

SPECIAL EDITION

# Has the Arab Spring Lived Up to Expectations?

The views of 39 experts from the  
Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and  
the United States

*Viewpoints  
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On the occasion of  
the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary  
of the Arab Spring



*Middle East  
Program*



**Jane Harman**, *Director, President, and CEO, Woodrow Wilson Center*

To mark the second anniversary of the Arab Spring, the Wilson Center's Middle East Program sought the views of the leading experts from the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and the United States. Common threads run through those views—lessons that are already clear from the earthquake in governance that is rearranging the landscape of the Middle East.

First, transitions are messy. Our own is still in process—from winning a war in 1776, to standing up a government in 1789, to enfranchising slaves almost a century later and women 70 years after that.

Second, we have minimal understanding of the tribal nature of many of the countries involved, and arbitrary boundaries drawn in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries create enormous difficulty for forging national unity.

Third, an election does not a democracy make. Political skills are minimal on all sides. The notion of working together to reach compromise is nonexistent.

Fourth, the rise of political Islam brings benefits and burdens. The requirements of governing can cause groups to moderate their behavior. But, sadly, as we are seeing in Egypt, they can overreach and create an enormous backlash.

Finally, the United States has limited ability to influence change. We were slow to embrace it and are mistrusted by many. We cannot impose or pick favorites any more. We must carefully and wisely support and encourage pluralism and tolerance and embrace homegrown and regional approaches. We are coach not captain.

As an election monitor in Tunisia and Egypt I witnessed incredible hope on the streets of both countries. Some but not all of that has been dashed. The road ahead will be a long a painful one with plenty of dead ends.



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**Ammar Abdulhamid**, *Syrian dissident; Fellow, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies; and Founder and Director, Tharwa Foundation*

For those who expected a fast and smooth transition to liberal democratic norms, the Arab Spring has certainly failed to deliver. But for those who simply wanted to push their countries into taking one important and necessary step in the right direction by breaking the prevailing political stalemate in their societies, then, the Arab Spring has definitely lived up to expectations.

The fear barrier is now broken; the *anciens regimes* are gone; and pent-up political forces, with their good, their bad, and their downright ugly, have been released. The Islamists might have the upper hand at this stage on account of their stronger organizational capabilities, but the more secular elements are not giving up and have, in fact, made it clear that they, too, have strong grassroots connections and support—and not only among minority communities but within the larger Arab Sunni community as well.

No longer can any of the sides dismiss the other as irrelevant. The choices confronting all are now stark and clear: accommodation, civil war, or civil war eventually ending in accommodation. A return to the autocratic past with one side dominating the other and imposing its ways is not feasible. Each side of the divide has enough regional and international backers to ensure the near impossibility of such an outcome. The sooner the representatives of the different political forces realize this, the better for all. For only when accommodation is reached can democracy finally begin to take root in our region.

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**Raghda Abushahla**, *Interpreter, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Gaza; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

As a Palestinian, my expectations of the Arab Spring were and still are different from the expectations of others in the Arab world. I wonder if this “Spring” is good for the Palestinian cause, whether the Palestinians will also protest for their freedom, and whether it will be peaceful, because Palestinians have already suffered much violence for decades.

It is still too early to make an assessment of the Arab Spring. Revolutions have always been unstable periods during which unexpected and external players attempt to impact, or even take the lead of, the new situation. Historically, both the Russian and

French Revolutions were followed by periods of political chaos that cost many lives. Palestinians are yearning for a Palestinian Summer, or even Winter, where conflicts are settled because the Spring has taken so long and is not yet over.

If my expectations of the Arab Spring had been to spread democracy, it seems at least the first few steps were successful; local populations evicted dictators, and new leaders were elected. However, having new leaders mirroring the previous dictatorships does not seem to be the goal for which nations went to the streets to call for the toppling of those regimes. There are big expectations of the Arab Spring, yet those have to wait until it reaches its peak in the awakening countries. And then Palestine will find the true meaning of this Spring.



**Khalid al-Dakhil**, *Sociologist and Political Analyst, Saudi Arabia*

If by expectations we mean the rosy ones that the Spring would have immediately ushered in—freedom, democracy, the rule of law free of any upheavals, and everything that comes with it—then you could say that the Spring did not live up to expectations. But, then, one should ask another question: how long, and how much, did it take for the French Revolution and the American Revolution, for instance, to live up to expectations? One thing is clear about the Arab Spring: it ushered in people's role in the political process for the first time in the countries where revolutions took place. And this, if consolidated, is a big achievement and a turning point in the political history of the region. Another thing to look for is the expected dramatic change in the political map of alliances in the Arab world as a result of the upheavals raging in countries like Egypt and Syria, in particular. The face of the Middle East will not be the same in the years to come. The cost of the Arab Spring has proven to be heavy and bloody, especially in Syria, but, by all accounts, the region is entering a different time, different place, and different moment. How this change shapes up in the near future is a question that hangs over the region.



**Fahmia Al Fotih**, *Communication analyst and youth focal point analyst, United Nations Population Fund, Yemen*

Taking a quick glimpse at so-called "Arab Spring" countries, one can see only disappointment and resentment. The positive changes—a civic state and rights, security, and all issues for which Arab people went into the streets—are not visible. On the contrary, turmoil, violence, hatred, and instability are taking place instead and seem dreadfully prevalent. The reality in the Arab Spring countries is that the new

powers that replaced dictators have failed to respond to the peoples' needs and to the new era. Egypt, for instance, is considered a role model for the rest of the Arab Spring countries; if the situation succeeds in Egypt, it would be similarly successful in other countries. Nonetheless, what has happened in Egypt lately, with people going back into the streets and demonstrating against President Morsi's regime, is just an example that the outcome of the Arab Spring is not actually corresponding to the needs of the masses.

It seems that the people in the Middle East have not comprehended the spontaneous uprising in the region, and they were not prepared for a drastic change after decades of suppression. Despite the fact that new governments have come to power via mass protests and despite the fact that new leaders have vowed to follow democratic principles, there is a tendency to practice and embrace the previous authoritarians' style.

Disappointingly, the Arab Spring has not lived up to nor has it gotten close to meeting the expectations of the people, especially those who lost their lives during the violence associated with the uprising. There is a perception that the Arab Spring has just brought about new faces but no new changes. However, it could be that the Arab Spring has only lived up to the expectations of those Islamists who have just parachuted into power unexpectedly. Yet, the Islamists are naïve in politics and unfamiliar with democracy as they try to eliminate their opponents and exclude other social components. If Islamists do not learn lessons from the ex-regimes and if they just continue rigidly ruling with their ancient ideologies and discarding others, their fall will come sooner and we will not witness any change but more turmoil in the region. And as George Bernard Shaw said, "Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."



**Mohammad Alkhazim**, *Academician and Writer; Professor, King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences; and Columnist, Al Jazirah Newspaper, Saudi Arabia*

The Arab uprising, at the start, happened at the street level. The driving force behind it was the daily frustration of people, rather than an organized political opposition movement. Ennahda in Tunisia and the Ikhwan (Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt benefited from the uprising's outcome and won elections because they were the only alternative party to the exiled "old guard." Yemen, on the other hand, changed its president—but not its ruling party—with the support of its neighboring Gulf states. This means that no definitive political change occurred in Yemen. As for Syria, its people are still unable to win their battle against President Bashar al-Assad due to the complicated geopolitics surrounding Syria. Saudi Arabia realized that the driving force behind the Arab uprising was people's frustration with their daily lives. As a result, it increased wages and used the support of religious scholars to suppress street demonstrations. The conclusion here is

that the outcome of the Arab uprisings was not the same in all Arab countries, although they all had similar origins. The political changes that have occurred in Egypt have attracted the most attention because of that country's size and influence in the region. The Ikhwan government has forgotten the original reasons for Egypt's revolution and has created political division among Egyptians. Thus, it has lowered the people's expectations of the Arab Spring. It must not be forgotten that Arab governments are not comfortable with the Ikhwan's intention to spread their ideology all over the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, and others have clearly expressed wariness about this through their officials and in their media.



**Honey Al Sayed**, *Director, Syria Program, Nonviolence International; and former host and producer, Syrian radio show "Good Morning Syria"*

It would be heart-rending, after the high human price paid for the cause of dignity and freedom, to now say that the Arab Spring has failed. I have always believed that change can only stem from the grassroots up. In other words, we cannot have political change if we do not reform as a people on socioeconomic, sectarian, political, and civil lines. Therefore, I have expected the chaos and the plight we have reached in the Arab Spring. We have been oppressed long enough that we instinctively behave as our oppressors. In addition, we belong to a tribal and patriarchal system, a tradition that has been wreaked on our culture for thousands of years and all the more imbued with decades of dictatorship.

Thus, change will be a challenge, and, although difficult, it is not impossible. I would like to believe this is only a metamorphosis, one that will take decades; but positive change will come. Arab people in the past two years have learned to say "No," even at gunpoint. Now it is time to transition this "No" into rule of law, justice for all, freedom of speech, women's empowerment, dialogue, reconciliation, and, finally, democracy, no matter how overrated it may be.



**Margot Badran**, *Senior Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center; and Senior Fellow, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding, Georgetown University*

Within the arc of the Arab Spring, I speak of the Egyptian revolution. Revolutions, which begin as uprisings in the first instance aimed at ejecting oppressive rulers, point to larger expectations of profound overhaul rather than result in immediate satisfaction. The expectation or hope for the practice of social justice, economic justice, and human

rights within a democratic order takes unwavering commitment and sustained work through thick and thin. Articulating such expectations is part of the process of realizing expectations while the act of articulation, or free speech, is itself an expectation achieved. The questions are: whose expectations and what expectations? Egypt is deeply divided between: (1) the liberally oriented (including many who are religiously identified) who want religion to be independent of the state and who desire a pluralistic state in which all voices are heard and (2) those inspired by politicized Islam who push a single ideology and favor an atavistic conservatism and an imposed uniformity of views and practices. At the moment, as the world sees, impassioned debate (accompanied by activism with a heavy dose of violent confrontation) swirls around the draft constitution drawn up by a committee—unrepresentative of all segments of society—which shores up massive power in the executive and leaves interpretation of *shari'a* (the principles of which are to be the source of all laws) in the hands of the state—as well as the definition of the “genuine Egyptian family” and gender roles. Women must balance their roles in the family and society, while men are not called upon to do the same; motherhood and childhood are to be “protected” (read controlled), but there is no attention to fatherhood and childhood? Egyptians’ expectations, or desires, of the kind of state and society they want are profoundly at odds with each other. Whose expectations will be met in the coming referendum on the constitution? And then what?



**Rachid Ould Boussiafa**, *Deputy Chief Editor, Echorouk Al Youmi, Algeria; and former Visiting Arab Journalist, Woodrow Wilson Center*

It is obvious that the outcome of the Arab Spring was not up to the people’s aspirations to depose dictatorships and move to a new era of democracy. The Arab Spring turned into terrifying outbursts of violence in both Libya and Syria because revolutions that started peacefully have turned into militarized insurgencies that use arms against regimes. The result has been wide-scale destruction and thousands of deaths. Even in Arab countries where revolutions maintained their peaceful nature, such as in Yemen, Tunisia, and Egypt, post-revolution policies did not improve the livelihoods of the people—who woke up to realize that the social and economic issues, inherited from the old regimes, are still the same.

In fact, the situation has become worse in most Arab Spring countries. Freedom of expression has taken a dangerous turn, where many extremist ideas and movements now threaten the social fabric. This could lead to bloody crises in the future, as some cannot accept the differences in views and opinions.

The main problem in the Arab Spring countries is that the new regimes did not create good mechanisms for dealing with the opposition. Now we see similar behavior and

attitudes, and the same mistakes have been made by the new governments, leading in some places to second revolutions.

However, these developments should not lead to pessimism. This is a part of the normal dynamic because people will have to let out what has been suppressed for decades. The vital forces of the Arab Spring will eventually reach a consensus. It will take years, but a common ground will be found and things will settle.



**Nathan J. Brown**, *Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, The George Washington University; and former Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center*

The uprisings in the Arab world in 2011 were sparked by many factors, but they were unified by a demand that those who exercise authority be held accountable to the broader society. That demand still animates much of Arab politics, and the struggle to find ways to institutionalize it will not fade quickly. But to date, much of what has been achieved has been far more negative than positive in nature. Authoritarian regimes have been challenged, and several have been brought down by societies united around a demand for political change. Construction of a new political order is a difficult task that demands not social unity but the management of political differences. And that task has registered few successes so far.



**Jason Brownlee**, *Associate Professor of Government and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin; and former Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center*

The Arab Spring of 2010-2011 left most of the region's regimes intact, but the changes it delivered were stunning. Before each uprising occurred, I had no clue that opposition forces in Tunisia, Egypt, and, to a lesser extent, Yemen would quickly unify and peacefully remove incumbents who had ruled for decades. Two years after Ben Ali and Mubarak's ouster, it is clear that the groundswell of dissents delivered not only leadership changes, but regime changes as well: the onset of a new kind of politics and the re-negotiation of old rules. These breakthroughs shattered expectations and revolutionized the realm of the possible, demonstrating that previously marginal social movements could seize the national agenda from governments inured to the public's will. In Tunisia and Egypt, Islamist groups have dominated elections, but they have ruled—eagerly or begrudgingly—in conjunction with liberal and leftist parties. In doing so, they have begun crafting a new social contract between citizens and the state, one that heeds the views of individual voters while seeking to enshrine social, and sometimes deeply conservative, values. Equally important, erstwhile oppositionists have



helped establish civilian sovereignty over the uniformed military and security forces—a simpler task in Tunisia with its tradition of civilian presidents but a tall order in the Egyptian republic, which army officers had led for nearly 60 years until the summer of 2012. Much of the region remains characterized by durable authoritarianism (Saudi Arabia), political instability (Libya, Iraq), or a combination of the two (Syria). The Arab uprisings, however, inaugurated unprecedented opportunities for resolving these problems, opportunities the people of the region will undoubtedly seize in the years ahead.



**Nadereh Chamlou**, *Senior Advisor, Office of the Chief Economist, Middle East and North Africa Region, The World Bank*

The share of Arab women leaders was already low and has declined even further since the Arab Spring. The share of women parliamentarians (both houses) declined from 14.8 to 13.2 percent in the region, and that of women ministers fell from 5.5 to 4.7 percent. This is cause for concern. Over a period of decades, Arab states had slowly taken measures for inclusion of women in leadership. Egypt established a 12 percent quota, Tunisia a 30 percent preference list, Iraq a 25 percent threshold, and Morocco a 12 percent female quota for local elections. The pros and cons of quotas generated profound debates about women's role in society and often broke some glass ceilings. While the share of women parliamentarians is one measure of women's inclusion in leadership, appointing women to high government positions may be a better one. It is a lever under the direct control of the executive branch and reflective of its gender ideology. Indeed, since 2000, women have been increasingly appointed as ministers, ambassadors, and even the much contested position of judges. With this, governments tapped into the emerging trained female talent pool and provided powerful role models that projected the potential of women in society. The women also played a crucial role in voicing insights into how government policies potentially affected women. At the very least, they integrated gender issues into their own ministries' or institutions' programs. Unfortunately, the declining share of women in both parliaments and governments will not only impact state policies, but also their responsiveness and accountability toward half of the population.



**Patrick Clawson**, *Director of Research, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*

In many ways, the results of the Arab Spring have been, and largely were, just as expected: Egypt is a deeply divided society; Libya and Yemen are in disarray; Bahrain's

ruling family is solidly in control; and Tunisia is doing best of the lot. The biggest surprise is how bloody and protracted the fighting has been, first in Libya and now in Syria; both the popular resistance and the entrenched dictators have proven much more determined than was expected. That is the macro level view. If we descend a bit deeper into the details, the Arab Spring has been more disappointing, and for much the same reason that the transition to elected government in Iraq has fallen short. A common theme in country after country has been the unwillingness to compromise—or, put another way, an insistence on holding onto absolute power—whether by the old rulers or the new authorities. Healthy democracy requires a loyal opposition, but those in power in too many Arab countries seem to see dissent as sedition and opposition as inherently dangerous. Given how deeply divided most Arab societies are—whether by ideology (liberal state vs. political Islam), sect, or ethnicity—the unwillingness to embrace compromise suggests the path to stable, open, free societies will be long and twisted. On a more cynical note, the new Egyptian authorities seem surprisingly willing to keep up the security relationship with the United States and the peace with Israel, making the correct calculation that this will insulate them from international criticism for their actions at home.



**Adeed Dawisha**, *Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Miami University, Ohio; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

The success or otherwise of revolutions can be assessed through various measures. Personally, I share the sentiment of Nicolas de Condorcet, a leading figure in the French Revolution, who argued that the purpose of revolutions is to deliver freedom. So has the Arab Spring delivered freedom? Of course, it is too early to tell; a few years have to pass before any definitive conclusions can be made. Still, while the future is by no means certain, at least the people, after many years of procrustean authoritarianism, have been given a chance to have a say in determining their political future. After all, free and fair elections have been held in a number of the countries, and these produced parliaments that for the first time truly represented the peoples' political preferences. On the other hand, it is not clear that these institutions have succeeded in nullifying anti-democratic impulses. So far, there is little to be said about the prospects for democracy in Libya or Yemen (or Syria for that matter). However, recent happenings in Egypt do not augur well for the predominance of democratic proclivities in that country. Yet the Tunisian case seems rather different. There, dialogue and a spirit of compromise among the various revolutionary groups are happily in evidence. The truth, however, is that the jury is still out, and will remain out for a few years to come, before we can conclusively assess whether freedom was indeed the purpose of the Arab Spring revolutions.





**Rangita de Silva de Alwis**, *Director, Global Women's Leadership Initiative, Woodrow Wilson Center; and Senior Scholar, Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College*

As we celebrate the two-year anniversary of the Tunisian Revolution and look back on the achievements of women in Tunisia and the region, we see that a “women’s spring” is yet to come.

The reform of the election law in Tunisia calling for parity on electoral lists represents a triumph in the region and the world. However, in elections in October 2011, a majority of parties placed men at the top of the lists. This resulted in an unequal representation of women in the Constituent Assembly charged with drafting a new constitution. A constitution born out of an unequal process will have less legitimacy, authority, and validity. This is true for Tunisia and other countries in the region. As existing protections for women’s rights are being challenged, women and men must remain more vigilant as a bulwark against the erosion of rights. This time of ongoing transitions in the Middle East and North Africa is decisive for women’s rights for generations to come. The time for action is now.



**Haleh Esfandiari**, *Director, Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson Center*

Hope and expectations are two different things. They part ways when the revolutionary fever subsides and the reality on the ground takes over. The millions of people who came out onto the streets during the Arab Spring called for the end of dictatorship and for dignity, the rule of law, and transparency. They no longer wanted to be treated as gullible fools. As one autocrat after another fell, hopes for a better future, free and fair elections, and a better standard of living rose. These hopes, encouraged by governments, led to expectations that were not necessarily deliverable. Regimes with a strong Islamic component took over in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The focus shifted from democratization to the Islamization of the state. When constitutions were drafted, the concerns of women’s groups, minorities, human rights activists, and civil society organizations were ignored. Revolutions, it seems, do not take good care of the people who started them and do not shy away from shattering hopes and dreams.



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**Hanin Ghaddar**, *Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center; and Managing Editor, NOW News, Lebanon*

Change is a process, and it takes time. Two years through the Arab Awakening, we have learned that change cannot happen overnight. The world was watching, and we became self-conscious. We toppled the dictator above us but did not go further to topple the dictator within us.

Breaking the fear barriers was the very first step toward achieving freedom, but that was not enough. Toppling the dictator was not enough. The Arab Spring should not be about replacing a dictator with another or a patriarchal system with another.

So far, the Arab Spring has not yielded real citizenship and equality. Women are still treated as second-class citizens, and democracy has become a marketing strategy rather than a genuine need. In order to achieve a real Arab Spring, we have to revolt against ourselves and touch the untouchable. We need to start talking about taboos and understand that with freedom comes responsibility. Citizenship is not only about rights; it also means that a citizen is responsible for his or her actions.

Two years ago, we realized that our real enemy is within us. But now we need to understand that another enemy, a more dangerous one that is buried even deeper within, is still intact: our patriarchal mentality. Getting rid of this enemy is the real challenge. It requires self-criticism, and that is something we have not learned to do in the Arab world.

However, the yearning to become real citizens has not died out, but it will take time and patience—a lot of both. Until we decide to become citizens and start changing ourselves, the only solution that would save the region from more tension and bloodshed is to separate religion from state institutions as much as we can, or at least limit religion's control over these institutions. With religion still controlling our lives and choices, we will never become citizens, and the Arab Spring would have been for nothing.

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**Galia Golan**, *Professor, School of Government, Policy and Diplomacy at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel; and former Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center*

The current developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and possibly Morocco certainly lead to the conclusion that the hopes and aspirations of the “Arab Spring” have come to

naught. Indeed, these aspirations appear to have been betrayed: in Egypt with the egregious violation of democratic processes and threatening religious oppression (particularly with regard to women); and in Tunisia due to the frequent violation of civil rights and retrograde policies toward women. Nonetheless, in these two cases, the necessity and justice of the revolutions should not be underestimated. A difficult transition period was to be expected since the few, if not only, organized groups in those societies tended to be from non-democratic, conservative, religious circles. One must continue to hope that the forces behind the original revolutions, those demanding democracy, can organize and prevail. For Israel, the message of the Arab revolutions remains the same: whether the new or subsequent regimes represent conservative political Islam or whether the regime that prevails truly represents the public will, the Palestinian issue will remain central. Thus, it is even more imperative for Israel to strive genuinely to resolve this issue. The good news is that the Arab Peace Initiative remains on the (Arab) table; the two-state solution, with its agreement to peace, security, and normal relations with Israel, is still an accepted option in the Arab world. Now more than ever, it should be the chosen option for Israel as well.



**Yasmine ElSayed Hani**, *Visiting Arab Journalist, Woodrow Wilson Center; and Independent Journalist, Foreign Desk, Al Akhbar daily newspaper, Egypt*

It might be difficult now to assess the results of the ongoing Arab uprisings. For Egypt, after the January 25 Revolution, it is hard to say that the main demands of the protesters—political, social, and economic reforms—have been fulfilled. In part, it is because the "free elections" did not bring about an elite that can fulfill those demands by operating within an inclusive political national framework. Nevertheless, the Islamists coming into power was expected after the uprising because they were the most organized group before the revolution. The developments, however, underscored the importance of constructing a new elite. The Muslim Brotherhood and the current opposition are seen as part of the old regime but with different affiliations. Perhaps this is because the opposition did not properly establish itself as an alternative to the Brotherhood within this new, free environment. In addition to their organizational problems, they share the mentality of the old elite in dealing with developments and consolidating power, all while taking advantage of the young revolutionaries. A "new" elite increasingly became more vital to turn the uprising into a revolution, from changing rulers to putting Egypt on a progressive path. The danger, however, is when the current rulers proceed to hamper this path by eliminating the freedoms that Egyptians finally received and monopolizing power once again. The ongoing protests might not have the same results—toppling the regime—but they send warning signals of a potential political earthquake, whose very existence ensures there will never be another Mubarak again. This is the main expectation of the "Egyptian Springers."



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**Roger Hardy**, *Senior Visiting Research Fellow, King's College, London; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

If we thought the Arab dictators would fall like dominoes, then, of course, we will now be disappointed. But this was never a realistic prospect. What we have learned, or should learn, through the drama of hope and disappointment of the last two years, is that this is a generational process of change. It will produce different outcomes in different places. And what should be chastening for Western policymakers is that they are largely powerless to determine the outcome in any of these places. The new Middle East, if that is what it is, will be created slowly, painfully, and on the ground. Anyone who tells you the Arab Spring has succeeded or failed is guilty of short-term thinking.

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**Moushira Khattab**, *former Egyptian Ambassador to South Africa and to the Czech and Slovak Republics; Former Minister of Family and Population, Egypt; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

Two years into the Arab Spring, Egyptians, faced with a flawed constitution, have once again taken to the streets. In betrayal of their heroic role in the revolution, women who were hailed as co-stars of the revolution saw their rights shamefully reduced from those guaranteed in the 1971 constitution. State responsibility to guarantee equality between men and women—a basic tenet of all Egyptian constitutions since 1923—was removed from the current draft, which falls short of meeting the internationally-agreed upon minimum standards of human rights. To make matters worse, all reference to the international human rights treaties that Egypt has ratified, and is bound to uphold, has been removed. The constitution does not even prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender, sex, religion and origin. While Article 33 provides for equality before the law and in public rights, no mention is made of personal rights, where discrimination is most flagrant. In fact, the only concrete mention of women is in reference to their role in the home. With the language in the 1971 constitution concerning shari'a strongly modified by Articles 219 and 4 of the new draft, principles of shari'a are effectively turned into the more restrictive, changeable, and controversial "provisions" of shari'a. The draft puts women's rights at the mercy of clerics. Egyptian women, who ignited the revolution and held the torch alive, will not sit idly watching their co-stardom tarnish at the hands of the forces of darkness seeking to objectify them.



**Rami G. Khouri**, *Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

The Arab Spring has certainly lived up to my expectations for its initial two years and, in some cases, has exceeded them. But we are at the early stages of a historic transition across much of the Arab world that will require decades to stabilize. My expectations, which I outlined in an article for the *Financial Times* in early 2011, were that we would see the uprisings continue to spread across many countries in the region, triggering a variety of regime responses. These responses would include buying off citizens with cash (the Gulf states), making modest and symbolic reforms (Jordan and Morocco), fighting back militarily (Bahrain and Syria), and leaving office dead or alive (Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen). The single most important thing that has happened in the past two years is the assertion of citizen sovereignty as the basis of political legitimacy. Translating this from the initial mass street demonstrations into stable pluralistic structures of governance will require many years, but this historic process has started in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, and other countries will follow in due course. The dramatic examples of citizen activism and defiance in Kuwait and other Gulf countries is one of the most important recent developments. The Arab Spring in this respect has, in fact, exceeded my expectations, as I would have expected the Gulf countries' citizens to remain docile for many more years.



**Ellen Laipson**, *President and CEO, Stimson Center*

At the two-year mark, the Arab Spring looks noisy, messy, and inconclusive. A smooth march to democratic practice, personal freedom, and cultural diversity and tolerance has occurred in none of the five cases. The democratic aspirants in Tunisia and Egypt, and perhaps in Libya and Yemen, nonetheless, hold out some hope that a new political culture can emerge over time. The passionate “battles” over Egypt’s constitution and between Islamists and secular forces in Tunisia have been relatively violence-free. As in most revolutions, the initial courageous actors have been pushed aside by more militant and better-organized forces, and this dynamic creates genuine dilemmas for outside governments and civil societies who want to help the democratic forces yet must limit the degree of involvement for fear of discrediting those forces. This is a long story, and the two-year mark is still an early moment to judge the outcome of the Arab Spring.





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**Stephen McInerney**, *Executive Director, Project on Middle East Democracy*

Historic protests that erupted in Tunisia and swiftly swept across the Arab world in 2011 sparked all kinds of expectations. Arab citizens hoped that dictatorships would be quickly replaced by genuine democracies and that political accountability would allow economies held stagnant by endemic corruption to flourish. The expectations in international circles varied dramatically, with some optimistic that democratic transitions would bring a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous region, while others feared that longstanding authoritarian allies would be replaced by Islamist governments hostile to the United States and the West. Inevitably, the events of the past two years have lived up to some expectations and defied others. The transitions to democracy have proven more difficult and slower than many in the region had hoped, yet it is too early to judge how these transitions compare to those in other regions. Islamist political parties have succeeded in elections as many had expected. As of yet, they have proven less hostile to the United States and the West than many had feared, but also less committed to democracy than many had hoped. Perhaps the most important expectation—that the region would be changed fundamentally, never to return to the pre-2011 status quo—has clearly been fulfilled. The newfound belief among Arab populations that they can stand up to their leaders and demand change is here to stay, accompanied by vibrant public debate and political discussion in societies where it had been off-limits for decades. Although the road ahead to full-fledged democracies in the Arab world will be a long and arduous one, the journey down that path fundamentally began in 2011.

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**Karim Mezran**, *Professor of Middle East and North African Studies, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies; and Senior Fellow, Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East, Atlantic Council*

From a historical point of view, too little time has passed. We know as a fact that revolutions take a much longer time to meet any kind of expectation. Nevertheless, I would say that the most important positive aspect of the revolutions of the Arab Spring has been the breaking of deadlock between the authoritarian systems and the Islamist opposition, hopefully freeing the more dynamic forces present in society, which until now have been repressed. It remains to be seen whether this will translate into stable pluralistic institutions, but the importance of the entrance of freedom in some parts of the Arab world is a fact not to be discounted. The real variable is the capacity, or lack thereof, to act of the new elites in power. While populations can understand the difficulty of building a democratic system from scratch, they are less tolerant from a civic and economic point of view. The new governments have to rapidly deliver basic



goods and services such as general security, clean streets, efficient schools, and working hospitals, or the risk of an authoritarian backlash becomes a real possibility. In other words, the countries of the Arab Spring are thus far moving in the right direction yet remain on the verge of a cliff—where the possibility that everything could go wrong is always present.



**Aaron David Miller**, *Vice President for New Initiatives and Distinguished Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

My expectations for the Arab (really the Islamist) Spring were always sober and realistic. It took America a bloody civil war and 150 years of struggle on the issue of racial equality to begin to reconcile the promise of equality contained in the Declaration of Independence with the Constitution's legitimizing slavery. Since 1950, only 22 countries in the world have maintained their democratic character continuously. The democratic club is a small one. And that process of democratization in the Arab world—in this case from authoritarian regimes to more pluralistic, democratic polities that respect human rights, freedom of speech, and conscience—will be a process measured in decades not years. The problem is that the trend lines in the Arab world are running in the wrong direction. To make this transition work, you need enlightened leaders who think first of the nation not their own party or sect, inclusive and legitimate institutions that offer credible participation in political life, and a way to accommodate differences and divisions without resorting to violence by the so-called street. No Arab state that has been through the Arab Spring—not Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and certainly not Syria—is close to having anything like this. We better hope that the Roman historian Tacitus was wrong and that the best day after the death of a bad emperor is not the first day.



**Caryle Murphy**, *Former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center; and freelance journalist*

Tahrir Square's *kumbaya* moments and the euphoria of seeing "people power" peacefully dethrone a dictator sent expectations for the Arab Awakening into the stratosphere. But the immediate aftermath of those events has been unnerving. Most disturbing has been the high human cost, with thousands dead across the region.

But another set of expectations emerge when the Awakening is seen through a longer lens as the seed of a historic new political era that, despite its messiness, can replace

the ossified past with opportunities for creating more just and open societies. Those expectations have been muted, but not yet dashed.

On the one hand, the invincibility of ubiquitous secret police who underpinned Arab authoritarian rulers has been exposed as a myth. As a result, Arab citizens have greater freedom to think and act. The latest evidence of this is in Egypt, where dictatorial overreaching by President Mohamed Morsi has brought “people power” back to the streets of Cairo. On the other hand, those who created this new era by courageously triggering the Arab Awakening have not yet come up with lasting solutions to the region’s ongoing crisis of governance.

That crisis revolves in large part around the all-important question of Islam’s proper role in the public life of a modern state. The expectation that the Awakening would be a catalyst for spirited public debate of this question between Islamists and their secular-oriented peers has been met. That debate is now front and center in the Arab political arena. Its outcome in the next few years will be key to the region’s future.



**Vali Nasr**, *Dean, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies; and Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution*

Has the Arab Spring lived up to expectations? The short answer is no. But that is not the only germane question. We should also ask: has the international community lived up to expectations in responding to the Arab Spring? And the answer here is a resounding no. What distinguishes the Arab Spring from the democratization movements that preceded it is not just the chaos and conflict, the Islamism and sectarianism associated with it, but how indifferent the United States and Europe have been to the promise of democracy this time around. America and Europe have lacked enthusiasm and strategy, failed to invest economically, got involved only to address crises after they have erupted, and then have turned their attention elsewhere as soon as tensions subsided. This minimalist approach is a break with the past, a surprising cold shoulder to democracy, and one big reason why the Arab Spring, even where it succeeded, will likely fail.



**David B. Ottaway**, *Senior Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center; and former Bureau Chief, Washington Post, Cairo*

The Arab Spring has met some expectations and dashed others. Four autocratic rulers have been unseated. Numerous free elections have been held in Tunisia, Libya, and

Egypt for the first time ever. The voiceless have found their voice. There is more freedom of expression, assembly, and protest than ever before. Unfortunately, the popular uprisings have also brought to the fore latent conflicts between secularists and Islamists, Shi'a and Sunnis, and Kurds and Arabs. They have opened the door to civil war in Syria and made the fragmentation of Syria and Iraq a real possibility. Finally, the uprisings have provided new space for al-Qaeda to revive and expand its activities. Whether the Arab Spring will have given birth to democracy or new autocracy, Islamic or otherwise, remains to be seen.



**Marina Ottaway**, *Senior Associate, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*

Uprisings, even the most successful ones, never live up to the hopes of the participants, who tend to be naïve and overoptimistic. But the result of the peaceful uprisings of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt is particularly sobering because it indicates that a democratic outcome is probably not possible in most Arab countries at this point. The problem is not that Arab citizens are not capable or willing to make their own political choices. Rather, it is that when they are offered an opportunity to do so, as they were in the elections in Tunisia and Egypt, they show the depth of the cleavage that separates Islamists and secularists. Outside the Gulf, Arab countries have been dominated for decades by secular, westernized elites. Free elections show that a majority, or at least a plurality, of citizens feel more comfortable with Islamist parties that they believe better represent their values and interests. The old secular elite—not only supporters of the old regimes, but also liberals who rejected their authoritarianism and demanded democracy—is not willing to accept popular choices that contradict both their values and their interests. In Egypt, members of the secular elite have used the courts in an attempt to annul election results. In Tunisia, where the initial transition appeared smoother, secular parties are beginning to question the legitimacy of Islamist parties. In Egypt, the clash has brought out the most authoritarian side of both Islamists and secularists and has spilled into the streets. In Tunisia, the situation is deteriorating rapidly. Whether Islamists or secularists prevail in the end, the casualty will be democracy.



**Trita Parsi**, *Founder and President, National Iranian American Council*

Asking whether the Arab Spring has lived up to our expectations raises the question of whether the world's expectations were realistic in the first place. Could one realistically have expected that the rights of women would be advanced in the short term following the fall of secular dictatorships, that Islamist parties would neither win elections

nor gain decisive influence in the new governments, or that change in the short term would be anything but messy and even chaotic?

The Arab Spring has set into motion a series of changes that is yet to fully unfold. The next chapters of this story remain unwritten. It can take many twists and turns before it hopefully reaches its inevitable destination—one in which the populations of these countries successfully create a political order born out of their values and cultural foundations that lives up to the universal rights of humanity.

There is no guarantee that devastating missteps will be avoided, such as repeating the tragedy of the 1979 Iranian Revolution where a popular revolution overthrew a repressive dictatorship only to put in place an even more repressive political system. Nor is there a guarantee that the ultimate destination will be secular in the Western sense.

In one sense, the Arab Spring has taught us to dispel a false expectation guiding recent analyses of the region: the belief that just because technology has empowered populations and increased the speed of communications, technology will also decisively affect the speed of social change. It won't.



**Hassan Rahmouni**, *Attorney at Law and Legal Consultant, Morocco*

Arab Spring? You mean a long, rainy season that generates plenty of muddy, unseeded fields? Street politics is not a particular phenomenon to the MENA region. Most capitals on all three continents have been experiencing various forms of popular disturbances. The peculiarity of this region though is that riots have led to the toppling of apparently strongly-established regimes.

In this context, Bobby Fisher might have momentarily scored temporarily-determinant goals over Boris Spasky. But, exactly like in a chess game, the tournament is not over yet, and it may certainly take many rounds before visible outcomes may be perceived.

Meanwhile, Israel's policies may swiftly progress toward the implementation of its agenda, with extremely limited risks of meaningful reactions from its presently non-reacting opponents. How can they? Every group is busy with its own domestic problems.

Over the last five decades, there certainly was a period when the region was run by uniform wearers, who came to power mostly from military coups. But they all gently and progressively switched their uniforms into coats and ties, under the cover of decorative democracies. But their authoritarian management styles always remained unchanged. How could they not? Soldiers are educated in discipline not in contexts of debates. Presently, the world-level chess players have thought it good to give their chance to turban wearers, yet another style of non-democratic breeding; one can quickly notice

that the outcome appears to be very similar if not worse for their ultimate global interests in the region. Within this context of uncertainty, it would not be unexpected to soon see uniforms back in the arena.



**Hazem Saghieh**, *Lebanese journalist and Political Editor, al-Hayat newspaper*

It depends on how we define the expectations. If we think that the Arab Spring is going to open the door wide for instant democracy and modernity, then it is going to fail us. If, on the other hand, we see it as an opportunity to empower the Arab people so that they can decide which life they want to live and which future they want to create, then the expectations are high.

In other words, it is a fight against the oneness that was imposed on Arabs decades ago. Breaking this oneness would make the Arab people, maybe for the first time in the modern age, responsible for themselves and have their own say.



**Fatima Sbaity Kassem**, *Former Director, UN-ESCWA Centre for Women, Lebanon*

The year 2011 is a watershed for the Arab world. The wall of fear is shattered forever. Women and men took to the streets and succeeded in toppling regimes and ousting despots and dictators. People had high expectations that poverty would swiftly disappear, jobs would become plentiful, equality would reign, and democracy would prevail. The reality is quite different; the road to democracy is never smooth but long, bumpy, and maybe violent.

The popular uprisings lacked leadership, organization, agendas, and an intelligentsia. This created a vacuum, which Islamists quickly filled. Islamists are organized and hierarchical have varying religious political platforms. They won democratically-held, free and fair elections. The “others”—seculars, leftists, and minorities—argue that Islamists hijacked their revolts. Although observers are skeptical, there is consensus to respect the “will of the people,” hoping that “moderation theory” will kick-in; i.e. once Islamists assume power, they will mellow in order to gain trust. This did not happen.

For example, Egypt has had violence and demonstrations contesting President Morsi’s unilateral decisions to revoke laws including those protecting women’s rights and his re-drafting of the constitution on Islamists’ tunes. In Tunisia, there have been demonstrations to restore women’s rights. In Syria, there has been ferocious fighting

despite the atrocities committed by the regime, while in Bahrain, we have witnessed the stamina of the opposition despite the regime's crackdown.

People are enraged. They mistrust the Islamists who seized power, took unilateral decisions, failed to deliver promises, and did not show moderation as expected. However, hopes are that future rounds of free and fair elections will navigate the course toward democracy, slowly but surely. Arab democracy will eventually prevail. It is not a mirage.



**Barbara Slavin**, *Senior Fellow, Atlantic Council; and former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center*

Many of us predicted that the upheavals in the Arab world would lead to messy transitions, and that has indeed been the case. The road to more democratic governance has been especially bumpy in Egypt and horribly bloody in Syria.

Everywhere, Islamic militants are taking advantage of power vacuums, and Sunni-Shi'a sectarianism is on the rise. But the status quo in these places was simply not sustainable; for 40 years, an entire region's politics had been frozen in amber that was bound to shatter eventually. The United States has been and will be hard-pressed to choose winners amid the chaos and will have to settle for supporting relatively constructive and liberal forces and for opposing violent anti-American extremists. Israel's ability to launch mass-casualty assaults against its adversaries will be constrained by the rise of more populist regimes on its borders—a fact already driven home during the recent war in Gaza. Israel may also be dissuaded from starting a war with Iran for fear of further inflaming anti-Israel and anti-U.S. sentiment. Iran is also a big loser because of its alliance with the Assad regime, which has destroyed the Iranian revolutionary narrative of "siding with the oppressed." Syria's future looks especially bleak, no matter when or how Bashar al-Assad falls.



**Joshua Stacher**, *Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center; and Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Kent State University*

The Arab uprisings, which began in Tunisia in December 2010, produced six major uprisings and promised to be an empowering regional watershed for greater inclusivity and popular rights. Instead, two uprisings were met with gross domestic military and police offensives; another fell victim to foreign intervention; while the other three have resorted to a single-candidate election in Yemen, a contentious and violent transition in

Egypt, and a more hopeful scenario in Tunisia. The mixture of lingering continuities such as repression, expanding militarism, and the rise of partisan, polarized politics just reveals that more political struggle is required to realize the goals of bread, freedom, and social justice. Yet, the continuing popular mobilization in support of these limited outcomes suggests that the dust has not settled and the world will continue to witness a longer historical process of political, social, and economic change unfold. The march to greater emancipation was never going to be swift, but it continues despite the setbacks and obstacles produced by recalcitrant elites seeking to hold on to their enclaves of interests and autocracy.



**Roberto Toscano**, *President, Intercultura Foundation, Italy; former Public Policy Scholar, Woodrow Wilson Center; and former Italian Ambassador to Iran and India*

Last year, following the events in Tunisia and Egypt and their repercussions throughout the Arab world, there was widespread and deep excitement, which opened up optimistic scenarios for democracy and freedom across the Middle East. Today, optimism has been replaced by concern, if not outright pessimism. We are now likely exaggerating the pessimism for the same reasons that we went overboard with excessive optimism last year.

Between optimism and pessimism lies a reality that is complex to define in a categorical way. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is democratic insofar as it wins elections on the basis of political platforms addressing the concerns of majorities—but is suspect in terms of its respect for constitutional liberties and the rights of minorities. President Morsi, having won an election and thinking he has God on his side, does not seem to care much about the separation of powers. Secularist liberals, on the other hand, tend to reject the legitimacy of the power of Islamists, even when they win free elections, and these liberals end up in coalitions with elements of the previous regime—pro-Western and secular, but certainly not democratic. The military is dangerously tempted to come back into the political game on the side of the Islamists and against the liberals to guarantee order. Saudi Arabia and Qatar, both U.S. allies, help radical Islamists everywhere, including in civil war-torn Syria. The United States hopes that there will be a version of political Islam that will turn out to be compatible with democracy and looks at the Turkish example with interest—at a moment when Prime Minister Erdoğan is showing worrying symptoms of Putin-like authoritarianism. Strange alliances, dubious outcomes, and dangerous scenarios. And yet, people have tasted agency and pride and will not easily go back to being subjects of corrupted elites, but will demand to be citizens. Not a revolution, but certainly an irreversible awakening.





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**Robin Wright**, *USIP-Wilson Center Distinguished Scholar and journalist*

Revolutions are never fairy tales. Nor do they create utopias, either instant or long-term. The Tunisian street vendors who now work on the same corner where Mohamed Bouazizi sold oranges summed it up pretty well when I visited them last spring: “We have more freedoms,” one told me, “but we have fewer jobs.” So far—and that is a pivotal caveat—the Arab uprisings have deepened both the political divide and economic woes. Defining a new order has proven far harder than ousting old autocrats. Phase one was creating conditions for democracy. Phase two is a kind of democratic chaos as dozens of parties in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia do political battle (and in some cases physical battle) over constitutions. *Anciens regimes* have not totally given up, as in Yemen. The cost of change has exceeded even the highest anticipated costs, as in Syria. And half of the Arab world’s 350 million people have yet to witness any real change at all. So, no, most Arabs are probably disappointed with the “Arab Spring” for one of many reasons. But the uprisings were never going to happen in one season. And this is only the beginning of a decades-long process—as most of us in the West should know from our own experiences.

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**Dalia Ziada**, *Executive Director, Ibn Khaldun Center for Development Studies, Egypt*

I still feel proud that I was part of the making of the Arab Spring. We had to make change happen and we do not regret that for a single moment, despite the fact that our dreams were stolen by Islamist groups headed by the most politically-experienced Muslim Brotherhood. The people who brought down former President Mubarak's autocracy are now standing up in the face of the emerging theocracy of President Morsi. The people have broken the barriers of fear and realized that they have the absolute right to decide their future and the future of their country. If this was the only gain from the Arab Spring, it is more than enough. It is even beyond expectations. We are still in the process of transformation. We know that we are and will be facing a lot of difficulties, obstacles, conspiracies, and tricks, but we are determined to lead the Arab Spring—our dream of liberal democracy—to the top of the mountain. We may be older, or perhaps dead, when this eventually happens, but history will always remember that we are the ones who helped transform the Arab region from dictatorship to democracy.

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The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not reflect those of the Woodrow Wilson Center.



## About the Middle East Program

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*The Middle East Program was launched in February 1998 in light of increased U.S. engagement in the region and the profound changes sweeping across many Middle Eastern states. In addition to spotlighting day-to-day issues, the Program concentrates on long-term economic, social, and political developments, as well as relations with the United States.*

*The Middle East Program draws on domestic and foreign regional experts for its meetings, conferences, and occasional papers. Conferences and meetings assess the policy implications of all aspects of developments within the region and individual states; the Middle East's role in the international arena; American interests in the region; the threat of terrorism; arms proliferation; and strategic threats to and from the regional states.*

*The Program pays special attention to the role of women, youth, civil society institutions, Islam, and democratic and autocratic tendencies. In addition, the Middle East Program hosts meetings on cultural issues, including contemporary art and literature in the region.*

*Since January 2011, MEP has convened 45 meetings on the Arab Spring with over 70 speakers from the region, Europe, and the United States. MEP published 17 papers in our Viewpoints and Occasional Paper series dealing with various aspects of the Arab Spring.*

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