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## TUNISIAN DEMOCRACY AND EGYPTIAN AUTHORITARIANISM: WHAT EXPLAINS THE DIFFERENCE?

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### ABSTRACT

*This article discusses two divergent cases within the Arab Spring: Tunisia and Egypt. In doing so, there is analysis of both states' paths toward democratization, where they faltered or succeeded, and why. Specifically, this paper synthesizes two ostensibly competing theories to strengthen an understanding of Tunisian and Egyptian politics. Tunisia and Egypt are similar cases. Their central difference revolves around the role and capabilities of security services. In Tunisia, where democracy was more successful, security services were less robust. In Egypt, conversely, security services were powerful enough to reverse democratic outcomes. This article concludes that security institutions interact with anti-state organizations, ultimately inhibiting or enabling democratic outcomes.*

### INTRODUCTION

While many initially viewed the Arab Spring as a hopeful and inevitable transition toward democracy, the realities of the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria dampen this optimism. Whereas Tunisia successfully democratized, Egypt and Syria did not. While Syria devolved into a violent civil war that still threatens Syria's status as a consolidated state, Egypt's de-evolution away from democracy was political (albeit violent). Focusing on Egypt and Tunisia, as they have similar demographics and grievances unlike Syria, this essay attempts to synthesize two explanations as to why Tunisia democratized and Egypt did not. Two possible explanations for the differences between Tunisia and Egypt concern the military and security apparati and the manifestation of social cleavages. The first theory states that the security services played a larger role in Egyptian politics than in Tunisia's. Because Tunisian politics were less securitized, the government lacked the will and means to maintain hegemony, whereas in Egypt, the security services could reverse democratic outcomes. The other main explanation is that the political and social cleavages in Egypt were not reflected in political outcomes, compared to Tunisia. As a result, Tunisians felt more comfortable with democratic outcomes than Egyptians because democratic outcomes better approximated the average voter.

Ultimately, this paper takes the position that while the role of the security services in Egypt and Tunisia influenced the progression of both revolutions, democracy failed in Egypt because Egyptian politics did not reflect the average voter enough for them to accept democracy as the legitimate and sole governing system. Alternatively, Tunisia better reflects

this paper's understanding of democracy. We can trace the determinants of these outcomes to the way in which the security services interacted with opposition movements.

## DEFINITIONS

Three terms integral to this analysis are democracy, authoritarianism, and democratic consolidation. Tunisia and Egypt are both measured against these terms. If we imagine a continuum from (1) authoritarianism, (2) democracy, and (3) democratic consolidation, we can compare both Tunisia and Egypt to each of the three standards to form an accurate characterization of the way the two governments function.

This paper utilizes Huntington's (1998) definitions of authoritarianism and democracy. According to these definitions, a democracy is when a government's "most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes and in which virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote," (Huntington, p. 7). This understanding of democracy supposes that the governed are congruent with the governors, which is evidenced by frequent, regular, and legitimate elections. Furthermore, in a democracy the population recognizes that their participation and beliefs are institutionalized via the political apparatus. A procedural definition of democracy is used because substantive definitions place demands on new democracies that cannot be met without a robust and effective bureaucracy capable of equitably distributing wealth. Moreover, substantive definitions are not necessarily designed for comparison and work better to understand a single case. A thin definition is thus more appropriate. Authoritarianism is defined as a system of government in which the procedural requirements of democracy are not met (Huntington, 1998, p. 7). Although one might leave room for hybrid regimes, this paper is concerned with the question of whether Tunisia and Egypt are democratic and assessing the extent of their levels of democracy. Although hybrid regimes are more democratic than a formally authoritarian regime, they are not entirely democratic and thus fall outside the scope of this paper.

Furthering Huntington's (1998) definition of democracy is Linz and Stepan's (1996) definition of democratic consolidation, which should be viewed as the teleological endpoint of democratic development. Linz and Stepan (1996) suppose any true consolidated democracy will meet three requirements reflecting Huntington's (1998) implication of cohesion between ruler and ruled. The first is behavioral, which demands that actors do not attempt to achieve their goals through non-democratic strategies like secession or authoritarianism. The second is attitudinal, wherein the population views democracy as the appropriate way to organize and govern collective life, even amid severe shocks to the "system." Third is constitutional, which tells us that the established (democratic) norms are the first and only solution for political conflict within the state, and that the robustness of institutionalized democracy de-incentivizes violating these norms. This definition also reflects the requisite cohesiveness between ruler(s) and ruled (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 15).

## METHODOLOGY

This essay follows the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). MSSD asks the researcher to compare cases in which the units under analysis, in this case countries, are either homogeneous or similar enough for generalization. MSSD stipulates that the independent variables meet these criteria but produce different dependent variables. The onus is on the researcher to find the point of divergence between the cases under comparison (Mill, 1996, p. 455). A problem with applying MSSD in this research is considering a country as one unit

of analysis. When the unit of analysis is that large, the researcher needs to consider all the different variables that intervene to produce other variables that then produce the dependent variables. For example, a country's natural resources or history of conflict with their counterparts might be reflected in education. It is difficult, if not impossible, to account for all of this. Evidence collected and archived by IndexMundi (2017) demonstrates that Egypt and Tunisia share many of the same demographic characteristics and through this lens are fit for comparison.

Tunisia's age structure is as follows: 0-14 years (23%), 15-24 years (15%), 25-54 years (44.5%), with the remainder being ages 55 and up. Tunisia is a young country which is evidenced by 82.5% of the country being under the age of 54. Likewise, Egypt's age structure is as follows: 0-14 years (33%), 15-24 years (19%), 25-54 years (37%) with the remainder being ages 55 and up. The percentage of Egypt's population under 55 is 89%, which is similar to Tunisia's. Egypt's median age is 23.8 whereas Tunisia's is 32.4, suggesting that Tunisia and Egypt are demographically young. Literacy rates (defined as the % of the population over 15 that can read and write) in Tunisia are 81.8% and in Egypt are 73.8%.<sup>1</sup>

Egypt and Tunisia both, and the Middle East in general, are in the midst of major demographic shifts in which the general population is increasingly younger and better educated. Simultaneously, the population is underemployed or unemployed, denied marriage, and alienated from "success." This demographic is increasingly clued in to their political, social, and economic realities but in the case of Tunisia, denied legitimate political channels to self-advocate (before the revolution) and in Egypt, continue to be denied these opportunities (Singerman, 2007, p. 6). The concept of "waithood" is integral to understanding the central grievances of the protesters. Essentially waithood states that, to be successful, one must marry. But in order to marry, a man needs a job and their family needs money, a seemingly unattainable feat post-1970's Neoliberal transitions. However, until one is married, full access to social and political life is blocked, which alienates and atomizes society (Singerman, 2007, pp. 6-8).

As the data and theory demonstrate, both Egypt and Tunisian youth have serious grievances that drove them to protest. The social movement literature stipulates that protests emerge due to a synthesis of three theories: (1) grievance theory which explains that when protests occur a person identifies a disconnect between what they believe they are owed and what they receive; (2) efficacy theory which demonstrates that whereas everyone has their perceived slights, protest only occurs when the necessary resources are available to protest and when political opportunities are available; and (3) identity theory, which states that protest occurs when individuals perceive that members of their group are oppressed and in need of help (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013, pp. 2-7). The following sections detail how these three theories worked in tandem and why they produced different outcomes.

## CASE SELECTION

### Tunisia

Of the two cases explored in this paper, Tunisia better reflects Linz and Stepan's (1996) definition of a consolidated democracy. Although only time can tell if Tunisia will demonstrate the same robustness of other consolidated democracies. The reasons should be traced to Tunisia's founding ideology and politics. These explain Tunisia's creation as a modern state and how Tunisian security services manifested differently than Egypt's.

<sup>1</sup> Tunisia and Egyptian male literacy rates are 89.6% and 82.2% respectively, whereas their female literacy rates 74.2% and 65.4% respectively.

To reiterate, this paper takes the position that we cannot disassociate the common explanations for the differences between Tunisia and Egypt. The role of the security apparatus, however, interacts with the methods of agitation and the avenues toward politics. Tunisia's security services, relative to Egypt's, were less developed, less political, and played less of a role in social and political life (Ware, 1985, p. 37). Independent Tunisia's first leader, Habib Bourguiba, took great pains to separate the security apparatus from the political realities of governance. The Tunisian military, for example, did not have a political wing and the officer and enlisted corps were not allowed a political association. Moreover, the security services were denied a role of suppression in times of dissent, this duty was reserved for a separate gendarmerie. By splitting the roles of the security apparatus, Bourguiba disempowered those institutions and agencies, leaving them ill equipped to defeat a popular uprising (Ware, 1985, p. 37). Bourguiba understood the role of the Tunisian military to be the defenders of Tunisian nationalism, rather than a tool for his own purposes. Bourguiba limited the size of the military as well as the quantity and sophistication of its armaments to disband other centers of power and concentrate power into his own fold (Ware, 1985, pp. 38-41).

Bourguiba held particular political views that influenced the functions of the Tunisian security services. In sum, these views dictated that the government should be a coalition of different associations all consenting to secular nationalist rule. The role of the military and security services in this regard was to ensure the stability of this political coalition. Whereas in states outside of this purview the military might have seen the weaknesses of a ruling class and expanded its power by supplanting the government with its own representatives, the role of the military was non-political insofar as it was to be a tool of the government rather than a counterpart to the party (Ware, 1985, p. 38). In other words, the military was a dedicated servant to the political state, rather than an actor outside of the political state.

The roots of the tension between state and society should be traced to the neoliberal transitions of the 1970s. Neoliberalism should be understood as a structural adjustment to a protectionist economic model (Bogaert, 2013, p. 217). Social programs are commercialized and government spending is corralled by newfound fiscal discipline. Industry is deregulated and labor is subordinated to capital, typically in the dismantling or elimination of labor unions (Bogaert, 2013, p. 217). A common example of neoliberalism would be the privatization of the post-office. Whereas the postal service might have been a government utility, it would now be a for-profit organization. For many countries in the Arab world, neoliberalism meant a break with the past. Whereas the social contract once revolved around the classic rentierist model of the purchasing loyalty in exchange for generous social programs, breaking this social contract meant that the population became alienated from the state. A state's coercive security apparatus would determine the state response to the population's reactionary outburst (Bogaert, 2013, p. 215).

Tunisia's experience with neoliberalism is typically referred to as the Tunisian "Miracle" by proponents, but in reality, this movement stratified and concentrated wealth into the hands of a small bourgeois and increased state power vis-a-vis the demos (Tsourapas, 2013, p. 24). While the "miracle" narrative was produced to maintain consent, or a semblance of consent, to the neoliberal process, the realities reflected a consistent subordination of labor to capital. The economic reform facilitated increasing youth unemployment, unequal economic growth, and placed further strain on a diminished welfare system (Tsourapas, 2013, p. 28). Social movement theorists would identify this breakage as

the central grievance.

Bellin (2004) tells us that the robustness of a regime's coercive apparatus determine the resiliency of that very regime. This process is linked to four variables: (1) fiscal health of the security establishment, (2) international support, (3) the level of institutionalization of the security apparatus, and (4) the level of popular mobilization (Bellin, 2004, pp. 144-6). Due to the role of the security apparatus in Tunisia the variables one through three indicate that the Tunisian security apparatus would be less robust than their Egyptian counterparts. This leaves room for capital's traditional counterweight, labor, to offer firm opposition to the state.

Tunisia has a robust history of labor unions and workers groups. This is evidenced by a brief history of strikes (Beinin, 2016, p. 72):

Year	Number of Strikes	Number of Strikers
1996	300	27,751
1997	305	35,683
1998	277	28,160
1999	308	31,989
2000	411	35,886
2001	380	38,242
2002	345	33,386
2003	395	46,893
2004	391	44,637
2005	466	78,953
2006	392	115,443
2007	382	98,210

To handle the frequency and intensity of the strikes, the Tunisian polity followed the traditional tripartite corporatist model in which the state moderated between labor and capital (Beinin, 2016, p. 74). This meant that for labor to effectively campaign on behalf of workers a network of activists and effective political representatives was required. Ultimately, the labor network provided an organized and effective counterpart to Islamist movements within Tunisia. Because labor was able to mobilize during the Arab Spring, alongside their anti-state Islamist counterparts, Bellin's (2004) fourth variable for an unresponsive security apparatus was met. The Tunisian pro-democracy movement was on its way to genuine reform without the latent threat of reversion.

Downs (1957) tells us that the goal for political parties in a competitive system is to maximize their votes. This assumes rationality, and that the best way to maximize votes is to attract the median voter (Downs, 1957, pp. 114-5). In uncompetitive elections (i.e. elections that are otherwise fair but one party is clearly more representative of the voting population), parties do not have to moderate their views because they better reflect the

voting tendencies of the majority of voters. Although Downs (1957) specifically speaks about a two-party system, the central idea of parties as rational actors is consistent across systems. During constitutional deliberation, which requires more than a simple majority, is especially prescient.

During the constitution drafting process in Tunisia and since its ratification, Tunisian politics has reflected Downs' (1957) paradigm. During the ratification process of the constitution, Tunisia's main Islamist party, Ennahda, moderated their stances on social issues to compromise with other secular parties (Marks, 2014, p. 2). This paper asserts that the reasons for Ennahda's moderation were driven by the fact that they had an effective counterpart that forced moderation. The military and other security apparati in Tunisia were unable to dismantle or disorganize labor opposition because they lacked the will and the means to do so. This meant that most if not all Tunisians would have a genuine representation in the political process because Ennahda was faced by parties capable of effectively aggregating and articulating opposing views.

Tunisia's mirroring of Linz and Stepan's (1996) and Huntington's (1998) standards of congruence and cohesiveness is best evidenced by the agreements made by the parties and how that might interact with society. Local actors, especially secularists and labor organizers, critiqued the constitution as flawed and alleged that Ennahda had dominated the drafting process (Marks, 2014, p. 4). Yet, the constitution was ultimately ratified as Ennahda eased their grip on the process. In 2003, non-regime parties such as Ennahda and Ettakatol met and concluded that the differences between them were less important compared to creating a tyranny free Tunisia (Marks, 2014, p. 11). Whereas the easy explanation for Ennahda's moderation would be that they valued a procedurally democratic and organized Tunisia over an anarchic or authoritarian Tunisia, this does little to highlight causal mechanisms. Applying Downs' (1957) view of the party as a rational actor helps us to understand why Ennahda moderated in the face of genuine competition. This moderation should be traced to the inability of the coercive apparati to diffuse labor as a threat to capital's hegemony. Congruence between the people and the new government is demonstrated by 2011's voter turnout rate of 86.4%, a staggeringly high number (IDEA, 2017).<sup>2</sup> In failing to prevent avenues of participation for the entire width of Tunisian political views, the state ultimately secured Tunisian democracy. Ennahda's moderation in the face of genuine competition, and the inclusiveness of Tunisian politics, represents a view that state society relations are highly cohesive.

## Egypt

This section investigates Egypt's experience with neoliberalism and the authoritarian modality used to inhibit Egyptian democracy. Compared to Tunisia's experience with democratization, Egypt's is markedly more chaotic and of course less successful. The central reason for this should be identified as the different role of Egypt's security apparati and their interaction with society, and their suppression of labor. Suppressing labor meant the same avenues for participation that were found in Tunisia could not be found in Egypt. As a result, post-revolutionary Egyptian politics was less inclusive, explaining Egypt's failure to adopt the requisite cohesiveness for successful democracy.

Like Tunisia, the Egyptian social contract tacitly revolved around the exchange of generous social spending for political support. While in Egypt this was wrapped in the 2 Although this fell into the 60's in 2014, it is likely that was more of the post-revolution fervor dying off than a break in democratic cohesiveness.

Nasserist discourses, the state-society economic relations were fundamentally the same as in Tunisia. The differences between the two cases lie in the nature of Nasser's rise. Nasser was a military officer and as a result, his political and social connections revolved around the military. As any coup leader does, Nasser hollowed out certain hostile institutions and replaced them with his friendly (military) connections (Migdal, 1988, pp. 186-8). While Migdal's (1988) point might help explain the initial linkages between the state's political institutions and military ones, it does not entirely explain Egypt's history with socialism and why that might have translated to anger at Sadat's Neoliberal transition, otherwise known as Infitah.

Nasser also reorganized society along new economic lines, and produced a culture of personalistic socialism to manufacture consent. In 1952, Nasser pursued the Agrarian Reform Law, which diminished the power of landed elites and redistributed wealth and land to peasants (Cleveland & Bunton, 2017, p. 286). The 1962 Charter for National Action was presented to the Egyptian legislature to stipulate Egypt's new left-wing policies. The charter postulated Egypt's central role in the fight for Arab independence and autonomy and identified socialism as the method of agitation. The Arab Socialist Union (ASU) was formed to co-opt potentially dangerous labor movements into the state's political structure (Cleveland & Bunton, 2017, p. 296).

Another aspect of this reorganization was the nationalization of the Egyptian economy. The nationalized economy offered guarantees of state jobs to individuals who would otherwise have been unemployed. Education was also a priority. Between 1953 and 1970, enrollment in schools increased from 1.3 million to 3.6 million students. Nasser eliminated tuition fees at post-secondary institutions and opened several new, city based, universities (Cleveland & Bunton, 2017, pp. 297-9). One hardly needs to read Foucault to understand that this was not entirely altruistic and that power relations between state and society determined this relationship. The production and tangible application of Nasserism created a relationship predicated on the population genuinely buying into Nasserism and thus acquiescing to Nasser's hegemony.

Upon Sadat's replacement of Nasser, Egypt underwent a major economic reorientation called Infitah (The Opening). Whereas Nasserism held its legitimacy in its anti-colonial closed-door policies, Infitah represented a significant break with tradition (Weinbaum, 1985, p. 207). While the politics behind Infitah are beyond the scope of this paper, it mirrors the economic and social transitions of the Tunisian Miracle. Infitah marked the transition away from economic nationalism, which Sadat viewed as protectionist and unsustainable. Infitah would revitalize Egypt's private sector and involve market forces in determining economic and political policy. New incentives would be designed to attract foreign capital. Loans and tax laws would spur investment opportunities for domestic entrepreneurs and grant them access to foreign capital. Tariffs on imported equipment would be lifted, and agricultural producers gained tax advantages and were promised hassle free repatriation of profits (Weinbaum, 1985, pp. 210-11). In sum, labor was subordinated to capital.

Recall the circumstances of Nasser's coup, wherein the military replaced the polity. Coupled with Egypt's role in the Middle East (under Sadat) as a friend of the United States and thus a receiver of significant military aid, Egypt's military and other security apparati were better equipped than their Tunisian counterparts (Raj, 1980, p. 116). Because the Egyptian security services were better equipped and thus better reflect Bellin's (2004)

criteria of a robust coercive apparatus, they were able to effectively curtail labor unlike Tunisia. In Egypt, civil society was securitized—meaning that the security apparatus regulated and confined the assemblages of the general population (Tadros, 2011, p. 82). Security organizations utilize torture and force disappearances to dissuade opposition at targeted organizations (Tadros, 2011, pp. 82-3). This strategy undermines cohesive opposition and forces dissent into localized and individualized incidents.

The result is a securitization of civil society. Whereas in Tunisia a labor union might call for a general strike (as they famously did), no such nationwide movement was capable because the requisite networks simply did not exist—any type of opposition needed to be organic and bottom-up. Of course, the Muslim Brotherhood's success might show that this claim is not entirely possible, but the Muslim Brotherhood should also be viewed as an outlier. The Muslim Brotherhood had the benefit of over a hundred years of evading coercive security apparatus and a vast international network. During the days of the Washington Consensus, international labor was no longer the force it once was.

Due to the Egyptian Revolution's origins in Infitah, the grievances of protesters originally manifested in labor-oriented agitation (Beinin, 2016, p. 6). But, the state's coercive apparatus prevented this type of agitation to reach a country-wide scale (Bellin, 2004, p. 142). Opposition, thus, was less cohesive and increasingly decentralized and flexible. In essence, opposition reflected the subaltern's rage at the broken social contract rather than any singularly identifiable voice. Key to this process was Egypt's State Security Investigations Service (SSI), the Egyptian secret police (Tadros, 2011, p. 82). The SSI tortured and kidnapped dissidents and harassed technically legal organizations to keep them from fomenting any cohesive insurrection. The SSI could do this under the 1981 Emergency law, which grants emergency powers to the state and has been in effect since its passage (Tadros, 2011, p. 83). The tangible product of this policy is obvious, but what typically goes unsaid is the latent, atomizing, and alienating fear that this policy sows. The SSI is the proverbial panopticon in the prison yard.

During the Egyptian Revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood, who although different from Ennahda, serves the same role in this story, did not have a cohesive counterweight in labor. Opposition unaffiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood is best typified by an organization called Kefaya. Kefaya was the alternative to labor-centric protests. Although it was formally created in 2004, its origins can be traced as far back as Sadat (Shorbagy, 2007, pp. 175-8). Kefaya's name in English, "enough" is broad. This is specifically designed to attract the broadness of inarticulate alienation. "Enough" can mean anything to anyone. If one has a grievance toward the state, this is their perfect social movement. Kefaya's lack of specificity is demonstrative of the subaltern's grievances. A broad and complicated system enforced by coercive mechanisms is difficult to define and direct anger at. Reflecting their demographic, Kefaya remained open to those of all "political trends and ideologies" as well as formal party members (Shorbagy, 2007, p. 187). While Neoliberalism created the demographic for the Egyptian Revolution, the robustness of Egypt's authoritarian institutions meant that opposition was ill defined.

Once Egypt exited the transition phase and entered the consolidation period, Kefaya's broad attractiveness ceased to function as a benefit. A party made up of all "political trends and ideologies" is a poor mechanism to articulate aggregated interests. The Muslim Brotherhood knew that they did not have a serious competitor in the first post-revolution election and did not have to moderate their position in the same way as Ennahda. Because

the Muslim Brotherhood swept the elections, many Egyptians did not have a representative in formal politics. The necessary cohesiveness for the consolidation process to begin was simply absent. There was little congruence between Egypt's great swaths of protesters and their representatives in the political world. The tacit congruence present in Tunisia did not exist in Egypt. Popular interests were not reflected by the Morsi government and protesters returned to the streets. Egypt then backslid into an authoritarian regime run by Sisi's military government.

## DISCUSSION

Egypt and Tunisia are two of the most interesting cases of successful and unsuccessful democratization. The two countries are demographically similar and suffered from the same social, economic, and political tensions. Yet, crucial differences in the founding ideologies and circumstances of the two countries' postcolonial manifestations ultimately determined the relative democratic success in Tunisia and the failure in Egypt. Both Huntington (1998) and Linz and Stepan (1996) make clear the importance of respect and cohesiveness between state and society. This is a relationship that demands constant work and strong counter-weights. Evidently, this relationship needs to be manufactured. Tunisia was able to cement this relationship through a balance between secular labor and Ennahda organizations equitably representing the Egyptian population. Alternatively, Egypt failed because no such counterweights exist. It appears then, that the methods of political agitation can ultimately determine the typology of post-revolutionary state.

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