

The Role of Governance in the Arab Awakening

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The central argument of this paper is that the authoritarian bargain in the Arab world changed in the 1990s, from the socialist contract based on state-led development, to a defensive model based on protecting the liberals and the West from Political Islam, and that this new authoritarian bargain sustained the autocracies for another two decades. Political circumstances in the region led to increased political that strengthened Political Islam and energized efforts to contain it. Less visibly however, more inclusive Islamic movements managed to achieve a rapprochement with the middle class. By the early 2000s, most Arab regimes were openly repressive and increasingly corrupt. I argue that the demise of the established order came when the revolutionary equation of the Liberal forces changed sufficiently to make it preferable to "tip" its support from the autocrats to political Islam, leading to the successful uprisings. This type of model is shown to explain the characteristics of the ongoing Arab awakening much better than the classical autocratic bargain model that had been used to understand the resilience of autocracy over the past decades and they therefore allow for more precise framework to make predictions about the feasibility of future policy reforms.