

## **The Arab Spring: Is Conflict really better than Cooperation?**

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### **Abstract**

As a result of the conflicts in the Arab Spring, the lives of the populations in the region have been arguably improved through measures towards democratization and by the fall of authoritarian regimes. However, at the same time, the populations have suffered losses during the conflicts, and cooperation with the governments could have resulted in continued periods of more peaceful times, exemplified by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Revolutions such as the Arab Spring bring about a radical wave of change to a country's political system and raise alarm in the international community as a call towards the need for change in relevant countries or regions. However, whether the conflicts are better by what standards is debatable. In this paper, I will examine the conflict of the Arab Spring to evaluate the question of whether conflict is better than cooperation.

Keywords: Arab Spring, conflict, cooperation, authoritarian regimes, transition

### **I. Introduction**

As a young man lit himself on fire in protest in Tunisia in December 2010, an unprecedented series of conflicts between the governments and populations in numerous countries in the Middle East began in 2011. The wave of conflicts in the Middle East, labeled the Arab Spring, spread through many more countries in the region such as Egypt, Libya, Syria and Bahrain. In the arguably ongoing conflicts, some countries have already witnessed political, social and economic changes. As a result of the conflicts, the lives of the populations have arguably been improved through measures towards democratization and the increase in civil liberties. Authoritarian leaders in the region such as in Tunisia and Egypt were forced to leave office and new political infrastructure was initiated. There have been calls for more transparent and democratic governments without corruption and human rights abuses. Through these results, the example of the Arab Spring tells us that conflict is better than cooperation given the context of the situation of the region.

On the other hand, the human and economic cost of the conflict cannot be ignored. Although political shifts and democratization seems to be occurring in some countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, many other countries like Syria and Bahrain have not had success in achieving drastic political changes and their populations continue to be oppressed and continued cooperation with the

governments could have brought them more peaceful periods. Because of rigorous protests and opposition movements, governments in countries such as Bahrain have reacted more violently to protect the legitimacy of their governments. While the question “when is conflict better than cooperation?” assumes that conflict is better than cooperation at certain situations, through the study of the Arab Spring we could also further examine whether conflict is better than cooperation at all.

The primary goal of this paper is to identify the conditions under which conflict is better than cooperation through the origins, process and results of the Arab Spring. The paper also evaluates whether the conflict of the Arab Spring was indeed better for the populations than an alternative to cooperate. The political, social and economic contexts will be analyzed as well as changes in the same domains, with an emphasis on political regime changes, democratization and civil liberties. I argue that the Arab Spring shows that conflict is better than cooperation in certain regimes with ongoing repression, loss of government legitimacy and strong protests with high desire and capacities. In addition, the stability of republics and monarchies are contrasted by the comparison between countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.).

This paper is organized into seven sections and the rest of the paper is as follows; the second section will detail the context of the region before the Arab Spring which led to conflict and the third will provide a positive account of the political progress after of the conflict. The fourth section will analyze the costs and backlash in the aftermath of the Arab Spring while the fifth will detail recent economic recovery and a positive outlook for the region. The sixth section provides a contrast to the Gulf monarchies and the seventh section will conclude.

## **II. Why was conflict chosen over cooperation in the Arab Spring?**

To analyze why the protestors choose to instigate conflict with the governments to express their discontent and demands rather than resorting to cooperation or negotiation with them, political, social and economic trends in the countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria in the Arab Spring should be taken into consideration. Although every country is not identical in its context, previous studies show that certain conditions provide the context for an insurgent movement, rather than negotiation, as a drive for political reform in certain cases.

Firstly, the lack of democratic values, similarly to the socialist Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>, and repression by the governments for extensive periods of time resulted in the choice of popular movements against the governments. The Middle East has been the least “free” region in the world<sup>2</sup>. Many countries in the Middle East have been ruled by authoritarian leaders for many decades, and the populations had limited civil liberties and social freedom. According to Freedom House, Tunisia,

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<sup>1</sup> Bunce, “Comparative Democratization: Big and Bounded Generalizations”, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> “Middle East and North Africa”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa>

Egypt, Libya and Syria were ‘not free’<sup>3</sup> in 2010, meaning that the populations were not guaranteed political rights and civil liberties. During the prolonged rule of authoritarian leaders, each of twenty years or more, they repressed political opponents, controlled the media and disregarded human rights. Ben Ali removed legislative barriers to continue ruling as President in Tunisia, for example, and Mubarak persecuted political opposition. The government forces’ unlawful and excessive use of violence against the protestors in Libya was noted by international organizations as a breach of the rules of war<sup>4</sup>. Political opposition was crushed by violence<sup>5</sup> and the media was controlled by the government in Syria as well. Similarly, more moderate forms of protest had been repressed by the governments in South Africa and El Salvador<sup>6</sup>, and widespread mobilization consequently became the alternative to bring about political reform. In other words, mass mobilization became one of the few available alternatives for the people to express their concerns.

Secondly, economic crisis along with corruption triggered a loss of legitimacy of the existing governments<sup>7</sup>. Unemployment rates were high across the region, especially due to the surge in the percentage of youth<sup>8</sup>. Youth unemployment rate in the Middle East has been among the highest in the world, peaking at around 24% around the time of the protests, with a similar rate in Egypt and reaching 30% in Tunisia.<sup>9</sup> During the widespread economic conditions, elites sided with the biased governments for economic benefits, while the protestors form the “insurgent counterelite”, similar to the series of regime changes in South Africa and El Salvador<sup>10</sup>. Corruption was prevalent in the Arab governments as well; elites held political and economic benefits and there was little incentive for them to divide or change their interests. More specifically, the Tunisian President and his associates have monopolized certain sectors of the market to their advantage<sup>11</sup> and further exacerbated the living conditions of the poor; this only brought discontent with government policies. Corruption had been prevalent in many levels of government officials in Egypt as well.<sup>12</sup> The emergence of a business elite class, associated with Mubarak’s son, increased the economic divide between different groups.<sup>13</sup> In this political environment in which elite interests were dependent upon the survival of the regime, it

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<sup>3</sup> “Freedom in the World 2010”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2010>

<sup>4</sup> “World Report 2012 – Libya”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-libya>

<sup>5</sup> “2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Syria”, accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4da56d83a2.html>

<sup>6</sup> Wood, “An Insurgent Path to Democracy”, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Van de Walle and Bratton, “Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa”, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Goldstone, “Understanding the Revolutions of 2011”, 2011, p12.

<sup>9</sup> “Youth Unemployment in the MENA Region”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.imf.org/external/np/vc/2012/061312.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Wood, “An Insurgent Path to Democracy”, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> “Freedom in the World 2010 – Tunisia”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/tunisia>

<sup>12</sup> “Egypt”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.transparency.org/country#EGY>

<sup>13</sup> Anderson, “Demystifying the Arab Spring”, 2011, p4.

would have been difficult to negotiate with the elites for a peaceful process through cooperation for the demanded political reforms. Hence, remnants of the previous system were not desirable to the people; similar to countries in Eastern Europe that wanted to part from their Socialist past, for Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – countries that went through regime change – as well as Syria – which saw serious conflicts – trying to “break” the regime rather than “bridging” the old regime into a new one was preferred in this situation.<sup>14</sup>

The relative strength of protests also affects the likelihood of a popular movement rather than elite pacting. When there is a strong opposition force with high desire and high capacity to carry on the movement<sup>15</sup>, there is likely to be conflict between the masses and the government. As in Eastern Europe, mass protests were widespread in the region during the Arab Spring and escalated into large scale conflicts in Libya, for example, showing the high desire and capacity of the mass protests against the existing governments. Although the so-called “Twitter revolution” in Egypt, for example, was mostly a sudden eruption facilitated by the Internet and social media rather than organized movements by preexisting institutions, the origins of the protests can be traced back to organized popular movements and the scale and persistence of the mobilization even after the ban of the Internet shows that the opposition movement was strong enough to challenge the government.<sup>16</sup> This suggested that the mobilizations of the Arab Spring had high desire and high capacity, comparable to those of in the Eastern European context which favored conflict – popular protests – over cooperation.

### **III. Political progress after the Arab Spring**

Although conflict is ongoing in some countries, there has been some political progress since the start of the Arab Spring. Changes in political infrastructure, slow but steady economic progress and development towards democratization are prevalent in the region. There has been an increasing trend towards democratization and a call for more accountable and transparent governments. Little by little, the region dominated by its cultural history and Islamic nativism has been transforming by the wake of the Arab Spring and the conflict was better than cooperation to an extent in certain countries.

Most importantly, there have been political shifts and changes in leadership in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen as seen in Figure 1. As mentioned, all the leaders have been criticized by the international community for their human rights abuses during conflicts with the public and the end of these autocratic regimes have been brought by groups of the population. The dictatorships which have been keeping the stability of their governments by means of repression,

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<sup>14</sup> Bunce, “Comparative Democratization”, 2000

<sup>15</sup> Bunce, “Comparative Democratization”, 2000; Van de Walle and Bratton, “Popular Protest and Political Reform in Africa”, 1992.

<sup>16</sup> “Egyptian protesters are not just Facebook revolutionaries”, accessed July 26, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/28/egyptian-protesters-facebook-revolutionaries>

legitimization and redistribution have been replaced for the progress of democratic values.

The political regime changes occurred relatively rapidly after the start of the protests, and the responsiveness of the governments and political leaders show the extent of discontent among the people and the governments' eventual acceptance of the situation. Tunisian President Ben Ali was forced to flee just months after the protests started in Tunis<sup>17</sup>, President Mubarak himself resigned shortly after<sup>18</sup> and Muammar Gaddafi's death later in 2011 marked the end of his rule in Libya<sup>19</sup>. Within a year after the incident in Tunisia that served as a catalyst, three countries consequently saw the end of political leaders who have ruled their respective countries for decades. For the people, these political changes were more desirable than retaining the unresponsive, autocratic governments and living under their oppressive policies.

More implicitly, the Arab Spring was a stepping stone towards strengthening the political rights and freedom of the populations in the countries that were under the control of Sultanistic dictators. The popular movements are closely tied to the consolidation of the populations' political rights and civil liberties, and the Arab Spring brought "the people" back as "a strategic player" in the Middle East<sup>20</sup>. This increase in the voice of the people, especially the youth, is better than cooperation and the stagnant situation without progress prior to 2011.

The Arab Spring, furthermore, brought together new groups of the population who were key players during the uprisings. Groups such as the youth that have been characterized by their liberal values and drive for change were identified in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia. New liberal youth groups in Egypt are examples of the emergence of new political actors. Egyptian youth who have identified themselves as "liberals" during the Arab Spring protests have expressed their support for views of classical liberalism and liberal democracy but also preserving their cultural and religious values, diverging from western models of liberalism<sup>21</sup>. From a favorable perspective towards democratization, these developments could be seen as better than what was the populations' political status under the authoritarian leaders. The Sultanistic dictators only preserved some form of formal democracy through political parties and elections but they were formalities to attain their survival in their leadership positions<sup>22</sup>. This suggests that the dictators had minimal regard for the well-being for their people and the Arab Spring signified the need for political reform in these countries.

According to Freedom House, some countries in the Middle East showed considerable improvements in their statuses in 2013 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2012. Tunisia, Egypt and

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<sup>17</sup> "Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali forced to flee Tunisia as protesters claim victory", accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/14/tunisian-president-flees-country-protests>

<sup>18</sup> "Hosni Mubarak resigns –and Egypt celebrates a new dawn", accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/11/hosni-mubarak-resigns-egypt-cairo>

<sup>19</sup> "Benghazi's moment of joy as Libya's tyranny ends", accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/23/benghazi-joy-end-libya-tyranny>

<sup>20</sup> Doran, "The Heirs of Nasser", 2011. p17

<sup>21</sup> Lesch and Haas, Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East, p46

<sup>22</sup> Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions", 2011, p9

Libya, for example, which were labeled as “not free” in 2010, improved their status as “partly free” countries in 2013. Libya and Tunisia were among the countries which showed the most drastic improvements worldwide as well<sup>23</sup>. This shows that considerable progress has been made in these countries in terms of securing some political rights and civil liberties to their populations by different means.

Developments in the new political agenda occurred subsequent to political transitions. There have been waves of fair elections and an increased demand for government accountability and responsiveness by the public. Remarkable improvement in the governance in Tunisia has been stimulated by its “institution-based democratic transition”. Its elections in October 2011 were run by an independent authority and this is evidence that Tunisia further took a step towards democratization as well. Civil society participation was encouraged and stimulated by the increase in new political parties as well as civic organizations.<sup>24</sup> Overall, political and electoral developments in Tunisia seem promising for further consolidation in the future. In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Tunisia has clearly encouraged democratic political participation.

Egypt, furthermore, showed some improvement in government accountability and governance through its constitutional referendum in 2011 as well as parliamentary elections. Egypt held its first ever democratic Presidential elections in 2012.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Libya held its first parliamentary elections since Gaddafi’s rule in 2012 and the appointment of a prime minister and the approval of a cabinet followed suit<sup>26</sup>. Other domains such as journalism started to emerge again in Libya as the freedom of press was improved after Gaddafi’s death and religious minorities have been guaranteed relative freedom to assemble and practice their religions<sup>27</sup>. Electoral reforms and relatively stronger guarantee of freedoms for populations prove that the result of the conflicts in the Arab Spring have brought better results in terms of political progress in some countries.

#### **IV. Costs of the conflict and backlash**

##### **Human and Economic Cost**

On the other hand, conflict incurs various costs that cannot be ignored. These costs should be

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<sup>23</sup> “Freedom in the World 2013”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2013>

<sup>24</sup> “Divergence and Decline”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads-2012/divergence-and-decline-middle-east-and-world-after-arab-spring>

<sup>25</sup> “Freedom in the World 2013: Egypt”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/egypt>

<sup>26</sup> “Freedom in the World 2013: Libya”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/libya>

<sup>27</sup> “Freedom in the World 2013: Libya”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/libya>



taken into consideration to evaluate whether the results of the Arab Spring were for the better. First of all, the clashes in the Arab Spring have inflicted numerous deaths in multiple countries, and the cost of life during the Arab Spring is not insignificant. During the protests, there were already as few as 2,500 deaths in the clashes between the protestors and the governments in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Bahrain by July 2011 (Figure 2). As many as 30,000 died in Libya alone during its heightened civil conflict as well.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the aggregate death toll in Syria's ongoing civil conflict has now surpassed 93,000 and the number of Syrian refugees has reached 1.6 million<sup>29</sup>. With hundreds to thousands of people dead in many countries and millions displaced, the human cost of the Arab Spring is grave.

Not only that, but the Arab Spring also had a significant impact on the economy. The Arab Spring has hindered the economic growth of many countries and many countries have made significant economic losses. Average GDP growth fell throughout the region in 2011 – as seen in Figure 3 and 4 – to the lowest in a decade. The degree of economic impact varied, but the countries which went through sizable conflicts such as Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria were among the hardest hit initially.<sup>30</sup> Libya's GDP contraction in 2011 is to be estimated to as much as 60%, for example. A decrease in foreign investments and a severe decline in tourism were among the most significant reasons accountable for the estimated economic costs. A lack of trust and security which resulted from the projected political instability could be held accountable for the decline in investments and tourism, as seen in Figure 4. The number of tourists in Egypt and Tunisia fell by 40%<sup>31</sup>, and tourism is said to account for 18% of the total economic losses in Egypt as well<sup>32</sup>. Geopolity's statistical analysis of data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated the total cost of the Arab Spring to be more than \$55 billion, with countries with more severe conflicts such as Libya and Syria bearing a significant portion<sup>33</sup>, which clearly shows that the countries went through significant economic losses in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

### **Limited Improvements and Backlash**

Despite the improvements and progress in political domains, there still exists many prolonged and new problems in some countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, which are transitioning from

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<sup>28</sup> “Libya: Estimated 30,000 Died In War”, accessed July 26, 2013.  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/08/libya-war-died\\_n\\_953456.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/08/libya-war-died_n_953456.html)

<sup>29</sup> “Syria's Heritage Hangs by a Thread”, accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2013/07/05/syrian-civil-war-takes-a-toll-on-its-rich-cultural-history>

<sup>30</sup> Masetti et al, “Two years of Arab Spring”, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Masetti et al, “Two years of Arab Spring”, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> “The Economic Impact of the “Arab Spring” Uprisings”, accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.valuewalk.com/2012/03/the-economic-impact-of-the-arab-spring-uprisings/>

<sup>33</sup> “Cost of Arab Spring more than \$55 billion”, accessed July 26, 2013.  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/10/14/us-mideast-unrest-cost-idUSTRE79D2CR20111014>

previous autocratic regimes. A second revolution led Morsi to step down from his short-lived term as President in Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Conflict was ongoing in Egypt in protest to Morsi's new government and its policies that have not met the expectations of the Egyptian public, leading up to a second regime change within two years. The recent arrest of activists involved in protests suggests that progress in terms of human rights protection has not been improved either.<sup>35</sup> A civil war broke out in Libya after the end of Gaddafi's rule and infrastructures such as the education system have not been recovered to operate normally. Security issues have also persisted throughout 2012.<sup>36</sup>

Not only that, but the Arab Spring also triggered a counter reaction from some regimes to further oppress their people to contain the protests and maintain their autocratic rule. A rigorous series of pro-democracy protests occurred throughout 2011 in Bahrain but most if not all were contained by violent crackdowns by the government forces as well as the support of Saudi Arabian troops<sup>37</sup>. With the strong determination of the government to fight the protests, it is doubtful whether the conflict in Bahrain was necessarily better than cooperating for the people. Anti-government protests had been going on in Syria even before the Arab Spring broke out, but civil war broke out in Syria in 2011 and severe conflict is ongoing.

## **V. Economic recovery and positive outlook**

Despite the initial economic damage, the general prospects of the regional economy are positive. After the general decline in real GDP growth in 2011, the trend of economic growth is positive in 2012 and beyond. According to Figure 3 and Table 1, although the economic recovery does not yet reach the levels in 2010, the regional economy is picking up and general prospects seem positive throughout 2013.

Economic recovery is accelerating with the continuous spread of political stability in the region. The stabilization of new governments in transition and the strengthening of institutions, governmental and non-governmental, will contribute to building a stronger economic system than what existed before the Arab Spring. More political stability through governments in transition in countries such as Tunisia and Libya has contributed to the economic recovery. Tunisia's tourist sector is steadily making a rebound<sup>38</sup>, contributing to its economic growth. The Tunisian National Tourism

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<sup>34</sup> "Mohamed Morsi ousted in Egypt's second revolution in two years", accessed July 26, 2013.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/03/mohamed-morsi-egypt-second-revolution>

<sup>35</sup> "Egypt: Prominent Activists Charged Over Protest", accessed July 26, 2013.

<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/egypt-prominent-activists-charged-protest-19332699#.UbEmUdLRiSo>

<sup>36</sup> "Freedom in the World 2013: Libya", accessed July 26, 2013.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2013/libya>

<sup>37</sup> "Arab spring: an interactive timeline of Middle East protests", accessed July 26, 2013.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline>

<sup>38</sup> "World Economic Outlook", the International Monetary Fund", 2013.



Office measured a 36.4% increase in tourism revenues in 2012 compared to 2011<sup>39</sup>. Libya's oil production has nearly reached the pre-revolution levels and has been the main strength for economic growth in 2012<sup>40</sup>.

Furthermore, even if there have not been political shifts or a considerable improvement in human rights protection in countries in transition such as Egypt, the protests and resulting conflict in the Arab Spring have raised an alarm in the international community as well as in other countries such as Bahrain and Syria for change. Governments are in transition and conflict is ongoing in some areas in the region. It takes much longer for governments in transition to consolidate political changes<sup>41</sup>, and the outlook for other countries still under conflict seems positive with persistence given the examples of others that have undergone political shifts.

### **The way forward for the regimes in transition**

Existing governments in transition will consolidate their infrastructure over time to become stable governments. Many countries' infrastructure needs to be strengthened and democratic means should be realized in the aftermath of the conflicts. Political and economic infrastructure needs to be strengthened to support the new order in many countries. Democratic infrastructure should be built around political institutions to further contribute to the well-being of the populations. This does not mean that all the countries should undergo a regime change into liberal democracies. However, governmental and non governmental institutions – political bodies, constitutional reform, business regulations, for example – as well as civil society should be strengthened and the accountability of the governments should be improved. In countries such as Tunisia and Egypt undergoing a transition, democracy should be realized in real changes rather than resting in theory for the new generations<sup>42</sup>. In Egypt, military officials and institutions, which still hold political influence, should be held more accountable starting from measures such as a budget review by the parliament<sup>43</sup>. The stronger the political system, the more sustainable the democratic system becomes<sup>44</sup>, backed by a strong legal system. Any further progress will only become effective with a strong and accountable political system in place to support the reforms.

In terms of economic recovery, unemployment issues have been evident in the region for a considerable length of time and strategies for job creation are crucial. Economic growth can be stimulated by institutional and regulatory reforms under the new governments. International financing and recovering foreign investment will also facilitate better fiscal adjustment. Political stability will

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<sup>39</sup> "Tunisia: tourism confirms its recovery", accessed July 26, 2013.

[http://www.africanmanager.com/site\\_eng/detail\\_article.php?art\\_id=18816](http://www.africanmanager.com/site_eng/detail_article.php?art_id=18816)

<sup>40</sup> "Libya's Economy", accessed July 26, 2013. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/05/01/libya-s-economy-on-path-to-recovery-but-facing-hard-challenges/aq71>

<sup>41</sup> Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011", 2011, p14.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, "Demystifying the Arab Spring", 2011, p4.

<sup>43</sup> Lesch and Haas, *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, 2012, p58.

<sup>44</sup> Bunce, "Comparative Democratization", 2000.

contribute to further economic stability, seen in the rebound of tourism in many countries such as Tunisia. Regulatory reform and consolidation of institutions such as business regulations should further promote democratic values as well, as countries with good governance, defined by high performance in the World Governance Indicators which includes measures such as government effectiveness and control of corruption<sup>45</sup>, are more likely to experience an “employment miracle” that will alleviate the unemployment rates<sup>46</sup>.

These policy implications show that the aftermath of conflict has stimulated a new political and economic direction for the countries in transition as well as a model for other countries to follow suit in the future. Even though they are going through periods of political instability, their future stability is largely estimated to be positive. The economy, which was hit hard by the political turmoil in 2011, is recovering, and will be strengthened with further increases in political stability.

## **VI. Regime stability and the contrast to Gulf monarchies**

It is important to note that there were other countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that have seen minimal conflict or political change even with limited civil liberties like other countries which have undergone recent political reforms. This contrast between Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. can be explained by institutional differences in addition to the political and economic context mentioned in the second section.

Regime stability varies for different political systems and economic structures, which can explain the prolonged stability of governments in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in contrast to the countries that underwent political change after conflict. Egypt, Libya and Tunisia are all republics. Before the Arab Spring, Egypt and Tunisia had limited multiparty systems in which political parties existed but with insignificant power. They were among the countries to take significant steps towards democratization such as holding free elections and reforming the constitution. This concurs with Teorell and Hadenius (2007), whereby limited multiparty governments are the most likely to democratize after transition from their previous authoritarian regimes. The protests consequently signify a call towards political liberalization and increased political competition, as in neopatrimonial regimes in Africa.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain, which did not go through political changes, are hereditary monarchies. They have effectively repressed the protests in their countries, as in Bahrain, or received minimal or no effect from the Arab Spring, like in Saudi Arabia. Monarchies prove to be a more stable political system than republics in the face of a political transition according to Teorell and Hadenius (2007), as the new political regime after a transition tends to continue as a monarchy of some sort.

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<sup>45</sup> “World Bank Middle East and North Africa Region”, 2012, p34.

<sup>46</sup> “World Bank Middle East and North Africa Region”, 2012, p30.

<sup>47</sup> Van de Walle and Bratton, “Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa”, 1994.

The particular context for relatively tranquil countries during the Arab Spring such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates can be attributed to their political and economic stability as well as tactics to contain the unrest in their countries. The Gulf monarchies were based on family allegiances, which did not face threats to their political legitimacy, compared to countries like Egypt which lost its legitimacy.<sup>48</sup> Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah enjoyed a higher popularity than many of the other autocratic leaders, and the economic status of Saudi Arabia as an oil exporter helped the kingdom to react appropriately to the crisis<sup>49</sup>. Oil importing countries such as Egypt and Tunisia did not have capabilities that matched Saudi Arabia's and the existing governments were forced to react more violently or step down from their leadership. The monarchies, all in all, were different in their historical contexts to their neighbors in political and economic crisis. Hence, the economic structure of the Gulf states, backed by oil, allowed the unchanged elite interests despite the initial unrest, in contrast to the countries in which the economy depended on significant groups of labor among the population. This analysis contrasts to the case of El Salvador and South Africa, in which the popular mobilizations successfully transformed the interests of the elites due to continued political and economic unrest.<sup>50</sup>

The relative weakness of protests contributed to the quick recovery of these countries, despite their freedom index status as 'not free', as well. In Saudi Arabia, for example, there was initially some unrest when religious minority groups mobilized in protest against the government. However, public protests were immediately banned and, more importantly, the government promised an economic stimulation packet to address the complaints of the people<sup>51</sup>. With no further widespread mobilization instigated, the case of Saudi Arabia could be seen as an example in which cooperation brought better results than prolonged conflict. There was little or no conflict in the United Arab Emirates or Kuwait as movements in these countries were insignificant.

Conflict was better than cooperation in the countries hard hit by conflicts, but the conflict did not affect some of the Gulf States because of different regime types as well as their political and economic contexts. This shows that conflict is not better than cooperation in all situations. Rather, in the case of regime transitions, a loss of legitimacy, strength of protests and certain political and economic systems are the preconditions for conflict over cooperation.

## VII. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the events of the Arab Spring, conflict is better than cooperation in situations with complex conditions of repression and lack of political rights, economic crisis and

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<sup>48</sup> "The UAE, the Arab Spring and Different Types of Dissent", accessed 26 July, 2013

<http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/uae-arab-spring-and-different-types-dissent>

<sup>49</sup> Lesch and Haas, *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, 2012, p99.

<sup>50</sup> Wood, "An Insurgent Path to Democracy", 2001.

<sup>51</sup> "Saudi Arabia's King announces huge jobs and housing package", accessed 26 July 2013.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/mar/18/saudi-arabia-job-housing-package>

corruption and the desire and capacity of protests for their projected aims. In the case of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria, conflict was chosen as the preferred drive for political change rather than elite pacting because of these political and socioeconomic conditions. The populations under authoritarian rulers took a step towards freedom under their economic problems and lack of political rights. More moderate forms of protest were repressed under these governments and widespread mobilization was an alternative to express the public's desire for political reform.

The results of the Arab Spring also show that conflict produced progress and positive change in the region. Although the conflict inflicted sizeable human and economic costs, these costs allowed the drive for political change in many countries. Political institutions are being constructed and consolidated, constitutions are being revised and governments are moving towards more accountability and strength. Furthermore, the economy is continuing its recovery and will continue to do so along with increasing political stability. Important industries such as tourism are recovering and real GDP growth provides a positive outlook for the post-conflict region.

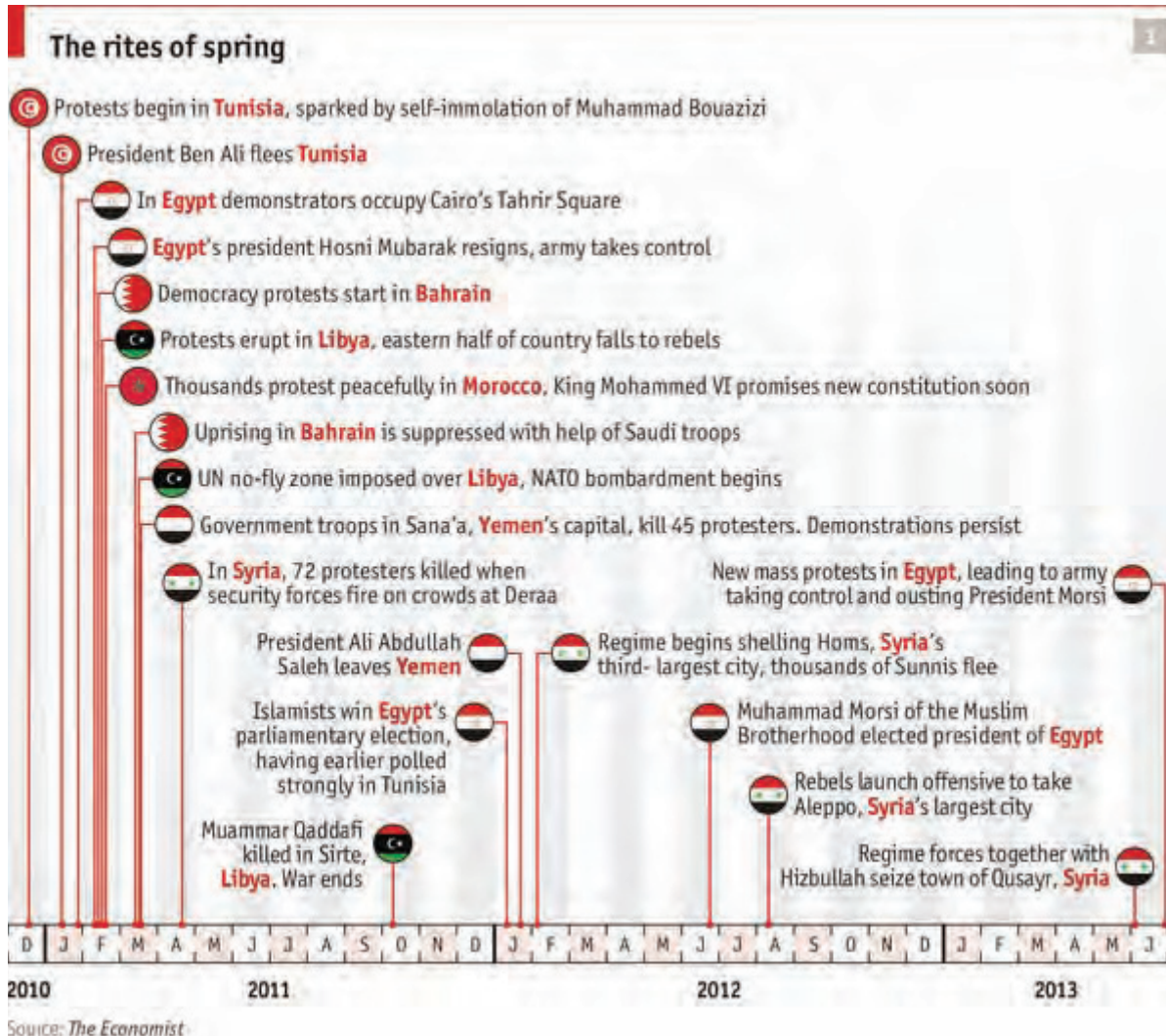
In countries such as Syria Bahrain, which have seen conflicts but without much progress towards political reforms, although imminent political change seems unlikely, it is difficult to judge that cooperation could have been better for the populations because it would have led to continued repression. Conflict in these areas therefore was still better than cooperation because it still contributed to increasing international awareness of the ongoing issues.

Not only that, but the contrast between the different authoritarian regimes also explain the difference between the countries embroiled in conflict during the Arab Spring and some of the Gulf states that did not undergo drastic political change. Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were republics with authoritarian leaders and limited political competition, with marginalized political parties holding insignificant power. In contrast, Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. and Bahrain are monarchies and this, to an extent, explains the relative of the regimes, given their political and economic contexts, despite limited political freedom enjoyed by the populations. In other words, conflict is only better in certain contexts of calls for political reform.

Although it is difficult to measure what is "better" for whom and according to what standards, key areas and issues such as political freedom, civil liberties, economic issues as well as structural factors have been addressed regarding the origins, process and results of the Arab Spring. In general, in the aftermath of the conflicts of the Arab Spring, the troubled countries are moving towards a better status than what it was before. Despite the costs, the choice of the public in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Bahrain to resort to conflict was better than cooperation.

## Appendix

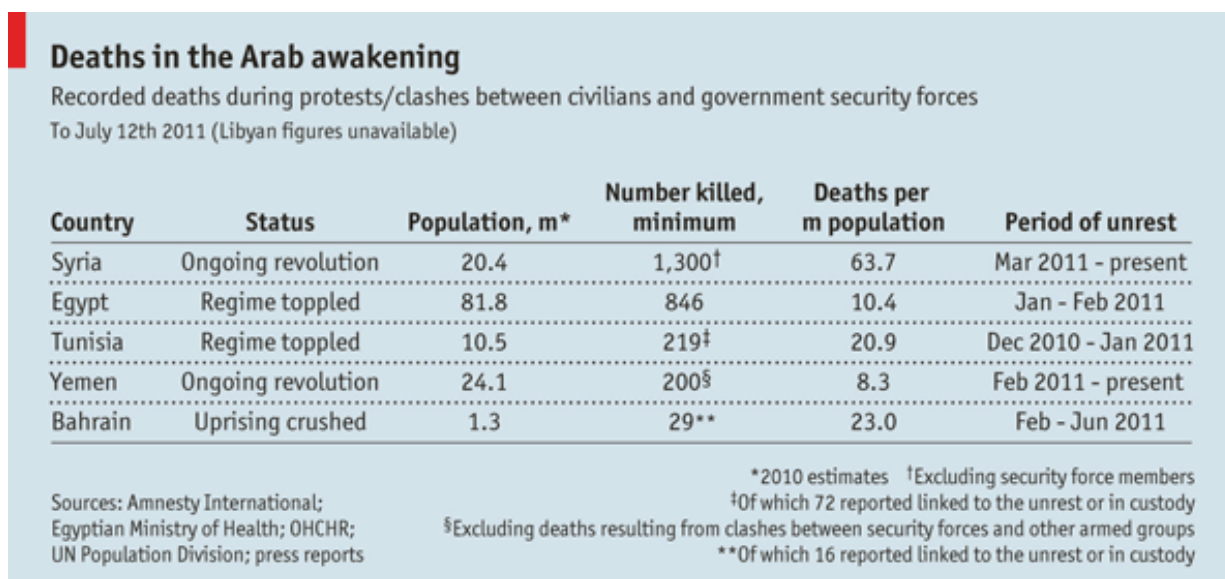
Figure 1: Key events and main achievements of the Arab Spring



Source: The Economist, "A climate of change", accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21580624-spring-proved-fickle-arabs-are-still-yearning-it-says-max-rodenbeck>

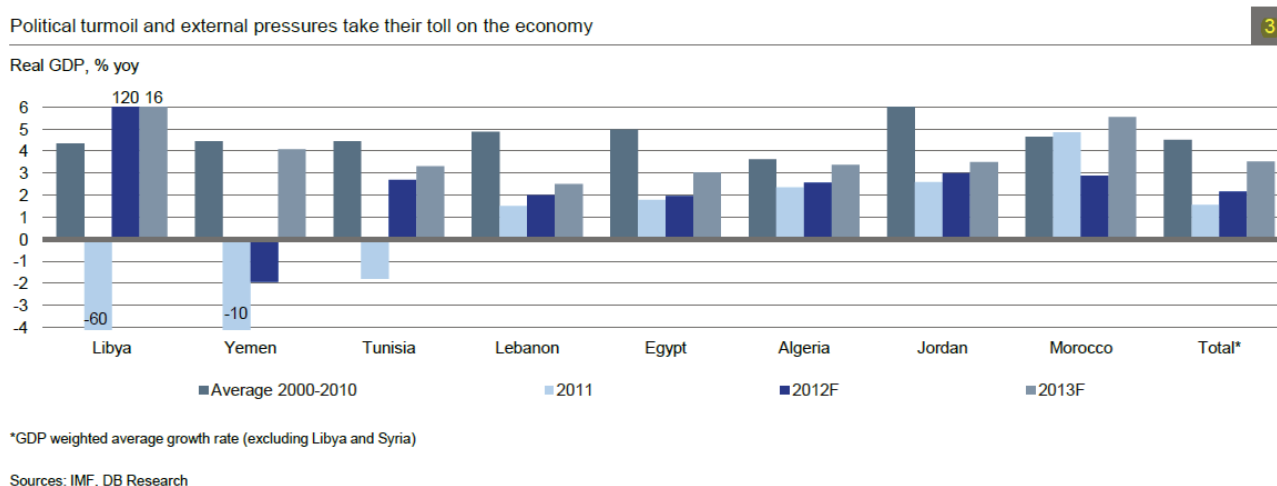


**Figure 2: Death toll of the Arab Spring as of July 12, 2011**



Source: The Economist, “The Arab Spring death toll: The price of the protests, so far”, accessed July 26, 2013. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/dailychart/2011/07/arab-spring-death-toll>

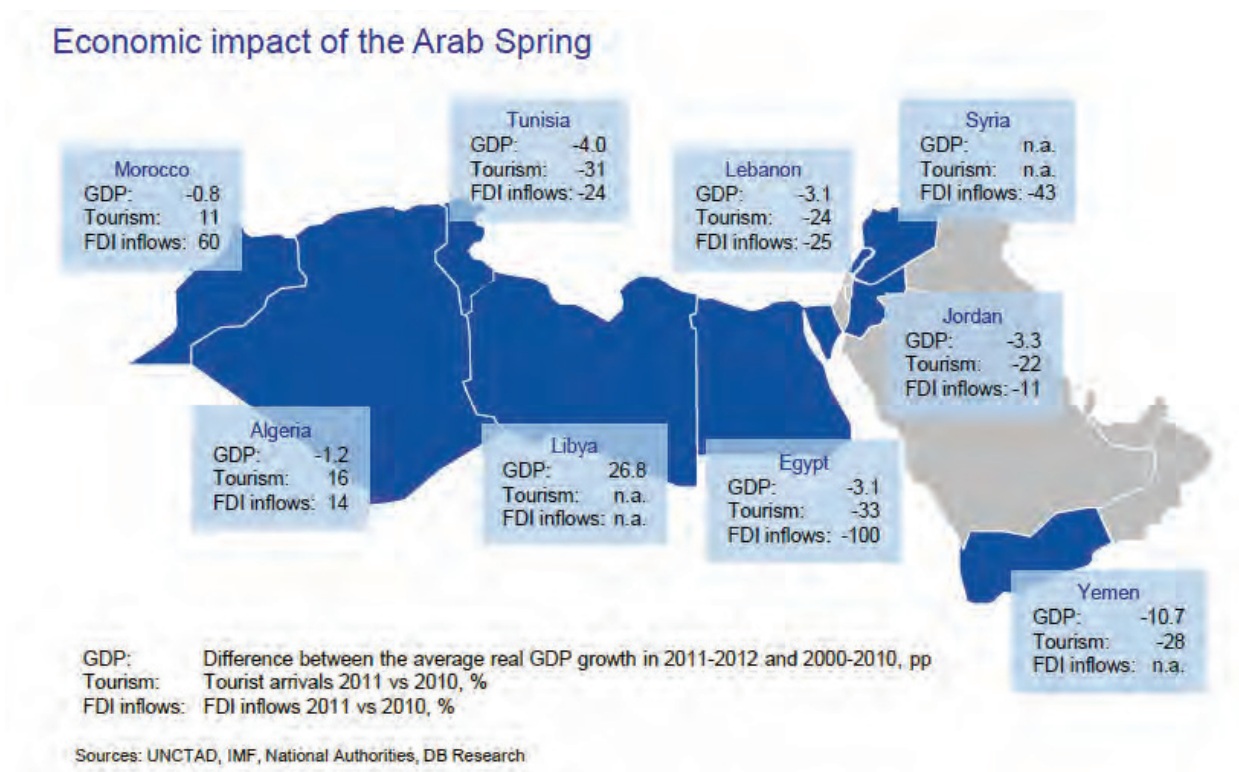
**Figure 3: Real GDP Growth in percentages year-over-year**



Source: Masetti et al, “Two years of Arab Spring: Where are we now? What’s next?”, Deutsche Bank, 2013.



**Figure 4: Economic Impact of the Arab Spring in terms of GDP, Tourism and FDI Inflows**



Source: Masetti et al, “Two years of Arab Spring: Where are we now? What’s next?”, Deutsche Bank, 2013.

**Table 1: Average annual percentage growth and projection for Real GDP**

Table 1: Average annual percentage growth and projection for Real GDP													
Country/ Year	Average									Projections			
	1995 -	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Egypt	4.8	4.5	6.8	7.1	7.2	4.7	5.1	1.8	2.2	2.0	3.3	6.5	
Libya	0.6	11.9	6.5	6.4	2.7	-0.8	5.0	-62.1	104.	5	20.2	10.1	5.0
Saudi Arabia	2.7	7.3	5.6	6.0	8.4	1.8	7.4	8.5	6.8	4.4	4.2	4.3	
Syria	2.6	6.2	5.0	5.7	4.5	5.9	3.4						
Tunisia	4.8	4.0	5.7	6.3	4.5	3.1	3.1	-1.9	3.6	4.0	4.5	4.8	
United Arab Emirates	6.4	8.6	8.8	6.5	5.3	-4.8	1.3	5.2	3.9	3.1	3.6	3.7	

Source: The International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook, April 2013: Hopes, Realities, Risks”, 2013.

Note: Blank fields indicate no available data

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