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1 Chapter 6. Conclusions: Resilient Authoritarianism and Frustrated Expectations

1.1 Introduction

This book has outlined an analysis of the changes affecting Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia since the 2010-11 Uprisings against the backdrop of pre-Uprisings trajectories by integrating survey and non-survey data, both quantitative and qualitative. While data availability and quality issues (e.g. Pellicer et al 2015) make it impossible to provide a systematic longitudinal comparative analysis, it is nonetheless possible to undertake a diachronic examination of major changes before and after the Uprisings in three key countries. The countries selected epitomise three key trends apparent in the wake of the Arab Uprisings, namely: a successful (if precarious) transition away from authoritarianism and towards democracy in Tunisia; a successful counter-revolution blocking such transition in Egypt; and a broadly successful attempt to absorb protests through mild reforms in Jordan.

The analysis suggests that without real progress on fundamental political and economic reforms, conditions for further regional turmoil will remain unchanged. The data suggest a close link between the need for progress and political instability, and they provide a stark picture of the scale and urgency of these tasks. Indeed, since 2014 – the year survey data were collected – events in the Middle East and North Africa suggest continued instability and tension, if not outright conflict. The fundamental issues which drove people to demand change in 2010-2011 have not disappeared; people were as concerned about the economic situation, unemployment and corruption in 2014 as they were three years earlier, and trust in government and many state institutions declined noticeably. In Egypt widespread repression has prevented protests, at least for the time being, and in Jordan the Monarchy has been able to maintain control but has been unable or unwilling to undertake fundamental reform. In Tunisia, the one country experiencing revolution deemed to be on the path to democracy, the unrest continues, with protests and strikes against unemployment, corruption and insecurity, particularly in those

very regions far from the coast and the capital city in which the protests originated in December 2010. Despite institutional political changes since the Uprising, the situation on the ground appears not to have improved in line with popular expectations in those parts of the country that most needed to see rapid improvements.

The remainder of this chapter summarises key findings and concludes by offering elements of a reflection on their significance for policy design and for the way scholarship approaches the question of political transformation in the region and beyond it.

1.2 Findings: Internal Challenges and External Responses

The use of survey data helps add significant pieces of a complex puzzle to the analysis of the Arab Uprisings and regional politics in their wake.

1.2.1 Drivers of the Uprisings

People in Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan were driven by both political and socio-economic marginalisation to protest in what became the 2010-11 Arab Uprisings. It should be emphasised, though, that the Uprisings did not start as explicitly ideologically-driven revolutions, nor were they revolutions in which either charismatic leaders or large, established social or political movements were prominent. Rather, they were directed against what some have called 'stolen futures', whether for social justice, political voice or economic inclusion. This helps explain why they were less generationally driven movements and more the product of people from all backgrounds – age, gender, socio-economic condition, etc. – reaching a tipping point of social inequality, of lack of political inclusion and economic opportunity.

The success of these protests did endow post-revolutionary governments at first with considerable popular trust, but that trust was predicated on their addressing social and economic problems as well as on the delivery of political reform. However, economic data suggests no significant change since 2011, and social and political analysis suggests governments have been at best sluggish in carrying out reforms. Trust in political leaderships had fallen in 2014 compared to 2011, and people did not see significant progress taking place to resolve underlying socio-economic tensions. If anything, the situation was perceived to have worsened. In turn, this has made it easier to replace post-revolutionary governments, whether through elections (Tunisia), coups (Egypt) or co-option (Jordan). All this signals not only the manner in which pre-Uprising economic policies contributed to socio-economic dislocation leading to the Uprisings, but also the failure of post-Uprising policies to deliver inclusive

growth, which leaves countries vulnerable to political instability. The unwillingness and/or inability to transform economic and social relations enough to achieve stability has made ordinary citizens sceptical of change, helping fuel counter-revolutionary drives, while political dislocation has heightened respondents' security concerns at the level of both individuals and countries.

1.2.2 Key Themes: Youth, Gender, and Corruption

The analysis of major themes – youth, gender, and corruption – to which survey data can contribute illustrates the depth of the challenges societies in the region face.

Not enough progress been made to overcome women's marginalisation: despite high support for the general principle of gender equality, half the population are still systematically denied at least some of their rights –rights to which their governments have nominally signed up. On the contrary, women's rights have been manipulated for political reasons perhaps even more intensely than before the Uprisings. In addition, survey data suggests much lower support for equality in specific contexts such as education, employment or personal status law than for the general principle of equality. The stakes on this issue spill over into political and economic realms, as there is a well-established link between women's empowerment and (levels and inclusiveness of) development and social cohesion. Unfortunately, levels of political representation for women remain low – only Tunisia passes the 30% threshold of female parliamentarians required for an effective voice, for example, and that only barely. In addition, not only are women much less likely to be economically active than men, but even when they *are* active they much more likely to be unemployed.

In addition, young people of both genders are often unable to find a way into their own society. The lack of productive and decent jobs at the level for which they have been educated drives them into casual and informal labour, family formation is delayed by lack of resources, and people come to feel that they are frittering away their lives and their skills. Older people feel let down by a breach of what was considered an implicit 'authoritarian social contract': they are not reaping the 'rewards of good behaviour' and subsequent generations are not enjoying the better future they had been promised. This is particularly problematic because the failure to include large swathes of the population in a workable developmental project can lead to further political and social instability. While one has to be careful about associating high levels of socio-economic dissatisfaction with political violence, there is always the danger that violent ideologies might become increasingly attractive. The sudden rise of Salafism in post-uprising

Tunisia for example (Cavatorta and Merone 2013; Merone 2015) can be seen as an indication of how young disenfranchised people can mobilise around a radical and at times violent socio-political project. In addition to violent political engagement, the dire economic situation can lead to widespread apathy, whereby an increasing number of people simply disengage from the rest of society and public life, retreating to family/clan/neighbourhood. This retreat into ascribed identities reinforces patterns of diminishing individual and collective trust, further sapping social cohesion. By reducing such cohesion, long-term apathy can also create the conditions for violent rebellion. Finally, many people simply see migration as their 'way out' of societies which have failed them.

Finally, corruption is the single most frequently cited factor behind the Uprisings – perhaps unsurprisingly, since it represents a nexus of political, economic and social inequalities and is a crucial mechanism for their reproduction. Corruption, including *wasta* in all forms, erodes social cohesion, exacerbates economic disparities, and thereby increases political instability. Bribes, payment for services funded from taxation or for special consideration, for places at good schools or universities, having to use connections to get a job or favourable business terms, splinter the community into two groups, not necessarily on the basis of class or affluence, but into the 'favoured' and the 'un-favoured'. What the un-favoured have learned from the Uprisings is that regimes can be toppled or at least driven to make substantial concessions; what they have learned from the post-Uprisings period is that concessions do not guarantee that underlying problems will be tackled. Two major categories of corruption are particularly relevant in the countries examined here. First, crony capitalism and state corruption: here, elite surveys (CPI, WB enterprise surveys) generally see increases in corruption, while public opinion surveys reveal high levels of perceived corruption, increasing to well over four fifths by 2014. The general public do not think there has been any decrease in government corruption – rather, they see things deteriorating and have little confidence governments are making reasonable efforts to challenge it. Secondly, at the level of 'everyday' corruption, over two thirds of respondents thought it impossible to get a job without *wasta*, a significant increase everywhere except Tunisia, where levels were already high. The combination of crony capitalism (including state corruption) and everyday corruption permeates society, undermines meritocracy and the rule of law, and delegitimises politicians, institutions and even political ideologies themselves (e.g. democracy).

All this signals significant erosion of the ties that bind societies together. What is at stake is ultimately no less than citizens' trust in their government and their future. The inability or

unwillingness of governments to deliver on pledges to improve the lives of ordinary people undermines trust in government, in governmental institutions and in government programmes. This failure to foster socio-political cohesion – intensified by the moderate demands and peaceful methods of the Uprisings – is likely to generate centrifugal forces which scholars and policymakers within the region and beyond would be ill-advised to ignore.

1.2.3 Economic Strategy: Orthodoxy Policy and Popular Perception

The literature on the political economy of the Arab world before the Uprisings was divided over the economic progress of the countries in the region. Many scholars and policy-makers emphasised the success of most Arab economies, lauding them for their adherence to the neo-liberal strategy and the reforms they carried out. Tunisia and Egypt in particular were often held up as role models of economic liberalisation and slow but inevitable democratization. These reforms, and external pressure to implement them, focused on ending subsidies, privatizing state assets, attracting foreign investment, deregulating the banking sector and signing free trade agreements. This appeared to have beneficial effects on the economy, with good rates of growth and diminishing unemployment (Sfeir, 2006). Other scholars, however, recognized the improvement of macroeconomic indicators, but focused attention on the inequalities being generated, with significant emphasis on the corrupt networks of privilege (Heydemann, 2004) at the heart of Arab political economies (Richards et al., 2014) .

The Uprisings provided a definite answer to debate over the state of Arab economies, with public opinion polls, including the Arab Transformations survey, indicating that protests were rooted in socio-economic dissatisfaction. The inability of the state to govern, the insertion of Arab states into the neo-liberal global economy and the collusion with networks of predatory capital meant that the legitimacy of regimes and of the state itself came to be questioned. Post-Uprisings instability simply confirmed to many citizens that the institutions of the state could not be relied upon. The combination of inability and unwillingness to govern the economy is central to this loss of legitimacy largely because it follows decades when much of the legitimacy of regimes did rest on their ability to reward the population around a more inclusive developmental project. When one examines the more political demands of the uprising it is also clear that there was significant dissatisfaction with the authoritarian nature of the political system, but demands for democracy were equated with the material gains that would be obtained once democracy was installed. Thus the confirmation of the mechanistic and instrumental rather than ideological conception of democracy that emerges in analysing the

data before and after the Arab spring is found in the perception that democratic systems have to deliver greater socio-economic equality. When this does not occur, it is not only the legitimacy of the state that is at stake but also the very nature and ideal of democratic governance. It is difficult to see how in the near future the Arab state will be able to recover its legitimacy and how 'democracy' can continue exercise widespread appeal.

As mentioned, the data across Jordan, Tunisia and Egypt strongly suggest that socio-economic inequalities were at the roots of the Uprisings. This ought to be particularly unsurprising since Arab autocracies – especially post-populist 'infitah republics' – attempting to implement neoliberal reforms were left without the option of 'decompressing' economically-driven resentment with political opening; they needed control of formal politics in order to push through precisely these unpopular changes. It follows that improving the economic situation of the country is the most pressing challenge for the governments in the region. The systems in place before the Uprisings were no longer able to deliver on the social contract despite rising growth rates and apparently declining unemployment. This led to the protests, and 'democracy' resonated as a potential solution for achieving socio-economic goals. This is why there has not been the expected breakthrough to an ideological commitment to democracy and its political institutions in the wake of the Uprisings. While the protests had a strong political dimension (in Jordan demands for constitutional monarchy and in Egypt and Tunisia for the overthrow of corrupt regimes), the reality is that outcomes mattered more than participatory and accountable governments. While some decry this instrumental view of democratic governance across the region, it is worth noting that socio-economic success is often prioritised over democracy in many other parts of the world. What is being discussed and 'demanded' across the three countries is a commitment to some sort of social-democratic welfare capitalism. While this form of governance would be expressed differently across countries and regions on important matters such as individual liberal rights (de Regt 2013), there is a similar core to it that would see market forced being tamed through much greater state intervention.

Our analysis suggests that there was significant dissatisfaction with governance and very little trust in political institutions largely because they were unable to deliver on the socio-economic dimension of the social compact. Regime change was meant to reverse the trend, increasing levels of trust, but it is clear from survey data that respondents' perceptions of democracy was and remains strongly associated with its 'substantive' nature, particularly economic redistribution and end to corrupt practices. When institutional reform claiming to be the harbinger of democratic change fails to produce substantive as well as institutional change as

it did in Egypt and Tunisia, disenchantment with democracy – either in the form of disappointment with governing elites or of delegitimisation of the idea itself – is likely to set in. In this situation, it is possible that citizens will look to ideological frameworks and institutional mechanisms other than democracy that might ensure the delivery of socio-economic goods, even if this means a return to authoritarianism or its consolidation.

1.2.4 Conceptions of Democracy

Given the difficult socio-economic conditions the majority of people experience, it is not surprising to find socio-economic issues at the heart of citizens' definition of democracy. This, however, generates a number of problems for incipient democratic regimes that then find confirmation in corollary data, namely the problem of excessive expectations. Under autocracy, a democratic system was associated with the political and economic benefits its adoption could bring and which were denied by kleptocratic autocrats. However, once the formal system was adopted, as in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia, these benefits did not materialize as quickly as expected, helping disillusionment set in. Democratic institutions have survived and been consolidated only in Tunisia, and even there the democratic system is not immune from criticism; decreasing rates of political participation suggest that the perceived legitimacy of the system is at best precarious. The uneasy legitimacy of the Tunisian post-authoritarian regime is a result of worsening economic conditions that democratic governments and their regional and international patrons seem unable or unwilling to reverse. The problem for Tunisia to which the data point is that political elites have earned little trust from the population and that this in turn affects the overall legitimacy of the system that has just been built, even though it might present marked advances in institutional design and even substantive differences compared to the Ben Ali era (Boukhars 2017). In Egypt any substantive democratic gains since the January Revolution have been reversed thanks to the regime's extreme nationalist rhetoric, aimed particularly at pro-democratic forces and any support they might have from Western counterparts. The worrying risk is that the combination of lack of effective action by Western governments and the repressive moves of counter-revolutionary regimes– not least stigmatising democratic groups as terrorist in the name of 'security', as well as any Western forces supporting them – may erode the legitimacy not just of specific pro-democratic groups but of democracy itself, associating it with increased violence, divisions, social tension, and insecurity.

1.2.5 Religion and Politics

The Uprisings were clearly not motivated by religious values or driven by religious groups, nor did the Uprisings, those who supported them or populations as a whole seek to establish religiously-directed government. Islamist parties did profit from the Uprisings in the short term in both Egypt and Tunisia, but this was primarily due to the absence of significant political alternatives, not least because previous regimes had all but destroyed other opposition forces. While religion and indeed the politics of Islam remain in diverse ways an important part of life across the region, and while a substantial minority – albeit for different reasons and in different ways – would like to see religious injunctions more firmly rooted and entwined in the institutions and practices of government, they are clearly not a majority. Indeed, Islamist governments are perceived by most citizens as just as likely to break their promises as others. Popular dissatisfaction with the way the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia governed after the fall of incumbent regimes testifies to the fact that the degree of religiosity of a political party is secondary, particularly if it cannot address the 'pragmatic' issues affecting standards of living which appear to have motivated protesters.

What survey data suggests is that the relationship between the religious and the political is nuanced – that it varies across countries as well as between them, defying facile generalisations and undermining claims that there is any 'essence' or 'core' of Islam in its relation to politics. What the surveys do indicate is the need for a more nuanced explanation of the this relation between the challenges which particular social, political and economic contexts present and the way religion and politics are articulated in each to produce political discourses and practices.

1.2.6 Transformations, Stability and Trust

Processes of regime transformation are by nature volatile and entail often profound uncertainties, so it is not surprising that trust in others halved in Egypt and Tunisia and in no case scored above 30%, remaining high only for family, friends, and neighbours. Trust in the political institutions of state dropped in the same way. Similarly, all three countries saw a drop in confidence in essential service provision (education, healthcare and social security), but the demand for them remained high. Different social and political entrepreneurs can use this uncertainty to make demands which the emerging system cannot meet, sometimes straining it to the point where a return to the *status quo ante* seems appealing. This destabilization is heightened in the case of the Arab Uprisings due to the simultaneity of instability inside each country, across the Arab region as a whole and in its southern, northern and eastern

neighbourhoods. During volatile times and with frustrated political and economic expectations, citizens may well return to placing their trust in the institutions of state and particularly organs which are perceived as less politicised, such as the judiciary or the security sector. This trust, however, comes with considerable strings attached: although security institutions in particular often – but not always – obtain comparatively high trust scores compared with other social and political actors, history suggests this trust is temporary and conditional. The Egyptian army's attempt to stall transition in 2011, for example, quickly wore thin and popular mobilisation forced it to concede parliamentary and presidential elections. It should also be emphasised that even for relatively popular institutions trust scores remain low overall and that respondents have far lower trust in the ability of those institutions to deliver on the issues that matter to them (e.g. public services, jobs, or corruption). In fact, a constant in the perceptions of ordinary citizens before and after the Uprisings and across all Arab Transformations Survey countries is the degree of *dis*satisfaction with governance and the lack of credibility ascribed to the actions and policies of ruling elites. This has had the effect of delegitimising the state as an institution because there seems to be no difference between it and the particular elites in power. Given the centrality of trust in building social capital and the importance of this in turn for economic growth, development and political cohesion, pervasive lack of trust in institutions of state and political actors provides a significant indication of both the difficulties of development and the lack of legitimacy and precariousness of existing regimes.

1.2.7 International Responses

While a degree of blame for the absence of significant economic improvements needs to be placed on post-Uprising governments themselves, it should also be noted that the international community, and international financial institutions in particular, have been unwilling to deviate from the very prescriptions which helped cause the Uprisings in the first place (e.g. Hanieh, 2015). Indeed, IFIs, along with the US and the EU, failed to learn lessons about their economic policies, blaming crony capitalism and authoritarian rulers for the financial bankruptcy of regimes and for their failure to deliver inclusive social development rather than recognising the contribution to this system of their own analytical and policy orthodoxy. Alongside the inherent volatility of political transitions, pushing for yet more neo-liberalism at a time of ideological rejection of its effects across the region considerably constrained post-Uprising decision-makers, rendering impossible the kind of radical economic transformation demanded by populations.

Furthermore, the economic and political influence of Gulf monarchies increased in all three countries, including influence obtained through the provision of development assistance and foreign direct investment (Aras and Falk 2015; Isaac 2014). This is especially the case for Egypt, which is also dependent on Gulf States providing employment opportunities for migrant workers, a dependency made worse by the unemployment crisis within Egypt, exacerbated but not caused by the Uprisings themselves. Western governments continue to support autocracies while claiming at least publicly that democracy and economic growth can be promoted through a combination of trade and privatization (which aggravate socio-economic polarisation) and the promotion of political rights while ignoring demands for economic and social rights, economic security and decent public services (e.g. Kausch 2016; Youngs and Gutman 2015). A system of conditionality was deployed to achieve this which is utterly unfit for purpose. All this amounts in practice to continued support for the region's autocrats. It is difficult not to conclude that while these regimes are presented as essential partners in maintaining stability, fighting terrorism, ensuring hydrocarbon supplies, and stemming migration, especially into Europe, the unfortunate and dangerous fact is that current policies do nothing but prop up regimes and contribute to eroding the foundations of social, economic and political cohesion which are crucial to stability and security both within and beyond Arab states' borders. Furthermore, there is no doubt that the EU's moral authority as a 'Normative Power' has been swept away as a consequence of these stances.

1.3 Implications

The particular conclusions from data summarised in previous sections provide important insights into a range of analytical and policy-relevant questions. In conclusion, we offer outlines of such implications for policy design and for the frameworks on which scholars currently rely for their analysis of regional transformations.

1.3.1 Policy Design: Achieving Inclusion, Cohesion and Stability

One of the most significant findings of our analysis and of the Arab Transformations project more generally is that the Uprisings should be understood as the culmination of the multi-dimensional dissatisfaction with how Arab states were – and are still – run and that the post-Uprising period simply accelerated and made all the more evident the misgivings ordinary citizens have about their governments, contributing to regime instability. Data suggest citizens want 'more' state in their lives; they just do not want their current regimes, which they regard

as untrustworthy, ineffective, and unconcerned with the public good. In order to have a chance of success, strategies for social, political and economic inclusion – whether by domestic policy actors or their international counterparts – must include a clear understanding of what people want and aim to achieve a significant improvement in political and economic inclusion. Without such improvements it is difficult to see how a sustainable path into the future can be established. For example, survey data suggests a fundamental mismatch between the liberal 'polyarchic' conception of democracy and people's view that social justice and socio-economic rights are integral to it. What is needed is modernisation of the public sector and ensuring good governance, alongside the promotion of human rights, not limited to action on selected civil and political human rights but tackling economic rights and social justice generally. Policy should aim to eliminate elite capture, promote effective government (policy formulation and service delivery) and tackle corruption. Development assistance and economic policy should be directed towards investment in infrastructure and support for programmes creating social development and decent jobs, particularly for young people. The overall aim of such policies cannot be merely to safeguard formal institutions of the state but must focus on achieving a more equal resource allocation across the population, if those institutions are to have a chance of regaining legitimacy. Finally, although there has not been time to discuss this in detail, to achieve these objectives Arab states must act on taxation alongside corruption. Much of this must be done soon to avoid further turmoil (e.g. Hedrick-Wong and Jarrar 2015).

1.3.2 Scholarship: Strength and Stability, Ferocity and Brittleness in Arab Autocracies after the Uprisings

The Uprisings and their characteristics, as they emerge in this stud, entail significant consequences for orthodox scholarly models of political change.

One lesson scholarship can draw from the Arab Uprisings is that there is a need to reflect on the conception of democracy at the heart of academic analysis. The Uprisings and their aftermath show that the understanding of democracy and authoritarian rule at the heart of both empirical studies and orthodox analytical models needs to be revisited, not least in the light of ordinary citizens' understandings of these concepts – not reactively and mechanically by simply redefining concepts to reflect public opinion, but by taking seriously the challenge that collective preferences may provide clues to help us address the limitations of our existing analytical and policy toolkits. In particular, data suggests reconsidering the significance of socio-economic rights and more generally of greater substantive and material equality – *as well*

as juridical equality in civil and political rights – as non-negotiable dimensions of a democratic society and of transitions towards it. This aspect has been neglected for several decades, especially in orthodox Anglophone social scientific scholarship on the Middle East, and despite its continued presence in relatively marginal parts of academic analysis and its relevance to policy debates it has not been central to the governance or analysis of democracy for some time; experts, stakeholders and public debate has focused predominantly on formal, procedural and institutional aspects of democracy (Teti 2012a; Teti 2012b). Recognising and challenging the strictures imposed by the narrowest of liberal marketised approaches to democracy can, in particular, provide a productive starting point for overcoming the impasses from which studies of political regimes and their transformations suffer, including their linear polarity, their teleology, and the normative assumptions built into the taxonomies upon which they rely.

A second set of implications pertains to re-evaluating the conceptions of stability, of security, and of authoritarian resilience in the light of evidence from the Uprisings. Most experts were taken by surprise by the Uprisings, partly because of limitations in the frameworks through which analyses of the region's regimes were conducted, specifically related to conventional approaches to security and stability and the role these play in conceptualising autocracy. It is important to understand how such myopia was produced and how the Uprisings can help overcome it.

From the mid-1980s until the Uprisings, analyses of democratization and authoritarianism in the Arab world reflected broader debates about transitions between autocracies and democracy. Early post-Cold War studies often viewed authoritarianism as unstable, replaced over time by liberal democracy understood as a combination of polyarchy and market economy. Some viewed Arab autocracies' instability as rooted in their inability to monopolise the use of force within their boundaries, making them particularly vulnerable to lack of internal consolidation and to external forces (see e.g. Ahram and Lust 2016). However, when the region appeared to be left out of democratization's 'third wave', analysts focused on 'authoritarian resilience': some suggested democratization was impeded by cultural factors, others pointed to material obstacles (economic or strategic rents). Later studies identified the emergence of 'hybrid regimes', describing the added resilience of authoritarian governance clothed in cosmetic liberal-democratic trappings. This scholarship underlined two aspects of regime endurance: first, repression carried out by state security organisations preventing regime overthrow or widespread contestation (Bellin 2004 , 2012); second, the use of material and/or symbolic rents to co-opt enough key social groups to ensure survival (Heydemann, 2007). The lack of

significant security challenges or political mobilisation made such authoritarian rule under coercive threats appear stable. In the wake of the Uprisings, particularly given the conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen, it is again tempting to view (in)stability and (in)security through the lens of a conventional focus on the use of force. What is significant about all three countries considered in this book is that in each the Uprisings presented significant challenges to stability – indeed, in Tunisia and Egypt these challenges came with a considerable increase in perceived domestic insecurity – *despite* the lack of serious security threats. Conventional approaches to security and stability produced a blindness to processes of destabilisation.

These approaches missed the way 'hybrid regimes' were being destabilised by the erosion of their ability to fulfil their social contracts, undermining their legitimacy and the society's social cohesion and thus also security. The integration of quantitative survey data provides some measure of the degree and type of destabilisation involved by identifying regimes' inability to meet citizen expectations and the impact this has on regime legitimacy. In addition, the reality of regime 'stability' appeared rather different from the standpoint of empirical and field research. For example, some had noted the regimes' inability to provide crucial services and guarantee more even-handed economic development, pointing to the shortcomings of economic liberalization under authoritarian constraints (e.g. Dillman, 2002; Haddad, 2012; White, 2005). While such precariousness never generated successful open challenges resulting in regime change, it did signal frail legitimacy. Indeed, numerous studies throughout the 2000s highlighted the existence of spaces of contestation, resistance and autonomy defying the assumed omnipotence of the state (Allal 2009; Chalcraft 2016; Heydemann and Leenders, 2012; Shehata 2009).

Facile determinisms and over-generalisations aside, structural weaknesses create the conditions in which more high-profile 'proximal' threats become possible. Indeed, the very fact that widespread and intense violence and repression – alongside political exclusion – are required to maintain regimes in place highlights regime vulnerability and the precarious nature of superficial quiescence achieved through coercion. Frm this viewpoint Arab regimes' aggressive repression of domestic and international dissent is a sign, not of strength and stability, but rather of weakness and instability. The ability to repress dissent should not be confused with stability, security, or resilience.

The particular bind in which these states find themselves is therefore the tension between the nature of these weaknesses – the lack of social, economic, and political cohesion, and the centrifugal forces this entails – and the inability and/or unwillingness of both domestic and

international political leaderships to meet the expectations of their populations. Insofar as they are the result of increasing social, political and economic polarisation, the weakness and instability are also of their own making.

How should we therefore think about this apparently contradiction of an ability to repress and coerce simultaneous with weakness and instability? One possibility is to return to a distinction first proposed over two decades ago between 'strong' states which can exercise force relying on social consensus and 'fierce' states which may exercise comparable levels of violence but do so precisely because they lack consensus (Ayubi, 1996). In turn, this suggests that while regimes are normally described in terms of strength or weakness, it would be more accurate to describe them as simultaneously *fierce* – capable of repressing dissent – but also *brittle* (Teti and Gervasio 2011), a brittleness rooted in the lack of popular consensus which in turn is rooted in governing elites' unwillingness or inability to meet their populations' needs. This simultaneity of repression and weakness suggests – in various ways and to varying degrees – that contemporary Arab regimes are better understood as brittle and therefore precarious autocracies. In the run-up to the Uprisings, countries like Egypt and Tunisia attempted to control through 'compression and decompression' as they had done in previous decades to release political or economic pressure, but this time they failed precisely because 'neoliberal' pathways to oligarchy prevented regimes from using economic tools to 'decompress' political impasses and vice versa (e.g. Hinnebusch 1998; Korany 1994).

1.4 Concluding Remarks

Beyond the tired rhetoric of 'Islamist winters', it is understandably tempting to view current conditions in Egypt, Tunisia and Jordan – and across the region – as a vindication of conventional approaches to authoritarianism. Indeed, scholars have developed analyses of 'authoritarian learning' and of 'authoritarian backsliding' (e.g. Dresden and Howard, 2016). Doubtless some will select from and interpret the findings presented here in this sense. What risks being lost in such arguments is the brittleness of Arab autocracies, both those preceding the Uprisings and those left in their wake. Along with the non-linear, contested and open-ended nature of transformation processes which others have noted (e.g. Asseburg and Wimmen 2016) and the need to adapt scholarly and policy frameworks to match (Andrea Teti, 2012a), this book has attempted to take populations' perception seriously, to explore a series of crucial issues more closely using a combination of data, to problematize the conception of democracy

in analytical models, and to contribute to overcoming the limitations in scholarship and policy design which the Uprisings highlighted.

Structural issues relating to regime legitimacy do not capture academic or policy attention as readily as terrorism or insurrection, both because the regimes in question possess the ability to use force to repress most ensuing dissent and because the responsibility for these particular threats ultimately lies not with an easily identifiable 'enemy' but with the regimes themselves and also their international allies. Undoubtedly, however, these trends were in place well before the Uprisings and continue in their wake. Observers have too often conflated the absence of immediate and significant security threats with lack of change, and the latter with stability. But if the story of the Uprisings teaches us nothing else we should have learned to be sceptical such equations.

Authoritarian counter-revolution and restoration may have regained the upper hand, but the Uprisings shed light on just how precarious this 'stability' is, and a close analysis of different types of data and different countries' experiences suggests that lasting solutions require fundamental political and economic reforms towards genuine inclusion, particularly delivering social justice. Against most pundits' expectations, the 2010-11 Uprisings were mostly non-violent, peaceful and moderate, spectacularly sweeping away Orientalist myths of a violent region; if regional governments and their international counterparts fail to address the Uprisings' reasonable demands, it would be surprising if the lack of legitimacy with which these forces are already tainted did not deteriorate further, to the point of risking the legitimacy of democracy itself both as a goal and a means of political action. An integrated approach to analysis of the region's politics and economics, drawing amongst other sources on carefully assessed survey data, can provide parameters for policy design and help to provide a better understanding of political transformations in the region and beyond.