Religion and Revolution: Theorizing of the Arab Spring in Accordance With the Selectorate Approach

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The selectorate theory introduces a framework to examine varying political structures, behavior, and systems with a fresh perspective. The theory proclaims that the political survival of a leader relies on a supportive coalition that continuously receives public and/or private payoffs. One revised revision of the selectorate theory elaborates on the classical selectorate model by investigating factors of political survival and regime stability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and scrutinizing the elements of the recent MENA revolutions, such as the leaders’ religious preferences. This study demonstrates that the classical selectorate approach can perfectly satisfy the analysis of MENA transitions. We validated the revised model by showcasing the dynamics of political transition and confirming that selectorate expansion triggered a shift from private to public distribution of goods. Overall, our results were in support of the classical selectorate model and proclaimed religion as a public good, rather than a hindrance.

Key words: Arab Spring, Middle East, political transition, religion, selectorate theory

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Overview

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been a high-priority area in the study of political science and international relations since 2011. The major wave of revolutions in the area affected a large number of countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and, to a limited extent, Bahrain. It dethroned the presidents of Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Egypt, and resulted in an ongoing political struggle in Syria.

Determining the reasons and the circumstances that led to these revolutions has been a major undertaking. Scholarly efforts in the past have tackled transition process disparities in MENA by analyzing political, economic, social, religious, and geopolitical factors. Several studies considered religion to be of paramount importance. For instance, Kugler, Bagherpour, Abdollahian, and Singer (2015, p. 5), using selectorate theory which argues that “within each society, there is a political selectorate containing a winning coalition... comprised of societal individuals, groups, and entities (who select) the national leader” who then provides public and private goods in exchange for political survival, introduce a revised model of the selectorate theory.¹ In their revised theory, they examine the political transitions of MENA to conclude that religion is a determinant of political structure and policymaking that complements the classical concept of public and private goods distribution (Kugler et al., 2015, pp. 6–7). They argue that religious preferences hindered democratization efforts by contributing to a leaders’ ability to maintain power despite selectorate expansion.

In this article, we argue that this revised selectorate model was not supported by the political outcomes in MENA. The present work differentiates between
Islam and Islamism, and analyzes the political aspects of every transition separately. Overall, religion was not found to have stimulated the Arab Spring; and events indicated that Islamists were unable to maintain power by relying solely on religion. While political struggles are still ongoing in MENA, this article notes that a considerable number of the Arab Spring countries passed the first stage of political transition by regulating elections and debating on public goods. Hence, our results advocate the use of the classical selectorate analysis (based on the concept of Public vs. Private goods) to study MENA transitions.

Theorizing the Arab Spring

Theories of revolution are generally still inadequate to answer questions such as “what makes a revolution spark in one country and not in another, even when both countries share similar political conditions?” or “why is it difficult to consolidate democracy after a long-lasting authoritarian regime?” This is the perhaps the main reason why after the Arab Spring, many theories emerged regarding the role of religion and the feasibility of democratization in the context of MENA.

In his study on the political transitions in MENA, Achcar (2013) holds that the Western powers supported authoritarian regimes in MENA in order to protect their interests in the region. He believes that the West never sought to protect the freedom of choice in the Middle East. United States’ support for Saudi Arabia in its military campaign to restore Kuwait in 1991 was quickly followed by a green light to the suppression of the Iraqi rebels to allow Saddam Hussein to remain in power after his defeat. According to Achcar, more and more interventions were undertaken later on aiming to support dictators, and that after 9/11, the United States waged the war against Iraq for the sole purpose of toppling Hussein and changing the political order in the country even as it justified the war by aiming to promote democracy.

Achcar notes that political Islam bloomed when the economy ceased to be state led and there was a shift to a liberal policy. He explains that in the case of Egypt, this was because the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) developed its social network after the transition to fill the vacuum that the state left and to gain the support of marginalized groups. However, MB did so using resources from MB loyalists in oil countries like Saudi Arabia (Achcar, 2013, p. 96). This, he points out, later shaped the relations between political Islam and the state, and undermined MB’s attempts of democratization and its ability to rule after the Egyptian revolution (Achcar, 2013, p. 236).

In his work on the revolutions of the Middle East, Tripp (2013) starts his analysis by comparing the structure of the authority and the opposition in the present time and in the colonial era. He notes that the opposition had early on been shaped by the practices of the postcolonial authorities. Marginalization and coercive measures, he believes, gave rise to an opposition that lacked the values of tolerance and participation, and was sometimes violent. However, following the Arab Spring, the opposition was transformed and tools of resistance became an outcome of collective choice. Tripp (2013) mainly focuses on the first months of the uprisings in MENA, and his analysis aimed to prove the legitimacy of the opposition.
The aspect of religion was debated in some other analytical works, which for the most part focused on the theory of modernity and endorsed Huntington’s claim of a lack of agreement between Islam and democracy (Huntington, 1996). Esposito, Sonn, and Voll (2015) however use a historical approach to showcase that Islamic culture embraced the values of democracy over the course of several centuries. They argue that the failure of democratization in the Middle East was due to the political environment in the colonial era and after independence. Huntington’s (1996) presumed incompatibilities in that context were mainly among political Islam, authoritarianism, Western hegemony and modernity. Esposito and colleagues (2015) highlight the immorality of the secular agenda and labeled it as a one-size-fits-all paradigm.

They argue that Islamic parties had attempted to participate in democratic elections and political processes in several countries during modern times; however, when they won, as witnessed in Algeria in 1991, the army often interfered turning the situation into a blood bath. Hence, they had been forced to confront military regimes in the Middle East and continued to do so after the Arab Spring, which most recently resulted in the removal of MB from office in Egypt following a military intervention in 2013 (Esposito et al., 2015, pp. 20–25).

**The Selectorate Theory**

Before 2002, selectorate theory was deemed vital to the analysis of Chinese policy reforms, as well as the reforms in the former Soviet Union. Studies aimed to identify the selectorate structures in these countries to determine policy change and decision-making preferences. However, analytical efforts faced challenges pertaining to the size of the selectorate, political conditions, and authority structures. Moreover, the theory was prone to underestimating the power of the disenfranchised groups in favor of the political elite (Gallagher & Hanson, 2015).

De Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, and Morrow’s *The Logic of Political Survival* (LPS), which was published in 2003, represented the first comprehensive revision of the selectorate theory as the model identified three main players: the leader, the challenger, and the coalition. According to the LPS model, residents (N) make up the main pool of both the selectorate (S) and the disenfranchised groups (people who are not part of the selectorate). The winning coalition (W) is rather contained in S as a group that chooses and supports the leader. It is a subset of the total number of sufficient supporters with political power, and is identifiable by its members’ qualifications and influence on S. Furthermore, members of the W receive shares of whatever private or public goods are distributed among the supporters.

The structure of W is subject to the political system. In hereditary monarchies, lineage is a major criterion for W members. In a premise where military power is more influential, however, W and S are much smaller.

In general, W is a part of S with special qualifications or requirements. For example, in the case of USSR, W was less than 10% of S (the total members of the Communist Party). According to various political analyses, to remain in power, USSR incumbent leaders needed to maintain the support of nearly half of W. In totalitarian regimes, there is a competition among S to be enrolled in W.
because of the privileges of private goods. Winning coalition, in this case, is an artificial scarcity created by the regime to maintain the political system (de Mesquita et al., 2003, pp. 10–11).

To secure a flow of public and private goods to maintain power, governments and leaders raise taxes, targeting sectors which satisfy their ambitions; and the generated privileges and services are usually labeled as the leaders’ success. Interestingly, in systems with a large $W$, production and wealth in the society are usually at higher levels, this is because the distribution of public goods becomes a necessity; and this indirectly promotes a productive behavior with minimal levels of corruption, leading to a higher GDP.

According to the selectorate model, revolutions are attempts by those in $N$ to move to $S$ to have political rights and be properly represented and integrated into the political arrangement. With the expansion of $S$, the disenfranchised groups shrink, but the cost for private goods increases. Hence, $S$ is large in democratic systems, whereas in authoritarian regimes, it looks more artificial with the selectorate having to fulfill certain inclusion requirements that serve the regime’s stability. Overall, the selectorate analysis provides a fresh perspective to predict the behavior and policies of a regime regarding the economy, social life, and politics (de Mesquita et al., 2003, pp. 12–21).

**Selectorate Theory and Revolutions**

Revolution is a tool for marginalized groups to alter the existing political arrangement or to implement more inclusive policies that allow more public goods distribution. Revolutions aim to flush out the beneficiaries of formal policies and give disenfranchised groups more access to public goods. They can also be tools for $S$ members to join $W$.

Consequently, a revolution against an autocratic system in which $W$ is highly exclusive and $S$ is large, is bound to face a great challenge in trying to change the order and enlarge the coalition and the selectorate. This is because members of the coalition enjoy most of the public and private goods and will try to maintain the status quo.

The selectorate theory indicates that in all cases, antigovernment uprisings are powered by the suppressed disenfranchised. To suppress an uprising, leaders and their winning coalitions resort to countermeasures. The theory argues that in case government actions were absent, the revolution would target the small $W$. It would then become the duty of $W$ to find countermeasures to face the rebels. On the other hand, a large $W$ would rather choose not to confront the revolution; because the regime is public goods-oriented. In such systems, leaders may face large-scale antigovernment actions if they resort to oppression (de Mesquita et al., 2003, pp. 571–607).

The selectorate model expects the size of the winning coalition to be directly proportional to civil liberties. In systems of a small $W$, large-scale oppression is expected to occur, which directly stimulates revolutions as the government is prone to misjudge the impact of its actions.

To assess a revolution’s probability of success, the army is key: If it was disenfranchised, chances of success are higher, especially if army troops supported the rebels or, at least, remained neutral. On the other hand, in systems whereby
the army is a part of S and military leaders belong to W, the army is bound to interfere to suppress any revolution (de Mesquita et al., 2003). An army that is independent in terms of finance and leadership will not take the risk of protecting leaders, and is expected to remain neutral.

Apart from the role of the army, building a revolutionary winning coalition is a critical step for an uprising to succeed and manage its outcome. However, the allure of private goods might exceed the size of the revolutionary W and can greatly undermine the revolution. In hopes of enjoying private goods, the new W would exclude the former regime members, who would be the new disenfranchised group (de Mesquita et al., 2003, pp. 571–607).

Government response against a revolution is dependent on the economic structure and whether it relies more on taxes or more on rent. A response can, thus, vary from an act(s) of suppression to the implementation of new provisions to foster the distribution of coordination goods, such as granting more press freedom, allowing more political communication and stopping the infringement of the freedom of speech.
When faced with a revolution, leaders would seek to respond in a manner that guarantees the loyalty of their small coalition, while fulfilling public demands. The selectorate theory stresses that the financial resources of the government will shape its policies and trajectories (Figure 1) (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010). The size of W is a determinant of the quality of public policies in the state. Distributing more public goods is the logical choice for leaders with a large W and governments that rely on taxing and a productive economy.

On the other hand, leaders supported by a small W use private goods distribution to reduce the risk of an uprising because the cost of private goods in such cases is minimal compared to the cost of distributing more public goods. In systems of the sort, private goods distribution is the logical choice as it increases the loyalty of the winning coalition and results in more suppression of revolutions. Besides, implementing provisions aimed at distributing more public goods can increase the likelihood of success of a political movement or a revolution against any regime (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010). This is why, the selectorate theory argues, a revolutionary effort often poses a threat to small-W systems, but does not overthrow the leader except when W is large. When W is small, a revolution challenges the regime as a whole, whereas a revolution

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**Figure 3. Selectorate Theory Model of Arab Spring**

**Figure 4. The Revised Selectorate Model (Kugler et al., 2015)**
against a system with a large W affects the incumbent leader the most. According to the selectorate theory, the survival of a leader depends upon three main variables: government institutions, access to free resources, and the presence of revolutionary threats (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010).

### Selectorate Theory, Arab Spring, and the Revised Model

The selectorate theory is an invaluable tool to analyze the prerevolutionary status of MENA (Figure 2). Furthermore, it predicts the future of other Arab countries based on coalition structure and size; government model and policies; and government financial resources.

Figure 3 depicts how the autocratic Arab leaders maintained their power until they were removed. Their governments advocated policies of clientelism and private-reward distribution. These policies served to guarantee the loyalty of the coalition at the expense of distorting the economic sector and alienating many groups. The pool of disenfranchised groups, which suffered from economic and social marginalization, expanded. The deposition of the leader—not the regime—was the effect witnessed in some of the MENA states.

As mentioned earlier, Kugler and colleagues (2015) introduced their modified model for the selectorate theory which considered religion as a key factor in determining the outcome of the Arab Spring. However, they rather contradicted the classical selectorate argument in terms of linking selectorate expansion with democratization.

The revised approach was built on the conviction that the Arab revolutions broke out in secular countries (Figure 4). Hence, leaders with religious legitimacy managed to remain in office and prevent the dissolution of their regimes. The revised model linked selectorate expansion with religious authority, as well as policy implementation. One of the main weaknesses of this model was that it utilized elements of the Iranian theocracy to predict the future of MENA as a whole (Kugler et al., 2015). It failed to acknowledge that selectorate expansion led to democracy or that the Arab Spring occurred primarily to expand the selectorate.

Kugler and colleagues (2015) sought to answer the question of why secular leaders faced more challenges when trying to maintain power compared with other leaders with religious legitimacy. Therefore, they argued that the classical selectorate model had to include the factor of religion to adequately analyze the politics of MENA; and they used an agent-based approach to try and prove their hypothesis.

The revised model predicts a decrease in secularism with the expansion of the selectorate in MENA, and holds that political survival subject to the religious acquiescence of government officials. In other words, to survive, leaders must allow the powerful involvement of religious political parties, and implement Sharia law and religious regulations.

The revised model considered Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria as the main countries that have witnessed the full impact of the Arab Spring, while Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain went unaffected because they had religious regimes. However, Iran is a special case of a country that transformed from monarchy to theocracy 35 years ago; and building an analysis on the Iranian premise would
only lead to the conclusion that MENA were going to elect religious parties which would change the political order to implement Sharia law. In that scenario, democracy would no longer serve other players due to limitations and restrictions in the Sharia law. Overall, the revised theory predicted that the political systems after MENA revolutions were going to be less democratic than the former secular autocratic regimes.

Saudi Arabia is a typical example of a monarchy as defined in the selectorate theory. The royal family dominates politically and financially, and holds most of the capital. Moreover, the selectorate is small and so is the coalition. The government has enough resources to distribute public goods to the king and his family. In their response to the Arab Spring, the Saudi government gave out US$15,000 per citizen (Kugler et al., 2015). The revised model claimed that private/public payoffs along with religious aspects were responsible for the survival of the government in Saudi Arabia. However, the revised model disregards the role of regional and international players in destabilizing MENA. It also overlooked the role of many external players who fostered and financed an internal competition within the countries of the Arab Spring, leading to civil wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

The revised model does not acknowledge that the implementation of public goods distribution was the main motivation for revolt in MENA. People in Tunisia and Egypt, the locations of the early Arab Spring, revolted for the sake of freedom, dignity, and social justice. Religious and liberal parties became involved in these revolutions later. When Mubarak, the former president of Egypt, and Bin Ali, the former president of Tunisia, were overthrown, the Islamic parties were the most organized, stable, and ready for the elections. Yet, they failed to remain in power later in both countries. This diminution of the power of the Islamists contradicts the revised model.

The argument presented by Kugler and colleagues (2015) underestimates the effect of selectorate expansion on the survival of a leader and the success of a revolution. It rather focuses on religious legitimacy and immunity, and did not properly define the financing sources of MENA regimes or the coalition size in most of the countries. The revised model’s assumptions about MENA were questionable in terms of both religion and governance. For instance, Kugler and colleagues (2015) described the political system in Libya before the revolution as secular, and held that it transformed into a hybrid Sharia-based system with tribal and multi-democratic elements. They classified the political systems in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria before the Arab Spring as secular systems. On the other hand, they believed that the political structures in Bahrain, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia were religious, as it is in Iran, which justified their analysis based on the political elements of the latter. We disagree with these classifications. In the present work, we analyze religion, Islamism, and the nature of the political systems in MENA prior to the Arab Spring based on the arguments of the classical selectorate theory.

The Evolution of Islamism

The roots of contemporary political Islam in the Arab world can be traced back to the middle of the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire started modernizing its politics and bureaucracy. Political reforms were also taking place in
Egypt under the leadership of Mohammed Ali after Egypt broke away from the Ottoman Empire. Power diminution in the Ottoman Empire made it unable to confront a new growing global force in Europe represented by France, Britain, and Russia. Hence, modernization and reform efforts targeted the main source of the legitimacy of the Caliphate. Soon the empire adopted European civil laws and reduced Sharia implementation to the minimum. To avoid weakness and the shrinkage of the empire, scholars and thinkers started to call for a different political contract within the empire that incorporated the principles of modernity and improved solidarity. Thereafter, Turkish politicians started lobbying and moving toward political modernization despite its impact on their culture and language (Enayat, 2005, pp. 3–6).

These political changes and this openness to the West produced a generation of new thinkers who visited Europe and learned about Western political systems. These “Ottoman youths” stimulated a new wave of political Islamic reforms and modernization debates. Khayr al-Dein al-Tunisi, Jamal al-Afghani, Sayed Ahmed, and Mohammed Abdou were some of the Arabic and Islamic innovators of the era. They all shared a common fascination with the European way of life in terms of knowledge, science, freedom, and liberties.

Their idea of modernization was centered on introducing the European concepts of freedom, justice, innovation, and openness in an Islamized format to be incorporated in the system. They did not accept the regression of the Ottoman Empire, and tried to induce useful ideas that could protect the Islamic states from colonial threats. Inspired by European reforms, al-Afghani, one of the most esteemed Muslim thinkers of all time, proclaimed that three conditions had to be fulfilled for Islamic power restoration: political unity, restoring Islam to its original teachings away from any impurities, and adopting a scientific mentality to achieve development (Enayat, 2005, pp. 134–138).

The role of the Caliphate in the last two decades of the 19th century became questionable. It was rather symbolic. Hence, scholars realized the need for different public goods distribution tools to replace the Ottoman model that failed in satisfying regional needs in the states of the empire. Islamic ideas of reform continued to develop, though they faced substantial challenges; and following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, most of the Muslim states were colonized.

The main political Islamic organization that remained was the MB, which was founded in Egypt four years after the Caliphate collapsed. In parallel, Islamic thinkers of the era attempted to answer questions regarding the relationship between Islam and the state. Ali Abd el-Raziq came up with a revolutionary notion: He emphasized that Islam was not meant to form a state but was a spiritual and a behavioral, rather than a governing tool (Aknur, 2013).

Hassan al-Banna, the founder of MB, created the organization to resist British colonization and rebuild the Caliphate by transforming the Egyptian legal framework into Islamic Law (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013, p. 59). al-Banna wanted to participate in the parliamentary elections of 1942, but he was not allowed to do so by the government. Three years after the inception of MB, he managed to do so. Yet, a year later, the prime minister outlawed the organization (Aknur, 2013).

In 1949, al-Banna was assassinated, leaving a strong organization with increasing popularity. MB had a well-structured financial network and was
gaining sympathy and credibility among the Egyptian population. The military regime in that period responded by banning the brotherhood and arresting its leaders. The radical wing kept being led by Sayed Qutb until his execution.

Since the 1970s, MB regularly participated in parliamentary elections and MB leaders had the respect of the existing political order, albeit banning the organization on more than one occasion. Financial deficiencies and the government’s failure to manage public services presented an opportunity for MB to attract marginalized groups and increase its popularity. In the next years, MB participated in the elections in Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Morroco, Sudan, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Libya.

Saudi Arabia witnessed a different type of modern political Islam: Wahabism and Salafism. Unlike MB, Wahabism was not a political organization. It was conceived in the 18th century by Mohammad Ibn Abd al-Wahab, who called for a return to the pure roots and sources of Islam: Koran and Sunna. Wahabism became more of an ideology that forbade grave visits, music, smoking and mystic practices. Furthermore, it held that Shias were nonbelievers and differentiated between Wahabis and other Sunnis (Moussalli, 2009). Wahabism became dominant in modern Saudi Arabia as the royal family, al-Saud, utilized the movement to achieve religious legitimacy. However, the Wahabi ideology was modified in many ways. For example, modernity was denounced along with science and technology; and the declaration of war “Jehad” was deemed as the right of the king only. Wahabism has since been dominating the social and the economic life in the Saudi society. Salafism did not differ much from Wahabism in terms of the concepts and believes; the main difference between the two was that Salafism opposed all political parties. Salafis often criticized Islamists arguing that to enroll in a political party was to abandon all efforts to spread the message of Islam “Dawaa,” the primary objective of Salafism, for the sake of politics (Moussalli, 2009).

Wahabism and Salafism do not accept gradual change and political bargaining. These ideologies refuse the concept of inclusion and diversity, even among Muslim doctrines. It is noteworthy that the early Wahabis strongly opposed the tolerance of al-Saud toward Saudi Shias, and even outlawed the use of cars and telephones because they were not Muslim products.

MB, on the other hand, regularly participates in the political process, has political dialogues and is public policy-oriented. The brotherhood accepts gradual change and has policy formulas based on modern political, social, and economic concepts. The political experience of MB is different from one Islamic country to another but the party has generally proven that it could be a part of the political process and tolerate ideological differences. The brotherhood has not been observed to produce a theocratic regime when in power. Its inclusion in the political process promotes political development by creating a system in which religion is a public good.

**Political Islam and Arab Uprisings**

After securing nearly 20% of the parliamentary seats in Egypt following the election of 2005, Mubarak’s regime disbanded the parliament and, once more, outlawed MB. However, the Islamic organization maintained its tradition of
solid social work and continued to provide health and educational services to the public whenever the government failed to do so. MB branches have been an organized network that allows experiences to be shared through international leadership and global hierarchy. Yet, local MB organizations determine their own strategies depending on the political structure of the country and the practices of the regime.

While MB became the main opposition party in the parliament in both Jordan and Morocco, Syria and Tunisia maintained an absolute ban on the brotherhood. Rashid Ghanouchi, the leader of MB in Tunisia, was exiled in the late 1980s. This is why the Arab Spring in Tunisia was an unexpected twist of events. Decision makers and political party leaders were amazed to see a revolution ignited by youths demanding major upheavals, especially with the licensed political parties in the country being too small, unpopular, and supporters of Bin Ali’s government.

After the success of the revolution in Tunisia, the number of political parties in the country soared. Liberal parties and activists unified in one party called Neda’ Tunis. The parties competed in Tunisia’s first free elections in decades, and Anahda, the MB local branch, won the majority of the seats at the national constitutional assembly. This assembly was given the task of drafting a new constitution. It faced enormous challenges trying to reach a compromise between Islamists and liberals while political instability ensued, with assassinations and upheavals all over the country (Özkan, 2014). Nevertheless, three years after the revolution, Tunisia introduced a revolutionary constitution that satisfied the political parties on both sides of the aisle, the liberals, and the Islamists, and accounted for the Tunisian political and ideological disparities.

As the party was newly structured, Rashid Chanouchi, the leader of Anahda, who later went on to become the president of the political office of the International MB, had to deal with a great many internal struggles. Chanouchi managed to avoid causing a crack in the fabric of the party despite one wing of Anahda believing that Islamic Laws had to be implemented promptly even if violence was necessary. His balanced approach and the fact that he had the support of other members who shared his view of a modernized and pragmatic process contributed to the success of Anahda. This allowed the political system in Tunisia to transform almost instantly into a multiparty system with two dominating powers despite many years of a one-party autocratic regime.

Like Tunisia, the political parties in Egypt went through unification, including MB. This contributed to the success of the revolution and the dethroning of Mubarak. It is noteworthy that the diversity of the ideologies of these political parties was not an obstacle in the way of political reform. It rather enriched the subsequent debates on social, political, and economic issues.

The first postrevolution parliamentary elections indicated that Islamists dominated the political arena. These elections resulted in Freedom and Justice, MB of Egypt, occupying 46% of the parliamentary seats, followed by al-Nour, a Salafi Islamist party, which secured 24% (Abdou & Zaazou, 2013). Consequently, a political conflict was observed between the hegemonic Islamists and the liberal parties. Shortcomings were evident in terms of state identity, state–religion relations and minority representation in postrevolution Egypt.
In 2012, the Islamic coalition drafted what went on to be the first postrevolution constitution. The controversial draft passed the referendum despite the discontent of the liberal coalition. This constitution was religion-oriented. It guaranteed freedom of practice and civil law for Egyptian Christians and Jews, but stressed that Islam be the source of legislation. Only Sunni resources of Sharia law were recognized. It gave more authority to the president, which did not conform well with the objectives of the revolution (Grimsgaard, 2014).

Libyan Islamists came to power after al-Gaddafi was overthrown, but they had limited institutional and organizational experience. Yet they had a major challenge of building Libya from scratch. Like Egypt, the constitution was subject to debate along with Sharia law. Unfortunately, the Libyan transitional council failed to deliver stability, the constitution or strengthen governmental institutions. The Libyan political transition process is currently facing critical challenges: there are two governments and multiple armed militias have ignited a civil war. Islamists did not attract voters in either of the two parliamentary elections and failed to maintain power and build a modern state. Nevertheless, they are still an important component of the country’s political structure (Meron & Alles, 2014).

Case Study of Egypt

Egypt under Mubarak was not a secular state. Government’s interference in religious matters was organized by the constitution, which stipulated that Islam was the source of legislations. The president had the authority to appoint Shaikh al-Azhar, the leader of the main Sunni institution in the world. The government sponsored mosques. The number of mosques in Egypt increased during Mubarak’s time from around 6,000 to more than 50,000. The government also managed Waqf estates, which comprised of lands and buildings donated for public use, and distributing the income following religious regulations. Moreover, the Egyptian regime relied on al-Azhar for religious legitimacy on different occasions. For example, it endorsed the Egyptian intervention in the second Gulf War (Moustafa, 2000).

The Egyptian revolution had many challenges after its impressive success in overthrowing Mubarak. The country’s complicated political structure was premised on three main cornerstones: the army, the national party, and the bureaucrats. Mubarak’s stepping down protected his winning coalition; and the neutral role of the army was welcomed by the rebels.

After the revolution, Dr. Mohammad Morsi was an unexpected candidate for the presidential office. He had to compete with the former prime minister, Ahmed Shafiq, and an Islamist moderate leader, Abdel Moneim Aboul-Fotouh. Morsi and Shafiq passed the first round of elections and the latter lost by a small margin in the second round, mainly because of his ties to the former regime (Row, 2015).

Trying to secure more political domination for his party, Morsi introduced fundamental structural reforms that established a constitution-drafting council to alter Egypt’s constitution. However, the council excluded many political parties, former political bodies and labor unions, in addition to other civil society components. Furthermore, aiming to gain control of the financial resources of
the military to weaken its leaders, Morsi attempted to change the structure of the Egyptian Army.

However, the hegemonic Islamists underestimated the power of the military and Mubarak’s winning coalition (W). They offered religion as the only available public good that they could deliver, but even failed to do just that. W hindered social or economic achievements; and a strong judiciary preserved the political structure of the previous regime. The Constitutional Court dissolved the new constitutional council and halted the process of drafting a new constitution (Row, 2015).

Being the main veto player in Egypt, the army stripped the Islamists of their power. Egypt in the current stage of its transition is run by a system of a small winning coalition and a large selectorate. The current president, Abdul Fatah El-Sesi sought to protect the military benefits and its independence. He won the presidential elections and restored the autocratic regime (Winter, 2015).

From a historical perspective, the legitimacy of the presidents of Egypt has always depended on many factors, such as ideology (specifically Arab nationalism), establishment of economic welfare (materialistic legitimacy), and religious preferences (Islamic legitimacy). This has been due to a high level of religiosity in the society and al-Azhar’s local and international influence (Winter, 2015). Abd al-Nasser relied on the first and the second factors, while al-Sadat depended more on the second. Mubarak achieved political legitimacy by a mixture of the second and the third factors. Morsi’s legitimacy stemmed from the third, while al-Sesi’s came more from the second.

In their analysis, Kugler and colleagues (2015) reported that as the level of participation and the size of the selectorate increased, democratization decreased in Egypt. They attributed the decrease to an increase in religiosity. However, their analysis did not seem to distinguish between religiosity in the society and government religiosity. As a matter of fact, the impact of religiosity on democracy in the Egyptian case is not clear. The argument disregarded the role of the winning coalition, the main variable in the selectorate theory. After MB arrived into power, the winning coalition in Egypt shrank. Currently, Egypt is moving rapidly from a semiautocratic regime structure to a military autocracy. The Egyptian political system is expected to be transitional in the next years. Kugler and colleagues (2015) attributed the failure of the Islamists to survive to the counter-revolution that the army led. They did not take into account that the Islamists lost their power because of their inability to provide public goods for the selectorate.

This study demonstrated that the classical selectorate approach was adequate to analyze the Egyptian revolution and political transitions. According to the selectorate theory, the army must be considered as an independent player in this context. A weak and exclusive revolutionary coalition allowed the military leaders to take the office. Currently, the revolution seems to be still in process; and demands for public goods distribution are high. Egypt is going through major economic crises. Nevertheless, the president is still trying to introduce economic plans, mega projects, and developmental policies to ensure the political legitimacy of his regime.

According to the selectorate theory, Egyptian politics is witnessing new variables after violating the taboos of Mubarak’s administration. The current
political order holds no party system. We predict that the present system would not be able to last without the distribution of sufficient public goods as the government is unable to deliver private goods efficiently.

**Case Study of Libya**

The country was led by al-Gaddafi, who claimed the presidential office after a bloodless military coup. He overthrew the monarchy and established his own autocratic system. Between 1969 and until the revolution, Libyan politics was dominated by al-Gaddafi. His political system went beyond autocracy and could more accurately be described as “Sultanic.” He controlled all economic, political, and social aspects of the state and maintained a weak, distorted state structure.

The Libyan revolution against al-Gaddafi’s regime started in the eastern city of Benghazi on February 15, 2011. Motivated by neighboring revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, thousands of Libyans took to the streets protesting against al-Gaddafi’s dictatorship. They called for fair distribution of wealth and freedoms. The disenfranchised groups rapidly unified and established the National Transition Council (NTC). Revolutions and demonstrations turned into a civil war. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization air strikes were initiated against the regime’s troops after a declaration from the Security Council banned the regime from using its air forces (Al-Abdin, Dean, & Nicholson, 2016).

al-Gaddafi’s regime was not secular. Religiosity was evident in the president’s speeches and practices. This was necessary as religion had a strong influence on the social structures of the Libyan tribals. Despite spending 42 years in office, al-Gaddafi did not manage to form a stable regime or an efficient political system. His survival was dependent on high oil revenue and tribal compromises.

The NTC was led by the Minister of Justice during al-Gaddafi’s era before he dissented early on and began to lead the revolution politically. Conservative Islamic leaders tried to Islamize the politics of Libya through the constitutional announcement. However, after securing 39 out of the 80 seats of the national council in 2012, the secular liberal front became the major political power in the country, followed by the MB, which occupied 17 seats only (BBC, 2012). Two years later, the Islamists were unable to gain more than 23 seats and remained the second major political power in Libya (Al-Arabiya, 2014).

The revised selectorate theory argued that Libya became less secular after the revolution and held that Islam was a factor of political survival in the country. Kugler and colleagues (2015) predicted that the state was headed for more Islamization. We believe that the conclusions that the authors made were mainly based on NTC structure and the political outcome. However, the transition process matches the classical selectorate model more. Following the revolution, the selectorate size increased along with the size of the winning coalition. Democratization was hindered by political instability, security issues and territorial struggles among the tribes. Internal and external factors led to a civil war between the liberals and the Islamists. This was part of the transition process.

Using the classical selectorate approach, we note that the political regime in Libya was autocratic with a small winning coalition before the revolution.
Following the revolution, both W and S expanded. Political debates in Libya are currently centered on federalism, management of resources, economic stability, and an inclusive constitution. These are but public goods resulting from the recently gained political representation and rights.

**Case Study of Syria**

The al-Assad regime is still in power after five years of a massive and destructive civil war. The Syrian regime is an autocratic regime that has a small coalition, basically consisting of the Alawi minority. It controls the Army, which is made up of the Alawi sect for the most part.

It is noteworthy that when the Syrian revolution was peaceful, religiosity was absent among the rebels. Only after the conflict turned into a civil war did the rebels form religious militias. This is because Islamic factions are supported financially and technically by regional and international powers for ideological and strategic reasons. On the other hand, liberal powers receive limited support.

Considering the selectorate model, it can be safely stated that Alawites have dominated the Syrian winning coalition since the late 1970s. They control the army, occupy the political positions, and manipulate the economy. For instance, Hafez al-Assad’s brother-in-law controlled around 60% of Syrian economic activities (Allinson, 2015). The Syrian uprising broke out to rectify the economic situation and abolish inequality and dictatorship. It spread around the country without any political leadership. MB had not been allowed in Syria and MB leaders remained in exile for more than three decades.

However, local and regional powers interfered to transform the revolution into a massive civil war. Later, the existence of ISIS and al-Nussra became a major determinant of the country’s future; and the focus of the international community shifted from calling for the dethroning of al-Assad to calling for war against the terrorism of ISIS.

The Syrian regime is purely secular. Although the Alawites rule the country, the Alawite religious ideology was not integrated into the political system. This is unlike Iraq, which became slowly more influenced by religious values under the rule of Saddam Hussain after the second Gulf War.

al-Assad’s regime is still capable of satisfying his loyal coalition using public and private goods. Besides, in Syria, the Alawites fight for survival and not only for the sake of benefits. Revisiting the revised model, we beg the question of “why religion should be considered when analyzing the Syrian system or predicting any future transition.” The Syrian regime still has a strong army, institutions and infrastructure. The ruling party, al-Ba’th, is well organized and has a long heritage and political experience. Coincidently, the Syrian opposition is rather fragmented and weak.

Negotiations between the regime and the opposition have mainly discussed the distribution of power, the structure of an alternative political system, and a political transition. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, the Syrian model does not exclude the ruling party from political participation. This implies that al-Ba’th can keep secular balance and even dominate the political arena following a transition, as MB did in Egypt.
Case Study of Saudi Arabia

The selectorate theory describes kingdoms like Saudi Arabia as “extremely authoritarian” due to limited W and S. The theory proposes that policymaking in such regimes is subject to government revenue sources. To counter a revolution in any royal regime, the theory predicts that the government would mostly be engaged in bestowing private goods on members of the royal family, which could range from jobs to business privileges, and even financial grants.

According to the revised selectorate model, the status quo in Saudi Arabia is going to last and the regime’s stability would go unaffected by any revolution because the political order is efficient in protecting the royal family. It assumes that religion is the main source of political survival for al-Saud and that they depend heavily on the Council of Clerics as their major supporter (Kugler et al., 2015).

Our analysis showed that the survival of the Saudi regime is dependent upon the support of the royal family, tribal notables, and religious clerics. As oil started to be exported, the wealth of thousands of the members of the royal family increased substantially. There seems to be an internal consensus on the mechanism of distributing private payoffs. al-Saud became one of the richest families in the Middle East. Power was shared among the members of the family who governed the provinces, led the armed forces and dominated the economy.

Meanwhile, Wahabist clerics reigned in the social context. They had an influence on law, regulations, and daily practices. Compromises among Wahabists and al-Saud allowed such an order to exist. The royal family utilized Wahabism as a source of legitimacy in a tribal, conservative and religious premise.

Additionally, the al-Saud family depends on the support of tribal notables, which it attains by granting them almost exclusive rights to manage their tribes. Royal family members maintain strong ties with these leaders through the distribution of private goods, including financial allowances and positions in the public sector and the military forces. They also grant some special access to investments and state enterprises.

The kingdom’s stability is contingent on high oil revenue to cover the ever increasing price of loyalty. When faced with limited Shiite demonstrations in an eastern province in 2011, King Abdullah responded by deploying the loyal National Guards in that province. The regime also invoked a fatwa issued by the High Council of Clerics that outlawed demonstrations in the kingdom. Thereafter, King Abdullah issued several decrees aimed at distributing both public and private rewards. He ordered that around US$130 billion be spent for public services, like housing, and as immediate payoffs for government employees (Gause, 2014). Following the demonstrations, the private sector gave two months bonus for each and every Saudi employee.

Saudi Arabia has a high unemployment rate among the youths. Although the local market creates between one and two million jobs annually, most of these jobs go to foreign workers. This is partially due to the fact that the locals generally prefer to work in the public sector. Inflation rates have been increasing in Saudi Arabia and the purchasing power has been declining. The benefits of the
economic players in the country seem to be completely dependent on the status quo. This makes them an invaluable stability factor for the regime as they would vigorously oppose any political reform.

The Saudi Army is well-trained and structured. The military forces are inclusive as they represent the whole society. Army leaders have traditionally been members of the royal family—a guarantee of loyalty. Overall, the Saudi army is not an independent player as the army is in Egypt; it is not exclusive like the Syria army; and does not lack combat proficiency like the armies of Libya and Yemen. Besides, Saudi Arabia is one of the main importers of military equipment in the world. Members of the military forces receive training in modern Western military schools, and always obtain the latest technology. However, as this well-developed army is a major consumer of the oil revenue of Saudi Arabia, its power is subject to having high oil revenue.

After the Arab uprisings, hundreds of intellectuals signed a petition calling upon the king to implement reforms and democratization. Meanwhile, the Salafis signed another petition asking the king for more radicalization in the kingdom. The Saudi society does not seem to be in harmony. On the one hand, the government sends hundreds of thousands of students to study abroad each year. Upon returning, they bring with them a different mentality and more liberal values, which can make them potentially a force of reformation. On the other hand, Salafism does not tolerate any kind of openness to Western values.

Saudi Arabia is not immune to revolutions. The recent drop in oil prices forced the government to impose taxes for the first time ever. Moreover, the government reduced the allowances of government officials to meet the increasing demand of the military. The royal family is currently facing a higher probability of scission than ever before, because of third-generation leaders. Using the selectorate theory to analyze the Saudi political structure, we argue that religious legitimacy does not make Saudi Arabia immune to revolutions. Religion in the selectorate model is only a potential resource for the leader and cannot be the cornerstone of a political analysis. An accurate analysis of the Saudi regime is one that is centered around the political players and the regime’s behavior based on the source of its revenue. In Saudi Arabia, freedom of choice, the right to representation, and human rights are among of the most limited globally. This makes public opinion and religiosity less of a priority to the regime compared to the royal family, the tribal notables, the private sector and the army. Our analysis concludes that the stability factors of the Saudi regime are dependent on a tax-free, nonproductive political system.

Case Study of Bahrain

Inspired by Tunisia and Egypt, the citizens of Bahrain took to the streets on February 14, 2011, criticizing 10 years of King Hamad’s political reforms. About 70% of the Bahraini population is made up of Shias. Sunnis are around 30% of the 1,314,000 population in the kingdom (BODP, 2014). The Sunni royal family managed to control the small strategic island using coercive measures. The small army of the kingdom excludes Shias and is comprised of loyal Sunni members.
The political system in Bahrain is sectarian; and the majority of the population are discriminated against and disenfranchised. Bahrain has historically been a target for regional powers. Iran claimed the island for years before it became independent in 1971. Soon after, Bahrain became a part of the Gulf political arrangement (Katzman, 2016, p. 27).

The kingdom of Bahrain is a perfect model for a selectorate analysis. The cabinet is appointed by the king, al-Khalifa, who holds 7 out of the 19 cabinet positions. Judges are also appointed by the king. Even though the reforms of 2012 enhanced the authority of the parliament, the king maintained his veto privileges and had the main power. The opposition called for a constitutional monarchy, fair representation, and free elections. Members of the coalition were not in agreement on how to respond to these calls. The reformers, led by the crown prince and the king, agreed to negotiate with the moderate opposition, whereas the hardliners, most chiefs of the armed forces, believed that suppression was necessary.

The first public demonstration was faced by extreme suppression and coercive measures. Four protesters were killed and the following days witnessed a cycle of violence which forced the leadership to start the negotiations with the opposition. However, the people called for overthrowing the regime (Husayn, 2015). After the beginning of the upheaval, Saudi Arabia donated around US$500 million to support the Bahraini government. Meanwhile, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) sent troops to restore stability in al-Manama. GCC members pushed hard to tackle the threat of the Arab Spring and protect their backyard (Katzman, 2016).

The Bahraini coercive government apparatus took extreme suppression measures against the protestors. They jailed thousands and demolished 30 Shiite mosques. Private and public sector employees who joined the demonstrators lost their jobs. These actions were internationally criticized. The king introduced new reforms and gave the parliament more authority but the opposition did not accept that (Husayn, 2015).

The revised theory argues that religiosity increased in Bahrain after the uprisings. Kugler and colleagues (2015) noted that the Shura Council was composed of 40 religious scholars. We argue that of the 40, two were Sunni scholars, one was a Shiite scholar, eight were women, and the rest pro-Western thinkers. Thirteen out of the 40 winners were independent Shiite candidates, even though the Shiite parties boycotted the parliamentary elections of 2013. Overall, the new parliament consisted of new and old members; and the Islamic parties failed in dominating the council (KBSC, 2015).

The Bahraini regime made efforts to move away from sectarianism and represent the Bahraini identity better. Religiosity was rather a weakness for the regime owing to its limited selectorate. In agreement with the selectorate theory, the government attempted to preserve stability by distributing goods, but the main source of stability was Saudi, American, and British protection. Stability was guaranteed with a continuous flow of financial resources from oil.

Following the Iranian-American rapprochement, pressure for political reforms and inclusive policies in Bahrain is expected to increase. Hence, the main assumptions on which the revised model was based are not backed by evidence. They disagree with the numbers and the results seen in the postuprising elections. Moreover, the political demands of the opposition do not seem of
a religious nature. They rather focus on the need for public goods distribution among the marginalized groups.

Case Study of Iran
The Islamic republic of Iran has a static and strong theocratic regime. The religious structure of the country and the influence of the Shiite leaders have had a great impact on the social and the political elements of the government. According to the revised model, the political system in Iran is based on a large selectorate and a small winning coalition that supports the supreme leader. However, what makes Iran unique is that religion is the source of political legitimacy in addition to being a public reward, as Iran is a hub for Shias in MENA.

Regime stability in Iran depends on public/private payoffs, the military, religious legitimacy, and high oil revenue. Therefore, using Iran as a reference to analyze the Arab Spring is impetuous at best. The Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran differs fundamentally from the Arab Spring. For instance, the latter was fueled by nationalism as the Arab countries shared a history, the same religion, culture, and goals. Moreover, state religiosity was not a factor in shaping the events of the Arab Spring as the revised model of Kugler and colleagues (2015) suggests.

The stability of the Iranian regime during the Arab Spring is attributable to public/private goods distribution. Besides, the leadership of al-Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, is theologically not challengeable. It has substantial political survival efficiency in a multitude of scenarios. Iran was the main model that Kugler and colleagues (2015) relied on to provide proof for their hypothesis, considering that it was a country led by a religiously legitimate supreme leader. We argue that as the Iranian selectorate expanded in the previous years, state religiosity was efficient in pushing the society away from democracy; and private rewards gave incentives to the elite to suppress any upheaval.

What makes Iran rather a special model is that it is a Shiite country that has a supreme leader. al-Khamenei is not a president but a guide for the revolution that enjoys unlimited authority. In contrast, the Arab Spring countries were led by presidents. Furthermore, political debates in Iran have been on issues of policy and strategy, and the public have not demanded a change in leadership or questioned the legitimacy of the supreme leader. Iranian reformers called for open social and economic policies that would improve Iran’s relationship with the West. On the other hand, the hardliners who supported the supreme leader resisted change and sought to keep the status quo (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013, p. 3).

The classical selectorate model applies to the Iranian political system: the al-Khamenei regime is theocratic and supported by a limited selectorate and a well-established winning coalition. The revised theory assumed that the Iranian system had a big selectorate. We argue that Kugler and colleagues (2015) have misused the term selectorate as they were rather referring to the electorate. Iran indeed has a big electorate. During elections, voters choose from a list of preselected candidates that had been filtered and shortened by the theocratic leadership. Running for an office is prohibited; and nomination applications filed by reformers have been refused repeatedly.

Iran was a key player in the Arab Spring. It supported its allies in Syria and Yemen. However, to conduct an internal political analysis of the revolutions in MENA, Iran ought to be considered irrelevant. There are fundamental
differences between Arab and Iranian internal politics. They are distinct in terms of the religious structure, political processes and social conditions.

**Religion Versus Public Goods?**

A universal model of analysis cannot apply in the cases of MENA due to many disparities in aspects of political transition and goods distribution. For instance, the army had a significant role in shaping Egypt’s politics after the Arab Spring, whereas the army of Tunisia took a neutral stance. In Libya, moreover, the army was dissolved.

The army has been a veto player in Egypt. However, after the revolution, the hegemonic regime the MB created failed to estimate the power of the army and the elite. MB also failed in distributing public goods among the citizens. Hence, they could not survive and were replaced by a military regime that reproduced Mubarak’s parliamentary model. However, currently, the selectorate and the winning coalition are large compared with Mubarak’s regime.

As to Tunisia, a stable democratic system formed after the revolution. Although the government and policymakers are still facing economic and social challenges—in addition to terrorist threats like most of the countries in North Africa, the present system has been shown to resort to bargaining and compromising for the most part. In Tunisia, both the selectorate and the winning coalition appear to be large; and political bargains are mainly centered around public goods distribution—not religion.

The Libyan model is more complicated and the state is still fragile, with tens of militias and areas controlled by ISIS. Interestingly, the last two elections were representative of peoples’ preferences; and political Islam failed to gain the majority of the parliamentary seats. As suggested by the classical selectorate model, the public trend in Libya has mainly been toward public goods, such as stability, security, welfare, and public services. The selectorate size is large; however, the size of the winning coalition is yet to be determined through the political bargaining process.

Syria has been facing a civil war since the beginning of the Arab Spring. al-Assad’s regime has survived for more than five years supported by a small Alawite coalition and international allies. Calls for international action to over-throw al-Assad have been gradually replaced by calls for a war on ISIS. The revised model predicted that religion was going to be the main element in the survival of any future regime in Syria. We disagree with this projection: al-Assad and his regime are still part of the bargaining process as his institutions and party have remained stronger and more organized than his opponents, which could possibly allow him to be a key player in any political transition in the future.

Iran has been the main theocratic regime in MENA, along with Saudi Arabia. Bahrain, however, could not be described as such for a great many reasons. King Hamad of Bahrain has created a system that is more reliant on public pay-offs than religious preferences. Our analysis showed that although the region’s main theocratic powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, depend on religion for regime legitimacy, they both ensure their survival by relying heavily on oil revenues for public and private rewards.
Conclusion

The selectorate theory is one of the modern theories in politics that can be a useful tool to analyze the behavior, structure, and practices of different political systems. The selectorate analysis incorporates the concept of public versus private rewards and focuses on the source of governmental resources to draw conclusions. We demonstrated that the theory was applicable to analyzing the political changes in MENA and predicting political structures after the Arab Spring. The revised selectorate model of Kugler and colleagues (2015), which considers religion as a key factor in political survival, was shown to generate obscure predictions about the outcome of the Arab Spring, whereas the classical model was found to generate more sensible predictions.

An analysis of the political transitions in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria indicated that the outcome was not influenced by leaders’ religious preferences; and religion had no effect on public/private goods distribution. The findings of this work revealed that the revised model overestimated the role of religion as a political variable in MENA and used Iran as a reference without proper justification.

We noted that although the Iranian regime was theocratic, it had different political, economic, and social elements from the Arabic theocratic regimes and could not be used as reference, namely, because the Islamic Republic of Iran was Shiite rather than Sunni and joined the Arab Spring as a regional power that thought to protect its interests. Moreover, the revised model was found to lack a distinction among public religiosity, political Islam, and Islamism. Our analysis indicated that Kugler and colleagues (2015) ignored Mubarak’s heavy involvement in religion, al-Gadaffi’s continuous use of religion to gain political legitimacy and Bahrain’s opposition to sectarianism. Furthermore, the revised model predicted that the future of Syria was going to be religion led. Yet, evidence pointed to the contrary.

The present study demonstrated that it was not religion that hindered democratization or a smooth transition. Furthermore, we showed that the classical selectorate theory was a reliable tool of analysis applicable to the Arab Spring. It can be used to answer questions about policymaking, the practices of the elite, governance, representation, democracy, and political structure.

Note

1This article is a critique of the revised selectorate model that Jacek Kugler, Amir Bagherpour, Mark Abdollahian, and Ashraf Singer introduced in their article titled “Pathways to Stability for Transition Governments in the Middle East and North Africa” published in Asian Politics & Policy, Vol 7, Issue 1, January 2015, 5–38. doi:10.1111/aspp.12170. Kugler and colleagues introduce a revised model for the selectorate theory based on the recent revolutions of MENA by including religion as an analytical factor. For the revised model, political survival in MENA is determined by meeting religious demands and not only public-private payoff balance. Moreover, as the selectorate size expands, the religious demands increase. Kugler and colleagues analyzed six MENA countries, and in conclusion they disagree with the classical selectorate approach and argue that regime survival and stability are related to religiosity as a domestic preference. Kugler and colleagues do not agree with the selectorate theory’s total conjunction between selectorate expansion and democratization. Instead, they emphasize that there is no guarantee for democratic tendencies in such cases. Moreover, the expansion of selectorate in MENA has increased instability and made the probability to have authoritarian regimes higher.

References


