



## **Democratic Waves in Arab World: Ideology and Typology**

**Md Aftab Alam<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Political Science, AMU, Aligarh, U.P, India.*

### **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The term "Arab World" is used to denote the geographical and nation-state entities in the modern West Asian and North African region popularly referred in its abbreviated version WANA. Democratic waves encapsulate the popular civilian uprisings, revolts, resistance, revolutionary upsurge, rebellion taking place from time to time in Arab world leading to political - regime transitions and profound convulsions in economy, society, culture ,literature, art and ideas. The contemporary WANA took birth in the interregnum of two world wars involving the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and emergence of new nation-states as designed by the European colonial masters. The new political restructuring fundamentally replaced the ancient tribalism. The characteristics of modern states like bureaucracy, organized army, police force and other coercive apparatuses, hierarchical judicial system, municipal administrative units made their historic appearance.

Across the Arab world, the political system has been largely authoritarian and dictatorial in nature. The implanted monarchies referred to as the Sheikhdoms, military dictators usurping power through bloody coups and individual dictators based on popular revolutionary upsurge have been the characteristics of regimes of the Arab world. The popular democratic sentiments were crushed by the state apparatus leading to large scale bloodsheds. The modern Arab political history is

\*Corresponding author: Email: [aftabamu75@gmail.com](mailto:aftabamu75@gmail.com);

replete with such instances of popular civilian democratic waves impacting the entire spectrum of their society. Undoubtedly, these upsurges didn't take place in any vacuum but were largely conditioned by contemporary political and economic changes. Besides this, these democratic waves were based on ideological frameworks containing the elements of Marxian socialism, Arab nationalism and Islam. These democratic waves have also been approached by construction of some typologies involving regional pattern, economic system and regime types. This paper is an humble attempt to understand those ideological frameworks inspiring, instigating, guiding and reinvigorating democratic sentiments and revolutionary movements against authoritarian regimes demanding freedom, liberty, rights, equality, justice, rule of law, representative institutions, responsible and accountable governance. Further, it also endeavors to analyse patterns and typology of those democratic waves convulsing the polities, economies and societies of the Arab world.

*Keywords: Democratic waves; arab world; ideology; typology.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this research paper, two value-loaded concepts have been utilized: "Democratic Movement" and "Arab World". There is an attempt to discern the ideological frameworks which guided democratic movements expressed through popular protests and upsurges across contemporary West Asia and North Africa popularly referred to as Arab Spring.

Democratic movements are generally premised on the demands for representative institutions, free and fair electoral system, rule of law, civil liberty, free press, institutionalized and constitutionally sanctified regime of rights, redistributive justice etc. Despite being labeled as derived from Western/European historical experiences, these principles have now almost acquired an universal character. Polities across the world have to either mould themselves into democratic system based on these paradigms or face civilian/popular uprisings demanding civil liberty, equitable distribution and representative/responsible governance. The processes of global economic integration have ultimately paved the way for global standardization of those universally accepted political values: values of representation, civil liberty and economic justice.

The conceptual category of "Arab World" is used to denote predominantly Muslim/Islamic Societies across the geographical entities of West Asia and North Africa. The one thing that all Arab countries share is that they are Arab. They speak the same language (at least to the extent that they share the lingua franca of classical Arabic), and it is often suggested that there are cultural beliefs, structures and practices more or less common to all countries of the

region. Moreover, they share the same predominant religion, namely Islam- though Lebanon has historically been about half Christian, and other countries such as Egypt, also have significant Christian minorities [1].

A street vendor's self-immolation after the harassment by local officials in Tunisia led to series of protests against corrupt, authoritarian regimes all over the West Asia and North African region in which March Lynch [2,3] have appeared as the first scholar to define these waves of demonstrations as Arab Spring [2,3]. Authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were toppled. Syria is still in the midst of a bloody civil and sectarian war. Yemen has turned into a failed state despite peaceful resignation of Abdullah Saleh and has now slipped into sectarian conflicts between Sunni groups backed by Saudi Arabia and Shia Houthis supported by Iran. Bahrain's Shia uprising were to be suppressed only by the intervention of the Gulf states and in other countries of the region, series of reforms were introduced to contain the revolutionary fever.

However, there is still an ongoing debate within the field about how to classify these demonstrations and understand their broad ideological underpinning. The literature have not reached a consensus about whether the Arab Spring uprisings resemble true revolutionary character like the classical ones of Chinese, French and Russia or they are something inherently different from these classical social revolutions.

The important story about the 2011 Arab revolts in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya is not how the globalization of the norms of civic engagement shaped the protester's aspirations. Nor is it about

how activists used technology to share ideas and tactics. Instead, the critical issue is how and why these ambitions and techniques resonated in their various local contexts. The patterns and demographics of the protests varied widely. The demonstrations in Tunisia spiraled toward the capital from the neglected rural area, finding common cause with a once powerful but much repressed labour movement. In Egypt, by contrast, urbane and cosmopolitan young people in the major cities organized the uprisings. Meanwhile in Libya, ragtag bands of armed rebels in the eastern provinces ignited the protests revealing the tribal and regional cleavages that have beset the country for decades. Although they shared a common call for personal dignity and responsive government, the revolutions across these three countries reflected divergent economic grievances and social dynamics-legacies of their diverse encounters with modern Europe and decades under unique regimes [4].

### **1.1 Ideological Framework of Arab Uprisings**

One of the main significance of ideology is that it reduces enforcement costs and pushes people to take such high risks to revolt against relatively superior state apparatus as ideology serves to energize groups to behave contrary to a simple, hedonistic individual calculus of costs and benefits, since neither maintenance of existing order nor its overthrow is possible without such behavior [5].

According to Walt, mass revolution and revolutionary change cannot occur without ideology and the presence of ideology achieves this outcome in revolutions by strong emphasis on three key themes: enemies are evil and incapable of reform; victory is ours inevitable and our revolution has universal superior meaning [6]. By these themes, conciliation between competing powers becomes more difficult as the relationship between revolutionaries and previous regime is placed on evil vs. good axis.

Another important attribute of ideology can be observed in the post-revolutionary politics as ideology provides a guiding framework for revolutionary change and in this way it dictates the scope and direction of revolutionary change [7,8]. On the other hand. Theda Skocpol in her earlier works; had argued that, ideology cannot be used to predict or explain revolutionary outcomes simply because structural conditions

and crises dominate the ideological explanations [9]. However, after the Iranian revolution, Skocpol incorporated the role of ideology into her famous definition of social revolutions: "Rapid, basic transformation of a country's state and class structure, and of its dominant ideology and in this sense revolution was deliberately and coherently made" [10]. Hence, ideology is an inherent character of revolutionary outbreaks as it can be used as tool for mobilizing masses as well as guiding post-revolutionary change.

In the three select cases of the Arab Spring: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where the actual regime changes took place, the ideological framework guided the actions of the protester and had its impact on post-revolutionary transformation in these countries. As for the presence of ideology it is appropriate to claim that the Tunisian revolution is about democracy and promotion of human rights against the totalization regime of Ben Ali. Tudoroiu [11] contends that the main motivation of protestors was to establish a Western Style liberal democracy which respects civil and political freedoms. Feldman [12] defines the ideology of the Arab Spring as democracy and Dodge argues that two factors that united people to revolt were the demands for full citizenship and the recognition of individual political rights [13].

Similar to the Tunisian case in Egypt, there was also a political ideology of revolutionaries that was to establish a liberal democratic order. As Tudoroiu [11] argues that the Egyptian uprising was also a plea for a democratic regime that respects human rights and political liberties. Although, because of the army's forceful intervention and ultimate takeover of the regime with a brief interlude of democratic elections and Presidency of Mohammad Morsi; the revolutionaries failed to achieve a sustained democratic transition and order.

Similar to earlier two cases of Tunisia and Egypt, the ideology played a certain role in the Libya uprisings as well. A good majority of protestors have raised their voices against the undemocratic authoritarian rule of Gaddafi and expressed their desire to establish a democratic regime based on popular sovereignty and respect of human rights and freedoms [14,15]. Similarly, Brahmi echoes democratic aspects of the Libyan case, distinguishes this ideology from the grand ideologies of great social revolutions and identifies the demands of protestors as post-ideological by stating that rather than being about

the politics of Left or Right, Socialism or Islamism, the protests centered on basic notions of freedom and human dignity [16].

At this stage, the question of democracy after the Arab spring and whether the usage of the spring metaphor was appropriate becomes significant. This spring metaphor, which was also used for the post-Soviet Eastern European republics is a term to denote the transition from authoritarian regimes to liberal democracies. The ideologies of these uprisings were to construct a western model of liberal democracy, however to what extent this aim was realized becomes visible after looking at political transitions which took place in these societies. Tunisia is the only case which witnessed a successful transition to democracy after the mass uprisings. On the other hand, in case of Libya and Egypt, the transition to Western style democracy became problematic as former is still trying to figure out how to resolve ongoing civil war and in later case, it experienced a counter-revolution by the army due to its sabotage of transition to democracy. The democratically elected Morsi government failed to fulfill the demands of the of the larger segments of the Egyptian society and its centralizing proclivities which eventually paved the way for a coup d'état and installation of military regime under General Sisi. As Weyland stated: Egyptian revolution has been throttled by the military, mainstay of the old regime; moreover, unorganized and inexperience in electoral politics, and without connection to the popular masses, they have been trounced by Islamist forces, whose true commitments to political pluralism, civic tolerance and democracy remains questionable [17].

Since a series of protests and uprising in Arab World ushered a new sets of dynamics that promised more freedom, economic prosperity, dignity and democracy, Arab spring was viewed as a critical and significant challenge to the status-quo even for countries in which old regimes were not toppled nor critically threatened.

Most commentators described them as “youth revolutions” after all, the young played as key role in organizing the initial street protests through the social media in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Sandhi Arabia. Some view then in terms of revolution of the multitude, a kind of post-modern revolt, diffused and leaderless with no fixed ideologies. While some characterize them as liberal revolutions, other contend that

they represent revolts against neo-liberal economics that have adversely affected Arab societies since the 1990s. Finally, the Arab revolts are also seen a secular democratic upheavals, a position that challenges those (including the supporters of the troubled Arab regimes, the Iranian Islamist leaders and al-Qaeda as well as some in the US Republican and pro-Israeli groups) who claim them to be inspired by Islam or Islamist politics [18].

In truth, most of these political uprisings have diffuse leaderships, enjoyed the widespread participation of young people in addition to other subaltern groups, including mostly pious Muslims, and followed more or less democratic pursuits. But, their ideological make-up and the trajectory of political change remain more complex [18].

In a 2008 7 essay on the future of Islamic revolutions published in *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change The Middle East* [19], Asef Bayat suggested that the Iranian experience may well remain the first and the last Islamic revolution of our time. For the growth of democratic sensibilities and movements (in the Middle East) is likely to push Islamism into the “post-Islamist” course, paving the way for a democratic change in which an inclusive Islam may play a significant role. The outcome may be termed “post-Islamist refo-lutions” (a mix of reform and revolutions). Thus, those Arab democratic upsurges are “post-Islamist” in orientation and “refo-lutionary” (barring Libya and Syria that involved foreign forces in a revolutionary war) in political trajectory [19].

Post-Islamism is at once a critique of Islamism from within and an alternative project to transcend it. By Islamism is meant those ideologies and movements that want (either peacefully or through armed struggles) to establish some kind of Islamic order – a religious state, sharia law and moral codes. Association with state power is a chief feature of Islamist politics. This is so not only because Islamist's seizures of the state would ensure their hold on power, but also because they consider the state to be most powerful institution that is able, through dawa (preaching) or duress, to spread 'good' and eradicate 'evil' in Muslim communities. Thus, the Islamist's primary concern has been to forge an ideological community from which similar concerns such as establishing social justice or improving the lives of the poor may or may not follow. Consequently,

in the Islamist ideological universe, people's obligations are strongly emphasized, while their rights get little attention, people then are perceived more as dutiful subjects (who are to follow the path of salvation defined by Islamist rulers) than rightful citizens (who may determine their own way to happiness) [19].

Post Islamism stands opposed to this kind of religious politics. Neither anti-Islamic nor secular, post-Islamism strongly upholds religion but also highlights people's rights. It envisions a society in which religiosity is merged with rights, faith with freedom, Islam with democracy. It aspires to a pious society within a civil (secular) democratic state. Early examples include Iran's reform movement of the late 1990's as well as the current Green Movement, the Prosperous Justice Party in Indonesia, the Justice and Development Party in Morocco and its ruling namesake in Turkey. The extent to which post-Islamists envision and commit in practice to democratic values varies. The Arab revolutions seemed to espouse a largely post-Islamist orientation. In fact, religious language was remarkably absent from these revolts, even though participants remained overwhelmingly people of faith, as they already enjoyed their faith, they strived to gain freedom [19].

This new political vision emerged from a constellation of new actors, a new political environment, and novel means and manners of mobilization – all of which came to fruition in turn through a series of structural changes that Arab societies have undertaken in the past two decades or so. In a sense, the authoritarian Arab states, affected by the forces of globalization, unintentionally created environments and actors that came to challenge the very essence of these states.

Three things had happened since the early 2000s to generate a new post-nationalist, post-ideological and post-Islamist vision and a new public receptive to such a vision. First, the political class realized that their nationalist, anti-imperialist, and pro-Palestinian stands would not deliver so long as they were fused with the demagogic rhetoric of their authoritarian regimes. It was time to centre the liberation struggles on the key internal issue-democracy. Secondly, Islamist politics had began to lose its hegemony in the post – 9/11 Middle East. The Iranian model had already faced a deep crisis for its repression, misogyny, exclusionary attitudes and unfulfilled promises and al-Qaeda's severe violence and extremism had caused a widespread

Islamophobia from which largely ordinary Muslims suffered. Islamism encountered serious challenges from without and within—from secularists and the faithful alike, who felt the deep scars left on the body politic and religious life by the Islamist's disregards for human rights, tolerance and pluralism. Finally, in the Arab world the expanding electronic media since the mid 2000s (satellite dishes, Aljazeera, internet, websites, weblogs and then Facebook and Twitter) supplied an unprecedented public arena for communicating and debating ideas with the discontented actors, new political thinking and novel channels of communication and exchange, Arab countries produced a new public one marked by a post-nationalist, post-ideological and post Islamist orientation. Arab revolutions seemed to embody this new thinking [19].

## **1.2 Classification and Typology of Democratic Movements in Arab World**

Arab countries are by means similar in the way they have developed socially and politically during the post-colonial decades. There was or is no single Arab authoritarianism, rather, there is an array of political settings with histories, structural conditions and dynamics that share both similar and strikingly dissimilar characteristics. The dynamics of opposition and protest in those countries, although linked, have also been quite different. Therefore, the post-revolutionary trajectories in the Arab spring states also developed in different directions in each of the countries involved.

Podeh claims that these uprisings were aimed to alter dynamics of political power and therefore political revolution in nature [20]. Franklin [21] and Beissinger [22] because of revolutionaries commitment to the democratic practices, civil and political freedoms, classify these as democratic revolutions.

On the other hand a good majority of scholars distinguishes the Arab Spring uprisings from classical social revolutions and argue that these events require a new understanding of revolution. Lawson sates that the meaning and character of revolution itself has changed, becoming increasingly oriented around political representation rather than the reordering of the society. Thus, he introduces a term called as negotiated revolution, which is marked by demands for political justice rather than radical transformation of institutions and the absence of the violence in the revolutionary process [23].

Similar to Lawson, Bayat [24] also emphasizes the emergence of a new type of revolutions as these Arab Spring cases are not sufficiently transformative to be social revolution and at the same time they are not simple reform movements. Instead it may make sense to speak of “refo-lutions”: revolutions that aim to push for reforms in and through the institutions of the existing regimes [24].

According to Goldstone [25], these cases are akin to the colour revolutions of the post-Soviet republics, however, they might enjoy the same fate of the reversal to the authoritarian rule. Springborg argues that prospects for democratization which was the main aim of the revolutionaries are very low and because of this Arab Spring resembles failed revolutions of 1848 [26].

Irfan Ahmad [27] used the concept of “categorical revolution” as the democratic storm in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere seem to dethrone the categories and language of thought dominant for over a half a century, “Categorical” is used in a double sense. First as an adjective of “category” by which is meant the “conceptual category”, the notions and tools with which we think, rather have been verily forced to think with. Intellectual categories are not formed overnight. Nor do they disappear over a fine weekend. In the case of Middle East, many important categories have been dominant for over a century, at least they have been dominant since the Second World War. One such hegemonic category is namely Islam and democracy are by definition opposed to each other. The events in the Middle East have substantially destabilized, if not nullified, this conceptual category. They have uprooted several other established myths and lies, hitherto often packaged and paraded as truth.

Second, the events in Arab World are also categorical in the sense, that they are not conditional. They are unqualified, direct, and explicit. By this is meant that the recent events are categorical enough to question the universal view-dominant on TV, internet and newspapers as well as in the syllabi of the universities across the globe-that Islam and democracy are antithetical: that Muslims cannot have democracy on their own, they badly need benign external promoters such as the USA or European Union. Barack Obama’s reluctant and belated appropriation of the “Arab Spring” notwithstanding, it needs to be noted that it

happened in spite of and indeed as a critique of the West in general and the US in particular [27].

The events of uprisings in Arab World are also categorical in that they cry for a redefinition of democracy, a democracy that questions the universal language of “national” interests” and “geo-politics”. Against the ruthless pursuit of “national interest” and “goe-politics”- which is the supreme principle of global politics-the democratic uprising in the Muslim world perhaps gestures a different language of enacting politics-a politics of ethics and dignity [27].

At the level of post-revolt political and security stabilization, some uprisings quickly toppled dictatorial regimes, as in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, while other like, in Syria and Libya, faced more protracted resistance and ultimately got mired in devastating civil strifes. This can be explained from a Gramscian viewpoint in terms of strength of the pre-existing civil society so that the stronger the civil society, the greater the likelihood of revolutionary success. As a consequence, a revolutionary movement that seems to arise with significant swiftness to topple an established regime is dependent on society-specific characteristics for its capacity to build a post-revolution consensus during the transition phase.

Tunisia and to a lesser degree Egypt, for instance, are relatively homogenous societies with regard to national identity, tribal and religious groups within their respective societies. And to a large extent, it is this homogeneity and cohesion that facilitated and enabled the creation of united mass movements against the fragile regimes of the two countries. Homogeneity, under these circumstances, engendered a unifying collective ideology. In contrast, socio-culturally heterogeneous and to a degree divided, authoritarian states, such as Libya, Syria and Yemen, launched their uprisings at a slower pace and their actions faced greater resistance. These societies are often split along sectarian or tribal lines which also overlap along socio-economic stratifications. Sustaining revolutionary movements in such societies may degenerate into sectarian power struggles or even outright civil war as in the case of Syria, or a state of lawlessness and civil chaos driven by ethnic or tribal groups as in the case with Libya and Yemen.

Therefore, ethnic, religious and tribal heterogeneity in the context of revolutionary

moment, have the potential to impede efforts towards developing the type of unified post-revolutionary worldview that can sustain and secure the consolidations stage. These country-specific socio-cultural characteristic along with other variables most notably strength of civil society and involvement of the military in domestic politics are also important in shaping the consolidation stage with a significant level of variation observed across the region. In Tunisia, for instance, human capital and civil society are in general more developed than in Egypt, facilitating more opportunities for post-revolutionary political transition and security stabilization and consequently, creating a stronger basis for consolidating the early revolutionary achievements.

## 2. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Egypt's military institution has been far more powerful and influential than either its civil society organization or the military institution in Tunisia, as a result, the Egyptian post-revolution transitional course has been characterized by deep ideological struggle for power between the military and Islamists culminating in the events of 30 June, 2013 and the overthrown of elected President Mohammed Morsi.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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