

## **Arab Spring: Its Causes And Consequences**

### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to examine the causes of the Arab Uprisings in Middle Eastern states. It also highlights the events of the civil uprisings which led to the removal of some rulers. Moreover this paper tries to predict the consequences of these widespread protests on the region as well as on the surrounding states. It also explores how the social media was used during these protests and how it helped to spread the news of the events of these protests. It also extends that through these uprisings and civil clashes, protesters succeeded to dethrone long-term Authoritarian rulers of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt while some economic and social rights were granted to citizens of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Bahrain. Furthermore, it explores that Tunisia was one of the victims of Arab Spring which succeeded to get the real fruits of the revolution while all other states could not succeed to achieve their all desired goals.

**Key words:** Arab Spring, continuous emergency, Social Media, Civil clashes, Tahrir Square.

### **Introduction**

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). Arab Spring was a movement of violent and violence less protests and civil wars started from Tunisia on December 18, 2010 and extended all over the Arab world (Terrill, 2011). It was against the long term despotic rules of the authoritarian rulers, continuous state of emergency in which Police and the Interior Ministry had excessive powers to crush the people, unemployment, poverty, inflation, etc. Social media was used in all countries where these protests took place to get the attention of world community. All the regimes which were affected by the Arab Spring used their powers vehemently to crush the demonstrators and consequently the peaceful protesters also became violent. The common slogan of the protesters throughout Arab Spring was “the people want to bring down the regime” (Aissa, 2012).

Causes of the Arab Spring

Causes of the Arab Spring may be described as following:

1. The economic causes

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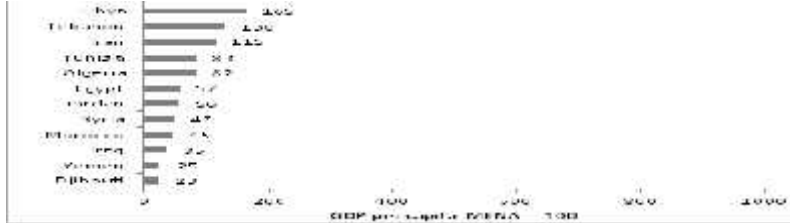
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Economic causes can be classified into further sub-divisions

i. 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. GDPpercapita (PPP)in2009(MENA=100)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2011.

North African states of the region have brought some reforms in their economies with the support of IMF and World Bank since 1990s (Khalili, Schwedler, Zartman&Eid, 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 (Muller &Hubner, 2014). Europe and America, which used to import manufactured goods from the region, decreased their demand during the crisis.

ii. 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 (Ansani& Daniele, 2012). About two years prior to the Arab Spring the inflation rate reached from 25 to 30 percent in the affected countries (Muller &Hubner, 2014). 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.

iii. Role of Unemployment

Decrease in the manufacturing of different goods during 2010 increased the unemployment in Morocco, Egypt, and Tunis (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. Unemployment among the youth, especially females, was one of the most important causes behind the Arab Spring. Throughout the world, there is the lowest female labor force contribution in the

Arab countries (Barany, 2011). 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 (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011).

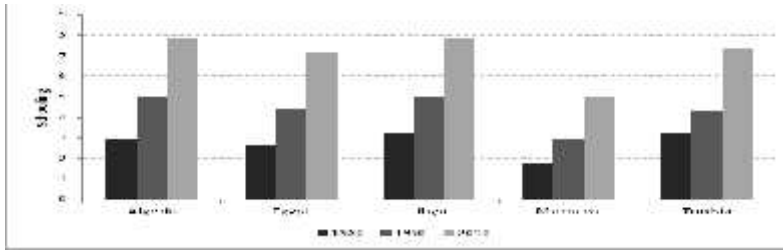
Tab.1. Composition of unemployment in North African countries, 2010

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

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators and ILO, Statistical update on Arab states and territories and North African countries, May 2011.

2. The social causes
  - i. 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 (A BBC Report, 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. The countries which had young population, had to suffer from civil clashes three times more than the others which had mature population during 1990s (Terrill, 2011). South Africa, Costa Rica and Jamaica developed democracies under the youth bulge (Terrill, 2011). 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. The increase in educational level boosts the democratic process. The achievement levels of education have improved in the Middle Eastern and North African states during the last three decades (Aissa, 2012). Fig. 2 Educational attainment in North Africa 1980-2010



Note: The figure illustrates the average years of schooling for the population over 25 years old. Data source: Barro and Lee (2010).

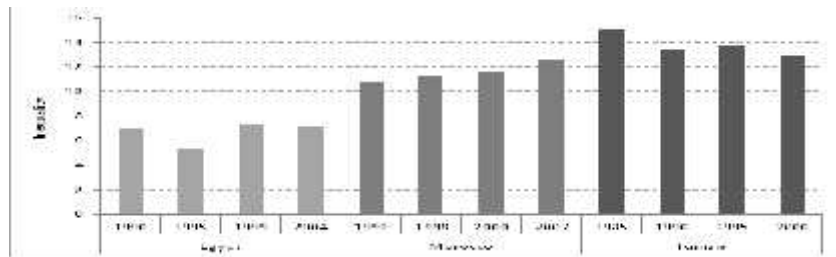
ii. Political freedoms and economic inequalities

The popular Arab riots can be described with a political economy point of view by discussing the social desire of the people for additional political and civil rights. People and especially youth of the region requested the respective governments to advance their social and economic circumstances with the resources of education and employment but it was not listen by the governments and consequently it led them towards the uprisings.

The MENA States had adopted the policy of privatization of public sectors, trade liberalization and deregulation to apply structural adjustment procedure (Soherwordi and Akram, 2011). 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. It just fortified the current authoritarian governments while blocking the way of democracy. 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 (Muller &Hubner, 2014).

Information about the economic inequalities of some countries like that of Egypt, Tunis and Morocco is given below.

Fig.3 Inequalityincomedistributionin Egypt,MoroccoandTunisia

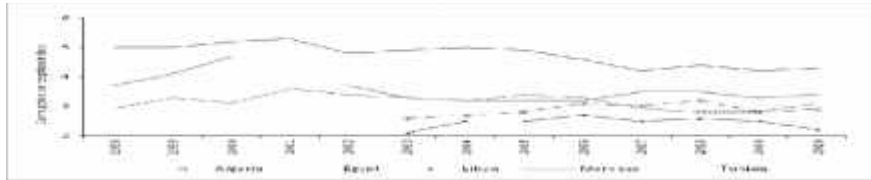


Note: Income inequality is measured by the ratio between the richest 10 per cent and the poorest 10 per cent of the population. Source: Povcal Net, World Bank

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 (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 Corruptionperceptionsindex,1998-2010



Note: The corruption perceptions index ranges between 0 and 10. Source: Transparency International.

iii. The role of social media

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.

When people watch the activities of others and then decide to do so, the information cascade arises. Deposition of the rulers occurs through revolution if majority of people rebel. Spreading of information plays a vital role in riots therefore the undemocratic governments of the current age censor the information. The role of internet and social media, such as Facebook and twitter played in Arab Spring, can be discussed with ‘information cascade’ model (Muller & Hubner, 2014). The role played by the Arab mass media in the Arab Spring is recognized by a lot of analysts. Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia were the important television channels that were responsible for both spreading the information among insurgents and the transmission of news throughout the world. Mass media declared the Arab Spring as “social network revolutions” (Tucker, 2012).

Egypt and Tunis are among the uppermost states of the region in which figure of internet users is elevated (Tucker, 2012). Social networks and internet along with cell phones played significant role in these states to uphold uprisings. 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 (Ansani and Daniele, 2012). Before the eruption of the riots, Qaddafi government in Libya disconnected the telephonic communications of the area where protest took place. 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 Arabcountries, 2011

Countries	Internet		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*	..

Note: Data are calculated as a percentage of population. Source: ASRM (2011); \*Data internetworldstats.com referred to 30 June 2011.

iv. 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. 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 (Soherwordi&Akram, 2011). Arabs are the major ethnic group of the Middle East while Turkmens, Armenians, Assyrians and Kurds are in minority. 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 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rozsa, 2012). Leaders of some states of Middle East belong to the minority religious sect due to which they are disliked among the public. The rulers of Syria and Iraq are the examples. Bashar Al-Assad, the Syrian President, belongs to Alawite sect to which other Muslims consider un-Islamic (Tucker, 2012). Gender discrimination was also on the peak in the region. Women were not given rights properly. The Arab uprising provided an opportunity to the minorities to air their gripes and to claim for the equivalent rights. Though, the riots were approximately put in order by the secular and tolerant forces.

3. Sudden cause; Self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi

All the causes of the Arab spring described above are accurate but these were the basic grounds and initial causes. The death of Mohamed Bouazizi provided the sudden base to the inhabitants of a lot of Arab states to go against the despotic rulers. Mohamed Bouazizi was a street hawker of Tunis. He committed the self-immolation as a protest on December 17, 2010 when his goods were taken away and he was humiliated at the hands of a female municipal officer

(Soherwordi&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 (Ansani and Daniele, 2012).

#### Consequences of the Arab Spring

It is much difficult to predict the consequences of the Arab Spring both in streets as well as in polling booths as much of the events are unfolding as yet. Though, some points can be predicted by keeping in view the long time awakening process at least politically and diplomatically.

##### 1) Removal of the Authoritarian Rulers from Tunis, Libya, and Egypt

Most of the Middle Eastern countries were being ruled by the authoritarian rulers. Some of them were in rule since decades. The first and foremost consequence of the Arab Spring was the removal of these long term autocrats. Some of them also took the resort of so-called elections to labialize their regimes as democratic but in reality that were not. Zein El AbidineBen Ali, the President of Tunis, was the first ruler in Middle East who stepped down under the pressure of Arab Spring. He remained for about 23 years in power but had to resign on *January 14, 2011* as protests over economic crises increased against him(Ryan, 2011). *A state of emergency was declared in Tunis and then Prime Minister Mohammed Ghannouchi took over the charge as acting President. Ben Ali left Tunis and went to Saudi Arabia. After Tunis, Libya was the next state to become the victim of Arab Spring. Protests rose against the long term elected-cum autocratic President Muammar al-Qaddafi. Qaddafi was not considered the puppet actor of the West as other Arab rulers were perceived. He never put aside the national interests for the sake of foreign powers' interests. He redistributed the wealth among the inhabitants of the country along with enriching his own family. As the protests spread in Libya, he tried to show his autocratic power but the uprisings were spread throughout the country. His regular military and mercenaries tried to cover the situation but failed. NATO also attacked the country under the label of saving the lives of civilians and those who were fighting for democracy against the autocratic ruler (MacFARQUHAR, 2011). Qaddafi met his disgraceful and horrible end when NTC and NATO forces found him injured and hiding in a compound on October 20, 2011 and he died the same day (KAREEM FAHIM, 2011).*

The movement which was started from Tunis reached Egypt after Libya. At that time Egypt was being ruled by President Hosni Mubarak. 25<sup>th</sup> January was celebrated as the National Police Day in Egypt and a number of Egyptians gathered to turn the day into protest one(Asser, 2011). These peaceful people were directed by the unending corruption, injustice prevailing throughout country, deteriorated economic conditions, continuous state of emergency, excessive emergency powers of the Home Ministry and Police and the continuous authoritarian rule of President Hosni Mubarak from last thirty years(Shenker, 2011). The protest of a small group of demonstrators grew into a national country wide movement. Mubarak's attempts to make the protesters agree by appointing Omer Suleiman as his vice President on 29<sup>th</sup> January, replacing the old cabinet

with new one on 31<sup>st</sup> January, and promising to not to take part in the next Presidential election along with his son Gamal, failed (KIRKPATRICK, 2011). Massive demonstrations of February 11 forced Mubarak to resign. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces led by Tantawi took over the powers and dissolved the legislature and suspended the constitution later (McGreal & Shenker, 2011).

2) Grant of Political and Social Rights

Keeping in view the fate of Bin Ali, Qadhafi, and Hosni Mubarak, the rulers of Oman, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Bahrain granted social and economic rights to their respective citizens. It helped them to avoid their inhabitants to follow the footsteps of the citizens of Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt (Stepan and Linz, 2013). The deteriorating situation in Syria and Yemen is also the episode of the Arab Uprisings.

3) Development of Public Political Sphere

At the end it can be concluded that in spite of all its negative aspects, Arab Spring marked the formation of a public political sphere where common people could discuss politics at public places and discuss their expected future and effort to attain democratic transition in Arab world. One of the major triumphs of the Arab Spring was the birth of the Arab citizen.

4) Impacts on the surrounding states

When the Egyptian long term authoritarian President Hosni Mubarak was compelled to vacate the post by the occupants of Tahrir Square, the leaders of Middle Eastern states had to adopt the reactive or proactive approaches. At the triumph celebrations by Tahrir Square occupants on the removal of Hosni Mubarak, the leaders of a number of Arab States stated to cope with iron hands to nip the social turmoil into the bud (Middle East War and Peace Home Page, 2011). Civil wars started in Yemen, Libya and Syria which shaped the future incidents. This was the reactive approach. Saudi Arabia and Moroccan leaders adopted the proactive approach. Saudi Shah, King Abdullah, announced a financial package of \$US36 billion to provide relief to Saudi families to keep them away to become the part of ongoing Arab social turmoil. It was greeted by local media and other sectors. Moroccan King Mohamed VI also adopted the proactive approach by introducing the institutional reforms to adopt the new constitution to structure the upcoming political and social atmosphere (Khalili, 2011). This led the country towards the voting for new constitution and parliamentary election.

5) Impacts on Arab League and GCC

The Arab League was also the victim of internal clashes and it played an important role in Arab Spring. Some members of the Arab League posed a dual standard as they were supporting the demonstrators against rulers of some states while on the same time they were supporting the rulers of some states against the protesters. Gulf Cooperation Council also played its role in Arab upheavals by sending its forces to save Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and then agreed the both parties to sign the agreement (Abdullah, 2012). Due to the Arab Spring, some reforms were seen within the GCC.



6) International Reactions

The Arab Spring was deliberated as a good attempt towards democracy by the world. When the protests became more organized, peoples from different countries had to declare it as the real voices for democracy. Different schools of thought gave their point of views about the change. The major powers also evaluated the situation to get the advantage for them. China and Russia had a heavy investment in oil rich country Libya therefore they had their support with Qaddafi. On the other hand, US-led NATO forces attacked and killed him to get the trust and support of opposition (Abdelhadi, 2011). Syria was the only and last client of Russia in the region. Russia started to support the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to keep their influence here.

**Conclusion**

This paper examined the causes of the Arab Uprisings in the Middle Eastern states. As people of the majority of Middle Eastern states were being ruled by the long-term authoritarian rulers under the banner of public representatives. The citizens of these states raised their voices against their autocratic rules through widespread public protests which led to the removal of Tunisian President Zein El Abidine Bin Ali, Libyan President Mu' ammar al Qadhafi and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. After the removal, Libyan President was attacked by the NATO forces along with the civilians and resultantly he demised. This paper also highlights the consequences of these civil clashes and civil uprisings. Tunis was one of the victim states of Arab Uprisings which succeeded to implement its new Constitution with common and mutual census. The remaining states could not fully achieve their desired goals as yet. Thus to conclude, it can be said that Arab Spring is neither fully successful nor unsuccessful. Much time is required to predict the accurate results of the Uprisings.

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