

THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

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FROM THE EDITORS

Another generation, another annus mirabilis. The Arab Spring is reminiscent of 1989, when mass protests swept out authoritarian governments across Eastern Europe. The Czech communists slid most easily from power that year, and that uprising quickly became known as the Velvet Revolution. Since then, we have seen revolutions of the most varied nomenclature: Orange, Tulip, Bulldozer, and many others. As this issue went to press, observers were struggling to find an appropriate name for fast-moving events in Moscow (a Russian Spring in December makes no sense, but a thaw in the Russian Winter?).

This issue is devoted to authoritarian government, how it falls, and what comes after. Georgy Egorov and Konstantin Sonin examine the court of the autocrat, where the dictator's fate depends on his degree of isolation and how well he manages the succession problem. Adam Meirowitz and Joshua Tucker focus instead on the protesters, asking whether today's "people power" necessarily carries over to tomorrow. Milan Svolik looks at the military—the one institution with the ability to both suppress popular protest and remove the dictator by force. Finally, Scott Radnitz tells us "what to read" on revolutions.

A striking lesson of this issue is how far the political economy of dictatorship has come in a very short period of time. Barely a decade ago, formal models of authoritarian politics were a rarity. Today, one can easily fill an issue of the Political Economist and only scratch the surface. Still, "more [models] are needed," as Roger Myerson noted in a recent issue of the APSR, and those models must be informed by sound empirical work, with the obvious challenges that poses in closed societies. There is much to do.

As always, you can join the discussion by leaving a comment at the Monkey Cage blog, which has generously provided space for select content from the Political Economist, or at the APSA Connect page where this issue is posted. We look forward to seeing you online.

Finally, please be sure to check out the citations for the Political Economy Section's award winners. They are a reminder, if any is needed, of the fabulous work being done in our field. As you do so, think about the books and papers you have seen more recently. If there is one that you think is deserving of a section award, please send your nomination to the appropriate committee.

Enjoy the issue, and happy holidays!

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FEATURE ESSAY

Authoritarian Politics 101: Examples and Exercises

Georgy Egorov, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University
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The “Arab Spring” of 2011 has (re)turned public interest to authoritarian regimes. Despite a recent surge in studies of non-democratic politics, both formal and empirical, the great bulk of political economists’ effort is devoted to the study of democratic politics. Still, at least a half of the world’s population lives under non-democratic regimes, and the beginning of the new century has witnessed the transformation of some previously weak democracies into partial or fully-blown dictatorships.

The recent economic crisis provides a second reason to focus now on non-democratic politics. The internal politics of large corporations are inherently non-democratic. The financial crisis of 2008-09 demonstrated all too well that models of a dictator’s relations with his subordinates are very helpful in studying intra-corporation organization. In both Bear Sterns and Lehman Brothers, the two major investment banks that failed during the crisis, the years preceding failure – the years of spectacular profit growth – were marked by the gradual replacement of competent deputies to the CEO with incompetent loyalists; loyalty to management rather than to corporate values also marred the last years of Arthur Andersen. Another salient feature of corporate politics is the succession problem, one of the most prominent issues of non-democratic politics.

Following the seminal work of Bueno de Mesquita et al (2003) and Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), there has been a surge of studies offering formal models of authoritarian politics. What do these models tell us about recent events in the Arab world and what is coming in now-consolidated authoritarian regimes such as Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, and Russia?

The Dictator’s Dilemma

A major prerequisite for efficient

governance and ultimately for the dictator’s survival in power is his ability to gather and process information. To rule, even the most sultanistic of dictators need to know the ever-changing needs of their subjects. Quite a few dictators showed enough aptitude in this respect to survive for decades, far longer than the most successful democratic leaders. This makes it even more surprising that, almost as a rule, dictators end up in an informational vacuum.

The tape record of the last rally that Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu called in his support reveals that he seemed genuinely surprised to see the anger and frustration of ordinary people. In February 2011, Hosni Mubarak appeared unaware of his unpopularity – both among ordinary citizens and the elite – the day before he was ousted from power and put under arrest. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi apparently considered himself a popular figure among ordinary Libyans, yet he failed to master any show of mass support during months of infighting: both the near-absence of pro-Gaddafi mass demonstrations and his reliance on mercenaries provide convincing evidence. Not surprisingly, dictatorships tend to respond slowly to the new challenges that their regimes and their countries face, and the economic performance and quality of governance of autocracies tend to be more volatile than in democracies (Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin, 2010). In December 2011, the entourage of Vladimir Putin, the paramount leader of Russia, dismissed with disbelief the exit polls showing a sharp drop in support to his party.

Some dictators come to realize the need for information, and some go as far as allowing for limited media freedom in the hope of increasing transparency and having better governance. More often than not, these are resource-poor dicta-

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tors, who cannot rely on petrodollars to enjoy a lavish lifestyle for themselves and for the broad elite and who need to provide proper incentives to their subordinates and put at least some check on corruption. In Egorov, Guriev, and Sonin (2009) we confirmed empirically this relationship between oil wealth and media freedom: in dictatorships, more oil means less media freedom, whereas in democracies the effect disappears. An oil-rich dictator can afford to stay out of touch with reality and yet stay in power; an oil-poor dictator does not have this luxury.

For any dictator there is therefore a trade-off, the “dictator’s dilemma”. Allow media freedom, and you may be brought down when evidence of your hard ways and your corruption mounts in the public mind. Repress the media and other information-gathering channels, and you are likely to stay in power for a longer time but then face an abrupt and brutal end. With less repression, the expected tenure is shorter, but in the end you may merely have to go into exile or even be allowed to stay as a citizen (often a very rich and privileged one) in the country you once ruled. Robert Mugabe’s power-sharing agreement with the opposition in Zimbabwe might have reduced his power, yet it made death at the hands of his successors or the mob less likely.

Succession and Other Issues for a Practical Autocrat

Very much like politicians in democratic countries, autocratic leaders need to build coalitions of supporters and position themselves in the policy space to keep these coalitions together. Other issues are more pertinent to autocracies. Dictators need to ensure loyalty; it is important that a close associate not betray you. It is critical that the appointed successor remain loyal; in a democracy, personal loyalty to the previous leader would not play as large a role.

The loyalty aspect of the dictator’s informational dilemma is studied in our

model of “dictators and their viziers” (Egorov and Sonin, 2011). A competent subordinate is more likely to side with the dictator’s enemies when the dictator is vulnerable, i.e., when his loyalty is most critical. An insecure or cautious dictator will therefore choose incompetent loyalists as ministers because he fears that a competent minister will betray him more easily than an inept one, and this cripples his control over the country he rules even further. In the corporate world, it might be the fate of Jon Corzine, Goldman’s CEO, ousted in a “palace” coup by the firm’s board members, that made Richard Fuld, the CEO of Lehman Brothers, surround himself with incompetent cronies.

The power that an appointed successor will possess over the dictator’s fate makes his loyalty most important. Not surprisingly, few dictators have truly solved the succession problem. The aging leaders of Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya for years failed to delegate any power to designated successors. In Egypt and Libya, rumors of possible succession by a son had long circulated, yet no real power was ever transferred. Similarly, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s choice of a placeholder from 2007 until his eventual return to the presidency in 2012 is best understood using the dictators-and-viziers model of non-democratic politics. The model suggests that if a successor has the qualities to consolidate power after the autocrat’s voluntary departure, he is most likely able to speed this departure up; Putin’s choice of a successor lacking leadership and wit is most certainly a manifestation of this reasoning.

Ultimately, the practical validity of any theory rests upon its ability to generate verifiable predictions. In 2006, we made a first attempt to generate specific predictions about the fate of the world’s worst dictators, as ranked by Parade in 2005; four of these have since ended their tenure. We listed Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan (age in 2005: 64; rank: 8) and Kim Jong Il of North

Korea (age in 2005: 64 or 65, rank: 2) as “the most likely to be killed or executed once overthrown”; both died of a sudden heart attack. For us, Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan (age in 2005: 61, rank: 9) was “the safest of the personalized dictators in the list”; he is now in exile. We suggested that “the main risk factor for Libyan Muammar Gaddafi (age in 2005: 62, rank: 6) is the degree of personalization of his power.”

Who is next? Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan (80) could be spared because of his age (he is less of a comeback threat!), but the high degree of personalization increases the threat to his life. By the same token, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov of Turkmenistan (53), who is approaching Niyazov’s god-like status at an astonishing speed, is going to be a lasting threat to any successful challenger, which makes him an unlikely survivor in the hands of the eventual new leader. It is too early to make predictions about Kim Jong Un (27), the successor in North Korea, but the more successful he is in consolidating power after his father’s death, the dimmer are his prospects to survive the loss of it. Leaders of more institutionalized regimes, e.g., mature party dictatorships or military juntas, where authority is spread over a group of individuals, are much more likely to survive their removal from power, as did Khrushchev in the Soviet Union, the multiple leaders of Communist China, or the military dictators of Argentina in the 1970-80s.

Ultimately, a leader who is smart enough to care about his final days at the helm would opt to share power with the opposition and appoint a successor well in advance of his last day in power. Unfortunately, this topic is typically not covered in Authoritarian Politics 101, and few dictators have mastered the advanced technique.

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FEATURE ESSAY

Formal Models and Political Protests

Adam Meirowitz
Joshua A. Tucker¹

With the explosion of protest in the past year in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe, and the rise of the Occupy Wall Street movement in United States, it seems an appropriate time to consider what formal models of political behavior have to say about the subject of political protest. Compared to other topics - such as spatial models of partisan competition - the study of protest is relatively unexplored in the formal literature, and represents an excellent area for future research. This essay traces out one particular formal approach that may be fruitful for understanding protests.

A prominent perspective in the seemingly disparate literatures on democratic theory, applied political science, and formal modeling is conceiving of citizens and the government as arranged in a principal-agent relationship. This perspective is similar to the longstanding treatment of agencies and firms by economists. To flesh out the details a bit, in politics we think of the government as the agent and the citizen(s) as the principal. The literature varies in the extent to which it treats the agent and principal each as a unitary actor or an aggregation of individuals.

In the formal literature the roots of this perspective originate in studies of the relationship between a representative voter and potential government decision makers. The voter is assumed to have at his disposal a seemingly blunt instrument: she can retain or replace a government. The pioneering articles are Barro (1973) and Ferejohn (1986); more recent examples include Bueno de Mesquita and Friedenber (2010) and Schwabe (2010).

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This principal-agent perspective provides for two key channels by which the principal (citizens) may influence the functioning of government. The channels are typically associated with their corresponding labels from the older literature on insurance markets. The first, adverse selection, pertains to the ability of the citizen to select as a government actors who possess competence – or a willingness – to serve the interests of citizens or hold preferences that are closely aligned with the citizens. The second, moral hazard, pertains to the ability of the citizen to create incentives for the government to make choices that are in the best interest of the citizenry. Depending on the perspective taken, the issue at stake could be how hard the government works, how much it expropriates tax or resource revenues, or whether it selects policies that are close to the ideal of the citizen(s).²

We typically think that the citizen faces serious hurdles to solving the adverse selection and moral hazard problems. She is typically not perfectly informed about important attributes of potential government actors. She may then not be able to determine who is "best." Moreover, she may not perfectly observe how they behave in office or what challenges they faced. This monitoring problem makes it hard for her to learn about quality, competence, and motivation, and it also limits her ability to determine if a government actor has worked hard or in the citizens' interest. Finally, in politics, we typically treat the principal (citizen) as severely constrained

² For the purposes of this exposition we ignore potentially deep questions about whether it makes sense to discuss the ideal policy of citizens. The large literature on social choice theory takes up this issue in great detail. See Austen-Smith and Banks (1999) for a thorough review.

in the types of instruments or contract she can use. Often models endow the citizen with a very coarse action space (e.g., replace or retain). Moreover, we typically worry about credibility or time consistency. A citizen is not usually free to commit to a strategy of sanctioning/replacing seemingly poor performance if she still thinks the incumbent will outperform his likely replacement. For these reasons, models typically imply that citizens will do worse than principals in some other contexts.

This agency-theoretic literature tends to focus on the case of a citizen who is able to replace a government at negligible cost, through a well-established and frequent election procedure. For this reason, the literature tends to ignore the relationship between protests (presumably a costly activity) and good governments or good government behavior. In thinking about revolutions, however, a sizeable body of theoretical work does exist. Acemoglu and Robin-

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son (2005), for example focus on how the risk of revolution might induce a ruling elite to make concessions to the masses. This work considers only moral hazard, not the adverse selection problem. The central thrust is that the risk of a revolution, presumably not a great outcome for the government in office, serves as a constraint on how the government behaves. It must do well enough that citizens don't find it worthwhile to revolt. Of course, the extent to which this constraint is relevant hinges on whether it is credible for the citizens to try revolting. Thus improved performance or actions that make attempted revolts really costly are both possible prescriptions for the ruling agent(s).

In Meirowitz and Tucker (2012) we take a first stab at studying the pure adverse selection side of the problem in the context of non-democratic governance. In contrast to voting, protests are costly. The citizen then is only willing to absorb these costs and replace a government that he believes to be of low quality if he thinks it is sufficiently likely that the replacement will be sufficiently better. The exact meaning of sufficiently (used twice in the previous sentence) is the main target of our equilibrium analysis. We depart from the extant work in a second way: we assume in our model that the citizen faces uncertainty not only about the quality of any particular government, but also about the distribution from which possible governments are drawn. This second-order or "aggregate" uncertainty is meant to capture settings in which democracy itself is a new phenomenon. So in Tunisia 2011, citizens might not know what to expect from any elected official, whereas in the wake of Watergate, Americans probably didn't update much about the level of corruption of potential presidents; they just learned about the corruption of one president. We find that in the former context— when aggregate uncertainty over the potential quality of the entire distribution of leaders is high enough — citizens that are willing to stomach

the costs of protesting today may not be willing to protest in the future even if government performance does not improve. Citizens protest today because they are hopeful that a replacement will be better, but after successfully replacing the poor performing government, continued poor performance can cause them to learn that future governments are not likely to do any better. Thus they learn to be pessimistic.

Of course moral hazard and adverse selection do not each exist in a vacuum. Real problems typically exhibit both aspects. In the study of elections, several papers have considered both simultaneously. Here a central trade-off often emerges. In order to make progress on moral hazard the citizen needs to be willing to replace the government if it does poorly. Tension arises because solving adverse selection means that the chosen government must be better than its replacement, so the threat of replacement may not be credible. Some recent work (Meirowitz 2007, Schwabe, 2010) shows how both problems can be partially solved in equilibrium. The citizen treats different potential governments differently. It lets the higher quality governments shirk more and the lower quality governments shirk less so as to make the citizen willing to replace either government.

But returning to settings in which the cost of replacement is not negligible to the citizen, as in costly protests, this solution can break down. In order for the citizen to be willing to replace the current government, she needs to expect that its replacement will perform strictly better (to offset the protest cost). But in order for this new replacement to be induced to behave well, it too needs to fear that poor performance will result in replacement and this replacement needs to be credible. So the replacement for the replacement would need to perform even better. This pattern is untenable, but if governments were expected to perform better at the beginning of their tenure (so as to make a new government

taking office sufficiently attractive to offset the cost of protest following bad performance by the incumbent), and then performance of the replacement were to decay, the replacement of that new government by yet another government that is likely to perform well in its early term is a credible threat. Thus in the presence of costly replacement (as in protests), a model of moral hazard and adverse selection might offer an explanation for cycling government performance or honeymoons, whereby new governments shirk less but performance decays over the tenure of the government. Interestingly, as this cycle does not hinge on moral hazard and adverse selection, it can emerge in a model of protests with only moral hazard.

What might this tell us about recent events in Egypt or Tunisia? After all, commentator after commentator has described the dawning of a "new day" in Egypt ([here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), for examples). The Egyptian people have risen up to take control of their own fate, and will no longer tolerate oppressive governments. Any attempts by future governments to oppress the Egyptian people will obviously meet a similar fate from a now emboldened population. After all, they took to the streets today: why wouldn't they take to the streets tomorrow?

And yet, we've heard this story before, and the ending isn't always so happy. One need only look to Ukraine, the site of 2004's now famous [Orange Revolution](#), when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to prevent [Viktor Yanukovich](#) from using electoral fraud to steal the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections. Fast forward to 2011, and look who is [President of Ukraine](#): the very same Viktor Yanukovich, his 2010 election to the presidency featuring a dramatic decline in turnout and barely any response from protesters.

We believe the lessons from the model we present in Meirowitz and Tucker (2012) may be illustrative here.

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Consider the case of Ukraine in 2005 following the Orange Revolution. Citizens have observed a number of bad governments. This may be because (a) non-democratic governments are bad or (b) all Ukrainian politicians are corrupt. At the time of the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians may have been motivated to protest because they believed (a) to be the case, and thus switching to a more democratic system would usher in a period where governments would be generally good. However, if 2005-2010 reveals nothing more than a series of bad, democratically elected, governments in Ukraine, then Ukrainian citizens may come to believe that they are simply living in a world where all Ukrainian governments are bad. And if that's the case, why bother protesting again?

Which brings us back to the Middle East. As of the writing of this piece, Tunisia has held multiparty elections, Egypt is in the process of conducting them, and perhaps Libya will too in the near future. Theory suggests caution is warranted in expecting the events of early 2011 to serve as a guarantee of good governance in the post-Arab Spring era. Indeed, to the extent that any post-Arab spring government fails to live up to the expectations of its citizenry, it might counter-intuitively make those citizens less likely to protest in the future. More generally, just because democracy is unleashed by people taking to the street, we need to be careful in overstating the likelihood that these same people will monitor the quality of that democracy in the future.

Finally – just as this piece is about to go to press – we are confronted with the recent images of Russians taking to the streets to protest fraudulent elections. What insights might our model offer these developments? On the one hand, the “return” of Russian protesters – who were certainly out on the streets back in 1991 and 1993 – might be seen as falsifying our arguments. Russians have clearly learned that “bad” government can come from both dictatorship and democracy, so

why according to our framework should they return to protest 18 years later? However, there is also something interesting – and perhaps illustrative – about the idea of 18 years, as that essentially represents a generation. Perhaps it is the case that idealism – defined in the context of our model as believing that the underlying distribution of government quality could be better under a different regime type than the current one – can be reborn in new generations. Thus, while for 18 years Russians were largely quiet, disappointed with the inability of democratic rule to produce “better” government, today maybe there is a new generation for whom the primary political memory is Putinism, and once again democratic elections (or at the very least something other than Putinism) hold the possibility of producing better government and, therefore, justify the costs of protest. Even more intriguingly, perhaps the effects we have pointed to – a changing belief in the underlying distribution of leadership quality in a country – itself has some sort of half-life; given enough time, people may always go back to thinking something better must be out there.

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FEATURE ESSAY

Moral Hazard in Authoritarian Repression and the Fate of Dictators

Milan W. Svobik¹

The popular uprisings that have recently swept across the Middle East have brought down some of the most entrenched and repressive authoritarian regimes in recent history. A key actor in these uprisings have been these regimes' own militaries. In Tunisia and Egypt, their refusal to quell the uprisings quickly sealed their leaders' fates; in Libya and Syria, their initial loyalty to the leadership resulted in protracted, violent confrontations between the rebels and the regimes; and in Bahrain, 1,200 troops from neighboring Saudi Arabia saved a crumbling monarchy.

Why did soldiers stick with some dictators and break with others? In this essay, I suggest that the political position that militaries take during mass, pro-democratic uprisings is critically shaped by their role in authoritarian repression. While everyday repression in Middle Eastern dictatorships – as in most dictatorships – has been handled not by soldiers but instead by the police and specialized internal security agencies, these repressive agents simply do not have enough personnel, equipment, or training to suppress an uprising of several tens of thousands of protesters. Soldiers, therefore, are any dictator's repressive agent of last resort.

Yet dictators are wary about relying on their militaries for repression. They understand that involving their militaries in the repression of internal opposition entails a fundamental moral hazard: the very resources and privileges that enable soldiers to suppress the regime's opposition also empower them to act against the

regime itself.

Consider the recently ousted Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who fled into exile in January 2011 amidst widespread protests against his government.² Like his predecessor Habib Bourguiba, Ben Ali relied for repression on internal security forces rather than the military (Ware 1985, 37). Both presidents deliberately kept the Tunisian military small, underequipped, and out of politics, fearing that a politically indispensable military might turn against them (Nelson 1986, Chapter 5). In Tunisia, military personnel were prevented from any political association, including membership in the regime-sanctioned Socialist Destourian Party (renamed the Constitutional Democratic Rally party under Ben Ali), and both leaders maintained the exclusive power to promote military officers (Ware 1985). When members of the Tunisian military attempted to participate in the ruling party's congress in 1979, Bourguiba refused to attend and dismissed the defense minister (Nelson 1986, 290).

Compare the impotence of the Tunisian military to the privileged political position of its Egyptian and Syrian counterparts. The Egyptian military has been the repressive pillar of the regime since the Free Officers brought down the monarchy in 1952 (Waterbury 1983, Chapter 14), and the military's role in repression was formalized by an Emergency Law that has been in effect with minor suspensions since 1967 (Cook 2007, 26-27). Meanwhile, the Syrian military came to dominate internal politics after a 1970 intra-party coup d'état that pitted the military wing of the Baath party against the civilian one. After the then-Minister of Defense Hafez al-Asad prevailed, he purged the defeated faction

and jailed its leaders for life.³ This is precisely the kind of praetorianism that most dictators fear.

The moral hazard in authoritarian repression thus presents dictators with a key dilemma: If they exclude soldiers from repression, they expose themselves to threats from the masses. But if they do rely on their militaries for repression, they become vulnerable to challenges from within the repressive apparatus. Waterbury (1983, 336) summarizes the latter concern when he describes Gamal Abdel Nasser's fears of his own military: "It is not really surprising that Nasser would be, from the outset, suspicious of his own military. He was able to seize power using his alliances within it, and there was no logical reason why others still in uniform could not do the same."

Hence in dictatorships that heavily rely on their militaries for repression, soldiers acquire political leverage that they can exploit. In return for their complicity in internal repression, militaries frequently demand privileges and immunities that go beyond what is necessary for suppressing the regime's opposition. As David Hume observed,

"The sultan of Egypt, or the emperor of Rome, might drive his harmless subjects, like brute beasts, against their sentiments and inclination: but he must, at least, have led his mamelukes, or praetorian bands, like men, by their opinion." (Of the first principles of government, 1741)

The military-run enterprises in Egypt (Cook 2007, 19) and Syria (Droz-Vincent 2007, 202) thus may be the modern counterparts of the donativa that Roman emperors gave the praetorian guards and the army in return for their support against rivals and the Senate (see e.g. Campbell 1994, Chapter 7).

Of course, dictators do not have

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2 See, e.g., "A dictator deposed" *The Economist* online, 15 January 2011; "Ali Baba gone, but what about the 40 thieves?" *The Economist*, 20 January 2011.

3 Van Dam (1979, Chapter 5); see also Seale (1990) and Zisser (2001).

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complete freedom when choosing whether and how much to rely on their militaries for repression. The military's size, labor-intensive nature, and proficiency in the deployment of large-scale violence are indispensable in dictatorships that frequently face or anticipate mass, organized, and violent opposition. These regimes must integrate their militaries within their repressive apparatus by granting them appropriate material and institutional resources. Once soldiers attain such a privileged political position, they naturally attempt to preserve it. Thus many authoritarian leaders simply inherit already politically pivotal militaries from their predecessors, as Hosni Mubarak and Bashar al-Asad did when they ascended to the Egyptian and Syrian presidencies.

In Chapter 5 of my forthcoming book, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press), I study how the moral hazard in authoritarian repression shapes dictators' solution to the dilemma that I highlighted above: whether and how much to rely on their militaries for repression. Briefly, I find that as the military's political indispensability grows, three regimes of interaction between dictators and their militaries emerge. I call the first perfect political control: it obtains when dictators either do not need to use their militaries for internal repression or when they are consciously accepting some vulnerability to threats from the masses in exchange for maintaining political control over their militaries. The latter is a trade-off that Tunisian presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali appear to have found acceptable. The few instances when the deployment of the Tunisian military against internal opposition was necessary – during a nation-wide strike in 1978 and the bread riots of 1984 and 2008 – were isolated and followed by the soldiers' immediate return to the barracks. The risk entailed in this strategy proved fatal when the 2010 uprisings overwhelmed Ben Ali's internal security services and forced him into exile.

At the other extreme, when dictators face mass threats of unusual magnitude, they have no choice but to endow their militaries with expansive resources and concede to any of the military's institutional or policy demands – they are effectively under military tutelage. This was, for instance, the position of Cuban governments after the fall of Gerardo Machado's dictatorship in 1933. In newly-independent Cuba, the army became indispensable in the suppression of internal disorder. But the army's political pivotalness grew even further after Machado began substituting compromise with political allies with their repression by the army. When in 1936 President Miguel Mariano Gómez – the first leader after the Machadato who did not owe his post to an overt military intervention – criticized the bloated military budget and vetoed a bill that expanded the army's role in rural education, the bill's proposer and army chief of staff Fulgencio Batista asked the Congress to impeach the president. The prospect of a surefire military coup compelled the Cuban Congress to comply with Batista's request, and the new president, Federico Laredo Brú, served as a "pliant accomplice to military rule for the remainder of the 1930s" (Pérez 1976, 108-11).

But when mass threats to the regime or the military's inherited capacity to intervene are in between these extremes, genuine bargaining over the military's institutional privileges and the government's policies takes place. This bargaining has a very specific form: the soldiers would like to use their guns to extract concessions from the government by threatening intervention; governments meanwhile have an incentive to test the soldiers' resolve to intervene by adopting policies that defy their demands. Because this interaction entails the conscious manipulation of the risk of an overt military intervention – an outcome that both parties prefer to avoid – I call it *brinkmanship bargaining*.⁴ Military dictatorships

⁴ On brinkmanship as a bargaining strategy that uses threats "that leave something to

emerge when in this push and shove for influence either the military or the government "rocks the boat" too much.

In turn, differences in dictators' reliance on their militaries for repression have potentially far-reaching consequences for the political role that militaries take during pro-democracy uprisings and in the democracies that may emerge out of them. When their position under dictatorship approximates the theoretical case of perfect political control, militaries do not have the material capacity, legal immunities, or vested political interest in taking an active role during pro-democratic uprisings. Hence it may not be surprising that, after seeing the magnitude of the protests, the Tunisian army chief of staff General Rachid Ammar defied Ben Ali's orders to assist the overwhelmed police and internal security services and thus sealed his fate.⁵

By contrast, politically pivotal militaries have a vested institutional interest in picking the right side during a pro-democracy uprising. If they side with the regime, they will certainly preserve or even expand their privileges, but they also risk losing everything if the uprising succeeds. The incentives to stick with the regime may be compounded by some of the institutional measures that dictators take in order to overcome the moral hazard in authoritarian repression. Coup-proofing measures – as they are sometimes called – frequently exploit sectarian and ethnic loyalties. Thus in Baathist Iraq, for instance, internal security services were overwhelmingly staffed by individuals from Tikrit (Batatu 1978, Chapter 58) – Saddam Hussein's (as well as his predecessor's) place of origin; in Jordan, Transjordanians (as opposed to Palestinians) receive preferential treatment in military recruitment (Brooks 1998, 49); and in Libya, Muammar Qaddafi appointed his family and tribal relationship," see Schelling (1960, 187-206).

⁵ See, e.g., "Tunisia's upheaval: No one is really in charge" *The Economist*, 27 January 2011.

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Svolik Feature Essay...continued from page 8

tives in the most sensitive security posts (Martinez 2007, 94). In Syria, Alawis – a minority Shia sect to which the al-Asads belong – has been favored in key security positions as well as the bureaucracy and the governing Baath Party since Hafez al-Asad's ascent to the presidency in 1971 (Van Dam 1979, Chapter 9). Because differences between the regime and the rest of the country have been drawn along these sectarian lines for decades, the officers within the Syrian military may fear that if the regime falls, all Alawis will fall with it. They therefore have an incentive to fight tooth and nail for the regime's survival.

If, on the other hand, authoritarian militaries side with the masses, they may preserve their privileges in the short run but risk losing them over time as the need for their services in the fight against internal opposition naturally declines under democracy. This seems to be the calculated risk taken by the Egyptian military. During the negotiations over Egypt's future constitution, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces – Egypt's interim governing military body – proposed a set of drafting principles according to which the Council alone handles “all the affairs of the armed forces,” including its budget, approves “any legislation relating to the armed forces,” and protects the country's “constitutional legitimacy.”⁶ The Egyptian military hopes to entice the pro-democratic, liberal Egyptian elite into a Faustian deal similar to that which it had offered to their authoritarian predecessors: we will protect your vision of democracy against mass threats from the poor and the conservative majority in exchange for the perpetuation of our political privileges and institutional autonomy.⁷

Hence any future, potentially demo-

6 Constitutional principles according to the text issued by the SCAF-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Ali al-Selmi on November 1, 2011.

7 “Egypt's Military Expands Power, Raising Alarms”, *The New York Times*, October 14, 2011.

cratic Egyptian leadership will govern in the shadow of the country's military-dominated authoritarian past. But unlike dictators, most elected governments can take advantage of their popular support to discourage their militaries from intervening. In Egypt, therefore, future elected governments may face even more pronounced incentives to engage in brinkmanship with their military than most dictators do – they will want to exploit their popular support in order to assert their formal authority.

This is precisely what the Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif did during his last term in office. In 1998, the Pakistani chief of army staff General Jehangir Karamat suggested that the government create a National Security Council that would permanently institutionalize the army's role in security affairs, which according to the general included the management of the economy and internal political instability.⁸ Enjoying widespread popularity after a landslide electoral victory in 1997, Sharif won a public confrontation with Karamat over the issue and forced the general to resign. But when in 1999, after his popularity waned, Sharif attempted to dismiss Karamat's successor Pervez Musharraf in another public confrontation – this time over Pakistan's defeat in the Kargil War with India – he was deposed.⁹

The moral hazard in authoritarian repression thus helps us understand not only the repressive choices and the resulting vulnerabilities of dictatorships. It also sheds light on the fate of pro-democratic uprisings and the challenges to democracies that emerge out of them.

8 See “Pak army chief tells Sharif to create a security council,” *The Times of India*, 7 October 1998; “Backdoor Junta,” *The Times of India*, 8 October 1998; “Pakistani Premier Prevails in Clash With General,” *The New York Times*, 20 October, 1998.

9 A Soldier's Soldier, Not a Political General,” *The New York Times*, 13 October, 1999; “Countdown to Pakistan's Coup: A Duel of Nerves in the Air,” *The New York Times*, 17 October, 1999.

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WHAT TO READ: REVOLUTIONS

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Revolution is in the air. Like 1848 and 1989, 2011 will be remembered as a historic year, in which long-held certainties turned out to be built on foundations as flimsy as the regimes that toppled so unexpectedly. Much of the popular commentary on these events revolves around a set of clichés—only with great restraint does one avoid mentioning “house of cards” or “dominoes”—that communicate the drama and emotion of the day. Fortunately, there is a wealth of scholarly research that allows us to take an informed and unsentimental approach to mass protest under prohibitive conditions.

The political economy literature on revolutions, social movements, rebellions, and regime change is vast. In order to produce a manageable reading list, I will cover work that is both thought-provoking and appears—at this early stage—to be most promising for making sense of the Arab uprisings of 2011. To impose some conceptual logic, I proceed from work that emphasizes the individual level of analysis and work my way “up” to studies that focus on more structural factors.

Perhaps the most salient aspect of the Arab uprisings was the sudden and seemingly spontaneous outpouring onto the streets of people once presumed to be docile, apolitical, or cowed. This puzzle—the capacity of people to suddenly change their behavior en masse—has been aptly captured in two pithy formulations describing the collapse of communist regimes two decades ago: “now out of never,” according to Timur Kuran (1991), and “from the impossible to the inevitable,” according to Mark R. Beissinger (2002). Kuran’s approach focuses on individuals. Under a repressive regime, people have an incentive to falsify their preferences to appear loyal, masking underlying dissatisfaction. Only when a precipitating event takes place, and bolder citizens express their true preferences by protesting, does the ma-

majority take advantage of safety in numbers and join in demonstrations. This leads to a sudden cascade of protest, as in the GDR in 1989.

A number of scholars have offered variations on this theme.¹ Susanne Lohmann (1994) describes an “informational cascade” but depicts participation as determined endogenously by the interaction of the regime and opposition. Joshua A. Tucker (2007) makes a narrower argument about collective action following rigged elections (in the “color revolutions”), arguing that fraud can act as a focal point for protesters, allowing aggrieved citizens to converge at a time and place when they can expect safety in numbers and enjoy a high-than-usual probability of success.

In contrast to Kuran, Beissinger places greater emphasis on structure, looking at the dynamics of nationalist mobilization and regime response in the waning years of the Soviet Union. When a regime signals that it will tolerate open dissent, it changes people’s perceptions of the bounds of permissible activity and emboldens observers who face similar constraints. Incremental changes in the perceived benefits and costs of protest can fuel increasingly bolder actions, which ultimately grow into widespread “tides” of mobilization that can imperil even the most redoubtable regime.

The approach of inferring individual preferences based on people’s participation in mobilization—from a post-revolutionary vantage point—raises the question of whether scholars are accurately depicting behavioral processes in revolutions. Charles Kurzman (2004) argues that the assumption of stable preferences is illusory because people cannot predict how they themselves would react in a situation of great uncertainty. The

¹ Some of these theories explicitly borrow from the logic of information cascades within social networks. See, for example, Granovetter (1978), Gould (1993), and Marwell and Oliver (1993).

retrospective identification of causal variables is of little use due to the high levels of contingency involved in revolutionary processes. Kurzman’s observation suggests limitations of the methodologically individualist perspective and pushes us to take uncertainty seriously. Thus, Kuran may be right about the falsification of preferences, but how could we ever know that “revealed” preferences are not formulated at the spur of the moment? Also, as scholars of the Soviet Union’s unraveling acknowledge, the catalyzing event—Gorbachev’s ascendance and introduction of political and economic reforms—lies outside of the scope of these models. Like the street vendor’s self-immolation in Tunisia in 2011, this event can be seen, for theoretical purposes, as an act of nature.

Given the difficulties associated with specifying individuals’ preferences, an alternative approach to conceptualizing people as atomized, isolated actors is to break down social movements in search of structures that pattern behavior in probabilistic ways, such as organizations that mediate people’s decisions to join in political mobilization. Doug McAdam (1986), in a pathbreaking article, finds that participants in the Freedom Summer were more likely than non-participants to exhibit strong pre-existing interpersonal ties with other activists and belong to a greater number of formal political organizations. Roger Petersen (2001) sees the structures of communities as critical to generating participation in high-risk rebellion in 1940s Eastern Europe. Where communities are characterized by many-sided and direct relations, strong norms, and high monitoring, the rebellious actions of a few tend to draw others into the fight through mechanisms similar to those described by Kuran. Misagh Parsa’s (1989) work on the Iranian Revolution highlights the network ties inhering in bazaars and the collective action facilitated by mosques, which were utilized in

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a critical alliance when the Shah alienated both merchants and clergy.

Another approach at this level of analysis, between individuals and the state, is to explore the sometimes conflicting motivations and power differentials of actors within organizations that take part in mobilization. Once we look past the conventional narrative of anti-authoritarian mobilization, which emphasizes activists' selfless devotion to the cause and unity of purpose, history tells us we may find a more complicated story behind in the Arab Spring. Participants may join opportunistically, out of greed rather than ideals, as Jeremy Weinstein (2007) argues. Alternatively, protests may be generated by elites for strategic purposes. For example, Graeme Robertson (2010) argues that governors in Russia would mobilize labor in their regions to signal their disagreement with Moscow in the Yeltsin Era. In my own work on Central Asia (Radnitz 2010), I argue that elites whose interests diverge from the regime's can cultivate a social support base by providing clientelistic goods to local communities, which they can then mobilize against the regime if their interests are threatened.

In contrast, other scholars argue that elite participation is unnecessary, highlighting how social and psychological factors can sustain insurgent organizations. Observers of the protests in Tahrir Square noted the formation of identity among the protesters over several weeks of collective action (Rashed and El Azzazi 2011). Roger V. Gould (1995) argues that the collective identity of a protest movement is critical in explaining who participates in high-risk activism, to what ends, and in what forms. Francesca Polletta (2006) notes how the creation of narratives can have causal effects on collective action by channeling emotions and creating collective identities—a vital tool for the weak when powerful actors seek to undermine the movement.

Moving up to the level of political regime, what structural conditions generate the greatest resistance? The 1989

revolutions all took place in repressive authoritarian regimes with no legal political opposition or civil society; Egypt and Tunisia were somewhat more pluralistic. By one logic, the most suffocating regimes tend to incubate rebellions. Jeff Goodwin (2001) argues that third-world revolutions during the Cold War tended to occur where states were repressive, patrimonial, and exclusionary, leaving people with limited institutional channels for dissent and no recourse but to rise up. Others, however, see semi-authoritarian regimes as most vulnerable to challenges from below because the possibility of improvement raises expectations. As Alexis de Tocqueville (1955) wrote on the French Revolution, “the most perilous moment for a bad government is one when it seeks to mend its ways.”² Similarly, Theda Skocpol (1979), in her classic work on social revolutions, saw state weakness stemming from international pressures as critical to providing opportunities for would-be revolutionaries.²

Finally, some have focused on key characteristics of unconsolidated, or hybrid, regimes that provide opportunities for the opposition, as in the postcommunist color revolutions. Michael McFaul singles out contested elections, a relatively independent media, and disunited security forces, among other attributes, that made these regimes vulnerable to a challenge from below. Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (2011) likewise see the relative freedom of opposition groups as critical for their ability to implement innovative electoral strategies.

A new wrinkle in the 2011 events is the role of social networking. Sites such as Twitter, the argument goes, allowed activists to circumvent state restrictions on assembly, spread anti-regime messages, and adapt to changing conditions. Yet upon subsequent research, we may find that this is old wine in new bottles.

² This leads to the concept of political opportunity structures, a literature too vast to do justice here, but popularized by Doug McAdam (1982).

Before the electronic age, oppositions in authoritarian systems could spread messages by word-of-mouth, gather at known sites and on symbolic dates, albeit against inferior regime technology, and undermine authority by turning daily routines to subversive ends (Tilly 1989; Scott 1985).

Concluding Thoughts

The work reviewed above is a sampling of the varied approaches to making sense of a complex phenomenon. There is probably no grand theory of revolution on the horizon, but different pieces can be assembled to provide meaningful insights, depending on one's purposes. That said, there are several ways future work can best build on existing theoretical foundations.

First, we should be wary of general propositions that stem from a small number of events, especially if those events are clustered in time and space and are conceptualized as a “wave.” Like generals who fight the last war, theorists tend to place undue weight on the most recent round of political change as a harbinger of future events.

Second, the study of revolution can benefit from more negative cases. Many studies focus on a single prominent—or in the language of qualitative methodology, deviant—case. Yet in doing so, they select on the dependent variable and lose valuable information that can come from comparisons across cases. Fortunately, the Middle East lends itself to medium-N most-similar-systems designs. For example, why did mass protests break out in Egypt and Libya but not Morocco or Algeria? Why did the president flee in Tunisia and Egypt but fight in Syria and Yemen? How does the type of regime—monarchy, dominant party, or “sultanistic”—matter in determining protest outbreaks and outcomes? Lucan Way (2011) has taken an early first cut at these questions, and others will surely follow.

At this early stage of the Arab uprising
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ings, it is possible at arm's length to analyze the economic and political factors that gave rise to protests and to speculate on the individual motivations of activists, as some have already done, in this newsletter and elsewhere. However, it will be several years before scholars can fill in some critical gaps in our knowledge of the events: How did the movements emerge and spread so rapidly? Which people were most likely to join and how were they recruited? What role did leadership play and were those leaders previously influential in society? What role was played by pre-existing social networks versus emergent structures in sustaining the movement in the face of violence? How did the state's response deter or encourage participation? What role did technology play? No doubt researchers will tackle these and other questions in the coming years and add to our cumulative knowledge about social movements and revolutions.

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

SECTION AWARDS: CITATIONS

BEST PAPER AWARD

RENAMED THE FIONA MCGILLIVRAY BEST PAPER AWARD, EFFECTIVE 2012

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST PAPER ON POLITICAL ECONOMY PRESENTED AT THE APSA MEETING)

“Learning to Love Democracy,” Milan Svulik, University of Illinois

Committee: Bill Bernhard (University of Illinois), Sarah Brooks (Ohio State), David Primo (University of Rochester).

In this paper, Milan Svulik models the mechanism by which voters’ dissatisfaction with the performance of individual politicians turns into doubts about the value of democracy as a political system. If voters believe that “all politicians are crooks,” then all politicians will “act like crooks,” even if most of them would be willing to behave in office if properly motivated. This vicious cycle of self-fulfilling pessimistic expectations is particularly likely in new democracies, after repeatedly disappointing government performance. In these circumstances, voters may rationally conclude that their particular democracy—rather than democracy as an abstract ideal—cannot deliver governance that is any better than that under dictatorship. This model improves our understanding of the failure of democracy amidst economic downturns, as in the cases of the Weimar Republic’s turn to Nazism and Russia’s return to authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin. It explains several prominent empirical regularities: why economic recessions lead to democratic breakdowns, why public support for democracy declines during economic downturns in new but not old democracies, and why new and poor democracies are more vulnerable to breakdowns than old and rich ones.

MANCUR OLSON AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST DISSERTATION ON POLITICAL ECONOMY COMPLETED AND ACCEPTED IN THE PREVIOUS TWO YEARS)

“Essays on Executive Power,” Tiberiu Dragu, Stanford University (principal advisor: Terry Moe)

Committee: Jamie Druckman (Northwestern University), Layna Mosley (University of North Carolina), Jonathan Rodden (Stanford University)

This thesis analyzes three aspects of executive power: the effect of judicial uncertainty on the executive incentives to use discretionary power, the impact of increasing surveillance power on preventing terrorism, and the role the president plays in shaping agency rulemaking. In each essay, Dragu brings powerful insights to classic questions and bridges American politics, comparative politics, and international relations in an unusual way. It is a model political economy dissertation that incorporates formal approaches and advanced empirical analyses. The committee has no doubt the essays will have substantial impacts on the discipline.

WILLIAM H. RIKER AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST BOOK ON POLITICAL ECONOMY)

From the Ballot to the Blackboard, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, Ben W. Ansell, University of Minnesota

Committee: Charles R. Shipan (University of Michigan), Orit Kedar (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), David Stasavage (New York University)

This book tackles a topic of enormous importance, albeit one that has not received sustained attention from political scientists: the political economy of education. And it does so marvelously. The argument is rigorous, creative, and elegantly communicated. The analysis is broad, reaching across developed and developing countries, and compelling. And the conclusions—which demonstrate, among other things, that democracies are better at providing higher spending for public education, that countries whose economies are open to the global market provide greater spending, and that the effect of openness to the global market is greater in autocracies—are appropriate and stimulating.

In addition, Ansell provides a model of how to do research in political economy, in at least three well-known senses of the term. First, his argument and evidence draw upon bread-and-butter concepts in political economy, such as partisan politics, interests, and questions of redistribution, which he combines into an innovative and convincing analysis of both access to and funding of education. Second, he draws upon tools often used in modern political economy to make his argument, presenting formal models of education expansion and spending that produce a number of hypotheses that he then tests using a mixture of econometric analysis and case studies. Third, he demonstrates the ways in which economic factors affect political outcomes. More specifically, he demonstrates how the redistributive politics of education are affected by labor market conditions, and in particular by how open the country is to the global economy.

There were numerous strong candidates this year, and the committee would like to highlight one other nominee, which ended up being the runner-up: The Endurance of National Constitutions, by Zachary Elkins (University of Texas), Tom Ginsburg (University of Chicago), and James Melton (IMT Institute for Advanced Studies), which is an outstanding book that examines why the constitutions of some countries are long-lived, while those in other countries expire earlier. Their analysis demonstrates that a mixture of current events (e.g., social and political crises) and decisions made by the founders of each constitution at the time they are writing it affect the longevity of constitutions.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

SECTION AWARDS: CITATIONS (CONT.)

MICHAEL WALLERSTEIN AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST PUBLISHED ARTICLE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE PREVIOUS CALENDAR YEAR)

“Building Strategic Capacity: The Political Underpinnings of Coordinated Wage Bargaining,” *American Political Science Review*, February 2010, John Ahlquist, University of Wisconsin

Committee: Scott Ainsworth (University of Georgia), Peter Rosendorf (New York University), and Sebastian Saiegh (University of California–San Diego).

Ahlquist seeks to explain variation across countries’ trade union structures and the consequences of that variation for wage bargaining. He employs a bargaining game and expectations of other unions’ behaviors to assess which trade unions choose to join a confederation. A crucial comparative static is that where there is heterogeneity in the size or the resources of the unions, large and powerful unions prefer to remain out of the confederation—because they don’t want to cede control and influence to smaller and weaker members; but when there is relative equality across the unions, larger and more powerful confederations are likely to emerge.

Ahlquist empirically tests aspects of the model, using various concentration indexes as measures of dispersion in union resources and a dummy variable for whether the largest national confederation of trade unions controls a strike fund as a proxy for the strength of the confederation. Using non-parametric methods, Ahlquist finds that more dispersion is associated with weaker confederations.

The paper offers a spare but compelling model that generates tight predictions that can be put to the test using data that closely match the variables of interest in the model. The tests are clear and informative, and they leave the reader with a sense of having had a new idea substantially established and proven. This, together with the issue area—when is collective bargaining likely to occur and be more successful—make this paper an excellent example of the quality and questions addressed in the work of Michael Wallerstein, after whom this award is named.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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