Democratic Transition in the Middle East and North Africa

A Case Study of Tunisia

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Abstract

This essay consists of a case study of Tunisian democratization process which came along the events of the Arab spring in 2010-11. The aim of the research is to understand why Tunisia took a distinctive path during the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-11. The case study is within the theoretical framework of traditional democratization literature. These theories are modernization theory, historical sociology and the agency approach. Using the methodological approach of qualitative content analysis, I have analyzed academic articles and come to the conclusion that seven factors played a crucial role for democracy in Tunisia: (1) increased level of education, (2) increased level of information, (3) existing formal and informal organizations in the civil society, (4) transnational power structure, (5) the size of coercive apparatus, (6) compromises among political actors and (7) existing political community. I argue that both the structure of the civil society and the political foundation in Tunisia played a vital role for the distinctive path it took towards democracy.

Key words: Arab Spring, Tunisia, Democratization, Middle East and North Africa

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

The Arab Spring was triggered through a young man's death by self-immolation in Saidi Bozi, Tunisia, December 2010. Mohamed Bouazizi, was a Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire in protest of the arbitrary confiscation of his products and probably also in reaction to the poor living conditions forcing young and educated people to sell fruit in the streets in order to survive financially. This dramatic event was followed by local protest in Tunisia, which eventually grew larger and spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa. These nationwide protests caused the fall of many long-lived dictators in the region. However, once dictators were overthrown, the countries took dramatically different paths in their struggle to create a democratic foundation. Many of the countries have now fallen back in old political patterns, suffering from economic stagnation and political violence with no end in sight. Almost a decade later a majority of the countries are still ruled by arbitrary corrupt forces, with the exception of Tunisia. Tunisia presents in many ways a successful case of transition in the North African region, making it of a great geopolitical significance for democratic studies. So far the country has held two elections and formed a new constitution. Political groups have managed to build an effective political structure, which is a sharp contrast to neighbouring countries like Egypt and Yemen.

1.2 Research Aim

The purpose of this essay is to gain knowledge of the unique democratization case in the Middle East and North Africa after the events of the Arab Spring in 2010-11. Tunisia is the only country so far with a successful transition, it is thus of great significance for democratization studies. By understanding the Tunisian success, the essay aims to contribute to the accumulated knowledge on democratic transitions and more specifically on democracy in the Middle East and North African region. Democratization studies have rarely considered the Middle East and North Africa, due to the absence of transitions in the past. The events of the Arab Spring postulate a great opportunity for democratization research to analyse the region.

The essay further aims to gather and account for the factors that have been emphasized in social science research as important for democratic prospect in the Middle East and North Africa today. By doing so, the essay contributes to democratic research field by compiling research on the distinctive case of the Arab Spring and creates an overview of the insight and conclusions that are established regarding democracy in the region post 2010.

1.3 Research Questions

Two research questions are formulated based on the complex and relatively new political phenomenon of Arab Spring. The research question of the essay will be answered with the support of the analytical tools presented in chapter 6. The research questions are as following:

- How can the Tunisian case be understood throughout current democratic theories?
- Which explanatory factors within social science research have been emphasized as crucial for the case?

Disposition

A historical overview of the political landscape of Tunisia initiates the study in chapter 2, followed by a presentation of the theoretical basis and context within which the study is to be placed. Chapter 3 thereby outlines previous research in the field of democratic studies and presents a discussion on the role of civil society, the role of the political system as well as important actors in the transition process. Chapter 4 accounts for the research design. It includes a presentation of the methodological basis of the essay, and a critical discussion of the chosen methods. Chapter 5 discusses the material the analysis will be based on. The analytical tools are presented in chapter 6. This is followed by the analysis in chapter 7. The essay concludes with a final discussion of the analysis and some theoretical remarks in chapter 8.

2. Historical Background

Before the fall of president Ben Ali's regime in 2010 due to the protests, Tunisia seemed somewhat more prosperous in comparison with its neighbouring countries. The country's relation to Europe and especially France contributed to its relative secularism and its progressive social legislation, especially regarding gender issues. For instance, before the fall of Ben Ali's regime, the country had some social and political organizations that functioned without official ties to the government and many women could be found participating in politics at all levels (Alexander 2010, p.36). These ties to Europe have historically generated a political culture that avoided violent conflicts and emphasized in some degree, rationalism and negotiation strategies (ibid, p.111-112). But the distinctive character of political stability is arguably rooted in two other factors. One, which is the objective circumstances that shape the country's existence: its geographical location, limited natural resources and its small size. The second involves the governing strategy that has since independence, combined authoritarian control with sustained investment in social development (ibid, p.112).

Regarding the first factor, Tunisia's size and absence of oil, did not determine political outcomes but it did set some real constraints on what Tunisia's policymakers could do. This is especially true for the country's economic and foreign policies. In economic terms, the country encouraged a form of state capitalism that followed growth through private sector activity and through involvement in the global economy (Alexander 2010, p.112). Over time, the rhetoric of development strategies changed a great deal, but the substance stayed pretty much the same (ibid, p.68). Changes in economic strategies tended to move in direction of greater commitment to the socialist approach rather then the opposite. Tunisian socialism was not about abstract political and economic philosophy. The president repeatedly emphasized that socialism in Tunisia was not about class conflicts, Marxism, communism or revolution. It was about planning and using resources and structures of the state to built a more independent economy and a strong sense of national solidarity (ibid, p.72). The development strategy from the 1960s generated long-term benefits for the country. Between 1962 and 1969 the country experienced a dramatic increase in expenditures in education, roads, water, electricity and health care (ibid, p.73). The small domestic market and the absence of oil export gave little opportunity to follow

other kind of development strategies (ibid, p.112). The small size of the country and its location near two large and oil rich countries, Libya and Algeria, has constrained foreign policymakers too. To avoid sovereignty threat and costly military conflicts, Tunisian foreign policy has therefore over a long time emphasized regional cooperation, negotiated conflict resolutions and maintained strong relations to the USA and France, especially regarding the shared concerned of Islamist violence (ibid). The second factor: mixed governing strategies of authoritarianism and sustained investment in social development can be traced back to the days where the country struggled for its independence. The first president of Tunisia Habib Bourguiba´s authoritarianism developed from the unique conditions that existed during independence. His party, the Neo-Destour heavily dominated the political and organizational atmosphere (ibid, p.113). When he came to power in 1957, no organization or no individual were allowed to limit Bourguiba's own pragmatic counsel, including the party he had built (ibid). Bourguiba did face some opposition due to his western ties and the strategy of negotiating independence in stages. The threat he felt from the opposition encouraged Bourguiba to create a system that gradually became authoritarian following the independence.

Between 1950s and the 1970s Tunisia developed a corporatist[1] system. But in reality, Tunisia did not develop the substance of a corporatist system. The government wanted the unions to implement their policies and not represent the member's interests (Alexander 2010, p.113). Due to the fact that stability and political reforms did not go hand in hand in a highly personalized system, Bourguiba's last years in power during the 1980s were that far, the most serious period of instability in Tunisia post independence (ibid, p.114)

When Ben Ali took over the presidential post in 1987, the government and the ruling party had lost much of their credibility among its people at the same time as the government faced well-organized Islamist organization with strong support in urban areas (Alexander 2010, p.115). In contrast to former president, Ben Ali created a very centralized but less personalized system. Ben Ali's regime allowed for instance several newspapers, and civil society organization to develop (ibid). His reforms

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[1] Meaning unions of workers, student and farmers were aloud to exist.

created a formal space for public discourse[2] and political activism that did not exist before (ibid). However, these reforms were very carefully designed. They set limits to how powerful the opposition could get.

While authoritarianism has defined the Tunisian political system, it is important to note its distinctive factors. Both presidents have in some level invested in human development (Alexander 2010, p.116). Since the 1960s, Tunisia has been a leader in the region, regarding family planning, education, and health care reforms (ibid). The investment in social development constituted a vital role for the stability of a small, resource poor country like Tunisia with economic development dependent on interaction with the global economy (ibid). Both presidents used therefore domestic stability as a vital tool to discourage strong neighbouring countries from interfering politically, reduced the need for an expensive military apparatus and tried to attract external financial and political support (ibid). These historical characters of the country are important in order to understand the distinctive path post Ben Ali Tunisia took.

3. Theory

This chapter will first present the definition of the concept democracy. Following is a presentation of previous research on democratization. The previous research has produced two major schools regarding the path to democracy. On the one side are the structural theories, modernization theory and historical sociology arguing that economic, cultural or institutional elements are necessary for a transition from authoritarianism to begin (Pripstein Posusney 2005, p.3). On the contrary side is the agency approach, arguing democracy can occur under a verity of socioeconomic and cultural conditions (ibid). The agency approach stresses mainly factors such as power relations among political actors.

3.1 Defining Democracy

A key element in the debate of what makes and consolidates democracy is the lack of consensus on the meaning of democracy (Diamond 1999, p.7). The concept of democratization has generally been taken for granted and rarely been properly

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[2] Public discourse in this context refers to public opinions regarding political matter such as health care policies.

problematized (ibid). The choice of definition is not just a theoretical question. It is also crucial to research and the collection of empirical data. In political studies the concept of democracy has been understood from a thin-thick perspective (Grugel 2014, p.6).

This essay will use a slightly thin definition articulated by Robert Dahl. The thin definition is limited to the political part of a society where the concept is affiliated with political processes. A democratic process according to Dahl (1) must make effective participation and voting equality to all the citizens who are subject to the binding collective of society (Dahl 1998, p.37). (2) Democracy must provide citizens with opportunities for understanding civic issues and allow them to have control over matters that reach the decision-making agenda (ibid, p.37-38). When speaking of democracy from here on, the essay assumes Robert Dahl's definition of the concept. This means democracy entails fair and regular elections, introduction of basic norms that makes free elections possible in addition to liberal individual rights such as freedom of assembly, religious freedom and a free press (Grugel 2014, p.6). When speaking of democratization or transition the essay refers to (3) the interval of going from authoritarian rule to one based on a democratic political process as defined by Robert Dahl. The use of a thin definition in empirical research makes it possible to identify theoretical factors in a case study. Further, explicit definitions generate more credible results.

3.2 Previous Research and Theoretical Framework

The political sociologist, Seymour Martin Lipset was one of the first proponents of modernization theory, declaring democracy as a direct result of economic growth. Until 1959 democratic studies were mainly in the field of political philosophy. When Lipset's article was published, a new perspective towards democracy was introduced. Lipset democratization theory has a major foothold in democracy research today, and many scientists have worked to explain the relationship between economic development and democracy, one of which is political sociologist Larry Diamond. According to Diamond, one factor stressed as important for democracy to take root is the crisis of legitimacy of the ruling authoritarian government. When the general public comes to believe the *system* of government lacks the moral authority to rule,

the system is threatened (Diamond 2008, p.89). All regimes depend on some mix of legitimacy and force. Meaning that no country, no matter how brutal and totalitarian, relies only on force to survive. A large pool of organized, confident citizens, who actively reject the legitimacy of an authoritarian rule, becomes a threat to the dictating force (ibid). Meaning, when the opposition in an authoritarian system can organize and mobilizes a majority of the public, it can bring about a change in the regime (ibid). Over the past few decades, democratic ideas have increasingly constituted the legitimate form of rule, making it more difficult to maintain straightforward authoritarian rule. Authoritarian regimes today, with some exceptions like Saudi Arabia and North Korea, have to justify themselves in large measures based on their performance. In doing so, any dictatorship faces an intrinsic dilemma. If it does not deliver order and economic development it loses its only basis of legitimacy (ibid, p.90). From the structural perspective, economic development enlarges the middle class and raises levels of education and information among the people. When a country achieves an average level of development and national income, inequality tends to fall, which in turn reduces social distance and political polarization between classes. For Lipset this constitutes the very foundation of his theory. Shifting political values – due to economic development or due to brutal repression, can trigger a revalorization of democracy (ibid, p.103). Profound changes in the society may also arise from the growth of formal and informal organizations in civil society. Their capacity, recourses, autonomy and initiatives, all of which can in a radical way bring change in the balance of power (ibid). Much of the success of democratization depends on the ability of the civil society to unite across competing political parties and disparate social classes into a broad front or movement (ibid, p.105).

Another society-centered theory is the school of historical sociology. Historical sociologist concerned with democracy, trace the transformation of the state through class conflict over time in order to explain how democracy has sometimes emerged (Grugel 2014, p.82). Historical sociology also emphasizes political economy. However, in contrast to modernization theory, economic development is not the driving force in democratization. Historical sociologist argue that expansion of the market lead to class conflicts which in turn disrupts the existing power structure and creates an opportunity for new structures to shape. The fundamental principle of historical sociology is that democracy is basically a matter of power (Rueschemeyer,

Stephens, Stephens 1992 p.5). It is power relations that most importantly determine whether democracy can emerge, stabilize and uphold, even in the most unfavourable conditions (ibid). Historical sociologists further argue that democracy requires a balance between the state and independent classes, in which the state is either completely autonomous from dominant classes or captured by them, creating a space where civil society can flourish (Hinnebusch 2006, p.378-379). Even though the main focus is on civil society, this approach later comes to highlight the importance of the state as an actor. The state as an actor plays for instance a major role due to the monopoly of the use of coercion. The specific role played by the means of coercion in a given state structure and in its relation to the wider society can be decisive for the chances of democratization (Rueschemeyer et al 1992 p.67). If the organization of coercion and violence – the police and military – are strong within the overall state apparatus, the situation is quite unfavourable for democracy. A strong military is one of the major obstacles to successful democratization in developing countries (ibid, p.67-68).

In contrast to both modernization theory and historical sociology is the agency approach. The agency approach argues that democracy can be created, if not independently of the structural context, certainly with fewer structural constraints (Grugel 2014, p.87). Democracy is seen as a result of action taken by conscious, committed actors, with some degree of luck, who are able to compromise (Grugel 2014, p.87). The approach emphasizes on actors' strategies and choices in the process of political change. In contrast to structural theorists, advocates of the agency approach argue – with the exception of national identity – no set of preconditions must exists in order for democracy to take root. When different actors – trade unions grass-roots movements – religious groups and defender of human rights come together it creates a strong united force, which is a threat to an authoritarian regime (O´Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p.54). The agency approach puts greater stress on negotiations and interactions between the opposition and the ruling government.

Any government, democratic or authoritarian needs to navigate among various political forces and needs to build a crucial coalition in order to stay in power (Gandhi & Przeworski 2007, p.1280). When authoritarian regimes feel a threat from large

groups within the society, the strategy to neutralize the threat is by co-opting[3] the opposition (ibid, p.1281). Similar to modernization theory this approach also emphasizes the importance of economic performance in order for dictators to stay in power. Unless they can rely on exporting natural resources, dictators will eventually need to seek economic and political cooperation and negotiate with important groups in the society. Dictators who can obtain rents from mineral resources will need little co-opting, the rest must rely on extensive cooperation with important actors (Gandhi & Przeworski 2007, p.1281). A democratic transitions comes thus from power struggle in forms of negotiations between the regime and opposition. The political change occurs in three phases, transition, liberalization and democratization. The transition phase is characterized as the period where dictators for whatever reason, modify their rules in the direction of providing more secure guarantees for rights of individuals and groups (O´Donnell and Schmitter 1986, p.6). Liberalization refers to the process of making polices that protect individual rights and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state (ibid, p.7). Democratization in this context thereby refers to the process where the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to existing political institutions or expanded to include persons not previously enjoyed such rights and obligations (ibid, p.8). Both the liberalization and democratization phase requires mobilization and organization of large number of individuals. This derives from a high degree of indeterminacy of social and political action (ibid, p.19). Incorporation of new actors, shaping and renewal of political identities are some important factors. All transitions begin with the consequences of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the unstable cleavage between hard-liners[4] and soft liners (ibid).

Theoretical Delimitation

The Tunisian case will be analysed on the basis of the theories presented above. All three theories are comprehensive and have been developed over a long time. It is thus crucial to mention that this essay has only presented the important aspects relevant for this case study. It has for instance not highlighted the external factors, which are stressed in Larry Diamond's theory. External factors are for instance, foreign pressure

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[3] Co-opting in politics is a way of managing the opposition by given them some formal or informal power.

[4] Hard-liners and soft-liners are tow terms referring to the two groups typically represented in autocratic regimes. Soft liners are more prone to change than hard-liners.

and sanctions (Diamond 2008, p106). Regarding historical sociology, the essay mainly focuses on power structures. In 1985 historical sociologist like Rueschmeyer, Evans and Skocpol put greater emphasis on the state as an actor. They analysed for instance the state as a promoter of economic development (Evans et al 1985, p.44). This has been excluded from the theoretical framework of this essay. When it comes to agency approach, one critic of the theory was it ignored the importance of civil society in democratization (Grugel 2014, p.92). In 1986 O'Donnell and Schmitter responded to the critic and highlighted important factors regarding the civil society. These factors are however also excluded within this theoretical framework. The theoretical delimitation is due to limit the study to a feasible proportion.

4. Methodological Approach

Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the methodological approach of the research. The first part accounts for the methodological design of the essay. The second part is an outline of the research method. This is followed by a discussion of some reflections regarding the choice of research methods.

4.1 Research Design

The choice of Tunisia as a case is based on its distinctive characters. In the context of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia demonstrates a critical case due to its successful outcome of the protests in 2010-11. It is thus of great geopolitical significance to study as it can provide the knowledge of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa. The establishment of a single case study is also due to the research question and its explanatory ambitions. The purpose of the research is not to generate new theories. The primary purpose is to understand the specific case of Tunisia. The material is used to distinguish patterns that can be reconnected to the existing theories of democratization. The approach is thus first and foremost abductive, meaning that the study is based on empirically collected data that is linked to the chosen theoretical framework. This in turn means that the theoretical framework and the empirical evidence are intertwined when conclusions are drawn about the case. The choice of a single case study as a method is motivated by the research ambition to contribute to knowledge and further understanding of a relatively new political phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa. The most distinctive

feature of a single case study is the involvement of an in-depth and detailed study of an individual case (Bryman 2008, p.73). Case study as a method relates to the complexity and specific nature of studied phenomenon (ibid). The method is best suited for research aiming to understand or explain the process of current or historical events (Yin 2006, p. 22).

4.2 Research Method

The method used to analyse the material – which consists of articles published in academic journals – is a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis refers to text analysis were nothing is counted or measured; it is rather about interpretations of the material (Bergström & Boréus 2005 p.44). Content analysis is a suitable methodological approach for drawing conclusions from a material consisting of text that is believed to include a certain meaning, by searching for different themes or categories in the studied sources (Bryman 2008, p.505). The intention is to search for themes or categories in the material that can be linked to the theoretical framework. This is accomplished by the use of beforehand crafted table of theoretical indications (see table 1.1). It is also noteworthy to mention that the ambition is to only interpret the explicit content of the material. Evaluating the implicit content will not add any important information critical for the research at the same time as the analysis of the latent content of the material can affect the reliability of the results. In summary, this methodological approach involves a systematic reading of the material with the ambition to search for indicators derived from the theories. The indicators will be presented in chapter 6.

4.3 Limitations in the Methodological Approach

Case study as a methodological approach is a valuable method in research with the ambition to describe and explain the reality of a social or political phenomenon. However, the method has limited possibilities of creating generalizable results when only one single case is being analyzed. The results may change once other cases or other aspects are included in the research. The conclusions of the essay should then rather be seen as indications towards a certain direction. They can be confirmed ones more research conducted by other methods, is pointing in the same direction.

Qualitative research can entail some methodological problems especially regarding the limits in creating generalizable results. Qualitative studies are more difficult to replicate than quantitative, as qualitative research is in a higher extend dependent on the researchers interpretations (Bryman 2008, p.368). The researchers interpretations are for instance reflected in both the creation of the analytical tools and the analysis of the material. In addition, qualitative methods cannot be described in a systematic manner based on a number of well-defined and concrete steps or phases in the research process, which is partially due to the openness of qualitative research strategy (ibid, p. 376). This in turn can be problematic for the determination of the quality of the study in terms of reliability and validity (ibid).

4.4 Alternative Methods

One can also use the method of ethnographic studies when studying the events of 2010-11 in Tunisia. It is equally suitable to combine with case studies. Ethnographic studies entail studying important actors such as politicians or labor unions. It can thus provide explanations to why Tunisia differentiated from the rest of the countries that experienced the Arab Spring. However, ethnographic studies require primary sources. Geographic distance and linguistic boundaries make up two limitations in access of primary sources. In order to apply ethnographic studies as a method one needs access to the field and master the Arabic langue.

Argument analysis was also considered. However, the method of argument analysis did not seem as adequate to fulfil the purpose of the essay. This is due to the aim of the method to outline what elements are being argued pro and against (Boréus 2011, p.136). Furthermore, the method aims to analyse the credibility of the arguments exposed in the material (Feldman 2014, p.192). Since this essay aims to account for the factors that were found to be critical for the case, argument analysis could have entailed some methodological problems too. With regards to these reflections, the chosen methodological approach seemed therefore best suited to answer the specific research question of this essay.

5. Material

The material consists of academic papers. The following is an outline of the sample criteria and a discussion on some concerns regarding the material.

5.1 Presentation of the Material

The material used in the analysis is exclusively secondary, consisting of academic papers. The choice to use secondary material is due to geographical and linguistics boundaries, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The motivation to use secondary sources is thus based on these circumstances. Further on, academic papers do naturally not contain the entire possible context where one can find reports regarding the case of the Tunisian democratic transition. However, the choice to limit the material to exclusively include academic papers is motivated by the fact that academic articles are the main form of reporting research results and have the advantage of undergoing collegial reviews, which constitutes a quality control mechanism (Bryman 2008, p.559). Books and other written documents for example, do not undergo the same form of quality control (ibid). Using academic papers exclusively is thus an adequate foundation to base the research on, although it has its limitation, which one should be aware of when drawing the final conclusions.

5.2 Sample Criteria

To find the articles three digital research archives were used: JStore, Scopus and Academic Search Premier. These three databases were chosen based on their wide collection of data. The search included four criteria in order to find articles concerned with the subject of matter for the research. The criteria are as fallowing:

1. Published between year of 2011-2017

2. Written in the English language

3. Collegial reviewed

4. Articles found by the use of following keywords:

- Arab Spring Tunisia
- Democracy Tunisia
- Democratization Tunisia
- Democratic transition Tunisia

5.3 A Critic of the Material

The criteria above have certain limitations that are important to highlight. Regarding the first criteria, a problem that can occur when using articles from 2011, is that they can be misleading, due to the uncertainty that still existed in Tunisia and the Middle East at this point of the Arab Spring. However including articles from 2011 may be rewarding in comparison to what was stated about the events later. As a researcher, not mastering the Arabic langue creates additional restriction to the material. An exclusion of material written in Arabic may however contribute to the loss of important factors that are not highlighted in the English articles and in turn create skewed results. The third and last limitation regards the use of the chosen keywords. These keywords may entail a loss of articles that can be vital for the conclusions but do not appear in the search. An attempt to address this problem is to search for material based on references in the articles found through the keywords above. Despite these limitations, the approach is a useful way to find relevant and qualified material to include in a case study. On the basis of this method a total of 52 articles were found, of which, 23 where relevant for the research question. Two of the articles have not undergone collegial review, but are included in the material due to their high quality and relevance for the research questions.

6. Analytical tools

Chapter 6 presents two analytical tools. The analytical tools are based on the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 3. Table 1.1 specifies theoretical indicators to search for. Based on these indicators three analytical questions are formulated in order to accomplish the aim of the research.

Table 1.1 Theoretical indicators

Structural centered		Actor centered
Modernization Theory	Historical sociology	Agency approach
- Economic growth - Government lacking legitimacy - Increased level of education - Increased level of information - Enlarged middle class - Shifting political values - Existence of formal and informal organizations in the civil society	- Changing relationship between the state and social classes - Disruption in existing power structure - Partial autonomy of the state - Transnational power structure - Size of coercive apparatus	- Compromises among political actors - National affiliation in the civil society - Elite pacts - Existing political community

6.1 Analytical questions

The three analytical questions are formulated on the basis of the theoretical indicators presented in table 1.1.

1. Are there any indicators in the material of modernization theory?
2. Are there any indicators in the material of historical sociology?
3. Are there any indicators in the material of the agency approach?

7. Analysis

This chapter presents the indicators highlighted as critical for the Tunisian case in the material. Religion and the role of Islam also constituted parts of the material. This was however not able to be analyzed due to the lack of theoretical support for indicators such as the role of religion. Before the uprising, Tunisia seemed to have a relatively large middle class, a government lacking legitimacy and a population that

seemed to have a national affiliation in the civil society. Though these indicators could be found in the material, they were not argued to be as critical as the indicators presented in table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Theoretical indicators found to be critical in Tunisia

Structural centered		Actor centered
Modernization Theory	Historical sociology	Agency approach
• Increased level of education • Increased level of information • Existence of formal and informal organizations in the civil society	• Transnational power structure • Size of coercive apparatus	• Compromises among political actors • Existing political community

7.1 Increased Level of Education

The material confirmed that education level in the whole region has increased significantly since the 1980s. A study conducted by the political economists Filipe Campante and David Chor demonstrates that eight of the top 20 countries in the world that have witnessed an increase in schooling attainment among its population, are countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Campante & Chor 2012, p.168). This included Tunisia, were the average total year of schooling has increased by 4,07 years in three decades (ibid, p.169). However, at the same time as education rates have increased, the region has been struggling with poor labor market prospects, especially evident in the countries in the heart of the protest waves. While many developing countries elsewhere also tended to see a large improvement in education during the same period, the Arab countries differed in a particular way. The Arab world had in many cases the advantage of oil incomes that supported the expansion of education (ibid, p.170). This however is not as relevant for Tunisia; the country is relatively secular and lacks large natural resources such as oil. Similar to other countries, Tunisia too suffered from high unemployment rates among its youth. International Labor Organization reported in 2011 that youth unemployment in the region was over 26 %, the highest number in the world and more than twice the international average (Avina 2013, p.78). The large-scale protests took place in countries with the highest

unemployment rates. In fact the Tunisian street vendor, whose act of protest marked the start of the revolutionary movement was himself a university graduate. Many analysts have since shed light on the high unemployment rates among the increasing population of educated in countries such as Tunisia. Pointing at overbearing presence of unproductive and heavily regulated states that penalizes the development of independent business activities as the reason for the failure (Campante & Chor 2012, p.174). In short, the combination of rising levels of education and poor labor opportunities, especially for the relativity educated was present in the region, and at most in the countries that witnessed the protests.

Empirical evidence has shown that individuals with higher level of education are more likely to engage in all types of political acts (Campante & Chor 2012, p.174). This could be due to education increases awareness of political issues or foster socialization needed for effective activity, or due to generally increases civic skills (ibid). Regardless of the reason, the relationship between education and political involvement is likely to be causal (ibid). The years before the events took place, the expansion of education in the region increased the pool of individuals who had completed primary and some secondary level of education. In 2015 more than 35 % of Tunisians had entered an institution of higher education within five years of completing secondary school, which is 10% higher in comparison with the whole region (Brym & Andersen 2016 P.262). However, there seemed to be no reward in the labor marked for the educated population. Making these individuals more likely to channel their efforts toward political action, and political protest in particular (Campante & Chor 2012, p.175). To clarify, great gains in education appears to be linked with stronger individual protest activities, and much more so when it is combined with poor labor marked conditions. The whole region witnessed both greater investment in education and reduced job opportunities, making Tunisia no exception to the pattern. This does not mean that the combination of higher level of education and poor labor market opportunities are associated with political change. However, the combination of these two factors was of importance for the protest wave in Tunisia.

7.2 Increased Level of Information

The access to information had a decisive role during the turmoil of political instability. The Internet contributed in one way to a new definition of public space that played an important role in the mobilization of people in various public spaces (Nachi 2016, p.499). The international context of communication and information in virtual spaces is a new way of public space and the initiation of another civil society (ibid, p.500).

The stability of any regime and especially an authoritarian one is threatened when a wide section of the society – people from different socioeconomic classes and political divisions – protests simultaneously across a large part of the country. However, collective action like this is usually limited in the authoritarian context due to public fear of the state. But in 2011, starting in Tunisia and then spreading to several countries in the region, mass protest had all of a sudden occurred in Middle East and North Africa, overthrowing one dictator after another. The conditions that contributed to the wakening of the protest wave were in a larger sense the same in all the countries. Declining economic prosperity, government corruption, repressive and violent nature of the regimes, and the oppression of individual freedom, all of which culminated in a widespread protest wave (Eldin & Salih 2013, p.186-187). Although these conditions were the same in many countries, the degree of their prevalence varied from one state to the other (Ogbonnaya 2013, p.15). In comparison with other countries in the region, Tunisia was better off in many ways. Higher literacy rate, a developed middle class, more advanced women's rights and higher level of education (Koubaa 2012, p.223). These features distinguished Tunisia from the rest of the countries in the region.

Social media was especially a critical factor in Tunisia due to the high rate of Internet use in the country. In 1991, Tunisia became the first country in the Arab world to have access to Internet – as a way for the regime to promote businesses and to attract foreign investments (Lowrance 2016, p.159). Social media networking contributed to the broad mobilization that outpaced the capacity of the internal security services to repress it. Since 1991, the Internet use grew steadily and at the time of the protest, one third of the population used the Internet. The estimated number of broadband subscription in the country in 2011 was 414,000 (ibid). And about 17 % of the

population was on Facebook (Breuer et al 2015, p.773). These numbers places Tunisia among the highest ranks of Internet use in Africa. The advanced Internet usage however, was not accompanied with Internet freedom. Before the regime fell, Tunisia's Internet censorship was among the most repressive in the world. In 2007, it ranked as the third most net-repressive country after Iran and China (Lowrance 2016, p.159). The regime used a number of means to restrict access to sensitive information which made all Internet traffic flow through a government controlled gateway, the Tunisian Internet Agency (ibid). Human rights and political activist could rarely openly criticize the regime. Those who dared were arrested and subsequently given prison sentence. A Tunisian journalist was tortured and imprisoned for a month in 2003, simply for using a blog to stress some problems relating to the education system in the country (Miladi 2016, p.38).

Despite the government restrictions, blogs and other social media managed to play a vital role in civil society as a forum for opposition. Important information was able to be injected into the public dialogue and bypass the government control. What started as a local socio-economically motivated protest in December 2010 turn in to something bigger in January 2011 When Mohammad Bouazizi died from his injuries (Breuer et al 2015, p.773). By this time the local protests had escalated to a nationwide anti-regime movement with tens of thousands of people from all levels of society united against Ben Ali's regime. The death of Mohammad Bouazizi provided the necessary collective frame of reference to drive the anti-regime movement on the Internet onto the streets of Tunisia (ibid).

The first demonstrations in Sidi Bouzid were recorded on personal mobile devises and posted on personal Facebook profiles. At the very beginning of the revolution, Facebook penetration was just under 20% (Breuer et al 2015, p.773). It is then unlikely to think the information would reach a mass audience, without the help of a small elite of digital activist who operated from all around the world as information agents. They used Facebook for protest related posts, translated the material and structured it into a coherent narrative (ibid, p.774). Social media networks such as Global Voices and Nawaat covered the movements and managed to spread the word through their social media channels on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (ibid). When the information was made accessible, international broadcasters, like Al Jazeera could

pick it up and further re-import it into the country. By these means, the information on the Internet managed to pass the government restrictions and reach a broad audience (ibid).

An important function of the Internet was to help the people to overcome the fear of collective action in authoritarian states. The reports of the large-scale protests enabled the people to overcome the barriers of fear that had prevented them from taking action in the streets earlier (Breuer et al 2015, p.775). The city of Sfax for example, witnessed the largest demonstration under Ben Alis rule when the UGTT called for a rally on 12 January and 30 000 people joined them (ibid, p.773). It is in this context no doubt that the Internet, and specifically social media was a contributing factor to the fall of Ben Ali's regime. Tunisia's early access to Internet created an essential recourse for the mobilization of a nationwide anti-regime protest (ibid, p.782). Absence of socio-economic opportunity combined with increasing government restrictions on Internet use for political matters, provided the conditions from which significant social media activism became possible.

Social media provided the tools needed to overcome censorship barriers to information and offered an important tool for people to calculate the risk of participation in the movement (Breuer et al 2015, p.782). In addition, the cyber activities contributed to transcend geographical and socio-economic differences and provided the foundation to create a national collective identity against an extremely unpopular government (ibid). In this context the Internet served as the basis for articulation of the peoples grievances. In conclusion, the Internet is a noteworthy actor that helped the people overcome the problem of collective action in a supressed society and provided the tools to form a successful movement that put an end to the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. However, the Internet, social media and the agents should not be featured as the cause for the protests (Ismael & Ismael 2013, p.233). The Internet should rather be understood as a tool, a mechanism, for the spread of opposition, which was caused by internal political and economic struggles (ibid).

7.3 Existence of Formal and Informal Organizations in the Civil Society

The Internet activist provided information about the movements and helped people to overcome their fear of engaging in a collective action against the regime. At the same time labor movement Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) managed to organize the movements in the street in order to create an effective action. The UGTT contributed to the structure and sustainability of the movement. The UGTT was quick to solidly stand with the protesters when they broke out, becoming the strategic ally of the social forces that arose against the regime (Hamrouni et al 2011, p.31). The regional offices of UGTT supplied both an organizational backbone and safeguard from the regimes security services (Hartshorn 2017, p.411). The union's role expanded gradually in the turmoil of the uprisings. In addition to building power in the streets it engaged in the process of drafting a new constitution (ibid). The UGTT joined the high commission for the realization of the goals of the revolution, political reform and democratic transition, an umbrella group with the aim to guide the early transition process (ibid). In some sense, the UGTT began to act more like an opposition party rather than a labor union, by addressing further political issues than those concerning labor matters (ibid, p.413).

7.4 Existing Political Community and Compromises among Political Actors

Shortly after the uprising some observers began to think that instead of a democratic path, the protest would lead to a wave of Islamist dominated autocracies by pointing to political trajectories of non-Arab Muslim majority countries such as Iran, and implied that Islam dominated states could not democratize (Chaney, Akerlof, Blaydes 2012, p.363).

Going back to the 9th century, the early history of the region shows how a distinctive institutional framework emerged by the Arab armies (Chaney et al 2012, p.365). Rulers enforced their authority through armies staffed largely by slaves, which in turn lead to a change in the organizational structure of the societies (ibid, p.366). Scholars have argued that the widespread use of slave armies allowed rulers to challenge the power bases of local elites, leading to their destruction (ibid). Meaning political power became increasingly concentrated in the hands of military leaders, making religious leaders as the only check on the sovereign's power. This balance of power

persisted in many areas in the 19th century and scholars think it has left a legacy of weak civil societies and weak institutions (ibid).

Political power largely in the hands of religious leaders and the military force constitutes poor conditions for a democratic transition to take place. This has been the case in both Egypt and Yemen (Chaney et al 2012, p.394). The political power needs to be shared with rival groups. This has been the case in Tunisia, where the Islamic party, Ennhada played an important role in several ways. For example by contributing to a balance of power in favor of a vibrant democratic system. Doing so by constraining and being constrained by rival political groups (ibid, p.367). Another way, which the Tunisian case is distinctive regarding religious parties, is their history of cooperation with other non-regime parties. Already in 2003, representatives from parties that would later hold seats in the post transition government met in order to discuss political matters (Greene & Jefferis 2016, p.18). These meetings included, for example, drafting of a document for "any future elected government (to be) founded on the sovereignty of the people as the sole source of legitimacy" (ibid). The political parties that had regular meetings represented a broad range of socioeconomic and religious demographic. The assemblies that were ongoing on a regular basis for eight years was a curial factor in determining the outcome after the fall of the Ben Ali's regime. Because by the time they started to work together in the Constituent Assembly, they had already reached consensus on several important issues to the Tunisian society (ibid). They had created documents outlining a family code for Tunisia, an outline of origins for future democracy and treatise on the role of religion in the state (ibid). Civil society played a vital role in destruction of the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali. But for democracy to take root, one is also in need of a political community. Meaning, there is a need for organized groups of political activist who can act as the opposition to the dictatorship and talk among themselves about how they can overcome their mutual fear and create the rules for a democratic alternative (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.23). This was one of the most distinctive and important factors found in the Tunisian case. The highly innovative pact forming between the religious and the secular groups also meant that it did not seam as likely for a hybrid authoritarian regime to take form during the political turmoil (ibid).

Despite the great deal of fear of religious groups (imposed by the former secular leaders Habib Bourguiba and Ben Ali) the secular liberals thought they had more to gain from an alliance with the religious parties than give in to the fear of religious autocracy (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.23). Although the parties differed ideologically on the specifics of many issues they still managed to create a basis of agreement on the foundation of the state and its moral order that could be drawn upon when they came to power (Greene & Jefferis 2016, p.18). In contrast to Egypt, the Tunisian Islamist party, Ennhada, took deliberate steps to moderate its religious goals and compromised on important issues (ibid). Another important factor was that both Ennhada and the secular opposition were able to resist appeals from hardline supporters and instead created polices from a centrist perspective. For example the leader of the Ennhada party argued that democracy was not only acceptable, it was necessary (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.23). Influential Islamic advocates, such as the Ennhada leader Rachid Ghannouchi have used key Koranic concepts of consensus, consultation and justice in arguing in favor of democracy and claimed that, democracy is most effective if it relates to the specificities of its citizens histories, in a given state (ibid, p.18). For example, Ghannouchi has frequently stated that his party should embrace the historic specificity that Tunisia for more than sixty years has had the most progressive and women-friendly family code in the region (ibid, p.18-19). This could be interpreted as a way of reaching out to secularist groups and to identity ways to integrate the Ennhada vision with an inclusive political structure.

Another dimension of the negotiations is the concept of a civil state. Instead of a secular state or a religious state, Tunisia created an intermediate way of identifying itself as a civil state (Greene & Jefferis 2016, p.19). The new constitution removed any reference to sharia laws and just specified that Islam is the religion of the Tunisian state (ibid). In a civil sate, religion respects democratic rights, the people are sovereign and they are the creators of the laws (ibid). At the same time, a civil state respects some religious rights and its legitimate role in the public sphere (ibid). In addition to the vital role of comprises between rival groups, this also illustrates the crucial point, that multiple forms of secularism can be compatible with democratic values.

7.5 Size of Coercive Apparatus

The military played a vital role within two contexts. First, the choice to stand with the protester and not follow orders from president Ben Ali. Second, it has a history of being small and neutral.

The military was to a certain extend professional and a separate branch from the government. But in addition the action of the military reflected some political calculations and served the military's organizational interest by actively choosing to stand with the people. If the military had obeyed Ben Ali's order to suppress the protesters, the events in Tunisia would have taken a different and much bloodier path (Brooks 2013, p.207). The fact that the military refused to suppress protesters initiated the end of an oppressive regime, allowing Tunisia and the whole region to usher in a period of political change (ibid). In short, what is crucial to understand in the course of events in 2011 is the action of the military in the Tunisian case and their decision to refrain from the use of violence to repress the protesters. The role of the military in the uprisings must be understood in the context of the country's civil-military relations.

The Military saw few benefits of sustaining Ben Ali and his regime in power especially given the costs the military would have suffered by violently suppressing the protests in the defense of the regime (Brooks 2013, p.207). Historically, the military have played a major role in the post independence era and therefore, many leaders have sensed a potential danger posed by a powerful military to their regimes (Chaney et al 2012, p.366). Consequently, policies aimed to marginalize and neutralize the military force were adopted in Tunisia (Eldin & Salin 2013, p.190). The army has been excluded from the political decision-making mechanism going back as far as the period of president Bourguiba (ibid). Ben Ali was no exception; ever since he came to power in 1987 he relied on his domestic security force and continued to cut on military staff and recourses (ibid). The marginalization and neutralization of the army was a way to ensure that the military was not to develop political aspirations and thus remained modest in size, which is a distinctive character in the region (Angrist 2013, p.550). Thus the increasingly personlist and corrupt regime of Ben Ali may have been a growing issue for the military, undermining its organizational interests. The decision to withdraw from using force against the protesters therefore

occurred in a context where the military had little to lose, and possibly something to gain from abandoning the president (Brooks 2013, p.207). In short, the military action was not only of a professional character, the action was also consistent with its organizational interests.

By building on Bourguiba's civil-military relations, Ben Ali sought to keep the military at a distance from the regime by limiting its political influence and investing in police and security services to act as the backbone of the coercive force of the regime (Brooks 2013, p.207). Thereby the military operated at the margin of politics. It continued a long-standing historical role of acting as the apparatus of the state, rather as of the regime, with limited responsibilities (Eldin & Salih 2013, p.190). Specifically, this involved two balancing strategies. First, the marginalization: military's limited role in state institutions and limited access to recourses. The military was kept small and poorly funded to constraint leaders opportunities for personal enrichment or influence in political networks and regime institutions (Brooks 2013, p.108). Which in turn limited the military's chances of sustaining Ben Ali in power during the uprisings. The second strategy was to exclude the military from daily security matters (ibid). Instead, the interior ministry and its constituent components managed the task of regime security (ibid). Meaning, the military was not associated with an oppressive security apparatus feared by the people. This created an important opening for the military to distant it self from the regime and refrain from assisting the police during the events of the uprisings.

The combination of these features of civil-military relations further contributed to yet a distinctive characteristic of the Tunisian military. The absence of a daily role in securing the leadership combined with limited resources sustained a corporate ethos. Meaning, officers identified themselves with the institution, such that they valued its organizational integrity, freedom from civilian interference and social prestige (Brooks 2013 p.213-14). Therefore it is adequate to think of the army as an independent professional institution. But the corporate ethos and the distance from the regime do not mean that the military is apolitical and incapable of engaging in political interventions. The military's action during the uprisings is evidence of the opposite. When the military was deployed to cities in the south and west, it was passive and stood by when the police used extreme device to suppress the protesters

(ibid, p.215). Although some units tried to control the escalated situation, the military as a whole was sitting on the fence and watching the regime try to suppress its people. The military did not shift its position until the balance of power between the police and the people had shifted in favor of the protesters (ibid, p.217). When the power shifted toward the people, the dimensions of civil-military relations played a vital role for the outcome. The army lacked motivation to protect the regime and it faced significant costs if they would engage in the mass repression necessary to defend the regime.

Yet the causal relationship between the army's act and the outcome should not be overestimated. Had the army agreed to defend Ben Ali, it is not clear that the ultimate outcome would have been different, though it might have been much bloodier. The Tunisian army was small and poorly equipped to handle the mass protests. The military budget in 2010 was approximately 1,4 percent of the GDP (Brooks 2013, p.210). Tunisia ranked 109th in the world in terms of percent of GDP spend on defense expenditure, which is a sharp contrast to other states in the region (ibid). In addition, much of the French and American equipment was outdated. Just to illustrate the balance in security force, the security forces in the ministry of interior had since the 1990 been growing significantly. The number of police and security services employed was estimated to be between 120,000 and 200,000, which is an extensive number for a country of ten and a half million citizens (ibid, p.212). But in order for Ben Ali to survive, he would have needed more than just the army. He needed a critical mass of people to either not take part of the demonstrations, and thereby limiting the influence of the protests, or that people would mobilize large and convincing counterdemonstrations that could have made the anti-regime protester to second guess there act (Angris 2013, p.551).

Another aspect of the importance of civil-military relations is that Ben Ali had limited power to prevent underground political community to rise. All of the opposition groups participated in an underground political community and discussed the shape of a post Ben Ali Tunisia (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.23-24). Thus when the dictator fell, a relatively coherent and democratic alternative already existed and could take over (Greene & Jefferis 2016, p.18). One important consequence of marginalization of the military is it effectively grants the military some degree of organizational autonomy.

Which in turn means the military is able to sustain a corporate culture – prioritizing missions and regarding the military as an institution (Brooks 2013, p.213). Hence the modest institution with few special privileges to protect supported the democratic transition rather than worrying about how to safeguard its own power and privileges (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.29). The military played a vital role in reestablishing control under a new government post Ben Ali's dictatorship. For instance, the military participated in the arrest of key officials and provided essential backing to the interim government. It defended the new government from threats posed by those loyal to Ben Ali and his regime, by engaging in a series of street battles with members of Ben Ali´s security forces (Brooks 2013, p.216).

In conclusion, due to the fact that Ben Ali did not trust the army to seize or maintain power he purposely marginalized the institution to ensure it was not to develop political aspirations (Angris 2013, p.551). The army had therefore for a long time been regarded as professional in nature, loyal to the public rather to a specific ruler, and more specifically not prone to interfere politically (Eldin & Salih 2013, 190). By supporting the people the military as an institution played a crucial role in bringing the dictatorship to a quick and nonviolent end and let new actors enter the political stage in Tunisia.

7.6 Transnational Power Structure

The material concerned with international action as a factor in the uprisings excluded Tunisia. Justified on the ground that actors such as the United States did not try to influence the uprising in any direction. The US response the uprising in Tunisia was to gradually back away from supporting Ben Ali and his regime (Ibrahim 2016, p.76). If anything, the Tunisian case illustrated that when a less strategic ally was in crisis the USA did not struggle to side with the protester (ibid, p.84). The American approach was due to two factors: USA had no strategic interest in Tunisia and considered the county being of interest for France. In this regard Tunisia was distinctive from neighboring country's, which experienced a higher level of transnational actors being involved in the protests. One study has for instance found that nations that produce less then 100 dollar per capita of oil per year are three times more likely to democratize then those producing more (Abbasi 2012, p.9). Naturally, making international actors more prone to interfere in the oil rich country's domestic

affairs. From this perspective, Tunisia had the advantage of not being a big oil producing country or being of geopolitical interest for Western states.

The United States main interests in the Middle East have historically been (1) oil from the Persian Gulf (2) limiting Iranian influence in the region and (3) counterterrorism (Byman 2013 p.293). The first interest is not relevant for Tunisia since it lacks access to oil. Iran has appeared to have little influence over the uprisings in Tunisia, which in turn made Tunisia even less critical for US interests (ibid, p.302). Regarding counterterrorism, Tunisia did not play a vital role there either, which is also a sharp contrast to its neighboring countries (ibid, p.297). In other words, Tunisia had a huge advantage in the democratic process by not having international actors interfere in the domestic political landscape, which in turn was mostly due to the fact that Tunisia lacks natural resources such as oil and gas.

8. Conclusion

With the purpose to gain knowledge of the unique democratization case in the Middle East and North Africa after the events of Arab Spring in 2010-11, the study aimed to find out how the Tunisian case could be understood through current democratic theories and what explanatory factors within research were considered important for the case. With the theoretical framework of modernization theory, historical sociology, and agency approach, the research has indicated that the theories are adequate when analyzing democratization in the Middle East and North Africa. The research has further presented a total of seven factors that played a crucial role in the Tunisian case: (1) increased level of education, (2) increased level of information, (3) existence of formal and informal organizations in the civil society, (4) transnational power structure, (5) the size of coercive apparatus, (6) compromises among political actors and (7) existing political community. In other words, the results illustrates that both social structures and political actors were of importance to democracy in Tunisia. Making the theories equally adequate in explaining the case, however, they present a more sufficient theoretical framework when combined together. One limitation that appeared during the course of the study regarded the role of religion, which no theory could account for. Modernization theory and historical sociology do not feature Islam in political analyses of Middle Eastern and North Africa. The theoretical focus has

been on the development of strong institutions and modern socio-economic systems (Volpi & Stein 2015, p.278). Neither has the debate on the third wave democratization concerned religion, no more then the argument presented by Huntington that religion, and especially Islam, is a major obstacle to democratization (Stepan & Linz 2013, p.17). Conflicts concerning religion, which were crucial in the earlier historical periods in Europe, have not been noticeable in more modern literature. The role of religion is arguably lacking in current theories, which is partially due to the European and Latin American context all theories are based on. Whether religion is an obstacle or not for democratization in the Middle East and North Africa, the events of the Arab Spring is giving scholars an opportunity to examine the role of Islam in democratization, and modify the theories. Despite this flaw, as the study confirms, the theories are still fruitful when analyzing democratization in the Middle East and North Africa.

All three theories provided important aspects of a complex reality, the use of three different theories made it possible to include a wider range of material. The essay has thereby contributed to democratization studies by compiling research on the distinctive case of the Arab Spring, in order to create an overview of the insights and conclusions that have been established regarding democratization in the Middle East and North Africa post 2010.

The last note regards further research. The essay has outlined the factors found to be important for democratization to take root in the region of Middle East and North Africa. What is interesting is if these factors play a vital role in the long term. Is the role of education, for example, only important for the installation of a democratic system, or is it also crucial for the consolidation of democracy? In conclusion, it would be of great significance for further research to investigate what effect these seven factors play over a long time of period for democracy in the region of Middle East and North Africa.

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