Arab Revolutions of 2011: An Explanatory Model

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a theoretical framework and elements of a causal model to explain the Arab revolutions occurred in 2011 (1). The main thesis of the model is that Arab regimes’ policies - in terms of their inherent nature, structure, and outcomes - created a certain individual and collective psychological makeup which, in turn, has transformed the rational calculating modalities for both individuals and groups. Essentially, there are patterns of ordering preferences and types of strategic interactions, both individually and collectively. The aforementioned components of the thesis are elaborated as follows: The regimes’ policies and their outcomes represent the macro-level of analysis, the individual rational calculations and corresponding decisions pertain to the micro-level, and the impact of the psychological makeup on calculations and preferences provides for the bridge between the two modes of analysis, the link being the notion of dignity. Drawing from diverse sources and theories, the model attempts to bring the notion of dignity into political science analysis, claiming that it is the only proper explanatory link between the rigidity of structuralism and the justification of agency.

Keywords: Arab Revolution, Arab Regimes’ Policies, Theoretical Framework.

INTRODUCTION

As the year 2011 draws to a close, the world remains in shock at the events that have unfolded within that short timeframe as upheaval, whether it is political or economic, defined the global state of affairs. Without a doubt, the proceedings that took place in the Middle East and North Africa over the course of one year will be an essential component in the description of many generations to come. The continuation and remnants of those cataclysms will forever change the world, as general assumptions are shattered and ordinary citizens and scholars alike are left scrambling in the aftermath to make sense of their shockingly new future. While the dismissal and death of longstanding dictators and their regimes is, within itself, a key development, it is rather the timing and manner in which they were toppled are the main focus of this paper.

Dignity is a concept that has long been forgotten within the traditional field of political science. Power structures are constantly examined and the rationality of choices is a particular favorite, while the collective psychology of people and its impact on individual behavior is often dismissed. Both macro and micro levels of analysis have their own merits, but it is the sole adherence to one that leads to the dismal downfall of a science. No one could have predicted the exact timing of the 2011 revolutions that took place among the Arab peoples; however, there were innumerable signals that foretold the inevitable downfall of cruel authoritarian regimes that were often touted by the West and others as “good dictators” due to their mutual interests. The general principle of dignity in the lives of the average Arab citizen was long forgotten. Therefore, it came as a major shock to the world, especially scholars and government officials, when millions of people across the Middle East and North Africa reached their threshold of inhumane suffering and non-violently demanded immediate change with the overthrow of those that had long trampled upon the people’s dignity and violated basic human rights.

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(1) The model combines both micro and macro levels of analysis, as it is bridges the gap between psychopolitical analysis and rationality, as defined within the context of a new and positive political science methodology.
The event that sparked a so-called chain of revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa was technically in 2010, as on December 17, a Tunisian street vender named Mohammad Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest to the utter humiliation he felt when his small livelihood, his cart and its produce, was confiscated by a local policewoman. His breaking point had obviously been reached with the act of self-immolation, but peculiarly, his dissatisfaction with life and the corrupt state of affairs within his nation was soon echoed across all of Tunisia. As the world entered 2011, protests only gained speed and by January 14, 2011, longstanding President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali declared a state of emergency and fled the country, eventually being granted refuge in Saudi Arabia.

By January 25, Egypt echoed Tunisia’s sentiment and erupted in widespread protests and demonstrations, insisting on the resignation of Hosni Mubarak, long-time ally of the United States. After several weeks of resistance, Hosni Mubarak rescinded control on February 11, 2011. The rest of the year unfolded rapidly, as every day swift change made its mark on the region, with widespread demonstrations striking Libya, Yemen, and Syria, eventually resulting in the death of Moammar Gadhafi and the resignation of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

As the year ends, Syria devolves into further chaos with the brutal use of force and suppression by Bashar al-Assad and his regime. Despite the harsh use of armed resistance against the non-violent protestors in all of these states, one concept is vital to remember: the threshold of fear has been broken and thus, there is no turning back.

Looking retrospectively at the first year of the continuing revolutions in the MENA region, as part of context and analysis, one needs to divide what has happened into four broad categories: Peaceful transitions, violent transitions, systems that have not yet collapsed, and monarchial systems. Although each will be thoroughly detailed and supported further throughout this writing, it is vital to first introduce the notion as a means to confirm the upcoming thesis of the paper.

Peaceful transitions are including Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen. Although the revolutions in each individual state did experience violence as the regimes flagrantly sought to retain power and control over their subordinates, the protestors themselves were generally nonviolent and the enduring authoritarian regimes of Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Saleh ended with their eventual resignation.

Meanwhile, in Libya and Syria, the transition has been anything but peaceful. It can be argued that the conflict that took place in Libya until the death of Moammar Gadhafi was, in fact, a civil war, despite NATO aiding rebel forces. Although there is still some lingering physical trouble in Libya, the aftermath of the power struggle is the hollow shell of violence that will haunt the state and its citizens for generations to come. As of the time of this writing, Bashar al-Assad is still clinging to power in Syria and the daily violent clashes have become more intense and receive widespread international condemnation.

The non-monarchial states in the MENA region that have yet to experience widespread protest, particularly Algeria, are designed to eventually experience immense change, in accordance with the theory that dignity, or lack thereof, determines revolutions. Finally, the monarchial systems, most of whom in the Gulf are characterized as rentier states, are not exempt from the spread of revolutions under their regimes. Although the notion of dignity is the same, the forces within monarchial systems are indeed different, as transitions to true democracy can be handled skillfully and peacefully, if the state wills it. The motivating factors for change are unique and thus the examinations of these states need to be approached as such.

Statement of Purpose

The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical framework and elements of a causal model to explain the Arab revolutions of 2011 The main thesis of this proposed model is that Arab regimes’ policies- in terms of their inherent nature, structure, and outcomes- created a certain individual and collective psychological makeup which, in turn, has transformed calculating modalities. Essentially, there are patterns of ordering preferences and types of strategic interactions, both individually and collectively. To effectively disseminate the aforementioned components of the thesis to the proposed model, they are elaborated as follows. The regimes’ policies and their outcomes represent the macro-level of analysis. Meanwhile, individual calculations and corresponding decisions pertain to the micro-level. Finally, the impact of the psychological makeup on

(2) The model being proposed combines both micro and macro levels of analysis, as it is trying to bridge the gap between psychopolitical analysis and rationality, as defined within the context of positive political science methodology.
calculations and preferences provides for the bridge between the two modes of analysis, the link being the notion of dignity.

For the model to proceed in its analytic attempts, it raises the following questions: First, why did the revolutions in the MENA region happen? Why did they occur in their various and differentiated manners? Why during that particular time? Why did the people go out into the streets and decide to challenge the regimes, even in the face of violence? How did they perceive the risks associated with the action and how did they calculated them? What accounts for the various ways in which the regimes responded and their corresponding strategies? What precisely triggered or rather caused this transformation of the disobedience into a massive collective revolution? What theories should one choose to explain and what approach and tools should we use to understand and explain this phenomenon? In sum, in order to build a causal model of the Arab Revolutions, when should one start, where should one look, what variables should be included and based on what?

Significance of the study

The questions proposed are detailed and diverse, but all are crucial to the comprehensive understanding of the Arab Revolutions of 2011. Through constructing a model based on the linkage between macro and micro-level approaches, with dignity as the linking variable, this paper seeks to provide an explanatory model for the events of 2011, as well as for the years to come. Drawing from diverse sources and theories, this model attempts to bring dignity back into the lives of all human beings, particularly Arabs, and champion the constant use of non-violence and growing intellectual capacity in the face of ruthless oppression.

I. Regional Landscape Before 2011

With the state of affairs in the Middle East and North Africa looking as dismal as they were in the years preceding 2011, it should have been no surprise that the revolutions occurred. The lack of democratic practices and practical non-existence of basic human rights in the region became increasingly unbearable over the years, leading to these massive uprisings in January.

For over two decades, the growing populations of the Middle East have held large urban riots to protest for secure jobs, better housing, and better human rights protection. As wealth disparities deepened throughout the Arab world primarily due to the liberalization of economic policies, Arab regimes’ main objective was to remain in power while satisfying minimal demands.

Using this section to depict the state of the Arab world leading up to the eve of the uprisings, the economic, political, and social indicators will demonstrate that the time was ripe for new and widespread protests to emerge as the result of declining life quality and degrading dignity.

The Finnish Institute for International Affairs published a report in 2011, simply titled, “The Arab Uprising,” looking for its roots causes, methods, as well as future implications. In sum, it stated that the uprisings were triggered by the following primary factors: Deteriorating living standards, growing inequality, a lack of political freedoms, no public accountability, and alienation of demographically dominant age cohorts (Behr and Aatola, 2011). The culmination of these factors resounded in a “widespread feeling of powerlessness and alienation”, which explains the central themes of ‘dignity’ and ‘pride’ that permeated the messages of the protestors. James Petras, in an article, furthered these notions, claiming that the underdevelopment or lack thereof, of social organizations which provide positive outlets for social and political action allowed for those frustrations to be taken to the streets, rather than a formal institution (Petras, 2011).

The majority of the Arab world was in the hands of the few powerful dictators, who employed countless authoritarian policies. These include Qaddafi of Libya, al-Assad of Syria, Egypt’s Mubarak, and Saleh of Yemen. Citizens often have little or no political rights, illustrated clearly with the Qaddafi regime’s banning of political parties for over 35 years (Freedom House, 2011). Even after the year of revolutions, Freedom House declared that 72% of the region was still, “Not Free” (Freedom House, 2012). The regimes throughout the Arab world have been characterized by some as “sultanistic” dictatorships (Goldstone, 2011). Neglecting the channels made by formal institutions, these dictators only concerned themselves with expanding their personal power at the expense of people power.

On the surface, these leaders seek international support and roles for themselves by promoting economic development through industrialization, education, and commodity exports. Many of these Arab regimes are guilty of “neo-colonization by invitation.” These regimes offered “land for military bases and collusion in financing
proxy mercenaries against anti-imperial adversaries” to multi-billion dollar firms and dominant world powers, notably the United State (Petras, 2011). Many become reinter states, simply distributing resources to the masses but allowing no representation on the political scene (Lucas, 2004).

Understanding the political climate of these Arab regimes, one can begin to see the economic effects on the masses. The seven major oil-exporting countries in the MENA region, Kuwait, Qatar, U.A.E., Bahrain, Libya, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, fall under the “High Human Development” section in the Arab Human Development Report of 2009. The rest of the Arab world’s economic, health, and education indicators lead the remaining countries to be classified under “Medium Human Development” or “Low Human Development”.

Gross domestic product (GDP) in the MENA region is extremely high in a few countries and particularly low in others. For example, the GDP is over 300 billion USD in Saudi Arabia, while it is 4 billion in the Israeli Occupied Territories. These disparities can also be seen in 2005 GDP per capita calculations. These values range from $27,664 in Qatar, to as low as a measly $930 in Yemen. The majority of state revenues in these Arab countries are provided through oil, gas, and mineral exports and tourism. It is to be noted, though, that “… as the examples of Libya and Bahrain have shown, economic wealth does not necessarily matter if certain sectors of society feel that they are deprived of their share of the pie or harbor other grievances” (Petras, 2011).

While these fields employ a tiny fraction of the labor force, this specialized economy is controlled by “foreign multi-nationals and expats linked to the ruling class” (Petras, 2011).

Available data shows that the richest 20% of the MENA region populations had nearly 50% of total income or expenditure. On the other hand, in many of the Middle Eastern and North African countries the unemployment rates ranged from about 3-26% between 1996-2005. Furthermore, up to 45% of some populations in the Arab world worked in the informal, non-agriculture economic sector (Arab Human Development Report, 2009). In many of the Medium Human Development countries a middle-class is unable to form, and citizens are almost completely incapable of attaining better economic opportunities. Public sector employees, such as teachers, police officers, and health professionals, are barely able to survive on their meager salaries.

In addition to the unfavorable economic and national policies outlined above, corruption and human rights violations plague this region. Libya, Syria, and Saudi Arabia received special mention in Freedom House’s 2010 report on the least free countries in the world. Several Middle Eastern countries, Egypt and Syria for example, have enforced emergency laws almost without interruption since the 1960s. In direct violation of human rights, these emergency laws give security officials freedom to suppress demonstrations and public meetings, and to detain people indefinitely without charge (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

As a result, democratic institutions and processes, such as free and fair elections, are unable to function properly. On the ground, these dictators control elections and provide subsidies for necessary goods, such as food, electricity, and gasoline, in order to keep the masses unorganized (Goldstone, 2011).

Torture is an unspoken, accepted means for security officials to obtain confessions in many of these countries. The majority of the time, as was the case in Egypt, torture went unchecked and unpunished by the Mubarak regime. Out of fear of reprisal or lack of faith in the government, victims of torture often do not submit complaints or report the incident (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

The corruption of the Arab regimes has an effect on the population at large, especially as a result of government policies toward media and education. Demographic contradictions tie into the increasing economic woes caused by regime policies. 50%-60% of the population in the MENA region is composed of people under the age of twenty-five. Of this young population, most are educated, yet underemployed or unemployed and forced to work in the “informal” economic sector (Petras, 2011). In recent years, more government funding has gone toward military spending than education. This is revealed by an adult literacy rate, ranging from 52% in Morocco to 93% in Kuwait (Arab Human Development Report, 2009). In several of these countries there is no independent press. Where the press is independent, it must heavily censor itself so as to avoid repercussion from the government.

Societies in the Arab countries are segmented along tribal, communal, sectarian, and regional lines (Eyadat, 2007). While the “sultanistic” dictators have maintained firm control of their governments, the micro-politics of failure “bounded consociationalism” has been prevalent. In this system, the regime “legitimizes and sustains itself
by an ongoing process of explicit and implicit bargaining with the communal elites” (Eyadat, 2007). The prime example of this issue is Yemen. Protestors have been divided over ideological lines, particularly over the dominance of the conservative Islamic point of view, Islah (al-Sakkaf, 2011). Completely separate from these protests are the continuing tribal war in the north, shadows of a secessionist movement in the south, and pockets of al-Qaeda influence throughout the country (Building Up, 2011).

This is also especially true of Libya, where before and during Qaddafi’s rule the three loosely-connected autonomous provinces were divided among feuding tribes and local power brokers (Cordesman, 2011). Syrians are also divided among sectarian lines, where some still claim that al-Assad’s rule is the only way to hold together Syria’s different groups and sects (The Uprisings, 2011).

Michele Penner Angrist correctly stated in her 2011 Foreign Affairs article, “…People bear an internal cost-to their sense of autonomy and personal integrity of pretending that the status quo is acceptable. And when the cost of pretending becomes intolerably high for a few citizens, sudden and surprising mass protests can erupt” (Angrist, 2011).

Inevitably, people unhappy with their economic and social status look to their government for help, but they met only with callous indifference, corruption and humiliation. The monolithic regimes were not merely inert bodies unable to make the situation better, but vast dead weights that pressed down the people, holding the exploitative system in place. And so, personal unhappiness grew into political discontent. Keeping the unhappiness bottled up, but magnifying its volatility; any unexpected event can produce a sudden explosion (Pollack, 2011); such as when Tunisian Bouazizi who set himself on fire in protest the humiliation he faced in his life produced the Tunisian Revolution.

II. Changes (or Lack Thereof) Accrued in 2011

1. Peaceful Transitions

Although the events in Tunisia provided a rippling phenomenon throughout the Arab states, obviously all of the transitions that followed did not pursue identical paths. Why is it that Tunisian and Egyptian protests led to a relatively quick removal of the oppressive leader with less violence, than revolutions in Libya, Yemen, and Syria? The difference seems to be the mode of communication and mobilization in each of these protests. Because Tunisia and Egypt have the largest number of internet users in the Middle East, it seems this speedy channel of youth mobilization quickly created solidarity (Howard, 2011). It is also evident that these more-peaceful transitions in Tunisia and Egypt utilized these organizational channels, to demand additional human rights, dignity, justice, and control of one’s own life (Friedman, 2011).

Why the use of nonviolent tactics though? Maria Stephen and Erica Chenoweth set out to find answers to that question in their 2011 book, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” they found that nonviolent campaigns tended to attract more participation from the citizens at hand, for “most people enduring the indignities and humiliation of dictatorship or foreign occupation are willing to fight, and even die, to end their oppression. But most are unwilling to kill” (Stephen, 2011). In addition, members of security apparatuses are more likely to defect from the regime, or obey orders, when faced with the decision of armed force against unarmed protestors. Henceforth, “in a study of 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns between 1900 and 2006…found that nonviolent campaigns had succeeded 52% of the time, compared to 28% for their violent campaigns” (Stephen, 2011).

2. Violent Transitions

There is a similarity between all of the countries experiencing brutal repression by their “sultanistic” dictators. The majority of the youth protesting in Syria, Yemen, and Libya have never participated in any “true” form of democracy. Yemeni youth have little organizational sense or experience in political program formation, and the few activist groups are still tensely divided over intellectual and ideological ideals (Al-Sakkaf, 2011). This is also true of the revolutionaries in Libya. Since his ascent to power, Gaddafi succeeded in preventing the development of alternative institutions in the political sphere, through government control and brutal repressions (Joffe, 2011). Under the dictatorships of the Ba’ath Party since 1963, the people of Syria have been subjected to nearly 50 years of emergency rule and have little experience with oppositional political organization (de Vasconcelos, 2011). In all of these most-violent cases of the 2011 Arab Revolutions, the youth in these movements have little or no political experience or direction. Altogether, the intense societal divisions
outlined above, have prevented the streets of Yemen, Syria, and Libya from uniting under one cause, and to articulate the societal demands in a form that related to all segments of their societies and achieve a singular, beneficial goal. In turn, the “sultanistic” dictators have been able to exploit these differences and use brutal repression in an attempt to quell the young voices. The inability to swiftly and uniformly mobilize the masses, as occurred in Egypt and Tunisia, is leading to a cycle of violence in the rest of the rebellious Arab world. A sobering thought to remember, though, as mentioned by Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth in their work, is that “Those who arrive at power through violence, particularly in domestic struggles, are more likely to resort to force to maintain power” (Stephan, 2011: 10).

3. Monarchial Systems

The role of the monarchy has played an interesting role throughout the course of the Arab uprisings, as the few protests that have existed under those systems were systematically quelled, sometimes more harshly than others, through the promise of immediate reform. For example, in Morocco, the February 20 movement that sprung up after the regime collapses in Tunisia and Egypt never called for the removal of King Mohamed VI or the abolition of the entire monarchy, but rather for critical constitutional reforms (Sater, 2011:16). Although there are differences in the political landscape of Jordan, as there is an increasingly large population of Palestinians present, the demand was much the same.

In Michael Herb’s book, “All in the Family,” he argues that the survival of monarchism is indeed a postponement of revolution, but it also offers the lucrative prospect of “gradual transition to a more liberal political order” (Herb, 1999:1). Huntington believes in the “King’s Dilemma,” which is essentially the notion that it is impossible for modern monarchs to achieve political participation and when faced with the choice of abdication and reform or repression of the people, the monarch will always choose repression. However, Herb responds that the monarchies possess “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 monarchial elites will take these steps” (Herb, 1999:16). Neopatrimonial regimes, on the other hand, which have borne the brunt of all the 2011 revolutions, fall prey much easier due to the fact that they find it much more difficult to reform while maintaining power.

III. The Theoretical Limits of Previous Literature

Although there is a whole host of theoretical literature devoted to the causal models of revolution, the political science scholarship is limited in the sense that it follows three main trends of analysis: natural histories of revolution, the general theories of political violence, and structural theories (Goldstone, 1982: 3). It is to be noted from the very start of analysis that all three modes of explanation either reject the use of agency as a means of justification for revolution or severely limit its role. This paper seeks to correct previous misassumptions and disassociations through claiming that agency is by no means a sole measure for developing a causal framework, but it is an essential and primary component that cannot be ignored, as purely structural means of explanation have utterly failed when examining the Middle East and North Africa.

Before delving into the work of specific authors, it is first necessary to look at the general framework of revolutionary theory Jack Goldstone provides in his work, “The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions.” As previously mentioned, he divides the scholarship into three primary periods/modes of explanation: natural histories of revolution, the general theories of political violence, and structural theories.

1. Natural Histories of Revolution

Examining the first period of revolutionary scholarship, natural histories, the seeds of dissent are sown as the bulk of intellectuals begin to reject the regime at hand, demanding reform. The state will then attempt to quell the air of rebellion by undertaking reforms, superficial or genuine, but the fall of the old regime is inevitable. It is to be noted that as the regime is falling, it is not due principally to the revolutionary opposition, per se, but rather to some form of “acute political crisis brought on by the government’s inability to deal with some problem” (Goldstone, 1982: 3). Once the old regime falls, the revolution is hardly over, for where the revolutionaries had united against the old regime, internal divisions begin to surface. The fact that may be surprising to some is that the first group to win power in the wake of the old regime is actually moderate reformers. During this time, however, “more radical centers of mass mobilizations spring up with new forms of organization” and the profound changes that occur
within a society occur not on the onset of the revolution, but rather in the attempt to oust the moderate reformers (Goldstone, 1982: 3). Disorder then becomes rampant and as the struggle between radicals and moderates is ongoing, military leaders take the opportunity to “move from obscurity to commanding leadership” (Goldstone, 1982: 4).

The primary problem with this model of explanation is that it first fails to explain why revolutions occur in the first place, why intellectuals rebel. Also, it is it does not account for the fundamental power of the masses, the average citizens, as it claims that the initial rebellion is started by dissident elites.

In the context of the so-called “Arab Spring,” the first protestors that eventually brought long-standing regimes to its knees were humiliated and frustrated citizens who could hardly be described as pure intellectuals. While intellectuals from all backgrounds did, of course, join the movements, as was seen with the Egyptian Google executive Wael Ghonim whom F. Gregory Gause III characterized as an individual where “political freedom outweighed economic opportunity,” the primary population at hand was not privy to that background (Gause, 2011: 5). The notion of the military’s rise at the end of the revolution is an interesting idea, as the exact opposite was seen in Egypt, where the military’s lack of support for the Mubarak regime was ultimately the final factor that forced Mubarak to step down. To this day, the military still holds the rein of power in the state and it remains to be seen if it is willing to relinquish control to the democratically elected authority.

2. Theories of Political Violence

Moving on to second stated mode of explanation, political violence theories, there is diversity within this field but Goldstone is merely noting the general trends that have taken place. First, one branch of theories identify the varieties of misery that are likely to lead to political change. Specifically, people generally accept oppression but only when individuals taste a better life and then have their expectations frustrated are they likely to develop feelings of aggression and resentment. The second approach begins to look at the role of institutions in revolutions. Essentially, when the various subsystems of a society advance at roughly the same rate, the regime will stay in place. However, if one subset changes independently, the result is imbalance, which “will leave people disoriented and considering new values” (Goldstone, 1982: 5). It is to be noted that Samuel P. Huntington, whose work will be examined later, is an advocate for this approach. The last explanation is that of resource mobilization, which states that discontent alone is unlikely to lead to revolution if the discontented remain unorganized and lack resources. Political violence is likely to occur only when aggrieved parties have the resources and organization to take significant action.

Goldstone finds fault with the political violence theories, for as he notes, “the general theories viewed revolutions as the result of actions by an opposition movement that sought to wrest control of the state…yet revolutions often began not from the acts of a powerful revolutionary opposition, but from the internal breakdown and paralysis of state administrations, a condition that rendered states incapable of managing normally routine problems” (Goldstone, 1982: 6).

3. Structural Theories

It is essential finally to look at structural modes of analysis, which have particularly dominated the study of the Middle East and North Africa, a region where the state structures of the authoritarian regimes were thought to be infallible. Structures theories of revolution first note that “…states vary in structure and are thus vulnerable to different kinds of revolution” (Goldstone, 1982: 6). Revolutions typically begin from some combination of state weakness, whether it be general popular uprisings or squabble between the state and its elites. The vulnerability of the regime to various forms of political crises is entirely dependent upon “…the extent to which elites can influence them and use their resources against it,” with the loyalty of the army playing a pivotal role here (Goldstone, 1982: 7). Those states that are weak economically in nature are particularly susceptible to outside foreign forces. When the outside pressure is strong and the elites note that the state is failing to take appropriate measures, the elite initiates an “elite revolution,” thereby furthering the decay of the regime at hand.

In the neo-patrimonial states, also known as “sultanistic” regimes, which are crucial component of the political landscape of the MENA region; a severe downturn (typically economic) may strip the leader of his or her normal path of patronage as a means for quelling dispute, therefore creating internal divisions within the structure, hindering the state’s resources that typically halt dissent, popular or bureaucratic.
The structuralist approach holds several advantages, as it is necessary to look at the institutions in place in order to adequately explain any phenomenon. In the case of Yemen, the structuralist approach of neo-patrimonial states provides much insight, as the former President Saleh was a mastermind of patronage, the system in place being extremely intricate. However, the structuralist approach fails in its lack of use of agency as an additional means of explanation. Why, after all, did the people in Yemen take to the streets? Even if the neo-patrimonial theory predicted why Saleh and his system eventually failed him, it still does not account for the initial rebellion.

4. Classical Revolutionary Theories

Now that the three traditional approaches to theories of revolution have been elaborated upon, it is necessary to examine some of the classical pieces of revolutionary theory that have been written in the last decades, beginning with Samuel P. Huntington’s famed work, “Revolution and Political Order.” Huntington is examining revolution through the lens of modernization, as at the time of the writing in 1969, much of the developing world was experiencing decolonization and its destabilizing effects. First and foremost in his model, Huntington believes that revolutions are extremely rare phenomena, with only a few having occurred throughout history, the Bolshevik Revolution being an example given. He particularly distinguishes them from “…insurrections, rebellions, revolts, coups, and wars of independence” (Huntington, 1968: 38) but claims they are a characteristic of the process of modernization. Broadly speaking, he claims that revolution is most likely to occur in societies which have experienced some social and economic development and “…where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change” (Huntington, 1968: 38). This particular notion is perfectly in line with the previously mentioned political violence theory of institutions, where one subset of society, namely political development, has lagged behind economic and social development, thus creating a powerful, destabilizing imbalance that predisposes revolution. The most striking component of Huntington’s argument is his notion of “Western” versus “Eastern” revolutions, as the two follow distinctly different patterns of revolutions, which will be elaborated upon below.

First is the “Western” revolution, in which the political institutions of the old regime are quick to collapse. In the absence of the former regime, the mobilization of new groups into politics occurs and the creation of new political institutions has sprung forth. The primary struggle, however, is internal, as it occurs between revolutionary groups. Throughout the process of rebellion, revolutionaries come to power in the capitol first, gradually expanding their rhetoric and influence over the countryside and corresponding peasantry. The pinnacle of the revolutionary moment is when the regime of old comes into financial problems, thus alienating the urban elites, intellectuals, and ruling class, creating the quick demise of the regime. The primary struggle of the revolution is not the overthrow of the regime, but rather the struggle between moderates and radicals.

This “Western” model can be cautiously used when analyzing the revolution that has occurred in Egypt. After all, mobilization took place primarily in the capitol of Cairo, with masses in the rural areas taking to the streets at a delayed rate. Although Hosni Mubarak and his infamous regime clung to power for the first several weeks of chaotic dissent, the longstanding regime eventually crumpled, especially after the elites started faltering. Now that Egypt is finally experiencing the democratic electoral process, struggles have been seen between the voices of moderate reform and those of radical means, such as the Salafis, who gained a striking percentage of votes in the parliamentary elections. Although Egypt was extremely fortunate in the sense that the overthrow of Mubarak was relatively quick and violence-free, in comparison to Libya or Syria, the revolution is far from complete.

The “Eastern” process of revolution, as Huntington describes, takes an entirely different revolutionary route. In general, the process can be described as the mobilization of new groups into politics and the creation of new political institutions, ending with the violent overthrow of the political institution of the old order, hence the primary struggle being between the revolutionary group at hand and the established order. Unlike the “Western” process, which maintains control of the urban center from the beginning, the “Eastern” area of control is first the countryside, where the support of peasants is established from the beginning. Huntington claims that there are automatically uses of terror and propaganda, which eventually escalates to guerilla warfare and upwards from then on. The government troops are henceforth defeated in battle and bloodshed. In
this scenario, moderates do not play a pivotal role, as they are much weaker and forced to pick sides. Essentially, everything is defined by the use of terror and violence.

As Egypt followed the general pattern of the “Western” model, it can be argued that Libya followed the “Eastern,” which is extremely ironic in the sense that Libya is geographically situated west of Egypt. It is true that the revolution and overthrow of Gadhafi in Libya, which has been described by some as a civil war, began in rural areas and culminated in the overthrow of Tripoli, used force instead of nonviolent civil resistance, and ended with the very bloody assassination of Moammar Gadhafi. It is obvious in Huntington’s writing, however, that he possesses an inherent bias towards the ambiguous “East,” as it automatically claims violence and terror, even though the acts of terror would be described by many as the rightful assertion of the need for basic human dignity against a tireless and bloodthirsty dictator.

To close with Huntington’s work, he states that the probability of a revolution in a modernizing country depends on three main factors: firstly, the extent to which the urban middle class is alienated from the existing order; secondly, the extent to which peasants are alienated from the existing order; and thirdly, the extent to which the urban middle class and peasants join together not only in fighting against the enemy but also in fighting for the same cause, the cause typically being nationalism (Huntington, 1968: 44).

Yet again, the pattern of explanation lacks a reason why the people actually take to the streets and what the specific motivating force is for this union of dissenters. History is full of disenfranchised individuals who face oppression in their daily lives, but this theory of revolution still fails to provide an explanation of why people head out to the streets en masse at that particular moment in time, as the world witnessed throughout the year of 2011.

Charles Tilly responded to Huntington’s theory of revolutions, stating that although he agreed with many basic proponents of the theory, he critiques Huntington for not disaggregating the components of revolutions, as well as with the different forms of conflict (Tilly, 1973: 48). Tilly however, brings up a point that Huntington pursues as well, in that the psychologization of the study of revolutions and corresponding socialization theory is wrong and essentially unscientific, thus excluding the argument for the role of agency in revolutions.

Eric Selbin, on the other hand, argues that agency and culture are primary modes of explanation when dealing with revolutions, as is apparent in his titled work, “Agency and Culture in Revolutions.” His argument, which inherently supports this paper’s logic of using dignity as a means of explanation, is that structures demarcate a certain range of possibilities and are valuable, but “structures do not unconditionally dictate what people do,” for individuals do not always behave rationally (Selbin, 1997: 83). Rather, revolution it is an interplay of “circumstance and action” (Selbin, 1997: 83). Another noteworthy point Selbin mentions is the notion of collective memory. “Most resistance movements conceive of and understand their struggles as continuing some long process of struggle that many societies hold in their collective memory” (Selbin, 1997: 82). This can be seen with the prominent example of Mohammad Bouazizi, whose act of self-immolation has become a symbol of the revolution in the MENA region and is still felt strongly a year after the deed took place.

This idea of collective memory is absolutely essential in the explanation of the revolutions occurring at the that particular time, for as Bouazizi struck Tunisians with that desperate act after his humiliating defeat, it was automatically ingrained upon the collective memory of Tunisians, whose cry for dignity was felt through that image and knowledge of his sacrifice. As the media took that information and spread it across the region and world at large, it became a part of the larger Arab consciousness, who sympathized with his utter desperation and disparity with the state at hand. Thus, the numerous factors for the causes of revolution joined together through collective memory to create a spark for revolution.

**IV. The Failure to Predict the Arab Revolutions of 2011**

Now that some of the basic modules of revolutions have been discussed, the transition to the analysis of why scholars failed to predict the occurrence of the Arab revolutions is necessary. To begin with, it is important to note that while it is absolutely impossible for any scholar to predict the exact moment in history when a major upheaval will occur, scholars are still capable of reading the warning signs for revolutions, which is precisely what scholars of the MENA region significantly failed to do.

Gregory Gause III wrote an article in Foreign Affairs in the June/August 2011 edition, obviously embarrassed by his discipline’s big mistake, on the main reasons for...
failure was primarily concerned with the two notions of the military-security complex and the state control over the economy, both factors being the primary mechanisms for weathering dissent (Gause, 2011: 2). Scholars saw the MENA region as extraordinary for its longstanding regimes which resisted democratization and instilled oppression while gradually being forced to liberalize economically for aid. In short, while academia acknowledged the dissatisfaction of the Arab people at large, they failed to recognize the power held by militaries, the effects of economic liberalization despite state control, and the general solidarity of the Arab people across state borders. It was assumed that since these authoritarian regimes used their security forces so powerfully and blatantly that the military was automatically a part of this state apparatus. As seen in Egypt, that is not necessarily the case, for it was the military’s refusal of support that primarily led to the expulsion of Hosni Mubarak. Also, the economic liberalization policies that were being implemented were creating increasingly large wealth disparities in already struggling societies. Essentially, the poor were getting poorer while a new class of elites were immerging, especially in Tunisia and Egypt, forcing popular dissent to become even more profound than it already was. Most importantly in this analysis, however, was Gause’s admission to the fact that the “popular revulsion to corruption and crony privatization was underestimated” (Gause, 2011: 6).

Ursula Lindsey championed the previously mentioned notions presented by Gause, as did many other scholars in her piece, “The Suddenly New Study of Egypt,” but she particularly presents the idea of the Arab citizen’s experience, the way scholars failed to take into account their politics and mere feelings of the structures they were living under. Quoting a political science professor at Barnard College, Mona El-Ghobashy, “…maybe scholars will now be more serious about understanding how citizens experience the repressive political structures under which they live…the old assumption was that these structures were infinitely resilient, in spite of popular resistance” (Lindsey, 2011: 3).

Also using the words of author Robert Springborg, the former claim is supported again, as, “We didn’t see the depth of indignation that was there…that may be because too many political scientists followed an ‘econometric model,’ on the principle that ‘if you can’t count it, it’s not real’” (Lindsey, 2011: 3). This further supports the point that the utter resistance by a majority of scholars to analyze agency in the probability of revolutions occurring is precisely what led to political science’s downfall in its dealings with the Middle East and North Africa.

Structure is indeed important and an essential component of any logical scientific analysis, but to entirely ignore other predicting values, namely in terms of agency, is a gross miscalculation. On the other hand, the use of a pure agency outlook with no regards to structures leads to breakdown in inquiry as well. This point is precisely why this paper proposes a new model of explanation for the Arab revolutions of 2011, one that promotes the use of the concept of dignity, or lack thereof, as the bridge between the two disciplines and an explanation for the reason why the citizens of the Arab world rejected the status quo en masse after the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi.

V. The Model

As prominently noted throughout the entirety of this paper, the themes of fear, corruption, coercion, and humiliation have been prominent in the Middle East and North Africa for decades, for they have been employed as methods of oppression and subversion by these so-called “sultanistic” dictators in order to maintain power for extended periods of time (Goldstone, 2011: 329).

Although each state throughout the past year has faced protests condemning these “sultanistic” regimes and the corresponding corruption, there were, of course, specific grievances in each separate movement. In Egypt and Tunisia, protests encompassed the frustrations over unaccountable authority, youth unemployment, and brutal police oppression (The Economist, 2011). Yemenis, on the other hand, decried the lack of freedom of the press, the absence of youth participation in politics, and the internment of political prisoners (Al-Sakkaf, 2011).

The policies of Arab regimes and their effects on their societies, described above, are extremely powerful. These “sultans” employed policies to aid the already-wealthy and exclude the rest of society. Any semblance of democratic institutions were, in fact, heavily regulated and guarded by these dictators and their police forces. Unsavory alliances between dictators, large businesses, and security firms channeled spending in a way that strengthened the regimes power base and marginalized its people. These alliances forced the educated young masses
into low-paying positions or the informal economy. Any form of critical protest was repressed brutally. Many outlets for communication and raising awareness were also suppressed by the Arab regimes, often preventing meaningful organization. Relationships with foreign countries sought to promise stability for aid and investment, none of which would be channeled back to the people (Goldstone, 2011). In a Machiavellian sense, all of the Arab regimes imposed fear on their people, because their harmful policies could obviously not win support or re-election (Howard, D. 2011).

To understand fully how such powerful apparatuses failed, one needs to look at Machiavelli’s famed work, “The Prince,” as well as Dick Howard’s modern interpretation of Machiavelli’s theory in terms of its relationship to these sultanistic regimes. Machiavelli notes that the defining differences between the “nobles” and the “commoners” is the desire to rule and the desire to not be ruled. This intense desire by the commoners to not be ruled, leads to “a greater will to live in liberty…” (Howard, 2011: 1) Bouazizi; Howard notes, was among these commoners whose “self-immolation became the inspiration for the growing assertion of human dignity…his act was not a means to an end but a statement of his undeniable liberty” (Howard, 2011: 2).

In following Howard analysis, although Machiavelli is famed for his realist notions of power relations, he notes that: Political power cannot be based on sheer physical force; it depends on forms of legitimation that make it acceptable to the ruled, who do not feel that they are being dominated by arbitrary force. In this way, power acquires the authority to govern without appeal to force or fear. Of course, this legitimation can be (or become) a fraud, the velvet glove covering the iron fist. But the fact of its existence is significant; no regime can long rule without it (Howard, 2011: 2).

The problem for these sultanistic regimes, according to the Machiavelli’s theories, was that the populations at hand didn’t hate the regime, but more importantly, they felt disdain, which he believes leads to the downfall of the ruler. After all, these sultanistic rulers didn’t feel the need to do the velvet glove- they merely crushed with an iron fist and have felt the consequences accordingly.

With the death of Tunisia’s Bouazizi, the entire rationale behind these regimes began to crumble. Elections and other democratic institutions were knowingly fixed, the masses knew of the networks of corruption, and physically felt the adverse economic effects. At the start of these revolutions, all of the corrupt Arab regimes lost their legitimacy, as a result of policies that fuelled a growing hatred towards the regimes.

One asks what subsequently motivated individuals on the micro-level? Online social networking websites, such as Twitter and Facebook, played a vital role in protest organization and influencing revolutions in other Arab countries. As Philip Howard notes (2011), it is extraordinarily important to realize that most reports from the ground identify these uprisings as mainly leaderless, and ignoring traditional ideology. While the most immediate causes include political dictatorships, unemployment, and police repression, the theory behind the individual and group decisions must be explored. Rationally, it can be difficult to understand why many young men and women would risk their lives protesting under brutal repression.

Based on the micro-level rational analysis, any form of democratic transition creates uncertainty, as only one of several outcomes can lead to a long-lasting, functioning democracy (Przeworski, 1991). On the eve of the revolutions, with such extreme marginalization, humiliation, and wealth disparities, the Arab street felt such desperation that outweighed the uncertainty. As preferences are derived from self-interest, or maximization of material gains, it is clear that the masses did not prefer to live under these Arab regimes any longer (Eyadat, 2007).

At this point, we must also take into account the aforementioned importance of dignity in Arab society; culture is deeply-rooted in Arab behavior and history. Many also realized that despotism was beginning to sink into culture, as actions had to be censored to avoid the dictator and his secret police (Ajami, 2011). Governments lost their legitimacy after Bouazizi’s death, due to a collective feeling of a loss of dignity. Most Arabs were, and still are, in Bouazizi’s hopeless position of education, without possible societal advancement. It was either in January, or never.

Looking at the rational thought of the protestors and the corrupt policies of the regimes, the timing of the Arab revolutions becomes clear. The dictators employed policies to empower themselves and used fear tactics to prevent any meaningful opposition. The vast wealth disparity was increasing and opportunities for the masses to lead a comfortable life were rapidly decreasing. In response to these macro-level policies, Bouazizi set himself on fire as a final act to resist being ruled
The rationale of these regimes quickly collapsed, as the masses were able to relate to the feelings of hopelessness that led Bouazizi to act. On the micro-level, dignity had been offended by the regimes long enough.

**CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper was to provide a theoretical framework and elements of a causal model to explain the Arab revolutions of 2011. As the paper integrated both micro and macro levels of analysis, it proposed that Arab regimes' policies created a certain individual and collective psychological temperament which, in turn, transformed calculating modalities. The regimes’ policies and their outcomes represented the macro-level of analysis. Meanwhile, individual calculations and corresponding decisions pertained to the micro-level. Finally, the impact of the psychological makeup of the citizens en masse on decisions and preferences provided for the bridge between the two mechanisms of inquiry, the notion of dignity acting as the articulation between the two.

In all senses of the phrase, 2011 was a revolutionary year. The world witnessed vast change and complete political overhauls shake the foundation of the Middle East and North Africa after a young Tunisian man by the name of Mohamed Bouazizi chose the route of self-immolation to signify his last act of defiance in the face of utter humiliation.

Todd Fine noted in his work, “‘The Beginning of Arabia’s Spring:’ The Khalid Revolution,” that the year 2011 marked the centennial celebration of Ameen Rihani’s famed piece, “The Book of Khalid.” He draws parallels between the 1911 book that focused on the nature of revolution and the revolutionary in the Arab world and the modern struggle for resistance, which “The Book of Khalid” predicted would overtake the region one day. There were many written in the piece on revolution, how “revolution becomes inevitable when the voice of wisdom and reason is no longer heard and people become accustomed to enslavement” (Fine, 2011). Rihani’s writings should serve as inspiration to all, especially to those currently fighting for their lives against the face of oppression, as he demands the development of the individual through the process of revolution, not just the collapse of old regimes.

However, the most haunting and prolific words come from the mouth of no other than Mohamed Bouazizi’s mother, Mannoubia, who managed to sum up the entire sentiment of the revolutions of the Middle East and North Africa, as well as that of this explanatory model, in one short phrase: “Mohamed suffered a lot. He worked hard. But when he set fire to himself, it wasn’t about his scales being confiscated. It was about his dignity” (Anderson, 2011).

**REFERENCES**

الثورات العربية في عام 2011
نموذج تحليلي

زيد عبادات وجويدولين سكفر

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم إطار نظري وبناء نموذج تحليلي لتحليل مسببات الثورات العربية لعام 2011. الأطرة الأساسية التي يقوم عليها هذا النموذج هي أن سياسات الدول العربية من حيث طبيعتها البدنية وهيكلها التنظيمية ومخرجاتها شكلت بناءً على نفسها فردية وجماعية، أدى دورها إلى تحول في كيفية حسابات القوى السياسية عند الأفراد والجماعات.

هذا النموذج التحليلي يهدف إلى تفسير تفاعلات التفاعلات الاستراتيجية سواء على المستوى الفردى أو الجماعي، يقدم نموذج التحليل التفاعلي مكوناته على النحو التالي: سياسات الأنظمة ومخرجاتها مثل المستوى الكلي من التحليل، ونماذج سلوك الأفراد وقراراتهم مثل مستوى التحليل الجزئي، بينما يمثل التكوين النفسي على الحسابات والخيارات الجذر الذي يربط بين مستوى التحليل الكلي والجزئي حيث تمتلك الكرامة الرابط بين الاثنين.

وبالاعتماد على مصادر ونظريات متعددة يحاول هذا النموذج إضفاء الكرامة في تحليلات العلاقات السياسية باعتباره المفهوم اللفظي الملموس لتفسير النجوم من جمود التحليل البياني ونموذج ثقاقي لسلوك الأفراد.

الكلمات الدالة: الثورات العربية، سياسات الأنظمة العربية، نموذج تحليلي.