Divided We Stand – The Resilience of Monarchies in the Arab Spring

by

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Divided We Stand: The Resilience of Monarchies in the Arab Spring - Chapter 1

Chapter 1
The Resilience of Monarchies and the Field of Political Contestation

Monarchies, Presidential Autocracies, and the Field of Political Contestation

As the third wave of democracy swept across continents and inspired predictions of the end of history, dictators everywhere scrambled to avoid falling victim to democratic revolution. Democracy had become the new global norm, but there seemed to be one notable exception. As the number of democracies worldwide nearly doubled between 1972 and the beginning of the new millennium, the Middle East actually experienced a democratic decline (Bellin 2004). While a handful of regimes in the region introduced limited democratic reforms, these openings were transient, and the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East proved to be particularly durable in the face of democratizing pressures. Political scientists tried to address the region’s exceptionalism from a variety of perspectives, arguing that authoritarian resilience in the region could be explained by institutional structures (Langohr 2004, Lust 2005, Brownlee 2009), the strength of the states’ coercive forces (Quinlivan 1999, Bellin 2004), cultural factors that preclude the practice of democracy (Sharabi 1988), and the availability of extensive oil rents (Beblawi and Luciano 1987).

The necessity of these explanations dissapeared when a street vendor in Tunisia self immolated to express his frustration with the regime of Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali. The Arab Spring rattled the confidence of political scientists researching authoritarianism in the region. As Tarek Masoud wrote of Mubarak’s collapse in Egypt:

Given this combustible mix of a failing regime, an aging leader, and a people increasingly willing to confront both, one might conclude that the revolution was not only

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1 See Marsha Posusney, “Enduring Authoritarianism: Middle East Lessons for Comparative Theory” for an overview of proposed explanations for the durability of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East
inevitable, but overdetermined. Those of us who study the region not only failed to predict the regime's collapse, we actually saw it as an exemplar of something we called "durable authoritarianism"—a new breed of modern dictatorship that had figured out how to tame the political, economic, and social forces that routinely did in autocracy's lesser variants” (Masoud 2011).

By sweeping away four Middle Eastern dictators in less than a year, the mass uprisings of the Arab Spring put an end to the powerful and persistent idea that Arab authoritarians were the exception to the rule. At the same time, the Arab Spring provides a useful series of events for comparing the politics of protest and revolution across various countries in the Middle East and improving our understanding of the workings of authoritarian regimes. While Middle Eastern regimes in general might not be exceptionally durable, certain regimes proved to be more resilient than others, and the dynamics of protest movements differed across countries in several informative ways.

A particularly noteworthy trend was the resilience of monarchs when compared to their presidential counterparts. Presidential autocrats fell in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, while Syria continues to be wracked by major unrest. In fact, of the region’s authoritarian republics, only Algeria has experienced no major upheaval. Meanwhile, the monarchs of the Middle East have fared far better. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia largely avoided the unrest. Oman and Kuwait experienced only minor turbulence. Jordan and Morocco faced major protest movements, but both monarchs managed to diffuse the situation by offering political reforms. Of the monarchies, only Bahrain dealt with a massive uprising on the scale of the presidential autocracies, and for a variety of reasons the regime survived.

What explains this comparative resilience of the monarchies? As the revolutions of the Arab Spring unfolded, several scholars theorized about possible explanations. Russell E. Lucas postulated that the monarchies have imbedded themselves in their countries’ “political DNA,” and this established position increases wariness about regime change. However, this explanation ignores the strong ties that single-party presidential regimes also build with political, military,

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2 The issue drew the attention of prominent think tanks studying the Middle East, including the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

and popular institutions in their own countries. Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies emphasized the monarchies’ ingrained legitimacy, large families, and deep pockets. The latter certainly helps to explain the resiliency of the Gulf monarchs, whose expansive wealth allows them to preempt major social unrest. However, financial resources cannot tell the entire story, as the success of monarchs in Morocco and Jordan remains somewhat puzzling. These countries lack the resources of the Gulf, and they share many of the same economic and social challenges that caused so many problems for dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The fact that Morocco and Jordan did go through their own protest movements highlights that point. However, despite these weaknesses, both King Abdullah and King Mohammed pursued reforms to which the majority of the opposition acquiesced, and even the opposition that continues to be dissatisfied refrains from calling for the exit of the king. The consistent difference in these outcomes from those in the presidential autocracies suggests that institutional variance offers a plausible explanation for the greater resiliency of the monarchs.

Shadi Hamid of the Brookings Institution follows this approach, arguing that monarchs benefit from an inherent flexibility and the ability to deflect popular anger towards scapegoats (Hamid 2011). His analysis was supported by Marwan Muasher of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who suggested that monarchs have an easier time reforming their political systems. These institutional approaches provide important insights into the question of monarchical resilience that are expanded on and developed throughout this thesis.

Political scientists have long recognized that institutions affect a wide array of outcomes in political systems, and the study of institutions has been particularly important in its application to the politics of authoritarian regimes. The field’s history extends to the early days of the Cold War, when political scientists identified the institutional structures that distinguish totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. (Arendt 1951, Linz 1975). More recently, political scientists have debated the proper system for classifying the world’s extensive spectrum of regimes. The extremes stretch from highly closed autocracies to fully fledged liberal-democracies, while the middle section is cluttered with a variety of governments that mix elements of both democratic and authoritarian politics. Political scientists have conjured a hodgepodge of terms to describe

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5 Ibid.
these regimes, ranging from competitive authoritarianism to pseudo democracy, but the general insight is that these regimes are not necessarily transitioning toward democracy; rather, they offer a stable system of government that can be capable of resisting democratizing pressures (Carothers 2002, Diamond 2002, Levitsky and Way 2002, Schedler 2006, Brownlee 2009).

The ability to effectively manipulate institutions has provided dictators with the means to weaken opposition, reward allies, and perpetuate their rule. Jennifer Gandhi demonstrates that regimes are capable of using the controlled introduction of institutions such as parties and legislatures to co-opt opposition with rents and policy concessions (2008). While stronger authoritarian regimes have less use for these institutions, weaker regimes can increase their resilience by adopting a legislature and permitting opposition political parties to function. Gandhi’s findings are supported by Brownlee in Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization (2007), which illustrates how the establishment of a strong party apparatus enables dictators to co-opt the opposition and stabilize their rule. Ellen Lust argues that the structure of political contestation can also be manipulated to control the opposition’s willingness to mobilize against the regime (2005). When the regime creates divisions between opposition movements by legalizing some organizations and making others illegal, the legal opposition is far less likely to oppose the government, even when it has a strong opportunity to do so. Dictators have even figured out how to transform civil society organizations into a weakness for the opposition. Civil society organizations tend to be relatively weak and fragmented, and by designing political systems that funnel opposition away from political parties and into civil society organizations, the government can undermine the capacity of the opposition to unite and effectively challenge the regime (Langohr 2004).

However, though dictators can shape institutions to constrain opposition, the underlying institutional type of the regime can predispose it to a certain fate. When operationalized as the independent variable, institutional structure has been shown to affect the durability of authoritarian regimes. In a landmark study, Barbara Geddes (1999) developed a typology of single-party regimes, personalist regimes, and military regimes to determine which structure was more likely to experience authoritarian breakdown and under which conditions. Geddes found that military regimes survive for the shortest period of time, followed by personalist and single-party regimes. This durability stems in part from the incentive structures associated with regime types that influence rulers’ decisions as they confront challenges to the status quo. Geddes found
that military regimes are more likely to negotiate their exit from power, personalist regimes circle the wagons to face off challengers, and single-party regimes attempt to absorb the opposition into the party structure.

Jay Ulfelder (2005) expanded on Geddes study by applying her typology and use of game theoretic logic to study the impact of contentious collective action on the survival of authoritarian regimes. While single-party and military regimes are vulnerable to such acts, personalist regimes are not. Ulfelder argues that this dynamic stems from differences in how these institutions govern and how they secure the support of the population. Single-party regimes depend on a narrative of popular sovereignty; as a result, they must maintain a façade of popular support, or their legitimacy collapses. Large protest movements, and the violent repression of those movements, threaten that narrative. Therefore, single-party regimes are more likely to collapse due to events of contentious collective action. Military regimes are also vulnerable. Military governments tend to value the institutional integrity of the military more than they value the military’s continued control of the country, so peaceful protests, which threaten the military’s prestige in society, can be effective at encouraging military leaders to cede power to a civilian government. On the other hand, personalist regimes are only worried about the power of an individual, not narratives of popular sovereignty or the prerogatives of an institution. As a result, they have fewer qualms and lower costs associated with crushing popular unrest.

While the studies of Geddes and Ulfelder provide important insights into the processes by which regime type influences regime durability and decision making under pressure, their typology excludes monarchies. In fact, monarchy has often been discounted in regime typologies, ignored as an anomaly or grouped together with other personalist regimes (Anderson 1991, Herb 1999). In Political Order in Changing Societies, Huntington (1968) gives voice to the view that monarchies are an outdated anachronism by arguing that monarchies are doomed to collapse under the weight of expanding middle classes who are opposed to the very idea of kingship. On the other hand, Hisham Sharabi (1988) states that Middle Eastern monarchies are “no more than a modernized version of the traditional patriarchal sultanate.” By this logic, monarchies fit well in Geddes’ personalist category, since they are no more than the individual

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rule of an autocratic sultan identified by Weber and, more recently, Linz and Stepan (1996: 51-4).\(^7\)

However, there are good reasons to consider monarchies as a separate type of institutional structure, independent from a vague categorization of personalist regimes. At one point, monarchies were the most common form of government in the world, so their transformations hold important lessons for understanding political change in authoritarian regimes. Though monarchies are relatively rare in today’s world, their durability in the Middle East demonstrates their continued relevance. As to their distinctness, monarchies operate on the institutionalization of hereditary rule, with legitimacy derived from dynastic birth. This distinguishes monarchies from personalist regimes such as North Korea or Syria, where power passes from father to son but legitimacy is still derived from the party, or regimes such as Haiti, where an individual ruler tries to pass power to a family member but lacks the legitimacy to sustain the institutionalized rule of a dynasty.

This definition of monarchy is used by Axel Hadenius and Jan Teorell (2006), who apply Geddes’ interest in regime durability to an expanded typology that includes competitive authoritarian regimes and monarchies. They derive their typology from the three broad claims of legitimacy that have supported governments since the beginning of human history: election (single and multi party authoritarian regimes), force (military regimes), and birth (monarchies). The power of birth as a justification for rule is enough to distinguish monarchy as a separate type of institution worth studying on its own merits. Interestingly, Hadenius and Teorell find that, contrary to the prediction of Huntington and others, monarchies in the post-World War II era are the most durable type of authoritarian regime. In fact, the competition is not even close; on average, monarchies survive 22 years, which is eight years longer than single-party regimes, their closest competitor.

What explains this durability? Lisa Anderson (1991) suggested that absolutist monarchies in the Middle East are well suited to building their states and bringing them into the modern world, and as long as this state building process continued the monarchies would survive. However, even Anderson predicted that the monarchies would struggle once their populations became modernized and demanded greater political participation. Another explanation is offered

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by Michael Herb (1999), who argues that the resilience of Middle Eastern monarchies stems from the construction of dynastic regimes that utilize a large family structure to secure absolute control of the state. These monarchies entrench themselves in the state by filling cabinet and military positions with an extensive array of princes and sheikhs, and they minimize conflict within the family by instituting family councils to negotiate and build consensus between relatives on important matters of state.

Herb’s theory about dynastic monarchies offers a convincing explanation for why the institutional structure of these regimes precludes the development of internal challenges to the monarchy. Since the family holds the majority of positions in the state and has mechanisms for minimizing conflict within the family, the opposition cannot use a position within the state to mount a coup against the monarch. The theory is supported by the historical record. Of the Middle Eastern monarchies that established a regime structure centered on the dynasty, only one, Qatar, has experienced a successful internal coup. Of the six monarchies that did not utilize the dynasty to secure power over the state, three fell to military coups.

However, though the theory accounts for the durability of dynastic monarchies against internal threats, it does not account for the resilience of monarchies in the face of popular unrest. While several of the monarchies have been challenged by small radical organizations, most organized opposition refrains from challenging the right of the king to be king. Furthermore, few of the monarchies have experienced a mass uprising of the people that calls for the exit of the king - only the Shah in Iran has been overthrown by popular revolution in the Middle East. Most monarchs in the region continue to enjoy the approval of their people, even when there is widespread dissatisfaction with the government and a desire for reform (Ottaway and Muasher 2011). Herb attempts to account for this resiliency by suggesting that the extensive families of the dynastic monarchies allow these regimes to maintain close relations with their people, and he argues that the success of the nondynastic regimes should be explained by the skill of individual rulers. However, these explanations are unsatisfactory, particularly when the monarchies are compared to the presidential autocracies in the Arab Spring. Single-party regimes are also effective at extending ties into local communities, and it is unlikely that autocratic presidents are substantially worse politicians than their kingly counterparts. Rather, institutional structure likely explains the success of monarchs in avoiding or diffusing widespread popular unrest in addition to internal challenges to the regime.
Herb hints at a possible explanation to the question when he argues that the Middle Eastern monarchies are actually in a strong position to progress through a gradual process of democratic reforms. He points to Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco to show that both dynastic and nondynastic monarchies have the important option to open a parliament without threatening the foundations of their rule. In describing this dynamic, Herb writes:

One of the most important liberalizing steps in any authoritarian regime is the holding of free and fair elections. Elections, however, are very threatening for most authoritarian ruling groups – if a ruling group loses an election it also loses any semblance of legitimacy it may have previously enjoyed. Monarchs, by contrast, are born to their positions, not elected. Monarchs can hold elections and still be monarchs…Once a parliament is in place, the monarch and his challengers can negotiate a sharing of power between palace and parliament…This capacity to liberalize in small steps that have predictable outcomes lowers the cost of liberalizing moves…and thus, other things equal, makes it more likely that monarchical elites will take these steps (16).

The dynamic that Herb describes points to an important institutional difference between monarchies and presidential autocracies that could explain why monarchies are more capable of diffusing protest movements against the regime. That difference is the monarch’s position outside of the field of political contestation, compared to presidential autocrats who sit in positions that can and must be challenged by the opposition for democratic reforms to be implemented. In monarchies where there is a competitive element to the political system, as in Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain, political parties and politicians compete over seats in parliament and positions in the cabinet, rather than the kingship itself. While loyalist politicians and parties support the prerogatives of the monarchy, the king does not strictly associate with a single party; instead, he maintains a relationship with almost all political actors and manages the relationships between them. This situation differs from presidential systems such as Egypt and Tunisia, where the dictator leads a party and holds a position that is theoretically contestable through elections. While the president can attempt to co-opt opposition by extending the boundaries of the party, he can never disassociate himself and his political fortunes from the party structure. The effects of this institutional difference can also be extended to closed regimes.
Though Bashar al-Assad of Syria maintains a monopoly on political participation and forbids any opposition from operating legally within the political system, he is still a president and leader of the Ba’ath party. As a result, the introduction of competitive reforms would involve competition against Al-Assad and his party. On the other hand, the king in Saudi Arabia mediates between the country’s competing factions, and the monarchy always has the option to expand its advisory council into a competitively elected legislative branch where the king continues to act as an arbiter positioned outside of the field of political contestation.

The placement in the field of political contestation has already been shown to affect the politics of authoritarian regimes in certain respects. It determines dictators’ preferred electoral systems (Lust and Jamal 2002), with monarchs preferring to construct a system that produces several fragmented parties that can be controlled from the palace and presidential autocrats interested in building a system that allows their party to dominate elections. In Morocco and Jordan, the political realm is saturated with weak parties competing for the favor of the palace; in Egypt, Syria, and Yemen, and other presidential autocracies, electoral rules favor the dominance of a single ruling party. Jillian Schwedler (2006) argues that placement in the field of contestation also influences the degree to which opposition organizations moderate when they are included in the political system. In comparing the Islamic Action Front (IAF) in Jordan and the Islah Party in Yemen, Schwedler finds that electoral participation has contributed to the ideological and political moderation of the IAF but not Islah. She partly attributes this result to differences in the field of political contestation. Since there is no ruling party in Jordan that can be threatened by electoral defeat, the IAF faces lower costs to forming coalitions with a wide range of opposition organizations of varying ideological backgrounds. In Yemen, the ruling party’s presence in the parliament required Islah to sustain its relations with that party to preserve its access to power. Developing coalitions with other opposition organizations threatened its special relationship, and the resulting political situation helped to stunt the moderation of Yemen’s primary Islamist political party (Schwedler 2006, 195).

Building on Herb’s insights and the findings of Schwedler and Lust, I hypothesize that the dictator’s presence in the field of contestation also shapes political incentives in a way that influences the likely outcome of protest movements in authoritarian regimes. When a monarch sits above the political competition, there are fewer incentives for the opposition to escalate its demands to include the exit of the monarch, and the monarch faces lower costs for engaging with
the opposition and offering credible reforms. As a result, protests are less likely to escalate in monarchies than they are in other autocratic regimes.

I develop a game theoretical model to illustrate the dynamics of protest escalation in monarchies and presidential autocracies in the Middle East. Game theorists use formal models to study the strategic interactions between rational players and the outcomes they produce. The methodology has a long history in the social sciences, beginning with John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern’s classic, *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944). Though game theory’s primary application has been in economics, it is often used by political scientists as well. The earliest studies to apply game theory to political science focused on international strategy and nuclear deterrence (Schelling 1960). Since then, games have been used to analyze issues as diverse as judicial politics in America (Marks 1988, Epstein and Thomas 1995), coalition formation in legislatures (Jackson and Moselle 2002), and democratic transitions (Przeworski 1991, Ulfelder 2010).

After providing a detailed explanation of the model, case studies of several regimes in the Middle East are used to explore the applicability of the theory to the actual workings of politics in the region. The model posits the functioning of certain political processes, where the players’ preferences influence their choice of strategies regarding protests and the subsequent outcomes of the protest movement. The case studies then provide an opportunity to empirically test the model’s claims, with the studies demonstrating the relevancy of the model to the real world and the existence of various preferences amongst the actors. This methodology was pioneered by Robert Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry Weingast, whose book *Analytic Narratives* used case studies to test the accuracy and durability of formal models (1998). The methodology has already been applied to studies similar to this thesis. In *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World*, Ellen Lust (2005) constructs a model to illustrate the effects of different structures of political contestation on opposition-regime dynamics in the Middle East, and she uses several cases studies to explore the relevance of her theory.

The following chapter introduces the model and my hypotheses about its applicability to protest movements in monarchies and presidential republics. Chapter 3 examines the presidential republics, and chapter 4 discusses the monarchies of the Middle East. Chapter 5 provides concluding analysis of the study’s results.
Chapter 2

The Escalation Game

Developing the Model

The institutional structure of a regime shapes the political behavior of actors in that state (Brownlee 2007, 10). Institutions determine how political decisions are made, delineating the powers and responsibilities of individuals and organizations within the regime. They establish how different actors can participate in the political system, structuring avenues for entry into the regime and defining the space of political participation within the state. Institutions also influence the goals of a state’s political actors, adjusting the probability that certain actions will result in the desired outcome and affecting the costs and benefits of those outcomes for the various actors.

How does the dictator’s placement in the field of contestation influence the preferences of actors in the state? The process is the product of two institutional effects stemming from the field of political contestation: the ease by which the ruler can use scapegoats to avoid blame for the country’s problems, and the availability of different strategies for the opposition to pursue democratic reforms. These two factors do not by themselves determine the emergence of a mass protest movement, but they can affect the likelihood that such movements will develop by raising the threshold at which activists and the public will begin to favor toppling the regime over other possible outcomes.

The successful politician must be capable of taking credit for successes and avoiding blame for failures. This rule is no different in dictatorships, where dictators frequently attempt to use both internal and external scapegoats to shift blame for political and economic problems away from their rule. Protest movements are typically blamed on agitation by foreign agents, opposition movements are often blamed for political instability, and economic weaknesses are generally construed to be the result of exploitation by international powers.

Institutional arrangements can impact the effectiveness of using internal political actors as scapegoats for a country’s problems. Generally, monarchs have an easier time than their
presidential counterparts of convincingly blaming others for political and economic woes. This difference results from the rulers’ placement in the field of political contestation. In monarchies, the political system is divided between an electoral and bureaucratic system involving political parties, independent legislators, cabinet officials, and the monarch, who theoretically sits above the political fray and maintains an appearance of distance from day to day governing. In practice, the monarch wields immense power, influencing all major policy decisions, appointing cabinet officials, and strongly influencing the outcome of elections. However, the institutional arrangement affords the monarch enough distance from elected politicians and appointed bureaucrats to effectively shift blame away from the institution of the monarchy and onto the elected institutions. In Jordan, the country’s weak and fragmented political parties often seem to serve no other purpose than to be blamed for the country’s stalled democratic transition.\(^8\)

In presidential autocracies, the dynamic is different. Unlike kings, presidents do not have the benefit of a credible division between their positions in the governing system; instead, they sit squarely in the field of political contestation. The president leads a party that controls the national legislature, and his position requires him to assume direct responsibility for both political and governing outcomes. While the president might be capable of constructing a foreign threat to blame for the country’s problems, this tactic will eventually wear thin, particularly if economic and political conditions deteriorate rapidly. As Shadi Hamid of the Brookings Institution points out, this dynamic produces the following outcome:

> In republics, the person of the president, because of his dominating, partisan role, provides a rallying point for an otherwise fractious opposition. The protesters may disagree on how their country should be run and by whom, but they at least agree one thing: the president must go. The goal isn't political change, which can mean many different things in execution, but regime change (Hamid 2011).

Because the ruler is tied so closely to the ruling party and the bureaucracy, it becomes far more difficult for the president to deflect discontent toward the government away from regime actors who are not linked to his rule.

\(^8\) Author interview with Jordanian political scientist, Amman, Jordan, March 2011.
The following diagram illustrates why the institutional structures of monarchies and presidential autocracies place monarchs in a better position to shift public anger onto other political actors.

Since the political opposition and the public have a clear target for their anger in a presidential system, protestors are more likely to arrive at the conclusion that the president has to be overthrown for the system to change. In monarchies, it is more difficult for opposition to agree on what needs to change. As a result, institutional structure influences the preferences of political actors by affecting the dictator’s ability to create believable scapegoats for the country’s problems.

The dictator’s placement in the field of competition in monarchies and presidential autocracies also influence preferences by shaping the strategies available to the ruler and the opposition as they clash over the implementation of democratic reforms. Democratic transitions can emerge out of bargaining between elite actors (Rustow 1970, O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986), or they can develop from pressure exerted on the regime by a mass mobilization of the public (Bermeo 1997, Wood 2001). The opposition in monarchies has access to a bargaining
strategy that is not available to their counterparts in presidential autocracies. By focusing on the powers of parliament, the opposition can push for democratic reforms without directly challenging the king’s hold on power. While the long term goal of reducing the monarchy’s role from ruling to reigning would still result in the king losing his ability to shape policy, this outcome is less threatening than the king losing all power and prestige within the state (Herb 1999). This dynamic produces a situation where the costs to the king of implementing reforms are lower while the benefits to the opposition of working within the regime are simultaneously higher. The strategy has disadvantages for the opposition in particular, since kings can and do renege on commitments to reform. However, when the costs of chaotic regime change are taken into account, the availability of this strategy makes it more likely that the opposition will prefer political reforms to an outcome where the king is unseated through popular unrest.

The relationship between the monarch and the parliament in 17th century England demonstrates how a fight over the powers of parliament can be a credible strategy for the opposition. At the time, the King’s power was justified in terms of divine right; as God’s representative on Earth, the King had unlimited powers, and he could do no wrong. Such a narrative might suggest that parliament was powerless, but the parliament actually succeeded in turning divine right to their advantage. Since the king’s rule rested on the premise that he could do no wrong, the king had to be careful to do nothing that would drastically undermine that belief. By enthusiastically supporting this justification for the king’s power, parliamentarians elevated him to such a height that his powers were constrained (Morgan 1989). Eventually, the king had been boxed in so effectively that he started a desperate, and ultimately doomed, civil war in an attempt to reclaim his former strength. In the Middle Eastern monarchies of the present day, it is possible for the opposition to make use of a similar strategy. The institutional separation of a monarch’s position allows him to avoid political competition, and it also enables a narrative in which the king justifies his power by claiming to be an arbiter who exists above politics and is capable of overcoming his country’s political and social cleavages. This narrative protects the king, but if he hopes to sustain the narrative his behavior must stay within certain bounds. A skilled opposition can use this to their advantage, supporting the king’s position while simultaneously using the institutional structure and narrative of that position to constrain his range of possible actions and to expand the power of elected institutions. In Jordan and Morocco,
the opposition has halfheartedly pursued such a strategy, particularly since democratic openings in the 1990s.

In presidential autocracies, the situation is again different. It is far more difficult for the opposition to pursue a strategy that does not involve an end game that removes the dictator from power, for the simple reason that a democratic presidential or parliamentary system requires a change in power between parties (Schumpeter 1950). If the dictator implements reforms that threaten the ruling position of his party in parliament, his power will eventually disappear. The opposition knows this fact, so while cooption might still be possible, reforms lose some of their value for the opposition. As a result, a dictator who sits in the field of contestation faces higher costs for dealing with the opposition, and the benefits of working within the regime are lower for the opposition. The activists are therefore more likely to prefer an outcome where the dictator is overthrown to a temporary settlement involving political reforms lacking in long-term credibility.

These institutional effects on the preferences of actors influence the outcomes of protest movements, making opposition more likely to escalate into a direct challenge of the dictator’s power in an authoritarian government where the dictator is located within the field of contestation. The effects can be formally demonstrated by defining their impact on the strategies and payoffs of different actors in a game theoretic model.

The following section of the paper details the assumptions and processes of the “escalation game.” The model is one of perfect information, and actors are assumed to be rational. Regime typology relies on a simple categorization based on the dictator’s placement in the field of political contestation. Almost all regimes with a dictator outside the field of political contestation are monarchies, so this regime type will be identified as “monarchy.” Regimes where the dictator sits inside the field of political contestation will be termed “presidential autocracies.” The space of regimes included in this study is limited to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, since the region is the only one in the world that continues to include a large number of monarchical governments. By limiting the study to a single region, the cases can be studied comparatively with other governments that share, to a certain extent, a common identity and similar cultures and histories. The categorization neatly captures all of the region’s authoritarian regimes, with the exception Iran. Despite sharing a similar field of contestation with monarchies, the theocracy also includes significant differences. Furthermore, it did not
experience major unrest during the Arab Spring. As a result, Iran will be excluded from this study until the end, where comments will be made concerning the theory’s applicability to non-monarchical regimes.

The model will illustrate the effects of the field of political contestation on protest movements by analyzing the interactions between three different actors. The first actor is the activists, which encompasses the core of politically active members in the society who oppose the regime, ranging from student and youth activists to members of legal or illegal political parties. It is assumed for the purpose of the model that opposition activists, despite their varying experiences, organizations, and ideologies, have enough in common through their anti-government activism to justify an aggregation of their preferences toward the regime. While a more complex model would take variance between different activists’ preferences into account, assuming an aggregation of activists’ preferences should prove adequate for the purpose of examining the existence of the proposed institutional effects. The model’s second actor is the regime. The regime includes the dictator, key members of his inner decision making circle, and the security services that are tasked with carrying out the regime’s orders to repress street protests. The model assumes that the regime remains largely unified until an outcome is reached. The assumption is justified by the fact that the model does not take a position on whether or not a mass uprising actually succeeds in overthrowing the dictator; generally, regimes that fragment only do so after the protests have reached a critical mass (Hale 2005). The game’s third and final actor is the public, the silent majority of citizens that generally refrains from political activism but whose mass participation in protests against the regime is necessary for a popular revolution that is capable of overthrowing the dictator. As with the activists and the regime, the model simplifies the complex variance within the public and assumes that the people’s preferences toward various outcomes can be aggregated to attain a single preference ordering.

Each of the actors chooses between different strategies when faced with a protest situation. Activists first have the choice between strategies “protest” and “stay home,” where “protest” is the decision to take to the street to make demands against the regime and “stay home” means that the activists decide not to protest. If activists choose “protest,” they later have to make a decision between “escalate” “accept,” or “go home.” If the activists choose “escalate,” the protests continue as activists attempt to intensify their demands and their presence in the streets. The activists can also choose to “go home,” in which case the protests stop, or “accept,”
in which case the outcome is reform. These choices are in response to the regime’s two strategies: “repress” and “offer reforms.” When the regime chooses to respond to the activists’ protest with “offer reforms,” the regime tries to diffuse unrest with concessions. Concessions are broadly defined to include everything from small-scale bread and butter economic issues to fundamental political reforms, with the unifying factor being the regime’s emphasis on trying to entice protestors out of the streets with positive incentives. On the other hand, choosing “repress” means that the regime sends security forces to violently quell the unrest. As the third actor, the public must choose between strategies “stay home,” and “join.” Should the public choose “stay home,” the general public decides not to get involved with the protest movement. However, choosing “join” means that a significant part of the public takes to the streets, and the regime is faced with a mass uprising that calls for the dictator to leave and threatens the regime with the prospect of a popular revolution.

The game has four possible outcomes: status quo, reforms, reforms after repression, and mass uprising. If the outcome is status quo, then the political situation in the country does not change. Reforms mean that the protests end with an agreement for reforms between the regime and the activists. Reforms after repression occurs when the regime offers reforms after initially responding with heavy repression, and these late reforms are enough to keep the public from joining the activists in the streets. This outcome is assumed to be different than reforms because the initial repression embitters the relationship between the regime and the opposition and leaves the country more fragmented and vulnerable to future problems. While no regime during the Arab Spring can boast of avoiding repression completely, a relatively clear dividing line exists between those regimes that initially responded with a strategy of repression and those whose first response consisted of concessions. Should the outcome be mass uprising, the protests have escalated into a large scale revolt where a significant portion of the public enters the streets and a majority of those protestors have taken to demanding the exit of the dictator from power. This situation poses a serious threat to the dictator’s continued hold on power, but the outcome is not preordained. The dictator has the option to repress the uprising, and if the military chooses to obey the dictator’s orders he has a good chance of holding onto power. The model does not attempt to predict the likeliness that this will occur, as the loyalty of the military and its ability to repress a popular uprising depends on factors other than the field of political contestation. The
scope of this model is to show why presidential autocrats are more likely to find themselves in this situation than their royal counterparts.

The preferences of the game’s different actors depend on calculations of the costs and benefits associated with each outcome. While this model uses aggregate preferences of the different actors, it can be conceptualized as complementing models of collective action that emphasize an individual’s “threshold” at which the individual joins the event because its benefits begin to outweigh its costs (Granovetter 1978, 1422). While individuals weigh costs and benefits differently and thus have different thresholds, the institutional effects of the field of contestation are present in a monarchy and lacking in a presidential republic. Thus, they can be understood as a constant in an individual’s equation of costs and benefits. This constant means that aggregate preferences in monarchies will be more likely to tend toward reform while aggregate preferences in presidential republics will be more likely to tend toward uprising.

Dictators prefer to maximize and maintain their power (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011), so the dictators’ preferences are based on a cost function that takes into account the extent of their reduction in policymaking power, the risk of civil war, and the risk of personal death or exile involved with losing power. For activists and the public, the end goal is assumed to be the establishment of a democratic government.\(^9\) Outcomes \textit{mass uprising}, \textit{reforms}, and \textit{reforms after repression} have the potential to move the country closer toward this goal, but there are different costs and benefits associated with each outcome across countries and regime types that adjust the calculations of the actors. The benefits include the absolute amount of reforms that are actually possible and the extent to which implementation of these reforms by the regime is credible and likely to occur. However, the activists and the public must also weigh the potential costs associated with the risk of personal harm from repression by the regime, the probability that the regime will renege on promises of reform, the potential for economic and political chaos if the regime collapses, and the risk of civil war. In countries where the regime tolerates political parties, an additional cost for the activists is the loss of a position within the government for co-opted political parties and politicians. The popularity of the dictator with the public should also be taken into account as a cost.

\(^9\) The Arab Barometer polling conducted by Mark Tessler at the University of Michigan finds that peoples across the Middle East overwhelmingly consider democracy to be the best form of government. See 232.4: http://www.arabbarometer.org/reports/countryreports/comparisonresults06.html
The game occurs as follows. First, activists must choose between “protest” and “stay home.” If they choose “stay home,” the game ends with outcome \textit{status quo}. If the activists choose “protest,” the regime must make a decision to either “repress” or “offer reforms.” Once the regime has made its choice, the activists must determine whether they should “escalate” or “go home.” If the regime has chosen “repress,” then “go home” results in outcome \textit{status quo}. If the regime has chosen “offer reforms,” then “accept” leads to outcome \textit{reforms}. If the activists choose “escalate” after the regime chooses “offer reforms,” then the public must determine if it will “join” the activists in their escalation or “stay home.” If the activists chose to gamble with escalation and the public stays home, then the outcome is \textit{status quo}, as the activists will lack the strength to maintain the protests and the regime will likely renege on any initial offer of reform. However, if a significant part of the public joins the activists, the regime will be faced with a mass uprising that could lead to popular revolution. If the activists choose “escalate” after the regime chooses “repress,” the game looks slightly different. At this point, the regime has one more opportunity to either continue with repression or to offer reforms in the form of political and economic concessions. Afterwards, the public decides whether or not to join the protests. If the regime again chooses to repress and the public stays home, the outcome is \textit{status quo}. However, if the regime chooses to offer reforms and the public stays home, the outcome is \textit{reforms after repression}. In both cases, the outcome is \textit{mass uprising} if the public chooses to join the activists in the streets.

**Illustration of the Escalation Game:**
The following tables and diagrams depict various preference rankings and their associated outcomes in the model that could plausibly be expected to occur across different countries.

**Outcome of Status Quo**

While it is assumed that dictators will always prefer the status quo to other outcomes, more variance is possible for activists and the public. These actors might prefer the status quo to reform or an uprising if the costs associated with the risks of repression or the chaos of an uprising are particularly high. For instance, the high quality of life for citizens of the UAE increases the potential costs of unrest, mitigating activists and the public’s desire to protest against the regime. In these cases, protests do not happen, as activists choose to stay home rather than initiate unrest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
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</table>

It is important to note that the public’s preferences determine whether or not the outcome of the game will be status quo. If the public is highly averse to any change, preferring the status quo to all other outcomes, then the preferences of the activists are irrelevant. Regardless of whether the activists prefer reforms or mass uprising, the public will not join an uprising and the regime does not need to offer reforms. Thus, even if the activists choose to protest, and then to escalate their protests, the only outcome they can attain will be status quo. This result illustrates why small groups of activists protesting in Saudi Arabia and Oman failed to acquire reforms from the regime or to initiate broader unrest among their respective publics. The result also speaks to the question of “why now?” Revolutions and mass uprisings are rare events that happen infrequently, and protests regularly occur in authoritarian regimes without leading to the overthrow of the regime. If the model is used to explain this outcome, it suggests that the public usually prefers the status quo to an uprising or reforms, in that the lack of these outcomes is
proof that the public does not prefer it at this point in time. Even if they desire reforms or regime change, they have calculated that the risks of protesting are too high. Therefore, for preferences to change, an event or series of events, such as the immolation of Bouazizi, must spark a change in actors’ calculation of costs and benefits associated with the risks of protesting and the outcomes of reform or regime change. The model does not posit which specific events create these circumstances; rather, it is meant to illustrate what happens when preferences do change, and how institutional effects act as a constant that increases or decreases the odds of activists and the public preferring reforms to a mass uprising.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms after</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>2: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome of Reform**

If both activists and the public prefer *reforms* to *mass uprising*, then the outcome will be *reforms*. Knowing that these two actors still prefer *mass uprising* to *status quo*, the regime will offer concessions to end the unrest before it escalates and the public chooses to enter the streets in large numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>3: Reforms after</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>2: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

It is important to note that the preferences of the activists are the determinant factor in reaching an outcome of *reforms* if both the public and the activists prefer *reforms* and *mass*
uprising to status quo. If the public prefers mass uprising to reforms, as below, but the activists still prefer reforms to mass uprising, then the outcome will be reforms. This result demonstrates why regimes facing a restive public can avoid large scale protests if they succeed in designing a political system where activists can be co-opted by relatively minor reforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repression</td>
<td>repression</td>
<td>repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Outcome of Mass Uprising**

For a mass uprising to occur, it must first be the preferred outcome of activists. If the protests escalate, the public must prefer a mass uprising to the status quo and to reforms after repression, although they might still prefer reform to a mass uprising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
<td>2: Reforms after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>repression</td>
<td>repression</td>
<td>repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
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</table>

**Outcome of Reforms after repression**

Normally, it is assumed that all actors prefer reforms to reforms after repression, since the initial repression embitters the opposition and further fragments the political system. However, under certain circumstances – perhaps external pressure to crack down on the opposition or fears of a minority-driven uprising – the regime might prefer to send a strong message before initiating the reform process by first repressing the activists. If this preference ordering appears, and the public prefers reforms before or after repression to a mass uprising and
the status quo, then the outcome will be *reforms after repression*. The activists will protest, the regime will respond with repression, the activists will escalate to avoid the status quo, the regime will then offer concessions, and the public will accept these concessions rather than risk the chaos of a mass uprising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes (4&gt;1)</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms after repression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: Reforms</td>
<td>repression</td>
<td>2: Mass Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of these scenarios could plausibly occur in any country, under the right conditions. Normally, both activists and the public might prefer *status quo*, or the regime might succeed in co-opting the opposition to the point where small reforms are enough to keep activists quiet. However, in a period of revolutionary fervor, preferences can be upended so that both the public and activists assign far lower costs to the risks of personal harm from repression, political chaos, and civil war. As a result, aggregate preferences shift toward *reforms* and *mass uprising*. When this occurs, the dictator’s position in the field of contestation can determine whether the dictator is more likely to face a reform movement or a revolution. In presidential republics, the lack of scapegoats and the president’s central position makes an uprising more likely; on the other hand, monarchies are more likely to experience a reform movement that the monarch can diffuse by offering reforms, or no protests at all. The Arab Spring provides a useful point to compare these dynamics, since the wave of revolution and unrest inundated the entire region. The following section of the chapter discusses why monarchies are more likely to reach an outcome of *reforms*, *reforms after repression*, or *status quo* and why presidential republics are more likely to experience *mass uprising* in the context of the model.

**The Model for Monarchs**

Monarchies are those regimes where the dictator holds a position of power that is located outside of the field of political contestation. In the Middle East, this category includes eight regimes. Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait, and Bahrain all have kings ruling in a country where there is
also a system involving relatively significant political competition between politicians for seats in parliament. Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman are ruled by kings who maintain extremely limited advisory councils, but they have the option of expanding the powers of these institutions without inviting competition against their regime. The UAE is a federation comprised of seven emirates, each ruled by a hereditary monarch. The government includes a president, usually one of the emirs, who is elected by the seven rulers of the principalities.

Each of the possible outcomes in the game – status quo, reforms, reforms after repression, and mass uprising – can be ranked as preferences for the game’s actors based on the costs and benefits associated with each outcome for the individual actors. The dictator prefers status quo above the other options, because he wants to maintain his current position of power. Reforms are the second most preferred outcome. For the monarch, reforms entail a potential loss of power over policy, but the monarch’s position is not threatened. Furthermore, there is very little risk of civil war, exile, or death. After reforms, the monarch is assumed to prefer reforms after repression, which can staunch escalation to a mass uprising but will leave the country more divided than a strategy of pure reform. However, under certain circumstances, such as external pressure to repress or fears of a minority uprising, the monarch might be more likely to prefer reforms after repression to reforms. Mass Uprising is the least preferred outcome, because the uprising could easily lead to the monarch’s removal from power, along with his death or forced exit from the country.

For the activists and the public, the order of preferred outcomes is reforms, reforms after repression, mass uprising, and status quo. While activists in particular might be expected to prefer the prospect of overthrowing the regime to reforms, the placement in the field of contestation changes the benefits associated with these two outcomes. This change stems from two factors that increase the credibility of reforms. First, the activists actually have a plausible path to democratic reform that does not involve removing the dictator from power. By focusing on expanding the powers of parliament, the activists can gradually constrain and reduce the powers of the king, until the country’s political system resembles the constitutional monarchies found in the West. The availability of this strategy raises the benefits of reform to the activists. Additionally, the king can also offer the opposition more credible reforms. Though the king is conscious that increasing the powers of parliament undermines his own power over policy, such a process is likely to be slow, and the king still has considerable power at his disposal.
Furthermore, while the king is unlikely to give up his powers over policy without a fight, the stakes of the contest are lower as long as the opposition refrains from attacking the right of the king to be the king. As a result, the king is more willing to propose limited but credible reforms that do increase the powers of parliament. This dynamic also raises the benefits of reforms to the activists. When these increased benefits are compared to the costs of mass uprising, one can understand why activists would prefer reforms to mass uprising. Uprisings have significant costs. There is a higher probability of death and imprisonment at the hands of the security services, and an uprising is more likely to trigger a period of sustained economic deterioration and political chaos that could result in an outcome for the activists that is even worse than the status quo. The logic is similar for the public. On one hand, monarchs are often very popular with the people, because they have the opportunity to use the actors participating in the field of political contestation, from politicians to political parties, as effective scapegoats for political problems. This effect raises the costs of mass uprising for the public. At the same time, the public understands that reforms offer a plausible pathway to democratic reforms, increasing the benefits of reforms. When these two effects are combined with the significant costs of a mass uprising to the public, including the threat of massive repression and political and economic chaos if the uprising succeeds, the preference ranking of reforms, reforms after repression, mass uprising, and status quo makes sense.

The following table displays ranked preferences predicted for actor in monarchies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td>3: Reforms</td>
<td>3: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>3: Reforms after repression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2: Reforms after repression</td>
<td>2: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>2: Mass Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
</tr>
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</table>

When preferences are ranked in this fashion, backward induction produces a reforms Nash Equilibrium for the escalation game where activists choose to protest, the regime responds by offering reforms, and the activists choose to accept the reforms, avoid escalation, and go
home. This result supports the theory, which states that a monarch faced with protests by activists demanding political reforms is less likely to respond with repression and the activists are more likely to accept the proposed reforms rather than attempting to escalate their protests by involving the general public to call for the overthrow of the king. The following illustration shows the outcome of the escalation game in monarchies.

![Escalation Game Diagram]

Note: the game follows underlined strategies and ends at the underlined outcome.

However, the above outcome is not the only plausible one for monarchies during a period of political turmoil. When taking the institutional effects of monarchies into account, two other outcomes are plausible: reforms after repression and status quo. Even after repression, reforms in monarchies still have the advantage of being more plausible than those in presidential republics. As a result, if the regime prefers reforms after repression to reforms, which might occur if, as in Saudi Arabia or Bahrain, the regime feared a sectarian uprising, then the outcome would be reforms after repression. It should also be noted that the presence of the scapegoat effect reduces the costs of status quo, so that monarchies, particularly those with extensive wealth and a high quality of life, are also more likely to contain activists and publics with preferences for the status quo. If these preferences are present, the outcome would be status quo.
The Model for Presidential Autocracies

Autocracies are those regimes where the dictator sits in a position of power that is located inside the field of political contestation. In the Middle East, this category includes six regimes. Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen are presidential autocracies where dictators held or hold power within a system that includes a relatively significant amount of political competition. Syria and Qaddahfi’s Libya are presidential regimes that have no major political competition. Syria’s regime operates with the Ba’ath Party and a closed legislature, while Qaddahfi maintained neither institution. However, Qaddahfi did not style himself as a monarch, and the field of political contestation in his government also resembles that of the other presidential autocracies.

As with the monarchies, each of the possible outcomes in the game – status quo, reforms, reforms after repression, and mass uprising – can be ranked as preferences for the game’s actors. The dictator in an autocracy is assumed to be the same as a dictator in a monarchy in that he values the continuation of his present power. Therefore, the dictator prefers status quo to reforms and reforms after repression which are preferred to mass uprising.

The preferences of the activists and the public in autocracies differ from the preferences of those actors in the monarchies. In this case, the activists and publics are more likely to prefer mass uprising to reforms, and they prefer reforms and reforms after repression to status quo. In the autocracies, the activists lack a plausible path to reform from within the political system, so the extent to which the dictator can offer credible reforms is much lower than it is in monarchies. The dictator knows that allowing the opposition to win elections would mean the end of his powers, so even dictators that allow a level of political competition will never purposefully allow the opposition to win a meaningful election as long as they are still interested in holding onto power. As a result, the benefits of reforms are substantially reduced for the activists. Similarly, the dictator lacks a credible scapegoat within the government at which to direct popular anger for poor governance, so popular anger, visible or not, is more likely to be directed squarely at the dictator and his party. This situation reduces the costs of mass uprising for the public. If the activists lack a credible option for reform and the public is more likely to direct its anger at the dictator, both actors are more likely to brave the potential costs associated with a mass uprising and attempt an overthrow of the dictator. As a result, mass uprising is preferred to reforms.
The following table displays ranked preferences by actor in autocracies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Public</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 preferred to 1)</td>
<td>3: Reform</td>
<td>3: Reform</td>
<td>3: Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Reform after repression</td>
<td>2: Reform after repression</td>
<td>2: Reform after repression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
<td>1: Status Quo</td>
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</table>

When preferences are ranked in this fashion, backward induction provides a mass uprising Nash Equilibrium for the escalation game regardless of whether the dictator chooses to repress or offer reforms. This result supports the theory, which states that activists presented with a chance to escalate protests in an autocracy are more likely to do so, and the dictator is more vulnerable to protest movements developing into a popular revolution calling for his ouster regardless of his choice of strategies. The following illustration shows the outcome of the escalation game in autocracies.
In the following chapters of my thesis, I will conduct several case studies of Middle Eastern regimes to illustrate how the theory contributes to our understanding of the real world politics of authoritarian regimes. These case studies will be organized around two chapters: one focusing on monarchies and one focusing on presidential autocracies. In the chapter on presidential autocracies, I will conduct in-depth studies of Tunisia and Egypt, followed by briefer analyses of events in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. The lack of a significant protest movement and mass uprising in Algeria will also be addressed. In the chapter on monarchies, I will write an in-depth case study on the protest movement in Jordan, supported by interviews conducted in the country with political parties. I will follow with briefer studies of Morocco and Kuwait. Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait strongly support the theory – they will be followed by analysis of Bahrain, whose outcome deviates somewhat from the theory and requires additional explanation, and commentary on the theory’s applicability to modern Middle Eastern monarchies prior to the Arab Spring. Following the case studies, I will conclude my thesis with a general overview of the findings and their relevance to the politics of regimes beyond the time period of the Arab Spring and the region of the Middle East.
Chapter 3

Presidents, Parties, and Protests

Introduction

Six of the Middle East’s fourteen autocracies are classified as presidential autocracies according to my typology of political institutions. This group includes a diverse array of countries from across the Arab world. Situated at the bottom of the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, suffers from chronic political instability and economic weakness. In Egypt and Algeria, presidents ruled in close cooperation with powerful militaries. Under the single-party regime controlled by Ben Ali, Tunisia fostered a reputation as one of the most culturally liberal countries in the region. Bashar Al-Assad rules a tightly controlled police state in Syria through the Ba’ath Party, while the Libya of Qaddafi was considered to be one of the most bizarre, incomprehensible, and under-institutionalized states in the world. However, all of these countries shared a relatively similar system of government, with a central presidential figure ruling through some form of party mechanism that was designed to implement policy, institutionalize loyalty to the regime, control parliament, and co-opt opposition. This system proved to be vulnerable to the protests of the Arab Spring. One year after Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire to express his frustrations with life in Ben Ali’s Tunisia, five out of six presidential autocracies have faced mass uprisings; four of the six presidential autocrats fell from power, and a fifth is teetering on the brink. Mubarak of Egypt, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Saleh of Yemen, and Qaddafi of Libya all lost power after popular uprisings swept across their countries, and Al-Assad continues to struggle for his political survival in Syria.

The vulnerability of these presidential autocracies, which becomes particularly stark when compared to the relative resilience of the region’s monarchs, can be explained by their position in the field of political contestation. Unlike monarchs, presidents do not have the ability to use scapegoats as effectively to avoid blame for the country’s problems. Presidents sit

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squarely atop the government, with clear responsibility for the decisions of their party and the parliament. Ministers can still be fired and officials replaced, but these actions are less plausible than they are in a monarchy, where the ruler has greater separation from the government. As a result, activists and the public are more likely to hold the president directly responsible for their grievances. Furthermore, presidents cannot offer the opposition a plausible path to reform that does not involve his removal from power. Single-party regimes and presidential autocrats can be effective at co-opting opposition political parties and politicians, but the game is clear to both sides. The opposition will never gain true power as long as the president continues to be the president, and this is not an outcome the president is likely to entertain willingly (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith 2011). As a result, reforms in presidential autocracies offer the opposition a far less effective strategy for pursuing change. Together, these two factors increase the probability that activists and the public will prefer a mass uprising targeting the dictator over reforms or the status quo.

This chapter uses case studies to analyze the theory’s applicability to the politics of protest in the presidential autocracies of the Middle East during the Arab Spring. To establish evidence for this applicability, the case studies will examine the extent to which events in presidential autocracies support the model’s sequence of events and the influence of institutional effects on preferences. The chapter begins with a detailed analysis of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, where protestors succeeded in overthrowing Ben Ali and Mubarak in a relatively short span of time. The revolts in Yemen, Libya, and Syria are also addressed, along with Algeria’s success, alone among the presidential autocracies, in forestalling a major uprising. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications for the theory’s ability to explain the dynamics of protest movements in presidential autocracies in the Middle East.

**Revolution in Tunisia**

Prior to the Arab Spring, if experts had been asked to pick one Middle Eastern country ripe for revolution, Tunisia probably would not have been a particularly popular choice. The country’s ruling party, the Rassemblement Constitutionelle Democratique (RCD), had ruled since 1956, when Tunisia acquired independence, and it excelled at keeping a tight lid on any dissent. Tunisia consistently ranked as one of the world’s worst countries for press freedoms,
trailing only Libya in its quest to have the Middle East’s most restricted press.\textsuperscript{11} Opposition parties were a nonfactor. Ennahda, the country’s largest Islamist party and the one opposition organization with a potentially significant following, had been crushed and driven out of the country in 1992 (Angrist 2007, 184). Riots were rare, and the regime would quickly crush any hint of political dissent. Furthermore, the country’s economy had surpassed those of many other Arab countries. Buoyed by liberalizing economic reforms in the 1990s, Tunisia’s GDP per capita had increased rapidly between 2000 and 2010, and outside of the Gulf, it trailed only those of Libya and Lebanon. Poverty rates were also low. Additionally, when compared to the situation in most other Arab countries, the country’s demographics did not seem to be particularly dire. With 42\% of the population younger than 25, Tunisia was still experiencing a major youth bulge, but among Middle Eastern countries only Kuwait and the UAE could boast lower percentages. The combination of relatively favorable economic and demographic situations, along with the regime’s decisive control of the political system, suggested that Tunisia’s political outlook was stable.

However, below the surface, Tunisia was increasingly afflicted by many of the same devastating ills that were fueling a growing discontent across the entire Middle East. Unemployment, at approximately 14\% according to official government numbers, was high. The youth suffered far more, with an estimated 30\% unable to find jobs. Even worse, many of those youth had graduated from secondary school and university, fueling additional frustrations due to unmet expectations.\textsuperscript{12} Corruption also posed a problem for the RCD. Tunisia under Ben Ali was not considered to be one of the Arab world’s worst offenders on corruption,\textsuperscript{13} but Tunisians perceived that the ruling family and a small clique of elites benefited substantially from unfair business practices. The problem gained salience in the month before the revolution when American government documents leaked by Wikileaks articulated the extent of the corruption that many Tunisians had suspected and grumbled about for years.\textsuperscript{14} Prior to the unrest, the country’s economy also experienced several shocks that contributed to the people’s frustrations. The Tunisian economy suffered during the great recession of 2008 and 2009, and unemployment

\textsuperscript{13} Tunisia ranked 59 out of 178 in 2010.
\textsuperscript{14} Gee, “Making Sense of Tunisia.”
climbed throughout 2010. The economy also experienced inflation, particularly in staples such as milk, which doubled in price in less than a year.\textsuperscript{15} In the context of high youth unemployment, rising prices, and deep frustration with corruption among the ruling party and family, it is easy to understand why Mohamed Bouazizi’s self-immolation was enough to shift preferences away from the status quo and spark unrest among the country’s restive youth.

The pattern of Tunisian politics in the years prior to December 2010 shaped the government’s response to the crisis in late 2010 and contributed to its vulnerability to a mass uprising. Prior to its independence in 1956, Tunisia had been a French protectorate, ruled by a monarchy closely tied to the colonial regime. As a colonial anachronism, the monarchy survived for only one year after the country gained independence, and in 1957 leaders of the independence movement founded a republican government. Habib Bourguiba, who had been instrumental in securing the country’s independence, became the first president. By 1963, he had established his party as the sole legal political party, and for the next 24 years Bourguiba ruled Tunisia using a well developed patronage network. A series of party bosses distributed resources to different populations throughout the country, and Bourguiba relied on his control of the public finances to play the bosses against each other, ensuring that no one tried to claim the presidency for himself (Angrist 2007, 188).

After a decades-long rule, Bourguiba’s model finally failed him when he was overthrown by the country’s Prime Minister, Zine Al Abidine Ben Ali, who had risen through the military and the Interior Ministry. To secure his rule, Ben Ali pursued a two-track strategy. First, he replaced the party bosses with technocratic officials who were tasked with implementing liberalizing political and economic reforms. Second, he increased the size of the Tunisian security forces to strengthen his position against any potential opposition (2007, 188).

While the economic reforms were implemented successfully, the contradiction between liberalizing political reforms and expanding the power of internal security services soon became apparent. The political reforms were superficial measures that neither provided opposition with more space to voice their demands nor offered them with a possible strategy to increase their political power relative to the ruling party and President Ben Ali. In 1994, Tunisia held its first legislative elections in which parties other than the RCD were permitted to win seats, but only 12% of seats (19 out of 163) were reserved for additional parties. In 1999, the percentage was

\textsuperscript{15} Gee, “Making Sense of Tunisia.”
increased to a mere 20%, still not enough to have any real impact on governing the country. In reality, this quota hardly mattered. The seven political parties that registered to participate hardly differed from the ruling party; all of them were secular liberal parties, mirroring the RCD in their ideology, and none of them could develop the ability to build sustainable relationships with a sizeable part of the population (2007, 176). The one real opposition party that could offer an alternative to Ben Ali’s government – Ennahda – had been repressed and exiled from the country. Furthermore, the parliament was already a weak institution, lacking real powers. In describing the internal dynamics of the Tunisian regime under Ben Ali, Michele Penner Angrist explained that “…the political impact of the presence of opposition candidates in parliament is minimal, however, as parliament is a distinctly subordinate political institution. It does not initiate legislation and cannot hold the executive branch – the seat of real power – accountable.” (Angrist 2007, 176)

In 1999, Ben Ali did permit additional candidates to challenge him in a presidential election for control of the all-powerful executive branch, but this reform proved to be as futile as reforms to the legislative branch. The candidates who ran for election were chosen by Ben Ali, and they did not differ from him in any major policy areas. The president won re-election with a meager 99% of the vote. In 2004, his share of the vote declined precipitously to 94% (Angrist 177). In case anyone had any doubts about Ben Ali’s desire to hold onto power indefinitely, the government held a constitutional referendum in 2002 that removed term limits from the constitution and raised the age limit under which a president could remain in office.

Thus, Tunisian politics featured a strong executive, supported by a dominant single-party that controlled a rubber-stamp parliament. This dynamic continued until the government was overthrown in January of 2011, and the fact of the matter is that it could not have been otherwise. As will be discussed later, Ben Ali could have followed the model of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, permitting slightly more space for the opposition to mobilize, lifting some restrictions on the press, and restraining the security services. However, these policies would not have changed the underlying principle of the regime. If the dictator wanted to retain power, the executive would remain the strongest and most visible position in the government, and the opposition could not be permitted to pass a threshold of strength in the parliament or on the streets that would allow it to actually challenge the regime’s grip on power. This situation increased the probability that unrest would explode into a mass uprising challenging Ben Ali’s right to continue ruling the country.
When the Tunisian protests began, they were initially focused on economic matters. Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire to express his despair at the dearth of economic opportunity in the country. A fruit vendor in the town of Sidi Bouzid, Bouazizi self-immolated after police confiscated his goods because he did not have the appropriate licenses. Over the following days, hundreds of young men poured into the streets to protest in solidarity with Bouazizi, demanding that the government take immediate action to create jobs. They were joined by a coalition of labor unions and opposition parties, who formed a committee to urge the government to improve economic and social conditions in the town.

The government responded immediately by trying to repress the unrest. In the first two days, hundreds of protestors were arrested by the security forces. The strategy backfired, as more people took to the streets to demand that the government release those who had been arrested. As the situation in Sidi Bouzid spun out of control, large numbers of security forces surrounded the city and sealed it off from the outside world. However, the situation continued to escalate. On December 22, the fifth day of consecutive protests in Sidi Bouzid, protests started to spread throughout the country, reaching the towns of Manzel Bouziane and Eriguab. The protests were organized by local labor unions, who also established a committee in Sidi Bouzid to bring protestors’ demands to the government.

At this point, protestors continued to focus on demanding greater economic opportunities and political rights, including freedom of the press and the right to organize. One demonstrator articulated their desire for "the right to jobs, social justice, sustainable development, freedom of expression, freedom of protest and the right to an honorable life." The government responded with a halfhearted attempt to assuage the demonstrators’ frustrations with promises of new job programs. On December 23, the Tunisian Minister of Economic Development and International Cooperation traveled to the province of Sidi Bouzid, where he declared the government’s intentions to bring new development projects to the area. However, the government was boxed in. Its meager offers were too little too late, and repression of the protests continued unabated. On December 24, security forces killed a teenager participating in a riot, sparking further anger.

20 Ibid.
across the country.\textsuperscript{21} Protests reached the capital two days later, on December 26. Hundreds of demonstrators congregated before the headquarters of the Tunisian General Labor Union in Tunis, where the reproached the government for not doing enough to provide employment opportunities for the country’s youth.\textsuperscript{22} While the protestors still emphasized economic matters, the spread of unrest to the capital underlined the growing danger to the regime.

As the threat grew, President Ben Ali oscillated between offering concessions and increasing the intensity of repression. In a televised speech before the country on December 27, the president vowed to fight the “use of violence in the streets by a minority of extremists,” calling it “unacceptable” and arguing that the protestors were damaging the economy by scaring away tourism and foreign investors.\textsuperscript{23} The very next day, he fired several peripheral members of his cabinet, including the ministers of trade and handicrafts, communications, and religious affairs.\textsuperscript{24} Two days later, he replaced the governor of Sidi Bouzid.\textsuperscript{25} The decisions did nothing to quell the growing demonstrations; as suggested by the theory, they were dismissed by protestors, who began to escalate their demands. In the aftermath of the president’s speech, increasing numbers of protestors could be heard calling for Ben Ali to be overthrown.\textsuperscript{26} Over the next few days, the government redoubled its efforts to crush the demonstrations, arresting activists, deploying the army in the streets, and increasingly relying on live fire to send protestors scurrying.\textsuperscript{27} Between January 8 and January 9, as many as 35 people were killed in the escalating violence.\textsuperscript{28}

As the end of Ben Ali’s reign drew near, the regime frantically tried to end the unrest by switching to a strategy of offering major concessions to the protestors. On January 11, Ben Ali fired his interior minister and ordered the release of all demonstrators who had been arrested since the beginning of the unrest.\textsuperscript{29} When this concession failed to have any effect, the president continued to offer promises that no one expected him to keep and concessions that no one expected to make a difference. “In his last days Mr. Ben Ali cycled through a series of attempts

\textsuperscript{21} “Tunisia tensions boil over as teenager dies in riot,” \textit{AFP}, December 24, 2010.
\textsuperscript{22} “Social protests in Tunisian towns spread to the capital,” \textit{Al-Jazeera Television}, translated by the BBC, December 26, 2010.
\textsuperscript{23} “Tunisian leader says violent protests unacceptable,” \textit{Al-Arabiya}, December 27, 2010.
\textsuperscript{24} “Tunisian president removes ministers after protests,” \textit{Al-Arabiya}, December 28, 2010.
\textsuperscript{27} “Tunisia deploys army to quell protests, another death,” \textit{Al-Arabiya Article}, January 9, 2011.
\textsuperscript{28} “At least 35 killed in Tunisia riots: rights group,” \textit{Al-Arabiya Article}, January 10, 2011.
\textsuperscript{29} “Tunisian president fires his interior minister,” \textit{Al-Arabiya}, January 11, 2011.
to placate the protesters…pledging a corruption investigation, promising new freedoms and a resignation at the end of his term in 2014, and finally dismissing his whole cabinet.”

It was not enough. On January 14, realizing that the game was up, Ben Ali forfeited his office and fled to Saudi Arabia. In the four weeks between Mohamed Bouazizi’s self immolation and the fall of Ben Ali, an estimated 200 people had been killed.

The events of the Tunisian Revolution seem to adhere to the escalation model’s predictions for protest in presidential autocracies in the Middle East. After the death of Bouazizi sparked protests in Sidi Bouzid, the government chose to repress the demonstrations. Police poured into the town and sealed the populace off from the outside. However, activists did not go home. Rather, they stayed in the streets, their numbers swelled, and protests spread throughout the country. As the government’s repression continued, protestors chose to escalate their demands, and focus shifted from “bread and butter” issues to Ben Ali’s right to rule Tunisia.

When it became clear that brute force alone was not enough to end the escalating protests, Ben Ali desperately tried to offer reforms to demonstrators as well. He announced new

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economic programs, fired several ministers, promised free and fair legislative elections, and finally promised to step down at the end of his term in 2014. However, these initiatives, ignored by protestors, also failed to staunch the revolution’s momentum. The protestors’ reactions to the regime’s concessions indicate that Ben Ali’s placement in the field of political contestation influenced their preference orderings. First, his proposals suffered from a glaring lack of credibility. Promises to hold free and fair elections and to step down from the presidency in the future could easily be broken, and they would be if the regime acted to preserve its interest in holding onto power. Ben Ali’s position also meant that he suffered from a dearth of plausible scapegoats. He could hardly blame parliament, dominated as it was by his ruling party. Neither did the government’s ministers, clearly subservient to the president, offer a better alternative. As a result, Tunisians vocally dismissed reforms, and Ben Ali became the natural target for Tunisians’ anger toward the political and economic situation in their country.

The inability to offer credible reforms and the scarcity of effective scapegoats made it more likely that both activists and the public would prefer a mass uprising to reforms or the status quo. President Ben Ali’s position in the field of political contestation meant that he lacked the protective buffer held by kings in Jordan, Morocco, and the other Middle Eastern monarchies. As a result, Tunisians’ thresholds for joining demonstrations were lower than they otherwise would have been when Mohamed Bouazizi’s suicide ignited the initial protests, and the country’s preference for a mass uprising resulted in a revolution that overthrew what had been one of the world’s most stable dictators.

Revolution 2.0 in Egypt

If Egypt and Tunisia had been compared on December 1, 2011, Egypt would have seemed more vulnerable to the possibility of a popular uprising. Far more than Tunisia, the Egyptian economy and political system seemed to be under increasing strain. The country’s GDP per capita more than doubled between 1990 and 2010, but at $5,900 it was still average by regional standards, and there was a widespread perception among everyday Egyptians that the benefits of growth had not been evenly shared. Ranking 98 out of 178 on a global evaluation of corruption, the regime had to address frustrations with corruption in the NDP and the ruling family. Particularly intense anger was reserved for Gamal Mubarak, the son of the president who

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had become a wealthy businessman and leader of the NDP. To many Egyptians, he represented the ascendancy of a class of corrupt businessman who had benefited unfairly from liberalizing economic reforms. The belief that Gamal Mubarak was being groomed to become president after his father further fanned the flames of discontent.

Egypt also suffered from the massive youth bulge common across much of the Arab world. With more than 50% of its population under the age of 25, Egypt struggled with high levels of youth unemployment, frustrations over a rising marriage age, and housing shortages for young adults starting their lives. Though the government reported an unemployment rate of 10% in 2010, these numbers were likely understated, and underemployment was common as well. Additionally, the economy experienced inflation in basic goods prior to the revolt in January 2011.

Egypt’s social and economic problems had fueled a growing culture of protest against the government that began to emerge in the early 2000s. Anti-Israeli and anti-American protests during the Second Palestinian Intifada acquired an anti-regime hue after protestors started to compare Mubarak to Ariel Sharon. In 2004, a group of young activists formed the Kefaya Movement, Arabic for “Enough,” to pressure the regime for democratic reforms. The movement did not gain significant momentum, but it used social media spread its example among young Egyptians across the country. In 2006 and 2007, Egypt also experienced a wave of industrial strikes. While ostensibly focused on economic matters, these protests also became political in nature, as workers burned posters of Mubarak. These events demonstrated the vulnerability of the regime and engendered a culture of protest that helped to mobilize Egyptians in January 2011.

Still, despite these challenges, almost no one predicted that the regime would collapse anytime soon. The state’s control of the security forces remained intact, and after cycling through a mere three rulers in six decades, the regime had acquired a sense of invincibility. When the Free Officers overthrew King Farouk in 1952 and established a republic in 1953, Egypt became the first Arab country to depose of its monarchy in favor of a republican government. The officers moved quickly to assert control, and by 1956 a single-party system had been established with Gamal Abdel Nasser assuming the presidency. While overwhelmingly popular with

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Egyptians, Nasser was not popularly elected; rather, the National Union nominated him for the position, and the nomination was confirmed by popular referendum. The creation of the National Union was meant to preempt demands for a competitive democracy, since the party would implement a corporatist system to represent Egyptians from all segments of society. However, the process required repression of Islamist and Communist opposition, a task the officers accomplished with zeal. Islamist leaders were executed, thousands were jailed, and the repression continued for decades.

In 1976, Anwar Sadat initiated a “democratic” experiment that introduced a controlled party system into the regime. Parties were established for the left, the right, and the center, though in reality all three parties were derived from the ruling party. Sadat governed from the center, as leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP), and this party morphed into an organization that would dominate Egyptian politics for the next forty three years (Gohar 2008, 173). From the moment of its founding, the NDP could claim undisputed access to “all available political, economic, financial, and publicity resources” at the disposal of the state, and it used those resources to squeeze other parties out of the system. Only in the legislative elections of 2000 did the NDP face a crack in its electoral inevitability. In the aftermath of the election, the party briefly lost majority control of parliament, but enticement of independent candidates to join the party quickly allowed the organization to reassert its dominance (Gohar 2008, 173).

Since 2000, the regime has expanded the political space in which it is permissible for the opposition to participate, and a handful of candidates were even allowed to challenge Mubarak for the presidency. However, the regime never permitted the opposition to acquire enough strength to threaten its rule. Opposition parties were harassed, elections were rigged, and the Muslim Brotherhood was excluded from formal participation on the basis of its religious nature. The party was the state, the vehicle by which the president attained the right to rule, and its dominance could not be questioned as long as the regime wanted to remain in power. This reality governed the dynamics of the Egyptian Revolution when activists took to the streets in January of 2011.

The fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia sent shockwaves through the Arab world, and its reverberations were felt almost immediately in Egypt. In the hours after Ben Ali fled, Egyptian protestors converged on the Tunisian Embassy, exhorting their country to follow the Tunisian
example and rise up against the regime. The topic of the revolution proliferated instantly online, as Egyptians took to blogs and social media sites to proclaim their excitement at the success of Tunisian activists. Three days later, on January 17, a man set himself on fire outside of the Egyptian parliament, in an effort to replicate the spark created by Mohamed Bouazizi. Five more self-immolations followed in quick succession. As tensions rapidly increased, the high profile Egyptian dissident Mohamed Al-Baradei warned Mubarak that his regime faced revolution if it did not immediately enact wide ranging political reforms, and youth activists announced plans for a “Day of Anger” on January 25.

The Day of Anger did not disappoint. Organized on Facebook by the April 6 Movement, a loose grouping of mostly younger and wealthier Egyptians, the call for protests succeeded in drawing thousands of Egyptians into the streets. The protestors converged on Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo, which quickly became the central location of the revolution. Despite proclamations from the Interior Ministry that the protestors would be permitted to express their grievances, government repression of the demonstrations began almost immediately. On the first day, thirty thousand policemen were deployed in the streets, and four protestors and a policeman were killed in clashes involving teargas and live ammunition. Hundreds of protestors were beaten and arrested. The repression grew more intense as activists returned to the square for a second day, on January 26. By day three, several prominent activists had joined the protests, including Ayman Nour and Mohamed Al-Baradei, and the demonstrations were growing substantially in size. From the very beginning of the unrest, Mubarak became a target of the protestors. While economic demands related to jobs were an important feature of the protests, prominent calls for the fall of the regime and the overthrow of Mubarak could also be heard cascading over Tahrir Square. Tunisia had shown the Egyptians that the removal of their dictator was a possible outcome, and they wasted no time in bringing pressure to bear on the ageing leader.

On the night of January 28, four days after the revolt began, Mubarak addressed the nation. Though he defended the actions of the security forces, he also fired his cabinet and promised to usher democracy into Egypt. Over the next few days, the government made several additional concessions, heralding a desperate attempt to embrace a strategy emphasizing reforms. On January 29, in a sign that he was preparing to eventually leave office, Mubarak named Omar Suleiman, head of Egypt’s powerful intelligence agency, as his first ever vice-president. He also named a new prime minister. On January 31, after the army declared that it would not use force against the protestors, Suleiman offered to talk to the opposition about a pathway to reforms. Three days later, on February 1, Mubarak pledged to step down from the presidency when his term ended in September, allowing a new leader to take power in scheduled elections.

For all intents and purposes, Mubarak’s concessions were a sideshow to events unfolding in the street. On the day the president addressed the country, 23 protestors were killed by the security forces as the protests continued to spiral out of control. Meanwhile, the concessions were scoffed at and ignored by protestors. The people in the street perceived, correctly, that the ruler’s actions did not, and could not, lead to real change. Suleiman was immediately decried as a crony of Mubarak, as the crowds in Tahrir took to chanting "neither Mubarak nor Suleiman; we're sick of Americans." The Prime Minister was similarly considered to be of secondary importance, and Mubarak could easily renege on his offer to step down from the presidency. Even if he followed through, there was no guarantee that a candidate from the NDP would not continue to manipulate the electoral system for the benefit of the party. As a result, the vague reforms and mild concessions were dismissed out of hand, and the public chose to decisively escalate the protests. By February 1, when Mubarak promised to step down in September, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians were in the streets calling for the immediate resignation of the president.

41 “Mubarak Names New VP, New PM as Protests Continue,” AFP, January 29, 2011.
44 “Mubarak Names New VP, New PM as Protests Continue,” AFP, January 29, 2011.
45 Ibid.
46 Jack Shenker, “Hosni Mubarak Vows to Step Down at Next Election, but Not Now.”
With the mass uprising in full swing, the overwhelmed regime began to oscillate between desperate attempts to end the unrest with repression and reforms. Though the army had declared that it would not fire on protestors, the state’s internal security services continued to battle the demonstrators in the streets. On February 2, the regime mobilized and armed tens of thousands of its supporters to drive the protestors out of Tahrir Square. Mounted on horses and camels, carrying sticks and even spears, the mobs of pro-Mubarak supporters clashed violently with protestors throughout the day. While the attack seemed to quell the protests for a time, activists succeeded in mobilizing the largest crowds yet on February 4, as hundreds of thousands of demonstrators marched peacefully on a planned “Day of Departure.”

At this point, the desperate regime started to emphasize concessions. On February 6, the newly sworn in cabinet proposed a 15% pay increase for public sector workers, hoping to draw government employees out of the street. That same day, Vice President Suleiman fulfilled his promise to negotiate with the opposition, meeting with fifty representatives from the Muslim Brotherhood, opposition political parties, and the Egyptian youth movement. In the aftermath of the meeting, the vice president announced that the parties had agreed upon a framework for reform involving a committee to propose constitutional amendments and limits on how many terms a president would be allowed to serve. The process, with its emphasis on constitutional reform, seemed to follow the models that would be used by the kings of Morocco and Jordan to manage their own protest movements. Unfortunately for Mubarak, the announcement was merely a ploy to split the opposition. There had been no agreement. Opposition leaders had demanded that Mubarak resign and single-party rule be disbanded, reforms that the regime could not hope to implement if it wanted to survive. As a result, the talks went nowhere.

With escalation of the protests complete, concessions falling flat, and force failing to halt the protestors’ momentum, Mubarak’s days were numbered. Demonstrations continued for several more days, but the game was finally up on February 11. Less than three weeks after the

initial Day of Anger, Mubarak resigned and handed power to the military. The Arab Spring had claimed its second scalp.

As in Tunisia, events in Egypt generally adhered to the predictions of the escalation model. After the fall of Ben Ali, Egyptian activists chose to stage demonstrations against economic and political conditions under the Mubarak regime. Fearing a repeat of Tunisia and hoping to destroy a potential revolution before it could gather any momentum, the regime eschewed negotiations with the demonstrators and chose to forcefully repress the protests. Protestors responded by immediately escalating their demands; calls for Mubarak’s resignation could be heard during the very first marches, and after the regime responded with force overthrowing the president quickly became the primary objective of the protest movement. In Egypt, the situation escalated more rapidly than the revolution in Tunisia, and within days there were tens of thousands of Egyptians marching in the streets and clashing with security forces across the country.

When repression failed to halt the growing protests, Mubarak attempted to switch strategies, trying to entice protestors to abandon the street with offers of political and economic reforms. However, the reforms fell flat, and they were rejected by the opposition out of hand. An attempt to scapegoat the cabinet and appoint new ministers and a vice president failed miserably, since Mubarak, as the president and leader of the NDP, could not escape responsibility for the actions of the government. Similarly, attempts to initiate a dialogue with the opposition went nowhere, since the opposition demanded that Mubarak resign and the NDP be dissolved. Recognizing that true reforms could not happen with the president and the party in power, they would not consider abandoning their momentum in the streets for the regime’s offers. The government, unable to meet these demands if it wanted to keep power, refused the opposition. These two outcomes illustrate the presence of the theorized institutional effects on protest movements, and reforms did no more than repression to deter activists from escalating their protests or the public from joining the attempt to unseat the president. Mubarak, one of the world’s longest serving dictators, was finished.

Revolutions in Yemen, Libya, and Syria

Tunisia and Egypt were the first two countries to experience major upheaval during the Arab Spring, but their experiences would soon be shared by several of their neighbors. One year after the outbreak of regional unrest, dictators had also fallen in the presidential autocracies of Yemen and Libya, and Syria continued to be wracked by a mass uprising that increasingly appeared to be headed toward civil war. While events in these countries have followed different trajectories, all experienced a mass uprising where thousands of protestors poured into the streets to call for the resignation of the dictator. The uprisings in Yemen, Libya, and Syria provide further evidence for the effect of the field of political contestation on protest movements.

As in Egypt, the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia proved to be a catalyst for protests in Yemen. Small, peaceful demonstrations occurred within days of the Tunisian president’s resignation, as protestors marched in the streets calling for Yemenis to revolt against their corrupt rulers. With the protests acquiring some momentum, particularly among university students, the government responded by deploying large numbers of security personnel into the streets, breaking up demonstrations, and arresting activists. On January 23, the police arrested Tawakul Karman, a female activist and member of the Islah party, for organizing unregistered demonstrations against the president. Karman had been a driving force behind the demonstrations that occurred after Ben Ali’s resignation, and her arrest sparked an escalation of the protests as activists responded to the government’s repression by taking to the streets in increasingly large numbers. On the day of her arrest, the number of protestors in Sana’a expanded from several hundred to several thousand. In the next few days, the activists continued to gain momentum. More than 15,000 protestors marched on January 27 to challenge Saleh’s hold on power. In contrast to Egypt, opposition organizations played an important role in organizing protests from the start, with opposition political parties allying with student groups to exhort their members to join the demonstrations.

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54 “Yemeni Police Clash with Student Protesters,” AFP, January 18, 2011.
Recognizing that his government was losing control of the situation, President Saleh momentarily abandoned repression and tried to tempt protestors with offers of reform. On February 2, he announced to the country that he would not try to claim an additional (and unconstitutional) term as president after his current term expired at the end of 2013. He also pledged that his son would not become president after he left office, raised wages and lowered income taxes, and discussed the possibility of Yemen abandoning its presidential system for a parliamentary system. However, Saleh refused to step down, and the opposition, unwilling to trust the wily president, rejected his demands out of hand.\(^{58}\) As in other presidential autocracies, the opposition’s skepticism of the dictator’s willingness to follow through with offers of reform speaks to the reduced benefits of reforms caused by the institutional effect of placement in the field of contestation. A spokesman for a coalition of opposition organizations rejected reforms by articulating the demands of the people, stating ‘We will be able to answer the call of the people…including their slogans of ending the regime and pushing out the leader.’ The next day, in a sign that the public was choosing to join the escalating protests, activists’ planned day of rage drew tens of thousands of people into the streets, the largest crowds yet in Yemen’s nascent revolution.\(^{59}\)

Over the next two months, Yemen’s protest movement coalesced into a mass uprising as the government’s attempts to repress and reform failed to convince the public to stay home. Saleh fired his cabinet and promised to transform Yemen into a parliamentary democracy, but demonstrators rejected these concessions just as they had before.\(^{60}\) Saleh could not escape his position as president; for as long as he did not leave office, protestors did not trust that true changes would be implemented.

Meanwhile, the government intensified its efforts to repress what had already become an outcome of mass uprising, as security forces began to use live ammunition to break up demonstrations. By the end of March, the uprising turned violent. Several prominent and powerful military officers defected to the opposition, with the stated goal of protecting protestors from murderous state security forces.\(^{61}\) Throughout the summer, the situation verged on civil war

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while foreign powers, including the Gulf Cooperation Council and the United States, tried to convince Saleh to step down. The president himself was nearly killed in an assassination attempt, and he was forced to leave the country for several weeks for treatment. Though the outcome of the uprising always seemed in doubt – Saleh had not survived Yemen’s tumultuous politics for thirty years by luck alone – the protestors eventually secured their aim when Saleh finally agreed to hand power to his vice president in November of 2012.\(^\text{62}\)

In Libya, the revolt against Muammar Qaddafi escalated into a clear mass uprising faster than similar events in any other Arab country, though the uprising devolved into a bloody civil war that was only resolved after international intervention and a military campaign of several months. In January and February, the country experienced slight tremors associated with the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, but it was not until February 15 that the Libyan revolution exploded. On the night of the fifteenth, several hundred demonstrators converged on downtown Benghazi to protest the arrest of a prominent human rights lawyer, Fathi Terbil.\(^\text{63}\) The incident, violently suppressed by government security forces, sparked demonstrations in several towns scattered across Western Libya. Within two days, activists had escalated their protests by holding a day of rage on February 17. Thousands of people flooded into the streets, braving a brutal government crackdown to call for Qaddafi to be overthrown.\(^\text{64}\)

Unlike dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, Muammar Qaddafi did not attempt to offer protestors concessions when events took a turn for the worse. Instead, he doubled down on repression, using every weapon in his arsenal, from snipers to bombers, to violently suppress the demonstrations. On February 21, Saif al-Islam, one of Qaddafi’s sons, defiantly warned the country that it faced civil war if it continued to defy the dictator. By the time he spoke, five days after the beginning of the uprising, more than 200 people had already been killed by the security forces.\(^\text{65}\) Despite these horrific numbers, repression did no more to help Qaddafi’s regime head off a mass uprising than offers of reform did to help Mubarak, Ben Ali, or Saleh. Within days, the regime seemed to be on its last legs as revolution swept the entire country. Rebel forces captured significant portions of the country less than ten days after the initial protests in


\(^{63}\) “Protests Spread to Libya,” CNN, February 16, 2011.


\(^{65}\) “Kadhafi’s son warns of ‘rivers of blood’ in Libya,” AFP, February 21, 2011.
Benghazi,\textsuperscript{66} and massive demonstrations even broke out in Tripoli, one of Qaddafi’s few remaining strongholds.\textsuperscript{67}

Unfortunately for protestors, Qaddafi would not go so easily, despite the rapid escalation into a mass uprising and the seemingly dire military situation facing the regime. Qaddafi succeeded in rallying his security forces, and in another swift turnaround the regime had nearly crushed the rebel effort by mid-March. At this point, the international community intervened by imposing a no-fly zone on the country and using airpower to destroy Libyan armor, ostensibly to protect Libyan civilians. The intervention halted Qaddafi’s momentum, and over the next several months the rebels fought a grueling civil war to take control of the country. Their efforts finally ended in victory when Qaddafi was found and killed by rebel soldiers in October 2011.

In Syria, escalation of the uprising against Assad occurred at a relatively slower pace when compared to other Arab countries, and it also occurred in a peripheral town on the outskirts of the nation’s politics. However, events followed the same trajectory as those in other presidential-autocracies. The government responded to unrest with repression, offered reforms lacking in credibility, and suddenly found itself facing a mass uprising as protestors rejected both government strategies and poured into the streets in their thousands to call for the exit of President Assad.

After several false starts, including a planned day of rage that failed to attract more than a handful of activists, the Syrian protests began in mid-March in the southern city of Daraa, close to the country’s border with Jordan. After several demonstrators were killed by the security forces, the city witnessed a rapid escalation of protests revolving around funerals of those killed in the unrest.\textsuperscript{68} Social networks enabled activists to mobilize large numbers of people; as a result, the funerals then acquired political overtones, at which point security forces used tear gas and live fire to break up the gatherings. As more people were killed, more and more people were thus motivated to take to the streets. The cycle continued for two weeks, as thousands of Syrians marched in Daraa, and the protests slowly started to spread across the entire country. On March

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ian Black, “As Libya uprising reaches Tripoli, Qaddafi vows to ‘open up the arsenals,’” \textit{Guardian}, February 25, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/25/protests-reach-tripoli-gaddafi-speech-shooting.
\item \textsuperscript{68} “Syria funeral hit with teargas,” \textit{AFP}, March 19, 2011.
\end{itemize}
27, the government deployed the army to Latakia, in northern Syria, to repress another growing uprising.⁶⁹

Recognizing that the situation was rapidly spiraling out of control, President Assad tried to extend concessions to the protestors by firing his cabinet on March 29 and promising reforms in a speech to the country on March 30. However, the speech was widely derided by protestors, who felt disappointed by the lack of concrete actions, much less promises, toward reform.⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the speech, the uprising took a turn for the worse. Activists continued to escalate their demands and their presence in the streets, and the regime responded with increasingly brutal force.⁷¹ By the end of April, it became clear that a significant portion of the public was supporting the protestors. On April 22, tens of thousands of protestors demonstrated in cities and villages across the country, calling for an end to the rule of President Assad and the Ba’ath party.⁷² In the following months, the mass uprising lurched toward a stalemate between protestors in the regime. Neither side could mobilize the strength to crush the other, as protestors periodically seized control of whole cities and the security services responded with “raids” intended to punish the perpetrators without entirely reasserting state control. As of this writing, more than a year after the initial outburst of unrest, the conflict in Syria appeared to be heading toward a protracted civil war.

In Yemen, Libya, and Syria, presidential autocrats found themselves contending with similar incidents of political unrest as activists’ attempted to capitalize on the revolutionary fervor of the Arab Spring. In all three countries, the regime responded to activists with repression, calculating that reforms would be rejected as superficial due to the unavoidable preponderance of the president and his party in the political system. However, repression did not prove enough to quell the protestors, who quickly focused their efforts on unseating the president. In Yemen and Syria, the regime responded by trying to use scapegoats – firing their cabinets – and promising political reforms in some vague future, but these concessions were rejected by protestors as superfluous, as the presidents suffered from their central position in the

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⁷¹ Guardian, Syria’s biggest day of unrest yet sees at least 20 people killed, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/08/syria-unrest-killed-damascus- Assad](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/08/syria-unrest-killed-damascus-assad)

⁷² Guardian, Syrian troops shoot dead protestors in day of turmoil, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/syria-protests-forces-shoot](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/22/syria-protests-forces-shoot)
political system. In Libya, Qaddahfi never reverted to concessions, consistently sticking to a strategy of unadulterated repression. Neither path enabled the dictators to avoid escalation, as the public joined en masse to challenge the dictator’s right to rule. Saleh, Assad, and Qaddahfi all suffered from their inability to scapegoat and their inability to offer credible reforms; as a result, people’s thresholds for protesting were lowered, and escalation in the environment of the Arab Spring was more likely to occur. Saleh and Qaddahfi ultimately lost power after protracted conflicts, and Assad’s fate remained to be determined.

**Whither Algeria?**

Despite political, economic, and social conditions suggesting that Algeria would be vulnerable to revolution, it was alone among the presidential autocracies of the Middle East in its ability to avoid a mass uprising during the Arab Spring. That is not to say that the country did not exhibit a budding protest movement. As unrest spread throughout Tunisia, Algeria also started to experience disorder, with riots spreading across the country during the first week of January. Angered over rising food prices and high levels of unemployment, roving youths attacked storefronts and battled with riot police. More ominously for the regime, on January 16, an Algerian copied Mohamed Bouazizi of Tunisia by self immolating to voice his frustration at economic conditions in the country. By the end of the month, the number of self-immolations had risen to three. After Mubarak fell from power in Egypt, the country seemed ripe for revolution, as protests acquired a stronger political tone and spread to the capital. However, the revolution never occurred. Riot police always vastly outnumbered demonstrators in the capital, and the demonstrations never gained any recognizable momentum. Instead, the government’s attempts to follow its repression with a series of reforms succeeded in precluding the emergence of a mass uprising. In late February, the government ended the country’s emergency law. This action was followed by economic incentives in mid-March and promises of future constitutional

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reforms in mid-April. While sporadic protests continued, the public never joined the hardcore activists, and Algeria’s experience with the Arab Spring ended with an outcome of reforms after repression.

What explains this outcome? After repression failed to halt activists’ escalation in other presidential autocracies, presidents from Mubarak to Assad responded by offering political and economic concessions. Their efforts failed, as the public joined the activists in the streets. This variance in outcomes suggests that preferences of Algerian political actors were different than the preferences of actors in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. Abdelmajid Hannoum of the University of Kansas supports this inference by arguing that Algerians were less willing to tolerate the uncertainty of an uprising after the bloody civil war of the 1990s. The war produced an immense cost in human lives, and as a result, Algerians, while still hoping for political and economic reforms, would be more difficult to entice into the street. The fear of bloody repression and renewed civil war was simply too great for the institutional effects of the field of political contestation to tip actors’ preferences away from reforms and the status quo and toward favoring a mass uprising.

How does the escalation model fit into this narrative? For the model to produce an outcome of reforms after repression, the actors’ preferences must be the following.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Dictator</th>
<th>Activists</th>
<th>Public</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ranked Outcomes</td>
<td>4: Status Quo</td>
<td>4: Mass Uprising</td>
<td>4: Reforms</td>
</tr>
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<td>(4&gt;1)</td>
<td>3: Reforms After Repression</td>
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<td>2: Reforms</td>
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In the context of Hannoum’s argument, these preferences can be easily justified. The public prefers reforms to address the political and economic situation in the country, and reforms after repression is less preferred due to the regime’s use of violence. In the context of the Arab

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Spring, *mass uprising* is still preferred to *status quo*, and this factor drives the government to make concessions to the people, rather than merely continuing to repress the activists. For activists, *mass uprising* is still the preferred outcome; this preference is supported by the desire of some opposition groups to continue pushing for Algeria’s own “Arab Spring.” After *mass uprising*, activists are presumed to favor *reforms*, followed by *reforms after repression* and *status quo*. The regime prefers *status quo* above all other outcomes, since it hopes to preserve its full powers. Following *status quo*, the regime must favor *reforms after repression*, then *reforms*, and finally *mass uprising*. In a presidential autocracy, it is assumed that the regime favors *reforms after repression* to *reforms* because repression allows the regime to weaken activists and make the mild reforms that it can conceivably offer – such as the relatively meaningless lifting of the emergency law – more palatable to the public. When these preferences are taken into account, the case of Algeria helps to demonstrate that placement in the field of political competition is not a deterministic factor in the escalation of protest movements; rather, it is a factor that makes protests more or less likely to escalate into a mass uprising.

**Conclusion**

In a presidential-autocracy, the president rules the country through his leadership of a single political party or organization that dominates the state. The political space available for opposition to contest the regime can differ substantially across presidential autocracies – compare the complete lack of legal opposition and electoral competition in Syria to the coalition government of Yemen – but only to a point. The president’s legitimacy theoretically stems from his position in the party and the party’s ability to articulate a vision of popular sovereignty (Ulfelder 2005). As a result, the president and his party, positioned as they are in the field of political competition, cannot afford to lose an election, which would publicly decapitate the logic of their rule. If the regime desires to perpetuate its rule – as safe an assumption as any in the realm of politics – opposition will not be permitted to operate past a certain point.

This dynamic increases the likelihood that activists and the public will prefer a mass uprising to reforms within the system. Opposition activists and organizations might be co-opted by the regime, which can offer individuals resources and power within the system, but if their ultimate goal is democratic reform that increases their odds of acquiring full power for themselves, another reasonable assumption, then co-optation can only go so far. The activists recognize that the only plausible path to democratic reform involves the removal of the president

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and the ruling party, so when protest provides an opportunity to directly challenge the regime they are more likely to do so. Additionally, the president, situated squarely in the center of the political system, will find it more difficult to use scapegoats in the government to effectively deflect anger from his personal rule. His party controls the government, and he is the leader of the party, so it will be more difficult to convince the people that firing the prime minister – his direct underling in the party – will result in any change. Therefore, the people are more likely to direct their anger toward the president, increasing the likelihood that they will revolt against his rule.

The case studies in this chapter demonstrated the accuracy of the model and the role of the aforementioned factors in increasing the vulnerability of presidential autocracies to mass uprisings. The sequence of strategies postulated by the model could be seen to occur in each of the presidential autocracies examined in this chapter. In Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, protests by activists were initially met by force, but activists only responded by escalating their demands to focus on the removal of the dictator. When presidents in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen then responded by offering concessions and vague promises of reform, these were rejected as insufficient by the people, who joined the activists in a mass uprising against the rulers. The case studies also provided evidence for the effect on preferences caused by the dictator’s placement in the field of political contestation. Whether it was Egypt, Yemen, or Syria, protestors responded to efforts to scapegoat and offer concessions with strikingly similar reactions. Reforms were derided as too little, and the firing of cabinet officials was ignored as insignificant. Instead, protestors made it clear that they would only be satisfied with the removal of the president, who could not escape his central position in the field of political contestation. This effect on preferences produced revolutionary change across the Middle East. In less than a year, Mubarak, Ben Ali, Qaddafi, and Saleh fell from power, and Assad struggled against a growing civil war. Of the presidential autocracies in the Middle East, only Algeria, tortured by the memory of its recent civil war, avoided a mass uprising against the regime during the Arab Spring.
Chapter 4
Kings, Parliaments, and Protests

Introduction
Of the fourteen autocracies of the modern Middle East considered in this study, eight are monarchies. As with the presidential autocracies, the group includes a diverse cast of countries and rulers. Morocco is the only North African country, and along with Jordan, Kuwait, and Bahrain, it has experimented most with electoral politics. Bahrain and Jordan are split by deep ethnic and sectarian cleavages. Saudi Arabia’s kings are both entangled and in competition with a powerful religious establishment. In the United Arab Emirates, seven hereditary emirs rule their principalities, with the emir of Abu Dhabi holding the presidency and the emir of Dubai acting as prime minister in the country’s federal government.

Despite their differences, all of these diverse countries share one particular similarity that sets them apart from other autocracies in the region. As monarchies, their rulers sit outside the field of political contestation, and their power cannot be challenged in electoral politics. They sit apart from a separate system of elections and legislatures that theoretically play a part in governing the country. The extent to which these institutions wield power, much less exist independently from the monarch, varies in each country. For instance, elected institutions in Morocco have powers independent of the monarchy, while budding legislative councils in some Gulf monarchies are not elected and only hold advisory powers. However, the structure of the field of political contestation creates important differences in the preferences of political actors, and in the process it reduces the probability that protests will escalate into a mass uprising that aims to overthrow the monarchy. This dynamic is the result of two effects created by the monarch’s position outside of the field of political contestation. First, the ruler can diffuse public anger more effectively by deflecting frustration toward other actors in the political system. Second, it increases the credibility of reforms by allowing the democratic opposition to ignore the monarch and to focus on expanding the powers of an elected parliament.
This chapter uses case studies to examine the applicability of the theory to the real world politics of monarchies in the Middle East. It analyzes Jordanian politics from liberalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s to the unrest of the Arab Spring. The politics of Morocco, Kuwait, and Bahrain are also addressed in detail. The chapter concludes by placing the model in the historical context of the modern Middle East.

The Hashemite Kings of Jordan

As revolution swept through the Middle East, it was unclear whether Jordan would escape the spring unscathed. Unlike the fabulously wealthy monarchies of the Gulf, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan shares many of the economic and social problems found in the region’s poorer countries. At $5,200, Jordan’s GDP per capita stands at comparable levels to Egypt and Syria; of the monarchies, only Morocco features a comparably low number. The country is poor in natural resources, and its economy is perpetually struggling as the government strives to encourage employment and investment while running up massive public debts. As with so many of the region’s countries, Jordan’s demographic situation is explosive. More than half of the country’s population is under 25, a number that is again comparable to Egypt and Syria and higher than any of those in the other monarchies. The combination of a perpetually weak economy and difficult demographic trends suggests that Jordan is ripe for political instability. In fact, the country did experience a major protest movement, though King Abdullah II continues to hold onto power. These conditions make Jordan a particularly useful case for comparing the dynamics of protest movements in the monarchies and presidential autocracies of the Middle East.

Why did protests in Jordan not escalate to call for the overthrow of the ruler, as they did in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, and Syria? Jordan hardly escaped unscathed. At least one protestor died due to police actions, skirmishes frequently occurred between loyalists and opposition protestors, and the relationship between the opposition and the monarchy seems to have soured. However, the country’s demographic and economic pressures have yet to determine its destiny; despite the revolutionary forces sweeping the Middle East, the protests in Jordan generally followed a pattern of politics established during the country’s democratic opening initiated by King Hussein in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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Liberalization was the king’s response to an economic crisis that shook the foundations of the Jordanian state. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Jordan’s economy experienced a boom fueled by a massive influx of foreign aid from Western and Arab governments. The government used the money to fund the construction of a large rentier state that could buy political stability with the promise of government jobs and financial support. As the global economic expansion lost momentum, particularly in the Middle East, the Jordanian government should have trimmed spending to avoid economic instability. Instead, spending increased, and by the late 1980s Jordan held the highest per capita foreign debt in the world (Robins 2004, 166). In 1988, the dinar experienced a precipitous decline in value, and by 1989 the Jordanian government was forced to call in the IMF and default on its foreign debts. Jordanians’ incomes cratered, the prices of basic necessities skyrocketed, and King Hussein found himself facing down a series of massive riots emerging from the regions of his most loyal tribal supporters.

The manner in which the crisis was resolved shaped the pattern of Jordanian politics for the next two decades and illustrated the inherent advantages held by kings for dealing with protest movements. Despite the intensity of the public’s anger, the rioters never challenged the legitimacy of the king’s rule, choosing instead to focus on specific economic and political grievances. This positioning gave the king room to maneuver as he decided how to respond. His immediate response was to fire Prime Minister Rifai, establishing his distance from the problems by holding the cabinet government responsible for the economic problems. The king then proceeded to ignore advisors advocating for a forceful crackdown (Schwedler 2006, 50), choosing instead to initiate a democratic opening that involved the restoration of parliamentary elections in 1989, the drafting of the National Charter in 1990, the ending of martial law in 1991, and the legalization of political parties in 1992. This liberalization was the public’s price for accepting austerity, and it established a new framework for political competition in the kingdom (Robins 2004, 170). The opposition attained the means to organize legally and openly. The opportunity to contest parliamentary elections, even under the constraining conditions imposed by the monarchy, provided additional space for voicing demands, influencing policy, and fighting to expand the powers of elected institutions. As long as the opposition did not overreach by directly challenging the monarchy, King Hussein could tolerate their increased political activity. This distinction was emphasized in the National Charter, developed by a consultative
council of 60 Jordanian notables and presented to the country in December of 1991. The charter confirmed that King Hussein would permit the complete restoration of pluralistic politics in Jordan. In exchange, the people were expected to accept the country’s ongoing existence as a Hashemite kingdom, with the monarch acting as the head of state (Robins 2004, 174).

The nature of monarchical institutions supported the effective implementation of this transformation. The prime minister offered an easy scapegoat who could be blamed for the country’s troubles. Furthermore, the king’s position was not threatened by increased political participation, so he refrained from repressing the riots violently and felt more confident about offering reforms. The opposition, recognizing an opportunity to gradually encourage reform from within, accepted the rules of the game and continued to refrain from directly criticizing the king himself.

When the dust settled, King Hussein had greatly reinforced the position of the monarchy. The reforms were not superficial, since they opened the political system to participation by almost all political actors. However, the powers of the king had merely been obscured, rather than reduced. King Hussein was “changing the rules of the game without changing the real distribution of power,” (Lust 2005, 106) and the establishment of political parties and inclusive parliamentary elections strengthened the position of the monarch by obfuscating the kingdom’s power dynamics and improving the monarch’s ability to shift blame to alternative political actors.

These dynamics shaped Jordanian politics until the death of King Hussein in 1999 and through the rule of King Abdullah in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Twenty political parties quickly registered after they were legalized in 1992, and elections have been held in 1993, 1997, 2003, 2007, and 2010. The opposition Islamic Action Front participated in cabinet government in the early 1990s, and the opposition has taken advantage of the new political opening to mobilize supporters and voice their demands. However, the deck is stacked in favor of the monarch, who can maneuver to disperse responsibility across the political system in a manner that reinforces his position. The Islamic Action Front gained five cabinet positions of relative importance in December 1990, but the organization quickly found itself subject to a public backlash as their proposals received more attention. Participation in the cabinet was a trap, since the positions provided enhanced scrutiny without equivalent increases in real power. The regime also aggressively redesigned the electoral system to reduce the potency of political
parties. Opposition organizations had performed well in the elections of 1989, securing a combined sixty percent of the seats (Schwedler 54), so the government implemented a single non-transferable vote system to strengthen the position of independent tribal candidates who would be more supportive of the monarchy. Amending the rules governing elections has been a favorite tactic of the regime for weakening opposition without abandoning the underlying electoral institutions.

The fundamental weakness of Jordanian political parties is another important factor of the political system that enables the king to scapegoat effectively. Jordan has a long history with political parties, which were particularly powerful in the 1950s. However, in response to fears about the stability of the monarchy, parties were banned in 1957, and association with a party was punished by the secret police. When parties were formally legalized in 1992, 20 parties quickly registered, but the parties have struggled to organize effectively across the country. Even the Islamic Action Front, the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, struggles to attract support from more than 10% of the public. Other parties barely register among the public, and 75% of Jordanians told researchers in 2008 that the country lacked a single party capable of forming a government in the parliament (Braizat 2008, 13). The sheer number of parties makes it difficult for any single organization to gain traction. During the upheaval of the Arab Spring, the country of six million people sported eighteen registered political parties. This number marked a substantial decrease from previous years, resulting from tighter restrictions on party formation. The problem is acknowledged, with one of the more successful parties commenting that the parties need to coalesce into three distinct organizations centered on the nationalist, leftist, and Islamist trends that dominate the country’s politics. However, regardless of whether the parties understand their flaws or not, the situation is dire. On top of the extreme fragmentation, parties lack the ability to develop and spread their message, they are starved of financing, and even when they succeed in reaching parliament they fail to develop a cohesive agenda. Confusing matters further, the parties understand their purpose as one of influence on policy, rather than actually creating policy as part of an elected government. As a result, most of the parties stay consistently loyal to the government of the day; they will criticize specific decisions, but they

81 Author interview with Jordanian political scientist, Amman, Jordan, April 24, 2011.
82 List of Registered Political Parties in Jordan, Center for Strategic Studies, Amman, Jordan.
83 Author interview Jordanian political party, Amman, Jordan, April 23, 2011.
84 Author interview with international non-governmental organization, Amman, Jordan, March 2011.
will refrain from wholeheartedly embracing the role of an opposition. 85 This further muddles their positions, and their usefulness, with the public.

The government actively encourages the weakness of the political parties. Though restrictions have been substantially reduced, partisan participation continues to be stigmatized by the government and the secret police. 86 The electoral system is also designed to reduce the effectiveness of parties. It encourages support of independents while over representing rural areas that are more difficult for parties to penetrate. This situation is a boon to the monarchy, with the parties’ weakness serving a dual purpose. On one hand, it prohibits politics as a partisan game, ensuring that elections will enable Jordanians to participate politically without developing an emphasis on ideologies that might be more likely to challenge the position of the monarch. On the other hand, the weakness of the parties provides the king with a credible scapegoat on which to assign blame for the slowness of Jordan’s democratic transition. If the country lacks effective parties, how can an elected government plausibly lead the country? This narrative might seem self-serving for the king, but the depth of the parties’ unpopularity makes it an effective argument explaining the slow pace of reform. 87 To strengthen its potency, the king frequently proposes reforms to improve the position of the parties, ranging from increased funding to more favorable electoral and parliamentary rules. 88 These policies show an effort on the part of the king, who beseeches the parties to get their act together, without actually transforming the balance of power in a way that would allow the largest parties to thrive.

The king also has the option to fire the prime minister and his cabinet officials when he needs to change the government’s agenda or hold a high profile member of the government responsible for an unpopular decision. The king exercises the option frequently. In the twenty-two years since the democratic opening in 1989, the office of the Jordanian prime minister has changed hands seventeen times, though several prime ministers held the office more than once. The longest serving prime minister was Ali Abu Al-Ragheb, who held the position for two and a half years, from June 19, 2000 until October 25, 2003. Since the prime minister and the cabinet officials serve at the pleasure of the king, any separation between the two institutions is

85 Author interview with international non-governmental organization, Amman, Jordan, March 2011.
86 Author interviews with Jordanian political scientists, Amman, Jordan, March and April 2011.
87 Fewer than 5% of Jordanians believe that the country’s slow pace of democratic reforms is the result of intransigence on the part of the executive branch. See Fares Braizat, “Democracy in Jordan 2008,” Center for Strategic Studies, 2008.
superficial. After all, the government’s job is primarily to advance the king’s agenda, and Jordanians understand that criticism of the prime minister is indirectly criticism of the king himself. However, the separation is just enough to allow the king to distance himself from the day to day realities of governing. When Jordanians express their frustration with policies, the king can avoid blame by assigning responsibility to the prime minister and changing the government.

The combination of these strategies enables the monarchy to undermine the effectiveness of Jordan’s democratic institutions, including the parliament, political parties, and the cabinet, while simultaneously using the weakness of those institutions as a scapegoat to distance the king from political and economic problems in the kingdom. Opposition organizations such as the Islamic Action Front accept this reality because the availability of elections and access to parliament provides a chance to voice demands and influence policy, even if indirectly. They retain the right to challenge the rules of the game without inviting a backlash from the palace. As freedoms in Jordan eroded throughout the 1990s and after King Abdullah II took the throne, the opposition successfully boycotted elections twice, in 1997 and 2010. Demands are also regularly made for a more transparent government, stronger civil liberties, fairer elections laws, and more power for elected officials. However, criticisms were always directed at the prime minister, the cabinet, and other government officials, rather than the king himself. The king was able to use this dynamic to his advantage. Just as the opposition criticized the government, so did he, blaming underdeveloped political parties for stunted political reforms and holding prime ministers responsible for economic and political problems. In the process, he co-opted the country’s entire democratic system by painting it as the problem, and the opposition struggled to make its demands relevant to the people. As Jordan’s Freedom House rankings steadily declined throughout the 2000s, the Jordanian people continued to assess democracy in their country as stable, and they continued to refrain from blaming the monarchy for the slowness of the transition (Braizat 2008, 12).

As the revolutions of the Arab Spring upended political status quos and toppled governments across the Middle East, the opposition faced a prime opportunity to shatter the

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89 Author interview with international non-governmental organization, Amman, Jordan, March 2011; Author interview with Jordanian political scientist, Amman, Jordan, April 24, 2011.
pattern of Jordanian politics. Instead, the country’s politics continued along the same path as before, with the institutions of monarchical government successfully stalling the escalation of political conflict between the regime and the opposition. The opposition initiated protests in January of 2011, with the Islamic Action Front and several leftist political parties leading weekly demonstrations after noon prayers on Fridays.\(^91\) The protests began as the Tunisian uprising overwhelmed Ben Ali and prior to the explosion of unrest in Egypt, though some Jordanians point out that “unprecedented”\(^92\) protests in Jordan after the November 2010 parliamentary election were a precursor to the events in Tunisia. From the beginning, the protests were controlled by organized opposition, unlike events in several other Arab countries, and the opposition articulated a straightforward list of demands focusing on “bread and freedom.” On Thursday, January 20, 2011 the government of Prime Minister Rifai responded to the initial protests by raising the salaries of government employees and freezing prices on basic goods. The next day, in a protest that mobilized 4,000 people in Amman, the opposition rejected the measures as insufficient. Pointing out that poverty rates stood at 25%, they called for a more comprehensive approach to economic reform.\(^93\) Economic demands were linked to political demands. Hamzeh Mansur, Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front (IAF), stated that “the acute economic crisis and explosive social crisis are the results of a political crisis that needs immediate political reforms.” However, the opposition’s proposals for political reform did not deviate from the framework of the Jordanian political system; instead, they focused on expanding the powers of parliament. Mansur called for the immediate dismissal of the current government, to be followed by constitutional amendments limiting the powers of the king. Chief among the proposed amendments was a request for the prime minister to be chosen by a parliamentary majority, rather than by the king himself.\(^94\)

As the protests dragged on for several weeks in January, the king recognized the potential severity of the situation. Revolutionary fervor was sweeping the Middle East, and opposition organizations were strengthened by the fact that traditional supporters of the king, including the all important East Bank tribes, were sympathetic to the demands for economic and political

\(^{91}\) Opposition parties participating in the rallies included the Islamic Action Front, the National Unity Party, Hashed, the Jordan Baath Party, the Popular Baath Party, and the Communist Party, and the National Movement Party


\(^{93}\) “5,000 rally in Jordan ‘bread and freedom’ demo,” \textit{AFP}, January 21, 2011.

reforms. However, rather than panicking and violently repressing the protests, as in other Middle Eastern countries, the king continued to address the opposition’s grievances. First, he consulted with a wide range of Jordanians, “including former and incumbent high-ranking officials, activists, unionists and Islamists.” Then, on February 2, he promptly fired Prime Minister Rifai, replacing him with a well respected East Banker, Marouf Al-Bakhit, who had previously held the post from 2005 to 2007. The change in government was immediately followed by an announcement that the king would support a national dialogue committee to propose political reforms for the kingdom. Throughout this period, the opposition engaged in legal protests that were monitored with a minimal police presence.

The ball was now in the opposition’s court. In Tunisia and Egypt, Mubarak and Ben Ali had addressed protests in a similar manner, sacking ministers, raising government salaries and subsidies, and promising additional political reforms. They were met with escalating demands as increasing numbers of everyday people mobilized against the regime. In Jordan, the king’s response was met with widespread acceptance by most of the people. The opposition responded accordingly. The Islamic Action Front criticized the appointment of Bakhit, claiming that he had rigged parliamentary elections as prime minister in 2007, and they continued to demand constitutional and economic reforms in their weekly protests. However, their agenda did not become more radical, and the protestors’ attitude towards the king was summed up by an activist who claimed that “we want to keep the kingdom, we want to keep the king, but we want the authority for the people.” The protests continued uninterrupted throughout February, with the largest protest occurring on February 25, but the king seemed to have avoided a dangerous escalation of the protest movement.

In early March, the king pulled off a coup when the government succeeded in persuading much of the opposition to abandon street protests for participation in the national dialogue committee. On March 2, five leftist parties that had been participating in protests with the IAF

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96 Ibid.
announced that they were removing themselves from the demonstrations.\textsuperscript{101} While the IAF and the small National Union Party decided to continue with the protests, the chance to directly shape the country’s political reforms proved to be too tempting for much of the opposition. The National Dialogue Committee was tasked with reforming Jordan’s election law and political parties law, and it was given three months to complete the task. The IAF refrained from participating because the committee was not supposed to address constitutional amendments, but the party stressed that it would continue to pursue “legitimate and lawful means” in its campaign for additional reforms. The 52 member panel also included three members of the Muslim Brotherhood, to speak for the IAF unofficially, in addition to representatives from trade unions, politicians, and other Jordanian notables.\textsuperscript{102}

On March 25, 2011, the political situation suddenly veered dangerously close to the precipice of escalation when Jordanian police violently drove protestors out of a makeshift tent city in central Amman. One man died of a heart attack after being beaten by police officers, the first protest-related death in Jordan since the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions.\textsuperscript{103} However, the kingdom’s fragile equilibrium held, and over the next two months the protest movement gradually lost steam. After rioting Salafis in Zarqa severely wounded several police officers, opposition parties canceled protests for several Fridays in late April and early May. Instead, activists decided to “wait and see” if the national dialogue committee would propose legitimate democratic reforms.\textsuperscript{104} Just as the committee approached its deadline, the king announced the creation of another group that would have “carte-blanche” to consider constitutional amendments.\textsuperscript{105} In doing so, he simultaneously addressed the IAF’s calls for broader reform efforts while further prolonging the reform process.

The national dialogue committee released its recommendations to the Jordanian government at the end of May. The proposals were a mixed bag. They included a recommendation for dropping the one-man, one-vote system that had undermined political parties since the parliamentary elections of 1993 by encouraging Jordanians to vote on the basis of tribal rather than party affiliation. They also introduced a limited national proportional list

\textsuperscript{102} “Jordan Islamists insist no talks with reform panel,” \textit{AFP}, March 15, 2011.
\textsuperscript{103} “Jordan: man dies in hospital after Amman clashes,” \textit{BBC}, March 25, 2011: \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12866531}
\textsuperscript{104} Thameen Kheetan, “Protests peter out as activists take wait and see approach,” \textit{Jordan Times}, May 9, 2011.
\textsuperscript{105} Thameen Kheetan, “Constitution review panel has carte-blanche,” \textit{Jordan Times}, May 1, 2011.
system, so that 15% of the seats in parliament would be filled based on a party’s national proportion of the vote. The remainder would be filled by proportions at the governate level. The IAF expressed disappointment in the lack of comprehensive change, claiming that the 15% national list would not enable political parties to win enough seats to create a majority government. However, the implementation of the proposed laws would help shift the balance of power toward political parties and the parliament, if at a slow pace. On June 13, 2011, in a speech marking the anniversary of the Great Arab Revolt, King Abdullah voiced his full support for the changes. More significantly, he also endorsed an eventual transition to a system where the prime minister would be chosen by a parliamentary majority. The proposed reforms did not end the protest movement, and weekly demonstrations continued throughout the summer of 2011. However, the national dialogue committee had succeeded in forestalling the emergence of a political crisis, while the opposition continued to deal with the government and to refrain from attacking the king. The king was still managing the situation successfully.

The next batch of reforms was released in August, when the constitutional committee issued its proposals to the king. Once again, the opposition expressed frustration with the extent of the proposed changes, but once again the proposals included potentially important changes to the Jordanian political system. The committee recommended changing or omitting 42 of the amendments added to the Jordanian constitution since 1952, and significant suggestions included limiting the jurisdiction of the special security courts, increasing the powers of the judiciary, and restraining the government’s ability to issue provisional laws without parliamentary approval. King Abdullah immediately expressed his support for the proposals, stating that they reflected his desire to encourage “wider public participation in the decision-making process, separation between the branches of government, and a clear definition of the responsibilities of each of these branches in a manner that truly reflects the Hashemite tradition and good governance in state administration.”

More than one year after the initial protests started in Jordan, unrest in the Hashemite Kingdom has yet to be completely quelled. King Abdullah is not necessarily out of the woods,
and after his motorcade was stoned in Tafila in the summer, a handful of stories have trickled into the Western press claiming that the king could be on shakier ground than expected. However, Jordan, for all of its vulnerabilities, has undoubtedly dealt with the pressures of the Arab Spring better than many of the other Arab dictatorships, and the advantages of kingship helped King Abdullah to successfully manage the unrest. He was able to distance himself from economic grievances and deflate tension by firing the unpopular prime minister. He had the ability to entice the opposition into a reform process focusing on expanding the powers of parliament and political parties. Even opposition groups that rejected direct participation in the reform process refrained from escalating their demands; instead, they used their ongoing demonstrations as pressure to keep the reforms on track. The king also continued to use the political parties as scapegoats for the slow pace of reform. The king acknowledged the opposition’s request for cabinets to be chosen by parliamentary majority, but he justified the extended and vague timeline – at least three years – by citing the lack of developed political parties. Throughout this process, the king himself remained popular and relatively untouchable, isolated incidents to the contrary. As a result, after the collapse of four Arab dictators and more than a year of protests in Jordan, news sources such as the BBC can still write articles about the slow burn of minor opposition protest and top-down reform in the country.

Meanwhile, what of the IAF and other opposition organizations? Why have they refrained from escalating their demands even after watching activists in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen sweep away their dictators? One plausible answer is that activists have been satisfied with the pace of reforms. The IAF criticized the proposals of the National Dialogue Committee and the Royal Constitutional Committee, but they still made substantial gains, both concrete and abstract. Changes to the election and political parties laws could begin to change the balance of power in parliament, and the constitutional reforms could restrain the power of the state. The rhetoric of the protestors, accepted by a wide range of Jordanians, along with the king’s very public acceptance of the idea that parliamentary majorities should choose cabinets, suggests that the opposition has also succeeded in altering the nature of the country’s political discourse.

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113 Ibid.
When these gains are compared with the potentially significant costs associated with the chaos of revolution, it makes sense that the opposition would prefer reform to escalation.

The series of events in Jordan between January 2011 and January 2012 appear to fit the escalation model developed in this thesis. As revolution spread throughout the Arab world, activists in Jordan chose to voice their economic and political grievances to the regime. King Abdullah had the opportunity to repress the protestors violently or to offer reforms. He chose reform almost immediately, firing the prime minister, consulting with Jordanian notables and activists, and announcing the creation of the National Dialogue Committee. Of course, real world events occurred somewhere between these two choices. Repression did occur in Jordan, with police or government aligned thugs occasionally attacking peaceful protests. However, for the most part the opposition was allowed to protest legally, with little interference from the police. The army was never called to violently disperse demonstrators.

After the king responded by offering reforms, the opposition had the choice to escalate or accept the reforms. Much of the opposition accepted the invitation to participate in the national dialogue and asked their supporters to refrain from protesting in the streets. Other organizations, including the IAF, Jordan’s largest opposition organization, complicated the picture by rejecting the invitation and continuing to mobilize in the streets. However, this outcome does not unduly deviate from the theory. At no point did the IAF attempt to involve the wider public or to escalate their demands from reform to the overthrow of the monarchy. Their decision to continue protesting should be viewed as an attempt to shape the reforms from the outside. The IAF had unofficial representation on the National Dialogue Committee through the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, and their protests have maintained a disciplined focus on the reform process. Occasionally during the past year, more radical opposition emerged to directly target the king, usually from Salafi and youth groups. However, these activists generally lacked sustainable organizations, and at no point did they come close to drawing substantial public support for their actions. We can therefore conclude that the situation in Jordan has reached equilibrium in the reform process, uneasy as it may be. This outcome suggests that the situation in Jordan can be explained by the escalation model, shown below.
Expanding the Field: Morocco and Kuwait

Despite the existence of a serious protest movement, Jordan avoided the escalation that occurred in the presidential autocracies, as the opposition either limited its demands or agreed to participate in a government sponsored reform process. Is Jordan merely an exception, rooted in cultural, historical, and political distinctions? Similar outcomes in other Middle Eastern monarchies suggest that institutions did have a substantial impact on the outcome of protest movements in the Arab Spring. In particular, events in Morocco and Kuwait closely tracked the trajectory of Jordan as it dealt with opposition to the regime. Like Jordan, Morocco ranks among the lower tier of Middle Eastern states in terms of wealth. Its GDP per capita equals that of Syria and trails Egypt’s and Tunisia’s. It also boasts an impressive youth bulge, with nearly 50% of the population under twenty-five years of age. Kuwait offers a glimpse at one of the wealthier Arab states. Its GDP per capita is the second highest in the region, and its youth, at 37%, make up a relatively low portion of the population by regional standards.\textsuperscript{114} However, despite these differences, protests in both countries followed a very similar dynamic.

In 1956, an alliance between the exiled Sultan Muhammad V and the Istiqlal Party achieved Moroccan independence from France. The alliance quickly turned to confrontation as King Muhammad and the party maneuvered for power in the newly independent state. The king, using his position to shape the rules of the game, succeeded in fragmenting the parties and creating a system that could be effectively managed from the palace (Lust 2005, 47). However, the monarchy’s legitimacy was tenuous, and it faced serious challenges, particularly after King Hassan II assumed the throne in 1962. Parliament was closed and reopened, the king ruled through emergency powers, and the country was roiled by two coup attempts in the early 1970s. Morocco was also hit hard by the global economic crisis of the 1980s, and the regime violently repressed protestors throughout the decade (Lust 2005, 132). However, the country’s political dynamic also continued to be governed by the relationship between a powerful palace and opposition political parties competing for seats in the parliament and a voice in the government. The opposition succeeded in gradually pushing for liberalization throughout the 1990s, and the process expanded rapidly when King Muhammad IV took power upon the death of his father in 1999. Opposition parties formed governments in the parliament, and since 1998 three of the country’s four prime ministers have been selected from major political parties.

As in Jordan, the king’s position above the political fray in Morocco has provided him with a buffer to focus political competition on targets other than his right to rule, at least since the 1980s. This dynamic was especially apparent during the protests of the Arab Spring, which did not escalate and ended with constitutional reforms giving more power to parliament. In contrast to Jordan, protests in Morocco did not quickly follow the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The first demonstrations took place on February 20, when youth activists calling themselves the “February 20 Movement” used Facebook to mobilize protests in several of Morocco’s largest cities. In the run up to the planned demonstrations, the regime increased subsidies to ease tensions, but the action did not forestall the unrest.115 The protest’s stated goal was to curb corruption and to push for democratic reforms. As one activist said of the February 20 demonstration, “This is a peaceful protest to push for constitutional reform, restore dignity and end graft and the plundering of public funds.”116 Protestors’ backgrounds varied extensively,

with youth activists, leftists, trade unions, and Islamists, including the banned organization Justice and Charity, all participating in the event.\footnote{“Thousands of Moroccans demand limits on royal powers,” Al-Arabiya, February 19, 2011.}

In responding to the unrest, King Muhammad’s strategy closely tracked the strategy used by King Abdullah in Jordan. After meeting with representatives from a variety of segments in Moroccan society, including trade unions, NGOs, and political parties, the king announced the creation of a committee to propose amendments to the constitution on March 9.\footnote{Giles Tremlett, “Morocco’s king bows to pressure and allows reform,” Guardian, June 17, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jun/18/morocco-king-reform; “Thousands of Moroccans demand change, end to corruption,” Al-Arabiya, March 19, 2011.} The speech was well received by Moroccans, with the opposition Islamist party, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), praising the king’s actions.\footnote{“Moroccan King’s Reform Pledges Draws Praise,” AFP, March 10, 2011.} At the same time, protestors vowed to keep pressure on the reform process by staying in the streets, and Morocco witnessed several large demonstrations between March and June, when the committee finally announced its proposals. The largest occurred on June 5, after a protestors died from alleged police brutality.\footnote{“Morocco: Thousands Demonstrate Over Killing of Protestor,” Africa News, June 6, 2011.} However, the regime generally refrained from violently repressing the demonstrators, and the demonstrators refrained from directly attacking King Muhammad.

The proposed constitutional changes were announced to the country on June 17. As in Jordan, the amendments offered a mixed bag, with the king maneuvering to insure that he would still be able to manage the political process. However, the proposals also offered a chance for real change in the political balance in the country. The king would continue to control the military and religious affairs of state, but the prime minister would come from the largest party in the parliament, he would have the power to appoint ministers, and the judiciary was made independent from the monarchy.\footnote{Steven Erlanger, “Moroccan King Proposes Limited Steps to Democracy,” New York Times, June 17, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/18/world/africa/18morocco.html.} Though the king would still maintain a major say in almost all policy issues, the changes significantly expanded the parliament’s powers over domestic matters.\footnote{Giles Tremlett, “Morocco’s king bows to pressure and allows reform,” Guardian, June 17, 2011; “Moroccan King Fails to Win Over Youth Protest Movement,” AFP, June 18, 2011.} The new constitution would be put to a national referendum on July 1, leaving only two weeks for Moroccans to decide their stance on the amendments.

The youth and Islamist opposition of the February 20 Movement found itself in a tricky situation. The proposed reforms were popular with the people, and leading political parties,
including the Islamist PJD, encouraged their supporters to flood the streets in support of the king and constitution.\textsuperscript{123} Despite this popularity, the February 20 Movement decided to oppose the reforms, holding out for more comprehensive changes. They were resoundingly defeated at the polls, with 98\% of Moroccans reportedly voting to approve the new constitution. In the aftermath of this defeat, the movement vowed to continue protesting, and in the following months it occasionally succeeded in drawing people out into the streets. However, the movement was fragmented, and much of the steam had gone out of the demonstrations. Broad public support for the efforts faded away, most protestors stayed home, and those who remained in the streets knew that they did not have the strength to escalate their demands.

The king was not done yet. After the constitutional amendments had been approved, he announced that new elections would be held within the year. On November 25, 2011, Moroccans went to the polls to elect a new parliament. The PJD won a resounding victory, claiming a plurality of 107 seats out of the 395 in the parliament. Their closest rival, the Istiqlal Party, finished a distant second.\textsuperscript{124} Three days later, the king named Abdelilah Benkirane, secretary-general of the PJD, as the nation’s new prime minister.\textsuperscript{125} Benkirane immediately began the task of cobbled together a coalition government and a cabinet.

The elections marked another success for the monarchy in reducing tensions and halting the momentum of the country’s protest movement. The February 20 movement again decided to boycott the proceedings, but turnout increased from 37\% in the 2007 elections to 45\%.\textsuperscript{126} Throughout the fall, the movement’s presence in the streets dwindled as its activists fragmented further and people focused their attention on the elections.

Events in Morocco during the Arab spring closely tracked the predictions of the escalation model. As protests spread throughout the country in late February, the king responded by initiating a reform process. Most of the major opposition organizations and political parties accepted that process, and those that did not used their presence on the street to pressure the regime for additional reforms. At no point in the preceding months did activists escalate their demands to directly challenge the position of the king.\textsuperscript{127} When the reforms were finally

\textsuperscript{123} Abdeljalil Bounhar and Paul Schemm, “Moroccans protest for and against new constitution,” Associated Press, June 26, 2011.
\textsuperscript{125} Richard Cochrane, “Islamist PJD LeaderNamed Moroccan PM,” Global Insight, November 30, 2011.
announced several months later, the overwhelming support among the public crushed any remaining impetus for additional protests, only a few hardcore activists remained in the streets, and the crisis ended with the outcome “reform.” King Muhammad’s placement in the field of contestation enabled him to stay above the fray. The prime minister and an unpopular parliament took the brunt of the public’s anger, and the king was able to avoid an escalation of the protest movement by directing the people’s disgruntlement toward parliamentary reform. Leading opposition organizations, particularly the established political parties, accepted the proposed reforms, since their own power increased in the process. Though the king continues to be Morocco’s most important political player, his position above the field of political contestation provided a plausible pathway to reform that most of the opposition eagerly grasped. Thus, we can conclude that the outcome in Morocco adheres closely to the escalation model.

Kuwait is another Arab monarchy with a tradition of parliamentary politics. The country’s Al-Sabah dynasty has ruled for more than two hundred years, but since independence the country has also introduced a role for electoral politics. The 1962 constitution allowed the emir to choose the country’s ministers and to dissolve parliament. As a result, the Al-Sabah family has staffed the government ministries with its own family members. However, the parliament has the ability to take votes of no-confidence against individual ministers that it does not like, even if they have royal blood. (Herb 1999, 161) This structure produced a political system where conflict has occurred in parliament, and it helped the monarchy to avoid challenges to its rule. The country experienced a democratic opening in 1992, after the Gulf War, and since that time the opposition has successfully used the parliament to influence the direction of the country’s government (Herb 1999, 168).

In Kuwait, the Arab Spring barely registered on the country’s domestic political scene. Small protests of several hundred people were held in June, with opposition figures calling for the resignation of the prime minister, but the country avoided major unrest. That started to change in September, when thousands of Kuwaitis took to the streets to demand a constitutional monarchy and fully elected parliamentary governments. The demonstrations occurred simultaneously with a heated confrontation between loyalist and opposition parliamentarians.

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over corruption.\textsuperscript{129} The conflict continued throughout the fall. On November 16, dozens of protestors rushed the parliament building to demonstrate against corruption.\textsuperscript{130} The incident was followed by further unrest as 15,000 Kuwaitis took to the streets in late November, demanding the resignation of the prime minister. As in Jordan and Morocco, the opposition refrained from directly targeting the institution of the monarchy, focusing on corruption and governance instead. According to one activist, “our spring is completely different…The Arab Spring is directed against the regimes. Our spring is directed against the prime minister and corruption, but we are devoted to the system of governance in Kuwait.”\textsuperscript{131}

Initially, the government responded to the demonstrations with defiance. Riot police fought back against protestors. The activists who stormed the parliament were arrested. In late November the emir proclaimed that he would not bow to pressure from the street; the prime minister would keep his job, and parliament would not be dissolved.\textsuperscript{132}

However, the emir quickly changed his tune. On December 6, he relented to the protestors’ demands and dissolved the parliament. Elections were set for February 2. In a heated election centered on major government corruption scandals and demands for greater political freedoms, a loose opposition alliance of Islamists and tribal candidates claimed 34 of the parliament’s 50 seats.\textsuperscript{133} In the aftermath of the opposition’s resounding success, the embattled prime minister resigned. At the time of this writing, the emir was in the process of selecting a new cabinet.

Events in Kuwait have yet to run their course, but to date they have followed a similar trajectory to protest movements in Jordan and Morocco. Demonstrations gained momentum slowly, with protestors focused on economic grievances, corruption, and political reforms. Even when tensions rose, the people in the street never counted regime change as one of their goals. Instead, political confrontation was channeled into the realm of parliamentary politics. The emir sacrificed the prime minister and parliament to grant protestors’ their demands, and the

\textsuperscript{129} “Kuwait’s Protest Movement: Simmering for Change,” Al-Akhbar English, September 19, 2011, \url{http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/kuwait%E2%80%99s-protest-movement-simmering-change}.

\textsuperscript{130} “Kuwait security crackdown after crowd storms parliament,” Guardian, November 17, 2011, \url{http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/17/kuwait-protesters-storm-parliament}.

\textsuperscript{131} “Thousands Protest for Reform in Kuwait, Dozens arrested,” POMED Wire, November 22, 2011, \url{http://pomed.org/blog/2011/11/thousands-protest-for-reform-in-kuwait-dozens-arrested.html#.TzNQkMXLYSo}.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133} Gwenn Okruhlik, “The identity politics of Kuwait’s election,” Foreign Policy Magazine Middle East Channel, February 8, 2011, \url{http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/02/08/the_identity_politics_of_kuwait_s_election}. 73
opposition pursued a strategy of gradually expanding their powers by working to reform the system from within.

The outcome of Arab Spring protest movements in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait illustrate the advantages held by monarchs as they contend with domestic unrest. The monarch’s position outside the field of political contestation allows him to distance himself from economic and political grievances. Additionally, the separation between the king and elected institutions means that prime ministers, cabinet governments, and parliaments can be used as credible scapegoats to be sacrificed to public discontent. Opposition organizations are also more willing to engage in regime-sponsored reform initiatives, since the king can credibly expand the powers of parliament without fundamentally undermining his own rule. As seen in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait, these factors interact to reduce the likelihood that popular protest movements will escalate into calls for regime change. In all three countries, protests focused on parliamentary politics, and monarchs responded by changing governments and offering to explore reforms. The opposition generally agreed to play along; at worst, some opposition groups maintained a presence in the streets to continue pressuring the regime to follow through on its promises. In both Morocco and Jordan, the eventual outcome was one of reform, as the vast majority of opposition accepted imperfect reforms that still expanded the reach of democratic institutions. In Kuwait, the confrontation between the opposition and the government has been confined to parliamentary politics, and the dynamic seems unlikely to change.

Complicating the Story: Bahrain

Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait all reached an outcome of reforms during the Arab Spring, and their experiences provide the clearest example of the benefits inherent to monarchies for managing unrest. However, other monarchies attained different outcomes. Unrest never developed in Qatar and the UAE, where the outcome was status quo. In Saudi Arabia and Oman, the kings initially responded to scattered acts of protest with repression. However, they later implemented mild economic and political reforms that precluded escalation into more significant demonstrations and led to an outcome of reforms after repression.

Alone among the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East, Bahrain’s experience with the Arab Spring is relatively difficult to explain with the model. Of the monarchies, Bahrain was the only country to approach a mass uprising. However, the uprising was only partially completed before being repressed in that the protestors were never capable of centering their focus on the
overthrow of the monarchy. Throughout the spring, radical groups escalated their demands to revolution, but significant portions of the opposition continued to advocate for reforms instead. In fact, the eventual outcome of the movement was a national reform dialogue similar to those conducted in Jordan and Morocco. As a result, Bahrain’s outcome has been classified as reforms after repression rather than as mass uprising, though this outcome also seems imperfect due to the seriousness and size of the protests, the intensity of the repression, and the fact that the protests were almost completely repressed long before the regime acted on its offer for a reform dialogue. However, despite the relative shortcomings of the model in explaining the pattern of events in Bahrain, a careful study of events still provides insights relative to the theory. The institutional effects of monarchical government benefited the regime by dividing the opposition, helping to stall the uprising in a state of partial mobilization, and strengthening the regime’s eventual offer of reforms.

Bahrain’s modern history with electoral politics extends to 2002, when the country held its first parliamentary elections. Previously, the National Assembly had lacked legislative powers, but upon taking the throne in 1999, Sheikh Hamid Bin Issa Al-Khalifa instituted a series of reforms. The reforms helped to end an uprising that had afflicted Bahrain since 1994, with a wide spectrum of opposition groups agitating for democratic reforms, sometimes violently. The reforms’ ability to quell the unrest without fundamentally undermining the position of the monarchy illustrates the process by which reforms in monarchies hold greater credibility and thus a greater chance of success. However, when the Arab Spring arrived in Bahrain in mid-February, the regime ignored its earlier actions and responded by immediately repressing the protests. After a half-hearted attempt to forestall unrest by offering every Bahraini citizen a $1000 grant before protests planned for February 14, riot police responded to the demonstrations with violent repression that resulted in the deaths of two protestors. At this point, the situation quickly spiraled toward escalation. Activists redoubled their efforts, thousands of people poured into the streets, and calls for abandoning the monarchy could even be heard amongst the crowds. Al-Wefaq, the largest Shi’ite opposition group, withdrew from the parliament, though it continued to insist that it was primarily focused on political reforms.\textsuperscript{134} The majority of protestors seemed to support this position, demanding that the prime minister step down in order

\textsuperscript{134} “Bahrainis Urge Regime Change as Second Protestor Buried,” \textit{AFP}, February 16, 2011.
to pave the way for an elected government in a constitutional monarchy. However, despite offers from the monarchy for a dialogue with the opposition, the crackdown continued, and splits soon emerged as activists escalated their demands. On March 8, 2011, three Shi’ite opposition organizations announced their desire to replace the monarchy with a constitutional republic. The groups were smaller than Al-Wefaq, but the announcement marked a significant escalation in the protest movement, and in the following days several more demonstrators were killed by the security services. The regime responded by requesting outside help. On March 14, more than 1,000 soldiers and police officers from Saudi Arabia and the UAE entered Bahrain to assist in quelling the unrest. These actions helped to quell the protests for several months.

Why did the regime respond to the protests with force? It is entirely plausible that a reaction emphasizing dialogue and reform, as in Jordan and Morocco, would have forestalled the escalation that occurred. One answer could be individual personalities within the government; several news articles emphasized the role of the hardliner prime minister, an uncle to the king who has held the position for more than forty years. A more plausible answer can be found in Bahrain’s unique demographic and geopolitical situation. While an estimated 70% of Bahraini Muslims are Shi’ite, the ruling family is Sunni, and the government actively discriminates against the Shi’ite majority in the government and security sectors. Bahrain is also situated squarely between the regional jockeying of Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shi’ite Iran, creating an explosive mix of demographic and geopolitical tensions. The combination offers a plausible explanation for the monarchy’s decision to repress the demonstrations rather than extending an initial offer of reforms. The majority of protestors were Shi’ite, and the regime seemed to fear a Shi’ite uprising. The monarchy justified its repression by blaming the unrest on interference by Iran, a posture that was encouraged by Saudi Arabia. Indeed, Saudi Arabia spearheaded the effort to deploy Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) forces to Bahrain, using the pretext that the country was the victim of a foreign assault.

135 “Thousands Protest at Bahrain Government HQ, AFP, March 6, 2011.
However, despite the monarchy’s decision to repress the protests, it still benefited from the nature of monarchical institutions, which enabled the regime to successfully switch strategies and emphasize reforms. After repressing the uprising for several months, the king announced plans to hold a national dialogue similar to those initiated by monarchs in Jordan and Bahrain. The offer successfully split the opposition, at least initially. After wavering for weeks, Al-Wefaq decided to join six other opposition parties in the talks, giving the dialogue a greater amount of legitimacy. However, each party had only five seats, giving the opposition a mere 35 out of 300 seats, and Al-Wefaq pulled out of the discussion after two weeks. More importantly, the offer of reforms forestalled a complete escalation of the protests into a mass uprising by helping to keep enough of the public out of the streets. The dialogue continued despite Al-Wefaq’s withdrawal, and it ultimately approved reforms that slightly increased the powers of the elected lower house without limiting the ability of the appointed upper house to block all legislation.

The reforms were followed by elections in September to replace the seats resigned by Al-Wefaq, elections boycotted by the opposition. Bahrain’s reforms were not as far reaching as those in Jordan or Morocco, and tensions between the opposition and the monarchy continue to be high. On the one year anniversary of the original February protests, the opposition and the security forces once again clashed violently. However, despite this situation, the legal opposition, including Al-Wefaq, continues to pursue reforms rather than regime change. The possibility of expanding the powers of parliament has still been enough to entice the legal opposition away from escalating its demands, even after the harsh repression from the regime. Furthermore, the later offer of reforms proved to be enough to quiet the public. Bahrain seemed to come close to a mass uprising, as several radical groups began advocating for the monarchy’s abolition and at one point the protests acquired substantial support among the public. However, the movement never quite reached the stage where a majority of protests were calling for the monarchy to be overthrown, and the regime’s strategy of repression followed by reform succeeded in quieting the unrest. Though protests continue in Bahrain today, they have failed to acquire the momentum they once possessed.

143 Toby Matthiesen, “Battling over the legacy of Bahrain’s Pearl Roundabout,” Foreign Policy Magazine Middle East Channel, February 13, 2012, http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/02/13/battling_over_the_legacy_of_bahrain_s_pearl_roundabout
As stated previously, reforms after repression seems to be the most appropriate outcome to use in the case of Bahrain, though it is imperfect. In general terms, the regime chose to repress the initial protests, and activists responded by escalating their activities and their demands. However, this escalation withered, and the regime chose to switch strategies by offering reforms. The public responded to this offer by largely staying home, despite calls by radical opposition organizations to overthrow the monarchy, and the outcome of the protest movement was reforms after repression. Characteristic of this outcome, the country is more embittered than it might have been if the outcome was reforms, and unrest continues today. However, the monarchy’s combination of repression and reforms succeeded in squelching the protests before they evolved beyond a partial escalation and spiraled completely out of control.

Events in Bahrain suggest that even when monarchies face the potential for a mass uprising, the divided structure of the regime still brings benefits to the rulers by more effectively splitting the moderate and radical opposition. Both presidential autocrats and monarchs are capable of co-opting opposition organizations, but monarchs seem to be more effective at convincing the moderate opposition to adhere to the rules of the game, even under a crisis situation where the regime chooses to repress a mass uprising. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood initially chose to keep its distance from the protests, and Islah made the same decision in Yemen. However, when more radical activists escalated their demands and the public chose to enter the streets in growing numbers, these opposition organizations were quick to join the fray against the regime. By contrast, moderate opposition in Bahrain never abandoned their pursuit of reforms from within the system. The logic of regime-opposition relations in monarchies and presidential autocracies can explain why this dynamic occurs. In presidential autocracies, co-opted opposition can share in the spoils of government to an extent, but they can never expect to rule as long as the current dictator holds onto power. On the other hand, moderate, legal opposition in monarchies can hope to play a far larger role in governing the country by expanding the powers of parliament. Additionally, there is no guarantee that these opposition groups will keep their privileged position in the chaos of revolution. As a result, they are more likely to continue preferring reforms over revolution, and the resulting split in the opposition means that repression by the regime is more likely to be successful, particularly when it is followed by an offer of reforms. Bahrain’s experience deviated slightly from the expected outcome for monarchies in
how close it came to experiencing a mass uprising, but the logic behind the model continues to be relevant to explaining the outcome of the country’s protest movement.

**The Model in Historical Context**

Historical developments in the modern Middle East also raise questions about the theory’s applicability to political events beyond the time period of the Arab Spring. Monarchies might be the most resilient Middle Eastern regimes at the moment, but this was not always the case. Between 1949 and 1979, monarchies collapsed in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Iran. The 1950s and 1960s were a time of great upheaval in the region; the British colonial presence was fading away, and nationalist fervor swept away governments that had depended on the British for their survival. In 1952, King Faruq was deposed in Egypt. In 1958, King Faisal II, along with the entire royal family, was killed in a violent uprising in Iraq. In 1969, King Idris of Libya was overthrown by Muammar Al-Qaddafi. All three kings ruled in countries with active parliaments, but parliamentary politics did not save them from a stridently nationalist and militaristic opposition.

However, it is important to note the manner in which these monarchs were overthrown. None of them were toppled by a popular uprising; rather, they collapsed due to internal coups carried out by small cells of disgruntled military officers. This distinction is important to the legitimacy of the model, which makes no claims about the resilience of monarchies from internal challenges. The capacity to scapegoat and the option of parliamentary reforms enables a monarch to more effectively manage opposition from political parties and the public, but if he cannot maintain the loyalty of his military, his ability to hold onto power will be seriously compromised.

The one Middle Eastern monarchy in the modern era that collapsed under pressure from a popular uprising was the regime of the Shah in Iran. In the early 1970s, the Shah implemented a series of reforms intended to aggressively modernize the country’s society and economy. The reforms fell flat with the Iranian people, and the Shah’s popularity plummeted throughout the decade. Realizing his overreach, the Shah spent the last two years of his rule trying to rebuild his support by introducing liberalizing reforms, but the reforms only encouraged additional unrest (Herb 1999, 219). In 1979, the regime collapsed under the strain of a massive popular uprising.

At first glance, the outcome of the Iranian revolution seems to contradict the expected outcomes of the escalation model. However, a closer look at the actions of the Shah in the 1970s
paints a different picture. In fact, the Shah had foolishly sacrificed many of the advantages that monarchs can use to limit the probability of a popular uprising occurring. The Shah actively put himself at the center of the government, becoming the figurehead for his unpopular modernization schemes. He even created a single political party – the Hizb-I Rastakhiz – to govern the country on the basis of single-party regimes popular with presidential autocrats (Herb 1999, 218). These actions undermined the Shah’s ability to float above the field of political contestation, ensuring that he would become the target of the people’s ire. As a result, preferences shifted, and both opposition activists and the general public focused on overthrowing the Shah rather than trying to reform the system from within. The outcome of the Iranian Revolution thus supports the logic of the theory of escalation and the field of political contestation, and in doing so it holds a lesson for monarchs in the Middle East today.

Another issue in the historical record emerges from the early experiences of monarchs in the newly independent states of Jordan and Morocco. Both monarchies survived, but they experienced years of virulent, nationalist opposition similar to that in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya. In Jordan, the Hashemite monarchs had to contend with the charge that they were lackeys to the British, the parliament was closed after anti-royalist sentiment became too strident, and King Hussein was forced to fight a civil war against the Palestinian Fedayeen to maintain his rule. In Morocco, the king had to contend with openly anti-royalist opposition from political parties and the public, and for decades the state chose to use repression as its primary strategy for dealing with potential threats to the monarch’s rule.

The situation of these two monarchs in the aftermath of World War II implies additional conditions under which the structure of the field of political contestation does not necessarily benefit monarchs. If the regime is young and lacks the legitimacy of history and habit, then the monarch will still be vulnerable to popular opposition to his rule. The Palestinian issue in Jordan also illustrates the problems caused by ethnic differences, as demonstrated by the present situation in Bahrain. For kings to reap the advantages that come with being king, they need time to embed a narrative of monarchical rule among the public that emphasizes the king’s separation from the dirt and grime of everyday politics.

Conclusion

Monarchs are capable of sitting above the field of political competition, and this positioning provides important benefits to rulers trying to diffuse protest movements.
Scapegoating becomes far more effective, as monarchs can use their distance from elected institutions theoretically responsible for the day to day governing of the country to avoid blame when something goes wrong. The monarch’s political separation from parliament also offers opposition organizations a plausible strategy for pursuing democratic reforms within the regime. If the powers of parliament can be gradually expanded, democratic change can be achieved without sacrificing the stability associated with the monarchy. The combination of these two effects changes the preferences of political activists and the public, who become more likely to prefer reforms or even the status quo to overthrowing the monarch. As a result, the probability that protests end with reforms increases, and the probability that protests escalate into a mass uprising calling for the fall of the monarch declines.

Events in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait during the Arab Spring illustrate how placement above the field of political competition enables monarchs to more effectively manage protest movements. In both Jordan and Morocco, activists mobilized large protests to demand economic and political reforms. The monarchs responded by firing prime ministers and initiating reform dialogues that incorporated input from the opposition. Demonstrating the existence of institutional effects on preferences, using scapegoats helped to quiet unrest, and these dialogues reduced the scale of the protests. Even those organizations that remained in the street used their mobilization to keep the reform process on track. In the end, the opposition refrained from targeting the king, the king held onto power, and the opposition gained concessions in the form of additional democratic reforms. In Kuwait, the emir dealt with protests by calling new elections. The opposition accepted, and political competition between the regime and the opposition was channeled back into the more controlled environment of parliamentary politics.

The institutional structure of a monarchy makes it less likely that protests will escalate into direct confrontation with the king himself, but they obviously do not rule it out completely. In Bahrain, the combustible mix of sectarian politics and geopolitical competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran encouraged the regime to respond to protests with immediate repression, to be followed later by an attempt at reforms and reconciliation. Bahrain managed to avoid a total escalation, as the opposition split on whether or not to call for reforms within the system or revolution, and the public eventually decided to stay home. However, the model suggests that the Bahraini monarchy would have been able to deal with their respective protest movements more effectively if they had relied on their ability to scapegoat and offer reforms. The Shah of
Iran sacrificed the advantages of monarchy throughout the 1970s, making himself the center of government and forming a single-party to execute his wishes. In abandoning his ability to scapegoat by preserving distance from the government, the Shah closed off plausible avenues to reform that preserved his rule, and he became the natural target of opposition. Eventually, he lost his throne to a popular revolution.

History also suggests that enough time must pass for the monarchy to establish itself as the legitimate government. Newly independent monarchies struggled to separate themselves from colonial pasts as nationalism swept the Arab world in the decades after World War II. The theory also has little to say about internal coups. Monarchs’ ability to manage popular protests says nothing about their ability to avoid a military putsch. However, in general, the experience of monarchies in the Arab Spring supports the theory that these regimes’ institutional structure reduces the probability of a mass uprising against the king. At a time of great unrest in the entire region, not a single monarch collapsed under pressure from popular protests. Only one experienced a major uprising. The monarch’s separation from the field of political competition enables him to scapegoat effectively and provides opposition with a plausible path to reform that does not remove the king from his position. These effects influence the preferences of political actors, making them more likely to prefer reforms and reducing the probability of an uprising against the monarch. In the next chapter of this thesis, I will examine how the institutional structure of presidential autocracies denies these advantages to the dictator, increasing the probability that protests develop into revolution.
Chapter 5

Applicability of the Escalation Game to the Arab Spring and Beyond

Overview of Findings

During the Arab Spring, some regimes proved to be more effective than others at managing or avoiding protests sparked by the period’s intense revolutionary fervor. While several likely played a role in producing these outcomes, the factor that goes furthest toward explaining different outcomes is the structure of the regime’s political institutions. While presidential autocrats were overwhelmed by a tide of popular anger directed at their rule, monarchs were more effective at tempering unrest by channeling it into dialogues over political reforms. The divide is stark. Of the region’s six presidential autocracies, five experienced mass uprisings that toppled their dictators or have come close to doing so. On the other hand, only one of the region’s eight monarchies experienced significant unrest, while three dealt with reform movements and four experienced hardly any unrest at all.

This thesis strived to provide an explanation for why the region’s monarchies were more resilient to the unrest of the Arab Spring, arguing that the institutional structure of monarchies provides kings with important benefits when dealing with protests. Other scholars have provided alternative explanations, focusing on the greater religious and political legitimacy of monarchs and the wealth of the Gulf monarchies. However, these explanations are unsatisfactory and incomplete. While the wealth of the Gulf monarchies undoubtedly helped preempt major unrest in the region, the monarchies of Jordan and Morocco, poorer or equivalent to the presidential autocracies, had to grapple with protest movements despite lacking such significant resources. Meanwhile, asserting that monarchies are more resilient because they are more legitimate does not clarify the problem, since a leader’s legitimacy is determined by his ability to hold onto
Rather, the striking success of monarchies in surviving the Arab Spring relatively unscathed when compared to their presidential counterparts seems far more likely to stem from differences in the institutional structures of these regimes. I have argued that the key difference setting monarchies and presidential republics apart is the dictator’s placement in the field of political contestation.

The dictator’s placement in the field of political contestation depends on whether or not his official position is theoretically contestable through elections. Presidents such as Mubarak and Ben Ali might not have tolerated much in the way of dissent or free and fair elections, but their legitimacy depended on leading a party and holding a position rooted in the theoretical application of popular sovereignty. Monarchs have no such disadvantage; rather, they are born into their position, and as such they can exist apart from a separate system of parliamentary elections and government. This difference creates two effects that influence the preferences of activists and the public, offering monarchs relative benefits when dealing with protest movements. First, monarchs are more capable of blaming political and economic problems on scapegoats within the government. Though King Abdullah II of Jordan has equivalent de facto power to the former power of Hosni Mubarak, Abdullah can use the formal division between his institutional position and the institutions of parliament and the cabinet to more effectively cast blame on these officials for Jordan’s woes. As the clear center of the government and his party, Mubarak had no such advantage. Second, the position of the monarch outside of the field of political contestation offers the opposition a path to pursue legitimate democratic reforms without directly challenging the position of the dictator. By focusing on expanding the powers of parliament, the opposition then centers the debate on the extent of the king’s influence over policy, not his right to rule. This dynamic lowers the monarch’s costs for working with the opposition while raising the opposition’s benefits for working with the monarch. Once again, presidential autocrats lack this benefit by virtue of their position in the field of political contestation. For democracy to develop in a presidential autocracy, the president must lose his position and allow a transition of power to occur. Thus, the costs of reforms are higher for presidential autocrats and the benefits of working with the autocrat are lower for the opposition. The combination of these effects makes the opposition and the general public in monarchies

more amenable to reforms and less eager for a mass uprising than their counterparts in presidential autocracies.

To illustrate how these differences in preferences influence the outcomes of protest movements, I developed a game theoretic model depicting the escalation of protests in authoritarian regimes. The model involved three actors: the regime, the activists, and the public. By choosing different strategies, the actors could arrive at four outcomes: status quo, reforms, reforms after repression, and mass uprising. As a model of perfect information, the game could be solved by backwards induction, and arriving at different outcomes depended on the actors’ preferences for those outcomes. To summarize, when activists and the public preferred reforms to mass uprising, the model would reach an equilibrium of reforms. When activists and the public preferred mass uprising to reforms, then an equilibrium of mass uprising would be reached. To apply the model to the Arab Spring, it was assumed that the revolutionary turmoil of the period made all people more favorable toward an uprising. Under such circumstances, the effects of the dictator’s placement in the field of political contestation would have a large impact on determining whether these players preferred reforms or mass uprising. Therefore, it was predicted that the activists and publics in monarchies would be more restrained and more likely to prefer reforms, while the activists and publics in presidential autocracies would be more likely to prefer mass uprising. As a result, the outcome in monarchies would be reforms or status quo, and the outcome in presidential autocracies would be mass uprising.

To test the theory, case studies of several regimes were used to analyze whether or not the protest movements developed as predicted by the model and if those developments could be linked to the proposed institutional effects differentiating monarchies and presidential autocracies. If the general processes illustrated by the game occurred across the range of regimes studied in the case studies, it would offer strong support for the theory by showing that actors’ preferences lead to different outcomes of protest movements. If the case studies also revealed that preferences could be linked to the effects of institutional differences, it would be a significant indicator of the theory’s accuracy. After conducting detailed case studies of Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia, along with more general studies of Kuwait, Bahrain, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Algeria, I concluded that there was substantial support for both the applicability of the model and the existence of the institutional effects, and therefore for the theory as well.
The table on the following page summarizes the events and outcomes in each of the region’s fourteen autocratic regimes. In the monarchies of Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait, initial protests were met by offers of reform from the regime, and the opposition activists generally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regime</th>
<th>Regime Type</th>
<th>Summary of Events</th>
<th>Sequence of Strategies</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Support for Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests repressed, hardcore activists escalate, public accepts regime’s reforms</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Stay Home</td>
<td>Reforms After Repression</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests escalate and overthrow dictator</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Join</td>
<td>Mass Uprising</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libya</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests escalate and lead to civil war, death of Qaddafi</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Join</td>
<td>Mass Uprising</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests escalate and lead to civil war, ongoing</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Join</td>
<td>Mass Uprising</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests escalate and overthrow dictator</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Join</td>
<td>Mass Uprising</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Presidential Autocracy</td>
<td>Protests escalate into mix of uprising and civil war, dictator eventually leaves</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Join</td>
<td>Mass Uprising</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Protests repressed, split in opposition leads to partial escalation, the public accepts regime’s reforms</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Escalate, Offer Reforms, Stay Home</td>
<td>Reforms After Repression</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Protests met with offers of reform</td>
<td>Protest, Offer Reform, Accept</td>
<td>Reforms</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Protests met with offers of reform</td>
<td>Protest, Offer Reform, Accept</td>
<td>Reforms</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Protests met with offers of reform</td>
<td>Protest, Offer Reform, Accept</td>
<td>Reforms</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Minor protests, reforms accepted</td>
<td>Protest, Repress, Stay Home</td>
<td>Reforms After Repression</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>No notable unrest experienced</td>
<td>Stay Home</td>
<td>Status Quo</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>Minor protests, reforms accepted</td>
<td>Protest, Offer Reforms</td>
<td>Reforms After Repression</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>Monarchy</td>
<td>No notable unrest experienced</td>
<td>Stay Home</td>
<td>Status Quo</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
accepted these dialogues. In Saudi Arabia, security forces dispersed small protests by the Shi’ite minority before preempting any additional unrest with an extensive package of economic reforms.\footnote{\textit{Saudi Arabia’s King Announces Huge Jobs and Housing Package,” Guardian, February 18, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/18/saudi-arabia-job-housing-package.}} Similarly, Oman also experienced protests, and despite heavier handed repression than that which occurred in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait, the monarch chose to deal with the protestors primarily by offering a series of political and economic reforms. In the UAE and Qatar, the combination of institutional effects with the regimes’ wealth meant that the activists and publics overwhelmingly favored the status quo, so protests never happened at all. Despite this, the UAE still implemented electoral reforms to stave off future unrest. On the other hand, rulers in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen, repressed protests, only to face an escalation by activists, who started to call for regime change. The rulers responded by offering mild reforms, but the public brushed these offers aside and took to the streets. In Libya, Qaddahfi adhered to a strategy of repression throughout, but he still found himself facing escalation and then a mass uprising in a matter of days.

Only Bahrain and Algeria offered possible contradictions to the model’s predictions. After the Bahraini monarchy responded to protests with harsh repression rather than offers of reforms, Bahrain experienced a partial escalation, in that major opposition groups and activists split on whether to escalate their goals to regime change. Despite this escalation, the activists could not get the public into the streets in large enough numbers to reach a mass uprising, and the regime’s later offers of reforms was tepidly accepted. In Algeria, small protests occurred, and the regime initially repressed these protests. However, escalation by activists could not bring the people into the street, and the regime’s later offer of reforms was enough to preempt major unrest. However, these outcomes of reforms after repression, while diverging from the outcomes in other monarchies and presidential autocracies, can be explained by the unique political and historical circumstances of these two countries. In Algeria, memories of the recent civil war likely make the public less willing to tolerate protests. In Bahrain, the country’s location at the intersection of the sectarian conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran meant that the country experienced heavy pressure from the Saudis to quickly crush the Shi’ite protests. As a result, these cases do not seem to significantly undermine the applicability of the model.
Beyond the Arab Spring and the Middle East

An examination of the Arab Spring revolts convincingly demonstrates the inherent benefits possessed by monarchs for dealing with protest movements. The ability to scapegoat more effectively and the option to pursue reforms that do not directly threaten the dictator’s power reduce the probability that opposition activists and the public will choose to rise up against the regime. However, the question remains: does this finding produce insights relevant to other regions and time periods, much less to other regimes that cannot be explicitly classified as monarchies? The answer to the former question is certainly yes. As discussed previously, the theory helps to explain outcomes for Middle East monarchies prior to the Arab Spring, including in Jordan, Morocco, and Kuwait. It also identifies how the Shah’s style of rule sacrificed the benefits of monarchy, increasing his vulnerability to the revolution that would overthrow his regime. Beyond the Middle East, the theory can provide insights to the politics of monarchies in Europe during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Though revolutions obviously occurred, change was often slow and gradual as monarchs expanded parliaments and rerouted opposition toward a discussion concerning the extent of monarchical power.

What of regimes that cannot be explicitly classified as monarchies? Here, the answer becomes less clear, as a monarch’s advantages spring primarily from the fact of his family. However, the present day regime of Iran seems to offer a lesson for would-be dictators. The structure of the field of political contestation in Iran is strikingly similar to the structure found in monarchies. The Supreme Leader resembles a king in that he exercises power from a position that cannot be contested electorally. Beneath him exists a separate system of elected government, where politicians compete over the presidency and seats in the parliament. While the Supreme Leader is the most powerful figure in the country, his existence apart from the system of elected government provides both scapegoats and a path to reform that does not involve regime change. This dynamic appears to benefit the Supreme Leader time and time again in Iranian politics. Currently, President Ahmadinejad is bearing the brunt of the blame for political and economic conditions in Iran as the Supreme Leader sacrifices the president in an ongoing feud between the two men.146 Most notably, the Supreme Leader benefited during the Green Movement of 2009. As thousands of Iranians took to the streets to protest the fraudulent presidential election, the

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146 Babak Dehghanpisheh, “Ahmadinejad’s eclipsed as Iran’s vote goes to the Ayatullah,” *Time Magazine*, March 5, 2012, [http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2108339,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2108339,00.html).
Supreme Leader’s position divided the opposition and prevented a full escalation of protestors’ demands. While some protestors eventually began to call for the abolition of the Supreme Leader’s position, most of them, including the highest profile opposition leaders, focused their efforts on demanding political reforms within the system instead. This division enabled the regime to repress demonstrations more effectively and to forestall a full scale mass uprising.

The experience of Iran with a divided structure of political contestation suggests that other dictators who cannot claim monarchical status might still be able to benefit from a king’s advantages. The lesson of the theory is that separating one’s self from the system of contestation enables a dictator to avoid becoming the natural target of popular unrest while affording him greater leeway in working with the opposition. If dictators can figure out how to accomplish this division of power, they can substantially reduce their risk of falling prey to popular revolution.

References


