

Egypt vs. Saudi Arabia: Alternative Paths to the Arab Spring

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Abstract

Why did Egypt experience an Arab Spring that led to regime change, while Saudi Arabia had limited protests and maintained stability? This research paper will test the theory that Egypt experienced protests in 2011, primarily due to the country's history during the 1950-1970s under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser. The materials consulted in writing this research paper consist of fourteen peer-reviewed scholarly articles and nine books, all focusing on either Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the dynamics of historical political regimes within the Middle East, or basic political theory. The research findings based on the literature show how Nasser's leadership instilled ideas of Pan-Arabism, secularism, and social justice. This would cause Egypt's historical trajectory to be caught between fighting against repression and fighting for democracy, eventually culminating in the 2011 Arab Spring and failed democratic uprising. Egypt's Arab Spring is contrasted against Saudi Arabia's stable experience to further illustrate the effect that differing historical trajectories play in catalyzing regional protest. This paper will also examine how the countries' economies, the influence of oil and the impact of international actors (namely the United States) were not the pivotal variables that explain Egypt's Arab Spring. I found that Egypt experienced an Arab Spring while Saudi Arabia did not, due to Egypt's history under the leadership of Nasser, which created a unique institutionalized framework that simultaneously liberated and repressed civil society, allowing tensions to easily build and ignite during the wave of pro-democracy Arab Spring protests in 2011.

Keywords: Pan-Arabism, secularism, social justice, pluralism, authoritarianism, modernization, traditionalism, Arab Spring

Literature Review

Prior literature regarding the Arab Spring in Egypt focused on inter-political dynamics of the country and intra-political relationships throughout the region of the Middle East and North Africa. The two traditional schools of thought that have been used to examine Middle East relations and conflict within the past decades are orientalism and exceptionalism. Edward Said's *Orientalism* and Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong? : The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* encompass these contrasting arguments (1978; 2002). This paper attempts to take neither an orientalist nor an exceptionalism stance, but uses these models as context for examining the specific effect of history on the countries of Egypt and Saudi Arabia (ibid).

Books such as *Cook's False Dawn*, Lynch's *The Arab Uprisings Explained*, and Brownlee, Jason, Masoud, Tarek and Reynolds' *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform*, present the most contemporary arguments that examine the political and economic factors that could explain the outbreak of an Arab Spring in Egypt and the lack thereof in Saudi Arabia (2007; 2014; 2015). Most recent literature within the past decade focuses on weak economies, the impact of oil wealth, and the influence of international intervention as the main factors of instability within the region. Additionally, the literature discusses how these factors catalyzed an Arab Spring in Egypt while being able to stop protests in Saudi Arabia (ibid).

Articles by Diamond, Gause and Spiers, including the aforementioned books, argue that these factors are some of the primary reasons for the differences in Arab Spring's throughout the region (2010; 2010; 2004). I argue, however, that these factors are not the most important indicators to explain the differences in Arab Spring's between countries throughout the region compared to a country's history using the contrasting experiences between Egypt and Saudi Arabia as the primary case study. Articles by Bellin, Farid, Kenney, Mansfield and Selim show how Egypt's distinct

history under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser created a foundation of political instability (2004; 1996; 2012; 1973; 2016). This literature presents a stark contrast to Saudi Arabia's history. Articles by Axelgard, Bellin, Choueiri, Mann, Menaldo and Özev examine the effect of Saudi Arabia's authoritarian, traditional monarchy and argues the country's robust authoritarianism has aided the political establishment in silencing public dissent significantly (2001; 2004; 2002; 2012; 2012; 2017). This paper goes beyond the traditional dichotomous arguments of orientalism vs. exceptionalism and expands upon previous findings regarding the countries differing histories, by relating history to contemporary politics. I argue that the causes of the Arab Spring in Egypt goes beyond the traditional and contemporary explanations of conflict within the Middle East, to show that Egypt's history under Nasser was the pivotal factor in creating the environment necessary for an Arab Spring to occur.

Egypt under Nasser: Ideology of Pan-Arabism, Secularism, and Social Justice

Pan-Arabism

Nasser's rule instilled modern ideas such as Pan-Arabism, secularism, and social justice which allowed for democratic principles, such as political representation, to enter Egyptian society. This would create a repressed, yet pluralized autocracy. Through Nasser's leadership in overthrowing colonial and monarchical rule and establishing Egypt's first (though authoritarian) Republic in the *coup* of 1952, he emerged as a charismatic national and regional leader. One of the key tenets in "Nasserism" was Pan-Arabism, which advocated for Arabs to unify across borders and nations against imperial powers and Israel. While Pan-Arabism could be seen as a force "from another era...Gamal Abdel Nasser inspiring the masses across the region", it was nonetheless formative and pertinent (Humphreys, 2005, 51). Pan-Arabism inspired Egypt for decades even after Nasser's rule, and directly influenced the protests in 2011 as Humphreys shows that a "latent

sense of Pan Arabism helped produce the communal wave of protests across the region” (Humphreys, 2005, 51-52). It is therefore a logical conclusion that Egypt would be the *most* inspired by this “renewed sense of Pan-Arabism” in the Middle East, which prompted the public to collectively mobilize for reform (Humphreys, 2005, 81). Additionally, Egypt would be more predisposed to protest repressive regimes compared to Saudi Arabia “given both its rich history of political protests and strikes especially in the few years leading up to 2011 and the strength of its civil society and labor movement” (Lynch, 2014, 64). As a result, in 2011, secular, Islamist, labor, and communist groups all protesting for democratic reform could unite under the commonality of Pan-Arabism that echoed the triumphs of their country’s history.

Secularism

Nasser promoted secularism that was implemented through an authoritarian Republic that advocated for state control over religion. Nasser’s secularism was unique to Egypt’s history, and can be defined as a type of “national-secularist dictatorship” in which government and politics operated without influence from other political or religious groups, specifically Islamic fundamentalists and traditionalists (Nettler and Marquand, 2000, 61). Nasser’s secularist policies manifested themselves through the repression of various religious groups, leading many popular Egyptian Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to be politically repressed for decades (Cleveland, 2016, 286-325). Despite this repression, The Brotherhood was one of the largest and most politically active groups during Nasser’s leadership. Egyptians saw the Muslim Brotherhood as a representative of their nationhood within the context of their religious and cultural heritage, causing an increasingly informed civil society to advocate for this group’s representation on behalf of the citizen’s interest (Cleveland, 2016; Kenney, 2012; Mansfield, 1973). Due to this historical

foundation, the Muslim Brother was the largest group advocating for political representation and reform once protests broke out in the 2011 Arab Spring.

Despite being institutionally repressed through the framework of Nasser's secularist policies, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to reorient itself in the 21st century as a representative of the strong Islamist current in Egyptian civil society (Kenney, 2012, 430-442). The Muslim Brotherhood was successful in filling the political vacuum that occurred after the initial wave of protests in 2011 since they "offered Egyptians what they had been demanding for the better part of a century - economic development, social justice, representative government, and dignity" (Cook, 2017, 105). This was possible only because Egyptian civil society was historically strong due to Nasser's attempts of giving the Parliament more power from the Executive in 1967, causing secular and Islamist groups to call for political representation.

As civil unrest continued, the demand for political reform grew, eventually forcing Anwar Sadat to expand upon Nasser's policies through a limited opening up of political life in the 1970s to stabilize society. These reforms were too limited to enact any real change, but enough to provide a glimmer of hope for the possibility of growing political involvement, leading to a civil society that would be continually bounded by limited pluralism. Several groups were unable to gain stable political control in 2011, because of the prevalence of repressive political institutions that prevented their ability to organize and mobilize (Brownlee, 2015, 40-60). Yet, while Nasser was simultaneously an advocate for secularism and Pan-Arabism, he could not reject the cultural importance of Islam. These two contradictory ideas greatly influenced Egyptian civil society during his rule. This complicated dynamic, combined with the influx of more modern principles like political representation within an autocracy, led to domestic unrest and instability that would culminate for decades until the Arab Spring protests.

Social Justice

This dynamic was further complicated through Nasser's policy of social justice that enabled Egyptian society to be open to modern political pluralism. This emerging political pluralism was rooted in Nasser's contrasting 'modern' policies of Pan-Arabism and secularism. One of the focuses during his leadership was to advocate for social justice through the implementation of Arab socialism. Social justice can be defined as providing an equal distribution of wealth, access to social empowerment and social mobility (Al-Shalabi, 2003, 230-214). For example, policies that held these aspects of socialism and social justice included the redistribution of land from the elites to peasant classes subsequently empowering all of Egyptian society (Al-Shalabi, 2003; Choueir, 2002, 650-656). Through these policies, Egyptians capitalized on modern principles like social mobility, wealth equality, and economic development.

The definition of "modernity" is often associated with Western values regarding progress and political ideology, often implicitly indicating a type of orientalism, when comparing the modernization of the Middle East to the West (Selim, 2015, 180-185; Lewis, 2002, 150-160; Said, 1978, 330-345; Habib, 2005). However, within the context of this paper, modernization is separated from "Westernization", or the practice of adopting Western values. For this paper, modernization is defined as the creation of an industrialized market economy, government that operates within a sovereign nation state, and the inclusion of an educated and involved civil society that can be represented through political pluralism (Al-Shalabi, 2003, 303-322; Thomas, 2011; Habib, 2005). Therefore Nasser's modernization of Egyptian society created a well-educated, complex, and mobilized public. Nasser's policies such as nationalizing the Suez Canal in 1956, and giving greater Parliamentary independence from the Executive in 1967, illustrated a slight shift from political repression to liberalization (Mansfield, 1973, 680-688). These policies also

represented how Nasser's ideas of socialism could be the means of reaching the ends of social justice (Mansfield, 1973, 680-688; Cleveland, 2016, 286-305). These policies helped create a sense of nationalism that would instill confidence and unity throughout civil society, and a demand for political participation that would only grow up until the Arab Spring as the demands were continually left unanswered (Mansfield, 1973, 688). These institutional shifts, combined with a more well-informed and nationalized Egyptian public, would be the foundation for Egyptians wanting more liberalized policies in future decades.

Historical Challenges with Nasser's Leadership

Many of these small, politically liberalizing reforms offered by Nasser were largely unfulfilled or only slightly expanded upon through the coming decades. The promise of political representation would continue throughout Egypt's history, only to cause small incremental reforms. As a result, Egyptian politics and civil society liberalized and differing political Islamist and secular ideologies gained popular support, though they never gained full political representation. The establishment of an autocratic Republic in 1952 had institutionalized political repression and militarism, keeping these political undercurrents repressed. Several political and Islamist groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) demanded representation for decades, only to be met with small domestic reforms such as allowing limited political liberalization, a slight decrease in censorship, and opening up Egypt's single party, the National Democratic Party, under Sadat's presidency (Farid, 1996; Kenney, 2012, 427-440). Ultimately, these reforms were limited and unsubstantial as most Egyptians were still excluded from the political process.

Egypt's Republic therefore became a type of 'liberalized autocracy' by continually allowing for some representation, only to resort to brutal repression enforced by Egypt's military structure, thus creating a fragmented and unstable type of authoritarianism (Cook, 2017, 47). It

became evident in 2011 that the “cohesion of repressive forces were pivotal in determining whether regimes cracked down or broke down”, and Egypt’s fractured authoritarian rule would ultimately break down the regime (Brownlee, 2015, 15). Egypt’s historical predisposition to radical regime change comes from a romanticization of Nasser’s rise to power that is associated with Egypt’s establishment as a sovereign state. Egypt’s repressed pluralized autocracy, military structure, and precedent for radical regime created an institutionalized foundation of principles that would act as a powder keg for the Arab Spring. Public demand for political representation would culminate over decades of repression to a breaking point in the protests of 2011 (Lynch, 2014).

Authoritarian Pluralism

The influx of modern principles, like having an educated and involved civil society, usually leads to democracy because political pluralism causes new groups to demand representation and involvement in government in order to represent citizens’ interests (Thomas, 2011). Subsequently, Nasser’s policies inspired the public to advocate for modern principles such as political representation. However, throughout the 1950s-60s Nasser also implemented stringent authoritarian militarism (Cleveland, 2016, 286-325). This complicated dynamic caused Egypt to experience a contradictory political environment that was torn between allowing for political pluralism and maintaining stability through authoritarianism.

This would be the framework in which subsequent “leaders [in these countries] [would] permit more open politics in which political parties operated relatively freely” (Cook, 2017, 45). This created a “counterintuitive idea of liberalized autocracy in which Middle Eastern authoritarians skillfully manage political challenge through political openings” (Cook, 2017, 47). So while Nasser’s regime did indeed start decades of repressive authoritarianism, the modern principles of Pan-Arabism, secularism, and social justice created a unique political environment

that was repressive yet occasionally open to limited political pluralism. This dichotomy explains how Egypt's trajectory after Nasser struggled between these norms of strict authoritarian rule and restrained representation.

Military-Security Structure

Nasser's leadership also created a powerful politically involved, military-security-apparatus that was instrumental in both enforcing authoritarianism and also consolidating political rule. Egypt's formative years of self-governance in the 1950s was defined not only by the precedent of radical regime change, but also the important responsibility of the military in enabling that regime change. The historical role of the military is evident in the fact that Nasser rose to power through a military-led *coup*, and the establishment of the Republic in 1953 was led by a Revolutionary Command Council in which martial law was established. These events set a precedent that encouraged the military to be instrumental in controlling Egyptian politics for decades. The prominence of the military in Egyptian society is demonstrated by the fact that "10.8% of Egypt's population is engaged in various branches of the security apparatus...high by world standards" (Bellin, 2004, 147). Since Nasser's institutionalization of militarism, the military-security-apparatus' power grew over decades and was responsible for crushing opposition, dissent, and protest through brutal domestic crackdowns that involved mass arrests, surveillance and torture. As a result "the state's coercive capacity and will has led to harsh repression of civil society; consequently, many popular forces have been reluctant to mobilize politically," (Bellin, 2004, 146). The military-apparatus' continual repressive force combined with insignificant political reforms, built up public dissent for decades, eventually catalyzing Egyptians to call for representation and an end to institutionalized repression in 2011.

The role of the military-security-apparatus in Egypt had always been to protect the regime and assert a Republican autocracy. The historical prominence of the military-security-apparatus in helping regime change in 1952 meant the military was predisposed to political involvement (Belin, 2004, 142-145; Cleveland 2016, 286-325). Subsequently, the military *coup* in 1952 would seemingly foreshadow the aftermath of the protests in 2011 as “the military took the reins of power withdrawing from Mubarak, while Islamists and their non-Islamist rivals failed to construct a durable coalition that would enshrine the principle of civilian sovereignty in a country long bereft of it” (Brownlee, 2015, 11). Once it became apparent that the several secular, Islamist, and various political groups after the 2011 protests were unable to consolidate rule, a power vacuum was created in which the military was the primary suitable force able to impose regulations to a more representative democracy, such as through establishing deadlines for elections. However, the very resilience and brutality of the military-security apparatus that had helped cause the protests, also allowed the military to centralize political power and assert a military dictatorship in 2013 under General Sisi, continuing authoritarian repression in Egypt once again. Therefore, Egypt’s repressive Republic and military-security-apparatus was more suited for protest and regime change due to institutionalized norms and precedents established in the country’s historical past.

Precedent of Radical Regime Change

The rise and leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser also gave Egypt a predisposition to radical regime change and set a precedent for future political reform. Nasser came to power through forming the Association of Free Officers in 1949, which was made up of military members, communists, members of the Muslim Brotherhood and Wafdists. The Free Officers seized power in July of 1952 through a *coup d’etat*, forced King Faruq to abdicate, and established a Republic and martial law in 1953. The Egyptian monarchy was abolished, political parties were outlawed,

and Nasser thereafter consolidated authoritarian rule that utilized militarism (Farid, 1996; Cleveland, 2016, 286-325). Egypt's path out of colonial oppression and into sovereign self-rule was defined by these characteristics. After 1952, radical regime change and *coups* were embedded as social norms in Egyptian society, and therefore viable options for political change. Since human behavior is based on existing institutional and cultural norms, it can be extrapolated that 1952 served as a model for Egyptian politics for decades, up until the 2011 Arab Spring and 2013 military *coup*, since these events parallel Egypt's history (Mansfield, 1973, 670-680). Nasser's rule further institutionalized these norms as the events took place during a formative and impressionable time in Egypt's early history as a sovereign state.

Contrasting Saudi Arabia's Suppressive yet Stable Authoritarianism

In understanding why Egypt experienced protests in 2011 that overthrew President Mubarak, it must be asked why did Saudi Arabia, a similarly repressive but conservative totalitarian monarchy, remain stable throughout the region's protests. Saudi Arabia's leaders during the 1950s-1970s were King Saud followed by King Faisal, who utilized monarchical rule, close control over the military and centralized leadership guided by conservative theological principles, ultimately creating a repressed but stable society. The first reason that explains why Saudi Arabia did not have mass protest while Egypt did is because Saudi Arabia's totalitarian monarchy was more suited to continued repression and stability than Egypt's Republican autocracy. One of the common patterns found throughout the Middle East regarding the Arab Spring, is that "all of the Arab republics except Lebanon have experienced protests...whereas the monarchies have been much more stable" (Lynch, 2014, 71). Monarchies have a predisposition to stability more than newly established or weak Republics due to their ability to draw on traditional legitimacy, oppress an already usually weak civil society and centralize authority through one leader or family (Weber, 1946; Menaldo, 2012, 707-

709; Özev, 2017). The Al-Saud family has governed most of the Arabian Peninsula for almost a full century. Saudi Arabia's leaders during the 1950s-1970s were King Saud and Faisal, who both enforced totalitarian monarchical regimes (Axelgard, 2001, 169-175; Özev, 2017, 999-1009). Saudi Arabia's conservative government was better suited to suppress protest than Egypt's since "a liberalized autocracy...backed by a military-security apparatus has clear disadvantages over many monarchies" (Lynch, 2014, 48). Egypt is a prime example of a liberalized autocracy with a strong influence of militarism that crumbled under the pressure of several opposition movements that united across religious or ideological lines to oppose the regime. Egypt's history of Nasserism and radical regime change created a type of liberalized Republican autocracy that set a precedent for repression, but also political pluralism. Adversely, Saudi Arabia's rulers did not allow for any sort of political or ideological pluralism, and there was no "opening up" of Saudi Arabia's civil society compared to Egypt's. Therefore, liberalized autocratic Republics are inherently more unstable and prone to political divisions and revolt, while repressive authoritarian monarchies are more successful in crushing public dissent and protest.

The second reason as to why Saudi Arabia did not experience an Arab Spring is due to the fact that the monarchy maintains all power and holds close control over its military, while the military was an independent politicized force in Egypt. Egypt's military was not only instrumental in furthering the repression that led to the protests, but was also an autonomous force that helped protestors overthrow Mubarak, and then consolidated political rule in 2013. The royal family in Saudi Arabia has a much stronger hold over the country's military than Egypt's Republic over the large military-security apparatus. While this is partially because the Saudi Arabia's monarchy is more successful in consolidating repressive rule, the Saudi military has not had the same influential role in regime change and political life as the Egyptian military (Cook, 2017, 40-68; Axelgard,

2001). Saudi Arabia's military does not have the political autonomy or experience in instigating radical regime change through a *coup* compared to Egypt. As a result, the military is more closely aligned with the monarchy and able to suppress opposition, while Egyptians targeted both the regime and military as instigators of repression.

Furthermore, the Saudi Arabian army has been described as a "family affair" rife with patrimonialism, while the military in Egypt is "highly institutionalized" (Bellin, 2004, 149). Egypt's institutionalized military was also highly politicized since it came to power along with Nasser's authoritarian system of government, and it "was backed by strong security forces and Egypt had many of the aspects of a police state" (Mansfield, 1973, 686). While both militaries served as a check on suppressing opposing political groups, the more autonomous the military the more likely military elites are able to assert power and eventually obtain possible leadership positions. This explains why the Egyptian military stopped firing on protestors in 2011 and was the pivotal player in removing Mubarak from power, once siding with the protestors. It also illustrates how the military was able to successfully consolidate power by forming an authoritarian military regime in 2013, after overturning the elected Muslim Brotherhood (Cook, 2017, 201-236). Contrarily, since Saudi Arabia's military lacks this political autonomy, their military is more likely to align with the monarchy's choices and be more effective in crushing political opposition in support of the current regime and retain the status quo.

The third reason as to why Saudi Arabia was able to curtail an Arab Spring was due to leadership being guided by strict conservative, theological principles which promoted a repressed but homogeneous and stable society. Nasser's principles of Pan-Arabism and secularism inspired political pluralism, developing a strong civil society that created different political groups and ideological viewpoints (Mansfield, 1973, 678). Saudi Arabia has always portrayed itself as the

representatives of the origins of Islam, and the country holds two of the religion's most holy cities, Mecca and Medina. As a result, Islam, namely Sharia Law and Wahhabism, is the guiding principle for the totalitarian monarchy and encompasses all of society: "Islam permeates the society in a web-like fashion. It is the dominant feature of the common ground between Saudi society and the ruling family" (Axelgard, 2001, 173). Egypt was experiencing a slight liberalization of politics through the promotion of secularism that simultaneously conflicted with Islamism, while Saudi Arabia remained steadfast in its sole promotion of Sharia Law. Furthermore, King Faisal's leadership in the 1960s further institutionalized conservative theological principles by using Nasser's socialist Republic and secular policies as a negative foil to Saudi Arabia, furthering centralizing the Saudis' conservative rule and the public's obedience (Mann, 2012, 749-755). While Egypt's history was greatly defined by Nasser's rule that created a paradoxical but pluralistic liberalized autocracy and heterogeneous civil society that fostered an environment for protest, Saudi Arabia had a homogenous political society that was able to prevent the evolution of an Arab Spring.

Alternative Explanations

Poor Economic Development

There are several attempts to explain why two similar countries in the Middle East experienced alternative paths to 2011. One of the common alternative explanations for why Egypt experienced an Arab Spring while Saudi Arabia did not was due to Egypt's low economic development and successive instability. This argument is faulty for several reasons. Firstly, while the country undoubtedly had economic struggles and vast amounts of the population experienced unemployment and poverty which only contributed to domestic unrest, the economy is not as pivotal in explaining Egypt's Arab Spring compared to its history. While Egypt did have a

struggling economy, it certainly wasn't as dire as other countries across the world: "with regard to fiscal health...few face economic collapse of sub-Saharan proportions" (Bellin, 2004, 147). Since Sub-Saharan Africa did not experience mass protests yet has far worse economies and unemployment rates, for example, and so this reasoning falls short for explaining Egypt's protests. The population's in Sub-Saharan Africa also have a negative perception of their country's economic standing, while the Egyptian populous' understanding of their nation's economic status had been improving in the years leading up to the Arab Spring (Bellin, 2004, 147-150; Cook 2017).

Secondly, it's additionally important to note a trend in the decade leading up to 2011 that showed Arab youths in Egypt and across the Middle East were "more satisfied with the current economic conditions of their countries and more optimistic that conditions will improve in the coming years" than previous decades or generations (Lynch, 2014, 283). While the years preceding 2011 did experience a rise in global food prices, it's not probable that youth mobilization regarding this issue would alter that quickly and dramatically, thus ultimately being the catalyst for mass protest. Even more so, "Egypt's [GDP] continued to grow at 4.7 and 5.2 percent in the two years before the uprising of January 25, 2011" (Cook, 2017, 65). Therefore, even despite the rising public dissent towards increased food prices, the Egyptian economy as a whole was not in as dire conditions as is often portrayed and the majority of the Egyptian population's perception of their nation's economic success was increasing positively right before the Arab Spring.

Thirdly, Egypt has received substantial financial aid from countries such as the US, in an effort to assert stability and prevent the country's economy from spiraling out of control. For example, "since 1948 the US has transferred almost \$80 billion in the form of military assistance and economic aid to Egypt" including food aid in the 1940s, and economic assistance in the 1970s, so as to prevent drastic domestic economic instability (Cook, 2017, 42 & 226). In response one

could argue that international economic aid only hurt the Egyptian government's ability to assert effective economic autonomy. Yet it was evident that "Egypt...does tax its citizens to varying degrees of effectiveness", nullifying this counter argument (Cook, 2017, 41). Therefore, despite apparent economic disparities and struggles, Egypt's economy held a suitable degree of autonomy, and was not disastrous enough to be a pivotal factor in causing mass unrest and political protest.

Influence of Oil

The second alternative explanation for why Egypt experienced an Arab Spring while Saudi Arabia did not is related to the economic conditions of the countries directly correlated to the influence of oil. Many scholars argue that Saudi Arabia is successful in asserting their repressive monarchy and keeping dissent quiet (Diamond, 2010; Gause, 2010, 25-35), due to the fact that "the most resilient regimes were those that held oil wealth" (Brownlee, 2015, 214). It is argued that oil allows the country to operate as a rentier state "in the sense that they depend heavily on oil and gas rents to keep their states afloat," and as a result "most are so awash in cash that they do not need to tax their own citizens...they fail to develop the organic expectations of accountability that emerge when states make citizens pay taxes" (Diamond, 2010, 97-98). However, this argument cannot serve as a truly encompassing valid explanation for why Egypt experienced protests since the country has its own oil and natural gas deposits.

Of course, however, these deposits are substantially smaller compared to Saudi Arabia's deposits. Yet, if oil was the central reason as to why unrest and protests occurred then why did Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco - three states with the lowest oil and natural gas incomes per capita - experience fewer protests than states with modest per capita incomes from hydrocarbon resources, such as Egypt (Lynch, 2014, 70)? If the amount of oil a country held was the central characteristic that determined whether a regime was able to buy off protestors and successfully

oppress opposition, there would have been a vastly different pattern of protests across the region. For example Lebanon, Jordan, and Morocco would have experienced vastly more protests as a result of the fact oil wealth did not help their economy and could not silent popular dissent. It must be concluded, then, that oil is not as instrumental in curtailing public opposition or dissent compared to the historical impact of monarchical oppression versus liberalized autocracy.

International Actors' Intervention

The third alternative explanation for why Egypt may have experienced an Arab Spring is due to the influence of international actors, specifically the US, affecting the country's domestic politics. For example, Cook states how leading up to the 2011 protests, "the Muslim Brotherhood believed that the close ties between Washington and Cairo had weakened Egypt and compromised its regional leadership role" (2016, 203). This neocolonial argument presents a narrative in which the United States' interventionist policies were in support of the authoritarian and repressive autocracies in Egypt in return for stability (Bellin, 2004, 143-148). It is argued this caused Egyptians to feel that their countries regional leadership was undermined, and Egyptians did not trust their own government because they viewed US economic intervention as a threat to their sovereignty (Bellin, 2004, 143-148). However, this narrative is biased because it equates US economic aid with political intervention. It is true that the United States favored the brutal regime of Hosni Mubarak, believing an authoritarian Republic was more beneficial to US interests in the Middle East compared to an Islamist regime. Yet, the United States' influence on Egypt was mainly through economic aid and diplomatic support, not through meddling in elections, influencing policy, or overthrowing regimes (Cook, 2017, 42 & 226). While the U.S. certainly has its fair share of dark stains in history through its interventionist policies in Middle Eastern governments and politics, the United States has never directly intervened in Egypt's political

elections or government compared to other colonial powers such as Britain (Spiers, 2004; Scott 1996). This is further corroborated by the fact that once Mubarak's government was overthrown, the US took a "hands off" approach and strongly encouraged free elections in Egypt to take place, despite the country's fear that the Muslim Brotherhood may come into power (Cook, 2017, 201-236).

So if the Egyptian public perceived that their regional leadership was undermined, it was primarily due to the political fragmentation that was occurring as a contradictory liberalized autocracy struggled to consolidate legitimate rule through repressive means. Furthermore, the period of Nasser's leadership were defining years of Egypt's political trajectory and was also when colonialism's effects in the country, and US intervention, were drastically weakened (Mansfield, 1973, 676-680). Therefore, the United States' international political involvement in Egypt was not only mainly through economic aid and never through direct political involvement. Additionally, this economic intervention was also after the country's most important developmental period (Mansfield, 1973 675-682). Additionally, the United States' gave similar, if not more, diplomatic support to Saudi Arabia's theocratic monarchy throughout recent decades, which did not experience an Arab Spring. To conclude, America's political intervention is not a sufficient alternative to explain the differences in Arab Spring's, because the US was more politically involved with Saudi Arabia and never directly affected Egyptian politics or autonomy.

Conclusion

A country's history greatly defines and influences a nation's people, what they stand for, and who they will become in the future. Egypt's formative years of post-colonial, sovereign, self-governed rule, was greatly influenced by Nasser and his policies. Through his leadership that modernized Egypt, his policies involving secularism and Pan-Arabism inspired the country for

decades, his leadership institutionalized a norm and precedent for radical regime change, and his institutions created a repressive politicized military-security-apparatus. His actions created a paradoxical environment in which Egyptians faced both the prospect of a Republic that held the promise of political representation, while also instituting repressive autocracy strife with brutal institutionalized militarism. This created a foundation that was well suited for protest and regime change, as Egypt's relationship between balancing pluralism and authoritarianism continued for decades, and unsurprisingly came to a boiling point in 2011. Contrastingly, Saudi Arabia has never faltered in its theocratic, monarchical totalitarianism that is successful in suppressing dissidents through its promotion of a homogenous political society. There is immense truth to the saying that to understand the present one has to look to the past. Egypt experienced an Arab Spring while Saudi Arabia did not due to Egypt's experiences under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser that created a framework which simultaneously liberated and repressed civil society. It was Egypt's history, shaped by Nasser's leadership that cultivated the environment that served as a political matchbox, empowering civil society to take a stand and become the match.

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