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Introduction: Democracy, Islam and Development in the Arab World

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Democracy, Islam and Development in the Arab World



Map of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region (Source: UNICEF).

Note: This map does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

Introduction

Shaheen Mozaffar

In the spring of 1974, popular demonstrations in Lisbon led to the overthrow of Portugal's 42-year old dictatorship, spawning what the late Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington called the "third wave of democratization." From Portugal, the third wave quickly spread to neighboring Spain and along the Mediterranean to Greece, dismantling long-standing dictatorships and replacing them with democracies in both countries. It then swept across the Atlantic and replaced once unshakeable dictatorships with democracies across Latin America. The democratic floodgate opened dramatically with the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, toppling communist governments in Eastern Europe like so many teetering dominoes and replacing them with successful democracies. By the mid-1990s, the third wave had spawned democracies in Asia and Africa.

While imperfect, often fragile, and susceptible to military coups and authoritarian reversals, democratic governments had become the order of the day in every region of the world.

In every region, that is, except in the Middle East and Africa (MENA). With the exception of Israel and Turkey, and the partial exception of Lebanon, the MENA region, and Arab countries within it in particular, remained immune from the onslaught of democracy's third wave. Limited political liberalization in Kuwait and Morocco, and the United States-imposed democracy in Iraq in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War did not weaken the resilient dictatorships in the Arab World. Until the Arab Spring! The political uprisings of spring 2011 quickly dismantled dictatorships and replaced them with democracies following relatively peaceful and successful contested elections in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Their impact reverberates today in the growing demands for democracy across the Arab world.



Compilation of Images utilizing iPad & cell phones as social media in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, 2011 (Courtesy of *Alra'a* newspaper, Jordan).

The historical significance of the Arab Spring cannot be gainsaid, and not only because democracy's third wave is finally sweeping through a region widely viewed as a place inherently inhospitable to democracy. The current struggle for democracy in the Arab world has the potential to foster far-reaching and deep-seated political, economic and social changes in the

Center for International Engagement and the Center for Middle East Studies organized a panel to examine these questions. The articles by Erica Frantz, Shaheen Mozaffar and Sandra Popiden were presented on this panel. Jabbar Al-Obaidi was subsequently invited to contribute a piece on the role of social media in the Arab Spring and its aftermath. Frantz examines the often mis-



Sumaya Al Arounony casting her ballot in the Tunisia Constituent Assembly Elections, 2011 (Photograph by Noeman Alsayyad, United Nations Development Programme).

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MENA region. These potential changes are as significant in scale as the historic changes wrought by the creation of MENA as a distinct geopolitical entity with independent sovereign states at the end of World War I.

Will the current struggle for democracy in MENA become the fourth wave of democratization? Will this fourth wave be a distinctive "Arab wave" as some observers have claimed? Embedded in these two broad questions are a set of specific questions raised by previous democratic transitions: what are the likely impacts of national differences in extant authoritarian regimes? How will social diversity in language, ethnicity and religion affect the move to democracy? Will economic conditions affect the origin, trajectory and outcomes of democratic transitions in MENA?

In spring 2012, the Political Science Department in collaboration with the Center for Legislative Studies, the

understood and underestimated impact of authoritarian regimes on democratic transitions. Mozaffar presents a global comparison of the relationship between democracy and Islam to highlight the

ways in which Islam might hinder or facilitate democracy in the Arab world. Popiden analyzes the critical importance of economic growth and improved living standards, especially for the volatile Arab youth, as the key to the viability and success of emerging democracies in the Arab world. Al-Obaidi examines the role of social media in launching and sustaining the popular uprisings of the Arab Spring, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the democratic struggle in the Arab world. The articles, individually and collectively, offer useful and important insights into a momentous and awe-inspiring event in recent history.



Demonstration in Tunisia with flags of many Arab countries and political parties 2012. (Courtesy of Alra'a newspaper, Jordan).