

# POSC 395: THE ARAB UPRISINGS

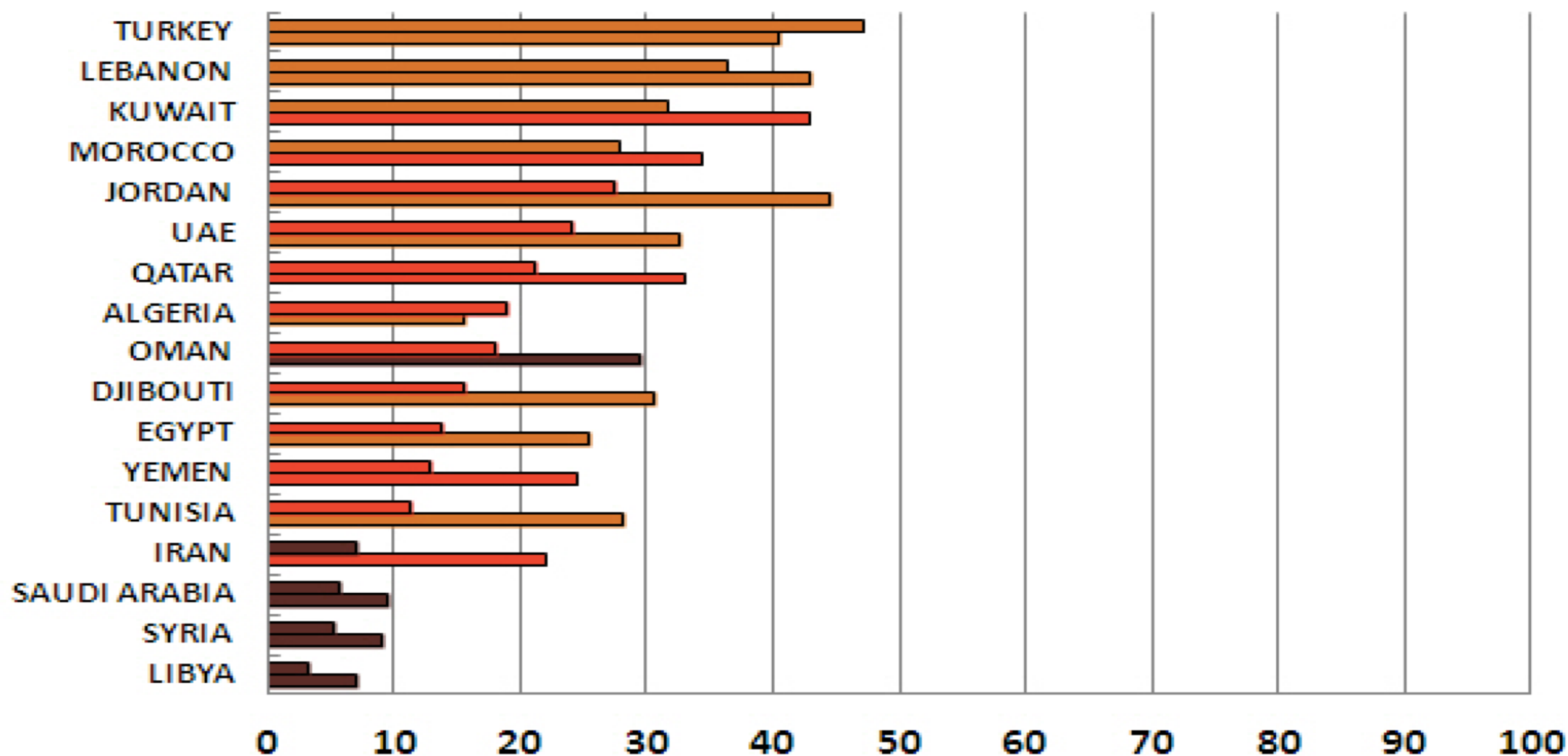


# AGENDA

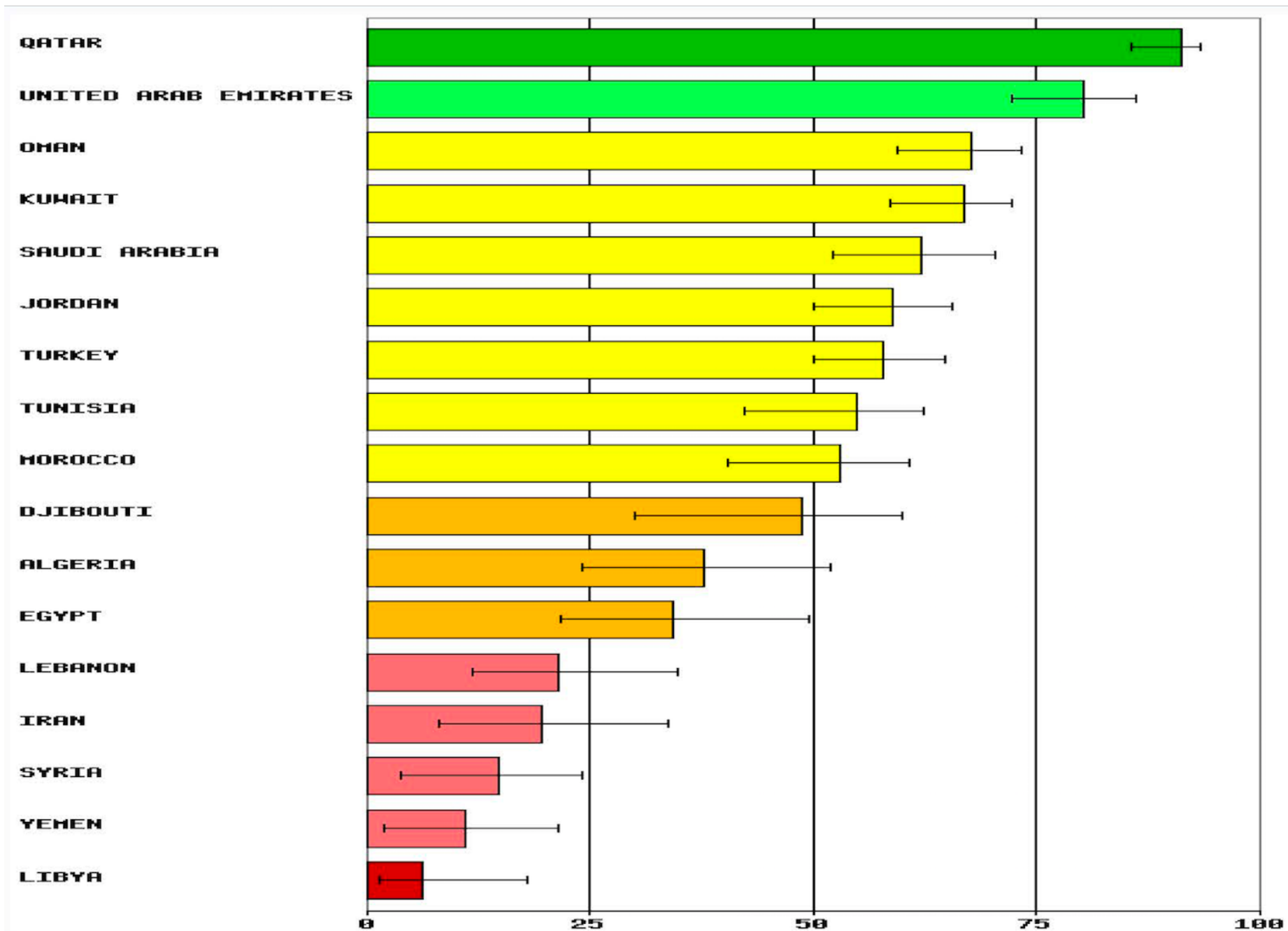
- Eve of the uprisings and initial events
- How did we miss this??
  - Deficiency?
  - Unpredictability?
- “Causes” of the uprisings



**Figure 2. Voice and Accountability in the Arab region,  
*for 2000 (bottom bar) and 2010 (top bar)***



## Control of Corruption in the Arab World – 2010



# EVE OF THE ARAB UPRISINGS

- Egyptian Parliamentary Elections (2010):
  - First round: National Democratic Party (NDP) wins 209/211 contests
    - Widespread allegations of fraud and violence
  - Final results:
    - NDP at >80% (compared to ~70% in previous parliament)
    - MB at **0%** (compared to ~20% in the previous parliament)

"We knew it was going to be bad, but I don't think anyone realised it was going to be this bad," said Shadi Hamid, director of research at the Brookings Institution thinktank and an analyst of Egyptian politics.

"Egypt has joined the ranks of the world's most autocratic countries. Now we're talking full-blown, unabashed dictatorship."



# THE UPRISINGS

- December 17, 2010 -- TUNISIA
  - Self immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi triggers nationwide protests



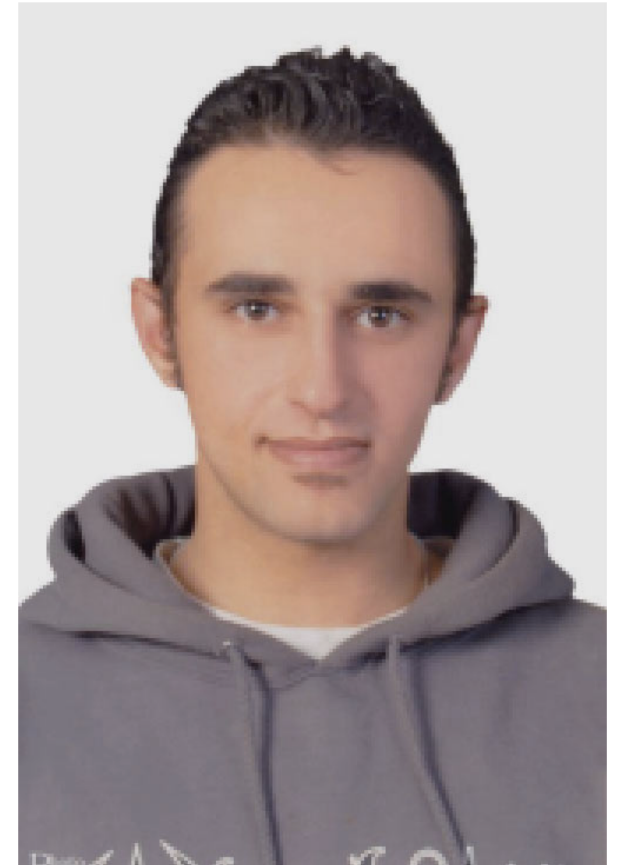
# THE UPRISINGS

- December 17, 2010 -- TUNISIA
  - Self immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi triggers nationwide protests
- January 14, 2011 – TUNISIA
  - President Ben Ali flees to Saudi Arabia in exile



# THE UPRISINGS

- January 25, 2011 -- EGYPT
  - “We Are All Khaled Said” calls for mass protests across Egypt on “Police Day”





# THE UPRISINGS

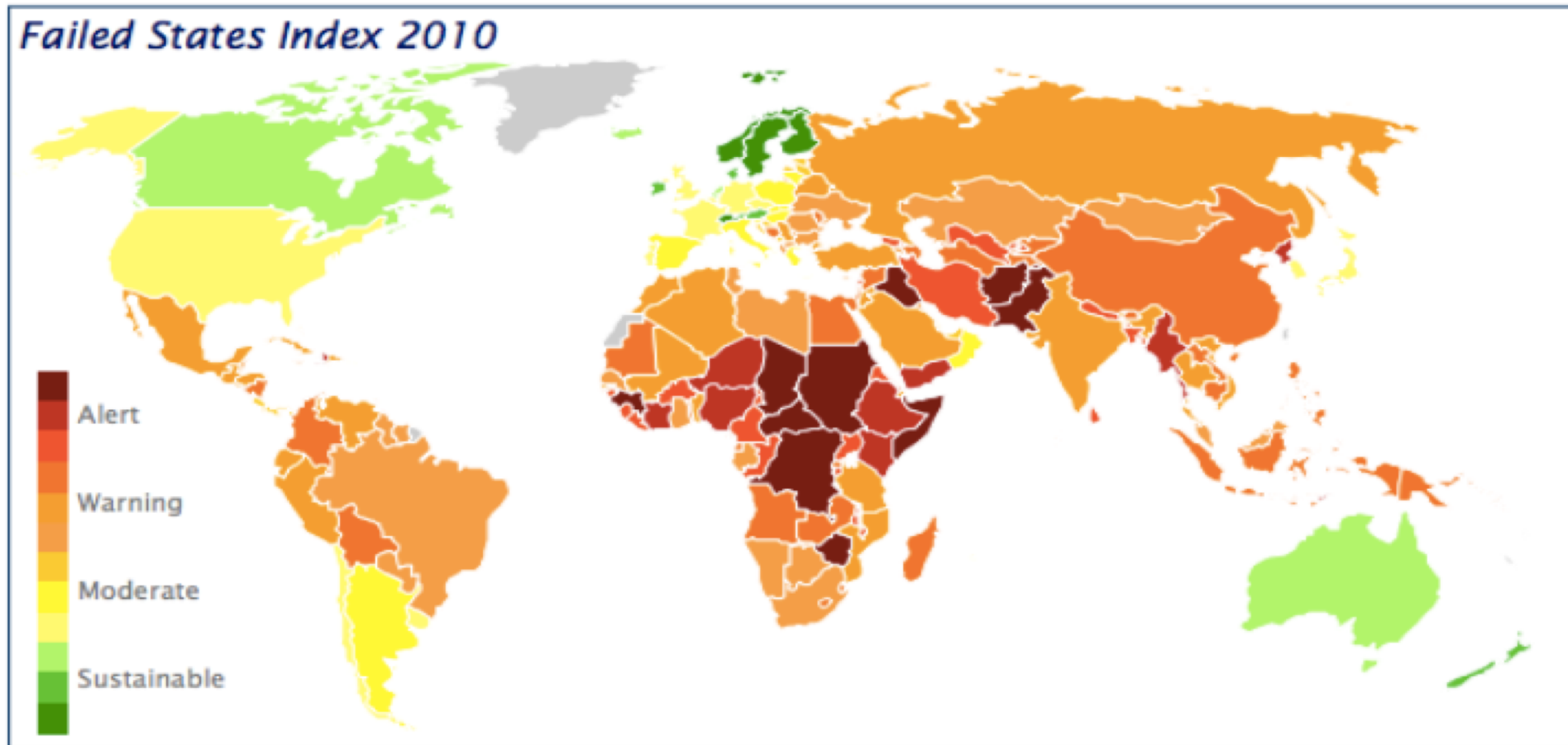
- January 25, 2011 -- EGYPT
  - “We Are All Khaled Said” calls for mass protests across Egypt on “Police Day”
- February 11, 2011 – EGYPT
  - Pres. Hosni Mubarak relinquishes power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (i.e., the bureaucratic wing of the military) to administer a transitional government





# HOW DID WE MISS THIS??

- First off, if we're gonna point fingers...





# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—DEFICIENCY?

“It is **unrealistic** to suppose, then, that there will be **any dramatic change** in the number of polyarchies within a generation or two.... As with a great many things, the safest bet about a country’s regime a generation from now is that it will be somewhat different, but not radically different from what it is today.”

~Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy* (1971)



# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—DEFICIENCY?



“Most African countries are by reason of their poverty or the violence of their politics, unlikely to move into a democratic direction....The **likelihood of democratic development in Eastern Europe is virtually nil.**”

~ Samuel Huntington, *Will More Countries Become Democratic?* (1984)

# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—DEFICIENCY?

- Are we simply ill-equipped?
  - Recall that there are really only a handful of relationships we're pretty confident about when it comes to democratization
  - Teorell quantitatively tests a broad range of hypotheses using data on 165 countries from 1972 to 2006
    - “When the entire range of putative determinants is taken into account, [the] statistical models at best explain 10 percent of the yearly change in democracy” (2010: 10)



# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—DEFICIENCY?

- What is the *general* reason that Gause points us to?
  - Recall the disappointing results of “liberalization” in the 1990s—scholars began to move away from the idea that the region would naturally progress toward democracy
  - In the years leading up to the Arab Spring, academics began focusing instead on the resilience of autocracy and the factors that contributed to authoritarian rule in MENA
- So, not exactly a general lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of focus



# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—UNPREDICTABILITY?

- Perhaps a more apt question: *could* social scientists have seen this coming?
- Timur Kuran: “Now out of Never” (1991)
  - Written a few years after many academics and experts “missed” the fall of the Soviet Union
  - Predicts that this kind of collective failure is likely to happen again (i.e., we should not have expected observers to foresee the Arab uprisings)

# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—UNPREDICTABILITY

- Kuran's main points:
  - **“Preference falsification”** – many people will not publicly reveal their private preferences out of fear or shame
    - This does not mean that we cannot discern a *general* opposition to a regime, but that the depth and breadth of this sentiment is difficult to know



# HOW DID WE MISS THIS—UNPREDICTABILITY

- Kuran's main points:
  - PF masks the precise distribution of individual **revolutionary thresholds** (i.e., the level at which an individual who opposes a regime would join some kind of movement against it if a certain number of others did so as well)
  - Even a slight shift in this distribution, brought about by “**a small, intrinsically insignificant event,**” may be sufficient to produce a “**revolutionary bandwagon**” in which more and more people take to the streets, encouraged by the relative safety and anonymity of large crowds

# LET'S TRY IT!



# EXPLAINING UPRISINGS: ECONOMICS?

- Poverty?
  - Yes...but other regions (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa) just as poor or worse

# EXPLAINING UPRISINGS: ECONOMICS?

“If poverty is the cause of revolutions, there would be revolutions all the time. What is needed to turn a million people's grumbling discontent into a crowd on the streets is **a spark to electrify them.**”

~Leon Trotsky

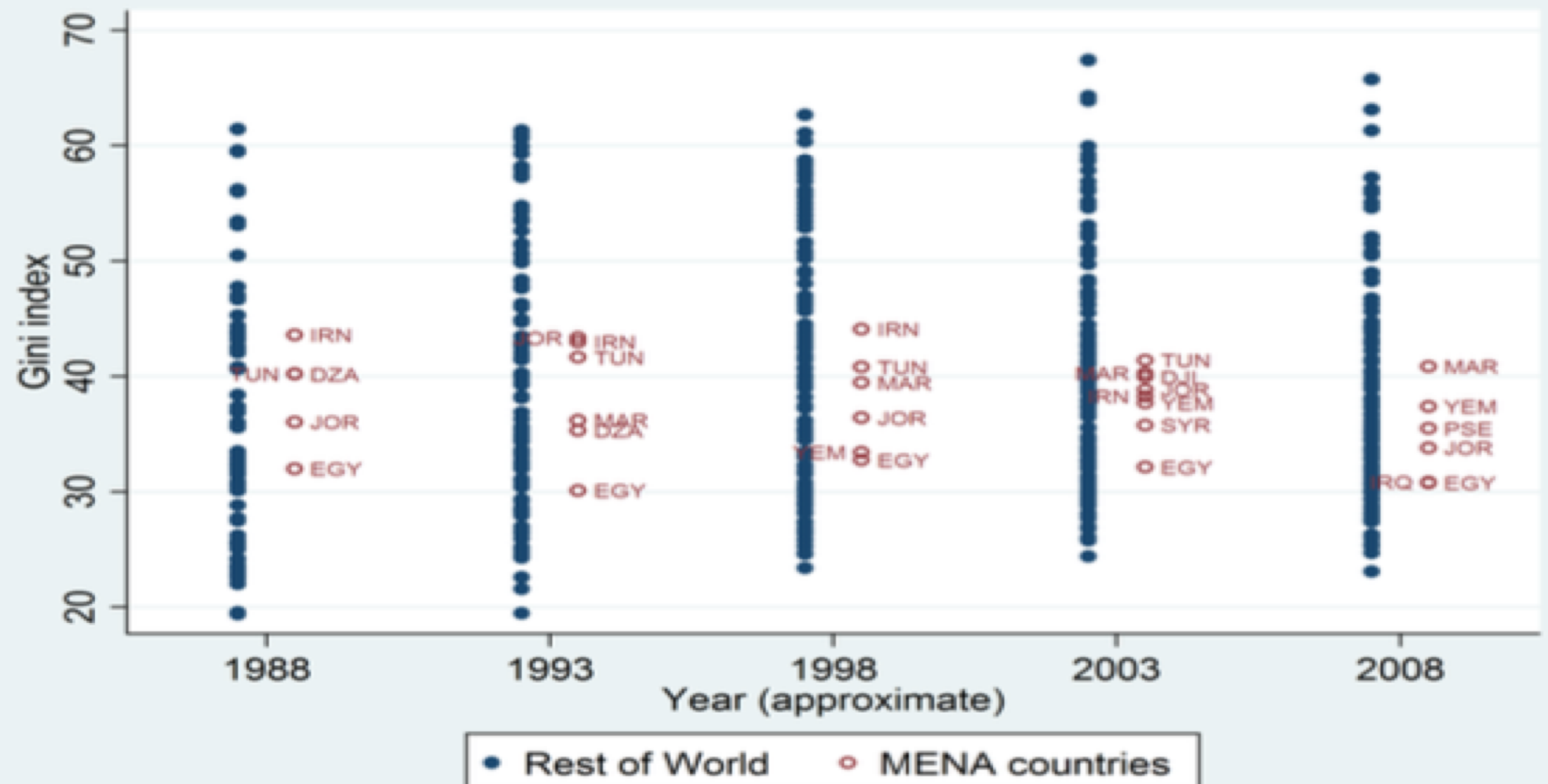




# EXPLAINING UPRISINGS: ECONOMICS?

- Poverty?
  - Yes...but other regions (e.g., sub-Saharan Africa) just as poor or worse
- Inequality?
  - Actually...it wasn't as bad as you'd think – MENA countries are middle of the road on common measures of inequality

**Figure 2.2 Inequality – over time and across the world**



Source: Data used in Lakner and Milanovic (2013, PRWP 6719)

# EXPLAINING UPRISINGS: ECONOMICS?

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- Inequality?
  - Actually...it wasn't as bad as you'd think – MENA countries are middle of the road on common measures of inequality
- Global economic crisis?
  - Actually...GDP/capita was increasing in the years prior to the uprisings and other economic indicators were showing a positive trajectory

# EXPLAINING UPRISINGS: ECONOMICS?



Judging by economic data alone, the revolutions of the 2011 Arab Spring should have never happened. The numbers from the decades before had told a glowing story: the region had been making steady progress toward eliminating extreme poverty, boosting shared prosperity, increasing school enrollment, and reducing hunger, child and maternal mortality. Reforms were underway and economic growth was moderate.