

The Puzzle of Democratic Divergence
Theory Meets Experience in Tunisia and Egypt

Eva Bellin

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The Arab uprisings of 2011-2012 - popular protests that challenged authoritarian rule across the Middle East and North Africa – took the world by surprise. The possibility that the Arab region might finally be loosening the chains of tyranny was electrifying. But within five years these hopes had largely been dashed. Popular mobilization had left in its wake a political scene littered with state collapse, civil war, and authoritarian regression. To pessimists this glum reversal in the Arab world was inevitable. But to others, alternative paths were possible.

Nowhere is this differential possibility captured more clearly than in the comparison of Tunisia and Egypt. These two countries, similarly blessed with historically robust states and ethnically homogenous societies, were the first to shake off their long-lived dictators. At the start of the uprisings they seemed best positioned to transition to democracy successfully. At the end of five years, however, the two countries found themselves in dramatically different places. Tunisia had succeeded in crossing the threshold of democratic transition. But Egypt had regressed, embracing authoritarian practices that were in some ways more repressive than what had come before.

What explains the divergent trajectories taken by these two countries? Could our theories of democratization, the product of three decades of extensive cross-regional study, have anticipated this outcome? And what does the experience of Tunisia and Egypt say about the dynamics of democratization generally (and the possibility of further democratization in the Arab world specifically)?

The goal of “The Puzzle of Democratic Divergence” is fourfold. First, the piece seeks to cast light on a puzzling reality – the divergent trajectories taken by Egypt and Tunisia. As such, the piece is focused on explaining an outcome in a specific historical case, rather than building a generalizable theory or testing it.¹ In line with this case-centric ambition, the piece adopts an analytic approach that

¹ Derek Beach and Rasmus Pedersen, *Process Tracing Methods* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2015), 3;11.

is eclectic rather than parsimonious, complex and multifactorial rather than theoretically spare and elegant.

Second, “The Puzzle of Democratic Divergence” has ambitions to go beyond the analysis of a single pair of cases and reach for more generalizable knowledge about the dynamics of democratization generally. By confronting the divergent experience of Tunisia and Egypt with a synthetic view of some of the classic approaches in democratization theory, the piece aims to take stock of the utility of these different approaches and shed light on the scope conditions that might favor one approach over another.

Third, the piece seeks to reflect more generally on the special lessons that the Arab uprisings have to teach theorists of democratization. Every regional spurt in democratization (whether fully successful or not) has brought theoretically distinctive insights to this literature – be it the role of learning/voluntarism (the lesson of the Latin American transitions of the 80s),² the contribution of prior institutional endowment (highlighted by the African transitions of the early 90s),³ or the importance of international modeling and contagion (illustrated by the Color Revolutions of Eastern Europe).⁴ The experience of the Arab world has important lessons for democratization theory as well, even if the outcome of this episode has been far more disappointing than originally hoped.

Fourth, the piece aims to reflect on the lessons the Tunisia-Egypt comparison offers concerning the possibility of future democratization in the Arab world.

² Nancy Bermeo, “Rethinking Regime Change” *Comparative Politics* 22:3 (April 1990): 359-377; Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

³ Michael Bratton and Nicolas Vandewalle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Rachel Riedl, *Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴ Mark Beissinger, “How the Impossible Becomes Inevitable,” November 2009, accessed at <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/beissinger-the-public-sphere-and-the-collapse-of-soviet-communism/>, 5 June 2016.

Despite these ambitions, this piece does not aim to propose a new, parsimonious, universally valid, theory of democratization. This is in line with the consensus of the field that there can be no single path to democracy.⁵ This is true for many reasons. For the sake of clarity let me reiterate three.

First, 30 years of research into democratization study has taught us that **context matters** in shaping the process and prospects of democratic transition. Historical precedent,⁶ international conditions,⁷ even changing definitions of the explanandum “democracy”⁸ mean there can be no one recipe for democratization that fits all instances.

Second, democratization is a dynamic process replete with manifold feedback mechanisms.⁹ To explain “first order” macro-political phenomenon such as this one, we must be prepared to embrace complexity rather than search for a single replicable causal path.¹⁰

⁵ Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy,” *Comparative Politics*, 2:3 (April 1970):337-363; at 346; O’Donnell and Schmitter, “Transitions from Democracy;” Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 38, Barbara Geddes, “What Causes Democratization,” *Oxford Handbook of Political Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 336; Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, “Democratization During the Third Wave,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 125-144, at 127.

⁶ Both Geddes and Linz and Stepan, for example, argue that antecedent authoritarian regime type (whether military or single party or sultanistic or other) exerts important influence on the transition path that follows. (Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know About Democratization After Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999):115-44; Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

⁷ Carles Boix and Susan Stokes, for example, explore the hindrances to democratization posed by rivalrous Great Power politics during the Cold War era. “Endogenous Democratization,” *World Politics* 55 (July 2003): 517-549, at 535.

⁸ For example, first wave democratizers conceived of democracy as consistent with the restriction of suffrage based on property ownership and gender ownership whereas contemporary democratizers consider universal suffrage a non-negotiable criterion of democracy. Daniel Ziblatt, “How Did Europe Democratize,” *World Politics* 58:2 (January 2006): 333-335.

⁹ Laurence Whitehead, *Democratization: Theory and Experience* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Hall and Tilly argue that for complex, first order” macro-political phenomena such as ethnic conflict or economic development, it is probably best to shift toward a lower level of analysis - to “identify recurrent micro-level processes that contribute to such outcomes” - if one’s goal is to develop parsimonious causal hypotheses. See Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Reuschmeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 388. See also Michael Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012), 135.

Third, the central role of “choice and chance” in human affairs obliges modesty in theorizing about democratization.¹¹ Thanks to our capacity for reflexivity and learning from past experience there is no causal homogeneity in sequential episodes of human history.¹² Contingencies of space and time shape macro-political outcomes like democratization in ways that are not uniformly repeatable.¹³ And idiosyncratic characteristics of people in “high impact positions” – characteristics like charisma, persuasiveness, preferences, and social networks – can dramatically steer human affairs matters in unpredictable ways.¹⁴

In recognizing this complexity, the analysis that follows does not aim to reproduce the idiographic narratives that characterize history and “privilege full description.”¹⁵ Rather, the ambition is to embrace the “eclectic messy center” found at the juncture of history, theory, and politics¹⁶ and identify generalizable causal patterns that will usefully inform future choices of real world significance. In addition, the goal is to capture the tentativeness and possibility of political affairs before they become ossified in the determinism of retrospection. The divergent paths taken by Tunisia and Egypt were in no way carved in stone. But as the moment of their forking recedes in time, the possibility of a different outcome seems less and less apparent.

What follows then is an inductively-informed analysis of the dynamics of democratization in Tunisia and Egypt with ambition to draw some generalizable insights from the comparison of the two cases. The piece will explore a check-list of seven factors that have been emphasized by different generations of democratization theory to determine what best explains the divergent paths taken by

¹¹ Ian Shapiro, Ian and Sonu Bedi, eds., *Political Contingency* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 10-23.

¹² Herbert Kitschelt, “Accounting for Post-Communist Regime Diversity” in R. Markowski, ed., *Transformative Politics in Central Europe* (Warsaw: IP Pan Publishers, 2001), 52-53; Beissinger, 2009.

¹³ Susan Stokes, “Region, Contingency, and Democratization” in Shapiro and Bedi (2007), 171-182.

¹⁴ Kitschelt, “Accounting for Post-Communist Regime Diversity,” 53.

¹⁵ Hall, 2003, 378.

¹⁶ Atul Kohli, Peter Evans, et. al. “The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics,” *World Politics* 48:1 (October 1995): 1-49.

these two countries. (See Table 1). Briefly put, the piece argues that social-structural and mass cultural factors do not prove terribly useful in explaining this outcome. More helpful are approaches that focus on institutions (especially the character of the military), civil society, and leadership. Of ancillary importance are international factors and issues of temporality. This piece also identifies some of the scope conditions that shape the variable importance of aforementioned. Finally, the piece explores some of the distinguishing lessons of the Arab chapter of the fourth wave, lessons that should be added to the analytic arsenal that helps us understand democratization in all regions going forward.

Table 1: Utility of Check-listed Factors

	Explanatory of Tunisia/Egypt Divergence?
Socio-economic:	
Level of “modernization”	No
Class interest	No
Level of Economic Crisis	No
Level of Economic inequality	No
Mass values	
(As Measured by Public Opinion Polls)	No
Institutions	
Regime Structure	No
Endowment with Strong Ruling party	No
Prior Tradition of Routinized Elections	No
Politically Ambitious Military with “Non-Republican”	
Institutional culture	Yes
Civil society	
CSOs with sufficient autonomy/ popular grounding/normative commitment to democracy?	Yes
Leadership	
Credible, Prudent, Normatively-committed to Democracy	Yes
International	
Linkage	Ancillary
Leverage	Ancillary
Temporality	Ancillary

Democratic Success/Authoritarian Reversion in Tunisia and Egypt

To begin with a justification of the puzzle: On what basis do we gauge Tunisia to be a case of successful democratic transition and Egypt a case of authoritarian reversion? The concept of democracy is complex and multi-dimensional.¹⁷ But for the sake of simplicity this piece defines successful transition by falling back on convention: the “simple turn-over test.” Namely, democratic transition begins with the removal of an authoritarian regime and ends when free and fair competitive elections (made meaningful through provision of basic civil liberties) have delivered two successive alternations of power in government.¹⁸ Clearly transition so defined is eminently tentative and reversible: it falls far short of “consolidation.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, it constitutes a clear and laudable achievement. By contrast, authoritarian reversion refers to the process following authoritarian regime deposal, when a country attempts political opening but founders due to the failure of elections to deliver true alternation in power (or because civil liberties are so compromised as to make the elections a farce).

By these terms the respective success and failure of Tunisia and Egypt at the five-year mark (following the ouster of the dictator) seem pretty clear. By early 2016 Tunisia had experienced three free and fair competitive elections – two of them parliamentary and one presidential. These elections delivered governments headed by two different parties – the first, led by the Islamist party an-Nahda and the second led by the secular Nidaa Tunis party. Furthermore, in the post-authoritarian period

¹⁷ Michael Coppedge and John Gerring, et al. “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy.” *Perspectives on Politics* 9:2 (June 2011): 253-54.

¹⁸ Whitehead, “Democratization: Theory and Experience,” 26. Clearly, this minimalist definition of democratic transition falls far short of delivering a fully robust, liberal democracy which boasts the full complement of institutional foundations guaranteeing horizontal accountability, minority rights, and individual freedoms. But this definition of democratic transition delivers electoral democracy which is a start.

¹⁹ The markers of consolidation are imprecise and no regime is ever so “consolidated” as to be immune to breakdown. But following Linz and Stepan (1996, 5), the term “consolidated” is merited when democratic rules and procedures have become so routinized and internalized that democracy becomes “the only game in town” thereby significantly reducing the chances of breakdown.

Tunisia enjoyed civil liberties so robust as to be astonishing to anyone who had lived in the country during the Ben Ali period or prior.²⁰

By contrast, by 2016 Egypt had experience three parliamentary elections, two presidential elections, and three constitutional referenda. Despite all this electoral activity, the alternation in power witnessed in Egypt was not, first and foremost, the work of popular vote. Egypt's first democratically elected parliament was dissolved by the Supreme Constitutional Court in June 2012 (leaving Egypt without a parliament for 3.5 years). And its first democratically elected president (Mohamed Morsi, a leader in the Muslim Brotherhood movement) was removed by military force in July 2013. Following the military intervention, the popular elections of 2014-15 that delivered a new president, parliament, and constitution were conducted in a political context that could hardly be considered free and fair. Opposition forces were repressed and the media constrained to a degree unheard of even in the Mubarak era.²¹ Despite repeated electoral performances it was evident by 2016 that Egypt had reverted to authoritarian ways.

What accounts for this divergent trajectory?

Socio-Economic Factors

Among the most pedigreed theories of democratization are those that put socio-economic factors at the center of analysis. The modernization school, epitomized by Lipset's classic work,²² linked successful democratization with economic development due to the purportedly democratizing

²⁰ Laryssa Chomiak, "Five Years After the Tunisian Revolution," 20 January 2016, accessed at https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/POMEPS_Studies_18_Reflections_Web.pdf, 5 June 2016. Again, Tunisia five years on was hardly a perfect democracy, with significant deficits in the foundational underpinnings necessary to deliver horizontal accountability and rule of law. Nevertheless, Tunisia met the minimalist criteria of an electoral democracy required by our "turn-over test."

²¹ Wael Ali, "Takrir Rasmi: Hukuk al-Insan fi Misr," *Al-Masry al-Youm*, 2 July 2016; Michelle Dunne and Scott Williamson "Egypt's Unprecedented Instability by the Numbers" 24 March 2014, accessed at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/24/egypt-s-unprecedented-instability-by-numbers-pub-55078>, 5 June 2016.

²² "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, 53:1 (March 1959): 69-105.

impact of its correlates (such as increased literacy and urbanization).²³ By contrast, Marxist-inspired work linked the rise of democracy with *capitalist* economic development and the rise of social classes (alternatively the “bourgeoisie” or the working class) whose economic interests led them to champion political opening.²⁴ Other socio-economic research honed in on variables such as the incidence of economic crisis (viewed as hindering democratization by reducing the rents available to buy popular and elite support for political opening)²⁵ and high levels of inequality (viewed as hindering democratization by increasing elite fear about democracy’s possible redistributive consequences).²⁶

But despite the eminence of these approaches, socio-economic factors have proven less than fully satisfying in explaining the incidence of successful democratization. Modernization theory has been critiqued for decades because the causal mechanism it proposes, besides being underspecified, is largely agent-free and apolitical. Class-based analysis fills this agential lacunae by identifying social forces that have a tangible interest in championing democracy. But it falls short because of its (false) assumption that economic classes are sufficiently cohesive, self-conscious, and organized to constitute consistently effective political actors.²⁷ In addition, much class-based work assumes a configuration of class structure and class interest based on the experience of early democratizers which no longer holds true for late-comers to democratization.²⁸

²³ Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts,” *World Politics* 49:2 (January 1997): 155-183, at 177; Geddes, 2007.

²⁴ For example, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, et. al, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

²⁵ Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

²⁶ Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, *Economic Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Carles Boix, *Democracy and Redistribution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁷ Scott Mainwaring and Anibal Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorship in Latin America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11.

²⁸ The tendency of many late-comer developmentalist states to “sponsor” both private sector industrialists and organized labor (to foster economic growth and lock-in crucial political support) makes both social forces less

Other socio-economic approaches are also vulnerable to challenge. The claim that economic inequality undermines democracy has not been substantiated statistically²⁹ and the distributive conflict model of democratization – the foundation for Acemoglu, Robinson and Boix’s linkage of inequality to failed democratic transition – does not hold up to empirical analysis of third and fourth wave democratization.³⁰ As for the impact of economic crisis, while this is certainly not a boon for democratization, economic crisis has proven less devastating than expected. In Latin America, for example, the highest rate of democratic regime survival coincided with one of the region’s most dismal periods of economic performance (1982-2002).³¹

Equally damning for a purely socio-economic approach is the fact that, despite the robust correlation found between economic development and democracy, countless anomalies exist. In fact, a substantial number of poor countries have successfully transitioned to democracy³² and “nearly half of all low income democracies have survived.”³³ The experience of entire regions challenges an unqualified espousal of linkage between democracy and development. An analysis of Latin American politics in the 20th century finds that the level of economic development had no statistically significant effect on long term regime outcomes in the region.³⁴ And in post-communist Europe and Central Asia, political regime patterns proved underdetermined by level of socio-economic development.³⁵

likely to champion the political system’s transformation and advocate democratic reform. See Eva Bellin, “Contingent Democrats,” *World Politics* 52:2 (January 2000): 175-205.

²⁹ Kenneth Bollen and Robert Jackman, “Political Democracy and the Size Distribution of Income,” *American Sociological Review* 50 (1985): 438-457; Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 284.

³⁰ Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *Dictators and Democrats* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

³¹ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 287.

³² Larry Diamond, *Spirit of Democracy* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 27; Stephan Haggard and Robert Kaufman, “Democratization During the Third Wave,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016), 129.

³³ Haggard and Kaufman, *Dictators and Democrats*, 301-38.

³⁴ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*.

³⁵ Kitschelt, “Accounting for Post-Communist Regime Diversity,” 76.

Table 2: Distribution of Income in Egypt and Tunisia by Percentage Share

	Egypt (2008)	Tunisia (2010)
Lowest 20%	9.25	6.37
Second 20%	13.02	11.60
Third 20%	16.37	16.14
Fourth 20%	21.04	22.62
Highest 20%	40.32	42.92

Source: www.indexmundi.com (Compiled by World Bank, Development Research Group)

Some may be tempted to say that Tunisia’s affinity for democratization was stronger because, overall, its performance on several significant “modernization” indicators (literacy, urbanization, life expectancy) was better than that of Egypt. In fact, the countries’ differential on these indicators is smaller than one might think as shown in Table 2. Beyond this, the indeterminacy of Tunisia’s structural blessings is no better demonstrated than by cross-temporal analysis of the Tunisian case. Tunisia had already seriously experimented with democratic opening in 1987 when Ben Ali promised political opening after unseating the country’s autocratic founding father. Optimism was high given the country’s strong performance on many modernization indicators (literacy, urbanization, size of middle class). But in the end this optimism proved illusory and Tunisia’s social structural endowments proved inconclusive. Ben Ali steered Tunisia down an authoritarian track that lasted 23 years.⁴⁰

Table 3: Comparative Socio-Economic Indicators for Egypt and Tunisia

	Egypt	Tunisia
Adult Literacy (age 15 and older)*	75.2%	81.8%
Mean Years of Schooling (years)*	7.1	7.1
Life Expectancy at Birth (years)*	71.3	75
GDP per capita (2011 PPI \$)*	\$10,250	\$10,726
Population in Multi-dimensional Poverty (%)*	4.2	1.5
Population near Multi-dimensional Poverty (%)*	5.6	3.2
Employment in Agriculture (% of total employment)*	28	14.8

⁴⁰ Mark Gasiorowski, “The Failure of Reform in Tunisia,” *Journal of Democracy* 3:4 (October 1992): 85-97; Christopher Alexander, *Tunisia: Stability and Reform in the Modern Maghreb* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

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Employment in Services (% of total employment)*	47.9	51.5
Youth Unemployment (15-24)*	35.5	34.5
Mobile Phone Subscriptions (per 100 people)*	111	129.9
Internet Users (% of population)*	35.9	48.5
Urbanization (% of population in cities)**	43.1%	66.8%

Sources: * UN Human Development Report 2016 (<http://hdr.undp.org>)

**CIA Factbook (2015)

Mass Values/Mass Culture

Another pedigreed approach to the study of democratization links the prospects for successful democratic transition to the character of mass values and mass culture.⁴¹ Mass culture is a problematic concept, both philosophically and methodologically. Here I will limit reflection to work that conceives of mass culture as the aggregation of individual level attitudes and that relies on survey research to capture the national average of these.⁴² The underlying assumption of this approach is that successful democratization turns on the degree to which average citizens are committed to foundational democratic institutions/principles. This assumption drives studies by the World Values Survey project, the various Barometer projects, and the Pew Charitable Trust.

The problem is that this assumption is far from incontestable. Attitudes, even if correctly measured (*and that is a big if*), do not automatically translate into behavior. Pro-democratic leanings do not automatically translate into active advocacy for democratic institutions.⁴³ Moreover, in many cases the attitudes of the average citizen might matter very little in shaping a country's regime trajectory compared to the attitudes of powerful elites (for example, the military, the economically powerful).⁴⁴ Measuring the modal attitude of the general population may thus tell us very little about

⁴¹ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (New York: Sage, 1963). Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴² Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 228.

⁴³ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 289.

⁴⁴ Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 238.

the possibilities of regime change. In fact wide-ranging statistical analysis finds surprisingly low correlation between indices of support for democracy and countries' achievement of democracy.⁴⁵

Widespread embrace of democratic culture does not appear to be “a precondition for the initiation of democracy.”⁴⁶ This is evidenced powerfully in Latin America where Mainwaring and Perez-Linan find no temporal linkage between public opinion polls on democracy and change in regime type.⁴⁷ Many citizens in Latin America express utter indifference to democracy yet this has not undermined the region's sweeping democratization over the past 30 years.

In terms of explaining the divergent paths taken by Tunisia and Egypt, survey-based measures of mass values provide little leverage. The Arab Barometer studies of Egypt and Tunisia found that in 2011, 79% of Egyptians considered democracy the best system of government⁴⁸ compared to 70% of Tunisians.⁴⁹ Similarly, 98% of Egyptians considered democracy a good or very good fit for Egypt⁵⁰ while the average Tunisian considered democracy moderately suitable for Tunisia.⁵¹ The Pew Charitable found nearly equivalent support for democracy in the two countries in 2012, with Egypt slightly outperforming Tunisia (67% of Egyptians vs. 63% of Tunisians considered democracy to be the preferable form of government). Moreover, when asked whether they prioritized a strong economy or good democracy, 48% of Egyptians prioritized democracy while only 40% of Tunisians did.⁵²

⁴⁵ Inglehart, 2003, cited in Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 244.

⁴⁶ Larry Diamond, *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 423.

⁴⁷ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 2, 292.

⁴⁸ “The Arab Barometer Project: Arab Republic of Egypt,” June 2011, accessed at <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/arab-barometer-ii-egypt>, at 4, 5 June 2016.

⁴⁹ “Arab Barometer Report: Tunisia Five Years After the Revolution,” May 2016, accessed at <http://www.arabbarometer.org/content/arab-barometer-iv-tunisia-democracy-country-report> at 13-14, 5 June 2016.

⁵⁰ “Arab Barometer Project: Egypt,” at 6.

⁵¹ “Arab Barometer Project: Tunisia,” at 6.

⁵² “Most Muslims Want Democracy,” 18 July 2012, accessed at www.pewglobal.org, 5 June 2016.

In short, these surveys find similar levels of popular support for democracy in the two countries, with Egyptians, on average, showing somewhat more enthusiasm than Tunisians. And yet democratization proved more successful in Tunisia than in Egypt. Perhaps this somewhat paradoxical finding is just the consequence of measurement error due to misunderstanding of the term “democracy” by those polled. Or perhaps the flaw lies in the fact that public opinion polls are somewhat cursory indicators of mass values and so do not really plumb the meaning or robustness of the public’s commitment to democracy. Either way the mass values measured by such polls do not give us much leverage on the Egypt-Tunisia puzzle at hand.

Institutional Legacy

By the late 1990s, political institutions were identified as the “missing variable” in the study of regime change.⁵³ Increasingly political scientists emphasized the impact that a country’s prior institutional endowment had on its chances for democratization. Some focused on ever more refined typologies of *regime type*, arguing that the varied institutional profiles of authoritarian regimes – whether patrimonial or single party or militaristic or “post-authoritarian” – yielded consequentially different patterns of regime susceptibility to breakdown or consolidation.⁵⁴ Other scholars honed in on specific institutional practices such as the importance of (routinized) elections (viewed by Bratton and Vandewalle as salutary for democracy, even if imperfectly practiced) or specific political structures such as the presence of “ruling parties” (viewed by Gandhi⁵⁵ and Brownlee⁵⁶ as crucial to sustaining authoritarian regimes by managing elite disputes and loyalty and preventing elite defection

⁵³ James Mahoney and Richard Snyder, Rethinking Agency and Structure in the Study of Regime Change, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 34:2 (Summer 1999); 3-32.

⁵⁴ Linz and Stepan, 1995; Bratton and Vandewalle, 1997; Geddes, 1999.

⁵⁵ Jennifer Gandhi, *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ Jason Brownlee, *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

to the opposition). In short, political institutions were not merely the “epiphenomenal manifestation of macrostructural forces”⁵⁷ but rather had independent impact on regime outcomes.

Overlapping with this institutional turn is the work of scholars who focused on one branch of the state: the military. Among Latin Americanists, the central role of the military in shaping regime type has been “so obvious that no analyst could ignore it.”⁵⁸ Most crucial was the military’s propensity to intervene in politics and its willingness to defect from a failing authoritarian regime. Both were shaped by the military’s institutional profile, culture, and historic role, among other key variables.

Differential institutional endowment proves pivotal in explaining the divergent trajectories taken by Tunisia and Egypt. But not all of the above-mentioned institutional factors prove equally consequential. Regime type does not provide leverage given the similarity of the regimes found in both countries prior to the Arab spring. Both Tunisia and Egypt sustained “liberalized autocracies”⁵⁹ where “big men” ruled through the institutional facades of democracy but perverted them to the point of vacuousness. Nor do electoral institutions distinguish the two countries. Tunisia and Egypt both had histories of electoral rituals that were reliably regular but neither free nor fair. Nor does the presence of a substantial “ruling party” differentiate the countries. Both Tunisia and Egypt had ruling parties that commanded supermajorities in parliament and channeled significant stores of patronage to cultivate elite loyalty – yet neither parties prevented regime collapse.⁶⁰

But Tunisia and Egypt showed significant dissimilarity in one crucial institutional domain: the military. The militaries in the two countries were very different in terms of their scope, legacy of

⁵⁷ Mahoney and Snyder, “Rethinking Agency and Structure.”

⁵⁸ John Stephens, “The Contribution of Barrington Moore,” January 2013, accessed at www.compdem.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/APSA-CDJanuary-2013.pdf, 10 October 2016.

⁵⁹ Daniel Brumberg, “Democratization in the Arab World? The Trap of Liberalized Autocracy” *Journal of Democracy* 13:4 (October 2002): 55-68.

⁶⁰ Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak’s Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Brownlee, 2007.

political engagement, and corporate culture. This proved pivotal to the countries' susceptibility to authoritarian reversal after the popular uprisings of 2011. The character of the military constitutes the foremost factor in accounting for the countries' divergent trajectories.

In Egypt, the military commanded an outsized presence. In terms of manpower,⁶¹ expenditures,⁶² and the scope of its economic empire,⁶³ the military was enormous. (Estimates of the military's role in the Egyptian economy hover between 20-40%; it encompasses enterprises as diverse as bakeries, food and household goods manufacturing, real estate development, gas stations, nurseries, farms, and slaughterhouses).⁶⁴ Even more consequential was the matter of historical precedent. The military had played a commanding role in Egyptian politics ever since the Free Officers had ousted the monarchy in 1952. Every Egyptian president had been drawn from the officer corps⁶⁵ and no matter the efforts to contain its influence,⁶⁶ the military continued to exercise veto power in policy-making.⁶⁷ Egypt's geo-strategic position as a front line state in the Arab-Israeli conflict conferred perpetual stature on the Egyptian military. So did the military's success in

⁶¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance – 2010*.

⁶² Hazem Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen* (New York: Verso, 2012), 183.

⁶³ Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies*, 182; Shana Marshall and Joshua Stacher "Egypt's Generals and Transnational Capital" in David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers, eds., *Arab Revolts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 107.

⁶⁴ The scope of this empire mushroomed after Egypt's conclusion of the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. The Sadat and Mubarak regimes decided to make economic ventures an outlet for the redirection of military talent and ambition. The expansion of the military's economic ventures was privileged by the provision of state subsidies and legal exemptions as well as access to both free land and cheap labor (military recruits), among other factors. Zeinab Abul-Magd, "The Army and the Economy in Egypt" *Jadaliyaa* 23 December 2011; Safa Joudeh, "Egypt's Military: Protecting Its Sprawling Economic Empire," 29 January 2014, accessed at www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/egypt-s-military-protecting-its-sprawling-economic-empire, 5 June 2016.

⁶⁵ Augustus Richard Norton, "The Return of Egypt's Deep State" *Current History* 112:758 (December 2013): 337-340, at 338.

⁶⁶ Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies*, 40; Robert Springborg, "Democracy vs. Rule of Law" in Eva Bellin and Heidi Lane (eds.) *Building Rule of Law in the Arab World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Press, 2016); 90-91; Joshua Stacher, *Adaptive Autocrats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 60.

⁶⁷ Holger Albrecht and Dina Bishara, "Back on Horseback:" *Middle East Law and Governance* 3:7(2011): 13-23.

delivering on large infrastructural and development projects. The military also provided the regime with coercive backstop at critical moments.⁶⁸ This meant it could never be completely shunted aside politically.

The military's outsized presence begat an outsized self-conception and institutional culture. The military in Egypt saw itself as the "guardian of the nation," and the "ultimate...guarantor of national interest."⁶⁹ The officers "shared a general contempt for civilians"⁷⁰ - what Ashour calls a "superiority complex."⁷¹ This spelled a general distrust for democracy and an affinity for regime types where the military could exercise oversight.⁷² In short, the military's habits of mind left it extremely susceptible to authoritarian temptation during the period of 2011-2015.

When popular protests seriously challenged Mubarak's hold on power in January 2011 the military proved ambivalent at first - torn between the contradictory imperatives generated by its self-understanding, sense of mission, and institutional interests. On the one hand, the military's abiding distrust of (disorderly) popular movements pointed it toward repression of the uprising against Mubarak. On the other hand, the military's calculation of corporate interest spelled a degree of disaffection with the Mubarak regime and its perpetuation. For decades, Mubarak had favored the internally-focused security apparatus over the military, providing the police and the Ministry of Interior with superior resources and preferential political access (with the express intention to sideline

⁶⁸ Recall the Amn-al-Markazi Uprising of 1986.

⁶⁹ Hicham Bou Nassif "Coups and Nascent Democracies," *Democratization* (2016):157-74, at 159, 165; Nathan Brown and Yasser el-Shimy, "Did Sisi Save Egypt?", 26 January 2016, accessed at <http://ceip.org/1ZQHKb>, 5 June 2016.

⁷⁰ Springborg, "Democracy vs. Rule of Law," 103.

⁷¹ Omar Ashour, "Collusion to Crackdown," 5 March 2015, accessed at <https://www.brookings.edu/research/collusion-to-crackdown-islamist-military-relations-in-egypt>, 5 June 2016..

⁷² Nathan Brown and Yasser el-Shimy, "Did Sisi Save Egypt." See also Roll, "Managing Change," 32; Philippe Droz-Vincent "Prospects for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces," *Armed Forces and Society* 4 (2014): 696-723, at 703.

the military).⁷³ In addition, during the prior decade, Mubarak's son (and potential successor), Gamal, had spearheaded a host of neo-liberal economic reforms that threatened the position of the military's economic empire.⁷⁴ The military was thus ambivalent about the extension of the Mubarak regime and so failed to take decisive action during the first few days of uprising. Ultimately, however, the military's institutional mandate to stave off chaos seems to have persuaded the army leadership to step in.⁷⁵ Notably, the military did not intervene to save Mubarak. Rather, it intervened to re-establish order in Egypt and control the political process in ways that would secure the military's interests and prevent a popular free-for-all.⁷⁶

The military's authoritarian leanings were evident from the moment it took hold of power. When Hosni Mubarak resigned, the military leadership seized control of the executive and chose not to name a civilian as interim president. Following the country's first constitutional referendum, the SCAF signaled its contempt for civilian supremacy by declaring itself "the ultimate decision maker and manager of the transformation process."⁷⁷ To underscore its immunity from civilian oversight the military proclaimed the "Selmi Doctrine" awarding itself sole discretion over armed forces affairs as well veto power over the declaration of war.⁷⁸ Several months later the military undercut popular empowerment when it acquiesced to the High Court's invalidation of the newly elected parliament on technical grounds. By July 2012 the military took this popular disempowerment a step further,

⁷³ Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies*, 4, describes this as Egypt's metamorphosis from a military state to a police state, tracing origins of this shift as far back as the 70s. See also Stacher, *Adaptive Autocrats*, 7-8.

⁷⁴ For more on the complexity of the military's corporate interests see Roll, "Managing Change," 26 and Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies*, 188; 209-11. See also Hicham Bou Nassif, "Generals and Autocrats," *Political Science Quarterly* 130:2 (Summer 2015): 245-275, at 264 for a discussion of internal division by rank within the Egyptian military and how fragmented corporate interests shaped the military's stance in 2011.

⁷⁵ Roll, "Managing Change," 25.

⁷⁶ Marcus Meitzner, "Successful and Failed Democratic Transitions from Military Rule in Majority Muslim Societies" *Contemporary Politics* 20:4 (2014): 435-452; Kandil, *Soldiers, Spies*, 231; Eric Trager, *Arab Fall* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 206.

⁷⁷ Roll, "Managing Change," 27

⁷⁸ Mona El-Ghobashy, "Egyptian Politics Upended," 20 August 2012, accessed at www.merip.org/mero/mero082012, 5 June 2016.

seizing legislative power for itself.⁷⁹ And concerned about the profile of the likely winner of Egypt's first free and fair presidential election, the military issued a decree circumscribing much of the president's executive power.⁸⁰

In addition to tampering with the foundational institutions of democracy in this way, the military also embraced a repressive stance toward popular protest and committed extensive human rights violations in the name of restoring order.⁸¹ During the following two years, the military became increasingly disaffected with the government that was popularly elected in 2011-2012 and was ultimately led by Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood leader. Economic crisis persisted in Egypt, political chaos loomed (as protest activity did not abate), and national security concerns arose. (The avowed commitment of the Muslim Brotherhood to intervene in the Syrian conflict was perceived by the Egyptian military as reckless and Morsi's resistance to disciplining Hamas in Gaza was seen by the military as compromising Egypt's national interests).⁸² In view of government's troubled track record, it is not at all surprising that when Egyptians mobilized huge popular demonstrations in June/July 2013 calling for the deposal of Morsi, the military decided to step in. (In fact, there is some evidence that the military abetted the popular mobilization against Morsi, providing demonstrators with political, symbolic, and perhaps even material support).⁸³ On July 3rd, the military, led by Minister of Defense Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, deposed President Morsi, unilaterally named a civilian as acting president, and then proceeded to rule from behind the scenes. A year later, new presidential elections delivered Sisi a landslide victory. Under his leadership a new regime of even more

⁷⁹ Ashour, "Collusion to Crackdown," 16.

⁸⁰ Droz-Vincent, "Prospects for Democratic Control," 712.

⁸¹ Droz-Vincent, "Prospects for Democratic Control," 705; Human Rights Watch, 2011:11, cited in Roll, "Managing Change".

⁸² See Bou Nassif, "Coups and Nascent Democracies," 8, 10, 14 for an excellent dissection of the military's multi-faceted calculus as it contemplated intervention in 2013.

⁸³ Sheera Frenkel and Maged Atef, "How Egypt's Rebel Movement Helped Pave the Way for a Sisi Presidency." *BuzzFeedNews* 15 April 2014.

compromised civil liberties and repression followed, complete with a new constitution that guaranteed the untouchability of the military.⁸⁴ Within four years of the uprising, Egypt had witnessed a return to “electoral authoritarianism” in many ways more illiberal than what it had known before the uprising.⁸⁵

The contrast between the Egyptian and Tunisian military could not have been greater. The Tunisian military had always been small, whether measured in personnel or resources.⁸⁶ More importantly, its historic role has been very different. The military had never played a consequential role in Tunisian politics. It was the “product, not the progenitor” of Tunisian independence.⁸⁷ Tunisia’s geo-strategic location, far from the Arab-Israeli conflict, spared the country from routine engagement in foreign wars and deprived the military of an important path to clout and stature. Most importantly, both of Tunisia’s presidents embraced a strategy aimed at the military’s marginalization and political exclusion, starving it of resources and (unintentionally) encouraging it to develop an identity distinct from the regime in power.⁸⁸

Over time the Tunisian military developed an institutional culture and a sense of mission quite different from that found in Egypt. The Tunisian military was “republican” in that it was respectful of civilian control and committed to abiding by constitutional principles.⁸⁹ It focused on a limited

⁸⁴ Roll, “Managing Change,” 35.

⁸⁵ Note that under the new regime, the military carved out autonomy from civilian oversight for the military’s budget and military affairs generally. The new regime also advanced the military’s economic interests by awarding government contracts to military-controlled companies without competitive bidding (Roll, “Managing Change,” 36).

⁸⁶ Risa Brooks, “Subjecting the Military to the Rule of Law” in Bellin and Lane, “Building Rule of Law,” 117.

⁸⁷ James Gelvin cited in Brooks, “Subjecting the Military,” 116.

⁸⁸ Derek Lutterbeck. “Arab Uprisings, Armed Forces, and Civil-Military Relations,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 39:1 (2013): 28-52, at 34.

⁸⁹ Brooks, “Subjecting the Military,” 113;120; Hicham BouNassif, “A Military Besieged,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47:1 (2015): 65-87, at 68.

mandate – to defend the country from external threat – rather than a grandiose mission to reshape the country according to its own vision.

The military's history and self-conception proved crucial in determining the fate of Tunisia's popular uprising. The military's distance from the regime meant it had no corporate investment in the regime's survival and was free to make the political decision to allow the "revolution" to take its course.⁹⁰ Army Chief of Staff Rachid Ammar forbade his officers from shooting at the demonstrators and positioned army tanks and armored vehicles to provide protesters with protection from police gunfire.⁹¹ It was General Ammar who ultimately told Ben Ali "he was finished" and dispatched him to exile. Ammar then handed power to the constitutionally-designated civilian successor and returned to the barracks. The military left it to the fledgling government and civil society to negotiate a new constitution and representative system for Tunisia.⁹²

Equally important for Tunisia's transition to democracy was the military's stance two years later. In the summer of 2013 the Tunisian transition seemed on the verge of collapse. In the wake of the assassination of two leftist politicians, the deadlocking of the constitutional assembly, and the less than vigilant restraint of Islamic radicals by the Nahda-led government, popular disaffection erupted. 60 members of the constitutional assembly resigned from their posts and a coalition of political parties backed by 100,000 protestors gathered in Bardo Square demanding the dissolution of the assembly, the resignation of the government, and the replacement of both with teams of unelected technocrats.⁹³ This was a "coup d'etat" moment⁹⁴ and some activists approached the military to divine its willingness to intervene a la Egypt. The Tunisian military, however, signaled its unwillingness to

⁹⁰ Brooks, "Subjecting the Military," 121.

⁹¹ Lutterbeck, "Arab Uprisings," 35.

⁹² Chris Townsend, "Civil-military relations in Tunisia and Libya" *Journal of Defense Resources Management* 6:2 (2015): 5-12, at 8.

⁹³ Amel Boubekour, "Islamists, Secularists, and Old Regime Elites in Tunisia," *Mediterranean Politics* 21:1 (2016):107-127, at 117.

⁹⁴ Hela Yousfi, *L'UGTT, Une Passion Tunisienne* (Tunis: IRMC/Karthala, 2015), 224, FN 20.

provide a military solution to the crisis and the civilians were forced back on themselves to negotiate their way out.⁹⁵ The military's very distinct **corporate culture and self-understanding** played a major role in preventing it from responding to these triggers.⁹⁶

In the end the different character of the military in Egypt and Tunisia put the two countries on very different paths. In both cases, the militaries' disaffection with, and disinvestment in, the old regime persuaded the military to stand aside and permit popular mobilization to oust the dictator. In both cases, the militaries' institutional commitment to staving off chaos spelled military intervention to impose order. However, the different corporate culture and self-understanding of the two militaries (born of their different roles, historically, in both politics and the economy) led them to respond to similar political and economic turmoil in very different ways: The Egyptian military leaned authoritarian while the Tunisian military leaned democratic. This factor proved paramount in explaining the two countries' divergent trajectories as the military set the institutional parameters within which all other variables (civil society, leaders, etc.) came into play.

Civil Society

Political scientists have debated the indispensability of a vibrant civil society to successful democratization for more than three decades. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the discipline's enthusiasm for civil society seemed boundless, propelled by the dramatic role that dissident groups had played in dislodging dictatorship in Poland, the Philippines, and beyond. During this "neo-Toquevillian decade," major works credited civil society with the power to bring down authoritarian

⁹⁵ Sharan Grewal, "To Coup or Not to Coup," unpublished ms. 2016, 7; Sharan Grewal, "Why Tunisia Did Not Follow Egypt's Path," 6 November 2015, accessed at https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/POMEPS_BriefBooklet27_Tunisia_Draft31.pdf, 5 June 2016.

⁹⁶ Corporate culture was not solely responsible for the military's restraint. See Grewal 2016 and Sharan Grewal, "A Quiet Revolution: The Tunisian Military after Ben Ali," 24 February 2016, accessed at carnegiemec.org/2016/02/24/quiet-revolution-tunisian-military-after-ben-ali-pub-62780, 5 June 2016. for fascinating evidence of the political and economic measures taken by Tunisia's provisional government to disincentivize military intervention in politics. These included stacking the military with new leaders from previously disfavored geographic districts so that the military leadership had even less investment in restoring the old regime elite.

regimes, secure human rights, promote good governance, consolidate democracy, generate economic prosperity, mitigate ethnic conflict...⁹⁷ The discipline's enthusiasm for civil society got a further boost with the publication of Robert Putnam's work *Making Democracy Work* – a sensation in the field - which linked vibrant associational life with the construction of networks of trust and reciprocity. The resultant “social capital,” Putnam argued, was crucial to facilitating collective action and a culture of public responsibility – both important generators of good governance and accountability.

Inevitably, overweening enthusiasm for civil society invited backlash. By the late 1990s, articles touting “the dark side of civil society” began to appear, highlighting civil society's capacity to reinforce society's cleavages as much as bridge them, advance explicitly illiberal agendas, and even contribute to the rise of fascism.⁹⁸ Among Middle East specialists, skepticism about civil society became especially pronounced. The fact that so many civil society organizations were subject to state supervision and cooptation led them to become, in the words of Wictorowicz, “more an instrument of state control than a mechanism of collective empowerment.”⁹⁹ The typical CSOs' limited mandates, narrow constituencies, dependence on foreign funding, and shallow grass roots made them politically ineffective at advancing a democratic agenda.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, many of the associations reflected the political context in which they operated, meaning they were organized internally along authoritarian and clientelistic lines.¹⁰¹ As such they failed to advance democratic culture and instead tended to reinforce the hold of authoritarian regimes.

⁹⁷ Omar Encarnacion, “Civil Society Reconsidered.” *Comparative Politics* 38:3 (April 2006): 357-376, at 361.

⁹⁸ Ibid.; Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49:3 (April 1997): 401-429.

⁹⁹ Quintan Wictorowicz, “Civil Society as Social Control,” *Comparative Politics*, 33:1 (October 2000): 43-61.

¹⁰⁰ Vickie Langhor, “Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics,” *Comparative Politics* (January 2004): 181-204. Amy Hawthorne, “Is Civil Society the Answer?” in Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds. *Uncharted Journey* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Amaney Jamal, *Barriers to Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

But the discipline's volte-face from frenzy (for) to repudiation (of) civil society proved an injudicious overcorrection. Even if CSOs were not the fault-free panacea touted two decades ago it seems reasonable to argue that increased popular engagement in networks of common cause can help nurture civisme, a culture of compromise, and countervailing power that is essential to state oversight and accountability. Scholars of democratization are once again turning attention to civil society, especially because sparse structural analyses have proven to be inconclusive in accounting for observed patterns of democratic success and failure.¹⁰²

The presence of autonomous, popularly-anchored, and democratically-committed CSOs have proven especially crucial in navigating the treacherous shoals of transition that present themselves in the immediate wake of authoritarian regime breakdown. Two challenges in particular jeopardize this process: (a) the tendency of interim governments (especially those that include old regime remnants) to backtrack from democratic ideals before democratic institutions are set in place; and (b) the persistence of deep political divisions within society that then spell political deadlock and threaten chaos, creating a wedge for opportunistic enemies of transition to set the process in reverse.¹⁰³ Robust, democratically-committed CSOs can parry these challenges in two ways: first, by serving a watchdog function (holding the interim government's feet to the fire when it strays from democratic ideals) and second, by drawing on their cross-cutting social networks and past experience at negotiation and compromise to bridge deep social cleavages and prevent the deadlock of the political process.

The differential vigor of civil society in Tunisia and Egypt proved extremely consequential for the two countries' divergent paths. Or, to be more precise, the differential vigor of one particular element of civil society – organized labor – proved pivotal. In both countries, the overall muscularity of civil society had been undercut by the two states' early corporatist logic and persistent aversion to

¹⁰² Haggard and Kaufman, "Dictators and Democrats."

¹⁰³ Laura Landolt and Paul Kubicek, "Opportunities and Constraints," *Democratization*, 21:6 (2014): 986.

politically autonomous associations. Bourguiba, Ben Ali, Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak all resorted to a variety of measures to compromise the autonomy of CSOs including obligatory licensing, surveillance, infiltration, fragmentation, cooptation, and direct repression.¹⁰⁴ Under these conditions only a few associations sustained a modicum of independence and persevered in the fight for basic human rights and freedoms.¹⁰⁵ In this way, civil society was similarly hobbled in both countries. If anything, conditions were worse in Tunisia during the last decade prior to the uprisings since the Ben Ali regime proved even more repressive than that of Mubarak, crushing free speech and vitiating associational life wherever possible.

.But one organization did manage to remain robust and resilient in Tunisia despite the larger repressive context and that was the national trade union federation.¹⁰⁶ The UGTT was unusual among Tunisian CSOs for its size, stature, autonomy, mobilizational capacity, and internal pluralism. The UGTT claimed over 500,000 members and was anchored in every corner of the country through a huge network of local and regional offices. The UGTT proved able to retain some autonomy thanks to a number of factors: (A) the extraordinary political stature the trade union enjoyed thanks to the historic role it had played in the national independence movement and the constitutive role it had played in the state's own creation.¹⁰⁷ This anchored the organization all over the country in the 40s, 50s, and 60s; (B) the useful function that a trade union (with some legitimacy) could serve in "delivering" the working class in nation-wide corporatist negotiations over wages and working

¹⁰⁴ On Tunisia see Eva Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent," in Augustus Richard Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 128; 140; Christopher Alexander, "Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia" in David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers, "Arab Revolts," 34-37. On Egypt see Maha Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed*. (New York: I.B.Tauris 2004), 5, 93-137; Moheb Zaki, *Civil Society and Democratization in Egypt* (Cairo: Ibn Khaldoun Center, 1995), 44-54.

¹⁰⁵ In Tunisia these included the Tunisian League of Human Rights (LDTH), the Union of Tunisian Women Democrats (UFTD) and the Bar Association. In Egypt these included such organizations as the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Hisham Mubarak Law Center, and the Judges Club.

¹⁰⁶ Brilliantly described by Hela Yousfi, "L'UGTT."

¹⁰⁷ Dina Bishara, "Labor Movements in Tunisia and Egypt, 2014, accessed at [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C\)1_bishara.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2014C)1_bishara.pdf), at 6.

conditions; and, (C) the common cause that the UGTT leadership often made with the political elite – a pragmatism and reliability which in turn won the federation some political space. Truth be told, many of the most notable moments of defiant independence exhibited by the trade union movement over the past five decades had been driven from the bottom-up, with militants at the local and regional level forcing regime-cozy UGTT leaders to uphold workers' interests.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the UGTT's autonomy should not be seen as simply "granted" by the state; it was seized by workers who had sustained a history of activism that reached back to the colonial era.

The UGTT's near unique ability to escape the grip of the authoritarian state and retain a modicum of autonomy made it something of a "malja'a" (refuge), if not a magnet, for political activists of all stripes.¹⁰⁹ This nudged the trade union towards a political role beyond just defending the interests of the working class. Furthermore, the UGTT incorporated an extremely heterogeneous base. As a national federation, it brought together different geographic regions, different political tendencies (reformist to revolutionary), and different classes of society (workers, civil servants, even professionals). This heterogeneous composition forced the union to develop a culture of negotiation and consensus-building across difference and it led to building bridges of trust (forged through common cause) across important social cleavages. Finally, for over fifty years the trade union had followed democratic procedure in its internal governance (elections, secret ballots, etc.) and this inculcated a commitment to democratic practice that proved crucial later on.

Equipped with this culture and sense of mission, the UGTT played a central role in channeling popular legitimacy to steer the political arena away from authoritarian regress. When the interim leadership proved hesitant to remove some of the old guard from power, the UGTT joined with an alliance of 28 other associations to form the CNPR (National Council for the Protection of the

¹⁰⁸ Eva Bellin, *Stalled Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Yousfi, "L'UGTT," 62.

Revolution) to push through a leadership overhaul.¹¹⁰ When the interim government dithered over organizing elections for a constitutional assembly, the UGTT threw its weight behind the formation of an even larger consortium of social forces, the HIROR, which won the right to shape the terms and timing of Tunisia's first elections. When the constitutional assembly set to drafting a new constitution, CSO representatives of all stripes, including the UGTT, actively participated in the deliberation processes.¹¹¹ When religiously conservative elements in the assembly proposed an article touting the illiberal principle of "gender complementarity" (rather than gender equality), the UGTT joined with several feminist and liberal CSOs to mobilize thousands to protest in the streets of Tunis, forcing the retraction of this article. As evident from the above, the UGTT did not act alone in pushing this pro-democratic agenda. But it was the UGTT's popular heft that gave this alliance of CSOs their force and helped put in place the institutional foundations of democracy during the dicey critical juncture between authoritarian regime breakdown and new regime creation.

The UGTT's ability to tap into an alternative register of legitimacy¹¹² helped Tunisia through a second crucial challenge: maintaining societal unity sufficient to prevent political deadlock and sustain democratic momentum during this juncture. By summer 2013 Tunisian political society had become so deeply divided, primarily along secular-Islamist lines, that political deadlock, backed by massive popular disaffection, threatened to terminate Tunisia's transition.¹¹³ But then the UGTT stepped in. Drawing on its historical stature, political clout, and long experience with negotiating compromise, the UGTT presented itself as the "artisan of national dialogue."¹¹⁴ It joined with three

¹¹⁰ Boubekour, "Islamists, Secularists," 111. Anna Antonakis-Nashif, "Contested Transformation," *Mediterranean Politics* 21:1 (2016): 128-149, at 130.

¹¹¹ Duncan Pickard, "Lessons from Constitution-Making in Tunisia," 13 December 2012, accessed at www.atlanticouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/lessons-from-constitutionmaking-in-tunisia, 5 June 2016, at 3.

¹¹² "Popular" as opposed to "electoral" or "legalistic." Yousfi, "L'UGTT," 220; Sami Zemni, "The Extraordinary Politics of the Tunisian Revolution," *Mediterranean Politics* 20:1 (2015):1-17, at 4-5

¹¹³ Yousfi, "L'UGTT," 224; Boubekour, "Islamists, Secularists," 117-118.

¹¹⁴ Hatem Mrad, *National Dialogue in Tunisia* (Tunis: Nirvana., 2015).

other CSOs to form “the Quartet”¹¹⁵ and together they hosted and mediated prolonged sessions that brought together all of Tunisia’s major political tendencies to hammer out a consensus. Thanks to the tireless work of this quartet, the constitution was successfully completed, the terms of a new election assembled were set, and a national unity government composed of technocrats was created to replace the elected government. Dialogue fostered by civil society helped Tunisia through this perilous juncture and kept the transition momentum going.

In Egypt, by contrast, the labor movement was not in a position to rally other forces in society to spearhead or sustain the democratization process. Egypt’s trade union federation, the ETUF, lacked the autonomy, the stature, the legitimacy, and the mobilizational capacity that distinguished Tunisia’s trade union movement. In contrast to the UGTT, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation was the creation (not the creator) of the post-independence state. It had been established by Nasser in 1957 as a tool to control the working class and had been subjected to a “corporatist straightjacket.”¹¹⁶ The state employed a host of legal, financial, and repressive means to assert top-down control within the ETUF. The latter came to be seen as an extension of the state rather than an organization representing workers’ interest and thus lacked credibility with the rank and file.¹¹⁷ To the extent that Egypt saw labor activism (and in fact Egypt saw a surprisingly high level of labor protests and strikes in the decade prior to the uprising) these were largely wildcat in nature or organized by independent activists at the local level; they were not the work of the ETUF.¹¹⁸

Stuck in this corporatist logic, the ETUF had neither the power nor the inclination to step up as watchdog or bridge-builder during the precarious transition period. This void proved calamitous

¹¹⁵ The Bar Association, the Human Rights League, and UTICA.

¹¹⁶ Bishara, “Labor Movements,” 2; Marsha Pripstein-Posusney, *Labor and the State in Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 11.

¹¹⁷ Pripstein-Posusney, “Labor and the State,” 80-126; Joel Beinin, *Workers and Thieves* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 74.

¹¹⁸ Beinin, “Workers and Thieves.”

because Egypt faced challenges familiar to all transitioning countries: (a) the presence of some less-than-democratically-committed elites who equivocated over the installation of foundational democratic institutions, and (b) the presence of deep division within political society that threatened political chaos and created an opening for intervention by opportunistic anti-democrats.

In Egypt, the absence of a robust civil society hobbled the formulation of basic democratic institutions (electoral rules, constitution). Early on the military “struck a deal” with the Muslim Brotherhood and largely excluded other civil society forces from the process of institution building. The result was (a) an interim constitution that privileged the power of the military; (b) an election sequence that empowered non-liberal elements in parliament before a constitution could be agreed upon, and (c) the creation of a constituent assembly tasked with writing a constitution that was in no way inclusive of the country’s diverse political tendencies. In Tunisia similar deviations from a liberal/democratic course had been “corrected” thanks to the coordinated intervention of civil society forces backed by the hefty UGTT. But in Egypt, non-Islamist and revolutionary elements in society lacked the organizational muscle to force attention to their views. Instead they opted for random protests and a “passive aggressive” approach: boycott.¹¹⁹ But boycotting failed to “hold the regime’s feet to the democratic fire” as new political institutions were constructed.

Second, deficiencies in civil society meant there were few organizational networks available to bridge the deep cleavages that came to plague Egypt. As in Tunisia, Egypt found itself on the brink of political abyss due to irremediable division between Islamists and non-Islamists. In June 2013, egged on by economic crisis, rising crime, and an ineffective government identified with a theocratic agenda, a popular movement called Tamarod brought millions into the street, calling for the deposal

¹¹⁹ Mustafa al-Naggar, “Limatha Insihabna Min Intihabat al-Ta’asissiya,” *Al-Masry Al-Youm* 25 February 2012.

of the Muslim Brotherhood government.¹²⁰ In contrast to the Tunisian case, however, Egypt lacked CSOs with experience, stature, credibility, or will sufficient to foster dialogue and negotiate a way through this divide. Foreign figures attempted to step in without success.¹²¹ The resulting stalemate and threatening chaos created an irresistible invitation for the military to intervene and end Egypt's experiment with transition.

Leadership (Molded by Elite Values and Vision)

Over the years, scholars of democratization have assigned varying importance to the role of individual agency and leadership in democratization. In the 1960s and 1970s structuralists such as Moore and O'Donnell considered the impact of individual leaders largely eclipsed by the force of structural imperatives (or worse, they considered them simply epiphenomenal). In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, when a surprising number of structurally-deficient countries managed to transition to democracy, a new generation of "transitologists" emerged, embracing a "voluntarist turn" and emphasizing the importance of elite choice, commitment, and strategy.¹²² Then in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as transition rates slowed and many new democracies relapsed to authoritarianism, the field once again reverted to structural pessimism.¹²³

For many political scientists, leadership-centered analysis is inherently suspect for two reasons. First, a focus on leadership is rejected as intrinsically "a-theoretical" because leadership - driven as it is by uniquely idiosyncratic characteristics such as the leader's charisma, persuasiveness,

¹²⁰ "Harakat "Tamarod" Tajma'a Akthar Min 22 Million Tawkiya....," accessed at <https://amp.france24.com/ar/20130629>, 5 June 2016.

¹²¹ Bernadino Leon, special envoy of the EU attempted to negotiate reconciliation to no avail. The ETUF threw its weight fully against Morsi.

¹²² O'Donnell and Schmitter, Gabriel de Palma, Terry Karl, are among the notables. See Mojtaba Mahdavi, "Rethinking Structure and Agency in Democratization," *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory* 1:2 (December 2008): 142-160, at 143.

¹²³ Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999), 114. Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13:1 (January 2002): 5-21.

social networks, and preferences¹²⁴ - is nearly impossible to predict. Second, focusing on leadership is rejected because it is perceived as mistakenly “myopic,” exaggerating the importance of “short-term micro-causes” because its viewpoint is “too close in.”¹²⁵ A more Olympian perspective (fostered by a longer time horizon) would reveal the predominance of more consequential and enduring structural factors.

But neither objection proves wholly convincing. Difficulty in theorizing a factor does not, in and of itself, eliminate its causal significance. And short-term “micro-causes” may have far-reaching consequences if they present themselves at pivotal moments where structural conditions (whether institutional or socio-economic) are in serious flux.¹²⁶ A number of scholars, including Karl, Linz, Stepan, Snyder, and Mahoney have advocated a middle ground arguing that the role of individual agency should be recognized but not seen as acting in a vacuum. They advocate theorizing about the ways in which structure *constrains* agency¹²⁷ or, alternatively, the way structure *enables* agency through the provision of resources.¹²⁸ To this author’s knowledge a robust and parsimonious theorization of this interplay has yet to be fully parsed with regard to democratization.

Without doubt the role of leadership is important in democratic transition because, as Whitehead argues, democratization is “partially a normative process of social construction” that turns on “persuasion, deliberation and generation of consent.”¹²⁹ In essence, democratization “institutionalizes uncertainty” by “subject(ing) all interests to competition.”¹³⁰ People must be

¹²⁴ Katherine Adeny and Andrew Wyatt, “Democracy in South Asia,” *Political Studies* 52:1 (March 2004): 1-18, at 5.

¹²⁵ Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 120-21.

¹²⁶ Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Keleman, “The Study of Critical Junctures,” *World Politics* 59:3(April 2007): 341-369.

¹²⁷ Terry Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America” *Comparative Politics* 23:1 (October 1990): 1-21, at 1,7.

¹²⁸ Mahoney and Snyder, “Rethinking Agency.”

¹²⁹ Whitehead, “Democratization: Theory and Experience,” 34, 65.

¹³⁰ Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14.

persuaded to embrace this gamble, especially constituencies with veto power such as the military, the business community, and the “street.”¹³¹ To persuade these constituencies one must “limit their fear of loss,”¹³² assure key players that their core interests will not be violated and that democracy is not a “one shot game of survival or destruction (but instead) an iterated game of incremental gains and losses.”¹³³

To accomplish this, as experienced “transitologists” have long pointed out, all sides must, “moderate demands, build consensus, and adopt a gradualist timetable.”¹³⁴ And essential to fostering this process are individual leaders, sober and conciliatory, capable of exercising restraint and committed to brokering compromise and building trust across the political divide. Close-in examination of many cases of successful transition have revealed the indispensable role played by such leaders including King Carlos in Spain, Maro Soares in Portugal, Mandela and de Klerk in South Africa.¹³⁵ Their efforts defused societal polarization and prevented the political stalemate that invites authoritarian forces to reverse course from transition.

In the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, the differential presence of credible, prudent leaders, normatively committed to democracy and invested in building bridges across deep political divides, was crucial to explaining the countries’ divergent trajectories. In contrast to many other transitioning countries, the most polarizing cleavage was cultural – Islamist vs. non-Islamist – rather than ethnic or socio-economic. In the absence of leaders on both sides committed to “playing the long game” and forging consensus, transition was in serious jeopardy.

In the Tunisian case, luckily, both the Islamist and non-Islamist camps had key leaders who “fit the bill.” Most extraordinary was the leadership that came to the fore in the Islamist camp. Rachid

¹³¹ These constituencies command, respectively, the power of the gun, capital, and public order.

¹³² Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization.”

¹³³ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 119.

¹³⁴ Karl, “Dilemmas of Democratization.”

¹³⁵ Diamond, *Spirit of Democracy*, 4-5.

Ghannouchi, the founder of Tunisia's leading Islamist movement, had made his name since the 1970s as a "moderate" Islamist. He had long preached the compatibility of Islam and democracy and had argued for a pragmatic cosmopolitan interpretation of Islam that (he argued) was authentically and particularly Tunisian.¹³⁶ After 22 years as a political refugee in London, he returned to Tunisia in the wake of the uprising and took up his moderate message again, pushing tirelessly for democratization. He rejected a "majoritarian" conception of democracy (against Ennahda's own interests) and argued that consensus had to be sought in drafting a new constitution and electoral law. He recognized the importance of playing the "long game" and reined in the political and cultural ambitions of his base in order to reassure the non-Islamist camp and secure the installation of democratic institutions.

Evidence of Ghannouchi's prudence (and Ennahda's restraint) is abundant. Although Ennahda won a (43%) plurality of seats in the first freely elected parliament, Ghannouchi did not push his advantage but rather worked to build political consensus with opposing forces. Ennahda began by forming a coalition government with two other leading (non-Islamist) parties. It made important concessions to non-Islamists in the drafting of the constitution: backing off from the ambition to make "sharia" the declared basis of law, abandoning an effort to declare blasphemy illegal, and jettisoning its preferred concept of "gender complementarity" in favor of the more liberal "gender equality." The party agreed to an electoral law that embraced the logic of proportional representation as well as the creation of a mixed presidential-parliamentary system of government even though a first-past-the post, parliamentary system would have been more to Ennahda's advantage. Ennahda chose not to field a presidential candidate in both 2011 and 2014 to avoid the impression that it was seeking to dominate all branches of government. And perhaps most critically,

¹³⁶ Azzam Tamimi, *Rachid Ghannouchi: A Democrat Within Islamism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

in late 2013, in the wake of severe popular crisis and on the edge of transition breakdown, Ennahda agreed to relinquish the office it had fairly won through popular election. This was part of the deal made to get a constitution ratified. Repeatedly, Ennahda surrendered electoral muscle to build bridges across a deeply polarized society.

This is not to say that Ennahda was completely accommodating to, or fully trusted by, the non-Islamist camp. To the contrary, non-Islamists were furious with the Ennahda-led government for its less-than-vigilant policing of Islamist radicals. They were suspicious of Ennahda's power grab - its appointment of heads of the national media without broad consultation and its award of numerous governmental posts to fellow party members.¹³⁷ They were alarmed by the increasing Islamization of the public sphere as evidenced by the closure of "unseemly" art exhibits and the prosecution of atheistic bloggers. Nonetheless, Ennahda's concessions on key issues ultimately proved sufficient to keep the transition process on track.

Ghannouchi's leadership was critical to this momentum. A significant portion of Ennahda's base, especially its younger members, opposed the party's concession on the grounds that they were "anti-democratic" and unIslamic.¹³⁸ Many in the rank and file criticized the leadership for being too conciliatory towards its opponents.¹³⁹ To bring them in line Ghannouchi had to tap his charisma, his authority, his seniority as the founder of the movement. And when that failed, Ghannouchi did not shrink from using strong arm tactics, threatening some conservative MPs, for example, with the loss of their seat in the next elections, if they did not fall in line.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists," 114.

¹³⁸ Monica Marks, "How Egypt's Coup Really Affected Tunisia's Islamists," POMEPS Brief 3/16/2015; Boubekeur, "Islamists, Secularists," 114, 115

¹³⁹ Anouar Boukhars, "The Reckoning," 02 April 2015, accessed at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/02/reckoning-tunisia-s-perilous-path-to-democratic-stability-pub-59571>, June 5 2016; Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism* (St. Martin's Press, 2016), 183-186.

¹⁴⁰ Sharan Grewal, "Pathways of Moderation in Tunisia's Ennahda," unpublished ms. September 2016, 12. Hamid, "Islamic Exceptionalism," 187.

The presence of credible leadership committed to democracy and compromise was not limited to the Islamist camp. On the non-Islamist side, Houcine Abbassi, Secretary General of the UGTT, also fit this profile. Abbassi had long experience negotiating compromises and bridging deep political divides in his decades of union activism. His passion and perseverance in organizing the National Dialogue and hammering out consensus during its brutally long sessions proved pivotal to the Tunisia's successful emergence from polarizing crisis at the time.¹⁴¹ Abbassi, in league with leaders from UTICA, the Bar Association, and Ennahda, succeeded in negotiating the compromises necessary to get a constitution signed, election rules defined, and the path to democratic alternation cleared.

In Egypt, by contrast, such blessings of leadership were not present in either the Islamist or non-Islamist camps. With regard to the Islamist camp, free and fair elections had delivered the presidency to MB leader Mohamed Morsi. In contrast to Ghannouchi, Morsi's commitment to democratic values was far more ambiguous, centered largely on the principle of "electoral majoritarianism" and dodgy on the embrace of liberal values or minority rights. In contrast to Ghannouchi, Morsi did not come from the progressive wing of his Islamist camp; he had made his name in the Muslim Brotherhood as a hardliner and an enforcer of the old guard's conservative line.¹⁴²

Morsi proved suspicious of outsiders, reluctant to compromise on his Islamist agenda, and concerned, preeminently first and foremost, about holding on to power. His inclinations were reinforced by the long-ingrained organizational culture of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt - deeply

¹⁴¹ Sarah Chayes, "How a Leftist Labor Union Help Force Tunisia's Political Settlement," 27 March 2014, accessed at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/27/how-leftist-labor-union-helped-force-tunisia-s-political-settlement-pub-55143>, at 5 June 2016; "L'Exception Tunisienne" (Full Report in French) 5 June 2014, accessed at <https://crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/tunisia/tunisian-exception-success-and-limits-consensus>, June 5, 2016, at 4 (FN 16).

¹⁴² Trager, "Arab Fall," 225, 77-79

hierarchical, conservative, insular, and distrustful of dissent¹⁴³ as well as by the larger political context in Egypt – confronting serious competition from both the Islamic “left” (charismatic leaders like Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh and the Wasat Party) and the Islamic “right” (Salafis won 25% of the vote in Egypt in 2012).¹⁴⁴ Given Morsi’s paramount concern to ensure the survival of the Muslim Brotherhood as an institution, these two factors led him to make choices read as uncompromising, non-inclusive, and power hungry.

The polarizing policies adopted by Morsi (and the MB party generally) are by now canonical. The MB failed to abide by its promise to “participate not dominate” the parliamentary elections of 2012 and field candidates for fewer than 50% of the seats. Once the MB won a plurality of seats in parliament it seized the lion’s share of committee chairs, justifying this power grab on the grounds that “the people have spoken.”¹⁴⁵ The MB used their plurality in parliament to elect a constituent assembly dominated by Islamists, rejecting the view that the assembly ought to “reflect a broad consensus of different political and civil groups” and arguing that any compromise of their own dominance would “infringe on the public will.”¹⁴⁶ During the presidential elections the MB reneged on its promise not to field a candidate (presumably for fear of losing its organizational coherence and part of its base to the charismatic, progressive Islamist upstart Aboul Foutouh).¹⁴⁷ Once elected, Morsi backtracked on his famous Fairmont Hotel promise to govern inclusively, including far fewer non-Islamists in his cabinet than promised.¹⁴⁸ In November 2012, concerned that the judiciary would dissolve the Islamist-dominated constitutional assembly he meant to convene, Morsi declared his decrees above judicial review, exuding a whiff of near dictatorial ambition. A constitutional rewrite

¹⁴³ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, *The Muslim Brotherhood* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) 126-30; 285. Trager, “Arab Fall,” 192.

¹⁴⁴ Trager, “Arab Fall,” 3-4.

¹⁴⁵ Trager, “Arab Fall,” 101, 114.

¹⁴⁶ Wickham, “The Muslim Brotherhood,” 193.

¹⁴⁷ Trager, “Arab Fall,” 128.

¹⁴⁸ Trager, “Arab Fall,” 143; Bou Nassif, “Coups and Nascent Democracies,” 12.

was rushed through in two days, a snap referendum of the constitution was held in two weeks, a majoritarian fait accompli was delivered to evade judicial (or military) restraint.¹⁴⁹ The list goes on...¹⁵⁰

As Brown says, Morsi proved utterly tone deaf to the concerns of the non-Islamist camp, unwilling or unable to reassure them even rhetorically that this experiment in democracy would not lead them to suffer permanent losses.¹⁵¹ Morsi's intransigence signaled the threat of theocracy and autocracy and fueled polarization in the country. This, combined with the stress of persistent economic crisis (shortages of gas, electricity, bread) and pervasive disorder (never ending protests and strikes; rising crime rates), led millions to come out into the streets and demand Morsi's removal – an invitation the military ultimately could not resist.

The lack of bridge-building leadership plagued the non-Islamist/secular opposition camp in Egypt as well. At various points Morsi did make small gestures toward inclusion of non-Islamist elites, but these gestures were largely rebuffed. When non-Islamist leaders were invited to join the constitutional assembly (as minority members) or to serve in Morsi's cabinet, many chose to withdraw rather than engage.¹⁵² When Morsi made gestures toward inclusion of opposition figures in the face of demonstrations late June 2013, his overtures were rejected by the non-Islamist camp which "didn't believe (it) had to negotiate anymore."¹⁵³ Rather than compromise and collaborate, these leaders preferred to turn to the military to eject Morsi and impose order on the country by force.

As the Tunisia-Egypt comparison suggests, leadership does not emerge in a vacuum. Institutional context, historical experience, and "learning" all come into play. The fact that

¹⁴⁹ Wickham, "The Muslim Brotherhood," 294.

¹⁵⁰ Trager, "Arab Fall," 169, 191-192, 197, 225.

¹⁵¹ Nathan Brown, "Egypt's Failed Transition." *Journal of Democracy* 24:4 (October 2013): 45-58.

¹⁵² Wael Haddara, "Egypt Narratives," 27 July 2013, accessed at <http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/Egypt%20briefing%2027%20july%202013.pdf>.

¹⁵³ Trager, "Arab Fall," 220.

International Factors

By the mid-1990s a new “family of hypotheses” emerged in the study of democratization, now focused on international factors.¹⁵⁴ Conquest, sanctions, conditionality, persuasion, and modeling across international boundaries all attracted scholarly attention. The “neighborhood effect” of democratic diffusion in Latin America, the fall of authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe (triggered by the end of Soviet sponsorship), the turn to democracy by Panama, Grenada, and Haiti (under the pressure of American occupation), the tentative embrace of democracy by sub-Saharan countries (nudged by debt crisis and conditional international assistance) – all pointed to the importance of international variables in democratization.

One of the most sophisticated contributions to this new trend was put forward by Levitsky and Way.¹⁵⁵ They argued that much of the international pressure for democracy was mediated through two channels: linkage and leverage. Linkage referred to “the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross border flows (of trade, investment, people, and communication)” that existed between the given country and Western democracies. Leverage referred to the degree to which the government of a given country was “vulnerable to external democratizing pressure” (for example, through aid dependency, insignificance as a security ally, etc.). Levitsky and Way argued that where Western linkage and leverage was low, as in many countries in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union, the effectiveness of international pressure to democratize would be weak. By contrast where Western linkage and leverage was high, the reverse would be true.¹⁵⁶

Despite this newfound emphasis on international variables, few scholars assert the preeminence of international factors over domestic ones in driving democratization. The general consensus remains that democracy must be largely homegrown to survive. It cannot simply be

¹⁵⁴ Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Steve Levitsky and Lucan Way, “Linkage vs. Leverage,” *Comparative Politics* 38:4 (July 2006): 379-400.

¹⁵⁶ Levitsky and Way, “Linkage vs. Leverage,” 379-80.

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¹⁵⁶ Levitsky and Way, “Linkage vs. Leverage,” 379-80.

imposed from outside. Nevertheless, in close cases, as Coppedge, Carothers, and Whitehead argue, international pressures “may tip the balance toward democracy.”¹⁵⁷

International factors clearly played a role in steering Tunisia and Egypt along divergent trajectories. Although the two countries were similar in that they shared a common neighborhood, they varied in terms of their linkage and leverage vis-a-vis Western democracies. More important, at a pivotal moment in the transition process, the two countries faced very different international financial incentives that steered them in different directions.

Linkage and leverage both favored a more democratic outcome in Tunisia than in Egypt. Linkage-wise: Tunisia had strong cultural, social, and economic ties with Europe, especially France.¹⁵⁸ The major share of Tunisia’s trade was with the European Union. A significant number of Tunisians migrated back and forth for both educational and economic opportunities. And nearly all educated Tunisians were bilingual, proficient in either French or English as well as Arabic. By contrast, Egypt was more remote from the West, geographically, culturally, and economically. Its trade relations were more diversified (with non-democracies like Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia constituting major trade partners along with Western countries).¹⁵⁹ Fluency in a language other than Arabic was rarer. And the vast majority of migrant workers from Egypt had historically headed for Libya and the oil rich Gulf, not Western democracies.¹⁶⁰

Leverage-wise: in both countries authoritarian forces could push back against democratic meddling by Westerners on the grounds that their hold on power provided a bulwark against Islamic radicalism and terror. But Western leverage over Egypt was weaker given the much more central role

¹⁵⁷ Coppedge, *Democratization and Research Methods*, 91.

¹⁵⁸ Landolt and Kubicek, 2013, 995; <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/egy/>

¹⁵⁹ <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/egy/>

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.mei.edu/content/remittances-egyptian-migrants-overview>

that Egypt played the US's regional security strategy as a counterweight against Iran and guarantor of peace with Israel.¹⁶¹

But even more important, it was divergent financial incentives dangled at a critical juncture in the transition process that steered the two countries in different directions. In June 2013, when political polarization peaked in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates signaled that they would bail out Egypt's faltering economy if the military stepped in and forcibly deposed the Muslim Brotherhood. Twenty four hours after the coup these countries came through with pledges of \$12 bn in financial assistance, rescuing Egypt from insolvency.¹⁶²

By contrast, when Tunisia faced a similar crisis point in late summer 2013, international forces such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the United States made clear that their financial support was contingent on the willingness of polarized forces to engage in dialogue, draft an electoral law and a constitution, and hold elections within the year – that is, proceed with the transition process.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹Meitzner, "Successful and Failed Democratic Transitions," 447.

¹⁶² Trager, "Arab Fall," 232, Yezid Sayigh, "Chasing Egypt's Economic Tail" 21 January 2016, accessed at <http://carnegie-mec.org/2016/01/21/chasing-egypt-s-economic-tail-pub-62546>, 5 June 2016. This financial assistance to the Sisi-led regime only increased over the next three years. By the summer of 2016 the combined pledges from Saudi, Kuwait, and the UAE had amounted to approximately \$60 billion, "roughly equivalent to a yearly average of 20% of government expenditures." Ruth Hanau Santini and Kevin Koehler, "Bankrolling Containment," 22 August 2016, accessed at www.pomeps.org/2016/08/22, 5 October 2016.. This financial assistance came in multiple forms: cash grants, oil shipments, foreign direct investment (both public and private sourced), and loans. See "Saudi Arabia Comes to the Rescue of the Egyptian Economy" April 2016, accessed at www.geopoliticalmonitor.com 5 June 2016. Other support came in the form of rhetorical diplomatic backing and the continuation of joint military exercises.

¹⁶³ Boubekour, "Islamists, Secularists;" Yousfi, "L'UGTT," 227. Why did states like Saudi Arabia take an interest in supporting Egypt's return to autocracy and retreat from a popularly elected Islamist government but showed no interest in pursuing the same agenda in Tunisia? Oisin Tansey, Kevin Koehler, and Alexander Schmotz insightfully address this issue in their piece "Ties to the Rest: Autocratic Linkage and Regime Survival" CPS 50:9 (August 2017): 1221-1254. Briefly, they argue that linkage on four dimensions – trade, migration, diplomatic ties, and geographic proximity – determines whether one autocratic regime will support another. These linkages were very strong between Saudi Arabia and Egypt but quite weak between Saudi Arabia and Tunisia. In addition, Saudi Arabia had never sustained joint military training/cooperation with Tunisia (as it had with Egypt) and Saudi Arabia considered Tunisia as a "peripheral player" in the

Neither linkage, leverage, or financial incentives alone can account for the outcomes observed in Tunisia and Egypt. But these international factors constituted one more factor incentivizing different trajectories for the two countries.

Timing

Finally, since the aughts, the discipline has paid increasing attention to the temporal dimension of politics.¹⁶⁴ The significant impact that sequencing, conjuncture, strategic interaction, and the self-reinforcing mechanisms of path dependence have on political outcomes all suggest that “timing matters” in politics. Political scientists who embrace this “historical turn” do not aim to mimic historians and divine the rich particularities that render each political event unique.¹⁶⁵ Still, they acknowledge the temporal dimension in human affairs even as they reach for generalizable causal hypotheses about politics.

In explaining the divergent trajectories taken by Tunisia and Egypt, the question of timing proves key. Of consequence is the timing of the two country’s moment of high crisis. As discussed above, ever increasing political polarization led to popular calls to terminate the democratic experiment in both Egypt and Tunisia. A key difference, however, was that Egypt’s crisis exploded first. In Egypt the standoff came to a head in June 2013 and ended in a military coup. In Tunisia the crisis peaked two months later.

As stressed by Ghannouchi himself, the timing of these events proved consequential. The disastrous turn of events in Egypt persuaded Ennahda leaders to make painful compromises to prevent a similar authoritarian reversal in Tunisia. This included compromises in the text of the constitution, the timing of elections, and the agreement to cede power to a government of

struggle over Islamist activism. Consequently, Saudi Arabia responded to Tunisia’s ouster of Ben Ali and subsequent elections of an Islamist-led coalition government with “benign disinterest.” See also Santini and Koehler, “Bankrolling Containment.”

¹⁶⁴ See Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Pierson, “Politics in Time,” 4.

“technocrats.” The Egyptian precedent, in other words, convinced Ennahda leaders to “play the long game” (as Egypt’s Morsi had refused to do) and thus keep the democratic experiment going forward.¹⁶⁶

Scope Conditions, General Lessons, and Implications for the Arab World

So far this essay has drawn on a check list of factors derived from 40 years of democratization research to explain the divergent outcomes witnessed in Egypt and Tunisia post 2011. From our analysis it is clear that the character of the military, civil society, and leadership proved to be the most important factors in explaining the puzzle of Egyptian and Tunisian divergence.

But can we go beyond cracking a curious empirical puzzle and use our analysis to yield more generalizable lessons about democratization? The study of the Tunisian and Egyptian cases may yield some modest insight into the scope conditions that govern a number of democratization’s check-listed stimuli, highlight the distinctive lessons of the Arab region’s experimentation with democratization, and suggest some implications for further democratization in the Arab world.

With regard to scope conditions, the paired comparison of Tunisia and Egypt confirms a number of truisms about when certain factors “matter” for democratization. The experience of the two cases confirms that for middle income countries, structural factors such as level of economic development prove less decisive in shaping successful transition to democracy than other factors such as elite commitment and institutional endowment. The Tunisian and Egyptian comparison also confirms that mass commitment to democratic values (at least as measured by public opinion polls) seems less crucial than elite commitment when it comes to the short-term objective of democratic transition. Time frame may also govern which institutional endowments matter most for

¹⁶⁶ Hamid, “Islamic Exceptionalism,” 181; Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). For a different take on temporality and learning, emphasizing the Algerian (rather than Egyptian) precedent, see Monica Marks, “Did Egypt’s Coup Teach Ennahda to Cede Power?” 22 July 2016 accessed at <https://pomeps.org/2016/07/22/did-egypts-coup-teach-ennahda-to-cede-power/>, 5 October 2016.

democratization. For the shorter term goal of setting in place democratic institutions, endowment with a politically modest military may be most important. For the longer term goal of delivering effective accountable governance, endowment with other institutions such as robust political parties or well-established practice of elections may prove more significant.

As for the distinctive lessons suggested by the Arab region's experimentation with democratization, three in particular stand out. First, the experience of Tunisia and Egypt confirms the need to re-conceptualize our notion of what constitutes "fatal polarization" for democracy. Sartori conceives of polarization as the ideological distance that separates key political actors.¹⁶⁷ It is seen as detrimental to democracy because it undermines the possibilities of bargaining and compromise, makes political competition appear "zero-sum," and threatens to impose permanent losses on key political actors who may in turn become fatally disaffected with democracy.

In contrast to Sartori, however, Latin Americanists like Mainwaring, Perez-Linan, Karl, and others have finessed the concept of polarization, arguing that is it not so much the *ideological distance between political actors* that is problematic for democracy as it is the matter of "*intransigence and urgency*."¹⁶⁸ If ideologically conflicting political actors are willing to embrace longer time horizons to achieve their policy objectives, then democracy-saving compromise can be achieved. In Latin America of the 70s and 80s where the primary ideological divide focused largely on distributional issues, the survival of democracy turned on the willingness (especially on the part of the left) to take the long view - postponing some of its re-distributional objectives to allay the worst fears of the business community and its military allies.¹⁶⁹ By contrast, in the Arab world today, the most searing ideological binary is cultural: Islamist vs. non-Islamist. Yet here too the level of ideological distance between key parties need not spell democratic breakdown if political actors are

¹⁶⁷ Cited in Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 38.

¹⁶⁸ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 39, 274.

¹⁶⁹ Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization."

willing to embrace longer time horizons. This is one of the key lessons of the Tunisia-Egypt comparison. In Tunisia, the ideological divide between the Islamist and non-Islamist camps was in many ways much more severe than it was in Egypt. Inculcated in the French tradition of “laicite”, the non-Islamist camp in Tunisia was much more hostile to official endorsement of religion.¹⁷⁰ But in Tunisia, the willingness of the Islamist leadership to “take the long view” and pursue its policy agenda gradually made the Islamist stance less threatening to its opponents and kept the transition process moving forward. The Tunisia/Egypt comparison highlights the temporal dimension of polarization and the important role that “playing the long game” can have in averting democratic breakdown even in countries deeply riven on identity lines.

Second, the experience of Tunisia and Egypt (as well as the Arab spring generally) signals the consequences for democratization wrought by changes in the international sphere: the end of unipolarity and the retreat of the liberal hegemon. As Plattner points out, much of the third and fourth wave of democracy took place during a unique period where the overwhelming dominance of the US and its democratic allies created an international environment favorable to pro-democracy struggles.¹⁷¹ But now well into the 21st century, increasingly assertive non-democracies, whether major world powers (such as Russia and China) or regional players (such as Iran and Saudi Arabia) regularly throw their weight against democratization in neighboring or “client” countries. This has proven true in Egypt, (as well as in Syria, Bahrain and beyond).¹⁷² The impact of this international factor (as well as the long-standing willingness of major powers to subsidize authoritarian regimes in the Arab world to combat terrorism and contain Islamic radicalism) highlights important international challenges to a “fifth wave.”

¹⁷⁰ Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, “The Arab Spring,” 43-46.

¹⁷¹ Marc Plattner, “Is Democracy in Decline? *Journal of Democracy* 26:1(January 2015): 5-10, at 8.

¹⁷² Haggard and Kaufman, “Democratization During the Third Wave,” 125; Tansey et. al, “Ties to Rest.”

Third, the Arab region's experimentation with democratization (and its abrupt suspension) makes clear yet again that, for most people, democracy ranks far below economic and physical security in terms of prioritization. This is by no means unique to the Arab world, but the trade-off between security and freedom is perceived as especially stark in the Arab world today. Surrounded by the chaos of failed states, the violent radicalism of competing religious movements, and the general state of economic and personal insecurity, most citizens in the region, at both the elite and mass level, display little appetite for democracy. In war-torn countries like Syria and Libya, democracy seems a far-fetched goal. But even in relatively stable authoritarian countries (Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia) the liberal-minded have been disarmed by the threat of neighboring chaos as well as their governments' forceful self-congratulation over the delivery of order. The current lack of commitment to the cause of democratization, especially among the elite, is the single most important obstacle to democratic progress in the Arab world today. The region's experience makes clear once again that order comes before freedom.¹⁷³

To conclude, what lessons do the Egyptian and Tunisian cases suggest for the rest of the Arab world regarding possibilities of democratization? To some degree the generalizability of these cases is limited by the fact that both Tunisia and Egypt score exceptionally high on two factors often considered auspicious for democracy: ethnic homogeneity and robust "stateness." The absence of one or the other in so many countries in the region creates a serious hurdle to successful democratization. And even if these hurdles are surmountable, the Tunisian and Egyptian cases do not show the way. In addition, both Tunisia and Egypt are relatively rent-poor (Tunisia more than Egypt)

¹⁷³ See Steven Heydemann for a fourth distinctive lesson from the region: the difficulty that mobilized publics face in sustaining their political influence once the locus of political activism shifts from street protest to formal political institutions. See "Explaining the Arab Uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 21:1 (2016):192-204, at 200.

and so neither can speak to the special challenges that its “resource-cursed” neighbors face in attempting democratization.

That said, the Egyptian and Tunisian cases do suggest two generalizable lessons to the region, one pessimistic and one optimistic. The pessimistic lesson has already been touched upon: the region’s deep enmeshment in international power struggles and patronage, due to its endowment with oil and gas resources and the fact that it is a geographic nucleus of Islamic radicalism and terror, means that democratization will continue to face international challenge more often than support. At the same time the study of the Tunisian and Egyptian comparison suggests an optimistic lesson as well: that elite commitment mobilized at pivotal moments can indeed establish democratic institutions, even in daunting contexts. This has proven true in countries all around the world.¹⁷⁴ Paradoxically perhaps, the innate tentativeness of Tunisia’s success (as well as Egypt’s turn toward failure in 2013) suggests the possibility of choice. Democratization in the Arab world, as elsewhere, is messy. It is reversible. But it is not impossible.

¹⁷⁴ Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, *Democracies and Dictatorships*, 3, 119; Diamond, *Spirit of Democracy*, 4-5