

Book Review

Title: Hot Contention, Cool Abstention: Positive Emotions and Protest Behavior During the Arab Spring. By Stephanie Dornschneider (2021). 218 p. Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780190693916 Hardback

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The first chapter starts with interviews with two witnesses of the same revolution in two completely different countries, Leila from Egypt and Ahmed from Morocco. The short quotes from the interview give the reader a hint towards the topic and research question for the book and describe the differences and similarities between the situation in Egypt and Morocco during the early stages of the Arab Spring.

Immediately after this introduction the reader is greeted with the research question for the book: ‘What suddenly motivated millions of Arabs to mobilize against their rulers?’. The author acknowledges that a lot of research has been conducted on the topic, but this research has almost always been done looking at organizational structures and methods used by the oppositional forces. Dornschneider argues that previous research has been looking in the wrong direction, there have always been oppositional forces. So she opens a new path, using the field of political psychology. In this first chapter the authors looks how certain beliefs shape and trigger other beliefs which may lead to people deciding to protest.

The results of the analysis in the book are twofold, ‘decisions to join the Arab Spring were triggered by beliefs about positive emotions of hope, courage, solidarity, and national pride, which were themselves triggered by beliefs that mass protests were happening at home, that a revolution happened abroad, and that fellow citizens were sacrificing themselves. By contrast, decisions to stay at home were triggered by beliefs about living in safety, satisfactory living conditions, and state approval’.

The main argument of the book is the following: a decision to participate in the protests of the Arab Spring are “hot”, meaning based on positive emotion. Decision not to join the protests are “cool”, meaning that life was safe, conditions were getting better and that the head of the state was found acceptable. This is important, it shows that mobilization is not only related to negative emotions and frustration but that mobilization can also be triggered by positive emotions. The study conducted throughout this book is unique, the real world setting has potentially big consequences on the lives of the protestors, this is never the case in laboratory settings.

The second chapter entitled *Similar States, Opposite Outcomes* introduces the main comparison in the book. The comparison is a most similar system design, comparing Egypt and Morocco. The two countries have the relevant features surrounding protest in common (authoritarianism, mobilization structures, economic hardship) but the outcome in both countries is different. In Egypt the protestors managed to bring down their head of state and bring democratic elections to the country, neither of those were achieved in Morocco. Using this system the author can see where the countries differ and thus look for the limits of the Arabic Spring.

The study uses psychological rather than systemic factors already used on other countries in the past to explain the events. Here the systemic factors are reflected in the beliefs that people hold about the systemic factors. The study is a double paired comparison comparing Egypt and Morocco and protestors and non-protestors. For the protestors the train of thought is comparable, all people lived under authoritarianism, they all had organizational structures for protest nearby and lived in poverty. Yet some decided to join the protest and some decided not to protest. So why after decades of authoritarian ruling did the people suddenly decide to start enormous protests? The same is true for mobilization structures, that mobilize people against the regimes, they have always existed and had in a way been tolerated by the regimes. There had been four large waves of protest in Egypt preceding the Arab Spring. So why were the 2011 protests the largest? Why were they successful in Egypt? A large part of this is credited to the growth of Facebook and the internet in general in both countries, these tools brought unprecedented opportunities to mobilize people.

Egypt and Morocco both have widespread problems concerning poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Scholars have been arguing and proving for a long time that economic hardship of this scale leads to frustration and triggers uprising. Still the question remains, why after so many decades of economic hardship did millions suddenly decide to start the largest protest ever seen in the region to hopefully bring an end to the economic hardship.

In the second part of the second chapter The author presents the sample she used to answer the questions raised above. In short she used two main ways of gathering information (i) ethnographic interviews (ii) analyzing and coding Facebook groups. Dornschneider interviewed 93 people in 2014, 65 men and 28 woman, all from varying age groups and socio-economic background. The interviews in Morocco were kept as varied as possible, interviewing all sorts of people and refraining from snowballing into new interviewees. In Egypt this was more difficult, in 2014 the environment was hostile for scholars and researchers, so Dornschneider relied on her large base of contacts she had built to snowball into relevant interviews. This chapter of the book also contains some stories about how she met some of the people she interviewed, their background, how they met and how the interview went in detail. The Facebook analysis investigated the two largest moments of protest, by joining the two largest Facebook groups, one for each country, that called for protest. For the Facebook analysis only posts and comments with long descriptions of their decisions to participate were selected. This ensured that serious coding was possible, looking for beliefs inferences, decisions for actions and key components of the reasoning process. In total Dornschneider was able to identify 121 reasoning processes from the ethnographic interviews and the Facebook groups she coded.

Chapter three aims at *Identifying Beliefs and Inferences*. The goal of the interviews is identifying the reasoning processes underlying the decision to participate in the uprising of the Arab Spring. These cannot be directly extracted from speech so Dornschneider identified the three main components (i) beliefs (ii) inferences (iii) decisions. In this chapter the coding scheme and the construction of the coding scheme is explained. Dornshneider opted for two different coding strategies, open coding and axial coding. Open coding compares parts of direct speech for similarities and differences, while axial coding adds an extra layer, it categories codes in subcategories when they belong together. Eventually the goal of Axial coding is that the researcher can say: "under certain conditions this happens and under other conditions that happens". Using open coding Dornschneider identified more than a hundred beliefs, in a second stage using axial coding creating different types of beliefs and generalizing the beliefs under those banners. The result are broader factors that relate to mobilization of the Arabic spring.

145 beliefs were categorized in 15 types of beliefs, to check the reliability of the coding scheme. Another researcher coded a random sample, the result was an agreement rate of 85 percent. Three beliefs were identified that correspond with the literature on the Arabic Spring;

Poor living conditions, social media and royal exceptionalism. Royal exceptionalism is a belief in Morocco that their monarchy and historical rarity is something unique and special and therefore protests are not justified. A second group beliefs that were identified are, *beliefs that matter most to decisions to join the Arab spring*. In total 12 beliefs were selected addressing emotions. The most important ones were explained in great detail with examples and quotes from the interviews. Those four are: courage, solidarity, hope, national pride.

In the next phase the inferences were detailed. Inferences are two or more beliefs that where an antecedent triggers a consequent. For example the antecedent belief that one has access to Facebook might lead to the consequent belief that the same person is in touch with a lot of regime opponents over the internet. A lot of direct and indirect inferences were identified using 4 strategies (i) logical reasoning (ii) temporal order (iii) conditional connectors (iv) causal connectors. In the book the author explains the four strategies in detail and gives examples with context and personal stories from the interview. The author goes into great detail and dissects the inferences again in front of the reader, this is done ten times each for a unique example representing another relevant inference possibility that needed to be highlighted.

Chapter four is entitled *tracing reasoning processes*. In this chapter the author explains how she contributes to existing studies of belief systems. The field of belief systems is a study area that has been abandoned by most scholars, mostly because believe systems are so complex that is a difficult task to make an analysis in a standardized way. The first part of the chapter describes that work that has been done on belief systems and the correlation between similar beliefs in the past, by colleagues in the past. This part is followed by the most technical part of the book, the computational analysis. To explain this in an understandable fashion the author reminds us of what “scripts” are; they are different paths of action an individual can take in a social situation. In a social situation every individual is unique, but they still follow social scripts. These scripts are also a tool for analysis when tracing reasoning processes. The Arab spring was such an extraordinary situation that there were no social scripts for people to follow. The result is that people responded in very unique and different ways. That is what the computational model explores. For the computational analyses Dornschneider uses monotone Boolean circuits. These Boolean circuits are mostly used in computer science, but are analogous to human reasoning and thus very useful for this application. Boolean circuits implement logical rules that have the same structure as inferences connecting beliefs. Using Boolean circuits adds to previous studies of belief systems, the interconnections are easier to identify and analyze.

In the fifth and second to last chapter everything comes together. In the introduction the reader gets insight in the individual decisions made by Leila and Ahmed when they both decide to join the protests. And that is what this chapter is about, learning about the decisions made by people when they decide to join or not to join the protest, but only on a larger scale. The chapter is very visual, every model figure and model that Dornschneider talks about is given in the book, the figures and models are the Boolean circuits that were explained in great detail in the previous chapter.

In the first part of the chapter we learn about the key antecedents of protest decisions. Four beliefs are about positive emotions which are direct antecedent to a large number of decisions to mobilize, those four beliefs are hope, courage, solidarity and national pride. 19 of 30 decisions to protest by Egyptians and 10 of 23 by Moroccans are based on direct inferences from these emotions. The chapter has 24 graphs that visualize a large variety of direct antecedents to protest decisions. A direct antecedent that always reoccurs has caught the attention of the author, it is the interaction with people who are already protesting. This belief is responsible for 6 of 53 protest decisions through a direct inference. The second most frequent direct antecedent are beliefs of criminal state behavior, disapproval of the head of state, prior protest behavior and negative personality of the head of state. Each of these beliefs triggers three out of fifty-three

protest decisions through a direct inference. The computational analysis also tells us that the reasoning of people who protested includes significantly more belief about solidarity, courage, hope and national pride than the people who decided not to protest. On top of that people who protested had significantly more beliefs about criminal state behavior in their reasoning process than people who decide no to.

Antecedents of positive emotions

There are three main beliefs that trigger the positive emotions hope, solidarity, courage and national pride. These three are self-sacrifice by fellow citizens, the revolution in Tunisia and protest at home. The analysis finds four more beliefs that trigger positive emotions of hope, solidarity, courage, and national pride namely: successful prior protest, state violence, self-support, family. But these last four beliefs are found in similar proportions under protestors as well as non-protestors and thus don't make the difference.

Other antecedents of protest decisions

The analysis finds two more direct antecedents besides positive emotions that make large contributions to a protest decision. State-crime and interaction with protestors. State-crime is antecedent to 38 of 53 protest decisions and 12 of 68 decisions to stay home. On top of that it is direct antecedent in three reasoning processes. Interaction with protestors is antecedent in 8 of 53 protest decisions and in 4 of 68 decisions to stay home. It is direct antecedent in 6 six reasoning processes.

Key antecedents of the decision to stay home

The antecedent that best differentiates the decision to stay home from the decision to join the protest is a belief that has to do with safety and security. Safety on its turn then triggers other key antecedents of decisions to stay home. Those are satisfaction with life, approval of the head of state, improving living conditions, and absence of need for protest. Satisfaction with life is a part of 27 reasoning processes of non-protestors compared to one on the protestor side. It is a direct antecedent of fifteen decisions apart from safety it is the best differentiator between reasoning processes of protestors and non-protestors. Other antecedents that are significantly more present in the reasoning processes of non-protestors are: employment, positive traits of the head of state, disapproval of protests, self-priority and negative personality of fellow citizens. For each of these antecedents throughout chapter five there is a graph included that details the reasoning protests toward participation in the protests or staying at home.

Chapter six presents the conclusions drawn by Dornscheider.

The findings in the book show that decisions to participate in the Arab Spring protests were "hot", which means triggered by positive emotions. Decisions to stay home and refrain from partaking were cool, triggered by reason and longer cognitive assessment considering safety, living conditions and state approval. These findings correspond with earlier findings by scholars and journalists who are always taken by surprise when large uprisings happen. Hot cognition is

characterized by speed, deciding to join a protest happens faster than other decisions that are not based on hot cognitions, this might explain why the Arab Spring and other uprisings unfold so fast and catch scholars and reporters by surprise I will start by saying that the whole book is an impressive piece of research in social and political science. The data that was used is very impressive and must have been very difficult to gather and time-consuming to analyze. The book is structured in an orderly and logical fashion, resembling the structure of a traditional research paper, but with more space for elaboration on details. Every chapter starts in the introduction with an update on the lives of Leila and Ahmed, two protestors one from Egypt and one from Morocco. This has two effects, it makes the subject more personal for the reader and gives the reader insight in the real world and environment of the Arab Spring. I really liked this aspect of the book and would have personally liked to see more of the context and historical context surrounding the Arab Spring to be explained throughout the book. Either way this was very well done.

In the second chapter of the book the research design is explained: A most similar case design comparing the cases of Morocco and Egypt. The whole design is a double-paired comparison comparing Morocco and Egypt and protestors and non-protestors. But it felt like the first idea was abandoned quickly throughout the book, and the choice for the most similar case design did not return in the fifth chapter where the analysis was laid out. This carries on in the conclusion, where the comparison of Egypt and Morocco does not really return. Throughout the book it is often hinted that the difference in authoritarianism between Egypt and Morocco is in tradition. The Royals in Morocco have been in power for over 400 years which might explain why the revolution failed in Morocco. This is of course a structural factor, and I would have liked to see how this influences the reasoning process of people when they decide to protest or not. I would have liked the book to dive deeper in this explanation, but I have to admit that is was not the main goal.

That main goal or main research question has been answered perfectly, and in a unique way using belief systems and reasoning processes. Which lead to the title of the book *hot contention, cool abstention*.

One large question that remains unanswered for me is *why did the Arab spring suddenly gain traction in 2011?* This question has only been answered partly in my opinion.

I am mostly impressed by the fourth chapter *Tracing Reasoning Process*. In this chapter the author explains how the process was automated. This was done by using Monotone Boolean circuits, which can be applied to spoken interviews because they use similar logical rules as humans do in their reasoning process. Monotone Boolean circuits were never used before for this sort of application and still the explanation in the book was not too technical for someone who is not at all familiar with computer science and logical reasoning on this level.

Chapter three and five are both very technical chapters and are definitely the most difficult chapters for the reader to digest. Still the reader is not left alone in these chapters, he or she is accompanied by various large tables and graphs which make each case understandable and help the reader to understand the larger and general picture. The reasoning processes for example become very long when written because they are accompanied by a lot of context. In the graphs they are stripped down and combined with the context given earlier they become easier to understand.

What I really appreciate in the book is that throughout the first two chapters the author gives an oversight of what has already been accomplished on the topic by other scholars, and then later on when starting the analysis the author reaches back to this. And explains that she has been able to confirm what others have been working on in the past.