Beyond Democratization: The Arab Spring Uprisings in Participants' Own Words

Valerie Boutros

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Approved by:

Dr. Erin Lockwood
UCI School of Social Science
Department of Political Science

Dr. Bojan Petrovic
UCI School of Social Science
Department of Global and International Studies

ABSTRACT

Prominent scholars, policy analysts, and research specialists on the MENA region generally view the Arab Spring uprisings, particularly their initial wave in 2010-2011, as a collective pro-democracy social movement. This framework assumes that states engaging in anti-authoritarian social movements will eventually progress toward democratization, and overwhelmingly focuses on evaluating the Arab Spring as a democratic success or failure. However, evidence suggests that the mobilizers' goal was not necessarily democratization. Conventional measures of democracy used in this literature flatten and obscure mobilizers' demands, which went beyond electoral reform and included "bread, freedom, justice, and human dignity." How do first-hand accounts and personal narratives of those involved in the protests challenge common measures of democratization? This project argues that conventional framings of the Arab Spring in terms of successful or unsuccessful democratization obscure mobilizers' actual grievances and motivations for participating in these social movements. It does so by pairing a critical review of the democratization literature on the Arab Spring with an interpretive analysis of participants' first-hand accounts, focusing on the uprisings in Libya and Tunisia. In identifying themes—corruption, quality of life, safety and security, human rights, and non-democratic political aspirations and goals—in the qualitative accounts, I find that the culturally situated meaning of these themes fails to map onto conventional indices of corruption and democracy, displaying the indices' ineffectiveness in capturing the motivations and grievances of mobilizers. This project builds on criticisms of indices like Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) to argue for incorporating ordinary people's lived experiences into scholarship on the Arab Spring.

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I - INTRODUCTION

What Is the Arab Spring?

The Arab Spring was a wave of anti-government protests that spread across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, beginning at the end of 2010 and early 2011. The term "Arab Spring" was coined in reference to the Revolutions of 1848, with "Spring's" connotation implying a chain of revolutions that result in increased government representation, and ultimately democracy (Manfreda, 2019). After its first wave, four authoritarian leaders were deposed in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. While it was a surprise that the then-incumbent presidents of Tunisia and Egypt were swiftly deposed only a few weeks after popular protests broke out, their use of coercion and violence made it clear that change could not occur unless they were removed from office. On the other hand, although their leaders were successfully overthrown, Libya and Yemen's protests degenerated into civil war-like conflicts. Syria was unlucky because its leader remained in power and the popular protests were faced with regime brutality and systemic use of violence, ultimately also devolving into conflict. Other sustained street demonstrations also took place in countries like Morocco, Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman; however, their effects were less destabilizing (see Figure 1).

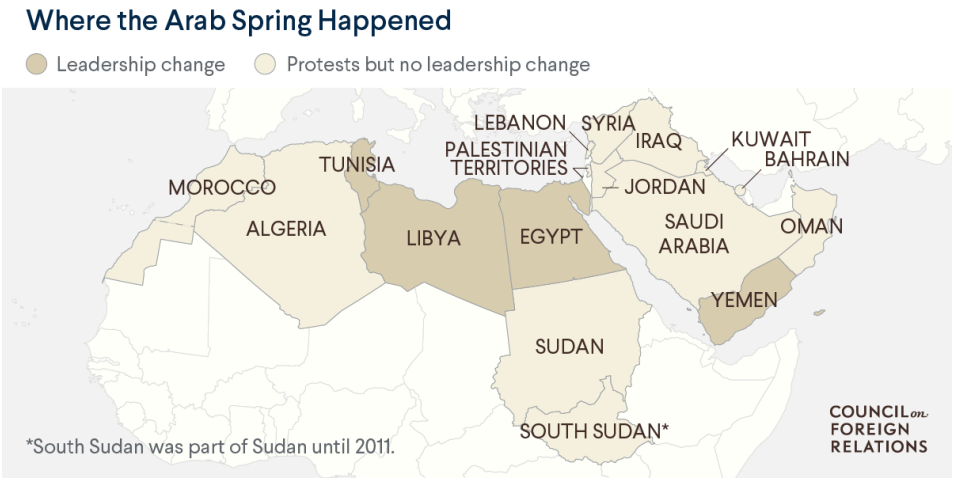

Figure 1: Where the Arab Spring Happened, source: Council on Foreign Relations

What Is the Purpose of this Research?

In this research, I ask, how do first-hand accounts and personal narratives of those involved in the protests challenge common measures of democratization? The objective is to develop a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of the Arab Spring. It focuses on a very specific aspect that often gets left out in research on the Arab Spring—the actual people involved. When its outcomes are assessed, spectators such as scholars and politicians evaluate the movement's success or failure based on the region's ability to democratize. Beyond geographic proximity and authoritarian governance, each country's causal factors and internal structure are significantly different (Katerji, 2020). Therefore, aggregating the uprisings into a singular motion for change is overly simplistic and obscures each individual country's unique grievances and motivations by producing surface-level conclusions. Furthermore, idealizing democratization as the successful outcome limits a full analysis of the participants' grievances and motivations. The project aims to develop an understanding of the Arab Spring that goes beyond labeling each country's mass mobilization as a "success" or a "failure".

This thesis develops a critical review of the democratization literature on the Arab Spring and compares widely used indices of democratization and corruption with qualitative accounts of corruption to display the indices' ineffectiveness in capturing the motivations and grievances of participants in social movements like the Arab Spring. It starts by demonstrating the shortcoming of the conventional framing of Arab Uprisings in the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm that relies on indices such as Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) as proxies for corruption. Next, by examining participants' first-hand accounts and personal narratives in two case studies, Tunisia and Libya, it demonstrates the potential discrepancies between widely used indices and the actual grievances of the participants. The goal is to add nuance to discussions of corruption and explain its mobilizing effects on the daily lives of Tunisians and Libyans but not necessarily as a mechanism toward the possibility of democratic transition. It specifically uses the descriptions of perceived corruption found in published first-hand accounts and personal narratives from citizens including activists, authors, journalists, writers, judges, healthcare workers, students, and teachers that played an active role in shaping their respective revolutions.

In the following chapter, I discuss the limitations that the autocracy-democracy paradigm places on analyses of the Arab Spring and explore an alternate framework present in

contemporary research: the authoritarian-democratic hybrid regime. In Chapter 3, I present pre-existing criticisms of the FIWR and CPI and analyze their implications on the MENA region. I then provide a brief overview in Chapter 4 of how I conducted my research and the way in which I examined and coded the Arab Spring participants' first-hand accounts and personal narratives before I dive into my analysis in Chapter 5. In that chapter, I illustrate themes that recur in the accounts and argue that participants' motivations for participating were centered around grievances and not on a pro-democracy agenda. Finally, I conclude my paper by discussing my findings and their implications.

My findings indicate that there is a disconnect between the participants' own experiences and grievances, and the base scores provided by popularly used indices. When I coded and analyzed the first-hand accounts, the participants told a story of struggle and expressed a desire for better conditions. Very rarely if ever did they express desires for formal democratic institutions. The participants described an aspiration for change from their authoritarian regimes toward a system that was not corrupt, unjust, and violated human rights. While their desires could be captured under a democracy, the participants' goal was not democracy but to depose their hegemonic rulers in favor of a just and fair society. While index results represent baseline levels of perceptions of corruption or levels of democracy, they do not capture what it is like to live under a corrupt regime or how that might drive someone to put themselves at political and physical risk by participating in a protest. Indices and traditional measures of corruption and democracy failed the participants of the Arab Spring by both misrepresenting their grievances and misunderstanding their goals.

This matters to MENA scholars, foreign policymakers, and political figures in individual states who use these measurements both to conduct research and in their approaches for future nation-building plans. Most importantly, this matters to the people whose lives are affected by decision-making based on index results. Index measures failed to capture the lived experiences of those who made the dangerous decision to publicly oppose their authoritarian rulers.

Understanding Pre-Existing Research

Research on the anti-authoritarian social movements from prominent scholars like Samuel P. Huntington, Juan J. Linz, Alfred C. Stepan, and Larry Diamond focused on the globalization of democracy (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 2010). "Waves"

of democratization, as popularized by Huntington, are surges of global transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that occur throughout history (Huntington, 1991). Typically, these waves are constrained to specific time periods and are identified by shared causal factors among the countries that underwent transitions (McIntosh, 2021). In 1991, Huntington identified three distinct waves of democratization: from 1826-1926, post-World War II, and the 1960s-early 1970s. Huntington's work on democratization, and the specific framework through which he establishes the three waves, places ideological limitations that led to expectations of democratization for the Arab Spring (Huntington, 1991). Thus, while a majority of scholarship refers to the Arab Spring as a pro-democracy movement, I make the active choice of labeling it as an anti-government movement to escape the framework's constraints.

Many scholars also find an issue with what I call in this paper the "bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm," which exists in large part because of Huntington's contributions. This framework assumes that there are only two options in discussions on systems of governance: democracy on one end, and autocracy on the other. Some criticisms of Huntington's work discuss his work's failure to produce a clear distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes (Doorenspleet, 2000). I raise an additional concern in my own research regarding the variation that exists within the gap between democratic and authoritarian regimes, and the extent of variation in transitions that this framework fails to capture. The recent resurgence of global authoritarianism drew researchers' attention away from this limited framework and toward searching for different modes of analysis.

The pre-existing literature also failed to capture the lived experiences of ordinary citizens in MENA states. When the Arab Spring first broke out, researchers and policy analysts were stunned because they did not foresee popular protests and mass mobilization occurring in the MENA region. Rather, they were preoccupied with analyzing the causes of the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the MENA region and the so-called "Arab democracy deficit" (Diamond, 2010). Some hindering factors researchers pointed to as causes for the deficit include the resource curse and other rent-seeking activities; the consolidation of power in the executive branches of governments; the role of the military and security services; a weak civil society and a culture of fear that disincentivized citizens' participation in public affairs; Islam's

"incompatibility" with democracy; and "Arab culture" as the distinguishing characteristic of the region that could lead to the deficit (Bayat, 2002; Bellin, 2004; Rowley & Smith, 2009).

As research developed and the Arab Spring unfolded, researchers seemed to be uncovering the socio-political significance of the region's demographics—the population majority of citizens under the age of 25 (Sugita, 2011). Had scholars looked at the Arab Development Reports issued by the UNDP's findings earlier, they would have perhaps expected or been less surprised by the initial outbreak of the Arab Spring. The reports detailed since 2002 the failures of MENA leaders in attending and responding to the legitimate demands of their young populations aspiring for better education, work opportunities, and jobs, social mobility, true political representation, and freedom to express opposing opinions without fear (Klugman, 2010; Mulderig, 2013).[1] Unfortunately, much Political Science research did not rely on sources like the UNDP reports but on index results such as Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) to analyze the MENA region.

I argue that these indices fail to capture the experiences of ordinary citizens under authoritarian rule due to corruption, repression, and harmful consequences for publicly opposing the regime. Countries' scores and ranks were quantitative indicators of a democracy deficit, but an inaccurate representation of the citizens' lives living within the country. The quantitative measures also did not aid researchers in predicting the Arab Spring because they do not capture participants' often-concealed grievances and motivations to participate in mass mobilization. While the indices are meant to be representative of the population of the country as a whole, those who make the dangerous decision to oppose their authoritarian regimes are not exactly representative.

[1] The information presented in this paragraph is featured in a forthcoming publication by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace of which I took part in the research effort.

II - LITERATURE ON THE ARAB SPRING & DEMOCRATIZATION

Bimodal Autocracy-Democracy Paradigm

In discussions of social upheaval, there is the underlying expectation that non-democratic countries who are opposing their authoritarian rulers will want to transition into democratic political systems. This expectation was cemented by the work of distinguished scholars such as Samuel P. Huntington, Juan Linz, and Alfred Stepan in the late 20th century (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Their work established a paradigm of looking toward democratic countries as the ideal. Furthermore, this assumes that countries who are unhappy with their own political system—particularly autocracies—and who are seeking to overthrow their governments, must then be pursuing modernization and democratization in their reformed political system. But that was simply not the case during the Arab Spring. Although participants were unhappy with the repressive and corrupt regimes they were living under, their primary motivation was not to establish a democracy. In analyzing the first-hand accounts of participants, I argue that their goal was to break free from their authoritarian regimes and establish a mode of rule that was not corrupt, unjust, or allowed poor living conditions and violations of human rights. While the elements of their hopes for their respective countries' political future could be categorized under democracy, I assert that their movement was not about *advocating for* something but instead vehemently *fighting against* the then-current conditions.

Democracy Explained

A democracy is defined as a modern polity under which there are free and contested elections, the governments resulting from the elections have *de jure* and *de facto* power to determine policy, and the rulers govern democratically (Linz & Stepan, 1996). For a democracy to be consolidated, it must meet five distinct conditions: the development of civil society, an autonomous political society, a pre-established rule of law, a bureaucracy, and an institutionalized economic system (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

Prominent political scientists, such as Linz and Stepan, make a distinction between liberalization and democratization. Liberalization involves policy and social changes: less censorship, more opportunities for the development of civil society, legal safeguards for individuals, tolerance of opposition, and improved living conditions (Linz & Stepan, 1996). On the other hand, democratization implies liberalization but goes beyond its basic standards and

advocates for free, fair, and competitive elections (Linz & Stepan, 1996). An argument can be made that democratization was not the goal of individuals who participated in their countries' anti-government protests during the Arab Spring period, but that their grievances and aspirations were more closely aligned with liberalization. However, discussions of liberalization by scholars such as Linz and Stepan are underdeveloped because the focus is placed so heavily on democratization. Furthermore, researchers with a specialization in the region, such as Xi Chen and Diana Moss, argue that the emergence of anti-authoritarian protests can destabilize regimes when certain conditions are met; however, this does not necessarily signify a change toward democracy or the functioning of an independent civil society (Chen & Moss, 2018).

The Arab Democracy Deficit

The MENA region is an exception to and challenges the bimodal paradigm. There is a common understanding among scholars and political scientists that the continued absence of democratic regimes in the MENA region is an exception to the globalization of democracy—an "Arab democracy deficit." While it is well-known that this "democracy gap" exists in the MENA region, its root cause is heavily disputed. Some scholars such as Rowley and Smith steadfastly upheld the assertion that Islam is the cause of this democracy deficit, or regard Arab culture as the primary proponent of the large "democracy gap" between Arab and non-Arab states and this display of regional exceptionalism (Rowley & Smith, 2009). However, more nuanced research conducted in the past two decades finds this simplistic analysis to be both harmful to the region and inaccurate of the actual cause of the deficit (Stepan & Robertson, 2003; Springborg, 2007; Diamond, 2010; Ahmed & Capoccia, 2014). Prominent scholar Larry Diamond argues that structural conditions present in the region, such as the political economy, geopolitics, and the existing institutions of individual states, are the true explanatory variables for the Arab democracy deficit and durable authoritarianism (Diamond, 2010; Brownlee, 2007). Similarly, researchers Springborg, Stepan, and Robertson point to aspects such as top-heavy and over-centralized executive branches, weak legislative and judicial branches, large military spending, poor living conditions, and lack of benefits for citizens as collective issues that contribute to enduring authoritarianism in the region (Stepan & Robertson, 2003; Springborg, 2007). Researchers who point to structural conditions as the primary cause of the deficit also

examine the ineffectiveness of looking at electoral competition as the primary indicator of democratic success.

Democratic Institutions

Rather than examining the basic democratic norm of free and fair elections, political scientist Wolfgang Merkel proposes a more exhaustive model: the five interdependent components—democratic elections, political participation rights, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective power to govern—of an "embedded democracy" (Merkel, 2004). In examining the democratic institutions found in an embedded democracy, Merkel aims to go beyond the electoral aspects of democracy in an attempt to capture the complex institutional variation that exists in democratic systems. Elements and norms of democracy, such as the rule of law, checks and balances, societal and electoral accountability, civil rights, political efficacy, and effective power to govern, have been found to curb corruption because they "limit discretionary power and increase the responsibility of political representatives" (Drapalova et al., 2019, p. 4). I examine Merkel's model of an embedded democracy as it creates a more robust understanding of the institutional elements required for the successful implementation of democracy.

Civil & Political Society in Aiding Opposition

One element from Merkel's embedded democracy that I highlight for my research is civil society and its interaction with political society. Civil society and its uniting force can play an instrumental role in the destruction of an authoritarian regime; however, civil society must also be supplemented by political society in order to construct a democracy (Linz & Stepan, 2013). This means that political activists must not only actively oppose the regime, but also form networks in which they can collaborate and mobilize against the regime. However, in the MENA region, it is very difficult to actively oppose and mobilize against the ruling powers. If opposition members participate in elections and choose to take a role in parliament, they risk becoming coopted or appearing to the public as a regime sell-out. And if activists stand against corrupt electoral and parliamentary politics, they lose a chance to potentially influence the actual institutions from the inside (Diamond, 2010). Consequently, divisions among opposition groups on political agenda, mobilization tactics, and organizational efforts divide and tear them from

within, leaving them incapable of uniting in full force against the authoritarian regime in place, as occurred in the MENA region following the uprisings. Thus, one of Merkel's most vital components of embedded democracy is unmet in the MENA region. Without having the political culture to support it, democracy simply cannot exist or persist. "The exceptionalism of the [MENA region] lies not so much in the absent prerequisites of democracy as in present conditions that foster robust authoritarianism and especially a robust and politically tenacious coercive apparatus" (Bellin, 2004, p. 152).

Alternate Framework: The Authoritarian-Democratic Hybrid Regime

Thus far, I have discussed the challenges of the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm, specifically, its failure to account for the grievances and motivations that led the Arab Spring's participants to mobilize. I argued that the anti-government protests were not advocating for democracy but against "rampant corruption and the failure of the political elite to address long-standing economic challenges" (Jamal & Robbins, 2022): that it was "a movement born out of grievances, not aspirations" (Huang, 2022). In the following section, I discuss a contemporary alternate framework that recognizes the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm's ineffectiveness at truly capturing the way in which governing systems operate, and seeks to develop a more holistic analysis.

Research on democratization had identified five regime types prior to the Arab Spring: democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian, and sultanistic (Linz & Stepan, 1996). However, an additional sixth regime type was introduced following the popular uprisings: the authoritarian-democratic hybrid (Linz & Stepan, 2013). This became relevant due to the unusual conditions present in the MENA region. Countries' major actors believe they will lose their legitimacy, both with international actors and in-state audiences, if they do not uphold the core features of democracy—such as elections—but also believe that authoritarian-level controls are necessary for their continued legitimacy (Linz & Stepan, 2013). The MENA region posed a challenge to political science scholars' bimodal way of understanding systems of governance, compelling them to incorporate this unusual archetype. The idea behind hybrid regimes forces scholars and policymakers to "abandon a worldview based on a simple dichotomy between autocracy and democracy, and to develop new analytical tools that respond to the increasing

complexity in the way that politics works around the world" (Pop-Eleches and Robertson, 2015, p. 145).

The literature's contemporary acceptance of "hybrid regimes" speaks against the strictly bimodal framework previously established, and supports the argument made herein that this paradigm imposes limits on analysis of the region. Hybrid regimes are nevertheless rarely incorporated in discussions on systems of governance, perhaps indicating that the bimodal paradigm had pervasively spread and captured the collective understanding. My research is critical of the paradigm and analyzes narratives from Tunisia and Libya because they exist on the extreme ends of this framework—Tunisia is believed to be a democratic success and Libya is regarded as a failed case. However, I argue that this framing is insufficient and fails to capture the intricacies and complexities of the movements. A visual representation of the wide range of governance found across regimes globally can be seen below (see Figure 2). This section develops how hybrid regimes operate specifically in the MENA region.

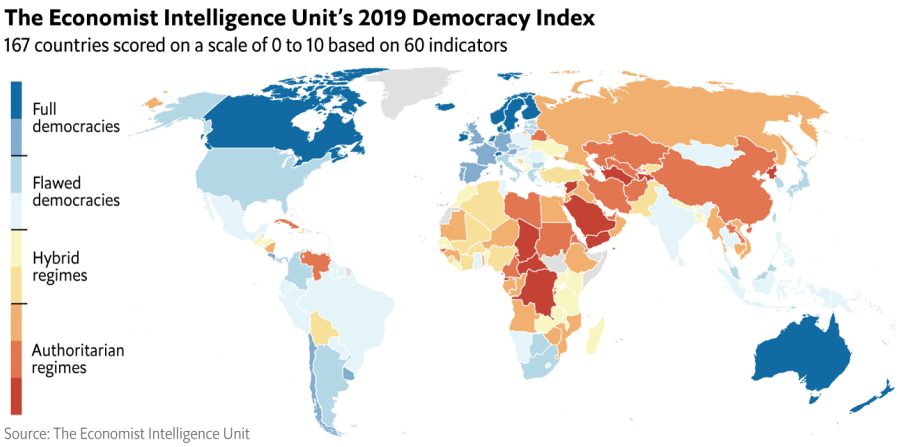

Figure 2: The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2019 Democracy Index, source: EIU 2019 Democracy Index

The Ruling Bargain

The term "ruling bargain" is a metaphor used by political scientists to refer to the accommodation reached between states and the citizens they govern, built on implicit and unspoken assumptions (Kamrava & Hamid, 2014). States and their ruling governments present themselves as defenders of the "national interest," providing security; social benefits for their citizens such as subsidized housing, free education, medical benefits, and subsidies on basic items like cooking oil and gasoline; economic opportunities; and fulfillment of national aspirations to create a form of authoritarian rule with no questioning of the person in power

(Kamrava & Hamid, 2014). Different actors have different understandings of the ruling bargain, as some aspects were based on formal arrangements or codified in national constitutions, while others were based on informal arrangements and mutual understandings (Kamrava & Hamid, 2014). The ruling bargain was maintained by the regime using fear, coercion, and repression, especially in the years leading up to the uprisings since states could no longer deliver on their promises. MENA leaders such as Mubarak and Ben Ali used the ruling bargain with their people to ensure political cohesion, which came in waves—periods of heightened coercion to occasional piecemeal concessions (Kamrava & Hamid, 2014). The 2011 Arab uprisings represented the collapse of old ruling bargains and the demand for new premises of rule, ones that involved explicit and outright freedoms. "The Arab Spring and the political movements it created were less united by collective democratic goals than they were by a rejection of decades of failed governments" (Katerji, 2020).

The Illusion of Democratic Institutions Under Authoritarian Governance

Most autocracies in the MENA region do not rely on coercion and fear for their survival. Their repression is selective and concealed by semi-democratic norms like representation, consultation, and cooptation (Diamond, 2010). Authoritarian regimes operate in a cyclical manner: when pressure from the opposition is applied, the regime loosens its constraints slightly to allow for more civic activity and a more open electoral process; however, the second political opposition grows and becomes effective, the regime returns to heavy-handed corruption—rigging elections, reducing potential political openings, and employing public arrests and fear tactics to remind their citizens of their power (Diamond, 2010). Thus, authoritarian regimes operate under the guise of electoral legitimacy and persist because there is an illusion of personal freedoms. Furthermore, the push and pull that authoritarian regimes practice when opposition arises is a dangerous balance. While the regime can use an annihilation approach, this risks fueling the movement's participation and radicalization (Chen & Moss, 2018). Mobilization is also oftentimes used by elites themselves as a vehicle to further a particular agenda.

Patrimonialism is when the ruler's authority is based on the personal power they exercise. Sultanism, which is an extreme version of patrimonialism, implies a lack of institutional autonomy within a state. In other words, the ruler's near complete personal discretion allows him

to govern however he pleases, with no checks and balances to control his decision-making, and no well-established institutions in place to limit his power (Linz & Stepan, 2013). The longer totalitarian or sultanistic regimes have had a stronghold in a country, and have had the chance to influence and alter the political culture of society to their liking, the more probable the defects in the consequent mode of rule, especially if it is a transition toward democracy (Merkel, 2004). Prior to 2011, the regimes in Libya, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, and Tunisia all displayed features along the continuum of sultanistic rule. Libya's president, Muammar Qaddafi, was a classic example of a sultanistic ruler: he "created, dismantled, and re-created chains of commands and security structures at will" (Linz & Stepan, 2013). His use of nepotism, cronyism, and patronage to establish almost dynastic successors and put core institutions under his relatives' power enabled him to secure and consolidate power in a sultanistic fashion.

Researchers argue that the "closed polity" approach of social movement studies should be replaced with one that acknowledges authoritarianism's transnational nature (Chen & Moss, 2018). Oftentimes, social movements rely on external allies in the international community to intervene and "name and shame" the regime's repressive practices in aid of the movement. It is a mistake to characterize authoritarian regimes as monolithic and cohesive. Rather, they should be viewed as variable, comprising multiple competing elite groups, who use a range of tactics to repress collective action (Chen & Moss, 2018).

Contemporary research now characterizes pre-2011 rulers in the MENA region as "spin dictators." These rulers manipulate information and consolidate political control under the guise of democratic rule by hiding their violent repression and interacting with the international community (Treisman and Guriev, 2022). Their principal tactic is to conceal autocracy under the guise of formal democratic institutions. While this might seem like a substitution of fear for other tactics, it's possible that dictators have just become more efficient at repression (Treisman and Guriev, 2022). They designed more effective and acceptable instruments of control in order to consolidate power without receiving backlash. Instead of terrorizing their citizens, spin dictators manipulate information and control the population by reshaping their beliefs about the world itself.

However, some dictators garner genuine popular appeal in societies traumatized by turmoil, dysfunction, and injustice, allowing them to rule through the ballot box—electoral authoritarianism (Matovski, 2021). This leads to a lack of vertical accountability of governments

toward their citizens. Dictators are able to justify their rule as a necessary good for the well-being of the country under false promises of resolving political, social, and economic issues present. Institutional maneuvers, such as "managed reform," allow authoritarian regimes to appear to be modernizing or accepting liberalization by adopting the language of political reform to appease opposition, without actually achieving democratic norms (Diamond, 2010). Authoritarian leaders consolidate their power by reforming institutions such as the constitution and electoral system in ways to disadvantage their opposition. Oftentimes, the reforms are carried out under the guise of public good or protecting democracy: economic crises; natural disasters; and security threats like wars, armed insurgencies, or terrorist attacks are used to justify anti-democratic measures (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). This is supported by Tunisia's case currently, as its president Kais Saied made false promises to the Tunisian people that he would bring about democratic changes, all the while slowly consolidating power in his favor systematically (Matovski, 2021). Democracy is thus voluntarily traded away in a pseudo-social contract during times of deep, systemic, and unmanageable upheaval and dysfunction (Matovski, 2021).

Therefore, the way in which authoritarianism operates in the MENA region is more complex than what the bimodal paradigm would imply. This research rejects the bimodal theoretical framework because it fails to capture what exists when authoritarian leaders rule in a seemingly-democratic fashion, while simultaneously establishing the conditions necessary for successful and long-term personalist rule.

The Intersection of Democracy & Corruption

As discussed in the previous section, corruption has the capacity to erode staple democratic institutions like free and fair elections. Furthermore, authoritarian leaders can reform institutions to their liking, enabling them to maintain their stronghold on power. I continue my argument in this section by examining the relationship between democracy and corruption as discussed in the literature.

While democratization is often seen as a guarantee for a decrease in corruption, research findings indicate that is not necessarily the case. Some democracies lack a norm of transparency in their political financing, making them more prone to corruption ("Anti Corruption Module 3," n.d.). Democratic elections can also be rigged, making subtle breaches of democratic institutions

also tip the scales toward corrupt regimes. Research finds that the relationship between corruption and democracy is non-linear and likely follows an inverted U relationship, with both rising up to a point, then declining (Rock, 2007). Furthermore, variation in the form of democratic institutions that exist does not affect the overall amount of corruption that exists, but the types of corruption that are most likely to appear (Stephenson, 2015).

Countries that are in the process of transitioning to democratic governance can also fall victim to corruption because they did not have enough time nor the capacity to develop effective anti-corruption mechanisms, leading them to also have low-performing democratic institutions ("Anti Corruption Module 3," n.d.). This is especially relevant to countries that are in reform periods in which their institutions are rapidly evolving and developing, leading to increased uncertainty. Thus, research argues that it is not democracy in general that reduces corruption, but its particular institutions and processes that have an anti-corruption effect: checks and balances, multiple political parties, and the ability to form opposition groups ("Anti Corruption Module 3," n.d.). Supplemental research also acknowledges the significance of political leadership and historical circumstances that affect transitions from authoritarian rule (Vanhanen, 1992).

In both Tunisia and Libya, the states lacked the institutions necessary to combat the corruption the participants were protesting against. Tunisia lacked well-established political parties, while Libya lacked formal institutions under Qaddafi's personalist rule altogether. Features of autocracies, such as informally defined executive power, limited political pluralism, media control, human rights violations, and military reinforcement of the regime, make it difficult to challenge corrupt governance ("Anti Corruption Module 3," n.d.). Furthermore, the ruling power's "time horizon," or how long he expects to stay in power, affects how willing he is to engage in corrupt activity, and to what extent his corruption will affect the state's institutional arrangements (Stephenson, 2015).

Typically, research that examines the question of democratization and corruption examines the correlation between "democracy," as measured by Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR), and "perceived corruption," as measured by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) (Stephenson, 2015). Studies show that the reliance on perception index scores in relation to democracy may lead researchers to misinterpret a change in the *form* of corruption as a change in the *level* of corruption instead (Stephenson, 2015). Furthermore, evidence shows that perhaps asking if democracy reduces corruption is

incorrect. To combat this, research advocates for the disaggregation of data to accurately form an in-depth analysis of which types of corruption democracy is likely to affect (Stephenson, 2015).

These widely used tools of measurement will be examined in depth in the following chapter, with an emphasis on their impact on the MENA region and their implications for discussions on the Arab Spring. I argue in the next chapter that the FIWR and CPI are ineffective at capturing the actual grievances and motivations of the Arab Spring's participants.

III - DISCUSSION OF THE CPI & FIWR ON THE MENA REGION

In this chapter, I dissect common measures of democracy and corruption and explore the limitations they pose on the motivations and grievances of participants in the Arab Spring protests. I explain that the framing used by the literature interacts with quantitative measures of democracy and corruption and creates a narrative that is unrepresentative of ordinary citizens in the MENA region during the first wave period of the Arab Spring. By examining the most popularly used indices to measure corruption and democracy—Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) and Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) respectively—I argue that quantitative measures fail to capture the experiences of the actual citizens in the countries they score and rank. Furthermore, I display that the quantitative indices used to measure democracy and corruption risk mistaking outcomes for motivations. By measuring states as more or less free, observers might be inclined to assume that Freedom House's definition of democracy was the main goal of these social movements. Similarly, they might assume that Transparency International's measure of corruption truly captured the lived experiences of ordinary citizens.

Measure of Corruption: Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI)

What is the CPI?

The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) is an aggregate index annually published by the non-governmental organization Transparency International ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.). The CPI defines corruption as an "abuse of entrusted power for private gain" ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.). It has been published every year since 1995 and is the most widely used global corruption ranking in the world ("The ABCs of the CPI," n.d.). It ranks countries based on their "perceived levels of public sector corruption," which is determined by experts and

business people from multiple sources, and not based on the public's experiences ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.). The index operates by evaluating *perceived* levels of corruption because corruption implies that the activity entails a level of criminality and illegality, and its doer is deliberately keeping it hidden. Hence, corruption is difficult to measure, as it is only exposed when there is a public scandal, investigation, or prosecution for illegal activities.

The CPI scores each individual country by combining at least 3 data sources from 13 different corruption surveys and assessments ("The ABCs of the CPI," n.d.). The data sources are collected from a variety of independent and reputable sources, including the African Development Bank, Bertelsmann Foundation, Economist Intelligence Unit, Freedom House, Global Insight, International Institute for Management Development, Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, The PRS Group, Inc., World Bank, World Economic Forum, World Justice Project ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.). The surveys specifically examine the following manifestations of public sector corruption: "bribery; diversion of public funds; officials using their public office for private gain without facing consequences; the ability of governments to contain corruption in the public sector; excessive red tape in the public sector which may increase opportunities for corruption; nepotistic appointments in the civil service; laws ensuring that public officials must disclose their finances and potential conflicts of interest; legal protection for people who report cases of bribery and corruption [(whistle-blowers)]; state capture by narrow vested interests; and access to information on public affairs/government activities" ("The ABCs of the CPI," n.d.). A country's score is based on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means a perceived level of high public sector corruption, while 100 means very clean ("The ABCs of the CPI," n.d.). After each country is individually ranked using the index's multiple data sources, they are ranked from least corrupt to most corrupt.

In 2011, the CPI measured the perceived levels of public sector corruption in 183 countries and territories around the world ("2011 CPI," 2011). During that year, the CPI scores were simplified and scored on a scale of 0-10, with 0 still indicating very corrupt and 10 indicating very clean. The 0-100 scale was newly established in 2012 in order to rescale for a global mean and standard deviation ("The ABCs of the CPI," n.d.). From 2012 onward, the scores can be compared due to the update in methodology, with the modern scale of 0-100. Unfortunately, with the eruption of uprisings in the MENA region beginning in 2011, contemporary scores cannot be compared to pre-2011 scores. To combat this, my research will

only look at the 2011 scores which capture corruption in 2010, therefore reflecting the corruption in the region immediately preceding the uprisings. The MENA region's 2011 CPI scores and rankings can be seen below (see Figure 3). Among those rankings, MENA countries displayed a wide range, with Qatar ranked at 22 and Iraq ranked at 175. Furthermore, the region's scores vary greatly, with Qatar's score at 7.2 and Iraq's at 1.8. The region as a whole also presents some of the lowest CPI scores as compared to other regions categorized by Transparency International (see Figure 4).

Because of the pervasive and often concealed effects of authoritarianism, the CPI rankings and scores are often misrepresentative of the actual events that occur within the borders of a nation-state, especially in the MENA region. For example, the Gulf States tend to score relatively better on the CPI than other MENA states; however, the Gulf States have a history of only distributing wealth to a select few, while extreme poverty and human rights violations run rampant (Hassan, 2011). Furthermore, repressive authoritarian regimes do not allow for criticisms of the ruling class, meaning that the CPI scores indicate a level of security to the outside world, while the lived experiences of the citizens of the country are not taken into account in policy-making decisions. Another example is Lebanon, which tends to score higher than most states. Lebanon's civil society exists on a more institutional level than most MENA states; however, its deeply entrenched nepotistic networks make it difficult to actually exact change without connections (Hassan, 2011). Finally, CPI scores only indicate when corruption is an issue, but do not provide solutions or take into account or create reform or anti-corruption programs and institutional solutions. The CPI actually found that perceived corruption in MENA states increased after the outbreak of protests in the first wave of the Arab Spring. Egypt dropped six places and ranked 118th out of 176, Syria fell 15 places to 144th, Tunisia fell two places to 75th, and Morocco fell 8 places to 88th (Jones, 2012). The decline of many states' rankings does not indicate an increase in corruption, but rather an increased awareness and acknowledgment of the issue of corruption. Shockingly, Libya's ranking actually climbed eight places to 160th following its civil war outbreak (Jones, 2012). This indicates that the CPI does not always necessarily capture the essence of the experience of living in a state because Libya is now labeled as one of the Arab Spring's archetypal "failed attempts to democratize." While the issue of corruption becomes apparent with a bad score, it does not predict potential protests or uprisings against corruption or the grievances and motivations of those involved.

Rank	Country	Score
22	Qatar	7.2
28	UAE	6.8
36	Israel	5.8
46	Bahrain	5.1
50	Oman	4.8
54	Kuwait	4.6
56	Jordan	4.5
57	Saudi Arabia	4.4
73	Tunisia	3.8
80	Morocco	3.4
112	Egypt	2.9
112	Algeria	2.9
120	Iran	2.7
129	Syria	2.6
134	Lebanon	2.5
164	Yemen	2.1
168	Libya	2
175	Iraq	1.8

Figure 3: The 2011 CPI Rankings & Scores of the MENA Region, source: Transparency International

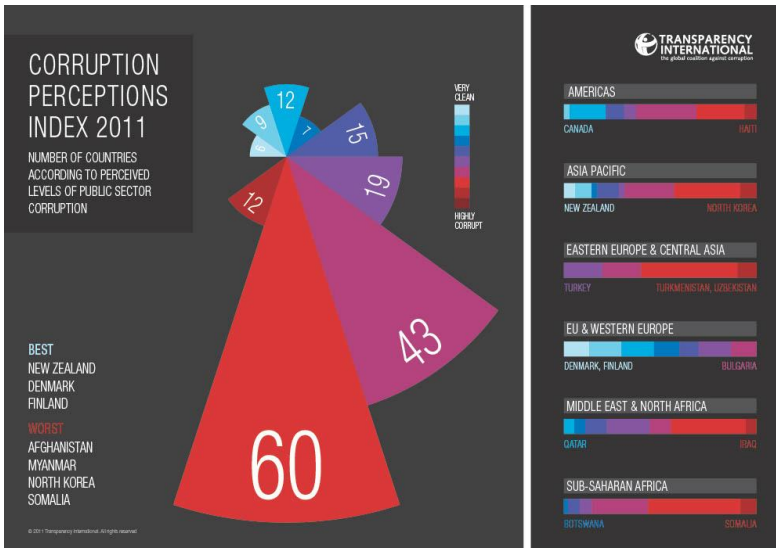

Figure 4: The 2011 CPI Infographic, source: Freedom House

Criticisms & Limitations of the CPI

Although the CPI is a helpful measure in quantifying an otherwise difficult concept to calculate, it is widely criticized among scholars of all disciplines. First and foremost, corruption is a very complex concept, too complex to be captured by a single score due to its variability in each state and the way it interacts with individual states' political, social, and economic structures. The CPI is technically a "poll of polls," acting as a composite index that combines data from multiple different sources that assess corruption, meaning that Transparency International does not actually independently collect its own data (Hough, 2021; Lancaster & Montinola, 2001). The index also only measures perceptions of *public sector* corruption, which ignores the private sector (Cobham, 2013; Hough, 2021). This means that private business corruption, which heavily impacts the public, is not accounted for by the CPI's scores and rankings. Some measures of corruption that are not included are "tax fraud, money laundering, financial secrecy, or illicit flows of money" ("Transparency International Corruption Research," n.d.). Finally, by measuring *perceptions* of corruption, rather than *corruption itself*, the index could potentially just be reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.).

Furthermore, in measuring perceived corruption, people's views on corruption are being captured, which may not be representative or informed by actual experiences of corruption. Research conducted by Byrne, Arnold, and Nagano (2010) indicates that perception-based and experience-based surveys display vast discrepancies in the extent of corruption in a country when compared ("Anti-Corruption Module 1," n.d.). Cobham makes a similar argument stating, "What's missing from this vicious cycle is not only evidence of actual corruption in Country X, but any information about how corruption is or isn't affecting the citizens of Country X" (Cobham, 2013). He advocates for the inclusion of the experiences of a group of a country's citizens because if they are taken into consideration, we might have a very different understanding of corruption.

Cobham and Hough go so far as to state that the CPI should be dropped by Transparency International because it depends on powerful and misleading elite bias, consequently failing to capture citizens' experiences and incentivizing inappropriate policy responses ("Corruption Perceptions Index," n.d.; Cobham, 2013; Hough, 2021). As a quantitative measure that incorporates only the perceptions of corruption, not only does the CPI dismiss factual evidence

of corruption in favor of perception, but it also asks the same kinds of people for their perceptions (Cobham, 2013). There is an 80-100% correlation between the individuals who are interviewed across the various data sources that the CPI aggregates. This means that, while the CPI aggregates its scores by combining at least 3 data sources from 13 different corruption surveys and assessments, the individuals who are interviewed in each of the 13 surveys and assessments tend to overlap. Therefore, the CPI's results reflect the opinion of a very narrow slice of the population, raising real concerns about representativeness. Elite perceptions also distort the experiences of the country's citizens when analyzed and ranked using this method. Aggregating the same group of people's perceptions of corruption develops scores that lack diversity (Cobham, 2013). Some expert assessments are actually conducted by experts that are not from the state in question ("Anti-Corruption Module 1," n.d.). Moreover, media coverage at the annual release time of the CPI affects countries' economic development and their capacity to fight poverty ("Anti-Corruption Module 1," n.d.).

Hough argues that, while the CPI is a great tool for ensuring anti-corruption efforts continue to be a priority in public policy agendas, it is skewed to favor particular types of states (Hough, 2021). The best-performing and top-ranking countries are liberal democracies, with a free press, independent judiciaries, and a norm of transparency when it comes to government spending and funding (Hough, 2021). A state's position in the CPI is only relative to the other countries included, and every country has corruption to some extent (Hough, 2021). Therefore, as most states in the MENA region are not liberal democracies, their scores remain low and stagnant. The "anti-corruption efforts" of the CPI do not matter to authoritarian leaders, who face no real or threatening opposition to their hegemonic power. Furthermore, MENA states have little to no democratic institutions or norms in place, which promptly places them at a disadvantage in indices with a neo-liberal bias.

A Different Approach: Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB)

The Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) is another measure of corruption conducted by Transparency International, which operates using national public opinion poll data and surveys approximately 1,000 respondents per country (Cobham, 2013). While questions about GCB's methodology also exist as it pertains to the barometer's low quality and low cost, its key strength is its ability to measure ordinary people's experiences with corruption (Hardoon & Johnson,

2012; Cobham, 2013). Although the GCB is not perfect, it proves to be a better alternative to the CPI, because it actually consults "a more broadly representative group of citizens in order to try to better understand the actual experience of corruption in different countries" (Cobham, 2013). The GCB was introduced in 2003 to supplement the CPI by including surveys from ordinary citizens from each state to capture their experiences and perceptions of corruption ("Transparency International Corruption Research," n.d.). While the CPI is an aggregate measure of corruption, the GCB allows for the disaggregation of data by variables like gender, income, age, and urban or rural residence (Hardoon & Johnson, 2012). Unlike the CPI, the GCB also captures ordinary people's views and perceptions on the state of corruption, how it affects them, and their willingness to stand up against it (Hardoon & Johnson, 2012). Capturing ordinary people's experiences of corruption rather than expert or business-based perceptions is especially relevant for countries that lack formal accountability processes and transparency, where people's voices would otherwise go unheard (Hardoon & Johnson, 2012). However, the GCB can only be used as a supplement to indices like the CPI because it lacks measures on the effectiveness of specific intrastate reforms or organizations (Hardoon & Johnson, 2012).

Measure of Democracy: Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR)

What is the FIWR?

The Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) is an annual global report published by the non-governmental organization Freedom House ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). The FIWR measures the levels of political rights and civil liberties in nation-states and significant disputed territories around the world ("Freedom in the World," n.d.; "Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). It was first published in 1972 in Freedom House's *Freedom at Issue* journal, and first appeared in book form in 1978 ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). Since then, it has been published annually and its rankings, political rights scores, and civil liberties scores are the most widely used sources by political researchers conducting analyses on democracy and political freedoms worldwide. It operates under the assumption that "freedom for all people is best achieved in liberal democratic societies" ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). This standard is grounded in the basic standards of political rights and civil liberties found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and applied to all countries and territories, irrespective of variations like

geographic location, ethnic or religious composition, or level of economic development (Puddington, 2011).

The FIWR is produced annually by a team of in-house and external analysts and expert advisers ranging from organizations like academics, think tanks, and human rights communities ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). For example, its 2023 edition was produced with the help of 128 analysts and approximately 40 advisers ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). Sources used include news articles, academic analyses and journals, reports from NGOs, individual professional contacts, and on-the-ground research such as public opinion polls ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). Using these sources, the analysts then score each country or territory based on the conditions or events that take place during the coverage period ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). Finally, the analysts' proposed scores are discussed and defended at a series of Freedom House-organized review meetings, their goals being methodological consistency, intellectual rigor, and balanced and unbiased judgments ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.).

The FIWR uses a two-part system: first, it scores each country 0-4 points for each of the 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil rights indicators; second, it combines the overall scores of each indicator and assigns a status of "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free" ("Freedom in the World Research Methodology," n.d.). Political rights ratings are based on an assessment of three subcategories: electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and functioning of government (Puddington, 2011). Civil liberties ratings are based on an assessment of four subcategories: freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy and individual rights (Puddington, 2011). The FIWR also assigns upward or downward trend arrows to specific countries that displayed either positive or negative trends that were present but not significant enough to result in a ratings change from the previous year (Puddington, 2011).

In 2011, the FIWR analyzed and ranked 194 countries and 14 select related and disputed territories, 18 of which belonged to the MENA region (Puddington, 2011). The 2011 FIWR presents the MENA region's political and civil climate immediately prior to the 2011 uprisings since it captures 2010 data. While each state or territory was individually scored and ranked, regional patterns and region-to-region variation become apparent when the scores are grouped

accordingly. The MENA region displayed the most skewed range of scores, with only 1 Free country and 14 Not Free countries (see Figure 5). With 78% of the region's states categorized as Not Free, the MENA region has the largest Not Free category, with Sub-Saharan Africa coming closest to it at 35% (see Figure 6). Only 3 states were labeled as Partly Free: Kuwait, Morocco, and Lebanon (see Figure 7). This displays the wide disparity between regions in the world. Of the 47 countries that were designated as Not Free worldwide, 9 were given the FIWR's lowest possible rating for both political rights and civil liberties—the "Worst of the Worst" (Puddington, 2011). Of the MENA region's states, Libya and Syria were part of the "Worst of the Worst" according to the 2011 FIWR. While the FIWR does explain its status, rating, and trend changes for the countries that experienced year-to-year variations, the explanation is typically one sentence long with simplistic descriptions. The following is an example of Iran's downward trend variation description in FIWR's 2011 edition:

> Iran received a downward trend arrow due to the rising economic and political clout of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, extensive efforts by the government to restrict freedom of assembly, and the sentencing of the entire leadership of the Baha'i community to lengthy prison terms. (Puddington, 2011)

The FIWR fails to capture when a country's citizens are fighting *for* freedom. The FIWR does a great job of presenting a lack of political rights and civil liberties that exist within a state's borders; however, its numeric score fails to capture the intricacies of living under a regime that suppresses political rights and civil liberties. For example, Tunisia experienced one of the largest single-year improvements from the 2011-2012 FIWRs in the history of the report because it was able to achieve a free and fair democratic election (Puddington, 2012). However, contemporary Tunisia suffers immensely from executive power consolidation and renewed concerns of nepotism and corruption under its current president Kais Saied. Thus, the report's perceived success or failure of democratic efforts does not necessarily capture the concerns and grievances of those who participated in the Arab Spring. Those who suffered under years of oppression and human rights violations were seeking justice and freedom, and not the democratic institution of free and fair elections.

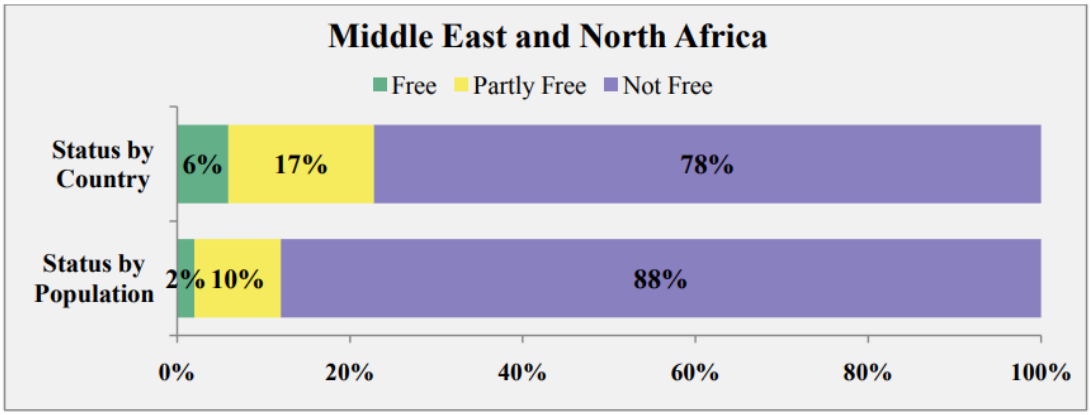

Figure 5: Freedom House's 2011 MENA Region Data, source: Freedom House's 2011 FIWR

REGIONAL PATTERNS

	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
Americas	24 (69%)	10 (29%)	1 (3%)
Asia-Pacific	16 (41%)	15 (38%)	8 (21%)
Central & Eastern Europe/Former Soviet Union	13 (45%)	9 (31%)	7 (24%)
Middle East and North Africa	1 (6%)	3 (17%)	14 (78%)
Sub-Saharan Africa	9 (19%)	22 (46%)	17 (35%)
Western Europe	24 (96%)	1 (4%)	0 (0%)

Figure 6: Freedom House's 2011 Regional Patterns Table, source: Freedom House's 2011 FIWR

Country	Freedom Status	Political Rights	Civil Liberties
Israel	Free	1	2
Kuwait	Partly Free	4	5
Morocco	Partly Free	5	4
Lebanon	Partly Free	5	3
Qatar	Not Free	6	5
UAE	Not Free	6	5
Bahrain	Not Free	6	5
Oman	Not Free	6	5
Jordan	Not Free	6	5
Iraq	Not Free	5	6
Tunisia	Not Free	7	5
Egypt	Not Free	6	5
Algeria	Not Free	6	5
Iran	Not Free	6	6
Syria	Not Free	7	6
Yemen	Not Free	6	5
Libya	Not Free	7	7
Iraq	Not Free	5	6
Saudi Arabia	Not Free	7	6

Figure 7: The 2011 FIWR Rankings of the MENA Region, source: Freedom House's 2011 FIWR

Criticisms & Limitations of the FIWR

Similar to the criticisms that exist for the CPI, scholarship exists on the limitations of the FIWR. Ilya Lozovsky, a corruption and democracy researcher with OCCRP, discusses the report's limitations as well as its intended purpose. First, just like the CPI is catered to and favors liberal democracies, Freedom House also has a neo-liberal bias (Lozovsky, 2016). Because of its standard that freedom is best achieved in liberal democratic societies, the index tends to assign better status labels and higher political rights and civil liberties ratings to countries that are stereotypically democratic or hold democratic norms and institutions. Second, many scholars and researchers have criticized the annual report's biases and methodological problems: conceptual bias, faulty data collection, and oversimplified results (Lozovsky, 2016). In deciding that the

FIWR will measure specific criteria that pertain to "freedom" or "democracy," the careful and systematic approach of the report ends up being subjective and relative to the views of the review committee. Thus, the report's neutrality is disputed due to the systematic bias and neo-liberal slant present in its ratings ("Freedom in the World," n.d.). However, Lozovsky argues that the Freedom House FIWR scores were never meant to cater to research but to act as a tool for advocacy and keep discussions of freedom and democracy on foreign policy agendas (Lozovsky, 2016). This is a similar intention to the CPI because it comparably advocates for anti-corruption efforts in discussions of future policy.

A Different Approach: Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)

One potential alternative to the FIWR is Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem), which provides a disaggregated dataset intending to reflect the complexity of the concept of democracy, one that goes beyond the presence of free and fair elections. The five high-level principles of democracy that V-Dem considers are electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian. It is an independently owned institution, which prides itself on academic freedom and integrity, and conducts its analysis according to V-Dem protocols and methods ("Funders," n.d.). It receives primary funding from the University of Gothenburg, and donation-based funding from a multitude of respected and valued institutions and research grants. It began collecting V-Dem indicators and data in 1789 and covers about 80 polities with its 200 V-Dem indicators ("Historical V-Dem," n.d.). V-Dem uses experts' extensive conceptual and case knowledge to analyze and assess the directly unobservable features of democracy (Marquardt, 2023). With an understanding that rating concepts require judgment, they address potential bias concerns by aggregating the expert-coded data with a measurement model to account for uncertainty about their estimates (Marquardt, 2023). Using this process, their model algorithmically estimates both the degree to which an expert is reliable compared to other experts, in addition to the degree to which their perception of the response scale differs from other experts (Marquardt, 2023). This overlapping code helps scale differences in perception across experts and makes for a more reliable estimation process (Marquardt, 2023). Furthermore, it does not seek to achieve the impossible task of creating a single measure of freedom, but divides "democracy" into multiple high-level principles to make it more expansive. Thus, some researchers prefer measures like V-Dem over the FIWR due to its more advanced and detailed method of measuring democracy.

However, this research project looks to develop an even deeper understanding of ordinary citizens' experiences in the MENA region, consequently looking at first-hand accounts and personal narratives to develop qualitative data rather than quantitative.

What Can Be Done Differently?

While the intention behind quantitative measures like the CPI and FIWR is to be representative of the population in the countries they score and rank, the conditions that sparked the Arab Spring were unique and indices failed to help scholars anticipate its occurrence. Furthermore, the group of people making the very risky choice to participate in protests against their repressive and corrupt authoritarian regimes are not exactly representative. Therefore, while these kinds of indices can tell us something about baseline levels of perceptions of corruption or levels of democracy, they do not capture what it is like to live under a corrupt regime, or how that might drive someone to put themselves at political and physical risk by participating in a protest.

This project was intentionally designed to capture participants' lived experiences leading up to and during the protests by analyzing and coding their own stories in their own words. This was done to counter the blandness of reducing perceptions of corruption or levels of democracy to a simple number. First-hand accounts offer a level of nuance, depth, and humanity that indices just do not capture.

Other researchers have approached the Arab Spring by using similar tactics. One example of such is "The Study of Democratization and the Arab Spring" conducted by Ahmed and Capoccia, in which they propose a theoretical framework for the analysis of the Arab Spring that utilizes both contemporary democratization theory and comparative-historical literature on the political development of the MENA region (Ahmed and Capoccia, 2014). Their research findings approached the Arab Spring with more breadth because of their utilization of comparative-historical literature to develop a clear and accurate causal framework.

IV - METHODS

Overview of This Study

This study analyzes participants' grievances and motivations to act as stated within participants' own stories, in their own words: an interpretive analysis of qualitative first-hand accounts from the time period. The goal in doing so is to supplement the prior critical review of both the democratization literature and the indices with evidential findings that indicate discrepancies and gaps in the analytical lens widely used by social scientists.

While the Arab Spring was a region-wide phenomenon, I choose to approach my research with the objective of developing a more nuanced and in-depth evaluation of the Arab Spring's outbreak. Thus, I focus on Tunisia and Libya as case studies. I select these specific countries because prominent scholarship often identifies them as stark examples of democratic "success" and "failure" respectively. This occurs because of the expectations previously highlighted as a result of the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm.[2] Tunisia is viewed as the country that came closest to emerging from the Arab Spring as a full democracy, with regular elections and competing political parties (Jamal & Robbins, 2022). On the other hand, Libya's civil-war outbreak, armed militia in-fighting, involvement of outside powers, Islamic State's influence, and contemporary political struggles make it one of the countries in the region that continue to struggle the most post-Spring (Wehrey, 2016). In analyzing these two countries, my aim is to deconstruct this bimodal standard of analysis and demonstrate the similarities in the participants' experiences living under oppressive autocratic regimes. Furthermore, I identify differences in the way corruption and oppression operated within the individual states, and how this variation played a role in the public perception of the movement's "success" or "failure."

Data Collection

During my initial data collection, I read approximately 100 first-hand accounts and personal narratives found in sources like books, journal articles, blog entries, and social media posts. I used resources and databases like the UCI Library, Google Scholar, JSTOR, Project Muse, and Academic Search Complete to find accounts and narratives. I then narrowed my sources down to only books and articles to establish a reliable and cohesive collection of accounts. The specific time period I looked at was from 2010-2012, with my focus being on

[2] See Chapter II's "Bimodal Autocracy-Democracy Framework" section for further discussion of this framework.

citizens of Tunisia and Libya. My primary sources for these accounts were Alsaleh's *Voices of the Arab Spring: Personal Stories from the Arab Revolutions* and Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, and Roderick's *Diaries of an Unfinished Revolution: Voices from Tunis to Damascus*. I also looked at an array of articles from publications such as *Al Jazeera* and *BBC News* and supplemented the narratives found in the books with additional journalistic first-hand accounts.

The two main sources of first-hand accounts and personal narratives that I use to analyze participants' stories also had a similar intention to my own research when collecting accounts and publishing them as a collection of narratives.[3] Alsaleh's book was published with simple edits, but the overall intention was that it was "written by the activists and participants themselves [...] to offer readers a deeper understanding of the motives, activities, and lessons learned from the revolutions" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 1). They were collected to be representative of the participants' "emotional, psychological, and cultural foundations and assumptions" and to "give voices to the people who lived under regimes that long oppressed them and describe the social, political, and historical context of the Arab Spring" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 1). His goal was to "add a human element to concepts of narrative and social movements that reflect real-life experiences" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 1). Similarly, Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, and Roderick's book was edited with the purpose of collecting "accounts [that] offer us a profound insight into the condition in which these societies lived, burdened as they were by dictatorships dressed up as civil bureaucracies" (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 2). They describe that, "through personal experience and human detail these testimonies give a sense of how the movements that became revolutions first began" (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 6). Just as these books did, I was able to gather a much deeper understanding of participants' experiences leading up to and during the protests by collecting several narratives, coding each individual narrative, and breaking down the stories told within.

I could not go back in time to interview protest participants from Libya and Tunisia, and I also could not presently travel to Libya and Tunisia and interview citizens about their experiences from that time, so my "participants" are those who told their stories in the two books and various journal articles. My participants were 20 Tunisian and Libyan citizens: 10 Tunisian

[3] This references Alsaleh, A. (2015). *Voices of the Arab Spring: Personal Stories from the Arab Revolutions*. Columbia University Press, and Al-Zubaidi, L., Cassel, M., & Roderick, N. C. (2013). *Diaries of an Unfinished Revolution: Voices from Tunis to Damascus*. Penguin Group.

and 10 Libyan citizens.[4] My sample included 12 men and 8 women, whose ages ranged from 21-48. However, many of the participants did not list their ages, so the age range is a rough estimate based on the ages that were provided at the time of publication. The participants were citizens from all walks of life including activists, artists, journalists, militia fighters, writers, judges, businessmen, lawyers, healthcare workers, state workers, students, and teachers that played an active role in shaping their respective revolutions.

Categories and Indicators

The following chapter breaks down participants' stories by analyzing and coding their grievances and reasons for engaging in political uprisings. On my first pass, I read these narratives to get a sense of the range of experiences and grievances people shared. Then, I identify themes within the stories told by the participants in first-hand accounts and personal narratives. These became what I call *"indicators."* Finally, I used the indicators as evidence of the *"broader categories"* I identified—corruption, quality of life, safety and security, human rights, and finally political aspirations and goals.

A narrative got coded as being about *"corruption"* if it discussed any of the following: bribery, exploitation, favoritism, and institutional or systemic corruption; about *"quality of life"* if it discussed unemployment, poverty, and rising prices; about *"safety and security"* if it discussed physical threats of violence, unlawful detainment, torture, or use of force against opposition by security apparatus, policy, or military; about *"human rights"* if it discussed repression and censorship, oppression and violation of human rights, and lack of political, civil, or religious freedoms; and about *"political aspirations and goals"* if it discussed desires for freedoms such expression/speech, assembly/association, and opposition of corrupt regime, and a desire for justice, freedom, and human dignity (see Figure 8).

[4] See Appendix for a detailed chart of the 20 participants and their names, ages, occupations, gender, country of origin, and source in which their narrative was found.

Broader Categories	Indicators Within Each Category
Corruption	- Bribery - Exploitation - Favoritism (nepotism, cronyism, & patronage) - Institutional or systemic corruption
Quality of Life	- Unemployment - Poverty - Rising prices
Safety & Security	- Physical threats of violence - Unlawful detainment - Torture - Use of force against opposition by security apparatus, police, or military
Human Rights	- Repression and censorship - Oppression and violations of human rights - Lack of political, civil, or religious freedoms
Political Aspirations & Goals	- Freedoms (expression/speech, assembly/association, & opposition of corrupt regime) - Desire for justice, freedom, and **human dignity** - Lack of desire for democratic institutions

Figure 8: Themes & their broader categories which were found in first-hand accounts and personal narratives of participants in Tunisia and Libya.

When coding for each of the five categories, I analyzed the individual stories told within each account to understand which grievances were mentioned most frequently. Out of 20 total accounts, 5 mentioned corruption, 5 mentioned an unjust quality of life, 8 mentioned a lack of safety and security, and 10 mentioned violations of human rights as grievances that motivated them to protest. 12 of the 20 accounts expressed aspirations and desires for justice, freedom, and human dignity (see Figure 9). None of the accounts listed democratic institutions as a desire. The account that came closest to doing so was Tunisian French teacher Nouha Tourki's. She described the first election immediately following Ben Ali's ousting as the first time she voted "in complete transparency and integrity," and stated her satisfaction with this step toward democracy ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011). However, she did not list this as a desire pre-protests, but as a welcome advancement away from the previous regime.

Category	Total Mentions
Corruption	5
Quality of Life	5
Safety & Security	8
Human Rights	10
Political Aspirations & Goals	12

Figure 9: Thesis Findings by Category as Mentioned in First-Hand Accounts

Rather than analyze and code the narratives mechanically, such as by identifying specific words or phrases, I read and dissected the content found within the accounts. I did so by breaking down the stories told within each account, understanding the elements discussed within each story, then coding them along one of the indicators listed below. Once I coded the story along one of the indicators, I was able to identify the broader category that the story fell under. This enabled my analysis of the narratives to be detailed and focused on the message the participants were conveying in their writing. I also approached the narratives with the knowledge that they were originally written in Arabic by the participants, then translated into English by the editors of the publication they were featured in. Additionally, I understood the intended meaning behind certain translated excerpts because of my fluency in both English and Arabic, which allowed me to develop my coding schema with the original narrative in mind.

Limitations

As does every research effort, this study has three main limitations. First, the participants' first-hand experiences were not collected through direct interviews, but through sources that collected and published them as a collective of narratives or as part of a news article. Therefore, my research relies on the data collection of others. However, I specifically chose Alsaleh's and Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, and Roderick's books as sources because, like my research, their intention was to develop a deeper understanding of the Arab Spring by learning from the participants themselves.[5] Second, due to time constraints, I was only able to analyze and code 24 accounts from Tunisian and Libyan citizens. In a research setting that allowed for more time and provided funding, I would have traveled directly to Tunisia and Libya, conducted interviews with

[5] See Chapter III's "What Can Be Done Differently?" section for further discussion of the sources' intended goals.

participants, and aimed for a larger sample size to analyze and code. Finally, there were language barriers and limitations in my efforts to collect more narratives. Not many libraries have access to publications in Arabic relevant to my study. Consequently, the narratives I gathered were translated into English by editors, and not direct first-hand accounts delivered in Arabic by the participants themselves. Because of these factors, my data and its findings cannot be generalized to the broader public in Tunisia and Libya but can aid in future research conducted on a larger scale.

The Arab Barometer

In an effort to support my research and bridge the aforementioned limitations, I also supplement first-hand account and narrative findings with quantitative data captured through public opinion surveys conducted by the Arab Barometer, specifically its third-wave data that surveyed respondents in 12 MENA countries from 2012-2014.[6] The Arab Barometer prides itself on being "the longest-standing and the largest repository of publicly available data on the views of men and women in the MENA region" ("About Arab Barometer," n.d.). As a non-profit and non-partisan organization, its survey findings "give a voice to ordinary Arab citizens and allow their views to inform national conversations and policy debates" and serve as a " valuable resource for research that seeks not only to describe but also to explain public attitudes on important issues affecting the Middle East and North Africa" ("About Arab Barometer," n.d.). It does so by conducting "rigorous nationally representative public opinion surveys across the Arab world" ("About Arab Barometer," n.d.).

Unlike typical quantitative measures like the CPI and FIWR, the Arab Barometer's survey questions engage with citizens' perceptions of the conditions under which they live. For example, the Arab Barometer dedicates a portion of its survey to questions regarding participants' trust in the government. Furthermore, it gauges citizens' level of trust in the municipality, like local governance, and security apparatus groups, like the military and police force. I use data from the Arab Barometer surveys to supplement or triangulate my interpretive analysis of first-hand accounts of the Arab Spring from participants. Unlike CPI, the Arab

[6] The Arab Barometer's Wave II data analyzed 2010-2011. However, the MENA countries included in this survey were only Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, and Tunisia; thus, Libya was not included in the second wave. To mitigate this gap, this research specifically uses the Arab Barometer's Wave III data, which interviewed participants from 2012-2014, because it includes data from both Tunisia and Libya.

Barometer surveys ordinary citizens, rather than elites. The Arab Barometer captures a wide swath of public opinion regarding trust in government, but, like other large-scale surveys, does not specifically focus on participants in social movements, whose grievances may not be identical to those of the general population. Nonetheless, it represents a reasonable way of charting prevailing public opinion in Libya and Tunisia during this timeframe. In what follows, I dedicate each section to a category and analyze its corresponding indicators by inspecting the stories told by participants that directly express their grievances and motivations to act.

V - ANALYSIS

A. Corruption

Corruption in brief is "a form of dishonesty or a criminal offense which is undertaken by a person or an organization which is entrusted in a position of authority, in order to acquire illicit benefits or abuse power for one's personal gain" ("Corruption," n.d.). Typically, corruption is viewed as a form of monetary or financial abuse committed by those in power; however, political corruption is also pervasive, especially in authoritarian governance. This occurs when power is illegitimately used by political leaders in order to benefit their personal interests like through ineffective law enforcement, election fraud, and bribing local and state officials (Benson, 1975). Corruption also ranges from an exchange of small favors, which is petty corruption, to large-scale and widespread government corruption, or grand corruption ("Corruption," n.d.). The main premise is that the corrupt agent uses their authority to negatively impact others, while unfairly benefiting or providing an advantage to a few, including themselves.

In the context of the MENA region, the level of corruption that endures is much broader than the limits of government corruption and expands to state institutions ("Corruption," n.d.). What exists is a political norm that enables corruption by allowing it to operate as a prevalent part of the everyday structure of society—systemic corruption ("Corruption," n.d.). When asked in the Arab Barometer's Third Wave if respondents thought corruption existed within their state institutions, 89.8% of Libyans and 69% of Tunisians said "Yes" (Arab Barometer Wave III).

In both Tunisia and Libya, the autocratic leaders and their families benefited greatly from the unstable institutions in place. Both leaders were also widely known for their practices of favoritism toward family members and close friends. This came about through nepotism, or favoring only relatives in positions of power, cronyism, or favoring only friends in positions of

power, and patronage, or appointing friends and family to high-ranking positions (Aydogan, 2009).

Ben Ali's dictatorship functioned for decades through the corrupt means of obtaining wealth by exploiting the economic system. Ben Ali and his family members owned 220 companies, which controlled 21% of net private sector profits and accounted for 3% of the nation's economic output (Dreusbach & Joyce, 2014). Ben Ali molded economic regulations to meet their companies' needs and structured Tunisia to benefit himself and his allies (Dreusbach & Joyce, 2014).

Qaddafi's regime similarly operated by manipulating weak state institutions and consolidating power into the executive position. Libya also had a unique aspect that enabled Qaddafi's corrupt ways: the "resource curse" (Luciani, 2019). About 80% of Libya's GDP and 99% of its government revenue comes from oil production, and there are no transparency laws in Libya that demand the central bank disclose the government's use of state funds (Thelwell, 2019). This allowed Qaddafi unlimited access to the state's oil revenue. In 2018 alone, the revenue of Libyan foreign exports of oil was $24.5 billion (Thelwell, 2019). Furthermore, Qaddafi's regime accepted billions of dollars in bribes from international wealthy corporations to make illegal deals in Libya's energy sector (Thelwell, 2019).

Therefore, corruption was more deeply entrenched within Libyan governance. Due to the lack of state institutions, Qaddafi *was* Libya. Khalid Albaih, a Libyan political cartoonist, shared that "[...] from the army to the judicial system, there were no independent institutions in the country, and unity between the Libyan tribal society was weak. It was a fact that, sadly, Gaddafi was Libya" (Albaih, 2021). Qaddafi was able to consolidate immense power in his regime, while also amassing an insurmountable amount of wealth without any consequence. Thus, while corruption affected Tunisian and Libyan citizens equally, the systemic root of corruption in Libya was much more evident in Libyan society. This affected the way in which participants approached corruption in Tunisia on one hand, and in Libya on the other. Tunisians believed that after Ben Ali and his regime were ousted, the system could be reformed and function justly. On the other hand, Libyans understood that beyond Qaddafi, there was very little left to reform. Libyans approached their revolution with this mindset and did not have a concrete vision of what Libya would look like after Qaddafi, in large part because the success of their movement seemed unlikely due to decades of oppression under his regime.

Understanding participants' lived experiences through their stories of living under systemic corruption, which was a principal grievance during the uprisings, presents a holistic picture of their motivations to participate in political uprisings. While corruption is coded as a separate category, its effects and reach into the other categories illustrate its vindictive force on the lives of Tunisian and Libyan citizens. Corruption affects all other aspects of citizens' lives. Thus, corruption is deeply ingrained within all other themes and categories presented herein.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, it was publicly known that President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, his wife Leila Ben Ali, and their friends and family controlled most high-ranking positions and owned numerous large corporations, consequently also amassing wealth. Abes Hamid, a Tunisian judge, described the people's sense of how their country was governed and the unfairness of the distribution of wealth:

> Ben Ali was a dictator whose authoritarian regime was enforced with the help of a gang, which is his wife's family. They transformed the country into private property, which they plundered and whose institutions they exploited for personal gain. Their wealth reached unimaginable amounts; it was obtained under the guise of electoral legitimacy and the complicity of Western leaders, who promoted the image of a bright and shining regime, despite knowing how ugly this image was. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 21)

The sense of exploitation the Tunisian citizens felt did not diminish, but increased with time, as their quality of life worsened and the ruling class enjoyed special privileges.[7]

Additionally, anti-western sentiments played a key role in participants' perception of corruption, as Ben Ali and the ruling class more broadly were supported by the United States and other Western powers. It was not explicit support, but they were complicit in the status quo and ignored reports from respected human rights organizations about the abuses citizens faced (Falk, 2011). Richard Falk, a prominent scholar, and critic of Western interference in the region stated, "If their lives and well-being is so easily cast to one side in this callous geopolitical manner, surely the American posture of welcoming democracy in the region needs to be viewed with more than a skeptical smile" (Falk, 2011). Mark LeVine, a MENA scholar and historian, echoes this perception of the West. Western governments have little interest in "fostering real democratic development" in the MENA region because authoritarian rule directly benefits them: steady oil

[7] See Chapter IV, Section B ("Quality of Life") for further discussion of this category.

supplies, military alliances, cooperative regimes, arms purchases, and a malleable economy (LeVine, 2011). This engages with the feelings of frustration Tunisians felt toward Western pro-democracy efforts in the country, which limited their reforms to liberal economic and political restructuring, and not the effects of such reforms on the lives of ordinary citizens.

Ahmed Yazidi, a Tunisian student of linguistics and literature, similarly expressed how frustrating it was for the Tunisian people to live under the Ben Ali regime:

> Indeed, Tunisians erupted like a volcano after twenty-three years of seething and frustration, borne of twenty-three years of injustice, oppression, tyranny, spying, and police rule. The former president Ben Ali ruled the country with an iron fist. He maintained a tight grip over the three branches of power, to say nothing of the media, which were under his full control. During his rule, Tunisia had a shameful record, hiring one policeman for every three citizens. Moreover, an outbreak of the rampant corruption, marked by bribery and favoritism, went hand in hand with a punitive rise in unemployment. People's money was stolen. Tunisia itself was a 'precious treasure,' over which the ex-president's wife and her brothers vied for the biggest share. (Alsaleh, 2015, pp. 15-16)

Yesmina Khedhir, a Tunisian English teacher, shared a comparable sentiment stating, "I feel sad for a country that lost much of its wealth because of a dictator surrounded by a bunch of thieves" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 45). There was widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling class, and cognizance that their wealth came at the expense of their population's poverty, hence labeling them as "thieves."

There was a general sense of despair among the Tunisian people, which compounded into resignation and apathy for their economic situation. While many were unhappy, the sort of injustice they experienced seemed to be unresolvable. The police, army, and other security apparatus groups were being paid by Ben Ali to quell any potential opposition; their local leaders were receiving bribes to govern in a way that benefited some—the ruling elite—at the expense of others—Tunisian citizens; the state leaders were friends and family of Ben Ali; and the judicial system was incapable of exacting justice for the people due to corruption.

Abes Hamid, a Tunisian judge, shared how the judicial system did not operate in the way it was supposed to, as Ben Ali's regime took advantage of it to "suppress freedom and silence the voice of every freedom-seeking individual" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 22). The judicial system and its judges were forced to protect the president and his entourage "through unfair mandates, which were subject to instructions from the regime" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 22). When his colleague Judge

al-Mokhtar Yahyaui sent a letter to Ben Ali condemning the rampant corruption found within the Tunisian judiciary, he was sentenced to death (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 22). Furthermore, when the Tunisian Judges Association attempted to defend the independence of the judicial department against the corrupt executive branch, its members were punished through arbitrary transfers to other areas, salary deductions, denial of promotions, and the association itself suffered a blow to its legitimacy (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 22). These examples represent the injustice found within the very system that is supposed to exact justice.

Marwen Jemili, a Tunisian graduate student, told a story of how people spoke about the protests when they first broke out. In a conversation with a stranger on the train, the stranger shared that his task for the day at his job was to calculate the damages caused by broken windows on a train. He explained to Marwen that "poor people, sick and tired of the autocratic regime, [...] resorted to throwing rocks and stones. They were saying slogans like 'Bread and water only, but we will not accept Ben Ali anymore' (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 32). He also shared with Marwen that "there were many [poor] people [protesting against the government,] cursing the president and his wife for stealing their land and farms" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 33). This was a movement led by poor people, specifically poor youth, who felt that they had no prospects under the failing corrupt regime. Their incentive for joining the uprisings extended beyond dissatisfaction with corruption, and toward expressing the injustice rooted within their failing political system.

Libya

In Libya, there was an understanding of the generational and institutional effects of the Qaddafi regime's abuse. Mohamed Mesrati, a Libyan citizen, explained the complexities of the prolonged authoritarian regime. He stated:

> I was never one for marches. We were a generation born from our fathers' defeats, a generation that first opened its eyes on a society that spoke in the language of oppression, where fear was an unalterable and undeniable destiny. (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 68)

While Tunisians also felt trapped within their cycle of oppression, Libyans felt that it was their unalterable destiny to live under Qadaffi. Thus, when their opposition movement erupted, it was a direct attack on Qaddafi himself. Unlike other movements that demanded the "fall of the regime," Libyans called for the fall of Gaddafi verbatim: "The people demand the fall of the

Colonel." Mesrati goes on to explain that in his account stating, "The Libyan people knew that there's no such thing as a political regime in their country. The regime and the government are all Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, and if he does not fall then nothing will" (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 83).

Libya lacked true political institutions. Khalid Albaih, a political cartoonist, explained that "[...] from the army to the judicial system, there were no independent institutions in the country, and unity between the Libyan tribal society was weak. It was a fact that, sadly, Gaddafi was Libya" (Albaih, 2021). This was distinctly different from most states' positions that participated in the Arab Spring. In Egypt and Tunisia, the ruling systems and political institutions, while governed through corruption, were larger than their rulers themselves (LeVine, 2011). Gaddafi spent decades repressively "stamping out every vestige of independent leadership in the country, ruling by personal network and the cult of authority" (Gatnash, 2021). Thus, Ben Ali and Mubarak could be ousted and the system could be preserved and reformed. However, Libya's political system operated with Qaddafi and his family as its focal point. *New York Times* reporter Robert F. Worth, who traveled to Libya immediately after the uprising, stated:

> Libya has no army. It has no government. These things exist on paper, but in practice Libya has yet to recover from the long maelstrom of Qadhafi's rule…What Libya does have is militias, more than 60 of them…Each brigade exercises unfettered authority over its own turf…There are no rules. (Linz & Stepan, 2013)

There was no larger political order in place that could be preserved after his fall (LeVine, 2011). Hence, deposing a ruler is one task, but restructuring the system they created and contorted to their benefit is another.

Furthermore, there was an absence of civil society or a separate sector of Libyan society dedicated to its citizens which is independent of the government. Libya lacked a "well-developed infrastructure of civil society that could maintain a level of discipline and unity of strategy from the start of the revolt" (LeVine, 2011). Egypt and Tunisia had civil societies that developed over decades, which enabled their reform movement and peaceful protests. Issandr El Amrani, a Moroccan-American political analyst, stated:

> Tunisia was fortunate to have civil-society leaders who recognised the gravity of the moment, and who were able to defuse the situation and avert radical scenarios. In a region where civil-society groups often face repression and are marginalised, the Tunisian example shows the value of having actors from outside formal politics play a role in moments of crisis. No one elected the National Dialogue Quartet, but they nonetheless

> represented something real: the desire of many Tunisians to resolve their differences in a peaceful and constructive way. At a time when NGOs are being shut down in Egypt and civil-society activists are threatened and even assassinated in Libya, there is a valuable lesson to be learned from this year's Nobel Peace Prize-winners. (El Amrani, 2015)

This also coincides with the chain of events in Libya, since their early efforts to protest were met with large-scale violence as a response. Thus, corruption was deeply entrenched in all sectors of Libyan society.

B. Quality of Life

As opposed to the insurmountable wealth that Ben Ali and his entourage or Qaddafi and his family amassed, Tunisian and Libyan citizens' lives were starkly juxtaposed against it with experiences of deep poverty. Their quality of life was abysmal: their stories describe rising prices, the inability to put food on the table, pay for housing, find jobs with livable wages, and afford basic necessities. Most importantly, the citizens witnessed the unfair treatment they received and the lack of support from their leaders, while they lived comfortably in wealth. Generational poverty also persists in the region since advancement is not based on merit but on corrupt favoritism. Thus, a poor family today in the MENA region will likely remain below the poverty line for several generations (Khouri, 2019).

Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation was not a response to the municipal officials demanding he obtains the necessary permit to operate as a street vendor ("Mohamed Bouazizi," n.d.). It was in response to the humiliation he experienced when the officer slapped him during the confrontation, which was his final straw. Bouazizi was also denied a hearing with the governor when he attempted to file a formal complaint ("Mohamed Bouazizi," n.d.). His treatment represented what many ordinary Tunisians faced, especially Tunisian youth just entering the workforce. He was a teenager selling fruits and vegetables from a cart to support his mother and siblings after his father's passing. He was unable to provide for them, and even his meager income exposed him to harassment from municipal officials, who often demanded bribes. Bouazizi's "struggles with underemployment and corruption came to be seen as emblematic of the economic and societal difficulties facing ordinary Tunisians" ("Mohamed Bouazizi," n.d.). When respondents were asked in the Arab Barometer's Third Wave if they were able to obtain a job without connections, 59.8% of Tunisians and 63.5% of Libyans stated that "obtaining an employment through connections is extremely widespread" (Arab Barometer

Wave III). This speaks to the detriments of excluding private sector corruption from the CPI.[8] This Arab Barometer measure is supported by the stories found within the participants' narratives. The sentiment that one could not attain a liveable wage without bribery or favoritism made youth prospects bleak.

Furthermore, the region's response to Bouazizi's death was not that of vengeance or retribution, but of relatability. These citizens knew what it felt like to grow frustrated with those in power's treatment of them. They also knew what humiliation and loss of human dignity felt like at the hands of their oppressor. Thus, this shared sense of identity and understanding of Bouazizi's experience as a consequence of corruption is what truly led to the outbreak of protests. Nada Maalmi, a Tunisian student, explained this sense of connection with Bouazizi's experience. She stated, "Mohamed Bouazizi himself could not find a job. Tunisians arrived at a situation in which lots of young graduates faced a stagnating employment market" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 47). It was years in the making, waiting for a spark to mobilize. Ahmed Gatnash—founder of the Kawaakibi Foundation, which focuses on human rights, freedom, and political reform in the MENA region—describes that every country had a moment that radicalized its citizens and enabled them to build the courage to protest:

> Looking back, we can pinpoint Mohammed Bouazizi, the impoverished and humiliated fruit-seller who self-immolated in Tunisia, Khaled Said, the computer programmer dragged out of an internet café and beaten to death by plain-clothes police thugs in Egypt, Fathi Terbil, the lawyer for widows of the victims of the Abu Slim prison massacre who was suddenly arrested in Libya, or Hamza al-Khateeb, the 13-year-old Syrian boy who was arrested and then tortured and mutilated after a protest in Syria. (Gatnash, 2021)

Abdulmonem Allieby, a Libyan university student described this emotion, not as courage, but as a flight or fight response, in which the citizens of individual states finally collectively chose to fight:

> Simply put, imagine a person oppressed, beaten, and humiliated for decades and when he finally speaks, he still is strangled. While slowly awaiting death the oppressor is momentarily disoriented and releases his grip. Knowing that this is absolutely your last and only chance at survival, what would you do? In my case, I fought. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 128)

[8] See Chapter III's "Criticisms & Limitations of CPI" section for further discussion of this.

Tunisia

Tunisian uprising participants, specifically its youth, saw no prospects for themselves in the near future. Marwa Hermassi, a Tunisian student, stated:

> For many years, most Tunisians were struggling every day to survive while the president's family (especially his wife's family), their friends, and their clan and anyone having close contact with the presidential family or their entourage were getting richer. Here was the situation: poor people getting poorer, rich people getting richer, no jobs, and not even the possibility of expressing ourselves or criticizing government policy or the president's wife or family. People were fed up with the social injustice. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 39)

In 2010, the richest 20% of the Tunisian population had approximately 42.9% of the country's total income, while the poorest 20% had approximately 6.7% of the country's total income (Gysler, 2019). As the wealth gap grew, and citizens' quality of life worsened, questions arose about what the future would look like for the youth population. Marwa explained that "the social situation in the country was getting worse: unemployment, poverty, rising prices. Even the families considered wealthy (like [hers]) could not make it to the end of the month" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 39). Many struggled to make ends meet, often sacrificing some expenses for others that were more pressing.

Although the economic conditions continually worsened, Tunisian citizens did not act in opposition immediately. According to Marwa, the wealth gap greatly affected the citizens of Tunisia, but Tunisian society more broadly enjoyed certain comforts like cars, the Internet, alcohol, wearing short skirts, and having private parties. These individual freedoms created an illusion of personal freedom, which "indirectly enabled [society] to turn a blind eye to corruption" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 47). Marwa argued that while "personal freedoms were allowed, not much space was given for intellectual liberties. The main discourse in the Tunisian media was controlled by and favored the regime" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 48). Citizens living under authoritarian regimes experience a duality: the regime must suppress any desires of opposition through oftentimes violent means, however, they must also maintain their citizenry's favor through piecemeal offerings under their ruling bargain like limited personal freedoms to preserve the facade of fair governance. However, as Tunisian businessman Youssef Attig put it, "The fact is that when a government does not respond to the demands of the people, the people demand more" ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011).

Libya

Libyan citizens experienced similar worsening living conditions and unequal distributions of wealth. In the 42 years of Qaddafi's rule prior to his death, he accumulated $200 billion in bank accounts and investments (Durgy, 2011). Put into perspective, at the time of his death, Qaddafi was richer than the three richest people in the world combined—Carlos Slim, Bill Gates, and Warren Buffet—and the wealthiest individual in the history of the world (Durgy, 2011). His wealth was held in bank accounts held by the Libyan government and legally owned by entities such as the Central Bank of Libya and Libya's sovereign wealth fund, the Libyan Investment Authority (Durgy, 2011). This represents the blurred line that existed between what is owned by the country and what is owned by its authoritarian leader.

The effects of Qadaffi's state-controlled oil revenues came at the expense of the Libyan people. Mohamed Zarrug, a Libyan coordinator in the information department, described Qadaffi's "policy of making people poor so they had to rely exclusively on him. The unethical policy fits the old Arabic saying, 'Keep your dog hungry, and it will follow you'" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 115). The saying implies that Libyan citizens would remain poor in order to rely on Qaddafi, making them incapable of sustainably surviving without his rule. Zurrag stated:

> Before [the uprisings], Libyan citizens had the lowest standard of living ever; it was common for the per capita income to be less than ten dollars a month, even though our country is situated on a huge lake of oil and has a number of gas reservoirs. Thanks to our government, poverty existed in a country that covers nearly two thousand kilometers of Mediterranean coastline in addition to having viable economic resources, such as historical and tourist attractions that can bring in global investments (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 115)

Widespread poverty and the poor quality of life experienced by the uprisings' participants exemplify their motivations to rise against authoritarian leadership in favor of humane living conditions.

C. Safety & Security

Echoed throughout the participants' accounts was a desire for a sense of normalcy. Marwen Jemili, a Tunisian graduate student, shared that "[a]t the beginning, all [she] cared about was safety and security" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 31). The citizens of both Tunisia and Libya were unable to express their opinions and openly oppose their governments. When asked if the

respondents had the freedom to express their opinions in the Arab Barometer's Third Wave, only 47% of Tunisians and 39.2% of Libyans stated it was "guaranteed to a great extent" (Arab Barometer Wave III). The physical threats of violence, unlawful detainment, torture, and use of force against opposition by the security apparatus, police, or military instilled fear among youth activists and dissuaded any potential mobilization from arising.

In both Tunisia and Libya, violent measures of containment enabled the regimes to subdue potential opposition. Therefore, in choosing to participate in political uprisings against their authoritarian regimes, citizens took a significant risk, understanding that they might not survive. Especially in Libya, public displays of opposition against Qaddafi resulted in a publicized death to set an example or violent torture. However, there was an outpour of nationalism and pride in one's own country, which enabled participants to carry on bravely against decades of hegemonic rule.

Tunisia

Tunisians were weary of publicly expressing their concerns about the regime. Those who were suspected of opposing the regime were detained and sent to the Ministry of Interior, which was publicly known for its brutal torture of dissidents, activists, and journalists who spoke about the regime negatively. Abes Hamid, a Tunisian judge, described the Ministry of Interior as follows:

> This place was the center of the terrorism and laboratory-tested methods of torture, the cruelest and most ferocious type of torture, carried out against detainees in dark cells. Those who had been in this place and were later released often wished they had died rather than live with the psychological and physical pain that turned them into bodies without souls. (Alsaleh, 2015, pp. 22-23)

Yesmina Khedhir, a Tunisian English teacher, helped a German journalist interview political and religious prisoners, who shared the "torture and humiliation they suffered at the Interior Ministry, just because they expressed their discontent with the situation or criticized the president" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 44). She also shared her brother's experience at the Ministry of Interior, as he was arrested at a protest and tortured:

> After a while—around ten minutes that I felt was ten hours—my brother picked up his phone and answered me by saying that he had been arrested with other protesters and that they all had been beaten, including a very old man. He said that they insulted them and that his leg was swollen because they all had been whipped. They were kept in detention

> for the entire day. The only reason they released him was because his identification card showed that he was only seventeen years old. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 44)

Thus, Tunisian citizens greatly feared participating in events that could cause them to be detained and tortured by Ben Ali's security apparatus or police force. Marwen Jamili, a Tunisian graduate student, was at a protest and described that "the splendid chanting voices did not last long [as…] the cops arrested them, and of course, there must have been all kinds of torture in the Ministry of the Interior" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 32). Furthermore, it did not matter if the protestors congregated in peaceful demonstrations: they were met with violence regardless. Marwa Hermassi, a student, shared her experience at a peaceful sit-in, in which young Tunisians wore white t-shirts:

> We decided not to go to the ministry; instead, everyone would just wear a white T-shirt. Some wrote on theirs 'Sayeb Salah' (Leave Salah), a Tunisian expression that means 'Leave me alone.' The police reaction was brutal. They insulted us, molested us, and arrested some of us just because we were wearing white and having a cup of coffee on Habib Bourguiba Avenue" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 38).

When asked if Tunisians have ever participated in a protest, march, or sit-in in the Arab Barometer's Third Wave, 83.2% of respondents said "I have never participated" (Arab Barometer Wave III). Clearly, this was not because they did not have grievances. Marwen stated, "Our situation was quite miserable—people were controlled, manipulated, and oppressed. Nobody could speak up because he would have been killed by the president's militias" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 31). The Tunisian people were suffering immensely; however, the cost of participating in a protest—death or torture—far outweighed the corrupt and unjust regimes they lived under.

These inhuman practices were used against anyone who was suspected of being anti-Ben Ali or the ruling regime. Ahlem Yazidi, a Tunisian student of linguistics and literature, shared that Ben Ali's opponents, or those even presumed to hold opposing sentiments, were "arrested and tortured, especially members of the Islamic movements, who were often labeled as 'prisoners of conscience'" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 26). Ahlem also explained that a majority of Tunisians were unhappy under Ben Ali's rule, "as he was a tough and cunning dictator, particularly because of his strategy to stifle any resistance against him" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 26). However, they succumbed to living in poverty and unjust conditions due to fear. She was an active participant in student-led demonstrations and protests and was shocked at "the sheer might of the military arsenal let loose by the government against a peaceful student protest" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 27). The protestors were surrounded by riot police, who hit them with batons, sprayed

them with boiling water, and mercilessly tear-gassed them (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 27). Marwen Jemili, a Tunisian graduate student, shared a similar story. He described the silent nature of oppression that Tunisian citizens lived under. He stated:

> I was among the majority of Tunisians who favored silence, and that was for a reason. The regime of the ousted President Ben Ali was ruthless and terrorized anyone taking part in any kind of protests. One would not only be tortured but also 'evaporated.' The regime was very similar to the totalitarian regime of Big Brother in Orwell's 1984. I remember in a course on George Orwell that I took at the University of Manouba in Tunis, that nobody felt comfortable or able to express himself during the discussions. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 31)

After favoring silence for decades, Tunisians took a tremendous gamble by participating publicly in anti-regime and anti-Ben Ali protests in the hopes that their prospects would improve—even if just slightly as compared to their 2011 state.

Libya

In Libya, similar violent tactics of unlawful detainment and torture occurred. Instead of the Tunisian Ministry of Interior, its Libyan equivalent was the Abu Salim prison. In 1996, around 1,200 prisoners, who were primarily imprisoned because they were opponents of the regime, were massacred and their bodies have never been found ("Abu Salim Prison Massacre Remembered," 2012). Their bodies were allegedly buried inside the prison, but the exact location of the bodies remains under speculation. The families of the victims had no idea they were dead, and one family shared with Human Rights Watch that it brought food and clothes to the prison every weekend for years, completely unaware their relative was brutally murdered ("Abu Salim Prison Massacre Remembered," 2012). Since then, a group of activists has organized regular public protests to call for an independent investigation into the prison massacre and prosecution of those responsible for the atrocity ("Arrests, Assaults in Advance of Planned Protests," 2011). On February 15th, 2011, Fathi Terbil, the leading lawyer advocating for the victims' families, and Frag Sharany, a prominent spokesperson for the association seeking justice on their behalf, were arrested to deter a demonstration planned for February 17th, a "Day of Anger" ("Arrests, Assaults in Advance of Planned Protests," 2011). What occurred was actually a mass protest outside the Internal Security office where they were held calling for their release ("Arrests, Assaults in Advance of Planned Protests," 2011). In attempting to deter the planned protest, the Libyan

government actually expedited it and revolutionized individuals who wouldn't normally have the courage to participate in the mass mobilization against the corrupt and unjust regime.

The 1996 tragedy and its legacy lived on in Libya, as described by Khairi Altarhuni, a Libyan high school teacher. He described his struggle to get a job after graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering with an expectation of a bright future:

> Surprisingly, I was never accepted, even though I had excellent grades. Then I discovered the real reason for this irrational and disappointing situation: my family name was on the watch (or black) list and was being scrutinized by state internal security. What had my family done? Three of my relatives were imprisoned in the infamous Abu Salim prison, and two of them had been executed by the Qaddafi regime in the massacre of 1996. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 121)

Being a known relative of a regime challenger led Khairi to be blacklisted from work opportunities that he would otherwise have earned rightfully with experience and merit.[9] Nonetheless, Qaddafi's regime prioritized its stronghold over power, punishing anyone who could potentially disrupt the imbalance of power it consolidated.

The regime's legacy of violence persisted throughout Qaddafi's rule after the 1996 Abu Salim prison massacre. Mohamed Zarrug, a Libyan coordinator in the information department, explained that:

> [Qaddafi] dealt with [the opposition] severely [...] and has established himself as someone who would kill anybody based on mere suspicion. That's why anyone who would even think of uprising against the regime would also consider the possible reprisals against his or her property and family members. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 116)

Adel el-Taguri, a Libyan child health consultant, similarly shared the following about Qaddafi's tyrannical rule:

> As the years went by, many attempts were made to stop this brutal regime but to no avail. Qaddafi's strategies were simple and primitive but successful. They were based on spreading terror to prevent a critical mass from going out into the streets to demonstrate against him. This explains his dislike for sports, especially those that could attract thousands of supporters, as sporting events could be a gathering place for the necessary critical mass that could end the life of a tyrant. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 140)

Even during the 2011 protests, which were largely ignited by the violence and unjust killing of opponents of the regime, Qaddafi continued to brutally punish and murder anyone who

[9] Khairi's experiences also indicate his dissatisfaction with his quality of life and employment opportunities, overlapping with the "Quality of Life" category. This is discussed in Chapter IV, Section B ("Quality of Life").

dared to oppose him. Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari, a Libyan member of a battalion of Tripoli rebels following the 2011 outbreak of protests, explained that "there was an incredible price for anyone who dared to oppose Qaddafi" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 129). Analogous to the violent response Tunisian protestors received, Libyan "police and thugs tried to suppress [protestors] using clubs and machetes, as well as cars spraying boiling water" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 118). Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari described the brutality of the Qadaffi regime in depth during the protests, stating:

> After this brief celebration of what appeared later to be false news, a swarm of Qaddafi's militias came out and used their arsenal of weapons to kill with unbelievable ferocity these peaceful people. I couldn't bear to see these people being killed in cold blood, falling in front of me. [...] Qaddafi's obsession with power motivated him to arrest more young people and to kill even more of them (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 130)

Even peaceful protests were targeted with violence simply because they acted against Qaddafi's regime and openly expressed dissatisfaction. Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari continued to explain the atrocious crimes committed against Libyans during the protest period:

> I should mention here that Qaddafi and his regime committed immoral crimes against the Libyan people. In addition to spreading drugs and encouraging prostitution among the youth that followed him, they were responsible for the systematic rape committed by his soldiers in many cities. These soldiers and supporters received orders that they could kill or rape anyone they wanted, and they acted on the orders of their leaders. Worst of all, they raped women in front of their fathers to destroy the dignity and pride of our resilient people. Of course, little information about these crimes is available because the Libyan people consider rape to be a grave shame—you cannot find someone who would say that his daughter had been raped; he would rather conceal such a crime with shame and anger. Other crimes were motivated by the regime's desire to stay in power. Qaddafi spent a lot of money to buy loyalty. His forces arrested the family members of revolutionaries and tortured them to discourage their sons from fighting. They also used the dirtiest means to protect Qaddafi, including using drugs to destroy some poor citizens' minds. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 132)

Humanity and respect for human life did not matter, so long as Qaddafi held on to his remaining power in Libya.

D. Human Rights

When asked in the Arab Barometer's Third Wave what were the main reasons that led to the Arab Spring, a majority of the respondents—53.5% in Tunisia and 45.9% in Libya—chose "civil and political freedoms, and emancipation from oppression" as their primary reason for

participating beyond economic considerations (Arab Barometer Wave III). Repression, specifically in the form of censorship, oppression, typically through violations of human rights, and the general lack of political, civil, or religious freedoms greatly affected Tunisian and Libyan citizens. According to the third wave's findings, when participants were asked if they had access to the relevant official to file a complaint if their rights had been violated, only 21.2% of Tunisians and 17.1% of Libyans stated it was either "very easy" or "easy" (Arab Barometer Wave III). On the other hand, 37.7% of Tunisians and 43.7% of Libyans reported it was "difficult" or "very difficult" (Arab Barometer Wave III). Unsurprisingly, 40.2% of Tunisians and 37.4% of Libyans stated "I have not tried" (Arab Barometer Wave III): why try when they knew for a fact that no action would be taken to bring them justice when their rights were violated? Abes Hamid, a Tunisian judge, perfectly encapsulated this sense of resignation that the Tunisian people had developed in response to their day-to-day rights violations:

> We Tunisians realized that this regime violated all human rights, carried out torture and repression, and encouraged corruption that spread throughout all the state institutions, including the judicial system and the security forces. The latter became aggressive and was the striking hand of Ben Ali, whose regime oppressed all who stood against it or defended human rights and freedoms. We lost hope in reform and believed that any solution short of overthrowing the entire system would be futile, and we resolved that the regime should be toppled at any cost. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 21)

In the face of systemic corruption, oppression, and human rights violations, the Tunisian and Libyan protestors understood that by engaging in mass mobilization they would be putting themselves at increased risk.

Repression, specifically through censorship, was widely used as a tactic to control opponents of the regime and prevent their dislike of the regime from spreading to others. With a state monopoly on domestic television transmissions, state-led radio stations, state-monitored newspapers, and internet censorship policies, both regimes were able to maintain a tight grip on potential opposition.

In hindsight, the regimes' fears of the Internet were reasonable, as it was cyberactivism that enabled organized protests and mass mobilization to occur. Those who followed political news through the internet, particularly more tech-savvy youth, had a perception of opportunities that led them to participate in protests (Kilavuz, 2020). Post-Spring research found a correlation between cyberactivism and physical space activism, suggesting that debating rights violations

and oppression on pre-existing social media platforms, and launching new cyberspaces, enabled MENA youth to collectively mobilize around shared grievances (Kim & Lim, 2019). MENA youth, who were previously denied a place in society, used the cyber sphere to form their own political space where the regime could no longer dismiss their calls for systemic change (Bangura, 2022). The youth's ability to engage in political discourse and organize grassroots mobilization in a safe space online also garnered the attention of those who were less likely to participate. Furthermore, research suggests that the youth used social media to initiate the protest process and, in turn, mobilize other segments of the population to protest (Waechter, 2019).

Tunisia

"During Ben Ali's rule, civil, political, and religious freedoms were eliminated," was what Ahlem Yazidi, a Tunisian student, shared when describing the state of Tunisia under the Ben Ali regime (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 26). When these citizens were stripped of their freedoms, they also lacked the ability to advocate for themselves because they lacked the freedom to express they were oppressed. Youssef Attig, a Tunisian businessman, expressed that, to him, "The most important thing is the freedom of speech and the breaking of the wall of fear of any action against yourself, your family or business" ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011).

In order to express the rights violations they endured, many tech-savvy youth took to the Internet to share their grievances with their corrupt regime. Marwa Hermassi, a Tunisian student, explained the following:

> Tunisians were active on the Internet, and they started to notice that 'Error 404 not found' was the message resulting from censorship. The ATI (Tunisian Agency of Internet) was randomly closing websites, blogs, and Facebook and Twitter profiles based on the use of certain words against the government. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 38)

Censorship was pervasive in Tunisia. The ATI and the Tunisian government more broadly utilized laws, regulations, and surveillance to maintain a tight grip on the youth's internet usage ("Internet censorship in Tunisia," n.d.). One example of such is when online dissident Mohamed Abbou, also a human rights lawyer, was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for accusing the Ben Ali regime of torturing Tunisian prisoners on a banned website ("Internet censorship in Tunisia," n.d.). Another example is when journalists were prosecuted by Tunisia's press code, which bans offending the president or speaking ill of the regime ("Internet censorship in Tunisia," n.d.). Even in online forums, citizens still feared being monitored and labeled as

dissidents, in the fear that they would suffer a vicious fate. Marwen Jamili, a graduate student, described his use of the Internet as an activist:

> When I used the Internet to read what critics and thinkers were saying about Ben Ali, I was always afraid, even though I used a proxy to open YouTube, which was censored during his regime. Ben Ali had recruited many brilliant computer engineers from across the country, whose task was to spy on people using the network (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 31).

Therefore, Tunisians were unable to participate in public space activism due to fear of a violent response from the regime, and their participation in cyberactivism was also limited due to censorship and regime monitoring of social media usage (Kim & Lim, 2019).

Libya

Libyan citizens expressed even worse oppressive and repressive regime forces, with restrictions and government surveillance of the Internet, blatant violations of human rights, and lack of political, civil or religious freedoms. Mohamed Mesrati's account explains the deep complexities of the Libyan situation and the grave risk that participants took when choosing to engage in uprisings. He describes that there was a discernment that the political situation in Libya was different than in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. He described this in his account stating:

> Only Libyans understood the true barbarity of the regime that faced them. They knew that Libya was no Egypt or Tunisia. They knew that there was no army to come to their aid because Gaddafi had divided his armed forces into security militias commanded by his sons. (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 82)

Not only had Qaddafi consolidated his power in the executive branch, but he had also effectively destroyed any other political or social institution that could step in and protect Libyan citizens against oppression and rights violations.

Libyan citizens went to great lengths to be able to join Internet forums that criticized the Qaddafi regime. Mohamed Zarrug, a Libyan coordinator in the information department, explained that the Internet was introduced to Libya in the late 1990s, but was limited to Qaddafi and his family (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 115). Later on, it became available to the general public, but the connection was so weak that many Libyans relied on their own Internet service and used two-way technology to connect through satellite. He stated:

> Despite the expensive price for such a service, it had the great advantage of not being under the surveillance of the government, which used to block any sites that disseminated ideas critical of the tyrant. Thanks to this uncensored access to the Internet, I had the opportunity to communicate with some opponents and read their writings, especially during the protests at the Italian consulate in 2006. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 116)

The ability to communicate with one another through the Internet brought together a large group of like-minded Libyans who recognized that the corruption of the regime had to be put to an end. It is no surprise that the Internet, which Qaddafi feared greatly, allowed his opposition to mobilize against him and topple his authoritarian regime.

Adel el-Taguri, a Libyan child health consultant, shared his experience of attending a Libyan university in the 1980s, a little over a decade after the onset of Qaddafi's rule. He said:

> When I entered the university, dozens of small incidents always reminded us of how Qaddafi's revolutionary committees changed the life of thousands of children who grew up in misery. A simple wall journal was confiscated because of a small comment on the value of the scholarship given to a student who had been reprimanded by Qaddafi himself. In student concerts, we were obliged to sing about the life of the greatest leader of all time. We were forced to participate in 'pro–great leader' demonstrations. This ended with some students being hanged in front of their classmates and terrorizing them. The cry from the mother of one of those students was in vain when she asked Qaddafi's wife for mercy. The reply was, 'You will conceive another son, but there is only one Qaddafi.' These words transmitted from the mouth of the poor mother kept ringing in my ears for years. I do not know why. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 140)

This story exemplifies the sheer brutality of the regime, which treated Qaddafi as a god-like figure, whose citizens were dispensable for the sake of his reigning power. At the outbreak of the Libyan uprisings, Gay Emmaya Tongali, a Filipina nurse working in the Benghazi Medical Center, described the illusion fading, revealing the truly violent and abusive nature of the Qaddafi regime. She stated:

> It was downright terrifying, especially at the beginning when we were completely cut off from the outside world. Within a few hours after the protest started, outside phone calls were prohibited, and the Internet was shut down. It seemed that for more than a week, blood continued to flow in the streets of Benghazi while the outside world was ignorant of what was happening in Libya. State television was conveying a different story on the international news networks, showing only those supporting the Qaddafi regime when, in truth, unrest was smoldering in the streets. Although the surface of Libya was peaceful, behind the facade, everything was ready to explode! The veil of Libya was slowly being

> lifted. The history of violence to and abuse of its citizens was slowly being uncovered; the pretense of civility was eroding. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 137)

E. Political Aspirations & Goals: Participants' Non-Democratic Desires for Post-Spring Outcomes

While many participants' stories told tales of what it was like to live under a corrupt regime, woven within tales of struggle were aspirations and hopes for a better future. Initially, democracy seemed to be a potential solution to the authoritarian regime in place. According to the Arab Barometer's Second Wave data, in eight of the ten countries surveyed, 70% of respondents held the view that democracy was the best political system (Jamal & Robbins, 2022). However, by 2018-2019, this support had dwindled: in only seven of the 12 surveyed countries did at least 70% of respondents prefer democracy over other forms of government (Jamal & Robbins, 2022). This is supported by first-hand accounts of participants, in which they shared a desire for self-determination, human dignity, justice, and freedom. They weren't necessarily advocating for a democratic system, but for one that was not corrupt, unjust, and violated human rights. While democracy serves as the antithesis of autocratic governance, it was not the protestor's end goal. Calls for better governance, protection of human rights, and economic management were their primary slogans. However, observers of the movement were confined to the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm previously established and believed that democracy was simply the alternative to oppression under an authoritarian regime.

Tunisia's initial spark was Bouazizi's immolation; however, decades of oppression compounded are what truly enabled the Tunisian people to rise against their oppressors. In her account, Ahlem Yazidi, a Tunisian student of linguistics and literature, stated:

> I personally consider the Tunisian revolution as an intifada, the justified uprising of an oppressed and heroic people, willing to sacrifice everything for the pursuit of freedom and dignity, the two sacred words that the entire Arab world aspires to yet are denied. [...] I saw it as my duty and the duty of every Tunisian citizen to stand up for the right of self-determination for our beloved country. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 25-27)

The word intifada originated in the late 20th century to early 21st century movement led by Palestinians for the independence of the Palestinian state, and against Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ("Intifada - Britannica," n.d.). However, the word as a noun is defined as a rebellion, uprising, or resistance movement ("Intifada - Wikipedia," n.d.). The key

connotation in the contemporary usage of the word implies that the movement is rightful and legitimate due to the oppression that participants endured and the injustice they are fighting against ("Intifada - Wikipedia," n.d.). Yesmina Khedhir, a Tunisian English teacher, described the conditions that the participants believed they were rightfully protesting against:

> Tunisian people lived for more than twenty years under the control of a president who governed with an iron fist. Corruption, exploitation, a high cost of living, and the absence of any kind of freedom of expression were at the root of the outbreak. When people took to the street to express their anger and dissatisfaction after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, their single demand was 'dignity'. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 42)

This movement lacked distinct leadership and was reactive to pre-existing conditions, in large part because the repressive regimes of Ben Ali and Qaddafi ruled with the expectation that the opposition could never publicly oppose them as they did during the Arab Spring.

> The erosion of support for the regime sometimes occurred openly, but, given the repressive character of authoritarian regimes, it was more likely to occur covertly. Authoritarian leaders were often unaware of how unpopular they were. Covert disaffection then manifested itself when some triggering event exposed the weakness of the regime. (Huntington, 1991, p. 26)

"Dignity" was a word many of the participants used when describing their aspirations for the future of Tunisia. Ahlem Yazizi similarly stated, "Well, we did our best for the sake of Tunisia and for the principles of freedom, dignity, and democracy" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 30). Dignity implies a certain level of honor, respect, and humanity. Thus, it comes as no surprise that citizens who had been stripped of their basic rights and subjected to oppressive regimes for decades were asking for the bare minimum: to be viewed as human beings.

Furthermore, the use of the word "democracy" among the participants was always combined with phrases such as "dignity," "justice," and "freedom." This implies that, while democracy does hold these values in its normative and institutional structure, these participants were not necessarily advocating for a democratic system. Their chants were not for democracy but against the oppressive system in place. Nada Maalmi, a Tunisian student, describes this sentiment:

> Young people, men and women, intellectuals, uneducated, and unemployed citizens together all took to the streets to protest against repression, unemployment, and corruption. [...] The moment Ben Ali left, all we Tunisians had to start thinking about how to rebuild our country. It is worthless mourning the past, but what will be useful to

> Tunisia is critical, in order to not let any other force take over the revolution. We need to focus on rebuilding a country in crisis, in which unemployment is record breaking and corruption is everywhere. We need to restructure and reform institutions (and minds) for the people who have never had 'transparency' and 'democracy' in their vocabulary. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 46-49)

The participants' desire was freedom specifically from the dictatorship and the brutal nature of the regime. Khairi Altarhuni, a Libyan high school teacher, told the dreadful story of his family friend Ahmed's arrest and disappearance during a raid that took place in his neighborhood against young people:

> After five days—I am not sure if it was May 5 or 6, 2011—a Toyota Tundra came to our neighborhood, and while speeding down the street, a body was thrown out of the vehicle. It was Ahmad, dead with three bullets in his chest. There also were burns all over his body. I was deeply saddened by this tragic event. They killed him only because he was bravely speaking out against the dictator. Fearless against persecution, he used to say, 'Death comes only once. We would rather die with dignity than die with humiliation.' Ahmad's death and all these ruthless actions increased my determination to oppose the brutal regime. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 123)

Ahmed's arrest, torture, and murder for opposing the regime ignited a fire within Khairi and other citizens to also fight back. Other participants, such as Tunisian Malek Sghiri, were also determined to fight against the brutal regime when it turned violent against the protestors: "In the eyes of my fellow citizens I saw an extraordinary determination to confront the forces of repression" (Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013, p. 21).

The people knew that Qaddafi's regime would kill them regardless, whether slowly through oppression, or quickly through violent torture and execution for opposing Qaddafi. Khairi Altarhuni continued by paying homage to those who lost their lives fighting for dignity and freedom against the regime:

> Without the courage of these men and their sacrifices, we would not have achieved freedom, and our revolution would not have succeeded. Without them, we would not have been able to breathe the air of freedom and break the shackles of dictatorship, which defined Arab governments and surprised the world with its brutality. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 125)

Another similar desire expressed by participants in their accounts was for a better future—a "decent and free life." Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari, a Libyan member of a battalion of Tripoli rebels following the 2011 outbreak of protests, shared this belief, by saying, "As Libyans, we see

Qaddafi's death as the beginning of a decent and free life and the start of mutual interests with the entire world. I see a beautiful and better future waiting for us" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 132).

Many participants shared similar sentiments, advocating for a future that moves away from the past oppressive regime and toward justice and stability. Marwen Jamili, a Tunisian graduate student, stated, "Now Tunisia is healing: real democracy is being established, and all citizens have just one dream left: to bring Ben Ali, his wife, and the snipers— whom Ben Ali ordered to kill dozens of innocent Tunisians—to justice" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 33). She also shared that the future path toward improvement would not be easy, but that youth were willing to make sacrifices in order to ensure a better future:

> Today we have a new government, and the security situation is much better. However, the real problems, the revolution's raisons d'être, are still here: unemployment and poverty. Even though freedom of expression is way better now, we still have a lot to learn. This is why I cannot say that the revolution has succeeded or failed. The revolution is still going on. The basic goals have not been realized yet. People need jobs, money, a decent life, justice, freedom. People want to live, not just survive. This revolution needs time. Some have said that there was external intervention, but I am not sure. I strongly believe that regardless of the political abuses of the past, these people, at a historical moment, decided to take their destiny in hand and make real change. This revolution, before being political, was for social justice. (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 41)

Intissar Kherigi, a Tunisian trainee lawyer and human activist, shared that the uprising brought about immense social and political changes. She stated, "To say there's been progress doesn't begin to describe it. There has been an entire paradigm shift" ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011). Furthermore, the uprisings sent a message to future regimes: "They know that if any government tries to ignore or silence them, they can take to the streets again and exert pressure and create change - that is enormously powerful" ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011). This is supported by research, as QadirMushtaq and Afzal shared the following:

> At the end it can be concluded that in spite of all its negative aspects, Arab Spring marked the formation of a public political sphere where common people could discuss politics at public places and discuss their expected future and effort to attain democratic transition in Arab world. One of the major triumphs of the Arab Spring was the birth of the Arab citizen. (QadirMushtaq and Afzal, 2017, p. 8)

Intissar also shared her hopes for Tunisia's future, saying, "What I hope is that this year can lay the foundations for a new system of governing based on consensus, participation and respect for human rights" ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011).

There was also a sense of pride in their undertaking and ousting of hegemonic regimes. Yesmina Khedhir, who had expressed her disappointment with the "bunch of thieves" who robbed her country stated, "But I still feel proud that I am Tunisian, that my people were the spark that illuminated the road for other Arab nations to democracy and freedom" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 45). Ezedin Bosedra Abdelkafi, a Libyan cardiothoracic surgeon, similarly stated, "This moment ended a very long three weeks of "sweet" tiredness mixed with a feeling we never experienced before: being proud to be a Libyan" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 152). Almost every single account mentions pride in their identity as a citizen of their country, and a resuscitation of nationalist sentiment after deposing their oppressive rulers.

Beyond just pride in their achievements, many participants shared a sense of relief in being free from the shackles of their oppressive regimes. Abes Hamid, a Tunisian judge, shared his feelings of joy and relief stating, "All I know is that I am free and that my words are free as well" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 24). Nouha Tourki, a Tunisian French teacher, also echoed this sense of relief:

> It's still strange to wake up in the morning and think that Tunisia is finally free. We're free to speak, free to talk about the forbidden taboos such as politics, free to choose our country's destiny, free to practice our religion in the right way. ("Tunisia anniversary," 2011)

Even during the protests themselves, the physical action of finally fighting against the regime brought about a sense of euphoria and freedom. Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari shared:

> We started chanting 'It is now your turn, dictator Muammar,' referring to the Arab dictators who were toppled before Qaddafi. With these words, I felt as if all the fetters with which I had been bound were breaking, and I felt the delightful taste of the word 'freedom.' (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 129)

Ezedin Bosedra Abdelkafi started his account by stating: "Yes, I am a Libyan, and yes, I did not believe that we would have even an opportunity to say no to Qaddafi's regime, let alone witness and participate in a 'revolution'" (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 148). Similarly, Aisha A. Nasef, a Libyan hematologist, also shared this sense of satisfaction in her and the Libyan people's ability to finally stand up against Qaddafi:

> We also participated in the civil society institutions that support democracy, justice, freedom, and equality. It is an indescribable feeling to be free from fear, to be able to express yourself openly against Qaddafi and his regime, in daylight, and in front of everyone! (Alsaleh, 2015, p. 154)

Ahmed Gatnash, whose foundation's focus is on human rights, freedom, and political reform in the MENA region, describes what it is like to be an activist in the MENA region:

> To be an activist is to become intimately familiar with the nature of suffering, and to reconcile yourself – one way or another – to that. It is to understand the futility of the human condition and yet still retain faith in our better nature, and in the possibility of a better future. It is to open your heart to the suffering of others – to carry it with you constantly, instead of closing yourself to shelter from the pain. It is to dare to retain hope when others do not. (Gatnash, 2021)

Therefore, while Tunisia and Libya's social movements are often placed on opposite ends of the bimodal autocracy-democracy paradigm, the participants' desire for democracy, or lack thereof, was indistinguishable. Neither movement had an organized agenda with aims for democratization. The one uniting goal was the ousting of each state's respective authoritarian leader for the betterment of future conditions.

In this chapter, I argued that, while participants' demands for dignity and freedom potentially overlap with democracy, they are not reducible to a demand for democratic institutions. This framework of analyzing a social movement like the Arab Spring erases ordinary citizens' experiences of oppression, how terrifying it was for them to publicly oppose the regime, and what it takes to break free from oppressive forces. When I coded the first-hand accounts, the participants told a story of struggle and expressed a desire for better conditions. I presented this by discussing their stories detailing corruption, poor quality of life, lack of safety and security, and violations of human rights in the MENA region leading up to and during the protests. In the final section, "Political Aspirations & Goals," I displayed that the participants rarely bring up desires for democratic institutions or discuss institutional markers of democracy such as free and fair elections, checks on the power of the executive, and representation. What they do describe are aspirations of being treated with basic human dignity by their rulers, a sense of freedom from repressive rule, and justice for decades of oppression. While this could be captured in a democracy, that wasn't necessarily the intended goal when the participants made the grave risk of participating in protests opposing their regimes.

VI - CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

In sum, my findings indicate that participants' primary grievances and motivations for acting and participating in mass mobilization were unaccounted for in prominent scholarship on the Arab Spring. This is in large part because research conducted on the Arab Spring does not take into account the lived experiences of ordinary citizens, but relies on quantitative data from Freedom House's Freedom in the World Report (FIWR) and Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Research also failed to predict the mass mobilization's occurrence because scholars and analysts were preoccupied with analyzing the causes of the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the MENA region and hindering factors of Arab democratization—the "Arab democracy deficit."

Comparative Analysis of Themes

In analyzing and coding the 20 participants' accounts, I found four recurring grievances: corruption, unjust quality of life, lack of safety and security, and violations of human rights. I included an additional category, which I called "Political Aspirations & Goals." I dedicate this section to discussing the lack of discussion surrounding democracy as a goal. Rather, participants devoted their narratives to discussing their aspirations for a better future.[10] This included desires for justice after decades of oppression, freedom from repressive forces, the ability to openly express dissatisfaction and opposition to corruption, and basic human dignity.

The meager aspirations that the participants described indicate the extreme level of corruption they lived under. Repression was so severe and widespread under individual states' authoritarian leaders that those who took the risk of participating were only hoping to secure themselves a slightly better quality of life, and not with the goal of enacting full-scale regime change or system-wide institutional reform. To the participants, deposing their corrupt leaders was an immense success as compared to their experiences. Unfortunately, corruption was deeply entrenched systemically, which was something many of the participants of the first wave did not realize until years following the initial uprisings.

While both Tunisian and Libyan participants listed the four key grievances—corruption, quality of life, safety and security, and human rights—the effects of these grievances were felt differently between the two countries. As it relates to "Quality of Life," Libyan participants more

[10] See Chapter IV, Section E ("Political Aspirations & Goals") for further discussion of this category.

frequently expressed struggles with aspects like unemployment, poverty, and rising prices. Stories from participants such as Khairi Altarhuni, who was black-listed from receiving employment, or Mohamed Zarrug, who described that average Libyans had a per capita income of less than ten dollars a month, are examples of such (Alsaleh, 2015). While Tunisians also struggled with experiences that indicate an unjust quality of life, Libyans' experiences seem to be more severe.

Furthermore, neither the Tunisian nor the Libyan movement had an organized agenda or aims for democratization. The one uniting goal that existed within both societies was a desire for better conditions, which they believed would come about after deposing their rulers. Because Tunisians believed that their system could be reformed after deposing Ben Ali, they had the ability to hope for a better future and express desires that extended beyond short-term goals like ousting Ben Ali. On the other hand, Libyans took cognizance that Qaddafi *was* Libya, which limited their advancements to short-term goals. Hence, Tunisians were much more likely to express aspirations for the future. All but two Tunisian participants expressed desires for dignity, justice, and freedom. On the other hand, only four Libyan participants had similar aspirations for the future. Libyan citizens' accounts were primarily focused on describing the unbearable and inhumane conditions that Qaddafi's regime forced them to live under.

Modern Connections

Today, both Tunisia and Libya suffer the consequences of expectations of democracy following the first wave of uprisings. Their movements were leaderless, lacked a clear political program, and had no distinct anticipation of what would follow the successful removal of their respective authoritarian rulers. This allowed outside forces and surviving political elites to hijack the participants' goals and co-opt the movements' activists.

Present-day Tunisia suffers from a return to pseudo-authoritarian rule. Tunisia's youth are still subjected to marginalization and are continually pushed to the fringes of the socioeconomic, political, and social segments of society (Chograni, 2021). Post-Spring, youth voters felt that Tunisian politics lacked progress and a sense of disenchantment built over time, dissuading them from voting in elections (Ben Salah, 2019). However, one outlier to this was current President Kais Saied's election in 2019. President Saied won Tunisia's presidential election with an overwhelming majority of the vote, 72.71% ("Saied Elected Tunisia," 2019). A large share of his

voters were young Tunisians: 37% of his voters were between the ages of 18-25, and 20.3% of his voters were between the ages of 26-45 years old (Ben Salah, 2019). President Saied's youth audience believed in his capacity for change because he had no political experience, and therefore could not be a part of the corrupt old guard. He was a law professor with traditional values, eloquent literacy in Arabic, and promises of justice against those accused of corruption in the old regime (Ben Salah, 2019; Boulifi, 2023). His campaign rested on a revolutionary anti-corruption platform, in which he rejected mainstream political institutions like political parties and advocated for a decentralized government with power to local officials (Ebel, 2021; Tarek & McDowall, 2019). His campaign was driven to garner youth support.

Unfortunately, young voters' aspirations for Saied were crushed when over time he established an authoritarian regime under the guise of constitutionality (Boulifi, 2023). Public discontent with President Saied rose to its peak on Republic Day, July 25, 2021, when demonstrations ensued because he failed to keep his electoral reform promises and make real progress with the help of the Assembly of Representatives of the People. In response, he dissolved parliament and began punishing corrupt judges and legislators (Boulifi, 2023). This was initially met with optimism and enthusiasm; however, Saied's coup enabled him to establish an authoritarian regime by consolidating his power without the parliament's control, arresting and trying journalists and activists who criticized him, and constitutional reforms that served his own interests (Ebel, 2021; Boulifi, 2023). Many youth who had been supportive of his "bold move" in 2021 are now regretting their optimism, stating that this was an example of yet another politician failing Tunisia and its citizens (Boulifi, 2023). Saied's crude attempts at consolidating power continuously fail due to his lack of political experience (Boulifi, 2023). Especially now that the youth have lost faith in him, he lacks the credibility and support necessary for true authoritarian power (Boulifi, 2023).[11]

Furthermore, Rached Ghannouchi, the head of the Ennahda Movement and democratically elected as speaker of the now-dissolved parliament, was just sentenced to prison on May 15th, 2023 (Wintour, 2023). His arrest has been the most extreme repressive tactic thus far in an intensifying campaign against dissidents and perceived critics of President Kais Saied ("Ghannouchi sentencing," 2023). Ghannouchi is one of the leading critics of President Saied,

[11] The information presented in this paragraph is featured in a forthcoming publication by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace of which I took part in the research effort.

publicly referring to him as a “tyrant” (Ben Bouazza, 2023). He is also often recognized as a prominent and consistent voice of moderation and condemnation of extremism, raising questions about how his arbitrary arrest is likely to encourage moderate Islamists to turn to extremism (Wintour, 2023). Over 150 academic and public leaders have condemned his arrest, calling for his release and naming him as “one of the most prominent advocates of democracy in the Arab world” (“More than 100 academics call for Ghannouchi’s release,” 2023).

Similarly, Libya faces continued repression and threats of violence. Since 2014, Libya has been split between rival East and West administrations, each backed by militias and several regional powers (“Libya parliament suspends rival,” 2023). Several bouts of conflict have ensued thus far, with no clear sign of putting this division to an end. The most recent of which is the suspension of parliament-appointed Prime Minister Fathi Bashagha who failed to overthrow his rival Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah, leading to a factional standoff (“Libya parliament suspends rival,” 2023). Bashgha has received public support from eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar, leaving the east and west in opposition on the issue (“Libya parliament suspends rival,” 2023). This is yet another example of the continued violence and lack of safety and security that Libyans face. Libya also remains unable to control violations of human rights. An increasing issue since the onset of the civil war has become a large population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Zayid, 2023). Legislative authorities’ inaction seems to promote immunity, impunity, and suppression of all legal approaches to ensure accountability for committed war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the post-conflict period (Zayid, 2023).

Now, Tunisian and Libyan citizens are filled with a sense of apathy and resolution toward their continued oppression. 2011 youth believed that through successfully deposing their authoritarian leaders, their prospects would improve and their demands for better education, work opportunities and better jobs, social mobility, true political representation, and freedom to express opposing opinions without fear would finally be resolved (Mulderig, 2013). Unfortunately, scholars and policy analysts failed the participants, who were then-youth and now adult members of their countries, as they continue to suffer from the same unjust conditions. "Many have come to believe that the democratic system itself, at least as it works in their country, is the problem" (Jamal & Robbins, 2022). Citizens in the MENA region have come to believe that democracy is bad for economic performance, stability, and government

responsiveness (Robbins, 2022). While Tunisia was hailed as a democratic victory post-Spring, nearly 50% of Tunisians now believe that the limitations that come with democracy outweigh its effectiveness (Robbins, 2022). Scholars claimed that the intended outcome of the Arab Spring was a "Fourth Wave of Democracy." What occurred instead was an unplanned and unsuccessful attempt at democratization, which left the citizens of the region with a negative experience with democracy and the conclusion that it was not the savior that scholars claimed it to be.

Implications

While this research's findings are not generalizable to the MENA region at large, its arguments examine widely contested issues of democratization in the region that still exist today. Citizens of the MENA region never planned for nor expected democracy as a result of the Arab Spring. Therefore, when outside observers placed this expectation upon the movement, states like Tunisia advanced toward democracy and attempted to reform the system in abidance with democratic institutions. However, democracy fails to be an achievable goal for the region. While the question of the "Arab democracy deficit" remains unanswered, the importance of accounting for ordinary citizens' citizens is irrevocably presented. Research that uses quantitative indices such as FIWR and CPI places limitations on our understanding of the events in the region. Furthermore, it disadvantages those who live in the region by inaccurately representing their demands, allowing for scholarly gaps in knowledge that contributed to scholars' inability to understand their grievances nor predict their motivations to participate in uprisings.

Democracy is not a one-size-fits-all solution for every state. While it is a favorable alternative to authoritarianism, the vast space that exists between the two systems encompasses a majority of countries globally. The findings of this research point to the people of individual states themselves as a solution to the problem. Rather than attempt to forcefully place unique governance into a pre-existing mold, scholars and academics can shape their framework to create a new model that accurately captures and reflects the contemporary state of affairs.

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APPENDIX

Name	Country of Origin	Age	Gender	Occupation	Categories Discussed	Source
Abes Hamid	Tunisia	36	Male	Judge	Corruption Safety & Security Human Rights Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Ahlem Yazidi	Tunisia	N/A	Female	Student of linguistics and literature	Safety & Security Human Rights Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Marwen Jemili	Tunisia	N/A	Male	Graduate student	Corruption Safety & Security Human Rights Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Marwa Hermassi	Tunisia	26	Female	Student	Quality of Life Human Rights	Alsaleh, 2015
Yesmina Khedhir	Tunisia	25	Female	English teacher	Corruption Safety & Security Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Nada Maalmi	Tunisia	21	Female	Student	Quality of Life Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Mohamed Zarrug	Libya	44	Male	Coordinator of information department	Quality of Life Safety & Security Human Rights	Alsaleh, 2015
Khairi Altarhuni	Libya	32	Male	High school teacher	Safety & Security Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Abdulmonem Allieby	Libya	24	Male	University student in networking and telecommunications	Quality of Life	Alsaleh, 2015
Ehab Ibrahim al-Khinjari	Libya	27	Male	Battalion of Tripoli Rebels	Safety & Security Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Gay Emmaya Tongali	Libya	N/A	Female	Registered nurse in medical surgical unit	Human Rights	Alsaleh, 2015
Adel el-Taguri	Libya	48	Male	Child health consultant	Safety & Security Human Rights	Alsaleh, 2015
Ezedin Bosedra Abdelkafi	Libya	35	Male	Cardiothoracic surgeon	Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015

Aisha A. Nasef	Libya	45	Female	Hematologist	Democracy	Alsaleh, 2015
Malek Sghiri	Tunisia	N/A	Male	Student	Democracy	Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013
Mohamed Mesrati	Libya	23	Male	Author	Corruption Human Rights	Al-Zubaidi, Cassel, & Roderick, 2013
Khalid Albaih	Libya	41	Male	Political cartoonist	Corruption	Albaih, 2021
Nouha Tourki	Tunisia	N/A	Female	French teacher	Democracy	"Tunisia Anniversary," 2011
Youssef Attig	Tunisia	N/A	Male	Businessman	Quality of Life Human Rights	"Tunisia Anniversary," 2011
Intissar Kherigi	Tunisia	N/A	Female	Trainee lawyer and human rights activist	Democracy	"Tunisia Anniversary," 2011

N/A: the participant did not list their age and their age was not available by searching online