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The Primacy of Political Security: Contentious Politics and Insecurity in the Tunisian Revolution

The removal of Ben Ali's regime in Tunisia signalled the start of the Arab Spring. The abrupt nature of the regime change raises questions about why it happened in the way it did. This article examines the contextual factors that precipitated the regime change through the lens of political security. The aim is to examine how political insecurity in society led to the emergence of opposition sufficiently organised to unseat Ben Ali. The paper develops a framework to consider how the loss of legitimacy by the regime opened the space for opposition. Attempts to restrict opposition failed to address underlying claims, leaving the way open for the opposition to unite following the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi.

Keywords: political security, legitimacy, protest, state capacity, Tunisia

Introduction

The flight of Ben Ali from Tunisia in January 2011 following days of protest provides a compelling case regarding the importance of political security. Although the events following the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi caught international attention, the level of discontent had been growing for some time. When opposition emerged it was shaped and channelled by the degree of control that the regime had been able to exert over society. Examining the unintended consequences of this control, MacQueen argues that:

> the ability of the Ben Ali regime to destroy, divide and co-opt opposition saw its final challenge emerge as a disaggregated movement, one impossible to quell as there was no clear target.[1]

The unpredictability of the opposition therefore resulted in a failure of the regime's control mechanisms and demonstrated the inherent fragility of the ruling institutions. Understanding and assessing the sources of this apparent fragility and the way in which opposition coalesced is a necessary task in understanding the course of events.

The protests that led to the ouster of the regime had their roots in deep economic inequalities within society and geographically between different parts of the country.[2] In the context of a closed political system, opportunities to express discontent and claims against the regime were limited. The study of contentious politics suggests that changes in political opportunity structures provide a means to identify decisions of actors to initiate change.[3] Events leading to the fall of the Ben Ali regime do not immediately suggest a significant

change in the political opportunities available to opponents. Therefore, in order to understand the fragility of the regime's control it is important to examine the origins of the disaggregated movement that did emerge. The notion of political security provides a frame within which to consider the operation of the regime and also the rise of an opposition sufficient to challenge it.

This article considers the roots of the opposition movement that led to the 2011 regime change in Tunisia. The aim is to examine how political insecurity in society precipitated the eventual outcome. The analysis will inform an understanding of the significance of protest as an expression of perceived insecurity within the population. The remainder of the article is divided into three sections. The first section examines the social, economic and political patterns that existed in Tunisia before the 2011 revolution. This is significant given the disjunction between the regime's focus on economic performance to legitimise its rule and the growing economic inequalities that underpinned the protests. The second section focuses on the wave of protest that led up to the fall of the regime to illustrate the way in which political insecurity facilitated the emergence of the disaggregated, but extensive opposition movement. The final section draws on concepts linked to civil society, contentious politics and democratisation to assess the way in which opposition emerged and reasons for its dramatic impact.

Tunisia Under Ben Ali (1987-2011)

Tunisia under Ben Ali exhibited a number of contradictory tendencies, but one constant was the non-democratic character of the regime. Despite a limited opening following the seizure of power in 1987, the regime maintained a tight control on expressions of dissent. In order to retain the quiescence over the longer-term, the regime relied on an extensive internal security network that dealt harshly with any opposition. Reflecting on Ben Ali's first decade, Murphy argued:

> arbitrary detentions, mass trials and allegations of torture quickly began to tarnish the regime's image, at home and abroad. Once unleashed, the security beast proved impossible to drive back into the cage… [and] increasingly turned on the secular opposition[4]

This was in keeping with the practice of the previous regime and was effective in maintaining control . The regime sought to demonstrate its credentials through a form of performance legitimacy[5], based on two key pillars: limiting the Islamist threat and maintaining economic growth. These tendencies were reflected in the cycle of elections under Ben Ali that

emphasised the success in neutralising the Islamist threat (1994 and 1999 elections), before shifting to economic development and prosperity in 2004 and 2009.[6]

Dealing with the perceived Islamist threat generated support for the policies of the regime, which was tempered over time as repression spread to other oppositional actors.[7] The regime prevented the Islamist Ennahda party from taking part in the 1989 parliamentary elections, but members of the party were able to stand as independent candidates. Allani argues that, although the Ennahda had moderated its language in the run-up to the election, its campaign 'put forward some extremist proposals denouncing women's rights and exploiting religion in public life…. [resulting in] hostility in public opinion and from the government.'[8] This more radical position provided an opening for the regime to portray the Islamist opposition as a threat and exclude it. In response, the party turned to more extreme measures, with radical offshoots such as the Salafist Jihadists emerging and engaging in conflict with the state.[9] The result was that the public turned increasingly against the broader Islamist opposition movement, alienating it from its potential support base.[10] The claims of the regime about the Islamist opposition were substantiated by violent confrontations, with a clash between government forces and Salafist Jihadists in early 2007.[11] Therefore, despite the genuine early challenge presented by Ennhada,[12] the radicalisation of parts of the movement allowed the regime to portray it as a threat and justify the use of force.

As the second pillar of the regime's legitimacy, economic performance presents a complicated picture. In terms of general economic performance, GDP per capita almost doubled between 1987 and 2010 from 1603.81 to 3143.53 (US$ 2000 constant).[13] This trend continued and accelerated growth seen under the previous regime, income climbed steadily as the population also grew. In order to achieve this growth, the regime adhered rigidly to the guidelines set down by the IMF and other international actors, leading to privatisation and marketization of the economic sphere. To achieve a stable economic system 'the regime sought to transfer the burden of export-income generation to the private sector in a manner that is sustainable and based on diverse, internationally competitive production.'[14] Tsourapas argues the nature of the reform programme allowed the regime to maintain control over the social configuration of work, specifically when 'promoting a specific work ethic (that of a well-behaved Tunisian) the regime found a natural ally in the country's business sector.'[15] Despite the appearance of economic stability Johnston argues the regime 'existed primarily to enrich and protect the President, his family, and politically connected elites....top-down exploitation extended, by various connections, all the way down to the neighbourhood and

village level.'[16] The extent of corruption ensured that the benefits of improved economic performance were not felt by the population.

Turning to the actual effects and distribution of the economic benefits of growth reveals a source of insecurity for the population and ultimately the regime. Rates of unemployment by level of education (Figure 1) demonstrate a shift during the time Ben Ali was in power. Rates of unemployment for those with primary or no formal education fell during the period, while those with secondary and higher education saw an increase. Of particular significance is the increase in unemployed graduates from a rate of 1.6 percent in 1994 to 28 percent in 2010. This is a substantial increase in a group with aspirations and expectations, which were not borne out by the quality of the qualifications they received, providing a source of discontent amongst a growing section of the population.[17] The rates of unemployment also varied significantly by region, with the North and Central East regions (including the capital Tunis) having an official unemployment rate in 2007 of 11.97 percent, whereas the interior regions saw a rate of 17.88 percent.[18] This difference demonstrates a significant variation in the relative economic opportunities in different parts of the country.

Figure 1

Given these tensions, a question could be raised about why the regime did not fall until 2011. Part of the reason for this can be found in the way in which it dealt with dissenting views. Murphy identifies this as an outgrowth of the response to the Islamist threat:

> Having successfully eradicated their challenge ...[Ben Ali] turned upon the secular and legal opposition, containing any genuine pluralism through the application of a rigorous security regime…. [resulting in] a hybrid regime, exhibiting democratic procedural practices but authoritarian patterns of power holding.[19]

Civil society organisations in Tunisia were restricted and limited in their ability to operate, yet there were some key organisations that exercised some degree of influence. These included the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) and the Tunisian League for Defence of Human Rights (LTDH) founded in 1946 and 1976 respectively.[20] Both organisations were subject to interference by the regime, but found ways of managing these pressures. Although the UGTT was weakened by the success of the regime in manipulating the leadership and the perception that it is 'a relic of the past rather than a force for the future'[21] it continued to play

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a role in labour disputes. The LTDH was more successful in fighting off state co-optation, but 'attempts to reassert its independent voice have cost it dearly… [as the state] moved from legalistic measures to active governmental and police harassment.'[22] The control exercised over these peak organisations illustrates the limits of political freedom under the Ben Ali regime and the use of institutionalised control measures to restrict dissenting voices.

In addition to the UGTT and the LTDH, other professional organisations existed that represented the rights of their members in the face of challenges by the regime. One of the more significant was the Bar Council, which staged strikes, sit-ins and engaged in protest demonstrations over issues such as persecution of journalists and attempts to limit the independence of the courts and extend regime control.[23] Given the centrality of the legal profession, these protests were successful in generating some limited concessions from the regime and holding back attempts at bringing them under control, leading Gobe to argue that the organisation moved 'from [an] instrument of State control to a social space for the crystallisation of professional and political opposition'.[24] Alongside these key groups, other more spontaneous groupings have emerged. Of particular significance, in view of the trend in unemployment figures noted above, was the formation in 2007 of the Union of Unemployed Graduates. This group formed to protest over the lack of jobs and opportunities available for the growing number of graduates. While it was tolerated initially by the regime, its emergence during a period of decreasing political freedoms led to a crackdown.[25] The emergence of this group was significant as it formed in the relatively impoverished central regions of the country, bringing together issues of regional unemployment and poverty.

These groups all presented a challenge to the authority of the regime, leading to attempts to control their activities. The experience of the UGTT, LTDH, Bar Council and the journalists union show that the preferred option was to attempt to co-opt the leadership rather than directly attack the organisations. The experience of the Union of Unemployed Graduates shows that, where it was deemed necessary, the regime was willing to use force. Although these groups challenged the state in various ways, they had limited impact on the practices of the regime. This can be linked to the level of control exercised by the regime through its internal security structures and the resulting inability to mobilise groups to work together to form a cohesive opposition movement. Where opposition did emerge it was centred in economically and geographically peripheral parts of the country allowing the state to limit the likelihood of such opposition spreading.

The durability of the regime was also facilitated by the security context in the wider region. Following the attacks on the US in 2001 there was heightened concern around the potential threat posed by Islamic groups. Ben Ali's regime had been a consistent opponent of such groups domestically, which provided it an opportunity to 'play on the security concerns of Western democracies to retain their support'.[26] Landolt and Kubicek argue that although the Western states had less influence over the MENA states than those in the former soviet space, Tunisia's 'smaller economy and fewer competing security issues' meant that it was possible to exert influence over its domestic practices.[27] While US and the EU attempted to influence the regime through efforts at democracy promotion this was secondary to their desire to maintain stability in the region, tending towards the status quo.[28] Together these factors combined to support the longer-term stability of the Ben Ali regime and shaped the nature of the opposition that did emerge as considered in the next section.

Protest and Repression in the Origins of the Tunisian Revolution

The control the regime exercised over formal organisations also extended to demonstrations against the policies of the regime. Instead of resorting to open repression, the regime made use of internal security and other apparatus to limit expressions of dissent. Where open opposition did emerge in the form of protest actions, the regime attempted to co-opt sections of the opposition, and resorted to force if this was not successful. An examination of the number of social conflict events over the 1991-2010 period (Figure 2) provides an indication of the limited scope of protest actions.[29] Although this data focuses primarily on newspaper reports of protest events, it has been noted that the use of this form of data can provide a means of measuring relative change in basic levels of protest actions. As Rootes argues with regard to environmental protests:

> We cannot hope, even by the most sophisticated analysis of data derived from media reports, closely to approach an unmediated record of events, but we can reasonably hope to give as comprehensive and balanced account of events as it is possible to assemble from public sources.[30]

The following section utilises this data to assess change in the scale of the protest events over the period, in relation to changes in the actions of the character of the regime.

Figure 2

The level of recorded social conflict remained relatively low for much of the 1990s, with few events taking place and of limited intensity (as measured by number of days of duration). From 2000, the number of recorded events began to increase, with events in that year being relatively short in duration (six events over seven days). There was a further change in 2005 when there was a significant increase in the intensity, with the four recorded events lasting a total of 40 days. This shift is significant as it suggests that the degree of commitment was increasing among those engaged in social conflict and challenging the state. The level of protest in 2008 is drawn primarily from Gobe (2009) and focused on a more specific region, however it points to the emergence of a cycle of contention.[31] During this period, 19 distinct events were recorded lasting a total of 112 days, centred on the Gafsa region.[32] What started as a protest against unemployment and a march by unemployed graduates, students, union members and mothers of injured workers to the Gafsa Phosphate Company on 5th of January grew into a more intense and sustained period of protest.[33] The protest wave was brought to an end by force by the regime and the deployment of the army on 7th of June.[34] Following these events, the level of protest remained relatively low until the beginning of the protest cycle in late 2010 that resulted in the removal of Ben Ali.

While these data rely primarily on newspaper sources and are partial they demonstrate some important features of opposition. Actions against the regime remained at relatively low level with occasional spikes in activity. The duration was also short, as the regime was able to bring them to an end through the use of inducements or force. This low level and intensity of protest when combined with the inability of organised groups (such as the LTDH and UGTT) to challenge the regime directly points to the degree of control. Addressing this point, Perkins argues:

> few civil society organizations had the ability to function at all effectively beyond the limited parameters permitted by the authorities, and only the largest, best organized and most entrenched such as the UGTT had any real possibility of challenging the practices of the regime, and they only with considerable discretion and circumspection.[35]

The focus of the protests on economic conditions demonstrates the way in which political insecurity limited opportunities to seek remedies for other forms of insecurity.[36]

The reaction of the regime to this perceived threat to its authority can be demonstrated by considering changes in political rights. Figure 3 shows the Freedom House scores for the Tunisian regime from 1986-2013.[37] During the early period of the Ben Ali regime there was a loosening of civil liberties and political rights as he sought to consolidate his position and

eliminate potential opponents (such as Ennhada). This was reversed in 1992 when civil liberties and political rights were restricted and control was re-asserted.[38] The second point of note is that, in 2007, the regime further restricted the political rights of the population in a time of heightening tensions. This may be seen as a reaction to the (limited) increase in the level and intensity of social conflict targeting the state. If this was the case, the restriction of political rights rather than civil liberties would accord with the tendency of the regime to avoid open confrontation in favour of co-opting opponents and restricting the political space. In so doing, the regime gave the appearance of allowing some opposition mobilisation, as long as it did not create instability.

Figure 3

The data support the earlier assertion that the regime was able to maintain limits on the expression of dissent through control of the social and political spheres. The pattern of institutional roles and power within the regime meant that the legislative branch was weak, with little ability to challenge the executive.[39] Coupled with the pervasive internal security forces, the lack of political rights and representation meant that the populace was at the mercy of the regime. In such an environment, the protests and opposition to the regime expressed by groups such as the LTDH and Bar Council were unable to lead to the formation of coordinated and sustained action. Hibou argues that this allowed the control of the regime to go beyond physical domination through repression:

> if policing [in Tunisia] has an unquestionable influence on people's frame of mind, perhaps even more than the organisation of daily life, control takes place, above all, through constant coercive practices involving economic and social activities.[40]

The centralisation of power in the executive, and in particular the president, made any concerted opposition force of limited use.[41]

The use of measures to contain dissent coupled with the failure of the regime to address the underlying concerns of the population undermined its claim to legitimacy and precipitated its downfall. The marginalisation of the central and southern regions at the expense of the northern and coastal regions led to inequalities that generated a sense of injustice. When this injustice was expressed through contentious actions, the state security forces responded with repressive tactics. In the normal run of events the use of force coupled with limited economic inducements was sufficient to deal with opposition. However, the

steady accumulation of economic inequalities coupled with the use of repressive force meant that the costs of not acting had accumulated to a point where action against the regime was conceivable.[42] The actions of Mohamed Bouazizi acted as a trigger that precipitated the emergence of diverse opposition pursuing different aims. Ayeb argues:

> While the marginalised classes protested with demands for employment, food and an end to marginalisation and exclusion, the middle classes fought tooth and nail for individual liberties, for political rights of expression, organisation and participation, for the consolidation or affirmation of their new rights, especially for women, and for an improvement in incomes and standards of living.[43]

In the absence of outlets to express this sense of frustration, the resulting protests were diffuse and varied, making it more difficult for the state to maintain order.[44]

The final failure of the regime was represented in the unwillingness of the armed forces to use force against the opposition protests.[45] As noted above, the regime possessed a formidable internal security force that was able to maintain order. However, the reliance on informal mechanisms and structures to maintain order undermined and weakened its ability to rely on the institutions of the state. As a professional body the military was unwilling to obey the order to repress the protests to protect the regime. Similar outcomes have been observed in other situations, as the loss of legitimacy and authority by the non-democratic regime requires actors to assess the relative costs of actions against the population.[46] The unwillingness of the military to obey the order to use force against the population arose due to the 'increasingly personalist and corrupt regime [that] may have been a growing liability for the military, subverting its core organizational interests.'[47]

Loss of legitimacy by the regime saw increasing opposition within society. Although the level of action against the regime remained relatively low and disconnected for much of the period, the claims that were being made centred on common concerns. Attempts by the regime to close down opportunities for expression of discontent, as represented by a decrease in political rights from 2007, were not sufficient to quell opposition. When Mohammed Bouazizi set himself alight he provided a symbolic figure that crystallised the diverse opposition and provided a rallying point that demonstrated the level of discontent and absence of regime legitimacy.[48] This was a significant moment, as it provided the impetus for diverse opposition actors to coalesce and overcome the constraints imposed by the state. The unwillingness of the armed forces to intervene to protect the regime further demonstrated this loss of control. The regime had extensive repressive apparatus at its disposal, but the

systematic weakening of key institutions meant that it was unable to rely on these when needed.

Protest, Political Insecurity and Democratisation

The spectre of political insecurity hung over the Ben Ali regime and ultimately sowed the seeds that led to his downfall. Political security in this sense refers to the degree of certainty about how the regime will act in particular situations, allowing participants to make decisions and judgements with confidence over the likely outcome. The pervasive network of corruption that underpinned the regime limited opportunities for advancement and certainty, as arbitrary decisions governed the actions of state representatives.[49] This section draws on the case to ask how political insecurity can interact with civil society and contentious politics to initiate regime change. The analysis will also take into consideration the way in which democratisation (or opportunity for) may be fostered by such interactions.

Political insecurity was important in undermining the regime in two key areas: state capacity and individual perceptions. State capacity refers to the ability of the governing regime to maintain order and provide for its citizens. The underlying principle is one of control leading Sewell to argue that 'To be fully effective, the state's policing must cover the entire space of its territory.'[50] Delving into the specifics of state capacity Cummings and Nørgaard have identified four dimensions: ideational, political, technical and implementational.[51] The ideational dimension denotes the degree to which the state is seen as legitimate, while the political dimension captures the ability of the state to function effectively when dealing with stakeholders. These two dimensions form the core of state capacity and are mutually reinforcing; in the absence of either the state will struggle to function effectively. Technical and implementational dimensions follow, identifying the intellectual and organisational resources of the state and the ability to implement decisions. This view of state capacity assumes a balance between dimensions, for example, if the state lacks ideational capacity it may be forced to rely on coercive measures to fulfil its aims.

Individual perceptions of political security are significant as they capture the view from below. These are represented at an aggregate level in the notion of ideational capacity, as the state is seen as legitimate to the extent to which it provides for the needs of the population. The form of political system determines how the state is able to generate legitimacy and in turn guarantee perceptions of security. In non-democratic systems the legitimacy of the state is reliant on economic performance or protection of national identity

from external threats.[52] In such a context views from society can be discounted or suppressed if they threaten the dominant position of the regime elites. In addition, Davenport argues that 'there are generally no effective mechanisms for countering/"checking" the coercive power of authority within such governments.'[53] By contrast, Bunce and Wolchik argue that 'democracies are more respectful of human rights; they are less likely to make catastrophic mistakes; and they have a stronger record than dictatorships with respect to…material quality of life.'[54] Although claims made by individuals and groups may not lead to change, the presence of feedback mechanisms allowing expression of discontent generate legitimacy, as participants accept the process.[55]

Civil society provides the space for opposition groups to gather and articulate claims in relation to the state. Outlining the character of civil society, Linz and Stepan define it as:

> an arena of the polity where self-organizing groups, movements, and individuals, relatively independent from the state, attempt to articulate values, create associations and solidarities and advance their interests.[56]

In this vein, civil society is represented as a relatively independent sphere, subject to oversight and management by the state. The essence of civil society is that it possesses the means to encourage change, whereas the character of economic and political systems is based on institutional structures and a degree of certainty, preventing the emergence of greater dynamism. Although civil society can represent dynamism, Chandhoke notes that it is not possible to 'assume civil society is emancipated or abstracted from the ethos that permeates'[57] The political and economic spheres. The strength and form of civil society is heavily influenced by the context.

The constraints imposed by the non-democratic system in excluding and marginalising dissenting voices shapes the way in which opposition emerges. Where political expression is restricted, associational activity declines as individuals become isolated, privatised and demoralised, undermining the development of a broader active civil society.[58] Although non-democratic regimes can constrain opposition, the issue of capacity and the (in)ability to provide for the needs of the population may create further challenges. Berman identifies the risks associated with civil society in the absence of effective capacity 'if…political institutions and structures are weak and/or the existing political regime is perceived to be ineffectual and illegitimate, then civil society activity may become an alternative to politics'[59] Civil society therefore becomes an alternative zone as the population

turns to practices of self-help, further challenging the legitimacy of the state. This tendency will be reinforced in what North et al refer to as natural states where

> A hierarchy of elite relationships exists in which small groups of powerful elite individuals know one another through direct personal contact and experience. These circles of elite relationships interlock: all elite individuals know and are associated with other elite individuals above and below them in the social hierarchy.[60]

The regime in Tunisia operated along these lines, with access to resources and opportunities determined by proximity to the ruling family.[61]

Contentious politics provides tools with which to interpret and understand manifestations of discontent that arise within civil society in response to perceived injustices. Defining contentious politics, Charles Tilly argued that it:

> involves interactions in which actors make claims bearing on someone else's interests, in which governments appear either as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties. Contentious politics thus brings together three familiar features of social life: contention, collective action, and politics.[62]

This illustrates the broad scope of activities captured by the concept, with actions ranging from meetings and demonstrations through to civil wars and revolutions. By placing actions in a spectrum, it also points to a unity among forms, recognising the centrality of contention and collective action. Refining the concept, Sewell argues that it 'might also be defined as concerted social action that has the goal of overcoming deep rooted structural disadvantage.'[63] This was certainly on display in Tunisia with key protests taking place in economically disadvantaged regions before spreading to the core.

The state plays a central role in contentious politics, serving as both target of the majority of claims and as provider of the space in which contention takes place. As noted above, expectations and limitations of civil society activities are defined by the state through the structuring of the legal and political environment.[64] Within this context, the state determines the opportunities and threats that actors face by 'choosing a mix of concessions and repression'[65] when responding to claims. In establishing these limits the state divides claim-making performances into prescribed, tolerated, and forbidden actions, with the boundaries between each determined and conveyed to those involved.[66] Forms of contentious politics vary significantly between cases, as they are shaped by the context in which they emerge. Tarrow argues that the 'repertoire of contention offers movements three broad types of collective action – disruption, violence and contained behaviour'.[67] The adoption of disruptive actions is the most common (and effective) approach, as it seeks to challenge and

break with established practices, and highlight perceived injustices. Central to disruptive actions is innovative behaviour which 'incorporates claims, selects objects of claims, includes collective self-representations, and/or adopts means that are either unprecedented or forbidden within the regime in question'.[68]

When considering contentious performances in this context, it is important to determine what factors provide the impetus for mobilization. Actors exist within a wider external environment that in turn shapes their decisions by presenting both opportunities and threats. These external opportunities have been divided into five specific categories – openness of the regime, coherence of the elite, stability of political alignments, availability of allies, and repression/facilitation – together with shifts in the rate of change that determine the political opportunity structure.[69] A change in any of these categories can increase or decrease the costs involved in action, thereby feeding into decision-making processes. The relationship between the political opportunity structure and action is not uniform and deterministic, but rather relative and contextual. Goldstone and Tilly note that where the costs of not acting outweigh the potential risks of acting, contentious action is possible.[70] Rather than facing repression or ongoing insecurity a group may act against the state to pre-empt perceived threats or at least limit the costs involved. Examining the costs of repression, Francisco notes that the use of disproportionate repression by the state can also lead to a backlash and the emergence of new forms of contention.[71] Such reactions point to a view that the actions of the state are illegitimate, providing opportunities for organised collective resistance to emerge.

If the state lacks the capacity to maintain order and satisfy the demands of its population (or if there is a perception that this is the case), groups engaged in contentious politics can turn to violent means. Considering the factors that lead to the escalation of conflict, Saxton and Benson identify social mobilisation, repression, external rebellion, and regime change all of which are possible in times of political uncertainty, when limits are ill-defined.[72] Akbaba and Taydas further note that '[p]rotest…is about negotiation with the political means provided by the state'.[73] Therefore, where the state lacks the will or capacity to negotiate, more direct forms of action (including the use of violence) may be adopted by claim-making groups. This is reflected in the finding that where the state uses repressive means to control dissent there will be an increase in violence.[74]

Where the associational space is restricted the opportunities for organising are limited, smaller and more isolated pockets of resistance will emerge. The situation in Tunisia

before the uprising illustrates this phenomenon, where opposition emerged it was maintained within limited boundaries defined by the state. Groups that had the potential to bridge social, economic and geographical sectors (such as the Union of Unemployed Graduates) were suppressed. The ability of groups to organise and present unified challenges to the state is central. Lang illustrates the significance of broad civil society organising in Eastern Europe in 1989, arguing: 'The tipping point of the old regimes was not the associational practices of dissident groups in their niche environments as such – the tipping point was reached when these associations decided to leave their niche and go public'[75]. In the absence of space to organise, the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi provided a unifying focus and impetus for mobilisation, his disruptive act challenged expected behaviour and introduced uncertainty that the opposition was able to capitalise on. Although there had been organised and spontaneous opposition to the regime previously this act reached across the different societal cleavages to generate a feeling of solidarity.

The change that resulted in the case of Tunisia saw the removal of the regime and of restrictions on participation. It is important to note that protests that emerged in the period prior to the regime change were not focused on introducing democracy, but rather overcoming political insecurity that led to perceptions of injustice. In an early paper on the subject Rustow recognised the seemingly indirect nature of some cases of democratisation, arguing 'Democracy was not the original or primary aim; it was sought as a means to some other end or it came as a fortuitous byproduct of the struggle.'[76] This perspective is supported in more recent work which suggests that income inequality is a more powerful driver[77] and that explicit support for democracy does not have a notable effect on democratic development.[78] The corollary of this is that such a regime change is not guaranteed to lead to sustained democratic practices, which Inglehart argues also requires tolerance, trust, political activism and postmaterialist values.[79]

Figure 4

This leads back to the significance of political insecurity in facilitating regime change in Tunisia. Figure 4 suggests a relationship between the factors considered in this section. This does not capture the level of activity at each stage necessary to result in the eventual outcome of democratisation, but it does identify a possible path for how political insecurity can serve as a basis for democratisation. As the analysis proposes there is a direct connection

between political insecurity, civil society and protest/contentious politics. The link to democratisation is more tenuous and is clearly dependent on the intensity of the relationship between the top three factors. Events in Tunisia suggest that the presence of insecurity alone is not sufficient to initiate democratisation, but rather that a triggering event that is able to bridge between contesting groups and unite opposition may be required.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to identify how political insecurity contributed to the fall of Ben Ali. The focus on perpetuation in non-democratic regimes means that avenues for the population to express claims of insecurity are closed and tightly controlled. Such expressions of discontent would challenge the legitimacy of the regime in power, given that such legitimacy would be based primarily on maintaining order and stability. The non-democratic state is forced to rely on coercive measures to maintain order in the face of challenges to its authority from below. In doing so it undermines its own political security by reducing flexibility and adaptability necessary for the development of a resilient political system. In a context of poor economic performance and inequality this can lead to a build-up of pressure for change and explosive opposition movements.

In the case of Tunisia, the effects of the closed system and absence of political security resulted in the regime change of January 2011. While the regime was able to maintain the appearance of economic performance through the steady growth of GDP, the benefits were unevenly distributed. Economic opportunities in the South and Central regions were limited relative to the North, leading to discontent, as was seen in the wave of protests around Gafsa in 2008. The growth in the number of unemployed graduates also added to the feelings of resentment and provided a base of support for opposition to the regime. In attempting to maintain control the regime restricted the operation of established groups such as the UGTT and LTDH, preventing them from providing a regular outlet for claims from within society. The loss of legitimacy by the regime coupled with the diverse base of opposition meant that when it did coalesce there was little the regime could do to contain it.

The findings illustrate the importance of political security in maintaining the stability of the regime. The absence of political security means that opposition is channelled towards the failings of the regime in an attempt to gain redress for what is perceived to be lacking. The inability of the Ben Ali regime to recognise and manage the growing level of discontent, other than through increased restrictions, laid the ground for its removal.

[1] MacQueen, "The Winter of Arab Discontent", 257.

[2] Chomiak and Entelis, "Making of North Africa's Intifadas".

[3] Tilly, *Contentious Performances.*

[4] Murphy, "Ten Years On", 119. Aleya-Sghaier notes that "Between 120,000 and 150,000 police officers regularly crisscrossed the country, far exceeding the number of police officers in France, whose population is five time's larger" Aleya-Sghaier, "The Tunisian Revolution", 22.

[5] Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*.

[6] Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*, 233.

[7] Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*.

[8] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation", 265.

[9] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation".

[10] Murphy, "Ten Years On".

[11] Allani, "The Islamists in Tunisia between Confrontation and Participation".

[12] Haugbølle and Cavatorta, "Will the Real Tunisian Opposition Please Stand Up?".

[13] World Bank http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/global-financial-development [accessed 28 October 2013]

[14] Murphy, "The Tunisian *Mise á Niveau* Programme and the Political Economy of Reform".

[15] Tsourapas, "The Other Side of a Neoliberal Miracle", 31.

[16] Johnston, *Corruption, Contention and Reform*, 88.

[17] Haouas, Sayre and Yagoubi, "Youth Unemployment in Tunisia". Tensions were exacerbated by the 'youth bulge'. Aleya-Sghaier, "The Tunisian Revolution".

[18] Jamoussi and Gassab, "Determinants of Graduate Unemployment in Tunisia", 3.

[19] Murphy, "The Tunisian *Mise á Niveau* Programme and the Political Economy of Reform", 522-3.

[20] Alexander, "Labour Code Reform in Tunisia"; Gobe, "The Tunisian Bar to the Test of Authoritarianism".

[21] Alexander, "Labour Code Reform in Tunisia", 124.

[22] Mednicoff, "Think Locally – Act Globally?", 87-88.

[23] Gobe, "The Tunisian Bar to the Test of Authoritarianism".

[24] Gobe, "The Tunisian Bar to the Test of Authoritarianism", 334. A similar transition occurred following attempts by journalists to organise and challenge the regime. After being denied registration the Tunisian Journalists Union in 2009 joined the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (NSTJ) which had been founded the year before. After the NSTJ issued two reports critical of the regime and its members staged a symbolic protest pro-government journalists staged an internal takeover of the board, thereby removing its independent voice. See Human Rights Watch "The Price of Independence",

[25] Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement".

[26] Volpi, "Explaining (and Re-explaining) Political Change in the Middle East During the Arab Spring", 974.

[27] Landholt and Kubicek, "Opportunities and Constraints", 7.

[28] See Durac and Cavatorta, "Strengthening Authoritarian Rule through Democracy Promotion?"; Powel "The Stability Syndrome".

[29] Data represented in Figure 2 are drawn from Hendrix and Salehyan, *Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD)*. This data is supplemented by events drawn from Ayeb, "Social and Political Geography of the Tunisian Revolution"; Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement"; Gobe, "The Tunisian Bar to the Test of Authoritarianism".

[30] Rootes **"**The Transformation of Environmental Activism", 16.

[31] On cycles of contention see: Tarrow *Power in Movement"*.

[32] Number of days was calculated per event. Events recorded occurred in towns and villages in the same region, but physically distinct. Some element of contagion is likely, but each group of protest actors was forced to deal with the threat of repression. See Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement" for events.

[33] Describing the breadth of actions in the Gafsa region, Perkins notes 'the miners adopted an array of tactics – work stoppages; street protests and demonstrations; hunger strikes; sit-ins at company facilities; roadblocks impeding the movement of vehicles throughout the basin; blocking, and in some instances, destroying the railroad tracks on which the phosphate ore moved to processing and export terminals; throwing up tent cities to

call attention to their grievances; and appealing to colleagues in the national labor movement and other progressive forces to adopt their cause.' Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*, 220-21.

[34] Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement".

[35] Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia*, 214.

[36] Gobe, "The Gafsa Mining Basin Between Riots and a Social Movement".

[37] Data represented in Figure 3 were obtained from Freedom House http://www.freedomhouse.org/ [accessed 29 October 2013]. The data reported score political rights and civil liberties range from 1 (high) to 7 (low).

[38] Sadiki, "Political Liberalization in Bin Ali's Tunisia".

[39] Tunisia is ranked in the bottom sixth of countries in terms of legislative power. Fish and Kroenig *The Handbook of National Legislatures*.

[40] Hibou, "Domination and Control in Tunisia", 188.

[41] Fish and Kroenig, *The Handbook of National Legislatures*. The strength of the regime was illustrated by Ben Ali's ability to overturn term limits on the presidency. Sadiki, "Political Liberalization in Bin Ali's Tunisia".

[42] See Moore, "Repression and Dissent".

[43] Ayeb, "Social and Political Geography", 476.

[44] MacQueen, "The Winter of Arab Discontent".

[45] Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace".

[46] On Romania see: Hall, "Theories of Collective Action and Revolution".

[47] Brooks, "Abandoned at the Palace", 207.

[48] Perkins, *History of Modern Tunisia.*

[49] Johnston, *Corruption, Contention and Reform*.

[50] Sewell, "Space in Contentious Politics", 68.

[51] Cummings and Nørgaard, "Conceptualising State Capacity".

[52] Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes*.

[53] Davenport, *State Repression and Domestic Democratic Peace*, 10.

[54] Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*, 23.

[55] Gilley, "The Determinants of State Legitimacy".

[56] Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 7.

[57] Chandhoke, "The 'Civil' and the 'Political' in Civil Society", 8.

[58] Galston, "Civil Society and the 'Art of Association'".

[59] Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic", 427.

[60] North et al, *Violence and Social Orders*, 35-6.

[61] Johnston, *Corruption, Contention and Reform.*

[62] Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 5.

[63] Sewell, "Space in Contentious Politics", 55.

[64] Chandhoke, "The 'Civil' and the 'Political' in Civil Society".

[65] Goldstone and Tilly, "Threat (and Opportunity)", 185.

[66] Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*. This is more questionable in non-democratic states where the rule of law is weak and permitted actions are subject to arbitrary change. See Diamond, "The Rule of Law Versus the Big Man".

[67] Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 99.

[68] McAdam et al, *Dynamics of Contention*, 8.

[69] Tilly, *Contentious Performances*, 92.

[70] Goldstone and Tilly, "Threat (and Opportunity)".

[71] Francisco, "After the Massacre".

[72] Saxton and Benson, "Means, Motive and Opportunities in Ethno-Nationalist Mobilization", 73.

[73] Akbaba and Taydas, "Does Religious Discrimination Promote Dissent?", 286.

[74] Moore, "Repression and Dissent". Carey also argues that 'protest and repression are… interdependent.' Caryey, "Dynamic Relationship between Protest and Repression", 8.

[75] Lang, *NGOs, Civil Society and the Public Sphere*, 42-3.

[76] Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy", 353.

[77] Muller and Seligson, "Civic Culture and Democracy".

[78] Hadenius and Teorell, Cultural and Economic Prerequisites of Democracy".

[79] Inglehart, "How Solid is Mass Support for Democracy."

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Figure 1 – Rates of Unemployment by Level of Education
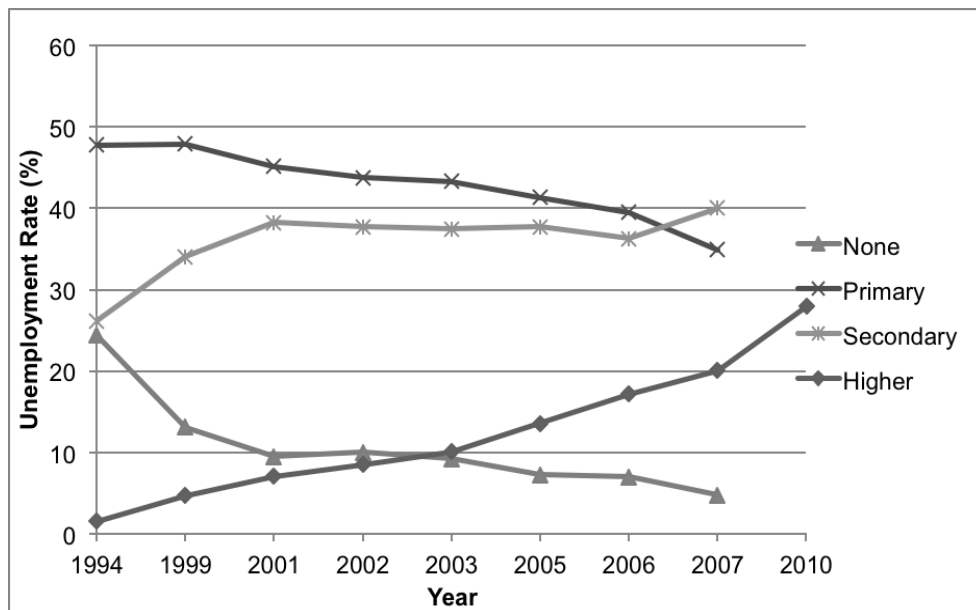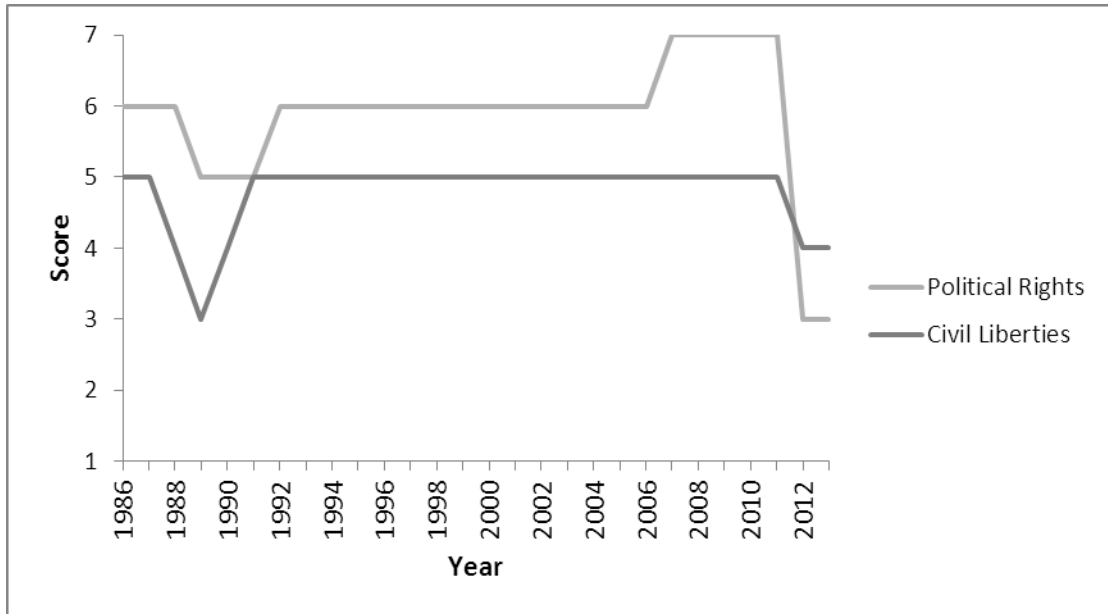

Source: Jamoussi and Gassab (2011), 4.

Figure 2 – Social Conflict Events (1991-2010)
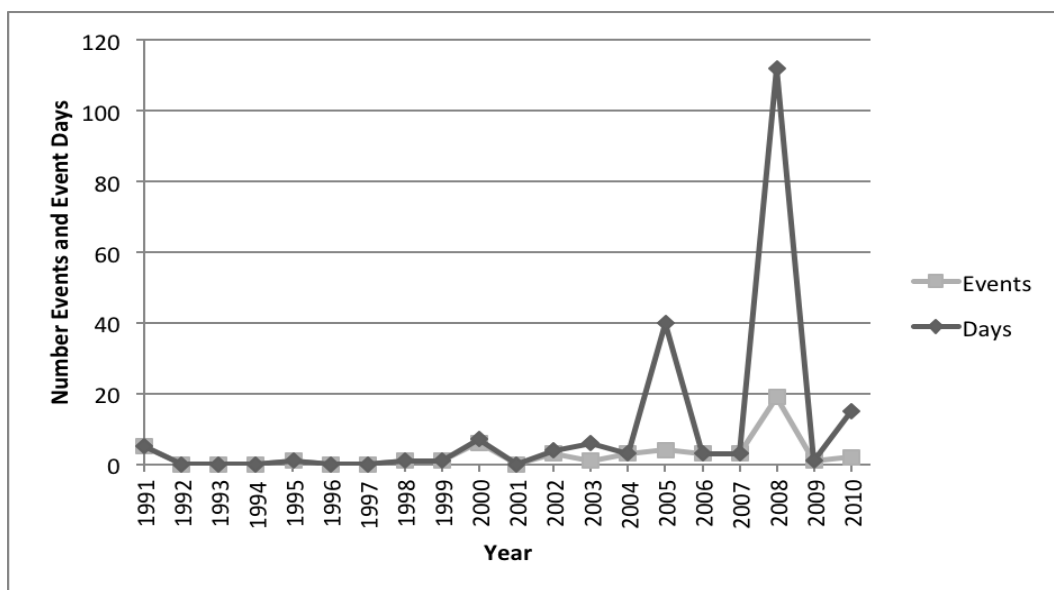
Source: Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD), Ayeb (2011), Gobe (2009) and Gobe (2010).

Figure 3 – Political Rights and Civil Liberties (1986-2013)

Source: Freedom House.

Figure 4 – Relationship between Political Insecurity and Democratisation