



5-2021

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Hannah Miller
Brigham Young University

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Recommended Citation

Miller, Hannah (2021) "Gender Equality and Democratization: How Greater Gender Equality Helps Explain Tunisian Success in the Arab Spring," *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*: Vol. 38 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sigma/vol38/iss1/7>

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Gender Equality and Democratization:
How Greater Gender Equality Helps Explain Tunisian Success in the Arab Spring

Hannah Miller
Dr. Quinn Mecham
POLI 450
6 April 2020

On March 8, 2017, millions of men and women filled the streets of dozens of the world's major cities to commemorate International Women's Day. Many speculated that the election of Donald Trump, with his misogynist statements and obscene behavior towards women, contributed to the unprecedented numbers of these marches. It was the event's fortieth anniversary, the United Nations having designated March 8 as International Women's Day in 1977 to celebrate progress and invite all nations to continue to increase gender equality.

Tunisia celebrates two women's days. The second, August 13, is also a public holiday celebrating the landmark Code of Personal Status, which gave unrivaled rights to women in the Middle East/North African (MENA) region. The law outlawed polygamy and declared that women were neither "secondary nor complementary" to men (Coleman, 2018).

Tunisia is unique in the region for other reasons. First, Tunisian women have historically enjoyed higher relative levels of equality than their regional neighbors. Also, besides Israel, Tunisia is the only democracy in the MENA region. Could these two anomalies be linked?

This paper explores the status of Tunisian women before, during, and after its 2011 revolution that launched a wave of regional revolutions and mass protests known as the Arab Spring. Only in Tunisia's case (the so-called Jasmine Revolution) did the Arab Spring result in a lasting democracy (a regime where all legislative and executive positions are filled by representatives who win in free and fair and regular elections), a result that has puzzled social scientists. I argue that an obvious but often forgotten variable —gender equality—could be a significant factor in explaining Tunisia's success in achieving democracy compared to the failure of its neighbors.

Tunisia's case demonstrates that a certain level of gender equality, before a revolutionary process, may be a significant variable in creating positive results for democracy and post-revolutionary stability. In this paper, Egypt will serve as a counterexample to show how low gender equality can generate negative results. Egypt's existing culture of low gender equality, rampant sexual violence, and the exclusion of women from political processes may have been a factor that doomed the aspirations of their pro-democracy revolutionaries, both male and female, and contributed to the failure of the revolution.

Delayed Democratization in the Middle East and North Africa

For contextual clarity, before discussing why gender equality mattered in Tunisia's democratic transition process and why it matters for democratic transitions in general, we must first review the attempts of Middle Eastern and North African states to democratize, especially their most recent attempts during the Arab Spring. Democracy has had multiple global waves, but the Middle East has failed to catch any of them. In the Arab Spring, it seemed as though the region's time had finally come. However, almost all efforts for democratization ultimately failed. This raised the question of why Middle Eastern states are so resistant to transition to democratic systems, especially since statistics show that 86% of citizens of Arab states support democracy (Jamal et al. 2008, 98).

Not only desire for, but action towards change and revolution blossomed in many countries during the Arab Spring. The uprisings began soon after December 17, 2010, when Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi publicly self-immolated in a shocking demonstration of his frustration with the limited economic opportunity in Tunisia. Grievances about the low

standard of living and the lack of political freedoms led thousands of Tunisians to protest against President Ben Ali's 23-year repressive regime.

Tunisia succeeded in toppling its government in 29 days. The quick and impressive toppling of the regime in Tunisia ignited hope in many other Arab peoples with similar economic and political grievances towards their authoritarian governments. A few weeks after Ben Ali's demise, Egyptians flooded Cairo's main square to protest the Mubarak regime. Mubarak was similarly ousted after only a few weeks of protests, but Egypt's political woes were far from over. By this time, news of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt reached many other Arab peoples via news media and social media outlets. Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain also saw major uprisings and violence. Additionally, sustained uprisings reached most other states in the region, including Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, and Sudan.

Unfortunately, the rate of success of the Arab Spring was low. Nine years after the uprising, solely Tunisia succeeded in establishing a lasting democratic regime with substantial political liberalization and expanded rights. Other authoritarian states succeeded in squandering the hopes of the revolutionaries through regime repression or economic incentives. The anomaly of Tunisian success has been debated by many social scientists. One explanation could be the importance of adopting secularism by Tunisia's Ennahda party. Secularism is not necessary for democracy; however, Alfred Stepan claims that "twin tolerance" between religious citizens and the state is necessary. The first toleration is that of religious citizens toward the state. It requires that "they accord democratically elected officials the freedom to legislate and govern without having to confront denials of their authority based on religious claims—such as the claim that 'Only God, not man, can make laws.'" The second toleration is

that of the state toward religious citizens. This type of toleration “requires that laws and officials must permit religious citizens, as a matter of right, to freely express their views and values within civil society, and to freely take part in politics, as long as religious activists and organizations respect other citizens’ constitutional rights and the law” (Stepan, 2000).

After winning Tunisia’s post-revolution elections, the Ennahda, although an Islamist party, accepted secularism and separated the powers of the state from the power of religious figures and texts. Consequently, the new 2014 Tunisian constitution did not include Islamic Shari’a law. Contrastingly, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood (MB) rejected secularism after winning the post-revolution elections in Egypt. It opted to include Shari’a jurisprudence in the new constitution and gave Muslim clerics power to interpret religious, and subsequently, civil law, which rules not only the Muslim citizens, but forces Islamic interpretations of the civil law on all Egyptians (Al Tuba, 2016). Further differences between these two Islamic parties will be addressed later in this paper.

Why Gender Equality is an Essential Factor for Democratization (Theory)

Existing theories as to why Middle Eastern states have been unable to realize democracy are inconclusive and contradictory. Some arguments are economically based. Samuel Huntington argues that modernization is an important prerequisite to democratization (Huntington, 1996). However, multiple Middle Eastern states, especially the oil states, are blatant exceptions to this theory. Some cite oil wealth and the rentier effect as primary obstacles to democratization. Melanie Cammett claims that what she calls the “governance gap,” where resource-rich countries can pay their citizens in exchange for political acquiescence, inhibits the potential for democratic transitions (Cammett, 2015).

The pervasiveness of the public sector in Middle Eastern economies could also stunt democratic transitional potential. Modernization theory emphasizes the role of the middle class in pushing for expanded political rights. However, the middle class in much of the Middle East is unique in the sense that it is mostly employed by the state and therefore risks much more by rebelling against the state (Waterbury, 1994). Authoritarian statecraft, clan governance, ethnic and religious sectarianism, and the effects of colonialism and imperialism are also among contributing factors.

Steven Fish published a unique argument. He says that, generally, Islamic countries have lower female literacy, less representation in government, and male-dominated sex-ratios; he argues that this gender gap is the main obstacle to democratization. Fish's argument would have been stronger if he said Middle Eastern countries have this problem instead of Muslim majority countries. Multiple Muslim majority states, including Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, are either full or partial democracies and have even had female heads of state. Additionally, many non-Muslim states suffer from greater gender inequality than some Muslim majority countries. What is more broadly valid is that *any* country with a large gender gap is very unlikely either to be a democracy or to democratize. Overlooking the status of women as a significant variable for contemporary democratization has been a lamentable omission by political scientists and other theorists alike.

It is often assumed that gender equality is typically an effect of democratization instead of a prerequisite. What if the opposite is true? Well-established democratization theories state that the process of political liberalization, meaning the extension of civil liberties and the reduction of state repression, tends to precede a democratic transition (Wang, et al., 2017). This

process suggests that in order to gain democracy, a country must first give civil liberties to both men and women because “the granting of rights – specifically the freedom of domestic movement and discussion, participation in labor markets and property rights – is especially necessary for women to generate civic skills that are crucial for the development of opposition movements” (Wang, et al., 2017, 737). Without these rights, half of the population would remain in the private sphere, uninvolved in political activities and not contributing to any potential opposition movement. The expansion of women’s civil liberties can enhance civil society’s pressure and demands on authoritarian governments for political change by increasing the number of stakeholders actively able to participate in society.

Female participation in the democratization process is important for other reasons as well. As Wang and his co-authors argue, the process of political liberalization that leads to democratization includes not only the extension of civil liberties but also the reduction of state repression. The possibility of a democratic transition is often conditional on a state’s ability or willingness to repress the opposition pushing for democracy. States calculate and weigh the cost of repression compared to the costs of concessions and democratic reform. Political scientist Robert Dahl argued that if the political costs of suppression exceed the costs of toleration, regimes will appease opposition groups by making democratic reforms (Dahl, 1971).

The involvement of women in opposition movements increases the cost of repression. Wang explains the logic behind the heightened cost that female participation brings; “when half of the population – that is, women – increasingly gain the rights to move, voice demands, discuss, and hold material and immaterial assets, the calculation of repression cost is significantly changed. Conversely, countries where women are denied their basic rights – that is,

highly gender unequal societies – are less likely to democratize as fewer people have the ability to express opposition to the system, and thus the relative cost of repressing revolts is lower” (Wang, et al., 2017, 737).

Additionally, female participation in opposition has a unique effect in raising the cost of repressing opposition movements. Various “mother’s movements” have had substantial effects and significant success in opposing authoritarian regimes and injustice. Mothers in Chile continuously protested publicly against the military regimes and military dictator Pinochet in the 1970s and 80s to know where their disappeared children and husbands were. These mothers gained international recognition when the band U2 ended their 1998 nationally televised concert in Santiago by inviting many of these protesting mothers onto the stage to show pictures of their disappeared loved ones and say their names into the microphone. This display sparked international sympathy for these mothers, and an international arrest warrant led to Pinochet’s arrest in London several months after the concert for his connection with many human rights violations (Greene, 2013).

Mothers in Turkey have similarly challenged various repressive governments, with groups like the Saturday Mothers who have held over 700 demonstrations demanding answers from the government about their disappeared family members. Women, especially mothers, have a unique effect on opposition movements because there is often a sacred status accorded to them. (Karaman, 2016). Therefore, using violence against them is much more costly since it casts increasing shame on the regime.

The link between gender equality and democracy is inescapable. Since women generally account for half of a population, such a large social category without full political rights would

be inherently undemocratic. Traditional cultural attitudes tend to present major barriers to women's participation in government offices, and countries with Islamic backgrounds fall towards the bottom of global rankings for the percentage of women in Parliament (Inglehart et al., 2002). Inglehart and his co-authors find that a cultural shift of attitudes towards women's roles and freedom of self-expression drive the process of democratization. Their study concludes that "cultural changes seem to bring rising female representation in parliament regardless of whether or not democratization occurs." (Inglehart, et al., 2002, 328). However, rising gender equality improves the chances of democratic institutions to emerge and thrive. Countries with more liberal views towards women's roles and their freedom in self-expression are more stable democracies (Inglehart et al., 2002, 329). Gender equality then works in a positive feedback loop: a certain level of gender equality is necessary for democracy to begin, the democracy begets more gender parity, strengthening the democracy, and so on.

In her book, *The First Political Order*, Hudson and her co-authors point out that a society's oppression of and violence towards women are a microcosm for a regime's use of oppression and violence against their people. They state that societies built by male kin groups that monopolize resources by subordinating women, "will not be predisposed to evolve as democracies, but rather as male dominance hierarchies in the form of autocracy" and that "political autocracies not only seem natural when women are subordinated, but men actually may feel a vested interest in the acceptance of autocracy at the group level to justify the use of autocracy at the household level" (Hudson, 2020, 119).

Hudson et al. identify a "syndrome" that exists in many societies where men subordinate women by monopolizing decision-making power, monopolizing the control of

resources, and using force and violence to coerce the women into submission. According to their data, the syndrome dominates the society in nearly all of the Middle East and North Africa. Tunisia is the only country in the region where they cite, the syndrome is “present, but somewhat mitigated”. All other MENA states are either dominated by it completely, or the syndrome is “hardly mitigated”. (Hudson, 53).

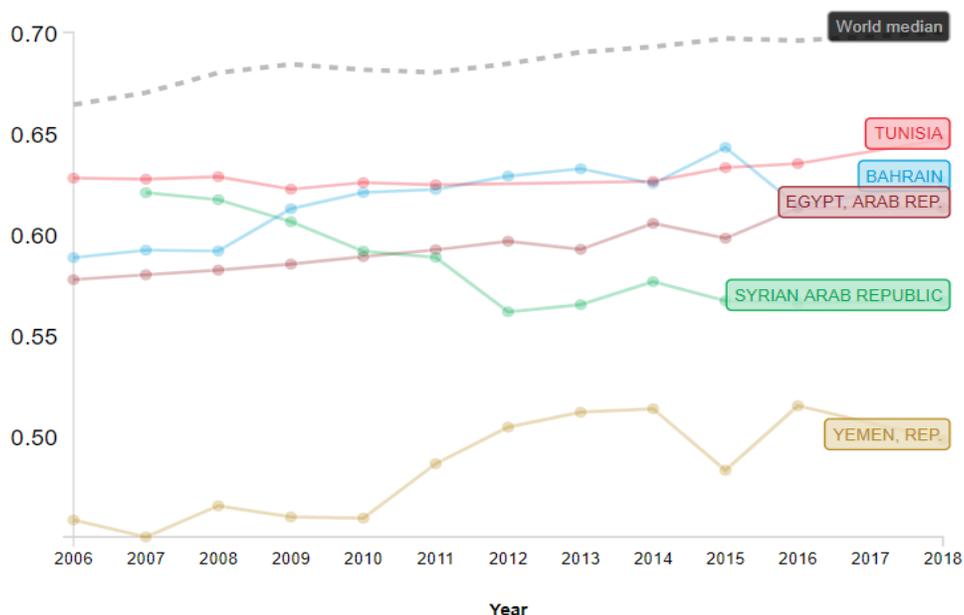
In *The First Political Order*, Pamela Shifman says, “until families are safe and democratic, society will not be. You have to address one before you can the other” (Hudson, 167). Looking at measurable variables like female economic participation, female literacy and school enrollment rates, physical security of women, rights for women in divorce, inheritance, custody cases, and more could point to higher levels of democratic attitudes and practices in families. The existence or lack of these variables reflect familial democratic attitudes because they demonstrate an equal distribution of rights and resources between the men and women of families. Families that hold more gender-equal attitudes will produce democratic societies. Therefore, the mechanism for democratic transition may be a democratic family structure.

The previously stated arguments and theories in this section indicate that the pre-existence of gender equality in non-democratic states will only aid the process of a democratic transition and may help instigate it. This paper specifically argues that the relatively high level of gender equality in Tunisia was a contributing factor to the success of the 2011 democratic transition.

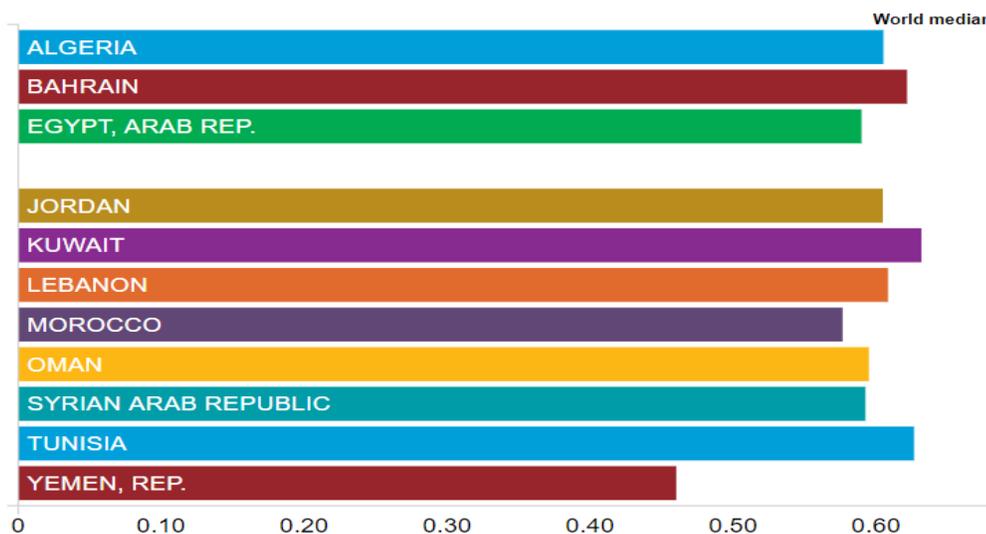
Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa

Looking at democratization in the Middle East through gender equality theories' frameworks may offer an enlightening explanation for the issue at hand. The Middle East generally suffers from not only long-lasting authoritarianism but also low levels of gender equality and female liberation. Middle Eastern and North African countries consistently rank in the lowest quartile of the Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020). The 2010 Global Gender Gap Index shows that in the year prior to the Arab Spring uprisings, the Middle East ranked the lowest of all global regions in both overall rank and gender equality progress on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2011).

Using data from the World Bank, I compared the five major participants in the Arab Spring: Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain (Libya, another major participant, does not have sufficient data). All these countries ranked below the global medium. However, comparatively, Tunisia scored the highest.



Adding the other regional countries that saw sustained protests, again we see each of them lagging behind the world median. And again, we see Tunisia coming out tied at the top with Kuwait (TCdata360, Overall Global Gender Gap Index). Does the above evidence suggest



that a threshold of gender equality was indeed a factor in the success of Tunisia’s revolution? A second country that the world had high expectations for during the Arab Spring was Egypt.

However, Egypt failed in sustaining a democratic transition. Egyptians, like Tunisians, revolted against a long-time authoritarian dictator. Both states succeeded in overthrowing their old regimes and instigating democratic elections. Both states saw Islamist parties win these elections. However, while the Tunisian democratic government is now relatively stable, Egypt quickly reverted to authoritarianism after a military coup in 2013.

Democracy is not only an institution but also a culture. Thus, democratization cannot succeed if the regime is the only aspect to change. Rather, culture must also transform until societies are more democratic-like, with guaranteed liberties, rights, security, and equality for all. In this paper, I assume a comparative analysis using Tunisia and Egypt as two cases to show that the chance of a democratic outcome increases when the culture of the transitioning country is more egalitarian. As stated previously, one of the most rampant and obvious inequalities in the Arab world is inequality between men and women. Therefore, successful democratization is more likely when gender equality prior to and during the transitional phase is higher.

Methodology

I use process tracing to measure gender equality levels in Tunisia and Egypt prior to their 2010/2011 revolutions. I measure the status of women by measuring multiple variables under five different factors: political factors, economic factors, social factors, civil/legal factors, and lastly, educational factors. I measure each factor by measuring one or more specific variables to show gender equality levels prior to the start of the respective revolutions. To measure civil/legal factors, I look at existing laws that either discriminate against or expand the rights of

women. I specifically look at laws surrounding marriage, abortion, property, divorce and custody rights, and the personal status or family code laws. To measure political factors, I look at the percent of female participation in the Tunisian and Egyptian state governments. I measure economic factors by recording the percentage of female participation in the labor force and the unemployment gap between men and women. I measure social factors by (a) ranking the levels of sexual violence as very prevalent, prevalent, or less prevalent, (b) ranking female physical security as high, medium, or low, and (c) sex ratio demographics of each nation-state. Lastly, to measure education, I use data on (a) female literacy rates and (b) gender gaps in school enrollment, specifically at the gender demographics of university enrollment. These variables should indicate a level of gender equality with reasonable accuracy.

After comparing the pre-revolution conditions of Tunisia and Egypt, I focus on female participation and mobilization during the protests themselves. Based on academic accounts and journalistic data, I rank the level of participation of women in each revolution as high, medium, or low. Secondly, I inspect how welcome and/or safe female participants were in each revolution by looking at the prevalence of gender-based or sexual violence in the protests.

Lastly, I compare the political outcomes and effects of the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions. I re-measure the same variables for the political, social, and civil measures prior to the revolution to see if democracy has expanded by looking to see if women's rights have expanded. I look specifically at how involved women are in the post-revolution phase measured by the number of women serving on constitutional councils and serving in the new governments. I also look at the new constitutions and laws that either expand or narrow gender equality.

The Higher Status of Tunisian Women in Pre-Revolution Society

Pre-existing political rights for women in Tunisia reflected a society that already had many democratic ideals—a society ripe for democratization. At the Independence of Tunisia in 1956, the government adopted the Personal Status Code (PSC) that instituted a series of laws increasing gender equality in several areas. The PSC was revolutionary in many ways, giving Tunisians unprecedented rights compared to the rest of the region. Under the PSC, Tunisian women had greater guaranteed rights than any other Arab women. The PSC abolished polygamy (making Tunisia the first Muslim country to do so), guaranteed protection for women against abuse from their husbands, and established women's equality in divorce, property rights, marriage, and child custody (Megahed, 2011, 405). The PSC also abolished the right of a father to force his daughter into marriage.

Since its adoption, many more liberal reforms and amendments have been added to the PSC. In 1962, the state allowed access to birth control, and in 1965, Tunisia legalized abortion. It was the first Muslim state to do so and granted this right to women eight years before the United States did (Saifuzzaman, 2017, 230). As of 1973, it is legal for women to have an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. In 1985, a new law stipulated death as a possible penalty for perpetrators of rape. In 1993, the Code was modified to give wives/mothers the right to give their patrimony and citizenship to their children in the same capacity as husbands/fathers. Women in other Arab countries, including Jordan, still do not have the right to pass on their citizenship to their children. Women in Tunisia also acquired the rights to represent their children in judicial procedures and manage their own bank accounts.

As Inglehart and his co-authors pointed out, a cultural shift in the perception of family and gender roles is what creates social changes strong enough to create political changes. Among the 1993 reforms to the PSC, maternal grandparents became equally entitled as paternal grandparents to receive support payments for children. This legal change reflected social trends that were working to eliminate the concept of the patriarchal family.

The Personal Status Code alone shows that Tunisian women had more political liberties than many of their regional counterparts. The 1957 PSC guaranteed many rights to Tunisian women that other Arab women still do not have today. Therefore, I conclude that Tunisian society enjoyed greater gender equality in its civil and legal frameworks before the Arab Spring than any other MENA country.

While Tunisia aggressively reformed the status of women in the family law, Egypt has expanded civil liberties to women more slowly and conservatively. In 1979, President Anwar Al-Sadat's wife Jehan initiated a Personal Status Law granting women more legal rights in marriage, divorce, and custody, which was opposed by Islamist parties. President Sadat implemented the law anyway, perhaps, to undermine the legitimacy of Islamist groups (Megahed 2017, 405).

However, under Mubarak's regime, the gains towards gender equality included in this law went away, as the law was repealed in 1985. The new law still gave women expanded divorce rights and the right to give their Egyptian nationality to their children, but it did not change the law to allow women to travel without the permission of a male relative (Megahed, 2017, 408). This 1985 law also stipulates that "if the wife refuses to show obedience (ta'a) to

the husband, without lawful justification, her maintenance (nafaqa) shall be suspended from the date of refusal.” Another article of this law states that a woman’s right of custody ends when a minor boy turns ten and when a girl turns twelve. After this age, a judge may allow the mother to keep custody of her children, but without custody payments from the father (El Alami, 1994).

While Egyptian women enjoyed greater liberties than women in some other MENA nations, significant institutionalized gender discrimination was still present prior to 2011. Therefore, Egyptian society prior to 2011 did not reflect a democratic society tolerant of female’s civil liberties.

The extent of female political participation in government is another important factor indicating the level of gender equality in Tunisia before the Jasmine Revolution. Tunisian women gained the right to vote and run in elections in 1957. In 2010, Tunisia topped other MENA states and even outranked many Western countries with women constituting almost 28% of Tunisia’s parliamentary deputies in President Ben Ali’s government. This 28% was 3% above the quota that Ben Ali implemented in 2004. Additionally, in 2005, women constituted 28% of the nation’s judges, 30% of its lawyers, 23% of regional governments, and 25% of municipal governments even under the dictatorial regime (Chambers, 2014).

Historically, female political participation in Egypt has been low, only surpassing 5% with the help of gender quotas. In 1956, Egyptian women were granted the right to vote and run for elections. In 1964, 2.3% of parliamentary seats were held by women. The rate reached 9% in 1979 after President Sadat issued a law allocating thirty seats for women. After the removal of

the quota in 1984, women's representation declined and remained stagnant at about 2% (OECD, 2018, 12). Among local councils and governments, in 2008, only 5% of the appointed officials were women. From 1979 until after the Arab Spring, women have never represented more than 10% of local Egyptian governments (OECD, 2018, 14).

According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2009, MENA countries are behind global averages in many factors of education. Quantitative studies considering the past 25 years recognize that greater equality distribution of education between women and men contributes to democratization (Wang, et al., 2017, 736). Tunisia has historically made education a priority, universalizing it in 1958 and making it compulsory for all children in 1991. Women and girls benefited greatly from these educational reforms, as reflected in Tunisia's educational statistics prior to its democratic transition in 2011. According to the Tunisian National Institute of Statistics, by the 2009-2010 academic year, female enrolment in pre-university education reached 98.5% (Megahed, 2017, 407). In 2008-2009, 59.5% of all university students were women (Megahed, 2017, 412). Additionally, Tunisia implemented a literacy program early on that raised female literacy from approximately 4% in 1956 to 71% in 2010 for all adult women and 96% for girls age 15-24 (Index Mundi).

Egypt's education statistics lag behind Tunisia. The Global Gender Gap Index lists Tunisia as 109th on the global education gender gap ranking while ranking Egypt 126th. This table compares pre-university and tertiary education in Egypt and Tunisia and shows disparities in female education rates in both countries. Tunisia does significantly better in both pre-university

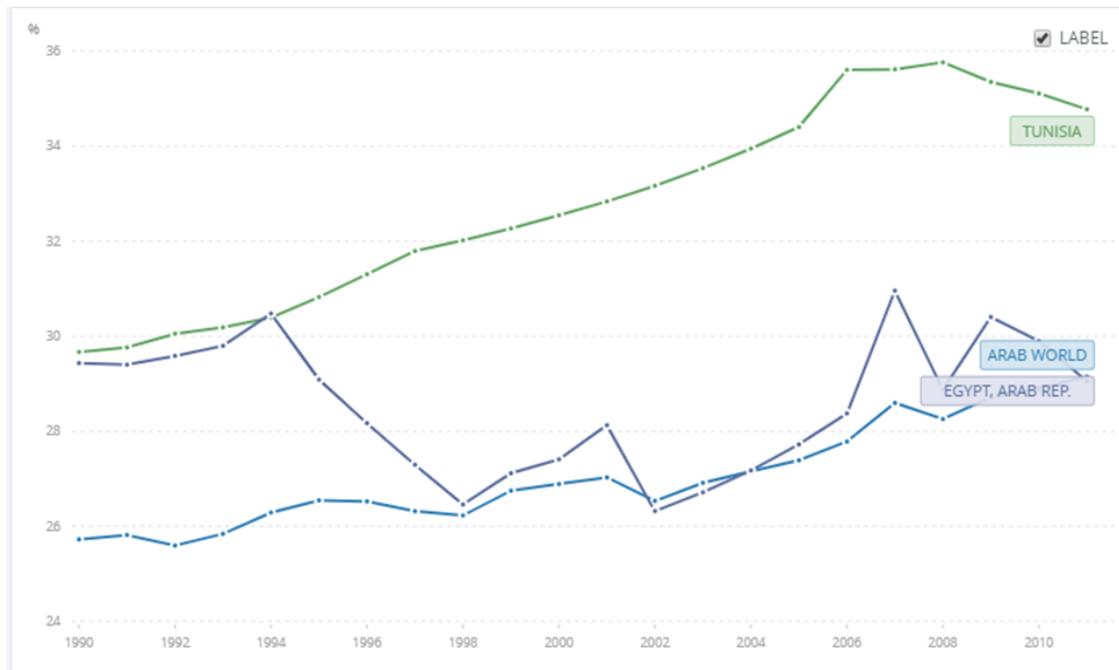
Pre-University Education	Tunisia (2009)	Egypt (2005)
Total enrolment rate	97.7%	90.1%
Male enrolment rate	97.4%	90.0%
Female enrolment rate	98.5%	90.3%
Tertiary Education	Tunisia (2009)	Egypt (2008)
Percentage of Female Students	59.5%	46%

and tertiary enrollment rates. Additionally, Egyptian adult female literacy rates in 2010 were 64.9%, over six percent less than their Tunisian counterparts.

Another way to measure female empowerment and a society's inclusivity of women is by looking at the rate of participation of women in the economy. Measuring both the percentage of female participation and the unemployment gap between men and women can help rank the status of women in Tunisian and Egyptian society prior to the revolutions. Tunisia rapidly increased its percentage of women in the labor force over the last half-decade. The female labor force was a mere 5.5% in 1966. By 1990, the ratio was 29.6%, and by 2010, women represented 34.8% of the labor force (Data World Bank, 2020d).

Female participation in Egypt took a different trajectory. While Egypt was nearly on par with Tunisia in 1990, with women making up 29.4%, it steadily declined until it hit 23.6% in 2002. By 2010, it had risen back up to 29%. Unemployment rates among women were higher than men in both countries, but the unemployment gap was significantly larger in Egypt, where, in 2008, 19.2% of females versus 5.9% of males were unemployed. In Tunisia in 2005, female and male unemployment rates reached 17.3% and 13.1%, respectively (Wang, 2017).

On the eve of the revolutions, Tunisia's female labor force participation was 34.8% juxtaposed to Egypt's at 29%. Egypt's ratio was on par with the regional average, while Tunisia was above it (Data World Bank 2020f).



Ratio of Female to Male Labor Force Participation Rate

When measuring female empowerment, Valerie Hudson, a political scientist at the Bush School of Government, says that society often overlooks the factors and variables that more truly reflect female empowerment. Looking at literacy rates or the percentage of seats in parliament held by women can be misleading. Afghani women hold 28% of national parliament seats, more than the corresponding 23.5% in the United States. However, most people would not argue that Afghani women are more empowered than American women. Women claiming higher government involvement does not always translate to greater gender equality and empowerment. According to Hudson, some of the more telling variables of gender

empowerment and equality are the physical security of women, divorce and custody laws, and the prevalence of female infanticide, to name a few (Hudson, 2012).

Looking at the physical security of women both before and during the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia should be a significant indicator of their status. Data from the Womanstats Project categorized Egypt in 2009 as a place where “women lack physical security.” In that same year, Womanstats categorized all other MENA countries in this same category except for Tunisia and Israel, who were ranked among nations with “low levels of physical security.” Tunisia and Israel were not free of physical attacks on women, but the rule of law offered relatively more protection than other regional states (Womanstats, 2009).

Looking at the rates of sexual violence in Egypt reflects a very unequal society, where nearly 50% of the population was physically insecure and highly prone to physical and psychological attacks. In 2010, women’s rights activist Abul Komsan surveyed 1,010 women in Egypt and found that 98 percent of foreign women and about 80 percent of Egyptian women said they had been sexually harassed in some way. Additionally, two-thirds of men said that they had harassed women. This type of gendered violence on the basic societal level creates a broader culture of violence and exploitation at the political and state level. While it would be inaccurate to say that Tunisian women experience no or even low levels of harassment, they did fare marginally better. Additionally, Womanstats ranked Tunisia as a regional leader in lower rates of child marriage, marital rape, and female genital cutting.

Regarding sex-demographics, unbalanced sex-ratios can show how women are unequal in several factors, from female selective abortion and female infanticide, higher rates of murder

of women, and the greater ease of men in migration. A natural sex ratio would have more women since women tend to live longer. However, in 2010, about 50.5% of the Egyptian population was male. That may seem insignificant, but with a population of about 83 million people in 2010, there were approximately 1 million more men than women in Egypt (Plecher, 2020a). In 2010 49% of the Tunisian population was male – a more natural balance (Plecher, 2020b).

At the end of this section, I summarize the most important data in a simple visual. This graph recaps the relatively greater gender equality that existed in Tunisia before the Jasmine Revolution. This narrower gender gap shows that at least a partial democratic cultural transition in Tunisia had already taken place – thereby facilitating the intuitional transition.

	Tunisia	Egypt
% of parliamentarians who are female	28.0%	2.0%
% of labor force that is female	34.8%	29.0%
% of male/female unemployment gap	4.2%	13.3%
Basic rights guaranteed in PSC or Family Code	Yes	No
% of female literacy	71.0%	64.9%
% of university students who are female	59.5%	46.0%
Physical security of women	Low	None

Female Participation in the Jasmine Revolution Facilitated the Democratic Transition

On the eve of the Arab Uprisings, women in Tunisia were poised to be significant stakeholders in political change. They had accumulated substantial legal, social, and economic rights and had a greater capacity to express opposition to the system. They also had more to lose if the revolutionary movement posed a threat to their thus far acquired rights. Parallely, Egyptian women were still very much marginalized. However, despite the apparent political and social marginalization of women in Egypt, both Tunisian and Egyptian women showed up in large numbers to participate in demonstrations against their autocratic governments.

To portray the extent to which women participated and were welcome in the demonstrations, I measure the presence and participation of women in the protest, ranked low, medium, or high, and secondly, how welcomed/safe women were in protests by looking at the prevalence of sexual violence in demonstration activities.

While historically political protests are often male-dominated, both Tunisian men and women filled the streets, demanding the end of Ben Ali's 24-year autocratic reign in December of 2010. Female voices in the protests created a conundrum for the state. Ben Ali's government had been the biggest champion of women's rights in the region over the past few decades. But instead of cooperating with or defending their alleged protector, women joined the men in demanding the fall of the regime. One Tunisian woman described the solidarity between all Tunisians, male and female, saying, "there was not the smallest difference between the men and the women... we were in the squares, facing bullets with the men and even on their shoulders chanting for freedom, we were with the young men in the front lines, us protecting them and they protecting us. It brought us together for one goal – the fall of the regime" (Al fara'ai, 2017).

Multiple news accounts and international non-governmental organizations repeatedly emphasized the strength and numbers of the women in Tunisian protests. Women of all kinds participated – students, grandmothers, professionals, etc., wearing veils, jeans, and everything in between (Morgan, 2011). Therefore, I comfortably rank female participation in the Jasmine Revolution as high.

Egyptian women likewise showed up in huge numbers to the first protest in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011. One Egyptian man described the first days of the protests as an “incredible time in Egypt.” He said, “Women and men were comrades in the protests... women were not afraid.... There was a sense of [male demonstrators’] complete respect, complete support, and complete solidarity towards the women” (Johansson-Nogues, 2013, 398). In the initial days of the protests, female participation was high and female mobilization was pivotal, adding to the weight and seriousness of the anti-Mubarak protests. However, the initial welcoming of women’s participation in demonstrations began to diminish as women became victims of sexual harassment from both state actors and other protestors.

The relative safety and acceptance of women in anti-regime demonstrations also point to the level of social inclusiveness of women. As Tunisian women’s roles became more visible via social media and famous Tunisian blogger, Lina Ben Mhenni, the state launched gender-specific deterrents. In some final efforts to disperse protestors, the regime security forces used sexual harassment or rape against female demonstrators. However, the quick fall of the regime prevented the continuation of attacks. The Tunisian people quickly realized that women were an essential part of their transition and included and protected them in the transitional period.

After the fall of Ben Ali's regime, women actively participated and were welcomed in the transitional period and the building of a new Tunisia. Right after the ousting of Ben Ali, Tunisian Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi formed the Higher Political Reform Commission, (in Arabic اللجنة العليا للإصلاح السياسي) in charge of overseeing legal and constitutional reform, hailed as one of the most effective consensus-building bodies in democratic transition history (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 93). The commission, which included various males and females from varying civil society groups, discussed the things they considered the most important in moving forward with democracy. One of those things was the preservation and even development of civil liberties and protected status for women. The commission wanted to aim for male-female parity in politics and therefore suggested that every other name on party candidate lists must be a female. The religious Ennahda party was the first party to accept this gender parity provision (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 93).

Soon after the beginning demonstration in Tahrir Square, the state started targeting women, seeing gendered violence as a highly effective tool for repression. Allegedly, the policy of Egyptian security forces was to harass and sexualize female protestors and to impugn the women's respectability (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 3019). Government-paid thugs would enter protest crowds and assault women. It was impossible to tell these thugs from other protestors. Despite these challenges, the Egyptian masses succeeded in pressuring Mubarak to step down only a few weeks after Tunisians ousted Ben Ali. However, the fall of Mubarak did not signal the end of the revolution, nor the end of violence towards women.

Mubarak was not replaced by an open civilian body like Tunisia, but rather by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) - composed entirely of male military officers.

Protests and violence towards women, including sexual harassment and assault and threats of rape, continued under the SCAF interim government that lasted from February 11, 2011 to June 30, 2012. On March 9, 2011, several women's organizations marching in Cairo, demanding the protection and expansion of rights for women, were attacked by state-paid thugs. The thugs arrested 19 women who were then tortured and sexually degraded in state dependencies, forced to submit to virginity tests. Egyptians today are still worried about the existence of such groups, referred to as *magmud'at baltagia* (in Arabic, *مجموعات بلطجية*) who undertake thug-like activity such as theft, sexual harassment, mugging, etc. and consistently avoid legal consequences.

Egyptian protestors and international media recorded multiple instances of especially harsh treatment of female demonstrators. U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton responded to horrid scenes of women being beaten and stripped to their underwear in the streets by police forces saying, "women are being beaten and humiliated in the same streets where they risked their lives for the revolution only a few months ago..." (Koppelman, 2011).

Women were essentially marginalized and terrorized out of reaching their full potential for participation in Egypt's 2011 revolution. Both Mubarak and the interim government after his fall used sexual violence to terrorize and wipe out the respectability of female demonstrators by sexually assaulting them in public, arresting them as prostitutes, raping, and sexually torturing them in jail (Johansson-Nogues, 2013). Many male protestors refused to let their female family members participate in demonstrations for fear their women would be sexually assaulted. Two years after the start of the revolution, 99.3 percent of Egyptian women said they had experienced some form of harassment (UN Women, 2013).

Inclusion/Exclusion of Women in the Transitional Period

So far, we have looked at the status and inclusivity of Egyptian and Tunisian women before and during the revolution in each respective state. The political, civil, social, educational, and economic factors measured in the first section of this paper show that Tunisia was more egalitarian than both Egypt and all other MENA states. Alternatively, Egypt reflected a more conservative society that undermined women's rights in many ways. Egyptian society largely ignored developing the status of women and likewise permitted the exploitation of women in many ways. Just as a culture of hierarchical male dominance controlled the social, economic, political, and civil spheres of society, the Egyptian interim government (SCAF) and later elected government (The Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi) continued a vertical structure of ruler and ruled. The more vertical a society is in its hierarchical power structure, the harder it will be to flatten into a horizontal, egalitarian, and democratic structure. Tunisia already reflected a less severe hierarchy, with women participating more equally with men than most MENA societies.

Eventually, both Tunisia and Egypt saw democratic elections after the fall of their authoritarian regimes. In both elections, Islamist parties won the largest percentage of votes. However, each respective Islamist party took different stances on women's rights.

When the moderate Islamist party Ennahda party won the Tunisian elections of 2011, many in the international community worried that the party would try to reverse Tunisia's progressive family code. But instead, the party assured continued protection of women's rights, and Ennahda party leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, called himself an "advocate of absolute equality

of men and women” (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 95). The Ennahda party is considered center-right in its ideologies and supports social conservatism and economic liberalism. Ennahda was one of the first parties that voted in favor of an election law requiring electoral lists of each party to include 50 percent women and 50 percent men, placed alternately on the list to ensure a high percentage of women in the legislative assembly. In 2014, the Ennahda party had the highest number of female lawmakers – 41 out of 90 (Kottor, 2014).

The outcomes of the post-revolution elections did not produce total parity. Nearly all running parties failed to put females at the top of their zippered candidate lists (except for Ennahda); therefore, women only won about 27% of the Tunisian Constituent Assembly (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 102). Despite these less-than-ideal outcomes, this percentage is still noticeably higher than the global average.

The election results did not fully reflect gender parity, but to hope for such an outcome would be quite unrealistic, even in the parliaments of the most liberal democracies. It is apparent, however, that women were politically and socially involved in Tunisia’s democratic transition. Women participated in protests, founded rights-based organizations, and mobilized around the writing of the constitution. On August 13, 2012 (Tunisia’s Women’s Day), both men and women filled the streets to protest controversial wording in the first draft of the new constitution. Article 28 referred to women as “complementary” to men. Protestors chanted, “Women are complete, not complements!” (Charrad, 2014). This clause was removed in the next draft. Today, the Tunisian Constitution states that men and women are equal under the law, and Ennahda continues to support laws that promote gender equality and protection for

women against violence, although it recently faced criticism for voting against a law that would guarantee equal inheritance for males and females.

In Egypt, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood won the first democratic elections in January 2012 but ensuring women's rights was not on their agenda. The MB supports social and religious conservatism and has long advocated for the traditional roles for women. Women and women's organizations had to fight to keep the Muslim Brotherhood from reversing the civil liberties they had before the revolution, like the right of women to travel alone without the consent of a male relative. The Muslim Brotherhood also attempted to cancel the family law providing women with the right to custody, amend the article granting children born to an Egyptian mother and a foreign father the right to Egyptian nationality, legalize female genital cutting, and abolish 18 as the legal age of marriage (Hafez, 2019).

Official female participation in the Muslim Brotherhood is nearly non-existent. The party did have a few lawmakers in the first parliament formed after the revolution, but men completely monopolized both leadership positions and decision-making bodies of the party. The party additionally claims that it would not support a woman or Christian president in Egypt (Fick, 2012).

Ennahda and the Muslim Brotherhood championing or attacking women's rights is not only a reflection of the parties' attitudes towards gender equality but rather also reflects the permissiveness of the respective societies to tolerate discriminatory policy. In Tunisia's case, we see how civil society mobilized to reject proposed discriminatory language in the draft of Article 28. Contrastingly, Egyptians, except for a few women's rights organizations, did not mobilize to

limit the deterioration of women's rights under the Muslim Brotherhood. The fact that the MB and President Morsi won a democratic election shows that much of Egyptian society was tolerant of the party's gender discriminatory ideologies. Morsi's government called for Egypt to re-evaluate its support for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and "re-consider whether the terms of the convention were suitable 'to our [Egyptian] culture, traditions and [...] established values'" (Dyer, 2013). Many of the MB's policies reflected the "culture, traditions and established values" of Egyptians.

Turnout for the Egyptian parliamentary election was unprecedented, but only 2% (12 of 498) of the seats in both upper and lower houses of parliament were occupied by women, even despite electoral law stipulating that all political parties must have women on their ballots. The first Constituent Assembly in 2012 only had six women out of a 100-member panel. The second Assembly initially included more women, "but all walked out before the draft was finished on the grounds that they were either reportedly being intimidated by their male homologs or found their views being ignored in the drafting of the text" (Johansson-Nogués, 2013, 402). The nearly all-male committee drafted a constitution that did not protect nor prevent gender discrimination nor guarantee women's rights inherent in the Personal Status Law. This constitution was adopted in December 2012.

Popular demonstrations continued in 2013 due to grievances with the results of the 2012 elections. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and Egyptian women's rights group, Nazra, said that during 2013, dozens of gage rape cases were reported, and testimonies indicate that the rapes were organized isolated attacks against female protestors designed to scare and shame women into abandoning demonstrations. This prevented women from

practicing their democratic right to participate in Egypt’s transitional democratic process (Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, 2019). The Muslim Brotherhood’s government took no measures to prevent, punish, or investigate such brutal violations.

Reflecting on female participation in the revolutions and in the transitional period, the men and women of Tunisian society, along with the new political power holders, proved to be more democratic-like by including women in these political processes. While certainly not all Egyptians support or promulgate sexist views, the Egyptian revolution and transitional process, in general, excluded women.

	Tunisia	Egypt
Participation of Women in Demonstrations	High	High
Sustained Sexual Violence Towards Female Protestors	No	Yes
Participation of Women in Writing New Constitution	Moderate	Low
% of Females Elected to New Government	27%	2%
Guaranteed Gender Equality in New Constitution	Yes	No

Conclusion

The status of women in these two countries today is starkly different. Tunisian women enjoy more legal protection, civil liberties, and social inclusivity than women in all other MENA countries. Political power in Tunisia has peacefully alternated between different parties more than twice – a good sign of a stable democracy. Egyptian women experience even harsher political marginalization than before. A military coup in 2013 overturned Egyptian democracy,

and women still live under a government that disregards adequate measures to protect their physical security, leading to Thompson Reuters ranking Cairo as the world's most dangerous megacity for women in 2017 with rampant sexual harassment and limited access to good healthcare, finance and education (Reuters, 2017).

To say that gender equality is the only variable that mattered for the success of the Tunisian revolution would be an oversimplification. A puzzle as complicated as a democratic transition will surely have many other important pieces. Some scholars say that Tunisia's commitment to greater secularism compared to its regional counterparts both before and after the revolution greatly aided the success of democratization. Tunisia had several religiously neutral state structures and laws giving rights to women since its independence. However, these religiously neutral structures and laws were not created nor promoted by secularists, but by many Islamic thinkers who argued for the expansion of women's rights from within Islam. Tahar Haddad, an early Tunisian Islamic thinker, wrote *Notre femme dans la Législation Musulmane et dans la Société* in which he argued that a correct reading of the Quran would lead to women's equality. Many of his ideas were adopted into Tunisia's first Family Code.

Alfred Stepan argues that secularism itself is not what is necessary for democracy, but rather what he called "twin tolerance" where religious citizens tolerate the state and its authority in making laws while states also tolerate religious citizens and their right to express their views and values within society and politics (Stepan, 2012). He points out that the success of both Islamic and secular organizations is contingent upon not enforcing their views on others. However, the real important twin tolerance that existed in Tunisia was civil and religious society's tolerance of women's rights.

Another potentially important variable in the success of Tunisia was the lack of international intervention. International intervention played a significant role in thwarting political change in the other Arab Spring states. Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Egypt all saw significant attempts by other states to affect the results of their popular uprising movements. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates vehemently opposed the fall of their Sunni monarch ally in Bahrain and sent military troops to disperse protestors. Intervention from numerous countries resulted in devastating and bloody proxy and civil wars in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Contrastingly, Tunisia avoided international intervention in all its forms. Certainly, this variable should also be considered in Tunisia's successful democratization.

We return now to the initial question raised in this essay—why have the Middle Eastern states in general struggled to democratize, and why was Tunisia the only successful Arab state to successfully realize a democratic transition during the Arab Spring? I conclude that this is largely because Middle Eastern societies and regimes oppress their women. And as they suppress their women, they suppress their possibility and probability for democracy. When societies oppress women, it invalidates those societies' calls for better treatment and equality from their governments.

Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of United Nations Women, said, "Women's full participation in national and local politics, in the economy, in academia and the media is fundamental to democracy..." She continues, "Indeed, true democracy is based on the realization of human rights and gender equality... Women's rights must be part of the foundation of these new beginnings" (Puri, 2011). Gloria Steinem once said, "the family is a

microcosm of the state... only democratic families can produce and sustain a real democracy” (Hudson, 2019, 119).

Democratization cannot just be an institutional change but must be a social/cultural change first. This cultural change cannot be implemented from a top-down approach, but rather must be the result of a long-time cultural shift in perceptions of gender roles and women’s freedom that later mobilizes to create political change. This type of cultural shift had gained significant momentum in Tunisia before its democratic transition. Since its independence in 1956, to before the revolution in 2011, Tunisians reflected this cultural change as they adopted more liberal laws and practices for women in custody, marriage, property-owning, divorce, etc. Tunisia also achieved significant gains for women in education, health, and economic sectors. This resulted in greater equality and the sharing of resources on all levels of Tunisian society.

We can think of democratic transition as making a jump from an authoritarian culture to a more egalitarian culture. Tunisia was able to make the jump because it had worked since its foundation to narrow the inequality gap, while the gap in Egypt was still too wide to cross. The Tunisian case demonstrates the importance of the link between gender equality and democratization. Female status in Egypt suggests a society unready for democracy.

Egypt, on the other hand, much like the rest of its regional counterparts, had a deep gender inequality gap at the onset of the Arab Uprisings. Egyptian women’s rights campaigners ascribe centuries of tradition and culture as the reason for rife discrimination and inequality (Reuters, 2017). The other major states where democratization did not ensue after mass protests in 2011 also exhibit significant gender inequality in both law and practice, and

therefore, the realization of democracy, a political system based on equality of all citizens, was an unrealistic expectation.

This conclusion presents a few important implications for MENA countries, revolution/democracy theorists, and U.S. foreign policymakers. First, Middle Eastern societies that hope for democracy might best start with tenacious efforts to enable women and treat them fairly. Egypt specifically should have a truth and justice commission for crimes and violations suffered by women during the conflict and transitional periods if it wants to create more stability, equality, and the rule of law under its current regime. Middle Eastern societies should not wait for governments to change laws surrounding women's rights but should initiate cultural changes in families, communities, workplaces, media, and literature. Certain societies have already begun to do so. A small group of women called *Sadaqa* in Amman, Jordan, have unrelentingly campaigned and lobbied for both the government and civil society stakeholders to increase female participation in the labor force by providing workplace daycares, improving public transportation, and eliminating sexual harassment. Men and women in other countries can undertake similar efforts.

When social scientists study revolutions and democratization in a country, they should consider and measure the social and political status of women in the country, along with the prevalence of female participation in the protests and transitional period. To ignore the level of contribution and/or marginalization of a country's largest identity group—women—makes no sense. Additionally, this variable should strongly indicate the likeliness of a country to democratize. Saudi Arabia, for example, likely has many years until it democratizes, despite any political challenges the monarchy may experience. The fall of Saudi's monarchy would not likely

result in a democratic transition at the present time. If Saudi Arabians want democracy, they should start by empowering their women.

This argument also has considerable implications for U.S. foreign policy. If the U.S. is interested in increasing and strengthening democracy in the world, it should support political groups and movements that promise to champion women's rights. The U.S. should also invest in projects that empower women globally. It is also an issue of national and world security. More democratic and liberal states are much less likely to go to war with each other. The chain reaction that women's empowerment would initiate could increase world peace.

Lastly, gender in politics should be included in broader political dialogue with other democratization theory arguments instead of circulating in gender studies circles only. This paper is about democratization, not gender issues. But it points out the importance of gender in politics. If political scientists and politicians start to pay attention to the factor of gender, it could have significant positive implications for the world.

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