

Why did the Arab Spring Fail?

James A. Robinson
University of Chicago

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The Preface of Why Nations Fail ...

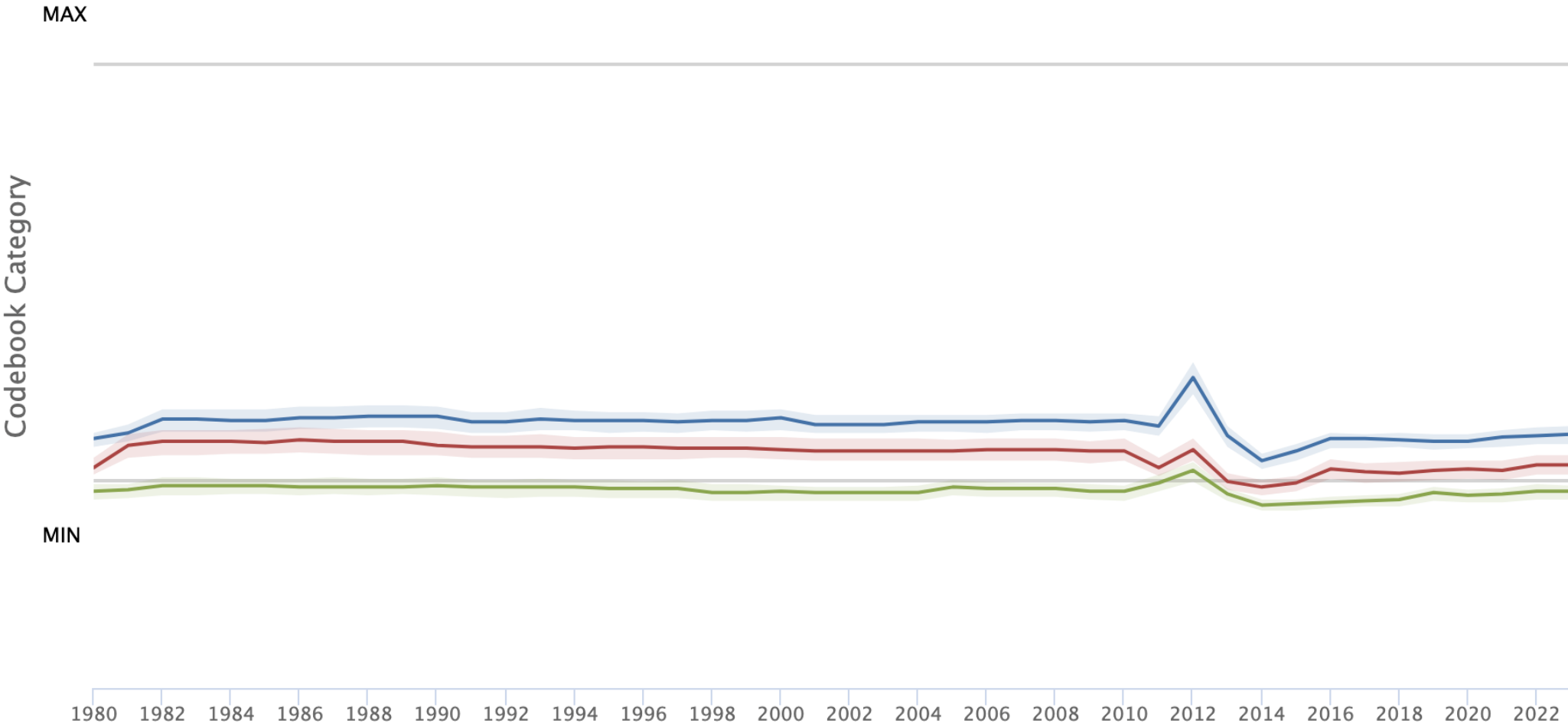
As we write this preface, North Africa and the Middle East have been shaken by the “Arab Spring” started by the so-called Jasmine Revolution, which was initially ignited by public outrage over the suicide of a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, on December 18, 2010. By January 14, 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had ruled Tunisia since 1987, had stepped down, but far from abating, the revolutionary fervor against the rule of privileged elites in Tunisia was getting stronger and had already spread to the rest of the Middle East. Hosni Mubarak, who had ruled Egypt with a tight grip for almost thirty years, was ousted on February 11, 2011. The fates of the regimes in Bahrain, Libya, Syria, and Yemen are unknown as we complete this preface.

What did we Predict?

- We saw the Arab spring through the lens of our theory that institutional transition between extractive and inclusive institutions occurs when those who are excluded engage in collective action
 - Our lead example: The English Glorious Revolution of 1688.
- But also obvious from history that collective action against extractive institutions often leads to extractive institutions with new people in charge
 - “Meet the new boss, Same as the old boss” The Who’s song: *Won’t get Fooled again.*
- This phenomenon is the **Iron law of Oligarchy**.
- When does the Iron Law not apply?
- When there is a **broad coalition** contesting the power
- ... what happened next

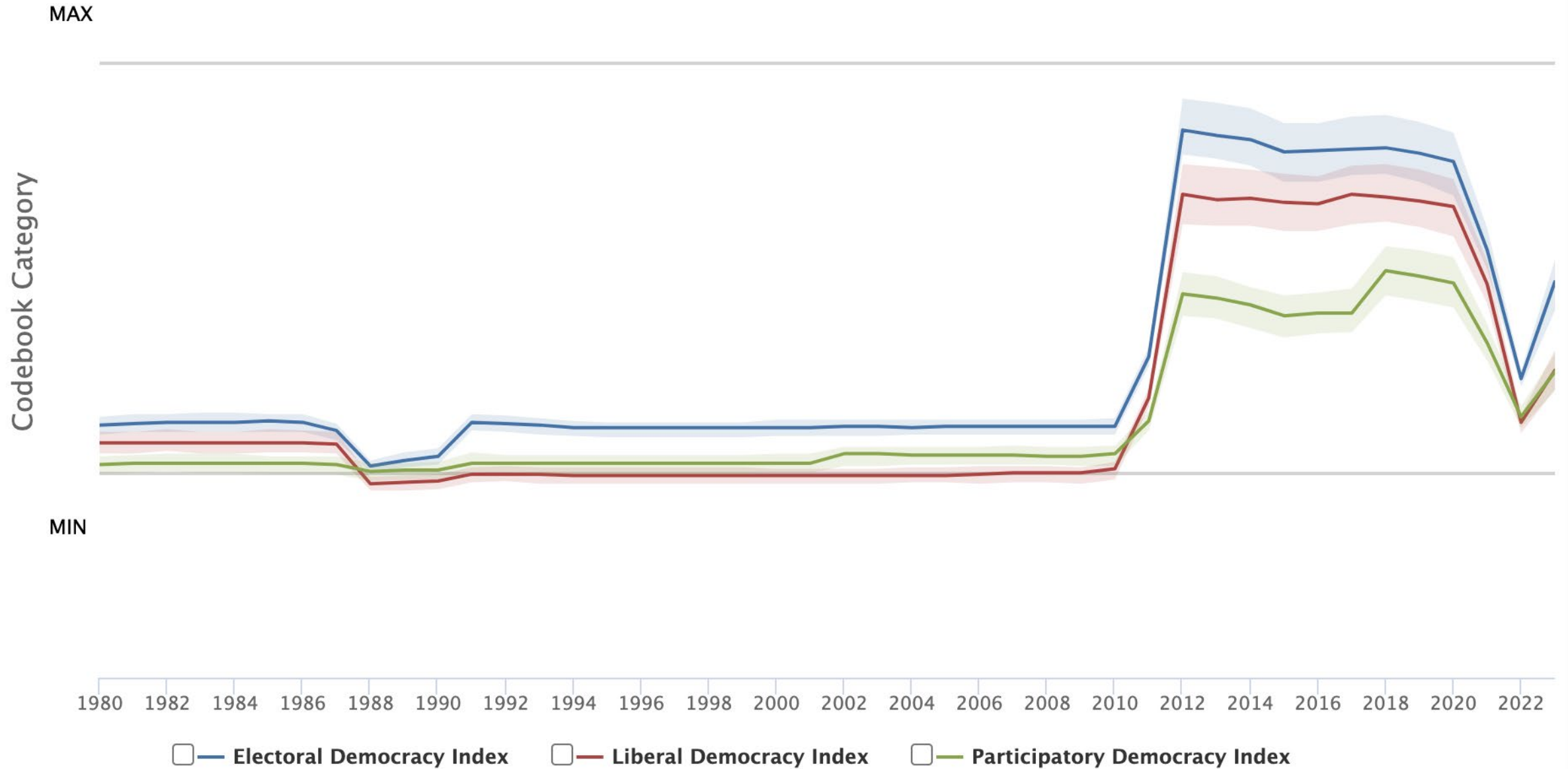
The Iron Law of Oligarchy

Egypt



□ — Electoral Democracy Index □ — Liberal Democracy Index □ — Participatory Democracy Index

Tunisia



What constitutes a broad coalition?

- This concept was not that well developed ...
- We meant something like pluralism or a vibrant civil society with many organizations which are autonomous from the state, something like the “associational life” of Robert Putnam’s social capital.
- The fact that the Arab Spring was most successful initially in Tunisia seemed to be accounted for by the strength of the civil society, trade unions and professional organizations (The Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet) autonomous from the state.
- But there are two aspects here
 - The ability to act collectively to oust an extractive regime.
 - The ability to forge compromises and reach enough consensus to make collective decisions about how effective inclusive institutions will be designed.
- It was this second part that failed in Egypt and Tunisia, but seemingly for different reasons.

Mechanisms?

- It's not obvious at all that a more pluralistic society should lead to a greater ability to forge compromises.
- You might have hypothesized the opposite.
- In *Why Nations Fail* we proposed a mechanism inspired by the English Civil War of the 1640s and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 – the more diverse the interests the less possible it is to imagine yourself in charge of and benefitting from a new set of extractive institutions and the more attractive a level playing field would become - I can't come out on-top, you can't come out on top, so let's all be equal.
- But perhaps this mechanism is conditional on:
 - A particular type of society?
 - Which had specific types of cleavages?
 - ... which made disagreements easier to resolve, or facilitated compromise?

Charles I, performing the Royal Touch (which he did 92,000 times)

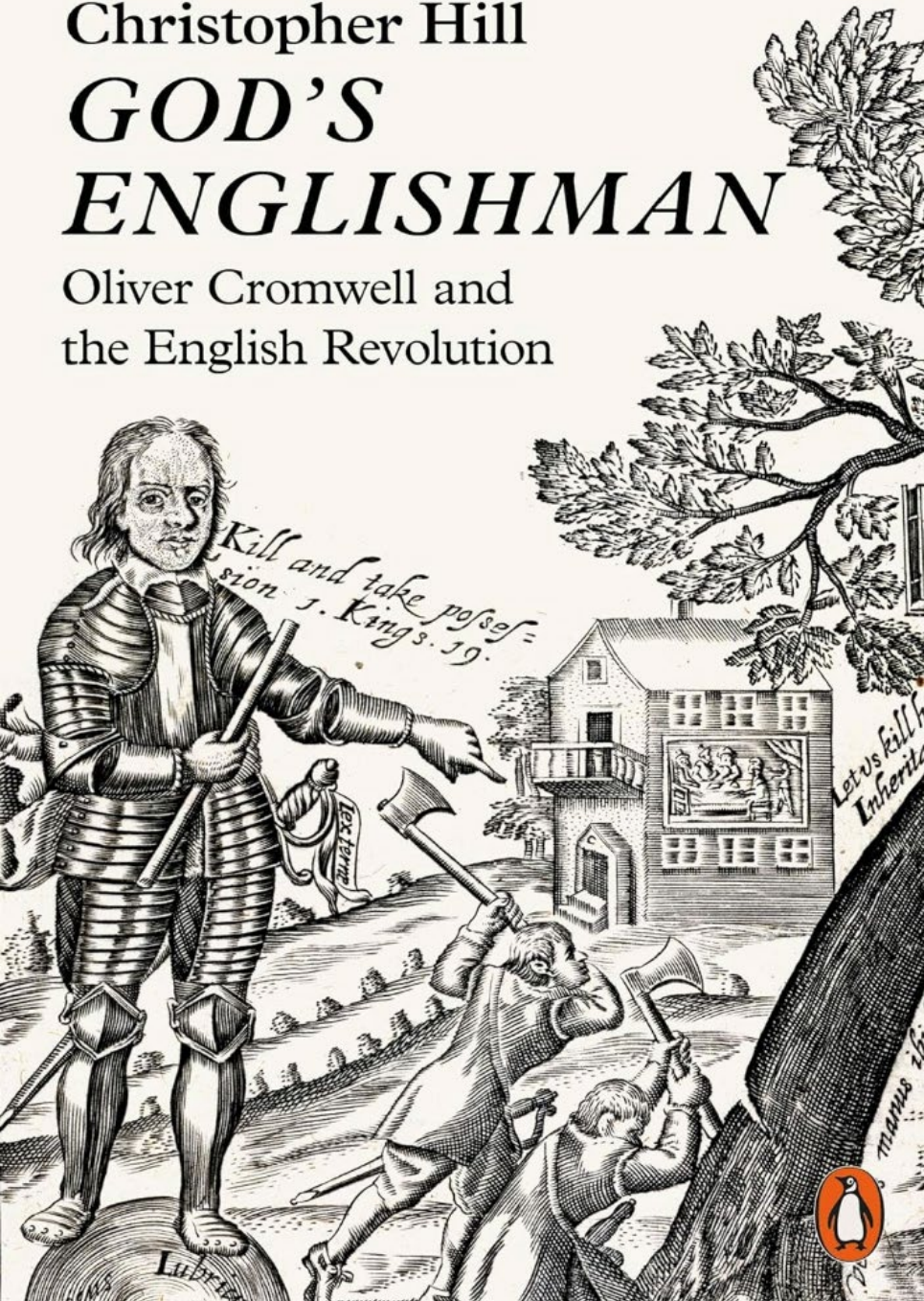


“They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Mark 16:18

Christopher Hill

GOD'S ENGLISHMAN

Oliver Cromwell and
the English Revolution



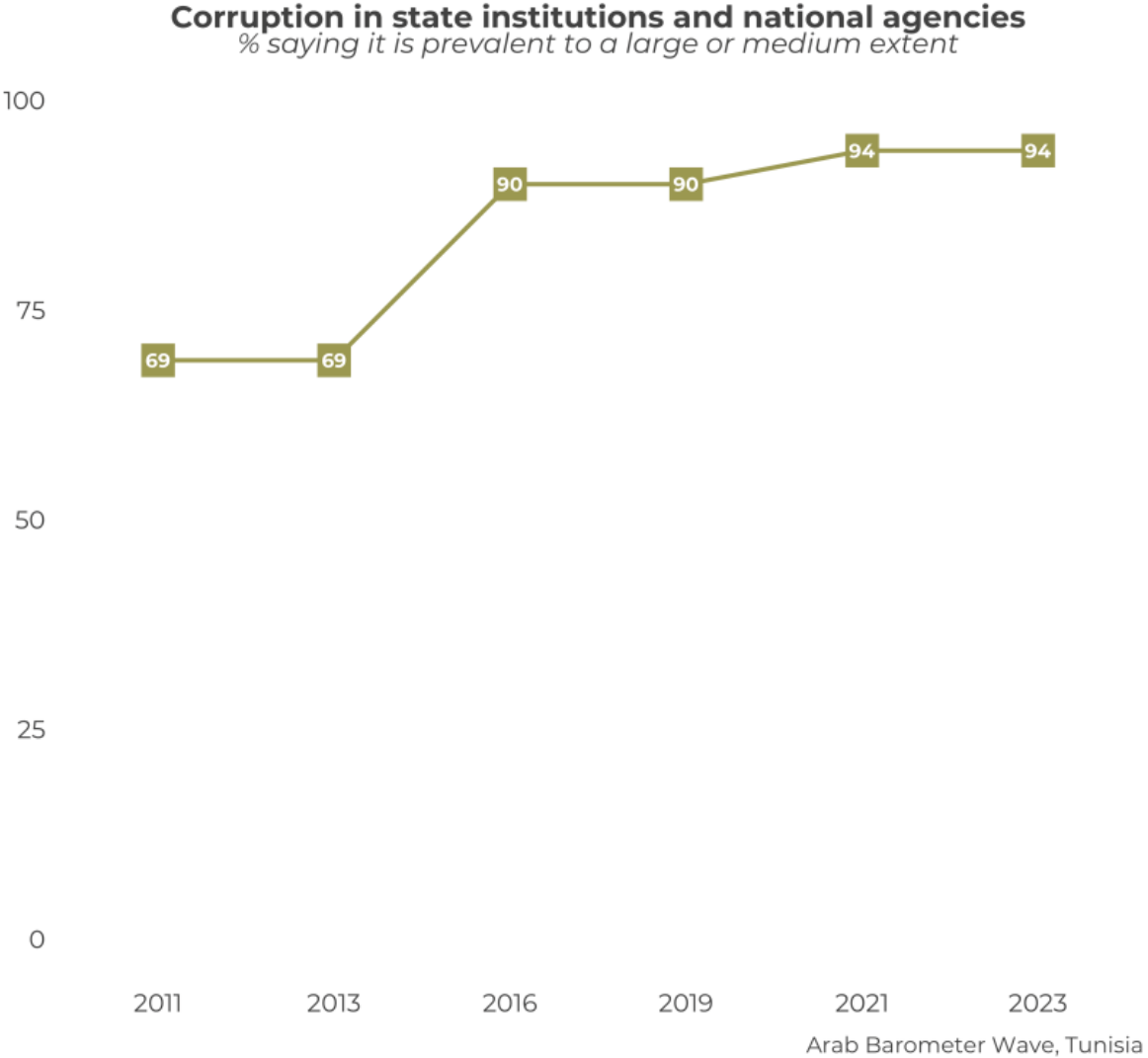
Charles I's opponent
in the Civil War of the 1640s

Politics had
secularized
by 1688.

Egypt and Tunisia

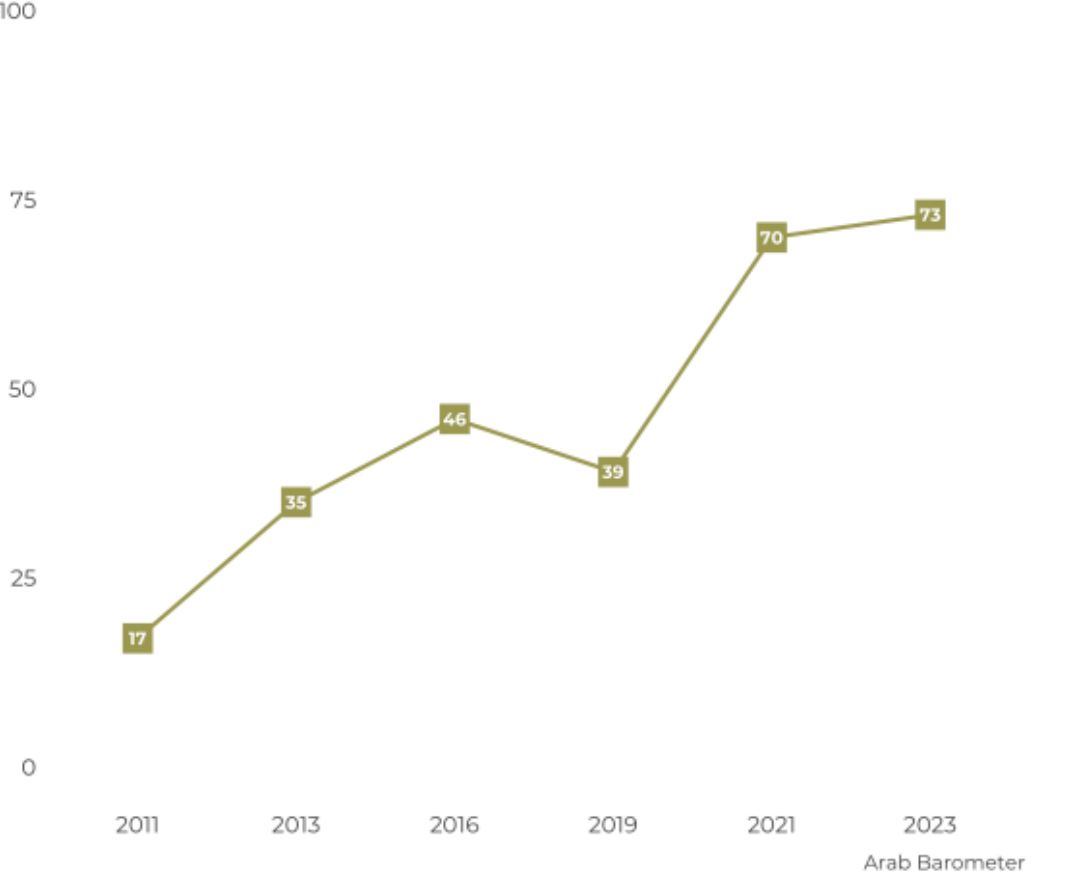
- In Egypt an obvious hypothesis about the failure of the Arab Spring is that this was due not to the nature of civil society, but to ideological opposition to democracy – the Muslim Brotherhood wanted to create an Islamic state.
- This gave a pretext for the military to re-intervene and reconciled the middle classes to their renewed rule
 - Remember Barrington Moore’s dictum: “No Bourgeoisie, No Democracy”.
- In Tunisia creating an Islamic state was not a viable option.
- But post Ben Ali governments were not able to create functional governance paving the way for the coup of Kais Saied
 - though there is some room for hope, e.g. the extremely low turnout in post coup elections.

The Rise of the perception of Corruption in Tunisia

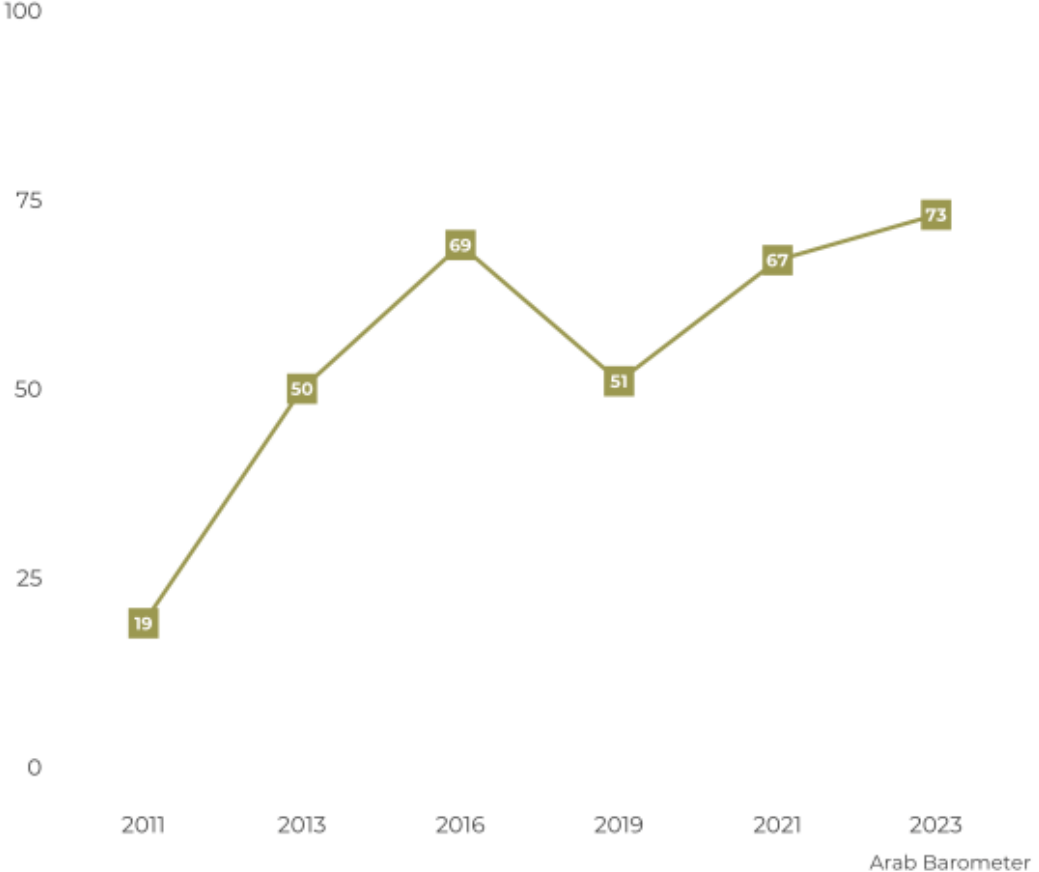


Democratic Tunisia: Poor economic performance and indecision

Under a democratic system, the country's economic performance is weak
% saying they strongly agree or agree



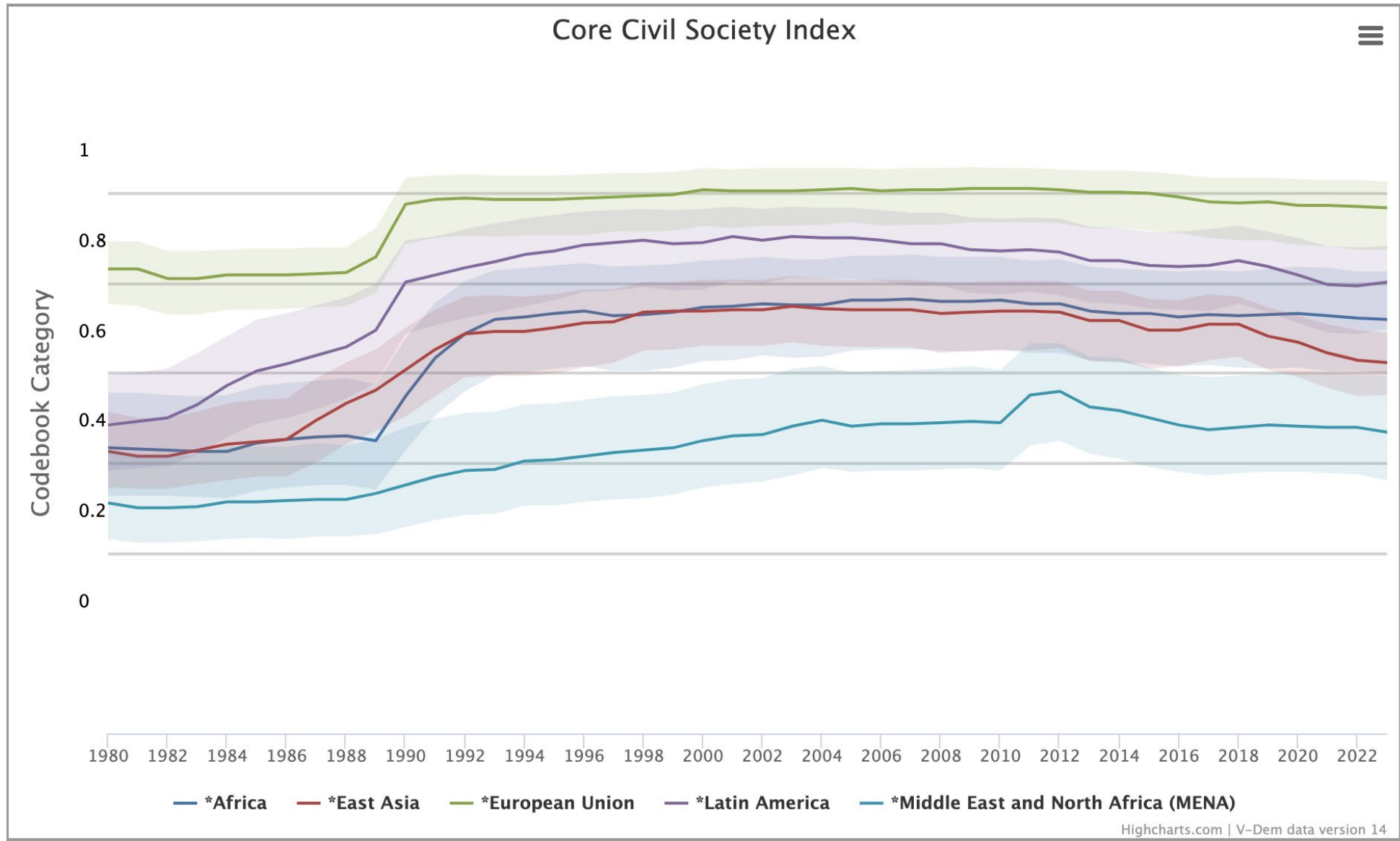
Democratic regimes are indecisive and full of problems
% saying they strongly agree or agree



Why the Inability to form an effective Social Contract?

- Timur Kuran has argued that the legacy of Islamic legal institutions and the *Waqf* meant that corporations and many institutions at the basis of western civil society never emerged in the Islamic world.
- **But** it is also true that more broadly that other aspects of Islamic political culture are difficult to reconcile with a liberal democratic state.
- (Perhaps good to distinguish **liberal** from **democratic** here?)
- For example, there is no tradition of many sorts of liberal political institutions, such as checks and balances, in Islamic political thought – though there is the tradition of shura.
- Attempts to build secular states in the region in the past 200 years seem not to have led to a reformed Islam reconciled to liberal democratic institutions, but rather the opposite.
- Islamic scriptures, like Christian ones, have to be interpreted. This has happened in certain spheres (Islamic finance), but not in others such as political institutions.

Civil Society is comparative weak in MENA



The Rise of Illiberal States

- The dominant trend at the moment in MENA is the consolidation of successful **illiberal** states like UAE, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia.
- These appear to have leveraged traditional patterns of legitimacy and authority (tribal loyalties) to successfully combine developmentalism with political regimes which are certainly not democratic.
- They are living in a world with many other non-liberal non-democratic success stories, for example in East Asia and China, which social scientists have had a hard time incorporating into their (western?) theoretical paradigms.

Lessons from Africa

- **At the risk of overgeneralizing:** If I thought about the problems of creating liberal democratic states in post-independence Africa, I would say there is a miss-match between them and many aspects of African culture
 - Africans are far more collectivist and place a lot of value on institutionalizations of this such as the clan and types of reciprocity. Liberalism is focused on individual rights in the absence of obligations.
 - Africans like to make decisions by consensus not majoritarianism.
 - African political society was highly decentralized historically and not well matched to large colonially created “nation states”.
- Success stories like Botswana or Somaliland are also not liberal in a Western sense but they **fit** with the local culture
 - Somaliland gives political representation to clans in the *Guurti*.
 - Real accountability in Botswana takes place not at the level of elections, which the same political party the Botswana Democratic Party has won since 1965. But in traditional fora such as the *kgotla*.

History is Dialectical

- Timur Kuran's book about the persistence of autocracy in the Middle East is called *Freedoms Delayed*.
- We are still living in the “End of History” delusion which set in in the 1990s.
- Fukuyama always says that he never made the positive claim that “democracy was the only game in town” but he did make the normative claim – there is no philosophical defensible alternative to liberal democracy.
- The normative claim is as **wrong** as the positive claim.
- There are alternative normatively justifiable types of states/regimes.
- What we are seeing at the moment is that they may sometimes be a better fit with the existing culture, and this allows them to achieve things that democratic regimes can't.

Defending (what form of?) Liberal Democracy

- No doubt any defense of democracy or a liberal state always has some **instrumentalist** aspect.
- On average liberal democracy **is** associated with greater public good provision and economic growth.
- **But not a magic wand:** There is a great deal of heterogeneity, so the context matters and may not be conducive to better outcomes, like in Tunisia (corruption, clientelism ..).
- This means that the **normative justification**, always important, needs to be made even more important.
- Unfortunately, since the 1990s, when democracy became the “only game in town” we have failed to develop arguments for why democracy is morally desirable.
- These arguments are desperately required now.
- What have the US, Brazil, the Philippines, India, Hungary ... got in common? The commitment to liberal democracy as an idea is crumbling.