

## The Fourth Wave of Democratization

The fourth wave would follow Samuel P. Huntington's historical analysis of the global democratic process. According to Huntington, the adoption of democracy happened in three waves:

- The first wave began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century across North America and Western Europe in outcome of the American and French revolutions.
- The second began after World War II.
- And the third began in the mid-1970s – starting in Portugal and Spain before spreading across Latin America, Asia, Central Europe and Africa.

In each of these three waves, there had been a sudden upturn in countries that began to adopt democratic ideals, leading to political transition towards democracy. The third wave of democracy, for example, had seen the number of democratic nations triple from 39 in 1974 to 123 in 2005. Interestingly enough, the Arab world had been the only major region in the world that the third wave had bypassed completely, leading some commentators to coin the phrase “Arab exceptionalism” to characterize the phenomenon.

That's why some observers had been stunned in 2011 by the speed, force and the scale of the revolution, which held place in the Arab world. The fall of the autocratic regimes – particularly in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya – had also led many political analysts to label the Arab Spring as the start of the new fourth wave of democracy.

Some researchers think that the fourth wave of democratization would probably look no different to the past three and would also be exclusively regional in its early stages. The discovery of the three waves by Samuel P. Huntington evolved from rigorous historical analysis and that's why it is risky to predict or label a wave before it has fully developed.

The Arab world had changed a lot. It all began in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid on 17 December 2010 when a simple street salesman named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest the alleged mistreatment that was inflicted on him by a government official. Few would have guessed at that time that Bouazizi act of self-immolation would eventually spark a socio-political revolution that would sweep across the Middle East and North Africa.

Then in 2011 in breathtakingly short order the decades-old dictatorships of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen collapsed. Due to the pressure of the people other Arab governments

announced political reforms, more public spending and other concessions. An enormous youth energy that reminded the Westerners of their own liberating social cataclysm of the 1960s suggested a new sense of empowerment. The “Arab exception” – the apparent inability of these states to move towards political norms shared by most of the world – seemed to have been overcome.

Some researchers believe that what is extraordinary about the Arab uprisings is how much progress has already been made. In just a little more than a year, four dictators had fallen in the Middle East – Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen in addition to Ben Ali and Mubarak — who had been in power for a combined total of 128 years.

“The birth of the Arab citizen,” meaning that people were expressing their views, fighting for their rights, demanding to participate in the political process, and holding their government accountable. They were becoming citizens, in other words, in a way that had never happened before in the Arab Middle East, taking responsibility for their own lives and futures, and not looking to blame someone else for their problems.

Surprisingly, in only a few months, the world saw striking developments from Tunisia to Yemen; one dictatorship after another collapsed or had been weakened to the point of major pro-democratic concessions being offered, in an effort to prevent regime change. These changes certainly seem to resemble the third wave of democracy in Latin America, when in Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, Honduras and Ecuador all military or one-party regimes had collapsed and were replaced by constitutional powers.

The snowballing effects of the breakdown or weakening of the dictatorships from Tunisia to Yemen had turned the power pyramid upside down. Researchers believe that it is also significant to observe that most of the protesters have not demanded an Islamic state, or stronger pan-Arabic policies. Rather, they demand more democracy and political participation. In this widespread uprising what the world saw was a new political paradigm, in which the emphasis is on the dignity of the individual and not so much on traditional concepts of honor in the religious Islamic context.

Authoritarian regimes that were used to playing closed internal games related to the stories of corrupt election practices and inability to provide necessary welfare to their citizens were no longer able to do so. Furthermore, when periods of political upheaval presented themselves, international news organizations play an important function in spreading the news to sympathetic political diasporas abroad and sometimes encouraging foreign governments to intervene, as in the case of Libya, and less successfully, in Syria. This

international networking of citizens extended by broadcast networks works in cohort with the successful connectivity made possible by the diffusion of social media tools, like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, to include average citizens in shaping and flows of political information. Indeed, citizen journalism videos and blogs were important vehicles for the spreading of news about self-immolations in Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria. More formally organized networks of citizens and civic organizations had also led to the entrenchment of civil society, although in some cases, mostly online.

The Autocratic regimes in Eurasia fought energetically to keep the threat of democratic change at bay in 2012. Their invariable response to new domestic pressures and the ongoing political excitement in the Middle East was to strike more vigorously at perceived opponents, whether advocates of striking oil workers, dissident, religious nonconformists, environmental activists, human rights defenders, or the leaders of opposition parties. In some cases, governments with established records of repression introduced new and arguably redundant measures to further limit dissent. As a result, governance institutions in the region's autocracies had grown more dysfunctional, less independent, and more prone to corruption.

Some researchers think that the problem for the Arab world stems from the fact that political change need not necessarily mean democratic change. Henry Kissinger for example is skeptical of the type of change in the Arab world. "I don't think that the Arab Spring is necessarily a democratic manifestation, I think it is a populist manifestation," Kissinger told the Wall Street Journal.

According to a report by Freedom House, global freedom has been on a decline in the past few years with the authoritarian nations, becoming more repressive, while citizens in moderate democracies also saw a decline in their overall freedom.

Western officials had expected that stable developing-world democracies like India, Indonesia, South Africa, Brazil, and Turkey would emerge as powerful advocates for democracy and human rights abroad, writes Kurlantzick. But as they had gained power, these emerging democratic giants have acted more like cold-blooded realists.

A civil society has emerged in the Arab world – the one that is powerful enough to determine the fate of its own citizens. Perhaps this is the new "Arab Exceptionalism". But for some scholars, unfortunately, those hopeful days may have passed. The mood across the Arab world now could be called gloomy. Some authors say that the Arab spring had turned into an Islamist winter. They fear that after losing power in Egypt, the Muslim

Brotherhood and kindred groups with strong religious leanings that did well in the Arab spring will may become even more combative.

Many suspect that the Islamists have the intention of following the path set by Iran's revolution three decades ago, and that to such people democracy is merely a vehicle for legitimizing a new form of authoritarianism: "One man, one vote, one time"

Scholars believe that now in power in many countries after decades in opposition, the Arab Islamist themselves had learned hard lessons. Translating religious ideals into practical policies could be tougher still when resistance to Islamist aims, whether from entrenched overthrow of Muhammad Morsi, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood president, by a combination of popular rejection and military muscle came as shock.

Other critics worry less about the Islamist's intention or the danger of political polarization than about the messy, prolonged political transitions now in progress, which so far have done nothing to relieve the social problems that gave birth to the cataclysm in the first place.

Unfortunately, some researchers believe that no Arab country had emerged as a model for others to follow. Despair seems to be winning over hope. Countries such as Tunisia and Egypt could remain turbulent for years to come, whoever is in government there.

And those newly democratic countries have done relatively well. For some people elsewhere, the first flowerings of the protest in the spring of 2011 brought not freedom but more tyranny and vicious civil strife.

Some authors believe that the Arab spring brought democratization wave over the Arab world, some authors still remain skeptical. Was the Arab spring really the forth wave of democratization – probably only time could show.

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