FROM PROTEST TO CIVIL WAR: EXPLAINING DIVERGENT OUTCOMES IN SYRIA, LIBYA, AND EGYPT AFTER THE ARAB UPRISINGS

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ABSTRACT

FROM PROTEST TO CIVIL WAR: EXPLAINING DIVERGENT OUTCOMES IN SYRIA, LIBYA, AND EGYPT AFTER THE ARAB UPRISINGS

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This thesis investigates why the 2011 Arab Uprisings resulted in the start of civil wars in Syria and Libya but not in Egypt, which saw widespread demonstrations and a regime crisis. It contends that this discrepancy cannot be explained by widespread protest alone. Instead, whether the advent of organized armed adversaries transforms protest capacity into insurgent capacity determines if civil war breaks out. The thesis analyzes Egypt as a negative case and Syria and Libya as positive cases of civil war, using a qualitative comparative case-study methodology. Three interrelated variables serve as the basis for the analysis: the emergence of organized armed challengers, elite cohesiveness and defection during the start of protests, and state coercive capacity and institutional cohesion. The comparison reveals that Syria and Libya took different paths to militarization: Syria through incremental repression, isolated resistance, and opposition militarization, whereas Libya through fast institutional breakdown, elite fracture, and military mobilization. In contrast, Egypt demonstrates that even large-scale protests and regime change do not always result in civil war when coercive institutions remain intact, and opposition forces fail to acquire sustained insurgent capacity.

Keywords: Arab Spring; Civil War Onset; Mass Protest; Armed Challengers; Coercive Institutions

ÖZ

PROTESTODAN İÇ SAVAŞA: ARAP AYAKLANMALARI SONRASINDA SURİYE, LİBYA VE MISIR'DA FARKLI SONUÇLARI AÇIKLAMAK

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Bu tez, 2011 Arap Ayaklanmaları'nın neden Suriye ve Libya'da iç savaşın başlamasına yol açtığını, ancak kitlesel protestolar ve rejim krizi yaşayan Mısır'da aynı sonucu üretmediğini incelemektedir. Tez, bu farklılığın yalnızca protestoların yaygınlığıyla açıklanamayacağını savunur. Bunun yerine, iç savaşın ortaya çıkışı, protesto kapasitesinin örgütlü silahlı aktörler aracılığıyla isyan kapasitesine dönüşüp dönüşmemesine bağlıdır. Nitel karşılaştırmalı vaka çalışması yöntemiyle Suriye ve Libya iç savaşlarının pozitif vakaları, Mısır ise negatif vaka olarak ele alınmaktadır. Analiz üç temel değişkene dayanır: devletin zor kullanma kapasitesi ve kurumsal bütünlüğü, protestoların başlangıcında elit bütünlüğü ve ayrışması, ayrıca örgütlü silahlı aktörlerin ortaya çıkışı. Karşılaştırma, Suriye'nin kademeli baskı, yerel direniş ve muhalefetin militarizasyonu yoluyla, Libya'nın ise hızlı kurumsal çöküş, elit parçalanması ve silahlı mobilizasyon yoluyla militarizasyona ilerlediğini göstermektedir. Mısır örneği ise zorlayıcı kurumlar bütünlüğünü koruduğunda ve muhalefet sürdürülebilir bir isyan kapasitesi geliştiremediğinde, kitlesel protestoların ve rejim değişikliğinin her zaman iç savaşa dönüşmediğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arap Baharı; İç Savaşın Başlangıcı; Kitlesel Protesto; Örgütlü Silahlı Aktörler; Zorlayıcı Kurumlar

To my Parents

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Arab Uprisings of 2011 demonstrated a regional moment of wide political contention against long-enduring authoritarian regimes. The protest movements have challenged rulers across the Middle East and North Africa; this process turned political exclusion and social grievances into a visible, unified action. The Arab Spring context is broad in the sense that it had different outcomes despite creating a shared regional moment of mass protest against authoritarian regimes. Countries such as Syria and Libya moved from mass protest to civil war onset, Egypt experienced a regime crisis, mass mobilization, and then the removal of President Hosni Mubarak without sliding into an armed conflict. The difference in outcomes makes the Arab Uprisings important not only as a regional wave of protest but on an analytical level as well, presenting it with a set of diverging pathways. This thesis aims to understand why similar practices of mass protests turned out to be the onset of civil war in some cases but not in others. It analyzes the reasons and factors behind the civil war onset instead of focusing on the reasons why authoritarian regimes faced protests or why the Arab Spring happened in the first place. Therefore, the central question is why protest became militarized in some cases and not in others. The Arab Uprisings clarify that mass protest does not necessarily or automatically result in civil war. The emergence of civil war is affected by whether organized armed challengers emerge and if the protest becomes militarized (Della Porta et al., 2018; Rød, 2023). As the Arab Spring created a common regional context, this enables Syria, Libya, and Egypt to be compared, without treating them as unrelated cases. The common regional context of the uprisings can be seen in demands for political accountability, dignity, an end to authoritarian rule, and social justice. The protests were linked through shared symbols, similar grievances, regional diffusion, and a perception that was encouraged from Tunisia, claiming that

long-enduring authoritarian regimes can suddenly be collectively challenged (Brownlee et al., 2015; Heydemann & Lynch, 2024).

The divergence in results itself suggests that protest on its own is not sufficient to explain civil war. It is understood in this case that the same starting conditions can produce different political trajectories (Geddes, 2003). During the same regional wave, Syria, Libya, and Egypt experienced protests, which is why they offer a useful basis for identifying the conditions that formed subsequent political trajectories. A common regional context can have control over many external influences.

The broader issue is that mass protest is one form of contention, while civil war is another (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Some factors happen in between and identify the probability of the state sliding into a civil war. Many societies have experienced wide protests at some level without civil war, which makes civil war and nationwide protests non-identical (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). The outbreak of civil war that takes place in the initial stages is a process, and it is far from being an automatic outcome. The transformation from civilian contention to armed conflict requires explanation and reasons behind its existence. There are other cases beyond civil war onset where political crisis can produce reform, remain peaceful, and produce regime change. However, in other cases, it can be repressed, produce regime change, and become militarized. It is essential to understand why and how protest rises into a sustained armed conflict to demonstrate clearly the difference across the Arab Spring cases.

The three cases are characterized analytically based on the outcomes that followed the uprisings. In Syria, protests began in a peaceful way. The transition from protest to civil war was gradual, and the opposition changed to be heavily militarized. In Libya, rapid change occurred at the beginning, followed by the quick fragmentation of state authority, and then armed conflict emerged early. Egypt was different in the sense that no sustained armed challenger emerged; the initial protests were successful in removing Mubarak, and then a political crisis followed. The different trajectories across Syria, Libya, and Egypt form an essential question. All three cases experienced large-scale protests, authoritarian crises, and significant challenges to

regimes. But only Libya and Syria developed conflicts. Explaining this distinction is the major research puzzle of this thesis.

1.1. Research Puzzle

The fundamental research question is why similar protest movements during the 2011 Arab Uprisings resulted in diverse outcomes. While Syria and Libya witnessed civil war, Egypt endured government change without the advent of long-term military conflict. The shared outcome of civil war onset did not suggest similar pathways in the two cases of Syria and Libya.

Rather, it explains why some instances of large-scale protest stay within the parameters of political dispute or regime change, while others escalate into protracted armed conflict. This divergence draws attention to a gap in the explanation between the start of civil war and protest, implying that the existence of widespread mobilization is not enough to explain different results. As a result, the research problem is formulated more precisely. Despite Egypt experiencing the same levels of political upheaval, these conditions did not generate an organized armed challenger within the state. Understanding this difference and the factors that contribute to a civil war is crucial to explaining how mass protests can turn into a civil war onset. This paradox gives rise to the primary research question addressed in this thesis.

1.2. Research Question

The primary question of this thesis is thus:

Why did civil war onset follow the 2011 protest episodes in some Arab Spring cases (Syria and Libya), while mass protest in Egypt did not lead to civil war onset?

In addition to answering this question, the thesis covers three related sub-questions. First, how did structural conditions influence the likelihood of armed confrontation before and during the uprisings? Second, how did elite cohesion and defection during the protests influence whether political tensions rose or remained contained? Third,

why have organized armed challenges emerged in Syria and Libya but not in Egypt?

1.3. Main Argument

This thesis's central claim is that the existence of widespread protests alone cannot account for the start of civil war following the Arab upheavals. Protest does not always result in civil war, but it can cause a major political crisis, undermine a regime's authority, and highlight the scope of public discontent. An extra mechanism that turns civic disagreement into a coordinated armed challenge is necessary for the shift from protest to civil war. In this regard, the main contrast made in this thesis is between the capacity for protest and the capacity for insurrection. Protest capacity is the capability of political and social actors to move protests in large number of people opposing the regime. In contrast, insurgent capacity determines the ability of opposition actors to arm, organize, recruit, coordinate, and sustain violence against the state authority. The onset is experienced when protest capacity is changed into insurgent capacity. Severe regime crises and protest wave can stay within the realm of political contention without sliding into a civil war as long as the change from protest to insurgent capacity does not take place.

This thesis expands upon the more general realization that the interplay of elite behavior, opposition organizing, and state response can shape the course of contested politics. Civil war and mass protest are two different types of conflict, and the transition from one to the other necessitates explanation rather than presumption (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Similar findings from studies on failed democratization movements and the emergence of organized armed conflict indicate that under certain political circumstances, protest movements may become radicalized or militarized, particularly when repression, elite fragmentation, and organizational opportunities make armed confrontation more likely (Della Porta et al., 2018; Rød, 2023). This is why the thesis does not deal with the Arab Uprisings as the only case in which protests transform naturally into either a democracy or civil war. But it argues that conditions that led to different results in each of the three countries were present long before the uprisings, relying on whether state coercive institutions

fragmented during the crisis or were cohesive, and if protests produced organized armed challengers in the last stages.

Three interconnected levels are used to develop the argument. The first level deals with the structural circumstances that existed before the uprisings. The atmosphere in which the protest took place was molded by institutional cohesiveness and the state's ability to use coercion. There was less room for armed challenger development in areas where coercive institutions were unified, centralized, and capable of maintaining control over organized violence. Protest was more likely to create opportunities for armed contestation in areas where coercive institutions were weaker, more dispersed, or connected to personalist rule rather than institutionalized authority. Insurgency is influenced not just by grievances but also by the viability, organization, and ability of challengers to continue violent action against the state, according to civil war literature (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). The nature of coercive institutions in the Arab Spring cases was crucial, as it indicated whether the state could contain protests coercively and politically or if its own fragmentation produced openings for armed opposition.

The second level focuses on the immediate dynamics at the beginning of the protest, particularly elite defection and coherence. The immediate actions of ruling elites and coercive elites during protest episodes can decide whether the onset of large-scale armed confrontation is restrained or increased, even in situations when structural conditions generate a broad background of conflict risk. The regime or state apparatus is better prepared to handle the crisis and keep opposition players from acquiring coercive space if the military and ruling elites continue to work together. A more severe breakdown in authority could result from dissent if elites split off, defect, or fight for power. This is especially crucial in authoritarian environments, because the use of force frequently dictates whether regimes endure, change, fall, or turn violent. The will and strength of the coercive apparatus are central to the survival of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East region (Bellin, 2004, p.142). In this thesis, that concept is used to explain why protest can or cannot turn into a civil war onset, not just to explain the regime's survival.

The method of organized armed challenger formation is the third and most important step. It takes more than chaos, oppression, or political instability to start a civil war. It necessitates the appearance of actors who can maintain armed conflict with the government. Military defections, local armed mobilization, territory control, weapon access, outside assistance, or the restructuring of opposition networks into armed structures are some of the ways in which these actors might appear. For this reason, the thesis centers the explanation around an organized armed challenger formation. The start of a civil war relies on whether opponents get the organizational and coercive ability to fight, even while repression may exacerbate rage, and protest may undermine the legitimacy of the authority. The crucial question thus is not analyzing if the regime used violence or if citizens protested, but whether the crisis created an armed actor that was capable of challenging state authority and succeeding in doing so.

Thus, the thesis's main claim is comparative. Syria and Libya provide examples of how organized armed resistance may turn large-scale protests into civil wars, while there are various ways in which this can happen. Egypt shows that when coercive institutions remain intact, and opposition players cannot launch an insurgency, even widespread mobilization and the overthrow of a dictatorship do not always result in civil war. The combination of structural conditions, elite cohesion or defection, and the presence or absence of organized armed challengers determines the outcome rather than protest alone. This reasoning enables the thesis to explain both sides of the comparison: why civil war broke out in Libya and Syria but not in Egypt.

1.4. Conceptual Clarification

Concepts rely on a clear contrast between organized armed challenger formation, civil war onset, and mass protest. Although they are connected, these ideas are not the same. The analysis runs the risk of interpreting protest, instability, repression, militarization, and civil war as components of a single continuous process if they are not separated. By defining each notion independently and concentrating on the particular mechanism by which protest may or may not turn into armed conflict, the thesis avoids that presupposition. The main idea is that a regime's legitimacy issue or

citizen protests alone do not cause civil war to break out. It starts when armed players who can continue to use violence against the state become the focal point of political conflict.

Large-scale group action against governmental authority is referred to as mass protest. Strikes, marches, public space occupations, protests, and other visible forms of popular mobilization are all included. Mass protest is particularly important in authoritarian environments because it publicly opposes governments that typically limit opposition organizations and political engagement. But before it turns into an armed battle, protest is still a difficult form of politics. It does not always result in the formation of armed groups or military capability, but it may put pressure on a government, reveal widespread grievances, and cause periods of political unpredictability. Therefore, protest can result in a variety of outcomes, such as the outbreak of civil war, reform, regime change, repression, or a negotiated transition. The concept of contentious politics clarifies this point as it deals with protest as one form of collective claim-making, not just an automatic step toward war (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

The term "civil war onset" describes the start of a protracted armed conflict in which organized parties use violence to contest state authority. This theory does not treat the onset of a civil war as being the same as instability, violence during protests, police repression, or brief conflicts. These could happen during a protest period without leading to a civil war. Organization and continuity are the main differences. Violence must be organized around recognizable armed players with the ability to sustain conflict over time for civil war to begin. Thus, the shift from civilian conflict to prolonged armed conflict is the focus of the thesis. Knowing the difference between the two situations is important, as many protest movements can experience violence or face repression, but only some of them turn out to become civil wars. Civil war literature emphasizes that armed conflict is determined not just by grievances, but also by the feasibility of insurgency, organizational capacity, and challengers' ability to work against the state (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Thus, the theory revolves around the idea of an organized armed challenger. A non-state or anti-regime actor with the capacity to employ violence against state authority

in a persistent and coordinated manner is referred to as an organized armed challenger. This calls for more than impulsive rage, altercations on the street, or short-term self-defense. Leadership, recruiting, weapon access, military expertise, territorial presence, command structures, and the capacity to organize violence beyond isolated events are all necessary. The presence of an armed challenger does not guarantee that the challenger is always cohesive or has a solid institutional foundation. Armed actors may arise through loose networks, fracture internally, or appear gradually. However, for a civil war to start, armed opposition must become well-organized enough to continue fighting the government.

This explanation also helps in distinguishing between the capacity for protest and the capacity for insurrection. The ability of opposition figures, social movements, and regular people to organize sizable crowds in public areas is referred to as protest capacity. Demonstrations, group involvement, slogans, strikes, and symbolic accusations against the regime are some of the ways it is conveyed. On the other hand, insurgent capacity is the ability to turn dissent into an armed force that can combat the government. It encompasses military coordination, recruitment networks, armed organization, coercive resources, and territorial access. A movement can be capable of protesting without also being capable of insurrection (Della Porta et al., 2018). This distinction is crucial to the thesis because it clarifies why mass mobilization can be politically effective without turning into a military organization, this distinction is crucial to the thesis.

Additionally, the study cannot overstate the causal importance of protest itself due to the distinction between protest ability and insurgency capacity. Large-scale demonstrations may undermine a leader or cause a crisis of legitimacy, but they do not by themselves account for the emergence of armed opponents. Other factors, such as the disintegration of coercive institutions, elite defections, weapon access, territory openings, and the strategic interaction between regime repression and opposition organizing, are necessary for the transition from protest to insurgency. Therefore, rather than being a direct outcome of grievance or mobilization alone, civil war onset is better understood as a process affected by political and organizational factors. Failure to democratize protest movements might lead to

radicalization or militarization, depending on the availability of resources and chances for armed resistance (Della Porta et al., 2018; Rød, 2023).

Egypt serves as a helpful conceptual example in the context of this thesis because it illustrates the distinction between armed challenger creation and mass protest. Large-scale mobilization and a regime crisis occurred in Egypt, but the protest movement did not grow into a coordinated armed actor capable of long-term conflict with the government. This does not imply that there was no violence, repression, or instability in the Egyptian example. Instead, it indicates that the lack of insurgent capacity caused by these dynamics prevented the start of a civil war. Therefore, the Egyptian situation explains why the theory does not link the likelihood of a civil war to the intensity of protests. The crucial question is not just whether protests take place, but also whether they develop into coordinated violent conflict.

The rest of the argument is shaped by these conceptual differences. Since Syria, Libya, and Egypt all saw significant protests during the Arab Uprisings, mass protest serves as the comparison's starting point. The beginning of a civil war indicates a different result because Egypt did not engage in armed conflict, whereas Syria and Libya did. The process that explains the transition from one to the other is identified by an organized armed challenger formation. Lastly, mass mobilization can undermine authoritarian government without necessarily leading to civil war because of the difference between protest and insurgency capacity. The thesis can compare the three situations without presuming that protest, repression, and war are all part of the same automatic process by outlining these ideas at the outset.

1.5. Analytical Framework of the Thesis

The thesis is based on an analytical framework that is further elaborated in Chapter 2. The rationale of this framework is briefly described in the introduction to clarify how the examples will be compared. The approach moves through three interconnected dimensions: structural factors, proximal dynamics during protest initiation, and the mechanism of organized armed challenger development. These dimensions are derived from the literature on civil war onset, contentious politics, and authoritarian

regime resilience, which all emphasize the importance of long-term structural conditions, short-term political dynamics, and the emergence of organized armed opposition in determining whether protests escalate into civil war. Rather of viewing these explanations as opposing viewpoints, the framework incorporates them within a sequential analytical process. The three dimensions are used consistently across the case studies to reveal both similar tendencies and significant variances in the paths from popular revolt to different conflict outcomes.

First, structural conditions primarily refer to state coercive capacity and institutional cohesiveness. These elements create the context in which protests occur and determine whether the state can maintain centralized control over organized violence. Second, proximal dynamics refers to elite cohesion and defection in the early stages of protest. These dynamics are important because the action of governmental, military, and security elites has the potential to control or exacerbate political fragmentation. Third, the method of organized armed challenger development explains whether protests escalate into continuous armed conflict or remain a source of political dispute.

This framework enables the thesis to analyze Syria, Libya, and Egypt using the same analytical process while not treating the cases as unrelated or exceptional. It also focuses on the onset of the civil war rather than the larger causes of the Arab Uprisings. The framework combines insights from Bellin (2004), Tilly and Tarrow (2015), and Rød (2023) to analyze how structural conditions, protest dynamics, and the emergence of organized armed challengers interact to explain the onset of civil war in three different cases.

1.6. Case Selection and Comparative Logic

This thesis focuses on Syria, Libya, and Egypt because they provide a valuable comparative framework for explaining the disparities in results following the 2011 Arab Uprisings. All three cases were part of a regional surge of anti-authoritarian protests. They witnessed large-scale mobilization, challenges to governmental authority, and periods of severe regime crisis. However, the outcomes differed. Syria

and Libya progressed from huge protests to civil war, whereas Egypt saw mass mobilization, Mubarak's departure, and political turmoil without devolving into civil conflict. This mix of shared geographical environment and disparate domestic outcomes renders the comparison analytically valuable.

Syria and Libya are viewed as positive examples of civil war start. In all cases, protests eventually rose to organized armed confrontation. However, the thesis does not see Syria and Libya as equivalent circumstances. Syria represents a more gradual path of the shift from mass contention to armed conflict. Protest began as mostly a civilian movement, but repression, localized resistance, defections, and the formation of an armed opposition progressively turned the battle toward militarization. Libya represents a faster and more fractured path. Institutional failure, elite division, territorial collapse, and weapon access facilitated the rise of armed challengers. As a result, Syria and Libya both experienced the onset of civil war, but they did so through distinct procedures.

Egypt is treated as a negative case not because it lacked protest, crisis, or repression, but because these dynamics did not produce sustained civil war onset. Conversely, Egypt went through a period of extreme political unpredictability, widespread mobilization, and Mubarak's downfall. But a civil war did not break out as a result of these circumstances. The protest movement in Egypt did not grow into a well-organized, armed opponent that could continue to fight the government. Opposition players did not get the military structure, territorial bases, or coercive resources required for insurgency, and the military remained institutionally unified. Egypt is also crucial to the comparison because it demonstrates that civil war is not always the result of widespread protests and political crises.

Examining the civil war onset is essential to the thesis's comparative logic. Libya and Syria provide insight into how dissent might lead to the emergence of armed challengers. Egypt contributes to the explanation of why this change might not take place. This is crucial because the lack of civil war shouldn't be viewed as a clear-cut or passive result. It also has to be explained. The argument might imply that the transition from protest to civil war was more automatic than it actually was if it only

looked at Syria and Libya. By taking Egypt into account, the research can determine what prevented widespread protests from leading to the start of a civil war.

The three scenarios are also appropriate because they enable comparison within a common regional framework. Common protest patterns, slogans, anti-authoritarian claims, and calls for political change, accountability, and dignity were all produced by the Arab Uprisings. At the same time, Egypt, Syria, and Libya had different internal organizations. They had different levels of state institutionalization, military structures, opposition networks, ruling coalitions, and coercive institutions. The comparison is helpful because it enables the thesis to question why comparable regional protest pressures resulted in disparate domestic trajectories. As a result, it is feasible to distinguish between the particular national circumstances that influenced the shift from mass contention to armed conflict or containment and the overall framework of the Arab Uprisings.

By posing the same analytical questions in each case, the thesis compares them. It looks at the pre-revolutionary structural conditions, how elites and repressive institutions behaved when protests started, and whether or not organized armed challengers emerged. This makes it possible for the study to compare the instances systematically without supposing that all three took the same course. In this situation, comparative analysis is helpful because it clarifies how comparable beginnings can result in disparate political results (Geddes, 2003). The Arab Spring cases are particularly helpful for this type of comparison because they demonstrate that widespread demonstrations and regime crises can result in civil war in certain contexts but not in others (Anderson, 2011; Brownlee et al., 2015).

1.7. Methodology and Contribution

This thesis takes a qualitative comparative case study approach. This strategy is acceptable since the research question aims to explain processes and consequences across a small number of examples. The thesis does not attempt to assess the impact of a single variable across a vast number of countries. Instead, it aims to understand why protests triggered civil war in Syria and Libya but not in Egypt. A qualitative

comparison technique allows the analysis to thoroughly investigate each instance while also detecting patterns between them.

Structured, focused comparison is employed in the thesis. Every instance is analyzed using the same set of analytical concerns. These include structural circumstances, the presence or absence of organized armed challengers, and elite cohesion or defection during the start of protests. The research is narrowly focused, it does not try to explain every facet of the Arab Uprisings or every subsequent political event in Syria, Libya, and Egypt. The start of the civil war and the circumstances that either succeeded or failed in turning large-scale protest into a coordinated armed conflict continue to be the main topics of discussion. By doing this, the comparison is kept under control, and the thesis is kept from developing into a comprehensive historical narrative of the Arab Spring.

The thesis also employs the analytical framework in each example. Civil war is viewed as a process rather than an immediate result of dissent. The examination focuses on how protests began, how the regime and coercive institutions responded, how elites behaved during the crisis, and whether opposition actors gained the ability to organize armed resistance. This strategy is beneficial for distinguishing between background factors and the mechanisms that directly influenced civil war onset. It also permits the thesis to demonstrate that the commencement of civil war was not caused solely by protest, but rather by a process in which protest became linked to the creation of organized armed challengers.

The argument relies on both comparison and sequence, so this methodological technique is appropriate for the thesis. The comparison clarifies differences between Egypt, Libya, and Syria. The order describes how each case's outcome evolved. Both Syria and Libya experienced civil wars, but not in the same ways. Despite widespread protests and a government crisis, Egypt did not turn into a civil war. Therefore, a qualitative comparative case study is helpful because it enables the thesis to look at both similarities and differences, and the research design explains how the important outcome evolved (Geddes, 2003). The thesis contributes by distinguishing between the start of a civil war and widespread protest. It contends

that the creation of an organized armed adversary is the missing link between the two. This contribution is significant since civil war, protest, and repression are commonly viewed as a single, uninterrupted path. Instead, this thesis contends that an explanation is necessary for the shift from protest to civil conflict. Regime crises may result from large-scale protests, but the start of a civil war requires people who can continue to engage in violent conflict with the government.

By focusing on organization, coercive fragmentation, and insurgent capacity rather than just grievances, the thesis engages with the literature on the onset of civil wars. Grievances may contribute to the explanation of why people organize against a dictatorship, but they do not explain why some opposition movements develop the ability to fight while others do not. Furthermore, by demonstrating that protest can result in a variety of outcomes, including regime change, repression, containment, or militarization, the thesis also engages with the literature on contentious politics. Lastly, clarifying why nations with similar regional protest contexts generated disparate domestic outcomes, it adds to the literature on the comparative Arab Spring studies. The thesis engages with this literature by highlighting the formation of organized armed challengers and the process through which mass protest evolves into civil war onset in some cases, while explaining why this mechanism did nit emerge in Egypt (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; Della Porta et al., 2018).

1.8. Chapter Roadmap

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical background and methods. It examines the literature on civil war onset, contentious politics, authoritarian resilience, coercive institutions, elite defection, and armed challenger development. It also describes the thesis's comparative method and how the same analytical framework is utilized in Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

Chapter 3 looks at Syria and Libya as favorable examples of the start of civil war. It applies the analytical approach to both events, demonstrating how the demonstration evolved into an organized armed battle. The chapter does not treat Syria and Libya as

identical. Syria is viewed as an example of incremental militarization, with protests evolving into armed conflict over time. Libya is examined as an example of rapid change, in which institutional weakness, elite division, territorial breakdown, and access to weapons hastened the development of armed challengers.

Chapter 4 explores Egypt as a negative case. It explains why large protests, a government crisis, and Mubarak's ouster did not spark civil war. The chapter focuses on the military's cohesion, centralized control over coercive institutions, and the lack of an organized armed challenger. Egypt is thus used to demonstrate how protests can cause a significant political breach without resulting in civil conflict.

The conclusion combines the comparative findings. It returns to the primary research topic, explaining why civil war broke out after protests in Syria and Libya but not in Egypt. The conclusion contends that the important distinction was not the existence of protest itself, but whether it evolved into an organized armed challenge. It also considers the thesis's broader implications for understanding popular mobilization, authoritarian crises, and the conditions under which protests turn into civil conflict.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to lay out the literature grounding, the analytical framework, and the methodological approach of the thesis. As stated in the introduction, the core question of the thesis is to understand why the 2011 protest episodes produced civil war onset in some Arab Spring cases, such as Syria and Libya, but not in Egypt. I do not treat the post-2011 trajectories as a single process of "civil war onset." Instead, I take mass protest as a shared starting point and focus on the conditions and processes that help explain why outcomes split across cases. This requires engaging both civil war onset scholarship and work on contentious politics, including research that directly explores the relationship between protest episodes and the emergence of armed conflict (Della Porta et al., 2018).

An analytical framework will be applied in this thesis instead of a theoretical one to move from abstract theories to workable tools in terms of examining the three cases. This kind of framework will enable stable comparison among countries that share the same consequential shock after the uprisings (Heydemann & Lynch, 2024). It will help identify how and why this kind of transition in events happened in some places but not in others. Finally, it will ease breaking down casual and complex relationships into clear categories, making those relationships understood in a structural, mechanistic, and proximate way. In this analytical framework, the thesis will act as a guide to give information, but will not dominate.

Rather than presenting a single all-encompassing theory, the chapter develops a theory-informed analytical framework that helps discipline the comparison. In practice, that means translating key debates into a small number of analytically distinct components that can be applied consistently across the three cases. The

chapter first reviews the main strands of scholarship used to conceptualize the puzzle; it then maps the variables that appear most often in those literatures; and finally, it justifies a narrowed framework consisting of three variables (one per analytical level) for structured comparison. The final section explains the comparative strategy and its role in identifying where a pathway consolidated into civil war onset or was blocked.

2.1. Literature Review

2.1.1. Civil War Onset and the Feasibility of Armed Contestation

Civil war onset research does not treat armed conflict as the automatic outcome of grievance or protest. A major line of argument instead stresses feasibility: civil war onset is more likely where states struggle to monitor territory, police effectively, or maintain control over coercion (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Complementary work on the organization and logic of violence in civil war emphasizes that armed conflict depends on institutions and organization, not simply anger or mobilization, including the ability to sustain armed contestation over time (Kalyvas, 2006). These debates are especially relevant for this thesis because they direct attention to the state's coercive capacity and institutional cohesion as baseline conditions that can help explain why civil war onset follows some protest episodes and not others.

In addition, International and regional interventions are widely recognized as influential in civil war onset literature and specifically in Syria and Libya, where external players contributed political, military, and material support, exacerbating existing domestic differences and influencing the evolution of violence (Byman et al., 2012; Ali, 2025).

2.1.2. Contentious Politics and Protest Trajectories

Contentious politics scholarship explains how collective action becomes possible, spreads, and changes direction. Work on political opportunities highlights that mobilization is shaped by how actors perceive the regime's openness or vulnerability,

including elite divisions and shifts in the costs of repression (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Related research on repression and protest policing shows that state responses can reshape protest strategies and reconfigure the space for non-violent action (Davenport, 2007; Della Porta, 1995). For this thesis, the point is not that protest "intensity" mechanically produces civil war, but that protest environments and state responses can differ in ways that matter for subsequent pathways.

These dynamics are also relevant for understanding how episodes of contention interact with questions of political change and democratization, even when outcomes diverge sharply across cases (Tilly, 2007).

2.1.3. Comparative Scholarship on the Arab Spring and Pathway Divergence

Comparative scholarship on the Arab Spring repeatedly shows that broadly similar regional pressures and diffusion dynamics produced sharply different national outcomes. A common emphasis is variation in authoritarian coalitions, security-sector behavior, and the repertoire of repression and reform strategies available to regimes. According to this literature, the divergent outcomes of the Arab Spring were primarily driven by variations in regime cohesion, specifically the unity of authoritarian elites and the reliability and fragmentation of security institutions, which shaped whether states were able to contain protests or experienced internal defection and state breakdown (Brownlee et al., 2015; Heydemann & Lynch, 2024).

Although the civil war onset literature looks at both external reasons like foreign interference and regional geopolitical dynamics, as well as domestic political processes, this thesis draws primairly on the social movement and contentious politics literature. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on the domestic mechanisms linking protest mobilization, state repression, and elite dynamics to the transition from mass protest to armed conflict.

Based on these strands of scholarship, the next section maps the main variables emphasized in the literature at three analytical levels—structural conditions, proximate dynamics, and mechanisms—and then justifies a narrowed analytical

framework consisting of three variables (one per level) for structured comparison across Syria, Libya, and Egypt.

2.2. Analytical Framework

2.2.1. Purpose and Logic of the Analytical Framework

This section explains why an analytical framework is necessary and why Syria, Libya, and Egypt can be compared in a structured way. The three cases experienced similar timing and regional pressures during the Arab Spring period, but they did not end up in the same place (Heydemann & Lynch, 2024; Abdel Salam, 2015). Syria saw civil war onset beginning in 2011 alongside armed opposition and territorial fragmentation, later shaped heavily by international involvement. Libya's uprising was followed by regime breakdown and prolonged civil war, then external intervention, again with external engagement. Egypt is included as a negative case: despite mass protests and major political upheaval, it did not experience the onset of civil war after 2011. The comparison is therefore designed to explain why civil war onset followed mass protest in some contexts but not in others, without assuming a single "emergence of civil war" trajectory.

Using an analytical framework helps prevent cases from being treated as purely exceptional or too complex to compare. The framework gives the thesis a consistent set of analytical steps and makes it clearer what is being held constant and what is being examined for variation (Aouragh & Hamouchene, 2022). Following the literature reviewed above, the thesis proceeds in two stages: first, it maps the variables most frequently emphasized in the scholarship; second, it narrows the framework so that comparison remains manageable and conceptually sharp.

At the mapping stage, the literature tends to cluster candidate explanations across three analytical levels. **Structural conditions** refer to longer-term baseline characteristics preceding the uprisings, such as state capacity and institutional strength, regime type and coercive architecture, resource dependence and economic development, and identity cleavages (sectarian or tribal). **Proximate dynamics** refer

to factors around protest onset, including political opportunity structures, triggering events, and early mobilization resources. **Mechanisms** refer to processes through which contention can, under certain conditions, be transformed into sustained armed conflict, including repression–radicalization dynamics, the formation and organization of armed challengers, and breakdowns of coordination or fragmentation (Della Porta et al., 2018; Rød, 2023).

Table 1. Variable map from the literature

Analytical level	**Candidate variables emphasized in the literature (mapped)**
Structural (pre-uprising baseline)	State capacity and institutional strength; regime type and coercive architecture; resource dependence and economic development; identity cleavages (sectarian/tribal).
Proximate (protest onset dynamics)	Political opportunity structures and elite alignment; triggering events; early mobilization resources and organizational networks.
Mechanisms (linking protest to civil war onset)	Repression–radicalization dynamics; emergence/organization of armed challengers; fragmentation/polarization and breakdown of non-violent coordination.
Contextual layer (international/regional)	External support and intervention; cross-border sanctuary/arms flows; regional proxy dynamics and international constraints (treated as context in the case narratives).

Mapping these variables does not mean the thesis adopts all of them as the analytical framework. To avoid an overextended model and to keep cross-case comparison consistent, the thesis narrows the framework to **three variables—one per analytical level**. The selection is guided by four considerations: the variables should be central across the relevant literatures, conceptually distinct (so they do not overlap heavily),

applicable across Syria, Libya, and Egypt without being tailored to one case, and useful for a structured, focused comparison. On this basis, the thesis uses **state coercive capacity and institutional cohesion** (structural), **elite cohesion and defection during protest onset** (proximate), and the **emergence of an organized armed challenger** (mechanism) as the core variables. Other variables identified in the literature remain part of the broader map and are treated as contextual factors or alternative explanations in the case narratives.

Comparative Arab Spring work (Brownlee et al., 2015) informs how coercive coalition behavior shapes elite alignment and state cohesion during protest onset, while Della Porta et al. (2018) helps specify the mechanisms through which contention can shift toward organized armed confrontation.

Methodologically, the framework fits to a comparative case study design built on structured, focused comparison. Each case is examined through the same analytical sequence—structural baseline, proximate dynamics at protest onset, and the mechanism that helps explain civil war onset or non-onset—so that differences in outcome can be tied to differences in pathways rather than to descriptive contrasts alone (Aouragh & Hamouchene, 2022). Within each case, the analytical framework is used to reconstruct key sequences and turning points and to show where a pathway consolidated or was blocked.

Finally, Figure 1 summarizes the narrowed framework visually and provides the organizing logic for the empirical chapters (Chapters 4–6) and the cross-case comparison (Chapter 7).

This section explains why the thesis groups the literature's candidate explanations into **structural**, **proximate**, and **mechanistic** levels. Civil war onset is typically treated as multi-causal and processual, shaped by combinations of background conditions, short-term dynamics, and turning-point processes rather than by a single factor. Grouping variables helps keep the comparison consistent across Syria, Libya, and Egypt and makes it easier to specify where pathways diverge. The goal here is not to claim that one model captures everything, but to adopt a clear analytical

sequence that matches how major strands of civil war and contentious politics scholarship conceptualize conflict formation (Della Porta et al., 2018).

Structural condition (baseline)
State coercive capacity and institutional cohesion
↓
Proximate dynamics (protest onset)
Elite cohesion and defection during protest onset
↓
Mechanism (hinge process)
Emergence of an organized armed challenger
↓
Outcome
Civil war onset vs no civil war onset

Figure 1. Narrowed analytical framework for civil war onset following mass protest

Structural variables capture longer-term baseline conditions that shape regime resilience and the feasibility of armed contestation. The literature commonly discusses factors such as state capacity and institutional strength, regime type and coercive architecture, resource dependence and economic development, and identity cleavages. These conditions do not automatically produce protest; they shape the environment in which protest unfolds and the constraints within which states respond. Work on regime fragility, for example, points to how vulnerability can increase the risk of breakdown following unrest (Goldstone, 2011), while research on authoritarian coercion highlights how coercive institutions influence resilience under pressure (Bellin, 2004). This level therefore clarifies what the thesis treats as "baseline."

Proximate variables focus on dynamics around protest onset—political opportunities, triggering events, and early mobilization resources—that help explain why collective action takes off at a particular time and how it develops initially (Tarrow, 1998; Brancati, 2016). This is where short-term openings, shocks, and early interactions between protesters and the state become visible. The proximate level is

needed because structural conditions alone rarely explain timing or early trajectories. It is also where variation in elite alignment can start to matter, especially in authoritarian contexts.

Mechanistic variables refer to the processes through which contention can become sustained armed conflict. In the literature, mechanisms include repression–radicalization dynamics, the emergence and organization of armed challengers, and fragmentation or breakdowns in coordination (Della Porta et al., 2018; Rød, 2023). This level is distinct from proximate dynamics: proximate variables help explain the onset and early development of protests; mechanisms help explain how (and whether) those protests are transformed into organized armed confrontation. Scholarship on armed organization and control in civil war underscores why organization matters (Kalyvas, 2006), while work on civil resistance highlights how strategies and trajectories can shift under repression (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Case-based accounts also suggest that fragmentation and militarization can be central to particular pathways, including in Syria (Pearlman, 2017).

Together, these three categories provide a coherent analytical sequence—**structural → proximate → mechanism → outcome (civil war onset vs non-onset)**—that supports transparent comparison across the cases. The literature maps a wider set of variables within each category, but the thesis narrows the analytical framework to three core variables (one per level) in the next section to keep the comparison focused and conceptually clear.

2.2.2. Structural Factors

2.2.2.1. State coercive capacity and institutional cohesion

This section reviews the main structural explanations emphasized in the literature and clarifies how they are used in the thesis. Structural variables provide baseline conditions that shape state resilience and the feasibility of armed contestation following mass protest. They capture features of the state and society that change relatively slowly and therefore matter as background conditions for the 2011 protest

episodes. The discussion draws on civil war onset scholarship as well as comparative work on authoritarian politics and the Arab Spring. In this thesis, state coercive capacity and institutional cohesion are the extent to which the state maintains effective command over coercive institutions and retains practical reach across territory. Institutional cohesion also includes whether key security institutions act in coordinated ways rather than fragmenting under pressure.

State capacity and institutional strength are important factors in determining whether protests can escalate into armed conflict. Migdal (1988) explains how institutional weakness affects state-society relations; weak institutional organizations create weak states. Weak states have weak institutional organizations; however, societies can be strong and carry out wide protests. Security sectors handle protests at the initial stage, and fragmented security sectors within a state struggle to manage them effectively (Tilly, 2007). State capacity is linked with coercion, political stability, and institutions.

When states are weak, they become more prone to insurgency, and a civil war can occur; the foundational theory of Fearon and Laitin (2003) proves this. Institutional fragmentation in Syria was one of the reasons that contributed to the Syrian civil war. Heydemann (2013) examines institutional fragmentation in Syria and why the events after the 2011 protests turned into violence. When state institutional strength is compared across the Arab regimes, this can give us a guide to why civil wars are experienced in some countries, while not experienced in others (Anderson, 2011). As a result, it can be understood that low state capacity and weak institutional organizations can create security vacuums, allowing armed groups to emerge. Arab states are very different in terms of bureaucracy, state centralization, and military loyalty as they were governed by different regimes with different characteristics. These indicators shaped how regimes could respond to protests.

2.2.2.2. Regime Type and Coercive Architecture

An authoritarian regime type is defined as personalist and single-party-based governance; it can also be military-based. Coercive architecture includes security

services, elite networks, and repression strategies, and how they work to respond to unrest and upheavals. Authoritarian regime types have their unique survival strategies. Different regime types escalate and collapse differently (Geddes, 2003). These regimes can implement coercive capacity linking that with regime survival; coercive capacity also varies across different types of authoritarian regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2010, pp. 3–7). The strength of the authoritarian regime is different among Middle Eastern countries, and the level of its strength and coercive apparatus explains the response of the government to the unrest (Bellin, 2004, pp. 143–145).

Although the regime of Egypt is authoritarian, just as regime in Libya and Syria, respectively, its strength and level of influence are distinct, along with the coercive power of the military, which decided to side with the will of the people. This is what Barany (2011) explains in light of the role of the military in the Arab revolts, looking into why some militaries became fragmented while others were not. To sum up, regime structure linked with coercive apparatus shapes the quality of repression, protest radicalization, and the likelihood of defection. Looking at regime type and its coercive apparatus is essential and relevant to the Arab Spring in the sense that MENA regimes differed. Syria's regime is sectarian and security-intelligence heavy. Libya is personalist and more fragmented. While in Egypt, it is military-dominated.

2.2.2.3. Resource Dependence and Economic Development

Economic underdevelopment and resource wealth are structural variables affecting conflict within the state. According to the oil curse theory, Ross (2012) states the effects of oil on state behavior and conflict. This was seen closely in the case of Libya. Resource dependence results in higher conflict risk, which is further highlighted by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), stating that resource wealth increases conflict vulnerability, so economic grievances fuel protests and recruitment. In the Arab economy context, the oil-driven political economy is linked with institutional weakness in Libya (Vandewalle, 2012). Similarly, in Syria, rural poverty and economic grievances caused revolts (Hinnebusch, 2012). In this regard, it can be stated that poverty and inequality are among the mobilization potential, and that resource dependencies are among the war economy incentives.

Considering the economies of the three countries addressed under the analytical framework would help in using them as indicators for civil war. Libya differs from Syria in that it is an oil rentier state, whereas Syria suffers from a severe rural economic crisis. Egypt is economically controlled, and it has experienced uneven development.

2.2.2.4. Identity Cleavages (Sectarian or Tribal)

Social cleavages are defined as structural identity divisions, either tribal or ethnic. The classic theory on group grievances by Gurr (1970) explains why people rebel, demonstrating that grievances emerge from group inequality and amount to violent mobilization. Exclusion and grievances can cause mobilization to resolve inequalities (Cederman et al., 2010). Although this is estimated for ethnic exclusion, it can also be applied to sectarian or tribal exclusion experienced in both Syria and Libya, the kind of exclusion that causes conflict risks.

Considering the Arab-specific identity politics, tribal and identity fragmentation in Libya were responsible for the mobilization and the violent conflict afterwards (Lacher, 2020). The Syrian war was a result of sectarian alignment and the emergence of armed groups. In light of understanding this variable and its relevance to the Arab spring, Syria has an Alawite-Sunni divide. On the other hand, Libya experiences tribal politics resulting in regional splits. Egypt is more homogeneous and entrenched in that sense, as it does not experience cleavages or divides.

2.2.3. Proximate Factors

Proximate factors are the second layer of the causal model, following structural conditions. They interact with structural factors from section 3. Structural conditions create vulnerability; proximate factors activate contention. Proximate factors are political opportunities, triggers, and early mobilization capacity. They emphasize short-term, situational dynamics that activate protest transitions, and clarify that these factors explain why conflicts occur at a particular moment, not why vulnerability exists.

2.2.3.1. Political Opportunity Structure

Political opportunity structure refers to shifts in regime vulnerability, perceived costs of contention, and elite cohesion that open or close space for mass mobilization. Scholarship on contentious politics uses political opportunity structures to explain when large-scale protest becomes possible and why it can expand rapidly, rather than to explain why grievances exist in the first place. Political openings can lower the perceived costs of participation, particularly when regimes appear uncertain, divided, or unable to repress effectively. Kuran's (1991) work on preference falsification and threshold effects is relevant here because it clarifies how participation can change abruptly once mobilization reaches a tipping point, producing sudden expansion even when underlying discontent is longstanding.

Preference falsification refers to the discrepancy between people's secret political opinions and their publicly proclaimed positions, as people may suppress opposition owing to fear of consequences or confusion about others' behavior. This suggests that seeming stability can conceal significant latent dissent. As some actors expose their true preferences through involvement, others may reconsider the dangers of participating, resulting in a cascade effect compatible with threshold-based theories of collective action. In the Arab Spring context, regional diffusion has also been described as an opportunity shock that altered expectations across countries and contributed to the spread of protest (Gause, 2011). For the purposes of this thesis, political opportunity structure is therefore treated as a proximate category that helps explain the timing and early expansion of mobilization, while recognizing that opportunity alone does not account for why some pathways later culminate in civil war onset. Political structure is relevant to the Arab Spring, as it created a region-wide political opportunity through symbolic diffusion. Egypt experienced a temporary opening that remained institutionally constrained. On the other hand, Syria and Libya experienced elite fragmentation and declining regime cohesion early on.

2.2.3.2. Triggering Events

Triggering events are symbolic, specific, or violent incidents that transform latent grievances into active mobilization. Triggering events initiate contention but do not

determine transition outcomes. Triggering events explain why mobilization begins at a specific moment, rather than the underlying causes of dissent. Sudden or symbolic events can activate latent grievances by altering participation expectations and lowering individual thresholds (Kuran, 1991). In the Arab Spring, localized incidents functioned as catalysts whose effects depended on regime response and protest spread (Gause, 2011). Triggering events gain political significance through diffusion and collective interpretation, not in isolation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). Because early episodes helped spark mobilization and, in certain cases, aided dissemination across borders, triggering events are crucial to the Arab Uprisings. Many people saw the Bouazizi incident as a regional spark that helped to change expectations throughout the area. The immediate consequences of early occurrences varied across the three cases analyzed here. The 2010 assassination of Khaled Said served as a crucial prior mobilizing reference point rather than a single direct spark in Egypt, as early mobilization was sparked by the larger regional wave and pre-existing concerns. The detention and torture of schoolchildren in Daraa in March 2011 following anti-regime graffiti sparked protests and further persecution, which in turn sparked the uprising in Syria. In Libya, the arrest of human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil in Benghazi in February 2011 sparked widespread protests.

2.2.3.3. Early Mobilization Resources

Early mobilization resources refer to organizational networks, communication channels, leadership structures, and logistical capacity available at protest onset. The theoretical justification of early mobilization resources depends on protest trajectories but does not itself produce violence. Early mobilization resources shape the scale, durability, and coordination of protest at its initial stage; pre-existing organizational networks facilitate rapid mobilization and protest persistence (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007).

Large and sustained participation increases regime vulnerability and reduces the effectiveness of repression (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Movements are more prone to breakdown and the emergence of civil war, where early mobilization relies on localized or fragmented networks (Staniland, 2014). This variable is relevant to

the Arab Spring as organizational differences shaped conflict trajectories. Syria and Libya relied on localized networks that later fragmented. While Egypt possessed relatively centralized protest coordination.

2.2.4. Mechanistic Factors

Mechanistic factors are the core transition layer of the analysis, determining the transition in events. This section explains how protests transform into organized violence. Mechanistic factors look into processes and interactions, not variables in isolation. Mechanistic factors reveal the pathways through which conflict unfolds once protests are underway, it is linked with comparative analysis, and highlights the role of feedback loops, agency, and organizational dynamics.

2.2.4.1. Repression–Radicalization Dynamics

Repression–radicalization dynamics describe interactive feedback loops in which state violence alters protester strategies and legitimizes violent resistance. To understand the theoretical justification of repression-radicalization dynamics, repression functions as a causal mechanism that conditions the emergence of civil war, but does not by itself predetermine civil war outcomes. Davenport (2007) explains that state repression reshapes protest trajectories by increasing participation costs and narrowing non-violent channels of contention. In Syria, sustained and violent repression against initially peaceful protestors accelerated the shift from reformist demands to armed resistance (Pearlman, 2017), a claim also advanced by Hinnebusch and Zintl (2015). Rising repression can radicalize movements by delegitimizing the regime and encouraging more confrontational tactics (Della Porta, 1995). Micro-level accounts from Syria demonstrate how repression produced moral shocks and armed resistance. Syria and Libya experienced early lethal repression, triggering radicalization. Egypt's military restraint limited protest radicalization.

2.2.4.2. Entrepreneurs of Violence and Armed Organization

Entrepreneurs of violence are actors who mobilize leadership, resources, and legitimacy to organize armed groups from protest movements. Entrepreneurs of

violence function as catalysts: they do not create grievances, but they organize and channel them into sustained conflict. Violent entrepreneurs transform diffuse grievances into structured armed action through leadership, recruitment, and command (Kalyvas, 2006). The transition from protest to civil war requires actors capable of organizing, legitimizing, and sustaining violence (Della Porta, 2013).

In Libya and Syria, local commanders and defectors played a decisive role in converting protest networks into armed factions (Lacher, 2020; Waetzel, 2016). Pre-existing social and organizational networks enable leaders to mobilize fighters rapidly and impose internal discipline (Staniland, 2014). Access to resources and organizational cohesion shape whether armed groups remain fragmented or evolve into durable insurgent actors (Almeida, 2007). Egypt lacked viable entrepreneurs of armed violence. However, in Syria, intermediary elites transformed protest networks into armed factions, and in Libya, local commanders and defectors organized militias rapidly.

2.2.4.3. Fragmentation, Polarization & Breakdown of Non-Violent Coordination

Fragmentation refers to the loss of centralized leadership and coordination, while polarization reflects identity-based alignment and enemy construction. Breakdown of non-violent coordination operates as a cumulative mechanism linking institutional weakness to civil war onset. Weak institutional environments reduce the capacity of states and societies to manage contention non-violently (Migdal, 1988). Where coercive institutions fragment or lose cohesion, regimes struggle to contain the rise of conflict (Bellin, 2004, pp. 144–145).

Fragmentation among opposition groups increases competition, polarization, and incentives for armed strategies (Kalyvas, 2006). Strong and unified militaries can prevent protest transition by maintaining order and facilitating controlled transitions (Slater, 2010). In Libya and Syria, institutional collapse and militia proliferation replaced coordinated protest with armed competition (Anderson, 2011; St John, 2018). Organizational disunity and rival networks undermine coordination and increase the likelihood of violence (Staniland, 2014). Syria saw increasing sectarian

polarization, and Libya experienced rapid institutional collapse and militia proliferation. Egypt retained centralized authority and coordination longer.

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Research Design: Comparative Case Study

This section presents the overarching study design that will guide the empirical examination of Arab Spring cases. It explains the comparative reasoning that underpins case selection and places the study within a qualitative, theory-driven tradition of political analysis. The research approach focuses on explaining diverse conflict trajectories rather than projecting outcomes, providing a formal foundation for the analysis presented in the following sections.

The methodology section explains how cases are compared, how variables are selected, and the justification for why other variables are excluded. The research goal is to explain why some Arab Spring Uprsisngs such as Syria, and Libya transformed into civil wars while others did not. The design of the thesis follows the framework as a guide, examining factors that can lead to a civil war, supporting causal explanation, not prediction.

This thesis adopts a comparative case study design. It compares Syria, Libya, and Egypt. The selection of the countries is suitable because they have shared an Arab Spring context, similar authoritarian governance, and mass protest episodes. Syria and Libya represent the emergence of civil war cases, while Egypt represents a negative case (non-civil war onset). According to Abdel Salam (2015), the Arab Spring is a shared regional process. However, it resulted in different outcomes among Middle Eastern states (Anderson, 2011).

In the case of similarity, the comparison is controlled for the Arab Spring as a common regional shock, authoritarian political systems before 2011, civilian-led initial protests, and economic grievances leading to popular discontent. These are not explanatory factors but background conditions. Similar background conditions justify

treating the cases as comparable. The MENA region shared a protest wave and regional diffusion (Aouragh & Hamouchene, 2022).

There is a different outcome obtained among the three countries. Since divergence cannot be explained by protest occurrence alone, this creates the need to examine domestic causal factors listed as structural, proximate, and mechanistic factors.

The structural factors look into pre-existing conditions preceding the uprisings. These include four factors: state capacity and institutional strength, regime type and coercive architecture, resource dependence and economic development, and identity cleavages, sectarian or tribal. Proximate factors look into variables during the protests, such as political opportunity structure, triggering events, and early mobilization resources. Mechanistic factors link protests to armed conflict, examining repression–radicalization dynamics, entrepreneurs of violence and armed organization, and patterns of fragmentation, polarization & breakdown of non-violent coordination. The variables chosen are controlled for the initial protest emerging from mass-based, non-armed protests. It is in the same timeframe, 2011-2012, and the same critical juncture of regional diffusion effects. Controlling these factors allows clearer causal inference and a focus on internal dynamics.

These variables were selected because they directly affect transition into civil war, fit into a clear causal sequence, and vary meaningfully across the cases. It must be emphasized that structural, proximate, and mechanistic variables together capture preconditions, triggers, and emergence of civil war processes. Following parsimony, fewer variables give high explanatory power. Regarding state weakness among the structural factors, Fearon & Laitin (2003) explain state weakness and how it can affect uprisings. Following the Arab protests, in some cases, violence and conflict were experienced (Della Porta et al. 2018).

Despite the literature reviewing other factors, some variables are constant within the Arab Spring context and do not vary significantly across the cases. Other variables operate indirectly through selected variables or belong to international/systemic levels. For example, geography as a variable is mediated by state capacity. Religion

is the only relevant variable when politicized, though it is already captured under identity cleavages. Colonial legacy is historically relevant but not decisive for post-2011 divergence. International norms are also another variable that's common across cases during the Arab Spring. Including all possible variables would weaken analytical clarity, blur causal sequencing, and reduce comparability. Following Geddes' (2003) emphasis on parsimony in comparative research design, this thesis restricts the number of explanatory variables to those with the most analytical leverage in explaining different results across similar situations.

The strengths of the research design through the analytical framework are that it allows causal tracing, enhances internal validity, and supports systematic comparison. This research design is not meant to generate statistical generalizations across a large number of cases, but rather to provide a thorough, causal explanation for varied outcomes within a limited sample of comparable examples. As a result, the findings are analytically generalizable to similar authoritarian situations where huge protests occur under comparable structural and political conditions, rather than generally relevant to all regime types or areas. Given the research question to look at the factors following certain variables as determinants of why some Arab states experienced civil wars, while others did not, the research design in that way is appropriate for examining authoritarian rule.

The same framework guides Chapters 3 and 4; each case is analyzed using the same variables and sequence, following consistency and transparency in reaching the result.

2.3.2. Case Selection Justification

This section describes the reasons for selecting the instances utilized in the comparative analysis. Rather than using cases as instructive examples, the study views case selection as an essential component of causal explanation. By carefully limiting the cases under analysis, the study assures that observed disparities in outcomes are substantially related to underlying political and institutional factors.

The purpose of this subsection is to explain why case selection matters for causal inference and to highlight that cases were not chosen arbitrarily. The cases are selected to maximize outcome variation while maintaining similarity along the regime, region, and time period. Together, Syria, Libya, and Egypt represent regime collapse with prolonged conflict. Syrian and Libyan cases present civil war onset, while Egypt represents the non-emergence of civil war despite mass protests. This variation enables the comparison of blocked versus completed causal pathways and the identification of conditions under which protests escalate. Geddes (2003) supports the logic of deliberate case selection. The Arab Spring has resulted in divergent trajectories (Anderson, 2011).

Syria represents a full civil war onset case. Uprising rose to multiple armed actors, territorial fragmentation, and sustained armed conflicts. High levels of regime repression, militarization of opposition, and foreign intervention were experienced. Syria exemplifies a complete activation of the causal chain regarding structural vulnerability, proximate repression, and mechanistic rise. Rod (2023) supports protest and armed conflict. Authoritarian fragmentation can result in violence (Heydemann, 2013). To show the analytical value of Syria, it allows the examination of the role of identity cleavages, fragmentation of opposition, and repression-radicalization dynamics. This illustrates how weak institutional cohesion and coercive strategies can fuel the emergence of civil war, providing that fear, fragmentation, and militarization are linked, causing each other (Pearlman, 2016).

Libya represents a case of rapid regime collapse followed by prolonged conflict. The country had a weak institutional state before 2011. Vandewalle (2012) argues that the Libyan state is internally weak. The collapse of central authority was experienced early in the uprising. There has been a persistent conflict without a state reconstruction. As Libya's structure is based on fragmentation and militia politics (Lacher, 2020), the proliferation of militias and armed entrepreneurs intervened. The analytical value of analyzing Libya includes showing the absence of strong state institutions, tribal and regional fragmentation, and resource-driven conflict dynamics. Resource dependence, namely oil is a supporting role in the conflict that resulted (Ross, 2012). Libya is a significant case because it highlights a different pathway to civil war, where collapse was experienced first, followed by fragmentation later.

Egypt is an example of a non-civil war. Egypt had widespread demonstrations and a change of government, but there was no protracted armed confrontation. Despite political turmoil, institutions were maintained, and the military continued to be unified and powerful. While Albrecht (2015, pp. 36–39) examines how patterns of coup-proofing and political–military ties determined why the Egyptian military remained unified in contrast to the trajectories seen in Syria and Libya, Barany (2011) addresses the role of the military. Egypt's path was unique (Anderson, 2011). Egypt is a negative example that highlights the coercive machinery and regime resilience in the authoritarian system by demonstrating where and how a civil war was prevented (Bellin, 2004).

Syria and Libya exhibit different forms of conflict and institutional failures, whereas Egypt demonstrates the containment of civil war. Based on the reasons behind selecting the countries for analysis, this highlights the variation among cases, and the comparison allows for the identification of necessary versus sufficient conditions, explaining that failed protests often lead to violence (Della Porta et al. 2018). Together, the cases test the analytical framework across different pathways and reveal how similar protests produce divergent outcomes.

These cases are not claimed to represent all Arab Spring outcomes; they represent analytically significant contrasts, noting causal logic and analytical value. The findings apply to similar authoritarian regimes facing mass protests.

2.3.3. Data Sources

This thesis adopts a qualitative, comparative case-study approach requiring multiple types of data. The onset of the civil war is complex and cannot be captured by one data source. Therefore, the study relies on triangulation by combining academic literature with a range of secondary sources. Data sources are selected to match the analytical framework of structural, proximate, and mechanistic factors, supporting comparative analysis rather than hypothesis testing.

Academic books and peer-reviewed articles form the core empirical foundation are used to explain civil war mechanisms, trace protest dynamics, and reconstruct the

pre-uprising for Syria, Libya, and Egypt, analyzing the Arab Spring for the region comparatively. The literature is used analytically, not just descriptively. Comparative studies of the Arab Spring highlight divergent regime responses despite shared grievances (Brownlee et al, 2015; Aktürk & Cherkaoui, 2024). Brownlee et al. (2015) is used to justify pathways of repression vs reform, comparative logic across authoritarian regimes, and regime responses to mass protest. In the same sense, Aktürk & Cherkaoui (2024) focus on regional and longitudinal perspectives on the Arab Spring, variation in outcomes across cases, and post–Arab Spring trajectories, fitting (Syria–Libya–Egypt) comparison. In addition, Heydemann & Lynch (2024) explain Arab state transformations. Carbonnier (2015) justifies variation in outcomes and democratization, explaining why similar uprisings diverged. During civil wars, external intervention and proxy wars are experienced, where the geopolitics is explained by Salloukh (2013), relevant to Syria and Libya in particular.

Secondary sources serve as contextual tools rather than theoretical evidence and are used to complement the academic literature by providing evidence on state responses, institutional dynamics, and the sequence of key events during the Arab Spring. These sources include analyses produced by international organizations, research institutes, as well as state documents. While such sources may reflect institutional perspectives, they are used selectively and critically to corroborate repression timelines, patterns of state response, and key phases of the conflict within the process-tracing framework.

Triangulation combines academic literature and complementary secondary sources, allowing theoretical explanations to be examined alongside contextual evidence on institutional dynamics and conflict processes. This approach strengthens internal validity, enhances comparative analysis, and improves the credibility of the findings.

This study challenges a number of data restrictions that are common to comparative research in authoritarian and conflict-affected environments. Data availability varies depending on institutional transparency, governmental capacity, and access to official records. Authoritarian government arrangements restrict public availability of information, forcing reliance on secondary sources, expert analysis, and

multinational datasets. Furthermore, sources from politically contentious situations may reflect different institutional or normative perspectives; this study addresses these constraints through thorough cross-referencing and triangulation. Finally, ongoing or recent wars in countries such as Syria and Libya pose obstacles for thorough documentation, which is handled by emphasizing well-established databases and confirmed accounts.

In this thesis, cross-source verification is used consistently; no single source is treated as definitive. There is an emphasis on convergence of evidence, not isolated claims.

2.3.4. Comparative Analysis

This section describes the analytical approaches used to investigate causal dynamics in particular cases. By combining within-case analysis and systematic comparison, this chapter moves the emphasis away from cross-case variation and toward the internal sequences and interactions that form different results. This technique enables the study to extend beyond correlations and engage directly with the processes that drive political conflict.

The analytical framework is used in a comparative manner to investigate the causal mechanisms between protest and civil war start. Rather than determining whether specific factors were simply present, the study examines how the combination of structural conditions, proximal dynamics, and mechanisms contributed to varying outcomes among the examples studied. This approach is compatible with Della Porta et al. (2018), who explain the move from protest to civil conflict in terms of causal mechanisms.

In this thesis, each case is analyzed chronologically. Turning points are defined as moments when protest trajectories shift significantly, repression escalates, and actors' strategies change. Rød (2023) argues that critical junctures affect the transition from protest to civil war, altering the trajectory of dispute. Examples of these turning points are the deployment of live ammunition, military defections, the emergence of armed opposition groups, and international intervention.

The analysis of the causal chain follows a step-by-step causal sequence. First, it represents initial protest mobilization, then moves to the state response of repression and radicalization of counter-mobilization. Finally, it shows the militarization of armed organizations and clarifies consolidation or breakdown into civil war. Kalyvas (2006) argues the logic of forming armed groups during protests. The causal chain shows how mechanisms operate differently across cases, and emphasizes interaction effects between protests and the state.

To explain clearly the factors within case analysis, the analysis identifies where conflict was blocked, explained through the case of Egypt, and tests whether the proposed causal chain holds. Each case is treated independently before the comparison. Applying the analytical framework helps identify alternative paths not taken and identify necessary or contingent steps within the process.

After within-case analysis, cases are compared using a structured, focused comparison in which they follow the same guiding questions. Examples of these questions are: how did state capacity shape repression? Did repression produce radicalization? And when did armed actors emerge? Geddes (2003) applies research design logic and structured, focused comparison. This method ensures both analytical control and consistency. The comparative qualitative approach used in this study gives great explanatory depth and allows for the obvious identification of causal mechanisms across cases. The study captures the sequencing and timing of significant political and institutional developments by applying the analytical framework and comparative analysis, thereby improving causal interpretation. While the findings are not statistically generalizable and rely on the availability and quality of existing sources, these constraints are inherent in in-depth case-based research. As a result, the study promotes analytical generalization, providing theoretically informed insights that can be applied to similar political circumstances outside of the cases studied.

2.4. Application of the Analytical Framework in Case Chapters

This section of the thesis combines the theoretical framework with empirical case analysis. It shows how the analytical framework is utilized in a systematic manner

throughout the case chapters to achieve consistency and comparison. This section shows how the framework facilitates the interpretation of case-specific data while also supporting cumulative causal explanation by combining theory and evidence.

The purpose of the synthesis section is to explain how the framework operationally guides Chapters 3 and 4, applying the analysis and the analytical framework to the case studies and comparing them: the section bridges methodology and empirical analysis, emphasizing consistency across cases.

Each empirical chapter follows the same sequence. First is the structural context assessing pre-2011 conditions such as state capacity, regime type, economic structures, and identity cleavages. This system establishes baseline vulnerabilities. The second step is proximate protest dynamics that examines protest triggers, scale, and organization, and regime responses. This stage focuses on early protest–state interaction. The third and last step is analyzing mechanisms of conflict or containment, tracing repression–radicalization cycles, emergence of armed actors, and fragmentation or cohesion. This highlights differences between Syria/Libya and Egypt.

To state the outcome, each chapter ends by identifying civil war onset, partial militarization, or non-civil war onset. Outcomes are explained, not assumed.

The framework of cross-case linkage ensures comparability, transparency, and coherence. Case chapters feed into Chapter 4 (comparison).

The framework demonstrates how protest dynamics can diverge. It reinforces the linkage between social movement and civil war literature. It also illustrates the interplay between structure, agency, and mechanisms.

CHAPTER 3

SYRIA AND LIBYA: PATHWAYS FROM MASS PROTEST TO CIVIL WAR ONSET

Mass protests during the Arab Spring produced different outcomes across countries. Syria and Libya moved from mass protest to civil war onset. Despite this common outcome, the way through which both cases moved from uprising to sustained armed conflict was different in important ways. Therefore, treating them as comparable cases makes it possible to analyze how a similar starting point can produce different pathways to civil war onset under most likely similar regional conditions.

The chapter argues that civil war onset in Syria and Libya followed divergent pathways. In Syria, the trajectory was characterized by gradual militarization of the opposition, sustained repression, and patterns of defections from state institutions, which resulted in the emergence of armed challengers over time. When Libya is analyzed, the pathway was marked by rapid regime fracture, the formation of localized armed groups in the context of institutional collapse, and early elite defection. All these contrasting trajectories show the importance of elite and domestic institutional configurations in shaping how protest episodes evolve.

At the beginning, both Syria and Libya experienced large-scale mobilization against authoritarian regimes, which happened during the same regional wave. Nevertheless, the institutional and domestic political contexts where these protests emerged were not identical. In Syria, relatively cohesive security institutions and a highly developed coercive apparatus made the regime able to respond to protests with sustained and increasing repression. In the Libyan case, by contrast, institutional weakness, combined with a highly personalized rule, led to a rapid breakdown of

centralized authority at the outset of the uprising. These differences illustrate how the inconsistency arose after the protest began.

In order to analyze these differences, the chapter follows the analytical framework built in Chapter 2. It continues by analyzing pre-uprising structural conditions, proximate dynamics at the protest onset, and the mechanisms through which contention was changed into organized armed conflict. This enables a structured comparison across the two cases while proceeding with how specific structures and interactions collectively caused the start of a civil war.

This chapter explains how Syria and Libya went from widespread protests to the start of civil wars through various domestic pathways using both conflict literature and country-specific studies. The two situations are not considered to be the same instances of Arab Spring uprisings in the analysis. Rather, it looks at how variations in elite conduct, institutional cohesiveness, coercive ability, and armed organization influenced the civil war onset process in each instance. The main problem in Syria is how persistent repression, terror, and the progressive militarization of the opposition were used by a coercively resilient administration to turn dissent into a protracted conflict (Pearlman, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2011c). In Libya, the essential issue is how inadequate institutionalization and early regime collapse reduced the time between protests and armed conflict by hastening geographical fragmentation and the formation of armed players (International Crisis Group, 2011a, 2011b; Lacher, 2020).

3.1. Syria

The Syrian revolt provides an alternative path to civil war beginning, one driven not by swift institutional collapse, but by the incremental militarization of conflict under a coercively durable authoritarian administration. The Syrian conflict did not arise from an instant breakdown of state authority but from a coercively resilient and institutionally cohesive authoritarian regime. Before 2011, the Syrian state had a dense security architecture, a strong coercive reach, and overlapping intelligence and military institutions that could sustain coordinated repression (Bellin, 2004;

Heydemann, 2013). These structural features shaped the trajectory of the uprising from the earliest stages, affecting both the regime's response and the strategies of opposition actors. This part uses the analytical framework that has been developed in Chapter 2 to explain the dynamics of the onset of civil war in Syria through the interaction of structural, proximate, and mechanistic conditions.

The analysis is carried out in three steps. It begins with an analysis of the structural conditions that characterized Syria before the uprising, focusing on coercive capacity, institutional cohesion, regime type, and social fragmentation. This is why the Syrian regime was able to sustain organized repression and not suffer instant institutional collapse. Second, the chapter examines the immediate conditions of protest onset, especially elite cohesion, elite defections, and the dynamics of repression and mobilization in the early phase of the uprising. Finally, it explores the mechanisms under which protest gradually transformed into sustained armed conflict, focusing on repression-radicalization dynamics and the emergence of organized challengers. All these stages combined show that Syria's pathway to civil war was not inevitable or sudden, the process developed in progress through the interaction between rise of protests, state coercion, and the consolidation of armed opposition.

The long-term evolution of Ba'thist rule, which tightly linked state authority, coercive institutions, and societal control, formed Syria's authoritarian structure prior to the revolt. The dictatorship organized political life through party organizations, patronage networks, and security agencies in addition to using direct repression. In order to maintain regime domination, society was integrated into the state through regulated and unequal channels rather than being merely barred from it. The Ba'thist rule was established through military-security domination, state-led transformation, and the control of class, sectarian, and regional divisions, according to classical studies of Syria (Hinnebusch, 2001; Perthes, 1995; Van Dam, 2011). This history is important because Syria entered 2011 with a state framework capable of monitoring society, coordinating repression, and maintaining elite loyalty under pressure. As a result, the Syrian revolt did not begin in an environment of institutional emptiness or imminent state collapse. It arose under a coercively organized authoritarian system

that could withstand the initial wave of protest, even as its violent response gradually exacerbated the conditions for subsequent militarization.

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Additionally, the Ba'thist state established a particular connection between political inclusion and coercion. The regime's ability to distribute access, privilege, and protection through official institutions and patronage channels was just as important to its longevity as fear. As a result, allegiance to the dictatorship became both material and institutional. Due to their reliance on the continuation of the current order, political leaders, security personnel, and some parts of society were linked to the dictatorship. This is crucial in explaining why, when protests started, the Syrian regime did not fall apart right away. Defection was expensive, unpredictable, and risky in a society whose political and coercive elites were closely linked to the governing structure. The regime's pre-2011 organization affected the early rebellion by increasing the likelihood of elite cohesion over fast elite abandonment.

However, Syria's socioeconomic and geographical divisions did not exist independently of the country's political system. Repression, selective inclusion, and

political control were all used by the dictatorship to manage these divisions. Civil war did not always result from sectarian and regional identities, and the rebellion was not initially sectarian. However, various communities and areas experienced state authority differently due to the pre-existing power structure. These previous trends became politically crucial as repression increased after 2011 because exposure to violence, mistrust, and dread were not spread equally. For this reason, the pre-revolutionary Syrian backdrop is crucial to understanding the start of civil conflict. It demonstrates that Syria's route was not created solely by social fragmentation, but rather by the interaction of a cohesive authoritarian state with a population already characterized by regulated inclusion, surveillance, and uneven political access.

3.1.1. Structural conditions

The main task of this subsection is to apply the structural variable, looking into the state coercive capacity and institutional cohesion in Syria before the uprising. But in Syria, the combination of coercive reach and institutional cohesion meant that the regime was structurally positioned to respond to unrest through organised and rising repression rather than fragmentation or immediate collapse (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

Rather than a single, consistent military chain of command, the Syrian regime's coercive capability is best viewed as a dispersed but integrated security infrastructure. Several overlapping entities, including military intelligence, air force intelligence, political security, and state security, functioned concurrently while remaining ultimately linked to the presidency. This arrangement allowed the regime to maintain surveillance, dominate local communities, and keep dissent from transitioning into organized opposition. The essential conclusion is that Syria has coercive capacity, but that its coercive institutions remained sufficiently cohesive during the early stages of the rebellion. In this approach, Syria's coercive machinery was fragmented in form but coordinated in operation, reducing the probability of quick collapse but increasing the risk of long-term violent transition (Bellin, 2004; Heydemann, 2013; Mazur, 2021; Pearlman, 2016).

It is important to consider regime type and societal fragmentation as supporting structural factors that influenced how Syria's coercive system functioned. Coercive

institutions were essential to the survival of Syria's authoritarian, security-focused Ba'thist administration. Prior to 2011, rather than using open political participation, the administration used repression, patronage, and controlled incorporation to manage class, regional, and sectarian divisions. The rebellion was not initially sectarian due to these divisions, but as the war intensified, they influenced the emergence of fear, mistrust, and repressive tendencies. Groups grew more divided as violence spread because it was harder to coordinate across groups due to roadblocks, informant networks, selective arrests, and official repression. Consequently, social disintegration in Syria was important as a condition rather than an inherent cause of civil conflict. As a result, Syria's social fragmentation was significant not as an inevitable cause of civil war, but as a condition that interacted with coercive administration and hampered opposition players' ability to form larger alliances (Hinnebusch, 2001; Perthes, 1995; Van Dam, 2011; Pearlman, 2016).

In addition, uneven conflict development and regional differentiation were central to the emergence of distinct local conflict dynamics across Syria, especially in Eastern regions and tribal areas where governance and social structures shaped patterns of mobilization (Khaddour, 2014; Khaddour & Mazur, 2017). Broader studies on ethnic conflict show that exclusion from political power can increase the likelihood of rebellion and organized opposition, whereas relative deprivation helps explain how inequality and perceived political frustration generate collective mobilization along identity cleavages (Cederman et al., 2010; Gurr, 2011). Importantly, these identity processes were formed over time by the state's coercive structure via uneven patterns of state presence, selective repression, and differential governance across regions. Even if they weren't initially crucial to the rebellion, patterns of fear and trust grew more polarized along community and regional lines as repression intensified. To put it another way, structural factors not only influenced how the regime responded to protests, but they also interacted with social dynamics in ways that led to the opposition's disintegration by affecting coordination capacity, safe spaces for mobilization, and the development of cross-community alliances. In this way, the larger conflict environment was shaped by institutional cohesiveness and coercive power, which in turn influenced the political and military significance of identity cleavages (Pearlman, 2016).

These structural features together illustrate that Syria did not join the uprising as a weak or fragile state institutionally, but as a coercively resilient regime capable of absorbing and responding to political shocks. This distinction matters because it moves the explanation of civil war onset away from immediate state failure and toward processes of civil war onset within an intact coercive system. The regime's ability to sustain repression over time produced a context in which conflict dynamics unfolded gradually rather than through sudden institutional collapse (Della Porta et al., 2018).

3.1.2. Protest onset

This subsection's primary goal is to operationalize the analytical framework's proximate variable, which is elite cohesiveness and defection at the start of protests. The background of the Syrian revolt can be explained by structural factors, while the reasons behind the initiation of the protest and its subsequent rise can be explained by proximate factors. The relationship between elite coherence, slow defections, repression, and protest dissemination was the main proximal dynamic in Syria. Protest resulted from interactions between challengers and authority during a period of uncertainty rather than just grievances. Public dissent may be dormant in authoritarian environments for extended periods of time before rapidly growing when people start to think that group action is feasible. As a result, the Syrian protests must be examined in terms of early mobilization, government response, and the behavior of political and coercive elites once the conflict began (Kuran, 1991; Tilly and Tarrow, 2015; Della Porta et al., 2018).

Similarly, the literature on protest-to-conflict transition explains that protest does not automatically transition to armed conflict, but that this transition is contingent on the interaction between state repression, mobilization, and elite fragmentation during moments of crisis (Della Porta et al., 2018). To understand the onset of protest, one must look at patterns of mobilization, early events, and particularly the behavior of elites and coercive actors once protest begins. This is particularly true in authoritarian contexts, where public dissent may be latent for long periods, and then erupt suddenly when people come to believe that collective action is possible. One

major implication of the emphasis on proximate variables is that they operate through rapid feedback loops that connect perceptions, expectations, and immediate political action. Interpretations of events as they happen are determined by proximate conditions rather than by long-term structural pressures. In the case of authoritarian uprisings, they involve shifts in expectations around regime vulnerability and collective readiness to challenge authority.

The crucial proximate point is that during the early stages of the revolt, the Syrian regime maintained significant elite and coercive coherence. This meant that even when protests grew, the dictatorship did not fall apart right away. In this context, "elite cohesion" refers to both allegiance and the capacity of ruling and coercive elites to organize repression under duress. While security and political elites continued to coordinate the regime's reaction, the Syrian elite initially stayed united over forceful methods despite growing protests. The regime's short-term survival was bolstered by this unity, but it also increased repression and made it more challenging to defuse the situation. In this view, elite cohesion averted rapid collapse while laying the groundwork for long-term militarization (Bellin, 2004; Brownlee et al., 2015; ICG, 2011d; Mazur, 2021).

Taken together, the literature suggests that while structural grievances created the conditions for unrest, the onset of civil war depended on proximate political processes. This thesis contributes to the literature on civil war onset by examining how the interaction between protest mobilization, state repression, and elite cohesion during the critical early months of the 2011 Syrian uprising explains the transition from protest to armed conflict.

Defection in Syria is considered to be the second defining feature of the proximate factors. At the protest onset, defections were significant, but still were not enough to end the regime's cohesion. In Syria, early political and institutional strain occurred (International Crisis Group, 2011d). Ohl, Albrecht, & Koehler (2015) analyze why soldiers join rebel groups and why they desert. This is when rebel recruitment begins in Syria at this level. Defections occurred and they did not matter because they immediately brought down the regime, but because they gradually moved military

experience, weapons, and organizational knowledge from the state to the opposition. However, they evolved gradually and under conditions of intense coercive pressure. This explained the gradual pattern, which later turned out to be essential for militarization. Due to repression and fear, actor perceptions can change, and this links later to militarization (Pearlman, 2016). Additionally, Rod (2023) emphasizes how protests with defections can escalate into armed conflict. Signaling effects within the coercive apparatus also shape defection dynamics. Even small early defections can change the perceptions of regime strength among the remaining security actors and the protesters. This creates a feedback loop in which repression can temporarily suppress dissent but also simultaneously increase the perceived legitimacy of defection as a survival strategy. Under repression, emotional and perceptual shifts can hasten fragmentation over time, even if early defections appear politically insignificant (Pearlman, 2016). In this sense, defections should be understood as cumulative and reputational rather than purely numerical, at the onset stage. The combination of repression, evolving perceptions, and the eventual legitimization of defection was obvious in the events of Dara'a, which marked the Syrian uprising's first major transformation into a conflict. The crucial point is not just that there was a triggering incident, but that repression turned a local grievance into a larger mobilization. In Dara'a, the uprising was determined more by the regime's use of force than the scale of the initial protest. The instance thus demonstrates how localized crises can escalate into national flashpoints when official violence is regarded as excessive and repression undermines trust in the likelihood of reform (International Crisis Group, 2011c, 2011d; Kuran, 1991; Pearlman, 2016).

The Syrian protests became a broad uprising as a result of early events, particularly in Dara'a, and the government's response to them. Dara'a is a city in southern Syria where initial local frustrations gained political traction after a group of adolescents were arrested and tortured for drawing anti-government graffiti inspired by the Arab Spring. Their family and local neighbors protested, first calling for changes rather than regime change. However, the government's strong response exacerbated tensions, transforming a localized protest into a national movement.

It is essential to highlight here that the Syrian uprising was initially nonviolent and socially organized. Civil coordination and local organization were observed at the

initial stages of the uprising (Khoury & Siegel, 2024). The onset of the civil war in that case was not immediate; it emerged gradually through transformation (Yahya, 2020). International Crisis Group (2011c) reported early evidence of nonviolent protest before the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Participation was uneven throughout Syria, with certain areas becoming bigger centers of protest than others, particularly when repression fueled local mobilization (Mazur, 2021).

The persistence of nonviolent organizations in the early stage is also important to understand civil war onset pathways. Networks of nonviolent protest are often based on decentralized coordination that can be highly adaptive, but also vulnerable to repression once state violence escalates. Early civil coordination in Syria helped accelerate the geographic spread of protest activity (Khoury & Siegel, 2024). But as repression increased, these same networks became conduits for disseminating information about state violence, leading to broader mobilization rather than containment.

Taken together, elite cohesion, defections, and early protest diffusion all point to the need to understand the beginning of the Syrian protests as a dynamic interaction between state capacity and opposition adaptation. Rather than a linear movement from protest to conflict, the first phase is characterized by a shift in the balance of power in which regime cohesion initially prevented the shift to conflict, but also laid the groundwork for longer-term fragmentation. This transitional instability is key to understanding why the uprising did not collapse immediately, but rather developed into sustained contention. Therefore, looking at the proximate conditions during the Syrian uprising, the protest onset was marked by a combination of widening nonviolent mobilization movements, which were met by harsh repression, causing gradual defections within a cohesive coercive order. This situation sets the opportunity for a later armed challenge instead of the state's collapse.

3.1.3. Mechanistic Conditions

This subsection's primary goal is to use the mechanism variable from Chapter 2—the emergence of an organized challenger—to understand the mechanical conditions

during the Syrian revolt. This mechanism emerged in the Syrian scenario as a result of radicalization brought on by repression. Parts of the opposition progressively organized, coordinated, and militarized to form an organized armed challenge to the regime as repression increased. The central analytic implication of the "organized challenger" mechanism is that radicalization is not just an ideological shift but a structural change in capacity to coordinate. In Syria, the transition from protest to armed opposition was based on the establishment of durable organizational networks that could support collective action under conditions of high risk. This meant that repression did not automatically generate violence, but instead filtered participation toward actors open and able to absorb risk, thereby gradually privileging more organized and disciplined forms of resistance. Thus, the emergence of armed groups should be understood as a product of selective participation under increasing repression rather than a direct outcome of mass militarization.

The main issue to identify is not whether violence increased, but how the protest evolved into a sustained armed confrontation. Organization matters more than spontaneous violence (Kalyvas, 2006). The logic of violence in the Syrian context was an organized armed challenger. Armed group cohesion is affected by pre-existing social networks that shape stability and insurgent organization (Staniland, 2014). Syria was also more inclined to worsen into an armed conflict because of its autocratic regime (Rod, 2023). Davenport (2007) and Della Porta (1995) connect repression exercised by the regime to the radicalization logic that is adopted by some radical groups. A failed democratization protest as the one that took place in Syria, can develop into civil war pathways (Della Porta et al., 2018). The transformation also signifies a change in the opportunity structure for opposition actors. As repression increased, the costs of nonviolent mobilization increased, and the relative benefits of armed protection and territorial control became more salient. In such environments, actors reconsider strategies not in isolation but with reference to the perceived durability of the regime's coercive apparatus. Repression often results in strategic adaptation rather than simple suppression, pushing movements into forms of contention less susceptible to state control (Davenport, 2007). This adaptive shift created the conditions in Syria where armed organizations became more and more rationalized as part of the opposition strategy.

The process of transformation into radicalization and fragmentation as a result of contention and repression is the stage of a mechanistic condition. Pearlman (2016) explains the narratives of repression and fear in this process and their effect on radicalization. In Syria, state violence became wider, which resulted in a protest-repression interaction that transformed the strategic environment (International Crisis Group, 2011c, 2011d). Repression deepened fear and anger, narrowed peaceful options, and made defensive or retaliatory violence more thinkable (Pearlman, 2017). Continued violence in Syria has the risk of altering the conflict into broader militarization (Byman et al., 2012). And crucially, the psychological and organizational effects of repression fed off one another. Fear and anger influenced individual willingness to participate in violence, but the way those emotions were channeled was determined by organizational fragmentation. Stories of collective victimization serve to deepen in-group cohesion and heighten out-group hostility (Pearlman, 2016, 2017). In Syria, this meant that repression not only increased participation in protests or armed groups but also affected the internal cohesion of emerging opposition networks, strengthening local solidarities while constraining early centralized coordination.

Armed opposition did not appear all at once. Rebel recruitment in Syria and patterns of defection reflected ideological commitments and material need, which affected how opposition structures were formed (Ohl, Albrecht, & Koehler, 2015). Opposition violence and armed coordination developed, it started gradually through defections, local protection, and growing organization among anti-regime actors (International Crisis Group, 2012a). The emergence of these armed actors was also uneven across regions as a result of different governance gaps and local conditions (Mazur, 2021). The effectiveness of those groups with stronger pre-existing networks was more able to endure and mobilize (Staniland, 2014). The uneven spatial development of armed opposition points to the importance of local governance vacuums. In some areas where state power was uneven and fragmented, armed groups stepped in to provide security, to coordinate, and to perform the basic functions of governance. This substitution effect helped the legitimacy of armed actors in some regions, while it was weaker in others. Insurgent cohesion is strongly affected by pre-existing social infrastructure, and variation in local networks explains

why some places moved more quickly to organized armed resistance than others (Staniland, 2014).

When taken as a whole, these factors imply that the formation of an organized challenger was the result of a gradual process of alignment among disparate actors rather than a single event. Due to defections, similar experiences of repression, and the increasing necessity for coordination, what started out as local self-defense eventually grew into bigger armed groups. This implies that rather than being a spontaneous rupture, Syria's descent into civil war was a slow consolidation of violence into organized resistance. The development of armed opponents who were sufficiently organized to go beyond dispersed violence and maintain armed conflict with the state was the most significant mechanism. The emergence of civil war was directly influenced by this organized opposition (Kalyvas, 2006; International Crisis Group, 2012a; Ohl, Albrecht, & Koehler, 2015; Della Porta et al., 2018).

The Syrian case shows that mechanistic conditions are better understood as a process of transformation that connects repression, organizational adaptation, and insurgent consolidation. Instead of seeing radicalization as a distinct milestone, we should see it as a multi-layered process of change, in which coercion alters the incentives and coordination capacities that lead to the emergence of persistent armed challengers. Syria's pathway to civil war is thus a combination of a structurally coercive and cohesive regime, protest onset was marked by gradual defections and repression, and a mechanism of organized armed challenge. The onset of the Civil War was not sudden; it developed through rising interaction between these processes and conditions.

3.2. Libya

Libya follows a different path to civil war onset than Syria, because the process from uprising to armed conflict was driven more by rapid institutional fragmentation and decentralized militarization than by prolonged centralized repression. Syria entered the uprising with relatively cohesive coercive institutions that could coordinate a sustained regime response, whereas Libya entered 2011 with a much weaker and

more personalized state structure. Under the Gaddafi regime, political authority was less a matter of institutional cohesion and more a reflection of fragmented security structures, patronage networks, regional balancing, and personal loyalty to the regime leadership. This meant the Libyan state had little institutional capacity to absorb, manage, or contain large-scale unrest once protests began. As a result, the evolution of mass mobilization rapidly exposed the vulnerability of the coercive order and made the weakening of central authority across divergent areas of the country more rapid.

The Libyan case is analytically important because it shows that civil war onset may be the result of the rapid collapse and fragmentation of state authority rather than a gradual transition toward an armed conflict process alone. The weakening of the regime did not just create instability; it created opportunities for localized armed actors to emerge almost immediately. Protest diffusion, elite defections, and the collapse of coercive coordination all worked together to drastically shorten the transition from civilian uprising to militarized conflict. State power was increasingly fragmented, with local militias, defector military units, neighborhood defense groups, and revolutionary committees supplanting formal state institutions as the primary providers of coercion and security. This resulted in a decentralized conflict where armed challenges were formed and territorially linked; they were not a unified national order (International Crisis Group, 2012b; Lacher, 2020).

3.2.1. Structural conditions

Following the analytical framework of Chapter 2, the primary goal of concentrating on structural conditions is to capture the background characteristics of the state that preceded the upheavals, especially state coercive capacity and institutional cohesiveness. Libya's pre-2011 structural environment differed from Syria in this regard. Libya relied more on elite balancing, patronage networks, and individualized rule, whereas Syria's coercive institutions were part of comparatively more cohesive bureaucratic systems. This distinction is crucial since a regime's ability to preserve elite allegiance, coordinate repression, and stop the quick fragmentation of power amid mass conflict depends on institutional cohesiveness (Migdal, 1988; Bellin,

2004). Therefore, Libya's institutional deficit should be viewed as a particular kind of political control in which formal institutions were purposefully undermined and replaced by unofficial systems of loyalty rather than just the lack of state capability. This diminished the regime's institutional buffering capacity during a crisis because there were few independent institutions that could withstand pressure or postpone collapse once protests started.

The framework of Gaddafi's regime was the cause of Libya's inadequate institutionalization. Gaddafi's Jamahiriya ("state of the masses") regime purposefully reduced official state institutions, replacing them with a system of people's committees, revolutionary committees, informal control, oil-based patronage, and individual authority, rather than a unified bureaucratic state. Gaddafi's Libya had a purposefully degraded or "stateless" system in which the leader maintained direct control over formal institutions (Vandewalle, 2012). The territorial organization of authority was also influenced by this. Libya lacked a coherent administrative structure that could maintain authority over the entire nation. Rather, while formally connected to the regime, local players frequently exercised considerable de facto autonomy. As a result, when the rebellion started, governmental authority collapsed through scattered and unequal breaches of control rather than in a single, concentrated moment. This helps explain why alternative power centers and armed organizations were able to immediately take advantage of unrest.

The coercive equipment exhibited the same reasoning. Libya lacked the degree of institutional cohesion seen in Syria because Gaddafi refrained from creating a cohesive national military that could function as an independent political actor. Regular forces, revolutionary committees, internal security organizations, and elite groups connected to Gaddafi and his family made up the security sector instead. Although these arrangements, combined with the recruitment of foreign fighters and mercenaries, particularly from Chad and other neighboring countries, reduced the risk of military coups, they also undermined the coherence of coercive command by fragmenting the security apparatus and impeding the development of a unified national military. Personalist regimes concentrate power in the ruler rather than in long-lasting institutions, making security agencies reliant on individual allegiance

rather than institutional discipline (Geddes, 2003). This meant that while the coercive apparatus in Libya may employ violence, it was unable to respond with a cohesive and institutionally organized structure. Thus, once widespread discontent started, the likelihood of defections, uneven repression, and local autonomy increased (International Crisis Group, 2011a; Lacher, 2020).

These systemic flaws influenced how quickly and how Libya collapsed in 2011. The crisis revealed a fundamental lack of institutional cohesiveness within the state itself, rather than merely sparking protests against the regime. The central control quickly deteriorated because the regime lacked a professional national military, solid elite coordination mechanisms, and a functional bureaucratic system that could sustain power. The lack of national institutions, which allowed militias to take the position of the state in a number of locations, was a major factor in Libya's collapse (King, 2020). Therefore, protest dynamics alone cannot account for Libya's spiral toward civil war. As a result of the state's disjointed institutions and divided coercive apparatus, which left a security gap that allowed armed rivals to swiftly arise, mass mobilization turned military.

Libya’s structural conditions, apart from institutional weakness, determined the social distribution of authority and capacity for mobilization. In the absence of strong national institutions, social organization was therefore more likely to take shape through local and regional networks than through channels mediated by the state. This is important because it means that when conflict did occur, the infrastructure for coordination was already localized, thus less likely to lead to a nationwide unified response and reinforced the tendency to fragmented mobilization.

Rather than being limited to a single tribal explanation, regional and social disintegration in Libya should be primarily understood in terms of local, regional, and armed networks. Due to Libya's weak national institutions, local networks, regional allegiances, and unofficial power structures were frequently used to organize authority. Later, militia organization and power battles were shaped by these splits. But pre-existing tribal or regional divisions were not the only cause of fragmentation. It was also a result of the Gaddafi regime's past social management.

The dictatorship frequently employed fragmentation as a control mechanism rather than creating strong national institutions capable of integrating socioeconomic disparities. Once central authority was undermined in 2011, these divides swiftly developed into opposing political and armed organizations (Vandewalle, 2012; King, 2020; Lacher, 2020).

But it is important to emphasize that fragmentation in Libya was not merely the result of pre-existing tribal cleavages but also the historical way in which the state had handled those divisions. Instead of integrating tribal and regional groupings into stable and inclusive state institutions, the dictatorship used patronage, selective favoritism, and divide-and-rule techniques to reinforce fragmentation and preserve control. This produced a structural environment in which social cleavages were not neutralized but politicized so that once the regime weakened, these divisions could rapidly metamorphose into competing centers of authority and armed organization.

Overall, the structural conditions of Libya suggest that the risk of civil war was less in the presence of strong opposition and more in the absence of institutional buffers that could contain a crisis from emerging. Weak coercive cohesion, fragmented authority, and personalized rule created a system where, once mass mobilization began, state breakdown was likely to be rapid and decentralized. These conditions did not cause civil war by themselves, but they did lower the threshold at which regime fracture could occur.

3.2.2. Protest onset

The primary task in this section is to apply the proximate variable from Chapter 2, specifically elite cohesion and defection during protest onset. In Libya, the onset must be explained through the interaction of rapid protest spread, triggering events, and especially early elite fracture (Kuran, 1991). Libya is different from Syria, as in Syria, the regime cohesion at the beginning held more strongly; however, in Libya, the protest phase was accompanied by the rapid weakening of central authority (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Looking at protest onset dynamics, protest onset is sometimes shaped by coordination under uncertainty and spatial diffusion, as early

demonstrations signal regime vulnerability and lower participation risks (Rod, 2023). In Libya, the initial protest in February 2011 rapidly spread across cities, contributing to a rapid mobilization and civil war onset. A significant implication of the outbreak of protest in Libya is that elite cohesion did not merely weaken, nor did it even consolidate under crisis conditions. This differs from cases where a regime proactively suppresses protests through coordinated elite responses. Libya's personalist configuration restricted the ability of elites to collectively interpret and respond to events as they unfolded. This meant that early signs of unrest were processed in a fragmented manner across different coercive and political actors. Thus, rather than a unified regime strategy of containment, responses to protest were uneven from the beginning, creating uncertainty for elites and protesters alike.

Due to a lack of institutional mediation, early elite defections, and fractured coercive authority, the distance between protest and military conflict was shortened, and Libya's protests swiftly turned militaristic. Libya's protest phase coincided with the swift erosion of central authority, in contrast to Syria, where regime coherence initially held more firmly. Early protests reduced the perceived dangers of involvement and indicated regime weakness. Early protests might be held down in a more institutionalized government by security or bureaucratic measures, but in Libya, insufficient institutional mediation allowed local occurrences to spread swiftly throughout towns. Repression and elite defection overlapped as protests grew, resulting in an almost simultaneous development of armed organization and public mobilization. Libya's path began with protest, but the speed of militarization distinguished it from Syria in that there was no stable nonviolent middle phase between uprising and armed conflict (Kuran, 1991; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015; International Crisis Group, 2011b; Lacher, 2020; Della Porta et al., 2018).

When it comes to elite cohesion and defection, it is clear that elite loyalties shifted more profoundly and earlier than in Syria, when Libya experienced security and elite breakdown. This split was obvious in the early defection of politicians, diplomats, military figures, and local elites, particularly as areas of eastern Libya fell away from Gaddafi's control. The International Crisis Group (2011a, 2011b) illustrates this elite divide.

These defections matter as they made the centralized authority weaker and sped the transition from uprising to armed military confrontation (Brownlee et al., 2015). Crucially, elite defection in Libya should be analyzed not only as a cause of regime weakening but as a signal amplifier that transformed strategic expectations. As defections emerged in the military and administrative structures, perceptions of the durability of the regime changed for the remaining actors. This signaling effect is important in that it speeds up the collective abandonment of the regime even for actors who have not yet defected. Elite fragmentation can lead to cascading uncertainty in which each defection increases the probability of additional defections by reducing the perceived costs of exit (Brownlee et al.,2015).

This early split in Libya had a big effect. These defections immediately led to an accelerated breakdown of institutions. Therefore, the weakening of governmental control was strongly associated with the protest stage. Due to Libya's autocratic past and this early split, protests shifted away from a stable democratic transition and toward armed conflict. The same relationship also demonstrates how the start of protests and the collapse of the state in Libya were mutually reinforcing. Protests became more feasible as state power waned. The state's cohesiveness was further undermined as protests increased. In an environment of weak institutionalization, where the state lacked the means to distinguish between protests and systemic collapse, this feedback loop was particularly potent. In Libya, territorial and institutional fragmentation resulted in a rapid redistribution of control among new local actors (International Crisis Group, 2011a; Lacher, 2020).

To sum up, the onset of protest in Libya indicates that the rapid emergence of conflict is not only a function of protest intensity, but of structural conditions that eliminate buffering mechanisms between contention and collapse. Weak institutional mediation, early elite fragmentation, and rapid signaling effects combined to produce a situation in which protest onset contained the seeds of armed organization from the start. This is why Libya passed quickly from mass mobilization to armed confrontation without a long period of stabilization. It is clear, therefore, that Libya’s protest onset was marked by rapid local mobilization, early elite fracture, and rapid militarization. This proximate configuration opened space for armed actors to emerge quickly, and weakened the state cohesion sharply as well.

3.2.3. Mechanistic Conditions

The primary goal of this section is to apply the mechanism variable from Chapter 2, specifically the formation of an organized armed challenger. In Libya, this mechanism emerged as a result of rapid governmental fragmentation and decentralized militarization. Unlike in Syria, where armed challengers formed gradually as a result of long-term repression and defections, Libya's armed challengers appeared quickly as coercive power broke early on. The main concern is not just that violence has spread, but that control of violence has migrated from the central authority to many local armed groups. Thus, Libya's mechanism of civil war onset was the quick emergence of organized but dispersed armed challengers under conditions of institutional breakdown (Kalyvas, 2006; Staniland, 2014; Lacher, 2020).

Armed organizations appeared in Libya fairly immediately, rather than after a lengthy period of progressive militarization. This resulted from the interaction of defections, local anti-regime organizations, and the breakdown of centralized authority. Defections were more than just political occurrences; they also served as organizational triggers, transferring weaponry, military experience, and local authority away from the dictatorship. As a result, protests and armed formations overlapped from the start. Security forces became sources of militarization, and local groups soon transitioned from demonstration protection to violent conflict. This explains why Libya's move from insurrection to civil war was more rapid and decentralized than Syria's (International Crisis Group, 2011b; King, 2020; Lacher, 2020).

As a result, the breakdown of security forces expedited the transition from protest to organized armed opposition. The key fact is that armed organizations emerged quickly; there was no stable nonviolent middle phase, and militarization did not occur after a long period of gradual increase. The defections that took place after the protests are not just events but are considered to be organizational triggers. Both happened simultaneously, protests along with armed formations overlap. Security forces themselves in Libya were sources of armed actors and militarization (International Crisis Group, 2011b).

Libya had organized military, although it was decentralized rather than united. The armed opposition was organized enough to challenge the regime, but it did not consolidate under a single national leadership. Local militias, defected military units, community defense groups, and revolutionary formations were frequently geographically anchored in certain cities and areas. This resulted in tactical collaboration against the dictatorship rather than stable political or military unity. In other words, armed organizations may cooperate in specific fights but did not constitute a cohesive national chain of command. Libya's armed resistance was thus structured locally but fractured nationally (International Crisis Group, 2011a; Kalyvas, 2006; Staniland, 2014; Lacher, 2020).

Libya had a weak national command structure, which produced multiple organized actors instead of one insurgent movement. The anti-Gaddafi armed field was organized to challenge the regime, it was not unified as one national actor. It was formed in a territorialized and decentralized way. Furthermore, armed groups in Libya were coordinated tactically but not politically, which means that they were able to unify in specific battles or against the regime, but did not form a unified command structure. Cooperation was situational and temporary rather than being centralized (International Crisis Group, 2011a). All these dynamics demonstrate that the Libyan armed groups' territorial anchoring and tactical coordination prevented the emergence of a strong national command structure despite being organized at the local level to sustain conflict. This resulted in a persistent insurgent field with fragmentation.

Fragmentation was accompanied by militia proliferation. Militias were part of the onset mechanism; they were not a later consequence. This was part of the pathway through which the protests transferred from a nonviolent uprising to a civil war (International Crisis Group, 2011b; 2012b). This shift in perspective is significant because militias were not simply later wartime players; they were also involved in the process of weakening governmental authority from the start. In the Libyan case, the fast rise of militias was not later than the collapse of the regime; however, it happened simultaneously with the disintegration of coercive institutions (Lacher, 2020). This clarifies that fragmentation was not only a result of state failure, but it

was also a principal mechanism of generating new coercive actors. This means that the state did not leave a vacuum after collapsing; it collapsed through a process that generated new coercive actors.

The first analytical step is linked with the early erosion of coercive monopoly over violence. Libya experienced uneven institutional collapse. Libya's coercive apparatus was structurally more prone to fragmentation because of its segmented and personalized organization, a case that opposes gradual institutional decay. The security sector under the Libyan regime before 2011 was structured to prevent unified military authority; this was built on purpose. The dictatorship relied on intelligence infrastructure, regime loyalist troops, and divided parallel groups. Although Libya possessed a nominal national army, Qadhafi purposefully maintained it weak and divided out of fear that a strong professional military might spark coups. Coercive power relied increasingly heavily on parallel security organizations, intelligence services, and loyal troops linked to the dictatorship and its inner circle (Vandewalle, 2012). While this was designed primarily for regime survival, it created results that were unintended when armed resistance and protest emerged (King, 2020). Thus, institutional collapse was not unified but, it occurred differently across units and spaces, causing this disintegration.

Coercive capacity is central to regime durance (Bellin, 2004). When coercive cohesion occurs, regime survival becomes structurally impossible to maintain because repression can no longer be coordinated across different regions effectively. Military formations were defected early, especially in Eastern Libya. In other areas, some lost operational coordination capacity but remained temporarily loyal to the regime. Sovereignty diverged almost immediately. Rather than a direct shift from order to chaos, the process evolved into partially controlled territories (Mezran & Miller, 2023). The key analytical extension in Libya is that the breakdown did not just make the regime unstable; the problem is that it was productive of new armed actors from its earliest phase.

To look into the emergence of local armed organizations as an immediate actor in the place of the weakening regime, this second step of the mechanism condition shows

the rapid substitution of localized armed organizations as soon as the central authority was destabilized (Bellin, 2004; Lacher, 2020). To substitute state coercion, tribal militias, urban revolutionary committees, neighborhood defense groups, and defected military units started to form armed structures rapidly (International Crisis Group, 2011b). It is important to note that this was not a centrally ordered coordination process across those groups; it happened to take place, driven by fast survival concerns and without considering long-term strategic or ideological planning. So, they were characterized as a highly decentralized response to this security uncertainty that was experienced (Staniland, 2014).

Early armed groups appeared at the beginning as a formation of defense to protect protest movements from regime violence (International Crisis Group, 2012b). This happened in cities like Misrata and Benghazi. But as the conflict intensified, these groups transformed from ad hoc defensive units into more organized armed formations. This transformation was driven and accelerated by three reinforcing dynamics: the collapse of policing institutions, access to military stockpiles, and the return of defected soldiers with tactical expertise (Lacher, 2020). First, the breakdown of policing institutions led to a local security vacuum as police forces retreated, splintered, or ceased to exercise control over urban space. It made armed protection seem necessary for protest sites, neighborhoods, and strategic locations. Second, having access to military stockpiles gave these groups the material capacity to move beyond basic self-defense. Weapons looted from abandoned barracks, depots and security facilities enabled local armed actors to establish checkpoints, defend territory and fight regime forces more effectively. Third, defected soldiers offered tactical knowledge, familiarity with weapons, and basic command experience that helped to transform civilian defense groups into more organized coercive actors. The confluence of these dynamics hastened the militarization of local space, and accounts for the rapid evolution of armed formation in Libya from protest protection to a more durable form of local violence.

In this context, Kalyvas' framework regarding civil war organization is very relevant. It is argued that violence in a civil war context is structured by control; it cannot be perceived as random (Kalyvas, 2006). In Libya, on the other hand, the early lack of

centralized control meant that armed organizations became the first source of local authority, which made the typical sequence, organization comes after territorial control. It is analytically significant to state that the organization substituted for control and did not follow it (Staniland, 2014).

The third step in the mechanism is linked with the legitimacy production through coercive substitution legitimacy developed from functional substitution. The process took place as follows: when militias took control over certain territories, they started to carry out some state functions such as regulation of movement, provision of security, protection of infrastructure, and management of detention facilities (Lacher, 2020). This substitution that took place is very significant as it explains the way armed groups changed from armed formations during a limited time to enduring political-military actors.

Legitimacy in that case did not come from those acts of performance, but from formal recognition. Communities sometimes supported militias and tolerated them because they provided the only sources of order in this context of institutional collapse, and this support was not based on political preferences. This distinction coordinates with Lacher's findings that Libyan militias evolved to be linked with local governance mainly in urban centers, places where state withdrawal was totally complete (Lacher, 2020). Over time, this introduced a dual legitimacy structure in which authority was simultaneously normalized and fragmented at the local level (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

The changes that occurred in Libya led to a civil war, which can be attributed to the interaction of early elite fracture, weak structural cohesion, decentralized militia proliferation, and rapid armed formation (Bellin, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003). The outcome was sustained armed confrontation without a coherent post-uprising coercive order, not just a conflict opposing the regime (Lacher, 2020). The process in Libya was reinforcing itself over again under certain conditions. Once militias formed themselves as providers of security, removing them became very risky and more difficult because an attempt to realize this would produce security vacuums. This puts forward a situation that can be described as a stabilized fragmentation

equilibrium, where disorder was reproduced from trials to manage it (Staniland, 2014). The fourth and final stage of the Libyan conflict was the evolution of a self-reinforcing fragmentation concept. This happened as the interactions of the multiple armed actors established across the country were increasingly shaped by competition. Those interactions were characterized by strategic distrust and uncertainty as well. Militias developed strong incentives to protect their autonomy instead of being part of a unified command structure. It was easy for militias to develop such strong incentives as a result of the absence of a credible state institution able to coordinate coercive authority or enforce agreements. As Staniland (2014) argues the cohesion of armed organizations is shaped more by pre-existing institutional and social networks. Attempts at coordination through military councils or political institutions failed one time after another because no central actor had enough enforcement capacity or legitimacy to overcome rivalries and localized interests. In Libya, however, the weakness of pre-war military institutions opened the way to the emergence of localized and diverged coercive structures.

The Libyan example also shows that fragmentation and structure can coexist. Armed groups that are dispersed may not necessarily indicate a lack of organization. Rather, it indicates that the organization evolved locally as opposed to nationally. Although armed actors were able to coordinate within particular cities, neighborhoods, or regions, they were unable to unite into a single national opposing force due to a lack of a permanent institutional structure. This divergence is crucial to the process by which Libya's civil war began. The progression of the conflict was not due to total uncontrolled violence, but rather to the redistribution of power over violence among various local actors. In this way, there was more than just a void created by the dissolution of state power. It resulted in multiple competing centers of coercive authority, each claiming local legitimacy and contributing to the disintegration of the national political structure.

This process also contributes to the explanation of why Libya's civil war started earlier than Syria's. Unlike Syrian rivals, armed groups did not have to confront a cohesive national security establishment once state power crumbled. Rather, they arose as a result of local defense requirements, weapon access, defections, and the

breakdown of military and police cooperation. As a result, the shift from protest to armed combat was accelerated. Instead of appearing as distinct stages, protest, defection, territorial control, and armed formation overlapped. Libya's route revolves around this condensed sequence. It demonstrates how a lack of institutional cohesiveness can reduce the time between public mobilization and civil war by enabling armed individuals to gain political and military significance prior to the development of a cohesive opposition structure.

As a result, the Libyan method should be interpreted as the quick development of regionally coordinated but nationally dispersed armed challengers. These individuals were organized enough to continue violence and undermine the state, but they were too dispersed to reestablish centralized leadership. This dual requirement made the conflict last. The same process that allowed armed opposition to grow also hampered the formation of a cohesive political-military order following the breakdown of central authority. Libya's path to civil war was thus determined by a self-reinforcing combination of weak institutions, early elite fragmentation, local militarization, and fragmented coercive authority (Kalyvas, 2006; Staniland, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2012b; Lacher, 2020). This fragmentation dynamic grew self-reinforcing with time. Weak state capability fostered the circumstances for several competing centers of violence, hampered the regime's ability to quell insurgency, and prevented the creation of a strong resistance force. Armed organizations supplanted state authority with localized security tasks and territorial control, resulting in institutional collapse and decentralized coercion. As a result, Libyan fragmentation should be viewed as more than just a byproduct of civil war. It was a fundamental tool for conflict progression. The combination of elite division, institutional instability, and fast militia formation created a political context in which no centralized coercive power could soon resurface (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Bellin, 2004; Staniland, 2014; Lacher, 2020).

3.3. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated, through the analytical framework established in Chapter 2, that both Syria and Libya experienced a transition from mass protest to

civil war onset during the Arab Uprisings, yet the domestic pathways through which this transformation occurred differed significantly. The findings reinforce the broader argument that civil war onset cannot be understood as an automatic consequence of protest rise alone, but rather as a process shaped by the interaction between elite behavior, coercive capacity, and the emergence of organized armed challengers. Applying the same analytical variables to both cases has shown that differences in institutional cohesion and coercive organization fundamentally shaped how each regime responded to contention and how quickly conflict transformed into organized violence. In line with the arguments of Fearon and Laitin (2003), the organizational capacity of the state and the structure of coercive institutions played a decisive role in determining the trajectory of conflict. Similarly, Bellin (2004) emphasizes that the durability of authoritarian regimes depends heavily on the cohesion and effectiveness of coercive apparatuses, a dynamic that became highly visible in both Syria and Libya.

In Syria, the pathway to civil war onset was characterized by relatively strong coercive institutions, sustained centralized repression, gradual defections, and slower militarization. The Syrian regime maintained a comparatively cohesive security apparatus during the early stages of the uprising, allowing it to coordinate repression and preserve regime continuity despite growing unrest. This institutional cohesion delayed large-scale fragmentation and slowed the emergence of organized armed opposition. As protests expanded, repression intensified, contributing to a gradual process of militarization in which armed challengers emerged over time rather than immediately. The Syrian case, therefore, illustrates how stronger authoritarian institutions can initially stabilize regime survival even while simultaneously deepening long-term conflict dynamics. Sustained repression under cohesive coercive structures increased polarization and contributed to the transformation of protest movements into organized armed resistance, reflecting the broader civil war onset logic discussed by Della Porta et al. (2018). Militarization in Syria was therefore neither immediate nor fully decentralized at the beginning, but evolved gradually through prolonged confrontation between protesters, defectors, and state security forces. In this sense, the Syrian pathway demonstrates how strong institutional cohesion may delay state fracture while simultaneously prolonging the pathway toward civil war onset.

Libya, by contrast, followed a significantly different trajectory rooted in weak institutional cohesion, fragmented coercive authority, rapid elite fracture, and decentralized armed formation. Unlike Syria, Libya entered 2011 with a highly personalized regime structure that lacked strong bureaucratic and military institutionalization. Authority depended heavily on fragmented patronage networks, parallel security units, and localized systems of control rather than cohesive national institutions. Consequently, once protests began, the regime experienced rapid weakening of central authority and uneven institutional collapse across different regions. Elite defections emerged early, and coercive fragmentation accelerated almost simultaneously with protest progression. This rapid weakening of state control reduced the distance between mass mobilization and organized violence. Rather than experiencing a prolonged period of nonviolent contention, Libya quickly transitioned toward militarized conflict through the emergence of localized militias, defected military units, and decentralized armed formations. In line with Kalyvas' (2006) argument that civil war depends on the organization of violence rather than violence alone, Libya's trajectory demonstrates how organized armed challengers can emerge rapidly under conditions of institutional fragmentation and state collapse. Moreover, the Libyan case reflects Rød's (2023) argument regarding protest diffusion and descent under uncertainty, as early protests and defections created signaling effects that accelerated collective mobilization and institutional breakdown across multiple cities and regions.

The findings of this chapter, therefore, suggest that the onset of civil war is strongly conditioned by the organizational structure of the state itself. These findings support the central framework of Chapter 2 by illustrating that structural conditions, protest dynamics, and organized armed formations must be understood as interconnected processes rather than isolated variables. Civil war onset emerges not simply from protest intensity or social grievances, but from the interaction between contentious politics and the organization of coercive power.

By comparing Syria and Libya using the same categories of structural conditions, protest onset, and mechanistic progression, the chapter provides a consistent analytical foundation for understanding variance in the pathways to civil war onset.

Rather than assuming a uniform Arab Uprisings trajectory, the findings reveal that authoritarian regimes vary substantially in their capacity to absorb unrest, coordinate repression, and prevent fragmentation. As Della Porta et al. (2018) argue, the transformation of protest into organized violence is shaped by the interaction between repression, political opportunities, and organizational dynamics. The evidence from Syria and Libya strongly supports this perspective, demonstrating that similar protest waves can generate very different conflict outcomes depending on the institutional and coercive context in which they unfold.

These findings reinforce the central argument of the thesis that the organization of coercive institutions and the cohesion of authoritarian structures play a decisive role in shaping how contentious politics escalate into civil war. The evidence from both cases demonstrates that the onset of civil war is not a singular or uniform process, but one deeply conditioned by the institutional and coercive configuration of the state itself.

CHAPTER 4

EGYPT AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MASS PROTEST WITHOUT CIVIL WAR ONSET

Egypt represents a negative case of civil war onset after the Arab Spring. The Arab Uprisings resulted in different outcomes across the regime despite similar protest waves at the beginning. Although both Syria and Libya experienced a civil war, they were under different circumstances, as was displayed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the analytical framework of Chapter 2 is going to be applied, looking into structural, proximate, and mechanistic conditions. This chapter explains why regime crisis and large-scale protest did not produce the onset of civil war. The analysis focuses on how Egypt's unusual outcome was driven by coercive institutions, elite behavior, and the non-creation of armed challenger groups.

Similar to Libya and Syria, Egypt had a severe government crisis but no civil war. This illustrates the analytical conundrum described in the chapter. The Egyptian example shows that, even in situations of authoritarian instability, widespread anti-regime demonstrations do not always result in civil war. Similar to Syria and Libya, Egypt experienced regime instability and uprisings, which posed a serious threat to the current government. Egypt might have gotten worse since the extent of the mobilization in Tahrir Square and other large cities indicated a significant decline in the legitimacy of the regime and created doubt about the stability of state power. During this time, Egypt saw regime fragility, the collapse of police power in some places, and uncertainty caused by a state crisis. At the regional level, the spread of the Arab Uprisings damaged Mubarak's legitimacy and increased political pressure on the regime. However, the paths from protest to civil conflict vary between Arab uprising scenarios. In Syria, repression and military defections aided militarization, while in Libya, coercive fragmentation hastened state collapse. Egypt's trajectory

was unique in that regime upheaval occurred without the emergence of organized military conflict. The resilience of coercive institutions was a decisive factor in shaping different outcomes of the Arab Spring (Bellin, 2012). Similarly, Egypt's uprising produced regime change, but not the collapse of state institutions required for sustained armed conflict (Brownlee et al., 2015). The Egyptian situation begs the question of why widespread protests and a government collapse did not result in civil war. Chapter 2's framework is used to explain this difference, with an emphasis on coercive cohesion, elite alignment, and the absence of rival armed authority.

Therefore, this chapter explains why Egypt's regime crisis did not turn into a civil war by examining three connected factors: the absence of organized armed challengers, the cohesiveness of coercive institutions, and the actions of political and military leaders during the start of protest. These elements contribute to the explanation of why Egypt is a poor example of an authoritarian crisis that resulted in regime change rather than state collapse. Therefore, the Egyptian case is significant because it demonstrates that the shift from protest to civil war depends not only on the extent of mobilization or the weakness of regime legitimacy, but also on whether state authority fractures and whether opposition actors acquire the organizational capacity to maintain armed violence.

In the following sections, structural conditions, protest onset, and mechanisms preventing civil war will be applied to Egypt. This will be followed by a comparison in the remaining part of the chapter to compare Egypt with both Syria and Libya.

4.1. Structural Conditions

4.1.1. State Coercive Capacity and Military Centrality

Egypt entered 2011 with a far more centralized and coercive structure than Libya and Syria. It did not show the same pathway to mass armed fragmentation. Strong coercive capacity and institutional cohesion are important as they lower the risks of state fragmentation in uprisings. The concept of coercive capacity explains the ability of the state to protect order and monopolize the legal use of violence across territory

with centralized institutions, and enforce authority. The centralized institutions of the state are the police, intelligence services, and the military. Institutional cohesion is closely connected to coercive capacity, as it demonstrates discipline, the degree of organizational unity, and hierarchical coordination within coercive institutions. Under authoritarian regimes in transitional contexts, it is argued that the strength and durability of coercive institutions primarily determine whether mass uprisings remain politically contained or escalate into the onset of civil war. Civil wars are less likely in states with coercive reach and strong bureaucracy because governments that maintain the organizational capacity required to suppress protests and rebellions before insurgent structure robustness consolidate through them (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Also, it is emphasized that authoritarian coercive apparatuses define regime survival in moments of crisis, especially when security and military institutions remain loyal to the central authority (Bellin, 2004). Furthermore, durable authoritarian systems depend on centralized coercive institutions able to prevent fragmentation and enforce elite coordination (Slater, 2010). Della Porta (2013) shows how state responses to protest are linked with the organizational structure of coercive institutions themselves. Thus, states with coercive cohesive institutions are more able to contain arising unrest before sliding into a civil war conflict. The monopoly of violence of the state is demonstrated through organizational discipline and command structures carried out with wide territorial outreach, making the probability of a civil war low. Institutional cohesion determines if the protest will turn into armed conflict or stay within the boundaries of political confrontation as protest movements encounter greater obstacles to transform into a militarized group. These perspectives together suggest that states possessing organizational discipline, nationwide territorial reach, and unified command structures are better inclined to contain unrest without experiencing armed fragmentation.

Egypt had one of the most institutionalized military establishments in the Arab World before 2011, which clarifies organizational discipline. The Egyptian military was unlike institutions whose authority primarily relies on individual leaders; it had developed into a durable bureaucratic organization with internal cohesion and substantial autonomy. The military had certain characteristics; it preserved organizational autonomy, retained national command hierarchy, and remained the

strongest institution within the state. According to Cook (2004), the armed forces acted as a central pillar of the state, not only a security institution, but also occupied a unique position within the Egyptian political system, showing centralized command. Through decades of professionalization, political influence, and organizational development, the military acquired economic resources and administrative strength, thereby strengthening its institutional capacity and solidifying its position as the most powerful institution in the state (Cook, 2004). This institutional strength continued into the Mubarak era, as the military possessed centralized command structures, nationwide deployment capabilities, and strong internal discipline, although the existence of political stagnation. Cook (2011) further argues that the Egyptian military was deeply connected with the state apparatus and had a significant amount of institutional governance from the ruling regime at the same time. As a result, when mass protests emerged in 2011, the armed forces faced the crisis as a cohesive institution, not competing and divided security actors. This differentiation is analytically important because centralized coercive institutions make the probability of militia competition able to challenge the state authority rather unlikely. Centralized and unified coercive institutions make militia competition impossible.

Egypt did not have a fragmented coercive apparatus. During the uprising, the military's institutional cohesion became especially significant because it allowed for the protection of state continuity, although Mubarak's regime was weakened. The Egyptian military was established around institutional interests that reached far beyond the survival of any ruler, unlike other authoritarian rulers, who generally depend on personal loyal networks. The military's intervention during the uprising shows its role as a protector of state stability, not just to show its influence as a simple instrument of protecting the regime (Droz-Vincent, 2011). Armed forces entered the post-2011 period with organizational coherence that was sufficient to deal with the political transition while also managing control over the coercive apparatus (Hussein & Martino, 2022). The institutional coherence reduced the probability that political fragmentation would turn into violent conflict and made the formation of competing centers of armed authority unlikely. The military, in that sense, functioned to be a stabilizing actor that maintained the continuity of the Egyptian state when the

political leadership lost autonomy. Egypt had a central coercive institution able to manage political uncertainty without risking experiencing institutional collapse.

After discussing that the Egyptian military was cohesive and institutionalized, it is time to explain more military autonomy and corporate interests. In Egypt case, the military had allowed the Mubarak regime to fall and did not fight for his survival, that's because the Egyptian military maintained institutional interests that reached far beyond the survival of a personal regime. The military had economic privileges and possessed an economic empire. This is seen through military-owned industries, construction projects, land ownership, infrastructure development, and manufacturing enterprises. Therefore, the military was a major economic institution, not just a security actor within the state (Cook, 2004). The military had interests to protect, as well as corporate interests and economic influence. Another reason is that the military developed a distinct corporate identity within the armed forces over the course of several decades. This identity within the military can be witnessed through professional officer corps, bureaucratic continuity, institutional interests, and military self-preservation. Both Cook (2004) and Cook (2011) argue that the military's interests were different from Mubarak's interests. The third reason why the military did not fight for the survival of the regime is its dependence and autonomy from regime leadership. According to Albrecht (2015), the Egyptian military maintained significant institutional autonomy and was not totally subject to Mubarak's personal leadership. This autonomy was strengthened by the military's organizational cohesiveness, independent command structures, and institutional legitimacy. Similarly, Cook (2011) describes Egypt's armed forces as the country's most powerful governmental institution, with business interests that go beyond Mubarak's political survival. These theories show that the military was ingrained inside the government but not entirely dependent on the president, allowing it to withdraw support for Mubarak while maintaining its own position and the broader state order. Because the military's economic and institutional interests were linked to the protection of the Egyptian state instead of being linked to Mubarak personally, it had inclinations to maintain state institutions and facilitate a controlled transition of power rather than engage in a destructive conflict on his behalf (Droz-Vincent, 2011; Hussein & Martino, 2022). The military's institutional autonomy and corporate

interests made its commitment to protect state continuity more likely. This explains why the removal of the regime did not cause the fragmentation or collapse of the coercive apparatus.

To discuss social and political cleavages, it is important to note that Egypt had serious political and socioeconomic grievances; the difference is that these cleavages lacked the fragmentation mechanisms connected with civil war onset, and they existed in a rather integrated social structure. Egypt experienced many grievances generally connected to popular uprisings, such as high unemployment rates, especially among youth, growing socioeconomic inequality, widespread corruption, restricted opportunities for political participation, and authoritarian exclusion. These conditions together created a possible situation for mass protest and widespread public dissatisfaction. In contrast, the territorial and social structure of Egypt was mainly different from other cases that experienced the onset of civil war because political mobilization was central in major urban cities such as Cairo, Alexandria, and Suez, cities where strong state penetration prevented the rise of autonomous local power centers (Brownlee et al., 2015). Furthermore, Egypt did not possess entrenched militia networks, regional autonomy, or tribal armed structures, conditions that make the armed conflict more possible. Thus, although grievances made protests more likely. The Egyptian social structure limited a territorialized armed fragmentation.

Looking at the opposition structure before 2011, the regime countered the rise of a collective anti-regime organization but allowed limited opposition activities. Egypt's opposition functioned within a system of controlled pluralism marked by selective repression, limited political openings, and a fragmented opposition landscape in which the regime tolerated certain forms of political activity while preventing the emergence of a unified challenger (Torres-Van Antwerp, 2022). Within this context, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the largest and most organized opposition movement, leveraging substantial social networks, electoral experience, and a gradualist political strategy based on political engagement rather than armed confrontation (Brownlee et al., 2015). Along with the Brotherhood, the Kefaya movement increased public dissent through anti-Mubarak action, while the April 6

Youth Movement pioneered new forms of youth activism, including internet mobilization and protest coordination. Strikes and workplace mobilization by labour networks aided collective action, offering significant organizing experience for subsequent protest actions (Ketchley, 2017). As a result, Egypt approached 2011 with large protest networks but no coherent revolutionary organization capable of coordinating an armed challenge.

In summary, Egypt entered 2011 with centralized coercive authority, a cohesive and institutionally autonomous military, widespread socioeconomic and political grievances that did not translate into deep societal fragmentation, and opposition networks capable of mobilizing large-scale protest but not armed rebellion. The state's coercive institutions remained intact, the military maintained its organizational unity and interests independent of the incumbent ruler's survival, and society did not exhibit the territorial, tribal, and militia-based divisions that often drive armed conflict. At the same time, opposition actors had considerable mobilizational capacity, but lacked the organizational structures and resources to mount an armed challenge to the state. Taken together, these structural conditions both enabled mass anti-regime mobilization and limited the emergence of rival armed authority and organized armed challengers.

4.2. Protest Onset

4.2.1. Elite Cohesion and Defection During Protest Onset

Structural conditions alone are not enough; they explain the environment before the uprising. They lack explaining why protests develop in a specific direction or why it rises in a specific moment. Proximate conditions functioning during protest onset shape the trajectory of contention through triggering events, mobilization patterns, and particularly the behavior of coercive actors and elites. Protest onset is not a single event; it should be viewed as a dynamic process. The interaction between state actors and protestors affects how the crisis takes place when the conflict begins. Contentious politics arises from interactions between authorities and challengers, which makes protest onset a changing process instead of being a single event. It is

important to emphasize that protest movements can follow different trajectories, and this is based on how opposition actors, along with the stage, react to protests in the early stages (Della Porta et al., 2018). Authoritarian systems can seem to be stable for long periods of time; however, they become fragile when protests begin to spread. Protests against authoritarian systems usually rise when different political opportunities transfer calculations in light of risk and participation (Rod, 2023). Under authoritarian regimes, citizens can privately be against the regime for many years, they stay silent, and once they begin observing others openly challenging the authority, they do the same thing. Protest can appear suddenly because preference falsification hides opposition until citizens understand that collective action has become possible to challenge the authority (Kuran, 1991). Proximate conditions consist of mobilization, triggering events, elite behavior, and coercive actors. Mobilization is how people transfer grievances to action. This is followed by triggering events, which change dissatisfaction into protest. The reaction to those protests comes from elite behavior and coercive actors. Elite behavior is about whether the ruling elites would stay united or begin to diverge, and coercive action is the response of security institutions and military clarifying how they react when protests rise. In Egypt, the analysis of proximate conditions is particularly important since structural grievances alone cannot explain the rapid emergence of mass protest in January 2011 or the subsequent trajectory of the uprising. Hence, the Egyptian case has to be analyzed through the interaction of protest diffusion, early mobilization, and the behavior of political and coercive elites once the contention started (Brownlee et al., 2015). Elite cohesion and defection are especially important in the onset of protests, as it determined whether the uprising would remain a political crisis or turn into a larger conflict. As the protests gained momentum, the political crisis was more and more about how the regime's elites and state institutions responded to the rising public pressure and calls for change (Dunne, 2011). Proximate conditions link long-term grievances to sudden political action. Therefore, the Egyptian uprising should be explained through early mobilization, protest diffusion, and the behavior of political and coercive elites by the time conflict began.

The broader Arab Spring and the start of the Tunisian revolution encouraged Egyptians to believe that collective action could succeed eventually; it also altered

perceptions of regime vulnerability. Long-standing grievances alone do not explain why protest arose in January 2011. Egypt had long-standing problems before 2011, including unemployment, authoritarian rule, and corruption. The grievances were there for years, but did not shape mass mobilization. The Tunisian revolution was a demonstration effect, not just in Egypt; it acted as the domino effect that triggered protests in other Middle Eastern countries as well. The Tunisian Revolution showed that authoritarian regimes could be changed and challenged because they are weak in essence (Brownlee et al., 2015). Thus, January 25 changed dissatisfaction into clear collective action. Participation expanded, and the fear barrier decreased as more people joined (Kuran,1991). Activist networks and social media had a role in spreading information and collective participation. Demonstrations experienced nationwide mobilization as they rapidly spread beyond isolated protests and became a challenge to Mubarak's rule (Freedom House, 2012). The importance of January 25 is not only about protests, but also seen in the transfer of political expectations. Regional diffusion created the conditions for the rapid expansion of anti-regime mobilization, encouraged participation, and reduced uncertainty.

To look into the expansion of protest and regime crisis more, it should be noted that the Egyptian uprising came to evolve as a nationwide challenge to Mubarak's rule and expanded beyond isolated demonstrations very fast. Protests expanded from Cairo to Alexandria, Suez, and other big urban centers. The geographic spread of mobilization and its level changed the protests from a localized dissent into a profound political crisis that put regime stability into a threat. Participation extended beyond youth activists to include professionals, workers, ordinary citizens, and opposition groups as well. Tahrir Square was the symbol of anti-regime mobilization and resistance. Strikes and labour participation put more pressure on the regime. Mubarak's legitimacy and authority were deeply challenged, and demonstrations turned out to be national instead of being local. By the weakening of police authority in many areas, this situation created uncertainty concerning the regime, its ability to restore order, and overall instability in the country. The future of the Egyptian regime became uncertain, and Egypt faced a severe regime crisis. The uprising developed into a wide movement challenging the political order and expanded far beyond its

initial participants (De Smet, 2016). The chronology of protest expansion was as follows: first spread across cities, which weakened regime control, and that was followed by a growing political crisis (Freedom House, 2012). The extent of engagement turned protest into a national political problem and indicated a broader decline in trust in the Mubarak government (Brownlee et al., 2015). As a result, the Egyptian uprising turned into a national regime crisis marked by widespread mobilization, waning legitimacy of the government, and increasing doubt about the future of political power. These changes did not immediately result in the fragmentation required for the start of a civil war, even though they did generate circumstances linked to extreme political instability.

Despite growing pressure on the Mubarak regime and the rapid expansion of protests, Egypt's ruling and coercive elites did not experience sudden fragmentation. Centralized command structures continued to function, the military high command remained unified, and the coercive apparatus retained organizational cohesion throughout the early stages of the uprising. The protests in Egypt put significant pressure on the regime. Military leadership remained cohesive despite Mubarak's position becoming more uncertain, and state institutions continued in spite of the political crisis. Cook (2011) states that although there was growing political uncertainty, the military continued to be protected as the most cohesive institution within the Egyptian state. It can be stated that the chain of command stayed unified, no competing centers of coercive authority appeared, and no huge split took place among the armed forces. The military leadership avoided the split that frequently follows serious political crises by maintaining internal unity throughout the revolt (Bou Nassif, 2020, pp. 173–176). Similarly, the armed services were able to handle political change without encountering institutional breakdown because of organizational cohesiveness (Hussein and Martino, 2022). During protest onset, elite behavior often determines if political crises will rise into broader conflicts or remain safely contained. Unified command structures can eventually discourage conflict, cohesive elites make uncertainty more unlikely, and organizational continuity reduces the chances of armed challengers to rise. As a result, rather than elite dispersion, Egypt's early protest phase was marked by elite solidarity. The military maintained a cohesive institution despite increasing pressure on the government,

which limited the likelihood of a fast rise into armed conflict and decreased uncertainty within the coercive apparatus.

To analyze the military's response to the protests, it was unlike coercive institutions reacting to protests with repression, the Egyptian military positioned itself as guiding the public order instead of an armed force that is supposed to protect Mubarak's rule at any cost. The military felt itself as the guardian of the state to preserve stability, so their interests were beyond Mubarak's regime (Droz-Vincent, 2011). Cook (2011) argues that the armed forces had sufficient institutional autonomy to distinguish their interests from those of the Mubarak regime. The military response in that way helped to protect institutional cohesion and decrease the probability of a conflict onset. As protests spread, the military was positioned, and armed forces became much more visible in public spaces. The military was able to possess more public legitimacy than the police. Thanks to the military's organizational structure, this formed a reaction that viewed institutional preservation more important than repression (Bou Nassif, 2020). What makes the situation different in Egypt is that the leaders of the military viewed public order and institutional stability as a priority, which made them avoid the type of large-scale violence. Armed forces wanted to manage the crisis instead of suppressing it using unrestricted force. The emergence of civil war, therefore, remained limited because it lessened the possibility that a confrontation between demonstrators and the government would turn into a protracted armed war; the military's response affected the course of the revolt. The military's handling of the uprising contributed to limiting civil war onset through its preservation of institutional cohesion, of public legitimacy, and of the coercive fragmentation that is a common characteristic of acute political crises. Egypt's regime crisis was serious, but the military behaved as a cohesive institution trying to manage the crisis rather than as a fragmented coercive actor fighting for Mubarak's survival.

Defections are often pivotal in transforming political crises into armed conflicts by providing opposition movements with trained personnel, military expertise, weapons, and organisational leadership. In many civil wars, the core of competing armed groups that challenge state authority is made up of defecting officers. But there were

no major defections from the armed forces in Egypt during the uprising. The coercive apparatus did not generate competing military structures or organized armed groups, and the military was still part of a cohesive chain of command. Bou Nassif (2020) contends that the architecture of Egyptian coercive institutions facilitated the preservation of military cohesion during the crisis, whereas Hussein and Martino (2022) emphasize the institutional continuity of the military in the transition period. As a result, opposition actors could not possess the coercive resources required for militarization.

The resignation of Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011 was a significant political transformation, but did not lead to the collapse of the Egyptian state. Authority was transferred to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), so the transition was through existing state institutions rather than through institutional breakdown. The military remained the main coercive power. Administrative and government functions continued even after the sitting leader was deposed. The armed forces were the guardians of institutional continuity in the transition (Droz-Vincent, 2011). The centrality of the military in keeping the authority of the state is underscored by Cook (2011). Similarly, Brownlee et al. (2015) notes that the power transfer took place without the formation of rival power centers. Egypt experienced a leadership change but without coercive collapse, protecting the institutional foundations of the state in the presence of severe political uprisings.

The Egyptian uprising quickly transformed from a localised protest into a country-wide challenge to the rule of Mubarak, resulting in a serious regime crisis and widespread political uncertainty. However, in contrast to trajectories leading to civil war, coercive elites stayed united throughout the period of protest. The military leadership kept the organization intact. There were no mass defections. Power was handed down through institutional channels after Mubarak resigned. Instead, the uprising brought political change, while eschewing the elite fragmentation and competing coercive institutions often preceding protracted armed conflict. The next section explores the mechanisms that limited civil war onset and explains why mass protest did not generate an organized armed challenger.

4.3. Mechanisms Preventing Civil War Onset

4.3.1. Absence of Organizational Pathways to Insurgency

The slide from mass protest to civil war is not inevitable. Protests may challenge the authority of the state and create acute political crises, but the onset of civil war will usually require the emergence of organized armed challengers capable of sustaining violence against the state. The difference, then, between civil wars and protest movements is the presence of military organization, coercive capacity, and the capacity to challenge state authority through violence. As Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue, insurgency is shaped not only by grievances but also by organizational opportunities and access to coercive resources. Likewise, Kalyvas (2006) argues that armed conflict necessitates actors that can employ violence in a sustained and coordinated manner. The key question in the Egyptian case is not why there was a mass protest, but why the protest did not produce an organized armed challenger. The importance of this distinction is that Egypt went through an acute regime crisis without the emergence of the military organizations normally associated with the beginning of civil war.

One of the major constraining mechanisms of transition into conflict was the inability of opposition actors to translate mobilization into militarization. Egyptian opposition organisations showed a considerable capacity for protest coordination, mass participation, and political mobilization. Activist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, April 6 Youth Movement, labour networks, and others were instrumental in maintaining demonstrations and challenging regime authority. However, these organizations were still fundamentally civilian in character. Their activities were concentrated on demonstrations, strikes, political participation, and collective action, and not on armed resistance. Ketchley (2017) demonstrates that protest networks were able to mobilize across cities. However, Brownlee et al. (2015) argue that the opposition lacked the organizational structures for insurgency. As a result, the opposition had substantial protest capacity, but with limited coercive capacity, which prevented the rise of a unified armed challenge to the state.

The lack of organizational pathways to insurgency constrained possibilities for the emergence of civil war. When armed challengers have access to weapons, military expertise, leadership structures, and territorial bases that enable opposition movements to sustain violence against state forces, they tend to emerge. Most of these resources were denied to Egyptian opposition actors. But unlike other cases where defecting officers set up rival military organizations, no alternative command structures were set up to direct armed resistance. There were no armed wings, no military infrastructure, and no territorial bases for opposition groups to organize insurgent activity. Successful armed organizations are built on pre-existing structures that can support military coordination and recruitment (Staniland 2014). In Egypt, those kinds of structures were absent. Thus, opposition actors were incapable of transferring political mobilization to organized rebellion despite the risk of the political crisis.

Another mechanism that prevented the outbreak of civil war was that the monopoly of organized violence was kept by the state. Although Mubarak was ousted and the regime experienced a major political transformation, the coercive institutions of the state remained intact. The military retained centralized command structures, control over coercive resources, and blocked the emergence of rival armed authorities. The transfer of power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces was done through existing institutions, not through the collapse of the state. Cook (2011) emphasizes the centrality of the military to the Egyptian state, while Droz-Vincent (2011) explains how the armed forces acted as custodians of institutional continuity during the transition. The preservation of coercive authority averted the state's disintegration and denied opposition actors the opportunity to develop alternative centers of armed power. Therefore, regime change took place without the institutional breakdown that usually facilitates civil war onset.

The Egyptian uprising shows that the arrival of a serious political crisis does not automatically lead to the advent of civil war. The mass protest challenged the authority of the regime and led to a change of leadership, but the mechanisms for the formation of armed challengers did not emerge. Opposition organizations remained civilian; there were no organizational pathways to insurgency, and the state retained

its monopoly over organized violence during the transition. Such mechanisms prevented transition into conflict and prevented mass protest from developing into sustained armed conflict.

4.4. Comparative Analysis: Explaining Divergent Outcomes

This comparative section discusses Egypt, Syria, and Libya's various paths following the Arab uprisings. It investigates why Egypt achieved government change without plunging into civil war, but Syria and Libya had transitions that resulted in armed conflict. Rather than examining the national instances separately, the research focuses on the differences in structural, proximal, and causative factors that influenced each country's vulnerability to violent fragmentation.

4.4.1. Structural Conditions and the Risk of Fragmentation

The main question to raise regarding the structural conditions is about the reason why Syria and Libya were more likely to experience violent fragmentation than Egypt before the uprisings, because structural conditions deal with the situation that was present in the state structure before protests took place. Coercive institutions, social structures, and state organization were different, and that formed opportunities for the conflict long before protests took place. The most essential difference in state structure between Egypt, Syria, and Libya, preceding the uprisings, is coercive capacity and state institutionalization. States such as Egypt, with more centralized coercive institutions, were better positioned to protect authority during political crises, while divergent coercive structures allowed chances for violent fragmentation and breakdown (Bellin, 2004; Slater, 2010). The three cases were significantly different in how the organization of those institutions was before 2011. The highly institutionalized coercive institutions in Egypt are present in a centralized military hierarchy, organizational continuity, a unified chain of command, nationwide deployment capacity, and strong bureaucratic structures (Brownlee et al., 2015). The Egyptian military was not a unification of competing coercive actors; it was rather a national institution as a whole. Similarly, Syria had strong coercive institutions as well, but depended more heavily on a system that was highly securitized. The

substantial coercive capacity that Syria had was more linked to regime survival. Syria had intelligence agencies, an extensive security apparatus, centralized coercive authority, and regime-centered coercive structures (Bellin, 2004; Brownlee et al., 2015). Libya entered the uprisings with one of the weakest forms of coercive institutionalization. This is viewed through its fragmented military, weak national military hierarchy, revolutionary committees, and patronage networks. The Libyan regime made national military institutions weak on purpose to create a coercive apparatus if opposition began, but it lacked cohesion and order (Brownlee et al., 2015). Egypt and Syria entered the uprisings with relatively strong coercive institutions able to maintain and manage state authority; in contrast, Libya's fragmented coercive structure created a greater chance for violent fragmentation and institutional breakdown when protests began.

To compare military autonomy and institutional interests across the three cases, they varied clearly across Egypt, Syria, and Libya before the uprisings, which affected the level of each state's fragmentation and its vulnerability. Military institutions that had organizational autonomy and corporate interests were better equipped to preserve cohesion during a crisis; however, militaries that were deliberately weakened or deeply entwined with regime survival were more vulnerable to fragmentation. The more institutionalized the military is, the more it is inclined to put state continuity and organizational survival as a priority instead of the fate of a particular ruler or a certain regime. Military institutions can have interests that oppose those of individual leaders (Bellin, 2004). The Egyptian military was characterized by the greatest degree of institutional autonomy among the three cases. The military had institutional strength, organizational continuity, and military centrality within the state (Cook, 2011). Mubarak could fall without the military collapsing or diverging because they possessed interests that reached far beyond Mubarak personally. These were mostly economic interests present in industrial production, military-owned economic enterprises, and infrastructure projects. Those interests helped in keeping the military unified while maintaining their institutional privileges, land ownership, and corporate identity (Cook, 2004). Mubarak’s regime fell because the military institution was structured to protect its own corporate interests and the state at all costs instead of protecting a certain regime (Droz-Vincent, 2011). There is a difference between state

and regime survival, and in the Egyptian case, the military acted as protector of state stability. In the Syrian case, although the military had a strong organizational capacity, it was more linked to regime survival, which mattered more than state stability. Differing from Egypt, the survival of the coercive apparatus was more connected to the survival of the Assad regime in particular. This situation made the military more inclined to defend the regime when protests started, while disregarding siding with the citizens. The Syrian regime formed coercive institutions in ways that reduced the likelihood of elite defection and increased loyalty (Albrecht, 2015). The Syrian military was overall characterized by dependence on loyal security networks and stronger integration between state security and regime interests. This caused overlap between regime and coercive institutions, which made the military protect the ruling coalition. Syrian coercive institutions became deeply centered and connected to the political foundations of the regime (Heydemann, 2013). The Libyan case presented the opposite extreme. The military could never acquire the institutional autonomy presented in Egypt, as Qaddafi actively prevented the rise of a strong national military. The policy of Qaddafi regime was about creating competing security organizations, making the national military weak on purpose, and developing coup-proofing strategies. The development of autonomous state institutions was deliberately reduced to decrease the likelihood of coup threats (Vandewalle, 2012). The military was also characterized by fragmentation, militia-style coercive structures, and patronage networks. It can be said, though, that Libya's coercive apparatus had already diverged long before the beginning of the uprisings (Lacher, 2020). As protests expanded, the weaknesses of the military contributed to the acceleration of the fragmentation of state control and the rapid erosion of centralized authority. Competing armed actors emerged as a result of weak central command structures, which increased the probability of violent fragmentation once the uprising began (International Crisis Group, 2011b). In contrast, the Libyan case lacked the institutional cohesion required to protect the authority. The degree of military autonomy was very different in the three cases. Egypt had the highest degree of institutional autonomy and corporate identity, and this allowed the armed forces to place institutional continuity over regime survival. Syria's coercive institutions were better integrated with the ruling regime, while Libya's deliberately hollowed-out military was not cohesive or autonomous enough to maintain authority during the

crisis. Such differences were a major factor in a state's vulnerability to fracturing when protests broke out.

Social fragmentation and cleavage structures were present in all three cases. However, the social structure where grievances existed in each case was organized differently. The differences in the social structure itself affected the extent to which political crises can develop into violent conflicts. Many societies can experience social grievances without armed conflict; grievances cannot explain civil war on their own. The indicator is how social divisions are mobilized and organized. Divided social environments can give organizational possibilities when the state authority is weak; Fragmented ecosystems are thought to be conducive to the creation of insurgency and armed challenger groups (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Similar to the two other cases in Syria and Libya, Egypt experienced social grievances but did not possess many of the social conditions connected to violent fragmentation. Social grievances are corruption, inequality, unemployment, urban concentration of opposition activity, and authoritarian exclusion. However, these societal complaints were not followed by tribal militarization, entrenched militia networks, or regional armed autonomy, all of which are conditions for an armed conflict. Rather than through tribal, regional, or community formations, opposition activity emerged inside a nationally linked political sphere. While Ketchley (2017) demonstrates that mobilization was primarily organized through urban and nationally connected protest networks, Brownlee et al. (2015) contend that these complaints boosted the potential for protest. As a result, collective action rather than dispersed territorial or identity-based mobilization gave rise to political disagreement. To explain the Syrian case, Syria had deeper communal and social cleavages that encouraged more identity-based mobilization during protests. Many divisions were present in the Syrian society, such as communal identities, uneven state-society relations, sectarian divisions, and localized grievances. These created social structures that could be mobilized once political violence was stronger, without automatically producing conflict immediately (Heydemann, 2013). As Albrecht (2015) shows, the Syrian dictatorship relied significantly on coercive mechanisms intended to ensure regime survival, widening gaps between the ruling coalition and various societal groups. Comparing the three cases, Libya had the highest degree of territorial and social

fragmentation. Fragmentation is either seen in regional identities or tribal divisions, causing localized power structures and weaker national integration. While Lacher (2020) emphasizes the role of localized authority and fragmented governance, Vandewalle (2012) contends that insufficient institutional integration increased the political significance of regional and tribal systems. As a result, after the rebellion started, there were more chances for fragmentation due to the inadequacy of national institutions. Libya had grievances alongside territorial and tribal divisions, Egypt had grievances without significant territorial fragmentation, and Syria had grievances alongside deeper communal cleavages. Egypt lacked many of the social and territorial elements that encourage violent fragmentation, even though all three examples had serious grievances. Libya had more pronounced tribal and regional differences, whilst Syria had more profound communal divisions.

The organizational characteristics of opposition movements also affected how political contention developed at the beginning of the protests. Organizational groups were different in their structure, capacity, and strength for collective action among the three cases. Opposition organization has a crucial role in the onset of civil war and determines if contention develops through repression, armed conflict, or protest. Egypt had the strongest opposition networks before the uprisings; however, they focused on collective action and political reform instead of armed struggle. These opposition networks were seen in labour protest networks, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the April 6 Youth Movement. Significant mobilization capacity was developed through these organizations, and they were characterized by being largely protest-oriented and civilian (Brownlee et al., 2015; Ketchley, 2017). At the same time, the development of opposition groups took place under controlled pluralism and legacies of repression, which shaped their organizational limits and prevented them from becoming unified armed actors (Torres-Van Antwerp, 2022). Opposition action did occur in Syria, but it faced far more obstacles. Limited organizational development, dispersed resistance, and harsh repression were examples of these constraints. Prior to the revolt, opposition groups struggled to form substantial national organizational structures. Repression hampered the development of unified opposition networks and contributed to fragmentation (International Crisis Group, 2011c; Heydemann, 2013). Syrian opposition action remained more constrained by authoritarian control,

monitoring, and the lingering impacts of fear, in contrast to Egypt, where opposition networks had expanded their capacities for protest. This contributed to the difficulty of creating a nationally coordinated opposition movement at the start of the uprising and made early conflict less organizationally cohesive (Pearlman, 2016; Mazur, 2021). Among Egypt and Syria, Libya had the weakest national opposition structures. Opposition activity continued to be divided and also lacked national organizational coherence. This weakness was connected to the restricted development of civil society under Qaddafi's rule, where regime control limited the emergence of autonomous national political organizations (Vandewalle, 2012). As a result, anti-regime activity remained fragmented and was more dependent on localized actors rather than cohesive national opposition movements (Lacher, 2020). Opposition organizations in Egypt were more focused on political reform and protest than on using force. In contrast, Syria and Libya had more dispersed opposition groups at the start of their uprisings, reflecting broader contrasts in political organization prior to 2011.

4.4.2. Elite Cohesion and Defection During Protest Onset

The primary question to address in this section is why the onset of the protest led to different patterns of elite behavior across the three cases. During the initial stages of contention, the behavior of coercive elites determined whether political crises would remain manageable or create opportunities for the formation of an armed challenger. Structural conditions clearly show the environment where uprisings started, but they are unable to identify why some political crises turned into an armed conflict, while others did not. The choices of elites, either being united behind existing institutions or diverging into competing factions during periods of uncertainty affect opportunities of civil war. Protest onset raises uncertainty for both rulers and opposition actors, and the elite's decision at this stage becomes critical. The reaction of coercive elites is sometimes more important than the protest itself because it identifies whether state authority remains unified. Elite cohesiveness refers to the ability of political and coercive elites to maintain unity, centralized decision-making, and command structures throughout a crisis. Opportunities for fragmentation decrease when elites remain cohesive because the state protects its organizational

continuity. Defections and elite fragmentation can arise due to disagreements among ruling elites and political defections, resulting in weakening of centralized authority and military defections. Defections are especially significant in times of political crises, as they increase uncertainty about the state's capacity to maintain authority. When major political or military actors in the ruling coalition defect, they send the message that regime survival is no longer guaranteed. Political change is frequently precipitated by abrupt changes in expectations, when people reappraise their preferences as they perceive existing authority to be crumbling (Kuran, 1991). Hence, early defections can lead to subsequent ones by changing the perceived strength of the regime and by raising uncertainty about the benefits of loyalty. Elite fragmentation can thus accelerate political crises and create opportunities for broader challenges to state authority. Fragmentation makes state coordination weaker, defections can give opposition movements resources, and elite division opens chances for armed challenger formation. The extent to which elites stayed united during protest onset affected whether contention would evolve into a more violent struggle or stay political. Elite behavior during contentious episodes is important, allowing transition from political contention to violent conflict (Della Porta et al., 2018). Thus, the crucial distinction between the three cases was not whether or not protest occurred, but instead the extent to which political and coercive elites remained unified once contention arose. Where elite cohesion generally bolstered the resilience of the state, elite fragmentation created space for conflict and the rise of armed challengers.

Both Egypt and Syria initially experienced cohesion without immediate fragmentation. Both regimes responded in different ways to the uprisings and did not see immediate divergence with the coercive apparatus. The state authority, therefore, stayed largely united during the beginning of the crisis. For Egypt, the military high command stayed united throughout the initial stages of the uprising. Military leadership continued operating through existing institutions, command structures remained intact, coercive coordination was preserved, and large-scale defections did not emerge. The protests placed considerable pressure on the Egyptian regime, but the military remained a cohesive institution and did not split into competing factions. The military's institutional strength, organizational continuity, and centrality to the

Egyptian state allowed it to maintain coherence in the face of the uprising (Cook, 2011). The preservation of military cohesion reduced the level of uncertainty in the coercive apparatus, as command structures remained intact and officers did not dissolve into competing centers of loyalty (Bou Nassif, 2020). Thus, protest pressure eroded the regime's political support, but did not generate immediate openings for coercive fragmentation or civil conflict. Similarly, Syria managed to maintain elite cohesion at the beginning of contention. In Syria, security institutions remained loyal, and the ruling coalition remained united. This allowed command structures to survive and enabled the regime to retain control over coercive institutions. The Syrian regime's ability to preserve loyalty within the coercive apparatus was connected to coup-proofing and regime survival strategies that reduced the likelihood of immediate elite fragmentation (Albrecht, 2015). Syria was therefore different from Libya because it did not experience an early split among the coercive elite despite increasing unrest and instability. Even as protests expanded, the regime maintained control over the coercive apparatus through the preservation of military cohesion and elite unity during protest (Bou Nassif, 2020). In Egypt, cohesion preserved institutional continuity, while in Syria, cohesion supported regime resilience.

Libya was different from Egypt and Syria as it experienced defections and elite fragmentation even during the early stages of the crisis. Those defections made the regime more fragile in its ability to respond in a unified way, and it further reduced the coherence of the coercive apparatus. Defections started relatively early, undermined the authority of the regime, and even diplomatic defections occurred, and further challenges to regime authority increased (International Crisis Group, 2011b). Institutional weakness caused the inability of the regime to maintain cohesion and fragment early on (Vandewalle, 2012). In Libya, elite fragmentation weakened centralized command and reduced the regime's ability to coordinate coercion effectively. As regime control eroded, state authority became increasingly unstable, allowing alternative centers of power to emerge and compete with the existing political order. This fragmentation not only weakened Qaddafi's regime from within; it also created openings for new actors to challenge state authority and claim control over territory, resources, and coercive capacity. Libya's crisis, therefore, moved beyond protest pressure because the collapse of centralized

authority enabled fragmented governance and competing power structures to develop during the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2011b; Lacher, 2020).

The comparison shows that the simple size of protest cannot explain the different outcomes in the three cases. Egypt and Syria have succeeded in maintaining elite cohesion for different purposes: institutional continuity in Egypt and regime survival in Syria. In Libya, however, early elite splits and defections undercut consolidated power from the start. These differences create the conditions for the potential for civil war onset, as elite fragmentation can generate the organizational openings through which armed challengers emerge. The next section, therefore, examines the extent to which the presence or absence of such organizational pathways affected the emergence of armed challengers and, ultimately, the transition from political contention to civil war.

4.4.3. Armed Challenger Formation

Armed challengers appeared in Syria and Libya but not in Egypt because the most important difference between the three cases was the emergence of organizations able to sustain armed conflict against the state. Regime crisis, protest intensity, and grievances were not strong indicators on their own, since civil war onset requires more than political opposition and protest mobilization. This process involves several conditions, such as access to weapons and coercive resources, the development of leadership structures, and military coordination, all of which create the organizational foundations necessary for insurgency (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). Civil war also depends on the organization of violence, since armed conflict requires actors capable of using violence in a sustained and coordinated way rather than through isolated or spontaneous confrontation (Kalyvas, 2006). In this sense, armed challengers do not emerge automatically from protest; they require organizational foundations that allow political contention to be transformed into military confrontation (Staniland, 2014). The essential question is why these organizational underpinnings existed in Syria and Libya but did not arise in Egypt.

Egypt experienced mobilization without militarization. Civilian opposition networks indeed existed, challenging the regime; however, there were limited defections and

an absence of military infrastructure, armed wings, and territorial bases. Protest networks were only used for mobilization, and they were united (Ketchley, 2017). The protests in Egypt had an opposition organization but a civilian nature of mobilization (Brownlee et al., 2015). Egypt could protest, but not to launch an insurgency. The military was united and without fragmentation (Bou Nassif, 2020). Opposition actors were unable to obtain the military know-how, leadership structures, and coercive resources required for insurgent formation due to the lack of notable defections.

In Syria, defection and insurgent formation occurred gradually as a result of military defections, providing opposition actors with organizational resources. Defecting officers provided military skills, which helped insurgency coordination and the formation of the Free Syrian Army. Furthermore, Syria experienced a militarization process and organizational development of armed groups (Staniland, 2014). The defections that were made in Syria were the stepping stones of transforming opposition actors into organizations able to sustain armed conflict, and supply armed opposition groups with leadership, organizational experience, trained personnel, and access to coercive resources.

Libya developed an armed adversary in a distinct way. Libya's armed challengers arose more directly from coercive fragmentation and the breakdown of centralized authority, in contrast to Syria, where defections gradually helped organize armed resistance. Localized actors were able to obtain weapons, territory, and coercive resources due to the erosion of governmental control. As a result, several armed players acting through local and dispersed organizations emerged instead of a single, centralized rebel organization. Thus, the Libyan scenario demonstrates that armed challengers can emerge through institutional failure and the disintegration of unified state authority in addition to military defections (International Crisis Group, 2011b; Lacher, 2020).

This meant that militarization did not emerge from a single organized opposition movement with a clear command structure but from the breakdown of state authority itself. Armed groups were distributed unevenly throughout localities, often with little

coordination and separate sources of authority, making the opposition field fragmented from the outset (Lacher, 2020). The Libyan case, therefore, shows that the formation of armed challengers can arise out of institutional collapse and coercive fragmentation, where the lack of a unified state structure leads to the emergence of many armed actors, as opposed to a single centralized insurgent organization.

Comparing the three cases, it can be argued that the most significant difference across the three cases was the absence or emergence of organizational pathways to the formation of armed challengers. In Egypt, opposition remained civilian, and there was no organizational pathway to insurgency. In Syria, defections gave way to supplied organizational resources, and as a result, armed opposition became institutionalized. In Libya, fragmentation generated many different armed challengers. Thus, armed challenger formation is the underlying mechanism linking protest to civil war onset, as it is when opposition actors can engage in sustained organized violence.

In sum, the comparison suggests that armed challenger formation was the key mechanism linking protest to the onset of civil war. All three cases experienced severe political crises, large-scale contention, and challenges to regime authority. But these conditions did not produce the same outcome. Without significant defections, armed wings, territorial bases, and rival military structures, opposition networks could put political pressure on the regime, but could not become sustained armed organizations. In Syria and Libya, political contention became associated with armed organizations and followed different trajectories. Political conflict grew linked to armed organizations in Syria and Libya, and the two countries' paths diverged.

4.4.4. Explaining Divergent Outcomes

This chapter discussed the reasons for mass protest and regime change without civil war onset in Egypt and for the transition from political contention to armed conflict in Syria and Libya. The key premise is that civil war didn't just happen because protesters were large, grievances were intense, or authoritarian regimes were in

crisis. The three cases were all marked by high levels of political instability during the Arab Uprisings, but their diverging outcomes were due to differences in coercive institutional cohesion, elite behavior at the beginning of protests, and whether armed challengers were present. Egypt is the negative case in that, while undergoing a severe regime crisis, this crisis did not produce the organizational and coercive conditions necessary for sustained armed conflict.

The first key finding relates to structural conditions. Egypt entered the uprising with a concentrated repressive apparatus and a well-institutionalized military. The military forces maintained organizational continuity, a cohesive chain of command, and corporate interests that went beyond Mubarak's personal survival. This enabled the military to distance itself from the president while retaining the state and defending its institutional position. Syria, on the other hand, had robust coercive institutions, but these were more directly linked to regime survival and the ruling coalition's security. Libya, however, had the weakest coercive institutionalization of the three cases because Qaddafi purposely undermined the national military and depended on fragmented security organizations, patronage networks, and competing coercive bodies. These distinctions influenced how each state behaved when protests erupted. Egypt's institutionalized military prevented the potential of alternative armed authority, Syria's coercive infrastructure initially maintained regime cohesiveness, and Libya's fractured structure increased the likelihood of state breakdown.

The second finding addresses protest initiation and elite behavior. The early stages of the dispute were critical because they determined whether state power remained cohesive or began to split. Despite the growing number of protests and the erosion of Mubarak's political power, Egypt's military high command remained unified. Command structures remained intact, no large-scale defections occurred, and the coercive apparatus did not split into opposing groups. This eliminated ambiguity within the state and denied opposition actors access to coordinated coercive resources. Syria likewise maintained elite cohesion at the outset of the conflict, albeit for a different reason. In Egypt, cohesion ensured institutional continuity and state preservation; in Syria, cohesion was more intimately linked with regime survival. Libya took a different way. Early defections and elite fragmentation weakened

centralized authority, limited the regime's ability to coordinate repression, and allowed alternative centers of power to arise. What mattered was whether political and coercive elites remained united, or whether fragmentation created space for armed rivals.

The third and most crucial discovery is on armed challenger formation. Civil war necessitated the formation of organizations capable of sustaining armed struggle with the state. Egypt had protest potential, but it did not build an insurgency capability. Opposition players, such as youth movements, labor networks, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other protest organizations, were able to organize protests and politically oppose the regime. They lacked armed wings, territorial bases, military infrastructure, extensive access to weaponry, and defecting officers capable of offering military knowledge and leadership. As a result, the Egyptian opposition might exert pressure on the administration and help remove Mubarak, but it could not become an organized armed opponent.

Syria and Libya pursued different paths to armed challenger formation. In Syria, militarization was linked to defections and the eventual development of armed opposition groups. Defecting troops and officers provided opposition actors with military expertise, leadership, and coercive resources, allowing some of the opposition to transition from protest to armed conflict. Libya took a different path, with armed challengers emerging through state collapse, militia formation, and the weakening of centralized authority. As regime control weakened, localized armed actors emerged and battled for territory, resources, and coercive power. Civil war became likely in Syria and Libya as opposition to the regime took on an armed form. Egypt did not encounter this mechanism.

The military remained unified, command structures survived, no major defections occurred, and opposition actors were unable to acquire the coercive resources required for an insurgency. The Egyptian story shows that autocratic breakdown and civil war outbreak are analytically separate outcomes. In Syria, defections and militarization gave opposition actors military skill, leadership, and coercive resources, allowing armed opposition formations to eventually emerge. In Libya, the

breakdown of centralized authority and the fragmentation of coercive power resulted in various armed actors rather than a cohesive resistance organization. Armed challenger formation is the essential process because it marks the point at which contentious politics ceases to be merely a challenge to regime authority and becomes an organized military clash capable of resulting in civil war.

The contrast to Syria and Libya reinforces the thesis's broader premise that political struggle becomes civil war only when it is militarized by organized armed challengers. It all hinges on whether political conflict turns militarized, with the development of organized armed challengers. Structural conditions impacted each case's vulnerability to fragmentation; protest onset determined whether elites remained cohesive or defected; and armed challenger formation determined if conflict could escalate into prolonged bloodshed. Egypt lacked this last mechanism, but Syria and Libya gained it via distinct processes. Thus, the chapter reveals that the commencement of civil war following mass protest is determined not only by the presence of contentious politics but also by whether the crisis generates organized armed players capable of threatening the state through continuous violence.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. Opening Synthesis: What the Thesis Has Demonstrated

This thesis has demonstrated that mass protest alone was not the defining factor of whether civil war ensued in the Arab Uprisings. In Egypt, Syria, and Libya, there was popular mobilization, a crisis of the regime, and a direct challenge to authoritarian rule. In all three cases, protest movements revealed the fragility of entrenched regimes and transformed contained grievances into visible collective action. But the consequences of these crises were quite different. Syria and Libya descended beyond the point of no return to civil war, whereas Egypt underwent mass protest and political rupture, and the overthrow of Mubarak, without descending into protracted armed conflict. The key consequence of this concept is that protest becomes civil war only when political dispute transforms into organized coercive confrontation under certain structural and proximal conditions.

The comparison worked out throughout the thesis shows that the decisive difference was not the existence of protest as such, nor even the intensity of regime crisis. Mass mobilization can weaken authoritarian rule, challenge regime legitimacy, and raise doubts about political survival. But these conditions do not automatically translate into civil war. Civil war demands another transformation: the opposition to the regime must be organized on the basis of armed capacity. Thus, protest must evolve from a civilian mobilization to one that connects to actors that can recruit fighters, acquire weapons, build command structures, control or contest territory, and sustain violence against the state. Without this transition, even severe political crises are more likely to remain disputed than to progress into civil war. Hence, the thesis dismisses any explanation that views civil war as a direct or automatic consequence

of protest. Protest may be the beginning of a political crisis, but protest is not itself the mechanism of civil war onset. The key process is the transformation of protest capacity into insurgent capacity. This transformation depends on the organization of coercive power, on the behavior of elites, on the cohesion or fragmentation of state institutions, and on the ability of opposition actors to develop armed structures. In this sense, the Arab Uprisings are indicative of the political openness of mass mobilization. The outcome of the crisis can be regime change, repression, containment, transition, or armed conflict, depending on whether the crisis creates organized armed challengers.

The findings of this thesis also show that authoritarian crises need to be understood through the interaction between state institutions and opposition organizations. Protest can present a serious challenge to a regime if coercive institutions are cohesive and opposition actors are civilian, but without leading to civil war. When coercive institutions break down, elites defect, weapons become available, and opposition actors acquire military organization, protest can become the basis for sustained armed confrontation. Thus, the boundary between protest and civil war is crossed not only when violence occurs, but when violence becomes organized, sustained, and tied to actors capable of contesting state authority.

5.2. The Main Comparative Finding

The main comparative finding of this thesis is that Egypt, Syria, and Libya started from a common regional moment of mass protest, but diverged in their domestic trajectories because protest interacted differently with coercive institutions, elite behavior, and armed challenger formation in each case. The Arab Uprisings created a shared political context in which authoritarian rule was openly challenged, public grievances were made visible, and the legitimacy of regimes was seriously strained. But this common beginning did not have a common ending. The analogy suggests that the mere presence of protest cannot explain the onset of civil war. The question was whether protest was still a civilian form of contention or was associated with organized coercive capacity.

This finding can be stated in one proposition: Egypt experienced mobilization without militarization, Syria experienced progressive militarization, and Libya witnessed fast armed fragmentation. This distinction captures the different paths of the three cases. In Egypt, the uprising brought massive protests and a deep crisis for the regime, but no organized armed challenger emerged. Syria started as a protest movement, but it evolved over time towards armed confrontation as repression, defections, and the militarization of the opposition changed the nature of the conflict. The weak institutionalisation, elite fragmentation, territorial collapse, and access to weapons meant that armed actors emerged at an early stage in competition with each other, which pushed Libya even faster towards armed conflict. The comparison thus suggests that protest became civil war only when it crossed the threshold from political mobilization to organized armed confrontation.

The bigger conclusion is that protest intensity alone cannot explain the three occurrences. All three faced mass mobilization, authoritarian crisis, and political uncertainty. However, only Syria and Libya established the organizational circumstances required for long-term military conflict. Egypt did not collapse into civil war because the resistance was mostly civilian and the repressive apparatus remained institutionally consistent. Syria slid into civil war as a result of repression, defections, and the creation of armed opposition, which eventually generated challengers capable of battling the regime. Libya slid into civil war because of institutional weakness and coercive fragmentation, which facilitated the growth of armed forces.

This similarity lends credence to the thesis's larger premise that civil war requires more than complaints, protests, or instability. It necessitates armed organization and the ability to maintain violence over time (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Kalyvas, 2006; Staniland, 2014). The key comparative result is that protests do not escalate into civil war just because they are huge, furious, or directed against authoritarian rule. When political disagreements turn into organized coercive confrontations, they become civil wars. Egypt, Syria, and Libya represent three distinct paths of the Arab Uprisings, but they all point to the same essential conclusion: the key threshold is not protest itself, but armed challenger creation.

5.3. Why Egypt Did Not Become a Civil War Case

Egypt is significant to the thesis's premise because it illustrates that extreme protest, regime crisis, and even leadership removal do not always result in the outbreak of civil war. The Egyptian uprising applied great pressure on the Mubarak dictatorship, organized a vast number of citizens, and resulted in a decisive political rupture. However, the fall of Mubarak did not result in the collapse of the Egyptian state. This distinction is fundamental to the thesis. Egypt demonstrates that authoritarian breakdown and civil war outbreak are two distinct outcomes. A government can lose its ruler without losing the institutional foundations that support centralized authority and organized coercive power.

The most crucial reason Egypt did not become a civil war case was military coherence. The Egyptian military forces maintained institutional unity throughout the crisis. They did not split into opposing factions, nor did the line of command break down into competing centers of coercive authority. This was significant because civil war needed more than public outrage or anti-government mobilization. It needs a collapse in the state's monopoly on organized violence, or the rise of opposition actors capable of challenging the monopoly. In Egypt, the military remained the primary coercive institution and maintained the organizational capacity to ensure state continuity. The crisis undermined Mubarak's political authority, but it did not destabilize the military institution that supported the regime.

This is why Mubarak's removal should not be mistaken for the state's demise. The Egyptian military managed to separate itself from Mubarak while maintaining its own institutional status. It may allow the president to fall without causing the coercive apparatus to fracture. The distinction between the king and the military institution was decisive. When the fates of the ruler and the coercive apparatus become inextricably linked, dissent can drive coercive institutions to extreme repression, fragmentation, or collapse. In Egypt, however, the armed forces had institutional interests that went beyond Mubarak personally. The military prioritized not only the president's survival, but also the maintenance of its own organizational

power and the state's continuation. This allowed for regime change without the commencement of civil conflict.

Centralized coercive power was also maintained by the state. The rebellion did not result in many armed actors vying for control of territory, resources, or governmental institutions, despite the fact that it caused moments of chaos and uncertainty. No competing armed authority with a comparable capability emerged, and the military continued to be the predominant organized coercive player. As a result of this continuity, the Egyptian crisis did not develop into the kind of fractured coercive atmosphere that frequently leads to civil war. Instead of completely dismantling central authority, the transition following Mubarak's retirement occurred through already-existing institutions. This does not imply that Egypt's post-2011 course was democratic or stable. More precisely, it indicates that the crisis failed to produce the military organizational structure necessary for the start of a civil war.

Another important consideration was the lack of substantial military defections, which could have provided opposition forces with coercive resources. Defections are significant because they can change the political nature of the protest. Defecting troops or officers may give anti-regime forces weapons, military training, strategic expertise, leadership, and legitimacy. These resources have the potential to transform civilian opposition movements into armed adversaries. In Egypt, however, this process did not develop on a large enough scale to result in alternative military institutions. The military forces failed to develop a defecting core capable of organizing an insurgency against the state. As a result, the opposition did not acquire the military expertise or organizational infrastructure required to continue an armed conflict.

Egypt's opposition networks remained largely civilian. Youth activist networks, labor protest organizations, and political opposition forces all contributed significantly to mobilizing collective action and maintaining pressure on the regime. However, these actors did not grow into armed groups. Their strength lay in protest, coordination, public mobilization, and political pressure, rather than coercive power. This is why the distinction between protest and insurgency capacity is critical. Egypt had a

significant protest capability, but it did not turn insurgency capacity. Opposition actors could criticize the regime in public, but they couldn't coordinate long-term violence against the government.

5.4. Why Syria and Libya Became Civil War Cases

Syria and Libya became examples of civil war because protests eventually created armed challengers capable of sustaining confrontation with the state. Although the revolutions in both instances started as challenges to authoritarian power, they expanded beyond the realm of civilian protest. The character of the crisis was altered when political conflict was linked to an armed organization. Thus, the beginning of civil war was the common result in both Syria and Libya, but the processes leading to this result were different. Libya went from protest to armed fragmentation faster than Syria, which went from protest to militarization more slowly. This distinction is significant because it demonstrates that there are multiple ways for civil war to break out, provided that protests are organized around the use of coercive force.

The transition to civil conflict in Syria happened gradually. Over time, the regime's reaction and the growth of defections altered the course of the revolt, which started out primarily as civilian opposition to authoritarian authority. While military defections started to give some elements of the opposition military experience, organizational knowledge, and coercive resources, repression increased hostilities between the state and opposition groups. As several regions established their own kinds of armed defense and opposition activity, localized resistance also grew in significance. These procedures changed the conflict over time, but they did not immediately produce a cohesive armed opposition. Armed formations were associated with civilian protest, and the opposition gained the ability to use persistent violence to oppose the government.

The Syrian situation demonstrates that civil conflict does not necessitate the rapid collapse of the state. The dictatorship maintained enormous coercive power and continued to defend itself with coordinated state brutality. However, this did not stop the civil war. Instead, the interaction of repression, defections, and opposition

militarization eventually resulted in armed challenges. The Syrian trajectory highlights how a strong coercive apparatus can lead to civil war onset, and it is inextricably linked to regime survival, and its violent response pushes military intervention. In this view, Syria became a civil war not because of protests, but because they evolved into organized armed opposition.

Libya took a faster and more fractured course. Unlike Syria, where militarization built gradually, Libya suffered a quick breakdown of centralized authority once protests started. The fragility of state institutions, the fragmentation of coercive authority, elite defections, territorial collapse, and access to weapons provided early openings for armed players. As the dictatorship lost control of portions of the country, opposition to Qaddafi's authority grew increasingly linked to territorial control and armed conflict. Armed challengers arose not only as a result of incremental opposition organizing but also when the state's ability to monopolize coercive force weakened. Civil war resulted from the rapid institutional breakdown and the rise of armed players.

The Libyan instance is significant because it demonstrates that fragmentation can lead to the development of armed challengers just as much as gradual militarization. Due to Libya's inadequate national institutions, protests were not met with a unified coercive machinery that could handle the problem centrally. Rather, the crisis created room for other centers of coercive power. Weapons and territory were accessible to opposition actors, local armed groups, and defecting forces. As a result, the shift from protest to armed war happened more quickly. Therefore, Libya serves as an example of how civil war can break out swiftly due to the fragmentation of state authority before the conflict can be confined within political confrontation.

The comparison of Syria and Libya shows that they should not be considered as similar civil war instances. Syria portrays a more gradual process in which citizen protests became militarized through repression, defections, and the establishment of armed opposition groups. Libya exemplifies a faster process in which institutional failure and coercive fragmentation resulted in armed players. However, both situations support the same central premise. Protests in Syria and Libya turned into

civil wars only after opposition to the regime grew organized and coercive. The particular approach varied, but the fundamental process remained the same: political dispute was translated into armed conflict.

5.5. Coercive Institutions, Elite Behavior, and Armed Challenger Formation

The thesis's final comparative lesson is that how protests interacted with coercive institutions and elite behavior determined whether civil war broke out. The examples demonstrate that a regime's capacity for repression is not the only indicator of state power. The structure of coercive power was more important. Authoritarian coercive structures existed in Egypt, Syria, and Libya, but they differed in how they were set up and reacted to opposition. Coercive institutions in Egypt maintained centralized control and stayed cohesive. Although coercive institutions in Syria were originally cohesive, they were tightly linked to the survival of the regime, which led to an increase in violence. Coercive institutions in Libya were weak and dispersed, which increased the likelihood that centralized authority would crumble once protests started.

This distinction is crucial because, in times of crisis, coercive cohesion determined whether the state remained united or broke up. The military in Egypt could remove Mubarak without abandoning the state. This prevented the start of a civil war and allowed for regime change. Command structures, organizational cohesion, and authority over coercive resources were all maintained by the armed forces. The outcome was neither civil war nor democratic stability. The regime in Syria was more directly defended by the coercive apparatus. In addition to delaying collapse, this intensified conflict also contributed to the militarization of dissent. The crisis swiftly created room for a number of armed actors because institutionalized coercive power was weak in Libya. As a result, the comparison goes beyond just saying that some regimes were more powerful than others. The idea is that the internal structure of coercive institutions determined whether protest resulted in continuity, repression, or fragmentation.

The gap can also be explained by elite cohesiveness and defection. Elites not only respond to crises during large-scale protests, but they also influence their course.

Opposition actors have a harder time obtaining resources for armed conflict when political and coercive elites stay together. In addition to weakening centralized authority, elite defections can give opposition groups access to weapons, military know-how, organizational experience, and credibility. The kind of significant military defections that may have given rise to competing armed groups did not occur in Egypt. Defections in Syria progressively aided the militarization of the opposition. Faster elite disintegration in Libya undermined the government and gave armed players early opportunities. Therefore, elite behavior was important since it determined whether protests stayed political or were organized through coercion.

The central mechanism linking these discoveries is armed challenger formation. Civil war begins with more than grievances, persecution, or protest violence. It necessitates players capable of sustaining an armed confrontation with the state. This includes coercive resources, leadership, recruiting, weaponry, territory control, and command structures. This is why armed challenger formation serves as the thesis's central mechanism. Egypt lacked this mechanism. Syria gradually developed it. Libya produced it quickly due to institutional collapse and fragmentation.

This clarifies the thesis's distinction between protest and insurgent capacity. The ability to organize people, take over public areas, plan protests, and oppose authority through group action is known as protest capacity. The ability to plan armed conflict, find fighters, get weapons, uphold command structures, and continue conflict over time is referred to as insurgent capability. Egypt had the ability to protest, but not to launch an insurgency. Different pathways led to the development of insurgency potential in Libya and Syria. Libya achieved this through quick fragmentation and availability of weaponry, but Syria achieved this through slow militarization. One of the thesis's primary contributions is this dichotomy, which clarifies why widespread protests may result in regime crises without necessarily leading to civil wars.

5.6. Broader Implications for Popular Mobilization and Authoritarian Crises

The broader implication of this argument is that public mobilization should not be interpreted as either peaceful or violent. Protests are politically open-ended. It may

result in reform, repression, leadership change, negotiated transition, authoritarian restoration, or civil war. The outcome is determined by how protesters interact with state institutions, elite calculations, and opposition groups. Despite its political influence, Egypt's mobilization remained mostly civilian. In Syria and Libya, mobilization became linked to armed organizations, transcending ordinary contested politics. This conclusion is significant because it undermines interpretations that view public protest as a direct cause of civil war. Protest may highlight grievances and undermine authoritarian legitimacy, but it does not always result in armed activity. Many cultures endure intense protest without civil war because opposition movements are civilian, or the state maintains control over organized violence. The Arab Uprisings demonstrate that the political repercussions of protest are contingent on whether mobilization becomes military. As a result, the question is not only why individuals protest, but also whether protest develops the organizational potential for long-term military struggle.

Additionally, the thesis advances research on authoritarian crises. Before protests start, authoritarian regimes frequently seem secure, but widespread mobilization reveals the internal power structure. Not only is the survival of the ruler important, but so is the coherence of coercive institutions in the face of challenges to the monarch. Egypt demonstrates the distinction between state collapse and regime collapse. The state's organized coercive authority persisted after Mubarak's downfall. Syria serves as an example of how a dictatorship can maintain coercive coherence while still heading toward civil war if repression and desertion eventually give rise to armed opponents. Libya demonstrates how authoritarian crises can swiftly turn into state collapse due to inadequate institutionalization. These examples demonstrate that an authoritarian crisis becomes a civil war crisis only when the struggle for political power is structured around armed force.

5.7. Conditions Under Which a Protest Turns into Civil Conflict

According to the comparison made in this thesis, certain institutional and organizational circumstances are necessary for protest to escalate into civil strife. By itself, protest can generate political pressure, expose the frailty of authoritarian rule,

and raise doubts about a regime's future. However, unless it is linked to a broader disintegration or restructuring of coercive power, it does not turn into a civil war. Whether political conflict stays a civilian challenge to authority or is associated with forces that can engage in prolonged armed conflict is the crucial question. This implies that the conditions that enable mobilization to turn militarized are more important in determining the shift from protest to civil strife than the mobilization itself.

Fragmentation within coercive institutions is the first prerequisite. Opposition actors encounter significant challenges in obtaining the resources required for armed conflict when militaries, security services, or other coercive entities continue to be unified. A well-coordinated coercive machinery upholds the state's monopoly on organized violence, restricts access to weapons, and keeps rival armed institutions from emerging. On the other hand, a political crisis may turn into a military crisis if coercive institutions break apart. The state's capacity to control opposition is weakened by fragmentation, which also raises questions about allegiance and may provide opposition actors access to personnel, weapons, or command expertise. In this way, one of the key factors determining whether a protest stays political or turns military is how coercive power is organized.

Elite defection is the second prerequisite. Defections are significant because they change the material balance of power during a crisis as well as how it is perceived. Defections politically indicate that allegiance may not be the best course of action and that the government is no longer completely secure. Defections can provide anti-regime actors with military expertise, leadership, weaponry, and legitimacy. In authoritarian environments, where opposition movements frequently have restricted access to coercive tools prior to protests, this is particularly crucial. A protest movement may become an armed challenger when officers, troops, or political elites desert. Defections are therefore significant not only because they undermine the regime but also because they might serve as an organizational link between civilian strife and armed conflict.

The availability of weaponry and opportunities in the territory constitutes the third requirement. Political desire alone is insufficient for armed adversaries. For them to

live and function, they require certain spatial and material conditions. While territorial openings give armed organizations a place to organize, recruit, train, and challenge state authority, access to weapons allows for prolonged conflict. Opposition actors may have the chance to establish new centers of power when the state loses control over territory. This does not imply that territorial control ought to be total or consistent from the start. Instead, armed actors can strengthen their position and turn protest into organized warfare by taking advantage of even partial or uneven territorial openings.

The fourth condition is oppositional organization. A protest movement must have or create mechanisms that allow it to expand beyond spontaneous mobilization. Civilian opposition networks may be adept at organizing demonstrations, strikes, and public claims, but civil war necessitates a distinct type of organization. Armed challengers require recruitment methods, command structures, logistical capability, leadership, and the ability to plan violence over time. Without these structures, protests may be politically significant but militarily constrained. As a result, the essential question is not whether opposition exists, but whether it can build the organizational capacity to fight.

When protests combine with coercive fragmentation, elite defection, weapons access, territorial openings, and armed organization, civil strife erupts. These conditions do not have to appear in the exact same order in each situation. Some conflicts grow gradually through repression and defections, while others emerge quickly as a result of institutional breakdown and geographical fragmentation. What matters is that the crisis generates organized, armed competitors. Protest is less likely to turn into civil war when coercive institutions remain unified, elites do not defect in ways that strengthen opposition actors, weapons stay out of reach, territorial control remains consolidated, and opposition networks remain civilian. As a result, organizational considerations take precedence over emotional, ideological, or numerical factors.

This result helps to explain why the research on protest should be separated from the study of civil war onset, even though the two may be related. Protest can be huge, disruptive, and politically transformational without culminating in civil conflict.

Civil war necessitates a progression from collective political action to organized bloodshed. This movement isn't automatic. It depends on whether the crisis generates armed actors capable of challenging the state. As a result, the circumstances listed here explain why protests escalate in some cases but not in others.

5.8. Comparative Value of the Negative Case

This thesis also shows how important it is to explain both the transition to civil war and the non-transition. Cases when armed conflict really starts are frequently the focus of studies on the onset of civil wars. These episodes are essential because they illustrate the emergence of armed players, the development of violence, and the contestation of state power. Nonetheless, instances in which civil war does not break out are just as significant since they shed light on the mechanisms that did not materialize. The argument could seem overly straightforward in the absence of a negative scenario, as if protests inevitably turn into violent conflict when a regime is under significant pressure. This assumption is prevented by Egypt's inclusion.

Egypt's importance stems from the fact that it experienced many of the conditions associated with a political crisis while avoiding the outbreak of civil war. This is analytically useful because it distinguishes political rupture from violent conflict. Egypt demonstrates that the absence of civil war does not mean the lack of protests, repression, instability, or government change. Rather, it is the lack of a precise mechanism: an organised armed challenger formation. This enables the thesis to explain not just why the emergence of civil war occurred in certain circumstances, but also why it was prevented in others. In this way, the non-emergence of civil war is not viewed as a passive or obvious consequence. It becomes part of the explanation.

The thesis is strengthened by this comparison reasoning, which demonstrates that the argument does not rely just on post-event observations of violent incidents. Rather, the comparison finds a threshold that was crossed in some instances but not in others. The rise of organized coercive capacity outside the state was the threshold, not mass mobilization by itself. The thesis becomes more specific as a result. It avoids both the

problem of interpreting civil war as a unique result that cannot be explained comparatively and the mistake of treating all authoritarian crises as comparable just because they start with dissent. The three examples show how, depending on internal institutional and organizational circumstances, the same geographical wave of conflict can result in various outcomes.

The negative instance clarifies the state's involvement. If the theory were limited to civil war examples, it might overemphasize the acts of opposition forces while underestimating the impact of coercive continuity. Egypt demonstrates how the state's ability to maintain centralized coercive authority can prevent protests from emerging into violent conflict. This does not imply that the state becomes democratic, legitimized, or stable. It indicates that the coercive conditions required for civil war to break out may not always exist. The distinction is significant because it isolates the issue of regime change from that of military combat.

As a result, the comparison helps to provide a more balanced picture of the Arab Uprisings. It explains both the rise of armed adversaries and their disappearance. It shows that civil war onset and non-onset are not distinct events, but rather two outputs of the same analytical problem. Civil war begins only when protest generates organized armed capacity; if this capacity does not arise, even a severe political crisis may remain below the threshold of civil conflict.

5.9. Limitations and Further Research

The onset of civil war has been the specific emphasis of this thesis, and this concentration establishes boundaries. Not all of the political developments that followed the original protests are explained by the argument. The long-term development of the Syrian civil war, the ongoing fragmentation of Libya, and the eventual authoritarian restoration in Egypt are not fully explained. International intervention, regional rivalries, economic collapse, ideological struggle, institutional reconstruction, and the shifting tactics of armed groups are some of the other elements that contribute to these latter trajectories. These elements are significant, yet they fall under a different category of analysis. This thesis has focused on the

onset of civil war rather than the complete historical evolution of each case following the onset or non-onset of civil war.

The theory is further limited by its emphasis on three cases from the Arab Uprisings. This comparison is analytically useful because Egypt, Syria, and Libya all experienced a regional revolt, but the results were different. However, the idea might be examined further by comparing it to comparable occurrences of authoritarian protest. Future studies could look into whether the same mechanism occurs in cases outside the Middle East and North Africa. It could also examine examples in which protests resulted in negotiated transition, authoritarian restoration, limited insurgency, or failed militarization. Such research would help to determine whether armed challenger creation operates similarly across areas and political systems.

Another barrier is the involvement of multinational actors. This thesis acknowledges that external involvement can influence civil war dynamics, particularly once an armed conflict begins. However, the major thesis concentrates on domestic onset mechanisms, such as coercive institutions, elite behavior, and opposition organization. Future research should look more specifically at how international recognition, military aid, sanctions, foreign involvement, and regional alliances influence the creation of armed challengers. External actors may not cause protests on their own, but they can affect whether opposition actors gain resources, legitimacy, or military might. This would broaden the argument by tying internal militarized mechanisms to global situations.

Further studies should look into the internal growth of opposition organizations in greater detail. This thesis focuses on the distinction between protest capacity and insurgent capacity, but future research might investigate how movements transition from one type of ability to another. This would necessitate increased focus on leadership, internal discipline, funding, recruiting, philosophy, and local networks. It would also necessitate an examination of why certain resistance organizations remain civilian despite repression, while others adopt armed techniques. Such research would provide a better understanding of the organizational decisions and constraints that determine the move from protest to armed conflict.

The main point is not undermined by these restrictions. Instead, they provide their parameters. The goal of the thesis has been to explain why, in certain Arab Spring countries, civil war followed protest, but not in Egypt. It has been maintained that this difference depends on whether organized armed challengers were created as a result of protest. Therefore, by pinpointing the process that links mass mobilization to armed conflict and explaining why this connection does not always develop, the argument advances the study of the beginning of civil war. This paradigm can be expanded upon in future studies by testing it in more situations, taking into account global variables, and taking a closer look at the internal evolution of opposition groups.

5.10. Final Conclusion

This thesis concludes that civil war followed the Arab Uprisings in Syria and Libya because protests turned into organized armed confrontations, although Egypt remained below that barrier. The distinction between the three situations was not the existence of a protest. All three cases saw widespread mobilization, political uncertainty, and threats to authoritarian leadership. The distinction was whether these crises resulted in armed opponents capable of continuing violence against the state. Syria and Libya crossed this threshold in different ways, although Egypt did not.

Egypt indicates that government crisis and civil war outbreak are not synonymous. The movement challenged Mubarak's regime and contributed to his ouster, although the Egyptian state maintained centralized control over organized coercion. The military remained united; big defections did not result in alternative military formations, and opposition networks were mostly civilian. This stopped protest capacity from developing into insurgency capacity. Egypt demonstrates that even severe authoritarian crises can fall below the threshold of civil war provided coercive institutions and elites remain united, and no organized armed adversary arises.

Syria and Libya highlight the polar opposite of the thesis, as well as how civil war can erupt via several routes. Syria's conflict evolved gradually as a result of repression, defections, small resistance, and opposition militarization. Libya took a

faster course, with weak state institutions, elite fragmentation, territorial collapse, and weapons access resulting in early armed players and competing centers of coercive authority. Despite differences in order and speed, both events reached the same critical point: opposition to the regime took organized armed form.

The bigger takeaway is that protests should be viewed as politically open-ended. It may result in reform, repression, leadership transition, authoritarian restoration, or civil war. The outcome is determined by whether the political dispute becomes structured around coercive power. This is why grievances and the intensity of protests cannot explain the commencement of civil war. They may help explain why people mobilize, but they do not explain why opposition actors can engage in long-term violent conflict. Civil war begins when dissent becomes more than just a citizen challenge to authority, but also involves armed actors capable of contesting the state.

As a result, this thesis contends that armed challenger development is the primary link between public protest and the beginning of civil war. The mechanism involves organizational and coercive capabilities, including weapons, leadership, recruiting, command structures, territory opportunities, and the ability to maintain violence. Where these prerequisites do not exist, protests may be disruptive yet civil. Where protests do materialize, they can serve as the foundation for an insurgency. This disparity explains why some conflicts turn into civil wars while others stay non-militarized.

The Arab Uprisings triggered a regional crisis of authoritarian leadership, but they did not result in a single political trajectory. Egypt, Syria, and Libya demonstrate how the same regional wave of mobilization can produce various results depending on home institutional and organizational factors. The thesis's concluding point is straightforward: public protest can spark a crisis of political authority, but civil war begins only when that crisis generates organized armed challengers capable of contesting the state via prolonged violence.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez, 2011 Arap Ayaklanmaları sonrasında Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'da ortaya çıkan farklı siyasal ve güvenlik sonuçlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak incelemektedir. Tezin temel çıkış noktası, aynı bölgesel protesto dalgasının her ülkede aynı sonucu üretmemesidir. 2011 yılında Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika'da birçok ülkede otoriter rejimlere karşı kitlesel protestolar ortaya çıkmış, siyasal dışlanma, ekonomik hoşnutsuzluk, yolsuzluk, sosyal adalet talebi ve rejim meşruiyetine yönelik itirazlar görünür hale gelmiştir. Bu ortak bölgesel bağlama rağmen, protestoların sonuçları birbirinden önemli ölçüde farklılaşmıştır. Suriye ve Libya'da kitlesel protestolar zaman içinde iç savaşın başlangıcına dönüşürken, Mısır'da geniş çaplı mobilizasyon, ciddi bir rejim krizi ve Hüsnü Mübarek'in iktidardan uzaklaştırılması yaşanmış, fakat sürdürülebilir bir iç savaş ortaya çıkmamıştır. Bu farklılaşma, Arap Ayaklanmaları'nı yalnızca tarihsel bir protesto dalgası olarak değil, aynı zamanda karşılaştırmalı siyaset açısından açıklanması gereken analitik bir problem olarak ele almayı gerekli kılmaktadır.

Tezin temel araştırma sorusu şudur: 2011 protesto dalgası neden Suriye ve Libya'da iç savaşın başlangıcına yol açarken, Mısır'da kitlesel protesto ve rejim krizine rağmen iç savaşın ortaya çıkmasına neden olmamıştır? Bu soru, protesto ile iç savaş arasında doğrudan, otomatik ve kaçınılmaz bir ilişki olmadığını varsayar. Üç vakada da otoriter yönetimlere karşı geniş çaplı toplumsal mobilizasyon, rejim otoritesinin sarsılması, siyasal belirsizlik ve halkın mevcut yönetime karşı kamusal meydan okuması görülmüştür. Buna rağmen yalnızca Suriye ve Libya'da protestolar uzun süreli silahlı çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Bu nedenle tez, "neden insanlar protesto etti?" sorusundan çok, "neden bazı protestolar silahlı çatışmaya dönüştü, bazıları ise bu eşiğin altında kaldı?" sorusuna odaklanmaktadır.

Tezin ana argümanı, kitlesel protestonun tek başına iç savaşın başlangıcını açıklamak için yeterli olmadığıdır. Protesto, bir rejimin meşruiyetini zayıflatabilir, otoriter yönetimi ciddi bir krizle karşı karşıya bırakabilir ve siyasal değişim baskısı yaratabilir. Ancak bu durum otomatik olarak iç savaş anlamına gelmez. İç savaşın başlaması için protesto hareketinin yalnızca rejime karşı kamusal muhalefet üretmesi değil, aynı zamanda devlet otoritesine karşı sürdürülebilir şiddet kullanabilecek örgütlü silahlı aktörler yaratması gerekir. Bu nedenle tez, protesto kapasitesi ile isyan kapasitesi arasında temel bir ayrım yapmaktadır. Protesto kapasitesi, muhalif aktörlerin geniş kitleleri harekete geçirme, meydanları doldurma, grevler ve gösteriler düzenleme, rejime karşı sembolik ve siyasal baskı kurma becerisidir. İsyan kapasitesi ise bundan farklıdır; silah, liderlik, komuta yapısı, askeri deneyim, insan gücü, lojistik ağlar, bölgesel hareket alanı ve şiddeti zaman içinde sürdürebilme becerisi gerektirir.

Bu ayrım, tezin bütün karşılaştırmalı mantığını şekillendirmektedir. Mısır'da protesto kapasitesi oldukça yüksekti. Tahrir Meydanı ve diğer büyük şehirlerde kitlesel gösteriler gerçekleşmiş, rejimin meşruiyeti derinden sarsılmış ve Mübarek iktidardan uzaklaştırılmıştır. Ancak bu protesto kapasitesi isyan kapasitesine dönüşmemiştir. Muhalefet hareketleri büyük ölçüde sivil ve siyasal nitelikte kalmış, alternatif askeri komuta yapıları, silahlı kanatlar veya devlet otoritesine karşı uzun süreli çatışma yürütebilecek örgütlü silahlı yapılar ortaya çıkmamıştır. Buna karşılık Suriye ve Libya'da protesto süreçleri, farklı yollarla da olsa, örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucuların oluşumuna yol açmıştır. Suriye'de bu süreç daha kademeli biçimde, baskı, askerî ayrışmalar, yerel direniş ve muhalefetin militarizasyonu üzerinden ilerlemiştir. Libya'da ise kurumsal zayıflık, hızlı elit parçalanması, silah erişimi ve devlet otoritesinin erken çözülmesi, silahlı aktörlerin daha hızlı ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur.

Bu nedenle tezde üç kavramın açık biçimde ayrılması önemlidir: kitlesel protesto, iç savaşın başlangıcı ve örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucu. Kitlesel protesto, otoriteye karşı geniş çaplı kolektif eylemleri ifade eder. Bu eylemler rejime karşı önemli siyasal baskı üretebilir, fakat tek başına iç savaş anlamına gelmez. İç savaşın başlangıcı ise yalnızca protestolar sırasında yaşanan şiddet, polis baskısı veya kısa

süreli çatışmalarla eş tutulamaz. İç savaşın başlangıcı, siyasal mücadelenin örgütlü, sürekli ve silahlı aktörler üzerinden devlet otoritesine karşı yürütülen bir çatışma biçimine dönüşmesini ifade eder. Örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucu ise devlete karşı şiddeti sürdürebilecek kapasiteye sahip muhalif aktördür. Bu aktörün varlığı, protesto hareketinin artık yalnızca sivil muhalefet veya rejim karşıtı gösteri olmaktan çıktığını ve askeri bir mücadele biçimine yaklaştığını gösterir.

Tezin açıklaması bu nedenle yalnızca hoşnutsuzluklara, ekonomik sorunlara veya rejim baskısına dayanmaz. Bu unsurlar protestoların neden ortaya çıktığını açıklamaya yardımcı olabilir, fakat protestoların neden bazı durumlarda iç savaşa dönüştüğünü tek başına açıklamaz. Bir toplumda yoksulluk, siyasal dışlanma, baskı ve eşitsizlik olabilir; fakat bu koşulların iç savaş üretmesi için muhalefetin silahlı kapasite kazanması ve devletin zorlayıcı otoritesine rakip olacak örgütlü bir güç oluşturması gerekir. Bu noktada devletin zor kullanma kapasitesi, güvenlik kurumlarının bütünlüğü, elitlerin kriz anındaki davranışı ve muhalefet ağlarının örgütsel niteliği belirleyici hale gelir. Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'ın karşılaştırılması bu yüzden önemlidir; çünkü üç ülkede de protestolar yaşanmış, fakat devlet kurumlarının dayanıklılığı ve muhalefetin silahlı kapasite geliştirme imkânı farklı olmuştur.

Bu tez, Suriye ve Libya'yı iç savaşın ortaya çıktığı pozitif vakalar, Mısır'ı ise iç savaşın ortaya çıkmadığı negatif vaka olarak ele almaktadır. Ancak Suriye ve Libya aynı kategoriye yerleştirilse de, bu iki vaka özdeş kabul edilmemektedir. Suriye, protestodan iç savaşa geçişin daha yavaş ve kademeli biçimde gerçekleştiği bir örnektir. Libya ise protestoların daha hızlı bir kurumsal çözülme ve silahlı parçalanma içinde iç savaşa dönüştüğü bir örnektir. Mısır ise, kitlesel protesto ve rejim değişimi yaşanmasına rağmen iç savaşın başlamadığı bir örnek olarak, tezin ana argümanını daha güçlü hale getirmektedir. Çünkü Mısır vakası, yoğun protesto, rejim krizi ve lider değişiminin iç savaş için yeterli olmadığını göstermektedir.

Bu bağlamda tezin temel katkısı, protesto ile iç savaş arasındaki eksik bağlantıyı örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucu oluşumu üzerinden açıklamasıdır. Protestolar siyasal otorite krizini başlatabilir, rejimlerin meşruiyetini sarsabilir ve otoriter yönetimleri

ciddi baskı altında bırakabilir. Ancak iç savaş, bu krizin silahlı aktörler tarafından örgütlü ve sürdürülebilir şiddete dönüştürülmesiyle başlar. Bu nedenle tezin temel sonucu, iç savaşın protestoların varlığından değil, protestoların örgütlü silahlı kapasite üretip üretmemesinden kaynaklandığıdır. Suriye ve Libya'da bu kapasite ortaya çıkmış, Mısır'da ise ortaya çıkmamıştır.

Tezin ikinci bölümü, bu temel argümanı açıklamak için kullanılan analitik çerçeveyi ve metodolojik yaklaşımı ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, tek ve kapalı bir teori kurmak yerine, farklı literatürlerden yararlanan bir analitik çerçeve geliştirmektedir. Bunun nedeni, protestodan iç savaşın başlangıcına geçişin tek bir değişkenle açıklanamayacak kadar karmaşık olmasıdır. İç savaşın başlangıcı, yalnızca ekonomik hoşnutsuzluk, siyasal baskı, rejim zayıflığı veya kimlik çatışmalarıyla açıklanamaz. Bu unsurlar önemlidir, ancak iç savaşın neden bazı protesto süreçlerinde ortaya çıktığını, bazı süreçlerde ise ortaya çıkmadığını anlamak için yapısal koşullar, protesto başlangıcındaki yakın dönem dinamikleri ve protestoyu silahlı çatışmaya bağlayan mekanizmalar birlikte incelenmelidir.

Bu nedenle analitik çerçeve üç düzeyden oluşmaktadır. İlk düzey yapısal koşullardır. Yapısal koşullar, protestolar başlamadan önce devletin ve toplumun sahip olduğu daha uzun dönemli özellikleri ifade eder. Bu düzeyde en önemli unsur devletin zor kullanma kapasitesi ve kurumsal bütünlüğüdür. Devletin ordu, polis, güvenlik ve istihbarat kurumları üzerindeki merkezi kontrolünü sürdürebilmesi, siyasal krizin iç savaşa dönüşmesini zorlaştırabilir. Buna karşılık, bu kurumların parçalı, kişiselleşmiş, zayıf veya bölgesel olarak dağınık olması, protestolar sırasında silahlı aktörlerin ortaya çıkmasını kolaylaştırabilir. Bu noktada devlet kapasitesi yalnızca idari bir kapasite olarak değil, aynı zamanda örgütlü şiddet üzerindeki merkezi kontrol olarak anlaşılmaktadır.

Yapısal düzeyde ayrıca rejim tipi, zorlayıcı aygıtın örgütlenme biçimi, ekonomik yapı ve kimliksel bölünmeler de dikkate alınmaktadır. Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'ın hepsi otoriter rejimlerdi; ancak bu otoriterlik aynı biçimde örgütlenmemişti. Suriye'de güvenlik ve istihbarat kurumları güçlü ve baskıcı bir rejim yapısıyla bağlantılıydı. Libya'da devlet daha kişiselleşmiş, daha zayıf kurumsallaşmış ve

yerel/tribal bağlılıklarla daha fazla iç içe geçmişti. Mısır'da ise ordu, devletin en merkezi ve kurumsal aktörlerinden biri olarak kendi bütünlüğünü koruyabilecek bir yapıya sahipti. Bu farklılıklar, protestolar başladıktan sonra her ülkenin krizi nasıl yönettiğini ve muhalefetin silahlı kapasite geliştirip geliştiremediğini etkiledi.

İkinci düzey, protestoların başlangıcındaki yakın dönem dinamikleridir. Bu düzey, protestoların neden belirli bir anda başladığını ve ilk aşamada nasıl genişlediğini açıklamaya yardımcı olur. Siyasal fırsat yapısı, tetikleyici olaylar, erken mobilizasyon ağları ve özellikle elitlerin davranışı bu düzeyde önemlidir. Uzun süredir var olan hoşnutsuzluklar her zaman otomatik olarak protesto üretmez. Bazen belirli bir olay, bölgesel bir örnek, rejimin zayıf görünmesi veya insanların başkalarının da rejime karşı harekete geçtiğini görmesi, korku eşiğini düşürür ve protestoların hızla yayılmasına yol açar. Arap ayaklanmaları bağlamında Tunus örneği, bu tür bir bölgesel etki yaratmış ve farklı ülkelerde insanların otoriter rejimlerin sarsılabileceğine inanmasını kolaylaştırmıştır.

Ancak yakın dönem dinamikler yalnızca protestonun başlamasını değil, protestonun yönünü de etkiler. Protestolar başladığında askeri ve siyasal elitlerin nasıl davrandığı belirleyici hale gelir. Eğer ordu, güvenlik kurumları ve rejim elitleri birlik içinde kalırsa, kriz siyasal olarak yıkıcı olsa bile devletin zorlayıcı çekirdeği korunabilir. Eğer elitler ayrışır, askeri birlikler bölünür veya bazı aktörler muhalefet tarafına geçerse, muhalefet yalnızca sembolik destek değil, aynı zamanda örgütsel deneyim, silah, komuta bilgisi ve meşruiyet kazanabilir. Bu nedenle tez, elit bütünlüğü ve elit ayrışmasını protestonun başlangıcındaki temel değişkenlerden biri olarak ele almaktadır. Elit davranışı, protestonun siyasi kriz olarak kalıp kalmayacağını veya silahlı çatışmaya doğru ilerleyip ilerlemeyeceğini etkileyen ara aşamalardan biridir.

Üçüncü düzey, mekanizmalardır. Mekanizmalar, protestolar başladıktan sonra bu protestoların iç savaşa dönüşüp dönüşmediğini açıklayan süreçleri ifade eder. Bu düzeyde en önemli mekanizma, örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucuların ortaya çıkışıdır. Rejim baskısı, protestocuların öfkesini artırabilir ve muhalefeti radikalleştirebilir; fakat baskının varlığı tek başına iç savaş anlamına gelmez. Baskının iç savaşın başlangıcına katkı sağlaması için muhalefetin silahlı örgütlenme kapasitesi

kazanması gerekir. Bu kapasite bazen askerî ayrışmalarla, bazen yerel komutanların ortaya çıkmasıyla, bazen silah erişimiyle, bazen de devletin belirli bölgelerde kontrolünü kaybetmesiyle gelişebilir. Bu nedenle mekanizma düzeyi, protesto ile iç savaş arasındaki gerçek geçiş noktasını göstermektedir.

Bu analitik çerçeve, literatürdeki birçok değişkeni tamamen dışlamaz; ancak tezin karşılaştırmasını daha açık ve yönetilebilir hale getirmek için üç temel değişkene odaklanır. Bunlar devletin zor kullanma kapasitesi ve kurumsal bütünlüğü, protesto başlangıcında elit bütünlüğü veya ayrışması, ve örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucuların ortaya çıkışıdır. Diğer faktörler, örneğin ekonomik hoşnutsuzluklar, kaynak bağımlılığı, kimliksel bölünmeler, dış müdahale veya bölgesel etkiler, tamamen yok sayılmamaktadır. Fakat bunlar tezin merkezindeki açıklayıcı mekanizmanın yerine geçmez. Çalışma açısından asıl soru, bu faktörlerin protesto kapasitesini silahlı isyan kapasitesine dönüştürüp dönüştürmediğidir.

Metodolojik olarak tez, nitel karşılaştırmalı vaka çalışması yaklaşımını benimsemektedir. Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'ın seçilmesinin nedeni, bu üç ülkenin aynı bölgesel protesto dalgası içinde yer alması, otoriter rejimlerle yönetilmesi ve 2011'de geniş çaplı protestolar yaşamasıdır. Bu benzerlikler karşılaştırmayı anlamlı hale getirir. Aynı zamanda sonuçların farklı olması, tezin araştırma sorusunu mümkün kılar. Suriye ve Libya iç savaşın ortaya çıktığı vakalardır; Mısır ise kitlesel protestoya ve rejim değişimine rağmen iç savaşın ortaya çıkmadığı negatif vakadır. Bu tasarım, yalnızca iç savaşın neden başladığını değil, neden bazı durumlarda başlamadığını da açıklamaya imkân verir.

Tez, yapılandırılmış ve odaklı karşılaştırma yöntemini kullanmaktadır. Her vaka aynı analitik sıra ile incelenir. Önce 2011 öncesi yapısal koşullar değerlendirilir. Daha sonra protestoların başlangıcındaki elit davranışı, mobilizasyon dinamikleri ve devlet tepkisi incelenir. Son olarak örgütlü silahlı aktörlerin ortaya çıkıp çıkmadığına bakılır. Bu yöntem, vakaların yalnızca tarihsel olarak anlatılmasını değil, aynı sorular etrafında sistematik biçimde karşılaştırılmasını sağlar. Böylece Suriye, Libya ve Mısır arasındaki farklılıklar rastlantısal veya yalnızca betimleyici farklar olarak değil, açıklanabilir nedensel yollar olarak ele alınır.

Ayrıca tez, süreç izleme yönteminden yararlanmaktadır. İç savaşın başlangıcı bir anda ortaya çıkan tek bir olay değildir; belirli aşamalardan geçen bir süreçtir. Bu nedenle tez, her vakada protestoların nasıl başladığını, devletin nasıl tepki verdiğini, elitlerin nasıl pozisyon aldığını, muhalefet ağlarının nasıl geliştiğini ve silahlı aktörlerin hangi aşamada ortaya çıkıp çıkmadığını izlemektedir. Süreç izleme yöntemi, arka plan koşulları ile doğrudan sonucu üreten mekanizmalar arasındaki farkı anlamaya yardımcı olur. Örneğin, Suriye ve Libya'da yalnızca protesto olduğu için iç savaş çıkmamıştır; iç savaş, protestoların zaman içinde silahlı aktörlerle bağlantılanması sonucunda başlamıştır. Mısır'da ise benzer protesto baskısına rağmen bu bağlantı kurulmamıştır.

Bu metodolojik yaklaşımın güçlü yönü, derinlemesine açıklama yapabilmesidir. Çalışma geniş bir ülke sayısı üzerinden istatistiksel genelleme yapmayı hedeflemez. Bunun yerine, üç benzer fakat farklı sonuç üretmiş vaka üzerinden nedensel süreçleri ayrıntılı biçimde açıklamayı amaçlar. Bu tür bir analiz, özellikle otoriter rejim krizleri ve protesto sonrası farklılaşan sonuçlar için uygundur. Çünkü bu süreçlerde yalnızca hangi değişkenlerin bulunduğunu bilmek yeterli değildir; bu değişkenlerin hangi sırayla ve hangi koşullarda etkileşime girdiğini anlamak gerekir. Tez bu nedenle hem karşılaştırmalı hem de süreç odaklı bir yöntem kullanmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, analitik çerçeve ve metodoloji tezin temel iddiasını sistematik biçimde test etmeye yardımcı olmaktadır. Çalışma, Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'ı aynı bölgesel bağlam içinde karşılaştırmakta, fakat her ülkenin iç kurumsal ve örgütsel özelliklerini dikkate almaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, Arap ayaklanmalarının sonuçlarını tek bir nedenle açıklamaktan kaçınır. Bunun yerine, protestoların hangi koşullarda silahlı çatışmaya dönüştüğünü ve hangi koşullarda bu dönüşümün engellendiğini gösterir. Böylece tez, kitlesel protesto ile iç savaşın başlangıcı arasındaki farkı açıklamak için devlet kapasitesi, elit davranışı ve örgütlü silahlı aktör oluşumunu birlikte ele alan bir karşılaştırmalı açıklama sunmaktadır.

Suriye ve Libya vakaları tezin pozitif iç savaş başlangıcı örneklerini oluşturmaktadır. Her iki ülkede de 2011 Arap Ayaklanmaları sırasında kitlesel protestolar ortaya çıkmış ve bu protestolar zaman içinde devlet otoritesine karşı sürdürülebilir silahlı

çatışmaya dönüşmüştür. Ancak bu ortak sonuca rağmen, Suriye ve Libya'nın izlediği yollar aynı değildir. Bu nedenle tez, bu iki ülkeyi yalnızca "iç savaş yaşanan vakalar" olarak aynı kategoriye yerleştirmekle yetinmez; aynı zamanda her birinde protestodan silahlı çatışmaya geçişin nasıl farklı biçimlerde gerçekleştiğini açıklar. Suriye'de süreç daha kademeli, baskı ve militarizasyon üzerinden ilerleyen bir yol izlerken, Libya'da süreç daha hızlı, kurumsal çözülme ve silahlı parçalanma yoluyla gelişmiştir. Bu fark, iç savaşın tek bir yolla ortaya çıkmadığını göstermektedir.

Suriye vakası, protestodan iç savaşın başlangıcına geçişin ani devlet çöküşüyle değil, kademeli militarizasyonla gerçekleştiği bir örnektir. 2011 öncesinde Suriye rejimi yoğun güvenlik kurumlarına, güçlü istihbarat ağlarına, merkezi baskı kapasitesine ve rejimle iç içe geçmiş zorlayıcı yapılara sahipti. Bu durum, rejimin protestolar başladığında hemen çözülmesini engellemiştir. Rejim, gösterileri bastırmak için güvenlik güçlerini örgütlü ve sürekli biçimde kullanabilmiş, böylece başlangıçta devlet otoritesini koruyabilmiştir. Ancak bu kurumsal bütünlük iç savaşın önlenmesi anlamına gelmemiştir. Tam tersine, rejimin merkezi baskı kapasitesi, protestoların bastırılması için yoğun biçimde kullanıldıkça, muhalefet ile devlet arasındaki çatışma derinleşmiş ve siyasal kriz zaman içinde silahlı mücadeleye dönüşmeye başlamıştır.

Suriye'de protestolar ilk aşamada büyük ölçüde sivil nitelikteydi. Gösteriler, rejim karşıtı talepler, kamusal mobilizasyon ve siyasal değişim çağrıları etrafında şekillenmişti. Ancak devletin protestolara verdiği sert tepki, krizin niteliğini değiştirmiştir. Güvenlik güçlerinin şiddeti, protestocuların karşılaştığı riskleri artırmış, rejime yönelik öfkeyi derinleştirmiş ve muhalefet içinde daha sert karşılık verme eğilimlerini güçlendirmiştir. Bu süreçte bazı bölgelerde yerel direniş biçimleri ortaya çıkmış, bazı askerî unsurlar rejimden ayrılmış ve muhalefet ağları yavaş yavaş silahlı örgütlenmeyle bağlantılanmaya başlamıştır. Bu nedenle Suriye'de iç savaşın başlangıcı, protestoların ilk günlerinde hazır bulunan bir silahlı isyanın sonucu değildir. Aksine, baskı, korku, yerel direnç, askerî ayrışma ve muhalefetin örgütlenmesi zaman içinde birbirini beslemiştir.

Suriye örneğinde devletin zorlayıcı kurumlarının görece güçlü ve bütünlüklü olması, iki yönlü bir sonuç üretmiştir. Bir yandan bu bütünlük, rejimin ilk aşamada ayakta

kalmasını ve protestoları merkezi biçimde bastırmasını sağlamıştır. Diğer yandan, aynı baskı kapasitesi, çatışmanın uzamasına ve radikalleşmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Rejim güvenlik aygıtını yoğun biçimde kullandıkça, protestoların yalnızca sivil bir itiraz olarak kalması zorlaşmıştır. Bazı muhalif aktörler için silahlı direniş, kendini savunma veya rejime karşı etkili mücadele yöntemi olarak görülmeye başlamıştır. Bu süreçte örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucular hemen ve tam biçimde ortaya çıkmamış, ancak zaman içinde muhalefetin bir kısmı askerî kapasite geliştirmiştir. Suriye'nin yolu bu nedenle yavaş fakat derinleşen bir militarizasyon süreci olarak anlaşılmalıdır.

Suriye vakası ayrıca iç savaşın başlaması için devletin tamamen ve hızlı biçimde çökmesinin gerekli olmadığını göstermektedir. Suriye rejimi, krizin başında ve sonraki aşamalarda önemli ölçüde zorlayıcı kapasiteyi elinde tutmuştur. Buna rağmen iç savaş ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu durum, güçlü baskı kapasitesinin her zaman çatışmayı önleyici bir unsur olmadığını gösterir. Eğer devletin zorlayıcı kurumları rejimin hayatta kalmasıyla çok sıkı biçimde bağlantılıysa ve bu kurumlar protestolara karşı ağır şiddet uyguluyorsa, bu durum muhalefetin militarizasyonunu hızlandırabilir veya derinleştirebilir. Suriye'de rejim, devletin merkezî kapasitesini korurken aynı zamanda muhalefetin silahlı biçimler kazanmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Böylece protesto, zaman içinde örgütlü silahlı meydan okumaya dönüşmüştür.

Libya vakası ise farklı bir yolu temsil etmektedir. Libya'da protestodan iç savaşın başlangıcına geçiş, Suriye'deki gibi uzun süreli ve kademeli bir militarizasyon süreciyle değil, daha hızlı kurumsal çözülme ve silahlı parçalanma ile gerçekleşmiştir. 2011 öncesinde Libya devleti, güçlü ve kurumsallaşmış bir bürokratik yapıdan çok Kaddafi'nin kişisel iktidarı, patronaj ağları, yerel bağlılıklar, paralel güvenlik yapıları ve parçalı zorlayıcı otorite üzerine kuruluydu. Bu nedenle protestolar başladığında rejim, krizi merkezi ve kurumsal bir devlet kapasitesiyle yönetmekte zorlanmıştır. Devlet otoritesinin belirli bölgelerde hızla zayıflaması, muhalefetin daha erken silahlı kapasite kazanmasına imkân sağlamıştır.

Libya'da elit ayrışması ve yerel güç merkezlerinin ortaya çıkışı, protestodan silahlı çatışmaya geçişi hızlandırmıştır. Rejim içerisindeki bazı aktörlerin ayrışması, yerel

komutanların ve silahlı grupların önem kazanması, devletin belirli bölgelerde kontrolünü kaybetmesi ve silah erişiminin artması, muhalefeti hızlı biçimde silahlı aktörlere dönüştürmüştür. Suriye'de muhalefetin silahlı örgütlenmesi zaman içinde gelişirken, Libya'da kurumsal çözülme bu süreci sıkıştırmış ve hızlandırmıştır. Bu nedenle Libya'da kitlesel protesto ile örgütlü şiddet arasındaki mesafe daha kısadır. Protestolar başladıktan sonra devletin örgütlü şiddet üzerindeki tekeli hızla zayıflamış ve rakip silahlı otoriteler ortaya çıkmıştır.

Libya örneğinde iç savaşın başlangıcını anlamak için devletin zayıf kurumsallaşmasına dikkat etmek gerekir. Kaddafi rejimi, merkezi, profesyonel ve bütünlüklü bir orduya dayanmaktan çok, kişisel sadakatler ve parçalı güvenlik yapıları üzerinden iktidarını sürdürmüştür. Bu durum normal dönemde rejimin kontrolünü mümkün kılmış olabilir; fakat kriz anında devletin bütünlüklü tepki verme kapasitesini sınırlamıştır. Protestolar ortaya çıktığında, devletin zorlayıcı aygıtı tek bir merkezden ve disiplinli biçimde hareket edememiştir. Bu nedenle muhalefet aktörleri silaha, yerel alanlara ve örgütlenme fırsatlarına daha hızlı erişebilmiştir. Libya'da iç savaşın başlangıcı, devlet otoritesinin parçalanmasıyla ve yerel silahlı grupların hızla siyasal önem kazanmasıyla doğrudan bağlantılıdır. Libya'nın yolu, zayıf devlet kapasitesinin ve parçalı zorlayıcı yapının iç savaş riskini nasıl artırabileceğini göstermektedir. Merkezi otorite zayıfladığında, siyasal kriz yalnızca rejim karşıtı protesto olarak kalmaz. Farklı bölgelerde silahlı gruplar ortaya çıkabilir, yerel güvenlik yapıları devletin yerini almaya başlayabilir ve muhalefet hareketi askeri bir nitelik kazanabilir. Libya'da bu süreç erken aşamada gerçekleşmiştir. Bu nedenle Libya, protestoların devletin kurumsal çöküşüyle birleştiğinde nasıl hızlı biçimde silahlı çatışmaya dönüşebileceğini gösterir. Bu vaka, protesto kapasitesinin isyan kapasitesine dönüşmesi için her zaman uzun bir radikalleşme sürecinin gerekmediğini; kurumsal parçalanmanın bu geçişi hızlandırabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Suriye ve Libya'nın birlikte incelenmesi, tezin ana argümanını güçlendirmektedir. Çünkü bu iki ülke aynı sonucu, yani iç savaşın başlangıcını yaşamış olsa da, bu sonuca farklı yollarla ulaşmıştır. Suriye'de daha güçlü ve merkezi bir güvenlik aygıtı vardı; bu aygıt rejimin ilk aşamada ayakta kalmasını sağladı, fakat yoğun baskı

zamanla muhalefetin silahlı örgütlenmesini besledi. Libya'da ise daha zayıf ve kişiselleşmiş bir devlet yapısı vardı; bu yapı protestolar başladığında hızla parçalandı ve silahlı aktörlerin erken ortaya çıkmasına imkân verdi. Bu nedenle Suriye "kademeli militarizasyon"u, Libya ise "hızlı silahlı parçalanma"yı temsil etmektedir.

Bu karşılaştırma, iç savaşın başlangıcını yalnızca protestoların yoğunluğuyla açıklamanın yanlış olduğunu göstermektedir. Hem Suriye'de hem Libya'da protestolar önemlidir; ancak iç savaşın başlamasına yol açan şey, protestoların örgütlü silahlı meydan okumaya dönüşmesidir. Suriye'de bu dönüşüm, baskı ve askerî ayrışmalar yoluyla zaman içinde gelişmiştir. Libya'da ise bu dönüşüm, devletin kurumsal zayıflığı ve hızlı çözülmesi nedeniyle daha erken ortaya çıkmıştır. Her iki durumda da belirleyici eşik, muhalefetin devlete karşı sürdürülebilir şiddet kullanabilecek aktörler üretmesidir. Bu nedenle Suriye ve Libya, farklı yollardan geçseler de aynı temel mekanizmayı doğrular: iç savaş, protesto örgütlü silahlı kapasiteye dönüştüğünde başlar.

Suriye ve Libya bölümü, aynı zamanda Mısır vakasını anlamak için de zemin hazırlamaktadır. Çünkü bu iki pozitif vaka iç savaşın ortaya çıkması için hangi süreçlerin gerekli olduğunu göstermektedir. Suriye'de baskı, ayrışma ve muhalefetin kademeli silahlanması; Libya'da ise kurumsal çözülme, elit parçalanması, silah erişimi ve yerel silahlı grupların yükselişi belirleyici olmuştur. Mısır'da ise bu süreçler aynı biçimde ortaya çıkmamıştır. Bu nedenle Suriye ve Libya'nın incelenmesi, Mısır'ın neden iç savaş eşiğinin altında kaldığını açıklamayı da kolaylaştırmaktadır. Pozitif vakalar, hangi mekanizmaların mevcut olduğunda protestonun iç savaşa dönüşebileceğini gösterirken, Mısır bu mekanizmaların yokluğunda yoğun protestonun bile silahlı çatışmaya dönüşmeyebileceğini gösterecektir.

Mısır vakası, tezin negatif iç savaş başlangıcı örneğidir. Mısır'da 2011 yılında büyük ölçekli protestolar yaşanmış, Tahrir Meydanı ve diğer büyük şehirler rejim karşıtı mobilizasyonun merkezleri haline gelmiş, Mübarek yönetimi ciddi bir meşruiyet kriziyle karşılaşmış ve sonunda lider değişimi gerçekleşmiştir. Ancak bu süreç, Suriye ve Libya'daki gibi sürdürülebilir bir iç savaşa dönüşmemiştir. Bu durum, tezin

temel iddiasını güçlendirmektedir: kitlesel protesto, rejim krizi ve lider değişimi tek başına iç savaşın başlaması için yeterli değildir. Mısır'da iç savaşın ortaya çıkmamasını açıklayan temel unsur, devletin zorlayıcı kurumlarının, özellikle ordunun, bütünlüğünü korumasıdır. Mısır ordusu kriz boyunca merkezi komuta yapısını sürdürmüş, büyük ölçekli parçalanma yaşamamış ve muhalefete silahlı örgütlenme için gerekli kaynakları sağlayacak kitlesel askerî ayrışmalar üretmemiştir. Bu nedenle Mübarek'in iktidardan uzaklaştırılması, devletin çökmesi anlamına gelmemiştir. Rejim liderliği değişmiş, fakat devletin örgütlü şiddet üzerindeki merkezi kontrolü devam etmiştir.

Mısır muhalefeti güçlü bir protesto kapasitesine sahipti. Müslüman Kardeşler, gençlik hareketleri, işçi ağları, aktivistler ve farklı muhalif gruplar geniş çaplı mobilizasyonun oluşmasında etkili olmuştur. Ancak bu aktörler büyük ölçüde sivil ve siyasal karakterde kalmıştır. Muhalefet, gösteriler, grevler, meydan mobilizasyonu ve siyasal örgütlenme üzerinden hareket etmiş; silahlı kanatlar, alternatif askerî komuta yapıları veya devlete karşı sürekli şiddet kullanabilecek örgütlü yapılar geliştirmemiştir. Bu nedenle Mısır'da protesto kapasitesi isyan kapasitesine dönüşmemiştir. Üç vakanın karşılaştırılması tezin temel bulgusunu netleştirmektedir. Suriye, Libya ve Mısır'ın üçünde de otoriter rejimlere karşı kitlesel protestolar yaşanmış, rejim otoritesi sorgulanmış ve siyasal kriz ortaya çıkmıştır. Ancak Suriye'de protestolar kademeli olarak militarize olmuş, Libya'da protestolar hızlı kurumsal çözülme ve silahlı parçalanma yoluyla iç savaşa dönüşmüş, Mısır'da ise ordu bütünlüğünü koruduğu ve muhalefet silahlı kapasite geliştiremediği için iç savaş başlamamıştır. Bu karşılaştırma, belirleyici farkın protestoların varlığı değil, protestoların örgütlü silahlı aktörler üretip üretmemesi olduğunu göstermektedir.

Bu tez, kitlesel protesto ile iç savaşın başlangıcını birbirinden ayırarak Arap ayaklanmaları literatürüne katkı sunmaktadır. Protestolar rejimleri sarsabilir, liderleri devirebilir veya siyasal kriz yaratabilir; ancak iç savaşın başlaması için örgütlü silahlı meydan okuyucuların oluşması gerekir. Suriye ve Libya'da bu eşik aşılmıştır. Mısır'da ise geniş çaplı protestoya ve rejim değişimine rağmen devletin zorlayıcı kurumları dağılmamış, ordu bütünlüğünü korumuş ve muhalefet isyan kapasitesi geliştirememiştir. Bu nedenle Mısır iç savaş eşiğinin altında kalmıştır.

Sonuç olarak, bu tez Arap ayaklanmaları sonrasında Suriye ve Libya'da iç savaşın ortaya çıkmasının yalnızca kitlesel protestoların varlığıyla açıklanamayacağını savunmaktadır. İç savaş, protestonun örgütlü silahlı kapasiteye dönüşmesiyle başlar. Suriye'de bu dönüşüm baskı, ayrışma, yerel direniş ve kademeli militarizasyon yoluyla gerçekleşmiştir. Libya'da zayıf kurumsallaşma, hızlı elit parçalanması, silah erişimi ve devlet otoritesinin erken çözülmesi bu dönüşümü hızlandırmıştır. Mısır'da ise bu mekanizma ortaya çıkmamıştır. Tezin nihai sonucu şudur: kitlesel protesto siyasal otorite krizini başlatabilir; ancak iç savaş, bu krizin örgütlü silahlı aktörler aracılığıyla devlete karşı sürdürülebilir şiddet kapasitesine dönüşmesiyle ortaya çıkar.

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