

The Political Conflict Trap: The Political Consequences of Civil Conflict

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Introduction

- The *Economist* December 2010: “Despite a recent flurry of elections, true democracy is still a rarity in the Arab world”
- Will the ‘Arab Spring’ bring democracy to the Middle East?



The Surprising Stability and the Surprising Change

- Until recently explaining “Arab Exceptionalism” was a growth industry.
- Arab regimes were stable and long lived.
- Dominant theories of civil war and political stability predicted unrest in the Middle East, but we found stability.

- Then came the ‘Arab Spring’.

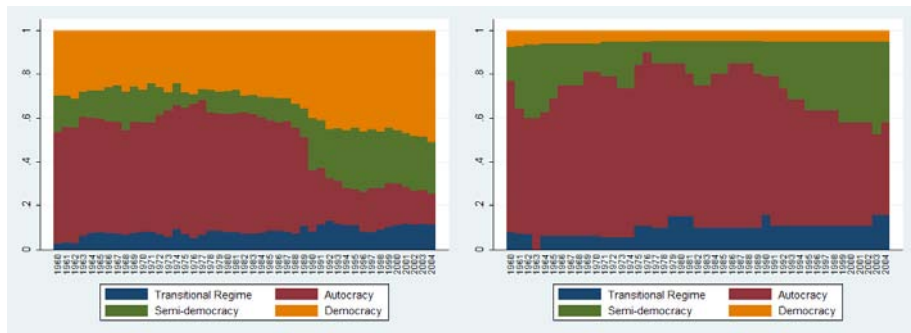
Predicting Revolutions

- Revolutions appear out of the blue – but in retrospect look inevitable
- Private vs. Public preferences (Kuran)

- Building on Kuran we argue:
- Regimes have an incentive to induce preference falsification as it is a self-reinforcing process
- This complicates civil society coordination and mobilization
- Regimes induce this through various forms of repression
- In situations with “revolutionary potential” this threat of repression is discounted and people’s true preferences are revealed
- In addition a “band-wagon” effect may make the shift seem greater than it actually is

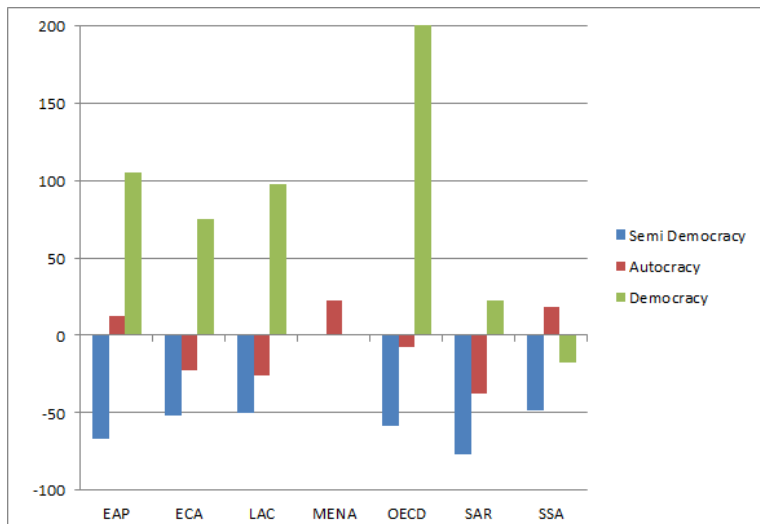
The first Wave of Semi Democracy? or a democratic ripple (Tunisia)?

Figure: Regime Types, Rest of World and MENA



Exceptionally Durable?

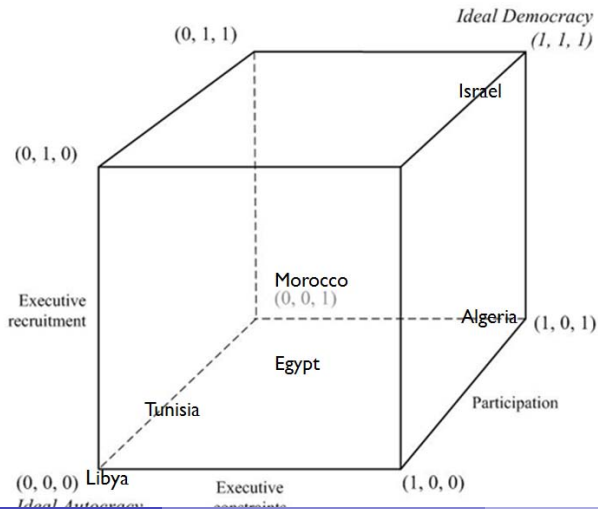
Figure: Regime Longevity Relative to MENA, by Regime Type and Region



Why Not Unstable? Institutionally Inconsistent Regimes

Arab Exceptionalism

Figure: Executive recruitment, constraints and popular participation



Explaining the Exceptionalism

Opportunity and Will to Survive: The Role of Rents

- Rents make regimes grow insulated from civil society
- Creates “Garrison States” which can only deal with civil society through force (Gurr 1971)
- MENA states among the most repressive in the world
- Repression, however, is costly
- Most states are not able to repressive indefinitely

No Taxation No Representation

- Oil is characterized by limited lootability
- Oil rents insulate the state from civil society
- States do not provide social safety nets (extended families)
- The state is severely limited

State Development, Resource Rents, and Regime Stability

- Mehlum, Moene & Torvik: Resource Curse – Institutions matter
- Special nature of state development in Middle East:
 - Muslim conquest
 - Religious and military actors ally (Chaney 2012)
 - Weak civil society
 - Natural resource wealth
 - Induces states to grow “fierce” or “hard”, but not “strong” (Ayubi 1991)

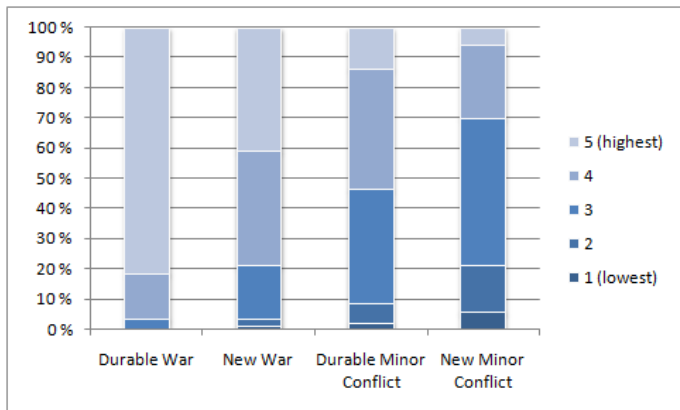
Civil Conflict and Regime Stability

A Political Conflict Trap

- Globally Semi Democracies win around 15 % of insurgencies
- In MENA they win almost every time

Political Terror

Figure: Political repression increases substantially in the wake of conflict



Political Conflict Trap – Securitization

- Conflict leads to securitization and political exclusion
- Oppositional voices are repressed
- which makes violent opposition the sole means of protest
- Riots & social fragility
- which in turn is met with more repression and political exclusion
- This is a vicious circle that has demonstrably led to renewed conflict

Mechanisms

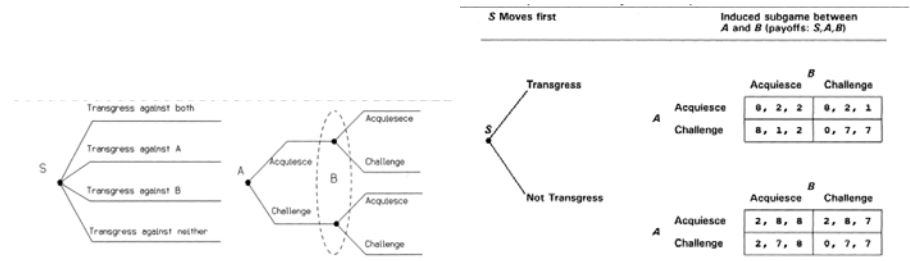
- Cooptation vs Repression
- Oil allows for elite cooptation
- No taxation and forms of limited political access
- No zero sum game between the groups

After the Arab Spring

- The Arab Spring basically saw a shuffling of elites
- Political leaders and security apparatus is a coalition (Svolik)
- What happened in the revolution in Tunisia and Egypt – military joins with civil society

Smart Repression

Figure: The Sovereign's Transgression Game



Conclusion

- Why are there so many Semi Democracies in the MENA region?
- Durability
- Win wars
- Fierce states, but not strong states
- Oil serves as the fuel to maintain Semi Democracies