

# Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa

The Arab Spring and Beyond

Edited by  
Ricardo René Larémont



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Providing an account of the recent revolutions or reform movements that constituted part of the Arab Spring, this book focuses on these transformative processes in a North African context.

Whilst the longer term outcomes of the Arab Spring revolts are not entirely clear, the revolutionary or reform processes in North Africa are further along than the events taking place in Levant or the Arabian Peninsula, elections having now been held in the post-revolutionary/post-revolt states. Understanding and examining North African events has become critical as the countries in question are part of *Mare Nostrum*; events in North Africa inevitably have effects in Europe. Using examples from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Algeria, *Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa* provides an insider scholar's account of these recent revolutions or reform movements.

One of the first attempts at undertaking an analysis of possible transitions to democracy in the region, this book is a valuable resource for students and researchers with an interest in the Middle East, Political Science or contemporary affairs in general.

**Ricardo René Larémont** is Professor of Political Science and Sociology at SUNY, Binghamton. His recent publications include: *Islamic Law and Politics in Northern Nigeria*; *Islam and the Politics of Resistance in Algeria, 1783–1992*; *The Causes of War and the Consequences of Peacekeeping in Africa*; and *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*.

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**To  
Mohamed Bouazizi  
In Memoriam**

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# 1 Revolution, revolt, and reform in North Africa

*Ricardo René Larémont*

It all started with a young fruit and vegetable street vendor in Tunisia. His name was Mohamed Bouazizi. On December 17, 2010, while he was quietly attempting to sell fruits and vegetables from his stand in the city of Sidi Bouzid to support his family, Mr. Bouazizi was confronted by a municipal inspector who challenged him on his right to sell his wares because he had not obtained a license from the local government authority to do so. Mr. Bouazizi protested. He thought he was being harassed. His goods were confiscated, and while his goods were being seized, he was allegedly slapped in the face by the city inspector, who was a woman. Having lost his means of economic livelihood and having suffered a public affront to his dignity and sense of masculinity, Mr. Bouazizi purchased a can of petrol, poured it over himself and self-immolated in front of the provincial governor's office police in protest. His self-immolation caused the city of Sidi Bouzid to rise in public demonstrations. Those demonstrations spread throughout rural Tunisia throughout the month of December and eventually reached the capital of Tunis during January 2011. On January 14, 2011, President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, an authoritarian ruler who had reigned over Tunisia for 23 years, relinquished his rule and boarded an airplane for Saudi Arabia. The Tunisian revolt and Ben Ali's departure encouraged a chain of revolutions, revolts, and mass demonstrations that would lead to the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and President Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, the assassination of Leader/Colonel Muammar Qaddafi in Libya, constitutional reform in Morocco and Jordan, economic reform in Saudi Arabia, the repression of demonstrations in Algeria and Bahrain, and an ongoing revolt in Syria that at the date of this writing has claimed more than 70,000 lives.

This edited volume examines revolution, revolt, and reform in North Africa during this tumultuous period. North Africa is the subject of this study because it is in North Africa where these processes of social change began and where they have evolved the most. While the longer-term outcomes of the Arab Spring revolts are not entirely clear, they are further along in North Africa than what can be observed elsewhere, for example in the Levant or the Arabian peninsula. In the post-revolution/post-revolt environments of North Africa, elections have been held in each North African state (Egypt,

Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco). During these elections Islamist parties won pluralities in Tunisia and Morocco and then formed coalition governments with secular parties. In Egypt, the Islamist party decided not to share power with secular parties. In Libya and Algeria, however, the results were different. When elections were held there, secular parties won pluralities of the vote.

The Arab Spring or Arab Awakening revolts have altered the authoritarian landscape in North Africa but the transitions to democracy there are not yet complete. We have new, democratically elected regimes but important questions remain concerning the content of democracy, the role of religion in government, and the protection of dissidents.

We need to clarify what has occurred in the region. Are we witnessing revolution or revolt? To answer that question we need to ask, have the relationships of power in society, in the economy, and politics fundamentally changed or have the deck chairs in the ships of state been rearranged—without a real impact on power relations? Are we witnessing revolutions or are less significant events such as revolts or *coups d'états*?

Besides defining whether we are witnessing revolutions, revolts, or *coups d'états*, additional questions remain. First, why did these revolutions or revolts take place at this moment in time? Second, which social classes mobilized to resist or oust authoritarianism? Third, what role did the army and the police play in determining political outcomes? Fourth, what role did technology (particularly television, cell phones, and internet-based social media) play in spreading political revolution or revolt? Fifth, were these “leaderless” revolutions and, if so, what are the longer-term consequences of having either political revolutions or revolts that lacked either a clear leadership or a well-articulated ideologies or programs for political change? Sixth, how did these movements of social resistance accelerate to create a chain reaction across the region, affecting almost every state in North Africa and the Middle East? Seventh, what are the short-term, mid-term, and longer-term outcomes of the Arab Spring revolts?

## **Social revolutions and political revolutions**

For our analysis we need to articulate the differences among the concepts of social revolution, political revolution, revolt, *coup d'état*, and mass demonstrations. In this regard, we find Theda Skocpol's distinctions between *social revolutions* and *political revolutions* to be helpful.<sup>1</sup> According to Skocpol, social revolutions are profound events: they involve a fundamental reordering of the relationships of power in a state and society. They are rare. They most often result from class struggle and conflict. The French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions can be counted among them. What has occurred in North Africa we define as *political revolutions* rather than as *social revolutions*. That differentiation is crucial to any analysis of recent changes in North Africa, as the key question remains: Have the fundamentals of power relations within North African states and societies changed? After defining what has occurred

in North Africa during 2011 as political revolutions, we go on to describe two categories of political revolution (the *revolt* and the *coup d'état*) and then move on to describe yet another category (the *mass demonstration*). These three movements can be distinguished from social revolutions because while they may affect the operation of the state (who rules and how they rule) they do not necessarily transform power relations among classes in society.

Of the five North African cases that we examine, Tunisia and Libya fit within the category of revolts because they displaced authoritarian rulers. The Egyptian case was a hybrid, involving a revolt and *coup d'état* because Egypt's military leadership decided to join the rebels to depose President Mubarak and his apparent heir, his son Gamal. Morocco and Algeria were mass demonstrations that demanded political or economic reform; these two movements did not hinge upon the *displacement* or *replacement* of the regimes in place.

None of these North African movements, thus far, have radically transformed relationships of power in society. We argue further that none had the capacity to evolve towards social revolutions because they lacked an identifiable, sustainable political leadership prepared to implement an ideology or a set of programmatic objectives whose objective was the fundamental and long-term transformation of power relations in society.<sup>2</sup> These movements in North Africa were interested in ousting or decapitating the head of state (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) or reforming the state (Morocco, Algeria). Importantly their inability to create a cohesive political leadership with a clearly articulated ideology or consistent set of programmatic objectives led to their eventual dissipation. What lies in the wake of the 2011 revolts and demonstrations are social movements and conflicts that are diffuse. The absence of programmatic objectives being driven by an identifiable, cohesive and committed political leadership explains why these North African revolts and demonstrations—despite their considerable success in displacing authoritarian leaders in some cases—seem to have lost momentum. The 2011 North African social movements were very important, legitimate, large-scale social resistance movements against leaders of authoritarian states who had created oppressive systems of chronic governmental surveillance and police abuse that frustrated their citizens' aspirations for civil liberties, personal dignity, and a better economic life. Nevertheless, viewed in their totality, these movements stopped short of becoming revolutions.

### **Revolts, *coup d'états*, mass demonstrations**

Of our five cases, two (Tunisia and Libya) were revolts that displaced authoritarian leaders. Egypt was a hybrid, involving mixing a massive social revolt with a *coup d'état*. The role of the military in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya helps us understand differences among these three cases. In Tunisia the military chose to return to their barracks and submitted itself to the control and direction of a civilian government. Egypt became a hybrid revolt/*coup*



*d'état* because the Egyptian military decided to join the rebels so that it would continue to play a dispositive role in the determination of future politics. In Libya the military imploded. Our cases of Morocco and Algeria were large protest movements that demanded political and economic reform rather than displacement of the regime. The Moroccan protest movement resulted in constitutional reform that officially constrained the power of the king in a limited way. The Algerian movement quickly dissipated when the Algerian government reacted to the protests by reducing the cost of important food commodities and investing in large-scale development projects that were aimed at improving employment prospects in the country.

The Tunisian revolt, the Egyptian hybrid revolt/*coup d'état*, and the Libyan revolt undertook different paths. The Tunisian revolt started in interior Tunisia, which historically has been poorer and less economically developed than coastal Tunisia. The Tunisian revolt then moved from the interior of the country to the capital. On its way to its eventual success, the initiators of the political revolution (marginalized working class or unemployed youth from interior Tunisia) joined forces with urban-based liberal secularists who took advantage of the electronic technologies of television, cellular telephones, and internet social media, to create a larger and more diverse social movement including middle-class lawyers and judges, labor union organizers, and urban youth clubs (especially soccer clubs) to create a multi-class revolt. The Egyptian hybrid case was urban-based, being principally located in Cairo, the center of government and media. Like Tunisia it too united lumpenproletarian, proletarian, and *petit bourgeois* elements into a cross-class revolt that eventually united with the army to effect the unique hybrid: the combined revolt/*coup d'état*. The Libyan case began in the city of Benghazi in the eastern province of Cyrenaica, which initially gave the Libyan revolt a regional rather than a national expression. NATO then joined the revolt and by providing indispensable military, logistical, and advisory support, the rebels were able to expand their revolt from the eastern province to the southern and western parts of the country, causing the Qaddafi regime eventually to fall. Morocco and Algeria were categorically different. They were mass demonstrations that demanded political or economic reform rather than the displacement or replacement of the regimes in place.

### **Why now? Explanatory variables**

The chapters in this book reveal multi-causal explanations for the suddenness and velocity of the 2011 North African revolts and mass demonstrations. In the chapters that follow five factors emerged as most relevant for our analyses: (1) the significant growth of large numbers of youth in society that clamored for greater participation in politics and economics yet were denied opportunities for participation; (2) the existence of consistent economic growth in all five North African states that raised expectations among all sectors of the population for economic benefits emerging from that growth;

(3) the disillusion of the *moyenne bourgeoisie* and the *petite bourgeoisie* with ruling elites that led them to break off with them and join with the aspirant revolutionaries and rebels; (4) decisions made by military leaders either to side with the rebels or revolutionaries or with the regime; and (5) the availability of mobilizing electronic technologies, including global television (especially Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya), texting via cellular telephones, and internet-based social media (especially the use of Facebook in the Tunisian case). These electronic technologies accelerated and facilitated the mobilization of citizens and residents in mass movements of social protest.

Chapter 2 of this volume theoretically and empirically addresses the concurrence of three of the factors mentioned above: (1) the emergence of large cohorts of youth in North Africa that created a demographic bulge within society and demanded changes in politics; (2) the constancy of economic growth in the region that enriched elites without providing redress for excessive youth unemployment; and (3) the availability of and access to global television (especially Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya), cellular telephones, and internet social media (especially Facebook) all of which intersected in 2011 to serve as catalysts to the North African protest movements.

Chapter 2's analysis demonstrates via the provision of data that population distributions in North Africa became demonstrably skewed to those in the age cohort under 30 years of age at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which led to the creation of a large group of persons that became disillusioned with the stasis of existing political and economic systems. This significantly large cohort of youth was available to be mobilized into mass movements for social change. Chapter 2 provides population pyramid data on a country-by-country basis and then ties the existence of this large youthful cohort with other macroeconomic data demonstrating consistent economic growth in each North African state for the period from 2000 through 2010. While this consistent economic growth occurred during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the problem with the type of growth that occurred was that wealth was not equitably shared with either alienated youth or disaffected elements of the *petite bourgeoisie*. The data reveal that the economies of the region were demonstrably improving. The economic quality of life and employment circumstances for most persons, however, were not. This combination of economic growth and static or declining economic quality of life created a classic case of relative deprivation, which is a condition often cited in the literature on causal factors of revolution. Put simply, humans "have basic needs, wishes, or instincts, which if frustrated give rise to feelings of aggression that sometimes take the form of revolutionary behavior or violence."<sup>3</sup> In all our North African cases, what was observable from field observations, public opinion research results, and macroeconomic data was that large swathes of the population believed themselves to be economically marginalized and politically repressed, and that they could observe smaller, more elite elements within their societies benefiting disproportionately from economic growth. Under these conditions of both mass perceived repression

and relative deprivation, possibilities for collective political mobilization rose considerably. Political psychologist Ted Gurr in his explication of the concept of relative deprivation emphasized that relative deprivation has two important aspects: *scope* (the number of issues causing resentment) and *intensity* (the degree of resentment felt).<sup>4</sup> The North African revolts and mass demonstrations fit into Gurr's third paradigm of "progressive deprivation," where society's aspirations for betterment rise while the economic capacity of the state rises as well (please see Figure 1.1 on page 13).

Another theorist, the economist Mancur Olsen, offered an analysis that concurred with Gurr's observation. Olsen claimed that the concurrence of rapid economic growth with increasing numbers of the poor leads to conditions of relative deprivation, social instability, and revolt.<sup>5</sup> Besides these questions of relative deprivation, Chapter 2 also explains that while a considerable youth bulge exists in North Africa now, fertility rates will dramatically decline in the region during the next 20 years (with the exception of Libya). When that decline occurs and as the population becomes both more aged and smaller, the demographic pressures that presently exist will dissipate. Twenty years from now a new period of demographic stability will arrive in the region.

To Gurr's and Olsen's notions of relative deprivation and rapid economic growth we add Samuel P. Huntington's notion that the most fertile ground for revolution can be found in "societies which have experienced some social and economic development and where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the processes of social and economic change."<sup>6</sup> Huntington claimed that political leaders need to make adjustments and modifications to their governmental systems to make them more inclusive and participatory during periods of economic growth. The failure to do this is precisely what occurred in our two revolts (Tunisia and Libya), our hybrid case (Egypt), and our two movements of mass social protest (Morocco and Algeria). All five countries experienced economic growth from 2000 through 2010. Yet all five states and economies were unable to absorb the demands made by the demographic bulge of youth that emerged during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The poverty created and the inadequate wages that prevailed in the midst of growing economies provided prime conditions that would create mass resentment of privileged classes. Given the combination of real demographic pressures, economic growth, and a failure of political accommodation, a spark (the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi) pushed the youth of Tunisia to revolt. After Tunisia was successful in ousting the dictator Ben Ali, organizers in Egypt were encouraged and they used electronic media to accelerate the pace of their demonstrations. The successes in Tunisia and Egypt in turn created a chain of revolts and demonstrations that would affect Libya, Morocco, Algeria, Bahrain, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Syria in varying ways.

We take the phenomenon of the concurrence of a significant youth bulge with very high youth unemployment, and an expanding economy that

exacerbated the population's sense of their relative deprivation and to these we add to our analysis the mobilizational capabilities of the old technology of television and the new technologies of cell phones and internet social media. Old and new electronic technologies combined with our preceding factors to create conditions that accelerated the mechanisms and processes of protest to make them regional phenomena. These components combined with an eventual fracturing of the relationship between the ruling elites and the *moyenne* and *petite bourgeoisies* that led to very unstable conditions. Members of the middle class including intellectuals, civil servants, labor union activists, lawyers, judges, engineers, technicians, entrepreneurs, and managers joined marginalized and unemployed rural and urban youth and in some cases the military (especially in Tunisia and Egypt) to accelerate these processes of social change.

Crane Brinton, Karl Mannheim, Gaetano Mosca, and Edward Shils in their separate works emphasized that the transfer of allegiance of the middle class and especially its intellectuals from the ruling regime to rebels or revolutionaries was essential for the conversion of revolutionary situations into revolutions.<sup>7</sup> In North Africa the *moyenne* and *petite bourgeoisies*' shift of allegiance from either support or passivity towards the ruling regime towards support of rebellion by proletarian and lumpenproletarian youth was essential to the creation of a multi-class coalition that either toppled authoritarian regimes or forced them to reform.

The final dispositive factor that played a role in these processes of social change would be the extent to which the military as an institution chose to support either the rebels or the regime. In Tunisia and Egypt the military establishment made the essential choice of supporting the rebels or the demonstrators. Libya was qualitatively different where the military simply imploded and stopped functioning as a viable political or military actor. Consequently, when NATO provided critical support to the rebels, the regime fell. Morocco involved an effort to reform rather than depose the monarchy and the allegiance of the military was not called into question. Algeria has had a regime in which the military has been the central force or *pouvoir primordial* behind the operation of politics for decades. The demonstrators in Algeria were simply unable to muster sufficient social resources to displace the regime. Our review of the role of the military makes evident, in all of our cases, that the extent to which the military chose either to support the regime or the putative revolutionaries was essential. Whether the military coheres, fractures, or implodes and whether the military decides to support the regime or the revolutionaries becomes critical in these processes of revolution, revolt, and mass demonstrations. Viewed from an historical perspective and from different eras (for example, Charles I of England in 1640, Louis XVI of France in 1789, or Nicholas II of Russia in 1917), if rulers had had the support of a unified and cohesive military during their periods of social unrest, their *revolutionary situations* would not have been transformed into *revolutions*. For example in Russia, the Russian military cohered in 1905 (leading