



## **The Arab Spring, Support for Democracy, and Political Action: Seeking an Explanation for the Authoritarian Paradox in the Middle East**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates the relationship between support for democracy and willingness to take political action in the Middle East before and after the Arab Spring. Despite general support for democracy in many Arab nations, as evidenced by open popular protests, most of the region remains under authoritarian rule. To explain this, I analyzed survey data from the World Values Survey that asked citizens in Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt whether they favored a democratic system of government and what types of political action, such as demonstrating, they had taken or would be willing to take. I found that the majority of respondents in each of these nations favored democratic rule, at least in an abstract sense, but most of them were unwilling to take actions that challenged authoritarian regimes. This revealed a disconnect between citizens' wish for a new government and their desire to strive to bring about change. Willingness to take political action actually declined after the Arab Spring, although there were exceptions in each nation. This decreasing willingness to take political action, whether it is caused by apathy towards unsuccessful protests or by increased government crackdown, has made achieving democracy even more difficult in the Arab world.*

### **INTRODUCTION: THE AUTHORITARIAN PARADOX**

From late 2010 to mid-2012, a series of democratic uprisings sprang up in nations across the Arab world. These uprisings, known as the “Arab Spring” in the West, started with peaceful protests and grew to full revolutions in some nations, with regimes even being toppled in few while little changed in others. These uprisings showed the culmination of mass popular support for democracy in the region, but they did not lead to stable democracies or democracies at all in most cases. While some gains were made in various nations, the most significant of these being the establishment of a relatively strong democracy in Tunisia, the reality is that most of the region remains under authoritarian rule.

According to a 2016 report by the organization Freedom House, which measures the quality of a nation's democracy in terms of political rights and civil liberties, only two nations, Tunisia and Israel, in North Africa and the Middle East were ranked as free. Meanwhile, three nations in the region were ranked partly free and the remaining sixteen were ranked not free (Freedom House). This presents a paradoxical dilemma. Despite open acts of protest in support of democracy, authoritarian rule remains the status quo for most of the Arab world.

Scholars have offered a variety of explanations for this phenomenon, with some explaining it in terms of a long history of colonialism and others suggesting that it is the result of the strategies employed by strong regimes. Still others believe that the answer may lie in the political culture of the nations making up the region. Rex Brynen explains in his paper, "Political Culture and the Puzzle of Persistent Authoritarianism in the Middle East," that many scholars view the persistence of authoritarian rule in the region as the result of a common political culture held across a region with a similar ethnic, religious, and historical background (Brynen, 2008, 2). Yet, the political culture explanation immediately runs into problems when actual survey data from the region on support for democracy is examined. In their article, "Attitudes in the Arab World," Amaney A. Jamal and Mark A. Tessler point out that Arab populations have actually indicated high levels of support for democracy. They cite an Arab Barometer study that found 86% of people across the region believe "democracy is the best form of government," and 90% believe "having a democratic system of government... would be good" in their respective countries (Jamal 98). Studies such as this have shown that the paradox above extends to political culture as well. Despite living in nations largely ruled by authoritarian regimes, people in the region desire to have a democratic form of government.

While this pro-democratic political culture may seem to contradict the state of government in the region, political culture data can be more revealing when other factors are also examined. Just because the people support democracy in an abstract sense does not mean that they hold the other beliefs and take actions that people in democratic societies tend to express. In their essay, "Understanding Civic Culture in the Middle East: Content, Meaning, Determinants," Mark Tessler and Eleanor Gao explore the extent to which democratic civic values exist in the region. Tessler and Gao measured qualities which they associated with democracy, including civic participation and political interest (Tressler and Gao). This approach suggests that one of the main qualities associated with achieving an actual functioning democracy is the extent to which the people are willing to participate in their society and government. This sort of active participation, which goes beyond merely voting in elections every few years, is manifest in such activities as political action and membership in civil society organizations. Political action enables individual citizens to express their political wills to the government collectively while being part of civil society organizations that act outside of the government exemplify a dedication to the community and allow

citizens to counter balance the government. Political action in particular could be a real measure of how willing to or comfortable with citizens are when it comes to actually taking the necessary actions to make a democracy work. A lack of political action could lead to failure to change a flawed government that does not provide basic rights for its people.

Therefore, it is important to consider willingness to participate in gauging why democracy has struggled to take root in the Middle East. The World Values Survey asked questions directly concerning political action in its surveys in the region, which provides an empirical measurement for this sort of participation. It is important to examine these factors both before and after the Arab Spring, which was a serious encounter with democratic action for people in the region, whether they were directly involved in the uprisings or not. Measuring actual participation and willingness to participate will show if the revolutionary experience of the Arab Spring made the population more or less supportive of these democratic principles. The nations of Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt, which each had very different experiences in the Arab Spring, are good gauges of what the general willingness to participate is in the region as a whole. Jordan and Morocco are both ruled by monarchs who gave some civil rights and economic concessions to their populations before and after the Arab Spring, giving the impression of democracy without actually yielding their sovereign authority. Egypt, on the other hand, had some of the largest demonstrations in the region and has undergone two regime changes since its president, Hosni Mubarak, was overthrown in a coup. Each of these nations' experiences with the Arab Spring brought their populations into contact with democratic action, in notably different degrees, and led to very different results.

Examining the survey data yielded some differences among each of these Arab nations, but in general showed a disconnect between support for democracy and willingness to participate in democratic forms of action. Comparing responses for support to democracy with responses to willingness to participate in political action, namely petitioning, boycotting, and demonstrating, confirmed that only a small segment of the population in these nations was normally willing to openly protest against the government. This divide was furthered after the Arab Spring for some types of actions in Egypt and Jordan and significantly grew for each type in Morocco. These changes in willingness to participate were likely the result of individual experiences with the Arab Spring for each nation and reflect larger changes in government and political culture.

### *THE ARAB SPRING: NATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH POLITICAL MOVEMENTS*

The Arab uprisings of 2011 and 2012 were the largest democratic movement across the Arab world in decades, with each nation having its own unique experiences and aftermaths. These uprisings were the result of years of

authoritarian domination that had left economies stagnant and citizens with few political rights, creating a level of discontent that had been simmering for years. The “Arab Spring” began on December 17, 2010, when a man in Tunisia lit himself on fire in protest of government corruption, turning years of discontent into a wave of pro-democratic protest across the nation. By mid-January, Tunisia’s longtime authoritarian president, Ben Ali, had stepped down and a new democratic government was established in the nation (Brynen et. al., 2012, 17). The success of this democratic movement in Tunisia inspired a series of similar protests and uprisings in nations around the Arab world. These movements were driven by open popular protest and demands from the people for real democratic reforms that would bring “dignity” to oppressed citizens, as the movement was referred to as the “Dignity Revolutions” in the Arab world. The results of these movements varied greatly by country. In Tunisia the revolution was swift and effective, but in nations such as Libya and Syria they led to civil war and civil upheaval. Elsewhere, these movements led to minor reforms on the part of regimes while in yet other nations the uprisings were swiftly crushed and had no notable results. Whether the Arab Spring led to little change or extreme change in the government of a nation, the experience of participating in a popular movement likely left lasting impressions on the political culture of its people.

Next to the structural changes they caused, the most significant feature of these uprisings was their open democratic nature, with the people driving them through protest and other ways of showing discontent with the ruling regime. According to Mark Haas, one of the main catalysts for democratic demonstration was the massive youth bulge in the nation, with one-third of all people in the region being between the ages of 10-24 (Haas 3). This huge collection of young people, who had little economic or political opportunity, was the main dissenting voice that organized protests and took to the streets. Most of these protests started from the bottom up, as young Arabs highlighted oppression through videos and social media, using them to cultivate dissent and organize demonstrations (Brynen, 2012, 8). These demonstrations, which provided powerful visual displays of dissent to regimes, were broadcasted across the region and became the central feature of the Arab Spring as places like Tahrir Square in Egypt were occupied by tens of thousands of protestors. In addition to these demonstrations, many citizens participated in boycotts and strikes, signed petitions, and took part in other acts of dissent that all put pressure on ruling regimes. What these uprisings had in common, regardless of the method of dissent chosen, was people openly taking political actions that voiced their grievances with the hope of causing political change.

In Morocco, uprisings put pressure on the ruling monarchical regime and led to some level of political reform. Since the 1950s, Morocco has been ruled by a monarchy that has continually sought to consolidate power in the hands of the crown. In the late 1990s, the newly appointed king, Mohammed VI, began implementing a series of reforms that expanded social rights and

provided economic aid to the poor, making the king increasingly popular among the people. The king, however, was not immune to the popular movements of the Arab Spring, which reached Morocco when protestors gathered around the February 20<sup>th</sup> Movement, marching through the streets demanding economic and political accountability from its government. In response to these demands, the king proposed reforms in the form of constitutional amendments, which were endorsed by a popular vote that expanded legislative power and promised the protection of human rights (Brynen, 2012, 33-36). These reforms, along with the election of a new parliament shortly after, showed the ability of the people to push demands upon the ruling regime and receive real results. Yet, despite these fairly major reforms, the king still holds the ultimate power in Morocco and maintains a strong oversight over the parliament. The reforms of the king were able to satisfy, at least to some degree, the democratic demands of the people, keeping him in power for now as a popular monarch who allows for some level of democratic governance.

A similar movement occurred in Jordan, which is also ruled by a popular monarch, but the results were somewhat different. Since the early 1990s, Jordan's monarchs have pursued a series of liberal reforms that have granted citizens increased participation in the parliamentary process and promoted economic growth. Under the current king, Abdullah II, who took power in 1999, Jordan has continued to hold parliamentary elections, but accusations of poll-rigging have been common. Some political groups, such as the Islamists, have been opposed by the regime despite having a large popular backing, creating political tensions (Haas and Lesch 119). Therefore, when the Arab Spring began in 2011, Jordan was not spared from the growing protest movement. Demonstrations began occurring every Friday across the nation, most of which demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Samir Al-Rifai, and, by February, the king had announced the resignation of al-Rifai and appointed a new prime minister. While this new appointment, and also an economic stimulus package from the monarch, was welcomed, many Jordanians were unhappy with the new Prime Minister. Protests resumed on March 24, only to be suppressed by anonymous riot disrupters the next day who may have been ordered by the monarch. Whoever broke up these protests, the king continued to try to give the Arab Spring an air of reform rather than revolution, as over the next six months he dismissed two more prime ministers (124-126). Since then, the king has suggested that further reforms will take place, possibly allowing the prime minister to come from the parliament itself rather than royal appointment, but the future of reforms are unclear. While Jordan did not undergo a major revolution and protests never challenged the legitimacy of the king directly, protestors demonstrated repeatedly their seriousness for real political reform in the country.

In contrast to the Arab Spring in Jordan and Morocco, Egypt experienced a much larger wave of protest that created more change, but also led to more severe consequences. Since 1981, Egypt had been ruled by President Hosni

Mubarak, who, in the 1990s, pursued a series of neoliberal economic reforms coupled with a tightening of state power. While Egypt's economy grew rapidly in the 1990s and early 2000s, its unemployment and poverty rates failed to get any better and even began to sink (Haas and Lesch, 2013, 36-7). As a result, several Egyptians staged labor strikes starting in 2004, followed by large protests in 2005, 2008, and 2010 against the Mubarak regime, which responded by cracking down more and more on dissenters. However, as a result of the Tunisian uprising and other factors including online communication and a large youth movement, a huge public demonstration began in Tahrir square on January 25, 2011 (40-41). Mubarak tried to dismiss this protest and sent in security forces to break it up, but the Egyptian military refused to fire on protesters and on February 11 forced him to step down, taking control of Egypt themselves in form of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF). The military drafted a new constitution and held new elections in late 2011 and 2012, with the well-organized Islamic party, the Muslim Brotherhood, winning the largest number of seats in parliament and the presidency with their candidate, Muhammad Morsi (44-45).

Many of the liberal youth who led the protests in the first place felt that the election of the Muslim Brotherhood was unwarranted and that their voices had been ignored. In addition, SCAF expanded its constitutional powers in response to the election, marking a continued military resistance to Morsi. These events are the most important to keep in mind, as the World Value Survey poll examined in this survey took place in 2012, but in 2013, in response to the protesting of millions of Egyptians on June 30, President Morsi was forced out of office and replaced by the military president Abdel El-Asisi. This turbulent Arab Spring, which involved mass protests, regime overthrow, and heated elections, was both an important lesson in the power of political action for Egyptians, but also showed the limits of the actions in the face of corruption and forces out of their control. Protesters may have forced Mubarak to step down, but many of them were dissatisfied with the Muslim Brotherhood's election victory and the lack of real democratic reform in the country as factions fought behind the scenes for political power. This means that many Egyptians have experienced political action first hand, but may have negative feelings towards it due to the instability of the democracy they fought to create.

### *SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY BEFORE AND AFTER THE ARAB SPRING*

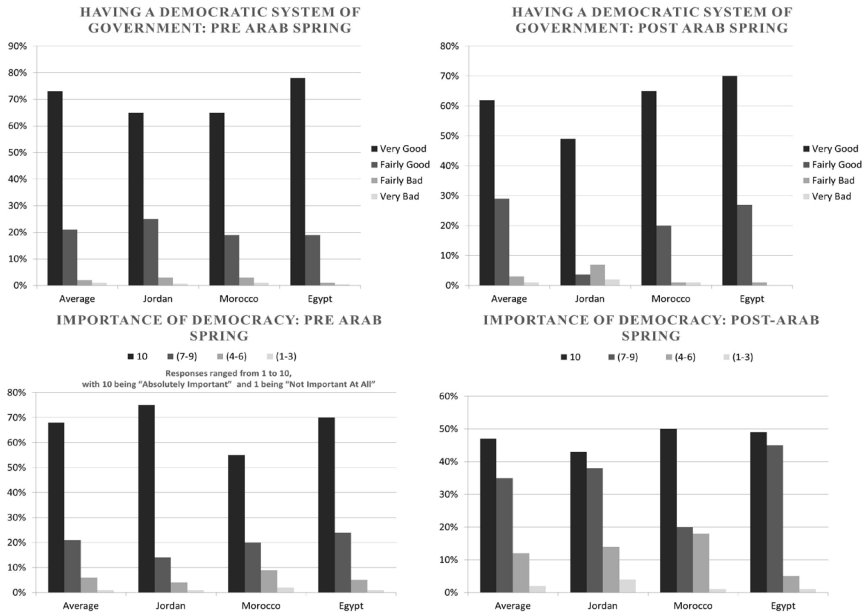
As the mass protests of the Arab uprisings suggest, there is a fairly high level of support for democracy in general in each of these nations. World Values Survey conducted surveys in Jordan, Morocco, and Egypt both before the Arab Spring, from 2005-2009, and after the uprisings, from 2012-2014, which asked participants about the worth and importance of democracy. While these surveys did not really attempt to define democracy and left the interpretation to

the respondents, they did find a high level of support for democracy, at least in an abstract sense.

When asked before the Arab Spring, “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?” on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being “absolutely important,” about 9 out of 10 respondents across all three of these countries said 7 or above. Moreover, over two-thirds of respondents said 10, meaning these Arab nations absolutely desired to live in a democracy, with an even larger majority supporting democracy to a lesser extent. Participants were also asked whether “having a democratic system of government” was very good, fairly good, fairly bad, or very bad. Across all three nations, 9 out of 10 once again said democracy is very or fairly good (Table 1). By asking about support for democracy through different angles of questions, the survey ensured that participants were consistent about their support. This once again shows that, before the Arab Spring, a large majority of people living in these Arab nations generally supported democracy.

It is important to note, however, that support for democracy, while very high across the board, did vary fairly significantly between a few of the nations before the Arab Spring. When it came to the question on having a democratic government, 98% of respondents in Egypt said good or fairly good, while 90% in Jordan and 84% in Morocco said the same (Table 1). Nearly all respondents in Egypt had positive thoughts towards democracy, while a notable portion of people in Jordan in Morocco were less supportive of having a democratic government. This difference was much less noticeable, however, when participants were asked about the importance of democracy for them individually. On a scale from 1 to 10, 85% of Egyptians responded 7 or above and 89% of Jordanians and 75% of Moroccans ranked the importance of democracy this high (Table 1). In this case, there was less of a difference in support between Jordanians and Egyptians, but still a noticeable portion of Moroccans who viewed democracy less favorably. Whatever the reason for these differences might be, whether it is the relative actual experience Morocco has had with democracy or influenced by another aspect of political culture, these less supportive portions are still the minority.





Support for Democracy Before and After the Arab Spring (Table 1).  
Data were collected from World Values Survey

What is more telling are the differences in these responses after the Arab Spring compared to responses before these democratic uprisings. When asked about the importance of living in a democratic country to them on a scale of 1 to 10, 83% of respondents across all three nations from the 2012-2014 wave said 7 or higher, compared to 89% before the Arab Spring. Similarly, when asked about whether it was good to have a democratic system of government, 91% of respondents across these nations said good or fairly good, compared to 93% before the Arab uprisings (Table 1). These differences are by no means extreme, as a large majority of people in these nations still support democracy, but it is telling that support did go down for both questions. This suggests that there was a portion of the population who became less interested in democracy. Whether this disenfranchisement was a direct result of experiences with uprisings or affected by other factors, it shows that support for democracy did waver over this period.

Some even more telling changes in support occurred in the individual nations. The slight decrease in support for having a democratic government was noticeable in Jordan, where 86% said very good or fairly good compared to 90% before. Support in Morocco, however, stayed relatively the same, with 85% saying very or fairly good compared to 84% before. Similarly, in Egypt, support was roughly the same with 99% saying very good or fairly good compared to 98% before, showing near unanimous positive feelings towards democratic



government. When it came to the question of importance of living in a democratic society, the differences were more significant. In Jordan, 81% of respondents ranked importance of democracy 7 or higher, compared to 89% before. Similarly, 70% of Moroccans now ranked importance of democracy 7 or higher, compared to 75% before (Table 1). Both of these nations showed a decrease in how important democracy is for their individual respondents after the Arab uprisings, which may suggest a negative experience with the uprisings for some portion of the population.

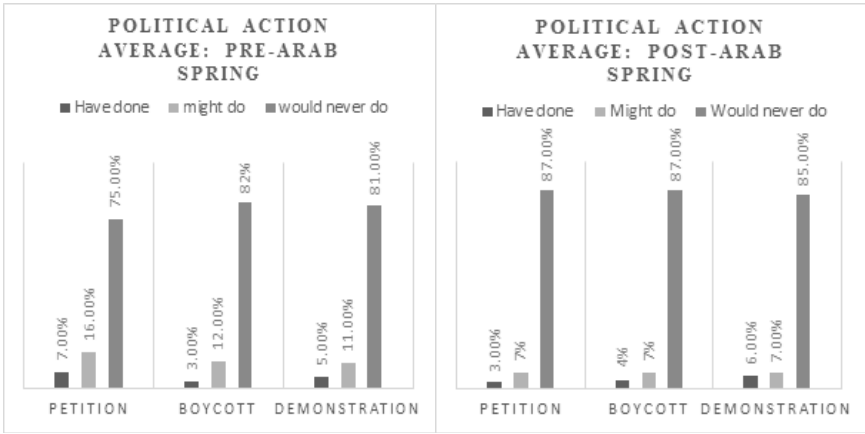
The picture was different in Egypt, however. When asked to rank the importance of living in a democracy to them, 94% of Egyptians now ranked it 7 or higher, compared to 84.7% before the uprisings. This increase is significant, not only because it was by nearly 9%, but also because it was in the opposite direction of both Jordan and Morocco (Table 1). This likely reflects the experience with revolution that was still occurring in Egypt in 2012, when the survey was taken. Egypt held elections in late 2011 and early 2012, which meant that Egyptians were still hoping for major changes in the government, but also continued demonstrations against the Islamists that were elected to power. These events surrounding this survey suggest that Egyptians would have still had high hopes for democracy and would not have given up their attempts for revolution like several Moroccans and Jordanians seem to have done.

This suggests that the differing experiences of revolution that people in each of these nations experienced had a notable effect on how portions of the population view democratic government. It is still important to realize that support for democracy remained relatively high in both surveys, as a large majority of respondents expressed pro-democratic views. Yet, even these slight changes in support, both up and down, may mean that the Arab Spring has larger implications for political culture in Arab nations. In light of this changing, yet still high support for democracy, it is now important to turn to the more specific aspect of political culture concerning participation in political action. Involvement in these dimensions of political culture will help make sense of a lack of democratic change during the uprisings despite high support and may reflect some of the changes in support that did occur.

### *DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE: PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ACTION*

Compared to the high support for democracy indicated by the data above, willingness to participate across these three nations is extremely low. In addition to the questions it asked about democracy, World Values Survey asked participants a series of questions on political action that were meant to reflect participation and willingness to engage in acts of protest. In these questions, WVS listed different forms of political action, namely “signing a petition,” “joining in boycotts,” or “attending peaceful demonstrations,” and whether participants had done, might do, or would never do these actions under any circumstance. These questions

measured a spectrum of political participation, ranging from fairly minimal by signing a petition, to fairly involved by joining in a boycott, to very involved by physically attending a demonstration. These surveys found significantly lower participation in these activities than general support for democracy, that participation plummeted after the Arab Spring and major differences in political action between nations.



Political action across Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco (Table 2).

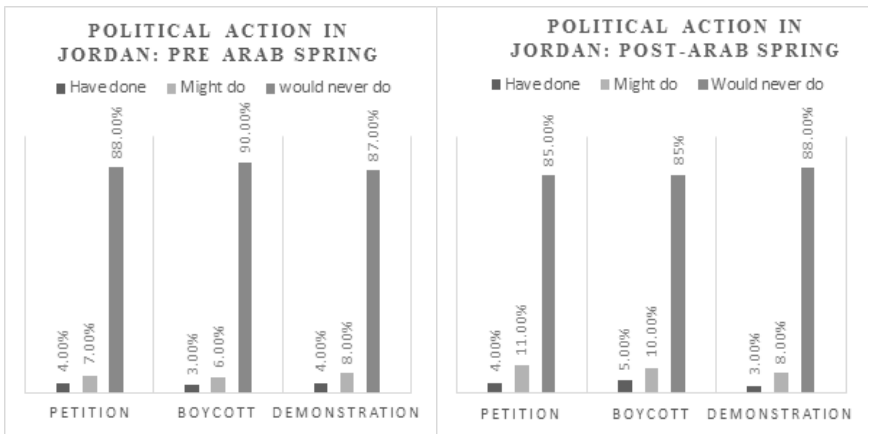
Data were collected from World Values Survey

When responses were averaged across all three nations, a large majority of respondents reported that they would never participate in any of these political activities. Compared to the over 9 out of 10 respondents who said democracy is good or fairly good before the Arab Spring, roughly 75% said they would never sign a petition and 81% said they would never attend a demonstration. This shows a stark disconnect between an abstract sense of democracy and actual willingness to participate across the region. The number of people who were willing to take political action shrunk even lower after the Arab Spring, which also happened with support for democracy. Post-Arab Spring, 91% of respondents had said democracy was very or fairly good, while 87% said they would never sign a petition, compared to 74% before, and 85% said they would never attend a demonstration, compared to 81% before (Table 2). With nearly 13% fewer respondents willing to sign a petition after the uprisings, a significant portion of respondents clearly shied away from this form of political action. With support for democracy growing slightly lower and willingness to take political action shrinking even more, experience with the Arab Spring appears to have snuffed a significant portion of Arabs’ desire for democracy and willingness to take the actions necessary to achieve it. This decrease in willingness to participate could

have resulted from a lack of satisfaction with the outcome of the uprisings or possibly the increased crackdown on civil rights by regimes after the protests. These changes were much more significant on an individual nation level, and so it is more important to examine how the particular experiences of each nation with the uprisings changed participation in political action.

*Political Action in Jordan*

In a general sense, Jordan also demonstrates a large disparity between willingness to participate and support for democracy that is shared across the region. Yet, it does not follow the same general trend after the Arab Spring, as not all of its political action responses went down and some even went up. The most notable differences were with the responses to the petitioning and boycotting questions. For willingness to petition before the Arab Spring, 88% of Jordanians had responded that they would never take this action, with only 4% saying they had already done so and 7% saying they might do so. After the Arab Spring, however, 85% of Jordanians said they would never sign a petition, while 4% again reported already having done so and 11% said they might sign one (Table 3). This shows that the number of Jordanians who actually signed a petition during or before the Arab Spring had not changed, but 4% more would now consider signing one.



Willingness to partake in various kinds of political action in Jordan before and after the Arab Spring (Table 3).

Data were collected from World Values Survey

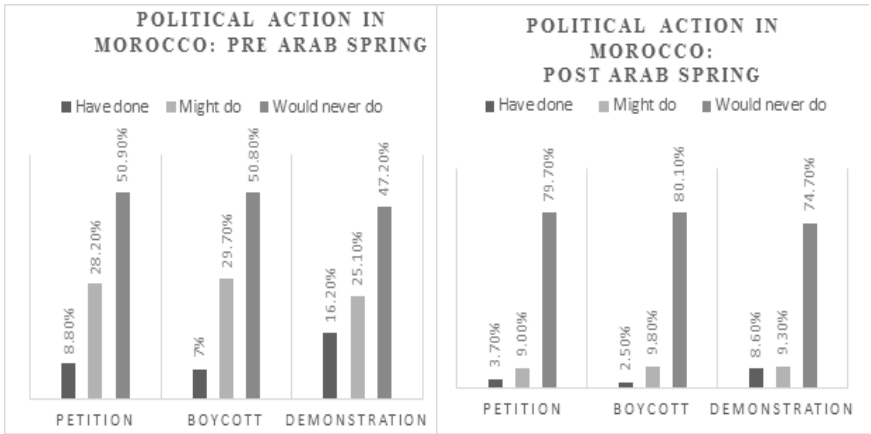
Similarly, before the Arab Spring, 90% of Jordanians replied that they would never join in a boycott, with only 3% saying they had and 6% saying

they might. After the Arab Spring, however, that number dropped to 85% saying they never would, with 5% now saying they had and 10% saying they might (Table 3). In this case, more Jordanians said they had joined in a boycott and even more said they might do so after the uprisings of 2011. Both of these response differences indicate that there was a slight boost in willingness to protest through methods such as petitioning and boycotting. This boost in political action was not present, however, when Jordanians were asked if they would ever attend a peaceful demonstration. Before the Arab Spring, 87% of Jordanians had said they would never demonstrate, with 4% saying they had and 8% saying they might. After the uprisings, roughly the same number, 88%, said they would never demonstrate, with 3% saying they had and 8% saying they might (Table 3). With little difference for each of these responses, there does not appear to have been any significant change in Jordanian attitudes towards openly demonstrating.

The case of political action in Jordan is interesting because the acts of petitioning and boycotting became slightly more supported, while those Jordanians who would openly protest stayed relatively the same. This is particularly striking because open demonstration was the hallmark of the Arab uprisings and was certainly the most visible form of protest across the region. In Jordan, however, the number of respondents who said they had demonstrated was still particularly low compared to the increase in those that had petitioned or boycotted. It still is important to note that the number of those who had actually participated in any of these three acts of political action was fairly low across the board. This suggests that Jordanians are divided between a large group with no desire to take political action and a smaller group that is consistently more willing to do so. Yet the uprisings in Jordan that led to some reforms from the Jordanian king do appear to have had some effect on willingness to participate, or at least no noticeable negative effect.

### *Political Action in Morocco*

The story is rather different in Morocco, however, where the responses to questions on political action yielded drastically different results before and after the Arab Spring, all of which were in the negative direction. Despite having lower support for democracy than Jordan or Egypt before the Arab Spring, Morocco demonstrated significantly more willingness towards political action than either of these nations. Before the Arab Spring, only about half of Moroccans responded that they would never sign a petition or join in a boycott, despite over 30% more respondents for these categories in Jordan. In addition, 9% of Moroccans said they had petitioned and 28% also said they might, while 7% said they would boycott and 30% that they might (Table 4). In both of these cases, not only had a decent number of respondents done these actions, but over a quarter of them expressed the willingness to maybe do them.



Willingness to partake in various kinds of political action in Morocco before and after the Arab Spring (Table 4).

Data were collected from World Values Survey

Similarly, before the Arab Spring, just under half of Moroccans said they would never demonstrate, with 16% saying they had and 25% saying they might (Table 4). When it came to demonstrating, once again only around half of Moroccans said they would never do this and around a quarter said they might, but twice as many Moroccans said they had demonstrated than had done the other political actions. In addition to this relatively large group that had taken political actions, the “maybe” category in this case is particularly interesting because it represents a large segment of the population that is potentially willing, but “hesitant,” to take political action. This presents a very different picture from Jordan, as a significantly larger number of Moroccans had already participated in these political actions and nearly a quarter of them considered participating.

This encouraging willingness to participate, however, was severely changed after the Arab Spring. After the uprisings, the responses were much closer to those in Jordan. In the survey after the Arab Spring, 80% of Moroccans said they would never sign a petition, with only 4% saying they had and 9% saying they might, compared to only half in the never category and 9% saying they had and 28% saying they might before the Arab Spring. With nearly one-third more Moroccans reporting that they would not sign a petition, this reveals a dramatic drop in those willing to take this type of political action. Even more revealing is the number who said they had signed a petition already, which dropped 5%, and those saying they might, which dropped by 19%. Similar numbers were seen in the responses to other types of political action, as 30% more Moroccans also reported that would not join a boycott, with 5% less saying they had done so and

20% less saying they might (Table 4). When it came to demonstrating, the same trend occurred, with 8% fewer Moroccans saying they had demonstrated and 16% fewer saying they might.

It is interesting that the number reporting that they had taken these actions dropped so much because this answer would have presumably only gone up after the Arab Spring. If respondents had done an action before, presumably they would have reported they had done so again. This suggests a potential unwillingness even to admit to actions already taken after the events of the 2011 uprisings. Furthermore, the drop in those who might petition shows a significant reduction in those Moroccans “hesitant” to take political action. With nearly 20% fewer Moroccans even considering taking some of these political actions, it seems that a major chunk of the population had their desire for political action drained during the uprisings.

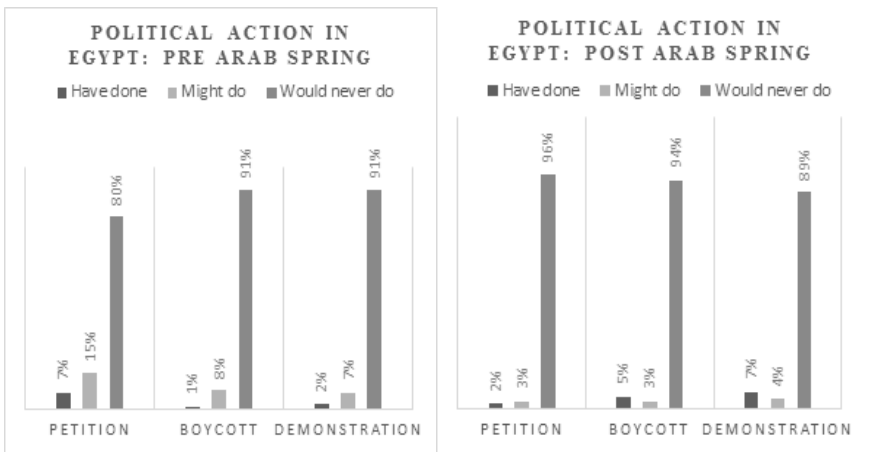
There are a few explanations for this massive reduction in willingness to take political action after the Arab Spring. One possibility may be a general feeling that the king made the same sort of superficial reforms he had in the past, making the uprisings feel like a fruitless endeavor. Another reason may have been increased limits on civil rights, such as free speech, which would have made respondents more fearful of revealing that they had protested. According to a Human Rights Watch report, authorities in Morocco have tightened their grip on human rights groups and increased penalties for politically motivated “crimes against the monarch” (Human Rights Watch). While these crackdowns could certainly have discouraged political participation, the report also notes the monarchy has been fairly accepting of open demonstrations. Whatever the root cause for this reduction, it is evident that, in Morocco, support for democracy decreased slightly while willingness to participate in political action took a much greater dive.

### *Political Action in Egypt*

Egypt presents yet another curious case. Egypt actually experienced a jump in support for democracy during and after the Arab Spring compared to the other two nations. But, when it came to political action, respondents from Egypt showed both positive and negative trends after the Arab Spring depending on the method of protest. Therefore, it is useful to look at the responses to each question individually in order to get an idea of which types of protest Egyptians became more willing and less willing to engage in as a result of their experience with mass protest, regime toppling, military control, and factional conflict.

Out of the three types of political action, petitioning appears to have been the most engaged in form of protest for Egyptians before 2011. In the pre-Arab Spring survey, only 80% of Egyptians said they would never sign a petition and 7% said they had already done so and 15% said they might. While a large majority of Egyptians were unwilling to petition, roughly 21% had done so or

were at least potentially willing to do, which would be a significant enough amount of citizens to give a petition some political weight. This large willingness to petition, however, all but disappeared. After the Arab Spring, 96% of Egyptians now claimed they would never sign a petition and only 2% said they had and 3% that they might. Not only did over 17% more Egyptians become unwilling to sign a petition, but 5% less admitted to having signed one and a whole 12% less were even potentially willing (Table 5). This reveals a huge drop in the “hesitant” category of respondents similar to that in Morocco, but also resignation to admit to signing one in the past. One explanation for this sudden decline in willingness to petition could be the fear of a new regime, whether it be Islamist or military, getting a list of people that was opposed to their actions. It is also possible that respondents were simply afraid to tell the survey collectors that they had taken such an action. A 2012 report by Freedom House, however, actually found that civil liberties went up in Egypt immediately after the uprisings (Freedom House). Whatever the particular reason, there was certainly a drop in willingness to perform this basic form of political action.



Willingness to partake in various kinds of political action in Egypt before and after the Arab Spring (Table 5)

Data were collected from World Values Survey

When it came to willingness to join in a boycott, there was both a similar and different trend in the responses compared to petitioning. Before the Arab Spring, 91% of Egyptians claimed they would never join in a boycott, with only 1% saying they had and 8% saying they might do so. This shows that far fewer Egyptians had joined or were willing to join a boycott before the uprisings than the nearly 21% that had said they had or would petition. After the Arab Spring,



however, 94% said they would never sign a petition, and 5% now said they had done so and 5% said they might (Table 5). While the overall number of those unwilling to boycott went up as they switched over from the “hesitant” category, 3% more admitted to having joined a boycott. This suggests that those who were on the fence about whether or not they would boycott either decided to do it during the uprisings or decided they never would, with relatively few staying hesitant. Once again the number of Egyptians taking this political action was very low, but it was more than before the uprisings and at least a portion of those who did so do not appear to have tried to hide it.

Finally, willingness to attend a peaceful demonstration experienced a somewhat different trend than joining in a boycott before and after the Arab Spring. Before the uprisings, 91% of Egyptians said they would never attend a demonstration, with only 2% saying they had already done so and 7% saying they might. This shows that the vast majority of Egyptians had no willingness to participate in an open demonstration before 2011, with only a fraction of them having done so before. However, after the Arab Spring, while the number of Egyptians unwilling to ever attend a demonstration hardly changed, 6.8% now said they had demonstrated while only 4% might do so (Table 5). While the number of those on the fence about demonstrating went down slightly, it appears that most of this group actually decided to attend demonstrations, as 5% more said they had done so. This jump in the number of Egyptians who had demonstrated reflects the mass demonstrations that swept the country in 2011, making it the most common form of protest among Egyptians in the survey. While at least 5% of the Egyptian population, which would be a significant amount of protestors, appears to have demonstrated for the first time during the Arab Spring, the large majority once again stayed away from any type of political action after the uprisings. This suggests that a relatively small portion of Egyptians were able to carry out the necessary political actions to pressure the Mubarak regime out of power, but raises questions of whether enough Egyptians are willing to work for a new democracy in the regime’s absence.

### *CONCLUSION: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DESIRE TO PARTICIPATE*

The above analysis of survey data reveals two broad trends. First, willingness to participate is significantly lower than support for democracy in these Arab nations. Second, the Arab Spring of 2011 had a noticeable effect on how willing Arabs were to engage in political action. This suggests that, despite low willingness to take political action, a small number of Arabs still engaged in open protest and impacted the way democratic action is seen in the region. This ties political action to political culture and shows that a small base of activists can inspire other citizens to protest and spark larger conversations about government. Yet, it also shows that protest can have negative impacts on willingness to

participate, suggesting that the context and scale of the revolt matters. While these broad conclusions can say little else about the region as a whole, they do suggest that political culture in the Middle East is not stagnant.

Perhaps the more significant finding is that willingness to participate varied greatly for each nation before and after the uprisings. Willingness to participate was most likely impacted by the different political conditions of each nation, such as the nature of the ruling regime and the level of civil liberties, as well as their unique experiences in the uprisings and their outcomes. In Jordan, where there was minor crackdown on protestors, but some concessions made by the king, willingness to protest fluctuated little and remained low. In Morocco, however, where the government restricted more civil liberties and made smaller concessions, willingness to take political action plummeted as fewer citizens were willing to report actions they had already done. In Egypt, where the regime was toppled and replaced by competing political factions, willingness to sign a petition went down significantly, but those admitting they had boycotted and demonstrated went up. This reveals a trend that when the political risks were higher, willingness to take political action went down. This suggests that willingness to participate in political action is greatly determined by whether the conditions in one's country are encouraging or discouraging of participation.

Yet, it is important to note that this data just captures a moment in time for political culture in the region. This data was taken in the aftermath of the region's largest democratic movement in decades and so it reflects the fear and excitement of people living during uncertain times. Even in the few years since this data was collected, attitudes towards democracy and political action have likely changed in these nations. For example, the data from Egypt was taken in 2012 after the Muslim Brotherhood had just swept the Egyptian elections. A year later, however, the military staged a coup and placed the pro-military president El-Asisi in power, who has since cracked down on civil liberties in Egypt. This turn of events has most likely discouraged Egyptians from taking open political action. This brings into question what the future holds for democracy in the Arab world. The data suggests that recent experiences with open protest and government crackdown have actually reduced willingness to take action, which does leave high hopes for another democratic movement in the near future. This does not mean, however, that political culture will not shift in the coming years and lead to change, but it seems improbable.

The most important lesson to learn from this data is that political culture is affected by circumstances. Many Arabs are unwilling to take democratic political action despite voicing support for democracy in the abstract, but this says more about the conditions they are living in than their character. When past protests have brought minimal or tumultuous change and it is dangerous to voice dissent, there is little incentive for citizens to engage in open political activism. It is only by restoring the civil liberties that allow citizens to voice their concerns that a healthy protest culture will return. But as long as regimes are able to keep

their citizens afraid to act, authoritarianism will continue to be the norm in the Middle East.

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