Security Services and Authoritarian Stability

- A Comparative Case Study of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria before the Arab Spring

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Abstract

This study tests the theory of Authoritarian Stability against the expectation that security services are essential for preventing the fall of the regime in Egypt, Jordan, and Syria in the lead up to the Arab Spring. A most similar comparative case study is used as method. Authoritarian stability is operationalised as the ruler maintaining the support from domestic elites and from external powers to preserve their rule. This operationalisation is used to collect information from mostly academic resources and an assessment of each state's security services is also performed to assess if the theory or the effectiveness of security service has the most significant effect on deciding outcome.

The data show a strong support for the Theory of Authoritarian Stability as the best predictor of outcome while at best only weak support for the expectation that security services are important at preserving regime stability in an authoritarian state.

Key words: Authoritarian States, Theory of Authoritarian Stability, Security Services, Arab Spring, Egypt, Jordan, Syria.

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Table of contents

1   Introduction

The advent of the Arab Spring (AS) invigorated the academic debate about the Middle East and led to questioning of previously firmly held beliefs about the region. One of these long-held dogmas concerns the Theory of Authoritarian Stability (TAS) and how several authoritarian Arab states are the best example of this. Obviously, this theory was challenged when several regimes that were previously considered stable fell in the years 2011-2012 and several more experienced significant disturbances. These same states also possess powerful security services (SS) built up and perfected over decades by the ruling regimes.

An interpretation of TAS indicates that the relationship between the ruler and the elites of the society is the most important predictor in accounting for regime stability. Other important predictors are foreign aid especially in the form of military support and readily available natural resources for export. It does not account for a powerful or effective SS. In this study the theory is tested against the expectation that SS should also be critical for regime survival. Egypt, Jordan and Syria form three case studies that are compared to assess if their outcomes from the AS was better predicted by TAS or by how effective their SS are. The period of analysis is from the foundation of the state in its current modern form, up until the start of the AS.

The three cases analysed all experienced different outcomes from the AS despite having strong similarities in history, language, culture, and demographics. The question is then, why despite these similarities they all experienced markedly different outcomes in the years following the start of the AS. Through a review of available literature on the SS of respective countries, I will argue that the SS had in each case a very minor, if any effect on outcome. Relationship between ruler and elites foreign support were predictor of outcome, in line with the TAS.

There is a need for such research since until the AS, the longevity of authoritarian rulers in almost every Arab state was remarkable and the mechanisms behind it are poorly understood.[1] This is especially when considering that other regions saw the fall of several authoritarian states with the end of the Cold War. Gaining this understanding is important both from a normative perspective to better counter authoritarian regimes and from a realistic perspective to better explain the current international order of states.

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[1] Gause 2011.

1.1 Overview

The essay is laid out, so chapter 2 offers background and provides a short summary of the three examined states. TAS and the concept of SS is also introduced. Chapter 3 concerns methodology where the theory the research hypotheses are presented and the theory is operationalised. A more detailed account for research methods and case selections is also included.

The main part of the essay are chapter 4-6 which in turn presents the findings on each case. Each of those chapters first accounts for the findings regarding TAS and then presents the relevant SS of each case and their effectiveness.

Chapter 7 then summarises the findings and how they supported the hypotheses before ending with a brief discussion of implications of findings and avenues for further research.

2   Background

2.1   The Arab Spring

The self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit seller in protest at his economic hardship marked the start of the Arab Spring in December 2010. This ignited a wave of popular demonstrations leading to reforms, uprisings and even civil war in Libya, Syria, and Yemen.[2] A similar whirlwind of activity occurred in academia with numerous publications on what caused the AS, if it could have been predicted and how it will play out.[3] Previous research into these questions has offered perspectives from both political science, economics and from the social sciences.

Perhaps the most interesting debate has been on causes of the AS and why it was so unexpected. The change was as unexpected as it was dramatic and rapid, which leads to the question on why it was not predicted.[4] The failure of anticipating this strategic surprise is reminiscent of the debate following the fall of the Soviet Union. Long ruling autocrats coupled with a population dominated by youngsters with limited economic opportunities has been pointed out as being the most likely causes. Other factors of more dubious validity include the continued rise of political Islam and the increasing usage of social media.[5]

Quantitative studies of economic factors that caused the AS did demonstrate a strong correlation with stagnant economic growth, rising food prices and especially the presence of high youth unemployment.[6]

2.2   Egypt

As the most populous Arab state and located in centre of the Middle East, it has traditionally exerted the most political and cultural influence in the region. The modern state was founded in 1952 with a military coup overthrowing the British supported monarchy led by Gamal Abd El Nasser. He laid the template for the current Egyptian republic with one man from the military holding power.[7] A strong Pan-Arabist streak supported by the Soviet Union guided the state until Sadat took over and sought the backing of the US instead in the 1970s. A policy of economic liberalisation followed and continued after Mubarak took over. Throughout this period until 2011, the military continued to dominate the political and economic spheres in Egypt.[8]

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[2] Hodler 2018.
[3] Asongu and Nwachukwu 2016, Gause 2011.
[4] Arcos and Palacios 2018.
[5] See Asongu and Nwachukwu 2016 for a comprehensive review of the literature.
[6] Al-Shammari and Willoughby 2019.
[7] Mäkelä 2014.
[8] Chekir and Diwan 2014.

The AS arrived in Egypt on 25th of January with large demonstrations that led to a deteriorating security situation. Despite violent response by the security establishment, the protests continued unabated until the military leadership finally broke with Mubarak and placed him under arrest.[9] With the military in control, the situation calmed and in the following year elections were held leading to the peaceful transfer to a civilian government in 2012. Instability and a violent countercoup by the military the following year led to today's situation with a return to authoritarianism.

2.3 Jordan

The kingdom of Jordan was formed in the aftermath of the 1st World War from the fallen Ottoman Empire. It took its current form and name after the 2nd world as a client state of the British. From the beginning the Hashemite dynasty has ruled a nominally constitutional monarchy with written constitution and elected lower parliament. In reality, the king has the real power and rules as an absolute monarchist, as in neighbouring gulf countries.[10] This system has been stable ever since the last major threat to the king during Black September in 1970.[11] A strong political support from western countries and economic from Saudi Arabia likely forms the main reason for this stability.[12]

The AS manifested itself in Jordan through weekly sit ins and demonstrations against the economic stagnation, corruption, and high unemployment rates. Protest spread even beyond Amman to the traditional rural tribal parts which have formed the strongest base of support for the monarchy. This continued during most of spring and summer of 2011 with occasional violent suppressions of these demonstrations. A marked difference from Egypt is that despite the same grievances being aired, the intensity of protests was nowhere near the levels seen in Egypt and the demands by the protesters did not include the demand the abdication of the king. This led in the end to some limited economic reforms before the protests abated.[13]

2.4 Syria

Syria shares a very similar modern history to both Egypt and Jordan. After breaking free from Ottoman rule after the 1st world war it fell under the influence of a European power, in this case France. After the 2nd world war Syria achieved independence. Following several military coups, Hafez El Assad, the father of the

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[9] Mäkelä 2014.
[10] Helfont and Helfont 2012.
[11] Fruchter-Ronen 2008.
[12] Beck and Hüser 2015.
[13] Helfont and Helfont 2012.

current Syrian president, finally established a firm hold on power in 1970 which was then inherited by his son. A running theme throughout is a strong support by the Soviet Union which continued onto today, as evidenced by the Russian intervention into the Syrian civil war. The elder Assad built up a strong centralised state with an extensive military and civilian security apparatus.[14] Those bases of power are further superimposed with an additional layer of control through the domination by the president's own Alawite ethnic group.

The Sunni Muslim majority accounted for the initial protest and acts of civil disobedience in March 2011. These relatively minor acts led to savage responses by the authorities which in turn caused even greater protests.[15] The pattern repeated itself all over the country and by 2012 an organised armed element among the opposition started to take shape leading to an all-out civil war.

2.5   Security Services

Security services are defined as the section of government that is responsible for maintaining internal security in a state and the agency can be civilian, military, police, or a combination. In authoritarian regimes as the ones reviewed in this study, SS foremost responsibility is to protect the ruler from threats.[16] These can come from political opposition or from challengers within the regime itself. Unlike in democracies, SS operate usually outside the law and can use widespread surveillance, torture, and extortion without any oversight or restrictions.

This definition of SS is used in this study. No distinction is made between whether the service is military, police or civilian. As long as the agency has an active role in maintaining regime security then it is included in the review.

2.6   The Theory of Authoritarian Stability

With democratisation sweeping large parts of the globe for most of the 20th century, authoritarian regimes stopped being the norm. Notable such exceptions include Spain which was ruled by Franco for several decades. Similar resilient regimes were up until 2011, seen in almost every Arabic country. The theory of authoritarian stability was developed as an attempt to explain this phenomenon and it has been specially applied to Arab states.[17] Even neighbouring Islamic countries such as Turkey, Iran and Pakistan have demonstrated several instances of democratic elections and peaceful transfer of power, but this development was not seen in any Arab state.

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[14] Landis 2012.
[15] Abboud 2015.
[16] Linz 2000, p. 65.
[17] Gause 2011.

Several explanations for this resilience have been previously offered including cultural, political, and economic ones. Cultural factors concern the tribal make-up of the society and Islam as the main religion with both considered incompatible with modern democratic institutions. This line of thinking has not been consistent with empirical data and is not seriously considered.[18]

The main mechanism of authoritarian stability, however, are more likely explained by the ruler in an authoritarian state keeping the elites in the state on his side. Their goodwill is usually secured through economic incentives, which can manifest itself in the form of crony capitalism.[19] Other options a ruler can use to secure allegiance from elites is by enriching them from exports of natural resources or from generous foreign aid.[20] Arab states are uniquely vulnerable to these mechanisms, having rich oil deposits in the gulf or receiving American military support to ensure peace with Israel. All three examined states are lacking in natural resources, but they receive significant military aid. Syria also has a ruling ethnic minority that has survived through co-option of other ethnic groups and successful distractions through intervention in Lebanon.[21]

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[18] Ibid.
[19] Chekir and Diwan 2014.
[20] Bak and Moon 2016.
[21] Haddad 2012, s. 221.

3   Methodology

3.1   The Theory

There exists no unified Theory of Authoritarian Stability. It is a collection of observations on how seemingly unpopular and weak regimes can survive under the same dictator, decade after decade. This observation has then driven a minor body of research on why this phenomenon persists. These observations are as mentioned, primarily account for the ruler's ability to secure allegiance from the elites of the country through economic means. This can be in the form of allocation of monopolies to certain well-connected people or through wealth generated from natural resources as in the Gulf states. The ruler can also safeguard survival by ensuring that only trusted individuals such as family member or relatives oversee sensitive institutions like the military. A third factor is seeking the support of powerful allies that can guarantee security through military or economic means. For example, Syria with Russia and Egypt and Jordan with the US.

This theory does however not account for any role of the SS so the question is which is a better predictor of regime survival? Does possessing a strong SS ensure regime survival or is this better predicted by the TAS?

According to the theory, the ruler main priority is to ensure the flow of wealth to elites to secure their continued support. The ruler would also prioritise if applicable, the continued support from a foreign beneficiary or to maintain the export of valuable natural resources such as oil to afford buying the support of the elites. The SS would then have a more auxiliary role toward these goals.

3.2   Hypothesis

The above-mentioned arguments lead to the expectation that regimes survival is better predicted by the TAS than by that regime having an efficient and powerful SS. This can be expressed as the following two hypotheses with a third partly competing one that all are applicable to the three cases examined:

> *H1 – An authoritarian ruler needs strong support from domestic elites to maintain power.*

> *H2 – An authoritarian ruler needs strong support from foreign benefactors to maintain power.*

> *H3 – Domestic security services are significant in securing the power of an authoritarian ruler.*

If we can demonstrate that the ruler fell or was seriously challenged despite having a powerful SS then that would support the *H1* and *H2*. Conversely, if a case demonstrates that a ruler survived despite losing support from the elites, or control over natural resources, or the support from a foreign benefactor then this would support *H1* and *H2* while potentially supporting *H3*.

3.3   Research methods

The design for this study, is a historic comparative case study of most similar cases. The investigated variables are first how closely the ruler behaves as predicted by TAS and second the differences in SS in each case (country). The outcome variable is the result following the AS. The method was chosen to allow for an in-depth analysis of each case. The selected cases are very similar but with different outcomes to adequately test the theory. Using only one case would also be an option but any conclusions reached would be of less interest and making any causal inference would be even less possible.[22]

The data is primarily academic literature with some additional input from NGOs that tend to focus on human right abuses of the SS in the examined states.

3.3.1   Case Selection

The thesis is designed as a comparative case study of most similar cases.[23] Egypt, Jordan and Syria are all very similar countries with a shared culture and history, forming a regional geographical security complex. Jordan and Syria are neighbours that throughout history have fallen under the same jurisdiction as part of the levant. Egypt and Syria are geographically close and even formed a union together 1958-1961, having started as monarchies before both seeing military coups inspired by socialism and Pan Arabism.[24]

Prior to the AS they were also classified as authoritarian. Despite this, each country experienced a distinctly different outcome from the AS. An argument could be made for including or replacing some of the cases with other north African states such Tunisia and Libya or with Gulf states, but this would not be as workable with the study design since there are either too large differences between cases or to strong similarities in outcome.

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[22] George and Bennett 2019, p. 142.
[23] Lamont 2015, p. 133.
[24] Rathmell 1998.

3.4   Operationalisation

3.4.1   Theory of Authoritarian Stability

TAS is in in this study operationalised as which political elites in each studied case exist and the nature of the relationship between the ruler and the elite. Elite in this context means a certain group or clique that forms the leadership of an influential segment of the state. The top strata of the military are often considered such an elite. Wealthy businessmen or the leaders of a certain ethnicity can also fulfil this role. Authoritarian states can also contain more than one elite faction that are then in competition to preserve or increase their influence.

TAS also predicts that the ruler will seek to preserve strong bonds to foreign benefactor which are usually global or regional powers. The ruler uses this relationship to secure military, economic and political support to preserve his rule. This accounts for the second operationalisation where any such relationship is described.

The third aspect of TAS concerns the ruler having access to natural resources as another source of wealth that can be distrusted among the elites to maintain their loyalty. Since none of the three cases studied possess any significant such resources, this aspect of TAS is ignored.

3.4.2   Role of Security Services

As mentioned, SS in authoritarian states tend to have the primary mission of preserving the ruler´s powers by suppressing any domestic opposition, both from within the regime and from the general public. Operationalisation here is performed by classifying the various military and civil organisation in the investigated countries and attempting to identify which ones fulfil the role of protecting the regime from domestic threats.

The second step is to assess how effective at their role the SS is. The academic literature offers no standardised method for directly assessing the performance of a SS, especially one operating in an opaque authoritarian system.[25] An inductive approach is instead used to assess from the available data which factors that might support or reject the hypothesis.[26] Literature indicating for example that joining a certain SS is prestigious or that it is efficient in suppressing protest point to an effective SS and vice versa. If available in the literature, the size in terms of budget, personnel and equipment can indicate the quality of the SS.[27] Indirect factors such

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[25] Refer to Gentry 2010 for a detailed review of the difficulty in assessing intelligence performance which is also applicable to SS. A short presentation on intelligence agencies in authoritarian states can also be found in Pateman 1992.

[26] See Marrin 2009 and Sims 2009 for a further discussion on use of inductive reasoning in intelligence analysis research.

[27] Springborg 2017.

as the number of directors and ministers in government with a background in a certain SS can also indicate its power and importance to the regime.[28]

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[28] Ibid.

4   Egypt

4.1 Authoritarian stability

4.1.1   The Military Elite

Egypt under Mubarak manifested all the characteristics of authoritarian stability, masquerading as a constitutional republic.[29] A former military officer he ruled as president for thirty years. Throughout this period Mubarak appeared firmly in control, especially of the military. The event of the AS however laid bare how that control was lacking. It is generally agreed that Mubarak's position became untenable when the military publicly withdrew their support.[30] The military is then the primary power structure in Egypt and has been so since the formation of the republic in 1952.[31] Every president since then, with the exception for the short-lived tenure of Morsi was an officer in the military first. It can therefore, without controversy be labelled as part of the elites in the country whose support is needed for any ruler to secure their position. As such the military occupies an exalted position in the hierarchy of the Egyptian society. Several factors demonstrate this. It has been consistently ranked the most trustworthy institution by the Egyptian public.[32] No civilian oversight of the military has ever been allowed and retired officers account for a significant portion of the Egyptian parliament and government.[33] Egypt can be accurately termed an "officers republic".[34]

The dominance of the military in the elite structure is still best exemplified by its economic activities. Wide ranging economic enterprises such as in construction, tourism and food production are owned by the military.[35] The economic activities of the military are so prevalent that it has become an economic enterprise for the benefit of the generals first, and a fighting force second.[36] This military-economic apparatus is opaque and difficult to assess but at least 10% of all economic activity in Egypt is believed to be under military control.[37]

All this points to the military as the primary elite whose support is required to rule Egypt. That Mubarak oversaw and allowed the military to reach this privileged position is in keeping with TAS, which indicates that the relationship between the ruler and the elites is of foremost importance.

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[29] Kechichian and Nazimek 1997.
[30] Holmes and Koehler 2020.
[31] Abdelrahman 2017.
[32] Springborg 2017.
[33] Jeff and Julie 2011, Holmes and Koehler 2020.
[34] Springborg 2017.
[35] Brumberg and Sallam 2012.
[36] Mäkelä 2014.
[37] Tabaar 2013.

4.1.2   The Business Elite

A second elite structure is identified by the literature, namely the business elite. This is a newer elite than the military and originated from the economic liberalisation during Sadat in the 1970s. This trend strengthened in the following decades under Mubarak.[38] A pattern of crony capitalism was established with Mubarak granting lucrative concessions to individuals close to him and his family.[39] His son Gamal was being promoted as the heir to the presidency and Gamal's power base was firmly in this business elite.[40] Gamal, unlike his father had no relation to the military. Furthermore, the increasing intrusion of a new business class, close to the president led to a widening conflict between these two elites. As mentioned previously, the military has large economic interests which were threatened by the economic liberalisation. Perhaps Mubarak intentionally sought to create a competing power base as a divide- and rule strategy to ensure his son's ascendance.

This strategy spectacularly failed when the military feeling threatened decided to abandon Mubarak when the protests started, since at that stage the military was far more popular than the president. The new business class was also deeply unpopular owing to their rapid and lavish enrichment. This is in stark contrast to the worsening economic situation for most of the population with widespread unemployment and rising poverty.[41] The AS presented itself as the perfect opportunity for the military to strike against a ruler that was in the process of diminishing their role and taking out a rising threat from a new elite.

Mubarak kept the support of the business elite until the end as exemplified by the extensive use of tugs hired to attack demonstrators just days before his fall. It is believed this was financed by his son and other business associates as a last-ditch manoeuvre to try and save Mubarak's presidency.[42]

4.1.3   Foreign Support

Authoritarian stability can also be predicated on strong and lasting support from foreign powers. In the case of Egypt, the US holds the position of such a power. Since the American sponsored peace agreement with Israel in 1978, political and economic support from the US has been essential for the Egyptian state.[43] 1.3 billion dollars annually has kept Egypt in alignment with American interests. The economic support is mainly in the form of military assistance. Mubarak also gained political support and diplomatic cover from American and other western powers.[44] This relationship was strengthened after the attacks on 9/11 when Mubarak traded

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[38] Abdelrahman 2017.
[39] Chekir and Diwan 2014.
[40] Anderson 2011.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Mäkelä 2014.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Jeff and Julie 2011.

political support for active involvement in renditions and intelligence gathering against Islamists. After Mubarak's fall it became obvious that were happy to loose Mubarak but kept the aid flowing towards the military.[45] After the AS and the restoration of military power the foreign support has continued to flow towards the military.

Course of events are as predicted by TAS. The ruler prioritised having fruitful relations with a foreign power but fell from power partly to loosing support from this power.

4.2   The Security Services

4.2.1   Overview

The ministry of interior is the foremost entity in charge of civilian domestic security and protection of the regime. Just before the AS in 2011 it had 1.7 million employees divided almost equally between the regular police and the security elements. The SS in turn consist of the Central Security Forces which is a paramilitary police force responsible for suppressing demonstrations and other overt activities. The other main SS is the State Security Investigations Services which is tasked with arresting dissidents, surveillance and deciding on appointments and promotions in the state apparatus.[46] All three agencies of the ministry of interior routinely used violence, torture and other forms of coercion making them deeply unpopular among the general populace.

Mubarak also had at his disposal two smaller and more elite units. First the Republican Guard, a smaller force directly entrusted with the president's security and accounting for a minor part of the internal security apparatus.[47] Secondly, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service which also sorted directly under the president and had both external and internal security responsibilities such as counterintelligence, counterterrorism, and covert action.[48]

Finally, there is some debate on how involved the Military Intelligence Department was in internal security. Formally, it is focused on external threats and counterintelligence but also seem to have had a role in domestic affairs.[49]

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[45] Mäkelä 2014, Springborg 2017.
[46] Brumberg and Sallam 2012.
[47] Springborg 2017.
[48] Mäkelä 2014.
[49] Holmes and Koehler point to a more hidden role for military intelligence in quelling internal unrest while Mäkelä contends that their activity is almost exclusively against external threats (Mäkelä 2014, Holmes and Koehler 2020).

4.2.2 Effectiveness

The literature offers several indications on the quality of the SS in the lead up to the events of 2011. The Ministry of Interior with the police force, Central Security Force and State Security Investigations Services under its command rapidly increased in numbers in the preceding 2 decades. Part of that was a response to increased activity from armed islamist groups in 1990s.[50] The numbers employed almost doubled in the last 25 year of Mubarak's rule and became a "*highly sophisticated coercive apparatus that, covertly and overtly, penetrated all walks of Egypt's political, social, and economic life*".[51] The ministry's budget also increased to more than the budgets of the ministries of health and education combined.[52]

It is perhaps just their sheer numbers more than any inherent quality that led to this increased cost. For example, the Central Security Forces was staffed by low paid and low educated conscripts.[53] Despite their numbers, they also seemed better adapted at intimidating individuals and small groups with a distinct lack of training in riot control.[54] This led to a SS that was expected to protect the ruler from internal dissent and act as a counter pole towards the military, but that had lower quality recruits and received little in training and equipment leading to overall low morale.[55] This is in contrast with the military that recruited from the middle class, enjoyed relatively good pay and had American funded weaponry such as F-16 fighter jets.[56] Military intelligence also seems to be of a higher calibre than its civilian counterparts, as when it when foiled a planned coup attempt in 2015.[57]

Mubarak clearly relied on the ministry of interior and their various police and security forces to suppress any internal dissent and to counteract the power of the military. Their brutal tactics ensured the intense hate from the population, and they proved to be woefully inadequate in controlling the streets when the AS started.[58] That these forces were inadequate was also demonstrated when the military after it retook power disbanded State Security Investigations Services and formed a national intelligence bureau.[59] The Republican Guard and General Intelligence Service that were heralded as elite units by Mubarak and supposed to protect his rule also in the end deferred to the military´s authority and abandoned him in the critical hour.[60]

So the various SS had no discernible effect on the outcome and perhaps at best had a minor role in the shadow of the military's dominance. Despite their large numbers, the SS under the control of the Ministry of Interior failed to keep Mubarak in power.

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[50] Brumberg and Sallam 2012.
[51] Ibid.
[52] El-Dawla 2009
[53] Kechichian and Nazimek 1997.
[54] Droz-Vincent 2019.
[55] Kechichian and Nazimek 1997.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Springborg 2017.
[58] Sherry 1993, Anderson 2011, Abdelrahman 2017.
[59] Mäkelä 2014.
[60] Springborg 2017.

5   Jordan

5.1 Authoritarian stability

5.1.1   Tribal elites

Jordan is an artificial colonial creation and not a nation state. It therefore initially lacked a single national identity. It is instead divided into two main constituting parts that form the power base of the Jordanian king.[61] The first of these are the tribal inhabitants of the eastern parts. More conservative, they dominate the military and SS, forming the primary nexus of power.[62] Ever since the events of Black September when king Hussein faced a Palestinian rebellion, the tribal elites have been the main guarantor of the Hashemite monarchy.[63] Those events formed a new national identity based on the eastern Bedouin tribes and the military and security forces that they staffed supporting the monarchy. A patronage system where the king spent public money to keep this group employed in public jobs.

Throughout the rest of the king Hussein's rule until his death, this elite was always the top priority when it came to political goodwill and state finances.[64] The SS and military answer only the king with their budgets secret but estimated to be 20% of the total national budget, 8th in the world relative to income.[65]

In 1999, Abdullah II ascended to the throne. By then the state finances were worsening due to reduced contributions from expats and friendly oil-rich gulf states. The state attempted to rein in the budget by reducing public spending. Spending that was the main source of income to the tribal eastern Jordanians. Protests followed and this new policy was condemned forcing the king to eventually reverse this policy.[66] The fact that the king was forced to retreat clearly demonstrates the importance he placed on keeping this elite satisfied with his rule. As expected by TAS.

5.1.2   Business Elites

After the Palestinian Nakba of 1948, newly arrived refugees settled in Jordan and became the majority in the country. Up to 70% of the Jordanian population had Palestinian heritage.[67] At that time they were generally more educated than the pre-

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[61] Tal 1993.
[62] Ryan 2020.
[63] Fruchter-Ronen 2008.
[64] Helfont and Helfont 2012.
[65] Yom 2013 and Tal 1993.
[66] Tell 2015 and Ryan 2020.
[67] Helfont and Helfont 2012

existing population and they settled predominantly in the urbanised western parts of Jordan. It was only natural then they largely contributed to the state apparatus including the military and security forces. Especially the business and banking sector became dominated by Palestinians, making them a new elite that the king Hussein was reliant on. All this changed after the events of Black September when the Palestinian segment was seen as traitorous and completely expelled from the Jordanian civil service and military.[68] the Palestinian dominated urban elite was greatly diminished.

Mirroring similar developments in Syria and Egypt, neo-liberal policies enacted in the 90s led to a return of the Palestinians as an elite, owing to their continued dominance of the business sector. Palestinian re-ascendance to the elites was best exemplified by the wife new king Abdallah II, Queen Rania, born to Palestinian banking family.[69] The re-enrichment of the Palestinian elite and their return to the centre of power caused consternation among the tribal elite who saw them as a threat to their position.

As already mentioned, the king had to prioritise his relationship to the tribal elites since they held the key to the security and military forces, but he still needs the business elites for its economic contributions. A situation where their interests are balanced is necessary to maintain both camps as a power base for the monarchy.

5.1.3   Foreign support

Jordan has a very vulnerable position neighbouring far larger Syria and Iraq, considerably more powerful Israel, and an immensely richer Saudi Arabia. A solution to this predicament is by making Hashemite stability a shared interest among global and regional powers. It has paid off in the form of significant American military aid and British political support.[70] It is the second largest receiver of American military aid in per-capita terms, partly influenced by Jordanian support for the various American military campaigns in the Middle East since 9/11.[71] The king is also heavily reliant on aid from gulf states, primarily Saudi Arabia forcing him to adopt friendly positions to them such as hostility to the Muslim Brotherhood.[72]

Ensuring the continued existence of the monarchy is a tightrope walk. During Black September for example, Syria started an intervention in support of the Palestinians but backed away after the king appealed to Israel for help.[73] During the first Gulf War in 1990-1991, Jordan maintained their friendly relationship with Iraq causing a fracture with Saudi Arabia and other gulf states. In revenge they drastically reduced their economic support.[74]

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[68] Fruchter-Ronen 2008.
[69] Yom 2013.
[70] Ryan 2020.
[71] Helfont and Helfont 2012.
[72] Tell 2015.
[73] Rubinovitz 2010.
[74] Robinson 1998.

All this indicates how essential foreign support is for the survival of the ruler in Jordan, as predicted by TAS. If Syria had succeeded with the intervention in 1970 then Hashemite monarchy would likely not survive. If the gulf boycott had bankrupted Jordan after the Gulf War, then the king would risk being replaced by another relative who could better provide for the tribal elites. The king considers this a serious threat, as made apparent in 2021 when his half-brother was put into house arrest suspected on planning a coup with tribal and Saudi Arabian support.[75]

5.2   Security Services

5.2.1   Overview

The main SS tasked with maintaining internal order and stability is the General Intelligence Directorate. It is similar in organization and function to corresponding agencies in other Arab states and started as part of military intelligence.[76] Officially it is tasked with counterterrorism, both internal and external but is in effect mainly used to suppress internal dissent and political opposition to the king.[77] The Royal guard is an elite unit of the military tasked with the personal safety of the royal family.[78] Riot police is as the name indicates focused on securing public places from protesters and other forms of opposition.[79] The military and police in its various inceptions are also foremost functioning as protectors of the monarchy and the interests of the eastern tribes that make up those forces.[80]

All these SS are dominated by eastern tribal Jordanians since they are seen as the most loyal to the Hashemite monarchy. The fact that Jordan never had a successful military coup against the monarchy as happened in Syria, Iraq and Egypt illustrates this loyalty.[81] The current king still sees some threat from this power nexus and this likely motivated the creation of a new gendarmerie civil police as a counterforce. Only a third of this new force is supposed to be recruited from the eastern tribes and instead inclusion of Palestinians and northern tribes is the priority.[82]

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[75] Millett 2021.
[76] Schwedler 2012.
[77] Yom 2013.
[78] Schwedler 2012
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ryan 2020
[81] Ibid.
[82] Tell 2015.

5.2.2   Effectiveness

The literature is in consensus that Jordanian security and military forces, despite their relatively small numbers are the most professional and effective security forces in the Arab world.[83] SS and the military can be seen as one since they both are dominated by the same eastern tribes. The division and competition that is common in other Arab states between military and civilian SS is not apparent in Jordan. A common shared bond along bloodlines and ideology unites both sides and probably accounts for their effectiveness and professionalism.[84] Authoritarian rulers in other Arab states tend to create competing poles of power amongst their security establishment to divide- and rule, blunting their effectiveness. In Jordan on the other hand, since 1950s, security forces have prevented numerous coups, repulsed Syrian challenges both covertly and overtly and kept any serious political dissent suppressed.[85]

This sector takes up a large portion of the national budget leading to continued high performance and high prestige attracting top talent from the eastern tribes. This patronage system is overseen by the General Intelligence Directorate which also exerts a strong influence on the royal court.[86] Allies to the Directorate came to dominate the cabinet and other sensitive posts to further secure their privileged position and the king allowed it to maintain their loyalty.[87] The directorate has extensive monitoring capabilities and can be relied on to manipulate elections to prevent opposition from gaining any influence, and to keep local leaders in line with the monarchy.[88] The king secures their interests in return by keeping their finances secret, preventing any oversight and even increasing their budgets, even as Jordan saw rising youth unemployment, reduced social welfare spending and higher cost of living.[89]

Once the AS arrived in Jordan, it manifested in terms of limited protests and no significant levels of violence.[90] Increased support from gulf countries who wanted Jordan to remain stable helped calm the situation relatively quickly. This aid the king mostly spent on propping up the eastern tribes to ensure the loyalty of armed forces.[91] It is therefore difficult to ascribe the stability of the regime to the SS only. Reliance of foreign powers and existing elites probably offered a more obvious explanation.

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[83] Ryan 2012.
[84] Ryan 2020.
[85] Rathmell 1996 and Schwedler 2012.
[86] Tell 2015
[87] Ibid.
[88] Yom 2013.
[89]Ryan 2020.
[90] Helfont and Helfont 2012.
[91] Yom 2013.

6   Syria

6.1   Authoritarian stability

6.1.1   The Military-Political Elite

The current president Bashar Al-Assad inherited the state and its military-security apparatus in 2000. His father Hafez Al-Assad built up this apparatus upon his ascendance to power in 1970 to consolidate power and bring about a remarkably long-lived stability in country that was wrecked by nearly a dozen coups after gaining independence from France in 1946.[92] This instability was primarily driven by power competition between the military and the Baath political party. The elder Assad had a strong power base in both and could therefore ensure stability by controlling both.[93] This "military-party" state provided the elite structure through which ambitious Syrians could advance. The president had the loyalty of this elite since they owed him for their position of power. Both Assads handpicked every candidate for major position in the whole state apparatus.[94] This policy was accelerated even further after the failed insurrection of the Muslim Brotherhood which was ended with the destruction of Hama in 1982.[95] It laid bare how the Sunni Muslim majority of Syria saw Assad´s power as illegitimate and he responded by excluding them even more from positions of power.

An additional indicator of how the ruler prioritised keeping the elites in the state in line is through extensive recordkeeping on its members, detailing their loyalties and failings.[96]All this demonstrates a "carrot and stick" system to keep the interests of the elite tied to the interest of the ruler, further supporting the theory of authoritarian stability and how the ruler always needs to maintain a strong relationship to their elites. Syria also illustrates an interesting twist in that the regime elites saw their prospects tied so strongly to the Assads that they ensured the smooth continuation of business by letting Assad junior assume power.[97]

6.1.2   Alawite Elites

Syria is composed of a multitude of ethnic and religious groups, unlike the largely homogeneous make up of Egypt and Jordan. When the Baath party took over soon after independence, it became a medium for previously overlooked minorities to

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[92] Darwisheh 2013.
[93] Hinnebusch 2011.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Landis 2012.
[96] Hinnebusch 2011.
[97] Ibid.

reach positions of power.[98] Alawite were already well represented in the military since the French liked to promote them as part of a divide- and rule strategy.[99] Hafez Al-Assad was born into an Alawite family, a small religious offshoot from Shia Islam and ended up as president after his rise through the ranks of the military and Baath party. To further coup-proof his regime, Assad also methodically staffed all sensitive posts in the military with direct blood relatives and other Alawites. This created a second base of power that was even more loyal to the Assads than the other elites. As was demonstrated during the Syrian civil war after the AS when the military units that proved least likely to desert where the ones made up of Alawites.[100] For example, Bashar's younger brother commands the Republican Guard while Bashar's brother-in-law was director of intelligence.[101]

This pattern of sectarian based promotion continued when limited market liberalisation took effect under Bashar´s rule. As seen in Egypt, profitable state enterprises were awarded to certain members of the elite to ensure their continued support. The difference in Syria is that Bashar continued to prioritise his family and clan when handing out these wealth generators. The most blatant example of this is when his cousin was allowed to take control of almost all mobile phone services in Syria.[102] Handing out lucrative monopolies may have kept the elites loyal but it damaged the economic development for large sections of the country, especially in rural areas and kept them in poverty.[103] Drought drove masses of farmers to relocate into larger cities in search of livelihood.[104] An inefficient state that prioritises enriching the elites and the leader proved incapable of meeting these challenges, eventually contributing to the AS.[105]

All these actions by the Assads illustrates how they maintained their grip on power, by creating an elite that was entirely beholden them for their wealth and security, thereby strengthening their loyalty.

6.1.3   Foreign Support

Syria was influenced by the Soviet Union which until its fall assisted in equipping and training the Syrian military. The Syrian Baath party was also organised according to the soviet communist party.[106] Syria in return stayed within the Russian sphere of influence and leased out a base to Soviet naval forces.[107] This special relationship survived the end of the Cold War. The Russian intervention into the Syrian civil war in 2015 to support Assad illustrated the continued strength of

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[98] Zisser 2006.
[99] Landis 2012.
[100] Heydemann 2013
[101] Darwisheh 2013.
[102] Haddad 2011 and Darwisheh 2013.
[103] Haddad 2011.
[104] Salamandra 2013 and Abboud 2015.
[105] Droz-Vincent 2019.
[106] Hinnebusch 2011.
[107] Harmer 2012.

this relationship. The Russian intervention was by all accounts a success and contributed to the survival of Syrian regime. Assad would obviously therefore want to keep Russia on his side. He therefore sacrificed national integrity when offering Russia continued use of a naval and air force base on Syrian territory.[108]

Support from Iran was even more extensive to the regimes war effort entailing both weaponry and combat units.[109] This support was likely the most important factor for keeping Assad in power. A re-alignment of Syrian interests to be more in line with Iran's was the price. For instance, allowing Syrian territory to be used as a transit for covert military transports between Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon.[110]

The Syrian example clearly demonstrates the importance for an authoritarian ruler to keep their foreign benefactors on friendly terms as predicted by TAS where Assad´s very survival hinged on this support.

6.2   Security Services

6.2.1   Overview

A bewilderingly large number of SS make up the Syrian security apparatus. This is partly by necessity since maintaining a security state that can keep the whole population in check requires serious manpower. It is also by design since establishing security agencies with overlapping responsibility ensures competition and reduces the risk of one single establishment growing too powerful and posing a threat to the ruler.

A short summary of the SS of note in Syria follows.[111] The Presidential Security Council is at the top and tasked with overseeing all the other security and intelligence services. The General Intelligence Directorate is the primary civilian agency tasked with internal surveillance of the population and providing internal security.

In a non-authoritarian state, military intelligence would be focused on external threats but in Syria, military intelligence also has significant responsibility in protecting the regime from internal threats such as coup attempts from within the military. Since elder Assad started his career in the air force, their intelligence branch is perhaps the most prominent of all SS and the one most trusted by the Assads in ensuring loyalty from the armed forces. The special forces and Presidential Guard are in theory military combat units but in peacetime they function as SS tasked with ensuring the personal safety of the Assads and critical installations.

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[108] Cafarella and Zhou 2019.
[109] Heydemann 2013.
[110] Droz-Vincent 2019.
[111] Rathmell thorough presentation of Syria´s security and intelligence services is the source for this section (Rathmell 1996).

Additionally, there exists various paramilitary units that are ethnically based and responsible for counteracting any threat from their respective populations. An example would be the militias in Palestinian refugee camps which are under complete Syrian control.

6.2.2   Effectiveness

Ruthless efficiency is defining characteristic of the Syrian SS as demonstrated during the civil war when widespread torture and killings became the modus operandi of the regime´s forces.[112] Their brutality failed to prevent a breakdown of Syria but they kept the armed forces of the regime loyal which was still one of their main responsibilities.[113] The SS can therefore be seen as the key to Assads rule and therefore a top priority when assigning resources and naming their leaders.[114] They had extensive influence on the daily life of the population also. They vetted all candidates for even low-grade positions in the state apparatus and kept extensive personal files. Even obtaining a license to run a business was predicated on approval from a SS.[115] Any organisation or enterprise in Syria was likely to include informants reporting to a SS. A practice that continued even during the civil war in newly formed opposition groups.[116]

The success of the SS in keeping the armed forces of the regime loyal contrasts with their failure in maintaining calm amongst the general public once the AS arrived. Their violent attempts at suppression instead deteriorated the situation further.[117] The rebellion started in the southern border areas which was even more firmly under SS control since they were considered strategically vital for the regime. The protesters initial demands there were not the fall of the regime but instead a loosening of the grip of the SS.[118]

A brutally efficient security conglomerate was built up by the Syrian regime. The most elite of them such as the Republican Guard had priority in funding and training.[119] Their large numbers functioned to keep each other and other armed units in check, which is from where the regime perceived the main threats to come from. The SS however failed to prevent the protests from developing into a regular civil war even if they kept Assad in power.

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[112] Darwisheh 2013 and Lynch 2013.
[113] Hinnebusch 2011.
[114] Rathmell 1996.
[115] Hinnebusch 2011.
[116] Landis 2012
[117] Abboud 2015.
[118] Droz-Vincent 2019.
[119] Darwisheh 2013.

7   Discussion

7.1   Summary of Findings

The three cases included in the review are most similar, but they experienced three markedly different outcome once the AS arrived. Mubarak who was the longest ruling of the three was forced out after chaotic protests and violence despite maintaining the allegiance of the civilian SS. Once the primary elite of the country, namely the military decided to abandon him however, he instantly fell. At the critical hour, Mubarak also received lacklustre support from his primary benefactors, US thereby losing the strong support from a foreign power . Events in Egypt therefore strongly support the TAS. The SS failed to maintain order despite decades of dominance over daily life with extensive budgets, numbering 1.7 million and facing no restrictions on the methods used. Their failure could be attributed to the "quantity over quality approach".

    Jordan on the other hand did not suffer any major or consistent disturbances and king Abdallah position was never under any immediate threat. He maintained the loyalty of the main elite faction who controlled both the military and the SS. The work of his father of making the Hashemite monarchy valuable for western powers, Saudi Arabia and Israel has also gained dividend in the form of solid and stable foreign power support. This also is in keeping with the TAS but the strength of the Jordanian SS could also have contributed to maintaining the king´s rule.

    Syria finally had perhaps the largest and most pervasive security complex of all three. They did, together with the military help sustain the rule of Assad but this was at the cost of a long running, destructively civil war that took almost 10 years before winding down. Terming this a "success" requires very low standards for applying that term. Throughout the war, Assad has maintained the support of the primary elite which is the Alwites who make up the leadership of the military and SS. He also had to greatly escalate the foreign support from Iran and Russia to stay in power. Again, these events are in support of the TAS. The SS however seemed instead to have a counterproductive effect on the events and provoking further disturbances and the eventual war. The SS did nevertheless succeed in keeping the internal aspects of the regime functioning even once the war started.

    So applying these findings to the hypotheses yields the following results:

    H1 – An authoritarian ruler needs strong support from domestic elites to maintain power.

The literature provides strong support in all three cases studied.

    H2 – An authoritarian ruler needs strong support from foreign benefactors to maintain power.

The literature provides strong support in all three cases studied.

Jordan is the only case which offers weak support for this hypothesis. The findings in the other cases tend to support the outright rejection of the hypothesis.

7.2   Implications

The study raises three key observations. Firstly, SS where never the primary source of power for the ruler. They only had this position if already under direct control of an elite, such as the Alawites in Syria and the eastern tribes in Jordan. In Egypt, they were constantly trailing the military in terms of both power and prestige. A successful authoritarian ruler must therefore prioritise his links to elites and foreign powers. SS are only useful in containing smaller and more limited disturbances and are therefore not a reliable base to secure power once popular discontent spreads. As so clearly illustrated by Mubarak's fall where he lost the support of the military elite. Mubarak also overestimated his importance to his foreign benefactors when they switched their support to the military.[120] The success of the SS in Jordan during the AS could be interpreted as supporting the importance of their role in preserving authoritarian rule. It could also be argued that since Jordan never faced widespread unrest, their SS were never as pressured as in the other states.

Secondly, all three rulers maintained or tried to maintain a competing power structure, so the ruler is not reliant on one elite faction and can balance them out against each other. Thereby reducing the chance of facing any serious challenger for power.[121] The Assads have had the most success in this approach, but this likely contributed to the subsequent disastrous developments. Divided SS were better at suppressing challenges to the Assads from within the state apparatus and keeping each other in check, but not as effective at stopping widespread dissent. Mubarak also tried to elevate the business elite and the SS under his control towards similar ends, but the outcome proved the inadequacy of this approach. Abdallah attempted a more limited approach but quickly backtracked when faced with opposition from the main elite faction. They could have responded shifting their allegiance to his half-brother and place him in power.

Finally, the effectiveness of the SS likely improved after the AS indicating that the authoritarian rulers themselves seem aware of SS shortcomings. Decades of stability led to the SS growing complacent and stagnant. In Egypt, the military undertook an ambitious program to update and improve the SS of the Ministry of Interior to prevent another AS occurring under the rule of the new leader general Sisi.[122] In the meantime, Egyptian military intelligence seems to have taken a more prominent role in internal security.[123] The Assads responded to deterioration in security by building up paramilitary forces to enforce security in areas under their

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[120] Holmes and Koehler 2020
[121] Gentry 2010.
[122] Abdelrahman 2017 and Hamzawy 2017.
[123] Springborg 2017.

control.[124] Unfortunately, this development in both Egypt and Syria seems to entail even more brutality and suppression of human right and civil liberties.[125] The same tactics that provoked partly caused the AS.

7.3   Further Study

There are several limitations to this study that future work could address. It is a narrow and at times superficial assessment of three cases. Access to primary sources is lacking which is partly due to the relatively recent date of events examined. Making firm conclusions is difficult based on these premises, but it does offer a steppingstone for further study.

   Future work could either go into more depth, for example a historic case study where the researcher has access to archives and other primary sources for a more detailed assessment of the mechanism underpinning authoritarian stability and the role of SS. A project in wider scope could also be attempted comparing a larger number of cases. This could be achieved by using existing databases and macroanalytical methods. Extending the study beyond the Middle East would also be of interest.

7.4   Conclusions

This study has offered strong support for this operationalisation and interpretation of the theory of authoritarian stability as demonstrated in all three cases examined. The study however offered at best only weak support for the expectation that SS are important at preserving regime stability in an authoritarian state as demonstrated in the case of Jordan. The other two cases showed no such support.

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[124] Abboud 2015.
[125] Hamzawy 2017 and Heydemann 2013

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