



E-ISSN: 2664-603X
P-ISSN: 2664-6021
IJPSG 2025; 7(5): 258-265
www.journalofpoliticalscience.com
Received: 12-04-2025
Accepted: 24-05-2025

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Impact of Arab spring in the GCC States

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2025.v7.i5c.727>

Abstract

The Arab Spring, a series of uprisings and anti-government protests that began in December 2010 in Tunisia, rapidly spread across the Arab world, profoundly reshaping the political, social, and economic landscape of the Middle East and North Africa. This study examines the origins, trajectory, and consequences of the Arab Spring, with particular emphasis on its impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The research investigates the underlying causes such as economic hardship, political repression, corruption, and rising unemployment that triggered widespread unrest. Using a qualitative and analytical methodology, secondary sources such as journal articles, policy reports, and media analyses were examined to assess regional responses and adaptations. The results indicate that while republics such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen experienced regime changes or civil wars, the GCC monarchies largely survived the wave of revolutions by employing a combination of economic concessions, security crackdowns, and political co-optation. Bahrain witnessed severe internal conflict and foreign intervention, while Oman and Kuwait faced limited protests that were managed through reforms and increased public spending. Conversely, Qatar and the UAE remained relatively insulated, positioning themselves as proactive regional actors. The study concludes that the resilience of GCC monarchies stems from a unique blend of oil wealth, traditional legitimacy, and adaptive governance. However, the Arab Spring exposed enduring socio-political vulnerabilities and the demand for reform, suggesting that stability in the Gulf remains contingent upon addressing issues of political participation, economic diversification, and social equity in the post-2011 context.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), middle east, political uprisings, authoritarianism, social media revolution, economic reforms, regional stability

Introduction

The Series of anti-government protests uprising and armed rebellion that is spread over the Middle East of Arabian Peninsula was known as “Arab Spring”.^[1] Among the foreign observers and powers, the purpose of relative success and outcome of the word is disputed. They are also trying to take advantage of the changing map of the Middle-East region. Towards early 2011, the term Arab Spring has popularized the western media around the world. The uprisings beginnings can be traced back to the one in Tunisia against former leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali^[2]. The phenomenon spread across almost all the Arab countries which provoked these protests. This process was compared with the turmoil of Eastern Europe in 1989, when communist regimes began to fall, under the pressure of popular protests. What followed in Europe was a smooth process of transition to the democratic political system, unlike the Arab countries where events were politicized and went in a direction of further uprisings. There was uncertainty as to the transition phase and end for countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen. There was a civil war in Libya and Syria while oil-rich countries in the Persian Gulf went unscathed with the protests^[3]. Exact beginnings of the Arab Spring can be traced back to the reasons such as economic hardship and discontentment with an autocratic rule for many years in these Arab countries. This led to widespread demonstrations in 2010 December. A young unemployed man, Mohamed Bouazizi, who had started selling vegetables as he couldn’t find any other job, set himself to fire because he was stopped from selling vegetables on the streets. There arose unrest and about 300 people were killed in ensuing violence. This coupled with the mass anger of the people forced the leader Ben Ali to resign in January 2011 to resign and go to exile in Saudi Arabia. He was given punishment as imprisonment for life in absentia.

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After the first democratic parliamentary elections in October 2011, the moderate Islamic party called Ennahda party won the elections with more than 41% of the votes. The party was also entrusted with the task of framing a new constitution. The new president elected was Veteran dissident Moncef Marzouki ^[4]. The uprising which began with the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor, against an ineffective, corrupt and unconcerned government of Tunisia, gave birth to revolutionary movements throughout Tunisia and other Arab countries like Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The movement came to be known as “Arab Spring” or “Arab Revolution”.

Not only Tunisia was affected by these events but also the entire Arab region had come under the garb of the “spring”, which eventually caught the world's attention. The infamous regime of Tunisia was opposed by the opponents of autocracies in the middle-east region and along with this, it was also alleged that the regime was using “soft” autocracy through the use of its security services. To survive the revolution or overthrow by the general public, the regimes of Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen had trodden softly, however, the Syrian and Libyan regimes resorted to violent means to remain in power. GCC members like Saudi Arabia supported the cause of their counterparts and advised western powers not to get involved or support the uprisings in the region. It also provided members of GCC to countries like Jordan and Morocco. On the other end, Qatar sided with the Muslim Brotherhood and cashed the opportunity to stay away from the Saudi regional hegemony ^[5].

There was an effort by each Arab nation to free itself from either the despotic rule or economic stagnation and also the corruption scenario in their respective countries. The examples of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and Syria are mentioned above. The latter tried to rebel but their turf turned into a conflict zone and power was difficult to maintain either by the government or by the opposition forces. Bahrain's struggle too was thwarted with the help of Saudi Arabia. Monarchies in Jordan and Morocco promised reforms, however, the power of the monarchs increased day by day. Public spending by the regimes soared up and this led to support for the monarchies. Leaving aside Algeria, all countries faced protests ^[6]. The effects of the Arab uprisings on the political, economic and security dynamics of the six Gulf Cooperation Council were immense. Interestingly, in the northern region of Africa, Yemen and Syria the impact were transformative politically, but in the Gulf region was affected economically and its repercussions are resonating via government structures. The Gulf region though faced economic issues that are directly impacted by the political decisions on how to use the revenue generated from hydrocarbons. That is why most recent policies have greatly complicated the transition which is politically driven which were underway in the GCC region ^[7].

The public uprisings which were the reasons for the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt respectively, united popular opposition to the Al-Khalifa. Family of Bahrain. Bahrainis cutting across all sections of the society demanded greater political freedom and equality. The ruling family responded by confronting the dissenters, with the help of GCC and Saudi-led forces and declared a three-month state of emergency until June 2011 ^[8].

There was large scale public demonstrations in Kuwait too, that escalated sharply after massive political corruption scandal allegations were in news in August 2011. This

culminated in the storming of the National Assembly in November followed by the resignation of the Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser al-Muhammad Al-Sabah in December 2011. The Shia communities too took part in widespread demonstrations in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia because of the Bahraini uprising. Oman experienced the protests in an industrial town called Sohar in February and March 2011 which were repressed with force by the state security machinery. In the UAE though, political reforms demands by the opposition forces were responded by arresting prominent opposition leaders and human rights activist, shutting NGO's and international think tanks and overpowering local civil society organizations. One country which escaped this turmoil is Qatar despite the fact that it has large hydrocarbon wealth and a small population ^[9].

The response with which Gulf States dealt the uprisings is not encouraging. Except for the GCC states, all others weathered the storm of protests, which confirms that monarchies are great survivors in the middle-east. Second, Two countries i.e. Qatar and UAE have emerged as regional powers as these two countries have international reach, by taking a proactive response to the Libya crisis of 2011 and leading from the front in international stage to end the civil war in Syria. The intervention of these countries demonstrates a pro-active stance towards controlling and containing unrest provoked by the Arab uprisings ^[10].

Impact of Arab Spring

The Arab spring whose hot bed was Tunisia and Egypt was also used as a platform by neighboring countries to stage protests in their respective countries. For example, in February 2014, Bahraini activists took advantage of social media and with anonymity called for protests in the capital city of Manama and elsewhere. The demands of the protestors were constitutional reforms, free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners, and the end of torture. Two other demands were the formation of a truly representative consultative council (which would have been a Shia Council) and the second one was an end to political naturalization ^[11]. The regime though seized on to the movement and characterized it as a sectarian movement. The regime claimed that it was the handiwork of Iran and its agents in Bahrain ^[12].

Meanwhile, in Manama, the Pearl Square was about to be made the Tahrir Square as was in Egypt. The protestors were dispersed by the security forces, however, the strength of the crowds increased with the increase of deaths of the protestors. People from all walks of life took part in the protests, i.e. members of legal and illegal political associations too included, Bahrainis from nearby villages descended in the arena which was the roundabout of Pearl Square. The Square came about to resemble the happenings of the Tahrir square as it was during the days of the Egyptian uprising. Despite provocations by the security forces, Bahraini protestors stuck to their will and ground and used non-violent means of protests ^[13].

The nature of the Bahraini uprising was transformed by the storming of the Pearl Square and it was one of the first two events to happen. It had repercussions on the protests in its own ways. The protesters, their numbers and the varied backgrounds they belonged to, swell over the course of next one month. There was an association of engineers, lawyers, teachers, politicians, trade unionists among others. The momentum was such that, there grew a division between

those wanting to pursue a dialogue with the regime to those who wanted the regime to fall ^[14].

The second event which was in highlight was the planned march square of Manama's financial district where the confrontation between the government forces and the protestors had settled into a stalemate. While the hardliners were pushing for finishing the job and others within and outside the government supported a compromise. The first group consisted of the Bahraini prime minister, and the Saudi Government was in the first grouping, while the second group comprised of the Bahraini King and the United States. However, the former group succeeded ^[15]. Over the course of time to thwart any external aggression, which was expected especially from Iran, the Saudi government and the UAE police sent at least a thousand and five hundred troops respectively, to free Bahrain's own military. This was done to withstand any rebellion. This Saudi and Emirati display of power was done under the umbrella of a joint military force known as Peninsula Shield, which the GCC had formed to deter and respond to any external aggression inflicted on any member state ^[16].

The regime continued its policy of repression and mass arrests, long prison sentences, declaring demonstrations illegal was the norm of the day. Some other repressive rules were; facing prison charges for up to seven years if the king was insulted, some villages which were recalcitrant were cordoned off. Punishment for crime against the state was increased, in some case, citizenship was revoked, and there was close scrutiny by the government on the media, NGO's and charitable organizations. The regime had also declared war on social media wherein cyber activists were arrested, internet sites were being blocked and a hotline was set up to report websites and social media accounts which went against the public interest ^[17].

The oppositional activity in Bahrain was affected by regime repression in three ways. First, the regime identified the enemy Iran and the groups within Bahrain it supported which mainly formed the Shiite population or the fifth column. Any action of counter insurgency was directed at them. Thus this became a tussle or conflict between Shiite forces and the government rather than the inter-sectarian struggle against the autocracy. Second, the struggle and protests became more violent, car bombings, street battles, and sporadic demonstrations became the norm of the day. Lastly, the protests had moved from the cities to the rural villages which were guarded by the Shia forces, where it was possible to contain the anti-regime activities, but eradicating them was not possible ^[18].

The nature of the debate on the small oil-rich Gulf countries has completely changed and has become more complicated especially since the Arab spring. These countries which also form the GCC, have been studied in two diametrically opposite readings, this includes the long and short term impacts of post-2011 events. It claims that the association of smaller countries should not be impacted by these events or the Arab spring. Though there are other studies which claim that these Arab Gulf States are not immune to the Arab Spring, thus clouds of instability and suspicion loom over the credibility of the GCC as even these states are prone to events like the Arab Spring ^[19].

The first exception list view cogently argues that these uniquely stable, prosperous and oil-rich states are totally immune from the Arab Spring. This perspective treats the GCC States as a distinct group of states with unique socio-

political features, concerns, and priorities. "The exceptional characteristics of the GCC States include: oil, huge capital surplus, high standard of living, cradle-to-grave welfare services, rapid economic growth, unique demographic composition, traditional legitimacy, a political culture impervious to radical political changes and a satisfied royal populace that appears more interested in social stability and economic well-being than in democracy and political reform. This exception list perspective also claims that the Arab Spring is noticeably limited to five Arab republic regimes of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. The rest of the Arab states, especially the GCC, are not directly concerned with the sudden burst of popular uprisings, which are fundamentally driven by the issues of dignity and bread" ^[20].

This normalist perspective thinks that the impact of the Arab Spring on the GCC is both unavoidable and is already visible all over the place. Indeed, what applies to the wider Arab World is equally true when it comes to the GCC. Even if there is room for exceptional status, it is merely a matter of degree. Oil and plenty of capital surpluses have once made these states appear somewhat privileged, but the GCC is fast losing that privileged status.

This normalist view asserts that the Arab Spring is about rejecting the prevailing political stagnation and ending one man, one party and one family rule. Freedom is the key concept and democracy is the fundamental drive for the Arab Freedom Moment. A strong dose of freedom, democracy, accountability, and political and constitutional reform is urgently needed in the GCC as it is needed for the other Arab states still classified as not free. All states in the region are consistently rated among the least democratic in the world. Their human rights record is dismal and embarrassingly poor and in some cases has gotten worse lately. The new socio-political realities in the GCC states are nearly similar to prevailing socio-political realities in the rest of the Arab World ^[21]. The Arab Freedom Moment is bound to travel at a speed of velocity in this age of globalization, internet, Al-Jazeera and social media throughout the neighborhood including the most impenetrable places like the Gulf region. The Arab revolution of 2011 is probably the fastest traveling revolution in history. Twenty of the twenty-two Arab States have been affected either directly or indirectly, massively or lightly by the winds of change. The GCC was not at the eye of the storm, but the storm usually moves in all directions. The Arab Spring is an all-inclusive Arab and regional phenomenon and will influence the Gulf Monarchies, some probably sooner and others later. It only confirms the fact that the GCC States are an integral part of the larger Arab World and that the GCC States do not have a separate history of their own ^[22].

Bahrain and Oman were the immediate victims. But the impact of the Arab Spring is also in full display in Kuwait. The other Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia, are extra careful and taking no chances. All the Gulf States are treating the revolutionary events of 2011 with utmost seriousness. No Arab state today, no matter how wealthy, is immune from this fourth wave of democracy emanating from the Arab World. Forces of change have been unleashed in a massive way and the forty-year-old stagnant political status quo is no longer sustainable even in the most economically prosperous places like the GCC. These states are probably revolution resistant, but not political reform

resistant. Great transformation is happening in different ways (some peaceful and others bloody), in different countries, (such as Tunisia and Libya, Yemen and Syria) and for different reasons (bread and dignity) ^[23].

For the lack of a better concept, the Arab Spring has been widely used in the media as well as in academia to describe the avalanche of events of the year 2011 that have changed the face of the Arab World. All the other terms such as Arab awakening, a new awakening, uprising, unrest, turmoil, transformation, revolt, and Erhal revolution are also used to describe the tumultuous changes of the year 2011 ^[24].

It is necessary to start with a caveat that the six GCC are far from a homogenous group. No matter how they are superficially lumped together, the GCC States are not one and the same. The socio-political similarities are real and deep but the differences are visible and vast. Among the six GCC States, there are the small and the big, the weak and the strong, the democratic and the not so democratic, the conservative and the liberal and certainly the super-rich and the not so rich states. These noticeable differences matter a great deal in reviewing the impact of the Arab Spring on the GCC States, which has been noticeably uneven. In fact, there are three categories of impacts: The most impactful (Bahrain and Oman), the least (Qatar and the UAE) and the partially impacted (Saudi Arabia and Kuwait). The different type of impacts reveals the subtle differences between the six states within the GCC. The response in each case varied and ranged in its intensity from the heavy-handed reaction (Bahrain), the light-handed response (Saudi Arabia) to literally no response such as in the case of Qatar which survived the Arab Spring with no dent ^[25].

There are various analysis and theories pertaining to the impact of the 2011 Arab Spring on the GCC states. On the impact it had on authoritarian rulers it took many shapes followed by different rationales. In countries like Yemen, Bahrain, and Oman there were massive mobilizations which occurred, as these were quite different for what happened in Qatar and UAE where the demand for reforms was only from a small segment of people. If there was some success in these struggles, there were contestations too. If the president of Yemen Ali Abdallah Salih was forced to quit, then in Bahrain, which is in quite different settings altogether, there was repression on these struggles and justifications like “stability of the country” (istiqrar) was being given. Thus, a comparative analysis can be concluded that the protests were better managed or handled by the Monarchies and resource-rich states than the republics. However, irrespective of their success or failure these mobilizations had impacted the processes of change in the region in both social and political arenas.

The dynamics of the “Arab Spring” among the monarchies of the Gulf region differs widely. These six monarchies had their own take and learning from the event. Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman tried to understand the causes and fostered deep research on the event, which eventually affects their domestic politics. Whereas, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and UAE, where there was no such mobilization related these events to geopolitics and diplomatic angles ^[26].

In comparison to Bahrain which is wealthy and resource-rich, protests in Oman and Kuwait didn't attract much attention. However, even with this meager attention, the mass-mobilizations in Oman has been huge which has been quite a contrast to the apparently apathetic political consciousness and life of the Omanis since the Dhofar war

which happened in 1975. This is considered due to the dearth of quality academics and experts working in Oman. The lack of enough research work and ignorance and negligence of the general public despite having good access to the field of political and social aspects sends a message that the political crisis may go unresolved even after the “Arab Spring”.

Establishments of countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE have been eluding the timid demands of reforms in their respective countries which are being articulated by their members of the civil society. Majority of academic approaches though have focused on “counter-revolutionary” policies of Saudi Arabia and UAE, for example, the happenings of Egypt Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of leading the counter-revolutionary efforts and also is responsible for the upsurge of sectarianism in the region which also is followed by the repression of the Bahraini movement in which Saudi had a big hand in its orchestration. There have been efforts to understand and study the attempts which have failed to organize protests in the kingdom or the mobilizations in the areas dominated by the Shias. Qatar and its ambitious role in the lead up to the Syrian and Libyan protests have invited many commentaries and works which have studied its creative foreign policy. There have been numerous accounts of analysis which have cited the rivalries and conflicting strategies of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and UAE vis-à-vis the revolution in Egypt and the Syrian crisis, however, there has been an oversight on these analyses as far as the foreign policy decision making in these countries is concerned ^[27].

Religious Sects

There are accounts and studies which claim that the major consequence of the protests in Bahrain and Syria has been the increasing tensions between the Sunnis and the Shias in the region. Coupled with this argument, the Houthi movement in Yemen in 2014 and early 2015, and the intervention of Saudi Arabia in early 2015 only justify these studies. The political field of Yemen is being fundamentally strengthened by the Zaydi revivalist movement, and along with the religious spectrum in the region is also growing. Houthis who are very different from the Twelve Shias, have redefined there Zaydi identity and are thus attempting to reframe the Sunni identity.

L. Bonnefoy and J Kuschnitzki in their article analyze the Salafi Rashad Party and argue that this identification process on part of the Houthis redefines the meaning of Salafism.

Religious Sectarianism in the GCC States

The situations in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia cannot serve as the models of Sunni/Shia relations in every part of the Gulf. The best example is Kuwait. Though this country has a significant population of the Shias and which are politically powerful too, various Shia groups have united since 2009 onwards in providing unconditional support to the government. At the other end, after the Shias came to power in Iraq and the regime got changed, these very Shias who lent their support to the government have faced increased hostility in their respective countries in the Gulf region. There have been efforts by the government within parliament to garner support from Shia MP's and in return, the MP's too have lent their trust on these governments, especially against the opposition parties and their hostilities.

Though the Kuwaiti government has been uncomfortable during the Bahraini uprising, this interest-based alliance has a long future in the region.

The context of community building in Bahrain not only gives the historical roots of the movement and its various components, but the authors in the article also provide interesting hypotheses about this process, which needs to be investigated further. The Sunnis in Bahrain despite being a demographic minority, don't have any existence as a community, which can take a collective action based on its religious identity, this is quite contrary to the Shia's who have been rallied by the Shia-al-Wefaq for the last fifteen years. Sunnis are politically scattered between rival political and religious groups and trends. They are also divided into ethnic and social backgrounds which cater to alternative lines of politicization. Their reluctance to position themselves with the government only proves that their desire for change and the fear that reforms will strengthen the opposition which is bound by a strong Shia identity only make their condition of dilemma worse.

Low-rent economies of the Gulf like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman are witnessing widespread social discontent and they also have less fiscal space for movement to deal the oppositional forces and maintain the social stability via distributive policies as their richer neighbours have been doing. The regimes in the Gulf have been following the welfare state policies since the 1970's oil boom, this has enabled the rulers to focus on health, housing, labor and family policies.

With the advent of "Arab Spring", the government has been forced to accelerate labor market policies which have been aimed at encouraging employment in private sector, further they can be made a part of the countries arsenal which can be used during the time revolution if there is any occurrence as such. These reforms were, however, far from being politically benign, but had far-reaching effects on the relations between state, labor, and business. On the other hand, these reforms are also an engine of a pro-labor policy-shift that is visible in new stricter regulations as well as in increased cost of labor for the private sector. The low-rent states are also empowering organized labor in order to support the new labor policies and to pressure the private sector. This includes the full-fledged trade unions and tripartite negotiations and by this, they are creating conditions of a more bargained social and political order.

Media and Arab Spring

The role of the media and its impact in exposing the paradoxes of the Gulf systems, its relationship to international political actors and its significance for the future of the uprisings, are all explored here. The Arab Spring also called the Facebook revolution and the media revolution has been one of the major events in recent history where the media was immediately linked to the success of overthrowing governments and autocratic regimes. Young women and men in Tunisia, Egypt and later in other countries of the region utilized social media to spread the call for uprisings; much Arab youths have also transformed into citizen journalists, sending messages and broadcasting live coverage from public squares across the Arab world. This material was widely used by satellite television stations when they were not able to cover the events. In countries of the Gulf where freedom of expression and the right of assembly is forbidden, many turned to social media as a tool

for expression; some analysts argue that in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, social media has created a separate, or parallel, society^[28].

While social media was one of the tools used to start these events, traditional media played a major role in covering the evolving events, to the extent that many have thought that they were part of these revolutions. Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya are the two major satellite television stations that have become part of the Arab Spring. Mattar and El-Bathy explore the roles played by social media and traditional media in the Arab Spring. Mattar argues that the Arab Spring has revealed the underlying nature of the region's two major sources of news Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya; she shows how each network followed the political line of its owners, namely Qatar and Saudi Arabia. El-Bathy explores the use of social media in Bahrain, showing both the powers and limitations of this emerging tool^[29].

The Arab Spring was greatly influenced by social media; online networks which were formed played a crucial role in uniting the people for a common cause. The role of the internet, mobile phones, and social media were also specified by civil society groups and their leaders, this immensely helped them to organize gatherings and protests. This medium has also been utilized by Arabs to exercise freedom of speech as a model for civic engagement.

People in the region had wide access to not only media-outlets in Arab region but also of Arab-American news media, prominent among these were again the social media outlets which spread the news far and wide, prominent amongst them were Twitter and Facebook. These outlets though also posed a threat to the local outlets. They not only covered the Arab Spring but also the parliamentary and presidential elections of Egypt. Some sources claimed that the presence of a number of media outlets also posed the threat of fake news and it was indeed difficult to verify the authenticity of the information. The competition for the user-generated information which was readily and rapidly available to audiences made things more difficult for them to verify and authenticate. This also led to confusion and dilemma. However, these studies have also suggested that the presence of a plethora of media outlets and social media communicated the news of the region to the outside world^[30].

The role of social media in the revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations which came to be known as Arab Spring seems to be a highly debated subject. The uprising in the Arab region was at its peak both in states which had considerable levels of internet usage and also in states which had low internet access.

Social media played a major role during the Arab Spring as it played an important role in facilitating communication and interaction among the political activists and protestors. Protestors utilized social media in organizing demonstrations which included both in favor and against the government. It also disseminated information about the activities and raised local and global level of awareness about the continuing events. Some studies which were purely research-based, especially project on information technology and political Islam found that mass demonstration was always preceded by online revolutionary conversations; this reflected that social media played a significant role in shaping the Arab Spring. Many aspects of social media and its impact on the movement and the Arab region, growth and popularity of social media outlets like

Facebook and Twitter, variations in media and internet traffic, demographic changes lead to the conclusion that social media played a critical role in “mobilizing, shaping opinions and influencing change” during the time of Arab Spring^[31].

The Arab revolutions witnessed an important role played by social media and it is still an effective tool to discuss political and social events, however, its role is changing with time, place and the type of leadership these countries have in the region. Countries like Tunisia and Egypt were helped by social media to overthrow despotic rulers and get rid of dictatorship, ultimately spreading the message to the west and around the world. Libya was one of the countries where the foundations of the revolutions were laid by Social Media, however in the later stages, communication and mobilization too were important which happened quite tacitly, and this precluded organizing the final overthrow. The situation in Syria was quite different as the leadership differed in Syria because Bashar Al Assad was prepared for this compared to his counterparts in Libya and Tunisia. He also used brutal tactics to remain in power and suppress the revolution, the effects of which are still plaguing the country. Social Media's importance in Syria has grown considerably as foreign journalists are not allowed in Syria to cover any news, that is why they depend on citizen journalists and international reporters working with their sources within their country^[32]. The people's movement helped with social media was instrumental in fighting corruption in these countries. The likes of Arab Spring are unlike any other revolutions as these were able to generate a situation where democracy could thrive after long periods of despotic and corrupt rule and this was done by galvanizing the grassroots level movement^[33].

It is not a deniable fact that there was already a feeling of anger and alienation amongst the citizens of these countries that were facing years of exploitation and their rights were being violated. There was the absence of democracy, freedom, justice, and accountability. However, with the advent of social media, there came about a platform or a tool which the common public of these countries desperately needed to use to fight against the autocratic forces. Social media was that tool which united these people despite their internal differences like region, sect and political affiliations to some extent. These people reacted to oppression and expressed their dissent. Social media helped them in organizing, planning, and coordination. The method of social media was more effective in countries like Tunisia and Egypt, where the protests started early and their respective governments were left shocked and pressured. Other countries started taking strict measures against these protests to prevent similar out-comes which came about in Tunisia and Egypt. Social media became a kind of threat to these countries where these regions had somewhat negative impacts than a positive one and part of their inspiration was owed to social media's immense coverage on Egypt and Tunisia. Finally, as far as Libya is concerned, it took measures to keep its actions secret but failed desperately^[34]. The GCC however, took social media seriously to some extent and denied its threat at another level as it treated it a threat as well as an opportunity. However, they couldn't define what a threat is and what is an opportunity? This gap in their understanding of the effects of social media and the effects it had on the Arab Spring brought in-depth changes in the Arab uprisings internally. This was the reason why

they had a difference in their approach in dealing with the Arab spring, e.g. the case of Egypt and Syria.

In general, there are two positions which define the clarity of the Gulf nations: Saudi Arabia and Qatar are at these two poles. Saudi Arabia treated it as a threat when it saw the fall of Mubarak, but Qatar saw it as an opportunity to use this as a time to spread its influence and ally itself with parties like Muslim Brotherhood.

The Saudi Kingdom in principle is against the Arab Spring. For a hereditary monarch, it is not possible to support the idea of revolution. On the other hand, revolution poses a threat, especially when the context influences the Arab Spring and eventually the internal politics. This is easily definable in the position and on the basis of security, religion and the concept of sedition or “FITNA”, chaos and upheaval. However, sometimes interests forced Saudi to support the Arab spring in other countries, where there occurs a problem as it is not possible to support a movement at one place and be against it at another. Thus, Saudi Arabia needed a flexible definition to justify its support or opposition to the movement wherever appropriate.

Positions of Conflict

The Arab Spring was declared as evil by one of the Grand Oulemas, Sheikh al-Fawzan. Another prince Turki al-Faisal declared it as “a cause of ruin and destruction”. However, supporting the Syrian people and arming its Free Syrian Army or the rebels opposing the Syrian regime was a “duty” which was started by Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal.

Further, there was no support from Saudi Arabia towards the revolution of the January 25th 2010-11 in Egypt, either to secure the inside against protesting revolutionaries or to protect Mubarak's regime; however, backed it in Syria, as it was directly linked to Iran which was its arch-rival. Saudi has tried its best to market this definition under many names both internally and externally.

Qatar, in fact, was not affected much by the Arab Spring, rather it got a very good opportunity to mend its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood. There its support was towards building “democracy and stability” in the countries which had experienced Arab Spring.

The GCC, on the other hand, didn't take a unified stance in handling the issue of the Arab Spring due to the difference in interest and vision. These interests and views have been convergent for reasons of security in certain circumstances and divergent in others as there is competition among the states.

Mubarak regime was supported by Saudi Arabia and UAE, Qatar was in support of the Muslim Brotherhood. This reflects the closeness of Saudi Arabia to the Mubarak regime especially when it came to relations with Iran for regional hegemony. Similarly, the UAE too did not favor the arrival of the Muslim Brotherhood in power at that point in time. Qatar also did not see any threat to the coming in power of the Muslim Brotherhood and fall of the Mubarak regime; rather it was seen as a positive change, which could create opportunities for diplomatic expansion. Along with these developments, Egypt didn't create an ally to counter Iran, as is the case with Saudi Arabia. Qatar and Iran relations have been cordial and between them fields of energy, oil, and gas. Qatar and Iran treated each other as partners and trod carefully as far as their relations were concerned.

There is however seen a difference in the way the Gulf politics was dealt. A stable Yemen was the goal of all in the region. The Houthis case or the opposition to Ali Abdullah Saleh wasn't the same for the GCC states. Example, Qatar is ready to negotiate and is gaining new cards, however, the GCC remains unified especially in security matters, and this encourages them to coordinate their efforts towards a myriad of issues, especially the Arab Spring^[35]. Each of the Gulf nations was affected differently during the Arab uprising. If Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman experienced uprisings centered on labor which transformed themselves into full-fledged demonstrations and national outrage, then Qatar and UAE, which were much smaller had muted protests or quietism. This is probably due to the fact that these two countries have been experiencing historical silence where people's voices were suppressed by the rent based economy. Qatar used its popular media channel Al-Jazeera to attract worldwide attention of Saudi-supported repression in Bahrain. Although this could be a useful distraction tactic, as per one survey, Qataris preferred democracy lower than any other Arab people in the region. There were some signs of the regime trying to hold its grip on the system, and the relative disinterest of the people in the Arab uprising also did not deter the government to provide zero-interest housing loans, and wages for public employees was raised by setting aside funds separately. There was a pledge by the GCC for \$20 billion to help in aid and to end the protests in Bahrain and Oman. Except for Bahrain, all other Gulf nations have used their oil wealth to solve the issues of the Arab Spring. However, Qatar used this time as an opportunity and advanced its political agenda and raises its prominence in the region. With the help of the Arab Spring, Qatari efforts were still on with the Palestinian cause, and Qatar with the help of regional and international intervention brought to attention the issues of Yemen and Libya^[36].

Role of women in Arab spring

The role of women during the Arab spring was crucial and they were involved in a variety of them. However, how far it impacted their rights is not clear yet. The Arab Spring was a series of protests, demonstrations and civil wars in opposition to the long authoritarian regimes, which had begun in Tunisia and later spread to other parts of the Arab world. These countries leaders were subjected to overthrowing from their power bastions and forced to agree to the will of the common people. There have been sustained civil orders in Bahrain and the protests in Syria have turned into civil war. Similar protests were experienced in other Arab countries. Most of these protests were for the rights of the common people and to seek opportunities in the higher educational system. Women in Egypt too have been active members of trade unions, organizations, online communities, and informal networks. Though there are very few women in politics, those who are have advanced their activism and their involvement in the Arab Spring went beyond direct participation in the protests which also included cyber activism. Social media has provided women that platform, from where they could organize, plan as journalists, activists and other professionals too. Women played a key role in influencing and changing the perceptions of many.

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