

After Repression: How Polarization Derails Democratic Transition.
Elizabeth R. Nugent (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020). Pp. 268.
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Following the initial 2010–11 so-called Arab Spring uprisings, a number of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) regimes were able to avert threatening challenges and political transition (i.e., Morocco and Bahrain). However, revolts in other states resulted in security vacuums and intrastate conflict (i.e., Syria, Yemen, and Libya), a return to, or increase in, authoritarian repression (i.e., Egypt), or democratic transition (i.e., Tunisia). Scholars have attempted to explain why Tunisia was able to remain on a path to successful democratization while Egypt's tumultuous transition eventuated in an arguably more repressive regime under the leadership of former military general Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. Early explanations focused on the role of the military, but few scholarly works have explored in depth why Tunisia was able to achieve a democratic transition while Egypt was not. Elizabeth N. Nugent's *After Repression* masterfully addresses this puzzle.

Focusing on transitions by rupture, Nugent's central argument is that the extent of political polarization within the opposition determines whether elite actors will be able to cooperate and compromise, a necessary condition for democratization. When levels of polarization are high, political elites are less likely to reach consensus, whereas lower polarization levels will ease the way to agreements among political parties and groups.

After Repression draws on social identity theory as well as social-psychological approaches, and chapters 1 and 2 meticulously build on, and address the gaps in, existing accounts of polarization, at the same time providing an exemplary model of how to lay out a clear, step-by-step explanation of an original theory. One of the most exciting and novel contributions that Nugent's work makes is its explanation of the connection between "polarization" and "repression." According to the author, opposition polarization is a function of the type of repression employed by an authoritarian regime. Widespread repression, where all opposition groups suffer from regime repression, increases positive affect between ideologically disparate groups and allows for out-group identification, whereas targeted repression, when one group is repressed more than others, increases the targeted group's in-group identification. Thus, when all opposition groups face state repression, they will form a collective identity based on victimization by the state and polarization among them will decrease, whereas when only one group is heavily repressed, it will develop an insular, victimized identity and polarization among the opposition, particularly between the targeted group and other opposition groups, will increase. Nugent also outlines *how* repression conditions political identities through its effect on three mutually reinforcing mechanisms: psychological processes, alteration of groups' social environment, and changes to groups' organizational structures.

Key to Nugent's arguments concerning the role of repression in opposition polarization is her findings on the colonial origins of coercive institutions and how colonial systems shaped the repressive approaches of post-independence regimes. The author offers historical accounts of French and British colonial policing structures in Tunisia and Egypt, respectively, and convincingly demonstrates how differing colonial approaches led to divergent post-independence repression strategies in the two countries. Nugent challenges the presumption that the implementation of a particular repressive strategy by a newly installed leader is necessarily an unconstrained choice; instead, the author contends that postcolonial repressive institutions and tactics in Tunisia and Egypt were rooted in policing structures established by the French and British, were path dependent, and remained relatively consistent over time. Thus, contrary to commonly held assumptions, when postcolonial leaders assumed power, they did not construct coercive institutions in response to the dominant perceived threats and instead were constrained by the institutions they inherited.

Another highlight of the book is a comprehensive overview of authoritarian party systems under the Mubarak and Ben Ali regimes, including an examination of the platforms of the democratic oppositions in relation to the religious-secular axis. In a discussion of the two regimes' repertoires of repression, Nugent explains how the Egyptian repressive strategy has been mostly consistent over the past century, even if the target of repression has changed at times. Although the leftist opposition was a target under Sadat, since Egypt's independence, the Muslim Brotherhood has been the primary object of repression. Nugent's arguments are supported by interviews from prominent political actors. Included in her discussion of repression and polarization in Egypt are quotes from Ayman Nour, founder of the liberal secular El Ghad Party, and Amr Darrag, founding member of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party.

The author goes on to document Tunisia's contrastingly widespread repressive environment under Ben Ali, from 1987 through 2010, and expertly weaves in quotes and information from interviews to support her contention that the democratic opposition formed a common identity through prison interactions that allowed for post-2011 bridge-building. One of Nugent's Tunisian informants from the social democratic Ettakatol political party, Mustapha Ben Jaafar, claimed, "those who suffered from tyranny have an awareness that we passed through a distinct moment...We worked together because we only had two choices: we could either return to what happened before the revolution, or we could move forward" (230); Rached Ghannouchi, founder of the Islamist Ennahda Party, expressed similar sentiments. Delving further into the influence of polarization on democratic transitions, Nugent contends that it can affect processes and outcomes of constitution drafting, the process and nature of the first democratic elections, and how provisional governments decide questions of transitional justice.

The strength of Nugent's work lies not only in her original theoretical contributions but also in the research and methods employed to support her arguments. The author's mixed-methods approach included one year of fieldwork, over 100 semi-structured interviews, and primary source evidence. She also devoted an entire chapter of the book to discuss her lab experiment, conducted in Tunisia, which aimed to establish the psychological mechanisms through which repression conditioned polarization by testing for the relationship between repression and political identities (Chapter 7). Nugent's identification of these mechanisms that generate opposition polarization addresses a significant gap in the existing literature.

In her conclusion, Nugent provides two shadow case studies to demonstrate that her theory on opposition polarization and democratic transitions applies beyond the cases of Tunisia and Egypt. The author explains that she selected Algeria and Indonesia, which represented targeted and widespread repression, because they both faced uprisings, the potential for sudden transition, and political division based on an Islamist-secular axis, similar to the cases of Tunisia and Egypt. However, Nugent ensures that the reader understands that her theory of repression and polarization extends beyond Islamist-secular polarization and that her choices of Algeria and Indonesia as shadow cases were made "only to reduce the number of dimensions along which these cases differ from each other and from the cases analyzed in the book" (253). In the future, it would be interesting to see the application of Nugent's theory to cases where divisions were not based on perceptions of the relationship between religion and state, or where the religion in question was not Islam.

After Repression is a necessary read for any scholar working on democratic transitions or political transitions more broadly. The work is theoretically innovative, supported by strong research, and highly readable, with the ideas being clearly explained throughout. The book should also be included in graduate and upper-level undergraduate syllabi for courses addressing democratization or the 2011 MENA uprisings. I have already altered my "Arab Spring and Its Aftermath" syllabus to devote a full week to Nugent's work.