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Chasing after Huntington's third wave  
of democratization

The Middle East under change

Reem Awny Abuzaid

Class: POLS, 558; Comparative Politics in the Middle East

Escaping Huntington's three waves of democracy, the Middle East has become a phenomenon. Ever since, the Middle East scholars attempted extensively to rationalize the prevailing authoritarian regimes over the past four decades; a number of theories were proposed to address such a paradox. Studying authoritarianism has denied the Middle East academic society the chance to predict the current wave of political change that is being witnessed in the region. A draw back that could be believed to have left researchers with limited theoretical explanations for the on going experience, but that could always remain superficial. In fact a number of theories on authoritarianism still carry an explanatory power, though remain sometimes insensitive to the differences between experiences, for theorizing the wave of political change in the region<sup>1</sup>. Principles such as authoritarian coercive apparatus, the lack of associational life, the weak institutional structure, and the non-existence of civil liberties, represents a dichotomy that in a way can help understanding the endurance of authoritarianism over the past four decades, while on another note still can rationalize the reasons that provoked the Arab uprisings. This paper searches for variables that could validate the usefulness of the theories on authoritarianism for anticipating such a turn out of events.

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<sup>1</sup> Middle East scholars (Anderson, 1987), (Lust-Okar and Jamal, 2002), (Anderson, 2001), (Albersht and Schlumberger, 2004) have given great interest in understanding the role of regime type in enduring authoritarianism. Though it's considered a valid explanation, yet was excluded from my paper. Taking into consideration that most of the effective uprisings that the region has witnessed is taking place in republics, hence my paper deliberately excludes the Arab monarchies from its data sample.

### **State's Institutional structure:**

Due to various inherited values of Tribalism and Sectarianism, democratization efforts were hindered through weak institutional context. Lisa Anderson proposed that value system was vital in reshaping the institutional structure of the post-colonial era in the region. During early stages of state formation, states of the Middle East adopted a clearly centralized institutional structure that has put the regime elites in control of the policy making apparatus; hence, the state became more likely an instrument dominated by regime elites, and affected the social conflict balance.<sup>2</sup>

Jason Brownlee also rested the lack of democratic change in the region to the weakness of institutional structure.<sup>3</sup> In his article “Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies”, Brownlee addresses one of the focal issues behind popular discontent in the region. In Egypt for instance succession was one of the main focal point of contentious that provoked mass discontent with the regime; while in Tunisia succession took a completely different form, with having what we call a Hereditary network of power among Ben Ali’s family members whom controlled the political and economic life in the country. As an extreme examples comes countries like Libya and Syria, which have witnessed more violent unrest as a reaction to a different level of

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Lisa; “the State in the Middle East and North Africa”, *Comparative Politics*, 20:1, 1987, (1- 18).

<sup>3</sup> Brownlee’s thesis emphasizes that authoritarian countries with weak institutionalized party system could engineer a ruling party that serves his authority and purpose in succession; on the other contrary, already established and institutionalized political party when predates the inauguration of the ruler would decrease the probability of succession.

succession; in Libya, Gaddafi's sons have control over all state activities, rather than institutions; while in Syria succession has taken place a long time ago. The relationship between hereditary succession and social unrest seems to explain why some regimes are struggling with uprisings, while in other countries like Lebanon or Algeria demands were only limited to some effective political changes.<sup>4</sup>

It's evidently proven that a weak institutional structure has allowed the regime elite to extend their power to all state institution, mainly through the ruling party. Using institutions as an instrument for the regime to enforce its interest, has allowed the ruler to choose his successor. Commonly, rulers of authoritarian regime name and groom their successors.<sup>5</sup> State institutions, political parties in specific, though evolutionary developed into multi-party system, yet state parties were utilized as mechanisms to regain elite consensus; hence, put the whole institutional system under elites' domination. <sup>6</sup>Such a phenomenon of hybrid regimes, that swiped the Middle East as a response to foreign pressures for democratization, has helped deep rooting authoritarian values in the political life and prepared the platform for social unrest.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brownlee, Jason; "Hereditary Succession in Modern Autocracies", world politics, 59: 4, 2007, (595- 628).

<sup>5</sup> Kausch, Kristina; "Managed Successions and Stability in the Arab World," Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE) 2010, Madrid, Spain.

<sup>6</sup> King, Stephen J. ; "Sustaining Authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa", political science quarterly, 122:3, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Brownlee, Jason; "Portents of Pluralism: How Hybrid Regimes Affect Democratic Transitions", American Journal of Political Science, 53:3, 2009, (515 – 532).

Country	Institutional structure and institutionalization of political liberalization			
Principle				
Variable	Function of government	Rule of law	Stability of democratic institutions	Corruption
Source	Economist intelligence unit (2010) <sup>8</sup>	Bertlesman transformation Index (2008) <sup>9</sup>	Bertlesman transformation Index (2008) <sup>10</sup>	Transparency international (corruption perceptions Index 2010) <sup>11</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	3.21	4.3	2.0	3.1
<b>Tunisia</b>	2.86	3.5	2.0	4.3
<b>Libya</b>	2.14	3.0	<u>1.0</u>	2.2
<b>Syria</b>	2.50	1.5	<u>1.0</u>	2.5
<b>Lebanon</b>	3.93	5.5	6.0	2.5
<b>Algeria</b>	2.21	4.3	2.0	2.9

Table (1): level of institutionalism (score of 10 represents the highest score and 0 represents the lowest)

Variables such as function of government, rule of law, and corruption show that Arab countries share a seriously low level of institutionalism. Only index on stability of democratic institutions could provide us a better vision, especially in case of Syria and Libya; with the lowest average of stability it shows that both represents the top candidates for suffering with a deteriorating conditions of institutionalism, especially when relates to political participation institutions such as political parties.<sup>12</sup> The almost absence of political institutions in both countries represents a better opportunity for oppression and freedoms' suppression; as well as represents a higher possibility of violence breaking down than in any other Arab country.

<sup>8</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, EIU's index of democracy 2010, <http://www.eiu.com/public/democracyindex.aspx>, access date: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> The Bertlesman Transformation Index 2008, <http://bti2008.bertlesman-transformation-index.de/fileadmin/pdf>, access date: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> The Bertlesman Transformation Index 2008, Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2010 results, [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/CPI/2010](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/CPI/2010), access date: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, Lisa; Demysifying the Arab Revolt: Understanding the Differences Between Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya", Foreign Affairs, 90:3, 2011, (1- 6).

### **Coercive apparatus:**

Coercion is historically proven to be associated with authoritarianism in the Middle East. In her attempt to understand the lack of democratic change in the region, Eva Bellin assumes that power maintenance of the coercive power is a critical point in understand the endurance of authoritarianism.<sup>13</sup> With the regime elites' monopoly over coercive apparatus, the society would fall into the prerequisite condition for authoritarianism; controlling it would provide both conditions of strength and well for repression to be enforced on a given society.<sup>14</sup>

Rejecting the Exceptionalism theory, as well as Huntington's theory on democratization; concepts of Cultural Values, Islam, and Rent could no longer explain the continuation of authoritarian leaders in power (Anderson, 2001).<sup>15</sup> Bellin, on the contrary, proposes that the focal reason behind the maintenance of authoritarian power is coercion; hence, coercive apparatus in the Middle East acts repressively to drive authoritarianism to robustness. Coercion is considered to be the only explanation for prevailing authoritarianism in countries of discontent and unsatisfied populations (Skocpol, 1994).

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<sup>13</sup> Marsha Posusney in her article on Enduring Authoritarianism proposes Bellin's theory on the role of coercion in enduring authoritarian robustness as a complementary for the socio-economic prerequisites for democratization theory. Posusney emphasizes that in order to understand such a complex fact as authoritarianism in Middle East, analysis of cultural, economic, and coercive condition would be sufficient for such a purpose.

<sup>14</sup> Bellin, Eva; "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective", Comparative Politics, 36: 2, 2004 (139- 157).

<sup>15</sup> Anderson, Lisa; "Arab Democracy: Dismal Prospects", World Policy Journal, 18:3, 2001, p. 53- 54.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Coercive apparatus</b>
<b>Principle</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	Military expenditure (2010/ \$ million)
<b>Source</b>	(SIPRI) Military Expenditure Database <sup>16</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	3.914
<b>Tunisia</b>	548
<b>Libya</b>	----- <sup>17</sup>
<b>Syria</b>	2.236
<b>Lebanon</b>	1.564
<b>Algeria</b>	5.584

table (2): Government annual Spending on Military (2010)

A strong coercive apparatus seems to be a precondition for a dictator to maintain his power; that is why authoritarian regimes of the Middle East spend millions of dollars to fund their coercive mechanism of containing the masses. Spending millions annually on military, while vital sectors such as Health Care, Unemployment fund, and Education suffer with limited budgets could be one of the reasons that fostered unrest in the region. Table (2) shows that military budget varies from a country to another, which dramatically varies. It's important here to note that military in Arab countries take a relatively large sum of the annual budget in comparison to any other sector; though numbers included might be misleading, yet relating those numbers to the annual total expenditure as well with the population size it would prove that Arab countries alike tend to spend a large sum of the national budget on security and coercion. The Libyan military appears to be a different story with close disclosure on State

<sup>16</sup> Stockholm International Peace Institute, Military Expenditure Database (2010), <http://milexdata.sipi.org>, access data: May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> There was no information on the Libyan Military available on the data base.



Military's capacity and expenditure, as it intersects with the fragmented tribal nature of armed organization in the country.<sup>18</sup>

### **Elections and electoral systems:**

Election is one of the fundamental strategies that authoritarian regimes have adopted for a long time in order to preserve their power; which has successfully managed to hinder all the opportunities of establishing a legislative foundation for democratic change. Sociologically analysis of the regional conditions, Ellen Lust proposed that authoritarian regimes that hold elections are more likely to maintain their power in comparison to other regimes that don't.

Election as it is considered to be the main mean of democratic transition is preserved to be a strategy for enduring authoritarianism in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> In order for Regime elites and its supporters to maintain their authority and to maintain social penetration, they tend to engage the society in a vicious cycle of clientalism in which elections becomes only a competition between elites and opposition over scarce resources, either political or economic.<sup>20</sup>

Using another institutional perspective, Ellen Lust-Okar and Amaney Jamal assumes that the regime type affects heavily the engineering of electoral system. It's by no coincidence that dictators tend to adopt an authoritarian electoral system that hinders the opposition participation. Both scholars draw a generalization that an electoral system is a result of power

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<sup>18</sup>Hatita, Abdel Sattar; "Libya, Searching for a political map", Arab Reform Brief, Arab Reform Initiative, issue no. 48, April 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Posusney, Marsha P.; "Multi-Party Elections in the Arab World: Institutional Engineering and Opposition Strategies", Comparative International Development, 36:4, 2002, (34- 62).

<sup>20</sup> Lust, Ellen; "Democratization by Elections? Competitive Clientalism in the Middle East", Journal of Democracy, 20: 3, 2009, (122-135).

conflict between the regime elites and opposition, in which the regime elites are always powerful.<sup>2122</sup>

Country	Elections and electoral system
<b>Principle</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	Elections process and pluralism
<b>Source</b>	The Economist Intelligence Unit (2010) <sup>23</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	0.83
<b>Tunisia</b>	0.00
<b>Libya</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Syria</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>	7.92
<b>Algeria</b>	2.17

Table (3): pluralism index in the Arab world (10 represents the highest pluralist societies)

Table (3) shows that Lebanon comes on the top of pluralist countries in the region, followed by Algeria; which represents a potential explanation for understanding why both countries' regimes maintained their power, while regimes of Egypt and Tunisia were over thrown. Zero pluralism in Libya and Syria indicates a closely tight repression for political act; with them placed at the bottom with no plural elections at all provides a clearer image of the violent stand that regimes of both countries have adopted with any form of political expression.

<sup>21</sup> Lust-Okar, Ellen and Jamal, Amany A.; "Rulers and Ruled: Reassessing the Influence of Regime Type on Electoral Law Formation," Comparative Political Studies, 35: 3, 2002 (337-366).

<sup>22</sup> The theory carries explanatory power, yet it couldn't be generalized to the whole spectrum of regime type in Middle East; hence, it remains to only explain the One-Party regimes along with the authoritarian Monarchies of the region.

<sup>23</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, Ibid.

### **Political participation and associational life:**

Authoritarian regimes have its impact on the type of participation (Posusney, 2004). Holger Albrecht proposed that in an authoritarian environment, individual participation and engagement in politics is minimal and ineffective in terms of participation quality.<sup>24</sup> Political Parties in the Middle East suffer extensively not only with the authoritarian framework that they perform within, but also with the protracted internal conflict between the moderate and the radical approaches of thought (Clark and Schwelder, 2003); such a struggle has backed down their effort for democratization.<sup>25</sup> The repressive political atmosphere has allowed the ruling elite to control the conditions of the opposition groups; therefore with the presence of a fragmented and divided opposition, the authoritarian regime managed to be maintain its power.<sup>26</sup> Hence, political participation took a more flexible and integrative path and created a new paradigm of informal activism in which social society agencies became the only strategy of fighting repression of participation.<sup>27</sup> Civil society agencies remain to be an effective apparatus for introducing a number of changes on some specific fields of great suffer, such as women's

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<sup>24</sup> in his article "the nature of political participation", Holger Albrecht focuses on judging participation in the light of an authoritarian regime; admitting that participation do exist in each and every regime type on the spectrum of political regimes, yet there is an important variables that might varies between an authoritarian and a liberal regime. Quality of participation is one of the variables that could test individuals' involvement in politics; hence, the quality of participation in an authoritarian state would remain very low and insignificant in comparison to more integrative liberal ones. Reactive activism is the second variable, which is mainly used to test the level of co-optation in a given regime; in authoritarian regimes, political activism is only a reaction to state policies and restrained by the regime elites' rule of political game.

<sup>25</sup> Clark, Janine A. and Schwelder, Jillian; "who opened the window? Women's activism in Islamist Parties", *Comparative Politics*, 35: 3, 2003, (293 -312).

<sup>26</sup> Lust –Okar, Ellen; "Divided they Rule: the Management and Manipulation of Political Opposition", *Comparative Politics*, 36: 2, 2004, (159 – 179).

<sup>27</sup> Albrecht, Holger; "The Nature of Political Participation," in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, editors, *Political Participation in the Middle East* (Lynne Reinner 2008).

rights or labor's economic rights, but remain not sufficient in fighting authoritarianism (Langohr, 2004). NGO's activity is considered vital for democratization but still limited with a narrow purpose in comparison to political parties, especially when it comes to fighting for democratization.<sup>28</sup>

The centralized control of authoritarian elite over the society has hindered mobilization efforts by the newly formed opposition groups throughout the past decades. Though the Middle East has witnessed, during the first decade of the twenty first century, an expansion in the formation of informal channels of expression and movements of protest, yet it remained ineffective and lacked participation (El-Mahdi, 2009). The complete domination of associational life denied opposition any political opportunity for collective action, but still allowed the formation of a genuinely new network of informal activism that carries the potential for collective mobilization.<sup>29</sup>

Political participation became one of the most important principles under study in the region, as scholars realized that political change is a direct outcome of domestic demands. Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van De Walle specifically remarked the importance of socially inclusive, Cross-Class popular protesting as a precondition for change.<sup>30</sup><sup>31</sup> History has proven, and also the witnessed uprisings, that dictators don't lean to voluntary stepping down their power,

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<sup>28</sup> Langohr, Vickie; "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics: Egypt and Liberalizing Arab Regimes", Comparative Politics, (36:2), 2004, (181 – 204).

<sup>29</sup> El-Mahdi, Rabab; "Enough! Egypt's Quest for Democracy", Comparative Political Studies, Feb. 2009.

<sup>30</sup> By inclusive popular protesting, Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van De Walle meant a popular demand in which most of the society's sectors participate; hence, highlighted the importance of political participation.

<sup>31</sup> Bratton, Michael; "Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa", Comparative Politics, 24:4, 1992, (419-442).

instead tend to adopt a number of reforms in order to maintain legitimacy, but an organized popular opposition movement would be sufficient for pushing reforms further forward.

Bratton and Van de Walle highlighted the importance of elites' role in understanding the mechanisms of accepting or excluding opposition from the political game.<sup>32</sup> The elite reactions towards social and political demands constitute the only prerequisite for adopting effective competitive multi-party elections, or otherwise it would have remained a façade of regime strategy for power maintenance.<sup>33</sup>

Stepping down the ruling regimes in Tunisia and then in Egypt, as well as challenging the remaining regimes of the region,<sup>34</sup> was enforced by a newly created central powers of popular demand on contention with the ruling elites' interest.<sup>35</sup> The new central powers were craving for being heard out, hence political participation boomed in countries that has knew a long history of repression such as Egypt; the mass participation in the March 19<sup>th</sup> Referendum on the constitutional amendment was an obvious representation that after years of suppression populations of the region are craving for politically express their citizenship's right of participation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> During the 1990s, African elites were enforced by external powers to adopt multi-party elections; according to Bratton and Van de Walle the outcome varied as a result of placing different elite reactions towards institutionalization of political parties. Hence, in countries with flexible elite the participatory democracy was more effective in comparison to rigid ones.

<sup>33</sup> Bratton, Michael and Van de Walle, Nicolas; "Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa", World Politics, 46:4, 1994, (453- 489).

<sup>34</sup> Snyder has defined Neopatrimonial ruler to be a centralized executive of overwhelming power and penetrating ability over the society, who controls the state institutions with a close network of patronage elites; hence, he acquire legitimacy based on personal relations rather than ideology or law. Such a definition could precisely demonstrate the ruling regimes of the Middle East.

<sup>35</sup> Snyder, Richard; "Transitions from Neopatrimonial Dictatorships", Comparative Politics, 24:4, 1992, (379- 399).

<sup>36</sup> Stacher, Joshua; "Egypt Without Mubarak", Middle East Research and Information Project, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

Country	Political participation and associational life			
Principle				
Variable	Political participation	Political culture	Political rights	Social unrest (threats posed to governments by social protest)
Source	The Economist intelligence unit (2010) <sup>37</sup>	The Economist intelligence unit (2010) <sup>38</sup>	Freedom house ratings (2010) <sup>39</sup>	The Economist intelligence Unit (2009/10) <sup>40</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	2.78	5.0	Low (6)	Low (5.4)
<b>Tunisia</b>	2.22	5.63	Low (7)	Low (4.6)
<b>Libya</b>	<u>1.11</u>	5.0	Low (7)	Low (4.3)
<b>Syria</b>	<u>1.67</u>	5.63	Low (7)	Moderate (5.8)
<b>Lebanon</b>	6.67	5.0	Medium (5)	High (7.0)
<b>Algeria</b>	2.78	5.63	Low (6)	High (6.6)

Table (4): political participation, political culture, and associational life (10 represents the highest level of political participation and culture)

Among variables testing associational life, countries of the Arab region seem to share a low level of political rights and a moderate average of political culture; yet an average that doesn't meet the low level of political participation. Table (4) shows a minimal participation in Tunisia and Egypt, while both of Syria and Libya were placed at the bottom with almost no participation. With banning any formal channels of participation protest against repression seems to be the only way out; with such conditions violence appears to be a potential strategy to be adopted by both the ruling regime as well as the opposition.

<sup>37</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Freedom House, Freedom in the world 2010: Global Data, [http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW\\_2010\\_TablesandGraphs.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/fiw10/FIW_2010_TablesandGraphs.pdf) , access date: May 18<sup>th</sup> ,2011.

<sup>40</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, Ibid.

### **Civil Society, and the condition of Human Rights:**

Not only by reputation but reality proves that the Human Rights condition in the region took into deteriorating with the tight control of authoritarianism on the social and political life; such a fact denies the usual Arab eagerness to join each new international humanitarian agreement. Still the extreme oppressive environment that the Middle Eastern regimes have created remains an obstacle facing the ratification or even the implementation of such agreements under obligation.<sup>41</sup>

Focusing on the individual level of analysis, Sheila Carapico proposes that Civil Society is a living organism which is deeply affected by not only the political and economic conditions, but also the state-civil society relationship; when the role of the civil society, with its potential for democratic change, encounters the role of the state as well as its absolute domination over the society its perceived as a zero-sum game. The prevailing strategy is the complete centralization of the civil society under the control of the ruling parties and the governmental agencies, which enforced opposition to adopt more of an informal pattern of activism.<sup>42</sup> Adding to that the donor organizations tight agenda in regard of democratization in the region that have limited the civil society activities in the region to peripheral problems such as Gender Equality (Tadros, 2010); problems that don't demonstrate the region's real suffer.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Allain, Jean and O'Shea, Andreas; "African disunity: Comparing Human Rights Law and Practices of North and South African States", *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24:1, 2002, (86 -125).

<sup>42</sup> Sheila Carapico, civil society and civic activism

<sup>43</sup> Tadros, Mariz; "Between the Elusive and the Illusionary: Donors' Empowerment Agendas in the Middle East in Perspective", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*; 30: 2, 2010, (224 – 237).

Country	Civil society and Human Rights conditions
<b>Principle</b>	
<b>Variable</b>	Civil Liberty
<b>Source</b>	The Economist Intelligence Unit <sup>44</sup>
<b>Egypt</b>	3.53
<b>Tunisia</b>	3.24
<b>Libya</b>	1.47
<b>Syria</b>	1.76
<b>Lebanon</b>	5.59
<b>Algeria</b>	4.41

table (5): civil liberty in the Arab world (10 represent the highest level of civil liberty)

with the exception of Lebanon; Table (5) proves that countries of the region still share a low level of Civil Liberty, which reflects the deteriorating condition of associational life and the presence of a minimal if not an ineffective civil society. Egypt and Tunisia appear to resemble in condition, while Algeria comes to guarantee a wider margin of civil liberty; at the same instance that Libya and Syria remain at the bottom, denying their citizens almost any civil right. Hence, Civil Liberty could be one of the preconditions for social unrest and change demand; meaning that in the light of dramatically deteriorating civil liberty, violence might erupt as in the case of Libya and Syria.

### **Concluding remarks:**

As much were the Uprisings taking place in the Middle East unprecedented, as it was academically impossible to be anticipated. After decades of attempting to rationalize the prevailing authoritarianism, scholars have proposed numerous theories to understand it; currently after the unexpected turn of events, it became researchers' main concern to test the validity of these theories.

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<sup>44</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, Ibid.



Some of the proposed variables as much as it proved the validity of their principles, yet remained insensitive to the differences between each change experience. Remains the usage of variables such as Political Participation, stability of democratic institutions, Civil liberty, Pluralism, along with other variables have proved that theories on authoritarianism implicitly anticipated the radical changes that the region is witnessing.

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