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The Arab Spring

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which represents a 'ticking time bomb' (chapter 4) and the threat of a renewed revolt by the Shi'ite minority (chapter 9).

Since Saudi Arabia remains an enigmatic state, so does its politics, which is the basis which Aarts and Roelants use on which to posit their predictions or 'scenarios'. One scenario is 'social explosion', especially as low oil prices could threaten the rentier state dynamics. Another posits 'the king's dilemma', in which any possible reforms might lead to un-ending demands for more. The two other scenarios are 'severe repression' by the state supported by strong and even popular religious institutions, which have maintained an historic alliance with the rulers since the eighteenth century (chapters 2 and 12), and 'total implosion', in which the state would disintegrate geographically, in the style of Syria. These scenarios are all bleak, but their variability, based on a wealth of information and the lively narrative of first-hand interviews, keeps them within the bounds of plausibility. Nevertheless, this practical broadness still lacks a theoretical conceptualisation which could have better situated these 'ingredients', belonging to disciplines as different as political economy, IR, education and feminism.

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The Arab Spring: Pathways of Repression and Reform by Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud and Andrew Reynolds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 324pp., £19.99 (p/b), ISBN 9780199660070

Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud and Andrew Reynolds' text provides a timely reflection on the recent Arab Spring uprisings, which began with the ousting of Tunisian autocratic Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. However, rather than offering another descriptive account of recent events that have swept the Middle East and North Africa, Brownlee et al. seek to situate recent developments in a broader comparative framework. The authors effectively present the Arab Spring against the historical backdrop of other waves of political change, such as the

collapse of single-party communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe. In doing this, they point out that, contrary to popular perception, 'most Arab countries did not witness extraordinary social upheaval' (p. 18), and comparatively, Arab regimes proved extraordinarily resilient to the wave of popular protest that swept the region in the aftermath of Ben Ali's fall.

However, the aim of this text is not to provide a historical context for the Arab Spring, but instead the authors aim to explain the variation in outcome in terms of leadership change, regime continuity and regime breakdown. Through six chapters, the first of which is a chapter on 'Theorizing the Arab Spring', the authors provide a strong case for explaining 'quiescence rather than rebellion' that posits that most regimes were able to make use of reserves of loyalty and repressive capacity effectively to prevent prospective challengers from mounting challenges to their rule (p. 213). Moreover, the authors go on to argue that the most resilient regimes were those that held oil wealth (p. 214). Of course, Libya constitutes an outlier to this finding; however, the authors argue that Libya's case can be explained through the external intervention that came in the form of a sustained bombing campaign (p. 214).

Indeed, it is this text's situation of the Arab Spring in the broader context of comparativist literature that aims to explain democratic transitions and authoritarian resilience that makes it essential reading for students and scholars of comparative politics who are seeking to make sense of the political transformations in the Middle East and North Africa. This work is both empirically strong and theoretically informed, characteristics which set this book apart from much of the existing scattered literature on the Arab Spring.

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The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath by Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (eds). London: C Hurst & Co, 2014. 320pp., £30.00 (h/b), ISBN 9781849043090