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From Dynamic Events to Deep Causes: Outcomes and Explanations of the Arab Spring

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Abstract

Attempting to understand the complexities of the Arab Spring is a challenge both methodologically and evidentially. Over a three year period we evolved a problem-driven attempt at theory building and came to see historically rooted structural factors as more satisfying explanatory variables than some of the more proximate arguments proposed to explain the causes and consequences of the Arab Spring. We found that antecedent variables could account for the contrast between countries that experienced *successful* uprisings and those countries that experienced no uprising at all or an unsuccessful uprising. We found two variables provided significant explanatory leverage. The first was the extent of non-tax hydrocarbon (mainly oil) rents, the second, the nature of the ruling elite and whether the incumbent had inherited power.

Keywords

Arab Spring – constitutional design – authoritarianism – political Science

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The overthrow of four Arab dictators in a span of thirteen months in 2011 and 2012 suddenly rendered the work of comparativists of Middle Eastern politics in demand by a much broader audience than had hitherto been the case. What contribution could social scientists make in the ensuing discussion and, equally important, what would be the most sensible way to develop that contribution? These questions were among the many issues we confronted when we began, perhaps precipitously, to collaborate in summer 2011 to explain the “Arab Spring.” With a bit of hubris—only two Arab autocrats had fully lost power by that point—and a larger amount of luck—early on we bet that Bashar al-Assad would retain his office while Muammar Qaddafi and Ali Abdullah Saleh would lose theirs—we embarked on what would become a three-year trek of researching, writing, presenting, re-researching and re-writing *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*.¹

The trials and tribulations of the Arab Spring, the rapid swings between hope and crisis, made the process of trying to find seeds of truthful explanations a challenge to say the least. Nonetheless, the decisions and judgment calls we made along the way may be instructive for political scientists who are either studying the Arab Spring now or will attempt in the future to grapple with an analogous epical event in the Middle East or in another region. Hence we welcomed the invitation from the editors of *Middle East Law and Governance* to reflect on our experience and the methodological and conceptual work it entailed. In the remainder of this essay we describe our investigation as a problem-driven attempt at theory building, one that began with the challenge of identifying our object of explanation.

Before we recount our approach, we will summarize our findings.

Examining the political outcomes across fourteen Arab autocracies in the Middle East during 2010–2013 we sought to explain two sets of outcomes. The first is the eruption and non-occurrence of domestic uprisings and their success or failure at ejecting incumbent rulers from power. In these respects we identified six cases of uprisings (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria), three cases of domestically driven leadership removal (Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen) and the deposition of one leader through foreign military intervention (Libya). We found that the uprisings themselves were driven by human agency and did not have strong antecedent structural determinants. By contrast, the *success* of uprisings was conditioned by whether the incumbent had fused the coercive apparatus into his coalition. The cohesion that drove massive repression in Libya, Bahrain, and Syria derived from at least one of two factors that predated the Arab Spring: inherited executive power or large oil rents. The

1 Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

presence of either was sufficient to enable a crackdown on the opposition and the absence of both was necessary for opposition groups to succeed (without western armed forces coming to their aid, as in Libya).

The second set of outcomes we sought to explain were the varied trajectories of the four countries in which we observed regime breakdown. Even before Tunisia's successful second democratic election or Egypt's military coup, divergences among the four "success" cases of the Arab Spring were evident. After Ben Ali's overthrow, Tunisians managed to organize a transition process in which civil society actors played the leading role. Meanwhile, Egypt after Mubarak's overthrow was governed by that country's military, which made only grudging concessions to democratic forces. And Libya and Yemen early on exhibited the difficulties posed to democratic transition by weak states and tribally-fractured polities. Though many scholars have argued that the relative success in Tunisia was a function of contingent factors such as the existence of genuinely moderate Islamists and fortuitous institutional design choices, we found that the success of a post-breakdown transition required two factors: a strong state, and a civic/political landscape that was balanced among Islamist and non-Islamist forces. Where the former existed without the latter, as in Egypt, authoritarian resurgence resulted, as outnumbered non-Islamists appealed to the military to reverse the outcomes of the ballot box. Where political balance existed in the absence of a strong state, as in Libya and Yemen, civil conflict resulted.

Solving the Moving Target Problem

In October 2011, Brownlee was sharing some tentative thoughts about the incipient transitions in Egypt and Tunisia to an audience in Tunis when an audience member asked bluntly: "How do you explain something that has not ended?" Brownlee conceded that he would steer his students away from such an enterprise for it violated a cardinal rule of dissertation research (not to mention later projects): *do not try to hit a moving target*. If the outcome of interest (dependent variable) is not fixed, you may "succeed" at explaining it only to find that later it has changed completely. For example, during the first year of the Arab uprisings it would have been ill advised to attempt to explain "social revolutions" in Tunisia and Egypt when there was not sufficient evidence that the two countries had experienced the requisite transformation of political and class structures to belong in that category.² Particularly in the Egyptian case, political and socioeconomic continuity in later years eclipsed the stunning changes of the first year after Hosni Mubarak was deposed.

² Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

At the same time, however, we reasoned that by late 2011 certain outcomes were no longer in flux and these phenomena invited explanation. Specifically, Tunisia and Egypt, plus four other countries (Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Syria) had experienced massive popular revolts and, by year's end, three rulers (Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, Mubarak, Qaddafi) had lost power. (Yemen's Saleh was half-way out the door and would formally leave office the next February.) We labeled these dependent variables "uprisings" and "authoritarian breakdown."

Uprisings are non-violent mass protests that control public space over multiple days and multiple cities. They are distinguished from conventional demonstrations, which may be large but tend to be sporadic and do not seize hold of the national agenda. Uprisings also differ from internal wars, in which opposition forces use arms to claim territory or accomplish other political aims. Uprisings may ebb and give way to either of these other forms of contentious collective action, but the three phenomena are analytically distinct. Recent politics in the Arab world included countless demonstrations and a number of internal wars. Only the six identified countries, however, qualified as uprisings. They separated the Arab Spring from more familiar challenges to authoritarian rule.

In the immediate term, the ousters of Ben Ali, Mubarak, and, eventually, their counterparts in Libya and Yemen, suggested regime change. But the removal of a dictator does not always spell the end of dictatorship. We therefore eschewed the outcome of "regime change," opting instead to specify the second dependent variable as "authoritarian breakdown," defined as the involuntary replacement of incumbent rulers by an alternative set of elites.³ This definition excludes assassinations that leave in place the top echelon. Domestic actors were the principal drivers of breakdown in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. In Libya, however, the foreign military intervention of NATO (and select Arab militaries) not only enabled the local opposition to break Qaddafi's authoritarian hold but leveled his regime. We followed the international relations literature and termed this outcome "foreign-imposed regime change" (FIRC).⁴ Thus Libya was differentiated from the other cases of authoritarian breakdown, in which local forces played the lead role and regimes may or may not have changed.

Our outcomes of interest did not reach the level of social revolutions or democratization. However, in the context of the almost uniformly authoritarian

3 Jason Brownlee, "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions," *American Journal of Political Science*, 53 no. 3 (2009): 515–532, 519. This operationalization derives from Barbara Geddes, "Authoritarian Breakdown: Empirical Test of a Game Theoretic Argument" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA, September 2–5, 1999).

4 Alexander B. Downes and Jonathan Monten, "Forced to Be Free?: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Rarely Leads to Democratization," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013): 90–131.

Arab world, they were breathtaking and consequential. Just as importantly, from an empirical perspective, they could be considered, not by gazing forward through a crystal ball, but by looking back, in the proverbial rearview mirror.

To be sure, the politics of post-Ben Ali Tunisia or post-Qaddafi Libya were still unfolding. We took care, in the first years of our work, however, to grapple first with explaining the *past events* of the uprisings and the forcible removal of dictators. Meanwhile we gingerly followed the formation of new governments and holding of new elections. Even then, our retrospective solution to the moving target problem informed our treatment of institutional changes. When it came to new constitutions and new rules, we sought to explain them in terms of process and immediate outcomes while taking care to avoid *prospective* judgments about whether they would underpin democratization in the future. Indeed, early on, a common expectation held by institutional experts (including at least one of the authors) was that institutional design considerations would have a dramatic impact on the post breakdown political trajectories of the Arab Spring cases. However, as constitutional design and electoral processes played out we came to the realization that specific institutional choices were in many respects a second and third order consideration. Their potential effects were often swamped by larger balance-of-power issues and historically-rooted state-society structural effects, which decreased the parameters for the newly chosen institutions to determine who was to hold power.

Finally, the occurrence of uprisings and authoritarian breakdowns implied a contrast space, so-called negative cases in which the phenomenon of interest *did not take place*.⁵ These “dogs that did not bark,” Arab countries that experienced no uprisings or had uprisings but no breakdown such as Morocco, Jordan and the Gulf States, were integral to our research when we turned from outcomes to explanations.⁶

Escaping the Pull of “Proximatism”

Live media coverage of the Arab Spring defined it as a phenomenon driven by activists, many of them young and audacious. The drama and exhilaration of events recalled images of the toppling of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, for a few

5 David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 49, no. 1 (1996): 56–91.

6 Our universe of cases encompassed the fourteen Arab autocracies of the Middle East: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen. We excluded Lebanon and Iraq because of their quasi-democratic status.

months the uprisings of 2010–2011 appeared to be gaining steam much like the revolutionary wave of Eastern Europe that swept aside six dictatorships in the second half of 1989.⁷

Even when it became clear that only a fraction of Arab states would witness uprisings and authoritarian breakdown, the narrative of success in Tunisia and Egypt quickly centered on human agency. Commentators and scholars were quick to discard the structural frameworks they had used to explain durable authoritarianism in the Middle East. Theories about institutions, economic conditions, and social structures appeared as dilapidated as the regimes whose downfall they ostensibly failed to explain.⁸ Rather than seriously testing structural theories, students of the Arab Spring treated the bravery and social media savvy of opposition organizers as a self-evident explanation for the changes that took place.

Our project diverged from this trend. We recognized that the uprisings would not have occurred without bold, even self-sacrificing, initiators at the helm. But firm leadership among Arab opposition groups was hardly a new phenomenon in 2010 and 2011. Nor was it a feature confined to Egypt and Tunisia. By homing in on the cases of change, initial explanations of the Arab Spring overlooked the stark and enduring difference between authoritarian breakdown and authoritarian continuity. This contrast not only placed the Arab Spring in another category than Eastern Europe 1989; it also offered an unprecedented opportunity for systematic comparison within the Middle East. In our reckoning, the absence and failure of uprisings in most Arab countries was as instructive as their sensational success in a few locales. This contrast space provided the foundation for robust explanation.

In developing our own theory, we contended not only with claims about the dignity and sophistication of protesters (which implied uprisings wherever brave Twitter users could be found), but also with more theoretical arguments about the nature of the regimes that fell or survived. In particular, we reflected on claims that the difference between authoritarian breakdown and authoritarian continuity hinged on the professionalism of the military or the personalism of the ruler.

Both of these traits were invoked to account for variations. For example, probably the most prominent version emerged when Eva Bellin suggested that the balance of factors made Egypt a likely case for soldiers breaking from Mubarak:

7 Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44, no. 1 (1991): 7–48.

8 See, for example, F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (July 2011): 81–90.

The Egyptian military was indeed professional. It was not linked by blood or ethnicity to Hosni Mubarak and his family. In addition, the number of protesters was large and the means they embraced were peaceful. All this pointed to military defection.⁹

She acknowledges, however, that the army's apparent restraint was not a foregone conclusion. In fact, the military had promoted its own economic interests in ways that departed from the conventional idea of career soldiers. Hence, it is hard to see this variable clearly separating breakdown in Egypt from continuity in other Arab states. (Indeed, nineteen months after Bellin's article was published, the Egyptian military would conduct the largest domestic assault on a peaceful civilian gathering in the country's modern history.¹⁰)

An additional problem with the professionalism variable was the difficulty of measuring it *ex ante*. If observers were assessing Arab regimes in summer 2010, would they have grouped the Egyptian, Tunisian, and Yemeni militaries together as professionalized? We think it unlikely and we return to the issue of *ex ante* measurability below.

A second prominent variable for illuminating the Arab Spring was the personalism of the ruler. To an extent, autocratic personalism is the other side of the coin of military professionalism. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, Jack Goldstone, the renowned scholar of revolutions traced the downfall of Ben Ali and Mubarak to their extreme corruption, known by students of Max Weber as "sultanism." A sultanistic regime, he averred, "often proves much more vulnerable [than a monarchy or single-party dictatorship] rarely retaining power for more than a generation." Dubbing the ousted autocrats of Tunisia and Egypt "modern sultans," Goldstone maintained that they had undermined themselves by concentrating power in their hands: "the very strategies [sultanistic rulers] use to stay in power make them brittle, not resilient."¹¹

Goldstone's argument raises a number of empirical and methodological questions. His list of contemporary Arab sultans includes not only Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Saleh, but also Asad, Qaddafi and Omar Bashir of Sudan, none of whom have lost power to the domestic uprisings that highly personalized

9 Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44, no. 2 (2012): 127–149, 134.

10 Human Rights Watch, *All According to Plan: The Rab'a Massacre and Mass Killings of Protesters in Egypt*. New York: Human Rights Watch. August 12, 2014. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2014/08/12/all-according-plan>.

11 Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (May/June 2011): 8–16, 8–9.

dictatorship allegedly produces. If sultanism reduces regime longevity, why had the regimes of Qaddafi (in power since 1969) and Asad (ruling, father and son, since 1970) lasted so much longer than Ben Ali and Mubarak, who took office in the 1980s? Further, some of the most notorious sultanistic regimes outside the Middle East—the Duvaliers in Haiti and the Somozas in Nicaragua—were neither brittle nor limited to a single generation.¹² Again, why were the most personalistic regimes outlasting their allegedly sturdier counterparts? Equally important for our interest in valid explanation is the slipperiness of the concept. As with professionalism, we think students would have difficult applying Goldstone's concept of sultanism *ex ante*.

Naturally, these two arguments do not represent the literature as a whole (and the book references a far broader corpus). But they did stand at the vanguard of initial political science research, setting an agenda that pushed us to think about ways we might more adequately explain the Arab Spring. Measurement issues weighed heavily in our deliberations. Both of the above variables ran the risk of retrospective coding, i.e., professional armies are the armies that do not shoot civilians; sultanistic rulers are those who concentrate power so much that they trigger a massive backlash of dissent. To develop a framework that would account for variance across the Arab Spring we looked elsewhere.

Explaining Breakdown: Oil Wealth and Inherited Authority

In order to explain the pivotal behaviors of Arab militaries we resisted the pull toward proximate accounts—whether they were about activists or soldiers—and peered further back, to deep causes that could be consistently identified across cases and before events unfolded. We approached the fourteen Arab autocracies inductively to find variables that were correlated with outcomes at the national level and also corresponded to within-country dynamics.

Soon into our research we found that the uprisings themselves defied structural explanations in the sense that they occurred in a wide variety of institutional and economic contexts. In this respect we found ourselves in partial agreement with the “agential” stream of commentary: country- and time-specific decisions by opposition organizers brought about massive popular revolts that the countries in question had not seen in at least a generation. The uprisings were of great import as an expression of discontent; they “mattered” tremendously for

¹² See, H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, eds., *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

politics and daily life. As students of national political systems, however, we were even more interested in the varied impact of the Arab Spring in terms of authoritarian breakdown and continuity. On this score, we found strong support for a more structural account.

Antecedent material and political variables could not explain the difference between uprisings and no uprisings, but they could account for the contrast between countries that experienced *successful* uprisings and those countries that experienced no uprising at all or an unsuccessful (i.e. repressed) uprising.

We found two variables provided significant explanatory leverage. The first variable was the extent of non-tax hydrocarbon (mainly oil) rents. Such rents shore up support within the armed forces and police, helping to reinforce the regime's coercive capacity during moments of unrest. Taking a cue from Michael Ross's work on rentier states, we measured oil wealth dichotomously based on whether or not a country qualified, in Ross's work, as "oil-rich." The cutoff line for us was \$1000 per capita of oil (and gas) revenue. Raising or lowering this amount would not have significantly altered our coding. The *least* wealthy of the oil-rich countries was Algeria (\$1930/capita) and the *most* wealthy of the non-oil-rich countries took in less than a quarter of that amount from hydrocarbons: Syria (\$450/capita).¹³

The second variable was the nature of the ruling elite and whether the incumbent had inherited power. Like rents, hereditary succession helps to bind the agents of state violence to the incumbent. Rulers that assumed power through domestic hereditary succession processes enjoy greater loyalty among state security agencies and, correspondingly, a greater capacity to quell uprisings.

There are two counterintuitive elements to this causal process. First, hereditary succession *ratifies* this consolidation of power; it does not generate it *ab initio*. Although several Arab autocrats in non-monarchies (Egypt and Yemen in particular) were scheming to install their sons as presidents, they had not accomplished hereditary succession. Hence, Egypt, Yemen, and Tunisia measured as non-inherited regimes in 2010. By contrast, Hafez al-Asad had arranged his ruling coalition around Bashar in the 1990s and Bashar al-Asad had seamlessly inherited power upon his father's death in 2000.¹⁴ Second, because inherited regimes fuse the executive office with the coercive apparatus, they tend to be *more* resilient than single-party regimes or personalistic regimes that have

13 Michael L. Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 20.

14 Joshua Stacher, "Reinterpreting Authoritarian Power: Syria's Hereditary Succession," *The Middle East Journal* 65, no 2 (2011): 197–212.

not passed power within the family. To an extent, then, our claim flips the popular expectation that extreme personalism fragments autocracy: during 2011 hereditary power violently kept the Syrian armed forces overall on Assad's side.

The rent and succession variables stretch the explanation further back historically and causally than more proximate claims relating to the professionalism of the security forces or the tech savvy and grievances of activist cadres. (They also shed significant light on post-uprising transition processes, although during that phase of political negotiation we concede that the impact of contingency and local agency tends to grow.) In addition, these variables were measurable before the uprisings, thus providing a more robust explanation of past outcomes and a more reliable guide to comparable phenomena in the future.

In combination the two variables sort the Arab autocracies of the Middle East in 2010–2011 into four cells. Uprisings can be found in all four cells: from non-hereditary, oil-rich Libya, to hereditary, non-oil-rich Syria, hereditary *and* oil-rich Bahrain, and non-hereditary, non-oil-rich Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. The first three cells include uprisings that were violently repressed *but also* the “non-occurrences” of uprisings, e.g., Algeria (non-hereditary, oil-rich), Jordan (hereditary, non-oil-rich), Saudi Arabia (hereditary and oil-rich). The fourth cell, however, includes *only* uprisings that culminated in authoritarian breakdown. Reasoning in terms of our deterministic dichotomous variables, we concluded that the absence of oil wealth *and* inherited executive authority was *necessary and sufficient* for domestically successful uprisings. By contrast, the presence of either oil wealth *or* inherited power was *sufficient* for a regime to avoid an uprising completely or violently crush it.

Case studies trace these processes within the cases and we take particular care to explain our coding of Libya and Bahrain. Neither Qaddafi's regime nor the despot himself survived 2011 and, in this sense, Libyan opposition forces can claim their uprising succeeded. As we detail in the book, though, this success was premised on a NATO-led military campaign that tipped the balance of power on the ground against Qaddafi's army. Prior to that intervention, all signs pointed to a catastrophic defeat for Libyan rebels in Benghazi and other key areas. Hence the ultimate outcome of foreign-imposed regime change should not occlude the immediate process of regime crackdown, which, if not for NATO's involvement would have looked like Syria or Bahrain.

Some colleagues questioned whether the Bahraini royal family's survival in 2011 evinced durability since a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) military force entered Bahrain a month into the uprising. Was regime continuity contingent on foreign support? The question raises the intriguing counterfactual of how the Bahrain regime would have fared without the GCC military units. We know

empirically, however, that GCC forces did not take the vanguard in the regime's offensive. Rather, they served mainly to secure key installations around the country. Meanwhile, the Bahrain military showed no signs of fragmenting or defecting from the monarch. In this respect, the GCC army was a backstop, not the key to the regime's survival.

From Breakdown to Transition

The second half of the book shifts our focus from explaining the success and failure of uprisings to explaining the success and failure of the democratic transitions that those uprisings made possible. Though this forced us to operate in a more speculative manner than we had in the previous half of the book—inasmuch as the transitions in all four cases can in some senses be said to be ongoing—it was evident early on that Tunisia was going one way and Egypt, Yemen, and Libya another.

In order to evaluate the transitions, we focused on five features of the transitional processes that we thought were important indicators of each country's trajectory. First, we asked who controls the interim government after the dictator's removal? Are oppositionists and civil society activists (i.e. groups that were excluded from government under authoritarianism) accorded a formal role in interim governance structures? And, if so, how expansive is this role? The greater the role enjoyed by these forces, we reasoned, the more likely inclusive, democratic institutions were to result. The second question we asked was whether the interim government eventually gave way to one in which both executive and legislative authorities are vested in freely-elected bodies. In other words, is the dictator's overthrow eventually followed by the election of a new government? Only with the election of a new government can a democratic transition be said to have been initiated. Third, and relatedly, who makes the rules regarding those elections? Is it oppositionists and civil society (operating, for example, through an independent electoral commission), or is rule-making controlled by components of the old regime (such as judiciaries and interior ministries)? The answer to this question allows us to determine the extent to which the new elected government was the democratically-legitimate outcome of a genuinely competitive process, rather than simply a continuation of the distorted electoral practices of Arab autocrats. Fourth, was this duly-elected government possessed of the requisite state capacity and legitimacy among relevant groups in society to actually govern, or is its tenure marked by violence and separatism? In other words, is the elected government *actually* the government, or does it have to contend with subnational actors

who challenge its monopoly over the legitimate means of violence? Fifth, and finally, if executive and legislative branches are duly elected, do they come to be replaced in anything other than an election? In other words, do the results of elections hold?

The greater the share of the above questions that can be answered in the affirmative, the more likely that country's transition is to result in democracy. A country that is on its way to democracy might be one in which oppositionists and civil society are able to assume control of government upon the flight of the dictator, constitute a new government through a free and fair election (whose rules they participate in shaping), are able to govern effectively without armed challenges to their authority, and are eventually replaced in an election.

To answer these questions, we delved deeply into the literature on the four transition cases, generating case study narratives for each country. In Egypt, the interim government was controlled by the military, with oppositionists accorded a minimal role. Though free and fair elections for the legislature and the presidency were held, at no time were both of these bodies controlled by separate, duly-elected bodies. Moreover, the rules governing these elections were made not by the parties that had to contest them, but by the same state bodies that controlled elections under Mubarak. Though the elected government was not forced to contend with subnational challenges to its authority, neither was it able to hold onto power in the face of a military-civil society coalition that ousted the elected president in 2013.

In Tunisia, as in Egypt, the interim government was *de jure* controlled by remnants of the former ruling party. However, a civilian-led forum of oppositionists and civil society gave them what amounted to *de facto* legislative powers. When elections were held to generate a constituent assembly, that assembly also formulated the government, replacing the old regime figures who had helmed government during the first months of the transition. Moreover, the rules governing those elections were made in an independent forum constituted and wholly controlled by oppositionists and civil society. As in Egypt, the government has faced no serious challenge to its authority over the country's territory, and, as of this writing, the country's elected institutions have held.

In Yemen, the interim government has been controlled by components of the old regime, elections have not yet been held, the rules governing those elections are made by an electoral commission whose composition is determined largely by allies of the old regime (in the form of the interim president and his ruling-party parliamentary majority), and the government contends with separatist movements in the North and the South of the country. In Libya,

in contrast, foreign intervention meant that oppositionists have controlled the interim government, generated a democratically-legitimated legislature and executive, and set the rules of elections free from interference of the Qadhafi regime. However, though elected institutions in Libya have so far held together, they are far from having power. The proliferation of tribal- and regional-militias has meant that the entire Libyan state, let alone Libyan democracy, is under severe threat. Indeed, we argue, the inability of the Libyan government to establish what Max Weber considered the *sine qua non* of a modern state—the “monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory”—underscored the insufficiency of institutional markers as indicators of a country’s likelihood of establishing democracy.¹⁵

Ultimately our explanations for why some uprisings were successful and others not, and the difference between transitions which set a course for democracy versus renewed authoritarianism, may smell of structural determinism—condemning some Arab nations to basket case status while anointing others with the prospect of a democratic opening. However, we do not see our reading of the Arab Spring writ large as conditioned by the straight jacket of determinism. Rather we believe the evidence suggests how the historical evolution of a state creates parameters from which it is often difficult to break free. The nature of the regime, its genealogy and modus operandi, funnel nation states into some given outcomes being much more likely and departures from those trajectories requiring a greater exogenous shock to the system. Democracy may not be a lost cause in a personalized sultanistic regime founded on oil revenues, but the democrats need to jump over much higher hurdles to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We close our book with a reminder of another springtime of the peoples over a century and a half ago in Europe. The revolutions of 1848 almost uniformly failed to bring about sustained democratic reform initially. But a class had been awakened and the old order could never return to their unchallenged ways. Democracy took decades to be made manifest but even the ‘failed’ uprisings of mid-19th century Europe planted the seeds of change in the future.

15 Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in H.H Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.