

# The new arab revolt research paper sample

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



The Arab world has been experiencing political revolt in the past few years because of a sense of awakening which has developed within. More and more citizens of these Arab countries are demanding for democracy, freedom of speech and greater public participation in the way they are governed. These revolts have led to some governments getting toppled after periods of relentless public demonstrations. This paper is going to talk about the revolts that have occurred in Arab countries and the likely results that are expected to be experienced out of these revolts.

The Arab revolt begun in Tunisia after there was general disaffection and disenchantment between the majority of the citizens of Tunisia and the regime of Zine Ben Ali. The regime had been in power for a long time during which many in Tunisia had become unsatisfied with the level of accountability it showed to its people. An incident in a small town in Tunisia involving Mohamed Bouazizi would ultimately set the stage for more public revolt against the regime a scene which would later be replicated in other parts of the Arab world. Bouazizi, a young vegetable vendor doused his whole body with fuel and later lit himself in front of the local council offices as a protest against the injustices carried out by the regime (Council on Foreign Relations 62).

The police had confiscated his cart and he became exasperated because that was the only way that he could earn a living. This single act proved to be the ignition to a fire of upheaval that would be felt across a big part of North Africa and later on in the Middle East. The citizens in Tunisia just like much of the Arab world had to contend with repressive regimes which cracked down violently on any form of dissent (Council on Foreign Relations 67). The

manner in which the revolt occurred was a clear indicator that the time for the old order was quickly elapsing and a new order determined by citizens' aspirations was beginning to form. A crucial thing in the Tunisian revolt was the role played by the youth in pushing the agenda of their country forward. Their efforts forced out the country's president who had ruled with an iron fist for more than two decades.

The revolt inspired similar revolts in neighboring Egypt which experienced one of the most sustained periods of rebellion by the public ultimately leading to the toppling of Hosni Mubarak. Egypt being the most populated Arab country and with an illustrious history had been under the grip of Mubarak for more than three decades (Council on Foreign Relations 72). The revolt that occurred therefore was a direct protest against the level of tyranny that the regime had carried out against Egyptians in those three decades it had been in power. The revolt just like in Tunisia had been carried out mainly by the youth who had become tired of the Mubarak regime. The youth had been feeling left out by the government, which was not doing anything to uplift their welfare. There was widespread unemployment and poverty which acted as a catalyst for the uprising that was to take place afterwards.

The Mubarak regime had been known for the brutality that it meted out against its opponents who dared to challenge its authority. Western powers, mainly the US and Britain, were happy to have the regime in power because it helped strengthen their interests in the Arab world. Since Egypt wielded a lot of influence in the Arab world, the west was happy to have Mubarak rule because the US was not ready for an Islamist republic (Council on Foreign

Relations 74). The government of Mubarak continued to crackdown on dissent especially from one of the biggest opposition groups, The Muslim Brotherhood. This group which had Islamic teachings as part of its philosophy was a thorn in the flesh of the Mubarak regime. The regime used a lot of force to crack down on dissent to ensure that it stayed in power for a long time. For a long time, the regime used secret police to terrorize and maim any opponents who spread messages of opposition against the government.

The Mubarak regime was not accommodating to any reforms that its opponents wanted especially in the police, judiciary and in the other areas of governance. The wishes of the majority were trampled upon and the people in the country who dared to oppose the regime were tortured, jailed or summarily executed. The regime was not interested in carrying out any meaningful political or social reforms in the country and used the state machinery that was at its disposal to strengthen its grip on power (Council on Foreign Relations 76). Mubarak went against the promise that he would only serve as the president of Egypt for two terms when he ascended to power in 1981. Mubarak became more wary of the opposition in the early 1990's when an attempt was made on his life while attending the then OAU summit in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. This action made the president and his cronies to tighten their grip on power.

The role the US had played in helping the regime of Hosni Mubarak to stay in power cannot be underestimated. The country was in close proximity to Israel and controlled the Suez Canal, which was one of the key routes for trade in the whole world. Therefore, a regime controlled by one of US allies

would help to maintain stability and keep in check the threat of radical Islam (Council on Foreign Relations 81). Mubarak received a lot of funds and other forms of military aid in exchange, which helped his regime to tighten its grip on power. Egypt being the country with the highest population in the Arab world therefore had to be under the stiff control of Mubarak whose regime received support from western countries. This changed with the toppling of the regime in February 2011 after a period of sustained pressure.

The western powers took the same approach with several Arab countries and did not interfere a lot with their domestic politics. The US was wary of regimes, which had a lot of Islamic influence as it thought they would stand in the way of the peace process in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine. This was why the US administration did not intervene a lot in the government crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic associations because it considered them radical. It was surprising to note that the driver of the revolt that took place in Tunisia and Egypt was not from the Islamic groups but from the civilian population (Council on Foreign Relations 85). The young populations in the two countries were able to make their leaders take note and this surprised many in the West and the rest of the world. This was a clear departure from the past because political order in the Arab world had for a long time been determined by older leaders.

The situation was mostly influenced by the social networks, which had come about because of the rise of the internet. The regimes in Tunisia and Egypt found it difficult to monitor the public discussions that were taking place within these networks and as a result, there was an increase in the level of political discussions (Council on Foreign Relations 87). The youth in urban

areas of Egypt relied on these social media networks to mobilize and discuss on the means through which they could bring about democracy within their country. The Arab world consists of a high number of people below the age of 35 who felt that their situation was not improving and they were not able to access vital economic opportunities. It is worth noting that the key influence of the revolts was from a socio-economic background rather than from a religious one.

The high cost of living, economic hardships and inflation created a lot of resentment for the two governments among its citizens leading to the uprisings. Zine Ben Ali and his family had infiltrated all sectors of the Tunisian economy and they controlled all forms of trade and commerce within Tunisia (Council on Foreign Relations 91). This made it difficult for ordinary Tunisians to have a say in the economy and this caused widespread economic hardships within the citizenry. An attempt by Ben Ali to cut the prices of foodstuffs and other essential commodities at the height of the uprising proved to be unsuccessful. The protestors wanted him out of power so that he could pave way for a new regime. Tunisia had only had two presidents since its independence from France in 1956 and as such, the protestors felt the time was ripe for change.

The regime of Ben Ali can be credited with progressive women rights in comparison to other Arab countries although it was corruption and authoritarianism that were to be his undoing. The regime would not allow free speech and any form of dissent against the government was harshly quelled. As a result the family of Ben Ali continued to grow rich while ordinary Tunisians only managed to eke out a living (Council on Foreign

Relations 94) . The regime had for long considered its citizens to be so weak that they could not mount any serious challenge to its dictatorship. The same situation could be said of Egypt and many other Arab regimes, which had stayed in power for far too long. The challengers to the regimes in the two instances were the youth who bore the brunt of these hardships since they could not get any jobs or other opportunities.

The wave of protests swept Ben Ali out of power and it provided the encouragement that Egypt, Libya and Yemeni youth needed to revolt against their repressive leaderships. Libya had for a long time been under the tight grip of Muammar Gaddafi who had been in leadership for close to half a century. The situation in Libya was far more complex as the revolt turned bloody, which claimed a lot of casualties. The regime in Libya was known for being very closed and secretive and the demonstrations, which took place were able to bring out the aspirations for freedom and democracy among the citizens (Council on Foreign Relations 103). The level of sustained violence by the regime was unprecedented when compared to the situations in Tunisia and Egypt. The Gaddafi regime unleashed its full force against unarmed combatants.

This revolt quickly evolved into a civilian conflict, which later became an armed rebellion challenging Gaddafi's stay in power. The military forces joined in the rebellion which had begun in the eastern city of Benghazi later on spreading to other parts of the country. The Libyan uprising was bloodier than the two other uprisings that had been experienced (Council on Foreign Relations 107). The subsequent defection of forces who once served Gaddafi to join the uprising pointed to a possibility of more violence being witnessed

in the country. Libya was a country which was divided along regional groupings and the formation of the militia who challenged Gaddafi's stay in power were motivated by these interests. Under Gaddafi, Libya was virtually a government, which did not have proper and well functioning institutions because of the long period of isolation the regime faced from the international community (Council on Foreign Relations 109).

The UN Security Council passed a resolution imposing a no-fly zone in the country in March 2011 after the regime had continuously targeted civilians in the east of the country. The country had been closed to international scrutiny for a long time because there was no freedom of speech that was allowed by the government (Council on Foreign Relations 112). The country had the worst form of tyranny when compared to Tunisia and Egypt although its citizens experienced a higher level of economic prosperity. Therefore, the uprising was more of a reaction by people in the country who wanted more involvement in the affairs of the state. The intervention that was adopted by the UN outlined the need for a no-fly zone for the country and set the stage for possible military intervention if the country failed to observe the resolution.

The Tunisian, Egyptian and Libyan uprisings have had significant contributions in the opening up of the democratic space in the Arab world. The Tunisian revolt set stage for more public rebellion against the oppressive regimes in North Africa and the Middle East. The country still faces a difficult transition into civilian rule even after Zine Ben Ali's ouster. The country still needs reforms, which can meet the aspirations of the citizens. Egypt has to contend with a long history of military dominance, which took over the reins



of power after the ouster of Mubarak (Council on Foreign Relations 138). The opposition in the country is also likely to be emboldened, which can easily result in the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic groups in politics. Libya faces a more bleak future since the country has not had any form of democratic governance since its independence. All the three countries are at risk of becoming safe havens of terrorist organizations and radical Islamists who may want to push their agenda at the expense of democracy (Council on Foreign Relations 142).

## **Works Cited**

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