



RESEARCH PAPER

**Current Arab Spring: A Wave of Democratic Revolution
in the Arab World**

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to explore the causes and motives behind the Arab Uprising. Arab Spring was a wave of protests against the long-term authoritarian rulers of the approximate Arab countries. People of those countries were being deprived from their fundamental rights and went against their rulers. This study is qualitative in nature and secondary sources are used to analyze. It is observed that the social crisis, global economic crisis, unemployment, youth bulge, lack of education and democracy, political slavery and economic inequalities, discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, and the Self immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi were the major causes of the stir in Middle East. This study recommends free, fair and continuous electoral process, modern education, rule of law and economic development in the region. The law enforcement agencies must be under the law and the continuous state of emergencies in these states should be lifted.

Introduction

Spring, comprises on violent and violence free protests, remonstrations, rebellions and civil wars, started from Tunis on December 18, 2010 and extended all over the Arab world (Terrill, 2011). The early revolts and riots have been ended but some are going on as yet. All the revolts had some common methods of protests and the use

of social media to get the attention of world community. All the affected regimes of the Arab Spring used their all sorts of power to crush the demonstrators and consequently the protesters also became violent. The common slogan of the protesters throughout Arab Spring was “the people want to bring down the regime” (Aissa, 2012). The first exact apply of the phrase “Arab Spring” to represent the current Arab uprisings was initiated by US political academic journal “Foreign Policy” (Abusharif, 2014). It was Marc Lynch, an American political scientist, who used this term in his article written in “Foreign Policy” journal (Abusharif, 2014).

Pre-requisites to Name a Protest as Revolution

It is necessary to describe earlier the pre-requisites of a revolution. Every mob protest cannot be called the revolution. There are some conditions which must be fulfilled to declare a protest as revolution. In the aftermath of French Revolution someone asked to Zhou Enlai, the then Prime Minister of China, about its consequences and he responded by saying “It is still too early to tell (Khalili, 2011).” Like that it will not be correct to declare the Arab Spring as a revolution without examining the conditions of these uprisings. The revolutions of 20th century and especially the Iranian revolution can be compared with the current Arab uprisings and mainly with Tunisian and Egyptian situation (Aissa, 2012). The comparison starts by primarily looking at the specific methods through which a revolution is prepared. Then it is examined that what changes a revolutionary alteration involves and at the end proposes some suggestions on meaningful methods of discussing revolutions and radical activities. About the emergence of revolution, the identifications of 20th century’s most prominent theorist Lenin’s are worth mentioning (Aissa, 2012). Lenin recognized three probable conditions or pre-requisites for the appearance of a revolution.

Lenin’s Pre-requisites’ Application to Middle East

The major feature of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolt was the participation of majority. It was seen in Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979 that people from all classes and sects participated irrespective religious and rural/urban difference. Structured working group activities were decisive in the development of personally and venerable relationship that frequently emphasized crowd mobilization and that made the revolutionary movements in all three states. The union establishment has been started in Tunis and Egypt well before the eruption of Arab riots and it played important role during the mutiny

(Warren, 2012). Student activism was also the part of union establishment.

The level to which interior separations inside the regimes cause their weakness to revolutions depends significantly upon the nature of power. There a flaw is seen in Lenin’s analysis. The monarchical government of Iran was united and there was no partition in their ranks. The Iranian revolution continued until it succeeded to create a horizontal crack in army which permitted the revolutionary groups to control the military bases and arms in all cities but there was no crack in ruling class which is essential precondition according to Lenin.

Vacillations are seen in the case of Libya as its officials started to defect from the government as riots began. However the authority and political establishment was concentrated so tightly in the hands of Qaddafi dynasty that these vacillations and dissections did not rapidly modify the strength of government (Warren, 2012). Qaddafi regime used the unexpected aggression to oppose the armed rebellion against it. On other side dissection and vacillation were enormously decisive to the product of riots in Egypt and Tunis. Military was in the favor of protesters in Tunis. Egyptian military is the most powerful institution in Egypt which saved its side by dethroning Hosni Mubarak during the protests.

Causes of the Arab Spring

Causes of the Arab Spring may be described as following:

1. The Economic Causes

Economic causes can be classified into further sub-divisions

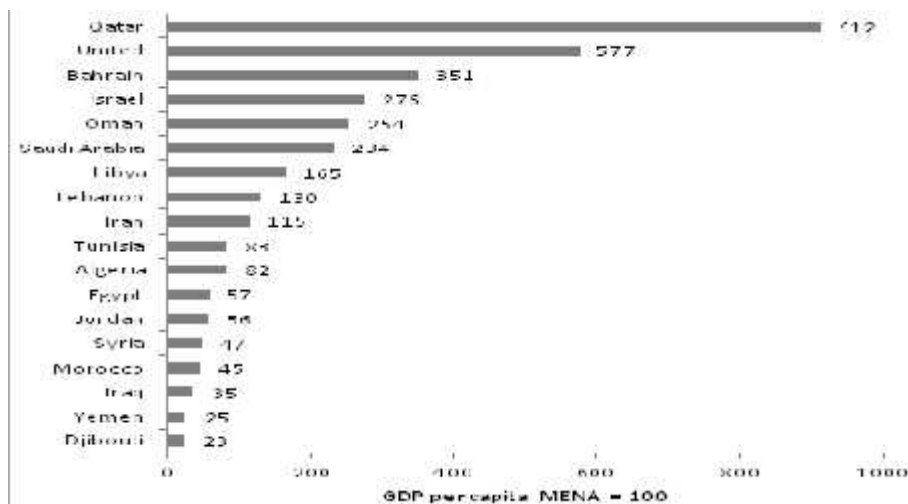
Role of Global Crisis

The economic condition of the Middle Eastern and North African countries is heterogeneous. They are different in their progressive level and economic structure. The GDP level of oil exporting states is far high from the other countries of the region. The income of some countries like that of Libya and Algeria is based upon their oil and gas export while some others’ like Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia on manufacturing and tourism (Akram, 2011).

Fig.1. GDP per capita (PPP) in2009(MENA=100)

Source: World Bank

North African states of the region have brought some reforms in their economies with the support of IMF and World Bank since 1990s



(Khalili, 2011). The public sectors have been privatized in these states and governmental interference has been decreased in the financial sectors. The downfall in oil prices during 2008-9 directly affected the oil exporting as well as other countries of the region badly (Warren, 2012). Europe and America, which used to import manufactured goods from the region, decreased their demand during the crisis.

Role of Food Crisis

The role of food crisis and its high prices in political unrest is historically accepted especially in poor countries as they have to rely upon some other countries for food. During 2007-8 the Arab countries like that of Yemen, Morocco, Tunis and Egypt had to suffer at the hands of public protests due to price increase in food grains (Rozsa, 2012). About two years prior to the Arab Spring the inflation rate reached from 25 to 30 percent in the affected countries (Warren, 2012). The oil producing countries were not the much affected of the high inflation rate. It was the North African region which was deadly affected by the high prices because there remains an affiliation between food prices and food insurrections. This all leads to the political unrest in the region. As it was discussed earlier that these countries have to rely upon the other states to fulfill their needs of food grains, the economic and inflation condition of those states also play a crucial role in the internal affairs of these states.

Role of Unemployment

Decrease in the manufacturing of different goods during 2010 increased the unemployment in Morocco, Egypt and Tunis where it reached to the highest level as compare to the preceding years (Tucker, 2012). According to the circumstances of the North African region its unemployment ratio was not much deteriorating as it was only about 10 percent. This ratio was at high level in other Arab countries. Unemployment among the youth, especially females, was one of the most important causes behind the Arab Spring (Rozsa, 2012). At the eve of the Arab Spring, one out of four Egyptians and Tunisians young was out of employment. Along with the decrease in production, the demographic boom was also responsible for increasing unemployment. This affected badly the North African countries as average age of the people decreased there. Due to the unemployment among the youth, more than 1/3 of the labor forces consist of young people (Unit, 2011).

Table. 1
Composition of unemployment in North African countries, 2010

Variables	Algeria	Egypt	Morocco	Tunisia
Unemployment(total) ^c	10.0	8.9	9.1	13.0
Unemployment(female) ^d	10.1**	22.9*	10.5*	..
Youth unemployment	21.5	24.8	17.6	29.4
Youth unemployment(female) ^b	..	47.9**	19.4 w	..

Source: World Bank

The unemployment ratio among the young women is seen higher in Egypt as compare to other countries of the region. Throughout the world, there is the lowest female labor force contribution in the Arab countries. About 25 percent of the labor force consists of women throughout the Middle East and North Africa region but ratio differs from state to state (Barany, 2012). 22.5 percent Libyan women represent the labor force while the ratio is about one quarter in Tunisia and Egypt (Daniele, 2012).

2. The Social Causes

The Youth Bulge, Education and Democracy

It is the fact that the Middle Eastern and North African states are heterogeneous both economically and politically but there are some common attributes among them. Demographically the whole region has about 30 percent population of 15 to 29 years therefore the unemployment rate among the youth is high there (Mortimer, 2012). The region progressed well in education levels during the last three decades. This socio-economic situation played an important role in social change especially towards democratization. History reveals that the Nations rich of youth do not fear the uprisings, political aggression and civil clashes. It also indicates that during the period of 1970-99 about 80 percent civil clashes with minimum 25 casualties occurred in such states where about 60 percent population was under 30 years of age (Jason Brownlee, 2013). The countries which had young population, had to suffer from civil clashes three times more than the others which had mature population during 1990s. In first phase it is seen that in the developing countries facing demographic change have a number of unemployment youth who have to depend upon their parents for a long time which frustrates them. It leads them towards violence and extra-legal political transformation. In these situations the governments try to use power to sustain political order and the

chances to preserve democracy are also there but rare. South Africa, Costa Rica and Jamaica developed democracies under the youth bulge (Terrill, 2011). The figure of children of every working mature reduces and the boost in middle aged section of the working class leans to produce economic and societal advantages. Education is another important factor behind social development and democratic procedure. Education along with economic development has got the inner position in the modernization theory of democratization (Aissa, 2012). The increase in educational level boosts the democratic process.

Fig. 2 Educational attainment in North Africa 1980-2011
Source: United Nations Scientific, Educational, and Cultural

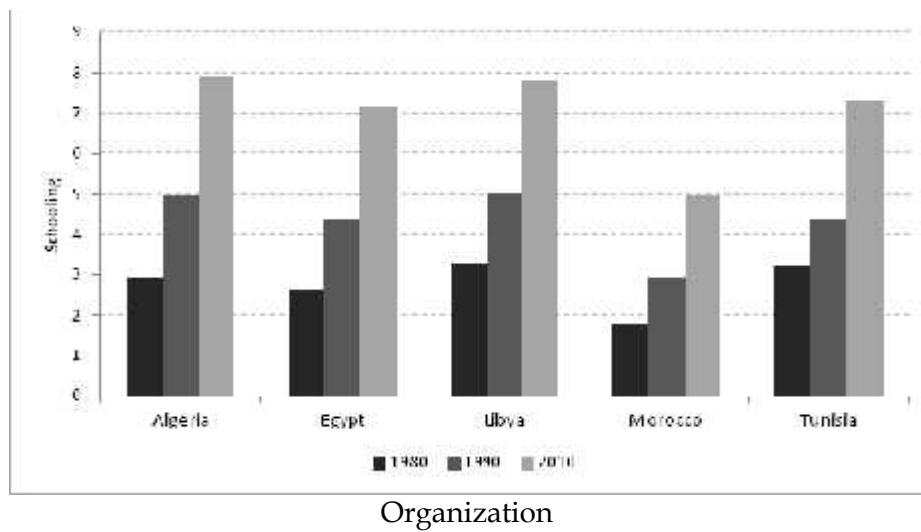


Table. 2
Human development index of the Arab countries 1980-2011

		Average annual HDI growth (%)		
HDI rank		1980-2011	1990-2011	2000-2011
Very high human development				
30	United Arab Emirates	0.96	0.97	1.06
37	Qatar	0.54	0.54	0.53
42	Bahrain	0.69	0.54	0.38
High human development				
56	Saudi Arabia	0.55	0.50	0.55
63	Kuwait	0.32	0.31	0.07
64	Libya	..	..	..
71	Lebanon	..	..	..

89	Oman	..	..	..
94	Tunisia	1.43	1.21	0.94
Medium human development				
95	Jordan	0.83	0.80	0.70
96	Algeria	1.40	1.13	1.03
113	Egypt	1.50	1.24	0.88
119	Syrian Arab Republic	0.78	0.68	0.73
130	Morocco	1.52	1.39	1.26
132	Iraq	..	..	..
Low Human development				
154	Yemen	..	..	1.93
165	Djibouti	..	..	..
169	Sudan*	1.41	1.52	1.23
Arab States		1.19	1.04	0.94
World		0.65	0.66	0.66

Source: United Nations Development Program

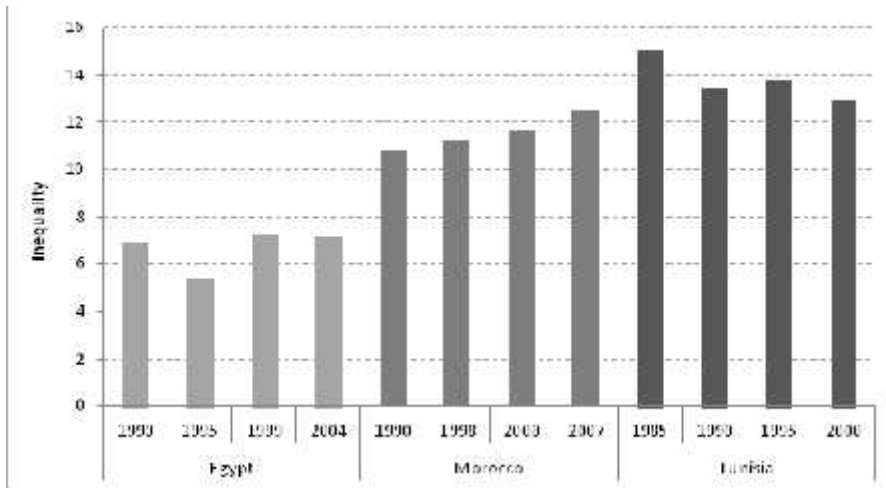
In spite of the national variations, it is evident that there was a significant progress in human development throughout the region. The region has succeeded to control the infant mortality by renovating family composition to much extent along with the fertility rates. Living standard has been improved throughout the region but unequally.

Political Freedoms and Economic Inequalities

Most of the countries of the region have brought deep economic improvements by introducing economic stability plans and minimizing public spending and by cutting subsidies. Reliance on foreign debts was reduced and inflation was controlled. The countries of the North African region adopted the policy of privatization of public sectors, trade liberalization and deregulation to apply structural adjustment procedure. Some scholars are of the view that these economic reforms are not sufficient to meet the economic needs of the region while to others it has no positive effect for the commoners. While the structural reforms have increased the economic development of the South African states but the middle classes and majority of youth was not included. It also did not support the political reforms for ensuring the civil rights of the commons. The fundamental human rights like that of right to vote, liberty, expression and association have

been discouraged through restrictions of continuous emergencies as Tunisia and other countries declared (Akram, 2011). These economic reforms accompanied corruption, bad governance and poor law and order situation in the middle and poorer income states like that of Tunis and Egypt.

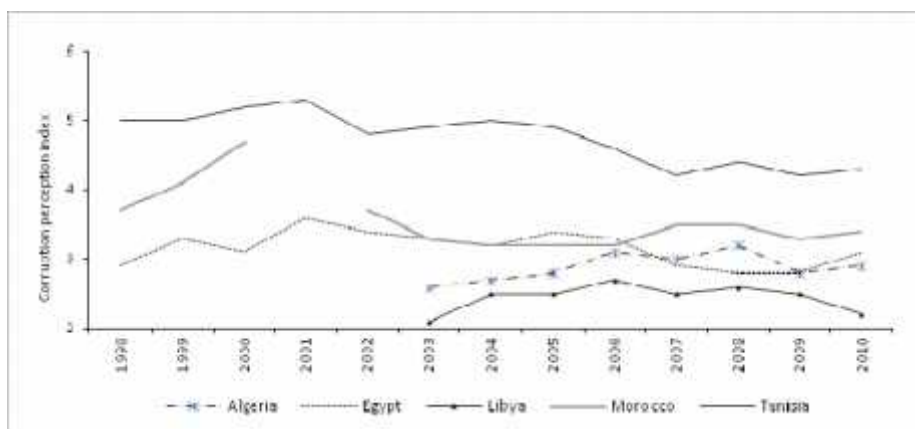
Fig. 3 Inequality in income distribution in Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia Source: World Bank



The rulers of the North African states always enjoyed great facilities. Mubarak in Egypt, Gaddafi in Libya and Ben Ali family in Tunisia are the examples and the protesters gathered on their properties as insurgencies erupted (Rozsa, 2012). Armies and the religious leaders of these states exercised vast authority. Power and wealth of these states was concentrated in a few hands. Lack of fairness and continuation of awkward and unproductive regulation schemes were encouragements for corruption in market for the approval of exploitation of natural possessions.

Ind. 1 Corruption perceptions index, 1998-2010

Source: Transparency International



The above data portrays a state which reveals that the major portion of wealth was definitely held by the small group of people while a minor part was for the majority of population who do not have properly access to education or political channels to advance their social status or to convey their dissatisfaction.

The Role of Social Media

The economic justifications for the democratic procedure are different as the role of economic growth and education is recognized above. A new model is presented by Robinson through whom it is described that the institutional changes are occurred by social clashes. In this model, the authoritarian governments introduce political developments to stop the workers' revolution. If workers cause a plausible warning of revolution, the ruling authorities attempt to avert the revolution by a promise to redistributive methods. During the protests of Arab Spring the governments of respective states tried to stop the riots by promising protesters to redistribution of possessions but failed. It occurred in Tunis, Libya and Egypt (Warren, 2012).

The usage of internet and social media is associated with the progress in educational levels in the countries of this region. Egypt and Tunis are among the uppermost states of the region in which figure of internet users is elevated (Muller & Hubner, 2014). Social networks and internet along with cell phones played significant role in these states to uphold uprisings (Moulis, 2010). The users of these social networks circulated the news and videos throughout the world which prevented the governments of the region to censor the internet and other social networks. The Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak suspended the networks for five days in the areas where riots were erupted. Before the eruption of the riots, Qaddafi government in Libya disconnected the telephonic communications of the area where protest took place (Jason Brownlee, 2013). Despite these all actions of the governments of the region, mass media played an enormous role to spread the revolutions throughout the Arab world.

Tab. 3 Internet and social network penetration in selected Arab countries, 2011

Countries	Internet	Face book	Twitter
Algeria	13,5	5,4	0,04
Egypt	24,3	7,7	0,15
Libya	5,5	1,1	0,96
Morocco	41,3	9,8	0,05
Tunisia	34,1	22,5	0,34
Jordan	26,0	21,3	0,85
Syria	20,4	1,6	0,17
Bahrain	57,1	36,4	7,53
Yemen	10,0	1,4	0,12
World	30,2*	11,5*	..

Source: World Bank

Discrimination against Ethnic and Religious Minorities

Prejudice against the ethnic and religious minorities is uncontrolled in the region and it was one of the most important causes behind the Arab Spring. Different civilizations and religions are living integrated in the region of Middle East but sometimes clashes emerge on ethnic and religion bases particularly in the areas where minorities are considered unimportant (Akram, 2011). Primarily the Middle East region consists of Shia and Sunni Muslims overwhelmingly but some other ancient religions and sects also exist. Alawite in Syria, Druze in Lebanon, Baha'is in Iran and Copts in Egypt are among the ancient ethnic sects and religions (Daniele, 2012). They make about 35 percent of all the population of region. Arabs are the major ethnic group of the Middle East while Turkmens, Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds are in minority (Rozsa, 2012). Ethnic minorities are persecuted in different times in different countries as Kurds and Turkmens by Saddam Hussein in Iraq, sectarian conflicts of Shia and Sunni in Iran, Syria and Iraq in the 21st century. Israeli invasion to Palestine and Arab-Israel wars displaced a millions of people from Palestine and Syria.

Sudden cause: The Self immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi

All the causes of the Arab spring described above are correct but these were the basic grounds and initial causes. The death of Mohamed Bouazizi led the inhabitants of a lot of Arab states against the despotic rulers and it became the sudden cause of the Arab spring. Mohamed Bouazizi was a street hawker of Tunis. He committed the self immolation as a protest on December 17, 2010 when his goods were took away and he was humiliated at the hands of a female

municipal officer (Akram, 2011). His suicide became a means for the occurrence of Tunisian Revolution and widespread Arab Spring. People started protests and riots against the existing issues in the region. The Tunisians dethroned the long term President Zane El Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011 who ruled for 23 years (Daniele, 2012).

On December 17, 2010 Mohamed Bouazizi was harassed by the police allegedly not having vendor's permit when he was on his work. SidiBouzud's officials claimed that no permit is required to sell the goods from cart. He was harassed by the police for bribe to sale the goods. According to his family he was disgraced publically by a lady municipal officer, Faida Hamdi, who slapped him and took away his weighing scales. Bouazizi went to the governor's office to file a complaint and to get back his scales but governor denied to listen or see him. Bouazizi threatened by saying that "If you don't see me, I'll burn myself" but in vein (Warren, 2012). He got a cane of petrol and came back to the office of governor. He went on the road in front of governor's office and shouted "How do you expect me to make a living?" (Rozsa, 2012) He wet himself in petrol and flamed by match at 11:30 a.m.

Motives behind the riots

Political Disaffection as a Motive for Rioting

Arab Congress met in 1913 at Paris and claimed more self-rule inside the Ottoman Empire (Aissa, 2012). From 1913 to date Arab people throughout the region are hopeful as yet to maintain a political system which could provide fundamental rights to Arab citizens. The current twenty-two Arab countries, approximate monarchies, which came into being as the result of First and Second World War, portray complex and matchless differences because of their roots (Terrill, 2011). Definitely the ruling families, powerful military and the dominant tribes of these countries always remained as the hub of power. The inhabitants and citizens of these countries were never considered as the key players in the process of power transfer and they always were neglected as all such decisions were made inside the palaces. It indicates that democracy has failed in the Arab countries as no ruler of any Arab country except Lebanon was changed through a democratic and peaceful method for generations. The approximate ruling period of an Arab leader is about 22 years (Tucker, 2012).

This authoritarian rule based on religious or secular grounds prevented the establishment of modern state system by Arab societies.

Democracy could be established through this system to guarantee the fundamental human rights to people and the right to change the regimes peacefully through the power of their vote. A wave of change was occurred in Eastern Europe two decades ago but it did not affect this region (Rozsa, 2012).

A Move towards Democracy

An important question is asked about the Arab spring that whether it was a step towards democratization. To predict that it was really an effort toward democracy or not will be too early judgment as uprisings leave different results in different states. The oil rich countries of the region controlled the protests easily (Khalili, 2011). Some countries cope with them by granting food subsidies, enhancing salaries and by providing jobs in public departments. These populist policies safeguarded the regimes in these states to be dethroned in the process of democratization. Only the governments of Egypt and Tunis could not save themselves. Libyan population has divided on the intervention of NATO forces in the aftermath of civil war and then the overthrow of Qaddafi (Warren, 2012). The conversion towards democracy is disadvantaged due to the nonexistence of social consistency and structure and the lack of socially legitimated institutions. Both economists and political scientists are agreed on the point that oil rents are barrier in the way of democratization. The major argument in this favor is that the totalitarian regimes can minimize the tax levels and provide subsidies to people to develop the will of the population in the presence of resource rents. The wealth received by rents may serve to avoid the public pressure for democratic change. Research describes about the Middle Eastern and North African oil rich countries that rents played important role here to restrain the procedure of democracy (Jason Brownlee, 2013).

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