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Kurt Weyland

Prominent scholars have highlighted important similarities between the Arab Spring of 2011 and the "revolutions" of 1848: Both waves of contention swept with dramatic speed across whole regions, but ended up yielding rather limited advances toward political liberalism and democracy. I seek to uncover the causal mechanisms that help account for these striking parallels. Drawing on my recent analysis of 1848, I argue that contention spread so quickly because many people in a wide range of countries drew rash inferences from the downfall of Tunisia's dictator. Applying cognitive heuristics that psychologists have documented, they overrated the significance of the Tunisian success, overestimated the similarities with the political situation in their own country, and jumped to the conclusion that they could successfully challenge their own autocrats. This precipitation prompted protests in many settings that actually were much less propitious; therefore problems abounded. Cognitive shortcuts held such sway because Arab societies were weakly organized and repressed and thus lacked leaders from whom common people could take authoritative cues. The decision whether to engage in emulative contention fell to ordinary citizens, who—due to limited information access and scarce experience—were especially susceptible to the simple inferences suggested by cognitive heuristics.

With its tremendous speed and sweeping scope, the wave of protests and uprisings triggered by the demise of Tunisia's authoritarian regime in January 2011 stunned observers across the globe and scared non-democratic governments in countries nearby, such as sub-Saharan Africa, and far away. Even China's post-totalitarian regime responded with revealing nervousness to the faintest of imitation efforts.[1] The world had not seen such dramatic contagion effects in many years.

Even the unexpected collapse of East European Communism in 1989 did not spread with the same kind of spontaneous horizontal impulse. Instead, a crucial vertical move, namely the withdrawal of Soviet protection for its client regimes, prompted this falling of dominoes. In the

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Arab world in 2011, by contrast, it was not the end of great power imposition that opened the floodgates for a wave of political contention, but the surprising downfall of an autocrat in powerless Tunisia. Whereas the revocation of the Brezhnev Doctrine greatly weakened the East European satellite regimes, the Tunisian ruler's demise did not directly alter the domestic power constellation elsewhere; instead, the dictators and monarchs of other nations retained the fearsome means of coercion they had used so effectively for many years before.[2] Therefore it is much more puzzling that frontal challenges to autocratic rule spread in 2011 with such striking velocity to a broad range of countries, in the Arab world and beyond.

Given the distinctive features of the Arab Spring, a number of commentators, including scholarly luminary Eric Hobsbawm,[3] have gone far back in history and drawn parallels to the "Springtime of the Peoples" in 1848. During this famous wave, revolution spread immediately, right after the principal spark: the overthrow of France's "Citizen King" Louis Philippe on February 24. Within three days, contention erupted on the Rhine in Mannheim, quickly reached Cologne, Leipzig, and Stuttgart (March 3), then Munich (March 6), Vienna and Berlin (March 13), and Copenhagen (March 20). With its dramatic speed, this tsunami of contention also covered a vast scope.[4] In April, the impulse arrived in the Americas and ended up fanning the flames of a smoldering rebellion in Northeastern Brazil, stimulating liberal reformism in Colombia, prompting the formation of a secretive Society of Equality

in Chile, and helping to inspire the US women's movement for the Seneca Falls Convention.

Among the waves of contention and democratization that the modern world has experienced, the revolutionary wildfire of 1848 thus looks quite similar to the Arab Spring. These two riptides—far apart in world-historical time—share important features, especially the speed and breadth of horizontal diffusion. The two contagion processes also achieved similar outcomes, namely a low rate of successful advances toward political liberalism and democracy. As the exalted hopes of many revolutionary crowds in 1848 were soon extinguished by resurgent princes, a similar cycle of euphoria and disappointment has played out so far in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) from 2011 onward.

The short-term outcomes of the protests inspired by the Tunisian success include many cases of authoritarian repression (Algeria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China), ongoing violence (Yemen), civil war (Syria), and virtual state collapse (Libya). Even where incumbent governments made hasty concessions (Jordan and Morocco) or autocrats resigned under duress (Egypt and Yemen), medium-term prospects for anything approaching liberal democratization look rather cloudy at the time of this writing (July 2012). In Egypt, the modern, internet-savvy middle-class professionals who spearheaded the struggle against President Hosni Mubarak have loudly complained that their revolution has been throttled by the military, mainstay of the old regime; moreover, unorganized and inexperienced in electoral politics, and without connections to the popular masses, they have been trounced by Islamist forces, whose true commitment to political pluralism, civic tolerance, and democracy remains questionable.[5] Indeed, Freedom House counts more cases of deterioration than improvement in the MENA during 2011.[6]

This predominant lack of success, which parallels the widespread failure of the 1848 revolutionaries, is especially noteworthy because after the protest wave gathered steam, influential democratic nations came to support anti-autocratic efforts in some countries. This outside help forestalled even worse outcomes. Only Western military intervention prevented Libyan dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi from carrying out his threat to exterminate the opposition "like cockroaches." Also, sustained prodding from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia was required to persuade the wily fox Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down in Yemen. Yet despite these external pressures, the Arab Spring has until now achieved very limited success—just like the 1848 tsunami.

Thus, the parallels between the Arab protest wave of 2011 and the revolutionary riptide of 1848 are striking. Both diffusion processes displayed unusual speed and broad scope, yet generated disappointing results. These descriptive similarities raise an explanatory puzzle: Why would two contentious waves that played out at very different times in very different regions share these distinctive features?

What Explains the Surprising Parallels?

In contemporary social science parlance, then, what are the causal mechanisms that bring forth these similarities across such diverse contexts? For instance, the tsunami of 1848 affected traditional monarchies, whereas the riptide of 2011 posed the greatest threat to Sultanistic republics.[7] But despite these differences in pre-existing regime type, the two waves were surprisingly similar in velocity, breadth, and consequences. These parallels are especially remarkable because the other waves of contention, democratization, and revolution in the modern world, including later diffusion processes in Europe and earlier ones in the Middle East,[8] have differed significantly: They have unfolded more slowly, spread less widely, or attained greater success. Given the varied characteristics of contentious waves, the striking coincidences between the European Springtime of the Peoples and the Arab Spring call for explanation. I try to establish a causal foundation for the parallels between 1848 and 2011.

Conventional approaches cannot account well for these similarities, especially the striking combination of high speed and meager success. Various frameworks seek to explain clusters of political events. Some theories emphasize common causes such as economic crises or acute social problems that affect a set of countries directly and independently, without interactions among each other. Other arguments highlight deliberate external promotion, either by great powers that apply influence, even force, to mold weaker states in their own image,[9] or by transnational activists who use assistance and persuasion to spark change.[10] A third set of theories stress demonstration and contagion effects among instances of political transformation. In this view, emulators in a wide range of countries seek to replicate the successful precedent of a frontrunner.[11] But the available evidence suggests that established versions of these three frameworks cannot fully account for the parallels between 1848 and 2011. After discussing the major extant arguments in the present section, I will proceed to draw on a novel theory in subsequent sections.

Theories about common causes stress structural and conjunctural problems that afflicted a range of countries at the same time and that, in this view, prompted a series of contentious efforts. This approach is important for understanding the grievances that drove many people to incur the grave risks of challenging repressive rulers. And there certainly were many problems, both in 1848 and 2011. In Europe, early industrialization had impoverished significant segments of the population, and bad harvests, inflation, and recession had imposed considerable hardship during the 1840s. In the MENA, youth

unemployment had reached critical levels,[12] and widespread destitution contrasted starkly with the greed and graft of the elite cliques surrounding unaccountable autocrats. Therefore, motivations for protest were plentiful and powerful.

Common cause theories elucidate important necessary conditions for widespread contention. But they cannot easily explain the most remarkable characteristic of the uprisings of 1848 and 2011, namely their unfolding in a crisp wave:[13] Why did challenges erupt in so many different countries right at the same time? Problems of long gestation that differ across nations in magnitude and acuteness cannot account for the remarkable temporary clustering of protests and their broad geographic spread. Claiming that slowly cumulating problems had suddenly reached a crucial break point—and that simultaneously in many countries—runs the risk of retrodiction, if not tautology, which often afflicts crisis arguments.

Common cause theories that highlight increases in capabilities, such as the frequent emphasis on modern communications technologies and social media for the Arab Spring,[14] or Marc Lynch's broader argument about the transformation of the public sphere in the MENA during the 2000s,[15] are not fully convincing either. Such arguments elucidate the quick, broad spread of a powerful impulse for protests, but not the crucial starting point, namely the origin and power of this impulse. For instance, Egyptian activists tried to use the brutal police killing of a critic of official corruption, Khaled Said, as a rallying point for mobilizing large-scale protests, but with very meager success. Only the downfall of Tunisia's autocrat provided the—totally unexpected—impulse for the uprising of early 2011.[16] Thus, while there is some margin for framing, such triggers cannot be "manufactured," even with modern communications technologies. These explanations derived from modernization theory also founder on the similarities with the riptide of the mid-nineteenth century. After all, the 1848 revolutions spread just as fast as the MENA protests, long before 24/7 TV news, Twitter, and Facebook. In sum, the distinctive waves of 1848 and 2011 were not due to common causes alone; external factors that affected various countries at the same time were crucial as well.

As regards such foreign influences, what role did the deliberate promotion of political change play? Did the riptides of 1848 and 2011 result from the efforts of great powers to push other countries toward adopting their preferred regime type? This variant of the promotion argument expects a fairly high rate of short-term success, as the United States attained it after World War II in Germany, Italy, Austria, and Japan. In particular, the "forcible regime promotion" analyzed by John Owen[17] should manage to unseat autocrats; the installation of liberal or democratic procedures is more difficult. But the very limited success of the waves of 1848 and 2011 casts doubt on this

explanation. In both instances, great powers did not get much involved; above all, they certainly did not set in motion these tsunamis of contention.

Whereas French armies had eagerly spread political change in the 1790s and early 1800s, the motherland of revolution undertook no effort to foment uprisings in 1848; in fact, its only involvement came in 1849, when it helped extinguish the flickering flame of contention in the Papal States of Italy. Similarly, the United States did not promote the spread of protests in 2011; instead, it was concerned about the threats that this gathering storm posed to its crucial regional allies, especially the autocrats of Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and potentially Jordan.[18] The only decisive contribution of the Obama administration was to help evict rogue dictator Gaddafi—an isolated case not repeated, for instance, in Syria. Because the US had traditionally supported non-democratic regimes in the region, the global superpower did not turn into the protagonist of this wave of protests.

Promotion arguments that invoke transnational networks of activists[19] cannot account for the wildfires of 1848 and 2011 and their surprising parallels either. Although mid-nineteenth century rulers blamed the sudden unrest among their hitherto quiescent subjects on French radicals and Polish exiles, actual evidence of foreign militants stimulating bottom-up challenges is extremely scant. In 2011, MENA oppositionists from urban professional circles did have transnational connections, and some learned from activists in other countries, such as Serbia—but much less than in the "color revolutions" that had rippled across the post-Communist world from 1998 to 2005.[20] Furthermore, these tenuous linkages had formed over the course of years; they cannot easily account for the sudden outburst of challenges in early 2011. Gene Sharp and his disciples certainly did not set off these uprisings in a wide range of countries.[21] In conclusion, neither the vertical nor horizontal versions of external promotion theories can explain the distinctive and remarkably similar features of the contentious waves of 1848 and 2011.

Can demonstration and contagion effects fill this explanatory gap? Did an autocrat's overthrow in one country stimulate emulation efforts in a wide range of other countries? According to conventional wisdom, such a diffusion process could result from the spread of new norms and values that delegitimated authoritarian rule and motivated a rash of challenges, or from rational learning that inferred from the initial case of success the feasibility and promise of regime contention in many other settings. Normative approaches, derived from constructivism, help explain the goals that many protesters sought to attain, but they cannot account for the immediate spread of protests. New values and principles do not diffuse instantaneously; persuasion takes time. Moreover, pre-existing value systems differed starkly among the polities swept up in

these tsunamis. In 1848, receptiveness for political liberalism was much stronger in West-Central Europe than toward the East; and in 2011, more secular, modern countries such as Tunisia were very dissimilar from "traditional" Yemen. In such heterogeneous settings, value change would not produce critical levels of support for liberal and democratic challenges at exactly the same time. Constructivist approaches therefore cannot explain the tight clustering of protests and uprisings in 1848 and 2011.

Rational learning, by contrast, claims to account for crisp waves of regime contention because new information can prompt quick updates of cost/benefit calculations. Under non-democratic rule, prudent preference falsification prevails because citizens fear to reveal their true intentions, especially if they oppose the established regime.[22] Therefore uncertainty runs high, and political information is scarce and unreliable. Given this fog, a successful challenge against a seemingly powerful ruler can suddenly clarify the political opportunity structure and send a striking message to oppositionists in many other countries: Rulers are much weaker than long assumed; as soon as people dare to challenge them, their domination crumbles. These quick reassessments of political opportunities and risks trigger cascading challenges as particularly committed opponents take to the streets and their daring actions induce ever-broader sectors of the population to join in.[23] As a result, "critical masses"[24] of protesters may rapidly form in a range of countries that rationally learn from a successful precedent.

Yet one must ask whether the inferences invoked by these rationalist accounts of dramatic diffusion processes are really rational, that is, logically derived from a systematic processing of the relevant information? Given the enormous stakes of defiance against repressive autocrats, thorough cost/benefit calculations seem to counsel prudence and caution, not the eager participation that drives cascades. Why infer from the downfall of one autocrat that his peers in many other countries are also vulnerable? These beliefs overrate the significance and evidentiary value of the precedent and overestimate the similarity between this initial success case and the political opportunity structure prevailing in those other countries. After all, ruler personalities, support coalitions, regime institutions, and the strength of potential opponents can differ greatly; in the MENA, for instance, vulnerable Sultanistic dictatorships existed side by side with more solid monarchies and party regimes.[25] Given such differences, the overthrow of one autocrat does not necessarily provide valid information on the chances of defying his colleagues elsewhere. In fact, the precedent itself may induce learning among other rulers, who may respond to challenges more skillfully and thus lower the chances of successful emulation. From a logical perspective, therefore, an initial case of success does not justify the high hopes that drive waves of imitation attempts, as in 1848 and 2011. The optimistic beliefs and

contagious enthusiasm that fuel these swift diffusion processes lack a conventionally rational basis.

In fact, emulative protesters in 1848 and 2011 deviated clearly from rational standards in their information processing and decision-making, as I will document for the Arab Spring and showed in my earlier investigation of the nineteenth-century riptide.[26] Instead of basing their risky challenges against brutal autocrats on reasonably solid, balanced information, protesters were captivated by the precedent event and often acted upon the first available scraps of news, even unfounded rumors. Moreover, they did not ·assess the similarities and differences between the precedent and the situation facing them with any care, but jumped to the conclusion that these power constellations were equivalent; therefore they believed rather unthinkingly that they could replicate the initial success.[27] Many people rushed into action without seriously evaluating opportunities and risks and without any assurance that fellow citizens would also participate in contention. In sum, critical masses of people displayed much greater boldness than rational considerations would recommend.

For these reasons, accounts of cascading contention that claim full rationality are questionable. Susanne Lohmann's well-known model, for instance, is compelled to make the heroic assumption that people know the proportion of extremists, moderates, and status-quo supporters.[28] But this premise is implausible, especially at times of tremendous political fluidity.[29] Adopting a more realistic approach, Timur Kuran's wide-ranging study departs from strict rationality and invokes cognitive shortcuts that process information in quick and easy, yet not fully logical, ways;[30] while these inferential heuristics enable people to cope with the flood of uncertain information and avoid decisional paralysis, they risk distortions and misjudgments.

This line of reasoning, which I will develop further, helps explain the surprising parallels between the tsunamis of 1848 and 2011. Specifically, I draw on my recent analysis of the 1848 revolutions, which invoked inferential heuristics to account for the surprising speed and meager success of this contentious wildfire.[31] After summarizing this argument and specifying the political-organizational context in which it applies, I assess whether it can elucidate the MENA uprisings, especially the striking combination of high speed and low success. Certainly, this broadstroke analysis cannot substitute for rigorous hypothesis-testing and careful, thorough case studies by area specialists. Instead, my intention is best seen as a plausibility probe designed to contribute to theory development.

The Crucial Role of Cognitive Shortcuts

My theory rests on a realistic, well-corroborated approach to human learning and decision-making, namely bounded

rationality. It diverges from rational choice, but does not postulate "irrationality". For instance, it does not emphasize emotions and passions, as some recent analysts of collective action do.[32] Instead, challengers in 1848 displayed goal orientation and sought to act step by step in pursuing these goals. They were "intendedly rational. They want[ed] to make rational decisions, but they [could] not always do so."[33] Not only did they have imperfect information, but they also processed it in deficient and problematic ways. Thus, they deviated from the low-information rationality postulated by defenders of rational choice.[34]

Cognitive psychology amply documents people's limited capacity to deal with over-abundant and often uncertain information. Since normal mortals cannot perform the comprehensive, systematic information processing prescribed by rational standards, they rely on inferential shortcuts to arrive at decisions and thus function in fluid environments. But these shortcuts focus attention on some aspects while filtering out others, and they draw conclusions in simple and quick, yet not fully logical, ways; they therefore risk creating distortions and biases. While these heuristics allow people to react to decisional opportunities and challenges and avoid overload and paralysis, they can easily lead to mistakes and failures, especially in complex, rapidly shifting situations.

Reliance on cognitive shortcuts is particularly pronounced under conditions of profound uncertainty, when established norms and institutions lose their guiding force, people face unexpected novelty, and outcomes seem up for grabs. Waves of political contention constitute such "eventful" situations.[35] Because pre-existing decision rules suddenly fail to provide valid orientation, people have to make up their minds from scratch, considering a multitude of complex developments. Under these confusing—if not chaotic—circumstances people eagerly rely on the crutches of cognitive shortcuts to get a minimal grip. Flooded with contradictory news about fast-changing events, they cannot ascertain its reliability and engage in systematic information gathering and deliberate decision-making. To navigate these unbounded situations, people eagerly draw on the mechanisms of bounded rationality, namely inferential shortcuts.

According to my analysis of 1848,[36] two shortcuts discovered by cognitive psychology, the heuristics of availability and representativeness,[37] played an especially important role in the cross-national spread of political contention during the "Springtime of the Peoples". The heuristic of availability affects attention as well as memory recall; it skews people's information intake and probability estimates. In a nutshell, drastic, vivid events make a disproportionate impression on people's mind, whereas less striking though highly relevant information is discounted. People overweigh dramatic appearance relative to actual importance, deviating from logical criteria. Stunning events have an excessive impact on perception and

thinking, leading people to overestimate their likelihood. After 9/11, for instance, many Americans avoided plane rides and preferred their car—although driving is much more dangerous.[38]

The representativeness heuristic also causes deviations from rationality by drawing inferences from seeming similarities, but neglecting statistical base rates—the crucial foundation for any logical assessment. Due to this multifaceted heuristic, people tend to derive overly firm conclusions from sparse information; contrary to statistical principles, they believe that patterns visible in limited samples are "representative" of the whole population. Therefore, an initial stretch of success can make an innovation look unusually attractive; a fully rational evaluation, by contrast, would consider the possibility that accidental factors contributed to the strong initial performance, which might soon give way to regression toward the mean. But the representativeness heuristic induces people to be overly impressed by a short run of data and to jump to conclusions about its significance.

The representativeness heuristic also leads observers to overrate the similarities between the forerunner and the situation they confront; by contrast, they underestimate the differences and their significance. These facile judgments make domestic circumstances appear similar to those that allowed for the precursor's original success. Accordingly, people rashly conclude that the conditions for replication are fulfilled in their own country. If they observe a striking and successful challenge to a foreign ruler, they infer that their own incumbent is also weak; that internal discontent is widespread and intense; and that potential challengers are willing and able to mobilize collectively and defy the forces of organized coercion with good prospects of success. In other words, people in a variety of countries see the precedent as "representative" of the political situations they are facing; they discount important differences that a thorough and systematic evaluation would consider.

These cognitive-psychological mechanisms help account for contention's swift spread across countries. Owing to the heuristics of availability and representativeness, the dramatic downfall of a longstanding ruler makes a disproportionate impression and captivates observers' attention in other countries; and impressions of similarity prompt much stronger emulation efforts than rational learning would counsel. Due to these shortcuts, a striking precedent makes challengers in a wide range of countries believe that they can achieve a similar feat; it boosts people's assessments of the feasibility and promise of confronting their own governments.

The heuristics of availability and representativeness thus inspire tsunamis of diffusion that sweep with stunning speed across a variety of polities. My earlier-mentioned case study shows that they are crucial for understanding the wave of 1848, when the downfall of Louis Philippe

triggered a plethora of immediate emulation efforts across Europe and beyond. As mentioned in the introduction, contention spread from France concentrically by the day and quickly affected a wide range of countries.[39] But since cognitive shortcuts help to spark precipitous, ill-considered challenges against established rulers in very diverse contexts, which include many unpropitious settings, aborted efforts and failures abound. Based on the availability and representativeness heuristics, people rush into emulation efforts—often under distinctly unpromising circumstances. Many rulers who suddenly face protests are in fact less weak than the autocrat who just fell; in fact, they can learn from this dramatic event and use their command over coercion to prevent successful replication. Therefore, incumbents often manage to preempt or suppress these externally-triggered protests and roll back challenges.

Cognitive heuristics thus shed crucial light on the underlying, systematic connection between high speed, broad scope, and low success in the cross-national spread of regime contention. This combination is unexpected in a fully rational world, where people rush into dangerous contention only when the chances of success are high. But it is predictable in the real world of bounded rationality. People get carried away by the rash inferences suggested by cognitive shortcuts, which can cause distortions and biases and are therefore not fully valid guides to successful action. The speed of emulation reflects imprudent precipitation, which leads many protagonists of imitative contention astray. Excessively impressed by an outstanding precedent and overrating its similarity and "representativeness" with the power constellation in their own polity, they strike at inopportune moments and challenge autocrats who sit in the saddle more firmly than these challengers believed. Cognitive shortcuts thus provide a powerful causal mechanism for the inner connection between the amazing speed and impressive scope of contention's diffusion, on the one hand, and its meager success, on the other.

The Tsunami of 1848: Cognitive Shortcuts in Inchoate Societies

Why did these inferential mechanisms play out with full, unfettered force in 1848, when several other waves of political contention advanced with much lower speed, yet greater success? For instance, the epic Russian Revolutions of 1917 unleashed much slower ripples, contributing to the toppling of autocrats and to important suffrage reforms only in late 1918. Similarly, the international student protests culminating in 1968 gathered steam over the course of several years, starting with the "Free Speech Movement" at Berkeley in 1964. And the third wave of democratization, which began in Southern Europe in 1974, unfolded in a rather leisurely fashion over the course of almost two decades.

As these contrasts suggest, inferential shortcuts alone cannot provide a full explanation; instead, they seem to operate differently and have diverse effects, depending on the political context, as my comparison of the European democratization waves of 1848 and 1917–19 suggests.[40] In particular, the organizational setting conditions how cognitive heuristics, which are individual-level mechanisms, shape political decision-making, a collective process. A polity's organizational density is especially important. Central European societies during the mid-nineteenth century were weakly organized and largely amorphous—inchoate, to borrow a concept used for uninstitutionalized party systems.[41] Specifically, there were few, if any, organizations that encompassed large numbers of common citizens, especially above the local level. By default, the decision whether to emulate the overthrow of Louis Philippe across Central and Eastern Europe lay with ordinary people in their families and small informal networks. These common citizens had only precarious information and lacked experience in political decision-making. Therefore, they made heavy use of cognitive shortcuts and were susceptible to the resulting distortions; disregarding prudence, they often jumped to conclusions. For these reasons, there was a strong chance that a striking foreign success would motivate significant numbers of people to rush to imitation efforts, which, however, held a high risk of failure.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw large-scale organization-building in Europe, especially among the lower classes that sought greater political and social inclusion.[42] For instance, social-democratic parties and unions came to encompass more and more workers in firm organizational structures and encompassing subcultures.[43] The leaders of these growing organizations came to guide and control collective action, including challenges to incumbent autocrats. Citizens now tended to follow these leaders, who commanded much better information, were experienced in political calculation, and had a fairly good understanding of the political opportunity structure, including the likely benefits and risks of political contention. Since organization leaders stood on firmer informational ground, they relied less heavily on cognitive shortcuts and therefore suffered fewer distortions in their inferences and judgments. Less affected by the availability and representativeness heuristics, their decisions on whether to confront autocratic rulers and lead their constituents toward contentious efforts were more attuned to the prevailing power constellation and took advantage of political openings, as my recent comparative study shows.[44]

In Europe, therefore, the emergence of organizational leadership led to a slowdown in the diffusion of political contention. This deceleration is evident in the slower repercussions of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, which triggered political protests, revolutions, and reform efforts in a range of European countries only at the end of 1918. But precisely because organizational leaders acted less rashly and waited for a good opportunity to challenge their rul-

ers, these emulative efforts achieved a good deal of success. They brought the final steps toward universal suffrage and full democracy in a number of nations, including Austria, Britain, Germany, and Sweden.[45] The development of large-scale political organizations thus gave waves of political conflict lower velocity, but a higher rate of success, as my just-cited examination of the contentious wave of 1917–19 shows. By contrast, regular citizens in inchoate societies are eager to emulate foreign precedents quickly, but this rush into action, even under unpropitious circumstances, produces frequent failure. Thus, polities' organizational density profoundly affects the way in which critical masses of people imitate foreign precedents. Inchoateness gives cognitive shortcuts free rein, whereas organization building brings forth political leaders who are less susceptible to rash inferences.

Similarities in Causal Mechanisms, 1848 and 2011

Can this theory about the unfettered operation of inferential heuristics in amorphous or repressed societies, which has been substantiated for the 1848 revolutions, elucidate the MENA uprisings as well? Above all, can this argument help explain the noteworthy combination of high speed and disappointing success that characterizes both of these diffusion processes? Can it thus account for the surprising parallels between these contentious waves that many observers have stressed—but left unexplained?

To address these questions, I will first examine the organizational setting of the contentious riptide in the MENA. Decades of authoritarian rule made it difficult for large-scale organizations to emerge and maintain a hold over mass constituencies, and in the rare case where such an organization existed, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it did not play a leading role in initiating the challenge of 2011,[46] which was spearheaded by newly mobilized, weakly organized sectors. As a result, the contention of the Arab Spring lacked clear organizational leadership that could authoritatively guide and speak for the protesting masses— precisely as during the revolutionary wave of 1848.

In these amorphous, repressed polities, the choice of whether or not to join the gathering storm of contention fell to common people and their informal personal or internet-based networks. In the absence of disciplined organizations that could send their "foot soldiers" into the streets, ordinary citizens had to decide whether to run the risk of defying autocrats who commanded fearsome coercion. Given the tremendous uncertainty prevailing during these unexpected episodes of regime contention, people who had little political knowledge and experience relied heavily on cognitive shortcuts. Ample evidence shows that critical masses of people were magnetically drawn to the surprising success of the Tunisian uprising and eagerly jumped to the conclusion that they could repeat a similar feat in their own country. Thus the heuristics of availabil-

ity and representativeness profoundly shaped the inferences that surging masses of people drew from the Tunisian precedent and induced them quickly to confront the undemocratic authorities governing a wide variety of Arab countries and beyond. Due to core mechanisms of bounded rationality, political conflict thus spread as instantaneously and rashly as in 1848. Typically, this precipitation reflected a lack of careful analysis of the existing power constellation and a deficient assessment of the prevailing opportunities and risks. Therefore, these over-optimistic efforts achieved very mixed and hitherto limited success; in particular, the urbane, secular, internet-connected reformers who initiated these challenges saw many of their goals and hopes disappointed.[47]

In sum, my explanation for the revolutionary wildfire of 1848 also seems to apply to the amazing wave of protests and rebellions in 2011, as the following sections show.

The Arab World: Inchoate Polities with Suppressed Civil Societies

Since decades of authoritarian imposition stifled organizational development in the MENA, broad-based associations and consolidated mass parties were rare in late 2010. Arab societies lacked organizational density;[48] even Egypt featured "a weak and fragmented civil society."[49] Opposition parties were prohibited and forced underground, "divided and ruled," or tightly limited in their political activities, especially their proselytizing efforts.[50] According to observers,[51] "most political parties in the region are feckless organizations with weak structures and generally old, even sclerotic, leadership." Where the government sponsored its own party, this vehicle of patronage lacked institutional firmness and an independent identity. Egypt's NDP, for instance, which had seemed to have considerable political significance,[52] proved to be strikingly weak and incapable of defending the Mubarak regime against the popular upsurge of early 2011; at this decisive moment, it "simply disintegrated."[53] Other types of collective action were sporadic and weak as well; area specialists highlight "the fatigue and demobilization of social movements."[54]

Given the absence or suppression of organizations that could represent large segments of the citizenry, the distribution of political preferences and power was opaque. Due to the common tendency toward prudent preference falsification under autocratic regimes,[55] the effective strength of support for the incumbent regime and the breadth and intensity of oppositional sentiment was anybody's guess; there was no reliable information on these crucial parameters for contentious efforts.[56] Citizens of all political persuasion, both supporters and adversaries of authoritarian rulers, faced tremendous uncertainty.

Ordinary people in these inchoate, largely unorganized societies lacked trusted leaders from whom to take guidance for their political actions. Few if any politicians held some kind of mandate to represent and authoritatively

speak for mass sectors, therefore they could not direct common citizens toward contention.[57] Small nuclei of activists had for years tried to stir up demonstrations against the regime, most prominently in Egypt. But because they lacked any solid mass organization, their sporadic protests had elicited very limited support. The sudden participation of tens and hundreds of thousands of discontented citizens in early 2011 was spontaneous, not commanded by representative leaders and engineered by disciplined organizations. In fact, this mass outpouring of dissatisfaction came unexpected for all parties involved; erupting after many years of quiescence, it shocked not only the authorities, but also surprised the initiators, who had not foreseen this extent of backing in their "wildest dreams."[58]

Because MENA societies lacked organizational density, the demonstrations and uprisings during the Arab Spring were as leaderless, amorphous, and fluid as during the Springtime of the Peoples in 1848. A polyphony and sometimes cacophony of voices arose and quickly swelled. But these voices could not draw on real political authority, not to speak of organizational discipline, and they did not even represent the broader population.[59] Few if any leaders had effective influence over followers and managed to control their contentious behavior. Instead, the decision whether to participate in protest fell to ordinary citizens, individually or with their families, friends, or Facebook groupings. Because political leadership was weak, common people had to make up their own mind.

Even the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the exceptional case of a firm organization with broad societal roots, did not take the lead in the effort to replicate Tunisia's success. Decades of repression had pushed it to adopt a cautious, risk-averse posture;[60] therefore, its top officials waited on the sidelines when protests started and quickly mushroomed in early 2011.[61] In Egypt as in the remainder of the region, the uprising was convoked and coordinated by loose networks of activists and spearheaded by fluid movements and spontaneous, leaderless crowds.[62] In fact, some protagonists, such as Egypt's Wael Ghonim, creator of a crucial Facebook page, long remained anonymous to avoid repression. Thus the people who set in motion these cascades of contention used their power of persuasion, but they did not have any power of command.

As in Europe during the mid-nineteenth century,[63] mass demonstrations lacked firm organization, well-oiled discipline, and authoritative leadership. Incumbents were at a loss when they undertook negotiation efforts: Who could really speak for the rebellious crowds? Who represented the contentious masses? The lack of organization is evident in the quick escalation of protesters' demands. They did not initiate these challenges with a well-defined program, but spontaneously voiced their discontent and initially pressed specific, fairly limited demands. Indignation over autocrats' repressive response then induced demonstrators to radicalize their goals and call for the removal of the leader, intoning the chant borrowed from the Tunisian precedent, "The people demand the overthrow of the regime!" This unplanned shift to all-out confrontation is typical of unorganized contention, which is difficult to sustain over the medium and long run. Once amorphous crowds have started a challenge and encountered governmental resistance, they have every incentive to push hard for an immediate victory, as Egyptian activists stressed;[64] the alternative is certain defeat. Fluid multitudes that face a recalcitrant regime must go for all or nothing; only well-established organizations can maintain collective pressure over time and pursue a strategy of cumulative gradual reform, which entails lower costs and risks. By contrast, spontaneous masses need to win now if they want to win ever; they therefore rapidly move to full-scale conflict to achieve this victory.

The absence of disciplined organizations also caused popular mobilization to recede quickly and the temporary unity of opposition forces to fray even more quickly.[65] Amorphous multitudes can spearhead a dramatic upsurge of protest, but soon a downswing tends to set in, especially if contention achieves its direct goal, such as the removal of a hated autocrat. Political mobilization is usually cyclical;[66] the less organized it is, the shorter are these cycles. Unorganized contention oscillates with particularly high amplitude. The problem is, however, that a ruler's downfall does not necessarily transform the power structure; although the figurehead is gone, his support coalition can retain an effective stranglehold on politics, as the military tries to do in contemporary Egypt and ex-president Saleh's relatives and cronies in Yemen.[67]

The striking ups and downs that characterize unorganized contention were evident during the Arab Spring. The upswing of strife drew particular attention, of course, but the downswing is noteworthy as well. Activists have been dismayed about the difficulty of maintaining popular mobilization and preserving the unity of the protesters.[68] After the initial days of excitement, many people have withdrawn into private life, and the remaining demonstrators face growing criticism from a silent majority longing for a return to normality. And while the rebellious crowds all shared the goal of toppling the dictator, discord erupted soon after as heterogeneous forces came to push and pull in divergent directions. Even in Egypt, where large multitudes have sporadically gathered for renewed demonstrations, mobilization has not been as massive as during the initial contention. Moreover, these renewed protests have evidenced the growing divisions among the diverse political forces that jockey for influence in the new, more open political situation.[69]

In conclusion, political contention during the Arab Spring rested on weak organizational foundations. The inchoate and repressed societies of the MENA lacked representative leaders who could have commanded the loyalty and discipline of ordinary citizens. Instead, common people

with their informal personal networks or Internet-based connections had to decide on their own whether to join the escalating wave of protests.

The Crucial Role of Cognitive Shortcuts in the Arab Spring

Since regime contention in unorganized polities carried tremendous uncertainty and risk and since the weakness of organizational leadership placed the choice on whether to participate in these dangerous challenges in the hands of ordinary citizens, cognitive shortcuts held unfettered sway during the Arab Spring and propelled this amazing wave of political regime conflict. As a wealth of evidence shows, the inferential heuristics that set in motion the revolutionary tsunami of 1848 also fueled the cross-national spread of protests and uprisings in 2011. The availability heuristic drew enormous attention to the stunning Tunisian precedent; and the representativeness heuristic suggested to large crowds that they could replicate this feat in their own countries. As innumerous participant accounts document, all eyes were directed toward Tunis; the gripping events there raised many people's hopes that they could accomplish similar political transformations across the region. Accordingly, challengers throughout the MENA employed the symbols of the initial uprising and chanted the same slogans from Morocco in the West to Sudan in the South and Iran in the East.

Due to the availability heuristic, the Tunisian events captivated people in the Arab world and beyond and turned into the decisive catalyst of the protest wave of 2011. Discontent fueled by a host of serious economic, social, and political problems had brewed for many years. In some countries such as Egypt, fluid networks of activists had tried to spark contention on several earlier occasions. But these efforts had never found much resonance; by 2010, frustration with these failures grew and depressed participation further.[70] Thus, these activists had certainly not managed to initiate a serious challenge to the established regime.

What changed in early 2011 and triggered a sudden upsurge of mass demonstrations that in their breadth, intensity, and courage surprised even their promoters[71] was the powerful impact of the Tunisian precedent, which in line with the availability heuristic immediately grabbed the attention of observers of all stripes.[72] Once that uprising gathered steam in early January and especially after it succeeded in driving out long-ruling dictator Ben Ali in mid-month, vast numbers of people all over the region turned their eyes to these epic events. The quickly following explosion of protest in Egypt, itself triggered by the Tunisian precedent, also attracted tremendous interest and reinforced the mobilizational impulse that drove the gathering storm. In line with the availability heuristic, new media usage during the Arab Spring indeed displayed "very sharp peaks

of attention pegged to dramatic events, such as the departure of Ben Ali in Tunisia."[73]

People all over the Arab world and beyond also applied the representativeness heuristic, inferring from these dramatic precedents that now was a good chance to defy their own rulers too. They emphasized the similarities between the precedent and the situation prevailing in their nation; they regarded the Tunisian and Egyptian events as representative for the wider region. Drawing surprisingly firm inferences from these precedents—a small sample—they jumped to the conclusion that they could repeat these successes. Due to this short circuit, the Tunisian and subsequent Egyptian example inspired the rash view that rulers across the Arab world were vulnerable and that critical masses of people were ready and able to defy these autocrats successfully. Many eyewitnesses recorded this rapidly congealing—but logically problematic—conviction.

The unfettered operation and powerful impact of the availability and representativeness heuristics is especially noteworthy in the Egyptian case, which quickly followed upon the single precedent of Tunisia. These causal mechanisms are well documented because modern electronic media provide a record of participants' assessments and beliefs "in real time." Indeed, within minutes of receiving the news of Ben Ali's forced departure, an Egyptian activist Tarek Shalaby tweeted in response to the message, "Tunisians are the heroes of the Arab world:" "WE WILL FOLLOW!"[74] As mobilizational energy built up in Cairo over the following days, another cyber-activist, Gigi Ibrahim, tweeted: "There is nothing that #Mubarak can do now to prevent the madness that will end his regime . . . . IT WILL HAPPEN THIS YEAR!! #DownWithMubarak 2011."[75] In the run-up to a large demonstration, Ibrahim announced with the certainty that is typical of people influenced by the representativeness heuristic: "I am sure Egypt will rise up tomorrow on a Friday just like Tunisia did on a Friday also!" On the same day, with a bit more caution, Hossam el-Hamalawy wrote, "No one knows what tomorrow is gonna be like. But I'm very hopeful. I'm very optimistic Mubarak's reign is about to end."[76] Finally, on February 11, right after Egypt's pharaoh had been evicted, Ibrahim wrote, "Thank you Tunisians 4m [sic] the bottom of my heart. Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi, Syria & Libya: keep fighting, nothing is impossible."[77]

These raw, unvarnished expressions of participants' surprisingly optimistic beliefs, sent at the spur of the moment from the midst of mass demonstrations and street battles, best reflect the operation of cognitive shortcuts and their crucial contribution to propelling emulative contention. Many other eyewitness accounts corroborate the role of inferential heuristics. To explain the outpouring of protesters in Cairo in late January, for instance, protagonist Ayman Nour stressed, "When [Tunisian] President Ben Ali stepped down . . . the Egyptian people said: 'Wow! If a country that tiny can do it, so can we.'"[78]

Similarly, after detailing his earlier mobilizational efforts, which achieved little success and seemed stuck in a cul-de-sac, activist Wael Ghonim wrote in his memoir: "But history kept intervening . . . events outside Egypt suddenly gave us the spark we needed . . . . The victory of the people of Tunisia would send a strong message . . . to our Facebook page members: we can effect change in Egypt." "Analogies between Tunisia and Egypt were increasingly being drawn;" there was "mounting anger of many Egyptians who sought to replicate this situation with Mubarak."[79] Therefore, after some hesitation due to the obvious risks, Ghonim felt it "necessary to completely reposition [a limited protest] event" [that he had already called before Ben Ali's overthrow] and found himself "unable to resist the word *revolution*. Every time I attempted to steer away from it in my thoughts, it kept coming back."[80] The last statement reveals how the powerful inferences produced by the representativeness heuristic pushed aside the caution that—given obvious risks—conventional rationality counseled. As a result, Ghonim announced on his Facebook page: "After all that's happened in Tunisia, my position has changed. Hopes for real political change in Egypt are much higher now."[81]

In more dramatic terms, film director Mohamed Diab recalls that after an ill-supported protest at the very beginning of 2011, "the chains of helplessness dangled menacingly . . . Then a complete miracle appeared, almost out of nowhere. On the 14th of January, a mere week after the failed mourning/protest, beautiful Tunisia brushed oppression off its shoulders and sent out the brightest beacon of hope to hit the Arab world in over fifty years . . . On that glorious day, my Facebook status read: 'Our ordeal appears to be as good as over. It is now only a matter of time.'"[82] Shaking off the frustration of several earlier failures, activist Mohamed Shawky also believed in the run-up to the initial protest of January 25: "I think it is all coming together because of Tunisia . . . This one will be different. I can feel it in my bones . . . This will not be like the meager gathering in 2005 [and other futile challenges]. *This* one . . . we will have our revolution. It can really happen."[83]

Cognitive shortcuts also affected people's thinking and decision-making in a wide range of other countries. For instance, a prominent human rights advocate in Morocco wrote a magazine article right after Ben Ali's fall that carried the euphoric title, "We are all Tunisians!"[84] In this remarkable reflection of the representativeness heuristic, Fouad Abdelmoumni stressed what he saw as the many similarities between the front-runner country and his own nation in historical heritage, economy, politics, ideology, and social tension and unrest. He admitted some differences, but immediately emphasized aspects that made the political situation in Morocco even worse—and therefore more prone to contentious challenges.

Similarly, an exiled Libyan activist, Fathi al-Warfali, commented on the beginning wave of protests in his home country that "these are old demands of the opposition in exile, but Egypt and Tunisia have given us a new impulse. They have torn down the barrier of fear."[85] Another Moroccan oppositionist, Oussama El Khlifi, explained in an interview the origin of the protest movement in his country: "In January 2011, we took inspiration from the Tunisian revolution. . . . We felt that if we moved to a structured movement with well-defined demands, we could initiate a revolution like those of Tunisia and Egypt."[86]

Revealing their focus on the Tunisian success and their judgments of similarity and representativeness, protesters in Egypt who tried to emulate this precedent characteristically used the same watchwords and demands. During the first massive demonstration, for instance, "the slogan 'Tunisia is the solution' was shouted in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria."[87] In the same vein, Egyptian activists tweeted from the middle of the first mass demonstration on January 25, 2011, "The chant in many of the protests is LEAVE! Just like #Tunisia;" and "Tahrir is a war zone now. Tens of thousands r protesting the same chants as the Tunisians."[88] This effort to re-enact a successful foreign uprising in one's own country, based on a clear overestimation of similarities in the socio-political setting, also characterized the revolutionary wave of 1848, when protesters across Europe sang the *Marseillaise* and erected "freedom trees."

In other MENA countries, the firm belief and magical hope that the accomplishments of the Tunisian and then Egyptian protesters could be repeated induced demonstrators to use the same watchwords, slogans, and symbols as well. For instance, in Bahrain and Libya, protesters called a "Day of Rage," just as in Tunisia and Egypt before. As in Egypt,[89] so in Libya and Yemen "the crowd chanted 'The people want to topple the regime' [the main slogan of the Tunisian uprising] . . . Opposition protesters [in Yemen] wore pink bandanas referencing what has become known as the Jasmine Revolution" of Tunisia.[90] Similarly, during mass demonstrations in Morocco "excited youth held aloft a banner bearing the image of Mohammed Bouazizi, the Tunisian vegetable seller, whose self-immolation touched off the Arab revolt."[91]

Indeed, in the most grisly and least conventionally rational form of this reenactment, a number of individuals across the Arab world set themselves ablaze,[92] hoping that this last act of despair would help to trigger a Tunisian-style uprising in their own nation.[93] This wave of self-immolations in January 2011 reflects the most extreme choice some people made under the influence of the availability and representativeness heuristics. Yet as protests quickly erupted in many countries, this ultimate "exit" gave way to "voice." Expressions of profound dissatisfaction turned from self-destruction to challenges to ruling autocrats. Activists encouraged this transition. Hossam el-Hamalawy tweeted in Cairo on the evening of Ben Ali's forced departure: "people r setting themselves on fire. i suggest they burn down police stations and

torture factories instead." The next day, Gigi Ibrahim chimed in: "is this true a 3rd person lights himself on fire at parliament for the 2ND TIME TODAY!?! #Sidi-bouzid" (site of Bouazizi's self-immolation). Minutes later, Nora Shalaby made the most imaginative suggestion: "I think it is time for Mubarak to set himself of [sic] fire. He is the one who really deserves to burn."[94]

Understanding inferential heuristics, then, is crucial for capturing people's decision-making process during the Arab Spring. As the wealth of primary documents show— most glaringly the tweets from the thick of mass contention—participants commonly diverged from the rules of logic in defining their choices on this high-stakes issue. Given the tremendous danger of joining protests against repressive regimes, rational calculations and even common sense would have counseled careful delibera-tion, a systematic evaluation of opportunities and risks, and a preference for prudence and caution. But thor-ough assessments of benefits and costs were conspicuous by their absence. People did not wait for solid informa-tion, but rushed into action based on rumors. Swept along by rash inferences derived from very precarious information, critical masses of people were willing to throw caution to the wind.

Numerous first-hand accounts demonstrate how par-ticipants were suddenly caught up in fast-moving, fluid, and unpredictable events that they had difficulty assessing and understanding.[95] As solid, reliable information was scarce, "improbable rumors" ran wild, "catch[ing] on rather quickly."[96] Protesters stood on fragile ground, shifting rap-idly from overconfidence to paranoia and back.[97] As even advocates of rational choice would argue,[98] this extreme uncertainty, when all parameters of political action were up in the air, impeded systematic calculations. Instead, it gave inferential heuristics free rein. Only these simple but logically problematic shortcuts enabled people to make minimal sense of chaotic situations that they had never encountered before.

The availability and representativeness heuristics also seem to provide causal micro-foundations for observa-tions by area specialists such as Eva Bellin:

> The rapid fall of the dictator in Tunisia gave Egyptians the feel-ing that suddenly the impossible was possible. . . . [T]he success-ful overthrow of Ben Ali in Tunisia created a wave of optimism and euphoria that only gained momentum after Mubarak was deposed less than one month later. In this context, hope and euphoria outweighed rational calculation of risk, cost, and ben-efit. 'People power' had succeeded in overthrowing two seem-ingly invincible autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, so why not in Bahrain and Syria as well?[99]

Similarly, Marc Lynch avers that "in the week following Mubarak's fall . . . anything seemed possible . . . The com-parison to Egypt and Tunisia exaggerated the real pros-pects for victory, which could lead hopeful but naïve protestors to their deaths."[100]

Cognitive Heuristics and the Limited Success of the Arab Spring

The emulative contention fueled by the availability and representativeness heuristics can be heroic and admirable; from the perspective of what Max Weber called an "ethic of conviction," people finally "do the right thing," stand up to despots, and demand dignity and liberty. But as Weber cautioned, an "ethic of responsibility," which con-siders probabilities rather than mere possibilities, obliges us to ask serious questions about the likely consequences of such boldness, which can result in disproportionate costs and sacrifices. Given the realities of power and inter-est, rash defiance may well fail to bring lasting improve-ments; it can even provoke a backlash and make things worse. Conviction and boldness are not necessarily valid guides to action, especially when inspired by the shortcuts of bounded rationality.

In the Arab Spring, as during the Springtime of the Peoples in 1848, the impressions of similarity suggested by the representativeness heuristic were especially prob-lematic and frequently proved misleading. Why infer from the downfall of Tunisia's and then Egypt's dictator that the rulers of a wide range of other countries were also vulner-able and could be successfully challenged, right at this moment? These beliefs, which drove the rash of emula-tion efforts, overlooked a number of important differ-ences across MENA countries. As area experts emphasize, countries in the region differed in the nature of their regime and state, the role of the military, the composition and cohesion of the opposition, and the involvement of extra-regional powers—to name just the major factors.[101] These important differences should have raised serious questions about the replicability of the Tunisian and Egyptian prec-edents; but the representativeness heuristic made many people overlook these issues and quickly join emulation efforts, which then, rather predictably, achieved much less success—at least so far—than these participants expected.

Social science finds some types of regimes and states particularly vulnerable to mass challenges, whereas others are more firmly grounded and have greater stability. Neo-patrimonial, Sultanistic dictatorships, built around the per-son of the ruler and deficient in institutionalization, have proven especially fragile. "Although such regimes often appear unshakable, they are actually highly vulnerable, because the very strategies they use to stay in power make them brittle, not resilient," Jack Goldstone argues.[102] No wonder that Ben Ali's autocracy in Tunisia, a prime exam-ple of Sultanism, crumbled quickly. What was surprising and logically problematic, however, was that this event inspired oppositionists to defy other types of regimes as well, such as the traditional monarchies of Bahrain and Morocco and the theocracy of Iran. Unsurprisingly, those challenges proved much less successful.[103]

Even in cases of Sultanism, the military's position vis-à-vis the ruler and the regime can make an enormous

difference. Indeed, Derek Lutterbeck finds that "military forces have responded quite differently across the region to prodemocracy movements, ranging from openness to, and even support for, protest movements, to internal fracturing, to firm support for the regime in power."[104] Specifically, Tunisia's professional military quickly withdrew from politics. By contrast, Egypt's armed forces, for decades a mainstay of authoritarian rule, have tried hard to preserve their influence and tightly restrict civilian politicians. And in Syria, sectional divisions have aligned the generals with the dictator and induced them to repress protesters atrociously.[105] Thus, as regards the military's role as well, the lessons from Tunisia were in no way generalizable.

The distribution of political preferences among the citizenry and their willingness and capacity to engage in protest also vary across countries. According to Jason Brownlee, Tarek Masoud, and Andrew Reynolds, "in only one Arab country, Tunisia, did the domestic balance of power favor challengers during the transition."[106] This North African nation had a relatively secular and modern society; as divisions and conflicts were limited, antiauthoritarian protest quickly found broad support. By contrast, Libya, Syria, and Yemen are rent by tribal, religious, or regional cleavages, weakening the opposition and facilitating autocrats' efforts to "divide and (continue to) rule." As a result, attempts to imitate the Tunisian and Egyptian success faced much greater obstacles in those countries.[107]

Last but not least, the differential interest and involvement of powerful countries from outside the region significantly affect the chances of political contention. Since Tunisia lacks geostrategic importance, challengers had ample room to bring down their dictator. But the US has been determined to forestall truly radical change in Egypt, Bahrain, and Yemen, and Russia has similarly protected its Syrian client. By contrast, Libya's eccentric autocrat had long drawn the wrath of Western countries and their regional allies, which took advantage of the opportunity to evict him. In sum, international influences diminished the chances for emulative regime contention in a number of countries, but increased them elsewhere.

Due to the workings of the representativeness heuristic, however, there was a widespread failure in the MENA in early 2011 to take these significant differences seriously. This oversight, a clear deviation from conventional rationality, held a great deal of responsibility for the hitherto low success of this contentious wave. As regional expert Marc Lynch writes, "If the delirious spread of protests in February demonstrated the power of diffusion effects in the new Arab public sphere . . . by April, the delirious spirit of inevitable triumph had long faded. . . . The challenged Arab regimes proved that they would not easily surrender their power even in the face of this newly empowered Arab public."[108]

Conclusion

To help explain the surprising parallels between the Arab Spring and the Springtime of the Peoples in 1848, I have highlighted fundamental mechanisms of information processing and political inference that found free rein in similarly suppressed and inchoate civil societies. As a wealth of instant messages and eyewitness reports shows, the heuristics of availability and representativeness propelled the rapid spread of political contention across a whole region and beyond in early 2011, just as they had done in 1848, according to my case study. Like the eviction of King Louis Philippe in Paris, the overthrow of long-ruling autocrat Ben Ali in Tunis immediately grabbed people's attention and made a disproportionately strong impression. Indeed, this single success prompted the rash, unthinking belief that the same feat could be replicated in a variety of other countries. Under the influence of the representativeness heuristic, people stressed the apparent similarities in these diverse settings and overlooked or downplayed the actual differences. Therefore, they jumped to the overoptimistic conclusion that they could repeat Tunisians' accomplishment in their own country as well.

Any realistic assessment conducted according to the rules of Bayesian updating and standard logic—or indeed according to the less demanding calculi of political judgment typically employed by political elites—would have cast doubt on these simplistic inferences, which gave rise to spontaneous outbursts of emulative protest. Because demonstrators in so many countries overrated the effective chances for success, their costly and risky efforts often failed to achieve their goals. Rather than toppling one autocrat after the other and moving toward freedom and democracy, oppositionists in numerous countries faced determined repression, which squashed protests in Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—not to speak of the faint stirrings in China—and ushered in spirals of escalating violence in Libya, Syria, and Yemen, with rather bleak prospects for instituting political competition amid the rule of law. Even in the one case where emulative contention reached its direct goal with relative ease, namely Egypt, the extent of effective regime transformation remains unclear and the path ahead cloudy; the continuing strength of the military, cornerstone of the old order, and the recent ascendance of Islamists, including the fundamentalist Salafis, pose obstacles to pluralist democracy. In sum, the role of cognitive shortcuts in inspiring the precipitous, often ill-considered emulation of contention in many different countries accounts for the disappointment of initial expectations and hopes and the meager success of the Arab Spring—a similar result as in Europe during 1848–49.

By documenting the operation of inferential heuristics in organizationally amorphous and repressed societies, I have sought to account for the underlying similarities between two contentious waves that swept through different regions at different world-historical times. I have thus

offered a causal explanation for the parallels that historians and sociologists have stressed. This comparison in turn suggests further insights. For instance, many participants and observers of the Arab Spring have highlighted the crucial role of modern news media and social technologies, such as al-Jazeera, Facebook, and Twitter, in propelling this riptide.[109] But the similarities with 1848 raise questions about these claims. Even in the absence of such instant means of communication, news traveled quickly and inspired rash emulation efforts. In the mid-nineteenth century, it took the trains a couple of days to take newspapers, letters, and passengers from country to country. Correspondingly, protests spread concentrically by the day, just as fast as during the Arab Spring; one can literally see the tsunami tearing eastward from Paris across Central Europe.[110]

The only real difference is that modern communication technologies easily overcome geographic distance; in 2011, mass demonstrations therefore spread less concentrically, erupting in a more fragmented fashion at varying distances from the precedents of Tunisia and then Egypt.[111] As this comparison suggests, modern technology did not significantly shape the temporal unfolding of these firestorms of contention. It only affected their geographic pattern; the 1848 revolutions diffused across territory more like a wave in a pond. Certainly, the images and sounds that modern technologies transmitted in 2011 were more vivid and graphic than the verbal news that spread in 1848. But these signals competed for attention with the flood of other stimuli that citizens of the third millennium receive every day. They probably did not stand out from this "noise" any more than the extra edition of a newspaper that reported the surprise of Louis Philippe's downfall did during the information-starved mid-nineteenth century.

In a broader perspective, this comparison of 1848 and 2011 suggests that beneath and beyond the peculiarities of space and time, political contention is molded in part by basic cognitive mechanisms that people commonly apply for information processing and decision-making. Both in Central Europe in the mid-nineteenth century and the Arab world in the early twenty-first, the availability and representativeness heuristics helped to fuel powerful waves of challenges. Psychologists have long documented the operation and impact of these inferential heuristics in many spheres of life. Political science has only begun to draw on these well-corroborated findings to elucidate the decisions it studies. By demonstrating the crucial role of cognitive shortcuts in a high-stakes and high-profile sequence of recent political events, I hope to encourage further pursuit of this novel research agenda, which promises to yield a wealth of striking insights.

It would be interesting to examine, for instance, what role inferential heuristics played in other waves of contention, such as the world-wide eruption of student protest and societal activism in 1968 or the "occupy" movements

in advanced industrialized countries during 2011. Such investigations would raise the important theoretical question how cognitive shortcuts operate in societies of greater organizational density. Can organizations such as political parties and broad-based interest associations fulfill their intended function of improving human information processing and decision-making and thus loosen the bounds of rationality?[112] If so, does political contention diffuse in less precipitous ways and achieve greater success? By probing these issues, scholars can embed the micro-mechanisms of cognitive psychology in the organizational macro-structures of politics and thus build a theory of bounded rationality for our discipline.

Notes

1 Chronology in Filiu 2011, vii–xii; broad overviews in Lynch 2012, 80–124, and Nordhausen and Schmid 2011; on sub-Saharan Africa, see Clark 2012; on China, Jacobs 2011 and Peerenboom 2011.
2 Way 2011 highlights additional differences between these contentious waves.
3 See Whitehead 2011.
4 *Contra* Osterhammel 2009, 781.
5 Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds forthcoming, ch. 3, 7–12, and ch. 6, 27–33; Stacher 2012, 3–4, 158–62, 170–71; Valenzuela 2012; Kirkpatrick 2012.
6 Puddington 2012, 77–82.
7 Goldstone 2011.
8 For Europe, see Huntington 1991 and Kurzman 1998; for the Middle East, Kurzman 2008.
9 Owen 2010; Narizny 2012.
10 Tarrow 2005.
11 Whitehead 2001 (4–15) similarly distinguishes external promotion and imposition ("control") from diffusion ("contagion").
12 Hvistendahl 2011; Al-Momani 2011, 159–61.
13 In fact, survey evidence suggests that youth grievances were not decisive in propelling the uprisings (Hoffman and Jamal 2012, 184–85).
14 Comninos 2011; Harb 2011; Howard and Hussain 2011; Joseph 2011; Rane and Salem 2012; nuanced discussions in Lynch 2011 and Aday et al. 2012; great empirical investigation in Solomon 2012.
15 Lynch 2012, 10–13, 124.
16 Ghonim 2012, ch. 3–5; Rashad 2012, 131, 140, 341–43.
17 Owen 2010; similarly Narizny 2012.
18 Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds forthcoming, chap. 6, 10, 36–47.
19 See in general Tarrow 2005. Givan, Roberts, and Soule 2010 (10–12) also distinguishes activist promotion as a "relational mechanism" from the contagion and demonstration effects discussed later, which rest on "nonrelational mechanisms."

20 Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 132–36, 144, 160, 186, 203, 236, 300–4.
21 Nuanced assessment in Stolberg 2011.
22 Kuran 1995.
23 Lohmann 1994, 2000; Kuran 1995.
24 See Marwell and Oliver 1993.
25 Goldstone 2011.
26 Weyland 2009, 406–16.
27 See the fascinating participant accounts from Egypt in Nunns and Idle 2011 and Rashad 2012.
28 Lohmann 2000, 663, 668–69.
29 See Goodwin 2011.
30 Kuran 1995, 74, 158–66, 180, 258; also Kuran and Sunstein 1999.
31 Weyland 2009.
32 Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Petersen 2002.
33 Jones 1999, 298.
34 See Popkin 1991.
35 Sewell 2005, ch. 3.
36 Weyland 2009, 2012.
37 Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Gilovich, Griffin, and Kahneman 2002; Hastie and Dawes 2010, ch. 5.
38 Gigerenzer 2006.
39 Comprehensive overview in Dowe et al. 2001.
40 Weyland 2012.
41 Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 4–5, 19–24, 27–28.
42 Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975, 192–97, 212, 227, 237, 254.
43 Bartolini 2000, ch. 2, 6; Eley 2002, ch. 1–2, 4.
44 Weyland 2012.
45 Eley 2002, 121, 124, 138, 154–56, 169–72, 220–24.
46 Wickham 2011, 212.
47 Valenzuela 2012.
48 King 2009, 96, 104–6, 110, 125–30.
49 Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds forthcoming, ch. 6, 20.
50 Langohr 2004, 181–93; Lust-Okar 2007; Vairel 2011, 33–38.
51 Ottaway and Hamzawy 2009, 7.
52 Brownlee 2007, ch. 1, 3–4.
53 Stacher 2012, 8; see also 9, 158.
54 Beinin and Vairel 2011, 17; similar Ottaway and Hamzawy 2009, 8–10.
55 Kuran 1995.
56 See Goodwin 2011.
57 For Yemen, e.g., see Heibach 2011, 160–63.
58 Rashad 2012, 352; Ghonim 2012, 189; Soueif 2012, 7, 48.
59 See Lynch 2012, 128–30. In fact, quite a number of the "tweets from Tahrir" reproduced in Nunns and Idle 2011 (54, 56, 81, 84, 90–91, 96, 184) insisted on the spontaneous nature of this contention, the insignificant role of politicians who claimed leadership, and the non-involvement of

Egypt's principal political organization, the Muslim Brotherhood.
60 Albrecht 2007, 68–71.
61 Wickham 2011, 212.
62 Shahid 2011; Joseph 2011, 14–15; Ghonim 2012, 293.
63 I establish this point in comparing the tsunami of 1848 with the slower wave of 1917–19, Weyland 2012.
64 Egyptian activists were concerned to maintain momentum during their uprising; see "tweets from Tahrir" reproduced in Nunns and Idle 2011, 135, 140, 143, 150, 154, 161.
65 Kasinof 2011; Masoud 2011.
66 Hirschman 1982; Tarrow 2011, ch. 10.
67 Kirkpatrick 2012; Newton-Small and Hauslohner 2012; Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds forthcoming, ch. 6, 27–34.
68 See, e.g., film director Mohamed Diab in Rashad 2012, 103–4.
69 Masoud 2011.
70 Albrecht 2007, 66–74; Ghonim 2012, 101–16; Filiu 2011, 47–53.
71 This surprisingly massive turnout confirms the spontaneous nature of this contention: Initiators had no idea how much support their convocation would elicit.
72 Joseph 2011, 12–13.
73 Aday et al. 2012, 12.
74 Reproduced in Nunns and Idle 2011, 27.
75 Ibid., 28.
76 Ibid., 56.
77 Ibid., 220.
78 Reported in Feiler 2011, 19.
79 Ghonim 2012, 131, 133, and 136, respectively; similarly 293–94.
80 Ibid., 136.
81 Ibid., 137.
82 Cited in Rashad 2012, 10.
83 Ibid., 123.
84 Abdelmoumni 2011. Abdelmoumni's stature was confirmed by Matthew Buehler during his field research in Morocco, personal communication, February 21, 2012.
85 Quoted in *Mercurio* 2011, author's translation.
86 In Najib 2011, author's translation.
87 Filiu 2011, 23.
88 In Nunns and Idle 2011, 37, 41; similarly Rashad 2012, 104–5, 140, 297.
89 Nunns and Idle 2011, 85.
90 Kasinof and Slackman 2011.
91 Waraich 2011.
92 Kirkpatrick 2011.
93 See Taha and Combs 2012, 76.
94 All in Nunns and Idle 2011, 28.

95 Nunns and Idle 2011; for participant accounts, see especially Rashad 2012, Rashed 2011, and Ghonim 2012.

96 Rashed 2011, 25; similar in Nunns and Idle 2011, 85, 89, 193, 210.

97 Rashed 2011, 26; Hamdy 2012.

98 Tsebelis 1990, 32–38.

99 Bellin 2012, 137, 141.

100 Lynch 2012, 101, 103.

101 Besides the authors cited in the following paragraphs, see also Anderson 2011; Asseburg 2012; Dalacoura 2012; Khashan 2012; Salamey and Pearson 2012.

102 Goldstone 2011, 8; see also Goldstone 1986. Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds (forthcoming, ch. 2, 18–19), however, question the explanatory power of Sultanism because of substantial differences among those regimes. For instance, the internal distribution of power varies greatly and affects stability: Some Sultanistic regimes centralize power in the ruler, whereas others rest more precariously on coalitions. Yet the opacity of such personalistic regimes leads regional experts to disagree on specific cases. For instance, Owen 2012 (61–62, 80–88, 144) classifies Syria as a "centralized state system," but Stacher 2012 (22–23 and passim) calls it decentralized.

103 On the very limited concessions extracted by protestors in Morocco, see Maddy-Weitzman 2012, 90–92.

104 Lutterbeck 2012.

105 Barany 2011; Bellin 2012, 130–35; Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds, forthcoming, ch. 6, 23–36.

106 Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds forthcoming, ch. 2, 3.

107 On Libya, see Schmid 2011, 100–4; on Syria, Ajami 2012, ch. 7; Landis 2012; Hinnebusch 2012, 106–13.

108 Lynch 2012, 158–59.

109 See, e.g., Howard and Hussain 2011; careful discussion in Lynch 2011.

110 For the spread of barricade fighting, the most violent protest, see map in Traugott 2010, 141.

111 I owe this observation to Wendy Hunter.

112 Simon 1976, 79–80, 100–3, 240–41.

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