENA governments an average score of slightly more than three out of a possible ten.[5] And in its 2010 publication, Freedom House reported that, with the exception of Lebanon and Iraq, freedom in the Middle East and North Africa was in steady decline.[6]

Poverty & Unemployment

Economic hardship, particularly unemployment, remains common. Particularly after the 2008 global financial crisis, many MENA countries saw international investment dry up, causing GDP growth rates to plummet. Between 2007 and 2011, for example, real growth as a percentage of GDP in Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia fell from a combined average of 7 percent to 1.5

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[4] Monty G. Marshall, and Benjamin R. Cole. *Global Report 2009: Conflict, Governance, and State Fragility*, Center for Systemic Peace | Center for Global Policy, December 7, 2009. http://www.systemicpeace.org/.

[5] *Democracy Index 2010: Democracy in Retreat*. Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010. https://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf.

[6] "Freedom in the World 2010." *Freedom House*. Accessed December 14, 2014. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2010#.VI325IrF_vR.

percent, with Tunisia's economy contracting.[7] The economic downturn, coupled with the well documented Arab "youth bulge,"[8] caused unemployment to surge. Pre-uprising unemployment throughout MENA hovered slightly above 10 percent, with youth unemployment at around 22 percent.[9] The MENA has a higher unemployment rate than any other region, including other chronically dysfunctional regions. Sub-Saharan Africa and Central/South Eastern Europe, for example, have roughly 8 percent unemployment, with 12 and 17 percent youth unemployment respectively. Lastly, authoritarian governments, particularly those without significant petroleum reserves, have commonly sought to mitigate unemployment by 'paying off' their citizens with public sector jobs. These jobs are neither useful nor productive, and are low paying.[10] Economic figures likely understate popular disaffection.

The often ostentatious wealth of the political elite, who have routinely amassed multibillion dollar fortunes, has been a source of insult as well as injury.[11] In Bahrain, for example, the Khalifa monarchy owns $40 billion in recently acquired public lands alone, making up roughly 10 percent of the country.[12] Extreme inequality between the political elite and the disenfranchised masses is no secret. When Wikileaks released details of Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's family's exotic spending habits, it created a national stir, but remained one in a long line of offenses.[13] The first topic to appear on social media prior to mass demonstrations was often the severe wealth gap separating the political elite from the commons.[14] The fortunes of the political elite made up the content of the first popular rhetorical salvos; but sheer economic hardship appears to have compelled mass mobilization.

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[7] Taylor Dewey, Juliane Kaden, Miriam Marks, Shun Matsushima, and Beijing Zhu, *The Impact of Social Media on Social Unrest in the Arab Spring* (Graduate Practicum. Stanford, CA: Prepared for: Defense Intelligence Agency, March 20, 2012), 6.

[8] Anthony Cordesman, *Rethinking the Arab "Spring": Stability and Security in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and the Rest of the MENA Region*. Center for Strategic & International Studies (November 8, 2011), 10.

[9] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, Appendix, vi.

[10] Cordesman, *Rethinking the Arab Spring*, 11.

[11] Manish Sahajwani, "8 Of The Richest Dictators In History." *Investopedia*, September 9, 2012. http://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0912/8-of-the-richest-dictators-in-history.aspx.

[12] May Ying Welsh, May Ying. *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*. Television Documentary. *Al Jazeera English*, 2011. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lmg1N1AKfFc.

[13] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 4.

[14] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 39-41.

Dewey et al.'s findings crystalize the importance of day-to-day economics. According to their quantitative analysis, "the only statistically significant variable for the occurrence of social unrest was the price of food."[15] Obviously, the inability to feed oneself can significantly alter an individual's immediate incentives. Joining unsanctioned public demonstrations in regions subject to authoritarian rule is physically risky. Demonstrators mitigate risk by acting collectively. Decreasing perceived risk increases the incentive to mobilize, whether as an organizer or attendee. Incentive to mobilize also increases as the perceived risk of *not mobilizing* increases. Economic deprivation is uncomfortable. But for most people it is, up to a point, not as uncomfortable as being pepper sprayed, beaten, or imprisoned. In fact, it is usually not even as uncomfortable as the *feeling* that those outcomes are a real possibility. When economic deprivation becomes so intense that an individual's ability to meet their most basic everyday needs becomes uncertain, the risks of protest may become comparatively less intimidating.

Authoritarian rapine and widespread economic hardship are useful to keep in mind as necessary but not sufficient causes. They were variously what the uprisings were *about*; but their presence does not explain why these uprisings happened where, when, and how they did.

1.2: Historical Context

Popular protest and political upheaval in the MENA is not new. The decade of the 1950s is sometimes referred to as the Arab Cold War. During this period, Marc Lynch writes,

> millions routinely flooded the streets to protest against their regimes, instigated by radio broadcasts and political agitation from abroad. [...] governments routinely fell, through military coups or popular uprisings, while all political actors engaged fiercely in a political battle that crossed national boundaries. [...] Power lay in the ability to mobilize the street, to wield the rhetorical weapons of pan-Arabism, and to navigate the treacherous field of factional and conspiratorial politics.[16]

Popular mobilization was significant and recurrent. But it was as much a product of top-down forces as bottom-up ones. Political elites fought vigorously, and *successfully*, to co-opt these movements and use them against their regional adversaries. Lynch notes that "efforts by protests movements to remain independent, unsullied by association with regimes, rarely lasted long."

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[15] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 50.

[16] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 2.

Most importantly, none of popular movements resulted in lasting transitions toward democracy.[17] By the 1970s autocrats were firmly entrenched.

In the following decades, MENA publics remained divided and depoliticized, with meaningful political discourse nonexistent and civil society nonfunctional. Lynch describes the MENA media environment as recently as the 1990s as a "black hole," where information ministries carefully managed international channels, state intelligence agencies manufactured content, and national media outlets trafficked a "monotonous, toxic brew" of regime propaganda.[18]

However, in the late 1990s the arrival of new information and communication technologies (ICT) began loosening autocratic grip. Benefiting first from satellite television — particularly al Jazeera — and more recently the internet, MENA populaces have become more politically active and aware.

Significant protests occurred across multiple Arab nations during both the 2000-2002 Israeli-Palestinian War and the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq.[19] Initially in response to external events, these protests endured and transformed into organized domestic opposition, most notably Egypt's *Kefaya* movement, which "pioneered protest methods, organizational forms, and communications tactics that were adopted by later Egyptian and wider Arab protest movements."[20] The 2011 uprisings were, according to Lynch, "the cresting of a powerful third wave of mobilization that began around 2000."[21] In sum, the uprisings were not unprecedented. And they were prefaced by a decade of growing awareness and organization.

2: Variables

I have chosen variables that have been credibly quantified and about which there is substantial scholarly literature. Some aspected of society are more readily quantified than others. Measuring a country's per capita GDP is straightforward. Measuring rates of digital media usage and cultural composition is only slightly less simple. In cases where individual factors are themselves made up of many component parts — i.e. 'political freedom' or 'regime type' — I have

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., Chapter 1.

[19] Marc Lynch, "Media, Old and New." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 94.

[20] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 3.

[21] Ibid., Chapter 2.

made use of aggregate indicators provided by a variety of academic and business sources, often making their own qualitative judgements. In certain cases I treat the presence or absence of categorical events as a variable, such as foreign military intervention or the choice of political elites to defect from the regime. Nonetheless, linking even well-quantified factors into causal recipes is a qualitative exercise. And there is much room for disagreement.

2.1 Digital Media

Howard and Hussain understand digital media as three components making up a connected whole.[22] Digital media is:

i. information and communication technology (ICT) — the infrastructure and tools (including both hardware and software) used to produce, distribute, and consume content,

ii. the digital content itself, and

iii. the actors — those individuals and organizations who produce, consume, and utilize both ICT and content.

This deliberately extensive definition illustrates the essential codependence of parts within the 'digital media environment'. Actors, content, and ICT manifestly depend on each other to function. Moreover, transition between digital and 'traditional' space is routine. And just as activities 'on the ground' are often mediated by digital spaces, the effects of digital media are themselves mediated by more traditional structures.

There is not a clear correlation between sheer access to ICT and protest sizes or outcomes. Rates of ICT availability and use vary widely throughout the MENA. The World Information Society's Digital Opportunity Index (DOI) scores countries in a number of areas including digital media cost, penetration, and the sophistication of ICT infrastructure.[23] Global DOI scores generally correlate with per capita GDP. Top-scoring MENA countries that experienced notable unrest in recent years include Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Exceptions include Morocco, which has a high DOI score despite low per capita GDP, as well as Iran, which scores low for its economic size due to the Iranian regime's extensive control over domestic ICT infrastructure. Yemen and Libya fall at the bottom of the list. Egypt and Tunisia sit in the middle.

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[22] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 13.

[23] "The Digital Opportunity Index." In *World Information Society 2007 Report: Beyond WSIS*. International Telecommunications Union, 2007. http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/publications/worldinformationsociety/2007/report.html.

Despite these variations, MENA countries are well connected. According to the Arab Social Media Report, in 2011 more Arabs used Facebook than read newspapers.[24] Howard and Hussain note that, "holding economic wealth constant, Arab countries have among the highest rates of technology adoption in the developing world."[25] Access to digital media is practically universal among certain important subsets of MENA populaces, including young urbanites, government workers, educated professionals, and business owners.[26]

One of the most important functions of digital media, and particularly social media, during and leading up to the uprisings was its ability to support and expand civil society. A number of scholars identify links between protest activity and civil society, even those that do not see a clear connection between social media and successful protest. Dewey et al. note that "internet communities can serve similar functions as civil society organizations," and moreover that "membership in civil society is more highly correlated with protest activity."[27] Howard and Hussain stress the connection between sustained protest movements and "wired and developed tech-savvy civil society groups."[28] Identifying the role of digital media in the Arab uprisings — and in popular uprisings, generally — requires a clear understanding of civil society.

2.1.1 Civil Society

Larry Diamond defines civil society as a "realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules."[29] Civil society serves as a check on government power, whether or not the government is democratic or authoritarian. Civil society becomes more important and simultaneously more difficult to sustain countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. In the abstract, civil society may be construed as a measure of a populace's political strength and wellbeing. It is an indicator of a populace's ability to mobilize independent of — and often in spite of — government direction.

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[24] Racha Mourtada, Fadi Salem, May Al-Dabbagh, and Ghalia Gargani. *Arab Social Media Report: The Role of Social Media in Arab Women's Empowerment. Dubai: Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government*, February 2011. http://www.mbrsg.ae/HOME/PUBLICATIONS/Reports-(1)/Arab-Social-Media-Report-The-Role-of-Social-Media.aspx.

[25] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 11-12.

[26] Ibid., 33.

[27] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, Preface, iii.

[28] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 115.

[29] Larry Diamond, "Toward Democratic Consolidation." *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (July 1994), 5.

More concretely, we can view civil society as constituted of a country's myriad civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs include, among other organizations: trade unions, student unions, international non-profit organizations, local charities, independent political parties, neighborhood watches, local militias, and etc. These organizations need not be explicitly oppositional to the government. However, there may be significant overlap between CSOs and dedicated political opposition groups. People often form CSOs to solve problems affecting their whole community. Political oppression may become another such problem. And CSOs under authoritarianism often become necessarily oppositional.

In many MENA countries CSOs became the bridge between dedicated political activists and relatively depoliticized ordinary citizens. And in countries where regimes eliminated effective political opposition, what CSOs remained often provided sources of organizational strength based on niche interests. In Tunisia, Ben Ali's control over media and public discourse was impressive even by MENA standards. And his successful evisceration of organized Islamist opposition was unique to the region, having eliminated El-Nahda, the Tunisian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, as a functional organization.[30] But Tunisia's many trade unions remained 'merely' co-opted by the state. Throughout the 2000s some unions gained more independence. And during the Tunisian uprising their contribution was invaluable, mobilizing "a large swath of Tunisian society including students, teachers, journalists, human rights activists, trade unionists and opposition politicians."[31]

Howard and Hussain argue that digital media, and social media in particular, had a causal role insofar as it provided "the fundamental infrastructure for social movements and collective action."[32] Elsewhere they argue that "Social media have become the scaffolding upon which a functioning civil society can grow."[33] Importantly, a scaffolding of social media is only necessary where autocrats have effectively destroyed traditional structures. But not all autocrats do this, often because they are simply unable to. Autocrats who are simply bad a being autocratic generally also govern exceedingly poor countries, those with low rates of ICT penetration.

Yemen is instructive. Ali Abdullah Saleh, as a textbook personalist dictator, may have wanted to consolidate power by nullifying traditional Yemeni civil society and rule safely over a

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[30] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 4.

[31] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 15

[32] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 118.

[33] Ibid., 34.

depoliticized population. But neither Saleh nor his forebears could find the strength. Yemen has an exceptionally contentious political history of regime change and civil war. Lynch writes that Yemeni's "had an impressive tradition of political protest" and by 2011 they had become "deeply invested in the new Arab public sphere."[34] Despite having the lowest level of internet penetration in the Arab world, the Yemeni populace mobilized in significant numbers.[35] Tribal leaders used traditional methods to organize protests. Arranging protests following Friday prayers, a tactic seen in multiple countries, became a key method for boosting turnout.[36] ICT use does not correlate with successful protest in Yemen because the movement did not require extensive social media. Traditional Yemeni civil society remained healthy. (Though, the culturally diverse and political active Yemeni populace may have ultimately proved weak as a whole, driving the country back into a state of deep political uncertainty, as discussed in section 2.5 below.)

Nonetheless, 'civil society', wired or otherwise, is difficult to quantify. Existing country-by-country indexes of civil society lack granularity; and there are significant gaps in data availability.[37] Howard and Hussain provide a rough country by country measure of 'wired civil society', distinguishing between 'small', 'moderate', and 'large'.[38] However, the unclear methodology behind these ratings make them little more than starting points.

In sum, digital media is most important in countries where regimes have severely weakened traditional civil society. In these cases digital spaces are the next best option for oppressed populations. Countries with weaker economies have much lower rates of digital media penetration. But the regimes of countries with weak economies also tend to be less able to control their populaces. Thus, traditional civil society remains to some degree whether the regime likes it or not.

Some regimes have been able to mitigate the ability of digital media to replace traditional forms of civil society. And apart from other variables, regimes that have most effectively managed and manipulated their ICT infrastructures have been least affected by modern protest movements (discussed in sections 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 below).

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[34] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 5.

[35] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 19.

[36] Ibid., 20

[37] Ibid. Appendix, iii

[38] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 6-10.

2.2 Regime Type

Regimes are to political elites what civil society is to populaces. The structure, scale, and intensity of a civil society tells us how a whole populace organizes itself for political action and how effective it is likely to be at achieving its goals. The same is true of political elites who are successful enough to organize themselves into an authoritarian regime. As noted above, the bottom-up nature of civil societies make them difficult to quantify with current tools. However, political scientists have developed relatively more effective (though still imperfect) methods for measuring and categorizing authoritarian regimes.

Sheer measures of authoritarianism do little to distinguish between MENA autocracies. Nonetheless, authoritarian systems come in many forms. Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz have pioneered a taxonomy of authoritarian regime types.[39] They define and categorize regimes based on formal and informal rules that "determine what interests are represented in the authoritarian leadership group and whether these interests can constrain the dictator."[40] Geddes et al. define the leadership group as "the small group that actually makes the most important decisions," which includes control over policy, new leaders, and the security apparatus. This super-elite core exercises significant power over other elite members of the regime. But the super-elite are nonetheless beholden to the entire elite interest groups that make up their power base. If suitably provoked, these interest groups can act in concert to topple the super-elite core.

Geddes et al.'s qualitative methodology emphasizes the importance of informal rules as opposed to formal regime structures, because such formalities are often façades. Geddes et al. note that "formal rules rarely determine membership in the leadership group."[41] Superficial indicators of regime structure are often misleading. Five of Geddes et al.'s regime types were represented in the MENA in 2010.

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[39] Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set." *Perspectives in Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2014): 313–31. doi:10.1017/S1537592714000851.

[40] Ibid., 314

[41] Ibid., 315

Figure 1: Regime Types in MENA Countries (& Iran)[42]

Regime type	Who makes the most important decisions	Countries as of 2010-2011
Party	Dominant political party	Iran, Tunisia
Military	Cadre of elite officers	Algeria
Personalist	Narrow group centered around single person	Libya, Yemen, Iraq
Monarchic	Royal family	Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia
Hybrid of party, military, and personalist	Variously shared, negotiated and competed for by a dictator, party officials, & elite military officers	Egypt, Syria

Figure 1 shows that the most notable contrast is between monarchic regimes and regimes with varying degrees of personalistic rule. With one exception, all of MENA's personalist and semi-personalist regimes have either fallen or been severely constrained. In Syria, Bashar al Assad's regime remains mired in civil war. In Yemen, various factions including elite military officers, businessmen, tribal groups, militarized popular movements, Islamic extremists, and remnants of Saleh's regime compete in an uncertain stalemate. In Yemen basic government functions have increasingly devolved to local governments and unofficial cultural networks.[43] Finally, largely personalist regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are no more.[44]

Notably, Geddes et al. categorize Iraq as a personalist regime as of 2011.[45] Nonetheless, the political situation in Iraq is uncertain at best. And the Iraqi government is exceptionally dependent on foreign support (a significant variable by itself).

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[42] Ibid.

[43] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 6.

[44] Ben Ali's Tunisia is considered a dominant-party regime in Geddes' taxonomy. However, Geddes notes that Tunisia falls on on the edge of the category. "In coding regime types, a line is drawn at one point on a continuum from personalist to dominant-party (or other type). Egypt and Tunisia are both near that cut-point because dictators in both countries had concentrated much decision-making in their own hands. The ruling party was entrenched in the bureaucracy, however, giving it some ability to influence decisions and policy implementation. Party organization penetrated the country and provided an avenue for upward mobility though like most autocratic dominant parties it did not command much popular loyalty." Geddes, Wright, Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown," 329.
     Arguably, Ben Ali's quick fall makes a strong case that underlying structures of the regime were in fact far more personalist than party-based. One hallmark of dominant-party regimes is their resilience.

[45] Geddes, Wright, Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown."

In contrast to the personalist and semi-personalist regimes, all six monarchies that experienced notable protests (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia) remain in power. While protests in the UAE and Qatar were virtually nonexistent. Finally, Algeria's military regime remains intact, as does the democratic state in Lebanon.

2.2.1 Monarchial Regimes

The roster of MENA monarchies includes Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. Of the above countries, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia experienced notable protests. All of these regimes remain in power, many having made only minor concessions to popular movements. A few have extended authoritarian measures. Arguably, None of the monarchies were even at serious risk of being overthrown. Civil unrest was particularly severe in Bahrain, as the small country's cultural composition made it singularly prone to civil unrest. But Bahrain's geopolitical standing made the regime as capable of dealing with unrest as any in the region. (Aspects of the Bahraini story are discussed in sections 2.5 and 2.6.2 below.)

Monarchies are stable by definition. (It is arguably the only regime type that must last for more than a few generations before it can be considered such.) This is particularly true for those monarchies that survived World War II. Geddes et al. notes that "the number of monarchies has remained stable for the past 50 years or so."[46] Figure 2 shows that for roughly 45 of the 55 years between 1950 and 2005, monarchs worldwide experienced far lower rates of conflict than other regime types. Multiple scholars consider the institutional characteristics of monarchies fundamental to their ability to persevere.

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[46] Ibid., 319.

Figure 2: Conflict Index by Regime Type[47]
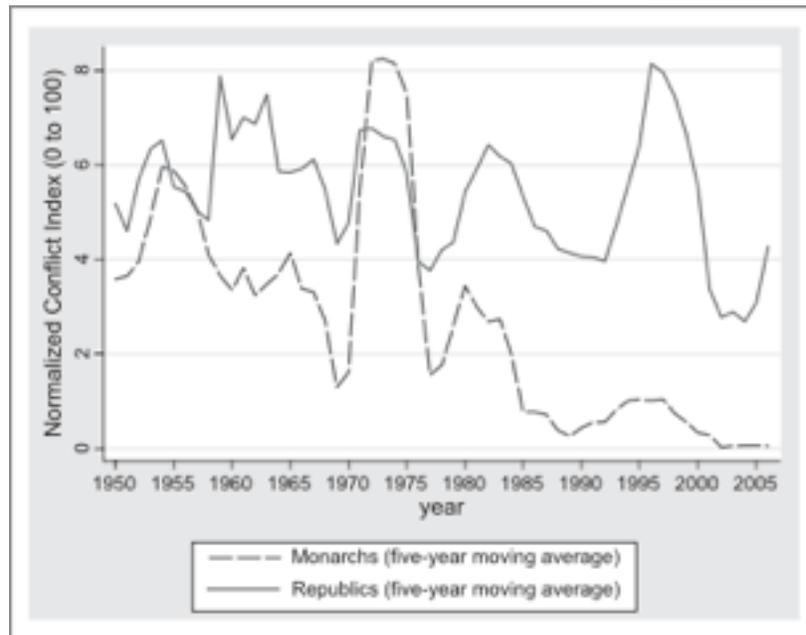
Goldstone argues that monarchies have a number of advantages over all other regime types when faced with popular upheaval. First, monarchs have "a reservoir of nationalist, ethnic, or religious legitimacy due to their traditional leadership role."[48] MENA monarchs have almost universally used protean political and legal principles enshrined in the Quran to inform political decisions, or at least justify them.[49] Second, monarchs can rely on government appointees and elected officials with nominal power to deflect blame and provide a credible façade for promises of political concessions.[50] Political legitimacy stems from functional institutions. And populaces may only consider the dismissal of government officials as meaningful change if those officials hold positions of credible responsibility. Effective institutions provide these positions. A prime minister may follow the dictates of the monarch to the letter, but the prime minister is nonetheless *actually* running the government day-to-day. Managing the distinction between 'governing and ruling' stabilizes the façade.

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[47] Victor Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs." *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 3 (July 2012): 709.

[48] Jack Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In – Explaining Success and Failure in the Middle East Revolts of 2011." (working paper, March 10, 2013. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2283655), 4-5.

[49] Menaldo, "Resilient Monarchies," 711.

[50] Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In," 4-5.

Menaldo provides a detailed account of how monarchs are able to achieve legitimate and nuanced systems of political power. He argues that MENA monarchies have developed a unique political culture that balances power and promotes cohesion among the political elite. The MENA monarchs use "constitutions, formal political institutions, Islamic principles, and informal norms" to constrain their own authority.[51] Numerous royal family members and other political elites share and compete for power within bounds. The game may be rigged in favor of the most elite members of the royal family. But, particular factions are rarely able to permanently consolidate power. Menaldo notes that control of executive power has often "cycled back-and-forth between different factions of the royal family."[52] All players can be confident in their rights and privileges, as well as what is expected of them. In short, the MENA monarchs have established systems within which they can work with rival players and institutions, while personalist regimes prefer to eliminate or cripple persistent rivals.

In the MENA monarchies, political institutions, personal connections, and informal norms frequently overlap. Monarchies have kept their royal families coherent using "tightly knit family structures reinforced through intermarriage" and by maintaining "clear rules about who qualifies as a member of the royal family." Legal recognition ensures ancillary family members a long term place in the regime, usually including a significant financial stake, and encourages them to contribute.[53]

These regimes actively publicize the institutional workings and informal norms of the political culture. This may be the most important unstated function of MENA monarchies' numerous appointed legislatures, assembles, and advisory councils. These institutions may not wield meaningful political power. But they provide the political elite with spaces to observe and participate in the political culture, monitoring adherence and generating common knowledge.[54]

The political culture also generates significant economic benefits. (Though the extensive petroleum rents available to most MENA monarchs, discussed in section 2.4 below, adds to the economic picture.) Categorically, political elites want to grow their wealth and improve their prestige. Within more freewheeling and unpredictable regimes their best option may be to 'invest' in bribery, theft, and the construction of a personal security apparatus in order to carve

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[51] Menaldo, "Resilient Monarchies," 709.

[52] Ibid., 711.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

out bigger piece of the pie. Or they may simply invest abroad. Conversely, for political elites who find themselves locked in a carefully structured and closely monitored political establishment, the best option is almost always to invest their wealth in the regime, increasing the overall size of the pie. Finally, secure property rights for the political elite create beneficial externalities for commoner, namely sustained economic growth and opportunity, thus lowering popular disaffection.[55]

Notably, and though Geddes, Frantz, and Wright do not explicitly state the connection, many of the strengths of monarchic political culture parallel those of the single-party regimes identified in their taxonomy. Both modern monarchies and single-party regimes are highly resilient.[56] Both single-party regimes and monarchies are led by small, organized cadres deeply connected by either ideology (in the case of single-party regimes) or kinship (in the case of monarchies). Single-party regimes in Iran and Algeria utilize public assemblies and prominent executive officials in similar ways to the MENA monarchs. And both regime types maintain sophisticated internal systems of checks and balances to prevent competition between elites from boiling over into coups or other destructive forms of elite defection.

Institutional Reform in Morocco

In Morocco the institutional aspects of the MENA monarchies can best be viewed in partial isolation from other variables. In particular, Morocco demonstrates parallels between healthy elite political culture and popular civil society.

The Moroccan monarchy benefited from neither petroleum rents nor a deeply divided populace. The regime also had no reason to count on foreign support if things turned ugly. With one of the lowest per capita GDPs in the region, Moroccan youth had plenty to protest about.[57] And despite their poverty, almost half of Moroccans were internet users.[58]

Chomaik and Entails argue that Morocco's political institutions and political culture made the regime more adaptable to change and demands for reform. Since ascending to the throne in 1999 King Mohammed VI began making limited reforms. Thus, Chomaik and Entelis note,

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[55] Ibid., 709.

[56] Barbara Geddes, "What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999): 122.

[57] "The World Bank, GDP per Capita (current US$)." *The World Bank*. Accessed December 14, 2014. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD.

[58] "OpenNet Initiative Country Profiles." *OpenNet Initiative*. Accessed December 14, 2014. https://opennet.net/research.

Unlike in pre-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt, civil society in Morocco has never been strangled to the point of political impotence. [...] Given this relatively pluralistic order, contestation has taken place within both formal institutions and outside of them, including regular demonstrations and protests staged by aggrieved groups against unjust government policies, but rarely directed at the king.[59]

During the 2011 protests, the strongest demands involved a shift to British-style monarchy.[60] In terms of real power, this change would be revolutionary. But the rhetoric need not be so. And though serious, the protests did not represent an existential threat to the monarch's household. In Morocco the population did not have to create its own political culture (e.g. its own civil society) in secret and despite the regime. As demonstrated in Tunisia and Egypt, such cultures and necessarily subversive; and they make little or no allowances for parley with the political elite. Moroccan popular political culture accepted certain 'red lines' set my the regime. And the opposing sides communicated more effectively.

2.2.2 Personalist Regimes

Personalist regimes (occasionally known as sultanistic or neopatrimonial regimes) are centered around a single dominant individual who makes all key policy decisions, official appointments, and directs the military and security apparatus. Generally, personalist regimes evolve out of other autocratic regime types. Power struggles are always simmering within military and party regimes. In cases where the ruling military cadre or political party is not sufficiently entrenched, the ongoing power struggle can boil over with a single individual and his cadre eventually coming out on top.

The weaknesses of personalist regimes stem from the necessities of their formation. Even with the benefit of loyal henchmen, organizations dependent upon a single individual are inherently weak. A person can only be so many places at once. As noted, in monarchies the king is situated at the head of an extended royal family that shares power and carefully manages transitions. First-generation personalist dictators — the proto-monarchs — usually do not have the benefit of well-connected, politically-experienced, subordinate family members. And they often have a number of unsympathetic rivals to keep in check. Immediately attempting to invent a

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[59] Laryssa Chomiak, and John P. Entelis, "The Making of North Africa's Intifadas." *Middle East Report* 41, no. 259 (Summer 2011). http://www.merip.org/mer/mer259.

[60] Marc Champion, "Morocco Joins In, Defying Predictions." *The Wall Street Journal*. February 21, 2011.

political culture inclusive of all serious competitors, especially when those competitors are not close kin, is a dubious proposition for nascent personalist dictators. Real inclusion means keeping rivals empowered, connected, and informed. At best, inclusion means developing a political party wherein the personalist dictator becomes first among equals. (Even guaranteeing a best-case scenario, the personality traits required to become a personalist dictator to begin with make inclusion personally unappealing except as a last resort.) At worst, inclusion becomes a show of weakness precipitating return to the active power struggle that the dictator just won. Autocrats who prefer not to share power must ruthlessly reshape the existing political landscape.

Once in power, personalist autocrats degrade the professional military and bureaucratic institutions in favor of extensive patronage networks, promoting individuals with personal ties, especially based on ethnicity and kinship. The essence of the personalist regime is the protection and enrichment of the autocrat and his closest kin. Thus, the regime's most elite agents are the autocrat's personal bodyguard. Often, their role is expanded as personalist autocrats develop parallel power structures to manage and enforce loyalty within military divisions and government agencies. Thus the autocrat's extended bodyguard becomes freakishly large.

The extent and form of the autocrat's bodyguard — the regime's primary coercive apparatus — depends on how much autonomy (if any) the military retains. In Egypt the military remained at least as powerful as Hosni Mubarak's cadre. Thus, Mubarak opted to develop the nation's police force, particularly the Ministry of the Interior. In Syria, Assad maintained more direct control over the military; Assad's sons became officers in the Syrian army. leading the most elite brigades made up of Alawites loyal to the regime.[61] In the most dominant personalist regimes (Libya, Syria, and Yemen) large swaths of the military became de facto extensions of the autocratic household.[62]

Insofar as there remain independent branches of government, savvy personalist autocrats carefully manage lines of communication, limiting the ability of potential competitors, namely elite military officers and key government officials, from working together. The communication problem faced by sub-elites in a personalist regime is similar to that faced by individual members of the populace — it is difficult to safely communicate genuine political interests in order to build consensus and coordinate action. The most successful personalist autocrats monopolize communication between different branches of the military and the bureaucracy, as well as foreign

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[61] Robert Springborg, "Arab Militaries." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 147

[62] Ibid.

diplomatic channels, particularly in cases where international aid is forthcoming. In this way the autocrat becomes an essential bottleneck, without whom the state becomes unable to function.[63]

As personalist autocrats become more successful the distinction between the regime and the state blurs. The regime grows as the autocrat abolishes or co-opts state institutions, or simply allows them to disintegrate from neglect. The unification of the personalist regime and the state finds completion in monarchial rule. Almost all personalist autocrats attempt to pass on power to a family member, typically a son. However, the recreation of state institutions around the royal family (e.g. institutionalizing and legitimizing personal patronage networks) is far more difficult and time-consuming than destroying previous state institutions.[64]

The variation of outcomes amongst the personalist and semi-personalist regimes emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the *regime* and the *state*. Lynch provides an insightful and succinct rundown of how MENA's personalist and semi-personalist regimes related to their states.

> The very uneven strength and penetration of the state apparatuses across the region shaped the regimes' responses. In Egypt and Tunisia, where we find relatively strong states, the rebellions were met with disciplined responses and prompt decisions to sacrifice the regime, or at least its incumbents, in favor of the stability of the state itself. In the countries with the weakest states—Libya, Yemen—the prospect of removing the regime signaled the collapse of the state, and the rulers' ineffectual resistance led to prolonged and ineffective rebellion. Where the regime's project is state building itself, in countries like Algeria and Syria, the regimes (and their military forces) see themselves as the builder and protector of the state, and they are prepared to be brutal in putting down rebellions that they see as challenges, not merely to their regimes, but also to the coherence and autonomy of the state itself.[65]

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[63] Jack Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies." In *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What It Means, and What Comes Next*. USA: Council on Foreign Relations | Foreign Affairs, 2011), 331.

[64] North Korea may be the most successful personalist regime by certain measures. It is also the farthest along the path toward a monarchial system. In North Korea the parallels between single-party states and monarchies become quite stark. Geddes et al. classify the Kim regime as a hybrid of personalist an single-party rule. North Korean political ideology has increasingly transitioned away from Stalinist Communism toward worship of the Kim proto-dynasty, complete with rhetoric that would be at home in Bronze Age kingdoms.

[65] Lynch, "Introduction," 13.

The personalist regimes in Egypt and Tunisia were the least able to absorb their states, arguably a necessity for any dictator intent on establishing familial succession, as Mubarak was.

In Libya and Yemen, autocrats largely succeeded in marginalizing their states and militaries. Though neither had yet been able to turn their informal regime networks into functional, legitimate institutions. In Yemen, enough of the professional military remained independent to put Saleh in an uneasy stalemate which arguably continues to this day, despite his eventual ouster. In Libya, an endemic absence of institutional checks left Mommar Qaddafi free to act out a four decade long tragicomedy of geopolitical blunders and domestic repression, his only remaining allies becoming close kin and those he paid with oil money.[66]

In Syria, the Assad regime had already survived a generation, with power having passed from Bashar al Assad's father to himself decades earlier. The Assads were well on their way to turning their personalist-military regime into a proto-monarchy. This transition to much more stable monarchial rule is incomplete, and, like Bahraini monarch, the Assad's are an ethnic minority. Thus, the regime has been unable to prevent significant popular rebellion and elite defection. (Syria is discussed in detail in section 2.7.3.2 below.)

MENA's personalist regimes were at once too intensely repressive and too institutionally weak to effectively avert or deal with the massive, sustained protest movements nearly as effectively as did the monarchial regimes. Tunisia is characteristic. Lynch follows Chomaik and Entelis in noting that the strength of Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia — the sustained ferocity with which it eliminated unsanctioned civil and political activity — became the regime's weakness once protests erupted.[67] The same decades-long story applies in various degrees to Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Egypt.

The informal patronage networks created by personalist dictators promote corruption and abuse at all levels. As Haugen and Boutros have convincingly shown, pervasively corrupt and degraded police forces and judicial systems become essentially a la carte services.[68] This creates immense insecurity for many poor members of society. Left literally unable to defend their basic rights, it becomes impossible for the poor to carry on virtually any significant economic activity. As they resort to their own informal networks of security and arbitration, they become disconnected from virtually all government functions.

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[66] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 7.

[67] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 4; Chomaik, Entelis, "North Africa's Intifadas."

[68] Gary A. Haugen, Victor Boutros, *The Locust Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014.

The wholesale destruction of meaningful civil society even among the middle classes makes any civil or political activity necessarily oppositional to the regime. Those who participate in underground civil society organizations become professionally subversive. And those who abstain from political activity, nonetheless experiencing pervasive political corruption and economic privation, become increasingly frustrated and desperate.

In sum, the methods of personalist rule by themselves make popular uprisings more likely. Personalist rule also makes elite defection more likely if popular protests take hold. Rival elite factions may perceive an opportunity to take power for themselves. Or they may lose faith in a regime they otherwise supported and defect in the interest of general stability.

Nonetheless, the MENA personalist dictators proved capable of keeping opposition movements weak and divided for decades, giving rival or subordinate elite factions no opportunities or reasons to challenge their rule. Though personalist methods make regimes brittle, the effects of this style of governance alone do not appear sufficient to create the sort of uprisings seen in 2011. As discussed in Section 2.1 above, another necessary but not sufficient variable, widespread use of digital media, may be a required addition to the causal recipe.

2.3 Regime Preparations & Responses to Protest

Regimes responded to the 2010-2011 uprisings in a variety of ways, ranging from genocidal violence to open-handed appeasement. The skill with which regimes chose and executed their responses varied as well. Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Qaddafi misjudged both domestic and international audiences, and proved unable to control or use digital media effectively. Conversely, Assad used carefully cultivated relationships with autocratic regimes in Russia and China to deflect international criticism,[69] while Saudi monarchs managed an international counterrevolution with ruthless, surgical aggression.

Regime responses also became increasingly sophisticated over time as autocrats learned from the examples of other more or less fortunate dictators. And the counterrevolution became offensive as well as defensive. Heydemann and Leenders describe counterrevolutionary strategies during and immediately following the protests as

> complex, multilevel games involving regimes, publics, and external actors, in which regimes develop strategies to affect the strategic calculus of citizens, allies, and

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[69] Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. and Russia Reach Deal to Destroy Syria's Chemical Arms." *New York Times*, September 14, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/world/middleeast/syria-talks.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&

adversaries while constantly updating their probabilities of successfully suppressing their opponents.[70]

The variety of regime responses are most readily ordered by how severely and immediately violent they were. The most violent responses include arrests, beatings, torture, and homicide. The least violent responses include political fraud and broken promises. Some of the most effective and straightforward responses were nonviolent; regimes simply provided financial incentives for protestors to go home — opting to manipulate the preferences of their populaces with carrots as opposed to sticks.

2.3.1 Crowd Control & Dispersal

By far the most visible and straightforward regime response was to forcibly clear the streets. This occurred in varying degrees in all countries where significant demonstrations occurred.

The Bahraini experience is typical. The initial protest was small. It met resistance from the Bahraini monarchy on the first night, when protestors prepared to camp out in the Pearl Roundabout. Late at night state security agents surprised sleeping demonstrators with tear gas, rubber bullets, and shotguns firing live ammunition. Protestors unwilling or unable to flee were beaten or struck by police vehicles. Authorities reportedly blocked emergency medical professionals from reaching Pearl Roundabout and attacked those found treating injured and in some cases dying protestors.[71] Four protestors were reportedly killed the first night. 26 more were killed before the major protest movement ended.[72]

As of November of 2011, Bahrain was the only monarchy to break double digits. Protest turnout and casualties were both comparatively higher among the personalist and semi-personalist regimes. As of 2011 900 deaths were reported in Egypt, 300 in Tunisia, and at least 250 in Yemen; by that time the Libyan Civil War was in full swing with tens of thousands dead; and in Syria 3,500 had been reported killed.[73]

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[70] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 83.

[71] Welsh, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*.

[72] Jessica Rettig, "Death Toll of 'Arab Spring.'" *U.S. News & World Report*, November 8, 2011. http://www.usnews.com/news/slideshows/death-toll-of-arab-spring.

[73] Ibid.

The use of lethal force on protestors backfired on regimes in almost every case. In country after country authorities violently dispersed relatively small protests, leaving multiple participants severely injured or dead. In following days, funeral marches turned into protest marches, which were themselves broken up, provoking growing national outrage. As previously neutral segments of the population took interest, protests grew to phenomenal size.[74] In contrast, protests were much smaller and desultory in countries where regimes showed restraint. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the regime kept violence minimal and even released detained activists. Funerals never turned into larger marches because they never happened.[75]

In Libya and Syria the use of widespread lethal force provoked international response. Assad avoided the most severe forms of international sanction. But Qaddafi proved geopolitically inept; and NATO intervention arguably proved the decisive factor in his fall.

2.3.2 Arrest, Imprisonment, & Torture

As noted, MENA regimes frequently target their most vocal dissidents in their homes even during peacetime. In the midst of popular uprisings, this activity becomes utterly routine. How persistently regimes intimidate, imprison, and torture dissidents is a function of overall repression. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, as of 2010 the most severely repressive regimes were Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The least oppressive regimes included Iraq, Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan, and Bahrain.

As many authors have noted, social media may make it easier for regimes to target individual protestors and organizers. Regime agents use Facebook as protestors do. Local knowledge can be an advantage to revolutionary activists. But this advantage is lost in cyberspace, where social media companies design their platforms to be accessible to all comers. The regimes in Syria, Iran, and Bahrain have become exceptionally adept at using identify and target activists. And during the 2009 protests, the Iranian regime notably unblocked Facebook.

Bahrain in particular is a cautionary tale. In the wake of the GCC's decisive action against protestors in the Pearl Roundabout the Bahraini monarchy began crowdsourcing the identities of protestors. Facebook pages with titles like "Together to Unmask the Shia Traitors" became what one Al Jazeera report called "virtual lynch-mobs," where loyalists called for the arrest and torture

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[74] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 22.

[75] David Patel, Valerie Bunce, Sharon Wolchik, "Diffusion and Demonstration." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 68

of individual protestors, and regime supporters posted checklists of those who had been arrested.[76]

2.3.3 Control of Infrastructure

With few exceptions, during the 2011 protests control of infrastructure meant control of public information and communication technologies (ICT), the tools and virtual spaces protestors use to communicate and organize.

It is worth noting that in some countries regimes had already established more or less widespread restrictions. The OpenNet Initiative provides measures of website filtering in a number of relevant countries. In 2009 Bahrain, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Yemen were the most restrictive. The regimes in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Libya were the least restrictive, blocking virtually no websites.[77] Thus there does not appear to be a clear correlation between pre-emptive web-blocking alone and protest success.

Those regimes with the least prior experience managing popular ICT proved inept in their efforts to restrict access once the uprisings were underway. In Libya, Qaddafi's response was characteristically severe; the regime quickly disabled internet and mobile phone networks. It also jammed al-Jazeera's satellite feed. Al-Jazeera quickly broadcasted what reports and uploaded videos did get out. And these were more than sufficient to make Libyan bloodshed a global concern.[78] Additionally, Libya's decentralized cellular network included key nodes in rebel held territory, including an important one in Benghazi; and rebels quickly reinstated service.[79] In Egypt, after days on protest, Mubarak's regime shut down Egypt's internet and cellular infrastructure in a desperate attempt to regain control. This interruption in service cost Egypt's economy at least $90 million. Nonetheless, Egypt's satellite links and landlines remained functional.[80] And hackers

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[76] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 22; Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 70.

[77] "OpenNet Initiative Country Profiles." *OpenNet Initiative*. Accessed December 14, 2014. https://opennet.net/research.

[78] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 7.

[79] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 70.

[80] Ibid., 30.

quickly found many alternative ways to access the internet.[81] Most importantly, Lynch notes, the internet shutdown did not noticeably hinder protests.[82]

Other regimes had more experience managing their digital infrastructures. Both Saudi Arabia and Syria, Howard and Hussain note, "responded very early and with very sophisticated offline and online strategies to curb the potential for protest mobilization."[83] These regimes and others "developed counterinsurgency strategies that allowed for surveilling, misleading, and entrapping protesters. New information technologies can be vital tools for social control."[84] The more experienced regimes did not impose blanket restrictions on their ICT infrastructure. They used that infrastructure as a source of information and misinformation.

When experienced regimes did impose universal shutdowns, the did so with clear purpose. For example, the Bahraini regime disabled its national satellite infrastructure minutes before allied Saudi Arabian forces moved on protestors camped in the Pearl Roundabout.[85] The coordinated attack gave protestors little time to find alternative digital channels and limited the economic impact of the shutdown.

Restriction of Journalists

Insofar as professional journalists merely chronicled protests and regime responses, they were effectively part of the ICT infrastructure. Some regimes attempted to restrict access to journalists in the same way they restricted access to other sections of the national and international ICT infrastructure. Regimes consistently blocked "activists from reaching international journalists."[86] Libya and Bahrain were most successful in keeping international journalists away. In Bahrain international journalists are still severely restricted.[87] And in both countries violence was significant. Protestors considered journalists from major international media outlets in particular to be both legitimizing and protective. In the lead up to major protests

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[81] "How the Internet Refused to Abandon Egypt: Authorities Take Entire Country Offline... but Hackers Rally to Get the Message out." *The Daily Mail*. January 30, 2011. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1351904/Egypt-protests-Internet-shut-hackers-message-out.html.

[82] Lynch, "Media, New and Old," 96.

[83] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 72.

[84] Ibid., 70.

[85] Welsh, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*.

[86] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 87.

[87] Alex Chitty, Ben Anderson. *The Revolt That Never Went Away — Bahrain: An Inconvenient Uprising*. Web Documentary. *VICE News*, 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fVF0qQU3kc.

in Tahrir Square, one protestor said, "If Al Jazeera turns off its cameras tonight, there will be a massacre in Tahrir Square."[88]

Blanket restrictions of journalists were difficult to enforce. Qaddafi was more effective than most in maintaining a media blackout during his counterrevolution. The regime expelled international journalists at the outset of the 2011 uprisings. Regime agents often detained and threatened international journalist, including those from major media outlets, with physical violence. Domestic journalists were killed outright. This, along with other ICT restrictions, and the fact that Libya had one of the worst rates of ICT penetration in the region to begin with, made journalism exceptionally difficult. Nonetheless, reports got out, and the gist of what was happening soon became obvious to all foreign observers. The mysterious, building horror may have even drawn more attention to the Libyan protestors' plight.

2.3.4 Political Concessions & Deception

In response to protests, virtually all of the MENA regimes made quick changes or promised to change the political landscape in accord with popular demands. These changes or promises to change were often deceptive or fraudulent. Immediate changes touched the de jure façades of the regimes only, keeping de facto power structures intact. While commitments to future reforms lacked credibility, as observers remembered long histories of broken political promises.

In principle, monarchial regimes are better able to utilize both political fraud and genuine political concessions than are personalist regimes. Following the discussion in sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 above, personalist regimes destroy or disregard state institutions in favor of ad-hoc networks based on personal relationships lubricated by wealth generated from political graft and corruption. Simply, for political concessions, either genuine or deceptive, to satisfy protestors (so that they go home) the promises must be credible. But institutional changes are incredible when everyone considers state institutions to be universally corrupt or ineffectual. Personalist autocrats structure their regimes around bonds of kinship and thinly veiled hard power (e.g. coercion and financial compensation). The dictator is subject to the system as well. Populaces living under personalist rule intuitively understand this. Thus, they are skeptical of any changes made to the personalist system that are not transparently connected to power.

Among the personalist regimes, political concessions remained a sideshow. In Yemen, Saleh promised to not seek reelection in 2013. Saleh had broken a similar promise as recently as

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[88] Quoted in Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 87, 89.

2006, and his new promise went ignored.[89] In Syria, Assad promised reforms while regime forces used live ammunition of protestors, thus diluting his credibility. In Libya, Qaddafi promised not to kill those who put down their arms; but this was not generally trusted. Protestors in these countries saw their personalist rulers as liars an hypocrites. Those who still believe in the regimes — members of favored ethnic groups and other quasi-elite hangers-on — had for the most part stayed home to begin with.

The monarchies were able to make more immediate and credible changes. But these changes were often superficial. In Oman the monarchy removed a number of unpopular ministers, and granted the previously consultative parliament legislative and regulatory powers. Nonetheless, Lynch writes, "none of these reforms touched the sultan's absolute power or opened the system to serious discussions about the system's future"[90] Meanwhile, the Bahraini monarchy shuffled its cabinet, moving some ministers to other positions and removing others entirely.[91] But the Prime Minister and key power broker between the Bahraini monarchy and the Saudi royal family remained in power.

Following the discussion in section 2.2.1, reforms both dubious and legitimate were most effective in Morocco. On 9 March, in response to initial protests, King Mohammed VI gave a speech announcing the creation of a committee to consider reforms and promising to give up certain powers. Protests continued to grow; and in the wake of an apparently unrelated terrorist attack regime security forces began a more severe crackdown. The king intervened at a pivotal moment, before the "violence-mobilization cycle could kick in," announcing sweeping constitutional reforms including genuine nods to participatory and representative government. This suite of concessions was enough to satisfy the ordinary Moroccans, thus putting an end to disruptive protests. Though the reforms did not come close to fundamentally altering the monarchy's political dominance. And the elite activist core of the movement was not satisfied, and boycotted subsequent elections.[92]

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[89] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 5.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Federik Richter, "Shi'ite Dissident Returns to Bahrain from Exile." *Reuters*. February 26, 2011, US edition. http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/02/26/us-bahrain-government-idUSTRE71P1A720110226.

[92] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 6.

2.3.5 Financial Incentives

The distribution of regimes that made use of financial incentives is straightforward. Simply, wealthier regimes gave out more wealth, leaving their populaces more satisfied and less likely to engage in sustained protest. Throughout the region the wealthiest countries were without exception oil regimes.

The oil-rich Gulf monarchies collectively spent billions of dollars on their populaces. Notably, some of this spending came before the initial protests. In Kuwait, the monarchy gave every citizen 1,000 dinars (about $3,500) and vouchers for free food for a year.[93] Saudi Arabia announced almost $2 billion in pay raises, government jobs, unemployment benefits, student scholarships, and housing construction, as well as an increased minimum wage. The Saudi monarchy also spent on other regimes, offering financial assistance to monarchies in Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Morocco.[94] In response to growing protests in Oman, the regime almost immediately "lavished money on disaffected constituencies" and the popular movement receded.[95] The only significant oil producer that did not offer significant financial incentives to protestors was Qaddafi's regime in Libya.

2.4 Petroleum

The most significant MENA oil producers as of 2009 were (as measured by barrels per capita): Kuwait (296), Libya (96), Oman (72), Qatar (572), Saudi Arabia (108), and UAE (285).[96] Yemen and Syria are minor oil producers. But revenues from oil exports represent significant portions of those governments' budgets. In 2009 oil revenue made up 20 percent of Syria's government budget.[97] And as of 2012, over 70 percent of the Yemeni government's revenue came from oil.[98] Bahrain has limited oil and natural gas reserves; petroleum refining and exports nonetheless represented close to 90% of government revenue in 2012. The regime also benefits

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[93] "OPEC Plows Billions in Profits into Quieting the Arab Masses." *Fuelfix*, September 19, 2011. http://fuelfix.com/blog/2011/09/19/opecs-1-trillion-cash-quiets-poor-on-longest-ever-100-oil/.

[94] Patel, "Diffusion," 70.

[95] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 4.

[96] Marshall, Cole, *Global Report 2009.*

[97] Jamal Mahamid, "Syria's Frail Economy, before and after the Revolution." *Al Arabiya Institute for Studies | Al Arabiya News*, April 1, 2013. http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/alarabiya-studies/2013/04/01/Syria-s-frail-economy-before-and-after-the-revolution.html.

[98] "Yemen Economy Profile 2014." *Index Mundi*. Accessed December 14, 2014. http://www.indexmundi.com/yemen/economy_profile.html.

indirectly from the petroleum production of surrounding Gulf states through the provision of financial services.[99]

Evidence associating access to natural resources with autocratic and dysfunctional governance is substantial.[100] The commonly proposed causal mechanism is that regimes with access to natural resources become rentiers. As regimes become reliant on revenue from direct exports or on taxation of foreign resource owners as opposed to cooperating local taxpayers, they may act relatively freely of local popular opinion. These theories emphasize the ability of regimes to use natural resource rents to mitigate the threat of being overthrown by popular uprisings.

Wright, Frantz, and Geddes propose an alternative causal mechanism. They argue that natural resource rents all autocrats to mitigate the threat of coups by rival political and military elites. They note that historically autocrats are more likely to be ousted by rival autocrats, particularly elite military officers, as opposed to popular movements. Natural resource rents allow regimes to spend significantly more money on their militaries, which they almost always do. Content militaries are far less likely to attempt coups.[101] (The relationship between regimes and militaries is itself a variable, discussed in section 2.7.3 below.)

Maintaining extravagant militaries is not the only way autocrats use petroleum rents to deter coups, however. Another common and effective strategy is to curtail the size the military while paying mercenaries and foreign armed forces to pick up the slack. This strategy also decreases the likelihood of principled opposition arising from within the military organization, as foreign fighters are disconnected from domestic social and economic concerns.

All of the MENA's wealthiest regimes use mercenaries, including all of the petroleum rich monarchies, as well as Qaddafi's regime before it fell. Notable examples include Bahrain, where almost one third of the national police force is made up of Sunni Pakistani nationals, and Abu Dhabi, where the monarchy reportedly struck a $529 million deal with "mercenaries formerly associated with the U.S. private security firm Blackwater" to train elite counterrevolutionary

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[99] "Bahrain Country Profile." *CIA World Fact Book*. Accessed December 14, 2014. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ba.html.

[100] Joseph Wright, Erica Frantz, Barbara Geddes, "Oil and Autocratic Regime Survival." *British Journal of Political Science* FirstView (November 2014).

[101] Geddes, Wright, Frantz, "Autocratic Breakdown," 2-3, 17

security squads.[102] Conversely, the petroleum free monarchies in Morocco and Jordan do not make significant use of private armed forces.[103] Similar to Egypt, their militaries are much more involved in the national economy.

As discussed in section 2.2.1 above the MENA monarchies are exceptionally stable. Petroleum rents may merely bolster this stability. As Goldstone notes, the more wealthy monarchs made fewer political concessions than those without oil wealth.[104] But the causal connection may run in the opposite direction. Oil wealth may have allowed the Gulf monarchs to persevere long enough to establish solid state institutions and shrewd political cultures. Wright, Frantz, and Geddes demonstrate a clear historical correlation between the survival and stability of authoritarian regimes and the availability of natural resources. They add their own causal mechanism to the list of possibilities, but state plainly that further research is needed.[105]

Compared to the monarchies, the three personalist regimes with significant petroleum reserves faired less well. Nonetheless, their differing stories support the contention that natural resources support authoritarian regime stability.

In Yemen, Saleh was eventually removed from power. But, Goldstone writes, "[Saleh's] oil-fueled patronage network was only partially sundered."[106] Saleh has returned to the country and continues to influence the course of events from behind the scenes.

In Libya, oil exports had long provided Qaddafi with the funds necessary to train and equip the most loyal segments of his military. Oil wealth also allowed him to import foreign mercenaries to supplement his own forces.[107] Arguably, these oil-funded forces were sufficient to quench the nascent rebellion in Benghazi, or else extend the Libyan Civil War indefinitely, in similar fashion to Syria. However, NATO intervention gave the Benghazi rebels the decisive technical advantages necessary to defeat Qaddafi's regime (discussed in section 2.6.1 below) despite his oil-funded private army.

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[102] Steven Heydemann, Reinoud Leenders. "Authoritarian Learning and Counterrevolution." In *The Arab Uprisings Explained: New Contentious Politics in the Middle East*, edited by Marc Lynch (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 84; Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 147.

[103] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 148.

[104] Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In."

[105] Wright, Frantz, Geddes, "Oil," 18.

[106] Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In," 12.

[107] Ibid., 12-13

The situation in Syria is unclear. As the Syrian Civil War has progressed, Syrian oil production has dropped significantly. International sanctions have cut of the Assad regime from its usual customers in Italy and Germany. And as of this writing many of Syria's oil fields are actively contested by various factions in the war.[108] Further complicating the issue are reported deals to export Syrian oil to Iraq or Iran despite sanctions.[109]

2.5 Cultural Composition

Goldstone notes that "history is full of protests put down because they only mobilized a fraction of the populace."[110] Popular uprisings only become truly successful when they unite large swaths of the populace. And it is easier for members of the same cultural sect or ethnicity to work together than it is to coordinate across cultural divides. Coordination is especially difficult when cultural groups have history of mutual aggression, as is often the case in the MENA. Absent other variables, we expect that popular protests will be more successful in more culturally and ethnically homogenous countries.

The cultural, ethnic, an sectarian differences within the MENA are complex. But countries can be loosely categorized. The first category includes countries without serious cultural differences that divide either commoners from the political elite or from each other. These countries are Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The second category includes countries where a significant divide exists between the populace and the political elite. Bahrain most firmly meets this criteria. In Syria the Alawite Assad regime stands apart from the Sunni majority. The Kurds are a distinct cultural group that is also geographically separate. The third category includes countries where significant divides exist amongst large swaths of the population, with the political elite representing one of the cultural groups. The most notable countries in this category include Iraq and Yemen.

There is no obvious correlation between cultural homogeneity and either the initial success of protest movements or their ultimate outcome. For example, protests grew quickly and became massive in homogeneous Tunisia and Egypt. But the opposite is true for Saudi Arabia and Algeria. Nonetheless, the cases where cultural distinctions appear to have been important are diverse and interesting. And certain patterns emerge.

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[108] "Islamic State 'Seizes Key Syria Oil Field.'" *Al Jazeera*, July 3, 2014. http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/islamic-state-seizes-syria-key-oil-field-2014731410866228.html.

[109] Mahamid, "Syria's Frail Economy."

[110] Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions," 330.

Sectarian Divisions in Bahrain

      The Bahraini populace is divided between Sunni and Shia. Though the population is 70 percent Shia, the ruling Khalifa monarchy is Sunni. Sunnis comprise the overwhelming majority of the political elite.[111] And Shia muslims are in fact restricted from joining the key institutions, most notably the police force.[112] Instead, Pakistanis make up the majority of the nation's police force; and the regime makes a point of hiring Sunni Pakistanis for these positions.[113] Bahrain is thus unique among the monarchies as the only regime ruling a culturally distinct populace.

      The size of the protest movement in Bahrain was also unique among the monarchies. In reaction to the regime's violent attacks on the initial protests, subsequent protests quickly grew in size to over 200,000 people, about 40 percent of the island kingdom's Bahraini population.[114] The Bahraini protest at its peak was arguably more unified and demographically significant than Egypt and Tunisia. Absent other variables, a third popular victory appeared imminent to even well-informed observers at the time. But (discussed in Section 2.6.2 below) Saudi intervention proved the Bahraini monarchy's weakness to be superficial.

Cultural Diversity in Yemen

      The overall effect of the of the various cultural divides in Yemen was to send the country into an uneasy stalemate that continues to this day. In typical fashion, the movement started with a small number of young, wired activists, and grew exponentially after the regime used excessive force. In this case, snipers killed 50 students protesting near Sanaa University.[115] As outrage spread, opposition to Saleh's regime turned into a unified movement despite ethnic, cultural, and religious divisions. "The protest movement drew in a number of diverse, mutually mistrustful, and usually contentious interest groups that nonetheless shared in opposition to the regime."[116]

      Despite the popularity and apparent clarity of the anti-Saleh movement, the regime had many supporters. And many more people at least questioned whether they would be better off

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[111] Dewey et al., *Social Media*, 21.

[112] "Witnesses: King's Supporters Confront Bahrain Students." *CNN*. March 13, 2011. http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/13/bahrain.protests/index.html.

[113] Welsh, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*.

[114] Stephen Zunes, "America Blows It on Bahrain." *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 2, 2011. http://fpif.org/america_blows_it_on_bahrain/.

[115] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 6.

[116] Ibid., Chapter 5.

without Saleh. Pro-regime demonstrations began to happen. And pro-regime demonstrators clashed with youth activists. Unlike in other countries, the regime supporters were not merely hired thugs. Though they benefited from Saleh's extensive patronage network.[117]

Ultimately, Saleh's network proved insufficient to keep other members of the political and military elite loyal in the face of increasingly disruptive protests and street fighting. The military was itself underpinned by a "highly factionalized tribal system"[118] that fractured as elite officers defected from the regime with their supporters. Eventually the situation descending into "a frustrating stalemate where rival militaries clashed and not even the wounding of the president in a failed assassination attempt could produce a political settlement."[119] Six months after the assassination attempt Saleh agreed to a GCC-brokered deal to step down as president.[120] Saudi assurances that Saleh would not meet the same fate as other personalist autocrats was key to the agreement.[121] The deal kept Saleh's political party and military connections intact, however. And he remains a power player in Yemen's culturally divided political landscape.[122]

2.6 Foreign Military Intervention

In both cases where immediate foreign military intervention occurred it arrived as a *deus ex machina*, nullifying the effects of previous causal elements. In Libya, NATO intervention saved the growing rebellion in Benghazi from a possibly lethal military response by Qaddafi's regime. In Bahrain, Saudi intervention saved the region's only imperiled monarch from either being overthrown or forced to make existential political reforms.

2.6.1: United Nations Intervention in Libya

In Libya, the first protests in Benghazi were characteristic of regional trends — peaceful, made up of digitally connected youth with familiar grievances and rhetoric. Unlike other autocrats, Qaddafi accepted almost no organized protest. And his response was immediate and

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 151.

[119] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 6.

[120] Tom Finn, "Yemen President Quits after Deal in Saudi Arabia." *The Guardian*. November 23, 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/23/yemen-president-quits?intcmp=239.

[121] Heydemann, Leenders, "Authoritarian Learning," 86.

[122] Peter Salisbury, "The Houthis Are Battling Al Qaeda Amid a 'Slow-Burning Coup' in Yemen." *VICE News*, October 28, 2014. https://news.vice.com/article/the-houthis-are-battling-al-qaeda-amid-a-slow-burning-coup-in-yemen.

total. Regime military forces used live ammunition on protesters, killing at least 1,000 people in the first few days.[123] Shortly thereafter both Qaddafi and his son Saif gave speeches blaming the protests on a variety of foreign elements including Israel, the United States, Al Qaida, and drug-laced Nescafé.[124] In the following weeks the movement transformed from protest to rebellion, as demonstrators began forcing police and other regime agents to flee outright. Less than a month after the 17 February hashtag protest, anti-Qaddafi forces controlled large swaths of Libya, including the cities of Benghazi and Misrata.

By early March the bloodshed was already both more widespread and more severe than anywhere else in MENA. Mercenaries fired indiscriminately at civilians from rooftops and helicopters.[125] Regime para-military forces raided hospitals, executing injured protestors and carrying away the living with the dead.[126] And the regime made it illegal to donate blood to injured demonstrators.[127] As of 6 March the death toll stood at roughly 6,000. It was at this point that Qaddafi's counteroffensive coordinated counteroffensive began. Loyal forces quickly retook Misrata and contested control of Benghazi, leaving the regime poised to at least massacre the population of Benghazi, if not end the uprising. Both Qaddafi's murderous rhetoric[128] and lived experience convinced global observers that a continued regime counteroffensive would result in genocide without international military action — "a preventable massacre that would be a permanent blot on the conscience of the world."[129]

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[123] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 5; Adrian Bloomfield, "Libya: 'More than 1,000 Dead.'" *The Telegraph*. February 23, 2011. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8342543/Libya-more-than-1000-dead.html.

[124] David Williams, Sam Greenhill. "Now Gaddafi Blames Hallucinogenic Pills Mixed with Nescafe and Bin Laden for Uprisings... before Ordering Bloody Hit on a Mosque." *Daily Mail*. February 25, 2011, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1360343/Libya-Gaddafi-blames-Osama-bin-Laden-hallucinogenic-pills-Nescafe-uprising.html.

[125] Nick Meo, "Libya Protests: 140 'Massacred' as Gaddafi Sends in Snipers to Crush Dissent." *The Telegraph*. February 20, 2011. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/8335934/Libya-protests-140-massacred-as-Gaddafi-sends-in-snipers-to-crush-dissent.html.

[126] "Gaddafi Forces Execute Patients." *News24*, February 24, 2011. http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/Gaddafi-forces-execute-patients-20110224.

[127] "Libya - Towards a Bloody Revolution." *International Federation for Human Rights*, February 18, 2011. https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/north-africa-middle-east/libya/Libya-Towards-a-bloody-revolution.

[128] Douglas Staglin, "Gadhafi Vows to Attack Benghazi and Show 'No Mercy.'" *USA Today*, May 17, 2011. http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2011/03/gadhafi-vows-to-retake-benghazi-and-show--no-mercy/1#.VIoLj6TF_vQ.

[129] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 7.

Lynch notes that even the Arab world, understandably resistant to Western military intervention, asked the West to act. He writes,

> rarely in modern Arab history had there been such a unified demand from both the regimes and public opinion, from al-Jazeera and the Saudi media, for the West to use its military power inside the region.[130]

Why MENA's populaces should support the Libyan rebellion is straightforward. The Arab populaces did not see Libyan bloodshed "as a calamity affecting distant strangers," but, Lynch writes, "as an attack on themselves."[131] If Qaddafi felled the Libyan protest movement through uncompromising violence without incurring the wrath of the international community, other autocrats might be emboldened to do the same. Why MENA's political elites should not support Qaddafi is less obvious. Writing in 2012, Lynch notes, "the Arab leaders who signed on to the Libya intervention [...] knew perfectly well that it could just as easily be them under this new microscope."[132]

Two connected factors explain why Qaddafi found no support from his fellow MENA autocrats. First, as Lynch notes in a 2014 article, the intervention in Libya did not ultimately deter other regimes from using overwhelming force against their populaces.[133] Gulf Cooperation Counsel (GCC) assistance to the United States during the intervention may have even made it more difficult for the West to act against the GCC's near-simultaneous intervention in Bahrain. Other MENA regimes had developed close economic and diplomatic ties to influential governments throughout the world. Regimes in Iran and Syria aligned with Russia and China. While the Saudis and their allies remain close to the United States.

The second reason is that, by comparison, Qaddafi's grasp of international politics was comically inept. Qaddafi's diplomatic offenses included humiliating the Qatari Emir at a diplomatic summit in 2009, allegedly conspiring to have the Saudi king assassinated, and repeatedly "lambasting the entire Arab order in his rambling speeches to assorted Arab gatherings."[134] His

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[130] Ibid.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Marc Lynch, "Reflections on the Arab Uprisings." *Monkey Cage*, November 17, 2014. http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/11/17/reflections-on-the-arab-uprisings/.

[134] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 7.

systematic alienation of all international allies as well as his constitutional inability to make any credible compromises left Qaddafi the target of an otherwise rarely unified international community.

The operation was not as quick and clean as hoped or expected. But NATO air power and guidance provided the Libyan rebel movement with a decisive advantage. Over the remainder of 2011, aided by a sustained NATO air campaign, the rebels coalesced into an organized force, defeated regime forces in Tripoli and killed Qaddafi in his hometown of Sirte shortly thereafter.

2.6.2: Gulf Cooperation Council Intervention in Bahrain

The story of Bahrain in 2011 is the antithesis of Libya. The Bahraini monarchy's close ties to the Saudi royal family resulted in a decisive and brutal Saudi-led military action that largely ended the uprising. Both initial attempts by the Bahraini monarchy to counter the protestors and the ultimately successful Saudi operation were largely ignored by Western governments.

Up to the point of GCC intervention the Bahraini protests grew in a familiar fashion. Small protests led to violent repression, which galvanized more people to support the protestors and take to the street. As of mid-March protests with tens of thousands in attendance were routine, with police and "regime supporters" of dubious origin intermittently attacking and breaking up smaller protests and sit-ins.[135] More moderate members of the regime led by the crown prince began to waver in the face of growing unrest and offered serious political reforms. However, the hard-line conservative members of the regime firmly opposed this avenue. This faction notably included the king's uncle, who has served as Prime Minister for almost 40 years and remains backed by the Saudi royal family. Ultimately the more conservative faction prevailed, bolstered in part by the increasingly vocal radical members of the protest movement who called for a removal of the royal family as opposed to incremental changes.[136]

On 14 March a GCC force of 1,000 Saudi soldiers with armor and 500 UAE police officers crossed the King Fahd Causeway connecting Bahrain with Saudi Arabia. The GCC backed Bahraini police and military as they cleared the Pearl Roundabout, following with a "comprehensive campaign of repression and intimidation."[137] The king declared a state of emergency. Police occupied the country's main hospital and shut down local clinics treating

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[135] "Witnesses: King's Supporters Confront Bahrain Students." *CNN*. March 13, 2011. http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/13/bahrain.protests/index.html.

[136] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 5.

[137] Ibid.

injured protestors. Bahraini police and military quickly established checkpoints around Shia villages. As noted in section 2.3.2 above, authorities used social media to target dissidents, eventually arresting almost all of the protest movement's prominent leadership. The regime also demolished the Pearl Monument and removed a coin bearing its image from circulation.[138] In the aftermath of the counterrevolutionary surge, the regime has targeted local centers of Shia civil society, destroying 35 Shia mosques throughout the country.[139]

Bahrain's geopolitical status determined the ultimate outcome of the 2011 uprising. Simply, Bahrain was and remains a satellite state of Saudi Arabia. BBC reporter Bill Law reports that the Bahraini regime was "on notice that if [the monarchy] did not deal with the demonstrations, the Saudis would do it for them" at least two weeks before the GCC operation.[140] That Bahrain cannot compete with Saudi Arabia militarily goes without saying. And as noted section 2.4 above, Bahrain's economy relies heavily on wealth generated by its Saudi-led GCC neighbors.[141] Notably, the GCC force entered Bahrain only to protected "key installations," which it in fact did. And GCC personnel largely did not take a direct part in the the police action that quelled the uprising.[142] Arguably, the GCC operation was as much to send a message to the more moderate members of the Bahraini monarchy, namely the heir apparent, Crown Prince Nayef, as it was to subdue to uprising.

The Shia majority in Bahrain, exceptional among the MENA monarchies, is, in terms of sheer political power, a less exceptional minority within Saudi Arabia's political umbrella.

2.7 Coercive Power

Coercive (or martial) power is simply the ability to mobilize any and all forms of arms and armor. Often, it is better to speak of 'credible coercive threat', because in many cases the *credible threat* of coercive power enough to compel agreement. Thus, coercive power is often invisible. It nonetheless has immense, often decisive influence over the behavior of political

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[138] Alicia De Haldevang, "Collector's Item." *Gulf Daily News*, March 28, 2011. http://gulf-daily-news.com/NewsDetails.aspx?storyid=302685.

[139] Welsh, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*.

[140] Bill Law, "Saudi Crackdown Takes on Sectarian Character." BBC News, December 14, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-16052343.

[141] Bahrain is only becoming more deeply connected to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi and Bahraini regimes have recently announced a joint venture to construct a second causeway connecting the two countries. Habib Toumi, "Bahrain and Saudi Arabia Announce New Causeway." *Gulf News*, September 6, 2014. http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/bahrain/bahrain-and-saudi-arabia-announce-new-causeway-1.1381322.

[142] Law, "Saudi Crackdown."

actors. Personal intuitions about the distribution of coercive power often guide decisions even when actors do not make conscious connections between the presence of coercive power and their own incentives. Finally, those who are most capable of exercising coercive power often refrain from using it except in extreme cases, and are likewise the first to demure from a fight they know they cannot win.[143] As Sun Tzu wrote, "To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill."

Identifying the distribution of coercive power as a variable can provide insight into the meaning of the 2011 uprisings generally, as well as into the outcomes of certain interesting cases. However, the above noted characteristics of coercive power make it difficult to measure quantitatively at present. Thus, this sections takes on a markedly more narrative form than previous sections. First, I will explain how coercive power underpinned the street protests that were the essence of the 2011 uprisings. Second, I will explain how the coercive power of the street protests influenced (or did not influence) political elites and quasi-elites, and led to sometimes difficult decisions for MENA military elites, those with the most direct and transparent access to coercive power. Third, I will show how autocrats in Tunisia, Syria, and Egypt either managed or failed to manage their military elites, who ultimately proved critical to the survival or failure of their regimes.

2.7.1: Coercive Power of Mass Demonstration

Mass political demonstrations represent a potentially vast and immediate source of coercive threat. In addition to making popular grievances widely known, they are in fact *demonstrations* of the physical power inherent in the populace.

Even avowedly peaceful protests represent a show of force that is immediately deployable, whether or not demonstrators realize the implication. It is worth noting that 'unarmed' demonstrators are almost never actually unarmed. As any footage of contentious street protest demonstrates, individuals acting *en masse* effectively use thrown objects against police and military forces at distance and clubbing objects at close range. Regime forces organized, trained, and equipped for crowd control are at an advantage even when modestly outnumbered. But as the numerical advantage shifts in favor of 'unarmed' demonstrators, the technical and

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[143] Superficially counterintuitive aspects of coercive ability vs. the *use* of coercive ability appear throughout nature and human society. Screaming, chest beating primates (humans included) are usually the last ones who want to *actually* engage in combat. Ostentatious demonstrations are fearful games of martial brinksmanship. In contrast, consider big cats hunting, serial killers, military snipers, stealth bombers — real killers work in darkness and silence; and they only choose prey over which they have nearly complete coercive superiority.

organizational advantage of police and military forces becomes negligible. We infrequently see these forces actually overwhelmed by demonstrators in pitched combat because, unlike less organized popular demonstrations, police and military forces pick their battles and only commit to fights they expect to win. For example, in Bahrain the first police attack on protestors in Pearl Roundabout was a decisive rout which left four demonstrators dead, and many more injured or arrested. In contrast, when protestors returned to the roundabout in greater numbers the waiting police forces quickly ceded the space without a fight.[144]

When popular demonstrations become exceptionally large and sustained, they turn into an existential threat to the regime. All protests are, strictly speaking, a form of rebellion. Under certain circumstances protests can turn into violent rebellion, as opposition organizations join with existing civil society organizations and coalesce into para-military forces. Sticks and stones do not pose a threat to the regime as such. But they are often sufficient to raid police departments and sack government offices. And all but the most severely restricted populaces have some access to small arms. Small victories bring nascent rebellions closer and closer to martial parity with regime forces. Nonetheless, the above scenario of 'pure' bottom-up rebellion rarely occurs as such, as interested 'outside' forces intervene either in support of the rebellion or the regime and complicate matters for the theoretician.

Libya and Syria are closest to being 'pure' bottom-up rebellions. In both countries protest movements quickly linked with local militias and transformed into disorganized para-military operations. Even after portions of the military and political elite defected, regimes in Libya and Syria both proved strong enough to prevent rebel victory, with the Libyan regime falling only after decisive international intervention.

Protests can also become existential threats to regimes because of the social and economic disruption they cause.[145] Demonstrations occupy central urban spaces, literally getting in the way of everyday life in key areas. The fraying social fabric causes uncertainty, which deters investment and economic growth in higher orders of the national economy. As the political elite are almost always deeply connected to high order economic activity — often treating the national economy as their own investment fund — this represents a near-direct personal attack. The populace cannot hurt the dictator personally, but it can break his toys. This proves decisive when factions within the political elite see their own financial futures at risk and turn on each other.

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[144] Welsh, *Bahrain: Shouting in the Dark*.

[145] Lynch, "Media, Old and New," 16.

This effect was most pronounced in countries where many political elite interests were tied into high-order economic activities, notably Egypt, where the military elite, deeply connected to the Egyptian economy, quickly turned on Mubarak. The effect was least important in Libya. Qaddafi had eliminated his political and military rivals. And his own financial interest was completely tied to oil exports. Without any expectation of defection within Qaddafi's inner circle, as evidenced by the regime's committed counterrevolutionary campaign, the protestors resorted to direct violence.

2.7.2: Quasi-Elite Defection

If autocrats refuse to capitulate and protests continue, two options remain: Either autocrats effectively quell the protests through some combination of violent repression, financial incentives, and political concessions (usually representing a combination of begrudging partial-capitulation and political fraud), or the regime falls.

In the MENA, the most frequent cause of regime failure was elite defection. Howard and Hussain identify this as the greatest threat. And they emphasize the role of elites and quasi-elites who straddle the divide between the regime and the populace:

> For authoritarian regimes, the single greatest threat to stability is often internal elite defection. When a cohort of wealthy families, educated and urban elites, and government employees decide they no longer wish to back a regime, it is likely to fail. In most of the countries studied here, only a small fraction of the population has internet access through computers and mobile phones. However, this small population is the one for which authoritarian regimes work hard to broker information.[146]

Quasi-elites are uniquely positioned to foster mass protest. While their connection to the regime provides financial opportunities and social prestige, quasi-elites remain well outside the inner circles made up of those few elite individuals for whose benefit the regime exists. Thus, quasi-elites serve as the 'canary in the coal mine' for elite defection. When things are bad only people with nothing invested in the regime protest. As things get worse, financial hardship and political frustration begins to touch the quasi-elites, those with some investment in the status quo. Should they decide to support change, things can devolve quickly, as quasi-elites play important roles throughout government bureaucracy, the economy, and whatever independent public

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[146] Howard, Hussain, *Fourth Wave*, 86.

communities the regime has tolerated. When they begin to protest, agitate, and strike basic government and economic activity starts to shut down.

2.7.3: Elite Defection — Regimes & Militaries

Once significant portions of the population are mobilized including quasi-elite defectors and vast swaths of 'ordinary citizens', it is generally too late for capitulation. At this point, whether or not the regime crushes the rebellion or falls often depends on its relationship with the military.

As noted in Section 2.2.1 above, the MENA monarchies kept their militaries well-equipped, close at hand, and limited in size. Their longevity allowed them to establish professional militaries with close ties to ruling families and a stake in the regime's future. They also supplemented their military and police forces with foreign mercenaries. Thus, none of these militaries defected.

Amongst MENA's personalist and semi-personalist regimes the story is more varied and interesting. Some militaries were more independent and institutionally sound than others. And autocrats attempted to control their militaries in quite different ways, with varying degrees of success.

2.7.3.1: Tunisia's Military — Marginalized, & Indifferent

In Tunisia, Ben Ali did not trust his military. He kept the military small, marginalized, and under-equipped.[147] Much of the military was made up of conscripts, who had no loyalty to the regime. Nor did the military elite have an organic connection to Ben Ali since the military did not found the regime.[148] Ben Ali's coercive power base was in the regime's security and intelligence apparatus, which he used extensively throughout his reign to target popular dissent and eliminate his political enemies. These organizations remained loyal to Ben Ali until his ouster; and their remnants continue to wield significant influence in Tunisian politics.[149]

Like other personalist dictators, Ben Ali established personal patronage networks that had a corrupting influence on all levels of government. His choice to exclude the military from this network left that organization exceptionally professional, not accustomed to committing overt political oppression, and aloof of domestic politics. When Ben Ali ordered the military to fire on

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[147] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 146.

[148] Steven A. Cook, "The Calculations of Tunisia's Military." *Foreign Policy*, January 20, 2011. http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/01/20/the-calculations-of-tunisias-military/.

[149] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 146.

protestors his top general refused.[150] Though his exact motivation remains uncertain, Ben Ali fled by plane with his wife in the ensuing days. The military had surrounded his house; and while it let his plane take off, it closed Tunisian airspace shortly thereafter, and prevented other family members from departing.[151]

Ben Ali based his power on a well trained, state of the art security and intelligence apparatus. for decades Ben Ali's police state was more capable than most at keeping serious political opposition disorganized and underground. But it was not remotely equipped to contest even Tunisia's small military once that organization decided to step into the political fray.

2.7.3.2: Syria's Military — Kinship & Professionalism

Bashar al Assad inherited the Syrian presidency from his father in 2000. Hafez al Assad participated in multiple military coups in the 1960s before seizing exclusive power in 1970. Like the other men in his family, Bashar joined the military. The Assad regime and the military remain closely entwined, with Assad family members holding key military posts. The coercive core of the personalist-military regime is made up of two divisions, the Republican (or Presidential) Guard, which Bashar commanded until 2000, and the Fourth Armored Division, currently commanded by Bashar's younger brother.[152] While the majority of the Syrian military are Sunni muslim conscripts, these two divisions are made up almost exclusively of Alawites, the cultural minority of which the Assad's are a part. Both divisions are well equipped and well funded.

The Republican Guard is a classic example of the personalist ruler's 'extended bodyguard'. The division is specifically tasked with protecting the capitol. It is the only military force allowed in the capitol, and maintains a constant presence in central Damascus, particularly around the presidential palace and the residential neighborhood where the most elite political officials reside.[153] As of 1999 the Republican Guard was reported to have been receiving revenue directly

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[150] Lynch, *Arab Uprising*, Chapter 4.

[151] Ibid; "Tunisia: President Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali Forced out." *BBC News*, January 15, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12195025.

[152] Heydemann, Leenders, "Authoritarian Learning," 84.

[153] "Syria's Praetorian Guards: A Primer." *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin* 2, no. 7 (August 5, 2000). http://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0008_s2.htm.

from oil fields in the Deir el Zūr region in eastern Syria.[154] Though these oil fields are now contested by the Islamic State.[155]

While the Republican Guard ensures the regime's core, the Fourth Armored Division maintains order within the military rank and file, and serves as the regime's elite strike force. According to a former Syrian Brigadier General, the Fourth is "commanded by career officers and [has] the best weapons available in Syria." When the 2011 uprisings became widespread, the regime sent parts of the division across the country to oversee and support counterrevolutionary police and military operations.[156]

In contrast to Ben Ali and Mubarak, Assad has consistently turned to professional military officers when family members have not been available. Thus far this has been a safe bet because, while Syria has the makings of a proto-dynasty, military service — and oil exports — have remained the family business.

2.7.3.3: Egypt's Military — Begrudging Defection

Geddes classifies the Egyptian regime as of 2010 as a personalist-party-military hybrid. It is common to speak of 'Mubarak's regime'. In reality only part of the regime was Mubarak's. As President of the country and leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP), he happened to represent the regime's most visible component. Mubarak did not found the NDP, though over his three decade tenure he shaped the party significantly. And when he fell, it fell.[157] Mubarak shared power with a number of elite military officers. From the start of the uprisings in 2011 and onward this group of officers met as the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), a statutory body only assembled during national crises.

Mubarak was in the armed forces before entering politics; and he integrated the military elite into his patronage network. Mubarak "showered his officers with direct and indirect economic rewards."[158] In cooperation with Mubarak's political network, elite military officers came

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[154] Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Royal Notables, and Their Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 237.

[155] "ISIS Militants Seize Another Oil Field in Syria's Deir El-Zour." *Al Arabiya News*, July 4, 2014. http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/07/04/Islamic-militants-seize-Syria-oil-field.html.

[156] Leela Jacinto, "'The Enforcer' Who Heads Syria's Dreaded Army Division." *France24*, March 4, 2012. http://www.france24.com/en/20120301-enforcer-who-heads-syria-army-fourth-division-maher-bashar-assad/.

[157] "Egypt: Mubarak's Former Ruling Party Dissolved by Court." *BBC News*, April 16, 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13105044.

[158] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 146.

to control large swaths of the Egyptian economy. Retired generals routinely moved into well-paying positions in local government, or onto the boards of state-owned companies.[159] For nearly three decades Mubarak provided Egypt with stability and economic growth that disproportionately benefited his own cohorts and the military elite. At present Egypt has the largest military economy in the Arab world.[160] Thus, the military elite had for a many years minimal incentive to contest Mubarak's rule.

Nonetheless, divisions were forming between Mubarak and the military elite in the years leading up to the 2011 uprising. Mubarak's intention to devolve power to his son, Gamal, rankled military officers, who expected Egypt's next president to come from their ranks, as had all of Egypt's previous presidents.[161] Gamal was not a military man. "As a banker, [Gamal Mubarak] preferred to build his influence through business and political cronies rather than through the military."[162] The increasing importance of the Egyptian police, an armed force distinct from the military and under Mubarak's direct governance — his own praetorian guard — also bothered the military elite.

Despite recent differences, the elite military officers remained loyal allies to Mubarak. Only defecting when they found themselves without options. During the "Battle of the Camel," when regime loyalists rode through the protestor's ranks on camelback with whips and clubs, the military did not intervene. In a 2011 interview with *The Washington Post*, a senior officer in the Egyptian military said, "At the beginning, we gave the presidential institution the full opportunity to manage events. If it had been able to succeed, nothing would have happened. We would have pulled our people back to the barracks. But they were incapable of responding to the events."[163] The language is telling. Egypt's thoroughly professional military elite, and the best judges of their own capabilities, were the ones in situated to *give* things to the regime. The military elite held decisive coercive threat. They did not immediately depose Mubarak in the interest of stability. As Nassif notes, "only when it became clear that a bloodbath would be required to dislodge the protestors from Tahrir Square" did the military elite defect.

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[159] Hicham Bou Nassif, "Why The Egyptian Army Didn't Shoot." *Middle East Report* 42, no. 265 (Winter 2012). http://www.merip.org/mer/mer265.

[160] Springborg, "Arab Militaries," 149.

[161] Goldstone, "Bringing Regimes Back In," 12; Nassif, "Why the Egyptian Army Didn't Shoot."

[162] Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions," 337.

[163] Quoted in Nassif, "Why the Egyptian Army Didn't Shoot."

But Nassif goes farther in his analysis. He rightly questions whether such a bloodbath would have even been possible. Violently clearing the Square in support of Mubarak would have meant ordering junior and mid-level officers as well as the rank and file to open fire on civilians. Evidence suggests that these men would not have followed those orders. Nassif notes that even mid-level officers were not included in Mubarak's patronage system. Such officers earned salaries roughly equivalent to that of a Cairo cab driver.[164] These men were struggling financially. Their economic lot placed them in the same social circles as rest of the Egyptian commons. The military rank and file thus found themselves in a unique position within Egyptian society and politics — similar but not perfectly equivalent to the quasi-elites. Though members of the same economic interest groups as the populace, rank and file soldiers were entwined in a complex and carefully governed organization that existed ostensibly for the benefit of the political elite at their own expense. These men had little reason to support a regime that did not support them, and the military elite likely knew it.

The Egyptian military elite did not want to remove Mubarak. They gave him every opportunity to quell the increasingly disruptive protests. The army above all else valued stability. The 2011 protests were destabilizing, but regime change might be worse. Ultimately the Egyptian protests were a victory for the populace, not the military elite.

Conclusion

From the perspective of regimes and states, the clearest trends are straightforward and familiar. Monarchies were more resistant to political unrest than personalist regimes. In other words, regimes that *are* states do better than regimes that *have* states. Furthermore, rentier states were and remain able to survive immense levels of unrest, keeping afloat and functional, even as they take on water. With few exceptions, the most powerful and secure regimes were also the ones that used the least overt repressive violence. To the list of examples in footnote 143 above add: Iran and the Gulf monarchies. These regimes experienced minimal protests, or were able to quickly put down protests because they spent years ruthlessly developing methods of controlling and manipulating digital media behind the scenes, often in counterintuitive ways. Finally, actors on both ends of the political spectrum found all other forces their favor swept from the field if they provoked the wrath of foreign actors possessing overwhelming coercive influence. Goldstone provides the best summary:

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[164] Nassif, "Why the Egyptian Army Didn't Shoot."

The government must appear so irremediably unjust or inept that it is widely viewed as a threat to the country's future; elites (especially in the military) must be alienated from the state and no longer willing to defend it; a broad-based section of the population, spanning ethnic and religious groups and socioeconomic classes, must mobilize; and international powers must either refuse to step in to defend the government or constrain it from using maximum force to defend itself.[165]

The influence of domestic militaries was clear in almost every case. Should militaries defect, Goldstone writes, "the government can unravel with astonishing rapidity. In the end, the befuddled ruler, still convinced of his indispensability and invulnerability, suddenly finds himself isolated and powerless."[166]

From the perspective of the crowd, a new story appears to be emerging. According to Lynch, one great effect of the new media environment is the creation of a *unified Arab political space*, "bringing together all regional issues into a common narrative of a shared fate and struggle."[2] The idea of a unified Arab political space is not novel; in the Sixth Century the Umayyad Caliphate represented a unified Arab political space which stretched from India to what is now Southern France. The novelty that Lynch identifies is a political space unified from the bottom-up. Political spaces, as opposed to merely geographical ones, depend on systems of communication. Throughout history, political spaces of absurd size united (often just barely) because of effective communication and transport based on top-down organizations and tools.

Digital media allows for the unification of political spaces *despite* top-down systems. It represents a sort of 'reverse-federalism'. Geographically distinct populaces are able to influence their governments as a whole, not by transferring political and military equipment across borders, but by digitally transferring information that provokes the realization and subsequent mobilization of a powerful democratic consensus. The realization of this democratic consensus can have fantastic ramifications for the distribution of coercive power. How does one autocrat provide another autocrat with coercive power? He sends a battalion. How does one populace provide another populace with coercive power? They send a few million tweets.

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[165] Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions," 330.

[166] Ibid., 331.

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