

Populism and alternative discourse: The case of the Arab region

Nadine Abdalla - Abdallah Ayyash-

Ahmed Abd Rabou- Mohamed El Agati- Zainab Srour

**Introduction
Gamil Mattar**

**Edited By
Mohamed El Agati**



**Populism and alternative discourse:
The case of the Arab region**



**Nadine Abdalla
Ahmed Abd Rabou**

**Abdallah Ayyash
Mohamed El Agat & Zeinab Srour**

Introduction by Gamil Matar

Edited by Mohamed El Agati

Translated By: Sonia Farid

Project coordinator: Nissaf Brahim

These papers are the product of the workshop: The Arab region between regional transformations and international changes, 17th of December, Beirut

The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the authors, and does not necessary reflect a position of AFA or any partner organization.

Contents

Introduction	2
The rise of the right-wing and the decline of demands for social justice in the Arab region	4
The impact of populism on citizenship and refugees.....	22
Governance in the Arab region: How populism affects democratic transition	40
Arab order under regional and international developments: Structural changes and institutional rigidity	56

Introduction

Gamil Matar¹

Despite the abundance of studies that tackled the Arab region, there are still many issues that require deeper analysis and a more comprehensive insight. The different political and social changes, many of which are radical and multifaceted, through which the region has been going underlines the necessity of looking for new approaches and reconsidering concepts that have for a long time dominated academic circles and are possibly no longer valid. Such changes give rise to a number of questions that have never been posed before.

For a long time, and not without reason, we got accustomed to a conviction that the Arab world and the Middle East are in a constant state of tension. This led researchers to overlook developments that transformed this quite bearable tension into a potentially explosive situation, therefore becoming unable to gain a deep insight into the impact of such developments in reshaping the region and to examine alternative scenarios as far as security and stability are concerned.

The Arab region and the Middle East went through different phases of development. The first was in the 1970s and the 1980s with the rise of globalization, which had a profound impact on societies in the region. This was particularly demonstrated in giving precedence to primitive identity over more modern identities, namely national identities, not only in the region but also in other parts of the world such as Yugoslavia, East Europe, and Latin America. The second phase was the Arab Spring revolutions that spread across the region and while several uprisings subsided, others erupted forcefully, at times taking a different shape, yet they never fully ground to a halt. These uprisings were, in fact, a reaction to globalization. It is worth noting that globalization is what enabled China to develop from a developing country into a superpower within a few years and this is a factor that needs to be taken into consideration when examining developments in the region. Another factor is artificial intelligence, which had become a major component in regional relations.

¹ Director of the Arab Institute for Development and Futuristic Research, board member of the Center for Arab Unity Studies, former director of the International Relations Unit at al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies. He started his career as a diplomatic attaché of Egypt in several countries. His research interests focus on democratic transition in the Arab region.

The above-mentioned factors need to be an integral part of any study that tackles the new regional order or even lack of it. Such studies are expected to take part in reshaping the region and coming up with alternatives that would play a major role in the formulation of this new shape.

The rise of the right-wing and the decline of demands for social justice in the Arab region

Nadine Abdalla²

Introduction:

Popular movements that focused on economic and social rights gained ground in the decade that preceded the 2011 uprisings and continued after. Despite the fact that demands put forward by those movements, which were clearly voiced during the protests, revolved around “bread, freedom, and social justice” as was the case in Egypt and “work, freedom, and national dignity” as was the case in Tunisia, the post-revolutionary era is characterized by the remarkable rise of the right wing, which adopted a discourse that overlooked, or rather eliminated, those demands. Such development gave rise to the question of how far the rise of the right-wing affected demands for social justice in the Arab region after 2011.

In order to answer this question, it is important to look at the rise of the right-wing across the world, and which undoubtedly played a major role in supporting the rise of a similar discourse in the Arab region. Added to this is examining the impact of the Arab right-wing on social and economic demands put forward during the uprisings and the role of neoliberal policies that do not tackle economic issues from a structural perspective, which in turn leads to more popular indignation. This paper will shed light on the above-mentioned issues through focusing on the cases of Egypt and Tunisia while also referring, even if in less depth, to the case of Saudi Arabia, which provides an insight into the dynamics of the rise of the right-wing in the region and its social impact. It is noteworthy that the paper deals with the impact of the right-wing on social and economic rights in the Arab region whether it is a populist right-wing as is the case in Egypt or not as is the case in Tunisia.

² Visiting assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo (AUC), part-time researcher at the Arab Forum for Alternatives, and a columnist at the Egyptian newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm*. She got her master’s degree in International Relations in 2006 from Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, Paris, France, and her PhD Degree in Political Science in 2014 from Grenoble Alpes University, France. Her research interests include social, labor, and youth movements, Euro-Mediterranean relations, state-society relations, and bottom-up approaches to democracy and social policies in the MENA region with special emphasis on Egypt.

The author would like to thank Salma Mustafa and Abdel Rahman al-Sayed for collecting the material required for this paper.

First: The international context and the Arab right-wing:

The past few years witnessed the rapid rise of the right-wing in different parts of the world, especially in Europe and the United States. This coincided with the emergence of right-wing Islamist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The following lines tackle the emergence of both trends and their impact on the political and economic rise of the right in the Arab region after the 2011 uprisings, especially in Egypt, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia.

European right-wing parties gained popularity in the past few years, which was reflected in electoral results on both the local and European levels. In 2005, the National Front in France won 11 seats in municipal elections and two seats in the French parliament in addition to 25% of European Parliament votes, hence exceeding any other French party. In Britain, the UK Independence Party, one of the major supporters of exiting the European Union, won several seats in municipal elections and one seat in the House of Commons for the first time in its history in addition to getting the largest number of votes among British parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections. In Italy, the right-wing rose under the leadership of the Five Star Movement (M5S), which won the municipal elections in Rome in 2016 and 32% of parliament seats in the 2018 legislative elections, hence sweepingly surpassing all other Italian parties³. The rising to power of Donald Trump in 2017 constituted the culmination of the right-wing rhetoric that started gaining ground in the United States following the 2008 global financial crisis.

Despite the fact that right-wing parties in Europe and the United States are not similar, they do share a number of characteristics. These include neoliberal economic policies, rejection of international organizations such as the European Union or free trade zones, and an exclusionist discourse that promotes dividing the world into “us” versus “them” in addition to animosity towards social democracy that emerged from the leftist heritage of welfare countries⁴. In the United States, Fox News and right-wing TV channels and radio stations slammed Obama’s policies, which they argued aimed at destroying the American economy. In addition to questioning whether Obama is truly American, those media outlets compared his policies to those of Stalin, only

³ “The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context.” *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

without the bloodshed, and labelled his economic reform plans socialist and communist⁵. Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May 2017 marked a significant turn in the United States' relations with the Arab region and which focused on allying with Arab regimes that adopted similar policies. A few days after this visit, King Salman replaced Mohamed bin Nayef with his son Mohamed bin Salman as crown prince, the latter known for his right-wing tendencies⁶. In the same vein, Trump supported Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as soon as he came to power and justified the intervention of the military by arguing that Egypt was threatened by radical Islamism. Trump also accused Clinton and Obama of wreaking havoc in the Middle East and argued that they played a major role in toppling Mubarak's regime in Egypt and paving the way for the Muslim Brotherhood⁷. Trump makes sure to affirm his support for Sisi in all their bilateral meetings.

On the other hand, civil conflicts that erupted in Syria, Yemen, and Libya provided a fertile soil for the emergence of extremist groups such as Ansar al-Sharia in Libya and al-Nusra Front in Syria and the establishment in 2014 of the ISIS caliphate that extended from Mosul in Iraq to al-Rekkah in Syria. ISIS also managed to establish strongholds in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen and tried to do the same in the town of Ben Gardane in Tunisia, but the locals sided with security forces and managed to get militants out of the town in March 2016⁸. The growing influence of radical Islamist groups and the atrocities they committed instilled fear in the entire Arab population and led them to question the ability of their governments at facing such threats. This coincided with the failure of conventional political entities in finding alternative solutions that would strike a balance between reforming state institutions and responding to social and political demands. People started believing that only a "strongman" would be capable of protecting the state and facing terrorism regardless of the policies, he would follow to make this possible. This argument constituted an integral component of the discourse adopted by right-wing parties⁹.

Both regional and international developments, therefore, supported the rise of the conservative right-wing in the Arab region that did not only gain momentum through the growing influence of

⁵ Mohamed El Menshawy. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: The United States [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2klsWqg>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Georges Fahmi. "The post-2011 rise of the Arab right-wing." *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

⁹ Ibid.

similar trends across the world, but was also seen as the only safeguard against the threat of radical Islamism.

Second: Popular uprisings before 2011:

Before the 2011 uprisings, the Arab region witnessed a series of protests such as those staged by workers in Egypt and the unemployed in Tunisia, the latter being the spark that ignited the 2011 revolutions. Those protests underlined the fact that social grievances across the Arab region were not only the result of neoliberal policies, but also due to lack of political channels through which people can voice their demands.

Protests in Tunisia started with the Mining Basin riots in 2008 and highlighted the basic structural problem in the country and which is basically related to the labor market. This was demonstrated in the rising percentage of youth unemployment that reached 29.5% in 2010¹⁰ with 22.9% of university graduates unemployed¹¹. The adoption of neoliberal economic policies since the late 1980s led to a decline in job opportunities for youths in the public sector while the private sector only offered jobs that did not require a university degree. This led to the establishment of the Union for Unemployed Graduates (Union des Diplômés Chômeurs- UDC) in 2006. The union organized several protests in which its members demanded integration into the labor market. Tunisia, on the other hand, suffered from regional injustice with coastal cities in the north like Sousse and Monastir getting a bigger share of investments and services and becoming major touristic hubs in the country while cities in the south and center such as Gafsa, Kasserine, and Sidi Bouzid, where the revolution started, suffered from marginalization, deterioration of public services, and higher rates of unemployment. In the Gafsa governorate, unemployment rates in 2010 reached 28.3% in 2010 with 46.5% of university graduates unemployed while the unemployment rate in Monastir in the same year was estimated at only 6.1%¹². Despite the fact that neoliberal policies adopted by then president Zein el-Abedin bin Ali resulted in growth rates that reached 5% in the years prior to his ouster, the revenue of this growth was not fairly distributed¹³. The problem was aggravated by a suppressive political scene and the subsequent absence of legitimate channels through which

¹⁰ "Tunisia: Youth Unemployment Rate from 1998 to 2018," Statista: <https://bit.ly/3cI2s7Q>

¹¹ Samiha Hamdi & Irene Weipert-Fenner. "Mobilization of the Marginalized: Unemployment Activism in Tunisia." American University of Beirut: Isaam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, Working Paper 43, p. 5: <https://bit.ly/3dVTqWh>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Edwin Tran, "Tunisian Success: An Economic Analysis." *International Review*, September 28, 2018: <https://bit.ly/3f2VYlr>

people can voice their demands. Even senior positions in the General Tunisian Labor Union were occupied by regime loyalists.

Protests of the unemployed started in April 2008 in the Gafsa governorate, particularly in the city of al-Rudayyif, known for its phosphate mines, and were considered a prelude to the 2010 uprising. The Gafsa protests coincided with the protests staged in Egypt by workers at the Mahalla Spinning and Weaving Company, believed to have set the stage for the 2011 revolution. Protests were also staged by the unemployed in the Mining Basin in Gafsa where protestors demanded development and social justice in their area and complained that the phosphate company is not offering enough job opportunities for university graduates especially after a series of layoffs implemented in response to liberalization policies that started in the 1980s. Local branches of the General Tunisian Labor Union supported the protests, especially in al-Rudayyif under the leadership of Adnan al-Haji. It is worth noting that the areas where the protests erupted are the richest in terms of their contribution to the Tunisian economy as they produce around 80% of Tunisian phosphate, yet they are among the least developed in the country and their inhabitants suffer from abject poverty¹⁴. The slogan of the Tunisian revolution, “Work, freedom, and national dignity,” was the same one adopted by the Union for Unemployed Graduates several years before.

In Egypt, increasing protests staged by workers played a major role in reshaping the political scene in Egypt a few years before the January 25 revolution. In addition to the creation of the Egyptian Movement for Change, also known as Kefaya, in late 2004, Egypt witnessed in the same year the biggest and longest workers’ protests since the end of World War Two. The protests came in response to the neoliberal policies adopted by the government of Ahmed Nazif, in office from 2004 to 2011, which resulted in growing inflation rates that increased from 4.7% in the fiscal year 2004/2005 to 7.2% in the following year then 10.9% in 2007. Added to this was the deterioration of the living standards of a sizable portion of the population. Despite the fact that the gross domestic product (GDP) increased as a whole, this was not reflected on wages, which did not witness any increase. In fact, the percentage of wages and salaries in the GDP declined from 48.5% in the late 1980s to 28.6% in 1995 then less than 20% in 2007.

¹⁴ Samiha Hamdi & Irene Weipert-Fenner, “Mobilization of the Marginalized: Unemployment Activism in Tunisia.” *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

Around 70% of the protests in Egypt in 2004 erupted after Nazif became prime minister in July of the same year. The success of the strike staged by al-Mahalla workers in late 2006 led to further protests that were staged on a larger scale. Starting 2007, workers' protests witnessed an unprecedented surge as it increased by three folds compared to the previous year. Protests increased from 266 in 2006 to 614 in 2007, 609 in 2008, and 728 in 2009. While the Egyptian Trade Union Federation was seen by the state as the only representative of workers, none of the protests were staged within it as workers realized that it does not represent them in terms of demands and grievances¹⁵. In fact, elections at the union were rigged in 2006 at the grassroots level, which was unprecedented in previous electoral manipulations, which usually targeted senior positions. This aimed at making sure that opposition to privatization at the union can be stifled and that the government's neoliberal policies can be smoothly implemented. The absence of democratically elected members in the union's committees widened the gap between the union and workers it is supposed to represent¹⁶.

On April 6, 2008, el-Mahalla workers called for a general strike to demand a minimum wage. The strike garnered support by a considerable number of political factions and activists, yet it did not yield the desired results on a national level. However, that day witnessed the eruption of a massive protest, the first of this magnitude since the 1977 riots that took place during Sadat's rule. That is why it was no surprise that workers' movements played a major role in toppling Mubarak in 2011. Workers intensified their protests, which was seen in the geographical spread of protests and the remarkable increase in the number of protestors, in the two days that preceded Mubarak's resignation, which tipped the balance in favor of revolutionaries. According to al-Masry al-Youm newspaper, workers' protests were quite limited and took place in few governorates until February 7 then increased to 20 protests in 9 governorates on February 8 then 35 in 14 governorates by February 10 and amounted to 65 protests on February 11, the day Mubarak stepped down. In addition to workers from different factories, those protests also included farmers, civil servants,

¹⁵ Nadine Abdalla, "Trade union movements in Egypt: Between organization efforts and impact challenges [Arabic]." Amr Adly and Fatma Ramadan (Eds.). *The rise and demise of the labor movement: Workers, politics, and the state in Egypt (2006-2016)*. Dar al-Maraya, 2019, p.42.

¹⁶ Nadine Abdalla, "The Neoliberal Policies and the Egyptian Trade Union Movement: Politics of Containment and Limits of Resistance." E. Akcali, Ed. *The Limits of Neoliberal Governmentality in the Middle East and North Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

and taxi drivers. As was the case in 2006, demands focused on improving living standards, raising wages and salaries, paying workers' arrears, and making temporary workers permanent¹⁷.

Even in oil-rich Saudi Arabia, protests erupted before 2011. Despite high oil revenues, they are never fairly distributed, especially under a regime that lacks accountability and transparency. This can be demonstrated, for example, in statistics reported in the Saudi Gazette in 2007 and which confirmed that thousands of citizens are homeless, especially in Jeddah where the number of street children is estimated at 83,000¹⁸. Beneath the surface, Saudi Arabia is facing several political, economic, and demographic challenges in addition to the constantly growing unemployment rates among youths¹⁹. Rising tension in Saudi Arabia was demonstrated in the protests staged by Shiites in the Eastern Province. In those protests, Twelver Shiites, who constitute 10-15% of the population, complained of economic and political marginalization in their regions²⁰. One of the massive protests that erupted before 2011 took place in 2009 in Medina, a city venerated by Shiites because it contains several shrines for Shiite imams. Clashes erupted between Shiite pilgrims who were visiting those shrines and members of the pro-regime Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. While there are different accounts of the incident, it is most likely that clashes erupted when members of the committee took photos of female Shiite pilgrims then security forces stormed Shiite districts in the city and beat and arrested many of the locals. Dozens were injured in the clashes²¹.

Third: The right-wing and neoliberal policies after 2011:

Protests did not stop after 2011 in Egypt and Tunisia, but rather intensified. Protests demanding social justice also erupted in Saudi Arabia at the same time. Despite the protests, regimes that came to power after 2011 belonged to the right-wing and adopted the same neoliberal policies implemented before the revolutions. Those regimes, therefore, not only overlooked the social dimension of economic policies, which led to another wave of protests, but also failed to address

¹⁷ Nadine Abdalla. "Significant numbers [Arabic]." *Al-Masry al-Youm*, August 2, 2019: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1417098>

¹⁸ Sherifa Zuhur, "Saudi Arabia", ABC-CLIO, 2011, p. 376.

¹⁹ Frederic Wehrey. "The Forgotten Uprising in Eastern Saudi Arabia." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 14, 2013: <https://bit.ly/3cIozLa>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

structural drawbacks of the economy, which led to growing instability on both the social and political levels.

After the Tunisian revolution, in which the General Tunisian Labor Union played a major role, tension started subsiding and presidential and parliamentary elections were held in 2014. Beji Caid Essebsi, the leader of the right-leaning party Nidaa Tunis became president while al-Nahda Party, which came second after Nidaa Tunis in parliamentary elections, was given several ministerial portfolios. The new government did not replace neoliberal economic policies that were adopted before the uprisings. While political administration improved after 2011, there were almost no changes in social and economic policies and social justice was not achieved. On the contrary, the government hastened to adopt neoliberal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in return for getting a USD 2.8 billion loan in 2016. A series of procedures to out those policies into effect were authorized in the 2018 budget, which included implementing more austerity measures and imposing consumption taxes in addition to reducing public spending through suspending appointments in the public sector and putting salary raises on hold²². All these measures aimed at reducing the deficit in the balance of payments, which did decrease from 6% of the GDP in 2017 to 4.6% in 2018²³. This development did not, however, correspond to any structural reforms. For example, unemployment rates among youths reached 34.8% in 2018²⁴. Also, the discrepancy between coastal and inland regions continued, which keeps threatening stability and democratic transition, especially that marginalized regions constitute almost 50% of the country. In 2013, 18 municipalities (including the capital Tunis and its suburbs La Marsa, La Goulette, Sidi Bou Said, and Carthage) received 51% of the municipalities' budget while all other 246 municipalities received the remaining 48%²⁵. Bridging the gap between coastal and inland regions in Tunisia had already been facing several challenges owing to lack of infrastructure in the latter, which makes it hard to attract investments there. The adoption of neoliberal policies makes

²² Tarek Emara. "IMF disburses \$247 million loan tranche to Tunisia." Reuters, 2019: <https://reut.rs/2Ah7IHJ>

²³ "Key questions on Tunisia." International Monetary Fund, July 2019: <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/TUN/tunisia-qandas>

²⁴ "Tunisia: Youth Unemployment Rate from 1998 to 2018." Op. cit.

²⁵ Sarah Yerkes and Marwan Muasher. "Decentralization in Tunisia: Empowering Towns, Engaging People." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 17, 2018: <https://bit.ly/30li1iY>

the situation worse since these policies do not support allocating more public funds for developing the infrastructure of these areas, hence obstructing investments in marginalized regions²⁶.

It was, therefore, normal for protests to continue. This was demonstrated in the protests staged by the unemployed in the Gafsa governorate in 2015 and in the Kasserine governorate in 2016. The protests culminated with the protestors blocking phosphate transportation routes to alert the state to their overlooked demands²⁷. A sit-in was also staged in el-Kamour in the south as part of a protest movement that took place between April and June 2017. The movement was marked by blocking oil supplies to protest against lack of development in the region, unfair distribution of natural resources, and unemployment²⁸ and also in response to the law issued by the government as part of its deal with the IMF and which imposed consumption taxes on all citizens²⁹. In January 2018, on the anniversary of the revolution, massive protests were staged in the impoverished outskirts of the capital Tunis. Those protests also came in response to putting increases in government salaries on hold, a decision the government justified by stating that total salaries and wages in the public sector rose to 13.7 billion dinars in 2017 compared to 13 billion in 2016³⁰. The General Tunisian Labor Union also organized a general strike in January 2019, which led to paralyzing the Tunisian economy³¹.

In Egypt, neoliberal policies continued with the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012. This was demonstrated in the negotiations then President Mohamed Morsi held with the IMF in August 2012 and in which he agreed to impose more austerity measures and lift fuel subsidies in return for a USD 4.8 billion loan³². Starting November 2016, when current president Sisi received a USD 12 billion loan, the Egyptian regime has been imposing further austerity measures that started with the devaluation of the Egyptian pound in the same year. This was followed by a series of decrees issued in July 2018, which led to a hike in the price of gasoline,

²⁶ Maha Yahya. "Great expectations in Tunisia." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 31, 2016: <https://bit.ly/30hKICl>

²⁷ Irene Weipert-Fenner. "Unemployed mobilisation in times of democratisation: The Union of Unemployed Graduates in post-Ben Ali Tunisia." *The Journal of North African Studies*, 2018: <https://bit.ly/30kCuEQ>

²⁸ Nissaf Brahmi. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Tunisia [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3f3hF4Y>

²⁹ Jihan Chandoul. "The IMF has choked Tunisia. No wonder the people are protesting." *The Guardian*, January 18, 2018: <https://bit.ly/3h7GzC4>

³⁰ The years 2010-2016 saw a 50% rise in public sector employees and 100% rise in the wage volume.

³¹ "Tunisian General Labor Union asserts rejection of 2017 budget draft [Arabic]." *France 24*, October 17, 2016: <https://bit.ly/37dCEis>

³² Tarek Emara. "Big strike paralyses Tunisia, thousands protest over pay row." *Reuters*, 17 January 2019, <https://reut.rs/30iUuzc>

³² "Egypt to get USD 4.8 billion loan from IMF [Arabic]." *France 24*, December 30, 2012: <https://bit.ly/2XMGfKk>

diesel, and liquefied petroleum gas for the second time in eight months. Electricity prices were also increased and so was the percentage of the value added tax on different commodities and services³³. As was the case in Tunisia, the government worked on issuing a civil service law that aims at minimizing the burden on the budget through suspending annual increases in the salaries of civil servants. These measures also aimed at reducing budget deficits and addressing budget structural imbalances especially those related to subsidizing petroleum products, which constituted 20% of public spending and 6% of the GDP in 2014³⁴. However, none of those measures address the economy's structural problems that mainly revolve around the decline of the industrial sector and dependence on imports (Egypt is currently a net importer of food and petroleum products). Those problems will only be solved through industrial policies that aim at developing manufacturing industries (plastic, iron and steel, chemicals) that are less dependent on imported products³⁵. It is also necessary to design policies that direct economic growth towards labor-intensive sectors such as industries instead of capital-intensive sectors such as banking and telecommunications³⁶. Such problems cannot be solved through policies proposed by the IMF or the policies adopted by right-wing governments.

True, economic growth was estimated at 5% in 2017/2018 and annual family income increased from LE 44,000 in 2015 to 59,000 in 2017/2018. However, poverty rates increased from 27.8% in 2015 to 32.5% in 2017/2018, that is by 4.7% according to a report issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in August 2019³⁷. It is noteworthy that poverty rates were estimated at 25.2% in 2010. The simultaneous increase in growth rates and family income on one hand and poverty rates on the other hand has different explanations: either inflation swallowed up all what economic growth achieved or economic growth was not fair, which led a few to get rich and many to get poor. The second explanation is more likely³⁸. This also explains why workers' protests increased from 530 in 2010 to 1400 in 2011, 1969 in 2012, and 2239 in 2013. Protests only started receding later when freedom of expression was curbed as they were estimated at 1655

³³ Shimaa El Sharkawy. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Egypt [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <http://bit.ly/2plX9If>

³⁴ Amr Adly. "What is the government counting on to save the economy? [Arabic]" *Al-Shorouk*, July 18, 2014: <https://bit.ly/2ARaZb2>

³⁵ Amr Adly. "Satisfying the IMF won't solve Egypt's problems." *Bloomberg*, January 30, 2019: <https://bloom.bg/2XGujRi>

³⁶ Amr Adly. "How Economic Growth is Making Many Egyptians Poorer." *Bloomberg*, August 21, 2019: <https://bloom.bg/30wK5jR>

³⁷ The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics estimated the poverty line at LE 735.5 per month that is almost LE 25 per day.

³⁸ Nadine Abdalla. "Significant numbers [Arabic]." *Al-Masry al-Youm*, August 2, 2019: <https://bit.ly/3h5ouom>

in 2014³⁹, 334 in 2015, and 726 in 2016⁴⁰, yet they remained higher than before the 2011 revolution. Several trade unions that would suffer if the civil service law is passed formed a coalition under the name Tadamon, Arabic for “solidarity.” The group is similar to other alliances formed by employees at the Real Estate Tax Authority and the Sales Tax authority. In January 2016, Tadamon managed to put pressure on the parliament to reject the civil service law. The law was, however, endorsed in July 2016 after modifying some of its articles⁴¹. Protests that were not organized by any political faction or trade union erupted in Egypt on September 20, 2019 in response to information posted on social media that unraveled the corruption of the current regime.

Saudi Arabia faced several economic challenges after 2011 with the country suffering from the biggest budget deficit in its history and which was estimated at 366 billion riyals in 2015, compared to 66 billion in 2014⁴². Such developments can be explained through a number of factors including taking part in the war in Yemen and Syria and financial support for the Egyptian regime. This coincided with the decline of oil revenues by 51% as prices decreased from USD 86 in early 2014 to USD 42 in late 2014. It is noteworthy that oil exports constitute 80% of state revenue in Saudi Arabia⁴³. In January 2015, crown prince Mohamed bin Salman initiated a neoliberal economic vision based on unprecedented austerity measures that reduced public spending by 30%⁴⁴. The government reduced the salaries of ministers and members of the Consultative Council by 20% in September 2016⁴⁵ and increased fuel prices by 50% and water and electricity by two thirds in late 2015. Energy subsidies had cost the Saudi state around USD 61 billion in 2015⁴⁶.

In order to overcome dependence on oil, the Saudi regime started looking into other means of increasing state revenues and improving the economy. On April 25, 2016, Mohamed bin Salman

³⁹ “Economic and social protests in 2015 [Arabic].” Report issued by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, January 15, 2016: <http://ecesr.org/?p=774766>

⁴⁰ “1736 protests in Egypt in 2016 [Arabic].” Press release issued by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, December 25, 2016: <http://ecesr.org/?p=775172>

⁴¹ Nadine Abdalla. “From the dream of change to the nightmare of structural weakness: The trajectory of Egypt’s independent trade union movement after 2011.” I. Weipert-Fenner and J. Wolff (Eds), *Socioeconomic Protests in MENA and Latin America. Egypt and Tunisia in interregional comparison*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

⁴² Asmaa Hassan al-Khouly. “Saudi Arabia’s budget 2018: Preliminary remarks [Arabic].” *Edaat*, December 21, 2017: <https://www.ida2at.com/notes-on-saudi-budget-2018/>

⁴³ Omar Khalaf. “The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Saudi Arabia [Arabic].” Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <http://bit.ly/35GzCCc>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Saudi Arabia announces austerity plan that includes reducing ministers’ salaries [Arabic].” *BBC Arabic*, September 27, 2016: <https://bbc.in/3h6doPX>

⁴⁶ “Saudi Arabia: Where does the investment crisis lie? [Arabic]” *Deutsche Welle*, March 4, 2018 <https://bit.ly/2AdI4y6>

announced the 2030 vision, a large-scale plan that adopted neoliberal policies. The plan includes a privatization program that includes several strategic sectors such as oil, particularly Aramco. This meant giving away one of the most important sources of state revenue to the private sector. According to the plan, the privatization program aims at providing the state with more revenue, which would create more financial resources to be used for the benefit of the economy on the long run. This should lead to the development of the state investment tools, particularly the public investments fund, which is expected to become the world's biggest fund after it acquires Aramco's ownership⁴⁷.

Most importantly, the 2030 vision aims at doubling and diversifying the sources of Saudi economy and creating six million jobs within the next 15 years through projects in the fields of entertainment, mass media, environment, and energy, which requires tremendous foreign investments⁴⁸. Saudi Arabia achieved a budget surplus of USD 7.4 billion (27.8%) in the first quarter of this year, the first since 2014, and non-oil revenue increased by 46% to reach USD 20.3 billion⁴⁹. Mohamed bin Salman plans on implementing a number of social projects of the same type as the Mohamed bin Salman bonds, in which newlyweds are offered financial support provided that their salaries do not exceed 4,000 riyals monthly and that they completed high school⁵⁰. The program aims at motivating lower and lower-middle classes⁵¹ to get better education, which is also part of the 2030 vision. However, most of the projects that have already started are service projects linked to tourism and entertainment⁵², therefore will not contribute to developing or improving the economy. For example, 4,775 residential villas were built in Taif, with prices starting from USD 134,000 per unit in addition to 67 residential projects in different areas including in Mecca, where 122,000 units are to be built⁵³. Added to this is the King Salman park project that is expected to provide 50,000 job opportunities and protect the environment⁵⁴. Despite the fact that these projects would solve the unemployment problem on the short and medium terms, they do not basically target the middle

⁴⁷ Website for Saudi Arabia's 2030 vision: <https://vision2030.gov.sa/en>

⁴⁸ <https://www.aremnews.com/economy/travel/1039758>

⁴⁹ "Saudi Arabia overcomes budget deficit for the first time in five years [Arabic]." *Al-Arab*, April 25, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2AdI4y6>

⁵⁰ "Mohamed bin Salman bond: Registration in the marriage bond [Arabic]." *Al-Mowaten*, December 30, 2018: <https://bit.ly/30wNf7d>

⁵¹ Mishary Alnuaim. "The composition of the Saudi middle class: A Preliminary Study." Gulf Research Center, 2013, p. 3-55: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/171150/Middle_Class_8157.pdf0.pdf

⁵² Ibid, p.4.

⁵³ Angitha Pradeep. "Saudi Arabia launches 4,775-unit residential project in Taif region." ME Construction News, September 15, 2019: <https://meconstructionnews.com/36779/saudi-arabia-launches-4775-unit-residential-project-in-taif-region>

⁵⁴ Jason Saundalkar. "Saudi Arabia invests \$23bn into Riyadh wellness projects." ME Construction News, September 26, 2019: <https://meconstructionnews.com/37009/saudi-arabia-invests-23bn-into-riyadh-wellness-projects>

class, which is currently suffering from housing prices and a high unemployment rate that reached 11.7% among males and 32.8% among females in 2015⁵⁵.

Austerity measures in Saudi Arabia triggered protests, some of which were led by princes, who objected to reducing their salaries and lifting subsidies on several services such as electricity, in January 2018⁵⁶. Protests by average citizens were also taken to social media, which drove the Saudi government to alleviate the economic burden in 2018 through paying bonuses for all civil servants and a monthly allowance of 1000 riyals (USD 266). It is noteworthy that the number of employees in the Saudi government is three million, which constitutes 70% of Saudis. The government, in addition, increased funding for students by 10%⁵⁷.

It is, therefore, obvious that neoliberal policies adopted after 2011 did not aim at solving economic structural problems that are basically reflected in the absence of social justice and growing unemployment rates. Those policies might have managed to address immediate financial problems such as budget deficits, but did not offer long-term solutions, hence reproducing the same systems that existed before the 2011 uprisings.

Fourth: The right-wing and limits of political reform after 2011:

Political reforms implemented by the right-wing were no different than the economic reforms that were based on the neoliberal model. These reforms were accompanied by the weakening of movements and entities that led the calls for social and economic justice such as trade unions. Those entities were no longer capable of voicing their demands either because of an oppressive political scene as is the case in Egypt, because of a privatization program that creates tension between senior and junior members, which is the case with the General Tunisian Labor Union, or because such entities are only being used as a façade to embellish the regime's image as is the case in Saudi Arabia.

In Tunisia, dialogue about social and economic issues is almost absent, which explains lack of popular support for the 2016-2020 development plan proposed unilaterally by the government.

⁵⁵ Abdulaziz Albrithen. "Child Poverty and Youth Unemployment in Saudi Arabia: Child Poverty in Saudi Arabia." *Poverty & Public Policy*, September 2018, vol. 10 issue 3, p. 373.

⁵⁶ "Protests in Riyadh: Protesters are princes [Arabic]." *Al-Kawthar*, January 9, 2018: <http://www.alkawthartv.com/news/114891>

⁵⁷ "Saudi Arabia retracts austerity measures following negative reactions [Arabic]." *CNN Arabic*, January 10, 2018: <https://arabic.cnn.com/business/2018/01/10/saudi-arabia-austerity-backlash>

Such a step overlooked a number of agreements reached earlier including the tripartite economic dialogue launched in 2012. The Council for National Dialogue was also not consulted even though it is through it that the government, trade unions, and the public sector could discuss the five-year economic plan, public policies, and reform priorities. This was the only way through which a social and economic dialogue could be resumed and could eventually pave the way for political reconciliation⁵⁸. Despite the fact that the General Tunisian Labor Union rejected the government's privatization decisions⁵⁹, which were unilaterally taken⁶⁰, the union's ability to face privatization projects and the domestic and international interests linked to them has lately been questioned. This in itself leads to internal divisions within the union as a result of the constant pressure to which it is exposed, especially when no steps are taken towards reaching a settlement with the government.

Despite the reforms Tunisia has already implemented as far as democracy and political and civil rights are concerned, the right-leaning government is still unable to achieve social justice and keeps adopting economic policies that do not make this possible. This is mainly because the ruling circles, even though they have become relatively more diversified, are still unable to communicate with the majority of the people. The same applies to opposition parties, which people believe do not represent their demands and are only after their political interests. This lack of communication channels is a problem that can only be addressed through integrating more segments of the society into the ruling circle so that it becomes more representative of the people and more responsive to their demands.

In Egypt, the emergence of the right-wing was accompanied by the closure of all channels, whether political parties or trade unions, through which the regime can communicate with the people. The regime in Egypt aimed not only at tightening its political grip on the country and establishing an authoritarian rule, but also at implementing economic measures that were bound to have a negative effect on the people without facing any form of opposition. To make this possible, the regime took full control of media outlets and issued a series of laws that curtailed all political activities. These

⁵⁸ Maha Yahya. Op. cit.

⁵⁹ After negotiations on raising wages came to a standstill, the Tunisian General Labor Union organized several strikes in October and November 2018 and January 2019. For details, see "Tunisian General Labor Union organizes general strike to protest privatization of public companies [Arabic]." *France 24*, September 2018: <https://www.france24.com/ar/20180921-تونس-الاتحاد-الاقتصاد-الافلاس-يهدد-القطاع-عام-في-تونس-فهل-تلجأ-إلى-سياسة-الخصخصة؟>

⁶⁰ Hoda al-Trabulsi. "Tunisian public sector threatened with bankruptcy: Is privatization an option? [Arabic]" *Independent Arabia*, May 8, 2019: <https://www.independentarabia.com/node/23156-اقتصاد-الافلاس-يهدد-القطاع-عام-في-تونس-فهل-تلجأ-إلى-سياسة-الخصخصة؟>

laws included the protest law issued on November 24, 2013, which imposed restrictions on the right to protest including jail sentences for protesting without a permit, and the NGOs law issued on May 29, 2017, which imposed restrictions on civil society organizations and their sources of funding. Although the law was modified in July 2019 to relatively ease the restrictions, it still curtails all activities related to civil society and all organizations dealing with human rights⁶¹.

In the same vein, the parliament issued in November 2017 a new law to restrict the activities of trade unions. While it was more lenient than law no. 35 for the year 1976, the new law still restricted the establishment and activities of trade unions. For example, article 11 stated that trade union committees should have a minimum of 150 members, which means that small private sector facilities, which include the majority of workers in Egypt, do not have the right to establish trade union committees that represent the workers of a given facility⁶². Article 12 stipulated that for a trade union to be created, it has to include a minimum of 15 committees with a minimum of 200,000 members. This not only makes the creation of trade unions extremely difficult, but also tips the balance in favor of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, which is controlled by the state⁶³. The law was modified in May 2019 through reducing the minimum number for establishing a trade union committee to 50 and the number of committees to create a trade union to 10 with 15,000 workers in addition to allowing the establishment of a federation of trade unions with seven trade unions that include 150,000 workers. However, those modifications were never implemented on the ground since administrative and bureaucratic procedures still obstruct the creation of new trade unions. Till the present moment, trade unions not affiliated to the Egyptian Trade Union Federation are unable to register. Also, these modifications are not accompanied by free and fair elections that allow workers to choose their representatives⁶⁴.

In addition to blocking all communication channels, it is not possible to resort to the ruling party as a mediator. This was not the case in the Mubarak era in which the ruling party, the National Democratic Party, also served as mediator whether through the parliament or municipal councils,

⁶¹ Nadine Abdalla, "Egypt's New Stability: How Long Can an Exclusionary Order Be Sustained?" Frankfurt: The Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), September 2017, <https://blog.prif.org/2017/09/12/egypts-new-stability-how-long-can-an-exclusionary-order-be-sustained/?lang=en>

⁶² The private sector includes approximately 17.5 million workers out of 23.9 million according to the report issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in 2014. Ayman Abdel Moati. "Labor movements in Egypt: What is to be done? [Arabic]" *Democratic Society*, October 24, 2015: <http://dem-society.com/2015/10/22/الحركة العمالية المصرية-ما العمل؟/>

⁶³ Nadine Abdalla. "The trade union scene and the future of syndicates in Egypt [Arabic]." *Democracy Magazine*, July 2018.

⁶⁴ Nadine Abdalla. "A step in the right direction [Arabic]." *Al-Masry al-Youm*, May 31, 2019: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1401451>

the latter being controlled by networks of nepotism that were connected to the regime, hence served as a link between the people and the authorities. The current regime, however, got rid of this form of mediation⁶⁵.

In Saudi Arabia, princes who took part in protests against austerity measures were arrested. The regime adopted a strategy that involved two contradictory approaches: the first is repression in order to implement neoliberal policies without opposition and the second is the superficial adoption of reforms in order to attract the investments needed to fund the 2030 vision. A question that poses itself is how ready the kingdom is for such projects on both the political and social levels. Another question is how far this contradictory approach is expected to last. On the political level, Mohamed bin Salman needed to move towards decentralization so that decisions related to future projects can be made quickly and smoothly. He, however, did the exact opposite with adopting policies that intensify centralization, hence making the bureaucratic process much slower⁶⁶. On the other hand, Mohamed bin Salman intensified clampdown on opposition and this was not confined to protesting princes, but also extended to activists and journalists. The assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul made several countries and corporations reluctant to invest in Saudi Arabia. On the social level, the 2030 vision, despite being supported by youths, is seen to contradict the Wahabi religious values that constitute a major part of the kingdom's culture and society. For example, Mohamed bin Salman saw that integrating women into the labor market would contribute to providing the labor force necessary for attracting investments. This development is not likely to be approved by clerics across the country⁶⁷.

In January 2019, the National Workers' Committee was established in Saudi Arabia to be the official representative of workers and their unions in the kingdom following almost 10 years of discussions at the Consultative Council. The proposal to establish the committee was submitted by the minister of labor in November 2010⁶⁸. According to the law, workers in private companies that have more than 100 workers can elect three to nine representatives who would form a committee.

⁶⁵ Nadine Abdalla, "Egypt's New Stability: How Long Can an Exclusionary Order Be Sustained?" Op. cit.

⁶⁶ "Muhammad bin Salman and the new Saudi Arabia." IISS, December 2018, vol. 24, comment 39: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/muhammad-bin-salman-and-the-new-saudi-arabia>

⁶⁷ Stephane Lacroix. "Saudi Arabia and the Limits of Religious Reform." *Religion & Diplomacy*, February 25, 2019: <https://religionanddiplomacy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TPNRD-Lacroix-Saudi-final.pdf>

⁶⁸ Rimón al-Kas. "The first workers' syndicate in Saudi founded by Saudis including three women [Arabic]. *Arabian Business*, November 30, 2010: <https://arabic.arabianbusiness.com/politics-economics/2010/nov/30/47534>

The committees affiliated to all companies are then to elect representatives, who are to form the National Workers' Committee⁶⁹. While it is still too early to determine whether the committee will represent workers' demands and negotiate on their behalf, growing political repression demonstrated that this committee is only part of superficial reform that aims at embellishing the kingdom's image in order to attract investment and capital.

Conclusion:

The past few years witnessed a remarkable rise of the right across the world. The emergence of right-wing extremist groups in the Arab world, such as ISIS, paved the way for the rise of right-wing regimes after 2011, especially in Egypt, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. The rise of the right-wing in the world Arab region was supported by both its rise in Europe and the United States and regional developments that led to giving precedence to security and willingness to give up on civil and political rights in return for protection from radical Islamism.

The 2011 uprisings were a reaction to two main factors: the adoption of new liberal policies that led to growing social and economic disparities and absence of communication channels through which the people can voice their demands. However, regimes that came to power after 2011 continued the same policies adopted before the uprisings, which is demonstrated in the cases of Egypt and Tunisia.

Post-2011 right-wing regimes that adopted neoliberal policies might have solved immediate financial problems, but failed in addressing the structural problems of the economy, hence reproducing the pre-2011 economic policies. This was also accompanied by a revival of political conservatism, which is the case in Tunisia, establishing an authoritarian regime, which is the case in Egypt, or implementing superficial reforms while clamping down on opposition, which is the case in Saudi Arabia.

This means that the conditions which led to the eruption of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions still persist. In Tunisia, marginalization and social injustice were the reasons for the eruption of the revolution, yet after toppling the regime and despite political reforms, there is little or no achievement on the social and economic levels. This is mainly because political elites in Tunisia

⁶⁹ "An hour of economics: The establishment of the national committee for labor unions [Arabic]." *Saudi News Channel*, January 22, 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xm9SI0KoY0I>

are incapable of managing negotiations between the state and the people to agree on fair distribution of wealth and resources. In Egypt, such communication channels are nonexistent to start with while the state continues implementing neoliberal policies and disregards the impact they have on the people. That is why the situation in Egypt is likely to explode at any moment. Saudi Arabia is a slightly different case since reforms are only introduced superficially to give a better image of the kingdom and attract investments, yet political repression is intensified, and all forms of opposition are crushed.

In response to the growing influence of the right-wing, several protests were staged in different parts of the world. This was particularly demonstrated in France (Yellow Vests Movement) and in Chile. The problem is not only the rise of the right-wing, but also the absence of an alternative and political parties' inability to provide a model that would take economic and social rights into consideration. In fact, even democratic left-leaning parties adopted at times neoliberal policies, which was the case, for example, with former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder. This weakened the relationship between those parties and their supporters as well as trade unions and crushed hopes for finding an alternative to conservative parties. Even though long standing social movements and trade unions, whether European such as in France and Germany, or Latin American such as in Brazil and Argentina, put a lot of pressure on the state to respond to their demands, they are still incapable of changing neoliberal economic policies. They might at times be able to suspend them and delay their implementation, but never radically changing them.

All this gives rise to the question of whether the right-wing is here to stay both regionally and internationally. The answer might be in the affirmative on the short term, but this is not expected to last for long. Even though it might be a lengthy process, it is always possible to find alternatives and to eventually overcome challenges that might seem invincible. This has been the case throughout history.

The impact of populism on citizenship and refugees

Abdallah Ayyash⁷⁰

Populism has in recent years become an alarming phenomenon, especially with the growing influence of the right-wing in the West. Articles and news stories on populist figures and their statements are published on daily basis and they mostly slam populism as a dangerous phenomenon that undermines political ethics, obstructs democracy, and is a threat to human rights. This is mainly because populism is linked to irrational policies and is always characterized by extremist views towards any entity perceived as “other” and general hostility towards scientific facts in addition to distracting the public from crucial issues.

Viewing populism as alarming is linked to the fact that many researchers in the West deal with it as some form of disease that undermines liberal democracy, which is defined as an institutional process for making political decisions that serve the general good through the election of a group of people who represent the people and their demands⁷¹. Because of being viewed as a disease, populism is not considered to be part of democracy even if it at times spreads in democratic societies⁷². According to Western political scientists, populism grows at times of crisis, especially those related to modernism such as globalization, the post-industrial society, and post-Fordist economy, hence it is supported by those who did not benefit from modernism and regard it as a system that does not meet their demands and aspirations. Such indignation at modernism’s failure to keep its promises, which mainly revolve around improved living standards for everyone, can easily be developed into a right-wing ideology⁷³.

In order to understand why populism is seen as a disease, it is important to examine the global historical context that Chantal Mouffe calls the “populist moment.” This context can be divided into two parts: one political and ideological and the other economic⁷⁴. Regarding the political

⁷⁰ A sociology researcher at the American University in Beirut. His research interests focus on alternative political activism in Lebanon since 2015 and is part of Naqd research project that focuses on critical thinking in the Arab region since the early 20th century.

⁷¹ Cas Mudde, ed. *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*. Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017). p.561.

⁷² Ibid. p.563.

⁷³ Ibid. p.565.

⁷⁴ Chantal Mouffe. *For a Left Populism* (London ; New York: Verso, 2018). p.25-35.

context, Mouffe differentiates between democracy and liberalism, which were both blended in the West under the umbrella of modern democracy. According to Mouffe, democracy is originally the form of governance that is based on sovereignty and justice and governs the relationship between rulers and subjects. The modern democratic revolution revived a historical concept that makes the people the source of power and sovereignty. Therefore, Mouffe argues that democracy must include a definition of the “people”⁷⁵. This means that democracy should include a distinction between those who belong to the “people” and those who don’t or, as Carl Schmitt puts it, the “friends” and the “enemies”⁷⁶. The concept of governance, which is an integral part of democracy, also needed to be defined or placed within some metaphorical framework. In the modernist context, this framework was determined through the liberal discourse that was based on the rule of law, separation of powers, and respect for human rights and personal freedom⁷⁷. Liberalism, Mouffe notes, makes sovereignty the essence of democracy provided that it is based on respect for individual freedoms⁷⁸. Mouffe argues that a form of tension is inherent within liberal democracy between the principle of sovereignty and defining society as a community of free individuals⁷⁹. Schmitt, on the other hand, sees that tension as a contradiction that liberalism cannot solve and, instead, resorts to crushing the will of the people throughout history⁸⁰.

However, Mouffe believes that this tension or contradiction does not fully explain the global historical context she calls the “populist moment.” She argues that in the present, and since the end of the Cold World, we live at the time of “post-politics”⁸¹. This concept constitutes an ideology that emerged with the coming to power of centrist factions that claimed they managed to overcome the struggle for power between left and right and which they allegedly consider outdated. Centrists claim they are capable of keeping the promises of modernism outside of political struggle. The argument that political struggle for power has come to an end is at the core of liberal ideology that works on reducing the role of the state in determining and achieving economic justice so that priority is given to capital and profit. Centrists, therefore, become the tool through which the neoliberal economic agenda is implemented and the promises they make are no different from

⁷⁵ Chantal Mouffe. *The Democratic Paradox* (London; New York: Verso, 2000). p.2-3.

⁷⁶ Carl Schmitt. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007 (1932), p.26.

⁷⁷ Chantal Mouffe. *The Democratic Paradox*. Op. cit. p.2-3.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.4.

⁷⁹ Chantal Mouffe. *The Democratic Paradox*. Op. cit. p.6

⁸⁰ Carl Schmitt. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005 (1922), p.11.

⁸¹ Chantal Mouffe. *For a Left Populism*. Op. cit. p.21.

neoliberal promises of a dignified life that is basically determined by individuals' ability to consume, which is usually done through continuous indebtedness.

Neoliberalism emerged in the 1970s as a way out of the financial crisis caused by stagnation and which hit the developed world. At the time, the only solution to the problem was to turn global capital from the surplus value model that focuses on industrial production to financial commodities. This means that economic policies in the West turned from Keynesian economics that forced the state to offer social safety networks to its citizens to the liberalization of industrial, financial, and commercial markets on both domestic and international levels. Under the new system public investment and taxes were reduced while government and private debts increased. State role in providing social safety started declining as part of an austerity program under the pretext that economic growth should be given precedence over social projects. This means that neoliberal policies basically aim at enabling financial capital of re-producing the surplus value of financial commodities, hence giving priority to the financial sector over other sectors.

Under neoliberalism, the state has become a financial capital entity that prioritizes private investments through the privatization of public facilities and facilitating the movement of financial capital. Neoliberalism is distinguished by having been first imposed on Third World countries in the 1970s then implemented in developed countries in the 1980s. Through neoliberalism, citizens turned into consumers who secure their needs through debts and societies came to be gradually based on consumption. Neoliberalism is not confined to economic policies, for it is also a political principle that determines individuals' objectives. According to Wendy Brown, neoliberalism defines the human being as a "homo economicus," which contradicts other common definitions such as "homo politicus," which means being able to rule himself/herself as part of a community⁸². Human beings, therefore, turn into sheer consumers and their participation in the political scene becomes confined to seasonal elections. This created a gap between the people and the government, as the later gradually distanced itself from the needs of the former. People, therefore, felt that the government no longer represents them and started questioning its legitimacy.

Populism claims to bridge this gap between the people and the government and that is why its success is linked to general indignation at neoliberal policies. Populist trends are, however, not similar and not all of them work on solving the problems created by neoliberalism. In fact, many

⁸² Wendy Brown. *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, First Edition. New York: Zone Books, 2015, p.41.

of them reproduce neoliberal models. Also, while populist factions in Europe and North America adopt right-wing ideologies, populism is not confined to the right-wing, for populism in Latin America and parts of Europe is actually leftist. The emergence of leftist populism in Latin America is mainly attributed to structural problems pertaining to underdevelopment, the subordination of the economy, and migration to the city. Populism in this case is inclusive of different segments of society especially the marginalized, rejects austerity measures, and call for a productive economy that replaces dependence on imports⁸³. As part of its plan to defend the marginalized, leftist populism sees the ruling oligarchy, which maintains the neoliberal system, as its enemy and focuses in its discourse on the fact that this oligarchy only represents the minority unlike those populist factions that represent the majority⁸⁴.

Variations of populism in the Arab region:

Most studies assume that populism is a phenomenon that emerges in democratic countries, but the emergence of populist trends in the Arab region, which is mostly comprised of totalitarian regimes, could refute this assumption. It also raises a number of questions including whether the emergence of populism in the Arab world is related to the 2011 uprisings that called for democratic transition and whether those emerging trends can be considered populist or only another form of authoritarianism.

Populism in the Arab world started gaining the attention of analysts only in recent years, especially with the growing influence of the populist right in Europe in the aftermath of the refugee crisis. In her book *Patio men: An analytical study of the populist phenomenon* (2012), Mona Khwais agrees that populism is a disease and attributes failure to cure it until the present moment to absence of a clear definition of populism that highlights its setbacks like what Western countries did with Fascism⁸⁵. Khwais notes that populism is the peak of totalitarianism since it is characterized by blind subordination to a leader who claims to represent all the people. Khwais argues that populism, unlike Fascism, does not offer any new ideas, but rather reproduces old slogans that have always had a strong impact on the people. Hence, populism is not considered a

⁸³ K.A. Hawkins and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. *The Ideational Approach to Populism*. Latin American Research Review. 2017; 52(4), pp. 513-528. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25222/larr.85>, p.515.

⁸⁴ Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis. "Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA." *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 19:2, 2014, 119-142, DOI:10.1080/13569317.2014.909266

⁸⁵ Mona Khwais. *Patio men: An analytical study of the populist phenomenon* [Arabic]. Dar al-Farabi, 2012, p.130.

development⁸⁶. She adds that liberal democracy and the rule of law it is founded on are expected to obstruct the emergence of populism. That is why populism is more likely to emerge in underdeveloped and authoritarian countries that were neither modernized nor democratized and in which people are less educated.⁸⁷

Khwaiss's orientalist approach does not, however, explain the continuation of the emergence of populism in democratic countries except through lack of a proper definition. But this is not a rationalist analysis since every phenomenon emerges for reasons and under circumstances that encourage its emergence. Therefore, the continuous emergence of populism in liberal democracies cannot simply be attributed to faulty definitions. While producing clear definitions is necessary, it cannot be done only for the purpose of condemning a particular trend or concept since this only serves at superficially dealing with the problem rather than addressing it in depth. A thorough study of the conditions under which populism gains momentum is what allows a given society to overcome it through making sure these conditions are eliminated.

In an analysis that differs from that of Mona Khwaiss, Wessam Saada provides an explanation of populism that is quite similar to that of Chantal Mouffe. For him, populism is an embodiment of the people in the form of a leader⁸⁸. This embodiment is an integral part of populism because in populism, the people become an authority above all authorities and have a will that supplants institutions and institutionalization⁸⁹. Saada adds that populism always requires demarcating the borders between the people and the enemies of the people, the latter also being part of the people⁹⁰. In other words, populism creates enemies of the people as a means of crushing all forms of opposition.

Since the will of the people, embodied by the leader, is above the authority of institutions, this leader has, for example, the right to temporarily suspend the constitution and give the power to issue constitutional declaration to any of the factions he/she is allied with. This means creating a power above the rule of law, one that can suspend the law itself. Carl Schmitt argues that sovereignty is not necessarily represented by the rule of law and state institutions as claimed by proponents of democratic liberalism. Sovereignty, according to him, is the power to suspend the

⁸⁶ Ibid. p.15-20.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p.28.

⁸⁸ Wessam Saada. "The fall of the leader... from the glossary of populism [Arabic]." *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, September 20, 2019.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

rule of law and apply extraordinary measures such as a state of emergency⁹¹. Even in liberal democracies, the rule of law, according to Schmitt, is not based on tradition but rather on the power of making decisions, namely the decision to declare a state of emergency or exception. The power to declare a state of exception, Schmitt notes, is the real problematic of sovereignty⁹².

That is why populism not only repressed freedoms and challenged the principles of citizenship, but also established some form of tradition that creates a hierarchy among citizens in which they are divided into two categories: good citizens who enjoy all their right and bad citizens, or enemies of the people, who do not have the same rights. This means that legislations could be drafted to distinguish between those two categories. In this case, clamping down on the so-called enemies of the people would eventually extend to all forms of real or potential opposition⁹³.

What is populism?

Several regimes in the region are authoritarian and they employ the populist discourse to justify repression and violate citizenship principles. The question is whether populism is the reason for authoritarianism, a manifestation of it, or one of its impacts. In order to examine the impact of populism on democracy, citizenship, and refugee issues, it is important to try to define the concept. As part of attempting to define populism, a number of questions need to be posed: Is populism the cause for people's abstention from politics, discrimination against the "other," and dictatorship? Why isn't it possible to say that the first is caused by neoliberalism, the second by right-wing policies, and the third by military rule? What are the characteristics of populism that make it capable of causing substantial social changes? In this paper, I argue that reaching a definition of populism would reveal that its social impacts are inherent within it. In other words, defining the concept of populism would automatically lead to understanding its social impacts.

Populism is tackled here through three main analytical points: the first is economic and focuses on the validity of economic policies, the second is political and sees in populism a reaction against the status quo, and the third focuses on the discourse employed by populism as targeting state institutions⁹⁴. Populism is also studied on both theoretical and practical levels. The first focuses

⁹¹ Schmitt. *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Op. cit. p. 1-9.

⁹² Ibid. p.11-13.

⁹³ Loai al-Madhoun. "Democracy in Egypt: A far-fetched dream [Arabic]." *Deutsche Welle/ Qantara*: <https://ar.qantara.de/content/ntkhbt-msr-lrlysy-2014-ldymqrv-fy-msr-lsysyhlm-byd-lmnl>

⁹⁴ K.A. Hawkins and C. Rovira Kaltwasser. Op. cit. p.515.

on the reasons and impacts of populism while the second examines cases of populism on the ground. The theoretical and practical aspects of populism are then compared in order to arrive at a definition of the concept.

In his book *What is Populism?* (2016), Jan-Werner Müller deals with the practical aspect of populism through several theoretical frameworks. Müller admits that he is addressing populism from the point of view of its antithesis, liberal democracy. He considers populism a threat to liberal democracy, yet is not satisfied with theories that despise populism or simply consider it a disease. According to Müller, populism “is a particular moralistic imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified... people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior”⁹⁵. Müller notes several contradictions between the claims of populists and their actual actions. For example, populists claim they are against state institutions, but as soon as they come to power, they and their allies control these institutions. They also claim they give people voice then apply repressive measures, claim they are working on the elimination of corruption among ruling elites yet support clientelism especially through appointments in state institutions, claim they are against the exclusionist policies of the ruling elites yet are essentially exclusionists, and claim they represent the people directly without mediators yet come up with moralistic figures through which they represent the people⁹⁶. Müller adds that populist factions always gain ground in countries where political parties, which are among the main pillars of democracy, get weaker. However, populism, whether right-wing or left-wing, do not actually destroy democracy but rather work against it. That is why Müller believes that liberal democratic parties should not exclude populist factions because this means they, too, claim to be the sole representatives of the people and should instead establish dialogue with those factions⁹⁷.

Even though Müller tackles the different effects of populism, several questions remain unanswered. For example, is every moralistic view of the political world populist? If yes, are all factions belonging to political Islam, whether now or in the past, populist? If populism, as Müller argues, is monopolizing the moralistic representation of the people, isn't this the same as the modern view of democracy in which the people are the source of power? What is specific about

⁹⁵ Ibid. p.86.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.77-86.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p.136.

populism that distinguishes it from traditional autocratic regimes that are also characterized by clientelism and control of state institutions? If populism is always against the elite, does this mean all popular protests staged by average citizens, can be called populist? Müller's criticism of populism remains a moral one, for he highlights the contradictions between what populists preach and practice, hence a hypocritical ideology. While this is a valid argument, Müller still does not provide a comprehensive definition of populism through which its effects can be thoroughly studied.

On the other hand, Ernesto Laclau considers populism a healthy phenomenon that empowers democracy rather than undermines it. Laclau refuses to consider populism a disease that infects liberal democracy and argues that this assumption originates from initial interpretations of crowd psychology, the most important of which were included in Gustav le Bon's book *The Crowd*, issued in 1895. Le Bon considers crowd psychology a disease that infects the individual mind and prevents it from thinking and drives it to regress to primitive actions. Because crowd psychology suppresses individual rationalism, it is easier to follow a leader who uses a discourse that addresses people's emotions and his ideas spread among them like a contagious disease. In this discourse, the leader depends on the fact that certain words and phrases can be easily visualized and the images they form have the ability to incite emotions that rationalism cannot conquer. Through repeating and emphasizing these words and phrases, the people collectively believe whatever the leader says⁹⁸.

In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), on which Laclau based his theories on populism, Freud does not consider group psychology a disease and argues that the idea of the group does not necessarily mean regression to primitiveness or repression of individualism. On the contrary, Freud establishes a similarity between personal unconscious and collective unconscious, which means that the psychology of the individual is the psychology of the group. For him, the formation of groups does not mean a return to a primitive state that undermines rationality, but rather a way of the individual identifying with the other, whether this other is another individual or a group. It is similar, therefore, to the feeling of love. Freud notes that the ego is not a positive concept in itself, but is the place in which the conflicts of the unconscious are manifested and argues that the ego always looks for an object of love from which it can form the

⁹⁸ Ernesto Laclau. *On Populist Reason*. London: New York: Verso, 2005. p.22-24.

ego-ideal, which means the part of the mind in which the ego imposes ideal behavior on itself⁹⁹. The ego-ideal is, therefore, the ego an individual loves and takes the form of another individual or a group. For example, a child would view his father as his ego-ideal because he is his mother's object of love, hence always tries to be like the father or identifies with him¹⁰⁰. However, at a certain point the child realizes that this identification fails and his unity with the ego-ideal is broken, hence the beginning of anxiety. The same applies to a group that shares an object of love, or a common ego-ideal, based on which its members are unified¹⁰¹. Identification with this object of love also stops at a given moment, which is mostly manifested in protests against the leader. This constitutes a moment of anxiety for the group since its unity is about to be broken. Another object of love is sought after this and so on.

According to Jacques Lacan, the unconscious is formed through a structure similar to that of language and is made up of three levels: the imaginative, the symbolic, and the realistic. For him, identification with the father is not related to the father as a person, but rather as a symbol. Symbolic identification for Lacan is linked to language, hence it is an identification with a signifier that refers to the idea of the master or is controlled by that master. That is why it is called "master signifier"¹⁰² and it becomes the foundation upon which the identity of an individual or a group is based. Lacan underlines another level of identification, the imaginative, in which the child, who has not yet entered the world of language and has not yet created a symbolic world, feels that his body is detached from him and that he is unable to fully control it. However, he still realizes the unity of his body when he looks at his reflection in the mirror, which creates tension between the divided body and its unity in his imagination. In order for the child to deal with this tension, he creates for himself an Ideal-I in his imagination, which means what the I aspires to be or the I the others would like to see him adopt¹⁰³. The child identifies in his imagination with the image of unity or with his imaginative unity through a projection of the Ideal-I that he wants to become. What is projected in this case is not a positive concept, which means it did not exist in the past as an I with particular characteristics, but rather a negative concept in the sense that it reflects a form

⁹⁹ Introjection is the unconscious process of adopting the attitudes and ideas of other people. See *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (1996)

¹⁰⁰ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, The Essential Žižek. London: Verso, 2008 (1989), p.114-117

¹⁰¹ Sigmund Freud. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1949 (1922) p.80.

¹⁰² Žižek. *Sublime Object of Ideology*. Op. cit. p.112.

¹⁰³ Jacques Lacan. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience 1." *Reading French Psychoanalysis*. Routledge, 2014. 97-104.

of lack. The process of the projection of this lack takes place through the imaginative “other,” the Ideal-I through which the child recognizes himself. This “lack,” therefore, turns into a positive concept when the body that is divided in real life recognizes itself as an imaginative unity. That is why the I recognizes itself through the Ideal-I, which is rather a process of misrecognition¹⁰⁴. The I is, therefore, not one single unity, but rather an entity divided between the ego and the Ideal-I. This entity starts with turning the negative, the lack, into positive in the world of imagination and symbols. The process of identification on the symbolic and imaginative levels constitutes a repetition of the I’s attempt at unifying itself or overcoming its division. It is in this attempt at unity that the positive characteristics of an individual or a group emerge while the negative, the lack, in reality is being suppressed. It is noteworthy that the negative does not exist independently, but only appears when it interacts with the positive. This means that the detached I does not exist except when it creates for itself an ideal during the mirror stage. Because the I is constantly fragmented as a result of the process of identification, it always lives in a state of alienation from reality. The first feeling of alienation is created on the imaginative level.

Ernesto Laclau builds his theory of populism based on the above-mentioned theories in psychoanalysis in addition to Carl Schmitt’s theory on politics. After releasing his book *On Populist Reason*, Laclau’s theory became one of the most prominent theories on populism. Laclau argues that populism is a linguistic process through which the political self is created, the self here meaning the people. He builds his theory on psychoanalytical theories on the individual and the group as he argues that the people cannot reach an absolute unity and did not exist as one single unit before being labelled as such. For Laclau, a community is formed through a series of differences between its different components and not through a pre-existing unity. These differences come to the surface at moments when different parts of the community turn out to have different demands. Therefore, it is impossible for the people in this community to form one single “positive” unit. What a populist leader does is creating a signifier that refers to the unity of their demands so that the word “people” becomes the master signifier, which denotes a unity that was not possible before. This unity includes all different, unfulfilled demands¹⁰⁵. This master signifier is associated with a series of secondary signifiers that give a meaning to the word “people” such “class,” “homeland,” “nation” and so on. These secondary signifiers differ in accordance with the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.7.

¹⁰⁵ Ernesto Laclau. Op. cit. p.96.

ideology adopted by the populist trend, whether right-wing or left-wing¹⁰⁶. However, the only way through which the word “people” can dominate is inventing a form of harmony between different demands. This requires inventing something that is outside the entity of the “people” and which becomes a signifier of the symbolic other that obstructs the people from reaching their aspired, newly-introduced, unity. In other words, an enemy camp needs to be identified depending on the ideology adopted by populist trends. In the case of the populist left, the enemy becomes the oligarchy, and for the populist right it becomes the political elites or refugees. Because populist trends promote the discourse that people’s different demands can be joined in one unit, the enemy takes a general, comprehensive shape rather than an entity with specific characteristics¹⁰⁷.

According to Laclau, the presumably harmonized demands that should achieve unity do not share any “positive” traits since all what they have in common is being unfulfilled, which is the “negative” upon which the series of signifiers linked to the master-signifier, the people is formed to create an imagined unity out of an entity that at its core lacks harmony¹⁰⁸. Such unity is only created through calling it as such and never existed prior to this designation¹⁰⁹. Based on Lacanian psychoanalysis, it can be said that no unity can be achieved except through creating an “other” in the world of symbols, the Ideal-I, through the master signifier, the people. For Laclau, the word “people” does not reflect reality and is only confined to the world of symbols. That is why the master-signifier remains hollow and fails in representing the I as it is. However, it is this hollowness that makes the master-signifier dominant in political struggle¹¹⁰. Like Chantal Mouffe, Laclau believes that populism is the only way to revive the struggle of the democratic left through making the word “people” denote the political I and creating of the oligarchy an enemy camp. They both justify the necessity of such an approach through arguing that capital is no longer dominant only through society’s control of the working class since it managed to control all segments of society. This means that political struggle is no longer confined to class struggle, hence the necessity of resorting to populism in order to instigate the creation of a radical democracy.

¹⁰⁶ Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis. *Op. cit.* p.123.

¹⁰⁷ Ernesto Laclau. *Op. cit.* p.86

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 96.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 104.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.105-108.

Populism: A definition:

Populism, like Laclau argues, is not an ideology but rather a discourse or linguistic system that creates a symbolic unity between different components through creating an “other” whose defeat is the only way to achieve this unity. However, Laclau overlooked an extremely important concept in both Marxism and psychoanalysis, that of the “symptom.” Populism is neither a disease nor an incentive for democracy, but rather a symptom. True, symptoms mark the moment a disease starts or spreads, but also mark the moment of the “return of the repressed.” What is repressed here is not only the people’s indignation at the neoliberal state and its policies nor the need for unity through identification with a new master-signifier. The repressed here does not appear in the same shape it assumed before appearing, but changes in the process.

Populism is a phenomenon that appeared in modern times and is particularly linked to the history of the bourgeois state and capital. That is why it is no surprise that the first case of populism emerged in the second half of the 19th century at the time of the industrial revolution in the United States. Labor leader Denis Kearney launched a campaign against Chinese workers in California, which eventually led to issuing the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Populism is a symptom that refers to the repressed in bourgeois states. Carl Schmitt attributes this repression to the problematic of sovereignty, which is at the core of democracy, which is repressed by the liberal state through the law. That is why any manifestation of popular sovereignty always takes the shape of a dictator. The problematic of sovereignty is, at its essence, a political and ideological manifestation of the problematic of the relation between the state and political representation on one hand and material relations on the other hand. Karl Marx underlines the contradiction in the bourgeois state between claiming that individuals are free and the actual presence of those individuals within labor relations as workers stripped of their ability to be paid for the value of their labor. The only freedom available to individuals, therefore, is whether or not to become part of this process of social alienation¹¹¹. On the level of political representation, Marx underlines another contradiction. While MPs are supposed to represent the interests of their class, they become representatives of the whole nation, meaning public interests or, in other words, state interests¹¹². This means that the problematic of sovereignty, which is that of the people over the law and institutions, is a

¹¹¹ Robert C. Tucker, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, Eds. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1978, p.80.

¹¹² Marx, Karl and Joseph J. O'Malley. *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*. Oxford. UK: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.104.

manifestation, on both ideological and political levels, of the problematic of the power workers have on labor relations.

In the case of populism, the “repressed” are the proletariat subjected to exploitation, which in turn leads to alienation from society. It is noteworthy to refer to Jacques Ranciere’s argument that the proletariat are not only the working class and do not have any “positive” sociological characteristics¹¹³. The proletariat are social alienation itself and which emerges on the symbolic level as the “people.” This means that the people are the ideal-I of the fragmented I, the proletariat in a state of social alienation. In reality, the proletariat produce a surplus value that is usurped. This surplus, which is repressed, cannot be represented by the people as a master signifier since this creates a nonexistent “positive” unity. The return of the repressed becomes in itself another repression of the “lack,” which signifies the proletariat in the word “people.” Because the people as a symbol represent an entity of heterogeneous classes and identities, or a fragmented body, populism needs an imaginary identification with one leader, who acts as the child’s reflection in the mirror. That is why populist leaders always make sure to tell the people they are “one of them”¹¹⁴. Populism becomes the embodiment of the people without a mediator even though the populist leader acts as the mediator on the imaginative level as well as the master signifier on the symbolic level. When they come to power, populist factions gradually create an authoritarian system that violates the principle of citizenship and democracy. This is assisted by the creation of an enemy, an entity outside the “people,” which allegedly has privileges of which the people are deprived, and its elimination becomes a condition for achieving the presumed unity. In his analysis of racism, psychoanalyst Jacques-Alain Miller argued that what is hated most about an “other” is the assumption that they are enjoying something you do not have¹¹⁵. And since populism is a moment of anxiety that results from fear of repeating a previous identification failure and the quest for a new object to identify with, it is easy to turn emotions into envy and hatred, both of which play a major role in any populist regime. These feelings are intensified by emphasis on the existence of the “other,” the danger that persists. This can be demonstrated in the Arab region where violations by populist regimes are justified as part of the war against terrorism.

¹¹³ Jacques Ranciere. *Disagreement Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 38.

¹¹⁴ Juliet Flower MacCannell, “LACAN’S IMAGINARY: A Practical Guide”, in *Jacque Lacan, Between Psychoanalysis and Politics*, edited by: Samo Tomsic and Andreja Zevnick, 2016. p.77

¹¹⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, “Universalism versus globalization. This at least will be our US chapter – to be read as United Symptoms,” *The Symptom*, Fall 2008: <https://www.lacan.com/symptom/extimity.html>

Anti-refugee discourse:

Hostility to the “other” does not only characterize right-wing populism, but rather all populist trends. However, hostility to refugees is an exclusive trait of right-wing populism that creates of refugees the “other” that does not belong to the people and that becomes their enemy. Supporters of a right-wing regime imagine that refugees form an independent entity that enjoy privileges it does not deserve and of which the “people” are deprived. Based on the populist discourse, refugees are the obstacle that stands in the way of their awaited unity as a “people.” Populist leaders, however, overlook an interesting fact: that hostility to refugees is what enable their supporters to form a “people.” True, refugees pose a threat to national identity and constitute an economic burden, yet people unconsciously make them an integral of their unity. That is why the persistence of the hostility and the struggle against the “other” is necessary for the unity of the people. Populist regimes make sending the refugees back to their countries a priority, hence calling for reducing the economic benefits they get whether from the state or non-governmental organizations, attempting to make their life in the host country harder, and at times justifying legal and/ or physical repression against them.

Lebanon offers a clear example of the impact of the populist right on refugees. Throughout its history, Lebanon saw the rise of several right-wing populist trends that targeted refugees. This is primarily demonstrated in the case of Palestinian refugees who are deprived of almost all their civil rights. The Lebanese law specifies businesses Palestinians are allowed to be part of and forces them to issue a work permit from the Ministry of Labor. Those restrictions, together with placing refugees in slum areas, allows for exploiting them as cheap labor¹¹⁶. Violation of the rights of Palestinian refugees reached its peak in 2001 with a law that banned them from owning property or inheriting¹¹⁷. Right-wing populist parties in Lebanon justified measures against Palestinians through arguing that they are a threat to the Lebanese identity, which is based on sectarian balances. In 2016, the Lebanese government decided to build a wall around the Ain al-Hilweh refugee camp to isolate it from its surroundings. This decision was supported by the allegation that those camps are terrorist hotbeds. In 2019, each of the Christian right-wing parties in Lebanon tried to prove more patriotic than the others through different racist proposals, all justified by the

¹¹⁶ Islam Khatib. “Anger in refugee camps: Dignity versus settler colonialism [Arabic].” *Bab El Wad*, July 21, 2019: <https://babelwad.com/ar/باختصار/غضب-المخيمات-كرامة-العيش-ضد-التوطين>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

idea of Lebanon's exceptionalism in the Arab region because of its Christian majority. The Free Patriotic Movement launched a campaign against Syrian workers while the minister of labor, who belongs to the Lebanese Forces, issued in 2019 a decree to fight foreign illegitimate labor on Lebanese soil¹¹⁸, a plan that included not allowing Palestinian refugees to work without a permit, which led many of them to be laid off.

Anti-refugee discourse in Lebanon reached its peak with the Syrian conflict. After the civil war, Lebanon based its economy on banking capital and the contracting sector. Syrian workers were a major source of power in the Lebanese economy because they offered cheap labor. Syrian workers were exploited and paid low wages while the wealth of the oligarchs kept multiplying. Because of how beneficial they were for the economy, Syrian workers were not the main target of the racist discourse adopted by the populist right-wing. This changed after the influx of Syrian refugees and the populist right-wing started warning of the repetition of the Palestinian refugee crisis. The government did not provide Syrian refugees with proper camps for fear they would stay. In fact, more than 97% of Syrian refugees pay rent for their tents and houses in Lebanon¹¹⁹. Nevertheless, the Lebanese government kept asking donor states for money under the pretext that the country hosts refugees, hence carries their burden on behalf of other countries. When UN aid for public schools stopped in 2014, the minister of education, who belongs to the populist right-wing, stopped the enrollment of Syrians for a while¹²⁰.

Also in 2014, several municipalities in Lebanon imposed a curfew on Syrians and justified their decision by the threat Syrians pose to security and stability. Signs imposing a curfew on Syrian citizens spread in different regions in Lebanon, which encouraged several local groups to act as vigilantes and assault Syrians, which continues till the present moment, also citing the need to protect security in their neighborhoods¹²¹. In 2015, a guardianship system was imposed on Syrian refugees, which increased the cost of living for them. Security forces also kept a close watch on

¹¹⁸ Elda al-Ghosein. "Ministry of Labor clamps down on undocumented labor [Arabic]." *Al-Akhbar*, June 15, 2019: <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/271965>

¹¹⁹ UNHCR and UN-Habitat. "Housing, Land, and property issues in Lebanon: Implications of the Syrian refugee crisis." August 2014, p.31.

¹²⁰ Sara Wansa and Alaa Morowa. "Lebanon uses non-Lebanese students to get money [Arabic]." *Legal Agenda*, April 16, 2014: <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=2480>

¹²¹ Maya Holw. "Curfew decree: Lebanon's municipal war against the poor [Arabic]." *Legal Agenda*, December 9, 2014: <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=948>

Syrians and registration of the new-born became more difficult¹²². Refugees in Lebanon are in constant danger because of having to break the law and ended up with no rights at all.

The populist right-wing in Lebanon demanded that Syrians go back to their country that they called upon entities supporting refugees to stop sending them aid so that they would not be encouraged to stay in Lebanon or so they can force them to go back through starving them. As the economic crisis worsened, the Free Patriotic Movement launched in 2019 a campaign calling upon small and medium companies to replace Lebanese workers with Syrian ones. A rally was staged on January 29, 2019 by the movement, calling upon refugees to go back to their country since Lebanon is not capable of handling the burden. Instead of admitting to the existence of structural defects in the economy, the populist right-wing holds refugees accountable for the economic crisis in order to justify its repressive policies.

Regional and international alternative discourses:

Calling the current situation the “populist moment” does not only mean that populist trends are currently dominating the political scene, but also that populism as an ideology and discourse is currently determining the form of political struggle, which takes place between two populist poles: the populist right and the populist left. This means that the populist left is also part of the “populist moment” the world is currently experiencing, and its influence varies from time to time depending on global developments. This means that the populist front is not only monopolized by the right-wing, but is constantly witnessing a struggle between the right and the left.

Wael Gamal writes about local left-wing initiatives that can be categorized under the populist left¹²³. These include Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, Bernie Sanders in the United States, and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK. These movements share a number of ideologies such as opposing neoliberal austerity measures and working on achieving social justice through policies that attempt bridging the gap between classes¹²⁴. These movements use a comprehensive discourse that does not only address the working class but the entire population of their respective countries. They also try to focus on different marginalized segments of society such as women and minorities and

¹²² Nezar Saghieh. “The manufacture of fragility [Arabic].” *Legal Agenda*, February 11, 2015: <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=992>

¹²³ Wael Gamal. “Global anti-right movements: The quest for Arab resistance.” *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

their main opponent is the oligarchy that monopolizes power¹²⁵. Gamal adds that those movements are always faced with obstacles that hinder their success. When Syriza came to power in Greece, the policies it aimed at implementing were undermined by countries and international organizations that would be harmed by those policies. The party's subsequent loss in the elections marked the end of the entire experience¹²⁶. Jeremy Corbyn's electoral loss did not only affect the Labor Party in Britain but was rather considered one of the biggest blows dealt to the populist left in general. Their experiences prove the existence of an alternative discourse, yet it is still unable to face the populist right-wing, which is supported by capitalist centers.

The situation is different in the Arab region owing to the specificity of the political context, yet alternative discourses are not entirely absent. This is demonstrated in the case of Lebanon where an alternative discourse emerged in 2011 and continued with the 2015 protests, the 2016 municipal elections, and the 2018 legislative elections. Those alternative movements succeeded in introducing some changes such as modifying the electoral law, which introduced a proportional representation system for the first time¹²⁷. The populist left-wing in Lebanon reached its peak with the 2019 protests against Banque du Liban and the banking sector in general and which constituted a direct confrontation between the people and the oligarchy.

In Sudan, Azza Mustafa explains, political struggle went through a number of significant changes since 1971. This started with the dominance of the social and Arab nationalist discourse, followed by the Islamist, the radical Islamist, and the civilian¹²⁸. The latest protests in Sudan focused on the creation of a civil state. The word "civil," Mustafa notes, is used to tone down the negative connotations associated with the word "secular"¹²⁹. Like Lebanon, the discourse in Sudan focuses on establishing a social justice state away from conventional class and social relations. This discourse, also like in Lebanon, tries to offer a progressive alternative that encompasses all segments of society and focuses on the marginalized.

¹²⁵ Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis. Op. cit.; Íñigo Errejón, Sirio Canós Donnay, and Chantal Mouffe. *Podemos In the Name of the People*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2016, p.80.

¹²⁶ Wael Gamal. "Global anti-right movements: The quest for Arab resistance." Op. cit.

¹²⁷ Abbas Assi. "The Arab region between regional developments and international context: The emergence of an alternative discourse: The case of Lebanon [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019.

¹²⁸ Azza Mustafa. "Sudan's protests: An oldd surviving discourse and a new one in the making [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Alternative discourses in the Arab region can all be categorized under the populist left even though each of them has its local context. Like in the rest of the world, the populist left-wing in the Arab region opposes neoliberal policies and institutions and attempts to establish a civil state based on justice and democracy. This is done in both cases through attempting to establish networks of social security. According to Chantal Mouffe, the populist left-wing is the only channel through which the left can take part in the political struggle following the failure of earlier experiences. The left, Mouffe argues, can no longer confine political struggle to a class struggle that only focuses on the working class and has to include all segments of society¹³⁰. However, the failure of populist left-wing movements in different parts of the world necessitates posing a number of questions: Isn't populism as a channel of political struggle a bourgeoisie strategy based on a pluralist framework in which the people are identified as an entity that includes different individuals with different ideologies and identities? If the interests of the oligarchy in all countries are closely linked to international bourgeoisie institutions such as the World Bank, how can leftist movements succeed if they keep considering themselves local entities? Is populism, now mainly based on hostility to the "other," only a manifestation of the post-modern era or of post-truth, where the truth is no longer the criterion on which political struggle is based nor is it an incentive for seeking freedom?

¹³⁰ Mouffe. *For a Left Populism*. Op. cit. p.13.

Governance in the Arab region: How populism affects democratic transition

Ahmed Abd Rabou¹³¹

Introduction:

Despite the frustration that followed the 2011 uprisings when many of the demands were not met, the September 2019 protests in Egypt and protests that took place in Lebanon, Iraq and before them Algeria and Sudan also in 2019 prove that assumptions about the end of the Arab Spring are far from accurate.

This paper deals with governance and democratic transition in the Arab region in light of the rise of the populist discourse on both regional and international levels, especially in the past five years. The paper is based on refuting the argument that the Arab region is resistant to democratic transition as several academic studies both inside and outside the Arab region claim. The paper, instead, argues that democratic transition in the Arab region is inevitable as it was in other parts of the world that were controlled by authoritarian regimes. It is, however, necessary to note that such transition is facing a number of challenges especially with the growing influence of the populist discourse both regionally and internationally. The paper mainly relies on conclusions of the background papers of the project entitled “Governance and democratic development in the Arab region” as it links those conclusions together to shed light on the future of democracy in the Arab region.

The paper tackles the following complex question: What are the possibilities of democratic transition in the Arab world with the growing influence of populist and anti-democratic trends both regionally and internationally? Do alternative discourses have the potential to lead democratic transition in the region or are they just individual initiatives that would never have that kind of impact? The paper is divided into four sections: the first is a background on democratic transition and its link to governance and an analysis of the argument of Arab exceptionalism in light of the

¹³¹ Visiting researcher at the Center for Middle East Studies at the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver and an associate professor of Comparative Politics at Cairo University and the American University in Cairo. His research interests include democratic transition in Egypt and the Arab region.

three international waves of democratic transition; the second examines the rise of populist discourse both regionally and internationally; the third examines the emergence of alternative discourses and their potential ability to achieve reform and democratic transition in the region; the fourth looks into possible future scenarios in light of developments in Arab politics since the 2011 uprisings and till the present moment.

First: Democratic transition and governance: An international overview:

Political scientists agree that the end of the 20th century witnessed history's biggest wave of democratic transition. In the 1970s, there were only 40 countries that could be called democratic and they were mostly concentrated in Western Europe and North America. By the 1990s, around 120 countries, which constituted one third of the world's population, had democratic regimes. In fact, the 1990s is considered the golden age of democracy on the international level. This decade was considered to have witnessed the third wave of democratic transition, the first being in the 19th century and the second after the end of World War II¹³².

The third wave was characterized by two main traits: the first was geographical expansion since democratic transition included countries in east and central Europe, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa; the second was developing the meaning of democracy so that it no longer became confined to the institutional definition (elections and pluralism), but also came to mean guaranteeing the representation of the opposition in the parliament, the rule of law, civilian control over security and military entities, and the participation of civil society in the decision-making process, in what came to be called "governance" or "good governance."

This development in the concept of democracy took place after many political scientists warned that the third wave of democratic transition might be quite misleading. For example, Marina Ottaway notes that many countries in Africa and East Europe had a regime that can be institutionally categorized as democratic but that did not follow the rules of governance. This was because many elected rulers in those regions kept the privileges their autocratic predecessors enjoyed, particularly through abuse of state resources, discriminating between citizens based on religion or ethnicity, or using their power to have militias or cartels protect them and their

¹³² W. Andy Knight. 2009. "Democracy and Good governance." *The Oxford Handbook of the United Nations*. Sam Daws and Thomas G. Weiss, eds. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199560103.003.0036

entourage. Ottaway adds that the last decade of the 20th century witnessed a rise in semi-authoritarian regimes that are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian. This is also the case at the present moment with the emergence of populist trends in Europe, the United States, and parts of Latin America¹³³.

It is commonly assumed, even among academics, that governance is part of the process of democratic transition that particularly focuses on cooperation between state institutions, civil society, and the world of business. Francis Fukuyama, however, has a different definition of governance. For him, governance is “a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not”¹³⁴. This means that governance here is about studying the ability of state institutions in providing public services efficiently in order to improve the living standards of citizens. That is why for him it is necessary to focus on what he considers the most important institution that is usually overlooked in the study of comparative political systems: the bureaucracy¹³⁵. While this paper agrees with Fukuyama's definition of governance, it will still use the most common concept that links governance to how far state institutions conform to the democratic rules.

Democratic transition waves and Arab exceptionalism:

Until 2010, with the exception of Lebanon and Kuwait, none of the Arab countries had witnessed the establishment of a democratic system since they gained their independence. Despite restrictions and criticism leveled at the sectarian system, Lebanon was the only Arab country to hold regular elections since the end of the civil war in accordance with the Taif Agreement in 1990. In Kuwait, the first decade of the millennium saw the emergence of a powerful parliament that had the ability to monitor government performance, but this did not last for long. Political scientists started wondering why there is no democracy in the Arab region. For many analysts inside and outside the Arab region, the answer revolved around the concept of “Arab exceptionalism,” which means that the Arab region is by nature resistant to democracy. According to supporters of this argument, this exceptionalism was due to a number of reasons. These included religious reasons such as the

¹³³ Marina Ottaway. *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2003. P.3.

¹³⁴ Francis Fukuyama. January 2013. “What is Governance?” Center for Global Development. Working paper No. 314. <http://tiny.cc/opiwiz> retrieved on January 16, 2020. Pp. 3-4.

¹³⁵ Ibid. pp. 5-7

argument that Islam does not support democratic values, cultural reasons including the assumption that Arab culture is against pluralism, and structural reasons related to the role oil plays in undermining any attempt at democratic transition in the region. For all those reasons, the Arab region is arguably not expected to witness a wave democratic transition like those that took place across the world¹³⁶.

Larry Diamond refutes the argument on Arab exceptionalism, yet admits that democratic transition in the Arab region is faced with many obstacles, such as the fact that the structure of Arab countries since independence does not allow for real democratic transition. This includes oil, rentier economy, the dominance of security and intelligence entities, and sectarian and tribal considerations. Added to this is the support given to Arab autocratic regimes by Western democracies. For Diamond, the chance for democratic transition still exists provided one country in the region becomes democratic since this will start a domino effect and launch a new wave of democratization in the region¹³⁷.

In a research conducted by the author of this paper, it was revealed that the period between 2005 and 2010 witnessed the publication of several Arab and Western academic texts that expected an imminent change in the Arab region. This materialized in 2011 with the eruption of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and the ouster of the regime in both countries. Even though other regimes were also toppled, this was followed by civil war as is the case with Libya and Yemen. Civil war also erupted in Syria even though the regime was not toppled. In Bahrain, the revolution was immediately crushed by Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia¹³⁸.

With the exception of Tunisia, most academic studies released after 2013, particularly after Mohamed Morsi was toppled in Egypt through military intervention, argued that Arab revolutions failed and that the theory of Arab exceptionalism has proven valid after all¹³⁹. However, this assumption can be refuted in two ways. First, it is not accurate to assume that Arab revolutions failed since toppling authoritarian regimes that are protected by military, security, and intelligence agencies and that are supported by international powers is not a development that can be taken

¹³⁶ Larry Diamond. "Why Are There No Arab Democracies?" *Journal of Democracy* 21.1 (2010): 93-104.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ahmed Abd Rabou (2019). "Arab Spring and the issue of democracy: Where does Middle Eastern studies stand?" E. Mohamed & D. Fahmy (Eds), *Arab Spring: Modernity, identity, and change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

lightly. Also, change takes place over an extended time. For example, in Egypt Mubarak was toppled, the National Democratic Party was disbanded, the 1971 constitution was suspended, and the parliament was dissolved. These are major developments even if they constitute a short-term success. As for the long term, it involves several other considerations that will be discussed later in the paper. Second, even in countries that did not manage to establish a proper system the political equation between the ruler and the ruled was significantly changed. This was demonstrated in the protests that erupted in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

It can be said that Arab revolutions and subsequent waves have so far proven the following:

First: People in the Arab region, like the rest of the world, also aspire for freedom and democracy. The 2011 uprisings proved that it is not true Arab people are resistant to democratization.

Second: Repressive measures imposed by Arab regimes may have proven effective on the short and medium terms, but on the long term those policies started losing their effectiveness as people realized they have nothing to lose, hence stopped fearing the risks of rebelling. They are also inspired by uprisings that take place in neighboring countries and which proved to them that toppling the regime is not impossible as they thought it was.

Third: Despite the support given to Arab regimes by Western powers, this support has always been contingent on the ability of those regimes at maintaining stability in the region. Once they fail in doing so, the support stops and no longer becomes a hindrance to popular uprisings. In other words, Western support for Arab regimes is solely based on mutual interests and once those regimes stop serving Western interests, this support is withdrawn. This was the case in Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria.

Second: Populism as a hindrance to democratic transition in the Arab region:

The populist wave that swept the world, including Western democracies, poses a major threat to democratic transition in the Arab region especially that this wave came at a time when authoritarianism made a powerful comeback in several Arab countries following the suppression of the uprisings. The problem of populists who managed to come to power in the US, the UK, and Brazil is not only that they adopt a conservative, right-wing ideology, but also that their policies undermine constitutional, legal, and institutional values upon which Western liberal democracies

were based. The question that needs to be posed here is how it was possible for populism to invade Western democratic regimes that forcefully.

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to understand the crisis of Western democracy, which was thoroughly examined by British sociologist Colin Crouch in his book *Post-democracy* (2004). Crouch argues that capital damaged the values, policies, and institutions of democratic countries when the decision-making process became controlled by representatives of business moguls who solely focused on implementing the capitalist agendas and when elections turned from a means of evaluating the performance of politicians to a commercial process in which less emphasis is laid on candidates' political platform¹⁴⁰.

Added to Crouch's theory is the role played by military institutions in the decision-making process, which contributed to defeating the purpose of democracy that turned into a front for serving the interests of capitalist circles allied with elected politicians. As a result, the democratic promise, which originally focused on providing healthcare, education, infrastructure, and social security, started collapsing in Europe and the United States as unemployment rates kept rising and the gap between classes widened. This led to the emergence of anti-globalization movements such as Occupy Wall Street. In addition to those factors, the refugee crisis marked the main channel through which populist discourse started gaining popularity.

The populist discourse in the West was based in three main promises:

- An economic promise through adopting protectionist measures for local industries in order to offer more job opportunities and raise the standards of living
- A political promise through making sure that people get fair representation in the legislative process and establishing direct contact with the people in order to respond to their demands and provide them with a chance to be part of the decision-making process, a promise that at times defies the constitution and the law and undermines the role of conventional democratic institutions

¹⁴⁰ Colin Crouch. *Post-democracy* / Colin Crouch. Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity, 2004. Print. Themes for the 21st Century.

- A security promise through adopting stricter measures to curb immigration, both legal and undocumented and fighting terrorism, a promise that implies the possibility of chaos or civil strife if support for the populist leader is withdrawn¹⁴¹.

These promises had an impact on considerable numbers of voters in the West, especially in the US and the UK in addition to central and east Europe and Brazil. The sustainability of the populist discourse depends on keeping those promises on one hand and defying democratic institutions on the other hand. Despite its relative success in keeping the economic promise, populism has not so far managed to keep the other promises. The promise of direct democracy in which people will be part of the decision-making process turned out to be an illusion. As for security, threats populists promised to eliminate remain the same.

A considerable number of voters have already been disillusioned with the populist discourse, which was demonstrated when the Democrats won a majority in the House of Representatives in 2019. According to Mohamed El Menshawy, election results showed a growing inclination among American voters to distance themselves from the Republican Party, especially that the difference in votes exceeded nine million in favor of Democrats. This means the relative economic progress Donald Trump achieved in the first two years of his term did not make the intended effect. It is noteworthy that many representatives of minorities, the disenfranchised, and the left won seats in those elections in an obvious defiance to the populist discourse adopted by the president¹⁴².

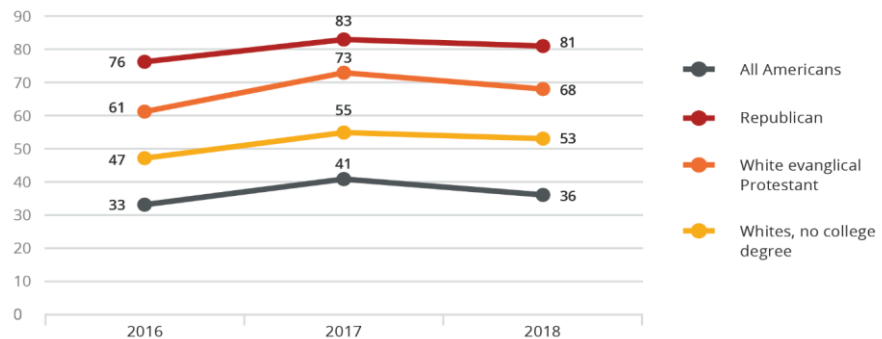
¹⁴¹ Claude Forthomme. "Populism's promises: Are Populist Leaders Delivering on Them?" January 6, 2019: <https://impakter.com/populisms-promises-are-populist-leaders-delivering-on-them/>

¹⁴² Mohamed El Menshawy. "The American right-wing and the Arab region [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives (under publication), p.6.

Despite his constant attempts at undermining democratic institutions, those institutions are still capable of aborting those attempts. Despite his eventual acquittal, Trump's impeachment was in itself proof the effectiveness of democratic institutions. As Figure (1) shows, Trump's popularity reached its peak in 2017, one year after he took office, then dropped in 2019 even among Republicans and white Anglicans.

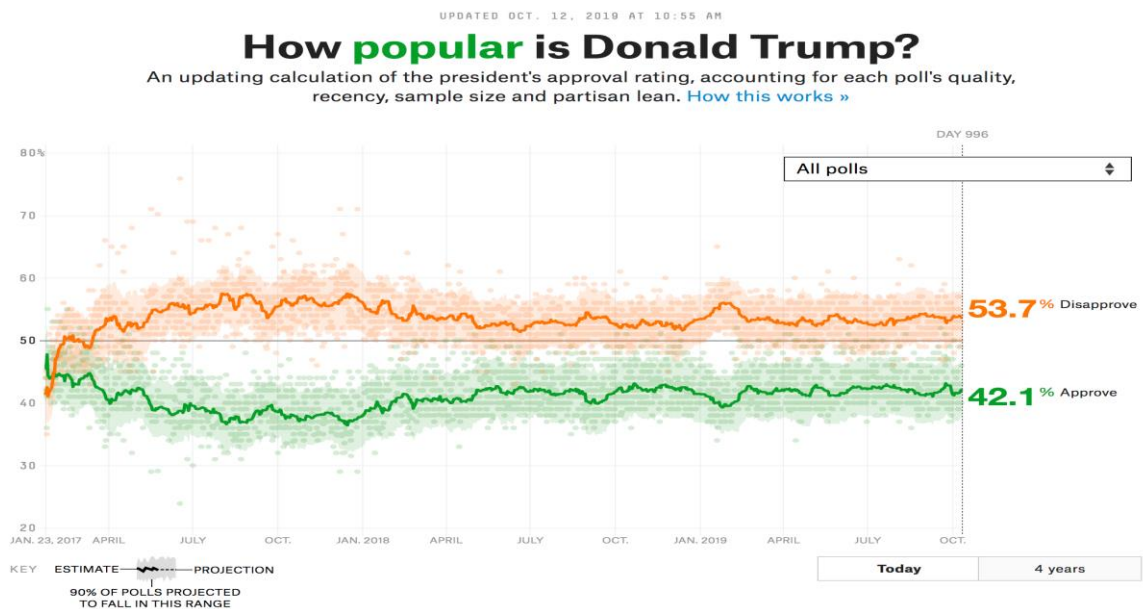
FIGURE 1. Trump's Favorability Among Republican Base Groups

Percent who say their overall opinion of Donald Trump is mostly or very favorable.



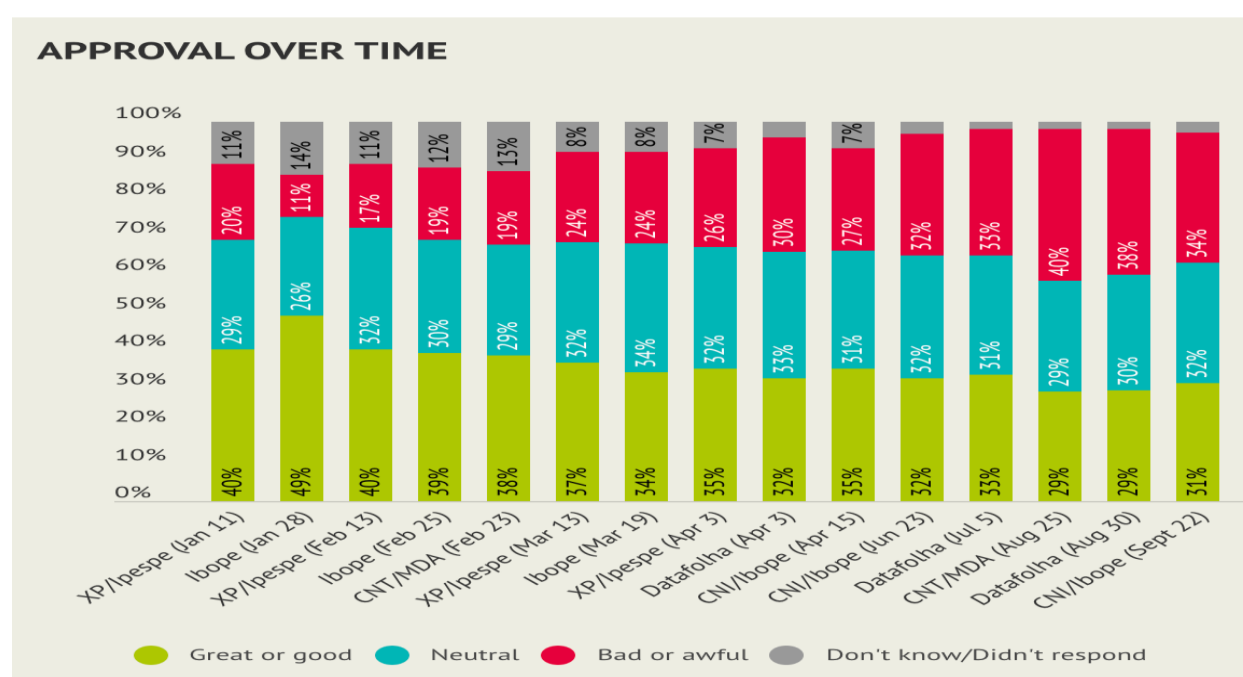
Sources: PRRI 2016 American Values Survey; PRRI 2017 American Values Survey; PRRI/The Atlantic 2019 Pluralism Survey.

Figure (2) shows how Trump's popularity continued dropping in 2019.



According to a study conducted by Tawfik Abdel Samad, Jair Bolsonaro rose to power through adopting a discourse that was relatively similar to that of Donald Trump for he criticized conventional democratic institutions, held the left-wing accountable for economic problems and the growing crime rate, was against immigration, and did not make women rights a priority.

However, his popularity started declining based on a study conducted by Brasil de Fato, which highlighted that the performance of Bolsonaro and his government was not up to expectations especially as far as social and economic plans are concerned. These include the modification of the pension system and the issue of landless farmers. Added to this are his political alliances and the way he deals with the opposition. He also appointed former military officers in official position, on top of whom is vice-resident Hamilton Mourão who announced before Bolsonaro's victory he was willing to stage a coup to seize power¹⁴³. Bolsonaro's popularity declined in the first six months of his rule with 32% of Brazilians seeing his performance as bad, which is shown in Figure (3).



The setbacks from which populism is suffering in the United States and Brazil did not stop it from expanding to the Arab region, particularly in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent Lebanon. In Egypt, populism gained momentum following the military intervention that overthrew Islamist president Mohamed Morsi in July 2013 and the authorization Egyptians gave to Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to fight terrorism in the same month. Egyptians at the time supported a populist discourse, which is still in control till the present moment. The rise of populism in Egypt is manifested in total bias to right-wing economic policies, repression of political parties and civil society, and total

¹⁴³ Tawfik Abdel Samad. "The extreme right-wing in Brazil [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives (under publication), p.11.

control of the media and the entertainment industry. The Egyptian regime uses the Muslim Brotherhood and terrorism to justify its policies and garner citizens' support for clamping down on opposition and several intellectuals and academics also declared their support for those policies. As part of its control of the political scene, the populist regime in Egypt put many in jail for charges such as joining an outlawed group, spreading rumors, and threatening national security.

Regional and international alliances played a major role in supporting populism in Egypt. The regime is backed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the US, and Russia. These countries not only supported the Egyptian regime politically on different international occasions, but also financially and that increased its chances at remaining in power¹⁴⁴. Despite the iron grip through which Egypt is ruled, protests erupted in September 2019. Even though those protests did not result in any substantial changes, they at least proved that the regime is not immune and that people's stance against democracy might not last for long. It is noteworthy that the promises given by the Egyptian populist regime, like its American counterpart, were not kept.

Saudi Arabia strongly supported the rise of authoritarian regimes and the repression of uprisings in the region. While the country has been undergoing cultural and social modernization, the populist right-wing under Mohamed bin Salman is incapable of achieving parallel political progress. The adoption of neoliberal policies meant restructuring the Saudi economy at the expense of citizens. Added to this is the tension caused by the conflict between the regime and clerics¹⁴⁵. All these factors are expected to cause instability in the kingdom for a while, especially in light of Saudi involvement in the war in Yemen and the fluctuating support of the United States.

Third: The potential of anti-populist discourse in the Arab region:

In addition to the restrictions populism faces in democratic countries, its popularity is also declining in different parts of the world. This is coupled by the emergence in 2019 of alternative discourses on both the regional and international levels and which gave hope for an imminent change.

After raising fuel prices, protests that gave rise to the Yellow Vests Movement erupted in France against social disparities and economic policies that decreased citizens' purchasing power. The

¹⁴⁴ Shima El Sharkawy. Op. cit.

¹⁴⁵ Omar Samir Khalaf. "The right wing in Saudi Arabia [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives (under publication).

movement, like others, does not have a leadership nor a unified discourse. Such movements are usually more spontaneous than organized and mainly aim at improving the living standards of citizens regardless of any partisan affiliations or conventional ideological divisions. The Yellow Vests Movement had a powerful impact on the European public opinion and similar protests erupted in west and central Europe. The movement inspired protests in Egypt and Lebanon, which erupted against capitalist policies, corruption, and nepotism¹⁴⁶. The movement inspired protests in several countries because it represented the suffering of the middle and lower classes as a result of capitalist policies and the subsequent decline of the state role in providing social services and the liberalization of the market. In other words, the movement revealed the structural fragility of democratic institutions in France¹⁴⁷.

Several democratic initiatives took place in the region. This was demonstrated in the popular movement that emerged in Sudan in 2013 and that finally managed to topple Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Protests in Sudan erupted for the same reasons that led to Arab uprisings, such as rising unemployment rates, the deterioration of living standards, and repression of the opposition. Civil society organizations and political factions managed to break state monopoly of the public sphere. One of the most important outcomes of the movement in Sudan is, as Azza Mustafa notes, the creation of a youths' base that managed to develop a unified conceptual framework for change that transcends partisan affiliations. The success of this movement can be attributed to a number of factors such as the fact that it was launched from the provinces and not the capital, the popular support it garnered, and its ability to transcend ideological divisions through uniting political parties, civil society, and some Sufi orders under one banner. In addition, the Sudanese regime was already not providing the people with any form of social security¹⁴⁸. The movement also managed to defeat the Islamist discourse adopted by the state since the 1989 coup and replace it with a secular, democratic one that does not include any religious, sectarian, or ethnic slogans¹⁴⁹.

Despite challenges, including political and economic pressures by Gulf countries or Egypt and developments in Libya, democracy in Tunisia is still maintained under the leadership of the General Tunisian Labor Union, civil society organizations, and leftist parties. However, Nissaf

¹⁴⁶ "Small squares' revolutions: Towards reshaping the political and social map in France [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives (under publication)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Azza Mustafa. Op. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Brahimi warns of excessive optimism about the Tunisian experience¹⁵⁰, especially with the recent rapprochement between the religious right-wing represented by al-Nahda Party and the secular right wing represented by the Nidaa Tunis Movement. While the two trends form a right-wing alliance and that might be alarming, yet it is an alliance that reflects Tunisians' wish to maintain the balance between Islamist and secular trends, which is one of the reasons for the success of the Tunisian experience unlike, for example, the case of Egypt.

In other words, the Tunisian experience cannot be reduced to the rise of the right-wing because the real test is how far the right-wing with its different factions would be capable of conforming to democratic values. The coming to power of Kais Saied could arguably be seen as an integral part of striking this balance since the democratic election of a university professor constitutes the third peaceful transition of power in the country, which is extremely rare in the Arab region. However, it is still important to deal with the Tunisian situation cautiously since Saied's discourse is characterized by populist features. He also did not belong to any political party or trend, which reveals that Tunisians might have lost faith in conventional political entities due to their inability to find solutions for economic problems, which provides a fertile soil for the rise of populism in the country.

Fourth: The future of democracy in the Arab region:

Studies conducted as part of the "Governance and democratic development in the Arab region" project reveal that despite the rise of populism on the regional and international levels including in democratic countries, the failure of Arab uprisings and democratic transition in the Arab region is far from certain. While the influence of populism grows, so is criticism levelled against it for not being capable of keeping its promises. That is why several anti-populist trends started gaining group whether in Europe, which was particularly demonstrated in the case of France, or in the region, which was demonstrated in protests that erupted in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and Egypt in addition to the Tunisian experience that has so far proven successful.

In order to determine the characteristics of potential democracies in the Arab region, it is important to look at the most prominent features of the post-2011 era. These can be summarized as follows:

¹⁵⁰ Nissaf Brahmi. "A study of the rise of the right-wing in Tunisia [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives (under publication).

First: The growing influence of military and security institutions:

The interval between 2011 and 2019 was mainly characterized by the growing influence of military and security institutions in the region especially as far as the decision-making process is concerned. This happened in Egypt when the military intervened to topple the Muslim Brotherhood regime in 2013, in Algeria in the last years of Abdel Aziz Bouteflika's rule, and in Sudan in the last years of Omar al-Bashir's rule. The same applies to the Gulf region particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where the role of the military increased remarkably following the two countries' involvement in the conflict in Yemen and their confrontation with Iran. Added to this is the role played by military and security institutions in helping Mohamed bin Salman take charge in Saudi Arabia. These institutions were also empowered across the region with the escalation of terrorist attacks and deepening internal divisions in several countries.

Second: The fragile nation state:

One of the most important components of right-wing populist discourse in the post-2011 era was the protection of the nation state against terrorism, chaos, and foreign intervention. However, this alleged objective did not materialize, for even though security and military institutions managed to take control of the decision-making process, the nation state they aimed at protecting appeared more fragile than it was before 2011. This fragility was manifested in the way the state failed at protecting its citizens and in the extent to which it opened the door for foreign intervention.

Third: Nationalization of politics and liberalization of the economy:

While neoliberal policies in the Arab region go back to the 1970s, they were fiercely implemented in the past seven years. Under these policies, the state withdrew social and economic support for its citizens. This was made worse by clamping down on all forms of opposition and closing the public sphere so that those citizens get no chance of voicing their grievances. The Arab economy is also based on crony capitalism¹⁵¹, in which there is no free competition in the market and only a few individuals and corporations monopolize both production and distribution. This superficial

¹⁵¹ Lisa Anderson. 2018. "Bread, Dignity and Social Justice: Populism in the Arab World." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Vol. 44(4). Pp. 478-490

liberalization is naturally accompanied by a matching political process in which citizens do not take part in the decision-making process.

Before 2011, the nation state maintained a more balanced equation for it did monopolize the public sphere yet offered social support whether through providing employment opportunities or subsidizing fuel and basic commodities. The current equation, meanwhile, deprives citizens of both and that is why protests always revolve around getting back economic support or at least having freedom of expression.

Fourth: Political and cultural awareness:

Despite the many losses that followed the 2011 uprisings, one of the most important gains is increased political and cultural awareness among average citizens in the Arab region. On the political level, citizens became aware of the meaning of constitution, elections, and political parties. In countries controlled by sectarian or tribal loyalties, popular movements managed to transcend those barriers and work on addressing the interests of the entire population through policies based on citizenship principles, fair distribution of wealth, and the rule of law. Cultural awareness was manifested in growing interest in women and minority rights and the ability to move beyond clerics' reactionary discourse. These developments are bound to play a major role in any future democratic transition.

Future scenarios:

Based on the above-mentioned factors, three scenarios are expected within the short and medium terms (two to four years from now).

First scenario:

Protests, similar to those that took place in 2010/2011, might erupt once more and call for radical reform. They could also take the form of civil disobedience or general strikes. The state is expected to crush those protests violently, which will most likely lead to clashes between protestors and security forces. The escalation of violence could force incumbent regimes to step down. If this happens in one country, a domino effect is expected to take place and other countries would follow suit. While the protests might yield the desired result, clashes between protestors and security forces are expected to be fiercer.

Second scenario:

Protests and popular movements in several countries such as Lebanon and Iraq would start fading away gradually and democratic transition that already took place in Sudan and Algeria would be reversed, hence taking the whole region back to square one. This would be followed by violent waves of repression as security institutions tighten their grip on citizens and could also be accompanied by an escalation in sectarian or tribal conflicts.

Third scenario:

Protests in the Arab region would continue but on a small scale. While movements that organize those protests might not prevail, they would still be able to put pressure on regimes in order to implement limited economic and political reforms. This might lead to less repressive measures and allow for more freedom in the public sphere while possibly offering more social and economic support to citizens.

It is more likely that the next four years will witness a combination of the first and third scenarios. In other words, there will be no going back to square one. Protest movements will be faced with several attempts at weakening them through, for example, playing the sectarianism card in Iraq and Lebanon or delaying reforms in Algeria and Sudan while no protests are expected to erupt in Egypt in the coming one or two years. However, overlooking demands by those movements is not expected to last for long and people are expected to rise once more if they realize that regimes not only have no intention of making any real changes but also make sure they keep manipulating the people into thinking that those changes are imminent. Such strategy is not expected to succeed on the long term, especially when repression becomes an old card that people no longer fear.

That is why the few coming years will either witness a new revolutionary wave that would reshape political, social, economic, and cultural equations in the region or the implementation of gradual reforms through constant pressure exercised by social movements. However, the materialization of one of those scenarios or a combination of both is contingent upon the following five factors:

First: The security approach needs to be replaced with a political one that no longer sees social movements and protests they stage as part of a conspiracy. This should be accompanied by the

realization that repression is bound to lead to explosion rather than stability and that politics is about negotiation rather than unilateral decision-making.

Second: A change in the global scene in which international populism, which supports autocratic regimes in the Arab world, declines would allow movements calling for reform to gain momentum, as was the case in Chile, and will give Arab people more incentive to demand a change.

Third: The ability of Arab movements to organize and transcend conventional divisions is necessary whether in negotiating with the state over reforms or in starting a new revolutionary wave that would only garner popular support if it has a unified leadership and common goals.

Fourth: Protests need to stay peaceful, which is expected to force regimes to negotiate. Like Georges Fahmi notes, violent protests are easier to repress because then regimes are justified in using force, hence defeating the whole purpose of the protest¹⁵².

Fifth: The alternative needs to be institutional and not populist. It is important in this regard to realize that populism is not only the approach adopted by regime, but also by people. With the exception of Tunisia, all other Arab uprisings saw the revolutionary discourse replaced by a populist one that is hostile to democratic institutions. Tunisia, in fact, offered a successful example because the revolutionary discourse was institutionalized right away. The only difference between the populism of post-2011 Arab regimes and revolutionary populism is that the first is right-wing and conservative while the second is left-leaning. Doing away with the populist approach and institutionalizing revolutionary movements is a crucial factor in determining the future of democratic transition in the Arab region.

¹⁵² Georges Fahmi. "The second wave of Arab uprisings: Five lessons learnt [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives: <http://tiny.cc/opiwiz> (accessed January 17, 2020)

Arab order under regional and international developments: Structural changes and institutional rigidity

Mohamed El Agati and Zeinab Sorour¹⁵³

The aftermath of Arab uprisings did not constitute the beginning of a new phase as much as the outcome of previous phases that contributed to shaping the post-revolutionary era. For example, the decline of state institutions in Egypt and Tunisia before the uprisings is closely related to the post-2011 rise of populist and right-wing discourses¹⁵⁴. Although protest movements in the Arab region were left-leaning, which was obvious in their demands, they were followed by the rise of the right-wing whether through political parties that won legislative elections in Iraq and Lebanon or through the use of populist discourse by the political elite in Egypt and Tunisia¹⁵⁵. The decline of state institutions is not the result of Arab uprisings, but is mainly attributed to the structure of the Arab state itself. The failure of the independence project is also thought to have played a major role in the decline of state institutions. Galal Amin, for example, argues that the 1967 defeat marked the beginning of this decline in Egypt¹⁵⁶.

The new Arab right-wing, as Wessam Saada calls it to set it apart from the Cold War-era right-wing that prioritized fighting communism, is based on three main arguments:

- Holding Arab socialism accountable for social and economic crises in the region
- Promoting the role of post-independence regimes in assisting liberal elites with the process of democratic transition

¹⁵³ Mohamed El Agati is a researcher in social science and an expert in civil society. He received his master degree in political development from the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University in 2001. His research and work focus on civil society organizations and coordination of projects, conferences, and workshops. He worked with several civil society organizations that focus on development and rights in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, and Sudan. He is an expert in strategic planning, training, skill building, and evaluation of civil society organization and is specialized in political reform in the Arab world, social movements, and civil society. His papers and articles are published in <http://elagati.wordpress.com/>

Zeinab Sorour is a journalist and assistant researcher at the Arab Forum for Alternatives. She is a Master student at the Lebanese University and her thesis is about cultural discourse in quarterly journalism in Lebanon. She received her B.A. in written journalism from the Lebanese University in 2012 and worked in several Lebanese cultural newspapers and magazines. She works in editing and language correction and is a civil society activist, particularly in the fields of public policies and public interest.

¹⁵⁴ Georges Fahmi. "The post-2011 rise of the Arab right-wing." Op. cit.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Galal Amin. "Egypt and Egyptians in the Mubarak era [Arabic]." Cairo: Merit Publishing House, 2011.

- Blaming the people for staging uprisings instead of waiting for the process of democratic transition promoted by the state and arguing that they need to pay the price for such impulsiveness¹⁵⁷.

This type of argument is not only employed by regimes, but is also adopted by several opposition factions. For example, the Islamist right-wing, represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, used a discourse that supported democratic values and political rights only to serve their interests. The Brotherhood had to abide by democratic procedures such as elections only to come to power in order to implement their own project that focused on the establishment of a religious state¹⁵⁸. When the Muslim Brotherhood came to power, their policies did not differ from those of the traditional right-wing. Social and economic rights were not given priority and unjust laws that deal with those rights either remained in place or were replaced by even more repressive ones¹⁵⁹.

First: The right-wing and a new balance of power:

In an article entitled “We’ve Got to Face it: Trump is Riding a Global Trend,” published on the eve of American presidential elections, Christian Caryl wrote that the extreme right takes different shapes and is not only spreading in the United States and Europe, but also all over the world. He cited the examples of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Egypt, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey. Caryl argues that the results of the Brexit referendum confirm how powerful the right-wing has become¹⁶⁰. In Egypt, Sisi was the spokesman of non-elitism at a time when political elites were unable to offer an alternative. A military figure with no political experience was believed to succeed at what political parties failed at. Trump had no political experience, but the only difference was that he had no military background¹⁶¹. The rise of the right-wing in Egypt was also closely linked to the war against terrorism¹⁶². The results of the Brexit referendum and the coming to power of Donald Trump were accompanied by many other examples of the rise of the right. This was demonstrated in the victories scored by right-wing parties in

¹⁵⁷ Wessam Saada. “The potential rise of a populist trend in the Arab region.” *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

¹⁵⁸ Ashraf El Sherif. “Egypt’s post-Mubarak predicament.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 29, 2014: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/01/29/egypt-s-post-mubarak-predicament-pub-54328>

¹⁵⁹ Shimaa El Sharkawy. Op. cit.

¹⁶⁰ Christian Caryl. “We’ve Got to Face it: Trump is Riding a Global Trend.” *Foreign Policy*, September 26, 2016: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/26/weve-got-to-face-it-trump-is-riding-a-global-trend/>

¹⁶¹ “The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context.” Op. cit.

¹⁶² Shimaa El Sharkawy. Op. cit.

different parts of Europe such as Poland, Hungary, and Italy and the increasing number of votes those parties got in the Netherlands, Sweden, and France¹⁶³.

On the economic level, the end of the Cold War and the parallel rise of neoliberalism¹⁶⁴ led to the revival of the right, which was demonstrated in the emergence of a new wave of right-wing and extreme right-wing movements in west and east Europe in the post-socialism era¹⁶⁵. This paved the way for accepting right-wing ideologies in the Arab region¹⁶⁶.

Neither the rise of right-wing parties in Europe nor their support for authoritarian regimes is new, but the situation is quite different in the aftermath of Arab uprisings as measures taken by post-2011 regimes against any form of resistance have become remarkably more repressive¹⁶⁷. While the rise of the right in Third World countries, such as Brazil, is not expected to have a direct impact on the Arab region, it will undoubtedly contribute to the spread and legitimacy of ideologies adopted by Arab regimes. This will be particularly demonstrated in issues where the far-right overlooks women and minority rights and which are already suffering from violations in the region¹⁶⁸. The growing influence of the far-right led to a wide-scale clampdown on civil society and protest movements through terrorism laws as well as laws that restricted political activities such as protests and strikes¹⁶⁹, and security forces targeted activists on regular basis¹⁷⁰. Arab right-wing regimes also try to present themselves as sources of balance in the region through offering more concessions on crucial issues¹⁷¹.

¹⁶³ Matt McAlester. "Brexit, Trump, Le Pen and the Rise of the Right: The Anger Goes Global." *The Independent*, November 2016: <https://goo.gl/TRGwNe>.

¹⁶⁴ The best critique of Neo-Liberalism from a leftist perspective is arguably David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007.

¹⁶⁵ On the rise of the far-right in Eastern Europe, see Michael Minkenberg, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Eastern Europe: Between Mainstreaming and Radicalization", *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (Volume 18, No.1), 2017: <https://www.georgetownjournalofinternationalaffairs.org/online-edition/2017/12/22/the-rise-of-the-radical-right-in-eastern-europe-between-mainstreaming-and-radicalization>

For more info see *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

¹⁶⁶ Georges Fahmi. Op. cit.

¹⁶⁷ Gennaro Gervasio. "The Emergence of the 'New Right' in Europe and its views on the main Arab issues." *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

¹⁶⁸ Tawfik Abdel Sadek. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Brazil [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives: <https://bit.ly/2KVYbD6>

¹⁶⁹ Shima El Sharkawi. Op. cit.

¹⁷⁰ "Cloning repression: Freedom of expression in the Arab region in 2013 [Arabic]." The Arabic Network for Human Rights, May 2014: <http://is.gd/mhMRgp>

¹⁷¹ Omar Samir Khalaf. Op. cit.

These developments were accompanied by a change in the balance of power that tipped in favor of the Gulf camp under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the UAE¹⁷² at the expense of other powers that historically played a leading role in the region. Egypt, for example, shifted from initiating and leading the progressive project under the banner of Arab nationalism to a sheer member of an alliance led by Gulf countries¹⁷³. The death of Gamal Abdel Nasser, together with the oil boom and migration to the Gulf, started a new phase that replaced the Arab nationalist project with a religious one. Egypt's isolation after the signing of the peace treaty with Israel followed by its decline in the Mubarak era and the dominance of Wahabi ideologies were also important factors that contributed to this shift¹⁷⁴. When Arab uprisings erupted, they constituted a major threat to Gulf monarchies. That is why Saudi Arabia made sure that those uprisings turn into a sectarian conflict that places the region under the leadership of the Sunni camp, which came to replace the regional Arab order that existed in the post-independence era. This shift would not have been possible had the regional Arab order not been defective to start with. Such defectiveness was mainly demonstrated in the status of minorities, the inefficiency of the Arab League, and the absence of democracy, social justice, and citizenship principles¹⁷⁵.

Sectarianism was used as a counter-revolutionary strategy by Saudi Arabia in order to make the balance of power in the region religious rather than political. The Saudi regime practices this on the domestic level with the persecution of the Shiite minority and emphasis on the Sunni identity of the state. The gradual replacement of the national discourse with a religious one was made easier by the decline of left-leaning and secular national movements and the rise of political Islam¹⁷⁶. Meanwhile, the violent turn revolutions in Libya and Syria took provided a fertile soil for the rise of populism at the expense of revolutionary discourse. The coming to power of Donald Trump also gave populism across the world more influence¹⁷⁷.

Developments that took place in the region had a remarkable impact on crucial issues such as the Palestinian cause, which was at the center of the old regional order. The post-revolutionary era

¹⁷² "The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context." Op. cit.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Mohamed El Agati. "A new regional order or a global disaster in the making? [Arabic]." *Assafir al-Arabi*, October 14, 2016: <https://bit.ly/2IB9E0x>

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Madawi al-Rashid. "Sectarianism as counter-revolution: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring [Arabic]." *Bidayat*, 2017: <https://www.bidayatmag.com/node/845>

¹⁷⁷ Mohamed El Agati. Op. cit.

saw the emergence of new alliances formed by the growing influence of non-Arab players such as Turkey, Iran, and Israel. The emerging alliances were directly linked to the new view adopted by the Gulf region and which replaces Israel with Iran as the main enemy and divides the region along sectarian lines. The national Arab discourse was, therefore, overshadowed by the Sunni camp¹⁷⁸.

In 2016, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi spoke at the UN about the suffering of Palestinians, ending the occupation, and the rights of the Palestinian people. In 2017, this discourse was replaced by the necessity of coexistence with Israelis, which marks a substantial change in Egypt's official position on the Arab-Israeli conflict¹⁷⁹. In Tunisia, a draft law submitted to the parliament by a nationalist bloc to criminalize normalization with Israel was manipulated¹⁸⁰. This also applied to right-wing parties in other parts of the world. In Italy, Matteo Salvini supported Israel citing its alleged war against terrorism. Salvini's party, the Lega Nord, also refused in a parliament debate any attempts at unilaterally recognizing Palestine as an independent state¹⁸¹.

When Trump came to power in the United States, he took several steps towards undermining the Palestinian cause, starting with recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's unified capital, hence robbing the cause of one of its most important symbols¹⁸². This was followed by a decision to stop funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), which constituted the start of a plan to turn the Palestinian right of return to a refugee issue¹⁸³ as a step towards undermining the cause altogether¹⁸⁴. The decision to reduce UNRWA funding by USD 300 million doubled the crisis the agency had already been going through since 2017¹⁸⁵. The agency was facing an existential crisis and was only saved when it launched a global fundraising campaign in Gaza under the name "Dignity is priceless" in order to make up for lost American funding and start a new strategy in which funding is not dependent on a few major donors¹⁸⁶. Despite efforts to continue working, the UNRWA is expected to face another problem as the United States and Israel

¹⁷⁸ "The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context." Op. cit.

¹⁷⁹ Shima El Sharkawy. Op. cit.

¹⁸⁰ Belal Aboud. "Will Tunisia criminalize normalization? Or will Israelis keep visiting? [Arabic]" *Al-Mayadeen TV*, June 13, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2J2Pjte>

¹⁸¹ <https://www.leganord.org/notizie/le-news-2/13791-palestina-mozione-lega-no-stato-sovrano-senza-intesa-con-israele>

¹⁸² "Trump annuls Palestinian right of return: US stops funding the UNRWA [Arabic]." *Al-Akhbar*, September 1, 2018: <https://al-akhbar.com/Palestine/257138>

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ "Trump stops funding the UNRWA: Reasons and context [Arabic]." Arab Center for Research, September 9, 2018: <https://bit.ly/2l15ni0>

¹⁸⁵ "Is the UNRWA facing another existential crisis in 2019? Why does its spokesman want to end its works? UN News, April 26, 2019: <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2019/04/1031821>

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

work on stopping the renewal of the agency's mandate at the UN General Assembly¹⁸⁷. This would mean robbing the agency of the political protection that guarantees the continuation of its work or might lead to reducing the number of Palestinian refugees the Agency provides for from five million, which is the registered number at the present time, to a few thousands¹⁸⁸.

In the same context, the proposals made by Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed are seen as the core of the plan proposed by Jared Kushner, Trump's senior advisor and son-in-law, to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict¹⁸⁹, also called "the deal of the century." Since Trump came to power in 2017, the American Administration vowed to present its vision of peace in the Middle East within a few months, yet nothing is still known about this vision and no draft of it has been written¹⁹⁰. Despite lack of an official version of this plan, Trump's administration seems to have decided to implement it on the ground right away through a series of decisions¹⁹¹ rather than announce it first and be faced with Arab objections. Ironically, declaring Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel and attempts at undermining the UNRWA were blessed, even if not publicly, by several Arab countries. Regimes in these countries no longer see Israel as their enemy, therefore ending Israeli occupation is no longer a priority for them. However, they did not publicly support the plan since the Palestinian Authority rejected it in principle and because the Palestinian cause still enjoys substantial support in the Arab street. The Bahrain conference discussed the economic aspect of the plan and was, according to Trump, meant to collect USD 50 million as investments¹⁹². While Palestinians boycotted the conference, several Arab countries participated under the pretext that they welcome any initiative that would improve the living standards of Palestinians¹⁹³, as Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir said. In addition to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco took part in the conference despite wide-scale objections both to the conference and to the economic solutions it was supposed to offer.

¹⁸⁷ Hani Ibrahim. "After funding crisis, UNRWA faces renewal crisis [Arabic]." *Al-Akbar*, May 13, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2lmhqM2>

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ David Kirkpatrick. "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn't M.B.S. It's M.B.Z." *New York Times*, June 2, 2018: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-zayed.html>

¹⁹⁰ Mohamed El Menshawy. "The deal of the century is not announced, only applied [Arabic]." June 20, 2019: <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=20062019&id=87b12efa-745f-4072-aff7-7551f1cf6131>

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² "Bahrain workshop: Why do Palestinians reject money for political resolution? [Arabic]" *France 24*, June 25, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2mLNZ6k>

¹⁹³ Bou Allam Ghabasgi. "Which countries are attending Bahrain's conference on the deal of the century? [Arabic]" *France 24*, June 25, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2NgaSvH>

All the above-mentioned developments undermined the credibility of joint Arab initiatives in the last few years and the Arab League became no longer capable of doing its job¹⁹⁴. This was accompanied by the implicit legitimization of direct intervention in Arab affairs, whether militarily or politically¹⁹⁵. All this means that the Arab regional order is entering a new phase on both economic and political levels, one characterized by a remarkable change in the balance of power as well as in the arrangement of priorities.

Second: The new regional order:

In light of the above-mentioned developments, the main features of the new Arab regional order can be initially identified.

1-The role of non-Arab powers:

In the old regional order, the main conflict was between progressive and reactionary camps, represented by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, respectively. Each of them was allied to one of the two superpowers at the time: Egypt to the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia to the United States¹⁹⁶. The post-revolutionary era witnessed the creation of new alliances that involved non-Arab powers such as Turkey, Iran, and Israel. Many argue that these alliances played a major role in shaping the post-revolutionary era, including taking several measures to make sure the region does not witness more uprisings that might threaten the current regional order¹⁹⁷. The Riyadh summit, held in May 2017, underlined the creation of a new alliance comprised of different right-wing agendas that all share a number of features including rejection of the Arab Spring, normalization with Israel, supporting the deal of the century, backing the war in Yemen, and promoting the creation of an Arab NATO¹⁹⁸.

The last decade witnessed Turkey's powerful comeback to the Arab region after almost a century of absence. With a new world order in the making, Turkey, like all other countries, needed to

¹⁹⁴ "Regional changes and global transformations [Arabic]." *Reforming and developing the 'Arab regional order*. The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship, p.14 : http://www.activearabvoices.org/uploads/8/0/8/4/80849840/4mar19_-_las_arabic_-_digital.pdf

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ "The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context." Op. cit.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Mohamed El Menshawy. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: The United States [Arabic]." Op. cit.

choose where it stands and adopt a new strategy in accordance with geo-political developments¹⁹⁹. Turkey's current strategy is implemented in a number of levels. On the political level, Turkey improved its relations with Arab countries and adopted the slogan of "zero problems with neighbors." On the economic level, Turkey signed several free trade agreements with Arab countries and worked on establishing free trade zones to allow the free movement of goods and labor across the Middle East. On the social and cultural levels, Turkey attempted to gain popularity among Arabs through its soft power, which was particularly demonstrated in the success of Turkish soap operas across the region²⁰⁰. Turkey played a major military role in Syria since the conflict started between the state and armed groups²⁰¹. This role cannot be separated from Turkey's conflict with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and its link to Kurds in Syria. Regarding Israel, Turkey made sure to attack the Hebrew state and champion the Palestinian cause on many occasions, which earned it the trust of many Arab leaders and influence inside the Arab League²⁰².

Iran, on the other hand, became a major player in the Arab region after 2011, particularly in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Iran took advantage of the developments that took place in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, the rise of Islamist fundamentalist groups such as ISIS and al-Nusra, the rise to power of Donald Trump in the United States, and the creation of a Sunni alliance under the leadership of Saudi Arabia to restore its regional influence²⁰³. Iran did everything in its capacity to keep Bashar al-Assad in power in Syria²⁰⁴, which was demonstrated in the political, financial, and military support Iranian intelligence and security agencies offered the Syrian state. Such support was taken to another level when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and intelligence and law enforcement agencies started having a physical presence inside Syria, which constitutes a remarkable development in which Iran proved its ability to extend its military power outside its territories²⁰⁵. Added to this is Iran's ties to Hezbollah, which fights in Syria alongside the regime. In Yemen, Iran's role had for a long time been quite marginal, yet this changed with the protests

¹⁹⁹ Bassel al-Hajjar. "Turkish strategic developments [Arabic]." *Lebanese National Defense Magazine*, issue 104, April 2018: <https://bit.ly/35rXVUk>

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Abdullah al-Sweiji. "The Turkish role in Syria [Arabic]." *Al-Khaleej*, February 19, 2018: <http://www.alkhaleej.ae/studiesandopinions/page/7fa5830b-bec3-4e2f-ab29-e8869ed9f259>

²⁰² Jana Jabour. "Turkey and the Arab League [Arabic]." *Reforming and developing the 'Arab regional order'* [Arabic], p.34. Op. cit.

²⁰³ Feras Ilias. "The future of Iran's regional position in the Middle East [Arabic]" :<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/391183>

²⁰⁴ Will Fulton, Joseph Holliday, Sam Wyer. "Iranian Strategy in Syria." Institute For The Study Of War: <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/iranian-strategy-syria>

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

that erupted in 2011 and 2012. True, Iran was not part of the negotiations that ended with Ali Abdullah Saleh's resignation, yet it started supporting the Houthis around this time. This support became public after the successful military operation carried out by the Houthis and Saleh loyalists in the summer of 2014²⁰⁶. Iran's policies in Iraq are still affected by the Iranian-Iraqi war (1980-1988)²⁰⁷ and for the past few years, Iran has been supporting the Iraqi army and the Popular Mobilization Forces, which were formed based on a religious edict issued by Shiite cleric Ali al-Sistani. Former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki described the Iranian role in Iraq as essential in helping Iraq fight al-Qaeda and ISIS and added that had it not been for Iranian weapons and military expertise, Iraq would have been in an extremely difficult situation²⁰⁸.

2-The revision of Sykes-Picot:

International powers played a major role in directing developments in the region especially as far as supporting the creation of alliances is concerned. This was mainly demonstrated in the Russian intervention in Syria and US support for the alliance led by the Saudi Arabia and the UAE and their military intervention in Yemen²⁰⁹. Russia's comeback to the region is no longer based on an ideological discourse as was the case in the past, but rather focused on economic and military cooperation on one hand²¹⁰ and employing new tools, such as Russia Today channel, in order to present itself as an alternative to the West, particularly the US, on the other hand²¹¹.

After World War One, the structure of the Arab region was based on the division of the states that were controlled by the Ottoman Empire. The two powers that controlled previous Ottoman colonies, Britain and France, adopted a new system of dominance: neocolonialism. This system was based on colonizing those states through local authorities that work under the supervision of the two colonial powers and creating new nation states along sectarian lines under the pretext of

²⁰⁶ Gerald M. Feierstein. "Iran's Role in Yemen and Prospects for Peace." Middle East Institute, December 12, 2018: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-role-yemen-and-prospects-peace>

²⁰⁷ Ali Reda Nader. "Iran's role in Iraq: Is there a way the US and Iran can cooperate?" Rand Corporation: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE100/PE151/RAND_PE151z1.arabic.pdf

²⁰⁸ "Who stopped Iraq's collapse? Al-Maliki answers [Arabic]" *Al-Alam TV*, November 25, 2014: <https://bit.ly/2M7UzOX>

²⁰⁹ Perry Cammack and Michele Dunne. "Fueling Middle East conflicts- or dousing the flames." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 21, 2019: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/23/fueling-middle-east-conflicts-or-dousing-flames-pub-77548>

²¹⁰ Nawar Jalil Hashem and Amjad Zein el-Abedin Teama. "The Russian stance on Arab revolutions [Arabic]." *Siyasat Arabiya*, 2015: https://siyasatarabiya.dohainstitute.org/ar/issue012/Documents/Siyassat12-2015_Hisham.pdf

²¹¹ Abdel Hadi al-Ajala. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Russia [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2ohTdYV>

protecting religious minorities²¹². Following the 2011 uprisings, there emerged an international inclination towards changing this structure in a way that serves the interests of major powers. It is worth noting that many factions that used to oppose the divisions initiated by colonial powers since they disrupt the unity of the Arab nation became in favor of further divisions. These include nationalist factions and a considerable part of the Left, which saw that dividing what is already divided would not make a difference. On the other hand, factions that saw the Sykes-Picot agreement as the best available solution turned against the idea of division and started calling for an alternative system that adapts more to globalization and international developments. These include the majority of right-wing factions, including Islamists who revived the idea of the caliphate.

3-The fragile structure of Arab states:

In the Arab region, there is no distinction between the state (legal, administrative, and bureaucratic structures that aim at regulating the relationship between civil society and the authorities as well as the relationship between members of civil society) and the regime (the rules the govern relationships within the center of political power as well as the relationship between those in power and citizens). This lack of distinction is directly linked to the fact that nation states in the Arab region were created from the top down, whether by ruling elites or colonial powers²¹³. The creation of the nation state in the Arab region was based on lack of democracy, which in turn led to the absence of one of the most principles upon which democracy is based: citizenship²¹⁴. The result is political regimes that are detached from the people and a system of governance in which people have no say. Owing to the absence of the principle of citizenship, Arab societies were divided along tribal, sectarian, ethnic, linguistic, or religious lines, hence undermining any sense of national belonging, creating fragile state institutions, and discriminating between citizens of the same country whether in legislations or practice²¹⁵. In his book *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*, Nazih Ayubi distinguishes between “strong” and “fierce” states and notes that while Arab countries with their authoritarian regimes and powerful

²¹² Fawwaz Traboulsi. “On the 100th anniversary of Sykes–Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration.” *Developments in the Arab region and the impact of international changes: Between populist trends and alternative voices*. Op. cit.

²¹³ Georges Fahmi. Op. cit.

²¹⁴ Mohamed El Agati and Shima El Sharkawy. “Citizenship and Arab protests: A reading in post-revolutionary constitutions, structure, and reality [Arabic].” Paper submitted to a conference entitled The impact of Arab uprisings on citizenship in the Arab world: <https://bit.ly/2k9kUAY>

²¹⁵ Ibid.

intelligence agencies and national security apparatuses would seem strong, they are in fact fierce. According to Ayubi, fierce states are actually very weak from within since they are unable to control society through soft power and are not popular among the majority. Therefore, the state needs to resort to harsh measures to implement its policies²¹⁶. Right before the eruption of the uprisings, this structure had reached the peak of its fragility²¹⁷ and the state in Arab countries became unable to generate mechanisms through which it can modernize and cope with global developments whether on the political or technological level²¹⁸.

4-Arab uprisings, new equations:

Arab uprisings revealed the urge youths in the region had to introduce a change that would lead to the establishment of a modern, democratic nation state and underlined the sacrifices they were willing to offer to make that happen²¹⁹. Youths did not only play a major role on the ground through taking part in the protests, but they were also the leaders of those uprisings. This is particularly demonstrated in the calls for the January 25 revolution in Egypt and which was initiated by youths²²⁰. This does not come as a surprise in countries where the majority of the population are youths. In fact, the average age of Arab population, 370 million, is 24 years old²²¹.

The new Arab generation is distinguished from previous ones on many levels. Older generations went through worse economic crises and were satisfied with middle-income jobs while the new generation was more ambitious and more capable of rejecting what they saw as an oppressive reality. This was demonstrated in their stance on authoritarian governments, especially following the emergence of the bequest of power scenario²²². The new generation also had the awareness that enabled it to rise above social, class, and ideological differences to unite for one purpose: change²²³.

²¹⁶ Georges Fahmi. Op. cit.

²¹⁷ For more on sectarianism see Madawi al-Rashid. Op. cit.

²¹⁸ Ahmed Abd Rabou. "On Gulf politics in Egypt [Arabic]." *Al-Shorouk*, February 13, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2X1ZQd9>

²¹⁹ Kazem al-Mousawi. "On the new Arab uprisings [Arabic]." *Al-Akhbar*, May 20, 2019: <https://al-akhbar.com/Opinion/270711>

²²⁰ *Unconventional forms of youth political activism in Egypt: Before, during, and after the revolution* [Arabic]. Arab Forum for Alternatives, p.11.

²²¹ Radwan Ziada. "Youths and Arab Spring revolutions [Arabic]." *Al-Hayat*, August 22, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2ID7yxq>

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

The different alliances formed by youths at the time of uprisings demonstrate their ability to overcome such difference²²⁴. Students played a major role in Arab revolutions, particularly in Egypt, Algeria, and Sudan.

Before the eruption of the uprisings, Arab youths found themselves facing two realities: an international reality that revealed a remarkable decline in conventional political participation across the world and a regional one in which Arab state institutions grew more fragile and legitimate channels of political participation became almost nonexistent²²⁵. Youths found no way for political participation other than the internet and social networking websites, from which calls for protests started. This was particularly the case in Egypt, where youths used social media to overstep state institutions in the Mubarak era²²⁶. Virtual space offered an alternative and an independent media outlet that offered a counter-narrative and defied the official story. This space was occupied by different forms of resistance including songs, jokes, and revolutionary slogans that contributed to garnering support for the protests while official media was discredited²²⁷. This shift in channels of expression became the most distinguishing feature of younger generations that looked for unconventional ways not only to voice its indignation, but also to make a statement of defying traditional forms of communication, which were practically closed, and opting for a freer space that distanced them from conventional political alliances²²⁸.

As conventional political parties proved their inability to integrate younger generations and make their demands part of their agendas²²⁹, youth movements emerged and expanded. Those movements, which started coming up with different strategies for having their demands met, were not affiliated to a particular ideology or political trend for they were united through their rejection of the current reality in the Arab region and their quest for a real change²³⁰. Youth movements differed from one country to another whether in terms of numbers, diversity, strategies, organization, and communication as well as in their success or failure.

²²⁴ “Unconventional forms of youth political activism.” Op. cit. p.11.

²²⁵ Mariam Mekhaimar. “Conventional political participation in Egypt: Obstacles and challenges [Arabic].” *Unconventional forms of youth political activism in Egypt*. Op. cit. p.121.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ *Unconventional forms of youth political activism in Egypt*. Op. cit. p.11.

²²⁸ Amr Abdel Rahman. “The Internet and the Egyptian revolution: Democracy and the quest for a place in the world [Arabic].” Op. cit. p.161.

²²⁹ Azza Mustafa. Op. cit.

²³⁰ Badr al-Ibrahim. “Arab youth movements in the revolutionary era [Arabic].” Al-Jazeera: <https://bit.ly/2lza8EI>

In Egypt, the tactics used by youth movements created during the January 25 revolution to put pressure on officials became no longer an effective means for achieving political, social, and economic demands²³¹. That is why youth movements were called upon to look for other tactics to have their demands met, which was arguably not possible without the creation of a strong structure and a clear strategy for addressing pressing issues²³². Regardless of the success of some and the failure of others, youth movements adopted similar strategies more or less. For example, they were decentralized and did not have leaders around which their members rallied, both being common traits in Arab uprisings in general. They also adopted a discourse based on citizenship and rights regardless of ideological differences and they all have strong mobilization skills²³³. Added to this is the fact that youth movements were mostly peaceful. Because of these common traits and because of course of a common language, these movements were able to communicate with each other, share their experiences, and propose solutions while doing away with the old nationalist discourse that older generations supported.

5-The rise of sub-identities:

The new regional order is characterized by the intensification of old problems that were previously overlooked by post-independence nation states such as minorities and the principles of citizenship. This was the result of recent emphasis on sub-identities, whether sectarian, religious, ethnic, or regional, at the expense of a collective national identity, which in turn led to the failure of creating the modern nation state²³⁴. Minorities in the Arab region have for several decades suffered from persecution and marginalization, which led many of them to start asserting their identity and demanding their rights. However, authoritarian governments never responded owing to their fear of empowering minorities and the effect it might have on their influence²³⁵. Since the early 1960s, the Kurdish problem in Iraq, then Syria, constituted a major transformation in the historical pattern of the issue of minorities in the Middle East²³⁶.

²³¹ Rania Zada. "Youth movements and democratic transition in Egypt [Arabic]." Arab Forum for Alternatives: <https://bit.ly/2nNUnur>

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Badr al-Ibrahim. Op. cit.

²³⁴ *Reforming and developing the 'Arab regional order*. Op. cit. p.14.

²³⁵ Mohamed El Agati. "Citizenship and social components in the Arab region after the revolution: Resuming structure or changing path? [Arabic]" *Citizenship and social components in the Arab region*. Arab Forum for Alternatives. p.38.

²³⁶ Rostom Mahmoud. "The future of citizenship and the Kurdish issue [Arabic]." *Citizenship and social components in the Arab region*. Op. cit. p.233.

In the 1970s, Egypt witnessed a rise in minority discourses, which was demonstrated in the religious and cultural demands voiced by Christians and Nubians²³⁷. Such initiatives are always suppressed by conservative, authoritarian regimes that adopt a discourse that does not embrace diversity²³⁸. Amazigh communities in several Arab countries have always suffered from cultural marginalization and inability to participate in the decision-making process on both political and institutional levels²³⁹. Minority identities started emerging in the public sphere as an alternative to Arab identity rather than one of its components. In 1967, the Moroccan Association for Research and Cultural Exchange was created in Rabat and became the first Amazigh entity in the country. Even though the association focused in the beginning on culture and folklore, other entities created in the 1970s and 1980s changed their discourse through voicing more direct demands²⁴⁰. In the case of Sudan, society became divided between the Arabist/Islamist discourse, which was right-wing and supported by Islamist groups, especially among youths and Sufi orders which were used as a tool to reach popular movements, and the African/Christian/non-religious discourse, which was left-wing, opposed Islamization and ethnic and tribal divisions, and supported the creation of a secular state. Such a split, with all the debates it gave rise to, has a substantial impact on the Sudanese society and could play a role in reviving the concept of a national identity that transcends ideological affiliations²⁴¹.

6-Neoliberalism and the decline of state role:

As the role of the post-independence Arab state in providing social safety networks declined remarkably, a neoliberal economy started taking control. Arab uprisings underlined the link between neoliberal economies and growing poverty and employment rates, corruption, and price hikes. They also revealed the way this economic pattern is closely associated with authoritarian regimes²⁴².

²³⁷ Georges Fahmi. "The crisis of citizenship in Egypt: Why did youth movements fail in demanding a citizenship state? The case of the Maspero Youth Union and Nubian Youths Democratic Union [Arabic]." *Citizenship and social components in the Arab region*. Op. cit. p.67.

²³⁸ The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context." Op. cit.

²³⁹ Youssef Laaraj. "Citizenship and cultural diversity: Amazigh in North Africa: The case of Morocco [Arabic]." *Citizenship and social components in the Arab region*. Op. cit. p.249.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p.250-51.

²⁴¹ Azza Mustafa. Op. cit.

²⁴² "For all seasons of change [Arabic]." *Bidayat*, Winter/Spring 2012: <https://www.bidayatmag.com/node/193>

This association is explained through the nature of Arab authoritarian regimes. Neoliberal economies constituted a way out for those regimes, both monarchies and republics, since their international legitimacy is fragile while their domestic legitimacy is almost nonexistent, especially after no longer providing social services for their citizens²⁴³. This economic pattern worked across the Arab region since most Arab regimes shared the same traits: they were police states in which wealth is controlled by a minority and power takes a tribal/familial shape and where a rentier economy that focuses on real estate and services is dominant²⁴⁴.

The Tunisian revolution, like other uprisings, erupted against neoliberal policies that led to the impoverishment of large segments of the Arab population²⁴⁵. In Syria, the gap between the rich and the poor reached its peak with only 5% of the population in control of 50% of wealth²⁴⁶. Bashar al-Assad's rule signaled the start of replacing state capitalism, created by his father Hafez al-Assad, with neoliberal restructuring. This transformation required offering a lot of concessions as far as the structure of the Syrian economy is concerned based on instructions by the International Monetary Fund²⁴⁷. As a result, the structure of the Syrian economy witnessed remarkable deterioration and a cash flow problem started as wealth became controlled by new businessmen²⁴⁸. That is why it was mainly impoverished youths that called for and participated in the protests²⁴⁹.

Post-revolutionary governments failed, however, to break this cycle of poverty and social injustice through reconsidering their relationship with the International Monetary Fund. In addition to the already existing problem of growing population and unbalanced development²⁵⁰, the interests of those governments were closely linked to the global system.

²⁴³ "On Revolution and war in Syria [Arabic]." Interview with Fawwaz Traboulsi. *Bidayat*, issue 5, 2013: <https://www.bidayatmag.com/node/349>

²⁴⁴ Salameh Kaileh. "The Syrian revolution: Reality, destiny, and horizons [Arabic]." *Atlas for Cultural Production and Publication* [Arabic]. 1st edition, 2013, p. 15.

²⁴⁵ Wael Gamal. "The jasmine uprising in Tunisia [Arabic]." *Al-Shorouk*, January 18, 2011: <https://www.shorouknews.com/columns/view.aspx?cdate=18012011&id=19842774-92a2-4165-81b6-f5cf7b5adb64>

²⁴⁶ Yasser Mounif and Omar Dahi. "Neoliberalism and repression in Syrai [Arabic]." *Bidayat*, issue no.1, Winter/Spring 2012: <https://www.bidayatmag.com/node/258>

²⁴⁷ Interview with Fawwaz Traboulsi. Op. cit.

²⁴⁸ Salameh Kaileh. Op. cit. p.18.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p.20-21.

²⁵⁰ *Reforming and developing the 'Arab regional order*. Op. cit. p.14.

This was demonstrated in the case of the Egyptian government, which represented the right-wing in both its religious and authoritarian forms. Post-revolutionary president Mohamed Morsi, who belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood, worked since coming to power in June 2012 on getting loans from the IMF²⁵¹, which was also done by the authoritarian right-wing that came power after June 30, 2013. Starting November 2016, the Egyptian regime started making drastic decisions as part of an economic reform program linked to a USD 12 billion loan from the IMF²⁵².

The growing influence of the neoliberal discourse that called for privatization and the liberalization of the economy led to the deterioration of industry and agriculture at times in favor of the service sector and at others in favor of knowledge economy. A new right-wing emerged in the Arab region and based its discourse on the argument that all political, economic, and social problems are the result of previous regimes' adoption of socialist systems²⁵³. The new Arab right-wing is different from the one that existed at the time of the Cold War and focused on an anti-Communist discourse. The new trend, however, considers the public sector its main enemy and works on using state institutions to serve its interests and those of its supporters²⁵⁴.

After coming to power in different parts of the world, the populist right-wing proved that its stance on economic and social rights is not different from its stance on political rights. Its main objective is to restore the power of the state even if at the expense of citizens, which is mainly demonstrated in its economic policies²⁵⁵.

7-The Palestinian cause: Official and popular stances:

One of the most distinguishing features of the new regional order is that Israel is no longer the enemy over which Arab countries are unified. In Lebanon, for example, a group of leftist youths launched a campaign called We Want Accountability.

²⁵¹ "IMF to loan Egypt 12 billion dollars [Arabic]." *Rueters Arabic*, August 11, 2016: <http://bit.ly/2IKL06X>

²⁵² Osman al-Sharnouby. "Analysts: A new wave of price hikes in the coming months [Arabic]." July 12, 2017: <https://goo.gl/Dju66h>

²⁵³ Wessam Saada. Op. cit.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Shimaa El Sharkawy. Op. cit.

When the group was getting ready for taking part in the 2018 elections, several of its members were against adding resistance and considering Israel the enemy to the group's political platform²⁵⁶. This dispute led the group to split in two factions²⁵⁷.

This transformation was the result of extensive efforts to replace the Arab-Israeli conflict with a Sunni-Shiite one. Within this framework, Saudi Arabia announced in December 2015 forming an Islamic coalition of 41 countries under its leadership to fight terrorism. This coalition did not succeed in fighting ISIS, yet paved the way for other alliances such as the Arab coalition in Yemen as well as attempts at creating an Arab NATO that considers Iran its main enemy²⁵⁸.

While the Palestinian cause is being overlooked on the official level, this is not the case across the Arab region. This is demonstrated in the discourse adopted by new political players in the region and who declared their solidarity with Gaza against Israeli strikes. This form of political activism rejects governments' attempts at promoting normalization with Israel as part of their attempt to gain international legitimacy²⁵⁹.

Third: An old order in a new form:

The developments that led to the creation of a new regional order led to the emergence of new conflicts or the revival of old ones, both leading to a series of armed struggles the region has never witnessed before. These struggles led in many countries, such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya, to the failure of the state and the growing influence of terrorist groups. The chaos that followed paved the way for the acceptance of a nationalist discourse that prioritized the war against terrorism over reforming state institutions²⁶⁰. Large segments of the population across the Arab region supported this discourse and accepted replacing demands for democracy and social justice with the prioritization of national security²⁶¹.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Ali Hammoud and Mohamed Hateet, members of the political committee of the Youth Movement for Change, July 5, 2018, Beirut, Lebanon.

²⁵⁷ Abbas Assi. "The impact of international developments on the Arab region: Lebanon [Arabic]." Paper series, Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2kje9ww>

²⁵⁸ Omar Samir Khalaf. Op. cit.

²⁵⁹ "The Arab region between domestic changes and the international context." Op. cit.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Georges Fahmi. Op. cit.

Four major factors led to the escalation and continuation of those conflicts: first, the balance of power in the region witnessed major transformations following the 2011 uprisings and before it the US invasion of Iraq; second, regional powers fought for control through supporting domestic armed conflicts; third, weapons entered the region in large quantities whether through the US or Europe; fourth, the Middle East suffers from lack of expertise in both war tactics and conflict resolution compared to other parts of the world²⁶².

Civil conflicts in the region claimed the lives of 600,000 people, 500,000 of whom are most likely Syrian, while 17,000 were displaced. The resulting refugee crisis constituted a major burden on the budgets of host countries and led to the eruption of domestic problems in those countries²⁶³. In light of the growing influence of the populist right-wing, refugees, both in the region and Europe, are exposed to systematic discrimination. This was, for example, demonstrated in Italy through the Lega Nord which, while mainly focusing on issues pertaining to northern Italy, has also adopted a discourse against immigrants and Islam since the second half of the 1990s²⁶⁴. For the new right-wing, sovereignty means adopting a closed borders policy and imposing more restrictions on immigration²⁶⁵. Racist campaigns in the Arab region extended to foreign labor, which is particularly demonstrated in Gulf countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia there is a tendency towards holding immigrant workers accountable for the economic crisis through which the kingdom is going. This was reflected in new policies such as imposing monthly residence fees on the families of immigrant workers²⁶⁶. While immigration and Islamophobia constitute an integral part of the discourse of the populist right-wing in both Europe and the US owing to fears of terrorist threats, this is not the case with the right wing in other parts of the world that have no experience with terrorism and fundamental groups such as Brazil or Latin America in general²⁶⁷.

On the other hand, resistance to neoliberalism and the rise of populist trends took different shapes. These included the victory of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labor Party in the UK, the coming to power of Syriza in Greece, movements like Me Too and Black Lives Matter, movements supporting immigrants and teachers' strikes, support for Bernie Sanders' candidacy and the

²⁶² Perry Cammack and Michele Dunne. Op. cit.

²⁶³ Perry Cammack. "Wars of the world." Carnegie Middle East Center, December 12, 2017: <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/75031>

²⁶⁴ Gennaro Gervasio. Op. cit.

²⁶⁵ <https://www.enfgroup-ep.eu/global-compact-for-immigration-bad-for-europe/>

²⁶⁶ Omar Samir Khalaf. Op. cit.

²⁶⁷ Tawfik Abdel Sadek. Op. cit.

subsequent emergence of a socialist wing within the Democratic Party, the Yellow Vests protests in France, the Podemos movement in Spain, and protests against price hikes in Sudan. Despite the fact that economic aspects constitute a major component of the discourse and political platform of those movements, they are not economic at their core, for they tackle economy from a political point of view. While those movements differ in terms of organizational structure, they all have a popular base on the ground from which they started their activism²⁶⁸.

While problems facing the Arab region have undergone several transformations, they are still tackled through the same mentality. This is demonstrated in reviving the Sykes-Picot agreement, which is considered the “original sin” of the Arab region, the one that started endless territorial divisions and initiated a series of violations of the sovereignty and unity of the Arab nation²⁶⁹. Contemporary revival of the agreement started with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, whose main aim was to divide the country. Some might argue that an invading power does not need to divide a country if it can control its resources anyway²⁷⁰. While such argument is valid in many cases, it is not applicable to the case of Iraq since after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, dividing the country enabled the US to allocate long-term oil contracts to different companies based on the region in which they will operate²⁷¹.

One of the most prominent features of the new right-wing is constant demonization of activists and civil society organizations. This is at times done using an Islamist discourse, which was the case after the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt and loyalist media outlets accused civil society of promoting anti-Islamic ideologies²⁷². This is still the case at the present moment as the Egyptian regime uses the media to promote its agenda and slam opposition²⁷³, which proves that the same tactics are used.

On the economic and social levels, the populist right-wing in the Arab region is faced with the setbacks of global capitalism yet in a more aggressive form. Neoliberalism proved incapable of responding to the demands of the majority and dealing with pressing issues such as economic

²⁶⁸ Nissaf Brahmi. Op. cit.

²⁶⁹ Fawwaz Traboulsi. “On the 100th anniversary of Sykes–Picot Agreement and Balfour Declaration.” Op. cit.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² “The Muslim Brotherhood: UN document on women contradicts Islamic principles [Arabic].” March 2013: <https://arbne.ws/2Rx8vU>

²⁷³ Azza Mustafa. Op. cit.

activity and the accumulation of capital, hence failing to either earn the trust of the people or address the widening gap between classes. Doing so, neoliberal policies not only lead to more instability, but also give rise to new forms of authoritarianism and are likely to give rise to fascist trends²⁷⁴. Such problem cannot be solved without the emergence of resistance movements that learn from the lessons of 2011 as well as from similar initiatives across the world²⁷⁵. Meanwhile, the structure of the state in the Arab region and regimes' insistence on centralization and authoritarian policies are expected to lead to more uprisings that can turn into armed conflicts as was the case in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. The only means of avoiding the repetition of such scenarios is granting local communities more autonomy and protecting minorities²⁷⁶.

Conclusion:

Uprisings that erupted in the Arab world did lead to a change in regional order, but not the kind of change protestors sought. Uprisings did not lead to the creation of a democratic system, but instead reshaped regional relationships. The region's conventional superpowers—Egypt, Iraq, and Syria—are currently at their weakest while oil-rich, authoritarian Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar—are at their strongest²⁷⁷. Such a shift arguably contributed to the chaos that spread all over the region and started three types of wars, each of which feeding the others: an Arab-Iranian cold war, proxy wars in different conflict zones, and civil wars. Those wars have had a detrimental effect on the region and its institutions²⁷⁸.

The current volatile situation necessitates the establishment of a new system that addresses the region's pressing issues without resorting to the same traditional methods that have always proven a failure. Such a system needs to avoid past mistakes, the most crucial of which was overlooking the principle of citizenship, hence setting the stage for sectarian conflicts and undermining the concept of a collective Arab identity while stripping minorities of their basic rights²⁷⁹. Citizenship is an indispensable part for an Arab identity that recognizes difference and diversity and rejects

²⁷⁴ Ben Fine, Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Marco Boffo. *The Elgar Companion to Marxist Economics*, 2013.

²⁷⁵ Wael Gamal. "Corruption without remnants of the former regime [Arabic]." *Al-Shorouk*, February 18, 2013: <http://bit.ly/2X1Pfi7>

²⁷⁶ Perry Cammack and Marwan Muasher. "Arab fractures: citizens, state and social contracts." Carnegie Endowment for international peace, 2017: <https://bit.ly/2kV8efW>.

²⁷⁷ Lynch, Marc. "The New Arab Order: Power and Violence in Today's Middle East, Foreign Affairs." September- October, 2018: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2018-08-13/new-arab-order>

²⁷⁸ *Reforming and developing the 'Arab regional order*. Op. cit. p.14.

²⁷⁹ Mohamed El Agati. "Citizenship and social components in the Arab region after the revolution: Resuming structure or changing path? [Arabic]" Op. cit. p.33

exclusion. Such a collective identity would be capable of addressing problems that regional identities cannot. Youth movements created during Arab uprisings constitute a perfect example for such an identity since they managed to transcend all ideological differences as they united over common goals that basically focused on reversing the repercussions of neoliberalism and avoiding all traditional nationalist discourses. Only a system based on respecting citizenship would be capable of restoring regional balance and would make it possible to benefit from the resources of each country in the region. Citizenship also has an economic dimension that strives for replacing the neoliberal pattern with a new one that achieves social justice and bridges the gap between classes.

For this to be possible, it is important to discard the Sykes-Picot approach that revolves around dividing and re-dividing the region. This will be done through a revision of traditional concepts such as imperialism and resistance. For example, imperialism in its new shape can be demonstrated in the intervention of both China and Russia in the region and does not have to mean imperialism in the old sense. The same applies to resistance, which means fighting against injustice and oppression without having to be represented by particular groups. It is also important to bring the Palestinian cause back to the forefront yet through a different discourse that does not fall prey to religious slogans, does not confuse Zionism with Judaism, and prioritizes the rights of Palestinians. In fact, that discourse that has been adopted for decades only serves the Israeli agenda. Adopting an alternative discourse in all fronts is crucial for breaking away from traditional systems and focusing instead on establishing dialogue with communities and people across the region in order to come up with a lobbying strategy that can attempt at challenging the dominant global system.

All the above requires the presence of a powerful regional entity that can oversee such changes. If this entity remains the Arab League, then it definitely needs substantial developments on three levels: first, the level of structure through modernizing its affiliated entities so that they can address current issues and interact with civil society while acquiring a degree of autonomy that enables them to do so; second, the level of mechanisms so that the Arab League can deal with current issues without being affected by regional conflicts or having to serve the interests of one camp at the expense of another; third, the level of organization so that the administration is independent of countries from which its members come and is only managed through the rules of good governance away from any bias. Such development requires a detailed plan to be designed by experts and

thinkers and necessitates the utilization of youth capacities across the region in order to introduce fresh perspectives and innovative changes.