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Political Change in the Middle East:
An Attempt to Analyze the "Arab Spring"

Abstract

This article deals with the Arab Spring as a process of deep political change in the Arab world, previously the only major world area where authoritarianism persisted unchallenged for decades. While in various countries of the Arab world mass protests in 2011 forced rulers to resign, other authoritarian regimes have – despite political and economic pressure – so far been able to remain in power, or have even been only insignificantly affected. This paper applies central social science approaches in order to analyze recent developments in the region – a major task of theoretically oriented social sciences in the coming years. In addition to providing an overview of the existing literature on the Arab Spring, the article examines the empirical results of political diversification in the Arab world. A two-by-two matrix of political rule that differentiates according to the type of rule and the degree of stability is presented and discussed. Although the analysis draws heavily on rent theory, it also applies findings from transition theory and revolution theory to illuminate the current political dynamics in the Middle East.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Middle East, rent theory, revolution theory, transition theory, democratization, authoritarianism, political and economic liberalization

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Martin Beck and Simone Hüser

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1 Introduction

Independently of its outcome, the Arab Spring[1] can be regarded as an event of global histori-
cal significance.[2] From its onset in early 2011, it has been understood as a process of political
change in the Middle East.[3] The Arab world was the only major area where authoritarian
rule could be established region-wide in the twentieth century, and where regimes managed

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1 From a policy perspective, the use of the term "revolution" could be useful, as it underlines the ambition of radi-
  cally turning away from Arab authoritarianism. From an analytical point of view, however, the term should be
  avoided because the theory-laden concept of revolution refers to long processes of profound political and social
  change. There have only been a few successful revolutions in world history, and at the present time it can not be
  determined whether the Arab Spring has actually initiated revolutions (see Skocpol 1979). In the following, the
  term "Arab Spring" is used for pragmatic reasons: it has become common, and the search for a theoretically more
  sophisticated concept is meaningless considering the fact that the subject is still very much in flux.

2 The authors are grateful to Markus Albert Maier and, particularly, Warren Altounian as well as Melissa Nel-
  son for their tremendous support in editing the present article.

3 In this paper, the term "Middle East" is used as a synonym for "Middle East and North Africa," and "Arab
  world" – that is, states with a predominantly Arab population.

to defy global trends beyond the threshold of the twenty-first century. But in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, internal mass protests forced the leadership to resign within weeks. Inspired by these successes, popular movements throughout the Middle East were bolstered. They demanded substantial political reform and, in some cases, regime change. After decades of authoritarian rule and political stagnation, popular movements were finally able to destabilize or overthrow a number of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world.

In the coming years, one of the main tasks of theoretically oriented social sciences will be to critically follow and explain the Arab Spring. For this purpose, such studies can draw on a wider foundation of social science than one might initially think. The fall of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Hosni Mubarak, and other regime leaders was not predicted by social science, unless the notoriously vague conclusions of academic articles – which state that due to the unsustainable development of the Arab systems, change is inevitable – are accepted as a prognosis. Yet, at the same time, it should be taken into account that making predictions about the nature and timing of social structural change is difficult for objective reasons. The research subjects of the social sciences have, in contrast to those of chemistry or physics, intentions and choices whose occurrence and effects are difficult to identify.

The primary role of the social sciences is to explain events and structures. Thus, until the Arab Spring, the task of social scientists was indeed to analyze the causal and intentional background of authoritarian structures' sustainability in the Middle East. At the same time, it can hardly be ignored that the potential of non-Islamist civic movements in the region was underestimated by social scientists. Moreover, it must be mentioned that – in reaction to the "deviant role" of the Arab world – some deterministic approaches and models were established that neglected or even ignored the idea that actors in the Middle East have choices. It would, however, mean throwing the baby out with the bath water if – because of the apparent failure of deterministic approaches – it were concluded that, in general, social scientific approaches have no value in the analysis of the Arab Spring. Reliable social science research, including humanities work analyzing the Middle East before the Arab Spring, works on the basis of the ceteris paribus clause: Statements that specific events and structures develop certain effects are made with the restriction that it applies only if other things are equal. The statement "smoking kills" is not false just because many smokers do not die from the immediate consequences of smoking, or even because nonsmokers also die. The same applies to social scientific approaches to the Middle East – they are not invalid just because they did not anticipate the Arab Spring.

The aim of this paper is to outline methods that use central social scientific approaches to analyze the Arab Spring. Thus, the paper attempts to contribute to the explanation and description of political change in the Middle East with reference to relevant social science theories. As the subject of the essay is very much in flux, it must be conceded that the present article has a strong exploratory character.

The empirical starting points of the analysis are the following observations: First, several indicators suggest that the Arab Spring is a regional phenomenon. In many Middle Eastern countries, it has challenged the political power of the current regimes in one way or another; it has also dominated the domestic political debate in countries where the Arab Spring has not gained traction.[4] Second, a brief glance at the changes in the political map of the Arab world makes it clear that political diversity in the region has increased significantly. Until the Arab Spring, differences between the Middle Eastern political systems could predominantly be found in the degree of their authoritarian character. But now there are two characteristics by which they differ substantially: authoritarian systems versus systems in transition, and stable systems versus unstable systems.

In Section 2 of the present article, an overview of the existing explanatory literature for the Arab Spring is provided. In Section 3 – the core of the article – the empirical results of the political diversification of the Arab world are examined in greater detail. The empirical analysis is based on rent theory, or the rentier state approach. Additionally, findings from transition theory and revolution theory are applied to illuminate the political dynamics in the Arab world sparked by the Arab Spring. The paper concludes with a summary and outlook.

2   Explanations for the Arab Spring

2.1   Demographic Change

A first approach to the Arab Spring argues that change was inevitable because of the critical socioeconomic development in the authoritarian states of the Middle East. According to Volker Perthes (2011: 24), the most important trigger for this change was the demographic development of the Arab world. From 1970 to 2010, the population nearly tripled, going from 128 million to 359 million inhabitants (Hegasy 2011: 41). An estimated 41 percent of these people live below the poverty line (UNDP 2009: 22), and nearly 30 percent of the population is between the ages of 20 and 35 (Perthes 2011: 30). Although the current generation is better educated and qualified than the previous one – due to a strengthened education sector and increased networking through digital technology – many are unable to find employment (ibid.: 30–31). The unemployment rate for the population cohort between the ages of 15 and 24 was 25.6 percent in 2003, the highest in the world (ILO 2004: 1, 8; UNDP 2009: 20). Additionally, the labor market offers limited opportunities for university graduates (Perthes 2011: 31). The consequent lack of prospects, rising costs of living, and anger over obviously corrupt and repressive rulers compelled this generation rise up against the authoritarian regimes (ibid.: 30–35).

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4   Lebanon constitutes a significant exception insofar as the debate on the Arab Spring has been, especially with regard to Syria, of a foreign and regional political nature, while the issue of domestic reforms has been of secondary importance.

2.2   Social Media

Another view, held especially by Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain (2011), attributes the outbreak of the Arab Spring to the access to digital media, including social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and text messages. Advocates of this approach make clear that the dissent between regimes and populations already existed long before the spread of the Internet. However, virtual communication gave people an instrument that made it possible for them to share their resentment with like-minded people and to organize movements against authoritarian rulers (ibid.: 36–37, 41).

Even before the outbreak of the riots, the strongest criticism came from political bloggers: investigative journalism in the Middle East has long been the domain of private actors (ibid.: 36, 42). The Internet showed videos which presented the corrupt rulers' luxurious standard of living, thereby substantiating the once abstract criticism of the regimes (ibid.: 36). Furthermore, digital media displayed the freedom and prosperity of people in the West and elsewhere in the world. Every day more people in the Arab world were exposed to the rest of the world through international online news or the use of programs like Skype to talk with friends or relatives living abroad (see Howard and Hussain 2011: 36, 42). The increasingly multilayered access to media gave people the opportunity to question political norms and values – often leading to a democratic orientation.

After Mohammad Bouazizi's legendary self-immolation, people communicated throughout Tunisia in various online forums, expressing their solidarity as well as their dissatisfaction with the political situation in the country. Social media offered a space for solidarity that was ultimately transferred from the virtual world to the real one and manifested in mass protests against the authoritarian regime (ibid.: 36–38). Messages and posts on Facebook and Twitter or simple text messages immediately informed protestors about the next step of action and the location where it would take place. Within a few weeks, guided instructions for organizing successful protests were circulated on the Internet (ibid.: 38–40). Authentic videos and pictures taken by protesters with cameras on mobile phones inspired citizens of other Arab states to organize protests – some of which were the largest in decades (ibid.: 38, 43). Abroad, social media platforms were used as channels to support protestors, to express solidarity, and to encourage people in their chosen path; for instance, external supporters programmed software that enabled activists to circumvent government firewalls (ibid.: 37, 44).

2.3   "Karama!"

As diverse as the uprisings in the Arab countries may have been, all protests were directly linked to the demands for human dignity (*karama)*, freedom, and social justice (Asseburg 2011a: 3; Perthes 2011: 33–34). The first major mass protest in Egypt on 25 January 2011 brought thousands of people to Tahrir Square in Cairo carrying the words "bread, freedom and human dignity" (HRW 2012). With slogans like these, people called for just structures that did not con-

strain them from access to jobs because they didn't belong to a particular family; political and economic systems not permeated by omnipresent corruption; and a state that would not force them to accept a poor social and economic situation (West 2011: 16). Thus, the assumption held by many in the West that the culture and religion, or the "mentality," of people in the Arab world, are incompatible with democratic values can be refuted (Beck 2011b).

2.4 Economic Liberalization without Political Reforms

From a political-economic point of view, the Arab Spring was caused by a fundamental crisis of the authoritarian social contract. The contract had regulated relations between the people of the Arab world and the power systems for decades (Harders 2011). This authoritarian bargain implicitly promised the population a minimum of subsidies. In exchange, people preserved some degree of political loyalty to the regime. If this minimum economic safety net guaranteed by the state were no longer maintained, the regime would suffer from a deficit of legitimacy and the authoritarian bargain would collapse (Desai et al. 2011). However, the timing of the Arab Spring still cannot be explained, as the crises that led to the failure of the Middle Eastern authoritarian bargain in 2011 had existed for years, if not decades (Beck 2010).

One result of the regional oil boom in the 1970s was the establishment of the rent-based system of "petrolism" in the Middle East. Rents are incomes which are not balanced by labor and capital, and are thus at the free disposal of the recipients. In the 1970s, not only did the incomes generated by rents of the oil-producing states in the Middle East escalate, but, through politically motivated transfers from the Arab oil states to the oil-poor countries of the region, political rentier states also emerged (Beck 2009). Because of falling oil prices, the system of petrolism fell into crisis during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The regimes of the Middle East reacted with a relatively complex, but unsustainable, attempt at crisis management, adopting limited economic reforms mostly aimed at enforcing foreign trade (Fürtig 2007; Richter 2011). At different stages most countries initiated political liberalization, but then withdrew from it in deliberalization phases (Kienle 2001). The structural dependence on rents, however, was not overcome. Two of the rentier system's typical defects appeared (although this still does not explain the exact timing of the Arab Spring): First, the distribution-oriented strategy of the rentier country eventually meets its limits. The productive sectors are neglected and government spending expands (especially with high population growth), while chances to generate compensating income through taxes are limited due to the neglected productive potential. Second, the primacy of the distributional policy is intended to depoliticize society. Therefore, the development of political institutions is neglected in rentier states. Again, this cannot explain the outbreak of the Arab Spring, but it makes it plausible that once the regimes in the Middle East were confronted with a powerful opposition movement, they did not have the appropriate means to drive those movements on system-compatible paths (Beck 2009, 2011a).

3   Political Diversification of the Arab World Caused by the Arab Spring

3.1   The New Arab Matrix of Rule

The Arab Spring disrupted the high degree of homogeneity among stable authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. This means, first, that there are some countries where authoritarian structures have been shaken to the point that one can speak of transition states. A central finding of transition theory is that transition has to be seen as an open process (Carothers 2002). While most transition processes after the collapse of the totalitarian regimes in Europe were affected by the global "spirit of democracy" (Mahatma Gandhi), they did not always result in the establishment of democratic systems. Rather, in many cases hybrid systems or new types of authoritarian systems developed. Regional examples from the Middle East are the authoritarian Islamic Republic of Iran, which emerged from the 1979 revolution, and the political system of Turkey, which developed after the failure of Kemalism in 1950 – and went through a process of democratization over decades (Diamond 2002: 31).

Second, certainly not all authoritarian regimes in the Arab world have been disrupted by the Arab Spring. Although no country has escaped the regional debate about the Arab Spring, the ruling houses of some regimes – especially in the Gulf states – have so far known how to keep the foundations of their authoritarian rule intact.

Third, there are strong indications that two regime types have been created which have more than short-term potential. On the one hand, not all protest movements in the Arab world have succeeded in forcing the ruling regime into transformation by peaceful means. Some regimes still control – at least temporarily – the levers of power with the help of their repressive apparatuses, yet they have been unable to force the newly formed opposition movements to their knees. A prime example is Syria.

On the other hand, transition countries can differ, as the transition process can be regarded as stable or unstable. It should be noted that transition processes are sui generis dynamic, and only in exceptional cases come to pass without retarding moments and setbacks. Although it may be controversial in a particular case, it is still possible to distinguish systematically between transitions showing a trend away from authoritarianism toward a new system and cases where the old system is strong enough to reintroduce authoritarianism. It may also be possible that newly emerged political players favor an authoritarian regime. The consequences of the latter could lead to the perpetuation of the old regime, to an authoritarian pact between old and new authoritarian elites, or to the takeover of state power by new authoritarian elites.

The result is a new two-by-two matrix of political rule in the Middle East (Table 1) generated by the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Egypt come close to ideal types, although to varying degrees.

Table 1: Matrix of Political Rule in the Middle East

Type of Rule Degree of Stability	Authoritarian Regime	Transition State
Consolidated/stable	Saudi Arabia	Tunisia
Not consolidated/unstable	Syria	Egypt

Source: Authors' compilation.

3.2 Four Types of Political Rule

3.2.1 Stable Authoritarian Systems: The Case of Saudi Arabia

Of those states in the Middle East which fall under the category of stable authoritarian, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is regionally and globally the most important regime. To date, the Saudi regime has succeeded in keeping its authoritarian rule stable without implementing substantial liberalization measures. When the Arab Spring began, various observers expected certain change in Saudi Arabia (Lacroix 2011: 48). This view appeared plausible, as Saudi Arabia shows similar grievances to those Arab systems that faced massive protests: high unemployment, especially among the young; extreme corruption; political repression; and a wide social gap between the establishment and the young population (ibid.).

Occasional protests occurred at the beginning of 2011, particularly in the Shiite east of the country (Freitag 2011: 23). But the regime succeeded in using its extensive material resources to stabilize the country (Lacroix 2011: 53). The revenues from the oil sector allowed the monarchy to maintain a policy of "sticks and carrots": concessions helped to depoliticize strategic sectors of society, and at the same time, rents were used to finance an all-encompassing security and intelligence directorate (see Lacroix 2011: 53). When civil unrest occurred in other Arab states, the government imposed a nationwide ban on demonstrations and increased the contingent of security forces. King Abdullah also announced a subsidy program of 130 billion USD (Steinberg 2011). Furthermore, the royal family received support from the influential Council of Senior Islamic Scholars (Hai´at Kibar al-Ulama), which said that demonstrations are not compatible with Islam and therefore declared a ban on protests to be religiously lawful (ibid.).

3.2.2 Unstable Authoritarian Systems: The Case of Syria

Although the Syrian opposition had already expressed its discontent with the authoritarian system in the past (for example, the "Damascus Declaration" in 2005), the regime led by Bashar al-Assad had succeeded on previous occasions at stifling major protests and maintaining its stability. In the wake of the Arab Spring, there was massive mobilization by the opposition, which the regime tried unsuccessfully to contain through cosmetic reforms and mas-

sive repression. At the same time, however, the regime was able to control the state institutions. Thus, a civil war–like standoff has resulted. At the time of the writing, it is not predictable how long this situation will last, if the Assad regime will maintain stable authoritarian rule, or if the conflict will lead to regime collapse and a progressive political transformation in Syria (Beck and Hüser 2011).

3.2.3   Stable Systems of Transition: The Case of Tunisia

Within one month, protestors in Tunisia overthrew a decades-old authoritarian regime. After 23 years as president, Ben Ali was forced to resign in late January 2011. Subsequent developments created a promising political atmosphere for the Constituent Assembly election in October 2011, and the newly elected assembly was tasked with drafting a new constitution and appointing a new government. Apart from protests in February 2011, which called for the dismissal of Ben Ali's supporters in government positions, there have been no destabilizing demonstrations or police suppression (Schraeder and Redissi 2011: 1, 14–17). Compared to other countries in the region, Tunisia has good prerequisites for democratization (Asseburg and Werenfels 2011: 8); thus it can be considered a stable transformation country.

3.2.4   Unstable Transition Systems: The Case of Egypt

Similarly to Tunisia, Egypt has been in transition since the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011. Egypt's transition, however, appears to be less consolidated than that of Tunisia. Since the fall of 2011, the country has been shaken by massive riots, and the state's reactions have led to substantial political and economic instability. The riots have been primarily directed against the transitional military government, which has delayed or blocked the transition of power to a civilian government. The "military-industrial complex" (Davis 2011b) has steadily expanded its political and economic role ever since its emergence in 1954. This suggests that despite the resignation of Mubarak, the regime's forces are still strong. Many observers state that the crucial factor blocking a democratic transformation is – presently – not the strength of Islamist groups but the military's interference (Davis 2011b, c). But there are also other assessments: In the post-Mubarak parliamentary elections, Islamist parties won two-thirds of the seats, stoking fears of an undemocratic Islamization of the political system. The rising popularity of Salafism, and the possibility of a coalition between Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood, is perceived as threatening (Ashour 2012).

3.3   An Attempt at Explanation: Reasons for the Diversification

3.3.1   Theoretical Framework

The matrix of political rule outlined above initially seems to have a static character. In other contexts such matrices are used to sharply delineate various types of political rule. Such a

procedure would, however, not match the dynamic character of the Arab Spring. In the following it will become clear that the matrix can analytically reproduce these dynamics, but only if the premise is noted that the matrix – although it reflects systematically clear separations – does not consistently produce empirically unambiguous classifications with regard to the Arab Spring. Bearing this in mind, the matrix is capable of enriching the analysis by capturing the dynamic character of political change in the Arab Spring.

In the following outline of the new matrix of political rule in the Middle East, three theoretical approaches are harnessed. The most important one appears to be the aforementioned rentier state approach, which was introduced by Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (1987). Two other theoretical approaches from social science research that should be applied are transition theory and revolution theory.

Portugal's Carnation Revolution in 1974 started the "third wave of democratization" (Huntington 1991). As a result, theories of political system change, especially approaches to transition theory, became popular: What causes the collapse of authoritarian regimes that appeared to be stable for decades? Which actors play a role in the transition processes (Lauth and Wagner 2009: 126–127)? Major attention is directed to the quality and efficiency of the emerging political systems (Carothers 2002: 6; Lauth and Wagner 2009: 126). Throughout the history of the research, some of the main assumptions of the early approach to transition have been questioned, particularly the teleological perspective according to which democratization more or less inevitably leads to the establishment of consolidated democracies (Carothers 2002: 6–8, 14). In addition, concepts that allow for an analytical view of the re-authoritarization of the political system or the development of hybrid regime types have been developed (Carothers 2002: 10; Merkel 2004).

A key finding of the revolution research is that revolutionary movements can only succeed when the ruling regime becomes substantially weakened both externally and internally (Skocpol 1979). There are many more cases of broken and failed revolutions in history than successful ones. Even in situations of severe crisis, ruling regimes have opportunities to come out on top because they have organizational capacities superior to those of their challengers. These include military and civilian institutions through which they can enact repression and garner legitimacy, respectively. But even if revolutions are successful, their initial organizers are often not those who arise out of them as the victors. Rather, those groups that were excluded from political power in the *ancien régime*, which can rely on a superior organizational capacity to that of the revolution's initiators, have a good chance of succeeding. In situations of political upheaval, revolution theory therefore emphasizes, on the one hand, not underestimating the forces of the old regime; on the other, the power of opposition groups that did not play a major role in initiating the revolution but maintain highly organized bodies (in the Middle East, Islamist groups fall into this category) are to be taken into account.

3.3.2   Political Systems in the Middle East between Authoritarianism and Transition

3.3.2.1 The Persistence of Authoritarian Rule in the Arab World: The Gulf States

The Arab Spring left many parts of the Arab world in sustained awe. In some cases – particularly in Libya – it even led to the overthrow of the regime. From a social science point of view, there is a need to explain the reasons why a significant number of regimes endured the Arab Spring without the destabilization of authoritarian rule – at least to date. Among all the social science approaches used to analyze the Arab regimes before the Arab Spring, the rentier state approach has the least difficulty explaining this difference. With the exception of Bahrain and Libya, all countries with high economic rent inflows – in particular oil states in the Gulf – were able to keep their power stable.

Among the Gulf states, Qatar's stable authoritarian structures were possibly the least affected by the Arab Spring. This is mainly due to the immense oil and gas reserves in the country, measured per capita. Together with Iran, Qatar possesses the largest natural gas reserves in the world and was the world's largest exporter of natural gas in 2006. The substantial rent inflows combined with a very small population of less than two million (of which only 220,000 have Qatari nationality) provide the state with significant freedom of action in the design of its foreign and domestic policy (Ulrichsen 2011). In 2009, per capita income was $82,978 (in purchasing power parity to the US dollar in the United Sates), which makes it the state with the second-highest per capita income in the world, ranking even before Luxembourg (UNDP 2011). According to the Global Human Development Index, Qatar ranks 37 (ibid.). The growth rate increased from 17 percent in 2010 to 19 percent in 2011 (IMF 2012a). At the same time, the unemployment rate is estimated to be below 1 percent (IMF 2012b: 3). This extreme prosperity has protected the state from the social, political, and economic discontent that led to the protests in most other Arab countries (Ulrichsen 2011). Massive social privilege "from above" has weakened the demand for political rights of participation "from below" (see Ulrichsen 2011). According to a study from the years 2010–2011, the people of Qatar valued democratic structures the least compared to other Arab populations (Asda'a Burson-Marsteller 2011).

At the same time, the Qatari ruling elite seeks to secure its legitimacy regionally and internationally by acting as a responsible regional player, a diplomatic broker, and a political mediator – a strategy that Qatar took up a few years ago and attempted to reinforce during the Arab Spring (Steinberg 2012: 3–4; Ulrichsen 2011). With the start of the Arab Spring, the government supported the uprisings in the region – with the exception of those in the Gulf states. In the case of Libya, Qatar advocated within the Arab League for the organization to approve the military intervention of NATO and thereby distinguished itself as an ally of the West. Simultaneously, the Libyan rebels were supported with arms, training and money. After initial reluctance, the country also supported the opposition movement in Syria – espe-

cially the Muslim Brotherhood – and used, as in the Libyan case, the influence it gained through its chairmanship of the Arab League (Steinberg 2012: 4–6).

While the rentier state approach has no problem explaining the stability in Qatar and other Gulf states, at first glance, the explanation is not as obvious for Bahrain. Bahrain has only very limited oil reserves. Therefore, from the point of view of the rentier state approach, it is not surprising that the largest protests in the Gulf states during the Arab Spring took place in Bahrain. In February 2011, one-third of the population belonging to various political affiliations took to the streets across the country to stand up for their rights (Niethammer 2011). But why was the regime able to relatively easily strike down the mass protests? This can mainly be attributed to its rentier neighbor Saudi Arabia. Since the Saudi royal family, as a hegemonic actor in the Gulf region, feared that a political crisis in a Gulf monarchy could call into question the general monarchical principle in this subregion of the Middle East, it supported the Bahraini regime in massively quelling the riots and even sent troops to Bahrain in March (see Steinberg 2011).

Another reason for the successful repression of the Bahraini protests is the qualitative strength and the confessional character of the country's military. Its soldiers possess sophisticated modern weapons, have first-rate training, and receive high compensation for their services. As the country, due to its diversified economy, provides various career opportunities in the civilian sector, the monarchy also employs well-trained soldiers from abroad. Hence, the military is not connected with society, but rather sees itself as a "Sunni" combat unit that has been raised in the service of the royal family and the country's Sunni elite (Barany 2011: 31–32).

In the case of Libya, much evidence indicates that Muammar Gaddafi's regime would not have been overthrown without the intervention of NATO, as the military capabilities of the opposition were too weak to prevail against the forces of the regime. While the regime's regular military was financially deprived, Gaddafi ensured that his sons commanded excellently equipped and trained militias. These family bonds secured the reliable backing of security forces in the face of a five-month military operation by NATO (ibid.: 29–31). The international response to Gaddafi's brutal crackdown on protests began in February 2011, when the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1970. The resolution condemned the violence carried out by the regime and called for sanctions. When Gaddafi was unimpressed and on the verge of invading the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing NATO to establish a no-fly zone to protect civilians. In addition, some of the allies provided the rebels with weapons and ammunition. The resulting international military operation ended on 31 October, after Gaddafi was killed by Libyan rebels and his last fighters capitulated (Wester and Goldstein 2011).

Yet why, in the first place, did the protest movement in Libya bring Muammar Gaddafi's regime to the brink of collapse without massive assistance from outside? As in the case of the Islamic revolution in Iran, a simple explanation according to the rentier state approach does

not hold true: both regimes went through an existential crisis, and ultimately fell, despite a substantial increase in oil revenues (see Beck 2007b). In both cases, the regime collapsed because of a rather characteristic defect of rentier states: In an extreme way, Gaddafi promoted the depoliticization of society by means of a distribution policy and the destruction of formal political institutions, which opposition groups could have used to exercise pressure for reform (Vandewalle 1991; Vandewalle 1998: 6–8). At the same time, the ruling elite was so heavily consolidated that it actually consisted only of the ruler himself and his closest family members (Asseburg and Werenfels 2011: 3). Thus, the regime had only one institution that was instrumental in the confrontation with the opposition: the security apparatus. Its efficacy, however, was blocked by the intervention of NATO.

The extreme depoliticization of society in the Libyan rentier state has also left a strong legacy for the transition process. For a society that did not have any civic culture and state structures over decades, the transition towards democratic structures appears to be a particularly difficult and long process in which setbacks are to be expected (Lacher 2011a, 2011b). From today's perspective, it is an open question whether such a transformation will lead to a democracy, an authoritarian regime, or a hybrid system.

3.3.2.2 *The Difference between Stable and Unstable Authoritarian Systems: Syria und Algeria*

As explained in the previous section, the difference between the (so far) stable authoritarian regimes of the Arab Middle East and countries that fall into one of the other three categories can be explained with the help of the rentier state approach. This approach also makes an important contribution in defining the difference between stable and unstable authoritarian regimes: the latter have a much lower rent income with which to buy off ambitions of political participation in times of political crisis. This difference can be empirically explained by comparing Syria and Algeria. Furthermore, the findings of revolution theory should be utilized in order to understand why some Middle Eastern regimes have been able to control the corridors of power despite continued massive mobilization by the opposition.

As already explained, in the context of the Arab Spring, Syria has slipped into a state of authoritarian instability. In the eyes of many Syrians the Assad regime has completely lost its legitimacy (Beck and Hüser 2011). The reason it is still able to hold on to power is that it can rely – albeit to a dwindling extent – on the support of elites and a largely intact security apparatus. The regime's inability to restore stability can be attributed to the fact that the state does not have adequate rent income to buy full legitimacy among the majority of the population, and/or to finance a security apparatus that could immediately suppress any insurrection. Although Syria has moderate oil reserves, it is estimated that the country will become a net importer over the next ten years (EU 2007: 8). Unlike Bahrain, Syria is not under the protection of an immediate rentier neighbor which could support the regime militarily. Quite to the contrary, Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states do not have any interest in supporting the republican, quasi-secular regime in Damascus. Therefore, they contribute – to a consider-

able extent – to the Arab front against Syria, thereby referring to values which they systematically violate themselves (Cunningham 2012; Dugulin 2012).

From the perspective of revolution theory, it is unsurprising that strategic groups in Syria still fear openly opposing the extremely repressive regime because they are afraid of losing their privileges. Moreover, Assad still has the full support of the security forces. It is not to be expected that this situation could change in the near future as the regime has managed to closely bind the Alawite elite. Thus the Egyptian scenario – where the military shifted away from the ruler – is rather unlikely. At the same time, there are no strong indicators for a Libyan solution, as no external military intervention comparable to the NATO operation in Libya seems to lie ahead. Additionally, despite increasing external pressure not only from the West but also from Turkey and the Arab League, Assad still has the support of influential players – namely, Russia and China, which have veto power in the UN Security Council; Iran; and Hezbollah (Beck and Hüser 2011).

In contrast to Syria, the Algerian regime was able to maintain its stable authoritarian rule. The protests, which began in January 2011, were directed against the poor living conditions and repression by the regime. Seventy-five percent of the population is under 30 years old, and the unemployment rate is approximately 10 percent (Belakhdar 2011: 82; Furceri 2012: 18). With a maximum of approximately 3,000 demonstrators (against a force of 30,000 policemen), political mobilization in Algeria did not reach the critical mass that it did in Tunisia or Egypt, where the leaders were ultimately forced to resign (Belakhdar 2011: 82–83). This was due to – aside from the horrific memories from the Algerian civil war in the 1990s – the state's immense oil rents. In 1989 Algeria appeared to be the first Arab country that could be on the path towards democratization. But when the Islamist opposition party Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) won the majority of votes in the 1992 parliamentary elections, the government blocked it from power. In a very short time the party was banned and thousands of its members imprisoned and persecuted. The subsequent civil war between supporters of the FIS and the state's security forces dragged on into the next decade and claimed more than 200,000 lives. The military elite and the heads of the security services managed to reimplement authoritarianism in the Algerian government, the material base of which was high rent incomes from the oil and gas sector (ibid.: 85).

A fundamental thesis of the rentier state approach is that socioeconomic systems that are exposed to a high influx of rents have a strong tendency to lack diversification within their economies (Beck 2011a). This phenomenon is also evident in Algeria: the Algerian economy is dominated by huge reserves of fossil fuels, which account for approximately 98 percent of exports and approximately 40 to 45 percent of the gross domestic product (IMF 2011a). These numbers reflect the weakness of Algeria's productive sectors as a result of the dominance of the oil sector, something that has been accentuated by the state's politico-economic blunders (Achy 2009). Since the oil industry is extremely capital intensive and provides few jobs, the Algerian youth pay a high price for this situation: the labor market hardly offers better pro-

spects than the informal sector (Belakhdar 2011: 82). Until now, however, the resources of the regime have been sufficient to keep its authoritarian rule stable. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika – in office since 1999 – responded to the recent protests with a mixture of "sticks and carrots": on the one hand massive repression and on the other limited political and financial concessions in the form of wage increases, a reduction in food prices, the dissolution of the state of emergency in existence since 1992 and the announcement of political reforms (ibid.: 87).

3.3.2.3 *The Difference between Stable and Unstable Transition Countries: Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen*

The distinction between transition countries that show potential for regime change and those that are at risk of falling back into old or new patterns of authoritarianism is a subject of great importance. Transition processes are complex, and there is no guarantee for the establishment of a consolidated democracy (Carothers 2002). At the same time, since the fluctuations that occur during transitions are notoriously great, the unambiguous assignment of certain cases to one of the categories in the above matrix is a difficult task. Taking a political snapshot – more than a year after the beginning of the Arab Spring (the time of the writing of this paper) – Tunisia seems to be the Arab country which is most likely to be on the path toward genuine democratization. In contrast, it is likely that Egypt's old regime is so strong that a transition away from authoritarianism could be blocked. Yemen distinguishes itself with an even higher degree of complexity.

Compared to other Arab states, Tunisia has strong potential for a successful transition due to the political, economic, and social structures of the country. In other authoritarian states in the Middle East, civil society organizations and political institutions are often underdeveloped due to depoliticization policies. Tunisia, however, has had relatively well-developed civil society structures for a long time; the labor movement, strongly represented by the country's labor union umbrella organization, the Tunisian General Labor Union (Davis 2011a), is well established. In the period from 1988 to 2009, the number of civil society organizations increased from nearly 2,000 to over 9,000 (Henry 2011: 5). In particular, women's organizations have long been very active and well organized. However, it should be noted that only a small number of these organizations acted independently from the regime in areas such as human and civil rights. Most organizations limited their work to governmentally accepted and funded areas: culture, sports, arts, economic development, and women's rights (ibid.). Women in Tunisia also enjoy a good level of education and, compared to other Arab countries, have achieved a higher degree of equality. Before the outbreak of the Arab Spring, women held nearly a quarter of seats in parliament (Davis 2011a). Critical observers point out, however, that the majority of women in politics had no decision-making power and largely took positions in areas that were controlled by the government (Matsson 2011: 8–9). Nevertheless, it can be argued that at least the institutional structures for the development of a free civil society were established by the *ancien régime* and therefore, unlike the case in Libya, do not need to be established anew. In addition, Tunisian society is more interconnected than

other Arab societies (Perthes 2011: 41–42). One-third of the Tunisian population uses the Internet (Schraeder and Redissi 2011: 11), which, even before the Arab Spring, served as a forum for the politically interested to discuss grievances about the political system (Howard and Hussain 2011: 36). After Ben Ali's fall, political debate intensified beyond the virtual world. Prominent exiled Tunisians returned to the country, and a multitude of political parties arose (Schraeder and Redissi 2011: 15). With regard to confessional, ethnic, and tribal structures, the conditions for a transition process are also relatively favorable in Tunisia as the country, unlike Yemen, enjoys a high degree of homogeneity (Plattner 2011: 7).

In the October 2011 elections the Islamist party Ennahda won 89 of 217 seats. Although this made it the strongest party, it still relies on nonreligious coalition partners (Davis 2011a). Ennahda has hitherto acted as a moderate Islamist party that does not have the goal of "Islamizing" Tunisian society according to the Tehran model (see Davis 2011a). Furthermore, the party leadership seems to also be aware of the fact that many Tunisians chose to vote for them not because of their religious affinities, but due to their role as a counterweight to the French-speaking elite of the country (ibid.).

The military class within a state plays a significant role in transition processes (Barany 2011). Even Ben Ali's predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, largely kept the military out of all political and economic decisions during his three decades of rule (1957–1987). Ben Ali continued this policy and focused instead on the construction of a state police based on the intelligence service, the Mukhabarat. Therefore, the relatively underprivileged military had little reason to fight for the regime after the outbreak of protests. Due to its political and economic insignificance, the Tunisian military – unlike its Egyptian counterpart – continues to view its role as deterring external threats and does not hinder democratization (Barany 2011: 27; Schraeder and Redissi 2011: 5–6).

Finally, Tunisia exports only minor amounts of oil, and has a relatively advanced and diversified economic system (Plattner 2011: 7). The middle class is, compared to other countries in the region, large and well educated (Davis 2011a). Nevertheless, it should be noted that these positive characteristics are analyzed in the context of the Middle East as a crisis region. If global standards are applied, the Tunisian economy must be viewed critically: the unemployment rate is 15 percent, and the economy suffered heavily during the financial crisis of 2008–2009 because of its dependence on the West, and as the result of the political upheavals of the past year. Whether Tunisia will make a fast economic recovery appears uncertain. There is, however, a high probability that the chances of successful democratization will be negatively affected if there is no economic upturn (ibid.).

Compared to Tunisia, the prospects for a democratic transition in Egypt appear less promising. As mentioned above, there is much evidence that the major political threat to the progressive political development of the country emanates from the military. Since the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) seized power on 11 February 2011, it has delayed the handover of power to a civilian government. In addition, it has not backed away from vio-

lently repressing demonstrators demanding an end to its rule. As previously mentioned, Egypt has been under the strong influence of the military since the 1950s. The military sector has built a business empire that controls, according to various estimates, 15 to 35 percent of Egypt's gross domestic product. This military-industrial complex includes a wide range of businesses – from bakeries and gas stations to factories and toll roads (Davis 2011c; Jacobs 2011).

In addition, the country faces massive socioeconomic challenges: in 2008, 22 percent of the population lived below the poverty line (World Bank 2012); in 2011 the unemployment rate rose to 12 percent and is projected to rise further, and economic growth fell to approximately 1 percent (IMF 2011b: 6–7). In order to be able to absorb all new entrants to the labor market, the country would need an annual growth rate of 6 to 7 percent according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2010: 19).

In Yemen, President Ali Abdullah Saleh resigned at the end of January 2012, one year after the outbreak of protests. Shortly thereafter, on 21 February, the former vice president, Abed Rabbo Mansur Hadi, was elected to a two-year term in office and was tasked with initiating constitutional reform. At first glance, this appears to be a prime example of a transition process. A closer look reveals that the country is indeed undergoing a process of political change; however, this process goes hand in hand with significant uncertainties due to a multitude of conflicting forces. Because of the precarious political and economic situation of the country – Yemen is the poorest country in the region – and the risks posed by al-Qaeda, many regional and international players are skeptical of regime change. The ruling elite, despite all the shortcomings of the system of government, has so far at least succeeded in preventing a total collapse of government authority, and Yemen's devolution into a failed state (Heibach 2011: 130–131). The possible consequences of further destabilization are dire: separatism in the south, civil war, or a further increase in the power of al-Qaeda (Steinberg 2010). Conflict between the country's patronage networks, which are polarized between the elites of the north and the south, the influence of extremist Islamist groups, and tribal structures are the main reasons for the precarious situation. Jens Heibach (2011: 132–142), however, argues that due to Yemen's experience with political institutions, a politicized civil society, and the existence of a "culture of dialogue," hope for a successful transition exists. However, it is crucial that political change is accompanied by an economic boom.

In the context of theoretical considerations, the revolutionary situation in the Arab world has often been compared with the situation in Eastern Europe in 1989 (Howard 2011; Way 2011: 17). Although there are similarities, it should be noted that the conditions of transition are much more difficult in the Middle East. This is, first, because the incentives for democratization are low: No Arab country has the prospect of full membership in the European Union. Second, it should be noted that the region's nationalist regimes (with some socialist paint), established in the 1950s, were an indigenous reaction to Western imperialism and colonialism, while socialism in Eastern Europe was externally imposed by the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern European states were able to return to their

economic and political heritage, which they shared with Western Europe, but the Arab world faces the challenge of having to redefine itself politically and economically. Third, the expected economic gains at the end of the Cold War encouraged economic actors to invest in Eastern European countries and to advance the reform process. The relatively uncertain dividends that are expected as a result of the Arab Spring, and concerns about the future role of Islamist groups in the Middle East, however, are limiting the confidence of investors (Marktanner 2012: 13–14).

3.3.2.4 *The Difference between Stable Authoritarian Systems and Transition Countries:*
Morocco and Jordan

The effects of the Arab Spring are not limited to those countries whose rulers have been overthrown or brought to the brink of collapse. In fact, all Arab countries came under pressure to reform. The only two remaining monarchies in the Arab world outside the Gulf region are under constant pressure to reform: Morocco and Jordan. In both countries the Arab Spring resulted in recurring protests that were less spectacular than those in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. However, if the political situation in the two monarchies before the Arab Spring is compared with the situation in 2011, it becomes clear that there has been an unmistakable qualitative leap in the political mobilization of society. What needs to be critically examined is whether the reforms that have been implemented provide sufficient evidence that the monarchies are really in a transition process. The rulers could also have chosen strategies – with reasonably good chances of success – to stabilize the authoritarian regime through limited, reversible liberalization or even simple cosmetic reforms.

The developments in Jordan and Morocco indicate the importance of the central theoretical distinction between liberalization and democratization. Liberalization is understood as an opening up of the political system in order to stabilize the authoritarian system under pressure. In specific empirical cases it may be difficult to clearly identify whether processes of political change fit into the pattern of "liberalization" or that of "democratization"; however, the two terms systematically refer to opposite processes. While liberalization is a survival strategy of authoritarian systems, and measures undertaken in this context can be reversed in times of diminishing pressure, democratization cannot be controlled from above. The distinction between the two processes is becoming even more complex because liberalization can lead towards democratization, contrary to the intentions of its initiators, as was the case with perestroika in the Soviet Union (Beck 2007a).

Shortly after protests against the government erupted in Morocco in February 2011, King Mohammed VI addressed his people and promised far-reaching constitutional reforms that were supposed to strengthen representative institutions. For the Moroccans, these promises of reform did not go far enough; instead they demanded a new constitution. The role of the popular king – public criticism of whom is taboo – is enshrined in the constitution and is based on both extensive secular and religious authority (Hoffman 2011: 92–94). Although the

regime had propagated democratic transition to the outside world for years, the political system had remained mainly authoritarian (ibid.: 96–98). Yet after the regime had initially responded to the protests with increased repression, Mohammed VI announced a referendum on a new constitution (Benchemsi 2012: 58).

Already before the outbreak of protests, the youth and the media, in particular, criticized the regime and vocalized their grievances in the country (ibid.: 97–98). Yet only with the Arab Spring has a discourse developed that does not back away from contesting the monarchy and the religious legitimacy of the king (ibid.: 102–103). Some observers regard this mobilization, "from below," as an indicator for the possible transition of Morocco into a constitutional monarchy in the European sense (ibid.: 103).

At the same time, critical observers have raised doubts about the government's commitment to making a substantial transition. This criticism can be traced back to the referendum in July 2011, in which the new constitution was adopted by an overwhelming majority. Like many of the king's speeches, the revised constitution appears to be a masterpiece of democratic rhetoric. In parts, the new constitution may actually be read as a response to the demand for the substantial limitation of royal power in favor of a democratic separation of powers. A closer look, however, reveals that major autocratic elements are still enshrined in the document (Benchemsi 2012: 57–59). The following discussion provides examples in the areas of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches that raise doubts about whether the royal family has actually decided to induce a democratic transition.

The new constitution still grants the king the right to convene and preside over the Council of Ministers, and to determine its agenda. This council's approval is required to ensure that parliament can bring in a bill (ibid.: 62); the king appoints the government's secretary general, who is able to block any of the parliament's legislation. In addition, Article 42 gives the king the right to issue laws by royal decree (ibid.).

Morocco's electoral law and its highly fragmented political landscape – there are currently 34 political parties – has ensured that no party can win more than a quarter of all seats in parliament, a situation which limits the prospect that the party system could challenge the royal palace. Indeed, the king is obliged to appoint the prime minister ("Chief of Government"), who then has the right to recommend the nomination of ministers or to claim deductions, from the strongest party in parliament (Benchemsi 2012: 63–64). However, these initiatives on the part of the prime minister are not binding for the king since the constitutional text only requests that he must "consult" the prime minister (ibid.: 64).

In the wake of the demonstrations, the demand for an independent judiciary grew loud. The regime responded by absolving the minister of justice from his supervisory role over the Superior Council of Magistrates, which holds the absolute authority on the appointment and dismissal of judges. Article 115 of the new constitution, however, grants the king the right to name half of the members of the council – an increase of 10 percent compared to the old constitution (ibid.: 65).

Jordanians' dissatisfaction with high unemployment, rising food prices, and institutional corruption were major factors in the outbreak of protests in the Hashemite Kingdom in January 2011. The largest protests consisted of roughly 6,000 demonstrators, paling in comparison with the democratic movements in other Arab states. In addition, violent riots in Jordan were nearly nonexistent. During a protest in March 2011, one protestor died during clashes between government supporters and the opposition; the exact cause of death is still a source of controversy (Hattar 2011). Measured by regional standards, Jordan's participation in the Arab Spring appears limited. However, compared to 2010, there has been a substantial increase in political protest and activism in 2011 and 2012.

The highly controversial parliamentary elections in November 2010, in addition to the regional protests, contributed to the demonstrations (Bank 2011: 30). After Prime Minister Rifais's measures to increase government subsidies failed to appease demonstrators, King Abdullah II dissolved the government on 1 February 2011 and appointed Marouf Al-Bakhit prime minister. In October 2011 the king replaced Prime Minister Bakhit with Awn Al-Khasawneh in order to demonstrate his will for political change, entrusting him with the formation of a reform-oriented government (Hamid and Freer 2011: 3). Khasawneh was not only a consultant of King Hussein's but also a judge at the United Nations International Court of Justice and enjoys international recognition. The majority of Jordanians supported his appointment, at least initially, and appreciated that he was not prone to corruption (Carlstrom 2011). While there are 16 new entries in Khasawneh's 29-member cabinet, 13 of the ministers have already held positions in previous governments (Jordan Times 2011; Hamid and Freer 2011: 3).

In March 2011 Abdullah responded to the ongoing protests by convening a National Dialogue Committee tasked with proposing constitutional amendments and reforming the highly controversial election law, as well as the laws for the formation of political parties (Hamid and Freer 2011: 3). The current electoral law of the "single non-transferable vote" was introduced in 1993 and primarily served to reduce the number of oppositional Islamists in parliament. The electoral law favors individual independent candidates who are chosen not because of their party affiliation but because of their tribal connections. With respect to electoral districts, urban areas in which the population of Palestinian origin agglomerates are disadvantaged, while candidates from rural areas – where the traditional power base of the monarchy primarily resides – are favored (Beck and Collet 2010: 3–4). It is not surprising that observers are skeptical about the announced reform program: Since 1989 four reform programs have been announced – three of them by King Abdullah – but little has changed in how the government operates. In 2005 the reform committee, National Agenda, presented a newly revised election law to the government that would have eliminated the shortcomings of the previous electoral law, but the proposal was ignored (Muasher 2011: 11–15). Furthermore, it must be noted that a new electoral law and the promotion of political parties alone would not change the fact that the parliament is a weak institution in Jordan's political sys-

tem. The separation of powers is heavily weighted in favor of unelected institutions such as the Royal Court and the executive branch in general (Hamid and Freer 2011: 3–4; ICG 2012). The reform program contains no measures to limit the power of the king, who appoints the prime minister, the ministers, and the deputies of the Senate (Majlis al-Ayan). The king can also block the laws of the House of Deputies and has the power to dissolve parliament unilaterally. King Abdullah II has used this privilege twice already: In 2001 he adopted 210 provisional laws, and in 2009 he ruled virtually on his own for almost a year before new elections were held (Hamid and Freer 2011: 4).

One more substantial development for Jordan is an anticorruption campaign launched in the second half of 2011 that led to the arrest and indictment of individuals who once held powerful positions. One such individual was Mohammad Dahabi, the former head of the Dairat al-Mukhabarat al-Ammah, the Jordanian intelligence agency. He was charged with money laundering and abuse of power. In addition, the parliament is considering indicting former prime minister Marouf Al-Bakhit for corruption in the case of the financing of a casino. One reason for this campaign against corruption is that it is the trans-Jordanian power base of the monarchy, rather than the Palestinian opposition, that has been intensively criticizing the regime for the shortfalls of the Jordanian system, particularly in terms of corruption.

In September 2011, however, the House of Deputies (Majlis al-Nuwwab) agreed to a draft law making it a punishable offense to publish corruption allegations against individuals or institutions that are not based on "tough facts." What exactly is meant by such facts was not further defined. The draft was passed on to the senate, which came under pressure from respectable journalists to reject the law. The vote was postponed indefinitely on September 29. Critics view this law not only as a glaring violation of the freedom of press; in the absence of strong institutions based on the rule of law, such a law would virtually make obsolete all efforts to curb corruption (Agence France-Presse 2011; Committee to Protect Journalists 2011; Hazaimeh 2011). This criticism is consistent with the estimations of some observers that Jordan is under the massive influence of an entrenched elite bloc that is obstructing reform processes in order to protect its own privileges (Muasher 2011: 1).

To date, Jordan has remained in a stable state of authoritarianism. The regime has created the impression of taking steps towards democratization and becoming a constitutional monarchy, but substantive political reform has yet to be seen. In the above analysis, we have questioned whether Morocco is undergoing a genuine process of democratization or simply liberalization. In Jordan, however, there are strong indicators that political change has so far been limited to purely cosmetic reforms.

3.3.2.5 The Difference between Unstable Authoritarian Systems and Unstable Transition Countries: Egypt and Libya

As noted above, it is debatable whether Egypt is undergoing a progressive transition or not. At the time of completion of this paper there are already skeptics who go one step further

and already consider Egypt to be making its way back toward an "Arab Winter." Thus, it is assumed that Egypt is in the state of an unstable authoritarian system (Byman 2011).

This assumption is primarily based on the role of the Egyptian military, which reveals little or no willingness to support a transition towards democracy. However, to date there has not been much evidence for a complete military takeover in the form of a coup, which would lead to a confrontation with major parts of the mobilized society and the further economic destabilization of the country and would jeopardize the financial support of the US and the EU. Since the military nevertheless seems to be reluctant to give up its political influence, a pact between the military and the Freedom and Justice Party of the Muslim Brotherhood – which forms, with approximately 47 percent of the seats in the National Assembly, by far the strongest party of the country – might develop. An alliance with the military would also have advantages for the Muslim Brotherhood: a compromise between the two camps could contribute to political and economic stabilization, and socioeconomic reforms that are crucial to preventing an economic collapse could be pushed forward. Additionally, unpopular foreign policy decisions – especially with regard to relations with Israel – could be left to the military (Roll 2012).

Libya's political system remains highly fragmented after the fall of the Gaddafi regime (Lacher 2011b: 11). The National Transitional Council includes former officials of the regime and the previous opposition. Hence, there are former confidants of Gaddafi, past members of the security apparatus, reformers, and technocrats among the new political leadership (ibid.: 11–12). The former oppositionists include Libyans from established notable families that were exiled, as well as representatives of the academic elite. The members of the highly segmented new elite are strongly committed to tribal structures. Controversial questions such as the model of the future government, the political and legal role of Islam, and the question of the legal processing of crimes committed by the regime are likely to exacerbate rivalries within the country (ibid.: 12–13). Given the high complexity of the Libyan political scene after the overthrow of Gaddafi, the possibility that Libya will transform from an unstable transition country to an unstable authoritarian system cannot be ruled out. Should one of the groups or alliances succeed in controlling the oil sector, Libya could also return to a stable authoritarian system.

4 Conclusion

Theory-based social science research on the Middle East has a strong incentive to analyze the Arab Spring and the changing empirical realities of Middle Eastern politics. This paper has attempted to contribute to this objective by presenting and discussing political change in the Middle East on the basis of a two-by-two matrix of political rule that differentiates according to the type of rule and the degree of stability. Based on a discussion of several case studies, the paper has shown on the one hand that this matrix helps to arrange the observed diversi-

fication of Arab regimes. On the other hand, it has shown that the matrix contributes to comprehending the dynamics of political change in the Middle East, a research topic that is still in flux.

After an exploratory summary of explanations for the Arab Spring in general, the paper has used three theoretical strands of the social sciences – rent theory, transition theory, and revolution theory – to make an explanatory contribution as to why the regimes in the Arab world have diversified, and to discuss the implications. Thereby, the rent theory approach has proven to be particularly fruitful, especially because it can explain the fundamental difference between the regimes shaken by the Arab Spring and the persistently stable regimes in the Arab world. Transition theory and revolution theory help to describe the complex, and sometimes contradictory, developments in the Middle Eastern countries – particularly in those that have been strongly affected by the Arab Spring.

Research on the Arab Spring is by its nature still in the early stages. It faces the complex task of linking general explanations of the Arab Spring with the development of individual cases. It should also critically observe further developments in the Arab region. Forecasts should be made on the basis of scenarios upon which statements of probable incidence can be made considering a theoretical background. The Arab Spring may produce four results: (consolidated) democracies, hybrid regimes, (restored) authoritarian rule, and new forms of authoritarian systems. Here it should be noted that the situation in the various Arab countries could develop quite differently. The diversification of the Arab regimes observed one year after the Arab Spring may only represent a preview. Additionally, it is also likely that developments in key countries and subregions will have repercussions for other countries and subregions. The Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia, inspired civic movements throughout the region and has since shaped the political debate across the region.

It is very unlikely that the Arab Spring will lead to consolidated democracies through smooth democratization. If we take into account the three lines of research in this paper, we see that a development similar to that in Eastern Europe in the 1990s is unlikely to take place. Economic and political rents are likely to continue to play a crucial role in the Middle East. As the case of Norway shows, rent-based democracies are possible; however, rents represent a major obstacle in the Arab world because they were available before the establishment of democratic structures. From the perspective of transition theory, the success of democratization processes depends on many factors whose fulfillment is questionable in the Middle East, even in the more promising cases. The comprehensive, decades-long socioeconomic crisis in the region has created a situation in which consumption is very distant from the production and productivity levels in the Arab world, while at the same time, social inequality is highly pronounced. The Arab world will therefore face major difficulties in achieving democratization processes that generate many winners and few losers. Thus, it is to be expected that there are major gateways for undemocratic groups within the state apparatuses as well as within society. Findings from revolution theory suggest that sections of the former regimes

may be able to persist because they have not collapsed – unlike the case in Eastern Europe after the implosion of the Soviet Union.

It is much more likely that at least some countries will pass through lengthy transition processes; these will be inconsistent and the results will be open. This could also lead to the emergence of hybrid regimes that cannot be clearly distinguished as consolidated democracies or autocracies for an extended period. With Tunisia, however, there is at least one country where some essential conditions that determine successful democratization exist.

The ruling houses of the Gulf states may not entirely escape the effects of the Arab Spring. Still, they have the potential to keep their authoritarian rule stable and to avoid transition – as long as they can manage to keep up the cash flow generated by rents and to use it for the depoliticization of society. Since the authoritarian rulers of the Gulf states gained valuable experience in dealing with the system-threatening challenges of Nasserism in the 1950s, their chances of survival remain high, pending further developments.

In those countries where the Arab Spring triggered political change, it is also possible that new authoritarian regimes will be created. Whether this will happen in some or even all countries depends largely on whether new authoritarian elites succeed in monopolizing economic and political rents. From the point of view of transition theory, however, there are significant hurdles for this negative scenario: Just as democratic forces are likely to have difficulties coping with the socioeconomic crisis in the Middle East, so are authoritarian actors. The resources in Libya appear sufficient to establish a lasting and stable government for new authoritarian rulers, which could relegate the Arab Spring to a brief episode in the country's history. In all other cases, however, given the political power that was generated by the Arab Spring, it is expected that potential new authoritarian rulers would have to create a much wider base of legitimacy than Hosni Mubarak or Muammar Gaddafi managed to build.

The long-term impact of the Arab Spring as an empirical regional phenomenon depends on whether a critical mass is reached and moderately successful democratization occurs. In this scenario – for the third time in the post-colonial history of the Middle East – regional competition among incompatible political systems could lead to entirely new dynamics of political development in the Arab world. As Maridi Nahas (1985) shows, systemic competition between republican and monarchical regimes occurred after the Egyptian Revolution in 1952. Then, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 replaced it with competition between Islamist and anti-Islamist actors. Should Egypt experience substantial democratization, this could lead to systemic competition between democratic and authoritarian regimes, with Cairo and Riyadh as antagonizing poles. Yet it should be clear that such a scenario depends on many factors whose fulfillment cannot be predicted at present.

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