Faculty of Social and Human Sciences
International Relations Degree

Final Degree Project

"Why 2011? Structural Causes, Situational Triggers and the Question of Timing in the Egyptian Revolution"

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List of Abbreviations

CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (cited as the source of the CIA World Factbook)
NDP	National Democratic Party (Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati), Egypt's ruling party under Mubarak
SSIS	State Security Investigations Service (Mabahith Amn al-Dawla al-‘Ulya), the regime's internal security apparatus

1. Introduction

1.1. Presentation of the topic and its relevance

1.1.1. The 2011 revolution within the framework of the Arab Spring

The 2011 Egyptian revolution was not an isolated event, but the most resonant episode of a wave of uprisings that shook the Arab world from late 2010 onwards. The protest, which began in Tunisia, spread rapidly across the Middle East and North Africa and set off a «domino effect» that threatened several long-standing authoritarian regimes (Puspitasari, 2017). In Egypt, that process culminated in the fall of President Hosni Mubarak after three decades in power.

What turned the Egyptian revolution into a first-order event was, to a large extent, its unexpected character. Egypt was perceived as one of the most solid and militarily strong states in North Africa, so the uprising surprised observers and experts alike: no one saw it coming (Puspitasari, 2017). That unpredictability is not an anecdotal detail, but a constant of the Arab Spring that the literature has emphasized: no analyst anticipated the wave (Goodwin, 2011), which moreover spread across the region with surprising speed (Weyland, 2012).

It is worth noting, however, that Egyptians had already rebelled against Mubarak before, without success (Puspitasari, 2017). The observation that a certain discontent had existed long before, but only in 2011 lead to a revolution, constitutes the starting point of this study and anticipates the question that gives it its title.

1.1.2. Relevance for International Relations

Beyond its historical importance, the Egyptian revolution speaks to some of the central debates in International Relations. First, it challenges the thesis of «authoritarian resilience» that had dominated the study of the region: for decades, Arab regimes were considered exceptionally stable, and their fall forced a rethinking of how and why authoritarian systems break down (Goodwin, 2011). Second, the Egyptian case falls within the study of political transitions and democratization, raising the question of under what conditions popular mobilization manages to bring down an established regime. And third, the rapid spread of the protest from one country to another makes the Arab Spring

a paradigmatic case of regional diffusion, a phenomenon the discipline studies in order to understand how political events cross state borders (Weyland, 2012). Analyzing why the Egyptian revolution broke out thus contributes to understanding problems that exceed the specific case: the durability and fragility of authoritarianism, the dynamics of transitions, and the mechanisms of political contagion.

1.2. Justification and scope of the topic

1.2.1. Why focus on the causes and not on the outcome

A large part of the literature on the Egyptian revolution has focused on its outcome: why the fall of Mubarak did not lead to a lasting democratization, but to a subsequent authoritarian restoration (Khasyi'in, 2019). This study adopts a different perspective and focuses on the causes of the outbreak, not on its outcome. This choice responds to two reasons. The first is logical: understanding why the revolution occurred precedes evaluating why it failed, and yet the debate on the outcome has tended to overshadow that of the origins. The second is one of analytical opportunity: while the consequences of 2011 have been widely studied, a question about the causes persists that has received much less attention, as detailed below. Focusing on the causes does not imply ignoring the outcome but rather delimiting the object of the study where it can contribute something less well-studied.

1.2.2. Why the problem of timing: temporal (2008–2011) and geographical (Egypt) scope

Within the study of the causes, the work is framed around a specific problem: that of timing. It does not ask only what caused the revolution which is a widely documented question, but why those causes produced an uprising in 2011 and not earlier. This framing imposes, in turn, two limitations. In temporal terms, the work concentrates on the 2008–2011 period, which allows two junctures of the same case to be compared: that of 2008, marked by the Mahalla strikes, and that of 2011. The comparison between an episode that did not lead to revolution and another that did constitutes the axis of the analysis. In geographical terms, the work is confined to Egypt. The choice is not arbitrary: due to its demographic and geopolitical weight, Egypt was the epicenter of the Arab Spring and,

above all, its prior trajectory offers comparable protest episodes that make possible the intra-case comparison on which the argument rests.

1.3. Research question and thesis

From the foregoing follows the question that structures this work: why did the Egyptian revolution break out in 2011 and not earlier, even though the structural conditions of discontent had been present for decades? The hypothesis defended here is that neither the structural conditions on their own nor the situational triggers by themselves explain the outbreak: the former had been present for a long time and had even produced serious protests, such as those of 2008, without bringing down the regime; and the latter would have had no effect on ground that was not already unstable. What distinguished 2011 was the convergence of both planes: the coincidence of a mature structural problem with a specific configuration of short-term triggers: the Tunisian precedent, coordination through social media, and the regime's accelerated crisis of legitimacy; that reduced the perceived risk of protesting and set off a cascade of mobilization. To account for that mechanism, the work draws on Kuran's (1991) model of revolutionary cascade and preference falsification, which explains how latent discontent, sustained over years, can be transformed suddenly into mass mobilization. The contribution of the work does not lie, therefore, in providing new facts, but in reformulating the question from «what caused the revolution» to «why in 2011» and in offering, on the basis of that reformulation, an explanation of the timing that single-cause interpretations leave open.

1.4. Structure of the work

The work is organized into six chapters. After this introduction, the second reviews the state of the art, the major existing explanations and the gap relating to timing and sets out the theoretical framework, articulated around structural, mobilization, and revolutionary-cascade approaches, from which the work's own distinction between structural conditions and situational triggers is derived. The third chapter specifies the objectives and research questions, and the fourth details the methodology, based on a case study with counterfactual logic and process tracing. The fifth, the core of the work, develops the analysis: it first examines the long-term structural conditions of the Mubarak regime (5.1); then studies why the protest episodes prior to 2011 did not lead to revolution (5.2); analyzes the situational triggers of 2010–2011 (5.3); explains the convergence of both

planes through Kuran's model (5.4); and finally discusses single-cause explanations against the proposed model (5.5). The sixth chapter presents the conclusions and points to future lines of research.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. State of the art

The 2011 Egyptian revolution has generated an abundant literature that has sought to explain why it occurred. Far from offering a single answer, the various analyses can be ordered into a series of strands that, broadly speaking, fall into two families: those that locate the origin of the revolt in the underlying structural conditions and those that attribute it to the factors that triggered it. Reviewing both families makes it possible to delimit both what the literature has explained convincingly and what has remained unresolved, which constitutes the starting point of this work.

The first family groups together structural, long-term explanations. The socioeconomic strand is possibly the most widespread: it links the outbreak to the deterioration of the living conditions of broad sectors of the population: unemployment, especially acute among university-educated youth, poverty, growing inequality, and the rise in food and fuel prices in the months prior to the revolt (LaGraffe, 2012; Gilpin, Kandeel, & Sullivan, 2011; Camplin, 2011). To this are added corruption and the clientelistic functioning of the economy, which some analyses identify as a structural feature of the Egyptian model rather than as a set of isolated deviations (Abdelbaki, 2017; Khasyi'in, 2019).

Closely linked to the previous one, the demographic strand introduces a relevant nuance. It holds that the existence of a disproportionately large youth cohort (the *youth bulge*) would have acted as a multiplier of those tensions, by concentrating a young, abundant population lacking employment prospects that was especially prone to mobilization (Goldstone, 2010; Urdal, 2007; LaGraffe, 2012). Along these lines, relative cohort size theory suggests that larger generations face worse conditions because of the greater competition they endure in education and employment (Macunovich, 2000). Demography would not operate, therefore, as a direct cause, but as a factor that aggravates preexisting socioeconomic conditions.

A third strand shifts the focus from society toward the regime itself. Instead of the population's grievances, it emphasizes the decline of the authoritarian state: the erosion of Mubarak's legitimacy, the discredit generated by the succession plans in favor of his son Gamal, and the rift between the presidency's business circle and the military leadership (Osman, 2011; Heiss, 2012). Heiss (2012), in particular, analyzes how the increasingly dysfunctional management of the National Democratic Party progressively undermined the cohesion of the regime. To this picture is added the deeply repressive character of the state, documented by human rights organizations (Amnesty International, 2020). From this angle, the revolution would be as much a product of social pressure as of the internal decomposition of the regime.

Finally, a strand that is often less attended to places the emphasis on the economic-labor dimension. Against interpretations that privilege the middle classes or the digital youth, Beinin (2012) argues that the 2011 revolts can only be fully understood in light of the wave of worker protest that swept across Egypt in the preceding decade: between 1998 and 2010, between two and four million workers took part in around 3,400 or 4,000 strikes and collective actions, outside the official trade union. This mobilization, one of the largest forms of opposition to the regime, would have prepared the social ground for the revolt.

The second family of explanations deals with the immediate triggers. The diffusion strand interprets the Egyptian revolt as a link in a regional wave, triggered by the demonstration effect of the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia: the Tunisian success would have proved that an Arab autocrat could be overthrown, lowering the perceived risk of protest and activating a knock-on effect in neighboring countries (Weyland, 2012). Weyland (2012), in fact, compares this contagion dynamic with the European revolutionary wave of 1848, emphasizing both its speed and its largely impulsive character.

On a more concrete plane, the well-known «Facebook revolution» thesis attributes a central role to social media. The study by Tufekci and Wilson (2012), based on a survey of participants in Tahrir Square, shows that social media offered citizens sources of information that the regime could not easily control and significantly increased the probability of attending the protests from the first day. That said, this strand has been criticized for its technodeterminism when taken to the extreme: social media would have

amplified and accelerated the mobilization, but it does not replace material grievances or prior organization as underlying causes.

Finally, the actor-centered strand examines the role of the various protagonists: youth movements such as April 6, the Muslim Brotherhood, or the independent trade unions and, above all, the formation of broad cross-cutting coalitions. Goldstone (2011) stresses that what was distinctive about the 2011 Arab revolts was the articulation of cross-class coalitions capable of uniting very diverse social sectors around a common goal, a factor that in Egypt had not managed to take hold in earlier episodes.

This review reveals a rich but unbalanced panorama. Most of the literature explains with notable soundness either the underlying causes of the revolt or the factors that triggered it; some works, moreover, have focused on its outcome: why the fall of Mubarak did not lead to a lasting democratization (Khasyi'in, 2019). What has barely been addressed systematically is the question of timing: why all those elements converged precisely in 2011 and not in earlier years, when many of the same conditions like grievances, demography, repression, and even organized worker protest were already present. It is significant that the literature itself acknowledges this gap. Goodwin (2011) stresses that no analyst, Western or Arab, predicted the uprisings, and that it is intrinsically impossible to anticipate where and when a revolution will break out; Weyland (2012) likewise insists on its surprising character. That difficulty in explaining the *when* is, precisely, the gap this work aims to fill. Addressing it requires going beyond the single-cause explanations reviewed so far and drawing on theoretical tools capable of accounting for how latent discontent, sustained over years, is suddenly transformed into mass mobilization: the models of revolutionary cascade and thresholds set out in the following section.

2.2. Theoretical framework: theories of revolution

To address the problem of timing it is useful to draw on theories of revolution, which provide the conceptual apparatus with which to interpret the Egyptian case. These theories can be grouped into three broad approaches that, far from being mutually exclusive, are complementary: structural approaches, centered on underlying conditions; mobilization approaches, attentive to how discontent is organized and seizes opportunities; and cascade models, which explain the sudden and largely unpredictable dynamic of the outbreak.

Each contributes a piece that the others leave incomplete, and it is their combination that makes it possible to answer the question of why a revolution occurs at a given moment.

2.2.1. Structural approaches

The classic formulation of structural explanations is that of Skocpol (1976), for whom revolutions are not deliberately «made,» but rather «happen» as a result of the confluence of deep structural conditions: the crisis of the state, class relations, and international pressures. From this viewpoint, the causes of a revolution do not reside in the will of actors, but in tensions of the social and political structure. Applied to Egypt, this perspective directs attention toward the long-term conditions analyzed earlier: socioeconomic weakness, external dependence, and the rigidity of the regime.

A contemporary variant of this approach incorporates the demographic dimension. Goldstone (2010) argues that the composition of the population constitutes a structural factor of the first order, and that a disproportionately large youth cohort (the *youth bulge*) raises the risk of political instability. In the Egyptian case, that demographic pressure figures among the most cited underlying structural conditions.

That said, theorists themselves have acknowledged the limits of the structural approach. Goldstone (2001) points out that these theories explain regime vulnerabilities well, but are insufficient to account for leadership, ideology, and individuals' identification with the movement, which is why he proposes a «fourth generation» that treats revolution as an emergent phenomenon. In other words: the structural explains why a regime is vulnerable, but not why or when that vulnerability turns into revolt. For that, other approaches are needed.

2.2.2. Mobilization and political opportunity structure

The second approach shifts the focus from underlying conditions toward the processes by which discontent turns into collective action. The political process and political opportunity structure perspective, developed by authors such as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly and synthesized by Meyer (2004), starts from a central idea: grievances, on their own, are not enough to generate a revolt, since they are present almost permanently; what is decisive is the context in which a movement emerges, which conditions its chances of development and success. Protests intensify when «political opportunities» open up:

divisions within the elite, less effective repression, or the example of successful mobilizations. These opportunities reduce the cost and raise the expectations of success of collective action.

Applied to Egypt, this perspective is especially suggestive: the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia can be interpreted as the opening of a political opportunity that altered the calculus of Egyptian protesters. Along the same lines, Goldstone (2011) stresses that the success of the Arab revolts depended on the formation of cross-cutting coalitions capable of uniting diverse social sectors. Nonetheless, this approach, which explains how and under what conditions discontent is mobilized, does not fully clarify the explosive and sudden dynamic of the process: why, once the opportunity is open, mobilization spreads so rapidly. That is the contribution of the third approach.

2.2.3. Revolutionary cascades and preference falsification

The third approach, central to this work, deals precisely with the dynamic of the outbreak. Its most influential formulation is that of Kuran (1991), which starts from the distinction between individuals' private and public preferences. Under a repressive regime, people tend to conceal their true rejection of power and to feign loyalty, what Kuran calls preference falsification (*preference falsification*), so that real discontent remains invisible and the regime appears to possess a solidity it lacks. Each individual also has a threshold of their own: the level of visible opposition by others at which they dare to express their own dissent. As long as that threshold is not reached, the repressive equilibrium holds; but a trigger that leads a sufficient number of people to reveal their preferences is enough to set off a cascade: each new adherence reduces the risk for the next ones and lowers their thresholds, producing a knock-on effect that can bring down the regime in a matter of days (Kuran, 1991).

The most important theoretical consequence of this model is that revolutions are intrinsically unpredictable: since real preferences were hidden, no one (neither the regime, nor observers, nor the participants themselves) can anticipate when the critical threshold will be crossed (Kuran, 1991, 1995). This idea connects directly with the surprising character of the Arab Spring (Goodwin, 2011) and, above all, offers an answer to the problem of timing: it explains why the same grievances can persist for years without consequences and, suddenly, precipitate an uprising.

Kuran's model rests on an intuition formalized earlier by Granovetter (1978) in his threshold model of collective behavior. Granovetter showed that the outcome of collective action depends not only on individual preferences, but on the distribution of thresholds across the population: small differences in that distribution can produce radically different outcomes, so that, from almost identical initial conditions, a group may remain inert or set off a mass mobilization. Transferred to the Egyptian case, this conceptual apparatus makes it possible to formulate the central hypothesis of the work: that in 2011, unlike in earlier years, a series of situational triggers simultaneously lowered the thresholds of a critical number of Egyptians and set off the revolutionary cascade that the structural conditions, on their own, had not managed to produce.

2.3. The work's own analytical framework: structural conditions and situational triggers

The three approaches reviewed each illuminate a different part of the problem, but none suffices on its own to explain the timing of the revolution. The structural approach accounts for the underlying conditions, but not for the *when*; the mobilization approach explains how discontent is organized once an opportunity opens, but not the speed of the outbreak; and the cascade model captures that sudden dynamic, but presupposes underlying conditions it does not analyze. The analytical framework adopted by this work integrates the three around a central distinction: that which separates the long-term structural conditions from the short-term situational triggers.

By long-term structural conditions are meant the deep, slowly evolving factors that generate and sustain discontent: socioeconomic deterioration, demographic pressure, corruption, and the decline of the regime's legitimacy. Taken from the structural approach (Goldstone, 2010), these factors constitute necessary but not sufficient conditions: they create the regime's vulnerability and longterm weakening, but they do not determine the moment at which that turns into revolt. In fact, as long as they remain hidden behind preference falsification, they can coexist for years with an apparent stability (Kuran, 1991).

By short-term situational triggers are meant the proximate and immediate factors that activate that latent discontent: the Tunisian precedent, coordination through social media, and the regime's immediate crisis of legitimacy. These elements do not create the

grievances which already existed but operate on them: they open a political opportunity (Meyer, 2004) and, above all, simultaneously lower the mobilization thresholds of a critical number of individuals, setting off the cascade described by Kuran.

The central argument is that the 2011 revolution resulted from the convergence of long-standing structural conditions and a specific situational configuration. Neither level alone can explain the outcome: the structural factors were already present in 2008, so the difference must lie in the triggers that, in 2011, crossed a critical threshold. This distinction underpins both the comparative approach between 2008 and 2011 and the empirical analysis developed in the following chapters.

3. Objectives and research questions

3.1. General objective and specific objectives

The general objective of this work is to explain why the Egyptian revolution broke out in 2011 and not at an earlier moment, even though the structural conditions of discontent had been present in the country for decades.

From this general objective the following specific objectives are derived:

1. **To analyze** the nature of Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian regime and the long-term structural conditions (political, socioeconomic, and demographic) that generated discontent in Egyptian society.
2. **To examine** the episodes of contestation prior to 2011(the 2008 Mahalla strikes, the Kefaya movement, and the wave of labor protest of 2004–2010) and to determine why they did not lead to a revolution despite comparable underlying conditions.
3. **To identify** the situational triggers of the 2010–2011 period: the Tunisian precedent, coordination through social media, and the regime's accelerated crisis of legitimacy.
4. **To explain**, on the basis of Kuran's model of revolutionary cascade and preference falsification, how the convergence between the long-term structural conditions and the short-term triggers produced the revolutionary moment.
5. **To assess** critically the single-cause explanations against the proposed convergence model.

3.2. Main question and secondary questions

The main research question that structures the work is the following:

> *Why did the Egyptian revolution break out in 2011 and not earlier, even though the structural conditions of discontent had been present for decades?*

From it four secondary questions are derived:

1. What long-term structural conditions characterized the Mubarak regime and fueled social discontent?
2. Why did the protest episodes prior to 2011, especially those of 2008, not lead to a revolution despite starting from comparable conditions?
3. What situational triggers distinguished the 2010–2011 situation from that of the preceding years?
4. How did the long-term structural conditions and the short-term triggers interact to set off the uprising?

4. Methodology

This chapter sets out the approach, the design, and the techniques with which the research question is addressed, as well as the sources used and the limitations of the study. The methodological strategy has been chosen to adapt to the aim of the work: to explain not what caused the 2011 Egyptian revolution, but why it occurred at that precise moment.

4.1. Qualitative approach and case-study design

This work adopts a qualitative approach and is structured as an explanatory case study. The choice responds to the nature of the research question: explaining why a singular event occurred at a specific moment requires an in-depth understanding of a specific context, and not the measurement of statistical regularities across numerous cases. As Gerring (2007) and Yin (2018) note, the case study is especially appropriate for answering «why» and «how» questions about complex, contemporary phenomena whose boundaries with the context are not clearly defined. A large-N quantitative design could identify general correlations between, for example, economic grievances and protest, but it would hardly capture the specific combination of factors that converged in Egypt. Against that

option, the study of a single case makes it possible to reconstruct the interaction among multiple elements that constitutes the core of this work. The selection of the case is not arbitrary: Egypt is particularly relevant within the Arab Spring owing to its demographic and geopolitical weight in the region, the magnitude of the 2011 mobilization, and the fact that its prior trajectory offers comparable protest episodes that allow an internal comparison.

4.2. Counterfactual logic and intra-case comparison (2008 vs. 2011)

Within the case study, the analysis rests on a counterfactual logic and on an intra-case comparison. Instead of comparing Egypt with other countries (which would introduce numerous variables difficult to control) two moments of the same case are compared: the 2008 juncture, marked by the Mahalla strikes and comparable structural conditions, and that of 2011. This strategy approximates the classic method of difference (George & Bennett, 2005): by holding constant the country, the regime, and much of the underlying conditions, the comparison makes it possible to isolate what varied between the two moments and that, therefore, can explain the divergent outcome. The implicit question about if the revolution would have broken out in 2011 in the absence of the situational triggers functions as a logical test for assessing the causal weight of each element. If the structural grievances were equally present in 2008 without producing a revolution, then they cannot be, on their own, the sufficient cause of the 2011 outbreak. This «negative case» design constitutes the methodological core of the work and is what makes it possible to answer the question of timing, instead of merely listing causes.

4.3. Process tracing as an analytical technique

To examine how those factors were articulated, process tracing is used. This technique consists of reconstructing the causal sequence that connects initial conditions with an outcome, identifying the intermediate mechanisms that link them (George & Bennett, 2005; Collier, 2011). Unlike methods that merely establish correlations between variables, process tracing seeks observations about the causal process itself: traces that make it possible to determine whether the proposed mechanism actually operated. In this work, that technique makes it possible to follow the chain that runs from the long-term structural conditions and the short-term triggers to the revolutionary outbreak, testing the convergence hypothesis and, in particular, the mechanism of cascade and preference

falsification proposed by Kuran. The aim is to show the concrete process by which latent discontent, sustained over years, was transformed into a mass mobilization at a given moment, paying special attention to the role of the triggers in reducing the perceived risk and in generating a shared awareness of discontent (Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

4.4. Sources and materials

The work is based on the analysis of secondary sources, articulated at three levels. First, the specialized academic literature such as monographs and articles from scholarly journals on the Mubarak regime, the Arab Spring, and theories of revolution which provides the interpretive and analytical framework. Second, the reports of organizations and institutions, such as Amnesty International or the United States Institute of Peace, useful for documenting concrete facts such as repression figures or socioeconomic conditions. Third, the socioeconomic and demographic data drawn from statistical sources, such as the United Nations Population Division, the World Bank, or the CIA World Factbook. The triangulation of these three types of material makes it possible to cross-check claims and to support the analysis at both the explanatory and the descriptive levels. The sources have been weighted according to their rigor, giving greater weight to peer-reviewed academic literature and using less robust sources only for specific data points.

4.5. Limitations of the study

The chosen design entails several limitations that are worth acknowledging. First, the study of a single case restricts the ability to generalize the conclusions to other revolutionary processes, although it does make it possible to draw hypotheses transferable to similar cases. Second, counterfactual reasoning, by its very nature, cannot conclusively demonstrate what would have happened in alternative scenarios, but can only offer plausible inferences. Third, attributing a precise causal weight to factors that interact with one another is intrinsically difficult, so the analysis aims to establish their relative importance rather than an exact hierarchy. Fourth, the reliance on secondary sources and, for the most part, in English introduces the bias of prior interpretations and leaves out Arabic-language sources that could nuance the analysis. Finally, the retrospective character of the study entails the risk of reading the events prior to 2011 in light of their

already-known outcome. These limitations do not invalidate the analysis, but they delimit the scope of its conclusions.

5. Analysis and discussion

5.1. The Mubarak regime and the long-term structural conditions

The analysis of the causes of the 2011 revolution must start from the long-term structural conditions that characterized Mubarak's Egypt. This section examines the nature of the regime and its institutional pillars, its chronic legitimacy deficit and the repression that sustained it, the socioeconomic conditions that eroded the daily life of Egyptians, the demographic pressure that amplified them, and, finally, the network of corruption that intertwined political and economic power. Taken together, these conditions form the substratum on which, years later, the situational triggers analyzed in the following sections would act.

5.1.1. The nature of authoritarianism: the NDP, the security apparatus, and the army

The Mubarak regime rested on three institutional pillars: the ruling party, the security apparatus, and the army. These three pillars are worth examining separately. The first was the National Democratic Party (NDP), which in practice was indistinguishable from the state itself. Heiss (2012) shows that the party was structured so that the leaders of the political institutions were at the same time the cadres of the NDP: Mubarak presided over the country and the party, the party's secretary-general also headed the Upper House, and most members of its political bureau held parliamentary seats or ministerial portfolios. This fusion between party and government guaranteed the longevity of the regime.

As a party typical of an authoritarian system, the NDP did not serve to channel citizen participation, but to keep the ruler in power through two mechanisms: the power of elites and the marginalization of the population as a whole. Heiss (2012) summarizes Mubarak's strategy in three principles: preserving the appearance of a united leadership, managing internal conflicts privately through reconciliation and the distribution of posts; controlling the growth of the elite circle by co-opting emerging businessmen; and repressing or neglecting the population. This priority of businessmen proved especially significant: throughout the 2000s, figures such as Ahmed Ezz (steel magnate and party secretary)

acquired decisive influence, and the president's own son, Gamal Mubarak, articulated within the NDP a business faction that displaced the traditional organization (Khasyi'in, 2019).

The second pillar was the security apparatus. After the assassination of Sadat in 1981, Mubarak reinstated Law 162/1958, which established a permanent state of emergency and gave him legal authority to suspend the Constitution, expand police powers, and censor any content deemed dangerous; under the cover of that legislation, the regime was able to imprison, disappear, and torture thousands of dissidents. The parliamentary elections, held every five years to seem democratic functioning, were systematically altered and served more to promote the party's elites than to represent the popular will (Heiss, 2012).

The third pillar, the army, is key to understanding the outcome of 2011. The armed forces were not only a security actor, but also an economic power with its own interests in industry and infrastructure. The rise of Gamal Mubarak's business group, protected by the presidency, was perceived by the military leadership as a threat to those interests, which opened a rift within the ruling elite itself (Khasyi'in, 2019). That fissure helps to explain why, when the protests broke out, the army chose to distance itself from Mubarak rather than defend him, a decision that was decisive in his fall.

5.1.2. Repression and legitimacy deficit

One of the underlying weaknesses of the Mubarak regime was its chronic legitimacy deficit. Unlike Nasser or Sadat, who had left a personal and ideological mark on Egyptian society, Mubarak never managed to connect with the population: after three decades in power, Egyptians barely knew the man who lay behind the institutional figure (Osman, 2011). The president tried to ground his legitimacy in his military past, in particular his role as commander of the air force during the 1973 war against Israel, but that narrative did not resonate with a young generation increasingly indignant at human rights violations and the lack of economic opportunities (Amnesty International, 2020). Socioeconomic deterioration, widespread corruption, and the growing gap between rich and poor fueled anger towards the regime, which from 2005 onward translated into hundreds of small disturbances (Osman, 2011).

Deprived of legitimacy, the regime relied increasingly on coercion, one of the three pillars, along with containment and confrontation, with which Osman (2011) summarizes its way of governing. That coercion rested on a far-reaching repressive apparatus. Immediately upon taking the presidency in 1981, after the assassination of Sadat, Mubarak imposed a state of emergency that granted extraordinary powers to the security forces and restricted the freedoms of the press, expression, and assembly, and that remained in force until his fall (Amnesty International, 2020). That legislation also created a parallel judicial system that made it possible to detain tens of thousands of people without charge or trial. The core of the apparatus was the feared State Security Investigations Service (SSIS), which came to have more than 100,000 employees and to which hundreds of cases of torture and arbitrary detention are attributed. Thus, Mubarak consolidated what is usually called the Egyptian «deep state»: powerful and unpunished security services, in fact placed above the law (Amnesty International, 2020).

In parallel, Mubarak hollowed out the institutions of the state: Parliament became the product of successive rigged elections and the presidency was reduced to a mere administrative shell (Osman, 2011). The expansion of satellite channels and the Internet, however, gave Egyptians greater awareness and the means to mobilize their discontent, while the insistence that his son Gamal inherit the presidency evidenced the regime's disconnection from an increasingly hostile society. When that discontent erupted in January 2011, the response was once again repression: the eighteen days of protests that ended Mubarak left at least 840 dead and 6,000 injured, with a deployment that included tear gas and live ammunition (Amnesty International, 2020).

5.1.3. Socioeconomic conditions: inequality, youth unemployment, crisis, and food inflation

On the eve of 2011, Egypt was dragging a socioeconomic deterioration that struck above all its young population. The official unemployment rate stood at around 9.7% in 2010, a figure that concealed the real magnitude of the problem by not counting underemployment (LaGraffe, 2012). Unemployment was disproportionately concentrated among qualified youth: nearly 87% of the unemployed were between 15 and 29 years old, and the rate among university graduates was as much as ten times that of those who had not pursued higher education (Camplin, 2011). In a country with free

higher education, where around a quarter of the population had university training, this produced a large mass of educated young people with no employment prospects.

To this structural mismatch was added a situational trigger: the rising cost of food and fuel. As a major wheat importer, Egypt was highly vulnerable to the volatility of the global market, and the rise in basic goods in the preceding months eroded the real incomes of the lower and middle classes (LaGraffe, 2012). A report by the United States Institute of Peace described this combination as a perfect storm: the global recession aggravated poverty and pushed an already strained population beyond its breaking point, so that, although the fraudulent elections and the Tunisian contagion lit the fuse, it was the underlying socioeconomic inequalities that fueled sustained discontent (Gilpin, Kandeel, & Sullivan, 2011).

5.1.4. Demographic pressure (youth bulge)

The factor that articulates and amplifies those tensions is demographic in nature. The Egyptian population grew by 378% between 1950 and 2010, rising from 21.5 to more than 81 million inhabitants (LaGraffe, 2012). More relevant than the size is its composition: more than 54% of Egyptians were under 24 years old, and some 24 million were in the 15-to-29 bracket, what the security literature calls «fighting age» (LaGraffe, 2012). This structure constitutes a youth bulge, a youth cohort disproportionately large relative to the population as a whole (Urdal, 2007).

Conceptually, the youth bulge does not operate as a direct cause, but as an intervening variable or force multiplier that aggravates preexisting conditions such as unemployment and poverty. Goldstone argues that the security of the twenty-first century will depend less on the size of the world population than on its composition and distribution, and Easterlin's relative cohort size theory adds that larger generations face worse conditions because of the greater competition they endure in school and the labor market (Macunovich, 2000). The concentration of this young, unemployed, and disenchanted population in dense urban centers, with Cairo as the largest metropolitan area in Africa, helps to explain why Tahrir Square became the epicenter of the mobilization (LaGraffe, 2012).

5.1.5. Corruption and crony capitalism

A defining feature of the regime's final stage was the close fusion between political power and economic power. From the liberalization and privatizations of the 1990s onward, Mubarak shifted the center of gravity of his support from the popular base toward the large owners of capital (the *rijal amal*), so that the state became a source of enrichment for a small elite. The businessmen close to the regime, many of them integrated into the NDP, gained access to contracts, credit, and positions of power thanks to their closeness to the leadership, while corruption, electoral manipulation, and favoritism became routine practices (Khasyi'in, 2019). The study of the economic determinants of this corruption has shown that it constituted a structural phenomenon, rooted in the regime's own economic model and not a set of isolated deviations (Abdelbaki, 2017).

This crony capitalism had its symbol in the circle around Gamal Mubarak, whose group of new businessmen concentrated growing shares of the economy (Khasyi'in, 2019), and it linked directly with the legitimacy deficit analyzed above: the perception that the regime governed for the benefit of a minority, and not of the country as a whole, fueled the social resentment that would lead to the 2011 uprising (Osman, 2011).

5.2 The 'dress rehearsal': why grievances were not enough before 2011

5.2.1. The Mahalla strikes (2008) and the April 6 Movement

The most significant antecedent of 2011 is located in April 2008, in the industrial city of Mahalla al-Kubra, home to the country's largest textile factory. In a context of growing labor unrest (Beinin, 2012A), the Mahalla workers called a strike for April 6, 2008, demanding wage improvements in the face of rising prices. The day, repressed by the security forces, transcended the strictly factory framework and became a point of reference for the opposition. It already brought together several of the elements that would be associated with the 2011 revolution: an economic grievance, the state's repressive response, and the irruption of a new generation of activists, which makes it the ideal test bed for asking why the uprising did not occur then.

The Mahalla episode did not end in the worker protest: it gave rise to one of the most relevant youth actors of the decade, the April 6 Movement. Its name comes from that day, called in support of the textile workers' strike; a group of young people decided to back it through a Facebook page created by the activists Israa Abdel Fatah and Nada Ta'ema, both arrested shortly afterward (El Sayed, 2014). One of the organizers stressed that the

success of the day was due to the fact that the call started from purely economic demands such as low wages and rising prices which were more capable of mobilizing a population that, in her words, had «divorced» itself from politics. It is worth distinguishing, however, between that day and the formal constitution of the movement, which was not decided until June 2008: it took the organizers themselves nearly a month to deliberate whether the protest should remain a one-off event or become a stable organization (El Sayed, 2014).

The movement was born as a deliberately de-ideologized platform, conceived as an «umbrella» capable of accommodating a broad political spectrum and avoiding conflicts with the opposition forces already in existence. That inclusive nature favored its growth, but it also points to its underlying weakness: it lacked a common program and depended, in order to mobilize, on its connection with other actors. The fragility of that link became evident very soon. As El Sayed (2014) recounts, the new protest day called on April 6, 2009, failed completely, precisely because the workers and the trade unions did not join it, which forced the movement to rebuild its base.

That failure of 2009 is especially revealing for the argument of this chapter. The success of 2008 had depended on the backing of the Mahalla factories and when that alliance was not reproduced, the mobilization deflated. The April 6 Movement already brought together in 2008 many of the ingredients that would be associated with 2011 like youth, digital coordination, and an underlying economic grievance and even adopted a decentralized structure that protected it from repression. Nonetheless, neither those resources nor its organizational capacity were enough to sustain the pressure on the regime: the disconnection between youth activism and worker mobilization prevented the impetus of 2008 from crystallizing into anything more than an isolated episode, which prefigures the negative case analyzed later on.

5.2.2. Kefaya and the prior opposition

If the April 6 Movement illustrates the limits of youth activism, the Kefaya ("Enough") movement shows those of the organized political opposition. Emerging in late 2004 as the Egyptian Movement for Change, Kefaya was, according to Clarke (2011), the first sustained, confrontational, reform-oriented social movement that managed to unite the ideologically disparate factions of the Egyptian opposition (Islamists, Nasserists,

Marxists, and liberals) into a single coalition. For about ten months it maintained intense street protest activity, centered on the 2005 elections, and dared to break a taboo: chanting slogans directly against the president («Yasqut Mubarak,» down with Mubarak), something unprecedented until then (Clarke, 2011). Its emergence was facilitated by a political opening: the Bush administration's pressure on a regime dependent on U.S. aid temporarily relaxed the repression and opened a margin for mobilization (Clarke, 2011).

Nonetheless, Kefaya never came to seriously threaten the regime, and the reasons for that failure are very revealing for the argument of this chapter. First, its scale was limited: its protests rarely gathered more than one or two thousand demonstrators, and its membership was estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000, concentrated above all in Cairo (Clarke, 2011). Second, the coalition drew on the weakest actors of the opposition, while the forces with a genuine mass base, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood kept their distance, wary of the confrontational tactics and of losing autonomy. Finally, its own diversity ended up being a burden: after Mubarak's fraudulent reelection in September 2005, each group preferred to compete on its own in the parliamentary elections rather than sustain the common front, and the coalition was deactivated.

That said, its immediate failure does not deprive it of importance. As Clarke (2011) stresses, reform movements that do not achieve their objectives can nonetheless plant the seeds of later waves of protest: they politicize a generation, forge ties, and refine a selection of tactics on which future mobilizations will draw. The Egyptian case confirms this clearly: it was in Kefaya that Ahmed Maher was politically formed, one of the figures who in April 2008 would drive the April 6 Movement and who, two and a half years later, would take part in the call for the first protest of January 25, 2011. Kefaya did not bring down Mubarak, but it built part of the human and tactical infrastructure that would make it possible.

5.2.3. The wave of worker strikes (2004–2010)

The third episode worth examining is the most massive of all: the wave of labor protest that swept across Egypt during the decade prior to the revolution. According to Beinin (2012b), between 1998 and 2010 between two and four million workers took part in it, in

some 3,400 to 4,000 strikes and collective actions, which made the labor movement the most numerous component of the protest culture that eroded the regime's legitimacy long before the 2011 demonstrations. Its origin lay in the rejection of the privatizations begun with the «open door» policy and accelerated by the adjustment programs of the 1990s and by the 2003 Unified Labor Law, which abolished job security (Beinin, 2012b). Unrest soared after the arrival in 2004 of Ahmad Nazif's «government of businessmen»: from an average of 118 actions per year between 1998 and 2003, the figure rose to 265 in 2004 alone, and by 2007 the protest had spread from textiles to practically every sector.

Despite its magnitude, this mobilization did not translate into a political challenge to the regime, and the reason is decisive for the argument of this chapter. As Beinin (2012b) notes, until 2010 only a small minority of workers framed democratization as a strategic objective; the usual approach was to seek co-optation rather than open confrontation, appealing for Mubarak himself or a minister to come and hear their complaints. The demands were, overwhelmingly, economic and not political. Only exceptionally, as in the strike of 22,000 workers at the Mahalla textile factory in September 2007, were openly political slogans raised. In fact, when the Mahalla strike committee tried to make the leap by calling a national protest for April 6, 2008, the security forces deactivated it by combining co-optation and repression: the regime drew a red line precisely at the point where local grievances connected with national politics, and, for the time being, managed to hold it (Beinin, 2012b).

There lies the lesson of this episode for the work's question. The labor movement contributed an immense mobilization capacity, but it lacked recognized national leadership, a political program, and stable ties with the middle-class opposition forces. It had the strength, but not the political articulation; movements such as Kefaya or April 6 had the political discourse, but not the mass strength. As long as those two planes remained separate (the economic and the political) neither could on its own bring down the regime. That disconnection is the key to the negative case addressed next.

5.2.4. The negative case: why it did not break out then

The Mahalla strikes and the April 6 Movement, the Kefaya movement, and the wave of worker protest of 2004-2010 share a decisive feature: each of them brought together, separately, some of the ingredients that would be associated with the 2011 revolution, and none led to it. Examined together, they function as a «negative case» that makes it

possible to isolate what was missing before 2011 and, therefore, what proved decisive when the outbreak finally occurred. The most rigorous way to establish that is to compare, element by element, the state of each relevant factor in 2008 and in 2011, holding the case constant: the same country, the same regime, and largely the same underlying conditions. What follows examines in turn the four elements that distinguish the two junctures (the structural substratum, the opposition and its articulation, the digital coordination tools, and the regional example) before drawing the lesson common to all of them.

The first element, the structural substratum, is the one that does *not* vary between the two moments, and that invariance is itself the first finding. The socioeconomic deterioration, youth unemployment, demographic pressure, corruption, and chronic legitimacy deficit analysed in section 5.1 were as present in 2008 as in 2011; if anything, the global recession had aggravated them. The 2008 Mahalla strikes were themselves a direct expression of that substratum: an economic grievance over wages and prices met by the state's repressive response (Beinin, 2012b). Precisely because the underlying conditions were common to both junctures, they cannot explain the divergent outcome. The difference must therefore be sought not in the structural plane, which remained constant, but in the three situational elements that did change.

The second element, the opposition and its degree of articulation, reveals the sharpest contrast. In 2008, opposition existed but in separate compartments: the labour movement supplied an immense mobilisation capacity (between two and four million workers over the decade), yet its demands were economistic and it lacked national leadership and a political programme (Beinin, 2012b); Kefaya offered an openly political, cross-cutting discourse but without a mass base, rarely exceeding one or two thousand demonstrators and drawing on the weakest sectors of the opposition (Clarke, 2011); and the April 6 Movement possessed the tools of digital coordination and an underlying economic grievance but depended on an alliance with the workers that it failed to sustain, as the resounding failure of its 2009 call demonstrated (El Sayed, 2014). In 2011, by contrast, those same actors converged: the January 25 call brought together workers, young activists, the organised opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Copts around a single goal. The mass strength that the labour movement had always possessed and the political articulation that Kefaya and April 6 had pioneered, separate until then, came together at one and the same moment. The actors were largely the same; what changed was their coordination.

The third element, the digital coordination tools, was not new in 2011 either, and this is what most clearly refutes a technological reading of the outbreak. The Facebook-based organising capacity already existed in 2008, when April 6 was born precisely on a Facebook page (El Sayed, 2014), and it had already been put to the test in 2009, when it failed. The tool was therefore constant between the failed 2009 call and the successful 2011 one; what differed was the terrain on which it operated. In 2011, social media ceased to be a mere logistical channel and performed a function it could not fulfil in 2008: by making a previously dispersed discontent suddenly visible, they allowed each individual to verify that their rejection was widely shared (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The same instrument that had been insufficient on its own in 2009 became decisive in 2011 once the rest of the configuration was in place.

The fourth element, the regional example, is the only one genuinely absent in 2008 and present in 2011, and for that reason it carries particular weight in the comparison. In the earlier episodes there was no successful regional precedent demonstrating that an Arab autocrat could be overthrown; the fall of Ben Ali in early 2011 supplied exactly that demonstration effect, lowering the perceived risk of protest and raising the expectation of success (Weyland, 2012). This was the one new ingredient that 2008 could not have had, and it functioned as the external catalyst that the purely domestic configuration had lacked.

The second factor that the comparison brings to light is the regime's response, which in 2008 knew how to keep those elements apart. Beinin (2012b) puts it clearly: the regime drew a «red line» where local grievances threatened to connect with national politics, and combined co-optation and repression to prevent that leap, deactivating the Mahalla strike committee's attempt to call a national protest for April 6, 2008. As long as the protest remained fragmented (workers asking for a minister to hear their complaints, middle-class activists chanting political slogans in half-empty squares), the regime could manage it piece by piece. What changed in 2011 was not that this capacity disappeared, but that the simultaneous convergence of the four elements overwhelmed it: the red line could be held against one compartment at a time, but not against all of them at once.

That said, the fact that these episodes did not triumph does not mean they were irrelevant; on the contrary, they functioned as a rehearsal. As Clarke (2011) shows, reform movements that fail can sow the seeds of later waves, politicising a generation and forging a repertoire of tactics: it was in Kefaya that Ahmed Maher was formed, who would drive

April 6 and take part in the call for January 25, 2011. At the same time, the wave of strikes gradually normalised protest and eroded the regime's legitimacy year after year (Beinin, 2012b). Each episode left behind experienced activists, contact networks, and a tested repertoire.

The conclusion that emerges from this element-by-element comparison is, therefore, twofold. On the one hand, three of the four elements (the structural substratum, the organised opposition, and the digital tools) were already present, in some form, in 2008, so none of them can explain on its own why the revolution came in 2011; only the regional example was genuinely new. On the other, and more importantly, what was missing in 2008 was not one more grievance, nor even the one new ingredient taken in isolation, but convergence: that the mass strength of the labour movement, the political discourse of the opposition, and the tools of the young activists come together at one and the same moment, on a terrain that the Tunisian precedent had finally rendered favourable, overcoming the fragmentation that the regime had known how to exploit. Understanding why that convergence occurred in 2011, and not earlier, is the object of the following sections.

5.3 The short-term triggers (2010–2011)

5.3.1. The Tunisian precedent and the diffusion effect

The first trigger, and the most clearly new with respect to the earlier episodes, was the Tunisian precedent. In late 2010 and early 2011, the revolt in Tunisia culminated in the fall of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, with an immediate effect on Egypt. As Chernomorchenko (2025) sets out, diffusion-based explanations interpret this chain through the «demonstration effect»: the events in Tunisia would have triggered mobilization in Egypt and, later, in the rest of the region, generating a knock-on effect or cascade of regional instability (Weyland, 2012). According to this logic, protest becomes possible above all through the borrowing of action repertoires and through the regional example: seeing a neighboring autocrat fall lowers the perceived risk of protesting and raises the expectation of success of those who until then had not dared (Weyland, 2012).

That said, Chernomorchenko (2025) warns of the limits of this explanation, and that warning is key to the argument of this work. Diffusion accounts for the dynamic of the protest's spread but it does not explain why the region's regimes proved vulnerable

simultaneously or why it was precisely 2010–2011 that the contagion caught fire. In other words, the Tunisian example was a necessary but not sufficient condition: to act as a trigger, Egypt had to be already «ripe.»

And it was. In the Tunisian case, Ben Ali's regime was in a phase of profound exhaustion of its legitimacy, aggravated by the constitutional reforms that had eliminated term limits and by the absence of channels for political renewal; the army's refusal to sustain it and the lack of a succession plan allowed the mobilization to bring down the old regime (Chernomorchenko, 2025). Egypt, like Tunisia, was undergoing in 2011 a structural break with its prior authoritarian cycle. The Tunisian precedent, therefore, did not create Egyptian discontent, which had been accumulating for years, but rather offered proof that change was possible and activated a malaise that was already ripe.

This nuance is important so as not to fall into a single-cause explanation. The Tunisian contagion was the spark that distinguished 2011 from 2008: in the earlier episodes that regional example of success that demonstrated the regime's vulnerability was missing.

5.3.2. Social media as a coordination tool

The second trigger was coordination through social media. The speed and the magnitude of the January 2011 revolt led to its being labeled a «Facebook revolution» or «Twitter revolution,» but it is worth specifying the real extent of that role. As Chebib and Sohail (2011) conclude, social media were not the cause or the ultimate trigger of the revolution, whose roots were structural and had been accumulating for decades, but a facilitator and, above all, an accelerator of the movement.

Its main function was logistical. Social media made it possible to call, organize, and coordinate the protests at an unprecedented cost and speed: one activist summarized that they used Facebook to call people out, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to inform the world (Chebib & Sohail, 2011). The clearest example is the Facebook page «We Are All Khaled Said,» created in memory of a young man beaten to death by the police in June 2010; the page became one of the main organizing hubs and it was precisely there that the call for January 25 was launched (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The fact that 78% of

Egyptian Facebook users were between 15 and 29 years old moreover connected this tool with the youth cohort analyzed in section 5.1 (Chebib & Sohail, 2011).

But, beyond the logistical, social media performed two functions decisive for the argument of this work, and it is here that the survey by Tufekci and Wilson (2012) provides a solid basis against the more descriptive character of other sources. First, they offered a source of information that the regime could not easily control. In an authoritarian system, the state dominates the broadcast media and restricts communication between citizens; social media broke that monopoly. In fact, the authors demonstrate through logistic regressions that those who used satellite television as a general source of information were half as likely to attend the first day of protests, while the use of social media and digital interpersonal communication was associated with a significantly higher probability of participating (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The medium mattered, and the traditional media controlled by the regime worked against it.

Second, social media made discontent visible and helped to coordinate sectors that until then had acted separately. Its most revealing finding in this respect is that nearly half of the surveyed demonstrators (48.4%) learned of the protests through face-to-face communication, and the second most important channel was Facebook (28.3%), far above satellite television (4%) (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). Social media did not replace personal ties, but were superimposed on them, amplifying the spread of discontent and bringing it out of the private sphere. Thus, they helped to overcome precisely the fragmentation that, as seen in section 5.2, had condemned the earlier episodes: the January 25 call managed to bring together workers, bloggers, jurists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Coptic Christians around a common goal (Chebib & Sohail, 2011).

The regime's reaction confirms that importance. When, at the end of January, Mubarak cut off Internet access to halt coordination, the measure proved counterproductive: the shutdown between January 25 and February 2 slowed, but did not stop, the flow of information out of Tahrir Square, since a small but technically skilled group continued to disseminate information and videos (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

That said, it is worth not exaggerating. Skeptical voices such as Gladwell's recalled that revolutions existed long before Twitter (Chebib & Sohail, 2011), and Tufekci and Wilson's own research insists that social media operated superimposed on preexisting

social ties, not in their place. For the argument of this work, that nuance is the right one: social media did not create the grievances, but they made it possible for a dispersed and hidden discontent to be coordinated and made visible all at once.

5.3.3. The immediate legitimacy crisis: the fraudulent 2010 elections and the succession of Gamal Mubarak

The third trigger was strictly political in nature: the accelerating legitimacy crisis that the regime itself provoked in the months immediately preceding the uprising. As shown in section 5.1, Mubarak's legitimacy deficit was a long-term structural condition (Osman, 2011); what distinguishes 2010 is not the existence of that deficit but its abrupt intensification. Two concatenated events, the parliamentary elections of November and December 2010 and the succession manoeuvre in favour of Gamal Mubarak, turned a chronic loss of credit into an immediate and visible affront, tightening the link between accumulated grievances and a concrete agent to whom they could be attributed.

The 2010 elections were, according to most observers, the most fraudulent in Egypt's recent history. As Sharp (2011) documents, in the elections to the People's Assembly the National Democratic Party won 420 of the 504 contested seats and, adding the aligned independents and the appointed representatives, controlled around 96% of the lower house, compared with just under 80% of the previous Parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had started with 88 seats, failed to win a single one in the first round and chose to boycott the second, so that the main opposition force was practically erased from parliamentary representation (Sharp, 2011). The process was marked by widespread allegations of ballot-rigging and abuse, with turnout estimated at 25% or less (Sharp, 2011). These elections were not, in themselves, a novelty: as Heiss (2012) notes, rigged elections were a permanent feature of the regime, held to simulate democratic functioning and, above all, to promote and co-opt the party elites. What was new in 2010 was the degree of brazenness of the fraud and the moment at which it occurred, on the eve of a presidential election and in the midst of regional ferment.

The key lies, indeed, in what that result was for. Sharp (2011) stresses that the Egyptian Constitution, following the amendments of the preceding years, required any aspirant to the presidency to gather the signatures of 250 elected officials, among them 65 from the People's Assembly itself, so that the NDP's overwhelming majority made it practically

impossible for any candidate outside the party even to stand. Electoral fraud was not, therefore, an end in itself, but the instrument that sealed the system ahead of the presidential election of September 2011 and cleared the way for a controlled transition. And that transition had a name: Gamal Mubarak's. The president's son, placed at the head of the NDP's Policies Committee, had staged a meteoric rise to the party's leadership over the previous decade, and most experts regarded him as the undisputed favourite to succeed his father (Sharp, 2011). Many observers linked the constitutional reforms directly to that rise, interpreting them as a smoothing of the ground for his accession to power (Sharp, 2011).

The prospect of an inherited succession proved especially corrosive to the regime's legitimacy for two complementary reasons. On the symbolic plane, it turned a republic into a de facto monarchy and laid bare, as Osman (2011) notes, the extent to which the regime had become disconnected from an increasingly hostile society: the insistence that Gamal should inherit the presidency was the most visible expression of that disconnection. On the material plane, the manoeuvre deepened the rift, already analysed in section 5.1, between the business circle surrounding Gamal and the military leadership: the rise of the business group protected by the presidency was perceived by the army as a threat to its own economic interests (Khasyi'in, 2019). Hence the succession question not only outraged the population but also strained relations within the ruling elite itself. It is no coincidence that the January uprising immediately reopened the question of whether the military would really allow a scenario of hereditary succession (Sharp, 2011), nor that, two weeks later, it was precisely the army's decision not to sustain Mubarak that proved decisive in his fall (Khasyi'in, 2019).

For the argument of this work, the 2010 legitimacy crisis performs a precise function within the convergence model. Unlike the Tunisian precedent, which was an external stimulus, this trigger was entirely internal and, above all, self-inflicted: it was the regime itself that, by rigging the elections and displaying its dynastic plan, supplied the focal grievance that had been missing. In the terms of Kuran's (1991) model developed in section 5.4, this factor acted on private preferences in a very specific direction: it made discontent, until then diffuse, converge on a shared target and a common timetable, the 2011 presidential election, feeding the perception that change through institutional channels was definitively foreclosed. It is worth noting, however, not to isolate this

element: on its own, the 2010 fraud would not have sufficed either, since that of 2005 did not lead to revolution. Its effectiveness derived from the fact that it coincided with a mature structural substratum (5.1), with the Tunisian demonstration that an autocrat could fall (5.3.1), and with coordination tools capable of making that discontent suddenly visible (5.3.2).

5.3.4. The final trigger: 25 January and the "Day of Rage"

The three preceding triggers, the Tunisian precedent, social media and the legitimacy crisis, shaped the terrain, but the cascade needed a point of ignition: a concrete date, place and call around which latent discontent could become visible all at once. That point was 25 January 2011, the day that the mobilisation itself christened the "Day of Rage". Its analysis closes the examination of the situational triggers and leads directly to the convergence mechanism of the following section, for it is in these days that Kuran's (1991) model becomes observable.

The choice of date was not accidental and condenses much of the argument of this work. The 25th of January was Police Day in Egypt, an official holiday that the organisers deliberately reframed in order to denounce precisely the police brutality that symbolised the "deep state" analysed in section 5.1. The call was launched, as shown in section 5.3.2, from the Facebook page "We Are All Khaled Said", created in memory of the young man beaten to death by the police in June 2010 (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). In this way, a single date brought together the structural grievance (repression), the situational tool (digital coordination) and the recent regional example (the fall of Ben Ali barely eleven days earlier).

The course of the day confirmed that a threshold had been crossed. According to Sharp's (2011) contemporary account, on 25 January tens of thousands of Egyptians demonstrated against Mubarak's government, charged at police barriers and tore down the president's posters, in what the author describes as a national day of "revolt". The act of pulling down Mubarak's image is revealing in terms of Kuran's model: actions that had until then been unthinkable, publicly expressing rejection of the leader, suddenly became practicable as each demonstrator saw that they were not alone. Sharp (2011) himself formulates this

when he observes that the scale of the protests was shattering old assumptions about the supposed incapacity of the Egyptian people to rebel against the regime's repression and corruption; that breaking of a shared belief is, precisely, the signal of a cascade under way.

The decisive turning point came three days later. On 28 January, christened the "Friday of Rage", the demonstrators, reorganised through social media after the midday prayers, staged a new wave of protests on an unprecedented scale, joined by the Muslim Brotherhood and coinciding with the return to Egypt of the Nobel Peace laureate Mohamed ElBaradei (Sharp, 2011). As anticipated in section 5.3.2, the regime's reaction, the blocking of mobile telephony and the Internet, far from defusing the protest, proved counterproductive (Sharp, 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). That same day, faced with the scale of the unrest, the army deployed to impose a curfew, and the great unknown became how the military institution would react (Sharp, 2011). That unknown, as already noted, was resolved in favour of the demonstrators: the army's refusal to defend Mubarak was decisive (Khasyi'in, 2019).

What followed is well known and can be summarised briefly, since it lies beyond the object of this work, which is centred on the causes of the outbreak rather than on its outcome. The mobilisation was sustained for eighteen days, with Tahrir Square as its epicentre, until Mubarak's resignation on 11 February 2011. The repressive response was once again the keynote: the clashes of those weeks left at least 840 dead and 6,000 injured (Amnesty International, 2020). For the argument of this chapter, however, what is relevant is not the fall itself, but what the start on 25 January demonstrates: that a concrete call, launched onto mature terrain and amplified by social media, was able to bring together in a single movement sectors that, as shown in section 5.2, had remained fragmented for years. The 25th of January was not, then, the cause of the revolution, but the trigger that activated the convergence of all the preceding factors. Explaining how that convergence produced the "revolutionary moment" is the task of the following section.

5.4. Convergence: how the structural and the situational produced the "revolutionary moment"

The preceding sections have examined separately the long-term structural conditions (5.1), the reasons why pre-2011 protest did not lead to revolution (5.2) and the situational triggers of 2010–2011 (5.3). The moment has come to articulate these planes into a unified explanation. The thesis of this work is that the 2011 outbreak is not explained by any of those factors in isolation, but by their convergence: by the coincidence, at a single moment, of a mature structural substratum and a specific configuration of triggers capable of activating it. Kuran's (1991) model of revolutionary cascade and preference falsification, set out in section 2.2.3, offers the precise mechanism that connects the two levels and, with it, an answer to the question of timing.

It is worth recalling the logic of the model. Under a repressive regime, individuals conceal their true rejection and feign loyalty (preference falsification), so that real discontent remains invisible and the regime appears to possess a solidity it lacks (Kuran, 1991). Each person has their own threshold: the level of visible opposition from others at which they dare to reveal their own. As long as that threshold is not reached, the repressive equilibrium holds; but a trigger that leads a sufficient number of people to take to the streets is enough for each new addition to reduce the risk for the next and lower their thresholds, producing a knock-on effect that can bring down the regime within days (Kuran, 1991). The decisive contribution of this framework is that it allows two questions that single-cause explanations tend to conflate to be clearly distinguished: that of the conditions which make a revolution possible and that of the instant at which it is actually unleashed.

Applied to the Egyptian case, the model assigns each plane a distinct and complementary function. The structural conditions analysed in section 5.1, the socio-economic deterioration, youth unemployment, demographic pressure, corruption and the chronic legitimacy deficit, constitute the reservoir of latent discontent: they explain why a large part of the population harboured private preferences hostile to the regime. But, on their own, they do not determine the moment of the outbreak; indeed, while they remained hidden behind preference falsification, they were able to coexist for decades with apparent stability (Kuran, 1991). The situational triggers of section 5.3 are what operate on that distribution of thresholds and modify it simultaneously for a critical number of individuals.

The value of the model is apparent when one observes how each trigger acted on a different spring of the mechanism. The Tunisian precedent (5.3.1) lowered the threshold by offering proof that an Arab autocrat could fall, raising the expectation of success and reducing the perceived risk of protesting (Weyland, 2012). Social media (5.3.2) attacked preference falsification directly: by suddenly making visible a discontent that had until then been scattered and hidden, they allowed each individual to verify that their rejection was shared by many others (the fact that almost half of the demonstrators learned of the protests through face-to-face communication and the next largest proportion through Facebook illustrates that overlapping diffusion (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012)). And the 2010 legitimacy crisis (5.3.3) provided the focal grievance and the common timetable, concentrating diffuse discontent on a shared target. It is no coincidence that Tufekci and Wilson (2012) themselves raise, as an open question, whether digital platforms can alter precisely the dynamic described by Kuran, according to which citizens self-censor because they mistakenly believe themselves to be a minority: sudden visibility is the factor that breaks that belief.

The call of 25 January (5.3.4) was the point at which these springs were triggered at once. As a sufficient number of thresholds were crossed that day, the cascade was set in motion: the images of tens of thousands of people pulling down Mubarak's posters in turn lowered the thresholds of those who still hesitated, and the movement expanded within a few days to encompass sectors that, as shown in section 5.2, had acted separately for years: workers, young activists, the organised opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood, Copts. The fragmentation that the regime had known how to exploit dissolved into a cascading mobilisation. Thus, Kuran's mechanism integrates into a single sequence the three theoretical approaches of section 2.2: the structural supplies the underlying discontent, the opening of the political opportunity (Meyer, 2004) creates the conditions for mobilisation, and the threshold dynamic explains the speed and explosive character of the outcome.

This reading allows, at last, a systematic answer to the comparison between 2008 and 2011 that structures the work, and it is worth setting it out element by element, since it is in the contrast factor by factor that the convergence mechanism becomes fully legible. The exercise is, in effect, the application of the method of difference (section 4.2): by holding the case constant, each element can be assigned to one of two categories (those

that remained the same across both junctures and those that changed), and only the latter can carry the explanatory weight of the timing.

Table 1. The same factors at the two junctures (2008 vs. 2011)

Factor	2008 (Mahalla)	2011 (January 25)	Varies?
Structural substratum (5.1)	Fully present; aggravated by recession (Beinin, 2012b)	Fully present, essentially identical	No
Opposition & articulation (5.2)	Fragmented: mass strength and political discourse in separate compartments (Clarke, 2011; El Sayed, 2014)	Convergent: workers, activists, Brotherhood and Copts united in one call	**Yes**
Digital coordination (5.3.2)	Tool existed but insufficient alone; 2009 call failed (El Sayed, 2014)	Made hidden discontent suddenly visible and shared (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012)	**Function changes**
Regional example (5.3.1)	Absent: no successful precedent	Present: fall of Ben Ali demonstrates an autocrat can fall (Weyland, 2012)	**Yes (new)**
Regime response (5.2.4)	Holds the «red line»: co-optation + repression keep protest fragmented (Beinin, 2012b)	Same capacity, but overwhelmed by simultaneous convergence	Capacity constant

Source: Own elaboration

Read in this way, the comparison yields an unambiguous verdict. The factors that remained constant between the two junctures (the structural substratum and, crucially, the regime's own capacity to repress and co-opt) cannot account for the divergent outcome, since they were equally present in the juncture that failed. The explanatory weight falls entirely on the factors that changed: the articulation of an opposition that had been fragmented, the shift of social media from a mere logistical channel to an instrument that broke preference falsification, and the appearance of a regional precedent that had simply not existed before. In 2008 these springs were either absent or, where present, isolated from one another; in 2011 they were triggered at once on a substratum identical to that of 2008. The difference between the two moments does not lie, therefore, in the underlying causes, common to both, but in that situational convergence, and it is there, in the simultaneous crossing of the thresholds that each of these elements helped to lower (Kuran, 1991), that the answer to the question of why 2011 and not earlier is to be found.

5.5. Discussion: a critique of single-cause explanations versus the convergence model

Having reconstructed the convergence mechanism, it is worth contrasting it explicitly with the single-cause explanations that have dominated much of the literature, reviewed in section 2.1. The aim of this discussion is not to refute them, since each identifies a real and well-documented factor, but to show that, taken separately, none resolves the problem of timing, and that their explanatory value increases precisely when they are integrated into the convergence model. The criterion that organises this critique is the same one that has guided the whole work: the comparison between 2008 and 2011 as a logical test (section 4.2).

Consider, first, the socio-economic explanation, the most widespread (LaGraffe, 2012; Gilpin, Kandeel & Sullivan, 2011). The deterioration of living conditions, youth unemployment and food inflation are undeniable and necessary to understand the underlying discontent. But as a single cause of the timing they suffer from a decisive problem: those same conditions, often aggravated, were present in 2008 without producing a revolution. The United States Institute of Peace report itself acknowledges this insufficiency when it admits that, although the inequalities fed sustained discontent, it was the fraudulent elections and the Tunisian contagion that "lit the fuse" (Gilpin, Kandeel & Sullivan, 2011). The socio-economic explains the why of the malaise, but not the when of the revolt.

The same can be said of the demographic explanation. The existence of a youth bulge, a disproportionately large youth cohort, figures among the most cited structural conditions (Goldstone, 2010; Urdal, 2007; LaGraffe, 2012). However, as the literature itself acknowledges, demography does not operate as a direct cause but as a "force multiplier" that aggravates pre-existing conditions (LaGraffe, 2012). A structural factor that evolves so slowly cannot explain why the outbreak occurred in one particular year and not another: the Egyptian youth bulge was practically the same in 2008 as in 2011. Demography delimits favourable terrain, but does not pull the trigger.

At the opposite pole stand the explanations that privilege the immediate triggers, and which fall into the symmetrical error. The "Facebook revolution" thesis, in its techno-determinist version, attributes a disproportionate role to social media. But, as argued in section 5.3.2, social media did not create the grievances and do not replace prior organisation: empirical research itself insists that they operated superimposed on pre-existing social ties (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), and sceptical voices recall that revolutions

existed long before Twitter (Chebib & Sohail, 2011). If social media were sufficient on their own, it would be impossible to explain why the digital call of 2009 failed resoundingly (El Sayed, 2014): the tool already existed, but the rest of the configuration was missing. Analogously, the explanation centred on diffusion, the Tunisian contagion, accounts for how the protest spread, but not for why the Egyptian terrain was already mature to receive that spark (Chernomorchenko, 2025).

The contrast with the negative case of section 5.2 illuminates the common root of all these insufficiencies. Each single-cause explanation isolates one ingredient, the economic grievance, the youth, the digital tool, the regional example, which, as was demonstrated, was already present separately in the failed episodes prior to 2011 without leading to revolution. The labour movement had the strength of numbers but not the political articulation (Beinin, 2012b); Kefaya had the political discourse but not the social base (Clarke, 2011); the April 6 Movement had the digital tools but depended on an alliance it could not sustain (El Sayed, 2014). The lesson of the negative case is, precisely, that no isolated factor, not even several of them, produces the outbreak: what is decisive is the convergence, which is what mono-causal explanations, by definition, cannot capture.

Against them, the convergence model presents three analytical advantages. First, it is integrative: it does not discard any of the factors identified by the literature, but assigns them their place, some as structural conditions, others as triggers, within a single causal sequence. Second, it answers the question of timing, which single-cause explanations leave open, by distinguishing between the conditions that make the revolution possible and the threshold mechanism that determines when it is unleashed (Kuran, 1991). And third, it is consistent with the surprising character of the phenomenon: unpredictability is not a flaw in the explanation, but a consequence of the very mechanism of preference falsification (Goodwin, 2011; Kuran, 1995).

The model is not free of limits, which it is worth acknowledging in keeping with the methodological cautions of section 4.5. Attributing a precise causal weight to factors that interact with one another is intrinsically difficult, and the analysis aspires to establish their relative importance rather than an exact hierarchy. Counterfactual reasoning, would the revolution have broken out without the situational triggers?, offers plausible inferences, not conclusive demonstrations. And the retrospective character of the study entails the risk of ordering the preceding events in the light of an already known outcome.

Nonetheless, these limitations affect any explanation of the case and do not invalidate the main conclusion of this analysis: that the 2011 Egyptian revolution is not to be understood as the effect of a single cause, but as the result of the convergence, at a determined moment, of mature structural conditions and a specific configuration of triggers capable of activating them

6. Conclusions and future agenda

6.1. Main findings

This study set out to answer a single question: why did the Egyptian revolution break out in 2011 and not earlier, even though the structural conditions of discontent had been present for decades? The preceding analysis supports a clear answer. The outbreak of 2011 cannot be attributed to any single factor in isolation, but to the convergence, at one particular moment, of a mature structural substratum and a specific configuration of short-term triggers that activated it. Neither plane suffices on its own. The structural conditions had been in place for years and had even produced serious episodes of protest without bringing down the regime; the triggers, in turn, would have had little effect on ground that was not already unstable. What distinguished 2011 was the coincidence of both.

The four secondary questions that structured the work lead to this same conclusion. The first concerned the long-term structural conditions of the Mubarak regime. The analysis identified a regime sustained by an extensive security apparatus and a chronic legitimacy deficit (Osman, 2011; Amnesty International, 2020), eroded by socioeconomic deterioration and youth unemployment (LaGraffe, 2012), amplified by a disproportionately large young cohort (Goldstone, 2010; Urdal, 2007), and hollowed out by corruption and the clientelistic functioning of the economy (Abdelbaki, 2017). These factors constituted the reservoir of latent discontent, that is, they explain why a large part of the population held private preferences hostile to the regime.

The second question asked why the protest episodes prior to 2011, and those of 2008 in particular, did not lead to a revolution despite comparable conditions. The answer lies in the absence of convergence. The labour movement possessed the strength of numbers but lacked political articulation (Beinin, 2012b); Kefaya offered a political discourse but

never built a broad social base (Clarke, 2011); the April 6 Youth Movement had the digital tools but depended on an alliance it could not sustain (El Sayed, 2014). Each of these episodes contained one ingredient of the later revolt, yet none assembled the full combination. The negative case of 2008 thus operates as the logical test on which the argument rests: if the structural grievances were equally present then without producing a revolution, they cannot be, on their own, the sufficient cause of the 2011 outbreak.

The third question concerned the situational triggers that set the 2010 to 2011 conjuncture apart from preceding years. Three stand out. The Tunisian precedent supplied a demonstration effect, proving that an Arab autocrat could be overthrown and thereby lowering the perceived risk of protest (Weyland, 2012). Coordination through social media made a previously dispersed discontent suddenly visible, allowing each individual to see that their rejection was widely shared (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The fraudulent elections of 2010 and the succession plans in favour of Gamal Mubarak provided a focal grievance and a shared timetable, concentrating diffuse discontent on a common target (Sharp, 2011). The call to protest on 25 January was the point at which these factors acted at once.

The fourth question asked how the structural conditions and the triggers interacted to set off the uprising. The answer is the mechanism that gives the work its analytical core. Following Kuran (1991), under a repressive regime individuals conceal their true rejection and feign loyalty, so that real discontent remains invisible and the regime appears more solid than it is. Each person holds a threshold, namely the level of visible opposition by others at which they dare to reveal their own. The triggers of 2011 lowered the thresholds of a critical number of Egyptians simultaneously, and once a sufficient number crossed that threshold on 25 January, a cascade followed: each new participant reduced the risk for the next and lowered their threshold in turn, producing a knock-on dynamic that the structural conditions alone had never managed to generate. In this way the fragmentation that the regime had long exploited dissolved into a single mobilisation.

The central finding can therefore be stated concisely. The difference between 2008 and 2011 does not reside in the underlying causes, which were common to both moments, but in the situational convergence that, in 2011, crossed a critical threshold. The contribution of this work lies less in providing new facts than in reformulating the question, moving

from what caused the revolution to why it occurred in 2011, and in offering, on that basis, an explanation of the timing that single-cause interpretations leave unresolved.

6.2. Connection with the theoretical framework

The findings of this study engage directly with the theories of revolution set out in the second chapter, and they confirm the value of integrating approaches that are often presented as rivals. The convergence model defended here does not adopt any single tradition wholesale, but assigns to each the part of the problem it explains best.

The structural approach, in the classic formulation of Skocpol (1976) and in its demographic variant (Goldstone, 2010), accounts for the underlying conditions that made the regime vulnerable. Its strength is also its limit, a limit that its own proponents have acknowledged. Goldstone (2001) observes that structural theories explain the vulnerabilities of a regime well, yet they do not adequately capture why or when that vulnerability turns into revolt. The present analysis bears this out. The structural conditions delimit the terrain on which a revolution becomes possible, but they cannot, on their own, account for its timing, since they were already in place during the failed episodes prior to 2011.

The mobilisation and political opportunity approach synthesised by Meyer (2004) contributes the intermediate link. Grievances on their own do not generate revolt, since they are almost permanently present; what proves decisive is the context that opens or closes the prospects of collective action. The fall of Ben Ali can be read precisely as the opening of a political opportunity that altered the calculations of Egyptian protesters, and the formation of cross-cutting coalitions, which Goldstone (2011) identifies as a distinctive feature of the 2011 revolts, is what allowed sectors that had previously acted separately to converge. This approach explains how discontent is organised once an opportunity appears, though it does not fully account for the speed of the outbreak.

That final element is supplied by the cascade model, which the analysis places at the centre. Kuran (1991) explains how a latent discontent, sustained for years behind preference falsification, can be transformed abruptly into mass mobilisation once a sufficient number of thresholds are crossed. The intuition had been formalised earlier by Granovetter (1978), whose threshold model shows that the outcome of collective action

depends not only on individual preferences but on their distribution across a population, so that almost identical initial conditions may produce either inertia or a sudden mobilisation. This apparatus accounts for the most commented feature of the Arab Spring, namely its unpredictability. If real preferences remained hidden, then neither the regime, nor observers, nor the participants themselves could anticipate when the critical threshold would be crossed (Kuran, 1991, 1995), which is consistent with the surprise that the literature recorded almost unanimously (Goodwin, 2011; Weyland, 2012).

Seen together, the three approaches are complementary rather than competing. The structural tradition provides the underlying discontent, the political opportunity perspective explains the conditions of mobilisation, and the threshold dynamic accounts for the rapid and explosive character of the outcome. The principal theoretical implication of this work is therefore that the analysis of a revolution gains more from articulating these levels within a single causal sequence than from defending any one of them against the others. The distinction between long-term structural conditions and short-term situational triggers, proposed in the second chapter, is the device that makes that articulation possible, and the Egyptian case lends it empirical support.

6.3. Limitations and future lines of research

The conclusions reached here should be read in the light of the limitations already noted in the methodological chapter, which delimit their scope without invalidating them. The first derives from the design itself. The study of a single case restricts the capacity to generalise the findings to other revolutionary processes, although it does allow hypotheses to be drawn that are transferable to comparable cases. The argument establishes the relative weight of the factors at work in Egypt; it does not claim to fix a universal hierarchy among them.

A second limitation concerns the counterfactual logic on which the comparison between 2008 and 2011 rests. Counterfactual reasoning, by its very nature, cannot conclusively demonstrate what would have happened in the absence of the situational triggers, but can only offer plausible inferences (George & Bennett, 2005). Related to this is the intrinsic difficulty of attributing a precise causal weight to factors that interact with one another, which is why the analysis has aimed throughout at relative importance rather than exact measurement. The retrospective character of the study introduces a further caution, since

there is always a risk of ordering the events prior to 2011 in the light of an outcome that is already known.

A third limitation has to do with the sources. The work rests on secondary material and, for the most part, on literature in English, which carries with it the interpretations of earlier authors and leaves aside Arabic-language sources that could nuance the analysis. This constraint suggests an obvious avenue for improvement. Research drawing on primary materials and on Arabic-language scholarship would be able to test the convergence mechanism against first-hand evidence and to refine the account of how the thresholds described by Kuran operated in practice.

Beyond addressing these limitations, the framework developed here opens several lines of inquiry. The most direct is comparative. If the convergence between structural conditions and situational triggers explains the timing of the Egyptian outbreak, the same analytical distinction could be applied to the other cases of the Arab Spring, in order to examine why the wave brought down some regimes while others withstood it. Such a comparison would connect this study with the question of authoritarian resilience, which the work has treated as a contrasting horizon rather than as its object, and would help to clarify why a mechanism of preference falsification gives way in some contexts and holds firm in others.

A second avenue concerns the role of digital coordination. This study has treated social media as one trigger among several, and has been careful to avoid the technodeterminism that an isolated reading of the so-called Facebook revolution invites. Tufekci and Wilson (2012) themselves raise, as an open question, whether digital platforms may be altering the very dynamic that Kuran described, in which citizens silence themselves because they wrongly believe their dissent to be a minority position. Examining how communication technologies affect the formation and crossing of thresholds, across a range of cases and over time, would refine the cascade model rather than replace it, and would situate the Egyptian experience within a broader transformation of the conditions under which collective action becomes possible.

A final reflection follows from the central finding. If revolutions are, by their nature, unpredictable, because the preferences that drive them remain hidden until the moment they are revealed, then the aim of an analysis such as this one cannot be to forecast when

an uprising will occur. No theory could do that. What it can do, once the event has taken place, is to explain why it happened when it did and not before. That, and not prediction, is the contribution this study has sought to make to the understanding of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and, through it, to the wider debates on the fragility of authoritarianism, the dynamics of political transitions, and the mechanisms of regional diffusion with which the work began.

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Curso 2025/2026

ANEXO: Declaración de uso de herramientas de IA generativa

Nombre Grado/Máster:	**E6 – Doble Grado en ADE y Relaciones Internacionales**
Nombre Alumno:	**Roberto Gómez Herrero**
Coordinador/a TFG/TFM:	**Javier Gil Pérez**
Nombre Director/a de TFG/TFGM:	**Marta Paradés Martín**

Declaro que para la elaboración del presente Trabajo Fin de Grado / Trabajo Fin de Máster se ha utilizado inteligencia artificial generativa como herramienta de apoyo.	SÍ	NO

1) Uso de la IA Generativo

Si tu respuesta ha sido SÍ, contesta a las siguientes preguntas. Si has contestado NO, pasa al apartado 2.

Uso ético

	SÍ	NO
¿A la hora de usar la herramienta IA, en los *prompts* utilizados has incluido datos de carácter sensible o de carácter personal (fotos de personas reales, datos personales, etc.)? *Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.*		No
¿Has orientado tu uso a suplantar tu trabajo personal sin hacer una revisión crítica de la extraído en la herramienta IA? *Si tu respuesta es afirmativa especifica cuáles.*		NO
¿Has tenido en cuenta las recomendaciones académicas que te han hecho específicamente en el Grado/Máster sobre lo que está permitido o no con la IA?	Sí	

Uso técnico realizado:

¿Qué herramientas has utilizado (ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude, Nano Banana….)? Especifica la versión o tipo de licencia.

Marcar lo que corresponda:

☐ Generación de texto *(Especificar qué herramientas)* →

☒ Reformulación *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude

☒ Traducción / corrección *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude

☒ Sugerencia de estructura *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude

☒ Apoyo metodológico *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude

☒ Buscar o citar bibliografía *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Claude

☒ Generar contenido audiovisual (videos, infografías, audios, imágenes, gráficos. *Especifica en concreto qué contenidos has generado con IA además de citarlo correctamente en el trabajo.*

☐ Otros *(Especificar qué herramientas)* → Ayuda con el índice – Claude

Confirmo que el contenido final ha sido revisado, corregido y validado íntegramente por mí como autor/a y asumo la plena responsabilidad académica del mismo.

La utilización de la IA no ha sustituido el análisis crítico, la reflexión personal ni el trabajo intelectual propio exigido en un TFG/TFM.

Firma: