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

Ibrahim S. I. Rabaia*
Makmor Tumin†
Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh‡

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

*Ibrahim S. I. Rabaia is a PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, Department of Administration Studies and Politics, University of Malaya.
†Makmor Tumin is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, University of Malaya.
‡Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Administration, Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, University of Malaya.