

ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests occurring in the Arab world that began on Saturday, 18 December 2010. To date, there have been revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; a civil war in Libya resulting in the fall of the country's government; civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen; major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman; and minor protests in Lebanon, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Western Sahara. Clashes at the borders of Israel in May 2011 and the Palestine 194 movement have also been inspired by the regional Arab Spring.

The protests have shared techniques of civil resistance in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches, and rallies, as well as the use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of state attempts at repression and Internet censorship.

Many demonstrations have met violent responses from authorities, as well as from pro-government militias and counter demonstrators. A major slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world has been *Ash-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ an-nizām* ("the people want to bring down the regime")

Overview

The series of protests and demonstrations across the Middle East and North Africa has become known as the "Arab Spring", and sometimes as the "Arab Spring and Winter", "Arab Awakening" or "Arab Uprisings" even though not all the participants in the protests are Arab. It was sparked by the first protests that occurred in Tunisia on 18 December 2010 following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of police corruption and ill treatment. With the success of the protests in Tunisia, a wave of unrest sparked by the Tunisian "Burning Man" struck Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, then spread to other countries. The largest, most organised demonstrations have often occurred on a "day of rage", usually Friday after noon prayers. The protests have also triggered similar unrest outside the region.

As of February 2012, governments have been overthrown in three countries. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011 following the Tunisian revolution protests. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 after 18 days of massive protests, ending his 30-year presidency. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown on 23 August 2011, after the National Transitional Council (NTC) took control of Bab al-Azizia. He was killed on 20 October 2011, in his hometown of Sirte after the NTC took control of the city.

During this period of regional unrest, several leaders announced their intentions to step down at the end of their current terms. President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen, signed the GCC deal in Riyadh on 23 November 2011 which allows him to transfer power within 30 days and formally step down by February 2012, in exchange for immunity from prosecution. Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir announced that he would not seek re-election in 2015,[as did Iraqi Prime



Minister Nouri al-Maliki, whose term ends in 2014, although there have been increasingly violent demonstrations demanding his immediate resignation. Protests in Jordan have also caused the sacking of two successive governments by King Abdullah.

The geopolitical implications of the protests have drawn global attention, including the suggestion that some protesters may be nominated for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize. Tawakel Karman from Yemen was one of the three laureates of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize as a prominent leader in the Arab Spring. In December 2011, Time magazine named "The Protester" its "Person of the Year"

Background "Motivation"

Numerous factors have led to the protests, including issues such as dictatorship or absolute monarchy, human rights violations, government corruption (demonstrated by Wikileaks diplomatic cables), economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, and a number of demographic structural factors, such as a large percentage of educated but dissatisfied youth within the population. Also, some[who?] attribute the 2009 Iranian protests as one of the reasons behind the Arab Spring. The catalysts for the revolts in all Northern African and Persian Gulf countries have been the concentration of wealth in the hands of autocrats in power for decades, insufficient transparency of its redistribution, corruption, and especially the refusal of the youth to accept the status quo. Increasing food prices and global famine rates have also been a significant factor, as they involve threats to food security worldwide and prices that approach levels of the 2007–2008 world food price crisis. Amnesty International singled out Wikileaks' release of US diplomatic cables as a catalyst for the revolts.

In recent decades rising living standards and literacy rates, as well as the increased availability of higher education, have resulted in an improved human development index in the affected countries. The tension between rising aspirations and a lack of government reform may have been a contributing factor in all of the protests. Many of the Internet-savvy youth of these countries have, increasingly over the years, been viewing autocrats and absolute monarchies as anachronisms. A university professor of Oman, Al-Najma Zidjaly referred to this upheaval as youthquake.

Tunisia and Egypt, the first to witness major uprisings, differ from other North African and Middle Eastern nations such as Algeria and Libya in that they lack significant oil revenue, and were thus unable to make concessions to calm the masses.

The relative success of the democratic and Muslim Republic of Turkey, with its substantially free and vigorously contested but peaceful elections, fast-growing but liberal economy, secular constitution but (moderate) Islamist government, created a model (the Turkish model) if not a motivation for protestors in neighbouring states.

Recent history

The current wave of protests is not an entirely new phenomenon, resulting in part from the activities of dissident activists as well as members of a variety of social and union organizations that have been active for years in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and other countries in the area, as well as in the territory of Western Sahara.

Tunisia experienced a series of conflicts over the past three years, the most notable occurring in the mining area of Gafsa in 2008, where protests continued for many months. These protests included rallies, sit-ins, and strikes, during which there were two fatalities, an unspecified number of wounded, and dozens of arrests. The Egyptian labor movement had been strong for years, with more than 3,000 labor actions since 2004. One important demonstration was an attempted workers' strike on 6 April 2008 at the state-run textile factories of al-Mahalla al-Kubra, just outside Cairo. The idea for this type of demonstration spread throughout the country, promoted by computer-literate working class youths and their supporters among middle-class college students. A Facebook page, set up to promote the strike, attracted tens of thousands of followers. The government mobilized to break the strike through infiltration and riot police, and while the regime was somewhat successful in forestalling a strike, dissidents formed the "6 April Committee" of youths and labor activists, which became one of the major forces calling for the anti-Mubarak demonstration on 25 January in Tahrir Square.

In Algeria, discontent had been building for years over a number of issues. In February 2008, United States Ambassador Robert Ford wrote in a leaked diplomatic cable that Algeria is 'unhappy' with long-standing political alienation; that social discontent persisted throughout the country, with food strikes occurring almost every week; that there were demonstrations every day somewhere in the country; and that the Algerian government was corrupt and fragile. Some have claimed that during 2010 there were as many as '9,700 riots and unrests' throughout the country. Many protests focused on issues such as education and health care, while others cited rampant corruption.

In Western Sahara, the Gdeim Izik protest camp was erected 12 km south-east of El Aaiún by a group of young Sahrawis on 9 October 2010. Their intention was to demonstrate against labor discrimination, unemployment, looting of resources, and human rights abuses. The camp contained between 12,000 and 20,000 inhabitants, but on 8 November 2010 it was destroyed and its inhabitants evicted by Moroccan security forces. The security forces faced strong opposition from some young Sahrawi civilians, and rioting soon spread to El Aaiún and other towns within the territory, resulting in an unknown number of injuries and deaths. Violence against Sahrawis in the aftermath of the protests was cited as a reason for renewed protests months later, after the start of the Arab Spring.

The catalyst for the current escalation of protests was the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi. A college graduate, he was unable to find work and was selling fruit at a roadside stand until the police confiscated his wares. The next day, 17 December, he doused himself with gasoline and set himself afire. His death on 4 January brought together various groups

dissatisfied with the existing system, including many unemployed, political and human rights activists, labor, trade unionists, students, professors, lawyers, and others to begin the Tunisian



Revolution

Tunisian revolution

Following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, a series of increasingly violent street demonstrations through December 2010 ultimately led to the ouster of longtime President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011. The demonstrations were preceded by high unemployment, food inflation, corruption, lack of freedom of speech and other forms of political freedom, and poor living conditions. The protests constituted the most dramatic wave of social and political unrest in Tunisia in three decades, and have resulted in scores of deaths and injuries, most of which were the result of action by police and security forces against demonstrators. Ben Ali fled into exile in Saudi Arabia, ending his 23 years in power.

Following Ben Ali's departure, a state of emergency was declared and a caretaker coalition government was created, which included members of Ben Ali's party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally (RCD), as well as opposition figures from other ministries. However, the five newly appointed non-RCD ministers resigned almost immediately. As a result of continued daily protests, on 27 January Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi reshuffled the government, removing all former RCD members other than himself, and on 6 February the former ruling party was suspended; later, on 9 March, it was dissolved. Following further public protests, Ghannouchi himself resigned on 27 February, and Beji Caid el Sebsi became Prime Minister.

On 23 October 2011, citizens voted in the first post-revolution election to elect representatives to a 217-member constituent assembly that would be responsible for the new constitution

Egyptian revolution

Following the uprising in Tunisia and prior to his entry as a central figure in Egyptian politics, potential presidential candidate Mohamed ElBaradei warned of a 'Tunisia-style explosion' in Egypt.

Protests in Egypt began on 25 January and ran for 18 days. Beginning around midnight on 28 January, the Egyptian government attempted, somewhat successfully, to eliminate the nation's Internet access, in order to inhibit the protesters' ability to organize through social media. Later that day, as tens of thousands protested on the streets of Egypt's major cities, President Mubarak dismissed his government, later appointing a new cabinet. Mubarak also appointed the first Vice President in almost 30 years.

On 10 February, Mubarak ceded all presidential power to Vice President Omar Suleiman, but soon thereafter announced that he would remain as President until the end of his term. However, protests continued the next day, and Suleiman quickly announced that Mubarak had resigned from the presidency and transferred power to the Armed Forces of Egypt. The military

immediately dissolved the Egyptian Parliament, suspended the Constitution of Egypt, and promised to lift the nation's thirty-year "emergency laws". A civilian, Essam Sharaf, was appointed as Prime Minister of Egypt on 4 March to widespread approval among Egyptians in

Tahrir Square. Protests continued through the end of 2011, however, in response to Sharaf and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces' perceived sluggishness in instituting reforms.. The current Prime Minister of Egypt Kamal Ganzouri, who took over for 2nd term.

Libyan civil war

After the success of the revolution in Tunisia, a protest on living conditions began on 14 January in Bayda, Libya, where protesters clashed with police and attacked government offices. Anti-government protests began in Libya on 15 February 2011. By 18 February, the opposition controlled most of Benghazi, the country's second-largest city. The government dispatched elite troops and mercenaries in an attempt to recapture it, but they were repelled. By 20 February, protests had spread to the capital Tripoli, leading to a television address by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, who warned the protestors that their country could descend into civil war. The rising death toll, numbering in the thousands, drew international condemnation and resulted in the resignation of several Libyan diplomats, along with calls for the regime's dismantlement.

On 26 February 2011, amidst ongoing efforts by demonstrators and rebel forces to wrest control of Tripoli from the Jamahiriya, the opposition set up an interim government in Benghazi to oppose Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's rule. However, despite initial opposition success, government forces subsequently took back much of the Mediterranean coast.

On 17 March, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 was adopted, authorising a no-fly zone over Libya, and "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. Two days later, France, the United States and the United Kingdom intervened in Libya with a bombing campaign against pro-Gaddafi forces. A coalition of 27 states from Europe and the Middle East soon joined the intervention. The forces were driven back from the outskirts of Benghazi, and the rebels mounted an offensive, capturing scores of towns across the coast of Libya. The offensive stalled however, and a counter-offensive by the government retook most of the towns, until a stalemate was formed between Brega and Ajdabiya, the former being held by the government and the latter in the hands of the rebels. Focus then shifted to the west of the country, where bitter fighting continued. After a three-month-long battle, a loyalist siege of rebel-held Misrata, the third largest city in Libya, was broken in large part due to coalition air strikes. The four major fronts of combat were generally considered to be the Nafusa Mountains, the Tripolitanian coast, the Gulf of Sidra, and the southern Libyan Desert.

In late August, anti-Gaddafi fighters captured Tripoli, scattering Gaddafi's government and marking the end of his 42 years of autocracy. Many institutions of the government, including Gaddafi and several top regime officials, regrouped in Sirte, which Gaddafi declared to be Libya's new capital. Others fled to Sabha, Bani Walid, and remote reaches of the Libyan Desert, or to surrounding countries. However, Sabha fell in late September, Bani Walid was captured after a grueling siege weeks later, and on 20 October, fighters under the aegis of the National

Transitional Council seized Sirte, killing Gaddafi in the process.

Syrian uprising

Protests in Syria started on 26 January, when one case of self-immolation was reported. Protesters have been calling for political reforms and the reinstatement of civil rights, as well as an end to the state of emergency, which has been in place since 1963. A "day of rage" was set for 4–5 February, but it was uneventful.

On 6 March, the Syrian security forces arrested about 15 children in Daraa in Southern Syria for writing slogans against the regime. Children were tortured. Daraa is the first city to protest against the Baathist regime, which has been ruling Syria since 1963.

Thousands of protestors gathered in Damascus, Aleppo, al-Hasakah, Daraa, Deir ez-Zor, and Hama on 15 March, with recently released politician Suhair Atassi becoming an unofficial spokesperson for the "Syrian revolution". The next day there were reports of approximately 3000 arrests and a few martyrs, but there are no official figures on the number of deaths. On 18 April 2011, approximately 100,000 protesters sat in the central Square of Homs calling for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. Protests continued through July 2011, the government responding with harsh security clampdowns and military operations in several districts, especially in the north.

On 31 July, Syrian army tanks stormed several cities, including Hama, Deir Ez-Zour, Al-Bukamal, and Herak in Daraa. At least 136 people were killed in the most violent and bloody day since the uprising started.

By late November – early December Baba Amr district of Homs falls under the armed Syrian opposition control, but is surrounded after a big military operation by the Syrian army.

International reactions

Protests in many countries affected by the Arab Spring have attracted widespread support from the international community, while harsh government responses have generally met condemnation. In the case of the Bahraini, Moroccan, and Syrian protests, the international response has been considerably more nuanced.

Some critics have accused Western governments, including those of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, of hypocrisy in the way they have reacted to the Arab Spring. Noam Chomsky accused the Obama administration of endeavoring to muffle the revolutionary wave and stifle popular democratization efforts in the Middle East.

The International Monetary Fund said oil prices were likely to be higher than originally forecast due to unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, major regions of oil production.

Kenan Engin, a German-Turkish political scientist, identified the new uprising in Arab and Islamic countries as the "fifth wave of democracy" because of evident features qualitatively



THE CSS POINT
Yes We Can Do It!

similar to the "third wave of democracy" in Latin America that took place in the 1970s and 1980s.