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# The Tipping Point:

Transitions to Democracy  
in Latin America and the Middle East



Kellogg Institute for International Studies

Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies



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## FOREWORD

**I**n the past 12 months, the world has witnessed a dramatic unfolding of events in the Middle East. Across the Arab world, people are raising their voices—and in some cases shaking off decades of dictatorship. In Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, longstanding dictators have fallen. Yet it remains unclear who, or what types of regimes, will take their place.

On October 4, 2011, the University of Notre Dame hosted the symposium: “Transitions to Democracy and the Arab Spring: Does Latin America Hold Lessons for the Middle East?” The event was cosponsored by the Kellogg Institute for International Studies and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

The goal of the symposium was to examine insights from Latin America’s experience that may be relevant to democratization for the Middle East today. The symposium drew upon the depth of knowledge of scholars who study the Middle East, Latin America, and democratization at the Kroc and Kellogg Institutes, as well as invited guests.

Why Latin America and the Middle East? While there are many obvious differences between the two regions, the Arab world in some ways resembles Latin America 30 years ago. Until the late 1970s, 17 of the 20 countries in Latin America were under military rule. And yet, in a relatively short period of time, the tectonic plates shifted.

By the 1990s, 18 of the region’s 20 countries had democratic governments, frequent elections, and empowered citizens who were actively engaged in determining their political destinies. That outcome was not predetermined, of course, and people struggling for their rights at the time did not know with confidence that their countries—or the region as a whole—would move so decisively toward democracy.

In the Middle East today political outcomes are uncertain. Relatively free elections have occurred in Tunisia and are underway in Egypt, but people in the region continue to struggle against the legacy of military rule and dictatorship.

By comparing the Latin American experience with the Middle East today, the symposium raised questions about the prospects for democratization in the Arab world. Is the Middle East today at the tipping point of a similar wave of democratization? What lessons from the Latin American experience might provide the most useful insights into the unfolding events in the Middle East?

The symposium drew together eminent scholars working in the fields of democratization and comparative politics. Speakers included Michael Coppedge, Robert Fishman, Scott Mainwaring, and Samuel Valenzuela (Kellogg Institute), David Cortright and Emad Shahin (Kroc Institute), Mona El-Ghobashy (Barnard College), Scott Hibbard (DePaul University), and Stephen McInerney (Project on Middle East Democracy). Renowned democratization expert Alfred Stepan (Columbia University) provided the keynote address.

The timely event drew upon the wealth of expertise at the Kroc and Kellogg Institutes to provide important, comparative insight on the radical events reshaping the political map of the Middle East. This report, carefully prepared by researcher Sarah Smiles Persinger, captures the key ideas presented on the day.

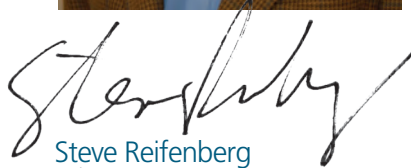




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## INTRODUCTION: THE TIPPING POINT

**T**hroughout 2011, the Arab world was gripped by a series of uprisings that toppled dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Regimes once seen as impregnable were overthrown. It remains uncertain, however, if the transitions will lead to consolidated democracies or usher in new forms of authoritarian rule. More than half of democratic transitions end in failure. The broader outlook for democratization in the region is uncertain.

As Arab civil society activists look for insight from democratic transitions that have transpired elsewhere, Latin America is a region of comparative interest. Much like the Middle East at the advent of the Arab Spring, it was dominated by authoritarian regimes up until the late 1970s. Religion and culture—or the Catholic Church and Iberian culture—were viewed by some as critical obstacles to democratic change. Influential external actors were also eager to maintain the status quo. With this view of the region, many scholars failed to predict the dramatic transformation that would unfold over subsequent decades. By the early 1990s, 18 of the region's 20 countries met the classification of democracies.

While there is much that differentiates countries in the Middle East from those in Latin America, the comparative framework is informative for analyzing the prospects for democracy in Arab states. What broad domestic and external factors helped facilitate the transitions in Latin America? Can we see these favorable dynamics in the Middle East today? Are there any specific lessons from Latin American case studies for Arab states in transition?

The symposium was divided into two panels: the first explored the domestic challenges to democratization in Latin America and the Middle East; the second explored the role of external influences. (See biographies of speakers page 21.)

■ Religion, culture, and democratic legacies were the focus of the first panel. In Latin America, the Catholic Church was hostile to democracy in many countries at various points in time. And yet, in the 1980s, it became an important advocate for democracy and human rights. In the Middle East, assumptions about Islam have long been used to explain the democracy deficit in the region to date. There is strong empirical and normative evidence however, showing that Islam is not incompatible with democracy.

In light of the Arab Spring, a new methodological approach is needed for studying democratization in the Arab world, one that avoids concepts of Middle East exceptionalism.

■ The second panel explored the importance of diffusion and external influences on the democratization process. The United States, the Organization of American States (OAS), and other actors played an important role in supporting democratization in Latin America. In the Middle East today, by contrast, the regional and international environments do not appear as favorable.

The United States played a decisive role in Libya and after some hesitation in Egypt, but it has struggled to craft constructive responses elsewhere. It has been partially hobbled by certain interpretations of its alliance with Israel and by a bureaucratic tendency to view the region through the prism of the old regional order. Fears of Iranian influence and the rise of Islamist groups remain front and center in US foreign policy concerns. Fundamental reform of this platform is needed, however, if the United States is to support democratization in the Middle East.

While revolutionary transitions tend to produce new, radicalized actors, the United States should not let this deter it from backing reform movements and democratic elections. When the ballot is free and fair, elections are typically won by relative moderates. Radical extremist parties rarely sweep the ballot.

The symposium focused largely on the transitions underway in Tunisia and Egypt and the nature of “political society” in both countries. The panelists were cautiously optimistic about Tunisia’s prospects of becoming a consolidated democracy, a move that would have important ramifications for the region. For Egypt, they were less hopeful, predicting a protracted struggle between the pro-democracy movement and the military as the latter seeks to carve out reserve domains of power. The case study of Chile’s 1988 referendum and the formation of the Concertación coalition were underscored to demonstrate the need for the Egyptian opposition to work together.

This report will summarize the two panels in order and conclude with a brief analysis of Tunisia and Egypt. While Latin America was the focus of comparative analysis, other transitions were referenced, such as the 1974 Portugal revolution. The implications of the Arab Spring for the broader theoretical debates about democratization were also discussed throughout the symposium.

## MIDDLE EAST EXCEPTIONALISM VS. THE ARAB SPRING

In the many decades of research on democratization, scholars have developed numerous hypotheses for why countries become or remain democracies, calling attention to class alliances, colonial heritage, geography, and the legacies of pre-democratic regimes, among other factors. One idea has stood out in its power and robustness: modernization theory. According to this theory, there is a general tendency for rich countries to be democratic and for poor countries not to be.

The Middle East and North Africa have long stood out as a glaring regional exception to this trend. While more obvious in resource-rich Gulf States that tend to be both wealthy and highly nondemocratic, the anomalous pattern is also apparent in poorer states that are comparable with Latin American countries in terms of economic development.

*“Why are Middle Eastern countries so much less democratic than Latin America countries, with about the same income level and reliance on oil production?”*

—Michael Coppedge

Democratization expert Michael Coppedge illustrated this point by comparing data on Egypt and Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Both share a similar reliance on oil production and levels of income. Much like Egypt under former president Hosni Mubarak, Mexico was ruled by an authoritarian regime up until 2000. At various periods, they shared a comparable lack of academic freedom and level of corruption. Yet according to several other indicators of democracy—such as civil liberties and free and fair elections—Egypt has for the most part scored consistently lower than Mexico since former Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser came to power in 1952.

A substantial literature has developed to explain this difference. Some scholars have pointed to the region’s history of state formation, colonialism, and lack of democratic legacies to explain the democracy deficit. Others argue that Islam and the tribal, patrilineal nature of Arab culture are antithetical to democratic norms. A look at gender gaps around the world provides comparative evidence that supports the culture hypothesis. According to Polity IV data, countries that had high rates of adult female literacy in 1980, including Turkey, were more likely to become and remain democracies.

<sup>1</sup>The data was collected as part of the Varieties of Democracy project, a research initiative supported by the Kellogg Institute. See <http://kellogg.nd.edu/projects/vdem/index.shtml> or <https://v-dem.net/>.

Other scholars have suggested that oil is the critical obstacle—the “rentier state” argument. The dependence of governments on oil rents over taxation has lessened their accountability to their people. It has also allowed leaders to fund large, centralized, corrupt states with repressive security apparatuses. Still other scholars have pointed to the ways authoritarian regimes in the Middle East have manipulated culture, Islam, and the regional conflict with Israel to bolster their claim to rule.

In light of the Arab Spring, which of these ideas are relevant when assessing the Middle East’s prospects for democratization today? The discussions focused on assumptions about religion, culture, and democratic legacies.

## IS ISLAM THE ISSUE?

The Arab Spring has pried open long-standing debates about the role of Islam and the state. Ever mindful of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, policy makers are fearful that Islamist groups will fill the vacuum left by authoritarian dictators. Many of these groups were brutally repressed by the old regimes. Yet how realistic are these fears? How incompatible is Islam with democracy and what threat do Islamist parties pose?

There is an emerging consensus in comparative political science that Islam does not pose any obstacle to democratization. When looking at the empirical evidence, two-thirds of the world’s Muslims live under democratic systems. Muslim-majority populations coexist with fairly democratic regimes in Indonesia, Turkey, Mali, and Albania. The third largest Muslim population in the world lives in democratic India. Public opinion research has also shown that in several North African countries and Jordan and Uganda, Muslims are no less inclined than non-Muslims to demonstrate support for democracy. In fact, religious practice is often positively associated with such support.

*“The Middle East has a democratic legacy that analysts often forget. The first constitution in the Arab world was introduced in Tunisia in 1860.”*

—Emad Shahin

The evolution of the Catholic Church in Latin America illustrates how religious actors can evolve within new political paradigms. Throughout the 19th century in most countries, and in many countries into the 1930s, the Catholic Church was hostile to democracy. The clerical/anti-clerical conflict was an important component of the intense liberal-conservative divide across much the region during the 19th century. It was an important contributing factor to intermittent civil war or democratic breakdowns in Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Ecuador, and beyond. However, significant change occurred after Vatican II. While the Catholic Church was still wedded to authoritarian rule in Argentina and Guatemala into the 1970s, it came to be widely regarded as a champion of democracy and human rights, most prominently in Brazil and Chile after 1973.

How do approaches to democracy within Islam and Catholicism differ? Is the notion of the sovereignty of the people as prominent in Muslim theological traditions as it has been in Hispanic Catholicism? Ideas about liberty and political participation are very much alive in Islam, yet it is important not to generalize. The different strands of political Islam must be distinguished when assessing the prospects for democracy in different Arab states. The moderate face of Turkey's AKP ruling party is vastly different from the model in Saudi Arabia, for example, where the state was founded on an alliance between the monarchy and Wahhabi fundamentalists. The critical question moving forward is how states in transition will reinterpret their Islamic traditions, and whether this will be in a manner that supports democratic norms.

### DO DEMOCRATIC LEGACIES MATTER?

How important are political legacies to democratic transitions? Sociologist and democratization expert Samuel Valenzuela argued that democratizing countries can be placed along a spectrum according to the extent to which they have had democratic experiences in the past. At one polar extreme are countries that have never had democracy and at the other, those with long-standing democracies that failed. The closer a country is to the latter, more democratic pole, the easier the transition to democracy.

*"In countries that were once democratic, the citizens can distinguish a real election from a sham one."*

—J. Samuel Valenzuela

Previously democratic countries have much of the organizational and institutional infrastructure of democracies, either in actual or latent form. They also have publics that are used to the notion that the only proper basis of governmental legitimacy is that which comes from democratic procedures, including having properly elected authorities. In addition, they usually have civil society organizations that emerged and developed in connection with past democratic experiences and well-known political parties whose leaders are bound to play leading roles in any new democratization. The change towards democracy is not a leap into the unknown.

The countries in Latin America that had the longest and best-established democratic regimes that failed were Chile and Uruguay, where the democratic legacies of the past were so strong that even the authoritarian military regimes established in the early 1970s were tinged with democratic formulations. It is no surprise that in both cases the transitions to democracy were triggered by the military regimes losing plebiscites that were intended to legitimate their rule.<sup>2</sup>

*“Public opinion research has shown that Muslims are no less likely to evince support for democracy than non-Muslims.”*

—Michael Coppedge

By contrast, Valenzuela said, Arab countries in the Middle East have had very low levels of past democratic experience. They have long experienced only various forms of authoritarian regimes, be they monarchic, colonial, one party-nationalist, or personalistic dictatorships. Their legitimacy formulae have rarely rested on democratic principles.

Middle East expert Emad Shahin argued that Arab countries do have democratic legacies, albeit weak ones. He pointed to the old constitutional monarchies of the Middle East and a host of Muslim thinkers who introduced the ideas of liberty and democracy to the Arab mind. The Arabic word for constitution, *dustoor* (دستور), is alive in Arab political culture. Legacies exist, and they can be built upon. Shahin argued that colonial legacies, economic factors, and external influences were more useful units of analysis in explaining the lack of democracy than cultural exceptionalism.

<sup>2</sup> J. Samuel Valenzuela, “Transición por Redemocratización: El Frente Nacional Colombiano en una Reflexión Teórica y Comparativa.” Kellogg Institute Working Paper No. 380, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 2011. <http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/380.pdf>

**I**n recent decades, scholars have increasingly looked at the influence of external factors to explain the rise and fall of political regimes. Up until 1986, the comparative politics literature focused almost exclusively on domestic variables. Since then, several studies have shown that politically homogenous parts of the world tend to reproduce themselves. Countries tend to become or remain like their neighbors, whether they are democratic or authoritarian. While more work needs to be done to unravel the causal mechanisms behind these trends, it is clear that you cannot understand what happens to a political regime by looking only inside its borders.

*“You cannot understand what happens with political regimes based only on what happens within the boundaries of one country.”*

—Scott Mainwaring

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFUSION IN LATIN AMERICA

Democracy and authoritarianism have swept through Latin America in dramatic waves from 1900-2010. Latin America and democratization scholar Scott Mainwaring presented statistical analysis showing the important influence of transnational effects on the rise and fall of regimes over this period. Regional political factors had the most powerful influence—as opposed to global political factors—yet US foreign policy also played a role. When US policy was favorable toward democracy, the likelihood of transitions increased and the likelihood of breakdowns decreased.

The full gamut of US influence has been felt in Latin America over this time period. At one extreme, the United States invaded or sponsored regime change as seen with the 1954 Guatemalan coup. During the Cold War, United States support for democracy dimmed. Yet a marked shift began under former US president Jimmy Carter (1977–1981). The United States began to play a positive role and influenced a number of transitions, such as that in El Salvador. The United States pushed for competitive elections during El Salvador’s civil war in 1982. The ballot triggered a profound shift in the logic of some right-wing actors, who saw that they could win competitive elections. There was variance in US influence, however. While the United States played a key role in some Central American states, it had less impact in the Southern Cone and Brazil. In countries like Argentina and Uruguay, it played an indirect role: by disseminating national security ideology in the 1960s, for example, and by supporting democracy after the transitions in 1983 and 1985, respectively.

Alongside this change in US foreign policy, other important transnational influences coalesced to support democratization in the region after the late 1970s. In concert with changes underway within the Catholic Church, new, receptive ideas and attitudes towards democracy started to emerge from the Left. Revolutionary socialist ideologies began to decline in most of the region. The Organization of American States (OAS) became an important regional actor in preventing overt coups from the

*“Transnational effects have had an important influence on the rise and fall of regimes in Latin America. Regional political factors have been the most powerful, as opposed to global political factors.”*

—Scott Mainwaring

late 1980s onwards. In 1993, it helped avoid a democratic breakdown in Guatemala; in 1995, it helped to restore competitive (albeit undemocratic) elections in Peru; and in 1996, it helped prevent the breakdown of democracy in Paraguay. While the international political environment was mostly hostile to democratization from 1948 until the late 1950s and from 1964 until 1977, by 1990 it had markedly improved.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFUSION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

How favorable is the regional and international context for engendering democracy in the Middle East today?

The Arab Spring revolts are entirely unique when looking at the literature on revolutions. They were not driven by a vanguard party or class conflict. Unlike in Latin America, where there was a slow diffusion of ideas about democracy, they weren't fueled by an overarching ideology. In fact, the major academic work on democratization has yet to be translated into Arabic. While protestors united around the desire to topple repressive authoritarian regimes, they differed about what should come next.

Diffusion has nonetheless been critical to the Arab Spring, in some new and novel ways. The Internet and social media played a pivotal role in empowering the protestors and accelerating demonstration and contagion effects. Armed with cell-phones, the protestors were able to broadcast photos and footage of the uprisings over the Internet. Middle East expert Stephen McNerney argued that new media was particularly indispensable in Tunisia, where clashes began in the small town of Sidi Bouzid. Had they occurred 10 years earlier, they would have been most likely quashed locally by the government, without the world or even other Tunisians ever learning what had happened.

Yet diffusion has worked both ways, allowing regimes to learn from each other's mistakes. After witnessing the unrest in nearby Tunisia, Egypt shut down the Internet and cell phone network. Regimes that were further afield had more time to make concessions—or prepare crackdowns—as happened in Syria. Parallels were drawn to a study by Kurt Weyland of the European revolutions of 1830 and 1848.<sup>3</sup> Weyland argued that the first governments to experience revolts were taken by surprise and overthrown. Those next in line were afforded a little more time to react. Those that could see it coming from far off were able to preempt the unrest and avert challengers.

*“New media was particularly indispensable in Tunisia’s revolution. Had the first clashes occurred 10 years ago—without the Internet—they would have most likely been quietly quashed by the government.”*

—Stephen McInerney

The sequence of cross-national diffusion led to varied outcomes in the Arab Spring revolts. Yet other regional influences have played a role. Comparing the Middle East to Latin America in the 1980s, regional support for democracy would appear weaker in the Arab world today. The specter of revolution has proved deeply unsettling for various regimes, particularly Saudi Arabia, which has sought to preserve the regional order, at least where it suits them. Charged with waging a “counterrevolution,” Saudi Arabia has backed the Egyptian military and allied regimes in Yemen, Morocco, and Jordan. It is also allegedly funding Salafist and other Islamist groups in Egypt. As part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), it deployed troops to Bahrain in March 2011 to support the monarchy’s crackdown on Shiite Muslim protestors. The GCC and Arab League have yet to play a role in the Middle East comparable to that of the OAS in Latin America in backing the democracy agenda.

Support for the reform movement has come from other quarters, however, notably Turkey. It has backed the pro-democracy movements in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya and severed old alliances with Israel and Syria. Turkey views the change in the regional order as an opportunity to develop closer economic and political ties with Arab states. A proliferation of democratic governments run by moderate Islamic parties would further its interests.

*“Turkey is a fascinating actor... because they’ve thrown their lot in with the Arab reform.”*

—Scott Hibbard

<sup>3</sup>Kurt Weyland, “The Diffusion of Regime Contention in European Democratization, 1830–1940.” *Comparative Political Studies* 43, 8–9 (2010): 1161–62.

## US FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: HELP OR HINDRANCE?

The United States—long the arbiter of the regional order—has played a varied role in the Arab Spring, tempered by its leverage and interests in different states. At one extreme, it joined NATO’s campaign to oust Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi. At the other, it has failed to bring significant pressure to bear on its allies in Bahrain and Yemen, seemingly favoring stability over democratic change. In Egypt, says McInerney, the United States used its leverage with the Egyptian military—which receives \$1.3 billion in US aid a year—to ensure that it didn’t open fire on protestors. Yet it also sought to safeguard the military’s role in any transitional government. Mindful of the Iraqi Army’s collapse in 2003, the United States sought to avoid this mistake in Egypt. After decades of working with the Egyptian armed forces, Washington sees the military as the most trusted, stable ally to maintain the status quo and Egypt’s peace treaty with Israel.

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIZATION

*“The United States really is the elephant in the room  
... we’ve consistently sacrificed our commitments  
to our values—democracy, human rights, and the  
rule of law—in favor of stability.”*

—Scott Hibbard

The United States has been partly hamstrung by its relationship with Israel. But McInerney noted that in addition the response of the bureaucracy has been uncreative. While the White House was responsive as the Arab Spring unfolded, the State Department and Pentagon have struggled to view the region outside the prism of the old regional order. They are accustomed to preserving bilateral relationships with regional autocrats for decades. Fears of Iranian influence and the emergence of Islamist parties remain front and center in US foreign policy concerns.

As the balance of power shifts in the region, fundamental reform of US foreign policy is needed to adapt to the changing circumstances. While the panelists did not discuss detailed proscriptions for a new foreign policy, they did highlight the need for the United States to reprogram its aid in support of the transitions in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. Middle East expert Scott Hibbard argued that US aid to Egypt must be tied to security-sector reform and a lifting of the emergency law. Bankrolling the status quo serves no one’s interests except the Egyptian military.

## THE RADICAL NATURE OF REVOLUTIONARY TRANSITIONS

The radical nature of the uprisings and the uncertainty in the region has no doubt complicated the US response. Robert Fishman argued that the processes of change in Egypt and Tunisia belong to a broad family of “revolutionary transitions” in which pressure in the streets and changes in the behavior or capabilities of the police or the army play a crucial role. All transitions provide a key role to crucially important minorities; however, the critical minorities that are decisive in revolutionary transitions tend to be more radical than those which predominate in reform-oriented or pacted transitions. The emergence of new, radicalized actors, such as Marxist-Leninists in Southern Europe or those with an Islamist face in the Middle East, can be deeply unsettling for international actors that are used to dealing with the status quo.

*“One of the most important features of revolutionary transitions is that they tend to change culture. They radicalize societies.”*

—Robert Fishman

Fishman argued that the United States should not let this deter it from supporting democratization. While there are no ultimate guarantees that elections won't bring Islamic parties to power, profoundly radical parties, whether Marxist-Leninists or extreme fundamentalists, tend not to win if elections are free and fair. Elections are decided by the majority and typically won by relative moderates.

Fishman pointed to the 1974 Portugal revolution as a positive example of a US response to a revolutionary transition. Triggered by a military coup, the revolution was radical in nature. Workers purged their bosses, students purged their teachers, and factories and businesses were nationalized. In the context of the Cold War, the unrest unnerved the US government. Yet, following the advice of the US ambassador to Lisbon, Frank Carlucci, the United States decided to engage with the Socialist Party, which was more moderate than the Communist Party. Carlucci believed the Socialists would win elections, and they did. With this pragmatic policy, the United States was able to contribute to the emergence of a new democracy and strengthen an old alliance by supporting elections and by agreeing to work with a party—the Socialists—which stood somewhat outside the policy preferences of Washington. The approach, adopted also by the IMF and wider European community, facilitated the consolidation of Portuguese democracy.

**T**he symposium explored the domestic and external influences on democratization, yet it also addressed democratic transitions as a political process. The demise of a dictator does not guarantee the formation of a democratically accountable system. Free and fair elections must be held to bring a new government to power. To arrive at a democracy, a society must overcome a series of interconnected political, economic, and cultural challenges. The process is fraught with difficulty and can be drawn out over decades.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the transitions in post-Communist states hinged on the ability of political leaders to raise basic living standards. Painful adjustments were made as command economies were replaced with capitalist systems. Arab states in transition face a similar challenge in overhauling highly politicized economies and patronage networks. Central grievances over issues such as corruption, unemployment, and poverty must be addressed. The judiciary and abusive culture of the security services must be reformed. As highly mobilized populations demand a greater inclusion in political life, failure or delays in making these reforms may lead to fatigue with the process. This fatigue, or “desencanto,” as the Spaniards called it, is a normal feature of democratic transitions, setting in as the euphoria associated with the beginning of the change process inevitably begins to fade.

Valenzuela noted that there are two phases in democratic transitions. The first begins with a severe crisis of the authoritarian regime that raises the possibility of substituting it with authorities chosen in free and fair elections and ends when such authorities are inaugurated. The second begins at that point and ends when the fledgling democratic regime is consolidated.<sup>4</sup> The whole process is easiest under conditions that include the following:

- When the authoritarian ruler is removed quickly.
- When he is repudiated not only by his opponents but also by his supporters.
- When most old supporters of the authoritarian regime become willing participants in the democratic transition process and are fully accepted as players in it by their opponents.
- When the transition to elections is handled by a provisional government led by civilian elites rather than the military.
- When the state—including the military—does not disintegrate but continues to function, and the military focuses narrowly on its national security concerns.

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<sup>4</sup> For a definition of democratic consolidation and its complexities, see J. Samuel Valenzuela, “Democratic Consolidation in Post-Transitional Settings: Notion, Process and Facilitating Conditions,” Kellogg Institute Working Paper No. 150, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 1990. <http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/150.pdf>

## STATES IN TRANSITION: TUNISIA AND EGYPT

- When organized segments of civil society—including religious leaders in countries in which social cleavages linked to religion are important—have fluid forms of dialogue and forge agreements to find common ground on critical issues that concern them.
- When the period of the first transition is relatively short. It should be long enough to make sure that the coming electoral process will indeed be free and fair, and that all players will trust that the votes will be properly counted.
- When the drafting of the new democratic constitution occurs after the inauguration of the newly elected government and legislature and is approved in a specially convened plebiscite devoted exclusively to this matter.
- When the national judicial system takes charge of prosecuting human rights violators without direct political initiative or interference.
- When politically pluralistic fact-finding commissions of experts are officially appointed to investigate past crimes and conflicts associated with and leading up to the authoritarian regime. The result should be to forge a single widely accepted narrative of the past.
- When pragmatic or moderate political leaders can create or recreate parties that will capture a large majority of votes while expressing the views and policy preferences of all major components of the national society.

Looking to Tunisia and Egypt, democratization scholar Alfred Stepan highlighted in his keynote the critical role that “political society” must play to construct democracy in the transition period. In a “political society,” organized segments of civil society negotiate and forge agreements over issues such as the electoral law or whether to choose a parliamentary or presidential system. Stepan argued the transition in Tunisia is likely to be successful precisely because of its political society. In Egypt, despite the creativity and sheer magnitude of the protests, political society is much less developed, he said. Without exhaustively detailing the political dynamics underway in both countries, the group discussed major positive and negative signposts of the transitions to date.

## TUNISIA: THE TRAILBLAZER?

The panelists were cautiously hopeful about how Tunisia's transition has unfolded. The Tunisian revolution was led by indigenous forces, with the United States playing virtually no role, and it succeeded despite external support for the Ben Ali regime, particularly from the French government. On January 14, 2011, protests culminated in the ouster of President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, who fled to Saudi Arabia.

Despite initial difficulties in selecting an acceptable interim government to manage the transition, the process has been led throughout by technocratic, civilian elites.

As Ben Ali's Tunisia was a police state rather than a military dictatorship, there has been no effort by the relatively apolitical military to control the process. Tunisia's civilian interim government guided the country to elections within a reasonable nine-month timeframe, with Tunisians electing a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) in October 2011. The NCA will now write the country's constitution and decide on its form of government.

Tunisia enjoys other advantages. It has a relatively homogenous population, an educated middle class, and a long record of support for women's rights. Under the secularist policies of Ben Ali's predecessor, Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia adopted one of the most progressive personal status laws in the Arab World. Stepan argued that Tunisia also has a positive legacy of the "twin tolerations"<sup>5</sup>—the toleration that elected authorities must have for religion and the toleration that religious authorities must have for the democratically elected. He pointed to historical coexistence between Muslims and Jews and Tunis's historically progressive Zitouna University.

This path to the "twin tolerations" was interrupted during the French mandate and subsequent decades of authoritarian rule. Under the secularist policies of Ben Ali, Islamists were jailed or exiled. This led to a polarization of society that is still evident today. Deep divisions exist between secularists and Islamists, and also between youth, the old political class, wealthy city elites, and the rural poor.

In this strained environment, the Islamist Party Ennahda won the October 2011 elections. Banned under the former regime, Ennahda has gone to pains to present itself as a moderate force, closer to Turkey's AKP than Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. It has also expressed support for women's rights. While deep distrust of the party remains, the panelists were guardedly optimistic about Ennahda's moderate stance, and the ability of Tunisia's diverse political society to negotiate and broker the transition.

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations,'" *Journal of Democracy* 11, 4 (2000): 37–57.

## THE STRUGGLE FOR EGYPT

The panelists were less sanguine about Egypt, predicting a protracted struggle between the military and the pro-democracy movement. To date, the transition has been managed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which is comprised of senior military officers. SCAF has sought to protect its extensive economic and political interests by carving out reserve domains of power above the purview of elected officials. Interference has been seen in many aspects of the transition, from the delay in holding elections to the writing of the constitution. Using the old policies of co-optation and coercion, SCAF has also been charged with ineffective and brutal handling of sectarian unrest.

This situation has been compounded by the seeming inertia of Egypt's political society. Deep schisms exist between secular groups and the Muslim Brotherhood. Pro-democracy advocates in the West have been frustrated by the reluctance of young activists—particularly those who helped spearhead the revolution—to engage in traditional party politics.

*“Many of the activists—these young, amazingly enthusiastic and creative people in Tahrir Square—are profoundly ambivalent about whether they actually want to have free and fair elections because they think they will be won by Islamists.”*

—Alfred Stepan

One telling example is that of Chile, where the ability of the opposition to overcome their differences was critical to the downfall of Pinochet. The 1988 referendum, which allowed Chileans to vote on another eight-year presidential term, had the unintended consequence of uniting parties that had been old foes. The Christian Democratic Party and the Socialist Party joined forces and formed a coalition, the Concertación. A year after the referendum, the Concertación won elections, paving the way for the restoration of democracy to Chile.

There is an expectation in the literature that after a revolution societal interests will be channeled into party politics. Yet Mona El-Ghobashy, an expert on contemporary Egyptian politics, argued that this is unlikely to happen quickly in Egypt because of widespread mistrust of the political class. Co-opted by Mubarak, political elites are seen as tainted, factionalized, and out of touch with ordinary Egyptians. New political parties also face basic collective action problems of building party structures and new constituencies.

*“I don’t think we can expect—nor should we expect—  
that party politics will take over from here in Egypt.”*

—Mona El-Ghobashy

This is not necessarily a negative sign, argued El-Ghobashy, who presented an alternative view of Egyptian politics that emphasized four distinct channels of interest representation. Starting before Mubarak’s fall and accelerating after his ouster, Egypt has become a “hyper-mobilized” society, surpassing the most mobilized democratizers of the Third Wave. New forms of organization have sprung up to aggregate citizens’ demands: in addition to political parties and street protests, new, independent trade unions have emerged from the bottom up to represent workers’ interests. In just one example, the independent union of bus drivers launched a nationwide ten-day strike to demand wage increases and better working conditions, forcing the government to the negotiating table. Additionally, middle-class Egyptians are turning to their professional associations to directly lobby the government.

Politics migrated to these forums under Mubarak and they have assumed added viability in the post-revolution era. It remains to be seen if authoritarian rule will be reconstituted in Egypt, perhaps with a kinder, gentler face or more space for popular participation. The sheer diversity of interest representation may prevent the return of authoritarianism, El-Ghobashy said.

## CONCLUSION

**T**he transitions in Egypt and Tunisia are in their infancy and exceedingly fragile. The broader outlook for democratization in the region is uncertain. And yet, Mainwaring pointed out that the climate for democratization in Latin America started out similarly “negative” in the late 1970s. Few would have predicted the positive role the United States, OAS, or the Catholic Church would come to play in subsequent decades. This was accompanied by a decline in radicalism and a growing normative preference for democracy.

Is the Middle East on the tipping point of a similar wave of democratization? While there are some obvious parallels between Latin America in the late 1970s and the Middle East today, there are critical differences. The Arab Spring was not fueled by the diffusion of new ideas about democracy. While protestors were united in their desire to bring down despots, they are much more uncertain about what should come next. Arab states also have much weaker democratic legacies than most Latin American states. New Arab leaders face a considerable challenge—surmounting a centuries-old authoritarian mindset.

Externally, there would appear to be less support for democracy. Regional powers such as Saudi Arabia have sought to limit the spread of democracy. US foreign policy has also been decidedly ambivalent towards the Arab Spring. While the United States played a decisive role in Libya and Egypt and is rhetorically supportive of democratic reform, it is continuing to support a number of regional autocrats. External influences can play a critical role in determining whether revolutions will take place, what form they take, and whether they will lead to democracy or non-democratic rule. Without strong external support, the onus rests with domestic actors to construct democracy from the ground up.

Despite this bleak assessment, there are some hopeful signs. Turkey, which recently completed a decades-long transition to a consolidated democracy, has supported the reform movements. Across the Arab world, the Turkish model of moderate Islamic government is viewed much more favorably than that of Saudi Arabia. A critical test will be the performance of Islamist parties in upcoming elections. Radical parties tend not to win if elections are free and fair. This is also the case with radical Islamic parties, as seen in the past in Pakistan and Indonesia.

The emergence of a democracy in Tunisia would also represent a watershed moment for the Arab world. Devoid of a single democracy since Lebanon collapsed into civil war in 1975, the region would benefit psychologically and geopolitically from a successful democratic transition. As scholarship on Latin America has shown, regional factors—as opposed to global factors—influenced the democratization wave in Latin America. Reform in one country increased the probability of reform in others. A democracy in Tunisia would provide a model for countries to follow. It would also dispel long-held assumptions about Middle East exceptionalism that have characterized the study of Arab political regimes to date.

## RECOMMENDED READING

**Brown, Nathan J., and Emad Shahin, eds.** 2010. *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East*. Routledge.

**El-Ghobashy, Mona.** 2011. "Politics by Other Means." *Boston Review* (November/December): 39–44.

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**Valenzuela, J. Samuel.** 2011. "Transición por Redemocratización: El Frente Nacional Colombiano en una Reflexión Teórica y Comparativa." *Kellogg Institute Working Paper No. 380*, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. <http://kellogg.nd.edu/publications/workingpapers/WPS/380.pdf>.

## EXPERT BIOGRAPHIES

### PANELISTS



**Scott Appleby**, the John M. Regan Jr. Director of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, examines in his research the roots of religious violence and the potential of religious peacebuilding. He directs *Contending Modernities*, a multiyear investigation of the interaction among Catholic, Muslim, and secular forces in the modern world.



**Michael Coppedge** is professor of political science at Notre Dame and a faculty fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies. His research focuses on political systems in Latin America and democratization more widely. He is one of the principal investigators of *Varieties of Democracy*, a multiyear effort to produce new indicators of democracy for all countries since 1900.



**Mona El-Ghobashy** is assistant professor of political science at Barnard College, Columbia University. Her research focuses on political mobilization in contemporary Egypt and has appeared in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Middle East Report*, and *American Behavioral Scientist*.



**Robert Fishman** is professor of sociology at Notre Dame and a Kellogg Institute faculty fellow. His research focuses on democratization, politics and culture, and the consequences of inequality. His current book project analyzes differences in democratic practice and societal outcomes in “Third Wave” pioneers Portugal and Spain.



**Scott Hibbard** is associate professor of political science at DePaul University, where he teaches about American foreign policy, Middle East politics, and international relations. He was a Fulbright scholar at the American University of Cairo from 2009 to 2010. His latest book is *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India and the United States* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010/ American University in Cairo Press, 2011).



**Scott Mainwaring** is the Eugene P. and Helen Conley Professor of Political Science and director of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at Notre Dame. His research interests include party systems, political institutions, and democratic and authoritarian regimes, particularly in Latin America. He is the coauthor of *The Emergence and Fall of Democracies and Dictatorships: Latin America since 1900* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press).



**Stephen McInerney** is the executive director of the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED), a DC-based nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting democratic change in the Arab world. He has over six years experience in the Middle East, including graduate studies at the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo.



**Atalia Omer** is assistant professor of religion, conflict, and peace studies at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame. Her research focuses on the interrelationships between religion, ethnicity, and nationalism.



**Emad Shahin** is the Henry R. Luce Associate Professor of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame. His research focuses on democracy and political reform in Islamic societies. The editor-in-chief of the forthcoming *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics*, he recently coedited *The Struggle over Democracy in the Middle East* (Routledge, 2009).



**J. Samuel Valenzuela** is professor of sociology at Notre Dame and a Kellogg Institute faculty fellow. He studies democratization, religion, and development in Latin America and Europe. His most recent book is *El eslabón perdido: familia, modernización y bienestar en Chile* (Taurus, 2006).

## KEYNOTE: "CIVIL SOCIETY, POLITICAL SOCIETY, AND DEMOCRATIZATION"



**Alfred C. Stepan**, the Wallace Sayre Professor of Government at Columbia University, is one of the world's leading thinkers in democratization studies. His research interests include comparative politics, theories of democratic transitions, federalism, and the world's religious systems. The most recent of his many influential books is *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies* (with Juan J. Linz and Yogendra Yadav, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).



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