Testing Regime Change Theory: A Comparative Analysis of Tunisia and Yemen

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06/05/2020
Course Paper

(Word Count: 9,135)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Arab Spring of 2011 dramatically impacted the stability of many Middle Eastern countries, threatening the viability of authoritarian regimes in the region and granting newfound legitimacy to civilian discourse. Significant research has been done into the revolutionary movements and the governing shifts that ensued, with scholars placing an immense emphasis on the methods by which the revolutions occurred rather than exogenous factors that unequivocally altered the movements' trajectories. Academia often categorizes revolutionary movements in a binary fashion, deeming them either a "success" or "failure." Success, as one might expect, is often measured by a singular variable; did regime change occur, and if so, is the regime ideologically distinct from the original governing group? Secondary variables of interest include whether the actual structure of governing was redefined, the state's economic stability following revolution, and the new regime's perceived legitimacy in the eyes of salient domestic and international stakeholders. Yet, although these are crucial factors, one will generally find that a revolution is deemed successful when wholesale regime change occurs. The additional factors work to describe how stable the new regime is. Alternatively, failure is precisely the opposite; the revolutionary attempt failed and the status quo was maintained. This dichotomous method of analysis is perfectly fine during rudimentary discourse, yet researchers have begun to question the rationale of describing revolutions through the lens of "success" and "failure." In other words, this distinction may not be as clear it seems. This is the case when analyzing the Arab Spring of 2011. The secondary variables must be brought to the forefront, as they hold the key to understanding the complex intricacies of these sociopolitical revolutions. Additionally, it is imperative to understand that classifying the Arab Spring revolutions as either successes or failures ignores the reality that some movements were destined for catastrophe from the very beginning.

It is commonly understood that Tunisia is the only "success story" following the denouement of the Arab Spring, with the country remaining one of the only states to achieve an internationally recognized democracy. Although its democracy is still nascent and fragile, Tunisia was able to complete a transition from lengthy and restrictive authoritarian rule. Alternatively, Yemen – another state that underwent significant conflict during the Arab Spring – was unable to complete its attempted transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The country currently suffers from a bloody and debilitating civil war, often considered a proxy conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Scholars are thus presented with a vexing quandary: how did two states, each governed by repressive authoritarian regimes prior to the 2011 revolutions, experience such radically different outcomes? This question, while salient, is admittedly quite broad; this paper does not seek to provide a comprehensive answer to this inquiry. Instead, my paper seeks to understand the decisive determinants that contribute to robust governing systems. These general findings will then be applied to two distinctly different case studies during the Arab Spring, Tunisia and Yemen. My argument is dichotomous, with one portion addressing the relevancy of the chosen case studies and the other concerning the fundamental tenets of robust governing systems. I assert that Yemen and Tunisia provide an edifying opportunity to challenge commonly held notions regarding regime success/failure while offering lessons on the intricacies of the Arab Spring. Additionally, supported by ancillary research, I postulate there are three primary factors that dictate whether a revolution is successful or not: the type of electoral system prior to regime change, the extent of foreign influence on the incumbent regime, and the level of elite predation of the social movement throughout the attempted revolution. I then apply these three factors to both Yemen and Tunisia to unearth the reasons for the former's revolutionary struggles when compared to the latter's relative successes in regime change. The two case studies serve as vessels to explore the previously delineated determinants and test their veracity. I find that Yemen's status prior to the revolutionary event and instability in all three outlined factors rendered their revolution impossible from the beginning; in contrast, Tunisia's historical experience with the three concepts greatly increased the possibility of a transition to democracy.

This paper stresses the usage of political theory throughout its contents. Democratic transition theory and elite predation theory will be used to emphasize and reinforce the three factors posited. More specifically, aspects of democratic transition theory will be used to support the arguments behind the importance of electoral systems and foreign influence when attempting to calculate the result of a revolution. Elite predation theory will be used to analyze the role of political society in affecting regime change, with emphasis placed specifically on the commandeering of social movements by antagonistic elite interests. To ensure this paper remains as organized as possible, I have split my research and opinions into distinct sections. First, a brief introduction into the Arab Spring revolutions within Yemen and Tunisia will be conducted. Secondly, I will delineate the three factors that dictate the success of regime change from a theoretical perspective; these assertions will propagate more generalized understandings of the three variables, supported by relevant academic research. Thirdly, the three factors will be applied to the two case studies, Yemen and Tunisia. Historical analysis will be utilized extensively to illustrate each factor within the case in question, and I will describe the result of the respective revolutionary movements within the context of each variable. Fourth and finally, I plan to succinctly review the benefit of utilizing the three crucial factors to describe social revolutions, revisit final thoughts on the two case studies, and describe further avenues of research and unanswered questions that may linger.

2. THE ARAB SPRING – TUNISIA AND YEMEN

It is imperative to understand the historical implications of the Arab Spring in the two target cases, Tunisia and Yemen; doing so clarifies the catalysts behind the revolutions themselves. The following section briefly examines the primary stimulants and history behind the Tunisian and Yemeni uprisings.

2.1 Tunisia - History

Within the context of this paper, Tunisia's story ultimately begins with former President Ben Ali, master architect of the pre-revolution Tunisian method of governing. His political prominence increased dramatically following his installment as prime minister in 1987 by President Habib Bourguiba (BBC News). Quietly working behind the scenes to gather support amongst his compatriots, especially the military, Ali began to exert pressure on President Bourguiba to relinquish the presidency. President Bourguiba was considered a "megalomaniac" ruler, an individual who desperately wanted to retain power until death – a "President for Life" (Ware 590-91). This obviously angered other political elite, especially the Islamic elected officials that were angered by President Bourguiba's continual breaching of Tunisia's constitution. With support from the military and other salient politicians, Ali managed to orchestrate a bloodless coup that resulted in his ascension to the presidency and the declaration that President Bourguiba was mentally unfit to lead. Although it appears that ordinary Tunisians were undecided on how to view the incoming administration, primarily due to President Ali's selection of a new government, the opportunity to rid a politician seeking a life tenure proved to prevail. Immediately upon the initiation of his administration, President Ali promised to pursue democratic principles, continue President Bourguiba's purported vision of a unified Tunisia, and place greater emphasis on both fostering and honoring international partnerships; this last point, in particular, galvanized the Tunisian population as they sought increased legitimacy and economic viability (BBC News) (Ware 592). Unfortunately, as is the case in many regime change efforts, the incoming administration gradually succumbed to the tendencies of corruption and greed. President Ali's promise of democratization efforts rang hollow, as he continued to run opposed or with minimal opposition and complaints. As one might expect, this invited concerns both domestically and internationally. Under intense pressure, multiparty elections were established in 1999 and opposition parties permitted to run. Although in theory the opposition parties were free to run for elected office and challenge the Ali regime, outcomes were ultimately mixed. Nevertheless, this quelled the fears of international penalization and opened external growth opportunities for the Tunisian economy.

Upon making slight institutional adjustments, the potential for international partnerships and economic development grew immensely. Surprisingly, the Tunisian economy – on a national level - grew exponentially under President Ali. Market reforms, an increased emphasis on tourism, and the injection of FDI (i.e. foreign direct investment) yielded beneficial results. In the year of 2010, for example, Tunisia ranked 32nd globally for the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index (WEF Report). This was an understandably massive achievement, especially due to Tunisia's presence within an economically volatile and struggling region. The increase in economic viability, however, did not translate into elevated economic sustainability for the majority of Tunisian citizens. Wide-spread corruption within the Ben Ali regime, coupled with the reality that most economic reforms were driven by and benefited elite elected officials/international investors, resulted in undue monetary burdens for Tunisia’s most vulnerable demographics. As an example, rural areas within Tunisia struggled with rising poverty and unemployment rates; the Center-West region of Tunisia, in 2010, had an unemployment rate slightly under 15% and an absolute poverty rate of approximately 33% (Sadiki). Youth, in particular, struggled to find work as Tunisia became unable to provide recent graduates with attractive jobs, leading to a subsequent increase in the youth poverty rate (BBC News). This anger manifested itself within the ordeal experienced by 26-year-old street vendor Mohammed Bouazizi. Harassed by local police for selling fruit without a license, Bouazizi resorted to self-immolation on December 17th to protest the harsh economic conditions and his inability to make a living-wage. The act sent ripples throughout the nation, and wide-spread protests began several days later. Interestingly, President Ben Ali attempted to calm the revolutionary tendencies by visiting Bouazizi (he had not died immediately, instead passing on January 4th after intensive hospitalization). This act only served to anger the Tunisian populous further, and rampant protests led to Ali’s ouster just 10 short days after Bouazizi’s death (Abouzeid). The protests, primarily civilian-driven, severely rattled the entirety of the MENA region. As one will see in the case of Yemen, it ultimately led to similar revolutions occurring throughout the Middle East. The specifics of the protests – the methods by which they occurred and who participated – will be discussed later in this paper. The Tunisian protests resulted in violent crackdowns by the Ben Ali regime, with governmental forces eventually attracting overwhelming international ire which forced to Ali to flee to Saudi Arabia; he remained there until his passing in September 2019. Ultimately regarded as the only “success” story of the 2011 Arab Spring, Tunisia is now considered a democracy, one of few such cases in the MENA region. The current administration has begun to covertly circumvent traditional democratic norms (the recent passing of an anti-terrorism bill which dangerously threatened the truncation of rights provides an example of this), but it is nonetheless viewed as a strong example of successful regime change. I turn now to provide brief history behind the Yemeni Arab Spring.

2.2 Yemen - History

Yemen was not always a unified country; North Yemen was locked in political conflict with the communist South Yemen until unification in 1990. The unified Yemen was then threatened following the attempted secession of South Yemen in 1994, but North Yemen was able to quash the rebellion quickly and efficiently. South Yemen was financed and supported by the Soviet Union, thereby serving as the primary catalyst behind South Yemen's ability to remain self-sufficient. Upon the Soviet Union collapsing in 1991, South Yemen's ability to fend for itself was effectively negated. With lack of support, South Yemen was easily incorporated in 1990 and then subsequently defeated in their attempted secession in 1994. Yemen's history of divisiveness, ideological differences, and intra-state diversity unequivocally affected their ability to remain a cohesive entity. Even today, Yemen is home to a bloody civil war that has severely destabilized all primary operations.

Much like Tunisia, Yemen's descent into the Arab Spring of 2011 is largely defined by the rule of the country's long-time former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh. Saleh rose to the presidency of North Yemen in 1978, after the assassination of his predecessor, Ahmed bin Hussein al-Ghashmi. As will be discussed later in this paper, Saleh immediately began establishing a complex political patronage system that allowed his party, the General People's Congress (GPC), to rule without any opposition. Political parties were banned throughout all levels of North Yemen politics at this time, allowing the GPC to usher their preferred candidates into parliament with minimal contestation (Inter-Parliamentary Union). Saleh was continually elected, too, allowing him to institutionalize his political party within the Yemeni political system. After presiding over the unification of Yemen in 1990, Saleh continued to extend his patronage networks within both the Northern and Southern areas, allowing him to minimize the possibility of discontent and uprising in the interim (Edroos). This relative stability came to a halt after South Yemen's attempted secession in 1994; Saleh, unwilling to risk losing an integral portion of his regime, responding quickly by crushing the rebellion with North Yemen's superior army. Upon his consolidation of his power, Saleh continued to be reelected and attempted to foster foreign support. After unwisely deciding to support Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War, Yemen attempted to broker relations with the United States following 9/11 and did so successfully, thus gaining access to a trove of international aid and sundry funds (Edroos). As one might expect, however, these funds were ultimately not disseminated amongst the general populous. Institutionalized corruption permeated all facets of Yemeni political life, sanctioned and even encouraged by the GPC. This detrimentally impacted civilians, as poverty began to decimate the livelihoods of many individuals. In more rural districts, such as the Amran province in western Yemen, approximately 71% of civilians were classified as poor in 2010 (World Bank). Social-service spending under the Saleh regime also decreased substantially to a mere 7% of national GDP in 2010; health care costs, education quality/access, and the employment market all suffered significantly as a result (World Bank). With many families rendered impecunious, discontent and anger with the Saleh regime began to spread throughout the country. Yemenis looked on as the Arab Spring broke out in Tunisia, leading to the ouster of President Ben Ali. Soon after these protests, Yemen underwent their own Arab Spring. The protests, in contrast to the ones held in Tunisia, were usually well organized (a unique occurrence when compared to the other protests) and resulted in slightly less intra-state violence. Unlike the civilian-driven Tunisian demonstrations, the protests in Yemen appear to have been spurred by and funded by elite opposition groups, a salient point that will be explored in greater depth. Upon the protests breaking out, Saleh originally attempted to rectify several of the deleterious sociopolitical circumstances, one such example of being his promising to reconstruct the electoral system and governance structure; these promises did little to calm the tensions and protests (BBC News). Forced by external actors and opposition pressure, Saleh first agreed to sign a proposal to relinquish power that was organized by members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. His promise to do so, however, was unfounded and he stated he would continue to lead Yemen. This reality changed following an assassination attempt on his life, upon which he finally agreed to a plan – constructed by international stakeholders – that transferred power to his vice president. The agreement stipulated that the vice president would then run unopposed, serve for two years, draft a new constitution, and subsequently implement legitimate multi-party elections within the country (Burrowes and Wenner). Unfortunately, much to the dismay of ordinary Yeminis, the hope for democracy was eradicated following the breakout of a new civil war. Instability stemming from protests, wide-spread foreign influence, and the continued impact of disgraced officials (e.g. Saleh) have stimulated massive conflict that has destabilized Yemen to this very day. Considered a failed revolution by many political scientists, Yemen was unable to follow the successful model characterized by the Tunisian protests.

3. REGIME CHANGE THEORY

Having established the historical implications of the Arab Spring in both Tunisia and Yemen, I now turn to define the theoretical variables that comprise my analysis. I argue there are three indicators that determine how successful a regime change will be: the strength and flexibility of the electoral system prior to revolution, the extent of foreign influence on the incumbent autocracy, and the level of elite involvement in organizing the revolution/regime change.

3.1 Electoral Systems

Regardless of whether one is inspecting authoritarian regimes or fully-fledged democracies, the type of electoral system employed and the effectiveness of existing political parties are two concepts that serve as the bedrock of a given state's political society. Authoritarian regimes, commonly thought of as unitary systems, often implement elections to maintain both domestic and international legitimacy; granted, the extent of political viability for opposition parties is relative to the state being analyzed. Nevertheless, it is crucial to fully define the essential functions of an electoral system in the context of democratic transition theory. As I will later argue, the extent to which the existing system – within an authoritarian regime - fulfills the inherent obligations of party membership and legitimate elections dictates a regime's ability to successfully transition to a democracy following revolution.

An electoral system, at its most basic level, generally retains three primary aims. Firstly, elections give tangible substance to voting preferences; civilian votes for candidates are transformed into actual seats within a legislature. Secondly, an electoral system offers some method of citizen accountability, as elections serve as a conduit for voters to express their (dis)satisfaction with those in office. Thirdly, elections are often the fundamental stimulant behind the structure of political society. They determine which voices are represented, who is rewarded/punished, which relevant stakeholders gain valuable insight, and provide an incentivization structure for those elected (Reilly and Reynolds). Of course, this is the idealized version of an electoral system. Generally speaking, several (or all) of these functions may be truncated within an authoritarian regime. The design of an electoral system is greatly impacted by social and political cleavages (Reilly and Reynolds). Extensive social and political cleavages within a state will often lead the authoritarian government to increase repressive measures and circumvent electoral norms. As has been stated, an authoritarian system is one that is inherently unitary; one political party or governing group drives all state operations. The primary goal of an authoritarian regime is the retainment of power, and leaders are forced to juggle a complex balancing act between monopolizing state functions and providing just enough resources to stave off revolutionary tendencies. Thus, a regime might construct an electoral system that capitalizes on one of the functions (e.g. opposition parties may be granted limited working capacity if voted into office by citizens, the first function) and eliminates another (e.g. accountability measures available to citizens may be severely curtailed, with those aligned with the regime protected against removal from office, the second function).

One may be curious as to how an electoral system, prior to regime change, indicates the success of a revolution. In almost all cases, it is apparent that an authoritarian regime's electoral system will be restrictive and imperfect. When regimes begin to lose their grip on power, they will often resort to counteractive measures aimed at preventing the complete eradication of their party. Geddes (2009) explains this assumption perfectly, writing that when "dominant or single-party regimes face severe challenges, they try to hang on by changing institutions to allow some participation by moderate opponents—thus isolating and rendering less threatening more extreme opponents. When they see the writing on the wall, they put great effort into negotiating electoral institutions that will benefit them when they become ex-authoritarians competing in fair elections" (18). We are thus introduced to the two most salient variable concerning electoral systems and transitions from authoritarianism: strength and flexibility. I have defined each below:

Strength: Strength refers to the level of which an electoral system is entrenched within a regime prior to revolution. If the authoritarian regime conducts limited elections and maintains a stable method of governing (irrespective of how repressive it may be), the electoral system may be considered strong. Alternatively, if the method of governing has historically been unstable with little to no electoral system present, the system itself can be considered weak.

Flexibility: Flexibility is measured by how often a regime makes concessions to opposition parties or changes to the electoral system prior to revolution. As Geddes (2009) makes clear, there are times when a regime makes institutional changes to retain power; this would insinuate a flexible institution. When a regime remains steadfast and makes no changes, they can be considered inflexible.

I argue that the stronger and more flexible a regime's electoral system is prior to revolution, a greater likelihood of a successful transition to democracy results. A precedent of government stability bodes well for the creation of new democratic institutions, such as an electoral system that – even if rudimentary or instable – fundamentally aims to promulgate inclusive and fair elections.

3.2 Foreign Influence

In addition to examining the integral nature electoral systems play in determining the success of regime change or revolution, the variable of foreign influence must also be explicated. Continually referenced throughout the academic literature on this subject, foreign influence is characterized by a dichotomous relationship with regime change: it can either successfully succor revolutionary tendencies and help provide support (e.g. troops, money) or lead to prolonged conflict and descend the instable target country into further chaos. The distinction lies within whether the foreign actor(s) is intent on creating conflict for personally beneficial reasons or aims to help the target country complete a successful transition. In many cases, prolonged conflict within the country can offer certain value to a foreign actor. Firstly, the external entity may co-opt the target country into becoming dependent – financially, militarily, or socially – on their operations and support. As an additional ramification of this method of reliance, the foreign actor may also pressure the target to undergo regime change; this is referred to as "foreign-induced regime change" (FIRC) (Brownlee et al.). This method of regime change occurs when an international actor militarily pressures the incumbent regime to abdicate their rule, and it occurs either by force (e.g. the foreign actor providing the insurgency with support) or external pressure devices (e.g. economic sanctions) (Brownlee et al). Evidence suggests that in many cases, had foreign actor(s) refrained from getting involved within the target country, the continuation of the current regime would have occurred. Examples of well-known FIRC-related endeavors include Libya and Iraq, two countries that remain in turmoil to this day.

Secondly, however, the target country may provide the opportunity for the foreign actor to engage in confrontations with another regional actor without sacrificing domestic security; this is colloquially known as a "proxy war." At its most simplistic definition, a proxy war occurs when two foreign actors begin to sponsor opposing domestic forces. The domestic forces, each with their external supporting actors, then engage in conflict, thus affording the foreign actors the opportunity to indirectly inflict damage on one another. As one might expect, the insertion of proxy wars and conflict-driven foreign influence unequivocally threatens the viability of regime change success. This assumption is not novel. Even in the case of one foreign intervening country (as will be examined in the case of Yemen), researchers have found that prolonged civil war and conflict will occur; economic stagnation and debilitated civil society, along with informational gaps that result in increased violence, follow (Albornoz and Haulk 77). The evidence is clear: foreign intervention, with the intention of conflict, undoubtedly inhibits regime change and further weakens already tenuous domestic stability. Logically, it becomes increasingly difficult for a state to democratize when all relevant opposition parties become co-opted by out-of-state actors, thereby preventing the ascension of an organized and domestically independent party.

Having established the two primary structural factors I believe impact the likelihood of regime change, I turn now towards analyzing an elitist driven-argument. The following section argues that the extent to which elites capitalize on the creation of social movements greatly affects how much institutional change will occur.

3.3 Elite Control of Social Revolutions

The revolutions that define the Arab Spring are often thought of as societal-driven movements, stemming directly from concerned citizens. While in many cases this may be an accurate assumption, I have significant doubts this broad assertion aptly describes each revolution that occurred. As I will later illustrate, to describe Yemen's movement as a social revolution unintentionally ignores several auxiliary factors that eventually superseded its origins as a civilian-driven movement. Thus, I believe it is important to briefly examine the theory behind the elite predation of social revolutions.

It has been established that authoritarian regimes possess a unitary governing structure, dominated by a single individual or party. Although this is routinely the case, it is imperative to understand there are always oppositions interests that conflict with the regime's perspective. Political elites that disagree with the incumbent leadership are commonplace within authoritarian regimes; opposition elites constantly scrutinize the regime to unearth intra-group tensions or political "Achilles heels." With this said, it is often politically infeasible for opposition elite to construct a coup d'état that allows them to assume power, as repressive regimes are quick to eradicate political dissenters. Left with no recourse to pursue their ambition of power, these elites struggle to remain viable. This reality can change, however, upon the creation of a social movement. Opposition elites, recognizing mass public dissatisfaction with the current regime, may be inclined to co-opt the movement to pursue their initiatives. Casper and Tyson (2014), conducting research on this very premise, found that “a popular protest provides a public signal which helps elites, who are contemplating a coup, to coordinate their actions. In the presence of strategic uncertainty, the information which a popular protest conveys affects not only an elite’s belief regarding the information which motivated citizens to protest but also her belief about the actions of other elites” (562). This, in turn, threatens the integrity of the social revolution and diminishes the potential for democratic transition. When a new elite group co-opts the social movement and attempts to implement their governing style while salient government institutions are instable (e.g. electoral system, party system, dissemination of social services), both the propensity for intra-state conflict and the continuance of authoritarianism greatly increase. In the case that feeble democratic principles are established within the state following revolution, conflict can still occur if new elites and their concomitant interests are unable to adapt to the new democratic institutions. Because the new democratic principles increase the ability for mass political participation, much to the chagrin of new elites, repressive measures are often implemented which plunge the state back into authoritarianism (Mansfield and Snyder 304).

4. YEMEN AND TUNISIA – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

It is now time to examine the primary focus of this paper, a comparative and variable-driven analysis of the Arab Spring protests that occurred within Yemen and Tunisia. More specifically, I seek to illuminate the reasons for why both countries took such different trajectories and arrived at polar opposite destinations. Each country will be examined through the three previously delineated variables: the strength and flexibility of the electoral system prior to regime change, the role of foreign influence in each Arab Spring, and the extent to which elites impacted the movements. Conclusions will then be drawn as to how the countries performed when the variables are applied.

Yemen

4.1 Electoral and Party Systems

Strength and flexibility are the two crucial variables that must examined through the lens of Yemen’s electoral and party systems prior to the 2011 uprising. A regime is considered to retain a strong electoral system if they perform limited elections and maintain a stable governing method. It does not matter how restrictive the electoral system is; if there is clear indication of steady elections and active political participation, the electoral system may be considered strong. Flexibility, on the other hand, refers to how many concessions or adjustments the incumbent regime grants to opposition parties – how often they make alterations to the governing style – prior to the revolution occurring. If the autocrat ruling the country elected to adjust the percentage frameworks which allotted how many seats an opposition party could achieve prior to election (as one will see in Tunisia), the electoral system would be considered flexible. With these definitions clarified, I turn to an examination of Yemen’s electoral system under former president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

Yemen’s electoral history is somewhat convoluted since the country was two separate entities – North and South Yemen – for a large portion of Saleh’s tenure. This natural instability often negatively impacted the prospects for free and fair elections, except for the unique case of the 1993 elections. Prior to examining this experience, however, it is important to characterize the state of the electoral system under Saleh. Upon gaining power in Yemen, he immediately began to instill clientelist policies aimed at co-opting individuals into supporting his regime. Yemen's electoral system is better described as an extensive patronage political network that employed elections inherently built to support the reelection of Saleh's GCP party; in some cases, official elections were not held at all. Prior to unification in 1990, political parties were all but banned in North Yemen (Inter-Parliamentary Union). Elections to parliament continued, but all candidates ran as independents. As one might expect, Saleh's preferred officials won elected office. This method of governing ultimately proved to be ineffective following unification of the two states, and Saleh – tapped to lead the newly created Yemen – was forced to readjust his policies. Southern Yemen, which propagated communist ideology and whose parties ascribed to this doctrine, posed a new threat for the continued dominance of Saleh. As such, elections would need to be held in some capacity. What resulted, however, was a feeble electoral system that severely limited the ability of opposition parties to gain elected office. Brian Perkins, in his article, "Yemen: Between Revolution and Regression," describes the new system that was created:

> "The hasty political settlement that enabled the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1990 set the stage for what would become an authoritarian-like regime ruled through a complex web of patron-client relationships concentrated around Saleh. . . The government of Yemen transformed into a neopatrimonial system in which Saleh governed and maintained his power through patron–client relationships rather than bolstering his legitimacy through law or ideology" (303-304).

This new system entirely eliminated the possibility for civilians to utilize elections as a vertical accountability tool, prevented votes for candidates from being transformed into actual seats within the legislature, and successfully truncated the viability of Yemeni political/civil society. This method of governing continued after the attempted secession and subsequent defeat of South Yemen in 1994. Much of South Yemen's discontent stemmed from their perceived inability to participate within parliament and represent their constituents. As a response to these pleas, Saleh offered incredibly minor revisions to the electoral system that, in theory, allowed for opposition party participation; unfortunately for Yemeni citizens, members inevitably became corrupted by Saleh's clientelist policies. The newfound elections following the attempted secession were designed to ensure Saleh's rule while allowing oppositional inclusion on the premise that their public outcries were kept to a minimum (Carapico 109). The opposition parties, collectively known as Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), included the following: al-Islah, the Socialists (primarily residing in Southern Yemen), other Arab nationalist parties, and minor indigenous parties (Carapico 109). Although these parties would play in role in leading the 2011 revolution, primarily al-Islah, many struggled to remain politically viable and often succumbed to the loyalty-driven policies of Saleh. Saleh's patronage network utilized a comprehensive system of "dependent-developments." These practices rewarded perceived loyalty with rents, many of them oil, that then co-opted the political parties (Perkins 304). The possibility of financial inducements proved to be an attractive offer to a plethora of Yemeni elites, even those who were considered members of the opposition. One such example of this occurred in 2006, when Saleh "encouraged two prominent southern politicians, Salem Salih Muhammad and 'Abdul Rahman al-Jifri, to participate in political life" (Alley 339). These politicians were members of the opposition parties and were subsequently co-opted, with Salem Salih even being appointed one of Saleh's presidential advisors (Alley 393). Saleh's entrenched version of patronage politics effectively eliminated the importance and meaning of the electoral system. With actors on both sides of aisle being continually co-opted by the head regime, the electoral system became meaningless and, as a result of the clientelist policies (which required the continued promise of rents for those loyal to the regime), increasingly volatile. This method of governing continued right until the precipice of the revolution, with Saleh making relatively little adjustments even amidst increased domestic and international pressure. Only after the protests began did Saleh promise to make renovations to the electoral system, chief among them the drafting of a new constitution that would separate the legislative and executive branches; he also guaranteed legislation to decentralize the power structure of Yemen (BBC News). As was explained in the historical section of this paper, none of these plans came to fruition.

Now possessing knowledge of the Yemen's electoral system prior to the 2011 Arab Spring, how might one characterize it within the context of this paper? Firstly, I previously insinuated that if the electoral system was strong, the chances for a successful regime change would increase. I strongly believe that the evidence illustrates the underlying weaknesses of Yemen's electoral system. Additionally, when compared to an electoral system's theoretical definition and its intended purpose, Yemen's method of governing and its occasional elections cannot be considered an actual electoral system. The only true, multi-party election that occurred was in 1993 following the unification of the country. Saleh, upon realizing the results, managed to further implement his patronage political system and upset Southern Yemen; his act served as the primary impetus for their secession. Secondly, one must examine whether the Yemen political system under Saleh was flexible; I concur it was not. Saleh demonstrated little willingness to readjust the electoral system to include for greater oppositional strength, instead relying on a consistent pattern of corruption and clientelism to retain loyalty. Only when Yemen became embroiled in civil unrest did Saleh attempt to construct a "last ditch effort" to appeal to the general public. Thrust into conflict, with no actual precedent of an existing electoral system and unbiased opposition (i.e. unsusceptible to patronage politics), Yemen was doomed from the moment political life was weakened after unification in 1990. I hypothesize that had Yemen possessed a somewhat stable electoral system with an opposition that, although restricted, resisted the incumbent regime's co-optation efforts, their chances for successful regime change would slightly increase.

4.2 Extent of Foreign Influence

Yemen has dealt with extensive of foreign influence throughout its history, with the current civil conflict widely regarded as a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Although Saudi Arabia's influence in the region has escalated since the Arab Spring, Iran's presence in the region dates back much earlier. Iran's primary influence during the Saleh regime was directed at the support and funding of Houthi rebels, an organization that orchestrated consistent conflict between 2004 and 2010 (and, in present day, has become a primary actor within the civil war). Much of the pressure began when Houthis became angered with Saleh's lack of financial and political attention to their home province of Sa'ada (Terrill 432). Much of this stemmed from Saleh's opinion that Sa'ada held minimal political salience, with this belief reinforced by his penchant for patronage politics. Iran, concerned with the rise of Yemen-Saudi relations (and each of those countries' improving connections with Western governments), elected to covertly fund the Houthis. Conflict erupted following Saleh's attempt to arrest the head of the Houthis, Hussein al-Houthi, with insurgent Houthi forces working to push government troops out of Sa'ada (Terrill 433). This move angered Saleh, who moved to implement policy of military destruction and complete eradication. The operation, named "Scored Earth," caused immense chaos (Terrill 433). Houthis began to attack Saleh government strongholds and several divisions caused minor attacks within Saudi Arabia that led to Saudi missile strikes on Houthi members. Upon Saudi Arabia exiting the war, a tenuous cease-fire was drawn. This proved to be ineffective, however, as intra-state fighting continued. Iran continued to step up their financing of Houthi operations throughout the conflict. After the Arab Spring of 2011, Iran considerably increased their influence in Yemen. There are variety of reports strengthening the veracity of this claim:

> "A United Nations Panel of Experts monitoring Iranian sanctions compliance reported that Yemen-based militants in Houthi areas were receiving Iranian weapons. In the media, a November 2011 Los Angeles Times article quoted U.S. intelligence sources as stating that Iranian operatives had provided millions of dollars to the Houthis. In 2012, the New York Times noted that there was compelling evidence of "at least limited material support from the Iranians." The New York Times further maintained that Iranian smugglers supported by Iran's elite Quds Force were using small boats to smuggle small arms to the Houthis" (Terrill 436).

Although a relatively simplistic summation of the extent of foreign influence within Yemen before and after the 2011 revolution (though Iran was, by far, the most prominent foreign influence), how did this external interference affect the trajectory of Yemen post-Arab Spring? Remember that one of the outcomes of foreign influence are FIRCs, foreign-induced regime changes. Whether it be a direct or indirect policy, Iran's funding of the Houthis held an instrumental role in the destabilization of the country. Iran certainly had regional interests that necessitated their involvement within Yemen. Crucial geopolitical tensions, from increased Saudi presence within the region to the elimination of key Iranian economic partners, certainly factored into Iran's decision to interfere. Although foreign influence certainly destabilized the country prior to the Arab Spring, Iran's support of the Houthi's served to be a primary inhibitor of the attempted democratic transition; simply, Yemen's continued disarray was beneficial for Iranian interests. Like Yemen's weak and inflexible electoral system, it appears that foreign influence also partially explains why Yemen's revolution failed to gain traction and lead to institutional change.

4.3 Elite Control of Revolution

The final variable of importance is the extent to which elites control or manipulate social revolutions. As I discussed within the theory portion of this paper, the more elites permeate what originated as a civilian-driven movement, the greater the likelihood of the revolution failing. Yemen's Arab Spring retains a strikingly different quality than that of Tunisia's: it was organized and methodic, driven by a clear institutional framework. Even with these seemingly positive qualities, however, it failed spectacularly. More importantly, Saleh himself was not exiled or forced to abdicate immediately. What explains this unusual circumstance? Yemen's movement was largely organized by the opposition, particularly by al-Islah and other opposition parties of the JMP.

Prior to the Arab Spring, the JMP retained little legitimacy in the public sector. As previously noted, many of their legislators and officials capitulated to Saleh's patronage politics. This changed dramatically, however, as these opposition parties began to recognize that Saleh's grip on power was abating. The first rumblings of political instability occurred following several small and civilian-driven protests. Saleh attempted to suppress these initial protests immediately, which drew both domestic and international condemnation. Seeing an interstice, the JMP began to assiduously organize massive protests. As Vincent Durac explains, "the JMP organized major rallies in Sana'a, Taiz and Al-Baydah governorates, at which protesters called for national dialogue and denounced poor living conditions. . . began to align itself with the protest movement and. .was supporting its demand for an immediate end to Saleh's rule" (363). These efforts, however, eventually frustrated traditional civilian organizers who argued that the formal opposition was co-opting the protests movement; this assertion ultimately proved to be correct (Juneau 412). Al-Islah, the primary spear-head of the formal opposition, was reported requesting the civilian protesters to change their slogan from "The people want the fall of the regime" to the "The people want the reform of the regime" (Juneau 414). Furthermore, an internal document intercepted by Wikileaks describes the leader of the Al-Islah party, Hamid Al-Ahmar, and his plans for co-opting the revolution. This provides further evidence for my assertions, especially due to it being made public in 2009 which was before the revolution had even begun. I have replicated some of the cable below, focusing on the salient portions:

> “Hamid al-Ahmar, Islah Party leader, prominent businessman, and de facto leader of Yemen's largest tribal confederation, claimed that he would organize popular demonstrations throughout Yemen aimed at removing President Saleh from power. . .Ahmar will begin organizing anti-regime demonstrations in "every single governorate," modeled after the 1998 protests that helped topple Indonesian President Suharto. . .Removing Saleh from power in a scenario that does not involve throwing the country into complete chaos will be impossible without the support of the (currently skeptical) Saudi leadership and elements of the Yemeni military, particularly MG Ali Muhsin, according to Ahmar” (WikiLeaks Cable).

This demonstrates a clear and blatant attempt by al-Islah and the JMP, parties that had been willing participants in Saleh’s patronage politics, to co-opt the movement. In addition, the JMP was the primary negotiator alongside the Gulf Cooperation Council when drafting the agreement for Saleh to step down; they did this with no input from civilian protesters which angered the informal opposition (Durac 363). As one can visibly see, Yemen’s experience solidifies the assertion that elite control damages and threatens the viability of civilian-driven movements. Like the previous two variables explicated, the JMP’s permeation into the protester’s revolution ultimately prevented it from gaining traction and enacting lasting change. What began as a hopeful movement for institutional change transformed into a continuation of patronage politics led by the formal opposition, a practice that slowly descended Yemen in civil war and immense bloodshed.

Tunisia

4.1 Electoral and Party Systems

It is difficult to begin to describe the electoral system employed within President Ben Ali’s Tunisia. After ascending to the presidency in 1987, Ali inherited a unitary system. The RCD party, or Democratic Constitutional Rally party, continually dominated parliamentary elections. Rarely did the oppositional parties allowed gain more than a few seats within parliament until the 1999 electoral renovations that both adjusted the party quota system and mandated multi-party presidential elections. The party quota system is increasing important, as it was continually adjusted by Ali; each reconstruction occurred after increased domestic pressure. The three integral quota adjustments can be viewed below:

Year	**Quota Adjustment**
1990	12% of parliamentary seats allocated to other legal parties (informally).
1999	19% of parliamentary seats allocated to other legal parties.
2009	25% of parliamentary seats allocated to other legal parties.

Figure 1. Quota System Percentage Adjustments (Paciello)

These quotas undoubtedly impacted the ability for legitimate opposition to enter the parliament, although the quota adjustments did lead to some increased opposition participation. Following the 2000 elections, opposition parties managed to gain 34 seats in the 182-member unicameral parliament, a sizable increase from the previous election cycle (Sadiki 64). As expected, the RCD party captured all the remaining seats. Even with this reality, early indications illustrate the presence of an institutionalized electoral system. This system remained in place for over 20 years which begs the question: how did it manage to do so? Our two indicators, strength and flexibility, are helpful in answering this question. Firstly, although the electoral system was unequivocally restrictive, it managed to ingrain itself within Tunisia and achieve the buy-in of community stakeholders. Hamadi Redessi, in an article for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, describes the way the state, through its electoral system, managed to retain moderate stability and power:

> "Equality between men and women, in addition to a sizeable middle class, generally helped the state to preserve social balance and comfortably keep its grip on civil society. Tunisia also stands out politically in the Arab world for its stability, which can be credited to the benefits of the corporate state. Since independence in 1956, there has been an enduring alliance among the ruling party, professional syndicates (industrial workers, artisans, and farmers), and women's organizations that effectively closes out any potential competition."

Unlike the electoral system found within Yemen, Tunisia's construction provided the opportunity for limited political diversity. Under the Ben Ali, the country placed a great emphasis on political gender equality. Immediately upon being deemed President, Ben Ali provided the state's recognition of two salient and community-driven feminist organizations, l'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD) and l'Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement (AFTURD) (Moghadam 6). The parliament also retained significant – in the context other MENA region countries, such as Yemen – gender representation within its parliament. The percentage of females occupying parliamentary seats between the years of 1995-2010 ranged from 23-28% (Moghadam 9). Furthermore, although restrictive, the parliament also routinely passed significant female-centric legislation (Moghadam 6). How might this speak to the strength of Tunisia's electoral system prior to revolution? Although only one portion of the previous Tunisian electoral system, the emphasis on gender equality signifies an important factor: a stable governing method that gradually grew more open to valuing political diversity – strength. The legislative success of female-focused bills indicates the presence of stable institutional principles. In other words, unlike Yemen, Tunisia had the ability to build on *precedent;* the possibility to pass impactful policy and embark on model governance was not an unrecognizable phenomenon for Tunisians upon the denouement of the Arab Spring.

Yet another factor that indicates strength of Tunisia's electoral system prior to revolution was the existence of *independent* opposition parties, a reality that lies in direct contrast with

Yemen's opposition parties. President Ali certainly facilitated wide-spread corruption and provided clientelist benefits, but these policies were intra-party in nature; they were reserved specifically for loyal RCD members and other influential economic stakeholders. Opposition parties were, by and large, not provided opportunities to gain benefits from the Ben Ali regime. Thus, when the regime was overthrown, "political parties did not have to start from a blank slate in terms of both popular perceptions and organizational structures. Two parties. . . that would play an important role in the post-revolution period - - the liberal Congress for the Republic (CPR) and the leftist Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) - had developed some name recognition and political legitimacy as opposition parties under the Ben Ali regime" (Hamid 139-140). This provided reassurance to citizens hesitant about wholesale regime change, ensuring the opportunity to select independent parties that had resisted the incumbent regime. Unlike in Yemen, where the primary opposition parties had been co-opted by the Saleh regime, Tunisian opposition parties were able to maintain an unbiased and neutral role in facilitating the transitional government.

I must finally address the existence of flexibility of Ben Ali's electoral system. The regime was undoubtedly restrictive, oppressive, and a consistent violator of human rights. With this said, Ali recognized the need to continually grant concessions to the opposition. This incrementally strengthened the opposition parties and the electoral system at large, increasing the possibility of a smooth transition. It is reported that Ben Ali recognized the dangers of facilitating a "meaningless opposition," and due to this fear, decided to act to ensure his regime's longevity while placating angered opposition members. This demonstrates flexibility, which I defined as how often a regime makes concessions to opposition parties or changes to the electoral system prior to revolution. When the revolution came to fruition, Tunisia retained an existent parliamentary system with gradually growing independent opposition parties; compare this to the

Yemen electoral system that demonstrated immense weakness and inflexibility. Tunisia's electoral system, even with its penchant for restrictiveness, provided institutionalized political precedents upon which the revolutionaries could build.

4.2 Extent of Foreign Influence

Upon testing the variable of foreign influence on the case of Tunisia, there is minimal evidence of foreign involvement within the country prior to the Arab Spring. With this said, President Ben Ali was able to cultivate beneficial economic relations with international partners (e.g. the United States, France). This could feasibly be seen as a dependent relationship between two states, a subcategory of foreign influence. The country itself, however, simply lacked – and continues to – any valuable resources that would attract destabilizing foreign influences. Peitro Marzo expertly describes why foreign influence did not ultimately impact Tunisia's Arab Spring:

> "Tunisia's relatively sparse natural resources have liberated it from the traditional geopolitical and economic appetites of foreign countries and multinational companies. In Tunisia, neither hydrocarbons nor other resources dominate the economy. As a result, the rent-seeking mechanism, which many experts regard as one of the main reasons for the undemocratic exceptionality of the Middle East and North Africa, is neutralized."

As I have previously demonstrated, diminished foreign influence increases the possibility of successful democratic transition. Without the added pressures of internationally induced domestic instability, Tunisians were able to freely conduct the transition and establish parliamentary elections and the new constitution on their own; this entire transitional process was done internally with little correspondence with international interests. The MENA region itself, although viewing Tunisia as an example on which to build the subsequent Arab Spring protests, displayed relatively little interest in Tunisia's geopolitical salience. Although foreign involvement did not retain a significant role within domestic operations prior the revolution, it certainly helped support Tunisia's nascent democracy following the establishment of a new constitution and parliamentary elections. Two countries in particular, Germany and the United States, began to provide monetary aid and subsidiary support measures for the tenuous democratic institutions that were being developed within Tunisia; these efforts have continued to the present day, with original Ben Ali allies Italy and France also supporting Tunisian growth initiatives (Marzo). It is striking to compare this reality to Yemen, a country that received minimal assistance following their attempted revolution and was beset by damaging foreign influences. Comparatively speaking, it is blatantly apparent why the two countries diverged in this regard.

4.3 Elite Control of Movement

Similar to the previous variable analyzed, Tunisia's case is also striking when compared to Yemen's revolution. Tunisian elites and opposition parties exerted minimal influence over the civilian-led social movements. It is important to note, however, that this is not to say opposition parties were prepared for a transitional period. As early as eight years prior to the fall of the Ben Ali regime, salient opposition leaders had begun to meet and theorize about what conditional variables would be needed for a transition to democratic governance (Stephan and Liz 23). As I discussed within the analysis of Tunisia's electoral system, this was made possible due to the flexibility of said system and the independent nature of the opposition parties. After Bouazizi's protest suicide, citizens became galvanized for change. The opposition parties did not have to provide an impetus for the protests and subsequently organize them, something their counterparts in Yemen had to do. Ordinary Tunisians capitalized on the advent of social media and were able to quickly amass wide-spread support, support that was both genuine and not influenced by the opposition. Citizens became impassioned, with 75% of Tunisians reported as saying that the two primary catalysts of their Arab Spring were a transition to democracy and newfound economic prosperity (Moaddel 192-193). Opposition parties within Tunisia, having already established a relatively strong political society and cohesive group, could afford to employ a "wait-and-see" approach. Only when Ben Ali's regime began to violently crack down on protesters did opposition parties get involved, yet even then their presence consisted primarily of expressing their discontent with the incumbent regime and offering an amplified platform for activists to disseminate their message. How might this indicate reason why Tunisia possessed an increased possibility of a successful democratic transition?

Simply put, what began as a civilian-driven movement in Tunisia remained a civilian-driven movement throughout the entirety of the revolutionary period. Elites and formal opposition parties merely played a supporting role in helping propel the revolution forward. This lies in stark contrast to the Yemeni experience, where opposition parties co-opted the primary operations of the civilian movement and forcefully inserted their dogma into the public messaging sphere; the opposition party, rather than play a supporting role, ultimately hindered any chance of genuine civilian-driven change. The Tunisian formal opposition had carefully and covertly cultivated support among the general populous throughout Ben Ali's tenure as ruler and could thus allow ordinary civilians to drive the movement and determine its outcomes. Tunisian opposition parties and their approach were rewarded following the country's first democratic elections, with the previously outlawed Islamic party gaining a majority and other sundry parties also earning sizable seat counts.

5. CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have conducted a two-pronged analysis. I began by arguing that there are three fundamental variables that potentially indicate whether a revolution is successful or not: the strength and flexibility of the electoral system prior to regime change, the extent of foreign influence on the incumbent regime, and the level of elite predation of the social/revolutionary movement during attempted regime change. I then proceeded to test each of the variables in a comparative analysis of my two selected case studies, Tunisia and Yemen. Upon conducting my analysis, I found that Yemen's status prior to the revolutionary event and instability in all three outlined factors rendered their revolution impossible from the beginning. Yemen dealt with an immensely inflexible and debilitated electoral system, foreign influence (i.e. Iran) that exacerbated existing domestic instability, and the existence of opposition parties that had been co-opted by Saleh's regime and ultimately hijacked what began as a societally driven movement. This lies in direct contrast with Tunisia, whose historical experience with the three concepts greatly increased the possibility of a transition to democracy. Tunisia's electoral system, although restrictive, fostered the development of an independent opposition and retained moderate strength and flexibility. The country also experienced minimal foreign influence and elite predation which allowed their "Jasmine revolution" to remain domestically created and civilian driven.

Although I strongly believe the three theoretical variables utilized in each case study serve as prime indicators on whether a revolution will be successful, there is much work to be done in clarifying the salience of each of them. This paper merely scratches the surface in understanding the true extent of each of the variables in both the Tunisian and Yemen cases. The variables do, however, help succor the creation of a new theoretical framework that can be applied to similar Arab Spring revolutions. For example, the application of this framework to the case of Egypt would undoubtedly yield edifying and thought-provoking results. This paper, however, has attempted to contribute an increased understanding of the structural factors behind the success of

Tunisia and the failure of Yemen, two diametrically opposite cases that have continually perplexed scholars.

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