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Struggling against the tide

The role of opposition movements in attempting to effect regime transition in Syria and Egypt

Bachelor's thesis comparative politics
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Abstract

This thesis discusses the impact of opposition movements in effecting regime transition in Syria and Egypt during the Arab Spring, analyzing their organizational structure, objectives, strategies, legitimacy, and *de facto* power. It starts out from the premise that it is crucial that the opposition influences 'soft-liners' within the regime to undermine its internal cohesion and stability. It is argued that the opposition in both countries has been durable due to intrinsic motivations of the participants and widespread social dissatisfaction, and their diffuse yet coherent grassroots forms of organization have rendered them hard to repress by the regime. In both countries, however, the opposition was unable to overthrow the regime by itself since it did not have sufficient military power resources to pose a real threat to the regime's survival. In Syria, the opposition could not generate enough division among the elite, while in Egypt, division already existed among the elite and this was augmented by the opposition, with the acquiescence of the military proving crucial in the regime transition. The extent of influence of the opposition was heavily constrained by the political opportunity structures in which they operated, with repression by the regime playing a large role and curtailing agency.

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During the events of the so-called Arab Spring from December 2010 onwards, the world was shocked by political turmoil and uprisings in several countries with hitherto authoritarian governments. The Arab world was often considered to be a region where authoritarian rulers were firmly entrenched and the potential for democratic or liberal reform was very low (e.g. Lewis 1996). Now in countries all over the Arab world, starting with Tunisia, then spreading out to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, among others, large-scale social movements have erupted to protest against the authoritarian rulers and call for reform. This has resulted in the overthrow of the governments of Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, and growing political pressure and fundamental reforms in other countries.

These events merit close inspection from a political science perspective since they can grant valuable insights on the dynamics of regime transition and democratization in strongly authoritarian countries. It is even more interesting from a general perspective because the turmoil did not arise in a situation of acute economic decline or political crisis, which is when the vast majority of transitions occurs (Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson 2006, 32), and many political scientists had predicted that no large-scale transitions would occur in the region (e.g. Kramer 2006) . Researching the Arab Spring countries is socially and politically relevant since it can lead to a deeper understanding of the currently ongoing processes and may even have predictive value about future developments in this region of pivotal global importance.

In this mostly exploratory thesis, I will attempt in part to explain these events by highlighting the role of the opposition in the case of Syria and comparing it with Egypt. The opposition movements are one of many involved actors in the political turmoil, but in the Arab Spring countries, the opposition appears to be the origin of the uprisings in the first place, rather than competition between existing holders of power. The opposition was largely organized from a grassroots base, mobilizing in a quite spontaneous manner from the bottom up, rather than coordinated solely by elites or existing political parties and movements, yet they were still effective, and this makes them particularly interesting to study from a social movement perspective. Interesting and debatable topics of research in this regard are the extent of the role of the opposition in undermining the regime, as well as the capacities for mobilization and the power resources the opposition has. Here it is relevant how the opposition is

constrained by the institutional context, and interacts with the regime and factions within it. This is what I will focus upon.

Theoretical framework, concepts, and measurement

I have picked the cases of Syria and Egypt to make a comparison between them. In order to explore the role of the opposition in these countries, I shall set out a theoretical framework consisting of theory on the dynamics of regime transitions in general, and on the origins and workings of oppositions according to social movement theory. For the broader framework on regime transitions, my principal starting point will be the classic theory of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) on the fall of authoritarian regimes, which is based on inferences drawn from several case studies. This theory outlines what the usual ways are in which the opposition can influence the process of regime transition. For the more specific analysis of the workings of oppositions, I will apply the research framework of John Lofland (1996), which provides general theoretical models to analyze and assess the structure and workings of social movements, including political opposition movements. I will link these theories by trying to see whether the opposition in Syria and Egypt conformed enough to Lofland's beneficial organizational factors in order to be effective enough to influence the process of regime transition in the way outlined in O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory.

Regime transition theory

O'Donnell and Schmitter define 'regime transition' as the interval between one political regime and another (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 6), which is the same as the period I will be examining in the two cases.

The substance of O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory is that "domestic factors play a predominant role in the transition", and they "assert that there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence -direct or indirect- of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavage between hard-liners and soft-liners" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 19). The hard-liners are those who 'believe that the perpetuation of authoritarian rule is possible *and* desirable', and are composed mainly of a core of unconditional authoritarians who are radically opposed to any signs of democracy, as well as mere opportunists. Soft-liners are

defined as those within the regime that view it as necessary and unavoidable that the regime will eventually have to find some kind of electoral legitimation and increase freedoms, making them more willing to change the status quo during times of political turmoil than hard-liners (ibid., 16).

The opposition often makes use of existing internal divisions within the regime and attempts to increase and exploit them, since it is much easier to revolt against a ruling elite whose coherence is undermined. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 21) write that "no transition can be forced purely by opponents against a regime which maintains cohesion, capacity, and disposition to apply repression", and if reforms are to be effected, it is likely that a 'pact' will have to be made between opposition factions which hold real power, and the regime. These 'pacts' have been widely stressed in the literature because they help generate consensus and compromise, which leads to a moderate political climate that can ease regime transition and democratization (Diamandouros, Puhle and Gunther 1995, 404). I will thus take into account conditions that shape the possibilty for interaction between (soft-liner) portions and factions within the regime, and the opposition.

Regarding the opposition itself, O'Donnell and Schmitter employ the concept of a three-stage "cycle of mobilization"[1] in which most citizens start out as relatively depoliticized, and given that political involvement in stable authoritarian regimes is often non-rewarding, it seems plausible. In the second case, when political unrest starts, there is a "sharp and rapid increase in general politicization and popular activation" (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 26). In this stage, civil society is 'resurrected' according to the authors, so in examining my cases, as well as describing the current insurgent opposition, I will take into account the role of established political actors and older institutionalized movements and interest groups. In the third stage, when political unrest has been partially repressed by hard-liners within the regime that fear loss of their power, many opposition supporters get disillusioned, tired, frustrated, or run out of resources, and then 'depoliticize' again (ibid.).

Since my research question focuses on regime transition defined narrowly as the removal of the authoritarian ruler from power, I will primarily discuss the 'second

[1]This concept is derived from the structure of the regime transitions in the Latin American countries studied by the authors, but can be applied generally.

stage’, before depoliticization, when opposition mobilization was highest and demands for acute change were made. For Egypt, this means the period leading up to Mubarak’s resignation, and for Syria, this phase is still ongoing.

During the ‘second’, politicized, stage of the cycle of mobilization, it is according to the authors crucial that the opposition is diverse and extended throughout society, so that it is harder for the regime hard-liners to repress it (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 27). To have a broad base from which opposition can emerge, it is important that most or all classes and sectors of society at least partially oppose the regime and more specifically, that the ‘bourgeoisie’ considers the ruling regime ‘dispensible’ (ibid.), so that they will not try to protect the status quo and constrain the influence of the opposition. The term 'bourgeoisie' has several meanings and is undefined by the authors, but I shall define this as the upper class for analysis purposes. In this way, I can take the role of the interests of the wealthy, who have economic power and can decide to support political factors financially, into account and see in which way they aid or undermine the opposition. However, other authors emphasize that excessive heterogeneity within society can “undermin[e] collective action on a broad scale” (Haddad 2012, 85), so this does not seem to be a singular relationship. The opposition forces should be resilient enough to maintain a high level of activity even when the regime attempts to repress them, but if they are too militant or revolutionary, they may be repressed more harshly and so this strategy can work counterproductively; it has to strike a balance (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 27). I will see to what extent the opposition in Egypt and Syria had a broad social base to mobilize and if this has had influence on regime transition.

The capabilities of the opposition are heavily dependent on the political opportunity structures in which they operate. These are described by Kitschelt (1986, 58) as 'comprised of specific configurations of resources, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others'. The opposition can exploit institutional contradictions inside these structures to generate divisions (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008, 93). If the opposition has no areas for political participation, no access to the media to let their voice be heard, or if they are repressed, their capabilities are severely limited. This usually leads to a more confrontational strategy (Kitschelt 1986, 66).

The eventual impact of opposition actors is determined by their political power. Political power in this context is defined by Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson (2006, 173) as “a measure of how influential a particular group (or individual) is in the political arena when there is a conflict over which policy should be implemented”. *De facto* political power varies over time, dependent on the concrete situation of political stability or crisis, the degree of mobilization of and momentum for the opposition, and other factors. *De facto* political power is 'transitory'[2] and can lead to institutional reforms that guarantee the formalization of durable *de jure* political power for citizens in the future (ibid., 174). Since I am investigating the role of the opposition in attempting to overthrow the regime, and not in establishing a new regime, I will focus on the transitory, *de facto* political power. There is no objective way to measure this entire concept, so I will define and operationalize the opposition's 'political power' by looking at its capability of “damaging the ruling regime through revolution or social unrest”, a central factor in persuading the elites and altering the regime (ibid., 175). This can include eroding the regime's power by reducing the efficacy or taking over control of lower state institutions, such as the judiciary and the civil service (Fishman 1990, 429).

Social movement theory

John Lofland defines his ‘social movement organizations’ (SMOs) as “associations of persons making idealistic and moralistic claims about how human personal or group life ought to be organized that, *at the time of their claims-making*, are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society” (Lofland 1996, 3). This includes opposition movements; indeed, Lofland mostly discusses ‘insurgent realities’. Many relevant political actors and agents of political mobilization, especially in Egypt, have only bargained for concrete interests of a small part of society (Tadros 2012, 7-9) and thus do not really qualify as ‘idealistic and moralistic’, but have nevertheless played a large role in mobilizing people for the eventual broad-scale opposition, so I will take these into account as well and broaden Lofland’s definition to all politically relevant civil society actors.

[2] By ‘transitory’, Acemoglu and Robinson (2006, 24) mean that this power is dynamic and arises temporarily during political turmoil when opposition actors pose a real threat, and will subside again later, in O’Donnell and Schmitter’s terms, during the third phase, that of depoliticization.

The principal aspects of social movement organizations are their beliefs, organization, causes, reason for participation, strategies, elicited reactions, effects, culture, financing, leaders, and recruitment (Lofland 1996, 48-52). These are too many aspects to systematically apply to both cases in this thesis, so I will limit the discussion to the most relevant aspects according to the data.

A major area of difference between social movement organizations is their political strategy, which can largely determine their success, presumably especially against strong and repressive regimes such as in Syria and Egypt. One aspect of this is the long-term goal, which can be radical (in my cases, the overthrow of the regime) or less radical (institutional reform). The concrete objective can be, amongst others, ‘societal manipulation’ (changing social institutions), ‘personal transformation’ (‘changing the hearts and minds of the people’), or taking control of the society by itself (Turner and Killian 1987, 292, quoted in Lofland 1996, 261).

Another aspect of strategy is the tactics used, which are either highly contentious and possibly violent, or more covert and often persuasive and bargaining (Lofland 1996, 262-263). The latter can be done through institutionalized political channels, such as party politics, or 'unruly politics', defined by Tadros (2012, 7) as 'the marginal space through which citizens engage politically outside the conventional realms of state and civil society'. Stephen and Chenoweth (2008, 8-9) have found that non-violent resistance is usually significantly more successful than violent resistance, and explain this as mainly because non-violent actors gain more legitimacy and encourage more broad-based participation, and therefore the regime faces heavier costs in repressing this opposition. This can lead to more internal divisions within the regime and cause defections (ibid., 12); in accordance with O'Donnell and Schmitter's theory, 'soft-liners' might align to the opposition or make concessions.

Given the diffusiveness of opposition in Egypt and Syria, the coherence and effectiveness of their organization is highly relevant. This can be classified according to the degree of ‘fragility and temporariness’, which makes the opposition less persistent, a trait that is important according to the regime transition framework outlined above. Other relevant factors are the degree of formal structure (which often makes them more efficient, unless overdone), internal democracy and diversity, and

scale (Lofland 1996, 142-149). Finally, the degree of member absorption (operationalized as 'the number of joint activities in which members are involved') is linked to a higher commitment of opposition members, and it is important that continuous recruitment of new members take place.

Finally, I will analyze the reasons why people join these movements, since the sudden large numbers of opposition in Syria and especially Egypt has been puzzling. This can be assessed according to various variables that are either mostly individual (such as a deeper motivation) or structural (such as existing organizational membership), and either mostly background factors, or situational and temporary factors (such as due to ‘affective bonds’, or ‘suddenly imposed grievances’) (Lofland 1996, 216).
Mobilization is hindered by collective action problems that make it less rewarding for individuals to participate in an opposition movement, which is potentially dangerous and uses up time and resources, than to remain passive and profit from others' efforts (Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson 2006, 123). This can be overcome in part through personal (economic) incentives or rewards, or through ideological commitment (ibid., 127-128).

I will qualify the various opposition movements in Egypt and Syria on these criteria and see if this can explain their impact on the different outcomes.

Relevant side factors
Since according to the theoretical framework above, the impact of the opposition is dependent on their ability to interact with the regime, their capacity to stay mobilized while repressed by the regime and the army, and their ability to gain legitimacy mobilize their social base, I will need to look at various side factors: the political elites, the military, international pressures, and the economic base for opposition mobilization. The cases of Egypt and Syria are somewhat similar on these factors and this makes them suitable for a comparison in which the role of the opposition can be distinguished, but I will analyze the different impacts these factors had on the opposition.

Actors, other than the opposition, that play a role in a process of regime transition include the political elites, which have a pivotal role in the continuation of the power

of the ruling regime. In order to maintain stability, it is of large importance that the elite have high internal cohesion. This is true if they work together, do not fight among another, embrace the same values, and show continuity in succession. The relationship between elite cohesion and regime stability is well-documented among many authors (Brown 1993; Kamrava 2010; Gulbrandsen 2012), and seems especially relevant in case of Arab countries, since there, many of the same elites have been in power for decades and thus consolidated (Brown 1993), or have the same, often Islamic, political beliefs, which can strengthen their commitment to the same causes (Humphreys 1979). Because elite cohesion undermines the ability of opposition groups to influence 'soft-liners' within the regime and thus makes their task to reform harder, this interaction is relevant for my research. The Mubarak regime in Egypt was slightly divided internally, while the Assad regime in Syria is more coherent, as I shall explain, and I will analyze how this influenced the opposition's capacities.

It is furthermore relevant that the regime is considered legitimate. O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986, 15) define a major problem of authoritarian regimes after World War II as the ‘legitimation problem’. They say that there is a worldwide consensus that regimes should have popular legitimacy, and so most authoritarian regimes promise democracy and freedom in the future or hold the façade of it, “justify[ing] themselves in political terms only as transitional powers”. In this way, they are restrained in institutionalizing blatantly authoritarian and repressive measures and become what other authors have termed ‘semi-authoritarian regimes’ or in a weaker form, ‘illiberal democracies’ (Hague and Harrop 1982, 42). If this veil of legitimation is then lifted, domestic and international support for the regime may erode, and I will look at this factor.

Another relevant actor is the military, which controls ‘hard power’ resources of physical force and violence, and can suppress revolutionary movements and uprisings violently, liquidate opposition politicians, or on the other hand, violently overthrow the government itself or help do so. According to many analysts, the willingness of the military to crack down on protesters in some countries and its refusal to do so in others has been a decisive factor in effecting regime change or not (Tadros 2011, 9). In both Syria and Egypt, the military was largely interwoven with the regime and had a big role in society (Anderson 2011, 4), as shall be explained. A crucial difference is

that the military intervened in Syria, when it didn't do so in Egypt, and I will look at the impact the military had on the opposition and the ways in which the opposition influenced the military.

International institutions, such as the United Nations, and other countries, have exerted external pressure on the political situation in Syria and Egypt and adopted condemning resolutions on the situation in Syria in particular. However, in both countries, no outside intervention took place. This enables me to focus on the domestic opposition. International actors can, however, influence the role of the opposition by legitimizing their cause, pressurizing the government to acknowledge them, or supporting them with funds or weapons, and I will take this into account in my analysis.

Finally, there is an empirical and theoretical relation between economic welfare and democratization (Diamond 1999, 78). Diamandouros, Puhle and Gunther (1995, 392) one the one hand state that individuals are increasingly mobilized politically as their economic welfare increases and they become more autonomous and modernized, and their resources for mobilization and organization increase. On the other hand, they say regime support is highly dependent on the level of economic performance, since the economic well-being and the employment of citizens makes them more content and gives them less of a reason to actively oppose the regime. Both Egypt and Syria fall within the same GDP per capita range, in which transitions from dictatorship to democracy are relatively likely to happen[3].

Classical theories describe that turmoil most likely occurs when economic development is declining compared to earlier periods and 'relative deprivation' occurs (Davies 1962). In both Syria and Egypt, economic growth has been stable at about 5% per year for the last decade (World Bank 2012a), so the relative deprivation level for society as a whole should be low in both countries and not a significant source of mobilization for the opposition; however, as explained later, some social groups were deprived more than others.

[3]The GDP per capita in Egypt is 2,420 dollars, and it is 2,750 dollars in Syria (World Bank 2012a). Both countries fall into the range of 2001-3000 dollars, in which it is general relatively likely that regimes are overthrown; the probability of a regime dying during a given year is 0.0316 in this category (Przeworski and Limongi 1997, 161).

Acemoglu and J.A. Robinson (2006, 35-37) claim that there exists an 'inverted U-shaped relationship between inter-group inequality the likelihood of transition to democracy', because in unequal societies, a revolution is economically more attractive for most citizens and they have more incentives to mobilize, although in extremely unequal societies, elites will not cooperate in democratization since this threatens their interest too much. Both Egypt and Syria have Gini coefficients[4] that fall in the range of 'medium inequality' (Conference Board of Canada 2012); hence, it is possible that this played a role in the opposition's mobilization.

Case selection, data, and research design

I will attempt to assess the role of the opposition in attempting to effect regime transition. Although the concept of regime transition is a murky one with many facets and stages[5], I will operationalize it simply as the removal of the authoritarian leader from power, by him stepping down from his political office. I have picked Egypt as one case in which regime transition has taken place, with the authoritarian leader stepping down[6], and Syria as one case in which it hasn't. According to Lofland (1996, 23), social movements, including the opposition, can best be studied qualitatively with a comparison of only a few cases, and I believe that by examining the different roles and structures of the opposition in these cases, I can draw conclusions about their potential impact on the eventual result.

I have picked the cases of Syria and Egypt. These cases have the most useful literature available on them. Whilst in Egypt, regime change did happen, it has not happened in Syria. However, on many other factors, the countries show many similarities, and they have been a political union in the past. The internal cohesion of the regime and the historical repression of the opposition has been relatively high in both cases, partially

[4] The Gini coefficient expresses a measure of income inequality in a country based on the shares of the total income earned by smaller and larger percentages of the population in a number between 0 and 1. In the latest measures of the World Bank (2012b), in Egypt, it is 0.308 (2008), while it is 0.358 in Syria (2004).

[5] In O'Donnell and Schmitter's framework outlined earlier, the gradual process of regime transition includes, after the removal of the authoritarian leader, factors such as the replacement of the rest of the political elite, transfer of power from the military to civilians, and consolidation of democratic institutions, but these are beyond the scope of my research.

[6] Although Mubarak stepped down and I have operationalized this as 'regime transition' taking place, the process of regime transition is still incomplete and ongoing, since many figures of the old regime are still in power and elections have yet to take place.

as the consequence of a necessity to maintain a strong state in the politically volatile context of the Middle East. Both countries had ruling elites which were principally secular and had been in power for a long time, and a strong and politically influential military. Syria and Egypt are thus quite similar in their backgrounds and political environments. This makes them suited for comparison in a 'most similar systems design' (see Meckstroth 1975, 132) in which both cases are mostly similar on the 'confounding variables', so that the role of the opposition can be better highlighted.

My specific research question will be: “What was the role of the opposition during the events of political turmoil in Syria compared to Egypt?” On basis of mostly qualitative data from the existing literature, including both factual descriptions of the situation, as well as interpretations by various authors, I will make a structured comparison of these case studies. In this, I will focus on Syria as a starting point and use Egypt as the reference point for comparison. Since this is an exploratory thesis, I will not formulate any explicit hypotheses beforehand, but it is likely that the factors mentioned in the theoretical framework play a role in the cases and whether this is true shall be made clear. Based on this, I will draw general inferences for regime transition theory and social movement theory.

For Syria, I will first describe the historical context of the country, and then, I will look at the political context of the regime, military, and existing political parties, to see the relevant (constraining) side factors in which the opposition operates[7]. Finally, I will discuss the insurgent opposition itself, analyzing their social base, organization, strategies, and legitimacy, and their impact in accordance with the theoretical framework. For Egypt, due to space constraints, I will only briefly summarize the situation and note the differences with Syria.

Empirical analysis

Syria

Historical context

Syria is a country of 22,5 million inhabitants that was established as a French mandate after World War I, and became independent in 1946. Until 1971, Syria underwent

[7]Of the other relevant side factors I distinguished, international pressures will not be discussed separately, but as a factor in determining the legitimacy of the regime and the opposition, and economic development will be discussed as a factor in the mobilization of the social base for the opposition.

perpetual political turmoil and experienced numerous (attempted) coups. In 1958, Syria was a unified with Egypt in the “United Arab Republic”, an attempt by Egyptian leader Nasser to establish a pan-Arab state. This ended when Syria declared secession after a coup in 1961.

After a period of instability, in 1963, a coup was staged by the Syrian Ba'ath Party. Emergency Law was instituted, remaining in place continuously until 2011, with individual and political freedoms were severely restricted. In 1970, the party was taken over by a military pragmatist faction led by Hafez al-Assad, who then ousted the prime minister and took over control. Al-Assad was a member of the Alawite minority, a non-orthodox faction of Shia Islam. Alawites composed only about 10% of the population and were previously excluded by most factions, including the Sunni majority, but from then on monopolized Syrian politics (Pryce-Jones 2011, 18-19). Several uprisings took place between 1976 and 1982, but these were violently repressed by the regime.

In 2000, Hafez al-Assad died and was succeeded by his son, Bashar. This led to a hope of reform and the period of the 'Damascus Spring', when intellectuals publicly debated political and social matters. After initial tolerance by the regime, it turned to repression; the saloons in which discussion took place were closed and several intellectuals were jailed. From then until the start of the Arab Spring, Syria remained strictly authoritarian, and got more and more isolated internationally after it had to end its occupation of Lebanon in 2005 due to international pressures. This invigorated the opposition, which thought regime collapse would be possible (Landis and Pace 2007, 54), and let to some unrest. Various opposition parties, including the Kurdish Democratic Alliance and the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, unified, publishing the 'Damascus Declaration' that criticized the government (Stratfor 2011, 3).

Political context

Regime

The Ba'ath Party was Syrian branch of the pan-Arabic 'Ba'ath' movement This movement was highly nationalist and anti-colonial, wanting to unite all Arab countries in an 'Ummah'. It supported a socialist political agenda and was nominally secular, although many authors dispute its secular character; the dominant interpretation in the

literature is that its real aims were to establish a strong Islamic state[8]. By advocating a strong Arab state, the Ba'ath opposed self-determination for minorities and maintained a strong grip on domestic politics, curtailing freedoms (Pryce-Jones 2011, 19). The current Syrian regime thus has an ideology that demands a strong state and a consequence of this is repression of the opposition.

The Ba'ath regime originated from the military, and displayed a high degree of stability, coherence and continuity, with most key positions being held by a small clique of Alawi military officers (Hinnebusch 2012, 97; Van Dam 1997, 118), guaranteeing the loyalty of these officers to the regime (ibid.). Therefore, the regime has always been strongly internally coherent (G.E. Robinson 1998, 160; Haddad 2012, 85). This elite, constituted from the Alawi minority, has too much to lose if the political process opens up and therefore contains few to no 'soft-liners' that regard democratization as inevitable (Haddad 2012, 86), severely hampering the opposition's possibilities for persuasion.

The social base and support for the regime strengthens its position. According to Dahi (2012, 49), Arab regimes have been founded after their independence mostly on 'an authoritarian populist social contract', which provided social-economic benefits in return for political obedience to the regime. In Syria's case, the regime was founded on an Arab nationalist basis, and its support should thus be contingent on this ideological basis as well as social-economic factors.

On an ideological level, the Assad regime appears to have lost much of its legitimacy, which is an important factor in O'Donnell and Schmitter's framework. The Syrian regime initially legitimized itself on a 'negative' dimension as being better than the old regime (Lenczowski 1966, 49), and on a 'positive' dimension through its Arab nationalist and socialist ideology (ibid., 53). Since the old regime is a long distant past, and the pan-Arabic thought is outdated and unpopular, the regime can no longer claim legitimacy on these grounds, and, since elections are widely known to be a farce

[8]Phares (2010, 207) claims that “the Ba'athists were secular jihadists looking to bring back the [Islamic] Caliphate, wrapping it with republican and progressive labels”. Indeed, the regime currently engages in clearly religious political discourse and builds thousands of mosques, and this has been increasing since the 1980s (Habash 2012, 1). Pryce-Jones (2011, 19) claims that Ba'athism is 'modeled on pre-war Nazism and Communism' and 'gives a false secular veneer to Alawi supremacy' (for the Syrian regime).

(as explained later), neither can it do so on democratic grounds. The international community no longer recognizes the legitimacy of the Assad regime, with UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon stating, after a massacre of civilians, that the regime has 'lost its fundamental humanity' and no longer has any legitimacy (Daily Star 2012). This may make it psychologically easier and socially more acceptable for possible regime soft-liners to make concessions or for army officers to defect, undermining the regime's capacities to repress the opposition[9].

The regime is mostly supported by its own Alawi sect, and some members of other minorities, such as the Christians, which fear they would be more severely repressed if the Sunni majority and Islamists such as the Muslim Brotherhood come to power (Guardian 2012; Sayigh 2012, 1; Abbas 2011, 6). During the past decade, the regime 'has forged effective relations and alliances within a multisectarian social structure' (Haddad 2012, 85). The regime has a social base in rural areas among peasants who have benefited from land redistribution, and in urban areas from (public sector) workers who have benefited from the nationalization of industries (G.E. Robinson 1998, 161).

According to O'Donnell and Schmitter in my theoretical framework, the support of the bourgeoisie for the status quo is crucial for regime survival. The regime has strong support among the Sunni business elite, especially those 'crony capitalists' who gain from their close corrupt ties with the government (Hinnebusch 2012, 107). Powerful parts of the Sunni business community have supported the Assad regime since the 1980s (Haddad 2012, 86), and the bourgeoisie 'sits at the center of economic power' (G.E. Robinson 1998, 160). However, if patronage ties erode or the opposition is seen as a viable alternative to the status quo, this support may vanish and this could prove important.

Bashar al-Assad's regime has faced pressures for political liberalization from the bourgeoisie who demanded more political openness when economic reforms became necessary (Hinnebusch 2012, 98). Some reformers then came into positions of power within the regime, and this may have diminished the regime's coherence (G.E.

[9]The extent of the impact of declining regime legitimacy on the defection of soft-liners is impossible to measure, but several defectors have cited illegitimate violence against civilians as their reason (see e.g. Chulov 2012).

Robinson 1998, 159). However, rather than undermining the regime's support, liberalization measures may have strengthened its position by enhancing patronage ties with the bourgeoisie (Heydemann 1993). Effective political liberalization has not occurred[10], and the uncompromising attitude of the regime in this regard is a constraining factor for the opposition.

Military

Although the regime is intertwined with the army and has a huge influence on it (Abu Jaber 2003, 133), the regime cannot always make indiscriminate use of the force of the army to repress insurgencies. The army is not well prepared for tense situations because it has been out of combat for a long time, it frequently refuses to fire on non-violent protesters, and Sunni officers within the army may be less loyal to the regime in general (Haddad 2012, 87-88). This factor gives the opposition more leeway to act. However, the regime continues to receive loyal support from elite security units, which are strongly coherent and whose 'fate is securely intertwined with that of the regime' (ibid., 88; Abbas 2011, 3), and it has a tough core of 100,000 to 200,000 officers that sustain it (Xhymshiti 2012, 1); thus, the opposition is likely to face huge repression when it actually attempts to overthrow the regime, and this did indeed happen.

Political parties

The only legal political parties in Syria are organized through the 'National Progressive Front', which is guaranteed at least 167 of the 250 seats in parliament (The Guardian, 2011). This is a coalition of parties that support the Arab nationalist and socialist ideology of the ruling Ba'ath party and formally recognize its primacy and leading role in society (ibid.), which is even woven into the Syrian constitution (Abu Jaber 2003, 133-134). The constitution of the Front demands that the Ba'ath party has an absolute majority within its ranks, and thus, it can simply overrule all other parties. These parties therefore do not have a formal position of political power in which they can actually influence decision-making, and in this sense, they are only 'accommodated' into the political system and perform a 'semi-opposition' role[11]. The

[10]This becomes evident from the historical context as sketched earlier, and will be further elaborated upon in the discussion of the insurgent opposition's impact on the regime.

[11]When opposition actors are institutionalized and granted benefits by the regime in return for acquiescence, this may actually strengthen the regime by giving it a veil of legitimacy (e.g. Singh 2010, 50, 59).

actual influence of opposition parties in parliament is considered very small by most authors (e.g. Van Dam 1996, 18; Perthes 1992); although parties within the Front can influence the ruling Ba'ath party (see Pipes 1988, 303), parliamentary discussion is mostly limited to non-political issues (Perthes 1992, 3).

According to Landis and Pace (2007, 50), in Syria, 'political parties are the weakest link in the opposition', are too scattered, all of them are easily infiltrated by security agencies, and 'none have planted roots in society'. The parties have little internal democracy. Illegal parties are harshly treated; membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, the most prominent Sunni Islamist opposition party, is even lawfully punishable by death (ibid., 51), and therefore it is weak in Syria (O'Bagy 2012, 16). However, due to decreased funding for security activities and less morale among regime 'enforcers', according to Haddad (2012, 87), the regime has recently been 'gradually losing its capacity to exercise effective control' over institutions, associations, and alliances.

Other institutionalized civil society actors are ineffective and scattered, especially after the crackdown on the Damascus Spring in 2001. Human rights organizations have low levels of membership and funding, and compete with one another. Civic associations, such as forums for dialogue, do not produce tangible results from their talk (ibid., 49).

Insurgent opposition

Power and impact

Analyzing the Syrian situation, the insurgent opposition has been the primary source of pressure for regime transition, and thus, domestic factors indeed played a dominant role, as O'Donnell and Schmitter suggest in the theoretical framework. The regime has faced resistance at several stages, notably in 2000 during the 'Damascus Spring' and in 2005 from the Damascus Declaration participants. This pattern conforms to the 'cycle of mobilization' theory; while civil society is usually dormant in Syria, it flared up during these periods, and there was indeed a 'resurrection' of existing civil society actors, with intellectuals going back to their discussion forums (Landis and Pace 2007, 47 and members of old organizations took place in the new uprising (Abbas 2011, 5; O'Bagy 2012, 19). After initial tolerance from the regime, the

hard-liners, who were 'anxious that the criticism was escalating beyond control' (ibid.), cracked down on the opposition. Most opposition forces then became repressed and demotivated, their unity dissolved, and so depoliticization took place and the cycle was completed.

During the current uprising, the opposition has been much more durable, successful and organized on a broad scale. It erupted from a grassroots base with widespread support among many sectors of society, making it significantly harder for the regime to repress it. It mostly does not operate through conventional political channels and so escapes the institutional 'accommodation' that happened with established political parties and which can hinder real change by the opposition. In these respects, the current opposition conforms more to the characteristics that can make it persist in the second stage of mobilization according to O'Donnell and Schmitter. Indeed, the opposition has survived harsh repression and extracted concessions from the Assad regime, including a new constitution and the lifting of Emergency Law; however, according to Abbas (2011, 4), these reforms have been mostly symbolic and have not resulted in political democratization. Repression led to some depoliticization, but because the security forces do not have enough resources to overwhelm the protesters, the state of uprising has been persistent (Stratfor 2011, 2) and the second stage of mobilization has become a 'stalemate' (Haddad 2012, 87).

The *de facto* political power of the opposition forces ('its capability of damaging the ruling regime through revolution or social unrest') is considerable. Their strengths lie foremost in their capacity to mobilize and organize diffuse opposition that undermine the regime's authority. Also, their legitimacy in the international arena grants them the ability to demand sanctions against the regime. The opposition have few financial resources and weapons (Stratfor 2011, 6; Haddad 2012, 90), although it is sponsored by international actors (ibid.). However, since the military's capabilities are limited as well, the opposition has engaged in severe confrontations with the army and this strained relations between the army and the government. Since several army officers have defected and chosen the insurgents' side, and the army sometimes refuses to kill unarmed civilians (Haddad 2012, 87), the opposition has succeeded in revealing internal divisions within the regime; however, it has not caused splits within the regime's core base (Sayigh 2012, 1).

The political opportunity structures for the opposition have been tight and limited their options[12]. Since they are repressed and considered illegal by the regime, they cannot meet in public or attempt to participate politically through normal political channels (Idlibi, quoted in Macleod and Flamand 2011, 2). Additionally, they cannot send messages through the official media. This is likely to have contributed to the confrontational strategy of the opposition, in accordance to Kitschelt's theory outlined earlier.

In analyzing the structure of the Syrian opposition, I focus on the following four aspects raised by Lofland: social base or source of membership, organizational structure, objectives and strategy, and legitimacy.

Social base and source of membership

Whilst Syrian society is very heterogeneous, the opposition includes almost all parts of society. The various opposition actors have their social base in different parts of society, including Islamists from the Sunni majority as well as minorities such as Kurds (O'Bagy 2012, 11). The opposition originated from social, political, and economic discontent.

Social and economic discontent originated in part because the socio-economic situation during the last decade has been mediocre and, in particular, there was and is a very high rate of youth unemployment (Kabbani and Kamel 2007, 20). This led the youth to feel socially excluded (ibid., 29)[13]. In this way, the youth was relatively deprived and has not benefited from the 'social contract' (Tadros 2012, 12) and does not feel bound to oblige to the state. The socio-economic situation has become worse due to consecutive droughts from 2006 until 2009, which led to poverty and people fleeing from rural areas into cities. These cities, especially Homs and Idlib, have become areas of political discontent (Haddad 2012, 87), and the youth form the forefront of the opposition (O'Bagy 2012, 21). There is a 'generation gap' between

[12]See also the section on the political context, in which the constraining influence of the regime and the military on the opposition is discussed.

[13]Young people kept growing in numbers in this period, and of them, 40% said work was the most important goal in their lives, so the effect of mass youth unemployment was profound.

youth protesters and older established opposition members (Macleod and Flamand 2011, 2).

Political discontent originated due high corruption within the state, authoritarianism, and a lack of human rights, among other factors (Nahar 2012). Most opposition actors plea for democratization and seem to have genuine ideals for reform, since they involve public intellectuals who do not merely stand for opportunist interests (Shehadi 2012, 1). The commitment to ideals, in this case, helps overcome collective action problems, in accordance with J.A. Robinson and Acemoglu's theory outlined earlier. Additionally, those who participate in a local committee or revolutionary council can gain standing in the 'state-like' insurgent regional entities and this may yield direct social and economic benefits for them, giving actors personal incentives to join the opposition.

In order to gather a broader base of support and more chances at success, it is crucial that the opposition is supported among the powerful ranks within the Sunni majority. As described earlier, the Sunni bourgeoisie (business elite) has had strong tries with the government and benefits from the status quo, but the majority of the business community did not have close ties with the regime and comprised the *ulema*. This group likewise values stability, but since it is not very dependent on the state, it could switch loyalties (G.E. Robinson 1998, 160). As a consequence of economic liberalization, they are increasingly pleading for greater inclusion in the political process and more government transparency and accountability (ibid., 169), but they do not necessarily support ‘democracy’ since this would include all social classes in the political process and undermine the bourgeoisie’s privileged position (ibid.). The bourgeoisie still mostly supports the regime, but may not remain behind the regime if the balance of power tips and they come to see the opposition as providing a viable alternative, which is not yet the case (Sayigh 2012, 1).

The uprising is becoming increasingly sectarian and mobilization is taking place on sectarian grounds (Abbas 2011, 5). For instance, tensions increased after some Shi'ites, believed to be covert security force members, were taken hostage by Sunnis (LA Times 2012).

Regarding the motives for people to participate in the opposition[14], it is plausible that all four categories distinguished by Lofland (1996, 216) play a role. Of individual background variables, many people did have a deeper motivation in opposing the regime, because of deeply held Islamist convictions, or a commitment to freedom and democracy influenced by global media and thought. Of structural background variables, many actors did indeed have a history of prior activism during the 2000 and 2005 turmoils (Abbas 2011, 5), although existing organizational membership was low. Of individual situational variables, a rational benefit calculation may have taken place in some regions as described above. Of structural situational variables, suddenly imposed grievances have played a large role, because the situation in Syria worsened dramatically after the uprisings started and the regime's brutal repression intensified the hate against it; it can even have led to a 'crisis of faith' (Lofland 1996, 230), a loss of in the invulnerable stability granted by the regime and a shift in thinking about the legitimacy of the state. Opposition actors may have gained affective bonds to each other, since they were finally able to fight for a common cause of freedom and interaction and struggle has been very intensive (see ibid., 235).

Organizational structure

The non-institutionalized opposition is diffuse and 'schismatic' (Landis and Pace 2007, 47), mirroring Syrian society. Since the opposition has been durable over the 15 months of the insurgency, its degree of 'fragility and temporariness' is low, and its scale has become large, both strengthening factors in Lofland's framework. The primary movements that have emerged during the uprisings are the Syrian National Council, the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change, and the Free Syrian Army, and various local groups (Haddad 2012, 88).

The Syrian National Council (SNC) was formed in Turkey on 23 August 2011 from a coalition including Damascus Declaration, Muslim Brotherhood and minority members (Shehadi 2012, 1). It is classified by O'Bagy (2012, 6) as 'a loosely-aligned umbrella organization'[15] with a large and diffuse base. It has as its stated objective 'to

[14]The available sources do not have systematic data on the actual motives for people to participate in the opposition, so only speculations can be made on basis of interviews with actors and the likelihood of motives.

[15]The SNC is comprised of seven different blocks: the Muslim Brotherhood, the Damascus Declaration, the National Bloc, the Local Coordination Committee (as representative of the grassroots movement), the Kurdish Bloc, the Assyrian Bloc, and Independents (O'Bagy 2012, 6).

represent the concerns and demands of the Syrian people' (ibid., 12), and cooperates with local committees (Shehadi 2012, 2). Its organization was not structured well enough, and after membership was expanded due to pressures to accommodate diversity, it became unmanageable according to Shehadi (2012, 2).

The National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change (NCC) is based in Damascus and prefers to adopt a pacifist stance, negotiate a political settlement and engage in dialogue with the regime, the only organization still to do so at present (O'Bagy 2012, 6, 19), and is tolerated by the regime.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA) is the umbrella under which various armed opposition forces operate. It was formed in July 2011 and consists mostly of Sunni defectors from the army and armed civilians, and claims to have 40,000 fighters. It is very loosely organized (Xhymshiti 2012, 2) and many fighters have no relations to the leadership, but are only united by their anti-regime sentiments (Stratfor 2012, 3).

The rest of the opposition is grassroots-based. It has various important organizational structures, coordination taking place mostly on a local level, but working upwards to the national level (O'Bagy 2012, 24). Local coordination committees in municipalities (tansiqiyyat) unite through regional revolutionary oversight councils (majils thawar), which have significant regional power and in some cases, such as the city of Homs, function almost as a state (Rosen 2012, 2) and these committees are the most organized part of the opposition (Abbas 2011, 4). About 70% of these councils work together with the Syrian Revolution General Commission, which is highly organized and coordinated, and has representatives within the Syrian National Council (O'Bagy 2012, 25-26); however, since it operates from abroad, its actual effectiveness in coordination is unclear (Stratfor 2011, 5).

Many opposition discussion councils are locally based and relatively democratic in nature, and have a solid but not overly formalized structure. This has enhanced members' possibilities for participation and made the opposition more persistent. Because opposition structures have become tight social communities, 'the number of activities in which participants are jointly involved' has been high, leading to a high degree of 'member absorption' (ibid., 144). Some members of the opposition,

however, did not have sufficient political aptitude and experience to perform effectively enough (Tarif, quoted in Macleod and Flamand 2011), and internal fragmentation and division has hampered cooperation between opposition members as well (Sayigh 2012, 1).

Legitimacy

As described earlier, the regime has largely lost its domestic and international legitimacy. It is beyond my scope to analyze the precise consequences of this for the opposition, but it may well strengthen the legitimacy of the opposition to the regime and encourage a sympathetic view of it in parts of society. This facilitates the opposition's recruitment of members.

The SNC, unlike most other opposition actors, has articulated a vision for a future of the country if Assad is removed from power (O'Bagy 2012, 7). It is recognized by at least seventy countries as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people (ibid., 9) and thus enjoys the most external legitimacy. Since it is based abroad, it is separated from the grassroots movement in Syria itself, and according to O'Bagy, it 'has not meaningfully engaged with local opposition forces, and is losing credibility and influence as the conflict grows more militarized' (ibid.). Likewise, Haddad (2012, 89) claims that the SNC is too dependent on other states and suffers from a sensitive relationship with the internal opposition, and therefore its internal legitimacy is lacking. The NCC has limited legitimacy among the broader opposition because it is perceived as collaborating with the regime, some opposition actors calling it a "puppet movement" (Stratfor 2012, 2). The FSA is disunited and its membership is unclear, and its armed nature has meant it is not recognized internationally as legitimate (O'Bagy 2012, 30). The lack of a unified vision of the opposition in general has diminished its international legitimacy (Nahar 2012; O'Bagy 2012, 18).

Objectives and strategy

The objectives of the opposition, in Turner and Killian's framework (Lofland 1996, 261), have been mostly focused on 'societal manipulation', the fundamental change of social institutions, namely the overthrow of the ruling regime (Abbas 2011, 6) and an end to the Ba'athist ideology (Shehadi 2012, 1). However, opposition actors have also

stressed the need to gain the 'hearts and minds' of the people on the side of democracy (ibid.), so there has been an element of 'personal transformation' as well.

Because the opposition is scattered in its origins and aims, it does not always share the same objectives and strategies. In particular, as described later, some have been more confrontational, violent and more in favour of foreign intervention than others, and the space for dialogue with the Assad regime has been a particularly significant divisive factor (McDonnell 2011). The struggles within the Syrian National Council and its failure to provide a real unified vision, for instance, have been plaguing its success according to O'Bagy (2012, 9, 11; also Sayigh 2012, 1). There is a disconnect between the external and the internal opposition forces (Stratfor 2011, 3). the external opposition forces have little legitimacy in Syria itself, while the internal grassroots opposition is often not considered as granting a viable alternative to the current regime for government (O'Bagy 2012, 20), and thus, its scattered nature undermines its credibility (Sayigh 2012, 1).

Tactically, the opposition has conformed to Tadros' 'unruly politics' model described earlier; it has not bargained much with the regime and has been contentious in its aims, although its manifestations have often been covert to avoid repression.

The opposition has been divided on the issue of a violent approach against the regime. It started out as largely non-violent and gradually became more violent, partially in response to violent repression by the regime of peaceful demonstrations (Abbas 2011, 2). The SNC now mostly supports military resistance against the regime, after being divided on the topic initially, and is a public proponent of foreign intervention under a UN mandate (Winstanley 2012, 3), and (O'Bagy 2012, 30). The NCC has condemned the militarization of the revolution (Khodr 2012, 1) and rejects foreign intervention, leading to a 'major fallout' with the SNC (Winstanley 2012, 3). The Free Syrian Army is militant in nature and supports foreign intervention (Khodr 2012, 1), and it is now supported by a majority of the opposition (Nahar 2012).

The FSA has engaged in all-out battles with the regime army. The regime has justified and intensified its repression by calling the opposition hostile armed insurgency groups or terrorists, and hesitancy by the military to crack down on protesters has

naturally been less when these protesters were armed (MacFarquhar and Kramer 2012, 1). The non-violent opposition made it easier for people to participate in the opposition (Chenoweth 2011, 1) and extracted concessions from the regime, but the violent opposition is unable to win militarily against the regime (Haddad 2012, 87), although they have established semi-independent insurgent communities. The violent approach therefore has been probably less effective than the non-violent approach, which is in line with Stephen and Chenoweth's (2008, 8-9) general theory. The opposition thus seems to have failed to strike the balance between confrontational and persuasive means required in order not to get repressed too severely, although it is not obvious if an alternative strategy would have been more effective.

In short, although the opposition has a wide social base and has been durable and reasonably well-organized, it is internally divided in its organization, aims and strategy, diminishing its effectiveness. Its lack of a unified vision, its failure to provide a credible alternative to the status quo, and the tension between non-violent and militant opposition, have undermined its legitimacy. The success of opposition actors in effecting regime change has been limited because they are repressed by the regime, which is unwilling to do concessions, and they have not won over soft-liners within the cohesive core of the regime.

Egypt[16]

Historical context

After Egypt became independent of the United Kingdom in 1922, a monarchy was established. In 1952, the regime was overthrown in the 'July Revolution' by a military coup, and the Republic of Egypt was proclaimed. Its first ruler was Mohammed Naguib, who was succeeded by Gamal Abdel Nasser, a pan-Arabic nationalist. He was succeeded after his death in 1970 by Anwar Sedat, and when Sedat was assassinated in 1981, Hosni Mubarak came to power, and established himself as an authoritarian leader.

Political context

Regime

[16]As explained in the research outline, due to space constraints, I have limited the discussion of Egypt to a brief analysis for the purpose of comparison with the situation in Syria, and hence, I cannot discuss each aspect at length, but will make use of observations by other authors.

The Mubarak regime is authoritarian in nature, and had, until the revolution, been durable and successful in repressing oppositional social forces (Masoud 2011, 21). The regime's survival had largely been secured during Mubarak's regime by the security apparatus (ibid., 23). The Egyptian political elite is more heterogeneous of composition than in most other states in the Middle East (Albrecht 2005, 380). There have been various struggles within the elite and there has been polarization between various state instititutions, although no group has ever been completely marginalized (ibid., 380-381).

Military

The military in Egypt has a large influence on the regime and has traditionally been somewhat well-perceived among citizens (El Sharnoubi 2012, 1), more so than that in Syria. Crucially, it refused to intervene in the uprising and use violence against peaceful protesters.

Social base

The grassroots opposition in Egypt originated primarily from dissent due to a lack of political reform, corruption, and a frustrating socio-economic situation (Masoud 2011, 32). The youth was 'alienated politically, economically and socially' (Tadros 2012, 12), and did not benefit from the social contract, and it played a central role in the revolution (Youssef 2011, 225). These factors were similar as in Syria. However, since Egypt does not have sectarian strife, the social base in Egypt is more homogeneous, and consequently, there were more grounds for chartering a unified opposition with similar objectives and strategies, granting it a wider legitimacy.

Political parties

In Egypt, elections take place, but according to Levitsky and Way (2002, 54), these yield ‘no meaningful contestations for power’, and elections are often rigged (Masoud 2011, 22). Egypt is formally ruled by the National Democratic Party (NDP), which is represented in the People's Assembly, but this Assembly is marginalized in practice and does not have effectual political influence (ibid.). The opposition parties in Egypt have been fragmented due to the government's tactics, and several of them have been forbidden; hence, parties have played a marginalized role (Stacher 2004, 215). Even more so, some parties, especially the Muslim Brotherhood, have often been

transformed into 'semi-opposition' that gains benefits from cooperating with the regime, and therefore strengthens the regime and marginalizes the role of more 'radical' opposition (Singh 2010, 60; Albrecht 2005, 393).

Currently, there is a strong political society and a weak civil society, since political actors are manifesting themselves strongly in the context of the constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections, and civic associations are merely 'instrumentalized' by these political actors (el Wahab 2012, 76).

Insurgent opposition

The grassroots opposition in Egypt was united on the Tahrir Square and organized loosely and spontaneously, and this contributed to its success (Youssef 2011, 227). Although insurgent opposition is forbidden under Egyptian emergency law (ibid., 223), the political opportunity structures were more lenient in Egypt because the opposition was not repressed when mobilizing. Its eventual impact was that the authoritarian leader was removed from power.

Comparison, conclusions, and inferences

In Egypt, the ruling elite was more heterogeneous and more fragmented than in Syria, and many powerholders within the Mubarak regime did not remain loyal since they were able to partially maintain their position of power after its overthrow. The opposition thus had more opportunities to highlight and make use of the internal divisions within the regime by cooperating with regime 'soft-liners'. In Syria, constrastingly, the ruling elite is homogeneously composed of members of the Alawi minority sect, and because this minority would most likely be repressed if the Sunni opposition comes to power, most powerholders see their fate as intertwined with that of the regime. Therefore, there are fewer 'soft-liners' and the opposition has had much fewer possibilities to influence the regime with persuasive methods. Hence, the opposition became more confrontational and violent in its strategy, which led to its repression and decreased its effectiveness.

Syrian society is heterogeneous and and divided on sectarian grounds, and its opposition has been fundamentally divided in their organization, aims, and strategic approach. Egyptian society, on the other hand, was more ethnically homogeneous and

had fewer internal political divisions, and hence the opposition was more unified in both its aims and methods. This allowed it to operate more effectively than in Syria, granted it more domestic and international legitimacy, and had an impact on the eventual overthrow of the Mubarak regime.

Future predictions are difficult to be made. It remains to be seen whether the opposition in Syria will be able to mobilize the influential bourgeois parts of Syrian society and generate divisions in the political elite, and gain enough power to destabilize the regime decisively. In Egypt, it is still unknown what the result of this transition phase will be and whether the current military rulers will make way for democracy.

The comparison of the Syrian and Egyptian cases has highlighted two major points. Firstly, the unity of the opposition and the extent of its social base and legitimacy plays a large role in its persistence during a transitional phase in which it has to overcome repression by the regime, and thus in its eventual success. Here, it is particularly important that most parts of society do not prefer the status quo to an overthrow of the regime by the opposition. This deserves more attention in future research. Secondly, it is clear that a regime with members that show strong internal cohesion and who will lose their social position and power if the regime falls and the opposition gains power, can hardly be influenced by the opposition, and this severely hampers the opposition's prospects for success. For future research, a plausible hypothesis would be that a strong regime consisting homogeneously of an ethnic minority will normally not be overthrown by a domestic opposition.

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