

The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN THE MAGHREB:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MOBILIZATION
IN TUNISIA AND MOROCCO**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Political Science
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

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Under the supervision of **Dr. Bahgat Korany**

November 2011

The American University in Cairo

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the processes of socio-economic and political change leading up to the most recent upheavals in the Arab World, with a focus on Tunisia and Morocco. A comparative study of the different historical trajectories of these countries is useful to identify causes for variation between countries that share many cultural, historical, socio-economic, and also political characteristics. The thesis illustrates how these countries have liberalized their economies without liberalizing their polities to the same extent, a process that has undermined regime legitimacy gradually over many years.

In Tunisia the worsening marginalization for growing segments of the population led to massive unrest. When exploring how such mobilization was possible under repressive conditions, I suggest that a combination of “traditional” mobilization by means of NGOs, and “new” mobilization via social media produced powerful tools for channeling popular discontent, articulated as oppositional discourse.

The visible political opportunities for protests in Tunisia were not many, but the new, shared discourses of alienation and indignation compelled people to act. In Morocco, contention has been a more moderate and drawn-out affair throughout the spring and summer of 2011. The thesis contrasts mobilization in these two countries, and suggests that differences in regime type, levels of socio-economic development and class configuration, as well as patterns of interaction between regimes and protesters, may explain most of the variation in how mobilization unfolded, and which concessions the state has yielded.

I - Introduction

The winter and spring months of 2010 and 2011 proved momentous in contemporary Middle Eastern history. Beginning in Tunisia in December 2010, mass protests spread like wildfire, and took the autocratic regimes of Tunisia and Egypt completely by surprise. The wave of contention has touched almost all Arab countries in what has been termed “The Arab Spring”. With presidents toppled in Tunis, Cairo, and Tripoli, and the leaders of Syria and Yemen under unprecedented pressure, the events have also challenged many previous postulates about the resilience of authoritarian regimes in Arab states.

Maybe this perspective of stagnation has been so common because studies of Arab countries have had a bias towards analyzing the elite level, when incremental change has in fact occurred at the popular level (Korany 2010, 7-8). Processes of socio-economic change, a reconfiguration of state-society relations, and the advent of globalization and new communications technologies have all affected the Middle East. The events of spring 2011 clearly prove that the social, economic, and political pressures of the last years have become a burden too heavy to bear for a growing number of people; and that the authoritarian regimes in the region had been incapable of addressing the grievances of those people. These gradual processes of change deserve further study.

The puzzle, however, remains that authoritarian regimes typically keep all challenges in check - by means of repression, co-optation, and pre-emption. Arab regimes have resorted to a discourse of political liberalization over the last two decades, often in response to external pressure. However, numerous investigations have demonstrated that this “liberalization” has existed only on paper, or that

authoritarian leaders have mastered a subtle game where any contestation has taken place either among factions inside a corporatist structure, or within a tightly monitored sphere of parties and civil society. Therefore, I must examine how widespread mobilization and opposition could upset this order so suddenly, and how popular movements managed to gain the momentum they did.

This thesis seeks to understand why this mobilization occurred, and how it could gain the momentum it did in the authoritarian contexts of Tunisia and Morocco. The comparison of socio-economic and socio-political contexts in these two countries will inform our study of how different protest movements did emerge, and why their impacts have been different.

Using a comparative study should help identifying and discussing relevant factors, notably by contrasting different outcomes in terms of protests and showing which variables have conditioned the scale and significance of these protests.

There are many perspectives in political science, economics, or political sociology that could be used to frame this discussion. The Gramsci School would surely focus on the undermining of hegemonic regimes and the transformation of means and relations of production in the region. Beatrice Hibou (2006; 2011) has a totally different point of departure, and uses the micro-sociological vocabulary of Michel Foucault to portray how authoritarian power in Tunisia was infused within the most mundane bureaucratic and economic processes. One could also draw upon the “Structures of Contestation”- model of Ellen Lust-Okar (2005). For lack of space, these approaches will not be included here; instead I opt for a framework of Social Movement Theories, and of studying how authoritarian corporatism has prevented an autonomous civil society from emerging in the region (see for instance Schmitter

1974).

The thesis focuses on the cases of Tunisia and Morocco in the sub-region of Francophone North Africa. These countries have adopted many of the same economic policies over the years, but their political regimes have evolved differently. Their socio-economic development levels are also different. All in all, however, I argue that one can compare relevant dimensions across the two cases.

Social Movement Theories (SMT) contains a range of tools for understanding mobilization processes under various political regimes. Nevertheless, most social movement models have been derived from a “Western” context, and presuppose the existence of a civil society that can act as driving force for mass contentious politics. Part two of this thesis therefore conducts a qualitative, empirical study of how mobilization could take place under the authoritarian conditions of Tunisia and Morocco. I conducted interviews with activists in the two countries to explore these phenomena, which have been widely covered in the global media, but which have not been the objects of much academic study as of yet.

Subsequently, I argue that mobilization in these countries represents a fascinating combination of traditional mobilization processes and the application of “new” communication resources that enabled the emergence of new popular discourse. In order to understand how discontent grows under authoritarian conditions when associative life is co-opted, I borrowed insights from *social constructivist* Social Movement Theories. Critics describe SMT as lacking in parsimony and clarity, and being so eclectic and contingent that it explains virtually “everything and nothing”. On the other hand, qualitative research should allow for variables and research design to be embedded in a specific social and political

context. I find social constructivist Social Movement Theory to be a broad perspective and meta-theory pointing more at where the researcher should focus than exactly which variables he or she must include.

When applied together with elements of a *Political-Opportunity-Structure* (POS) model of social movements, and a model of authoritarian corporatist regimes, I argue that the social constructivist framework proves useful for the purpose of this study. Of course, the analysis of new and unfolding phenomena in the Middle East might enable us to test and critique pre-established conceptual models, and possibly suggest modifications to such models. On a broader scale, theorists might argue whether Social Movement Theories derived from a “Western context” have universal applicability and can be transposed to the Middle Eastern context at all. All these questions should improve further studies of contentious politics in the Middle East.

I. Delimitation and Objectives of the Thesis

This study will highlight the most recent, and still ongoing, contention in Tunisia and Morocco. Furthermore, it will focus on the mostly secular, youth-led mobilization for political liberalization and improved economic opportunities that has taken place. It will only mention other forms of contention, such as Islamist protests, when these are relevant to the main objectives. The research puzzle concerning mobilization under an authoritarian state compels us to ask two questions, which are interlinked.

- First, why did contentious politics materialize in the recent socio-economic and socio-political contexts in both cases observed?
- Second, how did mobilization attain various degrees of intensity and impact in Tunisia and in Morocco?

The claims made by protesters obviously reflect their sense of grievance and injustice about current socio-economic and political conditions. The first objective must therefore be to map out major developments that have undermined the *status quo* (or the *ancien régime* in the case of Tunisia). The first empirical section of the study traces and compares the socio-economic troubles of Tunisia and Morocco all the way back to deficient policies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Secondly, this thesis will investigate how these grievances were translated into action. In order to address this puzzle, theories on contentious politics will be applied, looking at political opportunities and constraints/threats, the generation of collective action frames, and the relationship between regimes and protest

movements. These concepts will also help clarifying why protests in Tunisia and Morocco evolved along quite different paths.

I.2 Methods of the study¹

This study will employ mostly qualitative research methods, and will be based on primary sources in the form of interviews, and secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, web logs (blogs), and analytic and journalistic material retrieved online.

I.2.1 A Comparative Approach

A comparative study begs that I define accurately the concepts that are being studied and compared. Our two Maghreb cases share numerous cultural, historical, societal and religious characteristics. I argue in this thesis that their regimes and civil societies also share relevant features, despite the apparent differences between a

1 Research Ethics and Informed Consent

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the American University in Cairo had approved the ethical aspects of the research on May 29, 2011, prior to any field research (Please refer to Annex II). There is always an element of uncertainty pertaining to informed consent (Beauchamp, et al. 1982). Respondents might not have knowledge of social science research methods or terminology, and they have no means of knowing how the data might be disseminated at a later stage. However, the subjects of this research can be considered autonomous – they are generally outspoken, educated, resourceful individuals, and I assumed that they were capable of assessing the consequences of their own participation.

In any case, since I was interacting with human subjects in a volatile political environment, I followed a number of guidelines to reduce the risk for my interviewees. Notably, I decided *not* to use a recording device. Not recording the responses on tape unavoidably affects the reliability of data (Silverman 2010, 240). To strengthen the quality of the final analysis, however, I have quoted direct extracts from the responses given, and kept the discussion closely tied to the set of responses obtained. This should help in understanding how I investigated the topic and analyzed the data (Ibid, 300).

traditional monarchy like Morocco and Tunisia's republican regime. Moreover, the two countries can be compared to the rest of North Africa or the Middle East, and the surge in protests across the region during the spring of 2011 points to the fact that many countries in the region have similar social, economic and political problems.

Tunisia and Morocco are comparable because they do not have significant oil rent, unlike many Arab countries. Their political economies have therefore developed differently from neighboring Algeria, for instance. The lack of *rentier states* would seem to indicate that the Tunisian and Moroccan regimes are less immune to repeated societal pressures and economic crises. In comparison with other Middle Eastern regimes, Tunisia and Morocco have remained remarkably stable until recently, and their regimes have maintained a pro-Western orientation since independence (Pfeifer 1999).

I opt for a flexible comparative design inspired by the Most Similar Systems research design (MSSD) (Landman 2003). Due to a lack of space I will not elaborate further on background and control variables such as cultural, linguistic, historical and other features which Tunisia and Morocco share. The research design used here focuses on finding one or more independent variables which vary across the cases and may explain a given dependent variable, given that other dimensions are approximately similar. Although a complex dimension in itself, the outcome I want to focus on here is the *degree of contention*. A more specific conceptualization of this dimension will be given later.

The research design should allow for a study of how contentious politics in one country inspired protests in another, while differences in state-society relations and the articulation of grievances conditioned the outcomes of protests. I will single

out both general dimensions and more specific factors that appear to explain some of the variance between our cases, but I will not claim that these determine any outcomes, or that they are the sole relevant variables to the comparison. The numerous processes studied here are highly nuanced, and a thesis cannot do them all justice. Besides the differences, we shall also explore the similarities between the countries, which pertain particularly to our question of *why* protests have erupted.

When undertaking qualitative analysis based on survey data and socio-economic database materials, it is important to keep in mind the possible shortcomings of such data sets, especially when they concern developing countries (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 10, 134, 274). Collection of accurate data in such settings is often very difficult, and available data might have been distorted for political purposes.

I.2.2 Interviews: A tool for exploratory research

For the second main empirical chapter of this thesis, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with activists, bloggers and protest organizers in main cities in Tunisia and Morocco (Tunis, Sousse, Rabat, and Marrakesh). The interview guide (please refer to Annex III) contained the main questions and themes that I wanted to touch upon, but the interviews did not have to adhere strictly to this guide; as the interviews proceeded, I sometimes wanted to follow up on interesting points with additional questions, and the interviewees were quite free to elaborate on themes they found important. As a minimum, however, I sought to ensure that all topics were

covered at each interview – this to permit that a proper comparison could be made and common trends in the material analyzed.

Time and resource constraints, limitations on the availability of information about individual activists and their role, and geographical distance, set restrictions on the ways I could find suitable persons to interview. I cannot claim that the activists I talked to were representative of the larger population of activists in each country, and even less that they are representative of the crowds of protesters who joined them in Tunis, Casablanca, Rabat, and elsewhere.

A small sample size (20) and the unknown degree of representability in turn affected the reliability of the results obtained. One may also discuss critically the validity of any inference derived from in-depth interviews. One should always reflect on whether interviewees will use a different discourse and emphasize different things when they talk to researchers than when they interact with their own social environment. The interview setting is a specific social setting which affects the content and form of communication between interviewer and interviewee, and the data retrieved are in essence subjective narratives conveyed by the interviewee. Finally, the wording of questions will inevitably affect the responses obtained, both in terms of the content and the discourse used to convey the content (Silverman 2010, 128, 225; Roulston, de Marrais, and Lewis 2003, 654)².

2 Silverman also brings up the problems associated with carrying out *retrospective* studies.

For this particular study, events in Morocco have unfolded until the present day, while the mobilization phase I focus on in Tunisia took place about a year ago – which might affect the answers people give, because people generally view the past “through the lens of the present” (Silverman 2010, 192). However, the popular contention in Tunisia took a long time to subside, and the mass protests in January 2011 are still in a past so recent that I find it justifiable to ask for recollections of these events from interviewees.

II - Conceptual Framework and Theory Review

II.1 State-society relations and the authoritarian corporatist order

In order to study the recent surge in contentious politics in the Middle East, it is necessary to define key concepts and develop a theoretical framework. The fundamental argument that contentious politics “emerge from groups in society which advance claims against the state” (Goldstone 2001, 142) begs a further study of how regimes in Tunisia and Morocco related to their respective societies, and more specifically, to *organized civil society*: to labor unions, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), among others. Both regimes used co-optation, manipulation, repression and subjugation alternatively and in varying doses to control major organized groups in society. These mechanisms have worked in slightly different ways in monarchic Morocco and republican Tunisia, but I argue in line with Eshteshami and Murphy (1996, 757) that the two political orders have been comparable nonetheless.

Both represent varieties of a Middle Eastern *authoritarian corporatist state*, and scholars argue further that these are examples of states ruled by means of an “authoritarian bargain”. This means that civil society has mostly remained acquiescent and loyal to the regime, which has provided a degree of social justice, economic security, and development in return. The concept of an “authoritarian contract” or “ruling bargain” in Middle Eastern states has been shared widely among

analysts (Al Sayyid 1995, 139; Brumberg 1995, 233; Paczynska 2010, 36). This notion has also been contested, but I adopt it here with the knowledge that it requires substantial contextualization and nuance to be useful. In the Middle East, Kamrava (2007, 202) argues that the authoritarian bargain has been characterized by intra-elite conflicts, leading to the prevailing elite creating a direct link to the masses. Such populist authoritarianism (Brumberg 1995, 233) built on a pervasive ideology, which claimed that society constituted an “organic whole”, where the various components are obliged to function together in harmony. As we shall see, the Moroccan government has never espoused this ideology formally, but it has used corporatist mechanisms and a substantial public sector to develop the country and retain its grip on power (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 198-201). Middle Eastern regimes have typically developed special relationships with certain constituencies within the state, for instance organized labor, civil servants or state-owned enterprises, and offered them considerable side-payments for their loyalty (Kamrava 2007, 202).

The objective of corporatism has been to tone down class politics and other horizontal loyalties, which rulers have perceived as disruptive. It is clear that many Middle Eastern governments have preferred to institutionalize vertical bonds between the state and sectors of social and economic life, in order to control potentially rival loci of power (see Schmitter 1974, 93-94, 106). In republics such as Tunisia, the one-party state embodied the corporatist model. Leaders and cadres of the single party controlled the state, and used internal channels to mediate with different interest groups (Anderson 1986, 232-250). Society was organized along economic sectors, and the segmentation of workers into different, and often rivaling, unions, which were kept under tight political control, prevented potential class

mobilization. Challenges to this order were denounced as undermining national cohesion, and were swiftly suppressed (Eshteshami & Murphy 1996, 755).

As the vertical ties between the state and certain constituencies deepened, the two became increasingly dependent on each other, which further kept challenges to the state's dominance in check. The establishment of such ties often happened in informal ways: The extension of a patrimonial system emanating from the executive has been a typical feature of Middle Eastern regimes. Clientelistic networks were often twinned with more overt political control of associations, such as in Tunisia, or they thrived as informal bonds between the regime and organizations that were seemingly autonomous, such as in Morocco.

In the case of Moroccan politics, analysts have underlined the importance of the *Makhzen* as the “backbone” of the state. The concept of *Makhzen* has become synonymous with central power in contemporary Morocco. This network is clearly clientelistic, and links the monarchy to various individuals, associations and institutions, while “controlling power networks, patrimonial exchanges, and distribution of wealth” (Layachi 1998, 31). The *Makhzen* also includes much of associative life, and Brumberg (1995) concludes that authoritarian corporatism, clientelist largesse, and a weak and subordinate civil society are all complementary and reinforcing phenomena.

II.1.1 Civil society under authoritarian corporatism

There has been a lively debate concerning whether the term “civil society”, in its liberal, Lockean sense, can be applied in the Middle Eastern context at all. Locke and de Tocqueville represent the tradition where autonomous organized interests are viewed as posing a necessary and useful counterweight to the state (Layachi 1998, 13-14). From a liberal view, civil society is commonly viewed as the “organization of society at the level between the family and the state” (Brynen, Korany and Noble 1995, 11).

Moreover, observers who approach Middle Eastern societies from a liberal perspective will typically include an aspect of “civility” in their definition of civil society: Organizations only form part of this vision of “civil society” if they adhere to principles of pluralism, moderation, and tolerance of different views. Hence, many analysts have tended to exclude Islamist associations in the Middle East from their notion of civil society, because they have perceived the latter as authoritarian and intolerant (Zubaida 1992, 3). This exclusionary categorization can be problematic, because Islamist organizations have typically been much more successful than other movements in the Middle East (Sater 2007). The liberal view is of course that a modern, vibrant and pluralistic civil society is a necessary vehicle to advance political liberalization and democratization in authoritarian states.

There have been diverging views on the actual influence of liberal civil society organizations in the Middle East. Especially organizations working on human rights, political liberalization, and democratization issues, have more often than not been described as weak, fragmented, and numerically few, although their conditions

have improved over the years. They have also been characterized as “disconnected” from large segments of the population in the respective countries. Due to the difficult conditions for advocacy organizations under repressive conditions, it is also typical that some of the most successful organizations in the region have been de-politicized charities (Kandil 2010, 48-49).

Different explanations have been suggested for why Arab civil society is weak. From our discussion of authoritarian corporatism above, it is clear that the state has sought to tie all economic and social sectors of the country to itself in a hierarchical fashion, which has weakened the autonomy of the associative sphere. Especially organizations representing organized labor, students, lawyers and other key political forces have been co-opted, and regimes tried for decades to negotiate special relationships with resourceful constituencies of the middle classes, constituencies which could otherwise challenge the current order and lead regime change. Additionally, of course, regimes such as the Tunisian and Moroccan ones have always been able to wield a variety of economic, legal, and police tools against any elements of civil society viewed as challenging the *status quo*.

There are Orientalist scholars who have argued that authoritarian corporatism and its accompanying docile civil society constitute the “natural” socio-political order in Middle Eastern societies, because it conforms to the essence of the region’s Islamic culture. However, these arguments carry an essentialist bias, and disregard historical *path-dependent* developments such as colonialism, the weakness of the indigenous capitalist middle class, and super power meddling in domestic affairs during the Cold War, which were not conducive to the founding of liberal democracies on the “Western” model (Zubaida 1993, 123).

II.1.3 Economic order and economic reform under authoritarianism

The recent protests in Tunisia and Morocco reflect the economic grievances of an increasing number of people, grievances that are echoed by calls for political reform. Arab states have been compelled to liberalize their economies over the last three decades, and this in turn has made them less able to deliver on their end of the authoritarian bargain (Paczynska 2010, 37).

The authoritarian corporatist order is fundamentally economic as well as political, and the ambitious development plans and socioeconomic visions that were adopted by most Middle Eastern states after World War II led to a heavy statist involvement in their respective economies. Middle Eastern regimes typically mobilized around an ideology of economic redistribution and social justice, and they therefore also dismissed the private sector as a reliable partner in the development venture. In any case, indigenous entrepreneurial classes were usually small and relatively weak in financial terms, and perceived as too closely tied to foreign commercial interests as well as too reminiscent of colonial times, to play any great role in the newly independent states (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 181).

Along with the state's predominant role in the economy came its authoritarian political program of corporatist bargains and the rally around the national interest, with political liberalization put on hold indefinitely. This statist involvement was almost as extensive in the traditional Middle Eastern monarchies as in the fledgling republics (Ibid, 202). State-led development was generally flawed, however: Import-substitution industrialization (ISI), centralized price and import controls, and the exponential expansion of the public sector engendered major structural deficiencies

(Brumberg 1995, 234). Countries across the region were often financing expensive welfare and education programs, while subsidizing the prices of some staple foods and key commodities. Import substitution industrialization, for its part, turned into a daunting logistical and technological challenge that required considerable imports.

State interventionism in the economy proved inefficient and conducive to worsening corruption and clientelism. Public sector officials engaged in rent-seeking rather than achieving greater productivity³. Due to the fact that authoritarian systems legitimized their rule with a populist program of employment and development, and in reality used massive clientelism to buy political acquiescence, regimes across the Middle East were loath to enforce major changes in this system (Farsoun and Zacharia 1995, 262). Ultimately, though, countries across the board ran into balance-of-payments crises, and had to request loans from the international monetary institutions. With these loans came demands for economic austerity and structural adjustment of their economies (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 220). Structural adjustment normally entailed the following points: Fiscal discipline, tax reform, liberalization of interest rates, the streamlining of exchange rates, trade liberalization, encouragement of foreign direct investment (FDI), privatization, deregulation and securing property rights (Williamson 1990, cited in Richards and Waterbury 2008, 229).

As Richards and Waterbury (Ibid. 221) point out, this process was inevitably painful. The standards of living for people on fixed incomes declined, unemployment

3 Richards and Waterbury (2008, 17) define rent-seeking behavior as the search for strategic privileges in domestic markets, privileges that the public authorities often control. Evans (1995, 34 cited in Kamrava 2007) enumerates rentier mechanisms such as controlling remittance flows, rationing foreign exchange, restricting import licenses and tariffs etc. These were frequently used in the Maghreb.

soared – even among the highly educated, and groups that had enjoyed corporatist privileges under the old system found themselves under aggravating economic and social pressures (Farsoun and Zacharia 1995, 263). This pertained increasingly to the middle class groups – civil servants, employees of state-owned corporations and so on – which were so crucial to the authoritarian bargain from the outset.

Unemployment soared among recent graduates who had expected to be incorporated into the existing structures. This led to repeated crises and social unrest in all countries concerned, to which regimes increasingly answered with repression.

Leaders adopted a discourse of economic and political transformation in response, but the restructuring did not lead to genuine democratization in any Arab country. Elections were held in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Jordan, and censorship of the press and restrictions on forming associations were relaxed in several countries. Observers tended to believe that Arab countries would join the “Third Wave of Democratization” that was simultaneously taking place in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, 373-374).

However, reforms were quickly abandoned and authoritarian practices reasserted in all these countries, except maybe Morocco. Part of explaining the different outcomes on our dependent variable must be exactly to contrast these regime mechanisms between Tunisia and Morocco. More generally, Eshteshami and Murphy (1996, 763) argue that the brief democratic interlude was only intended to defuse political tensions while painful economic reforms were carried out. As Luciani stated, “countries revert to democratic rule in times of economic crisis, including IMF-imposed structural adjustment packages” (1988, 463). Ultimately, the new, liberalized economic order has not been mirrored by enduring political

liberalization.

As a result, regime legitimacy has declined over time, as the successes of Islamist groups, and the surge in riots observed across the Middle East, testify to. The failed political liberalization in Algeria from 1988 to 1992, and riots in Moroccan cities, such as in Fes in 1990, has also been the focus of French scholarship on the Maghreb. LeSaout and Rollinde (1999) discuss the prevalence of riots in their *Émeutes et Mouvements sociaux au Maghreb*. They see riots as symptoms of a growing opposition and as “safety valves” for people to let off anger against increasingly exclusionary forms of authoritarianism and economic liberalism. Conceptually, they view riots as a “language” of contention in closed political systems where no other meaningful channel for expressing grievances exists.

The French authors also emphasize the limited scope of riots: The reach and duration of the latter are limited, and rioters most often mobilize around basic economic grievances such as the price of bread. Hence, the Maghreb regimes have grown accustomed to these disturbances, and have developed the repressive capacities to quell them (Gallisot 1989). Le Saout and Rollinde (1999, 28) concur with Gallisot (1989) that the nationalist development project in the Maghreb has broken down. The regional states have turned into predatory apparatuses at the disposal of the new bourgeoisie of business, bureaucrat, and police/army elites, which they label *l'État-policier* and *l'État-business*. The question then becomes how the 2010-2011 protests could move from riots to “revolution”, for which the North African governments were not prepared.

II.2 Theory Review on Contentious Politics

To understand how widespread and sustained mobilization actually materialized in Morocco and Tunisia, I need to add an extra dimension to our conceptual framework. The socio-economic decline I sketched above resulted in economic and political grievances, but this does not tell us *how* it was possible to bring people out to contest these conditions. Sidney Tarrow (1998, 142), a theorist of social movements, defines a *cycle of contention* as follows: “a phase of heightened conflict across the social system; (...) the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities”. It is clear that the sudden rise of protest movements in the Arab world since December 2010 represents such a cycle. Social movement studies, an interdisciplinary sub-field of the social sciences, suggest tools to approach and dissect these complex processes. This diverse sub-field draws upon political science, political psychology, and sociology, among others.

Marxist works have undoubtedly influenced strands of social movement studies, but the main approaches that I apply in this thesis all have a liberal inclination. In fact, the studies of *collective behavior* that predated social movement studies placed much emphasis on individual rationality and self-interest. Mancur Olson (1965) posited that the classic “free-rider” problem made it an apparent paradox that rational individuals would organize into social movements in the first place, and he ended up suggesting a new framework for understanding how such organization could occur (DeFay 1999, 19). Inspired by Olson, theorists forged what

became known as the *resource mobilization* approach. The theory kept the assumptions and precepts of methodological individualism, but scholars tended to use decisions made at the organizational level as starting point for analysis (Tarrow 1998, 16; DeFay 1999, 20).

The resource mobilization model was soon criticized for making problematic assumptions about rational individuals and the dynamics of organizations, and for ignoring the importance of ideology and collective identity for mobilizing people. New approaches such as social constructivism, post-positivism, and the general “cultural and linguistic turn” in the social sciences inspired a new generation of academics. Charles Tilly, although not a social constructivist himself, was one of the prominent social movement theorists who singled out the unsolved conceptual challenge of determining whether external causal mechanisms, or rather purposive agency, drove contention forward (1978, 6).

Social constructivism focused especially on the importance of *framing*: Frames are interpretative schemes that people use to make sense of events and to guide collective action (Snow 1986). McAdam (1982, 51) stated: “before collective action can get underway, people must collectively define their situations as unjust”. When people are going through such a collective process, one observes the generation of a *mobilization potential* (Kriesi et al. 1995, 5). social constructivists have further suggested that social movements strive to achieve frame alignment – which means that they make use of collective frames that resonate with the individual frames of people they try to mobilize (Snow 1986)⁴.

4 Curtis and Zurcher (1973, 53) also present the notion of *multi-organizational fields*, which are defined as the totality of organizations with which the social movement might establish linkages. The configuration of multi-organizational fields might affect the strength and coherence of a social movement – not all alliances of relevant organizations are necessarily supportive of the movement

Frame production and alignment are clearly discursive and intersubjective processes. *Intersubjectivity* refers to shared meanings constructed by people in interaction with each other, and the process by which these shared meanings are continuously contested and renegotiated within a group. Formulating the concept of *intersubjectivity* was arguably an attempt to move beyond the methodological individualism of Olson and others (Melucci 1995, 45).

Dutch researcher Bert Klandermans suggested that these shared beliefs form the basis for a two-step mobilization process (1984, 586). Consensus mobilization is the process whereby a movement or a cluster of organizations attempts to gain as much support as possible for the collective good they seek to promote. Action mobilization is Klandermans's term for the act of calling people up to protest, and it presupposes that consensus mobilization has taken place beforehand.

The *Political-Opportunity-Structure* (POS) approach is a different model, owing in part to the path-breaking work of Charles Tilly (1978), and later Doug McAdam (1981). Tarrow (1998, 19-20) specifies that the POS model focuses on changes in political opportunity structures *external* to the social movement itself, but accepts that it is complementary to the social constructivist paradigm, which he also treats at length. Tarrow purports that “people engage in contentious politics when patterns of political opportunities and constraints change”. Political opportunities are defined as a perceived set of clues for when contentious politics will emerge: “consistent (...) dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics.” The constraints are defined as “factors – like repression, but

(cited in Klandermans 1997, 142).

(4 continued): In our cases, the concept of multi-organizational fields can be brought in to analyze the cohesiveness and effectiveness of civil society pertaining to the protests.

also like the capacity of authorities to present a solid front to insurgents – that discourage contention” (Ibid, 20). Briefly, Tarrow enumerates the general opportunity changes he finds most important: 1) Increased political access, mostly by means of elections – 2) deepening divisions among elites, – 3) political realignments strengthening the protest movement– 4) influential elite groups defect to protesters’ camp – and 5) repression is moderate or inconsistent (Ibid, 77-80). However, he admonishes that these are contingent dimensions, and that other dimensions may be more relevant in other empirical cases than his own. Opportunity changes may occur either before or simultaneously with the protest cycle, but Tarrow’s model also brings in more stable aspects of opportunity-constraints: *State strength* and *repression* (Ibid. 81).

Our empirical study will endeavor to ascertain whether Tarrow’s political opportunities for contention actually did open in Tunisia and Morocco before protests erupted, or whether other political opportunities or constraints must be identified. Alternatively, contention flared up under a stable authoritarian system. In the case of Tunisia, the latter narrative has been presented in most media and early analyses of the events. Kuran (1991) illustrates that when collective action does break out under depressed conditions of organization, “(...) it turns from a trickle into a torrent as people learn for the first time that others like themselves have taken to the streets.” This is reminiscent of the cycle of contention in Tunisia, as we shall see. A preliminary reading on Morocco, on the other hand, seems to indicate that political opportunities had indeed opened there throughout the decade of King Mohamed VI’s rule, and that the state had become much more tolerant of protests. The question remains to what extent the most recent wave of contention represents a qualitatively

new phenomenon also in Morocco.

II.2.1 Consensus as the groundwork for collective action

Shared action frames and identities may arguably empower restive, repressed societies in relation to their authoritarian masters. For this process to take root, however, I need a more specific model of how collective action frames are generated. Gamson (1995, 89-90), a prominent theorist of collective action, identifies three key factors that must be present for a consensus to become a plausible platform for such action:

- The *injustice* factor is usually defined as outrage over the way the government is treating a social problem, most often originating from a feeling of illegitimate inequality or a feeling that key moral principles are being violated (see Klandermans 1997, 38). Gamson highlights the emotional side of injustice, and its potential as a driving force for participation (1995, 89-91). Strong media images might often produce compelling emotional reactions of this kind. Melucci mentions that mobilization cannot simply be reduced to a cost-benefit calculation, because adherents have to be emotionally attached to their cause (1995, 45; see also McAdam 1982, 51).
- The *shared identity* aspect, which Melucci described as indispensable (1995, 44-47; Klandermans 1997, 41). Shared identity is a ubiquitous phenomenon, but is only politically relevant if one is able to define a concrete “us” in

opposition to a clearly defined target for protest, “them”, which could be the government, for instance. The inverse is also true: If the target of a grievance is too abstract or too diffuse, or not known, people will not move (Gamson 1995, 90).

- The *agency* dimension - People need to believe that something “can be done” about an issue. A dissemination of the belief that collective action can be successful is related to a perceived opening of political opportunities (Klandermans 1997, 42). Under authoritarian conditions, agency will often be hindered by passivity and fear. State media will echo the regime’s discourse of quietism, law and order, and portray mobilization as a dramatic breach of social stability (Gamson 1995, 96). However, when there are media images of successful action readily available, people find it easier to join a cause and identify the target (Ibid, 104). Gamson concludes that agency should be treated as a “dormant characteristic” in human beings, and as something one should try to awaken (Ibid, 106).

II.2.2 Media resources for collective action frame generation

The aforementioned dimensions beg a study of how media resources could be used by activists during the uprisings in the Arab world in the spring of 2011. Both Klandermans (1997) and Gamson (1995) are quick to highlight the role of the media in disseminating certain discourses and generating action frames. The introduction of the Internet to the Middle East has been the most momentous step towards a fundamental media transformation in the region, which has enabled an unprecedented potential for connectivity, notably through new social media (Abdullah 2010, 70-75). The region was previously known for its low scores on all indices of globalization. Kamrava (2007, 204) posits that Middle Eastern regimes have shown little interest in increasing transparency, opening information flows and easing restrictions on civil society – prerequisites of globalization which would threaten the regimes. However, new communication technologies have slowly become available to at least strata from the middle-classes upwards.

Cottle (2011, 648) argues that these new media have been fused directly into political processes *within* the recent Arab uprisings. In societies where there are no real ways of political claims-making outside the regime, social media create a new, highly inclusive, and informal space for exchanging opinions and engaging in politics (Dahlgren 2009, cited in Cottle 2011). Online, new identities can be created, shared, and transformed, and new interests and demands identified by a large number of individuals. Such live communication helps to embolden formerly passive individuals, for instance by appealing to the emotional aspect Gamson (1995) noted. Aspects of collective identity, and a sense of who the “enemy” is, can clearly be built

and sustained online, and images of protests and of successful regime changes in other countries nourishes the *agency* aspect for increasing numbers of individuals (Cottle 2011, 654). At the same time, regimes have not hesitated to set strict controls on online content (Ibid. 653). Bloggers and activists have been harassed and arrested, and their pages shut down, e.g. in Tunisia. Nevertheless, a challenge for regimes has been the basic fact that cyberspace is not confined to actual geography: Leading online militants are often located abroad, or in unknown locations, as an “offshore” democratizing force.

The use of media and Internet also draws attention to the transnational impact of the ongoing events in the Maghreb: The revolution in Tunisia has undoubtedly had direct bearing on the occurrence of unrest in the rest of the Middle East over the last months. Tarrow can remind us that as long as the target of contention is the domestic regime, contention itself is not transnational – but ideas about contention, and the prospect of successful regime change, amount to a transnational *diffusion* of ideas and agency which alter calculations of opportunity and threat in similar settings (1998, 185).

II.2.4 Synthesis of the Conceptual Framework and hypotheses

To sum up the theoretical works above, I will suggest dependent and independent variables which must be examined and compared and the tentative relationship between them presented as a set of hypotheses. Our dependent concept is **degrees of contention**, and under this label I will examine the *speed* and *size* of demonstrations (action mobilization) and the “*radicalism*” (revolutionary or reformist) of protesters' demands. As indicated earlier, the dependent variable is *not* regime change per se, although it is natural to touch on this in the Tunisian case. The state's response to contention constitutes an integral part of the conditions for protest. From the general theories and preliminary readings reviewed above, one might suggest the following independent variables:

- Extent and impact of economic liberalization, also within cases across time (the last three decades).
- Extent and impact of political liberalization, also within cases across time (the last three decades).
- Legitimacy of the regime/perception of injustice
- Strength and cohesiveness of civil society
- Access to Internet and media resources
- Literacy and education levels
- Extent of consensus mobilization
- Perception of agency

These variables are all qualitative phenomena, so again one must be reminded that they are not necessarily discrete, exhaustive or possible to gauge with precision. Especially the importance of perceptions is difficult to assess. The purpose of this study is precisely to explore recent events with the ambition of detecting new factors and relationships. Thirdly, these factors do not correspond or pair up neatly with the dependent variables; rather, they impinge on each other and might function as intervening variables etc. in a system which cannot be fully defined and extricated here.

Based on these theoretical tools and preliminary insights I present the following general model of contentious politics in Tunisia and Morocco, containing four sub-hypotheses:

1. The “authoritarian bargain” is undermined as regimes renew their hold on power in different ways, while socio-economic and demographic changes affect increasing numbers of Tunisians and Moroccans negatively.
2. People use communication technologies to disseminate a *consensus* about grievances and injustice.
3. A triggering event sparks protests, which echo widely because of the widely shared sense of grievances – the pre-existing consensus. The intensity of grievances affects the intensity of protests.
4. The transnational diffusion of ideas becomes the “spark” in neighboring countries, and the cycle of contention spreads across borders.

III – Socio-economic Changes and Authoritarian Stagnation

III.1 Economic crises and structural adjustment

Our two cases, Tunisia and Morocco, both engaged in economic reforms and structural adjustment in the 1980s. These countries felt the disadvantages of their previous statist economic policies quite early: Tunisia effectively pioneered the *Infitah* reform package (which is better known from Egypt (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 239)) in the early 1970s, and Morocco followed suit with timid attempts at stabilization in 1977 (Ibid, 243). However, changes were restricted to improving the already state-dominated economy, with the government still in control of prices, credits and foreign exchange.

Neither country was able to prevent the misallocation of resources due to state control over the economy, and both wanted to avoid renegeing on promises about salary rises in the public sector and further growth in investments intended to create jobs. Being politically paralyzed, both the Moroccan and the Tunisian governments believed they could “grow through” the compounded shocks of falling oil and phosphate prices, international economic recession in the early 1980s, rising interest rates on international loans, drought, and, for Morocco, the costs of the war in Western Sahara (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 240, 243; Layachi 1998b, 57). This unwarranted optimism enticed both regimes to continue to borrow heavily from abroad, resulting in severe balance-of-payments crises.

Morocco, one of the most vulnerable economies in North Africa, had to bow to the pressure and accept structural adjustment in 1983. Tunisia followed suit in August 1986, after having proudly resisted for a long time (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 240). The leadership of aging Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba had become more and more erratic, and the coup d'état of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on November 7, 1987 was partly driven by the need for a predictable, pragmatic course in the country's economic policy. Thence, Ben Ali was committed to reforms, as was King Hassan II in Morocco.

The adjustment packages they signed on to included classical measures such as devaluing currencies, promoting exports, reducing tariffs and import protection, deregulating the banking sector, raising real interest rates, privatization, and reducing budget deficits (Beau and Tuquoi 1999, 147). Typically, the IMF and the World Bank wanted governments to have deficits no higher than 4% of GDP (Ibid, 220; Layachi 1998b 58-60). Subsidies were to be removed or reduced to a minimum (Perkins 2004, 170).

Unlike most other Middle Eastern and North African countries, Morocco and Tunisia were seen as very compliant with IMF conditionality. Both followed a conservative budgetary policy in the end of the 1980s, with Moroccan budget deficits falling to around 2% of GDP in the early 1990s (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 244). In both countries, real interest rates were positive and inflation reduced to a manageable 2-3%, in line with international recommendations. The World Bank praised Morocco for its impressive results in 1992, and Ben Ali's technocratic government has also cooperated closely with the international financial institutions in implementing macro-economic orthodoxy (Ibid, 239, 244). From 1987-1992, private

investment grew to 51% of the total, and by 1997 foreign investment in Tunisia was at \$500 million (Alexander 2010, 81). GDP growth also accelerated in both countries: For the period 1987-1992 it rose from 2.8% to 4.3% in Tunisia, and it stabilized at around 4% in Morocco (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 240). Later, Moroccan growth has been sluggish however, hovering around 2-3 percent for most of the 1990s and early 2000s (Ibid, 245).

Both countries persisted on continuing their reforms throughout the same decades. As the macro-economic indicators have come under control, the focus has shifted to the more challenging task of dealing with deregulation, rationalizing the public sector, increasing revenue, and finalizing institutional reforms. Fiscal measures were streamlined to favor investment rather than consumption, and efforts were made to ensure that private investors could obtain unfettered profits from their projects (Pfeifer 1999, 24).

In order to achieve the structural goals, Morocco and Tunisia also wanted to adhere to free-trade arrangements (Alexander 2010, 82; Bertelsmann Stiftung Online 2006). Morocco became associated with the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1987, and Tunisia followed suit in 1990. Especially important were the comprehensive free trade agreements Tunisia and Morocco negotiated with the European Union, their main trading partner, in 1995 and 1996 respectively. The two countries were the first on the Mediterranean's southern shore to be granted this privileged access to European markets and money (Alexander 2010, 84; Pfeifer 1999, 25). These free trade agreements were only politically acceptable because the transitional phases were long; it was envisaged that the removal of Tunisian tariffs would take place incrementally over 12 years, with full implementation in 2008

(Murphy 1999, 148). Moroccan non-tariff protection measures remained high until well into the early 2000s. In 2006 the World Bank conceded that “the degree of import protection left Morocco with a not very open economy” (2006a, 99). This entailed that leading political and economic actors in Morocco continue to seek rent as well.

Tunisia has maybe been more successful at economic integration. In 1996, the European Union (EU) entered a ten year-agreement with the Ben Ali regime to upgrade Tunisian businesses and ameliorate both the quality of products and efficiency of production – the so-called *mise à niveau*-program (Alexander 2010, 83). This support was coupled with further loans from international and bilateral lenders – in 2005, Tunisia had a new debt of \$19.2 billion, a large amount for an economy of its size (Ibid.).

Important challenges remained, and Richards and Waterbury highlight that the overall scorecard on reform is mixed for both countries (2008, 24, 245). Reducing budget deficits was not done by increasing revenue collection or widening tax collection, but by slashing public consumption and subsidies, and capping salaries and employment figures in the public sector. Both countries achieved great short-term income from privatization, but such revenue must be reinvested to add value. In most cases, this did not happen (Denoueux 2001, 75).

Privatization stagnated for a long time for political reasons in both countries – regimes preferred to preserve existing jobs and add new ones, albeit redundant, to stem the tide of unemployment (King 1994, 117). Tunisia started privatizing more strategic sectors over the last decade, but as we shall see, this process was not transparent. The same was the case in Morocco; when privatization of state

enterprises finally took place, allegations ensued that the sales benefited the politically well connected (Sater 2010, 103; interview with Younes M'Jahid, President of the Moroccan Journalists' Union 2011). Second, trade unions have resisted privatization ferociously, strikes and protests have slowed down productivity, and investors have often been reluctant to salvage these companies (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 245).

Beyond the agreements and macro-economic policies enumerated here, the institutional reforms associated with economic liberalization have been limited in both countries. Although evaluations by the IMF, the World Bank, and the EU have been full of praise, and the macro-indicators point in the desired direction, critics such as Hibou (2011) find that populism, clientelism, and statist interventions are still abundant. Under new economic conditions the special relationships between the state and key constituencies have been renegotiated and relabeled: Crucially, regimes are now closely tied to small private business elites in each country, private businesses have been sold to regime members, and we shall see that this new entanglement has damaged their legitimacy considerably.

On the other hand subsidies, cheap access to credit, and other populist measures to the middle classes were never cut entirely. Corporatism has been dismantled in a piecemeal fashion, especially in Tunisia where Ben Ali's regime was always compared to Bourguiba's. Tunisians expected education and services to be maintained. However, perceived inequalities grew as a result of the reforms, and especially the bulging cohorts of youth felt excluded from economic life. The same problem affected Morocco, but there a larger segment of the population had never been integrated into the statist economy, and they expected less from the authorities.

III.2 Unemployment and the challenge of educational reform

It is interesting to note that Morocco has been much less successful than Tunisia at developing its human capital. While Tunisia performed best in the region, with the highest enrollment ratios in secondary and higher education, Morocco's ratios are only one third of Tunisia's, and the former was ranked as one of the worst in the MENA region (Harmak 2008, cited in Boukhars 2011, 34). This is a crucial contrast to include in our further discussion of the difference between consensus mobilization and protests in Tunisia and Morocco. Illiteracy levels in Morocco are high among a population that is still relatively poor and rural, and the education system is old-fashioned. The result is an educational system which also produces graduates with degrees the economy does not need – there is a disconnect between the labor market and the educational system that has tremendous social consequences (Boukhars 2011, 31; Richards and Waterbury 2008, 119).

The situation in Tunisia was also problematic. Murphy (1999, 157-163) claims that education had spiraled into crisis already in the 1990s. Among other problems, it had become gradually more important for students and parents to nurture good connections with the ruling party *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (RCD) to secure access to stipends, elite schools, and sometimes even high grades (Ibid.). In short, regime reforms and privatization had contributed to aggravating social disparities within the education system.

When Tunisian students graduated, they also found an economy that could not absorb them. Even though Tunisia has marketed itself as a host country for advanced industries, most of the economic expansion has taken place in traditional

sectors and tourism, and there has been little demand for graduates – only 7.4% of those hired by manufacturing actually have higher education (Haddar 2010, 66).

Similar structural problems are apparent in Morocco, where as many as 45% of new graduates are unemployed (Boukhars 2011). In certain urban areas such as Casablanca the numbers may reach 70%, (in 2002, USAID estimated that total unemployment was 20%, and urban unemployment 36%, and levels increase with levels of education, and among women (cited in Boukhars 2011).

Even before the uprisings of the Arab spring, authors labeled the unemployment problem a major potential source of political instability. And the ripples on the surface were already showing; in Morocco, organized unemployed graduates stormed the headquarters of the *Istiqlal* party in Casablanca in 2007 because they were required to take another competitive exam to get jobs. In Rabat, daily sit-ins demanding the “Right to Work” have been held for years. The government has dealt with the problem in its own piece-meal, patronizing manner: 1000 graduates were given jobs in 2007, on the condition that they refrained from militancy in the streets (Badimon-Emperador 2007: 5). Similarly, the King and his technocrats have taken responsibility for highly publicized job-generating development projects, reinstating a new form of royal populism in the process (Boukhars 2011, 36). One must consider that the Monarchy has been able to follow this strategy because unemployed graduates, though an articulate group in Morocco, are relatively fewer than in more developed Tunisia. The variations in the numbers of graduates correspond with the disparities in education levels and the size of the middle classes, where Tunisia has a larger middle educated class than Morocco. All these factors in turn impinge levels of mobilization, as we shall see.

III.3 The rhetoric of reform and the reality of authoritarian renewal

Both Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hassan II in Morocco adopted a language of political reform while steering the course of economic adjustment. Ben Ali had to legitimize his rule in new ways, because Bourguiba's authoritarian bargain had come under threat. The result was the National Pact of 1988, where civil society and opposition parties were included (Murphy 1999, 174). The pact was intended to embody a new consensus around liberal values, but the specific promises were few.

Interestingly, the pact expressed a commitment by the government to honor human rights and civil and political freedoms (Ibid, 175). The "Tunisian Spring" was short-lived, however; Ben Ali used the Islamist threat from the *Al-Nahda* ("Renaissance") Movement as a pretext for building a new security state, and for curbing these liberties in practice in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ibid, 202). As the years went by, it was apparent to everyone that Ben Ali's rhetoric concerning constitutional safeguards and liberal democracy had only been window-dressing in a transitional phase (Alexander 2010, 54, 62-66).

Notably, the Ben Ali regime has manipulated electoral rules before every election; for example, by setting aside a few seats to opposition parties while at the same time making the latter irrelevant in the larger political context. The secular opposition has never had a chance to grow and reach out to the electorate, so it grudgingly accepted this form of co-optation in 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009. At most, these arrangements at the mercy of the executive granted the opposition a 25% share of the 212 seats in the Lower Chamber of Parliament (Ibid). Secondly, parties were

encouraged to compete over these few seats, and the ensuing “divide-and-rule” arrangement benefited only the hegemonic RCD (Alexander 2010, 62-66).

In Morocco, the reassertion of authoritarianism has occurred in more subtle ways, and therefore deserves a more detailed treatise here. Since the 1990s, it has become clear that the regime tolerates the emergence of civil society, and that fundamental freedoms such as freedom of association and freedom of expression have been gradually accommodated both in law and practice (Layachi 1998, 69-73). Another noteworthy development has been the easing of repression – King Hassan II set free political prisoners at the end of his reign, and Mohamed VI has acknowledged the human rights abuses that happened during the *années de plomb* in the 1960s and 1970s. In this regard, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up already in King Hassan’s days to investigate human rights abuses (Storm 2007). This is a very notable difference from the Tunisian context.

Opposition groups were allowed to form and work in Morocco, civil society expanded, and elections have been held regularly since the 1990s (1993, 1997, 2002, 2007) - all to ease the pressures ensuing from economic transformation, population growth, rural-urban migration, unemployment, and other crises which compounded each other.

Morocco’s political party system has roots from decades back, and is composed of a wide specter of groups and coalitions. Analysts are quick to emphasize the shortcomings of this party landscape. First of all, many political parties have been set up by the *Makhzen* itself, and represent only the interests of the regime and the administration (Layachi 1998, 100). Secondly, all parties can be evaluated as organizationally weak and missing active constituencies that they can

mobilize to create any real counterweight to the executive or to each other (Boukhars 2011, 61). Parties are based on corporatist loyalties and personal connections.

There is also a very problematic disconnect between the parties and their political platforms: Ideology plays no role when electoral alliances and coalitions are negotiated, something that confuses voters. Indeed, the liberalization of the party system was a slow process led “top-down” by the Monarchy, and the parties are still deferential to the Palace (Sater 2010, 83).

Boukhars claims that the King does not hesitate to exercise his powers. There are many anecdotes about him overturning ministerial recommendations, or issuing *Dahirs* (decrees) concerning key civil servant appointments, etc. on which the Ministers are not consulted. The same applies to new political initiatives, which originate rather with the King and his close advisors than with party politicians. Under Hassan II, the government functioned as a committee, the role of which was to implement projects emanating from the King, his private coterie of technocratic advisors, and the *Makhzen*. This purely managerial role has continued under Mohamed VI, even though he claims that his role only complements that of the Council of Ministers (Sater 2010, 83).

The secluded group of royal councilors effectively constitutes a shadow government that has much more influence than the official government. Mohamed VI has recruited many of the best technocrats and administrators in the country to his councils, and these people have often produced viable and forward-looking plans for further economic and administrative reforms and improvements. The problem remains, of course, that this group is completely exempt from any public accountability or scrutiny, and that decision-making procedures are opaque

(Boukhars 2011, 51-53).

Furthermore, these technocratic elites, which now head all major government institutions, have been co-opted by the *Makhzen*, and if they ever advocated any systemic changes, they almost always acquiesce after having been offered administrative influence, prestigious jobs, and high salaries (Sater 2010, 75). In some ways, then, the technocratic apparatus around King Mohamed VI resembles the administration that surrounded Ben Ali in the 1990s – the latter was seen as surrounding himself with a circle of managers who could implement reforms while being shielded from criticism. In addition, Ben Ali prevented any technocrats from emerging as leading personalities of their own, and he constantly shuffled them from position to position in order to ensure that they did not build their own patronage networks or constituencies (Murphy 1999, 217-218).

This was a contrast to his predecessor Habib Bourguiba, who had enjoyed being an arbiter among competing interests and networks – an open “game of divide-and-rule” was surely Bourguiba’s leadership style (Ibid). Bourguiba was an expert at people management (Alexander 2010, 115), while Ben Ali ruled by means of a centralized, insulated technocracy (Ibid). Perhaps the Moroccan King has been able to do some of both - he also enjoys a role as “supreme arbiter” among competing factions and interests, which he keeps tied to him at the same time (Sater 2010, 85-86). In Tunisia, Ben Ali's increasingly insular regime lost some of its alliances with key interests, meaning that it also lost legitimacy over time.

The Moroccan Parliamentary system I mentioned above is an example of Monarchic influence over the polity. The Parliament provides an arena for competing interests, but the King retains ultimate decision-making prerogatives (Zerhouni 2008,

219-220). Parties are kept weak because they fight each other, while the Assembly mostly serves as a “rubber stamp” to approve initiatives from the Palace without debate. Moroccans call it a *Chambre d’enregistrement*, which derogatorily means that it only makes records of, and adds legitimacy to, the King’s wishes (Boukhars 2011, 44, 74). A de-legitimization of Parliament and elected politicians has only served the *Makhzen*, and underpinned the Monarch’s popularity (Zerhouni 2008, 217- 219).

One case where the *Makhzen* might have seen its power curtailed was under the *gouvernement d’alternance* of Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi from 1998 onwards. Youssoufi had been a long-standing opponent of King Hassan, and the latter appointed him to attenuate the authoritarian image of his regime. However, Youssoufi's power was still severely restricted by Royal prerogatives, and he had to rely on political forces straddling the political landscape to secure a coalition. In other words, this effort to “bring the Leftists to power” was unable to break with the democratically deficient system of the past, and King Mohamed appointed several technocratic Prime Ministers during the early 2000s, limiting the political legacy of *alternance* (Ibid.).

The main difference from Tunisia's short-lived liberalization was still that the Moroccan Monarchy had renegotiated its relationship with key constituencies in a subtle way, and without reverting to repression. This capacity to adhere to a reformist discourse might have shored up the King's legitimacy among important groups, while Ben Ali on his part was increasingly seen as aloof and corrupt.

III.4 The worsening Problem of Corruption

Of course, corruption has been an endemic problem both in Tunisia and Morocco at all levels of society. In Morocco, corruption has been a widespread problem throughout, and Transparency International (TI) saw Morocco dip on its global rankings from 45th place in 1999 to 80th in 2008 (Boukhars 2011, 26). A large majority of Moroccans acknowledge that corruption is deeply embedded into the workings of public institutions, and they find the government's efforts against it to be completely ineffectual (Ibid, 27). Some will even concede that they do not think corruption is dysfunctional – it is just the way the Moroccan system “works” (Hibou and Tozy 2000).

According to TI again, Morocco is one of the hardest hit countries (if not the worst) in the entire Arab World. In 2007, the *Cour des Comptes* (Audit Court) published a much-publicized report indicting the country's governance and corruption culture. It listed the paying of bribes, the recruitment of personnel based on connections rather than competence, waste of public funds, absenteeism among public officials, political and bureaucratic corruption, and clientelism of all sorts. The report, produced by 200 magistrates under the King's control, testifies to the importance the King seemingly assigns to dealing with this dysfunctional administrative culture (Ibid, 26; Sater 2010, 80).

Acknowledging these problems might fuel sympathy towards the King's reform-oriented rhetoric and enshrine his image as a paternalistic leader that wants the best for his country. This is in contrast to Ben Ali, who was viewed as enriching himself personally at the people's expense (Beau and Tuquoi 1999). However, in the

Moroccan case one must also ask whether the *Makhzen*, the parties, and other key groups have an actual will or even ability to combat corruption. Mechanisms of patronage are assuredly at the very core of how the *Makhzen* runs the country. Privatization and deregulation of economic life has not helped, with well-positioned businessmen and *regime* figures being able to reap company shares at low prices, and securing access to new licenses, privileged access to credit, etc. (Sater 2010, 103; Younes M'Jahid, interview 2011).

In Tunisia, the stories about corruption multiplied over the years. Especially French works dig into the successive scandals in which the Ben Ali regime was implicated (Lamloum and Ravenel 2002, Beau and Tuquoi 1999, Beau and Graciet 2009). The *Neo-Destour* party, and its successor the RCD, had always been clientelistic structures gravitating around the President and tying various constituencies and regions to his regime. In fact, some observers advance the contested notion that Ben Ali had merely recreated former President Habib Bourguiba's populist system.

Observers also notice that the Tunisian authoritarian system has always been more populist than corporatist, meaning that the RCD, trade unions, and other key organizations were never intended to represent corporatist interests "upwards" in any way, but just to channel patronage and commands from the "top down" (Alexander 2010, 113; Interview with Mamdouh, NGO chairman, 2011⁵). Even though this conclusion is probably too categorical, Ben Ali's populist ideology gradually became more and more pervasive. Since the days of the National Pact in 1988, the Ben Ali regime had underlined the importance of a national consensus benefiting the entire

5 The real names of my interviewees have been kept confidential for safety reasons, except in a few cases where respondents explicitly gave informed consent to me using their true identity.

social body, and this notion became one of several tools to tie people to the paternalistic figure of the President. Additionally, incrementalism and a political culture of moderation were portrayed as the “Tunisian way”, thus restricting the public space for legitimate contention or pluralistic politics (Hibou 2011, 60).

The President, just like the Moroccan King, launched social development funds that were under his personal control⁶. While the money doled out to orphanages, schools, women’s leagues, *et cetera* as part of Ben Ali's mass politics was appreciated by large numbers of Tunisians, people realized that Ben Ali's state distributed less than what the previous regime had done before liberal reforms began. But most importantly, stories of corruption within Ben Ali’s inner circle proliferated and punched holes in the official discourse about a “welfare state” in Tunisia. While the RCD party and the corporatist system came under pressure from a banal populism, the informal circle of families around Ben Ali was monopolizing political and economic power.

This clique was popularly called “Les Trabelsi”, even though they included more people than just the family of Leila Trabelsi, Ben Ali’s wife. She became a symbol of the regime’s greed, however, and at the end her family’s reputation was damaged beyond repair. Notably, the families were implicated in cases of outright theft, smuggling, and money laundering, which awarded them the nickname of “mafias” (Reem, Ahmed, Saida, interviews 2011; Kirkpatrick 2011).

The liberalization of the economy was one process they managed to manipulate: Few companies were privatized in Tunisia without someone from the “clans” obtaining inside access to shares in profitable ventures, or to lucrative

6 The fund known as the *Fonds de solidarité Nationale* was especially notorious. It was set up by the president himself and operated with no form of financial oversight (Hibou 2011, 194).

commercial licenses, or even key corporate board positions (Beau and Graciet 2009). Banks, infrastructure, and media were privatized in turn, always under a veil of neo-liberal rhetoric which foreign donors and observers tended to accept at face value, but with assets *de facto* still controlled by a family that did not distinguish between their private finances and those of the state (Nawaat Online 2010, 34). And, Tunisians were aware of this – already in 1997, a secret anonymous tract had circulated in Tunis denouncing “tentacular corruption” (Sadiki 2002, 68). To a larger extent than in Morocco, economic wealth was assembled on a few hands, and the gap between the very rich and the increasingly poor became more and more blatant.

Regardless of how pervasive the manipulation of the economic sphere in Tunisia actually was, investors became gradually more reluctant to participate in new projects because the ruling families were incessantly extorting concessions and side payments, and because the overall investment climate turned more and more politicized (Haddar 2010, 64). In economic terms then, the authoritarian bargain was replaced by a parasitic system in Tunisia. The authoritarian bargain was of course never an even deal, but most people had accepted economic security in return for loyalty since Bourguiba’s days. Crucially, one observes that Ben Ali lost important alliances with the business elites and upper classes, and that he based his rule on a gradually narrower group of close individuals. This isolation was not balanced out by Ben Ali's token charitable activities, and the fact that his closest aides were widely resented by the people hurt his position even further.

At times Ben Ali leaned towards mitigating some of the negative effects of his own neo-liberal reforms. Hibou (2011, 182) argues that Ben Ali’s regime functioned as a “security pact” more than a bargain – the pact was issued and

enforced unilaterally by the regime over society. The security pact entailed that the state would protect the people against all dangers, be they political or social. It was first of all intended to stem the rise of Islamism, which had become the ultimate rationale for developing the security state. And the security forces grew exponentially during Ben Ali's term, as did their surveillance powers (Hamadouche and Zabir 2007, 268). Commentators described the whole country as one big *Commissariat de Police* (Sadiki 2002, 68). In fact, the country had as many police officers as France, a country with six times its population (Schraeder and Derissi 2011, 6).

While the Ben Ali regime and its ruling families were privatizing the economic sphere, they were also viewed as "privatizing the state," (Hibou 2006, 196; Mamdouh, interview 2011) this did not just mean a delegation of regulatory or administrative functions. Increasingly, the traditional administrative hierarchy was supplanted by an informal, personal structure embedded within pre-existing institutions and RCD party cells. In ways reminding us of the Moroccan *Makhzen*, a new clientelist network emanated from the ruling family clique, with agents placed all over the official administrative apparatus. This shadowy structure equaled a "state within a state", and arguably included a private police, a "private justice system", and private intelligence agencies at the exclusive disposal of the inner circles of Ben Ali. Unlike the neo-Makhzenian institutions of Mohamed VI, Ben Ali's private apparatus did not have a recognized existence and public purpose, which could have assigned them at least a slight degree of legitimacy. Additionally, even though this parallel structure was probably intended to pre-empt any challenges and counterbalance a lack of support outside it, it is obvious in retrospect that it was not

solid enough to repress the unexpected popular wave of January 2011.

If Ben Ali's "shadow state" turned him into an arbiter between various group interests and patronage networks, he did not succeed in handling this role as well as the Moroccan Kings usually have. They are more accustomed to facing a pluralistic configuration of economic interests, regional groupings, social classes, and bureaucratic and political circles. Indeed, the late King Hassan II was seen as a master of this kind of rule – he shielded the Moroccan Army from civilian meddling, protected his clients in the traditional Moroccan bourgeoisie, patronized the country's small Jewish community, etc. (Richards and Waterbury 2008, 312-313). Even though the arbitrage itself was not always successful, this political dynamic ensured that the King remained the keystone in this structure. Mohamed VI continues to enjoy the same role today (Boukhars 2011, 54).

The problems of corruption in Tunisia and Morocco were markedly different, and it will be interesting to see how these differences informed the intensity of grievances and degrees of discontent. In Morocco, corruption was broadly seen as a grave but rather diffuse societal malaise. Corruption is thought of as commonplace at all levels, and people tend to blame highly visible senior politicians and officials. Nonetheless, the Monarch himself is rarely accused of direct implication in it, and accusations against him gain limited popular support. Thus, the King's popularity and prestige have been more shielded than that of the Tunisian President. Not only did Ben Ali not draw upon the same traditional authority as the King – people quickly associated him personally, and the people around him, with an unscrupulous and targeted exploitation of public assets. It is clear that allegations of corruption dramatically undermined Ben Ali's popular support.

III.5 Limitations on civil society in Tunisia and Morocco

We have seen how both Ben Ali and the Moroccan Kings proudly embraced liberal reforms that – in theory – granted an increased role to political parties, and maneuvering space to the opposition. This rhetoric was also embracing one of the fundamental pillars of political liberalization: The emancipation of organized civil society. Especially Morocco reveled in being labeled “a liberal Arab state” (Maghraoui 2008, 198).

Tunisia’s relapse into authoritarianism in the early 1990s was obvious. Media rights were constricted after a few years, and experts found evidence of human rights abuses. The regime clearly found human rights activists to be a nuisance, and promulgated a new Law of Associations in 1992. This law exposed civil society to infiltration by state agents, and restricted its activities (Murphy 1999, 206). The law succeeded in stymying much of the autonomous associational movement in Tunisia. Ben Ali continued to embrace a human rights discourse, but activists were increasingly being harassed, arrested, and targeted in other ways (Ibid. 202, 207; Sadiki 2002, 69-71). The Political Police and plain-clothed agents from various *Mukhabarat* agencies broke into activists’ homes, tapped their telephones, confiscated their passports and strove to exclude them from normal social life in as many ways as possible (Hibou 2006, 188-189). For instance, the Tunisian Human Rights Association *Ligue Tunisienne pour la Défense des Droits de L’Homme* (LTDH) held its last Congress in 1994, because persecution of its members had become so preponderant.

The majority of journalists have also reverted to auto-censorship in order to

avoid any friction with the authorities. This was not only the case for state-owned media corporations; private Tunisian media were also confined within a system of political interests and ownership structures that conditioned any editorial policies (Sadiki 2002, 71; Marwa, interview 2011). Self-censorship is a familiar feature in the Moroccan media landscape as well (Younes M'Jahid, interview 2011).

The Ben Ali regime, on its side, continued to display its organizations, and boasted that Tunisia had almost 10,000 registered NGOs in the last years before 2011. These were mostly sports clubs, youth associations, women's leagues and other non-politicized organizations, and they remained, in fact, tightly controlled and monitored by the RCD and the state. These associations served a variety of purposes for the regime: They disseminated regime discourse on key issues such as women's rights, children's rights, economic development, and so on, and in reality they glorified Ben Ali and his initiatives (Hibou 2011, 96-98). Moreover, associations were useful tools for surveillance of any active individuals. This is demonstrated by the state's efforts to keep accurate databases on associations and their membership. Finally, the state saw civil society as a useful intermediary to ensure that its programs of economic liberalization and rationalization progressed, maybe with civil society replacing some of the service provisions of a "retreating state" (Ibid.).

The organizations which continued to defend their autonomy, and which dared being critical of the regime, were exceedingly few: The LDTH, the *Conseil National des Libertés de la Tunisie* (CNLT), the Bar Association, the Journalists' Syndicate and the independent Magistrates were all quite marginal. The trade union federation *Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail* (UGTT) was a different story: It has always been the single most important organization in Tunisian public life, and it

has maintained financial autonomy. Politically, however, the UGTT has always kept an ambiguous relationship with the regime. The trade union federation is too important for the regime to ignore or antagonize, but Ben Ali and the RCD have striven to co-opt and control it as much as possible, or to undermine it indirectly with a discourse of liberal reforms, privatization, and conformity with the demands of global competitiveness (Cavallo 1998, 242-246).

According to Hibou (2011, 124), the Ben Ali regime had mostly succeeded at this effort, at least at the central level of the organization. Direct conflicts between the trade union and the RCD became rarer over the years, and the UGTT was seen as another machine implementing the President's policies, and working to ensure social peace. In return for the acquiescence of rank-and-file workers, cadres were enmeshed in the patronage networks of the regime (Ibid.). I shall return to why this assessment of the UGTT was fundamentally misinformed.

The conclusion is that Ben Ali's Tunisia had a very marginal civil society, which was seemingly incapacitated from representing particular interests, advocating any rights and political liberties, or addressing social, economic and political issues with autonomy. This seems in contrast to Morocco, where civil society has been portrayed as much more vibrant since the 1990s.

In fact, Hassan II and Mohamed VI understood that civil society could act as a safety valve for societal pressures, and Moroccan society has also witnessed a proliferation of NGOs working on local development projects, charitable assistance to housing, advocating women's rights and education, promoting improved care for children, advocating recognition of *Amazigh* (Berber) cultural rights and a host of other domains. Albeit, a vast majority of these associations are either charitable and

depoliticized, or working within the confines of regime approval just like in Ben Ali's Tunisia (Maghraoui 1998, 198; Layachi 1998, 97-98).

Many NGOs have been set up by regime actors, and are not autonomous. Rather, the *Makhzen* uses these NGOs to renew its own image, conform to an international liberal agenda, and appropriate funds from international donors (Sater 2007, 22). In the same vein, Moroccans typically perceive the secular and liberal NGOs as an elite project, and the poor prefer to revert to Islamic foundations for livelihood support (Ibid, 23). Formally accredited NGOs have also been set up by members of the professional classes or the new socioeconomic groups that have emerged in the wake of economic reforms, but who have felt left out from traditional *Makhzen* networks. These new organizations have therefore not prioritized reaching out and becoming mass movements, at least not until 2011 (Ibid, 23, 91).

Denoueux and Gateau (1995) argue further that the emergence of civil society in Morocco was an attempt by the *Makhzen* to pre-empt any uncontrollable challenges in the public domain. Slowly, public debate has been opened up and new issues can now be broached, but the modes of contestation and action are still strictly limited. Certainly, regime agents monitor the sector closely, and in particular those organizations that refuse co-optation. Some organizations that have been perceived as detrimental to regime interests took a long time to receive accreditation – one example being *Transparency Maroc*, which is the country branch of TI (Sater 2007, 92). Even organizations that have succeeded at remaining independent have found themselves confined to a playing field defined by the regime in their dealing with the latter, and this amounts to a subtle form of co-optation as well.

Moreover, Sater (Ibid, 150) affirms that the Moroccan state uses another

classical co-optation mechanism: Resourceful people, who receive public attention and have “discursive power” on a certain topic, are being brought closer to the discussion-making center at the expense of losing their autonomy. This is an integrative strategy, and NGOs have frequently been asked to join consultative bodies, roundtable conferences, Royal Commissions, and so on. These bodies can then manage the deliberations on a sensitive issue, or remove it from public debate altogether and confine it to the Ministries in Rabat (Ibid, 153). For instance, the human rights organization *L’Association Marocaine des Droits Humains* (AMDH) is known for its recalcitrance and its refusal to fall for the *Makhzen*’s game. Even so, the regime set up a Ministry for Human Rights, which threatened to turn the AMDH into a junior partner in discussions on human rights issues (Ibid. 125; Maghraoui 2008, 204-205).

Human rights issues are some of the most sensitive domains for any authoritarian regime, and the Moroccan regime has, in contrast to Tunisia, handled this issue with more diligence in the latter years. Precisely by conceding that violations had taken place, and by taking the initiative on human rights reform, the state assumed control of the direction of the human rights debate in Morocco (Sater 2007, 123-128). The state-controlled councils eventually declared the file of unlawful disappearances to be “closed”, and shifted the focus towards minor grievances. The deep-seated corruption in the judiciary, the lack of checks and balances on executive power, media censorship, and limitations on the freedom of assembly are among the topics that the state deliberately ignores.

In the same way as Tunisia, the Moroccan regime has preferred to emphasize its achievements pertaining to social, economic and cultural rights, thus downplaying

the core political and civil rights of the liberal human rights paradigm (Ibid, 126). By focusing attention on achievements in the socio-economic fields, the authoritarian state has also brought back the implicit “authoritarian bargain” or “security pact”, to justify its unceasing grip on power. The Moroccan government has let social movements appear only within the confined policy domains of local development, women’s issues, *Amazigh* issues, and a few other issues. The Moroccan regime has also, in ways evocative of Ben Ali’s Tunisia, promoted a political ideology of countrywide, close-knit consensus, of moderation, and the ideal of the “law-abiding citizen”. This has circumscribed the repertoire of legitimate contention that organizations may use, something that more militant organizations have paid a high price for.

The general picture, though, is certainly that the Moroccan regime has adopted a more flexible approach to emerging civil society than Ben Ali ever did. The Moroccan regime has been prepared to absorb new tensions and issues, and as long as it remains the hegemonic actor in society, it has been willing to renegotiate the *content* of that hegemony on select matters (Sater 2007, Sater 2010). Mohamed VI's regime features prominent non-democratic features, but it has struck a new balance with emerging social forces in a way that Ben Ali's authoritarian state was never able to equal.

III.6 The recent economic crisis and accumulated socio-economic pressures

It is clear that the global economic downturn since 2008 has affected Tunisia and Morocco negatively, as it came on top of accumulated social and economic pressures. The Moroccan government claims that repeated reforms have strengthened the country's ability to meet such crises. Morocco's GDP grew despite the crisis, but this can also be explained by high agricultural outputs (Paciello 2010, 78). Good crops do not remedy the fact that Morocco has remained highly dependent on food imports throughout the economic downturn; with food price inflation as high as 6.8 % in 2008. This is a bad figure, and the hike in the cost of living resulted in a surge of rioting and strikes in various locations countrywide. As I noted above, increased disenchantment equaled increased repression, for the *Makhzen* does not want to weaken its grip on society (Ibid, 94).

The Moroccan regime has been faced with daunting challenges related to the economic downturn, but it does not have a general solution for solving the multiple issues. The Moroccan exports sector remains vulnerable to external shocks; because as much as 76% of all exports go to only a few EU countries – mostly France and Spain - and decreased demand in these markets have an almost immediate effect on the local economy. In 2009, the value of exported goods overall fell by 28.1 % (Ibid. 77). Furthermore, a global economic recession affects remittances from Moroccans living abroad, which constitute an important economic input (Maghraoui 2008, 202-203). One study concluded that remittances are so important that if these flows dried up, an additional one million Moroccans would fall below the poverty threshold

(Paciello 2010, 93).

The short-term results of the recession have been to worsen pre-existing problems such as unemployment. The country needs to create 200,000 jobs a year to keep pace with annual additions to the labor market, but in 2009 for example, only 95,000 jobs were created. An unknown number of jobs were lost, notably in important sectors such as textiles. In addition, the figures do not count jobs lost in the informal sector, which might represent the majority of the losses.

The effects of the demographic youth bulge, unemployment, and rural-urban migration all mean that the informal sector has grown exponentially, and the regime has mostly tolerated its existence to ensure social peace. The economic problems over the last three years have also forced more people into this *marché parallèle*, where there is no legal or social protection for employees (Ibid, 90).

Lastly, the regime's response to the crisis betrays the continued democratic deficiencies of the regime. As is often the case, the King and his advisors moved first to deal with the situation. All the policies drafted and decreed in response to the crisis emanated from this narrow circle, while civil society, and even Parliament, were excluded from the discussions (Ibid, 95). The *Makhzen* had set up a Higher Council for Economic Intelligence to monitor the crisis and reach out to the businesses that were the hardest hit, but key economic actors such as the trade unions were not invited to give input (Ibid.).

For Tunisia, the crisis also had severe effects, and further undermined economic growth predictions. As many as 45% of graduates could not find work, and unrecorded figures were much higher. Recession in Europe led to reduced remittance flows, which are crucial to the economy just as in Morocco. Soaring food

prices also hurt lower and lower middle class families who felt the economic squeeze: In 2008, a Tunisian family on average spent 36% of their income on basic foodstuffs, which is a high figure for a country boastful of its solid middle class and advanced levels of development (Schraeder and Derissi 2011, 7-8). Surveys showed that an increasing number of Tunisians viewed their economic situation as deteriorating, and especially the marginalized interior regions of the country were suffering more than usual (Ibid, 7). And even more than in Morocco, people did not see Ben Ali dealing with the crisis in any credible manner, or having the legitimacy to do so.

Just as in Morocco, the informal sector had become a livelihood for those who could not find other jobs. This sector was vulnerable to police abuse, and control by businessmen who enforced mafia methods. Street vendors have had to pay the police to be left in peace; the criminal networks that control the sector have extorted bribes and commissions, and so on. There are indications that the ruling “Trabelsis” endeavored to monopolize the informal sector and that this further undermined their support among elite factions who used to profit from the same illegal activities (Mamdouh, interview 2011). In Morocco, the *Makhzen* and the police forces have actually left the informal sector alone after the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, to avoid any protests from originating in the streets (Hari, Tel Quel 2011, 43). The image of street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi immolating himself in Sidi Bouzid proved a very powerful symbol, and the Makhzen wants to forestall similar actions.

III.7 New discourses and popular responses to perceived injustice

The economic transformations that I have analyzed at length here have compounded the growing inequalities associated with economic liberalization and deregulation. They have especially hurt the lower and lower middle classes, and splintered the middle classes into upwardly and downwardly mobile subgroups (Farzoun and Zacharia 1995, 275; Karim and Magnus 2008 Online). However, the young generations of all social groups in Middle Eastern countries have been raised in a new political and media reality, with new sources of information and new arenas for debate.

Some scholars argue that globalization and the emerging neo-liberal economic paradigm have been twinned with a liberal political discourse concerning democratization and human rights, and that this discourse has been propagated more fervently than before. Global media have played a role in this regard, by parading examples of democracy, human rights, accountability and transparency before their audiences (Cottle 2011, 650). Therefore, the argument runs, people in Middle Eastern countries, and especially the youth, have a deeper knowledge of these ideals than ever before, and they are aware of the shortcomings of their own authoritarian systems. The simple fact that authoritarian leaders increasingly strive to maintain a liberal façade in their interactions with donors and “Western” powers is interpreted as evidence that liberal democratic values have gained prominence as the new global standard. In addition, there is a new set of global institutions and organizations that promote and enforce human rights with more power than before. The International

Criminal Court (ICC) and the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), for instance, represent this new paradigm (Koo and Ramirez 2009; Howard-Hassmann 2005).

Both Ben Ali and Mohamed VI claimed that they had brought their countries into the era of liberal democracy, human rights, and socio-economic rights and entitlements. The examples treated at length above demonstrate that this has been rhetoric with little or no real impact, but it has nonetheless put authoritarian presidents like Ben Ali in a dilemma. A contrasting claim made in the debate over democratization prospects in the Middle East is that “Western” powers, i.e. the USA and the European Union, have refrained from exerting much pressure on Arab states, worrying more about their own strategic interests and maintaining alliances with “friendly autocrats” than calling for genuine political reform (Kherigi 2011).

Howbeit, the ascendance of a global paradigm on human rights has also trickled down to key groups in the Arab world. Such a discourse has arguably had an uneven impact: The uneven access to resources such as Internet in the region has limited its expansion. The distribution of such resources typically correlates with disparities in levels of education and income as well.

Table I. Percentage of Individuals using the Internet in Tunisia and Morocco 2009-2010⁷

Country /Year	2009	2010
Tunisia	41.3	49
Morocco	34.1	36.8

7 Source: International Telecommunications Union 2012. Free Statistics Database Online. URL: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/> (accessed January 25, 2012). It is interesting to note that the percentage of Internet users does not vary with the scale of mobilization during protests. Access to Internet might help explain how certain discourses are disseminated, but not why protesters were relatively more numerous in Tunisia than in Morocco.

Table II. Literacy Rates and Gross Enrollment in Tertiary Education in Tunisia and Morocco⁸

	Total Adult Literacy Rate	Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate	Gross Enrollment Ratios
Country/Unit	%	%	%
Tunisia	78	77.9	34
Morocco	55	96.8	13

A different perspective altogether is that people did not need a thorough cognizance of human rights or democracy to experience a deep sensation of humiliation from years of enduring corruption, repression, and marginalization. As we shall see, activists in Tunisia thought there was an inherent need and natural desire to do something about their situation (Ahmed, interview 2011).

Another inference to keep from my argument so far is that the picture of North African countries transforming their economies and undercutting side-payments to domestic groups and thus breaking off the authoritarian bargain could be more nuanced than first envisaged. At least in Tunisia economic growth has been impressive in a regional context, and observers should keep in mind that perceptions of a decline in regime legitimacy there could flow from certain perceptions of corruption and power abuses, and a lack of fundamental rights and freedoms, just as well as from purely economic grievances.

8 Sources: UNESCO 2012. Higher Education Statistics Online. URL: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/tertiary-education.aspx> (accessed January 25, 2012), and World Bank 2012. World Bank Country Database Online. URL: data.worldbank.org/country (accessed January 25, 2012). Both databases warn of major gender, income and regional disparities within each category and each country. Enrollment in higher education is clearly much more prevalent in Tunisia. It is interesting to note that youth literacy rates are high for both countries.

III.8 Laying the groundwork for protest: A Summary

To sum up all the preceding pages, one can compare the situation in Morocco and Tunisia and outline similarities and differences. The regimes have dealt with economic restructuring for decades, but despite the self-congratulatory rhetoric and positive statistics, results have been mixed. Macroeconomic stability has not been combined with thorough institutional reform, with transparent privatization, or successful attempts to relieve the aggravating socio-economic pressures which rationalization, increasing economic competition, the demographic explosion, and inadequate education systems have brought on the most vulnerable sectors in society.

More precisely, neo-liberal reforms have in particular affected the middle classes that used to enjoy corporatist privileges under the previous economic order. The disenchantment of this politically crucial class should ring the alarm bells of any regime. In both Tunisia and Morocco, social unrest in the 1980s and 1990s inaugurated an era of political liberalization, at least on paper. Morocco did install genuine reforms and saw a gradual opening of its political space to various voices and grievances. At the same time, the rates of development of the Moroccan economy remained weaker than in Tunisia, where the Ben Ali regime could legitimize its authoritarianism with a discourse of promoting economic growth and fighting Islamists. The paranoid Tunisian regime labored relentlessly to stifle all kinds of dissent and eradicate an autonomous civil society from the early 1990s onwards.

The Moroccan regime also used a discourse of consensus and royal populism to restrain civil society. It permitted debate on new issues, but kept a monopoly on

defining *the ways* in which the debate was to take place, and how to implement eventual reforms. Moroccan society has seen a number of new organizations, parties, economic and social interests emerge, while the regime has inscribed a sphere of “tolerated criticism” from which the Monarch and his *Makhzen* network are exempt.

All in all, I argue that Morocco took a markedly different path than Tunisia in the 1990s, and that its interaction with contentious actors reduced the potential for intense conflict between the regime and challenging forces at a later stage. Besides, the Tunisian regime suffered more than the Moroccan one from popular resentment at its corruption and power abuse: People saw a distorted mirror image of their own grievances in the opulent lifestyle of the Trabelsi family. With few or no channels for meaningful claims-making, street action has frequently been the last option for aggrieved groups. In 2010-2011 people in both countries took to the streets again in protest, but this time discontent proved to be of an unprecedented magnitude.

IV – Mobilization under adverse conditions

IV.1 Articulating grievances and mobilizing consensus

The preceding sections demonstrated that the first hypothesis of our conceptual model on mobilization is valid – social and economic problems had accumulated in Tunisia and Morocco over the last decades, while reform was stifled by authoritarian regimes intent on preserving the political *status quo* at all costs. The way from this situation to a full-scale eruption of protests is a complex one, however, and the following pages shall map out and compare how these processes took place in Tunisia and Morocco, and help us assess our other hypotheses.

Doug McAdam (1981, 51) has ascertained that grievances have to be collectively expressed and defined in order to form a basis for collective action. Authoritarian and repressive regimes usually nurture a “political culture of fear”, which is obviously not conducive to the public expression of political opposition. It follows that in Tunisian and Moroccan societies, the act of sharing grievances has been mostly low-key, subtle, and restricted in scope.

Needless to say, substantial groups in both countries have felt socio-economic problems affect their daily lives in the form of unemployment, pauperization, rise in the cost of living, and so forth. People who have experienced this deterioration as unjust will seek recognition and confirmation of their problems in discussions with others; in cafés and marketplaces, in mosques and on the streets, and at the family table. Naturally, the higher the concentration of people concerned, the more likely it

is that the people affected will interact, and the larger the mobilization potential is.

Klandermans (1997, 20) echoes other political sociologists who have confirmed that interpersonal interactions between family, friends and colleagues play an essential role in the appropriation of collective beliefs. People usually seek to validate their own beliefs in interaction with significant others – who are often like-minded individuals. Such informal discourse will inevitably be contingent on local circumstances and the idiosyncratic grievances and interests of people involved, and in both Tunisia and Morocco several steps had to be accomplished to go from shared discourse to street action. Moreover, it is very hard to detect and gauge the extent of such everyday interaction by unemployed people, street vendors, and café patrons, and this can explain why the unrest came as such a surprise for both political leaders and Western onlookers. In other words, the people sharing this discourse might gradually embolden each other to act, while people outside it remain unaware of this relative strengthening of segments of the public.

In both Tunisia and Morocco, interview respondents acknowledge that these processes of collective framing were taking place prior to the winter of 2010/2011, although the political circumstances were different in each country. As we noted earlier, it is easier to construct a shared identity in opposition to an “adversary” when this adversary is clearly known (Gamson 1995, 90). In Tunisia, the political regime revolved around Ben Ali and the cult of his person and political initiatives. It was therefore natural for people to hold Ben Ali responsible for how things went in the country.

Ben Ali had been in power for over two decades, and he was an old man. As an interview respondent affirmed, there was a growing understanding that the

political situation in the country had to change (Amir, interview 2011). Saida, a journalist and street activist in Tunis, agreed that there was disquiet concerning who would inherit power at the Palace in Carthage, because Ben Ali had no heir apparent (Interview 2011). In particular, people feared that Laila Trabelsi herself would maneuver to control the selection process for a new leadership. In Morocco, on the other hand, King Mohamed VI had been in power for merely a decade when protests erupted, and he is still considered to be a young and dynamic leader by many Moroccans.

We have already touched upon the differences in how corruption was perceived in both countries. A prominent political analyst and NGO chairman, Mamdouh, attested to the impression that Ben Ali was directly implicated in corruption of all sorts, and that his wife, Leila Trabelsi, was a leading crony (Interview 2011). The popular discourse about her was especially pungent. Respondents ranging from UGTT secretaries to journalists portray Trabelsi as a vehemently disliked icon of greed and rapacity, heading a dynasty viewed as “out of control”. The outrage felt by most Tunisians at this corruption demonstrates how unjust people felt such practices to be. To revert to Klandermans (1997, 38), there was both indignation at the illegitimate (and growing) inequality between the Ben Ali/Trabelsi clans and the rest of society, and at the totally immoral ways in which their wealth had been accumulated. Tunisians perceived a deepening corruption in their society, and more decisively, they perceived that the President himself was more responsible than anyone for facilitating it.

Corruption has been plaguing Morocco as well, but it is less associated with the uppermost echelon of power than in Tunisia. Younes M’Jahid concurred with

Transparency Maroc that privatization has been skewed in favor of the politically well connected, and that rentier practices have not been abolished (Interviews 2011). Fundamentally, economic reform has only created new forms of dependence between the state and society in Morocco. However, the monarch himself is perched above the scandals of the Moroccan regime. Protesters have often brought pictures of the King with them to sit-ins and have begged him to solve their problems, since politicians have been unable to do so (Ibid). The King is widely respected and his position is founded on a strong traditional imagery and religious authority which shields him from criticism.

The Monarchy deflects accusations of corruption and mismanagement to the higher levels of politicians, and bypasses a discredited executive in order to nurture its support directly with the people. Hence, the King skillfully blurs the fact that he is in the last instance responsible for nominating the government and intervening in lucrative business deals (Interviews 2011). Even though corruption and mismanagement have added to a discourse of alienation between Moroccan society and a predatory state, the demands for change have been more limited and more diffuse than they ever were in Tunisia – in large part because the authorities of Ben Ali and Mohamed VI have been perceived so differently.

Moving on, we must also keep in mind that although collective understandings on socioeconomic and political problems were widespread throughout the Tunisian and Moroccan societies, their impacts were different across different social classes, and many people actually never shared these interpretations. Representatives from *Transparency Maroc* and other Moroccan activists conceded that the regime had been able to “buy” poor people’s acquiescence with cheap bread,

Ramadan meals, and other populist initiatives (Interviews 2011). On the other hand, the case of Tunisia illustrates that members of the *higher* classes had just as often abstained from any political activism prior to the mass mobilization of January 2011. Our informant Saida, a journalist with an upper-middle class background, put it like this:

“I believed in Ben Ali’s regime, I believed in the propaganda. I thought Tunisia was doing well, we were a very successful country, but we were not ready for democracy. Like most Tunisians, I was part of the passive, silent majority. We were disconnected from reality until Sidi Bouzid happened. December 17, 2010 was a shock for me” (Interview 2011).

In other words, one must be careful not to believe that all parts of society were brewing with discontent. Some did not have the resources to participate, while others benefited from the status quo. In a country such as Tunisia, with high literacy and education rates and less poverty, one can assume that a higher proportion of the population was politically conscious than in poorer Morocco. Before the protests, however, the Ben Ali regime was adept at stifling critical thought. Amira, another journalist and former social worker, meant that “we were asphyxiated, for regime collaborators monitored everyone else”. The regime had quenched any form of autonomous expression, be it in the arts, the academy, the media, or in politics: “There was a war on ambition and free thinking” (Amira, interview 2011).

The unemployed of Tunisia, and in particular unemployed youth, represented a “Generation X” that both the regime and society had neglected

(Ibid.) Together with the downwardly mobile segments of a middle class under pressure, and the outright poor, they amounted to a large and varied group with multiple social and economic problems. Seeing no hope, they were often underemployed street vendors, beggars, delinquents, and even criminals. This situation was especially severe in the interior and the south of Tunisia, which have always been at the country's economic and political periphery.

People in these strata and regions have typically advanced specific claims for jobs and bread, reminiscent of the demands of Morocco's poor. Such demands might have appeared limited to immediate economic and social concerns, but in fact they were more politically powerful than that. Street activists Reem, Amira, and others stressed the fact that these groups had had to endure a deeply felt *humiliation* derived from their situation, and from the way they were treated by the state (interviews 2011). Of course they wanted formal jobs, because jobs ensure at least some degree of economic security, personal dignity, and autonomy, both from family members and the state.

Instead, the unemployed, informally employed, and underemployed all remained at the margins of their societies (Amira, interview 2011). Ironically, these marginalized strata actually encompassed the majority of people in many poor towns and neighborhoods, and their frustration added to the growing *mobilization potential*. Governments were of course worried about the possibility for unrest, and sometimes used employment programs to co-opt graduates. As Hibou (2011, 192) states for the case of Tunisia, such *Chantiers de Travail* only succeeded in reinforcing the feeling of dependency of the youth (and hence their sense of humiliation) on the authoritarian state. Driven by the

state's incessant need to control these groups, the police treated them abusively, frisked them, and beat them (Hanafi 2011 Online; Amira, et al. interviews July 2011). Altogether, these groups were profoundly dehumanized. The mortification resulting from this relation to the state added to the humiliation of not having work in the first place, and of being ignored or considered of lesser worth, which turned into an explosive mix that drove Mohamed Bouazizi to commit suicide, and many people to identify with his desperation (Kefi 2011).

In the least, this has become the dominant narrative of how grievances accumulated among numerous Tunisians, and how one man saw no other way out than to enact an extreme form of protest. Soon, people in the periphery, the unemployed, and in particular the youth, descended on the streets demanding *Dignity!* (Reem, et al. 2011). This was a momentous development: Asking for dignity arguably entailed the wholesale rejection of an entire set of illegitimate power practices and social and economic relations, escalating in a matter of weeks to an outright rejection of the Ben Ali regime. Maha, a member of the human rights organization CNLT in Tunis, emphasized how the slogan “bread, water, and Ben Ali out!” had appeared only a few days after December 17. Others were quick to underline that Tunisians label their uprising “La Révolution de la Dignité” (Maha, Reem, et al., interviews 2011).

We now understand how a certain consensus had been propagated incrementally in Tunisia and Morocco, founded on fundamental economic and socio-political problems. The discourse led to a convergence of understandings – a sort of alignment of individual frames and the gradual emergence of shared frames. As the journalist Ramzi insisted, the process had been individual and

“psychological” as well as collective (Interview 2011). Innumerable interpersonal interactions fostered discourses, shared by a few people at a time, which confirmed the hardships felt by their members. Typically, these local groups consisted of people with shared social backgrounds, which in turn facilitated the creation of shared identities (Klandermans 1997, 20). The fact that the grievances of these people were so basic (for instance jobs and cheaper food) made consensus generation easier. Interestingly, I have noted that in the Tunisian context the many local, particularistic discourses revolving around the need for employment and food could easily be embedded into a larger frame, calling for the restoration of dignity for all. Crucially, this rallying cry did not gain the same momentum in Morocco as it did in Tunisia, and we shall see that this has had consequences for mobilization there.

Mass protests do not arise in a political vacuum, and one must not forget that both Tunisia and Morocco had histories of riots. In Morocco, riots occurred intermittently throughout the country in the 1990s and early 2000s, and people were accustomed to them as a local, contingent way of expressing grievances. In Tunisia, the effects of harsher repression, tighter regime control over information, and higher economic growth, meant that reported incidents of riots were few until the early 2000s.

However, more than one Tunisian interviewee highlighted that the unrest in the mining town of Gafsa in 2008 turned out to be a groundbreaking event, paving the way for the 2011 mass protests (Amir, interview 2011). The Gafsa riots were a response to the nepotism of local mining company officials, and were met with heavy repression. When asked why the Gafsa riots did not set off

countrywide protests, respondents pointed out that it was more difficult to relay information from the area back then. For instance, Facebook and Twitter were not commonly used at the time (Reem, Amir, interviews 2011). Furthermore, members of the trade union UGTT and lawyers from the Tunisian Bar Association stated frankly that although their members mobilized in Gafsa, there were few attempts to mobilize elsewhere in sympathy (Interviews 2011). Gafsa ultimately failed, but Amir and other activists recognize that it set an example for others, and that it helped cracking the “wall of fear” that the Tunisian regime had erected (Interviews 2011).

Gafsa left Tunisia simmering with tension, and fed into the oppositional collective frames already existing. Although many were not aware of what was going back in 2008, interviewees concur that Gafsa was an important example, which means that its story must have circulated in Tunisia in the years following the events. Narratives such as that of Gafsa surely helped to enhance people’s shared understanding that they were united in their plight, and that some had the courage to rise up.

Even Tunis City experienced its own acts of resistance before Bouazizi, curiously with soccer hooligans playing a big role. Dating back to around 2006, gangs named “Les Ultras” were battling the police at sports events, and they mostly managed to keep the security forces at bay. Blogger Reem and journalist Ramzi both credited these groups for dismantling the image of an “invincible” police, and showing people that street action was indeed feasible (Interviews 2011). This process undoubtedly contributed to the *agency* – factor - the all-important conviction that something could be done. In the dense urban quarters

of Tunis, the narratives about the Ultras' achievements flowed easily into other narratives about popular resistance, slowly altering people's perceptions of political opportunities and laying the groundwork for contention.

The riots at Gafsa and the running battles at soccer matches in Tunis were localized eruptions of anger, often with targets immediately present, and restrained by the limited resources of protesters. For a nationwide awareness to gain momentum, protesters needed communication tools to spread their message quickly. As we have already seen, conventional media such as television, radio, and newspapers were in no way able to disseminate the discourse of grievances and protest. However, people were getting their information from other sources, notably from international satellite broadcasters and the Internet. When as many as one in five Tunisians were maintaining a profile on Facebook, and one out of two were having regular access to the Internet, unfiltered news, and knowledge about the malpractices of Ben Ali's regime, could be distributed instantly (Schraeder and Redissi 2011, 11).

Interviewees highlighted how the use of social media evolved, turning them into political forums around the time when protests first broke out. The Tunisian government ran the infamous *Ammar404* censorship technology, one of the most restrictive in the world at the time (Mhenni 2008, Online). Already in early 2010 a loosely organized movement of bloggers had demonstrated against Internet censorship in Tunisia, using music, T-shirt logos, and other innovative expressions of protest (Maha, interview 2011). Two bloggers were arrested, but their fledgling freedom of expression movement got a lot of attention. Many "tech-savvy" Tunisians, who even had middle-class

backgrounds and had benefited from Tunisia's liberalized economy, understood that there was an urgent need to deal with Ben Ali's censorship, oppression and power abuses. In other words, Tunisia's *mobilization potential* increased sharply.

In addition, activist Saida recognized that scandals revealed by Wikileaks had added to the simmering resentment. US Ambassadors had written frankly about the rampant corruption and dictatorial practices of the Ben Ali regime (Nawaat Online 2010). One thing was to hear stories in cafés and rumors among friends – getting these stories confirmed by official American correspondence made people more confident in their collective beliefs (Saida, interview 2011). Again, one realizes that the alienation between regime and the rest of society amounted to a kind of political opportunity change, albeit a change that was difficult to detect. Tarrow (1998, 77) generally dismisses opportunity changes that pass unnoticed. I argue that in this case changes were not structural or external to the actors involved, but pertained to their individual experiences and intersubjective frames. This had consequences for people's sense of injustice, agency and shared identity. These were emboldened, but the enduring stability of the Ben Ali regime made a major revolt seem unlikely to most observers.

IV.2 Mobilization online and mobilization in the streets

On December 17 2010, Tunisia was ripe for protest. The following pages will attempt to give an overview of these events. It is important to keep in mind that revolutions can never be accurately predicted, and that there was nothing inevitable about the ways events actually unfolded. Structural problems had piled up all over the Middle East and North Africa, and finally, one spark was enough to set the country ablaze.

Mohamed Bouazizi's hometown Sidi Bouzid was shaken by riots on the first few days after December 17, and crucially, neighboring towns started to mobilize in support. At the village and town level, the strong bonds of communal solidarity and shared identity made local riots and sit-ins quite easy to organize. However, police brutality began immediately, and *fear* was evidently a major hurdle to the sustaining of protests. One must keep in mind that these communities had collective memories of earlier contention, and they were well aware of the risks.

There are somewhat divergent narratives concerning how mobilization gained momentum, and these narratives can generally be grouped into two categories. The first interpretation, adhered to especially by the young and the cyber-activists, emphasizes how new social media, and in particular Facebook, functioned as a "press agency", and a convenient tool for coordinating the dates and locations of demonstrations, inviting people to join, and disseminating anti-regime discourse in general. People subscribing to this narrative highlight that Facebook was only a tool to relay information – no one was able to successfully

assume leadership of the online movement. With its horizontal and inherently democratic structure, Facebook functioned to coordinate what was a close approximation to a “leaderless, spontaneous” community. However, it proved an invaluable resource, a fact which signs in Tunis saying “Merci Facebook” testify to.

We have already seen how great the reach of online social media in Tunisia was, and local communities and circles of friends could transmit information to those who were not directly connected. This amounts to what Denoueux (1993) calls *informal mobilization*, a process that typically occurs in times of crisis, when people are mobilized not by formal organizations but by networks existing at the workplace, in neighborhoods, or among friends. In his book *Urban Unrest in the Middle East*, Denoueux illustrates this concept with examples from Beirut and Cairo.

The spreading of protests from Sidi Bouzid to neighboring towns was a pivotal first step in drawing the entire country’s attention to local events. In the town of Kasserine, police responded to demonstrations with shocking brutality. Hundreds were killed over the space of a month – more than fifty were killed on the weekend of 8-10 January alone, as the police targeted funeral processions in particular. They placed snipers on rooftops and shot at women and children indiscriminately, while the Ministry of Interior called the police violence “acts of self defense” against attackers and looters (The Telegraph 2011). Maha, the CNLT member, explained that the regime paid *casseurs*, or vandals, to break shops and sow chaos, providing the security forces with an excuse to attack anyone who dared leave their homes (Interview 2011).

From the very first clashes in Sidi Bouzid and Kasserine, video clips, pictures, “Tweets”, and Facebook updates were posted, providing a live feed of horrifying, poignant images. Ramzi and other informants found it difficult to explain precisely why people continued to take to the streets under these dire, life-threatening conditions, but they all made reference to the instinctive impact of emotions (Interviews 2011; Miladi 2011)

Arguably, people did not make a calculated rational decision as to whether they should march in the streets or not. The videos of police brutality posted on Facebook and YouTube became a spectacle to which people could not stay neutral. Shaken by anger and desperation, they kept returning to the streets despite the risks (Maha, interview 2011). Tarrow’s (1998, 83) models acknowledge this mechanism of mobilization: Ruthless repression paradoxically facilitates outrage, which might drive protests. With repression and humiliation becoming so palpable, many felt that they had little to lose as individuals; while conversely, the stakes for their communities were becoming higher by the day. Saad, member of the LTDH, suggested: “The regime was dressed down, exposed as totally tyrannical against its own people. Some of us had known this for a long time...for others, the violence was a wake-up call” (interview 2011). Maha’s argument is similar: “there was a human sentiment – an emotional aspect (...), and Facebook was a platform for provoking and expressing these feelings” (Interview 2011). Referring to Kriesi et al. (1995, 5). I see that audiovisual media helped politicalize more of the already existing *mobilization potential* in the country. People who had no previous experience with expressing their grievances in public gathered in front of the Ministry of

the Interior in Tunis, crying: “You are killing the people, killing the youth!” (Saida, interview 2011).

Harking back to our model, I clearly see that disproportionate repression fueled an intense feeling of *injustice*. The rupture between regime and society was total, and it was easy for people to identify Ben Ali and his system as their adversary, the concrete target of anger. After mobilization first accelerated, this process became a rapid, self-reinforcing phenomenon, with people finding safety in numbers. The spreading of protests increased people’s feeling of agency, invigorating the shared belief that they could accomplish something as a collective (Klandermans 1997, 42).

Online social media were fused directly into all these processes. When information was relayed across the country, more people were touched by highly emotional narratives and images, and more people felt that they too had a stake in the collective of protesters. The activists I interviewed commonly believed that the situation had reached a sort of nationwide “tipping point” that had made people descend into the streets almost simultaneously. However, I must point out the evident fact that not everyone joined the protests from the start. Reem and Saida both exemplify how mobilization spread by example: Activists who were more aware of the unrest and its causes, who felt a strong emotional impact from repression, or were simply committed to supporting the movement early on, pioneered by posting images, status updates, and blog posts online.

These cyber-activists were braving a certain risk of being monitored, harassed, or even detained, and a few among them also experienced this.

Among others, the regime arrested Lina Ben Mhenni, Slim Amamou, and Yassine Ayari, whose influence it found worrying. These bloggers had been active online and in the freedom of speech movement for some time. They had begun the campaign to draw attention to the fledgling unrest in December 2010 and mobilize in sympathy (Cyberdissidents.org 2011). Arrests also conferred a symbolic role on detained individuals (Reporters sans Frontières 2011). Despite the salient public profile of these activists, they did not lead the movement: Rather, committed citizens at all levels played an invaluable role in initiating and spreading mobilization⁹.

Saida, who had a substantial audience due to her radio shows, recalled: “(...) in December, when I broke the silence about the repression, people started being afraid of being my friends on Facebook!” (Interview 2011). Fear of the regime had not lost its grip just yet. According to Reem, when her friends saw that she was not punished for her online activity, that she was not arrested and her accounts not hacked, they followed in her footsteps (Interview 2011). Importantly, these activists acted as *opinion leaders* in their respective social milieus.

In a matter of weeks, even the “passive majority” in Tunisia was stirred. Many were initiated into the action frame of grievances and humiliation for the first time, and went through the steps of consensus mobilization (awareness-raising) and action mobilization only in a matter of days. The fundamental character of the popular demands made it possible to construct the necessary

⁹ It is interesting to note that there is a lot of controversy surrounding leading bloggers in Tunisia, and that everyone I interviewed objected to the idea that these personalities constituted any form of moral or organizational “leadership” of the protests. Rather, they functioned as figureheads, even though there is no consensus on their importance (Interviews 2011).

shared identity around them, spanning gender, age, socio-economic, and cultural differences. Online social media made it possible for people to feel part of a new nationwide community, beyond their face-to-face interactions with friends and neighbors. Particular grievances at the level of towns and villages were actively renegotiated and assembled into a nationwide political frame.

The Tunisian protests of December and January 2010/2011 are arguably a qualitatively new phenomenon, in that online social media played such a key role. According to one account, “people protested in the streets during the day, and shared information online at night” (Mandraud 2011)¹⁰. The *mise en scène* of a protest movement had become easier than ever before (Zekry, interview 2011). Networks of online activists working under oppressive conditions also had the advantage of not having a clear center or headquarter which the regime could target and paralyze. (Al Saffar 2011).

It might appear that coordination online substituted for the need to set up a coherent, organized movement on the ground, as Social Movement Theories normally presuppose (e.g. Kriesi et al. 1995; Tarrow, Tilly and McAdam 2001). Kriesi et al. purport that a *mobilization potential* (i.e. people sharing awareness about shared grievances) needs a framework of both formal organizations and informal personal networks in order to actually mobilize (1995). Facebook, on

10 Furthermore, international attention to the events could be garnered when mainstream media, and in particular Al Jazeera, picked up information, images and videos from online platforms and broadcast them to global audiences. The growing global attention to events in Tunisia and later other Arab countries surely multiplied the pressure on the Ben Ali regime, and undermined its legitimacy further. Cottle (2011, 655) argues that the disturbing images from the protests in Arab countries increased the pressure on “Western” governments to demand that authoritarian leaders step down. Tunisia was the first theatre of the “Arab Spring”, and the international pressure on Ben Ali was arguably too timid at that point to compel his departure.

However, activists from the “Anonymous” hacker network attacked the Tunisian government. This campaign, and support from a range of foreign non-governmental actors, boosted the morale among Tunisian protesters (Reem, interview 2011; Miladi 2011; Ryan 2011).

the other hand, permitted the creation of loosely bound communities that could be created and dissolved in an instant, removing constraints of time and space, and making communication virtually effortless. Youth with no political experience could thus transform into activists overnight.

A lot of the youth were also careful to claim that they were not “political in the traditional sense”, and that online coordination had not created a lasting political movement (Reem, Ahmed, et al. interviews 2011). Further, youth activists and journalists that I interviewed argued unequivocally that traditional Tunisian NGOs had not initiated the wave of protests, but had merely tried to catch up with, and control, its development (Ibid. 2011).

Reem for instance, claimed that she did not want to be associated with any particular activist collective, and that this was not a necessary precondition to “make a difference” online (Interview 2011). Interestingly, several other interviewees were also skeptical of the more highly profiled activists and their agendas. Facebook clearly allowed people to maintain their strong sense of individuality and to converge selectively around a few topics, rather than the deeper cultural and social integration which activism in more “traditional” organizations arguably requires (Wanous, Rechers and Malik 1984, 671).

IV.3 Civil society and the popular movement in Tunisia

This is where I must introduce the other narrative on how mobilization occurred, the narrative proposed by members of “traditional” and formal civil society, such as the UGTT and the Tunisian Bar Association. Arguably, the ephemeral collective identities nurtured on Facebook were not sufficient to sustain widespread street action in the face of relentless repression.

For example, UGTT members claimed that their cadres in Sidi Bouzid and elsewhere were among the first to call for protests (UGTT Sousse, interviews 2011). They were proud of the UGTT’s tradition as a counterweight to the regime, and as a force the regime could not ignore. According to its representatives in Sousse, the UGTT had consistently advocated freedom of association, freedom of expression, and workers’ rights for many years.

External observers have asserted that the UGTT had been suffering from a deepening division between its activist local branches and the more accommodationist, i.e. co-opted, central bureau over the last few years (Ryan 2011). However, it is important not to let the passivity of the central level overshadow the important role played by the lower cadres during the uprising. Some accounts also perceive a deliberate two-pronged strategy of the UGTT during these critical days: The UGTT central bureau was negotiating with Ben Ali, while the regional offices were adding pressure on him in the streets. The local sections of the UGTT could also take the initiative because they were further removed from the regime’s coercive capacities and closer to problems “on the ground” (UGTT Sousse, interviews 2011; Hanafi 2011). Overall, the

activism of the UGTT during the pre-January 14 unrest proves in any case that the organization had never been totally co-opted by Ben Ali. Critics who argued otherwise had overlooked both the size of the organization and its historical role. The UGTT was indeed older than the Tunisian state structure itself, and a lot of the Tunisian leadership had acquired political training within its ranks (Perkins 2007). If the rest of Tunisian civil society was weak, the UGTT was strong and could become the backbone for protests.

In contrast with the riots in 2008, this time the UGTT cadres were ready to mobilize in sympathy all over the country. Branch offices were well connected and well coordinated, and collaborated also with smaller groups such as the lawyers and the LTDH. The UGTT was effectively a well-established mass movement, with its own organizational resources, its massive rank-and-file of more than 500,000 members, sharing an identity that was conducive to supporting popular socio-economic and political demands. Lastly, its cadres were already skilled at organizing demonstrations. Therefore, the UGTT claimed that it had been able to “frame and supervise”¹¹ the mass protests when they erupted (Ibid). It used text messages, notices, and improvised outdoor meetings to rally supporters, and marches in major cities typically began at UGTT offices.

For the trade unionists, protesting was a “duty”, even though repression continued to be horrendous, and the casualties were many (Ibid). Joining the union members at the forefront of demonstrations were the lawyers, easily recognizable in their black robes. Zekry, a member of the Bar Association in

¹¹ The French term “*encadrer*”, which was used by interviewees here, is difficult to translate.

Tunis, emphasized how Tunisia's lawyers had been advocating the rule of law and fair trials for a century, and detailed how Ben Ali had always sought to undermine the profession and its guild (Interview 2011). The Bar Association embodied a strong ethos of opposition to Ben Ali's unfettered autocracy, and because of its standing in Tunisian society and its *esprit de corps*, its members had dared critique Ben Ali more openly than most. In retaliation, outspoken lawyers had received threats, been harassed by police, and thrown in jail (Ibid). The lawyers also shared an acute sense of representing a resourceful, cultivated leadership in Tunisian society, and a competent avant-garde to the January protests.

The Bar's local branches had taken the initiative to rallies in collaboration with the trade unionists and other groups. The Bar Association's Head Office in Tunis knew what was stirring at any time, and approved street action. On December 30, thousands of lawyers decided to wear black mourning bands to commemorate the victims of police brutality. The police responded by harassing them in the streets, and Zekry himself believed this had been a wake-up call for many ordinary Tunisians (Ibid). From then on, the lawyers symbolized the opposition to the regime. On January 3, when schools and universities were supposed to have opened after New Year, protests flared up far and wide. Encouraged by the level of participation, thousands of lawyers observed a general strike on January 6. All courts in Tunisia stopped functioning, which showed that state authority itself was being undermined (Aljazeera English Online 2011).

When faced with these accounts of the role of established organizations,

most young cyber-activists and journalists admit that these organizations *did* play a noteworthy role (Amir, Saida et al. interviews 2011). Traditional forms of mobilization were important, but NGOs had of course cooperated and coordinated successfully with the youth groups and cyber-activists. Small groups of human rights activists, intellectuals, illegal political groups and high-profiled exiles had spent years advocating their own agendas, and jumped onto the opportunity for protests when it came. However, it was only the masses and the youth that could provide a “body” and critical mass to this political force (Saad, interview 2011).

Arguably, there was a generational as well as a cultural difference between NGO activists and the crowds that thronged the streets. Saad from the LTDH pointed out that this was not just a “revolution of the young”. He conceded that the LTDH had not been able to recruit any members since 1994 due to regime constraints, and this indicates that the regime had succeeded in alienating the youth from oppositional organizations (Ibid). Conversely, the independent associations had not been adept at integrating youth, and hence the youth had looked for new spaces to express their own discourses and culture – eventually finding such spaces online (Ghorbal 2011).

We understand that to listen exclusively to the “Facebook narrative” gives us a too narrow understanding of how mobilization took place in Tunisia. Despite decades of authoritarianism and corporatism, the country had a strong union and a few associations with the capacity to act against the regime. The organizational ethos of formal organizations such as the UGTT crystallized the shared *identity* of their members. Their organizational resources and established

chains of command (and political weight in the case of the UGTT) accentuated their sense of *agency*, so these variables were greatly strengthened as contention developed. And last, but not least, the long and troubled relationship between NGOs and the regime itself made it easy to mobilize around shared feelings of injustice and a clear picture of whom their antagonist was.

The sudden mass movement in Tunisia could therefore rely on a rather small, but unified and supportive *multi-organizational field* (Curtis and Zurcher 1973, 53). If this multi-organizational field was fragmented before the protests, NGOs from across the spectrum merged their efforts when the speed and scale of mobilization became apparent. These formal organizations might not have initiated the mass movement or encompassed all its participants, for this movement far surpassed what the rather small Tunisian NGOs could harness. However, they acted in alliance, encouraged sustained protests, and provided logistical support. Again, I emphasize that they subsumed their own organizational identities under the larger cause of regime change, enabling the creation of a “national front” against the regime.

To sum up, I appreciate the analysis by interviewee Maha from the CNLT (Interview 2011). She stated that three collective actors had come together during the December-January rallies:

- Formal organizations such as the UGTT, which should not be underestimated for all the reasons listed above.
- The new cohort of cyber-activists, whose networks flourished thanks to online social media. This was a new phenomenon, and the activists had little organization. They either mobilized based on their own grievances, or relayed

information from others.

- “The masses”, which came from all walks of life, and who rallied to the ranks of the first two. The momentum of protests, and the emotional impact of repression, compelled more and more people to join. To echo Terchek (1974, cited in Klandermans 1997, 144), I can conclude that the “indifference quotient of the general public” was very low, and further - “the trickle soon turned into a torrent” (Kuran 1991). In accordance with Tarrow’s definition of *cycles of contention*, I can add that there was a high rate of both organized and unorganized participation (1998, 142).

We cannot draw clear boundaries between these three collective actors.

Internet activism, for instance, blurred the distinction between the masses and the cyber-activists. A more interesting inference seems to be that online mobilization lowered the threshold for mobilization in the streets for everyone. Ultimately, however, one was not dependent on Internet access to mobilize: One could rely on, and align with, “traditional” civil society activists in the streets.

I observe that although Tunisian civil society was largely overlooked as potential agents of change before the protests, they were stronger than originally thought, or could mobilize dormant resources quickly. The variable *strength of civil society* is essential, and we should not become blinded by the “new social media”-paradigm in this case. The variables *perception of agency* and *extent of consensus mobilization* appear to increase in tandem. I prefer to view these two as intervening factors, closely related with preceding basic variables such as rates of Internet access and strength of civil society. The variable *perception of injustice* is another

fundamental factor, mirrored by its opposite, the question of regime *legitimacy*¹².

Legitimacy, although a complex notion, is invariably linked to regime practices, and it is to these practices and interactions with contenders that we must now turn¹³.

IV.4 The Response of the Ben Ali Regime

Contrary to what Sidney Tarrow (1998) purports, repression in Tunisia did not have to be moderate or inconsistent to enable people to protest. As I have elaborated on previously, the inverse mechanism materialized. Beyond repression, however, the regime's responses were muddled and inconsistent. Amir and Mamdouh are among the analysts who observed how the Tunisian authorities had no convincing way of dealing with the crisis (Interviews 2011). The worst repression was allegedly carried out by the security forces that Ben Ali and Trabelsi kept under their personal control, while other agencies acted more restrained. For the regime's part, harsh repression also proved to be a mistake. My interviewee Mamdouh made the analogy with the way Chairman Mao Zedong and his wife had led the Cultural Revolution in China: When no one could check the power of the leading families, the outcome was disastrous (Interview 2011).

The RCD Party, which had been "holed out" and sidelined by Ben Ali's

12 In this thesis I have most consistently analyzed the authoritarian bargain as source of regime legitimacy. Legitimacy/Injustice is another intermediate factor in our model. . It is interesting to consider that President Ben Ali could not base his regime on traditional legitimacy like the Moroccan King, and his status as statesman and administrator succumbed to mismanagement and stagnation – he therefore had to resort increasingly to repression to assert his authority.

13 When power is viewed as illegitimate people might withdraw their cooperation from a regime, and its power might collapse. This perspective on power was presented by Gene Sharp (1973).

fragmentation of the state, was also unable to respond to the crisis. All in all, the authorities lacked competent advisors and ideologists who could have devised a plan to stem the tide of demands and retake the initiative. The President's concessions came too late and belittled the popular demands, and his speeches to the nation only radicalized the protesters (Ibid; Miladi 2011).

Already before December 17, there was unease among certain business elites and party figures about the regime and its privatization of power. These nascent disagreements could have amounted to a small step towards the "deepening divisions among elites" that Tarrow classifies as a changing political opportunity (1998, 77-80). However, it was not publicly visible, and a real elite secession only occurred on the very last days prior to Ben Ali's flight on January 14. It is also interesting to note that one does not observe the other dimensions suggested by Tarrow: Political access was not increased before the protests, political realignments did not strengthen the protest movement except at the level of ordinary people, and influential elites only defected to the opposition in the final phase. Political opportunities rather changed because ordinary citizens shared a rejectionist discourse, and acquired the networks required for action mobilization. One thus understands that Tarrow's dimensions must be complemented with a social constructivist study, to fully comprehend how action frames were generated, and how people were empowered to rise up against a seemingly monolithic, hegemonic authoritarian regime.

Mobilization continued unabated during the second week of January, even though the regime's response remained the same: Police brutality. After

100,000 people had gathered in Sfax on January 12, Tunisians started realizing that the point of no return had been attained. The momentum then spiraled upwards again, and the regime was overtaken by events. On January 14, the UGTT called a general strike. The country's leadership was already paralyzed. Ben Ali fled the same afternoon, defeated by a movement his intelligence apparatus clearly had been unable to foresee (Al Jazeera English Online, 2011).

Tarrow (1998, 81) characterizes centralized states with a high capacity for policy implementation as "strong states". The Ben Ali regime prior to December 17 2010 appeared relatively strong compared to other Arab states, with a seemingly hierarchic power apparatus and quite well developed administrative – especially coercive – resources. This offered demonstrators with a centralized target. As I have noted, the regime's strength was twinned with its insulation from societal pressures: In Kriesi's terminology, Ben Ali's state was *highly exclusionary* (1995, 40-44). In short, the state had become so unresponsive to the grievances of Tunisian society, that it was unprepared for the crisis. Paradoxically, these regime features amounted to an advantage for protesters (see Tarrow 1998, 82).

Ben Ali's regime had not grasped how its flawed rule had undermined its own power, and I want to highlight that the *popular perception of responsibility for corruption* has emerged as a major variable in my study. As we have seen repeatedly, the regime had, in contrast to the Monarchy in Morocco, been totally inflexible in its encounters with domestic resistance. Ben Ali relied overwhelmingly on force and saw no need to open his political system, not even to pre-empt challengers like King Mohamed VI did. A second key independent

variable is emerging here, which I associate closely with regime type: *Regime rigidity/adaptability* – the regime's capacity and willingness to compromise with or co-opt challenging forces in order to survive. Korany (2012, forthcoming) employs the same variable in his analysis of the “Arab Spring” of 2011.

IV.5 The February 20 Movement and mobilization in Morocco

In Morocco, the processes of mobilization were evidently quite different. First, the successful toppling of Ben Ali in Tunisia directly inspired protests in Morocco. The Arab uprisings of the spring of 2011 are prime examples of *transnational diffusion* of contentious politics, as Tarrow (1998) labels it. Again, the fact that independent media and new social media networks are unbound by state boundaries entails that information flows much more freely than before, and that ideas, discourses and action frames can be appropriated by actors in comparable situations in various locations. This is exactly what happened in Morocco. International media conveyed compelling images to Moroccans who had access to them. Youths and activists on Facebook started discussing whether the country could, and should, experience something similar to Egypt's and Tunisia's ousting of their leaders a few weeks earlier (Selma, interview 2011). It follows from this that the regional precedents changed people's perceptions of what could be done. Here too, their sense of

agency was awakened.

We immediately observe that Facebook, just like in Tunisia, allowed for a decentralized, inclusive, and nationwide discourse among youth and activists. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the reach of new social media is more limited in Morocco than in Tunisia. Generally, the Moroccan population is more scattered, less resourceful, and consists in large part of an uneducated rural population and urban proletariat (Boukhars 2011, 31). Therefore, online mobilization was restricted to those who had access to the technology, and who were susceptible to support the cause. It is significant that the first circle of people who planned protests in Morocco were activists in the Rabat area with a middle-class background (Nizar, Nadia, et al. interviews 2011).

Moroccan NGOs did not initiate the protest movement on Facebook. Their influence on popular discourse was arguably limited. I have already stated that Morocco suffered from multiple economic and social problems in recent years just like Tunisia, and interview respondents confirmed that popular discourse among many Moroccans was centered on similar economic and social grievances, such as unemployment and the rising cost of living. Selma, a member of the February 20 protest Movement, confirmed that people had been complaining, but that they had been doing it informally, and mostly among families and friends (Interview 2011). “Bread riots”, strikes, and other forms of contentious politics had occurred across the country for years, with a wave of unrest peaking after the financial crisis (Paciello 2010, 94). These were symptoms of a widespread political malaise in Morocco, although the targets of contention were probably not defined as unequivocally as in Tunisia.

Nevertheless, the *perception of injustice* was strong enough to unclench waves of protests. Due to the less repressive circumstances in Morocco, oppositional discourses could be nurtured more openly, but I shall elaborate on why these discourses turned out to be less potent than their Tunisian counterparts.

The legitimacy of the Moroccan political system has been dropping during recent years. Significant strata of the Moroccan population had arguably lost patience with corrupt and inept politicians and weak parliamentarians and ministers, who were unable to solve the country's pressing problems. This national mood spurred several Moroccans to follow events in Tunisia and Egypt closely, and individuals to start Facebook groups such as "Democracy Now" and "Moroccans who want dialogue with the King" (Nizar, interview 2011). The regime's concessions in the 1990s and early 2000s had not been sufficient to assuage the grievances of those who had lost out from flawed reforms. Liberalism had undercut state-run programs and affected vulnerable businesses, without creating promised economic growth.

Thus far, the Moroccan situation resembled Tunisia in several ways. The discourses were oftentimes the same, although people had more experience with open contention in Morocco. As I have mentioned, the country had seen its *political opportunity structure* change in formal terms since the 1990s, notably with easier political access for the citizenry by means of elections and the right to organize political rallies. Anyways, I have noted previously that these reforms had entailed little *de facto* improvements in popular influence on decision-making (Boukhars 2011).

One major difference between Tunisia and Morocco was of course the

conditions under which civil society could operate. Moroccan NGOs had experienced attempts at co-optation, divide-and-rule, and infiltration by the *Makhzen*, but in general they were considerably less constrained than civil society in Tunisia. Interestingly, adherents to the February 20 Movement had divergent interpretations of the roles various NGOs had played in the Movement's founding and operation. As in Tunisia, some interview respondents argued consistently that the protest movement had emerged from communities set up online, first and foremost on Facebook. The information they had shared online had permitted the creation of collective action frames inspired by Tunis and Cairo. These online discourses had been compelling enough to inspire people to proceed to planning street action. Notably, the first members of the February 20 group online set up a manifesto, and then permitted people to discuss freely what they wanted to omit or include in the network's charter and list of demands. The end result was a set of political, social, economic, human rights, and cultural (*Amazigh*) demands (Selma, interview 2011).

The founders of the February 20 Movement did not vet the list of participants in any way and their contributions were extremely eclectic, so consensus could only be built around a "lowest common denominator" of demands. Selma, Nizar, Amin and other February 20 Movement members all recounted how the first small group of activists had made a video where they explained why they wanted to protest, and posted this video online. The video was credited as a huge success, arguably illustrating that such simple tools were sufficient to coordinate a mass movement (Interviews 2011).

Just as in Tunisia, the narrative about "spontaneous" protests

coordinated online is a forceful one, and it reflects the perceptions activists have of themselves as independent from narrow sectorial interests, political parties, or formal NGOs. Most of these latter actors have a tainted image in Moroccan political imagery, whereas engaged youth want to represent a new political force. Interview respondents were quick to note that the February 20 Movement was “the first of its kind in Morocco” (Nizar, interview 2011).

Mobilization did not just occur simultaneously among all aggrieved people, although the activists’ discourse frequently resorts to this image. Some individuals dared join protest networks before others. Just like in Tunisia, these founding members of the Movement gained status as symbols, even though they were not formal leaders. As the number of adherents to the Movement grew, mobilization became self-reinforcing. This mobilization by example was much easier to accomplish than in Tunisia, because activists did not have to fear regime censorship of their online activities or police arrests, although a few such episodes did occur (Nadia, *Transparency Maroc*, interviews 2011). Mobilization in Morocco was then more a question of awareness-raising and convincing people that participation could yield benefits.

However, I am not arguing that the question of “fear” and repression was not an obstacle to mobilization in Morocco. According to several activists, many Moroccans still remember the years of repression - *les années de plomb* - under former King Hassan II. Heavy *Makhzen* surveillance, the use of secret prisons, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of activists, torture, and widespread use of force against rioters are but a few of the vivid memories Moroccans still have from the 1970s and 1980s (Nadia, interview 2011). Despite an apparent

modernization and liberalization, the regime's agents are still omnipresent at all levels of society. Nizar of the February 20 Movement explained that there were still "reflexes of restraint" among many, who were therefore reluctant to join the mass protests (Interview 2011). Selma agreed, stating that people still live under a collective imagery of servitude to the King (Interview 2011). The February 20 Movement wanted to address this fear, and conversely to empower people to advance their claims.

All in all, the conditions were much more permitting for protests in Morocco than in Tunisia, and an answer to the question of why the *degree of contention* in Morocco will probably rather be found in the questions of perceived injustice and agency, civil society strength, and regime flexibility.

IV.4.1 The decisive role of formal organizations in Morocco

Online social media were indeed a catalyst for protests in Morocco, but civil society also entered the movement at an early stage. Human rights organizations in Rabat had been holding sit-ins in sympathy with Tunisia, Egypt and Libya during the winter of 2011, and there had been committees of support with Tunisia operating for years. Interviews with activists revealed that almost all of them had previous connections to the cluster of autonomous human rights organizations in Rabat: Amnesty International, the AMDH, and *Transparency Maroc*, to mention some. It was clear that several organizations, and the AMDH in particular, wanted to assume a leading role in the protest movement from the

start (Abdallah, Amin, et al., interviews 2011).

Amin, a member of the youth club of the AMDH, underlined that the Moroccan NGO sector had struggled to recruit youth to its organizations. He argued that the AMDH had been more successful at this precisely because it challenged the preconceptions many young people had of NGO activism as “participation in endless meetings and noisy assemblies” (Interview 2011). In his view, most NGOs only managed to recruit those who were already interested in volunteering, while the AMDH was better at reaching out to new constituencies and generations. Even though conditions for civil society organizations in Morocco were better than in Tunisia, the cultural and generational differences that I discern between long-running NGO activists and youth remind us of the situation in the latter country.

Interestingly, older Moroccan NGO activists expressed surprise at the level of commitment their youth members showed to the emerging protest movement. Furthermore, generational cleavages manifested themselves in debates on strategy. The youth were more impatient and wanted to replicate the dramatic, yet successful examples of Tunis and Cairo, while “the old guard” held back and opted for a moderate approach (Abdallah, interview 2011). Undoubtedly, activists were anxious about how the regime would respond to such unprecedented mobilization.

While certain activists worked independently of formal NGOs and only expressed their views online, activist youth belonging either to the AMDH or the plethora of radical Leftist groups, trade unions, etc. in Morocco were also active users of new social media. This meant that the distinction between online

organization and “non-cyber” organization of protests was even more blurred than in Tunisia.

Regardless of who shaped the agenda, the February 20 Movement benefited from being portrayed as a genuine youth initiative rather than a “product” of the activities of mainstream NGOs. The AMDH itself was careful to underline the Movement’s autonomy and grass-roots character (Ibid). I interpret this narrative as an integral part of the Movement’s identity, but the responses of interviewees betray a consistent civil society involvement and influence.

Amin and Nadia described how civil society activists gathered to form the first coordination cell of the February 20 Movement (Interviews 2011). Organizations such as the AMDH had chapters in more than 90 Moroccan cities, and encouraged these to set up February 20 coalitions around the country. From the start, experienced activists from established associations formed the “practical core” of the Movement, and ensured that its momentum was not lost. The demonstrations on February 20 were therefore planned and announced weeks in advance, and Amin recalled how young members of the AMDH had worked day and night to mobilize people leading up to this crucial day (Interview 2011). The long-established friendships and networks among these individuals greatly facilitated their joint efforts at pooling their resources together and preparing for the events.

Activists received substantial logistical support from their primary organizations, 99 of which established a National Council of Support to the February 20 Movement. Included were several trade unions, but these did not

have an influence or capacity comparable to that of the UGTT in Tunisia. Abdallah, himself leader of a local chapter of the *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT), elaborated on how the *Makhzen* had successfully splintered and weakened the Moroccan trade union movement over decades, and that membership was very low compared to that of the UGTT. The Moroccan regime had implemented legislation that undermined the power of union delegates at the workplace, and several unions were too closely associated with political parties to be credible representatives of workers' interests.

Civil society actors argued that their involvement in the Movement helped mobilization greatly. Traditional mobilization with flyers, posters, and outreach activities were relatively more important than in Tunisia, because of the limited reach of Facebook and Moroccan printed media. Television and radio, which remain under regime control, were not mentioning the Movement before the first mass rallies; while some minor newspapers were acknowledging its existence and potential. Still, the large numbers of illiterate people could only be reached if civil society and trade unions put their resources at the Movement's disposal. Hence, the Movement's online activity was complemented by the efforts of multiple organizations, and their role increased over time in an effort to keep up the politicization of sympathetic groups. This effort arguably became more important as protests dragged on throughout the spring and summer months of 2011.

IV.4.2 Challenges to widespread mobilization in Morocco

To further understand the important role of formal organizations for the February 20 Movement, one can employ Curtis and Zurcher's concept of *multi-organizational fields* (1973, 53). In contrast to Tunisia, where the multi-organizational field was small, but well consolidated, the Moroccan field of formal organizations has been broader and more polarized. Oppositional organizations ranging from the radical Left to the Islamists have constituted rival alliances vying for influence over the February 20 Movement. Interview respondents affirmed that the Movement remained open to anyone interested. The Leftists and Islamists had a notable capability to bring their followers out in massive numbers, and were therefore important components of the Movement. Abdallah rendered how the first core of activists had decided to open the Movement to everyone, to prevent any subsequent strife between factions in the streets (Interview 2011). However, the Movement's spokespersons have adamantly denied that extremists control them in any organizational sense, and have pointed out that this is only an allegation the *Makhzen* has been spreading to delegitimize the February 20 Movement.

Amin, and other human rights activists who had been involved from the start, emphasized their personal loyalty to the founding charter of the February 20 Movement, and argued that they had been able to hold the political "center" free from the interference of either Leftists or Islamists. Both of these "ends of the political spectrum" ran their own popular initiatives, and could operate independently from the Movement if they so wanted (Interviews 2011). Thus,

the February 20 Movement did not monopolize the socio-political space for protests in Morocco. One may derive from this discussion that the Moroccan protest movement was struggling much more than the Tunisian one to forge a strong sense of unity and *shared identity*.

In Tunisia, the escalation of protests had been so rapid that there had been little time to debate strategies, and various political forces were united in a popular front against the regime. Moreover, formal organizations had not “unleashed” the unrest in Tunisia, and had been unable to impose any pre-existing identity or agenda on it. Although the Tunisian organizational field was generally weak, the weight of the UGTT ensured that a massive mobilization could be undertaken through “traditional” channels and with participants from various age cohorts. The Moroccan organizations clearly lacked the leadership of a predominant organization like the UGTT which could have kept discipline at crucial junctures. Moroccan trade unions could not uphold this role. The AMDH spearheaded the February 20 Movement, but it was still not a mass organization, and it drew its core members from a limited socioeconomic stratum. The infighting of NGOs in Morocco weakened them collectively and undercut their legitimacy in the eyes of non-members. In sum, Morocco scores lower than expected on *civil society strength*, because this variable is not only about the freedom of civil society, but also about the ability of organizations to use their freedom and acting cohesively.

In its first phase, the February 20 Movement had been hastily built around a set of shared demands, with a basic shared identity related to these demands. The Movement’s identity and goals might actually vanish if people

were forced to choose between the identity of the Movement and the competing identities of its constituent groups, and this debate arose as the Moroccan demonstrations became drawn out in time. The February 20 Movement has managed this tension so far, both because the Movement's Founding Charter echoes the grievances participants had before February 20, and which they still have, and supposedly because the Movement's identity is malleable. Activists in Rabat conceded that starting from mid-May 2011, they had shifted their discourse somewhat from political to social demands, in order to activate the untapped potential of the poorest classes and forestall a weakening of the Movement (Amin, Selma, Nadia, interviews 2011).

Some went as far as claiming that the Movement's initial focus on politics, and in particular constitutional reform, had been a mistake. This discourse had mostly appealed to the middle classes, whereas the poor in *les quartiers populaires* were indifferent:

“People in the poorer districts are only interested in bread, olive oil, and so on. They don't know what parliamentary democracy is, they are illiterate and they don't care. If you talk about these things, you will not trigger their interest” (Amin, interview 2011).

Some interview respondents argued, like in Tunisia, that socio-economic and political demands could not really be extricated from each other, and that Moroccans from all walks of life had participated at the first demonstrations, which had taken place in more than 35 cities (Nizar, interview 2011). However, the February 20 Movement had clearly not been able to attain a critical mass. It

appears as if the multi-organizational field which helped drive mobilization in Morocco was quite divided according to class tiers and that the first waves of protests had not reached beyond the professional and middle classes to a sufficient extent, at least not in the capital. In Casablanca, on the other hand, mobilization among the poor had been a Movement goal from the outset (Selma, interview 2011).

This new drive in the poorer quarters entailed a shift in focus, meaning that local and communal issues gained more prominence at the expense of direct demands for political reform at the central level. The regime probably welcomed this change, but it was also worried about the possible growth of demonstrations when the poor joined them. The new strategy also meant that the moderate Islamists gained greater influence over the February 20 Movement. The Islamists had always been popular among the poor, who felt alienated by the modernizing rhetoric of the government and left out by the neo-liberal state. The Islamists were useful to the February 20 Movement, because their cadres were well disciplined, and they could provide a sizable pool of rank-and-file in order to throng the streets and add significance to the contention (Amin, interview 2011). Abdallah estimated the current number of protesters each weekend to hover around 300,000, but he believed that the numbers had to reach the millions for the regime to yield further concessions (Interview 2011). The largest single rally in the spring had probably never exceeded 80,000 people (Nizar, interview 2011). Obviously, the scale of this protest movement never equaled that of the mass demonstrations in Tunisia.

This basic fact, and the understanding that the continued efforts of

multiple NGOs was required to sustain mobilization throughout the spring, compels us to ask whether the *mobilization potential* in Morocco had actually been relatively limited from the beginning. The narratives about grievances and injustice that fueled participation might have been less suggestive, and less emotionally charged, than their Tunisian counterparts. While a large number of Tunisians felt collectively humiliated by the oppressive state and socio-economic pressures, Moroccans mobilized along class lines, and a lot of them apparently lacked a refined understanding of the more political aspects of demands. In Tunisia, again, people across the country had a very clear perception of the corruption at the top, which fueled an unprecedented anger.

The political agenda of the Moroccan protesters was limited to demanding constitutional reforms and improvements in governance and transparency. This is a total contrast to Tunisia, where the crowds clamored for the outright overturning of the regime itself. Theirs was a clear-cut, spectacular demand that stirred people's emotions and shared feeling of "making history". Their revolutionary demands stand in clear contrast to the reformist movement in Morocco. I want to foreground that the February 20 Movement was very careful when criticizing the King. As I have presented previously, the King benefits enormously from a propaganda and traditional imagery that elevates his person above the failings of the Moroccan regime. The February 20 Movement went further than anyone before it in holding the King accountable, but they could not have demanded his removal for fear of losing popular support. This difference on the variable *radicalism of protesters' demands* is a fundamental input to the question of why contention was so much less intense

in Morocco.

The fact that the *Makhzen*'s coercive apparatus appears less intrusive in people's lives than Ben Ali's security forces were to Tunisians, and that overt repression is rarely seen in Morocco, also prevented Moroccans from acquiring the same urgent need to change political conditions in the country. In spite of towering economic and social problems, the sense of *injustice* has been less heightened and people have felt less desperate to act.

If one makes a comparison in terms of socio-economic grievances only, the mobilization potential in Morocco could have been comparable to that of Tunisia. *Transparency Maroc* explained that "the social and economic grievances in Morocco are the same as in other Arab countries, but the political regime is different, so the outcome must be different" (Interview 2011). The reason for why protests have been more modest in Morocco might lie as much with the regime as with society. It is to the political regime that I now turn.

IV.4.3 Interactions between protesters and the Moroccan regime

Until the mass protests started to stir up the popular districts in the late spring of 2011, the Moroccan state did not respond with much repression. The *Makhzen* was careful to strike only when the media was absent, and repression was harsher in more remote locations. Nevertheless, the Moroccan regime was surely worried about protests from the start, and turned to its preferred methods of co-optation and pre-emption to take the steam out of this emerging political force. From the first weeks of February, the *Makhzen* even used Facebook and its own media outlets to spread disinformation against activists. The regime already had a tormented relationship with several of the core NGOs backing the February 20 Movement, most notably the AMDH.

One of the founding members of the Movement online appeared on television on February 19, saying that the anticipated protests had been called off. Other activists immediately refuted this claim, and accused the *Makhzen* of bribing people into acquiescence (Nadia, interview 2011). An expedient use of Facebook and traditional mobilization led to a very successful turnout the following day. The organizers themselves were surprised at their success, and the rallies that day made for a paradigmatic event in Moroccan politics. Marches were not met with police violence, but sit-ins over the following days were dispersed. The police also used indiscriminate violence when the protesters organized a small sit-in in May at Tamara, where the Moroccan secret police is suspected of running a prison (Selma, interview 2011). Furthermore, the February 20 Movement had recurrent troubles with thugs who called

themselves “royalists”, who interfered at their rallies, and who had allegedly been paid by the *Makhzen*. The police also protected the “royalists”. However, serious clashes did not erupt between them and anti-regime protesters.

Largely, repression was mild, with few people killed (New York Times Online 2011). This means that fear was a minor obstacle to participation, and conversely, that repression did not engender outrage and the ensuing escalation of protests like it did in Tunisia.

Table III: Estimates of Casualties in Tunisia and Morocco 2011¹⁴

Country	Numbers
Tunisia	219
Morocco	2

While escalation of contention in Tunisia was very swift, and the regime was unable to get ahead of the developments, the Moroccan regime had a greater opportunity to respond to the Movement’s demands. The Monarchy and the *Makhzen* might also have learned from the mistakes that Ben Ali and Mubarak had committed. On March 9, the King gave a speech where he declared that a constitutional reform would take place, the minimum wage would be increased, and other token social reforms carried out (Abdallah, interview 2011).

Thus, King Mohamed VI regained the initiative in the political process

¹⁴ Sources: BBC News Africa 2011. *Tunisia Protests left 200 dead says UN*. Online, URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12335692> (accessed January 26, 2012) Estimate derived from UN probes. Morocco source: *Tel Quel* (484) July 30.

merely a few weeks after the protests had begun. He was to appoint who would revise the constitution and how this process would be organized, and he was to have decisive influence over the final draft. Nevertheless, people responded with enthusiasm, and claimed that the King had granted them their “Arab Spring” without violence. This meant that the mass protests lost a lot of their less dedicated followers. The King’s plan effectively undermined the legitimacy of the February 20 Movement. The women’s association, *l’Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines* (ADFM), went so far as to say that the Movement had lost its very core (Interview 2011). This was arguably not the case, but the King had successfully appropriated the Movement’s own discourse to preserve his own hegemony. Nadia deplored: “When the King says he wants to address poverty, and we also want to address poverty, this creates ambiguity among people. Who are they going to believe?” (Interview 2011). One after another, Moroccan NGOs were confronted with the choice of boycotting the reforms, or bandwagon with the King’s initiative. Almost all chose the last option.

Mobilization in itself is exhaustive and requires heavy involvement and commitment by participants and organizations. A true popular movement can rarely be sustained over time (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986). In Morocco, the *popular perception of injustice* was simply not emotionally intense enough to nurture prolonged levels of contention, and the numbers receded through the spring of 2011. Dwindling support arguably affects *the perception of agency* among less committed participants, and demobilization becomes a self-reinforcing phenomenon. In Tunisia, the opposite mechanism occurred as we

have seen, and demobilization only took place after Ben Ali had stepped down.

To continue with the Monarchy's strategy in early 2011, I underline that the constitutional drafting process lacked transparency and the final constitution lacked in clarity and consistency. Still, many NGOs praised the new provisions and hoped they would entail real improvements. *Transparency Maroc* argued that the new draft opened for new anti-corruption legislation. The Union of Journalists perceived possibilities for improving the Press Code. They also viewed the threshold on critiquing the King as somewhat lowered¹⁵.

However, the Constitution that was approved by popular referendum on July 1, 2011 does not safeguard present gains in terms of fundamental civic and political rights from future threats. Reforms in Morocco remain precarious, because the *Makhzen* typically prefers to rule by means of ambiguity, nepotism, and traditionalism rather than codified laws (Sater 2007; Younes M'Jahid, interview 2011). The new Constitution has achieved little in terms of improving predictability in governance or equality before the law, even though popular optimism continues unabated.

The Moroccan regime has succeeded where Ben Ali failed – by creating a counter-discourse to the protest movement, and dividing the Moroccan people accordingly. Interestingly, the more integrative mode of governance in Morocco might have given the regime an advantage when dealing with protests¹⁶. In

15 Normally, the King's person, the Islamic faith, and the Army, are institutions that are protected from public debate by the so-called “red lines”. Journalists who transgress them are punished, but the Union of Journalists conceded that these red lines fluctuate with the political climate in the country. Around the time of approving the constitution, they had been scaled back, and some criticism of the Monarchy was even permitted. However, the unpredictable degree of censorship is precisely a tool for *Makhzen* to keep Moroccan media disciplined – they can never know when and how the authorities will react (Younes M'Jahid, interview 2011).

16 King Mohamed VI's multi-centered state might have seemed “weaker” than Ben Ali's

addition, the ambiguous governance structures of the Monarchy, the superficially modern institutions of Parliament and courts, and the *Makhzen* that permeates the entire structure, make for a difficult protest target¹⁷. Selma reflected on this, saying “people don’t know to whom, or how, to address their grievances” (Interview 2011). One understands immediately that the “perception of injustice”-factor suffered from such a lack of an easily identifiable antagonist: Corruption and mismanagement were systemic and severe, but they were not associated with the Head of State like they had been so expressively in Tunisia. This difference also informed people’s notion of *agency* in each country differently.

This discussion has shown that there were fundamental differences between how the Tunisian and Moroccan regimes interacted with challengers during the spring of 2011, and that their behavior reflects their more long-standing approaches to oppositional political forces. With reference to the *regime rigidity/adaptability* variable I applied in the case of Tunisia, I conclude that Morocco is situated much more towards the flexible/integrative end of the spectrum and has been for a long time, and that this can explain why that country only saw the emergence of a reformist movement with limited goals which also only gained fewer supporters and had a smaller impact on the

monolithic, insulated autocracy, if one compares them according to Tarrow’s criteria of centralization and implementation capacity (1998, 82). I am not arguing that the Moroccan state is decentralized in the meaning of “federal”, for its core remains authoritarian. However, it covers a larger and more diverse population, and encompasses a wider set of economic, social

(17 continued): and political interests, among which the King is the arbiter, as we have seen.
17 One must not exaggerate the usefulness of applying the dichotomies centralized-fragmented and exclusive-inclusive when one analyzes authoritarian states. The Tunisian state proved more fragmented than expected, while the study has shown how the various Moroccan institutions are sown together by the organic and personalistic bonds of the *Makhzen*. With these caveats in mind I contend that we may still undertake a comparison based on these dimensions.

regime than did contention in Tunisia.

Lastly, if one looks for Tarrow's other political opportunity structures in the case of Morocco, we see that most of them had not, and did not, materialize during the spring of 2011. Emboldened by the examples of their neighboring countries, people have expressed their grievances in unprecedented numbers, and they have managed to collaborate nationwide like they had never done before. Yet regardless of how pressured the regime felt, contention could not fracture it. Elites did not defect to the protesters, and the Moroccan regime remained as pluralistic and flexible, yet as loyal to its leader, as it had always been.

V - Conclusion

Our examination and comparison of contentious episodes in Tunisia and Morocco shows that most of the independent variables I suggested from the outset were relevant, but that others detected under way were also significant when explaining differences between the cases. The study supports my argument that one needs to apply a social constructivist approach to identify how structural, long-term socio-economic and political changes could help spur collective action. Despite the decline of the authoritarian corporatist order, I have observed that both the Tunisian and Moroccan regimes were quite adept at retaining control of their respective societies, albeit in different ways. If I restrict the analysis to the political opportunity structures in these countries, I cannot explain the sudden wave of unrest that emerged in both polities. However, by bringing in an exploration of the collective action frames that were generated, and how these affected people's interpretations of injustice, identity, and agency, one acquires the tools to understand how this "flash flood" could occur. The impact of purely economic grievances might also have been less than I hypothesized.

Indeed, Tunisia and Morocco shared many of the same problems, resulting from flawed processes of neo-liberal restructuring and a retreat of the public sector. The demographic boom only exacerbated rising unemployment figures, while cuts in subsidies led to rising expenses. At the same time, these countries had vastly expanded their educational systems. The consequence was that a huge number of students graduated every year with high aspirations, which the economic and political order could not fulfill.

The level of economic development and class configurations were quite different in the two countries, however, with Tunisia having a more advanced economy and a much larger literate educated middle class than Morocco. This affected the scope of mobilization. Morocco's poorer classes were slower to respond to the call for mobilization, and the February 20 Movement has had to alter its demands somewhat to appeal to the country's lower strata. In Tunisia, the middle class, and the highly educated unemployed, had experienced the Ben Ali regime as a collective humiliation, and rallied behind a fundamental, emotionally charged demand for the restoration of *dignity*.

The anger against the Ben Ali regime was directed at two levels – 1) the abusive and dehumanizing practices of security forces and regime agents, which were everywhere in society, and which interfered in all civil, social, cultural, educational, and political life in the country – and 2) against the President and his closest coterie of family and advisors, who seemed corrupt beyond repair.

The latter aspect is such a central factor to explain mobilization that I prefer to single out *popular perceptions of responsibility for corruption* as a major variable in my model. The Tunisian public had good opportunities to observe how the ruling family ran the state as its own private enterprise,

In Morocco, the regime's internal diversification between the Monarchy and the Parliament and Government meant that the public was less prone to keep the King personally responsible for problems identified at the lower rungs of the administration. Moreover, the Moroccan King and his closest technocrats managed to appear much more responsive to the problem of corruption.

In general, the Moroccan state seems less insulated from society than

Ben Ali's regime was. The Tunisian state either knew that its legitimacy was declining, but remained confident it could handle unrest with coercion like it did in Gafsa, or the regime was too preoccupied with depressing organizational life and imposing conformity on society to see the warning signs. The Moroccan state, on the other hand, had gained experience with responding to, and co-opting popular demands, and maneuvered to counter the February 20 Movement by adopting the latter's own discourse. Morocco had gone through an easing of repression and the installation of new channels for popular claims-making such as election campaigns and a freer civil society. All these reforms were heavily flawed, but they created valves which relieve most pressures against the regime structure.

This ability to adapt to new forms of opposition, to new discourses and even social media indicate that the Moroccan regime is flexible without reneging power or democratizing. The variable *regime adaptability* might be the single most significant factor detected in this comparative study. I argue further that regime adaptability must be assessed over time, because a regime that engages with challengers over time is more likely to pre-empt their demands and prevent future radical contention, than a harshly repressive authoritarian state which proves more "brittle" in the face of popular attacks. One must be cautious not to equate regime flexibility "reform-willingness": Most authoritarian states reform only under pressure and political liberalization is often more rhetoric than reality. Thence my focus on how the Moroccan government has reinvented its hegemony over the last two decades. Lastly, the Moroccan regime never made the same promises of social and economic justice

that the Tunisians were accustomed to, so expectations of what the state would deliver were always lower.

Our comparative study has shown in general that most of the political opportunity dimensions that Tarrow's model encourages us to look for were absent in our two cases. However, the introduction of new communication technologies and unprecedented media connectivity has heralded a new era for organization and mobilization, and this is also true for authoritarian settings. One must keep in mind that access to such information resources was skewed along socio-economic class lines, a fact that affected the possibility of awareness-raising more in poorer, decentralized Morocco than it did in urbanized middle-class Tunisia. But, in general, the advent of Facebook has greatly facilitated access to new communities and the sharing of discourses in all countries.

In this way, the many contingent, localized discourses of alienation, resentment and resistance found a new space where they could merge into a larger collective action frame against the political status quo. Facebook helped collapse constraints of distance and time, and made coordination decentralized, simultaneous, and almost effortless. Crucially, new social media enabled new forms of "citizen journalism", evading regime censorship and raising awareness among new groups. All in all, a lot of the obstacles for participation were greatly diminished. For instance, the knowledge that more and more people committed to join demonstrations removed some of the collective action problems that might otherwise incur under informal, non-hierarchical and spontaneous mobilization – in short, agency was enhanced. Consensus

mobilization, action mobilization, the sharing of strongly moving images and testimonies all happened at the same time for many, and their pace only accelerated: One can only separate them for analytical clarity.

Furthermore, our studies have confirmed that traditional mobilization organized by formal unions and associations played a key role for realizing successful and sustained mobilization. In Tunisia, where few autonomous organizations existed, the UGTT became the backbone of a re-energized civil society. In Morocco, civil society played a vital role in planning protests in advance, and it was effectively NGO youth which used social media to augment the mobilization potential. I have also seen that organizations in Tunisia were more coherent in their actions than the Moroccan NGOs, and that this had repercussions for the unity and influence of the protest movement. The friction within the Moroccan NGO field had time to emerge because mobilization was drawn-out and its momentum relatively low, while in Tunisia NGOs did not have a choice but to bandwagon with, and pool their resources with, the popular movement that had burst forth. The variable *strength of civil society* is more significant than one might have expected given the “Western” media’s one-sided focus on Internet-driven mobilization. I have also suggested that these factors are interrelated in complex ways, and I will not attempt to make a graphic model except for summing up my findings in Table VI. Some of these factors are arguably independent and precedes all others, while factors such as perceptions of legitimacy/injustice and agency are informed by more structural factors such as regime type, civil society, and class and education levels.

Interestingly, many of the factors which I have highlighted as

contrasting my cases are of a rather structural nature, such as regime type/adaptability. Economic grievances were comparable, but protesters challenged different *modes of governance* with unequal intensity.

Factors such as consensus mobilization, feeling of injustice and agency (where I find more commonalities) are of a more discursive and intersubjective nature. This supports my claim that oppositional discourses, shared action frames and similar mechanisms might arise independently of structural backgrounds, although structural broader state-society relations will affect the *outcome* of such contention. This study has maybe more than anything shown that contention is very difficult to predict, because compelling oppositional discourses can arise even under the harshest circumstances – Syria is another recent example of this. In particular, the groundbreaking advent of new social media has empowered activists in innovative ways in relation to their authoritarian masters.

I will sum up by presenting how the two cases scored on each of my variables in a table (see page 120). Lastly, the interplay of forces examined here deserves further study, and constitutes a fascinating research agenda for developing new analysis of contentious politics. To succeed, authors must look both at the macro- and the micro levels, and of course factor in human agency. Human agency is the decisive variable which will always make contention impossible to predict, but still unleashes it when it happens. No social science model can explain or predict all collective action scenarios, but the eclectic and flexible nature of the modern sub-field leaves it with a good prospect for improving its models and theories even further.

Table IV: Overview of Structural and Discursive Variables for Tunisia and Morocco¹⁸

Variable / Country	Tunisia	Morocco
Economic liberalization	Highly liberalized	Liberalized, but national economy less modernized and integrated
Political liberalization	Not liberalized	Limited reforms implemented
Literacy and education levels	High levels of literacy and education	Relatively low for the region
Civil society strength	Weak, but strong monopoly trade union	Few constraints on activity but relatively small and fragmented
Regime type/adaptability	Authoritarian and unwilling to reform	Semi-authoritarian, demonstrating adaptability
Popular perception on corruption	Corruption seen as emanating from ruling family	Corruption seen as endemic but not associated with Head of State
Perception on legitimacy/injustice	Regime perceived as highly illegitimate	Regime legitimacy in slow decline
Extent of consensus mobilization	Widespread consensus	Consensus on grievances divided along class and education lines
Perception of agency	Widely shared and increasing notion of agency	Relatively strong in February 2011 but declining since then
Speed of mobilization	Very rapid, spontaneous	Gradual
Magnitude of contention	Very large	Limited
Radicalism of protesters' demands	Revolutionary – demanding regime change	Reformist – political and social demands but not regime change

¹⁸ We saw previously that Internet access rates did not vary much across the cases.

VI - References

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VII - Annex I: Interview Participants

- Abdallah – Senior member of the AMDH and UMT trade union in Rabat
- ADFM – interview held with several members of the Marrakech branch
- Ahmed – youth street activist and student, from Nabeul, Tunisia
- Amin – Youth activist and member of the February 20th Movement, Rabat
- Amira – Journalist and human rights activist, Tunis
- Amir – Journalist and human rights activist, Tunis
- Maha – activist of the *Conseil National des Libertés en Tunisie (CNLT)*
- Mamdouh – NGO chairman and experienced pro-democracy activist in Tunis
- Marwa, online activist and journalist, Tunis
- Nadia – Youth Coordinator at the *Association marocaine des droits de l'homme*, Rabat
- Nizar – Youth activist and member of the February 20th Movement, Rabat
- Ramzi – radio journalist, Tunis
- Reem – Youth activist, especially active online (Facebook) in Tunis
- Saad – senior member of the *Ligue Tunisienne pour les Droits de l'homme*
- Saida – Journalist, blogger and activist, Tunis
- Selma – Youth activist, spokeswoman for the February 20th Movement, Rabat
- Transparency Maroc - interview with senior member, Rabat
- UGTT Sousse – Interview with senior ranking members.
- Younes M'Jahid – Secretary General of the Moroccan Journalists' Union, Rabat
- Zekry – Senior member of the Tunisian Bar Association, Tunis

Annex II: Informed Consent Interviews

**The American University in Cairo, Egypt. Summer 2011.
Informed Consent Form**

Principal Investigator: Johan Rognlie Roko

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to provide the researcher, a graduate student doing his thesis in the American University in Cairo, with information about how it was possible for activists to mobilize so many people in Tunisia and Morocco during the recent protests.

Procedures: The project relies on interviews with activists. The topics will include: What sort of ideas and views about the regime were shared among people prior to protests, how widespread were these perceptions and how did they spread, what role did the mass media and web sites play for mobilization, in what ways were the shared ideas of alienation and disillusionment changed into an idea about active participation and mobilization?

Risks: You are asked to assess your own risks carefully. Do you think you run any risk of political persecution or repression for talking to me, now or in the future? Are you willing and interested in talking to me about the topics mentioned above? You can choose freely the place and time for interviews, and which questions of the interview you want to respond to.

Benefits: There may be no direct benefits to you from this project.

Alternatives: You can choose not to participate in this project.

Confidentiality: I will only take notes by hand, and these will be safely stored and protected, and later destroyed. Electronic data which I compile will be safely kept and protected by password, and they will not be stored in English, Arabic or French. Electronic data will also be destroyed within a year. Your name will be kept anonymous in this study unless you ask me to use your real name.

Participant's Rights: It is totally voluntary to participate in this study. If you refuse, or if you at any time decide to interrupt your participation, you will not suffer any loss or penalty.

Contact Person: Any questions you may have about this project can be sent any time to:

Johan Rognlie Roko, graduate student, American University in Cairo, AUC Ave.,
P.O. Box 74, New Cairo 11835 Egypt.

E-mail: johanrro@aucegypt.edu

Cell phone: +20146868816 or +4747034371.

Signature of the researcher

Signature of participant

Annex III: Interview Guide

- How was the legitimacy of the regime perceived over time (Over the last two decades?)
 - In what ways have people obtained information about corruption, other problems. (especially with mainstream media censored).
- To what extent were ideas explicitly rejecting the Ben Ali Regime circulated before 17 December 2010? By which means?
- In what ways were people apathetic/cynical/disillusioned by the previous socio-economic and political conditions? How did the regime spread fear in the population?
- What discourses were shared over the last couple of years which promoted activism and mobilization? (From passive to active is key here)
- In your opinion, what did people think about the legitimacy of riots erupting over the last decade? Eventually which groups sympathized, but remained passive? In what ways was 2010-2011 different?
- In what ways were pre-existing social networks (eg families, the workplace, schools) and shared identities conducive to promoting opposition, and ultimately, activism?
- In what ways were pre-existing associations, organizations, and civil society in general active in promoting and spreading the protests when it began?
- What role did cyber-networks and new social media (eg Facebook) actually play for mobilization? Which role did your group play in particular?