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The Arab Spring Uprisings in Geopolitical Context

by

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Abstract

The question of why revolts, civil wars, and social unrest occur is central in the field of political science. This paper asks that question in the specific context of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings as a revolutionary wave. Many theories of revolution and social unrest locate their causes in the internal characteristics of the country where they take place, such as the country's demographics or level of economic development. This paper examines the external situation of a country: its relationships with other states and the international community. This paper examines eighteen Arab countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and compares the severity of the unrest in 2011 in each country with the general international attitude toward each country's government. Compared with various internal characteristics of each country, this paper finds a fairly strong statistical correlation between the severity of unrest in a country and the negativity of the international attitude toward that country, suggesting that the foreign attitude and indirect foreign influence are significant causes of revolutionary upheaval in many countries.

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I. Introduction

In 2011 spontaneous protests erupted in nearly every country of the Arab world, from Northwest Africa to the Persian Gulf. Protests started in Tunisia in December of 2010 after the public self-immolation of a street vendor who had been the victim of police harassment in the long-time dictatorship, and the unrest spread quickly to the rest of the Arab world. Despite differences of geography, economic development, religious demographics, state structure, and other local conditions, there were protests in almost every single country in the Arab world. And since almost all were autocracies in one form or another, basically every country's protests had similar aims: the removal of dictators and the restoration of civil liberties and democratic elections. Though they failed to achieve their goals in the majority of these countries, protests in a few of these countries managed to actually unseat long-time dictatorial leaders, and in another few countries large-scale civil wars broke out.

This paper's research question is asking why this happened. An apparent revolutionary wave broke out in a discrete cultural and political region, and the question is why it was more intense in some Arab countries than others: why some protests fizzled out quickly, and why some unseated a head of state, escalated to civil war, or both. More specifically, this paper will ask a question that seems under-examined in the literature: to what extent is the external geopolitical environment a causative factor, or at least a correlated factor, in the severity of the Arab Spring uprisings? Some introductory explanation is necessary.

Most societies are the site of contentious politics, but only occasionally do contentious politics escalate to what might be defined as *revolts*, which intend not just to change some policy but explicitly to overthrow the existing government. These do not always take the form of armed revolts—open military combat between rebels and government forces—but they are definitionally different from regular protest activity in that their participants explicitly demand regime change as their primary goal (and have at least a small but realistic chance of succeeding in this). The difference between revolt and regular protests demanding reforms is captured succinctly in the popular slogan of the Arab Spring uprisings: *ash-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ an-niẓām,* "the people want the fall of the regime."[1]

One of the most important questions in political science is the question of why revolts occur, and what determines their length and severity. Some revolts use little or no violence, and some revolts end fairly quickly. Other revolts use quite serious violence, and some of these cannot be repressed quickly and therefore escalate into civil wars which can drag on for years. Furthermore, some revolts are successful and overthrow a government, but many do not. And it is clear that it is not always simply greater violent force (having the "bigger stick") that determines which revolts succeed and which fail. Some well-armed governments fall to peaceful demonstrators or lightly-armed rebels. So, the further question is what exactly makes the cases of successful revolt different from the failed ones. The answer is not obvious.

[1] Kelly McEvers, "Revisiting The Spark That Kindled The Syrian Uprising," *National Public Radio*, March 16, 2012, npr.org.

Answering these questions is important both for practical-idealistic reasons, as well as for reasons of advancing the scientific field of political theory. For practical-idealistic reasons: many people would like to see various oppressive governments fall (or conversely would like to see various governments *not* fall) and are interested in learning what conditions make that possible. For scientific-theoretical reasons: political scientists would benefit from a more detailed and empirically-informed understanding of what exactly makes citizens view their governments as legitimate and what inclines them to obey those governments. This understanding is improved by observations of the opposite conditions: atypical situations where citizens overtly stop accepting their governments as legitimate and stop obeying them. Political ideologies have preconceived notions to explain legitimacy, obedience, and revolt, but these notions are rarely empirically tested in a rigorous way.

The Arab Spring uprisings offer the most recent historical example of a true "revolutionary wave" where the causes of revolt are evidently not entirely unique to the local history and political idiosyncrasies of the one specific country where it happened, because simultaneous revolts happened in almost a dozen countries. The Arab Spring uprisings provide a useful natural experiment for political scientists to observe and draw conclusions from, and indeed many already have. The existing literature on the subject will be examined later in this paper.

The goal of this paper is to examine the historical events and the social, political, economic, and historical context of the Arab Spring uprisings, and ask this question: what conditions are correlated with the severity of a particular country's uprising? "Severity"

here is being defined to consider the actual size and significance of a country's uprising, its success or failure in overthrowing a government, and the level of its escalation to violence—especially whether it resulted in civil war or not.

There is already a substantial literature in this area and many competing theories and explanations for why the Arab Spring happened, and explanations of what factors determined where uprisings happened and the success or failure of such uprisings. Research so far has observed mainly economic factors such as unemployment, inequality, and dependence on oil rents; and internal state-structural factors such as succession of state leaders, composition of the military, and relative strength of civil society. This paper will examine an underexplored area, which is international relationships.

Mark Lichbach in 'The Rebel's Dilemma' notes: "*the state…label[s] dissidents as 'deviants' and as a small minority of 'outside agitators*.'[2] Every dictator in history (and quite a few democratic leaders as well) has blamed trouble-making outside agitators and nefarious foreign influence for unrest against the existing regime. And fallen dictators and their allies often characterize successful regime change events as "color revolutions," implying that the hidden hand of a foreign power was pulling the puppet strings of popular unrest, or at least influencing it significantly. And they're obviously not always lying, exaggerating, or delusional about this. States and international organizations *do* frequently sponsor political opposition and resistance inside of the territory of rival regimes, hoping to annoy, harass, weaken, or even overthrow them. Such outside involvement can be as mild as financial grants for peaceful civil society organizations

[2] Mark Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (University of Michigan Press, 1995). pg. 23

and political parties, or as extreme as the direct military support of coups, insurgencies, and terrorist groups.

Perhaps more importantly, direct involvement or intervention by foreign powers is not always necessary to significantly influence the political situation in a country. The mere knowledge of the preferences of foreign powers can have a powerful effect as well—even public knowledge (as opposed to private knowledge learned through secret talks with foreign agents). Many armed revolts and coups throughout history have been instigated in part by receiving the implicit blessing of foreign powers. Something like the promise that a revolutionary or coup leader will be immediately recognized by foreign countries as the legitimate president after he takes power, or the understanding that an armed insurrection will (or will not) trigger external military intervention, is often the causative factor in whether the coup or armed insurrection is launched at all. The perception that the international community's response to a rebellion or coup will be friendly can be an asset to would-be rebels or putschists. The case of Egypt illustrates this most vividly, being the site of not one but two regime changes as a result of the Arab Spring. The first was a popular revolution and the second a military coup, both of which received the implicit or explicit approval of the international community at large for removing a distasteful head of state and each time replacing him with a more desirable one.

The topic under discussion here is inherently highly subjective and non-quantitative. In their most extreme form, theories of color revolution depend in large part upon evidence that, if it even exists, would be state secrets and therefore not available to

the public, news media, or most scholars. Theories of color revolution can easily veer into the realm of conspiracy theory, and conspiracy theories are generally unfalsifiable. But even if any specific purported color revolution cannot be proven to have been the result of scheming by foreign intelligence services, in general it is undeniably true that color revolutions (or similar phenomena, like coups or civil wars) with foreign backing have occurred before in history. The concept itself is valid and real—though any particular putative claim of a color revolution might not be. This paper will attempt to examine the situation in the Arab world empirically and apply a lens like the concept of color revolutions to the events of the Arab Spring.

Applying that lens means asking whether external political considerations might be a more significant factor than internal conditions in determining whether regime changes and civil wars occur in a particular country.

This paper will examine almost all of the countries of the Arab world around 2010 and 2011, the time of the beginning of the uprisings, and attempt to quantify the situation in each of them vis-a-vis the international community. Some Arab countries had governments that were more well-liked in the international community than others; and some governments were under more pressure than others, in terms of being the target of sanctions, military intervention, foreign-backed insurgencies, etc. This paper will attempt to rank the countries based on how stable they were in their relations with other states, and based on how favorably a popular uprising was likely to be received by the international community. And then this paper will attempt to rank the countries based on how significant the popular unrest was, and whether or not it triggered a civil war. Each

country will be assigned two numerical values: a point score representing how favorably a regime change would be received by foreign actors, and a ranking of the severity of its uprising. The point score will be compared to its severity ranking, and then other factors will be compared to its severity ranking as well.

To reiterate, the question that this paper will ask is: *to what extent is the external political situation a relevant factor in the varied severity of the Arab Spring uprisings*?

Using the results of this home-made system of measurement, this paper argues that the external political situation is *at least* equally as strongly correlated with unrest severity as two other strongly correlated factors—income and regime type—and potentially even stronger than them. Together those three are much stronger explanatory factors than any others commonly identified in the literature.

Though this paper places a special emphasis and the bulk of its attention on the question of international attitudes and their relation to regime change, the overall thesis is that the foreign attitude toward a country, a country's income per capita, and whether the country is a monarchy or republic, are the three most strongly explanatory factors in explaining the disparate outcomes of the dozen or so Arab Spring uprisings. The question of international attitudes and their relation to regime change deserves special attention because it is so under-addressed in the existing academic literature. As Ted Gurr said in his 1970 work 'Why Men Rebel', there are "*a number of questions about the effect of various kinds and degrees of external support on the duration, extent, character and outcome of internal war, but few empirical studies have dealt with those questions.*"[3] In

[3] Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton University Press, 1970). pg. 270

light of the findings of this paper, it deserves to rise to a place of greater prominence and deeper scrutiny as part of researchers' theoretical understandings of revolutions, political unrest, state collapse, and civil wars.

II. Literature Review

To begin, a survey of the literature not concerning the Arab Spring specifically, but civil uprisings more generally, will be instructive for this paper.

Some substantial literature makes arguments similar to the main thesis of this paper, that foreign attitudes and intervention are often crucial factors influencing the outcomes of internal wars. For example, George Kelly and Linda Miller in their 1969 book 'Internal War and International Systems' state that:

> "*economic and propaganda instruments are familiar modes for states wishing to affect the course of internal wars in the less industrialized sectors of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East* […] *the transfer of traditional forms of interstate rivalry into newer channels is reflected in the emergence of internal war and revolution as surrogates for international war*."[4]

James Rosenau's essay 'Internal War as an International Event,' appearing in his 1964 book 'International Aspects of Internal Strife,' says that the outbreak of internal violent conflict in a country triggers a kind of feeding frenzy as foreign actors scramble to intervene:

> *"This unique dimension of violence also obtains on an international scale. Whereas both nations and international organizations are quite circumspect in their manner of intervening in the affairs of a peaceful society, caution and discretion are readily abandoned when that society collapses into—or otherwise experiences—violence. Efforts to influence the outcomes of elections in other societies, for example, are ordinarily carried out in a judicious, if not secretive, manner. Other nations usually have strong preferences about which party they want to win at the polls, but rarely will they proclaim these preferences unqualifiedly, and even less frequently will they run the risk of seeming to intervene in the campaign. When the form of change is of a violent nature, however, the situation becomes amoral; all concerned accept the principle that both nations and*

[4] George A. Kelly and Linda B. Miller, *Internal War and International Systems; Perspectives on Method* (Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1969); **appears in** George A Kelly and Clifford W. Brown Jr., *Struggles in the State: Sources and Patterns of World Revolution*, 1970. pg. 254

> *international organizations are entitled to adopt publicly—even vociferously—a position of partiality with respect to the conflict. Elections are inviolable and intervention in them is wrong, but internal wars are everybody's business and overt concern about them is justifiable.*"[5]

And, perhaps surprising more recent readers, Rosenau credits specifically American sympathy for the success of the Cuban uprising in the late 1950s:

> *"Widespread publicity can also serve to arouse otherwise apathetic publics abroad, thus enabling the insurgents—if the publicity is favorable to their cause—to procure aid more effectively from external sources. The extensive and laudatory publicity which Castro's uprising received in the United States proved to be a major factor in the overthrow of the Batista regime. Among other things, widespread American sympathy for Castro contributed to the neutralization of the United States' diplomatic posture toward Cuba and, in March 1958, to the cancellation of military aid to Batista.*"[6]

A 1964 paper by Karl Deutsch, 'External Involvement in Internal War,' appearing in Harry Eckstein's 1964 collection of essays 'Internal War: Problems and Approaches,' predicts the pattern of color revolutions being perceived as *phony* rebellions, and the quite subjective and arguable bases for these perceptions:

> *"Soon after the beginning of an internal war, experienced observers may in many cases feel confident to judge the authenticity or artificiality of an internal war, the extent and significance of outside intervention on one or both sides, the larger relevance of this local conflict in the international arena, and the probable stability or instability of its outcome. They often arrive at these judgments, however, by means of criteria left implicit and unspecified, and when their judgments differ—as they often do—they may do so on matters not only of verifiable fact but also of semantic vagueness or misunderstanding.*[7]

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[5] James N. Rosenau, "Internal War as an International Event," in *International Aspects of Civil Strife* (Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs; Center of International Studies, 1964); **appears in** Kelly and Brown, *Struggles in the State: Sources and Patterns of World Revolution*. pgs. 201-202

[6] Rosenau, "Internal War as an International Event"; Kelly and Brown, *Struggles in the State: Sources and Patterns of World Revolution*. pg. 201

[7] Karl W. Deutsch, "External Involvement in Internal War," in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches (Edited by Harry Eckstein)* (New York Free Press of Glencoe, 1964). pgs. 103-104

A 1962 international-relations theory paper by Russell Rhyne also makes an argument similar to this paper's argument: that the mere potential for foreign assistance to a rebellion to possibly come in the future—the mere anticipation of assistance—is itself inflammatory and can provoke uprisings where they might not otherwise have occurred.

> *The close proximity of Communist power all along the vulnerable arc from Iran to Korea invites external support of internal disorder, and the external and internal threats feed upon each other. Potential and half-promised intervention from powerful neighbors stimulates the rise of underground movements, invites local Communist aid to them, and inhibits popular expressions of resistance against them. Once formed, such movements offer pretexts for increasing intervention in the interest of liberation.*[8]

In brief: in a self-reinforcing process, the possibility of foreign intervention incites rebels to rebellion, and then the rebellion invites the foreign power to intervene.

Lichbach too, locates the variable of foreign support in the collective action framework he uses in his book. Regarding external actors giving aid to dissidents in other nations he states, quite obviously: "*One motive for doing so might be to conduct surrogate warfare against the regime*."[9] And he even quotes another scholar, Greene, who says "*it is consequently difficult to see the logic behind the argument that revolutionary movements are best described as 'internal wars,'*"[10] to argue that revolutionary politics in a country is really just a manifestation of external geopolitics. He explains at length the importance of external support for dissidents:

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[8] Russell Rhyne, "Patterns of Subversion by Violence," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 341, no. 1 (1962): 65–73. pg. 73
[9] Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*. pg. 179
[10] Lichbach. pgs. 189-190

> "*A dissident group can ally with a foreign power. Crozier argues that 'at a given moment external help and advice can be of great importance to the rebels.' Gurr goes even further: 'The greatest potential increment to dissident military capacity is external support.'*
>
> *Foreign assistance to dissidents takes many forms. Verbal support includes diplomatic recognition and assistance; meetings and visits; alliances, agreements, and treaties; and* ***statements of solidarity coupled with threats to opponents*** [bolding mine]. *Nonmilitary support includes technical assistance and training, as well as material and financial aid (e.g., loans, bank arrangements). Military support includes arms and supplies; technical assistance, logistic planning, and advice given by military advisers and/or mercenaries in either an official or unofficial status…"*[11]

Lichbach also identifies a key element that is relevant to this paper's argument, which is that the most overt assistance and most explicit expressions of support come *after* a serious rebellion has already begun in earnest.

> *"Chong identifies a final motive encouraging the foreign patronage of collective dissent: 'Outside assistance from sympathetic and supportive third parties tends to be conditioned upon the ability of the movement to launch and sustain itself'–that is, on the hope that the dissidents may actually succeed. Patrons, no less than dissidents, will not contribute to lost causes.*
>
> *[…]*
>
> *A foreign patron's expectations concerning the dissidents' chances for success are related, second, to the existing scale of dissident activities. More foreign support for dissidents will be forthcoming in campaigns that are geographically broad and temporally enduring. Hence, significantly more external support is provided for internal wars than for conspiracy or turmoil."*[12]

Foreign patrons of internal dissent are not dedicated entrepreneurs seeking to organize an entire rebellion from the ground up, Lichbach says. They are opportunistic band-wagoners who will give their support to a rebellion that has already begun.

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[11] Lichbach. pg. 189
[12] Lichbach. pgs. 179-180

Moving on to the matter of economic development, a long trend in the literature denies that poverty in general is a cause of unrest. George Kelly and Clifford Brown in their anthology textbook on the subject, 'Struggles in the State: Sources and Patterns of World Revolution,' collect the writings of several authors who make the case that poverty or indeed economic crisis in general are not correlated with unrest. They report Pitirim Sorokin's findings:

> "*…not only is there no correlation […] between internal violence and the rise or decline of a society (or the well-being of its citizens) […] If Sorokin is to be believed, all the premises of stability […] in advanced industrial society are false.*"[13]

They also include James C. Davies's influential article 'Toward a Theory of Revolution' which argues:

> "*…revolutions ordinarily do not occur when a society is generally impoverished—when as de Tocqueville put it, evils that seem inevitable are patiently endured. They are endured in the extreme case because the physical and mental energies of people are totally employed in the process of merely staying alive.*"[14]

And they include Harry Eckstein's article 'On the Etiology of Internal Wars', which states:

> *"It now seems generally agreed that persistent poverty in a society rarely leads to political violence. Quite the contrary. As Edwards points out, following an argument already developed by de Tocqueville, economic oppression, indeed all kinds of oppression, seems to wane rather than increase in pre-revolutionary periods. Brinton makes the same point. While not underestimating the amount of poverty in the societies he analyzes in* The Anatomy of Revolution*, he does point out that all of these societies were economically progressive rather than retrograde… Even some Marxists seem to share this view. Trotsky, for example, once remarked that*

[13] Kelly and Brown, *Struggles in the State: Sources and Patterns of World Revolution*. pg. 124
[14] James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review* Vol.27 (1), (1962): 5–19.

> *if poverty and oppression were a precipitant of revolution, the lower classes would always be in revolt, and obviously he had a point."*[15]

However, some portions of the literature do find a correlation between national poverty and political instability. Ekkart Zimmerman in his 1983 book 'Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions' reports that countries experience more "domestic violence" (here meaning violent political instability not spousal abuse) the later they have begun economic development, such that countries which began developing centuries ago experience less violence than countries which only began developing recently.[16] Zimmerman also reports that in Africa and Asia, lower-income countries experience more military coups than higher-income countries.[17] And finally, Zimmerman asserts that Marx's theory that revolution will come in the economically-advanced, industrialized countries has been refuted:

> *"In any case, there is evidence enough to refute Marx's theory of a greater likelihood (or more precisely his definitive forecast) of revolution in industrially more advanced countries. Twentieth century revolutions predominantly took place in backward agricultural societies (or in partially modernizing ones) ..."*[18]

Lichbach in 'The Rebel's Dilemma' also argues at one point that wealth is an impediment to revolt, saying:

> "*It is economical to accept authority* […] *subordinates certainly recognize that superordinates are less than perfect, but they also know that nonaction conserves their attention, energy, resources, and so on. In short, only people who have nothing to lose but their chains will rebel.*"[19]

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[15] Harry Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 4, no. 2 (1965): 133–63.
[16] Ekkart Zimmerman, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research* (Schenkman Publishing Co., 1983). pg. 95
[17] Zimmerman. pg. 253
[18] Zimmerman. pg. 322
[19] Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*. pg. 42

However, Lichbach substantially complicates this in later portions of his book, arguing that both the financially unsuccessful and the independently wealthy are more inclined to rebel.[20]

*** * ***

Next, I will summarize a survey of the literature concerning the Arab Spring more specifically.

As stated previously, identifying the causes of political unrest is one of the most important questions in political science; so even within only a year or two of the events occurring there was already abundant literature on the topic of the Arab Spring uprisings, which has only expanded since. A 2013 *Economist* magazine special report on the Spring identifies a few key variables that will become themes in the academic literature: inequality and high unemployment; youth bulges and urbanization; weak or unstable state structures; the proliferation of the Internet and social media; Islamism and religious sectarianism; and economies' dependence on oil wealth.[21]

The existing literature on the Arab Spring uprisings come from several different fields and have a few different methodological perspectives. Some are political-science studies attempting comparative case studies, where others are more historical in orientation, reading like collections of news reporting and primary sources compiled to craft a historical narrative that doesn't necessarily try to analyze the events in the house style of academic political science.

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[20] Lichbach. pgs. 97-98

[21] Max Rodenbeck, "A Climate of Change - Special Report: The Arab Spring," *The Economist*, July 13, 2013.

Regardless of the scientific rigor of the papers in the existing literature, most tend to explain the Arab Spring uprisings either in economic terms or in terms of internal political structures. The economic explanations of the uprisings tend to come in the form of two basic frameworks. One is a broader type of narrative that focuses on the role of factors such as income inequality and unemployment and the ramifications of late- and post-Cold War privatization and structural adjustment programs, from the 1980s through the decade of the 2000s. The other focuses more narrowly on the role of oil rents and the 'petrostate' model, comparing the outcomes of Arab countries with economies heavily dependent on energy exports with the outcomes of countries that have little to no energy.

The explanations that come in terms of political structures can be much more diverse and detailed. Some focus on the role of regime type, Arab republics vs. Arab monarchies—as well as quasi-monarchical republics where autocratic power has passed down from father to son, or was planned to.[22] Some focus on the role of political expectations, seeing greater potential for revolt in those countries where the population saw reform as politically viable or were explicitly promised reforms by their governments in the recent past, as opposed to stable autocracies where the population perceived no realistic possibility of democratic reform.[23] Some explain the uprisings in terms of political inclusivity and pluralism, such as whether the state had any significant elected positions, whether there was an active civil society, or whether there was a

[22] Rex Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012). pg. 182
[23] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*.

disenfranchised religious or ethnic group in the country resentful of the exclusive power and privilege of the dominant group.[24]

However, much of the literature is focused on explaining the success of revolts, not necessarily their *incidence*. This is obviously useful, but it is in some ways a different question than the one this paper attempts to answer. For example, a 2013 article by Muzammil and Howard in the *International Studies Review* finds that an economy not being based on oil wealth, and especially the uncensored availability of the Internet, are two factors most positively associated with success in overthrowing dictators in the Arab Spring uprisings. However, somewhat humorously, the authors reference the aforementioned *Economist* report to dispute its claim that Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq (all countries which had bloody civil wars in the wake of the Spring) were the most vulnerable regimes based on a variety of statistical variables, because those regimes did not democratize or see major political concessions to protesters, unlike Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, which the authors assert did not appear as vulnerable in the *Economist*'s analysis.[25]

That distinction draws attention to the importance of framing in the literature. Research examining why revolts *succeed* will often find dramatically different results than research examining why revolts *happen*. To a presumptive observer, these might seem like inherently connected questions, with the assumption that a successful revolt is basically just a more complete version of any revolt. One might assume that whatever

[24] Donatella della Porta et al., *Social Movements and Civil War* (Routledge, 2018). pg. 30
[25] Muzammil M. Hussain and Philip N. Howard, "What Best Explains Successful Protest Cascades? ICTs and the Fuzzy Causes of the Arab Spring," *International Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (March 2013): 48–66.

factors are correlated with revolts in general will probably be especially highly correlated with successful revolts. It is an ideological assumption that revolts are caused by popular discontent and that at a sufficiently high level of popular discontent, regime change must inevitably occur, because regime survival is simply politically untenable once discontent has reached an extreme. That ideological assumption is one of the things to be examined in this paper.

But, as stated above, the literature usually examines the two questions—whether there was a successful revolution and whether there was violent conflict—separately. In some cases it even constructs a binary of successful vs. failed revolts, where the category of "failed revolts" includes both those that fizzled out quietly as well as those that led to deadly years-long civil wars! Then both of those kinds of situations are contrasted with the successful revolts that quickly and relatively peacefully overthrew their regimes. This is useful in studying democratization, but less useful in the field of conflict studies—it would not make sense to consider a civil war and a situation of no unrest at all to be equivalent historical outcomes.

* * *

Below, I will briefly summarize a broad survey of the last decade's literature on the Arab Spring uprisings, identifying key factors that other researchers have pointed to as the decisive factors in determining the different outcomes across the Arab world.

One of the earliest books on the topic, 'Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World,' written in 2012 by Brynen, Moore, Salloukh and Zahar, discusses most of the Arab world countries in 2011, both those that saw large-

scale unrest and regime change, and those that saw small, muted protests of little political significance. It outlines a brief history of each of them in terms of economic and state-structural factors, and then goes into detail describing the various broad historiographic or political-science frameworks that scholars have applied.

Brynen et al. lay out a few theories that political scientists have applied, though not necessarily definitively arguing for any of them. They point to economists Beblawi and Luciani who argued for a rentier-state theory, which argues that the lack of democracy in many Arab states was tied to how dependent the country's economy was on foreign-derived rents, mainly oil, but also foreign aid, cash remittances from emigrants, and use-fees for things like the Suez Canal and foreign military bases. The main theory being that "*state access to rents broke the taxation-representation linkage that was crucial to the development of democracy in the West.*"[26] But they quickly point out that this theory seems to have shown limited utility in explaining outcomes in the Arab Spring, as there didn't seem to be a strong correlation between high rents and democratization, or a correlation with the outbreak of civil unrest of any kind. The petrostate theory doesn't pan out, as will be explained further later in this paper.

Another theory they address concerns the relevance of monarchy. They mention: "*in most of the monarchies—Bahrain excepted—the 2011 protests saw more limited demands for constitutional reform or change in government.*"[27] Similarly, while Bahrain saw riotous protests and had a violent crackdown, it did not escalate to the level of a true civil war. Therefore, the authors might point to republicanism as a key predictor of

[26] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pg. 196
[27] Brynen et al. pg. 186

revolutionary instability, as well as the potential for political violence and civil war. They point out that while some critics argue official monarchy in the Arab world is only a "minor variant of autocracy", as nearly all Arab republics are also ruled by autocrats—some of whom groom their sons to replace them, as a hereditary monarch would—there was nevertheless a divergence in effects during the Arab Spring, as nearly all the republics faced significant unrest and several fell into civil war, whereas none of the monarchies faced major unrest except Bahrain. However, the authors also hedge this by reminding us that six of the eight monarchies (all but Jordan and Morocco) are high-income and rentier states, and so these economic factors might be strong explanatory factors too.[28] Brynen's analysis jives fairly well with the findings of this paper, identifying two of the three factors we identify as the most strongly predictive: income and state type.

Next, a study attempting to synthesize the fields of democratization studies and conflict studies to examine the Arab Spring was produced in 2018 by several European political scientists, led by Donatella della Porta, a researcher of social movements and political violence. Their book-length study, 'Social Movements and Civil War: When Protests for Democratization Fail,' examined the Libyan, Syrian, and Yemeni uprisings. Their analytic lens was dissecting cases of "failed democratization" in a country, as compared to the relatively more successful democratizations seen at the end of the Cold War. But the study also examined the military aspects of the uprisings in depth and aimed to explain why initially peaceful social movements escalated to violence, and then why

[28] Brynen et al. pg. 174

that violence escalated to the level of a civil war. This study used a qualitative method of comparison rather than a quantitative statistical one, and specifically chose only to examine three Arab Spring cases to avoid the pitfalls of "large-N studies" that sacrifice specificity in favor of generalizability. The results of their analysis are complex and too lengthy to summarize fully here, but they boil down essentially to firstly the weakness of the state and civil society, and secondly sectarian and regional/tribal divisions as the main factors explaining the escalation to civil war in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.[29] The lack of state cohesion and civil society organizations meant that the revolutionaries were unable to cohere into a project capable of seizing uncontested state power once the brutal repression began and the bullets started flying. And the fears (and reality) of sectarian violence further prevented cohesion and cooperation, and led to all sides digging-in in the conflict.[30] Though this book's analysis does not necessarily apply to the relatively more "successful" revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, as the authors' democratization studies lens sees civil wars and fizzled-out protests as roughly equivalent outcomes (both are "failed" democratization), the book's identification of civil society development and sectarian division as key factors in the unrest is something to focus on.

A 2013 article in the academic *Journal of Democracy* by political scientists Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, found that lack of oil wealth and having a non-hereditary head of state were the two factors most heavily associated with any of fourteen examined Arab countries being the site of an uprising.[31] However, the

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[29] Porta et al., *Social Movements and Civil War*.
[30] Porta et al.
[31] Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, "Tracking the 'Arab Spring': Why the Modest Harvest?," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (2013): 29–44.

article acknowledges uprisings in three regimes that were either hereditary or oil-exporting—though one of these is Libya, which the authors note probably only witnessed successful regime change because of NATO's external intervention. They thus conclude that since oil-exporting and hereditarily-ruled Syria and Bahrain saw uprisings which did not successfully topple their leaders, the only countries which did see leaders overthrown were the countries with neither a hereditary leader nor oil wealth: Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen—not counting Libya, which had direct foreign military intervention.

A 2012 paper by Victor Menaldo at the University of Washington credits monarchy for stability during the Arab Spring.[32] Menaldo argues that, ironically, there is a tendency toward a slight pluralism among elites in the Arab monarchies—with the monarchs historically sharing power among rival factions of the royal family and seeking consensus among them, as well as respecting the customary rights and privileges of traditional tribal elites. This quasi-pluralism, he argues, lowers the temperature of political conflict in those countries, preventing violent resentments and power struggles from burning out of control into revolutions and civil war. He also says that the monarchies have historically shown more respect for private property rights and the free market economy, promoting economic growth and stability.

Housam Darwisheh from the Institute of Developing Economies produced a discussion paper in 2014 comparing Tunisia with Egypt, and Syria with Libya. As two pairs, these countries form interesting contrasts with each other. Tunisia and Egypt both witnessed relatively quick regime change followed by free and fair elections, but Tunisia

[32] Victor Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 3 (2012): 707–22.

was able to maintain a liberal democracy (at least until the 2020s), whereas Egypt soon saw a military coup and a return to dictatorial rule. And for the other pair, Libya saw a civil war where the rebels defeated the government within a year, while Syria's government has been able to hold out against rebels for many years. For Tunisia and Egypt, their different outcomes lay in the polarization between Islamist and non-Islamist political factions, and the role of the military. The military acted as a "deep state" holding onto power in Egypt, in contrast with the relatively hands-off approach the Tunisian military establishment took in the transition. Comparing Libya and Syria, Darwisheh points to the effective consolidation of all power behind the single personality of Bashar al-Assad as well as Assad's ability to call on the help of international allies. He contrasts this with the Gaddafi regime relying on kinship and tribal networks to distribute state benefits, and Gaddafi's history of alienating any potential foreign allies—plus the decisive role of the UN-authorized intervention in the civil war.[33]

A book by Brookings Institute fellow Geneive Abdo argues that religious sectarianism played a role in the severity of the civil wars in Syria and Yemen.[34] She argues that Westerners who dismiss the role of religion in Arab politics are fooling themselves, as Islamist ideology has been the main organizing base of popular discontent in the Arab world since the late 1970s. She also points out that the wars and fighting in the Arab world have been most intense where they take on a religious or sectarian character, as in Syria and Yemen. She disputes the idea this can be entirely attributed to

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[33] Housam Darwisheh, "Trajectories and Outcomes of the 'Arab Spring': Comparing Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria," *Institute of Developing Economies Discussion Paper* 456 (March 2014).
[34] Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shia-Sunni Divide* (Oxford University Press, 2017).

great power competition (such as the Saudi-Iran rivalry), and her argument makes sense in light of the significantly less bloody civil war in Libya, where the fighting is not based in sectarianism, even though Libya is also the site of great power competition.

Another report, produced by several liberal think tanks, examines the role of climate-change-induced drought and economic hardship in worsening the social and political tension that spilled out into unrest in the Arab world. "The Arab Spring and Climate Change: A Climate and Security Correlations Series" argues that drought in major wheat-growing regions of the world massively increased food prices in Egypt and other Arab world countries that are major food importers, and that these price increases were contributive (though likely not causative) to unrest spinning out into revolt.[35]

And finally, a political-economic analysis of the Arab uprisings in Cammett & Diwan's book 'A Political Economy of the Middle East' argues that economic factors such as unemployment and inequality contributed significantly to the uprisings. But they argue it contributed specifically by the way that these factors interacted with the political and historical context of the Arab countries to produce a *politicized* resentment of inequality and cronyism, and heightened desires for social justice.[36] This, in the authors' view, partially explains why most of the world did not see the same scale of uprising as the Arab world in 2011, despite many other countries around the world also suffering from inequality, unemployment, and poverty that were all as bad or worse than in the

[35] Caitlin E. Werrell and Francesco Femia, "The Arab Spring and Climate Change: A Climate and Security Correlations Series" (Center for American Progress; Stimson; Center for Climate and Security, February 2013).
[36] Melani Claire Cammett and Ishac Diwan, "The Political Economy of the Arab Uprisings," in *A Political Economy of the Middle East* (Westview Press, 2013).

Arab world at the time. However, this political economy approach does not address the variation between Arab countries much, except to partially affirm the widely-repeated argument that oil wealth played a major role in determining which countries were able to maintain stability.

In addition, it might be useful to examine the "popular" literature on the topic, from non-expert and non-academic sources. Popular understandings, including ones that take the form of conspiracy theories, are widespread in political discourse even if they are (perhaps rightly) seldom given any consideration in the academic literature.

It is common to hear—from Westerners in particular—that the Arab world is a "basket case" and that war and chaos in the Middle East have been the rule and not the exception for thousands of years. The nefarious role of Islam is often highlighted here, particularly in American conservative discourse. A breathless article by Raymond Stock was posted online by Fox News in 2013, disputing the idea that the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt were popular revolutions at all, instead merely military coups aimed at consolidating power to prevent its seizure by the real organized threat: Islamists.[37] The idea of the Arab Spring as an outbreak of the usual sectarian violence and religious fanaticism in the Arab world is common in popular political discourse. This understanding is unfortunately only bolstered by the historical events of the last decade: the failure of constitutional democratic systems to cohere in Egypt or Yemen, the continuing popularity of Islamist factions anywhere that even partial electoral democracy

[37] Raymond Stock, "Morsi Detained, Bloodbath in Egypt -- Whatever Happened to the Arab Spring?," *Fox News* (Fox News, August 15, 2013).

exists in the Arab world, and the explosion of horrific sectarian violence in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen.

Then there is the explicit color revolution theory. Throughout the popular political discourse and across more conspiratorially-inclined corners of the Internet we find the hidden hand of foreign governments (particularly the CIA) held up as the explanation for regime change and the outbreak of civil wars. In a 2012 article on the extremist website *Counterpunch*, writer Ismail Hossein-Zadeh claims that though the initial outbreak of unrest in Western-aligned Tunisia and Egypt was organic (and righteous), the revolts in non-Western-aligned countries were all incited and supported with arms and training from the beginning by foreign intelligence and military forces. The uprisings in Libya and Syria are derided as "fake Arab Springs." And Hossein-Zadeh's narrative similarly explains the failure of the uprisings in other Western-aligned states as also being due to Western-directed repression.[38]

Contradicting or perhaps merely complicating that narrative, a rather more credible academic account in Asef Bayat's 2017 book 'Revolution Without Revolutionaries' attributes the influence of US National Endowment for Democracy programs as partial causes of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions.[39]

Factors Identified by the Literature

The literature identifies many competing theses about the origins of the Arab Spring uprisings, and uprisings in general, that this paper is attempting to examine. And

[38] Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, "Whatever Happened to the Arab Spring?," CounterPunch.org, April 13, 2012.
[39] Asef Bayat, *Revolution Without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring*. (Stanford University Press, 2017). pg. 177

not all of them are entirely transposable with the main thesis of this paper—transposable in the sense that they would simply identify *x* instead of *y* as the one important factor that is most strongly correlated with the outbreak of unrest and civil war in particular individual countries. Some of the competing theses are beyond the scope of this paper and beyond the capacity of one non-doctoral researcher.

However, a few factors that stand out and are most amenable to direct comparison are the following: income level and economic development, state type, sectarianism and religious demographics, oil rents and the petrostate model, and political opportunities for dissent and reform. These along with the paper's special interest in foreign attitudes are the main factors to be studied.

The first factor is income and economic development, independent of whether this wealth comes from oil rents or not—though the richest countries in the Arab world are of course the petrostates of the Persian Gulf. Theories about the correlation between income and unrest are varied. One is that citizens in wealthier countries are less inclined to violent rebellion, as wealthy comfortable citizens have a lot more to lose in a violent struggle than poor desperate citizens do, and so this theory might predict a simple linear relationship between growing income and growing stability. This would be disputed however, by eminent figures in the political science literature like Ted Robert Gurr who argues that "*the existence of what the observer judges to be abject poverty or 'absolute deprivation' is not necessarily thought to be unjust or irremediable by those who experience it.*"[40] They argue that national income is not significantly correlated with

[40] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*. pg. 24

unrest, or at least is correlated in a more complicated way than a simple linear relationship predicting that general poverty causes unrest. A related theory is the 'curvilinearity thesis', the argument that instability rises as countries *begin* to modernize and popular expectations rise, so that it is the middle-income countries that are the most unstable,[41] with the most-developed countries having generally happy people satisfied with the benefits of modernity, and the least-developed countries being stable because their people still don't have much personal experience with industrial modernity or at least don't have realistic hopes that such development could happen for them any time soon.[42] However, it should be said that much of the recent literature that blames economic factors for the Arab Spring unrest does not necessarily contradict any of these theories, as they usually do not identify poverty qua poverty as the cause, but more specifically things like unemployment and inequality, which can be present even in a wealthy and developed country.

The second factor corresponds to theories that the political stability of monarchy explains the different outcomes of the Arab Spring. This is a theory that republics are unstable, perhaps since the succession of power is not as certain, or because the head of state is inherently "politicized" in a way that it isn't in some monarchies. In some countries, the unchallenged rule of the king can be perceived to be a stabilizing political universal that all sides agree on. No party or faction has to feel the humiliation and resentment of seeing their opposition win the presidency, so the overall political "stakes"

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[41] Ivo Feierabend and Rosalind Feierabend, "Aggressive Behaviors within Polities, 1948-1962: A Cross-National Study," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 10, no. 3 (September 1966): 249–71. pgs. 256-257

[42] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*. pg. 24

are perceived to be lower, and therefore not worth resorting to violence over.[43] And while any upstart demagogue or army general can install himself as dictator in a republic, it's more difficult for someone like that to have himself crowned king or somehow gain decisive influence over the royal family. This theory would expect that the Arab republics would tend to see a greater level of unrest, and a greater likelihood of civil war, than the Arab monarchies.

The third factor corresponds to a theory of the Arab Spring uprisings as outbreaks of sectarian violence, or at least political struggle based in sectarian division. A theory of a 'sectarian Arab Spring' sees the events as civil wars to reshape the local balance of power between sects, as in Iraq following the 2003 US invasion, where the once-privileged Sunni minority was dethroned and the Shia majority took power. This theory might predict that religiously diverse countries would see greater political upheaval than religiously homogeneous ones where no such struggles are possible. These theories could overlap somewhat with theories based on foreign influence, in the sense that sectarian conflicts, especially the Sunni-Shia conflicts of the Arab world, can often take the form of a regional cold war between regional powers such as Shia Iran and the Sunni Gulf monarchies. These elements will have to be disentangled later in this paper.

The fourth factor corresponds to theories about petrostates. The political science literature about petrostates is not uniform and predicts several things, sometimes that they are less likely to be democratic since the state has no need to tax the population and therefore no liberal middle-class with a stake in the economy can form and contest power

[43] Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs."

in a democratic fashion.[44] But the literature on petrostates also sometimes predicts that petrostates can be *more* stable than other states, since they have the ability to "bribe" their population with generous social welfare benefits, which are funded externally by the profits from oil exports rather than internally by taxing the population; and therefore these "bribes" can theoretically be deployed strategically to smooth over political grievances. And furthermore, petrostates may simply be richer overall and thus a petrostate theory can on some occasions simply be a subtype of an income-based theory.

And finally, the fifth factor corresponds to authoritarianism and political openness. The potential theories could go in either direction here as well. Some would suggest that harsh dictatorships will be more likely to see violent rebellion as the brutality of the regime creates aggrieved victims who want revenge, and without opportunities for peaceful political contestation the opposition will have no other option than to resort to violence. Others (particularly dictators themselves) would suggest the opposite, that political openness only emboldens opposition by signaling the regime's softness, and allowing opposition groups breathing room to get organized and plot the overthrow of the regime. Gurr suggests a mixed position, another kind of curvilinear thesis, that it is *moderate* regime repressiveness that is most strongly associated with unrest, provoking violent retaliation from the people. Extreme repression and zero repression are more strongly correlated with stability.[45] This complicates but is not mutually contradictory with a theory that repression is simply negatively correlated with unrest, considering all the countries in this study are at least moderately repressive regimes, none being liberal

[44] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pg. 196
[45] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*. pg. 240

democracies with no repression. We could simply leave out the 'no-repression' side of the bell curve here, as it does not apply.

This paper's measurement of these factors will be explained in the following section.

III. Study Design

The scope of this paper is approximately the entirety of the Arab world—specifically all the member countries of the Arab League excluding Comoros, Palestine, Somalia, and Djibouti. This is eighteen countries in all.

The reason for choosing this set of countries is that they can be said to have experienced a true revolutionary wave. Together they are part of a shared political and geographic grouping, and most of them experienced significant political unrest; for a few it was the most intense kind of unrest: civil war and regime change. Because these events all occurred at the same time and the countries share a political-geographic identity and experienced unrest that was in some cases severe enough to overthrow governments, this qualifies the Arab Spring as a discrete event that constitutes a revolutionary wave, separate from the sometimes tangentially-related unrest events around the world that occurred roughly around the same time.

Other portions of the Middle East and Mediterranean world were gripped by popular protest around the same time period in history, as in the 2009 Green Revolution in Iran, the 2013 Gezi Park uprising in Turkey, the 2008 unrest in Greece, in addition to the general anti-austerity protests that took place in 2010 and 2011 throughout Europe and North America in response to the 2008 financial crash. But as none of these rose to the level of civil war or regime change, and all took place as largely isolated national-level events not particularly linked by political geography or shared ideology, they are not best understood as being part of some wider revolutionary wave that includes the Arab Spring.

True revolutionary waves in history occur when multiple countries, which share a similar historical or political situation and/or occupy the same geographic region, all experience revolutionary upheaval at the same time—and this upheaval is significant enough to overthrow governments in at least some of them. There are a few clear examples of such revolutionary waves throughout history. One example would be the Fall of Communism in 1989-1991 when nearly every country in the world with a Communist government saw large-scale protests and unrest, and all but a small handful of them saw their governments overthrown and replaced with new non-Communist regimes. Another example would be the revolutions that took place across Europe from 1917-1923 as a result of World War I, a wave which toppled numerous governments and resulted in the collapse of several empires and the creation of many new states. These along with the Arab Spring qualify as serious revolutionary waves in a way that many other waves of multinational popular unrest in history do not, because other waves did not actually overthrow any governments, or took place over too long of a time period to be credibly linked, or were not joined together by any real political similarities or geographic proximity.

The short timescale and clear relatedness of the constituent events makes revolutionary waves discrete events. Discrete events that are amenable to being studied in a more rigorous academic way—a way that is more serious than the kind of baseless armchair theorizing about global events that makes up punditry or activist rhetoric. This paper sets out to do a rigorous study of the events.

Other theorists in the existing literature have argued this or that economic or political factor is the most relevant for explaining why some countries had large and significant protests, overthrew their dictators, successfully democratized, or had civil wars. For example, if oil wealth is argued to be a significant factor depressing popular dissatisfaction, we will see whether countries with more or less oil wealth saw a greater or lesser degree of popular unrest. This paper will examine whether the variables I have chosen to quantify are more relevant factors than some of those identified in the existing literature.

As stated in the introduction, this paper's methodology will be to quantify the level of instability in each country's relations with other states as well as an amorphous quality we can call the "foreign attitude" to each country, this quality being assigned a numerical score we will call the "Stability & Foreign Attitude Score" or SFA. Next, the scope and severity of the popular unrest will be ranked on a simple five-point scale from the least intense to the most. Then the scores and ranks of each country will be compared, to look for correlations. And then finally, these correlations will be compared with other possible correlations, to see which is strongest.

Each of the eighteen countries in the set will be outlined in subsections of this paper containing a brief history of the Arab Spring events in that country and listing the various scores it will be given, and which will also list a few of the relevant factors identified by others in the literature, those five mentioned in the previous chapter. Though this paper will give due diligence to all eighteen countries—as the strength of this study lays in part in its larger scope—some of the countries' sections will be longer

and more detailed than others, because the cases of significant unrest require more detailed explanation than the cases where there was little or no unrest.

Below, I will explain the methods I will use to quantify the factors and variables this paper is analyzing. The scores that will be assigned to each of the eighteen countries will be compiled by looking at each case from two angles.

The first angle is what we might call the military situation in a particular state. War is obviously the most severe political intervention possible in a country. But also, countries that are already engaged in interstate war or civil war are more "open" to further intervention and are more hotly contested between competing great powers. For example, during the Cold War the United States and Soviet Union spent fairly little time and resources competing for influence over stable non-aligned countries like Sweden and Finland, but quite a lot of time and resources competing for influence over countries undergoing civil war such as Afghanistan and Angola. Countries that are at war, about to go to war, or just ended a war are the most "vulnerable" to foreign influence and generally receive the most attention from foreign powers. Indeed, foreign powers are often directly participating in those wars with their own troops or by the sponsorship of armed factions like rebels or separatist groups. It is quite rare that there is a civil war in a country and the international community completely leaves it alone, with no foreign power trying to put their thumb on the scale for one side or the other.

The second angle to look at is the diplomatic situation. The elements we look at here will be things like sanctions, arms control negotiations, UN resolutions, and the relative friendliness of other states' expressed attitudes toward the country. Since we do

not have access to any secret diplomatic communications about whether foreign powers promised assistance or approval to any regime or anti-regime forces, all we have to rely on are the publicly available statements and postures of foreign powers. These create the public perception of how popular a particular regime is with the international community.

With a checklist of yes/no questions and numerical values assigned to each answer, this paper will attempt to roughly quantify the external political situation each country faced. This quantity is intended to represent how contested the regime's rule in each country was, and how positive a reception a *new* regime would be likely to face, should it overthrow the existing one.

First, we attempt to put together a crude measure of state stability by asking a checklist of three questions of each. This is obviously not a new idea. The Fragile States Index is an already existing international index attempting to quantify the level of instability in all the countries of the world, and it will be used alongside this paper's "homemade" measure.[46] However these yes/no questions are aimed at quantifying a value somewhat more specific than that generally implied by the overall political-science concept of "stability", as they refer specifically to the state's stability *in its relations with other states*.

The Fragile States Index is a very sophisticated instrument, and indeed it includes many of the other factors this paper intends to examine alongside this homemade measure of stability and foreign attitudes. But it is because of its high level of detail and sophistication that the FSI is not quite attuned to the specific questions that this measure

[46] Fund For Peace, "Fragile States Index - 2010 | The Fund for Peace," 2021.

intends to address. This paper's measure intends to look fairly narrowly at exogenous sources of instability, such as foreign military action or the sponsorship of internal rebellion, as well as non-quantifiable things like the expressed attitudes of foreign powers and international institutions. The Fragile States Index includes a few of these things, but it also includes a dozen others (such as economic conditions, rates of violent crime, levels of migration, etc.) that would lessen the specificity that we are looking for.

The following series of yes/no questions composing the stability and foreign attitude score is focused narrowly on essentially geopolitical matters, the relations of one state to other states, and how this relates to the state's stability. Importantly, these questions refer to the situation before the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011; they are answered from the perspective of December 2010 (unless otherwise specified).

For questions A and B, if the question is answered in the affirmative in the present (the "present" being late 2010) it will add three points, affirmative only in the last ten years it will add two points, and affirmative only in the last forty years it will add one point. For question C a simple answer yes will add 1 point. Question C is of slightly downgraded importance as some countries have active armed secessionist movements that do not currently control territory and do not currently fight in open combat with the government. Such situations are somewhat less significant than a true civil war—for example, Iran is home to some armed Kurdish and Arab secessionist groups, but which are relatively weak and unable to wage open warfare and hold territory, so Iran is not said to be undergoing "civil war". The first three questions are as follows:

A. *Was this country currently the site of military action by a foreign country? Within the last 10 years? Within the last forty years?*

B. *Was this country currently the site of active hostilities in which a foreign country directly supplied arms (for free, rather than for sale) to the government or rebels? Within the last 10 years? Within the last forty years?*
C. *Did this country have an active armed secessionist movement (that may or may not hold or have ever held territory)?*

These questions are relevant to illustrating the foreign orientation toward a country for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are relevant because foreign military intervention in a country is essentially always an indication of a hostile relationship between that country and the intervening power. Unless it takes place with the explicit authorization of the government, intervention is usually a flagrant violation of a country's sovereignty, if not an outright act of war against the country. Even when the intervening foreign power is targeting a mutual enemy of the country, such as an omnicidal jihadist insurgency like the Islamic State in Syria in 2014, the targeted country often resents and protests the armed intervention of a non-allied foreign power. And secondly, the questions are relevant because—as stated previously—wars on a country's territory trigger a kind of feeding frenzy for foreign powers to exert their influence over the political outcomes for that country.[47] While states are normally fastidious in not expressing a preference about the outcome of regularly scheduled elections in other countries, they are often flagrantly and unashamedly partisan in supporting one side or the other in a foreign war. Therefore, the presence of ongoing or recent war in a country is an indicator that the international community most likely has strongly-held preferences about which faction should come to power in that country.

[47] Rosenau, "Internal War as an International Event."

As for rebels and secessionist movements, usually the most successful of them have foreign backing. Rival countries who have beef with another country's government often sponsor rebels and secessionists as a way of causing trouble for and imposing costs on that government, as a backdoor form of diplomacy. Lichbach mentions the "*provision of training facilities, military bases, and areas of refuge (i.e., safe havens and sanctuary given to leadership and/or rank and file)*" as a form of external support often given to armed dissidents.[48] The number of rebel groups and secessionist movements that the US and USSR supported during the Cold War are too numerous and notorious to be worth mentioning, but even much smaller powers with smaller ambitions are known to support rebel groups in neighboring countries, as well as to provide them safe harbor within their own territory. Pakistan provided support for the mujaheddin insurgency against the Soviet-backed Afghan government in the 1980s. Venezuela currently supports the leftist ELN rebel group in neighboring Colombia. Saudi Arabia supports the Al-Islah Sunni Islamist political party in neighboring Yemen's civil war. Algeria supports the Sahrawi rebels in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. Even a tiny country Rwanda supports the March 23 Movement militia in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo's endemic civil wars. The mere existence of an armed secessionist or revolutionary movement in a country can be viewed as a significant indicator that there is strong foreign interest in toppling or at least weakening that country's ruling regime.

And indeed even if a separatist movement is not publicly known to be supported by a foreign power, the mere existence of a separatist movement can still be an indicator

[48] Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*. pg. 189

of instability of a country in its relations with other countries, for at least two reasons. The first is that foreign support *could be* taking place, but is secret and covert, not publicly known. And the other reason is that the existence of a separatist movement is always a big juicy opportunity for foreign intervention, even if intervention has not *yet* begun. Many governments of ethnically diverse countries with unhappy minority populations live in fear that separatist rebels at any time could become a spearhead for foreign intervention, even if such intervention has not yet taken place. Question C attempts to account for these elements, for the *potential* for foreign involvement.

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With the last five questions, we attempt to measure this variable we will call the "foreign attitude". Any methodology trying to measure the foreign attitude will obviously be crude, subjective, and open to criticism. But the methodology laid out here will attempt to hew as closely as possible to existing mainstream comparative case studies in terms of the kinds of events and factors that are quantified. What I mean by the "foreign attitude" is the overall quality of the relations the country has with the international community, whether it experiences an atmosphere that is friendly, hostile, or indifferent.

The items will be listed here in the form of a checklist of yes/no questions that will be asked of each of the eighteen Arab countries. An explanation of the relative significance of each item will follow this list. Unless otherwise specified, all questions are asked from the perspective of the point in time immediately before the outbreak of the uprisings, in 2010. For Questions D and E, an answer yes earns one point. For Question F, a mere criticism from the president earns one point, and a call for the head of state to

resign earns two points. For Question G current sanctions earns two points, and sanctions in the past forty years earns one. And for Question H, the UN adopting a resolution earns three points, while *considering* a resolution without adopting it earns only two points. The questions are as follows:

D. *Has this country ever been the subject of major arms control negotiations or WMD controversy?*
E. *Was this country ruled by a government perceived to be anti-Western?*
F. *During the year 2011, did the President of the United States criticize the government of this country, or call on its head of state to resign?*
G. *Was this country under targeted international sanctions? Within the last forty years?*
H. *During the year 2011, did the UN Security Council consider or adopt a resolution critical of this government's reaction to Arab Spring protests?*

These questions are relevant for gauging the international attitude toward the governments and leaders of particular countries. Question D is relevant because the production and proliferation of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction, is a common destabilizing process in international relations, and one that occupies a lot of attention for diplomats and the international community. Fears and accusations about arms buildup are often the prelude to war or the levying of sanctions, and the perceived 'reckless' pursuit of weapons of mass destruction often makes a leader an international pariah who most of the world would be happy to be rid of.

Relevant to Question E, the mere orientation of some countries' governments is often something heavily contested in great power conflict. Especially during the Cold War, internal political events in a country (even a small country) that signaled a potential change of allegiances were often the precipitating factor in a direct military intervention by the US or USSR, such as in the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Hungary, and

Afghanistan. And though Russia has in the last decade increased its military footprint in Syria and Libya, in the broad analysis it is largely the Western nations that possess the capacity to intervene militarily in Middle East affairs and do so frequently. And so it is the question of orientation toward the West that seems the most relevant to whether potential rebels in a country perceive that they will receive the blessing and possible aid of foreign powers.

Question G is relevant in that sanctions are a very explicit and credible signal of the foreign attitude toward a country; and also, the prospect of the immediate withdrawal of sanctions after a regime change can function as a kind of solidarity with, and promise of aid to, potential rebels. Question H is relevant in that the most obvious possible way a country can receive the definitive disapproval of the international community is to be the subject of a UN Security Council Resolution, particularly one authorizing military intervention, such as the no-fly-zone in Libya.

Because of the large number of cases being compared here—eighteen countries—this scoring system will by necessity be fairly generalized. Obviously there is not one single attitude the international community as a whole takes toward any country; and countries often have competing and mutually exclusive foreign interests they are trying to appeal to or balance with one another. The SFA score cannot encompass all of that nuance itself, but additional explanation and analysis later in this paper will address many of those competing foreign influences.

Finally, the intensity of the actual uprisings themselves needs to be scored on a five-point scale. This is a simple ordinal ranking.

I.	***No significant protests***
II.	***Large protests but ended relatively quickly and/or did not amount to anything***
III.	***Large protests that were sustained and/or occasionally escalated to civil unrest***
IV.	***Sustained protests and/or severe unrest, short of civil war***
V.	***Successful regime change or civil war or both***

Table 3.1 Unrest Severity Scale

The question of how to quantitatively rank the various outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings is complex. There are three particular kinds of outcomes that pose difficulty for ranking. There is civil unrest that unseats a government, civil unrest that *fails* to unseat a government, and there is outright civil war. It is not always necessarily the case that a revolt that succeeds in overthrowing a government is more "severe" than one that fails, in terms of the level of violence involved. The decisions of the leader himself are relevant, not just the militancy of the rebels. Some leaders may give in and resign quickly after relatively brief nonviolent protests, whereas other leaders hold onto power tenaciously and are willing to employ extreme violence to crush resistance, even very prolonged resistance. Nevertheless, in a dictatorship an outcome as dire as resigning from power or inaugurating a civil war indicates the stakes of the situation must be even higher than a situation where quickly repressing the protesters is a viable option, so this is why regime change or civil war are both ranked higher than unrest that fails to unseat the regime.

And finally, to test the thesis of this paper against other potential hypotheses, statistics related to the five factors mentioned in the literature review will be listed along with the brief case studies themselves. The statistics and values that will be used to represent these factors are as follows:

(1) GDP(PPP) per capita in the year 2010 will serve as a rough proxy for income level and economic development in a country.

(2) State type: republic or monarchy.

(3) A simple description of religious demographics. A country will here be considered religiously "homogeneous" (and therefore unlikely to face any problems with sectarian tension) if 95% or more of its population are of the same religion and sect. Otherwise, the country will be considered religiously "diverse", meaning there is a significant population of religious minorities, composing more than 5% of its population. For example, Libya as 99% Sunni Muslim is a religiously homogeneous country, for our purposes.

(4) Net oil revenue as a percentage of GDP will serve as a definition of "petrostates".

(5) The 2010 Democracy Index rankings will stand in as a representation of the level of repressiveness and political openness in the country.

And finally (6) the already existing published Fragile State Index will be listed alongside this paper's "homemade" quantification of the country's stability in its relations with other states. The comparison of this paper's contrived measure of state stability to the more rigorous and established measure of the FSI will provide some needed grounding.

Finally, to reiterate: the purpose of this paper is to examine the question of whether the international environment was a significant factor in determining the varied outcomes of the Arab Spring events across the Arab world. A country scoring a high

number of points on the stability and foreign attitude score I've constructed indicates that the international community looked favorably on a change of regime there. A low score means the opposite: the world largely supported the regime and did not strongly desire regime change. The five-point unrest intensity scale is an attempt to quantify the degree of unrest so we can look for statistical correlations.

The thesis of this paper is that the international attitude is one of the most strongly explanatory factors in determining which particular countries experienced revolt. A strong numerical correlation between unrest severity and a hostile foreign attitude tells us that most or all of the countries that experienced revolts shared that in common. That is strong evidence for the theory that rebellions are more likely to break out when potential rebels perceive that they have powerful backers or world opinion on their side, and less likely to occur when they perceive that they would have to fight a lone struggle.

A. *Was this country currently the site of military action by a foreign country? Within the last 10 years? Within the last forty years?* ***(3, 2, or 1 point)***
B. *Was this country currently the site of active hostilities in which a foreign country directly supplied arms (for free, rather than for sale) to the government or rebels? Within the last 10 years? Within the last forty years?* ***(3, 2, or 1 point)***
C. *Did this country have an active armed secessionist movement (that may or may not hold or have ever held territory)?* ***(1 point)***
D. *Has this country ever been the subject of major arms control negotiations or WMD controversy?* ***(1 point)***
E. *Was this country ruled by a government perceived to be anti-Western?* ***(1 point)***
F. *During the year 2011, did the President of the United States criticize the government of this country* ***(1 point)****, or call on its head of state to resign?* ***(or 2 points)***
G. *Was this country under targeted international sanctions? Within the last forty years?* ***(2 or 1 point)***
H. *During the year 2011, did the UN Security Council consider or adopt a resolution critical of this government's reaction to Arab Spring protests?* ***(2 or 3 points)***

Table 3.2. Stability & Foreign Attitude Score

IV. Eighteen Case Studies

Tunisia

In Tunisia, on December 17, 2010, a twenty-six-year-old man named Mohamed Bouazizi self-immolated at the provincial government headquarters in the city of Sidi Bouzid in an act of spontaneous individual protest. Bouazizi, a street vendor, had that day been harassed and assaulted by police officers who confiscated his cart of vegetables, and had gone to the headquarters to seek redress. When no one there would speak with him or return his goods, he left and returned with a canister of gasoline. Bouazizi's provocative act of suicidal protest immediately provoked outrage in Tunisian society, and protests began the same day in Sidi Bouzid before spreading all around the country.

Protesters demanded a sufficient response to mass unemployment, the restoration of civil liberties and democratic rights, and the removal of long-time dictatorial president Zine Ben Ali. There were clashes with police and tires burned in the street; government buildings and police cars were set on fire.[49] Many were injured or even killed by a heavy-handed police response attempting to quell the unrest. But after barely a month the Tunisian president caved to the pressure and resigned, fleeing by plane into exile in Saudi Arabia on January 14.[50] It may or may not be significant that this was the very same day a statement was released from the Obama White House condemning government violence against protesters and calling for democratic elections in Tunisia.[51]

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[49] Julian Borger, "Tunisian President Vows to Punish Rioters after Worst Unrest in a Decade," *The Guardian*, December 29, 2010.
[50] BBC News, "Tunisia: President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali Forced Out," *BBC News*, January 15, 2011.
[51] Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Events in Tunisia" (White House Office of the Press Secretary, January 14, 2011)

The new transitional government that took power in the immediate aftermath of the revolution promised democratic elections and civil liberties. For the next ten years, Tunisia was considered a lone bright spot in an otherwise universally grim outcome for the Arab Spring, as the country wrote a new constitution and conducted successful democratic elections with peaceful transitions of power between administrations. However, a recent and ongoing political crisis starting in July of 2021 and involving the president unilaterally dismissing the parliament has cast a shadow on Tunisia's Arab Spring legacy.[52]

Table 4.1. Tunisia Data Table

Tunisia	
Stability and foreign attitude score:	1 point (A: 0; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 1; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	V (successful regime change)
Fragile State Index:	67.5
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	4.17%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita in 2010 USD:	$10,100
Democracy Index:	2.79 – Authoritarian Regime

Algeria

Protests inspired by the uprising in Tunisia began quickly in Algeria, and in the first week of the new year riots broke out across the country in response to high food prices.[53] There had already been sporadic protests and rioting throughout the previous year over economic grievances and corruption,[54] but unrest grew after the Arab Spring began. The government quickly suspended taxes and duties on certain food items on

[52] Vivian Yee, "Tunisia's Democracy Verges on Collapse as President Moves to Take Control," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2021.
[53] BBC News, "Several Injured in Pro-Democracy March in Algiers," *BBC News*, January 22, 2011.
[54] Lamine Chikhi, "Algeria Army Should Quit Politics: Opposition," *Reuters Africa*, January 21, 2011.

January 8 to appease some of the demands, which led to a brief halt to the rioting.[55] But sustained protests would take place for months after the Spring began, given continuing inspiration by the resignation of Ben Ali in Tunisia and then later the even more momentous removal of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. There would also be a wave of several copycat self-immolations in Algeria, inspired by Mohamed Bouazizi's martyrdom in neighboring Tunisia.

Over the course of the Spring, protesters demanded a response to mass unemployment and poor service provision, as well as democratic elections, civil rights, and an end to the two-decade-long official state of emergency that had resulted from the civil war decades earlier. After two months of protests, many of which were brutally suppressed by police and led to roughly a dozen deaths, the government would make the largely-symbolic concession of officially ending the state of emergency. But protesters were not satisfied and demonstrations continued for over a year. Ultimately the momentum petered out and the government would not concede to demands for fair elections and an end to censorship and repression.

Table 4.2. Algeria Data Table

Algeria	
SFA score:	1 point (A: 0; B: 1; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	IV (large protests sustained for a long time, some civil unrest)
Fragile State Index:	81.3
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	23.41%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$11,000
Democracy Index:	3.44 – Authoritarian Regime

Libya

[55] Beatrice Khadige, "Unrest Eases in Algeria as Prices Drop," *Agence France-Presse*, January 10, 2011.

Protests and civil disobedience began in Libya in mid-January, first emerging out of local anger about corruption and poor service delivery from a state subsidized-housing program.[56] The protests eventually became militant, involving clashes with police and protesters occupying government offices. Long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi condemned the deteriorating political situation in neighboring Tunisia, and it became clear the emerging unrest in his own country was at least thematically aligned with the ongoing protests in neighboring Egypt.[57] Unrest in major cities escalated in severity and brutality through February, as police and military forces fired live ammunition at protesters, and protesters burned down police stations.[58, 59] The city of Benghazi, the second-largest city in the country, became a center of the unrest. After reports of police defecting to join the rebels, government security forces were evacuated from the city and it was effectively conceded to the rebels, who proclaimed a transitional government on February 27.

In addition to police, some military units began defecting to the National Transitional Council and it became clear that the embryo of a parallel state was forming in the eastern half of the country, where regime-loyal police and military units had been forced to relinquish control of several cities to the rebels. Gaddafi declared that the rebels were al-Qaeda-affiliated and "mercenaries" and claimed that outside powers such as the US, UK, and Israel were involved in instigating the unrest.[60] The violence continued and

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[56] Mohamed Abdel-Baky, "Libya Protest over Housing Enters Its Third Day," *Al Ahram*, January 16, 2011.
[57] Matthew Weaver, "Muammar Gaddafi Condemns Tunisia Uprising," *The Guardian*, January 16, 2011.
[58] Mahmoud Turkia, "Anti-Government Protesters Killed in Libyan Clash," *USA Today*, February 17, 2011.
[59] Al-Jazeera, "Libyan Police Stations Torched," *Al-Jazeera*, February 16, 2011.
[60] Tzvi Ben Gedalyahu, "Yemen: It's All Israel's Fault," *Israel National News*, March 2, 2011.

the country broke out into a low-grade civil war that killed hundreds of people, the deaths mostly but not entirely on the rebel side; and both sides lobbed accusations of atrocities such as lynching, rape, and torture against each other. Some of the accusations made by both sides would later be proven to have been unsubstantiated.

First, a UN Security Council Resolution (Res. 1970)[61] would be passed unanimously on February 26, condemning the Libyan government's violent repression of protesters, calling on the government to respect civil liberties and hold the perpetrators of killings accountable, as well as imposing financial sanctions and travel bans against individuals associated with the regime, and imposing an arms embargo on the country. As the Libyan government began preparing for a major military offensive to retake the rebel-held cities such as Benghazi and Bayda, the government's rhetoric toward the rebels alarmed the international community. Gaddafi's use of eliminationist language, terms like "rats" and "cockroaches" to refer to rebels, was particularly alarming to the foreign press.[62] A second UN Security Council Resolution (Res. 1973)[63] was passed on March 17 authorizing the creation of a no-fly-zone over Libya, to protect the citizens in rebel-held cities from Libyan air power; the resolution to be enforced by NATO forces stationed in the Mediterranean. The second resolution was non-unanimous, but no country voted against it, only five abstaining.

NATO forces, mainly the US and France, began airstrikes against Libyan government forces and soon the rebels took the offensive in the war, in part with weapons

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[61] UNSC, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970 (2011)," February 26, 2011.
[62] Jon Snow, "Gaddafi's Ominous 'cockroach' Threat," *Channel 4 News*, February 23, 2011.
[63] UNSC, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 (2011)," March 17, 2011.

gifted to them by Qatar, despite the arms embargo.[64] With overwhelming air power on their side, the rebels won the war by late 2011, and Muammar Gaddafi met a grisly end, captured and publicly killed by rebel forces. The National Transitional Council would take control but its rule was unstable; and intermittent civil war has continued at varying degrees to this day, as no single government has quite managed to establish effective control over the entire country since 2014. The fighting has been somewhat less intense than in Syria or Yemen though, with roughly one tenth as many people killed in the fighting since 2011 compared to the fighting in those countries.

Table 4.3. Libya Data Table

Libya	
SFA score:	9 points (A: 1; B: 0; C: 0; D: 1; E: 1; F: 2[65]; G: 1; H: 3)
Unrest severity:	V (civil war and successful regime change)
Fragile State Index:	69.1
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	56.01%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$22,500
Democracy Index:	1.94 – Authoritarian Regime

Morocco

Protests began relatively late in Morocco, on February 20, calling for constitutional reform, an end to police brutality, and a government response to high unemployment and rising prices.[66] In the earliest days there were some riots and looting—and significant violence in the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara territory, where mobs of Moroccans and Sahrawis clashed—but the protests were largely

[64] Portia Walker, "Qatari Military Advisers on the Ground, Helping Libyan Rebels Get into Shape," *Washington Post*, May 12, 2011.
[65] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya."
[66] BBC News, "Morocco Protesters Demand Political Change," *BBC News*, February 20, 2011.

nonviolent thereafter, despite occasionally violent police repression.[67] Protests continued for a year, but failed to reach a breaking point. The king offered a popular referendum that would relinquish a few of his significant government powers and transfer them to the elected prime minister, however the reforms were widely seen as inadequate, and the protest movement declared a boycott of the vote, which therefore passed overwhelmingly in July. Protests continued afterward but fizzled out in 2012.

Table 4.4. Morocco Data Table

Morocco	
SFA score:	3 points (A: 1; B: 1; C: 1; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	III (sustained protests, some civil unrest, but no war or regime change)
Fragile State Index:	77.0
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	0.01%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$6,300
Democracy Index:	3.79 – Authoritarian Regime

Mauritania

On January 17, an affluent businessman named Yacoub Ould Dahoud carried out a public self-immolation in the capital city of Nouakchott, inspired by Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia. He would die a week later, but he left behind a manifesto calling for the overthrow of the military regime implanted by a coup three years earlier, fair elections, and the end of all manner of civil rights abuses in Mauritanian society, including chattel slavery, which has persisted in Mauritania longer than in any other country on Earth. Protests in support of Dahoud would break out within days, and would

[67] Martin Jay, "Police Violence Reaching New Levels in Morocco with Sunday Beatings," *CNN*, May 30, 2011.

last for many months.[68] Protesters were often subject to police brutality, but the most significant violence would occur in September, when police shot many black demonstrators protesting a racist census policy that made it more difficult for black Mauritanians to obtain citizenship papers than ethnically Arab Mauritanians, killing at least three people.[69]

Table 4.5. Mauritania Data Table

Mauritania	
SFA score:	0 points (A: 0; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	III (sustained protests but only rarely escalated to civil unrest)
Fragile State Index:	89.1
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	2.55%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$4,800
Democracy Index:	3.86 – Authoritarian Regime

Sudan

Small anti-government protests in solidarity with the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt—and largely based in the student movement—began in Khartoum in January but remained relatively peaceful and largely student-centered for almost a year.[70,71] This was occurring around the same time as the South Sudan independence referendum that led to South Sudan's secession from Sudan in July of that year. Though frequently subject to police brutality, the protests were mostly relatively small compared to other North African Arab countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. But in 2012 and 2013 the

[68] Wikipedia, "2011–2012 Mauritanian Protests," accessed August 31, 2023.
[69] Oudaa Marouf, "Two Killed in Mauritania's Anti-Census Protest, Group Says," *Bloomberg*, September 28, 2011.
[70] Salma El Wardany, "Sudan Police Fire Tear Gas, Arrest 73 Students in Khartoum," *Bloomberg*, December 25, 2011.
[71] Al-Jazeera, "Sudan Police Clash with Protesters," *Al-Jazeera*, January 30, 2011.

protests grew as a result of the government's proposed austerity program, passed in part because of the massive loss of oil revenues due to the South Sudanese secession. In 2012 and 2013, there were large-scale protests, rioting, and clashes with police,[72] with protesters chanting the famous "the people want the fall of the regime" slogan, calling on longtime dictatorial President of Sudan Omar al-Bashir to resign. Bashir promised to resign at the end of his term in 2015—a similar promise the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt had made before resigning in 2011—however he would later break his promise and remain in power until his eventual overthrow in a later revolution and military coup in 2019.

The Sudanese situation is further complicated by the existing ethnic and secessionist conflicts that had been occurring in Sudan for decades and were mostly (though not entirely) unrelated to the Arab Spring events. One might say that Sudan was already in a civil war prior to the Arab Spring and remained in one throughout it. However, here, when characterizing the country's unrest, the conflict in Darfur will not be counted, as it did not escalate during the Arab Spring, nor did any protesting factions in Sudan's Arab Spring events attempt to join the existing civil war with any kind of military action of their own.

Table 4.6. Sudan Data Table

Sudan	
SFA score:	11 points (A: 3; B: 3; C: 1; D: 1; E: 1; F: 0; G: 2; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	IV (sustained civil unrest, no regime change)
Fragile State Index:	111.8
Religious demographics:	homogeneous (after secession)
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	15.33%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$3,100
Democracy Index:	2.42 – Authoritarian Regime

[72] Al-Jazeera, "Deaths in Sudan's Biggest Price Protests," *Al-Jazeera*, August 1, 2012.

Oman

Oman witnessed protests that were considerable for its size and usual lack of political engagement;[73] and there was even a riot that led to the burning of a shopping mall in February.[74] Protesters demanded economic concessions and political reforms and were repressed with significant police brutality and the intervention of the military. The sultan would announce some modest reforms and modest anti-corruption measures, as well as additional state spending,[75] and the protests petered out.

Table 4.7. Oman Data Table

Oman	
SFA score:	1 point (A: 0; B: 1; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	II (large protests but that ended quickly and didn't amount to much)
Fragile State Index:	48.7
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	37.21%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$33,900
Democracy Index:	2.86 – Authoritarian Regime

Qatar

Qatar played a role in the Arab Spring events of many other countries through the popular and sympathetic coverage broadcast by the country's state-funded *Al-Jazeera* news network. And Qatar had even more direct involvement in a few places as well, such as by sending arms and military advisers to assist the Libyan rebels.[76] However the country saw basically no Arab Spring events inside its own borders. Due to Qatar's

[73] Jackie Spinner, "Elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf: A Peaceful Anti-Corruption Protest in Oman.," *Slate*, February 18, 2011.
[74] K.P. Nayar, "Jitters over Attack on Indian Mall in Oman," *The Telegraph India*, March 3, 2011.
[75] Sunil K. Vaidya, "Qaboos Gives Legislative Powers to Council of Oman," *Gulf News*, March 13, 2011.
[76] Ian Black, "Qatar Admits Sending Hundreds of Troops to Support Libya Rebels," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2011.

extremely high average income, and the fact that the majority of its resident population are non-citizen foreign laborers who do not live permanently in Qatar, there are fewer political grievances among the Qatari citizenry—apparently none that would animate people to take to the streets and demand the downfall of their regime.

Table 4.8. Qatar Data Table

Qatar	
SFA score:	0 points (A: 0; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	I (no significant protests)
Fragile State Index:	51.8
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	28.41%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$95,900
Democracy Index:	3.09 – Authoritarian Regime

Egypt

Egypt is the largest country in the Arab world by population, with over 100 million citizens, and is the Arab world's second-largest economy behind only Saudi Arabia. Though it was not the site of the initial outbreak of the Arab Spring, the events in Egypt quickly seized the attention of the international media, and the mass occupation of Tahrir Square in the capital city of Cairo became the international symbol of the Arab Spring.

Protests began on January 25, taking inspiration from the nearby events in Tunisia and demanding political rights, jobs, an end to police brutality, and an end to long-time president Hosni Mubarak's reign. Violence broke out immediately, with a soldier and two demonstrators reportedly killed in the clashes on the very first day.[77] Soon the entire

[77] Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar, "Violent Clashes Mark Protests Against Mubarak's Rule," *New York Times*, January 25, 2011.

country was in a state of general uprising. After a few days, police were unable to force the mass of protesters out of Tahrir Square, protesters in cities across Egypt defied a nationwide curfew, there were strikes in the city of Suez, and there were rioting and looting in several different cities.

The situation was very chaotic as police attempted to crack down hard and faced fierce resistance. There were violent clashes between police and anti-government demonstrators, as well as clashes between pro-Mubarak and anti-government demonstrators. Nearly one hundred police stations across the country were burned. It's estimated almost a thousand people were killed during the entire two-week uprising.

President Mubarak continually refused to resign, though he promised he would not seek re-election. But eventually, on February 11, only a little over two weeks after the protests had begun, his vice president appeared on television to announce both he and Mubarak were resigning and handing power over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. The Council promised elections within six months and also promised that the military would not be running a candidate of its own. Protests and strikes would continue for months, as many were not entirely satisfied with the decisions of the interim government and also demanded that Mubarak and other figures of the former regime be put on trial for the murder of demonstrators and other crimes and corruption from their time in office, which eventually did happen.[78]

In 2012, reasonably fair elections would be held and Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi was elected President. His attempts to rule by decree and

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[78] Neil MacFarquhar, "Protesters Scold Egypt's Military Council," *New York Times*, April 1, 2011.

promulgate a new constitution angered secularists; and amid mass protests in the summer of 2013, he was overthrown in a military coup. In the immediate aftermath there would be an extremely violent crackdown on pro-Morsi demonstrators and the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization, as well as violent retaliation by Islamist militants. An army general named Abdel el-Sisi would take power and sanctify his rule with an unfair election in 2014 in which Morsi's political party was not allowed to participate.

Simultaneous to all of this, an armed uprising had begun in the sparsely-populated Sinai Peninsula, which borders Israel and the Gaza Strip. Marginalized minority Bedouins, along with radical Islamist groups, took the opportunity posed by the weakened Egyptian state to launch an armed revolt in February 2011, and the revolt escalated after Morsi was toppled in 2013. By 2014, the Islamist militants in the region had declared their allegiance to the Islamic State. To this day the insurgency in the Sinai region continues, though it hasn't spread to the rest of Egypt.

Table 4.9. Egypt Data Table

Egypt	
SFA score:	2 points (A: 1; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 1 [79]; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	V (not one but two regime changes, and also localized civil war in one region)
Fragile State Index:	87.6
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	7.12%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$10,300
Democracy Index:	3.07 – Authoritarian Regime

Jordan

[79] Barack Obama, "Fact Sheet: 'A Moment of Opportunity' in the Middle East and North Africa" (Office of White House Press Secretary, May 19, 2011).

On January 14, inspired by the events in Tunisia, protests began in Jordan, demanding improved economic conditions and the resignation of the prime minister.[80] Protesters stopped short of calling for the overthrow of the monarchy, which is illegal and taboo in Jordan. Over the course of a year of protests and occasional riots as well as violent crackdowns by police and "pro-monarchy thugs,"[81] the king dismissed two different prime ministers and promised all manner of constitutional and electoral reforms, attempting to compromise with political demands for a constitutional monarchy where the government would be democratic and the royalty's role would be ceremonial.

Table 4.10. Jordan Data Table

Jordan	
SFA score:	0 points (A: 0; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	III (sustained protests and some unrest, but no regime change)
Fragile State Index:	77.0
Religious demographics:	homogeneous
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	0%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$11,300
Democracy Index:	3.74 – Authoritarian Regime

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates saw close to zero protest activity during the Arab Spring era. Petitions were sent to the government by pro-democracy activists and government officials, and several petitioners suffered persecution, including arrests[82] and torture.

Table 4.11. UAE Data Table

United Arab Emirates	
SFA score:	0 points (A: 0; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)

[80] Alexandra Sandels, "JORDAN: Thousands of Demonstrators Protest Food Prices, Denounce Government," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 2011.
[81] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pg. 186
[82] BBC News, "Five Jailed UAE Activists 'Receive Presidential Pardon,'" *BBC News*, November 28, 2011.

Unrest severity:	I (no significant protests)
Fragile State Index:	52.4
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	21.72%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$54,900
Democracy Index:	2.52 – Authoritarian Regime

Saudi Arabia

Protests in Saudi Arabia were fairly small for the first year. After a self-immolation in January inaugurated the kingdom's own Arab Spring events, there were occasional marches of a few hundred demonstrators each throughout the year, demanding the right for women to drive, free elections, and civil rights for Shia citizens in the eastern region of Qatif. They also marched in solidarity with the Bahraini uprising that was occurring at the time and demanded an end to the Saudi military intervention in that uprising. There was harsh police repression against even these relatively small protests. The Saudi government apparently attempted to mollify popular anger by announcing a large economic relief package, but no political reforms.[83]

Only in 2012, more than a year after the Arab Spring started, protests started getting larger in the eastern Qatif region, and protesters called for the overthrow of the House of Saud. Notably, authorities alleged that protesters were outside agitators, with the Interior Ministry spokesman claiming they were "working according to a foreign agenda."[84] The repression there would be brutal, with many demonstrators shot by police. The prominent Shia activist Nimr al-Nimr was wounded, arrested, and eventually

[83] Al-Jazeera, "Saudi King Announces New Benefits," *Al-Jazeera*, February 23, 2011.
[84] Md Al-Sulami and Walaa Hawari, "Arrest Warrants Issued for 23 Qatif Rioters," *Arab News*, January 3, 2012.

sentenced to death and executed. The 2012 unrest in the Qatif region was suppressed, though more unrest would break out again several years later.

Table 4.12. Saudi Arabia Data Table

Saudi Arabia	
SFA score:	1 point (A: 1; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	III (protests suppressed, not that large)
Fragile State Index:	77.5
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	41.27%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$44,000
Democracy Index:	1.84 – Authoritarian Regime

Kuwait

Small protests began in Kuwait in February 2011 in response to discrimination against the Bedoon minority who are denied citizenship.[85] Protests were occasionally broken up with tear gas though no deaths were reported. Further protests occurred in late 2011 and into 2012, not necessarily related to the Bedoon minority—including an incident in which the Kuwaiti parliament was briefly occupied[86] by demonstrators—and the Emir of Kuwait dismissed the prime minister and parliament in response to a disputed election.

Table 4.13. Kuwait Data Table

Kuwait	
SFA score:	1 point (A: 1; B: 0; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	II (protests not that large, parliament dismissed)
Fragile State Index:	61.5
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	48.82%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$58,800
Democracy Index:	3.88 – Authoritarian Regime

[85] Al-Jazeera, "Kuwait's Stateless Rally for Rights--At Least 1,000 Arabs Demonstrate to Demand Citizenship in Gulf Country, Leading to Dozens of Arrests.," *Al-Jazeera*, February 18, 2011.
[86] Aryn Baker, "Storming Kuwait's Parliament: What's Behind the Latest Arab Revolt," *Time*, November 17, 2011.

Iraq

Protests inspired by the Arab Spring events of Tunisia and Egypt began in February in Iraq.[87] Unemployment and corruption, as well as high prices and poor service from the state electric utilities were instigating factors in these protests, and soon Iraq too witnessed an act of Bouazizi-inspired self-immolation in the city of Mosul on February 13. Protests centered on service delivery and high prices for water and electricity, something that had been a problem in Iraq for nearly two decades after the end of the Gulf War and the imposition of crippling sanctions on the Iraqi economy, and apparently hadn't improved under US occupation since 2003. Many protesters called for the resignation of provincial governors, and a few called for the resignation of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. However, al-Maliki was not a consistent target of protesters' anger like other Arab heads of government because he had a rather mixed reputation among the deeply-divided Iraqi population. Sunni Iraqis despised him but many Shiite Iraqis had a more positive opinion of him, and he was seen by some as a symbol of majoritarian democracy in Iraq, as it had long been ruled by Sunni autocrats (like Saddam Hussein) who showed favoritism to the Sunni minority. The initial uprising was quite intense, as protesters invaded and occupied government buildings, blockaded bridges, and clashed with police, who killed dozens.[88]

At the same time, in the quasi-independent Kurdish region in the north of Iraq, there were also protests inspired by the Arab Spring, which occurred simultaneously with

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[87] Liz Sly, "Egyptian Revolution Sparks Protest Movement in Democratic Iraq," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2011.
[88] Stephanie McCrummen, "23 Killed in Iraq's 'Day of Rage' Protests," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2011.

large Kurdish protests in Turkey. Protests led by a regional opposition party in the city of Sulaymaniyah against the corruption of the regional government resulted in deadly clashes with police that killed at least a dozen people over the course of a few months.[89] This unrest would gradually peter out. However, later in December 2011, inflammatory Islamist preaching incited a brief outbreak of riots that targeted liquor shops and gambling halls, as well as shops owned by members of the Assyrian and Yazidi minorities. There was an ensuing crackdown by the autonomous regional government on the Kurdish Islamist political parties seen as responsible. The targeting of the Assyrian and Yazidi minorities by rioters would be a grim foreshadowing of the horrific genocidal violence against these minorities that would take place a few years later when ISIS took control of large swathes of Iraqi territory.

Nevertheless, all this unrest across the country did not immediately lead to a collapse of civil authority in Iraq, though the country had already been in a state of low-grade civil war for the previous five years and would continue to be. With the withdrawal of US troops in 2011, deadly attacks by radical Sunni Islamists increased and the fracturing of Iraqi society along sectarian lines became more and more extreme. There were bombings by the Islamic State of Iraq (this would be before the group merged with militants in Syria to become the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—ISIS) throughout 2012; and then Sunni protests throughout 2013 against the alleged sectarian biases of the al-Maliki government and the increasing influence of Iran in the country.[90] Repression of

[89] Mohammed Tawfeeq, "Teenager Dies, 39 Hurt in Fresh Clashes in Iraq's Kurdistan," *CNN*, February 21, 2011.
[90] Al-Jazeera, "Deadly Anti-Government Violence Grips Iraq," *Al-Jazeera*, April 27, 2013.

these protests, as well as more Islamic State attacks, would eventually culminate in the outbreak of true civil war in Iraq in 2014, which soon merged with the ongoing civil war in neighboring Syria. ISIS captured large swathes of territory across Syria and Iraq, including capturing Mosul, one of the largest cities in the country. The Iraqi government was incredibly weak in part due to sectarian division, as a significant number of Sunni Arabs in Iraq were willing to collaborate with ISIS and preferred the caliphate to rule by the Shia majority in government.

Ultimately whether the Arab Spring could be said to have led to this outcome is difficult to say. This was arguably the trajectory Iraq was already on, regardless of the Spring, as sectarian clashes and periodic massacres and bombings had already been happening for years before 2011, and the events of 2011 were relatively insignificant in the course of this unraveling. However, the civil war in Iraq probably could not have happened without the simultaneous civil war in Syria, which definitely would not have happened without the Spring. For that reason, it makes sense to say that—at least in a roundabout fashion—the Arab Spring did help contribute to a renewed outbreak of civil war in Iraq.

Table 4.14. Iraq Data Table

Iraq	
SFA score:	9 points (A: 3; B: 3; C: 1; D: 1; E: 0; F: 0; G: 1; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	V (civil war)
Fragile State Index:	107.3
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	42.44%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$8,750
Democracy Index:	4.00 – Hybrid Regime

Syria

After a Bouazizi-inspired self-immolation in January and a month of relatively small protests in February, Arab Spring events began in earnest in Syria in March of 2011, in response to the arrest and torture of several teenagers in the city of Deraa for painting anti-government graffiti.[91] Protesters demanded an end to police brutality and the state of emergency law that had been in place in Syria for nearly half a century. In Deraa, a headquarters of the ruling Ba'ath Party was burned, and over a dozen demonstrators were killed when military forces charged to a mosque that was an organizational headquarters of the demonstrations and shot at unarmed demonstrators.[92] Within a week there were protests nationwide, and demonstrators in cities across the country faced severe police repression. Violence escalated quickly, and hundreds were killed in the first few months, both police and demonstrators. The removal of dictator Bashar al-Assad was a unifying goal of the protests, as demonstrators chanted "the people want the fall of the regime."

Though the government offered some concessions, such as ending the state of emergency law, the level of militancy escalated quickly due to the violent repression, including reportedly over one hundred demonstrators killed on a single day in April.[93] By the summer, Syrian military forces were besieging several cities where rebels had overwhelmed the police and seized weapons, such as the city of Hama.[94] There were

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[91] Kareem Fahim and Hwaida Saad, "A Faceless Teenage Refugee Who Helped Ignite Syria's War," *New York Times*, February 8, 2013.
[92] Joseph Holliday, "The Struggle for Syria in 2011: An Operational and Regional Analysis," Middle East Security Report (Institute for the Study of War, December 2011), pg. 13
[93] Holliday. pg. 15
[94] Holliday. pg. 15

defections by military officers who soon formed a “Free Syrian Army”, and the Syrian National Council was proclaimed as a transitional government, as in Libya.

Though the early repression by the Assad government was if anything even more brutal than it had been in Libya, no intervention by the UN Security Council would be forthcoming. Russia and China had soured on the process after witnessing how the UN’s imposition of a no-fly-zone and arms embargo in Libya had quickly been subverted into a situation where arms were poured in for the rebels and Western military forces intervened actively in the hostilities. The Western forces given the mandate to enforce a no-fly-zone did not solely operate to ground the Libyan Air Force, but also directly assisted the rebels in combat on the ground, bombing Libyan government forces. Russia and China’s view was that these measures such as no-fly-zones were not simply humanitarian measures aimed at protecting civilians, but instead mere fig leaves for NATO-directed regime change, so they vetoed any Security Council resolution that would allow Syria to become the next Libya.

As a result, the rebels did not go to war with the all-powerful backing of NATO and so were not able to quickly defeat the government as had been done in Libya. In addition to humanitarian aid, many Western and Arab countries gave weapons and funding to the rebels, but no direct military intervention would take place for several years, until the rise of the Islamic State. The war would take on a sectarian character as the rebel opposition to the Assad government came almost exclusively from Sunni Arabs, while Shia and other religious minorities mostly stuck with the Assad government, seeing

it as the only guarantor of a relatively secular government.[95] The war would eventually fracture into an even more complicated four-way conflict. First, Kurdish militias established an autonomous zone in the northeast of the country but did not join up with the anti-Assad rebels. And later, ISIS broke off from Sunni extremist elements of the rebel faction to pursue its own apocalyptic agenda single-mindedly and with indiscriminate violence, waging attacks against all other sides of the conflict: the government, the rebels, the Kurdish militias, and even the foreign powers involved in the conflict such as the US and France.

In 2015, Russia took the unprecedented step of intervening militarily on behalf of the Assad government and began bombing campaigns aimed at both the rebels and ISIS (who were also both fighting each other). Western powers such as France and the United States have intervened militarily in the conflict starting in 2014, mainly to attack the Islamic State and assist the Kurdish militias in fighting them on the ground. However, the US has also unilaterally carried out airstrikes against the Assad government on a few occasions in retaliation for its use of chemical weapons against the rebels; and the US has also assisted anti-Assad rebels in the south of the country. Much later in the war, in the late 2010s and into the current decade, Turkey has also intervened independently to prop up the nearly-defeated rebel faction and attack the Kurdish-controlled autonomous zone in Northeast Syria. The war is ongoing to this day.

Table 4.15. Syria Data Table

Syria	
SFA score:	11 points (A: 2; B: 0; C: 1; D: 1; E: 1; F: 2; G: 2; H: 2)
Unrest severity:	V (civil war)
Fragile State Index:	87.9

[95] Holliday. pgs. 9-10

Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	23.00%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$4,800
Democracy Index:	2.31 – Authoritarian Regime

Bahrain

Protests began in Bahrain in February 2011. Bahrain saw the most intense unrest of any of the wealthy Persian Gulf monarchies. Though the citizens are majority Shia, the country's monarchy and elite are Sunni, as in most of the other Gulf states. Protests erupted in February demanding equal rights for the persecuted Shia majority. Some demanded a constitutional monarchy while others demanded the total overthrow of the monarchy and the creation of a democratic republic. Protesters were immediately met with police violence, including several shot and killed. At some points the protests were truly enormous, with one day seeing a mass gathering of over 100,000 people, called a "march of loyalty to martyrs" in remembrance of victims of the violent repression.[96] A march of that size would be quite large in any event but especially in a country with a total population of only one and a half million, two thirds of whom are non-citizen foreign laborers. President Obama reportedly talked to the King of Bahrain Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa on the phone, and the White House gave a statement in the first week of the uprising urging Bahrain (among other countries) to show restraint against peaceful protesters.[97]

[96] BBC News, "Bahrain Unrest: Thousands Join Anti-Government Protest," *BBC News*, February 22, 2011.
[97] Brad Knickerbocker, "US Faces Difficult Situation in Bahrain, Home to US Fifth Fleet," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 19, 2011.

Demonstrators violently resisted their repression and some policemen were killed in the fighting. In March, with the invitation of the Bahraini government, Saudi Arabia formed a coalition of the other Sunni Gulf monarchies to send in troops to help suppress the uprising.[98] This intervention would become an outrage that inspired many other protests across the Arab world, adding new fuel to the fire of the Arab Spring unrest. Daily protests would occur for the next three years, largely nonviolent but occasionally involving rioting and clashes with police as well as the bombing of a police station. The repression was brutal as many demonstrators were shot by police or tortured in custody; some being tortured to death. Several nonviolent activists received lengthy prison sentences, and several men accused of the deaths of policemen were sentenced to death in secret court proceedings. The government also imposed collective punishments against the Shia population, bulldozing dozens of Shia mosques, including historically-significant centuries-old sites.

The unrest in Bahrain was certainly the most intense and sustained of the countries that did not witness a civil war or successful regime change.

Table 4.16. Bahrain Data Table

Bahrain	
SFA score:	2 points (A: 1; B: 1; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	IV (intense unrest falling short of civil war)
Fragile State Index:	58.8
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	monarchy
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	3.34%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$44,600
Democracy Index:	3.49 – Authoritarian Regime

Lebanon

[98] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pg. 187

At the time the Arab Spring protests broke out, Lebanon had been undergoing its own unrelated political crisis. In January 2011, in response to criminal indictments against several top Hezbollah officials for the assassination of a previous prime minister, members of the Hezbollah-aligned party coalition resigned from the unity government, and so a new government had to be formed.[99] Sunni-aligned Prime Minister Saad Hariri would step down in June 2011 as a new government formed, but this was not in response to any of the protests that would take place that year. It would be an error to consider the resignation of Hariri as an Arab Spring event, as it occurred in the more or less "normal" process of Lebanese parliamentary politics and not in response to popular protest.

Lebanon did see protests starting in February 2011. Protesters called for the end of the sectarian policy of the government.[100] Many saw their protest as being a continuation of the "Cedar Revolution" that occurred six years previous, when occupying Syrian forces were finally withdrawn from the country. Some protesters called for the disarming of Hezbollah, as it is a powerful Shia militia and pro-Syrian force in Lebanese politics. By the summer, though the movement was officially secular, the protests would take on something of a sectarian character as Lebanese Sunni factions, in solidarity with the Syrian uprising, fought violently in the streets with Lebanese Shia factions which were in support of the Alawite-led Syrian government.

Lebanon itself never truly broke out into civil war, though throughout the next decade ISIS and rebel factions of the Syrian Civil War occasionally used Lebanese

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[99] BBC News, "Hezbollah and Allies Topple Lebanese Unity Government," *BBC News*, January 12, 2011.
[100] Meris Lutz, "Lebanon: Thousands Rally against Sectarian Leaders," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 2011.

territory as a staging ground and were occasionally attacked by Syrian government forces over the border. Hezbollah would involve itself heavily in the Syrian conflict as well. And over the course of the war Lebanon, relative to its population size, would take in the largest number of Syrian refugees from the civil war of any country by far. Even in raw numbers it took in more refugees than the entire European Union.

Table 4.17. Lebanon Data Table

Lebanon	
SFA score:	4 points (A: 2; B: 2; C: 0; D: 0; E: 0; F: 0; G: 0; H: 0)
Unrest severity:	III (protests small, only unrest or fighting is as spillover from Syria)
Fragile State Index:	90.9
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	0%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita:	$19,500
Democracy Index:	5.82 – Hybrid Regime

Yemen

Arab Spring-inspired protests began in Yemen in late January with demands for a response to high unemployment and official corruption.[101] Protests quickly escalated to demands for longtime president Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign. Yemen was already not a particularly stable country. The two separate states of North and South Yemen had only unified twenty years prior at the end of the Cold War, and the reunion itself was not necessarily amicable. A social movement and occasional insurgency demanding Southern independence had already existed since 1994, al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorists had conducted attacks starting in the late 2000s and had been the target of US drone and missile strikes since 2009, and the Shia-minority Houthi movement's insurgency had been underway

[101] BBC News, "Yemen Protests: 'People Are Fed up with Corruption,'" *BBC News*, January 27, 2011.

since as early as 2004. The Southern Movement and Houthi movement would both take part in nonviolent protests at the beginning of the Arab Spring in Yemen.

In March as many as fifty demonstrators were shot and killed by state security forces in the capital city of Sana'a,[102] which triggered mass defections from the military and the beginning of a period of open rebellion and low-intensity civil war in Yemen. A Saudi-led coalition attempted to intervene diplomatically to mediate between Saleh and the protesters, but he refused numerous proposals for him to resign. Major tribal leaders joined the fighting on the side of the opposition. A coalition of opposition groups attempted to form a transitional government and negotiated with the government for months. Eventually, after flying to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment, Saleh would agree to resign and transfer power to his vice president, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in late 2011, who would be formally elected president in a questionable election in early 2012.

This ends the revolutionary period, but the crisis in Yemen had barely begun at that point. The newly-reconstituted AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) had captured several towns in the Abyan Governorate and declared their new state the "Islamic Emirate of Abyan" as early as May 2011, and the Houthi rebels never accepted the transfer of power to Hadi, continuing their rebellion and soon capturing wide swathes of territory. The civil war would continue to escalate for several years, Saudi Arabia and many other Gulf nations would intervene militarily in 2015 when it appeared the Houthis might potentially win the civil war, and the US has assisted this intervention with blockades and sanctions. By 2017, the Southern Movement had also seized a small parcel

[102] Hakim Almasmari, "Yemen Imposes State of Emergency after Deadly Attack on Protesters," *Washington Post*, March 18, 2011.

of territory and has declared itself a transitional government aimed toward independence as well. The civil war is ongoing to this day, though a ceasefire is currently in effect.

Table 4.18. Yemen Data Table

Yemen	
SFA score:	11 points (A: 3; B: 2; C: 1; D: 0; E: 0; F: 2; G: 0; H: 3)
Unrest severity:	V (regime change and civil war)
Fragile State Index:	100.0
Religious demographics:	diverse
State type:	republic
Net oil revenue as % of GDP:	22.19%
2010 GDP(PPP) per capita	$4,200
Democracy Index:	2.64 – Authoritarian Regime

V. Analysis

Raw Data

The analysis will begin here with a simple description of the raw statistical correlations. The R values (*r*) were calculated using the tools on socscistatistics.com.[103]

Stability & Foreign Attitude

Starting with the main subject of this paper, we see a moderately strong correlation ($r = 0.639$) between unrest severity and the stability & foreign attitude (SFA) score. The average unrest severity ranking was between level III and level IV, and the median was IV. The average SFA score was 3.66 points, and the median was 2 points. The six countries with highest-ranked level V unrest were Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. The five countries with relatively high SFA scores (9 points or higher) overlap somewhat: Libya, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Additionally, though Sudan ranked IV on the unrest scale, one could argue it deserved the top ranking; it simply wasn't given one here because its actual civil war and partition were not related to the Arab Spring events.

[103] Jeremy Stangroom, "Socscistatistics.com," Social Science Statistics, 2021

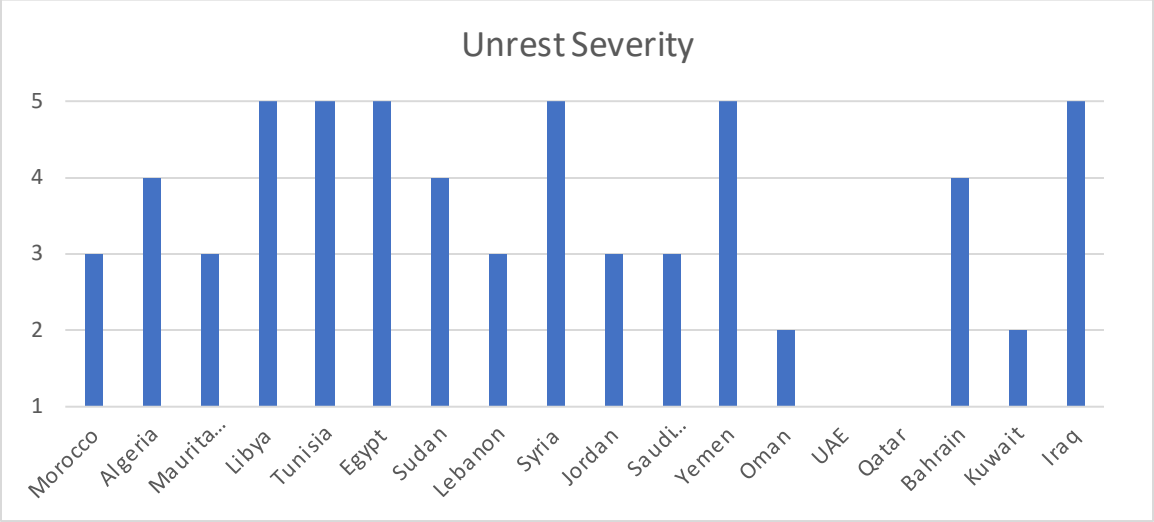

Figure 5.1 – Unrest severity rankings

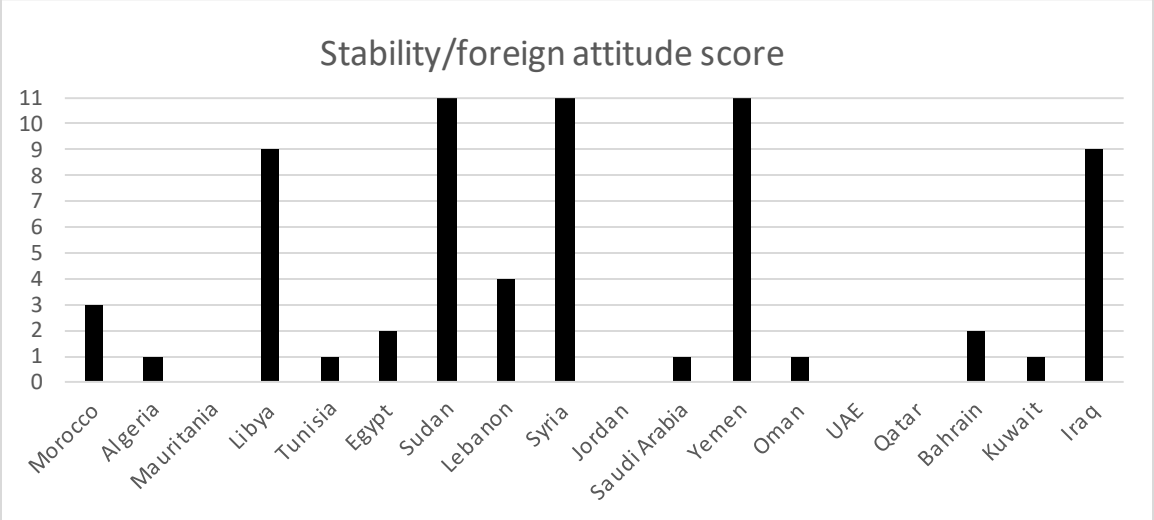

Figure 5.2 – SFA scores

At the lower end of the scale we find a similar strong overlap. Of the nine countries with unrest on the lower end of the spectrum—ranked I, II, or III—we see all but two of them had low SFA scores of only 0 or 1. And the other two, Lebanon and Morocco, were in the low-to-middle range of SFA scores (3 and 4 respectively), and notably they also received middling unrest scores of III.

But complicating the picture, we see Tunisia and Egypt were fairly low on the SFA scale, scoring only 1 point and 2 points respectively, though they had severe unrest and successful regime change. Bahrain and Algeria had similarly low scores on the SFA but saw relatively severe level IV unrest. Tunisia and Egypt do stand out among the level V countries however, in that their regime change did not result in outright civil war (except regionally in Egypt in the Sinai). If one were to consider regime change *without* civil war to be less severe than a civil war, then the overall correlation would be quite strong. This is a point we will return to later.

Income

Regarding the first additional factor, we see a fairly strong inverse correlation (r = -0.731) between income and unrest severity. Of the six richest countries of the group, the Persian Gulf monarchies, all with a GDP(PPP) per capita above US$30,000, not a single one saw level V unrest, though Bahrain did see fairly severe level IV unrest. Of the six poorest countries of the group, all with a GDP per capita below $10,000, three saw level V unrest, one was already in the aforementioned unrelated civil war (Sudan), and the other two were at least in level III unrest.

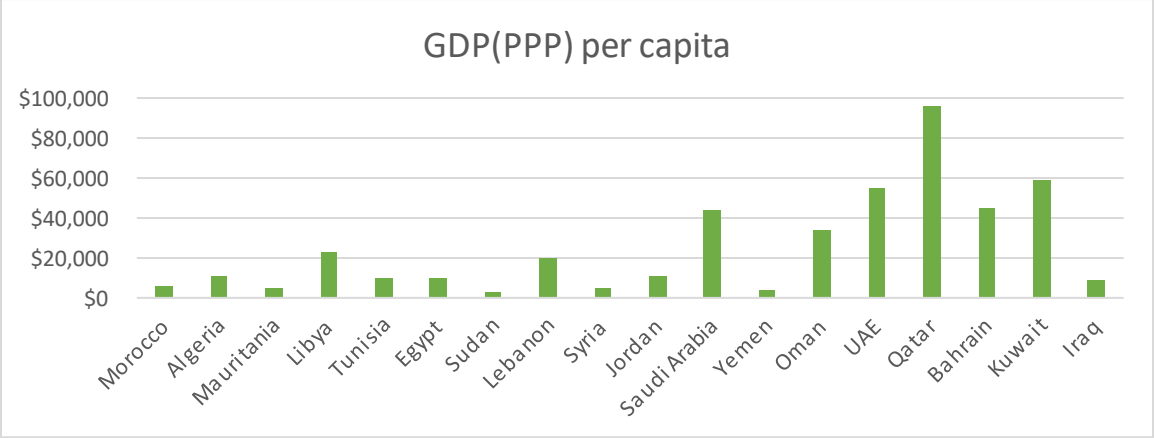

Figure 5.3 – 2010 GDP(PPP) per capita

The median GDP per capita among the group was $11,150, and the mean was $27,200. Of the six level V countries, five were below the median, and all were below the mean. Libya was the one outlier among this group, with a relatively high GDP per capita of around $22,000, the highest in Africa at the time and more than double that of neighboring Egypt and Tunisia. Mauritania and Morocco do complicate the picture somewhat, being among the poorest countries on the list but only at level III, but it is notable that no countries except a few of the wealthiest Persian Gulf monarchies were at level I or II.

State type

The second additional factor this paper examined was state type, comparing republics with monarchies. Does monarchy play a stabilizing role in a country's politics? We find a fairly strong negative correlation between monarchical government and unrest intensity (or one could say an equivalent positive correlation between republics and unrest intensity), an *r* value of -0.7488. Eight of the eighteen countries in this study were monarchies, and the other ten were republics. Of the six level V countries, not a single one was a monarchy. Of the level I and level II countries, *all* were monarchies. Bahrain again stands out as the one monarchy to see any significant unrest. But the lowest rankings of any republics were level III rankings for Lebanon and Mauritania, and Lebanon has complications relating to the spillover effects in the country of the neighboring Syrian Civil War, which we should address later.

One small complication to be addressed later is the question of succession. Syria was ruled by a man who had inherited rule from his father, and seems destined to one day

pass rule down to his son in turn. And in Libya too, we see a dictatorial father was grooming his son to be his eventual replacement. These states we might call "hereditary dictatorships" slightly undermine the notion that it is specifically the secure and unquestioned line of succession that is responsible for monarchies' stability. Some republics can have an unquestioned heir to power as well, but apparently they are still more unstable than true monarchies. We will return to this question.

Religion

The third additional factor this paper examined alongside the main hypothesis was religious demography. Did the unrest primarily have a religious sectarian character? There appears to be almost no correlation at all (r = -0.175) between unrest intensity and whether a country was religiously homogeneous or diverse (for the statistical calculations, this was represented by a simple binary condition: 0 for homogeneous states and 1 for diverse states). As stated previously, a country was considered religiously diverse for our purposes if more than 5% of its total population consisted of religious minorities. Any country with over 95% of the population belonging to the same religion and sect was considered religiously homogeneous for our purposes.

Of the level V countries, two were homogeneous: Tunisia and Libya. And four were diverse: Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. All of the wealthy Persian Gulf monarchies count as diverse when counting just their citizens, and become even more diverse when counting the massive population of non-citizen foreign laborers in these countries (who constitute the majority of the population of a few of these countries), but none were level

V. And Lebanon was only level III despite being the country that was, at the time, possibly the second-most historically wracked with sectarian violence, behind only Iraq.

However, potential complications might prevent us from totally discounting the sectarian thesis. It cannot be denied that three of the four civil wars have had a brutally sectarian character. In addition, Sudan's pre-existing civil war had an ethnic/sectarian character. Bahrain, the one outlier among the Persian Gulf monarchies to see any significant unrest, was clearly such an outlier *due* to its majority Shia (citizen) population living unhappily under a Sunni-dominated regime. This is a complicating point that will have to be returned to later in this section.

Oil

The fourth additional factor, oil, is relevant to the "petrostate" model. Do oil rents "buy off" the population and keep them contented when they'd otherwise be rioting? Or conversely, does reliance on oil retard the development of an advanced industrial economy and stable modern governance? We find essentially no correlation at all between unrest severity and net oil revenue as percentage of GDP (r = -0.053). Among the level V countries, we find major petrostates Iraq and Libya, partial petrostates Syria and Yemen, and non-petrostates Egypt and Tunisia. Of the wealthy Gulf monarchies, most were level I and II, but with a notable exception of Bahrain, which is the one state that bucked the former petrostate model and diversified its economy to the point where oil makes up only a small percentage of GDP now—and was apparently rewarded for this diversification with level IV unrest. Libya, the state with the highest percentage, was a

level V country; and Kuwait, the state with the second-highest percentage, was only a level II.

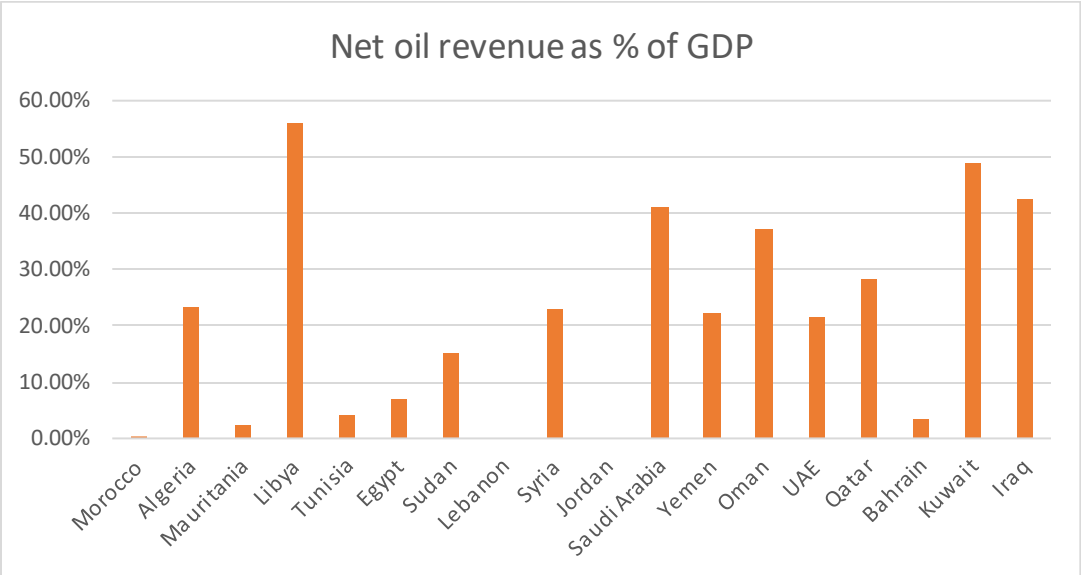

Figure 5.4 – Net oil revenue as % of GDP

Even if one removed Egypt and Tunisia from consideration as they did not see civil war, and focused on the four civil wars as all being in petrostates, it would not explain why the most stable countries were also all petrostates.

Political openness

The fifth additional factor we compare with is political openness and repression, as measured by the 2010 Democracy Index. Does brutal repression spur people to revolt? Or conversely does political openness just create opportunities for troublemakers? We find only a very weak negative correlation between unrest severity and the Democracy Index score (r = -0.1742). Of the two highest Democracy Index scores on the list—the only two to break out of the "Authoritarian Regime" category and into the "Hybrid Regime" category—we find Iraq, a level V, and Lebanon, only a level III. Similarly of

the two very lowest Democracy Index scores, we find Libya, a level V, and Saudi Arabia, only a level III.

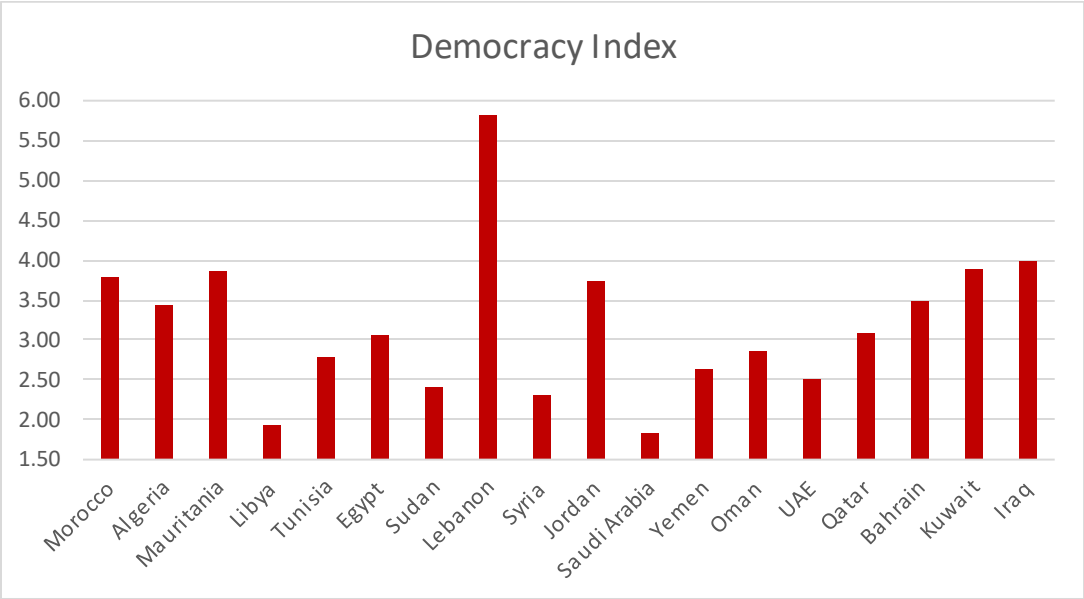

Figure 5.5 – Democracy Index

Of course, in global terms basically every country on the list scores very low on the Democracy Index, not one even being considered a democracy at all. So even the slight negative correlation found here means even less in absolute terms, as none of the countries in our list are really politically open, only a few are *relatively* open compared to the others. It would be difficult to explain the extremely wide range of outcomes (from no protests at all to bloody civil war) on this list by any reference to political openness.

Fragile State Index

Lastly, it would be useful to compare the main measures of this paper with the existing (and more prestigious) measure provided by the Fragile State Index. Does it obviate the entire need for the stability & foreign attitude scores? Does it itself predict unrest intensity? We find a moderate correlation between unrest intensity and the

country's score on the 2010 Fragile State Index (r = 0.619). We also find a moderate but not a perfect correlation between the SFA scores and the Fragile State Index itself (r = 0.661), indicating that the home-made SFA score and the FSI are not measuring precisely the same thing and the SFA is not superfluous. However, the similar strength of the correlations of both the SFA and FSI with unrest intensity (recall the former was r = 0.639) would imply they have nearly equal predictive power.

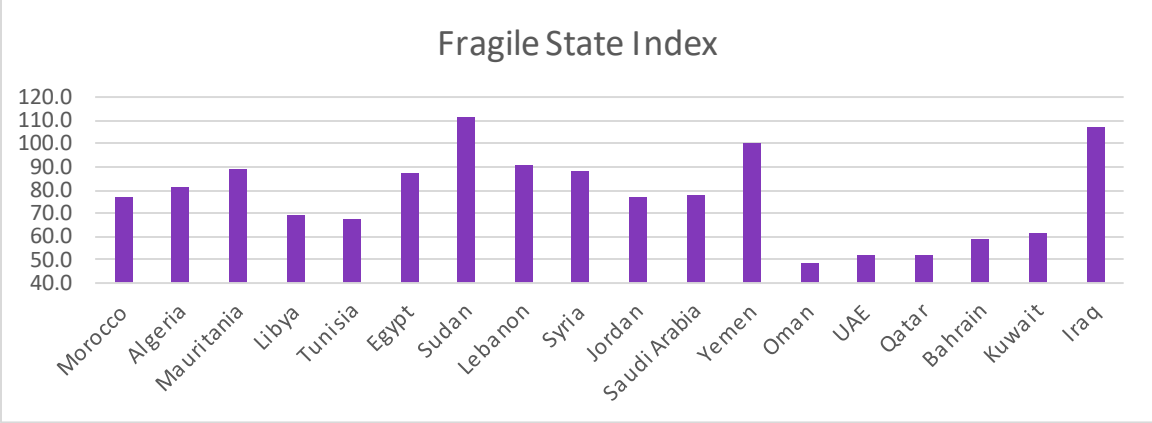

Figure 5.6 – Fragile State Index

This helps illustrate the complexity of this topic, as apparently several very diverse and unrelated factors we've looked at are all correlated to some extent with unrest intensity—though we've apparently been able to eliminate a few.

Robustness Test

In addition, there are other ways we can tweak the data to perhaps account for choices in the research design that other researchers would've made differently, and answer some questions that critical readers may have about the details.

For example:

(1) Removing Iraq, Lebanon, and Sudan because their already-existing civil wars complicate the matter too much, and perhaps Mauritania because the worst of its unrest was arguably not related to the Arab Spring

(2) Separating Questions A-C and Questions D-H of the SFA score into two separate scores, one for "stability" and one for purely "foreign attitude"
(3) Creating a new level 6 unrest to distinguish the countries with civil wars from the countries with regime change but not civil war
(4) Tweaking the unrest severity rankings in a few other ways
(5) Going back and applying the tweaked unrest severity ranking to the other factors (income, oil revenue, etc.)

Results:

(1) The original correlation between SFA score and Unrest severity is $r = 0.6389$. But if you exclude Iraq and Sudan it is $r = 0.6268$. If you also exclude Lebanon it becomes $r = 0.6361$. Almost zero difference.
(2) The correlation between only stability and unrest severity is $r = 0.4435$; correlation between only foreign attitude and unrest severity is $r = 0.6118$
(3) If the unrest severity for the four countries with civil wars (Libya, Syria, Yemen, Iraq) is upgraded to level 6, the correlation between SFA score and unrest severity increases to $r = 0.7334$
(4) If you increase **all** level 5 unrest severity rankings to 7 but leave everything else the same, the correlation between SFA score and unrest severity is $r = 0.6501$, and if you increase them to 8 the $r = 0.6454$, so this is little change.
    (a) One potential problem for this study is the fact that the unrest severity rankings are merely ordinal rankings, from least to greatest unrest, they do not actually rigorously *quantify* the level of unrest such that the numbers' relationships with each other are really mathematical. For example, if level 4 unrest were meant to be "double" the intensity of level 2 unrest, or to be 100-times the intensity if this were a logarithmic scale, those would be real mathematical quantities, not ordinal rankings. One way to partially address this might be to widen the gap between the unrest severity rankings, to more fully illustrate the distance between the low rankings and the high rankings. For example, if you downgrade all level 1 unrest to 0, and all level 2 unrest to 1, keep the 3s as normal, upgrade the 4s to 5s, upgrade Egypt and Tunisia to 6s, and the civil war countries to 7s, then the correlation between SFA and unrest severity is $r = 0.7045$.
    (b) And if you do all that but then further upgrade the 6s to 7s and the 7s to 9s, then $r = 0.743$, the strongest correlation yet.
    (c) If you do all that **and** exclude Iraq, Sudan, Lebanon, and Mauritania because they're too complicated, then $r = 0.7875$, stronger still.
    (d) If you go back to the start, but correlate foreign attitude only with unrest severity (remember it is $r = 0.6118$), and you upgrade the civil war countries to level 6 severity, $r = 0.7173$. And if you do everything in (4a) and (4b), then $r = 0.7364$. If you also exclude those four countries for being too complicated as in (4c), then $r = 0.7747$

(5) If you take this new '*dynamic* unrest severity scale' (meaning you apply all the changes described in bullets 4a and 4b to the original unrest severity scale to get a new unrest severity scale) and apply it to the other theories, you get the following correlations:
   (a) correlation between dynamic unrest severity and state type is r = -0.7428, recall the original was r = -0.7488, essentially no change
   (b) correlation between dynamic unrest severity and income is r = -0.6513, recall the original was r = -0.731, so it's now slightly weaker
   (c) correlation between dynamic unrest severity and oil revenue is r = 0.202, recall the original was r = -0.053, much stronger but still very low
   (d) correlation between dynamic unrest severity and religious diversity is now r = -0.1021, recall the original was r = -0.175, little change
   (e) correlation between dynamic unrest severity and Democracy Index is now r = -0.2419, recall the original was r = -0.1742, little change

Some of these changes are interesting, and the original questions are worthy of being asked. But overall, no major holes appear in this paper's thesis no matter how much we play with the data.

Making Sense of the Results

Theories about income

What does any of this data tell us? What do the correlations (and lack thereof) tell us? The strongest raw correlation this paper found—that of GDP(PPP) per capita—with unrest severity is potentially quite interesting. To a layman political commentator it is something usually quite obvious and unsurprising: people in affluent and comfortable economic circumstances are less likely to revolt. But this idea is usually seen as a little too simplistic for academic political scientists, who would like to be able to situate the data on armed conflict into more complex and interesting academic theories about state and class formation, collective action theory, or Marxist historiography. Such a finding could be quite demoralizing to those with high hopes for poor countries of the Global

South to democratize and form stable governments, seeing that it is their poverty more than anything else that prevents stability and democratization. It could conversely also be fairly demoralizing for political idealists in the affluent Global North who would like to see some kind of revolution in their own countries.

What this finding would mean for the Arab Spring is that though the protesters' stated grievances and goals were nearly identical throughout the entire Arab world, it was only in the relatively poorer countries that would-be revolutionaries had so little to lose that defying a brutal authoritarian police state began to look like a viable option. But it is important to say that it *began* to look like a viable option, by which I mean revolt was certainly not an obvious or easy choice to make for those in the poor countries—and many indeed did not make that choice—it was just *more viable* of a choice to make than for those in the richer countries. As stated above, GDP(PPP) per capita was not a perfect correlation. Desperately poor countries like Mauritania and Sudan did not see level V unrest, while Libya did, which was at the time the richest country in Africa, above the median in this paper's data set.

It would be possible to insert this correlation into a crude rational-choice theoretic framework for understanding the Arab Spring, and indeed revolts generally. One could come up with a thesis arguing something along the following lines:

Politically dissatisfied citizens weigh their current level of material comfort living under their current government. They anticipate the level of material discomfort they would potentially experience in the short term as a rioter facing the authoritarian state's police forces, or as a rebel soldier in some foxhole fighting a civil war. But they also

anticipate the increased material comfort they could hope to experience in the long-term, should their revolt be successful and a new regime be established. If the current level of material comfort is high, the short-term drop in comfort will be dramatic and therefore highly unpreferable, and furthermore the desire for increased comfort in the future will be weaker, as the would-be rebel is not feeling the pain and desperation of serious economic deprivation. Conversely, if the current level of material comfort is low, the short-term drop in comfort will be relatively small and therefore appear more endurable, and the potential for enhanced material prosperity in the long-term will be tantalizing. In other words: the rebels will have "nothing to lose but their chains, and a world to win."

Problems and support for this theory—that people in poorer countries are more inclined to revolt because they have less to lose from civil war—are detailed rather exhaustively (and exhaustingly) in Lichbach's major 1995 work on collective action theory, "The Rebel's Dilemma", as discussed in the literature review. Recall Lichbach argues that the costs of revolt in terms of lost resources, comfort, and opportunities are greater for the affluent and so revolt is much more likely when the oppressed have "nothing to lose but their chains."[104] On the other hand, he complicates and arguably contradicts this later in the same book when he says that the independently wealthy with plenty of time on their hands are more likely to participate in revolt than those with workaday jobs. However, this may only be a factor in less violent struggles in democratic societies, as Lichbach's book defines "revolt" extremely broadly to include essentially all political dissent.

[104] Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma*. pg. 42

On the other hand, theorists like Gurr, Eckstein, and others disagree strongly with this theory that people in poorer countries are more inclined to revolt, arguing that there is no causal relationship or correlation between deep impoverishment and the frequency of revolts and unrest. Recall Eckstein says that is "generally agreed" that there is no relationship between "persistent poverty" and political violence.[105] And recall Gurr specifically argues that to the extent there is any correlation at all, it is for a curvilinear relationship, where the middle-income countries are the most unstable, not the poorest ones.

Another theory, more politically-grounded, is simply that citizens of wealthy states see the material benefits that political stability (however authoritarian) gives them, and do not want to jeopardize it. As the people of Libya experienced, even when the armed uprising is successful in unseating a hated despot, there is no guarantee of political stability after the war ends. There is no guarantee the civil war won't continue on among rival rebel factions even after the original government has been defeated. And whatever the outcome of the war, a civil war will drain society's resources, destroy some of its capital and infrastructure, and scare away international trade and investment. If someone is currently benefiting significantly from these things, then they will be extremely reluctant to choose to disrupt all of that with a civil war. Life as a marginalized Shiite citizen in brutal Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia or Bahrain is still largely preferable to life in a refugee camp or a bombed and besieged city like Aleppo. However, citizens of poorer countries don't see nearly as much in the way of benefits from stability, and so

[105] Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars."

will be more willing to risk the harm that can come from instability. The sectarian grievances that led to civil war in Iraq were powerful enough to break out into war in such an economically-devastated society. Similar grievances in Bahrain did not, likely because it was a much more economically prosperous society.

What makes this a different theory is that it is not about *individual* incentives to participate or not participate in an uprising. It's not about the individual's material comfort and his willingness to give it up by volunteering to participate in a political struggle. This is a theory about the *collective* political strategy of a social movement. The strategies that social movements decide on will differ based on the economic conditions of their society. A social movement (usually) pursues not just its own interests—that is to say the interests of just its members and no one else. Instead, it has a grand *political* vision for what is best for all of society, both inside and outside of the movement.

A social movement in an affluent society will be much less likely to see armed insurrection and civil war as being conducive to the common good, just as a simple factual observation. The likelihood of massive collective harm will appear much higher than the likelihood of massive collective uplift. Such a social movement will tend to pursue its goals through nonviolent methods unlikely to destroy the entire economy and political system; and when facing violent repression, it will probably prefer to simply surrender and give up, rather than take on the further risks that violent retaliation and escalation would entail—risks to society at large, not just risks to themselves.

Again, I emphasize that that decision would not solely be about the personal incentives of social movement activists who don't want to get hurt. It would also be a

logical conclusion they could come to as a personally-disinterested matter of collective strategy: choosing to retaliate instead of surrender is likely to result in more harm than good for this society. For similar reasons, under German occupation during World War II, many of the resistance movements in Western Europe focused their efforts on covert and relatively nonconfrontational tactics such as sabotage, espionage, sheltering the persecuted, and making preparations for the eventual Allied invasion, because direct attacks on occupying German forces would provoke brutal reprisals that the partisans could not prevent, which would kill many innocent civilians. In the short term, not overtly antagonizing the occupiers was seen as the wiser strategy.

Theories about monarchy

The other additional factor we identified as a fairly strong correlation was state type. Eight of the eighteen countries in this study were monarchies, and the other ten were republics. No monarchies witnessed a regime change or civil war, and all the countries that did were republics. What kind of theory would explain a correlation like this? One could go all the way back to the 17th and 18th centuries when the question of monarchy vs. democracy and republicanism was a more relevant one in mainstream political philosophy. Back then, reactionaries still had the confidence to make full-throated claims that monarchs ruled by divine right, and ruled more ably than governments accountable to the people. Back then, mainstream philosophers in the West like Thomas Hobbes still made defenses of absolute monarchy where the king holds nearly all the power, as opposed to constitutional monarchies where power resides mostly in the elected government like any democratic republic.

Such defenses would seem to be the most relevant to the existing Arab monarchies, which are all much closer to absolute monarchies than constitutional ones. States like Jordan and Morocco do have significant political roles for the elected government; but even in those states—and definitely in the Persian Gulf monarchies—the royal family is still always the most powerful force in the state. All are modeled closer to an old absolutist monarchy than a modern figurehead monarchy.

Thomas Hobbes's "Leviathan" would make a claim that absolute unity in the state is necessary, lest it dissolve into factional squabbles. The overawing power of one single unitary force is necessary to impose stability on the political landscape. Its monopoly on violence will force everyone else to obey and play nicely with one another. However, one major problem with this theory is that it would seem to apply also to the factor of political openness, and we've already established that political openness (as measured by the Democracy Index) was not correlated at all with unrest severity.

Menaldo lays out a theory that the Arab monarchies in particular are more stable than the republics because they have a history of elite-consensus-based rule, assuring the property rights and access to power of elites (particularly tribal elites) across their entire societies, which reduces the need for violent political contestation. This almost precisely contradicts Hobbes' theory. In effect, Menaldo argues that the Arab monarchies are more liberal and pluralistic than the Arab republics.[106]

Monarchists—the few who still exist—argue that monarchy is a unifying political force because the monarch is by definition non-partisan. A 1991 opinion column written

[106] Menaldo, "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs." pg. 722

by a British conservative magazine editor in the immediate post-Cold War context made the argument that monarchy is needed everywhere so that ethnonational, sectarian, and political differences do not undermine the stability of the state, so that there is a "focus of loyalty above the nation."[107] A king or queen can be a politically-unifying symbolic figure who soothes the tensions and hatreds between competing political factions. And because their power is assured from birth, they do not have to be a pernicious "climber" who plots and schemes to attain power and must make unsavory and personally-corrupting deals with military officers, businessmen, foreign powers, and political bosses to build their power base. They do not have to be a demagogue who incites popular passions and appeals to their hatreds in order to get elected. And they do not always have to make short-sighted decisions that keep the voters happy to ensure their re-election. Their power is lifelong, so they can rule with the long-term public interest in mind, unconcerned with any short-term dissatisfaction by citizens who may have difficulty with delayed gratification.

Such a theory can fit well into the Arab Spring context in at least a few cases. In most of the Arab monarchies there is no history of popular rule, so the monarchy can be seen as a time-honored institution that hasn't let them down yet. After all, the monarchies are disproportionately the richest countries in the Arab world. Though Morocco and Jordan are not very wealthy, the six Persian Gulf monarchies absolutely are. And all are historically quite stable too, not only during the Arab Spring events. Few civil wars or

[107] Roger Scruton, "A Focus of Loyalty Higher Than the State," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1991.

foreign interventions have taken place on their soil in the last half-century, and almost no coups or revolutions either.

Furthermore, in the absence of any viable *alternative* unifying political project, the monarchy becomes the default. Many citizens may not be entirely satisfied with their monarchy, but their situation is not like the situation in the Atlantic world in the late 18th and early 19th centuries when the opposition to monarchy was largely unified behind a liberal republican ideological project. The Arab world does not have a unified opposition to its current authoritarian rulers, monarchical or otherwise. Some among the opposition are secularist liberals and nationalists, while others are Islamists of varying degrees of extremism. Historically there was a significant socialist movement among the anti-monarchical oppositions as well.

It would not be unreasonable for a person living under an Arab monarchy to see something like the events in Egypt as a likely outcome of any revolution in their own country. In Egypt the military dictatorship was toppled, elections were held in the immediate aftermath, and bitter political conflict between secular-leaning liberals and the Muslim Brotherhood (as well as the more radical Salafist parties) characterized the post-revolutionary period. Eventually this conflict came to a head and the real power in Egypt, the military, was forced to pick a side. The military chose the secularists, deposing Morsi and brutally crushing the Brotherhood. Two years later, having basically ended up right back where they started, under a military dictatorship—but with well over a thousand people now dead and the eruption of a regional insurgency in Sinai—at least a few Egyptians might have preferred the whole thing had never happened. A citizen of an

Arab monarchy might foresee a similar outcome to deposing the monarch or forcing them to allow popular elections: the competing post-revolutionary factions might never cohere into a new stable government, so the end result would likely be the monarchy or a military dictatorship returning to reimpose order through brutal repression—or worse, a collapse into perpetual civil war.

The theory would predict that such feelings (feelings that a revolution is too dangerous to risk) are less likely to prevail in a republic, because they already have historical experience with political turmoil and factional fighting. The perception of safety and stability that comes with monarchical autocracy comes from its longevity. Because its rule has lasted uninterrupted for centuries, it can be perceived as reliable. On the other hand, no matter how strictly and effectively a republican autocrat maintains his absolute control, the mere facts of recent history show his rule can't possibly be *that* stable and eternal. If he came to power in a revolution or coup some few decades ago, then surely someone else could too. If the old regime before him was destroyed that way, then his current regime could be too.

Returning to that point about monarchs inheriting power from birth, monarchists would say this is another benefit of monarchy over a republic. The transfer of power is constitutionally secured, the question of who will be the next leader of the country is rarely in doubt. This leaves less room for ambitious politicians to vie for power; less room for ambitious generals to plot a military coup. If only one person can ever really hold legitimacy as the head of state, there's no political opening for such challengers who would disturb the state's stability in their struggle for power. And such a theory would

seem to be confirmed in the Arab Spring events, in that even in Morocco and Jordan, which did see some limited unrest, support for the abolition of the monarchy was rarely a significant position among the protesters. There was no political opening for a potential new head of state.

One potential complication is that even ostensibly republican dictatorships can become quasi-hereditary positions, though that seemed to be no defense against civil unrest here. Bashar al-Assad succeeded his father who ruled for thirty years. Muammar Gaddafi was grooming his son to take power after him. This bought them no safety from internal turmoil. North Korea seems to be the only example in the modern world of an officially republican government *de facto* enshrining a new royal line into power and maintaining internal stability. North Korea's two successive hereditary successions, from father to son to grandson, is a pattern unheard of in any other non-monarchy in the world.

But a more significant complication would be that the much-proclaimed stability in monarchies can be quite illusory. The line of succession is actually never truly secure. The history of Europe shows that strategic political marriages, powerful regencies, the untimely death of a sibling, and creative legal interpretations can often allow rivals in a country's royal family to usurp power from the one who was supposed to inherit it, and such conflict has on many occasions led to severe instability and even civil war. The monarchies of the Arab world are by no means free of this kind of royal intrigue.

However, as Brynen points out, monarchies restrict the contestation of power by keeping it a 'family affair':

> "...*what is far more important* [than oil wealth] *is the presence of large dynasties where members of the royal family serve in a variety of critical*

> *roles within the political, security, and administrative apparatus. Examples of such countries would include most of the Gulf states (other than, in some regards, Oman). The most extreme case is of course Saudi Arabia, where there are approximately 7,000 members of the current royal family, including approximately 200 direct descendants of the founder of the modern state, Abd al-Aziz ibn Saud* […] *the presence of princes in important posts makes coup-making more difficult, since they will tend to support the existing regime whether out of familial loyalty or a self-interested desire to preserve their positions. These large royal families also act in a way that enhances information networks, facilitates succession, and creates a degree of accountability (within the royal family).*"[108]

Only close relatives hold the highest positions of power, which keeps the stakes relatively low. And even the possibility of a palace coup can only put one of a few people on the throne. So, while monarchies do still have palace intrigue—with various brothers, sons, cousins, uncles, and nephews of the king jockeying for power and attempting to usurp the throne from either the king or each other—the fact that only close family members have even a chance to attain power does inherently limit how many potential threats to a monarch's rule there are. In a republic virtually any ambitious politician, activist, religious leader, or military officer can dream of installing themselves in power in a quick bloodless coup, since anyone can be president. But in a monarchy only a handful of the monarch's closest relatives can entertain such a possibility since you need royal heritage to claim legitimacy as king.

Dismissed theories about oil, religion, and openness

What about the factors with weak or non-existent correlations? What theories correspond with those factors, and does this study falsify those theories?

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[108] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pg. 184

The petrostate theory seems unsupported in this context. In the political science literature, theories about petrostates can go in both directions. Theories of petrostate stability postulate that oil wealth allows for the state to provide generous social benefits[109] without any significant taxation of the population, creating an affluent society without any preceding period of miserable industrialization. Bitter political conflicts arising from trade and protectionism, industrial class struggle, and the rights of peasants to the land can be side-stepped entirely. And a restive population can be routinely "bought off" with new infusions of cash, as indeed happened during the Arab Spring in many of the Persian Gulf monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, which announced new social spending packages immediately upon the outbreak of protests.

Conversely, theories about the "resource curse" predict not stability but instability as a result of a country being blessed with abundant energy or mineral resources. As nearly the entire wealth of the society rests on the exploitation of a small area that needs only a relatively small labor force to extract oil or minerals, politics becomes solely a conflict for control over that one prized economic resource, to the exclusion of all others—meaning the exclusion of the rest of the population. No national development need occur that builds roads, schools, hospitals, power plants, and sanitation systems so the population as a whole can become more productive and carry on a "more complex division of labor."[110] The majority of the population are superfluous to the economy, and if they all suffer in destitute poverty or die in easily prevented epidemics and natural

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[109] Anita Demkiv, "Political Instability in Petrostates: The Myth or Reality of Oil Revenue as Petrostate Stabilizer" (Dissertation, Newark, Rutgers University, 2012). pg. ii; pg. 141

[110] Jeffrey D. Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, "Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth," NBER Working Paper Series, December 1995). pg. 5

disasters it will barely even affect the economy; the elites in control of the state will not care. Such a society will be unlikely to develop into a stable industrial economy and democratic polity. Its people will never feel any loyalty to its government nor even see any need for that government's existence.

Furthermore, the region of the country that is home to the lucrative oilfields or mines will often be tempted to secede from the nation so it can keep more of the profits for itself and not have to share them with the rest of the country, and that region may wage civil wars to achieve this. Preventing potential secessions through brutal repression will then become a major priority for the central government, fueling further conflict and instability through cycles of violent retaliation.

Though we can see elements of each of these theories show up to some extent in many of the countries of the Arab world, the fact that there is neither a negative nor positive correlation would indicate that neither theory really applies here. Both the most stable and the least stable Arab countries are among the ranks of the petrostates. Libya and Iraq both saw devastating civil wars, while Qatar and the Emirates were totally quiet. And similarly, those countries with economies not very dependent on oil are represented both among the least stable—as in Egypt and Tunisia—and among the relatively more stable—as in Mauritania and Morocco.

It would not even be possible to say that *both* the resource curse and petrostate stability theories are applying at the same time. If both applied, one might say that we could expect the states with no oil wealth to be in the middle of the pack in terms of unrest severity—neither strongly stabilized by oil, nor strongly destabilized by it—so the

petrostates would be represented only by the extremes of very high or very low unrest severity. But this does not appear to be the case either. Morocco, Mauritania and Lebanon might fit in that category of low-oil-dependence and middling unrest severity, but Tunisia and Egypt clearly do not, and Bahrain had perhaps the most severe unrest short of an outright civil war. Bahrain in particular is notable because it is a *former* petrostate that took every development economist's advice and significantly diversified its economy away from total reliance on oil and gas exports.[111] Apparently, its reward for this was experiencing the most intense unrest of any of the wealthy Gulf states.

Moving on to the factor of religious demography, what would a theory of sectarian-based instability predict? The measure used in this paper was, admittedly, probably the crudest measure used. But the logic was simply that one would expect that in a society without any significant religious minorities, sectarian tension basically cannot exist. Even in a highly bigoted society where the community of the majority religion despises and persecutes a tiny religious minority, this is simply not going to be a big enough issue to destabilize the political system. The tiny minority will be persecuted, and that will be that. The violence will almost certainly not escalate to engulf the rest of society.

Only in a society where there are large communities of people of differing religions will sectarian tensions have the potential to become a significant political issue and spur violent conflict. The measure used in this paper was simply comparing those countries that were religiously homogeneous (populations consisting of 95% or more all

[111] Eckart Woertz, "Bahrain's Economy: Oil Prices, Economic Diversification, Saudi Support, and Political Uncertainties," Notes Internacionals (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, February 2018).

belonging to the same religion and sect) with those that were somewhat diverse and had significant religious minorities, to at least distinguish the countries where destabilizing sectarian tension is even *possible* from the countries where it is not. If religious demographics were the most significant factor in the Arab Spring, we would expect to see most or all of the violent instability in religiously diverse countries, and little or none in the homogeneous ones.

One is tempted not to immediately discount this, despite the lack of statistical correlation. In three of the four countries that did have civil wars, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, the violence has taken on an explicitly and almost exclusively sectarian character, with the warring factions defined almost entirely by their religious sect. The significant unrest in Bahrain was of a sectarian nature as well, and to whatever extent unrest and Syrian War spillover occurred in Lebanon, that too had a sectarian character.

What is really significant here is that foreign involvement in these conflicts has at times taken on the character of a proxy war between the GCC Sunni bloc and Shia Iran. That will need to be discussed later in the sub-section about complications. Arguably, the extent to which sectarianism played a role in these conflicts is really the extent to which *foreign involvement* played a role. So, though a country's religious composition in and of itself is not a correlated factor with unrest intensity at all, its relationship with the geopolitical situation of the broader Middle East region may in fact be relevant.

Finally, there is the factor of political openness as measured by the Democracy Index. The Democracy Index is certainly the most detailed, rigorous, and granular of all the popular democracy and authoritarianism indices. The predictions that would be made

by the kinds of theories based around political openness were already discussed previously. Like the petrostate model, the predictions such theories would make could go in both directions. One could predict that political openness defuses political tension by allowing a space for nonviolent political contestation so that the discontented are not forced to resort to violent measures, and therefore we would expect to see the most unrest in the most strictly authoritarian regimes. Or one could argue the opposite, that political openness just gives free reign to potential insurrectionists to organize, agitate, and recruit, and so we would expect to see the most unrest in the most politically open regimes.

Because there was neither a negative nor positive correlation here, it seems justifiable to dismiss both theories and conclude political openness simply isn't the relevant factor here.

Ian Bremmer's 2006 book "The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall" argues for a curvilinearity thesis regarding political openness, that it is the most-open and most-closed societies that are the most stable, with the middling countries being the most unstable.[112] This is a thesis many would find intuitive: a dictator should either completely repress dissent or not repress it at all, because partial repression will create more angry people who hate him, while not sufficiently intimidating or eliminating them. But this too doesn't seem borne out by the data. The two lowest-scoring countries on the Democracy Index of our set were Saudi Arabia, which was stable, and Libya, which had a revolution. The medium-scoring countries like Kuwait and Qatar were among the most stable.

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[112] Ian Bremmer, *The J Curve: A New Way to Understand Why Nations Rise and Fall* (2006).

One could partially rescue the theory by zooming out to look at the larger global context, noting that fully politically open societies, liberal democracies (which none of the Arab states are) almost never witness civil wars, military coups, or violent revolutions. But when applied specifically to the context of the Arab world, it just doesn't seem to make a difference.

And lastly, the closeness of the correlation between the SFA score and unrest severity and the correlation between the FSI and unrest severity suggests that the two (SFA and FSI) may be measuring very similar things. Though this paper tried to craft a more specifically foreign-policy-focused measure that asks only a few of the same questions that the FSI does, the *r* values of both correlations were quite close. It is possible that these measures are about as close as you can get to a predictive measure of when unstable countries will break out into unrest, civil war, and state collapse.

Perhaps the Fragile State Index basically predicts it all to the maximum extent it can be predicted. The Arab Spring could just be an ignition event that lit off the existing powder keg in a few countries, and failed to affect the non-explosive situation in other states. The fact that the FSI did not perfectly correlate with outcomes could simply reflect existing weaknesses in the FSI's methodology as a precise predictor of state stability. The gap between this correlation and a perfect one-to-one correlation is perhaps the gap that presumably must exist for historical contingency, individual agency, and randomness and acts of God, the things that no statistical measure can predict.

The theory of foreign attitude

But finally, we must address this paper's main interest and hypothesis. As stated at length in previous sections: the hypothesis of this paper is that the attitude of the international community toward a country's government (compiled as the SFA score) represents one of the most significant variables predicting whether the most severe social unrest—defined as regime change or civil war or both—would break out in a particular country of the Arab world.

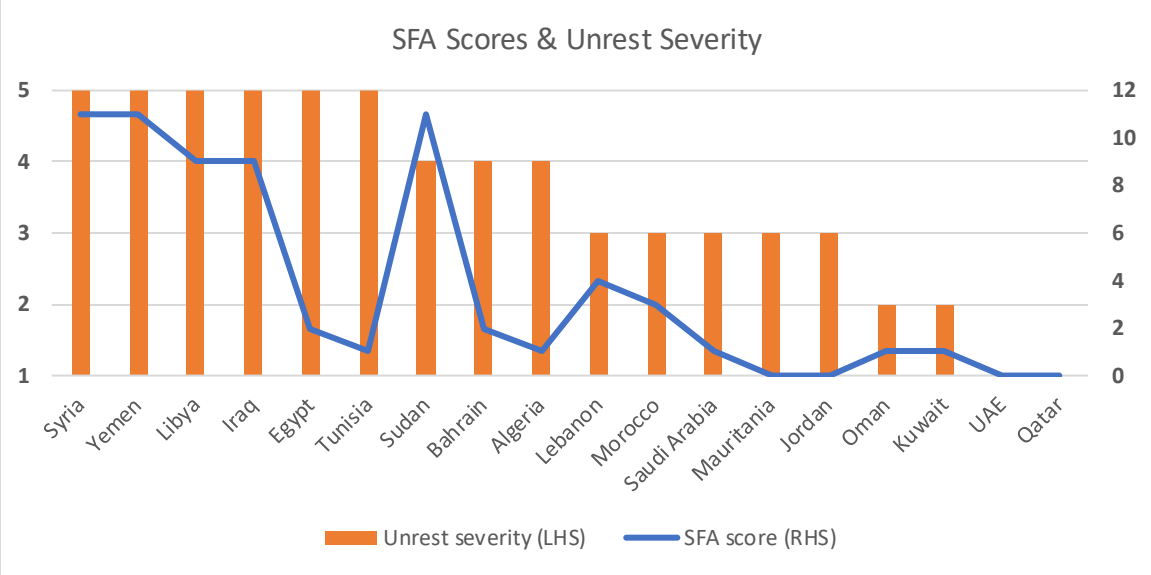

Figure 5.7 – SFA & Unrest rankings

A political-science theory that would predict this is one that posits that would-be rebels or coup-plotters take notice of the foreign attitude toward their government, and estimate their chances of success in a coup or rebellion based in part on that attitude. If a government is widely perceived as a tyrannical dictatorship or as an irresponsible destabilizing force, the international community will welcome that government's overthrow. Coup-plotters may benefit from quick international recognition of their new regime as legitimate and immediate relief from sanctions; and armed rebels may benefit from direct foreign assistance with arms and cash, or even the direct military intervention

of foreign powers. And conversely, if a government has wide support from the international community, its overthrow is more likely to be perceived as an illegitimate power-grab by military putschists, or as the work of destabilizing ideological extremists. The new regime can expect a hostile reception in the form of severed trade, foreign aid, and diplomatic relations, and sometimes even foreign military intervention against them. So would-be rebels or coup-plotters will be more likely to try to overthrow governments when they can expect a supportive international reception, and less likely to try to overthrow governments when they can expect a hostile reception.

As stated previously, this paper found a moderately strong correlation between the SFA score and unrest severity—though not necessarily any stronger than a few of the other factors studied. There are a variety of reasons for why that could be (besides the frightening possibility that this result simply proves the original thesis of the paper is incorrect). The measures used in this paper are by necessity fairly crude, and cannot capture many of the nuances of the unique situation in each country.

In the final section of this paper, I will explain why the original thesis is still the strongest explanation, and why the equivalently strong correlations from other factors do not necessarily lead to equally strong explanations.

Complications

Now for the disconfirming evidence. What data points seem to potentially contradict what the thesis would predict? There are at least three cases that merit in-depth discussion: Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq. These are countries where there are significant

factors that the theory would predict would push a country toward civil war, or would prevent the country from moving to civil war.

Sudan in particular stands out as a country that could not possibly have appeared *more* conducive to the outbreak of a civil war. The then-dictator Omar al-Bashir was under international indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity, and foreign powers were already in the process of mediating the end of a long pre-existing civil war and the planned secession of the southern portion of the country. The government of Sudan was probably second only to North Korea in terms of its international isolation and the universality with which it was condemned in the international community. If protests were to break out in Khartoum and rebels in the north (that is to say: putative rebels outside of Darfur and South Sudan) were to take up arms against the Sudanese government, one can hardly imagine a country where such a rebellion would have received a warmer reception by the international community. Long before the Arab Spring and calls for humanitarian intervention in Libya or Syria, there had already long been a foreign activist infrastructure and diplomatic movement pressing for humanitarian intervention in the Darfur region in Sudan.

Though protests did break out later in 2012—over high prices and unemployment—the failure of Sudanese activists and would-be rebels to seize the opportunity in 2011 and begin large-scale protests and uprisings against Omar al-Bashir requires explanation. Ostensibly, the thesis of this paper would more strongly predict a civil war or regime change event in Sudan than in any other Arab country. Sudan's SFA score was tied with Yemen and Syria for the highest, at eleven points. If foreign military

forces would intervene in any Arab country's civil war, if humanitarian intervention were ever to take place in an Arab country, Sudan would seem to be the most likely location.

Lebanon probably has a longer history of foreign intervention in its political affairs than any other Arab country. Its historically fractious sectarian politics are intimately bound up with its relations with various foreign blocs competing for influence. Furthermore, the Syrian Civil War was extremely close by and hostilities from that war even spilled over Lebanon's borders on more than one occasion.[113,114] Any theory predicting that foreign power politics produces uprisings would likely predict that Lebanon would be a major site of unrest and conflict. But it largely wasn't, and even after Lebanese society endured severe exogenous shocks like the influx of more than a million and a half Syrian refugees (equivalent to a third of Lebanon's pre-war population)—many of whom sympathized with and even fought for one or another faction of the neighboring Syrian war—still severe instability did not break out in Lebanon.

Iraq is an interesting case where the theory obviously predicts a high likelihood that civil war would break out, but the theory predicts it would break out in essentially the opposite way as it actually did. The rebellion of Sunni sectarians and ISIS against the Iraqi government was an uprising that couldn't have expected a more unsympathetic international response.

Obviously the country was already quite unstable and already subject to significant foreign influence from multiple competing power blocs. These would be

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[113] Sulome Anderson, "The Syrian War Is Creating a Massive Kidnapping Crisis in Lebanon," *The Atlantic*, September 6, 2013.
[114] Oliver Holmes and Nazih Siddiq, "Bombs Kill 42 Outside Mosques In Lebanon's Tripoli," *Reuters*, August 23, 2013.

points that affirm this paper's thesis. But in a bizarre twist, the insurgent faction that did end up taking up arms and waging a civil war (the Islamic State) was essentially the only faction that could *not* expect to rely on substantial foreign support from basically anyone. In 2011 it would be easy to imagine the Shia sectarian militias of Iraq trying to seize power with Iranian backing. And it would also be easy to imagine Sunni or nonsectarian actors attempting some kind of coup or civil war to oust the Shia militias and expel Iranian influence in a manner that would receive the approval and blessing of the US, which was keen to limit the expansion of Iranian regional influence after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. But in fact neither happened. Instead, the most hardline jihadist faction in modern history waged an unprecedentedly successful insurgency in eastern Syria and northwestern Iraq, and declared a global war against every major power in the world. With the apocalyptic zeal of true religious fanatics they waged an uncompromising war against all sides everywhere, not seeking tactical alliances with any faction, nor assistance from any foreign power.

While some critics have alleged that the anti-Assad rebel forces in Syria are no more than al-Qaeda-aligned Sunni sectarian militias, those forces have at least kept their ideological sympathies relatively quiet, attempting to maintain support from the West, Turkey, and the Gulf states; and they certainly did not carry out highly provocative terrorist attacks on foreign countries simultaneous to their uprising in Syria. The Islamic State, on the other hand, made no attempt at all to tone down their jihadist ideology so as to gain foreign backing, and made no attempt to avoid provoking hostile foreign

intervention—quite the opposite. Viewed this way, this is possibly a problematic outcome for this paper's thesis.

VI. Argument for the Thesis & Conclusion

Is Foreign Attitude a Stronger Explanation than Income or State Type?

As explained in the previous section: foreign attitude, the main factor examined by this paper, is fairly strongly correlated with unrest severity. But the correlation is not perfect by any means and there are two other factors that are also fairly strongly affirmed by the data, with roughly equally strong correlations. Are all three equally good explanations for why the Arab Spring events occurred in the countries they did, or is foreign attitude a better explanation? Are they even separable?

The first thing to mention is that the numbers may be somewhat misleading. As stated before, this paper's home-brewed SFA scoring system is a crude and imprecise measure. The $r = 0.639$ correlation between unrest severity and SFA score may not be telling the whole story. Remember that earlier it was mentioned that the cases of Egypt and Tunisia are qualitatively different than those of the four countries that broke out into full civil wars. Egypt and Tunisia saw their governments overthrown, but with relatively less chaos and violence. Less than a month of large-scale protests and occupations of public space—with associated clashes with police attempting to repress them—was all it took to unseat their countries' dictators. For whatever reason, their dictators saw simply resigning and leaving the country as a viable option. Few bullets flew. If we were to revise the unrest severity index to account for this as a "lesser" severity than a full civil war, the correlation would be even stronger than it is at present, and might partially account for the fact that Tunisia and Egypt had fairly low SFA scores. If we were to

consider regime change without civil war to be less severe than a civil war, then the overall correlation would be strengthened.

To be sure, this alone cannot rescue the thesis. The correlation would only be strengthened a little, because even if we grant that civil wars deserve higher severity rankings Egypt and Tunisia's rankings would still be on the higher end—just not quite at the highest ranking. But there are still a few other matters to discuss that help strengthen the main thesis.

Firstly, a few of the complications mentioned earlier can be interpreted in ways that strengthen rather than undermine the thesis. Bahrain appeared to be a problematic outlier for this thesis, as it experienced quite severe unrest, probably the most severe of any country short of those level V-ranked, but had a fairly low SFA score of just 2. However, there's another way to look at it. Bahrain seemed to be *on the way* to a general uprising until the Saudi-led GCC coalition intervened in March 2011. This show of force was a confirmation that the international reaction to an uprising in Bahrain would not be positive. And the Bahraini protesters reacted in the way the thesis would expect: they largely surrendered. Would-be rebels *before* the intervention might have been unsure of how exactly an armed uprising to overthrow the government would be received by the international community. They might have entertained expectations that it would be ignored or tolerated, or even hopes that it would be supported. But the intervention was what economists call a 'costly signal' and the signal was received loud and clear.

Rather than defy a military show of force, as rebels in Libya or Yemen did, they gave in to it. The difference was the military show of force came externally rather than

just internally. There is no stronger message members of the international community can send to disapprove of a potential foreign uprising than sending in their own troops to suppress it before it can even get off the ground. Rather than being problematic for the thesis, the case of Bahrain seems to be one of the strongest affirmations of it.

Next, is the matter of countries like Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon. These are messy cases that probably defy the simple measure of the SFA scale and the unrest severity index. Sudan's placement at level IV is itself debatable. In 2010, Sudan was already in the resolution stage of an earlier civil war that was about to result in the partition of the country. But the fact that the existing conflict in the south was unrelated to the Arab Spring and its proper Arab Spring events (some comparatively minor unrest in the north that did not unseat the government) is why it was classed as a level IV situation.

However, the fact that earlier unrelated international intervention was already taking place in Sudan is potentially a strong explanation for why regime change did not occur. Before the Arab Spring even broke out, potential rebels in northern Sudan had already received a fairly clear demonstration of the international community's intentions and commitments with regard to Sudan's internal political situation. The Second Sudanese Civil War had been brought to a close and a peace treaty was signed in 2005 in Nairobi, Kenya under the supervision of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a bloc of eight East African countries, most of which had participated in the civil war on the side of the rebels.[115] The agreement laid out a six-year process

[115] Comprehensive Peace Agreement, "Comprehensive Peace Agreement between The Government of The Republic of The Sudan and The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Sudan People's Liberation Army," 2005. pg. 19

whereby the Sudanese government in the North would gradually withdraw their troops from the South, leaving security in the hands of the southern-based rebels, and at the end there would be a referendum on independence held in the South. The referendum was long anticipated and in January of 2011, right in the middle of the Arab Spring events elsewhere, the referendum took place and the electorate voted overwhelmingly for independence, which went into effect in the summer of the same year. Many international organizations and world leaders gave their blessing and approval of the secession process.

Sudan had been involved in two bitter civil wars for most of its independence starting in the 1950s, and foreign governments were involved significantly in both of them. As a result, the specific details and contours of international opinion and its support for particular political outcomes in Sudan would become effectively known inside Sudanese society. The conclusion of a peace agreement on terms so clearly-defined but also so unfavorable to the northern Sudanese government made the intentions of the foreign actors in the Sudanese civil wars fairly clear: the international community supported the independence of the South but they were not interested in pushing further to force a total regime change. In a society so exhausted by decades of civil war, it would've made little sense for northern-based rebels to attempt such a regime change and expect any direct foreign military support for their efforts. They might not have been perceived as righteous freedom fighters, but possibly instead as irresponsible extremists wrecking an already delicate and hard-won peace process.

Furthermore, as the civil war had a significant ethnic/sectarian component, dividing the country largely between the Arab Muslim North and the black African non-Muslim South, discontent by Arabs in northern Sudan would have only aroused complicated and ambivalent feelings vis-a-vis the international situation. The secession of the South was already perceived as a defeat by some Arab governments, several of whom had assisted the Khartoum government in the civil war and had earlier called for a federated government in Sudan as the solution, rather than outright partition. In the context of a military defeat that had already partitioned an Arab country, northern-based Arab oppositionists may not have wanted to elicit any assistance from the kinds of foreign powers that would have wanted to see Omar al-Bashir overthrown in Khartoum, even if such assistance were possible to elicit at all. Doing so might have been perceived by the population as a betrayal of their country itself, not merely defiance of their dictatorial government.

Lebanon is another country where exhaustion with the long history of foreign involvement in domestic politics probably put a damper on Arab Spring uprisings. A country that had so recently been occupied by both Israeli and Syrian troops each taking sides supporting major political factions in Lebanese politics, is not a country where a revolutionary movement can take to the streets and expect a uniformly positive reception from the international community. In a country that has already in the recent past been reduced to a battlefield for foreign great power politics, there is no expectation that you can rely on great power support and not also receive great power opposition and retaliation.

As explained previously, the Islamic State invasion and collaborating Sunni uprising in Iraq would not fit with a simple version of this paper's thesis predicting that rebels only rise up when they expect a positive international reception. The Islamic State was and is the most despised faction in all of world politics, and it was the target of direct foreign military attack by multiple different countries, many of whom are not even allies or friendly with each other. It's not often that the United States, Russia, and Iran all agree on something, but all were willing to use their own forces as well as proxies to attack ISIS.

Nevertheless, it's still easy to see how the interests and activities of foreign powers helped fuel the Iraqi civil war after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. Iraq had already been opened up as a battleground for foreign powers to compete for influence before 2011. The newly US-installed regime was shaky, and foreign forces supported various factions in the low-grade civil war that had been ongoing for years before 2011. Large-scale protests and violence that took place during the Arab Spring were in some cases explicitly incited by grievances about Iranian influence in the country, and the Sunni forces associated with those grievances were themselves surely backed by wealthy benefactors in the GCC countries. Finally, the overflow of the Syrian Civil War into Iraq's borders—via the invasion by the then-surging Islamic State—was enthusiastically joined by some Sunni Iraqis seeking to be free from the majority-elected Shia government. This re-ignited the Iraqi civil war and escalated it into its most deadly phase yet in 2014.

Three Theories or One

Looking at the role of income in determining the intensity of uprisings, we see strong evidence for it as an explanatory factor. It's essentially tied for first place with regime type and foreign attitude as the most strongly statistically correlated. And if we take note of the 'curvilinearity thesis' from theorists like the Feierabends and Gurr, the correlation is even further strengthened. The curvilinearity thesis predicts that it's actually the middle-income countries that would see the most unrest, with the richest seeing the least, and the poorest roughly in the middle. And that's pretty closely though not perfectly borne out. All the lowest-ranked countries (levels I and II) in unrest severity were among the wealthiest Gulf states. The highest-ranked (level V) countries are somewhat evenly split between lowest-income countries like Yemen and Syria, and more middle-income countries like Iraq, Egypt, and Tunisia; as well as Libya which somewhat straddles the border between middle- and higher-income. And to restate the previous point in another way, all the other low- and middle-income countries were still at least in the middle ranks for unrest, not the lowest ranks.

But we can see that income alone does not tell the entire story. As stated, Libya was the highest-income country besides the wealthy Gulf states, the highest-income country in Africa at the time. And Libya's was the first Arab Spring revolt to erupt into open civil war, as the dictator Gaddafi did not resign in the face of mass protests as his neighbor dictators in Tunisia and Egypt had. In addition, the wealthy Persian Gulf monarchy of Bahrain is a state that saw the first stages of a revolt and probably *would have* erupted into a greater revolt if it had not been swiftly crushed by the intimidating force of a Saudi-led GCC intervention into the country. So, it would be too simplistic to

conclude that the disparate outcomes of the Arab Spring can be entirely explained by the observation that affluent rich kids in wealthier countries do not *really* want to revolt the way that desperate unemployed youth in poorer countries do. Some richer Libyans and Bahrainis were apparently willing to risk their lives for a revolution when poorer Mauritanians and Moroccans weren't. Referring back to the literature, it seems to affirm that deeply impoverished countries are not necessarily the most likely to revolt.[116, 117]

So next we look at the role of state type and we again see strong evidence for it as an explanatory factor. All of the civil wars or revolutions took place in a republic, none in a monarchy. All four of the most-stable countries were Gulf monarchies. These two findings alone are pretty powerful correlations. They are only partially complicated by some outlying cases. The poorer kingdoms of Jordan and Morocco were not as stable as most of the Gulf states like the Emirates and Qatar were. And there is the aforementioned case of Bahrain, the prosperous Gulf monarchy that came nearer than any other state to revolt without quite crossing the line. There is certainly something to say for the idea that a royal line over a century old seems to command more legitimacy than a republican regime established within living memory. A revolution that topples a king is "more revolutionary," as it requires not merely changing out one leader for another but entirely rewriting the constitution and basic institutions of the state, which would require greater self-confidence from rebels, and by necessity opens up wider possibilities (and greater danger) for radical societal changes. Furthermore, by definition, a population under a century-old monarchy has no modern experience of staging a revolution, no model to

[116] Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars."
[117] Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*. pg. 24

work off of; whereas a population under a more recently-established republic has the memory of "how we did it last time" to guide them if they are to try it again.

But as stated, state type is not quite perfect as an explanation, because of some confounding factors like the Bahrain case and the harsh crackdown Saudi Arabia needed to repress their internal unrest. And it's also not perfect because the role of monarchy as a guarantor of stability in the Arab Spring is possibly just a proxy for foreign attitude, which will be discussed shortly.

Finally, there is strong evidence for the role of foreign attitude as a key explanatory factor in the disparate outcomes of the Arab Spring. As stated previously, the statistical correlation there is tied for first place with those of income and regime type. There was no country with a high SFA score that saw unrest below level IV. Tunisia and Egypt had relatively low SFA scores though they notably did not break out into full civil wars; and crucially the few points they did receive on their SFA scores were for an unmistakable signal: explicit comments made by the US President, condemning heavy-handed government responses in their countries and expressing sympathy for protesters' aims. It's easy to imagine such comments being a final straw that convinces ambitious government officials or army officers to jump ship from the dictator's administration and refuse an order to violently suppress the revolutionary protesters, which would render a dictator powerless and force him to resign.

And there is another element this paper has not yet fully discussed which strengthens the role of foreign attitude vis-a-vis the other two strong correlations. That element is the extent to which foreign attitude is *itself* very strongly correlated with

regime type and moderately correlated with income. In other words: the fact that the richer countries were more stable and the monarchies were more stable may simply be a result of the fact that the wealthiest states and the monarchies all have the strongest supportive relationships with key foreign allies. These allies would be extremely hesitant to endorse or even appear to sympathize with revolutionary unrest in the wealthier countries and the monarchies. Bahrain is an example of this playing out on a regional scale, where revolutionary unrest in that country received a very explicitly hostile reception by the other Persian Gulf monarchies in the form of the GCC intervention.

> *"Finally, Arab monarchies undertook a series of important collective actions to preserve their positions. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, for example, provided aid to Oman, Morocco, and Jordan to help finance new spending. The GCC also sought to manage a transition in Yemen that would reduce the destabilizing effect of regime change there. As noted in Chapter 11, Qatari-owned* Al Jazeera *and Saudi-owned* Al Arabiya *toned down their televised coverage of the situation in Bahrain, certainly compared to* Al Jazeera's *coverage of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria. Perhaps a more obvious example of the collective defense of authoritarianism, however, was military intervention by over a thousand 'Peninsula Shield' troops from the GCC in Bahrain in March 2011 to shore up the regime. The GCC thus confirmed itself as a 'club of kings' concerned with acting to protect monarchical regimes across the Middle East. As one member of the Saudi royal family told the* New York Times*, 'We're sending a message that monarchies are not where this is happening.' The consolidation of even stronger webs of transnational authoritarianism has important implications for the study of both reform and international relations in the region, with antipathy to internal democracy emerging as an important element of external political and military alliance."*[118]

But indeed all of the monarchies in the Arab world, the Gulf states as well as Jordan and Morocco, have very friendly relations with the major Western powers and at least non-hostile relationships with all other major powers. In foreign policy

[118] Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism & Democratization in the Arab World*. pgs. 187-188

discourse, some of these states are considered to be simple client regimes of the United States. Brynen et al mention this explicitly:

> *"In virtually all of the monarchies, close relations with the West constrained Western calls for change. This was especially true in the strategically important and oil-rich Gulf states, and particularly so in Bahrain (headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet). While Washington and others emphasized the need for reform, they did not impose the kinds of sanctions imposed on Libya or Syria."*[119]

Many of the Arab republics only even became republics after overthrowing Western-installed monarchies or direct European colonial status during the era of decolonization, such as Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Algeria, Tunisia, and Sudan. The extant Arab monarchies in 2010 were the *surviving* Arab monarchies, the regimes that had maintained themselves in power continuously since the days of more direct great power interference in the Arab world. They were the regimes that survived with friendly and clientelistic relations with the major Western powers largely intact. To be fair, some of the revolutionary republics like Egypt and Tunisia also had friendly and even clientelistic relations with the West at the time of the Arab Spring uprisings. But at the very least these relationships were newer, far less long-standing and well-established than the nearly century-long client relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, for example.

The entanglement here when it comes to income is weaker though still definitely present. Libya was one of the wealthier Arab states, but Gaddafi's regime was perhaps the most universally despised of all the Arab regimes and it was the most quickly intervened against in the Arab Spring. Morocco and Jordan are not very rich countries

[119] Brynen et al. pgs. 187-188

despite their monarchies and Western support. But very clearly the six Persian Gulf monarchies stand out here: they are so wealthy because of their bountiful oil exports and their oil exports are the historical reason they have such tight-knit relations with the Western powers. There was obviously no appetite in the international community for revolutionary regime change in the six wealthiest Arab countries, the Persian Gulf monarchies. Any revolutionary fuel—like the discontent of the Shia majority in Bahrain, or the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia—stood little chance of catching fire into an uprising when the foreign attitude was so uniformly disinterested in one.

Altogether these details help bolster the case for foreign attitude as the key variable in determining the outcomes of Arab Spring uprisings, and put at least a small damper on the case for income and regime type as totally independent factors, despite their equally strong statistical correlations.

Tying Together One Narrative

The following is a simple narrative of how and why the Arab Spring unfolded as it did in every Arab country examined in this paper, and offers explanations for how foreign attitude was related.

The Arab Spring events began in the relatively small North African country of Tunisia. Protests raged for almost a whole month as police were unable to subdue the crowds with force, despite many shootings, beatings, and arrests. Longtime dictator Ben Ali resigned and fled the country on January 14, 2011, the same day that the Obama Administration released a public statement expressing sympathy with the demonstrators and calling for the Tunisian government to respect the human rights of demonstrators and

hold new elections soon. The statement itself was almost certainly not causative because Ben Ali had already been making the kind of desperate concessions that soon-to-be-ousted dictators make in the last days before they make the final decision to leave power, compromises like dissolving his government and promising not to seek another term in office when his current term expired in a few years (though other dictators such as Omar al-Bashir in Sudan had made such promises and would later break them). Unable to find any precise time-stamps in the reporting about these events, it is possible the statement itself may have only come in the hours after Ben Ali got on the plane and fled the country.

But with the sole exception of Algeria—which is something of an edge case as it had already been in the grip of periodic outbreaks of rioting over food prices and unemployment throughout 2010—all of the subsequent Arab Spring uprisings began *after* the crucial date of January 14 when Ben Ali fled the country. They all seem to have been directly inspired by the successful revolutionary example set by the Tunisians: if people go out into the street, and they resist the inevitable police crackdown, they might be able to force a dictatorship to fall. Certainly, the self-immolation in Tunisia in December 2010 that triggered that country's uprising spawned a series of dozens of copycat self-immolations in most of the other Arab Spring countries—the most concrete evidence of international inspiration for the protests.

In the Tunisian case, the SFA framework only really provides evidence for the ambivalence of the international community. Tunisia was not a large or economically- or strategically-important country, so the international community expressed no strong

opinion one way or another during the month the uprising was taking place. They did not initially condemn or even take a particular interest in the violent repression by Tunisian police, but neither did they make any loud calls for 'stability' or stress the need to counter 'terrorists' in the region, the kinds of comments foreign officials tend to make when they're trying to signal that they do not mind if harsh measures are taken to crush an uprising. Ben Ali was known to be a brutal dictator who had suppressed protests before, few seemed to take a strong interest in the outcome one way or the other.

But the fall of Ben Ali and the positive global media reaction to his fall—not as 'yet another' African coup or descent into civil war, but as an inspiring youth-led Internet-assisted revolution for liberal democratic values—helped trigger uprisings region-wide, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf. Within only three weeks of large-scale protests starting in Egypt, yet another dictator had fallen, Hosni Mubarak. In that event US prodding is quite evident. Numerous members of the Obama Administration, including the then-President himself, made comments calling the violent repression "deplorable" and "outrageous", openly demanding new elections be held, and even making semi-veiled threats that US aid might be cut off if reforms weren't passed.[120] The US didn't quite go so far as to say anything explicit like "Mubarak must go," and they may have even privately hoped Mubarak might be able to defuse the whole situation with some genuine-looking reforms—he was a longtime US partner after all. But they conspicuously didn't take the position of staying out of it all and expressing

[120] Bradley Klapper, "US Angered over Egypt, Hopeful over Yemen, Jordan," *Washington Examiner*, February 3, 2011.

only equivocal remarks or no remarks at all—as they later would regarding unrest in countries they definitely did not want to see revolts in, such as Saudi Arabia.[121]

It is conceivable that Mubarak lost the support of the Egyptian military in this atmosphere. The military did not overthrow him in a coup, Mubarak resigned peacefully and was not arrested by anyone for a few more months. But the military also did not take strong measures to crush the protests, and senior generals even made a public statement saying "The armed forces will not resort to use of force against our great people."[122] This is a notable contrast to the violent and unhesitating participation by the Egyptian military in dispersing large pro-Morsi sit-ins in public squares that took place in 2013 a month after the ouster of post-revolutionary elected president Mohamed Morsi, in which nearly one thousand protesters were killed in a single day. Several hundred revolutionaries had been killed by police and armed pro-government thugs over the weeks-long course of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, but the military's role in this repression was much lesser in comparison to the 2013 events.

After the Tunisian Revolution and especially the Egyptian Revolution, people were emboldened across the Arab world; and international events seemed to feed on each other in almost every case. Large-scale protests began or escalated in Algeria, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, and lesser but still significant ones took place in Morocco, Mauritania, and Saudi Arabia. Self-immolations inspired by Bouazizi in Tunisia took place in nearly all of these countries, and the slogan *ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam* ("the

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[121] Thomas Omestad, "President Obama: U.S. Supports Democratic Movements in the Middle East and North Africa, Pushes for Middle East Peace" (United States Institute of Peace, May 20, 2011).
[122] Staff Reuters, "Egypt Army: Will Not Use Violence against Citizens," *Reuters*, January 31, 2011.

people want the fall of the regime") of the Tunisian revolutionaries was adopted in all of them.

The SFA score framework this paper has crafted is an attempt to account for the *mediums* by which international attitude is communicated to a country. Though this paper did not analyze the role of social media as one of the variables in determining the unrest severity in each country (perhaps quantified by the percentage of the population who have Internet access, or the number of smartphones sold in the country), social media obviously played a role in the Arab Spring uprisings. The event was described in the news media as a "Twitter revolt" when it was taking place, as protests organized primarily on social media were still a novel phenomenon at the time. And it's easy to imagine that the viral spread of images and slogans on social media helped to ignite the Arab Spring by providing to the protesters *concrete evidence* of foreign sympathy and solidarity with their protests in a way that had rarely occurred before in history. Not only could protesters in one Arab country witness and be inspired by the simultaneous protests in a dozen other Arab countries, but they could also directly see expressions of support and sympathy from governments and even ordinary citizens overseas. Facebook "likes" from people in other countries and photographs of solidarity demonstrations around the world posted on Twitter would provide tangible evidence to Arab protesters that the international community looked sympathetically on their uprisings, offering further encouragement for a revolutionary overthrow of their regimes.

The conclusion of this paper is that the disparate outcomes of each Arab country's Spring events is traceable to the international environment, and the attitudes being

broadcast to these countries, implicitly and explicitly. The argument is most obvious in the cases of the three ongoing civil wars, those of Libya, Syria, and Yemen, each of which were the subject of UN Security Council deliberations, White House remarks, foreign aid given to rebels, and eventually active foreign military intervention. But the inverse events in Bahrain also make the case strongly: what might have been a Yemen or Libya-type event where large popular protests faced down against harsh state repression, instead received the opposite reaction. The Gulf Cooperation Council intervened directly with their troops to assist the Bahraini government in suppressing the unrest and preventing a revolution.

Sudan and Lebanon are cases where long-term political exhaustion with civil conflict and with foreign intervention probably conspired to prevent large-scale protests from escalating to revolution. Both were already so recently riven by internal conflicts that there was no political opening for any kind of unified popular movement to pose a challenge to their government. Lebanon's recent history with the intervention of foreign powers on behalf of one sectarian-based community or another surely soured them on the prospect of doing such a thing. Sudan's then-ongoing partition and loss of its non-Arab and non-Muslim lands would have seemed like a bad time to be appealing to the non-Arab world for moral support in their regime change. And foreign powers also likely did not want to jeopardize the delicate peace process and the new independence of South Sudan.

Iraq was already an open battlefield for competing foreign forces before 2011, and that certainly didn't change afterward either. The explosion of the Iraqi civil war to

its worst phase was fueled in major part by conflict and resentment about pre-existing foreign influence, the events in neighboring Syria spilling over the border, and then the international reaction to that spillover.

As stated previously, there was simply no foreign appetite for regime change in the Persian Gulf monarchies despite large-scale unrest in Bahrain and some significant protests in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, no revolutions took place in any of the six GCC countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

And as for the others, there was simply not enough foreign interest. There were protests in countries like Morocco, Jordan, Mauritania, even fairly significant and sustained unrest in Algeria. But there was no noticeable foreign interest in them despite harsh repression in a few cases. So protests didn't take off into open revolts.

Final Conclusion

The foreign attitude thesis is not completely flawless. Alone it has gaps. The inability to explain why the Tunisian Revolution occurred in the first place, igniting the Arab Spring as a whole, is a major gap. Supplementation with the income and regime type factors is needed for a fuller picture of the etiology of Arab Spring uprisings. However, the foreign attitude thesis provides the most detailed account of why revolts happen, and it is a thesis that is under-explored in the existing political science literature on the etiology of revolutions. It deserves further analysis by researchers in academia and the think tank sector.

For the purposes of this paper, foreign attitude is the most measurable and quantifiable way of examining this thesis. But in a broader sense, the international

environment in all its complexity provides a stronger explanation in many cases for why revolutions happen, rather than looking purely at the internal characteristics of a country.

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Appendix A

Supplemental File Information

The following supplemental files accompany this thesis.

Jake R thesis spreadsheet

A spreadsheet containing the numerical data for all 18 countries and all graphs used in this paper.

File type: .xlsx

File name: [Jake R thesis spreadsheet.xlsx]

File size: 32KB

Required software: Microsoft Excel