

Title: The Arab Spring Five Years On: A Comparative Analysis of Divergent Outcomes

Background: In the five years since the Arab Spring began, Middle Eastern and North African governments have underwent enormous structural changes. Yet, the outcomes between states have differed greatly. Tunisia, for instance, has ratified a new constitution, held two elections, and successfully transferred power from an Islamist to a secular party. Protests in Bahrain, conversely, resulted in a brutal government crackdown and no regime change whatsoever.

Research Question(s): Why have Middle Eastern & North African states experienced varying levels of success in terms of democratization following the Arab Spring uprisings? To what extent is that success dependent on inherent national traits as compared to governmental policy?

Methods: This is a comparative study that will examine four cases. I will compare Egypt and Tunisia because of their similar success in terms of regime change and holding elections. I shall also compare Syria and Bahrain due to their similarity in using government repression, but differences in terms of the escalation of violence. In all four countries, I will compare protestor demographics, regime suppression tactics, regime concessions, international intervention, and prior attempts at democratization. These will allow me to analyze the effects of factors such as sectarianism, colonial history, and regime response in the success of the protests. In Tunisia and Egypt, I will examine post-revolutionary outcomes in terms of economic changes, transitional government structures, and political parties to understand how interim governmental policies affected democratic consolidation. For the Syrian and Bahraini cases, I will primarily focus on the governmental response to protests to determine why regime change did not occur. I intend to analyze these factors by theoretically contextualizing them, and then by describing the chronology of events. This should allow me to disaggregate which actions contributed to certain outcomes.

Justification: This study explicates the processes which drive and shape the current Middle Eastern sociopolitical landscape. For years, the academic community has studied the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.¹ Currently, however, there is a dearth of literature analyzing the components of successful democratization efforts in the region. This study can elucidate both the processes that enable regime change and those which lead to successful democratic consolidation. Additionally, from a policymaking perspective, this study's examination of external intervention can clarify which actions from external governments are most beneficial or detrimental to democratic consolidation and post-revolutionary stability.

Conclusion: Though so much has changed in the last five years, it is likely the Arab Spring is far from over.² Still, the study of the recent upheavals can offer many insights on the direction the region is heading in, and evaluate the potential for additional change. Though academics were unsuccessful in predicting the Arab Spring, this study can identify the processes that contribute to revolutionary success, and can inform future policy actions and studies.

¹ Eva Bellin, "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (January 2004), pp. 139-157.

² H.A. Hellyer, "The Arab Spring Ain't Over," *The Atlantic* April 1, 2013; Khalid Al Mubarak, "Is the Arab Spring Over?" *Middle East Memo*, March 24, 2014