

“Stateness” and Revolution in the Arab World

Clement M. Henry
Middle East Institute
National University of Singapore

In his classic *State and Revolution*, completed just on the eve of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Lenin argues that true Marxists must smash the state to make because it is the weapon of the bourgeoisie. It must be immediately replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The state does not just spontaneously “wither away” until after the revolution has eliminated the bourgeoisie. Eliminating class rule first requires smashing its principal weapon.

Now it may seem quite a stretch to relate Lenin’s teachings to the Arab uprisings of 2011. In fact the Revolutions of January 14 (Tunisia) and January 25 (Egypt) rested on state foundations and illustrated the contention of Yossi Shain and Juan Linz (1995: 94) that such foundations were a necessary precondition for any transition to democracy; indeed, any change from one regime to another requires an underlying infrastructure. Lenin in fact implies this more general point in his discussion of the political transition from bourgeois rule to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Working back from a careful rereading of Lenin’s work, this paper will compare infrastructural power across the Arab region to explain in retrospect the very different trajectories of various Arab uprisings and why a complete smashing of weak states may produce an outcome that would have Lenin shaking in his mausoleum.

Lenin’s Excavations

There is no doubt that Lenin intended the state to be smashed to complete the revolution of the proletariat. As he concludes after citing Karl Marx’s passages in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* about France’s “host of officials numbering half a million, besides an army of another half million, this appalling parasitic body, ... all previous revolutions perfected the state machine, whereas it must be broken, smashed” (II: 2, 18).

“Excavating” the texts of Marx and Engels, Lenin develops a theory of political transition from the supposedly “smashed” bourgeois state to the dictatorship of proletariat that is required to eliminate any economic or social vestiges of bourgeois rule.¹ The interesting question is how a new political regime may emerge from a

¹ For Lenin, planning the October Revolution of 1917, it was necessary to legitimate an anti-democratic conspiracy and dictatorship of the proletariat by “excavations, as it were, in order to bring undistorted Marxism to the knowledge of the mass of the people” (III: 5, p. 33). He even added to his second edition of *State and Revolution*, printed in 1919 but originally written in August and September,

smashed state. What exactly do Lenin and possibly Marx think must be destroyed? What is the remaining substratum and how does it serve the proposed new regime of proletarian dictatorship?

It will not do simply to patch up a bourgeois regime, however democratic, for new proletarian class uses. Lenin has no use for revisionist arguments: however democratic, the bourgeois state must be destroyed. There is no room in Lenin's theory for distinctions between state and regime. But a rereading of *State and Revolution* can disaggregate his conflation of state and regime by examining the assumptions Lenin makes about the political transition between the bourgeois state and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The underlying assumptions define the social foundations for a political transition that Lenin takes for granted.

Lenin's model of political transition was the Paris Commune, which lasted from March 18 to May 28, 1871: "the Commune was able in the space of a few weeks to start building a new, proletarian state machine ... to provide wider democracy and to uproot bureaucracy" (p.68). Lenin notes that Marx, after initially considering the Paris uprising of March 18 to be premature, quickly came to support the Commune as history's first experiment in the dictatorship of the proletariat. It revealed a possible mechanism for transition. As Lenin explained, "Abolishing the bureaucracy at once, everywhere and completely, is out of the question. It is a utopia. But to smash the old bureaucratic machine at once and to begin immediately to construct a new one that will make possible the gradual abolition of all bureaucracy this is not a utopia, it is the experience of the Commune..." (III:2=p30).

The Commune emerged in a Paris still partly surrounded by departing Prussian troops who had defeated Louis Napoleon's Empire. The armistice signed in February 1871 by Adolphe Thiers, France's new provisional president of the Third Republic, had called for the disarming of the regular French army but not of the Paris National Guard. The latter seized power when the regular army withdrew from the city to Versailles after failing in a surprise attack to seize its canons, most of which were deployed in Montmartre and Belleville, working class districts of Paris (Merriman, 2014: 24). The Central Committee of the National Guard then voided the mandates of city officials elected in February under the auspices of the Third Republic and conducted new elections on March 26, just eight days after assuming power. Sixty of the 92 elected members of the Commune council took their seats on March 28 and proceeded to abolish military conscription and to incorporate all

1917, a short chapter section (II: 3, pp. 21-22) citing a letter written by Marx on March 5, 1852, that stresses the dictatorship of the proletariat as one of three core principles: (1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with the particular, historical phases in the development of production (historische Entwicklungsphasen der Produktion), (2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat, (3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society."

healthy adult males into the National Guard. The Commune also set salary limits on all employees and, at least in Engel's words cited by Lenin, "filled all posts-- administrative, judicial, and educational--by election on the basis of universal suffrage of all concerned, subject to recall at any time by the electors" (IV, 2, p. 45 citing Engels 1891 preface to the third edition of Karl Marx, *The Civil War in France* <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/civil-war-france/postscript.htm>).

From these modest achievements² of a regime that lasted only 72 days before being violently suppressed by the French military Lenin concluded that it was "exactly a case of 'quantity being transformed into quality': democracy, introduced as fully and consistently as is at all conceivable, is transformed from bourgeois into proletarian democracy; from the state (= a special force for the suppression of a particular class) into something which is no longer the state proper" (III: 2, p26)—in short, a change of regime. The momentous transition rested on the National Guard, the Paris police, and various public services that continued more or less to function under very

² Other achievements were, according to Lenin citing Engels, to "release citizens from all payments of rent for dwelling houses from October, 1870, to April [1871]... and to stop all sales of articles pledged in the hands of the municipal pawnshops. On April 1 it was decided that the highest salary received by any employee of the Commune, and therefore also by its members themselves, might not exceed 6,000 francs. On the following day the Commune decreed the separation of the church from the state, and the abolition of all state payments for religious purposes as well as the transformation of all church property into national property; on April 8 this was followed up by a decree excluding from the schools all religious symbols, pictures, dogmas, prayers—in a word, "all that belongs to the sphere of the individual's conscience"—and this decree was gradually applied. . . . On the 6th the guillotine was brought out by the 137th battalion, of the National Guard, and publicly burnt, amid great popular rejoicing. On the 12th the Commune decided that the Column of Victory on the Place Vendome, which had been cast from captured guns by Napoleon after the war of 1809, should be demolished, as the symbol of chauvinism and incitement to national hatreds. This decree was carried out on May 16 [implementing the concluding lines of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*—writer's note]. On April 16 the Commune ordered a statistical registration of factories which had been closed down by the manufacturers, and the working out of plans for the carrying on of these factories by workers formerly employed in them, who were to be organized in co-operative societies; and also plans for the organization of these co-operatives in one great Union. On the 20th the Commune abolished night work for bakers, and also the workers' registration cards, which since the Second Empire had been run as a monopoly by nominees of the police-exploiters of the first rank; the issuing of these registration cards was transferred to the mayors of the twenty districts of Paris. On April 30 the Commune ordered the closing of the pawnshops, on the ground that they were a form of individual exploitation of the worker, and stood in contradiction with the right of the workers to their instruments of labor and credit. On May 5 it ordered the demolition of the Chapel of Atonement, which had been built in expiation of the execution of Louis XVI." Lenin, "The Paris Commune and the Tasks of Democratic Dictatorship," *Proletary*, No. 8 (July 17, 1905), in V.I. Lenin, *The Paris Commune*, Paul Braun, ed., The Lenin Library, volume 5, New York: International Publishers, 1934, pp. 61-62.

difficult post-war circumstances. It even implemented Karl Marx's concluding lines of the *Eighteenth Brumaire* by making the bronze statue of Napoleon "come crashing down the Vendôme Column" (1852: 67) (The Commune did, however, make a serious mistake, both Marx and Lenin observed, in allowing the Bank of France, with war reparations looming, to continue operating on behalf of the Versailles government. They argue that the Commune should have brought the bank under the management of its elected council commission rather than allowing its finance commissioner to negotiate loans from it.)

The Commune rested on the National Guard and what remained of municipal services, the banking system, and the Paris police, over half of which deserted to Versailles on March 18. Since "Paris was left with virtually no officials or functionaries, no magistrates or police" (Merriman, loc 950), the Commune had to make due with skeleton administrations and focus on defence against the Versailles government by recruiting more guardsmen. State smashing in this context was more a matter of agency and intention than structure. While Lenin often speaks of smashing the state machine, in practice the dictatorship of the proletariat relied on its underlying mechanisms. "State" in the sense of Hegel's normative structure could be destroyed with only a minor rearranging of its underlying administrative mechanism, cutting salaries to "workingmen's wages" of up to 6000 francs (the skilled French worker earned up to 5 francs per day, a national guardsman 1.50 francs),³ rendering offices elective and subject to recall, and dropping honorific titles.

Transitions to the dictatorship of the proletariat would become even easier as the modern world industrialized, bringing ever more administration. As Lenin explained,

Capitalist culture has created large-scale production, factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc., and on this basis the great majority of the functions of the old "state power" have become so simplified and can be reduced to such exceedingly simple operations of registration, filing, and checking that they can be easily performed by every literate person, can quite easily be performed for ordinary "workmen's wages", and that these functions can (and must) be stripped of every shadow of privilege, of every semblance of "official grandeur" (III: 2, p27).

Governing perhaps did become simpler if a minority no longer had to contain and suppress an unruly majority. Since, moreover, the Commune intended to destroy

³ Labor in Europe and America: A Special Report on the Rates of Wages, the Cost of Subsistence, and by Edward Young, United States Dept. of the Treasury. Bureau of Statistics - 1875 - 864 pages, p. 465, gives 5 francs=\$1. https://books.google.com.sg/books?id=6coJAAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y; Lenin, p. 43; Merriman (2014).

the state and “every shadow of privilege,” any bureaucracy, the rule of officialdom, disappeared by definition. Yet the realities of administrative discipline served as underpinnings of the transition. The prototype of the new socialist regime was the postal service: “To organize the whole economy on the lines of the postal service so that the technicians, foremen and accountants, as well as all officials, shall receive salaries no higher than “a workman's wage”, all under the control and leadership of the armed proletariat—that is our immediate aim” (III 3, p31).

The “technicians” were perhaps an afterthought that were not quite consonant with the idea of state functions becoming simplified with large-scale production. But Lenin also had the solution to issues of increased divisions of labor and other social complexities: “We shall reduce the role of state officials to that of simply carrying out our instructions as responsible, revocable, modestly paid “foremen and accountants” (of course, with the aid of technicians of all sorts, types and degrees)” (III 3 p30). He later adds in another parenthesis, “The question of control and accounting should not be confused with the question of the scientifically trained staff of engineers, agronomists, and so on. These gentlemen are working today in obedience to the wishes of the capitalists and will work even better tomorrow in obedience to the wishes of the armed workers” (V 4, p58).

From this brief discussion of *State and Revolution* it is clear that any Leninist revolution rests on elaborate social infrastructure. Indeed, if we drop Lenin’s Hegelian definition of “state” as legitimate authority or constitution and replace it with the idea of a mechanism or infrastructure, then “stateness” may be viewed along dimensions of more or less, depending not upon its political form or constitution but rather on the solidity of its foundations or its extension into society. Paris in 1871, being completely urban by definition, exhibited a reasonable degree of stateness, although Marx and Lenin would have preferred a greater concentration of industry as well as the city’s postal and other services. More backward Russia in 1917 was much less conducive to revolution, but again, as in Paris, military forces provided the needed infrastructure for a Bolshevik putsch.⁴

Stateness as infrastructural power

Fast-forwarding to the Arab uprisings of 2011, degrees of stateness or infrastructural power offer a way of explaining its very diverse outcomes, from political transitions

⁴ Karl Kautsky, the distinguished German Marxist whom Lenin regarded as “renegade” for criticizing the latter’s conspiratorial methods, observed that in 1917 “the Mensheviks and the Socialist-Revolutionists... were supported by the majority of the population. The Bolsheviks under Lenin’s leadership, however, succeeded in capturing control of the armed forces in Petrograd and later in Moscow and thus laid the foundation for a new dictatorship in place of the old Czarist dictatorship.” See Karl Kautsky, *Marxism and Bolshevism: Democracy and Dictatorship* (1934), chapter 4: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1934/bolshevism/ch04.htm>

(Egypt, Tunisia) to containment (Jordan, Morocco), repression (Bahrain, Egypt), and civil war (Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen). With the possible fleeting exception of Yemen's Sana'a, none enjoyed the support of a National Guard like the Paris Commune, but differences in the structures of the Arab militaries do help to explain the potential for political transitions and differences in the outcomes. The relatively professional and cohesive military forces of Egypt and Tunisia prevented civil war whereas those segmented by tribe or religion either divided or made war on the rebels, inviting civil war in either case. Military structure, however, is only one of three dimensions of infrastructural power, the others being economic and ideological (Mann, 1985). Alone, in fact, it does not explain why political transition could occur in Egypt and not in Syria. As Albrecht observes about "the kind and degree of military professionalization as well as the military's organizational structure.... there are no substantial differences between the two cases" (2015: 41). He then very carefully lays out the differences in "coup proofing" that helped to explain why the Egyptian military deposed Mubarak while the Syrian high command supported Assad, but these differences already introduce another dimension of infrastructural power, namely the economy.

Michael Mann, who developed a theory of social power, defines infrastructural power as "the capacity of the state to penetrate civil society, and to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm." The other two dimensions, he suggests, in addition to the military, are economic and ideological: comparing capitalist democracies with authoritarian regimes, the former are "despotically weak" but "infrastructurally strong," whereas the latter may be "despotically strong" but of variable infrastructure (1985: 113, 114). Even fierce police states need infrastructural power if they are effectively to penetrate society, as the late Nazih Ayubi emphasized in his classic *Over-stating the Arab State* (1995). Building infrastructure requires "articulations" or dialogue between state elites and societal powers, in other words greater ideological and economic infrastructural as well as military or police power.

The uprisings across the Arab world signalled the collapse of any legitimacy or ideological underpinnings of its authoritarian regimes. Mann's proposed economic dimension of infrastructure does, however, suggest significant variation among the different states. By 2011 all of them had some "factories, railways, the postal service, telephones, etc.," that Lenin had thought simplified carrying out "the functions of the old 'state power,'" but they varied considerably with respect to per capita income, financial inclusion, and business development. Indeed even the Paris Commune, given its dense populations concentrated in 20 arrondissements headed by elected mayors, probably enjoyed greater infrastructural power than most contemporary Arab states. The various municipal administrations continued to function along with a clothing industry quickly converted to turning out uniforms for the National Guard. As Lenin suggested, the greater the density of routine

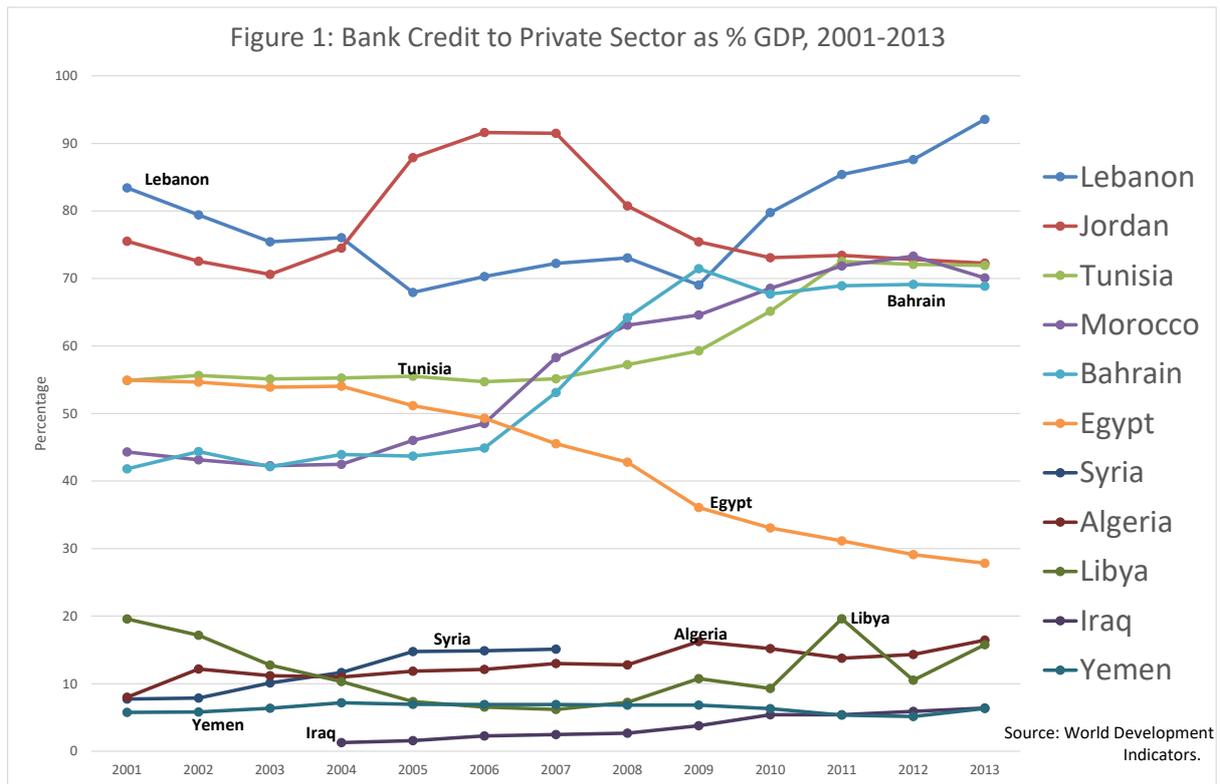
productive activity, the simpler it may be to engage in political transition, whether from what he viewed as being “dictatorship” of the bourgeoisie (however democratic) to the dictatorship of the proletariat (which could also take on a democratic form) or, for our purposes, to some other type of regime.

Following the money trail

The most politically relevant aspects of economic infrastructure among Arab states are financial inclusion and the structural power of local capital rather than per capita income per se. There are significant differences in the sizes of their private sectors, and these are also reflected in the relative penetration of the local banking systems. The World Bank undertook a global study in 2011 of “financial inclusion” or the proportions of populations dealing with banks and other forms of financing. These data also correlate with another measure of local banking systems that the IMF has been tracking since 1948. This is Contract-Intensive Money (CIM), the percentage of broad money (M2) stored in the commercial banking rather than in people’s pockets or under their mattresses (fiduciary currency outside the banking system). Snider (1996) and others have suggested that it might be a proxy for property rights or even respect for public institutions. Banks indeed tend to be convenient targets, along with other public buildings, for angry demonstrators.

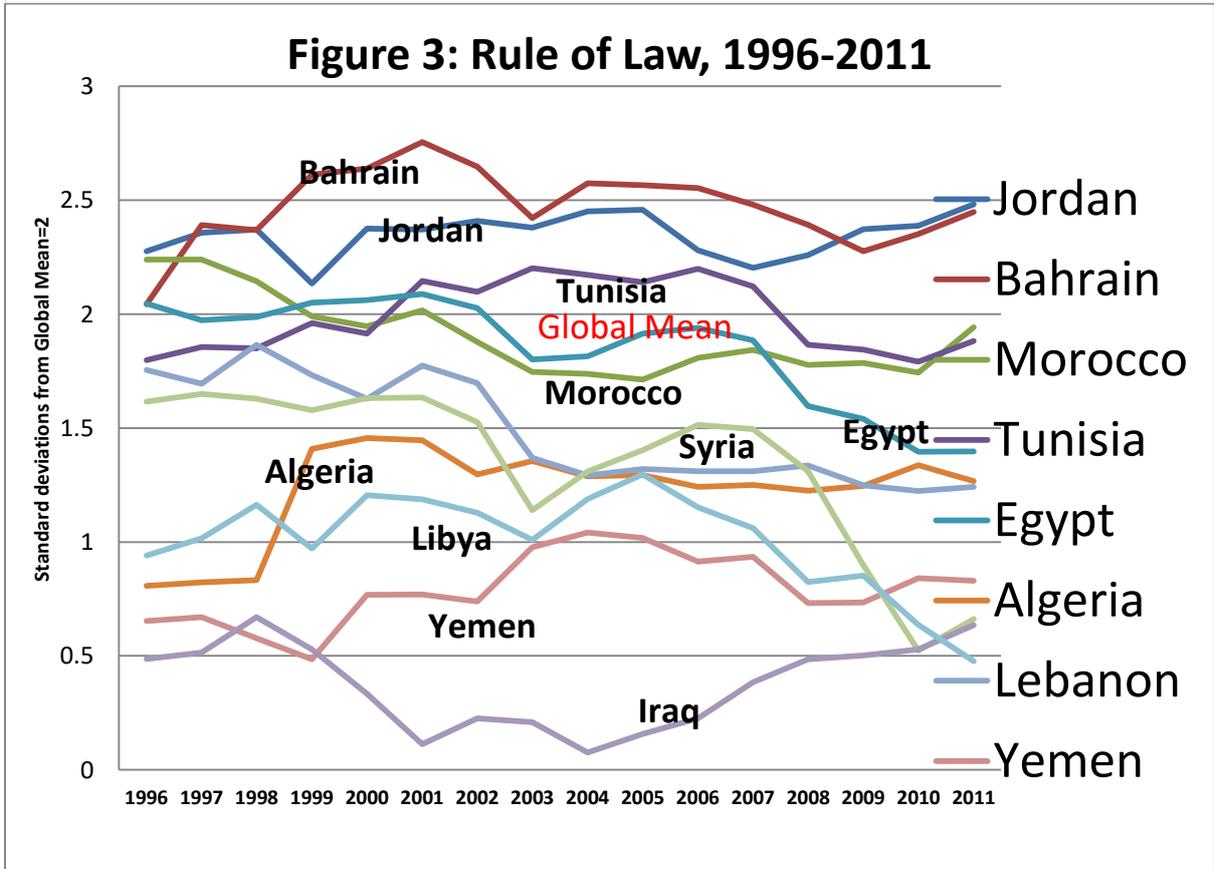
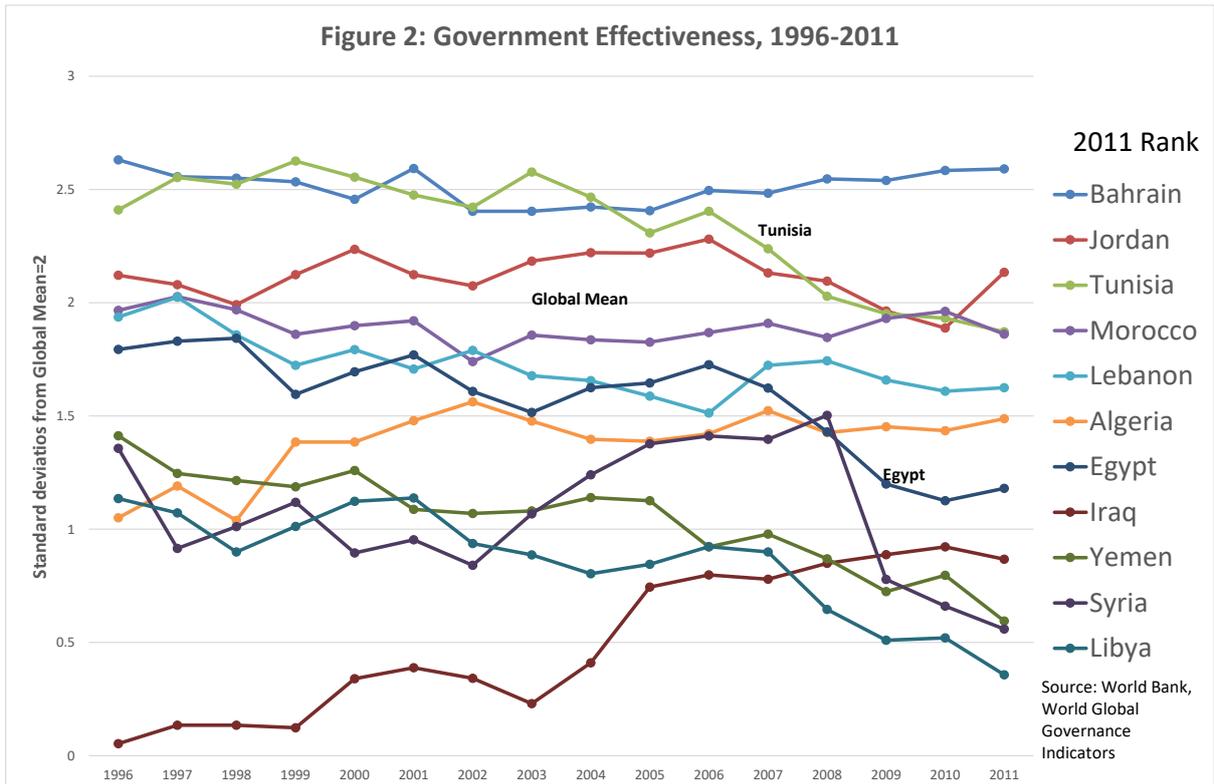
The percentage of money in banks is closely correlated with credit to the private sector as a percentage of GDP. It is argued here that credit to the private sector is a useful indicator of the economic infrastructure on which to situate political transitions. This infrastructure is the financial surface covering the underlying economy. The greater the financial surface of a society, and especially of its private sector commerce and industry, the greater the economic power of civil society.

The numbers in Figure 1, bank credit to the private sector as a percentage of GDP, already show large differences between the countries that experienced relatively peaceful political transitions (Egypt and Tunisia) or contained their uprisings through political reform (Jordan and Morocco) and those that broke up in civil war (Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen). Bahrain is also included, displaying a financial surface that could have supported a peaceful political transition, had it not been for external intervention. Algeria and Lebanon, two paralyzed regimes of weak states still recovering from their civil wars, serve as useful comparators in Figure 1. Lebanon is the big outlier. Its substantial private credit infrastructure unfortunately never facilitated peaceful political transitions. Economic infrastructure may be an enabling but hardly a sufficient condition for a peaceful political transition. In other parts of the Arab world, however, the weak private sectors indicated by meagre bank credit ratios seem to be strongly associated with the breakdowns into civil war of Arab uprisings. Figure 1 also suggests some cause for alarm in Egypt, where public debt may be crowding out credit to the private sector.



The financial surface of the private sector in turn has correlates in the political sphere such as bureaucratic effectiveness and the rule of law that private sector enterprise requires. These indicators, presented respectively in Figures 2 and 3 offer more conventional indicators of the “stateness” needed for an actual political transition from one regime to another. Effective bureaucracies are more likely to be politically neutral and serve a new regime than ineffective ones, and the rule of law, connoting a relatively independent judiciary, may also be more likely to support a change of regime.

Again, as with financial surface, Tunisia and the monarchies are in the lead. Indeed Bahrain and Tunisia had the most effective bureaucracies until the mid-2000s, as the corrosive effects of Ben Ali’s coterie became more evident. Egypt, too, nose-dived, possibly reflecting the credit squeeze shown in Figure 1. By 2009, Egypt had traded places with Algeria as well as Lebanon. And as became evident in 2012, Egyptian bureaucracy indeed subverted the new Morsi regime—far more so, despite some similarities, than did its counterparts in Tunisia who resisted the Al-Nahda transitional government. Egypt’s rule of law was also in decline well before 2011, as Figure 3 shows. Its political superstructure appeared to track the diminishing financial surface of its civil society. And as became evident after the January 25 Revolution, the judiciary was highly politicized and became a weapon of choice for the deep state against the Muslim Brotherhood.



It may be objected that the ratings described in Figures 2 and 3 are highly subjective. They simply average out numbers of polls carried out on national and international

business communities and are replete with their inevitable biases. Consistently, however, the countries with the unhappiest experiences of the Arab Spring, namely Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, scored the lowest on all the indicators. Although poorer in per capita GDP than Libya or Syria, Egypt scored substantially higher in credit allocated to the private sector and on its governance ratings, connoting a stronger civil society.

An ideological dimension: histories of anti-colonial struggle

Finally an ideological dimension of infrastructure may help us after all to understand the quality of those civil societies underlying the respective transitions. Although no Arab regime overturned in the Arab Spring had much legitimacy, some civil societies accumulated more social capital than others. They accumulated it in struggle first against the colonizer and subsequently against unjust postcolonial regimes. In this context it is possible to track Michael Mann's ideological dimension of infrastructural power. As a post Marxian political sociologist, he, too, views the development of infrastructural power as a dialectic between state and civil society. More recent "stateness" literature also offers interesting examples of infrastructural power expanding in partnership with civil society organizations in specialized fields such as irrigation, thereby integrating state territoriality with critical social services (Abers and Keck 2013). The new literature on Latin America, however, understandably forgets how legacies of anti-colonial resistance may build up civil society and accumulate social capital, in other words the art of public association.

In postcolonial societies, which incidentally range across a global surface that is almost coextensive with the precolonial Dar al Islam, nationalist uprisings resulted in new states with deeper social roots than their Western imperial predecessors. For instance, political entrepreneurs of anti-colonialism, such as Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia, mobilized their followers as *le pays réel* versus *le pays legal*, that is to say, civil society in opposition to the colonial state. However, colonial situations in the MENA varied considerably in their duration, scope of penetration, and intensity of social dislocation, giving rise to independent states with varying degrees of nationalist consciousness and built-in associational capacities.

At one extreme, what most of us today call Algeria and Palestine fell victim to vicious forms of settler colonialism. At the other extreme Saudi Arabia experienced only the most informal versions first, in 1909, of a British and then, by 1945, of an American protectorate. The only "settlers" were the oil exploration teams who were confined to ghettos, thereby sheltering the rest of society from their social practices (Vitalis 2007). By contrast French settlers began already to arrive in Algeria in the 1830s and 1840s to take over the best lands and finally, culturally as well as economically to pauperize most of the indigenous inhabitants by the end of the

nineteenth century. The other biggest and continuing victims of settler colonialism, of course, were the Palestinians, but they at least did not lose their culture as well as their land.

If colonizing a people meant exterminating them (Grandmaison 2005), it came in degrees that can be measured by indices of social dislocation, theft of land, and the duration of these miseries. Unlike the American Indians, the Arabs (and Berbers, Kurds, and other ethnic minorities) survived as peoples, defined and demarcated in new colonial police states, only three of which could claim a precolonial history. The Protectorates of Tunisia (1882), Morocco (1912), and Egypt (1882, but “veiled” until 1914) defined precise areas of colonial contestation. Other geographic regions such as Syria or Palestine received new boundaries. Within the various police states, contesting elites varied substantially in their social composition and the quality of their linkages with the respective populations.

Three generations of Tunisians worked through a paradigm of colonial dialectic. Before World War I the Young Tunisians, led by progressive, Western educated members of a traditional upper class, struggled for equal rights with their French overlords. After the war the broader, less progressive upper strata of “baldi” from Tunis and other coastal cities rejected such assimilation and urged immediate independence. By 1937, incapable of controlling street demonstrations, they lost out to a broader based middle stratum of French educated professionals. As the nationalist struggle intensified after World War II, organized Tunisian labor also broke away from French trade unions to create the Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT), the strongest labor movement in the Arab world. By independence in 1956, Habib Bourguiba’s *pays réel* consisted of a broad coalition of urban and village middle strata and much of the non-agricultural labor force, fully mobilized in modern mass organizations. Although the personality cults of the post-colonial state eventually turned the ruling party into a used-up cheer leader, the legacy of anti-colonial struggle embedded society with latent associative skills, social capital for civil society.⁵

Egypt’s anti-colonial struggle did not leave such an extensive legacy of social capital. Let me focus on just one critical difference between Egypt and Tunisia. The link developed in Tunisia’s Neo-Destour Party between village and national urban elites could never be as well articulated in Egypt, where the Wafd Party simply assembled urban elites and large landowners who directly commanded the vote. The functional equivalent of the Neo-Destour’s upwardly mobile urban professionals of

⁵ Prime Minister Narendra Modi, celebrating India’s “special relationship” with Britain in Wembley Stadium on November 13, 2015, was making a similar point about “the soil of London” giving birth to India’s “freedom struggle (Rowlatt, BBC). British India was one of the few other colonial situations to have given rise to mass parties organizing protracted struggles for independence.

village origins were growing numbers of graduates of the Egyptian Military Academy, starting with Nasser's class of 1936, many of whom were not sons of wealthy landowners.

As for Morocco, the colonial dialectic could not play beyond the second generation consisting mainly of traditional urban elites running the Istiqlal Party. The monarchy, regaining power with independence in 1956, never permitted a third (Bourguiba-style) generation, exemplified by Mehdi Ben Barka, to achieve hegemony. By encouraging political pluralism, however, the monarchy enabled a more vibrant civil society than in the theoretically monolithic republics. The most important legacy of anti-colonial struggle, indeed, was the monarchy itself, fully envisioned as the symbol of national unity that all Moroccans could share by gazing into the moon to see Sultan Mohammed V and his children watching over them after the French had deposed and exiled their supposed puppet in 1953 for refusing to sign colonial decrees.

The other Arab territories that became states, with the thorny exceptions of Algeria and Palestine, had weaker ideological infrastructure than the Protectorates, with their imagined shared pasts. The experiences of colonial occupation in the Levant came later, following World War I, and Levantine national liberation struggles hardly compared with those waged in the protectorates. The Damascene and Aleppo notables of Syria, never seriously challenged in the early years of independence by the Ba'ath party rooted in villages, quickly gave way to successions of military coups that eventually led, as in Egypt, to incorporating the villagers into a national or regional political process. In Iraq, too, the military absorbed the Ba'ath Party, and any civil society withered away under Saddam Hussein into rediscovered tribes.

As for Yemen, Lisa Wedeen (2008) teases out elements of "performing" national identity and rightly criticizes Benedict Anderson for insisting that they be "secular," but she also admits the fragility of its institutions. British colonialism and subsequent Egyptian intervention managed to shape not just one but two or three arenas of contestation (Chaudhry 1997). The GCC states were deprived of struggles for national liberation as the British simply withdrew, giving way to informal American protection of their oil riches. Bahrain and Kuwait perhaps enjoy a slight edge over the others in the arts of association, having longer histories of parliamentary opposition and modern education.

The cases that came closest to colonial-settler genocide, Algeria and Palestine, never enjoyed the continuous, geographically and legally demarcated spaces of contestation permitted by the protectorates. Each nationalist movement was severely repressed in the late 1930s and again in the mid-1940s. Under conditions of

armed struggle in the 1950s and 1960s neither the Algerian FLN nor the PLO could develop durable mass organizations; indeed the FLN splintered into warring armed factions in 1962, once independence beckoned. Yet legacies of struggle in the face of daily humiliations and continuing land theft in Palestine have articulated strong senses of national identity, despite weak infrastructure.

Conclusion

The only Arab elites who inherited precolonial states were those of Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. They also inherited strong European legacies of state building in colonial times. It is thus hardly a coincidence that among the presidential dictatorships of the region, only Egypt and Tunisia could really partake of an Arab “spring,” with uprisings that not only succeeded in ousting the dictator but also in enjoying the protection, of sorts, by their respective state militaries. Political transitions require a degree of “stateness” or infrastructural power that was lacking in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen. Morocco, too, managed its uprising politically and ostensibly engaged in a gradual political transition to constitutional monarchy. Jordan had a relatively easier time with a less demanding uprising sobered by events in neighbouring Syria. Bahrain enjoyed a sufficiently high degree of “stateness” – replete with an irredentist myth of eighteenth century Bahran covering Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province– to have effected a political transition, had it not been for Saudi intervention. Each case illustrated a relatively high degree of infrastructural power at work, compared to other Arab spring outcomes so far in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, not to mention Sunni Iraq.

State-building of course is always possible, no matter how hollow the infrastructure. By now the states of Iraq and Syria have been almost completely smashed, well beyond Lenin’s most revolutionary imaginings. The extreme case of the Islamic State emerged after Bashar Assad and Saddam Hussein, followed by American invaders, levelled civil society and infrastructure. More aerial bombardments by Russians and American coalitions do more leveling. As of this writing the Islamic State rests on older foundations of civilization along the Euphrates and Tigris, possible carriers, as Karl Wittfogel (1963) might have argued, of a new Oriental Despotism. Other elements of stateness or infrastructure, in addition to surviving municipal services, include a shadow ex-Iraqi military, global electronic as well as drone-proof river communications, and Salafi ideology. Bombed back into the times of Ibn Khaldun, a fresh generation of former Baathists threatens neighboring dynasties that the fourteenth century Tunis-born political sociologist and statesman would have viewed as aging and vulnerable.

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