

Countries at the Crossroads 2011



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OVERVIEW ESSAY:

AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

The Uphill Struggle For Democracy

Selected Data on Global Democratic Governance

Countries at the Crossroads 2011 Global Scores

Country	Accountability and Public Voice	Civil Liberties	Rule of Law	Anticorruption and Transparency
Eritrea	0.12	0.79	0.27	0.56
Libya	0.55	1.48	1.33	0.69
Syria	1.25	1.99	1.60	1.25
Rwanda	1.07	1.93	1.10	2.59
Laos	1.03	2.37	1.68	1.63
China	0.91	1.98	1.77	2.48
Egypt	1.64	1.91	2.68	1.70
Ethiopia	1.33	2.75	1.98	2.30
Swaziland	1.61	2.93	1.93	1.97
Angola	1.96	2.83	2.20	2.00
Tunisia	1.35	2.86	2.40	2.83
Venezuela	2.14	3.77	1.90	1.77
Algeria	2.58	2.92	2.49	2.56
Mauritania	3.32	3.01	2.15	2.82
Madagascar	2.30	4.48	2.45	2.13
Pakistan	4.11	2.56	2.58	2.30
Morocco	2.91	3.61	3.00	2.28
Thailand	2.62	3.38	3.68	3.41
Senegal	3.67	3.88	3.24	2.30
Bangladesh	4.10	4.28	3.08	2.54
Ecuador	3.89	4.13	3.03	2.99
Burkina Faso	3.58	4.16	3.36	3.51
Mozambique	3.88	4.38	3.60	3.30
Philippines	4.29	4.06	3.13	3.78
Bolivia	4.21	4.54	3.35	3.25
Turkey	4.12	3.81	3.92	3.62
Zambia	3.89	4.47	4.07	3.27
Colombia	4.37	3.99	3.99	3.51
Paraguay	4.67	4.34	3.50	3.41
Mali	4.90	4.80	2.96	3.44
Peru	4.54	4.30	3.89	3.48
Guyana	4.35	4.60	4.54	3.74
Bhutan	4.30	3.80	4.89	4.58
Greece	5.99	5.86	5.90	5.02
Italy	5.91	6.00	5.92	5.08

AFTER THE ARAB SPRING: The Uphill Struggle for Democracy

Christopher Walker and Vanessa Tucker

This year's uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa have dispelled illusions about the durability of the region's prevailing governance systems. Long-entrenched authoritarian leaders have been forced to give way to popular pressure for change, suddenly invigorating a previously moribund political landscape.

However, these stunning breakthroughs carry no guarantee that democratically accountable systems will emerge in their wake. Some initial improvements appear to have been made in areas like freedom of expression and freedom of association, if only because the interim authorities are not as active in systematically suppressing exercise of those rights. For similar reasons, the first post-uprising elections in some countries will likely be improvements on the thoroughly rigged contests of the past. Tunisia's election in October 2011 suggests promise in this regard. But rebuilding basic institutions like the justice system, law enforcement agencies, and regulatory frameworks for the media and civil society, all of which have been warped and corrupted by decades of authoritarian rule, will require many years of effort. In this sense the removal of a dictator represents only the beginning of the end of authoritarian governance.

The depth of the reform challenge facing these countries is apparent in the findings of *Countries at the Crossroads 2011*, Freedom House's comprehensive assessment of democratic governance. The report analyzes the performance of 35 countries—including six in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)—in the spheres of government accountability, civil liberties, rule of law, and anticorruption and transparency. The MENA countries' scores, which cover the period from April 2007 through December 2010, generally indicate grim and deteriorating conditions in the run-up to the Arab Spring.

Anciens Régimes in the Middle East and North Africa

The group of MENA countries examined in this edition of *Crossroads* offers a diverse cross-section of the region with respect to the political outcomes of 2011. Egypt and Tunisia have jettisoned their long-ruling presidents thanks to the determination of unarmed protesters, and now are engaged in difficult and highly uncertain reform efforts. Libya has seen the end of Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi's four decades of tyranny, but only after protests and their violent suppression evolved into a full-scale civil war; Syria appears to be on a similar path. The remaining two MENA states covered in this report, Algeria and Morocco, have so far avoided any persistent protest movements, but their governments' cautious pursuit of limited reforms may prove insufficient given the rapidly changing expectations in the region.

While the past year's uprisings seemed to emerge overnight, the circumstances that led to them were the product of decades of institutional degradation. In some cases the old regimes were successful in achieving macroeconomic growth, but they consistently blocked political reform. As a result, any new national wealth was funneled into existing systems of elite corruption and patronage, deepening the sense of grievance among ordinary citizens. Successful political reform

among other things would offer the societies in the Middle East and North Africa the chance to break free of the crony economics that has smothered economic opportunity and is endemic to their autocracies.

Tunisia and Egypt, which touched off the Arab Spring by ousting their authoritarian presidents in January and February 2011, had suffered acute downturns in their governance performance in the preceding years, according to *Countries at the Crossroads* data. Overall, Tunisia and Egypt experienced declines, respectively, in 8 and 9 of the 17 subcategories measured in the analysis. This left Egypt with an average overall score of just 1.98 out of 7, and Tunisia with 2.36 out of 7, placing them among the worst-ranked countries in the study. Such declines from already low levels suggest that the leadership in both countries had little commitment to reform, and the people living under these dysfunctional governments were no doubt aware of it.

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In Egypt, the prospect of a dynastic transfer of power from the octogenarian president Hosni Mubarak, who had held power for nearly three decades, to his son Gamal stirred deep disillusionment among the Egyptian population and stimulated greater engagement by civil society and independent media, particularly via online social-media platforms. The regime responded with a fierce crackdown on dissent. As Joshua Stacher's *Crossroads* country report observes, the Mubarak government's "determination to maintain control of the political system led to the unjustified imprisonment of thousands of people, including for the expression of political ideas in the media." The combination of this crackdown with venality among the country's ruling elite, lack of opportunity for ordinary Egyptians, and an increasing number of high-profile cases of severe police brutality proved to be highly combustible.

The accountability of the military and security forces is a pivotal issue in these countries. While Tunisia's performance in this sphere has been weak, it has been stronger than that of Egypt, which must reconcile the popular desire for change with military leadership more comfortable with the status quo. Indeed, Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) is wielding power in a manner that suggests it will only reluctantly relinquish it.

In Tunisia, the modernizing reputation cultivated by President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali was belied by the reality of rampant corruption, especially surrounding the president's family; harsh repression of civil society and independent news media; and brutal, often parasitic law enforcement agencies. The December 2010 self-immolation of 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, after a humiliating confrontation with the local authorities, captured the profound exasperation of the broader society and functioned as a catalyst for a long-awaited political overhaul.

Libya and Syria received even poorer governance scores than Egypt and Tunisia, and also showed declines from previous editions of *Countries at the Crossroads*. These regimes' exceptionally oppressive internal security policies and egregious failure to deliver public goods to their citizens presaged their markedly more savage responses to the protests of 2011, and may

also explain the Libyan and Syrian peoples' determination to continue their struggle in the face of ferocious violence.

Libya has removed its dictator from power but now confronts the challenge of building national institutions from scratch. Of the abundance of negative legacies left by al-Qadhafi is not only the complete absence of any meaningful institutions capable of delivering political goods, but a decades-long campaign to alienate Libyan citizens from the idea of working within an institutional system. Meanwhile, Syrians will be forced to reconcile a country whose leadership has resorted to indiscriminate violence to retain power. This will magnify the burden of building a democratic system.

Successful political reform would offer the societies in the Middle East and North Africa the chance to break free of the crony economics that has smothered economic opportunity and is endemic to their autocracies

Algeria and Morocco performed slightly better than pre-uprising Egypt and Tunisia, but they nevertheless experienced declines on key indicators during the *Crossroads* coverage period. This retrenchment left them more vulnerable to the increased popular demands for representative and responsive government that arose during the Arab Spring in 2011.

After the Uprisings: Prospects for Reform

High expectations for quick and thorough changes in the MENA region could drive the reform process forward, but they could also lead to a great deal of disappointment. Given the stakes involved, setting reasonable benchmarks for progress is critical.

Taking into account the difficult hand reformers have been dealt, what institutional changes should be expected from these countries in the near future and over a longer term?

The most achievable near-term opportunities for reform might be understood as those occurring in the "voice and expression phase" of transitional development. More complicated challenges loom in the sphere of rule of law, including overhauls of the judicial system and reorganization of the police and security services to ensure that they are subordinate to civil authorities and subject to meaningful checks on their power. These structural reforms will require years to accomplish, as they entail extensive training programs, complex reconstruction of legal codes, and the establishment of new institutional habits and cultures.

Egypt and Tunisia

In Tunisia, there is clear promise in the areas of freedom of association and freedom of expression, and media freedom in particular. A fairly open field for the exercise of these rights has emerged, in stark contrast to the deeply repressive environment for news media and civic groups under the Ben Ali regime. Civil society and trade unions since January 14, 2011, have operated with a degree of openness and independence that was unimaginable before that date. In addition, spirited political jockeying took place ahead of October's constituent assembly

elections and the elections themselves proved to be open, competitive, and pluralistic. But these gains do not mean that Tunisia has already cemented institutional reforms in the media, civil society, or electoral politics. Instead, they represent a promising early advance toward a culture of transparency and pluralism that must be safeguarded with concrete legal and regulatory changes. If citizens, political leaders, and other influential figures make the right choices, they can fortify Tunisia's nascent democracy against the challenges it will inevitably face.

Algeria and Morocco have so far avoided any persistent protest movements but their cautious pursuit of reforms may prove insufficient given the rapidly changing expectations in the region

In Egypt, the months since Mubarak's ouster have revealed a much darker outlook for reform. As of the end of October, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) had resorted to familiar methods of repression, including severe curbs on the activities of civil society and independent media, and foment of sectarian tensions for political gain. The SCAF's extension and expansion in September 2011 of the country's oppressive emergency law, a hallmark of the Mubarak era, sent a chilling signal to those working toward democratic governance. The scope of the law—nominally restricted in 2010 to narcotics and terrorism offenses—was widened to include labor strikes, traffic disruptions, and the spread of false information.

Egypt could achieve almost immediate progress by opening and defending the space for civil society and the news media, while ensuring fair, open, and transparent elections in November 2011. But if these first-tier reforms in the areas of free expression and association are not enacted and are prevented from growing roots, then the more difficult overhauls of the judiciary, security services, and other state institutions are far less likely to follow or succeed.

Algeria and Morocco

The governments of Algeria and Morocco have pursued piecemeal and often cosmetic reforms in response to the upheaval in their neighborhood, and it is unclear whether such measures will satisfy their citizens. Wary of surrendering any real power, the leaders of these countries may be tempted to emphasize the need for stability and sow fears of disorder to stave off genuine reform. However, Mubarak and Ben Ali long relied on similar stalling tactics, and their efficacy sharply declined as existing conditions became unbearable and the uncertainties of revolt became decidedly preferable. Given these dynamics, the success or failure of reforms in the countries to the east will be crucial to prospects for change in Algeria and Morocco, providing either aspirational models or cautionary tales for the region as a whole.

Libya and Syria

Libya and Syria—whenever they emerge from bloodshed—will be forced to build new governance systems almost from scratch, as the highly dysfunctional old regimes and the conflicts that shattered them will have left core institutions in ruins. The bitterness and divisions engendered by these countries' experiences will make political reconstruction and its essential compromises all the more difficult. At the same time, the extremely low scores recorded by *Crossroads* for Libya and Syria through 2010 suggest that they effectively have nowhere to go but up.

OTHER FINDINGS

The pre-revolt downturns in the MENA region formed part of a broader decline in governance indicators across the 35 countries assessed in this cycle of *Countries at the Crossroads*. The countries in question are a diverse selection of middle- and low-performing states, ranging from abysmal dictatorships like Eritrea and Libya to established democracies like Italy and Greece. The fact that so many on this spectrum experienced declines plainly illustrates the difficulty of establishing and sustaining effective democratic governance.

As with the previous assessment's similarly wide-ranging country set, the degree and overall number of declines exceeded those of improvements. On average, declines were registered in each of the four main categories—accountability and public voice, rule of law, civil liberties, and anticorruption and transparency. The rule of law category underwent the broadest decline, with 22 of the 31 countries with previous data experiencing deterioration. Venezuela and Syria suffered the sharpest score drops for rule of law. Deterioration in the protection of freedom of expression, part of the category for accountability and public voice, was nearly as common: two out of every three countries with previous data declined in this subcategory. Another subcategory under accountability and public voice, for free and fair electoral laws and elections, was also hit hard, with 17 of the countries with previous data registering declines.

With respect to the overall performance of each country, there were two that demonstrated dramatic deterioration (Venezuela and Syria), and four that improved significantly (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, and Paraguay), but the remaining 25 countries with previous data experienced a complicated mix of declines and gains, presenting a general picture of stagnation. In some cases, as with Eritrea and Libya, the previous scores were already so low that they simply could not drop further. In other cases, countries in the process of reform seem to have lost a degree of momentum, as occurred in Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Mozambique, and Senegal.

Sub-Saharan Africa

All but two of the sub-Saharan African countries with previous data dropped in the subcategory of free and fair electoral laws and elections. Rwanda was a case in point, with its violence-plagued 2010 presidential election. Opposition parties were subjected to systematic intimidation and harassment, and a number were prevented from registering and fielding candidates. The assassination of Andre Kagwa Rwisereka, vice president of the Democratic Green Party of Rwanda (DGPR), was a particularly serious blow to the process. In the absence of any meaningful challengers, incumbent president Paul Kagame won the deeply flawed election with 93.8 percent of the vote.

Ethiopia registered troubling declines in three of the four categories, with significant drops in accountability and public voice. Of special concern was the government's intimidation and harassment of civil society organizations, including through a new law that prohibits them from engaging in activities on politically sensitive topics. Civil society organizations established by Ethiopian citizens with foreign funding are now forbidden from working in the areas of governance, human rights, conflict resolution, and criminal justice.

Three other African countries—Eritrea, Swaziland, and Zambia—saw no improvements at all. Eritrea’s poor results were especially troubling, given the very low level at which it was last analyzed. The country declined in every category and, as was the case with its last assessment in 2007, none of the scores in any category exceeded one full point on the seven-point scale.

Asia

Scores in the Asian countries presented a more complex picture. Three countries with previous data—Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Pakistan—made notable gains in multiple subcategories in accountability and public voice, and in civil liberties, but the advances of each country were qualified in some way.

Pakistan, last covered in 2006 when it was still under military rule, demonstrated improvement in free and fair elections, government accountability, and freedom of association. However, challenges including widespread corruption and lawlessness in regions such as the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa continue to hamper the development of democratic governance.

Since Bangladesh’s last assessment in the 2007 edition of *Crossroads*, a government put in place by a de facto military coup oversaw a return to free and fair elections at the end of 2008. Bhutan has had a similarly contradictory democratic process. Since the last assessment, a series of reforms driven largely by the powerful monarchy have resulted in the first open elections in Bhutanese history and the adoption of a formal constitution. Both countries continue to face challenges regarding human rights and the rule of law.

There were a few cases of sharp decline in the region. Thailand suffered the largest overall decline due to a military coup in 2006 and subsequent political turmoil that lasted throughout the coverage period. In particular, there was an increase in state terror and curtailed freedoms of association as the country was racked by dueling partisan protest movements. The government and military continued to act in ways that undermined the rule of law and judicial independence.

China

China, though often touted as an economic powerhouse, showed significant signs of deteriorating governance, with declines particularly notable in the areas of civil society, media freedoms, and the rule of law. Since 2007, China’s leaders have tightened their grip on dissent in advance of high-profile events, such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Conditions have grown worse since the Arab Spring, as the authorities stepped up extrajudicial detentions of dissidents after calls for protests began to circulate on the internet in early 2011. But recent developments point to a more deep-rooted move away from democratic governance, extending beyond transitory fears of public protest during specific events. As Chinese Communist Party leaders continue to emphasize the need for economic growth, they have backtracked on even limited reforms undertaken in previous decades, just as these appeared on the verge of generating substantial change. This was particularly notable in the area of rule of law, which was damaged by increasing extrajudicial repression, limited civilian control of the military, and official campaigns to reinforce the supremacy of Chinese Communist Party directives over formal legal processes. With China’s average score hovering just below a 2 out of 7—slightly lower than Egypt’s on the eve of uprising—and rulers who have shown few signs of

willingness to undertake substantive political reforms that address the root causes of growing public discontent, the country's future social stability remain uncertain.

Americas

Of the seven Latin American countries examined, there were overall downward trends in six. Paraguay stands out as the only country with a significant net movement toward better governance. Since its previous assessment in 2007, Paraguay has held a pivotal election that ended the 61-year reign of the Colorado Party and ushered in a reformist government. Performance in the civil liberties category improved in most countries, with the exceptions of Guyana, Peru, and Venezuela. The largest gains across the region were in the areas of gender equality and opportunities for ethnic minorities. There have also been smaller positive trends, such as improvements in government accountability and effectiveness in Peru and Paraguay.

With respect to declines, Venezuela had the largest overall change since last assessed in 2007, with significant decreases in each category. The deepest decline came in the rule of law category, as property rights suffered from highly politicized confiscations of land. Rule of law was also a problem for Bolivia, Ecuador, and Guyana. Each of these countries experienced a move away from the primacy of law in civil and criminal matters, and featured a lack of accountability in the security forces. Freedom of expression and the media faced challenges throughout the region, but particularly in Ecuador and Venezuela. Lastly, in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, elections became less fair and open during the assessment period.

Turkey

Turkey has been alternately characterized as an exemplary democracy and a state that is sliding into authoritarianism, but the *Crossroads* data suggest that it falls somewhere in between. Its scores on accountability and public voice demonstrate the challenges inherent in the establishment of democratic governance. Drops in the subcategories for electoral laws and elections and for effective and accountable government stemmed from the ruling party's increasing dominance of the political scene. Another downward trend was evident in media independence and freedom of expression, caused in part by the state's growing hegemony over media holdings and laws that criminalize poorly defined, speech-related offenses.

Europe

Greece and Italy, which were included in the *Countries at the Crossroads* analysis for the first time, are European Union members whose economic and governance systems have begun to slide into crisis. While both countries perform at high levels on issues relating to public voice and civil liberties—such as elections, free expression, and freedom of assembly—they received quite weak ratings on anticorruption and transparency issues.

Italy earns its poorest scores in the sphere of anticorruption enforcement, for instance. An inefficient bureaucracy and overregulation of economic affairs are among the factors contributing to this liberal democracy's deep-seated corruption challenges. While Italy has sound laws on the books regarding conflicts of interest, monitoring mechanisms and effective prosecutions are notably lacking.

Greece likewise suffers from bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption despite performing well on political and civil rights. Corruption is believed to be common in areas including local government, town planning, transportation, public works, public health services, and education. High-level corruption has also flourished due to a relative concentration of power among a small group of politicians and a lack of transparency regarding the often entangled interests of the public and private sectors.

As these two countries seek to mitigate their massive public debts through increased tax collection and economic growth, a reinvigoration of fundamental democratic governance, especially as it relates to transparency and anticorruption, will be integral to success.

CONCLUSION

Great Expectations

Across the MENA region, the pent-up desire for change after decades of political stagnation and repression has led to high expectations for reform, and these are shared by observers in the international community. However, countries recovering from the breakdown of authoritarian regimes must overcome major economic disruptions associated with ongoing instability, and they are typically burdened with an inheritance of deeply flawed governance institutions. In this context, the potential for disillusionment and loss of momentum is great.

Among the most significant threats would be a mistaken conflation of the chaotic post-uprising period with democracy, and a tendency to judge the results of early reforms by the standards of long-established democratic states. Illiberal voices in the political arena will no doubt seek to blame democracy for the difficulties that inevitably follow the forced removal of a long-standing authoritarian regime. But Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya are not yet democracies. Instead they operate to one degree or another in a quasi-authoritarian limbo, where the remains of the old system form a hostile institutional environment for democratic reform efforts. Indeed, the story may not be how democrats prevail as much as how authoritarians seek to reconstitute themselves.

Given the wide range of challenges and the high stakes involved, it is in the interest of the democratic world—the European Union and the United States first and foremost—to understand that these are not yet democracies. Instead, they are part of a new phenomenon of governance unlike previous transitions from authoritarian rule, in which states in many cases had basic institutional frameworks on which to build. Keeping up pressure to follow through on the challenge of meaningful institutional reform, and avoid diversion to other paths, is of utmost importance. Formulating an effective strategy for aiding democratic reform in this context will test the ingenuity of the United States and European Union. *Countries at the Crossroads 2011* directs attention to some of the critical issues that should take precedence in such a strategy.

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