Abstract

This paper presents the following arguments. First, it is more productive to compare the recent protests in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to mass mobilization and authoritarian breakdown witnessed during ‘color revolutions’ in post-Soviet Eurasia than to East European velvet revolutions of 1989. Second, ‘Arab Spring,’ just like ‘color revolutions,’ is not a social science term or concept and as such has to be conceptualized. Both waves are conceptualized as cases of authoritarian breakdown and distinguished from democratization. Third, personalist authoritarianism, neutrality or defection of the army and oil wealth and patronage networks are found to be most agreed-upon and coherent explanations of authoritarian breakdown in the Arab Spring. Fourth, a comparison of authoritarian breakdown in the two regions hints that neutrality of security services, personalist authoritarian regimes holding façade elections and inability of the state to buy off or repress protest are strong predictors of collapse of authoritarian regimes. Fifth, privatization has contributed to breakdown, although in slightly different ways.

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Introduction

A wave, or rather waves, of protest that have engulfed Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) have been likened by pundits and scholars alike to 1989 protests that brought communism down in Eastern Europe (Way 2011, Howard 2011). One the one hand, such a parallel is indeed justified, as the scope and level of change against a robust authoritarian background is unprecedented. Each toppled dictator has been around in power for about three decades. The region did not have a single democracy until recently and has been surprisingly resistant to democratization efforts, earning a now notorious label of ‘Arab exceptionalism’. Then with the self-immolation of a fruit vendor in a small town in Tunisia autocratic Leviathans fell like a house of cards.

On the other hand, likening the ‘Arab Spring’ wave of protests to protests of 1989 is premature, if not altogether misleading. Of almost 20 authoritarian regimes in the region, only about a half witnessed protests and of those, only three saw their autocrats dethroned. In the ‘successful cases’ the success is limited to ousting a dictator: the transition process has just started and its way looks very thorny and difficult. In contrast, Eastern Europe was wholly engulfed in protest dynamic and almost all ended up deconstructing communism and moving towards free market and political pluralism.

Therefore, for those who want to draw parallels, it makes more sense to liken the Arab Spring to color revolutions (Way 2011). Color revolutions are a similar wave of popular protests that ousted four post-communist autocrats between 2000 and 2005. Somewhat like the initial two Arab Spring cases, Tunisia and Egypt, they have been largely peaceful.¹ Also, youth activists have been the early risers in both regions. In both regions there have been regional powers opposing change (Saudi Arabia and Iran in MENA, Russia in post-communist world) and active manipulation of ‘external enemy’ image. Both regions are a geopolitical chessboard and have large oil and gas reserves.

Among main differences between color revolutions and Arab spring is that neither the military nor social networking tools played a central role in color revolutions, while they did in Arab Spring. Moreover, youth unemployment and rising food prices were not primary grievances in the post-communist space, though corruption and nepotism contributed to uprisings in both regions. Finally, the post-communist color revolutions occurred after fraudulent elections and initially were electoral protests, while the Arab protesters demanded non-electoral removal of autocrats.

If consequences of color revolutions will be similar to those of Arab Spring, MENA is not to witness many democracies in the near future. This gloomy picture is strengthened by two more factors. First, the strong military, tribal divisions and political Islam seems to make democratization in MENA even more difficult than in post-communist Eurasia, where these obstacles were much less salient. Second, civil

¹ We do not overlook the fact that even the relatively low-casualty protests in Tunisia and Egypt have left at least 200 and 800 protesters dead, respectively (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012). Even then, these casualties are nowhere near to the losses in the three countries fallen into protracted armed crisis in neighboring countries.
strife and violent conflict in Syria, Libya, and to a less extent, Yemen, could make peacebuilding, reconciliation and ultimately democratization a much more challenging and complicated process.

This contribution proceeds as follows. First, I will deconstruct the popular catchphrases ‘Arab Spring’ and ‘color revolutions’ and specify what kinds of political processes tend to be referred to by these labels. Second, I review region-specific theories of authoritarian failure. While an empirical test of all theories is beyond the scope of this paper, an overview of main research approaches is very useful. Third, I propose broader (inter-regional) explanations for failures of authoritarian regimes that might be valid for both the post-Soviet space and MENA. Finally, I add privatization as an important factor to the already existing array of explanations and specify concrete mechanisms through which privatization has led to weaker autocracies in the Middle East and post-Soviet Eurasia.

Section 1: Catch-phrases into concepts

Neither the ‘Arab Spring’ nor ‘color revolution’ is a social science term or concept. Both are historical labels and journalistic catchwords used to describe common aspects of several cases. When these two terms are applied beyond a couple of ‘core cases’ the list of attributes referred to becomes contradictory and unstable, i.e. we witness conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970).

To illustrate in the post-Soviet context, while ‘color revolutions’ has been used to denote primarily electoral protest that took place in four countries (Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan) between 2000 and 2005, some authors and commentators have used the label to cases ranging from expulsion of Syrian troops from Lebanon and Iranian electoral protests of 2009 to Moldovan post-election riots in 2010 and Burmese monk protests in 2007 (Manning 2007, 171; Katz 2008; Baev 2010). Most recently Russian electoral protests have been termed “White Revolution” (Umland 2012). One should note that it is not the geographic scope of cases that is troublesome, but the number of political events a term denotes: struggle against foreign military, electoral protest, youth riots and socio-economic protests., successful ousting of autocrats as well as mobilizations ending in crackdown.

Likewise, ‘Arab Spring’ essentially seems to refer to comparatively peaceful protests that brought down authoritarian leaders in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. Besides these three cases of authoritarian breakdown, ‘Arab Spring’ has been used to refer to tribal war and international intervention in Libya, ongoing civil war in Syria and anti-government demonstrations in Bahrain. In terms of political concepts denoted, ‘Arab Spring’ lumps together a case of military intervention (NATO in Libya), three cases of armed sectarian warfare (Syria, Libya and Yemen), protest mobilization in a dozen of cases and failure of authoritarian regimes in three cases. While all these events are united by temporal dynamic and diffusion mechanisms, political processes in each country and at each stage are different.

As the time goes, academics take a more serious and nuanced look at important events and re-think them using the existing political science vocabulary. When this happens scholars apply social scientific terms to historical events. When the available vocabulary is inadequate or when it is necessary to point to recently discovered features of these events, scholars either propose new vocabulary or add
adjectives to existing terms. Since the new terms tend to have clearer defined sets of cases they apply to and a clearer set of attributes, they might as well be viewed as ‘concepts’ to denote their more complicated nature. Table 1 shows all terms and concepts used to refer to cases of ‘color revolutions’ in academic literature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Label used</th>
<th>Type of label</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Authoritarian failure/breakdown/collapse/turnover</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Democratic breakthrough</td>
<td>Term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(Modular) Democratic revolution</td>
<td>Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Electoral change</td>
<td>Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Electoral revolution</td>
<td>Term</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Democratizing elections</td>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Discontinuous regime change</td>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elite Contestation/Failure of succession in patronal presidentialism</td>
<td>Concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Liberalizing electoral outcome</td>
<td>Concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Revolutionary coup d’etat</td>
<td>Concept</td>
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</table>

The same terminological development is evident in the analysis of Arab Spring. Emotional descriptions like ‘Spring,’ ‘upheaval,’ and ‘awakening’ are gradually giving way to more political science terms like revolts, protests, demonstrations, civil war (in Libya), uprisings, armed rebellion and civil disorder. A number of scholars started inquiring to what extent concepts like democratization, regime change and resilience are applicable to MENA cases. There is even one instance of terminological innovation: a concept of refolution (combination of reform and revolution) has been used to refer to Arab Spring events to denote change within existing institutional framework and without violence² (Keane 2011).

It is necessary to note, however, that protests, riots and uprisings did happen in the region before 2011 and Islamic insurgency has long troubled autocrats of the regime. What distinguishes Arab Spring protests from previous ones in the scholarship I reviewed was the fact that Arab Spring uprising brought together broad coalitions of opposition activists, youth, Islamists, urban middle class and parts of the regime in a non-violent action (at least in Tunisia and Egypt).

A broad comparison of terms associated with Arab Spring with those associated with color revolutions shows that while conceptualizing these phenomena scholars of post-Soviet color revolutions concentrated on medium-term results and leadership change, while those working on the Arab Spring stress unusually large mobilization and coalition-making and concentrate less on whether protests succeeded or failed.

² After a deeper inspection, however, it was found that this concept, used several times to denote Arab Spring successes was originally coined by Oxford political scientists Timothy Garton Ash to refer to events of 1989. Therefore, it is an old concept applied to a new setting.
In the post-Soviet space it took some time after the ‘revolutions,’ for both the general population and academic analysts to realize that color revolution leaders cannot deliver the promised political change. In the Arab world this realization seems to have come even faster, especially given the capture of the Egyptian political scene by Muslim Brotherhood and the Army. Today very few informed commentators claim that democratization happened in the region. Even at the present conference, Arab Spring is discussed in the section “Authoritarian Breakdown” and not “Democratization.”

If what happened in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen was not regime change, what was it? To better conceptualize the difference between the countries that stopped short of regime change and those that succeeded in attaining at least a minimal democracy, I propose a set of concepts that addresses continuity and change in authoritarian regimes and is better suited to distinguish between mere leadership reshuffles and genuine institutional change. The proposed typology is rooted in critical assessments of ‘color revolutions’ and some of the conceptual arguments proposed by Lucan Way (2005).

Let me first make a distinction between uses of the term ‘regime’: as ‘a set of institutional relations’ as ‘a group of individuals, controlling the state.’ For instance in the case of Turkmenistan, ‘sultanism’ is an example of the former and ‘the Niyazov regime’ is an example of the latter. For lack of a better term to distinguish the two uses, let’s call the former institutional authoritarian regime and the latter personalist authoritarian regime.

Political processes in authoritarian systems are understood here to be in either of the two states: continuity or change. Among the phenomena that make up the processes of change, there is authoritarian breakdown, i.e. dismantling of a personalist authoritarian regime that can lead to either transition from authoritarianism (regime change) or authoritarian renewal (imposition of another authoritarian regime or authoritarian regime of different kind). Transition from authoritarianism is such a change in the authoritarian system that leads to the establishment of (electoral)/(minimalist) democracy, while authoritarian renewal is failure of a personalist authoritarian regime which is replaced by a similar personalist authoritarian regime (authoritarian turnover) or another type of authoritarian regime, e.g. military or theocratic, qualifying it as a case of authoritarian institutional change.

There is also a phenomenon of authoritarian succession, when one autocrat replaces another without the former’s failure (e.g. Putin-Medvedev reshuffles and intra-family successions of Aliyevs in Azerbaijan). Authoritarian succession in institutional sense is not a part of authoritarian change, but of authoritarian continuity, since such alterations do not bring any significant change to the established order of things.

These distinctions are important because of three reasons. First, they help us understand forms and modes of change in authoritarian systems and correctly label phenomena. Second, they are a methodological answer to Thomas Carothers’ call for the end of ‘transition paradigm’ (2002), a directional expectation that, I contend, have resurfaced recently with color revolutions and Arab Spring uprisings. Third, a richer vocabulary of authoritarian political dynamic frees scholarly pursuit from transition mindset and leads to finer and more relevant research questions, such as why do some
personal authoritarian regime failures lead to the installation of an electoral democracy, while others end up as mere authoritarian turnovers; or why do some attempts at authoritarian succession are carried out, while others lead to personalist authoritarian failures and later to either authoritarian turnovers or regime change?

As such all events in both regions were examples of authoritarian breakdown in personalist regimes, and not single-party, military or monarchical regimes (Geddes 1999) and so far can be identified only as such. It’s still not clear what will happen to these regimes as institutions, whether they will be replaced by democratic institutions, by new type of authoritarian institutions or the same type of authoritarian institutions headed by a different person. Only two countries in both regions look like potential cases of transition from authoritarianism (Serbia and Tunisia). Others have ended up as examples of **authoritarian renewal**, with cases of authoritarian turnover (Akayev-Bakiev succession, Yushchenko-Yanykovych succession) or of institutional authoritarian change (Egypt, where the failed personalist authoritarian regime will be replaced by single party authoritarianism, military regime or a combination of the two).

A richer terminology of change in authoritarian systems is necessary to prevent scholars from exerting undue optimism and embracing failures of personalist authoritarian regimes as ‘democratic breakthroughs’ (McFaul 2005), democratizing elections (Bunce and Wolchik 2011) and revolutions (McFaul 2005, Mitchell 2009, O’Beachain and Polese 2010, D’Anieri 2006, Beissinger 2007).

The concept of authoritarian renewal proposed here is akin to the concept of ‘revolutionary coup d’état’ (Lane 2009) and ‘failure of authoritarianism’ (Way 2005). All three concepts defy the view that a collapse of an authoritarian regime leads automatically to democratization and follow a call to end ‘transition paradigm’ in thinking about political change (Carothers 2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>What changes</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian survival</td>
<td>Authoritarian cabinet reshuffles and ‘confirming elections’</td>
<td>Incremental modification for adaptation</td>
<td>Lukashenka’s Belarus, Nazarbayev’s Kazakhstan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian succession</td>
<td>Authoritarian leaders</td>
<td>One autocrat replaced by other, regular/formal procedure</td>
<td>Putin-Medvedev succession in Russian, Alievs in Azerbaijan, Assad’s in Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian breakdown and renewal</td>
<td>Authoritarian turnover</td>
<td>One autocrat replaced by other, extra-institutional irregular procedure</td>
<td>Akayev-Bakiev succession, Yushchenko-Yanykovych succession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3To their credit, most of the scholars have revised their view on the events as time elapsed and tendencies became more evident.
Section 2: Causes of authoritarian failure in MENA: A literature review

Due to the fact that solid scholarly contributions on the Arab Spring are only being published, this literature review will concentrate more on the literature predating the Arab Spring protests. Before the Arab Spring the predominant discourse in Arab studies was around the phenomenon of ‘Arab exceptionalism’ – the fact that Arab countries were largely excluded from the Third Wave democratizations engulfing other parts of the world. Though the notion of ‘Arab exceptionalism’ became somewhat less solid lately, the review of exceptionalism literature nevertheless provided useful insights into specifics of political dynamic in Middle East and North African countries and helped identify most salient issues of regime failure, regime change and democratization.

Needless to say, the research question under considerations warrants a careful use of democratization and regime change literature, because, following the advice of Schlumberger (2000), in the present study the author is more interested in regime failure, not regime change or its transformation/transition towards democracy. No optimistic assumptions are made regarding the later fate of regimes that fall in face of protests. Though democratization theory is not exactly the topic of present paper, there is some overlap between explanations of absence of democratization and those of authoritarian breakdown. Based on that, I include explanations of related phenomena, like liberalization, regime transition, unrest and instability and civil-military relations in the review.

Some scholars prefer to analyze the Arab Spring as a single wave. This is rightfully justified by the fact that protest impulse created in the first two cases contributed to outbreaks of protest in places least likely to have them, launching the process of diffusion. Moreover, treating these events as a wave rather than a sample of independent cases solves a methodological problem of non-independence of cases. Even though comparative scholars treat outbreak and results of protests in a dozen of MENA countries as independent cases, in reality the spread of inspiration and activist strategies and know-how cannot be ignored.

Methodological issue notwithstanding, treating these events as a wave and as independent cases leads to the formulation of two different kinds of research questions. Those more interested in failure of authoritarianism might as well do comparative case studies, while being fully aware of ‘Galton’s problem,’ the mechanism of diffusion and important differences between cases.

Anderson (2011), for example, points to several of such differences. In Tunisia, she claims, the protesters came from rural areas and colluded with once powerful, but repressed labor movement. In Egypt, the
locomotive of revolt was young urban intelligentsia, while in Libya armed rebels from the east who mobilized alongside tribal cleavages. It is due to these important differences that I tackle Arab Spring phenomenon as separate cases, acknowledging but not operationalizing the power of example and diffusion (unlike Patel and Bunce 2012 did for a different set of cases).

Based on the literature review, I have grouped variables of importance into 3 conceptual groups: security apparatus, political regime and oil wealth. While dependent variables in each conceptual group are distinct conceptually, they are closely connected empirically. To illustrate with an example, some ‘security apparatus’ variables overlap with ‘economy’ variables.

Robustness and Professionalism of Security Apparatus

The first conceptual category, security apparatus, includes variables that explain outcomes of Arab Spring protests in terms of ‘robustness’ and professionalism of the military forces, the vulnerability of the political leadership to coups or the role the security apparatus plays in domestic politics. Robustness of the security apparatus is found to be a key factor explaining the resilience of Arab states to democratization (Bellin 2004, 2012). Robustness in turn is an outcome of four factors: state’s fiscal health, international support available to state and the military, level of popular mobilization for political reform and the degree of security apparatus’ institutionalization.

Similar to army’s institutionalization is the concept of army professionalism cited by Barany as an explanandum of Arab Spring protest success in Tunisia and Egypt (2011). Professional armies, like in those countries, do not disintegrate into factions during political polarization and also value their reputation untainted by turning arms against own people. In Yemen and Libya, Barany claims, tribal cleavages are reflected in the army and there are several parallel security structures, leading to the split within security apparatus when political elites are divided. These are the countries where initial outbreaks of protest led to a protracted conflict. Finally, armies stayed intact in Bahrain and Syria, where they were commanded by ethnic minorities. These so far are cases of unsuccessful protests.

Army playing a very important role in the state, two more variables are important. One is the degree to which a state is ‘coup-proof’ (Quinlivan 1999). To insure themselves against (foreign-inspired) coups, Middle Eastern autocrats have multiplied the number of agencies responsible for internal security, formed parallel military structures and gave control of armed forces to groups with special loyalties to the regime. Special loyalty of such groups came from tribal, religious or factional affiliation with regime elites against hostile masses. While this might have prevented military coups, it also tends to lead to disintegration of the security apparatus and violence when the regime is challenged.

The other is role of military in the state, according to which states can be divided into oil monarchies, civic-myth monarchies, mukhaberat states, military states, dual militaries and military democracies (Kamrava 2000). Interestingly, successful protests and protracted conflicts are a feature of mukhaberat states (Syria, Tunis, Egypt and Yemen) and dual-military states (Iran, Iraq and Libya). The mukhaberat states are rough equivalents of what is known elsewhere as policy/intelligence states, while dual-
military states create domestic praetorian guards as a counterbalance to professional army. In the Libyan case it is the Revolution Committees created by Colonel Qaddafi. A different method of state type classification also helps separate states with popular mobilization and authoritarian breakdown from those that did not witness either. One such classification is taken up in the next section.

Types of Authoritarian Regimes

In her seminal work on types of authoritarian regimes, Geddes discovered that different types of authoritarian regimes vary in durability and post-breakdown trajectory (Geddes 1999). Analyzing authoritarian regimes since 1946 she found that military regimes have the shortest tenure and are usually followed by multiparty elections, while single-party authoritarian systems last longest. Authoritarian systems that are most prevalent in MENA, of personalist type, were somewhere between single-party and military dictatorships in their durability and usually broke down as a result of popular uprisings (Geddes 1999).

Bulliet notes that even the personalist dictatorships in the Middle East originated from the military (2011). He uses the term ‘neo-Mamluk rule’ to refer to personalist dictatorships that were built by autocrats originating from the military/security services. Neo-Mamluk states were ruled by these officers and their families. Bulliet divided MENA regimes into two types, monarchies and neo-Mamluk states. With the exception of Bahrain, all Arab Spring uprisings happened in neo-Mamluk states, but not in monarchies. Tracing the origins of neo-Mamluk state formation to XII-XVI century Mamluk sultanate, Bulliet argues that Arab Spring uprisings were caused by loss of Mamluk and neo-Mamluk legitimacy which has been historically maintained by upholding the tenets of Islam and protecting the Muslim polity from foreign threats. Bulliet argues that aggressive anti-Islamic nature of neo-Mamluk regimes, as well as their cooperation with United States and Israel stripped neo-Mamluk states of their essential pillars of legitimacy.

Monarchies have been surprisingly resilient to popular demands for democratization and none of the MENA monarchies has fallen in the face of Arab Spring protests. According to Menaldo (2011) this is to be explained by the fact that political set-up of monarchies provides for political stability by solving problems of credible commitment. Moreover, according to the same author monarchies have a better record of private rights respect, tend to govern better and grow faster than other types of authoritarian regimes.

A number of scholars have pointed out important role that ruling parties and elections play in authoritarian politics (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, Geddes 2005, Brownlee 2007, Blaydes 2011, Boix and Svolik 2011). It is maintained that authoritarian states where there is credible power sharing institutionalized through pro-regime parties tend to last longer (Magaloni 2008, Brownlee 2007, Svolik 2009). On the one hand, Arab Spring cases tend to contradict this claim. After all, both Egypt and Tunisia had ruling parties that engaged in semi-competitive elections. On the other hand, both regimes also left out key political powers outside of these power sharing agreements. This is especially evident in the
case of Egypt, where the military were not well incorporated into the ruling National Democratic Party dominated by Gamal Mubarak.

The role of political opposition in authoritarian dynamics also cannot be overlooked. The seminal work is Snyder (1992) who discovered that strategies and strengths of moderate and radical oppositions, alongside institutional autonomy of the army, determined whether a transition from neopatrimonialism would lead to a democracy, military rule, endemic conflict, revolution or authoritarian stability. Snyder’s original argument was extended to MENA by Brownlee (2002) who found that strengths of moderate and radical opposition mattered, alongside with a number of other factors to stability of authoritarianism in the face of crises. Furthermore, studying Morocco and Jordan Lust-Okar (2004) found that whether state repression discriminates between more radical and more moderate opposition influences patterns of protest mobilization during economic downturn.

Somewhat surprisingly, civil society has not figured as a potent explanatory variable for authoritarian breakdown in the reviewed literature. There were only a small number of scholars who found them important in Arab authoritarianisms and no author reviewed claimed that civil society was important to the actual authoritarian breakdown. Independent media has also not been referred to as important variables, thought mainstream pundits point to the role of Al Jazeera in the Egyptian case. The same is with internet and social networking tools. Despite heated debates among Internet scholars and popular writers (Gladwell 2010, Zuckerman 2008, Morozov 2011) no area studies scholar reviewed considered information tools important for breakdown of authoritarianism.

Oil Wealth and Patronage Networks

Economy and state stability are intertwined in a number of very important ways. First, there is a long-observed correlation between economic crises (high inflation, unemployment and slow economic growth) and political instability and transition to democracy (Lipset 1959, Gasiorowski 1995, Schlumberger 2000). There are several mechanisms through which economic situation affects regime change. First is that economic performance affects rents available for elites and as economic downturn lowers the rent pool, patronizing elites become more vulnerable and political reform follows (Schlumberger 2000). Second, economic development (e.g. growth of GDP and incomes) fosters political change through the rise of the middle classes (Lipset 1959). Third, economic performance affects fiscal health of the state, while in Arab countries dominated by powerful armies, fiscal health of an authoritarian regime is paramount to its survival (Bellin 2004). In post-Soviet autocracies, state capacity, of which economic strength is one part, was found to affect levels of authoritarian robustness (Way 2005).

A number of panel-data analyses discovered that oil wealth increases robustness (or odds of survival) of regimes (Ross 2001, Smith 2004, Ulfelder 2007), a conclusion supported by qualitative and case study analyses of Arab oil states (Luciani 1987, Schlumberger 2000). The rentier state theory and political petrolism literature predicts three mechanisms through which the rentier state increases its own chances of survival and inhibits democratization: first, it does not need to tax its citizenry and therefore
does not give them voice; second, oil wealth provides for better repressive and welfare capabilities and therefore stifles dissent and third, rentier state makes the state the center of economic activity and leaves little outside of state supervision. Limited opportunities outside the state sector discourage people from voicing dissent and losing access to state resources (Sandbakken 2006).

Somehow connected to oil wealth, but conceptually distinct⁴ are the phenomena of state control over economy, of patronage networks and patron-client relationships. Studies of color revolutions and elite defections in the post-Soviet Central Asia have shown that color revolutions happen in highly privatized countries and not in countries where the state controls considerable part of the economy (Junisbaj 2010, Radnitz 2010). In post-Soviet Europe, state control over economy matters to the emergence and strength of opposition, translating into various levels of authoritarian consolidation (Way 2005).

In the context of MENA it was found that the extent to which patronage networks penetrate the state and society, along with the strength and resourcefulness of these networks affects the stability of authoritarian regime (Brownlee 2002). For example, in Jordan, political liberalization in mid-nineties has been traced to weakened neopatrimonial networks, a result of reduced remittances and economic aid from near abroad (Brynen 1992).

A number of scholars have noted the overall trend towards liberalization and curtailment of social benefits since the nineties and posit that rolling back of the welfare state has undermined the social safety net (Haddad 2012, Aissa 2012) and should have undermined patronage networks as well. The negative effect of reduced welfare state has been aggravated by steep rise in food prices that has preceded Arab Spring (Lage et al. 2011).

Section 3: Comparison of Authoritarian Breakdown in Two Regions

One of the tasks of comparative politics being replacing specific names with variables (Przeworski and Teune 1970), comparison of authoritarian breakdown in MENA and post-Soviet Eurasia is not only an area studies exercise, but is also a knowledge-accumulation practice. This section is an example of such an exercise. It is divided into two parts – comparison and contrast of overall political settings and of dynamics driving authoritarian breakdown.

Comparing Political Settings

To set the stage, there are striking similarities between Middle East and North Africa region and the former USSR (excluding the Baltic three, who quickly reformed and joined EU). Just as there is a phenomenon of ‘Arab exceptionalism’ in resisting democratization, this exceptional non-democratic stability is shared by the twelve countries of the former USSR. According to Freedom House scores for

⁴ ‘Connected-but-distinct’ claim is based on the fact that a state does not need to have oil wealth to engage in neopatrimonialism and patronage politics, some states without natural wealth still have access to oil wealth through remittances from labor migrants and economic aid from oil-rich neighbors (Brynen 1992).
2010, just before the Arab Spring there was only one democracy in MENA (Israel), three partially free states and 14 non-free states (Freedom House 2010). In the post-Soviet world in 2002, just before the spread of color revolutions in the region, 6 countries were rated partly free and 6 not free. There was not a single free country in 2002. The situation worsened in 2011 with 7 non-free states and 5 partially free ones (Freedom House 2002, 2011). Therefore, in terms of authoritarian-to-democratic ratio both regions are ‘exceptional.’

Furthermore, just as MENA region has core countries rich in hydrocarbons and neighbors depending on them for remittances and foreign aid, so does the former Soviet Union, with 5 countries rich in oil and gas and others largely counting on the booming oil economy of the biggest petro-state - Russia. There is a sizable number of personalist authoritarians in both regions, with gerantocratic leaders and attempts at hereditary succession. In both regions, rapacious presidential family and cronies exploit national economies amid rampant corruption, clanism and nepotism.

In addition to these similarities there are also important differences. First difference is that post-Soviet Eurasia features only personal autocracies, while MENA boasts monarchies, a military regime and personal autocracies. There is some research evidence that personalist autocracies are in the middle of durability spectrum and are usually displaced by mass uprisings. Monarchies so prevalent in MENA are much more stable than personal autocracies, while military juntas are usually short lived, giving way to other forms of dictatorship or democracy.

Second difference is that the role of the armed forces is much more dominant in MENA than in the post-Soviet Eurasia. Part of this has to do with different military legacies. Though the Soviet Red Army and the military-industrial complex were very important in Soviet economic and political life, Soviet armed forces have always been under the political control of the Communist Party and state apparatus. It might be due to this fact that no Soviet leader ever came from the military background. In MENA personalist autocracies on the other hand, neo-Mamluk states were prevalent (Bulliet 2011) with quite a few renowned Arab leaders coming from military and security backgrounds. The political power of military and intelligence services was at times contested (like in Algeria or contemporary Egypt), but was never was quite subdued.

Though the literature often confounds military, intelligence, police and other armed state formations as ‘security apparatus,’ there are very important functional and political differences between the military and the rest, especially in MENA context. Many of Middle Eastern police states had very large domestic intelligence and police forces but such forces are never enough to put down a large crowd once one mobilizes. That’s when the military is called to service. The military, however, usually reserve their fire-and man-power for protecting the state from outside enemies, has limited experience with urban battle on home turf and as a rule, prefers not to engage with its own civilians. Moreover, rank-and-file in the military usually reside in barracks and cannot ‘disappear’ when they are called to service, unlike the police, tax agency or intelligence staff who live with civilians and cannot be persecuted for treason or deserting their quarters if they do not show up when called to service.
This has two important consequences for inter-regional comparison. First, in MENA region, armies are most likely to be called upon when the crowds get too large for intelligence and the police to deal with them. In post-Soviet Eurasia involvement of the army has been minimal, with police and state security service being more important players. Second, once the Army is called to service in MENA countries, they might or might not respond, since the army enjoys the status of an independent political decision-maker. In post-Soviet Eurasia, in contrast, it is the police and to a less extent, intelligence staff that would most likely be mobilized to deal with crowds and they tend to be subdued politically and cannot be expected to act independently.

Third difference is that political Islam is a potent mobilizational and ideological force in MENA region, but is limited to marginal role only in a number of countries in post-Soviet Eurasia. This makes MENA a region where it is easier to mobilize people and inspire them to protest using the rhetoric of political Islam, while in the former USSR there is ideological vacuum and popular cynicism, making it impossible to sustain protest for a long time or against high costs of repression.

Comparing Breakdown Dynamic

Neutral or pro-protester security apparatus is key to authoritarian breakdown in both regions. In MENA, where the army is usually called upon when crowds get large, the army’s reaction to the protest was essential and was in turn affected by its professionalism and robustness. In Tunisia where it has been marginalized by the ousted Ben Ali, the Army stayed neutral. In Egypt, the all-powerful Army irritated by heir apparency of Gamal Mubarak, also did not intervene. In Libya the army was divided along the tribal lines, while in Syria - along religious sectarian lines, both disintegrating when ordered to shoot and plunging the country into chaos. In Bahrain the Army of foreign mercenaries and loyal Sunnis did not hesitate to shoot at rising Shia, quickly putting down the revolts.

The same dynamic was evident in post-Soviet Eurasia. In Ukraine the security apparatus divided alongside the pro-opposition security service and pro-regime police, leading both to stay in their barracks. In Georgia protests led to defection of an elite special operations unit within the police to the side of protesters. Defections by a number of other security officials divided the security apparatus and neutralized their anti-protest potential (McFaul 2005). By contrast unity of security agencies against protesters led to the survival of authoritarianism in Armenia’s 2008 electoral protests and Belarus’ 2006 and 2010 electoral protests.

Personalist dictatorships where leaders do not bow to term limits or to the choices of the electorate are most vulnerable to authoritarian breakdown, while monarchies and regimes with clear succession mechanisms are not. Regimes holding façade elections are always vulnerable to protest voting and to claims of election rigging. Moreover, such regimes are vulnerable when they are headed by lame-duck leaders expected to retire, who appoint successors unable to secure the support of the selectorate. Unlike in monarchies there is no undisputed legitimacy of their claim to power. In MENA all countries where Arab Spring protests ousted authoritarians were personalist dictatorships.

All of the former Soviet states are authoritarian and all are presidential authoritarianisms. Color revolutions happened in states where the lame-duck president designated a successor who couldn’t
garner enough support, e.g. Kuchma appointing Yanukovych in Ukraine and Akayev’s ill-fated plan to transform his rule into parliamentary family rule in Kyrgyzstan. In Georgia President Shevarnadze’s popularity was very low and his party was due to lose elections.

While elections were important mobilizational triggers in the post-Soviet cases, they were not central to Arab Spring uprisings, where the power of a single episode of indignation and its diffusion throughout the region galvanized populations much stronger than fraudulent elections.

Although two out of three post-Soviet revolutions featured a charismatic leader with an alternative ideology and a clear reform programme, the opposition does not need a single leader to be strong. This is partly demonstrated by the case of Kyrgyzstan, where there was a motley crew of opposition figures with no single leader. Conspicuous lack of leaders of mass revolts was also the case in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where opposition leaders played only a marginal role. What mattered more was the short-term coalition of youth, civil society and political opposition united with a single aim - to oust the incumbent dictator. This was the case in all countries in both regions, except Libya where a broad societal coalition was not witnessed.

Protests happened and succeeded in countries where the state’s capacity to buy off dissent, beef-up security apparatus and stifle the financing of opposition has been low. Oil rich states and states that exert strong control over the economy have the highest capacity to prevent authoritarian breakdown through the three channels identified above. States that are either poor in natural resource and energy endowment, have a vibrant private economy and are undergoing a major fiscal and economic crisis are most vulnerable to protest and ultimately, dismantling of authoritarian regime.

**Section 4: Privatization and Dissent**

In both regions, there was an interplay between privatization of formerly state economy and scope of protest. The relationship was especially evident in the post-Soviet countries, where patterns of privatization of 1990s tend to correlate with level and intensity of public protests. The link connecting the two phenomena are ‘oligarchs’ – very rich and politically connected tycoons that made most of their fortune through murky privatization deals and connections to power circles. One would expect oligarchs to be staunch supporters of the regime that created them, but the oligarch-government interaction is much more complex than that. Post-Soviet oligarchs proved to be hard to control politically and most have harbored political ambitions or have flirted with anti-government forces, in some cases financing popular protest and spearheading opposition movements.

As a matter of fact, oligarchs and their property ambitions and disputes played a highly visible role in at least two out of three ‘color revolutions’ in the former USSR, in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Ukrainian revolutions has been widely known as the revolt of millionaires against billionaires (Aslund 2009, 175) and Kyrgyz post-revolutionary dynamic’s most salient characteristic was property disputes that continued long after the revolution (International Crisis Group 2005).

The interplay of privatization, oligarchs and political dissent was also evident in countries where widespread public protest did not occur or did not lead to authoritarian breakdown. For example, in
Kazakhstan, a group of highly prominent businessmen and government officials stood up against aggressive business acquisition practices of president’s son-in-law and formed a political party, Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan in 2001. Authorities, wary of combination of discontent and big money, have reacted aggressively to ensure that the new initiative does not turn into a political force (Junisbai 2010).

The upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in Georgia are pitting the incumbent president Mikhail Saakashvili and his United National Movement party against a rich and powerful challenger Bidzina Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream party. Ivanishvili made most of his fortune in Russian privatization deals in the early 1990s. His wealth allowed him to create a serious political force that could compete with President Saakashvili’s political machine, and to invest large amounts of money into political communications and media to have informational access to the Georgian population (de Waal 2011).

In Russia, a crackdown against oligarchs, started by President Putin and culminating in the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, was motivated by the fact that quite a few oligarchs were harboring presidential ambitions and many did not agree with Putin’s ‘out of politics’ dictum. After a crackdown against the biggest three, Vladimir Gusinsky, Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, others have accepted Putin’s new rules of the game and have largely stayed out of politics or participated when sanctioned.

While MENA economies did witness the dramatic economic transformation that formerly socialist economies of post-Soviet Eurasia did, 1980s and 1990s were an era of liberalization and privatization in this region as well (Ayubi 1997). But here again, patterns of privatization were not similar. While Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Algeria were on the forefront of privatization and were closely cooperating with the IMF and World Bank, Saudi Arabia, for example, still has a Ministry of Economy and Planning and resembles more “an etatist system than…a market-oriented one” (Ayubi 1997).

In this setting, the link between privatization and dissent runs not through enriched businessmen elites, but through impoverished masses. A number of scholars have claimed that one of the causes of decreased legitimacy of the regimes and increasing grievances was the dismantling of the welfare state and impoverishment of millions due to cutback in state support (Aissa 2012, Haddad 2012).

Such a dramatic decrease in social welfare provision was dictated in part by international financial institutions and was based on the so-called Washington Consensus, a set of beliefs that liberalization and privatization leads to greater growth and prosperity. Washington Consensus was a dominant economic ideology around 1990s and served as a blueprint for World Bank and IMF strategies in various countries.

In Egypt a chain of causality somewhat resembles the one in post-Soviet space. While policies of Egypt’s first president Nasser, strongly favored state ownership and directed development, things changed somewhat under Sadat and even more under Mubarak, whose later years featured extensive liberalization and privatization. Given the fact that economic etatism created and maintained a huge
economic empire of the Egyptian Armed forces, deconstruction of economic statism and imposition of Washington Consensus in Egypt empowered a new force in Egyptian political scene – businessmen and bankers headed by Mubarak’s son Gamal.

While there is not enough publicly-available information about Army’s reaction to political and economic ascent of Gamal Mubarak in general, there is some evidence that Army’s irritation with economic liberalism (US Embassy Cable 2008) transformed into open discontent when Gamal Mubarak’s heir apparent to the Egyptian presidency became more certain. The Mubarak’s succession plan ran against the political and economic interests of the Egyptian Armed Forces and it is against this background that the Army withheld its support to Mubarak regime when the latter was challenged by first pro-democratic youth and later by a wider coalition of Egyptian societal forces.

There is a set of arguments about oil wealth and democratization that identify three ways in which a rentier state inhibits democratization. First, an oil-rich neopatrimonial state has enough disposable income to buy off political discontent through generous welfare spending and repress it through large military and security expenditure. Second, oil-rich states typically do not tax or under-tax their population, which leads to lower demands for and lack of institutions of political representation. Third, oil rich states create a large public sector to encourage political and economic patronage and therefore leave few livelihood opportunities for those who might be excluded from the public sector. Limited availability of opportunities outside the state-controlled economy discourages voicing dissent against that state (Sandbakken 2006).

The privatization-dissent argument runs through very similar three mechanisms. First, in state controlled economies there are wider opportunities for the government to mismanage public resources by investing heavily in security apparatus and social benefits to repress or placate the population. Second, in highly statist economies there are few employment and livelihood opportunities outside the public sector and few fundraising opportunities for various independent civil society organizations and the political opposition. Third, in state-owned economies the oligarchic classes are either part of the ruling coalition or highly depend on them to maintain de-facto control of de jure state-owned enterprises. Thus, they have an enormous stake in the maintenance of the regimes that bore them.

**Conclusions**

This contribution sought to connect Arab Spring protests in Middle East and North Africa region with color revolutions in post-Soviet Eurasia. It has been argued that uncertain nature of both transformations and their limited democratization potential differentiate them from the wave of 1989 velvet revolution that brought an end to communism in Eastern Europe.

It has been argued that although color revolutions have been called breakthrough, democratization, revolution, transition, regime change and Arab Spring protests have been called awakening, uprising, revolutions and democratization, the use of terminology is very problematic in both contexts. It has been argued that both waves are best conceived of as cases of authoritarian breakdown which could

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5 Estimates of Egyptian Army’s shares in the economy vary between 10 and 30 percent (Kirkpatrick 2011).
continue as transitions and end up in regime change or continue as the process of authoritarian renewal and end up as different kind of autocracies or same kind of autocracies with different people on top.

It has been argued that professionalism and robustness of armed forces, personalist authoritarian regime and absence of oil wealth or wide and penetrating patronage networks are best predictors of authoritarian breakdown in MENA. Comparing two regions it has been discovered that semi-authoritarian personalist regime, neutral or pro-protester security forces and capacity of the state to buy off the population are best predictors of authoritarian breakdown when generalized to both regions.

Finally, it has been shown that privatization and liberalization can contribute to onset of instability and popular mobilization through three mechanisms. First, it has been argued that privatized economies feature oligarchs who might turn against government incumbents and finance or protect protests. Second, there are fewer financial opportunities available for the government in a privatized state to divert resources to placating or repressing the population. Third, privatized economies offer wider economic opportunities for individuals and lessen their dependence on government controlled economy.
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