

Helpdesk Research Report

State-citizen relations in North Africa since 2011

Evie Browne

11.09.2015

Question

How have state-citizen relations in North Africa changed since the Arab uprisings?

Contents

1. Overview
2. Changes to structure, capacity, legitimacy and dynamics
3. Impacts on citizens
4. References

1. Overview

This brief literature review collates evidence on the changes in state-citizen relations in North African countries after the Arab uprisings in 2011, including considerations of: the main changes to the structure, capacity, legitimacy and dynamics of ruling elites (political, economic, social), including the ability of public authorities to maintain security, provide services and the role played by non-state actors; the impact these changes have had on citizens, such as perceptions of state legitimacy and accountability, observance of human rights and equality (including gender, religious identity, regional/geographical identity), citizens' aspirations and expectations; and the impact of these changes on the economy, civil society, private sector and regional (within countries) integration. This feeds into a larger piece of work on the drivers of instability in the North African region¹.

DFID's priority countries in the region are Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, but they also include Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania. Due to the recent political events in the region, such as the Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict, this report prioritises literature written after 2011. It is of crucial importance to note that each country has experienced very different processes and outcomes since 2011, and it is difficult to generalise across the region. A case-by-case approach should be taken to understanding the situation.

¹ Accompanying papers are available on: [irregular migration](#); and [security and justice](#).

Most of the literature looks at Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. Algeria is largely considered to have avoided or missed the Arab Spring. Mauritania was not mentioned in the literature reviewed for this report.

Most of the literature looks at the causes and events of the Arab Spring, with a more limited **evidence base** on how things have changed over time. A great deal of literature focuses on the democratisation narrative. Large parts of the literature are historical or political economy work, with a smaller body of work providing empirical evidence. Literature from the first few years after 2011 tends to be optimistic about potential change, while the later literature often notes reversals or unfulfilled opportunities. Brixi et al. (2015: 254) suggest that, immediately after the transition, institutions were weak as rules and norms had been uprooted and not yet replaced. This suggests that changes in state-society relations take time to manifest.

However, many commentators, organisations and academics are in agreement, and the literature provides a generally consistent, and therefore, a reasonably reliable picture of the current situation. The **key findings** are:

- The **expected democratic changes** have largely not materialised, or at least not to the extent hoped. As such, large-scale, durable and sustainable changes have not occurred (Le Pere, 2013).
- A considerable body of literature reports that superficial changes have occurred, but the **deeper underlying structures** of authoritarian governance and weak accountability remain the same.
- **Political changes** have been positive, in terms of increased voice, participation, media, and free and fair elections.
- One of the changes most reported on is the shift or potential shift in the **status of women**. Again, it is unclear to what extent women have benefited from political changes, but there are signs that they are making progress.
- All literature reports on the lack of **jobs and unemployment** as a key challenge in the region. Unemployed youth were a key factor in the revolutions but in large part their concerns have not been addressed and they remain marginalised from power structures. Expectations of radical change have led to apathy as promises were not delivered.

2. Changes to structure, capacity, legitimacy and dynamics

There is a large literature on the Arab Spring, with very varied opinions, making it difficult to appraise what has changed and what has stayed the same (Cavatorta, 2015). There are also great differences across the region (Cavatorta, 2015). Most studies assess whether the countries have ‘made progress’ towards democracy.

Political

The literature highlights that the revolutions **increased political freedoms**, usually seen in free and fair elections, the rights to freedom of expression and assembly, freedom of the press, and women’s political participation. In general, the strongest change in the region is the development of increased public engagement for new voices and actors (Brixi et al., 2015: 260).

The literature is fairly consistent in saying that the political changes in the region have not created ‘new political and social orders beyond change of regimes’ (Le Pere, 2013: 2). Although there is still considerable democratic potential, many of the countries in the region have experienced a slowdown in the revolutionary transition, indicating that longer-term or deeper change may not be occurring (Le Pere, 2013). Brixi et al. (2015: 260) argue that public engagement in the region died down over time, with citizens disillusioned with the lack of change, and public mobilisation decreasing gradually.

Heydemann (2015) argues that **authoritarian governance** across the Arab world has survived the uprisings. Authoritarian elites have adapted and made what could be transformative changes, but fundamentally held on to the same power in new ways. Heydemann (2015: 18) sees the new forms of authoritarian rule as “repressive-exclusionary systems of rule organiaed in response to the threat of mass politics under conditions of poor capitalism”. This retention of power structures and rule is sometimes called the ‘deep state’ in the literature, and used to explain why some states (principally Egypt and Morocco) have not experienced significant change. The revolutions and reforms appear to have allowed greater space for societal voice, but without affecting the decision-making structures at the highest (or deepest) level (Le Pere, 2013). Old elites and the social foundations of oligarchic rule remain in place (Le Pere, 2013).

Formal political engagement also experienced the same spike and decline as more general public engagement. In Tunisia, only 45 per cent of the eligible population voted in the 2014 election, down from a projected 82 per cent in 2012 (Brixi et al., 2015: 261). In Libya, 49 per cent voted in the first General National Congress elections of July 2012 and only 16 per cent in the parliamentary elections of 2014 (Brixi et al., 2015: 261). In Tunisia and Egypt, the initial political outcome was the victories of Islamist parties (Hinnebusch, 2015). Islamist parties have risen in prominence in the region, which perhaps signals a change in formal political representation (Joffé, 2013).

In 2013, **women’s parliamentary share** was 27 per cent in Tunisia, 17 per cent in Morocco, and 2 per cent in Egypt (Moghadam, 2014). Libya reported 16.5 per cent women in parliament after the 2011 election (Moghadam, 2014). In Tunisia a law was passed before the 2011 democratic elections to require parties to include women on their electoral lists (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). 49 women were elected into a chamber of 217 seats (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). Algeria’s elections in 2011 brought in 31 per cent female MPs (Moghadam, 2014).

In Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, the **economic and social situation** remains more or less unchanged (Hinnebusch, 2015). The revolutions have only increased political freedoms, not addressed poverty, or economic or social inequality (Hinnebusch, 2015). Merone (2015) also notes that the lack of improvements have created some degree of nostalgia for the pre-revolutionary period and weakened the position of the new political actors. Hinnebusch (2015) concludes that the underlying institutional structures suggest that Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco are likely to experience authoritarian continuity as much as democratic change. The special issue of the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* concludes that democratic change as traditionally understood has not occurred in the region (Cavatorta, 2015). Middle classes and the old elites control the most significant political power (Cavatorta, 2015). The various new constitutions adopted appear to entrench semi-authoritarian practices (Cavatorta, 2015).

The literature agrees that the **Moroccan monarchy** has remained stable and has, in fact, consolidated power, after the Arab Spring (García & Collado, 2015). The Moroccan king, Mohammed VI, made some changes which appear substantial but which retain power in the monarchy (Joffé, 2013). He conceded to a change that requires the monarchy to appoint the government from the party which wins a plurality at elections, but he still has control over the armed forces, security and foreign policy, and can dismiss the

Prime Minister and parliament at will (Hinnebusch, 2015). Some reforms towards decentralisation have been made in name, but real change or shifts in power remain to be seen (García & Collado, 2015). The monarch remains in control of the rules of the game (Hinnebusch, 2015).

Morocco's monarchy proved resilient to the Arab Spring uprisings, while Tunisia and Egypt experienced leadership change and state weakening (Hinnebusch, 2015). Hinnebusch (2015) considers this in terms of legitimacy of leaders. The self-enrichment and profiteering of all three country's leaders was considered more legitimate for a monarch (Morocco) than for an elected president (Tunisia, Egypt) (Hinnebusch, 2015).

In **Egypt**, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took control after 2011, and key members of SCAF appear to continue to play important roles in governance (Khorshid, 2014). The military rose as a powerful economic actor in its own right, with liberals and Islamists competing to win its loyalty (Hinnebusch, 2015). The military coup in June 2013 to depose Morsi made democratisation impossible and cemented the central role of the military in the current political economy (Hinnebusch, 2015). This reflects the authoritarian institutions of the past, which have not changed substantially. Hinnebusch (2015) describes the current Egyptian regime as hybrid Bonapartist.

In **Tunisia**, the Constitution has been revised, new leaders have been elected, and civil society has become more active (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). The literature is unclear to what extent real change is taking place in Tunisia, with different commentators interpreting events differently. Freedom House (2015) ranked Tunisia as 'free' in 2014, the first Arab country to achieve this status for 40 years. This ranking was given because of the adoption of the new constitution, and the 2014 elections. The trade union federation played a key role as arbiter in the 2013 crisis between Islamist and secular politics (Hinnebusch, 2015). The military remained unpoliticised (Hinnebusch, 2015). Charrad and Zarrugh (2014) argue that women's mobilisation during the Tunisian constitution revision process indicates a shift from 'politics from above' to 'politics from below', where citizens are more able to express demands and have some influence on public policy. These changes suggest stronger democratic practices.

However, some authors argue that underlying structures have not changed. The Ennahdha political party, in power from 2011 to 2014, enfranchised the conservative middle classes, but alienated the poor and excluded, in continuity with pre-revolution dynamics (Merone, 2015). The disenfranchised youth remain marginalised, experiencing no real change in their position in politics, the economy and socially (Merone, 2015). The participants in the transition process are mostly conservative moderates, but the socially marginalised have not been incorporated into this political process, nor represented in the new regime (Merone, 2015).

Economic

The special issue of the *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* concludes that the socio-economic conditions in the region have not been significantly addressed by the changes in politics (Cavatorta, 2015). Failures to address unemployment, living standards and inequalities have undermined gains in political freedoms (Cavatorta, 2015). Several authors point to continued neo-liberalism as a cause of the lack of change (Cavatorta, 2015). The underlying economic structures (primacy of the market) in these countries have not changed significantly (Cavatorta, 2015).

In Libya, the vast majority of employed people are working in the **public sector** (85 per cent) (Elgazzar, et al., 2015). Job security is therefore high. However, the unemployment rate is also one of the highest in the world, increasing from 13.5 per cent in 2010 to 19 per cent in 2012 (Elgazzar, et al., 2015). Youth

unemployment is 48 per cent (Elgazzar, et al., 2015). Labour legislation reform initiated after the revolution has stalled due to the outbreak of conflict in 2014 (Elgazzar, et al., 2015).

In Libya, the World Bank conducted a **private sector** Investment Climate Assessment in 2011, and compares the results to data from 2014 (Calice et al., 2015). Private sector managers were asked to rank some general constraints in terms of significance to their business growth. The “severe” or “major” obstacles showed that:

- Crimes and theft rose from 22 per cent in 2011 to 66 per cent in 2014.
- Transport and telecommunication (mobile coverage) more than doubled in terms of significance (from 18 per cent to 42 per cent and from 18 per cent to 35 per cent)
- Macro-economic uncertainty, which already ranked among the top three constraints in 2011 rose from 55 per cent to 82 per cent in 2014.
- Corruption, thought to have developed in the absence of strong institutions, also increased quite substantially as a key issue from 44 per cent to 78 per cent of respondents classifying it as a major or severe obstacle.
- Justice and crimes resolution had also developed to become a major constraint for 47 per cent of respondents in 2014 compared to a level that did not exceed a quarter of respondents’ concerns in 2011. This likely goes hand in hand with the sharp increase in crimes and theft, with an unsatisfactory resolution system in place for wrongdoers.

Social

Institutions

Brixi et al. (2015: 254) suggest that, immediately after the transition, institutions were weak as rules and norms had been uprooted and not yet replaced. This may undermine the provision of services; in Egypt, service provision was sabotaged for personal gain, in Libya, the civil war has damaged the general provision of services, but in Tunisia, with a stronger state, services were maintained to some extent. Where the state left a vacuum, new actors have emerged, some with negative consequences, such as armed militia groups in Egypt.

Merone (2015) sees the revolution in Tunisia in terms of class. The youth who sparked the first protests are part of a social class which was rejecting the political system and claiming enfranchisement. However, the new political regime has not effectively included them. They are not part of the new group in power.

Civil society

Tunisia has experienced a sudden expansion in civil society space, with up to 1000 new associations and 100 new political parties formed after the revolution (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014).

Human Rights Watch (2015) documents the upsurge in media freedoms in Libya immediately following the overthrow of Gaddafi, but notes that by 2015, this has been severely curtailed. The collapse of state institutions and the deteriorating security situation mean that the media landscape has become “polarized, chaotic, politicized, and violent” (HRW, 2015: 1). Attacks against journalists and media outlets are common, and not a single one has been prosecuted. However, journalists themselves have been prosecuted, under restrictive freedom of expression laws, some of which are new since 2011.

Gender

Women's refusal to sacrifice women's human rights during the period of transition suggests a rejection of the 'patriarchal bargain' made with the state (Skalli, 2014). In Tunisia, women were adamant that the new system would be built with women as well as men (Moghadam, 2014). Egypt and Libya have been much less successful at realising women's rights and participation (Moghadam, 2014).

Women in Tunisia have played a central role in creating change. They have founded new organisations, won elections and participated in protests (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). They mobilised during and immediately after the collapse of the Ben Ali government (Moghadam, 2014). The drafting of the new constitution created a public protest about the use of the term 'complementary' to describe women's position in relation to men (as opposed to the Arabic term meaning equality). Women's mobilisation and protest (along with male allies, particularly secular and left-wing) resulted in this term eventually being dropped, indicating some progress in gender equality (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014). This was a sudden shift in the way that citizens contributed to public political processes, helping the emergence of a new public sphere and potentially a structural change (Charrad & Zarrugh, 2014).

3. Impacts on citizens

Most literature on North Africa after the Arab Spring states that it is too early to provide much evidence on what impacts might be experienced. Literature from the first few years after 2011 tends to be optimistic about potential change, while the later literature often notes reversals or unfulfilled opportunities. There is a lot of literature about the specific roles and issues surrounding women and youth. In general, the strongest change in the region is the development of increased public engagement for new voices and actors (Brixi et al., 2015: 260).

General perceptions

Most North African citizens believe they are worse off than before 2011. Tunisians and Egyptians rate economic concerns as the most important issues facing the country, while Libyans rate security highest. (Brixi et al., 2015: 256).

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) conducted focus group discussions with Tunisian citizens in May 2015, to gather feedback on citizens' evaluations of the performance of new political institutions and leaders (Collins & Kedissi, 2015). The study reports that most Tunisians identify serious economic and security problems, and perceive the country to be headed in 'the wrong direction'. This is mostly seen to be the fault of politicians who are not solving economic problems. The economy and lack of jobs were most people's top priority, which they want to be solved by more state involvement, for example in oversight of prices to control inflation.

Many of the identity groups who participated in the uprisings now feel marginalised by the new governments (Joffé, 2013).

Trust

At the beginning of the transition period, the region experienced a wave of volunteerism, national pride, and trust and optimism in the new state (Brixi et al., 2015: 256). 2013 polls indicated high levels of optimism regarding good governance, less corruption, an improved economy, and better security in the

future (Brixi et al., 2015: 256). However, this was short-lived. Both Tunisia and Egypt saw developments of distrust between groups, particularly between Islamists and non-Islamists. Overall, **trust in institutions and actors has declined** in the transitional countries in this region (Brixi et al., 2015: 256).

In **Tunisia**, most people feel that the parliament elected in 2014 has achieved little, and politicians are seen to be absent, ineffective and self-interested (Collins & Kedissi, 2015). In particular, MPs are seen as unable to effectively represent citizens, due to prioritising personal interests over citizens' needs. This has resulted in a loss of trust in the institution.

In **Libya**, 60 per cent of 1,200 respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the General National Congress (NDI, 2013). In comparison to the year before September 2013, perceptions of political parties and political leaders have declined, although 85 per cent of respondents still believed that democracy was the best form of government.

In **Morocco**, citizens reported in focus groups with NDI (2015) that they did not see political parties as viable options to address their concerns over employment, education, healthcare and infrastructure. There is a trust deficit: "Participants do not believe parties have their best interests in mind, and they do not believe the parties have serious, focused ideas on solving problems. They feel politicians tell them lies during an election and ignore them the rest of the time. They also feel parties advocate for policies for the privileged few and ignore the many." (NDI, 2015: 3). There was a strong message that political parties did not deliver on promises, with previous electoral promises often recycled. The main challenge for political parties is to build credibility with citizens.

Women

The new freedoms experienced by women in terms of public political protest and expression of voice point to a change in the way they participate in public life. Many of the Arab Spring protests involved young people, and young women are proving a strong voice in the region for human rights and women's rights (Skalli, 2014). Using the language of human rights and inclusive citizenship, many young women are becoming activists and redefining feminism in the region (Skalli, 2014).

In Libya, a large survey (NDI, 2013) indicates that Libyans support gender quotas for MPs and want greater participation of women in the political process. At the time of the survey, Libyans felt that women's participation had not reached a satisfactory level.

Youth

In Tunisia (but also more broadly across the region), the main challenge for youth is the lack of employment (Collins & Kedissi, 2015). Tunisians see this as leading to drugs, violence and terrorism, and call for educational reforms and greater economic opportunities for young people (Collins & Kedissi, 2015).

Minorities

In Egypt, the situation for the small numbers of minorities (Bedouins, Nubians, Berbers, Christians) has not improved significantly since the revolution (Khorshid, 2014). There have been violent incidents and grievances over the violation of ethnic and religious rights. The Morsi government maintained a policy of denial of the existence of religious strife, painting incidents as 'normal quarrels' (Khorshid, 2014). Policies

have not yet changed significantly, and low levels of sectarian violence continue at much the same level as pre-revolution.

Services

It is unclear to what degree Libyan public services were affected by the 2014 crisis (Calice et al., 2015). Business respondents reported in equal measure that electricity, transportation and internet had got better, stayed the same, or got worse. Companies in Misrata and Tripoli tended to answer that services had got better.

Private sector

The outbreak of conflict in Libya in mid-2014 had a strong impact on the economy, and particularly on the private sector as described in a World Bank report (Calice et al., 2015):

- 37 per cent said that the main impact of the crisis was reduced revenues
- 7 per cent reported that the main impact was work stoppages
- 10 per cent reported issues with the supply chain (e.g., lack of access to imported goods, petrol and raw materials due primarily to disruptions along the supply chain such as closures of seaports or airports)
- 9 per cent reported problems with staff, with foreign workers leaving the country in large numbers and local staff unable to reach their workplace due to poor security conditions

Enterprises in Benghazi, Tripoli and the south appear to have had the greatest impacts, while enterprises in the middle have suffered less. About 30 per cent of the companies had to move their main office or a site of production due to the crisis.

Business access to courts and conflict resolution and the price of land were cited as important constraints by 47 per cent and 43 per cent of enterprises respectively.

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Key websites

- British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies Special Issue – Continuity and change before and after the Arab uprisings in Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cbjm20/42/1#.Ve3MIBHBzGc>
- The Journal of North African Studies Special Issue – Women, Gender and the Arab Spring: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/fnas20/19/2#.VfBSbhFVhBc>
- Chatham House – North Africa: <http://www.chathamhouse.org/research/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa/north-africa>
- World Bank – Middle East and North Africa: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena>
- Freedom House – Middle East and North Africa: <https://freedomhouse.org/regions/middle-east-and-north-africa#.Ve3NYRHBzGc>
- University of Cambridge - Centre for the Study of the International Relations of the Middle East and North Africa: <http://www.cirmena.polis.cam.ac.uk/>

Expert contributors

George Joffé, University of Cambridge

Suggested citation

Browne, E. (2015). *State-citizen relations in North Africa since 2011* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1272). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

Further information

See related report: Browne, E. (2015). *Drivers of irregular migration in North Africa* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1271). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. <http://www.gsdrc.org/publications/drivers-of-irregular-migration-in-north-africa/>

Carter, B. (2015). *Facts about security and justice challenges* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1273). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. <http://www.gsdrc.org/publications/facts-about-security-and-justice-challenges/>

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