

REVIEW ESSAY

Public Response to Authoritarian Regimes in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

How does people's response to repressive authoritarian regimes shape the subsequent strategic interactions between people and regimes in the Middle East? This review essay discusses how the recently growing literature on the Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes helps us to answer this question. We draw empirical evidence from Lisa Blaydes's *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*, Dana El Kurd's *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine*, and Elizabeth Nugent's *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transition*. The word "dictatorship" typically brings to mind monolithic images of a repressive regime where people lack legitimate recourse to respond to the regime. However, drawing on archival material, original in-depth interviews, public opinion surveys, and cutting-edge experimental data, these three books illuminate the complexities of political life in Saddam Hussein's Iraq (Blaydes), Palestine (El Kurd), and Egypt and Tunisia (Nugent). They demonstrate why certain people choose to collaborate with the regime while others work to undermine it, how polarization among people created under the authoritarian regime threatens democratic transition, and why well-intentioned international intervention may weaken people's capacity to confront the regime. Overall, they offer new explanations of why and how state-society interactions in the authoritarian context can induce unexpected negative effects on the regime's resilience and the capacity for nation building.

[This paper is a work in progress in the fullest sense. Please do not cite without the first author's permission. Comments and criticisms are welcome.]

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Public Response to Authoritarian Regimes in the Middle East

Lisa Blaydes. *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 354 pages, paperback, \$24.95.

Dana El Kurd. *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 226 pages, hardcover, \$51.99.

Elizabeth R. Nugent, *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), paperback, \$27.99.

Having observed that the Arab Spring uprisings mostly failed to bring desired lasting change for democracy, Steven Cook argues that the United States cannot “get the Middle East right” but that the future of the region lies in the hands of the people who live there.¹ How does people’s response to repressive authoritarian regimes shape the subsequent strategic interactions between people and regimes in the Middle East? Does it matter at all? Why did the Arab Spring not succeed?² How do authoritarian regimes face the challenges from popular protests and democratization movements? How do institutions help the regime to sustain authoritarian rule, if

¹ Steven A. Cook, *False Dawn: Protest, Democracy, and Violence in the New Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² For the most systematic and rigorous analysis on the Arab Spring, providing parsimonious explanations for why leaders were (or were not) ousted and for why institutional change did (or did not) occur, see Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, *The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

at all? Why are authoritarian regimes in the Middle East considered unstable and less resilient (compared, for example, with China)?³

This review essay discusses how the recently growing literature on the Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes helps us to answer these questions. By drawing empirical evidence from Lisa Blaydes's *State of Repression: Iraq Under Saddam Hussein*, Dana El Kurd's *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine*, and Elizabeth Nugent's *After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transition*, we explore whether and how public response matters for regime resilience. Each in its own way, these three single-authored books under review demonstrate why certain people choose to collaborate with the regime while others work to undermine it, how polarization among people created under the authoritarian regime threatens democratic transition, and why well-intentioned international intervention may weaken people's capacity to confront the regime. While the authors discuss different cases and there are different shadings of emphasis among them, overall they offer new explanations of why and how state-society interactions in the authoritarian context can induce unexpected negative effects on the regime's resilience and the capacity for nation-building.

The word "dictatorship" typically brings to mind monolithic images of a repressive regime where people lack legitimate recourse to respond to the regime. However, drawing on archival material, original in-depth interviews, public opinion surveys, and cutting-edge experimental data, these three books illuminate the complexities of political life in Saddam

³ On the debate about the resilience of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, see Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics* 36(2): 139–57; Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44(2): 127–49. On the resilience of China's authoritarian regime, see Hiroki Takeuchi and Saavni Desai, "Chinese Politics and Comparative Authoritarianism: Institutionalization and Adaptation for Regime Resilience," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 22(4) (December 2021): 381–92.

Hussein’s Iraq (Blaydes), Palestine (El Kurd), and Egypt and Tunisia (Nugent). To strengthen their own power or the resilience of the regime, authoritarian leaders who can monopolize decision-making in their countries do not sustain dominance through repressive tactics alone but they pair this with a certain level of responsiveness to the public.⁴ They respond to parts of the population and co-opt them while repressing other parts of it. Given the tenuous binary of co-optation and repression taken by authoritarian leaders, we argue that public response is significant and it matters for regime resilience for two reasons. First, the binary strategy institutionalizes vested interests, which divide citizens and their capacity to confront the regime as some people have access to vested interests. In the Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, vested interests curtail the expression of public preferences through civil society, while the institutionalized mechanism for public preference and government response is necessary for democratic transition to work. Second, the combination of co-optation and repression produces a wide range of unexpected societal outcomes on how citizens relate to each other and to the state—including ideological polarization, political identity, and social cohesion. These unexpected outcomes amplify the perceived threats faced by authoritarian leaders, exacerbates the paranoia that they feel, influences their survival strategy to choose between co-optation and repression, and as a result may undermine their capacity for good governance and the likelihood of regime resilience.

⁴ Bruce Dickson makes a similar argument to explain the resilience of China’s authoritarian regime under one-party rule by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He argues that the CCP maintains its power by both repressing and responding to its people. See Bruce J. Dickson, *The Party and the People: Chinese Politics in the 21st Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

Co-optation and Institutionalized Vested Interests

Designing institutional ties to the state by creating shared interests with societal groups is a common practice to generate regime support. Through co-optation, the regime establishes authority and control over the population by bolstering the security apparatus and providing private rewards for officials and bureaucrats to repress and refrain from participating in uprisings against the government. Financial incentives motivate citizens to comply in what Lisa Blaydes calls “fear of sanction or promise of inducements” (p. 36) such as rents, public goods (turned to private goods), and jobs or promotions. For example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has employed the co-optation strategy, by building the “revolving door” between the CCP and state-owned enterprises, to prevent the capitalist system from threatening China’s one-party rule.⁵ In fact, co-optation of societal groups is one of the CCP’s survival strategies with which CCP is quick to adapt to the world trend of economic globalization and technological advancements.⁶

Answering the questions of “what went wrong” and “how we should get the Middle East right,” Cook argues that institutionalized vested interests are stronger than civil society or institutionalized governance in state-society relations of the Middle Eastern politics, noting that “because institutions in any society reflect the interests of those who have political and economic power, leaders can be expected to leverage the prevailing rules of the political game to keep, maintain, and reinforce their privileged positions.”⁷ Empirical studies of Middle Eastern politics have provided various accounts on what Cook defines as “sticky” vested interest institutions

⁵ Jie Chen and Bruce J. Dickson, *Allies of the State: China’s Private Entrepreneurs and Democratic Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Kellee S. Tsai, *Capitalism Without Democracy: The Private Sector in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁶ Bruce J. Dickson, *The Dictator’s Dilemma: The Chinese Communist Party’s Strategy for Survival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Min Ye, *The Belt Road and Beyond: State-Mobilized Globalization in China, 1998–2018* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁷ Cook, *False Dawn*, p. 157.

causing institutionalized governance malfunction under the authoritarian regime. For example, Lisa Blaydes in her earlier work shows that because Hosni Mubarak's regime in Egypt manipulated the distribution of public goods to keep winning authoritarian elections the regime failed to make effective governance systems to provide public goods.⁸ In fact, what originally sparked the Arab Spring was not people's demand for democracy per se but their economic grievances against inequality, poverty, and stagnation caused by a paucity of economic and political reforms.⁹

Blaydes in *State of Repression* explores how Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party regime in Iraq increasingly shifted the balance from co-optation to repression. She discusses the Ba'ath regime's nation-building efforts during the 1970s, showing that Iraq was more of party-based dictatorship whereas the provision of public goods was one of the sources of regime's legitimacy at that time.¹⁰ These efforts, which aimed to industrialize, build infrastructure, spend more for

⁸ Lisa Blaydes, *Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Moreover, in another regional context of comparative authoritarianism, Beatriz Magaloni suggests that Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party used fiscal transfer to subnational governments as a means to maintain one-party rule. See Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁹ The article written by an author who uses a suggestive assumed name "Cassandra" once pointed out the stagnation of structural economic reforms as a source of political crisis for the authoritarian regime in Mubarak's Egypt. See Cassandra, "The Impending Crisis in Egypt," *Middle East Journal* 49(1) (Winter 1995): 9–27. For a comprehensive political economic explanation on the origins of the Arab Spring, see Omar S. Dahi, "Understanding the Political Economy of the Arab Revolts," *Middle East Report* 259 (Summer 2011). Available at <https://merip.org/2011/06/understanding-the-political-economy-of-the-arab-revolts/>.

¹⁰ In their comparative large-N study of authoritarian regimes, Barbara Geddes et al. find that a party-based dictatorship tends to be more resilient than a military or personalist dictatorship. It is partly because a party-based dictatorship has more incentives to provide public goods. See Barbara Geddes, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How Dictatorships Work: Power, Personalization, and Collapse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). In fact, Erica Frantz finds that party-based dictatorships last an average of 26 years, compared to 11 years for personalist dictatorships and 7 years for military dictatorships. See Erica Frantz, *Authoritarianism: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

education, and create jobs, laid the foundation of the support for Hussein and the Ba‘th Party. During this period of unprecedented government spending, “oil fueled Iraq’s economic expansion and was critically important in the nation-building process” (p. 63). The oil boom “increased both citizen investment in the regime as well as citizen dependence on the state” (p. 62) as the Party became a seemingly responsive and accountable primary institution in Iraq. Nation-building efforts also included cultivating a national identity to move the Iraqi populace away from religious, tribal, and regional cleavages and toward an Iraqi or Arab identity. To do this, the regime sought integration through the national economic developmental programs and a “deliberate de-emphasis on sectarian identity in regime rhetoric and policy” (p. 70). Blaydes concludes that in the 1970s there was “a relatively high level of citizen investment in the regime...[and] Hussein had successfully consolidated political power, culminating in his accession to the presidency in 1979” (p. 79). In short, in the 1970s Hussein’s regime in Iraq was an ordinary party-based authoritarian regime which maintains its power by both repressing and responding to its people.

Although oil strengthened the regime, the dictator’s distrust of people’s loyalty—especially those who live in oil producing areas—resulted in the regime’s overreaction, which eventually caused the regime’s breakdown. The tenuous binary of co-optation and repression had helped the Ba‘th regime endure in the 1970s, but this balance shifted increasingly toward repression since the 1980s. The over-reliance on repression unified various groups of people, including the Kurds living in oil producing areas, while only vested interests had originally unified ethnic and societal groups. All of the nation-building efforts adopted by the Ba‘th Party reflected the standard course of action for other party-based authoritarian regimes, but Hussein’s deliberate efforts to personalize power during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s made it impossible

for Iraq to return back to a ordinary party-based dictatorship after the Gulf War and the post-war UN sanctions in the 1990s—when the state lacked the financial capacity and institutional strength to enforce enduring control over its people. While the conventional wisdom is that tension exists between the regime and its people inherently, Blaydes contends that the regime’s over-reliance on repression *creates* animosity and tension, which results in a cycle of increasing repression and further resistance. In sum, she convincingly argues that a *regime*’s policy to encourage compliance and control resistance “influences forms of political identity that becomes salient within the population” (p. 308), refuting traditional beliefs that structural defects exist inherently when “citizens identify with their ethnic or sectarian group over their national identity” (p. 316). Although the oil boom was able to support public goods and institutionalization of the Ba‘th Party’s one-party rule, the regime’s failures stemmed from the dictator’s overly aggressive responses to foreign and domestic threats and inability to target dissenting individuals as opposed to groups. And while the institutionalization of the Ba‘th Party had created a virtuous circle, the personalization of the regime later created a vicious circle.

Perhaps Tunisia is an exception of what Cook calls the “stickiness” of vested interests institutions.¹¹ In Tunisia, institutionalized civil society organizations actually aided in democratization, and public response matters for political outcomes as the regime is more responsive to public preferences. In many of the Middle Eastern regimes, vested interests curtail the expression of public preferences through civil society. However, in Tunisia vested interests and civil society are able to interact and balance with each other.

Elizabeth Nugent argues that different forms of repression under the authoritarian regimes led to divergent trajectories taken by Egypt and Tunisia during democratic transitions.

¹¹ Cook, *False Dawn*, pp. 156–63.

Indeed, while a decade after the Arab Spring hopes for democracy have disappeared in violence and renewed state repression, experience in these two countries shows different political outcomes. For example, in January 2014 on the third anniversary of the flight of Tunisia's former dictator, President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia's political elites passed a new constitution that is one of the most liberal in the Arab world while Egyptians passed the referendum to approve a new constitution that gives power and immunity to the military and the police. Nathan Brown, a leading political scientist specialized in the Middle Eastern politics, was quoted in a *New York Times* article describing what happened in Egypt as "train wreck" while noting Tunisia's democratic transition as "everybody keeps dancing on the edge of a cliff, but they never fall off."¹² In short, Tunisia is considered an example of democratic success while Egypt is one of authoritarian reversion.¹³

In many of the Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes, institutionalized vested interests decrease the public's capacity to confront the regime by dividing citizens as some people have access to vested interests while others do not. Ironically, the same consequence was brought by targeted repression under Mubarak's Egypt. Nugent notes that "the type of perceived threat faced by a ruler when coming to power determines the nature of all types of institutions adopted by authoritarian leaders for coercion, co-optation, and survival" (p. 61). It is because "reward and punishment structures influence citizen beliefs and, when taken together with incentives, beliefs and incentives generate behaviors" (Blaydes, p. 36). Conventional wisdom finds that the Muslim

¹² David D. Kirkpatrick and Carlotta Gall, "Arab Neighbors Take Split Paths in Constitutions," *New York Times*, January 14, 2014. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/15/world/middleeast/arab-neighbors-take-split-paths-in-constitutions.html>.

¹³ For a comprehensive comparative analysis of the post-Arab Spring divergent paths between Egypt and Tunisia, see Eva Bellin, "The Puzzle of Democratic Divergence in the Arab World: Theory Confronts Experience in Egypt and Tunisia," *Political Science Quarterly* 133(3) (2018): 435–74.

Brotherhood was unable to govern due to its radical Islamism, when in reality it was due to the treatment of the Muslim Brotherhood under the Mubarak regime. Nugent argues that “the [targeted] repression facilitated the creation and strengthening of unique political identities *within* different opposition groups, rather than one in which shared victimhood was a common feature *across* groups” (p. 175; italics in the original).

While Blaydes and Nugent discuss domestic determinants of the regime’s strategic choice between co-optation vs. repression and public response to the regime’s binary strategy, Dana El Kurd introduces the international dimension to the strategic interactions between people and the regime in Palestine. She argues that U.S. support, including economic aid, for the Palestinian Authority (PA) has created private rewards and economic rents. She writes: “Donors, and the United States in particular, emphasized a ‘good governance’ framework in a way that was incompatible with Palestine’s economic and political conditions” (10). In other words, U.S. exercises have generated institutionalized vested interests. El Kurd highlights that “the PA’s repression is more effective and more damaging...because it is an indigenous authoritarian regime” (p. 3), and U.S. influence has led to unexpected consequences of incentivizing state repressive practices. In other words, well-intentioned international intervention resulted in the “polarized and demobilized” situation observed in the Palestinian authoritarian context, as she describes: “The second intifada was markedly different from the first in that there was no unified leadership, and grassroots organizations did not direct strategy as they had in the past” (p. 11).

Repression and Unexpected Outcomes

In almost every case, the autocratic leader is aiming to strengthen their own power or the resilience of the regime. This is accomplished through co-opting parts of the population, or

recruiting individuals into the folds of the government, while repressing other parts. This binary strategy ensures that the behaviors of individuals in an authoritarian context fall into one of two categories: through co-optation, the regime establishes authority and control over the population by bolstering the security apparatus and providing private rewards for officials and bureaucrats to repress and refrain from participating in uprisings against the government. Through repression, at least in theory, the government aims to significantly weaken the population's ability to confront the regime, and this is achieved through economic underdevelopment and punishment. While financial and coercive incentives motivate citizens to comply in "fear of sanction or promise of inducements" (Blaydes, p. 36) such as rents, public goods, and jobs or promotions, repressive strategies across different populations in a state can actually negatively impact state control and regime resilience. This occurs as a result of paranoia and incomplete information on part of the regime as good governance and institutionalization of government roles, which typically combat these phenomena, are overshadowed by institutionalized vested interests. Without a guaranteed, secure transition of power or an institutionalized bureaucracy to combat issues of illegibility and incomplete information, authoritarian leaders resort to large-scale, indiscriminate punishment that breeds social cohesion, ideological polarization, and political identity as well as how capable those identities are in confronting the regime.

In an analysis of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Blaydes highlights how "indiscriminate punishment by political regimes tends to backfire" (p. 37) and how the regime's failure to accurately identify non-compliant citizens and groups and consequently resorted to punishments that were too intense and imprecise to yield positive results for regime acquiescence. Two major groups experienced strengthened political identity and social cohesion as a result of Ba'th party punishment under Hussein, namely the Kurds and Shi'a Muslims across Iraq. In both cases,

collective punishment on smaller social groups resulted in “communalism” within “a cultural group, a religious community, or an extended kinship group” (p. 14), suggesting that sectarianism, a damaging force against regime compliance, was “a result of an interaction between unfavorable underlying conditions and damaging government policies where economic sanctions elevated the salience of sectarian identities” (p. 11).

During the Anfal Campaign in the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War, the Kurdish population in Hussein’s Iraq faced “brutal and collective forms of state-imposed punishment” that “encouraged social cohesion at the level of the ethno-sectarian group” (p. 135). Prior to the Iraqi repression of Kurds, this group was divided by language barriers, regional factions, and tribal lines. At this time, Kurdish nationalism did not extend to the lower and middle class. However, “challenges associated with identifying transgressors” in Kurdish-occupied northern regions resulted in blunt state punishment as army units utilized “chemical and high explosive bombardments that killed without discriminating between regime supporters and opponents.” It also led to economic blockades aimed to “lower the morale of villagers. Under such directives, foodstuffs and other basic supplies were totally blocked” (p. 152). As Kurds, including Kurdish local advisors that were allied with the government, experienced this overreaction in the form of widespread punishment and began to see a shared political fate, “feelings of Kurdish nationalism became common among ordinary Kurds” (p. 148). The regime’s use of terror, ethnic cleansing, and economic barriers had adverse impacts on its goal of enforcing compliance through repression, giving rise to a nation “born out of the deeply emotional, national traumas of the Anfal” (p. 154) that was then more able to confront the regime with a socially and politically unified group.

Similar impacts can be drawn from the repression of the Shi'a religious organizations, which posed a threat to political and religious unity under the Ba'athist regime. Hawzas, or centers for Shi'a clerical learning, and the Da'wa Party, a Shi'a populist Islamic group, were both viewed as "oppositional forces [that] would use religious cover to drive a wedge between the Ba'ath party and the masses" (p. 242). At first, Hussein attempted to use "alternative approaches to managing the religious domain" (p. 246) as widespread repression remained politically undesirable as it may foster broader religious resentments. Some of these approaches included Arabifying the hawza curriculum, co-opting Shi'a clerics, offering financial or party incentives to religious leaders, monitoring clerical activity, indoctrinating hawza students, and "replacing existing religious elites with ones amenable to the regime" (p. 251). However, these approaches failed to curb the rise of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, an important figure in the establishment and founding of the Da'wa Party. As the party gained traction, paranoia and a failure to achieve Baqir al-Sadr's public support of the Ba'athist regime led to his arrest and execution along with "widespread repression against Da'wa Party activists" (p. 245) and their families. Party membership became punishable by death, crackdowns aimed to reduce organizational capacity, and relatives of party members were reshuffled into different government positions to "reduce the regime's security vulnerabilities" (p. 245) among other attempts to dampen the popularity of opposition parties. The adverse effects of regime repression were heightened with the rise of Sadiq al-Sadr, cousin of Baqir al-Sadr and a high cleric able to gain significant support among Shi'a masses by emphasizing the shortcomings of the regime. Tensions escalated alongside Sadrist transgressions, public demonstrations, and growing efforts of the regime to curb opposition. Eventually, this "opened the door to regime repression in a way

that encouraged the merging of political Islam and clerical authority” and “high levels of solidarity within the group” (p. 257).

The cycle of opposition, repression, and rising political and social solidarity is not limited to the case of Ba’thist Iraq. In fact, while some literature finds that tension exists between the authoritarian regime and its people inherently, as also discussed in the previous section Blaydes contends that the regime’s oppressive activities *create* animosity and tension, increasing solidarity, polarization, coordination, and resistance, and ultimately results in a cycle of oppression. This is further supported by Nugent’s analysis of Egypt under the Mubarak regime. Mubarak continued a “divide and conquer” strategy initiated by his predecessor, Anwar Sadat, but switched its target to the Muslim Brotherhood, “more regularly and more harshly repressing the Muslim Brotherhood as a matter of normal policy” (p. 162). Through mass arrests, continuous security raids, and military tribunals resulting in longer sentences and brutal treatment of Muslim Brotherhood members, the Mubarak regime aimed to “create internal chaos within the Brotherhood” (p. 163). This treatment was markedly different from that of leftist party members, who often received significantly lesser sentences and “were treated better than other political prisoners while in custody” (p. 165).

The targeted approach to repression of this Islamist political party had profound effects on their ability to confront the regime and mirrored the developments occurring in Hussein’s Iraq. Nugent emphasizes the psychological, social, and organizational impacts on the Muslim Brotherhood. Through its isolating repressive approach, the Mubarak regime fostered a sentiment of collective, explicit victimhood among Brotherhood members stemming from the Brotherhood being subject to “the ugliest shades of injustice, abuse, and racism” (p. 167). This was further bolstered by the bureaucracy’s information gathering, which provided information

“about the differences between groups” and created “increasingly divergent identities among the larger opposition” (p. 166). On the social level, the regime strategically divided identities within the country’s prisons so that “prisoners were separated and isolated [which] forced socialization *within* groups rather than *between*” (p. 168). While from the regime perspective, this may have curbed a broader opposition movement, it also strengthened social cohesion and “group members’ identification with the group at the expense of an identity linked with a broader collective opposition” (p. 170). Like in the case of Shi‘a Muslims and Kurds in Iraq, the heightened sense of group identity bolstered anti-regime sentiment and organizational development. In fact, the Brotherhood exhibits the direct link between an increasingly intense targeted repressive environment and the increasing conservatism of the group. Experiences faced by the Brotherhood created “members more strongly aligned with the Brotherhood’s ideology, objectives, and norms as the exclusivity of Brotherhood identity became stronger” (p. 171). These shifts in party culture coupled with polarization culminated in a party platform reflecting “strong Islamist preferences” in 2005 and a new feature articulating its preference “for an increased role for religious institutions in more effectively implementing shari‘a” by 2007 (p. 184). Over time, the Brotherhood’s preferences strayed further and further from other Mubarak opposition parties that were centered on secularization. Egypt’s highly polarized society, partially provoked by the radicalization of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the years leading to the Arab Spring explains its failure in achieving significant change during the uprisings. Mubarak’s targeted repression, in this case, bred more effective opposition for individual groups while also polarizing society enough to weaken the public’s ability to confront the regime. Despite shared interests across parties to reform the existing regime and state to incorporate democratic values, polarization between political opposition over the role of religion in politics left Egypt too

divided to affect any real change. Nugent furthers the analysis of Kurds and Shi'a Muslims in Hussein's Iraq by allowing for study of the impacts of targeted repression on an organized political opposition group. While in Egypt repression worked to divide the public enough to hinder effective opposition, it is possible that psychological, social, and organizational consequences of repression breed parties that are highly cohesive and adept in influencing meaningful change. This occurs as a result of widespread repressive regimes, however, as seen in the case of Tunisia under Ben Ali.

Over the course of Ben Ali's rule, "repression came to affect nearly all opposition groups, regardless of whether they held legal or illegal status" (p. 103). In the early years of Ben Ali's succession in 1987, the Ennahda, an Islamic opposition group, became the first targets of arrests and major crackdowns carried out by Ben Ali's RCD party. Toward the tail end of Ennahda crackdowns, illegal "socialist and center-left motivating ideologies became the next victims of the regime" (p. 108). This was followed by repression of legal opposition groups and even loyal opposition that splintered from the ruling party in the 1990s. In the final years of his rule, the party expanded its highly repressive behaviors to suppress remaining opposition through the passage of terrorism laws. These laws encompassed "nearly any form of opposition to the regime," including personal enemies of Ben Ali and his family, and essentially legalized regime activities with the support of the international community and even the United States, which was determined to fight the War on Terror. This comprehensive, indiscriminate punishment led nearly all opposition groups to hold similar experiences of physical and psychological torture, imprisonment, and even exile at worst and "surveillance, physical threats, and other arbitrary restrictions" (p. 134) at best. The regime, while aiming to break political detainees' commitment to political opposition, unintentionally cultivated a sense of entitativity and collective groupness

alongside the more intentional atmosphere of terror. Unlike the victimhood that explicitly fueled the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, increasing identification as a victimized group gave rise to a broader opposition movement in Tunisia.

This broader movement, now encompassing various political ideas, strengthened non-political party organizations focused on more general principles of reform and resistance such as human rights abuses, arbitrary detention, and democratic reforms” (p. 142). This meant that despite the fragmentation of individual groups, these groups did not polarize as in the cases of Iraq and Egypt. Rather, it facilitated cohesion of political identity, shared victimhood, and continued struggle against a highly repressive regime. Together, these fostered party platforms, manifestos, and formal agreements that “converged on central issues of state identity” and “did not advocate an extreme division between religion and politics, or a total influence of religion and politics” (p. 150) and instead “protected differences of opinion regarding these matters” (p. 155). This sense of unity carried through to the Jasmine Revolution, which unseated Ben Ali in 2011, and even into 2013 with a process initiated by the National Dialogue Quartet to unite 12 political parties to roadmap Tunisia’s transition. Seeds of social cohesion and civil society sowed by widespread repression created the document calling for a “new technocratic government, an independent electoral commission” (p. 138) and the completion of a new constitution. This constitution created a balance between the president, head of government, and parliament.

Tunisia exhibits how regime activities affect public expressions of discontent and whether or not these attempts at confronting the regime are successful in inspiring legitimate change. In this analysis, it is clear why and how the public response to authoritarian regimes do matter, and how it is in the hands of the regime to control its own resilience.

The Palestinian territories offer an interesting case with two layers of governance, Israel and the PA. El Kurd extensively discusses the effects of these two repressive regimes upon Palestinians' ability to confront the regime. While in Israeli occupied areas, repression manifests in the standard tools against the collective, "Israel outsources much of its repression to the PA as an indigenous governing authority." The impacts of an outside repressive force, such as Israel, versus an internal repressive regime, such as the PA, differ significantly and are obvious in the marked disparities between the first and second intifada. In the first intifada, Israel was viewed as a common enemy for Palestinians, and grievances of rising Islamist groups centered around "opposition to the political establishment's negotiations with Israel" (p. 81). Despite its inability to achieve a contiguous Palestinian state, collective repression against Palestinians led to a high degree of social and political cohesion that allowed PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) forces to coordinate with forces on the ground and for local organizers and institutions to more directly organize uprisings. Failures of the first intifada, then, point more to President Yasser Arafat's repression and cooptation of these groups along with general inefficiency against Israeli forces rather than polarization and tension between groups. The second intifada, however, was uncoordinated and generated infighting between opposition groups. El Kurd contends that "the PA's growing repression, backed by Israeli demands for an end to resistance groups, led to increased insularity within groups and grievances between them" that resulted in an even less effective attempt to confront the regimes. Islamist groups also faced challenges as "repressive exclusionary strategies increased polarization to the point of inhibiting cooperation altogether" (p. 83) following Hamas's legislative victory. The Palestinian left also faced difficulty coordinating with other groups "as some groups decided to work with the PA while others maintained their opposition to the state building project" and maintaining autonomy to use Fatah

controlled PLO funds, which were used as “a tool to pressure and control leftist factions” (p. 84). These measures fostered internal fragmentation of opposition groups, both Islamist and leftist, that in conclusion were unable to effectively influence the regime toward democratic principles. Through a combination of co-optation and repression in PA led areas, the PA dramatically decreased political mobilization by polarizing opposition groups despite shared sentiments against Israeli occupation and demands for an independent Palestine.

External Factors and State-Society Relations in the Authoritarian Context

[Under Construction]

Conclusion: Future of Democratization of the Middle East

[Under Construction]