

Book Review: 'The 'Fall' of the Arab Spring'

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1. Summary

The 'Fall' of the Arab Spring: Democracy's Challenges and Efforts to Reconstitute the Middle East by Tofiq Maboudi explains the democratisation process (or lack thereof) in the Middle East and North Africa since the Arab Spring, specifically in the context of constitutional changes. The book offers a brief summary of the Arab Spring, and then uses statistical analysis to demonstrate the author's hypothesis, which, in brief, is that constitutions have a better chance of bring about democratisation if they a) solve problems, b) involve the people in their formation and c) use civil society actors as a representatives and intermediaries during the constitutional process (Maboudi 2022, 232). The author goes on to illustrate the successful case of Tunisia and finally the failures of other constitutions of Arab states.

2. Analysis

Constitutions

According to Maboudi, after the Arab Spring, a wave of constitutional changes was instigated across the region (Maboudi 2022, 1). However ten years on, only Tunisia was successful in its 'democratic transition' (Allinson 2015, Szmolka 2015, Zoubir 2015)¹. Maboudi seeks to explain this using statistical analysis of constitutions of Arab states.

The approach of analysing constitutions after the Arab Spring is not completely novel, for example a 2014 *European Institute of the Mediterranean* article seeks to explain how constitutional review is important for democratising states (Lombardi 2014). However, Maboudi's book aims at an empirical and comprehensive analysis of constitutions.

Statistical Analysis

This book aims to use statistics to demonstrate the paths of the many Arab states that underwent constitutional changes after the Arab Spring. Arguably the book's most important chapter, Chapter 2 defines the author's framework for his statistical analysis, including variables and sources for data.

Maboudi's most important distinction is that between (public) participation and (group) inclusion (Maboudi 2022, 45), which he posits are both key to constitutional democratisation.

¹ in (Maboudi 2022, 76)

Furthermore, he breaks the constitutional process into three parts: origination, deliberation and ratification, and assigns participation and inclusion scores to each of these phases. This is an interesting (yet slightly subjective) method of comparing constitutions that is effective for the goal of analysing participation and inclusion, using empirical data.

However, other variables that are also compared, like 'Ethnic Division', 'GDP' and 'Domestic Crisis' (Maboudi 2022, 61) have complications (i.e. risk over-simplification) enough for their own articles on their effect on constitutions (for example *Sowing seeds of ethnic division? Afghanistan's constitution and electoral system* (Qutb 2020)). This underlines the idea that Political Science can never be a perfectly scientific discipline due to human imperfection.

Tunisia

Tunisia, as the author aims to show, was successful in integrating various groups and allowing public participation during its constitutional formation in 2014 (Maboudi 2022, 47), which led to Tunisia having 'a successful democratic transition' (Allinson 2015, Szmolka 2015, Zoubir 2015)². This came after an arduous negotiation process and transition, including the tragic assassination of two left wing politicians, however the author shows how that eventually through compromise by the various parties an inclusive and participatory constitution was agreed upon.

The biggest flaw of the book, however, is that during the publication process, a constitutional crisis occurred in Tunisia, which is noted in a footnote in the introduction (Maboudi 2022, 2). This crisis was marked by a power grab by the incumbent president Kais Saied (Grewal 2021). This was as a result of a partially absent Constitutional Court, which underlines the importance of strong constitutional institutions, further underlying Maboudi's point. However he fails to take account of weak institutions within the structure of Tunisia's new constitution.

3. Conclusion

I set out on this book review with the aim of learning about the Arab Spring, and although this book offers quite an original interpretation of the events, I found it very interesting nonetheless.

In conclusion, *The 'Fall' of the Arab Spring: Democracy's Challenges and Efforts to Reconstitute the Middle East* tries to offer a scientific analysis into the changes in the Arab states since 2011, and I think it succeeds in this regard. Even though recent events in Tunisia have slightly undermined the book, it still serves as a testament for hope for democratisation in the region.

² in (Maboudi 2022, 76)

4. References

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