

University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Did the Arab Spring bring a positive or negative transition to democracy in the Middle East?

Sara Meghabghab

Abstract

The Arab Spring is an event that started in Tunisia in December of 2018. Mohammed Bouazizi of Tunisia lit himself on fire to demonstrate how the street vendors were feeling about the corrupt government system. This gave him the title of the one who started the uprisings. As other Middle Eastern countries watched protests in Tunisia occur over the corruption and lack of rights, a chain reaction of uprisings occurred. The main countries involved were Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Bahrain. As the modern world evolves, understanding how the effects of this event arose can be crucial to the interpretation of Middle Eastern governments and international affairs. Many who live in the diaspora, meaning that they live outside of their origin country, have withstood long-lasting consequences from their previous homes. With the effects of the event still impacting those in the Middle East and the diaspora, many researchers have studied whether the event brought a transition to democracy at all. Among these studies, positive and negative conclusions can be drawn from the transition in the Middle East. Many say the Arab Spring led to a positive transition in some of the countries because of a change in government systems, the start of cyberactivism, the change in the interpretation of democracy, and new political thinking. Negative conclusions drawn are because of the forced migration of people out of the Middle East, violence, civil wars, and stable regimes falling. The protests consisted of many sacrifices of the people in hopes of a better future for their families and future generations.

Keywords: Arab Spring, positive effects, negative effects, transition to democracy, the Middle East

Table of Contents

Did the Arab Spring bring a positive or negative transition to democracy in the Middle East?

I. Introduction	5
A. Problem Statement.....	5
B. Purpose of Study.....	6
C. Significance of Study.....	6
II. Chapter 2- Review of Literature.....	7
A. Historical Background.....	7
1. Overview: What is the Arab Spring?.....	7
2. The Street Vendor's Sacrifice	7-9
3. Tunisian Protests	9-10
4. Leaders During the Arab Spring	10-12
5. Protests and Results	12-13
A. Development of Democracy- A Positive Transition	13
1. Summary of the Positive Effects	13
2. Start of Cyberactivism in Egypt	14-16
3. Balance Between Religion and Democracy	16-17
4. Longer Transition to Democracy	17
5. Not a Failure	18-20
B. Development of Democracy- A Negative Transition	20
1. Summary of the Negative Effects	20-21
2. Anything but Springlike	21-23

3. Forced Migration and Migrant Workers	23-24
4. Effects of Regime Changes	24-25
5. Long-Term Effects	25-26
6. Victories Turned into Failures	26-27
III. Conclusion	28
IV. Works Cited	29-30

Introduction

Problem Statement

The Arab Spring has left many positive and negative impacts on the Middle East and those living in an area outside of their home country, known as the diaspora. The argument revolves around if this event actually progressed democracy and was successful or if it was a failure. Some researchers argue that it left some positive effects since authoritarian leaders left their positions, nationalism and hope rose, the definition of democracy was changed, new constitutions were created, political rights increased, public opinion was being expressed, and cyberactivism increased. The protests from 2010 through 2011 “were the first in which citizens specifically called for democratic political change”(Kenney paragraph 2). Other positive effects include aspects of government changing, new political thinking, a new balance between religion and democracy, and a chance for new leaders to make new decisions. In disagreement, some argue that the event left mostly negative effects since crisis and chaos erupted. A gap for Islamist authoritarian governments opened, prices of food and housing rose, public-welfare programs weakened, wages decreased, secular leaders struggled to achieve political and religious legitimacy, the oil curse, and Tunisia and Egypt’s previously stable regimes fell as a result. Other negative effects include Syria erupting into a violent civil war, Yemen’s economy falling, radical Islamist groups becoming more active, governments weakening as a result of less experienced leaders, deadly violence from uprisings, and the once strong social network between leaders falling. The discussion of both arguments has opened up potential interpretations of the event, but still lacks a clear conclusion.

Purpose of Study

The effects of the Arab Spring still impact the people living in the Middle East as well as those from the area living in the diaspora. It is important to realize how migration, economy, governments, and political rights have changed, whether positively or negatively, as a result of the Arab Spring. As problems arise in the Middle East, many of the ultimate causes are rooted during this period of time. The understanding of these causes and effects can help predict future events, explain the decline of some countries, and connect the progress of each country from how they restarted in 2011 to the present.

Significance of Study

Analyzing the Arab Spring is significant because there are many different interpretations of the event. Grouping all of those interpretations into one will help those who may not understand what happened during this event to get an overview through an unbiased lens. The positive and negative aspects help explain the status of these Middle Eastern countries. Over two million people migrated from their home countries in hopes of a better future, more job opportunities, less violence, and civil rights. These migrants continued their lives somewhere else, adding to the demographic change in the Middle East. Learning why and how these migrants moved is important to understand immigration patterns and demographic changes.

Chapter 2- Review of Literature

Historical Background

Overview: What is the Arab Spring?

The Arab Spring began in 2010 as a result of Middle Eastern citizens wanting a change in their government systems, specifically wanting a transition to democracy and more rights. The event started in late 2010 and lasted until early 2011. To try and achieve these wants, citizens turned to uprisings and protests against the government. The causes for the uprisings was the corruption in the government, bad economy, protests in Tunisia after a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire in protest of these conditions. This promoted a spark in motivation and nationalism among other Middle Eastern countries to fight in the hope for their future to progress.

Motivations for the protests consist of the citizens of a country being unhappy with years of authoritarian rule, corruption in politics, unfair elections, lack of civil rights and liberty, unemployment rising, slow economic growth, and inequality in income among social classes. Another factor of motivation was social media. Protesters could evaluate the situation in other countries and their process of fighting for change on social media platforms in order to strategize their own way. The protests against the leadership at the time also led to some changes in the government structure.

The Street Vendor's Sacrifice

Mohammed Bouazizi, a young street vendor, is considered the catalyst for the Arab Spring uprisings. The day before he lit himself on fire, he boasted to his mother about how his fruit would sell out the next day because his product was the best he had ever seen. His promise

to his mother was that “with this fruit, I can buy some gifts for you. Tomorrow will be a good day”(Fisher paragraph 1). For a long time, Mohammed had been telling his mother how corrupt the fruit market was. Police officers “treated the market as their personal picnic grounds, taking bagfuls of fruit without so much as a nod toward payment”(Fisher paragraph 2). On December 17th, Mohammed was stopped by two police officers on his way to the market. His uncle went to call the chief of police for the officers to step away. One officer, Fedya Hamdi, was outraged by the complaint against her. After letting him go, she proceeded to take a basket of Mohammed’s apples into her car. As she went for another basket, Mohammed blocked her from moving towards it. This exchange ended with the officer pushing him, hitting him with her baton, and then slapping him in front of 50 witnesses (Fisher paragraphs 5-8).

This event added to the deep rage inside of Mohammed as a result of frustration with politics and his job. Appalled, Mohammed went to the city hall to see an official. After being rejected at the door, he had no choice but to go back to the market. His discussion with the other vendors was focused on how “unfairly they were being treated [and] how corrupt the system was”(Fisher paragraph 15). He also added how he would light himself on fire in front of the other vendors. One vendor later said that he thought he was just talking out of anger. Later that day, shouts from the streets near the market revealed that Mohammed had “positioned himself in front of the municipal building, poured paint thinner over his body and lit himself aflame”(Fisher paragraph 18). The building burned, the police did not show up, and an ambulance did not arrive until an hour and a half later. His mother said that “it was not poverty that made her son sacrifice himself, it was his quest for dignity”(Fisher paragraph 20). The family was left with no money, symbolizing how poor the conditions were for many.

President Ben Ali came to visit Mohammed and his family in the hospital. Bringing a

camera crew, he made a show to hand Mohammed's mother a check for 10,000 dinars, which is about \$14,000 in US dollars(Fisher paragraph 21). She later commented about how she never got any of the money, since the president's staff took the check back after. Mohammed died three weeks later in the burn unit of the hospital.

The policewoman who humiliated Mohammed that day was arrested in early January. By then, the story had spread across the country, started the revolution, and created chain reactions throughout the Middle East.

A blogger from Tunisia, Slim Amamou, received a call from a friend informing him that one of Mohammed's cousins had recorded the crowd in front of the city hall protesting the treatment of street vendors. Since "Tunisia has the highest rate of Internet use of any Arab country,"(Fisher paragraph 28) the blogger was able to post the video on Facebook. This was the best social media option since YouTube was censored by the president. The video was shared across the country, inspiring citizens to protest corruption, the lack of jobs, and the corrupt system of officers.

Tunisian Protests

Al Jazeera, a news channel based in Qatar, aired the video of protestors in the streets of Tunisia. Since this brought more attention to the country's issues, the government started to retaliate. In a bazaar in Tunis, "acrid tear gas filled the air"(Fisher paragraph 31). The shopkeepers had to protect their items with a broomstick as no other protection was available. The secret police began firing their snipers trying to create anarchy. Many young children had been shot from being caught in the crossfires of snipers. Dependence on rulers disappeared as they fled to different countries. It seemed that "the wizards who commanded seemingly omnipresent secret police forces were revealed to be just old men behind a curtain, running state

security operations that didn't even know how to handle a virus of rebellious Facebook pages”(Fisher paragraph 44). Protests continued to evolve until the news spread to Egypt through social media. Since Egypt neighbors Tunisia, this would quickly start the chain reaction of protests across the region.

This chain of reactions has been known throughout history to remove all differences that normally divide the people. No matter their social status, people protested together on matters like the job market, political power, and the class system. The differences between them did not matter as much as they used to. A sense of unity emerged from this time of struggle, making the fight more personal to those involved.

Leaders During the Arab Spring

Leaders leaving their position of power in their country led to some positive and negative results. The former President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was killed on December 4, 2017, by Houthi rebels. These Houthi rebels have a goal of defending their group from discrimination and the government, as their sect of Islam is a minority in Yemen. Saleh was killed as a result of breaking his cooperation with the group on December 2nd. He made this decision based on siding with the United Arab Emirates, who are planning on battling the Houthis with Saudi Arabia's help. Before his death, he ruled over North Yemen from 1978 to 1990, then the country as a whole from 1990 to 2012. He resigned after the people of Yemen gained motivation to revolt after the start of the Arab Spring. The new president, Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, took over directly after Saleh's resignation and is still ruling to the present.

The country that marked the start of the Arab Spring, Tunisia, had a change in power as well. President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali resigned three weeks after the start of the protests. He

had been president since 1987, after a coup d'état. According to the source, he caused "rising inflation, unemployment, state oppression and other issues [that] are considered to be contributing factors to the uprising in 2010"(Al Jazeera Staff 2). Ben Ali left Tunisia for Saudi Arabia to seek asylum. He and his wife were tried in court for "charges of corruption, theft, and unlawful possession of cash and jewelry"(Al Jazeera Staff 2). They were sentenced to 35 years in prison after their case was ruled guilty.

Egypt had its own protests as a result of Tunisia's impact. The president, Hosni Mubarak, was in power from 1981 until he resigned in February of 2011. He was also tried in court and found guilty of "damaging the national economy and not preventing Egyptian security forces from killing unarmed protestors"(Al Jazeera Staff 3). As a result, he was fined 33 million dollars and sentenced to life in prison. However, the life sentence was overturned in 2013. Mubarak and his sons were convicted of embezzlement and three years in prison instead. In March of 2017, he was acquitted of all his charges and has stayed in Egypt since. This has caused tension among different groups of people in Egypt, adding to the civil unrest lingering.

The president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, has been in power since 2000 and stayed in power during the revolutions. When the uprisings turned violent, he "deployed the military to stop protests"(Al Jazeera Staff 3). By 2015, Assad was close to losing the civil war. Russia stepped in and joined his side. This inspired other groups, like Hezbollah, to aid them as well. The civil war is still occurring, with 400,000 deaths and 10 million refugees as of 2017. Assad is still in power in Syria.

Libya's leader, Muammar Gaddafi, used military force after the Arab Spring. He was a leader for 42 years before his death in October of 2011. Like Yemen's president, he was killed as a result of rebels in the country. In 2014, Libya had a civil war with the governments in Tripoli

and East Libya fighting against each other. This led to ISIS and other terrorist groups to join the country in the war.

Protests and Results

The outcomes of the protests can be categorized into two groups: “those in which the ruler was removed or stepped down, leading to the election of a new leader or leaders and the formation of a new government”(Kenney 60) or “those in which the incumbent regimes were able to survive through an effective and violent suppression of the opposition.”(Kenney 60). The countries that fit into group 1 are Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. The second group consists of Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. For this second group and Libya, their overall outcome was a drastic civil war.

In Tunisia, their process would be considered more peaceful compared to the others. President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali resigned and left for Saudi Arabia a month after the street vendor’s sacrifice. The process was more violent at the start, consisting of clashes between the security forces and the protesters, but the military ultimately agreed with the citizens. Together, a new constitution and starting government system was created. An election for the Parliament was run, with citizens voting for either the Islamist party Ennahda or the more leftist and secular parties of Congress for the Republic or Ettakatol. This resulted in some protests, ultimately leading to four of the civil society groups in Tunisia to compromise with the Islamist party on how to run Tunisia. Finally, in January 2014, the Islamist part stepped down, resulting in the Tunisian parliament passing a constitution including freedom of the press, women’s rights, freedom of religion, and the start of gender equality. The new constitution was considered and celebrated as “one of the most progressive in the Arab world”(Kenney 61). Tunisia was the only country under the Arab Spring that had a democratic transition in their government by 2014.

Overall, the uprisings across the Middle East did not affect the authoritarian rule among countries like Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. Egypt was on the same path as Tunisia to democracy, but it failed to reach its wanted outcome. Civil wars occurred in Yemen, Libya, and Syria. These different outcomes can be categorized as a positive transition to democracy or as a failure.

Development of Democracy

A Positive Transition

Summary of the Positive Effects

Many positive aspects have evolved from the Arab Spring. Some authoritarian leaders left their positions, leaving the potential for new governments to form in countries like Tunisia. The President of Tunisia, “Ben Ali, resigned three weeks after protests started and fled Tunisia for Saudi Arabia”(Al Jazeera paragraph 9). In 2012, Tunisia became the first Arab country in more than 30 years to receive a ranking of 3 or better for political rights on the Freedom House scale. This scale is ordered by the “7-point Freedom House scale (in which 1 is most free and 7 is least free)”(Stepan and Linz 18). Tunisia was able to create a new constitution and rotate power peacefully between leaders during elections. The transition from a completely religious state to a civil state was successful as well. Complete secularism is not achievable, as “in Arabic, the word for secularism, *almaniyah*, carries antireligious overtones”(Stepan and Linz 19). To many critics’ surprise, the exchange of power and change in Yemen’s government was well controlled. This is appraised as a very important achievement. Concerning the whole Middle East, public opinion started being expressed again. Those who were not in favor of their oppressive government were speaking out against it through protests, conversations, and social media. This is especially true in Egypt, where the concept of cyberactivism evolved.

Start of Cyberactivism in Egypt

In the early 2000s, the Egyptian government had given the citizens free Internet access in access centers and offered cheap computers. Previous to this time, the internet was not popular for any communication or connections. According to the Internet World Stats, “more than 21% of Egypt’s population of 80 million had access to the Internet, and more than 4.5 million used Facebook”(Eltantawy and Wiest 1212) by February of 2010. Some Egyptians expanded on the Internet by blogging and expressing themselves on controversial issues. These blogs were published in English at first, then into Arabic as software progressed. This allowed for a larger domestic audience involved in the use of this. The dictatorial presidential rule during the time allowed for large amounts of criticism from this audience. In April of 2008, the Egyptians had created their first cyberactivism event. Activists organized a protest over Facebook to support the tactile workers in Mahalla on strike. 70,000 people became supporters of the Facebook page. The strike was stopped by the security forces, but this event showed how significant social media was to create awareness on issues and organize events to support. Next, in June of 2010, a cafe critic was killed by two police officers in Alexandria, Egypt. The police officers told his family that he had actually choked on drugs. Media reporters had started researching the event and wrote articles on the topic. As a result of detailed research, a video the critic had recorded and posted before his death resurfaced. The video showed the same police officers exchanging money after a drug deal. The media took to creating awareness of his death online. Websites were “flooded with images of Said’s disfigured face, and many people, including human-rights activists, took to the streets in an expression of their outrage”(Eltantawy and Wiest 1212). His death became a symbol of the police brutality many Egyptians faced.

Several other activists became influential for expressing information on the Internet about issues they were facing. Omar Afifi, a former police officer, became an activist on how Egyptians can avoid police brutality. He wrote a book on it in 2008, but it was soon banned. Afifi's life was threatened, so he left for the United States for safety. Since social media was used largely around the world, he was able to create Youtube videos, Facebook, and Twitter posts on police brutality. When the Arab Spring began, Afifi also created videos on how the Egyptians could start their own uprising. His plans expressed in the videos were detailed and informative, giving him the title of the man who "basically fired the first shot"(Eltantawy and Wiest 1213) for the Egyptian Revolutions during the Arab Spring.

One major advantage of social media during the Egyptian Revolution was "its capacity for swiftly exchanging and disseminating information to millions of people inside and outside of Egypt"(Eltantawy and Wiest 1214). This allowed Egyptians to watch the Tunisian uprisings from their houses and plan for their own revolution. The people in Egypt were able to send encouragement to the Tunisian people because of an Egyptian blogger posting videos of motivation from celebrities and phone numbers to contact protesters. This blogger, Nawara Negm, organized a protest on January 25 in support of the Tunisian uprisings and to encourage the Egyptians to protest for their rights. Facebook pages were made in support and gathered lots of supporters. They also expressed how to keep safe and seek help during protests. Videos and pictures were posted for the world to see, generating international attention and interest. Activists in other countries encouraged people to communicate with their media outlets to create more awareness on the issue. Protesters posted videos and pictures from the uprising to show the first-hand experience. The government tried to censor the media from being spread to the world by banning reporters from Tahrir Square, the main attraction for protests. This is what made

them realize how powerful and fast social media was for the organization of protests. This brought the government to decide to cut off all Internet access and cellular data across the country, which disabled access for five days. However, activists were still able to find Internet access by changing the router information and using proxies. More protests occurred, but a major circumstance had been created. Now the protestors could not contact ambulances for those injured or dead. After the Internet was restored, protestors were able to express their defeat over this to others around the world in order to show how serious the revolution was.

Balance Between Religion and Democracy

The focus on the “relationship between democracy and religion, especially in the world’s Muslim-majority countries; the character of hybrid regimes that mix authoritarian and democratic elements; and the nature of ‘sultanism’ and its implications for transitions to democracy” (Stepan and Linz 15) are highlighted here. Starting with religion, an example would be described as the Roman Catholic Church's positive impact on the democratic transitions in Brazil, Chile, and Poland. In the Arab world, researchers say that the leadership of religious forces in civil society was not the same as the Church. One researcher, Samuel P. Huntington, argues that “religion, especially Islam, would set major limits to further democratization” (Stepan and Linz 17). He also added that the French interpretation of secularism and separation between religion and state is not necessary for democracy to start. What is really needed is a significant amount of differentiation between religion and state, known as “twin tolerations” (Stepan and Linz 17). This means that the religious authorities would not control the democratic officials that are abiding by the constitution and the democratic officials would not control religion if the officials respect every citizen’s rights. This is how the European Union operates, proving that

secularism can be consistent with democracy and religious toleration. In Albania, Indonesia, Turkey, and Senegal, democracy has thrived although they are Muslim-majority countries.

The total number of Muslims living in democracies outside the Western World amount to about half a billion. Research has been done on whether any Islamic political theologies helped progress democratization in these areas. This research supports that Tunisia has progressed and had positive results after the Arab Spring. They have also started incorporating a concept known as a civil state, not secularism, into their government. A civil state consists of mostly religious-themed views but contains some amounts of secularism. This shows a nice balance between religion and democracy. This balance is not completely set yet, as the transition to democracy does take more time than some have anticipated.

Longer Transition to Democracy

Islamist movements are not all the same and can be taken into a decontextualized form. The Arab Spring is not over yet, since the name suggests a “progression of change that moves well beyond revolution”(Abusharif paragraph 18). Even before the conclusion of the event, some effects have been shown as a result. Currently, the people under these governments are satisfied with receiving competence from their leaders. Another viewpoint concluded by research from Linsay Benstead and colleagues are that “international observers are increasingly cynical about the prospects of democracy, arguing that the Arab Spring has turned into an Islamist winter. This bleak prognosis is based on an incomplete understanding of the complex issues at hand and unrealistic expectations of a rapid, smooth transition”(Abusharif paragraph 10). This supports how not all democratic movements are the same, so some countries might have a long process to get to the same conclusion as others. The event cannot be labeled as a failure yet if there is a longer period of time needed for a transition.

Not a Failure

A general statement made about the Arab Spring is that “conventional wisdom holds that the Arab uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010 failed”(Lynch paragraph 1). This is a harsh verdict, as “most Arab regimes managed to survive their popular challenges through some combination of cooperation, coercion, and modest reform”(Lynch paragraph 1). Although Yemen, Syria, and Libya did not have a positive outcome, “simply dismissing the uprisings as a failure does not capture how fully they have transformed every dimension of the region’s politics”(Lynch paragraph 2). He adds that the decision of success or failure after a revolution does not help those understand the ongoing changes in society and politics that the area is facing. The Project on Middle East Political Science had a meeting in 2016 to reflect and closely examine the political forms and patterns after the uprisings. One feature that changed is regional international relations. The leaders in countries like Egypt and Tunisia being overthrown scared the Arab regimes, as they had always thought they were invincible. This scare and disagreement over how Egypt transitioned to a new government and Syria’s civil war created “an unusually intense public crisis in America’s traditional alliance structure”(Lynch paragraph 6). However, as of November 2012, the country has resolved its ethnic, ideological, and sectarian divisions by establishing the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces. This is seen as a somewhat positive development since some issues are being resolved slowly. Balances of power in the region have been changed since the uprisings. Aspects like “size, population, and historical position now seem to matter less for the exercise of regional power than do wealth, domestic stability, media empires, transnational networks and access to advanced weaponry”(Lynch paragraph 7).

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE manipulated the uprisings to fit into their intervention agenda. They aided countries that were popularly challenged, like Jordan and Morocco. This intensified the struggles in countries that were not helped, like Libya and Syria. Syria was catapulted into a civil war after that. These wars and small interventions between the countries in the region “changed the dynamics of regional international relations, mostly in destructive and counterproductive ways”(Lynch paragraph 9). Tunisia has been the only Arab country to partially succeed at a democratic transition. A new constitution was drafted and the rotation of power between leaders remained peaceful during elections. Labor unions and the military have been positively impacted as well. However, “repeated terrorist strikes have damaged an already weak economy and frustration with the political leadership is mounting”(Lynch paragraph 11). This still does not amount to classifying the events as a failure and stating that nothing has changed. New political practices, new opportunities, meaningful elections, labor unions, and the military have evolved in Tunisia because of the Arab Spring. However, in Egypt, their transition to the beginnings of democracy failed because of fear and uncertainty. The military, police, Muslim Brotherhood, and political class “made choices under these difficult conditions which collectively derailed the transition”(Lynch paragraph 12). Although Egypt is not classified as a stable regime because of economic challenges, violence, and the decline of institutionalism, the politics are certainly different as a result of the Arab Spring uprisings. In Morocco, the government created constitutional reforms that started an election of an Islamist-led government. Other countries that did not have immediate uprisings, like Algeria, Lebanon, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, all experienced political changes as well. Algeria experienced constitutional reforms but ultimately had a political stalemate. Lebanon has had protests that showed the persistence of activists to challenge the idle political system. Qatar and Saudi Arabia experienced a transition to

a monarchy, with significant changes in political and domestic affairs. Instead of a full change, researchers say that “the resurgence of Arab security states thus signals not a return to the old ways but a change in the ruling bargains and survival strategies of these embattled regimes”(Lynch paragraph 15). Lastly, another positive outcome from the Arab Spring has been the outburst of activists, entrepreneurs, and public speakers. This has started new political thinking and a way for those to network away from the public.

A Negative Transition

Summary of the Negative Effects

Researchers also argue that the Arab Spring was not effective in furthering democracy. After the Arab Spring, countries faced “constitutional crises, sectarian strife, economies on the precipice, military intrigue, and sporadic lethal confrontations”(Abusharif paragraph 2) that were not present before. More negative effects were the "rising prices of food and housing, reduction of wages and protection for workers and farmers, the rising of oligopolistic economies, and the dropping of the standards of living with weakened public-welfare programs"(Abusharif paragraph 14). Secular leaders have failed to achieve political and religious legitimacy. Yemen's economy and social indicators have declined since their change in power after the uprisings. This is a result of “an unhealthy stalemate of low-level conflict on a variety of levels”(Delacoura paragraph 11). Radical Islamist groups became more active as a result of the weakening governments, especially in Libya. The governments have become weaker since the new leaders are not as experienced as their predecessors. That is expressed as “one of the biggest changes in the Middle East [which] is likely to be the decline in the importance of individual leaders as key

decision-makers"(Byman 44). Since most of the old leaders have been overthrown, the strong network between leaders has been in chaos.

Violence from the uprisings led to the death of many. In Syria alone, "the death toll reached an estimated 5,000 people"(Kenney 12) since the country has been in a violent civil war since 2011. Although the authoritarian leaders in the area might have been removed, new Islamist authoritarian governments could evolve, making the transition to democracy a failure. Egypt and Tunisia, both considered stable regimes, fell as a result of the uprisings. Labeled as a curse, the looming problem of oil made it so that "no country with more than a fraction of the per-capita oil wealth of Bahrain, Iraq, or Libya has successfully gone from dictatorship to democracy"(Ross 17).

Anything but Springlike

In Egypt, Cairo's Tahrir Square was filled with violent demonstrations "that were anything but springlike"(Abusharif paragraph 1). Although the same spark of uprising from 2011 is not present anymore, the phrase "Arab Spring" has been still used. Using the word "spring" brings the metaphors of hope, a new start, renewal, and growth. The use of this hopeful phrase was spread across the world. Many argue against the use of this phrase, as the use of this phrase suggests there were hopeful effects as a result of the violence.

One argument on the negative side says that the problems in the Arab world would "enable Islamists to game the transitions in order to take power they could not have seized under the rule of the previous despots, and that trading one authoritarian system for another is hardly a 'spring' effect"(Abusharif paragraph 8). This is supported by the situation that occurred in Tunisia, as the Islamist Nahda Party took over the previous president. Additionally, the successor of the former president in Egypt, Mohamed Morsi, was part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Some

observers discuss how this argument is not accurate, as Islamist movements are not all the same. The term can be taken into a decontextualized form.

A researcher from the Brookings Institution, Shadi Hamid, reviewed that if truly democratic systems were to have formed after the Arab Spring, they would “include significant representation of mainstream Islamist groups. Like it or not, the United States will have to learn to live with political Islam”(Abusharif paragraph 12). This opens up the interpretation of democratic systems, as most do not include large amounts of religious beliefs.

Another argument over the use of the phrase “Arab Spring” comes from Joseph Massad of Columbia University. In an article written for Al Jazeera, he protested that the “dubbing of the uprisings in the Arab world by Western governments and media as an ‘Arab Spring’ was not simply an arbitrary or even seasonal choice of nomenclature, but rather a U.S. strategy of controlling their aims and goals”(Abusharif 13). Because of the United States’ continuous involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, their opinions on how the new governments should operate is of apparent benefit to them. Marion Dixon, a sociologist at Cornell University, shares her research on the “imperial reach in hijacking an Arab narrative”(Abusharif paragraph 14). She adds that the “effort of claiming and co-opting is funneled squarely to prop up the neoliberal agenda that has brought to the region much of what the movements have risen to reject”(Abusharif paragraph 14). This point can argue that the U.S. involvement in some of the Arab Spring uprisings brought back what was terrible under the countries’ authoritarian regimes. Some problems as a result of this are rising prices of food and housing, reduction of wages and protection for workers and farmers, the rising of oligopolistic economies, and the dropping of the standards of living with weakened public-welfare programs”(Abusharif paragraph 14). Lastly, some journalists have expressed how disrespectful the phrase “Arab Spring” is to the ones who

risked their lives by protesting against the government. It is considered disrespectful since this was not a positive experience for them since they risked injuries, arrest, and even death. Many were forced to leave their home countries for safety and health reasons.

Forced Migration and Migrant Workers

Violence and worsening living conditions led to the forced migration of many residents in the Middle East. It is calculated that “perhaps two million people have left their homes over the last year as a result of the impact of the Arab Spring across North Africa and the Middle East, and at least thirty countries have been directly affected by these flows”(Koser paragraph 1). This is a huge change in population and demographics to occur over the course of a year. Due to wars and government instability in Syria, Libya, and Iraq, “severe repression in Eritrea, and spiraling instability across much of the Arab world have all contributed to the displacement of around 16.7 million refugees worldwide.”(Kingsley paragraph 2). These issues have been widely ignored in discussions about the region by NATO and other analyses of the Arab Spring. Migration and displacement have occurred on a large scale in Libya and Syria. This is because of the large amount of conflict and the diminishing will of the governments to protect the citizens. Since the government fought against the opposition forces, civil war erupted in these countries mostly due to those two reasons. A protection gap has been highlighted as well.

Migrant workers make up the largest category of people to be forced out of their homes. Between March and June of 2011, “over half a million migrant workers left Libya for Egypt and Tunisia – more than the number of Libyans who fled the country during all of last year and more than the number of internally displaced Libyans or Syrians”(Koser paragraph 5). These migrant workers are essential for “kick-starting the oil industry and Libya’s economy more generally”(Koser paragraph 13). Without them, the economy will continue to fail, slowing down

their recovery. Tunisia and Egypt kept their borders open and “admitted between them perhaps half a million migrants (as well as receiving home half a million returning nationals)” (Koser paragraph 9). However, migrants who tried to leave for Europe were rejected as a result of increased security and their tight borders. The decline of the working environment in conjunction with the living conditions made migration necessary for survival. The changes in government leaders and structure created many issues for those living in the Middle East and outside of it.

Effects of Regime Changes

The previous leaders of these countries once had a strong connection with one another. This was because of their similar beliefs, government systems, and decisions. New politics and political actors have emerged after the uprisings. This is unusual for the region since only a select few people made the decisions before, so the governments are weaker as a result. Tunisia is the only country to see a full regime change. Egypt and Libya have had their old leaders removed, but with no quick replacement. Researchers fear that Egypt’s government will “become a junta rather than a caretaker of democracy” (Byman 27). In other words, Egypt could become a country run by a political group or military. The rise in Islamists and radical groups like the Muslim Brotherhood have also raised concern that Egypt will not be liberal. Libya has not seen much change in the process of gaining leadership, so they might have an authoritarian figure try to lead once again. After the main uprisings, Yemen was run by loyalists of the previous president, so they are forcing their dominance on the country. The quick transition from the previous leaders to the new forms of government have left the networks in chaos. This is because the past leaders held all the power and made a lot of political connections, so the balance was bewildered when they were overthrown. The new leaders may not have as much in common with the others, are less experienced, and do not know how to bring the country through recovery. Other factors the

new leaders could stumble at include the economy, civil rights, potential new constitutions, and the risk for more uprisings and failure.

Long-Term Effects

Even five years after the uprisings, many of the countries affected still face conflict and violence. Some countries that have failed dramatically are Libya and Yemen. This resulted in a regional intervention with competing governments. Syria has been involved in a civil war that has crippled the country for the unforeseeable future. In Yemen, “At least 6,660 civilians have been killed and 10,560 injured in the war, according to the UN”(PBS Writers paragraph 17). In addition to injuries and deaths, “the fighting and a partial blockade by the coalition have also left 22 million people in need of humanitarian aid, created the world’s largest food security emergency, and led to a cholera outbreak that has affected 1.1 million people”(PBS Writers paragraph 17). The United Nations has also warned that Yemen could be in the beginning stages of a famine, which is true as of 2020. Libya has also had its share of problems since the rebellious uprisings. The new government, along with their army, “carry out arbitrary detention, torture, unlawful killings, indiscriminate attacks, disappearances, seizure of property and forced displacement”(PBS Writers paragraph 11). Over 100,000 migrants and refugees stop in Libya on their way to Europe, where they “experience torture, sexual assault and forced labor by prison guards, coast guard forces, and smugglers”(PBS Writers paragraph 11). Syria has also struggled with their handling of the rebellions. The United Nations has marked Syria as having “the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II with over 300,000 people dead.. [and] more than 12 million Syrians have been displaced from their homes ”(PBS Writers paragraph 12). This huge displacement has led to Syria having the largest refugee population in the world.

Bahrain has had a large struggle with their human rights; the courts imprison many peaceful protesters. The army and militias have used force to stop these peaceful protests. As punishment for rebelling, the government has removed citizenship from these protestors, journalists, and lawyers for their negative words. The Bahrain government shut down the last “independent newspaper in the country”(PBS Writers paragraph 15) in 2017. The small victories these countries have faced during their time of uprisings have degraded into multiple failures.

Victories Turned into Failures

The best way to group the countries affected by this event is by their level of conflict. This ranges from violent to political, festering, or minimal. This categorizes them by their uprisings and domestic political situation. Syria is described as the “focal point of Middle East international politics”(Dalacoura 76). The uprisings evolved into a civil war, as the small protests were met brutally by the president’s harsh response. This included more violence from the military.

In Yemen, the previous leader was removed from his position of president. However, Yemen’s economy and social indicators have been declining since the change. Libya has had a problematic situation since the overthrow of their regime in 2011. The people were able to have a successful election in 2012, but the new government and parliament elected were not capable of leading the country and holding it together. Instead of the government providing security for the citizens, armed groups have begun to do it themselves. As a result, the central government has lost some of its abilities.

In Tunisia and Egypt, “rapid political change has engendered a considerable amount of political conflict”(Dalacoura 79). A new constitution was drafted and put to a referendum in Egypt in December of 2012. In Tunisia, the new constitution has been prepared and the new

government structure has been discussed. The final decision was that Islam will be the official religion, but sharia law will not be mentioned. Elections and their democratic processes have occurred. The uprisings in 2011 “may have delegitimized radical Islamist groups because they showed that political change can come about through people’s power, not violence”(Dalacoura 81).

The uprisings did open up opportunities for the radical Islamist groups to be active, however. Radical Islamists emerged in Libya as a result of the weak central government. The uprisings in 2011 “have influenced the Middle East region on the levels of ideology, sect, and power politics”(Dalacoura 83). The ideology in the region has been against Israel and the West. Iran allowed for uprisings to occur thinking that they would be pro-Islamist and anti-Western. This led to ideological allies for the republic. The “regional effects of the uprisings, thus far, have not been revolutionary”(Dalacoura 87).

Conclusion

From a fruit vendor's sacrifice to protests against the Middle Eastern government, the Arab world has experienced many changes in recent years. These changes include new leaders, different constitutions, altered religious beliefs, and the migration of many. Numerous of these changes root from the Arab Spring. The uprisings and rebellions from the event led to continuous effects on those living in the region and those who were forced to migrate as a result.

No matter if researchers argue if the effects were positive or negative, the Middle East has been changed in many ways. By all counts, the Arab Spring has left a long-lasting impact on the people, politics, and government systems of the region. Those who had hidden their critics against the government erupted during the time of protests. A new generation of activists has emerged from the strife they have lived through. Cyberactivism in Egypt has advanced into a reputable form of communication across the Middle East where many can express their opinions and concerns to others. However, the economy and state of the Middle East have crumbled from the migration of workers and citizens leaving in hopes of a better future in another region. The violence and civil wars, especially in Syria and Libya, have left many with disintegrated lives and unknown futures. A clear conclusion of whether the uprisings led to democracy is still under research, but the effects of the event will continue well into the future.

Works Cited

- Abusharif, Ibrahim N. "Arabs Keeping Their Spring." CHE, CHE, 15 Apr. 2013, www.chronicle.com/article/arabs-keeping-their-spring/?bc_nonce=59fgkf5x8ypn2q2pqqsc.
- Byman, Daniel. "Regime change in the Middle East: problems and prospects." *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 127, no. 1, 2012, p. 25+. *Gale In Context: College*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A289833560/CSIC?u=tel_a_rsc&sid=CSIC&xid=041a7f30. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.
- Cook, David. "The Arab Spring and failed political legitimacy." *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2011, p. 37+. *Gale In Context: College*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A273586408/CSIC?u=tel_a_rsc&sid=CSIC&xid=8bd64dc1. Accessed 24 Sept. 2020.
- Dalacoura, Katerina. "The Arab uprisings two years on: ideology, sectarianism and the changing balance of power in the Middle East." *Insight Turkey*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2013, p. 75+. *Gale In Context: Global Issues*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A315070206/GIC?u=tel_k_hardin&sid=GIC&xid=c779e319. Accessed 7 Oct. 2020.
- Eltantawy, Nahed, & Julie B. Wiest. "The Arab Spring| Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory." *International Journal of Communication* [Online], 5 (2011): 18. Web. 15 Sep. 2020.
- Fisher, Marc. "In Tunisia, Act of One Fruit Vendor Sparks Wave of Revolution through Arab World." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 26 Mar. 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-tunisia-act-of-one-fruit-vendor-sparks-wave-of-revolution-through-arab-world/2011/03/16/AFjfsueB_story.html.

- Kenney, Erica. "Arab Spring." *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, edited by Richard C. Martin, 2nd ed., vol. 1, Gale, 2016, pp. 59-63. *Gale In Context: Global Issues*, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX3629200047/GIC?u=tel_k_hardinh&sid=GIC&xid=897f3839. Accessed 11 Sept. 2020.
- Koser, Khalid. "Migration, Displacement and the Arab Spring: Lessons to Learn." *Brookings*, Brookings, 28 July 2016, www.brookings.edu/opinions/migration-displacement-and-the-arab-spring-lessons-to-learn/.
- Lynch, Marc. "Why It's Wrong to Say That the Arab Uprisings Failed." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 28 March 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/28/why-it-s-wrong-to-say-that-the-arab-uprisings-failed/.
- PBS Writers. "What You Need to Know About the Arab Spring." *PBS*, Public Broadcasting Service, 20 Mar. 2019, www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/uncategorized/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-arab-spring/.
- Ross, Michael L. "Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring? Democracy and the Resource Curse." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 5, 2011, pp. 17–22. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23041770. Accessed 5 Oct. 2020.
- Staff, Al Jazeera. "Leaders in the Arab Spring Era: Where Are They Now?" *News | Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 4 Dec. 2017, www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/leaders-ousted-arab-spring-171204151738505.html.
- Stepan, Alfred, and Juan J. Linz. "Democratization Theory and the 'Arab Spring.'" *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2013, pp. 15–30.