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POLI 227- Developing Areas/Introduction

Diverging Outcomes

Libya and Algeria are neighboring countries in North Africa that had long histories of authoritarian rule. But when the Arab Spring uprisings began sweeping the region in 2010-2011, the Libyan government was overthrown by rebel groups, while the Algerian government remained stable and experienced barely any unrest at all. What factors explain this divergence in outcomes?

Libya and Algeria are neighboring countries in North Africa that have both had authoritarian governments for much of their respective histories. These regimes were oppressive and undemocratic. The Arab Spring uprisings were a series of protests in the Middle East and Northern Africa that began in 2010 as a way of people protesting their authoritarian and corrupt governments.[1] The protesters were oftentimes young people, unemployed people, and impoverished people. Protests broke out in the urban and rural parts of the country. The protesters advocated for government reform, calling for shifts to more democratic practices including free elections.[2]

In Libya, the dictator for much of the late 20th century was Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi who was notoriously oppressive and criminal. While these two countries are close geographically, their outcomes and solutions to the problems posed by the Arab Spring and the calls for democratization during the early 21st century were drastically different. The similarities can be characterized by the protests themselves. Both groups of protesters wanted the same thing, democracy and free elections, improvements to their standards of living, and regime changes. These marked differences can be explained by the contexts of these protests within the two respective countries, the way these protests unfolded, and finally, how the government responded to these protesters and their demands.

The climate in which these protests unfolded were slowly built over many years. In terms of Libya, the oppressive and brutal regime of Gaddafi acted as a catalyst in

[1] Frédéric Volpi Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb, Democratization, (2013) 20:6, 969-990, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2012.668438

[2] Volpi. Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb.

addition to the poor standards of living.[3] In Algeria, the protests were triggered by high food prices, a housing shortage and rising inflation. In Libya, the protests unfolded quickly and violently. Gaddafi ordered airstrikes against his own citizens in an effort to quell the protesters. However, in Algeria, the protests unfolded in a more disjointed manner. The protests were less likely to be all linked to each other. The governments of Libya and Algeria responded differently to these protests as well. Libya's entire government collapsed. Gaddafi was deposed and in his place, the new Libyan government, the National Transitional Council, came into power until 2012. Algeria's government remained stable because the military was better equipped to handle the protesters. The people were less impassioned about the protests in Algeria compared to other countries. The government was also more receptive to the protesters, implementing constitutional reforms to appease them.

During the Arab Spring, one of the primary demands of the protesters was regime change. The protesters were tired of oppressive governments and wanted a free and fair democracy. They wanted more power for the people. The process of democratization is vastly complicated. Democratization refers to the process of transitioning a country's government from authoritarianism to a democracy.[4] This practice was popularized during the 20th century with the Cold War when the Western powers became afraid of the spread of communism.[5] It has had very mixed results. For example, democratization works best when there is cohesiveness and unity within the country. However, the transition will not go as smoothly when there is broad division and

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[3] Volpi. Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb.
[4] Doueck- POLI 227 Democratization 2021
[5] Doueck- POLI 227 Democratization 2021

fractured ideologies. It is also beneficial for transitions when small groups play a disproportionate role in the early decision making process.

The climate in which these protests, as a part of the Arab Spring, were similar in Libya and Algeria. In Libya, the climate was highly contentious and largely targeted at Gaddafi himself.[6] It was difficult to focus the blame on anyone other than Gaddafi. He had manipulated and changed the system to give himself as much power as he could. In doing so, he made himself, on behalf of the entire regime, largely responsible for any failings. In an effort to control the people, Gaddafi proposed his own version of Islam in his "Green Book."[7] This ideology called for a direct democracy, and the engagement of all adults in the political process.

Luis Martinez explains in his paper "Libya: The Conversion of a 'Terrorist State,'" that Gaddafi had spent years prior to the Arab Spring consolidating his power.[8] In manipulating the international community, convincing them that Libya was working to eradicate terrorism, Gaddafi was giving himself unchecked power that could lead to abuses of that power.

Whereas in Algeria, the protests focused on the issues. People were frustrated with the government's inaction to fix the issues of food prices, housing shortages or unemployment.[9] The issues of standard of living were major factors in the outbreak of the Arab Spring along with corrupt government practices. The issue of standard of living

[6] Alia Brahimi. Libya's Revolution, The Journal of North African Studies, (2011) 16:4, 605-624, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2011.630880

[7] Brahimi. Libya's Revolution

[8] Luis Martinez. Libya: The Conversion of a 'Terrorist State', Mediterranean Politics, (2006) 11:2, 151-165, DOI: 10.1080/13629390600682883

[9] Zidane Zeraoui Algeria: revolution, army and political power, Language and Intercultural Communication, (2012) 12:2, 133-145, DOI: 10.1080/14708477.2012.671608

was very prevalent in Libya and Algeria. There was high unemployment due to the failing economy. The government continued to invest its money and capital in the unstable oil business.[10] In Algeria, the majority of the population was young, because of the civil war that wiped out almost a quarter of a million people in the 1990s.[11] There was a lack of infrastructure for education, which is critical for developing a well-functioning work force.

As students finished university, they entered a workforce that had no jobs available to them. They were left unemployed and poor, building resentment towards the government. There was rampant poverty that often accompanies high unemployment. As Zidane Zeraoui explains in their article, "Algeria: Revolution, Army, and Political Power," there was a risk of youth rebellion in Algeria.[12] As a precaution, the government created the "Agence Nationale de Soutien à` l'Emploi des Jeunes," or the "National Agency for the Support of Youth Employment" which helped young people find jobs.

The culture of the Middle East and Northern Africa also played a role in the catalyst to these widespread protests. Islamism is defined as an ideology that believes that Islam, and its teachings, should guide the daily activities and practices of a person's life. Islam is a major part of everyday life in Libya and Algeria, along with the rest of the region. It was under Gaddafi in Libya that Islam saw a shift. Frédéric Volpi explains in their article, "in Libya Qadhafi had initially proposed his own version of Islamism in order to counter both the more traditionalist form of Islamic authority endorsed by the previous

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[10] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[11] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[12] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.

Libyan monarchy and the more politicized interpretations introduced by the Muslim Brotherhood. This all-out repressive option was reinforced in the mid-1990s as the guerrilla activities of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group created significant problems for the regime in eastern Libya."[13] They explain that Gaddafi wanted to use Islam as a way of harnessing more power for himself. However, there was less of an Islamist movement in Libya because Libya was more homogenous, in terms of religion, compared to other countries in the region.

In Algeria, on the other hand, there was a Islamist movement that was pushing for change in the protests. While Algeria banned "anti-systems" or parties that were anti regime, they allowed for parties that were pro status quo to remain.[14] This practice allowed for the creation and refinement of a system of very carefully controlled multi partisanism. It was a tricky system to balance. While it can be argued that this practice was beneficial because it was a step towards democracy, it is important to remember that there is still a need to fully implement democracy. Otherwise, this system would simply be a facade, and not truly helping bring about a more equal governing body.

There were oppressive regimes in both countries. In the international community, Gaddafi has a notorious reputation for war crimes. In Libya, the government regime was brutally cruel and committed human rights violations against their own people. Prior to the outbreak of protests in 2010, the people of Libya saw its military intentionally weakened by Gaddafi in his attempts to prevent any real threats to his power. Gaddafi

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[13] Volpi. Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb.
[14] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.

weakened the military by destroying cohesiveness,[15] which is a critical element to political stability as well as democratization. He damaged any ideologies that were not directly tied to the country, and his regime itself. He ordered the habitual rotation of military leadership from region to region with the aim of preventing close ties from developing between enlisted military personnel and the leadership.[16] The military force was a critical part of the regime's power and yet was consistently undermined by Gaddafi and his regime. Prior to the Arab Spring, the military was rarely used on protesters.[17]

These practices by Gaddafi meant that the military began to stop backing him as the protests broke out. Florence Guab explains in her article "the Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-Proofing and Repression," that the military was a hollow shell of what it needed to be to fight against the rebel protesters. Many military personnel abandoned their positions and left the regime defenseless. There were individuals that would desert the army and disappear. These individuals were not necessarily politically motivated to leave. Some may have left simply because they had foresight and did not want to be on the losing side. These individuals were often enlisted soldiers, rather than officers.[18] There were also entire units of soldiers that dissolved their allegiances to the regime and joined rebel groups.[19] This phenomenon has a different psychology than solitary individuals deserting their posts. This type of decision, on behalf of a whole group, requires time and effort and cooperation between soldiers. Guab says that psychology

[15] Florence Gaub. The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression, Journal of Strategic Studies, (2013). 36:2, 221-244, DOI: 10.1080/01402390.2012.742010
[16] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."
[17] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."
[18] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."
[19] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."

is what makes these units deserting so much more politically minded and also damaging to the regime itself.[20]

The protests themselves unfolded differently in Libya and Algeria. The only similarities that really can be drawn have to do with the aims themselves. The protests were widespread and dangerous in Libya. It is estimated that thousands of people died. However, in contrast, Algeria saw these protests as mass demonstrations. Like Libya, the protests in Algeria were widespread and violent but they were not to the same level of destruction as in Libya.

The protests were heavily influenced by the use of social media. Social media was used to spread information about the protests themselves. They were used to spread information about their messages and garner more attention from the international community. The governments of many countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa restricted people's access to Facebook and Twitter as a means of suppressing the protests.[21]

The Libyan protests were violent. It resulted in an all out civil war that lasted eight months. Prior to the protests, Gaddafi ordered an uncompromising repression on all kinds of activism.[22] The Libyan government saw the protests and Gaddafi launched airstrikes against his citizens. Thousands of people were killed. The violence and chaos ensued because of the weak regime itself. The destabilized military undeniably contributed to the fall of Gaddafi.

[20] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."
[21] Philip N. Howard and Hussain M. Muzammil. 2011. "THE ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA." *Journal of Democracy* 22 (3) (07): 35-48. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0041.
[22] Volpi. Explaining (and re-explaining) political change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: trajectories of democratization and of authoritarianism in the Maghreb.

In Algeria, the protests broke out in a different fashion. These protests were on a much smaller scale for a couple of reasons. As Zidane Zeraoui explains in their article, "Algeria: Revolution, Army and Political Power," the protesters were mostly small, unorganized youths.[23] They lacked the ability to grab other people's attention and grow their numbers. "In spite of this, the youth protests have not succeeded in binding society together, and their violent character made the population doubt the true objectives of the demonstrations."[24] The violent nature of their protests were also a reason for their failings which contrasts the Libyan conflict where violence was used liberally. Zeraoui explains that with the recent civil war in the 1990s, not many people were looking to get involved in another bloody conflict. They write "memories of the 1990s civil war, which began with a violent uprising that led to the death of 150,000 persons and the victory of the Islamic Salvation Front in the 1991 legislative election, are still present in the minds of the Algerian population who worry about avoiding a similar situation."[25]

The process of regime change demonstrates the significance of compromise and cooperation. In successful government transitions, there is communication between the outgoing and incoming governments. Nonetheless, there can be issues with regime changes when many parts of the old government are left in place.[26] It is also important to note that the military can play a critical role when it comes to regime changes.[27] In the case of Libya, that did not happen so much. The military had been destabilized by Gaddafi himself. By the time protests had broken out in Libya, the military was pulling

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[23] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[24] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[25] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[26] Doueck- POLI 227 Democratization 2021
[27] Doueck- POLI 227 Democratization 2021

away from Gaddafi.[28] Gaddafi was assassinated and the entire government was toppled. In Algeria, the government remained mostly in place.

The Algerian government took the protests and made concessions to appease some of the protesters. While not much was done to fix the problems, the government did end the 19 year old state of emergency, and opened communication channels to allow for constitutional reforms.[29] In contrast to Libya, the regime did not fall because there was a strong military holding people in place. There was a higher military presence than police force meaning that the government was well-equipped to handle the damage of protests.[30] It also did not fall because Algerians did not want a violent conflict. There was not a deep-rooted and intense passion for these protests like in Libya.[31]

In Libya, there were organized rebels and disorganized regimes that led to the fall of Gaddafi. In Algeria, there were disorganized rebels and organized regimes that led to the maintained stability of the Algerian government.

In conclusion, the Arab Spring in the Middle East and Northern Africa unfolded in different ways across the region for different reasons. The cause of these protests was people's frustration with their authoritarian governments not treating them with civility. The rampanent unemployment and plummeting standard of living left people upset and looking for solutions. The context in which the protests unfolded in Libya was pure chaos due to the brutal regime of Gaddafi. In Algeria, the protests were small scale and

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[28] Gaub. "The Libyan Armed Forces between Coup-proofing and Repression."
[29] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[30] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.
[31] Zeraoui. Algeria: revolution, army and political power.

disjointed, meaning they made less of a devastating impact, compared to Libya. These protests were largely done by young people who were unemployed and upset. The way the Libyan government and the Algerian government handled the protests were different as well. The Libyan government handled the protests by launching full-on assaults against citizens. The protests turned into a civil war that resulted in the death of thousands of people. In the end, the Libyan government was toppled and a new government was put into place for a year. The Algerian government handled the protests by military force as well. And in contrast with Libya, while Algeria saw protests, its government remained relatively stable and that was because the government was stronger and vowed a willingness to work to come to solutions.

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