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Never out of Now: Preference Falsification, Social Capital and the Arab Spring

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ABSTRACT

Could the Arab Spring have led to a rise in support for authoritarian governments in some states? Discussions of revolutionary diffusion during the Arab Spring focused on whether expressions of discontent spread to different states. Such discussions, however, neglect the potential for there to be a decrease in expressions of discontent in the wake of spreading revolutionary sentiment in certain contexts. The spread of revolutionary fervor in states with similar characteristics decreases perceptions that individuals will free ride in a revolution, and, thus, increases the perception that a revolution can succeed. This perceived increase in the probability of a revolution succeeding, however, can decrease expressions of discontent with the regime where the threat of an unfavorable alternative replacing the status quo is high. The empirical analysis of data collected before and after the Arab Spring provides evidence that the Arab Spring decreased criticism of the regime in some authoritarian contexts.

KEYWORDS

Arab Spring; Sudan; authoritarian regimes; preference falsification; civil war

On the heels of one of the most surprising events of this nascent century, the Tunisian Revolution and the fall of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Timur Kuran's words seemed prescient:

A shock that impels a few people to vocalize their grievances and demand reforms may catalyze a bandwagon process that resets the terms of acceptable public discourse and renders the incumbent regime unsustainable. Moreover, a bandwagon that topples one Arab autocracy may encourage covert dissidents in other Arab states to press their own cases, thus fueling a domino effect that alters the social landscape through much, if not all, of the Arab world (Kuran 1998).

His prediction went against a tide of scholarship on the stability of authoritarianism in the region. As the world watched President Hosni Mubarak's

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reign in Egypt end, and protests gather steam elsewhere, scholars of Middle East politics pondered how they could have generally failed to predict the wave of political activity that would engulf the Arab world (Gause III 2011). While Kuran's discussion of the possibility of a revolutionary wave in the Arab world predicted that such an event might occur, his larger body of work on revolutionary surprise and preference falsification provides the most compelling justification for why scholars generally missed the Arab Spring (Kuran 1989, 1991). If the primary implication of Kuran's thesis is that revolutionary cascades are unpredictable due to preference falsification by "covert dissidents" (Kuran 1989), the primary implication of this article is that even those who express some form of dissent prior to a spark may temper their dissent after such a spark occurs.

Missing in much of the analysis at the time of the Arab Spring was any discussion of how instability in neighboring states could strengthen the position of some authoritarian rulers (Hinnebusch 2006; Lust-Okar 2004; Werenfels 2007). There were certainly skeptical scholars who did not view the spread of protests in some states as indicative of the impending democratization of the region (Walt 2011a, 2011b; Weyland 2012). Each state in the Arab world was characterized by a different set of institutions, relationships between the governed and the governing, and histories of political organization (Ciftci 2018; Hinnebusch 2011; Lust-Okar 2004, 2005). Stephen Walt focused on these differences to explain why we should not infer that a democratic wave was imminent. Despite these differences, it is clear that some belief or sentiment spread across the Arab world in early 2011 (Weyland 2012). Kurt Weyland astutely pointed to similarities between the Arab Spring and Europe's revolutionary wave of 1848, and discussed the psychological factors that may have driven some imprudent mobilization throughout the Arab world. While these analyses differed in focus, they both presented a bleaker outlook for the prospect of immediate democratization in the region. Nevertheless, they, like others, assumed the same premise challenged within this article: A successful revolution in one state will lead to an increase in dissent in other states.

This article presents the theoretical and empirical basis to doubt the assumption that revolutionary movements in culturally and politically similar settings unconditionally lead to increases in the expression of political discontent in other authoritarian states. In states that have recently experienced losses due to political instability, the heightened perception that mobilization may succeed in producing a reversion to instability caused many individuals to shift toward expressions of support for the regime. The theory presented in this article is tested using data drawn from two samples collected during the second wave of the Arab Barometer in Sudan around the time of the 2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. In addition, these results are compared with an analysis of data drawn from Saudi Arabia and Lebanon during similar time frames in order to contrast the results from Sudan with

alternative paradigms (Tessler, Jamal, and Robbins 2012). The findings strongly suggest that what diffused across the borders of authoritarian regimes during the Arab uprisings was not an increased desire for revolution, but an increased belief in the willingness of others within society to not free ride. Although such beliefs were likely driven by misleading heuristics, as Weyland contends, the results of this analysis indicate that individuals in such settings are more pragmatic than generally acknowledged. While the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt may have acted as an exogenous shock to the belief that others were willing to contribute to the costs of protest in Sudan, this led to less rather than more dissent.

Another Democratic Wave

Prior to the Tunisian Revolution, the longevity of many authoritarian regimes in the Arab world led some scholars to presume that the region was exceptional in its authoritarian stickiness, and to seek to explain why (Anderson 2006; Bellin 2004; Lewis 2010; Stepan and Robertson 2003). A variety of answers regarding the relationship the Arab world shares with democracy were suggested, yet, in 2011, the assumptions underlying the question itself were challenged. The self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor on December 17, 2010 set into motion a series of political events that tested the notion that the Arab world's autocratic equilibrium was stable, and initiated the nearly immediate reevaluation of existent theories (Bellin 2012). Within a month of Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation, the protests that his actions brought on led to the downfall of the 23-year rule of President Ben Ali in Tunisia. While Bouazizi's actions served as an endogenous shock to Tunisia's system, Tunisia's revolution served as an exogenous shock to political systems throughout the Arab world. On February 11, 2011, President Mubarak's reign in Egypt came to an end as protesters gathered in squares throughout Egypt. It was at this moment that optimism regarding the future of democracy in the region reached its summit.

Over the course of the next six months, the world watched, and sometimes acted, as rulers throughout the Arab world scrambled to position themselves best in light of recent developments. In Jordan and Morocco, hasty institutional concessions were offered in order to prevent increased calls for change within each country. Bahrain's Sunni Al Khalifa dynasty attempted to hold onto power in the majority Shia country while facing significant protests by pairing a conciliatory tone with an increase in political repression. President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen attempted a similar strategy, but was driven out of the country on the heels of nationwide protests.¹ Libya's Muammar Qaddafi was unable to escape the Arab Spring alive, as protests gave way to an armed uprising in Libya that, along

¹Former President Saleh did eventually die a violent death at the end of 2017.

with the help of the international community, was able to topple the regime. While a violent uprising against Qaddafi succeeded in Libya, Syria's Bashar Al Assad has managed to hang on to power through both nonviolent protests and a violent uprising that followed his brutal crackdown on protesters. Even Saudi Arabia, the state that has epitomized the role that oil can play in maintaining autocratic rule, the reverberations of the Arab Spring were felt as minor protests popped up within the Kingdom. Like Saudi Arabia, the political foundations of Algeria and Sudan were not shaken by the Arab Spring, yet there were attempts to organize protests and officials acknowledged the potential political threat. The actions of one person in a rural town in Tunisia left some mark upon virtually every autocratic Arab state.

While the rapid spread of political activity led to hope that what would spring from this instability was a newly democratized region, the short-term results have not provided much cause for optimism. Outside of Tunisia, little progress toward stable democracy has been achieved. Syria, Libya and Yemen now find themselves mired in political violence and disorder. Tahrir Square, which had become one of the most powerful symbols of democratization in 2011, was the site of popular mobilization that helped usher in a reversion to dictatorial, military rule. Although the long-term effects of the Arab Spring cannot be adequately gauged at the point in time, it is clear that it did not immediately lead to widespread democratization.

Partial explanations for why each state experienced the Arab Spring differently abound. Oil wealth, institutional strength and autocratic linkages may have played a crucial role in shaping which states' rulers were able to maintain power (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2014; Tansey, Koehler, and Schmotz 2017). Moreover, previous experiences organizing politically and socially may have had an impact on whether protest movements arose, and how successful those movements were in achieving their immediate objectives (Anderson 2011). Beyond influencing the outcome of resistance, the robustness of civil society prior to the Arab Spring may have affected with whom individuals organized, and the tools that such individuals may have used (Anderson 2011; Shamaileh 2017). While the argument that the Arab Spring was the product of an angry Arab youth revolt against traditional Islamic norms and neoliberal economic policies may not have much empirical support, economic and religious conditions likely influenced the trajectory of these uprisings in nuanced ways (Campante and Chor 2012). A myriad of explanations exist as to how and why these uprisings differed, yet, as Marc Lynch (2014), a confluence of factors influenced the nature and tentative outcome of each uprising.

Theory: Social Capital, Historical Context, and Contestation

While Timur Kuran provided us with insight into why those who outwardly support a regime may end up supporting a revolution, this article presents the argument that such unpredictability extends to those who outwardly

appear critical of the authoritarian regime. In order for a bandwagon of criticism in one state to be spurred on by a popular revolution in another:

- (1) The revolution must provide salient information that increases the perceived probability of successful mobilization;²
- (2) The government must either be unwilling or unable to effectively utilize its coercive apparatus to prevent dissent;³ and,
- (3) The perceived risks associated with regime change should be outweighed by the perceived benefits.

Where the costs associated with political instability are fresh in the minds of the constituents of an authoritarian state, the perceived increase in the probability of protests should lead to a decrease in critical speech rather than an increase. Thus, even where an exogenous political event conveys salient information regarding the probability of a revolution, and the regime is vulnerable due to some weakness in its coercive capacity, where the prospect of instability is viewed as particularly undesirable, individuals will temper their criticism of an authoritarian regime.

In the case of Sudan and other Arab states with authoritarian restrictions on political mobilization, the Arab Spring acted as a shock to the expectations of citizens regarding the willingness of others in the Arab world to take on the costs of protest. The effect of such a shock on political mobilization, however, is context specific. For Sudan, where a recent prolonged civil war was still fresh in the minds of the Sudanese people, the belief that others might protest decreased criticism of the government. The increased belief that others might be willing to take on the costs of protest meant an increased probability of instability. Given the dire consequences associated with political instability in the recent past, the Sudanese reduced their criticism of the government and increased their support for the status quo. A discussion of the logic underlying this theory is presented in the remainder of this section.

Preference Falsification, Social Capital and the Arab Spring

Revolutions and revolutionary waves are inherently difficult to predict (Kuran 1989, 1991). The Arab Spring uprisings, like past waves of increased protest arising in authoritarian settings, caught most individuals by surprise (Bellin 2012; Goodwin 2011). In large part, the unpredictability of popular revolutions is due to the incentives individuals in authoritarian contexts have to falsify their preferences with regard to policy and politics (Goodwin 2011; Jiang and Yang 2016; Kuran 1989, 1991). Beyond passively hiding their preferences, citizens will

²See Strang and Soule (1998).

³See Siegel (2011).

often take actions and express opinions that appear to be in line with an authoritarian regime (Kuran 1991; Wedeen 1999). Given that the costs of dissent persisted throughout the Arab world during the Arab Spring, what did the Tunisian Revolution change to lead individuals in other Arab states to unbind themselves from authoritarian constraints on political speech?

Neither an increase in support for democracy nor changes in beliefs regarding the grievances of citizens likely explain the diffusion of dissent that was observed in some states. The rampant corruption, political nepotism, cronyism, and perception of rising income inequality throughout the Middle East and North Africa was no secret to those in the region (Borshchevskaya 2010; Brownlee et al. 2014). Furthermore, it is unlikely that citizens of more repressive states did not understand the fundamental differences between the political dynamics and coercive apparatuses in their own state and less politically repressive states such as Ben Ali's Tunisia and Mubarak's Egypt (Leenders and Heydemann 2012; Reeves 2006; Rone 1996; Wedeen 1999). These conditions were not private information. Nor is there any compelling evidence that Arabs before Bouazizi's self-immolation lacked sufficient support for democracy. The Arab and Muslim world showed substantial support for democracy prior to the Tunisian Revolution, and that level of support has remained stable through the Arab Spring and beyond (Ciftci 2010; Robbins 2015; Tessler et al. 2012). If the Tunisian Revolution did not alter the preferences of citizens, nor their perceptions of the state's willingness to repress dissent, what did it change?

As Weyland (2012) notes, the early revolutions may have led to an unreasonable increase in the belief that a popular uprising could succeed in other states. Absent a reevaluation of the preferences of fellow citizens or the willingness and ability of the state to use violent repression, a change in the belief that a large enough movement could be formed hinges on changes in citizens' beliefs that those within their state would be willing to contribute to a bottom-up transition (Kurzman 2004). The mechanisms utilized by authoritarian regimes to manufacture obedience are not only meant to signal the power of the regime, but a lack of willingness on the part of individuals to bear the costs of speaking out against the regime (Kuran 1989, 1991; Shamaileh 2017; Wedeen 1999). While citizens in authoritarian settings may be cognizant of the grievances of their fellow citizens, what is hidden is the willingness of those citizens to challenge the regime.

In order for a revolutionary movement to succeed, a sizable portion of the population must be willing to bear the costs of collective action (Lichbach 1998; Olson 1965). More importantly, in order for citizens to be willing to bear these costs, they must believe that others in society are willing to act with them to pursue the changes they seek. While unity of purpose may be a prerequisite for a non-violent movement to arise, it is not a sufficient condition for a spark to lead to a revolution (Bayat 1998). Individuals within a society must also believe

that others will bear the costs of protest. This requires trust of a generalized nature in others and civil society in order for citizens to be willing to protest.

While social capital's definition has varied, it has most often been rooted in notions of generalized trust, reciprocity, and cooperative norms, and is defined as such herein (Ciftci 2010; Coleman 1988; Knack and Keefer 1997; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994). At its core, trust is the belief that if an individual were to take some risk in relation to another person, that other person would reciprocate (Ostrom and Walker 2003; Wilson and Eckels 2011). Generalized trust is, therefore, the belief that if an individual were to take a risk in relation to strangers or outsiders, that those strangers or outsiders would reciprocate (Benson and Rochon 2004). Just as social capital and interpersonal trust may be needed for economies and institutions to perform efficiently (Arrow 1972; Grosser and Schram 2006; Putnam et al. 1994), trust between some subset of citizens is necessary for an effective political protest movement to arise (Benson et al. 2004; Shamaileh 2017). Thus, an increase in generalized trust, trust in civil society and the belief in the cooperative capacity of others should lead to an increased likelihood that an individual will protest.

When levels of repression are relatively low, individuals within a state should be able to make more informed predictions regarding the relative likelihood that others would be willing to bear the costs of protest. Where preference falsification is the norm, however, individuals will be forced to look to other sources for information regarding the willingness of others to participate in collective action. It is in this manner that outside revolutions may influence the willingness of an individual to express displeasure with the political status quo. A large-scale uprising occurring in an authoritarian context by individuals perceived to be similar to an individual's own people acts as an exogenous shock to an individual's belief that others from their own society are trustworthy and will be willing to bear the costs of protest. While this exogenous shock may not be sustained over a long period of time, in the short-term, individuals will generally believe that others will be less likely to attempt to free ride.

In short, what diffused throughout authoritarian states in the Arab world was the perception that others were willing to take on the costs associated with change. The costs of speaking out in an authoritarian context meant that while some limited dissent occurred, individuals signaled an unwillingness to bear the costs of protest through their day-to-day observance of regime-imposed political limitations. The Tunisian Revolution, having been the product of bottom-up processes in a seemingly similar cultural and political setting, shifted individuals' beliefs regarding the willingness of others to take on the cost of protest. This shift in the belief that others would not free ride should have occurred throughout authoritarian Arab states, including Sudan.

H1: The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions led to an increase in the belief that individuals would be willing to bear the costs of protest (or a decrease in the belief that individuals would free ride) in other authoritarian Arab states.

A Theory of Strategic Communication in Revolutionary Settings

While an increase in the belief that others within society will not free ride may potentially increase the willingness of individuals to voice discontent, in order for this to actually occur, individuals should prefer what they perceive to be the alternative to their current political paradigm. Interpersonal trust and social capital need not produce resistance to authoritarianism (Jamal 2009). Where individuals believe that a revolutionary movement may lead to chaos and instability, increased repression or other undesirable outcomes, individuals will be more likely to express preferences that support the government (Lust-Okar 2004). As Weyland (2012) discusses, individuals in repressive societies are forced to rely on heuristics that are often misleading to form judgments regarding the likelihood of successfully removing a government. This reliance on heuristics may artificially inflate beliefs regarding the viability of political contention, yet individuals do have information about their experiences during the state's recent past and use that information to form their stated preferences.

All revolutionary environments require potential participants to make predictions regarding how others will act (Kurzman 2004). In contexts such as Sudan, a state that had experienced drastic levels of political turmoil, and was recently shattered by a long and brutal civil war, the prospect of increased instability due to the Arab Spring led to an increase in expressions of support for the regime caused by heightened levels of risk and loss aversion (Kurzman 2012; Pearlman 2013). Whereas an expression of dissatisfaction with the regime prior to the Arab Spring may have signaled a preference for gradual institutional development or disagreement with the policies of the regime, the successful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt shifted the meaning of support for the regime. The perceived increase in the probability of a revolution succeeding did not just mean that the regime could be replaced, but that instability would likely follow.

While the concept of preference falsification is most often conceptually tied to the individual costs that are exacted against those who deviate from political or social norms established by society or the state (Kuran 1991), there is little reason to believe that the exaggeration or falsification of preferences may not take place in light of group-wide costs associated with certain actions. Evaluations of the government's performance in the shadow of potentially destabilizing protests may be higher than prior to the increased threat of revolution due to the changes in the political landscape. The mechanisms that drive this increased falsification of preferences derive from the same forces as those that motivate strategic voting.

Strategic voting entails the choice of an alternative by an individual based on a combination of that individual's sincere preferences and their perceptions of the probability of the relevant choices winning (Blais and Nadeau 1996; Cain 1978; Downs 1957). Where an individual's preferred option is not viable, that person will turn to their most preferred viable option (Cain 1978; Downs 1957). If we assume that this behavior extends beyond the voting booth, individuals will also consider the viability of their political options when communicating preferences outside of the ballot box. Like strategic voting, the strategic communication of preferences entails the consideration of what options are viable in any given context. Unlike strategic voting, however, the relationship between communication and outcomes is complicated by the fact that the signals that are sent and the potential outcomes are less clear.

Beyond falsifying preferences, individuals also exaggerate their preferences in the direction of the outcomes they seek (Minozzi and Woon 2016).⁴ Experimental and anecdotal evidence indicate that individuals exaggerate their public positions in order to try to influence the decisions and preferences of others. The implication of this for our purposes is that the misrepresentation of preferences in repressive regimes may be characterized by both exaggerated support for and criticism of the regime by individuals who are politically vocal; rather than just exaggerated expressions of support for the regime. Thus, separating those who would support a popular revolution from those who would not may be difficult, even among the regime's pre-revolutionary critics.

As a theoretical example, let us consider the communication of an individual faced with the choice to either criticize the government or to not criticize the government. This individual has some established preference ordering with regard to three potential outcomes: continuation of the status quo, gradual political change, and revolutionary political change. We can assume that some subset of individuals prefer gradual change to the status quo and prefer the status quo to revolutionary change due to a desire to see change only if such change can occur in a stable setting, and that this individual belongs to that subset. Where revolutionary change is perceived as a remote possibility, such individuals may be more likely to communicate critical messages regarding the government. When a shock to the system increases the perceived probability of a destabilizing revolution, that individual will be less likely to criticize the government.

Thus, the effect of an event such as the Arab Spring in contexts where citizens may be more risk averse or perceive a greater possibility of instability may be to increase expressions of support for the regime and approval of the status quo. While these individuals may indeed prefer the status quo to

⁴See also (Brooke 2017).

revolutionary change, their private preference still may reflect a profound disagreement with government policies. Although such individuals are probably present in many contexts, a state like Sudan, due to its recent history of autocratic rule and civil war, is likely to include a substantial number of individuals who were simultaneously in disagreement with the actions of the government while also opposed to a radical departure from the status quo. Therefore, a state that has recently experienced a costly civil war should, all else held constant, be more stable during a regional revolutionary wave than those that had previously experienced greater stability.

The Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt increased the belief that individuals in Sudan would not free ride in a revolutionary setting. This increased belief in the willingness of others to contribute to protest led to an increase in the perceived probability that mass protests could be effectively organized, which would destabilize the government. This, in turn, led to a decrease in criticism of the government. As such, the effects of the Arab Spring on criticism of the government in Sudan were mediated by beliefs regarding the willingness of others to protest.

H2: The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions led to a decrease in public criticism of the regime in authoritarian Arab states that recently experienced civil wars.

H3: The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions led to an increase in expressions of satisfaction with the status quo in authoritarian Arab states that recently experienced civil wars.

H4: For authoritarian Arab states that recently experienced civil wars, the negative correlation between the Arab Spring and criticism of the government is (partially) mediated by the effect of the Arab Spring on beliefs regarding free riding.

Alternative Causal Mechanisms

The theoretical framework presented herein is not the only one that could explain a positive shift in public support for the regime in Sudan. If we were to apply a standard preference falsification story to the Sudanese case, we could potentially explain a rise in support for the government during the Arab Spring through the increased costs associated with voicing discontent during a period of heightened scrutiny by the regime's security apparatus. Certainly, where the coercive capacity of the state was strong and was effectively used, a shift in stated preferences toward the regime likely can be explained by the government's attempt to repress dissent. In addition, the concessions offered by the Sudanese regime during the Arab Spring may have genuinely increased the perception that the state was headed in

the right direction. This may be due to the regime's response to the Arab Spring or due to another event that occurred during the Arab Spring. Thus, I examine whether fear of coercion or genuine support for the government increased due to the Arab Spring.

H5: Respondents were more likely to fear coercion by the government during the Arab Spring than before the Arab Spring.

H6: Respondents were more likely to genuinely prefer the status quo than respondents before the Arab Spring.

There are many potential barriers to revolutionary diffusion or factors that may increase support for a political paradigm; however, in a state like Sudan, we should see larger shifts in support for the regime due to strategic communication, which cannot be explained by these competing causal mechanisms.

Case Selection

Like citizens of many other Arab states in 2011, the citizens of Sudan had much to be aggrieved about. The dictatorial regime of Omar Al-Bashir had repressively and divisively ruled a fractured Sudan since 1989 after taking power through a military coup in the midst of a lengthy civil war with the Southern Sudan People's Liberation Army that continued until 2005. While much of the focus on the behavior of the regime under Al-Bashir's reign has been on the alleged war crimes committed by it, the brutality with which the government had acted in Darfur, and the support the regime had provided to terrorist organizations, the regime was equally characterized by its mismanagement of the Sudanese economy and the rampant corruption of government officials (Campbell 1999; Daly 2007; Patey 2010).

The Sudanese, however, also had reasons for optimism near the end of 2010. The Second Sudanese Civil War, which had plagued the country since 1983, had ended in 2005, and South Sudan had been granted autonomy and the opportunity to vote to secede from Sudan. Although conflict had persisted in Darfur, negotiations to reach a final settlement had been progressing. For the citizens of Sudan, despite the political and economic shortcomings of their state, stability and all of the benefits that stability brings were on the horizon. Moreover, recent increases in economic growth had likely provided some cause for optimism with regard to the direction the country was headed despite the economic crisis that Sudan had been experiencing when the Arab Spring began (Arabi and Abdalla 2013; Marwan, Kadir, Hussin, Zaini, Rashid, and Helmi 2013).

As the Arab Spring spread from Tunisia to Egypt and beyond, Khartoum experienced only minor protest activity (Hussain and Howard 2013). In January, the autonomous South Sudan held a referendum regarding its

independence, sparking minor protests against the regime that never gained significant traction. The following month, perhaps hoping to dampen any will for a revolution, President Al-Bashir, like Mubarak, announced that he would not be seeking reelection in 2015.⁵ Unlike the kings of Morocco and Jordan, however, he did not discuss institutional concessions. Although minor protests would periodically occur throughout 2011 and 2012, Sudan largely remained politically dormant despite the weakness of its central government relative to other states in the Arab world.

Sudan presents us with a difficult test case for our analysis. The relative weakness of the central government's coercive apparatus, the presence of political organizations and civil society independent of the government, and the lack of significant foreign military support for the regime or bases meant that the regime was vulnerable (see Tansey et al. (2017)). All of this would indicate that such a state would be likely to produce more rather than less expressions of discontent, yet the theory presented in this article argues that the recent history of civil war should have the opposite effect. As such, Sudan is a particularly suitable case for this analysis.

The empirical exploration of the hypotheses presented in this paper were conducted using data from Sudan from before and after the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia and the Mubarak regime in Egypt. This data is drawn from a stratified, randomized sample collected during the second wave of the Arab Barometer (Tessler et al. 2012). It was collected during two periods in the field, the first collection period ran from December 12–30, 2010, and the second period ran from March 24 – April 23, 2011. Neither collection period included respondents from the provinces of South Sudan. This allowed for the exploration of differences between individuals surveyed immediately before the Tunisian revolution gained steam, and those surveyed in the aftermath of the successful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.

In addition, data from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia was analyzed to compare to the results from Sudan. The second wave of the Arab Barometer similarly sampled from Lebanon and Saudi Arabia twice; the sampling was conducted in Lebanon from November 24 – December 6, 2010 and April 9–24, 2011, and in Saudi Arabia, from January 5 – February 6, 2011 and March 26 – April 9, 2011. No other states were surveyed as a part of the same randomization process before and after the Arab Spring. The analysis of the effects of the Arab Spring in Lebanon are meant to compare the effects on residents of a relatively liberal state with the effects on residents in a more authoritarian context. It was expected that the Arab Spring would have no robust effect on Lebanese respondents across all measures given that both formal and informal restrictions on political discourse are relatively low in comparison to other states in the region. While the first sample from Saudi

⁵Al-Bashir eventually reneged on the promise not to run for President.

Arabia was conducted during the initial stages of the Arab Spring, its analysis is primarily useful in comparison to Sudan when analyzing the distinction between preference falsification due to the fear of coercion and the strategic communication of preferences since the first sample precedes the Saudi government's brutal crackdown on protesters and the second sample comes in the midst of the crackdown by the regime. Thus, while each of these states is an example of a state that should not have experienced a shift in expressions of dissent, in each of these states we should witness different patterns pre- and post-Arab Spring.

While, ideally, cases would be chosen on the basis of their similarity across all relevant dimensions other than those being analyzed, data limitations severely reduced the availability of cases to select from. The three cases analyzed in this article represent the only three available cases from states where Arabic is the predominant language spoken where survey data immediately prior to and during the Arab Spring is available. Nevertheless, the cases do share important similarities that allow for some comparison. In particular, the shared language and overlapping sources of news regarding the Arab Spring and regional politics meant that individuals had access to similar information. In the case of Lebanon, a history of instability beyond the Lebanese Civil War, including Hezbollah's takeover of Beirut in 2008, might be expected to lead to similar patterns of expression of dissent as Sudan, yet the political openness of Lebanon meant that the Lebanese did not rely on signals from other states to draw inferences regarding how individuals in their own state would behave. As such, the similar histories of instability for these cases, as well as the weakness of the central state, allows for inferences to potentially be drawn regarding how political openness affected shifts in preferences. In Saudi Arabia, the authoritarian restrictions on discourse and political mobilization provide some basis for comparison with Sudan with regards to how differences in state coercive capacity and prior instability affect the expression of dissent. This allowed for a comparison between patterns expressions of dissent in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, where the traditional preference falsification story may have more explanatory power. Thus, Lebanon represents a politically open state where the Arab Spring should not have had much influence over Lebanese respondents, and Saudi Arabia represents the strong authoritarian state where repression and state scrutiny likely dampened expressions of dissent. Moreover, these three cases together provide interesting examples of three different potential barriers to revolutionary diffusion discussed within the article. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the economic, social and political heterogeneity of the cases is one of the study's limitations, and the focus of the analysis is on the Sudanese case.

Research Design

The primary dependent variables analyzed herein relate to beliefs regarding the willingness of others to bear the costs of collective action (*Social Capital*), criticism of the government (*Criticize Government*), *Current Economic Conditions*, and expectations regarding *Future Economic Conditions*. In addition, there is an examination of the amount of missing responses for support for democracy (*Missing Democracy*). Finally, the responses of individuals regarding a desire to *Emigrate* for political or economic reasons were also analyzed.

Social Capital, is a simple additive index of survey questions used to proxy for whether individuals believe that others are willing to cooperate with one another. Three questions, each coded as dummy variables, are included in this index, and they capture generalized trust, trust in civil society, and whether an individual feels safe in her community. Further details about the specific questions used and the tetrachoric correlation matrices of this index for each country can be found in Online Appendix D.

Criticize Government is a simple additive index that ranges from 0 to 4, and captures criticism of the regime by respondents on the Arab Barometer survey. This index was constructed by coding the responses for four questions as binaries where responses criticizing the government were coded as a 1 and responses that did not criticize the government were coded as a 0. The four questions used related to evaluations of government performance, trust in government, government corruption, and whether the government does all it can for citizens. These variables were then added together to construct the index. Given that a preference for the status quo extends beyond evaluations of government performance, this analysis also looks at an individual's evaluations of the *Current Economic Conditions* and expectations regarding *Future Economic Conditions*, which are ordinal variables operationalized on 4-point (0–3) and 5-point (0–4) scales, respectively. Robustness checks can be found in Online Appendix K.

It is possible that any increase in expressions of support for the government are due to the increased risks associated with expressing discontent during a politically sensitive period, and that these increases would be due to conventional mechanisms ascribed to preference falsification. If increases are observed and they are due to preference falsification, we should observe greater levels of missing responses for politically sensitive questions where the correct response is more ambiguous. The logic underlying the use of these proxies flows directly from Kuran's contention that individuals who do not support an authoritarian regime will attempt to mimic regime supporters (Kuran 1989). Thus, preference falsification due to fear of repression should not always lead to political silence, but, rather, attempts to blend in with regime supporters. Where individuals may have trouble ascertaining what the appropriate answer is, we should expect to see more missing answers. Questions regarding the performance of the government and political actors may have unambiguous correct responses from the

standpoint of those attempting to mimic the behavior of regime supporters, but questions that are not directly associated with the government, such as those related to democracy broadly, may not. Given that many authoritarian governments, including the Sudanese government, have made statements in support of democracy and framed their own government as being democratic in some sense, respondents would likely be uncertain as to whether they should or should not express support for democracy. Thus, the effect of the Arab Spring on the number of missing responses related to our proxy for support for democracy (*Missing Democracy*) was examined. If increased repression caused the increase in support for the regime, it would be expected that we would see an increase in missing responses for the question related to democracy. Results were also examined for an index of missingness for each of the four variables related to evaluating the government (*Missing Criticize Government*). While increases in censored responses for these four variables may not directly support a traditional preference falsification story, they were analyzed in order to better understand the patterns in the shifts in expressed preferences during the Arab Spring.

Another alternative to the theoretical paradigm discussed in this article is that the Arab Spring and the actions of the government in Sudan during the Arab Spring led to a genuinely better outlook for Sudan's prospects, and I proxy for this by looking at a question that asked individuals whether they would seek to *Emigrate* from Sudan for political or economic reasons. I also tested whether there was an increase or decrease in support for *Democracy* (0–3) to see if there was an ideological shift toward or away from democracy.

The key independent variable is whether the survey was conducted before or after the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt (*Arab Spring*). As such, the Arab Spring acts as the treatment in this analysis, with those surveyed prior to the Arab Spring acting as the control group. Due to covariate imbalances between the treated and control groups (see Table 1) related to whether a respondent came from a *Rural* community, household *Income*, *Age* and gender (*Female*), coarsened exact matching was used to partially correct these imbalances (Blackwell, Iacus, King, and Porro 2009; Iacus, King, and Porro 2012).⁶ Due to missing observations primarily related to income, missing data were imputed via Amelia (Honaker et al. 2011).

Only individuals with schooling below the secondary level were surveyed during the Arab Spring in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, and our analysis is limited to those with low levels of education.⁷ While this limits the direct inferences that can be drawn, an analysis of public opinion among the less educated is valuable in its own right, and these conclusions may be generalizable to the population as a whole absent the belief of an interaction between education and the Arab Spring exists with regard to the direction of the effect (Druckman and Kam 2011; Mintz, Redd, and Vedlitz 2006). Although the study of those with lower levels of

⁶See Online Appendix C.

⁷In Lebanon, only females were interviewed during the Arab Spring.

Table 1. Covariate Balance – Sudan.

	<i>Before Matching</i>		<i>After Matching</i>	
Multivariate L1 Distance	0.71		0.52	
N	505		318	
Univariate Imbalance	<i>L1</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>L1</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Rural	0.19	0.19	0	0
ln(Income)	0.28	0.05	0.11	0
Age	0.17	−0.52	0.09	−0.03
Gender	0.21	0.21	0	0

education is valuable in and of itself, given that the educated are likely to be better informed of the potential costs of an uprising, as well as better positioned to take advantage of Sudan's recent stability, there is little reason to believe that these results are not generalizable to the educated.⁸ Nevertheless, it is entirely plausible that the Arab Spring may have influenced individuals with higher levels of education in Sudan in a different manner than those with lower levels of education. In addition, while these results can provide evidence of causality, since sub-state populations should not be treated as representative, inferences should not be drawn regarding the magnitude of the effect of the Arab Spring on Sudanese individuals.

Empirical Analysis

A preliminary analysis of the data drawn from Sudan quickly dispels any notion of the uniformity of the direction that political preferences shifted upon witnessing the potential revolutionary wave. Among Sudanese respondents in the sample being analyzed, 39.74% expressed negative opinions of the government's performance prior to the Arab uprisings. After the Arab Spring, the percentage of individuals who negatively evaluated the government's performance decreased to 14.04% (Figure 1). In addition, the mean response on a 10-point scale (0–9) measuring satisfaction with the government jumped from 3.49 prior to the Arab Spring to 5.10 after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions (Figure 2).

Moreover, the results of the regression analysis largely corroborate the theoretical framework presented above, and supports the argument that Sudan experienced an increase in *Social Capital* during the Arab Spring that led to decreased criticism of the government. The analysis utilized ordinary least squares regression models with robust standard errors. Please see *Online Appendix K.6* for ordered logistic regression analyses of the data.

As predicted in *Hypothesis 1*, the Arab Spring did appear to increase social capital in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, although the results for Saudi Arabia are weaker and less robust across various model specifications. While the

⁸See Benson et al. (2004) and Hall, Rodeghier, and Useem (1986) .



Figure 1. Springing toward the government.

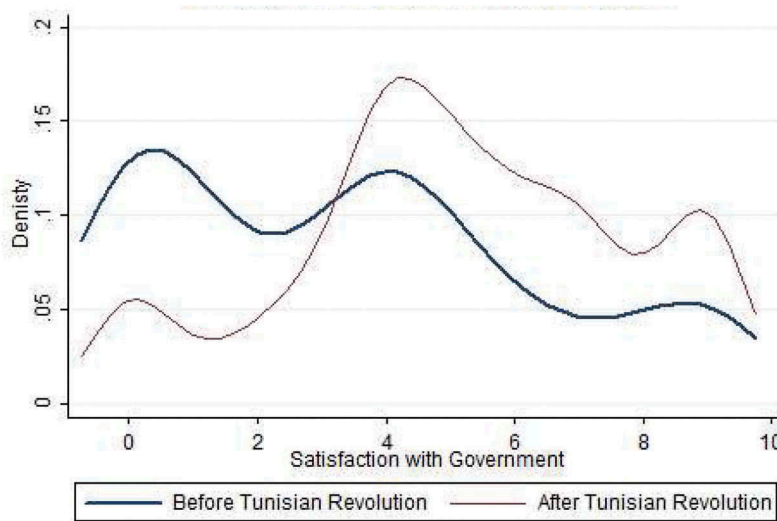


Figure 2. Increased satisfaction with the government in Sudan.

magnitude of the effect exhibited within the sample is not representative of the population, it should nevertheless be noted. There was a 0.48 increase in *Social Capital* among Sudanese respondents, and an estimated 0.26 increase in Saudi Arabia (Figure 3).⁹ This result is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level for Sudan and the $p < 0.10$ level for Saudi Arabia, and the magnitude of the effect

⁹It should be noted that this result is not the first to find social capital or interpersonal trust increasing with seemingly greater instability (Bahry and Wilson 2004).

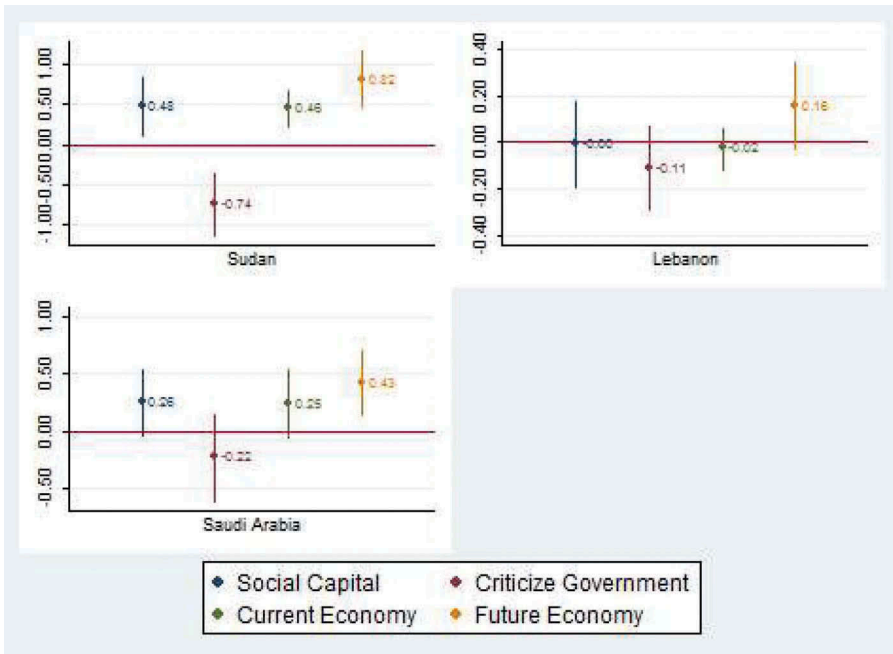


Figure 3. Evaluations of government and support for democracy (predictions and 95% confidence intervals).

was notably smaller in Saudi Arabia. The gap in the magnitude of the average effect between Sudan and Saudi Arabia is not particularly surprising given that the control sample in Saudi Arabia was collected during the Tunisian Revolution and the beginning of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, as well as the higher initial levels of social capital in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, as was expected, the Arab Spring did not appear to have a significant effect on *Social Capital* in Lebanon, supporting the argument that such a bump in *Social Capital* should only occur in authoritarian contexts where signals from outside should play a larger role in shaping perceptions of the trustworthiness of other individuals and civil society.

Was this increased belief that others would behave cooperatively accompanied by an increase in expressions of support for the government in Sudan, as was predicted by *Hypotheses 2 & 3*? The results presented in **Figure 3** indicate that beyond there not being a decrease in expressions of support for the government, there was a dramatic decrease in critical evaluations of the government in Sudan.¹⁰ Holding all other variables constant, the average decrease in *Criticize Government* after the Arab Spring was -0.74 in Sudan, and this result was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. In addition, this decrease in criticism of the government was significant in our analysis of each of the components of our index (see *Online Appendix K.6*). Moreover, this decrease

¹⁰Figure 3: Figures 3 & 4 were created using COEFPLOT (Jann, 2013).

in critical evaluations of the government was accompanied by an increase in support for the status quo as measured through *Current Economic Conditions* and *Future Economic Conditions*. These results were also significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, and the results of our robustness checks are consistent with these findings.

The results for Saudi Arabia were mixed, but there is also some evidence to support the contention that criticism of the government decreased. While there was not a statistically significant increase in the effect of the Arab Spring on the index of critical responses, there were no negative evaluations of the government performance after the Arab Spring. In addition, expressions of mistrust of the government and the perception that government does not do all that it can decreased. Nevertheless, the results related to Saudi Arabia were not robust across all reasonable model specifications that were run. Like Sudan, Saudi Arabia also appeared to experience an increase in expressions of economic optimism. As was expected, support for the government appears to have been unaffected by the Arab Spring in Lebanon.

Was the decrease in criticism of the government in Sudan due to increased scrutiny by government officials during the Arab Spring or a genuine increase in perceptions that conditions in Sudan had improved? Our results provide no evidence of an increase in fear of government reprisal in Sudan (Figure 4). If anything, the results indicate that Sudanese respondents were more likely to respond to politically sensitive questions during the Arab Spring. While we see a slight and statistically insignificant decrease in missing responses for the question regarding support for democracy, there was also a statistically significant decrease of 0.17 in missing responses for the variables related to criticism of the government that make up our index. Thus, it is unlikely that individuals tempered their criticism of the government during the Arab Spring due to a fear of coercion. In addition, there was no statistically significant or substantively large decrease in the probability a respondent expressed a desire to *Emigrate* for political or economic reasons, indicating that the increase in expressions of support for the status quo may not be due to genuine perceptions of improvement in their conditions. In addition, there was no significant increase in support for democracy in Sudan during the Arab Spring.

In contrast, Saudi Arabian respondents, were more likely to not respond to politically sensitive questions during the Arab Spring. Saudi Arabian respondents were approximately 36% more likely to not respond to the question related to support for democracy, and this result is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. In addition, respondents were also significantly more likely to not respond to questions related to the government. These results indicate that, unlike Sudan, an increase in government scrutiny during the Arab Spring may have led to the increased level of expressions of support for the Saudi regime and the status quo. Thus, while the increase in support for the

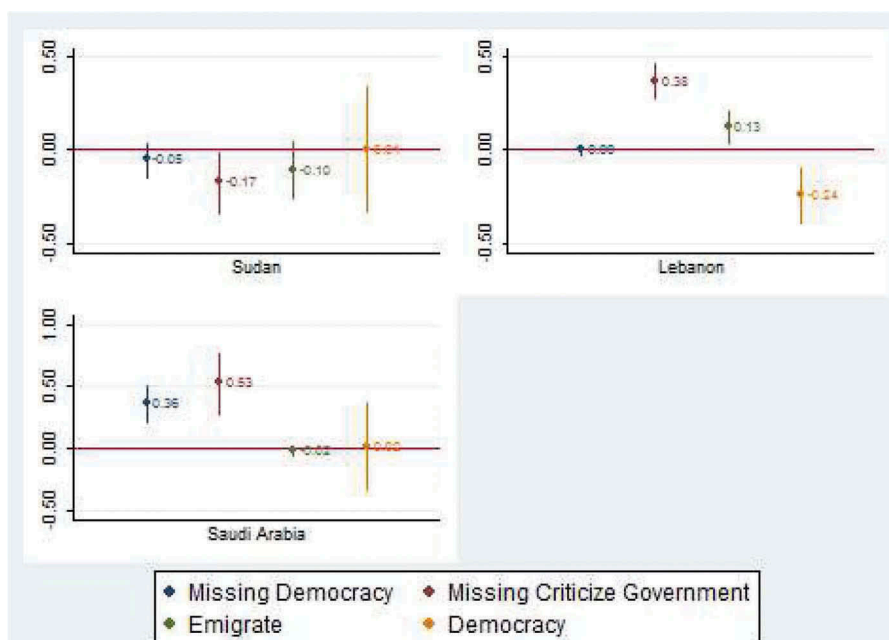


Figure 4. Increased scrutiny and/or better conditions (predictions and 95% confidence intervals).

government in Saudi Arabia appears to fit with the traditional preference falsification story and may be explained by the increase in coercive pressure applied by the government, the results indicate that such an explanation is unsuitable for the case of Sudan.¹¹

One of the primary implications of the theoretical framework presented in this article is that the Arab Spring should lead to a decrease in criticism of the government in Sudan that is partially mediated by the increase in social capital that it caused. Given that *Social Capital* is a covariate of the treatment, and the unsuitability of existing methods to remedy the issue for this particular analysis, the causal inferences drawn from the evidence presented in Table 2 should be limited (Acharya, Blackwell, and Sen 2016; King and Zeng 2005; Montgomery, Nyhan, and Torres Montgomery et al. 2018; Rosenbaum 1984). In order to test whether the effect of the Arab Spring on criticism of the government and support for the status quo may be mediated by its effect on social capital, Zellner's seemingly unrelated regression equations were utilized to implement the Baron and Kenny mediation method using feasible generalized least squares models (Baron and Kenny 1986; Imai, Keele, Tingley, and Yamamoto 2011; Zellner 1962). *Criticize Government* is the primary outcome variable examined in this analysis, but analyses of the variables related to a preference for the status quo were also included as outcome

¹¹Interestingly, Lebanon experienced an increased amount of censorship of responses related to evaluations of the government and decreases in support for democracy. As expected, however, censorship of responses to the question regarding democracy was not observed.

Table 2. Mediation Analysis.

	(1) Criticize Government	(2) Current Economy	(3) Future Economy
MV: Social Capital			
Arab Spring	0.48 *	0.48 *	0.48 *
	[0.19,0.77]	[0.19,0.77]	[0.19,0.77]
Social Capital	-0.48 *	0.27 *	0.32 *
	[-0.66,-0.30]	[0.15,0.40]	[0.14,0.50]
Arab Spring	-0.51 *	0.33 *	0.67 *
	[-0.84,-0.18]	[0.10,0.56]	[0.35,0.99]
Indirect Effect	-0.23 *	0.13 *	0.15 *
	[-0.39,-0.07]	[0.03,0.24]	[0.03,0.28]
Total Effect	-0.74 *	0.46 *	0.82 *
	[-1.05,-0.43]	[0.24,0.68]	[0.52,1.13]
Proportion Indirect	0.31	0.29	0.19

Controls and state-level fixed effects omitted from table (see Online Appendix)

95% confidence intervals in brackets

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$

variables in tangential analyses. The only mediator included in each of the models is *Social Capital*. The analyses included the same control variables used for each of the other analyses above and weights observations according to the coarsened exact matching analysis that was conducted.

The results of the mediation analysis provide support for the contention that social capital partially mediated the effect of the Arab Spring on criticism of the government (Table 1). The Arab Spring had a significant indirect effect on both criticism of the government and evaluations of the economy. Approximately 31% of the effect of the Arab Spring on criticism of the government appears to be mediated by *Social Capital*.¹² Alternative analyses that test other potential mediators in conjunction with the social capital mediator can be found in *Online Appendix M*. Nevertheless, the inferences drawn from these analyses should be tempered due to the presence of post-treatment mediators. Moreover, the results of the sensitivity analysis that was conducted (see *Online Appendix M.2*) point to a moderate level of sensitivity to violations of the sequential ignorability assumption (Imai, Keele, and Tingley 2010; Imai et al. 2011; Tingley, Yamamoto, Hirose, Keele, and Imai 2014). Across the imputed datasets, the average value of the sensitivity parameter, ρ , at which the average causal mediation effect is estimated to be zero is -0.35.

In Sudan, the Arab Spring appears to have strengthened the government's position. The dominant narrative surrounding the Arab Spring has emphasized the increased willingness of individuals to voice discontent in the immediate aftermath of the Tunisian Revolution. The analysis presented in this paper runs contrary to that dominant narrative, and indicates that the relationship the Arab

¹²A second implication of our theory is that increases in *Social Capital* should extend across all groups, but that decreases in criticism of the government should only be found among those who prefer gradual reform to revolutionary reform in Sudan. Evidence supporting this implication can be found in *Online Appendix N*.

Spring shared with the communication of political preferences may be more nuanced than has often been presented. While Sudan represents one example of where this strategic shift in the expression of preferences was particularly prevalent, it is likely that many across the Arab world in various settings also tempered their criticisms of the government when faced with the potential instability they saw on their doorsteps. Like Sudan, Algeria similarly had experienced a recent civil war, and despite there being no paucity of political grievances, its streets remained relatively quiet as the Arab Spring swept across the region. The chilling effects of a recent war on anti-regime mobilization likely also played a significant role in dampening enthusiasm for contestation in Algeria.

Conclusion

The dominant narratives that have been presented regarding the Arab Spring's effect on public opinion in the Arab world claim that the revolutionary spark lit by Tunisia and Egypt led to brief spikes in either support for toppling authoritarian rulers, or a greater willingness to express discontent. The empirical evidence presented in this analysis indicates that the expression of support for the regime may increase where citizens recently experienced the potential costs of instability. The effects of the Arab Spring on public opinion throughout the Arab world may be highly contextual. In Sudan, the Arab Spring may have been seen as potentially destabilizing, and, therefore, a threat to their newly acquired stability. In a state where stability and calm had preceded the Arab Spring, individuals may have been less risk averse. Thus, the calm that had characterized states like Algeria and Sudan, and the revolutionary sentiment that had spread in Libya during the Arab Spring may not be surprising given the evidence presented herein. While Sudan may have produced a particularly large number of individuals whose opinions shifted toward the government during the Arab Spring, individuals who shifted toward the position of the government likely existed in every state. Future analyses regarding strategic preference communication and falsification should be conducted to tease out the precise causal mechanisms that drive different responses to similar phenomena.

Context matters, and revolutionary shocks may have divergent results in different settings. The survival of the Sudanese government during the Arab Spring should not be viewed as simply the product of the government's actions. The results presented herein show that under certain circumstances, revolutionary fervor in neighboring countries may lead to an increase in expressed preferences for authoritarian stability in another country. The same event that caused some to unbind themselves from the shackles of political oppression may have led others to lean back into the open arms of their dictatorial regime. When the results of this analysis are viewed in light of existent research on voting and political participation in the aftermath of violent conflict (Blattman 2009), a general pattern of preferences for regime stability emerges among those whose lives have been touched by war.

While a recent civil war may dampen enthusiasm for a popular revolution, the stabilizing effects of war appear to fade over time. Eight years after their states laid dormant during the Arab Spring, President Al-Bashir of Sudan and President Bouteflika of Algeria were ousted from office after mass protests. Further removed from the wars that shook their countries, and with cohorts of young adults who could scarcely, if at all, recall the consequences of civil war, the threat of anti-regime mobilization increased. Both leaders were susceptible to a popular revolution threatening their authority, and such threats came to fruition as the appetite for anti-regime mobilization increased. Thus, a regime that succeeds in maintaining power at the conclusion of a civil war may find itself facing a decreased threat of experiencing a popular revolution in the immediate aftermath; however, the threat of mass mobilization may increase over time.

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