Reexamining the autocratic bargain: the effect of insecurity on political values

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Where have the revolutionaries gone?

• If the social contract was an autocratic bargain, then why is it that:
  – Revolutions occurred when economies were doing rather well?
  – Autocratic restorations ongoing when economies at a low?
• We look at the effect of insecurity on political values
• We argue that autocratic bargains are (or have become) unstable in MENA (without touching on the onset of social movements):
  – Grievances (measure by Trust in Government) fluctuate with economic insecurity, as in other autocracies
  – But democratic aspirations have also risen when economy was good, and fallen when bad.
Plan

1. Empirics: How do Trust Government (grievances), & Commitment to Democracy (aspirations), relate to state of the economy?
   – within MENA over time,
   – comparatively at a global level.

2. Implications for understanding Arab Spring and aftermath

3. Implications for longer term political economy
1. Empirics

- **Data**: Time series using Arab Barometer 2007-16; WVS6 around 2015 for cross-country work.
- **Trust Government (TG)**: "How much do you trust government"? (WVS and AB)
- **Commitment to Democracy (CtD)**:
  - WVS: choice between “democracy” and “strong man” in a menu of items
  - AB: (i) “Under a democratic system, the country’s economic performance is weak”; (ii) “Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems”; and (iii) “Democratic systems are not effective at maintaining order and stability”.
- **Economic Security (ES)**
  - AB: "Evaluate the current economic situation in your country?"
  - WVS: "worrying about losing job, giving children an education"
Empirical results

Trust in Government:
- Depends largely on country level ES, but also on personal level of ES;
- Falls with education and income.

Commitment to democracy
- Depends only on Country level ES
- Rises with education and income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Security: individual</th>
<th>Democratic approval</th>
<th>Trust government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Security: country/time</td>
<td>0.554***</td>
<td>1.830***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Security: individual</td>
<td>0.032</td>
<td>0.591***</td>
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Note: OLS using all data in AB 2008-2016, with country FE, and controls for personal characteristics. For economic security, individual-level variables are measured as deviations from the country mean, and at the country level, in absolute terms.
Arab Spring dynamics

Source: own design based on the regression results presented in the paper
Values and ES (AB 2007/2016)

Source: own design based on the regression results presented in the paper
Observations

• Egypt, Tunisia: lots of action
  – Start with high ES and moderately high TG, CTD
  – ES collapses: “revolutions” very destabilizing
  – ES and TG comes back only in Egypt (CtD unknown)
• Morocco, Jordan: less, but similar action
  – Morocco higher on CtD, lower on TG than Jordan
    • May explain differentiated strategies
• Oil countries: path follows oil prices (which allowed extra spending and arise in TG)
questions

• Arab Spring occurred when ES relatively high – a revolution of dignity more than hunger
  – MC had rising CtD: moved away from autocratic bargain (Diwan 2013)
  – But TG was also relatively high (outside marginal areas), weakening the social movements.

• After the AS, ES and TG recovered in Egypt but not in Tunisia
  – Tunisia: Messy democracy, taxing early on
  – Egypt: recovery does not seem durable (pre-maxi devaluation)

• Why does CtD fall when ES declines?
  – Liberals shift to support autocracy if they fear that PI will win the day (Lust 2011)
  – Liberals on the “right” fear more redistribution and taxes.
Long Term Dynamics
Annual GDP growth rates, 1960-2010 (%, 5yr avg.)

Source: own design based on the regression results presented in the paper
Changing political tensions..

- When economy was bad (1980s-2000):
  - TG low -> repression of the poor (and rise in PI).
  - CtD low -> autocratic bargain. Fear of PI helped. Gave regimes resilience

- When economy improved (modestly) in 2000s:
  - TG rose, and more so in countries that could afford generous populism (Algeria, Iraq), stabilizing the bargain for a while; reduced pressure on regimes.
  - CtD rose, creating new pressures -> attempts to neutralize MC wt subsidies.

- When ES declined after the AS of 2011:
  - CtD fell -> autocratic restoration
  - TG fell -> repression on the rise (esp. of PI)
TG – global comparisons

- MENA countries like autocracies around the world
- Autocrats rises and fall with ES

Source: own design based on the regression results presented in the paper
CtD – global comparison

- MENA countries like democracies around the world
- Non-democratic populisms rise with economic insecurity

Source: own design based on the regression results presented in the paper
Global comparison

• MENA like LDC autocracies on TG
  – Patronage politics and clientelism,
  – Especially strong where rents high.

• MENA like democracies on CtD
  – Elite behavior, closeness to Europe.

• Autocratic paradox:
  – Autocratic bargains unstable: Good economics -> CtD rise, disrupting the bargain
  – To stabilize the bargain, need repression of “elites”, which often weakens the economy, and lowers TG, leading to new sources of instability from below
Concluding thoughts

Questions from Algeria and Sudan

• For both: regime military trying to replace autocrat; but use of divide-and-rule strategies by army not working
  – In spite of bad economy (esp. in Sudan), CtD seems high (and TG is low)
  – Is it because Islamists unlikely to take power?

• There seems also to be some learning from other regional experiences
  – The CtD/Insecurity relation may end up transitory, rather than structural.